

JANUARY 26, 1895.

the character of this

BETTY.

by the Author of

and Fauntleroy.

written—at least I was

once. That was more

years ago. I can not a kitten

little cat, and I have

and think a great deal

of hearing her looking at

me with my eyes. I have

known about that I even stop

over when I am lap-

ping or washing my face.

I had about lapping my

lips upon the saucer. Betty

was not. She used to talk

when she gave me my

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time." The little face peeped farther round the green of the rose bush and looked prettier and prettier. The pink frock and white frills began to show themselves a little more. "Got behind me," said my mother, and I began to shrink back. "Ab, how often I have wondered since why I did not know in a minute that it was Betty—just Betty! It seemed so strange that I did not know it without being told. She came nearer and nearer and her cheeks seemed to grow pinker and pinker, and her eyes bigger and bigger. Suddenly she gave a little jump, and began to clap her hands and laugh. "Ah," she said, "it is a little kitty. It is surely a little kitty." "Oh, my goodness!" said my mother. "Fits-fits fits! Fits-fits fits!" "I could not help feeling as if it was rather rude of her, but she was so frightened. But Betty did not seem to mind it at all. Down she went on her little knees in the grass, bending her head down to peep under the porch, until her cheek touched the green blades and her heap of curls lay on the buttercups and daisies. "Oh, you dear little kitty!" she said. "Pretty pussy, pussy, puss. Kitty-kitty! Poo! little kitty. I won't hurt you!" She made a movement as if she were going to put her dimpled hand to stroke me, but a voice window opened and I heard a voice call to her: "Betty, Betty!" it said: "you mustn't put your hand under there. The pussy is frightened and it makes her cross and she might scratch you. Don't try to stroke her, dearie." She turned her bright little face over her shoulder. "I won't hurt her, mamma," she said. "I surely won't hurt her. She has such a pretty kitty. Come and look at it, mamma!" "Fits-fits fits!" said my mother. "More coming! Grown-ups this time!" "I don't believe they will hurt us," I said. "The little one is such a pretty one." "You know nothing about it," said my mother. But they did not hurt us. They were as gentle as if they had been kittens themselves. The mother came and bent down to Betty's side and looked at us, too, but they did nothing which even frightened us. And they talked in quite soft voices. "You see she is a wild little pussy," the mother said. "She must have been left behind by the people who lived here before we came and she has been living all by herself and eating just what she could steal—or perhaps catching birds. Poor little cat! And now she is frightened because evidently some of her kittens have been stolen from her and she wants to protect this one." "But if I don't frighten her," said Betty, "if I keep coming to see her and don't hurt her, and if I bring her some milk and some bits of meat won't she get used to me, and let her kittens come out and play with me after a while?" "Perhaps she will," said the mother. "Poor pussy, puss, pussy, pretty pussy!" How Betty did enjoy herself that lovely sunny afternoon we had the first tea party in the playhouse. How she laughed and talked and ran backwards and forwards and bits of cake. I could scarcely believe myself sitting nearer to her, and I found myself saying "Meow," quite softly in answer. And from that time we saw her every day ever so many times. She seemed never tired of trying to make friends with us. The first thing in the bright mornings we used to hear her pretty child voice and see her pretty child face. She used to bring saucers of delightful milk to us two or three times a day. And she always was so careful not to frighten us. She would just call us, "Pretty, pretty pussy; pretty kitty puss!" in a voice as soft as silk, and then she would put the saucer of milk near us and go away behind the rose bush and let us drink in comfort and peace. We thought at first that she went back to the house when she set the saucer down; but after a few days, when we were beginning to be rather less afraid, we found out that she just hid behind the rose bush and peeped at us through the branches. I saw her pink cheeks and big soft pansy eyes one day, and I told my mother. "Well, she is a well-behaved child-person," mother said. "I sometimes begin to think she does not mean any harm." I was sure of it. Before I had lapped three saucers of milk I had begun to love her a little. A few days later she just put the saucer down near us and stepped softly away, but stood right by the rose bush without hiding behind it. And she said, "Pretty pussy—pussy!" so sweetly without moving towards us, that even my mother began to have confidence in her. About that time I began to think it would be nice to creep out from under the house and get to know her a little better. It looked so pleasant and sunshiny out on the grass, and she looked so sunshiny herself. I did like her voice so, and I did like a ball I used to see her playing with; and when she bent down to look under the porch and her curls showing, I used to feel as if I should like to jump out and catch at them with my claws. There never was anything as pretty as Betty or anything which looked as if it might be so nice to play with. "I wish you would like me and come out and play, kitty," she used to say. "I do so like when it is not half as high bush. And it is such pretty to look again."

kitties. I never hurt kitties. I'll give you a ball of string." There was a fence not far from the house, and it had a sort of ledge on top, and it was a good deal higher than Betty's head—because she was so very little. She was quite a little thing—only four o'clock. So one morning I crept out from under my porch and jumped on to the top of that fence, and I was there when she came again to peep and say, "Pretty pussy." When she caught sight of me she began to laugh and clap her little hands and jump up and down. "Oh, there's the kitty," she said; "there's my kitty. It has come out its own self. Kitty—kitty; pretty, pretty kitty!" She ran to me and stood beneath me looking up with her eyes shining and her pink cheeks full of dimples. She could not reach me, but she was so happy because I had come out that she could scarcely stand still. She coaxed and called me pretty names, and stood on her tip-toes stretching her short arm and dimpled hand to try to see if I would let her touch me. "I won't pull you down, pussy," she said. "I only want to stroke you. Oh, you pretty kitty!" And I looked down at her and said "meow," gently, just to tell her that I was not very much afraid now, and that when I was a little more used to being outside instead of under the house, perhaps I would play with her. "Meow!" I said, and I even put one paw as if I was going to give her a pat, and she danced up and down for joy. My dear little Betty! I wish I could see her again. I cannot understand why she should go away when I loved her so much—and when everybody loved her so much. Oh, how happy we were when I came down from the fence. I did it in three days. She brought some milk and coaxed me and then she put it on the grass close to the fence and moved away a few steps and looked at me with such a pretty imploring look in her pansy eyes that suddenly I made a little leap down and stood on the grass and began to lap the milk and even to purr! From that time we played together always. And oh, what a delightful playmate Betty was! And such a conversationalist! She was not a child who thought you must not talk to a kitten because it could not talk back. She had so many things to tell me and to show me. And she showed me everything and explained it all, too. She had a playhouse in a box in a nice grassy, shady place, and she told me all about it and showed me her teacups and her dolls, and we had tea parties with bits of real cake and tiny cups with flowers on them. "They don't hold much milk, kitty," she said; "but it's a dolls' tea party, so you must pretend, and I'll give you a big saucerful afterwards." I pretended as hard as ever I could, and it was a beautiful party, though I did not like the Sunday doll, because she looked proud and as if she thought kittens were too young. The everyday doll was much nicer, though her hair was a little tatty and she was cracked. How Betty did enjoy herself that lovely sunny afternoon we had the first tea party in the playhouse. 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sober and sat by the fire thinking so much. One afternoon we had the most beautiful play we had ever had. We ran after the ball, we swung together. Betty knelt down on the grass and shook her curly hair so that I could catch it with my paws; we had a tea party on the box, and when it was over we went to the rose bush and found a bud beginning to be a rose. It was a splendid afternoon! After we had found the bud beginning to be a rose we sat down together under the rose bush. Betty sat on the thick green grass and I lay comfortably on her soft lap and purred. "We have jumped so much that I am a little tired and I feel hot," she said. "Are you tired, kitty? Isn't it nice under the rose bush? And won't it be a beautiful place for a tea party when all the white roses are out? Perhaps there will be some out tomorrow. We'll come in the morning and see!" Perhaps she was more tired than she knew. I don't think she meant to go to sleep, but presently her head began to drop and her eyes to close and in a little while she sank down softly and was quite gone. I left her lap and crept up close to the breast of her little white frock and lay and purred and looked at her while she slept. I did so like to look at her. She was so pretty and pink and plump, and she had such a lot of soft curls. They were crushed under her warm cheek and scattered in the grass. I played with them a little while she lay there, but I did it very quietly, so that I should not disturb her. She was lying under the white rose bush, still asleep, and I was curled up against her breast watching her, when her mamma came out with her papa and they found us. "Oh, how pretty!" the mamma said. "What a lovely little picture. Betty and her kitten asleep under the white rose bush, and just one rose watching over them. I wonder if Betty saw it when she lay there. She has been looking at the buds every day to see if they were beginning to be roses." "She looks like a rose herself, said her papa, "but it is a pink one. How rosy she is." He picked her up in his arms and carried her into the house; she did not wake, and as I was not allowed to sleep with her I could not follow, so I stayed behind under the rose bush myself a little longer before I went to bed. When I looked at the white streaks of white showing through the green, and there were three that I was sure would be roses in the morning, and I knew how happy Betty would be and how she would laugh and dance when she saw them. I often hear people saying to each other that they should like to understand the strange way I have of suddenly saying "Meow!" meow!" as if I were crying. It seems strange to me that they don't know what it means. I always find myself saying it when I remember that lovely afternoon when I played so happily and Betty fell asleep under the rose bush, and they thought how teased she would be when she came out in the morning. I can't help it. Everything was so different from what I had thought it would be. Betty came out in the morning. "Oh Betty, oh dear! she never came out!" I got up early, myself, and it was a beautiful day. In the morning there was dew—absentness and on the flowers, and they sparkle so that it was lovely. These I did so want Betty to see. I ran to the white rose bush, and though there were four or five more such white roses and with many to red, I went down to the rose bush and called to Betty as I attempted to get here to come. But she did not mean to. She was not even at breakfast, and I was not even at breakfast. I kept asking and asking where Betty was, but she never answered me. Once I nobly would answer me. Once I called her there, and told her about the white roses and asked her why she did not come out. But before I had really finished telling her my feelings were quite hurt by her papa. He came and spoke to me in a way that was not kind. "Go away, kitty," he said. "Don't make such a noise; you will disturb Betty." I went away waving my tail. I went out into the garden and sat under the rose bush. As if I could disturb Betty! As if Betty did not always want me! She wanted me to sleep with her in her little bed, but her mamma would not let me. But—ah! how could I believe it—she did not come out the next day, or the next, or even the next. It seemed as if I should go wild. People can ask questions, but a little cat is nothing to anybody unless to some one like Betty. She always understood my questions and answered them. In the house they would not answer me. They were always busy and troubled. It did not seem like the same house. Nothing seemed the same. The garden was a different place. In the playhouse the Sunday doll and the every-day doll sat and stared at the tea-things we had used

that happy afternoon at the party. The Sunday doll sat bolt upright and looked prouder than ever, as if she felt she was being neglected; but the every-day doll lolled over as if she had given her strength away because Betty did not come. I had made up my mind at the first tea-party that I would never speak to the Sunday doll, but on Monday I was so lonely and helpless that I could not help it. "Oh dear!" I murmured. "Oh dear! Do you know anything about Betty? Do you—do you?" And that heartless thing only sat up and stared at me and never answered, though the tears were streaming down my nose. "What could a poor little cat do?" I looked and looked everywhere, but I could not find her. I went round the house and round the house and called in every room. But they only drove me out and said I made too much noise and never understood a word I said. And the white rose bush—it seemed as if it would break my heart. "There will be more roses and more roses," Betty had said, and every morning it was coming true. I used to go and sit under it, and I had to count ten over and over and over, there were so many. It was such a great rose bush that it looked at last like a cloud of snow-white bloom. And Betty had never seen it. "Ah, Betty, Betty!" I used to cry, when I had counted so many tens that I was tired. "Oh, do come and see how beautiful it is and let us have our tea party. Oh, white rose bush, where is she?" They drove me out of the house so many times that I had no courage, but one morning the white rose bush was so splendid that I made one desperate effort. I went to the bed-room door and rubbed against it and called with all my strength: "Betty, if you are there, Betty, if you love me at all, oh speak to me and tell me what I have done. The white rose bush has tens and tens and tens of flowers upon it. It is like snow. Don't you care about it? Oh do come out and see. Betty, Betty, I am so lonely for you and I love you so!" And the door actually opened and her mamma stood there looking at me with great tears rolling down her cheeks. She bent down and took me in her arms and stroked me. "Betty, if you are there, Betty, if you love me at all, oh speak to me and tell me what I have done. The white rose bush has tens and tens and tens of flowers upon it. It is like snow. Don't you care about it? Oh do come out and see. Betty, Betty, I am so lonely for you and I love you so!" "It seemed as if I felt myself lose my senses. My Betty! I kissed her, and kissed her, and kissed her! I rubbed her little hands, her cheeks, her curls: I kissed her and purred and cried. "Betty," said her mamma, "Betty, darling, don't you know your own little kitty?" Why did not she? Why did she not? Her cheeks were hot and red, her curls were spread out over the pillow, her pansy eyes did not seem to see me and her little head moved drowsily to and fro. Her mamma took me in her arms again, and as she carried me out of the room her tears fell on me. "She does not know you, kitty," she said. "Poor kitty, you will have to go away."

walked before them two men who were carrying a beautiful white and silver box of some kind on their shoulders. They moved very slowly, and their heads were bent as they walked. But the white and silver box was beautiful. It shone in the sun, and—oh, how my heart beat!—all my Betty's snow, white roses were heaped upon and wreathed around it. And I sat under the stripped rose bush breaking my heart. She had gone away, my little Betty, and I did not know where, and all I could think was that this was the very last I should ever see of her, because I thought there must be something which had belonged to her in the white and silver box under the roses, and because she was gone they were carrying that away, too. "Oh, my Betty, my Betty! And I am only a little cat, who sits by the fire and thinks, while nobody seems to care or understand how lonely and puzzled I am, and how I long for some kind person to explain. And I could not bear it, but that we loved each other so much that it comforts me to think of it. And I loved her so much that when I say to myself over and over again what her mamma said to me, it almost makes me happy again—almost—not quite, because I'm so lonely. But if it is true, even a little cat who loved her would be happy for her sake. Betty has gone—where there are always roses. Betty has gone—where there are always roses.—Francis Hodgson Burnett in the English Magazine.



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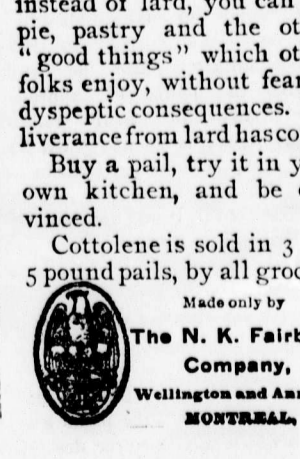
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