# Cat and Mouse in Company

Contributed by Gary V. Hartman
Wednesday, 26 November 2003

A cat had made acquaintance with a mouse and had gone on so much to her of the great love and friendship which she bore for her, that the mouse finally agreed to live together with her in a house and to keep a common household.

translated by Gary V. Hartman

A cat had made acquaintance with a mouse and had gone on so much to her of the great love and friendship which she bore for her, that the mouse finally agreed to live together with her in a house and to keep a common household. (2) "But for winter we must make provision, otherwise we shall suffer hunger," said the cat. "You, Little Mouse, cannot venture everywhere and will end up in a trap on me." The good advice was followed and a little pot with fat was purchased. They did not know, though where they should put it. Finally, after much consideration, the cat said, "I know of no place where it would be better preserved than the church, where no one dares to take anything away. We will set it under the altar and will touch it no sooner than we need it." The little pot was brought to safety, but it did not take long before the cat got cravings (3) for it and spoke to the mouse, "What I wanted to say to you, Little Mouse, my cousin (4) has asked me to be godfather. (5) She has brought a little son into the world, white with brown spots, which I am to hold over the [baptismal] font. Let me go out today, and you look after the house alone." — "Yes, yes," answered the mouse, "go in the name of God! If you eat something good, think of me; I, too, would like a little drop of the sweet, red, christening wine." (6) But none of it was true: the cat had no cousin and had not been asked to be godfather. It (7) went straight away to the church, crept to the little fat pot, began to lick, and licked off the fat's skin. Then it took a walk on the roofs of the city, considered the opportunity, thereafter stretched itself out in the sun, and wiped its whiskers as often as it thought about the little fat pot. Only when it was evening did it return home. "Well, you are back," said the mouse. "You have certainly had an enjoyable day." — "It was all right," answered the cat. "What kind of name did the child receive," asked the mouse? "Skin Off," said the cat very dryly. "Skin Off!" cried the mouse. "That is a strange and unusual name. Is it common in your family?" — "What of it," said the cat. "It is no worse than Crumb Thief like your godchildren are called."

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Not long thereafter, a craving overcame the cat again. It said to the mouse, "You must do me a favor and once again look after the household alone. I have been asked a second time to be godfather and since the child has a white ring around its neck, I cannot refuse." The good mouse agreed, but the cat crept behind the city wall to the church and ate the fat pot half empty. "Nothing tastes better," it said, "than what one eats [by] oneself," and was quite satisfied with the day's work. When it got home the mouse asked, "What was this child christened?" — "Half Empty," answered the cat. "Half Empty! You don't say! I haven't heard that name in all my life. I will bet that it is not in the calendar." (8)

The cat's mouth watered again soon for the delicacy. "All good things come in threes," (9) it said to the mouse. "I am again supposed to be godfather. The child is all black and only has white paws, otherwise not a white hair on its whole body. That only happens once every few years. You will let me go?" — "Skin Off! Half Empty," answered the mouse. "Those are such curious names, they make me very thoughtful." — "You sit home in your dark-gray fleece coat and your long, hair braid," spoke the cat, "and have silly ideas. (10) That is what happens if one doesn't go out during the day." The mouse tidied up during the cat's absence and put the house in order; the sweet-toothed (11) cat, however, ate the fat pot clean. "Only when everything is eaten up does one have peace," it said to itself and got home, full and plump, only when it was night. The mouse asked right away about the name which the third child had received. "You won't like it either," said the cat. "He is called, All Gone." — "All Gone!" cried the mouse, "that is the most dubious name of all. I have never come across it in print. All Gone! What is that about?" It shook its head, rolled itself together, and went to sleep.

From then on, no one else wanted to ask the cat to be godfather, but when winter had come on and outside there was nothing more to be found, the mouse remembered their provisions and spoke, "Come, cat, let us go to our fat pot which we have put aside for ourselves; that will taste good." — "Yes, indeed," answered the cat, "it will taste as good to you as if you had stuck your dainty tongue out the window." They set out on their way, and when they arrived, the fat pot still stood in its place, but it was completely empty. "Oh," said the mouse, "now I realize what has happened, now it comes to light; you are a true friend to me. You ate everything up when you stood as godfather. First, Skin Off, then Half Empty, then . . ." — "Be still," cried the cat, "one more word and I will eat you up." — "All Gone," the poor mouse already had it on its tongue. Hardly was it out, but the cat made a leap toward it, grabbed it, and swallowed it down. You see? So it is in the world.

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Notes

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Cat and Mouse In Company — Katze und Maus in Gesellschaft. Gesellschaft carries the double meaning of a business venture such as, "The John Smith Company" as well as a social gathering, a group or society, i.e., "in good company." To convey some of the difficulty in the word, itself, I include the titles from the three most common translations of the Grimms' tales: "Cat and Mouse in Partnership" (Hunt/Stern); "The Companionship of the Cat and the Mouse," (Jack Zipes); "The Cat and the Mouse Set Up Housekeeping," (Ralph Mannheim). I use this title because it seems to best express both the ambiguity and the double entendre of the original title.

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household — There is also somewhat of a double-meaning here as well as with "company." Wirtschaft is the German which can mean anything from "housekeeping" to "trade" and "industry." The emphasis in this story is upon the economics of maintaining a household, the business end of living together.

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cravings — Gelüste, also "appetite," "desire," or "lust."

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cousin — Base, one of several terms in German for the English, "cousin." "Female cousin" is the meaning of this form.

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godfather — Gevatter, from Vater, "father." I have no idea why other translations render it as, "godmother".

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christening wine — Kindbetterwein, which means literally, "child-bed wine." This may be a play on words as well as an idiom.

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It — Sie, "she." I am leaving the cat as "it." Both animals would be feminine in German. Some translations use "she" for the cat. The pronoun has to agree in gender with its antecedent in German.

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calendar — Kalender, a cognate in German. Presumably this is another way of saying the name is not a Christian name since it is not in the "calendar" with the saints' holy days and their names.

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All good things. . . — Aller guten Dinge sind drei. This is pretty much a literal translation.

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have silly ideas — Grillen fangen, meaning literally, "catching crickets". Grille, "crickets", is figuratively used to mean "whim" or "fancy." This is another colorful idiom in a story replete with such expressions.

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sweet-toothed — Naschhaft, from naschen meaning "nibble" or "snack," especially sweets, implying food eaten outside of meal time or which somehow is a treat or luxury.

The Loose-Leaf Fairy Tale Book is a work-in-progress. Gary Hartman has translated over fifty of the Grimms' stories. Thirty-seven of the stories are available for purchase—$35.00 for the text in a spiral binding. Anyone wishing to purchase the second batch of fairytales translated by the fall of 2000 can purchase them for $25.00. If you would like to purchase these works, please contact Gary Hartman at his e-mail address: TRTLHEART@aol.com

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