

THE WITCH'S CAT'S KITTEN

By Shirley And Aldarilla Beistle

In the Public Domain

ONCE upon a Halloween there was a witch's cat that was unhappy. It wasn't that she was unhappy about the witch, for she had lived with her most of her lives.

She wasn't unhappy about riding on the broomstick, either. It was exciting to sail over the moon and swoop down to frighten children on Halloween. The witch's cat knew that children really liked to be frightened. They even made Jack O' Lanterns to frighten each other.

No, it was none of these things that made the cat unhappy. It was her secret.

Every year since she could remember, Shadow, for that was the witch's cat's name, had had a family of beautiful kittens. They were always born in the spring when the flowers were beginning to bloom. Shadow's kittens were always as black as night. They had the biggest green eyes and the very sleekest fur. The Old Witch was proud of them, for the young witches begged for Shadow's kittens when they were preparing for their first rides.

This year, just two weeks before Halloween, Shadow had a kitten—one kitten. She looked down on her tiny baby in wonder and alarm, for it did not look like her other kittens. Never had she seen such a witch's cat's kitten. The Old Witch would be very angry.

Shadow tried to think how she could hide her baby. She was sure the Old Witch would not like the new kitten, though it was the finest baby she had ever seen. She must keep the secret as long as she could. The Old Witch must not know about this wonderful child of hers.

At first it was easy, for all the kitten did was eat and sleep in the old basket in the pantry cupboard. Then her eyes opened. Shadow was pleased and yet alarmed to see that they were blue instead of the usual green. Now that the kitten could see her mother, it was high time for her to learn to talk. All witches' cats can talk. That is

part of the fun of being a witch's cat. So Shadow taught her baby to be very polite.

The kitten learned to say, "Yes, please," and "No, thank you,"—all the proper words that might please the witch on that dreadful day when Shadow's secret would be discovered.

So far the Old Witch had not suspected a thing. She was too busy worrying about herself. The Old Witch had been worrying because she was wishing for something that would never come true. What she wanted more than anything else in the world was to be frightened—really frightened—the way children were when she peered into their faces on Halloween. They shrieked and yelled with excitement and, as she sailed away again, she could hear the shrieks turn into gales of laughter.

In all these years the Old Witch had never been frightened. She had never laughed with excitement. Who was there to frighten her? She knew every witch and ghost and goblin in Witchhollow. She even knew all the other witches' cats, for they were always Shadow's kittens.

Still, the Old Witch couldn't help wishing. The more she thought of it, the more worried and angry she became. She jumped up from her chair in a fury and hobbled out into the kitchen to look for the cat. Her voice was shrill and high.

Shadow rose hastily from the basket, giving her kitten loving push into a corner of the bed. She had hardly reached the kitchen door when the lonesome kitten called after her, "Meow, meow."

"Bless the bumps on a toad," shrieked the Old Witch, "what was that?"

"It sounded sort of—like—a—kitten," faltered Shadow.

"Sounded like—" snorted the witch,

"What do YOU know about a kitten?" Thump, thump went her feet toward the pantry. "I'll see for myself."

The Old Witch flung open the cupboard door. There in the middle of the basket sat the witch's cat's kitten. When she saw the Old Witch, she stood up on her four wobbly little paws and said politely, "How do you do?"

The witch was not listening. Her voice rose higher and higher, and her finger shook with anger as she pointed it at the basket. "White—that kitten's white! Get it out of this house—get it out this minute."

"I know it's white," the mother cat said meekly. "But do witches' cats always have

to be black?”

“Certainly they do. A white cat will bring us bad luck. Take it away.”

“I’m getting old,” went on Shadow, as if she had not heard what the Old Witch said. “I won’t be able to ride your broom much longer. You’d better keep this kitten.”

“Never. I’ll go without a witch’s cat rather than keep this white one. She’s bad luck,” shrieked the witch. “I must have a black cat.”

“You’re in a very bad temper,” spoke up Shadow stubbornly. “You’ll like her better tomorrow.”

“Temper! Who wouldn’t have a temper? Here it is Halloween, a day that is fun for everyone but me.”

Shadow was surprised. “I thought you liked Halloween?”

The Old Witch was almost crying now. She was sorry for herself all over again. “Am *I* ever frightened? Does anyone ever try to scare *me*? And now, now in my very own house, everything is going wrong. You don’t want to ride on my broom anymore and you want me to ride with a *white kitten!*” She reached down and picked up the little white kitten by the back of her neck, pulled open the kitchen door and tossed her out into the yard.

Shadow closed her eyes in misery. What would happen to her baby? If only the Old Witch would go at once, she could run outside and find the kitten. There still might be some way of making the witch change her mind. The Old Witch wasn’t happy. That was the trouble.

There was a whir in the air. Shadow opened her eyes to see the Old Witch fly past the window on her traveling broom. She did not bother to peer out the window as all the witches and their cats gathered together to start on their journey toward the earth. She did not even see the ghosts who left a few moments later. Shadow was very busy, thinking. Perhaps there was a way to please the bad-tempered Old Witch and save her kitten, too.

It was past midnight when the witches began returning. The Old Witch was the last to get back. She hobbled wearily in at her gate. The trip alone without Shadow had not been easy and she was tired. Suddenly she stopped.

There in the moonlight was a ghost. It wasn’t any of her neighbors—it was a ghost

of a cat. It did not mew—it did not cry—it floated in the moonlight without making a sound. It floated toward her and rose on its hind feet. In the shadows it seemed to grow bigger and bigger—then it began to wail:

“I am the ghost of a witch’s cat,
The ghost, the ghost of a witch’s cat,
I chill your bones,
I haunt your homes,
For I am the ghost of a witch’s cat.”

Strange things began to happen to the Old Witch. Her knees began to shake, her hands and feet turned cold and she caught her breath.

Was she frightened?

Could she be frightened?

Something brushed against her foot.

It felt like a cat’s bushy tail. Something pulled at the shoelace of her high pointed shoes. Would a ghost cat do a thing like that? The Old Witch opened her eyes, and the witch’s cat’s kitten stopped playing with her shoelaces.

“Happy Halloween,” said the kitten.

The witch began to chuckle. “By the bumps on a toad,” she laughed. “You are my own Shadow’s kitten, and you are the most wonderful, most frightening ghost kitten I have ever seen. From now on I’m going to be the only witch in all Witchhollow with a ghost kitten instead of a black cat. Come, kitty, let’s go home.”

If it had not been so dark, and if the Old Witch had not been so busy smiling at the witch’s cat’s kitten, she might have seen Shadow walking close behind them. Shadow was purring.