

TOKGABI'S MENAGERIE

(Cats and Dogs)

Korean Fairy Tales

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THERE are many dogs, but few cats, in Korea. Nobody loves poor pussy there. They are not made pets and are rarely seen in the houses of the people. Even bull calves are more caressed by the children than are cats, and the puppy dog takes the place of Tabby or Grimalkin.

Korean cats are not bob-tailed, like their cousins in Japan; nor is pussy ever used, as the Chinese kitten is, to tell the time of day by the width of the slits in its green eyes.

Alas! the cats in Korea are too wild to enjoy the society of human beings, or human beings theirs! The presence of dogs is especially hateful to them. Mother cats tell their kittens wonderful stories of the cruelty of dogs and why cats and dogs do not agree.

The native roof-scramblers can howl and caterwaul, arch their backs, blow up their tails, spit and scratch, or purr pleasantly, lick their fur, and wash their faces with their paws like cats in other countries. They are highly accomplished as mouse catchers and bird-eaters. Yet they have a hard time of it, for there are too many dogs to make a kitty's life either easy or agreeable. The Korean cat hates to get its feet wet, yet it is often obliged to wade in the water to get rid of the dogs that chase it. As for the furry, purry kittens, one wonders, how they ever escape the fierce dogs and grow up at all.

Yet it all came about because a certain cat-ancestor laughed when it shouldn't have done so. Although it was a lot of school-children that made Kitty laugh, the dog never forgave the cat for its frivolity. And this is how it happened.

Long, long ago, one of the mountain fairies had come down into the land from the high peaks, and being kindly treated by an old man named Tip Pul, who kept a wine shop, called Tokgabi and bade him reward the old fellow with a precious stone.

So, one night, Tokgabi dropped the gem into Tip Pul's long-necked wine bottle. Strangely enough, after this, the wine never ceased. The bottle was always full. Every day Tip Pul sold plenty to his neighbors and it was good and cheap, so that the shopkeeper was very popular. Yet, without any refilling, the flask was always ready to

overflow. So Tip Pul had no fear of poverty in extreme old age. Having neither wife nor children, his only companions were a dog named Su Nap, or Snap, for short, and a cat named Mee Yow. All three lived happily together in these times of long ago.

But one day the bottle was found to be empty, and when Tip Pul shook it, nothing rattled inside. Somehow the magic stone had disappeared. Poverty now seemed certain. The old man was nearly paralyzed with grief and his neighbors all came in to sympathize with him. They knew well that they could buy no wine anywhere else so good and so cheap as they had long enjoyed, at Tip Pul's shop by the river.

Yet this loss of the wonderful stone was the very making of Tip Pul's pets. As for the cat, she became the most industrious kitty ever known. She at once began to, ransack every rat's quarters known, not only in her master's home, but in, every house in the village, in search of the missing stone. The racket which that cat kept up at night, among the rafters and beams under the roof, nearly drove some people crazy. They declared that Tokgabi had got drunk by tasting Tip Pul's drams. Yet it was Mee Yow all the time. The cat knocked over tobacco boxes, scratched among hat covers hung on the wall, tipped up the hanging shelves and upset the crockery in the closet over the kitchen stove. In a word, this four-footed creature played every kind of mischief that people usually ascribe to Tokgabi, the sooty imp.

Yet, when any one climbed up to the attic, looked among the rafters, and peered into the darkness, all he could see was a pair of green eyes that shone like the moon. Poking the uncanny thing with fishing poles, or throwing shoes or sticks at it, only caused spitting or snarling. So they knew it was a cat, and not Tokgabi, and betook themselves to bed again. Laying their topknots on their wooden pillows and their bodies on their oiled-paper carpet, they soon fell asleep again. The Koreans do not swear, but the way some good folks hurled bad words on all the ancestors of that cat, clear back to the time of Kija, was dreadful to think of. Indeed, some of their remarks are still preserved in tradition and proverbs. Nevertheless, with all his pains taken, Mee Yow could not find the magic wine-stone. As for Tip Pul, he got poorer and poorer.

The dog could not climb like Puss among the rafters and the roofs, but being able to run fast and having a nose that could smell a tiger a mile off, he made excursions all over the country, even crossing the ice of the frozen river. Although he fought many another dog, chased many a rat into its hole, and worried about a hundred cats, even jumping into wood-sheds and running in and out among the cows and horses, he found nothing. Once, while in a stall where the pony, tied up with a belly-band by

ropes to the ceiling, was enjoying its supper of bean soup, the poor dog was nearly kicked to death. The vicious brute, thinking that Snap was trying to steal some beans from its feed box, gave the dog a blow with its hoofs that made Snap, go on three legs for a week afterward.

The long winter passed away and the ice melted but the river water was still cold. One day Pussy, while chasing a rat among the rafters of a house of a Yang-ban or gentleman, brushed its whiskers against a greenish soapstone box, such as the king often sends as a present to those whom he likes. Recognizing the smell of something inside as that of his masters long-lost gem, he tried hard by tooth and claw to open it.

All Pussy's scratching, biting and clawing, however, were in vain. Nor could the dog help in the least. So a bargain was struck with the rats to gnaw open the box and get the magic stone. Both Su Nap and Mee Yow promised to let all rats and mice entirely alone for six months, if one of them would agree to gnaw open the box.

Delighted at the prospect of peace and quiet for half a year, and especially while the grain should be ripening, both rats and mice worked together, until out of a hole gnawed in the box, polished and hard on their teeth as it was, they got the magic stone. Carrying it in their paws, they dropped it where their former enemies, now so peaceful, could get it. At once the dog took the gem in his mouth and ran to the river, Mee Yow following after.

"Now, Kit," said Snap, "get on my back and hold tight to my neck-hair with your claws, while I swim across. As I must breathe hard, put the gem in your mouth. Mind that you don't open your jaws, or yawn, or laugh, till we get across. Do you hear?"

Mee Yow wagged her tail and took the wine-stone firmly in her mouth in token of determination to deliver that precious gem safely to her master. All the time Mee Yow intended to jump ashore and run to her master, while the dog would be shaking off the water from his hair, and thus get the credit for first finding where the stone had been.

It was a long, hard swim and the dog's strength was nearly used up when only two-thirds across the river, but the cat was happy, for she had, only to hold on and keep her feet dry. All went well until near the opposite shore.



Now it happened just then that a party of children, out of school and ready for fun, caught sight of the odd pair. They had never seen anything so funny in all their lives, and at once they laughed uproariously. Snap was too serious to pay any attention to their glee, but Mee Yow, already tickled with vanity, became positively frivolous. She too joined with the children and laughed so hard that Snap's body was badly shaken, so that he nearly got his nose under water and drowned them both. This made the light-headed and conceited cat laugh all the more. Finally bursting in a guffaw, Mee Yow dropped the gem out of her mouth, so that it was hopelessly lost in the river and fell to the bottom.

That was too much, for the dog, to have his labor, thus wasted. Thinking only of his master the faithful and serious Snap dived to the bottom of the river, tumbling Mee Yow off. You may well believe though, much scratching and clawing took place before Puss let go and swam ashore.

Alas! the dog could not find the precious gem, and when once on land he first shook himself to dry his hair and then rushed at the cat to give her a good shaking. But Mee Yow climbed up a tree, and though nearly frozen to death after her icy bath, kept up growling as long as the dog barked.

After that, in Korea, the cats and dogs ceased to be friends. Indeed, they never spoke to each other. Wild, unloved and unpetted, the cat belongs to the bad animals in Tokgabi's museum, while the dog is the faithful friend of man.