

Rejoined Mrs. Number One: "Well, we did hear that he works in a warehouse, in his shirt sleeves; not even behind the counter, you know!"

With heightened colour and in staccato tones, Mrs. Number Three, who had been before her marriage in the haberdashery department of Smith and Greenings, expressed her horror at this enormity.

"Of course," said Mrs. Number One, "we must be charitable; *she* may be all right, poor thing!"

But Mrs. Number Three would have none of this weakness. "Why weren't they open about it from the beginning then? One would at least be able to feel one had gone into it with open eyes."

"Thank goodness," said Mrs. Number One, "it is not too late to draw back. It will teach her a lesson, too."

"Thank you very much for telling me. You must come in some evening for a little music, both of you. Good afternoon."

And two smart sunshades bobbed off in opposite directions.

Very soon after this the Number Ones set off for their annual holiday, and before going Mrs. Number One ventured, on the strength of the new *entente*, to commit her black cat to the care of Mrs. Number Three; leaving minute directions as to hours of feeding, and an order on the milkman for a penn'orth a day. This done, the Number Ones drove off in a hansom, with a very large trunk adorned with a very small label (it is so much more interesting to leave something, such as one's destination, to the imagination), and there was much waving of handkerchiefs by the new allies.

Now the black cat residing at Number One—for I have at length arrived at the introduction of my hero—was a philosophic pussy, and not over young. He had before this seen the drawing-room suite clothed in newspapers, the blinds drawn in daylight, and a large trunk obstructing the hall, and he knew what manner of desolation these signs portended. So pussy washed his face, gave an extra rakish tilt to his whiskers and tail, and set off on a little expedition of his own that he had meditated by many a winter fire.

Next morning Mrs. Number Three hovered round the door of Number One, calling in sweet and seductive tones, "Blackie! Blackie! Come along then, pussums!" But pussums came not, and Mrs. Number Three, giving expression to a thought not over sugary, returned home with the milk. That evening, as she lingered in the garden, noting with fond pride the growth of two pansies, a sunflower, and a

luxurious wealth of nasturtiums, a gentle purring noise fell on her ear, and looking up she beheld a sleek black pussy, purring, and blinking its eyes in the rays of the setting sun. With eager steps Mrs. Number Three went for the milk. "Blackie! Blackie! Come pussums then!" she called.

It behoveth the Chronicler to be truthful. Pussy Number Two knew full well that her name was not Blackie. But she beheld the saucer, she heard the white fluid softly gurgling from the jug, and after a slight show of polite reluctance she dropped gracefully from the wall, and deliberately drank the milk intended for her absent neighbour; sitting on Number Three's garden seat afterward to accomplish her toilet. Also, I grieve to say that Mrs. Number Two, being a somewhat humorous little woman, watched these proceedings from her back bedroom window with much joy.

For a whole fortnight did Pussy Number Two feast on new milk, fish, and all manner of delights; and daily her coat grew sleeker, her expression smirker, and her purr more full of satisfaction and vain-glory. Surely she had arrived at a feline Valhalla! But, alas! 'twas not eternal.

On the appointed day the Number Ones returned, with cheeks well browned and trunk well battered. And the very same evening Blackie also returned from his expedition, somewhat ragged as to ears and coat, and decidedly gaunt as to figure. Mrs. Number One saw him enter the kitchen as she was preparing the nocturnal kipper, and she shrieked loudly. Alfred flew to her side and joined in her lamentations. He seemed less interested, however, when she proposed a visit of remonstrance and reproach, but was unable to offer any objection when Mrs. Number One tore off her overall and dashed from the house, the astonished Blackie under her arm.

"Well, you *are* delightfully sunburnt," began Mrs. Number Three; when she was stricken dumb by the apparition of a very skeletal cat thrust close to her face, the furious eyes of her neighbour glaring above it.

"Look at this poor dumb animal!" shrieked Mrs. Number One, to the accompaniment of an expostulatory howl from Blackie.

"I fed it every day," faltered Mrs. Number Three. Then a light flickered through her bewildered mind. "I must have been feeding the next door cat," she said eagerly.

If she thought that this trivial explanation would find any favour with the enraged cat owner she was woefully mistaken. Mrs. Number One surveyed her with withering scorn.

"Do you mean to say you mistook that

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