



THE WELL READ MASON

THE BUILDER



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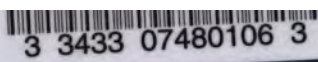
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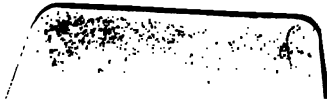
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"THE TEASING ATTENTIONS OF ELEVEN YOUNG POLES"

**THE TRUE  
PHILOSOPHER**

**AND OTHER CAT TALES**

**BY**

**PEGGY BACON**

**ILLUSTRATED WITH ETCHINGS BY THE AUTHOR**



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**DEDICATED**  
**TO**  
**DUFF, BRITA AND SIAM**

## THE TRUE PHILOSOPHER AND HIS CAT

ONCE there was a philosopher and he had nothing in the whole world but his cat and his philosophy. He had pawned his last book and eaten his last batter-cake and been ejected by his last landlady; so tucking his cat under his arm in a position which he and the cat knew to be comfortable, he started bravely off down the king's high-way, and being a young philosopher he whistled a tune.

It was early May, and the daffodils and hyacinths were out in the gardens he passed, and the violets were out by the wayside, and all the fruit-trees in all the land were in blossom, so he did not feel nearly so destitute as one would have supposed, for who could be lonely or sad when the birds were singing and the sun shining on a sweet and balmy morning? Besides, his cat was a fat one and his philosophy genuine so he really had something after all.

They had journeyed some time and it was just high noon, when a coach rolled up and stopped abreast of them. Out bounced a stout gentleman in gorgeous attire who accosted the philosopher.

"I," he said with an air, "am the Lord High Chamberlain!"

"And I," replied the young man with a smile, "am a philosopher," for he disliked so much importance.

"That is beside the mark," said the Lord Chamberlain testily. "You have a cat. It appears to be a pure white cat. Is it?"

"Yes," replied the philosopher proudly, "it is absolutely pure white,—not a single hair of any color whatsoever."

"*And* it has a black nose."

"Yes, and the loveliest forget-me-not blue eyes. Look up, beloved, and show the gentleman your eyes." But beloved felt dozy and would not look up.

"His eyes are of no importance whatever," pursued the Lord High Chamberlain in a sweeping way. "But the King is ill—at least he does not feel quite well, and the doctor has prescribed the heart of a pure white cat with a black nose. Now all the cats with black noses seem sure to have a few black hairs somewhere, and all the pure white cats have *pink* noses, so the King has offered for such a cat a very large reward—in fact, the hand of the princess in marriage and the kingdom after his death. Now what do you say to that!" cried the Lord High Chamberlain triumphantly.

The philosopher looked up at the pretty face of the princess gazing down at him bashfully but favoringly from the coach window. Then he looked down at his cat and sighed.

"I fear it is impossible," he said looking at the

princess again wistfully. And as the jaw of the Chamberlain dropped he added hastily in explanation, "You see my cat needs his heart; and I need my cat—in short, I simply couldn't part with my cat."

"Do you mean to say you will forfeit a brilliant career for the sake of a cat?" exclaimed the Lord Chamberlain aghast.

"Oh, but it isn't just any cat!" cried the young man. "He's been my companion for years and years, and we have always been the best of friends." The cat looked up and purred. "And now I really couldn't treat him this way after all we've been through together. He's all I have in the world except my philosophy," he added.

"He may be all you have in the world just now, but you'd have a very great fortune if you gave him up," reasoned the Lord High Chamberlain.

"I simply couldn't consider it!" declared the philosopher stoutly.

"But if the cat is all you have in the world, how do you propose to live?" cried the Lord High Chamberlain desperately, for he did not dare return to the king without the requisite cat, and besides he saw the princess beginning to cry.

"Oh!" returned the philosopher. "We shall live very happily, I assure you. I am extremely busy at present attempting to pursue a course of reasoning along lines I have never tried before. To tell the truth, I am endeavoring to build up a philosophy of my own that

will include all other philosophies and supply all their deficiencies. I assure you it is intensely interesting. For example—" he was going on, warmed to his subject, but the Lord High Chamberlain interrupted him impatiently.

"I wish to know how you expect to live! Even philosophers must eat, I take it, and cats certainly must."

"Why yes, of course we will eat," said the philosopher, puzzled, "but it is not lunch time yet. I make it a rule never to eat between meals. It disturbs the mental processes."

"But when it is lunch time, what will you do? And when it is supper time what will you do? And what will you do for breakfast tomorrow?" shouted the exasperated man.

"Do—" repeated the young man still more puzzled, "Why we will eat of course, what do you do at meal times?"

But at this moment a messenger came riding up on horseback and drew rein before the chamberlain.

"The King," he announced loudly, "has quarrelled with his doctor and called in another who declares that all the king really needs to make him perfectly well and happy is five minutes talk with a true philosopher. You are to procure him one immediately and bring it home with you. The same reward is offered."

"I think we have one here," sighed the Lord High Chamberlain. "No one but a true philosopher could

be so indifferent to his diet. Will you kindly step into the coach, sir, and we will drive to the palace?"

So the philosopher got in with his cat and took his seat by the princess, who dried her eyes and looked very happy, and they all drove to the palace.

"Are you the true philosopher?" said the King. "Talk to me!" And he lay back and shut his eyes wearily.

"What is the matter with you?" said the philosopher, stroking the cat and eyeing the king mildly.

"The doctor says that my disease demands five minutes talk with a true philosopher. He diagnosed it in no other way. Begin!"

"In that case there cannot be much the matter with you," observed the philosopher.

"Oh, it does not *sound* as if I were very ill!" quoth the king with the air of a martyr.

"You look very well indeed," said the philosopher.

"Oh?" cried the king, "I don't *look* so ill!"

"Well, are you ill?" asked the philosopher skeptically.

"Of course I am!" said the king, haughtily. "Very ill!"

"I don't believe it!" declared the philosopher.

The king opened his eyes and demanded, "Why?"

"Because," began the philosopher with an air of one following out a logical course of reasoning, "you look perfectly well, you sound perfectly well, and what

would there be to make you ill? Have you not everything? Are you not quite happy?"

"Happy?" repeated the king, vaguely.

"Why, yes," pursued the philosopher. "You have a nice palace, an attractive garden, a comfortable bed, a good cook, a pretty daughter, a prosperous kingdom, and a splendid digestion,—or so the doctor says. Of course you are happy; and if you are happy, it stands to reason you are well; and if you are well, you cannot be ill."

"Very true," said the king, thoughtfully, "I have all the things you say,—so of course I must be happy,—and if I am happy—of course I am well—because I would not be happy if I were not well; and if I am well—I am not ill,—that would be ridiculous. Are the five minutes up?"

The five minutes proved to be up, and as the king assured the philosopher he felt "quite convalescent" they went downstairs to lay the plans for the wedding.

"And what will you do for an observatory?" said the king, who had rather confused ideas about philosophers.

"Dear me," cried his future son-in-law, "all a philosopher needs is a garret."

"Well now," said the king, with a troubled frown, "you are asking a very difficult thing of me, for I never heard of a garret in the palace, though we might fit one up in one of the towers. But I think the best



“LAY BACK AND SHUT HIS EYES WEARILY”



thing would be to erect one on the roof, and then it would be comfortable and conveniently near."

"Oh, pray do not bother about a garret, if it is so difficult," cried the philosopher hastily. "What I would really like more than anything would be a library."

"Well, that you shall have!" replied the king, very much relieved. And he immediately put the philosopher in complete possession of a very large one indeed filled with globes, maps, easy-chairs, writing-desks, waste-baskets, and paper-cutters, and at least one copy of every book, manuscript and inscription that had ever existed in the world. Here the philosopher and his cat immediately and delightedly installed themselves, whence the former was with difficulty dislodged for the wedding, having indeed to be reminded four times to go and get dressed for the occasion. But after that was over and he and the princess were happily settled, he managed to spend most of his time there. And upon the decease of the old king, letting the affairs of state slide into the hands of his wife, who thoroughly enjoyed such things, he retired for good and all into his sanctum where, with his cat on his knee and a book in his hand, he pursued a philosophical train of thought almost without interruption from that time to his dying day.

## A TOOTH FOR A TOOTH

ONCE there was an excellent dentist who did all the cleverest things to people's mouths. He did them so ingeniously that he soon became rich; but he was an idealist, much exalted by the grandeur of his mission, and continued to work as hard as ever, starting early, stopping late, drilling and filling all day long. If any one had told him that he slaved the year round for the purpose of supporting a fat, lazy cat in luxury and idleness, he would have denied it hotly; but so, in fact, it was; for being a bachelor of an affectionate and self-abnegating nature with no relative on whom to clamp his devotion, his cat, Isabella, had come to be the idol of his heart and its comfort the aim of his life. It is not possible, of course, to spend as much money on a cat as on a wife; but the dentist did his best, and the bills of the milkman and veterinary were always the largest.

The dentist lived in a comfortable suburban villa with colored glass in the front door, a bronze group in the parlor, and a back-yard where Isabella and the week's wash were wont to take the air. Unfortunately for Isabella, the privacy of the yard was insecure against the trespassings of neighboring cats; and yet



“DID ALL THE CLEVEREST THINGS TO PEOPLES’ MOUTHS”

more unfortunately, Isabella's second teeth had never made their appearance. Though a couple of back teeth on either side of her jaw sufficed her nicely for a diet that consisted of milk, minces, custards, fish, sweet-breads and egg-nogs, they proved unhandy and ineffectual as weapons of war; and the dentist's rest was often broken by precautionary trips, false alarms, and necessary midnight rescues.

Among these back-yard marauders so abhorred and dreaded by Isabella and the dentist, were three that inspired them with special feelings of panic and hatred. Not knowing their natal names, we will, in describing them, make use of the opprobrious ones with which the dentist, for the sake of vilification, christened them. Judas, a treacherous maltese with a tail like a lance and a slimy grey coat that fitted as suavely as a union suit, would creep up warily when Isabella lay blinking in the sunshine or dozing in the moonlight, and suddenly let out an awful hiss; whereat Isabella would leap as high as her fat would let her and the fight would begin. For such combats there would have been for Isabella no issue in this world, had not the dentist invariably arrived in time.

Nero was a stout, yellow brute, with arrogant whiskers and greedy, round eyes; he always growled loudest at the ash can, and would bound savagely towards Isabella who fled at the sight of him. At such times, also, the dentist's advent was the only solution.

The last of the terrible trio was Clytemnestra,

black as Erebus, who would flatten her ears, look Isabella between the eyes and advance in deadly side-steps, while that helpless feline would crouch hypnotized with horror. These and many more were a thorn in the side of the dentist and a whole bramble-bush to his pet.

The dentist's diary declares that it was on the twelfth of November that Isabella lost her last first tooth—or perhaps it might be more accurate to say her first and last tooth, since she never cut any more,—and since the fall of that invaluable fragment of herself, Isabella and the dentist had not ceased their war against the invaders, neither had the latter's sleep become less uncertain. The summer had now arrived, and the dentist, finding himself almost too tired to fill and quite too tired to pull, determined to extend his customary vacation from ten days to two weeks, and accordingly, in the hottest of the hot weather, when pajamas and ice water had no effect at all, the dentist, carrying a fat, brown hand-bag, backed himself off the stoop, earnestly exhorting the cook to protect Isabella.

Now the cook had a follower, not the kind that drone dully in the kitchen, nor the kind that hang over palings in honeyed converse, but a gay and gallant escort who wore a diamond ring and a flowered neck-tie, and who, during the dentist's absence, took Bridget walking every afternoon and conducted her to the movies every evening. Wherefore it came to



“EARNESTLY EXHORTING THE COOK TO PROTECT ISABELLA”

pass that upon the dentist's return a very disheveled Isabella stepped to meet him in a very syncopated way, and the cook could make no explanation, albeit calling the saints to witness that she had not let the blessed beast out of her sight.

Upon examination, the wounds proved to be a severe bite in the left hind-leg, one equally severe in the right fore-leg, two nicks in the ear, a long brown scratch down the nose, and a bare pink area on the tail. Horrified, the master summoned the veterinary who bandaged Isabella, while the dentist retired at once into his office where he might have been seen till two o'clock in the morning immersed in a stout volume bearing the laconic title: "Jaws."

For the ensuing week, the dentist utilized all his spare moments in making difficult researches in Isabella's mouth, drawing little diagrams, and even attempted a wax impression—a project that failed utterly for too many reasons to enumerate. During that period so full of trial for both Isabella and her master, the latter came to the conclusion that human dentistry was a sinecure and the most panicky human patient an easy problem,—“Isabella, you are not a patient—you are an impatient!” he declared one day when that animal had cleverly contrived to bite two of his fingers with those remote back teeth. But he persevered courageously, and produced by the end of the week a very pretty little enamel set of pointed false teeth, peculiarly adapted to Isabella's masticatory and

martial needs, and having two couple of dangerous fighting tusks rather longer and sharper than those of the normal cat. "Thank heaven, I learned to etherize!" ejaculated he, and capturing Isabella, he bore her to his office.

In Isabella's mouth, aside from the above-mentioned back ones, were several insignificant little teeth, beady and abortive, appearing through the gums here and there like grains upon an imperfect ear of corn; and it was to these that the dentist riveted his bridge, Isabella unconscious as the Sleeping Beauty. The measurements, though taken by stealth, proved exact, the calculation just, and the fit precise. It was a neat job, and the dentist was delighted.

Not having had any teeth for some time, it took Isabella a short while to learn their management. In fact, the first thing she did on regaining consciousness was to bite her tongue deeply. This happened again when she lapped her milk and ate her dinner, her tongue being accustomed to roam about her mouth untrammelled and in safety. When she washed her face, she sometimes scratched her paw on the military tusks; but she soon got control of her new acquisitions, and it was noticed how effectively she marshalled them against her back-yard enemies.

Them she quelled at once,—Judas, Clytemnestra, Nero,—taking whole mouthfuls at a time to the infinite ecstasy of the dentist, who, wreathed in smiles, would view their vanquishment from the office window. In-



deed, she proved herself the doughtiest of them all, owing chiefly, perhaps, to her master's unctious labors over those extra long fangs, on which she was wont victoriously to impale her opponents. She did not, however, confine their use to warfare, frequently brandishing them against mankind in token of her displeasure or resentment. And if sometimes Isabella's disposition strikes the caller, cook, or grocer's boy—never the dentist—as less agreeable than of yore, sooth, it was the power to bite and not the will that had previously been lacking.

## THE QUEEN'S CAT

ONCE there was a great and powerful king who was as good as gold and as brave as a lion, but he had one weakness, which was a horror of cats. If he saw one through an open window he shuddered so that his medals jangled together and his crown fell off; if anyone mentioned a cat at table he instantly spilled his soup all down the front of his ermine; and if by any chance a cat happened to stroll into the audience chamber, he immediately jumped onto his throne, gathering his robes around him and shrieking at the top of his lungs.

Now this king was a bachelor and his people didn't like it; so being desirous of pleasing them, he looked around among the neighboring royal families and hit upon a very sweet and beautiful princess, whom he asked in marriage without any delay, for he was a man of action.

Her parents giving their hearty consent, the pair were married at her father's palace; and after the festivities were over, the king sped home to see to the preparation of his wife's apartments. In due time she arrived bringing with her a cat. When he saw her mounting the steps with the animal under her arm,

the King, who was at the door to meet her, uttering a horrid yell, fell in a swoon and had to be revived with spirits of ammonia. The courtiers hastened to inform the queen of her husband's failing, and when he came to, he found her in tears.

"I cannot exist without a cat!" she wept.

"And I, my love," replied the King, "cannot exist with one!"

"You must learn to bear it!" said she.

"You must learn to live without it!" said he.

"But life would not be worth living without a cat!" she wailed.

"Well, well, my love, we will see what we can do," sighed the King.

"Suppose," he went on, "you kept it in the round tower over there. Then you could go to see it."

"Shut up my cat that has been used to running around in the open air?" cried the Queen. "Never!"

"Suppose," suggested the King again, "we made an inclosure for it of wire netting."

"My dear," cried the Queen, "A good strong cat like mine could climb out in a minute."

"Well," said the King once more, "suppose we give it the palace roof, and I will keep out of the way."

"That is a good scheme," said his wife, drying her eyes.

And they immediately fitted up the roof with a cushioned shelter, and a bed of catnip, and a bench where the Queen might sit. There the cat was left;

and the Queen went up three times a day to feed it, and twice as many times to visit it, and for almost two days that seemed the solution of the problem. Then the cat discovered that by making a spring to the limb of an overhanging oak tree, it could climb down the trunk and go where it liked. This it did, making its appearance in the throne-room, where the King was giving audience to an important ambassador. Much to the amazement of the latter, the monarch leapt up screaming, and was moreover so upset, that the affairs of state had all to be postponed till the following day. The tree was, of course, cut down; and the next day the cat found crawling down the gutter to be just as easy, and jumped in the window while the court was at breakfast. The King scrambled onto the breakfast table, skillfully overturning the cream and the coffee with one foot, while planting the other in the poached eggs, and wreaking untold havoc among the teacups. Again the affairs of state were postponed while the gutter was ripped off the roof, to the fury of the head gardener, who had just planted his spring seeds in the beds around the palace walls. Of course the next rain washed them all away.

This sort of thing continued. The wistaria vine which had covered the front of the palace for centuries, was ruthlessly torn down, the trellises along the wings soon followed; and finally an ancient grape arbor had perforce to be removed as it proved a sure means of descent for that invincible cat. Even then, he clever-



“PLANTING THE OTHER IN THE POACHED EGGS”

ly utilised the balconies as a ladder to the ground ; but by this time the poor King's nerves were quite shattered and the doctor was called in. All he could prescribe was a total abstinence from cat ; and the Queen, tearfully finding a home for her pet, composed herself to live without one. The King, well cared for, soon revived and was himself again, placidly conducting the affairs of state, and happy in the society of his beloved wife. Not so the latter.

Before long it was noticed that the Queen grew wan, was often heard to sniff, and seen to wipe her eyes, would not eat, could not sleep,—in short, the doctor was again called in.

"Dear, dear," he said disconsolately, combing his long beard with his thin fingers. "This is a difficult situation indeed. There must not be a cat on the premises, or the King will assuredly have nervous prostration. Yet the Queen must have a cat or she will pine quite away with nostalgia."

"I think I had best return to my family," sobbed the poor Queen, dejectedly. "I bring you nothing but trouble, my own."

"That is impossible, my dearest love," said the King decidedly—"Here my people have so long desired me to marry, and now that I am at last settled in the matrimonial way, we must not disappoint them. They enjoy a Queen so much. It gives them something pretty to think about. Besides, my love, I am attached to you, myself, and could not possibly manage with-

out you. No, my dear, there may be a way out of our difficulties, but that certainly is not it." Having delivered which speech the King lapsed again into gloom, and the doctor who was an old friend of the King's went away sadly.

He returned, however, the following day with a smile tangled somewhere in his long beard. He found the King sitting mournfully by the Queen's bedside.

"Would your majesty," began the doctor, turning to the Queen, "object to a cat that did not look like a cat?"

"Oh, no," cried she, earnestly, "just so it's a *cat!*"

"Would your majesty," said the doctor again, turning to the king, "object to a cat that did not look like a cat?"

"Oh, no," cried he, "just so it doesn't *look* like a cat!"

"Well," said the doctor beaming, "I have a cat that is a cat and that doesn't look any more like a cat than a skillet, and I should be only too honored to present it to the Queen if she would be so gracious as to accept it."

Both the King and the Queen were overjoyed and thanked the doctor with tears in their eyes. So the cat—for it was a cat though you never would have known it—arrived and was duly presented to the Queen who welcomed it with open arms and felt better immediately.





"A SMILE TANGLED SOMEWHERE IN HIS LONG BEARD"



It was a thin, wiry, long-legged creature, with no tail at all, and large ears like sails, a face like a lean isosceles triangle with the nose as a very sharp apex, eyes small and yellow like flat bone buttons, brown fur short and coarse, and large floppy feet. It had a voice like a steam siren and its name was Rosamund.

The King and Queen were both devoted to it; she because it was a cat, he because it seemed anything but a cat. No one indeed could convince the King that it was not a beautiful animal, and he had made for it a handsome collar of gold and amber—"To match," he said, sentimentally, "its lovely eyes." In sooth so ugly a beast never had such a pampered and luxurious existence, certainly never so royal a one. Appreciating its wonderful good fortune, it never showed any inclination to depart; and the King, the Queen, and Rosamund lived happily ever after.

## CATNIP AND CATNAP

ONCE there were brothers, Catnip and Catnap, as different as kittens can be, for Catnip was all enthusiasm and energy, Catnap all calm somnolence. The latter was devoted to sleep, and next to sleep he loved sleepiness, and next to sleepiness, peace. He loved the hollows of chairs, the cushions of sofas, the laps of humans. He loved to be stroked, scratched under the chin and combed, for all this could continue while he slept; but anything that tended to disturb his slumbers was hateful and inexcusable, the only legitimate interruption being food, which was brought to him in a pretty bowl inscribed with the legend "For a Good Cat", by a devoted human hand.

Catnip, on the contrary, played ceaselessly with every small object that came his way, tossing it in the air, rolling over on it, chasing it, biting it, kicking it, and lavishing upon it all his exuberant attentions. In the face of his tireless energy every obstacle was overcome,—plates fell from the pantry shelf, pitchers flooded the kitchen with their milky contents, and precious vases crashed to the hearth-stone, while Catnip, perched upon the mantelpiece, surveyed with animation the rebounding fragments. Never was he













































































