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Wonderful cat of Cobbie
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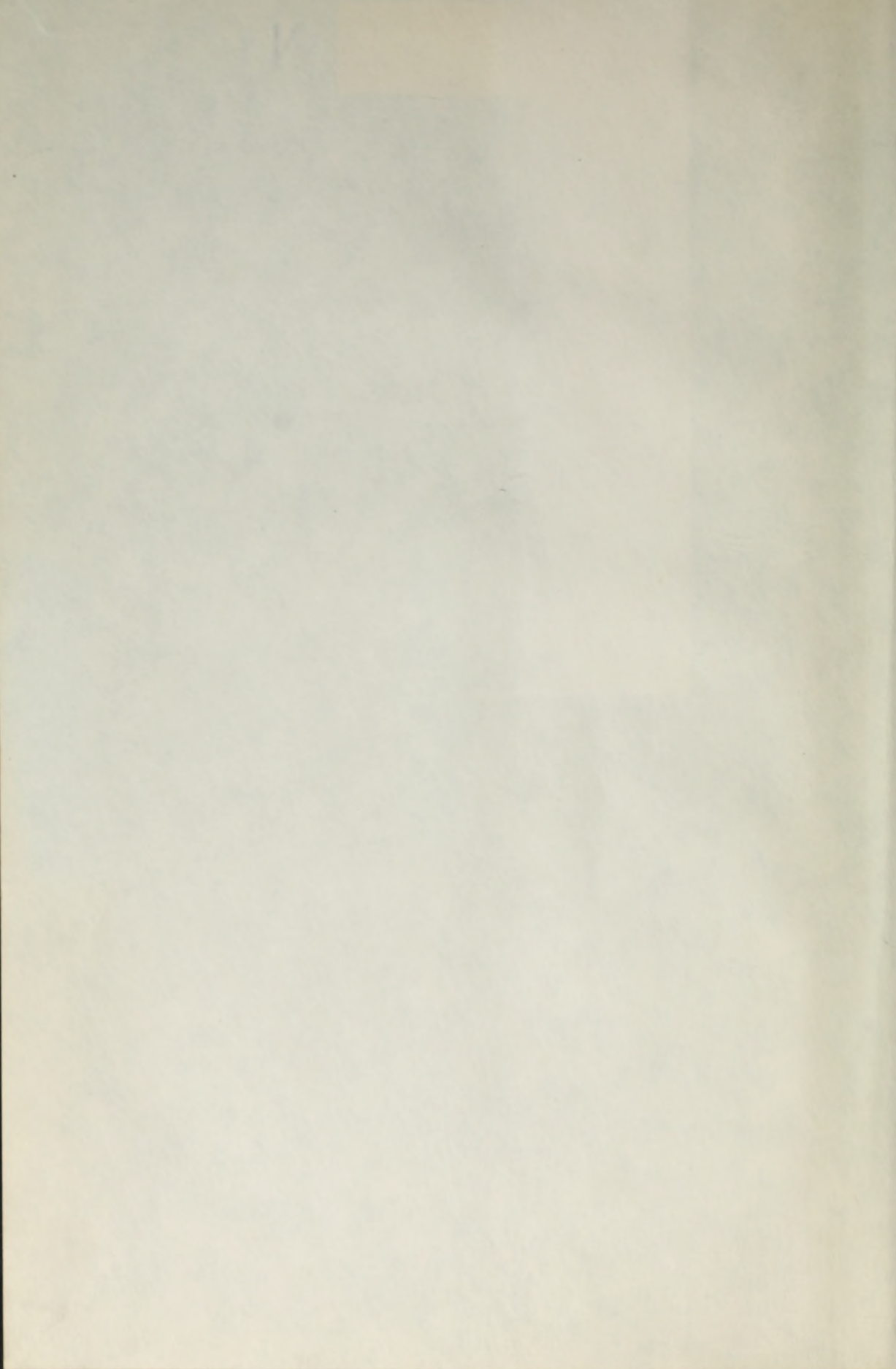
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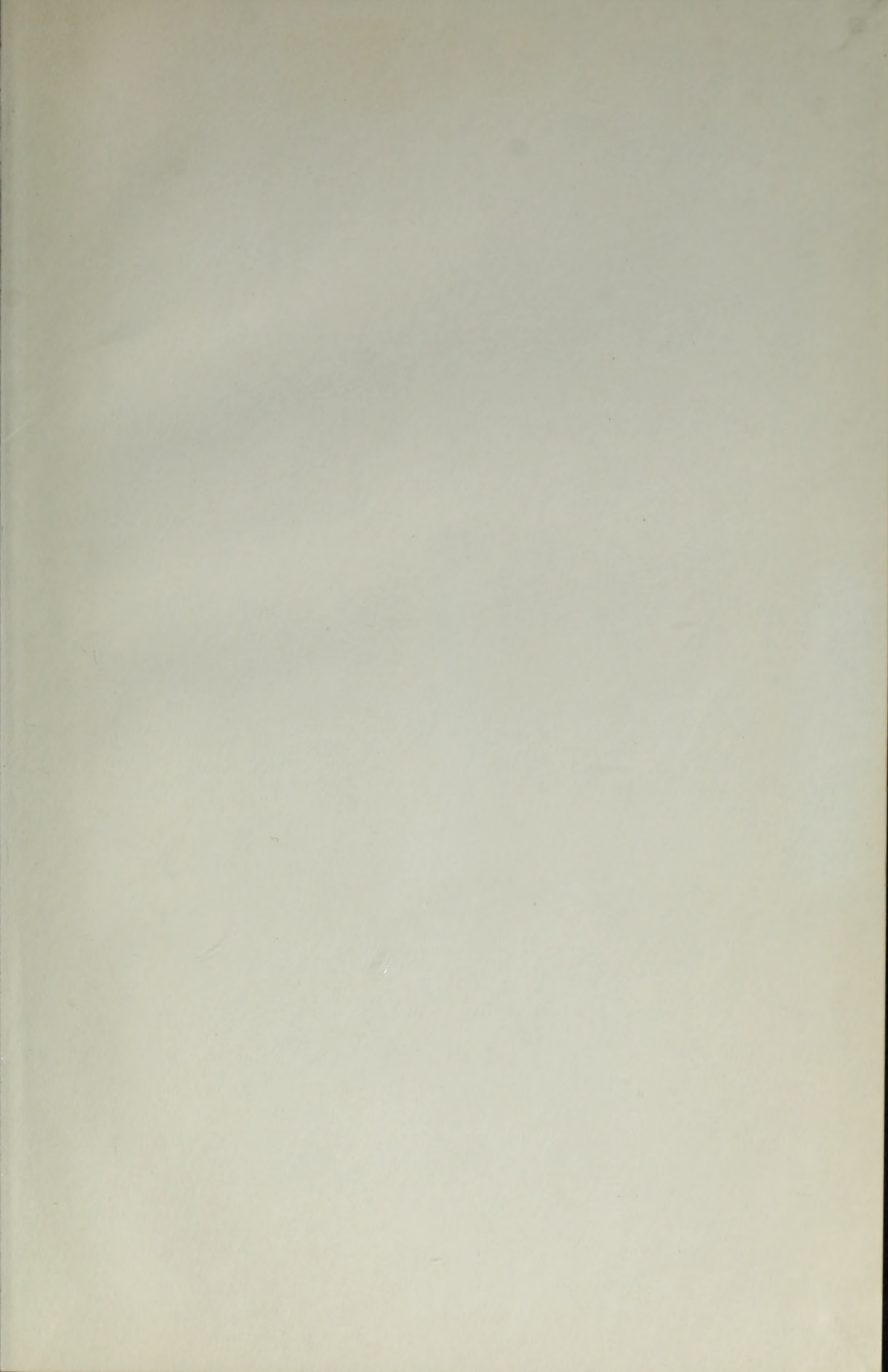
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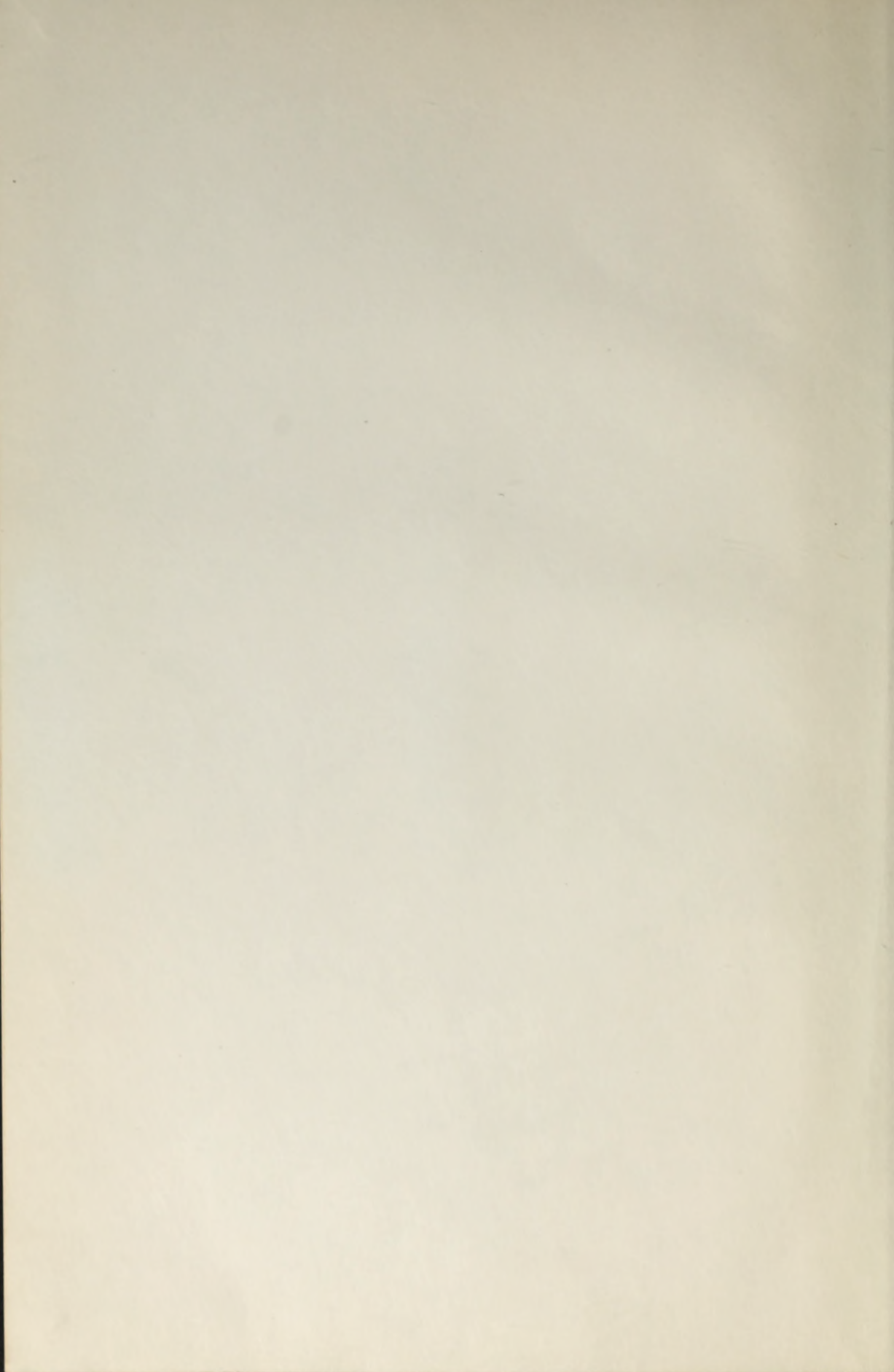
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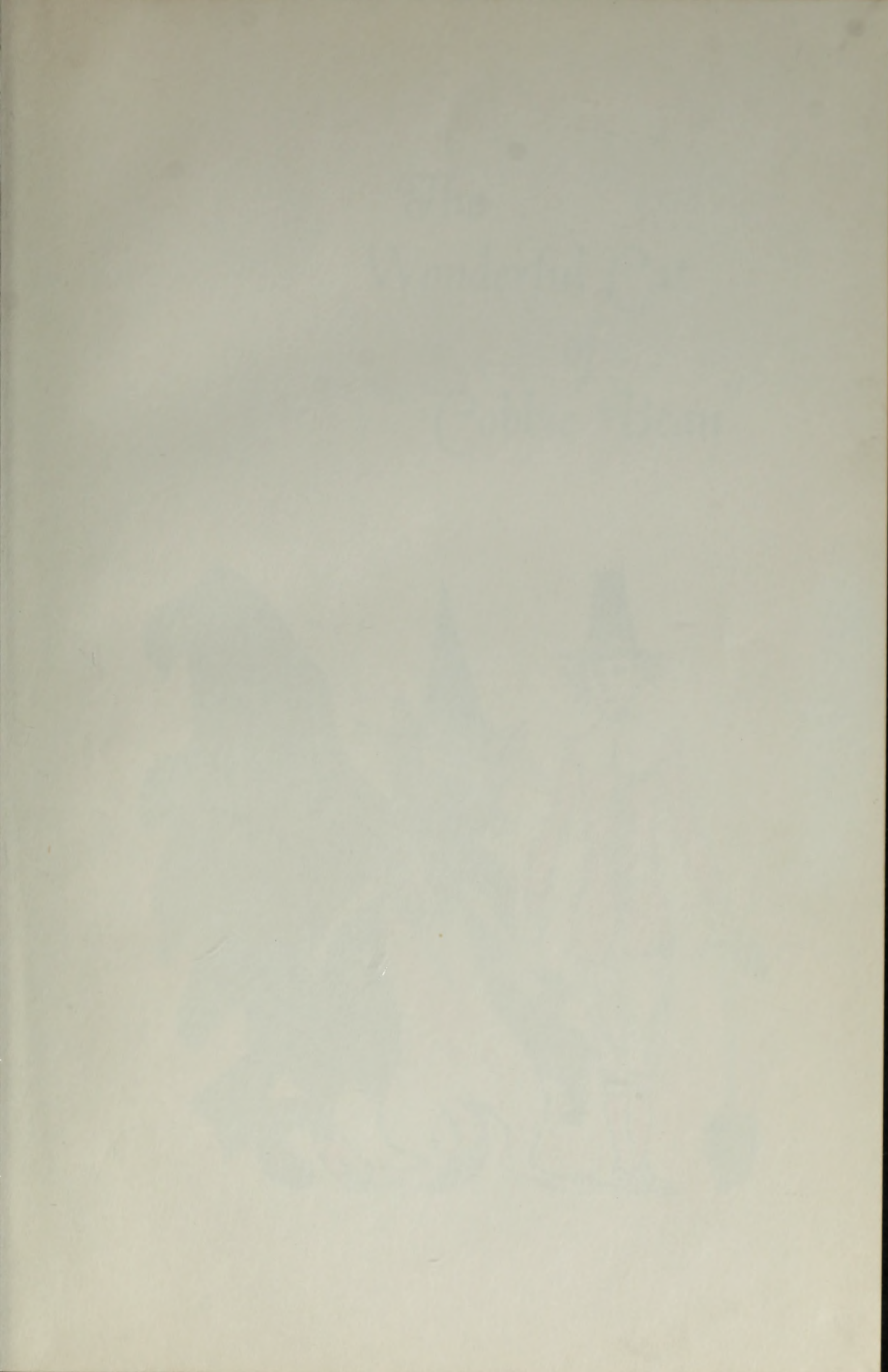
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The
Wonderful Cat
of
Cobbie Bean







*The Wonderful Cat
of Cobbie Bean*

BY BARBEE OLIVER CARLETON

Illustrated by Jacob Landau

THE JOHN C. WINSTON COMPANY



Philadelphia • Toronto

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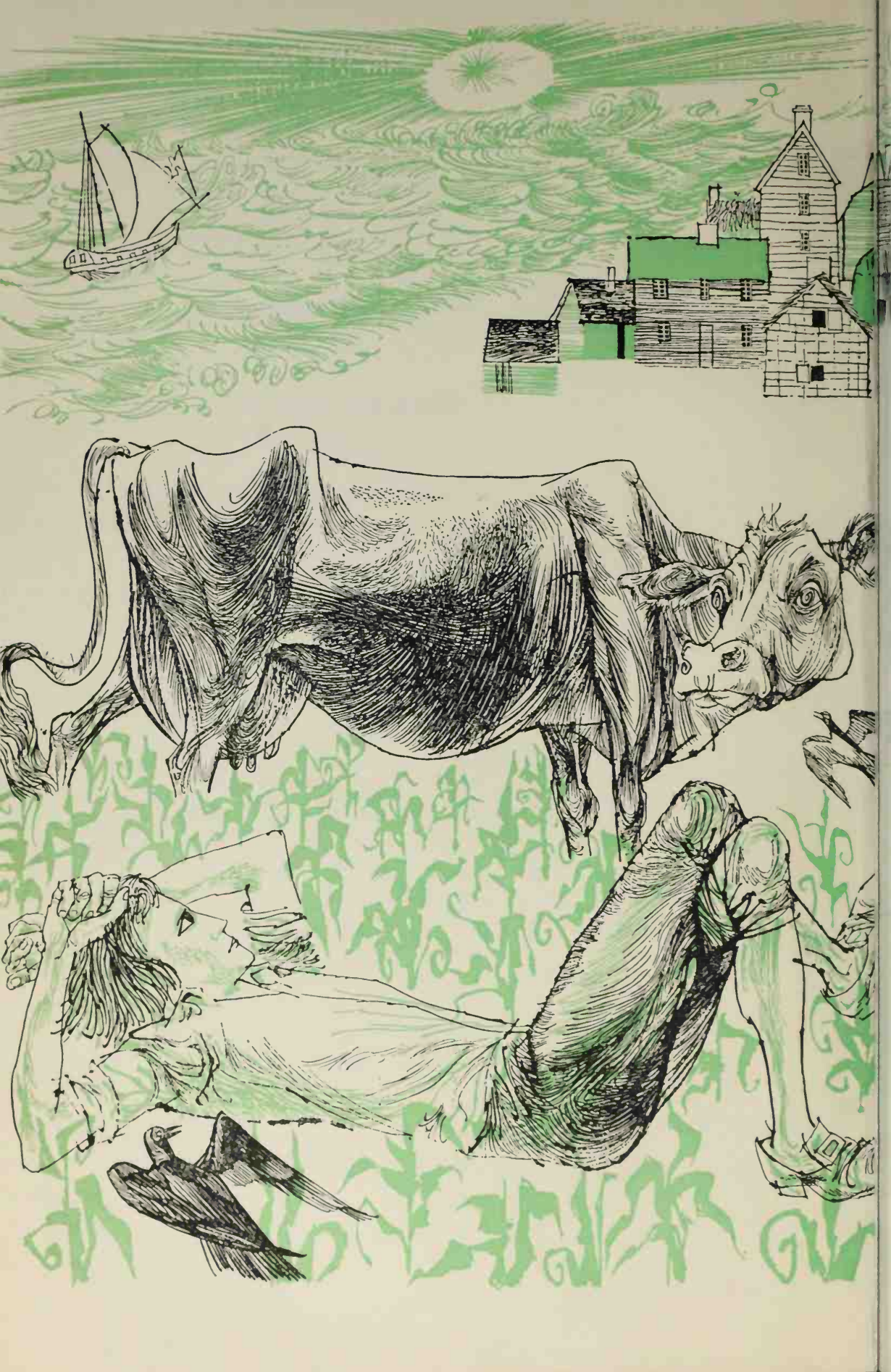
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This Book Is Dedicated
to
Courtney and David
and
All Who Believe in Magic





Chapter 1

The Voice in the Hobblebush

IN the early days of this country there lived by the sea a ne'er-do-well lad named Cobbie Bean. In those days witches were said to be abroad in the land. So strange things happened by night and by day, and this is how it was.

From his cornfield on the hill, Cobbie could look out over all the world. He could see the village of Salem, with the forest dark on one side and the harbor bright on the other. He could see the fine ships of his cousin, Captain Bean, who was as fat as a pudding.

Now, the captain was a getter. He got and he got. Already he had got himself a fleet of ships and a wharf and a warehouse; and day by day he got more and more.

And Cobbie could see the handsome house of his other cousin, the famous Deacon Bean, who was as thin as a bone. The deacon was a doer. He did and he did. He wrote deep books that nobody understood. He preached dark sermons that frightened folk half to death. So the deacon was the most famous man in all of Essex County, just as the captain was the richest.

As for Cobbie Bean, he had done nothing, and he had got nothing. Yet, he had the sun at his head and the world at his feet and the merriest heart in the county. He had it all for keeping a cow and a patch of corn. "Nothing to it," said Cobbie Bean.

But one night something happened. It was twilight, and the air was



sweet with lilacs and the twittering of birds. Happy as a clam at high tide, Cobbie sat on his doorstep eating his supper of porridge.

Then he saw two figures on horseback, moving with purpose up the hill. One was as fat as a pudding. One was as thin as a bone. And they looked grim, even from a distance.

Cobbie sighed. "I wish my cousins would move to China!" he told himself. Then his Conscience bothered him.

"They only want you to make something of yourself," said his Conscience.

"I doubt it," said Cobbie. "The less I am, the bigger they feel."

"How can you think such a thing!" said his Conscience. "Especially when you didn't lay a hand to the hoe all day."

"I did so," said Cobbie uneasily. The cousins were getting nearer.

"You did not," argued his Conscience. "All morning long you lay on your back on the top of the hill and watched the clouds go by. Whistling, at that!"

Cobbie said, "Well, I was wondering . . ."

"Wondering what?" demanded his Conscience. "How to grow a corn crop?"

"I was wondering where the wind goes. . . ."

His Conscience sniffed. "That is all very well. But here come your cousins. Let's see you whistle your way out of this one, Cobbie Bean."

Solemnly, the deacon and the captain hitched their horses to Cobbie's gate. In all their finery, they swept into the cottage and sat stiffly on the two rude stools.

The deacon wrinkled his long, thin nose, as if he smelled something unpleasant. "Well, Cobbie Bean, I see that things are as bad as ever with you."

"Better than ever, Cousin," grinned Cobbie. "Spring is here!"

"Spring!" The captain snorted so loudly that all five chins jiggled. "Look at those rags you wear, Cobbie Bean. Look at this hut you live in. Look at that cold porridge you eat for your supper." The captain shuddered.

"But I'm happy the way I am," Cobbie said timidly.

"That," hissed the deacon, "is the whole point. Happiness is a sin! If you are happy, Cobbie Bean, *it is because you are bewitched!*"

Cobbie's eyes popped. "B-Bewitched?"

"Bewitched!" thundered the captain. "Your cousin and I agree that the time has come to tell you."

The deacon leaned forward and pointed his bony finger. "Cobbie Bean," he said darkly, "a strange thing happened at your christening. Just as the minister spoke your name, a large, gray cat leaped upon the window ledge. She wore a black cloak and a high-crowned hat, and her eyes glittered like ice! Then she spoke in the voice of the wind, or of the sea, and it filled the meetinghouse: "*Cobbie Bean . . . Cobbie Bean . . . I give thee the gift of happiness. . . .*"

Cobbie turned as red as joe-pye-weed. The deacon had always taught how sinful it was to be merry. The captain had told all over Salem that men who got ahead had no time for happiness.

"'Gift of happiness,' indeed!" The deacon's long lip curled. "The cat was a witch, of course! As we tried to seize her, she disappeared in a sizzling chain of lightning!"

"And a thunderclap that made us all but deaf!" added the captain in a shaking voice.

"If you would have gifts," preached the deacon scornfully, "you

should have the gift of doing. Look at me. I've done and I've done, and now, behold! I am the most famous man in all the County of Essex!"

"How about the gift of getting?" shouted the captain. "I've got and I've got, and look at me now: the richest man in the county!"

"But I had no choice," said poor Cobbie. "I was only a baby!"

"You're not a baby now," snapped the deacon. "You are a do-nothing, living off a cornpatch."

Hopefully, Cobbie said, "Yesterday I did something. I took some fresh herbs down to the jailer, who has the mumps."

The two cousins laughed aloud. "And, pray," said the captain, "what did this great deed get you?"

Cobbie bit his fingernail. "Just made us happy, me and the jailer."

"You see?" breathed the deacon. "He has certainly been bewitched!"

"Without a doubt," whispered the captain.

The two cousins looked nervously about them. Night was falling, and Cobbie's cabin was filled with shadows. It was no place to be with a person who was bewitched. They hurried outside and mounted their horses.

"Cobbie Bean," warned the deacon, when he was safely in his saddle, "see that you make something of yourself."

"Before it's too late!" bellowed the captain. And away they trotted down the hill toward Salem.

Poor Cobbie stared after them. Was he bewitched? Nonsense! "Anyway, they're right about one thing," he told his Conscience sadly. "I'm a do-nothing, all right. I didn't even hoe down the cornfield today!" And Cobbie Bean made for the hilltop to hoe a row or two by moonlight.

"The gift of happiness! Pooh!" He struck the earth such a mighty blow that the hoe caught in the roots of a hobblebush growing at the edge of the field. Like a good farmer, Cobbie seized his ax to chop it down. But its twisting branches and its snowy blossoms made so handsome a picture in the moonlight, that Cobbie grew weak with happiness. Besides, he had heard that a hobblebush holds all sorts of magic. Slowly, he lowered his ax and turned to go home.

Then it happened. Alone in the moonlight, Cobbie heard something more than the peepers in the marsh below. He heard a strange voice whisper, "*Cobbie Bean . . . Cobbie Bean . . .*" It was the voice of the wind or of the sea. But there was no wind at all that night. Nor could



the sound of the sea be heard from Cobbie's lonely hill. Under the hobblesh tree there was nothing but moon-shadow. Cobbie felt the hair prickle on his neck.

The voice rose from the hobblesh tree and filled the air between earth and heaven like the pealing of bells: "*Cobbie Bean . . . Cobbie Bean. . . Stranger things will come to pass than you have ever seen. . .*"

The voice died away among the hills. For a moment the tree tossed violently as if in a windstorm. Then there was only the moonlight, flowing peacefully over hobblesh and cornfield.

Cobbie took to his heels. His ax went one way, his hoe the other. Down the hill he sprinted with his shadow close behind. He pounded across the footbridge where the mist reached after him with wet fingers. He burst into his hut and bolted the door and leaned against it, panting.

But he was not alone. There on the stool, full in the moonlight, sat a large, gray cat. She wore a black cloak and a high-crowned hat, and her eyes glittered like ice!



Chapter 2

The Large, Gray Cat

COBBIE Bean stared at the cat and the cat glared back at Cobbie with eyes that glittered in the moonlight. Cobbie opened his mouth to say "Scat!" but he could only hiss in a jiggly sort of way. He was shaking like the hobblebush he had just fled. After all, it isn't every day that a fellow runs home from a voice in a tree to find in his house a strange cat wearing a cloak and hat!

Cobbie decided to leave. Keeping his eyes on the cat's—for, truly, he could not look away—he moved the bolt, very slowly. Very softly, he lifted the latch.

"Stop that," the Cat said calmly.

Startled, Cobbie dropped the latch with a clatter.

"Now, come over here," directed the Cat, "and stop acting like those two ninnies you have for cousins."

Cobbie swallowed, and made a wide circle around his guest.

"People!" chuckled the Cat. "Nothing but a bunch of nerves. Here, you might hang up my things before you sit down."

Cobbie Bean took the small cloak and the steeple-crowned hat as one would take up a white-hot poker. He hung them on a peg by the door and seated himself gingerly across the table from the stranger. Finally he cleared his throat. "You can talk!" he croaked.

"So can you!" said the Cat with relief. "I was beginning to wonder if you did anything but hiss. It would be dull to stay with someone who hissed all the time."

"S-Stay?" stammered Cobbie. "Did you s-say 's-stay'?"

"There you go hissing again," said the Cat. "And I did say 'stay.'"
Cobbie blinked. "S-Stay here?"

"Where else?" asked the Cat.

"But what will folks say?"

The Cat's laugh was like the chiming of bells. "They'd say I am a witch, naturally. And they would hang you for witchcraft, of course. So you must never tell a soul that I am anything but an ordinary cat."

Speechless, Cobbie shook his head.

"And now, Cobbie Bean, I should like my supper. It has been a long journey." The large, gray cat gazed at Cobbie with eyes as chilly as the northeast wind.

Cobbie Bean shivered. He served the porridge with a shaky hand, placing it carefully on the hearth.

His guest sniffed. "On the table, Cobbie Bean. Do you take me for a common cat?"

Cobbie hastened to place the bowl on the table, along with a wooden spoon. The Cat ate with the grace of a queen, but when she was done she wrinkled her nose.



"Porridge. Wooden spoons. We shall have to do better than that."

"Yes, ma'am," said Cobbie humbly.

"Still, thanks to me," the Cat went on dryly, "you do have the gift of happiness, surely the greatest gift on earth."

"Yes, ma'am," said Cobbie, blushing. "Thank you, ma'am."

"Oh, I know what those cousins of yours think about happiness! They do and they get, but they will leave the world just the way they found it. You, Cobbie Bean, have a gift to share. You can make the world a happier place." Thoughtfully, the Cat tapped her claws on the edge of the table. "People are funny. They listen only to their betters."

Cobbie nodded doubtfully.

"In short, Cobbie Bean," said the Cat briskly, "if you are to make the world happier, you must first turn into a gentleman!"

Alarmed, Cobbie bit his fingernail. "But I don't know how."

"Fingers out of your mouth!" ordered the Cat. "I'll teach you, of course. And after that, I shall bewitch you again."

Cobbie moved hastily toward the door.

"Oh, go sit down," said his guest. "I don't mean the turn-you-into-a-mouse sort of bewitching. I do that all the time." To prove it, the Cat suddenly took the shape of a mouse.

"I can do people, too," she said. And there, in place of the mouse, sat the captain, stroking his five chins. Immediately after, the captain gave way to the deacon, stiff as a ramrod, and pointing a long finger straight at Cobbie. Then there sat the Cat again, not even breathing hard.

She shrugged. "Low-grade witchcraft. Nothing to it. Making you rich and famous is just as easy. I can do that overnight. But turning you into a gentleman," the Cat looked Cobbie over carefully, "will take a little longer."

And that was the way the magic began. Each day the Cat stayed with Cobbie Bean. Each night she returned to the hobblebush. "Where do you think the magic comes from, eh, Cobbie?" she said, winking broadly.

As the warm summer days went by, the Cat taught Cobbie how to act kindly and speak gently, and how to live with love toward his fellows. "Think high," said the Cat. "That makes it easy."

And since no true gentleman lacks wisdom, she told him where the birds go in winter and what makes the wind blow and the tide move and people do as they do. On the golden afternoons when the corn



waved high, Cobbie and the Cat lay side by side on the hilltop. They watched the captain's ships, like great, white birds on a blue wind, sail off to the far corners of the earth. Then the Cat told Cobbie wonderful tales about other countries and other times, and a great friendship grew between them.

But sometimes, listening, Cobbie felt a shiver go up his spine. For the voice of the Cat seemed not to be a voice at all. At times it was the night wind blowing. At times it was the sea, hushing into a cove. The Cat must be very wise, and very, very old. Or the Cat must really be, as the cousins had said, a witch!

One day Cobbie dared to ask. "Cat, how is it that you, being—er, what you are, can talk?"

The Cat looked back at him with the gaze of an old idol. She glanced at the hobblebush. "Magic," she said. "The world's full of it."

And Cobbie was left still wondering if his friend was, after all, a witch. Yet, it seemed that he had never been without the Cat's wisdom. The days when he had put off his hoeing to whistle at the clouds seemed far away. For after Cobbie had learned to think high and act



the part of a gentleman, the Cat said, "Now you must learn to work well, or all I have taught you will come to nothing." She showed Cobbie how to plan his time and use his strength so cleverly that he could farm better than before and still have time to study the world around him.

And all this time, the two cousins, through the captain's spyglass, kept an eye on Cobbie's hill. Amazed, they saw Cobbie busily hoeing and busily weeding, and they saw his corn grow like magic!

"I guess that talk of ours did him a world of good," declared the captain.

"Maybe," said the deacon. "Maybe not."

Then one day, when the corn was beginning to tassel, the Cat turned to Cobbie a little sadly. "You are ready now," she told him. "You have learned to think high and to work well. Tonight at midnight, if there is a ring around the moon, come with your cow to the hobblebush. We'll make the world a happier place, all right! And while we're about it, we'll make those cousins of yours pipe a different tune!"

"Cat," said Cobbie, touching her fur fondly, "thank you."

The Cat gazed at him with frosty eyes. "You're welcome. Only beware, Cobbie Bean. *Never tell a living soul where the magic comes from!*" Then, in a blinding flash of lightning that ringed her round and round, and with a thunderclap that echoed after her through the hills, she disappeared.

A low wind blew in from the sea and the hill was filled with shadows. At the end of the cornfield, the hobblebush began to whisper and toss. His scalp prickling, Cobbie sprang to his feet and sprinted down the hill as if the devil himself were after him. Across the bridge he raced and into the hut, and shot the bolt. Half-afraid, half-hopeful, Cobbie looked about him for the large, gray cat. But the cottage was empty.

Slowly, the night drew out of the sea and lowered over Salem. A dark wind sent clouds racing down the sky. The pale moon rose, like a circle of silk. Higher and higher it climbed, until Cobbie Bean could see full and clear the great ring of light around it!

Then he left for the hilltop, pulling the cow by her halter. His hands were icy and his heart pounded as he picked his way past the boulders and the stiff forms of junipers. Had he taken a witch for his teacher?



Would the devil come for him tonight, up here in the full of the moon? The wind rushed past him in a panic. Ahead crouched the hobblebush, like a giant spider. Cobbie's throat was dry, and his tongue felt too large for his mouth. Fearfully, he tied the cow to a branch of the hobblebush.

Then it happened, the thing he was waiting for. A cloud covered the moon. An icy mist rose from the hill, and the hobblebush tossed wildly. As Cobbie stared, the cow bellowed in fear and fell to the ground. Then came the voice that Cobbie remembered. First it was soft like the sea. Then it filled the air like the chant of a winter wind. "*Cobbie Bean . . . Cobbie Bean. . . Never tell what you have seen. . .*"

A wailing of voices rose to fill the night. It was a witches' Sabbath! Stiff with fright and cold, Cobbie saw tall figures swirling slowly in the mist. Chanting, they moved like shadows around the hobblebush, each in turn casting something underneath its branches.

*"Blood of bat and bone of cat,
Tongue of frog and tooth of rat,
Hog's hair, claw of bear,
Three times three, now follow me. . ."*

Faster and faster they whirled and louder they shrieked, until Cobbie's head reeled. Then, quite suddenly, the wind died. The mist rolled back into the earth, taking the shadowy shapes along with it. The tossing branches came to rest.

Unbelieving, Cobbie Bean stared at the ground beneath the hobblebush.



Chapter 3

“Witchcraft!”

COBBIE Bean’s eyes all but popped from his head. In place of his cow stood a splendid black steed, bridled and saddled and pawing the ground. Over a branch of the hobblebush hung a fine suit of clothes, and on the grass lay bags bulging with gold.

“Cat,” breathed Cobbie, “wherever you are, listen to me. I don’t care if you are a witch! You’re a good witch, anyway.” Then, never forgetting that he was to make the world happier, he changed his rags for the finery. He filled his saddlebags with gold. Then he leaped into the saddle and set off for Salem.

Like a golden ribbon, the path wound down the rocky hill to the village and the bright harbor. The rising sun touched the junipers with fire. It brought sparks out of every boulder.

“Magic,” breathed Cobbie Bean, trotting a little faster.

He passed the meetinghouse where, long ago, the Cat had come to his christening. He began to smell the sea, and the wharf smells of cordage, of tar and of spices. The world was so full of magic that Cobbie joined with the birds in a jolly whistle, for he longed to tell everyone about it.

The good folk of Salem peeped out of their windows, or paused at their milking, surprised to see what a gentleman Cobbie Bean had become. All day long his wonderful tune went round in their heads and made the day merry.

Only the two cousins were too busy to listen. After working all night,

the deacon was finishing up a book that would frighten the sins right out of folk and make him more famous than ever. And down on the wharf, the captain had been thundering at his men since cockcrow. Doing and getting, the two cousins had no time for tunes.

Suddenly, Cobbie's horse stopped before a splendid new house. It had many steep gables and windows of glass cut in the shape of diamonds. A servant with frosty eyes bowed low at the door. "Welcome home, Master."

Closing the door behind him, the servant turned at once into the large, gray cat. She winked solemnly. "Quite a job of witchcraft, eh, Cobbie?" And she showed him over his house with its fine furnishings and its stores of food, its servants and gardens and coaches and horses.

Cobbie was bewildered. "Is it a dream?"

The Cat's laugh rang out like the chiming of bells. "No more a dream than the rest of life," said she. "Here your happiness will be no greater than on your hill. But you can share it better."

And Cobbie did. Wherever he went, the people of Salem were the happier for Cobbie Bean. He made the old feel young with his wonderful tales of faraway times and places. He made the sick feel well again with his secrets about how the grass grows and where the wind goes. And sometimes at night, the poor would find at their door a bag of gold or a sack of food. "Cobbie Bean," they would tell each other, blessing him in their hearts.

With the lads in town, Cobbie was a favorite. "You never worry," they told him, "about saving people's souls or getting more money than anybody else. Yet, you're happy and successful. Tell us your secret, Cobbie," they begged.

"It's easy," he laughed. "Think high. Work well. Pass your happiness along."

And so they did, laughing and singing at their tasks and working as never before. Only now and then people wondered. "Who told these marvelous things to Cobbie Bean?" they asked each other.

But Cobbie only smiled. For he knew that magic was thought evil, and that witchcraft was punished by death. He would keep his promise to the Cat never to tell where the magic came from.

Nor did Cobbie himself forget what the Cat had taught him. Thinking high and working well, he became in time as rich and famous as he was beloved.

Now his two cousins did not know what to make of all this. "Perhaps

he has some secret," whispered the deacon, "about how to become rich and famous."

"After all we have done for that ne'er-do-well," blustered the captain, "he should be made to share it with us!"

So, with canes tapping on the cobbles, off they trotted to learn how Cobbie Bean had become richer and more famous than they.

Once at Cobbie's house, they roared at the servant who led them to the study. Brutally, they kicked at the large, gray cat that came to greet them. "If I didn't know better," hissed the deacon, "I'd say that was the same beast that came to the christening!"

"Hush," said the captain, as Cobbie entered, wearing the fine garb of a gentleman.

"Well, Cobbie Bean," purred the deacon. "We see that you have come up in the world."

"That I have," smiled Cobbie, remembering his promise to the Cat.

"But, Cobbie," added the captain shrewdly, "we hardly expected this much profit from our advice. Have you some secret, perhaps, to share with us?"

"I have, Cousins," said Cobbie earnestly. "Think high. Work well. Pass your happiness along."

But the deacon squinted darkly into Cobbie's soul. "Cobbie Bean, you are not telling the whole truth. There's more to this than meets the eye!"

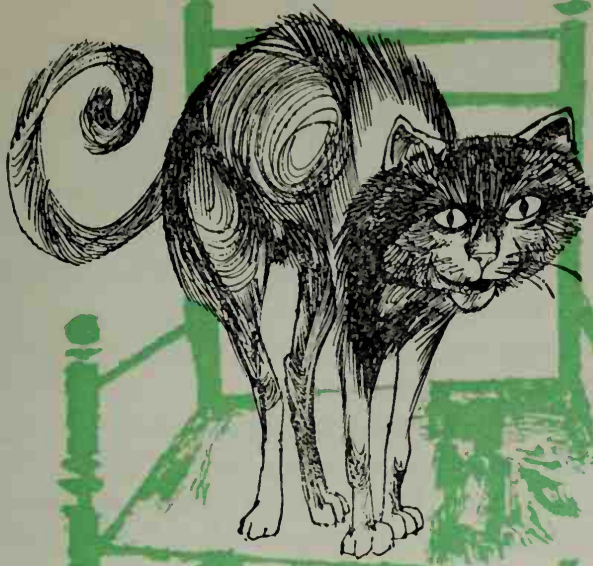
Cobbie shuffled his feet. Before he could think of an answer, the Cat silently walked into the room on all fours, like any common cat. She leaped into a chair and stared at the cousins with eyes like the northeast wind. They shook with cold and tried to look away. But the eyes of the cat held them stiff and frost-bound. Finally, with teeth chattering, they left the room as fast as shaking legs could carry them.

The two looked so miserable that Cobbie followed them to the door. "Wait!" he said. Surely, as long as he kept the Cat's secret, he might tell about the hobblebush.

He whispered swiftly, "Go to the hobblebush on the hill when there's a ring around the moon."

Scarcely able to hide their delight, the two cousins took their leave.

That very night there came a pale circle around the moon that half-filled the heavens. Two figures, one as fat as a pudding, one as thin as a bone, rode stealthily up Cobbie's lonely hill. Soon they reached the hobblebush.



"This must be the place," whispered the deacon nervously. The captain rubbed his fat hands together. "Now for the gifts that will make us as rich and famous as Cobbie Bean."

"Hark!" cried the deacon. "Is that the wind?" Startled, the two saw the branches begin to toss. They felt a chill rushing of wind and saw a gray mist rise around the hobblebush. They heard a voice that rode the wind like the tolling of a bell. "Cobbie Bean . . . Told . . . Cobbie Bean . . . Told . . ."

Then the night was filled with the wailing of voices and the swirling of dark figures. The cousins stared like statues, as faster and dizzier whirled the shapes. Then straight toward the two on horseback they came, screaming and scratching and pounding and beating. The wretched pair threw their arms over their heads. Plunging in terror, their horses turned into squealing pigs that bore them pell-mell down the hill, beaten and battered and bleeding and tattered.

"Witchcraft!" gasped the deacon as they galloped into Salem. Straight to the house of the magistrate they rode. Pounding on the door, they got that gentleman out of bed and told him their story.



“So Cobbie Bean can’t be our cousin at all,” finished the deacon. “If his cat is a witch, then he must be a witch himself!”

Horrified, the magistrate threw on his clothes. With trembling legs, the three crept down the dark street. They peered through the window into Cobbie Bean’s study, where a candle still burned.

There sat Cobbie before his fire, looking handsome and scholarly in his fine clothes. Opposite him in a high-backed chair sat the great, gray cat, still in her cap and cloak. Her strange voice filled the room with the sound of the wind and the sea.

“You broke your promise, Cobbie Bean,” the Cat was saying sadly. “And now, evil will come of it.”

“Witchcraft!” gasped the magistrate, with every hair on end.

“Witchcraft!” nodded the cousins.

“Cobbie Bean!” called the magistrate in a shaking voice. “In the name of the Governor of Massachusetts Bay, I arrest you for witchcraft!”



Chapter 4

Gallows Hill

POOOR Cobbie Bean was as damp as a mushroom. He sat on the jail floor with a chain around his leg. There was not a window in the place, but Cobbie knew by the nearby crowing of a cock that the night had run out. Now they would come and take him away to be hanged for witchcraft.

Cobbie shivered and tightened his belt. Hanging is not a pleasant thought on an empty stomach.

“Oh, Cat,” moaned Cobbie for the hundredth time. “I’m sorry I told about the hobblebush. If you are really magic, help me now!”

But the Cat did not appear. All through the dark days of Cobbie’s trial, the Cat had not come, either by day or by night. Now, as then, there was only the *drip, drip* of water down the dungeon wall. For a long time, Cobbie thought of their golden hours together on the hilltop above the sea, where even now the gallows tree was waiting.

Suddenly, a key grated in the lock. In came his friend, the jailer, looking so miserable that Cobbie felt sorry for him. “Here, take my hanky,” said Cobbie.

“I can’t help it,” sniffled the jailer, unlocking Cobbie’s chain. “You were so good to me when I had the mumps.” At the thought, he buried his face in Cobbie’s hanky and sobbed.

The magistrate waited at the front door to tie Cobbie’s hands behind his back. Under his eyes were circles the size of saucers. “I haven’t slept a wink all night,” he said, with his lip quivering. “You cheered up the

town so nicely, Cobbie, I still don't see how you can be a witch. I'm all mixed up."

"So am I, sir," said Cobbie. "But you must do your duty." With that, Cobbie led the way out into the sunlight. The dew sparkled on the grass. The sparrows twittered in the trees. The bright air was filled with the smell of the tide and the bayberry growing on the beach. Cobbie sniffed deeply. It was a wonderful world, and this was his last morning in it!

There stood the militia, as colorful as a quilt. Behind them the cart waited, with a tired old horse to draw it. The deacon and the captain sat on horseback at either side. They sat rather painfully, and their horses were brand-new. Behind the cart waited the people of Salem, silent and sad. But nowhere in all that staring crowd was the familiar, furry face with the eyes of ice.

"You broke your promise, Cobbie Bean," the Cat had said that night of his arrest. "And now, evil will come of it."

Cobbie bowed his head and climbed into the cart. "Serves me right," he muttered. "After all you did for me, I had to go break my promise."

The drum started its slow, deep, *beat, beat, beat*. The jailer blew his nose and pulled the old horse forward. *Clop, clop*, Cobbie bounced over the cobbles, with the people of Salem following behind. They were the old and the ill and the poor and the young, whom Cobbie had made happy. And at the very end walked the hangman, all in black. No one would speak to him, and he was feeling very sorry for himself.

Slowly, the procession wound up the hill, behind the magistrate on his white horse. At the very top rose the gallows, dark against the sky. Nearby stood the hobblebush. But the Cat was nowhere at all.

Maybe, thought poor Cobbie, it was all a wonderful dream. And this is the nightmare ending.

Up rode the magistrate, splendid in his red cloak. "Cobbie Bean!" he called. "Come forward."

Cobbie climbed down from the cart and mounted the steps to the gallows. The minister read a prayer. There was a long roll of the drums. The hangman stood waiting.

Then the crowd broke their silence. "Witches are evil!" cried one. "But Cobbie Bean is the best lad in town!"

"Witches hurt people!" cried another. "But Cobbie has helped every one of us!"

“Witches are full of woe!” called a third. “But Cobbie is the happiest lad in Salem!”

“Silence!” shouted the magistrate in a quavering voice. “I feel the same way. But Cobbie Bean will not confess, and we must do our duty. Hangman, carry on.” Then the poor magistrate rode off behind the hobblebush to have a good cry.

Cobbie looked his last at the sky. A little breeze sprang up, and the hobblebush started to toss. But then the blindfold was tied on, tickling his nose. The hangman placed the rope around his neck.

The wind began to blow so cold that the people hugged themselves to keep warm. It blew so high that it sounded like the wailing of a giant cat. An icy mist rose up from the hill.

Back rode the magistrate with his scarlet cloak billowing behind. “Cobbie Bean . . . Have you anything to say before you die?”

Amazed, the townspeople looked at one another. The magistrate’s voice sounded quite different. It sounded like the wind itself, or like the sea. His eyes, too, looked strange. They were frosty and cold, like eyes of ice. The people shivered and tried to peer through the mist. Some said later that it seemed not to be the magistrate at all, but rather, a large, gray cat.

Cobbie Bean took hope. “Not guilty, sir!” he cried.

At that, the magistrate threw back his head and laughed. His laugh sounded like the chiming of bells, and it filled the very heavens. “Not guilty? Why, then, there has been a mistake! Hangman, set Cobbie Bean free!”

The people cheered as the hangman hastened to obey.

“Go back to your homes, good people!” shouted the magistrate. “And let’s have no more foolishness about witchcraft. Remember: the world is full of magic, and most of it is good!”

Again the people cheered.

But a loud voice rose above the wind. “I object!” It was the deacon, looking as dreadful as he knew how.

“And so do I!” thundered the captain, his five chins shaking with rage.

The magistrate turned to where the captain and the deacon sat astride their new horses. He fixed his icy eyes upon them and said in a terrible voice, “Scat!”

Now what happened next may not be so. It is difficult to see, with the wind in your eyes. But some said that the horses turned into pigs



and ran squealing down the hill, with the deacon and the captain hanging on for dear life. As far as anybody knows, they kept on going all the way to China, for never again were the cousins seen in Salem, from that day to this.

The wind blew like a hurricane, and the townspeople ran for home. It blew so hard that the gallows tree toppled and fell onto the hobblebush, carrying it to the ground, along with Cobbie and the magistrate.

At that, the wind stopped as suddenly as it had started. The sun shone warm on the hill, and the birds sang again in the trees.

Cobbie crept out of the wreckage and helped the magistrate to his feet.

"What happened?" asked the magistrate in his usual voice and with his eyes as red as before.

"The wind blew the gallows down, sir," explained Cobbie.

"So it did," frowned the magistrate, feeling the bump on his head. "I seem to have forgotten what happened after I rode back here to—er, blow my nose."

"You came back out and set me free," said Cobbie.

The magistrate brightened. "I did, did I? Good for me! That's the smartest thing I ever did in my life. Well, good day to you, Cobbie Bean."

And the magistrate rode off down the hill, rubbing his head.

Frantically, Cobbie looked through the wreckage. "Cat," he whispered, "where are you?"

There lay his cat under a branch of the fallen hobblebush. Cobbie freed her and held her on his lap. Her eyes were open, but Cobbie could see that the frost was leaving them.

"Oh, Cat, you are dying," cried Cobbie.

"Don't be silly," said the Cat. "Magic never dies." She winked solemnly at Cobbie. But her voice was getting weaker. "What do you think of that show we just put on, eh, Cobbie?"

"It was wonderful, Cat," said Cobbie warmly. "Thank you very much."

"Don't mention it," whispered the Cat. With the last of her voice she reminded Cobbie of something important to ordinary cats. "Fish . . ." she gasped, "for breakfast. . . . Cream . . . for supper. . . ." Now the frost had gone entirely. She looked at Cobbie with the hungry eyes of any ordinary cat.

"Then home we go to breakfast," said Cobbie Bean, blinking his

eyes very fast. The Cat had given her magic to save him. The hobblebush was gone. Now, to the end of her days, she would be nothing but a common cat, a large, gray cat that loved him very much.

He lifted her tenderly into the cart, where she curled up in his lap. Before they were halfway down the hill, the cat had closed her eyes and was purring splendidly.

Cobbie looked out to where the sea and the sky came together. "I won't forget you, Cat," he whispered. And he never did forget.

In a few years' time, Cobbie married a fine girl in Salem. Never did he tire of telling his children, and later on his grandchildren, the story about his wonderful cat.

And the people of Salem have not forgotten. To this very day, whenever the moon is full and the wind howls and the sea is running high on the beach, they remember that the world is filled with magic.

"Listen!" they tell one another. "It's the wonderful cat of Cobbie Bean, going by on the wind."

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