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Opening extract from
Gobolino the Witch's Cat

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Published by
**Puffin Classics an imprint of
Penguin Books Ltd**

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I. Gobbolino in Disgrace

ONE FINE moonlight night little Gobbolino, the witch's kitten, and his sister Sootica tumbled out of the cavern where they had been born, to play at catch-a-mouse among the creeping shadows.

It was the first time they had left the cavern, and their round eyes were full of wonder and excitement at everything they saw.

Every leaf that blew, every dewdrop that glittered, every rustle in the forest around them set their furry black ears a-prick.

'Did you hear that, brother?'

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‘Did you see that, sister?’

‘I saw it! *And that! and that! and that!*’

When they were tired of playing they sat side by side in the moonlight talking and quarrelling a little, as a witch's kittens will.

‘What will you be when you grow up?’ Gobolino asked, as the moon began to sink behind the mountains and cocks crowed down the valley.

‘Oh, I'll be a witch's cat like my ma,’ said Sootica. ‘I'll know all the Book of Magic off by heart and learn to ride a broomstick and turn mice into frogs and frogs into guinea-pigs. I'll fly down the clouds on the night-wind with the bats and the barn owls, saying “*Meee-ee-ee-oww!*” so when people hear me coming they'll say: “*Hush! There goes Sootica, the witch's cat!*”’

Gobolino was very silent when he heard his sister's fiery words.

‘And what will you be, brother?’ asked Sootica agreeably.

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‘I’ll be a kitchen cat,’ said Gobbolino. ‘I’ll sit by the fire with my paws tucked under my chest and sing like the kettle on the hob. When the children come in from school they’ll pull my ears and tickle me under the chin and coax me round the kitchen with a cotton reel. I’ll mind the house and keep down the mice and watch the baby, and when all the children are in bed I’ll creep on my missus’s lap while she darns the stockings and master nods in his chair. I’ll stay with them for ever and ever, and they’ll call me Gobbolino the kitchen cat.’

‘Don’t you want to be bad?’ Sootica asked him in great surprise.

‘No,’ said Gobbolino, ‘I want to be good and have people love me. People don’t love witches’ cats. They are too disagreeable.’

He licked his paw and began to wash his face, while his little sister scowled at him and was just about to trot in and find their mother, when a ray of moonlight falling across both

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the kittens set her fur standing on end with rage and fear.

‘Brother! Brother! one of your paws is white!’

In the deeps of the witch's cavern no one had noticed that little Gobolino had been born with a white front paw. Everyone knows this is quite wrong for witches' kittens, which are black all over from head to foot, but now the moonbeam lit up a pure white sock with five pink pads beneath it, while the kitten's



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coat, instead of being jet black like his sister's, had a faint sheen of tabby, and his lovely round eyes were blue! All witches' kittens are born with green eyes.

No wonder that little Sootica flew into the cavern with cries of distress to tell her mother all about it.

'Ma! Ma! Our Gobbolino has a white sock! He has blue eyes! His coat is tabby, not black, and he wants to be a kitchen cat!'

The kitten's cries brought her mother Grimalkin to the door of the cavern. Their mistress, the witch, was not far behind her, and in less time than it takes to tell they had knocked the unhappy Gobbolino head over heels, set him on his feet again, cuffed his ears, tweaked his tail, bounced him, bullied him, and so bewildered him that he could only stare stupidly at them, blinking his beautiful blue eyes as if he could not imagine what they were so angry about.

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At last Grimalkin picked him up by the scruff of his neck and dropped him in the darkest, dampest corner of the cavern among the witch's tame toads.

Gobolino was afraid of the toads and shivered and shook all night.