11. Of the Young Man and the Cat

Grimalkin’s grandchild, Tybert’s noble race, For beauty gave no cattish damsel place.
    Round was her face;
Her eyes were grey° as Germans’, or the Gaul;°
    The stars that fall
Through gloomy shade cast no such dazzling light,
Nor glow-worms that most glorious are by night;
    Her bosom soft and white
Like down of silver swans; her head was small,
And round as any ball;
Daily she wore a particoloured° gown,
Curiously mixed with white, black, grey, and brown.

Stol’n from her mother’s teat, a young man bred
This female up, and laid her in his bed;
Each morning fed,
And evening, with warm strokings from the cow;
Would fish allow,
But not to wet her tender feet afford;
She may in pleasant gardens catch a bird,
Or make afeared.
Scorched with love’s cruel flames, this youth did now
At Venus’ altars bow,
That she his love would change into a maid,
When thus with reared-up hands to Heaven he prayed:

‘O Citherea,° since the cruel dart
Of thy dear son hath strangely pierced my heart,
Some aid impart.
Thou at the prayer of sad Pygmalion°

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120 In the first book of fables, The Fables of Aesop, this is fable 73, which marks the beginning of another three-fable sequence.
121 Grimalkin and Tybert were typical names for a cat.
122 i.e., the French
123 Citherea is another name for Venus, the goddess of love; her ‘dear son’ mentioned in the next line is Cupid.
124 Pygmalion, the son of Cilax the Cypriot, deterred by the beastly life of the Propetides, and the vices generally incident to women, resolved to live a single life; who, carving the image of a virgin in ivory, fell in love with his own workmanship;
Mad’st flesh of stone,
Formed a soft woman from obdurate° flint;
That had no soul, this hath a spirit in’t;
This hath her passions, hath affection shown,
And loves or me, or none.
Make her for marriage fit, and she and I
Will day and night adore thy deity.’

The goddess heard; first on her hairy face
Did lilies of untainted beauty place,
Which roses grace,
And now her grey eyes sparkle more by day;
A Milky Way
’Twixt hills of snow, which coral fountains shows,
And her clear neck like silver dawn arose;
Her white foot grows
Now a fair palm, whence fingers long display,
Where azure° rivers stray.

A virgin then appeared, so fair and sweet

at whose prayers Venus converted the statue into a woman, of whom he begot Paphus.
Thus Ovid relates the fable:

\[ Sit Conjux opto, non ausus, eburnea virgo, Dicere Pygmalion, similis mea dixit eburnae, etc. \]

‘Give me a wife, one like,’ Pygmalion said,
But durst not say, ‘Give me my ivory maid.’
The golden Venus, present at her feast,
Conceives his wish, and friendly signs expressed;
The fire thrice flaming, thrice in flames aspires.°
To his admired image he retires,
Lies down besides° her, raised her with his arm,
Then kissed her tempting lips, and found them warm.
That lesson oft repeats; her bosom oft
With amorous touches feels, and felt it soft;
Th’ivory, dimpled with his fingers, lacks
Accustomed hardness, as Hymettian° wax
Relents with heat, which chafing thumbs reduce
To pliant forms, by handling framed for use.
Amazed with doubtful joy and hope that reels,
Again the lover what he wishes feels;
The veins beneath his thumbs’ impression beat,
A perfect virgin full of juice and heat, etc. [Ogilby’s note.]

Ogilby quotes Ovid’s \textit{Metamorphoses} X.275–76, but (loosely) translates X.275–89.
She seemed a heaven all o’er, from head to feet.

Nor could the ravished youth admire too much,
Nor could believe, till by enduring touch

He found her such,

But when she spake, sweet love was in his breast

With joy oppressed,

And loud he cries, ‘Come all my friends, and see

The gods’ great gift, what Heaven hath done for me;

I shall too happy be!

Bring silk and gold; with gems let her be dressed;

Prepare the marriage feast!’

All came, and wonder; women’s envious eye,

Surveying her, could not one blemish spy.

All rites performed, and Hymen’s torch put out,\textsuperscript{125}

Who of the joys of marriage bed could doubt,

Or fear a flout?\textsuperscript{o}

The Cyprian goddess then desired to find

If that her mind

Was with her form improved; a little mouse

Straight she presents on th’eaves\textsuperscript{126} of the house.

The bride leaps from her spouse,

And leaves the young man to embrace the wind.

The cat will after kind.\textsuperscript{°}

Just when he thought to reap the joy of joys,

‘A mouse!’ she cries, and all his hope destroys.

When Venus thus, highly incensed, stormed:

‘A hateful cat t’a virgin we transformed,

But still deformed,

And bestial thoughts within her breast remain;

The task was vain:

No power can stave off nature. Though our art

Gave fair dimensions to the outward part,

We could not change the heart.’

Here she transformed her to a cat again;

\textsuperscript{125} i.e., the marriage ceremony having been completed; Hymen is the god of marriage

\textsuperscript{126} In modernizing \textit{The Fables of Aesop}’s ‘Evins’ as ‘eaves’, we have altered the metre of this line.
Then did the youth complain:
‘Thy pity, Venus, thou hast turned to spite.
Wouldst thou not let me have her one short night?’

Moral

No punishment, no penalty, nor hire
Can repulse nature led by strong desire.
So barbarous people civilized with care,
The least occasion turns to what they were.
ARTHUR GOLDING’S A MORAL FABLE TALK
AND OTHER RENAISSANCE FABLE TRANSLATIONS

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