



THE THREE LEMONS

A STORY FOR CHILDREN, FROM THE
ITALIAN.

THE King of Terra Longa had an only son, who was the apple of his eye, and on whom he built all his hopes. He felt he was growing an old man, and the great desire of his life was to see his son happily married before he died. But, unfortunately, the young Prince was of a very different mind, and if a woman was as much as mentioned in his presence, he got up and left the room, and refused to come back till the conversation had turned on some other subject.

Neither his father's tears and entreaties, nor the counsel and advice of the statesmen and courtiers round the King's throne, would make him consider the subject of matrimony. But nothing happens so often as the unexpected, and a mere trifle will change the history of nations. One day, as the Prince was cutting a cream tart in half and attending more to the conversation that was going on than to what he was doing, he cut his finger with his knife.

The blood spurted out and fell on the cream, and the mixture of colour was so beautiful that the Prince was seized on the

spot with the desire to find a wife with a complexion like the cream and blood. He said to the King: "Dear father, if I do not find a bride who is red and white like this, then it is all over with me. Hitherto no woman has ever caused my heart a single flutter, but now I long for this red and white maiden, as I have never longed for anything in my life before. Permit me, therefore, to go in search of my ideal, for if I do not find her I shall die."

At first his father was much startled and grieved at his words, and tried hard to dissuade his son from setting out on such a futile journey, but when he saw that his remonstrances were of no avail, and that he might as well have spoken to the winds, he said: "Go, my son, since your heart is so set on the journey; take money and whatever else you desire with you, and hasten back with all speed to your poor father, who will be disconsolate till you return."

So the Prince set out on his travels, and wandered through fields and woods, over mountains and through valleys, visiting different countries and nations, always keeping his eyes open for the maiden of his dreams. But he sought in vain, for though he left no stone unturned, nowhere could he find the blooming image he had painted in his mind's eye. From kingdom to kingdom he roamed, and at last he came to the Island of the Wild Women.

Here he met an old dame who was as

thin as a scarecrow, and with the ugliest face he had ever seen. The Prince told her at once what brought him to the island, and when the old woman had heard his tale, and all the dangers and sufferings he had gone through, her heart melted with pity, and she said: "My son, let me warn you to fly from hence with all speed, for if my three daughters, who live on human flesh, find you here, you are a lost man. They will certainly eat you raw, or roast you for their next meal. Make haste to leave this place as quickly as you can, and I promise you won't be gone far before you meet your fate."

When the Prince heard her words he took to his heels, and, without as much as bidding the old creature farewell, he ran without stopping till he came to a different country, where he met another old woman even uglier than the first. To her, too, he confided the history and object of his wanderings, but she answered him as the other had done: "You had better make haste to get away from here, unless you wish to provide my daughters, the little man-eaters, with a meal; but not far from this spot you will meet your fate."

As soon as the poor Prince heard her words he set off running at full speed, and didn't pause for a moment till he came upon another old woman, who was sitting under a tree with a basket on her arm full of cakes and other dainties.

The Prince made her a polite bow, and commenced at once to tell her his story. This time the old woman comforted him with friendly words, and made him sit down and eat a good breakfast. When he had finished his meal, she presented him with three lemons, which looked as if they had just been cut from the tree, and along with the fruit a beautiful knife, saying, as she gave them to him, "You may go home now as fast as you like, for you have got

what you sought; when you are close to your father's kingdom, stop at the first well you come to, and cut one of the lemons in half; a fairy will come out of it, and say to you, 'Give me something to drink.' Then you must get her some water as quickly as you can, for if you don't she will disappear like quicksilver, and if you don't succeed with the first or second, you must be sure not to let the third fairy escape, but hand her the water in a moment, for she is the wife of your heart's desire."

The Prince joyfully kissed her hairy old hand, which felt exactly like the back of a porcupine, and thanking the old dame heartily for her kindness, he bade her farewell, and left the country with all speed. After many dangers by sea and land, he arrived safely about a day's journey from his own kingdom. Here on a lovely heath, shaded by beautiful old trees, the Prince



"THE PRINCE JOYFULLY KISSED HER HAIRY OLD HAND."

dismounted at a well, the running of whose crystal waters sounded like a bell, calling people to come and refresh themselves. The Prince sat down on a carpet formed of

tender green grass and lovely coloured flowers, and, taking the knife out of its sheath, he cut the first lemon open. In a moment, like a flash of lightning, a beautiful girl stood before him, as white as milk and as red as a strawberry, and she said to him, "Give me something to drink."

The Prince, quite dazzled and bewildered by the beauty of the fairy, did not give her the water quickly enough, and to his great grief she vanished almost as soon as she had appeared.

The same thing happened when he cut the second lemon open, and the Prince exclaimed in despair, "I am the most unlucky creature in the world. Twice have I let my luck escape me—but courage! I have still a third chance, and there is luck in odd numbers: this knife shall either be the means of securing my happiness, or it shall put an end to my griefs."

With these words he cut the third lemon open, and out stepped the third fairy, and said, as the others had done, "Give me something to drink."

This time the Prince handed the fairy a glass of water as quick as lightning, and in a moment a lovely girl stood before him, as white as cream and as red as blood. Her hair was golden, her mouth like a rosebud, and her eyes shone like two stars. In one word, she was as beautiful as the day, and she looked as good as she was beautiful, and as charming as she was good. The Prince could not contain his admiration, and said: "Am I asleep or awake, or are my eyes bewitched; for how can such a lovely creature have been contained in the bitter rind of this yellow lemon?"

But when he had at last convinced himself that the beautiful apparition before him was no dream, but sober reality, he kissed the fairy tenderly, and said many charming things to her. He begged her to be his wife. "But," he said, "I will not take you back to my father's kingdom without the splendour worthy of your beauty, or without the escort fitting for my queen. Therefore, let me beg of you to remain in the meantime in the hollow of this leafy oak, which looks as if it had been made for a hiding place, and there await my return. You may be sure I will come back to you as quickly as I can, and will then lead you

to my kingdom with the retinue and following that befits your position"; and so saying he bade her

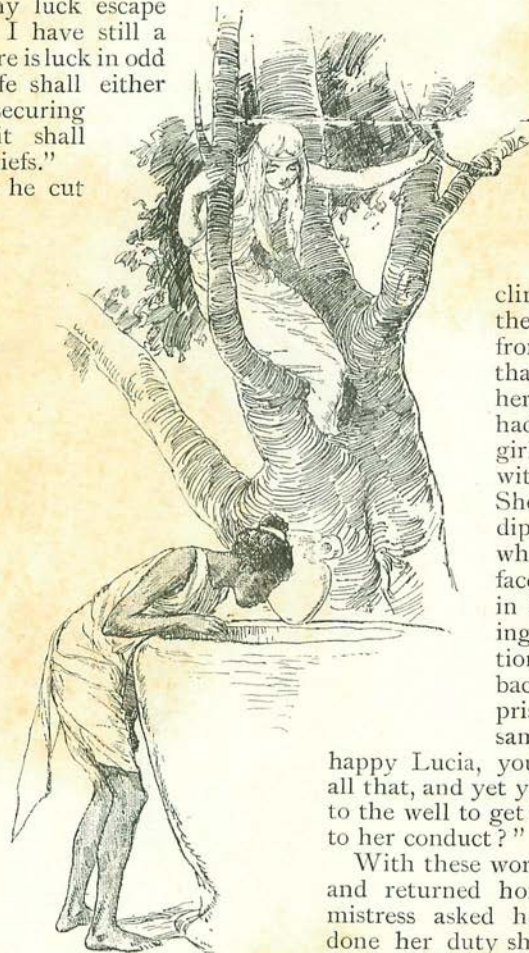
farewell, and set forth on his journey.

When he had gone, the fairy climbed up into one of the forks of the tree, and from there watched all that was going on around her. Before many minutes had passed a black slave girl arrived at the well with a pitcher for water. She was just going to dip the jug in the waves, when she perceived the face of the fairy reflected in the water, and, thinking it was her own reflection she saw, she started back with a cry of surprise, exclaiming at the same time, "What, un-

happy Lucia, you are as beautiful as all that, and yet your mistress sends you to the well to get water, and you submit to her conduct?"

With these words she broke the jug, and returned home. But when her mistress asked her why she had not done her duty she replied, "I went to the well, and broke the pitcher by mistake against a big stone."

The woman restrained her anger as well as she could, and on the following day gave the girl a beautiful china jug, and told her to go to the well and fill it with water.



"SHE PERCEIVED THE FACE OF THE FAIRY."

but when she came to the well, and once more saw the lovely reflection there, she heaved a deep sigh and said, "I will no longer be a slave, for I am not ugly as I have always thought I was; on the contrary, I am lovely and charming, and it is ridiculous that I should be made to fetch water from the well!" With these words she broke the jug into a hundred pieces, and when she got home she told her mistress that a donkey had passed by, and had kicked the jug and broken it to pieces.

When the woman heard about this fresh accident she lost her temper, and, seizing a broom, she beat the girl to within an inch of her life, then handing her a leather bottle she said, "Now go as quickly as you can, you useless creature, and bring me back the bottle full of water. Don't dawdle on the way, and if anything happens this time, I'll give you another beating that you won't forget in a hurry."

The slave-girl ran with all her might back to the well and filled the bottle full of water, but once more catching sight of the lovely reflection, she said, "I would be a fool to go on drawing water; it would be far better and more fitting that I should marry. From this moment I refuse to serve my mistress any longer." With these words she took a pin that she wore in her hair and pierced the leather bottle with it, so that it became exactly like a fountain, with the water spurting out in every direction. Here the fairy, who had been watching the black girl's ridiculous behaviour, could contain her mirth no longer, and burst into a hearty laugh.

When the slave heard the sound of laughter she looked to see where it came from, and, when she caught sight of the girl hidden in the tree, she said to herself, "So you are the cause of my mistress nearly beating me to death, are you? but wait a little, and I'll be even with you yet;" but to the fairy she

said, "What are you doing up there, my beautiful maid?"

The fairy, who was politeness itself, told the black girl everything there was to tell, and ended up by saying she was going to marry a charming prince, and was only awaiting his return with a suitable escort and retinue to accompany him to his father's kingdom.

When the black slave heard this, a wicked plan entered into her head, and she said: "Oh, if you are expecting your bridegroom's return, let me come up beside you, and comb your locks in order to make you even fairer than you are."

The fairy answered: "You are most welcome to come," and stretched down her hand, which looked like a piece of crystal set in ebony, as she helped the slave up. As soon as the black creature began to comb the fairy's hair she stuck her hairpin into her skull, hoping in this way she would kill her on the spot.

But as soon as the fairy felt the prick of the pin, she called out "Dove, dove!" and in a moment she was changed into a dove, and flew away right up into the sky.

When the Prince returned with his suite and train, he could hardly believe his eyes when he beheld, instead of the lovely maid he had left behind in the hollow of the tree, the form of the ugly black slave girl.

But when the wicked creature perceived the Prince's distress and amazement she said: "Don't be surprised, dear Prince, for it is I, your Lucia, but I have been bewitched by an evil magician, and turned from a fair and lovely maiden into the ugly black marble statue you see before you."

The poor Prince, not knowing how to help himself, made the best of a bad business, and after the black girl had got down from the tree, he had her dressed in the splendid clothes he had brought with him for his bride; and when she had been



"THE WATER SPURTING OUT IN EVERY DIRECTION."

made to look as well as she could, he set forth with her to meet the King and Queen, who were to meet the young couple a few miles from their home.

When his father and mother perceived the folly their son had committed, and how that he who had travelled so far in search of a white dove had only returned with a black crow, they could hardly restrain their disgust and disappointment. But, seeing the thing was done, and that there was no help for it, they abandoned their throne to the young couple, and a gold crown was placed on the slave's woolly head. The wedding was held with much pomp and ceremony, and everyone far and wide was invited to the feast.

Now it happened that while the King's cook was preparing all the dainty dishes for the wedding banquet a beautiful dove

wrung its neck, and, when he had plucked its feathers, he threw them out of the kitchen window. A few days afterwards, on the spot where the feathers had been thrown, a beautiful lemon tree sprang up, which grew and blossomed as you looked at it.

Now it happened one day that the King was looking out of his window, and saw the tree, which he never remembered to have noticed before. He immediately called the cook before him, and asked him when and by whom the tree had been planted. When he had heard the whole story from the chief cook, he gave orders that no one, under pain of death, should touch the tree, and that it should be tended and watered carefully every day.

In a very short time three lemons appeared on the tree exactly the same as those the old woman had given the Prince, and he had them plucked at once and brought to his room. Here he shut himself up with



"A BLACK CROW."

H.M.

flew in at the kitchen window, and said—

"Tell me, cook, oh! tell me true,
What do the King and his black bride do?"

At first the cook paid no attention to the words of the bird; but when the dove had repeated them a second and a third time, he ran into the banqueting hall, and told the assembled company what the bird had said. When the bride heard the words of the dove's song, she ordered the bird to be caught on the spot and roasted. The cook did as he was told, seized the bird, and

a tumbler full of water, and with the same knife that he had used before, and which he always wore at his side, he began to cut the lemons in half. As before, the first and second fairy escaped him; but when he had cut the third lemon open, and given the fairy some water to drink, as she requested, she changed into the beautiful girl whom he had left behind in the hollow of the tree, and from her he learnt the whole history of the black slave's misdeeds.

The King's joy was beyond words at this new stroke of fortune, and he could hardly realise that his bride was really the beautiful girl who stood before him, and not the ugly black creature who had deceived him so wickedly. After he had dressed her in the most costly garments, and kissed her tenderly, he took his fairy bride by the hand, and led her into the throne-room, where all the Court were assembled. Then the King addressed his courtiers, and said: "Tell me, all of you, what punishment does the person deserve who has ill-treated this beautiful lady?" Whereupon one replied, "They deserve a breakfast of stones"; another, "A draught of poison"; and a third said, "They should be rolled down a hill in a barrel with sharp spikes inside it."

At last the King called the black Queen to him, and asked her what punishment she would propose.

"The wicked creature," she answered, "who could harm so

fair a vision should be burnt to death, and her ashes scattered to the four winds."

When the King heard her words, he said: "You have pronounced your own doom, for it was you, and no other, you vile wretch, who did my beautiful bride so much wrong. Know now that this is the lovely maid whose head you pierced with your hairpin, and she, too, was the beautiful dove you had so cruelly caught and roasted. But as you have done unto others, so it shall be done unto you, and as you showed no mercy, neither shall it be shown you."

With these words he had the black slave seized and thrown alive into a huge bonfire, and when she was burnt to ashes they were scattered to the four winds from the top of a high watch-tower. But the King and his fair wife lived happily ever afterwards; and if only you and I knew where to find the kingdom of Terra Longa, I believe we should find them living there still.

