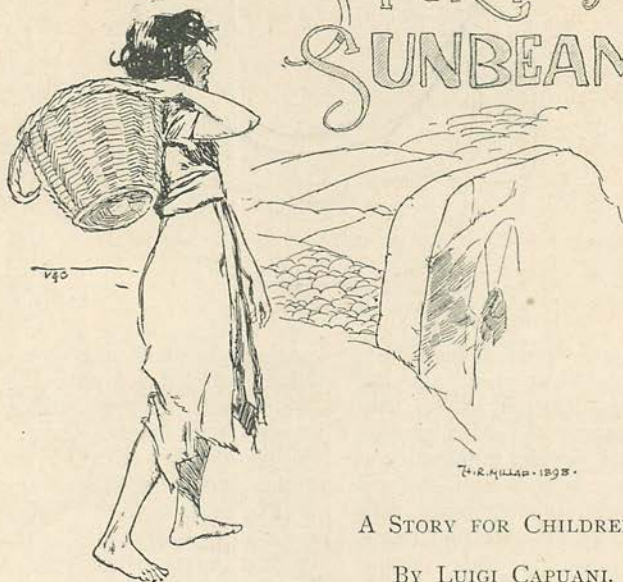


THE STORY of SUNBEAM.



A STORY FOR CHILDREN.

BY LUIGI CAPUANI.

THERE was once a poor baker-woman whose only daughter was as black as coal and as ugly as sin, and was therefore called by everybody "Tizzoncini," which means "blacker than burnt wood." Mother and daughter supported themselves miserably by baking bread, and Tizzoncini had to be on her legs from early morning to late night. "Halloa, Tizzoncini, get some hot water!" "Here, Tizzoncini, knead the dough." Now she had to run here and there, up and down-stairs, with the tray under her arm, and the basket on her head, to fetch from the people their dough for bread and cakes. Then she had to hurry once more with the heavy basket on her back to the same houses to deliver the newly-baked loaves and cakes. In short, poor Tizzoncini could not sit down to rest for a moment the whole day long.

Nevertheless, she was always in good spirits, and although the poor girl was covered over and over with pitch-black soot, and her tumbled hair hung down in tangles, although her feet were bare and coated with dirt and mud, and although her body was clothed in rags, yet her clear laugh could be heard ringing from one end of the street to the other.

"Tizzoncini has laid an egg!" the neighbours jeered, when they heard the girl laugh, for her unrestrained merriment reminded one forcibly of the cheerful cackle of a hen when it comes out of the nest.

As soon as the bells rang for vespers, mother and daughter locked themselves into their room, and did not even put the tips of their noses out of the window after that. That was all very well in winter; but in summer, when the whole neighbourhood was amusing itself in the open air, and going for walks in the moonlight, these two shut themselves up

in their close room, which could really be no pleasure. The neighbours could not understand what it meant, and almost racked their brains to pieces from curiosity about it.

"Oh, baker-women, come into the open air for a little, come!" they cried in at the window.

"The air in here is much fresher!" the two replied.

"Oh, baker-women, see how splendidly the moon shines!"

"We have a much more beautiful light in here!" answered mother and daughter from inside.

Then the neighbours said: "There is something wrong there!" and made every effort to get to look in at the windows, or to listen behind the door to what went on in the house. After a long search they at last found a little chink in the door, and looking through it were almost blinded by the brilliant light which met their eyes. And now, when they listened very quietly, they heard the mother say to her daughter:—

Dearest Sunbeam, dearest Sunbeam,
If it good to Heaven seem,
Some day the King will make you his Queen!

Whereupon Tizzoncini's merry laugh rang out.

And this went on every evening up to midnight. All the people were astonished at it, and one related the strange story to the other.

In this way it also reached the King's ears, who fell into a furious passion at it, and ordered the baker-women to appear before him.

"Old witch!" he cried out, when they stepped before the throne, "if you go on like this, I will have you and your black daughter thrown into the deepest dungeon!"

"Please, your Majesty!" the old woman pleaded in a trembling voice, "not a word of the story is true; the neighbours have lied!"

Tizzoncini, too, could not help laughing at the King's suspicions.

"Aha! you laugh!" gasped the King in a rage, and he had them both thrown into prison.

But during the night a wonderful light shone through the cracks of the cell door, nearly blinding the gaoler, who at the same time heard the old woman sing:—

Dearest Sunbeam, dearest Sunbeam,
If it good to Heaven seem,
Some day the King will make you his Queen!

Whereupon Tizzoncini broke out into such clear laughter that the whole prison resounded with it. The gaoler hurried to the King and

reported to him what he had seen and heard, down to the smallest detail.

"So that is the way the wind blows!" cried the King, and commanded that the mother and daughter should be thrown into the dungeon deep down under the earth, which was intended for the worst criminals.

This was a pitch-dark little place, filled with damp air, in which one could scarcely breathe. On all sides muddy water had accumulated, so that not a single dry spot was left for the miserable prisoners to rest upon. But even here the wonderful brilliance shone, and the voice of the old woman sang:—

Dearest Sunbeam, dearest Sunbeam,
If it good to Heaven seem,
Some day the King will make you his Queen.

The gaoler went once again to the King, and related faithfully what he had experienced in the night. But this time the King remained dumb with astonishment, and did not know in the least what to do.

Then he assembled the great ones of the kingdom, to take counsel with them about the matter. But they were not agreed themselves. For some advised the King to behead them both, while the others asserted again and again that the baker-women were innocent, and proposed, therefore, that they should quietly be set at liberty again. "For," they said to their Sovereign, "did not the old woman say in her song, 'If it seem good to Heaven'?" Now, if it is the will of Heaven, the King himself cannot prevent it."

The King let himself be persuaded by these arguments, and gave orders that the old woman and Tizzoncini should be released from prison. The baker-women were heartily glad of regaining their freedom, and began once more to carry on their miserable trade as before.

Now, as there was not a single baker in the whole town who could bake as excellently as Tizzoncini and her mother, the two latter immediately had their hands full of work again, and already on the first day after their release all their customers had come back to them. Yes, even the Queen herself had her bread baked by them, and Tizzoncini now had often to climb the palace steps with her bare mud-and-dirt-covered feet in order to deliver her goods.

"Tizzoncini, why do you not wash your face?" asked the Queen.

"Your Majesty, my skin is too tender—the water would ruin it."

"Tizzoncini, why do you not comb your hair?"



"HE ASSEMBLED THE GREAT ONES OF THE KINGDOM,
TO TAKE COUNSEL WITH THEM."

"Your Majesty, my hair is too fine, and the comb would tear it out of my head!"

"Tizzoncini, why do you not buy yourself a pair of shoes?"

"My feet are too tender, the hard leather would rub them sore!"

"Tizzoncini, then why does your mother call you 'Sunbeam'?"

"Because, if it seem good to Heaven, I shall one day be Queen," the maiden answered hereupon.

The Queen was greatly pleased at these answers; but Tizzoncini sprang hurriedly down the palace steps with the heavy basket on her head. And at the same time she laughed so clearly that it could be heard from one end of the street to the other, and the people ran together and cried: "Tizzoncini has laid an egg!"

But the apparition in the night did not cease, and the neighbours were so badly tormented by curiosity that neither food nor

drink had any more taste for them. — Scarcely had they seen once again the wonderful brightness, and heard the old woman's song, than they set their brains to work to find out some means of getting to the bottom of the mystery.

"Hi, baker-woman!" one cried, "will you be so friendly as to lend me your flour-sieve? Mine has a hole in it."

Tizzoncini opened the door and handed out the sieve.

"What! You are in the dark? And when I knocked it was as bright as day in your room!"

"Oh, you must have imagined that it was so!"

"Baker-woman," called in another, "do not take my disturbing you amiss, but perhaps you can lend me a needle? Mine has just broken, and my sewing must be done by this evening!"

Tizzoncini opened the door and held out the needle.

"What! You are quite in the dark? And when I

knocked there was a light in your room!"

"Ah! You must have imagined it," Tizzoncini answered.

Now it was not long before the story reached the ears of the young King too. He was sixteen years old, and of surpassing beauty. Now, when he one day met on the palace steps the ugly Tizzoncini, with the tray under her arm and the basket on her head, he conceived such a great dislike to the poor girl that he turned away so as not to have to look at her. Indeed, he detested her so much that one day, when he met her again, he spat straight in her face. Then Tizzoncini returned home with her heart full of grief, and wept bitterly.

"What has happened to you?" asked the mother.

"The King's son spat in my face!"

"That may be the will of Heaven," the mother comforted her; "the Prince is our master."

But the neighbours were beside themselves with joy, and mocked poor Tizzoncini still more. "The King's son spat in her face," they jeered; "that must have suited Sunbeam's face well."

Another time it happened that the young King met Tizzoncini on the landing in the palace, and it seemed to him that she just touched him with her basket. Thereupon he became so angry that he pushed her violently away with his heel, so that the poor girl rolled right down to the bottom of the steps. The dough for the bread and cakes was now covered with dirt, and was, besides, all out of shape. Who would have had the courage to take it back into the King's palace?

Now, when Tizzoncini reached home, she lamented and wept so terribly that the neighbours heard her.

"Why do you weep so bitterly, my child?" asked the mother.

"The King's son kicked me and threw me down the palace steps, so that all the dough was scattered!"

"The doings of Heaven are always good," the old woman consoled her; "the young Prince is our master!"

But the neighbours mocked again and jeered: "That must have been a pretty sight, Tizzoncini tumbling down the steps!"

Now some years had passed, and the King's son thought of marrying.

He sent his ambassador to the King of Spain to ask the hand of the King's daughter in marriage. But when the ambassador reached Spain, he learnt that the King's daughter had been married just the day before. The young Prince was very angry at this, for he thought that the ambassador had tarried too long on the way. But the

latter proved to him clearly that he had arrived half a day sooner than the swiftest travellers. And so the King's son became reconciled with the ambassador and sent him to the King of France to sue for the hand of the King's daughter. But when he arrived in France he learnt that the King's daughter had the day before taken a holy oath never to marry. And then, in accordance with her wishes, she had

been shut up as a nun in a convent.

The King's son was so terribly angry at this news that he wanted to have the ambassador, who always arrived a day too late, hanged. But the latter proved to him once more that, if he had raced with the swiftest traveller in the world, he would this time have reached his goal a whole day sooner than the travel-

ler. The proof was satisfactory to the young Prince, and so he commissioned the ambassador to travel to the Ruler of Turkey, whose daughter he was to woo for the Prince.

But when he reached the Ruler's Court, he learnt that the day before a robber had stolen all the costly raiment, the gold ornaments,



"THE POOR GIRL ROLLED RIGHT DOWN."

and the jewels of the Ruler's daughter, so that she could not leave her home.

The poor ambassador had now to return once more without having accomplished anything. When the King's son heard the news he cried with vexation and rage, and the King, as well as the Queen and all the Ministers, stood round him to console him. Now, there was only one King's daughter left whom he considered worthy enough to lead to the throne as his consort. That was the daughter of the King of England. Swift as an arrow the ambassador set out on his journey. Day and night he granted himself no rest until he had England under his feet. But, alas! scarcely had he set foot in the land than he heard all the bells begin to toll. The people went about with sad faces, and when he inquired the cause of this mourning, he learnt to his horror that the King's daughter had died the day before.

One can imagine the state of grief into which the King's son fell when he heard the sad news from the mouth of his ambassador.

In order to distract his mind and drive the sad thoughts out of his head, he one day went out hunting. But before long, having separated from his companions, he lost himself in a thick, thick forest. The further in he went, the more difficulty he had in finding again the path by which he had come; and at length he knew neither which was the way in nor the way out. At last, when it was already evening, he discovered under some dense trees an old, ruinous little house. As he found the door open, he went boldly in. But what was his astonishment when he saw a very aged man, with a long, flowing, snow-white beard, standing in the cottage. The old man had just kindled a fire to cook his supper.

"Good man," said the King's son, tremblingly, "could you perhaps show me the way to get out of this forest again?"

"Ah! You have come at last!" the old man roared at him, in such a terrible voice that he could neither see nor hear for fright.

"Good man, I do not know you; I am the King's son!"

"King's son or no King's son! Take the axe there and chop me some wood!" roared the old man.

Then the young King could not utter a word more for terror, and chopped some wood.

"Now get you gone and fetch some water from the spring!" was the next order.

The King's son did in silence what he was told to do, hung the pails round his neck, and hastened to the spring.

"Now wait on me at table!"

The King's son made no reply, but served the old man at table as he had been ordered to do. After the aged man had eaten and drank he gave him what was over.



"THE YOUNG KING CHOPPED SOME WOOD."

"Now lie down here," shrieked the old man. "That shall henceforth be your place!" At these words he pointed to a little heap of straw which lay in the corner of the room, and the King's son at once cowered down upon it. But, however much he tried to go to sleep, he could not close an eye the whole night long from terror and grief.

The old man with the long white beard was a magician, and also the ruler of the forest. Whenever he left his house, he surrounded it with a magic net so that the young King could not escape, but remained his slave and also his prisoner.

Meanwhile the King and the Queen, who had waited a long, long time for the return of their son in vain, believed that he was dead and put on mourning for him. But one day the news reached them—it has never been found out how it came—that their son was still alive, but the slave and prisoner of a magician.

Then the King at once sent the cleverest people in his Court to seek his son. At last, after long wanderings to and fro, they found the magician and said to him: "The King will give you as a present the most splendid treasures of his kingdom, if you will send back to him his son!"

Then the magician laughed and said: "Oh! I am much richer than he!"

The King's consternation at this answer of the magician was great, and he sent once more his cleverest courtiers to him.

"What do you want to come here so soon again for?" he cried to them in a rough voice.

Then the ambassadors answered: "The King is ready to sacrifice his life to you, if you will give him back his only son!"

"Oh! I do not ask that!" said the magician. "Just bring me a loaf of bread and a cake, kneaded and baked by the Queen's own hand. Then the young Prince shall go hence free!"

"Is that all?" exclaimed the messengers, and they hurried home with joyful hearts.

Now the Queen passed the flour through a sieve, kneaded it, moulded a loaf and a cake out of it, and with her own hand lighted the fire in the oven to bake the dough. But as she was not accustomed to this work, she did not take the bread and cake out of the oven soon enough, and they were both burnt.

Now, when the magician set eyes on the spoilt batch he made an angry grimace, and cried: "Good for the dogs!" at the same time throwing them to his sheepdog, who greedily devoured them both at once.

However, the Queen did not lose patience, and once again set about sifting the flour, kneading and moulding the dough. Then again she lighted with her own hand the fire in the oven, so that the dough should bake. But, alas! this time she took it out of the oven too soon, with the result that the bread and cake were not nearly done.

When the magician saw this batch, he wrinkled his brow, and cried: "Good for the dogs!" and threw them once again to his sheepdog to eat.

Now, the Queen took the greatest possible pains, and stood day and night by the oven, in order to learn how to bake bread properly. But it always came out of the oven either burnt or not done enough; and the poor King's son remained a prisoner with the magician.

Then the King, in this dire extremity, called together all the cleverest people in his whole kingdom, to ask their advice.

"Your sacred Majesty," one of them said, "I have found a means. The Queen may sift the flour, knead and prepare the dough, but Tizzoncini shall heat the oven and do the baking. Perhaps the magician will not notice it."

"Excellent, excellent!" all the rest cried, as if with one voice.

And this advice was followed. But scarcely had the magician set eyes on the batch than he wrinkled his brow and cried:—

False bread and cake is brought once more,
Wash your face, it needs it sore!

And again he threw them to the dog. He had at once noticed that Tizzoncini, with the sooty face, had had her hands in the baking.

"Now," said the very cleverest of all the King's advisers, "there is only one way left."

"And that is?" asked the King, while drops of perspiration stood out upon his forehead, in his anxiety.

"The King's son must marry Tizzoncini. Only then can the magician have his bread and his cake as he wishes them, namely, sifted, kneaded, and baked by the Queen's own hand. Only then will the young King obtain his liberty again."

"That is just the will of Heaven!" cried the King. "For did not the old woman always sing:—

Dearest Sunbeam, dearest Sunbeam,
If it good to Heaven seem,
Some day the King will make you his Queen!"

And with his own hand he drew up a Royal letter which should make known in all countries that the King's son and Tizzoncini were man and wife.

The magician now had what he wanted, and the King's son was set at liberty. But he would not have anything to do with Tizzoncini.

"What!" he cried out, indignantly, "this dirty, sooty wench, this ugly oven-sweep is to become my wife and Queen? Never, never!"

But it could not be helped. The Royal decree, signed by the King's own hand, had been published, and only the King himself could annul it.

Tizzoncini had removed to the palace, as Queen. But nothing would induce her to wash her face, comb her hair, change her dirty garments, or put on a pair of shoes.

"When the King's son comes, I will dress myself!" she said again and again.

At last the young King appeared. But how horrified he was when he saw Tizzoncini from a distance.

"I would rather die than have her for my wife!" he exclaimed, with a shudder.

When these words were repeated to Tizzoncini, she laughed aloud, and said: "He will come, he will come!"

The King's son heard this, and fell into a most terrible passion. Seizing his dagger, he ran

against Tizzoncini's door in order to cut off her head. But the door was bolted on the inside, and when the King's son looked through the keyhole he let the dagger fall out of his hand from sheer astonishment. For in the room stood a girl whose face was more beautiful and whose figure was more stately than any he had ever seen before. It was the real Sunbeam who stood there before his astonished and dazzled eyes.

"Open the door, my Queen!" he cried out, joyfully. "Open the door!"

But Tizzoncini sang mockingly on the other side of the door: "Dirty, sooty wench!"

"Open the door, Queen of my Heart!"

But Tizzoncini sang mockingly on the other side of the door: "Ugly oven-sweep!"

"Open the door, my Tizzoncini!" the young King now implored.

Then the door opened, and the young King and Tizzoncini lay in one another's arms. Now all the bells in the land were rung. Splendid wedding festivities were celebrated, and the King's son and his consort lived for many years happily and contentedly together.

