

Lionbruno

Thomas Frederick Crane

Italian

Easy

25 min read

There was once a mariner who had a wife and three or four children. He followed the business of a fisherman, and he and his family lived on his fishing. For three or four years there had been a dearth of fish, so that he had not been able to catch even a sardine. Poor mariner! From this misfortune he had been obliged to sell, little by little, all he possessed, to live, and was reduced almost to beggary. One day he was fishing, and as you can imagine, poor fellow! he did not haul in even a shell. He cursed madonnas and saints. All at once a certain person (it was the Enemy) rose in the midst of the sea before his bark. "What is the matter, mariner, that you are so angry?"

"What should the matter be? My bad luck. For three or four years I have been ruining myself, body and soul, in this sea with these nets, and I cannot catch even a string to hang myself with."

"Listen," said the Enemy. "If you will agree to give me your wife's next child in thirteen years, from now until you deliver it to me I will cause you to catch so much fish that you shall become the richest of men by selling it." Then the mariner understood that this was the Enemy, and said to himself: "My wife has had no children for some years. Will she take it into her head to have another just now when I make this agreement with the Enemy? Oh, come! she is old now; she will have no more."

Then turning to the Enemy, he said: "Well, since you wish to make this contract, let us make it. But, remember, you must make me rich."

“Don’t fear,” said the Enemy; “let us make the agreement and then leave the matter to me.” “Softly, we must settle another matter first; then we will make the contract.” “What is it?” “Listen. Suppose my wife should have no children during these thirteen years?”

“Then you will remain rich and give me nothing.” “That is what I wanted to know. Now we can make the contract.” And they settled everything at once.

Then the Enemy disappeared. The mariner began to draw in his nets, and they were full to overflowing of all kinds of fish, and he became richer from day to day. In great joy he said: “I have played a trick on the devil!”—and, poor man! he did not know that it was the devil who had played a trick on him. Now you must know that just when they were making the contract, the mariner’s wife, old as she was, expected to become a mother again, and the Enemy knew it. In due time the wife gave birth to a boy so handsome that he seemed a flower. His parents named him Lionbruno.

The Enemy suddenly appeared: “Mariner! mariner!” “How can I serve you?” replied the poor man, all trembling. “The promise is due. Lionbruno is mine.” “Yes, you are right. But you must obey the contract. Remember that it is in thirteen years. Now only a few months have passed.”

“That is true,” replied the Enemy; “farewell, then, until the end of the thirteen years.” Then he vanished.

Meanwhile Lionbruno grew every day, and became constantly handsomer, and his parents sent him to school. But time passes, and behold the end of the thirteen years draws near. One day, before the time agreed upon, the Enemy appeared. “Mariner! mariner!” “Oh, poor me!” said the wretched man, who recognized him by his horrid voice. But he had to answer. And what could he do? The contract was clear and the time come. The poor mariner, willingly or unwillingly, was obliged to promise to send the boy the next day alone to the sea. The next day the mother sent her son, when he returned from school, to carry something to eat to his father. The unhappy father had, however, gone far out to sea, so that his son could not find him. The poor boy sat down on the beach, and to pass the time, took pieces of wood and made little crosses of them, and stuck them in the sand around him, so that he was surrounded by them, and held one also in his hand, singing all the time. Behold, the Enemy comes to take him, and says to him: “What are you doing, boy?” “I am waiting for my father,” he replied. The Enemy looked and saw that he could not take him, because he was seated in the midst of all those little crosses, and moreover had one in his hand.

He regarded the boy with an ugly look, and cried: "Destroy those crosses, miserable boy!" "No, I will not destroy them." "Destroy them at once, or—or"—and he threatened him and frightened him with his ugly face. Then the poor child destroyed the little crosses around him, but still held one in his hand. "Destroy the other, quick!" cried the Enemy, more enraged than ever. "No, no!" the poor child replied, all in tears; "I will not destroy this little cross."

The Enemy threatened him again and terrified him with his rolling eyes, but the child was firm, and then a bright light appeared in the air. The fairy Colina, queen of the fairies, came down, took the good boy by the hair, and delivered him from the Enemy. Then if you had seen what lightnings and thunder! what darts! The Enemy shot fire from his eyes, mouth, nose, ears, everywhere! But with all his flames he remained duped, and the fairy carried the good boy away to her splendid palace. There Lionbruno grew up in the midst of the fairies. Imagine how well off he was there! He lacked nothing. Increasing always in beauty, he became a youth whom you should have seen! Some years passed. One day Lionbruno said to the fairy Colina: "Listen. I want to go and see my mother and father a little. You will not refuse me your permission, will you?" "No, I will not refuse you it," said the fairy. "I will give you twenty days to go and see your family. But do not stay any longer. Remember that I have saved you from the Enemy and have brought you up in the midst of great wealth. Now this wealth we are to enjoy together, for you, Lionbruno, are to be my husband." You can imagine whether the youth wished to say no. He replied at once: "I will do your will in all things." Then the fairy said: "My Lionbruno, take this ruby; all that you ask of it you shall have." He took the ruby. Then all the fairies gave him in turn some token. He took them, and thanked them all. Then he embraced his bride and departed. Lionbruno travelled better than a prince, magnificently dressed, on a superb horse, with guards before him. He arrived at his town, went to the square, and a crowd of people surrounded him out of curiosity. He asked his way to the house of the mariner who was his father. He did not reveal himself to his parents, but asked them for a lodging that night. At midnight Lionbruno changed, by virtue of the ruby, the wretched hovel into a magnificent palace, and the next day he changed himself into the thirteen-year-old Lionbruno and revealed himself to his parents, telling them how the fairy Colina had liberated him from the Enemy, brought him up, and made him her husband. "For this reason, dear father and mother," said he, "I cannot remain with you. I have come to see you, to embrace you, to make you rich; but I can stay with you a few days only, and then I must leave you." His father and mother saw that they could do nothing, and had to be contented. One fine morning Lionbruno, by an order to the ruby, which he wore on his finger, brought together a great mass of riches, and then called his parents and said: "I leave you masters of all this wealth and of this palace. You will no longer need anything. Now give me your blessing, for I wish to go." The poor people began to weep, and said: "Bless you, my son!" They embraced each other in tears, and he departed.

He arrived at a great city,—like Naples, for example,—and went to lodge at the finest inn. Then he went out to walk and heard a proclamation which declared: "Whatever prince or knight, on horse, with spear in hand, shall pierce and carry away a gold star, shall marry the king's daughter." Imagine how many princes and knights entered the lists!

Lionbruno, more for braggadocio than for anything else, said to himself: "I wish to go and carry away the star;" and he commanded the ruby: "My ruby, to-morrow, I wish to carry away the golden star." The princes and knights began to assemble and try their skill. Every one reached the star and touched it with his spear, but there was no talk of their carrying it away. Lionbruno came, and with a master-stroke carried off the star. Then he quickly escaped with his horse to the inn, so that no one should see him. "Who is he?" "Where is the winner?" No one can give any news of him. The king was ill-humored about it, and issued the proclamation again for the next day. But, to cut the matter short, the same thing occurred the next day. Lionbruno duped them a second time. Imagine how angry the king was! He issued a third proclamation. But this time what does the crafty king do? He posts a large number of soldiers at all the places by which one could escape. The princes and knights begin their courses. As usual, no one carries away the star, and Lionbruno carries it off and rides away. But the soldiers, quicker than he, seize him, arrest him, and carry him to the king. "What do you take me for, that, not satisfied with duping me twice, you wish to dupe me a third time?" Thus spoke the king, who was seated on the throne.

"Pardon, Majesty. I did not dare to enter your presence." "Then you ought not to have undertaken to carry away the star. Now you have done so, and must become my daughter's husband." Lionbruno, nolens volens, was obliged to marry the princess. The king prepared a magnificent feast for the wedding, and invited all the princes, counts, and barons,—all sorts of persons. When the hall was filled with these gentlemen, Lionbruno, before marrying the princess, said to the king: "Majesty, it is true that your daughter is a very beautiful girl, but I had a bride by whose side your daughter could not stand for beauty, grace, everything." Imagine how the king felt when he heard these words. The poor princess, at this affront in the presence of so many noblemen, became as red as fire.

The king, greatly disturbed, said: "Well, if it is so, we wish to see your wife, if she is as beautiful as you say." "Yes, yes!" cried all the noblemen; "we, too, wish to see her; we wish to see her!" Poor Lionbruno was in a tight place. What could he do? He had recourse to the ruby. "Ruby mine, make fairy Colina come here." But this time he was mistaken. The ruby could do everything, but it could not compel the fairy to come, for it was she who had given it its magic power. The summons, however, reached the fairy Colina; but she did not go. "My friend has done a pretty thing!" said she. "Bravo! good! Now I will fix him as he deserves!" She called the lowest of her servants, and made her suddenly appear in the great hall of the king, where all were assembled for the wedding. "How beautiful she is! how beautiful she is!" all said as soon as they saw her. "Is this, then, your first bride?" "What!" answered Lionbruno, "my first bride! This is the lowest of the servants of my first bride." "Gracious!" exclaimed the noblemen; "if this is the lowest of the servants and is so beautiful, imagine what the mistress must be

!" "Then," said the king, "if this is not your first bride, I wish you to make her come herself." "Yes, yes, herself!" cried the others, likewise. Poor Lionbruno! He was obliged to have recourse again to the ring. But this time, also, the fairy did not go, but sent instead her next servant. Scarcely had they seen her when they all said: "This one, oh, this one, is really beautiful! This, now, is certainly your first bride, is she not, Lionbruno?" "No, no!" replied Lionbruno; "my first bride is a marvel of beauty. Different from this one! This one is only the second servant."

Then the king, in a threatening tone, said to him: "Lionbruno, let us put an end to this! I command you to cause your first wife to come here instantly." The matter was growing serious. Poor Lionbruno had recourse for the third time to the ruby, and said to it: "Ruby mine, if you really wish to help me, now is the moment. You must cause the fairy Colina herself to come here." The summons reached her at once, and this time she went. When all those great lords and the king and his daughter saw that marvel of beauty, they became as so many statues. But the fairy Colina approached Lionbruno, pretended to take his hand, and drew off his ring, saying: "Traitor! you cannot find me until you have worn out seven pairs of iron shoes." Then she vanished. The king, in fury, said to Lionbruno: "I understand. The power of carrying off the star was not yours, but your ruby's. Leave my palace!" He had him seized and well beaten and sent away.

And so poor Lionbruno was left without the fairy Colina and the king's daughter, and departed from the city in great grief. When he had gone a few steps, he heard a great noise. It was a smithy. He entered, and called the blacksmith: "Master, I want seven pairs of iron shoes." "I will make you twelve if you wish, but it seems to me that you must have some agreement with the Eternal to live who knows how many hundred years to wear out all these shoes." "What does that matter to you? It is enough if I pay you. Make me the shoes and hold your tongue." He made them for him at once. Lionbruno paid him, put on one pair, and stuck three in one side of his travelling sack and three in the other, and set out. After walking a long time, he arrived late at night in a forest.

All at once three robbers came there. "Good man," said they to Lionbruno, "how did you happen here?" "I am a poor pilgrim," he replied; "it grew dark and I stopped here to rest. And who are you, gentlemen?" "We are travellers." And they all stopped there to rest. The next day Lionbruno arose, took leave of the three robbers, and departed. But he had scarcely gone a few steps when he heard them quarrelling. Now you must know that those robbers had stolen three objects of great value, and were now disputing as to how they should divide them. One of them said: "Fools that we are! We had here that pilgrim, who could have acted as judge and made the division, and we h

ave let him go. Let us call him back." "Yes, yes! let us call him," said the others. They called him, and he came back. "How can I serve you, gentlemen?" said he. "Listen, good man; we have three objects of great value to divide. You must be the judge, and give to each one what belongs to him."

"Very well; but what objects are you talking of?" "Here is a pair of boots, a purse, and a cloak. The boots have this virtue, that he who has them on runs faster than the wind. If you say to the purse, 'open and shut,' it at once gives you a hundred ducats. Finally he who puts on the cloak and buttons it up, can see and yet not be seen." "Very good. But to act the judge well, I must first examine these three objects carefully." "Certainly, that is right."

Lionbruno put on the boots, tried to run, and went marvellously. "What do you think of these boots?" asked the thieves. "Excellent, indeed," replied Lionbruno, and kept them on. Then he said: "Now let us see the purse." He took it and said: "Purse, open and shut," and at once there came forth a hundred silver ducats. "Now let us see what this

cloak is," he said, at last. He put it on and began to button it up. While he was doing so he asked the robbers: "Do you see me now?" They answered: "Yes."

He kept on buttoning it and asked again: "Now do you see me?" "Yes." Finally he reached the last button. "Now do you see me?" "No." "If you don't see me now you never will see me again." He threw away the iron shoes and cried: "Now for you, boots!" And away! faster than the wind. When the three robbers saw themselves duped in that way, what a rage they were in! They thrashed each other soundly, and especially the one who had called Lionbruno back; and at last they all found themselves with broken bones.

Lionbruno, after having cheated the robbers thus, continued his way joyfully. After a long journey, he arrived in the midst of a forest. He saw at a distance a slight smoke, and among frightful rocks, a little old hovel all surrounded by dense wild shrubs, with a little door entirely covered with ivy, so that it could scarcely be seen. Lionbruno approached the door and knocked softly. "Who is knocking?" asked from within an old woman's voice. "I am a poor Christian," replied Lionbruno; "night has overtaken me here, and I am seeking a lodging, if

it can be had." The door opened and Lionbruno entered. "Oh, poor youth! How have you been tempted to come and ruin yourself in this remote place?" demanded, in great wonder, the old woman, who was within, and who was Borea. (Do you know who Borea is? No less a person than the mother of the winds.)

"Oh, dear little old lady, my aunt," replied Lionbruno, "I am lost in this great forest, for I have been travelling a long time to find my dear bride, the fairy Colina, and I have not yet been able to find any trace of her." "My son, you have made a great mistake! What shall we do now that my sons are coming home? Perhaps, God help you! they will want to eat you."

"Oh, wretched me!" cried Lionbruno, then, all trembling; "who, my aunt, are these sons of yours who so devour Christians?" "My son," replied Borea, "you do not know where you are. Do you not know that this house in the midst of these precipices is the house of the winds? And I, you do not recognize me; I, my son, am Borea, the mother of all the winds." "What shall I do now? Oh, my dear aunt, help me; do not let your sons eat me up!"

The old woman finally concealed him in a chest, telling him not to make the slightest noise when her sons returned. Soon a loud noise was heard at a distance: it was the winds returning home. The nearer they approached the louder the noise grew, and a sound of branches and trees broken off was heard. At last the winds arrived, pushed open the door, and entered. "Good evening, mamma." "Welcome, my sons!" replied their mother, all smiling.

And so one after the other all the winds entered, and the last to enter was Sirocco, for you must know that Sirocco is the youngest of Borea's sons. Scarcely had they entered when they began to say: "What smell of human flesh is here? Here Christians, Christians!" "Oh, bad luck to you! what fools you are! Where is there any smell of human flesh here? Who do you think would risk their lives by coming here?" But her sons would not be convinced, especially that obstinate Sirocco. Lionbruno commended his soul to God, for he saw death at his heels. But finally Borea succeeded in convincing her sons. "Oh, mamma, what is there to eat to-night? We have travelled so far, and are so hungry!" "Here, my sons," the mother answered, "come here; for a nice polenta is cooking for you. I will finish cooking it soon, and put it at once on the table."

The next day Borea said to her sons: "My sons, when you came you said you smelled human flesh. Tell me, should you really see a man now, what would you do to him?" "Now, we would not do anything to him. Last night, we should have torn him in pieces." "But you would not do anything to him, truly?" "Truly." "Well, if you will give me your promise by St. John not to harm him, I will show you a live man." "Oh! just see! A man here! Yes, yes, mamma, show him to us at once. We swear by St. John! we will not touch a hair of his head."

Then their mother opened the chest and made Lionbruno come forth. If you had heard the winds then! They puffed and blowed around him and asked him, first of all, how he had come to that place, where no living soul had ever penetrated

. Lionbruno said: "Would to heaven that my journey ended here! I must go to the palace of the fairy Colina; perhaps one of you can tell me where it is?" Then Borea asked her sons one by one and each replied that he knew nothing of it. Finally she questioned her youngest son: "And you, Sirocco, do you not know anything about it?" "I? Should I not know something about it? Am I perchance like my brothers who never can find a hiding-place? The fairy Colina is love-sick. She says that her lover has betrayed her, and continually weeps, and is so reduced by her grief that she can live but little longer. And I deserve to be hanged, for I have seen her in this condition, and yet I have annoyed her so that I have driven her to despair. I amused myself by making a noise about her palace, and more than once I burst open windows and turned things upside down, even the bed she was resting on."

"Oh, my dear Sirocco!" said Lionbruno; "my good Sirocco, you must aid me! Since you have given me news of her, you must al

so do me the favor to show me the way to my bride's palace. I, dear Sirocco, am the betrothed of the fairy Colina, and it is not true that I have betrayed her; on the contrary, if I do not find her, I shall die of grief."

"My son," said Sirocco, "listen; for my part I would take you there with all my heart. But I should have to carry you about my neck. And the trouble is I cannot do so, for I am wind, I am air, and you would slip off. Were you like me the matter would go very well." "Don't worry about that," said Lionbruno, "show me the way, and I will not lag behind." "He is crazy," said Sirocco to himself; then he said to Lionbruno: "Very well, since you feel so strong, to-morrow we will make the trial. Meanwhile let us go to bed, for it is late, and to-morrow, God willing, we will rise early!" And all went to sleep. In the morning early Sirocco arose and cried: "Lionbruno! Lionbruno! get up quickly!"

And Lionbruno put on his boots in a hurry, seized his purse, fixed his cloak carefully, and left the house with Sirocco. "There," said Sirocco, "is the way we must take. Be careful! Don't let me out of your sight, and leave the rest to me. If a few hours after sunset to-night I don't make you find your beauty, you may call me an ass." They started. They ran like the wind.

Every little while Sirocco called out: "Lionbruno!" and he, who was ahead, answered at once: "Oh! don't think I am going to lag behind!" and with these questions and answers they finally reached the palace of the fairy Colina about two hours after sunset. "Here we are," said Sirocco. "Here is your fair one's balcony! See how I am going to blow open the window for you. Attention, now! As soon as it is opened you give a jump and spring in." And so he did. Before the servants could run and shut the balcony window, Lionbruno was already under the fairy Colina's bed. Afterwards one of the maids said to the fairy: "My mistress, how do you feel now? Do you not feel a little better?" "Better? I am half dead. That cursed wind has nearly killed me." "But, mistress, will you not take something this evening? A little coffee, or chocolate, or broth?" "I wish nothing at all." "Take something, if

you don't, you will not rest to-night, you have eaten nothing for three or four days. Really, you must take something."

And the servant said so much that to get rid of her importunity the fairy said: "Well, bring something; if I want it, I will take it." The servant brought a little coffee, and left it by the side of the bed. Lionbruno, in his cloak so that no one could see him, came from under the bed and drank the coffee himself. The servant, believing her mistress had drunk it, brought the chocolate too, and Lionbruno drank that as before. Then the servant brought the fairy some broth and a pigeon. "Mistress," said she, "since, thank God, you have taken the coffee and the chocolate, take this broth and a bit of pigeon, and so you will gain strength and be better to-morrow." The mistress on hearing all this believed that the servants were making fun of her. "Oh, stupid blockheads! What are you saying? Are not the cups still here with the coffee and the chocolate? I have touched nothing." The servants thought that their mistress was out of her mind. Then Lionbruno took off his cloak, came out from under the bed, and said: "My bride, do you know me?" "Lionbruno mine, is it you?" and she rose from the bed and embraced him. "Then it is not true, my Lionbruno, that you have forgotten me?" "If I had forgotten you I should not have suffered so much to find you. But do you still love me?" "My Lionbruno, if I had not always loved you, you would not have found me at the point of death. And now you see I am cured only because I have seen you."

Then they ate and drank together, and summoned the servants and made a great festival. The next day they arranged everything for the wedding and were married with great splendor and joy. In the evening they gave a grand ball and a fine banquet, which you should have seen.

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