

The Love of Three Oranges

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Italian

Easy

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Once upon a time there was a king and queen who had a half-witted son. The queen was deeply grieved at this, and she thought to go to the Lord and ask counsel of him what she was to do with this son. The Lord told her to try and do something to make him laugh. She replied: "I have nothing but a jar of oil, unfortunately for me!" The Lord said to her: "Well, give this oil away in charity, for there will come many people; some bent, some straight, some humpbacked, and it may happen that your son will laugh." So the queen proclaimed that she had a jar of oil, and that all could come and take some. And everybody, indeed, hurried there and took the oil down to the last drop. Last of all came an old witch, who begged the queen to give her a little, saying: "Give me a little oil, too!"

The queen replied: "Ah, it is all gone, there is no more!" The queen was angry and full of spite because her son had not yet laughed. The old witch said again to the queen: "Let me look in the jar!" The queen opened the jar, and the old woman got inside of it and was all covered with the dregs of the oil; and the queen's son laughed, and laughed, and laughed. The old woman came out, saw the prince laughing, and said to him: "May you never be happy until you go and find the Love of the three Oranges."

The son, all eager, said to his mother: "Ah, mother, I shall have no more peace until I go and find the Love of the three Oranges." She answered: "My dear son, how will you go and find the Love of the three Oranges?" But he would go; so he mounted his horse and rode and rode and rode until he came to a large gate. He knocked, and some one within asked: "Who is there?" He replied: "A soul created by God." The one within said: "In all the years that I have been here no one has ever knocked at this gate."

The prince repeated: "Open, for I am a soul created by God!" Then an old man came down and opened the gate. He had eyelids that reached to his feet, and he said: "My son, take down those little forks, and lift up my eyelids." The prince did so, and the old man asked: "Where are you going, my son, in this direction?" "I am going to find the Love of the three Oranges." The old man answered: "So many have gone there and never returned! Do you wish not to return, too? My son, take these twigs: you will meet some witches who are sweeping out their oven with their hands; give them these twigs, and they will let you pass." The prince very gratefully took the twigs, mounted his horse and rode away. He journeyed a long time, and at last saw in the distance the witches of immense size who were coming towards him. He threw them the twigs, and they allowed him to pass.

He continued his journey, and arrived at a gate larger than the first. Here the same thing occurred as at the first one, and the old man said: "Well! since you will go, too, take these ropes, on your way you will encounter some witches drawing water with their tresses; throw them these ropes, and they will let you pass."

Everything happened as the old man said; the prince passed the witches, continued his journey and came to a third gate larger than the second. Here an old man with eyelids longer than the other two gave him a bag of bread, and one of tallow, saying: "Take this bag of bread; you will meet some large dogs; throw them the bread and they will let you pass; then you will come to a large gate with many rusty padlocks; then you will see a tower, and in it the Love of the three Oranges. When you reach that place, take this tallow and anoint well the rusty padlocks; and when you have ascended the tower, you will find the oranges hanging from a nail. There you will also find an old woman who has a son who is an ogre and has eaten all the Christians who have come there; you see, you must be very careful!"

The prince, well contented, took the bag of bread and the tallow and rode away. After a long journey, he saw at a distance, three great dogs with their mouths wide open coming to eat him. He threw them the bread, and they let him pass.

He journeyed on until he came to another large gate with many rusty padlocks. He dismounted, tied his horse to the gate, and began to anoint the locks with the tallow, until, after much creaking, they opened. The prince entered, saw the tower, went up and met an old woman who said to him: "Dear son, where are you going? What have you come here for? I have a son who is an ogre, and will surely eat you up." While she was uttering these words, the son arrived. The old woman made the prince hide under the bed; but the ogre perceived that there was some one in the house, and when he had entered, he began to cry:—

"Geîn geîn, I smell a Christian,
Giàn giàn, I smell a Christian!"

"Son," his mother said, "there is no one here."

But he repeated his cry. Then his mother, to quiet him, threw him a piece of meat, which he ate like a madman; and while he was busy eating, she gave the three oranges to the prince, saying: "Take them, my son, and escape at once, for he will soon finish eating his meat, and then he will want to eat you, too." After she had given him the three oranges, she repented of it, and not knowing what else to do, she cried out: "Stairs, throw him down ! lock, crush him!"

They answered: "We will not, for he gave us tallow!" "Dogs, devour him!" "We will not, for he gave us bread!" Then he mounted his horse and rode away, and the old woman cried after him: "Witch, strangle him!" "I will not, for he gave me ropes!" "Witch, kill him!" "I will not, for he gave me twigs!"

The prince continued his journey, and on the way became very thirsty, and did not know what to do. Finally he thought of opening one of the oranges. He did so, and out came a beautiful girl, who said to him:

"Love, give me to drink!"

He replied:

"Love, I have none!"

And she said:

“Love, I shall die!”

And she died at once. The prince threw away the orange, and continued his journey, and soon became thirsty again. In despair he opened another orange, and out sprang another girl more beautiful than the first. She, too, asked for water, and died when the prince told her he had none to give her. Then he continued his way, saying: “The next time I surely do not want to lose her.”

When he became thirsty again, he waited until he reached a well; then he opened the last orange and there appeared a girl more beautiful than the first two. When she asked for water, he gave her the water of the well; then took her out of the orange, put her on horseback with himself, and started for home. When he was nearly there, he said to her: “See, I will leave you here for a time under these two trees;” one had leaves of gold and silver fruit, and the other gold fruit and silver leaves.

Then he made her a nice couch, and left her resting between the two trees. “Now,” said he, “I must go to my mother to tell her that I have found you, then I will come for you and we shall be married!” Then he mounted his horse and rode away to his mother.

Now while he was gone an old witch approached the girl and said: “Ah, dear daughter, let me comb your hair.” The young girl replied: “No, the like of me do not wish it.” Again she said: “Come, my dear daughter, let me comb you!” Tired of being asked so often by the old woman, the girl at last allowed her to comb her hair, and what did that monster of an old witch take it into her head to do. She stuck a pin through the girl’s temples from side to side, and the girl at once was changed into a dove. What did this wretch of an old woman then do? She got into the couch in the place of the young girl, who flew away.

Meanwhile the prince reached his mother’s house, and she said to him: “Dear son, where have you been? how have you spent all this time?” “Ah, my mother,” said he “what a lovely girl I have for my wife!” “Dear son, where have you left her?” “Dear mother, I have left her between two trees, the leaves of one are of gold and the fruit is silver, the leaves of the other one are silver and the fruit gold.”

Then the queen gave a grand banquet, invited many guests, and made ready many carriages to go and bring the young girl. They mounted their horses, they entered their carriages, they set out, but when they reached the trees they saw the ugly old woman, all wrinkled, in the crotch between the trees, and the white dove on top of them.

The poor prince, you can imagine it! was grieved to the heart, and ashamed at seeing the ugly old woman. His father and mother, to satisfy him, took the old woman, put her in a carriage, and carried her to the palace, where the wedding-feast was prepared. The prince was downhearted, but his mother said to him: "Don't think about it, my son, for she will become beautiful again." But her son could not think of eating or of talking. The dinner was brought on and the guests placed themselves at the round table. Meanwhile, the dove flew up on the kitchen balcony, and began to sing:

"Let the cook fall asleep,
Let the roast be burned,
Let the old witch be unable to eat of it."

The guests waited for the cook to put the roast on the table. They waited, and waited and waited, and at last they got up and went to the kitchen, and there they found the cook asleep. They called and called him, and at last he awoke, but soon became drowsy again. He said he did not know what was the matter with him, but he could not stand up. He put another roast on the spit, however. Then the dove again flew on the balcony and sang:

"Let the cook fall asleep,
Let the roast be burned,
Let the old witch be unable to eat of it."

Again the guests waited until they grew weary, and then the groom went to see what was the matter. He found the cook asleep again, and said: "Cook, good cook, what is the matter with you that you sleep?" Then the cook told him that there was a dove that flew on the balcony and repeated: —

"Let the cook fall asleep,

Let the roast be burned,

Let the old witch be unable to eat of it.”—

and that he was immediately seized with drowsiness, and fell asleep at once.

The bridegroom went out on the balcony, saw the dove, and said to it: “Cuócula, pretty cuócula, come here and let me see you!” The dove came near him and he caught it, and while he was caressing it he saw the pins planted in its head, one in its forehead, and one in each of its temples. What did he do? He pulled out the pin in the forehead! Then he caressed it again, and pulled out the pins from its temples.

Then the dove became a beautiful girl, more beautiful than she was before, and the prince took her to his mother and said: “Here, my mother, this is my bride!” His mother was delighted to see the beautiful girl, and the king, too, was well pleased. When the old witch saw the girl, she cried: “Take me away, take me away, I am afraid!”

Then the fair girl told the whole secret how it was. The guests who were present wished to give their opinions as to what should be done with the old woman. One of the highest rank said: “Let her be well greased, and burned!” “Bravo, bravo!” exclaimed the others, “burn her; she must be burned!” So they seized the old woman, had wood brought, and burned her in the midst of the city. Then they returned home, and had a finer wedding than before.

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