



The Goat-Faced Girl

Andrew Lang's Fairy Books

Italian

Advanced
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There was once upon a time a peasant called Masaniello who had twelve daughters. They were exactly like the steps of a staircase, for there was just a year between each sister. It was all the poor man could do to bring up such a large family, and in order to provide food for them he used to dig in the fields all day long. In spite of his hard work he only just succeeded in keeping the wolf from the door, and the poor little girls often went hungry to bed.

One day, when Masaniello was working at the foot of a high mountain, he came upon the mouth of a cave which was so dark and gloomy that even the sun seemed afraid to enter it. Suddenly a huge green lizard appeared from the inside and stood before Masaniello, who nearly went out of his mind with terror, for the beast was as big as a crocodile and quite as fierce looking.

But the lizard sat down beside him in the most friendly manner, and said: 'Don't be afraid, my good man, I am not going to hurt you; on the contrary, I am most anxious to help you.'

When the peasant heard these words he knelt before the lizard and said: 'Dear lady, for I know not what to call you, I am in your power; but I beg of you to be merciful, for I have twelve wretched little daughters at home who are dependent on me.'

'That's the very reason why I have come to you,' replied the lizard. 'Bring me your youngest daughter tomorrow morning. I promise to bring her up as if she were my own child, and to look upon her as the apple of

my eye.'

When Masaniello heard her words he was very unhappy, because he felt sure, from the lizard's wanting one of his daughters, the youngest and tenderest too, that the poor little girl would only serve as dessert for the terrible creature's supper. At the same time he said to himself, 'If I refuse her request, she will certainly eat me up on the spot. If I give her what she asks she does indeed take part of myself, but if I refuse she will take the whole of me. What am I to do, and how in the world am I to get out of the difficulty?'

As he kept muttering to himself the lizard said, 'Make up your mind to do as I tell you at once. I desire to have your youngest daughter, and if you won't comply with my wish, I can only say it will be the worse for you.'

Seeing that there was nothing else to be done, Masaniello set off for his home, and arrived there looking so white and wretched that his wife asked him at once: 'What has happened to you, my dear husband? Have you quarrelled with anyone, or has the poor donkey fallen down?'

'Neither the one nor the other,' answered her husband, 'but something far worse than either. A terrible lizard has nearly frightened me out of my senses, for she threatened that if I did not give her our youngest daughter, she would make me repent it. My head is going round like a mill-wheel, and I don't know what to do. I am indeed between the Devil and the Deep Sea. You know how dearly I love Renzolla, and yet, if I fail to bring her to the lizard to-morrow morning, I must say farewell to life. Do advise me what to do.'

When his wife had heard all he had to say, she said to him: 'How do you know, my dear husband, that the lizard is really our enemy? May she not be a friend in disguise? And your meeting with her may be the beginning of better things and the end of all our misery. Therefore go and take the child to her, for my heart tells me that you will never repent doing so.'

Masaniello was much comforted by her words, and next morning as soon as it was light he took his little daughter by the hand and led her to the cave.

The lizard, who was awaiting the peasant's arrival, came forward to meet him, and taking the girl by the hand, she gave the father a sack full of gold, and said: 'Go and marry your other daughters, and give them dowries with this gold, and be of good cheer, for Renzolla will have both father and mother in me; it is a great piece of luck for her that she has fallen into my hands.'

Masaniello, quite overcome with gratitude, thanked the lizard, and returned home to his wife.

As soon as it was known how rich the peasant had become, suitors for the hands of his daughters were not wanting, and very soon he married them all off; and even then there was enough gold left to keep himself and his wife in comfort and plenty all their days.

As soon as the lizard was left alone with Renzolla, she changed the cave into a beautiful palace, and led the girl inside. Here she brought her up like a little princess, and the child wanted for nothing. She gave her sumptuous food to eat, beautiful clothes to wear, and a thousand servants to wait on her.

Now, it happened, one day, that the king of the country was hunting in a wood close to the palace, and was overtaken by the dark. Seeing a light shining in the palace he sent one of his servants to ask if he could get a night's lodging there.

When the page knocked at the door the lizard changed herself into a beautiful woman, and opened it herself. When she heard the king's request she sent him a message to say that she would be delighted to see him, and give him all he wanted.

The king, on hearing this kind invitation, instantly betook himself to the palace, where he was received in the most hospitable manner. A hundred pages with torches came to meet him, a hundred more waited on him at table, and another hundred waved big fans in the air to keep the flies from him. Renzolla herself poured out the wine for him, and, so gracefully did she do it, that his Majesty could not take his eyes off her.

When the meal was finished and the table cleared, the king retired to sleep, and Renzolla drew the shoes from his feet, at the same time drawing his heart from his breast. So desperately had he fallen in love with her, that he called the fairy to him, and asked her for Renzolla's hand in marriage. As the kind fairy had only the girl's welfare at heart, she willingly gave her consent, and not her consent only, but a wedding portion of seven

thousand golden guineas.

The king, full of delight over his good fortune, prepared to take his departure, accompanied by Renzolla, who never so much as thanked the fairy for all she had done for her. When the fairy saw such a base want of gratitude she determined to punish the girl, and, cursing her, she turned her face into a goat's head. In a moment Renzolla's pretty mouth stretched out into a snout, with a beard a yard long at the end of it, her cheeks sank in, and her shining plaits of hair changed into two sharp horns. When the king turned round and saw her he thought he must have taken leave of his senses. He burst into tears, and cried out: 'Where is the hair that bound me so tightly, where are the eyes that pierced through my heart, and where are the lips I kissed? Am I to be tied to a goat all my life? No, no! nothing will induce me to become the laughing-stock of my subjects for the sake of a goat-faced girl!'

When they reached his own country he shut Renzolla up in a little turret chamber of his palace, with a waiting-maid, and gave each of them ten bundles of flax to spin, telling them that their task must be finished by the end of the week.

The maid, obedient to the king's commands, set at once to work and combed out the flax, wound it round the spindle, and sat spinning at her wheel so diligently that her work was quite done by Saturday evening. But Renzolla, who had been spoilt and petted in the fairy's house, and was quite unaware of the change that had taken place in her appearance, threw the flax out of the window and said: 'What is the king thinking of that he should give me this work to do? If he wants shirts he can buy them. It isn't even as if he had picked me out of the gutter, for he ought to remember that I brought him seven thousand golden guineas as my wedding portion, and that I am his wife and not his slave. He must be mad to treat me like this.'

All the same, when Saturday evening came, and she saw that the waiting-maid had finished her task, she took fright lest she should be punished for her idleness. So she hurried off to the palace of the fairy, and confided all her woes to her. The fairy embraced her tenderly, and gave her a sack full of spun flax, in order that she might show it to the king, and let him see what a good worker she was. Renzolla took the sack without one word of thanks, and returned to the palace, leaving the kind fairy very indignant over her want of gratitude.

When the king saw the flax all spun, he gave Renzolla and the waiting-maid each a little dog, and told them to look after the animals and train them carefully.

The waiting-maid brought hers up with the greatest possible care, and treated it almost as if it were her son. But Renzolla said: 'I don't know what to think. Have I come among a lot of lunatics? Does the king imagine that I am going to comb and feed a dog with my own hands?' With these words she opened the window and threw the poor little beast out, and he fell on the ground as dead as a stone.

When a few months had passed the king sent a message to say he would like to see how the dogs were getting on. Renzolla, who felt very uncomfortable in her mind at this request, hurried off once more to the fairy. This time she found an old man at the door of the fairy's palace, who said to her: 'Who are you, and what do you want?'

When Renzolla heard his question she answered angrily: 'Don't you know me, old Goat-beard? And how dare you address me in such a way?'

'The pot can't call the kettle black,' answered the old man, 'for it is not I, but you who have a goat's head. Just wait a moment, you ungrateful wretch, and I will show you to what a pass your want of gratitude has brought you.'

With these words he hurried away, and returned with a mirror, which he held up before Renzolla. At the sight of her ugly, hairy face, the girl nearly fainted with horror, and she broke into loud sobs at seeing her countenance so changed.

Then the old man said: 'You must remember, Renzolla, that you are a peasant's daughter, and that the fairy turned you into a queen; but you were ungrateful, and never as much as thanked her for all she had done for you. Therefore she has determined to punish you. But if you wish to lose your long white beard, throw yourself at the fairy's feet and implore her to forgive you. She has a tender heart, and will, perhaps, take pity on you.'

Renzolla, who was really sorry for her conduct, took the old man's advice, and the fairy not only gave her back her former face, but she dressed her in a gold embroidered dress, presented her with a beautiful carriage, and brought her back, accompanied by a host of servants, to her husband. When the king saw her looking as

beautiful as ever, he fell in love with her once more, and bitterly repented having caused her so much suffering.

So Renzolla lived happily ever afterwards, for she loved her husband, honoured the fairy, and was grateful to the old man for having told her the truth.

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