



# *The Story of Ciccu*

Andrew Lang'S Fairy Books

Italian

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*Intermediate*  
*5 min read*

Once upon a time there lived a man who had three sons. The eldest was called Peppe, the second Alfin, and the youngest Ciccu. They were all very poor, and at last things got so bad that they really had not enough to eat. So the father called his sons, and said to them, 'My dear boys, I am too old to work any more, and there is nothing left for me but to beg in the streets.'

'No, no!' exclaimed his sons; 'that you shall never do. Rather, if it must be, would we do it ourselves. But we have thought of a better plan than that.'

'What is it?' asked the father.

'Well, we will take you in the forest, where you shall cut wood, and then we will bind it up in bundles and sell it in the town.' So their father let them do as they said, and they all made their way into the forest; and as the old man was weak from lack of food his sons took it in turns to carry him on their backs. Then they built a little hut where they might take shelter, and set to work. Every morning early the father cut his sticks, and the sons bound them in bundles, and carried them to the town, bringing back the food the old man so much needed.

Some months passed in this way, and then the father suddenly fell ill, and knew that the time had come when he must die. He bade his sons fetch a lawyer, so that he might make his will, and when the man arrived he

explained his wishes.

'I have,' said he, 'a little house in the village, and over it grows a fig-tree. The house I leave to my sons, who are to live in it together; the fig-tree I divide as follows. To my son Peppe I leave the branches. To my son Alfin I leave the trunk. To my son Ciccu I leave the fruit. Besides the house and tree, I have an old coverlet, which I leave to my eldest son. And an old purse, which I leave to my second son. And a horn, which I leave to my youngest son. And now farewell.'

Thus speaking, he laid himself down, and died quietly. The brothers wept bitterly for their father, whom they loved, and when they had buried him they began to talk over their future lives. 'What shall we do now?' said they. 'Shall we live in the wood, or go back to the village?' And they made up their minds to stay where they were and continue to earn their living by selling firewood.

One very hot evening, after they had been working hard all day, they fell asleep under a tree in front of the hut. And as they slept there came by three fairies, who stopped to look at them.

'What fine fellows!' said one. 'Let us give them a present.'

'Yes, what shall it be?' asked another.

'This youth has a coverlet over him,' said the first fairy. 'When he wraps it round him, and wishes himself in any place, he will find himself there in an instant.'

Then said the second fairy: 'This youth has a purse in his hand. I will promise that it shall always give him as much gold as he asks for.'

Last came the turn of the third fairy. 'This one has a horn slung round him. When he blows at the small end the seas shall be covered with ships. And if he blows at the wide end they shall all be sunk in the waves.' So they vanished, without knowing that Ciccu had been awake and heard all they said.

The next day, when they were all cutting wood, he said to his brothers, 'That old coverlet and the purse are no use to you; I wish you would give them to me. I have a fancy for them, for the sake of old times.' Now Peppe and Alfin were very fond of Ciccu, and never refused him anything, so they let him have the coverlet and the purse without a word. When he had got them safely Ciccu went on, 'Dear brothers, I am tired of the forest. I

want to live in the town, and work at some trade.'

'O Ciccu! stay with us,' they cried. 'We are very happy here; and who knows how we shall get on elsewhere?'

'We can always try,' answered Ciccu; 'and if times are bad we can come back here and take up wood-cutting.' So saying he picked up his bundle of sticks, and his brothers did the same.

But when they reached the town they found that the market was overstocked with firewood, and they did not sell enough to buy themselves a dinner, far less to get any food to carry home. They were wondering sadly what they should do when Ciccu said, 'Come with me to the inn and let us have something to eat.' They were so hungry by this time that they did not care much whether they paid for it or not, so they followed Ciccu, who gave his orders to the host. 'Bring us three dishes, the nicest that you have, and a good bottle of wine.'

'Ciccu! Ciccu!' whispered his brothers, horrified at this extravagance, 'are you mad? How do you ever mean to pay for it?'

'Let me alone,' replied Ciccu; 'I know what I am about.' And when they had finished their dinner Ciccu told the others to go on, and he would wait to pay the bill.

The brothers hurried on, without needing to be told twice, 'for,' thought they, 'he has no money, and of course there will be a row.'

When they were out of sight Ciccu asked the landlord how much he owed, and then said to his purse, 'Dear purse, give me, I pray you, six florins,' and instantly six florins were in the purse. Then he paid the bill and joined his brothers.

'How did you manage?' they asked.

'Never you mind,' answered he. 'I have paid every penny,' and no more would he say. But the other two were very uneasy, for they felt sure something must be wrong, and the sooner they parted company with Ciccu the better. Ciccu understood what they were thinking, and, drawing forty gold pieces from his pocket, he held out twenty to each, saying, 'Take these and turn them to good account. I am going away to seek my own fortune.' Then he embraced them, and struck down another road.

He wandered on for many days, till at length he came to the town where the king had his court. The first thing Ciccu did was to order himself some fine clothes, and then buy a grand house, just opposite the palace.

Next he locked his door, and ordered a shower of gold to cover the staircase, and when this was done, the door was flung wide open, and everyone came and peeped at the shining golden stairs. Lastly the rumour of these wonders reached the ears of the king, who left his palace to behold these splendours with his own eyes. And Ciccu received him with all respect, and showed him over the house.

When the king went home he told such stories of what he had seen that his wife and daughter declared that they must go and see them too. So the king sent to ask Ciccu's leave, and Ciccu answered that if the queen and the princess would be pleased to do him such great honour he would show them anything they wished. Now the princess was as beautiful as the sun, and when Ciccu looked upon her his heart went out to her, and he longed to have her to wife. The princess saw what was passing in his mind, and how she could make use of it to satisfy her curiosity as to the golden stairs; so she praised him and flattered him, and put cunning questions, till at length Ciccu's head was quite turned, and he told her the whole story of the fairies and their gifts. Then she begged him to lend her the purse for a few days, so that she could have one made like it, and so great was the love he had for her that he gave it to her at once.

The princess returned to the palace, taking with her the purse, which she had not the smallest intention of ever restoring to Ciccu. Very soon Ciccu had spent all the money he had by him, and could get no more without the help of his purse. Of course, he went at once to the king's daughter, and asked her if she had done with it, but she put him off with some excuse, and told him to come back next day. The next day it was the same thing, and the next, till a great rage filled Ciccu's heart instead of the love that had been there. And when night came he took in his hand a thick stick, wrapped himself in the coverlet, and wished himself in the chamber of the princess. The princess was asleep, but Ciccu seized her arm and pulled her out of bed, and beat her till she gave back the purse. Then he took up the coverlet, and wished he was safe in his own house.

No sooner had he gone than the princess hastened to her father and complained of her sufferings. Then the king rose up in a fury, and commanded Ciccu to be brought before him. 'You richly deserve death,' said he, 'but I will allow you to live if you will instantly hand over to me the coverlet, the purse, and the horn.'

What could Ciccu do? Life was sweet, and he was in the power of the king; so he gave up silently his ill-gotten goods, and was as poor as when he was a boy.

While he was wondering how he was to live it suddenly came into his mind that this was the season for the figs to ripen, and he said to himself, 'I will go and see if the tree has borne well.' So he set off home, where his brothers still lived, and found them living very uncomfortably, for they had spent all their money, and did not know how to make any more. However, he was pleased to see that the fig-tree looked in splendid condition, and was full of fruit. He ran and fetched a basket, and was just feeling the figs, to make sure which of them were ripe, when his brother Peppe called to him, 'Stop! The figs of course are yours, but the branches they grow on are mine, and I forbid you to touch them.'

Ciccu did not answer, but set a ladder against the tree, so that he could reach the topmost branches, and had his foot already on the first rung when he heard the voice of his brother Alfin: 'Stop! the trunk belongs to me, and I forbid you to touch it!'

Then they began to quarrel violently, and there seemed no chance that they would ever cease, till one of them said, 'Let us go before a judge.' The others agreed, and when they had found a man whom they could trust Ciccu told him the whole story.

'This is my verdict,' said the judge. 'The figs in truth belong to you, but you cannot pluck them without touching both the trunk and the branches. Therefore you must give your first basketful to your brother Peppe, as the price of his leave to put your ladder against the tree; and the second basketful to your brother Alfin, for leave to shake his boughs. The rest you can keep for yourself.'

And the brothers were contented, and returned home, saying one to the other, 'We will each of us send a basket of figs to the king. Perhaps he will give us something in return, and if he does we will divide it faithfully between us.' So the best figs were carefully packed in a basket, and Peppe set out with it to the castle.

On the road he met a little old man who stopped and said to him, 'What have you got there, my fine fellow?'

‘What is that to you?’ was the answer; ‘mind your own business.’ But the old man only repeated his question, and Peppe, to get rid of him, exclaimed in anger, ‘Dirt.’

‘Good,’ replied the old man; ‘dirt you have said, and dirt let it be.’

Peppe only tossed his head and went on his way till he got to the castle, where he knocked at the door. ‘I have a basket of lovely figs for the king,’ he said to the servant who opened it, ‘if his majesty will be graciously pleased to accept them with my humble duty.’

The king loved figs, and ordered Peppe to be admitted to his presence, and a silver dish to be brought on which to put the figs. When Peppe uncovered his basket sure enough a layer of beautiful purple figs met the king’s eyes, but underneath there was nothing but dirt. ‘How dare you play me such a trick?’ shrieked the king in a rage. ‘Take him away, and give him fifty lashes.’ This was done, and Peppe returned home, sore and angry, but determined to say nothing about his adventure. And when his brothers asked him what had happened he only answered, ‘When we have all three been I will tell you.’

A few days after this more figs were ready for plucking, and Alfin in his turn set out for the palace. He had not gone far down the road before he met the old man, who asked him what he had in his basket.

‘Horns,’ answered Alfin, shortly.

‘Good,’ replied the old man; ‘horns you have said, and horns let it be.’

When Alfin reached the castle he knocked at the door and said to the servant: ‘Here is a basket of lovely figs, if his majesty will be good enough to accept them with my humble duty.’

The king commanded that Alfin should be admitted to his presence, and a silver dish to be brought on which to lay the figs. When the basket was uncovered some beautiful purple figs lay on the top, but underneath there was nothing but horns. Then the king was beside himself with passion, and screamed out, ‘Is this a plot to mock me? Take him away, and give him a hundred and fifty lashes!’ So Alfin went sadly home, but would not tell anything about his adventures, only saying grimly, ‘Now it is Ciccu’s turn.’

Ciccu had to wait a little before he gathered the last figs on the tree, and these were not nearly so good as the

first set. However, he plucked them, as they had agreed, and set out for the king's palace. The old man was still on the road, and he came up and said to Ciccu, 'What have you got in that basket?'

'Figs for the king,' answered he.

'Let me have a peep,' and Ciccu lifted the lid. 'Oh, do give me one, I am so fond of figs,' begged the little man.

'I am afraid if I do that the hole will show,' replied Ciccu, but as he was very good-natured he gave him one. The old man ate it greedily and kept the stalk in his hand, and then asked for another and another and another till he had eaten half the basketful. 'But there are not enough left to take to the king,' murmured Ciccu.

'Don't be anxious,' said the old man, throwing the stalks back into the basket; 'just go on and carry the basket to the castle, and it will bring you luck.'

Ciccu did not much like it; however he went on his way, and with a trembling heart rang the castle bell. 'Here are some lovely figs for the king,' said he, 'if his majesty will graciously accept them with my humble duty.'

When the king was told that there was another man with a basket of figs he cried out, 'Oh, have him in, have him in! I suppose it is a wager!' But Ciccu uncovered the basket, and there lay a pile of beautiful ripe figs. And the king was delighted, and emptied them himself on the silver dish, and gave five florins to Ciccu, and offered besides to take him into his service. Ciccu accepted gratefully, but said he must first return home and give the five florins to his brothers.

When he got home Peppe spoke: 'Now we will see what we each have got from the king. I myself received from him fifty lashes.'

'And I a hundred and fifty,' added Alfin.

'And I five florins and some sweets, which you can divide between you, for the king has taken me into his service.' Then Ciccu went back to the Court and served the king, and the king loved him.

The other two brothers heard that Ciccu had become quite an important person, and they grew envious, and thought how they could put him to shame. At last they came to the king and said to him, 'O king! your palace is beautiful indeed, but to be worthy of you it lacks one thing—the sword of the Man-eater.'

'How can I get it?' asked the king.

'Oh, Ciccu can get it for you; ask him.'

So the king sent for Ciccu and said to him, 'Ciccu, you must at any price manage to get the sword of the Man-eater.'

Ciccu was very much surprised at this sudden command, and he walked thoughtfully away to the stables and began to stroke his favourite horse, saying to himself, 'Ah, my pet, we must bid each other good-bye, for the king has sent me away to get the sword of the Maneater.' Now this horse was not like other horses, for it was a talking horse, and knew a great deal about many things, so it answered, 'Fear nothing, and do as I tell you. Beg the king to give you fifty gold pieces and leave to ride me, and the rest will be easy.' Ciccu believed what the horse said, and prayed the king to grant him what he asked. Then the two friends set out, but the horse chose what roads he pleased, and directed Ciccu in everything.

It took them many days' hard riding before they reached the country where the Man-eater lived, and then the horse told Ciccu to stop a group of old women who were coming chattering through the wood, and offer them each a shilling if they would collect a number of mosquitos and tie them up in a bag. When the bag was full Ciccu put it on his shoulder and stole into the house of the Man-eater (who had gone to look for his dinner) and let them all out in his bedroom. He himself hid carefully under the bed and waited. The Man-eater came in late, very tired with his long walk, and flung himself on the bed, placing his sword with its shining blade by his side. Scarcely had he lain down than the mosquitos began to buzz about and bite him, and he rolled from side to side trying to catch them, which he never could do, though they always seemed to be close to his nose. He was so busy over the mosquitos that he did not hear Ciccu steal softly out, or see him catch up the sword. But the horse heard and stood ready at the door, and as Ciccu came flying down the stairs and jumped on his back he sped away like the wind, and never stopped till they arrived at the king's palace.

The king had suffered much pain in his absence, thinking that if the Man-eater ate Ciccu, it would be all his

fault. And he was so overjoyed to have him safe that he almost forgot the sword which he had sent him to bring. But the two brothers did not love Ciccu any better because he had succeeded when they hoped he would have failed, and one day they spoke to the king. 'It is all very well for Ciccu to have got possession of the sword, but it would have been far more to your majesty's honour if he had captured the Man-eater himself.' The king thought upon these words, and at last he said to Ciccu, 'Ciccu, I shall never rest until you bring me back the Man-eater himself. You may have any help you like, but somehow or other you must manage to do it.' Ciccu felt very much cast, down at these words, and went to the stable to ask advice of his friend the horse. 'Fear nothing,' said the horse; 'just say you want me and fifty pieces of gold.' Ciccu did as he was bid, and the two set out together.

When they reached the country of the Man-eater, Ciccu made all the church bells toll and a proclamation to be made. 'Ciccu, the servant of the king, is dead.' The Man-eater soon heard what everyone was saying, and was glad in his heart, for he thought, 'Well, it is good news that the thief who stole my sword is dead.' But Ciccu bought an axe and a saw, and cut down a pine tree in the nearest wood, and began to hew it into planks.

'What are you doing in my wood?' asked the Maneater, coming up.

'Noble lord,' answered Ciccu, 'I am making a coffin for the body of Ciccu, who is dead.'

'Don't be in a hurry,' answered the Man-eater, who of course did not know whom he was talking to, 'and perhaps I can help you;' and they set to work sawing and fitting, and very soon the coffin was finished.

Then Ciccu scratched his ear thoughtfully, and cried, 'Idiot that I am! I never took any measures. How am I to know if it is big enough? But now I come to think of it, Ciccu was about your size. I wonder if you would be so good as just to put yourself in the coffin, and see if there is enough room.'

'Oh, delighted!' said the Man-eater, and laid himself at full length in the coffin. Ciccu clapped on the lid, put a strong cord round it, tied it fast on his horse, and rode back to the king. And when the king saw that he really had brought back the Man-eater, he commanded a huge iron chest to be brought, and locked the coffin up inside.

Just about this time the queen died, and soon after the king thought he should like to marry again. He sought everywhere, but he could not hear of any princess that took his fancy. Then the two envious brothers came to

him and said, 'O king! there is but one woman that is worthy of being your wife, and that is she who is the fairest in the whole world.'

'But where can I find her?' asked the king

'Oh, Ciccu will know, and he will bring her to you.'

Now the king had got so used to depending on Ciccu, that he really believed he could do everything. So he sent for him and said, 'Ciccu, unless within eight days you bring me the fairest in the whole world, I will have you hewn into a thousand pieces.' This mission seemed to Ciccu a hundred times worse than either of the others, and with tears in his eyes he took his way to the stables.

'Cheer up,' laughed the horse; 'tell the king you must have some bread and honey, and a purse of gold, and leave the rest to me.'

Ciccu did as he was bid, and they started at a gallop.

After they had ridden some way, they saw a swarm of bees lying on the ground, so hungry and weak that they were unable to fly. 'Get down, and give the poor things some honey,' said the horse, and Ciccu dismounted. By-and-bye they came to a stream, on the bank of which was a fish, flapping feebly about in its efforts to reach the water. 'Jump down, and throw the fish into the water; he will be useful to us,' and Ciccu did so. Farther along the hillside they saw an eagle whose leg was caught in a snare. 'Go and free that eagle from the snare; he will be useful to us;' and in a moment the eagle was soaring up into the sky.

At length they came to the castle where the fairest in the world lived with her parents. Then said the horse, 'You must get down and sit upon that stone, for I must enter the castle alone. Directly you see me come tearing by with the princess on my back, jump up behind, and hold her tight, so that she does not escape you. If you fail to do this, we are both lost.' Ciccu seated himself on the stone, and the horse went on to the courtyard of the castle, where he began to trot round in a graceful and elegant manner. Soon a crowd collected first to watch him and then to pat him, and the king and queen and princess came with the rest. The eyes of the fairest in the world brightened as she looked, and she sprang on the horse's saddle, crying, 'Oh, I really must ride him a little!' But the horse made one bound forward, and the princess was forced to hold tight by his mane, lest she should fall off. And as they dashed past the stone where Ciccu was waiting for them, he swung himself up and

held her round the waist. As he put his arms round her waist, the fairest in the world unwound the veil from her head and cast it to the ground, and then she drew a ring from her finger and flung it into the stream. But she said nothing, and they rode on fast, fast.

The king of Ciccu's country was watching for them from the top of a tower, and when he saw in the distance a cloud of dust, he ran down to the steps so as to be ready to receive them. Bowing low before the fairest in the world, he spoke: 'Noble lady, will you do me the honour to become my wife?'

But she answered, 'That can only be when Ciccu brings me the veil that I let fall on my way here.'

And the king turned to Ciccu and said, 'Ciccu, if you do not find the veil at once, you shall lose your head.'

Ciccu, who by this time had hoped for a little peace, felt his heart sink at this fresh errand, and he went into the stable to complain to the faithful horse.

'It will be all right,' answered the horse when he had heard his tale; 'just take enough food for the day for both of us, and then get on my back.'

They rode back all the way they had come till they reached the place where they had found the eagle caught in the snare; then the horse bade Ciccu to call three times on the king of the birds, and when he replied, to beg him to fetch the veil which the fairest in the world had let fall.

'Wait a moment,' answered a voice that seemed to come from somewhere very high up indeed. 'An eagle is playing with it just now, but he will be here with it in an instant;' and a few minutes after there was a sound of wings, and an eagle came fluttering towards them with the veil in his beak. And Ciccu saw it was the very same eagle that he had freed from the snare. So he took the veil and rode back to the king.

Now the king was enchanted to see him so soon, and took the veil from Ciccu and flung it over the princess, crying, 'Here is the veil you asked for, so I claim you for my wife.'

'Not so fast,' answered she. 'I can never be your wife till Ciccu puts on my finger the ring I threw into the stream. Ciccu, who was standing by expecting something of the sort, bowed his head when he heard her words, and went straight to the horse.'

'Mount at once,' said the horse; 'this time it is very simple,' and he carried Ciccu to the banks of the little stream. 'Now, call three times on the emperor of the fishes, and beg him to restore you the ring that the princess dropped.

Ciccu did as the horse told him, and a voice was heard in answer that seemed to come from a very long way off.

'What is your will?' it asked; and Ciccu replied that he had been commanded to bring back the ring that the princess had flung away, as she rode past.

'A fish is playing with it just now,' replied the voice; 'however, you shall have it without delay.'

And sure enough, very soon a little fish was seen rising to the surface with the lost ring in his mouth. And Ciccu knew him to be the fish that he had saved from death, and he took the ring and rode back with it to the king.

'That is not enough,' exclaimed the princess when she saw the ring; 'before we can be man and wife, the oven must be heated for three days and three nights, and Ciccu must jump in.' And the king forgot how Ciccu had served him, and desired him to do as the princess had said.

This time Ciccu felt that no escape was possible, and he went to the horse and laid his hand on his neck. 'Now it is indeed good-bye, and there is no help to be got even from you,' and he told him what fate awaited him.

But the horse said, 'Oh, never lose heart, but jump on my back, and make me go till the foam flies in flecks all about me. Then get down, and scrape off the foam with a knife. This you must rub all over you, and when you are quite covered, you may suffer yourself to be cast into the oven, for the fire will not hurt you, nor anything else.' And Ciccu did exactly as the horse bade him, and went back to the king, and before the eyes of the fairest in the world he sprang into the oven.

And when the fairest in the world saw what he had done, love entered into her heart, and she said to the king, 'One thing more: before I can be your wife, you must jump into the oven as Ciccu has done.'

'Willingly,' replied the king, stooping over the oven. But on the brink he paused a moment and called to Ciccu, 'Tell me, Ciccu, how did you manage to prevent the fire burning you?'

Now Ciccu could not forgive his master, whom he had served so faithfully, for sending him to his death

without a thought, so he answered, 'I rubbed myself over with fat, and I am not even singed.'

When he heard these words, the king, whose head was full of the princess, never stopped to inquire if they could be true, and smeared himself over with fat, and sprang into the oven. And in a moment the fire caught him, and he was burned up.

Then the fairest in the world held out her hand to Ciccu and smiled, saying, 'Now we will be man and wife.' So Ciccu married the fairest in the world, and became king of the country.

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