



The Three Brother Beasts

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Italian

Advanced
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There was, once upon a time, a King of a country called Verdecolle, who had three daughters, each one more lovely than the other. The three sons of the neighbouring King of Velprato fell very much in love with these beauties, but just as the weddings were going to come off, the three Princes fell under the power of a wicked Fairy, who turned them all into different animals; and the father of the Princesses very naturally refused in consequence to let his daughters marry them.

Thereupon the eldest Prince, who had been changed into an Eagle with magic power, summoned all the birds of the air to his aid. They came in swarms — sparrows, larks, thrushes, starlings, and every other bird you can think of; and the Eagle commanded them to devastate the whole country, not leaving a leaf or blossom on any tree.

The second Prince, who had been changed into a Stag, called the goats, rabbits, hares, pigs, and all the other four-footed beasts, and ordered them to lay waste all the fields and ploughed land, and not to leave a single root or blade of grass.

The third Prince, who had been changed into a Dolphin, assembled all the monsters of the deep, and raised such a storm on the coasts of the country, that all the ships and trading vessels were lost and shattered to

pieces.

When the King saw that the only way to put an end to these troubles and disasters was to give the three Beasts his daughters in marriage, he gave in at last, though with much foreboding and many tears.

When the Eagle, the Stag, and the Dolphin arrived to carry their brides off, their mother gave each of the Princesses a ring, saying as she did so: "My dear daughters, keep these rings carefully and always wear them, for if you separate and do not meet again for many years, or if at any time you come across any one of your own blood, you will always recognise each other by these talismans."

So they took their departure and set out on their different ways. The Eagle carried Fabiella, who was the eldest sister, off to a lofty mountain above the clouds, where it never rained, but the sun shone perpetually, and here he gave her a magnificent palace, and treated her like a queen.

The Stag bore Vasta, the second sister, away with him, right into the heart of a dark wood, and here he lived with her in the most beautiful house and garden you can imagine. The Dolphin swam with Rita, who was the youngest sister, on his back, right across the sea, till he came to a huge rock, and on the rock stood a house in which three crowned kings might have lived in comfort and luxury.

In the meantime, the Queen gave birth to a beautiful little boy, whom she called Tittone. When he was fifteen years old he determined to set out into the world and seek tidings of his three sisters, for his mother did nothing but bewail their loss and the unhappy fate which had given them three Beasts for their husbands. At first his father and mother could not be prevailed on to let him go, but at length they yielded to his entreaties, and, having provided him with a suitable escort and with a ring the same as his sisters, they took a tender farewell of him. So the young Prince set forth on his travels, and wandered for many years through all the different countries of the world without ever coming on a trace of the three Princesses. At last one day he came to the mountain where Fabiella and the Eagle lived, and when he saw their palace Tittone stood still, lost in admiration of its marble pillars and alabaster walls, its windows of crystal and roof of glittering gold.

As soon as Fabiella saw him she called him to her and asked him who he was, where he came from, and what business had led him thither. When the Prince had described his native land, his father and his mother, and answered all the Princess's questions, Fabiella recognised him as her brother, and she became quite certain of

the fact when she compared his ring with the one she always wore. She embraced her brother tenderly; but, fearful lest her husband should object to his arrival, she hid him in a cupboard. When the Eagle came home that evening Fabiella confided to him that she was very home-sick, and that she had been suddenly seized with a strong desire to see her own people once more. The Eagle answered: "Try and get over this wish, my dear wife, for it cannot be fulfilled till I become a man again." "Well, then," said Fabiella, "if it is impossible for me to go to them, let us invite one of my relations to come and visit us here." "With all my heart," replied the Eagle, "but I don't think anyone would take the trouble to come such a long way to see you."

"But suppose someone had come, and was in the palace at this moment, would you object?" asked his wife. "Of course not," answered the Eagle. "Any relation of yours would be as dear to me as the apple of my eye."

When Fabiella heard these words she took heart, and, going to the cupboard, she opened it, and showed the Eagle her brother hidden there. The Eagle greeted him warmly, and said: "You are most welcome, and it is a great pleasure to me to make your acquaintance. I hope you will consider yourself quite at home in my palace, and ask for anything you want." And he gave orders that everything was to be done for the comfort and entertainment of his brother-in-law.

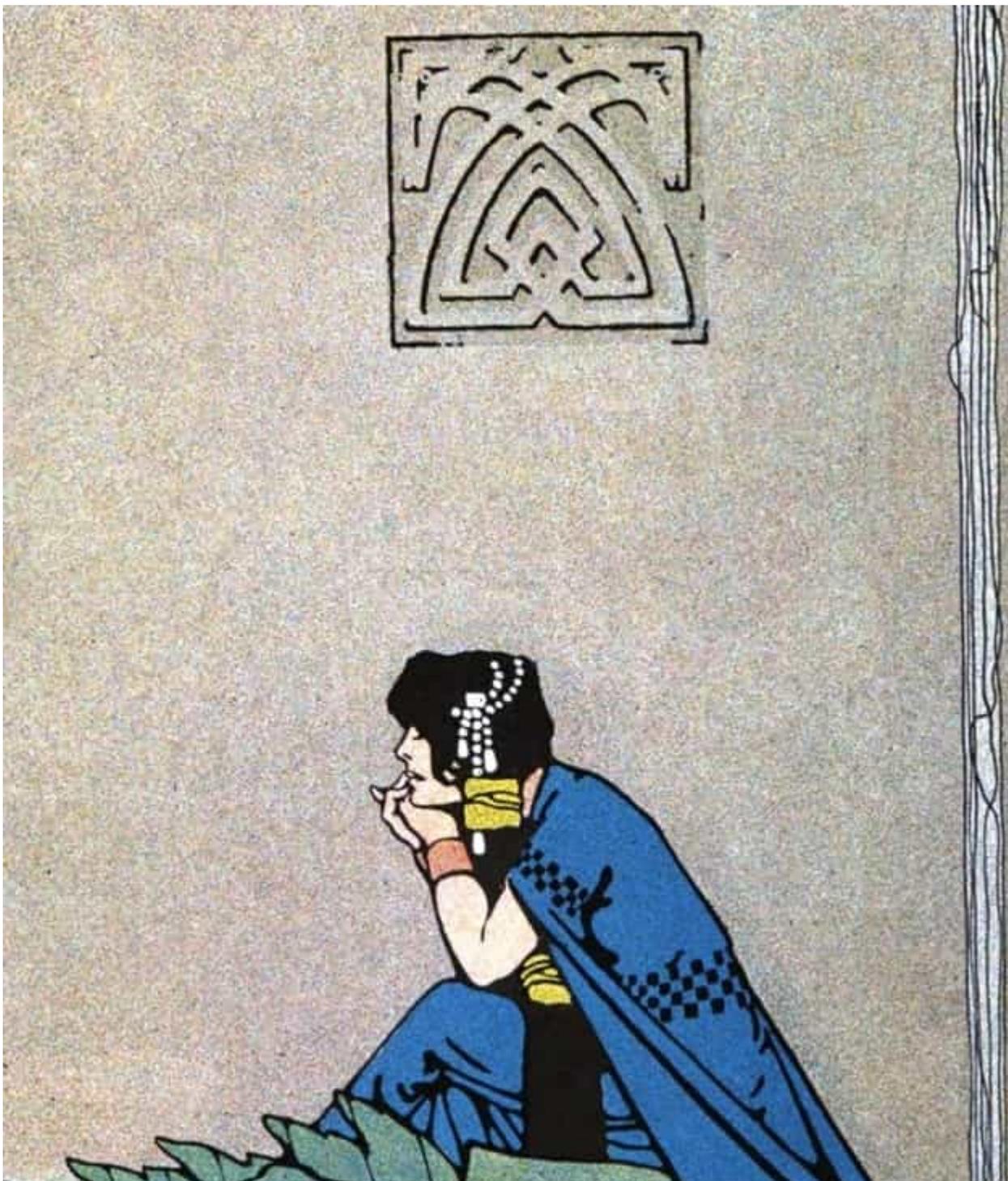
But after Tittone had stayed on the mountain for a fortnight, he remembered that he had still to find his other two sisters. He therefore asked his sister and her husband for permission to depart from their hospitable roof; but before bidding him farewell, the Eagle gave him one of his feathers, saying as he did so: "Take this feather, dear Tittone, and treasure it carefully, for it will be of great use to you someday. If any misfortune should overtake you, throw it on the ground, and call out 'Help, help!' and I will come to you."

Tittone took the feather and put it carefully away in his purse; then he took a tender leave of his sister and the Eagle, thanking them a thousand times for their goodness and hospitality to him.

After a long and weary journey he came at length to the wood where the Stag lived with Vasta; and as he was nearly starving with hunger he went into the garden and began to eat the fruit he found there. His sister soon noticed him and recognised him, in the same way that Fabiella had done; she hastened to introduce him to her husband, who received him in the most friendly manner, and entertained him sumptuously. After spending a fortnight with Vasta and her husband, Tittone determined to set out and look for his third sister; but before his departure the Stag gave him one of his hairs with the same words that the Eagle had spoken when he gave him

one of his feathers to guard carefully.

So Tittone departed on his way, and with the money the Eagle and Stag had given him he wandered to the uttermost parts of the world, where the sea at last put an end to his travels by land, and he was obliged to take ship and search through the islands for his third sister. At length, after many days, he came to the rock where Rita lived with the Dolphin. Hardly had he stepped on land when his sister perceived him and recognised him at once, as the others had done. His brother-in-law gave him a warm welcome, and when, after a short time, Tittone expressed his desire to return home once more to his father and mother, the Dolphin gave him one of his scales with the same words that the Eagle and Stag had spoken when they gave him the feather and hair.



“With a terrible-looking dragon at her feet.” Illustration by Charles B. Falls, published in *The Wild Flower Fairy Book* by Esther Singleton (1905), Dodd, Mead, and Company.

So the young Prince took ship again, and when he reached the land he mounted a horse and rode on his way. But he had hardly ridden a mile from the coast when he came to a gloomy wood overgrown with thick brushwood and rank weeds. The Prince forced his way through it as best he could, and at last reached a lake with a high stone tower in the middle of it, at one of the windows of which sat a lovely maiden with a terrible-looking Dragon asleep at her feet. As soon as she perceived the Prince, she called out in a pitiful voice: “ Oh! beautiful youth, Heaven has sent you to rescue me from my sad fate; I implore you to free me from the clutches of this horrible monster, who has carried me away from my father, the King of Merovalle, and has shut me up in this gloomy tower, where I am nearly dead with loneliness and terror.”

“Woe is me,” answered the Prince, “ but what can I do to help you, lovely maiden, for what mortal could ever cross that lake? and who could face this terrible Dragon, who spreads terror and desolation wherever he goes? But wait a little, perhaps I may be able to summon other help to your aid.” And with these words he threw the feather, the hair, and the scale, which his three brothers-in-law had given him, on the ground, calling out at the same time: “ Help! help! help!” In a moment the Eagle, the Stag, and the Dolphin appeared before him, and cried in one voice: “ Here we are. What are your commands?” Tittone, who was overjoyed at their appearance, exclaimed: “ I desire that this poor Princess should be freed from the clutches of that Dragon, and that I should carry her home with me as my bride.”

“Very well,” answered the Eagle, “ all shall be done as you desire”; and turning to the Stag he said, “let us lose no time, but let us strike while the iron is hot ! ” With these words the Eagle gave a shrill cry, and in one moment the air was black with a flight of vultures, who flew into the window of the tower, and seizing the beautiful Princess, they bore her over to the spot where the Prince and his brothers-in-law stood. And if the maiden looked as fair as the moon in the distance, when you saw her near she was as beautiful and radiant as the sun. But while Tittone was embracing her, and saying all manner of pretty things to his fair bride, the Dragon awoke, and flying out of the window he set upon Tittone, intending to kill him on the spot. But in a second the Stag caused a quantity of lions, tigers, panthers, bears, and wild cats to appear, who sprang upon the Dragon and tore him to pieces with their claws.

When Tittone and the Princess saw that their enemy was dead for ever, they determined to leave the place as soon as possible, but before they started the Dolphin said: “ I too would like to do something for you.” And in order that no trace should remain of the grim castle where the Princess had spent such unhappy hours, he caused the waters of the lake to overflow, and to beat so violently against the tower that it fell, and the ruins disappeared in the waves. Tittone thanked his brothers-in-law warmly for having thus rescued his beautiful bride, but the Beasts replied: “ Our thanks are rather due to the Princess, because it is through her that we are able once more to assume our human forms. At our births, a wicked Fairy, who owed our mother a grudge, condemned us, when we grew up, to go about the world in the shape of three beasts, until we should have rescued a King’s daughter from some great danger; the longed—for moment has come at last, and already we feel new life in our breasts and fresh blood flowing through our veins,” and even as they were speaking, they turned into three beautiful young men, who, each in turn, embraced their brother-in-law, and made low bows to the Princess, who was nearly beside herself with joy and amazement. Then Tittone spoke with a sigh: “Ah! why can my poor father and mother not share this joy with us? What would they not give to see three such charming and beautiful sons-in-law?”

“We will go to them at once,” answered the three Princes; “ but first we must go and fetch our wives, so let us lose no time in setting forth on our journey.” But as they could not go on foot, and as they had no means of conveyance, except Tittone’s one old horse, the brothers commanded a chariot to appear drawn by four lions, in which they all five seated themselves.

They travelled all through the night, and with such speed that they came next day to the various places where the wives of the three Beast brothers were waiting for them. After much rejoicing and embracing, the whole eight of them continued their journey to the Kingdom of Verdecolle, where the King and Queen received their long-lost children—with what joy you can imagine! which was only increased when they perceived their sons-in-law in their human shape, and the beautiful bride Tittone had brought back with him. They sent at once to tell the Kings of Velprato and Merovalle of the good fortune that had befallen their children, and invited them to a feast, the like of which for splendour and magnificence had never been seen before, and all the woes and troubles of the past were forgotten in the rejoicing and merrymaking of the present.

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