

THE YOUNG LORD AND HIS BRIDE

Once upon a time there lived a count and a countess who were very unhappy with their their son. They were an old and noble family, and the young lord was rich and handsome, but he continually refused to take a wife. In vain his mother and father asked him to find a beautiful daughter-in-law for them and to start a family. But it was no use, the young man had fixed on the idea that he must not bring a bride who was born of woman into the family. But, he had never met a girl who was not born of woman. So, one day he took leave of his parents and rode away to look for one.

He had travelled far and wide, searching in every town and village without success, when one day he came to a fork in the road. In the middle, where the two roads joined, there stood an old, old woman. She was nearly bent double, her hands and face were very wrinkled, and she had no more than one tooth left in her mouth. When the young lord asked her where the two roads led, she didn't hear him. Instead, she asked him what he was seeking. Thinking that she was deaf, he told her very loudly that he was looking for a girl who was not born of woman to be his bride.

She nodded and turned her old grey head to the road on the right. Pointing the way with her staff, she quietly spoke in a croaking voice "Beautiful Boy, if you go this way you will come to a great big house. If you go inside, Beautiful Boy, you will find a broom behind the door. If you take this and sweep the stairs as you climb, Beautiful Boy, then you will come to a doorway guarded by a great lion. If the lion has the key to the door in his mouth, then Beautiful Boy, you must wrest it from him and unlock the door. If you pass through the door, Beautiful Boy, at the other side of the great hall, you will find another door guarded by another lion. If the second lion has the key to the second door in his mouth, then Beautiful Boy, you must wrest it from him and unlock the door. If you pass through this door, you will be in the kitchen. If, in the kitchen you find three fresh ripe oranges and an ebony handled knife, Beautiful Boy, then you must use the knife to cut open one of the oranges. If you cut open one of the three oranges, Beautiful Boy, inside you will find a maiden as beautiful as the morning sun. If you find the maiden, Beautiful Boy, you must immediately take her to bathe in the spring in the courtyard between the two lime trees. If you don't, she will very quickly wilt and die."

The young lord took the old woman's words to heart, and rode to the right into the cool dark forest. He rode deeper and deeper into the woods until, suddenly, he came to a grand palace built of shining white marble. He entered through the main door, where he found the broom behind it. He took the broom and, carefully following the old woman's instructions, thoroughly swept the stairs as he climbed them. At the top of the stairs he found the lion with a golden key in its mouth. He wrested the key from the beast and unlocked the great ebony door to the hall. Then he crossed the hall until he came to the second lion in front of the second door. He wrested the second key from the

second lion, unlocked the door and entered the kitchen. As promised by the old woman, in the kitchen he found three fresh ripe oranges and an ebony handled knife.

At first he hesitated. He thought it a shame to cut into such wonderful glowing fruit, but after a while he took the knife and cut the first orange cleanly in two. As soon as he lifted the top half of the fruit, he saw a tiny beautiful maiden standing in the bottom half. She was as beautiful as a summer day and her eyes were as blue and clear as the summer sky. The young lord was so astonished and enamoured of her beauty, that he forgot the old woman's warning, and just stared and stared. After a few moments, the tiny beautiful maiden wilted and died before his eyes.

The young lord decided to be more careful when he tried a second time. He took the orange and the ebony handled knife with him, up the marble steps into the courtyard. Only when he reached the spring between the two lime trees did he cut into the orange. As he cut it in two, he was dazzled as an even more beautiful maiden appeared standing in the lower half. She was more beautiful than anyone or anything which had ever seen the light of day. But he didn't hesitate, but quickly held her under the flowing water. As the water flowed over her, she grew and grew until she was as big as he was. Then he took her hand and led her back into the shining white marble palace. There he asked her to marry him, and she agreed. He then kissed her, and left on the long journey back to his parent's home to fetch a carriage for her. While he was away, the maiden lived by herself in the marble palace, had to prepare her own food, and fetch water from the spring between the two lime trees. But she was not alone.

There was a little cottage near the shining white marble palace, and in this cottage lived a witch with her two daughters. They often saw the girl fetching water from the spring and talked to her. They asked her anything and everything, particularly who she was and why she was waiting in the palace. The girl, being new to world and not yet having met anyone evil, was very trusting, and she honestly and openly told them everything about the young lord and her marriage.

"Come home with us" said the witch's eldest daughter. "Our mother has just baked some cakes, and they are sure to be delicious". The maiden trusted the two sisters, and was very happy to go with them. They played together all afternoon, and in one game the girl was to be a queen. She had to change her clothes and the two sisters would arrange her hair. But as they were doing so, one of the sisters stuck a pin into her head. It was a magic pin, and as soon as it went in, the poor girl was turned into a snow white dove. The ugliest oldest sister then took the maiden's place in the shining white marble palace, and waited for the young lord to return. When he did return, he was shocked to find his beautiful young bride changed into the horrible witch's daughter. But, believing her to be the same girl, he kept his promise to marry her, and they set off in the carriage.

Not long after they had left, the snow white dove escaped through the window of the witch's cottage and flew after them. When it reached the carriage, it fluttered its wings and cooed so plaintively that the young lord took pity on it and held out his hand. As it landed the witch's daughter was angry, because she recognised the bird, and tried to drive it away. But the young man took the bird and let it settle on his lap, where it cooed contentedly. As the dove looked up at him with its clever little black eyes, he saw a pin sticking out of its head. He grasped it firmly, and gently pulled it completely out. When he did so, the bird was gone and his true bride was with him in the carriage. Shortly after, the ugly witch's daughter was no longer in the carriage, and the happy couple continued the journey. When they arrived, the count and countess were happy for their son and his new bride, and soon afterwards there was a great wedding celebration.