



Tonight's Bedtime Story

Fairy Tales for Sleepy Children

presents

The Yellow Dwarf

From "The Fairy Book" by Miss Mulock



here was once a queen, who had been the mother of several children, but all were dead, except one daughter, of whom she was excessively fond, humouring and indulging her in all her ways and wishes. This princess was so extremely beautiful, that she was called All-Fair, and twenty kings were, at one time, paying their addresses to her. She had so many lovers, indeed, that she did not know which to choose, and refused them all. Her mother, being advanced in years, was anxious to see her married and settled before she died; but as no entreaties could prevail, she determined to go to the Desert Fairy to ask advice concerning her stubborn daughter.

Now, this fairy being guarded by two fierce lions, the queen made a cake of millet, sugarcandy, and crocodiles' eggs, in order to appease their fury, and pass by them; and having thus provided herself, she set out. After travelling some time she found herself weary, and lying down under a tree fell asleep. When she awoke, she heard the roaring of the lions which guarded the fairy, and on looking for her cake she found it was gone. This threw her into the utmost agony, as she felt sure she should be devoured; when, hearing somebody approach, she raised her eyes, and saw in a tree a little yellow man half a yard high, picking and eating oranges.

"Ah! queen," said the Yellow Dwarf, for so he was called on account of his complexion, and the orange-tree in which he lived, "how will you escape the lions? There is but one way; I know what business brought you here; promise me your daughter in marriage and I will save you."

The queen, though she could not look without horror upon so frightful a figure, was forced to consent; and having agreed to the terms proposed, she instantly found herself in her own palace, and all that had passed seemed much like a dream: nevertheless, she was so thoroughly persuaded of the reality of it, that she became melancholy.

The young princess being unable to learn the cause of her mother's dejection, resolved in her turn to go and inquire of the Desert Fairy; and, accordingly, having prepared a cake for the lions, she also set off on the same journey. It happened that All-Fair took exactly the route her mother had done before her; and coming to the fatal tree which was loaded with oranges, she felt inclined to pick some; therefore, laying down her basket, in which she carried the cake, she plentifully indulged herself with the delicious fruit.

The lions now began to roar; All-Fair, looking for her cake, was thrown into the utmost despair to find it gone; and as she was lamenting her deplorable situation, the Yellow Dwarf presented himself to her with these words:—"Lovely princess, dry your tears, and hear what I am going to say. You need not proceed to the Desert Fairy, to know the reason of your mother's indisposition—it is this: she is ungenerous enough to repent having promised you, her only daughter, to me in marriage—"

"How!" interrupted the princess; "my mother promised me to you in marriage;—you such a fright as you!"

"None of your scoffs," returned the Yellow Dwarf; "I warn you not to rouse my anger. If you will promise to marry me, I will be the tenderest and most loving husband in the world; if not, save yourself from the lions, if you can."

The princess, overcome with terror, gave the promise; but such was the agony of her mind, that she fell into a swoon, and, when she recovered, she found herself in her own bed, finely adorned with ribands, with a ring of a single red hair so fastened round her finger that it could not be got off.

This adventure had the same effect upon All Fair as the former one had had upon her mother. She grew melancholy, which was remarked and wondered at by the whole court. The best way to divert her, they thought, would be to urge her to marry; which the princess, who was now become less obstinate on that point than formerly, consented to. Trusting that such a pigmy as the Yellow Dwarf would not dare to contend with so gallant a person as the King of the Golden Mines, she fixed upon that prince for her husband. He was exceedingly rich and powerful, and loved her to distraction. The most superb preparations were made for the nuptials, and the happy day was fixed when, as they were proceeding to the ceremony, they saw moving towards them a box, upon which sat an old woman remarkable for her ugliness.

“Hold, queen and princess!” cried she, knitting her brows; “remember the promises you have both made to my friend the Yellow Dwarf. I am the Desert Fairy; and unless All-Fair consent to marry him, I solemnly swear to burn my crutch.”

The queen and princess were struck almost motionless by this unexpected address of the fairy; but the Prince of the Golden Mines was exceeding angry, and holding his sword to her throat, he said, “Fly, wretch! or thy malice shall cost thee thy life.”

No sooner had he uttered these words, than the top of the box flying off, out came the Yellow Dwarf, mounted upon a large Spanish cat. Placing himself between the king and the fairy, he exclaimed, “Rash youth! thy rage shall be levelled at me, not at the Desert Fairy. I am thy rival, and claim thy princess, who is fast bound to me by her own promise, her mother’s, and the single red hair that you see round her finger.”

This so enraged the king, that he cried out, “Contemptible creature! wert thou worthy of notice, I would sacrifice thee for thy presumption.”

The Yellow Dwarf, clapping spurs to his cat, and drawing a cutlass, now defied the king to combat; and down they went into the courtyard. The sun was immediately turned as red as blood, the air became dark, it thundered heavily, and the flashes of lightning discovered two giants vomiting fire on each side of the Yellow Dwarf. The king behaved with such undaunted courage, as to give the dwarf great trouble; but he was dismayed when he saw the Desert Fairy, mounted on a winged griffin, and with her head covered with snakes, strike the princess so hard with a lance, that she fell into the queen’s arms, covered with blood. He immediately left the combat, to go to the relief of his beloved, but the dwarf was too quick for him; and flying on his Spanish cat to the balcony where she was, he took her from her mother’s arms, leaped with her upon the top of the palace, and immediately disappeared.

As the king stood confused and astonished at this strange adventure, he suddenly found a mist before his eyes, and felt himself lifted up in the air by some extraordinary power; for the Desert Fairy had fallen in love with him. To secure him for herself, therefore, she carried him to a frightful cavern, hoping he would there forget All-Fair. But finding this scheme ineffectual, she resolved to carry him to a place altogether as pleasant as the other was

terrible; and accordingly placed him in a chariot drawn by swans. In passing through the air, he was unspeakably surprised to see his beloved princess in a castle of polished steel, leaning her head on one hand, and wiping away her tears with the other. She happened to look up, and had the mortification to see the king sitting by the fairy who then, by her art, made herself appear extremely beautiful. Had not the king been sensible of the fairy's power, he would certainly have tried to free himself from her by some means or other; but he knew it would be in vain, and therefore made believe to have a liking for her. At last they came to a stately palace, fenced on one side by walls of emeralds, and on the other by a boisterous sea. The king, by pretending an attachment to the fairy, obtained the liberty to walk by himself on the shore. There, one day, he heard a voice, and presently after was surprised by the appearance of a mermaid, who, swimming up to him with a pleasing smile, spoke to this effect:—"O King of the Golden Mines, I well know all that has befallen you and the Princess All-Fair. Do not suspect this to be a contrivance of the fairy to try you, for I am an inveterate enemy both to her and the Yellow Dwarf; therefore, if you will place confidence in me, I will lend you my assistance to procure the release, not only of yourself, but of All-Fair also."

The overjoyed king promised to do whatever the mermaid should direct, and seating himself by her desire upon her fish's tail, they sailed away together over the rolling sea.

When they had sailed some time, "Now," said the mermaid to the king, "we are approaching the place where your princess is kept prisoner by the Yellow Dwarf. You will have many enemies to fight before you can come to her, take, therefore, this sword, with which you may overcome everything, provided you never let it go out of your hand."

The king returned her all the thanks that the most grateful heart could suggest; and the mermaid landed and took leave of him, promising him farther assistance when necessary. The king boldly advanced, and, meeting with two terrible sphinxes, laid them dead at his feet with the sword. Next he attacked six dragons that opposed him, and despatched them also. Then he met four-and-twenty nymphs, crowned with garlands of flowers, at the sight of whom he stopped, being unwilling to destroy so much beauty; when he heard a voice say, "Strike! strike! or you lose your princess for ever!" So he threw himself into the midst of the nymphs, smiting right and left, and soon dispersed them.

Presently he came to the castle, where was imprisoned the princess All-Fair. "O my princess," exclaimed he, "behold your faithful lover!"

"Faithful lover!" she replied, drawing herself back: "Did I not see you passing through the air with a beautiful nymph? were you faithful then?"

"Yes," replied the king, "I was. That was the detested Desert Fairy, who was carrying me to a place where I must have languished out all my days, had it not been for a kind mermaid, by whose assistance it is that I am now come to release you." Having uttered these words, he threw himself at her feet; but, catching hold of her gown he unfortunately let go the magic sword, which the Yellow Dwarf no sooner discovered, than, leaping from behind a shrub, where he had been concealed, he ran and seized it. By two cabalistical words he then conjured up a couple of giants, who laid the king in irons.

“Now,” said the Dwarf, “my rival’s fate is in my own hands; however, if he will consent to my marriage with the princess All-Fair, he shall have his life and liberty.”

“No,” said the king, “I scorn thy favour on such terms.”

The dwarf was so exasperated by this reply, that he instantly stabbed the king to the heart. The disconsolate princess stood a moment petrified, and then exclaimed, “Thou hideous creature! since entreaties could not avail thee, perhaps thou now reliest upon force; but thou shalt be disappointed. I will die for the love I have for the King of the Golden Mines!” and so saying she sank down upon his body, and expired without a sigh.

Thus ended the fate of these two faithful lovers, whom the mermaid very much regretted; but as all her power lay in the sword, she could only change them into two palm-trees, which, preserving a constant and mutual affection, still fondly unite their branches together.

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