

8. *The Laughing Apples*

1. *The Merchant's Three Daughters*

A merchant had three daughters. They were all three very lovely, but the youngest, whose name was Zafarana, was the loveliest of the three.

The merchant often travelled into foreign lands; and always on his travels he carried with him the portraits of his three daughters.

Well now, one day the merchant travelled to France; and he sold some jewels to the French king. The king was delighted with the jewels. And the merchant said, 'Yes, your majesty, those jewels are doubtless rare and precious, but I have more precious jewels at home.'

And he showed the king the portraits of his three daughters.

The king looked at the portraits: he gazed and gazed at the portrait of Zafarana, and said, 'This maiden and no other shall be my wife!'

So, when the merchant set sail for home, the King of France went with him. But when they were sailing through the straits of Messina, a strange thing happened. There came a voice – a threatening voice – out of the air, and the voice said, 'Do not touch Zafarana, for Zafarana is *mine!*'

That frightened both the merchant and the King of France. And when they reached the merchant's home, the king scarcely dared look at the beautiful Zafarana. Instead he gazed long and lovingly at the merchant's eldest daughter; and he married her, and took her home with him to France.

Not long after this, the merchant took another journey, to Portugal this time. And again he carried the pictures of his three daughters with him. He showed the portraits to the King of Portugal, and the king said, 'Merchant, of all the beauties in the world, your daughter Zafarana is the most beautiful; she and none other shall be my wife!'

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So, when the merchant set sail for home, the King of Portugal went with him.

But again, as they sailed through the straits of Messina, the threatening voice called loudly, 'Do not touch Zafarana, for Zafarana is *mine!*'

And the merchant said to the King of Portugal, 'My lord King, it is certain that some enchantment lies upon my poor little youngest daughter. This is the second time I have heard that voice. I dare not give Zafarana to you in marriage. But if it so pleases you, you shall have my second daughter.'

The King of Portugal was scared also; he said he didn't want to have anything to do with enchanted girls; and when they arrived at the merchant's house, he turned his eyes away from Zafarana. But he gazed long and lovingly at the merchant's second daughter. And he married her, and took her back with him to Portugal.

Now Zafarana lived alone with her father, and her father could never forget that threatening voice. But the day came when he must take yet another journey over seas. So then he called all his servants together and said, 'To you I entrust my daughter. As you value your service with me, guard her well.'

'Master,' said the servants, 'we will guard her with our lives!'

So then the merchant set out on his journey. But his heart was heavy.

For a time all went well in the merchant's house. The servants obeyed Zafarana's slightest wish, but they kept their eyes open to see that no evil befell her. And one morning Zafarana said, 'Today I will take a drive up into the hills.'

So the carriage was brought round, and Zafarana set out, with two horses drawing the carriage, the coachman on the box seat, a footman up behind, and a young girl, Zafarana's favourite maid, sitting beside Zafarana in the carriage.

And when they got up among the hills, Zafarana said, 'Now I will get out and take a stroll.'

And she jumped down from the carriage, and set off up a steep hillside, the maid going with her.

And the carriage waited.

The carriage waited a long time. And then the coachman heard someone screaming. It was the maid screaming. She came running and stumbling down the hill. 'Our mistress, oh our beloved mistress,' she

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cried. 'A cloud came down from the sky; it wrapped itself about our dear mistress, and oh, oh, it rose into the air again – and carried her off!'

The coachman jumped down from the box seat, the footman jumped down from behind the carriage, they left the horses standing, they ran, ran up the hill, this way and that way. No, they couldn't find a trace of Zafarana, and in great distress they turned and drove home, to carry the sad news to the old housekeeper, Teresa.

'What, you fools! What, you dumb-heads!' cried Teresa. 'Of course our mistress Zafarana must be still on the hillside!'



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And she called all the menservants together, bade them take lanterns and go back up the hill. 'If you have to search till dawn,' she said, 'don't you dare to come back without your mistress!'

The men went. They searched through the night, they searched till dawn, they searched till midday. But they did not find Zafarana; for the cloud had carried her far, far away.

After that there was a sad homecoming for the merchant.

But he was a just man. He remembered the voice he had heard in the Straits of Messina, and he did not blame his servants. 'Whose voice was it?' he asked himself. 'One thing is certain. It is the owner of that voice who has taken away my darling Zafarana. . . And oh, whoever you may be,' he cried, stretching up his hands to the clouds, 'I pray you to deal kindly and fairly with her!'

Then he sent out messengers, east, west, north and south, seeking for news of Zafarana. But all the messengers came back with the sad tidings that they had heard nothing of her.

2. Carried off by a Cloud

And what *had* become of Zafarana? Well, the cloud had carried her away and away, and set her down before a great castle. At the entrance to the castle stood an old white-haired man. The old man was dressed in handsome robes, and his eyes were bright and sparkling, but his shoulders stooped, and his voice was husky.

'Zafarana,' he said, 'I have waited long for you. But come in now. All shall go well with you, if you serve me faithfully.'

Zafarana felt frightened. She answered meekly, 'I will serve you as best I can, since it seems I can do no other.'

And she followed the old man into the castle.

Now she must read to him, sing to him, play to him on the zither, whilst he sat and listened, nodding his head until he fell asleep. Zafarana had no other work. The rooms were kept bright, and the meals were duly served; but Zafarana never saw by whose hands all this was done. . .

And the days passed and the weeks passed.

And then one morning the old man said, 'Zafarana, the sun shines and the birds are singing. Come into the garden and comb my hair.'

So Zafarana took a brush and comb and went with the old man out

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into the garden. The old man sat on a bench under a pear tree, and Zafarana stood behind him and brushed and combed his long white hair.

The old man sat silent for a while. And then he said, 'Zafarana, I have something to tell you. You now have a little nephew. Your eldest sister, who married the King of France, has given birth to a baby boy.'

'Oh,' exclaimed Zafarana, 'how I should love to see him!'

'And so you shall see him,' said the old man. 'My cloud shall take you. But, mind you, I cannot spare you for long. The moment you hear my call you must come back.'

'Yes, I will come back,' said Zafarana.

'Is that a promise?' said the old man.

'Yes, it is a promise,' said Zafarana.

Then the old man took her indoors, and into a big room. In the room there were three armchairs. One was made of pure gold. One was made of silver. One was made of lead.

'When you return to me, Zafarana,' said the old man, 'you will find me sitting in one of these chairs. If I am sitting in the gold chair, it will mean that I am pleased with you, and all will be very well between you and me. If I am sitting in the silver chair, I shall not be pleased, but neither shall I be displeased. But if I am sitting in the leaden chair, I shall be so displeased with you that I doubt if I shall be able to forgive you. Oh my darling Zafarana, whom I love as if you were my own daughter, do not cause me the grief of having to rebuke you!'

'I would not willingly cause you grief,' said Zafarana, 'for indeed you are good to me.'

'Well now, be off to visit your sister,' said the old man.

He went with her into the garden again, put two fingers to his lips, and whistled. Immediately a cloud came floating down from the sky. The cloud wrapped itself round Zafarana, rose with her up into the air, carried her swiftly, swiftly over the land, over the sea, over the land again, and set her down in front of the palace of the King of France.

Zafarana ran into the palace, and found her eldest sister sitting by an open window with a beautiful little baby boy in her arms.

The eldest sister was overjoyed to see Zafarana. They spent three happy days together – three happy days that seemed to Zafarana so very short a time! But at the end of the three days she heard her

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master's voice, calling loudly, calling clearly: 'Zafarana! Zafarana!' And she jumped up, kissed her sister, and said, 'I must go. My master calls me!'

'Oh stop a little longer, just a little longer!' cried her eldest sister.

But Zafarana would not stop. She hurried out of the French king's palace, and the cloud floated down from the sky and wrapped itself about her. Over the land, over the sea, and over the land again, the cloud carried her, and set her gently down in front of the old man's castle.

Zafarana hurried into the castle, and found the old man sitting in the gold chair. He was smiling. 'You are a good girl, Zafarana,' he said, 'and I have missed you sorely. Come now, sing me to sleep.'

So Zafarana sang, and the old man slept. And she thought wistfully of her eldest sister, and wondered if she would ever see her again.

Well, it wasn't very long after this that the old man went with Zafarana into the garden again, seated himself on the bench under the pear tree, and bade Zafarana brush and comb his hair. The old man sat with his eyes closed; Zafarana thought he must be dozing, so silent he was. But suddenly he opened his eyes and spoke.

'Zafarana, I have news for you. Your second sister, who married the King of Portugal, has given birth to a little daughter. And as I know you will want to visit her, I will call my cloud to take you. But remember, oh remember, Zafarana, that when I call you, you must come back at once.'

'I will remember,' said Zafarana.

Then the old man called his cloud. And the cloud came and wrapped itself round Zafarana. It rose with her into the air, and carried her over the land, and over the sea, and over the land again, and set her down before the palace of the King of Portugal.

Zafarana went into the palace, and found her second sister sitting rocking a cradle, in which lay a most lovely little baby girl. Then – such joy there was! The sisters embracing, the baby being lifted out of the cradle and laid in Zafarana's arms.

'In three days from now our darling baby is to be christened,' said Zafarana's sister. 'She shall be called by your name, and you shall be her godmother.'

Three days – such happy, happy days they were for Zafarana! But on the fourth day, as she stood in the church before the font, with

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the baby in her arms, there suddenly rang out a loud voice, her master's voice, calling 'Zafarana! Zafarana!'

'Oh, I will come, dear master,' whispered Zafarana, 'I will come when the christening is over. But I cannot put the baby down and leave the church in an unseemly hurry. Dear master, you will understand that!'

But the voice went on calling, and getting angrier every moment 'Zafarana! *Zafarana!*' – though, strangely enough, no one but Zafarana heard that voice.

Well, as soon as ever the christening ceremony was over, Zafarana handed the baby back to its nurse. 'Goodbye, I must go now,' she whispered to her sister, and hurried out of the church, where she found the cloud, drifting restlessly among the tombstones in the churchyard. The cloud immediately wrapped itself about Zafarana, rose with her into the air, and carried her rapidly back to her master's castle.

In the great hall the old man was sitting in the silver chair. When he saw Zafarana he didn't smile, but neither did he frown.

'So you have come back to me, Zafarana,' he said.

'Yes, dear master, I have come back.'

'I had to call you a great many times, Zafarana.'

'Yes, dear master, but –'

'Go, go,' said the old man irritably. 'I will hear no "buts". Fetch your zither and sing and play to me, that hearing your sweet voice I may forget that I am vexed with you.'

'Dear master, I came as soon as I could.'

'You did not!' cried the old man. 'You did not! If I called you once, I called you a hundred times!'

But Zafarana fetched her zither and played and sang to him. And by and by she had him smiling again.

So her life went on peacefully for several weeks. And then, one autumn morning, when the leaves were falling from the trees and the birds had ceased to sing, the old man said, 'Give me your hand, Zafarana, and come with me into the garden, I have something to tell you.'

Hand in hand they went into the garden. Hand in hand they sat down on the bench under the leafless pear tree. 'Little one,' said the old man gently, 'I have bad news for you. Your father is very ill. In

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his troubled dreams he is calling for you, Zafarana, and I think I must let you go to him.'

'Oh yes, dear master, indeed, indeed I must go!'

'Don't distress yourself, my little dear one,' said the old man. 'You shall go, and your father will recover. But the very moment he is able

to rise from his bed, you must come back to me, Zafarana. Do you understand that?’

‘Yes, yes, dear master, I understand that, and I will come.’

The old man clenched his right fist. He struck his clenched fist into the palm of his left hand. ‘I am filled with sorrow, filled with sorrow!’ he cried. ‘I fear that you are going to disobey me, Zafarana. I fear that when you return you will find me sitting in the leaden chair. But go now, go, go quickly!’

Then the cloud came floating down out of the sky. The cloud wrapped itself about Zafarana, and carried her home to her father’s house.

Her father was indeed ill: he looked a mere wraith of his usual sturdy self. But the sight of Zafarana did him more good than all the doctor’s medicines. Day and night she sat at his bedside, and nursed him, and sang to him the songs he loved best. And by and by he was sitting up; and by and by he was able to rise from his bed, and take little walks in his garden, supported by Zafarana’s loving arms.

‘You are my health, my strength, my joy, my darling little daughter,’ he said. ‘And now you have come back you must never leave me again.’

But scarcely had he spoken those words when Zafarana heard her master’s voice calling, ‘Zafarana! Zafarana!’

‘Dear Father,’ said Zafarana, ‘I think I must now leave you.’

‘What! *Leave me?*’

‘Yes, dear Father, though it breaks my heart – my master is calling.’

‘And has your master more claim on you than your father?’

‘Oh I don’t know, I don’t know,’ answered Zafarana. ‘I only know that I must go.’

‘Your master is nothing but a thief,’ cried her father. ‘A bad, wicked thief! He stole you away from me! Is he then so young and handsome that you love him more than you do me?’

‘He is neither young nor handsome,’ answered Zafarana. ‘He is an old, frail man. But he has been very good to me.’ She looked up and saw the cloud slowly descending from the sky. ‘See, his messenger has come!’ she cried.

‘Then his messenger can wait,’ said her father. ‘No, rather it must go away! You are not a slave girl to be ordered about by any master. You are my daughter, and until you marry your place is here with me.’

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What could Zafarana do? She lingered on, but with dread in her heart. And then, one night when her father slept, she stooped and kissed his forehead. 'Goodbye, goodbye, my dear, dear Father,' she whispered – and stole out of the house.

And the cloud wrapped itself about her, and carried her back to her master's castle.

She found him in the great hall of the castle. He was sitting in the leaden chair, and he was frowning. He spoke no word to her, either good or bad. Nor by and by, when they sat together at supper, did he say anything. Zafarana was frightened. She tried to give him news of her father, but she might have been talking to a log. When they had eaten their supper, she dared not rise from the table. And so they sat in silence until midnight. And then the old man got up and snarled out, 'Go to bed.'

'Goodnight, master,' said Zafarana timidly. But getting no answer, she went to her bed and fell into a troubled sleep.

It seemed to her that she had only slept for a few minutes when she heard her master's voice calling: 'Zafarana, get up, open the window, and see what the weather is like.'

Obediently Zafarana rose, opened the window and looked out.

'Dear master,' she said, 'the sky is overcast, and I think it is going to rain.'

'Good!' called the old man. 'Lie down and sleep again.'

Zafarana got back into bed. She slept. Again she woke to hear the old man calling: 'Zafarana, open the window and see what the weather is like.'

Zafarana got up, she opened the window, she looked out.

'Master, it is raining heavily. I see a flash of lightning – and hark; here comes the thunder!'

'Good!' called the old man. 'Lie down and sleep once more.'

Zafarana shut the window. She got back into bed. She slept. But again she woke to hear the old man calling: 'Zafarana, get up, look out of the window, and see what the weather is doing.'

Zafarana got up. She went to the window. It was rattling. When she opened it, it dashed against her hand. She looked out. 'Oh dear master,' she cried, 'the sky is black, the rain pours down in torrents, the lightning flashes, the thunder booms, never, never in all my life have I seen such a storm as this storm!'

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'Good,' said the old man. 'Now dress yourself and go! You shall not stay here a moment longer!'

'Master, master,' cried Zafarana, 'you cannot mean it! So long and so faithfully I have served you! You cannot turn me out into such a night, into such a storm!'

But the old man's angry voice answered, 'Go, go, ungrateful girl! Go back to your father who means more to you than I do! I will never look upon your face again. . . Unless,' he added after a pause, 'you can find and bring me the Laughing Apples. But that you will never do – no, never, never, never!'

'Goodbye then, dear master, and may heaven bless you!' whispered Zafarana.

And she dressed and went out into the storm.

3. Out in the Storm

Zafarana looked for the white cloud. But no white cloud did she see, only the rain falling, and the flashes of lightning. She called to the cloud, but the cloud did not come; and her very voice was drowned by the loud tumult of the thunder. Bowing her head against the storm, she set off to walk home.

But how was she to find her way home? She only knew that her father's house lay somewhere to the west. And so unhappy and dizzy did she feel that she could no longer tell west from east, or north from south. She could make no headway against the wind, and so she went the way the wind took her – and that was not in the direction of her home.

All night she walked. With the dawn, the wind dropped. But it was still raining heavily. And seeing a peasant's hut by the roadside, she decided to ask for shelter, and she knocked at the door.

The door was opened by a shock-headed peasant, who stared at her in astonishment.

'What do you want?' he said.

'Just to shelter from the rain,' faltered Zafarana. 'Just – just to – to sit down for a little while and rest –'

'Well, you can come in, I suppose,' grunted the peasant. 'But a beautiful lady like you shouldn't be out in this weather. It's not fitting!'

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'No,' said Zafarana, 'it – isn't – ' But she faltered, she swayed, she was just about to faint when the peasant took her roughly by the arm, ran her into the hut, and dumped her down before his kitchen fire.

'Wife!' he shouted. 'We've got a visitor!'

At his shout a young woman came clattering into the kitchen. She gave one glance at Zafarana, said 'Here, leave her to me' – and there she was stripping off Zafarana's dripping clothes, bundling a blanket round her, pegging up the wet clothes on a line, and exclaiming the while, 'Silks and satin! What lovely things!'

Zafarana was thinking of her old master's words: 'I will never look upon your face again, unless you can find and bring me the Laughing Apples.' She was also thinking of her father. She felt she could not return to him in disgrace, knowing well how enraged he would be – not with her, but with her good old master. Were it not perhaps better, rather than return home, to seek for those Laughing Apples? If she could find them and bring them to her master, he would forgive her, and there would be no ill feeling on her father's part against him. Yes, it would be best to seek for those apples. . . But then she thought of the dangers that she, a girl, might meet from rough men on the way. And then she had another idea. And she said to the peasant's wife, 'As you admire my clothes, I will give them to you, if in return you will let me have an old suit of your husband's. We are about of a size, and it would be safer for me in my journeying.'

'Bless us,' cried the peasant's wife, 'you can't mean it!'

'Indeed I do mean it,' said Zafarana.

'Carlo, Carlo,' shouted the peasant's wife, 'Bring your Sunday suit!'

'No, no,' said Zafarana. 'Not a Sunday suit, just an old workaday one.'

'The young lady's mad!' thought the peasant's wife. But she quickly fetched some patched and well worn garments belonging to her husband and helped Zafarana to put them on. Then she took a pair of scissors and ruthlessly cut short Zafarana's long golden hair. And having done all that, she sat back and regarded her handiwork with smiling satisfaction.

'You make a handsome lad!' she said. 'And as for me – oh ho, won't I cause folk's eyes to goggle when I march to church next Sunday in all your fineries! For march to church in them I will, even though I may feel like bursting with the tightness of them!'

Zafarana now felt it was high time she went on her way. But what

way was it? She asked the peasant Carlo if he could direct her to the place where the Laughing Apples grew.

The peasant had never heard of such things; he thought they couldn't exist. But he was now as convinced as his wife that their guest was mad, and he was only too anxious to get rid of her. So he took her to the door, pointed to a road running south, and said, 'You just keep on walking straight ahead, my lady, and you're bound to come across those apples sooner or later.'

Zafarana thanked him and set out. And the peasant went back into his kitchen, and said to the woman, 'I think we're well rid of her, wife.'

'May be,' answered his wife. 'But oh, what a beautiful young lady!'

4. The Wheel at the World's End

Zafarana walked on her way. The day was still early, and she met but few people – only just now and then a labourer going to work in the fields. Of those she did meet, she asked if they could tell her where to find the Laughing Apples; but they either shrugged their shoulders and passed on, thinking she was making some game of them; or, thinking she was crazy, smiled and nodded, and told her that the apples were not far off, and that she had only to follow her nose.

So on she went and on. She was feeling that she could go very little farther, and that in the end she must just lie down under a hedge and die, when she saw a white horse standing by the roadside, cropping the grass. The horse which was saddled and bridled, lifted his head, gave a joyous whinny, and sprang into the road in front of her.

'Zafarana, Zafarana,' cried the horse, 'I have been expecting you!'

'Oh,' said Zafarana, 'I never knew that horses could speak!'

'They can't as a rule,' said the horse. 'But it just so happens that I can. And it just so happens also that I know you are seeking the Laughing Apples, and that I know where to find them. So up with you on my back, Zafarana, and we will journey on together.'

So Zafarana scrambled on to the horse's back, and he set off at a steady trot along the road. And he was turning his head, and talking to her over his shoulder.

'By and by,' he said, 'we shall come to the end of this world, and to the borders of the Other World. The Laughing Apples grow in a



garden in the Other World, and between the two worlds stands the Great Wheel. The Wheel turns, turns, turns. It has been turning since the beginning of time, and it will turn until the end of time. When the rim of the Wheel all but touches the ground of this world, I must jump on to it. When the rim of the Wheel, in its turning, all but touches the earth of the Other World, I must jump off it. You must sit tight in the saddle, Zafarana – you will not be afraid?’

‘No, dear horse, I will not be afraid.’

So the horse trotted on and on along the high road, and came at last to the World’s End. And there was the Great Wheel, slowly turning. The Wheel was so huge that as it turned the top of it kept disappearing into the clouds, whilst the bottom of it was all but scraping the ground.

‘Hold fast!’ cried the white horse.

And he sprang on to that part of the Wheel’s broad rim that neared the ground.

Now up they went, and up, higher and higher; until, glancing behind her, Zafarana could see the whole wide world from horizon to horizon, with its seas and rivers, cities, villages, fields, moors, and forests, spread out like a map.

‘You are not afraid, Zafarana?’ said the horse.

‘No, dear horse, I am not afraid. I am lost in wonder.’

But now they were up among the clouds, and Zafarana could see nothing. And now they were coming down out of the clouds, and Zafarana could see the wide landscape of the Other World, with its glittering domes of silver and gold, and its brilliant green meadows and its clusters of white towns and villages, and gardens gay with flowers of every colour.

‘If the people were but friendly to us mortals, what a world to live in!’ said the white horse. ‘But they look upon us as we look upon earth worms, and no wonder! . . . Hold tight, hold tight, Zafarana, I am going to jump!’

Zafarana clung to the horse’s mane. That part of the wheel’s rim on which the horse stood neared the ground. The horse gave a leap. There they were in the Other World. And Zafarana slid down from the horse’s back.

The breezes blew softly, the sun shone brightly, the birds sang merrily. It was indeed a beautiful world. Zafarana would have liked to linger and look about her; but the horse was impatient.

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'You see that garden yonder,' he said, 'the garden over there to the left of you, with a hedge of flowering bushes and a golden-gleaming gate. In that garden grows the Tree of the Laughing Apples. Run now, Zafarana, push open the gate (it is not locked) and pick three apples. You can't mistake the tree on which they grow, for you will hear the apples laughing. But you must hurry back; for the apples will cry out when they are picked, and the gardener, who is sleeping under the hedge, will wake and rouse the people. If we are caught, our lives will be forfeit. For how should the people of this fair World have mercy on such as we are?'

Zafarana ran, she pushed open the gate of the garden, she heard the laughing of the apples, she hurried to the tree, she caught hold of one of the lower branches, pulled it down, plucked three of the round rosy apples, and thrusting them into her pocket, ran out of the garden again.

But the apples were laughing, 'Ha, ha! We are stolen, we are stolen!' And the garden gate screamed. 'A thief! A thief!' and the gardener woke and shouted, and the people of the Other World came running out of their houses.

'Thieves, thieves, thieves!' The air echoed with their cries. But the white horse came galloping, he snatched up Zafarana by the belt of her tunic, swung her on his back – and away with him to the Great Wheel, and leaping on to it.

Now the Wheel began to turn the other way. Round it went and round, turning, turning. Zafarana clung to the horse. And with her back to the Other World, she saw the familiar landscape of This World spread out below her. Then she heard the horse cry, 'Hold tight, Zafarana, I am going to jump!' And jump he did, and landed safe and sound on the grass in a meadow.

'Now,' said the horse, 'we can go home.'

'Home?' said Zafarana.

'To your master's castle,' said the white horse.

'I do not think it is home,' sighed Zafarana.

Oh, how tired she was! She thought of her old master's scowling face. She remembered how he had driven her out into the storm. He had said he would forgive her, if she brought him the Laughing Apples. Yes – but could she forgive *him*?. . . Well, she would give him the apples, and then perhaps she would go back to her father. Yes, that was her home – her father's house.

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'Dear Father,' she whispered. Her head sank down against the horse's mane and she fell asleep.

The white horse was galloping, galloping. On his back Zafarana was sleeping. In Zafarana's pocket the apples were singing. This was their song:

*'Magic here,
Magic there,
On the ground,
In the air.
Mortals with their earthly sight
See not everything aright.
But who eats of us shall learn
Truth from falsehood to discern.'*

When Zafarana woke – where was she? She was in her old master's castle, in the big room with the three chairs: the gold, the silver and the leaden chairs. Her master was sitting in the gold chair. He was not frowning, but neither was he smiling. . . And oh, how old and frail he looked!

'So you have brought me the apples, Zafarana,' he said.

'Yes, I have brought you the apples.'

And she took the apples from her pocket and held them out to him.

They were not singing now. They were whispering something that sounded like 'Happy, happy, happy!' But Zafarana didn't feel happy. She felt resentful, and inclined to cry.

'I will only take one apple,' said the old man. 'The second you will give to the white horse, whom you will find waiting in the courtyard. And the third you will eat yourself.'

'I am not hungry,' said Zafarana.

'Nevertheless you will eat one apple,' said the old man, so angrily that Zafarana felt frightened. She turned from him and hurried out into the courtyard.

There was the white horse, patiently waiting.

Zafarana held out an apple on the flat of her hand. 'My master says you are to eat this,' she said.

'Whilst I eat, you must eat,' said the white horse.

'I am not hungry,' said Zafarana again.

'But the apple will give you a wish,' said the white horse.

So then Zafarana shut her eyes and bit into the third apple.

THE LAUGHING APPLES

'I wish, oh I wish that I were with my dear father,' she whispered. . .

'Zafarana! Zafarana!' That was her father's voice calling. And the voice came from within the castle. Zafarana flung down the remainder of the apple, and ran back into the room with the three chairs. An old king, wearing a gold crown was sitting in the golden chair; a tall handsome prince was standing at his side – but Zafarana gave them scarcely a glance, for hastening to meet her, and holding out his arms, was her father.

'Father, Father, dear, dear Father, promise me that I shall never leave you again, never, never!'

There now was Zafarana safe in her father's arms.

'No need for promises,' said the old king; 'everything is now happily arranged, thanks to you, my heroic little Zafarana. You think I have treated you badly? But you must forgive me – there was no other way out of our troubles. I am king of all this country, and this lad here is my son. But a wizard whom I offended put a spell upon us both, turning me into the crotchety old fellow you served so faithfully, and my son into a white horse. Now you have broken the spell. If you can find it in your heart to fancy him, you shall marry my son, and we can all four live together happily in my castle. What do you say, Zafarana?'

Zafarana glanced shyly at the prince. Yes, indeed she could fancy him! 'It shall be as my master wills,' she said demurely.

The old king laughed. Zafarana's father shouted '*Hurrah!*' The prince took Zafarana's hand. He raised her hand to his lips; he kissed it. 'Dear Zafarana,' he said. 'As your horse I have served you. As your husband I will love and protect you. And tomorrow shall be our wedding day.'

The old king laughed again. 'You are in a hurry, my son,' he said.

'But not in too much of a hurry, I hope?' said the prince to Zafarana.

'No, not in too much of a hurry,' answered Zafarana.