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The Magic Mouthful

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Once upon a time there was a woman who lived a most unhappy life. She and her husband were always quarreling. Every day when he came home from work he was cross, and said harsh words to her. She would respond with bitter words, and things would go from bad to worse until at last he would beat her.

One day the woman took her water jar and went to the fountain to fill it as usual. She was so unhappy that great tears were rolling down her cheeks.

There was a little old woman standing by the fountain.

"What is the matter, my daughter?" she asked as she saw the tears upon the poor woman's cheeks.

When she had heard all the story, the little old woman took the water jar and filled it at the fountain.

"Go home, my daughter," she said. "Keep this water in the jar. The moment your husband says a cross word to you, fill your mouth with the water."

The sad woman thanked her and went to her own house.

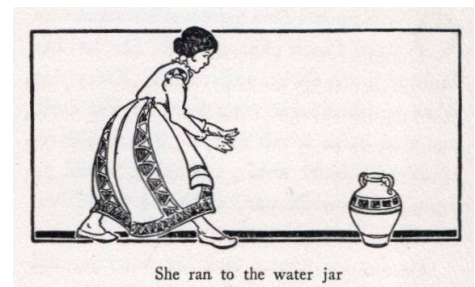
The next day when her husband came home he began to scold as usual. She was about to reply when she suddenly remembered the old woman's advice. She ran to the water jar and filled her mouth with water.

To her great amazement her husband soon stopped scolding. That night, for the first time in many weeks, she went to sleep without a beating.

Things kept on going well for several days. Just as soon as her husband came home cross and said unpleasant things she would fill her mouth with water from the jar. Then he would get over being cross. Now there were smiles instead of tears on the woman's face.

At last, however, the water jar grew empty.

Once more the woman went to the fountain, hoping that she would again find



the little old woman who had given her the magic water. She found her waiting at the fountain.

"How did my prescription succeed, dear daughter?" she asked as soon as she saw her.

"How can I ever thank you for all you have done for me!" cried the woman. "Now I am happy once more. My husband no longer beats me. I did not dream that my life could ever be so full of joy. Give me, I pray you, some more of the magic water."

The little old woman smiled gently.

"Dear daughter," she said, "the water which I put in your jar is nothing but the water from this fountain. It is the very same which you always carry home. This is the secret: When your mouth is full of water you cannot reply when your husband says cross words to you. If you do not keep up the quarrel it soon ends. That is why your life is happy now instead of sad. Go home, and whenever your husband says an unkind word pretend that your mouth is full of water and do not reply. Go in peace, my child."

The woman always remembered this good advice and never again quarreled with her husband. When she had children of her own she passed on to them the secret.

Now it is generally known in the Azores that if one does not want to keep up a quarrel it is well to pretend that his mouth is full of water. This is the reason why the people of the islands are so peaceful and happy.

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