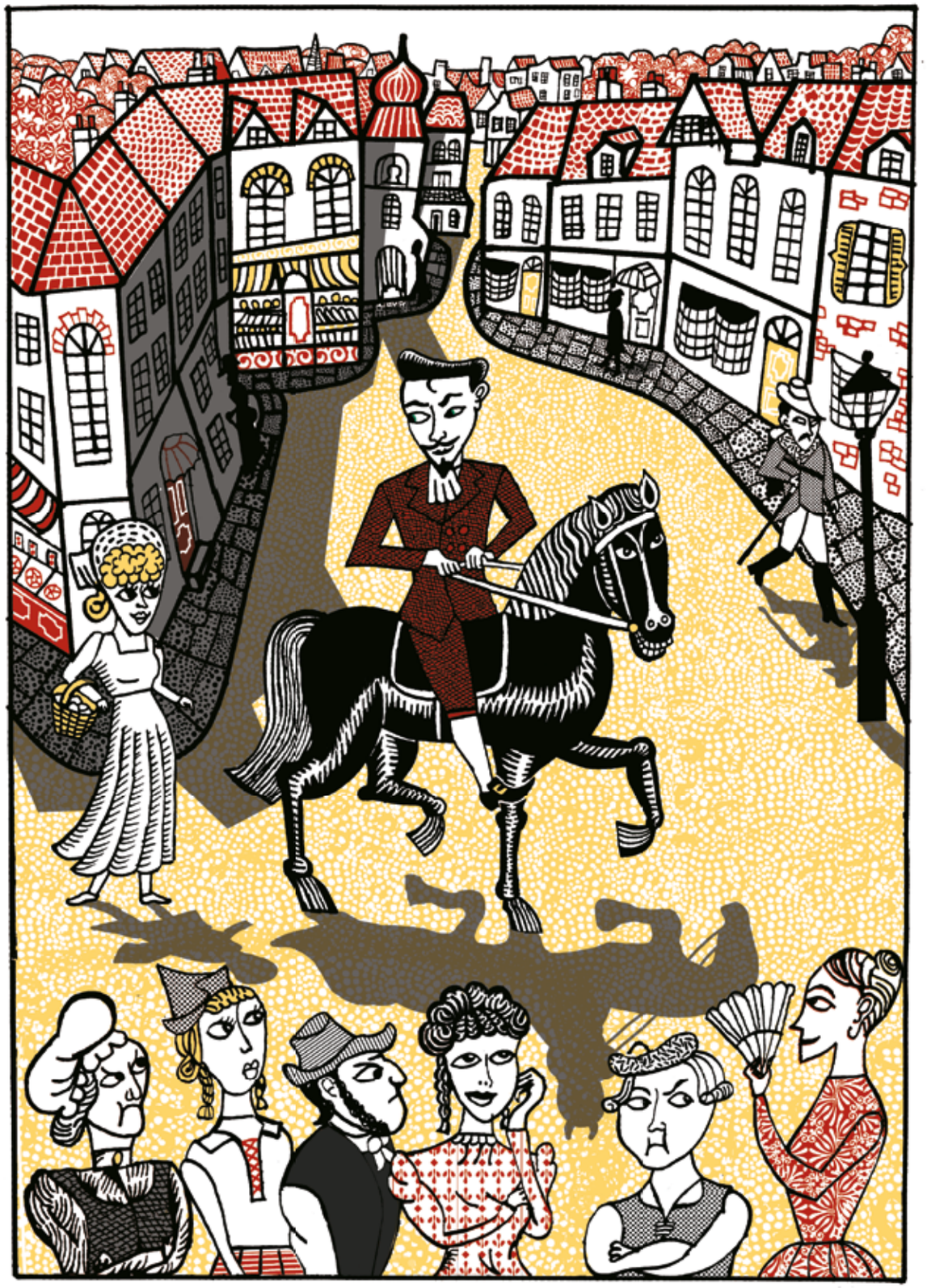


The Devil



THERE ARE FAIRY tales where a man marries a proud or shrewish woman and turns her into an obedient wife. I hear even Mr Shakespeare wrote a tale like that once.

There are other tales where a woman opens a forbidden door, and terrible things happen to her.

This story is a little different.

Once, long ago, in the days when it was usual for men and women to marry on a brief acquaintance, the Devil decided to take a wife. He bought a grand house in the country and disguised himself as a handsome gentleman, with a sharp black beard and a wicked glint in his eye. Then he rode into town to go a-courting.

He roamed around the town, looking at the ladies with his green eyes. Some looked back, some looked away, but the devil kept on until he came to the house of a poor widow. He peeped in the window,



and there he saw three sisters at their sewing. *These look like three meek, obedient girls*, he thought to himself, and he rapped on the door.

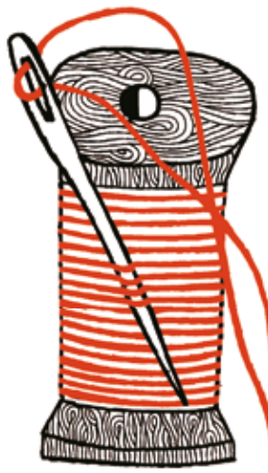
Rat-a-tat-tat!

The eldest sister, whose name was Carlotta, answered.

"Good day!" she said.

"Good day," said the Devil, bowing low. "I'm a wealthy gentleman, new to town, and I'm looking for a wife."

"Well, you've come to a funny place to find one," said Carlotta. "We're three fatherless girls, who earn our living sewing. Don't you want to marry a fine lady?"



"Not I," said the Devil. "All I want is an obedient woman."

"Obedient, hmm?" said Carlotta.

"Yes," said the Devil. He paused. "I've a grand big house on the hill."

"Oh," said Carlotta.

"And a stable full of prize horses."

"Ooh," said Carlotta.



"And a wardrobe full of beautiful gowns, and a jewellery box full of gold and silver."

Now, Carlotta was a poor girl, and she was bored with endless sewing. She'd often dreamed of what it might be like to live a life of luxury.

"All right," she said. "It's a bit sudden, but why not?"

So Carlotta and the Devil were married at the church door. (The Devil wasn't keen on marrying at the altar, for reasons I don't think I need to explain.)







Carlotta promised to love him, honour him and obey. Then she rode off beside her husband in a red gown, with a red rose at her breast, and felt herself very fine.

"Oh!" cried the second sister, whose name was Lucia. "How I wish I'd opened the door! Then I might have been the one riding off in glory."

"Hmm," said the youngest, whose name was Margarita. "If something looks too good to be true, you mark my words, it probably is."

