

GIAMBATTISTA BASILE

STORIES FROM THE PENTAMERONE

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Stories from the Pentamerone

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I

HOW THE TALES CAME TO BE TOLD

It is an old saying, that he who seeks what he should not, finds what he would not. Every one has heard of the ape who, in trying to pull on his boots, was caught by the foot. And it happened in like manner to a wretched slave, who, although she never had shoes to her feet, wanted to wear a crown on her head. But the straight road is the best; and, sooner or later, a day comes which settles all accounts. At last, having by evil means usurped what belonged to another, she fell to the ground; and the higher she had mounted, the greater was her fall—as you shall see.

Once upon a time the King of Woody Valley had a daughter named Zoza, who was never seen to laugh. The unhappy father, who had no other comfort in life but this only daughter, left nothing untried to drive away her melancholy. So he sent for folks who walk on stilts, fellows who jump through hoops, for boxers, for conjurers, for jugglers who perform sleight-of-hand tricks, for strong men, for dancing dogs, for leaping clowns, for the donkey that drinks out of a tumbler—in short, he tried first one thing and then another to make her laugh. But all was time lost, for nothing could bring a smile to her lips.

So at length the poor father, at wit's end, and to make a last trial, ordered a large fountain of oil to be set in front of the palace gates, thinking to himself that when the oil ran down the street, along which the people passed like a troop of ants, they would be obliged, in order not to soil their clothes, to skip like grasshoppers, leap like goats, and run like hares; while one would go picking and choosing his way, and another go creeping along the wall. In short, he hoped that something might come to pass to make his daughter laugh.

So the fountain was made; and as Zoza was one day standing at the window, grave and demure, and looking as sour as vinegar, there came by chance an old woman, who, soaking up the oil with a sponge, began to fill a little pitcher which she had brought with her. And as she was labouring hard at this ingenious device, a young page of the court passing by threw a stone so exactly to a hair that he hit the pitcher and broke it to pieces. Whereupon the old woman, who had no hair on her tongue, turned to the page, full of wrath, and exclaimed, "Ah, you impertinent young dog, you mule, you gallows-rope, you spindle-legs! Ill luck to you! May you be pierced by a Catalan lance! May a thousand ills befall you and something more to boot, you thief, you knave!"

The lad, who had little beard and less discretion, hearing this string of abuse, repaid the old woman in her own coin, saying, "Have you done, you grandmother of witches, you old hag, you child-strangler!"

When the old woman heard these compliments she flew into such a rage that, losing hold of the bridle and escaping from the stable of patience, she acted as if she were mad, cutting capers in the air and grinning like an ape. At this strange spectacle Zoza burst into such a fit of laughter that she well-nigh fainted away. But when the old woman saw herself played this trick, she flew into a passion, and turning a fierce look on Zoza she exclaimed: "May you never have the least little bit of a husband, unless you take the Prince of Round-Field."

Upon hearing this, Zoza ordered the old woman to be called; and desired to know whether, in her words, she had laid on her a curse, or had only meant to insult her. And the old woman answered, "Know then, that the Prince of whom I spoke is a most handsome creature, and is named Taddeo, who, by the wicked spell of a fairy, having given the last touch to the picture of life, has been placed

in a tomb outside the walls of the city; and there is an inscription upon a stone, saying that whatever woman shall in three days fill with tears a pitcher that hangs there upon a hook will bring the Prince to life and shall take him for a husband. But as it is impossible for two human eyes to weep so much as to fill a pitcher that would hold half a barrel, I have wished you this wish in return for your scoffing and jeering at me. And I pray that it may come to pass, to avenge the wrong you have done me." So saying, she scuttled down the stairs, for fear of a beating.

Zoza pondered over the words of the old woman, and after turning over a hundred thoughts in her mind, until her head was like a mill full of doubts, she was at last struck by a dart of the passion that blinds the judgment and puts a spell on the reasoning of man. She took a handful of dollars from her father's coffers and left the palace, walking on and on, until she arrived at the castle of a fairy, to whom she unburdened her heart. The fairy, out of pity for such a fair young girl, who had two spurs to make her fall—little help and much love for an unknown object—gave her a letter of recommendation to a sister of hers, who was also a fairy. And this second fairy received her likewise with great kindness; and on the following morning, when Night commands the birds to proclaim that whoever has seen a flock of black shadows gone astray shall be well rewarded, she gave her a beautiful walnut, saying, "Take this, my dear daughter, and keep it carefully; but never open it, but in time of the greatest need." And then she gave her also a letter, commending her to another sister.

After journeying a long way, Zoza arrived at this fairy's castle, and was received with the same affection. And the next morning this fairy likewise gave her a letter to another sister, together with a chestnut, cautioning her in the same manner. Then Zoza travelled on to the next castle, where she was received with a thousand caresses and given a filbert, which she was never to open, unless the greatest necessity obliged her. So she set out upon her journey, and passed so many forests and rivers, that at the end of seven years, just at the time of day when the Sun, awakened by the coming of the cocks, has saddled his steed to run his accustomed stages, she arrived almost lame at Round-Field.

There, at the entrance to the city, she saw a marble tomb, at the foot of a fountain, which was weeping tears of crystal at seeing itself shut up in a porphyry prison. And, lifting up the pitcher, she placed it in her lap and began to weep into it, imitating the fountain to make two little fountains of her eyes. And thus she continued without ever raising her head from the mouth of the pitcher—until, at the end of two days, it was full within two inches of the top. But, being wearied with so much weeping, she was unawares overtaken by sleep, and was obliged to rest for an hour or so under the canopy of her eyes.

Meanwhile a certain Slave, with the legs of a grasshopper, came, as she was wont, to the fountain, to fill her water-cask. Now she knew the meaning of the fountain which was talked of everywhere; and when she saw Zoza weeping so incessantly, and making two little streams from her eyes, she was always watching and spying until the pitcher should be full enough for her to add the last drops to it; and thus to leave Zoza cheated of her hopes. Now, therefore, seeing Zoza asleep, she seized her opportunity; and dexterously removing the pitcher from under Zoza, and placing her own eyes over it, she filled it in four seconds. But hardly was it full, when the Prince arose from the white marble shrine, as if awakened from a deep sleep, and embraced that mass of dark flesh, and carried her straightways to his palace; feasts and marvellous illuminations were made, and he took her for his wife.

When Zoza awoke and saw the pitcher gone, and her hopes with it, and the shrine open, her heart grew so heavy that she was on the point of unpacking the bales of her soul at the custom-house of Death. But, at last, seeing that there was no help for her misfortune, and that she could only blame her own eyes, which had served her so ill, she went her way, step by step, into the city. And when she heard of the feasts which the Prince had made, and the dainty creature he had married, she instantly knew how all this mischief had come to pass; and said to herself, sighing, "Alas, two dark things have brought me to the ground,—sleep and a black slave!" Then she took a fine house facing the palace

of the Prince; from whence, though she could not see the idol of her heart, she could at least look upon the walls wherein what she sighed for was enclosed.

But Taddeo, who was constantly flying like a bat round that black night of a Slave, chanced to perceive Zoza and was entranced with her beauty. When the Slave saw this she was beside herself with rage, and vowed that if Taddeo did not leave the window, she would kill her baby when it was born.

Taddeo, who was anxiously desiring an heir, was afraid to offend his wife and tore himself away from the sight of Zoza; who seeing this little balm for the sickness of her hopes taken away from her, knew not, at first, what to do. But, recollecting the fairies' gifts, she opened the walnut, and out of it hopped a little dwarf like a doll, the most graceful toy that was ever seen in the world. Then, seating himself upon the window, the dwarf began to sing with such a trill and gurgling, that he seemed a veritable king of the birds.

The Slave, when she saw and heard this, was so enraptured that, calling Taddeo, she said, "Bring me the little fellow who is singing yonder, or I will kill the child when it is born." So the Prince, who allowed this ugly woman to put the saddle on his back, sent instantly to Zoza, to ask if she would not sell the dwarf. Zoza answered she was not a merchant, but that he was welcome to it as a gift. So Taddeo accepted the offer, for he was anxious to keep his wife in good humour.

Four days after this, Zoza opened the chestnut, when out came a hen with twelve little chickens, all of pure gold, and, being placed on the window, the Slave saw them and took a vast fancy to them; and calling Taddeo, she showed him the beautiful sight, and again ordered him to procure the hen and chickens for her. So Taddeo, who let himself be caught in the web, and become the sport of the ugly creature, sent again to Zoza, offering her any price she might ask for the beautiful hen. But Zoza gave the same answer as before, that he might have it as a gift. Taddeo, therefore, who could not do otherwise, made necessity kick at discretion, and accepted the beautiful present.

But after four days more, Zoza opened the hazel-nut, and forth came a doll which spun gold—an amazing sight. As soon as it was placed at the same window, the Slave saw it and, calling to Taddeo, said, "I must have that doll, or I will kill the child." Taddeo, who let his proud wife toss him about like a shuttle, had nevertheless not the heart to send to Zoza for the doll, but resolved to go himself, recollecting the sayings: "No messenger is better than yourself," and "Let him who would eat a fish take it by the tail." So he went and besought Zoza to pardon his impertinence, on account of the caprices of his wife; and Zoza, who was in ecstasies at beholding the cause of her sorrow, put a constraint on herself; and so let him entreat her the longer to keep in sight the object of her love, who was stolen from her by an ugly slave. At length she gave him the doll, as she had done the other things, but before placing it in his hands, she prayed the little doll to put a desire into the heart of the Slave to hear stories told by her. And when Taddeo saw the doll in his hand, without his paying a single coin, he was so filled with amazement at such courtesy that he offered his kingdom and his life in exchange for the gift. Then, returning to his palace, he placed it in his wife's hands; and instantly such a longing seized her to hear stories told, that she called her husband and said, "Bid some story-tellers come and tell me stories, or I promise you, I will kill the child."

Taddeo, to get rid of this madness, ordered a proclamation instantly to be made, that all the women of the land should come on the appointed day. And on that day, at the hour when the star of Venus appears, who awakes the Dawn, to strew the road along which the Sun has to pass, the ladies were all assembled at the palace. But Taddeo, not wishing to detain such a rabble for the mere amusement of his wife, chose ten only of the best of the city who appeared to him most capable and eloquent. These were Bushy-haired Zeza, Bandy-legged Cecca, Wen-necked Meneca, Long-nosed Tolla, Humph-backed Popa, Bearded Antonella, Dumpy Ciulla, Blear-eyed Paola, Bald-headed Civonmetella, and Square-shouldered Jacova. Their names he wrote down on a sheet of paper; and then, dismissing the others, he arose with the Slave from under the canopy, and they went gently to the garden of the palace, where the leafy branches were so closely interlaced, that the Sun could not separate them with all the industry of his rays. And seating themselves under a pavilion, formed by a

trellis of vines, in the middle of which ran a great fountain—the schoolmaster of the courtiers, whom he taught everyday to murmur—Taddeo thus began:

"There is nothing in the world more glorious, my gentle dames, than to listen to the deeds of others; nor was it without reason that the great philosopher placed the highest happiness of man in listening to pretty stories. In hearing pleasing things told, griefs vanish, troublesome thoughts are put to flight and life is lengthened. And, for this reason, you see the artisans leave their workshops, the merchants their country-houses, the lawyers their cases, the shopkeepers their business, and all repair with open mouths to the barbers' shops and to the groups of chatterers, to listen to stories, fictions, and news in the open air. I cannot, therefore, but pardon my wife, who has taken this strange fancy into her head of hearing the telling of tales. So, if you will be pleased to satisfy the whim of the Princess and comply with my wishes, you will, during the next four or five days, each of you relate daily one of those tales which old women are wont to tell for the amusement of the little ones. And you will come regularly to this spot; where, after a good repast, you shall begin to tell stories, so as to pass life pleasantly—and sorrow to him that dies!"

At these words, all bowed assent to the commands of Taddeo; and the tables being meanwhile set out and feast spread, they sat down to eat. And when they had done eating, the Prince took the paper and calling on each in turn, by name, the stories that follow were told, in due order.

II

THE MYRTLE

There lived in the village of Miano a man and his wife, who had no children whatever, and they longed with the greatest eagerness to have an heir. The woman, above all, was for ever saying, "O heavens! if I might but have a little baby—I should not care, were it even a sprig of a myrtle." And she repeated this song so often, and so wearied Heaven with these words, that at last her wish was granted; and at the end of nine months, instead of a little boy or girl, she placed in the hands of the nurse a fine sprig of myrtle. This she planted with great delight in a pot, ornamented with ever so many beautiful figures, and set it in the window, tending it morning and evening with more diligence than the gardener does a bed of cabbages from which he reckons to pay the rent of his garden.

Now the King's son happening to pass by, as he was going to hunt, took a prodigious fancy to this beautiful plant, and sent to ask the mistress of the house if she would sell it, for he would give even one of his eyes for it. The woman at last, after a thousand difficulties and refusals, allured by his offers, dazzled by his promises, frightened by his threats, overcome by his prayers, gave him the pot, beseeching him to hold it dear, for she loved it more than a daughter, and valued it as much as if it were her own offspring. Then the Prince had the flower-pot carried with the greatest care in the world into his own chamber, and placed it in a balcony, and tended and watered it with his own hand.

It happened one evening, when the Prince had gone to bed, and put out the candles, and all were at rest and in their first sleep, that he heard the sound of some one stealing through the house, and coming cautiously towards his bed; whereat he thought it must be some chamber-boy coming to lighten his purse for him, or some mischievous imp to pull the bed-clothes off him. But as he was a bold fellow, whom none could frighten, he acted the dead cat, waiting to see the upshot of the affair. When he perceived the object approach nearer, and stretching out his hand felt something smooth, and instead of laying hold, as he expected, on the prickles of a hedgehog, he touched a little creature more soft and fine than Barbary wool, more pliant and tender than a marten's tail, more delicate than thistle-down, he flew from one thought to another, and taking her to be a fairy (as indeed she was), he conceived at once a great affection for her. The next morning, before the Sun, like a chief physician, went out to visit the flowers that are sick and languid, the unknown fair one rose and disappeared, leaving the Prince filled with curiosity and wonder.

But when this had gone on for seven days, he was burning and melting with desire to know what good fortune this was that the stars had showered down on him, and what ship freighted with the graces of Love it was that had come to its moorings in his chamber. So one night, when the fair maiden was fast asleep, he tied one of her tresses to his arm, that she might not escape; then he called a chamberlain, and bidding him light the candles, he saw the flower of beauty, the miracle of women, the looking-glass and painted egg of Venus, the fair bait of Love—he saw a little doll, a beautiful dove, a Fata Morgana, a banner—he saw a golden trinket, a hunter, a falcon's eye, a moon in her fifteenth day, a pigeon's bill, a morsel for a king, a jewel—he saw, in short, a sight to amaze one.

In astonishment he cried, "O sleep, sweet sleep! heap poppies on the eyes of this lovely jewel; interrupt not my delight in viewing as long as I desire this triumph of beauty. O lovely tress that binds me! O lovely eyes that inflame me! O lovely lips that refresh me! O lovely bosom that consoles me! Oh where, at what shop of the wonders of Nature, was this living statue made? What India gave the gold for these hairs? What Ethiopia the ivory to form these brows? What seashore the carbuncles that compose these eyes? What Tyre the purple to dye this face? What East the pearls to string these teeth? And from what mountains was the snow taken to sprinkle over this bosom—snow contrary to nature, that nurtures the flowers and burns hearts?"

So saying he made a vine of his arms, and clasping her neck, she awoke from her sleep and replied, with a gentle smile, to the sigh of the enamoured Prince; who, seeing her open her eyes, said, "O my treasure, if viewing without candles this temple of love I was in transports, what will become of my life now that you have lighted two lamps? O beauteous eyes, that with a trump-card of light make the stars bankrupt, you alone have pierced this heart, you alone can make a poultice for it like fresh eggs! O my lovely physician, take pity, take pity on one who is sick of love; who, having changed the air from the darkness of night to the light of this beauty, is seized by a fever; lay your hand on this heart, feel my pulse, give me a prescription. But, my soul, why do I ask for a prescription? I desire no other comfort than a touch of that little hand; for I am certain that with the cordial of that fair grace, and with the healing root of that tongue of thine, I shall be sound and well again."

At these words the lovely fairy grew as red as fire, and replied, "Not so much praise, my lord Prince! I am your servant, and would do anything in the world to serve that kingly face; and I esteem it great good fortune that from a bunch of myrtle, set in a pot of earth, I have become a branch of laurel hung over the inn-door of a heart in which there is so much greatness and virtue."

The Prince, melting at these words like a tallow-candle, began again to embrace her; and sealing the latter with a kiss, he gave her his hand, saying, "Take my faith, you shall be my wife, you shall be mistress of my sceptre, you shall have the key of this heart, as you hold the helm of this life." After these and a hundred other ceremonies and discourses they arose. And so it went on for several days.

But as spoil-sport, marriage-parting Fate is always a hindrance to the steps of Love, it fell out that the Prince was summoned to hunt a great wild boar which was ravaging the country. So he was forced to leave his wife. But as he loved her more than his life, and saw that she was beautiful beyond all beautiful things, from this love and beauty there sprang up the feeling of jealousy, which is a tempest in the sea of love, a piece of soot that falls into the pottage of the bliss of lovers—which is a serpent that bites, a worm that gnaws, a gall that poisons, a frost that kills, making life always restless, the mind unstable, the heart ever suspicious. So, calling the fairy, he said to her, "I am obliged, my heart, to be away from home for two or three days; Heaven knows with how much grief I tear myself from you, who are my soul; and Heaven knows too whether, ere I set out, my life may not end; but as I cannot help going, to please my father, I must leave you. I, therefore, pray you, by all the love you bear me, to go back into the flower-pot, and not to come out of it till I return, which will be as soon as possible."

"I will do so," said the fairy, "for I cannot and will not refuse what pleases you. Go, therefore, and may the mother of good luck go with you, for I will serve you to the best of my power. But do me one favour; leave a thread of silk with a bell tied to the top of the myrtle, and when you come back pull the thread and ring, and immediately I will come out and say, Here I am."

The Prince did so, and then calling a chamberlain, said to him, "Come hither, come hither, you! Open your ears and mind what I say. Make this bed every evening, as if I were myself to sleep in it. Water this flower-pot regularly, and mind, I have counted the leaves, and if I find one missing I will take from you the means of earning your bread." So saying he mounted his horse, and went, like a sheep that is led to the slaughter, to follow a boar. In the meanwhile seven wicked women, with whom the Prince had been acquainted, began to grow jealous; and being curious to pry into the secret, they sent for a mason, and for a good sum of money got him to make an underground passage from their house into the Prince's chamber. Then these cunning jades went through the passage in order to explore. But finding nothing, they opened the window; and when they saw the beautiful myrtle standing there, each of them plucked a leaf from it; but the youngest took off the entire top, to which the little bell was hung; and the moment it was touched the bell tinkled and the fairy, thinking it was the Prince, immediately came out.

As soon as the wicked women saw this lovely creature they fastened their talons on her, crying, "You are she who turns to your own mill the stream of our hopes! You it is who have stolen the favour

of the Prince! But you are come to an end of your tricks, my fine lady! You are nimble enough in running off, but you are caught in your tricks this time, and if you escape, you were never born."

So saying, they flew upon her, and instantly tore her in pieces, and each of them took her part. But the youngest would not join in this cruel act; and when she was invited by her sisters to do as they did, she would take nothing but a lock of those golden hairs. So when they had done they went quickly away by the passage through which they had come.

Meanwhile the chamberlain came to make the bed and water the flower-pot, according to his master's orders, and seeing this pretty piece of work, he had like to have died of terror. Then, biting his nails with vexation, he set to work, gathered up the remains of the flesh and bones that were left, and scraping the blood from the floor, he piled them all up in a heap in the pot; and having watered it, he made the bed, locked the door, put the key under the door, and taking to his heels ran away out of the town.

When the Prince came back from the chase, he pulled the silken string and rung the little bell; but ring as he would it was all lost time; he might sound the tocsin, and ring till he was tired, for the fairy gave no heed. So he went straight to the chamber, and not having patience to call the chamberlain and ask for the key, he gave the lock a kick, burst open the door, went in, opened the window, and seeing the myrtle stript of its leaves, he fell to making a most doleful lamentation, crying, shouting, and bawling, "O wretched me! unhappy me! O miserable me! Who has played me this trick? and who has thus trumped my card? O ruined, banished, and undone prince! O my leafless myrtle! my lost fairy! O my wretched life! my joys vanished into smoke! my pleasures turned to vinegar! What will you do, unhappy man! Leap quickly over this ditch! You have fallen from all happiness, and will you not cut your throat? You are robbed of every treasure! You are expelled from life, and do you not go mad? Where are you? where are you, my myrtle? And what soul more hard than marble has destroyed this beautiful flower-pot? O cursed chase, that has chased me from all happiness! Alas! I am done for, I am overthrown, I am ruined, I have ended my days; it is not possible for me to get through life without my life; I must stretch my legs, since without my love sleep will be lamentation, food, poison, pleasure insipid, and life sour."

These and many other exclamations that would move the very stones in the streets, were uttered by the Prince; and after repeating them again and again, and wailing bitterly, full of sorrow and woe, never shutting an eye to sleep, nor opening his mouth to eat, he gave such way to grief, that his face, which was before of oriental vermillion, became of gold paint, and the ham of his lips became rusty bacon.

The fairy, who had sprouted up again from the remains that were put in the pot, seeing the misery and tribulation of her poor lover, and how he was turned in a second to the colour of a sick Spaniard, of a venomous lizard, of the sap of a leaf, of a jaundiced person, of a dried pear, was moved with compassion; and springing out of the pot, like the light of a candle shooting out of a dark lantern, she stood before Cola Marchione, and embracing him in her arms she said, "Take heart, take heart, my Prince! have done now with this lamenting, wipe your eyes, quiet your anger, smooth your face. Behold me alive and handsome, in spite of those wicked women, who split my head and so ill-treated me."

The Prince, seeing this when he least expected it, arose again from death to life, and the colour returned to his cheeks, warmth to his blood, breath to his breast. After giving her a thousand caresses and embraces, he desired to know the whole affair from head to foot; and when he found that the chamberlain was not to blame, he ordered him to be called, and giving a great banquet, he, with the full consent of his father, married the fairy. And he invited all the great people of the kingdom, but, above all others, he would have present those seven serpents who had committed the slaughter of that sweet suckling-calf.

And as soon as they had done eating, the Prince asked all the guests, one after another, what he deserved who had injured that beautiful maiden—pointing to the fairy, who looked so lovely that she shot hearts like a sprite and drew souls like a windlass.

Then all who sat at table, beginning with the King, said, one that he deserved the gallows, another that he merited the wheel, a third the pincers, a fourth to be thrown from a precipice; in short one proposed this punishment and another that. At last it came to the turn of the seven wicked women to speak, who, although they did not much relish this conversation, yet, as the truth comes out when the wine goes about, answered, that whoever had the heart basely to touch only this quintessence of the charms of love deserved to be buried alive in a dungeon.

"As you have pronounced this sentence with your own lips," said the Prince, "you have yourselves judged the cause, you have yourselves signed the decree. It remains for me to cause your order to be executed, since it is you who with the heart of a negro, with the cruelty of Medea, made a fritter of this beautiful head, and chopped up these lovely limbs like sausage-meat. So quick, make haste, lose not a moment! throw them this very instant into a large dungeon, where they shall end their days miserably."

So this order was instantly carried into execution. The Prince married the youngest sister of these wicked creatures to the chamberlain, and gave her a good portion. And giving also to the father and mother of the myrtle wherewithal to live comfortably, he himself spent his days happily with the fairy; while the wicked women ended their lives in bitter anguish, and thus verified the proverb of the wise men of old—

"The lame goat will hop
If he meets with no stop."

III

PERUONTO

A good deed is never lost. He who sows courtesy reaps benefit; and he who gathers kindness gathers love. Pleasure bestowed on a grateful mind was never barren, but always brings a good recompense; and that is the moral of the story I am going to tell you.

Once upon a time a woman who lived in a village, and was called Ceccarella, had a son named Peruonto, who was one of the most stupid lads that ever was born. This made his mother very unhappy, and all day long she would grieve because of this great misfortune. For whether she asked him kindly, or stormed at him till her throat was dry, the foolish fellow would not stir to do the slightest hand's turn for her. At last, after a thousand dinnings at his brain, and a thousand splittings of his head, and saying "I tell you" and "I told you" day after day, she got him to go to the wood for a faggot, saying, "Come now, it is time for us to get a morsel to eat, so run off for some sticks, and don't forget yourself on the way, but come back as quick as you can, and we will boil ourselves some cabbage, to keep the life in us."

Away went the stupid Peruonto, hanging down his head as if he was going to gaol. Away he went, walking as if he were a jackdaw, or treading on eggs, counting his steps, at the pace of a snail's gallop, and making all sorts of zigzags and excursions on his way to the wood, to come there after the fashion of a raven. And when he reached the middle of a plain, through which ran a river growling and murmuring at the bad manners of the stones that were stopping its way, he saw three youths who had made themselves a bed of grass and a pillow of a great flint stone, and were lying sound asleep under the blaze of the Sun, who was shooting his rays down on them point blank. When Peruonto saw these poor creatures, looking as if they were in the midst of a fountain of fire, he felt pity for them, and cutting some branches of oak, he made a handsome arbour over them. Meanwhile, the youths, who were the sons of a fairy, awoke, and, seeing the kindness and courtesy of Peruonto, they gave him a charm, that every thing he asked for should be done.

Peruonto, having performed this good action, went his ways towards the wood, where he made up such an enormous faggot that it would have needed an engine to draw it; and, seeing that he could not in any way get in on his back, he set himself astride of it and cried, "Oh, what a lucky fellow I should be if this faggot would carry me riding a-horseback!" And the word was hardly out of his mouth when the faggot began to trot and gallop like a great horse, and when it came in front of the King's palace it pranced and capered and curvetted in a way that would amaze you. The ladies who were standing at one of the windows, on seeing such a wonderful sight, ran to call Vastolla, the daughter of the King, who, going to the window and observing the caracoles of a faggot and the bounds of a bundle of wood, burst out a-laughing—a thing which, owing to a natural melancholy, she never remembered to have done before. Peruonto raised his head, and, seeing that it was at him that they were laughing, exclaimed, "Oh, Vastolla, I wish that I could be your husband and I would soon cure you of laughing at me!" And so saying, he struck his heels into the faggot, and in a dashing gallop he was quickly at home, with such a train of little boys at his heels that if his mother had not been quick to shut the door they would soon have killed him with the stones and sticks with which they pelted him.

Now came the question of marrying Vastolla to some great prince, and her father invited all he knew to come and visit him and pay their respects to the Princess. But she refused to have anything to say to either of them, and only answered, "I will marry none but the young man who rode on the faggot." So that the King got more and more angry with every refusal, and at last he was quite unable to contain himself any longer, and called his Council together and said, "You know by this time how my honour has been shamed, and that my daughter has acted in such a manner that all the chronicles

will tell the story against me, so now speak and advise me. I say that she is unworthy to live, seeing that she has brought me into such discredit, and I wish to put her altogether out of the world before she does more mischief." The Councillors, who had in their time learned much wisdom, said, "Of a truth she deserves to be severely punished. But, after all, it is this audacious scoundrel who has give you the annoyance, and it is not right that he should escape through the meshes of the net. Let us wait, then, till he comes to light, and we discover the root of this disgrace, and then we will think it over and resolve what were best to be done." This counsel pleased the King, for he saw that they spoke like sensible, prudent men, so he held his hand and said, "Let us wait and see the end of this business."

So then the King made a great banquet, and invited every one of his nobles and all the gentlemen in his kingdom to come to it, and set Vastolla at the high table at the top of the hall, for, he said, "No common man can have done this, and when she recognises the fellow we shall see her eyes turn to him, and we will instantly lay hold on him and put him out of the way." But when the feasting was done, and all the guests passed out in a line, Vastolla took no more notice of them than Alexander's bull-dog did of the rabbits; and the King grew more angry than ever, and vowed that he would kill her without more delay. Again, however, the Councillors pacified him and said, "Softly, softly, your Majesty! quiet your wrath. Let us make another banquet to-morrow, not for people of condition but for the lower sort. Some women always attach themselves to the worst, and we shall find among the cutlers, and bead-makers, and comb-sellers, the root of your anger, which we have not discovered among the cavaliers."

This reasoning took the fancy of the King, and he ordered a second banquet to be prepared, to which, on proclamation being made, came all the riff-raff and rag-tag and bob-tail of the city, such as rogues, scavengers, tinkers, pedlars, sweeps, beggars, and such like rabble, who were all in high glee; and, taking their seats like noblemen at a great long table, they began to feast and gobble away.

Now, when Ceccarella heard this proclamation, she began to urge Peruonto to go there too, until at last she got him to set out for the feast. And scarcely had he arrived there when Vastolla cried out without thinking, "That is my Knight of the Faggot." When the King heard this he tore his beard, seeing that the bean of the cake, the prize in the lottery, had fallen to an ugly lout, the very sight of whom he could not endure, with a shaggy head, owl's eyes, a parrot's nose, a deer's mouth, and legs bare and bandy. Then, heaving a deep sigh, he said, "What can that jade of a daughter of mine have seen to make her take a fancy to this ogre, or strike up a dance with this hairy-foot? Ah, vile, false creature, who has cast so base a spell on her? But why do we wait? Let her suffer the punishment she deserves; let her undergo the penalty that shall be decreed by you, and take her from my presence, for I cannot bear to look longer upon her."

Then the Councillors consulted together and they resolved that she, as well as the evil-doer, should be shut up in a cask and thrown into the sea; so that without staining the King's hands with the blood of one of his family, they should carry out the sentence. No sooner was the judgment pronounced, than the cask was brought and both were put into it; but before they coopered it up, some of Vastolla's ladies, crying and sobbing as if their hearts would break, put into it a basket of raisins and dried figs that she might have wherewithal to live on for a little while. And when the cask was closed up, it was flung into the sea, on which it went floating as the wind drove it.

Meanwhile Vastolla, weeping till her eyes ran like two rivers, said to Peruonto, "What a sad misfortune is this of ours! Oh, if I but knew who has played me this trick, to have me caged in this dungeon! Alas, alas, to find myself in this plight without knowing how. Tell me, tell me, O cruel man, what incantation was it you made, and what spell did you employ, to bring me within the circle of this cask?" Peruonto, who had been for some time paying little attention to her, at last said, "If you want me to tell you, you must give me some figs and raisins." So Vastolla, to draw the secret out of him, gave him a handful of both; and as soon as he had eaten them he told her truly all that had befallen him, with the three youths, and with the faggot, and with herself at the window: which, when the poor lady heard, she took heart and said to Peruonto, "My friend, shall we then let our lives run

out in a cask? Why don't you cause this tub to be changed into a fine ship and run into some good harbour to escape this danger?" And Peruonto replied—

"If you would have me say the spell,
With figs and raisins feed me well!"

So Vastolla, to make him open his mouth, filled it with fruit; and so she fished the words out of him. And lo! as soon as Peruonto had said what she desired, the cask was turned into a beautiful ship; with sails and sailors and everything that could be wished for; and guns and trumpets and a splendid cabin in which Vastolla sat filled with delight.

It being now the hour when the Moon begins to play at see-saw with the Sun, Vastolla said to Peruonto, "My fine lad, now make this ship to be changed into a palace, for then we shall be more secure; you know the saying, "Praise the Sea, but keep to the Land." And Peruonto replied—

"If you would have me say the spell,
With figs and raisins feed me well!"

So Vastolla, at once, fed him again, and Peruonto, swallowing down the raisins and figs, did her pleasure; and immediately the ship came to land and was changed into a beautiful palace, fitted up in a most sumptuous manner, and so full of furniture and curtains and hangings that there was nothing more to ask for. So that Vastolla, who a little before would not have set the price of a farthing on her life, did not now wish to change places with the greatest lady in the world, seeing herself served and treated like a queen. Then to put the seal on all her good fortune, she besought Peruonto to obtain grace to become handsome and polished in his manner, that they might live happy together; for though the proverb says, "Better to have a pig for a husband, than a smile from an emperor," still, if his appearance were changed, she should think herself the happiest woman in the universe. And Peruonto replied as before—

"If you would have me say the spell,
With figs and raisins feed me well!"

Then Vastolla quickly opened his lips, and scarcely had he spoken the words when he was changed, as it were from an owl to a nightingale, from an ogre to a beautiful youth, from a scarecrow to a fine gentleman. Vastolla, seeing such a transformation clasped him in her arms and was almost beside herself with joy. Then they were married and lived happily for years.

Meanwhile the King grew old and very sad, so that, one day, the courtiers persuaded him to go a-hunting to cheer him up. Night overtook him, and, seeing a light in a palace, he sent a servant to know if he could be entertained there; and he was answered that everything was at his disposal. So the King went to the palace and passing into a great guest-chamber he saw no living soul, but two little boys, who skipped around him crying, "Welcome, welcome!" The King, surprised and astonished, stood like one that was enchanted, and sitting down to rest himself at a table, to his amazement he saw invisibly spread on it a Flanders tablecloth, with dishes full of roast meats and all sorts of viands; so that, in truth, he feasted like a King, waited on by those beautiful children, and all the while he sat at table a concert of lutes and tambourines never ceased—such delicious music that it went to the tips of his fingers and toes. When he had done eating, a bed suddenly appeared all made of gold, and having his boots taken off, he went to rest and all his courtiers did the same, after having fed heartily at a hundred tables, which were laid out in the other rooms.

When morning came, the King wished to thank the two little children, but with them appeared Vastolla and her husband; and casting herself at his feet she asked his pardon and related the whole

story. The King, seeing that he had found two grandsons who were two jewels and a son-in-law who was a fairy, embraced first one and then the other; and taking up the children in his arms, they all returned to the city where there was a great festival that lasted many days.

IV VARDIELLO

If Nature had given to animals the necessity of clothing themselves, and of buying their food, the race of quadrupeds would inevitably be destroyed. Therefore it is that they find their food without trouble,—without gardener to gather it, purchaser to buy it, cook to prepare it, or carver to cut it up; whilst their skin defends them from the rain and snow, without the merchant giving them cloth, the tailor making the dress, or the errand-boy begging for a drink-penny. To man however, who has intelligence, Nature did not care to grant these indulgences, since he is able to procure for himself what he wants. This is the reason that we commonly see clever men poor, and blockheads rich; as you may gather from the story which I am going to tell you.

Grannonia of Aprano was a woman of a great sense and judgment, but she had a son named Vardiello, who was the greatest booby and simpleton in the whole country round about. Nevertheless, as a mother's eyes are bewitched and see what does not exist, she doted upon him so much, that she was for ever caressing and fondling him as if he were the handsomest creature in the world.

Now Grannonia kept a brood-hen, that was sitting upon a nest of eggs, in which she placed all her hope, expecting to have a fine brood of chickens, and to make a good profit of them. And having one day to go out on some business, she called her son, and said to him, "My pretty son of your own mother, listen to what I say: keep your eye upon the hen, and if she should get up to scratch and pick, look sharp and drive her back to the nest; for otherwise the eggs will grow cold, and then we shall have neither eggs nor chickens."

"Leave it to me," replied Vardiello, "you are not speaking to deaf ears."

"One thing more," said the mother; "look-ye, my blessed son, in yon cupboard is a pot full of certain poisonous things; take care that ugly Sin does not tempt you to touch them, for they would make you stretch your legs in a trice."

"Heaven forbid!" replied Vardiello, "poison indeed will not tempt me; but you have done wisely to give me the warning; for if I had got at it, I should certainly have eaten it all up."

Thereupon the mother went out, but Vardiello stayed behind; and, in order to lose no time, he went into the garden to dig holes, which he covered with boughs and earth, to catch the little thieves who come to steal the fruit. And as he was in the midst of his work, he saw the hen come running out of the room, whereupon he began to cry, "Hish, hish! this way, that way!" But the hen did not stir a foot; and Vardiello, seeing that she had something of the donkey in her, after crying "Hish, hish," began to stamp with his feet; and after stamping with his feet to throw his cap at her, and after the cap a cudgel which hit her just upon the pate, and made her quickly stretch her legs.

When Vardiello saw this sad accident, he bethought himself how to remedy the evil; and making a virtue of necessity, in order to prevent the eggs growing cold, he set himself down upon the nest; but in doing so, he gave the eggs an unlucky blow, and quickly made an omelet of them. In despair at what he had done, he was on the point of knocking his head against the wall; at last, however, as all grief turns to hunger, feeling his stomach begin to grumble, he resolved to eat up the hen. So he plucked her, and sticking her upon a spit, he made a great fire, and set to work to roast her. And when she was cooked, Vardiello, to do everything in due order, spread a clean cloth upon an old chest; and then, taking a flagon, he went down into the cellar to draw some wine. But just as he was in the midst of drawing the wine, he heard a noise, a disturbance, an uproar in the house, which seemed like the clattering of horses' hoofs. Whereat starting up in alarm and turning his eyes, he saw a big tom-cat, which had run off with the hen, spit and all; and another cat chasing after him, mewing, and crying out for a part.

Vardiello, in order to set this mishap to rights, darted upon the cat like an unchained lion, and in his haste he left the tap of the barrel running. And after chasing the cat through every hole and corner of the house, he recovered the hen; but the cask had meanwhile all run out; and when Vardiello returned, and saw the wine running about, he let the cask of his soul empty itself through the tap-holes of his eyes. But at last judgment came to his aid and he hit upon a plan to remedy the mischief, and prevent his mother's finding out what had happened; so, taking a sack of flour, filled full to the mouth, he sprinkled it over the wine on the floor.

But when he meanwhile reckoned up on his fingers all the disasters he had met with, and thought to himself that, from the number of fooleries he had committed, he must have lost the game in the good graces of Grannonia, he resolved in his heart not to let his mother see him again alive. So thrusting his hand into the jar of pickled walnuts which his mother had said contained poison, he never stopped eating until he came to the bottom; and when he had right well filled his stomach he went and hid himself in the oven.

In the meanwhile his mother returned, and stood knocking for a long time at the door; but at last, seeing that no one came, she gave it a kick; and going in, she called her son at the top of her voice. But as nobody answered, she imagined that some mischief must have happened, and with increased lamentation she went on crying louder and louder, "Vardiello! Vardiello! are you deaf, that you don't hear? Have you the cramp, that you don't run? Have you the pip, that you don't answer? Where are you, you rogue? Where are you hidden, you naughty fellow?"

Vardiello, on hearing all this hubbub and abuse, cried out at last with a piteous voice, "Here I am! here I am in the oven; but you will never see me again, mother!"

"Why so?" said the poor mother.

"Because I am poisoned," replied the son.

"Alas! alas!" cried Grannonia, "how came you to do that? What cause have you had to commit this homicide? And who has given you poison?" Then Vardiello told her, one after another, all the pretty things he had done; on which account he wished to die and not to remain any longer a laughing-stock in the world.

The poor woman, on hearing all this, was miserable and wretched, and she had enough to do and to say to drive this melancholy whimsey out of Vardiello's head. And being infatuated and dotingly fond of him, she gave him some nice sweetmeats, and so put the affair of the pickled walnuts out of his head, and convinced him that they were not poison, but good and comforting to the stomach. And having thus pacified him with cheering words, and showered on him a thousand caresses, she drew him out of the oven. Then giving him a fine piece of cloth, she bade him go and sell it, but cautioning him not to do business with folks of too many words.

"Tut, tut!" said Vardiello, "let me alone; I know what I'm about, never fear." So saying, he took the cloth, and went his way through the city of Naples, crying, "Cloth! cloth!" But whenever any one asked him, "What cloth have you there?" he replied, "You are no customer for me; you are a man of too many words." And when another said to him, "How do you sell your cloth?" he called him a chatterbox, who deafened him with his noise. At length he chanced to espy, in the courtyard of a house which was deserted on account of the Monaciello, a plaster statue; and being tired out, and wearied with going about and about, he sat himself down on a bench. But not seeing any one astir in the house, which looked like a sacked village, he was lost in amazement, and said to the statue: "Tell me, comrade, does no one live in this house?" Vardiello waited awhile; but as the statue gave no answer, he thought this surely was a man of few words. So he said, "Friend, will you buy my cloth? I'll sell it you cheap." And seeing that the statue still remained dumb, he exclaimed, "Faith, then, I've found my man at last! There, take the cloth, examine it, and give me what you will; to-morrow I'll return for the money."

So saying Vardiello left the cloth on the spot where he had been sitting, and the first mother's son who passed that way found the prize and carried it off.

When Vardiello returned home without the cloth, and told his mother all that had happened, she wellnigh swooned away, and said to him, "When will you put that headpiece of yours in order? See now what tricks you have played me—only think! But I am myself to blame, for being too tender-hearted, instead of having given you a good beating at first; and now I perceive that a pitiful doctor only makes the wound incurable. But you'll go on with your pranks until at last we come to a serious falling-out, and then there will be a long reckoning, my lad!"

"Softly, mother," replied Vardiello, "matters are not so bad as they seem; do you want more than crown-pieces brand new from the mint? Do you think me a fool, and that I don't know what I am about? To-morrow is not yet here. Wait awhile, and you shall see whether I know how to fit a handle to a shovel."

The next morning, as soon as the shades of Night, pursued by the constables of the Sun, had fled the country, Vardiello repaired to the courtyard where the statue stood, and said, "Good-day, friend! Can you give me those few pence you owe me? Come, quick, pay me for the cloth!" But when he saw that the statue remained speechless, he took up a stone and hurled it at its breast with such force that it burst a vein, which proved, indeed, the cure to his own malady; for some pieces of the statue falling off, he discovered a pot full of golden crown-pieces. Then taking it in both his hands, off he ran home, head over heels, as far as he could scamper, crying out, "Mother, mother! see here! what a lot of red lupins I've got. How many! how many!"

His mother, seeing the crown-pieces, and knowing very well that Vardiello would soon make the matter public, told him to stand at the door until the man with milk and new-made cheese came past, as she wanted to buy a pennyworth of milk. So Vardiello, who was a great glutton, went quickly and seated himself at the door; and his mother showered down from the window above raisins and dried figs for more than half an hour. Whereupon Vardiello, picking them up as fast as he could, cried aloud, "Mother, mother! bring out some baskets; give me some bowls! Here, quick with the tubs and buckets! for if it goes on to rain thus we shall be rich in a trice." And when he had eaten his fill Vardiello went up to sleep.

It happened one day that two countrymen—the food and life-blood of the law-courts—fell out, and went to law about a gold crown-piece which they had found on the ground. And Vardiello passing by said, "What jackasses you are to quarrel about a red lupin like this! For my part I don't value it at a pin's head, for I've found a whole potful of them."

When the judge heard this he opened wide his eyes and ears, and examined Vardiello closely, asking him how, when, and where he had found the crowns. And Vardiello replied, "I found them in a palace, inside a dumb man, when it rained raisins and dried figs." At this the judge stared with amazement; but instantly seeing how the matter stood, he decreed that Vardiello should be sent to a madhouse, as the most competent tribunal for him. Thus the stupidity of the son made the mother rich, and the mother's wit found a remedy for the foolishness of the son: whereby it is clearly seen that—

"A ship when steered by a skilful hand
Will seldom strike upon rock or sand."

V THE FLEA

Resolutions taken without thought bring disasters without remedy. He who behaves like a fool repents like a wise man; as happened to the King of High-Hill, who through unexampled folly committed an act of madness putting in jeopardy both his daughter and his honour.

Once upon a time the King of High-Hill being bitten by a flea caught him by a wonderful feat of dexterity; and seeing how handsome and stately he was he had not the conscience to sentence him to death. So he put him into a bottle, and feeding him every day himself the little animal grew at such a rate that at the end of seven months it was necessary to shift his quarters, for he was grown bigger than a sheep. The King then had him flayed and his skin dressed. Then he issued a proclamation that whoever could tell what this skin was should marry the Princess.

As soon as this decree was made known the people flocked in crowds from all the ends of the world to try their luck. One said that it belonged to an ape, another to a lynx, a third to a crocodile, and in short some gave it to one animal and some to another; but they were all a hundred miles from the truth, and not one hit the nail on the head. At last there came to this trial an ogre who was the most ugly being in the world, the very sight of whom would make the boldest man tremble and quake with fear. But no sooner had he come and turned the skin round and smelt it than he instantly guessed the truth, saying, "This skin belongs to the king of fleas."

Now the King saw that the ogre had hit the mark; and not to break his word he ordered his daughter Porziella to be called. Porziella had a face like milk and roses, and was such a miracle of beauty that you would never be tired of looking at her. And the King said to her, "My daughter, you know who I am. I cannot go back from my promise whether a king or a beggar. My word is given, I must keep it though my heart should break. Who would ever have imagined that this prize would have fallen to an ogre! But it never does to judge hastily. Have patience then and do not oppose your father; for my heart tells me that you will be happy, for rich treasures are often found inside a rough earthen jar."

When Porziella heard this sad saying her eyes grew dim, her face turned pale, her lips fell, her knees shook; and at last, bursting into tears, she said to her father, "What crime have I committed that I should be punished thus! How have I ever behaved badly toward you that I should be given up to this monster. Is this, O Father, the affection you bear to your own child? Is this the love you show to her whom you used to call the joy of your soul? Do you drive from your sight her who is the apple of your eye? O Father, O cruel Father! Better had it been if my cradle had been my death-bed since I have lived to see this evil day."

Porziella was going on to say more when the King in a furious rage exclaimed, "Stay your anger! Fair and softly, for appearances deceive. Is it for a girl to teach her father, forsooth? Have done, I say, for if I lay these hands upon you I'll not leave a whole bone in your skin. Prithee, how long has a child hardly out of the nursery dared to oppose my will? Quick then, I say, take his hand and set off with him home this very instant, for I will not have that saucy face a minute longer in my sight."

Poor Porziella, seeing herself thus caught in the net, with the face of a person condemned to death, with the heart of one whose head is lying between the axe and the block, took the hand of the ogre, who dragged her off without any attendants to the wood where the trees made a palace for the meadow to prevent its being discovered by the sun, and the brooks murmured, having knocked against the stones in the dark, while the wild beasts wandered where they liked without paying toll, and went safely through the thicket whither no man ever came unless he had lost his way. Upon this spot, which was as black as an unswept chimney, stood the ogre's house ornamented all round with the bones of the men whom he had devoured. Think but for a moment of the horror of it to the poor girl.

But this was nothing at all in comparison with what was to come. Before dinner she had peas and after dinner parched beans. Then the ogre went out to hunt and returned home laden with the quarters of the men whom he had killed, saying, "Now, wife, you cannot complain that I don't take good care of you; here is a fine store of eatables, take and make merry and love me well, for the sky will fall before I will let you want for food."

Poor Porziella could not endure this horrible sight and turned her face away. But when the ogre saw this he cried, "Ha! this is throwing sweetmeats before swine; never mind, however, only have patience till to-morrow morning, for I have been invited to a wild boar hunt and will bring you home a couple of boars, and we'll make a grand feast with our kinsfolk and celebrate the wedding." So saying he went into the forest.

Now as Porziella stood weeping at the window it chanced that an old woman passed by who, being famished with hunger, begged some food. "Ah, my good woman," said Porziella, "Heaven knows I am in the power of the ogre who brings me home nothing but pieces of the men he has killed. I pass the most miserable life possible, and yet I am the daughter of a king and have been brought up in luxury." And so saying she began to cry like a little girl who sees her bread and butter taken away from her.

The old woman's heart was softened at this sight and she said to Porziella, "Be of good heart, my pretty girl, do not spoil your beauty with crying, for you have met with luck; I can help you to both saddle and trappings. Listen, now. I have seven sons who, you see, are seven giants, Mase, Nardo, Cola, Micco, Petrullo, Ascaddeo, and Ceccone, who have more virtues than rosemary, especially Mase, for every time he lays his ear to the ground he hears all that is passing within thirty miles round. Nardo, every time he washes his hands, makes a great sea of soapsuds. Every time that Cola throws a bit of iron on the ground he makes a field of sharp razors. Whenever Micco flings down a little stick a tangled wood springs up. If Petrullo lets fall a drop of water it makes a terrible river. When Ascaddeo wishes a strong tower to spring up he has only to throw a stone; and Ceccone shoots so straight with the cross-bow that he can hit a hen's eye a mile off. Now with the help of my sons, who are all courteous and friendly, and who will all take compassion on your condition, I will contrive to free you from the claws of the ogre."

"No time better than now," replied Porziella, "for that evil shadow of a husband of mine has gone out and will not return this evening, and we shall have time to slip off and run away."

"It cannot be this evening," replied the old woman, "for I live a long way off; but I promise you that to-morrow morning I and my sons will all come together and help you out of your trouble."

So saying, the old woman departed, and Porziella went to rest with a light heart and slept soundly all night. But as soon as the birds began to cry, "Long live the Sun," lo and behold, there was the old woman with her seven children; and placing Porziella in the midst of them they proceeded towards the city. But they had not gone above half a mile when Mase put his ear to the ground and cried: "Hallo, have a care; here's the fox. The ogre is come home. He has missed his wife and he is hastening after us with his cap under his arm."

No sooner did Nardo hear this than he washed his hands and made a sea of soap-suds; and when the ogre came and saw all the suds he ran home and fetching a sack of bran he strewed it about and worked away treading it down with his feet until at last he got over this obstacle, though with great difficulty.

But Mase put his ear once more to the ground and exclaimed, "Look sharp, comrade, here he comes!" Thereupon Cola flung a piece of iron on the ground and instantly a field of razors sprang up. When the ogre saw the path stopped he ran home again and clad himself in iron from head to foot and then returned and got over this peril.

Then Mase, again putting his ear to the ground, cried, "Up! up! to arms! to arms! For see here is the ogre coming at such a rate that he is actually flying." But Micco was ready with his little stick, and in an instant he caused a terrible wood to rise up, so thick that it was quite impenetrable. When

the ogre came to this difficult pass he laid hold of a Carrara knife which he wore at his side, and began to cut down the poplars and oaks and pine trees and chestnut trees, right and left; so that with four or five strokes he had the whole forest on the ground and got clear of it. Presently, Mase who kept his ears on the alert like a hare, again raised his voice and cried, "Now we must be off, for the ogre is coming like the wind and here he is at our heels." As soon as Petrullo heard this he took water from a little fountain, sprinkled it on the ground, and in an twinkling of an eye a large river rose up on the spot. When the ogre saw this new obstacle, and that he could not make holes so fast as they found bungs to stop them, he stripped himself stark naked and swam across to the other side of the river with his clothes upon his head.

Mase, who put his ear to every chink, heard the ogre coming and exclaimed, "Alas! matters go ill with us now. I already hear the clatter of the ogre's heels. We must be on our guard and ready to meet the storm or else we are done for." "Never fear," said Ascaddeo, "I will soon settle this ugly ragamuffin." So saying, he flung a pebble on the ground and instantly up rose a tower in which they all took refuge without delay, and barred the door. But when the ogre came up and saw that they had got into so safe a place he ran home, got a vine-dresser's ladder, and carried it back on his shoulder to the tower.

Now Mase, who kept his ears hanging down, heard at a distance the approach of the ogre and cried, "We are now at the butt end of the Candle of Hope. Ceccone is our last resource, for the ogre is coming back in a terrible fury. Alas! how my heart beats, for I foresee an evil day." "You coward," answered Ceccone, "trust to me and I will hit him with a ball."

As Ceccone was speaking the ogre came, planted his ladder and began to climb up; but Ceccone, taking aim at him, shot out one of his eyes and laid him at full length on the ground, like a pear dropped from a tree. Then he went out of the tower and cut off the ogre's head with a big knife he carried about with him, just as if it had been new-made cheese. Thereupon they took the head with great joy to the King, who rejoiced at the recovery of his daughter, for he had repented a hundred times at having given her to an ogre. And not many days after Porziella was married to a handsome prince, and the seven sons and their mother who had delivered her from such a wretched life were rewarded with great riches.

VI CENERENTOLA

In the sea of malice envy frequently gets out of her depth; and, while she is expecting to see another drowned, she is either drowned herself, or is dashed against a rock, as happened to some envious girls, about whom I will tell you a story.

There once lived a Prince, who was a widower. He had an only daughter, so dear to him that he saw with no other eyes than hers; and he kept a governess for her, who taught her chain-work and knitting, and to make point-lace, and showed her such affection as no words can tell. But she was very lonely, and many a time she said to the governess, "Oh, that you had been my mother, you who show me such kindness and love," and she said this so often that, at last, the governess, having a bee put into her bonnet, said to her one day, "If you will do as this foolish head of mine advises I shall be mother to you, and you will be as dear to me as the apple of my eye."

She was going to say more, when Zezolla, for that was the name of the Princess, said, "Pardon me if I stop the word upon your tongue. I know you wish me well, therefore, hush—enough. Only show me the way. Do you write and I will subscribe." "Well, then," answered the governess, "open your ears and listen, and you will get bread as white as the flowers. You know well enough that your father would even coin false money to please you, so do you entreat him when he is caressing you to marry me and make me Princess. Then, bless your stars! you shall be the mistress of my life."

When Zezolla heard this, every hour seemed to her a thousand years until she had done all that her governess had advised; and, as soon as the mourning for her mother's death was ended, she began to feel her father's pulse, and beg him to marry the governess. At first the Prince took it as a joke, but Zezolla went on shooting so long past the mark that at length she hit it, and he gave way to her entreaties. So he married the governess, and gave a great feast at the wedding.

Now, while the young folks were dancing, and Zezolla was standing at the window of her house, a dove came flying and perched upon a wall, and said to her, "Whenever you need anything send the request to the Dove of the Fairies in the Island of Sardinia, and you will instantly have what you wish."

For five or six days the new stepmother overwhelmed Zezolla with caresses, seating her at the best place at table, giving her the choicest morsels to eat, and clothing her in the richest apparel. But ere long, forgetting entirely the good service she had received (woe to him who has a bad master!), she began to bring forward six daughters of her own, for she had never before told any one that she was a widow with a bunch of girls; and she praised them so much, and talked her husband over in such a fashion, that at last the stepdaughters had all his favour, and the thought of his own child went entirely from his heart. In short, it fared so ill with the poor girl, bad to-day and worse to-morrow, that she was at last brought down from the royal chamber to the kitchen, from the canopy of state to the hearth, from splendid apparel of silks and gold to dishclouts, from the sceptre to the spit. And not only was her condition changed, but even her name, for, instead of Zezolla, she was now called Cenerentola.

It happened that the Prince had occasion to go to Sardinia upon affairs of state, and, calling the six stepdaughters, he asked them, one by one, what they would like him to bring them on his return. Then one wished for splendid dresses, another to have head-ornaments, another rouge for the face, another toys and trinkets: one wished for this and one for that. At last the Prince said to his own daughter, as if in mockery, "And what would you have, child?" "Nothing, father," she replied, "but that you commend me to the Dove of the Fairies, and bid her send me something; and if you forget my request, may you be unable to stir backwards or forwards; so remember what I tell you, for it will fare with you accordingly."

Then the Prince went his way and did his business in Sardinia, and procured all the things that his stepdaughters had asked for; but poor Zezolla was quite out of his thoughts. And going on board

a ship he set sail to return, but the ship could not get out of the harbour; there it stuck fast just as if held by a sea-lamprey. The captain of the ship, who was almost in despair and fairly tired out, laid himself down to sleep, and in his dream he saw a fairy, who said to him, "Know you the reason why you cannot work the ship out of port? It is because the Prince who is on board with you has broken his promise to his daughter, remembering every one except his own child."

Then the captain awoke and told his dream to the Prince, who, in shame and confusion at the breach of his promise, went to the Grotto of the Fairies, and, commending his daughter to them, asked them to send her something. And behold, there stepped forth from the grotto a beautiful maiden, who told him that she thanked his daughter for her kind remembrances, and bade him tell her to be merry and of good heart out of love to her. And thereupon she gave him a date-tree, a hoe, and a little bucket all of gold, and a silken napkin, adding that the one was to hoe with and the other to water the plant.

The Prince, marvelling at this present, took leave of the fairy, and returned to his own country. And when he had given his stepdaughters all the things they had desired, he at last gave his own daughter the gift which the fairy had sent her. Then Zezolla, out of her wits with joy, took the date-tree and planted it in a pretty flower-pot, hoed the earth round it, watered it, and wiped its leaves morning and evening with the silken napkin. In a few days it had grown as tall as a woman, and out of it came a fairy, who said to Zezolla, "What do you wish for?" And Zezolla replied that she wished sometimes to leave the house without her sisters' knowledge. The fairy answered, "Whenever you desire this, come to the flower-pot and say:

My little Date-tree, my golden tree,
With a golden hoe I have hoed thee,
With a golden can I have watered thee,
With a silken cloth I have wiped thee dry,
Now strip thee and dress me speedily.

And when you wish to undress, change the last words and say, 'Strip me and dress thee.'"

When the time for the feast was come, and the stepmother's daughters appeared, dressed out so fine, all ribbons and flowers, and slippers and shoes, sweet smells and bells, and roses and posies, Zezolla ran quickly to the flower-pot, and no sooner had she repeated the words, as the fairy had told her, than she saw herself arrayed like a queen, seated upon a palfrey, and attended by twelve smart pages, all in their best clothes. Then she went to the ball, and made the sisters envious of this unknown beauty.

Even the young King himself was there, and as soon as he saw her he stood magic-bound with amazement, and ordered a trusty servant to find out who was that beautiful maiden, and where she lived. So the servant followed in her footsteps; but when Zezolla noticed the trick she threw on the ground a handful of crown-pieces which she had made the date-tree give her for this purpose. Then the servant lighted his lantern, and was so busy picking up all the crown-pieces that he forgot to follow the palfrey; and Zezolla came home quite safely, and had changed her clothes, as the fairy told her, before the wicked sisters arrived, and, to vex her and make her envious, told her of all the fine things they had seen. But the King was very angry with the servant, and warned him not to miss finding out next time who this beautiful maiden was, and where she dwelt.

Soon there was another feast, and again the sisters all went to it, leaving poor Zezolla at home on the kitchen hearth. Then she ran quickly to the date-tree, and repeated the spell, and instantly there appeared a number of damsels, one with a looking-glass, another with a bottle of rose-water, another with the curling-irons, another with combs, another with pins, another with dresses, and another with capes and collars. And they decked her out as glorious as the sun, and put her in a coach drawn by six white horses, and attended by footmen and pages in livery. And no sooner did she appear in the ball-room than the hearts of the sisters were filled with amazement, and the King was overcome with love.

When Zezolla went home the servant followed her again, but so that she should not be caught she threw down a handful of pearls and jewels, and the good fellow, seeing that they were not things to lose, stayed to pick them up. So she had time to slip away and take off her fine dress as before.

Meanwhile the servant had returned slowly to the King, who cried out when he saw him, "By the souls of my ancestors, if you do not find out who she is you shall have such a thrashing as was never before heard of, and as many kicks as you have hairs in your beard!"

When the next feast was held, and the sisters were safely out of the house, Zezolla went to the date-tree, and once again repeated the spell. In an instant she found herself splendidly arrayed and seated in a coach of gold, with ever so many servants around her, so that she looked just like a queen. Again the sisters were beside themselves with envy; but this time, when she left the ball-room, the King's servant kept close to the coach. Zezolla, seeing that the man was ever running by her side, cried, "Coachman, drive on quickly," and in a trice the coach set off at such a rattling pace that she lost one of her slippers, the prettiest thing that ever was seen. The servant being unable to catch the coach, which flew like a bird, picked up the slipper, and carrying it to the King told him all that happened. Whereupon the King, taking it in his hand, said, "If the basement, indeed, is so beautiful, what must the building be. You who until now were the prison of a white foot are now the fetter of an unhappy heart!"

Then he made a proclamation that all the women in the country should come to a banquet, for which the most splendid provision was made of pies and pastries, and stews and ragouts, macaroni and sweetmeats—enough to feed a whole army. And when all the women were assembled, noble and ignoble, rich and poor, beautiful and ugly, the King tried the slipper on each one of the guests to see whom it should fit to a hair, and thus be able to discover by the help of the slipper the maiden of whom he was in search, but not one foot could he find to fit it. So he examined them closely whether indeed every one was there; and the Prince confessed that he had left one daughter behind, "but," said he, "she is always on the hearth, and is such a graceless simpleton that she is unworthy to sit and eat at your table." But the King said, "Let her be the very first on the list, for so I will."

So all the guests departed—the very next day they assembled again, and with the wicked sisters came Zezolla. When the King saw her he had his suspicions, but said nothing. And after the feast came the trial of the slipper, which, as soon as ever it approached Zezolla's foot, it darted on to it of its own accord like iron flies to the magnet. Seeing this, the King ran to her and took her in his arms, and seating her under the royal canopy, he set the crown upon her head, whereupon all made their obeisance and homage to her as their queen.

When the wicked sisters saw this they were full of venom and rage, and, not having patience to look upon the object of their hatred, they slipped quietly away on tip-toe and went home to their mother, confessing, in spite of themselves, that—

"He is a madman who resists the Stars."

VII THE MERCHANT

Troubles are usually the brooms and shovels that smooth the road to a man's good fortune, of which he little dreams. Many a man curses the rain that falls upon his head, and knows not that it brings abundance to drive away hunger; as is seen in the person of a young man of whom I will tell you.

It is said that there was once a very rich merchant named Antoniello, who had a son called Cienzo. It happened that Cienzo was one day throwing stones on the sea-shore with the son of the King of Naples, and by chance broke his companion's head. When he told his father, Antoniello flew into a rage with fear of the consequences and abused his son; but Cienzo answered, "Sir, I have always heard say that better is the law court than the doctor in one's house. Would it not have been worse if he had broken my head? It was he who began and provoked me. We are but boys, and there are two sides to the quarrel. After all tis a first fault, and the King is a man of reason; but let the worst come to the worst, what great harm can he do me? The wide world is one's home; and let him who is afraid turn constable."

But Antoniello would not listen to reason. He made sure the King would kill Cienzo for his fault and said, "Don't stand here at risk of your life; but march off this very instant, so that nobody may hear a word, new or old, of what you have done. A bird in the bush is better than a bird in the cage. Here is money. Take one of the two enchanted horses I have in the stable, and the dog which is also enchanted, and tarry no longer here. It is better to scamper off and use your own heels than to be touched by another's; better to throw your legs over your back than to carry your head between two legs. If you don't take your knapsack and be off, none of the Saints can help you!"

Then begging his father's blessing, Cienzo mounted his horse, and tucking the enchanted dog under his arm, he went his way out of the city. Making a winter of tears with a summer of sighs he went his way until the evening, when he came to a wood that kept the Mule of the Sun outside its limits, while it was amusing itself with Silence and the Shades. An old house stood there, at the foot of a tower. Cienzo knocked at the door of the tower; but the master, being in fear of robbers, would not open to him, so the poor youth was obliged to remain in the ruined old house. He turned his horse out to graze in a meadow, and threw himself on some straw he found, with the dog by his side. But scarcely had he closed his eyes when he was awakened by the barking of the dog, and heard footsteps stirring in the house. Cienzo, who was bold and venturesome, seized his sword and began to lay about him in the dark; but perceiving that he was only striking the wind and hit no one, he turned round again to sleep. After a few minutes he felt himself pulled gently by the foot. He turned to lay hold again of his cutlass, and jumping up, exclaimed, "Hollo there! you are getting too troublesome; but leave off this sport and let's have a bout of it if you have any pluck, for you have found the last to your shoe!"

At these words he heard a shout of laughter and then a hollow voice saying, "Come down here and I will tell you who I am." Then Cienzo, without losing courage, answered, "Wait awhile, I'll come." So he groped about until at last he found a ladder which led to a cellar; and, going down, he saw a lighted lamp, and three ghost-looking figures who were making a piteous clamour, crying, "Alas, my beauteous treasure, I must lose thee!"

When Cienzo saw this he began himself to cry and lament, for company's sake; and after he had wept for some time, the Moon having now, with the axe of her rays broken the bar of the Sky, the three figures who were making the outcry said to Cienzo, "Take this treasure, which is destined for thee alone, but mind and take care of it." Then they vanished. And Cienzo, espying the sunlight through a hole in the wall, wished to climb up again, but could not find the ladder, whereat he set up such a cry that the master of the tower heard him and fetched a ladder, when they discovered a

great treasure. He wished to give part of it to Cienzo, but the latter refused; and taking his dog and mounting once more on his horse set out again on his travels.

After a while he arrived at a wild and dreary forest, so dark that it made you shudder. There, upon the bank of a river, he found a fairy surrounded by a band of robbers. Cienzo, seeing the wicked intention of the robbers, seized his sword and soon made a slaughter of them. The fairy showered thanks upon him for this brave deed done for her sake, and invited him to her palace that she might reward him. But Cienzo replied, "It is nothing at all; thank you kindly. Another time I will accept the favour; but now I am in haste, on business of importance!"

So saying he took his leave; and travelling on a long way he came at last to the palace of a King, which was all hung with mourning, so that it made one's heart black to look at it. When Cienzo inquired the cause of the mourning the folks answered, "A dragon with seven heads has made his appearance in this country, the most terrible monster that ever was seen, with the crest of a cock, the head of a cat, eyes of fire, the mouth of a bulldog, the wings of a bat, the claws of a bear, and the tail of a serpent. Now this dragon swallows a maiden every day, and now the lot has fallen on Menechella, the daughter of the King. So there is great weeping and wailing in the royal palace, since the fairest creature in all the land is doomed to be devoured by this horrid beast."

When Cienzo heard this he stepped aside and saw Menechella pass by with the mourning train, accompanied by the ladies of the court and all the women of the land, wringing their hands and tearing out their hair by handfuls, and bewailing the sad fate of the poor girl. Then the dragon came out of the cave. But Cienzo laid hold of his sword and struck off a head in a trice; but the dragon went and rubbed his neck on a certain plant which grew not far off, and suddenly the head joined itself on again, like a lizard joining itself to its tail. Cienzo, seeing this, exclaimed, "He who dares not, wins not"; and, setting his teeth, he struck such a furious blow that he cut off all seven heads, which flew from the necks like peas from the pan. Whereupon he took out the tongues, and putting them in his pocket, he flung the heads a mile apart from the body, so that they might never come together again. Then he sent Menechella home to her father, and went himself to repose in a tavern.

When the King saw his daughter his delight is not to be told; and having heard the manner in which she had been freed, he ordered a proclamation to be instantly made, that whosoever had killed the dragon should come and marry the Princess. Now a rascal of a country fellow, hearing this proclamation, took the heads of the dragon, and said, "Menechella has been saved by me; these hands have freed the land from destruction; behold the dragon's heads, which are the proofs of my valour; therefore recollect, every promise is a debt." As soon as the King heard this, he lifted the crown from his own head and set it upon the countryman's poll, who looked like a thief on the gallows.

The news of this proclamation flew through the whole country, till at last it came to the ears of Cienzo, who said to himself, "Verily, I am a great blockhead! I had hold of Fortune by the forelock, and I let her escape out of my hand. Here's a man offers to give me the half of a treasure he finds, and I care no more for it than a German for cold water; the fairy wishes to entertain me in her palace, and I care as little for it as an ass for music; and now that I am called to the crown, here I stand and let a rascally thief cheat me out of my trump-card!" So saying he took an inkstand, seized a pen, and spreading out a sheet of paper, began to write:

"To the most beautiful jewel of women, Menechella—Having, by the favour of Sol in Leo, saved thy life, I hear that another plumes himself with my labours, that another claims the reward of the service which I rendered. Thou, therefore, who wast present at the dragon's death, canst assure the King of the truth, and prevent his allowing another to gain this reward while I have had all the toil. For it will be the right effect of thy fair royal grace and the merited recompense of this strong hero's fist. In conclusion, I kiss thy delicate little hands.

"From the Inn of the Flower-pot, Sunday."

Having written this letter, and sealed it with a wafer, he placed it in the mouth of the enchanted dog, saying, "Run off as fast as you can and take this to the King's daughter. Give it to no one else, but place it in the hand of that silver-faced maiden herself."

Away ran the dog to the palace as if he were flying, and going up the stairs he found the King, who was still paying compliments to the country clown. When the man saw the dog with the letter in his mouth, he ordered it to be taken from him; but the dog would not give it to any one, and bounding up to Menechella he placed it in her hand. Then Menechella rose from her seat, and, making a curtsy to the King, she gave him the letter to read; and when the King had read it he ordered that the dog should be followed to see where he went, and that his master should be brought before him. So two of the courtiers immediately followed the dog, until they came to the tavern, where they found Cienzo; and, delivering the message from the King, they conducted him to the palace, into the presence of the King. Then the King demanded how it was that he boasted of having killed the dragon, since the heads were brought by the man who was sitting crowned at his side. And Cienzo answered, "That fellow deserves a pasteboard mitre rather than a crown, since he has had the impudence to tell you a bouncing lie. But to prove to you that I have done the deed and not this rascal, order the heads to be produced. None of them can speak to the proof without a tongue, and these I have brought with me as witnesses to convince you of the truth."

So saying he pulled the tongues out of his pocket, while the countryman was struck all of a heap, not knowing what would be the end of it; and the more so when Menechella added, "This is the man! Ah, you dog of a countryman, a pretty trick you have played me!" When the King heard this, he took the crown from the head of that false loon and placed it on that of Cienzo; and he was on the point of sending the imposter to the galleys, but Cienzo begged the King to have mercy on him and to confound his wickedness with courtesy. Then he married Menechella, and the tables were spread and a royal banquet was set forth; and in the morning they sent for Antoniello with all his family; and Antoniello soon got into great favour with the King, and saw in the person of his son the saying verified—

"A straight port to a crooked ship."

VIII GOAT-FACE

All the ill-deeds that a man commits have some colour of excuse—either contempt which provokes, need which compels, love which blinds, or anger which breaks the neck. But ingratitude is a thing that has no excuse, true or false, upon which it can fix; and it is therefore the worst of vices, since it dries up the fountain of compassion, extinguishes the fire of love, closes the road to benefits, and causes vexation and repentance to spring up in the hearts of the ungrateful. As you will see in the story which I am about to relate.

A peasant had twelve daughters, not one of whom was a head taller than the next; for every year their mother presented him with a little girl; so that the poor man, to support his family decently, went early every morning as a day labourer and dug hard the whole day long. With what his labour produced he just kept his little ones from dying of hunger.

He happened, one day, to be digging at the foot of a mountain, the spy of other mountains, that thrust its head above the clouds to see what they were doing up in the sky, and close to a cavern so deep and dark that the sun was afraid to enter it. Out of this cavern there came a green lizard as big as a crocodile; and the poor man was so terrified that he had not the power to run away, expecting every moment the end of his days from a gulp of that ugly animal. But the lizard, approaching him, said, "Be not afraid, my good man, for I am not come here to do you any harm, but to do you good."

When Masaniello (for that was the name of the labourer) heard this, he fell on his knees and said, "Mistress What's-your-name, I am wholly in your power. Act then worthily and have compassion on this poor trunk that has twelve branches to support."

"It is on this very account," said the lizard, "that I am disposed to serve you; so bring me, to-morrow morning the youngest of your daughters; for I will rear her up like my own child, and love her as my life."

At this the poor father was more confounded than a thief when the stolen goods are found on his back. For, hearing the lizard ask him for one of his daughters, and that too, the tenderest of them, he concluded that the cloak was not without wool on it, and that she wanted the child as a titbit to stay her appetite. Then he said to himself, "If I give her my daughter, I give her my soul. If I refuse her, she will take this body of mine. If I yield her, I am robbed of my heart; if I deny her she will suck out my blood. If I consent, she takes away part of myself; if I refuse, she takes the whole. What shall I resolve on? What course shall I take? What expedient shall I adopt? Oh, what an ill day's work have I made of it! What a misfortune has rained down from heaven upon me!"

While he was speaking thus, the lizard said, "Resolve quickly and do what I tell you; or you will leave only your rags here. For so I will have it, and so it will be." Masaniello, hearing this decree and having no one to whom he could appeal, returned home quite melancholy, as yellow in the face as if he had jaundice; and his wife, seeing him hanging his head like a sick bird and his shoulders like one that is wounded, said to him, "What has happened to you, husband? Have you had a quarrel with any one? Is there a warrant out against you? Or is the ass dead?"

"Nothing of that sort," said Masaniello, "but a horned lizard has put me into a fright, for she has threatened that if I do not bring her our youngest daughter, she will make me suffer for it. My head is turning like a reel. I know not what fish to take. On one side love constrains me; on the other the burden of my family. I love Renzolla dearly, I love my own life dearly. If I do not give the lizard this portion of my heart, she will take the whole compass of my unfortunate body. So now, dear wife, advise me, or I am ruined!"

When his wife heard this, she said, "Who knows, husband, but this may be a lizard with two tails, that will make our fortune? Who knows but this lizard may put an end to all our miseries? How

often, when we should have an eagle's sight to discern the good luck that is running to meet us, we have a cloth before our eyes and the cramp in our hands, when we should lay hold on it. So go, take her away, for my heart tells me that some good fortune awaits the poor little thing!"

These words comforted Masaniello; and the next morning, as soon as the Sun with the brush of his rays whitewashed the Sky, which the shades of night had blackened, he took the little girl by the hand, and led her to the cave. Then the lizard came out, and taking the child gave the father a bag full of crowns, saying, "Go now, be happy, for Renzolla has found both father and mother."

Masaniello, overjoyed, thanked the lizard and went home to his wife. There was money enough for portions to all the other daughters when they married, and even then the old folks had sauce remaining for themselves to enable them to swallow with relish the toils of life.

Then the lizard made a most beautiful palace for Renzolla, and brought her up in such state and magnificence as would have dazzled the eyes of any queen. She wanted for nothing. Her food was fit for a count, her clothing for a princess. She had a hundred maidens to wait upon her, and with such good treatment she grew as sturdy as an oak-tree.

It happened, as the King was out hunting in those parts, that night overtook him, and as he stood looking round, not knowing where to lay his head, he saw a candle shining in the palace. So he sent one of his servants, to ask the owner to give him shelter. When the servant came to the palace, the lizard appeared before him in the shape of a beautiful lady; who, after hearing his message, said that his master should be a thousand times welcome, and that neither bread nor knife should there be wanting. The King, on hearing this reply, went to the palace and was received like a cavalier. A hundred pages went out to meet him, so that it looked like the funeral of a rich man. A hundred other pages brought the dishes to the table. A hundred others made a brave noise with musical instruments. But, above all, Renzolla served the King and handed him drink with such grace that he drank more love than wine.

When he had thus been so royally entertained, he felt he could not live without Renzolla; so, calling the fairy, he asked her for his wife. Whereupon the fairy, who wished for nothing but Renzolla's good, not only freely consented, but gave her a dowry of seven millions of gold.

The King, overjoyed at this piece of good fortune, departed with Renzolla, who, ill-mannered and ungrateful for all the fairy had done for her, went off with her husband without uttering one single word of thanks. Then the fairy, beholding such ingratitude, cursed her, and wished that her face should become like that of a she-goat; and hardly had she uttered the words, when Renzolla's mouth stretched out, with a beard a span long on it, her jaws shrunk, her skin hardened, her cheeks grew hairy, and her plaited tresses turned to pointed horns.

When the poor King saw this he was thunderstruck, not knowing what had happened that so great a beauty should be thus transformed; and, with sighs and tears he exclaimed, "Where are the locks that bound me? Where are the eyes that transfixed me? Must I then be the husband of a she-goat? No, no, my heart shall not break for such a goat-face!" So saying, as soon as they reached his palace, he put Renzolla into a kitchen, along with a chambermaid; and gave to each of them ten bundles of flax to spin, commanding them to have the thread ready at the end of a week.

The maid, in obedience to the King, set about carding the flax, preparing and putting it on the distaff, twirling her spindle, reeling it and working away without ceasing; so that on Saturday evening her thread was all done. But Renzolla, thinking she was still the same as in the fairy's house, not having looked at herself in the glass, threw the flax out of the window, saying, "A pretty thing indeed of the King to set me such work to do! If he wants shirts let him buy them, and not fancy that he picked me up out of the gutter. But let him remember that I brought him home seven millions of gold, and that I am his wife and not his servant. Methinks, too, that he is somewhat of a donkey to treat me this way!"

Nevertheless, when Saturday morning came, seeing that the maid had spun all her share of the flax, Renzolla was greatly afraid; so away she went to the palace of the fairy and told her misfortune.

Then the fairy embraced her with great affection, and gave her a bag full of spun thread, to present to the King and show him what a notable and industrious housewife she was. Renzolla took the bag, and without saying one word of thanks, went to the royal palace; so again the fairy was quite angered at the conduct of the graceless girl.

When the King had taken the thread, he gave two little dogs, one to Renzolla and one to the maid, telling them to feed and rear them. The maid reared hers on bread crumbs and treated it like a child; but Renzolla grumbled, saying, "A pretty thing truly! As my grandfather used to say, Are we living under the Turks? Am I indeed to comb and wait upon dogs?" and she flung the dog out of the window!

Some months afterwards, the King asked for the dogs; whereat Renzolla, losing heart, ran off again to the fairy, and at the gate stood the old man who was the porter. "Who are you," said he, "and whom do you want?" Renzolla, hearing herself addressed in this off-hand way, replied, "Don't you know me, you old goat-beard?"

"Why do you miscall me?" said the porter. "This is the thief accusing the constable. I a goat-beard indeed! You are a goat-beard and a half, and you merit it and worse for your presumption. Wait awhile, you impudent woman; I'll enlighten you and you will see to what your airs and impertinence have brought you!"

So saying, he ran into his room, and taking a looking-glass, set it before Renzolla; who, when she saw her ugly, hairy visage, was like to have died with terror. Her dismay at seeing her face so altered that she did not know herself cannot be told. Whereupon the old man said to her, "You ought to recollect, Renzolla, that you are a daughter of a peasant and that it was the fairy that raised you to be a queen. But you, rude, unmannerly, and thankless as you are, having little gratitude for such high favours, have kept her waiting outside your heart, without showing the slightest mark of affection. You have brought the quarrel on yourself; see what a face you have got by it! See to what you are brought by your ingratitude; for through the fairy's spell you have not only changed face, but condition. But if you will do as this white-beard advises, go and look for the fairy; throw yourself at her feet, tear your beard, beat your breast, and ask pardon for the ill-treatment you have shown her. She is tender-hearted and she will be moved to pity by your misfortune."

Renzolla, who was touched to the quick, and felt that he had hit the nail on the head, followed the old man's advice. Then the fairy embraced and kissed her; and restoring her to her former appearance, she clad her in a robe that was quite heavy with gold; and placing her in a magnificent coach, accompanied with a crowd of servants, she brought her to the King. When the King beheld her, so beautiful and splendidly attired, he loved her as his own life; blaming himself for all the misery he had made her endure, but excusing himself on account of that odious goat-face which had been the cause of it. Thus Renzolla lived happy, loving her husband, honouring the fairy, and showing herself grateful to the old man, having learned to her cost that—

"It is always good to be mannerly."

IX

THE ENCHANTED DOE

Great is the power of friendship, which makes us willingly bear toils and perils to serve a friend. We value our wealth as a trifle and life as a straw, when we can give them for a friend's sake. Fables teach us this and history is full of instances of it; and I will give you an example which my grandmother used to relate to me. So open your ears and shut your mouths and hear what I shall tell you.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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