

Conclusion

Stories From The Pentamerone

Italian

Advanced
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All sat listening to Ciommetella's last story. Some praised the skill with which she had told it, while others murmured at her indiscretion, saying that, in the presence of the Princess, she ought not to have exposed to blame the ill-deeds of another slave, and run the risk of stopping the game. But Lucia herself sat upon thorns, and kept turning and twisting herself about all the time the story was being told; insomuch that the restlessness of her body betrayed the storm that was in her heart, at seeing in the tale of another slave the exact image of her own deceit. Gladly would she have dismissed the whole company, but that, owing to the desire which the doll had given her to hear stories, she could not restrain her passion for them. And, partly also not to give Taddeo cause for suspicion, she swallowed this bitter pill, intending to take a good revenge in proper time and place. But Taddeo, who had grown quite fond of the amusement, made a sign to Zoza to relate her story; and, after making her curtsy, she began—

“Truth, my Lord Prince, has always been the mother of hatred, and I would not wish, therefore, by obeying your commands, to offend any one of those about me. But as I am not accustomed to weave fictions or to invent stories, I am constrained, both by nature and habit, to speak the truth; and, although the proverb says, Tell truth and fear nothing, yet knowing well that truth is not welcome in the presence of princes, I tremble lest I say anything that may offend you.”

“Say all you wish,” replied Taddeo, “for nothing but what is sweet can come from those pretty lips.”

These words were stabs to the heart of the Slave, as all would have seen plainly if black faces were, as white ones, the book of the soul. And she would have given a finger of her hand to have been rid of these stories, for all before her eyes had grown blacker even than her face. She feared that the last story was only the fore-runner of mischief to follow; and from a cloudy morning she foretold a bad day. But Zoza, meanwhile, began to enchant all around her with the sweetness of her words, relating her sorrows from first to last, and beginning with her natural melancholy, the unhappy augury of all she had to suffer. Then she went on to tell of the old woman's curse, her painful wanderings, her arrival at the fountain, her bitter weeping, and the treacherous sleep which had been the cause of her ruin.

The Slave, hearing Zoza tell the story in all its breadth and length, and seeing the boat go out of its course, exclaimed, "Be quiet and hold your tongue! or I will not answer for the consequences." But Taddeo, who had discovered how matters stood, could no longer contain himself; so, stripping off the mask and throwing the saddle on the ground, he exclaimed, "Let her tell her story to the end, and have done with this nonsense. I have been made a fool of for long enough, and, if what I suspect is true, it were better that you had never been born." Then he commanded Zoza to continue her story in spite of his wife; and Zoza, who only waited for the sign, went on to tell how the Slave had found the pitcher and had treacherously robbed her of her good fortune. And, thereupon, she fell to weeping in such a manner, that every person present was affected at the sight.

Taddeo, who, from Zoza's tears and the Slave's silence, discerned the truth of the matter, gave Lucia a rare scolding, and made her confess her treachery with her own lips. Then he gave instant orders that she should be buried alive up to her neck, that she might die a more painful death. And, embracing Zoza, he caused her to be treated with all honour as his Princess and wife, sending to invite the King of Wood-Valley to come to the feast.

With these fresh nuptials terminated the greatness of the Slave and the amusement of these stories. And much good may they do you, and promote your health! And may you lay them down as unwillingly as I do, taking my leave with regret at my heels and a good spoonful of honey in my mouth.

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