



The Dove

Stories From The Pentamerone

Italian

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He who is born a prince should not act like a beggar boy. The man who is high in rank ought not to set a bad example to those below him; for the little donkey learns from the big one to eat straw. It is no wonder, therefore, that Heaven sends him troubles by bushels—as happened to a prince who was brought into great difficulties for ill-treating and tormenting a poor woman, so that he was near losing his life miserably.

About eight miles from Naples there was once a deep wood of fig-trees and poplars. In this wood stood a half-ruined cottage, wherein dwelt an old woman, who was as light of teeth as she was burdened with years. She had a hundred wrinkles in her face, and a great many more in her purse, and all her silver covered her head, so that she went from one thatched cottage to another, begging alms to keep life in her. But as folks nowadays much rather give a purseful of crowns to a crafty spy than a farthing to a poor needy man, she had to toil a whole day to get a dish of kidney-beans, and that at a time when they were very plentiful. Now one day the poor old woman, after having washed the beans, put them in a pot, placed it outside the window, and went on her way to the wood to gather sticks for the fire. But while she was away, Nardo Aniello, the King's son, passed by the cottage on his way to the chase; and, seeing the pot at the window, he took a great fancy to have a fling at it; and he made a bet with his attendants to see who should fling the straightest and hit in the middle with a stone. Then they began to throw at the innocent pot; and in three or four casts the prince hit it to a hair and won the bet.

The old woman returned just after they had gone away, and seeing the sad disaster, she began to act as if she

were beside herself, crying, "Ay, let him stretch out his arm and go about boasting how he has broken this pot! The villainous rascal who has sown my beans out of season. If he had no compassion for my misery, he should have had some regard for his own interest; for I pray Heaven, on my bare knees and from the bottom of my soul, that he may fall in love with the daughter of some ogress, who may plague and torment him in every way. May his mother-in-law lay on him such a curse that he may see himself living and yet bewail himself as dead; and being spellbound by the beauty of the daughter, and the arts of the mother, may he never be able to escape, but be obliged to remain. May she order him about with a cudgel in her hand, and give him bread with a little fork, that he may have good cause to lament over my beans which he has spilt on the ground." The old woman's curses took wing and flew up to Heaven in a trice; so that, notwithstanding what a proverb says, "for a woman's curse you are never the worse, and the coat of a horse that has been cursed always shines," she rated the Prince so soundly that he well-nigh jumped out of his skin.

Scarcely had two hours passed when the Prince, losing himself in the wood and parted from his attendants, met a beautiful maiden, who was going along picking up snails and saying with a laugh—

"Snail, snail, put out your horn,
Your mother is laughing you to scorn,
For she has a little son just born."

When the Prince saw this beautiful apparition he knew not what had befallen him; and, as the beams from the eyes of that crystal face fell upon the tinder of his heart, he was all in a flame, so that he became a lime-kiln wherein the stones of designs were burnt to build the houses of hopes.

Now Filadoro (for so the maiden was named) was no wiser than other people; and the Prince, being a smart young fellow with handsome moustachios, pierced her heart through and through, so that they stood looking at one another for compassion with their eyes, which proclaimed aloud the secret of their souls. After they had both remained thus for a long time, unable to utter a single word, the Prince at last, finding his voice, addressed Filadoro thus, "From what meadow has this flower of beauty sprung? From what mine has this treasure of beauteous things come to light? O happy woods, O fortunate groves, which this nobility inhabits, which this illumination of the festivals of love irradiates."

"Kiss this hand, my lord," answered Filadoro, "not so much modesty; for all the praise that you have bestowed on me belongs to your virtues, not to my merits. Such as I am, handsome or ugly, fat or thin, a witch or a fairy, I am wholly at your command; for your manly form has captivated my heart, your princely mien has pierced

me through from side to side, and from this moment I give myself up to you for ever as a chained slave.”

At these words the Prince seized at once her hand, kissing the ivory hook that had caught his heart. At this ceremony of the prince, Filadoro’s face grew as red as scarlet. But the more Nardo Aniello wished to continue speaking, the more his tongue seemed tied; for in this wretched life there is no wine of enjoyment without dregs of vexation. And just at this moment Filadoro’s mother suddenly appeared, who was such an ugly ogress that Nature seemed to have formed her as a model of horrors. Her hair was like a besom of holly; her forehead like a rough stone; her eyes were comets that predicted all sorts of evils; her mouth had tusks like a boar’s—in short, from head to foot she was ugly beyond imagination. Now she seized Nardo Aniello by the nape of his neck, saying, “Hollo! what now, you thief! you rogue!”

“Yourself the rogue,” replied the Prince, “back with you, old hag!” And he was just going to draw his sword, when all at once he stood fixed like a sheep that has seen the wolf and can neither stir nor utter a sound, so that the ogress led him like an ass by the halter to her house. And when they came there she said to him, “Mind, now, and work like a dog, unless you wish to die like a dog. For your first task to-day you must have this acre of land dug and sown level as this room; and recollect that if I return in the evening and do not find the work finished, I shall eat you up.” Then, bidding her daughter take care of the house, she went to a meeting of the other ogresses in the wood.

Nardo Aniello, seeing himself in this dilemma, began to bathe his breast with tears, cursing his fate which brought him to this pass. But Filadoro comforted him, bidding him be of good heart, for she would ever risk her life to assist him. She said that she ought not to lament his fate which had led him to the house where she lived, who loved him so dearly, and that he showed little return for her love by being so despairing at what had happened. The Prince replied: “I am not grieved at having exchanged the royal palace for this hovel; splendid banquets for a crust of bread; a sceptre for a spade; not at seeing myself, who have terrified armies, now frightened by this hideous scarecrow; for I should deem all my disasters good fortune to be with you and to gaze upon you with these eyes. But what pains me to the heart is that I have to dig till my hands are covered with hard skin—I whose fingers are so delicate and soft as Barbary wool; and, what is still worse, I have to do more than two oxen could get through in a day. If I do not finish the task this evening your mother will eat me up; yet I should not grieve so much to quit this wretched body as to be parted from so beautiful a creature.”

So saying he heaved sighs by bushels, and shed many tears. But Filadoro, drying his eyes, said to him, “Fear not that my mother will touch a hair of your head. Trust to me and do not be afraid; for you must know that I

possess magical powers, and am able to make cream set on water and to darken the sun. Be of good heart, for by the evening the piece of land will be dug and sown without any one stirring a hand."

When Nardo Aniello heard this, he answered, "If you have magic power, as you say, O beauty of the world, why do we not fly from this country? For you shall live like a queen in my father's house." And Filadoro replied, "A certain conjunction of the stars prevents this, but the trouble will soon pass and we shall be happy."

With these and a thousand other pleasant discourses the day passed, and when the ogress came back she called to her daughter from the road and said, "Filadoro, let down your hair," for as the house had no staircase she always ascended by her daughter's tresses. As soon as Filadoro heard her mother's voice she unbound her hair and let fall her tresses, making a golden ladder to an iron heart. Whereupon the old woman mounted up quickly, and ran into the garden; but when she found it all dug and sown, she was beside herself with amazement; for it seemed to her impossible that a delicate lad should have accomplished such hard labour.

But the next morning, hardly had the Sun gone out to warm himself on account of the cold he had caught in the river of India, than the ogress went down again, bidding Nardo Aniello take care that in the evening she should find ready split six stacks of wood which were in the cellar, with every log cleft into four pieces, or otherwise she would cut him up like bacon and make a fry of him for supper.

On hearing this decree the poor Prince had liked to have died of terror, and Filadoro, seeing him half dead and pale as ashes, said, "Why! What a coward you are to be frightened at such a trifle." "Do you think it a trifle," replied Nardo Aniello, "to split six stacks of wood, with every log cleft into four pieces, between this time and the evening? Alas, I shall sooner be cleft in halves myself to fill the mouth of this horrid old woman." "Fear not," answered Filadoro, "for without giving yourself any trouble the wood shall all be split in good time. But meanwhile cheer up, if you love me, and do not split my heart with such lamentations."

Now when the Sun had shut up the shop of his rays, in order not to sell light to the Shades, the old woman returned; and, bidding Filadoro let down the usual ladder, she ascended, and finding the wood already split she began to suspect it was her own daughter who had given her this check. At the third day, in order to make a third trial, she told the Prince to clean out for her a cistern which held a thousand casks of water, for she wished to fill it anew, adding that if the task were not finished by the evening she would make mincemeat of him. When the old woman went away Nardo Aniello began again to weep and wail; and Filadoro, seeing that the labours increased, and that the old woman had something of the brute in her to burden the poor fellow

with such tasks and troubles, said to him, "Be quiet, and as soon as the moment has passed that interrupts my art, before the Sun says I am off, we will say good-bye to this house; sure enough, this evening my mother shall find the land cleared, and I will go off with you, alive or dead." The Prince, on hearing this news, embraced Filadoro and said, "Thou art the pole-star of this storm-tossed bark, my soul! Thou art the prop of my hopes."

Now, when the evening drew nigh, Filadoro having dug a hole in the garden into a large underground passage, they went out and took the way to Naples. But when they arrived at the grotto of Pozzuolo, Nardo Aniello said to Filadoro, "It will never do for me to take you to the palace on foot and dressed in this manner. Therefore wait at this inn and I will soon return with horses, carriages, servants, and clothes." So Filadoro stayed behind and the Prince went on his way to the city. Meantime the ogress returned home, and as Filadoro did not answer to her usual summons, she grew suspicious, ran into the wood, and cutting a great, long pole, placed it against the window and climbed up like a cat. Then she went into the house and hunted everywhere inside and out, high and low, but found no one. At last she perceived the hole, and seeing that it led into the open air, in her rage she did not leave a hair upon her head, cursing her daughter and the Prince, and praying that at the first kiss Filadoro's lover should receive he might forget her.

But let us leave the old woman to say her wicked curses and return to the Prince, who on arriving at the palace, where he was thought to be dead, put the whole house in an uproar, every one running to meet him and crying, "Welcome! welcome! Here he is, safe and sound, how happy we are to see him back in this country," with a thousand other words of affection. But as he was going up the stairs his mother met him half-way and embraced and kissed him, saying, "My son, my jewel, the apple of my eye, where have you been and why have you stayed away so long to make us all die with anxiety?" The Prince knew not what to answer, for he did not wish to tell her of his misfortunes; but no sooner had his mother kissed him than, owing to the curse, all that had passed went from his memory. Then the Queen told her son that to put an end to his going hunting and wasting his time in the woods, she wished him to get married. "Well and good," replied the Prince, "I am ready and prepared to do what you desire." So it was settled that within four days they should lead home to him the bride who had just arrived from the country of Flanders; and thereupon a great feasting and banquets were held.

But meanwhile Filadoro, seeing that her husband stayed away so long and hearing (I know not how) of the feast, waited in the evening till the servant-lad of the inn had gone to bed, and taking his clothes from the head of the bed, she left her own in their place, and disguising herself like a man, went to the court of the king,

where the cooks, being in want of help, took her as kitchen boy. When the tables were set out and the guests all took their seats, and the dishes were set down and the carver was cutting up a large English pie which Filadoro had made with her own hands, lo, out flew such a beautiful dove that the guests in their astonishment, forgetting to eat, fell to admiring the pretty bird, which said to the Prince in a piteous voice, "Have you so soon forgotten the love of Filadoro, and have all the services you received from her, ungrateful man, gone from your memory? Is it thus you repay the benefits she has done you: she who took you out of the claws of the ogress and gave you life and herself too? Woe to the woman who trusts too much to the words of man, who ever requites kindness with ingratitude, and pays debts with forgetfulness. But go, forget your promises, false man. And may the curses follow you which the unhappy maiden sends you from the bottom of her heart. But if the gods have not locked up their ears they will witness the wrong you have done her, and when you least expect it the lightning and thunder, fever and illness, will come to you. Enough, eat and drink, take your sports, for unhappy Filadoro, deceived and forsaken, will leave you the field open to make merry with your new wife." So saying, the dove flew away quickly and vanished like the wind. The Prince, hearing the murmuring of the dove, stood for a while stupefied. At length, he inquired whence the pie came, and when the carver told him that a scullion boy who had been taken to assist in the kitchen had made it, he ordered him to be brought into the room. Then Filadoro, throwing herself at the feet of Nardo Aniello, shedding a torrent of tears, said merely, "What have I done to you?" Whereupon the Prince at once recalled to mind the engagement he had made with her; and, instantly raising her up, seated her by his side, and when he related to his mother the great obligation he was under to this beautiful maiden and all that she had done for him, and how it was necessary that the promise he had given should be fulfilled, his mother, who had no other joy in life than her son, said to him, "Do as you please, so that you offend not this lady whom I have given you to wife." "Be not troubled," said the lady, "for, to tell the truth, I am very loth to remain in this country; with your kind permission I wish to return to my dear Flanders." Thereupon the Prince with great joy offered her a vessel and attendants; and, ordering Filadoro to be dressed like a Princess, when the tables were removed, the musicians came and they began the ball which lasted until evening.

So the feast being now ended, they all betook themselves to rest, and the Prince and Filadoro lived happily ever after, proving the truth of the proverb that—

"He who stumbles and does not fall,
Is helped on his way like a rolling ball."

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