



The Ingrates

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Italian

Intermediate
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There was once a man who went into the forest to gather wood, and saw a snake crushed under a large stone. He raised the stone a little with the handle of his axe and the snake crawled out. When it was at liberty it said to the man: "I am going to eat you." The man answered: "Softly; first let us hear the judgment of some one, and if I am condemned, then you shall eat me." The first one they met was a horse as thin as a stick, tied to an oak-tree. He had eaten the leaves as far as he could reach, for he was famished. The snake said to him: "Is it right for me to eat this man who has saved my life?"

The nag answered: "More than right. Just look at me! I was one of the finest horses. I have carried my master so many years, and what have I gained? Now that I am so badly off that I can no longer work they have tied me to this oak, and after I have eaten these few leaves I shall die of hunger. Eat the man, then; for he who does good is ill rewarded, and he who does evil must be well rewarded. Eat him, for you will be doing a good day's work."

They afterwards happened to find a mulberry-tree, all holes, for it was eaten by old age; and the snake asked it if it was right to eat the man who had saved its life. "Yes," the tree answered at once, "for I have given my master so many leaves that he has raised from them the finest silk-worms in the world; now that I can no longer stand upright, he has said that he is going to throw me into the fire. Eat him, then, for you will do well."

Afterwards they met the fox. The man took her aside and begged her to pronounce in his favor. The fox said: "The better to render judgment I must see just how the matter has happened." They all returned to the spot and arranged matters as they were at first; but as soon as the man saw the snake under the stone he cried out: "Where you are, there I will leave you." And there the snake remained. The fox wished in payment a bag of hens, and the man promised them to her for the next morning. The fox went there in the morning, and when the man saw her he put some dogs in the bag, and told the fox not to eat the hens close by, for fear the mistress of the house would hear it. So the fox did not open the bag until she had reached a distant valley; then the dogs came out and ate her; and so it is in the world; for who does good is ill rewarded and who does evil is well rewarded.

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