

Zelinda and the Monster

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Italian

Advanced
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There was once a poor man who had three daughters; and as the youngest was the fairest and most civil, and had the best disposition, her other two sisters envied her with a deadly envy, although her father, on the contrary, loved her dearly. It happened that in a neighboring town, in the month of January, there was a great fair, and that poor man was obliged to go there to lay in the provisions necessary for the support of his family; and before departing he asked his three daughters if they would like some small presents in proportion, you understand, to his means. Rosina wished a dress, Marietta asked him for a shawl, but Zelinda was satisfied with a handsome rose. The poor man set out on his journey early the next day, and when he arrived at the fair quickly bought what he needed, and afterward easily found Rosina's dress and Marietta's shawl; but at that season he could not find a rose for his Zelinda, although he took great pains in looking everywhere for one. However, anxious to please his dear Zelinda, he took the first road he came to, and after journeying a while arrived at a handsome garden inclosed by high walls; but as the gate was partly open he entered softly. He found the garden filled with every kind of flowers and plants, and in a corner was a tall rose-bush full of beautiful rose-buds. Wherever he looked no living soul appeared from whom he might ask a rose as a gift or for money, so the poor man, without thinking, stretched out his hand, and picked a rose for his Zelinda.

Mercy! scarcely had he pulled the flower from the stalk when there arose a great noise, and flames darted from the earth, and all at once there appeared a terrible Monster with the figure of a dragon, and hissed with all his might, and cried out, enraged at that poor Christian: "Rash man! what have you done? Now you must die at once, for you have had the audacity to touch and destroy my rose-bush."

The poor man, more than half dead with terror, began to weep and beg for mercy on his knees, asking pardon for the fault he had committed, and told why he had picked the rose; and then he added: "Let me depart; I have a family, and if I am killed they will go to destruction." But the Monster, more wicked than ever, responded: "Listen; one must die. Either bring me the girl that asked for the rose or I will kill you this very moment." It was impossible to move him by prayers or lamentations; the Monster persisted in his decision, and did not let the poor man go until he had sworn to bring him there in the garden his daughter Zelinda.

Imagine how downhearted that poor man returned home! He gave his oldest daughters their presents and Zelinda her rose; but his face was distorted and as white as though he had arisen from the dead; so that the girls, in terror, asked him what had happened and whether he had met with any misfortune. They were urgent, and at last the poor man, weeping bitterly, related the misfortunes of that unhappy journey and on what condition he had been able finally to return home. "In short," he exclaimed, "either Zelinda or I must be eaten alive by the Monster." Then the two sisters emptied the vials of their wrath on Zelinda. "Just see," they said, "that affected, capricious girl! She shall go to the Monster! She who wanted roses at this season. No, indeed! Papa must stay with us. The stupid creature!" At all these taunts Zelinda, without growing angry, simply said: "It is right that the one who has caused the misfortune should pay for it. I will go to the Monster's. Yes, Papa, take me to the garden, and the Lord's will be done."

The next day Zelinda and her sorrowful father began their journey and at nightfall arrived at the garden gate. When they entered they saw as usual no one, but they beheld a lordly palace all lighted and the doors wide open. When the two travellers entered the vestibule, suddenly four marble statues, with lighted torches in their hands, descended from their pedestals, and accompanied them up the stairs to a large hall where a table was lavishly spread. The travellers, who were very hungry, sat down and began to eat without ceremony; and when they had finished, the same statues conducted them to two handsome chambers for the night. Zelinda and her father were so weary that they slept like dormice all night.

At daybreak Zelinda and her father arose, and were served with everything for breakfast by invisible hands. Then they descended to the garden, and began to seek the Monster. When they came to the rose-bush he appeared in all his frightful ugliness. Zelinda, on seeing him, became pale with fear, and her limbs trembled, but the Monster regarded her attentively with his great fiery eyes, and afterward said to the poor man: "Very well; you have kept your word, and I am satisfied. Now depart and leave me alone here with the young girl." At this command the old man thought he should die; and Zelinda, too, stood there half stupefied and her eyes

was obliged to depart, leaving his dear Zelinda in the Monster's power.

When the Monster was alone with Zelinda he began to caress her, and make loving speeches to her, and managed to appear quite civil. There was no danger of his forgetting her, and he saw that she wanted nothing, and every day, talking with her in the garden, he asked her: "Do you love me, Zelinda? Will you be my wife?" The young girl always answered him in the same way: "I like you, sir, but I will never be your wife." Then the Monster appeared very sorrowful, and redoubled his caresses and attentions, and, sighing deeply, said: "But you see, Zelinda, if you should marry me wonderful things would happen. What they are I cannot tell you until you will be my wife."

Zelinda, although in her heart not dissatisfied with that beautiful place and with being treated like a queen, still did not feel at all like marrying the Monster, because he was too ugly and looked like a beast, and always answered his requests in the same manner. One day, however, the Monster called Zelinda in haste, and said: "Listen, Zelinda; if you do not consent to marry me it is fated that your father must die. He is ill and near the end of his life, and you will not be able even to see him again. See whether I am telling you the truth." And, drawing out an enchanted mirror, the Monster showed Zelinda her father on his death-bed. At that spectacle Zelinda, in despair and half mad with grief, cried: "Oh, save my father, for mercy's sake! Let me be able to embrace him once more before he dies. Yes, yes, I promise you I will be your faithful and constant wife, and that without delay. But save my father from death."

Scarcely had Zelinda uttered these words when suddenly the Monster was transformed into a very handsome youth. Zelinda was astounded by this unexpected change, and the young man took her by the hand, and said: "Know, dear Zelinda, that I am the son of the King of the Oranges. An old witch, touching me, changed me into the terrible Monster I was, and condemned me to be hidden in this rose-bush until a beautiful girl consented to become my wife."

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