

## CENERENTOLA.\*

IN the sea of Malice Envy frequently gets out of her depth; and whilst 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.

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THERE once lived a prince, who was a widower, but who had a 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 after a time the father married again, and took a wicked jade for his wife, who soon conceived a violent dislike to her stepdaughter; and all day long she made sour looks, wry faces and fierce eyes at her, till the poor child was beside herself with terror, and was for ever bewailing to her governess the bad

\* The title of this story is 'La Gatta Cenerentola,'—Puss on the hearth.

treatment she received from her stepmother, saying to her, "O heavens, that you had been my mother, you who show me so much kindness and affection!" And she went on thus, sighing and singing to this tune, till at last the governess, having a wasp put in her ear and blinded by the Mazzamauriello\*, 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 on to say more, when Zezolla† (for that was the girl's name) 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 to get out of my trouble; 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‡. When your father goes out, ask your stepmother to give you one of the old dresses that are in the large chest in the closet, in order to save the one you have on. Then she, who would like of all things to see you go in rags and tatters, will open the chest, and say, 'Hold up the lid!' and whilst you are holding it up, and she is rummaging about inside, let it fall with a bang, so as to break her neck. When

\* A wicked little imp.

† Lucretia.

‡ *i. e.* 'you shall have your wish.'

this is done, as you know well enough that your father would even coin false money to please you, do you entreat him when he is caressing you to take me to wife; for 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 the stepmother's death was ended, she began to feel her father's pulse, and to entreat 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 took Carmosina (that was the name of the governess) to wife, and gave a great feast at the wedding.

Now whilst the young folks were dancing, and Zezolla was standing at a window of her house, a dove came flying and perched upon a wall, and said to her, “Whenever you desire 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, whom she had until then kept concealed; and she praised them so much, and talked her husband over in such a manner, that at last the stepdaughters engrossed 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 today and worse tomorrow, 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,—*Imperia*, *Calamita*, *Fiorella*, *Diamante*, *Columbina*, *Pasearella*,—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; in short, one wished for this thing and another 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 either backwards or forwards : so remember what I tell you, for it will fare with you accordingly."

Then the prince went his way, and transacted his affairs in Sardinia, and procured all the things which his stepdaughters had asked for ; but poor Zezolla went quite out of his thoughts. And embarking 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 back 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 blood."

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 remembrance, and bade him tell her to be merry and of good heart, out of

\* *Remora*.—See Pliny, Nat. Hist. ix. 25.

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 the 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 flowerpot, hoed the earth around it, watered it, and wiped its leaves morning and evening with the silken napkin ; so that 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 flowerpot and say,

‘ My little Date-tree, my golden tree,  
 With a golden hoe I have hoed thee,  
 With a golden can I have water'd 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 verse, and say, ‘ Strip me, and dress thee. ’ ”

• When the time for the feast was come, and the step-mother's daughters appeared, drest out so fine, all ribbands and flowers, and slippers and shoes, sweet smells and bells, and roses and posies, Zezolla ran quickly to the flowerpot; and no sooner had she repeated the words which the fairy had told her, than she saw herself arrayed like a queen, seated upon a palfrey, and attended by twelve smart pages all drest in their best. Then she went to the ball where the sisters had gone, whose mouths watered with envy of the beauty of this graceful dove.

Now as luck would have it the king himself came to that same place, who, as soon as he saw the marvellous beauty of Zezolla, stood magic-bound with amazement, and ordered a trusty servant to find out who that beautiful creature was, and where she lived. So the servant followed in her footsteps; but Zezolla, observing the trick, 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 the lantern, and in his eagerness to fill his pockets with the crown-pieces he forgot to follow the palfrey. In the meantime Zezolla hastened home, and undressed herself as the fairy had told her. Soon afterwards the wicked sisters returned, and, in order to vex her and excite her envy, they told her of all kinds of beautiful things that they had seen.

Meanwhile the servant came back to the king, and told him what had happened with the crown-pieces; whereupon the king flew into a great rage, telling him that for a few paltry farthings he had sold his pleasure, and commanding him at all events to find out at the next feast who the beautiful maiden was, and where this pretty bird had its nest.

When the next feast was come, the sisters all went to it decked out smartly, leaving poor Zezolla at home on the hearth. Then Zezolla ran quickly to the date-tree, and repeated the words as before; and instantly there appeared a number of damsels, one with a looking-glass, another with a bottle of pumpkin-water, another with the curling-irons, another with a comb, another with pins, another with dresses, and another with capes and collars. And decking her out till she looked as beautiful as a sun, they placed her in a coach drawn by six horses, attended by footmen and pages in livery. And no sooner did she appear in the room where the former feast was held, than the hearts of the sisters were filled with amazement, and the breast of the king with fire.

When Zezolla went away again, the servant followed in her footsteps as before; but, in order not to be caught, she threw down a handful of pearls and jewels; and the good fellow, seeing that they were not things



to lose, staycd to pick them up. So Zczolla had time to slip home and take off her fine dress as before.

Meanwhile the servant returned slowly to the king, who exclaimed when he saw him, "By the souls of my ancestors, if you don't find out who she is, I'll give you a sound thrashing, and, what's more, I'll give you as many kicks as you have hairs in that beard of thine!"

When the next feast was held, and the sisters had gone to it, Zczolla went to the date-tree, and repeating the words of the charm, in an instant she was splendidly arrayed, and seated in a coach of gold, with ever so many servants around, so that she looked just like a queen. The envy of the sisters was excited as before; and when she left the room, the king's servant kept close\* to the coach. But Zczolla, seeing that the man kept running at her side, cried, "Coachman, drive on!" and in a trice the coach set off at such a rattling pace, that Zczolla lost one of her slippers, the prettiest thing that ever was seen. The servant, being unable to overtake the coach, which flew like a bird, picked up the slipper, and carrying it to the king told him all that had happened. Whereupon the king, taking it in his hand, said, "If the basement indeed is so beautiful, what must the building be? O beauteous

\* The Neapolitan is very pretty—*se cosette a ffilo duppio*.

candlestick, where is the candle that consumes me? O tripod of the bright boiler in which life simmers! O beautiful cork, fastened to the angling-line of Love, with which he has caught my soul! Lo, I embrace you, I press you to my heart; and if I cannot reach the plant, I adore at least the roots; if I cannot possess the capital of the column, I kiss the base. You who until now were the prison of a white foot, are now the fetter of an unhappy heart."

So saying he called his secretary, and commanded the trumpeter to sound a "Too, too!" and make proclamation, that all the women of that country should come to a feast and banquet which he had taken it into his head to give. And when the appointed day was come, heyday, what a feasting and frolic was there! from whence in the world came all the pies and pasties? whence the stews and ragouts? whence the maccaroni and sweetmeats? In short there was enough to feed a whole army.

And when the women were all assembled, noble and ignoble, rich and poor, old and young, beautiful and ugly, and when all was ready, the king tried the slipper first on one and then on another of the guests, to see whom it should fit to a hair, and to be able thus to discover by the form of the slipper the maiden of whom he was in search; but not finding one foot which would fit

it exactly, he began to despair. However, having ordered silence, he said, "Come again tomorrow, and eat a bit of dinner with me; and as you love me, don't leave a single girl or woman at home, be she who she may." Then the prince said, "I have indeed another daughter at home; but she is always on the hearth, and is such a graceless simpleton that she is unworthy to sit down to 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, and the next day they assembled again, and with Carmosina's daughters came Zezolla. The instant the king saw her, he imagined it was she whom he longed to find; but this he kept to himself. And when the feasting was ended, came the trial of the slipper; but as soon as ever it approached Zezolla's foot, it darted of itself to the foot of that painted egg\* of Venus, as the iron flies to the magnet; at the sight of which the king ran to her, and made a press for her with 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 sisters beheld this, they were full of spite and rage; and not having patience to look upon this object of their hatred, they slipped quietly away on tip-

\* See note, p. 16.

toe, and went home to their mother, confessing in spite of themselves that

“ He is a madman who resists the stars.”

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It is impossible to conceive how much the good fortune of Zezolla touched the heart of every one present ; but greatly as they praised the liberality of Heaven to the poor girl, they considered the punishment of Carmosina's daughters far too trifling ; for there is no punishment which pride does not deserve, no misfortune that envy does not merit. But in the midst of all the babbling about this story, the Prince Taddco placed the forefinger of his right hand across his lips, and made a sign for silence ; whereupon all stopped in an instant, as if they had seen a wolf ; or like a schoolboy, who in the height of the fun sees the master unexpectedly appear. Then the Prince made a sign to Ciulla to commence her story, and she thus began.