

Cendrouse

Once upon a time, there was a man whose wife had died shortly after giving birth to a little girl. He deeply grieved that death, but, because he was still young and he did not have a housewife to keep his house, he remarried and, in his second marriage, had two daughters.

His wife did not at all like the child from the first bed: she hardly gave her anything to eat, imposed upon her the most burdensome work, and dressed her so poorly that one could see her skin through her miserable clothing. Also, when the little girl returned in the evening from the field where, even in the dead of winter, they sent her to tend to the sheep and cows as her sisters warmed up in the house, she was so cold that her teeth chattered: she would squat down like a cat at the corner of the chimney next to the cinders to try to warm her poor body. Her sisters, who had beautiful skirts that were very warm, good wool stockings, and well-fitted clogs, mocked her without pity: deriding her, they called her Cendrouse, and this remained her nickname.

One winter day, they sent her into the fields, and it was so cold that she shivered, and trembled, and could not succeed at all in warming any of her limbs: she saw an old, good woman covered by a worn, torn cape, who approached her and said to her in a soft voice:

“You appear to be cold, my little girl?”

“Oh, yes, my good woman! The clothes that my stepmother gives me are so bad that the wind passes through them. They hardly cover me, and she does not want me to light a fire.”

“I feel bad for you,” said the old woman who was a fairy in disguise. “Take my cane, and hit it against that wooden fence.”

Cendrouse obeyed, and, instantly, the fence split open into pieces, as though a logger had broken it apart with an axe: the fairy then gave her matches, and soon the little girl saw a good fire glowing next to which she warmed herself, thanking the compassionate old woman who had made it for her.

“Warm yourself, my child; I shall return tomorrow,” said the fairy while walking away.

When Cendrouse arrived at her parents' house in the evening, she did not go in her usual place to snuggle up in the corner of the fireplace. Her sisters were shocked and said to her:

"Why aren't you going to cram yourself into the cinders today?"

"Because I'm not cold: a kind woman came to find me in the field where I was keeping my flock, and she lit a fire to warm me."

The next day, the old woman returned again: she ordered Cendrouse to take her cane and hit a pruned oak tree, which fell into dry pieces that were ready to burn. The little girl passed the day next to this fire, and, when she returned to the house, she was not cold.

Her sisters were more surprised than they were the previous evening, and, because they had cruel hearts, they said that, if this continued, they would go with their mother to chase away the kind woman who came to do good for Cendrouse.

When Cendrouse went to see the fairy the next day, she told her about her sisters' proposals, and she cried, thinking about their meanness.

"Would you like to," said the fairy, "be better dressed than you are, and have beautiful and warm clothes in place of your rags so full of holes?"

"Oh, yes," she replied, "That would make me very happy, because it would only make my sisters, who are so mean, jealous."

"You mustn't wish them bad; on the contrary, you must wish them good," said the old woman.

"I shall try," replied Cendrouse, "not to hate them, because that is what they want."

The kind woman gave her a white wand, saying:

"Your father pushed some beautiful pumpkins that he carefully gathered when they were ripe, over into the piles of manure. Take the largest and carry it into the field. When you hit it with the wand, it will transform into a carriage. Call the cat that warms up in the cinders and who isn't afraid of you, because you have never harmed him; with three strikes of the wand, he will turn into a horse, who will be harnessed to it. And, instead of your rags, you will have clothes more beautiful than those of your sisters, you will climb into the carriage to go for a ride, and the wand will provide you with all the money that you desire."

Cendrouse did not know how to thank the old woman. She returned to the house, and, soon, she climbed into a beautiful carriage harnessed by a vigorous horse. She was also better dressed than a lady of the city, and she began to go for a carriage ride.

On the road, she encountered the old woman, who walked with difficulty, bent over a cane. She immediately stopped her carriage and invited the poor woman to climb inside. She accepted, and, as soon as she was seated next to Cendrouse, she became young and beautiful again with magnificent clothes. She said to the young girl:

“You mustn’t be ashamed of having helped a poor and badly-dressed old woman. If you were ungrateful and prideful, you would lose it all, and no one would have protected you against your stepmother and your stepsisters.”

Cendrouse traveled for some time with the fairy, who, very happy with her natural goodness, married her to a handsome gentleman with whom she lived happily ever after.

Told in 1879 by Aimé Pierre, from Liffré, age 19, farm boy in Ercé.
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