



Ourson Part II: Birth and Infancy of Ourson

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French

Intermediate
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Three months after the appearance of the toad and the cruel sentence of the fairy Furious, Agnella gave birth to a boy whom she named Ourson, as the fairy Drolette had commanded. Neither Agnella nor Passerose could decide if he was ugly or handsome for he was so hairy, so covered with long brown bristles, you could see nothing but his eyes and his mouth, and not even these unless he opened them.

If Agnella had not been his mother and if Passerose had not loved her like a sister, poor Ourson would have died from neglect for he was so frightful no one would have dared to touch—he would have been taken for a little cub and killed with pitchforks. But Agnella was his mother and her first movement was to embrace him lovingly and, bathed in tears, to exclaim:—

“Poor little Ourson! who can ever love you well enough to deliver you from this horrible curse? Alas! why will not the fairy permit me to make this exchange, which is allowed to another who may love you? No one can ever love you as I do.”

Ourson did not reply to these endearments; he slept peacefully.

Passerose wept also in sympathy with Agnella but she was not in the habit of afflicting herself for a long time on any occasion so she dried her eyes and said to Agnella:—

“Dear queen, I am very certain that your dear son will be clothed but a short time with this villainous bear-skin and from this day I shall call him Prince Marvellous.”

“I beseech you not to do so,” said the queen, anxiously; “you know that the fairies love to be obeyed.”

Passerose took the child, clothed it in the linen that had been prepared for it and leaned over to embrace it but she pricked her lips against the rough bristles of Ourson and drew back precipitately.

“It will not be I who will embrace you frequently, my boy,” said she, in a low voice; “you prick like a real hedgehog.”

It was Passerose, however, to whom Agnella gave the charge of the little Ourson. He had nothing of the bear but his skin: he was the sweetest-tempered, the most knowing, the most affectionate child that ever was seen. Passerose soon loved him with all her heart.

As Ourson grew up he was sometimes permitted to leave the farm. He was in no danger for no one knew him in the country. The children always ran away at his approach and the women repulsed him. Men avoided him—they looked upon him as something accursed. Sometimes when Agnella went to market she put him on her donkey and took him with her and on those days she found more difficulty in selling her vegetables and cheese. The mothers fled from her, fearing that Ourson would come too near them.

Agnella wept often and vainly implored the fairy Drolette. Whenever a lark flew near her, hope was born in her breast. But the larks, alas, were real larks, fit only to make pies and not fairies in disguise.

Note: The story continues in Ourson Part III: Violette

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