



Ourson Part IX: The Well

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French

Intermediate

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Agnella, Violette and Passerose walked slowly towards the burned walls of the farmhouse. With the courage of despair they removed the smoking ruins. They worked diligently two days before this work was completed. No vestige of poor Ourson appeared and yet they had removed piece by piece, handful by handful, all that covered the site. On removing the last half-burned planks, Violette perceived an aperture, which she quickly enlarged. It was the orifice of a well. Her heart beat violently—a vague hope inspired it.

“Ourson!” cried she, with a faint voice.

“Violette! dear Violette! I am here; I am saved!”

Violette could reply only by a smothered cry; she lost her consciousness and fell into the well which enclosed her dear Ourson. If the good fairy Drolette had not watched over her fall, she would have broken her head and limbs against the sides of the well. But their kind protectress, who had already rendered them so many services, sustained her and she fell safely at Ourson’s feet.

Violette soon returned to consciousness. Their happiness was too great to be believed in—to be trusted. They did not cease to give the most tender assurances of affection. And now they were aroused from their ecstasy by the cries of Passerose, who, losing sight of Violette and seeking her amongst the ruins, discovered the open well. Peering into the darkness she saw Violette’s white robe and she imagined that the poor girl had thrown herself intentionally into the well and there found the death she sought. Passerose screamed loud enough to

destroy her lungs. Agnella came slowly forward to know the cause of this alarm.

“Be silent, Passerose,” cried Ourson in a loud voice; “you are frightening our mother. I am in the well with Violette; we are happy and want for nothing.”

“Oh blessed news! blessed news!” cried Passerose; “I see them! I see them! Madam, madam, come quickly, quickly! They are here—they are well—they have need of nothing!”

Agnella, pale, and half dead with emotion, listened to Passerose without comprehending her. She fell on her knees and had not strength to rise. But when she heard the voice of her dear Ourson calling to her: “Mother, mother, your poor son Ourson still lives!” she sprang toward the well, and would have precipitated herself within, had not Passerose seized her by the arms and drawn her back suddenly.

“For the love of Ourson, dear queen, do not throw yourself into this hole; you will kill yourself! I will restore Ourson and Violette to you unharmed.”

Agnella, trembling with happiness, comprehended the wisdom of the counsel given by Passerose. She remained rooted to the spot but shuddering with agitation while Passerose ran to seek a ladder.

Passerose was absent a long time which was excusable as she was somewhat confused. First she seized a cord, then a pitchfork, then a chair. For an instant she thought of lowering the cow to the bottom of the well so that poor Ourson might have a drink of fresh warm milk. At last she found the ladder before her eyes, almost in her hands, but she had not seen it.

While Passerose was seeking the ladder, Ourson and Violette talked incessantly of their present happiness and the despair and anguish they had endured.

“I passed uninjured through the flames,” said Ourson, “and sought groping about for the wardrobe of my mother. The smoke suffocated and blinded me. Then I felt myself raised by the hair and cast to the bottom of this well where you have come to join me, dear Violette.

“In place of finding water, or even moisture here, I felt at once a sweet, fresh air. A soft carpet was spread on the bottom: you see it is still here. There was from some source sufficient light around me. I found ample provisions at my side. Look at them, Violette, I have not touched them. A few drops of wine was all I could swallow.

“The knowledge of your despair and that of my mother rendered me too unhappy and the fairy Drolette took pity on me. She appeared to me under your form, dear Violette, and I took her for you and sprang forward to seize you in my arms but I embraced only a vague form of air or vapor. I could see her but I could not touch her.

“Ourson’, said the fairy, smiling sweetly upon me, ‘I have assumed Violette’s form to testify my friendship in the most agreeable way. Be comforted; you shall see her to-morrow. She weeps bitterly, because she believes you to be dead but I will send her to you to-morrow. She will make you a visit at the bottom of this well. She will accompany you when you go forth from this tomb and you shall see your mother and the blue heavens and the dazzling sun which neither your mother nor Violette wish to look upon since your loss, but which appeared beautiful to them while you were with them. You will return once more to this well for it contains your happiness.’

“My happiness!’ I exclaimed to the fairy; ‘when I have found my mother and my Violette I shall be in possession of all my happiness.’

“Believe implicitly what I say. This well contains your happiness and that of Violette.’

“Violette’s happiness, madam, is to live with me and my mother.’”

“Ah! you replied well,” interrupted Violette. “But what said the fairy?”

“I know what I say,’ she answered. ‘In a few days something will be wanting to complete your happiness. You will find it here. We will meet again, Ourson. Remember what I have said.’

“Yes, madam; I hope it will be soon.’

“When you see me again, my poor child, you will be scarcely content and then you will wish that you had never seen me. Silence and farewell.’

“She flew away smiling sweetly, leaving behind her a delicious perfume and an atmosphere so soft and

heavenly that it diffused a peaceful calm in my heart. I suffered no more—I expected you.”

Violette on her part comprehended better than Ourson why the next return of the fairy would be painful to him. Since Agnella had revealed to her in confidence the nature of the sacrifice that she could impose upon herself, she was resolved to accomplish it, in spite of the opposition of Ourson. She thought only of the delight of giving an immense proof of her affection. This hope tempered her joy at having found him.

When Ourson had completed his narrative, they heard the shrill voice of Passerose crying out to them:

“Look, look, my children! the ladder. I will put it down to you. Take care that it does not fall on your heads. You must have some provisions down there; send them up, if you please; we are somewhat destitute above here. For two days I have only had a little milk to drink and a crust. Your mother and Violette have lived upon the air and their tears. Softly! softly! take care not to break the ladder. Madam! madam! here they are: here are Ourson’s and Violette’s heads—Good! Step up! There you are!”

Agnella, still pallid and trembling, was immovable as a statue.

After having seen Violette in safety, Ourson sprang from the well and threw himself into his mother’s arms. She covered him with tears and kisses and held him a long time clasped to her heart. After having thought him dead during so many painful hours, it seemed a dream to her almost impossible to realize that she was holding him safe once more. Finally Passerose terminated this melting scene by seizing Ourson and saying to him:

“Now it is my turn! I am forgotten, forsooth, because I do not bathe myself in tears; because I keep my head cool and preserve my strength. Was it not Passerose, after all, who got you out of that terrible hole? Speak the truth.”

“Yes, yes, my good Passerose! You may believe that I love you and indeed I thank you for drawing me out of it where, however, I was doing very well after my sweet Violette came down to me.”

“But now I think of it,” said Passerose, “tell me, Violette, how did you get to the bottom of that well without killing yourself?”

“I did not go down purposely. I fell and Ourson received me in his arms.”

“All this is not very clear,” said Passerose. “The fairy Drolette had something to do with it.”

“Yes, the good and amiable fairy,” said Ourson. “She is always counteracting the cruelties of her wicked sister.”

While thus talking merrily, their stomachs gave indication that they were suffering for dinner. Ourson had left in the well the provisions furnished by the fairy. The rest of the happy family were still embracing and weeping over past remembrances but Passerose without saying a word descended into the well and remounted with the provisions which she placed on a bundle of straw; she then placed around the table four other bundles of straw for seats.

“Dinner is ready,” said she; “come and eat; you all need food. The good queen and Violette will soon fall from exhaustion. Ourson has had a little wine but he has eaten nothing. Here is a pie, a ham, bread and wine. Long life to the good fairy!”

Agnella, Violette and Ourson did not require to be told a second time but placed themselves gayly at the table. Their appetites were good and the repast excellent. Happiness illuminated every countenance; they talked, laughed, clasped each other’s hands and were in paradise.

When dinner was over, Passerose was surprised that the fairy Drolette had not provided for all their wants.

“Look,” said she, “the house is in ruins, we are destitute of everything! The stable is our only shelter, the straw our only bed and the provisions I brought up from the well our only food. Formerly everything was provided before we had the time to ask for it.”

Agnella looked suddenly at her hand—the ring was no longer there! They must now gain their bread by the sweat of their brows. Ourson and Violette seeing her air of consternation demanded the cause of it.

“Alas! my children, you will no doubt think me very ungrateful to feel disquieted about the future in the midst of our great happiness but I perceive that during the fire I have lost the ring given me by the good fairy and this ring would have furnished us with all the necessaries of life so long as it was upon my finger. Alas! I have it no longer. What shall we do?”

“Dismiss all anxiety, dear mother,” said Ourson. “Am I not tall and strong? I will seek for work and you can all live on my wages.”

“And I, too,” said Violette, “can I not assist my good mother and Passerose? In seeking work for yourself, Ourson, you can also find something for me to do.”

“I will go at once and seek work,” said Ourson. “Adieu, mother. We will meet again, Violette.”

Kissing their hands, he set off with a light step.

He had no presentiment, poor boy, of the reception which awaited him in the three houses where he sought employment.

Note: The story continues in Ourson Part X: The Farm, the Castle, the Forge

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