

Ourson Part IV: The Dream

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French

Intermediate

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In the morning Ourson was the first awake, aroused by the lowing of the cow. He rubbed his eyes and looked about him and asked himself why he was in a stable. Then he recalled the events of the day before, sprang up from his bundle of hay and ran quickly to the fountain to wash his face.

While he was washing, Passerose, who had like Ourson risen at a very early hour and had come out to milk the cow, left the house-door open. Ourson entered quietly and proceeded to the chamber of his mother, who was still sleeping. He drew back the curtains from Violette's bed and found her sleeping as peacefully as Agnella.

Ourson watched her for a long time and was happy to see that she smiled in her dreams. Suddenly Violette's brow contracted and she uttered a cry of alarm, half raised herself in the bed, and throwing her little arms around Ourson's neck, she exclaimed:

"Ourson! good Ourson! save poor Violette! poor Violette is in the water and a wicked toad is pulling Violette!"

She now awoke, weeping bitterly, with all the symptoms of great alarm. She clasped Ourson tightly with her little arms: he tried in vain to reassure and control her but she still exclaimed:

"Wicked toad! good Ourson! save Violette!"

Agnella, who had awaked at her first cry, could not yet understand Violette's alarm but she succeeded at last in calming her and the child told her dream.

"Violette was walking with Ourson but he did not give his hand to Violette nor look at her. A wicked toad came and pulled Violette into the water; she fell and called Ourson; he came and saved Violette. She loves good Ourson," she added, in a tender voice; "will never forget him."

Saying these words, Violette threw herself into his arms. He, no longer fearing the effect of his bear-skin, embraced her a thousand times and comforted and encouraged her.

Agnella had no doubt that this dream was a warning sent by the fairy Drolette. She resolved to watch carefully over Violette and to make known to Ourson all that she could reveal to him without disobeying the fairy.

When she had washed and dressed Violette, she called Ourson to breakfast. Passerose brought them a bowl of milk fresh from the cow, some good brown bread and a pot of butter. Violette, who was hungry, shouted for joy when she saw this good breakfast.

"Violette loves good milk, good bread, good butter, loves everything here, with good Ourson and good Mamma Ourson!"

"I am not called Mamma Ourson," said Agnella, laughing; "call me only Mamma."

"Oh no, no! not mamma!" cried Violette, shaking her head sadly. "Mamma! mamma is lost! she was always sleeping, never walking, never taking care of poor Violette, never kissing little Violette, Mamma Ourson speaks, walks, kisses Violette and dresses her. I love Mamma Ourson, oh, so much!" she said, seizing Agnella's hand and pressing it to her heart.

Agnella replied by clasping her tenderly in her arms.

Ourson was much moved—his eyes were moist. Violette perceived this and passing her hand over his eyes, she said, entreatingly:

"I pray you don't cry, Ourson; if you cry, Violette must cry too."

"No, no, dear little girl, I will cry no more. Let us eat our breakfast and then we will take a walk."

They breakfasted with good appetites. Violette clapped her hands frequently and exclaimed:

“Oh how good it is! I love it! I am very glad!”

After breakfast, Ourson and Violette went out to walk while Agnella and Passerose attended to the house.

Ourson played with Violette and gathered her flowers and strawberries. She said to him:

“We will always walk with each other. You must always play with Violette.”

“I cannot always play, little girl. I have to help mamma and Passerose to work.”

“What sort of work, Ourson?”

“To sweep, scour, take care of the cow, cut the grass and bring wood and water.”

“Violette will work with Ourson.”

“You are too little, dear Violette, but still you can try.”

When they returned to the house, Ourson started on his various tasks. Violette followed him everywhere, she did her best and believed that she was helping him but she was really too small to be useful. After some days had passed away, she began to wash the cups and saucers, spread the cloth, fold the linen and wipe the table. She went to the milking with Passerose, helped to strain the milk and skim it and wash the marble flag-stones. She was never out of temper, never disobedient and never answered impatiently or angrily.

Ourson loved her more and more from day to day. Agnella and Passerose were also very fond of her and the more so because they knew that she was Ourson’s cousin.

Violette loved them but Ourson most of all. How could she help loving this good boy, who always forgot himself for her, who was constantly seeking to amuse and please her and who would indeed have been willing to die for his little friend?

One day, when Passerose had taken Violette with her to market, Agnella related to Ourson the sad circumstances which had preceded his birth. She revealed to him the possibility of his getting rid of his hairy skin and receiving a smooth white skin in exchange if he could ever find any one who would voluntarily make this sacrifice from affection and gratitude.

“Never,” cried Ourson, “never will I propose or accept such a sacrifice. I will never consent to devote a being who loves me to that life of wretchedness which the vengeance of the fairy Furious has condemned me to endure; never, from a wish of mine, shall a heart capable of such a sacrifice suffer all that I have suffered and all that I still suffer from the fear and antipathy of men.”

Agnella argued in vain against this firm and noble resolve of Ourson. He declared that she must never again speak to him of this exchange, to which he would most assuredly never give his consent and that it must never be named to Violette or any other person who loved him.

Agnella promised compliance, after a few weak arguments. In reality she approved and admired his sentiments. She could not but hope, however, that the fairy Drolette would recompense the generous and noble character of her little charge and, by some extraordinary exercise of her power, release him from his hairy skin.

Note: The story continues in Ourson Part V: The Toad Again

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