

Ourson Part XII: The Combat

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French

Intermediate
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Violette was about to reply, when a kind of roaring was heard in the air, and they saw descend a chariot made of crocodile's skin, drawn by fifty enormous toads. All the toads were hissing and blowing, and would have cast their infectious venom in every direction, if they had not been restrained by the power of the fairy Drolette.

When the chariot reached the ground, the fairy Furious, a huge and heavy creature, issued from it. Her big eyes seemed bursting from their sockets, her large flat nose covered her wrinkled, withered cheeks, her monstrous mouth extended from ear to ear and when it was open a long pointed black tongue was seen licking her horrid teeth.

She was not more than three feet in height and was very corpulent; her grizzly skin was gluey and cold, like a snail's and her thin red hair fell in locks of unequal length around her throat, which was disfigured by a goitre. Her large, flat hands looked like the fins of a shark, her dress was made of snail's skins and her mantle of the skins of toads.

She advanced towards Ourson (who shall hereafter be known by his true name of Prince Marvellous) with a slow step. She paused in front of him and casting a furious glance upon the fairy Drolette and an eye of mocking triumph upon Violette, she folded her great cold arms and said in a sharp yet hoarse voice:—

“My sister has triumphed over me, Prince Marvellous. I have, however, one consolation: you will not be happy, because you have obtained your original beauty at the expense of that little fool, who is now frightful and

repugnant and whom you will now never wish to approach. Yes! yes! weep, my handsome Ourson! You will weep a long time, Violette, and you will regret bitterly, if you do not already regret, that you have given your beautiful skin to the prince Marvellous.”

“Never, madam, never! My only regret is that I did not know sooner what I could do to testify my gratitude.”

The fairy Drolette, whose countenance had assumed an unaccustomed expression of severity and irritation, now waved her wand and said:—

“Silence, sister! You shall not triumph long over the misfortunes of Violette. I will provide a remedy for those misfortunes: her generous devotion merits recompense.”

“I defy you to come to her assistance under penalty of my wrath,” said Furious.

“I do not doubt your rage, sister, but I disdain to punish you for it,” replied Drolette.

“To punish me!—Do you dare to threaten me?” said Furious. And hissing furiously, she called her chariot, mounted it, rose in the air and tried to launch upon Drolette all the venom of her toads in order to suffocate her.

But Drolette knew her sister perfectly. Her faithful larks held the door of her chariot open and she sprang within. The larks rose in the air, hovered above the toads, and then lowered themselves rapidly upon them. The toads, in spite of their weight, escaped the blows by turning adroitly to one side. They however threw their venom on the larks which were nearest to them, who died instantly.

Drolette detached them with the rapidity of a thunder-bolt, rose again in the air and fell so adroitly on the toads, that the larks tore out their eyes with their claws, before Furious had time to come to the rescue of her army.

The outcries of the toads and the hissing of the larks made a deafening noise; and the fairy Drolette called out to her friends, who were regarding the combat with terror:—

“Withdraw immediately and stop your ears!”

Which was done instantly, in obedience to her command.

The fairy Furious made one last effort. She guided her blinded toads in such a way as to meet the larks face to face, and to dart their venom upon them.

But Drolette rose higher and higher in the air and Furious found herself always under her sister's chariot.

At last, unable to contain her rage, Furious cried out:—

“You are assisted by the queen of the fairies, an old fool whom I should gladly see in the lower regions!”

Scarcely had she pronounced these words when her chariot fell heavily to the earth. The toads perished and the chariot disappeared. The fairy Furious only remained, in the form of an enormous toad. She wished to speak but she could only bellow and snuffle. She gazed at Drolette and her larks—at Prince Marvellous, Violette and Agnella, in a transport of rage but her power was destroyed.

The fairy Drolette lowered her chariot, descended to the earth and said:—

“The queen of the fairies has punished you for your audacity, sister. Repent, if you wish to obtain pardon.”

The only answer of Furious was to spit forth her poisonous venom, which happily reached no one.

Drolette extended her wand towards her and said:

“I command you to disappear and never to appear again to the prince Marvellous, to Violette or to their mother.”

Drolette had scarcely uttered these words when the toad disappeared; there remained no vestige of the chariot or of herself.

Drolette remained some time motionless. She passed her hand over her brow, as if to chase away a sad thought; then approaching Prince Marvellous, she said to him:—

“Prince, the title which I give you indicates your birth. You are the son of King Ferocious and the queen Aimee, concealed till now under the appearance of a modest farmer woman. The name of your father sufficiently

indicates his character. Your mother having prevented him from killing his brother Indolent and his sister-in-law Nonchalante, he turned his rage against her. I was her protectress, and carried her off with her faithful Passerose in a cloud.

“And you, Princess Violette, your birth is equal to that of Prince Marvellous. Your father and mother were that same King Indolent and Queen Nonchalante who, saved once by Queen Aimee, became at last the victims of King Ferocious and their own apathy. Since that time King Ferocious has been killed by his subjects who could no longer support his cruel yoke.

“They expect you, prince, to reign over them. I have revealed to them your existence and I have promised them that you will take a wife worthy of you. You can select from the twelve princesses whom your father retained captive after having slain their parents. They are all wise and beautiful and each has a kingdom for her marriage portion.”

Surprise had kept Prince Marvellous silent. At the last words of the fairy he turned towards Violette, and seeing that she was weeping, he said:—

“Why do you weep, my Violette? Do you fear that I will blush for you—that I will not dare to testify before my whole court the tenderness with which you inspire me? That I will conceal what you have done for me or forget the bonds which attach me to you for ever? Can you believe that I will be ungrateful enough to seek any other affection than yours and fill your place by any of those princesses held captive by my father? No, dearest Violette! Until this time I have seen in you only a sister but from this moment you are the companion of my life, my sole friend, my wife!”

“Your wife, dear brother? That is impossible! How can you seat upon your throne a creature so repulsive as your poor Violette? How will you dare to brave the raillery of your subjects and of the neighboring kings? And how could I show my deformity in the midst of the festivals given on your return to your kingdom? No, no, my brother! Let me live near you, near to your mother, alone, unknown, covered with a veil. I cannot be your wife! No one shall blame you for having made so sad a choice.”

The prince insisted long and firmly. Violette could scarcely control her emotions but she resisted with as much resolution as devotion. Agnella said nothing. She would have been willing that her son should accept even this

last sacrifice from poor Violette and simply allow her to live near to them but hidden from the world.

Passerose wept and in a low tone encouraged the prince in his determination.

“Violette,” said the prince, at last, “since you absolutely refuse to ascend the throne with me, I abandon it and all royal power in order to live with you as before in solitude and happiness. Without your sweet presence, the sceptre would be a heavy burden; with you at my side, our little farm will be a paradise! Say, dear Violette, shall it be so?”

“Yes, dear brother, you have triumphed; let us live as we have lived so many years: modest in our lives, happy in our affections.”

“Noble prince and generous princess,” said the fairy, “you shall be recompensed for this rare and devoted tenderness. Prince, in the well to which I carried you during the fire, there is a priceless treasure for Violette and yourself. Descend into the well, seek for it, and when you have found it bring it to me. I will teach you its value.”

The prince did not wait to be told a second time; he ran towards the well; the ladder was still there and he descended. On arriving at the bottom, he saw nothing but the carpet which had been there from the first; he searched the walls of the well, but saw no indication of treasure. Finally he raised the carpet, and perceived a black stone with a ring attached; he raised the stone and discovered a casket which glittered like a constellation.

“This must contain the treasure spoken of by the fairy,” said he.

The prince seized the casket; it was as light as a nutshell. He ascended the ladder hastily, holding the casket carefully in his arms.

They were awaiting his return with impatience. He handed the casket to the fairy. Agnella exclaimed:—

“This is the same casket you confided to me, madam, and which I supposed I had lost in the fire.”

“It is the same,” replied the fairy. “Here is the key; open it, prince.”

Prince Marvellous hastened to open it. But who can describe the general disappointment, when, in place of some rich treasure which they supposed it contained, they found only the bracelets which Violette had worn

when her cousin found her sleeping in the wood, and a vial of perfumed oil!

The fairy looked from one to the other, and enjoyed their surprise and consternation. She took the bracelets and gave them to Violette.

“This is my bridal present, my dear child; every one of these diamonds has the property of guarding from all evil influences the person who wears it, and of endowing its wearer with every virtue, enormous riches and resplendent beauty, with wit, intellect and all desirable happiness. Use them for the children who will be born of your union with Prince Marvellous.

“As to this vial of perfumed oil, it is the wedding gift of the prince your cousin. I know you love perfumes, this has peculiar virtues; use it to-day. To-morrow I will return to seek you and carry you all to your kingdom,” she said.

“I renounce my kingdom, madam,” said Ourson.

“Who will govern your people?” said Agnella.

“You, my mother, if you are willing,” replied Ourson.

The queen was about to refuse, when the fairy interfered.

“We will speak of this to-morrow,” said she. “You, madam, I know, desire to accept the crown which you are about to refuse. I forbid you, however, to accept it before my return. And you, dear and amiable prince,” added she, in a sweet voice, accompanied with an affectionate glance, “I forbid you to repeat this offer before my return. Adieu till to-morrow. When you are truly happy, my dear children, think kindly of your friend the fairy Drolette.”

The fairy ascended her chariot. The larks flew like lightning and she soon disappeared, leaving behind her a delicious perfume.

Note: The story continues in Ourson Part XIII: The Recompense

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