

Princess Rosette Part II: Rosette at the Court of the King Her Father

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French

Intermediate
7 min read

They were but two hours on the way, for the king's capital was only ten leagues from the farm. When Rosette arrived, she was surprised to see that she had to descend in a little, dirty court-yard, where a page attended her.

“Come, princess, I am commissioned to conduct you to your chamber.”

“Can I not see the queen my mother?” asked Rosette, timidly.

“In two hours, princess, when they are assembled for dinner, you will see her. In the mean time you can dress.”

Rosette followed the page, who led her through a long corridor, at the end of which was a narrow staircase. She ascended, slowly, after a long, long time arriving at another corridor where she entered the chamber destined for her. The queen had lodged Rosette in one of the servants' rooms. The little page placed Rosette's modest trunk in a corner and said, with an air of embarrassment,

“Pardon me, princess, for having led you into this chamber, so unworthy of you. The queen has disposed of all the other apartments for her guests, the kings, queens, princes and princesses. There was no other room vacant and——”

“Well, well,” said Rosette, smiling, “I shall not blame you. Besides, I shall be very comfortable.”

“I will come for you, princess, to lead you to the king and queen at the proper hour.”

“I will be ready,” said Rosette, “adieu, pretty page.”

Rosette now unpacked her trunk. Her heart was beating and swelling tumultuously. Sighing heavily, she drew out her robe of coarse cloth and the other articles of her toilette. Rosette was very adroit. She arranged her exquisite blonde hair most beautifully, with a pullet’s feather and a band made of burrs. Her head-dress was indeed so charming that it made her a hundred times more lovely. When she had put on her shoes and stockings and her robe, what was her amazement to see that it was made of gold brocade, embroidered with rubies of marvellous beauty; her coarse heavy shoes were now white satin, adorned with buckles of one single ruby of wonderful splendour; her stockings were of silk and as fine as a spider’s web; her necklace was of rubies surrounded with large diamonds; her bracelets of diamonds, the most splendid that had ever been seen.

Rosette now ran to the glass and saw that the pullet’s wing had become a magnificent locket and that the pendant was a carbuncle of such beauty and brilliancy that a fairy alone could possess it.

Rosette, happy, delighted, exultant, danced around the little room and thanked her good godmother aloud for having tested her obedience and thus magnificently rewarded it.

The page now knocked at the door, entered and started back, dazzled by the beauty of Rosette and the magnificence of her toilette. Rosette followed him. They descended the stairs, passed through many apartments and at last entered a suite of superb salons, filled with kings, queens and nobles. Every one who saw Rosette paused and turned to admire her. The modest princess, however, was ashamed to be thus gazed at and did not dare raise her eyes. At last the page paused and said to Rosette:

“Princess, behold the queen your mother and the king!”

Rosette raised her eyes and saw just before her the king and queen who regarded her with a comic surprise.

“Madam,” said the king at last to her, “be graciously pleased to tell me your name. You are no doubt some great queen or still greater fairy whose unexpected presence is an honor and a happiness for us.”

“Sire,” said Rosette, falling gracefully upon her knees, “I am neither a great queen nor a powerful fairy but your daughter Rosette, for whom you were kind enough to send.”

“Rosette!” exclaimed the queen; “Rosette clothed more magnificently than I have ever been! Who, then, miss, has given you all these beautiful things?”

“My godmother, madam. Graciously permit me, madam, to kiss your hand and present me to my sisters.”

The queen gave her hand coldly. Then pointing to Orangine and Roussette, who were by her side, she said: “There are your sisters.”

Poor Rosette, saddened by this cold welcome from her father and mother, turned gladly towards her sisters and wished to embrace them but they drew back with terror, fearing that while embracing them Rosette would displace the red and white with which they were painted. Orangine covered herself with white to conceal her yellow skin and Roussette to hide her ugly freckles.

Rosette was repulsed by her sisters but was soon surrounded by the ladies of the court and all the invited princes. As she conversed with ready grace and goodness and spoke several languages she charmed all those who approached her. Orangine and Roussette were frightfully jealous. The king and queen were furious for Rosette absorbed all attention; no one paid any attention to the sisters.

At table the young prince Charmant, who was monarch of the most magnificent and beautiful of all the kingdoms of the earth and whom Orangine hoped to wed, placed himself by the side of Rosette and was completely absorbed in her during the repast.

After dinner, Orangine and Roussette, in order to draw some attention towards themselves, sang a duet. They sang indeed admirably and accompanied themselves on the harp. Rosette who was truly good and wished her sister to love her, applauded them rapturously and complimented them on their talent.

Orangine, in place of being touched by this generous sentiment and hoping to play her sister a malicious trick,

now insisted upon her singing. Rosette for some time modestly refused. Her sisters, who supposed that she did not know how to sing, were insistent. The queen herself, desiring to humiliate poor Rosette, joined her entreaties to those of Orangine and Roussette and in fact commanded the young princess to sing.

Rosette curtsied to the queen. "I obey, madam," said she.

She took the harp and the enchanting grace of her position astonished her sisters. They would have been glad indeed to interrupt her when she commenced her prelude for they saw at a glance that her talent was much superior to theirs. But when, in a beautiful and melodious voice, she sang a romance, composed by herself on the happiness of being good and beloved there was an outbreak of admiration, the enthusiasm became general and her sisters almost fainted with jealousy and envy.

Charmant was transported with admiration. He approached Rosette, his eyes moistened with tears and said to her:

"Enchanting and lovely princess, I have never heard so touching a voice. Can I not have the happiness of hearing you once more?"

Rosette, who was painfully aware of the jealousy of her sisters, excused herself, saying she was fatigued. Prince Charmant, who had clear intellect and penetration, divined the true motive of her refusal and admired Rosette still more for her delicacy. The queen, irritated by the success of Rosette, terminated the party at an early hour and retired.

Rosette returned to her little room and undressed herself. She removed her robe and her ornaments and put them in a superb case of ebony which she found in her room. Much to her surprise, she found in her little trunk the robe of coarse cloth, the pullet feather, the necklace of nuts, the burrs, the dry beans, the coarse shoes of felt and the blue yarn stockings. She would not allow herself, however, to be disquieted, certain that her good godmother would come to her assistance at the proper time. Rosette was indeed saddened by the coldness of her parents and the jealousy of her sisters; but, as she scarcely knew them, this painful impression was effaced by the remembrance of the Prince Charmant, who appeared so good and who had been so flattering in his attention to her. Rosette soon slept peacefully and awoke late in the morning.

Note: The story continues in Princess Rosette Part III: Family Council

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