



Riquet with the Tuft

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French

Advanced
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Once upon a time there was a Queen who had a son so ugly and so misshapen that it was long disputed whether he had human form. A fairy who was at his birth said, however, that he would be very amiable for all that, since he would have uncommon good sense. She even added that it would be in his power, by virtue of a gift she had just then given him, to bestow as much sense as he pleased on the person he loved the best. All this somewhat comforted the poor Queen. It is true that this child no sooner began to talk than he said a thousand pretty things, and in all his actions there was an intelligence that was quite charming. I forgot to tell you that he was born with a little tuft of hair upon his head, which made them call him Riquet^[1] with the Tuft, for Riquet was the family name.

Seven or eight years later the Queen of a neighboring kingdom had two daughters who were twins. The first born of these was more beautiful than the day; whereat the Queen was so very glad that those present were afraid that her excess of joy would do her harm. The same fairy who was present at the birth of little Riquet with the Tuft was here also, and, to moderate the Queen's gladness, she declared that this little Princess should have no sense at all, but should be as stupid as she was pretty. This mortified the Queen extremely; but afterward she had a far greater sorrow, for the second daughter proved to be very ugly.

"Do not afflict yourself so much, madam," said the fairy. "Your daughter shall have her recompense; she shall

have so great a portion of sense that the want of beauty will hardly be perceived.”

“God grant it,” replied the Queen; “but is there no way to make the eldest, who is so pretty, have any sense?”

“I can do nothing for her, madam, as to sense,” answered the fairy, “but everything as to beauty; and as there is nothing I would not do for your satisfaction, I give her for gift that she shall have power to make handsome the person who shall best please her.”

As these princesses grew up, their perfections grew with them. All the public talk was of the beauty of the elder and the rare good sense of the younger. It is true also that their defects increased considerably with their age. The younger visibly grew uglier and uglier, and the elder became every day more and more stupid: she either made no answer at all to what was asked her, or said something very silly. She was with all this so unhandy that she could not place four pieces of china upon the mantelpiece without breaking one of them, nor drink a glass of water without spilling half of it upon her clothes.

Although beauty is a very great advantage in young people, the younger sister was always the more preferred in society. People would indeed go first to the Beauty to look upon and admire her, but turn aside soon after to the Wit to hear a thousand most entertaining and agreeable things; and it was amazing to see, in less than a quarter of an hour’s time, the elder with not a soul near her, and the whole company crowding about the younger. The elder, dull as she was, could not fail to notice this; and without the slightest regret would have given all her beauty to have half her sister’s wit. The Queen, prudent as she was, could not help reproaching her several times for her stupidity, which almost made the poor Princess die of grief.

One day, as she had hidden herself in a wood to bewail her misfortune, she saw coming to her a very disagreeable little man, but most magnificently dressed. This was the young Prince Riquet with the Tuft, who having fallen in love with her upon seeing her picture, – many of which were distributed all the world over, – had left his father’s kingdom to have the pleasure of seeing and talking with her. Overjoyed to find her thus alone, he addressed himself to her with all imaginable politeness and respect. Having observed, after he had paid her the ordinary compliments, that she was extremely melancholy, he said to her:–

“I cannot comprehend, madam, how a person so beautiful as you are can be so sorrowful as you seem to be; for though I can boast of having seen a great number of exquisitely charming ladies, I can say that I never beheld

any one whose beauty approaches yours.”

“You are pleased to say so,” answered the Princess, and here she stopped.

“Beauty,” replied Riquet with the Tuft, “is such a great advantage, that it ought to take place of all things besides; and since you possess this treasure, I can see nothing that can possibly very much afflict you.”

“I had far rather,” cried the Princess, “be as ugly as you are, and have sense, than have the beauty I possess, and be as stupid as I am.”

“There is nothing, madam,” returned he, “shows more that we have good sense than to believe we have none; and it is the nature of that excellent quality that the more people have of it, the more they believe they want it.”

“I do not know that,” said the Princess; “but I know very well that I am very senseless, and that vexes me mightily.”

“If that be all which troubles you, madam, I can very easily put an end to your affliction.”

“And how will you do that?” cried the Princess.

“I have the power, madam,” replied Riquet with the Tuft, “to give to that person whom I love best as much good sense as can be had; and as you, madam, are that very person, it will be your fault only if you have not as great a share of it as any one living, provided you will be pleased to marry me.”

The Princess was quite confused, and answered not a word.

“I see,” replied Riquet with the Tuft, “that this proposal does not please you, and I do not wonder at it; but I will give you a whole year to consider it.”

The Princess had so little sense and, at the same time, so great a longing to have some, that she imagined the end of that year would never come, so she accepted the proposal which was made her.

She had no sooner promised Riquet with the Tuft that she would marry him on that day twelvemonth than she found herself quite otherwise than she was before: she had an incredible faculty of speaking whatever she had in her mind in a polite, easy, and natural manner.

She began that moment a very gallant conversation with Riquet with the Tuft, which she kept up at such a rate that Riquet with the Tuft believed he had given her more sense than he had reserved for himself.

When she returned to the palace, the whole court knew not what to think of such a sudden and extraordinary change; for they heard from her now as much sensible discourse and as many infinitely witty phrases as they had heard stupid and silly impertinences before. The whole court was overjoyed beyond imagination at it. It pleased all but her younger sister, because, having no longer the advantage of her in respect of wit, she appeared in comparison with her a very disagreeable, homely girl.

The King governed himself by her advice, and would even sometimes hold a council in her apartment. The news of this change in the Princess spread everywhere; the young princes of the neighboring kingdoms strove all they could to gain her favor, and almost all of them asked her in marriage; but she found not one of them had sense enough for her. She gave them all a hearing, but would not engage herself to any.

However, there came one so powerful, so rich, so witty, and so handsome that she could not help feeling a strong inclination toward him. Her father perceived it, and told her that she was her own mistress as to the choice of a husband, and that she might declare her intentions. She thanked her father, and desired him to give her time to consider it.

She went by chance to walk in the same wood where she met Riquet with the Tuft, the more conveniently to think what she ought to do. While she was walking in a profound meditation, she heard a confused noise under her feet, as it were of a great many people busily running backward and forward. Listening more attentively, she heard one say:—

“Bring me that pot,” another, “Give me that kettle,” and a third, “Put some wood upon the fire.”

The ground at the same time opened, and she saw under her feet a great kitchen full of cooks, kitchen helps, and all sorts of officers necessary for a magnificent entertainment. There came out of it a company of cooks, to

the number of twenty or thirty, who went to plant themselves about a very long table set up in the forest, with their larding pins in their hands and fox tails in their caps, and began to work, keeping time to a very harmonious tune.

The Princess, all astonished at this sight, asked them for whom they worked.

“For Prince Riquet with the Tuft,” said the chief of them, “who is to be married to-morrow.”

The Princess, more surprised than ever, and recollecting all at once that it was now that day twelvemonth on which she had promised to marry the Prince Riquet with the Tuft, was ready to sink into the ground.

What made her forget this was that when she made this promise, she was very silly; and having obtained that vast stock of sense which the prince had bestowed upon her, she had entirely forgotten the things she had done in the days of her stupidity. She continued her walk, but had not taken thirty steps before Riquet with the Tuft presented himself to her, gallant and most magnificently dressed, like a prince who was going to be married.

“You see, madam,” said he, “I am exact in keeping my word, and doubt not in the least but you are come hither to perform your promise.”

“I frankly confess,” answered the Princess, “that I have not yet come to a decision in this matter, and I believe I never shall be able to arrive at such a one as you desire.”

“You astonish me, madam,” said Riquet with the Tuft.

“I can well believe it,” said the Princess; “and surely if I had to do with a clown, or a man of no sense, I should find myself very much at a loss. ‘A princess always keeps her word,’ he would say to me, ‘and you must marry me, since you promised to do so.’ But as he to whom I talk is the one man in the world who is master of the greatest sense and judgment, I am sure he will hear reason. You know that when I was but a fool I could scarcely make up my mind to marry you; why will you have me, now I have so much judgment as you gave me, come to such a decision which I could not then make up my mind to agree to? If you sincerely thought to make me your wife, you have been greatly in the wrong to deprive me of my dull simplicity, and make me see things much more clearly than I did.”

“If a man of no wit and sense,” replied Riquet with the Tuft, “would be well received, as you say, in reproaching

you for breach of your word, why will you not let me, madam, have the same usage in a matter wherein all the happiness of my life is concerned? Is it reasonable that persons of wit and sense should be in a worse condition than those who have none? Can you pretend this, you who have so great a share, and desired so earnestly to have it? But let us come to the fact, if you please. Putting aside my ugliness and deformity, is there anything in me which displeased you? Are you dissatisfied with my birth, my wit, my humor, or my manners?"

"Not at all," answered the Princess; "I love you and respect you in all that you mention."

"If it be so," said Riquet with the Tuft, "I am happy, since it is in your power to make me the most amiable of men."

"How can that be?" said the Princess.

"It is done," said Riquet with the Tuft, "if you love me enough to wish it was so; and that you may no ways doubt, madam, of what I say, know that the same fairy who on my birthday gave me for gift the power of making the person who should please me witty and judicious, has in like manner given you for gift the power of making him whom you love and to whom you would grant the favor, to be extremely handsome."

"If it be so," said the Princess, "I wish with all my heart that you may be the most lovable prince in the world, and I bestow my gift on you as much as I am able."

The Princess had no sooner pronounced these words than Riquet with the Tuft appeared to her the finest prince upon earth, the handsomest and most amiable man she ever saw. Some affirm that it was not the fairy's charms, but love alone, which worked the change.

They say that the Princess, having made due reflection on the perseverance of her lover, his discretion, and all the good qualities of his mind, his wit and judgment, saw no longer the deformity of his body, nor the ugliness of his face; that his hump seemed to her no more than the grand air of one having a broad back, and that whereas till then she saw him limp horribly, she now found it nothing more than a certain sidling air, which charmed her.

They say further that his eyes, which were squinted very much, seemed to her most bright and sparkling, that their irregularity passed in her judgment for a mark of the warmth of his affection, and, in short, that his great

red nose was, in her opinion, somewhat martial and heroic in character.

However it was, the Princess promised immediately to marry him, on condition that he obtained the King's consent. The King, knowing that his daughter highly esteemed Riquet with the Tuft, whom he knew also for a most sage and judicious prince, received him for his son-in-law with pleasure, and the next morning their nuptials were celebrated, as Riquet with the Tuft had foreseen, and according to the orders he had given a long time before.

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