

# *The Ugly Princess*

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Portuguese

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There was once a king who had an only daughter, and she was so very ugly and deformed that, when she rode through the streets of Alcantara, the children ran away, thinking she was a witch.

Her father, however, thought her the most lovely creature in his kingdom; and as all the courtiers agreed with him, and the Court poet was always singing her praises, the princess had been led to believe what most ladies like to believe; and as she was expecting a prince from a distant country, who was coming expressly to marry her, she had ordered many rich dresses which only made her look uglier.

The city of Alcantara was ready to receive Prince Alanbam, who was going to espouse the Princess Altamira.

Crowds thronged the streets, martial music was heard everywhere, and in the public square a splendid throne had been erected for the king, Princess Altamira, and Prince Alanbam.

Around the throne were formed large bodies of well-equipped cavalry, dark visaged warriors clad in white and gold, and mounted on superb Arab steeds.

Behind the king, on his left side, stood the royal barber with his retinue of apprentices; and on his right side was seen Nabó the headsman, a black man of gigantic stature, with his implement of office, an axe, over his shoulder.

Seated on the steps of the throne were a number of musicians, and below these a guard of honour, composed of foot soldiers dressed in short vests, called "aljubas," and wide lower garments, and with their aljivas, or quivers, full of bright arrows.

From the throne the king could see the splendid bridge on six pillars, built by Trajan, along which a brilliant cavalcade was proceeding, namely, the procession formed by Prince Alanbam and his retainers.

As soon as the prince, after saluting the king, beheld the princess, he turned pale, for he had never seen any one so ugly; and however much he might have desired to keep up an appearance of courtesy to the princess before her father's subjects, he could not kiss her as she expected him to do, nor could he be persuaded to occupy the chair reserved for him beside the princess.

"Your mercy," said he, addressing the king, "must excuse my insuperable bashfulness; but the fact is that the Princess Altamira is so transcendently beautiful, and so dazzling to behold, that I can never expect to look upon her face again and live."

The king and the princess were highly flattered; but as Prince Alanbam continued obdurate in his professions of bashfulness, they commenced to feel somewhat vexed, and at last the king said in a loud voice—

"Prince Alanbam, we fully appreciate the motive that prompts your conduct, but the fact is the Princess Altamira is present to be wedded to you; and, as a Christian king, the first of my line, I desire to lead to the altar my only daughter, Princess Altamira, and her affianced husband, Prince Alanbam."

"It cannot be," said the prince. "I would rather marry some one less beautiful. Sir king, forgive me if I annoy you, but I will not be wedded to so much beauty."

The king was now incensed beyond measure, and the princess his daughter, thinking to spite Prince Alanbam, said—

“With your permission, royal father, since I am too beautiful for a prince, I will be married to the most learned man in your kingdom—Bernardo, the royal barber.”

“And that you shall,” said the king; but, on turning round to speak to the barber, he found that this the most learned man in his kingdom was all of a tremble, as if dancing to the music of St. Vitus.

“What has possessed thee, caitiff?” asked the king. “Hearest not thou the honour that is to be conferred on thee?”

“My royal master,” muttered the poor frightened man of learning and lather, “I can no more avail myself of the honour which you would confer on me than the Archbishop of Villafranca could. His grace is bound to celibacy, and I am already married.”

Now, the barber had on many occasions rendered himself obnoxious to Sanchez, the royal cobbler, who, seeing the king’s perplexity, and a chance of avenging past insults, exclaimed—

“Royal master, it would be most acceptable to your subjects that so much beauty should be wedded to so much learning. Our good friend, Bernardo, was, it is true, married; but since he has been in attendance at the palace, he has so fallen in love with Princess Altamira that he no longer notices his wife; therefore, may it please your mercy to dissolve the first marriage, and announce this new one with her highness, your daughter?”

The barber at this harangue became so infuriated that he rushed blindly at the cobbler, and with his razor would have severed his head from the rest of his body, but that he was prevented by the guard, who held him down.

“Executioner, do your work!” cried the baffled king; and at one blow the head of the unfortunate barber rolled on the ground.

Prince Alanbam seeing this, and fearing that more mischief might ensue, proposed to the king that one hundred knights should be chosen, and that these should fight for the hand of the lovely Princess Altamira. “I myself will enter the lists,” said the prince; “and the survivor will be rewarded by marrying your daughter.”

“That is a good idea,” said the king; and calling together ninety-nine of his best knights, he bade them fight

valiantly, for their reward was very precious.

Fifty knights, mounted on beautiful chargers, placed themselves on one side, and were opposed by forty-nine equally well-mounted knights and Prince Alanbam; and at the word of command, given by the king, they advanced at headlong speed against each other; but, much to the astonishment of the spectators, no knight was unhorsed; rather did it seem that each knight did his utmost to get run through by his opponent.

At it they went again and again, but with the same result, for no man was hurt, although seeming to court death.

“We will alter the order of things,” exclaimed the king. “The knight who is first wounded shall be the one to marry the princess.”

This was no sooner said than the knights seemed to be possessed of a blind fury, and at the first charge nearly every knight was unhorsed and every one wounded, while the confusion and noise were awful. They were all accusing each other of being the first wounded; so that, in utter despair, the king declared his daughter should be married to the Church, enter a convent, and thus hide her transcendent beauty.

“No, father,” exclaimed the ugly princess; “I will get a husband; and if in all the states of Spain no one be found worthy enough to be my husband, I will leave Spain for ever. There is a country where the day never dawns, and night is eternal. Thither will I go; for in the dark, as all cats are gray, so are all degrees of beauty brought to one common level. I now know that it is just as unfortunate to be too beautiful as it is to be very ugly.”

Having delivered herself of this speech, Princess Altamira bade the king, her father, good-bye, and was on the point of leaving the royal presence, when the handsome figure of Felisberto, the blind fiddler, was seen to approach.

“Princess,” exclaimed blind Felisberto, “to Spain nothing is denied. You speak of proceeding to the North, where the day never dawns, in search of a husband. You need but look at me to behold one to whom night and day, extreme ugliness and transcendent beauty, are alike; and since all are so bashful that they will not marry you, allow me, fair princess, to offer you my services as a husband. In my world ‘handsome is that handsome does.’”

The king was so pleased with the blind fiddler's speech that he immediately made him a Grandee of Spain, and acknowledged him as his son-in-law elect.

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