



How the Brewess's boy became a Duke

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Retold Fairy Tales

On the outskirts between the woods and the village there lived a widowed brewess and her only son. Brewing in those days was considered a woman's task, but her son had no shame in assisting her in the craft. Years of hard work made him strong, and he was a clever fellow who managed to greatly increase their business by his persuasive claims about their products. Their lager, he claimed, gave drinkers the gift of eloquence. The brewery supplied local beer halls, and their lager was the drink of choice for the Duchess who ruled the land. She too was a widow, and in search of a husband who would become the new Duke. One day the Duchess showed up at the brewery, the brewess was thrilled to give her a tour.

"Your beer is my favorite, I'd drink it over the finest wine any day!" The Duchess said.

"Thank you so much for your kind words! I wouldn't be able to keep my business afloat if it wasn't for my son." said the brewess.

"He's a rather handsome lad, had he not been a peasant I'd ask to marry him!" the Duchess half joked.

"Sure he's no knight or nobleman, but that boy can chop wood and turn it to ivory!" the brewess said.

In those days ivory was costly, for it could only be purchased from traders who had been to Thule or Timbuktu.

The Duchess had the lad brought back to her chateau, where she chained him to a pillar in the courtyard garden and handed him an ax and several uncut logs.

"Your mother says you can turn chopped wood into ivory, you have until sunrise to produce a stack of ivory. Fulfill this task, or your mother will lose her lying tongue." the Duchess said grimly. She left.

Chop! Chop! Chop! The lad knew cutting the wood was in vain, but doing nothing could have condemned his

mother. As the sun disappeared he curled into a ball and started to weep. Many people say “real men don’t cry,” but the brewess’s boy cared nothing for such judgments.

“Why so sad?” a shrill voice asked.

The lad looked up and saw a pointy eared woman standing in front of him. She was three feet tall and was dressed almost as elegantly as the Duchess, she wore a conical felt hat that added another foot. Her skin was blotchy and her hair was moist. Most notably, she had a nose that resembled a gherkin.

“My mother told the Duchess I can turn firewood into ivory, and the Duchess said if I can’t prove it she’ll cut my mom’s tongue out!” he told her sobbingly.

“I can turn firewood into ivory! Just give me that ax!” the pointy eared woman said.

He handed her the ax, which was taller than her. She took it and started to chop, singing an indecipherable ditty as she worked. Each log was split into two large tusks as they hit the ground. Soon all the wood was gone and a pile of tusks was in its stead.

“Oh thank you, miss!” the lad said in relief.

“Now you owe me.” the pointy eared woman said calmly.

“Well gee, I don’t have much. Here’s a rosary I got when I was baptized.” the lad said and handed it to her, it was made of amber.

The pointy eared woman took it, then vanished into a poof of sparkling mist. The lad scratched his head, then he noticed the red sun was rising. Suddenly footsteps were heard behind him. It was the Duchess and two guardsmen.

“You did it!” the noblewoman said. “However I still want proof this wasn’t some form of trickery, so I’m having you locked in a cellar full of wood. Do what you did here and you will be my husband, the new Duke. Fail and you lose a hand.”

The guards escorted the brewess’s boy to the cellar. It was filled with wood and lit by a single lamp. Once again he started to weep.

“The Duchess ain’t satisfied yet?” a shrill voice asked. It was the pointy eared woman again.

“She wants the same thing as before, except now she’ll remove my hand. I won’t be much help to my mom with only one hand. How could I sow or reap grain? Can’t brew without grain!” the brewess’s boy said.

“No worries! I can help you again. For a price, of course!” the pointy eared woman replied.

“I’m afraid I don’t have anything of value on me!” the lad said.

“Tell you what, I’ll do this for credit. I’ll turn this wood into ivory, and in return you will give me your firstborn son once he is born!”

Having children seemed so distant to the brewess's boy, so he swiftly agreed. The pointy eared woman was delighted, so she picked up the ax and started her little song. Soon all of the wood was chopped, every single log transformed into fine ivory tusks. Once the task was finished the point eared vanished the same way as before. The Duchess walked in shortly after.

"Well, well!" she said. "You did it again. I'm a lady who keeps her word, so we shall be married in a fortnight!" So the son of a brewess wed the Duchess and became a Duke, with all of the privileges and obligations that entailed. The ivory was auctioned off to various craftsmen and the proceeds provided a handsome dowry for his mother, she used to it expand the brewery and hire a full staff. A child was born a year later, a healthy girl. Initially the Duke was worried the pointy eared woman would come for her due but was soon convinced he was safe, he forgot that it was his first son he agreed to surrender.

A second daughter followed, then finally a son after that. A son who would inherit the Duchy. The boy wasn't a week old when the pointy eared woman appeared in his nursery and tried to tear the babe from his wet nurse's breast.

"HEEELP!" the wet nurse cried out.

The Duke rushed in. "What are you doing here? I thought you forgot about the agreement!" he roared to the pointy eared woman.

"Our agreement was you pay me your first son, not first child." she told him.

"Is there any way out of this?" the Duke asked.

"Figure out what my name and all is forgiven. But you won't! I'll give you three days to think of some names. See you tomorrow. Tatty-bye!"

Poof!!!

The Duke cradled his heir for about half an hour, then kissed him and returned the baby to his wet nurse. Both Duke and Duchess spent the next day in the castle library, scouring volume after volume for unusual women names. After endless hours of compiling a list of candidates the two dozed off, with their faces pressed into open tomes.

Poof!!!

"I'm back!" The pointy eared woman said, awakening the couple. "Let's hear what you think my name is!"

The couple rattled off the names on their list. Hecate, Lagertha, Terpsichore, Zenobia, Boadicea, Hagar, Gorgo, Psyche, Calpurnia, Brunhilde, Fatima, Gomer, Thetis, Hatsheput, Calliope, and so on.

Haw haw haw haw haw! The pointy eared woman shrieked in laughter. "Are those the best you can do? They're wrong! All wrong! I'll give you a hint: no one else has my name! Better luck tomorrow!"

Poof!!!

“Perhaps it’s based on a physical characteristic,” the Duchess told her husband. So they compiled a second list, this time of everything they could think of about the pointy eared woman. One they were done they ate lunch and resumed the day normally. At bedtime they were fully confident they would guess correctly.

“Wakey wakey!” The pointy woman said, she was swinging from the canopy of the couple’s lush bed.

“We’ll get it this time!” Said the Duke as he pulled up his list. Elf Ears, Stubby, Greasy Hair, Blotch Face, Cone Head, Pitchy Voice, Pickle Nose, the list went on.

“Now you’re just trying to insult me!” The pointy eared woman said “But you failed, all those features are highly desirable to us Fair Folk! You also failed finding my name, tomorrow is your last shot. Guess correctly, or your son is mine!”

Poof!!!

The Duke and Duchess embraced each other and and wept until their eyes dried. Once they were done they got dressed and ate breakfast. Both were hungry, but they hardly touched their porridge or sausage. The eldest daughter asked what was wrong and learned her brother was in jeopardy. Just then, a sweat soaked knight rushed into the dining hall.

“Sire! I just got back from a hunt with the other knights and we think we know the name of that woman! Last night we heard singing in the woods and when we followed the voice we found an odd little woman dancing around a campfire! She was singing ‘I always will be paid my due! If only my name they knew! If they fail I get their son! Promises are not undone! That poor Sir and Dame would never guess Esigurkinasa is my name!’ Once we heard that we knew. I rushed back here to tell you once dawn broke!”

“Excellent!” the family said in unison. A good laugh was had and the family continued the day in peace. The Duke told his mother, then dispatched messengers to every fief in the Duchy to invite all to the ducal court the next day.

The following day the court was packed. Every vassal of the Duke and every merchant and priest showed up, as did many peasants. The Duke and Duchess sat in their thrones, with their son’s cradle between them and their daughters beside them.

Poof!!!

“Last chance!” Esigurkinasa said, the audience shocked at her appearance. “Let’s hear what names you have today!”

“Is it Maria?” the Duke asked.

“No!”

“Catherine?” the Duchess asked.

“Not even close! One more guess!”

“Then maybe Esigurkinasa?” the Duke asked for a final time.

“WHAAAT!” Esigurkinasa shrieked as her face reddened. “You must have consorted with a witch! Or maybe the Devil told you himself!”

Esigurkinasa dropped to the floor, wailing about how unfair the situation was. Eventually she started to melt away, until all that was left was a giant glob of black yeast. Everyone roared with laughter at the site.

The Duke’s mother collected the yeast and took it with her to the brewery. She used it to produce several barrels of her finest beer yet. The barrels were locked away in her storage cave, where they aged until they were served for her grandson’s first birthday feast.

The End

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