



◊ KING-THRUSHBEARD ◊



KING had a daughter who was beautiful beyond measure, but so proud and overbearing that none of her suitors were good enough for her; she not only refused one after the other, but made a laughing-stock of them. Once the king appointed a great feast, and bade all the marriageable men to it from far and near. And they were all

put in rows, according to their rank and station; first came the kings, then the princes, the dukes, the earls, the barons, and lastly the noblemen. The princess was led in front of the rows, but she had a mocking epithet for each. One was too fat, "What a tub!" said she. Another too tall, "Long and lean is ill to be seen," said she. A third too short, "Fat and short, not fit to court," said she. A fourth was too pale, "A regular death's-head;" a fifth too red-faced, "A game-cock," she called him. The sixth was not well-made enough, "Green wood ill dried!" cried she. So every one had something against him, and she made especially merry over a good king who was very tall, and whose chin had grown a little peaked.

"Only look," cried she, laughing, "he has a chin like a thrush's beak."

And from that time they called him King Thrushbeard. But the old king, when he saw that his daughter mocked every one, and scorned all the assembled suitors, swore in his anger that she should have the first beggar that came to the door for a husband.

A few days afterwards came a travelling ballad-singer, and sang under the window in hopes of a small alms. When the king heard of it, he said that he must come in. And so the ballad-singer entered in his dirty tattered garments, and sang before the king and his daughter ; when he had done, he asked for a small reward. But the king said,

“Thy song has so well pleased me, that I will give thee my daughter to wife.”

The princess was horrified ; but the king said,

“I took an oath to give you to the first beggar that came, and so it must be done.”

There was no remedy. The priest was fetched, and she had to be married to the ballad-singer out of hand. When all was done, the king said,

“Now, as you are a beggar-wife, you can stay no longer in my castle, so off with you and your husband.”

The beggar-man led her away, and she was obliged to go forth with him on foot. On the way they came to a great wood, and she asked,

“Oh, whose is this forest, so thick and so fine?”

He answered,

“It is King Thrushbeard’s, and might have been thine.”

And she cried,

“Oh, I was a silly young thing, I’m afeared;
Would I had taken that good King Thrushbeard!”

Then they passed through a meadow, and she asked,

“Oh, whose is this meadow, so green and so fine?”

He answered,

“It is King Thrushbeard’s, and might have been thine.”

And she cried,

“I was a silly young thing, I’m afeared,
Would I had taken that good King Thrushbeard!”

Then they passed through a great town, and she asked,

“Whose is this city, so great and so fine?”

He answered,

“ Oh, it is King Thrushbeard's, and might have been thine.”

And she cried,

“ I was a silly young thing, I'm afeared,
Would I had taken that good King Thrushbeard ! ”

Then said the beggar-man,

“ It does not please me to hear you always wishing for another husband ; am I not good enough for you ? ”

At last they came to a very small house, and she said,

“ Oh dear me ! what poor little house do I see ?
And whose, I would know, may the wretched hole be ? ”

The man answered,

“ That is my house and thine, where we must live together.”

She had to stoop before she could go in at the door.

“ Where are the servants ? ” asked the king's daughter.

“ What servants ? ” answered the beggar-man, “ what you want to have done you must do yourself. Make a fire quick, and put on water, and cook me some food ; I am very tired.”

But the king's daughter understood nothing about fire-making and cooking, and the beggar-man had to lend a hand himself in order to manage it at all. And when they had eaten their poor fare, they went to bed ; but the man called up his wife very early in the morning, in order to clean the house. For a few days they lived in this indifferent manner, until they came to the end of their store.

“ Wife,” said the man, “ this will not do, stopping here and earning nothing ; you must make baskets.”

So he went out and cut willows, and brought them home ; and she began to weave them, but the hard twigs wounded her tender hands.

“ I see this will not do,” said the man, “ you had better try spinning.”

So she sat her down and tried to spin, but the harsh thread cut her soft fingers, so that the blood flowed.

“ Look now ! ” said the man, “ you are no good at any sort of work ; I made a bad bargain when I took you. I must see

what I can do to make a trade of pots and earthen vessels ; you can sit in the market and offer them for sale."

"Oh dear !" thought she, "suppose while I am selling in the market people belonging to my father's kingdom should see me, how they would mock at me !"

But there was no help for it ; she had to submit, or else die of hunger.

The first day all went well ; the people bought her wares eagerly, because she was so beautiful, and gave her whatever she asked, and some of them gave her the money and left the pots after all behind them. And they lived on these earnings as long as they lasted ; and then the man bought a number of new pots. So she seated herself in a corner of the market, and stood the wares before her for sale. All at once a drunken horse-soldier came plunging by, and rode straight into the midst of her pots, breaking them into a thousand pieces. She could do nothing for weeping.

"Oh dear, what will become of me," cried she ; "what will my husband say ?" and she hastened home and told him her misfortune.

"Who ever heard of such a thing as sitting in the corner of the market with earthenware pots !" said the man ; "now leave off crying ; I see you are not fit for any regular work. I have been asking at your father's castle if they want a kitchen-maid, and they say they don't mind taking you ; at any rate you will get your victuals free."

And the king's daughter became a kitchen-maid, to be at the cook's beck and call, and to do the hardest work. In each of her pockets she fastened a little pot, and brought home in them whatever was left, and upon that she and her husband were fed. It happened one day, when the wedding of the eldest prince was celebrated, the poor woman went upstairs, and stood by the parlour door to see what was going on. And when the place was lighted up, and the company arrived, each person handsomer than the one before, and all was brilliancy and splendour, she thought on her own fate with a sad heart, and bewailed her former pride and haughtiness which had brought her so low, and plunged her in so great poverty. And as the rich and delicate dishes smelling so good were carried to and fro every now and then, the servants would throw her a few fragments,

which she put in her pockets, intending to take home. And then the prince himself passed in clothed in silk and velvet, with a gold chain round his neck. And when he saw the beautiful woman standing in the doorway, he seized her hand and urged her to dance with him, but she refused, all trembling, for she saw it was King Thrushbeard, who had come to court her, whom she had turned away with mocking. It was of no use her resisting, he drew her into the room; and all at once the band to which her pockets were fastened broke, and the pots fell out, and the soup ran about, and the fragments were scattered all round. And when the people saw that, there was great laughter and mocking, and she felt so ashamed, that she wished herself a thousand fathoms underground. She rushed to the door to fly from the place, when a man caught her just on the steps, and when she looked at him, it was King Thrushbeard again. He said to her in a kind tone,

"Do not be afraid, I and the beggar-man with whom you lived in the wretched little hut are one. For love of you I disguised myself, and it was I who broke your pots in the guise of a horse-soldier. I did all that to bring down your proud heart, and to punish your haughtiness, which caused you to mock at me." Then she wept bitterly, and said,

"I have done great wrong, and am not worthy to be your wife."

But he said,

"Take courage, the evil days are gone over; now let us keep our wedding-day."

Then came the ladies-in-waiting and put on her splendid clothing; and her father came, and the whole court, and wished her joy on her marriage with King Thrushbeard; and then the merry-making began in good earnest. I cannot help wishing that you and I could have been there too.

