

The Clever Princess

A certain king had a daughter, and so clever was she that it frightened people to speak with her. She could stop anyone's mouth and had only to utter a word for a man to be thrown into confusion and lose his powers of speech.

And so the king had it proclaimed far and wide that he would give his daughter in marriage to the one who got the better of her in an argument.

Young men, all seeking to marry the princess, flocked to the palace. They came in such numbers that the place was packed with them. No sooner did one leave than others appeared. But not a man among them could out-talk the princess who always held her own in every argument.

However, there were so many of them that the princess was beginning to feel quite worn out. She had no time left even to comb her hair. And as for the old king, he was kept so busy that he slept in his clothes.

At length, vexed beyond endurance, the king announced that those who could not think of a sensible word to say and only came to the palace to play the fool would be severely punished.

The army of wooers melted away at once, and by the look of it the princess was now in danger of being left an old maid.

It was then that a young beggar, hearing that the princess would marry the one who got the better of her in an argument, said to himself:

"Why shouldn't I try my luck? If it turns my way, then I'll become the king's son-in-law; if not, I'll take my punishment and go."

And with these words the beggar set off for the palace.

On his way he saw a dead crow lying on the road.



"Who knows, it might come in handy," said he to himself, and he thrust the crow into his sack.

He walked on and soon came across an old tub.

"Who knows, the tub may come in handy, too!" thought he, "I think I'd better take it."

And slipping the tub, cracked though it was, into his sack, he went on again.

By and by he found a stake, and then a hoop, and a little later, a ram's horn, and these, too, he picked up and took with him.

He reached the town, but not liking to look for lodgings there, asked a farmer from a nearby farm to let him in for the night. He told the farmer and his wife where he was going and why but they only laughed at him.

"What do you want to court trouble for!" they said.

"I'll be all right!" the beggar replied. "I have a mouth under my nose and a tongue in my mouth, so I'll find what to say to the princess."

On the following morning the beggar rose at dawn and went straight to the palace.

"What do you want?" the king's servant asked him.

"I have come to woo the princess," replied the beggar. The servant burst out laughing.

"Why should the princess want to talk with a foolish lad like you!" said he. "You'd better grow up and learn some wisdom first."

But the beggar would not take no for an answer and pleaded with the servant till at last he persuaded him to tell the princess what he was there for.

Said the princess when the servant told her that a young beggar was waiting to see her:

"Well, if this young scamp is here to make fun of me, I won't be the least bit sorry to see him become shorter by a head."

And she asked the servant to show the beggar into her presence.

"Greetings to you, o bride with hands of ice!" said the beggar as he came into the princess's chamber.

The princess was not at all put out.

"My hands are not cold," said she. "They are warm. Warm enough to roast a crow in."

"Let's see if that is indeed so!" said the beggar, and he brought the dead crow out of his sack.

The princess never batted an eye.

"Let's!" said she, and added: "Only won't the fat drip to the floor?"

"Not if we catch it in this tub!" said the beggar, taking the tub out of the sack.

"The tub is cracked and might leak," returned the princess.

"Not if we draw this hoop round it tightly enough!" the beggar said, bringing out the hoop.

"How can we do that?" said the princess, and she took the hoop and held it to the tub. "The hoop is too large for the tub and will hang loose!"

The beggar thrust his hand into the sack again.

"We'll make it fit with the help of this stake!" said he, pulling out the stake.

The princess saw that the beggar was getting the better of her but did not like to admit it.

"You do twist so, my good lad!" she said. "You'll twist your tongue and yourself out of joint before you know it."

The beggar reached into his sack and drew out the ram's horn.

"Look at this horn!" he said. "Could anything be more twisted? Yet it's as sound and fine a horn as they come."

He waited for a reply but none came, for the princess could not think of anything to say.

There was nothing for it, and so she and the beggar were married and so rich was their wedding as was never seen before.

And that was how a beggar became son-in-law to the king himself.

So the saying does not hold that you can't get anywhere by your wits—you can if you set your mind to it.