

CHAPTER 47

Riquet-Topknot

By Charles Perrault

Once upon a time there was a King and a Queen. They had such an ugly baby that people who saw him were not sure whether he was a human child. The Queen was very much distressed at the ugliness of her son and often cried when she looked at him.

One day as she was sitting at the cradle, a good witch entered the room. She looked at the little monstrosity and said:

"Don't weep, Queen; the boy is really very ugly, but it won't prevent him from being kind and attractive. Besides, he will be the cleverest person in your kingdom and will be able to make clever the person he will love most of all."

Everyone was very glad at the good witch's prophecy, and the Queen was especially happy. She wanted to thank the witch, but the witch disappeared as suddenly as she had appeared.

The witch's prophecy came true. As soon as the boy learned to speak his first words, he began talking so cleverly and fluently that everyone was delighted and exclaimed:

"O, how clever the little Prince is!"

I forgot to say that the Prince had been born with a topknot on his head. So he had got a nickname—Riquet-Topknot.

At the same time a neighboring Queen had a daughter. The girl was beautiful as a summer day. The Queen nearly lost her wits with joy when she saw how beautiful her little daughter was. But the same witch that was present at little Riquet's birth told her:

"Don't be too glad, Queen: the little Princess will be as stupid as she is beautiful."

The Queen was distressed at the prophecy. She began to cry and asked the witch to give her daughter a little cleverness.

"I cannot do it," said the witch, "but I can provide that the man the Princess will love will make her as clever as himself."

On saying that the witch disappeared.

The Princess grew, and each year she became more and more beautiful. But her stupidity increased together with her beauty.

She didn't answer when asked questions, and if she did, everyone covered their ears at her stupidity. Besides, she was so absent-minded that she could not put a cup on the table without breaking it, and when she drank water, she spilled half of it on her dress. That is why no one liked her in spite of her beauty.

When guests came to the palace, they approached the beautiful girl first just to look and to admire; but on hearing her stupid talk, they left.

It made the poor Princess very sad. She would gladly give all her beauty for a tiny bit of cleverness.

Although the Queen loved her daughter, she could not but reproach her for her stupidity. That made the Princess suffer even more. Once she went to the forest to cry over her unhappiness. Walking in the forest, she met a small, hunch-backed man who was very ugly but dressed splendidly. The man was walking toward her.



It was the young Prince Riquet-Topknot. He had seen the portrait of the beautiful princess and fallen in love with her. He had left his kingdom and come there to ask the Princess to become his wife.

Riquet was very glad to meet the beautiful girl. He greeted her and, seeing how sad the Princess was, he said:

"Why are you so sad, Princess? You are so young and beautiful! I have seen many beautiful princesses, but you are the best."

"You are very kind," said the Princess and stopped because she was so stupid she couldn't add anything. "Such a beautiful person shouldn't be so sad," Riquet-Topknot continued.

"I'd rather be as ugly as you than so beautiful and so stupid," said the Princess.

"You are not stupid, Princess, if you consider yourself stupid. A really stupid person never admits it."

"I don't know," said the Princess. "I only know I am very stupid, that is why I am so sad."

"Well, if you are sad because of that, I can help you."

"But how?" the Princess asked.

"I can make clever the girl I love most of all," Riquet-Topknot said. "And as I love you most of all, I can give you as much cleverness as you want, if only you marry me."

The Princess was embarrassed. She said nothing.

"I see my proposal has distressed you," Riquet-Topknot said. "But I am not surprised. I will give you a year to think it over. In a year I shall come for the answer."

The Princess thought the year would be endless and agreed.

As soon as she promised Riquet-Topknot to marry him, she felt herself a different person. From that very moment she began to talk to Riquet-Topknot so reasonably and

fluently that Riquet-Topknot thought he had given her more cleverness than he had left for himself.

When the Princess came home, the courtiers didn't know what to think of her sudden change. She went to the forest as stupid as is possible, and returned exceedingly clever and reasonable.

The King began to ask advice from the Princess and even decided important state affairs in her room.

The rumors of this extraordinary change spread widely. Young Princes began to come from neighboring kingdoms. Each of them tried to win the Princess's love and asked her to marry him. But the Princess thought they were not clever enough and refused to marry any of them.

At last a very rich, very clever and very slender prince came. The Princess liked him at once.

The King noticed it and said she could marry that prince if she wanted to.

In order to think it over, the Princess went for a walk and by mere chance strode into the forest where she had met Riquet-Topknot a year ago.

Walking along the forest and thinking, the Princess suddenly heard some noise underground, as if people were running to and fro.

The Princess stood still and listened. She heard shouts:

"Give me the pot!"

"Put some wood into the fire!"

At that moment the ground opened, and the Princess saw a large underground kitchen full of cooks, kitchen-boys and different servants. A crowd of cooks clad in white caps and aprons, with enormous knives in their hands, went out of the kitchen. They went to a forest clearing, sat down around a long table and began chopping meat and singing merry songs.

The surprised Princess asked for whom they were preparing such a rich feast.

"For Prince Riquet-Topknot," the fattest cook answered. "Tomorrow he celebrates his wedding."

When the Princess remembered that a year before on this very day she had promised to marry the little monster, she nearly fainted.

Having recovered from her confusion, the Princess moved forward, but no sooner had she taken 30 steps than she saw Riquet-Topknot, who was merry, healthy and splendidly dressed as a bridegroom.

"You see, Princess, I keep my word," he said. "I think you have come here to keep your word too and to make me the happiest man in the world."

"No," the Princess said. "I haven't made up my mind yet, and I am afraid I'll never be able to marry you."

"But why?" Riquet-Topknot asked. "Can it be because of my ugliness? Or perhaps you dislike my mind or my character?"

"No," said the Princess, "I like both your mind and character."

"Then it is my ugliness that scares you away. But that can be mended, because you can make me a very handsome man!"

"How can I?" the Princess asked.

"It is very easy," Riquet-Topknot said. "If you love me and want me to be handsome,

I'll become handsome. A witch has made me able to make clever the girl I love. And the same witch has made you able to make handsome the man you love."

"If it is so," the Princess said, "I want you to become handsome with all my heart!"

No sooner had the Princess uttered these words than Riquet-Topknot seemed to her the most handsome and the most slender man she had ever seen.

They say it had nothing to do with witches and witchcraft. It is simply that the Princess fell in love with Riquet and ceased to notice his ugliness. Now his ugly features seemed to her nice and attractive.

At any rate the Princess agreed to marry him immediately, and they celebrated their wedding the next day.

For Your Journal



Imagine that you are given a choice: You could be born very beautiful but very stupid, or you could be the embodiment of wisdom and kindness, but be very ugly. Which would you choose? Make a list of reasons that determined your choice and think how these reasons might influence your life.

