



## KING THRUSHBEARD

Once upon a time, there was an incredibly beautiful but enormously spoiled and arrogant princess. Whenever a suitor asked for her hand in marriage, she would laugh at them and send them away. All the girls her age had already been married for ages, but not this princess. She was too vain, and believed firmly that no one would ever be good enough for her.

One day, her father decided to invite all of her suitors to the castle so the princess would have to choose one.

Crowds of royal men gathered to ask for the princess's hand. There were so many the king had to line them up. He organized them by their titles and their wealth, so the kings and counts were brought to the front while knights had to retreat to the back. The princess walked along the line, stopping at each one of them for a little while to examine them, and every single time she found something about them that she could mock. One was too fat, another too tall, the next too crooked, bald, or red as a tomato.

But it was the first man in the line who amused her the most. His chin, she said, looked like the beak of a thrush. She started giggling and even mimicking the thrush's calls.

This was the last straw for the king. He lost his temper and shouted angrily:

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“Enough! I’m sick of that arrogance of yours! I swear I will give you to the first beggar who comes asking for your hand.” Then he sent all the men home and stormed out.

The next day, a scruffy beggar passed by the royal palace, shouting: “A song for a reward! I’ll play you a song for a reward!”

The king sent for him and ordered him to play. The beggar started strumming a guitar, his lovely voice carrying throughout the hall.

“You played well, indeed,” the king said.

The beggar bowed deeply, then looked up daringly.

“Thank you, your highness. Now, what is my reward?”

The king remembered what he had threatened the day before. He looked at his spoiled daughter and thought about how terribly she had acted the day before.

“I offer you my daughter’s hand in marriage,” he said.

The princess thought her father was joking and laughed uproariously. Her father had never done anything that would displease her, so she had no reason to believe he would actually do this to her.

When the priest arrived, however, it dawned on the princess that her father wasn’t joking. The king’s order was law, so there was nothing she could do, and after the wedding ceremony the king bid his daughter farewell.

“I’m sorry, my dear, but now that you are married to a commoner, you must leave the palace.”

The king wouldn’t even let her pack her favourite dresses, and so she left the palace with nothing but the clothes she was wearing. She was furious and utterly disbelieving, but soon her anger faded to shock and sadness. Her new husband kindly took her by the hand and led her away from the palace. Hand in hand, they walked through woods and over mountains until they came upon a hill with a beautiful hunting lodge on top.

“It’s so lovely up here! Do you know who these woods and that beautiful lodge belong to?” asked the princess.

“They belong to King Thrushbeard,” the beggar said. “I’ve heard that not long ago he asked for your hand and you mocked him.”

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They walked on and on, over vast green fields and meadows.

“Who owns these lovely fields?” asked the princess again.

“They, too, belong to King Thrushbeard.”

“I had no idea he was so rich! How silly of me!” The princess was beginning to deeply regret mocking the king.

Soon, they reached a beautiful town.

“Oh, what a lovely town!” the princess said. “Who does it belong to?” But, of course, she already knew the answer.

“This, too, belongs to King Thrushbeard.”

“Oh, I’m so sorry now that I mocked him! Oh, King Thrushbeard, if only I had known,” the princess lamented. But it was no use crying now; she was married to a beggar, and she had to live with her mistakes.

Before long, they arrived at their new home. As soon as the princess laid her eyes on the broken down old shack, she remembered her beautiful chambers and exquisite dresses back in the palace and she began to weep.

“Come in, my dear. This is your new home!” The beggar seemed quite pleased with his announcement, and when she wouldn’t enter he took her by her arm and steered her inside.

The house was very modest, and as the princess looked around, she noticed that there was nothing but the bare necessities: a table and two chairs, a stove with a bubbling pot on top, and a simple bed. Up until now the princess had slept in a gigantic canopy bed; now the two of them were supposed to fit into one wooden bed half the size of her old one.

Once they were inside, the beggar asked the princess to light a fire and make something to eat. But she had never done any of those things and had no clue where to start.

“Good heavens! I married a woman who cannot cook!” exclaimed the beggar desperately. He lit the fire himself and put porridge on the stove. The princess watched him, feeling horribly ashamed. She wanted to help, so in the end she picked up a broom and started sweeping in front of the shack.

They lived like this for several weeks and little by little the princess got used to

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hard work. After some time, though, they ran out of food and realized they had spent almost all the money they had.

“We must find a way to earn some money unless we want to starve to death,” said the beggar. He gave the princess a pair of knitting needles and asked her to knit something they could sell at the market, but the moment she started, she pricked her hand and dropped the needles on the ground.

Her husband was very frustrated but he brought her some willow branches so she could weave some baskets. This too, of course, the princess didn't know how to do.

Finally, the beggar came up with one last idea. He would make earthenware and his wife could sell it at the market. He sat behind his potter's wheel and spun it with his feet. A few days later, they had a stack of pretty clay pots fresh out of the kiln. The beggar loaded them into a wagon and sent his wife to sell them at the market.

People in town liked buying the pots from the beautiful woman, and soon enough she'd sold everything she'd brought and returned home with a pouch full of coins. The money and the food they bought lasted them a few weeks before the princess had to go back to the market to sell another batch of earthenware. As soon as she arrived, she took the ware out of her knapsack and laid it out around her, calling at the passers-by to come and have a look. She was feeling very proud of herself, but suddenly a drunkard appeared out of nowhere and toppled over, right into the pots, and shattered every last one of them.

“What will I do now?” lamented the princess. Distraught and penniless, she headed home and told her husband everything.

“How could you let that happen?” the beggar asked. “What will we eat? We have no food!”

The princess felt miserable. They were both very hungry and she knew how hard her husband had worked to make the pots. She wanted to be useful, so she decided to go to the castle and ask for work in the royal kitchen. The cook told her they didn't need help, but she begged until the woman gave her a job as a simple servant who would work in exchange for food. She wanted to prove

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she was responsible to her husband, and so every day she wasn't working at the castle, she was at the market selling her husband's clay pots.

Some months later, news spread that King Thrushbeard was going to get married. The castle was to plan a spectacular celebration. The most honoured of guests would attend, dressed in beautiful gowns. The princess, who was working in the kitchen, secretly envied them and quietly scolded herself for having been so ungrateful and arrogant when she had the chance for a better life. Her life had been good and she had had everything she wanted and needed, but she had taken it for granted. Now she was wearing a dirty apron and filling enormous tables with silver plates full of delicacies meant for someone else. Despite that, she suddenly realised, she was happier here than she had ever been at her father's palace. She'd made friends with the other servants, and she had grown to love her husband. She'd learned to cook, wash clothes, and make pottery. Her work was hard and her life simple, but she had grown to like it. Still, she couldn't help but imagine what her life might have been like if she had married King Thrushbeard and become the Queen of this beautiful castle.

One the day before the wedding, there was a massive feast. The king himself entered the hall, wearing beautiful, expensive clothes and many jewels. When he noticed the princess clearing the tables, he approached her and asked her for a dance. The princess was completely taken aback, feeling too ashamed even to offer him her hand. She was dirty and unkempt after a long day in the kitchen. Suddenly, everyone turned and stared and there was a massive uproar in the hall. The princess, too confused and humiliated to bear it any longer, rushed outside. She thought she would die of embarrassment.

King Thrushbeard hurried after her. She thought he must want to show her up for the way she had treated him when he proposed so very long ago.

"I'm sorry that I mocked you, okay? Please, forgive me, just don't humiliate me as I did you," the princess begged.

"Your scorn hurt my feelings, yes. But now, look at me." He paused. She was looking at her shoes. "Please, look at me. Don't you recognize me?"

The princess looked at his clothes and the jewels on his hands.

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“Yes, you’re King Thrushbeard. I remember you.”

“No, my dear. Look in my eyes.” And when she did, she suddenly recognized him. He was her husband, the beggar!

“But... how is that possible?” she asked. “How can that be? And even if it’s true, I can’t be your wife. I’m not worthy of you.” She couldn’t believe that this was the man she lived with in her little shack.

“It is me. And you are my one and only, my darling. I fell in love with you the moment I saw you, but I wanted you to learn to love me for more than my riches. You do love me, don’t you?”

And she did, of course, whether or not he was rich.

They hadn’t had a proper wedding, he reminded her, and so he led her up to a chamber where a beautiful wedding gown had been laid out for her. She nearly wept for happiness, and after she took a bath and washed off the kitchen grime, they had the most beautiful wedding she could ever have imagined. The princess became a queen, and she was forever known around the land as the kindest and fairest of rulers.