

## PRINCESS CARPILLON

There was once an old king who, to console himself for a long widowhood, married a beautiful princess whom he loved very much. He had a son from his first wife, hunchbacked and cross-eyed, who felt a great deal of chagrin at his father's second marriage. *The quality of unique son, he said to himself, made me dreaded and loved, but if the young queen has children, my father, who can dispose of his realm, will no longer consider than I am the eldest; he will disinherit me in their favor.* He was ambitious, full of malice and dissimulation, with the consequence that, without giving any evidence of his anxiety, he went secretly to consult a fay who was reputed to be the most skillful in the world.

As soon as he appeared, she divined his name, his quality and what he wanted of her. "Prince Bossu," she said to him—that was the name by which he was known—"you have come too late; the queen is pregnant with a son. I can't do him any harm, but if he dies or something happens to him I promise you that I'll prevent her from having any others."

That promise consoled the hunchback slightly; he implored the fay to remember it, and made the resolution to do his little brother a bad turn as soon as he was born.

After nine months the queen had a son, the most beautiful in the world, and it was remarked, as an extraordinary thing, that he had the form of an arrow imprinted on his arm. The queen loved her little infant to such an extent that she wanted to nurse him herself, by which Prince Bossu was very annoyed, because the vigilance of a mother is much greater than that of a nurse, and it is much easier to deceive the latter than the former.

However, the hunchback, who was thinking of nothing but making his coup, testified an attachment for the queen and a tenderness for the little prince, by which the king was charmed. "I would never have believed," he said, "that my son was capable of such good nature, and if he continues, I'll leave him a part of my kingdom."

Those promises were not sufficient for the hunchback; he wanted all or nothing, with the consequence that one evening, he presented the queen with some jam that contained opium. She fell asleep; immediately, the prince, who had hidden behind the tapestry, took the little prince very quietly, and put in his place a large cat, carefully swaddled, in order that the nursemaids would not perceive his theft. The cat cried, the nursemaids rocked it; eventually, it made such a strange racket that they thought it wanted to suckle.

They woke the queen who was still asleep, and, thinking that she was holding her dear baby, gave it her breast; but the malevolent cat bit it. She uttered a loud scream, and looked at it. What became of her when she perceived the head of a cat instead of that of her son? Her dolor was so intense that she nearly expired right away.

The noise of the queen's women woke the entire palace. The king put on his dressing-gown and run to her apartment. The first thing he saw was the cat, wrapped up in gold sheets that his son ordinarily had; it had been thrown to the ground and was making an astonishing racket. The king, very alarmed, asked what it signified, and he was told that no one understood anything, but that the little prince was not there, that they had searched in vain, and that the queen was badly wounded.

The king went into her bedroom; he found her in an unparalleled affliction, and, not wanting to augment it with his own, he controlled himself violently in order to console the poor princess.

Meanwhile, the hunchback had given his little brother to a man who was entirely his. "Take him into a distant forest," he said, "and put him, completely naked, in the place most exposed to ferocious beasts, so that he'll be devoured and no more mention will be heard of him. I'd take him there myself, so fearful am I that you won't carry out my commission well, but it's necessary that I appear before the king. Go, then, and be sure that if I reign, I won't be an ingrate."

He put the poor child into a covered basket personally, and as he was accustomed to caress him, the baby already knew him, and smiled at him, but the pitiless hunchback was less moved by that than a rock.

He went promptly to the queen's room, almost undressed—by virtue, he said, of being in such haste—rubbing his eyes like a man still asleep, and when he learned the bad news of his stepmother's wound and the theft of the prince and saw the swaddled cat, he uttered cries to dolorous that everyone was also occupied in consoling him, as if he had really been very afflicted. He took the cat and wrung its neck with a ferocity that was very natural to him; he made it understood, however, that it was only because of the bite it had given the queen.

No one suspected him, even though he was malevolent enough to have done it; his crime was hidden under his feigned tears. The king and queen were grateful to that ingrate, and charged him with sending word to all the fays to ask what might have become of their child. In his impatience to put an end to the search he brought back several different and very enigmatic responses, which all agreed on one point: that the prince was not dead, that he had only been abducted for a time, for impenetrable reasons; that he would be brought back perfect in all ways; and that it was necessary not to search for him any longer, because the efforts would be futile. He judged that they would be tranquilized by that, and he judged correctly. The king and queen flattered themselves with recovering their son one day.

Meanwhile, the bite that the cat had inflicted on the queen's breast became so poisoned that she died of it, and the king, overwhelmed by dolor, remained in his palace for an entire year, always waiting for news of his son, but waiting for it in vain.

The man who had taken him away walked all night without stopping; when dawn began to appear, he opened the basket, and the amiable infant smiled at him, as he had been accustomed to do to the queen when she took him in her arms.

"Poor little prince," he said, "how unfortunate your destiny is, alas! You shall serve as fodder, like a tender lamb, for some hungry lion. Why did the hunchback choose me to aid him in dooming you?"

He closed the basket again in order no longer to see that object worthy of pity; but the child who had gone all night without feeding, started to cry with all his might. The man who was carrying him picked some figs and put them in his mouth. The sweetness of the fruit appeased him slightly, so he carried him all day until the following night, when he entered a vast and somber forest. He did not want to go into it deeply, for fear of being devoured himself, but the next day he advanced, with the basket, which he was still holding.

The forest was so large that, in whichever direction he looked, he could not see the end of it, but he perceived, in a place covered with trees, a rock that rose up in several different pinnacles. *That, no doubt,* he said to himself, *is the retreat of the cruelest beasts; it's necessary to leave the child there, since I'm not in a position to save him.* He approached the rock; immediately, an eagle of prodigious size emerged to fly around it, as if there was something dear to it there. In fact, it was its chicks that it was nourishing in the depths of a kind of grotto.

"You'll serve as prey for those birds, which are the kings of the others, poor child," the man said. Immediately, he unwrapped the baby and laid him in the middle of three eaglets. Their nest was large, sheltered from the insults of the air; he had a great deal of difficulty putting the prince inside because the side from which it could be approached was very steep and inclined over a frightful precipice. He drew away, sighing, and saw the eagle returning rapidly to its nest.

"There, it's done," he said. "The child will lose his life."

He drew away diligently, in order not to hear his last screams. He returned to the hunchback and assured him that he no longer had a brother.

At that news the barbaric prince embraced his faithful minister and gave him a diamond ring, assuring him that when he was king he would be the captain of his guards.

The eagle, having returned to her nest, was perhaps surprised to find that new guest there. Whether she was surprised or not, however, she observed the rights of hospitality better than many people have done. She placed herself next to her nursling, extended her wings over him and warmed him; it seemed that all her cares were now only for him; a particular instinct engaged her to go in search of fruits, to peck

them and to pour the juice into the vermilion mouth of the little prince; in sum, she nourished him so well that the queen, his mother, could not have nourished him any better.

When the eaglets were a little stronger, the eagle took them one by one, sometimes on her wings, sometimes in her claws, and thus accustomed them to gazing at the sun without closing their eyelids. The eaglets sometimes quit their mother and flew a little way on their own, but for the little prince here was none of that, and when she lifted him into the air he ran a great risk of falling and being killed. Fortune mingled on that; it was her who had furnished him with such an extraordinary nurse, and it was her who made sure that she did not let him fall.

Four years passed thus. The eagle lost all her eaglets; they flew away when they were big enough; they no longer came back to see their mother and their nest. As for the prince, who did not have the strength to go far, he stayed on the rock, for the eagle, far-sighted and fearful, being apprehensive that he might fall into the precipice, took him to the other side, to a place so narrow that the wild beasts could not get into it.

Amour, who is depicted as perfect, was less so than the young prince; the ardor of the sun could not tarnish the lilies and roses of his complexion; all his features had something so regular that the most excellent painters would not have been able to imagine their like; his hair was already long enough to cover his shoulders, and his manner was so elevated that nothing more noble and grandiose has ever been seen in a child. The eagle loved him with a surprising passion. She only brought him fruits for his nourishment, making that species of difference between him and her eaglets, to whom she gave nothing but raw flesh.

She desolated all the shepherds in the surrounding area, stealing their lambs mercilessly; there was no talk of anything but the eagle's rapine. Finally, fatigued by nourishing her at the expense of their flocks, they resolved between them to search for her retreat. They split up into several groups, followed her with their eyes, and explored the mountains and valleys; they could not find her for a long time, but finally perceived that she alighted on the big rock.

The most determined among them tried to climb it, although there were a thousand perils. At that time she had two little eaglets that she nourished carefully, but however dear they were to her, her tenderness was still greater for the young prince, because she had seen him for a longer time.

When the shepherds had found her nest, as she was not there, it was easy for them to tear it to pieces and take everything there was inside. What became of them when they found the prince! There was something so extraordinary in that discovery that their limited minds could not comprehend it at all.

They took away the child and the eaglets; all of them cried. The eagle heard them, and came to swoop down on the thieves of her property. They would have felt the effects of her anger if they had not killed her with an arrow launched by one of the shepherds. The young prince, utterly ingenuous, seeing his nurse fall, uttered pitiful cries and wept bitterly.

After that expedition the shepherds matched toward their hamlet. On the way they performed a cruel ceremony, of which this was the subject.

That country had long served as a retreat for ogres. Everyone, desperate by virtue of such a dangerous proximity, had sought a means of driving them away without being able to succeed; the terrible ogres, angered by the hatred testified against them, redoubled their cruelties, and ate, without exception, all those who fell into their hands.

Finally, one day, when the shepherds had assembled in order to deliberate as to what they could do against the ogres, a man of frightful size appeared in their midst; half of his body had the form of a deer covered with blue fur, with the feet of a goat; he had a club over his shoulder and a buckler in his hand. "Shepherds," he said to them, "I am the Blue Centaur; if you will give me a child every three years, I promise to bring a hundred of my brothers here, who will make rude war on the ogres, whom we shall drive away, no matter what they do.

The shepherds had difficulty engaging themselves to do something so cruel, but the most venerable among them said. "Well, my companions, is it more useful to us that the ogres eat our fathers, our children and our wives every day? We would lose one in order to save several; let us not refuse the offer

that the Centaur has made us, then.” Immediately, everyone consented; they engaged themselves, with great oaths, to keep their word to the Centaur, and that he would have a child.

He departed and came back, as he had said, with his brothers, who were as monstrous as him. The ogres were no less brave than cruel; they delivered several combats, in which the centaurs were always victorious, finally forcing them to flee. The Blue Centaur came to demand the recompense for his pains; everyone said that nothing was more just, but when it was necessary to deliver the promised child there was no family that could resolve to give up theirs; the mothers hid their children in the bosom of the earth.

The centaur, who did not appreciate mockery, after having waited for twice twenty-four hours, told the shepherds that he intended that they would give him as many children as the days that he remained among them, with the consequence that the delay cost them six little boys and six little girls. Since that time, the great affair had been regulated; every three years there was a solemn fête to deliver the poor innocent to the Centaur.

It was the day after the prince had been taken from the eagle’s nest that the tribute was due to be paid, and although the child had already been chosen, it is easy to understand that the shepherds gladly put the prince in his place; the uncertainty of his birth—for they were so simple that they sometimes believed that the eagle was his mother—and his marvelous beauty, determined them absolutely to present him to the Centaur, because he was so delicate that he did not want to eat children that were not very pretty.

The mother of the child that had been destined for him passed suddenly from the horrors of death to the joys of life; she was charged with ornamenting the little prince, as she would have done for her son; she combed his long hair well, gave him a crown of little red and white roses, which ordinarily came from the bushes, and dressed him in a long, trailing robe of fine white cloth, with a girdle of flowers.

Thus clad, he was marched at the head of several children that were to company him; but how can I describe the air of grandeur and nobility that already shone in his eyes? Having never seen anything but eagles, and being still at such a tender age, he appeared neither fearful nor savage; it seemed that all the shepherds were only there to please him.

“Oh, what a pity!” they said to one another. “What! That child is going to be devoured! Can we not save him?” Several wept, but in the end, it was impossible to do otherwise.

The Centaur was accustomed to appear on top of a rock, his club in one hand and his buckler in the other, and from there, in a terrible voice, he cried to the shepherds: “Leave me my prey and retire.” As soon as he perceived the child he had been brought, he began to celebrate, and, shouting so loudly that the mountains trembled, he said in his terrible voice: “That’s the best meal I’ve ever had in my life; I won’t need salt or pepper to crunch that little lad.”

The shepherds and shepherdesses cast their eyes on the poor child and said to one another: “The eagle has spared him, but this is the monster that will end his days.” The oldest of the shepherds took him in his arms, kissed him several times and said: “Oh, my child, my dear child, I don’t know you, and I sense that I haven’t seen enough of you. Is it necessary that I witness your funeral? What is Fortune doing, then, to have protected you from the sharp claws and the hooked beak of the terrible eagle, since she is delivering you today to the carnivorous teeth of that horrible monster?”

While the shepherd was moistening the pink cheeks of the prince with the tears flowing from his eyes, the tender innocent passed his little hands through his gray hair, smiling in an infantile fashion, and the more pity he inspired, the less diligent the shepherd appeared to be in advancing.