

THE LITTLE LAME PRINCE



The Prince With the Nose

There was once a king who was passionately in love with a beautiful princess, but she could not be married because a magician had enchanted her. The king went to a good fairy to inquire what he should do. Said the fairy, after receiving him graciously: "Sir, I will tell you a great secret. The princess has a great cat whom she loves so well that she cares for nothing and nobody else; but she will be obliged to marry any person who is adroit enough to walk upon the cat's tail."

"That will not be very difficult," thought the king to himself, and departed, resolving to trample the cat's tail to pieces rather than not succeed in walking upon it. He went immediately to the palace of his fair mistress and the cat; the animal came in front of him, arching its back in anger as it was wont to do. The king lifted up his foot, thinking nothing would be so easy as to tread on the tail, but he found himself mistaken. Minon—that was the creature's name—twisted itself round so sharply that the king only hurt his own foot by stamping on the floor. For eight days did he pursue the cat everywhere: up and down the palace he was after it from morning till night, but with no better success; the tail seemed made of quicksilver, so very lively was it. At last the king had the good fortune to catch Minon sleeping, when tramp! tramp! he trod on the tail with all his force.

Minon woke up, mewed horribly, and immediately changed from a cat into a large, fierce-looking man, who regarded the king with flashing eyes.

"You must marry the princess," cried he, "because you have broken the enchantment in which I held her; but I will be revenged on you. You shall have a son with a nose as long as—that;" he made in the air a curve of half a foot; "yet he shall believe it is just like all other noses, and shall be always unfortunate till he has found out it is not. And if you ever tell anybody of this threat of mine, you shall die on the spot." So saying the magician disappeared.

The king, who was at first much terrified, soon began to laugh at this adventure. "My son might have a worse misfortune than too long a nose," thought he. "At least it will hinder him neither in seeing nor hearing. I will go and find the princess and marry her at once."



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He did so, but he only lived a few months after, and died before his little son was born, so that nobody knew anything about the secret of the nose.

The little prince was so much wished for that when he came into the world they agreed to call him Prince Wish. He had beautiful blue eyes and a sweet little mouth, but his nose was so big that it covered half his face. The queen, his mother, was inconsolable; but her ladies tried to satisfy her by telling her that the nose was not nearly so large as it seemed, that it would grow smaller as the prince grew bigger, and that if it did not a large nose was indispensable to a hero. All great soldiers, they said, had great noses, as everybody knew. The queen was so very fond of her son that she listened eagerly to all this comfort. Shortly she grew so used to the prince's nose that it did not seem to her any larger than ordinary noses of the court; where, in process of time, everybody with a long nose was very much admired, and the unfortunate people who had only snubs were taken very little notice of.

Great care was observed in the education of the prince; and as soon as he could speak they told him all sorts of amusing tales, in which all the bad people had short noses, and all the good people had long ones. No person was suffered to come near him who had not a nose of more than ordinary length; nay, to such an extent did the countries carry their fancy, that the noses of all the little babies were ordered to be pulled out as far as possible several times a day, in order to make them grow. But grow as they would, they never could grow as long as that of Prince Wish. When he was old enough his tutor taught him history; and whenever any great king or lovely princess was referred to, the tutor always took care to mention that he or she had a long nose. All the royal apartments were filled with pictures and portraits having this peculiarity, so that at last Prince Wish began to regard the length of his nose as his greatest perfection, and would not have had it an inch less even to save his crown.

When he was twenty years old his mother and his people wished him to marry. They procured for him the likenesses of many princesses, but the one he preferred was Princess Darling, daughter of a powerful monarch and heiress to several kingdoms. Alas! with all her beauty, this princess had one great misfortune, a little turned-up nose, which, every one else said made her only the more bewitching. But here, in the kingdom of Prince Wish, the courtiers were thrown by it into the utmost perplexity. They were in the habit of laughing at all small noses; but how dared they make fun of the nose of Princess Darling? Two unfortunate gentlemen, whom Prince Wish had overheard doing so, were ignominiously banished from the court and capital.

After this, the courtiers became alarmed, and tried to correct their habit of speech; but they would have found themselves in constant difficulties, had not one clever person struck out a bright idea. He said that though it was indispensably necessary for a man to

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have a great nose, women were very different; and that a learned man had discovered in a very old manuscript that the celebrated Cleopatra, Queen of Egypt, the beauty of the ancient world, had a turned-up nose. At this information Prince Wish was so delighted that he made the courtier a very handsome present, and immediately sent off ambassadors to demand Princess Darling in marriage.

She accepted his offer at once, and returned with the ambassadors. He made all haste to meet and welcome her, but when she was only three leagues distant from his capital, before he had time even to kiss her hand, the magician who had once assumed the shape of his mother's cat, Minon, appeared in the air and carried her off before the lover's very eyes.

Prince Wish, almost beside himself with grief, declared that nothing should induce him to return to his throne and kingdom till he had found Darling. He would suffer none of his courtiers or attendants to follow him; but bidding them all adieu, mounted a good horse, laid the reins on the animal's neck, and let him take him wherever he would.

The horse entered a wide-extended plain, and trotted on steadily the whole day without finding a single house. Master and beast began almost to faint with hunger; and Prince Wish might have wished himself at home again, had he not discovered, just at dusk, a cavern, where there sat, beside a bright lantern, a little woman who might have been more than a hundred years old.

She put on her spectacles the better to look at the stranger, and he noticed that her nose was so small that the spectacles would hardly stay on; then the prince and the fairy—for she was a fairy—burst into laughter.

“What a funny nose!” cried the one.

“Not so funny as yours, madam,” returned the other. “But pray let us leave our noses alone, and be good enough to give me something to eat, for I am dying with hunger, and so is my poor horse.”

“With all my heart,” answered the fairy. “Although your nose is ridiculously long, you are no less the son of one of my best friends. I loved your father like a brother; he had a very handsome nose.”

“What is wanting to my nose?” asked Wish rather savagely.

“Oh! nothing at all. On the contrary, there is a great deal too much of it; but never mind, one may be a very honest man, and yet have too big a nose. As I said, I was a great friend

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of your father's; he came often to see me. I was very pretty then, and oftentimes he used to say to me, 'My sister——'

"I will hear the rest, madam, with pleasure, when I have supped; but will you condescend to remember that I have tasted nothing all day?"

"Poor boy," said the fairy, "I will give you some supper directly; and while you eat it I will tell you my history in six words, for I hate much talking. A long tongue is as insupportable as a long nose; and I remember when I was young how much I used to be admired because I was not a talker; indeed, some one said to the queen my mother—for poor as you see me now, I am the daughter of a great king, who always——"

"Ate when he was hungry, I hope," interrupted the prince, whose patience was fast departing.

"You are right," said the imperturbable old fairy; "and I will bring you your supper directly, only I wish first just to say that the king my father——"

"Hang the king your father!" Prince Wish was about to exclaim, but he stopped himself, and only observed that however the pleasure of her conversation might make him forget his hunger, it could not have the same effect upon his horse, who was really starving.

The fairy, pleased at his civility, called her servants and bade them supply him at once with all he needed. "And," added she, "I must say you are very polite and very good-tempered, in spite of your nose."

"What has the old woman to do with my nose?" thought the prince. "If I were not so very hungry, I would soon show her what she is—a regular old gossip and chatterbox. She to fancy she talks little, indeed! One must be very foolish not to know one's own defects. This comes of being born a princess. Flatterers have spoiled her and persuaded her that she talks little. Little, indeed! I never knew anybody chatter so much."

While the prince thus meditated, the servants were laying the table, the fairy asking them a hundred unnecessary questions, simply for the pleasure of hearing herself talk. "Well," thought Wish, "I am delighted that I came hither, if only to learn how wise I have been in never listening to flatterers, who hide from us our faults, or make us believe they are perfections. But they could never deceive me. I know all my own weak points, I trust." As truly he believed he did.

So he went on eating contentedly, nor stopped till the old fairy began to address him.

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“Prince,” said she, “will you be kind enough to turn a little? Your nose casts such a shadow that I cannot see what is on my plate. And, as I was saying, your father admired me and always made me welcome at court. What is the court etiquette there now? Do the ladies still go to assemblies, promenades, balls?—I beg your pardon for laughing, but how very long your nose is.”

“I wish you would cease to speak of my nose,” said the prince, becoming annoyed. “It is what it is, and I do not desire it any shorter.”

“Oh! I see that I have vexed you,” returned the fairy. “Nevertheless, I am one of your best friends, and so I shall take the liberty of always——” She would doubtless have gone on talking till midnight; but the prince, unable to bear it any longer, here interrupted her, thanked her for her hospitality, bade her a hasty adieu, and rode away.

He traveled for a long time, half over the world, but he heard no news of Princess Darling. However, in each place he went to, he heard one remarkable fact—the great length of his own nose. The little boys in the streets jeered at him, the peasants stared at him, and the more polite ladies and gentlemen whom he met in society used to try in vain to keep from laughing, and to get out of his way as soon as they could. So the poor prince became gradually quite forlorn and solitary; he thought all the world was mad, but still he never thought of there being anything queer about his own nose. At last the old fairy, who, though she was a chatterbox, was very good-natured; saw that he was almost breaking his heart. She felt sorry for him and wished to help him in spite of himself, for she knew the enchantment which hid from him the Princess Darling could never be broken till he had discovered his own defect. So she went in search of the princess, and being more powerful than the magician, since she was a good fairy and he was an evil magician, she got her away from him and shut her up in a palace of crystal, which she placed on the road which Prince Wish had to pass.

He was riding along, very melancholy, when he saw the palace; and at its entrance was a room, made of the purest glass, in which sat his beloved princess, smiling and beautiful as ever. He leaped from his horse and ran toward her. She held out her hand for him to kiss, but he could not get at it for the glass. Transported with eagerness and delight, he dashed his sword through the crystal and succeeded in breaking a small opening, to which she put up her beautiful rosy mouth. But it was in vain; Prince Wish could not approach it. He twisted his neck about, and turned his head on all sides, till at length, putting up his hand to his face, he discovered the impediment.

“It must be confessed,” exclaimed he, “that my nose is too long.”

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That moment the glass walls all split asunder, and the old fairy appeared, leading Princess Darling.

“Avow, prince,” said she, “that you are very much obliged to me, for now the enchantment is ended. You may marry the object of your choice. But,” added she, smiling, “I fear I might have talked to you forever on the subject of your nose, and you would not have believed me in its length, till it became an obstacle to your own inclinations. Now behold it!” and she held up a crystal mirror. “Are you satisfied to be no different from other people?”

“Perfectly,” said Prince Wish, who found his nose had shrunk to an ordinary length. And taking the Princess Darling by the hand, he kissed her courteously, affectionately, and satisfactorily. Then they departed to their own country, and lived very happily all their days.