

# THE GOLDEN OX

Once upon a time there lived a King and a Queen who had one little daughter. The Queen fell ill, and when she felt that her end was nigh, she called her husband to her and made him promise that if he decided to remarry, he would choose a woman who looked so like her that she could wear the same clothes.

Soon after, she passed away and the King's counsellors urged him to take another wife. Messengers were sent far and wide to announce that the King would marry the woman who looked so like the dead Queen, that she could even wear her clothes.

Many maidens came to try on the clothes, but they did not fit any of them. The King himself set out, and travelled through many lands, but, although he searched amongst princesses and noblewomen, and merchants' daughters and peasant girls, he could find no one who looked like his dead wife. He returned home, and his advisors continued to urge him to remarry.



Some years passed away, and the King's little daughter grew into a lovely maiden. One day she went into the room in which her mother's clothes were kept, and she decided to try them on. Her father was passing by and he heard a noise. He looked through the keyhole and it seemed to him that his dead wife had come back to life. Filled with delight, he opened the door and hurried into the room. He only realized that it was not the Queen when his daughter turned to speak to him, for she was as like her mother as one drop of milk is to another.

"Daughter," said the King, "it is you who are most like your mother, so you must become my wife."

"You cannot mean that, Father," said the Princess.

"Yes I can," said the King. "Before your mother died, I promised that I would only marry a woman who looked just like her. I have searched everywhere for such a person, but all in vain; however, when I came in just now, I thought you were the Queen herself."

The Princess was very distressed, but she did not dare to say no to her father. When he had gone, she went in tears to her nurse, and told her what had happened. The old woman advised her not to refuse outright, but to ask her father for a gown with no seams, and made from violet flowers.

The King came to urge his daughter to marry him, but she replied:

"First I must have a gown with no seams, and made from violet flowers. I will only marry you if you bring me such a gown."

The King called together all the drapers and cloth-sellers in his kingdom, but none of them could bring him the gown he wanted. At last he set out himself, and travelled through many countries offering any person who could make him a gown of violet flowers their own weight in gold. After a long time he found the gown, and brought it joyfully home to his daughter. She pretended to be well pleased, but when the King had left, she went running to her nurse. The old woman advised her to ask for a gown made from rose flowers, without so much as a stitch or a seam.

When the King came to his daughter again, he said:

"Well? When are we to be married?"

"Oh, Father," said his daughter, "I must first have another gown, made of rose petals, and without any seams or needlework."

Once again the King called together all the drapers and merchants in his kingdom, but none of them could give him such a dress. At last he set out himself, and after he had searched far, far away, he found the gown the Princess had asked for. He brought it joyfully to his daughter, and she pretended to be pleased, but when he left she began to weep, and went to

seek the advice of her nurse.

The old woman advised her to ask for a hollow ox made from gold, which was the same size, and looked just like a real ox.

When the King came to see his daughter he said:

“So, now you have your two gowns we can be married.”

“Yes,” said the Princess, “but first I would like a golden ox. It must be hollow inside, and must look like the very largest living oxen that there are.”

The King called together the most skilled goldsmiths in his kingdom, and promised them a rich reward if they could make him a hollow golden ox. They set to work, and when the ox was completed, the King had it carried into the Princess’s bedchamber.

She declared herself well pleased with it and promised to marry her father the next day.

However, during the night she put food and clothes inside the Golden Ox and hid inside it – for there was a panel that could be opened and closed. When the King came in to fetch his daughter the next morning, he could not find her in her bedchamber, nor in any of the other apartments in the castle. He thought that she must have drowned herself, or thrown herself off the walls, or even run away, and messengers were sent out to look for her. They searched far and wide, but they could not find the Princess anywhere.

The King was very sad, and because the Golden Ox reminded him of his daughter, he decided to sell it. Proclamations were made in many lands and kings and princes came to buy the wonderful Golden Ox, which was hollow inside and as large as a real animal.

In the end it was given to the King of Spain, and he set off with it to his own kingdom. The King of Spain’s son was young and handsome but he was never pleased with anything, and he lived all alone in his bedchamber. He never laughed or smiled, and he did not seem to like anyone. The King hoped that the sight of the marvellous ox would please him, and he placed it in his chamber, but the Prince barely looked at it.

It was the custom for the servants to bring the Prince his food while he was asleep. He was a heavy sleeper, and they never disturbed him.

When the Princess had eaten all the provisions that she had hidden in the Golden Ox, she crept out silently, while the Prince was asleep, and ate some of the food from the dishes which the servants had left behind.

When the Prince awoke he saw that all the food which he had been given had already been started and he called his attendant and reproved him.

“What does this mean?” he said. “Why are you serving me the leftovers of others’ dishes?”

“Indeed, I am not, Your Highness,” said the attendant. “The dishes had not been touched when I brought them to you.”

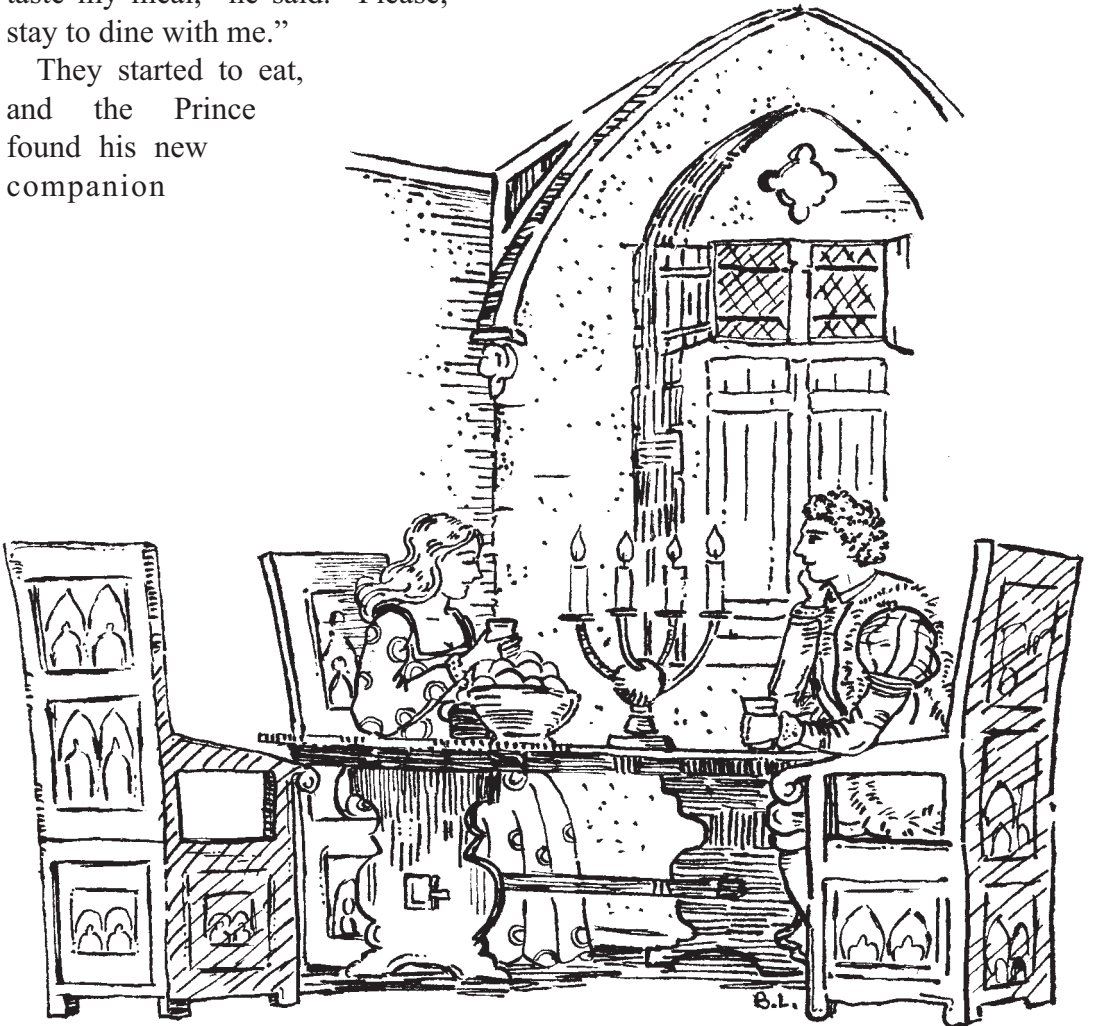
Several days passed, and still the Prince saw that someone was eating his dishes.

“I will have to pretend to be asleep,” he thought. “I will half close my eyes, and I will find out who dares to rob me from under my very nose.”

As soon as his attendant had brought him his dinner, the Prince saw a girl climb out of the Golden Ox, and come and eat from the dishes. When she had finished he pretended wake.

“So it is you who comes every day to taste my meal,” he said. “Please, stay to dine with me.”

They started to eat,  
and the Prince  
found his new  
companion



so pretty that, even though he did not like anyone, he began to smile and talk to her. When the attendant came to clear away the meal, he was surprised to see a maiden sitting at the table by the Prince's side.

"Ask my father to come here," the Prince said to the attendant.

The King came immediately, and when he saw the Prince seated beside a maiden he was very glad, for she was as fair as the day.

"Well, my son," he said. "So this maiden is to your liking?"

"Yes, father," said the Prince.

"In that case you must marry her."

"I would like that very much, if she agrees."

The Princess replied that she would like nothing better, but they must first obtain the consent of her father, who was also a king.

Messengers were sent to the Princess's father, and at first he refused, for he said that his daughter had already promised to marry him. However, they urged and pressed him, and at last he gave his consent, and even came to the wedding.

There was a magnificent feast, at which nothing was lacking, and everyone came in their finest clothes. The Prince and Princess lived very happily together, and ruled over their kingdom for many years.

*Told in 1880 by François Depays, a fisherman from Saint-Cast, aged about 60 years old*