

Once upon a time there lived a great King and Queen who ruled over a kingdom about the size of Brittany. They had an only son, whom they had obtained from the good God after many years, and his name was Victor. He was kind-hearted and generous and handsome, but the day before his birth an old woman had come to the court and told the King and Queen that their son would experience the most terrible dangers if he left the palace before his twenty-first birthday.

The King watched over the Prince with the greatest anxiety, and he set his most trusted servants to guard him night and day. However, as the young man grew older he began to long for adventure. He was the best warrior and the swiftest rider in the kingdom, and he begged his father to allow him to go out into the world.

One day, the Prince was left alone for a little while, and he seized the opportunity. He ran down to the stables, leapt upon his horse, and set off at a gallop. He rode on and on, filled with delight at finally being free, until he came to the edge of a heath. Here he saw a large castle, with walls over a hundred feet high; it was surrounded by a pond of glittering silver water, and, in this, three girls were bathing.

“By Saint Cado, here are some lovely creatures,” he thought. “I wager they are the daughters of the Lord of these parts. Whether they are or not, I will ask them the way to that castle, for I am weary of travelling.”

He crept up to the pond, and picking up the bathers’ clothes, which were lying on the bank, he hid himself in the reeds. The girls saw him immediately and all three began to weep.

“Young man,” they cried, “please give us back our clothes. If you do not, our father will kill us.”

“If that is the case then here they are,” said the Prince. “But, pray, may I ask you the name of this cruel father?”

“He is the Caragine,” said one of the girls. She was the prettiest of the three, and her name was Victorine. “Strangers who enter his palace never come out alive.”

“Indeed?” said the young man. “I wonder if I will prove the exception.”

“You are very daring to attempt such an adventure, but I will do whatever I can to help you,” said Victorine. “Just remember, take care to carry out my instructions exactly.”

Victor promised and, lifting his ivory horn to his lips he blew a blast that echoed through the home of the Caragine. A terrible noise sounded behind the door and a gigantic man appeared on the threshold. His shoulders were as high as a cathedral, his beard looked like a prickly bush, and his teeth were as long and pointed as the tusks of a wild boar. When he saw the Prince, he let out a mighty laugh, which shook him from head to toe.

“By the devil, little man,” he cried, “you almost frightened me with your ivory toy. But tell me what you want, before I put you in my cooking pot, along with your horse.”

“What I want,” said the Prince, “is the hand of your daughter, Victorine, in marriage. I warn you not to refuse, for I am a King’s son.”

“I could have guessed that from your bearing and courage,” said the Caragine. “However, you will have to pass three very difficult tests if you wish to marry the daughter of the Caragine.”

“I accept them beforehand,” said Victor.

“So be it. Do you see this pond? Before the sun has set I command you to empty it with this bucket full of holes.”

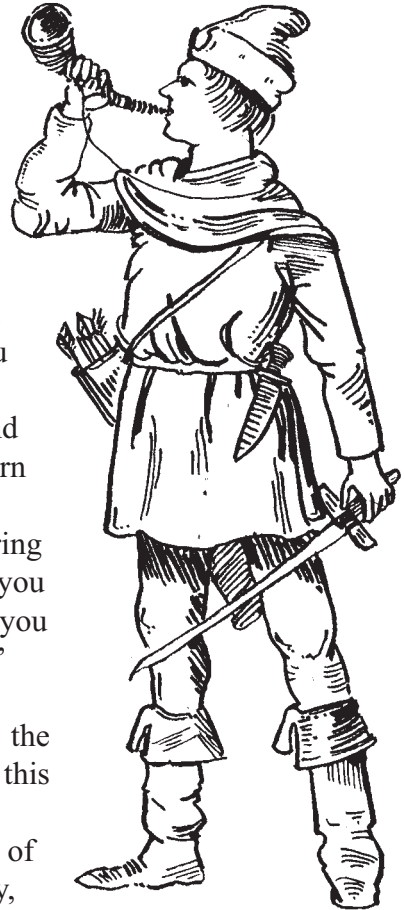
“Very well!” said the young man. In spite of his confident tones, he was filled with dismay, and he sat down on the bank trying to keep back the tears that had risen to his eyes.

Suddenly he saw Victorine running towards him.

“Do not weep,” she cried, “I have come to help you. Take my ring, throw it in the pond and say:

‘Water to one side, fish to the other.’”

Victor obeyed, and no sooner had he uttered the words, but the pond became empty and thousands of fish were left wriggling in the mud.



The Prince went to the castle, and hammered on the door. "I have finished now," he said.

"What – already?" said the Giant.

"See for yourself," said the Prince.

"Very good," said the Caragine. "Let us move on to the second test. Take this wooden axe. Tomorrow, at dawn, you must use it to cut down the forest behind the castle, and you must be finished by noon."

"Let us hope that I will be finished before," said Victor.

Next day the Prince entered the forest, his axe under his arm, whistling a cheerful tune. Soon he was joined by the Caragine's youngest daughter.

"Command these trees to lie down," she said. "You must say:

'Trees here, branches there.'

Victor uttered the command, and in an instant the forest had disappeared; in its place were piles of tree trunks, and mountains of faggots made from the branches.

When he saw what had been done, the Caragine was amazed.

"I can see that you are an excellent worker," he said. "Perhaps you would make a good son-in-law. But now I have a test which may outstrip your abilities. On yonder tower of polished glass is a bird with golden feathers. I have been watching it for a long while, and I give you two hours to bring it to me.

"Two hours! that is very little time – still, I hope it will be enough," said the young man.

Soon Victorine came running up to him.

"Courage, friend," she whispered. "This time you will have to kill me."

"Kill you! Never!" exclaimed the Prince. "I would rather be killed myself."

"No, you must do what I say, and without delay. When I am dead you must cut me into pieces and make a ladder from my bones. That will enable you to reach the bird. When you have caught it, put each limb and each bone back in its place, and then blow upon them, and I will come back to life."

Victor decided to obey Victorine's commands. He killed her, clambered up the ladder, and caught the bird. However, he was in such a hurry to restore his sweetheart to life, that he blew upon her before he had laid the last bone in its place. It was the bone of the little toe, and henceforth Victorine was lame.

They went to the Caragine together, bearing the golden bird in triumph.

"Truly," he cried, "you are the son-in-law I dreamt of. I will give you one

of my daughters, but as they are all as pretty as each other, and I do not want any jealousy between them, you shall have the girl you choose when they are in their room this evening, with the lights out.

“Do not forget that I lack my little toe,” Victorine whispered to Victor.

“I understand,” he replied.

At around midnight the Caragine brought him into the bedchamber of the three sisters. The Prince asked for permission to touch their toes.

“Strange request,” said the giant. “But please yourself – do whatever you wish.”

The examination did not last long. Victor stopped before one of the maidens, and declared that he chose her for his bride. The girl he chose was Victorine.

Some time later, the marriage took place and the Caragine prepared the most magnificent celebrations. However, he forbade the young couple to leave the castle on pain of death.

During the first month, neither thought of disobeying his command, but in the second month Victor began to tell his wife about the kindness of his mother, and the pleasures of his father’s court.

“Why don’t we run away from here and go to them?” said Victorine.

“I am willing to try,” said Victor.

“I know a way to escape,” said Victorine. “My father has two magnificent pairs of boots. With one pair he can travel seven leagues at a stride, and with the other pair fourteen leagues at a stride. I will take the second pair, and we will easily get a lead.”

That same evening she crept into the giant’s bedchamber when he was fast asleep and snatched up a pair of boots. She hastened back to her husband, and began to fasten them on to his feet, but she suddenly noticed that she had made a mistake and taken the seven league boots, rather than the fourteen league pair. She could not return to her father’s bedchamber for already they could hear by his breathing that he was about to awaken.

“We must get ahead of him,” she whispered. “With the fourteen league boots he will easily be able to bar our way.”

As she spoke, she cut off her beautiful golden hair with a pair of scissors and, laying the locks on the bed, told them to reply three times to her father’s calls. This done, she took her husband’s arm, and fled from the castle.

Before they had even crossed the boundaries of the giant’s lands, the Caragine’s wife awoke, and felt that something was amiss.

“Wake up,” she said to her husband. “Your daughter must have run away.”

The giant sat up rubbing his eyes.

“Victorine! Victorine!” he called.

“What is it, Father?” replied the golden locks of hair, through the walls of the young couple’s bedchamber.

Three times the giant repeated the call, and three times the hair replied “What is it, Father?”

However, at the fourth call they remained silent.

The Caragine saw that he had been tricked, and he sprang out of bed, pulled on his fourteen league boots, and, fastening on an enormous sword, set off after the runaways.

They had already covered a good deal of ground, and Victor was beginning to think that they were near to his father-in-law’s domains, when Victorine stopped in terror. In the distance they could hear a sound like a storm coming towards them, and the ground trembled beneath their feet.

“My father – it is my father,” she cried.

They were passing by a field of broom, surrounded by a ditch. It was quite hidden by the branches of the broom plants, and the young couple crawled beneath them. The Caragine passed by without sparing them a glance.

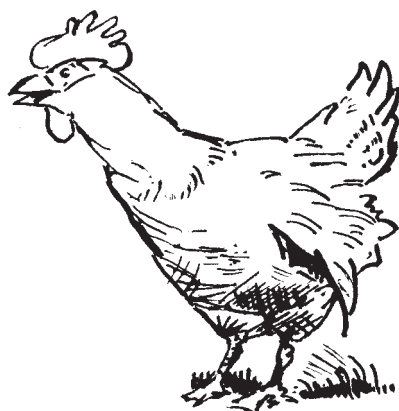
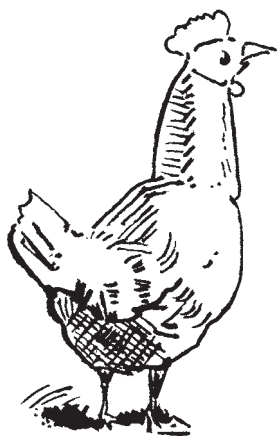
Once again they set off, this time in the opposite direction, but they soon realised that the Caragine was close behind them. At that moment, they came to a chapel, and they hurried through its doors. Victor changed himself into a priest, and Victorine turned herself into a choirboy at his side.

The next moment, the giant crossed the threshold and asked after the runaways. The priest murmured a few words in a foreign tongue, and, uttering a curse, the Caragine went on his way.

Soon night began to draw on and the young couple began to think that they had seen the last of the giant, when they heard behind them the same tempest as before.

“It is he!” cried Victorine. “Quick – we must hide!”

They were in the middle of a village,



and hens and their chicks were busily pecking at the ground. In the blink of an eye they changed into a cock and a hen, and were lost amidst the group.

The giant soon arrived. He was weary with running, and he was wiping off the sweat that ran down his face. At the sight of the poultry he stopped, and it looked as if a suspicion passed through his mind, but he only stood panting a while longer, and then disappeared.

“Are our trials at an end?” asked Victor, who felt almost spent.

“Soon, my love, if God so wishes,” said Victorine.

As if to contradict her words the tall shadow of the Caragine appeared at the entrance to a cornfield in which they had stopped to rest.

They only just had time to change shape. Victorine became a partridge, and Victor a hunter, hidden behind an oak tree, bow and arrow in hand.

“This time you shall not escape me!” roared the giant. He had recognised the partridge flying at a great speed over the corn as his daughter, and, changing himself into a falcon, he swooped down upon her.

Quick as lightning, Victor let fly his arrow. It entered the falcon’s heart, and the bird fell heavily to earth.

The danger was finally past, and Victor hastened on with his wife to his father’s court. They soon arrived, and there was great rejoicing to celebrate his return. The storyteller himself was there, and it was only with difficulty that he could get away to bring you this story of everything that took place.