Ririro
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Felicia and the Pot of Pinks

Madame d'Aulnoy

Once upon a time there was a poor laborer who felt he had not much longer to live. He called his son and daughter to him, for he loved them dearly, and told them how he wished to divide what he owned.

"Your mother brought me two stools and a straw bed when we married," he said. "Besides those, I have a hen, a pot of pinks, and a silver ring. A noble lady once stayed in our humble cottage, and when she left, she gave me the ring and the pinks. She said, 'Take care of my gifts, good man. Don't lose the ring, and never forget to water the pinks. As for your daughter, I promise she will be more beautiful than anyone you have ever seen. Call her Felicia, and when she is grown, give her the ring and the pot of pinks to comfort her in her poverty.' So take them, my dear child. Your brother shall have everything else."

When their father died, the children wept for him and shared his things just as he had said. Felicia believed her brother loved her. But when she sat down on one of the stools, he snapped at her.

"Keep your pinks and your ring, but leave my things alone. I like order in my house."

Felicia was very gentle, and she said nothing. She stood up and cried quietly, while her brother Bruno settled by the fire. At supper time, Bruno ate a delicious egg and tossed the shell to Felicia.

"There, that's all I can spare. If you don't like it, go and catch frogs in the marsh."

Felicia didn't answer, but she cried harder than ever and went to her little room. It was filled with the sweet scent of the pinks, and she said sadly, "Beautiful pinks, you're all the comfort I have left. I promise I'll take care of you and water you well, and I'll never let a cruel hand pull you from your stems."

As she bent over them, she saw how dry they were. So she took her pitcher and ran through the moonlight to the fountain, which was some distance away. She sat down on its edge to rest. Hardly had she done so when she saw a stately lady coming toward her, surrounded by attendants. Six maids of honor carried her train, and she leaned on the arm of a seventh.

A canopy was spread beside the fountain, with a cloth-of-gold sofa beneath it. A

dainty supper was served on gold and crystal dishes, and the wind in the trees and the falling water made the softest music. Felicia hid in the shade, too astonished to move. After a few moments, the lady, who was a Queen, said:

“I think I see a shepherdess by that tree. Bring her here.”

Felicia came forward and curtsied timidly, but with so much grace that everyone was surprised.

“What are you doing here, my pretty child?” asked the Queen. “Aren’t you afraid of robbers?”

“Oh, madam,” said Felicia, “a poor girl who has nothing to lose doesn’t fear robbers.”



“You aren’t rich, then?” the Queen said, smiling.

“I’m so poor,” Felicia answered, “that a pot of pinks and a silver ring are everything I own.”

“But you have a heart,” said the Queen. “What if someone wanted to steal that?”

“I don’t know what it’s like to lose one’s heart, madam. But I’ve always heard that without a heart we can’t live, and that if it’s broken we die. Poor as I am, I’d be sorry not to live.”

“You’re right to guard your heart, pretty one,” said the Queen. “But tell me, have you had supper?”

“No, madam. My brother ate it all.”

The Queen had a place made for Felicia at the table and filled her plate herself. But Felicia was too amazed to be hungry.

“Why were you at the fountain so late?” the Queen asked.

“I came to fetch water for my pinks, madam.” She bent to pick up her pitcher. To her astonishment, it had turned to gold, sparkling with diamonds, and the water inside smelled sweeter than roses. She was afraid to touch it until the Queen said:

“It’s yours, Felicia. Water your pinks with it, and let it remind you that the Queen of the Woods is your friend.”

Felicia knelt and thanked her. “Madam,” she said, “if you’d wait a moment, I’d run and fetch my pot of pinks for you. They couldn’t go to better hands.”

“Go,” said the Queen, stroking her cheek. “I’ll wait.”

Felicia ran home with her pitcher. But while she was away, Bruno had slipped into her room and taken the pot of pinks, leaving a great cabbage in its place. She didn't know what to do. At last she ran back to the fountain and knelt before the Queen.

"Madam, Bruno has stolen my pinks, so I have only my silver ring. Please accept it as a sign of my gratitude."

"But then you'll have nothing left," said the Queen. "What will you do?"

"Oh, madam," said Felicia simply, "if I have your friendship, I shall do very well."

The Queen took the ring and put it on her finger. She climbed into her chariot, made of coral and studded with emeralds and drawn by six milk-white horses. Felicia watched until the forest path hid her from view. Then she went home, thinking over all the wonderful things that had happened.

The first thing she did in her room was fling the cabbage out of the window.

"Oh! I'm half killed!" cried an odd little voice. Felicia couldn't tell where it came from, because cabbages don't usually talk.

At first light, still miserable about her pinks, she went out to look for them. The first thing she found was the cabbage. She nudged it with her foot. "What are you doing here? How dared you take the place of my pinks?"

"If I hadn't been carried," said the cabbage, "you can be sure I'd never have gone there."

Felicia shivered to hear a cabbage talk. But he went on: "Plant me back with my friends, and I'll tell you where your pinks are right now. They're hidden in Bruno's bed!"

Felicia didn't know how she would ever get them back. Still, she kindly replanted the cabbage in his old place. As she finished, she spotted Bruno's hen and caught hold of it.

"Come here, you horrid creature! You can pay for all the unkind things my brother has done to me."

"Oh, shepherdess, please don't!" said the hen. "I'm a bit of a gossip, but I can tell you surprising things you'll want to hear. You're not the daughter of the poor laborer who raised you. Your mother was a queen who already had six daughters. The King had sworn that unless she gave him a son to inherit his kingdom, he would send her away in disgrace.

"When she had yet another daughter, she was terrified. She agreed with her sister, who was a fairy, to swap the baby for the fairy's little son. But the King had locked the Queen in a high tower, and days went by with no word from the

fairy. At last she escaped from the window on a rope ladder, carrying her baby. She wandered until she was half dead with cold and weariness, and she reached this cottage. I was the laborer's wife then, and a good nurse. The Queen put you in my care and told me all her troubles. Then she died before she could say what was to become of you.

"I never could keep a secret. I told the whole story to my neighbors, and one day a beautiful lady came here, and I told it to her too. When I finished, she touched me with her wand, and I became a hen. That was the end of my talking! My husband was out at the time and never knew what had become of me. He searched everywhere and decided I must have drowned or been eaten by wild beasts.

"That same lady came back once more. She told us to call you Felicia, and she left the ring and the pot of pinks for you. While she was in the house, twenty-five of the King's guards arrived to seize you. She muttered a few words, and they all turned into cabbages. One of them is the one you threw out of your window yesterday.

"I don't know how he can speak. I've never heard either of them say a word before, and I couldn't speak myself until now."

Felicia listened in amazement. "I'm truly sorry for you, my poor nurse," she said, "and I wish I could give you your own shape back. But don't lose hope. After all you've told me, I think something is about to happen. For now, I must find my pinks, which I love better than anything in the world."

Bruno had gone into the forest. He never dreamed Felicia would look in his room, and she was glad of his absence. But when she went in, she found an army of rats guarding the straw bed. They sprang at her, biting and scratching, and she backed away, crying, "Oh, my dear pinks, how can you stand such company?"

Then she remembered her pitcher. Perhaps the water had some magic in it. She ran to fetch it and sprinkled a few drops over the rats. In an instant not a tail or whisker was left. Every rat had bolted for its hole. Felicia took up her pot of pinks. They were nearly dying of thirst, so she poured the rest of the water over them. As she bent to enjoy their scent, a soft voice rustled among the leaves:

"Lovely Felicia, the day has come when I may tell you how even the flowers love you and rejoice in your beauty."

A cabbage, a hen, and now a flower had spoken, and she had just faced an army of rats. It was too much. Felicia turned pale and fainted.

Just then Bruno came home. Hard work in the heat hadn't improved his temper. When he saw that Felicia had found her pinks, he was furious. He dragged her out into the garden and shut the door on her. The fresh air soon woke her, and

she opened her eyes to see the Queen of the Woods standing before her, as lovely as ever.

“You have a bad brother,” said the Queen. “I saw him throw you out. Shall I punish him?”

“Oh, no, madam,” said Felicia. “I’m not angry with him.”

“And if he weren’t really your brother, what then?”

“I think he must be,” said Felicia.

“Haven’t you heard that you’re a princess?”

“I was told so a little while ago, madam. But how could I believe it without a single proof?”

“Dear child,” said the Queen, “the way you speak convinces me that, in spite of your humble upbringing, you are a real princess. And I can make sure you’re never treated like this again.”

At that moment a handsome young man arrived. He wore a green velvet coat fastened with emerald clasps and a crown of pinks on his head. He knelt and kissed the Queen’s hand.

“My pink! My dear son!” cried the Queen. “What joy to see you in your own shape again, thanks to Felicia!” She embraced him happily and turned to Felicia.

“Charming princess, you’ve heard the hen’s tale. But you haven’t heard what happened to my son. The breezes I trusted to carry him to your mother’s tower left him in a garden of flowers and flew off to tell her. A fairy I had quarreled with seized the chance and turned him into a pink. I couldn’t undo it. All I could do was bring Prince Pink to the place where you were growing up, hoping that you would grow to love him, and that your care would restore him. And so it has. When you gave me your silver ring, it was a sign that the spell was nearly broken. My enemy’s last hope was to frighten you with her rats, and she failed. Now, dear Felicia, if you’ll marry my son with this silver ring, your happiness is certain. Do you find him handsome and kind enough to be willing?”

Felicia blushed. “Madam, you overwhelm me. I know you are my mother’s sister, and that you turned the soldiers sent to harm me into cabbages and my nurse into a hen. I’m hesitating because for the first time in my life I know how happy it would make me to be loved. Can you really give me the Prince’s heart?”

“It’s yours already, lovely princess!” the Prince cried, taking her hand. “If the enchantment hadn’t kept me silent, I’d have told you long ago how dearly I love you.”

This made Felicia very happy. The Queen couldn’t bear to see her niece in a poor

shepherdess’s dress, so she touched her with her wand. “Let her be dressed as her rank and beauty deserve.” At once Felicia’s cotton dress became a robe of silver brocade embroidered with jewels, and a crown of diamonds with a floating white veil rested on her soft dark hair. With her bright eyes and rosy cheeks, she was so dazzling that the Prince could hardly bear to look.

“How pretty you are, Felicia!” he cried. “Don’t keep me waiting. Say you’ll marry me.”

“I think she won’t refuse now,” said the Queen, smiling.

Just then Bruno, on his way back to work, came out of the cottage. He thought he must be dreaming. But Felicia called to him kindly, and she begged the Queen to be merciful.

“After he was so unkind to you?” the Queen asked.

“I’m so happy,” said Felicia, “that I want everyone else to be happy too.”

The Queen kissed her. “Then, to please you, let’s see what I can do for Bruno.” She waved her wand, and the little cottage became a splendid palace full of treasures. Only the two stools and the straw bed stayed exactly as they were, to remind Bruno of his old poverty. Then she touched Bruno himself. He felt his temper melt away, and he saw for the first time how he had treated his sister. He bowed to the Queen and the Princess and thanked them a thousand times, and he meant it. Last of all, the Queen gave the hen and the cabbages their own shapes back, and everyone went home content.

The Prince and Princess were married as soon as possible with great splendor, and they lived happily ever after.

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