



King Thrushbeard

Humility, Learning from Mistakes

This folk tale teaches that being arrogant does not pay off. True wealth and beauty come from our modesty, sincerity, and kindness.



🕒 24 min

😊 8+

Once upon a time, there was an incredibly beautiful but enormously spoiled and **arrogant princess**. She was convinced she was perfect and that no man, no matter how smart or charming or handsome, could match her.

Whenever a suitor asked for her hand in marriage, she would laugh hysterically at them and send them away with a snort. All of the girls her age had already been married for ages, but not this princess. She was really quite vain, believing firmly that no one would ever be good enough for her.

“They’re all so drab and useless!” she thought to herself. “Boring, boring, boring!”

One day, her father was **so fed up** he decided to invite all of her suitors to the castle so the princess would be forced to choose one. Crowds of royal men gathered to ask for the princess’s hand. There were so many the king had to line them up along the walls of the castle’s main hall.

He organized them by their titles and their wealth, so the proud kings and rich counts were brought to the front, while the brave knights had to retreat to the back. The princess walked along the line, stopping at each one of them for a little while to examine them. Every single time she found something about them that she could mock and make fun of.

One was too fat (like a butterball, she said). Another was too tall (like a homely giraffe, she said), the next too crooked (like a gnarled branch), bald (like a baby), or red (like a ripe and squishy tomato).

But it was the first man in the line who made her giggle the most. His chin, she said, looked like the beak of a thrush. She **started giggling** and even mimicking the thrush’s calls: “Bup! Bup! Bup! Pit! Pit! Pit!” She laughed so

hard she had tears streaming down her beautiful face.

This was finally the last straw for the king. He completely lost his temper and shouted angrily: "Enough! I'm sick of **that arrogance** and rudeness of yours! I swear on my kingdom I will give you to the very first beggar who comes asking for your hand." Then he sent all the men home and stormed out, slamming the door to his private chambers.

The next day, a scruffy, smelly beggar passed by the royal palace, shouting: "A song for a reward! I'll play you a song for a reward!" He was in grey rags, a dirty brown cloak and his toes poked through the tips of his worn boots.

The king sent for him and ordered him to play. The beggar started **strumming a guitar**, his lovely voice carrying throughout the hall. It was clear and pure, and the song was from the heart. The king and the court were all touched.

"You played well, indeed," the king said.

The beggar bowed deeply, then looked up daringly with an eyebrow arched.

"Thank you, your highness. Now. **What is my reward?**"

The king remembered what he had threatened the day before. He looked at his spoiled daughter and thought about how terribly she had behaved the day before. He was still angry with her, and a little ashamed of her. "I offer you my daughter's hand in marriage," he said.

The princess truly thought her father was joking and **laughed uproariously**. Her father had never done anything that would upset her, so she had no reason to believe he would actually do this to her.

When the priest arrived, however, it dawned on the princess that her father wasn't kidding. The king's order was absolute law, so there was nothing she could do. After the short and small wedding ceremony the king bid his daughter farewell. He felt **sadness**, but also a little relief.

"I'm sorry, my darling girl, but now that you are married to a mere commoner, you must leave the palace. Only royalty and royal servants are allowed to live here." The king wouldn't even let her pack her favourite dresses and designer shoes, much less her colourful satin ribbons for her hair.

She left the palace with nothing but the plain wedding clothes she was wearing. She was furious and couldn't believe this was happening, but her anger soon faded into shock and sorrow. Her new husband gently took her by the hand and led her away from the palace, the only home she'd ever known.

Hand in hand, they walked **through woods** and over rocky mountains until they came upon a huge green hill with a stunning oak hunting lodge on top.

"It's so lovely up here! Do you know who these woods and that beautiful lodge belong to?" asked the princess.

"They belong to King Thrushbeard," the beggar said. "I've heard that not long ago he asked for your hand and you mocked and laughed at him."

They walked on and on, over vast green fields and meadows. Wildflowers were blooming in vibrant yellows and purples and reds, with a few bluebells and daisies growing along the path.

"Who owns these lovely fields?" asked the princess again.

"They, too, belong to King Thrushbeard."

"I had no idea he was so rich! I'm **so stupid, aren't I?**" She looked at the beggar and he just shrugged. They walked on in silence. The princess realised she was beginning to deeply regret mocking the king.

Soon, they reached a delightful little town. The buildings were in bright pastel colours and the streets shone like glitter.

"Oh, what a pretty town!" the princess said. "Who does it belong to?" But, of course, she already knew the answer.

"This, too, belongs to King Thrushbeard," he replied. "He tries to make his people happy."

"Goodness gracious. I'm so **very sorry now** that I made fun of him! Oh, King Thrushbeard, if only I had known," the princess wailed. But it was no use crying now; she was married to a beggar, and now she had to live with her mistakes and actions.

Before long, they arrived at their new home. As soon as the princess laid her eyes on the broken down old shack. It was built of rotten wood full of holes and some rusted tin for the roof. She remembered her beautiful chambers and exquisite dresses back in the palace and she **began to weep**. "This cannot be!" she told herself. "I'm having a bad dream."

"Come in, my love. Welcome to your new home!" The beggar was quite pleased with his announcement, and when she wouldn't enter he took her calmly by the arm and steered her inside.

The house was very modest, and as the princess looked around, she noticed that there was nothing but the bare necessities. A small, uneven table and two mismatched chairs, a stove with **a bubbling pot on top**, and a simple pine box bed filled with straw and covered with dingy sheets. Up until then, the princess had slept in a gigantic canopy bed; now the two of them were supposed to fit into one tiny wooden bed, not even half the size of her old one.

Once they were settled inside as well as could be, the beggar asked the princess to light a warm fire and make them something good to eat. But she had never done any of those things and didn't have the first clue where to start.

"Good heavens! I married a woman who can't cook? Seriously?" exclaimed the beggar, shaking his hooded head. He **lit the fire himself** and put a pot of porridge on the stove. The princess watched him, feeling horribly embarrassed. She wanted to help, so in the end she picked up a broom made of twigs and started sweeping **in front of the shack**.

They lived like this for several weeks and little by little the princess got used to hard work. She had learned a lot, from scrubbing the wash in a nearby creek to helping patch the holes in the shack with mud and grass. After some time, though, they ran out of food and realized they had spent almost all of the little money they had.

"We have to find a way to earn some money unless we want to starve to death," said the beggar. "I don't fancy eating worms or grasshoppers to get by. Do you?" The princess shook her head, making a face.

He gave her a pair of old copper knitting needles and asked her to knit something they could sell at the market, but the moment she started, she **pricked her hand** and dropped the needles on the ground. She cried as she wrapped her hand in a rag.

Her husband was very frustrated, but he brought her some thin willow branches so she could weave baskets. This too, of course, the princess didn't know how to do and she made a mess. Broken branches covered the floor and she had to clean up while he just sighed.

Finally, the beggar came up with one last idea. He would make earthenware and his wife could sell it at the market. He had an old wheel and a small kiln behind the shack he rarely used. He sat behind his potter's wheel and spun it **with his feet**. A few days later, they had a stack of pretty clay pots fresh out of the kiln. They let them sit to cool and then the beggar loaded them into a wagon and sent his wife to sell them at the market.

The people in the town liked buying the pots from the beautiful woman in the strange wedding rags. Soon enough she'd sold everything she'd brought and returned home with **a pouch full of coins**.

They used the money for food and even treated themselves to a small teapot to boil the nettles they picked in the forest. Unfortunately, the food they'd bought only lasted them a few weeks before the princess had to go back to the market to sell another batch of earthenware. As soon as she arrived, she took the wares out of her knapsack and laid them out around her, calling at the passers-by to come and have a look.

“Pretty little pots! Beautiful bowls! Get them while you can!” she cried out.

She was feeling very proud of herself after several sales, but suddenly a drunkard appeared out of nowhere and toppled over, right **into the pots**. He had shattered every last one of them.

“What will I do now?” wailed the princess. “We have nothing. Nothing!” Distraught and penniless, she headed home and told her husband everything.

“How could you let that happen?” the beggar asked. “What will we eat? We have no food! Worms and grasshoppers, with nettle tea!” She hung her head at his words. She felt **absolutely miserable**. They were both very hungry and she knew how hard her husband had worked to make the pots. One accident and poof! it was all gone.

She wanted to be useful, so she decided to go to the castle and ask for work in King Thrushbeard’s royal kitchen. The cook told her they didn’t need help, but she begged and begged and even got on her knees. “Please, I’ll do any kind of work at all! I’ll even muck out the horse stables or clean bedpans!” Finally, the woman gave in and **gave her a job** as a simple servant who would work in exchange for food.

She wanted to prove she was responsible and capable to her husband, and so the few days she wasn’t working at the castle, she was at the market selling her husband’s pretty clay pots.

Some months later, news spread that King Thrushbeard was going **to get married**. The castle was planning a spectacular celebration. The most honoured and famous of guests would attend, dressed in beautiful gowns and sleek uniforms. The princess, who was working her fingers to the bone in the kitchen, secretly envied them. She quietly scolded herself for having been so ungrateful and arrogant when she’d had the chance for a better life.

Her life had been good. She had had everything she ever wanted or needed, but she had taken it for granted. Now she was wearing a dirty apron smeared with grease and filling enormous tables with silver plates full of delicacies

meant **for someone else**. Despite that, she suddenly realised, she was happier here than she had ever been at her father's palace.

She'd made friends with the other servants, and she had grown to love her husband deeply. She'd learned to cook, wash clothes, and **make pottery**. Her work was hard and her life was simple, but she had come to like the small things:

The songbirds that woke them in the morning; the way her husband met her at the palace gates to walk her home; and the sweet coziness of the shack. Still, she couldn't help but imagine what her life might have been like if she had married King Thrushbeard and become the Queen of this beautiful castle.

"Would I be happy?" she asked herself, then smiled. "No," she thought, "I have everything I need and no palace or gown or roast pig could replace it."

On the day before the wedding, there was a massive feast. The king himself **entered the hall**, wearing exquisite, expensive clothes and many jewels that sparkled red, green and blue. The musicians began to play a waltz. When he noticed the princess clearing the tables, he approached her and asked her for a dance.

The princess was completely taken aback, feeling too ashamed to even offer him her hand. She was so dirty and unkempt after a long day in the kitchen - her hands were calloused and she was dripping with sweat. She was sure she must stink! There was no way she could dance with the king.

Suddenly, everyone turned to stare at her and there was a **massive uproar in the hall**. The princess, too confused and humiliated to take it any longer, rushed outside. She thought she would die of embarrassment. Her cheeks burned and she had tears in her eyes.

King Thrushbeard **hurried after her**. She thought he must want to get revenge for the horrible way she had treated him when he'd proposed so very long ago.

"I'm sorry that I laughed at you, okay? Please, forgive me. Just don't shame me as I did you," the princess begged. "You'll never know how terrible I feel."

"Your scorn hurt my feelings, yes. But now, look at me." He paused. She was looking at her scuffed shoes. "Please, look at me. Don't you recognize me?"

The princess looked at his vibrant clothes and the shining jewels **on his hands**.

"Yes, you're King Thrushbeard. I remember you. Of course I do."

"No, my dear. Look in my eyes." And when she did, she suddenly realized who he was. He was her husband, the beggar! She'd never really seen him without his hooded cloak, but she knew those eyes.

"But... but how is it possible?" she asked. "How can it be you? And even if it's true, I can no longer be your wife. I'm not worthy of you. You deserve far better than me." She still couldn't believe that this was the man she lived with in their little shack, toiling, cooking, laughing together for the past few months.

"It is me. And you are my one and only truth, my darling. I fell in love with you the moment **I saw you**. I wanted you to learn to love me for more than my riches. I wanted you to see that you're capable of so much more than being beautiful. I wanted you to love who we could be. You do love me, don't you?"

And she did, of course, whether or not he was rich or poor.

They hadn't had a proper wedding, he reminded her, and so he led her up to a chamber where a dazzling wedding gown had been **laid out for her**. It was ivory silk, covered in pearls and diamonds. The veil was laced with bluebells and daisies from his meadows.

She was speechless and nearly wept from happiness. After she took a hot bubble bath and washed off the kitchen grime, her handmaidens helped her get ready. She was radiant as she walked down the aisle to her smiling king

on her father's arm.

They had the most beautiful wedding she could have ever imagined, one so memorable people all over the kingdom talked about it. The princess proudly became Queen Thrushbeard, and she was forever known around the land as the kindest and fairest of rulers. And they all lived **happily ever after**.