

Rodomont

Once upon a time, there was a dressmaker named Marie Mariton. She was so ugly that no one ever even thought of courting her, and her entire fortune consisted of several poor pieces of furniture.

She would often go to work in a house where lived a young man whom she liked very much, but who never paid any attention to her, and who was about to marry a very attractive person.

Sometimes, she would say to herself that, if instead of being ugly and poor, she had the good fortune to have some *écus* and an agreeable face, he whom she secretly loved, far from considering her an ugly young woman, would have looked at her with pleasure, and maybe would have thought about marrying her.

One day when she was alone and sitting in her chair, she was daydreaming while sewing, she saw a gentleman enter who greeted her politely and asked her whether she was happy.

“Alas, no, *monsieur*,” she said, “for, as you can see, my face is not made for pleasing, and I am so poor that I don’t have the means to have a lovely toilet¹ that could give me a better figure and a more agreeable appearance.”

“It’s up to you,” he said, “to accomplish what you desire: as for the rest, I will give you a charm that will make you appear so seductive to the person you love, that all other women will appear ugly to him and he will only have eyes for you. I will only grant you this on one condition: I shall return one year from today, and you will have to call me by my name; if not, your body will be mine and I will take your soul. But know that the charm that I entrust in you would lose all its power if you wrote down my name, or if you told it to someone else. Now, my name is Rodomont; it is a name easy to remember.

The young girl found that the condition was not difficult to fulfill, and so she signed the pact with her blood, and, after having handed over the talisman, the gentleman disappeared so suddenly that she did not know where he went. She locked the charm that he gave her away carefully, and, while stitching, she repeated: “Rodomont! Rodomont!” in order to engrave his name deeply into her memory.

When the young man returned to the house, instead of coldly greeting the worker and barely paying attention to her, he seemed to take a particular pleasure to looking at and flirting with her. The next day and the following days, he would

¹ Toilet: “The articles required or used in dressing.” *Oxford English Dictionary*, s. v. “toilet,” accessed August 05, 2013, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/202921>. – Trans.

come keep her company while she worked, and he would tell her sweet things, from which the young girl, not accustomed to being courted, took great pleasure.

His mother and his sister were not late to perceive that he frequently occupied himself with the dressmaker, and that he only rarely left her, and, regretfully, regarding the future, they would say to him:

“From where are you deriving so much pleasure by talking with a girl so ugly, instead of occupying yourself with your fiancée who is, on the contrary, without a doubt, one of the loveliest people in the country?”

“I will not marry her, whatever you say, and I declare that I will not have any wife but Marie Mariton, for no one pleases me as much as she.”

His parents reprimanded him, and reminded him of the worker’s poverty and ugliness, but he did not listen at all, and he finished by marrying her to the surprise of everyone in the country, on whom the charm had no power and who saw the dressmaker as she truly was: that is to say, unattractive.

* * *

The Devil – for it was he who presented himself to Marie Mariton in the guise of a gentleman – was eager for the year to pass, so that he could seize his prey, and, as he feared that the young bride would escape him, he sent her a dream that made her forget the name Rodomont. She had searched her thoughts at length to retrieve the syllables that she had once known so well, and could not reach them.

Her husband, who saw that she was sad, asked her what was upsetting her: whether she longed for something, or had lost someone. But she did not dare to confide in him the secret that made her so unhappy, and she responded evasively.

He thought that fresh air would do her good, and proposed to take her hunting, but she refused, and, when he left, she shut herself in her chamber to think of her unhappiness and cry.

Meanwhile, her husband raced across the fields, and, at every instant, he saw little birds perched in bushes, who sung:

*If Marie Mariton
Knew the name of Rodomont,
It's she that would laugh!²*

² Literal translation of the French:

*Si Marie Mariton,
Savait le nom de Rodomont,
C'est elle qui rirait !*

– Trans.

And, at each instant, he heard the refrain hit his ears, and so frequently that he found the bird very annoying.

When he returned, he said to his wife:

“You were very wrong not to accompany me while hunting. All the little birds spoke about you, and you could very well have diverted yourself by listening to them.”

“Little birds? You want to laugh, without a doubt. What were they singing, then, and how did you comprehend their language?”

“Well, it wasn’t very difficult, for they flew around me, repeating:

*“If Marie Mariton
Knew the name of Rodomont,
It’s she that would laugh!”*

When she heard these words, she was so filled with joy that she roared with laughter and sang.

“Why does that bizarre name please you so much?” asked her husband.

“Ah!” she said. “It is he that I count on giving to our baby who will have to come.”

The husband showed himself to be satisfied with that response, and she swore not to speak any more of Rodomont, fearing that her charm would disappear, and, from that moment on, regained her gaiety and her good humor.

However, the year went by. One night when Marie’s husband was not at home, and it was the exact anniversary of the day when the pact took place, she heard a great noise, and a hand pounded on the panes of the chamber windows. She opened them trembling, for she was well aware of the visit that would occur. It was, indeed, the Devil who entered, and who said:

“The year is over, I have accomplished my promise, and I have come to take you away if you cannot call me by my name.”

“Nothing is as easy, Rodomont,” she replied.

The Devil, seeing that he was thus tricked, left through the window that, fortunately, remained open and he was so angered that he took the form of a hurricane that took down many nearby trees and raised the tiles off the roofs of several houses.

Told in 1878 by Jeanne Bazul, from Trélivan.
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Translated by Michelle Collins.