

Prince Alarming

Long ago, there lived a king and queen who longed for a child. After many years of trying without success, the desperate couple sought guidance from a Romani fortune teller renowned for her proficiency and sagacity. To their delight, the old woman revealed that they would soon welcome a son.

‘He shall be blessed with good health and a brilliant mind,’ she prophesied as she gazed into her crystal ball. ‘In fact, I see the most beautiful being in the world.’

The elated king and queen paid the fortune teller a handsome sum, then returned to their palace to await their son and heir.

Prince Cedric arrived the following year on a blustery spring morning. Whilst the infant boy was healthy and remarkably alert, he wasn’t what one would call ‘beautiful’. With his protruding forehead, bulbous nose, weak chin, and sticky-outie ears, he had a face only a doting parent could love. You’ll be glad to know that the king and queen adored their son immensely and spent many idle hours admiring their wonderful creation.

Everyone in the kingdom knew at first glance that their new prince was no looker. It was plain for all to see. But no one ever spoke of his most unfortunate appearance. Instead, they treated the boy as any living being should be treated—with love, kindness, decency, and respect. Having grown up in this nurturing environment, Cedric matured into a thoughtful, good-natured boy. The youngster was often seen about town helping the elderly tend their gardens, distributing meals to the poor, or calling on the infirm at their homes. Cedric was no stranger in the palace, either. He visited the staff daily to assist them with their duties—even the most unpleasant ones—and always did so with a (crooked) smile.

When Cedric reached adulthood, the king and queen invited princesses from neighbouring kingdoms to attend a grand ball in their son’s honour. On the day of the soirée, Cedric paced nervously along the palace corridors. The thought that his future wife—the someday queen—could present herself that very evening was too exciting! Soon, a train of carriages arrived, and one by one, hopeful maidens in frilly frocks entered the ballroom. But the moment they caught sight of the awkward-looking prince, they averted their eyes and didn’t spare him another glance. Some insolent young ladies even whispered vicious words amongst themselves. ‘Prince Charming? More like, Prince Alarming!’

Princess Anja, however, did not look away, nor did she utter unkind words. Rather, she asked Cedric to dance. Anja and Cedric spent the entire evening in each other’s company, dancing, chatting, and having a marvellous time getting to know one another. By the time the clock struck midnight, Anja had fallen hopelessly in love with the benevolent prince.

‘But how could you possibly love someone so ... *ugly*?’ one haughty princess asked.

‘Whatever do you mean?’ Anja said. ‘Prince Cedric’s soul is beautiful, which makes him the most beautiful being in the world!’