

This is an English fairy tale, much like the Cinderella story. It was recorded by Joseph Jacobs in *English Fairy Tales*, (1890).

Cap o' Rushes

Long long ago, there lived a rich man and his three daughters.

One day, the rich man asked his daughters, 'How much do you love me, my dears?'

'Why, Father,' said the first daughter, 'I love you as much as life itself.'

'Oh, Father,' said the second daughter, 'I love you more than all the world.'

The rich man was very pleased. Then he turned to his youngest daughter who had not said a word.

'I love you as much as salt loves food, Father,' she replied, quietly.

This made the rich man very angry.

'What sort of an answer is that? You don't love me at all!' he said. 'You will no longer live in my house or be my daughter!'

He threw his youngest daughter out of the house, and shut the door. The poor girl wandered till she came to a riverbank where tall, green rushes grew. She cut the rushes and wove herself a cloak and a hood to hide her beautiful clothes. She then went to a large house that she could see, and knocked at the kitchen door.

'What do you want?' asked the cook, as she opened the door and saw the girl in her cloak of rushes.

'I have nowhere to go, and nowhere to stay,' said the girl. 'I'll do any sort of work for you, and ask only for food and a roof to sleep under in return.'

'Well,' said the cook. 'I do need someone to scrub the floor and wash the dishes and scour the pans. If you are willing to do that, you are welcome to stay.'

So the girl became a scullery maid in the large house. All day long she would scrub and clean. At night she would go to sleep in a little corner of the kitchen.

The girl would never take her cloak of rushes off, not even at night and as she refused to reveal her name the other maids began calling her Cap o' Rushes. Cap o' Rushes stayed in that big house for many days, doing all that she was asked to do.

One evening the other maids said to her, 'There is a great dance tonight in the next village, and the servants have leave to go and watch the rich folk dance. Will you come with us?'

But Cap o' Rushes said she was far too tired to go that far. She lay down in her corner and pretended to go to sleep. As soon as the other servants had left, and the house was empty, Cap o' Rushes threw off her cloak and hood of rushes and, dressed in her fine clothes, went to the dance. There she was the most beautiful girl of all. The son of her master was at the dance as well. He could not take his eyes off the girl and danced with her all evening.

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'Who are you?' he asked her. 'Where do you live?'

Cap o' Rushes only smiled and gave no answer. Well before the dance was over, Cap o' Rushes slipped off home. She quickly put on her hood and cloak of rushes again, and lay down in her corner, pretending to be fast asleep.

The other maids and servants returned home very excited.

'Why, Cap o' Rushes!' they said. 'You missed the most beautiful lady there ever was. She danced all evening with the master's son, and then vanished into thin air. Nobody knows where she came from, and where she went off to.'

'Oh,' said Cap o' Rushes, 'I would have liked to see that lovely lady!'

The next evening there was a dance again. 'Come with us, Cap o' Rushes,' said the other maids and servants. 'Maybe the beautiful lady will be there again tonight, and you can see her.'

But Cap o' Rushes said she was too tired to go all that way, and pretended to fall asleep in her corner again. As soon as the house was empty, she threw off her hood and cloak of rushes, and dressed in her fine clothes, went to the dance again.

The master's son was at the dance again, hoping the beautiful lady would come again. When he saw Cap o' Rushes he rushed up to her, and wouldn't leave her side all evening. But as before, Cap o' Rushes would tell him nothing about herself and slipped off before the dance was over.

The other maids and servants came home to find her sleeping in her corner as before. 'O Cap o' Rushes, ' they sighed. 'The beautiful lady was there again. The master's son danced with her all evening, and with no one else.'

'O', said Cap o' Rushes again. 'I would have loved to see that!'

The following evening there was another dance. Again the others begged Cap o' Rushes to come with them. Again she refused, but went later to the dance dressed in fine clothes. The master's son was waiting for her, and danced with her all evening.

'I don't know who you are,' said the master's son to Cap o' Rushes that evening. 'But if I lose you, I will pine away and die for you.' And he gave her a ring to put on her finger, to remember him by.

Once again, Cap o' Rushes slipped off before the dance was over, and the other maids and servants found her sleeping in her corner when they came back home. 'O, Cap o' Rushes,' they said. 'You'll never see the beautiful lady forever for now there are no more dances.'

The master's son tried to find the beautiful lady. But nobody knew anything about her, and no one had ever seen her, except at the dances. Soon the master's son was ill with love and longing for his beautiful lady, and nobody knew how to help him or make him better.

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One morning Cap o' Rushes saw the cook was making gruel for the master's son.

'Let me do it,' said Cap o' Rushes. 'I know how to make good gruel.'

'Very well, ' said the cook, and went off to do her work.

Cap o' Rushes made the gruel, and poured it into a bowl. She dropped the ring the master's son had given her into the bowl of gruel, and gave it to the cook to take upstairs.

The master' son finished the gruel, and saw the ring lying at the bottom of the bowl. He recognized the ring as the one he had give his beautiful lady.

'Who made this gruel?' he asked the cook.

'Cap o' Rushes did, ' said the cook.

'Send her to me,' commanded the master's son.

Cap o' Rushes went into the master's son's room, still dressed in her hood and cloak of rushes.

'Where did you get this ring?' asked the master's son, not recognizing his beautiful lady under the hood and cloak of rushes.

'From him that gave it me,' answered Cap o' Rushes, throwing off her hood and cloak and standing there in her fine clothes.

The master's son was overjoyed to find his beautiful lady. But Cap o' Rushes still did not tell him her real name. Soon a wedding was arranged between the master's son and Cap o' Rushes. People from all over were invited to the wedding feast, including the rich man who was the father of Cap o' Rushes. Before the feast, Cap o' Rushes went into the kitchen and told the cook to put no salt in any of the dishes she prepared for the feast.

'But that will make the food taste horrible,' protested the cook.

'Never mind,' said Cap o' Rushes. 'Just do as I say.'

The guests arrived for the wedding feast. The guests sat down to eat, but could not swallow a single bite; the saltless food tasted so terrible! It was at that moment that the father of Cap o' Rushes suddenly realised what his youngest daughter had meant when she said she loved him 'as much as salt loves food'.

'I once had a daughter,' he said, with tears in his eyes, 'who said she loved me as much as food loved salt. I didn't understand what she meant, and threw her out of the house. Now, eating this food without salt, I realise she loved me very much!'

Then Cap o' Rushes walked over to him and put her arms around her father. Her father was overjoyed to see her safe and sound. And they all lived happily ever after!