

The Princess and the Pea

by

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Now, there are many stories about princesses, and many people who think they know what it means to be a princess. This story is a reminder that things are not always what they seem.

Once upon a time there was a powerful Queen who was used to getting what she wanted. She accepted nothing less than the best, and she also wanted nothing but the best for her son. She only clothed him in the finest suits, only fed him gourmet foods, and hired the smartest teachers in all the land to educate him.

So when it was time for him to be married, she told him:

"Son, you deserve the best woman in the whole world. Do not settle for just any pretty face. A prince must be married to a princess." she told him, as he listened intently.

"But remember," said the Queen, "A real princess is not just the daughter of a king and queen. A real princess is delicate and refined, and eats only the finest foods. She is well-educated, and

reads only the greatest books and poems. She wears the loveliest dresses, and carries herself with grace and dignity. And the first thing you will notice, a real princess has the voice of an angel."

With that, the prince set off with his servants in search of his princess.

After he had traveled for several days, he reached the nearest kingdom. When he came to the castle, he introduced himself as the prince of the neighboring kingdom.

When he met the king and queen, they were immediately impressed by how handsome and polite he was. They thought right away that it would be a good idea to introduce the prince to their daughter, a princess who was not yet married.

They brought the prince to the princess's study, where she was busy reading poetry as a servant fixed her hair. The Prince was happy to see that she was very beautiful, and she smiled at the Prince as he greeted her.

"Hello, Princess," said the Prince.

"Hello!" squawked the Princess, her voice hoarse and cracking.

"Um, are you all right, princess?" asked the Prince. "Can I bring you a glass of water?"

"No, I am not thirsty," replied the Princess, smiling politely.

"Well, it was lovely to meet you," said the Prince nervously. "I must be going, it is very late."

As he left, he felt badly for leaving abruptly, but he reminded himself of what his mother said: "A real princess has the voice of an angel."

The good part was that it was actually not late at all. The Prince had plenty of time to set out for the next neighboring kingdom, where he again found the castle and asked to meet the king and queen.

Again, he was so charming that he was immediately invited to meet the unmarried princess of the kingdom. This time, the king and queen led the Prince to castle's dining hall.

This princess was also very beautiful but when the Prince entered, she hardly looked at him. She was sitting at the table eating like a pig with food dripping from her face and hands.

"Um, hello Princess," said the Prince, speaking hurriedly, "it looks like you are very busy, so, I'll just leave you alone with your food."

He continued on, through valleys and over endless stretches of plains, but at each castle he stopped at, he met only disappointment. Finally, the Prince gave up and returned home - still unmarried and very disappointed by his very long journey.

When he arrived at his own castle, his mother and father greeted him. The Prince told his parents the whole story of his journey. His mother was especially sad for him, but also glad he had not chosen to marry any of the princesses he met.

That night, during a terrible thunderstorm, there was a knock at the door. A servant went to go answer the door, and a young woman stood outside, dressed in a heavy cloak, soaking wet from the rain.

The Prince happened to be walking past, but when he heard the voice of the young woman he stopped in his tracks.

She explained to the servant, "My driver got lost in the rain and we saw the light from your castle. Would you be kind enough to provide us shelter for the night?"

She had the voice of an angel, and the Prince knew immediately that this must be his princess. He quickly ran up and excused the servant.

"Of course you are welcome to stay, good lady," he said, bowing

respectfully. "Allow me to take your coat."

When she pulled the hood off of her head, the Prince thought that she was the most beautiful woman he had ever seen in his life.

"Thank you so much, kind sir."

The Prince was so excited, he ran to go tell his mother what had happened. But right after he told her the story, she scoffed.

"My dear son, she is no princess," she said. "What kind of a princess goes out in the rain, knocking on doors in the middle of the night? Shouldn't she have a servant for that?"

She peeked out into the hall to get a look at the girl, and was appalled to see her with dripping wet hair and a muddy dress.

"You see? She is no more than a common peasant."

"But mother," argued the Prince. "Look at how she walks! I've never seen anything more graceful."

The Queen could see that her son had already fallen for the girl, so she quickly devised a plan to get rid of her.

"Alright, then, if you don't believe me, we will put her to a test.

Tonight we will dress her bed with ten of the softest, fluffiest, most luxurious feather mattresses in the castle. Then under the ten mattresses, we will place a single, uncooked pea. If this pea disturbs her sleep, then we will know. Only a real princess would be delicate and refined enough to feel the pea."

The Prince didn't think that anybody would be able to feel the pea, but he also knew that his mother knew best. Besides, he thought, he didn't want to marry anything less than a real princess.

So the Queen ordered her servants to gather the best mattresses they could find, and bring them to the guest tower. The she took a single pea, and put it right in the middle of the bed, and had the servants stack all the mattresses on top.

Then the Prince escorted the guest to her room, where she needed a ladder to get to bed.

In the morning, the Prince went to the dining hall, and peeked inside to get a look at his love. She looked terrible. She had dark circles under her eyes and was sipping a large cup of tea.

"I am so tired," the princess told a servant. "Please do not tell the Prince, but that bed is awful, I felt like there was a brick inside it. I did not sleep a wink all night. I am so tired."

The Prince rushed over to her side and knelt before her.

"You are a true princess, aren't you? Please marry me and live here and I will get you any mattress you choose."

The Princess looked shocked but then smiled and said, "Yes, I will marry you, as long as I don't have to sleep on that bed ever again!"

The next day, after the Princess got a good night's sleep without a pea to disturb her, the Prince and Princess were married.

And they lived happily ever after.