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THE PRINCESS AND THE PEA

Once upon a time, there was a prince who wanted to marry a real princess. He did not want to marry just anyone. He wanted someone special, someone kind, delicate, and good-hearted. So he traveled to many places, visited many castles, and met many young ladies, but he was never completely sure that they were true princesses.

—I want to find a real princess —the prince would say—. I do not want to make a mistake.

A long time passed while he searched. Sometimes he met a young lady who looked very elegant, but he felt that something was not quite right. Other times, he met someone kind, but he still had doubts. So after many journeys, the prince returned to his castle

feeling a little sad. He thought that perhaps he would never find the princess he had been hoping for.

In the castle, he lived with his mother, the queen, who was a very wise woman. She could see the sadness in her son's face and understood how important it was for him to find the right person.

—Do not worry —the queen would tell him—. Sometimes good things arrive when we least expect them.

One night, while the wind blew very hard and the rain tapped against the palace windows, there came a loud knock at the main door.

—Knock, knock, knock!

Everyone was surprised.

—Who could it be at this hour, in such terrible weather? —asked the queen.

A servant hurried to open the door. There he found a young lady completely soaked by the rain. Her dress was wet, her hair hung damp over her shoulders, and her shoes were covered with mud from the road.

—Good evening —said the young lady softly—. I am a princess, and I need a place to stay for the night.

The queen looked at her carefully. The girl seemed tired, but also very polite. When the prince saw her, he felt curious and hopeful. Perhaps this young lady was truly the princess he had been looking for all this time.

—We will gladly help you —said the queen—. You may rest in the castle tonight.

The young lady thanked her with a small smile. The servants brought her dry clothes, a soft towel, and something warm to drink. After that, they showed her to a beautiful room with a large bed and many blankets.

But before the young lady entered the room, the queen had an idea.

—I will make a little test —she said quietly to herself.

Then she placed a tiny pea at the bottom of the bed. On top of it, she ordered many mattresses and several soft blankets to be piled up. The bed became so tall that it looked almost like a tower.

—If she truly is a princess, she will feel it —thought the queen.

The young lady climbed carefully into the bed. From up there, the room looked peaceful and cozy. Outside, the rain still fell, and the storm sounded strong in the night. The girl closed her eyes and tried to sleep, but no matter how she moved, she could not rest comfortably.

—What a strange bed —she whispered—. I feel something hard underneath, though I do not know what it is.

She turned to one side, then to the other, fixed her pillow, pulled the blankets closer, and closed her eyes again. But she still felt uncomfortable. Much of the night passed with her tossing and turning, unable to find a comfortable position.

When morning came, the young lady looked tired. Even so, she came downstairs politely to have breakfast with the queen and the prince.

The queen welcomed her kindly and asked:

—Did you sleep well?

The young lady gave a soft sigh before answering.

—Not very well, to be honest. The bed was very soft and very pretty, but I felt something hard underneath. I could hardly sleep at all last night.

The queen smiled and looked at the prince with satisfaction.

—Now we know —she said—. Only a real princess could notice a tiny pea under so many mattresses and blankets.

The prince was overjoyed. His face brightened at once, and his eyes filled with happiness. At last, he had found a real princess, just as he had always hoped.

—Then you truly are a real princess —said the prince with a big smile.

The young lady smiled sweetly.

—It seems so —she answered.

As the days passed, the prince and the princess began to know each other better. They walked through the castle gardens, talked under the trees, and shared stories about their journeys and their lives. The prince discovered that she was not only a real princess, but also kind, intelligent, and warm-hearted.

The princess also felt happy in the castle. She liked the peace of the place, the kindness of the queen, and the honesty of the prince. Little by little, through conversations, smiles, and quiet walks, a very special affection began to grow between them.

One day, the prince said to her happily:

—You are exactly the person I had been waiting for.

Not long after that, they celebrated a beautiful wedding at the castle. There were flowers everywhere, cheerful music, delicious desserts, and many happy guests. The lights shone brightly, the great hall was full of laughter, and the queen could not stop smiling as she watched her son so full of joy.

As for the little pea, it was kept as a memory of that very special night. No one forgot it, because thanks to that simple test, the prince found the princess he had been searching for.

And so, with joy, affection, and hope, the prince and the princess lived happily for a very, very long time.

THE END

