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IMAGINATION OVER KNOWLEDGE

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# The Twelve Dancing Princesses

Once upon a time, there was a king who had twelve beautiful daughters. They all slept in the same room, and every night the door was locked from the outside. Yet, every morning the princesses' shoes were completely worn out. It seemed as if the princesses had been dancing in their shoes all night long. But no one could tell what had happened during the night.

The king wanted to know the secret. He promised that whoever could unravel the mystery for him could marry one of his daughters. Not only that, but he would also become the heir to the throne. It couldn't be just any attempt, because anyone who failed to reveal the secret after three nights would pay with their life.

Soon, a prince arrived. He was allowed to sleep in a room next to the princesses' bedroom. His door remained open, so he could keep a close eye on the princesses' room all night long. However, the prince fell asleep early. And so, he had no idea what the princesses had done that night. He only saw that the soles of their shoes were full of holes, probably because they had been dancing on them all night. The same thing happened on the second and third nights, which meant his death. After this prince, several others came. But no one could tell what had happened during the night, and so they all lost their lives.

At the same time, an old soldier traveled through the land. He had been wounded in battle, and could no longer fight. In the forest, he met an old woman.

"Where are you going?" asked the old woman.

"I have no idea where I will go or what I will do," the soldier replied politely. "But I would really like to know where the princesses dance, because then one day I could be a king."

"Well," said the old lady. "That's not difficult. Just be careful not to drink any wine. You will be offered a glass of wine by one of the princesses. So do not drink from it and pretend to fall into a deep sleep."

Then she gave the soldier a cloak and said: "As soon as you wear the cloak, you will become invisible. You can follow the princesses without them seeing you."

When the soldier heard the old woman's good advice, he took the cloak and decided to try his luck.

The king received the soldier as courteously as he had done with the others. He gave him royal clothing and allowed him into the room next to the princesses' bedroom.

That evening, the oldest princess came to his room. She brought him a glass of wine. The soldier pretended to drink the wine but did not take a sip. He threw away the contents and then lay on the bed, snoring loudly, as if he had fallen into a deep sleep.

When the twelve princesses heard the loud snoring, they laughed out loud. The oldest said, "This old man should have known better. Now his curiosity will cost him his life."

In their room, they took out the most beautiful dresses from their wardrobe and put them on. The youngest princess hesitated and said, "I don't know what it is, but my feeling tells me that something terrible is going to happen to us."



"Don't be silly," said the oldest. "You are always so scared. Have you forgotten how many princes have visited us in vain? And as for this old soldier, I don't think I even needed to give him a sleeping potion. He would have fallen asleep without it."

When the princesses were all dressed up, they quickly went to check on the soldier. He was lying motionless on his back making a loud snoring sound. The princesses thought they were safe. The oldest princess went to her bed and clapped her hands. The bed sank into the floor and a hatch opened. The soldier saw the princesses go down through the hatch. He quickly grabbed his cloak and followed them. But in the middle of the stairs, he stepped on the youngest princess's dress. She called to her sisters, "Help, something's wrong. Someone grabbed my gown."

"Don't be silly," said the oldest. "It was probably a nail in the wall."

When they reached the bottom, they found themselves in a beautiful forest. The leaves of the trees were made

of silver. The soldier broke a branch. It made a loud noise. The youngest princess heard it and said, "I'm sure something's not right. Didn't you hear that sound? This has never happened before."

But the oldest princess said, "It's our princes you hear." The princesses reached another part of the forest where the leaves were made of gold, and then another part where the leaves were sparkling diamonds. The soldier also broke branches from the trees here. It could serve as evidence later. The sisters continued on their way until they came to a large lake. There were twelve handsome princes waiting for the princesses in their own boat. The soldier got into the boat of the youngest princess. The prince in the boat with the soldier said to the princess, "I don't know why, but the boat isn't going as fast as usual. I'm already quite tired. The boat seems very heavy this time." The youngest princess said nothing, as she didn't want to appear complaining to the prince. So she kept quiet.

They moored at a beautifully lit castle. Happy music was playing. The princes and princesses went inside the castle, and each prince danced with his princess. The soldier danced and drank wine. It was good wine, and the soldier enjoyed it. The princesses danced until three o'clock in the morning. Then they had to leave because their shoes were completely worn out. The princes took the princesses back to their boat to cross the lake. This time, the soldier took his place in the boat of the oldest sister. At the farewell, the princesses promised their princes solemnly that they would return the next night.

When the princesses arrived home, the soldier quickly walked ahead of them to his room, where he went to bed. The twelve sisters heard him snoring, so they thought everything was safe. They put their dresses back in the closet and took off their shoes. Then they went to bed. The soldier didn't tell them what had happened the next morning. He secretly went with the princesses for a second and third night. This time he took a golden cup from the princes' castle.

The next day, the soldier was brought to the king. He brought the three branches and the golden cup with him. The twelve princesses were listening behind the door to hear what the soldier would say.

"Where and why are my twelve daughters dancing at night?" the king asked the soldier.

The soldier replied, "Your daughters are dancing with twelve princes underground." He told the king everything he had seen and showed him the branches and the golden cup. The king called his daughters to him. The twelve sisters realized that their secret had been discovered and confessed.

The king asked the soldier which of his daughters he would choose as a wife. The soldier replied, "I'm not so young anymore, so I choose the oldest."

They married the same day, and it didn't take long for the king to die and the soldier to rule the kingdom.