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READ ANYWHERE, ANYTIME

The tears of princess Prunella

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Once upon a time there lived a very beautiful princess. Her name was Princess Prunella. The princess had no brothers or sisters. In fact, the little princess had no one to play with at all. Boredom made her very annoying to everyone. The king and queen did everything they could to make the life of their princess as pleasant as possible. But nothing made the princess happy. One day the queen thought that a playmate for the princess should come. She made it known in the country and hundreds of princes and princesses came.

"Choose one," said the queen. The princess looked around her, but saw hundreds of the same faces. "They are all the same!" she exclaimed. Until she saw a boy standing at the doorway. "Him!" cried the princess, "he will be my playmate!" cried the princess to the boy. But the boy withdrew, bewildered, and shook his head. Princess Prunella stamped her foot angrily. "How dare you decline my offer?" she cried. At this the strange boy turned and hurried out of the room.

"Who is he?" asked the princess. "It is deaf Robert, the son of our court musician," replied the servants.

"That means he can't hear anything," said the king. "Besides, he is not a prince. Wouldn't you rather choose someone else?" But the princess said: "They are all the same, but the son of the court musician has a beautiful look on his face. I want him as a playmate."

The king and queen thought she would think differently in a few days. But the princess fetched her horse and left the castle in search of deaf Robert who she knew lived in the woods. Once at the musicians' cottage, Robert looked up at her in surprise from the beautiful flower garden. The princess jumped off her horse and walked over to the boy and took his hand. "Hello," she said softly. "Are you unhappy?"

"I was just unhappy because I couldn't hear what you were saying to me this morning," he explained.

"Oh!" cried the princess. "You can hear me now!"

"Ah, yes," said deaf Robert. "I can hear you now because you speak so kindly. It's only when people are angry and talking rudely that I can't hear them."

"Have you always been deaf?" asked the princess in astonishment.

"When I was born, my father invited elves. He was allowed to choose a gift for me. He chose that I should be deaf to any sound that wasn't pretty."



"So that's why you have such a beautiful look on your face," said the princess. "Come to the castle with me!" But the boy said, "I cannot go with you. It is so horribly quiet in the castle. I like the sounds in the forest. Can't you hear them?" And the princess shook her head no, and persuaded the boy to go with her to the castle.

When the king and queen saw how happy their daughter was now, they said nothing more about the fact that the boy was not a prince. They solved the problem by giving him the status of Marquis. Now you'd think the son of a court musician—who was suddenly made a princess's marquis and playmate—would be the happiest boy in the world. And yet, though he loved the princess more every day, Robert was the saddest person in all the court. He became quieter and quieter, and as the days went by, the princess finally noticed that he had changed too.

"The beautiful look is gone from your face," she said. "Aren't you happy here?" Then the boy said, "I am unhappy because I cannot hear the sounds of the city. I wish you would live with me in the woods."

"But in the forest I cannot hear any sounds," said the princess.

"That's only because you hear all the wrong things," said the boy. "If you could ever hear the sounds of the forest, you wouldn't want to go back to the city."

The princess got angry, but held herself back. She knew he wouldn't be able to hear her if she expressed her anger now. So she said in a low voice, "You're wrong. If you were really sweet boy, you would understand." And with that, she turned and left him. The boy thought about what she'd said and thought she was right that he wasn't a nice boy at all. That afternoon the princess pricked her finger and began to cry. The boy stared at her. "What are you doing, Prunella?" he asked her gravely.

"Well, of course I'm crying. You would too if you had pricked yourself so badly."

"To cry? What is that?" the boy asked. "And why would you do such a useless thing? It would be better to get a band-aid."

"It's not a plaster I want," replied the princess sadly. "When people cry, they naturally want to be comforted."

"But if I can't hear you cry, how am I supposed to comfort you?" the boy asked.

"That's just it!" sobbed the princess. "You should be able to hear me cry! Then you would be a real sweet boy!" Then she began to cry terribly and hid her face behind her hands. When she finally removed her hands from her eyes, her playmate was gone. Robert hurried home. His father sighed a little as he saw his son enter at the gate, for he too saw at once that the beautiful look had disappeared from the boy's face.

"What is going on? he asked concerned.

"Father, why did you let the fairies come at my birth?"

"That's easy to answer," said the court musician. "I wished for you that you would only hear beautiful sounds for the rest of your life."

"But what sounds are those exactly?" his son asked. The court musician smiled. "Can't you hear my music?" he asked.

"Sure," said Robert. "But what else?"

"Well," said the musician, "can't you hear the sounds of the forest?"

"I used to be able to do that," said Robert sadly. "But now the forest has become quiet. And I can't hear the princess crying."

"What nonsense!" cried the court musician. "Tears make a very unpleasant sound. And you would be greatly disappointed to hear the princess cry."

"You don't understand," cried Robert, "you're not nice either! My princess's tears make the sweetest sound in the world and I will not rest until I learn how to hear them!" Then he turned back into the woods where he wandered aimlessly. And there the boy would still wander, had he not suddenly come across a fairy boy.

"Hello," said the fairy boy, "what's the matter with you?"

"I'm very unhappy because I'm not a really sweet boy," Robert replied. "And you should know that, because it's all because the fairies came to visit me at my birth."

"That's not true at all!" cried the fairy-boy indignantly. "It's because of your father who knew better than us. If the fairies hadn't visited you at birth, you wouldn't even want to be a real sweet boy. "

"It could all be so," the boy lamented, "but you probably have no idea how unpleasant it is to be a boy without being a real sweet boy."

"Then why don't you learn to be a real sweet boy?" asked the fairy boy.

"How do I learn that then?" asked Robert.

"You ridiculous boy!" cried the fairy boy. "Well, the first person you meet will be able to tell you that!"

So the boy walked on through the woods, hoping to meet someone who could tell him. It took him three days to reach the edge of the forest in the morning of the fourth day. There he saw an old woman sitting. "Hurrah!" cried Robert. "Do you know that you are the first person I met, and that you are going to tell me how to become a real sweet boy?"

"I'll tell you right away," said the old woman, smiling. "This is what you should do then: something brave and something nice and something foolish and something wise. If you're not a real sweet boy after that, it's your own fault!" Then she walked around a blackberry bush and disappeared. So Robert walked on in search of a brave act. This did not last long, for the same day he passed a castle where a giant was holding a princess captive. Robert called the giant and the giant immediately came out. The giant thought he could easily kill the boy, but the opposite happened. Robert defeated the giant and freed the princess, who immediately exclaimed, "That's the bravest deed I've ever seen anyone do!"

After that the boy wandered about for many days without finding a wise or foolish deed to do. Two years passed and he still hadn't learned how to be a real sweet boy. One day, as he was walking down a country road, he came across a girl with a herd of cows.

"Why do you look so sad?" she asked.

"Because I left my princess crying two years ago, and I've been away from her ever since," the boy replied. The girl burst out laughing. "Well," she exclaimed, "that was a foolish thing to do!"

"Foolish?" cried Robert. "Did you say foolish?"

"Can there be anything more foolish than staying away from someone you want to be with?" the girl laughed.

"Then I'll go right back to her," said the boy.

"And that would be the wisest thing you could do," replied the girl, and she disappeared at once, cows and all, which can only mean that she must have been a fairy girl all along.

"Okay," said Robert, "this has done my wise and my foolish deeds, so now I'm a real sweet boy!"

Then he went back to the castle as quickly as he could, and though it had taken him two years to get away from home, he was at the door of the princess's room within two hours. It's a good thing there are elves, otherwise it would have been quite a coincidence that at that moment Princess Prunella had pricked her finger

again. Anyway, that was what had happened. As young Robert stood at her door listening, he heard the softest and sweetest sound he had ever heard in his life.

"Hurrah!" he exclaimed. "Finally I can hear the princess crying." He pulled open the door and ran into the room where he knelt before the princess to comfort her.

"Look at my finger," the princess cried, showing him her hand. It was impossible to tell which finger she had pricked, but when Robert kissed them all, it became clear that he had healed the right one. The princess immediately stopped crying. Then she looked at her old playmate and laughed with joy. "The beautiful look has returned to your face," she said, "but now so much more beautiful than before!"

"Dear playmate," said Robert softly. "I can hear the forest sounds again. But you were right: the sounds of the city are much more charming."

"Oh no," said the princess. "It is not, because the sounds of the forest are much more beautiful."

And this is something they could never agree on, but it didn't get in the way of their happiness in any way.

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