



The Porcelain Princess

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Retold Fairy Tales

Once upon a time, a King and Queen ruled in splendor. Renowned for their wisdom and benevolence, the kingdom prospered. The farmer's corn grew as high as an elephant's eye. The merchant's pockets jingled with coins. Yet there was one thing missing: the King and Queen did not have a child.

The King and Queen longed for a child. They prayed, they consulted all manner of physicians, without any results. Day after day, the Queen gazed sadly at the wooden cradle carved with the royal seal, wishing for a little one to fill the empty space on the cushion and in her heart.

One day, the Queen went to bathe in her favorite pool in the forest. As she came out of the water, she spotted an old woman on the edge of the clearing, dressed in a multi-colored feather cloak. The woman's face was lined as deep as carriage tracks, but her eyes were kind. The Queen beckoned to her.

"Forgive me, My Queen, could you help a poor woman with a morsel of food?" the old one asked.

"Why, of course." The Queen reached into her basket and pulled out a baguette. She broke off a piece and gave it to the old woman.

"Thank you, My Lady. You have shown a great kindness. Now it is my turn to help you," the old one replied.

"Alas, no one can help me," the Queen sighed and told the woman of her wish for a child.

“Perhaps all hope is not lost.” The old woman, who was the Good Fairy, plucked a blue feather from her cloak. “Take this, care for it until the third day, and see what happens.” She handed it to the Queen, then vanished.

The Queen took the feather back to the castle and put it on the pillow in the cradle. Then she did as she was told. On the morning of the third day the Queen rose to discover the feather was gone. In its place lay a baby, a little girl with golden curls and chubby, pink cheeks, and the bluest eyes ever seen.

The Queen’s heart swelled with joy. She scooped up the child, kissed her and hugged her tightly, filling her nostrils with baby scent. She could hardly believe this day had come at last. Then she ran to tell the King the good news and show him their daughter.

The King was equally overjoyed. He ordered a celebration at once to introduce the baby princess to the kingdom. No expense was spared. Only the finest foods and wine were would be served, on plates of gold, with velvet chairs to sit on. Everyone near and far was invited.

Now it happened that the King, being a forgetful sort, neglected to invite the Good Fairy’s sister, the Dark Fairy. The Dark Fairy grew enraged at the slight and determined to be avenged. The night before the party, she flew to the kingdom to seek out the new baby princess.

The Dark Fairy landed outside the princess’ window. Peering in, she looked down at the sleeping child, lashes fluttering gently against her downy cheeks. The baby’s lips pursed in a tiny smile as she slept. The Dark Fairy’s mouth tightened, and she chanted:

“Little Princess, soft and sweet
Never again a smile to greet
Sorrow’s kiss shall be your own
Now until you’re fully grown.”

With that the Dark Fairy vanished.

The party for the Princess got underway with all pomp and splendor. Wine flowed freely and the guests ate their fill. The musicians played merrily and dancing went on for hours. Through it all the baby princess scowled as she sat in her mother’s lap.

Just then a servant, ladling soup into the Queen’s bowl, spilled a few drops of the hot broth on the Princess. The

baby howled. As the Queen comforted her, she discovered a tiny white spot on the baby's cheek; a bit of the Princess' skin had turned to porcelain.

A few days later, when the Princess cried to be fed, the same thing happened: another white speck appeared on her cheek. Then later when she needed to be changed. Every time the Princess cried another spot on her chin turned into porcelain. No matter how much they washed her, the spots wouldn't come off.

The King and Queen were perplexed. They summoned every physician in the land in the hopes of finding a cure. They tried all manner of face creams and ointments, poultices and powders, but nothing worked. Nothing could undo the Dark Fairy's curse.

So it went on. Soon the Princess became a toddler and started to walk. One day, while in the parlor, she stood and took but two steps, then fell back on her behind. Immediately she started bawling and two more specks of porcelain appeared on her face.

But it didn't stop there. By the time she was five, there were spots of porcelain on her arms and legs as well. Every skinned knee, every scraped elbow, brought a fresh flood of tears and more patches of porcelain on the Princess's complexion.

The King and Queen resolved to do everything they could to keep their daughter from being hurt. They gave her the softest cushions to sit on, the thickest mattress on which to sleep. Any toys with sharp edges were removed from the nursery so she wouldn't be harmed.

Most of all they forbade the Princess to leave the castle. The Queen ordered the servants to keep a close watch on her daughter. The Princess was too quick for them, however. She disappeared into the nooks and crannies of the castle that she loved to explore. Eventually, they found her and took her back to the nursery.

Finally, the King and Queen had no choice but to keep the Princess locked in her room. They provided her with pretty dresses to wear, soft cloth dolls to play with. They gave her everything she could want, except her freedom.

The Princess whiled away the hours playing in her room. When she grew tired of her dolls, she sat by the window and stared at the garden below, at the grass and flowers. It looked so beautiful she longed to go out there. If only she could feel the sun on her face, the wind in her hair. She let out a sigh as the tears rolled down her cheeks.

By the age of twelve, the Princess had turned completely porcelain. She didn't understand why she was different, why Mother said she must stay hidden. More than ever she longed to stroll in the beautiful garden below her window. She put crumbs from her dinner on the windowsill and talked to the birds that came, who were her only companions. Like them she yearned for the sky.

Then one day the Porcelain Princess could ignore her heart's wish no longer. As the servant girl entered with the lunch tray, the Porcelain Princess slipped out to the hallway and through a secret passage to the kitchen. She hid in a corner until Cook headed down to the root cellar to get some herbs for the dinner. Then the Porcelain Princess opened the door and stepped outside.

The Porcelain Princess stood in the Royal Garden. She squinted in the sunlight. A rush of air brushed her cheek and a sweet chirping met her ears. She gazed in wonder at the wide stretch of blue above, wider than she'd imagined.

Suddenly, a great gust of wind blew through the garden, so strong it knocked the Porcelain Princess off her feet. She stumbled across the grass, hitting the iron birdbath with a clatter, the jolt knocking her to the ground. There she lay helplessly under the weight of her porcelain shell, like a turtle on its back.

In the next moment, a crow, spotting the shiny figure on the grass, swooped into the garden and carried off the Porcelain Princess. It flew over the fields and the mountains. As it came to a lush forest, the weight of the Porcelain Princess caused it to lose its grip. The Porcelain Princess fell from its claws and dropped to the forest floor.

The Porcelain Princess lay beneath the canopy of trees. She was unbroken but at the thought of being alone so far from home she sobbed harder than ever. The porcelain grew even heavier and she became unable to move at all. There she lay as still as a statue.

The Porcelain Princess could only look up at the specks of sky visible between the branches. Blue turned to orange, then to black, and she stared at the moon and stars throughout the night. Surely someone would find

her and bring her back home to the castle.

Days passed, then weeks and months. The days grew shorter and colder. Leaves turned color then dropped, covering her in a blanket of scarlet and gold, crackling as a squirrel ran by to collect nuts to store for the coming of the long winter season.

Then Winter's snow replaced the leaves. The forest floor became a blanket of white, branches framing a gray sky. The Porcelain Princess was almost invisible beneath the snow. Still and stiff, she waited for the snow to recede and Spring to return.

Eventually the sun's rays melted the snow and awakened the flowers. The forest burst into a riot of color. Bright green leaves came out, grass sprouted around the Porcelain Princess. Flowers dotted the forest floor, marking the welcome return of Spring.

One day, it started to rain and continued all day. The Porcelain Princess lay staring up at the clouds, raindrops pouring down her faded white face. As it continued to rain, the Porcelain Princess grew until she reached the size and shape of a woman.

Still the Porcelain Princess remained in the same spot. She took to watching one particular tree, a crooked birch. It seemed a kindred spirit, rooted to the spot like herself. It stood through the wind and rain and sun, even when a storm peeled off a piece of its bark. Night and day it remained a constant companion.

The Porcelain Princess followed the graceful taper of the birch tree's limbs as it reached to the sky. She wasn't sure what it was reaching for, but as she gazed at the solitary sentinel she found herself searching the heavens with her eyes, beseeching someone to set her free.

Finally, one day, the north wind blew past the forest and spotted the Porcelain Princess where she lay. Intrigued by the unusual sight, the wind drew closer to investigate. Though cracked and chipped, her hair matted, she was still lovely. The wind blew her a kiss, then swooped back up through the trees.

A gentle breeze blew through the stillness of the forest. The trees swayed in a merry jig with the sun, accompanied by birdsong. A squirrel poked its head out of its burrow to see what the fuss was all about. And the Porcelain Princess did something she never had before: she laughed.

Suddenly a loud crack rent the air. In the next instant, porcelain shattered in a white cloud. The dust faded to

reveal a human female. Long golden curls cascaded down her shoulders and real blue eyes looked upon the tree, her skin as rosy as a peach. She was as beautiful as any princess could be.

The Princess gasped in amazement. For the first time in a long while she felt warmth on her face and arms as the sun shone down on her. The scent of flowers tickled her nose, as grass rubbed her skin. Then a great weariness overcame her and she fell into a deep slumber.

All around the Princess the forest rose up to protect her. A wall of thorns sprouted that encircled the clearing and wound overhead in a dome over the sleeping form. There the Princess lay, untouched by any mortal hand.

As it happened, at the same moment a prince was riding past the forest. He spotted a bird with multi-colored wings wheeling in the sky above and pulled to a stop. For some reason, he felt compelled to go into the woods. Dismounting, he left his horse tied to a stump by the side of the road and entered the forest.

The Prince stepped past the trees. Following the bird overhead, he climbed over roots and stones as he made his way through the woods. He walked until he came to where his path was blocked by a wall of thorns. Yet just as he raised his sword to cut his way through the leafy greens parted and admitted him into the clearing beyond.

Climbing past the briars, he came to the space where the sleeping princess lay. Hair like spun gold, dress the color of the sky, she lay in perfect repose in a bed of flowers. The Prince stared in wonder to find an elegant princess sleeping in the middle of the forest. Unable to help himself, he bent over her and gave her a kiss.

For a moment time seemed to stand still. Then in the next moment the Princess' eyes flew open. She stared, sat up, looking around in confusion. Then her eyes fell on the Prince and she smiled a smile as bright as a sunbeam.

“Oh, but I've waited a long time for you to come,” she said.

“Have no fear. You are safe with me,” he replied.

The Prince sat beside the Princess and proceeded to tell her the story of how he found her. They talked for hours—after such a long rest Princess wasn't sleepy—and agreed they wanted to get to know each other better. The Prince reached over and stroked her face and the Princess delighted at the touch of his fingers on her cheek.

The Prince took the Princess back to his kingdom where they were happily greeted by his subjects. Word was sent to her parents who came at once; they embraced her warmly, overjoyed at having their daughter back to normal. Many happy hours were spent catching up and getting to know each other again. The Princess couldn't have been more pleased.

In time the Prince and Princess were married. A grander celebration was never seen in the kingdom. It lasted for several days, filled with music, song, and entertainments of all kinds. The Princess' every laugh caused a rose to fall from her mouth. And they lived happily ever after in a garden of flowers.

THE END

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