

CHAPTER 2

The Parable of the Princess and the Pea

There once was a prince who longed to have a princess at his side. But not all the time. More precisely, there once was a prince who longed to have a princess who was continually in need of rescuing occasionally at his side. For times had changed in the land, you see, and merely going out and slaying creatures just because they were different, or smelly, or had dietary requirements at variance from the norm was no longer acceptable. It was still widely acknowledged, however, if the aforesaid different, smelly or nutritionally divergent creature was to abscond with a princess who was somehow associated with a prince, well then, The Era of Officially Sanctioned Tolerance and We Are All Brothers Under The Skin, Or Scales, Or Fur, Or Shell, Or Feathers, Or Gelatinous Goo was out and The Age of Gleeful Mayhem And Slaughter was back in.

Accompanied by his Noble Steed, Noble, the Prince imagined he would rescue His Princess from the fiercest of dragons, the ugliest of orcs, the hugest of giants, for her he would even brave the beasts so repulsive they had no name, or names so repulsive that even the beast itself preferred not to be called. For his princess he would climb, mostly atop his noble steed Noble, the heights of Mt. Flabadoon to vanquish the many feathered Flassie. For her he would descend, again about as far as the noble steed Noble could descend, the deepest depths to subjugate the many-tongued Brockasee. The treacherous Sand Gazabonnes of the driest desert and the dastardly Histabees of the deepest jungle would feel his vengeance as he rescued his beloved Princess.

OK, so you get the idea. So the Prince, being a dutiful son went to his mother, and declared to her in strong and clear tones,

“Mother, I a Prince who wishes to do heroic things in this bureaucratic age, desires a Princess to be at my side, except when she is carried away and hence requires heroic rescuing.”

“Oh my son,” said the Queen, “Long have I dreaaadmt of this day. Now my son any heroic deeds must be done properly which means that any Princess you rescue and then kiss, you must first wed.”

The Prince considered the wise words of his mother, The Queen.

“Mother, I a Prince who wishes to do heroic things in this increasingly bureaucratic and rule-bound age, desires a Princess to be at my side, except when she is carried away and hence requires heroic rescuing.”

The Queen replied, “Only the most princessly of princesses deserves the hand of you my son. I shall determine whom shall be your bride for as a Queen I am best qualified what should be in the heart of a princess who deserves to be your bride. So go outside and play and prepare for your wedding and the heroic rescues that will ensue.”

Now as the word spread far and wide that the prince desired a bride, a veritable passel of princesses soon descended upon the castle. But is soon became apparent that mere lineage or fine dress was not enough the pass the muster of Her Majesty, the Queen. Some princesses laughed too loud and were too boisterous. Others laughed not at all and were too grim. Some princesses fell asleep during affairs of state. Others paid too much attention and tried to express an opinion. Some princesses enjoyed the opera and tried to sing along. Others hated the opera so much they tried to strangle the plump tenors. And thus the line of princesses leaving the

castle was the exact same length as the line of those entering.

Despair raged in the heart and other parts of the Prince, who longed to do great deeds.

One night a terrible storm was raging and there was a knock at the castle's door. The door was opened and there was a sopping wet, bedraggled damsel who demanded entrance and then a bed for the night. Sensing something innately Princessly about her, the Queen had assembled a pile of 20 mattresses and beds which, if you think about it for a moment, is a pretty impressive feat of domestic engineering in and of itself, especially considering it was done late at night and on the fly. Now, unnoticed by the damsel and after much considered deliberation, the Queen slipped a thirty-five day sun dried Petit Majestic #2 pea under the bottom of the heap of mattresses and beds. The damsel was then hoisted (some say flung) atop the pile and bid a good night. In the morning there were one and twenty grumpy people in the castle; the twenty who had been deprived of their mattresses and beds in the middle of the night, and the damsel who had slept on them. The damsel was asked by the Queen, "Did you sleep well?" (The other twenty, needless to say, were never queried by the Queen)

"Oh!" said the damsel. "No. I scarcely slept at all. Heaven knows what's in that bed. I lay on something so hard that I'm black and blue all over. It was simply lumpy!"

At once the Queen recognized a kindred spirit and declared the damsel was indeed a True Princess and thus worthy of her son's hand in marriage. So great was the need for the Prince to engage in derring-do that the wedding was conducted almost at once. And soon thereafter the castle was to hear a constant refrain from the newly married Princess,

"This porridge is too lumpy."

"This dress feels too lumpy"

"This path is too lumpy."

"That sky is too lumpy."

And while the prince still longed to have his princess carried away by some hideous creature. (any creature actually), he was less sure he would bother to go and rescue her.

He planned to sorta play it by ear.

THE MORAL: IF YOU ARE GOING TO GIVE SOMEONE A TEST, MAKE SURE THAT YOU CAN LIVE WITH THE RESULTS

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