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Prince Hyacinth and the Dear Little Princess

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Once upon a time there lived a king who was deeply in love with a princess, but she could not marry anyone, because she was under an enchantment. So the King set out to seek a fairy, and asked what he could do to win the Princess's love. The Fairy said to him:

"You know that the Princess has a great cat which she is very fond of. Whoever is clever enough to tread on that cat's tail is the man she is destined to marry."

The King said to himself that this would not be very difficult, and he left the Fairy, determined to grind the cat's tail to powder rather than not tread on it at all.

You may imagine that it was not long before he went to see the Princess, and puss, as usual, marched in before him, arching his back. The King took a long step, and quite thought he had



the tail under his foot, but the cat turned round so sharply that he only trod on air. And so it went on for eight days, till the King began to think that this fatal tail must be full of quicksilver—it was never still for a moment.

At last, however, he was lucky enough to come upon puss fast asleep and with his tail conveniently spread out. So the King, without losing a moment, set his foot upon it heavily.

With one terrific yell the cat sprang up and instantly changed into a tall man, who, fixing his angry eyes upon the King, said:

“You shall marry the Princess because you have been able to break the enchantment, but I will have my revenge. You shall have a son, who will never be happy until he finds out that his nose is too long, and if you ever tell anyone what I have just said to you, you shall vanish away instantly, and no one shall ever see you or hear of you again.”

Though the King was horribly afraid of the enchanter, he could not help laughing at this threat.

"If my son has such a long nose as that," he said to himself, "he must always see it or feel it; at least, if he is not blind or without hands."

But, as the enchanter had vanished, he did not waste any more time in thinking, but went to seek the Princess, who very soon consented to marry him. But after all, they had not been married very long when the King died, and the Queen had nothing left to care for but her little son, who was called Hyacinth. The little Prince had large blue eyes, the prettiest eyes in the world, and a sweet little mouth, but, alas! his nose was so enormous that it covered half his face. The Queen was inconsolable when she saw this great nose, but her ladies assured her that it was not really as large as it looked; that it was a Roman nose, and you had only to open any history to see that every hero has a large nose. The Queen, who was devoted to her baby, was pleased with what they told her, and when she looked at Hyacinth again, his nose certainly did not seem to her *quite* so large.

The Prince was brought up with great care; and, as soon as he could speak, they told him all sorts of dreadful stories about people who had short noses. No one was allowed to come near him whose nose did not more or less resemble his own, and the courtiers, to get into favour with the Queen, took to pulling their babies' noses several times every day to make them grow long. But, do what they would, they were nothing by comparison with the Prince's.

When he grew sensible he learnt history; and whenever any great prince or beautiful princess was spoken of, his teachers took care to tell him that they had long noses.

His room was hung with pictures, all of people with very large noses; and the Prince grew up so convinced that a long nose was a great beauty, that he would not on any account have had his own a single inch shorter!

When his twentieth birthday was passed the Queen thought it was time that he should be married, so she commanded that the portraits of several princesses should be brought for him to see, and among the others was a picture of the Dear Little Princess!

Now, she was the daughter of a great king, and would some day possess several kingdoms herself; but Prince Hyacinth had not a thought to spare for anything of that sort, he was so much struck with her beauty. The Princess, whom he thought quite charming, had, however, a little saucy nose, which, in her face, was the prettiest thing possible, but it was a cause of great embarrassment to the courtiers, who had got into such a habit of laughing at little noses that they sometimes found themselves laughing at hers before they had time to think; but this did not do at all before the Prince, who quite failed to see the joke, and actually banished two of his courtiers who had dared to mention disrespectfully the Dear Little Princess's tiny nose!

The others, taking warning from this, learned to think twice before they spoke, and one even went so far as to tell the Prince that, though it was quite true that no man could be worth anything unless he had a long nose, still, a woman's beauty was a different thing; and he knew a learned man who understood Greek and had read in some old manuscripts that the beautiful Cleopatra herself had a "tip-tilted" nose!