

## SWEEPING BEAUTY

A King and a Queen once lived in an enormous and slightly messy castle. Their greatest wish was to have a child and when, after many years, they did, they held a royal birthday celebration for the little Princess. Everyone in the kingdom was commanded to attend—every man, woman, child, and fairy.

But there was one fairy, a very naughty one who always ruined everything, who was not invited at all. But just as the good fairies were each giving their magical gifts to the young Princess, this wicked mean fairy appeared and announced: “Because you did not invite me to your party, *I* will give the child a mean and nasty present. On her sixteenth birthday she will prick her finger on a spinning wheel and die!” And with that the evil fairy was gone.

Now, the King and the Queen did not like this idea at all, so they asked the littlest fairy, who had not yet given her present to the Princess, if there was anything she could do. “I can twy,” said the tiny fairy. She rolled up her sleeves, waved her wand, and began:

“Wittle Pwincess, hewre is my gift: When you pwick youwr fingewr on the wheel, you will not die but will begin to sweep.”

“Sweep?” whispered the Queen to the King.

“A sweep,” continued the fairy, “that will wast until you weceive twue wove’s first kiss.”

This suited the King and Queen much better, as the idea of the Princess learning to sweep up the castle suited them fine. “It will build character,” declared the King.

So the Princess grew up happily in the enormous and slightly messy castle, and soon her sixteenth birthday arrived. Sure enough, around lunchtime she wandered into a room full of spinning wheels. She walked up to one and touched its pointy needle with her finger. “Ouch!” she cried.

Then she noticed something she had never seen before. It was a broom. A dusty, dirty old broom, lying unused in a corner. Immediately the Princess was filled with a desire to pick it up and start sweeping everything in sight.

The King and the Queen were walking past and heard a strange noise coming from the room—*BRSH, BRSH, BRSH*. They looked inside and saw the Princess hard at work, sweeping up all the dust and thread and scraps of cloth that had been left around the spinning wheel room.

“Ah, so it’s begun,” remarked the King. “Capital.”

The King and Queen watched as the Princess moved into the hallway, sweeping up lint and cobwebs and pieces of garbage that had been carelessly dropped on the floor. They

were quite pleased and even proud of their daughter, showing her spots she had missed and sending a servant for a trash bag.

The Princess swept off the Grand Staircase, cleaned out the entire Giant Ballroom, brushed off the Enormous Tapestries, and even made the Royal Bathroom sparkle.

“A job well done,” said the Queen. “Let us celebrate with lunch.”

So the King and Queen called for their food and sat down at the table to begin eating. The King smacked his lips. “Mutton sandwiches—my favorite.”

He reached down to pick it up when—*BRSH*—the Princess swept it right off his plate. “I say!” said the King.

Then the Princess swept the King’s plate right off the table. *CRASH!* Then the Queen’s. *CRASH!* Then their glasses of milk. *CRASH! CRASH!*

“Must clean that up,” said the Princess, and—*BRSH, BRSH*—she swept up the pieces.

“Now Princess,” began the Queen, but the Princess swept the crown right off her head. The Princess swept off the King’s crown too, and his royal ring and his scepter. From then on things at the castle began to get rather unusual.

When the King was thirsty, before he could take a drink—*BRSH*—the Princess swept the glass right out of his hand!

In the morning the servants wanted to put on their work clothes and shoes, but—*BRSH, BRSH*—the Princess swept them away while they were still in their pajamas!

When it was time for the Queen’s royal nap—*BRSH*—the Princess swept the pillow right out from under her head!

*BRSH, BRSH*—there went the sheets as well!

The Princess swept the pictures off the wall. She swept the chairs off the floor. She swept the silverware off the tables and the tables out the door.

When the herald had an announcement she swept the paper out of his hands.

When the jester came to cheer people up, she swept away his juggling balls, his card tricks, and even his hat with the little jingly bells.

Once an important person from another kingdom came to pay his respects to the King, but he didn’t get very far at all. [*Illustration: The Princess is sweeping him and his retinue right out the door.*]

And let's not even talk about the evil dragon who came looking for princesses...

You couldn't even brush your teeth there without—*BRSH*—the Princess sweeping the toothpaste right off your toothbrush.

The enormous castle had become the cleanest castle in the history of all the world, but the people who lived there didn't seem to like it all: they were cold and hungry and tired and had dirty teeth. But the Princess still swept, and swept, and swept, and *SWEPT*.

Finally, one day a Prince arrived at the castle. "Is this where the Princess who keeps sweeping everything up lives?" he asked. "My castle is a terrible mess and, between you and me, I could use a princess like that."

"She lives here," said the King wearily. "She's over there . . . sweeping."

The Prince was delighted to see the Princess sweeping out the royal cupboards (his were a mess). He walked over and looked her in the eyes, and she completely swept him off his feet. [*Illustration: This is literal, of course.*]

"She's perfect!" cried out the Prince. He hopped around her busy broom, leaned forward, and gave her a kiss. *SMACK!*

The Princess blinked. She stopped sweeping and looked down at the broom. "What's that?" she asked.

"That is a broom," said the Prince. "And I am a Prince. And I want to marry you and take you and your broom home to my castle. It is even bigger and fancier (and messier) than this one."

The Princess thought about this for a moment then decided that sounded fine. Soon they were married and the Princess went to live with the Prince in her new castle. Just as the Prince had said, it was a terrible mess. But the Princess knew just what to do, and she and the Prince lived happily ever after. [*Illustration: The Princess is reading a book on a comfortable chair while the Prince is busy vacuuming up the floor.*]