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The Prince and the Pauper

Every day Tom went to the palace where the King of England lived. Tom was poor and he begged on the way and sometimes got money. More often he got a kick.

Then one day Tom saw a boy in the palace. He looked at the boy's beautiful clothes and he knew. It was Prince Edward, the king's son! He ran to the gates.

'I want to see the prince,' he cried.

One of the soldiers hit Tom. Tom fell and everybody laughed. But the prince saw and was very angry.

'Why did you hit that poor boy?' he shouted at the soldiers. 'Open the gates. Bring him in.'

'But sir ...,' said the soldier. 'He's only a poor, dirty beggar.'

'My father is king of rich people and poor people,' answered Prince Edward. 'Bring in the boy.'

The prince took Tom inside the palace, up some stairs and into one of his rooms.

'Are you hungry?' he asked.

'I'm always hungry, sir,' answered Tom.

Edward called a servant.

'Bring some food,' he ordered. 'Meat, cake, fruit and bread.'

The servant brought food and Tom ate.

'Now, who are you?' asked the prince. 'I see you at the palace gates every day. I watch you from the window.'

'My name is Tom Canty, sir. I live with my family in a room near London Bridge.'

'In a room?'

'Yes – with my mother, my father, my grandmother and my two sisters. Our room is quite big and it is very cheap.'

'Why do you all live in one room?'

'Because we're very poor,' said Tom. 'My father doesn't work and I have to beg for money.'

'I have two sisters too but they don't play with me and I don't know any boys. Do you play with other boys?'

'Yes, of course. We play by the river and we swim. Sometimes we play princes and soldiers. I'm always the prince,' said Tom.

Edward was sad. 'I would like to be a poor boy,' he said. 'I would like to play with other boys.'

Then Edward had an idea. He jumped out of his chair.

'Let's change clothes. You can be the prince and I'll be the pauper.'

Edward put on Tom's old, thin trousers and shirt. Tom washed his face and hands. They had the same eyes, the same nose, the same hair. Tom put on Edward's fine clothes and shoes.

'Wait here!' said the prince. 'I'm going to be a pauper for a day. I'm going to the river to swim.'

He ran out of the room.

'What shall I do?' shouted Tom.

But there was no answer.
