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Opening extract from

The Practical Princess

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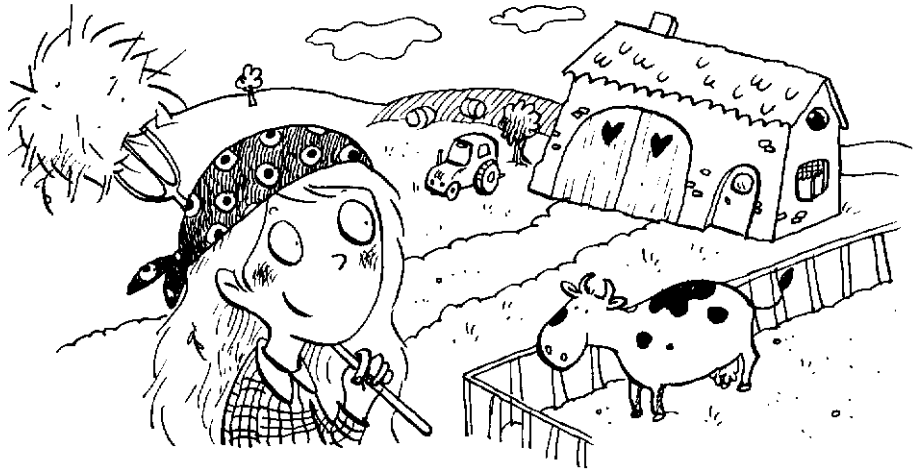
Andersen

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1

Princesses Don't Do Dirt



Molly worked on Hill Farm in the muck.
But she wanted to be a princess.
She milked the cows and goats.
She tugged up tough turnips and

stubborn swedes. She fed the chickens – the mice too.

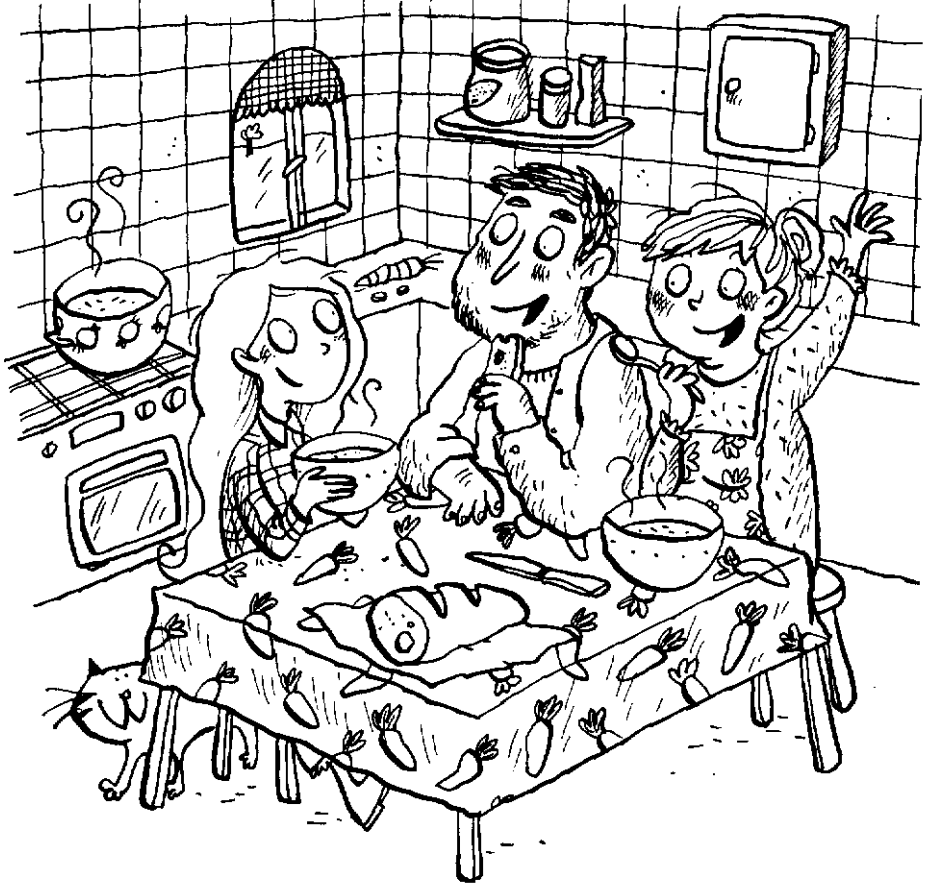
But she dreamed of being a princess.

She scratched the grumpy old pigs. She stroked the sheep and spun their wool into cloth.

She fed and groomed the dusty donkey, though he always tried to kick her.

Molly lived on the farm with her ma and



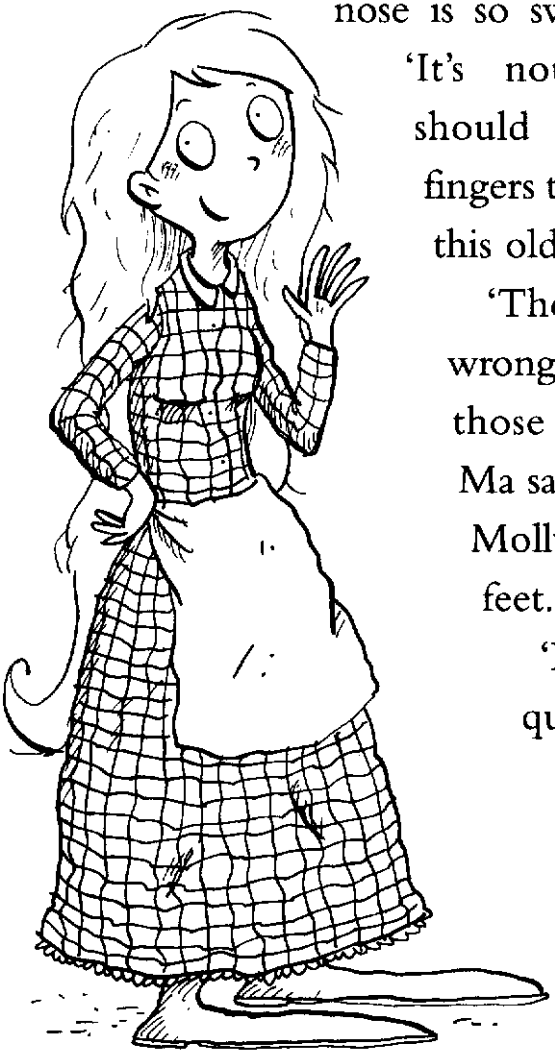


pa. They were poor farmers, always dreaming of a better life.

'You'd make a perfect princess!' Ma said. 'You're such a lovely girl!'

Molly had long wavy blonde hair right down to her knees. She had big brown eyes . . .

'You've got such a teeny tiny waist. Your



nose is so sweet!' Pa said. 'It's not right you should work your fingers to the bone on this old farm.'

'The only thing wrong with you is those big things,' Ma said, pointing at Molly's enormous feet.

'Don't!' Molly quickly tucked them out of sight beneath her dress. 'Thank goodness Stan doesn't mind my feet,' she said.

Stan was a blacksmith. He lived on the



next hill. He was very good at making things. He was kind and had lovely blue eyes. But he was not a prince.

And Molly wanted a prince because princesses had princes.

2

Preparing to be a Real Princess

One day, a notice was pinned up in the village square.



Molly jumped for joy. Ma did a jig.

'This is your chance!' Ma cried. 'You'll marry the Prince and we'll get rich and get

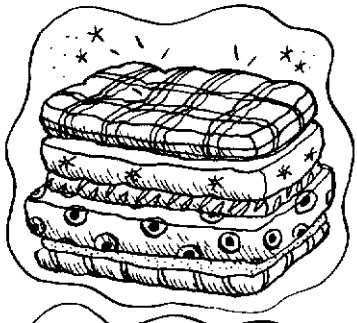
rid of the farm. Yipee!'

Stan was worried and shook his head sadly.

Ma went to the library and took out some books. *Sleeping Beauty. The Princess and the Pea. Cinderella. Snow White and the Seven Dwarves.* They were so heavy Ma had to put them in the back of Stan's cart to get them home.



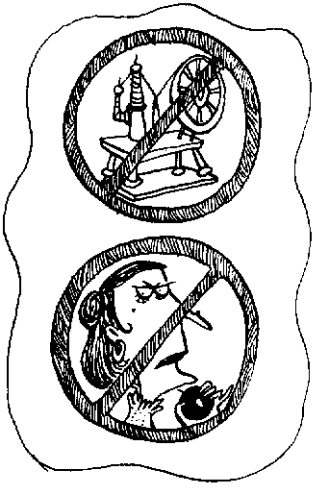
'It's all here,' said Ma, tapping the books. 'All the clues you need are in these books. All the tricks and scams to make you a perfect princess. Listen, you must:





Feel the Royal Pea Under the Mattresses.

Show you can Dance all Night until Your Slippers Wear Out.



Avoid Spinning Wheels.

Avoid Evil Stepmothers.

Be Nice to Older Women in Case They Turn out to be Evil Stepmothers or Witches.

Be Kind and Helpful to all Dwarves Especially if there are Seven of them.'

'What a lot of things to remember!' cried Molly.

'Are you sure you want to be a princess?' Stan asked her quietly. 'Sounds like a waste of time to me.'

'Oh, yes.' Molly said. 'More than anything in the world.'

Stan sighed and shook his head.

'Now,' Ma said. 'You need a princess's name!'

'What's wrong with Molly?' Stan asked.

'It's dreadful! Can't think how we chose it. Dull and unprincessy . . . ' Ma flicked through the Dictionary of Princess Names. 'Annabellabella, Arabellabella . . . Pansy, Pinsey, Ponsey . . . These are all horrible. Ah, Blondine!' Ma cried. 'Princess Blondine is a smashing name for you.'

'Is it?' Molly said. 'Blondine is a very pretty name but I don't have the clothes to match.'

'True,' Ma said. 'You'll need a ballgown for the ball and glass slippers too! Hmmm, no fairy godmothers around, are there?' She peered over the sides of the cart hopefully. 'No. Well, I'll have to get out Grandma's old wedding dress and we'll royal it up.'

'You'll look wonderful whatever you wear,' said Stan.

Stan didn't want Molly to be a princess. He loved her the way she was.



The next time he came to see her, Stan brought her a present. It was hundreds of tiny sparkling things to sew on her dress. They were minuscule bits of silvery scrap metal, fragments of mirror – everything he could find in his workshop. He had made her a crown too.

Ma had bought Molly two pairs of slippers: one pair to wear during the day and the other pair for the ball.

'They're special. I spent all our savings on them,' Ma told Molly. 'You and your great big feet!'

'Thank you, Ma. I'll try and win,' Molly said. 'But I don't think I'll ever remember all the things I have to do.'

'Nonsense!' Ma said. 'There'll be a way round it. You don't believe princesses are any different to us, do you?' Her eyes glinted. 'I bet they all cheat!'

