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# The Pauper Meets a Prince

In the city of London, on a fall day in the 1500s, two boys were born. One was born to paupers by the name of Canty. This very poor family did not want another mouth to feed. The other boy was born to a rich family by the name of Tudor. They wanted their child very much. In fact, all of England had awaited the birth of Edward, Prince of Wales. While the paupers' child, Tom Canty, lay wrapped in rags, the royal child, Edward, lay in silk and satin.

Poor Tom grew up on Offal Court, a filthy street near London Bridge. Tom's mother was a kind woman. But Tom's father and grandmother were mean, drunken thieves. They forced the children to beg by beating them. The Canty tribe lived on the third floor of a big old house. The mother and father had a bed of sorts. The grandmother, Tom, and his twin sisters slept on rags.

Among the poor souls who lived in the house was Father Andrew. The old priest tried to tell the children about right and wrong. He taught Tom to read and write and even taught him a little Latin.

So Tom's days passed, filled with begging and brawling. His was a hard, wretched life, but he did not know it. It was the sort of life that *all* the Offal Court boys had.

Tom loved to hear Father Andrew tell him of magic castles. The boy had a wonderful imagination. Before long, he could easily picture himself living the life of royalty. What he yearned for, more than anything else, was to see a real prince.

With all his reading and dreaming, Tom even began to *act* like a prince. He took on fancy speech and manners that impressed the people of Offal Court. They began to look up to him and to treat him as if he really were someone special—everyone, that is, except his own family.

Each day, Tom went out to beg just enough to please his father. Each evening he came home to a beating. One night, Tom's pain and hunger were so great that he could not sleep. He let his thoughts drift to far-off lands and fine palaces. In his dream he moved among great lords and ladies. But when

Tom awoke and looked around him, his *real* life seemed sorrier than ever. Then, as always, came the heartbreak and the tears.

One morning, Tom's thoughts were still on his dreams. He wandered the city, hardly knowing where he was going. Soon he passed the walls of London and came upon the homes of rich nobles. He roamed on to Charing Village. At last he stood before the mighty stone castle at Westminster. Tom stared in wonder. This was, indeed, a king's palace! Was he about to see a prince at last?

Guards stood at the gates. A crowd had gathered, hoping for a peek at royalty. Ragged Tom moved past the guards. His heart beat fast. Through the bars of the gate, he saw a sight that made him shout for joy. There on the palace grounds was a handsome boy about his own age. The boy wore fine clothes made of silk and satin. At his hip was a jeweled sword, and a feathered cap was on his head. Oh! He was a living prince! Poor Tom's fondest wish had come true.

Tom pressed his face against the gate to get a closer look, but one of the guards grabbed him.

"Mind your manners, young beggar!" snarled the guard. He threw Tom into the crowd. The countryfolk laughed, but the young prince rushed

to the gate. His eyes flashed as he cried out, "How dare you treat a lad so rudely! Open the gates and let him in!"

That pleased the crowd. "Long live the Prince!" they shouted. When the guards opened the gates, Tom Canty, the Prince of Poverty, passed inside. There in the courtyard he joined hands with Edward Tudor, the Prince of Plenty.

"Poor boy! You look tired and hungry," said Prince Edward. "Come with me." He led Tom to his rooms in the palace. There he ordered a fine meal such as Tom had never seen.

Edward waved his servants away. He sat beside Tom. "What is your name, lad?" the prince asked.

"Tom Canty, if it pleases you, sir."

"It is an odd name. Where do you live?"

"Why, right here in the city, sir. On Offal Court off Pudding Lane."

"*Offal Court!* It is another odd name. Do you have parents?"

"I have, sir—and a grandmother too. But of that I am sorry! And I have twin sisters, Nan and Bet."

"Is your grandmother unkind?"

"She has a wicked heart, sir. There are times