

The Lost Prince

By Marilyn Reeves

Once upon a time in a land far away, Crown Prince Edward Albert Henry III, dressed in plain clothes, set out for his early morning ride with his loyal squire Bigelow riding beside him. But once they arrived at Meadows Crossing, Edward spurred his noble steed Champion into a gallop across the open fields, leaving poor Bigelow behind in the dust. That was the last time that Edward had been seen by anyone. Bigelow returned to the castle to report what had happened. Then, later that afternoon Champion came trotting back – riderless! The king ordered his soldiers to search the countryside for the lost prince. They searched and searched but he was nowhere to be found.

After Edward had laughingly evaded his poor squire, he came to a stream in the meadow. He dismounted and both horse and rider drank their fill of the cool, refreshing water. Then the Prince lay down in the shade of a tree and quickly fell asleep. But when he awoke from his nap, Champion was gone. “Something must have spooked him,” thought Edward. “He’s never run off like that before.”

Well, there was nothing to do but to head back on foot, so he set off across the meadow. He walked and he walked and along toward sunset he happened upon a farm, where he spotted a young maiden carrying pails of milk from the barn. He hailed the young lady, “Ho miss! Could you spare a poor pauper a sip of that milk? I’ve been walking for hours in the heat of the day, and have worked up quite a thirst.”

The maiden looked the man over, who indeed looked like a pauper, dressed as he was in plain, soiled riding clothes. But he was handsome and friendly, and she decided there was nothing to fear, so she offered him a dipper of milk.

“Who are you sir, where do you come from, and how is it that you are on foot?”

Not wanting to give himself away, he told her his name was Ed, and that he was a mendicant just passing through. His horse and wagon had been stolen and he was trying to make his way to the nearest town, but in the meantime if he could sleep in the barn, he'd be happy to work for his keep.

So the girl Catherine allowed him to sleep in the barn, and brought him bits of bread and cheese – even a leg of lamb – and all the milk he could drink.

During the next several days Edward worked beside Catherine in the garden, digging and weeding and pruning the roses. They talked for hours and became good friends, but he never told her he was the Prince.

But then one day some soldiers arrived at the farmhouse and spotted him there. “Prince Edward! What are you doing here? The king is worried and has had everyone out searching for you since the day you disappeared. You must come back with us to the castle.”

Catherine stared at him in astonishment and he gave her a sheepish grin. Then he addressed the lead soldier, “Only if this fair maiden will agree to come back with me, so we can get married and live happily ever after.”

She said sure, and climbed up behind the prince on his horse Champion. Then, with two pigs, four ducks, six chickens and Bossy the cow taking up the rear, they set out for the castle. As for the rest of the story, I think you can take it from here.