



The Princess and the Pea

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~~Editor's Choice:~~

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

5

I never thought **The Princess and the Pea** was much of a fairy tale. Its only fascination is in the aristocratic pretension to refinement carried to absurdity. Perhaps Andersen was having a joke at the expense of those in the upper classes who thought themselves creatures of more delicacy than the rest of us. But Lauren Child and Polly Borland make more of it. They pick up on the preciousness of the story and they place it in a doll's house world, created in almost three dimensions by Child and photographed by Borland. Child provides a knowing, arch narrative, paced by eccentric typography and careful repetition of key phrases, as a languid accompaniment. The result is a charming interplay of reality and artificiality in text and illustration as two dimensional figures live in a stage set world where interior décor denotes not only social status but, in the case of the rooms of the rejected princesses, suggests personality as well. The princess with the 'black, black' hair who, having suffered the unbearable discomfort of the pea, wins the prince's heart, is clearly connected to much deeper, and unmentionable well-springs of natural desire, as we first see her at night in her pea-green dress in the heart of nature: a house that is also a tree in a wood. Her arrival in the prince's home begins to cast a green glow over everything, despite the couple's subsequent rejection of peas as a suitable dinner dish.

This is a clever, delightful and resonant realisation, lovingly constructed and lit, which gives Andersen's story an appeal and interest I would have not thought possible. It's another triumph for Lauren Child.

Running Order:

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