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IMAGINATION OVER KNOWLEDGE

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The Laughing Prince

Once upon a time, there was a farmer with three sons and a daughter. The eldest son was very clever. The second son was good at negotiating. The youngest son, Stefan, had no particular talent. But his little sister, Militza, loved her brother Stefan.

Militza loved her brother's stories, which always made her laugh. Stefan loved his sister and the work on the farm. He worked hard and took care of the animals, who were very happy with him.



The kingdom where the farmer's family lived was ruled by a great tsar. Because the tsar only had a daughter, he raised her as if she were a boy. The girl received an education from the greatest scholars in the country. The princess struggled with the constant learning. There was no time for jokes or simply playing around.

One day, the princess shouted, "I am a princess, so I want the freedom to do what I would like!" "You talk like the daughter of a farmer!" spoke the lady-in-waiting. "If only I were," blurted out the princess. When the tsar heard this, he became terribly angry. "Wow! Wow!" was what he bellowed. He always did

that when he was furious. And when that happened, the princess always froze. But she became stubborn and yelled at her father, "I'm tired of hearing those snooze-inducing stories from those old geezers. I want to laugh! I want to have fun!"

The tsar became red with anger and shouted, "Lock this young lady in her room until she apologizes." The princess walked out of the room with her head held high and snarled, "I'll lock myself up and won't eat a crumb until you send someone who can make me laugh." And the princess meant what she said. For hours, she ate nothing until the tsar came to her bed and said she could have anything she wanted. "I want to be amused," said the determined princess. "Send someone who can make me laugh."

The tsar realized then that he had offered his daughter little entertainment in her young years and sent his people out into the land to announce that he was looking for someone who could make the princess laugh. Whoever succeeded could marry her and rule the kingdom with her. This news reached Militza. She insisted that Stefan should report to the tsar.

The princess was surprised by the fresh appearance of the young farmer. Stefan himself was impressed by the beauty of the princess. He started his story. It initially seemed like a very strange story. Not funny at all. But it piqued the princess's curiosity, so she asked him to continue. Stefan knelt beside the princess and whispered in her ear, "Even if I make you laugh, you don't have to marry me. Only marry me if you want to. I come here on behalf of my sister Militza. She wanted

me to make you laugh. I think she likes you, and she thinks I like you, and I think I like you too."

"Well, go on," the tsar interrupted the whispering. And Stefan continued his story, and as the story progressed, the princess began to smile more and more until she finally burst out laughing. Then Stefan stood up to leave, and the tsar said to him, "Stefan, I will reward you handsomely. You made the princess laugh, and you did not insist on marrying her. You are a good man. I will never forget you."

"But father," said the princess.

"I don't want Stefan to go. I like him! I want to marry him." With conviction, she added, "If I can't

marry Stefan, I will not marry anyone. Furthermore, I will stop eating again!"



The tsar understood his daughter. Stefan proved to be a good man and was used to working hard. That was what the kingdom needed. So he agreed.

Stefan and the princess married, and from that day on, the castle was filled only with laughter and happiness.