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IMAGINATION OVER KNOWLEDGE

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The Princess And The Goblin: Irene Behaves Like a Princess (24/32)

When the princess awoke from the sweetest of sleeps, she found her nurse bending over her, the housekeeper looking over the nurse's shoulder, and the laundry-maid looking over the housekeeper's. The room was full of women-servants; and the gentlemen-at-arms, with a long column of servants behind them, were peeping, or trying to peep in at the door of the nursery.

'Are those horrid creatures gone?' asked the princess, remembering first what had terrified her in the morning.

'You naughty, naughty little princess!' cried Lootie.

Her face was very pale, with red streaks in it, and she looked as if she were going to shake her; but Irene said nothing—only waited to hear what should come next.

'How could you get under the clothes like that, and make us all fancy you were lost! And keep it up all day too! You are the most obstinate child! It's anything but fun to us, I can tell you!'

It was the only way the nurse could account for her disappearance.

'I didn't do that, Lootie,' said Irene, very quietly.

'Don't tell stories!' cried her nurse quite rudely.

'I shall tell you nothing at all,' said Irene.

'That's just as bad,' said the nurse.

'Just as bad to say nothing at all as to tell stories?' exclaimed the princess. 'I will ask my papa about that. He won't say so. And I don't think he will like you to say so.'

'Tell me directly what you mean by it!' screamed the nurse, half wild with anger at the princess and fright at the possible consequences to herself.

'When I tell you the truth, Lootie,' said the princess, who somehow did not feel at all angry, 'you say to me

"Don't tell stories": it seems I must tell stories before you will believe me.'



'You are very rude, princess,' said the nurse.

'You are so rude, Lootie, that I will not speak to you again till you are sorry.

Why should I, when I know you will not believe me?'

returned the princess. For

she did know perfectly well that if she were to tell Lootie what she had been about, the more she went on to tell her, the less would she believe her.

'You are the most provoking child!' cried her nurse. 'You deserve to be well punished for your wicked behaviour.'

'Please, Mrs Housekeeper,' said the princess, 'will you take me to your room, and keep me till my king-papa comes? I will ask him to come as soon as he can.'

Every one stared at these words. Up to this moment they had all regarded her as little more than a baby. But the housekeeper was afraid of the nurse, and sought to patch matters up, saying:

'I am sure, princess, nursie did not mean to be rude to you.'

'I do not think my papa would wish me to have a nurse who spoke to me as Lootie does. If she thinks I tell lies, she had better either say so to my papa, or go away.

Sir Walter, will you take charge of me?'

'With the greatest of pleasure, princess,' answered the captain of the gentlemen-at-arms, walking with his great stride into the room.

The crowd of servants made eager way for him, and he bowed low before the little princess's bed. 'I shall send my servant at once, on the fastest horse in the stable, to tell your king-papa that Your Royal Highness desires his presence. When you have chosen one of these under-servants to wait upon you, I shall order the room to be cleared.'

'Thank you very much, Sir Walter,' said the princess, and her eye glanced towards a rosy-cheeked girl who had lately come to the house as a scullery-maid.

But when Lootie saw the eyes of her dear princess going in search of another instead of her, she fell upon her knees by the bedside, and burst into a great cry of distress.

'I think, Sir Walter,' said the princess, 'I will keep Lootie. But I put myself under your care; and you need not trouble my king-papa until I speak to you again. Will you all please to go away? I am quite safe and well, and I did not hide myself for the sake either of amusing myself, or of troubling my people. Lootie, will you please to dress me.'