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IMAGINATION OVER KNOWLEDGE

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The Wonderful Toymaker

Princess Petulant sat on the nursery floor and cried. She was only eight years old, but she had lived quite long enough to grow extremely discontented; and the royal household was made very uncomfortable in consequence.

"I want a new toy," sobbed the little Princess. "Do you expect me to go on playing with the same toys for ever? I might just as well not be a Princess at all!"

The whole country was searched in vain for a toy that would be likely to please the Princess; but, as she already possessed every kind of toy that has ever been heard of, nobody succeeded in finding her a new one. So the little Princess went on crying bitterly, and the royal nurses shook their heads and sighed. Then the King called a council in despair.

"It is very absurd," grumbled his Majesty, "that my daughter cannot be kept amused. What is the use of an expensive government and a well-dressed court, if there are not enough toys for her to play with? Can no one invent a new toy for the Princess Petulant?"

He looked sternly at all his councillors as he spoke; but his councillors were so horrified at being expected to invent something straight out of their heads that no one said anything at all until the Prime Minister summoned up courage to speak.

"Perhaps, if we were to send for Martin," he suggested, "her royal Highness might consent to be comforted."

"Who is Martin?" demanded the King.

"He is my son," said the Prime Minister, apologetically; "and he spends his days either dreaming by himself or playing with the Princess Petulant. He will never be Prime Minister," he added sadly, "but he might think of a way to amuse the Princess."

So the King dismissed the council with much relief and sent for Martin to come and play with his daughter. Martin walked straight up to the royal nursery and found the spoilt little Princess still crying on the floor. So down on the floor sat Martin too; and he looked at her very solemnly out of his round, serious eyes, and he asked her why she was crying.

"I want a new toy," she pouted. "I am tired of all my old toys. Don't you think you can find me a new toy to play with, Martin?"

"If I do," said Martin, "will you promise not to be cross when I run faster than you do?"

The Princess nodded.

"And will you promise not to mind when I don't want to play any more?"

The Princess nodded again.

"And will you promise not to call me sulky when I don't feel inclined to talk?" continued Martin.

"Yes, yes!" cried Princess Petulant. "You won't be long before you find it, will you, Martin?"

"In four weeks from now," said the Prime Minister's son, "you will have me with you again."

"And I shall have my new toy," said the Princess Petulant, sighing contentedly.

Now, Martin was one of the few children who can see the fairies. He knew how to coax the flower fairies to speak to him, and how to find the wood fairies when they hid among the ferns, and how to laugh back when the wymps made fun of him; and, above all, he knew how to find his way to Bobolink, the Purple Enchanter, who knows everything. And he found his way to Bobolink, on the evening of that very same day.

Bobolink, the Purple Enchanter, sat on his amethyst throne in the middle of a grove of deadly nightshade. He was the ugliest enchanter any one has ever seen; and on each side of him sat an enormous purple toad with an ugly purple smile on his face. Even the sun's rays shone purple in the home of the Purple Enchanter; and Martin stared at him for a whole minute without speaking. For, although Martin was two years older than the little Princess Petulant, he was not a very big boy for all that; and there was something that made him feel a little queer in the purple face, and the purple hands, and the purple expression of Bobolink.

"Why don't you say something?" growled Bobolink, in just the kind of voice one would expect such a very ugly person to have. "What are you thinking about, eh? If it's anything about me, you 'd better say so at once!"

"Well," said Martin, as bravely as he could, "I was thinking that it must be very odd to be so purple as you are. Of course," he added politely, "I don't suppose you can help it exactly, because even the sun is purple

here, and perhaps you have got sunpurpled instead of sunburned."

"May I ask," said Bobolink, rolling his purple eyes about, "if you came all this way on purpose to make remarks about me?"

"No, I didn't," explained Martin, hurriedly. "I came to ask you the way to the Wonderful Toymaker, who makes all the toys for Fairyland. I am going to fetch a new toy for the Princess Petulant."

"And how do you think you are going to get it?" asked Bobolink, with a chuckle.

"That is exactly what I want you to tell me," said Martin, boldly.

Now, Bobolink, the Purple Enchanter, was used to being visited by people who wanted to get something out of him, because, as I said before, Bobolink knows everything. But he had never come across any one who did not begin by flattering him; and he took a fancy to Martin from the moment he told him he was sunpurpled. So he smiled as well as he could,—which was not very well, for he had never done such a thing before and his jaws were extremely stiff,—and for the moment he hardly looked ugly at all.

"I like you," he said, nodding at the small figure of the Prime Minister's son; "and I am going to help you. Of course, I know quite well where the Wonderful Toymaker lives; but I have promised the pine dwarfs not to tell, because it is the only secret they possess, and it would break their hearts if any one were to hear it from me instead of from them. You see, when a person knows everything he must keep some of it to himself,

or else there would be nothing left for anybody else to say, and then there would be no more conversation. That is the worst of knowing everything. But I can show you the way to the pine dwarfs; and if you keep perfectly quiet and speak in a whisper to them, they'll tell you all you want to know."

"Why must I keep perfectly quiet and speak in a whisper?" asked Martin.

Bobolink scowled, and became as ugly as ever again.

"Now you want to know too much, and that isn't fair," he complained. "I'll tell you the way to the pine dwarfs, and you must find out the rest for yourself. Go straight ahead and take the hundred and first turning to the right, and the fifty-second turning to the left, then turn round seventeen times; and if that isn't good enough for you I'll never help you again. Now, off you go!"

Martin saw that he was no longer wanted and set off as fast as he could. It took him a whole week to reach the hundred and first turning on the right; and it was the most anxious week he had ever spent, for he had to keep counting the turnings all the time and was dreadfully afraid of losing count altogether. And the fifty-second turning on the left was almost as bad, for his way took him through a large town, and he dare not stay to speak to any one for fear of overlooking one of the little streets. He left the town behind him at last; and after walking for two days longer, he reached the fifty-second turning on his left, and it led him to the middle of a vast sandy plain.

"How queer!" thought Martin. "Not a single tree to be seen! Surely the pine dwarfs don't live in a place like this? Perhaps old Bobolink has only hoaxed me after all."

However, he turned round seventeen times just to see what would happen; and the first thing that happened was that he became remarkably giddy and had to sit down on the ground to recover himself. When he did recover he found he was in a beautiful thick pine wood, with the sunshine coming through the branches, and flickering here and there over the ground, and painting the great big pine trunks bright red. Over it all hung the most delicious silence, only broken by the soft passage of the wind through the pine leaves. Martin had almost forgotten the warning Bobolink had given him, but, even if he had quite forgotten it, nothing would have induced him to speak loudly in such a stillness as that.

"Are you there, little pine dwarfs?" he whispered, as he looked up through the pine trees at the blue sky on the other side. No sooner had his whisper travelled up through the hushed air than all the branches seemed to be filled with life and movement; and what Martin had believed to be brown pine cones suddenly moved, and ran about among the trees, and slid down the long red trunks. And then he saw they were dear little brown dwarfs, who surrounded him by hundreds and thousands, and travelled up and down his boots, and stared at him with looks full of curiosity.

"Who are you, little boy, and where do you come from?" they seemed to be saying; and as they spoke all

together their voices sounded exactly like the wind as we hear it in the pine trees. They were so gentle and kind-looking that Martin was not a bit afraid and asked them at once to tell him the way to the Wonderful Toymaker who makes all the toys for Fairyland. They were delighted to tell him all they knew, for it was their one secret and they were very proud of it; and so few people ever came that way that they had very few opportunities of telling it. So their honest little brown faces were covered with good-nature and smiles, as they crooned out their information.

"You must walk straight through the wood," they said, "until you come to a waterfall at the beginning of a stream; and you must follow the stream down, down, down, until it brings you to a valley surrounded by high hills; and in that valley is the toyshop of the Wonderful Toymaker, who makes all the toys for Fairyland."

"That is simple enough, I 'm sure," said Martin.

"Ah," said the pine dwarfs, wisely, "but it is not so easy to get there as you think; for the stream leads you through the country of the people who make conversation, and they try to stop every stranger who passes by, so that they can make him into conversation; and that is why so few people ever reach the Wonderful Toymaker at all."

"Make conversation! How funny!" said Martin; and he almost laughed aloud at the idea.

"It is more sad than funny," said the pine dwarfs, sighing like a large gust of wind that for the moment made Martin feel quite chilly; "for it gives us so much to do. You see, they make conversation, and we make

silence; and the more conversation they make the more silence we have to make to keep things even. They are always ahead of us, for all that!" They sighed again. Martin looked puzzled.

"Still, your silence is so full of sound," he said. The pine dwarfs laughed softly, so softly that most people would have called it only smiling.

"Real silence, the best kind, is always full of sound; and of course we only make the very best kind," they explained proudly. "Anybody can make the other kind of silence by taking the air and sifting out the noise in it. Now, we take the air, and when we have sifted out the noise we fill it with sound. That's a very different thing. The worst of it is," they added, sadly, "there is so little demand for real silence. We have layers of it piled up at the top, of those pine trees, and nobody ever wants it. The other silence is so much cheaper, you see, and most people don't know the difference."

"When I am grown up and have a house of my own," said Martin, "I shall come and ask you to fill it with the very best silence for me."

The pine dwarfs shook their little brown heads incredulously.

"Wait till you are grown up," they said; "and then, if you will let us fill one room for you, we shall be quite satisfied. Now, set off on your journey; and if you want to escape being made into conversation, you must not speak a single word until you reach the valley where the Wonderful Toymaker lives."

"Trust me!" laughed Martin. "It is only talking that is difficult; any one can keep silent."

"Very well; be careful, only be careful!" they sighed; and in another moment they had all gone back to their pine trees, and nothing was to be heard except the distant sounds with which they were filling the silence. Then Martin walked on until he came to the rushing waterfall; and along by the side of the stream he trudged and thought it was the very noisiest stream he had ever come across, for it clattered over the stones, and splashed up in the air, and seemed bent on getting through life with as much fuss and excitement as it was possible to make. As he walked along by its side, he discovered that the noise it made was caused by millions of little voices, chattering and gossiping, quarrelling and laughing, as busily as they could. "This must be the country where they make conversation," thought Martin. "Well, I must be pretty careful not to let them know I can talk." At the same time, the longer he walked by that talkative little stream the easier it was to forget the silence in the pine wood; and he began to think that, after all, one silent room would be quite enough in the house he was going to have some day. Presently, there were not only voices in the stream beside him but all around him as well, in the trees, and the flowers, and the grass, and the air; and they were not the pretty little voices of the fairies which he knew so well, but they were the harsh, shrill, unpleasant voices of unpleasant people, who must have spent their lives in chattering about things that did not concern them. Then the voices came closer and closer to him, and buzzed up round his head, and shrieked into his ears, asking him dozens and

dozens of questions, until it was all he could do not to shout at them to leave him alone.

"Who are you? Where do you come from? What do you want? Where are you going? What are you doing here? Why don't you answer? How did you get here? Whom did you meet on the way? Did they tell you anything interesting? What is your name? How old are you? Who is your father? What is your mother like? Does she give parties? Does she invite many people? Do you know the King? Have you been to court? Does the Queen dress well? Do you like jam or cake best? What is your favourite sweet? Don't you think we are very amusing?" etc., etc., etc.

These were only a few of the questions they asked Martin, but they quite cured him of any wish to speak; and, instead of telling them anything about himself, he just put his hands over his ears and ran as fast as he could until he dropped down, very much out of breath, some way further along the stream. As he sat there, delighted at having escaped from all those impertinent voices, a curious little fish with a bent back popped his head above the water and nodded to him.

"Good morning," said the fish. His tone was so friendly that Martin forgot all about the warning of the pine dwarfs, and entered into conversation with him.

"This is a strange country," said Martin.

"It's a very busy country," answered the fish. "None of us get left alone for long; and as for me, I never get any peace at all. If I could only get my tail into my mouth, things would be very different."

"You look as though you had been trying a good deal," observed Martin. "I suppose that is why your back is so bent."

"Bent?" cried the fish, angrily. "Nothing of the sort! On the contrary, it has a most elegant curve. It's not the shape I complain about, it's the difference in the work. You see, if I could only get my tail into my mouth I should be a Full-stop; and Full-stops have so little to do nowadays that I should be able to retire at once. Being a Comma is quite another matter; it's work, work, work, from year's end to year's end. Hullo! What is it now?"

His last remark was addressed to another fish, who seemed to have succeeded in getting his tail into his mouth, and who spoke very huskily in consequence.

"Come along," he said to the Comma-fish; "you 've got to help me to make a Semi-colon."

"Oh, dear, oh, dear!" replied the other. "I do wish Colons were more used; it would at least give me a rest and use up some of you Full-stops for a change."

Martin was just going to sympathise with the poor little overworked Comma-fish, when the storm of voices he had left behind suddenly managed to overtake him; and there they were once more, buzzing round his head and shrieking in his ears, until he was almost deafened by the noise; while dozens of invisible hands were lifting him from the ground and carrying him along at a terrific pace.

"He has spoken, he has spoken!" the voices were shouting triumphantly, as they bore him along. "He is ours to make conversation of!"

Then they took him into a magnificent glittering palace, made of glass of a thousand colours; and invisible voices told him it was all his and he should be king over it, if he would only make conversation for them. It was the most beautiful palace a king could possibly have wished for; and even the Prime Minister's son was dazzled by it for the moment. There was everything in it that a boy could want; if he pulled a golden cord, down fell a shower of chocolate creams; if he went to the strawberry ice room, there was a wooden spade for him to dig it out with, and a wheelbarrow in which to bring it away; if he wanted a present, he had only to turn on the present-tap and out came whatever he wished for. So he immediately wished for a six-bladed knife, a real pony, and a gold watch. For all that, he was not a bit happy. The incessant talking around him never ceased for a moment; the air seemed packed with people whom he never saw, but who asked him innumerable questions which he never attempted to answer. Besides this, all the furniture talked as well. When he opened the door it made remarks about the way he did it, which were not at all polite. If he sat on the arm of a chair, it pointed out to him in a hurt tone that chairs were not intended to be used in that way. When he cut his name on the mahogany dining-table, it shouted abuse at him until he had to paint over the letters to appease it. The windows chatted pleasantly about the weather when the wind blew, instead of rattling; and the fires gossiped when they were lighted, instead of crackling and smoking. He gave up riding his pony after it had told him the history of its childhood

for the fifteenth time; and when he found that his gold watch was always telling stories instead of telling the time he had to get rid of that too. As for his six-bladed knife, it wearied him so much by telling him the same thing six times over that he threw it out of the window as far as he could. All this was excessively trying to a boy who had never talked much in the whole of his life; and the worst of it was that he was prevented by magic from running away; so the four weeks came to an end, and he had not found a new toy for the Princess Petulant.

Meanwhile, the little Princess had been waiting, and waiting, and waiting. In all the eight years of her life she had never waited so patiently for anything; and the affairs of the country went on quite smoothly in consequence. When, however, the four weeks were over and Martin did not return with her new toy, Princess Petulant grew tired of being good, and, once more, she lay on the nursery floor and sobbed; and, once more, there was consternation in the royal household. So the King called another council.

"Haven't you got any more sons?" he demanded crossly of the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister shook his head, and owned sadly that he had only one son.

"Then why do you lose him?" said the King, still more crossly. "Does no one know where the Prime Minister's son has gone?"

The councillors looked helplessly at one another. One thought that Martin had gone to Fairyland; another said it was to Toyland; and a third declared he must be with the wymps at the back of the sun. But, as nobody

knew how to get to any of these places, the suggestions of his councillors only made the King more annoyed than before. At last, he asked the Queen's advice; and the Queen proposed that the little Princess should attend the council and explain why she was crying. However, when they sent up to the royal nursery for the Princess Petulant, there was no Princess to be seen; and the royal nurses were rushing everywhere in great confusion, trying to find her.

"It is a most extraordinary thing," cried the King, "that we cannot keep anybody in the place! What is the use of children who do nothing but lose themselves? There must be wymphcraft in this!"

The Queen only said "Poor children!" and set to work to have the country searched for the missing pair, and sat down to cry by herself until they could be found.

What had really happened was quite simple. While the Princess Petulant was sobbing on the nursery floor, something came through the open window and dropped with a thud just in front of her. This astonished her so much, that she stopped crying and looked up to see what it was. There stood a little pine dwarf, holding his hands to his ears.

"Dear, dear!" crooned the pine dwarf in his soft voice.

"What are you making such a noise for?"

"I am crying because Martin has not come back," said the Princess, sorrowfully. "He promised to fetch me a new toy, and he has never broken his promise before. I do wish he would come back. Even if he does n't bring me a new toy, I wish he would come back."

"Ah," said the pine dwarf, smiling, "now I think I can help you. But you must not cry any more; it is almost as bad as the noise they are making in the country where Martin is imprisoned."

"Oh!" cried Princess Petulant, clapping her hands; "do you really know where Martin is?"

"Come along with me and see," said the pine dwarf. The next thing the Princess knew was that she was gliding through the air in the most delicious manner possible; and she never stopped until she found herself by the side of the waterfall, that stands at the edge of the country where they make conversation.

"I cannot take you any further," said the pine dwarf; "because there is so much noise down there that it would blow me into little pieces at once. Follow the stream along until it brings you to a glass palace, and there you will find Martin waiting for you. Whatever you do, though, you must not speak a word to any one until you find him. Do you think you can do this?"

The Princess was thoughtful for a whole minute.

"I can do it if I stop up my ears with cotton wool," she said. "I am quite certain I should speak if I heard any one talking to me."

The pine dwarf smiled again; and a linnet, who had overheard their conversation, kindly offered the Princess a piece of cotton wool from the nest he was making; and she thanked him as charmingly as a Princess should, and immediately stuffed it into her two little pink ears. Then she kissed her hand to the good little pine dwarf, and ran away along the stream; and she never stopped running until she reached the

magnificent, glittering glass palace; and there she saw Martin right in the middle of it, sitting at the table with his head in his hands.

"I do believe he is crying!" thought Princess Petulant; and she very nearly cried too at the mere thought of it, for no one had ever seen the Prime Minister's son cry before. She picked up a stone instead, however, and sent it right through the glass wall of the palace,—for she was in far too great a hurry to go round to the door,—and she made a hole large enough to slip through; and into the room she bounded, where Martin sat thinking about her.

They kissed each other a great many times; and Martin pulled the cotton wool out of her two little pink ears, and told her all that had happened, and how miserable he had been because he could not keep his promise to her, and how dreadfully tired he was of conversation.

"Even now," he added, sadly, "I don't suppose they will let me go with you. Just listen to their stupid voices! I shall have to bear that for the rest of my life."

"Oh, no, you won't!" buzzed the voices in the air. "You can go away as soon as you like. It is quite hopeless to think of making you into conversation; you are the most unconvivial prisoner we have ever captured. If the Princess had not put cotton wool in her ears we should have caught her directly; and what splendid conversation she would have made! Unfortunately, she is out of our power now, because she reached you without speaking a word; so you can go off together as soon as you like."

They did not wait to be told twice, but set off at once, hand in hand, and walked straight on until they reached the top of the hill that slopes down into the valley where the Wonderful Toymaker lives. Then they ran a race down the side of the hill; and of course Martin allowed the Princess to win, so she was the first, after all, to see the most wonderful toyshop in the world. It was so wonderful that she actually remained speechless with astonishment, until Martin caught her up; and then they stood side by side and stared at it.

To begin with, it was not a toyshop at all. The whole of the valley was strewn with toys: they lay on the ground in heaps, they were piled high up on the rocks, they hung from the trees and made them look like huge Christmas trees, and they covered the bushes like blossoms: wherever the children looked, they saw toys, toys, toys. And such toys, too! People who have never been to Fairyland can have no idea of the toys that are made by the Wonderful Toymaker; even Martin, who was a friend of the fairies, had never seen anything like them before. As for the Princess Petulant—her large blue eyes were open, and her little round mouth was open, and she could not have spoken a word to please anybody.

Then, suddenly, into the middle of it all stepped the Wonderful Toymaker. Any one who has lived for thousands and thousands of years might reasonably be expected to look old, but the Wonderful Toymaker looked young enough to play with his own toys; when he laughed, the children felt that they should never feel unhappy again; and when he came running towards

them, turning coach-wheels on the way, they felt certain that he was only a very little older than themselves. For that is what happens when a man has been making toys for thousands and thousands of years.

"My dear children, how pleased I am to see you!" he cried joyfully. "At last, I shall have some one to play with! Come and look at my two new tops."

He took them by the hands and raced them across the valley to his workshop, which was strewn with gold and silver tools with handles made of rubies; and he took up a gaily painted top and set it spinning by blowing gently upon it three times. As it spun

it began to hum a tune, and in the tune they could hear every sound that the world contains,—birds singing and wind whistling, children laughing and children crying, people talking and people quarrelling, pretty sounds and ugly sounds, one after another, until the children

were spellbound with astonishment.

"Oh, oh!" cried Princess Petulant, as the top rolled over on its side. "I never heard anything so beautiful before."

"The top is yours, since you like it," said the Wonderful Toymaker, handing it to her with a bow. "Now listen to my other new top."



Then he took up another one, made of burnished copper, and gave it a twist with his fingers, and it began to spin with all its might; and as it spun round, the song it sang was one that could never be described, for it was full of the sounds that do not exist at all, the sounds that are only to be heard in Fairyland when we are lucky enough to go there. It made the Princess Petulant feel sleepy; but Martin gave a shout of pleasure when it stopped spinning.

"I like that one much better," he said.

"It is the finest toy I have ever made," said the Wonderful Toymaker; "and it is yours because you know how to appreciate it. Now, we will play games!"

They had never played such games in their lives before, nor had they ever had such a delightful playfellow. He put such feelings of joy and happiness into their hearts that the little Princess wondered how she could ever have felt discontented, and Martin never once wanted to stop and dream. They played with toys that would not break, however badly they were treated; they chased one another over the rocks and through the bushes, without getting out of breath at all; and when they could not think of anything else to do, they laughed and laughed and laughed and laughed. Then they sat down on the grass to rest; and the Wonderful Toymaker sat between them and smiled at them both.

"Now, we will refresh ourselves by eating unwholesome sweets," he said, and he gave a long low whistle.

Immediately, they were pelted from all sides by the most delicious, unwholesome sweets that were ever made; but, although they were ever so unwholesome,

and although the children ate quantities and quantities of them, they were not in the least bit the worse for it; and when they had eaten all they could, the Wonderful Toymaker filled their pockets for them, and laughed again.

"Won't you stop here always?" he asked them.

The children shook their heads.

"I must go back to mother," said the Princess Petulant.

"She must be wondering where I am, now."

"And I have got to be Prime Minister, some day," said Martin, with a sigh.

"You will never be Prime Minister," said the Toymaker, just as his father was always saying. "Why can't you both stay with me? Only think of all the games we can have, and the toys we can make, and the unwholesome sweets we can eat! Won't you really stay and play with me?"

However, when he saw that they were quite determined to go home, he made the best of it and asked them whether they would like to go by sea, or by sky, or by land. Martin wanted to go by sky, but when the Princess said she would much prefer to go by land as she had come most of the way by sky, the Prime Minister's son gave in at once and said that he had meant to choose the land road all the time. So the Toymaker fetched two beautiful rocking-horses and helped the children to mount them, and said he should never forget their visit for the rest of his life. He could not have said more than that, for of course he has been living ever since.

So they rode out of the valley and up the hill-side, and they waved their hands to the Wonderful Toymaker who stood looking disconsolately after them, and they wished they could have played with him just a little longer. They had very little time even to wish, however, for the rocking-horses rushed over the ground at such a pace that they could see nothing they were passing; so, after all, they would have been none the wiser if they had come by sky as Martin had wished. Then the townspeople came out of their houses and stared with amazement, as they saw their King's daughter and their Prime Minister's son racing past them on wooden horses; but they had no time, either, to make remarks on the matter before the children were out of sight again, for the wooden horses never stopped until they brought their riders to the palace gates; and then they disappeared and left Martin and the Princess Petulant knocking for admission.

Then there was a hullabaloo! The Queen dried her tears and hugged them both, one after another; and the King dismissed the council which had not helped him in the least; and the Prime Minister was more convinced than ever that his son would never be Prime Minister; and the two children span their tops before the whole court and told the story of their adventures. And it was at once written down, word for word, by the Royal Historian, and that is how it has got inside this book. The two children never visited the Wonderful Toymaker again; and Martin never became Prime Minister. One day he became King instead; and it was all because he married the Princess Petulant the moment he was

grown up. They thoroughly enjoyed life for the rest of their days, and so did everybody else in the kingdom, down to the Prime Minister and the Royal Historian; and this was all because they never lost the wonderful tops which had been given them by the Wonderful Toymaker.