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READ ANYWHERE, ANYTIME

The Lady Daffodilia

Evelyn Sharp

No one in the whole kingdom was so idle, or so careless, or so thoughtless as the Lady Daffodilia. The only thing she had done ever since she was born was to grow and grow and grow, so that, although she was only twelve years old, she was quite as tall as the Countess, her mother. In fact, she was tall enough to be conceited about it, which, of course, was extremely foolish of her, for she had certainly had nothing to do with it herself.

"You are a whole year older than I am, but I am a head taller than you," was what she said to Prince Brilliant, when he came to play with her, one day. She was perched on the garden wall at the time, so she was able to look down on the little Prince even more than usual.

"Hush!" said the Countess, who was drinking tea on the lawn. "That is not the way to speak to a Prince."

Prince Brilliant stuck his chin into the air and tried to make the most of his height.

"I don't care a bit," he said; "I wouldn't have silly long legs like yours for anything. It's much better to know things; and only think of all the things I know that you never heard of! You couldn't even say the exports and imports of Fairyland without looking in the book first; now, could you?"

"Hush!" said his Queen-mother, who was also drinking tea on the lawn. "That is not the way to speak to a little lady."

The Lady Daffodilia stooped a little, and smoothed out the creases in her black silk stockings, just to show that she had not forgotten how much longer her legs were than the Prince's. The Prince pretended not to see.

"What you say is very true," then said Daffodilia, who was always fair, even when she was most aggravating; "but I am better off than you, all the same. I can go and look in the book if I want to know all those tiresome stuffy things you think such a lot about; but all the books in the world won't make you so tall as I am!"

The Prince was much annoyed, for there was no doubt that the Lady Daffodilia had the best of the argument. He aimed a most unprincely kick at a harmless geranium plant, that, like the Lady Daffodilia, had never done anything in its life

but grow; and he turned very red in the face.

"You're only a girl," he said; "and girls think too much of themselves. That's what my Professor says!"

"If you were a girl," laughed the Lady Daffodilia, "it would not matter about your being such a little bit of a thing! Is it not very unpleasant to be so short, when you are a boy?"

The Prince turned and walked quickly towards the garden gate. It was true that he was a prince, and could not therefore be rude to the Lady Daffodilia; but he was a boy, too, and if he had stopped another minute he was quite certain he would have lifted her down from the wall and given her a good shaking.

"Where are you going?" she cried after him, and laughed more than ever when she saw how cross she had made him.

"Where are you going?" echoed the Queen and the Countess.

Prince Brilliant turned when he reached the gate, and faced them all with a resolute look on his small, round face.

"I am going to find out the way to grow tall," he said. "I shall not come back until I am as tall as the Lady Daffodilia."

Then he went through the gate and slammed it behind him, and marched away down the hot, dusty road. The Queen and the Countess only smiled, for they did not suppose he had gone for good; but the Lady Daffodilia slipped down from the wall and on to the grass lawn, and began to weep.

"I have sent away my favourite Prince," she sobbed, "and I shall never have him to play with again."

"Do not cry, little daughter," said the Countess, soothingly; "your Prince will come back soon."

"You do not know him so well as I do," said Daffodilia. "He always means what he says; and since it is quite certain that nothing can ever make him as tall as I am, it is quite certain that he will never come back any more."

It seemed as though her words were likely to come true, for the Prince had not returned by bedtime; and, although the King's messengers rode out that very night and hunted the whole country up and down for days and weeks and years, not a trace was ever found of the little Prince who had gone to learn the way to grow tall. So the kingdom was left without an heir to the throne, and the Lady Daffodilia was left without a playfellow. It was not her way, however, to sit down and cry about it, besides which she had found something really important to do at last.

"If the Prince has gone away to grow as tall as I am," she said, "I will stay at home and grow as clever as he is!"

So she shut herself up in the Count's library with a pile of dusty books, and tried her very best to learn the exports and imports of Fairyland. But as fast as she learned one she forgot the other; and she ended by completely jumbling them up, which was really a serious matter, for it is quite evident that the things we give to Fairyland are not at all the same things as Fairyland gives to us. And then, long before the Lady Daffodilia had grown as clever as the Prince, the people came and clapped her into prison, "for," they said, "it is your fault that the heir to the throne is lost." It is true that they did not put her into a very unpleasant prison, for it was a nice, comfortable old castle, in the middle of a green plain; but there was no one to play with and no one to tease, so it was most decidedly a prison. Added to this, the Lady Daffodilia seemed to have stopped growing at last, for she never grew another inch after the Prince went away; and as this robbed her of her only occupation, she began for the first time in her life to long for something to do. And she grew so tired of looking at the same green plain day after day, that she determined to make it into a garden for a change; and the flowers and the shrubs were so proud of being planted by such dainty, white hands that they tried their very hardest to grow up nicely and be a credit to her; and the result was that the little lady in the castle soon became known as the most wonderful gardener in the kingdom.

Now, when Prince Brilliant ran away from the Lady Daffodilia he found the road so hot and so dusty that he was obliged to keep near the hedge at the side; and he had not run very far before he pushed his head through a very elegant spider's web. The spider was exceedingly cross, and grumbled; but the daddy-longlegs that tumbled out of her web was very much pleased with himself.

"Well, my little friend," he said to the Prince, "where are you running so fast, this fine morning?"

Now, one of the things the Prince had learned from his Professor was the way to speak to a daddy-longlegs, so before another five minutes had passed he had told him the whole of his trouble. "Do you know the way to make your legs grow long?" asked the Prince at the end of his story.

"Well," said the daddy-longlegs, "that is certainly one of the things I am generally supposed to know; but if I show you the way, do you think you will have patience to do everything I tell you? It may take a very long time."

"I can wait years and years and years and years," said the Prince, in his determined way; and the daddy-longlegs had the sense to see that he meant what he said.

"Right you are," he said. "Then jump straight into that hedge; and the more

spiders' webs you break on the way, the better—nasty, choky, stuffy things!"

"What shall I do when I get there?" asked the Prince.

"Oh, you haven't got to do anything," said the daddy-longlegs, with a chuckle. "Just wait there until I come to you."

"All right; but you won't be long, will you?" said the Prince; and he tucked his crown under his arm and shut his eyes tight and jumped straight into the thorny, prickly hedge.

When he opened his eyes, he found himself in a strange new country, that was all made of rose-coloured dreams, and filled with rose-coloured air, and lighted with rose-coloured sunbeams. There were no people or trees or mountains or rivers to be seen; but before the little Prince had time to notice this, his mind was filled with rose-coloured thoughts, and so he forgot the Lady Daffodilia and his own crossness and everything that had made him unhappy when he was in the real world.

"Hullo! Where am I?" he cried.

"You are in the world of dreams, to be sure," said a voice in his ear. "Where else should you be at your time of life?"

"But who lives here?" asked Prince Brilliant.

A great many voices answered him. "We live here, of course," they said. "We are really nice dreams, we are; and when children are the right sort, like yourself, they come here to stay with us until they are grown up."

"May I play with you, then?" asked the Prince. In the real world he had been too fond of books to play much, but here he felt as though he must do nothing but play all day long.

"Of course you may," answered the dream voices; "that is what you are here for."

Prince Brilliant was soon the happiest boy possible. Some people might think it dull to have playfellows who could not be seen, but the Prince thought nothing could be more delightful than to live in the midst of dreams for the rest of his life. It is true that he was fast forgetting everything that his Professor had taught him; but this was hardly surprising, for there is no room in a very small head for serious thoughts as well as rose-coloured ones.

It is doubtful whether the Prince would ever have wanted to go back to the real world again, if he had not met the daddy-longlegs one day, as he was strolling along with his favourite dream.

"Hullo!" said the daddy-longlegs, chuckling. "I see it is time for you to go back

into the real world."

"What, already?" exclaimed the Prince. "Why, you said I should have to wait years and years and years and——"

"You have been here exactly seven years," interrupted the daddy-longlegs; "and it is time for you to meet the waking-up dream."

The Prince suddenly began to remember things. "When shall I be as tall as the Lady Daffodilia?" he cried. But the daddy-longlegs had no time to do anything but chuckle before the waking-up dream came and seized hold of the Prince, and he found himself falling, falling, falling—down, down, down—until he dropped with a thud on a soft grass lawn, and found himself in the middle of the most beautiful garden in the world. A little way off stood an old grey castle; and as he lay looking at it the gate swung open, and out stepped a dainty, winsome little lady.



The Prince sprang to his feet with a shout and held out his arms; and the Lady Daffodilia ran straight into them without stopping so much as to think.

"How did you learn to grow so tall?" she asked, looking up at him.

"Well," said the Prince, truthfully, "I just went into the world of dreams and waited till I was grown up. You see, I was a boy and not a girl, all the time; so I was not in such a hurry as you to get my growing done early."

"I tried to grow as clever as you," sighed Daffodilia, "but nothing would stop in my head. I couldn't even say the exports and imports of Fairyland without looking in the book first!"

"Never mind," laughed the Prince; "I don't believe there are any imports, for I am sure we have nothing good enough to send there. And as for the exports, there is only one thing that Fairyland has sent into this country that is worth remembering."

"And what is that?" she asked anxiously.

"It is something that is not very tall and not very serious and not very wise," answered the Prince; "but it is sweet and merry and charming, and it is called the Lady Daffodilia!"

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