

THE LIGHT PRINCESS

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Excerpt

SCENE SEVEN

NARRATOR. Meantime, the Light Princess laughed and grew and floated and flew!

(A burst of music as the LIGHT PRINCESS herself appears, floating and laughing, dancing on air. She may fly on silks, or via harness, or swinging across the stage in the center of a Cyr wheel, or doing acrobatics through the arms of other actors—whatever pleases the company.)

(It is magic. And it lingers.)

(As does her laughter: maniacal, infectious, untamed.)

(When at last the PRINCESS bobs to a stop, she declares:)

PRINCESS. And she never, *ever* cried!

NARRATOR. For since she had been cursed at her baptism, not a drop of water had gotten in her. And since she never touched the ground, she very rarely needed bathing. In fact, she preferred milk to water, too, and she always stayed inside the few times that it rained—laughing at the droplets and getting lost against the ceiling.

QUEEN. She could hear the most terrible things—

KING. And still the girl would laugh!

NARRATOR. The Witch's cruelty had gotten inside her. The worse something was, the more it delighted her. So, when her Father told her as an experiment:

KING. The General's been cut to pieces, and all the troops are dead.

(The PRINCESS laughs.)

KING. The enemy's marching to siege our castle!

(The PRINCESS laughter grows.)

QUEEN. We shall all die!

(The PRINCESS howls with laughter.)

PRINCESS. What queer faces Mamma makes! And she squeezes water out of her cheeks? Funny Mamma!

KING. Your Mother is *not* funny!

QUEEN. Oh, George!

KING. But if she can't feel for the country, Penelope, how can she ever rule?

PRINCESS. Do you know what I should like, Papa? To tie a string to me and fly me like a kite!

KING. I mean look at her! Look at you! Will anything make you sorry for anybody else? Your mother's crying! And now I'm screaming!

QUEEN. George...

PRINCESS. Do you know sometimes what I'm feeling? Like I'm the only person in the whole, wide world.

KING. Will you listen to her? She takes everything too lightly! Her head is in the clouds! *And now I'm making puns!*

PRINCESS. Oh, look at Papa's face! It's gone all purple! How funny Papa is! Do it again!

(The KING growls and tries to catch the PRINCESS.)

NARRATOR. Round and around and around they went! The King became—

KING. So furious!

NARRATOR. That he threw his glass of water at her. When suddenly...

(The PRINCESS bumps to the floor.)

NARRATOR. The princess became grounded.

WITCH. *(Appearing.)* Ba-dum-dum-chhh.

(The KING groans at the pun.)

NARRATOR. The King sent for his court Metaphysicians (*Whipping out the puppets again.*) who said:

QUEEN. (*Silencing the puppet.*) If water will help the princess' gravity, she should be *made* to cry.

KING. What? Shall I whip her?

WITCH. (*Whispering in the KING'S ear.*) Strike her!

(The WITCH raises the KING'S hand, but the PRINCESS, although frightened, begins to laugh. Everyone is taken aback, even the WITCH.)

KING. And still the Princess laughs!

QUEEN. Although it sounds like screaming.

NARRATOR. Perhaps the best thing for the Princess would have been to fall in love.

QUEEN. But how a Princess who has no gravity could fall into *anything* is a difficulty—

KING. Perhaps *the* difficulty. Unless...

QUEEN. (*Clapping her hands.*) The lake!

KING. (*Taking out the lake.*) Yes! If water makes her grave...

WITCH. Then the Princess should be laid in one.

(The KING and QUEEN make a lake with lengths of cloth, ribbons, lights, or wood, while the WITCH recoils, leaving the PRINCESS to contemplate the water "alone.")

PRINCESS. But there remained the difficulty of how she should get *in* the lake. For she had as great a fear of the open air, as most children have of the sea. If an errant wind should catch me, I would float away forever...! What I need—

NARRATOR. Thought she.

PRINCESS. Is someone who can *make* me fall.

SCENE EIGHT

(With a fanfare, the PRINCE enters, possibly riding a horse—possibly riding a horse à la Monty Python; certainly behaving as pompously and “princely” as possible. The mood is altered. This is something different.)

PRINCE. It must have been about this time that the son of a King, who lived a thousand miles away, set out to look for the daughter of a Queen. *(Through the AUDIENCE.)* He travelled far and wide, but as soon as he found a princess, he found some fault in her.

(The PRINCE spends some time improvising through the AUDIENCE. This period can be as long or as short as he prefers. Each person he approaches should be considered and rejected—although kindly. So, nothing like: “You’re old and ugly,” but things like: “Not you; you’re my Dad” are fine.)

(It also always gets a laugh to have the PRINCE reject someone for his or her good qualities. “Too pretty,” is generally good. “Too tall,” to any infants in the audience. Well known audience members might get a little fun poked at them. Even there, be gentle.)

(Once it’s clear he’s done with the audience—typically some agreed-upon rejection, the NARRATOR “interrupts” with:)

NARRATOR. Of course, he could not marry a mere woman, however beautiful; and there were No Other Princesses to be found worthy of him.

PRINCESS. Whether the Prince was so near perfection that he had a right to demand perfection itself, I cannot pretend to say. All I know is, that he was a—

PRINCE. Fine, handsome, brave, generous, well-bred, and well-behaved youth, as all Princes are.

PRINCESS. In his wanderings he had come across some reports about our Princess.

PRINCE. But as everybody said she was—

NARRATOR. *(Running across, or otherwise popping up.)* BETWITCHED!

PRINCE. He never dreamed that *she* could bewitch him.

(The PRINCE might go up to where the PRINCESS floats in her castle made of air, and play with her; poking her; prodding her; dribbling her up and down, swinging her cyr wheel or tugging on her silks.)

PRINCE. For what indeed could a Prince do with a Princess that had lost her gravity? Who could tell what she might not lose next? She might lose her visibility, or her tangibility; or, in short, the power of making impressions. He did not think of her again.

PRINCESS. *(Furious.)* Then one day, he lost sight of his retinue in a great forest!

(A forest appears. Perhaps the PRINCESS rains down leaves upon him, perhaps the others come on with branches, or maybe just the NARRATOR and others stand in his way with sticks tangled behind his head.)

(Either way, the PRINCE accepts his location philosophically and addresses the AUDIENCE.)

PRINCE. These forests are very useful; they help the Princes get away to follow their fortunes. In this way Princes have the advantage over Princesses, who are forced to marry before they have had a bit of fun. I wish our Princesses got lost in the forest sometimes.

(The PRINCE sighs and shakes himself out of his ruminations. The PRINCESS is rather touched, and has all but forgotten her anger. If it could be said she is following him through the air, she is following him. The forests rustle and part to reveal the lake again. It is night.)

PRINCE. One lovely evening, after wandering about for many days, he found himself by the side of the lake. Suddenly he paused, and listened. Strange sounds came across the water.

(Silence. The PRINCESS has been listening to his story. The PRINCE sighs and:)

PRINCE. I said: "Strange sounds came across the water."

PRINCESS. Oh!

(She plunges into the water with a delighted shriek.)

PRINCE. It was, in fact, the Princess laughing.

NARRATOR. Now there was something odd in her laugh, it was missing something. Something like...

PRINCE. The possibility of sorrow.

(The PRINCE strips off his outer layer, as the NARRATOR speaks.)

NARRATOR. And this was how the Prince mistook the laughter for screaming. He saw something in the water. He plunged in.

(Play continues.)