

The Princess Lolita

('Christian Register.')

No one who saw the two little girls talking together would have guessed that one was a princess and the other a forester's daughter. Indeed, one of the little girls did not know it herself. That is, Frieda, who had lived all her life in the little cottage on the edge of the park, had no idea that her companion was the princess whose name was held precious all over the kingdom, and whose picture was in every house and shop in city or town or country. Why, Frieda had a picture of Lolita hung up in her own room; but it never occurred to her that the beruffled and befrilled little princess, in the dainty white frock, who smiled so graciously to her from the gilded frame, bore any resemblance to the rather cross and—oh, I don't like to confess it, but I must—bad-mannered little girl beside her.

'I eat my bread and milk out of a golden bowl when I am at home,' she was saying haughtily.

'Do you?' responded Frieda, politely, though really she was wondering if Lolita wasn't making fun of her. 'It's too bad; for then you can't have lovely pink roses on it, like the roses on my mug.'

The princess frowned.

'And I have silk dresses that are golden in the sunlight and silver in the moonlight.'

'That's better,' said Frieda, approvingly. 'That sounds just like a fairy story. What comes next? Do tell me some more.'

Lolita smiled more graciously. 'I don't have to tell such things at home, because everybody knows me; but I never had anybody talk to me the queer way you do.'

'I was just going to ask you what your name is. I don't see many little girls here, and it will be great fun if we can play together after I get my work done.'

Lolita was about to say that she wasn't allowed to play with other children; and she began, 'Madam von Stallwegen told me not to tell anybody who I am, but I will if I want to, and—'

'Oh, no, don't,' interrupted Frieda, hastily. 'I don't care in the very least. I heard about a man down in the village who escaped from State's prison; and, when the officers caught him they went all over the place, trying to find out whether anybody had known his real name. Dear me! I don't want to know.'

The little princess was offended. 'That isn't the reason with us,' she said proudly. 'You aren't very polite. I am going home now.'

'All right, Miss High-and-Mighty,' said Frieda, rather cross herself. 'I suppose I must call you something.'

'That is not at all necessary,' said the princess, with her loftiest air. And she walked back through the winding avenues of the park.

That was the first time the two little girls had happened to meet in the park. The great house belonged to a nobleman at court, but he had no family and rarely came there; and Frieda did not know how it happened that suddenly the place seemed alive with servants putting things in order, and then came guests who apparently took absolute possession. Perhaps

her father knew, because he had charge of the park; but he did not tell Frieda.

The truth was simple enough. The Princess Lolita had become nervous and tired with the strain of her studies and the excitement of the city palace. Her cheeks grew pale, her eyes ached, and she was so cross that her governesses and Madame von Stallwegen were tired out with her. The wise old doctor had managed this visit to the south in time for the awakening spring, and Lolita was to run about the park and have partial vacation from her books and training.

The knowledge of her exact whereabouts was kept a secret from the newspapers, because, if it were generally known, the place would be besieged with visitors and reporters and beggars; and, though they could not penetrate the guarded park, yet they might cause annoyance and destroy the sense of freedom which Madame von Stallwegen desired.

After a single week Lolita's cheeks began to grow rosy again, and her appetite improved; but, oh, dear! her temper seemed more uncertain than ever.

'What wretched fate ever induced me to undertake this charge?' moaned Madame von Stallwegen to herself. 'Why isn't Lolita quiet and obedient like her two older sisters? The queen will think I am growing old.'

Naughty Lolita knew that Madame was worried, and made life no easier for her. One day she was positively unendurable. She scolded all the servants who came in her way, refused to speak to her English governess and declared she hated the English, reduced her little maid to tears by her impatience, flew into a temper because her favorite saddle horse had not been sent on from the city, and finally spoke so rudely to Madame von Stallwegen that the good lady swept indignantly from the room. More than that, a letter came just then from the queen, her mother, bidding her remember the duties that belonged to her, and urging consideration for Madame.

'The old lady has been telling tales,' she said angrily. 'I just hate to be a princess. I don't want to have to do things. I won't—I won't.'

She threw herself on a lounge, and sobbed violently for a time. After a while, as nobody came near her, she rose, put on her hat, slipped out without telling anybody, and walked slowly down the avenue of copper beeches.

She and Frieda had met once or twice since that first day, and she knew where Frieda lived. Without really intending it, she walked in that direction, going on and on, growing finally quiet and a little ashamed of herself. She had eaten little breakfast, and by the time she came within sight of the forester's cottage she was really faint.

'I will go there and ask for a drink of milk,' she thought. When she came to the garden, she hesitated. She could see Frieda washing dishes by an open window, singing a gay little springtime song, and looking the picture of content.

'Good-morning, my lady,' called Frieda, merrily. Lolita knew that Frieda called her 'my lady' in fun, if not in mockery; but it was good-natured, and she did not mind. She went up to the window and

stood there, watching Frieda, who went on with her work, merely saying, 'Mother has gone to market, and I'm all alone here.'

'Can't you come out in the park?' asked Lolita, in a friendly tone. She felt somehow as if she wished Frieda would like her, even if she didn't know she was the princess.

'No, I'd like to; but I've got to work. I must sweep and dust, and water the flowers, and feed the birds, and make the beds. If you come in and help, I might go out for half an hour or more.'

'All right, I will,' said Lolita, with an amiability that astonished nobody but herself, 'if you'll give me a drink of milk first.'

So Frieda brought a glass of milk in her big mug with the pink roses, and Lolita said not a word about golden bowls. Then she ate two generous slices of rye bread and butter, and felt better than ever. Then she helped Frieda with the dishes, carrying them carefully to the little corner cupboard across the room. Then they watered the flowers and fed all the birds, and Frieda started to sweep up the room, while Lolita brushed off the wide piazza on the other side of the house. Somehow, Frieda did not think it very well done.

Frieda's mother came back from market before the two girls finished the work; and, as soon as she saw who was helping, she sent them both into the park, thanking Lolita in a friendly, perfectly dignified way.

They seated themselves on a rustic bench, half hidden by shrubs.

'Tell me, Frieda,' said Lolita, thoughtful, 'do you have to work like this every day?'

'Oh, sometimes much harder,' said Frieda. 'I black the stove, and clean the pots and pans, and cook the dinner, and learn the multiplication table; and that's the worst. I have to study every day. I do sums, and learn geography and 'most everything.'

The two girls sat silent for a time; and then Lolita asked, almost humbly: 'Tell me, Frieda, how you can work so hard all the time and yet be so jolly about it. Don't you ever want to scream and kick?'

Frieda hesitated. 'Won't you laugh if I tell you?' Lolita promised. 'Wait a minute, then, and I'll show you.' She ran to the house, and came back again quickly with her beloved photograph of the Princess Lolita in her pretty frock, smiling graciously from the gilded frame.

'There, that's it. I'm not always happy or good, but this is what helps me the most.'

Lolita looked puzzled and surprised with good reason.

'You see,' Frieda went on, 'I used to like to play that I was Princess Lolita, and could travel about and see lovely things and wear pretty clothes, and never have to wash dishes. Sometimes I cried to think I didn't have any friend near here nor half so much fun as the girls in the village. Then father gave me this picture; and, of course, anybody looking at it could see right off what the Princess Lolita would do if she was here and had to work like me. She'd do it like a princess, of course. So I pretend I'm a truly prin-