



The Story of Princess Olivia: Wherein an Optimistic Slip of a Girl Brings Sunshine Into the Lives of Her Royal Parents, the Whiny King and the Scolding Queen, and Outsmarts the Despicable Count Carlos Maximillian von Dusseldorf (with two s's) and His Magical Minion...

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A curious and quaint adventure, this playful tale brings cleverness and wit to the fable genre.

The Story of Princess Olivia is an offbeat and peculiar fable-like story about a princess who outsmarts an evil count and saves her parents' kingdom from impoverishment.

The subtitle is indicative of the book's quirkiness: *Wherein an Optimistic Slip of a Girl Brings Sunshine Into the Lives of Her Royal Parents, the Whiny King and the Scolding Queen, and Outsmarts the Despicable Count Carlos Maximillian von Dusseldorf (with two s's) and His Magical Minion, the Mischievous, Poetical Georgette and What is a Hoop Snake Anyway?*

Princess Olivia is a bored child of King Horace and Queen Cora, living a "long long time ago" in the Green Mountain Kingdom, now known as Vermont. The kingdom is suffering from poverty, and Princess Olivia is suffering from boredom. Everyone knows, though, that the evil Count von Dusseldorf is responsible for all of the kingdom's woes.

On the same day that Olivia finds a new friend, a "hoop snake," who resembles a hula hoop as he has swallowed his tail, she disappears from her play area, having been kidnapped by none other than Count von Dusseldorf, with the aid of his minion, Georgette, a former bronze statue that has been turned into a beautiful woman. The hysterical queen and shell-shocked king enlist the aid of Prince Dropoffsky, who arrives out of nowhere to save Olivia.

In many children's stories, including this one, the children are often smarter than the adults, often outwitting and outthinking them. Predictably, the sanest, smartest character seems to be Princess Olivia herself, who comes up with a brilliant escape plan that not only saves herself but saves the kingdom.

The book's tone is playful and silly with a touch of charm. The characters are more caricatures, with the queen representing silliness and folly, the king as a bumbling and ineffectual leader, and the count as the prototypical bad guy. Perhaps the most fun character is Queen Cora, who insists that her daughter use an umbrella even if the only sign of rain is distant thunder.

The Story of Princess Olivia is not easily pigeon-holed into a genre. While the book is properly categorized as juvenile fiction, younger children will likely miss some of the subtle nuances of humor. While the pacing is good, at times the author seems to be trying too hard with the plays on words and the humor. However, the book will function well as a read-aloud, as it is laced with pictures, poems, magic spells, and a snake who only says "hissy hissy."

HILARY DANINHIRSCH (Fall 2013)

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