



Imara and the Prickles of Protection

Children at Priory School are very special indeed! They have the most amazing power to plant seeds and make flowers grow with every positive choice that they make. They demonstrate how kind, determined and courageous they are every day. And, for this reason, their school now resembles the most beautiful garden you have ever seen!

The garden contains an outstanding orchard filled with the ripest apples, plums, pears, cherries and berries. They thrive in the best conditions for each of them. There is also a wonderful woodland with trees that have strong roots and grow as tall as skyscrapers. Bernie the dog takes care of the children inside of the school. And flying above the garden is Myra the owl who is eager to join the children in their learning and play.

But, what you might not have realised, is that there are other creatures living in the garden too. Animals that are born from the Priory Values and demonstrate them every day. Animals like Imara the hedgehog and this is her story...

Imara's story actually begins long before she entered the Priory Garden and, I am sad to say, that it does not have the happiest of beginnings. But, fear not, as is so often the case, things work out in the end.

Imara was born quite a way away from here and, when she was a little hoglet – which is the name for baby hedgehogs, she became separated from her hedgehog parents and had to make her own way in life! She knew that she needed a place of safety and security so she began the long journey to find it.

As she was so young, Imara's prickles were white and soft – not at all like the prickles we can see on her now – and they weren't much use against the predators in the wild. Because of this, Imara needed to use her wits. She had to stay alert to the sounds and the shadows that often meant danger. The journey was long and cold and lonely. Imara felt sad and scared and worried.

The distance and the weather were bad but Imara faced other dangers too. There were animals out there that she knew would hurt her if they had the chance. But she hated the roads most of all! The cars sped past quickly with their loud sounds and glaring lights. Imara would huddle in a ball covering her tiny hedgehog ears and wait for the road to be quiet. Sometimes it felt like they never would.

Imara began to lose hope that she would ever find the sanctuary that she needed. Her sadness and worry slowly became frustration and anger. It was then that she noticed the prickles appearing on her back. These were different from the prickles that she'd been born with. These prickles were longer and harder and pointier. These prickles would keep other creatures away. These prickles were prickles of protection!

The prickles on Imara's back made her feel safe and strong. They gave her the boost of encouragement that she needed to finish her quest. After many weeks of difficulty, she finally stumbled across the Priory garden. She breathed a sigh of relief and looked for somewhere to make her home. The sun was shining and the flowers bloomed. The creatures here looked friendly and she could hear the sounds of the children laughing as they played at school. But the journey had hardened Imara. She knew that you couldn't always trust appearances. The brightest of flowers might be the deadliest. She couldn't let her guard down. Not now. Maybe, not ever.

Before long, the other animals learned of the new creature that had made the garden their home and set out to make a new friend. Nadine liked to give the animals their space so it was only Dara and Kaspian that bounded over to welcome Imara. The boys were so excited to have a new friend. They ran over to her nest, accidentally disturbing some of the leaves that she had worked hard to gather. The sound of their paws alerted Imara who peered up at the visitors. Seeing her face, Dara and Kaspian started talking all at once. They told Imara about the school and the children and the clubs and the garden and the trees. They waved their hands enthusiastically as they spoke and got closer and closer to her so that she could share in their excitement.

But Imara didn't see or hear excitement. She didn't trust the other animals. She saw threat and danger. The running and their waving paws reminded her of the predators in the wild. Their shouts of excitement reminded her of the sounds of the roads. And she didn't like the way they were getting closer and closer towards her and her home. But Imara was so young. She couldn't put all of these thoughts into words. "Get away from me!" she cried leaping up and displaying her prickles, "Get away from me and get away from my nest!"

Dara and Kaspian listened to her cries and stared at her sharp prickles and they ran. They were confused and upset. Why had she reacted like that? She had been so rude! They only wanted to help and become friends. They ran all the way to Nadine who was fluttering over a flower patch and retold the events to her. Nadine listened, like she always did. She didn't interrupt. "She's so mean and I don't think that she belongs in this garden," Kaspian finally announced.

Nadine understood what had happened at once. She thought carefully about how best to explain to the boys the mistake they had made; what Imara might need; and how to make it right. She said:

*Creatures with prickles need oh so much care,
To know other creatures don't just shout and scare,
The prickles they have are the armour they wear,
To keep themselves safe and tell dangers, "Beware!"*

*Creatures with prickles need oh so much care,
Events in their lives might have been too much to bear,
Most often they just need to know that you're there,
They need patience and kindness, they need you to be fair.*

*It can take such a long time to build up their trust,
But for friendship to follow, that trust is a must.
I know that you two can do what is right,
Give her time, warmth and love and don't give her a fright.*

Dara and Kaspian listened silently and they realised at once what had happened. They had been too quick, too loud, too much. They hadn't even asked the young hedgehog her name. Dara took some paper that he had squirreled away and the animals wrote a note that simply said:

**We're sorry. We're here when you're ready.
Your friends,
Dara, Kaspian and Nadine.**

They left the note outside Imara's nest and gave her the space that was needed. Imara peeped out from her home and saw the note waving gently in the breeze. She checked for danger and slowly reached out to take it. Reading it, she felt a smile on her face and a warmth in her heart that she had not felt for a very long time.

Over time, the other animals slowly built Imara's trust and she began to realise that these other animals were safe. The garden provided her with the security and home that she had always wanted. She began smiling more and her anger flared less. Her prickles always remained – these aren't things that just go away – but she had to use them much less than before. She knew that she could trust others to help her feel safer now too.