

PRINCESS CRYSTAL

OR
THE
HIDDEN
TREASURE

A STORY FOR CHILDREN.

BY ISABEL BELLERBY.



HERE were the four Kings: the King of the North, the region of perpetual snow; the King of the South, where the sun shines all the year round; the King of the East, from whence the cold winds blow; and the King of the West, where the gentle zephyrs breathe upon the flowers and coax them to open their petals while the rest of the world is still sleeping.

And there was the great Dragon, who lived on top of a high mountain in the centre of the universe. He could see everything that happened everywhere by means of his magic spectacles, which enabled him to look all ways at once, and to see through solid substances; but he could only see, not hear, for he was as deaf as a post.

Now the King of the North had a beautiful daughter called Crystal. Her eyes were bright like the stars; her hair was black like

the sky at night; and her skin was as white as the snow which covered the ground outside the palace where she lived, which was built entirely of crystals clear as the clearest glass.

And the King of the South had a son who had been named Sunshine on account of his brightness and warmth of heart.

The King of the East had a son who, because he was always up early and was very industrious, had been given the name of Sunrise.

The King of the West also had a son, perhaps the handsomest of the three, and always magnificently dressed; but as it took him all day to make his toilette, so that he was never seen before evening, he received the name of Sunset.

All three Princes were in love with the Princess Crystal, each hoping to win her for his bride. When they had the chance

they would go and peep at her as she wandered up and down in her glass palace. But she liked Prince Sunshine best, because he stayed longer than the others, and was always such excellent company. Prince Sunrise was too busy to be able to spare her more than half an hour or so ; and Prince Sunset never came until she was getting too tired and sleepy to care to see him.

It was of no use, however, for her to hope that Sunshine would be her husband just because she happened to prefer him to the others. Her father—the stern, blustering old King, with a beard made of icicles so long that it reached to his waist and kept his heart cold—declared that he had no patience for such nonsense as likes and dislikes ; and one day he announced, far and wide, in a voice that was heard by the other three Kings, and which made the earth shake so that the great green Dragon immediately looked through his spectacles to see what was happening :—

“He who would win my daughter must first bring me the casket containing the Hidden Treasure, which is concealed no man knows where !”

Of course the Dragon was none the wiser for looking through his spectacles, because the words—loud though they were—could not be heard by his deaf ears.

But the other Kings listened diligently ; as did the young Princes. And poor Princess Crystal trembled in her beautiful palace lest Sunrise, who was always up so early, should find the treasure before Sunshine had a chance : she was not much afraid of the indolent Sunset, except that it might occur to him to look in some spot forgotten by his rivals.

Very early indeed on the following morning did Prince Sunrise set to work ; he glided along the surface of the earth, keeping close to the ground in his anxiety not to miss a single square inch. He knew he was not first in the field ; for the Northern King's proclamation had been made towards evening on the previous day, and Prince Sunset had bestirred himself for once, and had lingered about rather later than usual, being desirous of finding the treasure and winning the charming Princess.

But the early morning was passing, and very soon the cheery, indefatigable Sunshine had possession of the entire land, and flooded Crystal's palace with a look from his loving eyes which bade her not despair.

Then he talked to the trees and the green fields and the flowers, begging them to give

up the secret in return for the warmth and gladness he shed so freely on them. But they were silent, except that the trees sighed their sorrow at not being able to help him, and the long grasses rustled a whispered regret, and the flowers bowed their heads in grief.

Not discouraged, however, Prince Sunshine went to the brooks and rivers, and asked their assistance. But they, too, were helpless. The brooks gurgled out great tears of woe, which rushed down to the rivers, and so overcame them—sorry as they were on account of their own inability to help—that they nearly overflowed their banks, and went tumbling into the sea, who, of course, wanted to know what was the matter ; but, when told, all the sea could do was to thunder a loud and continuous “No !” on all its beaches. So Prince Sunshine had to pass on and seek help elsewhere.

He tried to make the great Dragon understand ; but it could not hear him. Other animals could, though, and he went from one to another, as cheerful as ever, in spite of all the “Noes” he had met with ; until, at last, he knew by the twittering of the birds that he was going to be successful.

“We go everywhere and learn most things,” said the swallows, flying up and down in the air, full of excitement and joy at being able to reward their beloved Sunshine for all his kindness to them. “And we know this much, at any rate : the Hidden Treasure can only be found by him who looks at its hiding-place through the Dragon's magic spectacles.”

Prince Sunshine exclaimed that he would go at once and borrow these wonderful spectacles ; but a solemn-looking old owl spoke up :—

“Be not in such a hurry, most noble Prince ! The Dragon will slay anyone—even so exalted a personage as yourself—who attempts to remove those spectacles while he is awake ; and, as is well known, he never allows himself to sleep, for fear of losing some important sight.”

“Then what is to be done ?” asked the Prince, beginning to grow impatient at last, for the afternoon was now well advanced, and Prince Sunset would soon be on the war-path again.

A majestic eagle came swooping down from the clouds.

“There is only one thing in all the world,” said he, “which can send the Dragon to sleep, and that is a caress from the hand of the Princess Crystal.”

Sunshine waited to hear no more. Smiling his thanks, he hastened away to put his dear Crystal's love to the test. She had never yet ventured outside the covered gardens of her palace. Would she go with him now, and approach the great Dragon, and soothe its savage watchfulness into the necessary repose?

As he made the request, there stole into the Princess's cheeks the first faint tinge of colour that had ever been seen there.

"My robe is of snow," she faltered; "if I go outside these crystal walls into your radiant presence it will surely melt."

"You look as if you yourself would melt at my first caress, you beautiful, living snowflake," replied the Prince; "but have no fear; see, I have my own mantle ready to enfold you. Come Princess, and trust yourself to me."

Then, for the first time in her life, Princess Crystal stole out of her palace, and was immediately wrapped in Prince Sunshine's warm mantle, which caused her to glow all over; her face grew quite rosy, and she looked more than usually lovely, so that the Prince longed to kiss her; but she was not won yet, and she might have been offended at his taking such a liberty.

Therefore, he had to be content to have her beside him in his golden chariot with the fiery horses, which flew through space so quickly that they soon stood on the high mountain, where

the Dragon sat watching them through his spectacles, wondering what the Princess was doing so far from home, and what her father would think if he discovered her absence.

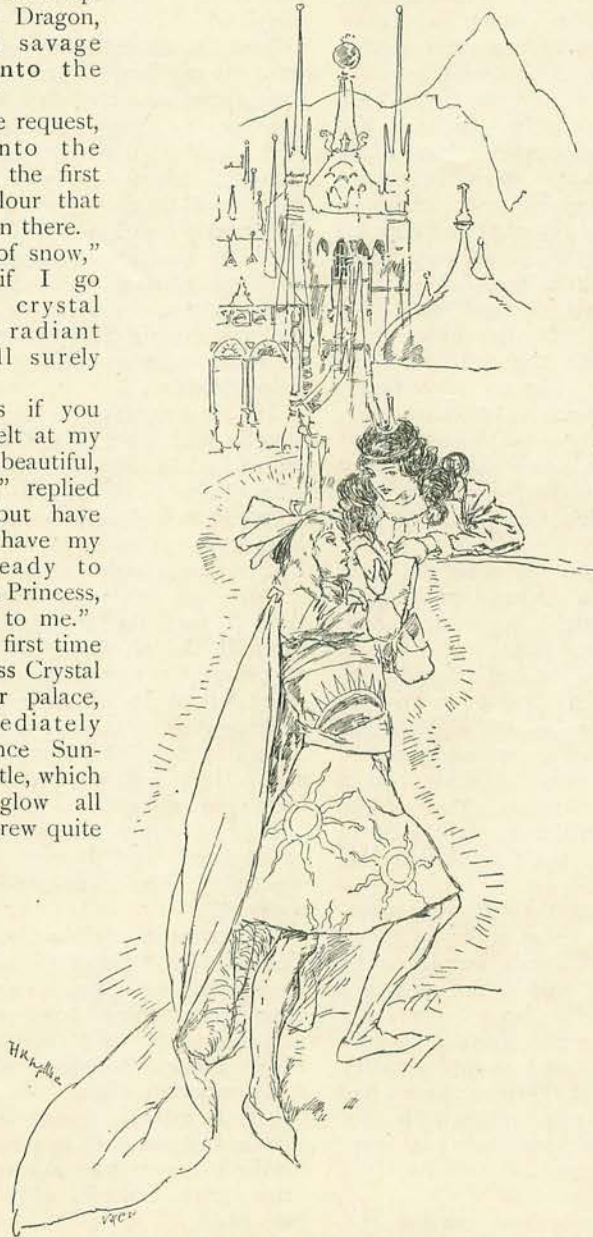
It was no use explaining matters to the Dragon, even had they wished to do so; but of course nothing was further from their intention.

Holding Prince Sunshine's hand to give her courage, the Princess approached the huge beast and timidly laid her fingers on his head.

"This is very nice and soothing," thought the Dragon, licking his lips; "very kind of her to come, I'm sure; but—dear me!—this won't do! I'm actually going—to—sleep!"

He tried to rise, but the gentle hand prevented that. A sensation of drowsiness stole through all his veins, which would have been delightful but for his determination never to sleep. As it was, he opened his mouth to give a hiss that would surely have frightened the poor Princess out of her wits; but he fell asleep before he could so much as begin

it; his mouth remained wide open; but his eyes closed, and his great head began to nod in a very funny manner.



"MY ROBE IS OF SNOW," SHE FALTERED.

Directly they were satisfied that he really slept, Prince Sunshine helped himself to the Dragon's spectacles, requesting the Princess not to remove her hand, lest the slumber should not last long enough for their purpose.

Then he put on the spectacles, and Princess Crystal exclaimed with fear and horror when—as though in result of his doing so—

hiss which sleep had intercepted; and under the tongue was the golden casket containing the Hidden Treasure!

The spectacles enabled the Prince to see through the cover; so he learned the secret at once, and knew why the King of the North was so anxious to possess himself of it, the great treasure being a pair of spectacles exactly like those hitherto always worn by the Dragon, and by him alone—which would keep the King informed of all that was going

on in every corner of his kingdom, so that he could always punish or reward the right people and never make mistakes; also he could learn a great deal of his neighbours' affairs, which is pleasant, even to a King.

The Princess was overjoyed when she knew the casket was already found; she very nearly removed her hand in her eagerness to inspect it; but, fortunately, she remembered just in time, and kept quite still until Prince Sunshine had drawn his chariot so close that they could both get into it without moving out of reach of the Dragon's head.

Then, placing the spectacles, not in their accustomed place, but on the ground just beneath, and laying the golden casket on the Princess's lap, the

Prince said, as he gathered up the reins:—

“Now, my dearly beloved Crystal—really mine at last—take away your hand, and let us fly, without an instant's delay, to the Court of the King, your royal father.”

It is well they had prepared for immediate departure. Directly the Princess's hand was raised from the Dragon's head his senses returned to him, and, finding his mouth open ready for hissing, he hissed with all his angry might, and looked about for his spectacles that he might pursue and slay those who had robbed him; for, of course, he missed the casket at once.

But he was a prisoner on that mountain



“HE LEARNED THE SECRET AT ONCE.”

she saw her beloved Prince plunge his right hand into the Dragon's mouth.

Prince Sunshine had stood facing the huge beast as he transferred the spectacles to his own nose, and, naturally enough, the first thing he saw through them was the interior of the Dragon's mouth, with the tongue raised and shot forward in readiness for the

and unable to leave it, though he flapped his great wings in terrible wrath when he saw the Prince and Princess, instead of driving down the miles and miles of mountain side as he had hoped, being carried by the fiery horses right through the air, where he could not reach them.

all night, so that Prince Sunrise was able to offer his good wishes when he came early in the morning, flushed with the haste he had made to assure Prince Sunshine that he bore him no ill-will for having carried off the prize.

Princess Crystal never returned to her palace, except to peep at it occasionally.



"RIGHT THROUGH THE AIR."

They only laughed when they heard the hiss and the noise made by the useless flapping of wings. Prince Sunshine urged on his willing steeds, and they arrived at the Court just as the King, Crystal's father, was going to dinner; and he was so delighted at having the treasure he had so long coveted, that he ordered the marriage to take place at once.

Prince Sunset called just in time to be best man, looking exceedingly gorgeous and handsome, though very disappointed to have lost the Princess; and the festivities were kept up

She liked going everywhere with her husband, who, she found, lived by no means an idle life, but went about doing good—grumbled at sometimes, of course, for some people will grumble even at their best friend—but more generally loved and blessed by all who knew him.