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# THE GIRL WHO HATED THE SKY

A Tale of Sacrifice

Adapted By TJ Hawk

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## CHAPTER 1: BEWITCHING THE BABY

Once, a king lived with his queen by a beautiful lake. Their kingdom was peaceful and prosperous, but they were sad, as they had no children.

“Why don’t you give me a child?” berated the grumpy monarch to his wife.

“I’m so sorry,” stammered the queen.

“Don’t apologize,” snarled her dumpy husband. “Just give me what I want.”

She grimaced, saying, “I’m trying.”

The queen had hoped to pacify her husband, but remained barren for years. Finally, she gave him a daughter, a beautiful little princess. They looked into her sapphire eyes, and were giddy.

“Our friends should help us celebrate our perfect little girl,” said the queen with much pride. “Let’s have a party.”

The king agreed and wrote the invitations with gladness. Yet, not all was well. For the grumpy, dumpy king failed to invite his sister, his only sister.

She was a mean and nasty sister. Beastly wrinkles covered her ugly face. She had a crooked nose and twisted smirk. When the vixen hated somebody, her eyes turned black. They were black most days.

To be blunt, the king’s sister was a witch. She was a genuine witch, a spiteful, rotten, putrid, witchy witch. In fact, she was the worst witch to ever fly a broom, and most frightful at dispensing gloom.

The old hag went to the party without an invitation. She flung open the palace doors, and slithered among the crowd toward the baby. Panic quickly ceased the throats of each guest, producing a fresh and eerie silence. Now in the center of the ballroom, the witch swung around six times, and broke the hush by croaking:

*Dark spirit, wispy charms,*

*By laughter rip apart;*

*Never tire peasant arms,*

*Yet pierce the regal heart!*

As the witch finished, an icy wind blew through the palace. The guests screamed together as one, but the baby started to laugh and snort, like a demon. The nurse who held the royal child, not feeling the baby in her arms, supposed the magic spell had paralyzed her.

Was it a curse on the nurse? No, the witch had pillaged gravity from the poor princess. The child was now weightless.

The baby floated from the nurse's arms. She was quickly penned against the ceiling, kicking and cackling. The queen ordered a servant to get a ladder. While trembling with terror, she climbed to the top step, reached up, and fetched down her feathery daughter.

The sovereign's shameful sister grinned, malignantly. She was proud of her wicked curse.

The dumpy king quickly dismissed the panic-stricken crowd. "This party is officially over," shouted the grumpier-than-ever monarch.

The king took the baby from his wife's quivering hands. Not feeling the weight of his child, the ruler stared at his daughter in horror, stammering, "I smell conspiracy. This is not our baby!"

"Yes, she's ours," the queen answered, rolling her eyes. "But a certain uninvited female should have stayed home."

“Ah, ha,” announced the king, pointing at his forehead, “I’ve got it. My sister has bewitched our baby.”

“That’s what I meant,” answered the exasperated queen.

“Sure you did,” patronized her dumpy mate.

## CHAPTER 2: THE ABSENCE OF GRAVITY

One day the baby princess was asleep under a heavy blanket to prevent her from floating away. The queen entered the room (unaware of the baby) and opened a window. A wind mightily rushed inside, blew away the blanket, and caught up the baby. Floating her along like a milkweed seed, the naughty wind carried her outside.

When the nurse returned, she saw the missing child and rushed to the parlor, proclaiming to the queen, “The baby is *gone!*”

“Oh, NO!” loudly screeched the queen, falling to the floor.

Hearing the queen’s scream and thud, several courtiers ran into the parlor. After finding the queen with a bloody lip, but alive, they quickly formed a posse. Soon the courtiers found the princess tangled in tree limbs, asleep and unharmed. Awakened by the noise of the posse, she cackled.

The court jester rushed toward the gathering beneath the tree. He arrived with his colorful outfit, his droopy hat and his big smile. He was pleased to find a ready audience, as he lived to make people laugh.

The lively jester ran around in circles under the tree. While running, he held out his arms, yelling, “Don’t worry, baby princess, I’ll catch you. I’ll catch you.”

Everyone laughed. They knew the silly jester would not catch the feathery infant. If she wiggled free of the tree limbs, she would not fall. She would float up. The jester running in circles under the baby was ridiculous, and hilarious. The laughter continued for several minutes. Yet, it was not funny to the queen.

One morning the porky king went into the vault to count his money. He grumpily groaned to himself, “Every one of these gold coins weighs an ounce, and my daughter weighs nothing.”

The queen was in the kitchen, eating a biscuit and jelly. Suddenly, she burst out crying. When the king heard the cry, he threw down his coins, jammed his crown on his head, and rushed into the kitchen.

“What’s wrong?” he exclaimed loudly, twirling his sword above his large head with his short arms.

“I can’t eat,” groaned the queen.

“Well, sure,” returned the king, putting away his sword, “you’ve just eaten three eggs, and five sausages, and two potatoes, and...”

“Oh, hush!” scolded his wife. “I can’t eat because I’m worried about our baby.”

“What’s the matter with her now? Up the chimney again?” The king tried to jest. “It is good to be lighthearted.”

“But it’s bad to be light-minded,” replied the queen, with both indignation and sorrow. “You’re not funny.”

“Well, neither are you,” responded the lumpy husband in a childish tone.

“You have to do something, now,” demanded his wife with a scowl that would make the devil howl.

“Well, well, what can I do?” stuttered the king.

“Try apologizing to your evil sister.”

“Well, fine,” said the dumpy king, frowning.

With reluctance, the king trudged to the witch’s frightful abode. After an apology, he begged her to undo the spell. The

hateful hag refused, pointing a crooked finger in the king's chubby face, repeatedly chanting this evil trinity:

*Loss of gravity,*

*Curse of levity,*

*Ends your sanity.*

During the third chant of his sister's foul psalm, the king put both fingers in his ears, and cried like a baby, like a *big* baby. He then returned to the palace, still in dismay, with these words still ringing in his ears: "Loss of gravity, curse of levity, ends your sanity."

Seeing her pitiful king, the queen whispered, "Maybe the floating will diminish in time."

"But, if not, what if she marries?" moaned the king. "In a few years the sky might be full of floating children."

"Oh, my lumpy grump, my poor, dear, lumpy grump," she replied kindly, patting his royal shoulder, trying to console her mate.

The grump opened his mouth to speak, but could only groan.

## CHAPTER 3: THE CURSE OF LEVITY

I hate the sky,” declared the toddling princess while looking out the window.

Her mother, the queen, was shocked. “Darling, why do you hate the sky?”

“I hate the sky,” the little princess said again without explanation, laughing and frowning at the same time. It was an unsettling sight. Then she whispered, as if touched with madness, “Mommy, I hate the sky.”

The encounter brought a chill to the queen. Later, the queen asked her daughter’s nurse, “I’m worried about my baby. Why does she hate sky?”

“Well, your majesty, I’m just a poor peasant, not very smart. However, yesterday I was walking past the deep pit on southern edge of the kingdom. I then realized that I hated the pit.”

“Why?” asked the queen, trying to understand.

“When I looked into the dark pit without seeing the bottom,” explained the compassionate nurse, “I wondered how it would feel to be in someone’s arms dangling over the pit. It would be so frightening, even horrifying. That fear for the pit soon became hatred and rage. Now I hate the pit. I hate it.”

“I understand,” said the queen with a beam. “My baby feels about the sky like you feel about the pit. If you fell into the pit, you would fall into the frightening unknown. Likewise, if someone lost a grip on her outside, my child would float into the terrifying sky. Where would she go? Who knows? Yet, it would be horrifying. Indeed, her sky is our pit. She has a right to hate the sky.”



“Exactly,” responded the nurse, happy to help her queen and the wispy princess.

The story of this conversation went throughout the land. Soon, across borders and kingdoms, the princess became known everywhere as *the girl who hated the sky*.

Years passed, and the little princess grew to be a teenager. She continued to float, and continued to hate the sky. She also kept laughing at anything, at everything. She laughed for no reason. Her excessive laughter became as much a curse as her weightlessness.

When the girl heard any story, even a sad story, she laughed, enormously. Her laughter’s effect on the kingdom went from annoying to alarming.

“Her laugh hides a dreary heart,” said the colorful jester, this time without his normal wink or grin. “I’ve seen overabundance before. It’s a cruel weapon of the witch.”

“Frivolity has its place,” added the old nurse (who loved the girl), “but too much of any good thing is bad.”

The jester nodded, appreciating her simple logic. He then crept away in low spirits. Moreover, from this day forward he forgot how to tell a joke (to everyone’s shock and sorrow). What else could a jokeless jester do, except become a hermit and brood? Even his colorful clothes became dingy and dull, like his jokeless life.

One evening the royal couple tried to talk with their daughter. The king, holding her firmly to keep her from floating away, advised, “You know that you’re different.”

“Well, sure,” she double chuckled. “I’m the daughter of a king.”

“That’s not what your father means,” interjected the queen. “Don’t you want to walk like others?”

“No, oh, no,” she stubbornly lied, cackling.

Seeing the futility of continuing their chat, the grumpy king sent his daughter away with her kind nurse.

“Dear queen,” the king moaned, “what can we do?”

The weary queen answered, “I’m without a clue.”

“I suppose we should consult the scholars,” suggested the king.

Now at the university were two famous philosophers. The king sent for them, and in a long speech explained the plight. Of course, they already knew. The king begged them to find the cure.

“Sure, we can help,” the two brainy scholars proudly uttered in unison. “We’ll never let you down.”

The esteemed intellectuals went berserk with work. From their vast libraries, they read a book from every nook, studying thousands of documents, researching millions of pages. After analyzing the mysterious curse for weeks, their eyes looked like red peppermint candies.

They also debated, shaking their enormous heads at each other, pounding their little fists on the table to reinforce their arguments. They worked hard. However, despite their many efforts and their vast knowledge, these scholars found no answers.

## CHAPTER 4: THE PEACEFUL WATERS

The palace overlooked a charming lake with majestic cliffs. Tethered to her balcony, the princess spent hours gazing at the lake. Such a beautiful lake, she thought, with its gentle waves and the reflection of trees in its blue waters.

She still hated the sky, but loved the birds flying there. Unlike her, these flying creatures were in complete control as they flew with carefree abandon.

In particular, the princess enjoyed watching eagles fly above the lake. They would swoop down and skim along the lake, ascending again after a tiny splash. In delightful daydreaming, she imagined touching the waters like the eagles.

The wispy princess begged her royal parents to escort her to the lake. They refused her many pleas, because of the difficulty of getting her down the steep path to the lake.

“Besides,” the king declared, adjusting his crown, “There’s no time. I must attend to my important kingly matters.”

“What matters?” asked his daughter, gurgling and giggling.

“Well, coin counting for one, and, uh . . .” The king paused, looking to the heavens for help, before continuing, “I’ve got plenty of pending matters. A teenage princess couldn’t begin to understand them.”

After much complaining from the princess, with peculiarly maddening laughter, the king reluctantly agreed. It took twenty attendants to battle a fierce wind and take her down a dangerous embankment to the lakeshore. Four strong servants, one on each

arm and one on each leg, pulled the floating princess toward the water.

The moment her toe touched the water, the magic began, and the princess plopped in the lake, to the shock of everyone. Furthermore, it kept happening. When her toe, or any part of her body, touched the water, the princess temporarily regained the gift of gravity. However, when she was lifted *completely* out of the water, she again suffered from the curse of weightlessness.

Who could understand such a mystery? The lake was the antidote, though temporary, for the spell of that ugly, wicked witch.

The wispy princess began to spend hours in the magical waters. She enjoyed freedom in the lake, and in the lake alone. Out of the water, she could not move without an entourage, lest the wind might take her away. (The king never allowed her outside without twenty silken cords fastened to her, held by twenty noblemen.) Yet she forsook these restraints when she entered the water.

Soon the water became the passion of her life. Each day, from morning until evening, she swam like a fish in the cool waters.

The princess grew to love the water, as her hatred of the sky ever increased. Hate arose from a simple fact. Out of the water, if not carefully secured by ropes, a gust of wind might carry her far from home, into the land of her worst nightmares.

“Oh! If I had gravity,” she whispered, “I’d leap off this high cliff, headlong into the water.” Yet, that could never happen, even in her sweetest dreams.

So remarkable were the lake’s effects on the princess, it gave the two illustrious philosophers an idea. They recommended to the king to bury the princess in the ground for three years (with a tube for air, of course). They believed, since the water did her so much good, the earth would do yet more.

The argument was presented with delicacy. Nevertheless, mercifully, the king would not consent.

Foiled in this, the brainy scholars agreed on another plan. They reasoned, since external water (the lake) was so effective, consequently, internal water (her tears) would bring a complete cure. If someone could force the afflicted princess to cry, she would recover her lost gravity.

The grumpy king liked this plan better. However, forcing his wispy daughter to cry proved as impossible as making her weighty. They sent for a professional beggar to prepare his most touching oracle of woe. The pitiful princess listened quietly to the beggar's sad story, until she could contain it no longer, and burst into undignified shrieking, squawking with fiendish laughter.

“Why can't she cry?” lovingly asked the nurse.

The jokeless jester wisely proclaimed in sorrow, “She is too full of joyless glee. The weight of human compassion cannot find a place to lodge.”

With sadness, the nurse had to agree with the jester.

## CHAPTER 5: THE PRINCE ARRIVES

**A**bout this time, the son of a distant king set out to find a wife. He traveled the earth, but found faults in every woman he met. No princess was worthy of him.

This prince was ruggedly handsome and talented beyond measure. He could hunt and fish, or wash a dish. He could sing and dance, or throw a lance. All young maidens desired to marry him.

One evening, after much wandering, the prince approached the lake. He heard strange sounds across the water. It was the laughing princess. However, the prince mistook her laughter for crying. Looking across the lake, he saw the princess in the water. Thinking she was distressed, he hastily tore off his cloak, and plunged in the water.

He reached her and grabbed her. She kept flailing as he brought her to shore, nearly drowning her. Each time she tried to protest, water got into her throat, and muffled her sounds.

At the rocky bank, he gave her a strong lift out of the water. Yet the moment she left the water, her weightlessness returned, and away she went, screeching and scolding.

“Why did you do that?” she yelled, as she floated toward the wretched sky. “You bad boy! You bad, stupid boy!”

The prince’s eyes and mouth opened wide. The soaring princess fortunately managed to grab the top of a giant pine. It kept her from leaving this world forever.

For a second, the prince just stood, mesmerized, staring high above the water. When he finally scrambled to the top of the cliff, he found the fuming princess climbing down from the tree.

“You imbecile,” she screamed, holding tightly to the pine’s bottom branch. “Why did you throw me out of the water into the horrible sky? I hate the sky.”

“I thought I was saving you.”

“Saving me? Don’t you have a brain? Your stupidity is worse than having no gravity.”

In his wanderings, the prince had heard about a bewitched princess, who was weightless. He had heard about the girl who hated the sky. Yet, when he had heard it, he ridiculed the storytellers. He thought it was make-believe . . . but not anymore. The undeniable evidence stood in front of him, fuming and foaming from her beautiful lips.

Wanting to help the young princess, he grabbed her arm. Her skin was as soft and smooth as her voice was harsh. Before he could apologize, she burst out, “Put me back. Put me back in the water, *now*.”

She was angry, but the prince did not care. He had fallen in love with her. Her rage made her most charming. As far as he could see, she had not one fault, except she had no gravity. Nevertheless, it would not be proper, he reasoned, to judge a princess by her weight (or lack of it).

“Okay, you beautiful goddess,” crooned the prince, holding her arm firmly, but lovingly. “I’ll put you in the water.”

When they reached the edge of the bank (about twenty-five feet above the water), he asked, “How should I put you in?”

“You idiot,” she snapped.

“Well, okay, I don’t know how others put you in, but I’m trying this,” explained the prince. Embracing her tightly with his muscular arms, he sprang with her from the rock. The princess

chuckled repeatedly on the way down. At the last moment, she took a quick breath and enjoyed the splash.

When they rose to the surface of the water, he was still embracing her. “You can stop holding me now,” said the princess softly.

He did not want to let go of her, now or ever, but promptly obeyed. “How did you like it?” choked the prince while treading water.

“That was fun,” she declared, grinning. “For an idiot, you somehow found the best way to put me in the water. Can we do it again?”

“Anytime,” exclaimed the smiling, smitten prince.

After a few more times of plunging into the lake, they rested in the shallow water. Then they swam together, gently, until it was nearly dark.

After the princess went home, the prince returned to the forest. All night he dreamed of swimming with the princess. She was more gorgeous than any woman he had ever met.

The next morning the prince returned to the lake with the happy expectancy of seeing her again. The princess was already swimming there. His heart beat faster as he approached her.

“Would you like to jump in again with me?” said the prince, peering down at her from the cliff.

“Yes, indeed. Thank you for asking, Mr. Prince,” stated the princess with mock formality. Pulling herself out of the water, she floated up to the prince. Embracing each other, they sprang from the cliff toward the water. The dive was exhilarating; the splash was wild; and the swim was delightful.

He was happy. She had fun.

Night after night, they swam in the charming lake by the light of moon. The prince was so happy. However, when he talked about heaven, the princess laughed at him, cackling hellishly.



The prince discovered that in the water the princess was less rude, and more maidenly. When she left the lake, she became as mean as death, with a nasty laugh. The prince thought, “If I marry her, to be happy, I suppose I’ll have to grow fins and live with her in the water.”

## CHAPTER 6: THE LAKE AND THE SNAKE

The princess loved the lake. Imagine her dismay, when she thought the lake was lower than usual. Examining the borders each day fortified her fears, until the terrifying idea became reality. The lake *was* sinking.

The poor girl went crazy with panic. Her beloved lake was shrinking before her eyes. As the lake sank, she ached. How could she survive without it? Yet, she never cried.

Her father widely proclaimed that whoever could discover the reason for the lake's malady, would receive a hefty reward. The two philosophers applied themselves to their logic, but were baffled, like everyone else.

Why did this happen to the lake? The old witch, the king's sister, was the source of the anguish. When she had heard that her niece found pleasure in the water, she went into a rage. "I will snatch the lake from the girl," moaned the evil hag with madness. "And people will die of thirst, with their brains sizzling in their skulls." Her ferocious laugh caused her black cat to purr with pleasure.

The witch descended into her cellar, and took dried seaweed from an ugly, old chest. She flung the weed into a tub of putrid water, stirring it with her bare arm, muttering hideous words. Suddenly, from out from the tub, came the head a huge snake, waving backward and forward. The snake laid its head on the witch's shoulder, sweetly hissing in her ear. The enchantress kissed the snake's vibrating tongue, and removed the vile creature from the tub.

After grabbing a rusty key, she left the cellar, and crept through a dark passageway, with the twisted snake embracing her. After walking down the long, narrow passage, she finally came to a door. She unlocked the door with the key, and entered a vast cave.

She untwined the snake from her body, and held it by the tail. The venomous reptile stretched its head toward the roof of the cavern. (Now this roof was the underside belly of the lake.) The snake started to move its head around, slowly oscillating. Then it made a sudden dart, and clung to the roof by its long, venomous fangs.

“Excellent, my baby!” cried the old hag. “Drain the lake dry.”

It hung like a huge leech, and sucked the stone, while the woman muttered muck. After six days and six nights, the serpent fell from the roof.

One drop of water was shivering where it had been sucking. Seeing this, the witch left the cave quickly, shutting and locking the door behind her. She arrived in the cellar and put her wrinkled ear on the floor, listening with cruel gladness to the rushing sound of water.

As the lake was draining, she took a bottle of unholy water from the tub, and set out with her black cat in a boat. She circled the slowly shrinking lake, croaking incantations, and sprinkling putrid water on the shore. After finishing the circuit, she defiantly flung the remaining water at the moon.

First, the small brooks ceased to flow. Soon all tributaries became dry, even the vast rivers that fed the beautiful lake. It made the moon weep.

Now the witch and her cat were proud of themselves. They sat down and mocked the moon for crying. Then each contently purred in the ear of the other.

CHAPTER 7: *LOVE ENDURES*

The prince had not seen his weightless princess for days. He overheard that his future bride was wasting away with her lake, sinking as it sank, withering as it dried.

The sad, weightless princess stayed in her room, with curtains drawn to shut out the sad sight of the subsiding lake. Yet it haunted her imagination. The lake was her soul, drying and dying. She thus brooded, with all of its dire consequences. As for the prince, she had forgotten him. Sure, she had enjoyed him in the lake, but did not care for him without it.

The lake kept sinking. Soon the lake was gone, except one small pool in the center of the lake.

Then one day it happened. Some boys were wading in the pool. Seeing something shiny, a boy reached down and grabbed a golden plate covered with writing. They carried the relic to the dumpy king.

*One side of the ancient plate read:*

*Love alone can fill the deepest grave;*

*Love alone endures beneath the wave.*

Now the other side of the plate, although still mysterious, further unveiled the meaning of this riddle:

*When the lake vanishes,  
Plug the hole with a living soul,  
To freeze hell and reverse the spell.  
Yet the hero must be free,  
Not bound by regal decree.*

What did it mean? The grumpy, dumpy king approached the university. The two renowned philosophers worked day and night on this riddle. They meditated and hesitated, contemplated and speculated, with their big heads swaying above their tiny bodies. In fact, they worked so hard that their brainy brains finally exploded.

Desperate now, after a quick funeral for the scholars, the king turned to the jokeless jester. The king pointed his stubby finger at the jester, saying scathingly, “Maybe at least you can still read a riddle, though your jokes have forsaken you.”

The jester heard the riddle and pointed out with assurance, “It’s simple, my dear monarch. You need a human sacrifice.”

“Wonderful,” said the king, “I pick you.”

“No, no. That won’t work, sir,” declared the jester, sweating from his brow. “The rescuer must volunteer; he cannot be forced.”

Doubtful of finding a willing sacrifice, the poor, lumpy grump was brokenhearted. He desperately wanted to sit down and cry, yet he knew that he had to try. Thus, the king published the words of the mystifying golden plate throughout the land. He then waited, and waited. Nevertheless, no soul volunteered to plug the hole.

When the prince heard about the golden plate, he debated in himself, “She’ll die unless I offer my life for her lake, but my life is

nothing without her. If I do this, I must request the princess to be with me. It will sweeten death.”

The brave prince rushed to the king’s palace. “Greetings, king. I’m your butler,” said the young prince with a wink.

“What? Butler! Liars must die!” exploded the grumpy king, pointing his sword.

“I mean, I’ll cork your bottle,” said the prince nonchalantly, “plug your leaky lake.”

“Oh! I see,” said the king, putting away his sword. “Well, come inside, fool! I mean, *brave warrior*. Take some wine, before you change your mind.”

“No, thank you,” replied the prince.

“Then we must find the hole at once,” exclaimed the king, slapping on his crown.

“Stop, sir, I have a condition,” interposed the prince.

“What?” the indignant king roared, drawing his sword again. “I don’t barter with beggars. Leave. Another man will come along.”

“I think not,” affirmed the prince without fear.

“Well, what’s your condition?” growled the king.

The prince replied with a wrinkled brow, “Your daughter must be with me. Waiting for death will be tedious, so the princess will comfort me. When the water reaches my eyes, she may leave and forget her poor butler.”

“Is that all?” asked the king. “Yes, I grant your condition. Now we must go.”

The feeble princess was glad to hear of a sacrificial dupe. The maidservant dressed her in haste, and twenty attendants escorted her to the dry lakebed. When she saw it, she squalled, covering her face with her dainty hands.

They approached the hole, near the center of the lake, the site of the golden plate. The twenty attendants busily secured the princess to a small boat (docked on slimy clay next to the hole), fastening her legs to the vessel with velvety cords of royal purple.

“Don’t tie them too tightly,” demanded the poor princess.

Soon the prince arrived. Baffled to see *him*, the princess said, “They told me you were a butler.”

“So I am,” said he.

The prince stepped into the nasty hole, and sunk to his knees. He bravely resigned himself to his fate.

After the princess dismissed the courtiers, they climbed to the top of a bank. The wicked witch was on an opposite cliff, sneering and jeering. The courtiers sat on the grass embankment, with their picnic baskets full. The royal couple had already gone home for dinner.

## CHAPTER 8: DROWNING HOPE

The gritty prince kept wiggling in the hole to try to get comfortable. However, nothing worked. The pain traveled from his toes to his feet to his calves. Where would it end?

Before long, a little water gathered, wetting one of the prince's thighs. Then he softly sang to the princess, the lovely girl who hated the sky, the one he had hoped would someday be his wife:

*Let one small thought of me,*

*Spring a huge well in thee;*

*Lest thy uncaring soul,*

*Shrink into the horrid hole.*

"Sing it again. This wait will be less boring," said the princess as she lie in the boat with her eyes shut.

Yet, he had no other song to sing.

Sparkling water was filling the lake, making it beautiful again. The cold water flowed over his legs and hips; but he did not resist. Three hours passed, with water creeping up the body of the prince. Three hours felt a million years to him, but the princess slept.

"Princess!" shouted the brave prince, as her little boat bumped against his shoulder.

"What?" said she, rubbing her eyes and chuckling. "I'm so sleepy."



“Sleep then, darling,” said the brave prince. “But first, please give me some wine.”

She got the wine, and leaning over the side of the boat, she was forced to look at him. She giggled and asked, “Why are you doing this?”

“I love you,” answered the prince, faintly.

She pressed the wineglass to his lips. After one swallow, he managed to kiss her fingertips.

Gush after gush, the waters were rising up the prince’s body. They were up to his chest now.

“I wish we could swim,” said the princess. “There’s enough water now.”

“I will never swim again,” said the prince.

“Oh, I forgot,” said the princess, shamefully giggling by an awkward reflex.

The water kept rising, as the moon shone full on the face of the dying prince. Now the waves reached his neck, and the haunting sound of a witch squealing echoed across the lake.

“Please kiss me, dear,” he said, “I feel so weak.”

“Yes,” she murmured, and kindly kissed his cheek.

“Thanks,” the hero whispered, contently. It was the last thing he said.

The princess gazed at him, with her mouth open. Something strange was happening to her. She found it hard to swallow, and her eyes were itchy.

The water rose, touching his chin, then his lower lip. Oh, no, she thought, it’s really happening: he’s going to die . . . for me.

She shook violently, trembling under the mysterious, crushing weight of sympathy. Compassion had arrived at last.

The prince inhaled deeply through his nostrils one last time before the water submerged his head. He held his breath for one minute, for two minutes, for three minutes . . . then the last blessed breath bubbled up, his lifeless body senselessly moving to the rhythm of the waves.

The princess was in a swift panic. Shrieking, she suddenly placed her foot in the water to regain gravity, untied the silk cords, and plunged into the lake toward her brave hero. After taking a deep breath and submerging, she kept yanking on his legs, but she could not move either. Frantic now, she tried to hold his head above the water, but it was futile. She was exhausted, and the water was too deep. Then love rejuvenated her.

She went under again, and pulled with all her might, until at last she got one leg out, then the other. She somehow managed to get him into the boat. His dead weight was acting as a substitute for her lack of gravity, keeping her from gliding away.

What could she do now? She screamed violently, with mingling rage and fear in her voice. It was loud enough to be heard in another kingdom.

The curious courtiers, who had been waiting on the bank to see the show, rushed to the girl and her hero prince. After carrying them to the palace, they gently secured her to the bed, and they dropped him on the hard floor.

“Look, princess, the lake is rising,” said the maidservant with joy.

“Now aren’t you observant,” the princess blurted bitterly. “I need some help here.”

Hurt by the remark, the maidservant marched back to her room, followed by other attendants. The king and the queen were already asleep. However, the old nurse stayed to help the princess with the limp, lifeless body of the prince.

Though devastated with fear and grief, the princess begged the heavens for another chance. Furthermore, she pleaded with

her beloved nurse to keep trying. The old woman repeatedly tried to revive the motionless prince, but without success.

“My prince is dead,” whispered the princess, without crying, but this time without laughing.

“I’m sorry,” wept the nurse.

Finally, when all hope was gone . . . the sun rose, and the prince opened his eyes.

## CHAPTER 9: THE RISING WATER

**W**hen the prince smiled, the princess burst into tears. For the first time, she was crying. For an hour, her sobbing never quit, a lifetime of tears were flowing down her cheeks.

Furthermore, rain fell outside in record amounts. Strangely, the sun never quit shining, as huge drops splashed on the earth; and the palace sparkled in the heart of a wonderful rainbow. Rivers of water poured from the mountains, rushing and gushing from all directions toward the resuscitated shoreline.

As a result, the lake was full.

Still, the princess never noticed the lake; she was too busy weeping. Furthermore, this water of tears inside the palace was far more glorious than the water outside.

When the crying abated, the princess wanted to see the lake. “Please help me over to the balcony,” she asked the nurse.

The nurse untied her, and, surprisingly, the princess actually had to struggle to rise, before quickly tumbling to the floor. The old nurse yelled with delight, “Princess! You’ve got gravity!”

“Oh, gravity?” said the princess, rubbing her sore knee. “It’s beastly.”

“No! I’ll show you *gravity*,” said the prince, picking her up, tossing her in the air like a baby, and kissing her as she fell back into his arms.

“Then I like gravity a lot,” said the princess, smiling, full of joy, instead of superfluous laughter.

She gave him one kiss for his thousand kisses. Yet, senseless with passion, the silly prince thought he was overpaid.

“How’s the lake?” asked the prince.

“Full,” answered the nurse.

“Wonderful,” exclaimed the prince and princess in unison, sobbing with pleasure.

In time, the princess learned to walk, but she enjoyed swimming better than walking. Each day her prince took her for a swim. Though she could now jump into the lake without his help, she preferred the prince to embrace her, and plunge in with her.

One day, when the princess was alone, she strolled to her balcony, and stood in the open air, without laughing, and without being tethered. It felt good. Furthermore, she raised both arms in the air, turned her face toward the warm sun, and whispered with reverence, “I love the sky.”

The lake was indeed full. In time, it wore through the roof of the cavern. This undermined the witch’s house, causing it to fall in the night, burying her in the grisly ruins.

No one bothered to dig up her body.

Seeing the sparkling lake, the dumpy king and his queen, ecstatic for any reason to celebrate, decreed a yearlong festival. They gorged themselves daily in decadent feasts.

Even the beggars forgot their troubles, and danced. In addition, the jester remembered how to tell a joke. He amused the peasants until tears of joy flowed like the rivers.

The lake never sank again. The prince and princess were married, and lived happily. They had crowns of gold and silver. They had garments of silk and lace. Above all, they had children of boys and girls.

They had many boys and girls. And not one ever lost an ounce of gravity.

