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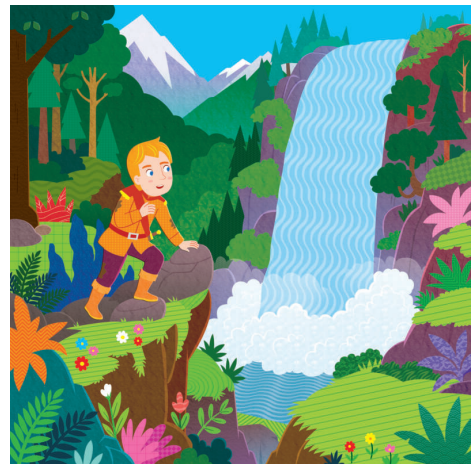
READ ANYWHERE, ANYTIME

The Queen of Lanternland

Henry Beston

Once upon a time, there was a young prince who was eager to see more of the world. He climbed onto his horse and set off on his journey. During his travels, the prince visited several villages and slept in small inns until he came to a mountainous area. Here, he stopped to eat some bread. While the prince was eating his meal by the side of the road, he heard a mysterious tinkling sound. "There must be a waterfall nearby," said the prince to himself, and decided to go and look for it.

He looked back at his horse, which was happily sniffing around, and then climbed up the mountain in the direction of the sound. The prince was so fascinated by the sound that he did not realize that he had been walking for hours. Suddenly, he realized that he was hopelessly lost. It took several days for the prince to find the waterfall. It was a gigantic waterfall and the noise of the falling water was deafening.



The prince was very tired and hungry, and so it happened that he fell into the water and was carried away by the current to a strange place. He had been briefly unconscious. When he woke up, he was lying on a narrow beach. There was a boat with a lantern attached to the bow. The prince stepped into the boat and sailed into a large cave in the direction of the current.

The prince did not know if it was day or night, but he knew for sure that he had ended up in the underworld. The boat entered the port of Lanternland. Lanterns provided the necessary light, as it was dark day and night. The prince soon collapsed from exhaustion on the floor of his boat. When he woke up, he was lying in a large four-poster bed in the room of the royal palace. He was given food and drink and soon felt much better.



The Queen of Lanternland was a very beautiful young woman. "You are the first

stranger to come to Lanternland in a thousand years," said the young queen. The prince told her that he was the son of a king and described his adventures in the mountains. This made the queen very happy, because she had fallen in love with the prince at first sight. One day, the prince looked at the queen and saw that she was crying.

"Why are you crying?" asked the prince. "I am crying because we must soon say goodbye to each other," said the queen. "I have to marry the wizard Dragondel." "Who is Dragondel?" asked the prince.

The queen replied, "He is the most powerful wizard in the entire underworld. We met at a party at the king of the kobolds. Dragondel pursued me with compliments. A few days later, an iron boat arrived in the port of Lanternland, with a blue dog on board. It dropped a jewel-encrusted box at my feet. It contained Dragondel's request to marry me. If I refused, he would unleash a legion of ghosts and spirits in Lanternland. That is why I accepted the request and promised to marry him. Soon Dragondel will come to take me and take me to his terrible castle on an island in the dark ocean. Dragondel has enchanted the waves so that a terrible whirlpool forms on the sea when a boat approaches the enchanted castle."

And the queen continued. "You cannot save me. Tomorrow the blue dog will come to remind me of my obligation. A few palace servants will accompany him to prepare Dragondel's castle for my arrival."

The next day, the iron boat with the blue dog arrived. Some servants were taken on board. The prince had disguised himself as a kitchen boy and went along. In the castle, the prince took his place in the kitchen and looked for ways to prevent the wedding. An unfortunate fishing boat approached Dragondel's castle and was swallowed by a cruel, all-devouring whirlpool. The prince shuddered.

The chef looked at him and said, "Yes, that would have been your fate too if the dog of our master had not carried the talisman that controls the whirlpool." "Talisman? What talisman?" asked the prince. "That golden little hand, you fool," said the chef. "A golden little hand? It must be magically big!" thought the prince out loud. "It's not really," growled the cook. "It's as big as a baby's hand. I've seen it often. The master carries it in his pocket and puts it under his pillow when he sleeps."



The prince knew what to do. He waited until Dragondel was asleep and crept into his room. However, the room was guarded by two panthers. The prince went outside to see if he could climb along the outer wall, but it was impossible to get there. While he was outside, he saw a black cat running back and forth. She was trying to save a kitten that had fallen between the rocks. At great risk of falling to his own death between the rocks, he saved the kitten and gave it to its worried mother.

"Thank you," said the old cat, "how can I repay you?" The prince told his story and the cat said, "Those panthers will let me through. If you make a golden little hand from your pastries, I'll swap it for the real talisman." And that's exactly what happened.



Then came the day when Dragondel, with the blue dog and all the friends of the evil wizard, would sail to Lanternland to pick up the queen for the wedding. On top of a cliff, the prince saw how a huge whirlpool swallowed the ship with great spinning force and dragged it to the bottom of the sea.

The prince found another boat and took the talisman, the servants, and the black cat with her kittens on board to sail back to Lanternland. He married the queen, and they lived happily ever after.



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