

The Snow Queen

by Hans Christian Andersen

Fourth Story

The Prince and Princess

Gerda was obliged to rest herself again, when, exactly opposite to her, a large Raven came hopping over the white snow. He had long been looking at Gerda and shaking his head; and now he said, “Caw! Caw!” Good day! Good day! He could not say it better; but he felt a sympathy for the little girl, and asked her where she was going all alone. The word “alone” Gerda understood quite well, and felt how much was expressed by it; so she told the Raven her whole history, and asked if he had not seen Kay.

The Raven nodded very gravely, and said, “It may be—it may be!”

“What, do you really think so?” cried the little girl; and she nearly squeezed the Raven to death, so much did she kiss him.

“Gently, gently,” said the Raven. “I think I know; I think that it may be little Kay. But now he has forgotten you for the Princess.”

“Does he live with a Princess?” asked Gerda.

“Yes—listen,” said the Raven; “but it will be difficult for me to speak your language. If you understand the Raven language I can tell you better.”

“No, I have not learnt it,” said Gerda; “but my grandmother understands it, and she can speak gibberish too. I wish I had learnt it.”

“No matter,” said the Raven; “I will tell you as well as I can; however, it will be bad enough.” And then he told all he knew.

“In the kingdom where we now are there lives a Princess, who is extraordinarily clever; for she has read all the newspapers in the whole world, and has forgotten them again—so clever is she. She was lately, it is said, sitting on her throne—which is not very amusing after all—when she began humming an old tune, and it was just, ‘Oh, why should I not be married?’ ‘That song is not without its meaning,’ said she, and so then she was determined to marry; but she would have a husband who knew how to give an answer when he was spoken to—not one who looked only as if he were a great personage, for that is so tiresome. She then had all the ladies of the court drummed together; and when they heard her intention, all were very pleased, and said, ‘We are very glad to hear it; it is the very thing we were thinking of.’ You may believe every word I say,” said the Raven; “for I have a tame sweetheart that hops about in the palace quite free, and it was she who told me all this.

“The newspapers appeared forthwith with a border of hearts and the initials of the Princess; and therein you might read that every good-looking young man was at liberty to come to the palace and speak to the Princess; and he who spoke in such wise as showed he felt himself at home there, that one the Princess would choose for her husband.

“Yes, Yes,” said the Raven, “you may believe it; it is as true as I am sitting here. People came in crowds; there was a crush and a hurry, but no one was successful either on the first or second day. They could all talk well enough when they were out in the street; but as soon as they came inside the palace gates, and saw the guard richly dressed in silver, and the lackeys in gold on the staircase, and the large illuminated saloons, then they were abashed; and when they stood before the throne on which the Princess was sitting, all they could do was to repeat the last word they had uttered, and to hear it again did not interest her very much. It was just as if the people within were under a charm, and had fallen into a trance till they came out again into the street; for then—oh, then—they could chatter enough. There was a whole row of them standing from the town-gates to the palace. I was there myself to look,” said the Raven. “They grew hungry and thirsty; but from the palace they got nothing whatever, not even a glass of water. Some of the cleverest, it is true, had taken bread and butter with them: but none shared it with his neighbor, for each thought, 'Let him look hungry, and then the Princess won't have him.'”

“But Kay—little Kay,” said Gerda, “when did he come? Was he among the number?”

“Patience, patience; we are just come to him. It was on the third day when a little personage without horse or equipage, came marching right boldly up to the palace; his eyes shone like yours, he had beautiful long hair, but his clothes were very shabby.”

“That was Kay,” cried Gerda, with a voice of delight. “Oh, now I've found him!” and she clapped her hands for joy.

“He had a little knapsack at his back,” said the Raven.

“No, that was certainly his sledge,” said Gerda; “for when he went away he took his sledge with him.”

“That may be,” said the Raven; “I did not examine him so minutely; but I know from my tame sweetheart, that when he came into the court-yard of the palace, and saw the body-guard in silver, the lackeys on the staircase, he was not the least abashed; he nodded, and said to them, 'It must be very tiresome to stand on the stairs; for my part, I shall go in.' The saloons were gleaming with lustres—privy councillors and excellencies were walking about barefooted, and wore gold keys; it was enough to make any one feel uncomfortable. His boots creaked, too, so loudly, but still he was not at all afraid.”

“That's Kay for certain,” said Gerda. “I know he had on new boots; I have heard them creaking in grandmama's room.”

“Yes, they creaked,” said the Raven. “And on he went boldly up to the Princess, who was sitting on a pearl as large as a spinning-wheel. All the ladies of the court, with their attendants and attendants' attendants, and all the cavaliers, with their gentlemen and gentlemen's gentlemen, stood round; and the nearer they stood to the door, the prouder they looked. It was hardly possible to look at the gentleman's gentleman, so very haughtily did he stand in the doorway.”

“It must have been terrible,” said little Gerda. “And did Kay get the Princess?”

“Were I not a Raven, I should have taken the Princess myself, although I am promised. It is said he spoke as well as I speak when I talk Raven language; this I learned from my tame sweetheart. He was bold and nicely behaved; he had not come to woo the Princess, but only to hear her wisdom. She pleased him, and he pleased her.”

“Yes, yes; for certain that was Kay,” said Gerda. “He was so clever; he could reckon fractions in his head. Oh, won't you take me to the palace?”

“That is very easily said,” answered the Raven. “But how are we to manage it? I'll speak to my tame sweetheart about it: she must advise us; for so much I must tell you, such a little girl as you are will never get permission to enter.”

“Oh, yes I shall,” said Gerda; “when Kay hears that I am here, he will come out directly to fetch me.”

“Wait for me here on these steps,” said the Raven. He moved his head backwards and forwards and flew away.

The evening was closing in when the Raven returned. “Caw—caw!” said he. “She sends you her compliments; and here is a roll for you. She took it out of the kitchen, where there is bread enough. You are hungry, no doubt. It is not possible for you to enter the palace, for you are barefooted: the guards in silver, and the lackeys in gold, would not allow it; but do not cry, you shall come in still. My sweetheart knows a little back stair that leads to the bedchamber, and she knows where she can get the key of it.”

And they went into the garden in the large avenue, where one leaf was falling after the other; and when the lights in the palace had all gradually disappeared, the Raven led little Gerda to the back door, which stood half open.

Oh, how Gerda's heart beat with anxiety and longing! It was just as if she had been about to do something wrong; and yet she only wanted to know if little Kay was there. Yes, he must be there. She called to mind his intelligent eyes, and his long hair, so vividly, she could quite see him as he used to laugh when they were sitting under the roses at home. “He will, no doubt, be glad to see you—to hear what a long way you have come for his sake; to know how unhappy all at home were when he did not come back.”

Oh, what a fright and a joy it was!

They were now on the stairs. A single lamp was burning there; and on the floor stood the tame Raven, turning her head on every side and looking at Gerda, who bowed as her grandmother had taught her to do.

“My intended has told me so much good of you, my dear young lady,” said the tame Raven. “Your tale is very affecting. If you will take the lamp, I will go before. We will go straight on, for we shall meet no one.”

“I think there is somebody just behind us,” said Gerda; and something rushed past: it was like shadowy figures on the wall; horses with flowing manes and thin legs, huntsmen, ladies and gentlemen on horseback.

“They are only dreams,” said the Raven. “They come to fetch the thoughts of the high personages to the chase; 'tis well, for now you can observe them in bed all the better. But let me find, when you enjoy honor and distinction, that you possess a grateful heart.”

“Tut! That's not worth talking about,” said the Raven of the woods.

They now entered the first saloon, which was of rose-colored satin, with artificial flowers on the wall. Here the dreams were rushing past, but they hastened by so quickly that Gerda could not see the high personages. One hall was more magnificent than the other; one might indeed well be abashed; and at last they came into the bedchamber. The ceiling of the room resembled a large palm-tree with leaves of glass, of costly glass; and in the middle, from a thick golden stem, hung two beds, each of which resembled a lily. One was white, and in this lay the Princess; the other was red, and it was here that Gerda was to look for little Kay. She bent back one of the red leaves, and saw a brown neck. Oh! that was Kay! She called him quite loud by name, held the lamp towards him—the dreams rushed back again into the chamber—he awoke, turned his head, and—it was not little Kay!

The Prince was only like him about the neck; but he was young and handsome. And out of the white lily leaves the Princess peeped, too, and asked what was the matter. Then little Gerda cried, and told her her whole history, and all that the Ravens had done for her.

“Poor little thing!” said the Prince and the Princess. They praised the Ravens very much, and told them they were not at all angry with them, but they were not to do so again. However, they should have a reward. “Will you fly about here at liberty,” asked the Princess; “or would you like to have a fixed appointment as court ravens, with all the broken bits from the kitchen?”

And both the Ravens nodded, and begged for a fixed appointment; for they thought of their old age, and said, “It is a good thing to have a provision for our old days.”

And the Prince got up and let Gerda sleep in his bed, and more than this he could not do. She folded her little hands and thought, “How good men and animals are!” and she then fell asleep and slept soundly. All the dreams flew in again, and they now looked like the angels; they drew a little sledge, in which little Kay sat and nodded his head; but the whole was only a dream, and therefore it all vanished as soon as she awoke.

The next day she was dressed from head to foot in silk and velvet. They offered to let her stay at the palace, and lead a happy life; but she begged to have a little carriage with a horse in front, and for a small pair of shoes; then, she said, she would again go forth in the wide world and look for Kay.

Shoes and a muff were given her; she was, too, dressed very nicely; and when she was about to set off, a new carriage stopped before the door. It was of pure gold, and the arms of the Prince and Princess shone like a star upon it; the coachman, the footmen, and the outriders, for outriders were there, too, all wore golden crowns. The Prince and the Princess assisted her into the carriage themselves, and wished her all success. The Raven of the woods, who was now married, accompanied her for the first three miles. He sat beside Gerda, for he could not bear riding backwards; the other Raven stood in the doorway, and flapped her wings; she could not accompany Gerda, because she suffered from headache since she had had a fixed appointment and ate so much. The carriage was lined inside with sugar-plums, and in the seats were fruits and gingerbread.

“Farewell! Farewell!” cried Prince and Princess; and Gerda wept, and the Raven wept. Thus passed the first miles; and then the Raven bade her farewell, and this was the most painful separation of all. He flew into a tree, and beat his black wings as long as he could see the carriage, that shone from afar like a sunbeam.

Source:

Andersen, Hans Christian. "The Snow Queen." *Andersen's Fairy Tales*. Electronic.