

PRINCESS BEATRICE

THE WIND RETURNS



THE TARFANTIA CHRONICLES

BOOK ONE

Copyright Page

Princess Beatrice: The Wind Returns

Copyright © 2026 by Brian BJ Hsll OneKindScience.com

All rights reserved.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means, including photocopying, recording, or other electronic or mechanical methods, without the prior written permission of the author, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical reviews and certain other noncommercial uses permitted by copyright law.

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are either the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, events, or locales is entirely coincidental.

First Edition

Printed in Orlando, FL - USA

Princess Beatrice: The Wind Returns

(Story Four)

Character List

Princess Beatrice of Nooaje

Princess of the floating city. She answered the sky-roads when they called. Now the harder question remains: what she will do when the wind finally allows her to choose.

Zephyrus

Winged lion of storm and gold. He has carried her through danger and silence. He knows the difference between leaving and returning.

Prince Willip of Tarfantia

Ruler of the emerald valley. He kept the gates open. He kept the vigil. He is about to learn what a kept promise looks like when it lands.

Cassian

Eldest advisor. He has prepared the east wing more than once. This time he allows himself a small, private hope.

Chapter 1

The Sky-Roads

The trouble in the lower sky-roads was worse than the wardens had admitted.

Beatrice and Zephyrus found the first broken isle three days after leaving Tarfantia — a small floating garden that had once held a single watchtower and a grove of wind-bell trees. Now it hung listing and dark, its wards shattered, its trees blackened as if by a frost that burned. No bodies. Only the lingering taste of something cold and hungry in the air.

They followed the damage higher.

What they found was not an army. It was a hunger given shape — ragged, wingless things that moved through cloud like ink through water, drawn to the magic that kept the floating isles aloft. They did not kill for territory. They unmade. Where they passed, the sky itself felt thinner.

Beatrice fought the way she had always fought: fast, precise, unwilling to waste power on spectacle. Zephyrus became storm and claw and fury. Together they drove the things back from

two more isles and sealed the worst of the breaches with light drawn hard from her staff. It cost them. By the fifth day Beatrice's hands shook when she lowered the staff. Zephyrus's wings carried a new limp in the left primary feathers.

On the sixth night, after the last of the larger breaches had been closed and the remaining wardens had enough strength to hold the line, Beatrice sat on the edge of a repaired isle and looked down through broken cloud.

Far below, unseen, lay the green valley of Tarfantia.

She touched the small folded parchment still in her pouch — the lyrics, and the single line on the back.

Some gates, once opened, remember the shape of the one who walked through them.

"We are not finished," she told Zephyrus. "But we have done what we came to do."

Zephyrus rumbled, low and tired.

Beatrice stood. The wind at this height was thin and sharp. It smelled of cold stone and distant rain.

"Time to keep a promise," she said.

Chapter 2

The Vigil

In Tarfantia the days had not been idle.

Willip strengthened the northern watch. He finished the signal towers. He rode the border until the captains stopped looking surprised to see him. At night he walked the east garden less often; the lute remained on its peg. Cassian noted the change and said nothing.

On the twelfth day after Beatrice's departure, a courier from the high ridges reported unusual lights in the northern sky — not auroras. Willip only nodded and ordered the night watch doubled.

On the eighteenth day Cassian found him in the high library before dawn, maps of the valley spread across the table though he was no longer seeing them.

"You believe she will come," Cassian said. It was not quite a question.

"She said she would return to tell me what she found," Willip answered. "She does not make promises lightly. That is enough."

Cassian studied the prince's face in the grey light. "And if what she found means she cannot stay?"

Willip closed the nearest map with care. "Then I will listen. And the gates will remain open anyway."

He did not say the rest: that waiting had become a kind of faith, and faith, once chosen, was not easily set down.

Chapter 3

The Shape in the Clouds

They saw her at dusk on the twenty-first day.

A golden glint above the northern ridges. Then the clear, unmistakable silhouette of a winged lion against the last rose light. The signal towers lit one after another as the watchers recognized what they were seeing. By the time Zephyrus began his descent toward the capital, the outer roads had begun to fill with people who simply wanted to witness the landing.

Willip did not wait for a formal reception.

He rode out through the main gates with only Cassian and two guards, cloak snapping in the evening wind. They met Beatrice in the open fields west of the city wall, where the grass was long and the light was soft.

Zephyrus touched earth with a heavy, careful grace. Beatrice slid down. She looked thinner. There was a new sparseness to her face, and a thin cut along one cheekbone that had already closed to a pale line. Her traveling clothes were stained with something that was not ordinary dirt. But her eyes, when they found Willip's, were clear.

For a moment neither of them moved.

Then Willip dismounted and walked the last distance on foot. He stopped an arm's length away.

"You came," he said. The words were simple. They carried everything.

"I said I would." Beatrice's voice was rough from cold air and long silence. "The sky-roads are holding. For now. The things that hunted them have been driven back. The wardens can manage what remains."

She glanced once at the growing crowd of distant watchers, then back to him.

"I kept the other part of the promise as well. I came to tell you what I found."

Willip nodded. "Then tell me. But not here." He looked at Zephyrus, at the fatigue in the great lion's stance. "Come inside the walls. Rest first. The telling can wait until morning if you need it."

Beatrice hesitated — the old instinct to deliver her news and leave before roots could form. Then she looked at the open gates behind him, still standing wide as he had promised, and the resistance in her eased.

“Morning,” she agreed. “But I will tell you tonight. Some things should not wait for daylight.”

Chapter 4

What She Found

They spoke on the east terrace after the palace had grown quiet.

Cassian had seen to food, hot water, and a quiet dismissal of anyone who might linger. Zephyrus slept heavily in the courtyard below, wings folded tight, one ear still tracking the sound of Beatrice’s voice.

She told Willip everything: the broken isles, the hunger that moved through cloud, the way the sky itself had felt thinner where the things had fed. She told him how close two of the smaller settlements had come to falling. She told him what it had cost.

When she finished, Willip was silent for a long time.

“Will they return?” he asked at last.

“Yes. Not soon, if the wards hold. But the sky-roads have never been truly safe. That is why riders like me exist.” She looked down at her hands. “I am needed there. That has not changed.”

“I know.”

“And I am needed... differently... here.” The admission cost her. She made it anyway. “That is new.”

Willip leaned forward, elbows on his knees, eyes on the dark valley.

“I will not ask you to choose one need over the other tonight,” he said. “I only need to know if there is still room in your road for this place. For these gates. For the man who keeps them open.”

Beatrice was quiet so long that the wind between them began to feel like a third presence.

“When I was fighting in the high cold,” she said finally, “I thought of the song. Not the grand parts. The uneven parts. The way you laughed at yourself when the strings went wrong. I thought of the ridge where we stood and said true things. I thought of the fact that you never once tried to make the choice simple for me.” She turned to face him fully. “That is not something I have been given before. I do not know yet how to shape a life around two skies. But I know I no longer want a life that has only one.”

Willip's breath left him slowly. He reached across the small space between their chairs and rested his hand on the stone, palm up — an offer, not a claim.

Beatrice looked at it. Then she placed her hand in his.

Their fingers closed.

It was not a vow. It was not a solution. It was only the truth of the moment, held carefully between them while the night wind moved over the open valley and the open gates.

Chapter 5

The Days That Followed

She did not leave in the morning.

She stayed to recover. She stayed to help the northern captains understand the new signal patterns she had devised in the sky-roads. She stayed because Zephyrus needed longer rest than pride wanted to admit. She stayed because Willip never once made her staying feel like a victory he had won.

They fell into a different rhythm than before.

Less careful. More honest. They argued once, sharply, about the risk of Tarfantia becoming a target if her presence drew the attention of whatever still moved in the high cold. They reconciled without ceremony, the disagreement simply folded into the larger understanding that nothing about this would be simple.

One evening Cassian watched them from a high window as they walked the orchard path with Zephyrus pacing behind like a patient shadow. The advisor allowed himself the smallest smile and went to update the stores in the east wing. Some preparations, he had decided, were worth making permanent.

Chapter 6

What the Open Gate Becomes

On the night before Beatrice was due to fly north again — not in flight from something, but to check the repaired wards and return — she and Willip stood once more in the great gateway.

The same stones. The same wind. Different people standing inside them.

"I will be gone seven days," she said. "Ten at most. Then I will land here again. After that we will decide the next stretch of road together."

Willip nodded. "I will be here."

“I know.”

She stepped in close, closer than she had ever allowed herself in daylight, and rested her forehead against his the way she had on the morning she left for the sky-roads. This time neither of them pulled away quickly.

“Thank you,” she said against his skin, “for never closing the gate. And for never trying to lock it behind me.”

“Thank you,” he answered, “for walking back through it.”

Zephyrus gave a low, impatient rumble. The sky was waiting. Duty was waiting. The future — complicated, unwritten, and finally shared — was waiting too.

Beatrice mounted. The winged lion gathered himself, muscles coiling under storm-colored fur.

She looked down at Willip one last time, the morning light catching in her hair and the staff across her saddle.

“Keep the song uneven,” she said.

Willip’s smile was small and real. “Always.”

Zephyrus leapt.

This time, when the sky took them, the man who remained in the gateway did not look as if he were watching something end.

He looked as if he were watching something begin its next careful, hard-won chapter.

And the gates of Tarfantia, true to their promise, stayed open behind her.

End of Princess Beatrice: The Wind Returns