

PRINCESS BEATRICE

THE OPEN GATE



A KINGDOM BEYOND. A DESTINY WITHIN.

A STORY OF COURAGE, MAGIC, AND THE HEART.

Copyright Page

Princess Beatrice: The Open Gate

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****Princess Beatrice: The Open Gate****

(Story Two)

Character List

****Princess Beatrice of Nooaje****

Princess of the floating city. Rider of Zephyrus. Bearer of the sky-staff. She answers darkness wherever she finds it, yet each return to Tarfantia makes leaving harder.

****Zephyrus****

Winged lion of storm-colored mane and ancient eyes. Beatrice's truest companion and the only witness to the weight she carries.

****Prince Willip of Tarfantia****

Ruler of the emerald valley. He keeps his gates open and his heart carefully guarded — except where one particular sky-girl is concerned.

****Cassian****

Eldest advisor to the prince. Loyal, perceptive, and increasingly certain that his prince's waiting is not in vain.

Chapter 1

The Letter That Was Never Sent

Beatrice did not mean to return so soon.

She told herself the northern border of Tarfantia needed watching. She told herself the rumors of armed riders moving under no banner were reason enough. She told Zephyrus it was only duty.

Zephyrus, flying through cold moonlight with her on his back, rumbled low in his chest — the sound that meant he knew better.

Below them the valley slept. Rivers glinted like silver thread. The palace of Tarfantia rose pale against the dark hills, its windows mostly dark. Beatrice's hands tightened on the staff.

She had left him standing in a muddy field three weeks earlier, his words still burning in her chest:

Wherever you go... know that Tarfantia's gates — and mine — are always open to you. Not as a princess. Not as a legend. Only as yourself.

She had not answered. She had only flown.

Tonight the wind carried a different weight. Something was wrong in the northern woods. She could feel it the way she felt approaching storms — a pressure behind the eyes, a restlessness in the staff.

Zephyrus banked without being told. They began their descent.

Chapter 2

The Prince Who Could Not Sleep

Willip had not slept properly in nineteen nights.

He told Cassian it was the border reports. He told the night guard it was the coming harvest. He told himself it was nothing more than a ruler's ordinary vigilance.

He was lying to all three.

Every evening he walked the east garden with the old lute in his hands, though he no longer tried to play. He only sat beneath the open sky and watched the northern horizon, waiting for a shape that might never come.

Cassian found him there again just after midnight.

"You will wear yourself thin," the advisor said quietly.

"I am fine."

"You are waiting."

Willip did not deny it. "The northern scouts reported movement two days ago. Riders without colors. They may be nothing."

"Or they may be the reason a certain winged shadow has been seen crossing the high ridges after dusk."

Willip's head turned sharply.

Cassian's expression was carefully neutral. "The border villages are already whispering. They say the Sky Girl has returned."

Something in Willip's chest pulled tight. He stood.

"Saddle two horses. Quietly. We ride north before dawn."

Chapter 3

Fire in the Pines

The attack came at the edge of the Blackridge woods, just as the first grey light touched the treetops.

A cluster of freehold farms had been hit in the night — not by ordinary bandits, but by disciplined men who burned storehouses and took captives with grim efficiency. By the time Beatrice reached the clearing, smoke still rose in pale columns and the survivors were dragging the wounded into the largest remaining barn.

She landed Zephyrus in the open field beyond the treeline and was already moving when the first of the raiders tried to flee with a wagon of bound villagers.

They did not get far.

Wind snapped the wagon's harness poles like kindling. Beatrice's staff flared with cold light. Zephyrus's roar shook needles from the pines. The fight was short and brutal. When it ended, twelve raiders lay bound or unconscious and the captives were free.

Beatrice stood breathing hard in the settling dust, storm-grey eyes scanning the treeline for further threat — and found Prince Willip instead.

He rode out of the smoke on a dark horse, cloak thrown back, sword already drawn. Two palace guards followed at a distance. He looked first at the bound raiders, then at the freed villagers, and finally at her.

For a long moment neither of them spoke.

Then Willip dismounted, sheathed his sword, and walked toward her through the ash-dusted grass.

"You came," he said simply.

Beatrice lowered the staff. "The wind carried word of riders without colors. I followed."

“And found the fight already underway.” His gaze moved over her — the soot on her sleeve, the tight set of her mouth, the way Zephyrus still stood braced and ready behind her. “Are you hurt?”

“No.”

“Good.” He exhaled, something tight leaving his shoulders. “Then help me finish this.”

They worked side by side through the morning.

Willip organized the survivors, sent riders for healers, and questioned the captives with a calm severity that left little room for lies. Beatrice moved among the wounded, using the gentler face of her magic — cool wind to clear smoke from lungs, soft light to slow bleeding, quiet words to steady the terrified. Zephyrus paced the perimeter like a living storm cloud, allowing no one to approach unseen.

By midday the worst was contained. The remaining raiders had been marched toward the capital under heavy guard. The freeholders who still had homes began the long work of salvage.

Willip found Beatrice at the edge of the field, cleaning soot from her staff with a strip of cloth.

“They were not ordinary brigands,” he said. “They carried coin from across the southern border and orders to take able-bodied workers. Someone is testing how far they can reach into Tarfantia.”

Beatrice looked toward the smoke-stained trees. “Then they will try again.”

“Yes.” Willip’s voice was quiet. “Which is why I am asking you — not as a prince commanding, but as a man who has seen you fight — to ride back with me. Stay a few days. Help me strengthen the northern watch. The people already trust the Sky Girl more than they trust half my captains.”

She was silent for a long time.

Zephyrus watched them both, golden eyes unreadable.

At last Beatrice said, “A few days.”

Willip did not smile, but something in his face eased. “A few days,” he agreed. “The gates are open.”

Chapter 4

Inside the Walls

It was the first time Beatrice had entered the palace of Tarfantia as anything other than a shadow.

Willip did not parade her through the main gates. He brought her in through the old orchard postern as the afternoon light turned gold, Zephyrus padding silently behind them like a myth given form. Servants stared and then remembered their manners. Cassian met them in the inner courtyard, took one look at Beatrice's staff and the winged lion, and simply bowed.

"My lady," he said. "The east wing has been prepared. The rooms overlook the high gardens. I thought you might prefer sky."

Beatrice inclined her head. "Thank you."

Willip walked her there himself. He did not offer his arm. He simply matched her pace and spoke of practical things: the northern road, the need for signal beacons, the villages that still felt too exposed. Only when they reached the door of the east suite did his voice change.

"You are not a guest under obligation," he said. "You are free to leave the moment you decide the work is done. Or the moment the sky calls you. I will not hold you with gratitude or with need."

Beatrice looked at him fully then. The soft afternoon light caught the sea-after-storm color of his eyes.

"I know," she said. "That is why I came inside the walls at all."

Something unspoken passed between them — fragile, dangerous, and already too strong to ignore.

She stepped into the room. Zephyrus followed. The door closed quietly behind her.

Willip stood in the corridor a moment longer, one hand resting against the stone, before he turned and walked away.

Chapter 5

The Dinner That Was Not a Court Function

That night Willip did not call a formal banquet.

He had a small table set on the open terrace of the east wing, where the wind could still reach them and the first stars were visible above the valley. Only Cassian and two trusted guards remained within earshot. The rest of the palace was told the prince was reviewing border maps and was not to be disturbed.

Beatrice wore the cleaner of her traveling gowns. She had washed the soot from her hair and braided it simply. The staff rested against her chair. Zephyrus lay at the edge of the terrace like a living statue, eyes half-lidded, listening to everything.

They spoke first of strategy.

Then of the freeholders they had helped that morning.

Then, somehow, of smaller things: the way the rivers of Tarfantia sang differently at dusk than the high winds of Nooaje; the first time Willip had tried (and failed) to play the old lute; the nights Beatrice sat at the rim of the floating gardens and asked Zephyrus questions that had no answers.

At one point Willip refilled her cup and said, almost casually, "When I was a boy I used to climb the highest tower and watch for lights in the northern sky. My tutors told me they were only auroras. I preferred to believe they were something else."

Beatrice's mouth curved, small and real. "Sometimes they were only auroras. Sometimes they were me."

The silence that followed was not empty.

Later, when the candles had burned low and Cassian had discreetly vanished, Willip walked her to the door of her rooms.

He did not try to touch her.

He only said, "Sleep if you can. Tomorrow we ride the northern line together. I would rather face whatever is coming with you beside me than with a hundred captains who have never seen you fight."

Beatrice rested her hand on the doorframe. "You are very free with your trust."

"No," Willip answered. "I am very careful with it. That is why it means something when I give it."

He left her there with the night wind and the quiet breathing of a winged lion.

Chapter 6

The Line They Rode Together

They spent the next three days along the northern border.

Beatrice and Willip rode side by side through pine forest and open ridge, Zephyrus often pacing them from the air or the deeper shadows. They spoke with village headmen, inspected half-finished watchtowers, and listened to every rumor of colored riders and missing livestock. At night they camped with a small troop of trusted guards. Willip took first watch more often than not. Beatrice sat with him in the dark more often than she meant to.

On the second night, while the fire burned low, she asked the question she had been carrying since the warehouse.

“Why do you do it this way?” she said. “Most rulers would have sent an army and stayed behind stone walls. You keep placing yourself where the danger is.”

Willip was quiet for a long time. When he finally spoke, his voice was low.

“Because the day I stop placing myself where the danger is, I will have become the kind of king my father feared I might become. And because...” He glanced at her across the firelight. “Because the people who ride into danger for Tarfantia should not have to do it alone. That includes you.”

Beatrice looked into the flames. “I was not born to stay in one kingdom.”

“I know.”

“My duty is larger than any single set of borders.”

“I know that too.”

“Then why—”

“Because knowing a thing does not stop the heart from wanting otherwise,” Willip said simply. “I will not ask you to become smaller than you are. I only ask that when you are here, you allow me to stand beside you. That is all.”

The fire cracked. Somewhere in the dark Zephyrus shifted, wings rustling like distant rain.

Beatrice did not answer with words.

But she did not rise and walk away either.

Chapter 7

The Night the Sky Opened

On the fourth night the raiders returned in force.

They came under cloud and silence, striking three watch posts at once. Signal fires flared too late. By the time Willip and Beatrice reached the central ridge, the fighting was already close and ugly.

This time there was no question of hidden identities.

Willip fought with open face and open blade, the prince of Tarfantia in the thick of his own border war. Beatrice fought as herself — staff blazing, wind howling, Zephyrus a golden terror from the sky. They moved together as if they had trained for years instead of days: she clearing space with storms, he holding the line where the wind could not reach. When a spear took Willip across the ribs, Beatrice's cry was sharp enough to cut through the battle. When a crossbow bolt hissed toward her back, Willip's sword was already there.

They won.

But it cost them.

At dawn the ridge was quiet except for the wounded and the wind. Willip sat on a fallen log while a field healer bound his side. Beatrice stood a few paces away, staff planted in the earth, staring at the blood that had dried on her own sleeve — his blood, transferred when she had caught him as he staggered.

Cassian arrived with reinforcements and took one look at the two of them before quietly ordering the area cleared.

When they were alone, Willip spoke first.

"You could have left when the signal fires rose. No one would have blamed you."

"I know," Beatrice said.

"Why did you stay?"

She turned to face him fully. The morning light was hard and honest.

"Because the gates were open," she said. "And because I am tired of pretending that does not matter to me."

Willip's breath left him slowly. He stood, careful of his side, and closed the distance between them until only the cool morning air remained.

"Then stay a little longer," he said. "Not forever. Just long enough for the border to hold without us. Long enough for me to show you the rest of the valley in peace. Long enough..." He stopped, then finished quietly, "Long enough for us to stop being careful with every word."

Beatrice looked at him for a long time.

Then she nodded once.

"A little longer," she agreed.

Above them Zephyrus lifted his head and gave a single low rumble that sounded, for the first time, almost like approval.

Chapter 8

What the Open Gate Means

They returned to the palace at dusk.

This time Beatrice did not enter through a side gate. She rode through the main approach beside the prince, Zephyrus walking at her shoulder like a living standard. The people who saw them did not cheer. They simply stopped and watched with something softer than celebration — recognition, perhaps, or hope.

That night Willip did not leave her at her door.

They stood together on the east terrace as the first stars appeared. The valley lights below looked like a second sky.

"I still cannot promise you forever," Beatrice said.

"I am not asking for forever," Willip answered. "I am asking for the days we can have. And for the honesty to admit that those days already matter."

IShe leaned her shoulder lightly against his — the first deliberate touch either of them had offered.

"Then we will be honest," she said.

Below them the gates of Tarfantia stood open to the night.

Above them the road back to Nooaje waited, patient as ever.

But for the first time since her first descent, Beatrice did not feel the sky calling her away quite so loudly.

Some gates, once opened, change the shape of every road that follows.

****End of Princess Beatrice: The Open Gate****