

KRIS KRINKLE and THE MOON PRINCESS



This is a different kind of "Christmas" story, from which modern adults can relearn the inborn wisdom of children — the wisdom that was formalized to become the cultural ideals of our ancestors, the "primitive" Northern Europeans.

THE MOON PRINCESS

1.

Once, long ago, so long that the first books had not yet been written, and all the histories were stories told in song, the custom of Selentag was created among the dark, snow-carpeted forest of the northland. The Valley of the Moon, ruled over by Princess Selene, was the heartland of the ancient custom. A change came upon the old practices after Prince Mazda found this valley lying peacefully within the path of his conquests.

Prince Mazda, whose father ruled the southland from the Mountain of the Sun, was skilled in the use of the sword and enjoyed using it. Also he loved leading men into battle. When he became a man, he set forth to the northland to found his own kingdom. Kings, queens, priests, prelates, and all periwigged persons possessing pompous palaces fell before his armies like heavy grain before the swing of a sharp sickle. Of all the monarchs who stood in his path only Princess Selene did not fall.

At night in the moonlight, alone, wearing furs and walking silently through the soft, snow-carpeted forest, the Princess came to where his great

army was camped on a craggy hill overlooking her valley. The mighty army lay like a sleeping monster, ready to sweep down on her little kingdom as soon as the dawn provided sufficient light for fighting.

The sentry, who stood by a campfire with his long lance, looked into the blue moonlight surrounding the circle of orange light made by his fire and, seeing her, froze speechless with awe. It seemed to him that a woman of such beauty and breeding, appearing alone out of the moonlight and advancing toward an army, was beyond all explanation and understanding. He was filled with fear and wonder at what he thought must be an apparition. The Princess approached him, stopped, studied him carefully, then spoke to him very calmly.

"Your Prince," she said, "is renowned for his courage in personal combat, even as much as for his valor in battle. Go to him and say that the Princess of the Moon stands here prepared to settle the issue planned for tomorrow's battle now, alone, sovereign to sovereign.

Listening to her soft voice, the sentry was calmed from his fear that she was an apparition, but was awed at recognizing the bearing of highest royalty together with the highest beauty of woman. He saluted her royalty with his long lance and started to go. Then he turned back tentatively and warned the beautiful woman against the path of folly she seemed to be following. "My Prince does not compromise," he told her.

"The Princess Selene does not com-

promise," she answered. "Full agreement to first demands must be reached or one of us must die on this spot. Tell your Prince the Princess says to wear his sword."

Wearing his scarlet tunic and the fur cap that had been adopted for the northland, and on his belt a short sword as if in readiness for battle, Prince Mazda met and faced the Princess where she stood by his campfire. They studied each other long in silence and found much ground for reciprocal admiration, but only their eyes gave it fleeting acknowledgment. At last the Prince spoke, a little sharply:

"You, a Princess, and ruler of a great land, come to me alone and unannounced in the night. This is a manner of behavior that is strange to me and to any sovereign I have before met."

"I come in this way," she said, "to tell you that the ways of my people are not the ways of those who follow the Prince of the Sun. I know you plan an attack at dawn. Your armies are great and my warriors are not so many, but my people are proud and ask no favors from their enemies. I do not come here seeking mercy. I come saying that if enemies could know each other better, any fight that had to come could then be waged against an enemy who, in part, might be loved and respected. It would thus become a nobler fight than battle waged against an opponent who was unknown and faceless. It is the custom of my people to meet as friends before they meet as enemies. The merit of this custom I now recommend to you."

The Prince thought on what she had said before he answered: "The things you say I have not before heard put into words, but they have in them a morsel of merit that often falls lost on the floor when brave words are spoken. Also I find your face good to look upon. Speak what you have to say and I will give you audience."

The Princess spoke quietly but very clearly. "You are famed," she said, "not only for your valor in battle but also for your courage and fairness in personal combat. Therefore, you, a renowned warrior, may not think less of my people when I tell you that all differences in my land are settled by personal combat. This is because each man is his own sovereign. My title of Princess is entirely an honorary one. The meaning of my title you may not understand easily because it is symbolic. To you it may sound like a fairy tale of the sort your people tell to children to quiet them at bedtime. But the symbolism contained in my title of Princess Selene was not created to amuse children and quiet them with wide-eyed wonder so that their dreams when they sleep will be happy. It was created to say, both to children and to adults, things that are too great for simple one-meaning words, things also too great for the empty equations of scientists, and for the incantations with which priests seek to confuse the clear thinking of simple people. This symbolism I tell you.

"I am Princess Selene who am so named to honor the spirit of woman and the boundless depth of woman's love. There, in the sky, gliding in and out amongst the clouds, rides a young moon that is

also called Princess Selene by my people. It rules in the same way that I rule — only because it has been chosen as a symbol of something that endows it with honor by so naming it. But I and the moon are more than the equations of scientists or the incantations of priests, because we are also meaningful examples as well as symbols. As such we are fit for the understanding of those who look with clear eyes at realities, as is the way of my people." . . . She saw his attention to her words was wandering, so she broke off abruptly and changed to matters that were closer to the thoughts of a warrior.

"If you do not fully understand what I say," she continued, "at least you would do well not to misunderstand. My people are not superstitious savages whose superstitions may be used to trick them into foolishness. If you attack at dawn you will find competent warriors ready to meet you — warriors who have never turned back from a challenge without leaving their opponents dead on the field of battle. That custom of my people you, a warrior, can readily appreciate. But we have another custom that to you may seem strange.

"A season we call Selentag began when yonder young moon first showed in tonight's sky. It will last until that same moon has grown full, and then will continue on until the moon has again shrunk to the same size and set in the west some twelve days hence. Among my people, a woman and a woman's love, at all times, are given honor equal to a man's courage and will. But because my men are exceptionally brave and zealous in their defense of honor,

and because the winters are long and dark in my country, we have designated a season surrounding the first full moon after the winter solstice when a woman's love is not only honored equally with a man's valor; it is honored absolutely. During this time, woman and woman's love are honored wholly and exclusively, while the spirit of man sleeps quietly, even as, beneath a deep snow, a bear goes into hibernation. Anyone who provokes or issues a challenge during Selentag without extremely good cause is held in contempt by my people. He forgoes the honor usually accorded a brave man who fights with judgment and fairness when in honor he can not avoid fighting. Often men who drink and sing the songs of Selentag together forget their differences and fail to issue the challenges that their restraint has caused them to hold back in deference to the holidays.

"It would be a very wild hope to dream that your whole army of men, with their strange customs of massed warfare, could be persuaded to withdraw after becoming acquainted with the magic of Selentag. I have such hope only in very small extent. But if you would meet warriors as warriors, rather than contemptuously kill those who kill you with contempt, then I ask that you withhold your attack until the set of yonder moon after she has become full and has again become as small on the other side as now she is on this side. That will be twelve nights hence."

The Prince had listened carefully. He answered in a tone as calm as that of the Princess, albeit his voice had in it the sharp edges of a man who commands men: "I gave my word and I have

heard you out, but such a request never before have I heard from a ruler who stood before me — unless it was a game of guile and treachery. Guile and treachery therefore I have looked for. Clearly you have some faint hope of making friends and so avoiding battle, but this hope you have told me plainly. For some reason I believe less what experience teaches for this occasion than what I see. A truth in your eyes tells me you hold back nothing. I believe it. Therefore I will lay bare my thoughts.

"The valor and steadfastness of your men in battle is known wherever brave men tell awesome stories of courage around campfires. Not only have I wished to find a way of avoiding the losses I knew would come to my armies with tomorrow's battle, I have searched on many sleepless nights for a way to win the favor of your men and bring them under my banner. And now in the night, alone and uncomforted even by a guard of honor, you come here and offer me a greater opportunity than my wildest dreams could have imagined. You seem as a child who, seeing it only as a pretty bauble, might offer to a stranger a king's crown set with priceless jewels. I am eager to grant your request. If I should do so, I could make use of my considerateness by seeking to win the fidelity of your warriors. But I am a Prince and a warrior. I do not like to take priceless treasures from a mere child who knows not what it offers. Convince me you understand what you are doing and I will grant your request with joy."

"I am Princess Selene. I know what I must do as the moon knows what the moon must do. And

like the moon I know from whence comes the light that is mine only to the extent that I reflect it. I do nothing here. My men are all sovereign. I wield no sword and command no army. Like the moon I give only what is mine to give — a something that comes to me without my asking. By exacting from your men oaths of allegiance, you have taken from them their own souls; you have taught them to act when you command them. Yours alone is the present decision. If you command your men to attack at dawn we both know what will happen. If you do not attack, the hospitality customary in the Valley of the Moon at Selentag time stands open before you. I, Princess Selene, am here to proclaim to you the customs of Selentag.

"Each night while the moon is young, open house will be held by the older children of every hearthside, while adults and small children go from house to house, everywhere welcomed to enter, eat and drink by any hearthfire, and to join in songs and merriment. On the night of the full moon, and from noontime of the day preceeding it to noontime of the day that follows, it is customary for everyone to travel as little as possible — all remaining as house guests in whatever home the preceeding midday finds them. Because all are inside by their hearthfires in congenial happiness, the full moon shines down on a silent night of profound peace, as woman's love would have it. Then during the nights following, while the moon wanes to the present size again, the adults and small children hold open house, and all the older children visit. They, then, are entertained with food, drink, songs and merriment.

"As strangers, having no homes of your own, you and all your men would be everywhere welcomed throughout the whole of Selentag time. I suggest that during the whole time all of your men could take turns making a round of visits, leaving always the great bulk of your forces armed and intact against any possible treachery — a treachery that you will not find. You need instruct your men in this one thing only: It is our custom at all times, even Selentag, that death must be dealt swiftly to any man who fails to honor a woman's unspoken withholding of her love until she formally announces a man by whom she will bear children. The dealing of that death to any of your own men who violate the custom would have to be done by the leader who commands them — this you would be expected to take upon your own hands. You are a leader of men and you know that your failure in this matter would earn you the mortal enmity of my people. If your men are well instructed in this matter and accept our hospitality in the spirit it is extended, you may attract many of my men to follow your banners. I must tell you that if this happens it will not be to my liking. But such matters are not those to be decided by a moon-princess. The moon and the sun move in separate orbits. I do not have in my heart the ways of combat, even as a man does not have in his heart the ways of a woman's love. But I honor men who do what they must, as I, a woman, expect to be honored. What my men do in this matter is between you and them. I, Princess Selene, have spoken."

With his eyes overbrimming with admiration for the beautiful moon-princess, Prince Mazda

told her she could tell her men to put away their swords and tell all her people to prepare for additional guests during Selentag.

She thanked him and, as she turned to go, added graciously, "I hope the Prince will find time to visit Princess Selene during the Selentag season." Then she bowed, gave him a smile, a smile given freely, and disappeared into the snow-carpeted forests.

Even as in fairy tales written for children, the Prince did visit the Princess and they found great joy in each other that became love between them. But that is not the end of the story. It is only the beginning.

2.

The young Prince Mazda was a leader who treated his troops with fairness and consideration, but his discipline was swift and merciless, so when he related to them the customs of Selentag as Princess Selene had told them to him, and gave them instructions concerning them, he knew his instructions would be obeyed. Because they respected his strong discipline, they would have obeyed any instructions. But these they welcomed gladly and took great joy in their obedience.

Each night a tenth of Prince Mazda's army had leave to attend open houses throughout the entire Valley of the Moon. Thus, during the full season of Selentag, all went at least one night among the people of the valley. Those whose conduct had merited special reward were given leave to attend the holiday open houses for two nights. Some still more often. Everywhere they found a warm welcome. Following special instructions decided upon and given them by Prince Mazda, they went in small groups and never overcrowded any of the houses. Before they knocked for entrance at any door they stuck their swords

outside in the snow. When five swords were stuck in the snow before any door no further soldiers knocked for entrance at that house until some already there had removed their swords and departed. With the possibility of battle at its end, the holiday season was not one of unclouded joy but it had an unaccustomed intensity. The songs — sung along with eating, drinking, and story telling by the hearthfires — had their merriment brought to a jovial new pitch by the many robust soldiers happy to have relief from the constant pressures of conquest.

Prince Mazda and Princess Selene were radiant in their joy over the success of the venture. Perhaps they were even more radiant in their joy of having found each other. At least so it seemed to all who welcomed them to the merriment before their hearthfires. Many hearths during the long Selentag celebration were made to glow as if with a magic radiance by the presence of the Prince of the Sun in his scarlet coat, with the Moon-princess by his side in the soft blue that she wore as her moon symbol. Many were the discussions after they had gone from each place as to whether they had looked more beautiful standing together by the fireside in their colorful clothes, or when they had first knocked together at the door bundled in furs, their eyes, smiles and faces brightened by the cold wind, blowing snow, and their joy in each other.

No strange prophet making mystical incantations was needed to tell what the future would bring. As foretold by the light in the eyes of the Sun Prince and the Moon Princess, there was no battle when the

moon waned at the end of Selentag. The kingdom of the Sun and the Valley of the Moon were united so peacefully that no one ever knew which had won the battle.

On the northernmost wall of the moon-valley was a high hill and on this hill the Prince built a great stone castle, from which he ruled the vast domain of the many lands he had conquered. The Prince took the title of king when he had come into his new palace. The Princess, who by the time the great castle was finished had borne him a twin-born boy and girl, came with him to live in the castle. Thereafter she had queen for her title.

Then something happened to the Princess. The thing that happened is not easy in the telling. Her former title had been hers solely by reason of her beauty and the radiance of her woman's love. The ceremonious alchemy of changing titles seemed nothing more than a meaningless play of words. Still a change came over her when she was made into a queen and made to feel a need for joining in a rule born of decree rather than symbol. The joy in her eyes began to lessen and the radiance to fade from her smile. The cause of it was a thing of great subtlety — a thing which to be fully understood needs to be thoughtfully considered.

Something also happened to the people of the moon-princess. All the old cherished dreams made into symbols, that had ruled among them, began to lose their grandeur. Even life, it seemed, lost much of its old joy and meaning. The cause of this was also subtle but it is easier in the telling.

Once the protector of each home had, himself, been a sovereign. As such he had known joy in the hospitality around his hearthfire and that hearthfire's glory of woman's love and children's laughter. This joy gave meaning to the readiness and skill with which he would meet in personal combat anyone who showed disrespect to his hearthfire — a readiness that taught the goodness of life to those insensitive enough to need teaching and made vulture food of those motivated by malice. But in respect to a great prince who could be considerate of a strange people and love their moon-princess, these men gave up their sovereignty to become soldiers in the King's armies. Then personal combat ceased to be revered because it was service to what was good and beautiful. Personal combat, even as valor in massed battle, became a thing only of skill at arms and of stark bravery degenerated into braggadocio.

The ways of the men in the Valley of the Moon were strange to the King and he could not understand their unhappiness. But he was sad at the sadness of his Queen, who had been the moon-princess. He wanted to undo the harm he had done to her valley. Attempting this, he proclaimed that the old practice of Selentag should be observed throughout the whole of his vast kingdom. The observation was accepted as a good practice. But it was just accepted; it did not glow with life and joy.

The King's decree was a hollow honor paid to the girl who, one night on a moonlit hill, had stood before him by a campfire. That girl seemed no more. And the old spirit did not return to her valley. The

open-houses of Selentag time could not give understanding between those from rival groups, whose custom of rivalry with others — always considered as groups — had been brought from the Kingdom of the Sun.

The custom of group rivalry had been created to give a feeling of mass spirit to men, and consequent unity to an army in battle. The dissolving of each man's separate spirit into a spirit of group solidarity was a subtle thing of catch phrases, uniformity of manner, and uniformity of battle dress. But Selene, looking on, saw a terrible alchemy at work, the same terrible alchemy that had turned into a ruling queen a woman who had been a princess because she glowed with a woman's love and a woman's beauty. She looked at the men she had once seen as clear-eyed in their dreams and stalwart in upholding them. In their place she now saw only uniform battle dress covering men who were ever more faceless.

The effects of the subtle alchemy were not subtle. Great sadness fell over all the land. It fell most heavily over the Queen who had once been a princess.

After Princess Selene moved, with her twin-born babies, into the great castle, and took the title of queen, she died — many said because her heart was broken.

The King then became harsher in his discipline and fiercer in war because there was no moon-princess by his side. After many long years of increasing hardness he also died. It seemed he died

of festering wounds received in battle, but there were many who said a man with a less heavy heart could have survived a hundred such wounds as those that seemed to kill him. He was buried beside the moon-princess in the depth of the snow-carpeted forest, the same forest out of which she first came to him. There, together as part of the earth, they still lie and one great tree grows out of the grave where both are buried.

KRIS KRINKLE

1.

After the King's death the heirs to the throne were the twin-born Prince and Princess. They were known to be a handsome young man and a beautiful maiden but, because strongly guarded in the castle, they had only been glimpsed on rare occasions. Neither their faces nor their thoughts were widely known.

Throughout the land that had once been ruled by a princess symbolizing a woman's love, and later by a warrior prince, all wondered what sort of rule the new heirs would make known by proclamation. Some thought the Princess would surely rule, some said surely the Prince, some said that both would rule together and jointly. Many said a joint rule would be good and well-balanced. All rumors coming from the castle were agreed that the twins' affection for each other was great and they would certainly act in harmony, but no rumors could give any weight to what might be their plans, nor the manner of the thoughts from which such plans might come. It was a field for wide speculation. However the speculation was leisurely; urgency for rule was not great.

Indeed a ruler was hardly needed. In the last years of the hardened King's rule the power of the royal word became absolute, and the discipline with which it was executed so great that it became fable. It was said that the world's most beautiful virgin could travel alone from border to border of the kingdom, with all the horns of the reindeer that pulled her sleigh decked with jewels — jewels for which any king would sacrifice half his kingdom — and she would need have no fear for her person nor fear that the smallest jewel from the horn of any reindeer would ever be stolen. Such was the formal rigor of the rule instituted by the King of the Sun as he tried, in the only way that seemed to him possible, to spread the good graces found by him in the Valley of the Moon. Conformity to this discipline had become a strong habit. No one doubted that any decree which his heirs might make would be obeyed — instantly and without question.

The young Prince and Princess knew this also; they were awed by the responsibility such conditions imposed upon them. Their queen-mother had died before they were old enough to be taught much, and the King had been much too busy with far-reaching affairs to instruct mere children in the ways of rulers. Fearing the displeasure of the King, most of the palace attendants had been afraid to go beyond their assigned duties in approaching the children. It was therefore through a childhood of great loneliness that the Prince and Princess had become a young man and a young woman. The palace attendants had always obeyed their wishes, obeyed with alacrity, obeyed with eagerness, often with

kindness. But they truly loved and were loved only by the old palace carpenter.

The carpenter was a big man, robust of health and of great vigor, a man with a round face and merry laughing eyes accented by crinkles at the corners. Such a big man would have made a mighty warrior, but his great size made him shy in expressing his love for the children. The needed tenderness seemed to him appropriate only to a woman. Yet his heart was full to overflowing for the orphaned children of his moon-princess. Also he knew that if the kingdom was ever again to have happy adults it must grow them up from happy children. New doors to joy had to be found and opened. The hearts of children had to be explored. So he made them little boxes with drawers and doors that were great puzzles to open. He carved them whistles, and dolls, and soldiers, and animals with jointed legs that could move so that they seemed to be walking. Because thanks embarrassed him, he always let them find the things he made for them and pretended he knew nothing of the source from which came all the toys. Out of love for him, they played the game his way, but they spent much time with him in his carpenter shop.

There he could talk without a feeling of shyness. When he had some complicated looking carpentry work to cover the embarrassment of his playing with children, he would sometimes tell them stories and give them full, careful answers to their questions — questions about their great kingdom and the big world surrounding it. To make such talk

possible it was necessary only to act as if making a joint fit exactly was the important business of life, and the rule of kingdoms was something to be sandwiched in when important work had time gaps that could be stuffed with such trivial matters. They came to understand this game too and play it.

After the King died, the Prince and Princess talked together about how they should rule. The prospect did not appeal to them. Everywhere men seemed only to wait for orders from a monarch. Even women, who had once given their love when and where their hearts told them, now held it back as a coin to be used in bargaining for prestige and position.

The Prince and Princess listened to the advice of prime ministers and prelates, and saw their cruel calculations as essential parts of the game of government. They also saw the greedy graspings of those who had blindly tasted the power porridge and cried for more without knowing its substance.

"The game of piling up power is ugly and should be ended," they agreed. "Rule of a people should be a thing of spirit only, as in the days of our mother."

"It may be you should take the throne," suggested the Prince to the Princess tentatively. "After the harsh discipline, the people need to feel again the touch of a woman's love and tenderness."

"Things are no longer as they were when there was symbolic rule by our mother," said the Princess. "Since new ways have come into our kingdom, women try to use their beauty as a weapon.

A woman on the throne would no longer be seen as a symbol of a woman's love. Before a woman can again be seen as a woman, a man, standing by her, must be seen in a man's full stature. You must provide such a symbol."

"That, too, is no longer possible," the Prince told her. "A prince can no longer be seen as tall because of his own measure — only by measuring the size of his armies. The symbol of prince is no longer that of an admirable man but of a clever general. New symbols are needed in place of the old ones that have lost their meanings."

With this, reluctantly, the Princess agreed. Then she mused with great seriousness: "Man is a builder. Shall we put Kris, the carpenter, on the throne and make a hammer and axe the symbols of our kingdom?"

"No," said the Prince. He answered quickly because he had already considered the possibility and rejected it. "Kris," he said, "turned himself into a carpenter with great reluctance only when other sovereigns turned themselves into soldiers. Our people are much too fine to be represented only by a hammer and axe, just as Kris is too big a man to be called only a carpenter. His hand aches for a sword, but he is much too big a man to wear a sword for aimless swagger. He, himself, has said that the sword has lost its old meaning. The sword, that was once ready to destroy men with an ambition for power over others, now symbolizes the very ambition it once sought to destroy. But the tools of labor can not be lifted up in place of the old symbol

that has been desecrated.

"Man is man not because of his buildings but because his own dreams set a boundary to the unrestrained buildings of others. Not man's buildings, and not even his blood, are fit things to be honored as inviolable. The only thing worthy of such honor, other than woman's love, is something unseen and intangible. It is real but it can be expressed only by a symbol. So the symbol must be chosen very carefully. A sword by his side could once give meaning to a man's clear eyes and broad shoulders as a baby in her arms gives meaning to the being of woman. But a sword has ceased to mean a man of integrity and come to signify the might of a massed army. A sword pledged to strike upon orders is no longer sacred.

"Dreams, not orders, each man must have, and he, himself — himself only — can judge their value and the extent to which he will defend them. Dreams shared are what make sovereign individuals into a people. A people who have lost their dreams are a people who have lost their direction and unity. Simple people need something tangible to stand for abstracts so they can see that their dreams have substance. But the hammer and axe can never stand for the finest in man's being as that finest was once symbolized by a sword."

The Princess had also heard the old carpenter's mutterings at his work and thought about them. She understood the Prince's meaning and agreed. Then she brought out an idea she had long considered and held back until all else was rejected.

"Not you and not I should take the throne," said the Princess. "Neither one of us alone nor we two, together, as brother and sister. Great changes need to be made in the world we have inherited. It seems the game of prestige and power makes men and women lower than any animals living. This condition was created by men and it can therefore be changed by men. But great wisdom is needed for great changes. The needed wisdom may come to us when we are older. We are young now but at least we are wise enough to be true to what is in us. Let us act upon what our young hearts tell us.

"We can lay the beginnings of a new foundation for people by becoming at least as good as other animals — at least a woman can hold in her arms a child who bears the image of her protector — a protector who is not a far-off king, nor a faceless army, but one real man. Separately, let us go away and find mates among those who know and care nothing for position. From time to time we can meet and discuss our obligation to use the power we have inherited. Then, if either has found a dream that we deem worthy, we will lift that dream up where all can see it by that one making a formal return to the palace."

It was a new idea and the Prince pondered it long and thoughtfully. At last he stated his only objection: "If we are disguised and unknown," he said, "rumor that we are dead will be circulated, and the throne will be taken by some clever schemer."

Together they thought of this in silence. Then they looked at each other and, reading each

other's eyes and thoughts, both burst out with joyous laughter.

"Kris would not want to rule," they said, "but no one could push him away while he sat on the throne."

The picture of the frail scheming priest, or the prissy little prime minister trying to push big Kris from the throne furnished them with wondrous amusement. It was a deeply joyous thing, not merely comical, because they knew the immovable outward bulk also represented the kind old Kris's quiet determination.

Kris listened to their plan and had no heart to refuse them. They told him they would announce him as temporary monarch, proclaim their plans for disguising themselves and becoming better acquainted with their kingdom, then decree that, until their return, all men again would be individually sovereign, as in the days when Selene was Princess. Thoughtfully he agreed to cooperate in their wishes. Then they turned to the adventure of putting their plan into action.

The big, solitary, round-faced Kris as the king was something previously unimaginable —when a king was expected to be a ruler. But when the role demanded immobility, Kris was delightful to contemplate in the person of a king who cared nothing for power. They knew he would continue to make all his funny little boxes, his whistles, wooden soldiers, his smiling dolls and jointed animals. As a king who did not seek pomp he would surely set up

a workshop in the throne room and cover the foot of the throne with his whittlings. In this way he would silently drive into scandalized retreat all the annoying hangers-on whose addiction to dignity was gross and immoderate. He would not even need to go to the trouble of proclaiming their dismissal.

It was joyously funny to imagine. But there was nothing ridiculous about Kris as a king, if that were the whole idea; the humor of it all was in the imagined spectacle of a king who would not rule but was a man whom none could push — neither into a rule nor away from it.

Kris was certainly of royal blood. The Princess had told him this when she was still small enough to sit on his knee and play with his whiskers. She had asked him his name and peerage, then said that a personage of royal blood should have a longer name than the simple sound Kris provided. He asked her what she would call him and she sought hard to remedy the deficiency of too short a name without giving him a title. Looking at the fine lines that seemed to run in all directions from the corners of his eyes, she dubbed him Kris Kross, then amended it to Kris Kross Krinkle. Finally, after much testing of names, she decided Kris Krinkle alone sounded off a sufficiency of syllables to dignify his regal personage. All could see just by looking into his eyes that he was born of the highest royalty.

Now he was not only to have a royal name but could choose for himself any title he wanted. As he had been secretly impressed by the wisdom of their plan, he also took concealed delight in the joy they

found in its execution. But this turned out to be almost unbearably embarrassing.

They both felt some special added touch of dignity was called for by the occasion. "We, ourselves," they said, "are to go everywhere in disguise, and you, Kris, must, of course, wear the scarlet." They alluded to the scarlet that had been Prince Mazda's tunic, and had ever since been worn by the King — and the King exclusively. The color itself symbolized royalty.

But Kris Krinkle could certainly not wear a tunic — not a coat of the cut worn by their father. He was too fat. They ordered forth whole bales of the royal red cloth from the warehouse and set the scandalized royal tailors to work making something of size and design suited to the new royal personage who was to wear it. A whole red suit, they said. The tailors snickered and asked if they had heard right. Yes, a whole red suit, they repeated, and a red cap, too — and none of your sly snickering. Then they brought out their finest white furs to match his white hair and beard and ordered that the suit be trimmed in them to give it new glamour. Shiny black boots and a wide black belt around the royal fat belly made the Princess clap her hands and the Prince shout with joyous laughter. Kris Krinkle, himself, smiled with happy embarrassment at their joy even though his solitary propriety was taxed to undreamed of limits by so much unmanly attention. But the result must have been good. Even the royal tailors forgot their solemn dignity enough to smile, exchange slaps on the back, and say their handiwork was excellent.

The young Prince and Princess seated the brightly colored new monarch on the throne and broke into new outbursts of ecstasy at the delightful appropriateness of what had once seemed enormously funny. Then they realized that they had caused him great embarrassment. The Princess broke into tears and flung herself into Kris Krinkle's comforting arms as she had so often done when a child who had no mother. When she had been comforted by his presence and regained her composure she removed herself and recaptured her dignity. At last, with rapturous admiration in her eyes, she stood before the throne and made a curtsy that had never been excelled in that court for sincerity of homage. The young Prince also saluted and dropped to his knee before the throne in solemn dedication to full exploration of a new dream and homage to the man who had awakened it — a dream that he who refused a scepter might be of higher royalty than he who accepted it — and he who refused to let anyone else rule with a scepter might be highest of all.

Reading the eyes of the Prince and Princess, Kris Krinkle was sobered to the point of forgetting his embarrassment. The royal tailors, looking on, became frightened at their remembered early attitude of ridiculing a king's clothes for old Kris the carpenter. They withdrew bowing low and backing away from the royal presence. Then they hurried down the halls to spread the word to all the palace attendants that this was no joke and all had better watch their tongues and conduct.

The throne room was indeed turned into a

workshop and no one dared question the right of the acting king to make whittlings around the throne — to create tangible symbols of contempt for all governments that degrade the people in order to give a false feeling of prestige to the rulers.

The Prince and Princess were happy at the results of their first act under their new authority. They felt that something once taken away had been returned to their people.

2.

As made known by royal proclamation, the Prince and Princess dissolved among the common folk of the kingdom. At first the people feared that each handsome young man or each lovely girl newly met might be the Prince or Princess in disguise come to spy on their behavior. This saddened the Prince and Princess. It seemed to say that the people would have to be ruled by decree because their long familiarity with the game of government had made them forget how to dream or how to find in their dreams the meanings.

But this soon changed. Reason came to the rescue of dreams. Reason decreed that if some unknown young man were the Prince and the local girl by his side were the one he had picked for his queen, then certainly any cordiality and courtesy shown them now would stand one in good stead if the Prince reclaimed the throne. Or this radiant young girl, the people reasoned, might be the Princess and this young man someone whom she had chosen for the father of her children. If so they should have a welcome befitting royalty. And if the guess was wrong, there was no loss; they were a fine young

couple and any action adding to their happiness was highly fitting. Soon many began to profit by assuming royal graces.

After a time it seemed that the whole of the kingdom had been infused with royal blood in great torrents. Courtesy and grace appeared everywhere like flowers that cover the meadows and fill the woods in springtime. Old people said that again it was now as things had once been in the Valley of the Moon. Perhaps, after all, Princess Selene had done well to extend a royal welcome to Prince Mazda that night long ago in the moonlight of Selentag.

In memory of the occasion, next Selentag took on a renewal of meaning. Not only were there again happy songs with good friends around warm hearthfires; the old thoughts again seemed fittingly renewed — warm glowing thoughts about the moon-princess and the woman's love she had symbolized. The visits of Prince Mazda and Princess Selene to the Selentag firesides were retold over and over and in the telling was much pleasure. There was a feeling that again royalty might be expected at all hearthsides.

One tale told was of a beautiful young woman and a strange young man who had begun a puzzling conversation at one open house at Selentag. It seemed nothing at the time but it was brought out for reconsideration later. The two came in separate groups of guests, seemed to be strangers to each other, and the incident at first appeared only the customary one of a young man broadening his acquaintance with beauty by approaching a lovely girl.

The man approached the young woman who was staring into the blazing fire in reverie; for awhile he stood beside her and seemed sensitively to share her reveries; it was a long time before he spoke. Then he said, "Now that the symbol of the sword had been desecrated the hearthfire might become the symbol of man's will. It could be done if people would bring into full awareness a knowledge they already have in their hearts."

He paused, and after a moment she looked at him as an invitation to continue. He then said, "Only a hearthfire that refuses to welcome a king who uses the sword as a scepter is fitted to welcome true royalty."

The young woman continued looking in the fire so long that those around began to think she was rudely ignoring the man and returning to her reveries. But then slowly a very happy smile came over her face. She voiced agreement and made some allusion to a carpenter.

Then she added, "We have grown up having our use of the words 'kings' and 'royalty' based on the only examples we knew. We have imposed upon them some strange meanings — strange because, in the big world outside our kingdom, most of the tangible examples that created the words are nearly opposite to our meanings. I have been trying to clarify my own thinking, and had almost forgotten our unique language, so it took some time for me to realize just what you were saying. At last, I realized you were saying that we, and those who share our dreams, can restore the hearthfire as

a sacred symbol only if we refuse to welcome both rulers and subjects who play the perverse game of coercive persuasion. All who share our dreams will have to limit their open houses to those committed to the age-old morality of individual sovereignty, as that morality was consciously upheld by our ancient customs."

She paused. They searched each other's eyes for understanding, and he thoughtfully nodded agreement.

She continued, "All of us, who have had our words and dreams ground like grain between the millstones of two opposing cultures, have developed a strange confusion between the words 'royalty' and 'morality.'"

"My words were a prime example of what you say," he agreed. "Fortunately there is a reality that ignores words and gives its wisdom to our dreams."

There was then much further talk in which everyone joined. There was talk of the relationship between swords, hearthfires, dreams, ideals, customs, and coercive rulers.

Later, remembering how the significant talk had got started, the host and hostess of the unknown guests were convinced that they had entertained, at the same time, both the Prince and Princess.

As the words of the presumed Prince and Princess were studied each time the story was repeated, the old idea of reverence for the hearthfires

was renewed and spread. Because the ground for the growth of the revived idea was fertile, it began to give forth branches of related ideas that were strong and enduring. All were carried on the simple rumor that the disguised Prince and Princess surely chose the hearthfire of some predetermined home for a yearly rendezvous at Selentag.

All in all, it was an era of new growth for customs. In the climate of restraint following King Mazda's firm discipline, the old custom of individual sovereignty again grew strong enough to ensure order. Whether because of this, or because they decided that dreams worthy of growth into accepted customs could grow without the help of royal sanction, is not known, but the young Prince and Princess never returned to rule by issuing decrees from the castle.

Their continued anonymity was surely a silent yes-saying to the dream that had brought them forth from their hereditary role as rulers. It must have made them very happy to find their youthful judgment to limit government was as sound as the man they chose to put that judgment into practice. Kris Krinkle never let any prime ministers or prelates pressure him into issuing decrees with the stamp of officialdom.

3.

From the very first of Kris Krinkle's "rule" the great front gates of the palace were barred shut, leaving no passage through the castle walls except through the woods and the small gate once used for service. During the first year vines covered the barred gate and grass grew high on the road to the palace. Even within the palace grounds, the once carefully trimmed trees and shrubs were allowed to grow rampant, and grass grew so high it lured reindeer to come in through the little rear gate. Several reindeer took up permanent residence in the courtyard and were made into pets by palace attendants.

As time went by, vines grew solidly over the palace wall, the forest closed in around it, and the symbolic king was almost forgotten. All knew real rule would never return unless the hereditary wearers of the royal scarlet came back to reclaim the throne, which they showed no signs of doing. All were content. The once sharp lines of the palace on the north hills dissolved into the softening landscape, and this was often viewed with silent satisfaction as having profound meaning.

No mean thing had ever been said of old Kris within man's memory and all wished him well. Some even voiced the hope that he would some day visit them during the open houses of Selentag. He was much too shy, or given to habits of solitude, for such behavior, said those who heard this. If he ever came, he would probably sneak down the chimney in the middle of Selentag night, some said. "With that big belly!" others rejoined. And they all laughed. But there was no ill feeling in their laughter. Such a monarch was what many had always wanted.

Yet Kris Krinkle did come to have wide notice — after a fashion. Before many years rumors began to spread that the bright red suit had actually been seen on Selentag night. It was said that the old man had been seen riding in a big sleigh pulled by a long line of reindeer as if setting off for fast and distant travel. The next year, in the still of Selentag night, when the practice of holding open houses was suspended and all stayed within doors, some were especially attentive to any noise outside, and rose to look for what was causing it. There were many positive confirmations that the old man actually went abroad somewhere, after everyone else had eaten and drunk their fill and all were sleeping.

Then one year a new family with three small children moved into the Valley of the Moon from some distant place unknown to any. The next Selentag after they came there was no doubt about it. Kris Krinkle did go abroad on the night of Selentag.

Several persons were invited to remain with the new family during Selentag night, as was the

custom. Five of these were children, small children who might have been expected to get things confused, but the four parents of the children were young adults from local families. Their families had been well-known for generations and unquestionably their words could be trusted. This is what they saw.

At just about midnight, when all was quiet, there were strange sounds outside. Hearing these, one of the guest-fathers got up and looked out the window. He saw, with unmistakable clarity, an old man in a red suit drive up in a sleigh pulled by reindeer and stop by the side of the house. The father called the other adult guests to witness and they all confirmed what he had seen; they told him it really wasn't just too much plum pudding affecting his vision. Then they decided it was their duty to let their host and hostess know what was going on. All four went along to alert them. However they found their host and hostess already watching surreptitiously out of the corner of a window. The host motioned for them not to talk and to get down where they would not be seen.

"But I think the old man wants to come in," whispered one of the guests. "Don't you want to go down and see him?"

Their hostess turned to them such a radiant face as they had never before seen. It was as if she were all lighted up inside and her being contained a great glowing. But her smile was all crooked with the effort of containing her emotion, and her cheeks, her whole face, were wet with tears from too much happiness. "No, no!" she whispered when she could get the words out. "He would like it much better this

way. If we let him know we see him it would spoil everything."

While they all watched and kept very quiet the old man took a big bag from the sleigh and went around the house, leaving deep tracks in the snow where his big black boots crunched through. Soon there were sounds coming from the living room downstairs. The host and hostess motioned for everyone to be very still. The sounds went on for awhile then the old man came in sight again, still carrying the bag but it was no longer full. The moon was bright so that his face could be seen clearly; it was round and happy with some secret joy. The effort the hostess had to make to control herself was almost unbelievable in its intensity. The joy in her eyes reached an even greater radiance than before, while at the same time the tears flowed down her cheeks so that they fell on her hands which were twisted and clamped together as if each were trying to hold the other. Both her hands and her feet too, even her shoulders and arms and whole body seemed trying to get away and do something that her restraining reason said she must not. With some sort of little happy song on his lips the old man got back in the sleigh, gave one joyful crack of his whip over the heads of the reindeer and disappeared around the corner. When he was gone the hostess jumped up as if she would run after him right through the window. Then she turned about, ran and dived into bed. There she grabbed her pillow in her arms and squeezed it and squeezed it until it seemed that all the stuffing would surely be squeezed out. The host told all to go back to bed, and in the morning to let none of the

children go into the living room until they were all assembled and could go together.

The next morning, before full dawn, when candles were still needed to find the way down the dark halls, everyone was assembled and the host told about the midnight visitor in such a way as to bring wide-eyed wonder to the children. Then all in the household trooped together, the children on tiptoe, into the living room to see what the visitor had been doing.

The banked fire had burst through and was burning brightly in the fireplace. In its glow, was a great mass of toys — dolls, drums, whistles, jointed animals, boxes with little secret compartments, candies, fruits from foreign places, all sorts of things that were wondrously strange and unbelievable. At first the children approached with curious wonder as to what had happened, what had been done by the midnight visitor. Then as discovery was added to discovery, giving meaning to the whole, they clutched some choice find, screamed with joy, and danced with ecstasy. The host had thoughtfully prepared some hearty drinks to give something of the mood of the children to the adults. New wood was thrown on the fire and the joy of discovery allowed to run its course before the mysterious happening was brought out for wondering discussion.

How did he get in was a big part of the mystery. Did he come down the chimney? The thought fascinated the children. It seemed impossible; he was too big, certainly too big when to his own great bulk was added the enormous pack that had

contained all the things they found. But how else could he have gotten in? The latch string was still inside, just as it had been last night. And last night, unmistakably, it had been inside. Everyone remembered. Taking in the latch string was a formal ceremony that was always performed at noon before Selentag night. It was taken in as a ceremony to signify that open house was suspended until noon the next day and all guests must for that period become part of the family and remain overnight. Everyone, *everyone*, had seen that the latch string was on the inside. And there was no other way to get in but come down the chimney. So the impossible must somehow have happened.

However, there were those who liked to think that something had been done to the latch string by the hostess who tried to squeeze the stuffings out of the pillow. They pictured her earlier in the night, after all had gone to bed, tiptoeing silently down the stairs and putting out the latch string. Perhaps she caressed it tenderly and held it close between her hands in anticipation of the next hands that would touch it. Maybe she kissed it and held it to her cheek. Maybe she tied onto it some little token of her love, some memento that had a special meaning. And maybe there Kris Krinkle had found something dangling. If true, that something would surely have been touched with magic. Any little symbol known between them from her childhood would have had its substance shot through with a great glowing by carrying such an enormous cargo of emotion as the demand she would have put on it. But it must have been so. Somehow there must have been a

communication. Everyone who saw remembered the joy in the old man's face when he was getting back into the sleigh. The crack his whip made had sounded like a shout of ecstasy. Even the reindeer seemed caught up in the mood of some incomprehensible joy. As they rounded the corner out of sight the runners of the sleigh hardly seemed to touch the snow. Maybe it was a trick of moonlight on snow, but instead of flying snow crystals, sparks like Stardust seemed to mark the trail left behind when that sleigh disappeared in the moonlight.

That year, and the next, and the next, more and more mysterious midnight visits seemed to be made, for they were confirmed beyond any possibility of further question. All the toys that were found by every fireside were evidence that could be seen and handled and shown to any who doubted. As the custom grew it was often parents, grandparents and others who placed the toys by the fireside to be found by the children on Selentag morning. But the story of big Kris Krinkle and his midnight visits was repeated over and over to explain the miraculous appearance of the gifts.

In time the tides of foreign customs which overflowed the Valley of the Moon carried the story of Kris Krinkle's midnight visits to all the world. Other legends were overlaid on the story of Selentag, and the name of the season was changed in many lands, but the toys, and the big kind man in the red suit were never entirely forgotten. However the overflowing cultures had different backgrounds and none carried full understanding of the great gift made

by old Kris, the one which earned undying love from the daughter of the moon-princess — the whittlings he made around the foot of the throne.