THE STOLEN PRINCE OF CLOUDBURST
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PART 1

THE STOLEN PRINCE OF CLOUDBURST

A Narrative Account

by

Esther Mettlestone-Staranise, Year 6

1

Long ago, far away, on a damp and sniffly day –

This happened.

A little prince, not yet two years old, played upon the shore.

'Hoopla!' said his nanny, and the boy leapt over a frothy wave. Nanny and boy giggled.

'Hoopla!' the nanny repeated, and again the tiny boy leapt. He wore a little romper suit and his name – *Alejandro* – was embroidered

on the collar. His little feet were bare, for the nanny had removed his shoes.

If you are wondering where the shoes were, well, I think they were probably just off to the side somewhere, on the sand.

'Again!' said little Alejandro.

'Hoopla!' the nanny obliged.

The child leapt.

This could have gone on for hours, days – maybe even years! Well, perhaps not years, they'd have gotten hungry – but the nanny's gentleman friend happened to stroll by along the boardwalk. He spotted the pair on the beach.

'Ahoy there!' called the gentleman friend.

The nanny straightened, raised her hand to wave, and that was all the time it took.

A Water Sprite burst from the waves and stole the child.

The nanny saw him. She felt a *whoosh*, a splash, turned at once and saw. The gentleman friend up on the boardwalk, he saw too.

The Water Sprite had broad shoulders. He gathered Alejandro into his arms, leapt into the waves and swam away.

'Right before my eyes!' said the nanny. 'I chased him! Into the waves, I dove! Ruined my good pinafore! But the Water Sprite – and darling Alejandro – were gone!'

By the way, all this happened in the town of Spindrift, in the Kingdom of Storms about ten years ago. Ordinarily, the royal family of Storms live in the city of Cloudburst, but they were on holiday by the sea.

Everyone searched the sea for the prince, even the lighthouse keeper: his lighthouse beam swept back and forth like a duster on the sideboard.

King Jakob and Queen Anita were distraught. Well, of course they were.

(They were the little boy's parents, if you haven't figured that out.)

They were also bewildered.

'Why should a Water Sprite steal a child?' they asked each other, over and over. 'Water Sprites don't steal children!'

Meanwhile, the Water Sprite was asking himself the same question.

His name was Caprito, and he had swum far out to sea, little Alejandro babbling beneath his arm, and then paused, treading water. Carefully, he'd placed the little prince on an ocean lily.

Then he had swum down to his home beneath the sea, and –

'What have I *done*?' he asked himself. 'Why did I steal a child?'

For it was true that Water Sprites *do not* steal children. Not ordinarily, they don't.

The Water Sprite swam directly to his own king, King Khalid, and confessed.

'You stole a child?' cried King Khalid. 'Well, give him back at once!'

'I can't,' replied Caprito. 'I placed him on an ocean lily.'

(Ocean lilies, in case you don't know, are just like the water lilies you see on ponds, only bigger and stronger. They spread themselves over the surface of the ocean like floating picnic blankets.) (That was a helpful aside.)

'Then fetch him back from the ocean lily!' ordered King Khalid, exasperated. 'At once!'

Caprito thought that was genius, and he streaked through the water to the place where the ocean lily had been.

But it was gone.

And so was the child.

Caprito returned to his king. '*Gone,*' he said.

The Water Sprite King was very upset. He got stuck on the issue of *why* Caprito had stolen the child in the first place.

'Why would you *do* such a thing?' the King complained.

'I cannot say,' Caprito replied.

'Yes, you can,' the King snapped. 'Say!'

But Caprito sadly shook his head. 'I cannot say,' he said, 'because I do not know.'

Eventually, King Khalid summonsed a shore's-edge meeting with King Jakob and Queen Anita. Caprito confessed all.

It was a heated meeting, as you can imagine.

Everybody asked the Water Sprite why he had done this: King Jakob, Queen Anita, constables, guards, the nanny, the nanny's gentleman friend. But Caprito's answer was always the same:

'I cannot say.'

And then, more quietly: 'I cannot say because I *do not know*.'

Caprito wept and apologised, begging forgiveness.

The king and queen did not much feel like forgiving him.

However, they did not throw him in a dungeon or declare war on the Water Sprite Kingdom, for they believed his regret and confusion.

While many thought the prince must have fallen from the ocean lily into the sea and drowned, others said that the lily could have floated across the Kingdoms and Empires, washing ashore in a distant land.

And so the search for little Alejandro continued, year after year, and King Jakob and Queen Anita grew ever sadder, sorrier, thinner and older. Sometimes they sat side by side on the beach, staring at the waves, taking turns with the spyglass, looking for their lost little prince.

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Meanwhile, what of the little prince?

This is what.

He floated about on the ocean lily a while. Perhaps he fell asleep? I do not know. I was not there. What I do know is this: the currents carried the ocean lily a fair distance, but it did not wash up on a shore.

Instead, pirates spied the child, and scooped him aboard their ship. They did not know he was a prince, of course, or they'd surely have demanded a mountain of gold for his return. They're all about mountains of gold, pirates.

All they knew was that his name was Alejandro, for that was embroidered on his collar.

The pirates thought him as cute as a baby otter, gave him a parrot to play with and let him splash about with dolphins now and then.

As Alejandro grew older, however, they began teaching him things: how to fight with a sword, for instance, or to shoot with a bow and arrow, and how to load and fire a musketoon.

He excelled at these, and the pirates cheered and congratulated themselves on their forethought in fishing him out of the waves.

But then?

When he was ten years old?

Well, they sat him down and told him that now he must become a pirate.

'And what must I do as a pirate?' Alejandro enquired.

'You must steal gold and treasure from other ships!' one pirate exclaimed, very excited to tell him. (They loved their work.)

'Use the sword, the arrow and the musketoon, to kill any who try to stop you!' a second cried.

'Set the ships alight and watch them sink!' all the other pirates bellowed.

Alejandro was ten, as I said, and very shocked to find out that *this* was how his pirate friends spent their days. How they 'earned a crust', as they put it. (They'd kept him below deck while they pirated up until now.)

He had a golden heart and did not *want* to steal, destroy and kill!

The pirates were furious.

'Not angry so much as disappointed,' one of them said, which hurt Alejandro's feelings, but then the others said, 'Not angry?! Why, I'm angry enough to rip apart a shark with my bare teeth! I'm furious! Livid!'

They were also very disappointed. 'All the *work* we put into bringing him up!' they complained. 'This is how he repays us?' And they squabbled about who had been too soft, so that he was raised to be *nice*. A milksop.

They began to beat him then, and to inflict punishments upon him, trying to make up for years of kindness. Trying to un-milksop him.

'We will make a pirate of you yet!' they swore.

Poor Alejandro. He was very unhappy.

He used his wits and cunning, and escaped from the pirate ship!

They recaptured him.

He escaped again!

Upon the shore, he made friends with a girl his own age named Bronte Mettlestone, who was an adventurer. She invited him to live, *happily ever after,* with her family in faraway Gainsleigh.

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And that, as I said, was the *happily ever after*. . .

But was it?