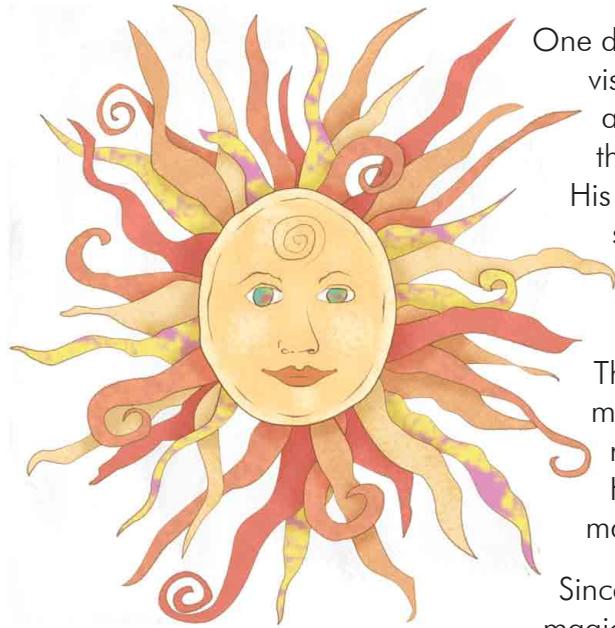


Magic Mask

Story

In a far away country, there lived a powerful prince. He had a huge army, and everyone was afraid of him. His friends and enemies respected him, but they did not love him; and as the prince grew older, he became lonely and unhappy. His face started to look sad, and no one ever heard him laugh.



One day, the prince decided he wanted to get married. He went to visit a princess who lived in a city nearby. The princess was kind and good and helpful, besides being beautiful. However, when the prince got to the princess' castle, he saw himself in a mirror. His face looked angry and mean and unkind, and when he tried to smile, it made him look even worse. Not wanting the princess to see him like that, the prince returned to his own castle without even meeting her.

The prince wanted to look happy and kind, so he asked his court magician to make him a mask. This mask would hide the prince's real face, and make him look as pleasant as the princess. However, explained the magician, if the prince ever frowned or made an angry face, the mask would crack and break off.

Since the prince didn't know how to be happy, he asked the magician how he could keep the mask from breaking.

"You must train yourself to think kindly thoughts," said the magician, "and you must do kindly deeds. If you are angry, keep still until the feeling has gone away. Be kind and courteous to all men and women." So the prince agreed, and he put on the wonderful mask the magician had made. No one could tell that it wasn't the prince's real face, and he looked kind and gentle.

The princess agreed to marry the prince, and they began to rule their kingdom together. Many times, the prince almost destroyed his mask, but as he struggled to overcome his temper and frowns, he became as gentle as the princess. His subjects began to love him, and they thought he was a good king.

However, the prince was unhappy because he knew the mask was not his real face. He wanted the princess to love his real face, not the mask. Finally, he asked the magician to take off the mask.

“Remember,” warned the magician, “I cannot make another one.”

“So be it,” said the prince. “Anything would be better than to fool the princess, whose love and trust I value so much.”

So the prince took off his mask and fearfully looked into the mirror. Amazingly, instead of a mean, ugly face, he saw a smiling, gentle man. Because the prince had tried so hard to be kind and courteous, his face had actually changed. Now, instead of the cruel, ugly man he had once been, the prince was truly the kindly ruler that all his subjects loved.