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IMAGINATION OVER KNOWLEDGE

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A Christmas present for mother

There was once a little prince whose mother, the queen, was sick. All summer she lay in bed, and everything was kept quiet in the palace; but when the autumn came she grew better. Every day brought color to her cheeks, and the little prince was allowed to go into her room and stand beside her bed to talk to her. He was very glad for he wanted to ask her what she would like for a Christmas present; and as soon as he had kissed her, and laid his cheek against hers, he whispered his question in her ear.

"What should I like for a Christmas present?" said the queen. "A smile and a kiss and a hug around the neck; these are the dearest gifts I know."

But the prince was not satisfied with this answer.

"Smiles and kisses and hugs you can have every day," he said, "but think, if you could choose the thing you wanted most in all the world what would you take?"

So the queen thought and thought, and at last she said:

"A little jar of rosemary like the one that bloomed in my mother's window when I was a little girl."



The little prince was delighted to hear this, and as soon as he had gone out of the queen's room he sent a servant to his father's greenhouses to inquire for a rosemary plant. But the servant came back with disappointing news. There were carnation pinks in the king's greenhouses, and roses with golden hearts, and lovely lilies; but there was no rosemary. Rosemary was a simple herb and grew, mostly, in country gardens, so the king's gardeners said.

"Then go into the country for it," said the little prince. "No matter where it grows, my mother must have it for a Christmas present."

So messengers went into the country here, there, and everywhere to seek the plant, but each one came back with the same story to tell; there was rosemary in the spring, but the frost had been in the country and there was not a green sprig left to bring to the little prince for his mother's Christmas present. Two days before Christmas, however, news was brought that rosemary had been found, a lovely green plant growing in a jar, right in the very city where the prince himself lived.

"But where is it?" said he. "Why have you not brought it with you? Go and get it at once."

"There is a little difficulty. The old woman to whom the rosemary belongs did not want to sell it even though I offered her a handful of silver for it."

"Then give her a purse of gold," said the little prince. So a purse filled so full of gold that it could not hold another piece was taken to the old woman; but it was brought back. She would not sell her rosemary; no, not even for a purse of gold.

"Perhaps if your little highness would go yourself and ask her, she might change her mind," said the prince's nurse. So the royal carriage drawn by six white horses was brought, and the little prince and his servants rode away to the old woman's house, and when they got there the first thing they spied was the little green plant in a jar standing in the old woman's window.

The old woman, herself, came to the door, and she was glad to see the little prince. She invited him in and gave him a cookie to eat. She had a little grandson no older than the prince, but he was sick and could not run about and play like other children. He lay in a little white bed in the old woman's room, and the little prince spoke to him and took out his favorite toy, which he always carried in his pocket, and showed it to him.

The prince's favorite toy was a ball which was like no other ball that had ever been made. It was woven of magic stuff as bright as the sunlight, as sparkling as the starlight, and as golden as the moon at harvest time. And when the little prince threw it into the air, or bounced it on the floor or turned it in his hands it rang like a chime of silver bells.

The sick child laughed to hear it, and held out his hands for it, and the prince let him hold it, which pleased the grandmother as much as the child. But she would not sell the rosemary. She had brought it from the home where she had lived when her little grandson's father was a boy, she said, and she hoped to keep it till she died. So the prince and his servants had to go home without it.

When they left the sick child began to talk of the wonderful ball. "If I had such a ball," he said, "I would be happy all the day."

"You may as well wish for the moon in the sky," said his grandmother; but she thought of what he said, and in the evening when he was asleep she put her shawl around her, and taking the jar of rosemary with her she hastened to the king's palace.

"Silver and gold would not buy the rosemary," she said when she saw him; "but if you will give me your golden ball for my little grandchild you may have the plant."

"But my ball is the most wonderful ball that was ever made!" cried the little prince; "and it is my favorite plaything. I would not give it away for anything."

And so the old woman had to go home with her jar of rosemary under her shawl. The next day was the day before Christmas and there was a great stir and bustle in the palace. The queen's physician had said that she might sit up to see the Christmas Tree that night, and have her presents with the rest of the family; and every one was running to get things in ready for her. The queen had so many presents that the Christmas Tree could not hold them all, so they were put on a table before the throne. The little prince went in to put his gift, which was a jewel, among them.

"She wanted a jar of rosemary," he said as he looked at the glittering heap. He thought of it many times that day, and once, when he was playing with his ball, he said to the nurse: "If I had a rosemary plant I'd be willing to sell it for a purse full of gold. Wouldn't you?"



"Indeed, yes," said the nurse; "and so would any one else in his right senses. You may be sure of that."

"I wish it were spring. It is easy to get rosemary then, is it not?"

"Your little highness is like the king's parrot that knows but one word with your rosemary,

rosemary, rosemary," said the nurse who was a little out of patience by that time. "Her majesty, the queen, only asked for it to please you. You may be sure of that."

But the little prince was not sure; and when the nurse had gone to her dinner and he was left alone, he put on his coat, and taking the ball with him he slipped away from the palace, and hastened toward the old woman's house. He had never been out at night by himself before, and he might have felt a little afraid had it not been for the friendly stars that twinkled in the sky above him.

"We will show you the way," they seemed to say; and he trudged on bravely in their light until he came to the house and knocked at the door. Now the little sick child had been talking about the wonderful ball all evening. "Did you see how it shone, grandmother? And did you hear how the little bells rang?" he said; and it was just then that the little prince knocked at the door. The old woman made haste to answer the knock

and when she saw the prince she was too astonished to speak.

"Here is the ball," he cried, putting it into her hands.

"Please give me the rosemary for my mother."

And so it happened that when the queen sat down before her great table of gifts the first thing she spied was a jar of sweet rosemary like that which had bloomed in her mother's window when she was a little girl.

"I would rather have that than all the other gifts in the world," she said; and she took the little prince in her arms and kissed him.