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IMAGINATION OVER KNOWLEDGE

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The Little Girl With The Light

There once lived a little maiden to whom God had given a wonderful light, which made her whole life bright.

When she was a wee baby it shone on her face in a beautiful smile, and her mother cried:—

"See! the angels have been kissing her!" And when she grew older it lighted up her eyes like sunshine, and gleamed on her forehead like a star.

All lovely things that loved light, loved her. The soft-cooing pigeons came at her call. The roses climbed up to her windows to peep at her, and the birds of the air, and the butterflies, that looked like enchanted sunbeams, would circle about her head.

Her father was king of a country; and though she was not so tall as the tall white lily in the garden, or the weeds that grew outside, she had servants to wait on her, and grant her every wish, as if she were a queen. She was dearer to her father and mother than all else that they possessed; and there was no happier king or queen or little maiden in any kingdom of the world, till one sad day when the king's enemies came upon them like a whirlwind, and changed their joy to sorrow.

Their palace was seized, the servants were scattered, and the king and queen were carried away to a dark prison-house, where they sat and wept for their little daughter, for they knew not where she was.

No one knew but the old nurse, who had nursed the king himself. She had carried the child away, unnoticed amid the noise and strife, and set her in safety outside the palace walls.

"Fly, precious one!" she cried, as she left her there.

"Fly! for the enemy is upon us!" And the little maiden started out in the world alone.

She knew not where to go; so she wandered away through the fields and waste places, where nobody lived and only the grasshoppers seemed glad. But she was not afraid,—no! not even when she came to a great forest, at evening;—for she carried her light with her.

'T is true that once she thought she saw a threatening giant waiting by the dusky path; but, when her light shone on it, it was only a pine tree, stretching out its friendly arms; and she laughed so merrily that all the woods laughed too.

"Who are you? Who are you?" asked an owl, blinking his eyes at the brightness of her face; and a little rabbit, startled by the sound, sprang from its hiding place in the bushes and fell trembling at her feet.

"Alas!" it panted as she bent in pity to offer help, "Alas! the hunters with their dogs and guns pursue me! But you flee, too! How can you help me?" But the child took the tiny creature in her arms and held it close; and when the dogs rushed through the tanglewood, they saw the light that lighted up her eyes like sunshine and gleamed on her forehead like a star, and came no further.

Then deeper into the great forest she went, bearing the rabbit still; and the wild beasts heard her footsteps, and waited for her coming.

"Hush!" said the fox, "she is mine; for I will lead her from the path into the tanglewood!"

"Nay, she is mine!" howled the wolf; "for I will follow on her footsteps!"



"Mine! mine!" screamed the tiger; "for I will spring upon her in the darkness, and she cannot escape me!"

So they quarreled among themselves, for they were beasts and knew no better; and as they snarled and growled and howled, the maiden walked in among them; and when the light which made her lovely fell upon them, they ran and hid themselves in the depths of the forest, and the child passed on in safety.

The rabbit still slept peacefully on her breast. At last she, too, grew weary, and lay down to sleep on the leaves and moss; and the birds of the forest watched her and sang to her, and nothing harmed her all the night.

In the morning a party of horsemen rode through the forest, looking behind each bush and tree as if they sought something very precious.

The forest glowed with splendor then, for the sun had come in all its glory to scatter darkness and wake up the world. The darkest dells and caves and lonely paths lost their horror in the morning light, and there were violets blooming in the shadows of the pines.

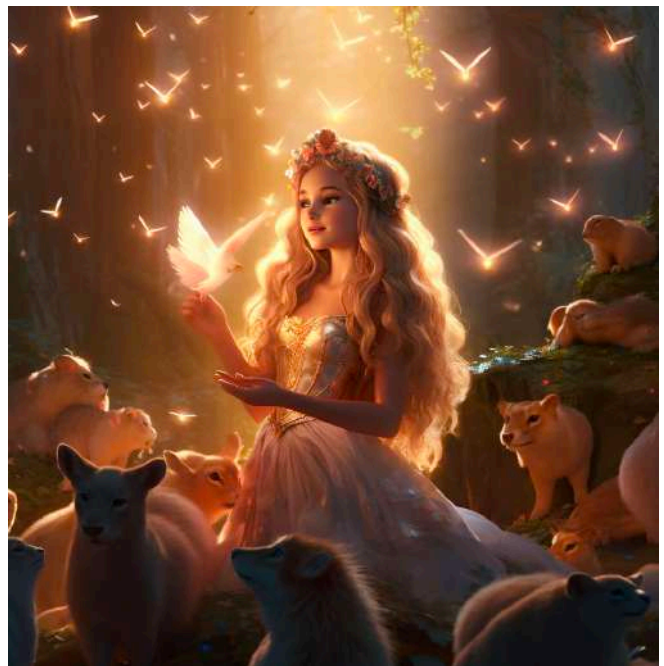
The leaves glistened, the flowers lifted their heads, and everything was glad but the horsemen, whose faces were full of gloom because their hearts were sad.

They did not speak or smile as they rode on their search; and their leader was the saddest of them all, though he wore a golden crown that sparkled with many jewels.

They followed each winding path through the forest, till at last they reached the spot where the little maiden lay.

The rabbit waked up at the sound of their coming, but the child slept till a loud cry of gladness awakened her and she found herself in her father's arms.

In the night-time the king's brave soldiers had driven his enemies from his land, and opened the doors of the prison-house in which he and the queen lay, and the king had ridden with them in haste to find his darling child, who was worth his crown and his kingdom.



The sight of her face was the sunshine to lighten their hearts, and they sent the glad news far and near, with blast of trumpet and shouts of joy.

But in all their great happiness the child did not forget the rabbit, and she said to it, "Come with me and I will take care of you, for my father the king is here." But the rabbit thanked her and wanted to go home.

"My babies are waiting," it said, "and I have my work to do in the world. I pray you let me go."

So the child kissed it and bade it go; and she, too, went to her own dear home. There she grew lovelier every day, for the light grew with her; and when, long years afterward, she was queen of the country, the foxes and wolves and tigers dared not harm her people, for her good knights drove evil from her land; but to loving gentle creatures she gave love and protection, and she lived happily all the days of her life.