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The Legend of the White Gifts

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Many, many years ago, in a land far away from ours, there lived a king who was dearly loved by all his people.

The men admired him, because he was strong and fair. In everything he did, they knew they could depend on him. Every question brought before him was weighed carefully in his mind, and his decisions were always wise and just. The women trusted him, because he was honest and true, a man of noble thoughts and high ideals. And the children loved him best of all, because of how gentle and kind he was to them. He was never so busy with the great affairs of his kingdom that he couldn't stop to speak a warm word of greeting to the smallest child — and even the very poorest of his people knew he truly cared about them.

This deep love for their king made the people long for some way to show him just how much he meant to them — a way he would really understand. They held meeting after meeting. One idea after another was suggested and set aside, until at last someone thought of something wonderful. Word of it spread quickly from village to village, and everywhere it was met with delight.

It was a plan to celebrate the King's birthday.

Now, of course, kings' birthdays had been celebrated in many lands before. But this celebration would have one very special difference. On his birthday, everyone would bring the King a gift — but they wanted each gift to say, without any words, *my love for you is pure and true and unselfish*. And so they decided that every single gift would be a **White Gift** — white being the colour of a love with no stain in it.

When the King heard of the beautiful plan, it touched his heart deeply. He decided he would play his part too, and show his people just how much their thoughtfulness meant to him.

You can imagine the excitement across the whole land as his birthday drew near! People made all kinds of loving little sacrifices, each one eager to bring the very best gift they could offer. At last the great day dawned, and the people came dressed all in white, carrying their white gifts.

To their surprise, they were led into an enormous room — the grandest in the whole palace. As they stepped inside, they fell silent, for it was more beautiful

than words could describe. Everything in it was white. The floor was white marble. The ceiling looked like a mass of soft, fluffy white clouds. The walls were draped in shimmering white silk, and every furnishing was white. At the far end stood a stately white throne — and seated upon it was their beloved King, robed in gleaming white, his attendants all in white gathered around him.

Then, one by one, the people came forward to present their gifts.

And what a wealth of gifts there was — and how very different they were! Then, as now, some people were rich, and they brought gifts as generous as their fortunes allowed. One offered a handful of pearls. Another brought delicately carved ivory. There were beautiful white laces and silks and embroideries, and some even led in splendid white horses for his majesty.

But many of the people were poor — some of them very poor — and their gifts were humbler by far. One woman brought a handful of white rice. A boy shyly held out his favourite white pigeon. And one small girl, smiling up at the King, gave him a single pure white rose.



It was wonderful to watch the King as each person knelt and offered a gift. He never once seemed to notice whether a gift was grand or small. He held no gift above any other — so long as it was white. Never had the King been so happy as he was that day, and never had such deep joy filled the hearts of his people.

They loved it so much that they decided to do the very same thing every year. And so it came to pass that year after year, on the King's birthday, the people came from near and far, bringing their white gifts — the gifts that showed their love was pure, and strong, and true, and without a single stain.

And year after year, the King sat in his white robes on his white throne in that great white room. And it was always, always the same: he held not one gift above another — so long as every gift was white.

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