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The Little Match Girl

Hans Christian Andersen

On the last evening of the year it was freezing cold, it was snowing and it was already almost completely dark. Through the twilight a poor little hungry girl walked. She wore no hat and her bare feet were blue with cold. She had left home on her mother's slippers, but she had lost one, and a bully had taken the other one.



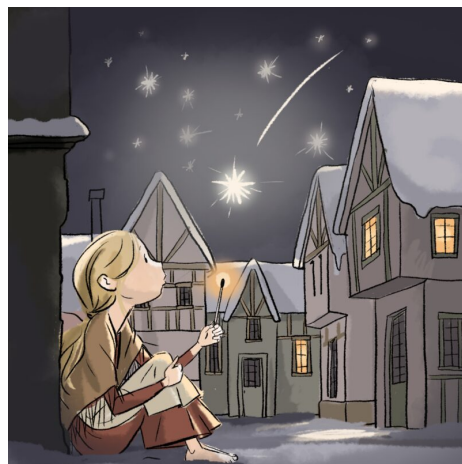
In her apron she had a lot of matches. She had not sold anything yet. That is why she did not dare to go home, for there was probably a beating waiting for her there, and it was cold there too. Lights shone from all the windows of the houses, and the smell of deliciously roasted goose was in the air. The snow fell on her hair and she crouched down in a corner between two houses. Her ice-cold hands were very sore.

If only she would dare to light a sulphur stick, she could warm her hands. Skrrrrtttt the fire sputtered and flamed. It looked like a small candle. But what a strange light...it seemed as if she was sitting in front of a lovely warm stove. Oh, how nice that was! Then the flame went out and she was back in the corner in the cold.

She stroked a new stick. Then... she could see through the walls into the room. On the table was a fat roasted goose and lots of other deliciousness. The goose even waddled up to the girl. But even now the flame went out and she sat on the cold street once more.



Again, she burned a match. And now... she was suddenly sitting under a beautiful Christmas tree with colourful ornaments and a thousand candles. As she held out her hands to the candles, the stick went out. The thousand candles rose up and turned into bright stars. One of the stars began to fall, leaving a trail of light across the sky. She thought, 'When a star falls, someone dies.' She had learned that from her grandmother.



She lit another stick. Again, there was a strange light. And there... she suddenly saw her grandmother, bright and shining and with a sweet look in her eyes. "Grandmother please take me with you," cried the girl. "When the flame goes out you will be gone again, just like the goose, the stove and the Christmas tree."

She quickly lit all the matches because she wanted her grandmother to stay. The light was even brighter than daylight. Never had grandmother been so beautiful. She took the girl in her arms and ascended with her. Higher and higher, to where there is only happiness and no cold or hunger. They were now together with God.



The next morning, in the corner between the houses, people found a little girl with pink cheeks and a smile on her lips. She had frozen to death on the last night of the year. The first light of the new year shone upon her.

She certainly tried to warm up a bit, people said. But nobody knew about the wonderful things the girl had seen. And nobody knew that she and her grandmother had started the new year in the joyful heavens.

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