



Ririro

READ ANYWHERE, ANYTIME

Eva's visit to Fairy-Land

Louise M. Alcott

Down on the grass lay little Eva by the brook-side, watching the bright waves. As she was wondering where the waters went, she heard a faint, low sound. She thought it was the wind, but not a leaf was stirring, and soon through the rippling water came a strange little boat.

It was a lily of the valley, whose tall stem formed the mast, while the broad leaves were filled with little Elves, who danced to the music of the silver lily-bells above, that rang a merry sound.

On came the fairy boat, till it reached a moss-grown rock; and here it stopped, while the Fairies rested beneath the violet-leaves, and sang with the dancing waves.

Eva looked with wonder at their happy faces and bright garments, and in the joy of her heart sang too. Then she threw some crimson fruit for the little folks to feast on.

They looked kindly to the child, and, after whispering long among themselves, two little bright-eyed Elves flew over the shining water, and, landing on the clover-blossoms, said gently, "Little girl, many thanks for your kindness. Our Queen asks if you will go with us to Fairy-Land, and learn what we can teach you."

"Gladly would I go with you, dear Fairies," said Eva, "but I cannot sail in your little boat. See! I can hold you in my hand, and could not live among you without harming your tiny kingdom, I am so large."

Then the Elves laughed, as they folded their arms around her, saying, "You are a good child, dear Eva, to fear doing harm to those weaker than yourself. You cannot hurt us. Look in the water and see what we have done."

Eva looked into the brook, and saw a tiny child standing between the Elves. "Now I can go with you," said she, "but see, I can no longer step from the bank to the stone, for the brook seems now like a great river, and you have not given me wings like yours."



But the Fairies took each a hand, and flew over the stream. The Queen and her

subjects came to meet her, and all seemed glad to say some kind words of welcome to the little stranger. They placed a flower-crown on her head and soon it seemed as if the gentle Elves had always been her friends.

“Now must we go home,” said the Queen, “and you shall go with us, little one.”

The cool waves’ gentle plashing against the boat, and the sweet chime of the lily-bells, lulled little Eva to sleep, and when she woke it was in Fairy-Land. A faint, rosy light, as of the setting sun, shone on the white pillars of the Queen’s palace as they passed in, and the sleeping flowers leaned gracefully on their stems, dreaming beneath their soft green curtains. All was cool and still. They led Eva to a bed of pure white leaves.

“You can look at the bright colors till the light fades, and then the rose will sing you to sleep,” said the Elves, as they folded the soft leaves around her, gently kissed her, and went away.

Long she lay watching the bright shadows, and listening to the song of the rose, while through the long night dreams of lovely things floated like bright clouds through her mind; while the rose bent lovingly above her, and sang in the clear moonlight.

In the morning she woke up and with the Elves. They flew away to the gardens, and soon, high up among the tree-tops, or under the broad leaves, sat the Elves in little groups, taking their breakfast of fruit and pure fresh dew; while the bright-winged birds came fearlessly among them, pecking the same ripe berries, and dipping their little beaks in the same flower-cups, and the Fairies folded their arms lovingly around them.

“Now, little Eva,” they said, “you will see that Fairies are not idle Spirits, as mortals believe. Come, we will show you what we do.”

They led her to a lovely room. Here lay many wounded insects, and harmless little creatures, whom cruel hands had hurt; and pale, drooping flowers grew beside urns of healing herbs, from whose fresh leaves came a faint, sweet perfume.

Eva silently followed her guide, little Rose-Leaf, who with tender words passed among the delicate blossoms, pouring dew on their feeble roots, cheering them with her loving words and happy smile.

Then she went to the insects; first to a little fly who lay in a flower-leaf cradle.

“Do you suffer much, dear Gauzy-Wing?” asked the Fairy. “I will bind up your poor little leg, and Zephyr shall rock you to sleep.” So she folded the cool leaves tenderly around the poor fly, bathed his wings, and brought him refreshing drink, while he hummed his thanks, and forgot his pain, as Zephyr softly sung and

fanned him with her waving wings.

They walked on, and Eva saw beside each bed a Fairy, who with gentle hands and loving words soothed the suffering insects. They stopped beside a bee, who lay among sweet honeysuckle flowers, in a cool, still place, where the summer wind blew in, and the green leaves rustled pleasantly. Yet he seemed to find no rest, and murmured of the pain he was doomed to bear. "Why must I lie here, while my kindred are out in the pleasant fields, enjoying the sunlight and the fresh air, and cruel hands have doomed me to this dark place and bitter pain when I have done no wrong? Uncared for and forgotten, I must stay here among these poor things who think only of themselves. Come here, Rose-Leaf, and bind up my wounds, for I am far more useful than idle bird or fly."

Then said the Fairy, while she bathed the broken wing,—

"Love-Blossom, you should not murmur. We may find happiness in seeking to be patient even while we suffer. You are not forgotten or uncared for, but others need our care more than you. Look on the bed beside you; this little dove has suffered far greater pain than you, and all our care can never ease it; yet through the long days he has been here, not an unkind word or a repining sigh has he uttered. Ah, Love-Blossom, the gentle bird can teach a lesson and you will be wiser."

Then a faint voice whispered, "Little Rose-Leaf, come quickly, or I cannot thank you enough for all your loving care of me."

So they went to the bed next to the discontented bee, and here lay the dove, whose gentle eyes looked gratefully upon the Fairy.

"Dear Fairy, for all you have done, I can only thank you and say farewell."

Then the wings were still, and the patient little dove was dead; but the bee murmured no longer, and the dew from the flowers fell like tears around the quiet bed.

Sadly Rose-Leaf led Eva away, saying, "Lily-Bosom shall have a grave tonight beneath our fairest blossoms, and you shall see that gentleness and love are prized far above gold or beauty, here in Fairy-Land. Come now to the Flower Palace, and see the Fairy Court."

Eva went into a lofty hall. She stood beside the throne and watched the lovely forms around her.

Suddenly the music grew louder and sweeter, and the Fairies knelt, and bowed their heads, as on through the crowd of loving subjects came the Queen, while the air was filled with voices singing to welcome her.

She placed the child beside her, saying, "Little Eva, you shall see now how the

flowers on your great earth bloom so brightly. A band of loving little gardeners go daily from Fairy-Land, to tend and watch them, that no harm may befall the gentle spirits that dwell beneath their leaves. This is never known, for like all good it is unseen by mortal eyes, and only pure hearts like yours can know our secret."

Little Rose-Leaf said to Eva; "come now and see where we are taught to read the tales written on flower-leaves, and the sweet language of the birds, and all that can make a Fairy heart wiser and better."



Then into a cheerful place they went, where were many groups of flowers, among whose leaves sat the child Elves, and learned from their flower-books all that Fairy hands had written there. Some studied how to watch the tender buds, when to spread them to the sunlight, and when to shelter them from rain; how to guard the ripening seeds, and when to lay them in the warm earth or send them on the summer wind to far off hills and valleys, where other Fairy hands would tend and cherish them, till a sisterhood of happy flowers sprang up to beautify and gladden the lonely spot where they had fallen. Others learned to heal the wounded insects, whose frail limbs a breeze could shatter, and who, were it not for Fairy hands, would die ere half their happy summer life had gone. Some learned how by pleasant dreams to cheer and comfort mortal hearts, by whispered words of love to save from evil deeds those who had gone astray, to fill young hearts with gentle thoughts and pure affections, that no sin might mar the beauty of the human flower; while others, like mortal children, learned the Fairy alphabet. Thus the Elves made loving friends by care and love, and no evil thing could harm them, for those they helped to cherish and protect ever watched to shield and save them.

Eva nodded to the little ones, as they peeped from among the leaves at the stranger, and then she listened to the Fairy lessons. Several tiny Elves stood on a broad leaf while the teacher sat among the petals of a flower that bent beside them, and asked questions that none but Fairies would care to know.

"Twinkle, if there lay nine seeds within a flower-cup and the wind bore five away, how many would the blossom have?" "Four," replied the little one.

"Rosebud, if a Cowslip opens three leaves in one day and four the next, how many rosy leaves will there be when the whole flower has bloomed?"

"Seven," sang the little Elf.

"Harebell, if a silkworm spins one yard of Fairy cloth in an hour, how many will it spin in a day?"

"Twelve," said the Fairy child.

"Primrose, where lies Violet Island?"

"In the Lake of Ripples."

"Now, little ones," said the teacher, "you may go to your painting so that our visitor can see how we repair the flowers that earthly hands have injured."

Then Eva saw how, on large, white leaves, the Fairies learned to imitate the lovely colors, and with tiny brushes to brighten the blush on the anemone's cheek, to deepen the blue of the violet's eye, and add new light to the golden cowslip.

"You have stayed long enough," said the Elves at last, "we have many things to show you. Come now and see what is our dearest work."

So Eva said farewell to the child Elves, and hastened with little Rose-Leaf to the gates. Here she saw many bands of Fairies, folded in dark mantles and with the child among them, they flew away over hill and valley. Some went to the cottages amid the hills, some to the sea-side to watch above the humble fisher folks; but little Rose-Leaf and many others went into the noisy city.

Eva wondered within herself what good the tiny Elves could do in this great place; but she soon learned, for the Fairy band went among the poor and friendless, bringing pleasant dreams to the sick and old, sweet, tender thoughts of love and gentleness to the young, strength to the weak, and patient cheerfulness to the poor and lonely.

Then the child wondered no longer, but deeper grew her love for the tender-hearted Elves, who left their own happy home to cheer and comfort those who never knew what hands had clothed and fed them, what hearts had given of their own joy, and brought such happiness to theirs.

Long they stayed, and many lessons little Eva learned. When she asked them when they would go back, they said: "Our work is not done; we can't leave so many sad hearts when we can cheer them up, so many dark homes that we can brighten? We must stay longer, little Eva, and you can learn more."

Then they went into a dark and lonely room, and here they found a pale, sad-eyed child, who wept bitter tears over a faded flower.

"Ah," sighed the little one, "it was my only friend and it was all that made my sad life happy and it is gone."

"Do you see," said the Elves, "through this simple flower will we keep the child pure amid the sin and sorrow around her. The love of this flower will lead her through temptation and through grief, and she will be a spirit of joy and

consolation to the sinful and the sorrowing.”

And so the Elves gave new strength to the flower. Day by day the friendless child watered the growing buds and deeper grew her love for the unseen friends who had given her one thing to cherish in her lonely home; sweet, gentle thoughts filled her heart.

The loving Elves brought her sweet dreams by night, and happy thoughts by day, and as she grew in childlike beauty, pure and patient amid poverty and sorrow. The love she gave to the tender flower kept her own heart innocent and bright, and was a lesson to those who knew the girl; and soon the gloomy house was bright with happy hearts, that learned of the gentle child to bear poverty and grief as she had done, to forgive those who brought care and wrong to them, and to seek for happiness in humble deeds of charity and love.

“Our work is done,” whispered the Elves, and they flew away to other homes.

To all who needed help or comfort went the faithful Fairies; and when at length they turned towards Fairy-Land, many were the grateful, happy hearts they left behind.

Then through the summer sky, above the blossoming earth, they journeyed home, happier for the joy they had given, wiser for the good they had done.

All Fairy-Land was dressed in flowers, and the soft wind went singing by. Sweet music sounded through the air, and troops of Elves in their pretty robes hastened to the palace where the feast was spread.

Soon the bright hall was filled with smiling faces and fair forms, and little Eva, as she stood beside the Queen, thought she had never seen a sight so lovely.

Long they feasted, they sang, and Eva, dancing merrily among them, longed to be an Elf.

Then the Queen said, as she laid her hand on little Eva’s shining hair:—

“Dear child, tomorrow we must take you home. Dear Rose-Leaf; you shall watch over little Eva’s flowers, and when she looks at them she will think of you. Come now and lead her to the Fairy garden, and show her what we think our fairest sight. Weep no more, but strive to make her last hours with us happy as you can.”

With gentle caresses and most tender words the loving Elves gathered about the child, and, with Rose-Leaf by her side, they led her through the palace, and along green, winding paths, till Eva saw what seemed a wall of flowers rising before her, while the air was filled with the most fragrant odors, and the low, sweet music as of singing blossoms.

"Where have you brought me, and what do these lovely sounds mean?" asked Eva.

"Look here, and you shall see," said Rose-Leaf, as she bent aside the vines, "but listen silently or you cannot hear."

Then Eva, looking through the drooping vines, saw a garden filled with the loveliest flowers; fair as were all the blossoms she had seen in Fairy-Land, none were so beautiful as these.

"How beautiful they are," whispered Eva, "but, dear Rose-Leaf, why do you keep them here, and why call you this your fairest sight?"

"Look again, and I will tell you," answered the Fairy.

Eva looked, and saw from every flower a tiny form come forth to welcome the Elves.

"These are the spirits of the flowers, and this the Fairy Home where those whose hearts were pure and loving on the earth come to bloom in fadeless beauty here, when their earthly life is past. The humblest flower that blooms has a home with us, for outward beauty is a worthless thing if all be not fair and sweet within. Do you see that lovely spirit singing with my sister Moonlight? A clover blossom was her home, and she dwelt unknown, unloved; yet patient and content, bearing cheerfully the sorrows sent her. We watched and saw how fair and sweet the humble flower grew, and then gladly bore her here, to blossom with the lily and the rose. The flowers' lives are often short, for cruel hands destroy them; therefore is it our greatest joy to bring them here, where no careless foot or wintry wind can harm them, where they bloom in quiet beauty, repaying our care by their love and sweetest perfumes."

"I will never break another flower," cried Eva; "but let me go to them, dear Fairy; I would gladly know the lovely spirits, and ask forgiveness for the sorrow I have caused. May I not go in?"

"Dear Eva, you are a mortal child, and cannot enter here; but I will tell them of the kind little maiden who has learned to love them, and they will remember you when you are gone. Come now, for you have seen enough, and we must go away."

On a rosy morning cloud, surrounded by the loving Elves, went Eva through the sunny sky. The fresh wind bore them gently on, and soon they stood again beside the brook, whose waves danced brightly as if to welcome them.

"Now we say farewell," said the Queen "tell me, dear Eva, what Fairy gift will make you happiest, and it shall be yours."

"You good little Fairies," said Eva, folding them in her arms, for she was no

longer the tiny child she had been in Fairy-Land, “you dear good little Elves, what can I ask of you, who have done so much to make me happy, and taught me so many good and gentle lessons, the memory of which will never pass away? I can only ask of you the power to be as pure and gentle as yourselves, as tender and loving to the weak and sorrowing, as untiring in kindly deeds to all. Grant me this gift, and you shall see that little Eva has not forgotten what you have taught her.”

“The power shall be yours,” said the Elves, and laid their soft hands on her head; “we will watch over you in dreams, and when you would have tidings of us, ask the flowers in your garden, and they will tell you all you would know. Farewell. Remember Fairy-Land and all your loving friends.”

Little Rose-Leaf placed a flower crown on her head, whispering softly, “When you want to come to us again, stand by the brook-side and wave this in the air, and we will gladly take you to our home again. Farewell, dear Eva. Think of your little Rose-Leaf when among the flowers.”

Long Eva watched their shining wings, and listened to the music of their voices as they flew singing home, and when at length the last little form had vanished among the clouds, she saw that all around her where the Elves had been, the fairest flowers had sprung up, and the lonely brook-side was a blooming garden.

She stood among the waving blossoms, with the Fairy garland in her hair, and happy feelings in her heart, better and wiser for her visit to Fairy-Land.

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