



Ririro

READ ANYWHERE, ANYTIME

Little Bud

Louise M. Alcott

In a great forest lived Bird Brown-Breast, and his bright-eyed little mate. They were very happy; their home was done, the four blue eggs lay in the soft nest, and the little wife sat still and patient on them, while the husband sang, and told her charming tales, and brought her sweet berries and little worms.

Things went smoothly, until one day she found in the nest a little white egg, with a golden band around it.

“Come and see! Where can this fine egg have come from? My four are here; what think you of it?”

The husband shook his head and said, “Don't be alarmed my love; it must be some good Fairy who has given it to us; let's not touch it, but sit on it carefully and we shall see in time what has been sent to us.”

So they said nothing about it, and soon their home had four little chirping children; and then the white egg opened, and a little girl lay singing within. The birds were amazed, but they welcomed her warmly and she lay warm beneath the mother's wing, and the young bird loved her. They named the little girl Little Bud.

The joy was great in the forest and proud were the parents of their family while all the neighbors flocked in, to see Dame Brown-Breast's little child. And the tiny girl talked to them, and sang so merrily, that they could have listened for ever. Soon she was the joy of the whole forest, dancing from tree to tree.

The wild fruits were her food, the fresh dew in the flower-cups her drink, while the green leaves served her for little robes; and thus she found garments in the flowers of the field, and a happy home with Mother Brown-Breast; and all in the wood, from the stately trees to the little mosses in the turf, were friends to the merry child.



Then one day a couple of sad little Elves came to Bud, praying that they might hear the sweet music; and when she took them by the hand, and spoke gently to them, they wept and said sadly, when she asked them why they came,—

“We dwelt once in Fairy-Land, and how happy were we then! But we were not

worthy of such a lovely home, and were sent into the cold world. Look at our robes, they are like the withered leaves; our wings are dim, our crowns are gone, and we lead sad, lonely lives in this dark forest. Let us stay with you; your music sounds like Fairy songs, and you are so friendly, and speak so gently to us. It is good to be near one so lovely and so kind; and you can tell us how we may again become fair and innocent. Say we can stay with you?"

And Bud said, "Yes," and they stayed; but her kind little heart was grieved that they wept so sadly, and all she could say could not make them happy; till at last she said,—

"Do not weep. I will go to Queen Dew-Drop, and ask her to let you come back. I will tell her that you are repentant, and will do anything to gain her love again; that you are sad, and long to be forgiven. This will I say, and more, and trust she will grant my prayer."

"She will not say no to you, dear Bud," said the poor little Fairies; "she will love you as we do, and if we can come again to our lost home, we cannot give you thanks enough."

All of Bud's friends came to say farewell, as with the morning sun she would go; and each brought some little gift, for the land of Fairies was far away, and she would journey long.

"You will not go on your feet, my child," said Mother Brown-Breast; "your friend Golden-Wing will carry you."

Then came the bee with his yellow honey-bags, which he begged she would take, and the little brown spider that lived under the great leaves brought a veil for her hat; while the ant came bringing a tiny strawberry. The mother gave her good advice, and the father stood with his head on one side, and his round eyes twinkling with delight, to think that his little Bud was going to Fairy-Land.

Then they all sang together, till she passed out of sight over the hills.

And now Bud left the old forest far behind her. Golden-Wing bore her swiftly along, and she looked down on the green mountains, and the peasant's cottages, that stood among overshadowing trees; and the earth looked bright, with its broad, blue rivers winding through soft meadows, the singing birds, and flowers, who kept their bright eyes ever on the sky.

Finally they arrived in Fairy-Land.

As Bud passed through the gates, she no longer wondered that the exiled Fairies wept and sorrowed for the lovely home they had lost. Bright clouds floated in the sunny sky, casting a rainbow light on the Fairy palaces below, where the Elves were dancing; while the low, sweet voices of the singing flowers sounded softly

through the fragrant air, and mingled with the music of the rippling waves, as they flowed on beneath the blossoming vines that drooped above them.

All was bright and beautiful; but kind little Bud would not linger and quickly to the Flower Palace she went. When they saw Bud, they gathered round her, and led her through the flower-wreathed arches to a group of the most beautiful Fairies. And among them was the queen.

Bud knelt before her, and, while tears streamed down her little face, she told the queen why she came, and pleaded earnestly that the exiled Fairies might be forgiven, and not be left to pine far from their friends and kindred. And as she prayed, many wept with her.

With tearful eyes, Queen Dew-Drop replied,—

“Little girl, your prayer has softened my heart. They will not be left sorrowing and alone, nor will you go back without a kindly word to cheer and comfort them. We will pardon their fault, and when they can bring a perfect Fairy crown, robe, and wand, they will be again received as children of their loving Queen. The task is hard, for none but the best and purest can form the Fairy garments; yet with patience they may restore their robes to their former brightness.”

Little Bud thanked the queen and returned home to tell the Elves what they had to do.

But the Elves were angry and disappointed and would not listen to her gentle words. They grieved her kind heart with many cruel words; but patiently she bore with them, and when they told her they could never perform so hard a task, and must dwell for ever in the dark forest, she answered gently, that the snow-white lily must be planted, and watered with repentant tears, before the robe of innocence could be won; that the sun of love must shine in their hearts, before the light could return to their dim crowns, and deeds of kindness must be performed, before the power would come again to their now useless wands.

Then they planted the lilies; but they soon drooped and died, and no light came to their crowns. They did no gentle deeds, but cared only for themselves; and when they found their labor was in vain, they tried no longer, but sat weeping. Bud, with patient care, tended the lilies, which bloomed brightly, the crowns grew bright, and in her hands the wands had power over birds and blossoms, for she was striving to give happiness to others, forgetful of herself. And the idle Elves, with thankful words, took the garments from her, and then they went with Bud to Fairy-Land, and stood with beating hearts before the gates; where crowds of Fairy friends came forth to welcome them.

But when Queen Dew-Drop touched them with her wand, as they passed in, the light faded from their crowns, their robes became like withered leaves, and their

wands were powerless.

Amid the tears of all the Elves, the Queen led them to the gates, and said,—

“Farewell! It is not in my power to help you; innocence and love are not within your hearts, and were it not for this untiring little girl, you never would have entered your lost home. Go and strive again, for until all is once more fair and pure, I cannot call you mine.”

“Farewell!” sang the weeping Fairies, as the gates closed on their outcast friends; who, humbled and broken-hearted, gathered around Bud; and she, with cheering words, guided them back to the forest.

Time passed and the Elves had done nothing to gain their lovely home again. They wept no longer, but watched little Bud, as she daily tended the flowers, restoring their strength and beauty, or with gentle words flew from nest to nest, teaching the little birds to live happily together; and wherever she went blessings fell, and loving hearts were filled with gratitude.

Then, one by one, the Elves secretly did some little work of kindness. Flowers looked lovingly up as they passed, birds sang to cheer them when sad thoughts made them weep. And soon little Bud found out their gentle deeds, and her friendly words gave them new strength.

And not only birds and flowers blessed them, but human beings also; for with tender hands they guided little children from danger, and kept their young hearts free from evil thoughts; they whispered soothing words to the sick, and brought sweet odors and fair flowers to their lonely rooms. They sent lovely visions to the old and blind, to make their hearts young and bright with happy thoughts.

But most tenderly did they watch over the poor and sorrowing, and many poor mothers blessed the unseen hands that laid food before their hungry little ones, and folded warm garments around their naked limbs. Many poor men wondered at the pretty flowers that sprang up in their little garden-plots, cheering them with their bright forms, and making their dreary home fair with their loveliness.

Time passed on, and though the exiled Fairies longed often for their home, still, knowing they did not deserve it, they worked on, hoping one day to see the friends they had lost; while the joy of their own hearts made their life full of happiness.

One day little Bud came to them, saying,—

“Listen, dear friends. I have a hard task for you. It is a great sacrifice for you light loving Fairies to dwell through the long winter in the dark, cold earth, watching over the flower roots, to keep them free from the little grubs and

worms that seek to harm them. But in the sunny Spring when they bloom again, their love and gratitude will give you happy homes among their bright leaves.

It is a wearisome task, and I can give you no reward for all your tender care, but the blessings of the gentle flowers you will have saved from death. Gladly would I help you; but my winged friends are preparing for their journey to warmer lands, and I must help them teach their little ones to fly, and see them safely on their way. Then, through the winter, I must go to the houses of the poor and suffering, comfort the sick and lonely, and give hope and courage to those who in their poverty are led astray. These things I have to do; but when the flowers bloom again I will be with you, to welcome back our friends from over the sea."

Then the Elves answered, "Ah, good little Bud, you have taken the hardest task yourself, and who will repay you for all your deeds of tenderness and mercy in the great world? Yes, dear Bud, we will gladly toil among the roots, that the fair flowers may wear their prettiest robes to welcome you."



Then deep in the earth the Elves dwelt, and no frost or snow could harm the blossoms they tended. Every little seed was laid in the soft earth, watered, and watched. Tender roots were folded in withered leaves, that no chilling drops might reach them; and safely dreamed the flowers, till summer winds should call them.

At last the snow was gone, and they heard little voices calling them to come up; but patiently they worked, till seed and root were green and strong. Then, with eager feet, they hastened to the earth above, where, over hill and valley, bright flowers and budding trees smiled in the warm sunlight, blossoms bent lovingly before them, and rang their colored bells, till the fragrant air was full of music; while the stately trees waved their great arms above them, and scattered soft leaves at their feet.

Then came the merry birds, making the wood alive with their voices, calling to one another, as they flew among the vines, building their little homes. Long waited the Elves, and at last she came with Father Brown-Breast. Happy days passed; and summer flowers were in their fullest beauty, when Bud bade the Elves to come with her.

Mounted on bright-winged butterflies, they flew over forest and meadow, till with joyful eyes they saw the flower-crowned walls of Fairy-Land.

Before the gates they stood, and soon troops of loving Elves came forth to meet them. And on through the sunny gardens they went, into the Lily Hall, where,

among the golden stamens of a graceful flower, sat the Queen.

Then, amid the deep silence, little Bud, leading the Elves to the throne, said,—

“Dear Queen, I here bring back your subjects, wiser for their sorrow, better for their hard trial; and now any Queen would be proud of them. Through the dreary months, when they could have dwelt among fair Southern flowers, beneath a smiling sky, they toiled in the dark and silent earth, filling the hearts of the gentle Flower Spirits with grateful love, seeking no reward but the knowledge of their own good deeds, and the joy they always bring. This they have done unobtrusively and alone; and now, far and wide, flower blessings fall upon them.

Are they not worthy of your love, dear Queen? Have they not won their lovely home? Say they are pardoned, and you have gained the love of hearts pure as the snow-white robes now folded over them.”

Bud touched the Elves with her wand, and the dark faded garments fell away; and beneath, the robes of lily-leaves glittered pure and spotless in the sun-light. Then, while happy tears fell, Queen Dew-Drop placed the bright crowns on the bowed heads of the kneeling Fairies, and laid before them the wands their own good deeds had rendered powerful.

They turned to thank little Bud for all her patient love, but she was gone; and high above, in the clear air, they saw the little form journeying back to the quiet forest.

She needed no reward but the joy she had given. The hearts of the Elves were pure again, and her work was done. All of Fairy-Land had learned a lesson from gentle little Bud.

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