



Ririro

READ ANYWHERE, ANYTIME

The Fairy Box

Louise M. Alcott

"I wish I had a magic bracelet like Rosamond's, that would prick me when I was going to do wrong," said little May, as she put down the story she had been reading.

There was no one else in the room, but she heard a sweet voice sing these words close to her ear:-- "Look under your pillow every night. If you have been good, something nice you will find. But if you've been naughty or wild, something bad you will find, dear child."

May was very much surprised at this, and looked everywhere to see who spoke, but could find no one.

"I guess I dreamed it; but my eyes are wide open, and I can't make up poetry, asleep or awake."

As she said that, some one laughed; and the same voice sang again,-- "Haha you can't see me! Don't tell anyone of this. If you will be patient, a real fairy will come to see little May."

"Oh, how splendid that will be! I'll try hard, and be as good as an angel if I can only get one peep at a live fairy. I always said, there were such people, and now I shall know how they look," cried the little girl, so pleased that she danced all around the room, clapping her hands.

Something bright darted out of the window from among the flowers that stood there, and no more songs were heard; so May knew that the elf had gone.

"I've got a fine secret all to myself, and I'll keep it carefully. I wonder what present will come tonight," she said, thinking this a very interesting play.

She was very good all day, and made no fuss about going to bed, though usually she fretted, and wanted to play, and called for water. She got safely into her little nest, and then was in such a hurry to see what was under her pillow that she forgot, and called out crossly to her mother,--

"Do hurry and go away. Don't wait to hang up my clothes! Go, go!"

That hurt her mother's feelings, and she went away without her goodnight kiss. But May didn't care, and felt under her pillow the minute the door was shut. A lamp was always left burning; so she could see the little gold box she drew out.

"How pretty! I hope there is some candy in it," she said, opening it very carefully.

Oh, dear! what *do* you think happened? A wasp flew out and stung her lips; then both wasp and box vanished, and May was left to cry alone, with a sharp pain in the lips that said the unkind words.

"What a dreadful present! I don't like that spiteful fairy who sends such horrid things," she sobbed.

Then she lay still and thought about it; for she dared not call any one, because nobody must guess the secret. She knew in her own little heart that the cross words hurt Nursey as the sting did her lips, and she felt sorry. At once the smart got better, and by the time she had resolved to ask the good old woman to forgive her, it was all gone.

Next morning she kissed her mother and said she was sorry, and tried hard to be good till tea-time; then she ran to see what nice things they were going to have to eat, though she had often been told not to go into the dining-room. No one was there; and on the table stood a dish of delicious little cakes, all white like snowballs.

"I must have just a taste, and I'll tell mamma afterward," she said; and before she knew it one little cake was eaten all up.

"Nobody will miss it, and I can have another at tea. Now, a lump of sugar and a sip of cream before mamma comes."

Having done one wrong thing, May felt like going on; so she nibbled and meddled with all sorts of forbidden things till she heard a step, then she ran away. No one missed the cake, and her mother gave her another, saying,--

"There, dear, is a nice plummy one for my good child."

May turned red, and wanted to tell what she had done, but was ashamed because there was company; and people thought she blushed like a modest little girl at being praised.

But when she went to bed she was almost afraid to look under the pillow, knowing that she had done wrong. At last she slowly drew out the box, and slowly opened it, expecting something to fly at her. All she saw was a tiny black bag, that began at once to grow larger, till it was big enough to hold her two hands. Then it tied itself tight round her wrists, as if to keep these meddlesome hands out of mischief.



"Well, this is very strange, but not so dreadful as the wasp. I hope no one will see it when I'm asleep. I do wish I'd let those cakes and things alone," sighed May, looking at the black bag, and vainly trying to get her hands free.

She cried herself to sleep, and when she woke the bag was gone. No one had seen it; but she told her mamma about the cake, and promised not to do so any more.

"Now this shall be a truly good day, every bit of it," she said, as she skipped away, feeling as light as a feather after she had confessed her little sins.

But it is so easy to forget and do wrong, that May spoilt her day before dinner by going to the river and playing with the boats, in spite of many orders not to do it. She did not tell of it, and went to a party in the afternoon, where she was so merry she never remembered the naughty thing till she was in bed and opened the fairy box. A little chain appeared, which in a flash grew long and large, and fastened round her ankles as if she were a prisoner. May liked to tumble about, and was much disgusted to be chained in this way; but there was no help for it, so she lay very still and had plenty of time to be sorry.

"It is a good punishment for me, and I deserve it. I won't cry, but I will-- I *will* remember."

All the next day she was very careful to keep her lips from cross words, her hands from forbidden things, and her feet from going wrong. Nothing spoilt this day, she watched so well; and when mamma gave the goodnight kiss, she said,--

"What shall I give my good little daughter, who has been gentle, obedient, and busy all day?"

"I want a white kitty, with blue eyes, and a pink ribbon on its neck," answered May.

"I'll try and find one. Now go to bed, deary, and happy dreams!" said mamma, with many kisses on the rosy cheeks, and the smile that was a reward.

May was so busy thinking about the kitty and the good day that she forgot the box till she heard a little "Mew, mew!" under her pillow.

"What's that?" And she popped up her head to see.

Out came the box; off flew the lid, and there, on a red cushion, lay a white kit about two inches long. May couldn't believe that it was alive till it jumped out of its nest, stretched itself, and grew all at once just the right size to play with and be pretty. Its eyes were blue, its tail like a white plume, and a sweet pink bow was on its neck. It danced all over the bed, ran up the curtains, hid under the clothes, nipped May's toes, licked her face, patted her nose with its soft paw, and winked at her in such a funny way that she laughed for joy at having such a

dear kitty. Then as if it knew that bed was the place to lie quiet in, the cat cuddled down in a little bunch and purred May to sleep.

"I suppose that darling kit will be gone like all the other things," said May, as she waked up and looked round for her first pretty gift.

No; there was the lovely thing sitting in the sun among the flower-pots, washing her face and getting ready for play. What a fine frolic they had; and how surprised every one was to see just the cat May wanted! They supposed it came as kitties often come; and May never told them it was a fairy present, because she had promised not to. She was so happy with little cat that she was good all day; and when she went to bed she thought,--

"I wish I had a dog to play with darling Snowdrop, and run with me when I go to walk."

"Bow, wow, wow!" came from under the pillow; and out of the box trotted a curly black dog, with long ears, a silver collar, and such bright, kind eyes May was not a bit afraid of him, but loved him at once, and named him Floss, he was so soft and silky. The cat liked him too; and when May was sleepy they both snuggled down in the same basket like two good babies.

"What shall we find next?" said her mom, when she saw the dog in the morning.

"Perhaps it will be an elephant, to fill the whole house, and scare you out of your wits," laughed May, dancing about with Snowdrop chasing her bare toes, while Floss shook and growled over her shoes as if they were rats.

"If your cousin John wants to give you any more animals, I wish he'd send a pony to take you to school, and save my old legs the pain of trotting after you," said mother; for May did have a rich cousin who was very fond of her, and often gave her nice things.

"Perhaps he will," laughed May, much tickled with the idea that it was a fairy, and not Cousin John, who sent the cunning little creatures to her.

But she didn't get the pony that night; for in the afternoon her mother told her not to sit on the lawn, because it was damp, and May did not mind, being busy with a nice story. So when she took up her box, a loud sneeze seemed to blow the lid off, and all she saw was a bit of red flannel.

"What is this for?" she asked, much disappointed; and as if to answer, the strip of flannel wrapped itself round her neck.

"My throat *is* sore, and I *am* hoarse. I wonder how that fairy knew I sat on the damp grass. I'm so sorry; for I did want a pony, and might have had it if I'd only minded," said May, angry with herself for spoiling all her fun.

It was spoilt; for she had such a cold next day she couldn't go out at all, but had to take medicine and keep by the fire, while the other children had a lovely picnic.

"I won't wish for anything tonight; I don't deserve a present, I was so disobedient. But I *have* tried to be patient," said May, feeling for the box.

The fairy had not forgotten her, and there was a beautiful picture-book, full of new, nice stories printed in colored ink.

"How splendid to read tomorrow while I'm sick!" she said, and went to sleep very happily.

All the next day she enjoyed the pretty pictures and funny tales, and never complained or fretted at all, but was so much better the doctor said she could go out tomorrow, if it was fine.

"Now I will wish for the pony," said May, in her bed. But there was nothing in the box except a little red-silk rope, like a halter. She did not know what to do with it that night, but she did the next morning; for just as she was dressed her brother called from the garden,--

"May, look out and see what we found in the stable. None of us can catch him, so do come and see if you can; your name is on the card tied to his mane."

May looked, and there was a snow-white pony racing around the yard. Then she knew the halter was for him, and ran down to catch him. The minute she appeared, the pony went to her and put his nose in her hand.

May was delighted, and very proud when the pony let her put on the saddle and bridle that lay in the barn all ready to use. She jumped up and rode down the road; and Will and mamma and Floss and Snowdrop ran to see the pretty sight. The children at school were much excited when she came trotting up, and all wanted to ride Prince. He was very gentle, and every one had a ride; but May had the best fun, for she could go every day for long trots by the carriage when mamma and Will drove out. May was so happy and contented at night that she said to herself as she lay in bed,--

"I'll wish for something for Will now, and see if I get it. I don't want any more presents yet; I've had my share, and I'd love to give away to other people who have no fairy box."

So she wished for a nice boat, and in the box lay a key with the name "Water Lily" on it. She guessed what it meant, and in the morning told her brother to come to the river and see what she had for him. There lay a pretty green and white boat, with cushioned seats, a sail all spread, and at the mast-head a little flag flying in the wind, with the words "Water Lily" on it in gold letters.

Will was so surprised and pleased to find that it was his, he turned heels over head on the grass, kissed May, and skipped into his boat, crying, "All aboard!" as if eager to try it at once.

May followed, and they sailed away down the lovely river, white with real lilies, while the blackbirds sang in the green meadows on either side, and boys and girls stopped on the bridges to see them pass.

After that May kept on trying to be good, and wishing for things for herself and other people, till she forgot how to be naughty, and was the sweetest little girl in the world. Then there was no need of fairies to help her; and one night the box was not under the pillow.

"Well, I've had my share of pretty things, and must learn to do without. I'm glad I tried; for now it is easy to be good, and I don't need to be rewarded," said May, as she fell asleep, quite happy and contented, though she did wish, she could have seen the fairy just once.

Next morning the first thing she saw was a beautiful bracelet, shining on the table; and while she stood admiring it, she heard the little voice sing,-- "Here is a bracelet for good little May, to wear on her arm by night and by day. When it shines like the sun, all is going well, but when you are bad, a sharp prick will tell. Farewell little girl!"

As the last words were sung, right before her eyes she saw a tiny creature swinging on the rose that stood there in a vase,--a lovely elf, with wings like a butterfly, a gauzy dress, and a star on her forehead. She smiled, and waved her hand as she slowly rose and fluttered away into the sunshine, till she vanished from sight, leaving May with the magic bracelet on her arm, and the happy thought that at last she had *really* seen a fairy.

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