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The King's Birthday

Maud Lindsay

Little Carl and his mother came from their home in the country one sweet summer day, because it was the king's birthday, and all the city was to be glad and gay, and the king would ride on his fine gray horse for the people to see.

Little Carl had gathered a very fine bunch of flowers to throw before the king. He had marigolds and pinks and pansies, and they had all grown in his mother's garden.

This was a great day for little boy Carl, and before he started from home he told everything goodbye,—the brindle calf and the mooley cow and the sheep and little white lambs.

"Good-bye!" he said; "I am going to see the king."

The way was long, but Carl did not complain. He trudged bravely on by his mother's side, holding the flowers tightly in his little hand, and looking out of his great blue eyes for the king, in case the king should ride out to meet them.

Every now and then Carl wished for his father, who was obliged to work in the fields all day, and who had been up and away before Carl was awake. Carl thought of the fine sights his father was missing, especially when they came to the city, where the flags were flying from every steeple and housetop and window.

There were as many people in the city as there were birds in the country; and when the drums beat, the crowd rushed forward and everybody called at once: "The king! the king! Long live the king!"

Carl's mother lifted him up in her arms that he might see, The king rode slowly along on his great gray horse, with all his fine ladies and gentlemen behind him; and little Carl threw his flowers with the rest and waved his cap in his hand.

He felt sorry for his flowers after he had thrown them, because they were trampled under the horses' feet and the king didn't care; and after that he felt very tired, and his little hot hand slipped from his mother's and he was carried away in the crowd.

He thought that his mother would surely come. But there were only strange faces about him, and he was such a little lad that nobody noticed him; and at last he was left behind, all alone.



He was very miserable, and the tears rolled down his cheeks; but he remembered that it was the king's birthday, and that everybody must be glad, so he wiped the tears away as he trudged along.

There were wonderful houses along the street, with great gardens in front; and Carl thought that they must belong to the king, but he did not want to go in. They were all too fine for him. But at last he reached one which stood off by itself and had a tall, tall steeple and great doors, through which hundreds of people were coming.

"Perhaps my mamma is there," thought little Carl. After he had watched all the people come out, and had not seen her, he went up the white marble steps and through the doors, and found himself all alone in a very beautiful place.

The roof of the house was held up by great strong pillars, and the floor had as many patterns on it as his mother's patchwork; and on every side he saw windows,—beautiful windows like picture books,—and when he had seen one, he wanted to see another, as you do when you are looking at picture books.

Some of the windows had jewels and crowns upon them; some had sheaves of lilies; and others had lovely faces and men with harps; and at last he came to one great window which was different from the rest and lovelier than any of them.

The other windows were like picture books, but this one was like home; for there were sheep in it and flowers, and a dear, gentle Man, with a loving face, and He had a lamb in His arms.

When little Carl looked at this window, he crept very close under it, and, laying his head on his arm, sobbed himself to sleep.

While he slept, the sunbeams came through the window and made bright circles round his head; and the white doves that lived in the church tower flew through an open window to look at him.



"It is good to live in the church tower," cooed the white doves to each other, "for the bells are up there; and then we can fly down here and see the dear Christ's face. See! here is one of his little ones!"

"Coo, coo," said the white doves softly; "we cannot speak so loudly as the bells, nor make ourselves heard so far; but we can fly where we please, and they must stay always up there."

All this cooing did not wake little boy Carl, for he was dreaming a beautiful dream about a king who had a face like the Good Man in the window, and who was carrying Carl in His arms instead of a lamb, and was taking him to his mother; and just as he dreamed that they had reached her, Carl woke up, for he heard somebody talking in the church.

He lay still and listened, for this seemed part of the dream. Somebody was talking about him, and the words were very plain to Carl:—

"Dear Father in Heaven, I have lost my little boy. I am like Mary seeking for the Christ Child. For His sake, give me my little child!"

Carl knew that voice, and in an instant he ran out crying:—

"Mother! mother! here am I!"

And in all the joy of the king's birth day, there was no joy so great as theirs.

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