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READ ANYWHERE, ANYTIME

The Search For A Good Child

Maud Lindsay

Long, long ago there lived, in a kingdom far away, five knights who were so good and so wise that each one was known by a name that meant something beautiful.

The first knight was called Sir Brian the Brave. He had killed the great lion that came out of the forest to frighten the women and children, had slain a dragon, and had saved a princess from a burning castle; for he was afraid of nothing under the sun.

The second knight was Gerald the Glad, who was so happy himself that he made everybody around him happy too; for his sweet smile and cheery words were so comforting that none could be sad or cross or angry when he was near.

Sir Kenneth the Kind was the third knight, and he won his name by his tender heart. Even the creatures of the wood knew and loved him, for he never hurt anything that God had made.

The fourth knight had a face as beautiful as his name, and he was called Percival the Pure. He thought beautiful thoughts, said beautiful words, and did beautiful deeds, for he kept his whole life as lovely as a garden full of flowers without a single weed.

Tristram the True was the last knight, and he was leader of them all.

The king of the country trusted these five knights; and one morning in the early spring-time he called them to him and said:—

"My trusty knights, I am growing old, and I long to see in my kingdom many knights like you to take care of my people; and so I will send you through all my kingdom to choose for me a little boy who may live at my court and learn from you those things which a knight must know. Only a good child can be chosen. A good child is worth more than a kingdom. And when you have found him, bring him, if he will come willingly, to me, and I shall be happy in my old age."

Now the knights were well pleased with the words of the king, and at the first peep of day they were ready for their journey, and rode down the king's highway with waving plumes and shining shields.

No sooner had they started on their journey than the news spread abroad over

the country, and many fathers and mothers who were anxious for the favor of the king sent messengers to invite the knights to visit them.

The parents' messages were so full of praises of their children that the knights scarcely knew where to go. Some of the parents said that their sons were beautiful; some said theirs were smart; but as the knights cared nothing for a child who was not good, they did not hurry to see these children.

On the second day, however, as they rode along, they met a company of men in very fine clothes, who bowed down before them; and while the knights drew rein in astonishment, a little man stepped in front of the others to speak to them.

He was a fat little man, with a fat little voice; and he told the knights that he had come to invite them to the castle of the Baron Borribald, whose son Florimond was the most wonderful child in the world.

"Oh! there is nothing he cannot do," cried the fat little man whose name was Puff. "You must hear him talk! You must see him walk!"

So the knights followed him; and when they had reached the castle, Florimond ran to meet them. He was a merry little fellow, with long fair curls and rosy cheeks; and when he saw the fine horses he clapped his hands with delight. The baron and baroness, too, were well pleased with their visitors, and made a feast in their honor; but early the next morning, the knights were startled by a most awful sound which seemed to come from the hall below.

"Boo-hoo-hoo-hoo!" It sounded something like the howling of a dog; but as they listened, it grew louder and louder, until it sounded like the roaring of a lion.

The knights seized their swords and rushed down to see what was the matter; and there, in the middle of the hall, stood Florimond, his cheeks puffed up and his eyes swollen,—and right out of his open mouth came that terrible noise: "Boo-hoo-hoo-hoo!"

His mamma and papa were begging him to be quiet. The cook had run up with a pie, and the nurse with a toy, but Florimond only opened his mouth and screamed the louder, because the rain was coming down, when he wanted to play out of doors!

Then the knights saw that they were not wanted, and they hurried upstairs to prepare for their journey. The baron and baroness and fat little Puff all begged them to stay, and Florimond cried again when they left him; but the knights did not care to stay with a child who was not good.

The knights began to think that their mission was a difficult one; but they rode on, asking at every house: "Is there a good boy here?" only to be disappointed many times.

North, south, east, and west, they searched; and at last, one afternoon, they halted under an oak tree, to talk, and they decided to part company.

"Let each take his own way," said Tristram the True, "and to-morrow we will meet, under this same tree, and tell what we have seen; for the time draws near when we must return to the king."

Then they bade each other farewell, and each rode away, except Sir Tristram, who lingered long under the oak tree; for he was the leader, and had many things to think about.

Just as the sun was red in the west, he saw a little boy coming towards him, with a bundle of sticks on his back.

"Greeting to you, little boy," said he.

"Greeting to you, fair sir," said the boy, looking up with eager eyes at the knight on his splendid horse, that stood so still when the knight bade it.

"What is your name?" asked the knight.

"My name is little Gauvain," replied the child.

"And can you prove a trusty guide, little Gauvain, and lead me to a pleasant place where I may rest to-night?" asked the knight.

"Ay, that I can," Gauvain answered gladly, his whole face lighting up with pleasure; but he added quickly, "I can, if you will wait until I carry my sticks to Granny Slowsteps, and bring her water from the spring; for I promised to be there before the setting of the sun."

Now little Gauvain wanted to help the good knight so much that he was sorry to say this; but Sir Tristram told him to run, and promised to wait patiently until his return; and before many moments Gauvain was back, bounding like a fawn through the wood, to lead the way to his own home.

When they came there the little dog ran out to meet them, and the cat rubbed up against Gauvain, and the mother called from the kitchen:—

"Is that my sunbeam coming home to roost?" which made Gauvain and the knight both laugh.

Then the mother came out in haste to welcome the stranger; and she treated him with honor, giving him the best place at the table and the hottest cakes.

She and little Gauvain lived all alone, for the father had gone to the wars when Gauvain was a baby, and had died fighting for the king.



She had cows, horses, and pigs, hens, chickens, and a dog and a cat, and one treasure greater than a kingdom, for she had a good child in her house.

Sir Tristram found this out very soon, for little Gauvain ran when he was called, remembered the cat and dog when he had eaten his own supper, and went to bed when he was told, without fretting, although the knight was telling of lions and bears and battles, and everything that little boys like to hear about.

Sir Tristram was so glad of this that he could scarcely wait for the time to come when he should meet his comrades under the oak tree.

"I have found a child whom you must see," he said, as soon as they came together.

"And so have I," cried Gerald the Glad.

"And I," exclaimed Kenneth the Kind.

"And I," said Brian the Brave.



"And I," said Percival the Pure; and they looked at each other in astonishment.

"I do not know the child's name," continued Gerald the Glad; "but as I was riding in the forest I heard some one singing the merriest song! And when I looked through the trees I saw a little boy bending under a heavy burden. I hastened to help him, but when I reached the spot he was gone. I should like to hear him sing again."

"I rode by the highway," said Sir Brian the Brave, "and I came suddenly upon a crowd of great, rough fellows who were trying to torment a small black dog; and just as I saw them, a little boy ran up, as brave as a knight, and took the dog in his arms, and covered it with his coat. The rest ran away when I rode up; but the child stayed, and told me his name—Gauvain."

"Why!" exclaimed Kenneth the Kind, "he is the boy who brings wood and water for Granny Slowsteps. I tarried all night at her cottage, and she told me of his kindness."

"I saw a lad at the spring near by," said Percival the Pure. "He hurried to fill his bucket, and some rude clown muddied the water as the child reached down; but he spoke no angry words, and waited patiently till the water was clear again. I should like to find his home and see him there."

Now Sir Tristram had waited to hear them all; but when Sir Percival had finished, he arose and cried:—

"Come, and I will carry you to the child!" And when the knights followed him, he

led them to the home where little Gauvain was working with his mother, as happy as a lark and as gentle as a dove.

It was noonday, and the sun was shining brightly on the shields of the knights, and their plumes were waving in the breeze; and when they reached the gate, Sir Tristram blew a loud blast on a silver trumpet.

Then all the hens began to cackle, and the dog began to bark, and the horse began to neigh, and the pigs began to grunt; for they knew that it was a great day. And little Gauvain and his mother ran out to see what the matter was.

When the knights saw Gauvain they looked at each other, and every one cried out: "He is the child!" And Tristram the True said to the mother:—

"Greeting to you! The king, our wise ruler, has sent us here to see your good child; for a good child is more precious than a kingdom. And the king offers him his love and favor if you will let him ride with us to live at the king's court and learn to be a knight."

Little Gauvain and his mother were greatly astonished. They could scarcely believe that such a thing had happened; for it seemed very wonderful and beautiful that the king should send messengers to little Gauvain. After the knights had repeated it, though, they understood; and little Gauvain ran to his mother and put his arms around her; for he knew that if he went with the knights he must leave her, and the mother knew that if she let him go she must live without him.

The rooster up on the fence crowed a very loud "Cock-a-doodle-doo!" to let everybody know he belonged to Gauvain; and a little chick that had lost its mother cried, "Peep! peep!" And when the mother heard this, she answered the knights and said:—

"I cannot spare my good child from my home. The king's love is precious; but I love my child more than the whole world, and he is dearer to me than a thousand kingdoms."

Little Gauvain was so glad when he heard her answer that he looked again at the knights with a smiling face, and waved his hand to them as they rode away. All day and all night they rode, and it was the peep of day when they came to the king's highway. Then they rode slowly, for they were sad because of their news; but the king rejoiced when he heard it, for he said: "Such a child, with such a mother, will grow into a knight at home."

The king's words were true; for when the king was an old, old man, Gauvain rode to his court and was knighted.

Gauvain had a beautiful name of his own then, for he was called "Gauvain the

Good"; and he was brave, happy, kind, pure, and true. And he was beloved by all the people in the world, but most of all by his mother.

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