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READ ANYWHERE, ANYTIME

The story of the amber beads

Jane Andrews

Do you know Mother Nature? She is responsible for the care of the earth and everything that grows on it or in it. You might think that Mother Nature, like the famous "old woman who lived in a shoe," has so many children that she doesn't know what to do. But you will know better when you get to know her and learn how strong and active she really is. She can be in fifty places at once, caring for a sick tree or a newly born baby flower, while at the same time building underground palaces, guiding the footsteps of little travelers on long journeys, and tending to her great house, the earth.

And all the while, amidst her patient and never-ending work, she will tell us the most charming and wondrous stories of centuries ago, when she was young, or of the treasures hidden in the most remote and secret closets of her palace. Such stories you will all enjoy hearing your mother tell you as you sit around her in the twilight. I will now tell you a few of these stories that she has told me, starting with this one.



I know a Scottish girl who lives in the Highlands. Her house is barely more than a hut. Her father tends sheep on the slopes, and instead of wearing a coat, he wraps himself in a warm cloak to protect himself from the cold wind that drives great clouds of mist and snow between the mountains in front of them. As for Jeanie herself, her face has been browned by the sun and her hands hardened by work, for she helps her mother with cooking and sewing, spinning and weaving. And Jeanie has a beautiful treasure in her possession. It is a necklace of amber beads. You may have seen amber before and know its rich, sunny color and the scent of it when you rub it, and do you also know that rubbing it attracts things to it like a magnet?

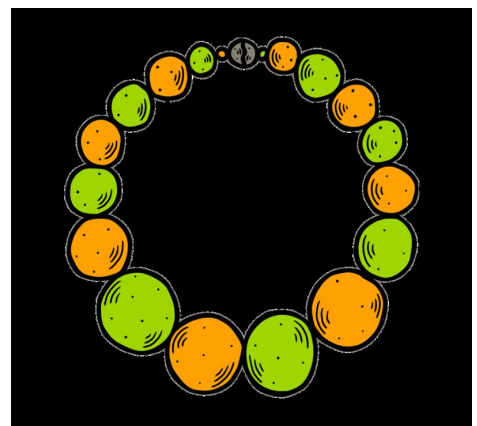
Jeanie's beads had all these properties, but some other ones as well, miraculous and lovely; and it is of these in particular that I want to tell you. Each bead has a small object inside as if it has grown inside the stone; and Jeanie never tires of looking at them and thinking about them. She has a bead with moss inside it and one with a fly, its little wings spread and lifted to fly. And in another bead is a bee caught and a small beetle in another. She also has a bead with two pine

needles inside it.

I wish you could see the beads, for they are beautiful! But where did these beads come from and why does Jeanie have them? The only thing she knows is that her grandfather, years ago when he was a boy, went to the beach after a big storm and found a bright, shiny lump of amber among the slippery seaweed, in which all these little creatures were stuck. Her grandfather was in love with a beautiful girl and gave her the necklace when they got married.

He had carved the beads out of the lump of amber himself, carefully working to save the most beautiful insect or moss in each bead. And when her grandmother passed away, Jeanie was allowed to have the necklace. But what Jeanie didn't understand is how the amber came to the coast and especially how the bees and mosses got inside it. And Mother Nature told her: "Long ago, before there were people on earth, the Scottish Highlands were covered in forests. There were oaks, poplars, beeches, and pines; and among them a kind of pine, tall and stately, from which a shiny yellow gum flowed.

"This beautiful yellow gum was fragrant, and as the thousands of small insects fluttered around it in the warm sunshine, they were attracted by the delicious scent and perhaps also by the taste, and when they settled on it, they became stuck and could not escape, while the large yellow droplets that oozed out surrounded and eventually completely covered them. And this is amber." "That's a beautiful story, Mother Nature; but how did the lump of amber end up on the coast, belonging to Jeanie's grandpa?"



This is the second part of the story. "Have you ever heard that very long ago, the land sometimes sank into the sea, even so deep that the water covered the mountaintops? You can hardly believe it, yet I was there to see it myself; and I remember well when the great forests of northern Scotland - the oaks, poplars, and amber pines - disappeared into the sea. There the gum hardened into stone, and only great storms can move the stone. It was one of those great storms that brought grandpa's lump of amber to the shore."

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