



The little match girl

Description

How cold it was! The snow was falling and night was not far off; it was the last evening of the year, New Year's Eve.

In the middle of this cold and darkness, a poor little girl passed in the street, bareheaded and barefoot.

It is true that she had slippers when she left home, but they had not served her long: they were large slippers that her mother had already worn out, so large that the little girl lost them as she hurried across the street between two cars.

One was really lost; as for the other, a boy took it away with the intention of making a cradle for his little child, when heaven would give him one.

The little girl walked along with her little bare feet, which were red and blue with cold; she had in her old apron a large quantity of matches, and she carried a bundle in her hand.

It was a bad day for her; no buyers, so no money. She was very hungry and cold, very miserable.

Poor girl! The snowflakes were falling in her long blond hair, so nicely curled around her neck; but was she even thinking about her curly hair?

The lights were shining in the windows, the smell of roast meat was wafting down the street; it was New Year's Eve: that's what she was thinking about.

She sat down and slumped on herself in a corner, between two houses.

The cold seized her more and more, but she didn't dare go back home: she brought her matches, and not the smallest coin.

Her father would beat her, and besides, wasn't it cold at home too?

They lived under the roof, and the wind blew through, though the largest cracks had been sealed with straw and rags.

His little hands were almost dead from cold.

Alas, how good a little match would do them! If she dared to take one from the packet, rub it on the wall and warm her fingers!

She drew one: ritch! how it burst! How it burned!

It was a warm, clear flame like a small candle, when she covered it with her hand.

What a strange light! It seemed to the little girl that she was sitting in front of a large iron stove decorated with balls and topped with a shiny copper lid.

The fire was burning so beautifully, it was heating so well!

But what is it! The little girl was already stretching out her feet to heat them too; the flame went out, the stove disappeared: she was sitting down, a small piece of the burnt match in her hand.

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She rubbed a second one, which burned, which glowed, and where the glow fell on the wall, it became transparent like gauze.

The little one could see right into a room where the table was covered with a white tablecloth, dazzling with fine china, and on which a roast goose, stuffed with prunes and apples, was smoking with a delicious fragrance. O surprise! O happiness!

Suddenly the goose jumped from its dish and rolled across the floor, fork and knife in its back, to the poor girl.

The match went out: she had only the thick, cold wall in front of her.

Here was a third one lit. Immediately she saw herself sitting under a magnificent Christmas tree; it was richer and bigger even than the one she had seen, last Christmas, through the glass door, at the rich merchant's.

A thousand candles were burning on the green branches, and pictures of all colors, like those that adorn the windows of the stores, seemed to smile at her.

The little girl raised both hands: the match went out; all the Christmas candles went up and up, and then she realized that it was only the stars.

One of them fell and traced a long line of fire in the sky.

It was a long line of fire in the sky;

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Arthur Rackham

« It is someone who is dying, » said the little girl to herself; for her old grandmother, who alone had been good to her, but was no more, often repeated to her, « When a star falls, it is that a soul ascends to God. »

She struck another match on the wall: a great light appeared, in the middle of which grandmother was standing, looking so sweet, so radiant!

Grandmother cried the little girl, « Take me away. When the match goes out, I know you won't be there. You will disappear like the iron stove, like the roast goose, like the beautiful Christmas tree. »

She promptly rubbed the rest of the package, for she was anxious to keep her grandmother, and the matches spread a brighter glow than the day.

Grandmother had never been so tall or so beautiful. She took the little girl on her arm, and both of them flew away joyfully in the middle of this radiance, so high, so high, that there was no more cold, nor hunger, nor anguish; they were at God's house.

They were at God's house;

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Athur Rackham

But in the corner, between the two houses, sat, when the cold morning came, the little girl, her cheeks all red, the smile on her mouth.... dead, dead of cold, on the last night of the year.

New Year's Day dawned on the little corpse sitting there with the matches, one pack of which had been almost completely burned. « She wanted to warm up! » someone said.

Everyone ignored the beautiful things she had seen, and in the midst of what splendor she and her old grandmother had entered the new year.

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