



THE LITTLE MATCH GIRL

The winter raging outside was bitter and harsh, the air full of giant fluttering snowflakes, the sky slowly growing dark. It was the last day of the year and everyone was getting ready for the festivities of New Year's Eve. Well, almost everyone. A little girl with little clothes and no shoes walked sadly along the streets. She left home in slippers, but they belonged to her mother and were still too big for the girl's tiny feet. As she hurried through the freshly fallen snow, her feet, already soaking wet after taking a few steps, kept sinking into the white powder and the slippers kept slipping and slipping until, one by one, she lost them both.

The girl didn't stop and continued barefoot through the cold snow. Her frostbitten feet were slowly turning from red to blue and her whole body was numb with cold.

She carefully carried a huge bunch of matches in her loose skirt and held a full matchbox in one of her hands. She sold matches in the town every day, but today she was out of luck. No one had bought a single match from her.

Hungry and freezing and desperate, she kept roaming the streets of the lit-up town, hoping to come across someone who would buy at least a single match.

The snowing was heavier and heavier and the snowflakes settled on the little girl's long braided hair, but she hadn't even noticed that she was all covered

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with snow as she passed by the beautifully decorated windows glowing with every colour. She could hear festive music coming out of some of the houses and smell yummy food from almost all of them. Soon, the tables would fill up with tasty dishes with families gathered around them, celebrating the magical holidays together.

The weather was getting worse still, ice cold wind blowing stronger and stronger, the snow turning into a blizzard. The girl, exhausted and chilled to the bone, hid behind a corner between two houses and sat on a low wall. Luckily, it was under a roof and there wasn't much snow.

She pressed her legs together and curled up to warm up a bit. Not having sold or earned anything, she dared not go back home, knowing she wouldn't escape her father's beating. Besides, she wouldn't get much warmer at home either. It had been a while since they had any wood to make a fire with and the attic room where she lived with her mother and father had holes and cracks in the roof through which the wind blew in, bringing cold air. The girl sat on the cold wall, hands almost frozen stiff. Oh, how nice it would be to light a match and feel just a tiny bit of warmth. Just one... If only she could take one match and warm her hands above the flame... If only she could muster the courage to set one on fire... In that harsh weather, she had no choice. She took a single match and struck it against the wall of the house. A little flame flared up in an instant, glimmering in the wind and illuminating the girl's cheeks for a tiny while. She quickly put her fingers as close as she could to the bright glow to warm them up, gazing at the tiny light as if it were a small miracle. Suddenly, she started dreaming and in this dream she was sitting right in front of a giant tiled stove radiating pleasant heat, feeling bliss and happiness.

But when she wanted to warm her legs, too, all of a sudden, the flame went out. The image of the huge tiled stove disappeared and all she was left with was a charred match in her hand. So she took a second match out of her skirt, and when she struck it, it flamed up with a bright glow right away. This time, the girl dreamt of a large room with a festive table. The beautiful white tablecloth was set with white porcelain plates and the room was filled with the fresh-out-of-the-oven smell of crispy roast goose. All of a sudden, the goose sprang to its feet, a

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fork and knife still in its back, and started jumping across the floor right towards the poor girl. Then the second match burned out. Instead of a room with a festive dinner afoot, there was a cold white wall in front of her again. She struck another match right away and saw herself sitting under the most beautiful Christmas tree she had ever seen. It was tall with marvellous ornaments all over it. There were tiny golden bells that gently tinkled every now and then and thousands of colourful lights shimmered on the green branches. The girl tried to reach up for them, but the match burned out again and she realized that the lights were in fact stars twinkling on the cleared up dark sky. Then she saw a shooting star with a golden tail behind it.

“Someone has just died,” said the girl to herself softly with a sadness in her voice. She knew this from her grandma, the only person, who had ever been kind and nice to her. Sadly, she died a long long time ago.

“A star falling from the sky means there is a soul going up to heaven,” her grandmother used to say. The freezing girl lit up another match. Suddenly, her beloved grandmother appeared right in front of her. She could clearly see her standing there, within arm’s reach.

“Grandma,” called the girl, “please, take me with you! You will surely disappear when my match burns out, just like the tiled stove, the dinner table and the Christmas tree.”

Then she quickly lit all the remaining matches to keep her grandmother by her side for as long as possible. The matches burned so brightly it almost looked like the night had already turned into a new day and the girl thought she could hear Christmas singing. Her grandmother kept smiling at her lovingly. After some time she took the girl’s hand and they both started rising up, up in the air. And suddenly, the cold, the hunger and the fear – all of that just vanished up in smoke. A few hours later, a little girl with rosy cheeks and a smile on her face was found sitting on a wall in the freezing cold morning. She sat there motionless, still holding the tiny matchbox in her little hand, frozen to death.

“She wanted to get warm, poor thing,” the passers-by said when they found her. They didn’t know, though, what beautiful things she saw right before she left this world and that she had happily joined her grandmother in heaven.