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# THE LITTLE MATCH GIRL

Once upon a time, there was a very poor little girl walking through the streets on a winter night. It was terribly cold. The snow kept falling, the wind blew strongly, and the streets were almost empty. The little girl wore an old apron and slippers that were too big for her, because they had once belonged to her mother. In her hands, she carried several boxes of matches that she was trying to sell.

It was the last night of the year. In many houses, there were bright lights in the windows and tables prepared for supper. From

outside came the smell of hot food, and happy laughter and voices could be heard. But the little girl was alone, walking slowly and shivering from the cold.

—Matches... who will buy matches? —she said in a very soft voice.

But no one stopped to listen to her. No one bought anything. And the little girl was afraid to go home without having sold even one little box, because she knew that no warmth or food was waiting for her there either.

Little by little, her hands turned red, and she could hardly feel her fingers. Her feet were freezing, and her little face looked tired and sad. So she found a corner between two houses, where the wind blew a little less, and sat down on the ground, hugging herself to keep warm.

She looked at the matches she was carrying.

—If I light just one, maybe I can warm my hands a little —she thought.

She took out one match and struck it against the wall.

Rasch.

The tiny flame lit up and shone with a soft and gentle warmth. The girl held out her hands toward it, and suddenly she thought she saw something wonderful. In front of her appeared a great iron stove, beautiful and warm. The fire glowed inside it and seemed to invite her to come closer.

—What lovely warmth... —whispered the little girl.

She stretched out her feet to warm them too, but at that very moment, the flame went out.

And the stove disappeared.

Only the cold wall remained in front of her.

The little girl sighed and lit another match.

Rasch.

This time, the light shone even more brightly, and then she thought she saw a table covered with a white cloth. On it were beautiful dishes, fresh bread, fruit, and a large roasted goose that smelled delicious. It seemed like a perfect supper, warm and plentiful, like the ones she saw from outside the bright houses.

The little girl opened her eyes wide in wonder.

—How beautiful... —she said softly.

It even seemed to her that the goose was moving toward her on the table, as if it wanted to come all the way to where she was. But just then, the match went out.

And the table disappeared.

Once again, the little girl was alone in the freezing street.

Then she lit a third match.

Rasch.

The light lit up the wall, and this time a huge and beautiful Christmas tree appeared before her. It was much taller and brighter than any she had ever seen before. It had green branches, little candles, stars, golden ribbons, and ornaments of many colors. Everything shone in a magical and beautiful way.

The little girl lifted her hands in wonder.

—Oh... what a beautiful tree...

As she looked at it, one of the lights rose into the sky and became a falling star.

The little girl remembered something her dear grandmother had once told her.

—When a star falls, it means someone is going up to heaven —she murmured.

Her grandmother had been the only person who had always treated her with tenderness and love. But she was no longer with her. She had died some time ago, and the little girl missed her very much.

With her heart full of longing, she lit another match.

Rasch.

And then she saw her.

There, in the middle of that soft and shining light, appeared her grandmother. She looked kind, peaceful, and radiant, just as the little girl remembered her. Her face was full of sweetness, and her eyes seemed to embrace her.

—Grandmother! —cried the little girl with joy—. Grandmother, it is you!

The little girl stretched out her hands toward her.

—Please, do not go away —she said quickly—. When the match goes out, you will disappear too, just like the stove, just like the warm supper, and just like the beautiful tree.

Then, in great haste, she lit another match. And then another. And then many more. She wanted the light not to go out, because she did not want to lose her grandmother.

Soon many matches were burning at the same time, and everything around her was filled with a warm and beautiful brightness. Her grandmother smiled tenderly and opened her arms.

—Come with me —she seemed to say.

The little girl felt that she was no longer cold, hungry, or afraid. She felt only peace, warmth, and a gentle joy in her heart. It seemed to her that her grandmother took her by the hand and lifted her softly.

And in that light, the little girl left behind the dark night, the icy wind, and the sadness.

The next morning, when the day began, people found the little girl in her corner, still and quiet, with a little smile on her face. Beside her were the burned matches.

—Poor little thing —some people said—. She must have wanted to warm herself.

But no one could imagine the beautiful things she had seen during the night. No one knew that, in her final moments, she had felt warmth, beauty, and her grandmother's love one more time.

And so, the story of the little match girl reminds us that sometimes, behind a sad and quiet face, there may be a heart that needs love, care, and compassion.

# THE END

