

The Young King & Other Stories

by Oscar Wilde

(Adapted book. Pre-Intermediate level)

Story 1. The Young King

The young king was alone in his beautiful room in the palace. He was only sixteen years old and he was wild-eyed, like an animal of the forest. The old king's servants found him in the forest. At that time, the boy believed that he was the son of a poor forester. He was brought up by the forester. But now he knew that he was the child of the old king's daughter.

The king's daughter married an ordinary man, a painter. He painted pictures on the walls of the great church where kings were crowned. But one day he disappeared, leaving the pictures unfinished. The week-old baby was taken away from his mother's side while she slept. The forester and his wife had no children, and the baby was given to them.

The princess died.

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When the old king was dying, he said, 'My heart is heavy because I have done a terrible thing. The crown must not pass away from my family. Bring my daughters child from the forest. He will be king after me.'

When the boy was brought to the palace, he showed a strange love for beautiful things. He gave a happy cry when he saw his fine new clothes and rich jewels. He quickly took off the old coat that he wore in the forest. He walked through the palace from room to room, looking at everything.

A rich man came to see the young king one day. He found him on his knees in front of a beautiful picture from Venice. On another day, people searched for the king for hours. They finally found him in a little room at the north end of the palace. He was looking at the shape of the Greek god Adonis, cut in a jewel.

In bed that night, the young king thought about the beautiful clothes for his special day - a gold coat and a jewelled crown. People were working day and night to finish the clothes in time. The young king imagined himself in the great church, dressed as a king. His eyes closed, and he fell asleep. As he slept, he dreamed.

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He dreamed that he was standing in a long, low room. Around him were cloth-makers at work. Only a little daylight came in through narrow windows. The men's faces were pale and thin. Little children were working with them. They were weak and hungry and their little hands shook.

The young king went to watch one of the cloth-makers. The man looked at him angrily.

'Why are you watching me?' he said. 'Did our employer ask you to watch us?'

'Who is your employer?' asked the young king.

'He is a man like me. But unlike me, he wears fine clothes. And while I am hungry, he has too much food.'

'You are not a slave,' said the young king. 'Your employer does not own you.'

'The rich make the poor their slaves,' answered the cloth-maker. 'We must work to live. But they pay us too little and we die. Men call us free, but we are slaves. But these things do not matter to you. You are not one of us: your face is too happy.'

He turned away and continued his work. Then the young king saw that the cloth-maker was making gold cloth. He felt a sudden fear.

'Who are you making that cloth for?' he asked.

'I am making it for the crowning of the young king.'

The young king woke up with a loud cry. He was in his own room in the palace. Through the window, he saw the golden moon hanging in the sky.

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The young king fell asleep again and dreamed. He dreamed that he was on a ship. Hundreds of slaves were working on the ship. They

were wearing only simple cloths round their waists, and each man was tied to the man next to him. The hot sun shone down on them without pity. A man ran up and down between the slaves. He hit them until the blood came. 'Work faster!' he ordered.

At last the ship stopped near some land. The seamen took one of the youngest slaves, tied a stone to his feet and let him down over the side of the ship. After some time they pulled him out of the water. He had a pearl in his right hand. The seamen took it from him, then pushed him back into the water.

The young slave came up again and again; each time he brought with him a beautiful pearl. The seamen put the pearls in a green bag.

Then the slave came up for the last time. This time he brought the best pearl of all. It was shaped like the full moon and it was brighter than the morning star. But the face of the slave was strangely white. He fell down on the ship, and blood came from his ears and mouth.

'Dead?' cried one of the seamen. 'Throw the body into the sea.' He looked at the pearl. 'This will be for the crowning of the young king.'

When the young king heard this, he woke up with a great cry. Through the window, the stars were growing weak and daylight was coming.

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The young king fell asleep again and dreamed. He was walking through a dark forest full of strange fruit and flowers. He continued walking until he came out of the forest. There he saw a great crowd of men, working in a dry river. They were making large holes in the ground and breaking the rocks with tools.

The young king turned and saw an old man standing behind him, with a mirror in his hand.

'Who are these men?' he asked.

'The people in the walled cities have no food, and little water,' said the old man. 'But these men are working in the river to find-'

'What are they trying to find?'

'Jewels - for a king's crown,' said the old man.

‘For which king?’

‘Look in the mirror and you will see him.’

The young king looked in the mirror and saw his own face. He woke up with a great cry. Bright sunlight was shining into the room, and in the garden outside birds were singing in the trees.

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Government officers came into the young king’s room and greeted him. Servants brought the coat made of gold cloth. Other servants placed the crown and fine jewels in front of him.

The young king looked at the lovely things. They were very beautiful. But he remembered his dreams, and said, ‘Take them away. I will not wear them.’

The government officers were very surprised. Some of them thought that he was joking. They laughed.

He spoke to them again: ‘Take these things away. I will not wear them. This cloth was made by the white hands of pain. There is blood in the jewels and death in the heart of the pearl.’ And he told them his three dreams.

When the men heard this, they said to him, ‘You do not know what you are saying. A dream is only a dream - it is not real. We cannot worry about the people who work for us. And if you do not wear these clothes and this crown, you will not look like a king. How will the people know that you are king?’

‘Perhaps you are right,’ answered the young king. ‘But I will not wear this coat and I will not wear this crown. I did not wear fine clothes when I came into the palace. I will go out of the palace in the same way. Go, all of you. Only this boy may stay.’

The government officers and the servants left. Only one servant, a boy, stayed with the king. The young king opened a big box and took out a rough coat. This was his coat in the days when he watched animals on the hillside for the forester. The young king also took out a stick from the forest.

The boy said, ‘Sir, where is your crown?’

The young king cut a piece from a wild rose that grew near the window. He made it into a circle and put it on his head.

‘This will be my crown,’ he said.

The young king left his room. The government officers were waiting for him. He got up on his horse and rode out through the great gates of the palace towards the church. The boy ran with him.

The people in the streets laughed. ‘This is not the king,’ they said as he rode past them. He stopped and answered, ‘I am the king.’ And he told them his three dreams.

A man came out of the crowd and spoke angrily to him: ‘The life of the poor comes from the fine things that rich people use. When we make these things, we can buy bread. Go back to your palace and put on your kings clothes. Why are you worrying about us?’

‘Aren’t rich people and poor people brothers?’ asked the young king. His eyes filled with tears as he rode through the angry cries of the people. The boy became afraid and left him.

At the great gate of the church, the soldiers tried to stop him. ‘Only the king can come in here,’ they said to him.

‘I am the king,’ he answered angrily, and he pushed through them.

The most important priest in the church was waiting to crown the new king. He saw the young king in his poor clothes, and he went to meet him.

‘My son,’ he said. ‘Is this how a king dresses? What crown shall I crown you with? This should be a day of great happiness.’

‘Can happiness wear what sadness and pain have made?’ said the king, and he told the High Priest his dreams.

‘I am an old man,’ answered the High Priest. ‘I know that many wrong things are done in the world. But God has made us this way, and He is wiser than you. The weight of this world’s suffering is too heavy for one man.’

‘Can you say that in this house of God!’ said the young king. He walked past the High Priest and went down on his knees.

Suddenly a loud noise came from the street outside. The government officers came into the church, shouting, ‘Where is this

dreamer of dreams? Where is the king who is dressed as a servant? He cannot be our king!’

The young king stood up and turned sadly towards them. Then sunlight shone down through the coloured glass of the church windows. It changed his coat into a coat that was more beautiful than one of gold cloth. From the dead stick, white flowers grew that were more beautiful than pearls. The wild roses on his head shone brighter than jewels.

He stood there dressed as a king. The light of God filled the place and there was music and singing. The people fell on their knees.

The High Priest laid his hands on the young king’s head. ‘Someone has crowned you who is greater than me,’ he said, and he went down on his knees in front of his king.

Story 2. The Birthday of the Infanta

It was the birthday of the Infanta, the daughter of the King of Spain. She was twelve years old. The little princess was playing with her friends in the sun-filled palace garden. From a window in the palace, the king watched her. The Infanta looked just like her mother. The king thought sadly about his young French queen. She died soon after her child was born, before she saw the beautiful flowers in the garden and the fruit on the trees.

His love was great, and he could not hide her body in the ground. So an Egyptian doctor worked on her body. It stayed as fresh after death as it was in life. Twelve years later, it still lay in the small palace church. Once every month the king went there and fell down on his knees by her side. He called out, ‘My queen! My queen!’

Today, the king watched the Infanta playing in the garden. Memories of his married life returned to him. The Infanta had the same pretty ways as the queen. She moved her head in the same way when she talked. She had the same proud, beautiful mouth, the same wonderful smile. But the king felt very sad. He could not enjoy the children laughing or the sunny garden. When the Infanta looked up again at the window, he was not there.

‘Why has he gone away,’ she said, ‘when I want him to stay with me on my birthday? Where is he? Has he has gone to that dark little church where I cannot go? He is very silly! The sun is shining so brightly and everyone is so happy!’

She walked to a big tent to watch her birthday show. Don Pedro, her uncle, went with her. The Camarera went too. She was a great lady who looked after the Infanta. At the show, some boys rode on wooden horses, dressed in bright clothes. An Indian man played music on a pipe and made magic. He covered the sand with a cloth, and a tree grew up out of it. Then flowers grew on the tree. He brought eggs out of his nose. Then he took one egg and changed it into a little bird. The bird flew away, and the children were excited and happy.

Some schoolboys did a beautiful dance. Then some Africans sat in a ring and played music. Another man brought in a dog. The animal stood up on its back legs and danced.

But the funniest thing was the dancing of an ugly little dwarf. He had very short legs and a very big head. The children laughed and laughed at him. The Camarera told the Infanta to be quieter. A princess must not laugh so loudly.

The dwarf was found by two rich Spanish men when he was running wild in the forest. His father happily sold his ugly child to them, and they took him to the palace as a surprise for the Infanta. There was one very funny thing about the dwarf. He did not seem to know how strange and ugly he looked. He seemed quite happy! When the children laughed, he laughed too.

The Infanta was very amused by him. He could not keep his eyes off her; he seemed to dance just for her. At the end of his dance, she took a white rose out of her hair and threw it to him. He caught the flower and kissed it. Then he put his hand on his heart and went down on one knee in front of her. He was smiling, and his little eyes were bright.

The Infanta laughed at this for a long time. She wanted the dwarf to dance again. But the Camarera said, ‘The sun is too hot. The Infanta should go back to the palace for her birthday dinner. The dwarf can

dance again for you later.’ So the Infanta went back to the palace, and the other children followed her.

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The little dwarf was very, very proud. He ran out into the garden, kissed the white rose and jumped up and down happily. He told the flowers: ‘The Infanta has given me this beautiful white rose. She wants me to dance for her a second time.’ They moved their heads, but they did not seem to hear him. He told the birds, but did not stop singing. Perhaps their song was about him and Infanta.

‘The Infanta has given me a white rose and she loves me. Oh, I want to be with her in the palace. I can be her friend and play with her and teach her nice things. I can make a pipe and play music on it for her. I can teach her how to call the birds. Yes! She must come to the forest and play with me. We will dance on the fresh grass. When she is tired, I will find a soft bank of flowers for her. Then she can rest on it.’

He looked at the palace. The doors and windows were shut to keep out the midday heat. Then he saw a little door which was open. He went through it. He was in a beautiful room. There was gold everywhere, and the floor was made of coloured stones. But the little Infanta was not there.

The dwarf came to a second room. In the centre there was a big round table with red books on it. This was the room where the government officers met. The little dwarf was afraid, but he thought of the pretty Infanta. ‘I must continue,’ he said, ‘and find her. I will tell her that I love her. I will ask her to come away with me after my dance. I know that she will come to the forest with me.’ He smiled as he thought of it.

He went into the next room. This was the brightest and the most beautiful of all the rooms. The tables and chairs were made of silver, and the floor was of sea-green stone. But he was not alone!

He saw someone - a small person - standing in the shadow at the other end of the room. Watching him! He shouted with excitement, and moved out into the sunlight. As he moved, the other one moved too. He saw it clearly. This was not the Infanta! It was a terrible, ugly thing. It

was not shaped like other people. It had short legs and long arms, and its big head was covered with long black hair. He looked angrily at it, and it looked angrily back at him. He laughed, and it laughed. He went towards it, and it came to meet him.

‘What is it?’ He looked at the rest of the room. He could see everything in this wall of clear water. Every picture, every chair, every table. He took the white rose and kissed it. That other one had a rose too! It kissed it and pressed it to its heart. He was looking at himself in a mirror!

When he realized this, he fell down on the floor. He cried. He was the ugly one! The children laughed at him, not with him. The little Infanta did not love him; she only laughed at his ugliness.

‘Why didn’t they leave me in the forest? There were no mirrors there and I never knew. Why didn’t my father kill me? Why did he sell me so other people could laugh at me?’

Hot tears poured down his face. He pulled the white rose to pieces and threw the pieces away. The other one did the same. When he looked at it, it looked at him with a face full of pain. He covered his eyes and lay in the shadow.

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When the Infanta and her friends came into the room, they saw the ugly little dwarf. He was lying on the floor and hitting it with his hands in the strangest way. They shouted happily and stood round and watched.

‘His dancing was very funny,’ said the Infanta, ‘but this is funnier.’

The little dwarf did not look up. He lay there, crying very quietly. Then he made a strange noise and put his hand on his side. Then he fell back and lay there.

‘That was wonderful!’ said the Infanta. ‘But now you must dance for me.’

‘Yes,’ cried the children. ‘Get up and dance!’ But the little dwarf did not answer.

The Infanta was angry and called her uncle. He was walking with the king's doctor in the garden outside.

'My funny little dwarf is not listening to me,' she cried. 'You must wake him up. Tell him to dance for me!'

Don Pedro hit the dwarf. 'You must dance,' he said. 'The Infanta of Spain wants to see you dance.'

But the little dwarf did not move. The king's doctor looked at the dwarf and put his hand on the little man's heart. 'Oh, princess,' he said, 'your funny little dwarf will never dance again. That is very sad, because he is very, very ugly. Even the king laughed at him.'

'Why won't he dance again?' asked the Infanta.

'Because his heart is broken. He did not want to live, and he is dead.'

The Infanta was angry. 'In future,' she cried, 'I will only play with people who have no hearts.' And she ran out into the garden.

Story 3. The Happy Prince

The statue of the Happy Prince stood high above the city. It was covered with gold, its eyes were bright blue jewels, and a red jewel hung from its waist. Everyone thought that it was very beautiful.

'Why aren't you like the Happy Prince?' mothers said to their little boys when they cried.

Sad men looked at the statue and said, 'I am glad that someone in the world is happy.'

One night a little bird flew alone over the city. The other birds were all in Egypt now. 'Where can I stay tonight?' he thought. Then he saw the statue. 'I will stay there,' he thought. 'It is high up, so there is plenty of fresh air.'

He landed between the feet of the Happy Prince. 'I have a golden bedroom!' he thought. But as he put his head under his wing, a large drop of water fell on him.

He looked up. 'That is very strange!' he thought. 'There is not a cloud in the sky, but it is raining!'

Then another drop fell. 'I cannot stay on a statue that does not keep me dry,' he thought. 'I must find another place.' And he decided to fly away. But as he opened his wings, a third drop fell. He looked up and saw - Ah! What did he see?

The eyes of the Happy Prince were full of tears. Tears ran down his golden face. The face was very beautiful in the moonlight, and the bird felt sorry for him. 'Who are you?' asked the bird. 'I am the Happy Prince.'

'Then why are you crying? I am wet with your tears.'

'When I was alive,' said the prince, 'I had a heart like every other man. But I did not know what tears were. I lived in a palace where there was no sadness. In the daytime I played with my friends in a beautiful garden, and in the evening I danced. There was a high wall round the garden. But I did not know what lay on the other side. So I was called the Happy Prince. I was pleased with my little world. Now I am dead, and they have put me up here. I can see all the unhappiness of my city. My heart now is made of a cheap metal. But even that poor heart can feel, and so I cry.'

'Oh,' said the bird to himself, 'he is not all gold - he is only gold on the outside.'

'Far away from here,' said the Happy Prince in a low voice, 'there is a poor house in a little street. Through an open window, I can see a woman at a table. Her face is very thin and she has rough, red hands. She is making a dress for one of the queen's ladies, for a dance in the palace. Her little boy is lying on a bed in the corner of the room. He is very ill. He is crying because she can only give him water from the river. Little bird, will you take my red jewel to her? I cannot move from here.'

'My friends are waiting for me in Egypt,' said the bird.

'Little bird, little bird,' said the prince, 'please stay with me for one night and do this for me. The boy is crying and his mother is so unhappy.'

The Happy Prince looked very sad, and the little bird was sorry for him. 'It is very cold here,' he said, 'but I will stay with you for one night. Tomorrow I will take the jewel.'

Thank you, little bird,' said the prince.

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So the bird took the great red jewel from the prince's waist and flew away with it over the roofs of the town. He passed the palace and heard the sound of dancing. A beautiful girl was at a window with her lover. 'I hope my dress will be ready for the dance next week,' she said. 'Those women are so lazy.'

The bird passed over the river and flew and flew. At last he came to the poor little house and looked inside. The boy was lying on the bed. The mother was asleep; she was so tired. He flew in and put the great red jewel on the table. Then he flew round the bed, moving the air around the boy's face with his wings.

'Oh,' said the boy, 'my face does not feel so hot. I think I am getting better.' And he fell asleep.

Then the bird flew back to the Happy Prince. 'It is strange,' the bird said. 'It is very cold, but I feel quite warm.'

'That is because you have done a good thing,' said the prince. The little bird fell asleep.

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When day came, the bird flew down to the river for a bath. A clever man saw him. 'That is very unusual!' he said. 'That kind of bird, here in winter! I must write that down!'

'I will go to Egypt tonight,' thought the bird.

When the moon came up, he flew back to the Happy Prince.

'Can I do anything for you in Egypt?' he said.

'Little bird, little bird,' said the prince, 'please will you stay with me for one more night?'

'My friends are waiting for me,' answered the bird.

'Far away across the city,' said the prince, 'I can see a young writer in a little room at the top of a house. He is sitting at a table that is covered with papers. At his side there are some dead flowers. He is

trying to finish a story. But he is very cold and he cannot write. There is no fire in the room, and he is weak and hungry.'

'I will wait with you for one more night,' said the bird kindly. 'What shall I take to him?'

'Take him one of my eyes,' said the prince. 'They are made of beautiful blue stones from India. The young man can sell it and buy wood and food. He can finish his story.'

'Take out your eye, dear prince?' said the bird. 'I cannot do that!' And he began to cry.

'Do it!' said the prince.

So the bird took out the prince's eye and flew away to the young man's room. It was easy to get in because there was a hole in the roof. The young man was sitting with his head in his hands, so he did not hear the bird's wings. When he looked up, a beautiful blue jewel was lying on the dead flowers.

'Someone likes my stories!' he cried happily. 'This is a gift from someone who has read my books. Now I can finish writing this story!'

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On the next day the bird flew down to the river. He watched the seamen working on the ships. 'I am going to Egypt!' he cried, but no one listened to him.

'When the moon came up, he flew back to the Happy Prince. I have come to say goodbye to you,' he said.

'Little bird, little bird,' said the prince, 'please will you stay with me for one more night?'

'It is winter,' answered the bird. 'The snow will soon come. In Egypt the sun is warm and the trees are green. Dear prince, I must leave you; but I will never forget you.'

A little girl is standing there in the square below. She is selling eggs. Her eggs have fallen on the ground and they are broken. She has no money to take home. Her father will hit her. Take out my other eye and give it to her.'

'I will stay with you for one more night,' said the bird, 'but I cannot take out your other eye. You will not be able to see!'

‘Do it!’ said the prince.

So the bird took out the prince’s other eye and flew down with it. He flew to the girl and put the jewel in her hand.

‘This is a beautiful piece of glass!’ cried the little girl. She ran home, laughing.

Then the bird flew back to the prince. ‘You cannot see now,’ he said, ‘so I will stay with you.’

‘No,’ said the poor prince, ‘you must go to Egypt.’

‘I will stay with you,’ repeated the bird, and he slept at the prince’s feet.

The next day he stayed with the prince. He told the prince stories about the strange lands that he knew.

‘Dear little bird,’ said the prince, ‘you are telling me about strange and wonderful things, but the suffering of men and women is stranger than anything. Fly over my city, little bird. Tell me what you see there.’

So the swallow flew over the great city. He saw the rich eating, and drinking in their beautiful houses. He saw the poor people sitting at the gate. He flew into the dark streets and saw the white faces of hungry children with sad eyes. Under a bridge, two little boys were lying close together to keep warm. ‘We are so hungry!’ they said. ‘You cannot lie there!’ shouted a guard.

Then the bird flew back and told the prince.

‘I am covered with fine gold,’ said the prince. ‘Take it off, piece by piece, and give it to my poor people.’

The bird pulled off the gold, until the Happy Prince looked grey and ugly. The bird took the gold to the poor, and the children’s faces became brighter. ‘We have bread now!’ they cried.

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Then the snow came. Ice followed the snow, and hung down from the roofs of the houses. Everyone wore thick coats.

The little bird became colder. He did not leave the prince, because he loved him too much. But he was dying.

‘Goodbye, dear prince!’ he said. ‘Can I kiss you?’

‘I am glad that you are going to Egypt,’ said the prince. ‘You have stayed too long. Kiss me, because I love you.’

‘I am not going to Egypt,’ said the bird. ‘I am going to the House of Death.’ He kissed the prince, and fell down dead at his feet. Then there was a strange sound inside the statue. CRACK - the metal heart broke into two pieces.

Early next morning, an important man in the city was walking below with two of his friends. He looked up at the statue. ‘The Happy Prince does not look very bright!’ he said. ‘The red stone has disappeared, his eyes are not there, and he is not golden. He looks like a beggar.’

‘Yes he does!’ said the man’s friends.

‘Here is a dead bird at his feet!’ said the officer. ‘We must make an order that birds cannot die here.’

They pulled down the statue of the Happy Prince and put it in the fire. A stream of bright metal ran out.

‘This is strange!’ said the workmen. ‘This broken piece in the middle of the statue has stayed hard. We must throw it away.’ So they threw it away with the dead bird.

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God said to his servants, ‘Bring me the two best things in the city.’ They brought Him the broken heart and the dead bird.

‘Yes, you have brought the right things,’ God said. ‘This little bird will sing for ever in my garden, and the Happy Prince will stand in my city of gold.’

Story 4. The Nightingale and the Rose

‘She said, “I will dance with you if you bring me a red rose”,’ cried the young student, ‘but there are no red roses in my garden. I have studied everything that wise men have written. But my life is unhappy because I have no red rose!’ His eyes filled with tears.

A little nightingale heard him from her old tree.

‘Here, at last, is a true lover,’ said the nightingale. ‘I have sung about true love night after night, but I have never seen a true lover!’

‘There will be a dance at the palace tomorrow,’ said the student. ‘The prince will be there, and my love will be there too. If I bring her a red rose, she will dance with me. If I bring her a red rose, I will hold her in my arms. But there are no red roses in my garden, so I will sit alone. She will not need me, and my heart will break.’

‘Yes, he is a true lover, like the lovers in my songs,’ said the nightingale. ‘Love is happiness to me, but it is pain to him. Love is a wonderful thing. Gold and jewels can never buy it.’

The student cried, ‘The musicians will play and my love will dance to the music. Rich men in their fine clothes will crowd round her. But she will not dance with me because I cannot give her a red rose.’ He lay down on the grass, put his face in his hands and cried.

‘Why is he crying?’ asked the little animals in the garden. ‘Why is he crying?’ asked the flowers.

‘He is crying for a red rose,’ said the nightingale. ‘For a red rose!’ they cried, and they laughed. But the nightingale understood. She opened her brown wings and flew up into the air. She passed across the garden like a shadow.

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There was a beautiful rose tree standing in the centre of another garden. When she saw it, she flew down to it.

‘Give me a red rose,’ she cried, ‘and I will sing you my sweetest song.’

‘I am sorry,’ said the rose tree. ‘My roses are white - as white as snow. Go to my brother on the other side of the garden. Perhaps he will give you what you want.’

So the nightingale flew to the other rose tree. ‘Give me a red rose,’ she cried, ‘and I will sing you my sweetest song.’

‘I am sorry,’ answered the rose tree. ‘My roses are yellow - golden yellow. But go to my brother who grows below the student’s window. Perhaps he will give you what you want.’

So the nightingale flew to the rose tree which was growing below the student's window.

'Give me a red rose,' she cried, 'and I will sing you my sweetest song.'

'My roses are red,' it answered, 'but the winter cold has frozen my flowers and they have fallen. I will have no roses this year.'

'I only want one red rose,' cried the nightingale, 'only one red rose! How can I get it?'

'There is a way,' answered the tree. 'But I do not want to tell you about it.'

'Tell me the way, please,' said the nightingale. 'I am not afraid.'

'If you want a red rose,' said the tree, 'you must build it out of music by moonlight. The redness must come from your hearts blood. You must sing to me all night with your heart pressed against a thorn. The thorn must cut open your heart and your life blood must run into me and become mine.'

'Death is a great price to pay for a red rose,' cried the nightingale. 'I enjoy life. I love sitting in the green trees and watching the golden sun go down. I love smelling the flowers. But love is better than life, and the heart of a man is more important than the heart of a bird.'

So she opened her brown wings and flew up into the air. She passed over the garden where the young student was still lying in the grass. The tears were not yet dry in his eyes.

'Be happy,' cried the nightingale. 'You will have your red rose. I will build it out of music by moonlight, and I will give my heart's blood for it redness. But you must be a true lover, because love is the wisest and strongest thing.'

The student looked up from the grass and listened. But he could not understand what the nightingale was saying. He only knew things that are written in books. But the old tree loved the little nightingale, and he understood.

'Sing me one last song,' he said. 'I shall be sad and alone when you go.'

So the nightingale sang to the old tree. Her voice was like drops of water falling from a silver cup.

When she finished her song, the student took out a notebook.

‘Her voice is beautiful, but her song does not mean anything. It is not really useful because she has no true feelings. She thinks only of her music, not about other people.’

He went into his room, lay down on his bed and thought about his love. After a time, he fell asleep.

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When the moon shone in the sky, the nightingale flew to the rose tree. She pressed herself against a thorn. She sang all night, and the cold moon listened. All through the long night she sang, and the thorn went deeper and deeper, and the life-blood ran out of her.

First she sang about the birth of love in the heart of a boy and a girl - and a wonderful rose grew on the highest part of the rose tree. As song followed song, the rose opened. At first it was white - as white as a cloud on a river, as silver as the wings of the early morning.

The rose tree cried to the nightingale, ‘Press closer against the thorn, little nightingale. The rose must be red before daylight.’

So the nightingale pressed closer, and her song became louder. Now she sang about the birth of love in the hearts of a man and a woman. The rose became red. But the heart of the rose stayed white, because only the heart’s blood of a nightingale can colour the heart of a rose.

The rose tree cried to the nightingale, ‘Press closer against the thorn, little nightingale. Or the day will come before the rose is red.’

So the nightingale pressed closer against the thorn. The thorn touched her heart, and pain shot through her. As the pain became worse, her song became wilder. Now she sang of the love which is made perfect by death.

The rose became deep red. The heart of the rose was as red as a jewel. But the nightingale’s voice became weaker and weaker. Her little wings stopped moving; her eyes lost their brightness.

She sang a last, wonderful song. The moon heard it and waited in the sky. The red rose heard it and opened wide to the cold morning air.

‘Look! Look!’ cried the rose tree. ‘The rose is ready now.’ But the nightingale did not answer, because she was lying dead in the long grass with the thorn in her heart.

* * *

At midday, the student opened his window and looked out. ‘Ha!’ he cried. ‘Here is a red rose! It is exactly what I wanted! I have never seen a rose as beautiful as this. It probably has a long Latin name.’ He put out his hand and took it.

Then he put on his hat and ran to the doctor’s house with the rose in his hand. The doctor was the student’s teacher, and the student loved the doctor’s daughter. She was sitting at the door, and her little dog was lying at her feet.

‘You wanted me to bring you a red rose,’ cried the student. ‘Here is the reddest rose in the world. You can wear it tonight next to your heart. Then we can dance together. And you will know how I love you.’

‘I am sorry,’ said the girl. ‘It will not go with the colour of my dress. And the officer has sent me some real jewels. Everyone knows that jewels cost more than flowers.’

‘Thank you very much!’ said the student angrily. ‘You are very kind!’ He threw the rose into the street.

‘You cannot speak to me like that,’ said the girl. ‘Who are you? Only a student!’ She got up from her chair and went into the house.

‘Love is a very silly thing!’ said the student, as he walked away. ‘It tells us things which are not going to happen. We believe things which are not true. It is useless. In these difficult times, we must learn useful things. I shall go back to my studies.’

So he returned to his room, took out a big old book, and began to read.

Story 5. The Star Child

Two woodcutters were going home through the forest. It was winter, and very cold. There was thick snow the ground and on the trees. The river was frozen. The snow was very deep, and the woodcutters went slowly. They were careful, because it is easy to lose your way in the snow.

At last they saw the lights of their village far down below them. They laughed because they were glad. But then they were sad. 'Why do we want to live? Life is so hard for poor people like us.'

Then a strange thing happened: a very bright and beautiful star fell out of the sky. It seemed to fall behind some trees quite near them.

They ran towards it. 'Perhaps there will be a pot of gold where it fell!' they thought.

The first woodcutter reached the place. He saw a coat of gold lying on the white snow. It had silver star on it. The woodcutters opened the coat to take the pieces of gold from it. But there was no gold. There was only a little child.

One of the men said, 'This is a sad ending to our hopes! We do not need a child. We are poor men and we already have children. We cannot give their food to another child. Let's leave it here.'

The other man said, 'We cannot leave the child here. It will die in the cold. I am as poor as you are. I have many mouths to feed and not much food for them. But I will take the child home with me. My wife will look after it.'

So he picked up the child. He put the coat round it to keep out the cold. Then he went down the hill to his village.

When they came to the village, his friend said, 'You have the child - give me the coat.' But the other man answered, 'That coat isn't ours. It belongs to the child'

Then he went to his house. His wife opened the door and kissed him.

He said, 'I have found something in the forest and I have brought it to you. I know that you will look after it.'

'What is it?' she asked. 'We need many things.'

He opened the coat and showed her the sleeping child.

‘Oh!’ she said. ‘We have enough children! Why have you brought this strange child to live here?’

‘It is a star child,’ he said, and he told her about it.

‘Our children haven’t enough bread. Must we feed another person’s child?’

A cold wind from the forest came through the open door. ‘Shut the door!’ she said. ‘The wind is cold.’

He said, ‘A cold wind always comes into a house where the heart is cold.’

She did not answer, but went nearer to the fire.

Soon she turned round and looked at him, and her eyes were full of tears. He put the child in her arms. She kissed it and put it in a little bed with her youngest child.

The next day, the woodcutter took the golden coat and put it away in a big box.

* * *

The star child grew up with the woodcutter’s children. He sat at the table for meals with them and played with them. Every year he became more and more beautiful.

But the star child was only beautiful on the outside. He was proud and unkind. He thought that he was better than the village children. ‘They are ordinary people,’ he thought, ‘but I am the child of a star. They are my servants.’

He threw stones at the poor and at people who asked for help: ‘Go to another place and ask for bread! We have none to give you!’ He laughed at people who were weak and ugly. He loved himself. In summer, he sat by the water and smiled down at his beautiful face.

The woodcutter and his wife often spoke to him angrily: ‘We looked after you when you needed our help. Why are you so unkind to people who need your help?’

The star child did not listen to them. He went back to the other children. He could run fast, and dance, and make music. The other children followed the star child. When he pushed a stick into the eyes of

a little rabbit, they laughed. When he threw stones at a sick man, they laughed. Their hearts became as hard as his.

* * *

One day, a poor woman came through the village. She looked like a beggar. Her clothes were old and dirty, and there was blood on her feet. She sat down under a tree to rest.

The star child saw her and said, 'Look at that ugly old beggar woman. Lets send her away!'

So he came near and threw stones at her. She looked at him with fear in her eyes. The woodcutter saw what the star child was doing. He ran to him and said, 'Why is your heart so cold? What has this poor woman done to you?'

The star child was angry. 'You cannot question me. I am not your son.'

'That is true,' said the woodcutter, 'but I helped you. I was sorry for you when I found you in the forest.'

When the old woman heard this, she made a loud noise. Then she fell to the ground. The woodcutter carried her into the house to his wife. They brought food to her, but she did not eat or drink.

She asked, 'Did you say that the child was found in the forest? Was that ten years ago - ten years ago today?'

'Yes,' said the woodcutter. 'I found him in the forest exactly ten years ago.'

'Did he have a coat of gold with silver stars on it?'

'Yes,' said the woodcutter. He took the coat out of the box and showed it to her.

'He is my little son. I lost him in the forest. I have travelled the world, trying to find him.'

The woodcutter went out and called to the star child: 'Come into the house. Your mother is waiting there for you.'

The star child ran into the house. But when he saw the old woman, he laughed. 'Where is my mother?' he asked. 'I can only see this dirty old beggar woman.'

The woman said, 'I am your mother.'

He said, 'I am not your son! You are dirty and ugly. Go away! I do not want to see your face again!'

'But it is true. You are my son,' she cried. She fell on her knees and held out her arms to him. 'Thieves stole you from me and left you in the forest. But I knew you when I saw you. And I knew the coat of gold with silver stars. So please come with me. For many years I have tried to find you. Come with me, my son. I need your love.'

But the star child did not move.

At last he spoke, and his voice was hard and angry. 'If you are really my mother, I do not want to know you. I thought that I was the child of a star, not the child of a beggar. So go away. I do not want to see you again!'

'Won't you kiss me before I go?' she cried. 'I suffered so much while I was looking for you.'

'No,' said the star child. 'I will not.'

So the woman went away, crying, into the forest.

The star child was glad and ran back to his friends. But when they saw him, they said, 'Go away, ugly face! You cannot play with us.'

'Why did they say that to me?' thought the star child. He went to the water and looked into it. His face was ugly now.

He fell on the grass and cried. 'This has happened to me because I have done wrong,' he thought. 'I have been unkind to my mother and sent her away. I will go and look for her.'

I will not rest until I find her.'

So he ran away into the forest. He called for his mother all day, but there was no answer. When the sun went down, he slept on the grass. The animals and birds remembered his sticks and stones, and they ran away from him.

In the morning, he walked through the forest. He asked everything he met, 'Have you seen my mother?' But the animals said, 'You pushed sticks into our eyes. You threw stones at us.' And the birds said, 'You cut our wings. You stole our eggs.' The star child cried and asked them to forgive him. Then he continued walking.

On the third day, he came out of the forest and into open country. He passed through villages, and the children threw stones at him. The men sent him away.

* * *

The star child searched for three years. Sometimes he seemed to see his mother on the road in front of him. He called to her and ran after her, but he never reached her. People told him, 'No, we have not seen her. Nobody has walked along this road.' They laughed at him.

One evening, he came to the gates of a great city. The soldier at the gate stopped him. 'What do you want here?'

'I am looking for my mother,' he answered. 'I want to come into this city, please. Perhaps she is here.'

'Your mother will not be pleased when she sees you. You are uglier than the ugliest animal. Go away!'

Another soldier said, 'Who is your mother and why are you trying to find her?'

He answered, 'My mother is a beggar. I have been very unkind to her. I want her to forgive me.' But they stopped him going in.

He turned away, crying. Then an officer came. 'Who is trying to come into this city?' he asked.

'A beggar,' they answered, 'and he is the child of a beggar. So we are sending him away.'

'No!' said the officer, laughing. 'We will sell him as a slave. The price will be the price of a loaf of bread.'

A strange old man said, 'I will buy him at that price.' He paid the money and took the star child into the city.

They went along many streets and came to a little door. The old man touched the door with his ring, and it opened. They went down five steps into a garden. Then the old man put a cloth over the star child's eyes and pushed him into a building. When the cloth was taken away, the child was in a dark prison.

The old man gave him a piece of bread and said, 'Eat!' And he gave him a cup of water and said, 'Drink!' Then the old man went out. He shut and locked the door.

The old man was really a clever magician.

The next day, he came to the star child and said, 'There is a forest near the south gate of the city. In it there are three pieces of gold. One is white gold, one is yellow gold, and the third is red gold. Today you must bring me the piece of white gold. If you do not bring it back, I will hit you. Go! This evening I will wait for you at the door of the garden.' He put a cloth over the eyes of the star child and took him through the house and the garden and up the five steps to the door. Then he sent him into the street.

The star child went out of the gate of the city and came to the forest. It was a beautiful forest, but the plants under the trees cut his skin. He could not find the piece of white gold anywhere. He looked for it all day. In the evening he turned back, crying.

As the star child came to the end of the wood, he heard a cry. He saw a rabbit. 'Help me! Free me!' it cried.

'I am a slave,' said the star child, 'but I can free you.' So he freed the rabbit.

The rabbit answered, 'You have helped me. What shall I do for you?'

'I am looking for a piece of white gold. I cannot find it.'

'Come with me,' said the rabbit, 'and I will take you to it. I know where it is hidden.'

So the star child went with the rabbit and found the piece of white gold in a tree. The rabbit ran away and the star child went towards the city.

At the gate of the city, there was a man. His face and skin were eaten away by a terrible illness. A grey cloth covered his face and there were two holes in the cloth for his eyes. When he saw the star child, he cried out, 'I have no food. Give me some money or I will die.'

'I only have one piece of gold,' said the star child. 'If I do not take it to my employer, he will hit me.'

The sick man said again sadly, 'Please give me some money, or I shall die.' The star child felt sorry for him and gave him the piece of white gold.

When the star child came to the magician's house, the magician asked, 'Have you got the piece of white gold?'

'No,' said the star child, 'I have not.'

So the magician hit him. Then he said, 'Eat!' but he did not give him any bread. He said, 'Drink', but he gave him a cup with no water in it.

The next day, the magician came to the child and said, 'Bring me the piece of yellow gold today. If you do not bring it, I will hit you harder than yesterday. And I will keep you as my slave.'

The star child went to the forest. All day he tried to find the piece of yellow gold. In the evening, he sat down and began to cry. The little rabbit came to him.

'Why are you crying?' asked the rabbit.

'I am looking for a piece of yellow gold which is hidden here. If I do not find it, my employer will hit me again.'

'Follow me,' said the rabbit, and it ran through the forest to a little stream. The piece of yellow gold was lying in the sand at the bottom of the stream.

'How can I thank you?' said the star child. 'This is the second time that you have helped me.'

'You helped me first,' said the rabbit, and it ran away. The star child took the piece of yellow gold and hurried back to the city. The sick beggar saw him. He cried out, 'Give me some money, or I will die!'

The star child said, 'I only have one piece of gold. If I do not take it to my employer, he will hit me. He will keep me as his slave.' The sick man cried, and the star child felt sorry for him. He gave him the piece of yellow gold.

When the star child came to the magician's house, the magician opened the door.

'Have you got the piece of yellow gold?'

'No,' said the star child, 'I have not.'

So the magician hit him and put him in the prison.

The next day, the magician came to him and said, ‘If you bring me the piece of red gold today, you will be free. But, if you do not bring it, I will kill you.’

The star child went to the forest. He looked for the piece of red gold all day. In the evening, he sat down and cried. The little rabbit came to him.

The rabbit said, ‘The piece of red gold is in that hole in the rock behind you.’

‘How can I thank you?’ said the star child. ‘This is the third time that you have helped me.’

‘You helped me first,’ said the rabbit, and it ran quickly away.

The star child looked in the hole and found the piece of red gold. He hurried back to the city. The sick man saw him coming. He stood in the middle of the road and cried out to him, ‘Give me the piece of red gold or I must die.’

The star child gave him the piece of red gold, saying, ‘You need it more than I do.’ But he was very sad.

As the star child walked through the gate of the city, the soldiers greeted him. ‘That is a beautiful young man!’ they said. A crowd of people followed him, shouting, ‘Nobody in the world is as beautiful as this man!’ The star child thought, ‘They are laughing at me because I am so unhappy.’

He lost his way in the crowd and suddenly he was in the great square. In that square was the king’s palace.

The palace gate opened. Government officers ran out to greet him. They said, ‘We have waited for you. You are the son of our king.’

The star child answered, ‘I am not a king’s son. I am the ugly child of a poor beggar woman.’

Then an officer held up a mirror and asked, ‘Why do you think you are not beautiful?’

The star child saw that his face was beautiful again. But something new shone from his eyes. It was love and kindness.

The officers stood in front of him and said, 'Wise men told us about this day a long time ago. We are waiting for you - for our new king. Take this crown and be our king.'

The star child said, 'I cannot be your king, because I have been unkind to my mother. I must find her and ask her to forgive me. I cannot stay here.'

He turned away towards the city gate. Then, in the crowd, he saw the beggar woman who was his mother. At her side stood the sick man.'

He cried out in happiness. He ran to them and threw himself down and kissed his mother's feet. 'Mother,' he said, 'I was proud and unkind. Now please forgive me and take me as your son.'

He held out his hands and touched the sick man's feet and said, 'I gave you money three times because I was sorry for you. Ask my mother to speak to me.'

The star child's mother put her hand on his head and said, 'Stand up'.

He stood up and looked at them. Now they were a king and queen.

The queen said, 'This is your father. You helped him when he was the sick man.'

And the king said, 'This is your mother.'

Then they kissed him and took him into the palace.

So the star child became king. He gave bread and clothes to the poor, and was kind and good to everyone. There was happiness in the land.

Story 6. The Selfish Giant

When the giant went away for seven years, the children played in his garden every afternoon on their way back from school.

It was a large and lovely garden. Beautiful flowers grew in the grass, and there were twelve fruit trees. In the spring, the fruit trees were covered with red and white flowers, and later in the year wonderful fruit grew on them. The birds sang sweetly in the trees. Sometimes the

children stopped their games and listened to them. ‘We are so happy here!’ they said.

Then, one day, the giant came back. He saw the children playing in his garden. ‘What are you doing here?’ he shouted in a very loud voice. The children ran away.

‘My garden is my garden,’ said the giant. ‘No one can play in it. Only me.’ So he built a high wall round it and put up a notice: KEEP OUT. He was a very selfish giant.

* * *

So the children had nowhere to play. They tried to play on the road, but the road was dirty and full of hard stones, and they did not like it. After their lessons, they walked round the giant’s high wall and talked about the beautiful garden inside. ‘We were so happy there!’ they said.

The spring came, and there were flowers and little birds all over the country. But in the garden of the selfish giant, it was still winter. The birds did not sing in it because there were no children. The trees forgot to grow flowers. Snow covered the grass, and ice covered the trees with silver. The north wind came, and the rain.

‘I cannot understand why the spring is so late,’ said the selfish giant. He was sitting at the window of his house and looking out at his cold, white garden. ‘I hope there will be a change in the weather.’

But the spring never came, and the summer did not come. When there was golden fruit in every other garden, there was no fruit in the giant’s garden. It was always winter there, with the north wind, and snow, and ice and rain.

* * *

The giant was lying in bed one morning when he heard some beautiful music. A little bird was singing outside his window. It was the first birdsong in the garden for a very long time, and it seemed to him the most beautiful music in the world. Then the north wind and the rain stopped.

‘I believe that spring has come at last!’ said the giant. He jumped out of bed and looked out.

His garden was full of children! They were coming in through a hole in the wall and were climbing up into the trees. The giant saw a little child in every tree. The trees were glad to have the children back. They were covered with flowers again. The birds were flying around and singing with happiness, and flowers were looking up through the green grass.

A very small boy was standing in the far corner of the garden. He could not reach up to climb his tree. He was walking round it and crying. That tree was still covered with ice and snow.

‘I have been very selfish!’ said the giant. ‘Now I know why the spring did not come here. I will put the little boy into the tree. Then I will pull down the wall and my garden will be a children’s playground for ever.’

He was really sorry about his unkindness. So he went down, opened the door very quietly, and went out into the garden. But when the children saw him, they were afraid.

All the children ran away except the little boy. His eyes were full of tears and he did not see the giant. The giant came quietly behind him. He took the little boy carefully in his hand and put him up into the tree. Then the tree was suddenly covered with flowers, and the birds came and sang in it. The little boy put his arms round the giant’s neck and kissed him.

The other children saw that the giant was not bad and selfish now. They came running back.

‘It is your garden now, little children,’ said the giant, and he pulled down the wall.

When people walked along the road to the town, they could see into the garden. They saw the giant playing with the children. ‘That is a beautiful garden!’ they said.

The children played all day. In the evening they came to the giant to say goodbye to him.

‘But where is your little friend?’ he said. ‘Where is the little boy that I put into the tree?’ The giant loved him best because the little boy kissed him.

‘We do not know,’ answered the children. ‘He has gone away.’

‘You must tell him to come tomorrow - he must come tomorrow.’

But the children said, ‘We do not know where he lives. We only met him today.’ The giant felt very sad.

Every afternoon after school, the children came and played with the giant. But the giant’s favourite little boy did not come back again. The giant was very kind to the other children. But he wanted to see his first little friend. ‘I would really like to see him!’ he thought.

* * *

Years passed, and the giant became very old and weak. He could not play in the garden now. So he sat in a big chair and watched the children’s games and looked at his garden. ‘I have many beautiful flowers,’ he said, ‘but the most beautiful flowers are the children.’

One morning, when he was dressing himself, he looked out of the window. It was winter, but he did not hate the winter now. The spring was only sleeping, and the flowers were only resting. He waited happily for them to come again.

Suddenly he opened his eyes wide. He looked and looked again. Something wonderful was happening! In the far corner of the garden, a tree was covered with beautiful white flowers. The tree was golden, and silver fruit hung down from it. And the little boy was standing under the tree.

The giant ran out into the garden and he hurried across the grass to the child. Then his face became red and angry ‘Who has hurt you?’ he said. There was blood on the child’s hands, and on his little feet. ‘Who has hurt you?’ cried the giant. ‘Tell me and I will kill him!’

‘No,’ said the child. ‘This pain is the pain of love.’

‘Who are you?’ asked the giant. He was afraid, and went down on his knees in front of the little child.

‘You helped me to play in your garden,’ said the child. ‘Today you will come with me to my garden in the sky.’

That afternoon the children came into the garden. They found the giant lying dead under the tree. He was covered with white flowers.

- THE END -

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