

LITTLE DAYLIGHT

ADAPTED FROM *AT THE BACK OF THE NORTH WIND*, BY GEORGE MACDONALD

Once there was a beautiful palace, which had a great wood at one side. The king and his courtiers hunted in the wood near the palace, and there it was kept open, free from underbrush. But farther away it grew wilder and wilder, till at last it was so thick that nobody knew what was there. It was a very great wood indeed.

In the wood lived eight fairies. Seven of them were good fairies, who had lived there always; the eighth was a bad fairy, who had just come. And the worst of it was that nobody but the other fairies knew she was a fairy; people thought she was just an ugly old witch. The good fairies lived in the dearest little houses! One lived in a hollow silver birch, one in a little moss cottage, and so on. But the bad fairy lived in a horrid mud house in the middle of a dark swamp.

Now when the first baby was born to the king and queen, her father and mother decided to name her "Daylight," because she was so bright and sweet. And of course they had a christening party. And of course they invited the fairies, because the good



fairies had always been at the christening party when a princess was born in the palace, and everybody knew that they brought good gifts.

But, alas, no one knew about the swamp fairy, and she was not invited,—which really pleased her, because it gave her an excuse for doing something mean.

The good fairies came to the christening party, and, one after another, five of them gave little Daylight good gifts.

The other two stood among the guests, so that no one noticed them. The swamp fairy thought there were no more of them; so she stepped forward, just as the archbishop was handing the baby back to the lady-in-waiting.

"I am just a little deaf," she said, mumbling a laugh with her toothless gums. "Will your reverence tell me the baby's name again?"

"Certainly, my good woman," said the bishop; "the infant is little Daylight."

"And little Daylight it shall be, forsooth," cried the bad fairy. "I decree that she shall sleep all day." Then she laughed a horrid shrieking laugh, "He, he, hi, hi!"

Everyone looked at everyone else in despair, but out stepped the sixth good fairy, who by arrangement with her sisters had remained in the background to undo what she could of any evil that the swamp fairy might decree.

“Then at least she shall wake all night,” she said, sadly.

“Ah!” screamed the swamp fairy, “you spoke before I had finished, which is against the law, and gives me another chance.” All the fairies started at once to say, “I beg your pardon!” But the bad fairy said, “I had only laughed ‘he, he!’ and ‘hi, hi!’ I had still ‘ho, ho!’ and ‘hu, hu!’ to laugh.”

The fairies could not gainsay this, and the bad fairy had her other chance. She said,—

“Since she is to wake all night, I decree that she shall wax and wane with the moon! Ho, ho, hu, hu!”

Out stepped the seventh good fairy. “Until a prince shall kiss her without knowing who she is,” she said, quickly.

The swamp fairy had been prepared for the trick of keeping back one good fairy, but she had not suspected it of two, and she could not say a word, for she had laughed “ho, ho!” and “hu, hu!”

The poor king and queen looked sad enough. “We don’t know what you mean,” they said to the good fairy who had spoken last. But the good fairy smiled. “The meaning of the thing will come with the thing,” she said.

That was the end of the party, but it was only the beginning of the trouble. Can you

imagine what a queer household it would be, where the baby laughed and crowed all night, and slept all day? Little Daylight was as merry and bright all night as any baby in the world, but with the first sign of dawn she fell asleep, and slept like a little dormouse till dark. Nothing could waken her while day lasted. Still, the royal family got used to this; but the rest of the bad fairy’s gift was a great deal worse,—that about waxing and waning with the moon. You know how the moon grows bigger and brighter each night, from the time it is a curly silver thread low in the sky till it is round and golden, flooding the whole sky with light? That is the waxing moon. Then, you know, it wanes; it grows smaller and paler again, night by night, till at last it disappears for a while, altogether. Well, poor little Daylight waxed and waned with it. She was the rosiest, plumpest, merriest baby in the world when the moon was at the full; but as it began to wane her little cheeks grew paler, her tiny hands thinner, with every night, till she lay in her cradle like a shadow-baby, without sound or motion. At first they thought she was dead, when the moon disappeared, but after some months they got used to this too, and only waited eagerly for the new moon, to see her revive. When it shone again, faint and silver, on the horizon, the baby stirred weakly, and then they fed her gently; each night she grew a little better, and when the moon was near the full again, she was again a lively, rosy, lovely child.

So it went on till she grew up. She grew to be the most beautiful maiden the moon ever shone on, and everyone loved her so much, for her sweet ways and her merry heart, that someone was always planning to stay up at night, to be near her. But she did not like to be watched, especially when she felt the bad time of waning coming on; so her ladies-in-waiting had to be very careful. When the moon waned she became shrunken and pale and bent, like an old, old woman, worn out with sorrow. Only her golden hair and her blue eyes remained unchanged, and this gave her a terribly strange look. At last, as the moon disappeared, she faded away to a little, bowed, old creature, asleep and helpless.

No wonder she liked best to be alone! She got in the way of wandering by herself in the beautiful wood, playing in the moonlight when she was well, stealing away in the shadows when she was fading with the moon. Her father had a lovely little house of roses and vines built for her, there. It stood at the edge of a most beautiful open glade, inside the wood, where the moon shone best. There the princess lived with her ladies. And there she danced when the moon was full. But when the moon waned, her ladies often lost her altogether, so far did she wander; and sometimes they found her sleeping under a great tree, and brought her home in their arms.

When the princess was about seventeen years old, there was a rebellion in a kingdom not far from her father's. Wicked nobles murdered

the king of the country and stole his throne, and would have murdered the young prince, too, if he had not escaped, dressed in peasant's clothes.

Dressed in his poor rags, the prince wandered about a long time, till one day he got into a great wood, and lost his way. It was the wood where the Princess Daylight lived, but of course he did not know anything about that nor about her. He wandered till night, and then he came to a queer little house. One of the good fairies lived there, and the minute she saw him she knew all about everything; but to him she looked only like a kind old woman. She gave him a good supper and a bed for the night, and told him to come back to her if he found no better place for the next night. But the prince said he must get out of the wood at once; so in the morning he took leave of the fairy.

All day long he walked, and walked; but at nightfall he had not found his way out of the wood, so he lay down to rest till the moon should rise and light his path.

When he woke the moon was glorious; it was three days from the full, and bright as silver. By its light he saw what he thought to be the edge of the wood, and he hastened toward it. But when he came to it, it was only an open space, surrounded with trees. It was so very lovely, in the white moonlight that the prince stood a minute to look. And as he looked, something white moved out of the trees on the far side of the open space. It was something slim and white, that swayed in the dim light like a young birch.

“It must be a moon fairy,” thought the prince; and he stepped into the shadow.

The moon fairy came nearer and nearer, dancing and swaying in the moonlight. And as she came, she began to sing a soft, gay little song.

But when she was quite close, the prince saw that she was not a fairy after all, but a real human maiden,—the loveliest maiden he had ever seen. Her hair was like yellow corn, and her smile made all the place merry. Her white gown fluttered as she danced, and her little song sounded like a bird note.

The prince watched her till she danced out of sight, and then until she once more came toward him; and she seemed so like a moonbeam herself, as she lifted her face to the sky, that he was almost afraid to breathe. He had never seen anything so lovely. By the time she had danced twice round the circle, he could think of nothing in the world except the hope of finding out who she was, and staying near her.

But while he was waiting for her to appear the third time, his weariness overcame him, and he fell asleep. And when he awoke, it was broad day, and the beautiful maiden had vanished.

He hunted about, hoping to find where she lived, and on the other side of the glade he came upon a lovely little house, covered with moss and climbing roses. He thought she must live there, so he went round to the kitchen door and asked the kind cook for a drink of water, and while he was drinking it he asked who lived there. She told him it was the house of the Princess Daylight, but she told him nothing

else about her, because she was not allowed to talk about her mistress. But she gave him a very good meal and told him other things.

He did not go back to the little old woman who had been so kind to him first, but wandered all day in the wood, waiting for the moontime. Again he waited at the edge of the dell, and when the white moon was high in the heavens, once more he saw the glimmering in the distance, and once more the lovely maiden floated toward him. He knew her name was the Princess Daylight, but this time she seemed to him much lovelier than before. She was all in blue like the blue of the sky in summer. (She really was more lovely, you know, because the moon was almost at the full.) All night he watched her, quite forgetting that he ought not to be doing it, till she disappeared on the opposite side of the glade. Then, very tired, he found his way to the little old woman’s house, had breakfast with her, and fell fast asleep in the bed she gave him.

The fairy knew well enough by his face that he had seen Daylight, and when he woke up in the evening and started off again she gave him a strange little flask and told him to use it if ever he needed it.

This night the princess did not appear in the dell until midnight, at the very full of the moon. But when she came, she was so lovely that she took the prince’s breath away. Just think!—she was dressed in a gown that looked as if it were made of fireflies’ wings, embroidered in gold. She danced around and around,

singing, swaying, and flitting like a beam of sunlight, till the prince grew quite dazzled.

But while he had been watching her, he had not noticed that the sky was growing dark and the wind was rising. Suddenly there was a clap of thunder. The princess danced on. But another clap came louder, and then a sudden great flash of lightning that lit up the sky from end to end. The prince couldn't help shutting his eyes, but he opened them quickly to see if Daylight was hurt. Alas, she was lying on the ground. The prince ran to her, but she was already up again.

"Who are you?" she said.

"I thought," stammered the prince, "you might be hurt."

"There is nothing the matter. Go away."

The prince went sadly.

"Come back," said the princess. The prince came. "I like you, you do as you are told. Are you good?"

"Not so good as I should like to be," said the prince.

"Then go and grow better," said the princess.

The prince went, more sadly.

"Come back," said the princess. The prince came. "I think you must be a prince," she said.

"Why?" said the prince.

"Because you do as you are told, and you tell the truth. Will you tell me what the sun looks like?"

"Why, everybody knows that," said the prince.

"I am different from everybody," said the princess,— "I don't know."

"But," said the prince, "do you not look when you wake up in the morning?"

"That's just it," said the princess, "I never do wake up in the morning. I never can wake up until—" Then the princess remembered that she was talking to a prince, and putting her hands over her face she walked swiftly away. The prince followed her, but she turned and put up her hand to tell him not to. And like the gentleman prince that he was, he obeyed her at once.

Now all this time, the wicked swamp fairy had not known a word about what was going on. But now she found out, and she was furious, for fear that little Daylight should be delivered from her spell. So she cast her spells to keep the prince from finding Daylight again. Night after night the poor prince wandered and wandered, and never could find the little dell. And when daytime came, of course, there was no princess to be seen. Finally, at the time that the moon was almost gone, the swamp fairy stopped her spells, because she knew that by this time Daylight would be so changed and ugly that the prince would never know her if he did see her. She said to herself with a wicked laugh:—

"No fear of his wanting to kiss her now!"

That night the prince did find the dell, but no princess came. A little after midnight he passed near the lovely little house where she lived, and there he overheard her waiting-women talking about her. They seemed in great distress. They were saying that the princess had

wandered into the woods and was lost. The prince didn't know, of course, what it meant, but he did understand that the princess was lost somewhere, and he started off to find her. After he had gone a long way without finding her, he came to a big old tree, and there he thought he would light a fire to show her the way if she should happen to see it.

As the blaze flared up, he suddenly saw a little black heap on the other side of the tree. Somebody was lying there. He ran to the spot, his heart beating with hope. But when he lifted the cloak which was huddled about the form, he saw at once that it was not Daylight. A pinched, withered, white, little old woman's face shone out at him. The hood was drawn close down over her forehead, the eyes were closed, and as the prince lifted the cloak, the old woman's lips moaned faintly.

"Oh, poor mother," said the prince, "what is the matter?" The old woman only moaned again. The prince lifted her and carried her over to the warm fire, and rubbed her hands, trying to find out what was the matter. But she only moaned, and her face was so terribly strange and white that the prince's tender heart ached for her. Remembering his little flask, he poured some of his liquid between her lips, and then he thought the best thing he could do was to carry her to the princess's house, where she could be taken care of.

As he lifted the poor little form in his arms, two great tears stole out from the old woman's closed eyes and ran down her wrinkled cheeks.

"Oh, poor, poor mother," said the prince pityingly; and he stooped and kissed her withered lips.

As he walked through the forest with the old woman in his arms, it seemed to him that she grew heavier and heavier; he could hardly carry her at all; and then she stirred, and at last he was obliged to set her down, to rest. He meant to lay her on the ground. But the old woman stood upon her feet.

And then the hood fell back from her face. As she looked up at the prince, the first, long, yellow ray of the rising sun struck full upon her,—and it was the Princess Daylight! Her hair was golden as the sun itself, and her eyes as blue as the flower that grows in the corn.

The prince fell on his knees before her. But she gave him her hand and made him rise.

"You kissed me when I was an old woman," said the princess, "I'll kiss you now that I am a young princess." And she did.

And then she turned her face toward the dawn.

"Dear Prince," she said, "is that the sun?"