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*“The Bird
and the Web”*



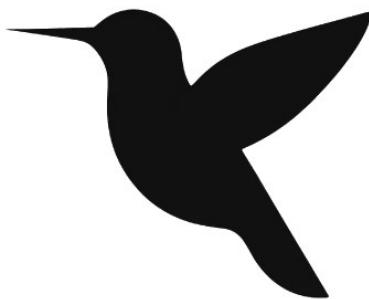
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“The Bird and the Web”



“. . . The princess, who had a good heart and an extremely excruciating inability to tolerate the smallest of peas under stacks and stacks of mattresses, inquired of the king if she might visit the people of the capital city. The king gave his permission after cautioning her to wear a common girl’s dress of course linen and to tie her brilliant hair under a kerchief. The princess chose to wear green linen, and before she put the kerchief on her head, she tied up her dark hair with a red ribbon. The king also informed her he would have disguised courtiers follow her for her protection. While walking among some people at various repasts and listening to them talk about her father and herself, she heard laughter coming from a café and found a group of people gathered around a young woman who was telling a story. When the storyteller glanced up, she saw the princess, immediately pushed back her chair, scrambled to her feet, and bowed.

“Your Royal Highness,” said Lydia, and the others who had been listening to the story turned to face the young girl and followed Lydia’s lead.

“Please be seated and don’t make a fuss,” said the princess. “I may be the king’s daughter, but I am poorly educated in the ways of friendships and stories. I have a good governess, but I have no real friends, and I don’t even know how to play properly.”

“Play properly?” asked Lydia, sitting down. “Come! Join us at the table.”

“I have dolls,” said the princess, sitting by the others and ordering a lemonade and a piece of wild berry pie, “but I must confess, I don’t really know how to play with them. I use my imagination to invent stories and friendships, but they always seem to fall flat.”

“I have a friend for you until you find a real one,” said Lydia, pulling her doll from a bag and watching the princess’s eyes light up. Of all of the dolls she had been given, the princess had never before seen such a beautiful one.

“There is one rule when it comes to accepting this doll,” cautioned Lydia. “You must never bind her hair.”

“Why not?” asked the princess.

“Because,” answered Lydia, “then she will not be able to fly.”



In the olden days, when devotion was still of some use, there lived a toymaker. Having quickly reached a high level of success, the toymaker grew in prestige and notoriety and created an industry of toymaking that spread far and wide across the kingdom, and so he abandoned toymaking in favor of adopting the title of Chief Eye of Operations, or C.E.O. Many in the kingdom were desirous not only of learning toymaking but of teaching the necessary techniques required to produce high quality toys that children could enjoy for years and pass on to their children and their children's children, so the C.E.O. founded schools designed to educate new toymakers. Those he placed in charge of the schools developed programs and curriculums and hired eager learners desirous of following those curriculums with the intention of making positive impressions on new toymakers. The teachers taught their students how to keep up with standards and how to be

attentive to details to ensure the toys given to children in the kingdom would not only last but also inspire the children's imaginations so that, as adults, they would contribute to the favorable growth and creative energy that made the kingdom famous throughout many lands.

In a small village of the kingdom lived a poor girl with her mother who could not afford to give her daughter toys. But one day, on her way home from the market, the widow met a merchant in a caravan on the road, and she saw, amidst the other toys he was selling, a beautiful doll with a silk, emerald gown and with raven hair—seeming to be actual, human hair—that had a ruby ribbon woven through it and tied at the bottom with a secure bow. Since her daughter was good and worked hard without complaining, she wished she could buy the doll for her, but, alas, the price of the doll was far too high. As the mother turned sadly away to return home, the merchant's wife, who looked lovely in a dress of green silk with a ruby ribbon woven through her raven hair, blocked the widow's way, grasped her hand, and placed a copper coin into her palm.

“If you show me the girl to whom you wish to give the doll clad like me,” said the merchant's wife, “there may be more such coins for you. But you must allow me to live with

you and share your meals and daily life.”

“I am but a poor woman,” replied the widow. “It is my daughter to whom I wish to give the doll. I cannot take your coin, for I live only with my daughter in a small cottage with our two beds and just enough provisions for the two of us to survive.”

“But with the copper coin,” said the faerie, for she was a faerie who knew all about the widow’s circumstances, “you shall be able to buy more provisions, and my husband has a cot in the caravan I can bring with me to sleep upon.” But although the widow consented to take the coin and to allow the merchant’s wife to live with them, she would not allow her daughter’s benefactor to sleep on the cot and instead slept on it herself and gave the use of her straw-filled mattress and her strong, maple bed—a wedding gift to herself and her honorable husband—to the merchant’s wife. Noting how good and patient Lydia, the widow’s daughter, was, the faerie chose to educate Lydia about all types of cloths and their histories, from silks, brocades, satins, and fine linens to cottons, course linens, fustian, and linsey-woolsey. Lydia learned about how such fabrics were woven, for the merchant’s wife brought several books with her that contained pictures of fabrics and of maps

of countries from which they originated, as well as drawings of silk worms and harvesters wearing wide, cone-shaped hats, and of sheep being shorn by shepherds with large, metal, scissor-like shears. The merchant's wife was pleased with Lydia's love of learning, and she enjoyed the widow's meals, where the three of them gathered about the table and told and listened to stories in turn. Lydia, mused the faerie, was a better storyteller than she had thought, for she wove together tales that not only told of the adventures of her mice, rabbit, and bird characters, but also taught messages about hope, for even her captured and caged bird characters in her fictional markets were able to escape their prisons and fly to freedom where they taught others how to fly away from their captors.

With the copper coins given to her by the merchant's wife, the widow purchased enough wool to fill the maple bed's mattress when it came time to discard the straw, and she bought some more serviceable pots, spoons, and other household items so that the three lived in what Lydia and her mother declared were quite comfortable, blessed circumstances. When the poor widow asked why the merchant's wife chose to educate her daughter, the faerie told the widow that she had been an old friend of her husband's and

wished to pay him back for a kindness he had bestowed upon her when she was a little girl. The widow wondered about the merchant's wife's identity, but the merchant's wife merely told her it had been so many years ago and the kindness so small that it would be no surprise if the widow's husband had never mentioned her. When the merchant's wife revealed she had known her father, Lydia, that very second, remembered a story her father had told her about his having difficulty freeing a hummingbird from entanglement in the silk of a spider's web. It had been a delicate situation, and after her father had removed the filaments from the hummingbird's wings, legs, and feet, the hummingbird had fallen limply into his hand in exhaustion. Her father had nourished it with juice from berries, and, once animated, it circled him three times, hovered several seconds in front of him, and flew away. Lydia felt that the merchant's wife could very well have been the hummingbird of her father's tale, but when her teacher piercingly glanced her way, Lydia, embarrassed for thinking such an absurd thought, focused on the pages in her book. . . .