

The Little Match Girl

by
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Based on the short story by Hans Christian Andersen

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EXT. CITY STREET - DAY

A brisk December day of 1872 in the big city. Horse-drawn carts and carriages clog the street as continuous lines of strolling pedestrians file alongside.

LITTLE MARY, a small girl of about age 5, tries to keep up with her mother, EMMA, a woman in her mid 20's. Her carriage suggests a proud, middle class life, however, her clothes betray her true status. Emma carries a basket of apples. Little Mary pauses occasionally to take in a new sight which causes Emma to urge her along.

They pass shop windows. The display in a Milliner's window catches Emma's eye causing her to stop abruptly. Little Mary almost runs into her. She peers into the window, in love with a beautiful hat.

Emma's reflected face is perfectly framed by the hat past the glass.

Emma spies her adoring daughter watching and quickly recomposes herself. She grabs Mary's hand and pulls her along.

Emma and Little Mary halt at a street corner. Emma leans over to inspect her. Emma, with an intent look, hands Little Mary a box of matches and asks a question.

Little Mary demonstrates a curtsy and awkwardly attempts to find and present a match.

Emma shakes her head and takes the match and demonstrates the move. She bends down to Mary and says something to her while motioning for her to start off.

Little Mary looks scared. Emma tries to look stern.

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Little Mary looks uncertain but Emma's reassuring look soon sets her right. She trots off as her mother greets a customer of her own.

EXT. SHOP LINED STREET

Pedestrians crisscross the street, weaving in between the horse-drawn traffic.

SIDEWALK

A well dressed couple, GEORGE and MARGARET, makes halting progress through the throng. At nearly every step something stops them:

Near a poster advertising a charity ball, Margaret freezes in front of an elegant dress in a shop window. George pulls her along.

Several PAPER BOYS wave papers in their faces. George waves them off.

A FLOWER GIRL offers flowers. George looks to Margaret for her opinion. He exchanges coins for a small bouquet and a boutonniere for himself.

As they attempt to continue on, George comes to a screeching stop, admiring a fine pipe in the Tobacconist's window. Margaret pulls HIM along. He responds by pulling a cigar from his inside coat pocket. She glares at him.

Little Mary observes from behind the legs of a horse. She darts under the horse's belly and scampers toward them across the crowded street.

She dodges a carriage, barely avoiding getting trampled. She bobs around a group of other urchins, spots an opening and races through it.

She sprints to a doorway ahead of the couple. A SHOP KEEPER pokes shoes her away from inside the doorway.

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Little Mary turns and nearly runs into the couple. She shyly curtsies in a practiced way as she spies the man's cigar and asks a question. This charms Margaret.

George tries to wave her off but Margaret won't let him

George looks at Little Mary again. She curtsies again. He is amused. Withdrawing some change, he signals four.

Little Mary carefully counts out four matches and hands them to him. He fills her palm with coins. She is surprised by how many.

She curtsies and rushes away. The couple laughs.

CURB

Little Mary watches the oncoming procession of pedestrians for another smoker. A Flower Girl carrying an armful of bouquets towers over her and glares.

Afraid and embarrassed, Little Mary backs away and runs.

CORNER

Little Mary stops, looks back and then checks the immediate area to see if the coast is clear.

Without warning Little Mary is suddenly surrounded by three large aggressive paper boys. They start shoving her between them. She tries to get away but the boys trap her. One of the boys misses the catch and she falls to the payment. She cries. Disapproving looks from bystanders make the boys skulk away.

EXT. SHOP LINED STREET - DUSK

Little Mary searches the passing jumble of pedestrians. She hails a man but is waived off. Every few moments she tries a different spot. She glances at a poster announcing a charity ball.

EXT. SIDE STREET

Little Mary wanders down an empty street by a park. A COUPLE turns onto it just in front of her. They are dressed in finery as though going some place special. Little Mary notices that the GENTLEMAN is smoking a pipe. Little Mary follows from a discreet distance looking for an opportunity to head them off.

They turn onto another street eventually, disappearing behind a hedge.

Little Mary scrambles to the corner to see where they went and continues to follow.

EXT. CITY STREET

Other couples soon converge onto the couple's path.

Little Mary soon finds herself in the midst of a crowd.

EXT. GREAT HALL

Little Mary finds herself standing in front of a great hall. Couples file past her to enter. In front stands a sign that reads "Charity Ball Tonight".

Little Mary strategically stations herself close to the entrance but away from a very imposing DOORMAN. She hails passing smokers but most of the couples are in too much of a hurry to get out of the cold. Little Mary is dazzled by the shiny top hats and silk scarves of the men and the furs of the women. She pulls her own woolen scarf closer.

An old Navy man, ADMIRAL BLIMP, fully decked out in a dress uniform with an unlit cigar in hand, steps out the entrance and beckons her.

He pats his pockets for change but can't find any. Blimp motions for her to follow him inside.

INT. RECEPTION AREA

As she follows the admiral, Little Mary is surrounded by a whirl of activity as well-dressed, glamorous couples greet each other. Admiral Blimp motions for her to stay put.

As the admiral steps away, Little Mary stands enthralled.

She turns. Her eyes widen at the sight of dancing couples whirling in a large ballroom. She moves toward the spectacle in a trance.

INT. BALLROOM

Little Mary sways to the music, watching the dancers.

A hand on Little Mary's shoulder snaps her out of her reverie. She jumps at the sight of a group of revelers behind her. SUSAN, the young woman who has gotten her attention, leans down to ask Little Mary a question as her friends giggle among themselves.

Little Mary, bewildered and embarrassed, shakes her head.

Susan spots EDWARD and his date for the evening, ADELINE and beckons them over.

Susan says something to Edward to which he resists. Adeline, amused by the suggestion, pulls his hand and begs him to reconsider.

Susan's friends entreaty him too.

Feeling outnumbered and seeing that all the eyes on him, Edward relents. He takes Little Mary by the hand and leads her onto the dance floor.

Edward formally bows to Little Mary respectfully. Little Mary stands frozen not knowing what to do. She looks up to him uncertainly. He whispers into her ear.

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Her face brightens. After a few uncertain steps she is astonished to find that she is dancing. She looks in awe at her new dance partner.

Susan, her friends, and Adeline happily look on as Edward and Little Mary dance among the other couples. Edward and Little Mary disappear into the whirl of activity.

The mismatched couple emerge elsewhere from the crowd.

Two ladies, MRS. WORTHING and MRS. HARRISON watch as their husbands, ALBERT and RODNEY, are deep in conversation behind them. Delighted by the sight of Little Mary, they try to divert their husbands.

Edward and Little Mary dance by a succession of couples, both on the floor and on the sidelines. Everyone brightens and smiles at their appearance.

Edward and Little Mary glide by the refreshment tables.

MRS. ACTON points to a nearly empty punch bowl. A MAIDSERVANT acknowledges, curtsies and rushes off.

Mrs. Acton spies Little Mary and Edward and frowns. She turns around to MRS. UPPINGTON, an old dowager who apparently is in charge.

She directs her toward Edward and Little Mary. Mrs. Uppington looks at them disapprovingly.

Mrs. Uppington seeths as the dance ends.

When the music stops Little Mary curtsies to Edward and he bows to her. They walk with the crowd to the edge of the dance floor.

They are confronted by the Doorman and a very stern Mrs. Uppington. She looks to the Doorman and points at Little Mary, motioning for her to be ejected.

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Edward's mouth hangs open in disbelief.

The Doorman reluctantly motions to Little Mary to follow him. With a frightened look, she follows.

Edward gains his wits and tries to catch up to Little Mary, calling to her.

With wave of the hand, Mrs. Uppington hustles Little Mary and the Doorman along. Little Mary's scarf drops.

INT. RECEPTION AREA

Admiral Blimp, coins in hand, blocks Little Mary's path.

Little Mary fumbles in her box for the correct number of matches. He lays coins into her palm. The Doorman motions for her to come along.

EXT. GREAT HALL

The Doorman looks at Little Mary's small stature and her ragged clothes. He shakes his head with pity. He ponders and then motions for her to wait in the alley.

With a grateful look, Little Mary curtsies and slowly backs into the alley.

EXT. ALLEY

Turning, Little Mary looks over the cold, bleak space of the alley.

A little flurry of light snow swirls near the brick wall.

She settles into a slightly sheltered spot beside a brick buttress. She shivers, pulling her tattered coat closer. She pulls her knees in as she sits with her back to the wall. She looks in her box of matches and withdraws one.

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She holds it close to the wall as to strike it but hesitates. She places it back in her box and waits.

INT. BALLROOM

Edward and Adeline dance a slow waltz. Adeline enjoys the dancing. She looks admiringly at the high society folk.

She glances at Edward. Edward wears a frown and a distant look in his eyes. She tugs on his arm to regain his attention.

EXT. ALLEY

Little Mary struggles to keep from shivering. Her teeth chatter. She strains to hear the music filtering into the alley. She pulls out a match from her box once again. She hesitates but a cold breeze changes her mind. She strikes it and the warm glow lights her delighted face. She looks into the flame.

The flame fills the air with yellow, glowing warmth.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. FAMILY DINING TABLE

Aunts, uncles, cousins, and grandparents surround a well stocked table happily chatting with each other.

Looking over the top of a huge turkey sits Little Mary. Her eyes grow wide as a large slice of turkey is deposited on her plate. She raises a fork.

CUT TO:

EXT. ALLEY

Little Mary drops the match as it burns her fingers.

The match flame flickers out on the pavement.

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She wraps her arms around herself for warmth.

INT. BALLROOM

Edward and Adeline are in a conversation with another couple, MR. and MRS. SPENCER. Adeline talk animatedly during the exchange. Edward stands quietly, his mind elsewhere. Adeline gives him a look of disapproval.

EXT. ALLEY

Little Mary raises her collar about her ears to keep them warm. She rubs her hands together to ward off the cold. With difficulty she grips a match and strikes it. A smile crosses her face as the flame's warm glow fills her eyes.

The flame grows larger.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. SUNLIT BEDROOM

Emma appears puzzled by a large round box sitting on the table in front of her mirror. The warm glow of a sunlit garden filters through the window upon both her and Little Mary. Little Mary looks up at her mother and tries to stifle a smile. She motions for Emma to open the box.

Emma hesitates for a second, then carefully undoes the ribbons holding the box shut. She removes the lid and peers inside. With both hands she carefully lifts out a beautiful hat. Little Mary enthusiastically nods and motions for her to put the hat on.

Emma places it on her head. She carefully ties the hat ribbon into a bow beneath her chin. She looks into the mirror to see how the hat frames her face. Happy tears well in her eyes.

Emma pulls Little Mary close to her and embraces her tightly, Mary's smiling face above her shoulder.

CUT TO:

EXT. ALLEY

A snap of wind extinguishes the flame, leaving a smoldering puff of smoke.

INT. BALLROOM

Edward and Adeline do a lively dance. He gives her a twirl and they both laugh. The music ends and all clap.

Adeline lures a very willing Edward over to the punch bowl. He steps on something underfoot.

Edward looks down and sees Little Mary's lost scarf.

Edward's face darkens with concern. He abruptly turns and marches from the dance floor. Adeline screams at him.

INT. RECEPTION AREA

Edward approaches the coat check and asks the COATCHECK GIRL a question. She points toward the door.

The Doorman stands just outside of the glass.

EXT. ALLEY

Edward and the Doorman round the corner into the alley. They stop short, shocked by what they see.

Little Mary sits motionless against the cold brick wall of the building. She stares intently at a scene that only she can see.

Her eyes at first seem dark but soon a warm glow reflects off her pupils.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. FAMILY HEARTH

A big roaring fire fills a good sized fireplace. The embers of the logs glow.

Little Mary smiles as she sits on a comfortable cushioned seat under a warm blanket.

Silhouetted by the glow of the hearth, she looks into the fire. Two adult figures lean in and place their arms about her shoulders. They turn toward each other. It is her mother, Emma, and Edward. They look at each other and down at Little Mary. They smile.

CUT TO:

EXT. ALLEY

In the spot where Little Mary had been, snow blows in the chill wind.

THE END