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The stairway and the well

Once upon a time, at the edge of the world we know, there was a girl. She dreamt of stairs to the stars, where – her parents so said – her good grandmother moved last year. It must have been a good place, if grandma chose to move from her magical and beloved forest. Little Red Riding Hood thought the stairway to the stars must be in the forest and sought to find it that night as the Sun bid farewell and hinted a faint promise of returning at dawn. The girl smiled at the sinking ship of colours flowing down from the ballroom of the sky like paint washed down in the rain, and pondered what it will be like to look down from the stars. To see the trees and the waters, enjoy the air without any streams of human trouble attached. The only heart-wrenching thought in her was the obstacle that was the night, which silently crept up on her tiptoeing behind the trees when she would not look and standing still when she would raise suspecting glances.

She sighed as she edged closer to the forest and drenched herself in the deep sea of leaves and branches. The moon danced up to the very top of the sky and shone down on her shedding a dim, mysterious light on the elusive path she has taken. Step by step she just reminded herself to breathe in and out to lock fear out of her trembling limbs. The creatures of the forest stayed low and quiet in their nocturnal hiding, but the mind can never rest. Where we think noises or fragrances are needed we just imagine them, and where we think the evil is missing we create it. She heard a spring running nearby, owls calling sleepily, branches breaking and suddenly, she believed to be caught up in a breath-taking whirlwind of early autumn leaves. She heard howling and as she panted nervously a grey figure pulled itself up from the misty ground jumping towards her. She screamed and fell back caught up on a root as she tried to make an escape. It was too late, the wolf was now face to face with her.

‘A wolf!’ she cried to herself in despair. The glimmering bird of dread passed in the black eyes of the wolf.

‘A wolf?’ he asked in nervous panic ‘Oh, no a wolf... where?!’

Little Red Riding Hood helped herself to her feet with wide eyes which did not know whether to wonder over the fact of a talking wolf, or by what it said. She decided it would be the latter.

‘You are playing with your food now, aren’t you?’ she said on a sadly challenging voice.

‘I would never play with carrots’ the wolf said in his most serious of tones.

‘But wolves don’t eat carrots, they eat little girls like me.’

‘No wonder they do’ whispered the wolf ‘If you wear red all the time.’ Then he quickly added ‘But what they really want is me.’

The girl let out a tiny laugh.

‘You?’

‘Yes, me. Rabbit meat is delicious.’

‘Wait a moment, you think you are a rabbit?’

‘You ask silly questions, little girl. I don’t think I am a rabbit, I am a rabbit.’

The girl looked around as if she sought advice from the trees and shook her head frantically to force the insane illusion out of her mind but the wolf would not go, he asked if she had carrots instead, or at least cabbages. However, she had no time to form any further thoughts about this, because the mist seemed to open up once again and leave way for another figure. A blond girl in all blue.

‘Ah, finally’ she said looking at the wolf. ‘I thought I lost my rabbit.’

Little Red Riding Hood was completely blown away by astonishment, which hardened her limbs and tied her tongue into a tight knot. Here is a wolf who thinks he is a rabbit and a girl, who shares in this insanity.

‘I am Alice by the way’ said the girl in blue. ‘Where are you headed?’

‘Deeper into the forest, that’s all.’

‘Can I come with you? I need to find the well leading to Wonderland again. I need to find the key to Wonderland too.’

‘Wonderland?’

‘Wonderland is beautiful. Every tree, every flower is just purely magical there. The streams are fresh and nothing hurts... the sky is glittering with purple clouds. Also, there are

marvellous mushrooms in Wonderland. They can make you grow, raise you up high or shrink you down until you are invisible to yourself. I have some with me, do you want to taste?’

Little Red Riding hood shook her head silently in reply as she stared into the darkness, which shut off the top of the trees from sight slowly, until only the white trunks remained visible. They trod carefully and quietly as another figure approached – another grey wolf. It growled and drooled showing off the sharp fangs on each side of its mouth. For a moment he eyed them, probably thinking if they tasted better cooked or roasted, but at the sight of the other wolf it fled.

‘See, you are a wolf,’ Little Red Riding hood said to him.

‘You are insane, I am a rabbit.’

As the strange company of three reached the deepest spot in the forest there it was: the stairway to the stars and the well to Wonderland. Alice went pale as she observed the stairway to the stars. Little Red Riding Hood wanted to say farewell politely, but Alice grabbed her by the hand almost crushing the bones in her wrist.

‘There is no way back to my Wonderland now.’ she said ‘Why won’t you come and search for the key to its door on the bottom of this well with me?’

‘My grandmother is waiting for me in the stars.’

‘Wait...’ Alice whispered thoughtfully. ‘I... I want to show you something.’

She went through her ragged pockets and pulled out a strange looking, dirty mushroom.

‘Here... take this... if you eat this you will grow... grow as high as these stairs and see your good grandmother. And if you want to stay there I will bid you farewell. But if you want to tell me what the stars are like I will wait here... until the end of time even. Then eat one more bite to shrink and come back to me.’

Little Red Riding Hood did not understand, but she took the mushroom. She grew and grew rapidly rising over this darkness and into the lightened pathway of the blue sky. Her grandmother built a house there. She was sitting on the porch knitting with a red cat curled up by her side.

‘My sweet girl’ she said sadly. ‘You should not have come.’

‘But I did. I will stay here with you.’

The good grandmother shed a golden tear and gave it to the girl.

‘Sweet child, it is a great relief to live in the stars. And one day... you will stand here with me looking down, saying what a wonderful air we breathed down there, what a marvellous story we wrote with our words and deeds. But not now. There are still cobblestones you need to tread on. Look down. See Alice, your friend. She still needs your help, and we cannot have her waiting until the end of times. So go! And rest assured that I will always be here watching and waiting for you. You need not worry, these stairs will always be here. But you need to see Wonderland and tell me what it’s like.’

Little Red Riding Hood bid farewell obediently, and took another bite from the mushroom. As she became more and more tiny she felt like falling through the air, trying to grab the edge of every cloud and catch her breath until she saw Alice sitting on the edge of the well crying.

‘What is it Alice?’

‘She cannot find the key of Wonderland’ explained the wolf.

But Little Red Riding Hood saw something which made her heart rise in her chest. Alice cried a golden tear. Little Red Riding Hood took it from Alice and put it right next to her grandmother’s golden tear in her palm. The teardrops found each other slowly, and never let go again, but together they were: a little golden key.

‘The key to Wonderland!’ Alice whispered enthusiastically.

They decided to descend to Wonderland at once. The wolf said he hoped there were carrots in Wonderland before he dived into the well.

Little Red Riding Hood turned to Alice when he was gone.

‘He is a wolf.’

‘I know.’

‘But you said you were looking for your rabbit.’

Alice winked.

‘It does not do any harm anyone if a wolf thinks he is a rabbit. What harms us all is rabbits who think they are wolves.’

Therewith they both jumped into the well and onto the soft, magical ground of Wonderland,
but that is the beginning of another story...