

IN STORY-LAND

IN STORY-LAND

BY

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YESTERDAY'S CLASSICS

CHAPEL HILL, NORTH CAROLINA

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PREFACE

It is not expected that the stories in this book will be told in their present form to Kindergarten children, as experience has shown that each Kindergartner must modify her story to suit the needs and capacities of her children, and must learn to take from any story just so much as may be helpful to her in creating a fresh story for the occasion. It is hoped, however, that they may serve the mother in her home reading with her group of children, and also that my colaborers in primary and second grade schools may sometimes use them for Friday afternoon readings.

A friendly critic has suggested that I add "One story a day is enough for a child." This is certainly the case if the story is to make any deep or lasting impression.

E. H.

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LITTLE BETA AND THE LAME GIANT

Near the top of a high, high mountain there lived a great giant. He was a very wonderful giant indeed. From the door of his rocky cave he could look into the distance and see for miles and miles over the surrounding country, even to the point where the land touched the great ocean, yet so clearly that he could observe the smile or the frown on a child's face three miles away. More wonderful still, he could look through the darkest cloud which ever covered the sky and see the sun still shining beyond and above it. And then his hands! Oh how I wish you could have seen his hands! They were so large and strong. Such wonderful hands, too! With them he could lift up a rock as big as this room and set it to one side. Sometimes his fingers could make the sweetest kind of music come from a crude violin which he had fashioned for himself.

Then, too, he knew so much, and he knew it well. I don't believe that ten of the wisest men that our universities ever sent out could have told you such extraordinary things. He knew all about every plant which grew on the mountain, and just where the rich

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mines of gold and silver were hidden inside the mountain. He could have pointed out to you which pebbles could be polished into emeralds and topazes and sapphires and which were worthless. Had you asked him he could have taken you to the secret spring from which flowed the sparkling stream of healing waters, sought by all the sick folks in the country round. He was such a wonderful giant that it would take me the whole day to tell you of all the things which he could do—but—*he was lame* and somehow could never get down the mountain to where the ordinary mortal lived. So for ages he had been alone upon his mountain top, seeing all the people below him, loving them with all his heart, and knowing just what would help them, yet never being able to come near to them.

In one of the valleys of the great mountain lived a little maiden called Beta. She was so small that most people thought her a young child and so weak that she could not even carry a bucket of water from the well to the house. Then too, she was a very plain looking girl, not at all pretty. Her mother used to say to her: "My dear daughter, you are neither rich, nor clever, nor beautiful, therefore you must learn to be useful to others if you would be loved."

The little maiden often wondered how she was to be of any use to the people about her. She would say to herself, "I have no money to give to them; my hands are not skilled enough to do much work for them and my brain is not quick, therefore I can not give them beautiful thoughts which will help them." Still she was a loving-hearted little girl, and love, you know, always finds a way to be helpful.

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One day it occurred to her that she could gather some wild flowers and take them to the old woman who lived all alone at the end of the village and who was so deaf that nobody ever tried to talk to her.

With this thought in mind she started out in search of the brightest flowers she could find. She climbed the mountain side and gathered *a whole armful* of beautiful yellow golden-rod and purple asters and red Indian pinks. These she carried joyfully to the little house at the end of the village. They made the dingy old room take on a look of warmth and happiness. Gay as they were, however, the face of the old deaf woman was brighter still as she said, "Bless you, my child, bless you! Who but little Beta would ever have thought of bringing flowers to me?"

The next day Beta thought she would take some flowers to the blind weaver who made all the carpets that the villagers used. "This time," she said to herself, "I must hunt for the flowers which have a sweet odor, as he cannot see their gay colors." So she gathered some wild roses and some sweet scented violets and some witch hazel. As she entered his small shop he lifted his head from his work and said, "Ah me, what is this I smell? It has been many a day since I have been near enough to the mountain's own flowers to breathe in their perfume." Beta placed them in a mug near his loom and as she ran home she was very happy, yet she hardly knew why.

After this she went daily to the mountain to gather flowers for some dear soul who could not go out to get them. Sometimes they were taken to the

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gentle mother who had so many children that she never found time to leave her home. Sometimes they went to the village church and made the Sunday seem more beautiful than other days. Each time she climbed higher and higher as she had soon learned that the rarer and more beautiful flowers could only be found far up the mountain. At last one day, when she had climbed farther than she had ever ventured before, she suddenly came upon the lame giant sitting on a large stump in front of his cave. In his hand was his violin, but he was not playing; his face wore a thoughtful, almost a sad look.

Beta was so frightened that the flowers dropped from her hands and she nearly stopped breathing. She had never before in all her life, seen a *real, live giant*. He was so big that she could hardly believe her own eyes as she looked at him. Her first impulse was to run down the mountain as quickly as possible, but somehow, the very sight of such a wonderful being held her spell-bound, so she stood motionless, gazing at him from behind a huge rock.

Soon he put his violin in position under his chin and taking up his bow began to play. He played so softly and sweetly that little Beta felt sure he could not be wicked and cruel as were the giants she had read about. Little by little she came shyly toward him. As soon as he saw her he laid down his violin and held out his hand, smiling as he did so. "Come near to me, child," he said, "I will not hurt you." Beta thus encouraged, came slowly forward.

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“Tell me, little one,” said he gently, “from whence came you, and how did you find your way so far up the mountain side? None but strong mountain guides have ever before come near my cave.” “I was gathering flowers,” answered little Beta, “and I thought I might find some blue forget-me-nots among these rocks.” “So you have learned already, have you, that forget-me-nots can best be found near the mountain tops.” With that he laughed softly to himself. His laugh was such a kindly laugh that it took away all fear and made Beta feel quite at home with him. “What is your name?” said she, “and why do you live up here? Do you not sometimes get lonesome?” The great giant did not answer her, but began talking about something else. In a short time he had led the little maiden into telling him all about herself and the people of the village and the flower gathering. It was not until he rose to point out to her where forget-me-nots could be found in abundance, that she noticed he was lame. She had soon gathered a whole apron full of the beautiful flowers and bidding him good-bye she climbed down the mountain, sometimes slipping and sliding, but always holding fast to the hem of her apron that the flowers might not be lost.

Many times after that she climbed the mountain to the cave of the giant and sat on a little stone at his feet while he told her stories of things which had happened in the village long before any of the people who lived in it were born. She loved best to listen to the tales of gods and heroes of the olden times. Then when she was tired of stories he would show her where the flowers grew most profusely. Little by little

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he taught her to know the herbs which were good for sick people. Oftentimes they were very humble looking plants which she would have passed by unnoticed. She soon learned how to brew these into drinks and medicines for the feeble and sick folks of the village. Sometimes, though not often, he would play on his violin for her. He always played such strange, weird music that it made her think of Siegfried, and of Lohengrin and the white swan, or of other beautiful beings whom she had never seen, but of whom she had heard.

Each day when she returned to her home she told the people of the village about the wonderful giant who lived so high up the mountain that its top could be seen from his cave door, but they only laughed and said, "Little Beta has been dreaming." Even after they had learned to call upon her for herbs with which to poultice bruised limbs and strengthen weak stomachs or quiet restless fevers, they gave no heed to what she said about the giant.

Years passed by and the little maiden still continued to climb the mountain to learn of the lame giant more and more of what was wonderful and beautiful in the world about her. Much climbing in the open air had made her strong and well. As time wore on, she unconsciously made a path up the mountain side, which of course caused the climbing to be much easier than in the days when she had to scramble over the rocks and push aside the underbrush to make her way up. The path too, was firm and smooth now, with no stones suddenly slipping from beneath her feet and causing painful falls.

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At last one day Beta persuaded two or three of her companions to go with her to the cave. Now that there was a respectable path, the undertaking did not seem so foolish as in the days when Beta had gone scrambling up the rocks, nobody knew whither. So they laughingly consented to go, more to please Beta, whom they had learned to love, than with any expectation of seeing a real giant at the end of the journey. Therefore they were greatly astonished when, after much climbing, a sudden turn in the road brought them face to face with a being five times as large as an ordinary man, whose strong hands looked as if they might easily crush any one of them, yet whose kindly face re-assured them.

The great giant received them pleasantly, as they were little Beta's friends, and soon they were eagerly plying him with all sorts of questions. "Did he know those strange creatures, the centaurs, whose bodies were half man and half horse? They had heard that those centaurs lived somewhere among the mountains, and that they could teach any boy how to become a great hero. Had he ever ridden on the back of Pegasus, the flying horse, whom none but giants could ride without tumbling off? Did he ever drink from the fountain of youth which had the power to keep mortals from growing old? Was it true that he could change the dirt beneath their feet into golden money?" All these and many other questions they asked him and to each he gave an answer.

That night, when they returned to the village, they could talk of nothing else but the wonderful giant whose home was near the mountain top. Next day a

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larger number of the villagers climbed the mountain to the cave, and each succeeding day more were persuaded to make the journey, until everybody in the little valley, that is, everybody who could climb, had visited the lame giant. Then they began to discuss how they could open a road up the mountain to the cave. Finally they decided to unite together and build a broad, winding road, one wide enough to let horses and vehicles pass each other. "Then," said they, "we can take our dear old grandsires and granddames and even our little children up to the good giant that he may teach them also."

Soon the whole village was humming with the sound of pickaxe and spade. Everybody worked and everybody was eager and happy in the work. It took a long time, several years, in fact, before the road was completed, but it was done at last and it proved a greater blessing than they had anticipated, for not only could they now drive up the mountain to the lame giant's cave, but *he* was able to come down to them! This was a thing of which they had never dreamed, and great was the rejoicing on the occasion of his first visit to them.

Years passed by and the little valley became the most famous spot on the whole earth, so rich was its soil, so remarkable the products it sent out. People came from all over the land now to visit the lame giant and learn of him some of the wonderful secrets which had been hidden for centuries, and all loved him and revered him.

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My story would not be complete if I did not tell you that he too became less lame, since the journeys up and down the mountain helped to make him much stronger.

Perhaps some day you may go to this valley yourselves and learn how to do many wonderful things, which now seem impossible to you.

THE LINE OF GOLDEN LIGHT; OR THE LITTLE BLIND SISTER

Once upon a time there lived a child whose name was Avilla. She was sweet and loving, and fair to look upon, and had everything in the world to make her happy, but she had a little blind sister, and Avilla could not be perfectly happy as long as her sister's eyes were closed so that she could not see God's beautiful world, nor enjoy His bright sunshine. Little Avilla kept wondering if there was not something that she could do which would open this blind sister's eyes.

At last, one day, she heard of an old, old woman, nobody knew how old, who had lived for hundreds of years in a dark cave, not many miles away. This queer, old woman knew a secret enchantment, by means of which the blind could receive their sight. The child, Avilla, asked her parents' permission to make a journey to the cave, in order that she might try to persuade the old woman to tell her this secret. "Then," exclaimed she, joyfully, "my dear sister need sit no longer in darkness." Her parents gave a somewhat unwilling consent, as they heard many strange and wicked stories about the old woman. At last, however, one fine spring morning, Avilla started on her journey. She had a long distance to walk, but the happy thoughts in

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her heart made the time pass quickly, and the soft, cool breeze seemed to be whispering a song to her all the way.

When she came to the mouth of the cave, it looked so dark and forbidding that she almost feared to enter it, but the thought of her little blind sister gave her courage, and she walked in. At first she could see nothing, for all the sunshine was shut out by the frowning rocks that guarded the entrance. Soon, however, she discerned the old woman sitting on a stone chair, spinning a pile of flax into a fine, fine thread. She seemed bent nearly double with age, and her face wore a look of worry and care, which made her appear still older.

The child Avilla came close to her side, and thought, she is so aged that she must be hard of hearing. The old woman did not turn her head, nor stop her spinning. Avilla waited a moment, and then took fresh courage, and said, "I have come to ask you if you will tell me how I can cure my blind sister?" The strange creature turned and stared at her as if she were very much surprised; she then spoke in a deep, hollow voice, so hollow that it sounded as if she had not spoken for a very long time. "Oh," said she with a sneer, "I can tell you well enough, but you'll not do it. People who can see, trouble themselves very little about those who are blind!" This last was said with a sigh, and then she scowled at Avilla until the child's heart began to beat very fast. But the thought of her little blind sister made her brave again, and she cried out, "Oh *please* tell me. I will do anything to help my dear sister!" The old woman looked long and earnestly at her this time.

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She then stooped down and searched in the heap of the fine-spun thread which lay at her side until she found the end of it. This she held out to the child, saying, "Take this and carry it all around the world, and when you have done that, come to me and I will show you how your blind sister may be cured." Little Avilla thanked her and eagerly seized the tiny thread, and wrapping it carefully around her hand that she might not lose it, turned and hastened out of the close, damp cave.

She had not traveled far before she looked back to be sure the thread had not broken, it was so thin. Imagine her surprise to see that instead of its being a gray thread of spun flax, it was a thread of golden light, that glittered and shone in the sunlight, as if it were made of the most precious stuff on earth. She felt sure now that it must be a magic thread, and that it somehow would help her to cure her blind sister. So she hastened on, glad and happy.

Soon, however, she approached a dark, dense forest. No ray of sunlight seemed ever to have fallen on the trunks of its trees. In the distance she thought she could hear the growl of bears and the roar of lions. Her heart almost stopped beating. "Oh, I can never go through that gloomy forest," said she to herself, and her eyes filled with tears. She turned to retrace her steps, when the soft breeze which still accompanied her whispered, "Look at the thread you have been carrying! Look at the golden thread!" She looked back, and the bright, tiny line of light seemed to be actually smiling at her, as it stretched across the soft green-sward, far into the distance and, strange to say, each

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tiny blade of grass which it had touched, had blossomed into a flower. So, as the little girl looked back, she saw a flowery path with a glittering line of golden light running through it. "How beautiful!" she exclaimed, "I did not notice the flowers as I came along, but the enchanted thread will make the next traveler see them."

This thought filled her with such joy that she pushed forward into the dark woods. Sometimes she knocked her head against a tree which stood in her way; sometimes she almost feared she was lost, but every now and then she would look back and the sight of the tiny thread of golden light always renewed her courage. Once in a while she felt quite sure that she could see the nose of some wild beast poking out in front of her, but when she came nearer it proved to be the joint in a tree trunk, or some strange fungus which had grown on a low branch. Then she would laugh at her own fear and go on. One of the wonderful things about the mysterious little thread which she carried in her hand was, that it seemed to open a path behind it, so that one could easily follow in her foot-steps without stumbling over fallen trees, or bumping against living ones. Every now and then a gray squirrel would frisk by her in a friendly fashion, as if to assure her that she was not alone, even in the twilight of the dark woods. By and by she came to the part of the forest where the trees were less dense, and soon she was out in the glad sunshine again.

But now a new difficulty faced her. As far as she could see stretched a low, swampy marsh of wet land. The mud and slime did not look very inviting, but the

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thought of her little blind sister came to her again, and she bravely plunged into the mire. The dirty, dripping mud clung to her dress and made her feet so heavy that she grew weary lifting them out of it. Sometimes she seemed to be stuck fast, and it was only with a great effort that she could pull out, first one foot, and then the other. A lively green frog hopped along beside her, and seemed to say, in his funny, croaking voice, "Never mind the mud, you'll soon be through it." When she had at last reached the end of the slippery, sticky marsh, and stood once more on firm ground, she looked back at the tiny thread of golden light which trailed along after her. *What* do you think had happened? Wherever the mysterious and beautiful thread had touched the mud, the water had dried up, and the earth had become firm and hard, so that any other person who might wish to cross the swampy place could walk on firm ground. This made the child Avilla so happy, that she began to sing softly to herself.

Soon, however, her singing ceased. As the day advanced, the air grew hotter and hotter. The trees had long ago disappeared, and now the grass became parched and dry, until at last she found herself in the midst of a dreary desert. For miles and miles the scorching sand stretched on every side. She could not even find a friendly rock in whose shadow she might rest for a time. The blazing sun hurt her eyes and made her head ache, and the hot sand burned her feet. Still she toiled on, cheered by a swarm of yellow butterflies that fluttered just ahead of her. At last the end of the desert was reached, just as the sun disappeared behind a crimson cloud. Dusty and weary, the child Avilla was

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about to throw herself down on the ground to rest. As she did so, her eyes turned to look once more at the golden thread which had trailed behind her all day on the hot sand. Lo, and behold! What did she see? Tall shade trees had sprung up along the path she had traveled, and each tiny grain of sand that the wonderful thread had touched, was now changed into a diamond, or ruby, or emerald, or some other precious stone. On one side the pathway across the desert shone and glittered, while on the other the graceful trees cast a cool and refreshing shade.

Little Avilla stood amazed as she looked at the beautiful trees and the sparkling gems. All feeling of weariness was gone. The air now seemed mild and refreshing, and she thought that she could hear in the distance some birds singing their evening songs. One by one the bright stars came out in the quiet sky above her head, as if to keep guard while she slept through the night.

The next morning she started forward on her long journey round the world. She traveled quite pleasantly for a while, thinking of how cool and shady the desert path would now be for any one who might have to travel it, and of the precious jewels she had left for some one else to gather up. She could not stop for them herself, she was too anxious to press forward and finish her task, in order that her little blind sister might the sooner see.

After a time she came to some rough rocks tumbled about in great confusion, as if angry giants had hurled them at each other. Soon the path grew

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steeper and steeper, and the rocks sharper and sharper, until they cut her feet. Before her she could see nothing but more rocks until they piled themselves into a great mountain, which frowned down upon her, as much as to say, "How dare you attempt to climb to my summit?" The brave child hesitated. Just then two strong eagles with outspread wings rose from their nest of sticks on the side of a steep cliff near by, and soared majestically and slowly aloft. As they passed far above her head they uttered a loud cry which seemed to say, "Be brave and strong and you shall meet us at the mountain-top."

Sometimes the ragged edges of the rocks tore her dress, and sometimes they caught the tiny golden thread, and tangled it so that she had to turn back and loosen it from their hold. The road was very steep and she was compelled to sit down every few minutes and get her breath. Still she climbed on, keeping the soaring eagles always in sight. As she neared the top, she turned and looked back at the enchanted thread of golden light which she had carried through all the long, strange journey. Another marvelous thing had happened! The rugged path of sharp, broken rocks, had changed into broad and beautiful white marble steps, over which trailed the shining thread of light. She knew that she had made a pathway up this difficult mountain and her heart rejoiced.

She turned again to proceed on her journey, when, only a short distance in front of her, she saw the dark cave in which lived the strange old woman who had bidden her carry the line of light around the world. She hastened forward, and on entering the cave, she

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saw the old creature, almost bent double, still spinning the mysterious thread. Avilla ran forward and cried out, "I have done all you told me to do, now give sight to my sister!" The old woman sprang to her feet, seized the thread of golden light and exclaimed, "At last! at last! I am freed!"

Then came so strange and wonderful a change that Avilla could hardly believe her own eyes. Instead of the ugly, cross-looking old crone, there stood a beautiful princess, with long golden hair, and tender blue eyes, her face radiant with joy. Her story was soon told. Hundreds of years ago she had been changed into the bent old woman, and shut up in the dark cave on the mountain-side, because she, a daughter of the King, had been selfish and idle, thinking only of herself, and her punishment had been that she must remain thus disguised and separated from all companions and friends until she could find someone who would be generous and brave enough to take the long, dangerous journey around the world for the sake of others. Her mother had been a fairy princess and had taught her many things which we mortals have yet to learn. She showed the child Avilla how, by dipping the golden thread into a spring of ordinary water, she could change the water into golden water, which glittered and sparkled like liquid sunshine. Filling a pitcher with this they hastened together to where the little blind sister sat in darkness waiting for some one to come and lead her home. The beautiful princess told Avilla to dip her hands into the bowl of enchanted water, and then press them upon the closed eyes of her sister. They opened! And the little blind girl could see!

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After that the fairy princess came and lived with little Avilla and her sister, and taught them how to do many wonderful things, of which I have not time to tell you to-day.