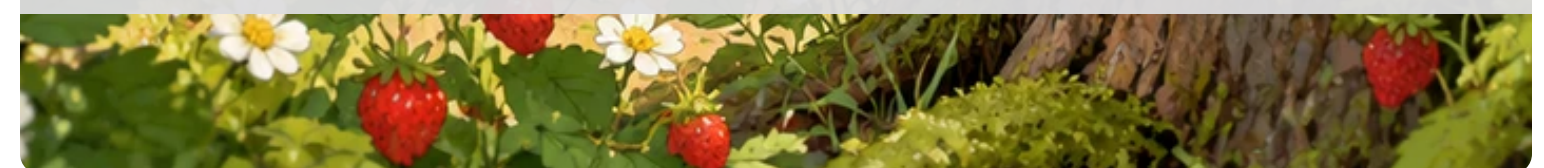




The Magic Pipe and the Pitcher

Инна Соколова





Summer arrives in the forest, bringing an abundance of sweet, ripe wild strawberries. Zhenya sets out into the woods with her family, holding a lovely white pitcher given to her by her mother, eager to gather as many berries as she can.



Zhenya wanders across her sunny patch looking for ripe fruit, but she refuses to look closely and comes up empty-handed. While her parents and little brother fill their containers, Zhenya stares sadly into her empty pitcher.



Her father gently shows her the secret to finding strawberries, kneeling down on the mossy ground to lift the green leaves. He recites a cheerful rhythmic rhyme about picking one berry while spotting another hidden underneath.



Following her father's demonstration, Zhenya crouches down and lifts the broad leaves to uncover dozens of bright red berries. She picks a few, but quickly grows tired of kneeling and decides to search for an easier spot where berries do not hide.



After walking deep into the woods without finding any visible berries, Zhenya sits down on a mossy tree stump to rest. She eats the few berries she picked and wishes aloud for someone to help her gather fruit effortlessly.



The moss beside her suddenly rustles, and a tiny forest spirit named Old Man Mushroom emerges from beneath the stump. Clad in a white coat and velvet hat, he asks Zhenya why she is complaining in his magical woods.



Zhenya complains that the strawberries hide beneath their leaves and force her to bend down continuously. Old Man Mushroom chuckles and pulls a magical wooden pipe from his pocket, explaining that its melody makes hidden berries reveal themselves instantly.



Eager for an easy shortcut, Zhenya trades her pitcher for the magic pipe and runs back to her strawberry patch. As she plays a lively song on the pipe, every berry on the glade pops out from under the leaves and sways to the music.



Zhenya reaches down joyfully to gather the exposed berries, only to freeze when she realizes her hands are empty. Without her pitcher, she has nowhere to store the fruit, making the magical music completely useless.



Realizing that magic cannot replace honest effort, Zhenya runs back to swap the pipe for her pitcher with Old Man Mushroom. Returning to her patch, she happily kneels down, lifts the leaves with her own hands, and fills her pitcher to the very brim.