



The Little Match Girl's Last Night

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On a freezing New Year's Eve, young Elara walked through the snowy streets with her head and feet bare. She carried a bundle of matches in her old apron, hoping to sell just one to help her family. The snowflakes fell on her long golden hair, but she was too cold to notice the beauty around her.



Earlier that day, Elara had lost her oversized slippers while running across the busy street to avoid two speeding carriages. Now her little feet were blue and red from the biting frost as she stepped through the deep, white snow. Not a single person had stopped to buy a match, and she dared not go home empty-handed.



Lights twinkled from every window, and the delicious scent of roast goose filled the evening air. Elara watched as happy families gathered behind warm glass, their laughter muffled by the thick stone walls. She felt like a ghost in the shadows, invisible to the bustling world of the city.



Exhausted and shivering, the little girl found a small corner between two tall houses and curled up as tightly as she could. She tucked her frozen feet under her thin dress, but the cold seeped through her very bones. Her hands were so numb that she could barely feel the small wooden sticks she held.



With trembling fingers, Elara pulled out a single match and struck it against the wall to warm herself. The flame sputtered to life, glowing like a tiny candle and casting a magical light over her cold hands. In its warmth, she imagined she was sitting before a great iron stove with polished brass feet and a roaring fire.



The match flickered out, and the stove vanished, leaving her once again in the dark, cold corner. She struck a second match, and this time the wall became transparent like a veil, revealing a table spread with a white cloth and fine china. A magnificent roast goose, stuffed with apples and dried plums, seemed to hop off the dish and waddle toward her.



When the second light faded, Elara quickly struck a third match, and suddenly she was sitting under the most beautiful Christmas tree she had ever seen. Thousands of tiny candles sparkled on the green branches, looking like the stars in the night sky. She reached out her hands toward the lights, but they rose higher and higher until they became real stars.



One of the stars streaked across the dark sky, leaving a long trail of golden fire behind it. Someone is dying, Elara whispered, remembering her late grandmother's words that a falling star meant a soul was going up to God. Her grandmother was the only person who had ever truly loved her, and Elara missed her more than anything.



She struck another match, and in its bright glow, her grandmother appeared, looking tall, kind, and surrounded by a soft radiance. Fearing the vision would vanish like the stove and the feast, Elara quickly struck the entire bundle of matches at once. The light became brighter than the midday sun as her grandmother took her into her arms.



The next morning, the sun rose over a quiet, snowy street where the little girl sat with rosy cheeks and a smile on her lips. She had frozen to death during the night, but no one knew the beautiful things she had seen. Elara was now in a place where there was no cold, no hunger, and no fear, walking hand-in-hand with her grandmother into the light.