

THE BAG OF MAGIC GOLD

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IN a beautiful country far away lived a good, kind king. He had many children, and as each one was ready to go out into the world to seek his or her fortune, he (or she) was given a bag of magic gold.

The time came for Prince Jolly and Princes Prudence to go forth. The king called them to him and said, as he handed to each the bag of magic gold:

“My children, this bag of gold has magic powers; if used for right purposes, the bag will never be empty, but if used for wrong purposes, or selfish ones, it will soon be empty and can never be filled again. And here is a ball of silver thread, which also has magic powers. When in trouble give a gentle pull and help will come immediately; but under *no* circumstances ever break the thread, for if unbroken it will lead you back home. And now my blessings be with you. Bring back a gift.”

“Oh, thank you, Father!” they both cried. Then they went down the road chatting merrily and happily about the wonderful things they would do and see. As they journeyed along, Prudence saw a little bird which had fallen from a nest and broken its wing. Very carefully she picked it up.

“Oh, brother,” she said, “see, its little wing is broken. Come, help me fix it.” Very reluctantly the prince helped her prepare a splint and set the wing. From some little twigs and grass Prudence made a nest in which she very tenderly carried the

bird so as not to jar it. Every little while she gave it some water to drink.

“What are you going to do with it?” asked Prince Jolly.

“Nurse it until it can fly. It will find a mate some day and settle down to housekeeping,” Prudence answered.

On another day they saw a little child crying bitterly.



“You poor little dear, what is the matter?” asked Princess Prudence.

“I’m hungry!” sobbed the child.

“Where do you live?” asked the princess. The child pointed to a little cabin some distance away. It stood alone in a forest of very large trees.

“Brother,” said the princess, “let us go to the cabin. We may be able to help the people; evidently they are in trouble.”

“If you are going to stop and help every bird, beast, or person we meet, we’ll never get anywhere.

I want to see the world and have a good time!" pouted Prince Jolly.

"Just this once, please, Jolly," begged Prudence.

"Oh, all right, but it is the last time."

Prudence took the child's hand, saying kindly: "Lead us to your home, Dear, and we will see what can be done to get something for you to eat."

In a few minutes they reached the cabin. It had but one large room and a lean-to for a kitchen. On the bed lay a woman, very pale and with a sick baby in her arms. Prudence went up to the woman, her eyes full of compassion.

"What can I do for you? Are you alone?" she asked.

"Yes," the woman answered. "John, my husband, went for a doctor yesterday and hasn't returned yet. Then the baby got sick and I am too sick to do anything for Jeanette. She's hungry and too little to do anything for herself; she is only five years old. God must have sent you for I have been praying so hard for help." Tears were in her eyes.

"There now, don't talk any more," Prudence cautioned. "I'll get something for Jeanette." The little girl followed Prudence with her big brown eyes as she sat on the bed by her mother.

Prudence found some bread and milk and fruit, butter and eggs. She made a pot of tea for the woman and while the water was heating for the baby's bath she fed Jeanette. While the mother was eating, Prudence bathed the baby. Jeanette watched the proceedings with wide eyes. When she had given the clean, sweet-smelling baby back to its mother, Pru-

dence went to where Prince Jolly was sitting by the door with a scowl on his face.

“Jolly, I am going to stay here until the woman is strong enough to do her work. You go into town and see if you can find Mr. White and a doctor. The woman is very ill.”

“I’m not coming back; I mean to see the world and have some fun,” Jolly said, and he got up and walked away without another word. Prudence watched him sadly for awhile, then went into the cabin.

“Jeanette, do you want to feed the little bird while I tidy up the house?” she asked.

“Oh, goody! What’s the matter with it?” Jeanette asked when she saw the bandaged wing. Prudence told her and then showed her how to feed a drop of water at a time, or a crumb of bread, or a seed. When the house was all clean and Mrs. White’s bed was nicely made, Prudence sat down and they had a quiet talk.

It was two days before Mr. White came back with the doctor and plenty of food. Prudence knew her brother had seen to that, but Prince Jolly did not return and it was many years before she saw her brother again.

Prudence stayed at the cabin for three weeks, then went on her way, always helping others, doing all she could to cheer and comfort the sad and feed the hungry, and it thrilled her to see her bag was always full no matter how much she used. And she always talked of her home and the time when she would return.

Many years passed; Prudence became tired and wished to go back to her Father, so she started out very slowly. How glad she was to see her ball of silver thread shining brightly with not even one little strand frayed, her bag of magic gold still full, and her gift all ready. At first she was not quite pleased with her gift. She wished she might have been a great musician, or artist, or writer of beautiful poems and stories that would lift the hearts of men, but her gift was just a life of loving service. It looked rather small to her compared to the others, but she felt the Father would be pleased.

Princess Prudence traveled slowly along and one day she saw an old man walking with a cane, bent over and crippled with rheumatism. He looked so sad and forlorn she hurried up to him to say a cheering word and to her surprise found him to be her brother, Prince Jolly.

“Oh, brother, how glad I am to see you!” she cried.

“Prudence! Is that you? How young and beautiful you are! And your bag is still full!” he exclaimed.

“Yes, twice thieves tried to steal it from me but I gave my silver cord a gentle pull and Father sent help at once,” the princess told him.

Prince Jolly sighed dolefully. “My bag is empty and has been empty for a long time. I forgot everything Father told us in my desire to have a good time.”

“Did you enjoy life, Jolly?” asked Prudence softly, looking with compassion on the broken man before her.

“For a while I did, but the gold went so fast that I soon had nothing left. I tried to work but my health was gone and others had to take care of me.” Tears of self-pity filled Prince Jolly’s eyes as he talked.

“Why did you not let me know, Jolly?” asked his sister. “I would gladly have helped you.”

Jolly flushed as he answered, “I heard so much about your good works I was ashamed.”

“Oh, I am so sorry. But brother, I see your ball of silver thread is rather frayed and here is a place where the strand is almost broken in two. What happened?” questioned the princess.

Prince Jolly looked down in shame, not being able to meet his sister’s eyes.

“Brother,” gently Prudence spoke, “you didn’t do it on purpose?”

The prince nodded, then murmured: “I was sick, had no place to go, no money, no friends — I had it almost cut in two when I remembered what Father said: Under no circumstances cut the thread; pull it gently and I will answer your prayer’. So I gave a little pull and someone found me and took me to the hospital. After a while I was able to work for a mere pittance, but I did try to help others and once did prevent another from breaking his thread.”

“I am so glad. I know Father will forgive you and give you another chance,” the princess said encouragingly.

“But, sister, I have no gift to bring him,” sighed Jolly.

“Oh, yes you have, there it is in your hands. The

life you saved from destruction and the food and doctor you sent to Mrs. White and her husband. Only for you, Dear, she would have died. Remember?" asked Prudence.

"Do you think Father will accept this gift?" Prince Jolly asked eagerly, a new light in his eyes.

"I know he will," replied the princess. "Our gifts may seem small in our own eyes but we do not know how they appear in his."

As the two journeyed on, Prudence accommodated



her steps to the slow steps of her brother, and at last they reached the Father king who came to meet them.

To Prince Jolly he said sadly, "Son, you have not done so well this time, but after a long rest and a thorough cleansing of your soul, you may go out again and I know you will do better. Your gift has earned you this chance." Gently the Father placed his hands on the tired eyes and put the prince to sleep.

To Prudence he said, "Daughter, you have done very well indeed, and are worthy of greater work. Enter into the joys of the kingdom. Your gift is very precious to me."