

## THE LITTLE BROWN BALL

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ONE night in the Garden of Delight, where the flower spirits shone like sparks of light, Mother Nature called her lily children to her and said, "Of all my flower children you seem to be the most beautiful. Your colors are so radiant and your fragrance so sweet it is hard to choose the fairest." This made the lilies happy and they swayed and bowed low.

Now the red lily, one of the brightest, was a bit forward and spoke out quite boldly. "I am much admired and find favor with the earth children. If you have a message for them I will take it."

Mother Nature, smiling, said: "Yes, I have a message and you may take it if you are willing to lose your beauty and be wrapped in a hard brown ball, to be tossed about and finally put deep in the earth, quite hidden from the eyes of admiring children."

The lily blushed a deeper red and said: "Oh no, I could not lose my beauty even for a little while. The earth children love and praise me and I like it."

Mother Nature softly answered: "Then, red lily, you cannot carry the message."

In the great stillness the flower lights floated in and out among the shadow forms in the Garden of Delight. Presently a dainty blue lily whispered: "Mother Nature, perhaps I could carry the message."

"Are you willing to lay aside your dainty dress and wear an ugly brown wrapper and sleep deep

down in the earth, that the earth children may learn through your sacrifice the lesson of endless life?"

"But my dress is like the blue of the sky, and the earth children like it. No, I cannot change my dainty blue dress for an ugly brown wrapper." And the blue lily hung her head.

Mother Nature's heart ached a bit, for she did not like to see her lily children selfish. She had been so pleased with them, yet there was not one willing to make a little sacrifice. Then Mother Nature gave them another chance. "Come, children, closer to me and I will tell you what the message is. Some of the earth children are filled with fear, a fear of death. So they must learn that all things sleep awhile and then take new bodies. Once more I ask, which of you will go to the earth children and show them that through sleep they enter into a life of greater beauty?"

How still it was, and then a soft voice murmured: "The earth children say that I am frail and white, Mother Nature. Perhaps I have no beauty to lose and I should not mind being shut in a tight ball."

"Dear garden lily," said Mother Nature, "you are a brave child. Though you lose your beauty for a little while, this loving service will make you still more beautiful." So the life spark of the garden lily was tucked snugly into a little brown ball. And Mother Nature watched tenderly over her child until the earth children were ready for the message.

Dick and Rosalie were playing ball. Once when she missed the ball she ran after it as it rolled along the garden walk. Picking up what she thought was the ball she threw it back to Dick.

You should have heard him laugh as he called to her, "What is this? I threw you a soft rubber ball and this little brown ball is hard as a stone."

"Let me see it," called Rosalie, and Dick tossed it to her. Then Rosalie laughed too. "It's not a ball at all — it's a bulb. Wait, I will put it in the



ground and then look for our ball." So she stuck the little brown bulb in the earth and then found the rubber ball and they went on with their game.

The little brown ball felt lonesome in the dark underworld, shut off from the bright sunlight. By and by there was a buzzing and humming noise and the little brown ball heard a voice say:

"Look, here is a newcomer. We will help it, for

it can't stay buried in the earth like this."

Then the garden lily asked: "Who are you?"

"We are the little nature spirits that work with the flowers. You are a lily bulb, aren't you? You will need to stretch out your arms and legs and we will help you."

"But I haven't any arms and legs," said the little brown ball.

"No, not yet, but you will have quite soon, if you do as we tell you."

A strange feeling crept through the bulb. "Why, what is this?" said lily to herself.

"Come," called the nature spirit, "you need not fear us."

Was this trembling *fear*? Had she not come to teach the earth children not to fear? Yes, and she would do as the nature spirits told her.

"Come along now, and I will help you to come out of yourself," called Elf-kin. Snap! something cracked. "Give me your hand and stretch. That's right!"

"Oh," cried lily, "I never knew I had a hand."

"Well, if you will let us help you," said Elf-kin, "you will soon be ready to give your message."

"You know about the message?" asked the lily.

"Of course," said Elf-kin, "Mother Nature's children are all in on the secret."

A voice from deep down somewhere called, "Stretch out your foot, down this way. Never mind if it is dark. There, that's good, now try again."

Snap, crack! "Oh," cried the lily, "I have so many feet!" Then the nature spirits helped the lily

to stretch until presently the little feet were all firmly planted in the earth, and the little hands were reaching up to the trail of the sunbeams. Each day the gentle showers, the dancing sunbeams, and the nature spirits helped the lily to come out of herself, until finally long green stalks stretched toward the Sun. Then one day she opened her heart of gold to the Sun — a beautiful white lily.

Soft footsteps were heard on the garden walk. The lily listened. Then there was an exclamation of joy: "Oh, you lovely white lily!" cried Rosalie. "How fair you are! Your soul must be very beautiful, for you smell so sweet."

And then she exclaimed, "Why, Elf-kin, what are you doing here?"

"Helping this lily to give Mother Nature's message of life to you earth children," answered Elf-kin. "For this beautiful lily is the little brown ball that you threw in play to Dick. She sacrificed her beauty for a while to do a noble deed."

Mother Nature often teaches lessons of life through her flowers. The flowers and the nature spirits remember what earth children sometimes forget, that each year the great Spirit of the Earth leaves His Kingdom of Happiness and gives His life that all Nature may have life. Then in the beautiful spring-time when His work is finished and He returns to the Kingdom of Happiness, the spring breezes, the swaying grain, the singing birds, the gay flowers, and the happy children all join in a song of praise to the Lord of Life, whose Love remains with them, giving hope and joy and happiness to all the earth children.