

THE LITTLE MATCH-GIRL

A Dramatic Reading

by
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It was very cold, the snow fell, and it was almost quite dark; for it was evening--yes, the last evening of the year. Amid the cold and the darkness, a poor little girl, with bare head and naked feet, was roaming through the streets. It is true she had a pair of slippers when she left home, but they were not of much use. They were very large slippers, so large, indeed, that they had hitherto been used by her mother; besides, the little creature lost them as she hurried across the street, to avoid two carriages that were driving very quickly past. One of the slippers was not to be found, and the other was pounced upon by a boy who ran away with it, saying that it would serve for a cradle when he should have children of his own. So the little girl went along, with her little bare feet that were red and blue with cold. She carried a number of matches in an old apron, and she held a bundle of them in her hand. Nobody had bought anything from her the whole livelong day; nobody had even given her a penny.

Shivering with cold and hunger, she crept along, a perfect picture of misery--poor little thing! The snowflakes covered her long flaxen hair, which hung in pretty curls round her throat; but she heeded them not now. Lights were streaming from all the windows, and there was a savory smell of roast goose; for it was New Year's Eve. And this she did heed.

She now sat down, cowering in a corner formed by two houses, one of which projected beyond the other. She had drawn her little feet under her, but she felt colder than ever; yet she dared not return home, for she had not sold a match, and could not bring home a penny! She would certainly be beaten by her father; and it was cold enough at home, besides--for they had only the roof above them, and the wind came howling through it, though the largest holes had been stopped with straw and rags. Her little hands were nearly frozen with cold. Alas! a single match might do her some good, if she might only draw one out of the bundle, and rub it against the wall, and warm her fingers.

So at last she drew one out. Ah! how it sheds sparks, and how it burns! It gave out a warm, bright flame, like a little candle, as she held her hands over it,--truly it was a wonderful little light! It really seemed to the little girl as if she were sitting before a large iron stove with polished brass feet, and the brass shovel and tongs. The fire burned so brightly, and warmed so nicely, that the little creature stretched out her feet to warm them likewise, when lo! the flame expired, the stove vanished, and left nothing but the little half-burned match in her hand.

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