

## The Stars in the Sky

Adapted from Carolyn Sherwin Bailey, Kate Douglas Wiggin, and Nora Archibald Smith

Once upon a time there was a little lass who wanted nothing more than to touch the stars in the sky. On clear, moonless nights she would lean out her bedroom window, gazing up at the thousand tiny lights scattered across the heavens, wondering what it would be like to hold one in her hand.

One warm summer evening, a night when the Milky Way shined more brightly than ever before, she decided she couldn't stand it any longer-she just had to touch a star or two, no matter what. So she slipped out the window and started off by herself to see if she could reach them.

She walked a far, far way, and then farther still, until she came to a mill wheel, creaking and grinding away.

"Good evening," she said to the mill wheel. "I would like to play with the stars in the sky. Have you seen any near here?"

"Ah, yes," groaned the old mill wheel. "Every night they shine in my face from the surface of this pond until I cannot sleep. Jump in, my lass, and you will find them."

The little girl jumped into the pond and swam around until her arms were so tired she could swim no longer, but she could not find any stars.

"Excuse me," she called to the old mill wheel, "but I don't believe there are any stars here after all!"

"Well, there certainly were before you jumped in and stirred the water up," the mill wheel called back. So she climbed out and dried herself off as best she could, and set out again across the fields.

After a while she came to a little brook, murmuring over its mossy stones.

"Good evening, brooklet," she said politely. "I'm trying to reach the stars in the sky so I may play with them. Have you seen any near here?"

"Ah, yes," whispered the brooklet. "They glint on my banks at night until I cannot sleep. Wade in, my lassie, and you will find them."

So the little girl waded in and paddled around for a while, and climbed all over the mossy rocks, but never once did she find a star.

"Excuse me," she said as politely as she could, "but I just don't think there are any stars here."

"What do you mean, no stars here?" the little brook babbled. "There are lots of stars here. I see them all the time. On some nights, they cover me from the edge of the woods all the way down to the old mill pond. I have more stars here than I know what to do with." And the brooklet babbled on and on until it even forgot the little girl was there, so she tiptoed away across the fields.

After a while she sat down to rest in a meadow, and it must have been a fairy meadow, because before she knew it a hundred little fairies came scampering out to dance on the grass. They were no taller than

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toadstools, but they were dressed in silver and gold.

"Good evening, Little Folk," said the girl. "I'm trying to reach the stars in the sky. Have you seen any near here?"

"Ah, yes," sang the fairies. "They glisten every night among the blades of the grass. Come and dance with us, little lass, and you will find as many stars as you like."

So the child danced and danced, she whirled round and round in a ring with the Little Folk, but though the grass gleamed beneath her feet, she never spied a single star. Finally she could dance no longer, and she plopped down inside the ring of fairies.

"I've tried and I've tried, but I can't seem to reach the stars down here," she cried. "If you don't help me, I'll never find any to play with."

The fairies all whispered together. Finally one of them crept up and took her by the hand, and said: "If you're really determined, you must go forward. Keep going forward, and mind you take the right road. Ask Four Feet to carry you to No Feet At All, and then tell No Feet At All to carry you to the Stairs Without Steps, and if you climb that..."

"Then I'll be among the stars in the sky?" cried the lassie.

"If you'll not be there, then you'll be somewhere else, won't you?" laughed the fairy, and he vanished with all the rest.

So the little girl set out again with a light heart, and by and by she came to a saddled horse, tied to a tree.

"Good evening," she said. "I'm trying to reach the stars in the sky, and I've come so far my bones are aching. Will you give me a ride?"

"I don't know anything about stars in the sky," the horse replied. "I'm here only to do the bidding of the Little Folk."

"But I come from the Little Folk," she cried, "and they said to tell Four Feet to carry me to No Feet At All."

"Four Feet? That's me!" the horse whinnied. "Jump up and ride with me."

They rode and they rode and they rode, till they rode out of the forest and found themselves at the edge of the sea.

"I've brought you to the end of the land, and that's as much as Four Feet can do," said the horse. "Now I must get home to my own folk."

So the little girl slid down and walked along the sea, wondering what in the world she would do next, until

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suddenly the biggest fish she'd ever seen came swimming up to her feet.

"Good evening," she said to the fish. "I'm trying to reach the stars in the sky. Can you help me?"

"I'm afraid I can't," gurgled the fish, unless, of course, you bring pie word from the Little Folk."

"But I do," she cried. "They said Four Feet would bring me to

No Feet At All, and then No Feet At All would carry me to the Stairs Without Steps."

"Ah, well," said the fish, "that's all right then. Get on my back and hold on tight."

And off he went-kerplash!-into the water, swimming along a silver path that glistened on the surface and seemed to stretch toward the end of the sea, where the water met the sky. There, in the distance, the little girl saw a beautiful rainbow rising out of the ocean and into the heavens, shining with all the colors in the world, blues and reds and greens, and wonderful to look at. The nearer they drew, the brighter it gleamed, until she had to shade her eyes from its light.

At last they came to the foot of it, and she saw the rainbow was really a broad bright road, sloping up and away into the sky, and at the far, far end of it she could see wee shining things dancing about.

"I can go no further," said the fish. "Here are the Stairs Without Steps. Climb up, if you can, but hold on tight. These stairs were never meant for little lassies' feet, you know. " So the little girl jumped off No Feet's back, and off he splashed through the water.

She climbed and she climbed and she climbed up the rainbow. It wasn't easy. Every time she took one step, she seemed to slide back two. And even though she climbed until the sea was far below, the stars in the sky looked farther away than ever.

"But I won't give up, " she told herself "I've come so far, I can't go back."

Up and up she went. The air grew colder and colder, but the sky turned brighter and brighter, and finally she could tell she was nearing the stars.

"I'm almost there!" she cried.

And sure enough, suddenly she reached the very tip-top of the rainbow. Everywhere she looked, the stars were turning and dancing. They raced up and down, and back and forth, and spun in a thousand colors around her.

"I'm finally here, " she whispered to herself She had never seen anything so beautiful before, and she stood gazing and wondering at the heavens.

But after a while she realized she was shivering with cold, and when she looked down into the darkness, she

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could no longer see the earth. She wondered where her own home was, so far away, but no street lamps or window lights marked the blackness below. She began to feel a little dizzy.

"I won't go until I touch one star." she told herself, and she stood on her toes and stretched her arms as high as she could. She reached further and further-and suddenly a shooting star zipped by and surprised her so much she lost her balance.

Down she slid, down-down-down the rainbow. The further she slid, the warmer it grew, and the warmer it grew, the sleepier she felt. She gave a great yawn, and a small sigh, and before she knew it, she was fast asleep.

When she woke up, she found herself in her very own bed. The sun was peeking through her window, and the morning birds sang in the bushes and trees.

"Did I really touch the stars?" she asked herself "Or was it only a dream?"

Then she felt something in her hand. When she opened her fist, a tiny light flashed in her palm, and at once was gone, and she smiled because she knew it was a speck of stardust.