

The Nightingale and the Rose

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"She promised she'd dance with me if I brought her a red rose," cried a young heart-broken student. "But there's not one in this whole garden."

From her nest in the oak tree, the Nightingale heard him, and she looked out through the leaves, and wondered.

"Not a single red rose anywhere!" he cried, and his eyes filled with tears. "It's amazing how happiness depends on such little things. I've read all that the wise men have written, and all the secrets of philosophy, but my life is wretched because of a red rose."

"Here at last is a true romantic," said the Nightingale. "Night after night I have sung of him, though I didn't realize it. Night after night I have told his story to the stars, and now I see him."

"The Prince gives a ball tomorrow night," murmured the young student, "and my love will be there. If I bring her a red rose, she'll dance with me till dawn. If I bring her a red rose, I'll get to hold her in my arms, and she'll lean her head on my shoulder, and her hand will be clasped in mine. But there's no red rose in the garden, and so instead, I'll sit by myself while she passes me by. She'll pay no attention to me, and my heart will break."

"Here indeed is a true romantic," said the Nightingale. "Surely love is a wonderful thing. It's more precious than emeralds and diamonds and gold."

"The musicians will play their instruments," said the student. "And my love will dance to the sound of the violin. But she won't dance with me, because I have no red rose to give her." And he flung himself down on the grass, buried his face in his hands, and wept.

"Why is he weeping?" asked a butterfly, who was fluttering about after a sunbeam.

"He's weeping for a red rose," said the Nightingale.

"For a red rose?" cried the butterfly. "How ridiculous!"

But the Nightingale understood the secret of the student's sorrow, and she sat silently in the oak tree, and thought about the mystery of love. Suddenly, she spread her brown wings and soared into the air. She passed through the grove like a shadow, and sailed across the garden. In the center of the grass stood a beautiful rose tree, and when she saw it, she flew over and landed on a branch.

"Give me a red rose," she cried, "and I'll sing you my sweetest song."

But the tree shook its head. "My roses are white," it said. "But go to my brother who grows near the fountain, and perhaps he'll give you what you want."

So the Nightingale flew over to the rose tree by the fountain.

"Give me a red rose," she cried, "and I will sing you my sweetest song."
But the tree shook its head. "My roses are yellow," it answered. "But go to my brother who grows beneath the student's window, and perhaps he'll give you what you want."

So the Nightingale flew over to the rose tree that was growing beneath the student's window and repeated her request for the rose. But this tree also shook its head.

"My roses are red," it answered. "But the winter has chilled my veins and the frost has nipped my buds, and the storm has broken my branches, and I'll have no roses at all this year."

"One red rose is all I want," cried the Nightingale. "Is there no way I can get it?"

"There is a way," answered the tree. "But it's so terrible, I can't tell you."

"Tell me," said the Nightingale, "I'm not afraid."

"If you want a red rose," said the tree, "you must build it out of music by moonlight, and make it red with your own heart's blood. You must sing to me with your breast against a thorn, and your blood must flow into my veins, and become mine."

"Death is a great price to pay for a red rose," cried the Nightingale. "Yet love is better than life, and what is the heart of the bird compared to the heart of a man?"

So she spread her brown wings and soared into the air. She swept over the garden like a shadow, and like a shadow she sailed through the grove. The young student was lying on the grass where she had left him, and the tears were not yet dry in his eyes.

"Be happy," cried the Nightingale. "You shall have your red rose. I'll build it out of music by moonlight and stain it with my own heart's blood. All that I ask of you in return is that you will be a true romantic, for love is wiser than philosophy."

The student looked up from the grass and listened, but he could not understand what the Nightingale was saying, for he only knew the things that are written in books. But the oak tree understood, and felt sad, for he was very fond of the little Nightingale who had built her nest in his branches.

"Sing me one last song," he whispered. "I'll be lonely when you're gone."

So the Nightingale sang to the oak tree, and her voice was like water bubbling from a silver jar.

When she had finished her song the student got up, and went to his room and began to think of his love. After a time, he fell asleep. And when the moon shone in the heavens, the Nightingale flew to the rose tree and set her breast against a thorn. All night long, she sang against the thorn, and the cold moon leaned down and listened.

She sang of the birth of love in the heart of a boy and a girl. And on the top branch of the rose tree, there blossomed a marvelous rose, petal after petal, as song followed song. It was pale at first, but grew darker as the bird sang louder, and a delicate flush of pink came over the

leaves. But the thorn had not yet reached her heart, and so the rose's heart remained white, for only a Nightingale's blood can make the heart of a rose red.

Her song grew wilder as she sang of love, and the marvelous rose became crimson, like an eastern sky. But the Nightingale's voice grew fainter, and her little wings began to beat fast. Then she gave one last burst of music. The white moon heard it, and she forgot the dawn, and lingered on in the sky. The red rose heard it, and it trembled all over with ecstasy, and opened its petals to the cold morning air.

"Look!" cried the tree. "The rose is finished now." But the Nightingale made no answer, for she was lying dead in the long grass, with the thorn in her heart.

And at noon, the student opened his window and looked out. "Why, what a wonderful piece of luck," he cried. "Here is a red rose! I've never seen a rose like this in all my life. It's so beautiful!" And he leaned down and plucked it.

Then he put on his hat, and ran up to his professor's house with the rose in his hand. The daughter of the professor was sitting in the doorway, and her little dog was lying at her feet.

"You said that you would dance with me if I brought you a red rose," cried the student. "Here's the reddest rose in all the world. You'll wear it tonight next to your heart, and as we dance together, it will tell you how much I love you."

But the girl frowned. "I'm afraid it won't go with my dress," she answered. "And the prince's nephew has sent me some jewels, which cost far more than flowers."

"How ungrateful," said the student angrily, and he threw the rose into the street, where it fell into the gutter.

"What a silly thing love is," he thought, as he walked away. "It's not half as useful as logic, and in fact, is quite unpractical. I shall go back to philosophy." And so he returned to his room and pulled out a dusty book, and began to read.