



**THE BEAUTY OF THE LILY**

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## THE BEAUTY OF THE LILY

### AN EASTER TALE

Once upon a time, in a far-distant land, there dwelt a peasant named Ivan, and with him lived his little nephew Vasily.

Ivan was gloomy and unkempt, and his restless eyes looked out from his matted hair and beard. As for the little Vasily, he was a manly child; but though his uncle was kind enough to him in his way, he neither washed him, nor combed his hair, nor taught him anything.

The hut they lived in was very miserable. Its walls were full of holes, the furniture of its one room was broken down and dusty, and its floor unswept. The little garden was filled with stones and weeds. The neighbors passing by in the daytime turned aside their heads. But they never passed at night, for fear of Ivan.

Now it happened one Easter morning that Ivan, feeling restless, rose early and went and stood before the door of the hut. The trees were budding, the air was full of bird-songs, the dew lay glittering on the grass, and a near-by brook ran leaping and gurgling along. The rays of

the rising Sun shone slanting from the tops of the distant hills, and seemed to touch the hut.

And as Ivan looked, he saw a young man coming swiftly and lightly from the hills, and he bore on his arm a sheaf of pure white Lilies. The stranger drew near, and stopped before the hut.

"Christ is risen!" he said in flute-like tones.

"He is risen indeed!" muttered Ivan through his beard.

Then the young man took a Lily from his sheaf and gave it to Ivan, saying:

"Keep it white!" And, smiling, he passed on.

Wonderingly Ivan gazed at the flower in his hand. Its gold-green stem seemed to support a pure white crown, or was it a translucent cup filled with light! And as the man looked into the flower's gold-fringed heart, awe stole into his soul.

Then he turned and entered the hut, saying to himself, "I will put it in water."

But when he went to lay the Lily on the window-sill, so that he might search for a vessel to set it in, he dared not put it down, for the sill was covered with thick dust.

He turned to the table, but its top was soiled with crumbs of mouldy bread and cheese mingled with dirt. He looked about the room, and not one spot could he see where he might lay the Lily without sullyng its pure loveliness.

He called the little Vasily, and bade him stand and hold the flower. He then searched for something to put it in. He found an empty bottle, which he carried to the brook and washed and filled with sparkling water. This he placed upon the table, and in it set the Lily.

Then as he looked at the begrimed hands of little Vasily he thought to himself, "When I leave the room he may touch the flower and soil it." So he took the child and washed him, and combed his yellow hair; and the little one seemed to bloom like the Lily itself. And Ivan gazed on him in amazement, murmuring, "I never saw it thus before!"

From that hour a change came over Ivan. He cared tenderly for the little Vasily. He washed himself and combed his own hair. He cleaned the hut and mended its walls and furniture. He carried away the

weeds and stones from the garden. He sowed flowers and planted vegetables. And the neighbours passing by no longer turned their heads aside, but stopping talked with Ivan, and sometimes gave the little Vasily presents of clothes and toys.

As for the Lily, seven days it blossomed in freshness and beauty, and gave forth a delicate fragrance; but on the eighth day, when Ivan and Vasily woke, it was gone. And though they sought it in hut and garden, they did not find it.

So Ivan and the little Vasily worked from day to day among their flowers and vegetables, and talked to their neighbours, and were happy. When the long winter nights came, Ivan read aloud about the Lilies of the Field, that toil not, neither do they spin, yet Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like them. He read of that Beloved that feedeth among the Lilies, and of the Rose of Sharon and the Lily-of-the-Valley.

**So Easter came again.** And early, very early in the morning, Ivan and the little Vasily arose and dressed, and went and stood before the hut. And when the splendour of the coming day shone above the distant hills, lo! the young man came swiftly and lightly, and in his arms he bore crimson Roses.

He drew near, and, stopping before the hut, said sweetly:

"Christ is risen!"

"He is risen, indeed!" responded Ivan and Vasily joyously.

"How beautiful is thy Lily!" said the young man.

"Alas!" answered Ivan, "it is vanished away, and we know not whither."

"Its beauty lives in thy heart," said the young man. "It can never die!"

And he took from his arm a crimson Rose and gave it to Vasily, saying: "Keep it fresh!"

But he smiled tenderly at Ivan, and passed on.

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