

## THE PRINCESS BEYOND THE MIRROR

**Nine magical tales and one for fun**

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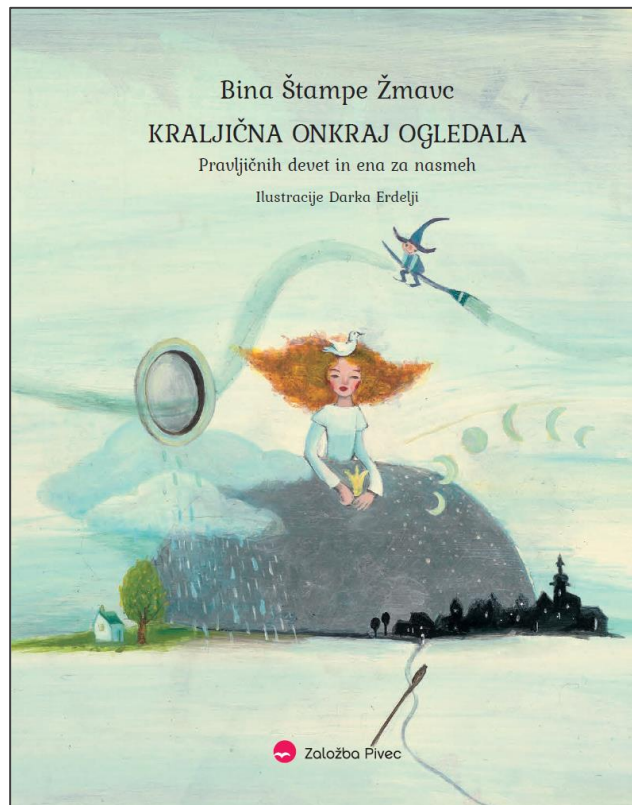
The Princess beyond the Mirror is a collection of original fairy tales by the internationally acclaimed creator for both adults and children, a master of verse and prose, of music and the theatre, Bina Štampe Žmavc. A selection of canonical fairy tales, heroes and motifs are deconstructed and reconstructed in a witty way. The stories of Snow White, Cinderella, Sleeping Beauty and others become the subject of the author's contemplation and are addressed from a unique perspective.

What will the princess do with her glass slippers? How will she defend herself against the wicked queen? And what is on the other side of the mysterious mirror? Will the star caught in the treetop finally discover the purpose of its existence and come to terms with its tiny size? What drives the infatuated moon to appear before the poet's window every night? Will the tailor successfully protect his work against the mischievous elf? Will the poem stir the hardened heart of the jeweller? Will there be a prince who brings the right gift for the picky princess? How did the poor young wife trick the miserly ruler Stingyson? What kind of clouds does the Rain King sew? What happens to the magician Cadabra? The epilogue contains playful musings about the poetry contest for the golden pear.

All in all, a look through and beyond the mirror in which we usually see fairy tales. This makes them both fairy tales and un-fairy tales. But the interpretation is in no way simplistic and light-hearted. It is viewed through the magical optics of a camera obscura, reaching far into the other side and back, as well as deep into us ourselves. Discussing, revealing, even denying fairy tales takes us on a journey that – in a lively, witty, inciteful and poetic way – ultimately leads us back to their essence.

The magically poetic, mysterious and layered illustrations by Darka Erdelji, with their many intricate details, connections and hints, follow, respond to, reflect and underscore what is written.

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## SAMPLE TRANSLATION

### THE PRINCESS BEYOND THE MIRROR

Once upon a time, somewhere around *Then* or maybe somewhere close to the clearer *Now*, there lived a princess. Enthusiastic as the spirit of a gnome's fairy in the morning forest and beautiful as the first blooming rose of May. A storm flowed through her veins and a breeze ruffled her hair so that the wafting angels of the ether would glide along its strands full of mirth. And her thoughts would invariably race like nine times nine galloping horses on a merry-go-round. Even when she would lie, seemingly still, in the grass and peer into the endless domes of white clouds, her gaze would travel with them into the unknown. And her arms like outstretched wings of a bird could hardly wait to take flight.

No wonder that the princess much rather enjoyed hunting for hidden nooks in the unending castle garden than counting the chandeliers in the palace chambers. Those nooks overflowing with plants that now and then managed to escape the close watch and sharp shears of the ever so attentive castle gardeners. Allowing themselves to overgrow the shady roofs with ivy and the weeping, mysterious tendrils of willows that silently sung their song above the water's surface.

One morning, when the princess was gathering flowers in the garden – it was just before her birthday – a snow-white dove flew to her out of nowhere. As though it had fallen from the blue sky above, it circled low around the princess's head a few times and cooed excitedly:

*Princess, oh, pretty flower,  
You will surely find if your scour,  
A secret niche with a hidden door,  
Concealed there from times of yore,*

*Hiding slippers no mouse can gnaw,  
Such you have never seen before,  
So, waste no time, go on your way,  
Hurry, haste and do not delay.*

The princess wanted to say something to the dove, but before she was even able to utter a word the bird flew away. All that was left in the sky was a snow-white mist that floated there for a while before getting lost in the blue.



The princess stood there for a moment, then ran across the garden and up the stairs straight to her secret attic chamber. Out of breath she peered out of the window and scanned the sky. But there was no trace of the white dove to be found. If only she could ask it why it had come to her, and what it meant by the secret door. And by the shoes that mice do not nibble. The palace was full of doors and hatches, plenty of shoes and slippers, and a mouse or two, here and there. But what did the dove mean? And it left so quickly, faster than an unspoken thought! Almost a little rudely, in fact. For a second, the princess considered asking the queen about it all. However, an unseen voice whispered to her that it would not be a good idea to tell the queen everything just yet. Especially not the queen stepmother.

The princess stood still for a moment, but her restlessness soon led her out of the palace and back into the garden, straight to the flowerbed full of big white daisies.

“I will ask the big daisy. Its flower is as round as the world. It surely must know a great deal. Bees and butterflies and bumblebees that fly to the most hidden places around the globe all flock to it. And everyone knows that flower petals never lie.”

The princess began counting the petals of the daisy.

*Daisy dearest,  
Whatever you decide,  
I promise I will do.*

*Should I search, or not,  
Should I look, or not,  
Leave it closed or open it,  
Tell me what to do...*

With bated breath she counted the last petal and her eyes twinkled restlessly.

“Therefore I shall search, thank you daisy dearest!”

She hurried back to the palace and stopped in front of her hidden attic chamber. There were many doors and hatches, but all had been opened at one time or another. She had never found anything hidden behind them. Disappointed, she looked around. The little chamber in the attic really did not seem to hold any secrets. She knew each nook and cranny from top to bottom. Deep in thought, she made her way from the room into a dark hallway of the palace. As she passed a large Baroque mirror, she suddenly got the feeling that the mirror was watching her.

“If you seek, you shall find there, whence you came...” shimmered the mirror.

The princess turned around as if bewitched and returned to her chamber. It was then that the curtain of the little window niche stirred and the princess noticed something she hadn't seen before. She quickly drew the curtain. In the barely visible window niche there was a tiny little door, barely noticeable. Without a moment's hesitation she opened it. Behind the door an opening the size of a beehive was looking back at her. It seemed to be a meaningful look.

She plucked up the courage and reached in with her hand. The air was filled with the magical scent of jasmine and in her hand appeared a parcel wrapped in silk. The princess quickly sat on the bed and

began unwrapping it. In the pretty silk box she found the most beautiful glass slippers. In the dim light in the chamber they sparkled mysteriously like the magical threads of a wish or undreamed treasure.

“Glass slippers!” whispered the princess. “This is what the white dove was talking about when it spoke about the slippers no mice could gnaw!”

In her mind she tried to guess whose they were and placed them carefully back in the silk box. Again a voice inside her whispered that it was not a good idea to tell everything to the queen.

But she still knew too little to be able to understand the mysterious visit of the snow-white dove. And the mirror – how did it know what she was looking for and where? Although the princess had always been somewhat scared of the mysterious, almost floor-length mirror that reigned over the wall, she bravely decided to ask it and find out more.

The mirror stood there, seemingly calmly perched in its frame made of blackened silver and decorated with ornaments from mysterious glistening hematite and garnets. These glimmered in the low light of the hallway like dried drops of blood. The surface of the mirror glistened with the opaqueness of a pool that disappears into the depths.

The princess stepped in front of the mirror. But before she was able to ask it a question, the mirror replied.

“You are wondering how I knew what you were looking for, princess. The depth of the mirror is infinite. Enough for a thousand questions and answers. Even for yours. Layer upon layer of memories are held in the silver reflection.”

“But whose are the glass slippers?” asked the princess.

“See for yourself, princess,” shimmered the mirror mysteriously.



The princess looked into the mirror. At first she could not see anything. But then, slowly and glimmering like a mirage, the image of the princess emerged from the depths of the mirror.

“Is this another me?” asked the princess with bated breath.

“Yes and no,” replied the mirror.

“A reflection of a memory, princess...”

And the princess stared in wonder as, next to the image of the princess in the mirror, the silhouette and blurred face of an unknown prince materialised. In the mirror, just as in a pool of deep water, noiseless words swam out in front of her eyes.

“Do you think you can wear the glass slippers just once, dance in them with the prince and become a princess? I can still smell the ashes from your fireplace on you. I don’t know how I was, how I could have been so blind!”

And with each inaudible word that floated on the mirror's surface, the princess in the mirror moved further and further away from the prince, as though the words were taking her with them. Further and further away. Into the distance far beyond the mirror.

The princess stared into the mirror questioningly.

"Where did she disappear to?"

"Do not forget, princess, it was only the reflection of a memory. However, since you ask, she was hurt by words. The words of the very prince that her glass slippers had once led her to..."

"Words?" asked the princess, puzzled.

"Words, princess. The sharpened spears of words. She removed her glass slippers and returned them to the memory of the fairy tale. Now they belong to you, princess."

"Was the princess my mother?"

"The imprint of a memory," replied the mirror secretively. "Do not ask questions, princess. The mirror never lies. Believe me, the glass slippers are now yours.

But there is always someone who believes they belong to them ... It rouses the winds of evil.

In every palace a snake is hidden.  
Silently slithering in shrouded greed.  
As one with the dark and evil forbidden,  
It lies with it in lust and need.

Concealed in a coil, there the snake lay  
Slithering snakily in an unfeeling touch  
And in its terrible strangeness it keeps at bay  
Stained windows of beauty and a heart's warm clutch..."

"A snake? I have never seen a snake in the palace," said the princess.

"You just did not recognise it, princess. It is hidden by the beauty of its countless chambers and conceals its vices with the light of magical stained glass windows of dreams ... Have you forgotten, princess, that it is your birthday tomorrow? It is time for the memory's reflection to return. Hold on to what is yours. Since there is someone who wants to get their hands on the glass slippers, steal what is yours, princess. Tomorrow is not only your birthday..." shimmered the mirror.

"Tomorrow is also the birthday of the queen's daughter, your half-sister, princess?"

The mirror stared meaningfully at the princess for long time.

"Are you saying that the princess...?"

"Is the snake hiding in the palace. And she will do anything to get her hands on your glass slippers. To put them on the feet of the wrong princess. Even if that means chopping off a bit of her heel or a toe and the slippers would run with blood ... Like in a old fairy tale, princess. But the princess beyond the mirror returned the glass slippers to the fairy tale. She went beyond the time of fairy tales. That is

why the reflection of the memory had to return, princess. The glass slippers are yours now, but you can still lose them. The queen will not give up that easily. So listen to me carefully. On your birthday you must put on the dress with the little mirrors. Only that can protect you against the queen.”

“And put on the glass slippers?” asked the princess.

“You can wear them or not, princess. Tomorrow, in a year or never. It is up to you, princess,” shimmered the mirror meaningfully.

The princess was left standing before the mirror, speechless.

“Thank you, mirror!” she finally said after a few moments had passed.

“Thank you, princess. I only reflect what I can see in your heart.”

“But where can I find the dress with the mirrors,” asked the princess.

“Beyond the mirror, princess. You must walk through the secret of its dark side without ever touching the darkness, without even glancing at it for a second. Blindfolded, princess.

“Blindfolded?”

“You must trust me, princess. If you do not heed this rule, the dress with the mirrors will be lost forever. And you, you will be lost in the mirror’s mystery, wandering around, never being able to return.”

“I could just give up the glass slippers,” said the princess in hesitant hope. “I’ll forget about them, as though they never existed. I didn’t know about them up to now either.”

“You may, princess. However, this means that the glass slippers will be lost forever. And they will never return to the fairy tale,” replied the mirror in an almost sad, disappointed shimmer.

The princess was silent for a while, thinking what she should do. She though she could sense just how the sad eyes of the lost reflection of the princess beyond the mirror were looking out at her from the blackened silver mirror. She made the brave decision to do it.

And the princess, blindfolded, stepped into the unknown, dark secret of the mirror. There were voices along the way that whispered to her, lured her away, urging her to take off the blindfold that covered her eyes. Sometimes the voices were menacing, full of ominous echoes that came at her from all directions and echoed in her head with a shrill ringing as though even the air she was breathing was turning into sounds that were stifling here. But the thought of the sad eyes of the princess beyond the mirror gave her the courage to keep going. As did the strange, barely audible shimmering of the mirror, “Trust in yourself, princess!”

Without breaking the rule, the princess walked as far as the mirror told her to. The frightening voices died down and it became pleasantly silent. Suddenly, the princess could feel in her lap the magical dress with mirrors that would save her.

Without knowing exactly why, she sensed the hand of the princess beyond the mirror sliding along her cheek in a way that felt lighter than the gentle scent of jasmine.

And so, on her birthday, the princess wore the dress dripping in colourful mirrors, just as the mirror had told her to. Everyone was admiring her oh-so unusual and charming dress. All except the queen. The queen made sure to avoid her at all costs. This was because each individual mirror reflected her evil brightly in a hundred little glints and gleams.



After the princess slipped out of her magical mirror dress in the evening, she went to get the silk parcel containing the glass slippers from the hidden niche. She sat on the bed and the magical scent of jasmine filled the chamber once again. She tried on the slippers. How curious, they fitted her perfectly. Fascinated, she took a few steps before carefully placing them back where she found them.

“I’d better not wear them for now,” she whispered to herself. “Actually, I don’t really know if I ever will. You never know when it comes to glass slippers...”

At night, the queen crawled to the mirror, frozen from rage and evil.

“You brainless, misshapen piece of glass, I am going to smash your mirror face into a thousand glass splinters!”

The mirror paid no attention to her words and calmly stood in its blackened silver frame.

“To what do I owe such anger, queen? My surface is as calm as a lake in a painting.”

“Don’t you play dumb with me, you ridiculous mirror! You reflecting piece of metal, you scheming polished glass, I know very well what you did!”

“That what befits a mirror, queen. I became wise long ago and a wiseman does nothing. The answer to your question, therefore, is nothing, queen.”

“You conniving reflective metal, why should I even listen to you! You are only a meddling piece of glass...”

“I beg your pardon, dear queen, a piece of crystal. You cannot see into my depths. Opaque as steel, I will always conceal what is invisible to your eyes. But if you let something slip, beware, it may catch in your throat like glass, so take care...”

In her rage, the queen bended low over the impenetrable depth of the mirror. It was then, in its deep reflecting eyes, that she suddenly caught sight of her true image. And she was so horrific that she hardened into an obelisk made of the darkest of black tar.

When the dawn bathed the palace in light, all that was left was a black stain in front of the tranquil silver mirror.

## THE TREE AND THE STAR

The night sky twinkled with stars. One by one, they lit up, big, brilliant and beautiful. In the corner of the small constellation of the Splendids, a small star watched them spellbound.

"Oh, how bright and big they are tonight. Brighter, more beautiful and bigger than ever! Magnificent, brilliant and big, they streak past me without even noticing me! How small and insignificant I am. The smallest in the midst of a vast universe of stars," whispered the star to herself. "I can barely call myself a star! I can't even be a light in the dark to anyone!"

Surrounded by gazillions of stars, the little star encountered loneliness for the first time. In the moment they caught each other's gaze for a second, the little star shed a tiny golden tear in the frozen shell of night and fell in a flash out of the sky.

She fell far, far, deep into the ringing silence of space, closing her eyes tightly to avoid seeing the swirling rapids of darkness that raced past. She fell closer and closer to the ground, falling far, and the black corals of meteorites were grabbing at her hair and entangling it in the grasping tendrils of their resinous fingers, as if they wanted to take her away with them.

And, oh, just as the star was getting dangerously close to the ground to which she was hurtling, she suddenly landed in the wide-branching canopy of a mighty tree. Her head was spinning a little from the swaying of the tree's branches. After all, the sky doesn't sway its stars.

"A strange phenomenon indeed!" said Stargazer the astronomer, nodding into his beard and staring up at the night sky as he always did. "I could have sworn I just saw a star perched on a tree like a bird! What a strange phenomenon."

When the star landed in its lap, the tree became red hot. How could it not, the star was positively glowing.

Then suddenly the star burst into tears, which cooled her glowing cheeks. "Why are you crying?" the tree rustled sympathetically. "Because..." sobbed the star, "because I'm just a tiny little star!"

"Is it very important for you to be a big star?"

"Of course it is, because I'm so small, so tiny, nobody even notices me in the vast expanse of the sky!"

"I noticed you!" said the tree kindly.

"You noticed me because I fell into your lap, so to speak," said the star.

"Into the top of my canopy," the tree corrected her, smiling with its delicate leaves.

"Why, that's just it!" the star wailed even louder. "No star is so small that it can sit in a treetop."

"Almost all the stars look the same size to me when I look at them from here," the tree murmured comfortingly.



"That's true, but that's only because they're so far away, thousands of floors of space away. In reality they are very, very big, you know, sometimes even glowing like real suns! Only I am so small that I can hardly call myself a star."

"You look like just the right size for a star to me," said the tree, gently swaying the branch on which the star was sitting.

"Do you think so?" asked the star, wiping away her tears with the sleeve of her golden shirt.

"I know so," said the tree earnestly. "That's exactly how I've always imagined the stars. Only..."

"Only what?" asked the star timidly.

"Only that you're much, much more beautiful than I ever imagined. Really and truly a star!" the tree rustled admiringly.

"If I'm closer, I look bigger, you know!" said the star and started weeping again. "But I don't really know what a real star is supposed to do in a treetop. After all, stars are supposed to shine in the sky!"

"True, but you can stay with me for a while since you've just fallen into my lap," the tree said, swishing its leaves happily. "You might discover something down here that you couldn't see in the sky. You know, on Earth we always dream of the stars and want to get very close to them, as close as possible. Maybe you'll see something here that you couldn't see when you were far away. Something that will make you happy, so you won't cry anymore! Otherwise, you'll extinguish yourself with your tears!"

"You think so?" said the star in a doubting voice.

"I know so," said the tree.

"Maybe you're right," nodded the star and carefully wiped away a tear.

"I won't be in the way if I stay with you for a while, will I, tree?"

"Absolutely not," said the tree. "How many trees are so lucky to have a real star to keep them company?"

So the star moved into the tree's canopy. By day she slept in an empty stork's nest at the top of the tree, and by night she watched what took place on Earth.

"From here, all the stars are almost the same size! The tree was right. But I'm so small that no one could see me from here!" she whispered to herself softly. "It's as though I grew up without a nest, a home. I'm just a tiny, tiny little starry star. Small as a tiny light in a lost sky..."

"You're crying again," the tree murmured. "Like golden rain! Soon I won't need any water at all!"

The star carefully wiped away her tears and said, "You know, tree, just now I promised myself I wouldn't cry anymore!"

The star kept her word for a long time. Meanwhile, autumn came and the green leaves of the tree turned golden.

"Tree, you have turned into gold!"

"It's only autumn," the tree rustled with a tiny tinge of sadness. And a few golden leaves drifted to the ground in the autumn wind. The star watched as autumn painted the landscape with a magical kaleidoscope of colours and breathed into it the golden grace of sorrow. The leaves of the trees changed colour every day. Now they were no longer just gold but slowly turned a deep ochre, turning to copper and then to a dull crimson, until finally they turned brown. The days were growing shorter and the sunlight was becoming fainter and fainter. The rustling leaves of the tree were torn from their branches in the autumn wind and fluttered to the ground. The tree was losing its leaves and the canopy was becoming bare.

"Tree, what is the matter with you, why have you lost your leaves? Are you sick, dear tree?" the star sobbed again.

"You promised not to cry anymore. Autumn is already so full of rain," said the tree, then smiled and gently rocked the star.

"You aren't sick, are you, tree?" wondered the star, wiping away her tears.

"I've just lost my leaves. Like every autumn, you know. It's always like that with trees."

"Oh, tree, I was so afraid you were sick, very sick!"

The star clutched at the trunk and hugged it tightly.

"Tree, how happy I am!"

"I hope you won't cry anymore," smiled the tree. "It's not so bad, you know, winter is slowly coming. If the leaves hadn't fallen off, my canopy would have been too heavy in the snow and it might have broken."

"How fortunate that you dropped them, tree! But won't you be very cold now?"

The tree laughed from the bottom of its trunk.

"How could I be cold with a star shining beside me?"

Cool autumn rains soon followed the warm autumn days. The rain and wind came driving down onto the bare treetops. Almost unnoticeably, autumn turned into winter.

One night, the first snow began to fall...

"Tree, wake up! White stars are falling from the sky, thousands and thousands of white stars, tree!" shouted the little star.

"I see," the tree smiled. "They are snowflakes, you know, and this is your first snow since you came to stay with me."

"How beautiful, tree! And how white the snowflakes are!"

The star stretched out her arms and tried to catch the snowflakes. But the snowflakes melted into drops of water upon falling into the palm of her warm golden hand.

"See, I'm not crying anymore, tree."

"I see!" the tree laughed.

The snow fell and fell some more and the little star tried again and again to catch the snowflakes, and the tree smiled despite it being winter. The ground was thickly covered with snow and a deep, snowy silence reigned far and wide. The winter was long, white and cold, but the star was warm, golden and glowing, so that the snow on the tree's branches melted as it fell. The birds that freezingly foraged for food during the day were at night able to warm up and fall asleep on the branches in the treetop, warm from the star's glow. Who knows whether they would have survived the relentlessly long winter otherwise.

Slowly, however, the strength of winter began to dwindle. The winter nights were getting shorter and the sun rose so early that the star was still asleep. A little more, and only patches of snow remained here and there. One day, when the star woke up, the ground around the tree was covered with the golden-yellow flowers of anemones.

"Tree, tree, stars have grown at your feet! So golden and delicate and quite different from the stars in the sky! And, tree, they are all pinned to the ground with green crowns!"

The tree laughed all the way to its hidden, barely awakening buds.

"They are not stars, just spring awakening after a long winter. And its earliest heralds are these tiny, yellow flowers. Like little suns, they emerge from the earth and have many names such as windflower, thimbleweed and cuckooflower. Snow still clings to their stems as they spring from the ground. Just as the sky still clings to you!"

"Oh, tree, though so small, the yellow crowns are like little suns on Earth!"

Thus, day after day, the star discovered what spring was like on Earth. The meadows of bluebells, the grace of the blossoming hellebores in the meadows of green groves and the sky-blue of the liverworts, the most beautiful blue stars on Earth, as the star called them. Then one day she said to the tree, "Tree, you're beginning to get all spiky!"

The tree laughed.

"They're not spikes, but buds!"

"What are buds, tree?"

"It's spring, little star. Soon I will sprout leaves again."

"Will you grow anew, tree?"

"Not quite like that. Remember in the autumn when I lost my leaves? You see, now I will sprout them again, like every spring!"

Every day the tree grew greener and its canopy thicker and more beautiful and more vibrant. The empty stork's nest where the star slept was now completely hidden behind the wide leafy sleeves of the branches. The birds returned and the star gathered a bouquet of brightly coloured yellow marsh-marigolds by the stream.

"This is for you, tree!"

The tree rejoiced. How could it not, it had never received flowers as a gift from anyone before.

One morning, the star asked thoughtfully, "Tree, do you also have a moon on Earth?"

"A moon? Only when we are moonstruck!" smiled the tree, murmuring.

"Then I was certainly moonstruck tonight," said the star seriously.

"How do you know?"

"You said the moon only comes to Earth when you are moonstruck! And you know, I saw a moon on Earth last night. It was big and shiny, just like the one shining in the sky. It was floating in a pool of water, and I thought it was beautiful beyond words, tree!"

The tree laughed with all its branches rustling at once.

"The moon from the pool of water is just a reflection of the Moon as it peeks at itself on the surface of the water, little star!"

"I know, tree! The moon comes to Earth when the moon from the sky is reflected in the water. And then we are moonstruck!" said the star.

And the tree laughed and rustled and listened to the star's golden words.

Spring was getting warmer and warmer, and the summer flowers, the Earth's stars, as the star called them, appeared overnight on the meadow by the tree. Large, snow-white shasta daisies and yellow buttercups waved among the simple blades of grasses and the star once again gave a bouquet of beautiful summer flowers to the tree. The sunflowers, the golden suns of the Earth, bloomed and turned their heads to follow the Sun in the sky.

When the sweet and delicate summer poppies bloomed in the fields the nights became so warm that they were barely distinguishable from the days. And the stars seemed so close that the little star gazed longingly into the night sky more and more often.

One night, two young sweethearts came and sat under the tree.

"How near and bright the stars seem tonight," they whispered to the sky, holding each other in an embrace.

"The whole tree is warm with the night and bright, as if illuminated by an invisible light. Perhaps we shall see a shooting star! And then we can make a silent wish... Oh, that would be almost too beautiful!"

The star laughed brightly at the two sweethearts, and a golden thought flashed across her glowing brow.

"I'll play a shooting star to bring them luck!"

And for a tiny fraction of a moment, the star rose to the top of the canopy and glimmered through the leaves like a golden glimmer in the sky. And the two young sweethearts kissed each other, enchanted under the canopy of the tree in which the little star called home.

In the morning, the star said to the tree happily: "Tree, last night I was a shooting star for two young sweethearts."

"I know," the tree murmured joyfully all the way down to its roots.

The next day, the star sat thoughtfully in the treetop, "Tree, what is a theatre?"

"It's a stage on which actors perform, and other people sit in the audience and watch them play."

"I'm going to the theatre tonight, you know. I'm going to see Adele the Little Star. Can you imagine, tree? A little sister star!"

"I worry she won't be the right star for you," murmured the tree ruefully.

But the star wanted so badly to see little Adele, her sister star from the sky, that she could not stop thinking of her longingly.

In the evening she went to the theatre, where above the entrance in large letters read: Adele the Little Star.

The theatre glittered in a hundred lights and the star, with a dim glow, hid quietly in a back corner of the theatre gallery, waiting with great anticipation for her sister star. But, when Adele the little star came on stage, the star could barely hold back tears of disappointment.

"She's not a little star, she's just a little girl. Alone on a great big stage..."

Rainbow waterfalls of light flooded the stage and the music started. Little Adele danced. The star watched with bated breath as her tiny body disappeared in the whirling eddies, reassembled itself for a moment, floating on the tips of her toes, and vanished again in the breath-taking swirls of the dance. Her thin arms floated in the air like wings as she took a leap in a long arc...

Then, suddenly, little Adele tripped and fell. The music stopped, the spotlights went out and the audience-filled hall murmured in disbelief. It rumbled in ever-growing, almost menacing disapproval and little Adele cried out. A white, jewelled hand reached out from behind the curtain and pulled her off the stage.

The star, glowing speechlessly, saw little Adele leave the stage in tears that night, and in her place, in a brilliant firework of lights, a new little star shone on the stage.

"I'm going to break my mother's heart," cried little Adele.

"I'm afraid, little Adele, that it's yours that is broken!" The star's golden heart quivered with grief.

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The next morning, the star said wistfully to the tree, "You know, tree, I'd much rather be a little star in the sky than a star on Earth!"

"I know," the tree murmured sympathetically.

For a few long moments, the star was lost in the light of her thoughts.

"Tree, even though I am a very small star indeed, I am still a star and my home is the sky..."

"Of course," the tree murmured.

"Here I will always be just a star that fell from the sky. A fallen star," the star whispered sadly.

"I know," the tree rustled in understanding.

"You know? How clever you are, tree. It's like you've lived for thousands of stars."

And the star pressed herself tightly against the tree trunk.

"Except I don't know how I could return to the sky. Stars fall from the sky, after all. I don't know any that have fallen into the sky!"

"I've already thought of that!"

"Oh, tree, have you really?"

"Really! I'll call the spider, Moonweb, to help you."

From the top of the trunk, a strange, slightly scary, hairy creature with many legs descended on a thin, almost invisible thread, shimmering in the setting sun.

"I know, I'm not very fetching in appearance," it rasped in a gravelly voice. "Nothing like a star," it stared at the star with its strange eyes. As though it had noticed that she had flinched a little when she saw him.

Then the tree said, "But that's why your cobwebby works of art more star-like, Moonweb!"

But the star was still a little reluctant to look directly into the strange, creepy creature's eyes.

"Don't be afraid, I don't bite! Well, at least not stars."

The star clung to the trunk. The tree said comfortingly, "Moonweb always had a sense of humour, you know!"

Then the star found her voice again.

"Why do you have such a strange name? Are you from the moon?"

The creature gave a gravelly laugh.

"You could be fooled into thinking that when I descend rapidly from up high!" it replied.

"Moonweb's cobwebs reach so dizzyingly high that they seem to reach up to the sky," said the tree.

"What are cobwebs?" asked the star.

"These," the creature rasped, and a thin, translucent curtain of thread descended from a high branch above the star. Here and there it glimmered, faintly visible, swaying, like the illusion of a shimmer.

"How beautiful," whispered the star.

"And strong," the creature croaked. "No rope of steel is stronger than the cobwebs spun by Moonweb."

And soon the Moonweb spider spun a strong, long ladder of silver cobwebs that reached high into the sky, so the little star could climb up and go back home.

"Don't be sad, tree. You know, it was only because of you that I was able to see the earthly world up close. Now I know that the Earth has its stars, too. For I got see the flowers, the stars of the Earth, and the earthly Moon that floated in the pool of water. And I got to play a shooting star for good luck, tree. But now I must return to the sky, you know. I'm just a star after all and the sky is my home. Now I'll never be alone again. You will be down there on Earth, dear tree. Your big warm heart. Your rustling canopy, the earthly home of the star that fell from the sky. Now I can shine for you, tree! But first I must give back little Adele her lost dream!" said the little star, hugging the tree.

"Of course, that's what stars are for," the tree rustled with emotion, its leaves fluttering like tears.

So, one night, the little star beamed back up into the sky.

"I'm going come down a little lower to be closer to you, tree!" she whispered in golden farewell. Now the star looked bigger and brighter than before, as she shone with great happiness.

People marvelled at the star shining in the sky right above the mighty old tree. But the tree just smiled softly in the warm, big heart of its trunk and rustled its leaves mysteriously. For it was the only tree that had its own star.

"What a strange phenomenon," said Stargazer the astronomer, shaking his head. "I could have sworn that a shooting star flew up into the sky and began shining there like a star."

## THE MOON IN LOVE

Once upon a time, the moon was young, slim and thin, like a little moon made of silver, like the first pussy willow of spring.

When she wasn't playing in a sandbox of stardust with which she gilded the images of her dreams, she liked to gaze down at the Earth. She watched as dreams drifted down from the starry plains of the Milky Way and flew like glittering stardust down onto the Earth. She watched the lights go out in the windows of the houses and the sapphire night grow heavier and darker and impenetrably mysterious.

But somewhere, in a town as small as a thimble, she saw a light on in a house near the town fountain. The Moon was very curious about who had their light on when everywhere else was already dark. Her curiosity got the better of her, and she descended to Earth in soundless slippers of moonlight. She crept up to the window where the light was shining and peered cautiously through. In a small room, the silhouette of a young man was hunched over under a table lamp and his lips seemed to be moving. The Moon leaned in closer.

"Strange," she whispered to herself. "There's no one else in the room, and yet the young man is talking to someone."

She put her ear close to the window pane. She listened with bated breath, transfixed.

*As though you were made of white moonlight,  
When you shine so bright in the pearly night,  
Of dainty cobwebs in midnight dreams grown,  
In which, like a gem, a smile is sewn.*

Ah, so many magical words coming from a small room.

"So that's why the light is still on! That's exactly how I always imagined a poet would be!" whispered the captivated the Moon.

Then the young man stirred and looked towards the window. The Moon quickly hid behind the window frame and held the dark shade of night in front of her, just in case. Just then, the cheeky Twinkle-Tail comet whizzed by, almost taking the shade with him and momentarily illuminating the Moon. The Moon held her breath as she hid in silence. Fortunately, the young man didn't see her, only his shadow passed by the window a few times and then disappeared.

*As though you were made of white moonlight,  
When you shine so bright in the pearly night,  
Of dainty cobwebs in midnight dreams grown,  
In which, like a gem, a smile is sewn.*

*I carried, I carried the moon with me,  
It shone so soft and pale,  
And I said, come, stay with me,*



*Let me bewitch you with my tale.*

*Along a thin moonlight bridge tonight,  
I follow you, a dreamy fairy tale,  
Bright and twinkling starry light,  
Lulling the Earth to sleep without fail.*

*Carry, carry me, Moon, with you,  
The Moon, a magical mandala so bright,  
And your sleepwalker always anew,  
I shall be in the midst of the crystal night.*

Lost in deep thought, the Moon returned to the sky, mesmerised by all that had happened. Oh, how she regretted not being able to hear the song all the way through. She silently repeated the last verse to herself:

*As though you were made of white moonlight...* But not quietly enough to avoid being overheard by the cheeky comet Twinkle-Tail, whose tail, constantly whizzing across the sky, created annoying swirls of stardust. Cheeky as ever, he called out to her:

"Oh, moonstruck Moon, spellbound by a poem, has the sky become too cramped for you, so you moon behind the windows of earthly houses and snoop around sleepless poets? I'll wager that the sky will be explode with joy to hear about this!"

"You rogue!" the Moon scolded, and tears of indignation instantly welled up in the corners of her eyes. "You're not even worthy of the sky!"

Twinkle-Tail had already sped off, and all she could hear was his cheeky giggle in the distance.

"What a brute!" said the Moon, still a little angry. But the song of the unknown young man was still echoing in her head and stirring in her heart. She decided to visit him again the next night. Perhaps she would be able to hear the song to the end and finally see the young man's face. When she thought of him, her cheeks instantly took on a golden glow.

So, night after night the Moon returned to the window of the unknown young man's house and secretly eavesdropped on the verses. Slowly, the Moon grew larger, round and brilliantly bright, so that even the dark shade of night could no longer hide her light. Because of this, she wasn't able to get too close to the window.

One night, when the Moon was finally beaming in her full circle of brilliance, and the sky was as bright as day and the Earth was bathed in moonlight, the Moon shone above the young man's house. The window of the young man's attic room suddenly opened, he stepped through it onto the balcony and climbed on top of the railing below the window. With bated breath, the Moon looked upon his face for the first time. His black hair fluttered in the night wind as he walked along the top of the narrow railing, arms outstretched, his gaze fixed on her.

*I carried, I carried the moon with me,*

*It shone so soft and pale,  
And I said, come, stay with me,  
Let me bewitch you with my tale.*

*Along a thin moonlight bridge tonight,  
I follow you, a dreamy fairy tale,  
Bright and twinkling starry light,  
Lulling the Earth to sleep without fail.*

*Carry, carry me, Moon, with you,  
The Moon, a magical mandala so bright,  
And your sleepwalker always anew,  
I shall be in the midst of the crystal night.*

"He's looking at me!" whispered the Moon to herself. The young man's face was pale, almost white, like the most silver moon of a winter's night. His lips moved in an inaudible whisper – just as they had when she first came to shine at his window. He was so handsome that the Moon fell eternally in love with him in an instant.

All day long she dreamt of his face in her sleep and woke up even more in love than before. Suddenly, as she sat at breakfast with the Sky, she said firmly:

"I want to get married!"

The Sky laughed. "With me I hope!" he said mischievously.

"It's not nice of you to make fun of my love, Sky!" said the Moon with cheeks all aglow. "Just so you know, I really mean it!"

"So, who is the mysterious lucky person you're so cosmically serious about marrying?" the Sky asked.

And the Moon began to tell of a young man as beautiful as the most beautiful silver moon of a winter night, writing verses that sounded like the silver of dreams.

"You're in love with someone who is not from the sky?" said the Sky, in disbelief, with stifled anger and a frown on his brow. "A mere moonstruck sleepwalker, and a poet for that matter? Have you got full moon fever?"

"Of course, I am the Moon after all," said the Moon defiantly. The Sky pushed away his breakfast and stood up. Then he began to bowl restlessly with a heavy black sphere made from a shiny meteorite.

"Only the Sun could marry you, for he is the sun of the day just as you are the sun of the night! How could you marry someone not from the sky? And how could day and night exist without you? For it is as if the sky were to crash to the ground!"

And the Sky rolled the heavy black ball several times in anger, so that it shook the mighty pillars of the heavenly palace with a clap of thunder.

But the Moon was so deeply in love that even the terrible anger of the Sky could not scare her and keep her away from her beloved sleepwalker.

Just as the Sky was stubbornly resolute, the Moon was adamant about her love. She cried throughout her last crescent and drowned completely in her tears in the new moon. When all thin, pale and weeping she shone in her first waxing crescent, she wailed:

"I never want to be a big moon again if I'm not allowed to marry!"

"Don't be childish, Moon!" said the Sky, trying to talk some sense into her. But the Moon pleaded and pleaded so long that Sky gave in with a sigh.

"You can marry your sleepwalker if you can find a tailor on earth who will make you a wedding dress in a single month that will fit you like a glove!" he said.

The Moon put on her magical moon shoes, beamed to Earth and hurried to find a suitable tailor to make her a wedding dress. When she found one, the tailor carefully measured out her dress, and it took him a week to sew it.

In the meantime, the Moon had grown from the first crescent to a full moon, and her dress was too tight, as she had become big and round. How could she fit into a dress made for a thin crescent!

Frustrated, she found a new tailor. Within a week, he promised her the most beautiful wedding dress, with a train and a veil studded with tiny slivers of stars to cover her pretty face.

But the Moon had shrunk again to a waning crescent in the past seven days, and the dress was far too big for her to wear.

She got angry with the tailor and hurried off to find another one. When she found yet another, she asked him for the most beautiful wedding dress, which she was sure would fit her like a glove. But just then she began to grow thinner, thinner and thinner, and she disappeared into a new moon. The tailor shook his head and said, "How can I tailor your wedding dress when I can only hear your voice, and your figure has become invisible?"

Thus, the Moon was left without a wedding dress and could not fulfil the Sky's requirements.

To console her, the Sky himself sewed a dress for her out of the white moonlight that shines as magnificently as the night sun. Wearing it, the Moon still goes to meet her sleepwalker in the brilliant light of the full moon. She clasps him to a thin beam of moonlight so that he cannot tumble into the depths as he wanders dreamily along the railings of his balcony.

There, high up under the roof of the house by the town fountain, where the moon first saw the face of her sleepwalker.