

The Little Match Girl

Most terribly cold it was; it snowed, and was nearly quite dark, and evening-- the last evening of the year. In this cold and darkness there went along the street a poor little girl, bareheaded, and with naked feet. When she left home she had slippers on, it is true; but what was the good of that? They were very large slippers, which her mother had hitherto worn; so large were they; and the poor little thing lost them as she scuffled away across the street, because **of two carriages** that rolled by dreadfully fast.

One slipper was nowhere to be found; the other had been laid hold of by an urchin, and off he ran with it; he thought it would do capitally for a cradle when he some day or other should have children himself. So the little maiden walked on with her tiny naked feet, that were quite red and blue from cold. **She carried a quantity of matches in an old apron, and she held a bundle of them in her hand.** Nobody had bought anything of her the whole livelong day; no one had given her a single farthing.



Figure 1: A Cradle

Figure 2: Farthing- A coin used in Britain



Figure 3 Roasted Goose

She crept along trembling with cold and hunger--a very picture of sorrow, the poor little thing!

The flakes of snow covered her long fair hair, which fell in beautiful curls around her neck; but of that, of course, she never once now thought.

From all the windows the candles were gleaming, and it smelt so deliciously of roast **goose**, for you know it was New Year's Eve; yes, of that she thought.

Notes: She did not think of snow as she was hungry & cold. She had not been able to sell any matches for the whole day. Night was approaching & she was barefooted, bareheaded and apparently nowhere to go.

However, she did think of smell of goose and a warm meal. Shows she had the longingness. She wanted to celebrate, to eat to make merry. She ignored art, and beauty, even her own beautifulness and was just concerned with food.

In a corner formed by two houses, of which one advanced more than the other, she seated herself down and covered together. Her little feet she had drawn close up to her, but she grew colder and colder, and to go home she did not venture, for she had not sold any matches and could not bring a farthing of money: from her father she would certainly get blows, and at home it was cold too, for

Commented [VP1]: mischievous roguish child, especially one who is young, small, or raggedly dressed.

Commented [VP2]: Girl was under lot of misery, She was the very picture of sorrow. Girl was blond (fair hair)

Commented [VP3]: crouch down

Commented [VP4]: some risky journey, or shows some uncertainty

above her she had only the roof, through which the wind whistled, even though the largest cracks were stopped up with straw and rags.

Notes: Going to one's own home is something most natural and desirable. Here we get a glimpse into the misery and suffering of the girl as she was not even considering going back to her own house on this cold, last evening of a year. We are introduced to the fact that her father is cruel and she is frightened of him. Father is most likely to beat his daughter as she has been unable to sell any matches. Further her father was not concerned as there is not even a remote possibility of the father searching for his daughter. Her house also needed mending and repair work and was not very comforting. This was another reason for the girl opting not to return to her home. This also shows the neglect of father towards his family.

Her little hands were almost numbed with cold. Oh! a match might afford her a world of comfort, if she only dared take a single one out of the bundle, draw it against the wall, and warm her fingers by it. She drew one out. "Rischt!" how it blazed, how it burnt! It was a warm, bright flame, like a candle, as she held her hands over it: it was a wonderful light. It seemed really to the little maiden as though she were sitting before a large iron stove, with burnished brass feet and a brass ornament at top. The fire burned with such blessed influence; it warmed so delightfully. The little girl had already stretched out her feet to warm them too; but--the small flame went out, the stove vanished: she had only the remains of the burnt-out match in her hand.

She rubbed another against the wall: it burned brightly, and where the light fell on the wall, there the wall became transparent like a veil, so that she could see into the room. On the table was spread a snow-white tablecloth; upon it was a splendid porcelain service, and the roast goose was steaming famously with its stuffing of apple and dried plums. And what was still more capital to behold was, the goose hopped down from the dish, reeled about on the floor with knife and fork in its breast, till it came up to the poor little girl; when--the match went out and nothing but the thick, cold, damp wall was left behind. She lighted another match. Now there she was sitting under the most magnificent Christmas tree: it was still larger, and more decorated than the one which she had seen through the glass door in the rich merchant's house. Thousands of lights were burning on the green branches, and gaily-colored pictures, such as she had seen in the shop-windows, looked down upon her. The little maiden stretched out her hands towards them when--the match went out. The lights of the Christmas tree rose higher and higher, she saw them now as stars in heaven; one fell down and formed a long trail of fire.

Commented [VP5]: Depicts both the heat produced by the matchstick, as well as the cheerfulness and life brought in the dark evening by the bright flames.

Notes: The first three visions the match fire produced

1. On lighting the first match, the girl imagined she was sitting before a large iron stove, with burnished brass feet and a brass ornament at top. The fire burned brightly producing comforting warmth. It felt like a heavenly gift. The little girl felt relaxed and warm enough to stretch out her feet to warm them too, before the matchstick burnt off.
2. On lighting the second matchstick the girl imagined the feast which was taking place inside one of the houses. She could see a large table with a snow-white tablecloth and beautiful service dishes of porcelain. On the table was a roasted goose, which was emitting aroma from all stuffing inside. She even felt as though the goose had started moving towards her, inviting her to take a bite but the matchstick died out before she could start eating, fading the vision with it.
3. In the third vision the girl imagines that she was sitting under the most magnificent Christmas tree which was large and even more beautiful than any she had ever seen in her life. Thousands of lights were burning on the green branches, and bright pictures were hanging from the tree.

When the last vision faded out, she felt as though it was like a star had burnt off. This rekindled the image of her grandmother and paved way for the next visions.

"Someone is just dead!" said the little girl; for her old grandmother, the only person who had loved her, and who was now no more, had told her, that when a star falls, a soul ascends to God.

She drew another match against the wall: it was again light, and in the lustre there stood the old grandmother, so bright and radiant, so mild, and with such an expression of love.

"Grandmother!" cried the little one. "Oh, take me with you! You go away when the match burns out; you vanish like the warm stove, like the delicious roast goose, and like the magnificent Christmas tree!" And she rubbed the whole bundle of matches quickly against the wall, for she wanted to be quite sure of keeping her grandmother near her. And the matches gave such a brilliant light that it was brighter than at noon-day: never formerly had the grandmother been so beautiful and so tall. She took the little maiden, on her arm, and both flew in brightness and in joy so high, so very high, and then above was neither cold, nor hunger, nor anxiety--they were with God.

But in the corner, at the cold hour of dawn, sat the poor girl, with rosy cheeks and with a smiling mouth, leaning against the wall--frozen to death on the last evening of the old year. Stiff and stark sat the child there with her matches, of which one bundle had been burnt. "She wanted to warm herself," people said. No one had the slightest suspicion of what beautiful things she had seen; no one even dreamed of the splendor in which, with her grandmother she had entered on the joys of a new year.

The Story line / Plot Summary

The story "The Little Match Girl" by Hans Christian Anderson is set against the backdrop of a New Year's Eve. It was a very cold winter evening with snow and frost. When everyone was busy in celebrating the festive day with candles, Christmas trees and delicious dishes, a poor little girl was wandering on the streets trying to sell her matches. She was barefoot and bareheaded. Though she had the shoes of her mother, she lost them on the way. Her scanty clothes were not enough to make her warm.

The girl was sure to be beaten by her father as she could not earn a single penny the whole day. So she decided not to go home and sat down on the ground on a corner created by two houses. While sitting there she lit a match to warm herself. To her surprise, she saw a great iron stove with bright brass knob in the bright flame of the match. The stove vanished when the flame went out.

The girl lit three more matches one after another and saw the visions of a roasted goose on the table, a beautiful Christmas tree and her grandmother who loved her most. By then the girl realized that she would lose the vision of her grandmother when the match would go out. But she wanted her to stay there so much that she quickly lit all the rest of the matches to make sure the light stayed on. In the bright light of the matches her granny looked more beautiful than ever before. She took her in her arms and flew high up the sky to the God.

At the dawn of the new year, people discovered that the girl had frozen to death, still holding the matches in her hand. They were talking about how the girl had tried to warm herself. But they did not know what beautiful visions she had seen and into what “heavenly joy and gladness of a new year” she had entered with her “dear old grandmother”.

Notes: When people saw the dead girl, they just felt pity for her. They failed to understand the fact that she had died peacefully, imagining a life in heaven with her grandmother. A life which would have no cold, no hunger, and no ill treatment by her father.

These lines depict the condition of poor children and are a paradox on very existence of a civil society. A child finally decided that she will be far better off in her death, than she could hope to be in her life.

The society on whole had failed to provide considerably basic things to a poor girl. She did not get home, clothes, or food. She did not even get love and affection every child deserves. Her abusive father was cruel and ignorant of her, and apparently, she had no one else to look after her. The society did not care. No one had bought a single match from her, had provided her with food, clothes or even shelter. People were busy celebrating new year eve, completely ignorant of her plight and distress. Certainly, this makes everyone culpable for her death.

The short story “The Little Match Girl” is all about the **poverty, hunger and helplessness** of a little girl who is sent to sell matches when she is supposed to stay at home or at school. When all the world seems to be celebrating the New Year’s Eve, the girl is deprived of the joy. But the readers are caught in the riddle whether it is sheer poverty of the family, or the **cruelty of a father** to his daughter; may be both.

Whatever the case may be, the author has shown us how sometimes death can be better than life on earth. The poor girl got nothing here in this life. All the visions she had in the light of the matches only reflected her unfulfilled **wishes and dreams**. She also wished to enjoy some delicious food, to sit under a beautiful Christmas tree, and to have the company of her dear old grandmother. But it was not to be in her earthly life. She could only get those after death, in the Heaven. That is why the writer says —

But no one knew what beautiful visions she had seen and in what a blaze of glory she had entered with her dear old grandmother into the heavenly joy and gladness of a new year