

## The Richest Gift

Long ago, and far, far away, when fairies could be seen by mortals, a sweet baby boy came to live in a humble home. As his mother cradled the newborn in her arms, and wondered what kind of man he would become, she softly whispered, “How I wish that I could give to you, my darling child, the richest gift on earth, so that Kings and Emperors might be proud to call you their companion.”

“So you can,” said a gentle voice beside her that startled the mother. “I can give him the greatest and most wonderful gift on earth.” The mother looked around the room and her eyes fell upon a perfectly beautiful little creature, no bigger than your thumb, with two wings as thin as gauze gleaming with every color of the rainbow. Upon its head was a slender gold crown and its small face was bright with a merry smile.

“What will you do for my child?” cried the mother. “Will you give him comfort and ease and fill his days with endless pleasure?”

“Ah, no,” replied the fairy, “I will give him something far better than pleasant food and a soft bed and fine clothes.”

“Then will you make him great and powerful so that men may bow down before him and honor him?”

“No! No” again replied the fairy shaking her head. “I will give him something of far more worth than fame and power!”

“Then you will make him rich, so rich that he will never have a financial worry or care; so rich that he never has to work?”

“Nay, good woman,” said the fairy seriously. “These are foolish things for which you ask. My gift is greater than all of those put together. Pleasure and influence and wealth a man may earn for himself—and he may be very miserable after he gets them, too,” she added with a shrug of her shoulders. “The gift that I would bestow upon your son will make him the happiest of mortals and will give him the power of making many, many others happy.”

“Tell me,” cried the mother, “how will you make him so happy? No human being is ever sure of happiness.”

The fairy replied, “Let me kiss him upon his two eyelids as he lies there asleep and do you the same each returning birthday and all will be well.”

A step was heard approaching the door. “Quick! Quick! exclaimed the fairy, “I must be off before the door opens. Shall I give him the magic kiss or not?”

“Yes,” cried the excited mother. “I trust you will do no harm to my precious child.”

Instantly the fairy fluttered down and, as she kissed each closed eyelid, gently whispered, “He shall be called ‘Blessed Eyes.’”

The door opened and the fairy was gone.

Most of the mother’s friends and relatives thought Blessed Eyes was a very strange name to give a child, but as the boy grew into a sweet and healthy childhood, loving and kind to everyone, little Blessed-Eyes became a favorite.

Long before her child could talk, the mother noticed how closely he observed everything around him. He saw the first red glow of the evening sunset. His eyes were the first to spy out the early spring flower and in the autumn when the wind was sharp and cold, he would bring home some red mountain berries or a withered leaf wrapped around a little caterpillar. No stone nor cloud nor stream nor tree but gave him pleasure.

“Ah,” thought the mother, “this is the birthday gift. She has made his eyes to see the beautiful everywhere.”

But then she heard these words whispered gently in her ear: “More than that, far more than that! Kings and princes shall yet call him great’. She seemed to hear the soft but distant singing of the words,

Love well, love well, love well,  
That the heart within may swell.

Years passed by, changing little Blessed Eyes into a tall young man, and each succeeding year added to the wonderful power which his eyes possessed, of seeing the best that was in everything and everybody. He was the friend of rich and poor. All sought his companionship, for he was constantly pointing out to them so many beautiful things in the world about them which they would never have seen but for him. All loved him dearly, for he was just as constantly finding the best that their inner world contained, and encouraging them to live according to their noblest ideals of how true men and women should live.

Long years passed and Blessed-Eyes became the King’s Chief Counsellor. One day as he was walking through the streets, he heard a deep sigh of some one in great trouble. He turned to see a poor laboring man with his head bent forward upon his hands.

“What is the matter?”

“Ah,” replied the poor man, “All the jobs in the shops are taken and I can find no work; my children are starving for want of bread.”

“What large, strong arms you have!” said Blessed Eyes. “Why do you not seek the King and offer to quarry the beautiful white marble that lies in yonder mountain range. Those great strong arms of yours could do a grand work in the King’s quarry.”

The man softened, "I will go."

The King gladly accepted the offer and sent him with crow-bars and drills and soon there came a wagon load of beautiful white marble, and then another and then another. The King was so pleased, he sent another ten men and then twenty and then a hundred and soon a vast pile of the glistening, white marble had been collected and the poor and discouraged man had become the most famous stonemason in the world.

Not long after this, as Blessed-Eyes and the King looked at the shining white marble and wondered how it could be used to make beautiful the city, they noticed a man standing beside it, measuring it with his eye.

It's a fine sight, is it not? commented Blessed-Eyes.

But the poor man looked at him sadly, shook his head and wrote, "I cannot hear a word that you say; I am totally deaf, and therefore I am the loneliest man in all the King's realm."

Blessed Eyes heart was stirred with pity for the lonely man. He took his pencil and wrote, "You evidently have a very correct eye for measurements."

"Yes," replied the man, "I think I could estimate the weight of any one of these great stones within half an ounce."

Blessed Eyes wrote quickly: "With such good eyes for measurement, you would surely be a good builder. This is the King. Why do you not offer to make for him some beautiful buildings out of this white marble?"

The lonely man's face brightened. The King accepted his offer and the new architect set to work at once drawing plans for several buildings which were to surround a charming lake in the King's park.

Soon, scores of men were laying foundations, while others shaped the marble into blocks and pillars, all under the direction of the new architect. When all was done and the buildings stood in their full majestic beauty with their long colonnades shining in the sunlight and their graceful towers rising airily in the upper air and their beautiful gilded domes crowning all, the scene resembled fairyland. People came from the farthest ends of the earth to enjoy its beauty and the sad and lonely deaf man had now become the most famous architect in the whole world.

As beautiful as the buildings were on the outside, inside they were cold and bare and one day as the King and Blessed Eyes consulted how the inner walls might be made as beautiful as the outer ones, they heard a group of boys making fun of a stranger in their midst. With a feeling of indignation, Blessed Eyes pressed forward: "What is your difficulty, sir?"

The stranger blushed and stammered, "I I I ca-ca-canno- no-not sp-speak your language wi-without st-st-stammering."

At this the boys roared with laughter. Blessed Eyes turned an angry look at them, and slipping his arm through the stranger's, he said, "Will you walk with me? I noticed you have strong, artistic hands. Surely you must be able to draw and paint."

The stranger's face lit up—he had hoped to get work there as an artist.

He was taken to the King, and soon the three were deep in plans for decorating and making beautiful the inner walls of the white buildings. It was not long before the stammering artist had proved that he was not only an artist, but a master artist. Lesser artists and new pupils flocked to him from all parts of the land. In less than a year, the walls were decorated with wonderful pictures of faraway landscapes; of beautiful sunset clouds, and best of all, true and lifelike portraits of the noblest men and women of the nation and the stammering stranger had become known as the greatest artist of the age.

Now the next question that arose was the best way to use these magnificent buildings, so that all might enjoy them. One day, as Blessed Eyes pondered the matter, he came upon a man, pacing the halls with his hands clasped behind him. He soon noticed the man was completely blind.

"Ah! That is the step of Blessed-Eyes! Much as he has done to help others, there is nothing he can do for me!"

"Indeed," replied Blessed Eyes. If you can tell a man by his step, you must certainly have good hearing. Surely a man whose hearing is so acute must be a good musician."

"Yes, the man cried impatiently, "I am the finest conductor of an orchestra in the whole world, but for what use? Nobody cares for good music now!" And he shrugged his shoulders.

"Come with me to the King. I think he has need of you."

After a long talk with the King, the King offered his generous support that the people might learn to love good music. The blind man became such a marvelous director of musicians that soon, thousands upon thousands came to hear the afternoon concerts which were given in the largest of the beautiful, white buildings.

One bright, spring morning, as Blessed Eyes started out to enjoy the sunshine and flowers, his eyes fell upon the tear-stained face of a woman. "Dear Madam, is there anything I can do for you?"

"Alas, what can you do for a broken hearted mother whose four little children have been taken by death from her arms. Unless I have children to love, life has no brightness for me."

"Surely," said Blessed-Eyes softly and compassionately, "there are yet many children who need your love. Will you not come with me to the palace of the King?"

The woman looked perplexed, but followed. I do not know just how it happened, but soon their

were voices of happy children who followed her as she told them stories and taught them songs and led them in charming games, and trained their hands into skillful work. So full of motherly love was the woman's work that other beautiful and noble women came and joined her until at last there was no child in the whole city who had not learned how to love sweet music, enjoy beautiful pictures and how to be kind and thoughtful towards others.

In time many of these children grew into manhood and womanhood and became musicians, artists, authors, physicians, clergyman and wonderfully skilled workmen of all sorts. Many of the women married and became loving and wise mothers because of the training they had received from the pale-faced childless woman who was now filled with joy.

At last the good King died, and the question arose, "Who shall be our King?" The counsellors sent to the stonemasons and the great stone-mason cried, "Let Blessed Eyes be our King! Did he not teach me how to use my strong arms? Has he not furnished bread for us and our families?"

And the architects said, "Let Blessed Eyes be King! Have we not, from him, learned to make beautiful whatever we build?"

And they sent to the mills and the factories and the designers said, "Why not make Blessed-Eyes our King? It was he who first introduced Art into our land and showed us how to make as beautiful as pictures our carpets and curtains and walls.

Then they sent to all the colleges and schools of the land and the superintendents said, "We know of no better man than Blessed-Eyes. He first taught us that a love of the beautiful should be part of each child's education."

Soon the whole nation seemed to cry out, "Blessed-Eyes, Blessed-Eyes, Long live King Blessed-Eyes!" There is none among us whom he has not helped. When the news was brought to Blessed-Eyes, he smiled gently and said, "I had hoped to rest now, but if I can serve my country, I must do it."

So he was made King and the nation became wise and great and powerful under his reign. For the little children grew up learning to love the beautiful and to see it everywhere until at last there was a whole nation of blessed-eyes, and every city in the land became as beautiful as the White City by the Lake.