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GENTLE WISE TALES

Stories for Family Reading

Александр Макаров

Gentle Wise Tales

«Автор»

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Gentle Wise Tales are like moments of silence in a noisy world. Here, fear is not shamed, but noticed. A mistake is not called a failure, but turned into another path. The collection helps a child experience important states, from the first day at kindergarten to the worries of school. Each fairy tale is a readymade support tool: an understandable image and gentle words that are easy to transfer to real life. Convenient format: read one story at a time, depending on your mood. Large font, comfortable layout. For family reading and educators. May this book become your quiet place, where you can take a breath and move forward—no longer alone.

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The world can be too fast sometimes. It keeps urging: *Hurry up! Keep pace! Be the first!* But what a child truly needs is something very different — someone to sit beside them, to wait until the wind carries away all the unnecessary noise, and then softly say: *Don't try to see everything at once. Look at a single line. At the drop right here. At the shadow trembling at the edge.*

These tales are like those quiet moments. Time flows differently here — slowly, deliberately, giving space for all that truly matters. In this world, it's okay not to have the answer and still be heard. You can bring your own dinosaur along, and instead of being a nuisance, it will become a hero. You can knock down a tower and not hear *"You ruined it again"*, but rather *"Then let's try a different way."*

Each story is a little island where a child can feel safe. Where they are seen. Where the way they understand the world is treated as important. Where courage isn't the absence of fear, but taking a step even when something inside is trembling just a little.

May this book become your quiet place. A place where you can breathe out, gather yourself, and then move forward again — but not alone.

This book is suitable for family reading, for educators working with groups, and for gently addressing anxious feelings. It doesn't promise that fear will disappear, but it shows that there's someone nearby who won't rush or shame you — someone who'll help you take the next step at your own pace.

Baba Yaga

Once upon a time, there lived a boy and a girl. They loved wandering along the forest edges, sitting on tree stumps, and listening to the forest as if it were whispering stories. The boy had a gift for noticing tracks: here a hare had scampered, and there a squirrel had dropped a pinecone. The girl was all about scents: the smell of rain, of honey, of something brand new—like the very first leaf unfurling in spring. To them, the forest wasn't just trees; it was alive, warm, and so very attentive.

One day, they followed their usual path, only this time the path seemed to lead them somewhere they'd never been before. At first, everything felt familiar: sunspots lay on the grass like golden coins, and the bluebells tinkled softly with every breath of wind. The air smelled of warm bark, damp earth, and something sweet—as if the very first flower of summer had just opened nearby.

Suddenly, the children heard a tiny, tiny squeak: “Peep, peep, peep...” It was as if some little creature was calling for help. Their hearts skipped a beat. A little fear crept in—the forest was so vast, and the shadows between the trees were so thick, as if hiding a thousand secrets. But the boy and the girl held each other's hands tightly.

“If we don't go, who will help?” the boy said quietly.

“We're not alone,” the girl replied. “We're together.”

They walked on. The trees grew taller, as if trying to reach the sky, and the shadows fell across the path like dark patches of cloth. Then, above the clearing, something hummed and rustled; the very air seemed to tremble. The children looked up and saw a mortar appear from behind the pine tops. It flew low, almost touching the branches, swaying as if drifting along an invisible river. And in it sat Baba Yaga.

She didn't look frightening. Her headscarf was patchwork, made of scraps that seemed stitched from pieces of sky, sunset, and morning mist. In her hands, she held a long twig, tapping it gently against the edge of the mortar: tap tap, tap tap. With each tap, the forest seemed to grow calmer.

The mortar settled smoothly onto the moss, rocked, and came to a stop. Baba Yaga stepped down, leaned on her twig, and looked at the children with steady eyes—not stern, but as if she understood everything in the world.

“What brings you here?” she asked, not loudly, but as if she just wanted a friendly chat.

The girl hid a little behind the boy, then peeked out and whispered, “We heard a squeak. There's someone small out there—scared and cold. We want to help.”

Baba Yaga listened without interrupting. Then she nodded, as if she'd made up her mind about something.

“That's true courage,” she said, almost in a whisper. “When your knees are shaking, but you still go where help is needed.”

She bent down, plucked a leaf from a branch, and sniffed it.

“Do you hear it, boy?” she asked. “That’s the scent of the forest—damp moss, warm bark, a drop of dew. The forest hears everything. It knows who comes with kindness and who comes with a shout.”

Then she handed the children a smooth stone. It was warm, as if it had just lain in the sun, and on it, a thin silver line traced a tiny heart.

“As long as your heart is kind, it will glow a little, like a spark. If anger or hurt comes, it will turn plain gray. But I’ll tell you this: it’s not so scary when you’re together. Hold on to each other, breathe in the forest, listen to its quiet, and it will show you the way.”

The children took the stone, and indeed, it glowed with a warm, honey colored light. As they walked, the forest seemed to grow kinder: branches no longer caught at their clothes, shadows didn’t frighten, and the bluebells rang softly, as if cheering them on: “Well done, you didn’t give up!”

They came to an old tree stump. The moss lay on it like a soft blanket. In a little hollow, a tiny fledgling shivered, curled up. It looked so small, as if made from a single downy feather and two drops of water. The children covered it with a cap, sat beside it, and whispered, “Don’t be afraid. We’re here. This smells like the forest—it smells like home.”

The fledgling calmed a little.

When they stood up to walk on, Baba Yaga appeared again. This time, she wasn’t in the mortar but walking along the path, as lightly as if she’d never flown at all. She carried a basket, and from it drifted a thin, warm scent—like fresh bread, only better, as if summer itself were hidden inside.

“I see you’ve learned the most important thing,” she said quietly, almost to herself. “Courage can be loud, and courage can be quiet. Loud courage runs forward without looking back. Quiet courage stops, listens, and doesn’t take an extra step that might hurt.”

The children looked at her in wonder.

“Is that courage too?” the girl asked.

Baba Yaga nodded.

“Absolutely. Not to chase away the frightened with a shout, not to break a branch, not to crush the moss—that’s harder than it seems. You want to touch everything, to look closer... But true care means you can say to yourself: ‘I’ll wait. I’ll be quiet. I won’t disturb.’”

They went on, trying to step so softly that not a single twig would snap. And suddenly, by the tree roots, they spotted a tiny hedgehog. He pressed himself to the ground, as if afraid of every rustle.

The boy crouched down, perfectly still. The girl sat beside him. They didn’t reach out, didn’t call to him; they just sat there, breathing evenly, the way the forest breathed.

The hedgehog lifted his snout, sniffed the air, saw that no one meant him harm, and quietly toddled over to a bush where a ripe strawberry lay.

“See?” smiled Baba Yaga, standing nearby, almost blending into the tree’s shadow. “He knew he wouldn’t be hurt here. And the forest sees that.”

As the children walked home, the stone still glowed softly, and from it came a gentle, kind scent—as if it held a piece of the forest’s quiet. And Baba Yaga called after them, not loudly—just for them to hear: “Remember: courage isn’t only about walking forward. Courage is also about knowing when to stop, to listen, and not to cause pain to any living thing.”

On the way back, the children didn’t hurry. They noticed everything again: the scent of bark warmed by the sun, the rustle of grass, the deep blue of the bluebells. And every smell, every color, every quiet rustle seemed to say: “You’re good. You didn’t walk past.”

From then on, whenever fear crept in or they felt like making noise, they held each other’s hands, clutched the warm stone in their palms, breathed in the forest scent, and whispered: “We’re not alone. Our hearts are kind. We’ll be quiet. We’ll be kind.”

And the forest nodded to them with its branches, as if saying: “Well done. You’re doing it right.”

Santa Claus

In a quiet little town, where the streets in winter were wrapped in a snowy blanket and the windows glowed with warm light, there lived a family: a father, a mother, a boy, and a girl. The children were still very young, and for them, New Year wasn't just a holiday — it was a real doorway to wonder. They believed that if you whispered a wish beneath the Christmas tree, Santa Claus would hear it. And not just hear it — he would make it come true.

And the parents? They believed in Santa Claus even more than the children did. Only their belief was different. They knew that Santa Claus wasn't just an old man in a fur coat with a sack of gifts. Santa Claus was the warmth they kindled in their home themselves. It was the quiet evening when the father pulled out the box of Christmas ornaments, and the mother brewed cocoa, and the air already smelled of the holiday. It was the letters the children wrote on scraps of paper, folded into envelopes, and placed on the windowsill — and which the parents quietly took later to “send” to Santa Claus.

Every year, as snowflakes swirled outside the window, the mother would say: “Santa Claus only hears wishes that hold kindness in them. If you ask for a gift not for yourself, but to bring joy to someone else, he will surely come.” And the father would add: “And he also comes to those who truly believe — not just waiting for candies and toys, but waiting for a miracle with their whole heart.”

Then one year, the house grew very quiet. The father lost his job, money was nearly gone, and the mother sighed more and more often as she looked at the empty shelf in the wardrobe. But she never told the children that there might be no holiday. Instead, she took out an old box where they kept paper snowflakes and called the boy and the girl: “Let's make the most beautiful garland in the world. Let it be so bright that Santa Claus will see our house right away.”

Meanwhile, the father found an old wooden rocking horse in the attic. It was scratched, but sturdy. He took sandpaper, rubbed off the old paint, and then covered it with golden varnish. “Let it be like new,” he whispered, as if afraid to scare away hope.

The boy wrote a letter to Santa Claus. But it didn't list any toys. He wrote: “Please let Mama smile. Let Papa be cheerful again. I don't need anything for myself — I just want everything to be all right for us.”

The girl, meanwhile, cut out a tiny paper angel. She didn't ask for anything for herself, only whispered quietly: “Let everything be all right. Let the holiday come to us, even if there are very few gifts.”

On New Year's Eve, the children went to bed early, snuggling close to each other. And the parents sat in the kitchen, drinking lukewarm tea and watching the lights of the garland. “What will we give them?” the mother asked softly, her voice trembling. “What we have,” the father replied. “Warmth. Quiet. And faith.”

Just then, there was a soft knock at the door. Not loud, not demanding — as if someone was afraid to disturb them. The parents looked at each other. On the threshold stood Santa Claus. But not

like in the greeting cards. His coat was slightly worn, as if he had already walked through a thousand courtyards; his beard was grey and soft, and his eyes glowed like two kind stars.

“I heard there’s real belief living here,” he said quietly, and his voice made the room feel warmer. “And where the heart truly believes, wishes come true. Even when it seems that miracles don’t happen.”

He handed the parents a small pouch embroidered with silver threads. “It’s not gold or money,” Santa Claus smiled. “These are seeds of miracles. They only grow where people love and cherish each other.”

Before the parents could ask anything, Santa Claus had already vanished, melting into the snowy silence. All that remained on the porch were two large boot prints and a faint scent of pine and frosty wind.

In the morning, gifts lay beneath the tree. Not expensive, not glittering, but exactly what they needed: for Mama, a warm scarf knitted from soft wool; for Papa, a book about old crafts he had long wanted to read; for the boy, that very wooden rocking horse, now shining like the sun; for the girl, a set for making paper angels.

But the greatest gift was something else. That day, the father found a new job — a small one, but a good one, where they valued his hands and his heart. And Mama suddenly noticed that even on the coldest days, their home was warm, because they held on to each other.

From then on, the boy and girl grew up, but every New Year they remembered that night. And when they became parents themselves, they told their children: “Santa Claus grants wishes. But not because he has a magic wand. He lives in those who believe, in those who try to make the world a little brighter, even when it’s hard.”

And now, when snow swirls outside the window again, they light the garland, take out the old ornaments, and whisper to their children: “The most important wish is that kindness always lives in your heart. The rest will follow.”

Because where there is love and care, a miracle is sure to happen. Even if you’re already grown up. Even if you’re just quietly waiting for the house to smell like the holiday once more.

Cat Bayun

In a very old forest, where the trees grew so thick that it was almost dark even in the daytime, and at night the stars shone right through the crowns, lived Cat Bayun. Not an ordinary cat, but a magical one. People said he could do more than just purr—he could tell tales in such a way that even the wind grew quiet to listen. They also said his voice could lull you into a deep sleep, wake forgotten dreams, or even show you what was hiding behind the farthest cloud.

He lived in a tall oak, on the thickest branch, where he wove a nest from moss, dry blades of grass, and moonlight. During the day, he dozed with his sides turned to the warm rays; in the evenings, he sat on the edge of the branch, lowered his whiskers almost to the air, and began to hum very softly. And then the forest seemed to grow wider, and every rustle held its own story.

One day, a little girl came to this forest. She wasn't especially brave or curious; she was just very tired of all the noise and of everyone around her always wanting something from her. At home, they told her to be faster; at school, to be quieter; and on the street, they simply didn't notice her. So she went to a place where, as she thought, no one would demand anything.

She walked until her legs grew weary, until the path became very narrow, and then disappeared altogether. The girl sat down on a fallen tree, lowered her head, and suddenly heard a purr. It wasn't like the purr of an ordinary cat; it seemed made of a thousand soft sounds at once—the rustle of leaves, the patter of raindrops, the distant hum of the wind.

Lifting her head, she saw Cat Bayun. He sat on the branch, his head tilted slightly, looking at her not sternly, but as if he had been waiting for her for a long time.

"You didn't come here for a miracle," he said without words, because words weren't needed there. "You came so that someone would simply hear you."

The girl nodded, though she didn't understand how he knew.

"Then listen," Cat Bayun continued, and began to purr again. But now his purr didn't carry sleep. It carried a silence where you could finally breathe out. It carried the voice of the forest, whispering to anyone who knew how to listen: "You're not in the way. You're neither too loud nor too quiet. You just are."

He jumped down from the branch and sat beside the girl, pressing his warm side against her knee.

"You know," he said, "many people think magic is when miracles happen. But real magic is when you can sit beside someone and not be afraid they'll chase you away. Or when you can speak softly, and still be heard."

The girl ran her hand over his soft fur. The cat smelled of the forest, dry grass, and something very calm—as if he held the entire quiet evening inside him.

"Can you tell me a story?" she asked quietly.

“I can,” Cat Bayun replied. “But not one where everything is solved with a single magic word. I’ll tell you a story where the hero simply walks forward, even when he’s afraid. Where he stops to listen to how the forest breathes. Where he doesn’t have to shout, because he knows he’ll be noticed anyway.”

And Cat Bayun began to tell a tale. In his story, there was a boy who was afraid of the dark but still lit a small flame and carried it through the forest so that no one would be left in darkness. There was a girl who was afraid to speak, but one day she whispered a single word, and that word turned out to be the most important one. And there was the old forest that listened to everyone and gave each one their own place.

As the cat told the tale, the girl stopped flinching at every rustle. She realized the forest wasn’t a stranger. It didn’t rush her, didn’t judge her, didn’t demand that she be better. It just was—and in it, she could simply be.

When the story ended, Cat Bayun lifted his head and looked at the girl with his big eyes.

“Now you know,” he said. “Magic isn’t about disappearing from everyone. Magic is about finding someone who hears you. Even if it’s just a cat on a branch. Even if it’s just the forest nodding to you with its branches.”

The girl smiled. For the first time in a long while, she didn’t want to run anywhere.

“Come,” said Cat Bayun. “I’ll show you the path that those who aren’t afraid of silence walk. Crowds don’t go there, but it leads to a place where you’re truly expected.”

They walked side by side. The cat stepped softly on the moss, and the girl tried to walk just as quietly, so as not to scare away this peaceful evening. And suddenly, she noticed that at every step, the forest seemed to show her the way. A bird flapped its wing and pointed the direction. A fern bent as if inviting her to pass. Even the shadow of a tree lay in such a way that it looked like a path.

They reached the edge of the forest, where the lights of the village were already visible. Cat Bayun stopped at the forest’s border.

“From here, you’ll go on alone,” he said calmly. “But you’re not alone. As long as you remember that there is a silence where you are heard, you can always come back here. Or find such silence somewhere else.”

The girl crouched down to pet him one more time.

“Thank you,” she whispered.

“You’re welcome,” purred Cat Bayun. “Just remember: sometimes the strongest magic is simply sitting beside someone and letting them breathe.”

He turned and ran back into the forest, light and almost soundless, fading into the twilight. The girl stood still for a little while longer, listening to the leaves whispering, to a distant bird singing, to the night breathing.

Then she walked toward the lights. And now it seemed to her that every step didn't sound like an escape, but like a return. That at home, they wouldn't scold her for having left. Because there were quiet voices there too, voices that knew how to listen.

From then on, whenever things grew noisy and heavy, the girl would close her eyes and remember the purr of Cat Bayun. And in that sound, she would find again that very silence where she could just be, without trying to become someone else.

And in the forest, in the tall oak, Cat Bayun still sat on his branch. And if someone came there, tired of the bustle, he would begin to purr softly once more. Because he knew: sometimes the most important miracle is simply to let someone hear themselves.

Vasilisa the Wise

In a faraway kingdom, at the edge of a dense forest, stood a wooden manor with carved shutters and a roof that seemed woven from sunbeams. There lived Vasilisa the Wise. People said she knew the language of the wind and could hear the grass growing. Not because she was born a sorceress, but because she had spent a long time listening to the world—and never rushed to answer before she understood what it was whispering.

Vasilisa had a special gift. She could see not what lay on the surface, but what hid behind the first glance. She saw how weariness hid inside worry, how hurt hid behind an angry word, how hope hid within silence. And she also knew how to make a person feel lighter simply by being there—not to judge, but to understand.

One day, a young man came to the manor. He was from another kingdom and was always in a hurry. He believed that wisdom meant quick answers and loud words. He wanted to ask Vasilisa how to defeat an enemy, how to build a fortress, how to become the strongest. But when he stepped into the manor, his voice grew quieter all at once. The room smelled of dried mint, linden blossoms, and something deeply calm—as if time moved more slowly here.

Vasilisa didn't rush to answer. She seated the guest by the window, placed a cup of warm tea before him, and said, "Look."

The young man looked. Outside, the wind sent waves rolling across the meadow; bees danced above the clover; and on a branch sat a little grey bird, as if listening to something.

"What am I supposed to see?" the young man asked.

"What doesn't need haste," Vasilisa replied. "Sometimes the most important things don't shout. They simply are. And if you learn to notice them, you'll understand how to act."

She took a thin thread and began weaving a pattern. The thread was simple, made of linen, but in her fingers it seemed to come alive.

"Look," Vasilisa said. "To make a beautiful pattern, you mustn't tug. You have to feel where the thread wants to lie gently, and where it asks for a little tension. It's the same with people. It's the same with decisions. If you rush, you tear. If you listen, the pattern weaves itself."

The young man sat and watched her fingers glide effortlessly over the threads. He suddenly realized he hadn't just sat still for a long time. He'd been running somewhere, proving something to someone, afraid of not making it in time. Here, it was possible just to breathe.

Then Vasilisa took out an old book. There was no title on the cover, only a pattern that looked like dewdrops on grass. She opened it to a random page and pointed to a single line. It held no grand advice—just words about an old gardener who watered the same tree every day, even though it didn't bear fruit for a long time. And one day, apples appeared on it. Not the largest, not the brightest, but the sweetest—because they had been waited for.

“You see,” Vasilisa said. “Wisdom isn’t always about doing everything at once. Sometimes it’s about not giving up. About noticing the small signs. About letting time do its work.”

The young man fell into thought. Suddenly, he didn’t want to conquer, to build, to prove anything. He just wanted to learn to sit and listen. To learn not to tear, but to weave.

“What if I make a mistake?” he asked quietly.

“It’s okay to make mistakes,” Vasilisa answered. “The important thing is not to stop listening. If you hear, you can always adjust the pattern. But if you don’t hear, even the most perfect plan can become a trap.”

She handed him a ball of linen threads.

“Try,” she said. “Weave something simple. Let it be your first pattern.”

The young man took the thread. At first, his fingers fumbled; the thread tangled; he wanted to give up. But then he slowed down. He began to feel how the thread lay, where it wanted a little freedom, and where it asked for care. And gradually, from the tangle, a simple but even pattern began to emerge.

When he finished, Vasilisa smiled.

“See?” she said. “You already know the most important thing. You know how to pause. How to listen. How not to give up when it doesn’t work right away. The rest will come.”

The young man sat a while longer, breathing in the scent of mint and quiet. Then he stood, bowed to Vasilisa, and said, “Thank you. I thought wisdom meant knowing the answers to all questions. But it turns out it’s about asking the right ones. And about learning to wait.”

“Go in peace,” Vasilisa said. “And remember—the pattern can always be adjusted. The most important thing is to hear where the thread asks to be handled gently.”

He left the manor, and now even the road seemed different to him. He noticed how the sun lay upon the grass, how a bird settled on a branch, how the breeze stirred the leaves. And it felt as though the world itself was hinting at which way to go.

From then on, whenever the young man felt afraid or wanted to solve everything with one sharp move, he would remember the quiet manor, the scent of mint, Vasilisa’s calm hands, and her words. He would take from his pocket the small piece of linen thread she had given him and simply hold it in his palm. And that was enough to hear again the silence where the truest answers hid.

And Vasilisa still sat by the window, weaving her patterns and listening to the forest whispering. And if someone came to her, worn out by haste, she didn’t hand out ready-made solutions. She taught them to listen. Because true wisdom isn’t about knowing everything—it’s about seeing, hearing, and not rushing to tear the thread before you understand what pattern it wants to form.

Koschei the Deathless

In a land where forests stood like a dark, unbroken wall, and rivers ran so fast they never had time to reflect the sky, there rose Koschei's castle. It was nothing like the cheerful palaces you see on postcards. Its walls were built of grey stone, as if each block had been gathered from silence and old, lingering grievances. The windows peered out at the world through narrow slits, and a cold wind always circled above the tower.

People said Koschei wasn't just immortal — he had long stopped noticing how time flowed. Days merged for him into one long shadow, and only the chime of gold reminded him he was still there.

Koschei sat in his hall, where chests piled up to the very ceiling. He sifted through coins, listening to their ringing, and believed that in this sound lay true power. The more gold he had, the stronger his rule, the farther any trouble stayed from him. But trouble didn't come with swords and arrows. It hid in something else — in the fact that there was no one nearby who could simply say, "Hey, you look tired today." Or, "Want me to tell you how the sun set over the forest?"

One day, someone knocked at the castle gates. Not loudly, not threateningly, but as if the knocker wasn't even sure they wanted to come in. Koschei frowned. No one came to him just like that. They came either to threaten or to beg. This knock was neither. It seemed to belong to another world — a world where people first say hello, and only then decide whether you're a friend or a foe.

Koschei stepped into the courtyard. A boy stood at the threshold. Not a hero, not a wizard, not a trickster — just a boy in a patched-up jacket, with freckles on his nose and a little basket in his hands.

"Who are you?" Koschei asked, his voice sharper than he'd meant it to be.

"I was just walking by," the boy replied. "And your castle is so tall, it looks like it's trying to reach the clouds. I thought maybe you're lonely. Or maybe you know where to find the grass that smells like morning."

Koschei almost took a step back. No one ever asked him about grass. No one ever thought he might be lonely.

"What do you want?" he growled.

"Nothing special," the boy said. "I've been gathering herbs for my grandmother, and then I saw the castle and thought: maybe someone here knows how to make her smile again. She hurts all over, but she still bakes pies and says life is good."

Koschei stayed silent. The boy's words didn't break through his armour, but they seemed to catch on something inside him, something long covered in dust.

"Aren't you afraid of me?" Koschei asked. "Everyone knows I'm Koschei the Deathless. I could turn you to stone. I could lock you in the dungeon. I could..."

“Could, could,” the boy interrupted. “But you aren’t doing any of that. You’re standing here, listening. That means you care at least a little.”

Koschei wanted to get angry, to remind the boy who was master here, but instead he found himself asking, “What kind of grass do you need?”

The boy took a few dry stalks from his basket. “This one. They say it helps when your heart aches from weariness. But I don’t know where to find it.”

Koschei looked at the grass as if seeing it for the first time. And suddenly he remembered: far beyond the forest, by the river where the water flowed slowly and whispered to its banks, this grass grew. Almost no one noticed it, because it hid in the shade and didn’t try to be bright. But if you knew where to look, it would reach out to your hand.

“I’ll show you,” Koschei said, surprising even himself.

And they set off. The boy walked beside him, not glancing at Koschei with fear, but simply as if it were the most ordinary thing in the world — to walk side by side along a forest path. On the way, he talked about his grandmother, about the pies, about how she laughed at her own mistakes and said that without them, life wouldn’t be real. Koschei listened and felt something stir quietly inside him, as if a long-forgotten corner of his soul was waking up.

When they reached the place, the grass really was growing by the water’s edge — quiet, modest, with tiny white flowers. The boy picked a few sprigs, wrapped them carefully in a clean scrap of cloth, and smiled.

“Thank you,” he said. “Now I know where to go if my grandmother feels heavy-hearted again.”

He turned to leave, then stopped.

“You should come visit us too,” he added softly. “My grandmother bakes pies every day. And she’s always glad to see anyone who knows how to listen. Even if that someone is Koschei the Deathless.”

Koschei didn’t answer. But when the boy disappeared around the bend, he didn’t go back to his cold castle. He sat down by the river, dipped his fingers into the water, and felt the current — alive and real. For the first time in many years, he didn’t want to hide behind walls and chests. He just wanted to sit and watch the sun set, see the shadows fall across the grass, watch the sky turn violet, then black, and the stars light up.

From then on, Koschei no longer brooded over his gold with such fierce intensity. Sometimes he still returned to the castle, sorted through the coins, and listened to their chime, but now he knew: that wasn’t true power. Power lay elsewhere. In stepping out of the darkness and seeing how the world breathed. In showing someone the path to the right herb. In hearing a simple “Thank you” and understanding that you’d helped someone.

And when the silence grew too heavy and the castle seemed to press down on his shoulders, Koschei would remember the freckles on the boy’s nose and his words. Then he’d take a small pouch,

put a few dried sprigs inside — not for magic, but just to remember that somewhere there was a home where they baked pies and welcomed anyone who knew how to listen.

Sometimes he even went there. The grandmother greeted him without fear, poured him some tea, and said, “So, did you bring more stories from faraway lands today?” And the boy would smile and whisper, quietly so Koschei wouldn’t hear, “See, she’s happy. That means you’re needed too.”

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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