

The Little Grey Mouse Part V:

The Casket

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French

Intermediate

6 min read

Thus passed the entire day. Rosalie suffered cruelly with thirst.

“Ought I not suffer even more than I do?” she said to herself, “in order to punish me for all I have made my father and my cousin endure? I will await in this terrible spot the dawning of my fifteenth birthday.”

The night was falling when an old woman who was passing by, approached and said:—

“My beautiful child, will you oblige me by taking care of this casket, which is very heavy to carry, while I go a short distance to see one of my relations?”

“Willingly, madam,” replied Rosalie, who was very obliging. The old woman placed the casket in her hands, saying:—

“Many thanks, my beautiful child! I shall not be absent long. But I entreat you not to look in this casket, for it contains things—things such as you have never seen—and as you will never have an opportunity to see again. Do not handle it rudely, for it is of very fragile ware and would be very easily broken and then you would see what it contains and no one ought to see what is there concealed.”

The old woman went off after saying this. Rosalie placed the casket near her and reflected on all the events which had just passed. It was now night and the old woman did not return. Rosalie now threw her eyes on the casket and saw with surprise that it illuminated the ground all around her.

“What can there be in this casket which is so brilliant?” said she.

She turned it round and round and regarded it from every side but nothing could explain this extraordinary light and she placed it carefully upon the ground, saying:—

“Of what importance is it to me what this casket contains? It is not mine but belongs to the old woman who confided it to me. I will not think of it again for fear I may be tempted to open it.”

In fact, she no longer looked at it and endeavored not to think of it; she now closed her eyes, resolved to wait patiently till the dawn.

“In the morning I shall be fifteen years of age. I shall see my father and Gracious and will have nothing more to fear from the wicked fairy.”

“Rosalie! Rosalie!” said suddenly the small voice of the little mouse, “I am near you once more. I am no longer your enemy and to prove that I am not, if you wish it, I will show you what this casket contains.”

Rosalie did not reply.

“Rosalie, do you not hear what I propose? I am your friend, believe me.”

No reply.

Then the little gray mouse, having no time to lose, sprang upon the casket and began to gnaw the lid.

“Monster!” cried Rosalie, seizing the casket and pressing it against her bosom, “if you touch this casket again I will wring your neck.”

The mouse cast a diabolical glance upon Rosalie but it dared not brave her anger. While it was meditating some other means of exciting the curiosity of Rosalie, a clock struck twelve. At the same moment the mouse uttered a cry of rage and disappointment and said to Rosalie:—

“Rosalie, the hour of your birth has just sounded. You are now fifteen; you have nothing more to fear from me. You are now beyond my power and my temptations as are also your odious father and hated prince. As to myself, I am compelled to keep this ignoble form of a mouse until I can tempt some young girl beautiful and well born as yourself to fall into my snares. Adieu, Rosalie! you can now open the casket.”

Saying these words, the mouse disappeared.

Rosalie, wisely distrusting these words of her enemy, would not follow her last counsel, and resolved to guard the casket carefully till the dawn. Scarcely had she taken this resolution, when an owl, which was flying above her head, let a stone fall upon the casket, which broke into a thousand pieces. Rosalie uttered a cry of terror and at the same moment she saw before her the queen of the fairies, who said:—

“Come Rosalie, you have finally triumphed over the cruel enemy of your family. I will now restore you to your father but first you must eat and drink, as you are much exhausted.”

The fairy now presented her with a rare fruit, of which a single mouthful satisfied both hunger and thirst. Then a splendid chariot, drawn by two dragons, drew up before the fairy. She entered and commanded Rosalie to do the same. Rosalie, as soon as she recovered from her surprise, thanked the queen of the fairies with all her heart for her protection and asked if she was not to see her father and the prince Gracious.

“Your father awaits you in the palace of the prince.”

“But, madam, I thought that the palace of the prince was destroyed and he himself wounded sadly?”

“That, Rosalie, was only an illusion to fill you with horror and remorse at the result of your curiosity and to prevent you from falling before the third temptation. You will soon see the palace of the prince just as it was before you tore the cloth which covered the precious tree he destined for you.”

As the fairy said this the chariot drew up before the palace steps. Rosalie's father and the prince were awaiting her with all the court. Rosalie first threw herself in her father's arms, then in those of the prince, who seemed to have no remembrance of the fault she had committed the day before. All was ready for the marriage ceremony which was to be celebrated immediately. All the good fairies assisted at this festival which lasted several days.

Rosalie's father lived with his child and she was completely cured of her curiosity. She was tenderly loved by Prince Gracious whom she loved fondly all her life. They had beautiful children, for whom they chose powerful fairies as godmothers in order that they might be protected against the wicked fairies and genii.

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