The Girl Skazka

Long, long ago, back when fairies and angels flew across the earth, when flowers and stars talked with children, when magical fruits grew on trees, there lived in a far-off land a little poor girl named Skazka. She was a complete orphan, and no one looked after her: she had no home to live in, no little bed to sleep in, and hunger and thirst often tormented her.

The little one bore it and bore it, and at last she decided to leave her native city and go wherever her eyes led her.

She walked a long time through dense forests and wide fields until she came to the kingdom of the Sun. Oh, how hot it was there! All around there was only molten gold and silver. The Sun sat in such a dazzling castle that the little one nearly went blind when she looked at it.

"Do not come, do not come here, I shall melt you! Go away quickly from here, or you will melt!" the Sun shouted at her.

The girl was frightened, took to her feet, and came to a dense forest.

"Where are you going?" the forest deer asked her.

"I do not know myself!" the little one answered. "I lived with people, and they mistreated me; I came to the Sun, and it frightened me! Where am I to go now?"

Other beasts came out of the thicket; they all gathered around Skazka and, not knowing how to help her in her sorrow, looked sadly at the little stranger.

"Would you like me to carry you to the kingdom of Fantasia? There no one will harm you. The kind fairies will cherish and love you," a horned stag said to the little one.

"Please do!" the girl rejoiced, and she climbed onto his back, encircling his neck with her little white hands.

The wind flies fast, but faster runs the slender-legged stag with his light burden; rivers are nothing to him to swim across, forests and fields are nothing to him to run through.

At last they reached the magic forest; not a single sunbeam penetrated there; everything was covered with a pale-blue glow, pleasant to the eye.

The trees and grass gleamed with bright colors, the birds sang wondrous songs, and the silver streams answered them; at every step there were marvelous grottoes and picturesque crags.

"We have arrived!" said the stag. "It is time for me to go home, but if you need me, just call out: 'Sadi!' and I shall appear at once."

Skazka embraced and kissed her friend, said farewell to him, and when he had vanished from sight, she went to wander through the unfamiliar forest.

Everywhere she came upon strange, unseen objects, each lovelier than the last. Suddenly she stopped: before her, deep within a crystal crag, was a silver grotto, all overgrown with bright greenery and flowers. Soft music sounded all around; when Skazka looked more closely at the flowers and leaves, she saw that in every rose sat a marvelous tiny fairy with blue and pink little wings, and beneath every little leaf lay pretty birds in green nests.

In the middle of the grotto a pearl fountain played, constantly changing colors and shades: now it seemed red, now blue, now pink, now it broke up into fine spray.

Skazka clasped her little hands in delight and whispered: "God, how beautiful this is!"

Evening came imperceptibly; the walls of the grotto spread apart, receding farther and farther into the depths. Before the enchanted girl's eyes opened a sea blue as enamel, with nymphs, swans, and airy boats floating upon it. In bright ribbons the frolicsome mermaids circled and whirled above the surface, the great stars gazed down from on high into the transparent water, and on the horizon the moon rose majestically and slowly.

The fountain seemed to catch fire, its spray shone, and from its midst appeared the queen of this realm, the kind fairy Fantasia.

"Hello, dear Skazka! Welcome to us!" she said to the dumbfounded little one, and her voice rang like a silver bell.

Skazka wanted to tell the kind Fantasia how much she liked it here, but she grew shy and lowered her little head.

"Oh, how beautiful, just like a magic dream!" the girl answered.

"And would you like to stay here?"

"I would!" the little one said hastily.

She had scarcely uttered the word when tiny nymphs surrounded her and led her into the queen's castle.

And Skazka began to live among them.

Everyone loved her, but the queen most of all: she so loved the orphan that she never parted from her, by day or by night.

Skazka slept in a golden shell, beside Fantasia's mother-of-pearl cradle.

She flew with her friend to the kingdoms beyond the clouds, to the angels and stars, played with the moon, went down to the sea bottom to the fish, entered the cups of flowers, the nests of the little birds, frolicked with the little fairies in the sunbeams, and rested by the wandering fires beneath the broad leaves of the fern.

"You must surely be missing your old world here with us?" Fantasia said to her one day. "Would you like to go back to that world you came from?"

"No, no!" the girl cried out in alarm.

"You are so meek and kind, we love you so much, ask us for whatever you wish!" said the little fairies. "Would you like to become a beautiful rose or a fragrant lily of the valley?"

"No," Skazka shook her little head.

"Well then, a bright-winged bird?"

"No!"

"A motley butterfly or a sparkling little star?"

"No!" the girl interrupted, weeping. "I do not want to leave you, my beloved forest, my dear grotto!"

"Then stay with us, kind child, but still we shall bestow gifts upon you. With these gifts, in your hours of leisure, you shall go into the world of people, and there you shall bring forgetfulness and happiness."

"We give you eternal youth, carefreeness, and cheerfulness," said the sea nymphs.

"We give you little swift shoes, which in an instant will carry you wherever you please," said the little forest folk, the elves.

"From us take beauty and a loving, kind heart, equally able to love rich and poor, happy and unhappy, great and small," said the little fairies.

"We give you a motley cloak: clad in it, you will be able to turn all that is everyday, poor, and pitiful into something festive and splendid," added the frolicsome mermaids.

"From us take the gift of telling tales and amusing," said the kind dreams.

"And I, my darling, shall never part with you! Wherever you go, there I shall go too," added Fantasia.

"Oh, these gifts I accept with delight!" Skazka answered, kissing her friends.

From that time on, the two wondrous girls, in red little swift shoes and a motley flying cloak, go about all the houses, all the corners where people live.

Especially long and lovingly do they stay with the children. In sleep they whisper wondrous dreams to them, from which the little ones' cheeks flush and smiles appear on their sleepy faces.

In waking hours they carry them into the world of fantasy and dreams, where the children see crystal castles, knights, blue rivers, magic forests, and wondrous beasts.

And everyone began to live better from the time when the little ones Skazka and Fantasia began to visit people.