

Candles

Once upon a time there lived a large wax candle; it certainly knew its own worth. "I am made of wax and molded in a form!" it said. "I burn brighter and longer than other candles; my place is in a chandelier or in a silver candlestick!"

"What a happy life that must be!" said the tallow candle. "As for me, I am only made of tallow: my wick was dipped in tallow, and thus I came to be! Yet I console myself with the fact that I am a proper thick candle, not some shabby little thing! There are indeed candles that are dipped only twice, whereas I was dipped in tallow a whole eight times before I finally grew properly fat. I am content! Of course, it is better, more aristocratic, to be born a wax candle than a tallow one, but we do not choose our position in the world ourselves! Wax candles will find themselves in the ballroom, in a crystal chandelier; I shall remain in the kitchen, but even that is no bad place—the kitchen feeds the whole house!"

"But there is something more important than food!" said the wax candle. "Good society! To witness all that splendor, to shine oneself!... This evening there is a ball at the house; soon they will take me and all our family away from here!"

Hardly had she spoken these words when all the wax candles were taken, but along with them the tallow candle was taken as well. The lady herself took her in her elegant hand and carried her into the kitchen. There stood a little boy with a basket full of potatoes. Several apples were added too. All this the kind lady gave to the poor child.

"And here is a candle for you besides!" she added. "Your mother will be working again tonight—she will need the candle!"

The lady's little daughter stood nearby, and upon hearing the word "tonight," she exclaimed joyfully:

"I shall not sleep tonight either! We are having a ball, and I shall wear a dress with red ribbons!"

How brightly her eyes sparkled! Where could the wax candle compare in brilliance to that pair of childish eyes!

"Simply delightful!" thought the tallow candle. "I shall never forget those eyes! And perhaps I shall never get to see them again!"

Then she was laid in the basket, covered with a lid, and the boy carried the basket home.

"Wherever shall I end up now!" thought the candle. "Among poor people; there, perhaps, they won't even have a copper candlestick for me, while the wax candle will sit in silver, admiring noble society! How pleasant it must be to illuminate chosen company! But fate made me a tallow candle, not a wax one!"

And so the candle arrived among poor people, at a widow's with three children, in a low little room situated directly opposite the rich house.

"God reward the kind lady for all this!" said the mother. "What a wonderful candle! It will burn past midnight."

And the candle was lit.

"Ach-choo-choo!" she sneezed. "Phew, how these matches stink of sulfur! Surely such things would never be offered to a wax candle in a rich house!"

There, too, the candles were lit, and bright light streamed from the windows onto the street. Carriages kept arriving at the house with elegantly dressed guests. Music began to play.

"So it has begun there!" thought the tallow candle, recalling the little girl's face, which shone brighter than all the wax candles in the world. "I shall never forget it!"

At that moment the youngest girl in the family approached the table and wrapped one little arm around her brother's neck, the other around her sister: she had to tell them something very important, which could only be whispered!

"Tonight—just imagine!" she said. "We shall have hot potatoes!"

And her eyes sparkled with delight. The candle shone straight upon her face and saw there the same joy, the same happiness, that had illuminated the rich girl's face as she dreamed of red ribbons!

"Can hot potatoes really be as delightful as red ribbons?" thought the candle. "Yet the little ones rejoice just the same!" And she sneezed, that is, she crackled; tallow candles know no other way to sneeze.

The table was set, and they began eating the potatoes. How delicious they were! A miracle! It was a veritable feast, and for dessert each received an apple! After the meal the youngest girl recited a short verse:

I thank You, dear God,

For feeding me once more!

Amen!

"Did I say it well, Mama?" she then asked.

"One must not ask about that!" answered the mother. "You must think not of yourself, but only of God, who fed you!"

The children lay down to sleep, the mother kissed them all, and they immediately fell asleep, while the mother herself sat down to sew and worked far past midnight to earn bread for herself and her children. Meanwhile, in the rich chambers, candles shone and music thundered. Yet the stars twinkled in the sky equally bright and welcoming for both the rich and the poor.

"In truth, I have spent a splendid evening!" thought the tallow candle. "Was it any better for the wax candles in their silver candlesticks? If only I could learn that before I burn away!"

And once again she remembered the two equally radiant faces: one illuminated by a wax candle, the other by a tallow one.

That is all.