

# THE DAY GIRL AND THE NIGHT BOY<sup>1</sup>

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As the sun sinks down into its bed and before the moon blossoms into a silvery white flower, the firefly remembers the story of the day girl and the night boy and their twilight time together. Though the two did not know the tiny creature like their other friends, they loved him because his streak in the black night captured their spirit. It is the firefly who keeps their story alive. . .

It was near dusk and the sky was beginning to get sleepy. The lily of the valley stood on the gently cascading hill, listening to the river's steady lullaby. The river sang to the lily in deep, soft syllables. The wind, whom the lily called Forever—for she always touched all creatures, whispering to them wild, yet somehow comforting tales—tousled the petals of all the lilies in the garden.

The day girl, Elsie, knew nothing of the darkness, the stars and the moon. She thought it was dangerous for girls to be caught in the night. Fearing night's approach, Elsie said goodnight to her children in the garden, to Endure—the river, Forever—the wind, and Vigor—the mighty oak. Vigor sighed as Forever hummed in her ear. The long furrows in Vigor's face suggested that she had heard Forever's story before, but it was a tale that was never old and always welcome, like those told to awaken the child's spirit in an old soul.

Just as Elsie was wiping the dirt from her feet to enter the house before darkness fell, the night boy, Christopher, came up the path

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1. This story is inspired by the Victorian fairy tale, "The Day Boy and the Night Girl" by George MacDonald (1879), reprinted in *Victorian Fairy Tales: The Revolt of the Fairies and Elves*, edited by Jack Zipes (1987). MacDonald tells the story of Photogen and Nycteris and the witch who leads them to know only the day and the night, respectively. The two protagonists must overcome the limits of their social conditioning to discover their identities, despite their fears of the unknown.

2. I am moved by the powerful simplicity of children's stories to represent complex principles of life. This story attempts to illustrate that although men and women are often characterized by their differences and stratified into separate spheres, we can obtain great rewards in the union of shared experience and understanding. Self discovery occurs when one reaches out. Social progress comes from valuing "the other."

next to her garden. He scuffed his feet and kicked a stone into the bed of Elsie's lilies.

"Excuse me, but you'll wake them. They need their rest or else they'll be tired when the sun wants them to grow and Forever wants them to play," said Elsie.

Christopher was quite startled that this odd girl whom he had seen only in her garden had actually spoken to him about the lilies—things she obviously thought were alive, and which he thought were just flowers.

"What did you say?" he asked, taken aback.

"Please. I've worked so hard to help them to stand strong on their own," she implored.

Christopher thought for a moment and then followed the track of the stone he had kicked.

"Oh, you mean the flowers? Is that it? Is that what you worked on? Is that what you do?" he questioned.

Elsie was confused by Christopher's barrage of questions. She did not understand what he meant by his strange, and seemingly disdainful tone of voice. Every day, from the moment the sun poked his head from the cover of the horizon, she looked after, responded to, and cared for her lilies. The dirt she now had on her feet, the dampness she felt on her back, and the ache she felt in her limbs told her she worked hard. Elsie wondered whether Christopher could not see this. In fact, Elsie decided that she was offended by Christopher's disrespect for her and her lilies.

"Please be careful in passing. I must go for I cannot see the sun anymore," she pleaded.

With that, she was gone. Christopher was shocked at the abruptness of both her stay and exit, but he found her actions consistent with her oddity. Nonetheless, as he walked home under the stars, he picked up the stone he had kicked and placed it with its siblings in Endure's pebbly channel.

The following day Elsie joined her friends early. The day seemed still and she suspected Forever had matters elsewhere. At dusk, she headed inside the house, but not before Christopher stopped her.

"Why do you give so much time to them?" he asked.

"Because I love them. I love Endure, Forever, and Vigor. I love all the things that grow in the sun. I love the Day and the life it brings me," she spoke with a tone that suggested it would be bizarre if others didn't understand her view.

"But what about the night," Christopher probed.

With Christopher's question, Elsie suddenly became frightened.

"The night is dangerous. There is no light. I have to leave," she cried.

Before she departed, Christopher called to her.

"Elsie, there is nothing to be afraid of. I always travel during the night. Come with me, I'll show you," he yelled.

Although Elsie heard him, she left quickly, for she feared the night. Christopher, saddened to see his new friend scared, walked home, feeling Forever brush the side of his face.

"I know you're here," he said, "and, of course, I will come tomorrow."

The following day, with the sun at his peak in the sky, Elsie was surprised to see Christopher.

"What are you doing here?" she asked, "I thought you only traveled at night?"

"I came to see you and to visit with Endure, Vigor, and the lilies," he replied.

"What about Forever?" Elsie questioned.

"Oh, we are old friends," he said with a smirk.

And so the two spent the day in the garden working harder than they had ever worked before. When twilight approached, Elsie strode toward the house, but Christopher called to her.

"Please stay. I promise there will be light," he said.

Elsie hesitated.

"I understand if you want to go," he added.

Elsie knew she had not seen the last of Christopher in the garden for he, too, had grown to love its life and its spirit. Despite her fear, she trusted her friend, as he had trusted her. Elsie decided to stay.

Trusting the darkness behind her own eyelids more than the unknown darkness of night, Elsie kept her eyes shut tightly until she heard the voices of her friends. Endure babbled, Vigor rustled, and Forever whispered.

"Open your eyes and you will see," Christopher said.

Slowly Elsie opened her eyes and beheld all of her friends. She could see them because of the tiny lamps in the sky.

"Who turned those on?" she asked.

"They're stars," Christopher replied.

At that moment Elsie saw amidst these stars in the deep purple sky, the largest, most beautiful flower. It illuminated the ground with a silver glow. Christopher saw the awe in Elsie's face.

"It is the moon," he said.

Elsie was stirred by the moon's light; she journeyed farther out into the night and was not afraid.

Suddenly, Elsie hastened Christopher to come quickly.

"What's wrong?" he asked.

"Nothing at all," she said, holding a tiny firefly on her finger. "Watch. It shines like the day, yet thrives in the dark night. It is you and me—the day girl and the night boy."

With that, the firefly flew from Elsie's finger into the night and into the following days, carrying their story. And Elsie and Christopher spent many more days in the garden and many more nights under the stars, both together and alone.