

THE FAIRY'S GIFT

(A STORY)

By Antonio C. Muñoz



MARTIN lived with his parents in a small house in a barrio near a forest. His father was a carpenter. His mother washed clothes. They earned very little but they were contented. Martin did all he could to help his parents although he was too young to do hard work. He was a good boy, helpful, kind, honest, and courageous. Everybody in the neighborhood liked him.

One day while he was in the woods gathering wild berries, a beautiful lady came to him. She was clad in a white dress decorated with white flowers. A chain of sampaguitas encircled her neck.

"Martin," she said, "come to me for I have something to say to you."

Martin went down the tree and approached the lady. The latter put her hand gently on Martin's shoulder and smiled at him.

"I have been watching you for a long time, Martin," she addressed the astonished boy. "I always follow you whenever you go away from your home, although you have never seen me until now."

"Wh—, who are you?" Martin stammered.

"Just call me your Fairy Godmother," replied the lady.

"Why do you follow me?" asked Martin.

"Because I want no harm to fall on you. A boy as young as you are should not go far from his home without someone to protect him from evil. Without my protection, every step you take in this place leads you to destruction," the lady said to him.

"But why do you like me and why have you taken the trouble of protecting me?" Martin was inquisitive.

"It is my duty to protect good boys," the lady explained.

The fairy then pulled a needle out of her hair.

"This," she said, "is the gift. It has four charms. They are symbols of helpfulness, courage, honesty, and kindness. You possess these four qualities and I want you to help other boys who disregard them. Push it through the skin of a thoughtless, dishonest, or cruel boy and he will become good. Thrust it deep into the body of anyone who wishes to do you harm and no matter how strong or brave he is, he will be at your mercy. Go home now and good luck to you. Don't tell anyone about it. Good-bye."

The fairy disappeared and Martin went home.

Martin set out to gather wild berries in the woods on the following day.

"Don't stay there very long, Martin," said his mother. "Take this little provision with you. Be sure to come back before the sun sets this afternoon."

On the way Martin saw a boy teasing an old woman who was begging for something to eat. The rascal would pull the ragged clothes of the beggar. Then he would toss pebbles on her back.

"Don't do that," Martin shouted.

"Mind your own business," the boy shouted back. "If you have nothing to do here, you had better go away before you force me to give you a lesson which you will never forget for twenty years. I hate to do it although it's good medicine for boys of your kind."

Martin approached the two and said, "Don't you see that the old woman is suffering?"

"Shut up and beat it before I lose my temper," the boy warned him.

Martin was now very near the boy. "Look!" he exclaimed. "A policeman is coming this way."

The boy looked back and Martin pricked him on the arm with the magic needle. The effect was wonderful. The boy turned slowly around. A wonderful change swept over him. His face was a picture of kindness. He looked at Martin and then at the old woman. Tears rolled down his cheeks. He ran to the beggar and kissed her wrinkled hands.

"Pardon me, oh, pardon me. I did not know what I was doing," he sobbed.

The old woman kissed the boy on the forehead and went away.

The boy did not know anything about the needle for the prick did not give him any pain.

"Thank you and pardon me, my friend. I did not mean what I said to you an hour ago," he apologized.

Martin went on. As he was passing by a garden, he saw another boy going into it through a hole in the fence. The boy had a basket. After feeling sure that nobody in the house was looking at him, he climbed the orange tree which was laden with fruit. As soon as his basket was full, he climbed down the tree and then ran to the hole in the fence.

Just as he was picking up his basket, Martin laid his hand on his shoulder and asked, "Is that your garden?"

"No, but it's none of your business," the boy replied.

In a flash the needle went through the boy's skin on the back. The boy hung his head in shame. He was changed.

"Please tell me what to do," he begged. "I did not know that it was all wrong."

"You had better take the fruit to the owner," Martin suggested. "Tell him the truth."

The boy went to the house. The owner was reading on the veranda. The boy handed him the basket and told him all that happened. He promised that he would never do such a thing again.

The man gave him back the basket and said, "I am very glad that you realize that what you did was wrong and that you will never do it again. The fruits are yours. I give them to you. Whenever you want to eat some, just come to me and you will have them."

The boy thanked the man and then went home. Martin's face was a picture of satisfaction. He continued his way to the woods.

Just as he was about to enter the forest, he heard a woman calling her son who was playing on the road. The former was splitting wood for fuel.

"Come, Jose," she called, "take this fuel to the kitchen."

"Not now, mother," the boy said. "I'll do it later."

"Why don't you do it now?" asked Martin.

The boy showed him the marbles, grinned, and went on with his play. Martin got his needle and thrust it into the boy's back. Jose dropped his marbles and stood up. He seized Martin's hand, pressed it, and then ran to his mother. He gathered the pieces of wood and took them to the kitchen. He came out again with a bucket in his hand. Martin saw him running towards the brook.

"Good Fairy Godmother," Martin said to himself.



He was in the woods. There was a tree heavily laden with ripe berries. He climbed it. As soon as his sack was full, he climbed down the tree. Just as he was ready to go home, he noticed that something was coiling around his legs. It was a snake big enough to swallow him. He wanted to run. He could not. The snake encircled his body as far as the waist. As his hands were yet free, he lost no time in drawing out the needle and drove it deep into the body of the snake. The latter loosened its hold. It dropped to the ground wriggling. Then it lay still and Martin knew that it was dead.

"You see, Martin," said someone behind him, "if I had not given you protection, the snake would have crushed you to death."

Martin looked behind. His Fairy Godmother was there.

"Thank you for giving me the needle, my Fairy Godmother," he said as he bent down to kiss her hand.

"The power is not wholly in the needle, Martin," she explained. "It is also in you. Your fine character is your most powerful protection. Give that needle to a bad boy—one who is cruel, disobedient, thoughtless, or dishonest and the needle will not do him any good. Give it to a good boy—one who is helpful, obedient, kind, honest, or thoughtful and the needle's power will always protect him from all harm. Remember, Martin, that it is one's good character that protects him from all sorts of danger. Be good always, Martin. Good-bye."

The fairy disappeared and Martin went home happy.