

## The Magic Pouch

THERE CAME A TIME on earth when disease and famine filled the lands. The people had to stay at home, the streets were empty, and the children had to do school at their kitchen tables. The people planted bigger gardens to grow food for their families and neighbors. Mothers and fathers, siblings, and grandparents spent more time than usual telling stories, cooking together, walking in the forest, and taking care of each other.

There was one girl named Faye who lived with her mother and her sisters in a cottage at the edge of town up against the forest. She spent her days as most 12 year olds then, helping with chores, trying to keep up with learning from books, and then playing and exploring in the yard to keep herself busy when she couldn't visit friends or go to school. She often felt lonely and would sit in the oak tree looking out over the village and the forest beyond.

One night she had a dream that someone spoke to her. The voice said, "look under your pillow at dawn. There will be a pouch made of leather. Put it around your neck and it will lead you on a journey."

Faye woke the next morning and put her hand under her pillow. To her surprise there was a pouch of the softest leather with a fibrous cord. She slipped it in her pocket, not wanting to test its magic just yet.

After she had helped make breakfast and clear the table and wash up, she ran outside to the mossy stones at the edge of the forest. First, making sure that her siblings hadn't followed her, she took out the pouch and put it around her neck. Nothing dramatic happened and she wondered what the voice in her dream had meant. She did have an urge to explore the forest that day though so she hopped over the mossy stones and started walking down the warm pine needle path.

She stopped to see the painted trillium emerging from its throne of big green leaves, and listened for the hermit thrush singing like a silver flute in the trees. Spring had finally arrived and the earth was waking up from a long sleep. She walked deeper and deeper into the forest until she came to the darkest corner where the tallest hemlock trees grew.

*Why did I come here?* she thought and just then she noticed something white to one side. She walked closer and there was a bush with large white blossoms. It looked like an old woman bent over and hobbling through the forest, her arms outstretched offering something beautiful to the world. All down her dark wrinkled arms were white blossom bracelets. The flowers were large and had bigger petals on the outside and tiny flowers in the middle. It was the most beautiful plant Faye had ever seen. As she peered at it, it began to speak in the voice of an old woman.

“My name is Grandmother Hobblebush, and I am your mother’s mother. Take one of my petals and put it in your pouch and remember that even during the darkest times, beauty can be found in unexpected places.”

Faye gently took a petal from one of the blossom bracelets on grandmother’s arm and thanked her before putting it in the pouch around her neck.

And then she continued on.

Faye walked and walked until she came upon a small pool surrounded by rocks. She heard something trickling and bubbling from underneath the rocks and so she bent down and lifted the rocks to the side. There was a freshwater spring bubbling up from deep inside the earth. Faye put her hand into the water and it was cold as ice. Then the water began to talk in the voice of an old old woman. “I am great grandmother Earth Water. I am your grandmother’s mother. Inside your pouch you will find a small jar, fill it with my water and remember that even during sparse times, the earth will provide for you if you can hear her talking.”

Faye filled the jar with ice cold spring water that had bubbled up from deep inside the earth and thanked great grandmother Earth Water.

She put the stones back into place above the spring and continued on.

Faye came to the end of the forest and there was a lake and on the other side of the lake a rounded mountain rose up. It seemed to call to Faye and so she hopped in a small boat that was nestled in the reeds on the shore and paddled to the other side to climb the mountain. She climbed and she climbed and finally came to the summit. And as she stood on the ancient bedrock of the top of the mountain, it began to speak to her in the voice of an old old old woman, whose rocky shoulders were wrapped in clouds.

“ I am great great grandmother mountain, your great grandmother’s mother. Choose a small stone from the ground near your feet and put it in your pouch to remind you that the earth is always here to hold you and make your spirit strong again.”

Faye thanked great great grandmother mountain and hiked back down to the boat. She paddled across the lake and began to head home through the forest. As she neared the village the sunset cast light in among the trees, golden slanting sunlight that touched the forest floor. Faye stopped to warm her toes in the sunlit moss and suddenly the voice of an old old old old woman began to speak, “ I am great great great grandmother Light in the Forest, your great great grandmother’s mother. Hold your pouch in the sunlight slanting through the trees and it will be filled with the warmth of the sun. Whenever you feel cold and sad, hold the pouch and the ancient light of your ancestors will make you warm again.” Faye did as she was told and the pouch gleamed in the sunlight and she thanked her great great great grandmother Light in the Forest.

Faye walked home after that with the pouch still around her neck, filled with the gifts from her grandmothers. And ever after that Faye was able to weather the hardships that came up in her life, as she knew that the women in her family who had come before her were not only out there in the earth itself, but also inside of her, in her spirit, in her DNA. This made her feel strong and happy to know that whatever happened in life, she was never alone.

Eventually disease and famine left the land and good times returned, but Faye wore the pouch around her neck for the rest of her life.

**THE END**

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