

The Golden Lantern
A Story
Stephen Spitalny

This story came to me when preparing for a Lantern Festival. I told the story and wrote it down several days later. Since then, with colleagues, I have revised it and edited out words that seemed unnecessary, particularly adjectives and adverbs. The movement, the story, are the important part for me, not the soul coloring that adjectives and adverbs bring. I feel that this is a true story of a spiritual reality and potential that lives in every human being.

Once upon a time there was a girl named Sophie. Her eyes were shining. Her mother and father had died and she lived alone in a house at the edge of the forest. Her sole inheritance was a golden lantern. The light of the golden lantern was always shining.

Whatever Sophie put her hand to went well. Each day she brought fresh water from the stream for cooking and washing. She tended her garden. She collected fallen branches for her fire. She always took the golden lantern with her. The creatures of the forest were her friends. They were made welcome in her house and what food she had she shared with them.

As she grew older, the light of her eyes grew dim. One evening in Fall when she was in the forest and it grew dark, she noticed that her golden lantern was not shining as brightly as it had been. Over the next days, she saw that the light of the golden lantern was growing dimmer and dimmer.

One evening when Sophie was gathering wood for the fire, she met a traveler and asked him, "Why are you going through the forest with no lantern and yet the way is bright for you?"

"I am the king's youngest son. I live on the other side of the forest at the foot of the mountain of the Sun. I have come to see the girl with the golden lantern and shining eyes because they do not shine as brightly as they once did."

"Oh, but it is only my golden lantern that is growing dim," she said. "Will you help me rekindle it with a spark from the sun?"

"If that is your wish, come with me," he said.

He held out his hand and together they went through the forest. At last they came to the foot of the mountain of the Sun and began to climb. They climbed higher and higher and higher. The stars were sparkling and smiling as they made their way toward the top of the mountain. When they neared the peak and reached a small plateau, the prince said, "You must go the rest of the way by yourself. I will wait here."

So, Sophie went on. It was a steep climb and she had to crawl on her hands and knees. Finally she reached the peak of the mountain of the Sun. The first rays of dawn were at hand and reds and yellows and purples and pinks were dancing across the sky. And then the sky filled with golden light, and the warm face of Father Sun was shining over the world. Sophie called out, "Father Sun. My lantern needs kindling. Please send a spark of your light that it may brighten my way in the dark world."

Father Sun looked down and said, "My light is always shining even when you cannot see it. It is always with you. So, look at your lantern, my child. Look, it shines brightly. And as long as the

light shines in your heart the light in your lantern will shine. And all will be well.” Then Sophie’s eyes were shining again.

“Thank you Father Sun,” Sophie said, and she started down. When she came to the prince she saw his eyes were shining. Then she took his hand and they went down the mountain.

Together they returned to Sophie’s house. Then the wedding was celebrated amid great rejoicing. And the golden lantern shines its warm light into their home and never grows dim.