Chapter Five

Ludmilla and the Spark of Courage

Ludmilla was a little princess who could already do a great many things. She could shout very loudly. She could say exactly what she wanted. And she could explain wonderfully well why something was really not a good idea just now.

But there was one thing Ludmilla did not like at all: new things. New paths. New tasks. New situations. Whenever something was unfamiliar, she felt strange inside, almost as if she had a tummy ache. Then she preferred to say, “No.” Or, “Later.” Or, “I can't do that.” Or even, “I'm still too little.”

But Ludmilla was not really so little. She was simply careful. Very careful.

One morning, while helping her get dressed, Maria said quite casually, “Today, perhaps you could walk to the big fountain in the garden all by yourself.”

Ludmilla froze. Alone? Without holding hands? With no one beside her?

“The garden is much too big,” she explained seriously. “And the paths are long. And there are shadows. And perhaps... stones.”



Maria smiled. “You don't have to run. Just walk. One step at a time.”

Ludmilla nodded, but her heart beat much faster than usual. It did little somersaults with excitement. Later, as she stepped through the garden door, everything suddenly seemed enormous. The trees looked taller. The hedges much thicker. And the fountain... very far away.

“I'd better go back,” she murmured. “Trying is enough, really.”

Then something suddenly glowed at her feet. A tiny point of light. As small as a firefly, but warm and friendly.

“What are you?” Ludmilla whispered.



The little light hopped once. Then she heard a quiet, cheerful voice.

“I am your Spark of Courage.”

Ludmilla folded her arms. “I haven't got any courage.”

The spark gave a soft laugh. “Yes, you have. Yours is just young. Courage always starts small. Otherwise I'd be a great roaring bonfire!”

Ludmilla had to giggle. A little.

The Spark of Courage hopped a few steps ahead. “Come on. Just one step. If it doesn't work, we can both go back.”



Ludmilla thought about it. One step was not really such a big thing. She put one foot in front of the other. The spark grew a little brighter.

“You see?” he whispered. “Courage grows when you use it. Like muscles. Only without the exercises.”

They went on. Very slowly. Sometimes Ludmilla stopped. Then the spark waited patiently.



When a bird suddenly fluttered into the air, she jumped.

“I didn't plan that!”

The spark laughed softly. “Courage doesn't plan everything either. It just happens.”

They carried on, all the way to the fountain. When Ludmilla stood in front of it, she was amazed. She had done it! It had not been so far after all.



The spark was much bigger now. Not enormous, but warm, steady and friendly.

“Will you stay with me for ever now?” she asked.



The spark nodded. “Of course. I'm not out here. I live in here.”

He gently tapped her chest.

From that day on, Ludmilla understood:

Courage is not loud.

Courage does not shout.

Courage is not a knight with a sword.

Courage is a little light that says, “I'm a bit afraid, but I'll try anyway.”

And sometimes, when Ludmilla did not want to try something new, she heard the Spark of Courage whisper, “Just one step.”

Now and then, she would say, “All right. But only ONE.”

Usually, one became two. And occasionally even three...

