
Star of Light

Patricia St. John

Revised by Mary Mills

Illustrated by Gary Rees

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CHICAGO

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Revised Edition

It has been over fifty years since the first edition of Patricia St. John's *Star of Light* was published. It has been reprinted many times and has become a classic of its time.

In this new edition, Mary Mills has sensitively adapted the language of the book for a new generation of children, while preserving Patricia St. John's skill as a storyteller.

Kinza

A little girl came running down the side of the mountain one midday in spring. Pulling her cotton dress up around her knees, she skipped as lightly as a lamb on her bare brown feet, leaping over the bright orange marigolds that shone up at her. Baby goats jumped among the wildflowers, and the storks had *Star of Light* (Patricia St John Series) begun to build their nests on the tops of the thatched houses.

Rahma was seven *Star of Light* (Patricia St John Series) years old. She was small because she never had enough to eat. Her stepfather and his elder wife didn't like her and sometimes beat her. Her clothes were very ragged, and she had to work very hard. But today she was going to have a treat, and nothing could spoil her happiness. She had been asked to look after the goats alone while her brother went on some mysterious trip with their mother.

She was free and alone with just the goats and storks for company—two whole hours to play in the sunshine with the goat kids, with no one to shout at her, or make her grind the millstone, or carry heavy buckets of water.

She spotted Hamid, her brother, rounding up a couple of mischievous black kids who Star of Light (Patricia St John Series) were trying to get into a patch of young wheat. Spring was making Star of Light (Patricia St John Series) them feel excited, and they were jumping about all over the place. Hamid joined in with them and then Rahma, too, her smooth dark hair blowing about her face, her black eyes shining brightly.

Laughing and shouting together, they steered the kids away from the patch of wheat and on to the open hillside where the rest of the flock was scattered. Then Hamid turned, surprised, to look Star of Light (Patricia St John Series) at his little sister. He had not often seen her so happy and carefree, for country girls were taught to behave themselves properly.

“What have you come for?” he asked.

“To look after the goats. Mother wants you.”

“Why?”

“I don’t know—she wants you to go somewhere. She has been crying and Star of Light (Patricia St John Series) looking at Little Sister. I think perhaps Little Sister is ill.”

Her sparkling eyes looked sad as she remembered her mother’s tears, for she loved her mother—only the sunshine and freedom had Star of Light (Patricia St John Series) made her forget all about them.

“All right,” said Hamid, “but take good care of the goats. Here’s a stick for you.”

He turned away and climbed the valley between the two green arms of the mountains. He walked fast because he did not want to keep his mother waiting, but he did not skip or look about him as Rahma had done, for his Star of Light (Patricia St John Series) mind was full of questions.

Why did his mother look so worried and full of fear these days? Why was she always hiding away his baby sister, keeping her out of sight whenever she heard her husband or the older wife approaching? Of course, neither of them had ever really liked Baby Sister, but they knew she was there, so why hide her? Mother even seemed afraid of Hamid and Rahma playing with the baby nowadays. She would drive them away and hide in a corner of the room, her little daughter clasped against her, and always with that fear in her eyes. Was it evil spirits she feared? Or poison? Hamid did not know, but perhaps today Star of Light (Patricia St John Series) his mother would tell him. He walked faster.

He sighed as he climbed the hill, because until a few Star of Light (Patricia St John Series) months ago his mother had never looked frightened, and he and Rahma had never been knocked about or considered in the way. They had lived with their mother and their father, who loved them, in a little thatched home down the valley. There had been three other curly-headed children younger than Rahma, but they had started coughing and grown thin. When the snow fell, and there was hardly any bread or fuel, they grew weaker and died within a few weeks of each other. Their little bodies were buried on the eastern slope of the mountain facing the sunshine, and marigolds and daisies grew on their graves.

Their father coughed that winter, too, but no one took any notice because, Star of Light (Patricia St John Series) after all, a man must earn his living. So he went on working, and plowed his fields in spring and sowed his grain. Then he came home one night and said he could work no more. Until Star of Light (Patricia St John Series) the following autumn, he lay on the rush mat and grew weaker. Zohra, his wife, and Hamid and Rahma gathered in the ripened corn and gleaned what they could so they could buy him food, but it was no use. He died, leaving his wife, still young and beautiful, a poor widow with two little children.

They sold the house and the goats and the hens and the patch of corn, and went to live with their grandmother. A few months later Little Sister was born, bringing fresh hope and sunshine to the family. They called her Kinza, which means "treasure," and everyone loved and cuddled her. Yet, strangely, she never played or clapped her hands like other babies. She slept a lot and often seemed to lie staring at nothing. Hamid sometimes wondered why she didn't seem pleased with the bunches of bright flowers he picked for her.

When Kinza was a few months old, a man offered to marry their mother. She accepted at once, because she had Star of Light (Patricia St John Series) no work and no more money to buy food for her three children, and the family moved to their new home.

It was not a very happy home. Si Mohamed, the husband, was already married to an older wife, but she had never had Star of Light (Patricia St John Series) any children, so he wanted another wife. He did not mind taking Hamid, too, because a boy of nine would be useful to look after the goats. He also thought Rahma could be a useful little slave girl about the house. But he could not see that a baby was any use at all, and he wanted to give Kinza away.

“Many childless women will Star of Light (Patricia St John Series) be glad of a girl,” he said, “and why should I bring up another man’s baby?”

But Zohra had burst into tears and refused to do any work until he changed his mind, so he rather crossly agreed to let Kinza stay for a while. No more was said about it—unless perhaps something had been said during the past few weeks, something that Hamid and Rahma had not heard. Could that be why their mother held Kinza so close and looked so frightened?

Star Of Light Patricia St John Series

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