

Fairy Tales (127 pieces)

by Hans C. Andersen

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FAIRY TALES OF HANS CHRISTIAN ANDERSEN

A CHEERFUL TEMPER

by Hans Christian Andersen

FROM my father I received the best inheritance, namely a "good temper." "And who was my father?" That has nothing to do with the good temper; but I will say he was lively, good-looking round, and fat; he was both in appearance and character a complete contradiction to his profession. "And pray what was his profession and his standing in respectable society?" Well, perhaps, if in the beginning of a book these were written and printed, many, when they read it, would lay the book down and say, "It seems to me a very miserable title, I don't like things of this sort." And yet my father was not a skin-dresser nor an executioner; on the contrary, his employment placed him at the head of the grandest people of the town, and it was his place by right. He had to precede the bishop, and even the princes of the blood; he always went first, - he was a hearse driver! There, now, the truth is out. And I will own, that when people saw my father perched up in front of the omnibus of death, dressed in his long, wide, black cloak, and his black-edged, three-cornered hat on his head, and then glanced at his round, jocund face, round as the sun, they could not think much of sorrow or the grave. That face

said, "It is nothing, it will all end better than people think." So I have inherited from him, not only my good temper, but a habit of going often to the churchyard, which is good, when done in a proper humor; and then also I take in the *Intelligencer*, just as he used to do.

I am not very young, I have neither wife nor children, nor a library, but, as I said, I read the *Intelligencer*, which is enough for me; it is to me a delightful paper, and so it was to my father. It is of great use, for it contains all that a man requires to know; the names of the preachers at the church, and the new books which are published; where houses, servants, clothes, and provisions may be obtained. And then what a number of subscriptions to charities, and what innocent verses! Persons seeking interviews and engagements, all so plainly and naturally stated. Certainly, a man who takes in the *Intelligencer* may live merrily and be buried contentedly, and by the end of his life will have such a capital stock of paper that he can lie on a soft bed of it, unless he prefers wood shavings for his resting-place. The newspaper and the churchyard were always exciting objects to me. My walks to the latter were like bathing-places to my good humor. Every one can read the newspaper for himself, but come with me to the churchyard while the sun shines and the trees are green, and let us wander among the graves. Each of them is like a

closed book, with the back uppermost, on which we can read the title of what the book contains, but nothing more. I had a great deal of information from my father, and I have noticed a great deal myself. I keep it in my diary, in which I write for my own use and pleasure a history of all who lie here, and a few more beside.

Now we are in the churchyard. Here, behind the white iron railings, once a rose-tree grew; it is gone now, but a little bit of evergreen, from a neighboring grave, stretches out its green tendrils, and makes some appearance; there rests a very unhappy man, and yet while he lived he might be said to occupy a very good position. He had enough to live upon, and something to spare; but owing to his refined tastes the least thing in the world annoyed him. If he went to a theatre of an evening, instead of enjoying himself he would be quite annoyed if the machinist had put too strong a light into one side of the moon, or if the representations of the sky hung over the scenes when they ought to have hung behind them; or if a palm-tree was introduced into a scene representing the Zoological Gardens of Berlin, or a cactus in a view of Tyrol, or a beech-tree in the north of Norway. As if these things were of any consequence! Why did he not leave them alone? Who would trouble themselves about such trifles? especially at a comedy, where every one is expected to be amused. Then sometimes the public applauded too much, or too little, to please him. "They are like wet wood," he would say, looking round to see what sort

of people were present, "this evening; nothing fires them." Then he would vex and fret himself because they did not laugh at the right time, or because they laughed in the wrong places; and so he fretted and worried himself till at last the unhappy man fretted himself into the grave.

Here rests a happy man, that is to say, a man of high birth and position, which was very lucky for him, otherwise he would have been scarcely worth notice. It is beautiful to observe how wisely nature orders these things. He walked about in a coat embroidered all over, and in the drawing-rooms of society looked just like one of those rich pearl-embroidered bell-pulls, which are only made for show; and behind them always hangs a good thick cord for use. This man also had a stout, useful substitute behind him, who did duty for him, and performed all his dirty work. And there are still, even now, these serviceable cords behind other embroidered bell-ropes. It is all so wisely arranged, that a man may well be in a good humor.

Here rests, - ah, it makes one feel mournful to think of him! - but here rests a man who, during sixty-seven years, was never remembered to have said a good thing; he lived only in the hope of having a good idea. At last he felt convinced, in his own mind, that he really had one, and was so delighted that he positively died of joy at the thought of having at last caught an idea. Nobody got anything

by it; indeed, no one even heard what the good thing was. Now I can imagine that this same idea may prevent him from resting quietly in his grave; for suppose that to produce a good effect, it is necessary to bring out his new idea at breakfast, and that he can only make his appearance on earth at midnight, as ghosts are believed generally to do; why then this good idea would not suit the hour, and the man would have to carry it down again with him into the grave—that must be a troubled grave.

The woman who lies here was so remarkably stingy, that during her life she would get up in the night and mew, that her neighbors might think she kept a cat. What a miser she was!

Here rests a young lady, of a good family, who would always make her voice heard in society, and when she sang "Mi manca la voce,"* it was the only true thing she ever said in her life.

* "I want a voice," or, "I have no voice."

Here lies a maiden of another description. She was engaged to be married,—but, her story is one of every-day life; we will leave her to rest in the grave.

Here rests a widow, who, with music in her tongue, carried gall in her heart. She used to go round among the families near, and search out their faults, upon which she preyed with all the envy and malice

of her nature. This is a family grave. The members of this family held so firmly together in their opinions, that they would believe in no other. If the newspapers, or even the whole world, said of a certain subject, "It is so-and-so;" and a little schoolboy declared he had learned quite differently, they would take his assertion as the only true one, because he belonged to the family. And it is well known that if the yard-cock belonging to this family happened to crow at midnight, they would declare it was morning, although the watchman and all the clocks in the town were proclaiming the hour of twelve at night.

The great poet Goethe concludes his Faust with the words, "may be continued;" so might our wanderings in the churchyard be continued. I come here often, and if any of my friends, or those who are not my friends, are too much for me, I go out and choose a plot of ground in which to bury him or her. Then I bury them, as it were; there they lie, dead and powerless, till they come back new and better characters. Their lives and their deeds, looked at after my own fashion, I write down in my diary, as every one ought to do. Then, if any of our friends act absurdly, no one need to be vexed about it. Let them bury the offenders out of sight, and keep their good temper. They can also read the *Intelligencer*, which is a paper written by the people, with their hands guided. When the time comes for the

history of my life, to be bound by the grave, then they will write
upon it as my epitaph-

"The man with a cheerful temper."

And this is my story.

THE END

FAIRY TALES OF HANS CHRISTIAN ANDERSEN

A GREAT GRIEF

by Hans Christian Andersen

THIS story really consists of two parts. The first part might be left out, but it gives us a few particulars, and these are useful

We were staying in the country at a gentleman's seat, where it happened that the master was absent for a few days. In the meantime, there arrived from the next town a lady; she had a pug dog with her, and came, she said, to dispose of shares in her tan-yard. She had her papers with her, and we advised her to put them in an envelope, and to write thereon the address of the proprietor of the estate, "General War-Commissary Knight," &c.

She listened to us attentively, seized the pen, paused, and begged us to repeat the direction slowly. We complied, and she wrote; but in the midst of the "General War-" she struck fast, sighed deeply, and said, "I am only a woman!" Her Puggie had seated itself on the ground while she wrote, and growled; for the dog had come with her for amusement and for the sake of its health; and then the bare floor ought not to be offered to a visitor. His outward appearance was characterized by a snub nose and a very fat back.

"He doesn't bite," said the lady; "he has no teeth. He is like one

of the family, faithful and grumpy; but the latter is my grandchildren's fault, for they have teased him; they play at wedding, and want to give him the part of the bridesmaid, and that's too much for him, poor old fellow."

And she delivered her papers, and took Puggie upon her arm. And this is the first part of the story which might have been left out.

PUGGIE DIED!! That's the second part.

It was about a week afterwards we arrived in the town, and put up at the inn. Our windows looked into the tan-yard, which was divided into two parts by a partition of planks; in one half were many skins and hides, raw and tanned. Here was all the apparatus necessary to carry on a tannery, and it belonged to the widow. Puggie had died in the morning, and was to be buried in this part of the yard; the grandchildren of the widow (that is, of the tanner's widow, for Puggie had never been married) filled up the grave, and it was a beautiful grave- it must have been quite pleasant to lie there.

The grave was bordered with pieces of flower-pots and strewn over with sand; quite at the top they had stuck up half a beer bottle, with the neck upwards, and that was not at all allegorical.

The children danced round the grave, and the eldest of the boys among them, a practical youngster of seven years, made the proposition that there should be an exhibition of Puggie's burial-place for all

who lived in the lane; the price of admission was to be a trouser button, for every boy would be sure to have one, and each might also give one for a little girl. This proposal was adopted by acclamation.

And all the children out of the lane— yes, even out of the little lane at the back— flocked to the place, and each gave a button. Many were noticed to go about on that afternoon with only one suspender; but then they had seen Puggie's grave, and the sight was worth much more.

But in front of the tan-yard, close to the entrance, stood a little girl clothed in rags, very pretty to look at, with curly hair, and eyes so blue and clear that it was a pleasure to look into them. The child said not a word, nor did she cry; but each time the little door was opened she gave a long, long look into the yard. She had not a button— that she knew right well, and therefore she remained standing sorrowfully outside, till all the others had seen the grave and had gone away; then she sat down, held her little brown hands before her eyes, and burst into tears; this girl alone had not seen Puggie's grave. It was a grief as great to her as any grown person can experience.

We saw this from above; and looked at from above, how many a grief of our own and of others can make us smile! That is the story, and whoever does not understand it may go and purchase a share in the tan-yard from the window.

THE END

FAIRY TALES OF HANS CHRISTIAN ANDERSEN

A LEAF FROM HEAVEN

by Hans Christian Andersen

HIGH up in the clear, pure air flew an angel, with a flower plucked from the garden of heaven. As he was kissing the flower a very little leaf fell from it and sunk down into the soft earth in the middle of a wood. It immediately took root, sprouted, and sent out shoots among the other plants.

"What a ridiculous little shoot!" said one. "No one will recognize it; not even the thistle nor the stinging-nettle."

"It must be a kind of garden plant," said another; and so they sneered and despised the plant as a thing from a garden.

"Where are you coming?" said the tall thistles whose leaves were all armed with thorns. "It is stupid nonsense to allow yourself to shoot out in this way; we are not here to support you."

Winter came, and the plant was covered with snow, but the snow glittered over it as if it had sunshine beneath as well as above.

When spring came, the plant appeared in full bloom: a more beautiful object than any other plant in the forest. And now the professor of botany presented himself, one who could explain his knowledge in black and white. He examined and tested the plant, but it

did not belong to his system of botany, nor could he possibly find out to what class it did belong. "It must be some degenerate species," said he; "I do not know it, and it is not mentioned in any system."

"Not known in any system!" repeated the thistles and the nettles.

The large trees which grew round it saw the plant and heard the remarks, but they said not a word either good or bad, which is the wisest plan for those who are ignorant.

There passed through the forest a poor innocent girl; her heart was pure, and her understanding increased by her faith. Her chief inheritance had been an old Bible, which she read and valued. From its pages she heard the voice of God speaking to her, and telling her to remember what was said of Joseph's brethren when persons wished to injure her. "They imagined evil in their hearts, but God turned it to good." If we suffer wrongfully, if we are misunderstood or despised, we must think of Him who was pure and holy, and who prayed for those who nailed Him to the cross, "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do."

The girl stood still before the wonderful plant, for the green leaves exhaled a sweet and refreshing fragrance, and the flowers glittered and sparkled in the sunshine like colored flames, and the harmony of sweet sounds lingered round them as if each concealed within itself a deep fount of melody, which thousands of years could

not exhaust. With pious gratitude the girl looked upon this glorious work of God, and bent down over one of the branches, that she might examine the flower and inhale the sweet perfume. Then a light broke in on her mind, and her heart expanded. Gladly would she have plucked a flower, but she could not overcome her reluctance to break one off. She knew it would so soon fade; so she took only a single green leaf, carried it home, and laid it in her Bible, where it remained ever green, fresh, and unfading. Between the pages of the Bible it still lay when, a few weeks afterwards, that Bible was laid under the young girl's head in her coffin. A holy calm rested on her face, as if the earthly remains bore the impress of the truth that she now stood in the presence of God.

In the forest the wonderful plant still continued to bloom till it grew and became almost a tree, and all the birds of passage bowed themselves before it.

"That plant is a foreigner, no doubt," said the thistles and the burdocks. "We can never conduct ourselves like that in this country." And the black forest snails actually spat at the flower.

Then came the swineherd; he was collecting thistles and shrubs to burn them for the ashes. He pulled up the wonderful plant, roots and all, and placed it in his bundle. "This will be as useful as any," he said; so the plant was carried away.

Not long after, the king of the country suffered from the

deepest melancholy. He was diligent and industrious, but employment did him no good. They read deep and learned books to him, and then the lightest and most trifling that could be found, but all to no purpose. Then they applied for advice to one of the wise men of the world, and he sent them a message to say that there was one remedy which would relieve and cure him, and that it was a plant of heavenly origin which grew in the forest in the king's own dominions. The messenger described the flower so that its appearance could not be mistaken.

Then said the swineherd, "I am afraid I carried this plant away from the forest in my bundle, and it has been burnt to ashes long ago. But I did not know any better."

"You did not know, any better! Ignorance upon ignorance indeed!"

The poor swineherd took these words to heart, for they were addressed to him; he knew not that there were others who were equally ignorant. Not even a leaf of the plant could be found. There was one, but it lay in the coffin of the dead; no one knew anything about it.

Then the king, in his melancholy, wandered out to the spot in the wood. "Here is where the plant stood," he said; "it is a sacred place." Then he ordered that the place should be surrounded with a golden railing, and a sentry stationed near it.

The botanical professor wrote a long treatise about the heavenly