

HANS, WHO MADE THE PRINCESS LAUGH

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Once upon a time there was a king, who had a daughter, and she was so lovely that the reports of her beauty went far and wide; but she was so melancholy that she never laughed, and besides she was so grand and proud that she said “No” to all who came to woo her—she would not have any of them, were they ever so fine, whether they were princes or noblemen.

The king was tired of this whim of hers long ago, and thought she ought to get married like other people; there was nothing she need wait for—she was old enough and she would not be any richer either, for she was to have half the kingdom, which she inherited after her mother.

So he made known every Sunday after the service, from the steps outside the church, that he that could make his daughter laugh should have both her and half the kingdom. But if there were any one who tried and could not make her laugh, he would have three red stripes cut out of his back and salt rubbed into them—and, sad to relate, there were many sore backs in that kingdom. Lovers from south and from north, from east and from west, came to try their luck—they thought it was an easy thing to make a princess laugh. They were a queer lot altogether, but for all their cleverness and for all the tricks and pranks they played, the

princess was just as serious and immovable as ever.

But close to the palace lived a man who had three sons, and they had also heard that the king had made known that he who could make the princess laugh should have her and half the kingdom.

The eldest of the brothers wanted to try first, and away he went; and when he came to the palace, he told the king he wouldn't mind trying to make the princess laugh.

“Yes, yes! That's all very well,” said the king; “but I am afraid it's of very little use, my man. There have been many here to try their luck, but my daughter is just as sad, and I am afraid it is no good trying. I do not like to see any more suffer on that account.”

But the lad thought he would try anyhow. It couldn't be such a difficult thing to make a princess laugh at him, for had not everybody, both grand and simple, laughed so many a time at him when he served as soldier and went through his drill under Sergeant Nils.

So he went out on the terrace outside the princess's windows and began drilling just as if Sergeant Nils himself were there. But all in vain! The princess sat just as serious and immovable as before, and so they took him and cut three broad, red stripes out of his back and sent him home.

He had no sooner arrived home than his second brother wanted to set out and try his luck. He was a schoolmaster, and a funny figure he was altogether. He had one leg shorter than the other, and limped terribly when he walked. One moment he was no bigger than a boy, but the next moment when he raised himself up on his long leg he was as big and tall as a giant—and besides he was great at preaching.

When he came to the palace, and said that he wanted to make the princess laugh, the king thought that it was not so unlikely that he might; “but I pity you, if you don’t succeed,” said the king, “for we cut the stripes broader and broader for every one that tries.”

So the schoolmaster went out on the terrace, and took his place outside the princess’s window, where he began preaching and chanting imitating seven of the parsons, and reading and singing just like seven of the clerks whom they had had in the parish.

The king laughed at the schoolmaster till he was obliged to hold on to the doorpost, and the princess was just on the point

of smiling, but suddenly she was as sad and immovable as ever, and so it fared no better with Paul the schoolmaster than with Peter the soldier—for Peter and Paul were their names, you must know!

So they took Paul and cut three red stripes out of his back, put salt into them, and sent him home again.



Well, the youngest brother thought he would have a try next. His name was Hans. But the brothers laughed and made fun of him, and showed him their sore backs. Besides, the father would not give him leave to go, for he said it was no use his trying, who had so little sense; all he could do was to sit in a corner on the hearth, like a cat, rooting about in the ashes and cutting chips.

But Hans would not give in—he begged and prayed so long, till they got tired of his whimpering, and so he got leave to go to the king’s palace and try his luck.

When he arrived at the palace he did not say he had come to try to make the princess laugh, but asked if he could get a situation there. No, they had no situation for him; but

Hans was not so easily put off—they might want one to carry wood and water for the kitchenmaid in such a big place as that, he said. Yes, the king thought so too, and to get rid of the lad he gave him leave to remain there and carry wood and water for the kitchenmaid.

One day, when he was going to fetch water from the brook, he saw a big fish in the water just under an old root of a fir-tree, which the current had carried all the soil away from. He put his bucket quietly under the fish and caught it. As he was going home to the palace, he met an old woman leading a golden goose.

“Good day, grandmother!” said Hans. “That’s a fine bird you have got there; and such splendid feathers too! He shines a long way off. If one had such feathers, one needn’t be chopping firewood.”

The woman thought just as much of the fish which Hans had in the bucket, and said if Hans would give her the fish he should have the golden goose; and this goose was such that if any one touched it he would be sticking fast to it if he only said: “If you’ll come along, then hang on.”

Yes, Hans would willingly exchange on those terms. “A bird is as good as a fish any day,” he said to himself. “If it is as you say, I might use it instead of a fish-hook,” he said to the woman, and felt greatly pleased with the possession of the goose.

He had not gone far before he met another old woman. When she saw the splendid golden goose, she must go and stroke it. She made herself so friendly and spoke so nicely to Hans, and asked him to let her stroke that lovely golden goose of his.

“Oh, yes!” said Hans, “but you mustn’t pluck off any of its feathers!”

Just as she stroked the bird, Hans said: “If you’ll come along, then hang on!”

The woman pulled and tore, but she had to hang on, whether she would or no, and Hans walked on, as if he only had the goose with him.

When he had gone some distance, he met a man who had a spite against the woman for a trick she had played upon him. When he saw that she fought so hard to get free and seemed to hang on so fast, he thought he might safely venture to pay her off for the grudge he owed her, and so he gave her a kick.

“If you’ll come along, then hang on!” said Hans, and the man had to hang on and limp along on one leg, whether he would or no; and when he tried to tear himself loose, he made it still worse for himself, for he was very nearly falling on his back whenever he struggled to get free.

So on they went till they came in the neighborhood of the palace. There they met the king’s smith; he was on his way to the smithy, and had a large pair of tongs in his hand. This smith was a merry fellow, and

was always full of mad pranks and tricks, and when he saw this procession coming jumping and limping along, he began laughing till he was bent in two, but suddenly he said:

“This must be a new flock of geese for the princess: but who can tell which is goose and which is gander? I suppose it must be the gander toddling on in front. Goosey, goosey!” he called, and pretended to be strewing corn out of his hands as when feeding geese.

But they did not stop. The woman and the man only looked in great rage at the smith for making game of them. So said the smith: “It would be great fun to see if I could stop the whole flock, many as they are!”—He was a strong man, and seized the old man with his tongs from behind in his trousers, and the man shouted and struggled hard, but Hans said:

“If you’ll come along, then hang on!”

And so the smith had to hang on too. He bent his back and stuck his heels in the ground when they went up a hill and tried to get away, but it was of no use; he stuck on to the other as if he had been screwed fast in the great vise in the smithy, and whether he liked it or not, he had to dance along with the others.

When they came near the palace, the farm-dog ran against them and barked at them, as if they were a gang of tramps, and when the princess came to look out of her window to see what was the matter, and saw this procession, she burst out laughing. But

Hans was not satisfied with that. “Just wait a bit, and she will laugh still louder very soon,” he said, and made a tour round the palace with his followers.

When they came past the kitchen, the door was open and the cook was just boiling porridge, but when she saw Hans and his train after him, she rushed out of the door with the porridge-stick in one hand and a big ladle full of boiling porridge in the other, and she laughed till her sides shook; but when she saw the smith there as well, she thought she would have burst with laughter. When she had had a regular good laugh, she looked at the golden goose again and thought it was so lovely that she must stroke it.

“Hans, Hans!” she cried, and ran after him with the ladle in her hand; “just let me stroke that lovely bird of yours.”

“Rather let her stroke me!” said the smith.

“Very well,” said Hans.

But when the cook heard this, she got very angry. “What is it you say!” she cried, and gave the smith a smack with the ladle.

“If you’ll come along, then hang on!” said Hans, and so she stuck fast to the others too, and for all her scolding and all her tearing and pulling, she had to limp along with them.

And when they came past the princess’s window again, she was still there waiting for them, but when she saw that they had got hold of the cook too, with the ladle and

porridge-stick, she laughed till the king had to hold her up. So Hans got the princess and half the kingdom, and they had a wedding which was heard of far and wide.