

Hans in Luck

Hans had served his master for seven years, when he one day said to him: 'Master, my time is up, I want to go home to my mother; please give me my wages.' His master answered, 'You have served me well and faithfully, and as the service has been, so shall the wages be'; and he gave him a lump of gold as big as his head. Hans took out his pocket-handkerchief and tied up the gold in it, and then slung the bundle over his shoulder, and started on his homeward journey.

As he walked along, just dragging one foot after the other, a man on horseback appeared, riding fresh and gay, along on his spirited horse. 'Ah!' said Hans, quite loud as he passed, 'what a fine thing riding must be. You are as comfortable as if you were in an easy-chair; you don't stumble over any stones; you save your shoes, and you get over the road you needn't bother how.'

The horseman, who heard him, stopped and said, 'Hullo, Hans, why are you on foot?' 'I can't help myself,' said Hans, 'as I have this bundle to carry home. It is true that it is a lump of gold, but I can hardly hold my head up for it, and it weighs down my shoulder frightfully.' 'I'll tell you what,' said the horseman, 'we will change. I will give you my horse, and you shall give me your bundle.' 'With all my heart,' said Hans; 'but you will be rarely burdened with it.'

The horseman dismounted, took the gold, and helped Hans up, put the bridle into his hands, and said: 'When you want to go very fast, you must click your tongue and cry "Gee-up, Gee-up."' Hans was delighted when he found himself so easily riding along on horseback. After a time it occurred to him that he might be going faster, and he began to click with his tongue, and to cry 'Gee-up, Gee-up.' The horse broke into a gallop, and before Hans knew where he was, he was thrown off into a ditch, which separated the fields from the high road. The horse would have run away if a peasant coming along the road leading a cow had not caught it. Hans felt himself all over, and picked himself up; but he was very angry, and said to the peasant: 'Riding is poor fun at times, when you have a nag like mine, which stumbles and throws you, and puts you in danger of breaking your neck. I will never mount it again. I think much more of that cow of yours. You can walk comfortably behind her, and you have her milk into the bargain every day, as well as butter and cheese.'

'What would I not give for a cow like that!' 'Well,' said the peasant, 'if you have such a fancy for it as all that, I will exchange the cow for the horse.' Hans accepted the offer with delight, and the peasant mounted the horse and rode rapidly off. Hans drove his cow peacefully on, and thought what a lucky bargain he had made. 'If only I have a bit of bread, and I don't expect ever to be without that, I shall always have butter and cheese to eat with it. If I am thirsty, I only have to milk my cow and I have milk to drink. My heart! What more can you desire?' When he came to an inn he made a halt, and in great joy he ate up all the food he had with him, all his dinner and his supper too, and he gave the last coins he had for half a glass of beer. Then he went on further in the direction of his mother's village, driving his cow before him. The heat was overpowering, and, as midday drew near, Hans found himself on a heath, which it took him an hour to cross. He was so hot and thirsty, that his tongue was parched and clung to the roof of his mouth.

'This can easily be set to rights,' thought Hans. 'I will milk my cow and sup up the milk.' He tied her to a tree and as he had no pail, he used his leather cap instead, but, try as hard as he liked, not a single drop of milk appeared. As he was very clumsy in his attempts, the impatient animal gave him a severe kick on his forehead with one of her hind legs. He was stunned by the blow, and fell to the ground, where he lay for some time, not knowing where he was. Happily just then a butcher came along the road, trundling a young pig in a wheelbarrow.

'What's going on here?' he cried, as he helped Hans up. Hans told him all that had happened. The butcher handed him his flask, and said: 'Here, take a drink, it will do you good. The cow can't give any milk. I suppose; she must be too old, and good for nothing but to be a beast of burden, or to go to the butcher.' 'Oh dear!' said Hans, smoothing his hair. 'Now who would ever have thought it! Killing the animal is all very well, but what kind of meat will it be? For my part, I don't like cow's flesh; it's not juicy enough. Now, if one had a nice young pig like that, it would taste ever so much better; and then all the sausages too!' 'Listen, Hans!' then said the butcher, 'for your sake I will exchange, and let you have the pig instead of the cow.' 'God reward your friendship!' said Hans, handing over the cow, as the butcher untied the pig, and put the halter with which it was tied into his hand.

Hans went on his way, thinking how all everything was turning out for him. Even if a mishap befell him, something else immediately happened to make up for it. Soon after this, he met a lad carrying a beautiful white goose under his arm. They passed the time of day, and Hans began to tell him how lucky he was, and what successful bargains he had made. The lad told him that he was taking the goose for a christening feast. 'Just feel it,' he went on, holding it up by the wings. 'Feel how heavy it is; it's true they have been stuffing it for eight weeks. Whoever eats that roast goose will have to wipe the fat off both sides of his mouth.' 'Yes, indeed!' answered Hans, weighing it in his hand; 'but my pig is no light weight either.' Then the lad looked cautiously about from side to side, and shook his head. 'Now, look here,' he began, 'I don't think it's all quite straight about your pig. One has just been stolen out of Schultze's sty, in the village I have come from. I fear, I fear it is the one you are leading. They have sent people out to look for it, and it would be a bad business for you if you were found with it; the least they would do, would be to put you in the black hole.' Poor Hans was very much frightened at this.

'Oh, dear! oh dear!' he said. 'Do help me out of this trouble. You are more at home here; take my pig, and let me have your goose.' 'Well, I shall run some risk if I do, but I won't be the means of getting you into a scrape.' So he took the rope in his hand and quickly drove the pig up a side road; and honest Hans, relieved of his trouble, plodded on with the goose under his arm. 'When I really come to think it over,' he said to himself, 'I have still had the best of the bargain. First, there is the delicious roast goose, and then all the fat that will drip out of it in roasting will keep us in goose-fat to eat on our bread for three months at least; and, last of all, there are the beautiful white feathers which I will stuff my pillow with, and then I shall need no rocking to send me to sleep how delighted my mother will be.'

As he passed through the last village he came to a knife-grinder with his cart, singing to his wheel as it buzzed merrily round and round . . .

'Scissors and knives I grind so fast, And hang up my cloak against the blast.' Hans stopped to look at him, and at last he spoke to him and said, 'You must be doing a good trade to be so merry over your grinding.' 'Yes,' answered the grinder. 'The work of one's hands is the foundation of a golden fortune. A good grinder finds money whenever he puts his hand into his pocket. But where did you buy that beautiful goose?' 'I did not buy it; I exchanged my pig for it.' 'And the pig?' 'Oh, I got that instead of my cow.' 'And the cow?' 'I got that for a horse.' 'And the horse?' 'I have a lump of gold as big as my head for it.' 'And the gold?' 'Oh, that was my wages for seven years' service.' 'You certainly have known how to manage your affairs,' said the grinder. 'Now, if you could manage to hear the money jingling in your pockets when you got up in the morning, you would indeed have made your fortune.' 'How shall I set about that?' asked Hans. 'You must be a grinder like me - nothing is needed for it but a whetstone; everything else will come of itself. I have one here which certainly is a little damaged, but you need not give me anything for it but your goose. Are you willing to make your fortune?'

'How can you ask me such a question?' said Hans. 'Why, I shall be the happiest person in the world. If I can have some money every time I put my hand in my pocket, what more should I have to trouble about?' So he handed him the goose, and took the whetstone in exchange. 'Now, said the grinder, lifting up an ordinary large stone which lay near on the road, 'here is another good stone into the bargain. You can hammer out all your old nails on it to straighten them. Take it, and carry it off.' Hans shouldered the stone, and went on his way with a light heart, and his eyes shining with joy. 'I must have been born in a lucky hour,' he cried; 'everything happens just as I want it, and as it would happen to a Sunday's child.' 'How lucky I am, indeed.' In the meantime, as he'd been on foot since daybreak, he began to feel very tired, and he was also very hungry, as he had eaten all his provisions at once in his joy at his bargain over the cow. Finally he could hardly walk any further, and he was obliged to stop every minute to rest. Then the stones were frightfully heavy, and he could not get rid of the thought that it would be very nice if he were not obliged to carry them any further.

He dragged himself like a snail to a well in the fields, meaning to rest and refresh himself with a draught of the cool water. So as not to injure the stones by sitting on them, he laid them carefully on the edge of the well. Then he sat down, and was about to stoop down to drink when he inadvertently gave them a little push, and both the stones fell straight into the water. When Hans saw them disappear before his very eyes he jumped for joy, and then knelt down and thanked God, with tears in his eyes, for having shown him this further grace, and relieved him of the heavy stones (which were all that remained to trouble him) without giving him anything to reproach himself with.

'There is certainly no one under the sun so happy as I,' and so, with a light heart, free from every care, he now bounded on home to his mother.