

The Pigs

Hans Christian Andersen

Dear Charles Dickens once told us the story of the pig, and since that time it has put us in a good humor just to hear one grunt. Saint Anthony took the pig under his protection; and when we think of "the prodigal son," our thoughts promptly carry us into the midst of a pigsty.

And it was, as a matter of fact, in front of a pigsty that our carriage stopped, over in Sweden. Out near the highway, close beside the house, the farmer had put his pigsty, and another like it could scarcely have been found in the world. It had been an old state carriage; the seats had been removed and the wheels taken off so that the body of the old coach stood on its stomach. And four pigs were shut up inside it. Whether these were the first that had ever been in there, one couldn't ascertain; but that this had been born to be a state coach, there was every evidence of, even to the damask rag that hung down from the roof and that indeed bore witness of having seen better days. This is true, every blessed word.

"Oink! Oink!" was said inside. And the coach creaked and groaned; it was indeed having a mournful end. "The beautiful has gone," it sighed and said, or at least that's what it might have said.

We came back in the autumn and the coach was still there, but the pigs were gone. They were now lords in the forest. Rain and storm reigned, the wind blowing all the leaves from the trees, and gave them neither peace nor rest. The birds of passage had flown.

"The beautiful has gone," said the carriage. And all through nature the same sentiment was sighed, and even from the heart of man it sounded, "The beautiful has gone. The glorious greenwood, the warm sunshine, and the song of the birds are gone! Gone!"

So it was said, and it creaked in the trunks of the lofty trees. And a sigh, a very deep sigh, was heard right from the heart of the wild rose tree and from him who sat there—the Rose King. Do you know him? He is all beard, the finest reddish-green beard, and he is good to know. Go to the wild rosebushes, and when all the flowers have faded from them in autumn, and only the red hips remain, you will often find among them a large red-green moss flower; that's the Rose King. A little green leaf grows out of the top of his head; that's his feather. He is the only man of his kind on the rosebush; and it was he who sighed.

"Gone! Gone! The beautiful is gone! The roses have gone, and the leaves have fallen from the trees. It's wet here; it's rough here. The birds who sang are silent. The pigs go hunting acorns; the pigs are the lords of the forest."

The nights were cold and the days were gray, but the raven sat on the branch and sang nevertheless, "Caw! Caw!" Both raven and crow sat on the high bough; they had a large family, and all of them said, "Caw! Caw!"—and, of course, the majority is always right.

In the hollow beneath the high trees was a great puddle, and here lay a herd of pigs, large and small ones. They found the place incomparably lovely. "Oui! Oui!" they said. This was the only French they knew, but even that was something. They were so clever, and so fat.

The old ones lay still, for they were thinking; the young ones, on the other hand, were very busy and had no time for rest. One little piglet had a curl in his tail that was his mother's pride and joy. She thought that all the other pigs were looking at the curl and thinking only of the curl, but they weren't; they were thinking of themselves, and what was useful to them, and of what the forest was for. They had always heard that the acorns they ate grew at the roots of trees, and therefore they had always dug up the ground. But now there was a little pig—it's always the young ones who come out with new ideas—who insisted that the

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acorns dropped from the branches; one had fallen on his head, and that had given him the idea; he had then made observations, and now he was quite sure of it. The older ones put their heads together.

"Oink!" said the pigs. "Oink! All the beauty is gone. The twittering of the birds is ended. We want fruit. Anything that's good to eat is good, and we eat everything."

"Oui! Oui!" they all said together.

But now the mother sow looked at her little piglet with the curl in his tail. "One mustn't forget the beautiful," she said.

"Caw! Caw!" cried the crow, and flew down from the tree to try to get appointed as a nightingale; one was needed, and so the crow was promptly appointed.

"Gone! Gone!" sighed the Rose King. "All the beautiful is gone!"

It was wet; it was gray; it was cold and windy; and through the forest and over the fields the rain beat down in long, murky streaks. Where were the birds who sang; where were the flowers in the meadow, and the sweet berries of the wood? Gone! Gone!

Then a light shone from the house of the forester. It lighted up like a star and cast its long ray through the trees. A song sounded from within the house; beautiful children played there around the old grandfather. He sat with the Bible on his knee and read of God and the eternal life, and told them about the spring that would return, about the forest that would become green anew, the roses that would bloom, the nightingales that would sing, and the beautiful that again would sit upon the throne.

But the Rose King did not hear it; he sat in the cold, wet weather and sighed, "Gone! Gone!"

And the pigs were the lords of the forest; and Mother Sow looked at her little piglet and the curl in his tail.

"There's always somebody who has an appreciation of the beautiful!" said the Mother Sow.

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