

Sunshine Stories

Hans Christian Anderson

"I'll tell you a story," said the wind. "Kindly remember," said the Rain, "that it's my turn to talk. You've been howling around the corner at the top of your voice quite long enough."

"Is that the thanks I get for all of the favors I've done you?" the Wind blustered. "Many an umbrella I've turned inside out, or even blown to tatters, when people tried to avoid you."

"Be silent! It is I who shall speak," said the Sunshine, who spoke with such brilliance and warmth that the weary Wind fell flat on his back, and the Rain shook him and tried to rouse him, crying: "We won't stand for it. This Madam Sunshine is forever interrupting us. Don't let's listen to her. What she says is not worth hearing."

And the Sunshine began: "A beautiful swan flew over the rolling, tossing waves of the ocean. Each of its feathers shone like gold. One feather drifted down above a great merchant ship that sailed the sea with all its canvas spread. The feather came to rest upon the curly hair of a young overseer who looked after the goods aboard that ship - supercargo they called him. The bird of fortune's feather touched his forehead, became a quill pen in his hand, and brought him such luck that he soon became a merchant, a man of wealth, a man so rich that he could wear spurs of gold and change a golden dish into a nobleman's shield. I know - I have shone on it," said the Sunshine.

"The swan flew far away, over a green meadow where a little shepherd boy, not more than seven years old, lay in the shade of an old tree, the only tree in that meadow. As the swan flew past it, she brushed one leaf from the tree. This leaf fell into the boy's hands, where it turned into three leaves, ten leaves - yes, it turned into all the leaves of a book. In this book he read of the many wonderful things that are in nature, about his native language, about faith, and about knowledge. Before he went to sleep he laid the book under his pillow to keep from forgetting what he had learned during the day. The wonderful book led him first to school, and then far into the fields of learning. I have seen his name where they carve the names of great scholars," the Sunshine said.

"The swan flew over the forest, where it was lonely and quiet. She came to rest on a deep blue lake, where the water lilies grow, where wild apple trees flourish along the shore, and where the cuckoo and wild pigeon make their nests.

"A poor woman was in the forest, gathering fallen branches. She carried them on her back, and held a baby in her arms. She saw the golden swan, that bird of fortune, rise from the rush-covered shore. What was this glittering thing the swan had left? It was a golden egg, still warm. She put it in her bosom, and the warmth stayed in it. Truly there was life in that egg. Yes, she heard a tapping inside the shell, but it was so faint that she mistook it for the sound of her own heartbeat.

"When she came home to her own poor cottage, she took the egg out to look at it. 'Tick,' it said, 'tick,' as if it had been a costly gold watch. But it was no watch. It was an egg, just about to hatch. The shell cracked open, and a dear little baby swan looked out. It was fully feathered, all in gold, and around its neck were four gold rings. As the poor woman had four boys - three at home and the baby she had carried in her arms - she knew that one of the rings was meant for each of her sons. As soon as she realized this, the little golden bird flew away. She kissed all of the rings, and she made each son kiss one of them, touch it against his heart, and wear it on his finger. I saw all this," said the Sunshine, "and I saw what came of it.

"As one of the boys played in the bed of a stream, he picked up a handful of clay. He turned it, and twisted it, and he shaped it in his fingers until he had made a statue of

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Jason. Like Jason, the young sculptor had found the golden fleece he sought.

"The second boy ran across the meadow, where there were flowers of every hue. He gathered a handful, and squeezed them so tightly that the colored juices wet his ring and splashed in his eye. They stuck to his fingers and colored his thoughts. The days went by, and the years went past, until people in the big city came to speak of him as 'the great painter.'

"The third boy clenched his ring in his teeth so tightly that it echoed the song that lay deep in his heart. The things he thought and the things he felt were turned to music. The rose like singing swans, and like swans they plunged down as deep as the depths of the sea, 'the deep Sea of Thoughts.' He became a great musician, a great composer of whom every land has the right to say: 'He belongs to me.'

"The fourth boy - the baby - was an outcast. They said he had the pip, and that like a sick little chicken he should be dosed with butter and pepper. They gave him pepper enough with his butter, but I gave him warmth and the kiss of the sun," said the Sunshine. "He got ten kisses for one that the other children received. He was a poet, who met with a blow and a kiss, all his life long. But he had something that no one could take from him. He had the ring of fame from the golden swan of fortune. There were golden wings to his thoughts. Up they flew and away they went, like golden butterflies, which are the symbol of things immortal."

"What an extremely long story," said the Wind.

"And so awfully dull," the Rain agreed. "Fan me, if you please, so I may revive a little."

The Wind blew again, and the Sunshine said: "The swan of fortune flew over the deep gulf, where fishermen spread their nets. The poorest of the fishermen thought of getting married, and marry he did. And to him the swan brought a lump of amber. Amber has the power to draw things to it, and it drew the hearts to the fisherman's home. Amber makes the most wonderful incense, and there came a fragrant air as from a church, like a balmy breeze from God's nature. So the fisherman and his bride were happy and thankful in their quiet home. They were content with what little they had, and their life became a complete sunshine story."

"I think," said the Wind, "that these stories should stop. The Sunshine has talked long enough, and I am very bored."

"So am I," said the Rain.

And what do we others who *knew* this story say?

We say: "Now it's out."

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