

The Sweethearts; or, The Top and the Ball

Hans Christian Andersen

A top and a ball were lying together in a drawer among a lot of other toys. The top said to the ball, "Since we live in the same drawer, we ought to be sweethearts."

But the ball, which was covered with a morocco leather, and thought as much of itself as any fine lady, would not even answer such a proposal.

The next day the little boy to whom the top belonged took it out, painted it red and yellow, and drove a brass nail into it; so that the top looked very elegant when it was spinning around.

"Look at me!" it said to the ball. "What do you think? Shall we be sweethearts now? We are just made for each other! You bounce and I dance. None could be happier than we two."

"That's what you think!" said the ball. "You evidently don't realize that my father and my mother were a pair of morocco slippers, and that I have a cork in my body!"

"Yes, but I am made of mahogany!" said the top. "The mayor himself turned me on his own lathe and had a lot of fun doing it."

"Am I supposed to believe that?" said the ball.

"May I never be whipped again if I'm lying!" answered the top.

"You speak very well for yourself, but I'm afraid it's impossible. I'm almost engaged to a swallow. Whenever I bounce up in the air, it puts its head out of its nest and says, 'Will you be mine? Will you be mine?' And to myself I've always said 'Yes.' But I promise I shall never forget you."

"That will do me a lot of good," said the top, and that ended their conversation right then and there!

The next day the ball was taken out, and the top saw her flying high up into the air, just like a bird; so high that you could hardly see her. And every time she came back, she bounced up again, as soon as she touched the ground. That was either because she was longing for the swallow or because she had cork in her body. At the ninth bounce the ball disappeared; the boy looked and looked, but it was gone. The top sighed; "I know where she is: she's in the swallow's nest and has married the swallow."

The more the top thought of this, the more infatuated he became with the ball. Just because he couldn't have her, his love for her increased, but, alas! she was in love with somebody else. The top danced and spun, and in his thoughts the ball became more and more beautiful.

Many years went by - it was now an old love affair. The top was no longer young. But one day he was gilded all over; never had he looked so beautiful. He was now a golden top, and he leaped and spun till he hummed. This certainly was something. But suddenly he jumped too high, and disappeared! They looked and looked, even down in the cellar, but he was not to be found. Where was he? He had jumped into the dustbin, where all sorts of rubbish was lying-old cabbage stalks, dust, dirt, and gravel that had fallen down through the gutter.

"What a place to land in! Here my gilding will soon disappear. And what kind of riffraff am I with?" he mumbled, as he glared at a long, scrawny-looking cabbage stalk and at a strange round thing that looked like an apple. But it wasn't an apple-it was an old ball that for years had been lying in the roof gutter and was soaked through with water.

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"Thank goodness! At last I have an equal to talk to!" said the ball, looking at the golden top. "I want you to know that I am made of morocco leather, sewn by maiden hands, and that I have a cork in my body; but no one will think so now! I almost married a swallow, but I landed in the roof gutter instead, and there I have been for the last five years, soaked! That's a long time, believe me, for a young lady."

But the top said nothing. He thought of his old sweetheart, and the more he listened, the more certain he felt it was she. Just then the housemaid came to throw some rubbish in the dustbin.

"Why," she cried, "here's the golden top!"

And the top was carried back into the living room and admired by everybody. But the ball was never heard of again. The top never spoke a word about his old sweetheart, for love vanishes when one's sweetheart has been soaking in a roof gutter for five years. Yes, you don't even recognize her when you meet her in a dustbin.

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