What Old Johanne Told

Hans Christian Andersen

The wind whistles in the old willow tree. It is as if one were hearing a song; the wind sings it; the tree tells it. If you do not understand it, then ask old Johanne in the poor house; she knows about it; she was born here in the parish.

Many years ago, when the King's Highway still lay along here, the tree was already large and conspicuous. It stood, as it still stands, in front of the tailor's whitewashed timber house, close to the ditch, which then was so large that the cattle could be watered there, and where in the summertime the little peasant boys used to run about naked and paddle in the water. Underneath the tree stood a stone milepost cut from a big rock; now it is overturned, and a bramblebush grows over it.

The new King's Highway was built on the other side of the rich farmer's manor house; the old one became a field path; the ditch became a puddle overgrown with duckweed; if a frog tumbled down into it, the greenery was parted, and one saw the black water; all around it grew, and still grow, "muskedonnere," buckbean, and yellow iris.

The tailor's house was old and crooked; the roof was a hotbed for moss and houseleek. The dovecot had collapsed, and starlings built their nests there. The swallows hung nest after nest on the house gable and all along beneath the roof; it was just as if luck itself lived there.

And once it had; now, however, this was a lonely and silent place. Here in solitude lived weak-willed "Poor Rasmus," as they called him. He had been born here; he had played here, had leaped across meadow and over hedge, had splashed, as a child, in the ditch, and had climbed up the old tree. The tree would raise its big branches with pride and beauty, just as it raises them yet, but storms had already bent the trunk a little, and time had given it a crack. Wind and weather have since lodged earth in the crack, and there grow grass and greenery; yes, and even a little serviceberry has planted itself there.

When in spring the swallows came, they flew about the tree and the roof and plastered and patched their old nests, while Poor Rasmus let his nest stand or fall as it liked. His motto was, "What good will it do?" - and it had been his father's, too.

He stayed in his home. The swallows flew away, but they always came back, the faithful creatures! The starling flew away, but it returned, too, and whistled its song again. Once Rasmus had known how, but now he neither whistled nor sang.

The wind whistled in the old willow tree then, just as it now whistles; indeed, it is as if one were hearing a song; the wind sings it; the tree tells it. And if you do not understand it, then ask old Johanne in the poorhouse; she knows about it; she knows about everything of old; she is like a book of chronicles, with inscriptions and old recollections.

At the time the house was new and good, the country tailor, Ivar Ölse, and his wife, Maren, moved into it - industrious, honest folk, both of them. Old Johanne was then a child; she was the daughter of a wooden-shoemaker - one of the poorest in the parish. Many a good sandwich did she receive from Maren, who was in no want of food. The lady of the manor house liked Maren, who was always laughing and happy and never downhearted. She used her tongue a good deal, but her hands also. She could sew as fast as she could use her mouth, and, moreover, she cared for her house and children; there were nearly a dozen children - eleven altogether; the twelfth never made its appearance.

"Poor people always have a nest full of youngsters," growled the master of the manor house. "If one could drown them like kittens, and keep only one or two of the strongest, it

would be less of a misfortune!"

"God have mercy!" said the tailor's wife. "Children are a blessing from God; they are such a delight in the house. Every child is one more Lord's prayer. If times are bad, and one has many mouths to feed, why, then a man works all the harder and finds out ways and means honestly; our Lord fails not when we do not fail."

The lady of the manor house agreed with her; she nodded kindly and patted Maren's cheek; she had often done so, yes, and had kissed her as well, but that had been when the lady was a little child and Maren her nursemaid. The two were fond of each other, and this feeling did not wane.

Each year at Christmastime winter provisions would arrive at the tailor's house from the manor house - a barrel of meal, a pig, two geese, a tub of butter, cheese, and apples. That was indeed an asset to the larder. Ivar Ölse looked quite pleased, too, but soon came out with his old motto, "What good will it do?"

The house was clean and tidy, with curtains in the windows, and flowers as well, both carnations and balsams. A sampler hung in a picture frame, and close by hung a love letter in rhyme, which Maren Ölse herself had written; she knew how to put rhymes together. She was almost a little proud of the family name Ölse; it was the only word in the Danish language that rhymed with *pölse* (sausage). "At least that's an advantage to have over other people," she said, and laughed. She always kept her good humor, and never said, like her husband, "What good will it do?" Her motto was, "Depend on yourself and on our Lord." So she did, and that kept them all together. The children thrived, grew out over the nest, went out into the world, and prospered well.

Rasmus was the smallest; he was such a pretty child that one of the great portrait painters in the capital had borrowed him to paint from, and in the picture he was as naked as when he had come into this world. That picture was now hanging in the King's palace. The lady of the manor house saw it, and recognized little Rasmus, though he had no clothes on.

But now came hard times. The tailor had rheumatism in both hands, on which great lumps appeared. No doctor could help him - not even the wise Stine, who herself did some "doctoring."

"One must not be downhearted," said Maren. "It never helps to hang the head. Now that we no longer have father's two hands to help us, I must try to use mine all the faster. Little Rasmus, too, can use the needle." He was already sitting on the sewing table, whistling and singing. He was a happy boy. "But he should not sit there the whole day long," said the mother; "that would be a shame for the child. He should play and jump about, too."

The shoemaker's Johanne was his favorite playmate. Her folks were still poorer than Rasmus'. She was not pretty. She went about barefooted, and her clothes hung in rags, for she had no one to mend them, and to do it herself did not occur to her - she was a child, and as happy as a bird in our Lord's sunshine.

By the stone milepost, under the large willow tree, Rasmus and Johanne played. He had ambitious thoughts; he would one day become a fine tailor and live in the city, where there were master tailors who had ten workmen at the table; this he had heard from his father. There he would be an apprentice, and there he would become a master tailor, and then Johanne could come to visit him; and if by that time she knew how to cook, she could prepare the meals for all of them and have a large apartment of her own. Johanne dared not expect that, but Rasmus believed it could happen. They sat beneath the old tree, and the wind whistled in the branches and leaves; it seemed as if the wind were singing and the tree talking.

In the autumn every single leaf fell off; rain dripped from the bare branches. "They will be green again," said Mother Ölse.

"What good will it do?" said her husband. "New year, new worries about our livelihood."

"The larder is full," said the wife. "We can thank our good lady for that. I am healthy and have plenty of strength. It is sinful for us to complain."

The master and lady of the manor house remained there in the country over Christmas, but the week after the new year, they were to go to the city, where they would spend the winter in festivity and amusement. They would even go to a reception and ball given by the King himself. The lady had bought two rich dresses from France; they were of such material, of such fashion, and so well sewn that the tailor's Maren had never seen such magnificence. She asked the lady if she might come up to the house with her husband, so that he could see the dresses as well. Such things had surely never been seen by a country tailor, she said. He saw them and had not a word to say until he returned home, and what he did say was only what he always said, "What good will it do?" And this time he spoke the truth.

The master and lady of the manor house went to the city, and the balls and merrymaking began. But amid all the splendor the old gentleman died, and the lady then, after all, did not wear her grand dresses. She was so sorrowful and was dressed from head to foot in heavy black mourning. Not so much as a white tucker was to be seen. All the servants were in black; even the state coach was covered with fine black cloth.

It was an icy-cold night; the snow glistened and the stars twinkled. The heavy hearse brought the body from the city to the country church, where it was to be laid in the family vault. The steward and the parish bailiff were waiting on horseback, with torches, in front of the cemetery gate. The church was lighted up, and the pastor stood in the open church door to receive the body. The coffin was carried up into the chancel; the whole congregation followed. The pastor spoke, and a psalm was sung. The lady was present in the church; she had been driven there in the black-draped state coach, which was black inside as well as outside; such a carriage had never before been seen in the parish.

Throughout the winter, people talked about this impressive display of grief; it was indeed a "nobleman's funeral."

"One could well see how important the man was," said the village folk. "He was nobly born and he was nobly buried."

"What good will it do him?" said the tailor. "Now he has neither life nor goods. At least we have one of these."

"Don't speak such words!" said Maren. "He has everlasting life in the kingdom of heaven."

"Who told you that, Maren?" said the tailor. "A dead man is good manure, but this man was too highborn to even do the soil any good; he must lie in a church vault."

"Don't speak so impiously!" said Maren. "I tell you again he has everlasting life!"

"Who told you that, Maren?" repeated the tailor. And Maren threw her apron over little Rasmus; he must not hear that kind of talk. She carried him off into the peathouse and wept.

"The words you heard over there, little Rasmus, were not your father's; it was the evil one who was passing through the room and took your father's voice. Say your Lord's Prayer. We'll both say it." She folded the child's hands. "Now I am happy again," she said. "Have faith in yourself and in our Lord."

The year of mourning came to and end. The widow lady dressed in half mourning, but she had whole happiness in her heart. It was rumored that she had a suitor and was already thinking of marriage. Maren knew something about it, and the pastor knew a little more.

On Palm Sunday, after the sermon, the banns of marriage for the widow lady and her

betrothed were to be published. He was a wood carver or a sculptor; just what the name of his profession was, people did not know; at that time not many had heard of Thorvaldsen and his art. The future master of the manor was not a nobleman, but still he was a very stately man. His was one profession that people did not understand, they said; he cut out images, was clever in his work and young and handsome. "What good will it do?" said Tailor Ölse.

On Palm Sunday the banns were read from the pulpit; then followed a psalm and Communion. The tailor, his wife, and little Rasmus were in church; the parents received Communion, while Rasmus sat in the pew, for he was not yet confirmed. Of late there had been a shortage of clothes in the tailor's house; the old ones had been turned, and turned again, stitched and patched. Now they were all three dressed in new clothes, but of black material - as at a funeral. They were dressed in the drapery from the funeral coach. The man had a jacket and trousers of it; Maren, a high-necked dress, and Rasmus, a whole suit to grow in until confirmation time. Both the outside and inside cloth from the funeral carriage had been used. No one needed to know what it had been used for before, but people soon got to know.

The wise woman, Stine, and a couple of other equally wise women, who did not live on their wisdom, said that the clothes would bring sickness and disease into the household. "One cannot dress oneself in cloth from a funeral carriage without riding to the grave." The wooden-shoemaker's Johanne cried when she heard this talk. And it so happened that the tailor became more and more ill from that day on, until it seemed apparent who was going to suffer that fate. And it proved to be so.

On the first Sunday after Trinity, Tailor Ölse died, leaving Maren alone to keep things together. She did, keeping faith in herself and in our Lord.

The following year Rasmus was confirmed. He was then ready to go to the city as an apprentice to a master tailor - not, after all, one with ten assistants at the table, but with one; little Rasmus might be counted as a half. He was happy, and he looked delighted indeed, but Johanne wept; she was fonder of him than she had realized. The tailor's wife remained in the old house and carried on the business.

It was at that time that the new King's Highway was opened, and the old one, by the willow tree and the tailor's, became a field path, with duckweed growing over the water left in the ditch there; the milepost tumbled over, for it had nothing to stand for, but the tree kept itself strong and beautiful, the wind whistling among its branches and leaves.

The swallows flew away, and the starlings flew away, but they came again in the spring. And when they came back the fourth time, Rasmus, too, came back to his home. He had served his apprenticeship, and was a handsome but slim youth. Now he would buckle up his knapsack and see foreign countries; that was what he longed for. But his mother clung to him; home was the best place! All the other children were scattered about; he was the youngest, and the house would be his. He could get plenty of work if he would go about the neighborhood - be a traveling tailor, and sew for a fortnight at this farm and a fortnight at that. That would be traveling, too. And Rasmus followed his mother's advice.

So again he slept beneath the roof of his birthplace. Again he sat under the old willow tree and heard it whistle. He was indeed good-looking, and he could whistle like a bird and sing new and old songs.

He was well liked at the big farms, especially at Klaus Hansen's, the second richest farmer in the parish. Else, the daughter, was like the loveliest flower to look at, and she was always laughing. There were people who were unkind enough to say that she laughed simply to show her pretty teeth. She was happy indeed, and always in the humor for playing tricks; everything suited her.

She was fond of Rasmus, and he was fond of her, but neither of them said a word about

it. So he went about being gloomy; he had more of his father's disposition than his mother's. He was in a good humor only when Else was present; then they both laughed, joked, and played tricks; but although there was many a good opportunity, and played tricks; but although there was many a good opportunity, he did not say a single word about his love. "What good will it do?" was his thought. "Her parents look for profitable marriage for her, and that I cannot give her. The wisest thing for me to do would be to leave." But he could not leave. It was as if Else had a string fastened to him; he was like a trained bird with her; he sang and whistled for her pleasure and at her will.

Johanne, the shoemaker's daughter, was a servant girl at the farm, employed for common work. She drove the milk cart in the meadow, where she and the other girls milked the cows; yes, and she even had to cart manure when it was necessary. She never came into the sitting room and didn't see much of Rasmus or Else, but she heard that the two were as good as engaged.

"Now Rasmus will be well off," she said. "I cannot begrudge him that." And her eyes became quite wet. But there was really nothing to cry about.

There was a market in the town. Klaus Hansen drove there, and Rasmus went along; he sat beside Else, both going there and coming home. He was numb from love, but he didn't say a word about it.

"He ought to say something to me about the matter," thought the girl, and there she was right. "If he won't talk, I'll have to frighten him into it."

And soon there was talk at the farm that the richest farmer in the parish had proposed to Else; and so he had, but no one knew what answer she had given.

Thoughts buzzed around in Rasmus' head.

One evening Else put a gold ring on her finger and then asked Rasmus what that signified.

"Betrothal," he said.

"And with whom do you think?" she asked.

"With the rich farmer?" he said.

"There, you have hit it," she said, nodding, and then slipped away.

But he slipped away, too; he went home to his mother's house like a bewildered man and packed his knapsack. He wanted to go out into the wide world; even his mother's tears couldn't stop him.

He cut himself a stick from the old willow and whistled as if he were in a good humor; he was on his way to see the beauty of the whole world.

"This is a great grief to me," said the mother. "But I suppose it is wisest and best for you to go away, so I shall have to put up with it. Have faith in yourself and in our Lord; then I shall have you back again merry and happy."

He walked along the new highway, and there he saw Johanne come

come driving with a load of rubbish; she had not noticed him, and he did not wish to be seen by her, so he sat down behind the hedge; there he was hidden - and Johanne drove by.

Out into the world he went; no one knew where. His mother thought, "He will surely come home again before a year passes. Now he will see new things and have new things to think about, but then he will fall back into the old folds; they cannot be ironed out with any iron. He has a little too much of his father's disposition; I would rather he had mine, poor child! But he will surely come home again; he cannot forget either me or the house."

The mother would wait a year and a day. Else waited only a month and then she secretly went to the wise woman, Stine Madsdatter, who, besides knowing something about "doctoring," could tell fortunes in cards and coffee and knew more than her Lord's Prayer. She, of course, knew where Rasmus was; she read it in the coffee grounds. He was in a foreign town, but she couldn't read the name of it. In this town there were soldiers and beautiful ladies. He was thinking of either becoming a soldier or marrying one of the young ladies.

This Else could not bear to hear. She would willingly give her savings to buy him back, but no one must know that it was she.

And old Stine promised that he would come back; she knew of a charm, a dangerous charm for him; it would work; it was the ultimate remedy. She would set the pot boiling for him, and then, wherever in all the world he was, he would have to come home where the pot was boiling and his beloved was waiting for him. Months might pass before he came, but come he must if he was still alive. Without peace or rest night and day, he would be forced to return, over sea and mountain, whether the weather were mild or rough, and even if his feet were ever so tired. He would come home; he had to come home.

The moon was in the first quarter; it had to be for the charm to work, said old Stine. It was stormy weather, and the old willow tree creaked. Stine, cut a twig from it and tied it in a knot. That would surely help to draw Rasmus home to his mother's house. Moss and houseleek were taken from the roof and put in the pot, which was set upon the fire. Else had to tear a leaf out of the psalmbook; she tore out the last leaf by chance, that on which the list of errata appeared. "That will do just as well," said Stine, and threw it into the pot.

Many sorts of things went into the stew, which had to boil and boil steadily until Rasmus came home. The black cock in old Stine's room had to lose its red comb, which went into the pot. Else's heavy gold ring went in with it, and that she would never get again, Stine told her beforehand. She was so wise, Stine. Many things that we are unable to name went into the pot, which stood constantly over the flame or on glowing embers or hot ashes. Only she and Else knew about it.

Whenever the moon was new or the moon was on the wane, Else would come to her and ask, "Can't you see him coming?"

"Much do I know," said Stine, "and much do I see, but the length of the way before him I cannot see. Now he is over the first mountains; now he is on the sea in bad weather. The road is long, through large forests; he has blisters on his feet, and he has fever in his bones, but he must go on."

"No, no!" said Else. "I feel so sorry for him."

"He cannot be stopped now, for if we stop him, he will drop dead in the road!"

A year and a day had gone. The moon shone round and big, and the wind whistled in the old tree. A rainbow appeared across the sky in the bright moonlight.

"That is a sign to prove what I say," said Stine. "Now Rasmus is coming."

But still he did not come.

"The waiting time is long," said Stine.

"Now I am tired of this," said Else. She seldom visited Stine now and brought her no more gifts. Her mind became easier, and one fine morning they all knew in the parish that Else had said "yes" to the rich farmer. She went over to look at the house and grounds, the cattle, and the household belongings. All was in good order, and there was no reason to wait with the wedding.

It was celebrated with a great party lasting three days. There was dancing to the clarinet

and violins. No one in the parish was forgotten in the invitations. Mother Ölse was there, too, and when the party came to an end, and the hosts had thanked the guests, and the trumpets had blown, she went home with the leavings from the feast.

She had fastened the door only with a peg; it had been taken out, the door stood open, and in the room sat Rasmus. He had returned home - come that very hour. Lord God, how he looked! He was only skin and bone; he was pale and yellow.

"Rasmus!" said his mother. "Is it you I see? How badly you look! But I am so happy in my heart to have you back."

And she gave him the good food she had brought home from the party, a piece of the roast and of the wedding cake.

He had lately, he said, often thought of his mother, his home, and the old willow tree; it was strange how often in his dreams he had seen the tree and the little barefooted Johanne. He did not mention Else at all. He was ill and had to go to bed.

But we do not believe that the pot was the cause of this, or that it had exercised any power over him. Only old Stine and Else believed that, but they did not talk about it.

Rasmus lay with a fever - an infectious one. For that reason no one came to the tailor's house, except Johanne, the shoemaker's daughter. She cried when she saw how miserable Rasmus was.

The doctor wrote a prescription for him to have filled at the pharmacy. He would not take the medicine. "What good will it do?" he said.

"You will get well again then," said his mother. "Have faith in yourself and in our Lord! If I could only see you get flesh on your body again, hear you whistle and sing; for that I would willingly lay down my life."

And Rasmus was cured of his illness, but his mother contracted it. Our Lord summoned her, and not him.

It was lonely in the house; he became poorer and poorer. "He is worn out," they said in the parish. "Poor Rasmus." He had led a wild life on his travels; that, and not the black pot that had boiled, had sucked out his marrow and given him pain in his body. His hair became thin and gray. He was too lazy to work. "What good will it do?" he said. He would rather visit the tavern than the church.

One autumn evening he was staggering through rain and wind along the muddy road from the tavern to his house; his mother had long since gone and been laid in her grave. The swallows and starlings were also gone, faithful as they were. Johanne, the shoemaker's daughter, was not gone; she overtook him on the road and then followed him a little way.

"Pull yourself together, Rasmus."

"What good will it do?" he said.

"That is an awful saying that you have," said she. "Remember your mother's words, 'Have faith in yourself and in our Lord.' You do not, Rasmus, but you must, and you shall. Never say, 'What good will it do?' for then you pull up the root of all your doings."

She followed him to the door of his house, and there she left him. He did not stay inside; he wandered out under the old willow tree and sat on a stone from the overturned milepost.

The wind whistled in the tree's branches; it was like a song: it was like talk.

Rasmus answered it; he spoke aloud but no one heard him except the tree and the whistling wind.

"I am getting so cold. It is time to go to bed. Sleep, sleep!"

And he walked away, not toward the house, but over to the ditch, where he tottered and fell. Rain poured down, and the wind was icy cold, but he didn't feel this. When the sun rose, and the crows flew over the bulrushes, he awoke, deathly ill. Had he laid his head where he put his feet, he would never have arisen; the green duckweed would have been his burial sheet.

Later in the day Johanne came to the tailor's house. She helped him; she managed to get him to the hospital.

"We have known each other since we were little," she said. "Your mother gave me both ale and food; for that I can never repay her. You will regain your health; you will be a man with a will to live!"

And our Lord willed that he should live. But he had his ups and downs, both in health and mind.

The swallows and the starlings returned, and flew away, and returned again. Rasmus became older than his years. He sat alone in his house, which deteriorated more and more. He was poor, poorer now than Johanne.

"You have no faith," she said, "and if we do not believe in God, what have we? You should go to Communion," she said; "you haven't been since your confirmation."

"What good will it do?" he said.

"If you say that and believe it, then let it be; the Master does not want an unwilling guest at His table. But think of your mother and your childhood. Once you were a good, pious boy. Let me read a psalm to you."

"What good will it do?" he said.

"It always comforts me," she answered.

"Johanne, you have surely become one of the saints." And he looked at her with dull, weary eyes.

And Johanne read the psalm, but not from a book, for she had none; she knew it by heart.

"Those were beautiful words," he said, "but I could not follow you altogether. My head feels so heavy."

Rasmus had become an old man. But Else, if we may mention her, was no longer young, either; Rasmus never mentioned her. She was a grandmother. Her granddaughter was an impudent little girl.

The little one was playing with the other children in the village. Rasmus came along, supporting himself on his stick. He stopped, watched the children play, and smiled to them, old times were in his thoughts. Else's granddaughter pointed at him. "Poor Rasmus!" she shouted. The other little girls followed her example. "Poor Rasmus!" they shouted, and pursued the old man with shrieks. It was a gray, gloomy day, and many others followed. But after gray and gloomy days, there comes a sunshiny day.

It was a beautiful Whitsunday morning. The church was decorated with green birch branches; there was a scent of the woods within it, and the sun shone on the church pews. The large altar candles were lighted, and Communion was being held. Johanne was among the kneeling, but Rasmus was not among them. That very morning the Lord had called him.

In God are grace and mercy.

Many years have since passed. The tailor's house still stands there, but no one lives in it. It might fall the first stormy night. The ditch is overgrown with bulrush and buck bean. The wind whistles in the old tree; it is as if one were hearing a song; the wind sings it; the tree

tells it. If you do not understand it, ask old Johanne in the poorhouse.

She still lives there; she sings her psalm, the one she read for Rasmus. She thinks of him, prays to our Lord for him - she, the faithful soul. She can tell of bygone times, of memories that whistle in the old willow tree.

Livros Grátis

(http://www.livrosgratis.com.br)

Milhares de Livros para Download:

Baixar livros de Literatura
Baixar livros de Literatura de Cordel
Baixar livros de Literatura Infantil
Baixar livros de Matemática
Baixar livros de Medicina
Baixar livros de Medicina Veterinária
Baixar livros de Meio Ambiente
Baixar livros de Meteorologia
Baixar Monografias e TCC
Baixar livros Multidisciplinar
Baixar livros de Música
Baixar livros de Psicologia
Baixar livros de Química
Baixar livros de Saúde Coletiva
Baixar livros de Serviço Social
Baixar livros de Sociologia
Baixar livros de Teologia
Baixar livros de Trabalho
Baixar livros de Turismo