

The Flying Trunk

Hans Christian Andersen

There once was a merchant so wealthy that he could have paved a whole street with silver, and still have had enough left over to pave a little alley. But he did nothing of the sort. He knew better ways of using his money than that. If he parted with pennies they came back to him as crowns. That's the sort of merchant he was-and then he died.

Now his son got all the money, and he led a merry life, went to masquerades every night, made paper dolls out of banknotes, and played ducks and drakes at the lake with gold pieces instead of pebbles. This makes the money go, and his inheritance was soon gone. At last he had only four pennies, and only a pair of slippers and a dressing gown to wear.

Now his former friends didn't care for him any more, as he could no longer appear in public with them, but one of them was so good as to send him an old trunk, with the hint that he pack and be off. This was all very well, but he had nothing to pack, so he sat himself in it.

It was no ordinary trunk. Press on the lock and it would fly. And that's just what it did. *Whisk!* It flew up the chimney, and over the clouds, and away through the skies. The bottom of it was so creaky that he feared he would fall through it, and what a fine somersault he would have made then! Good gracious! But at long last he came down safely, in the land of the Turks. He hid his trunk under some dry leaves in the woods, and set off toward the nearest town. He could do so very well, for the Turks all wear dressing gowns and slippers, just as he did.

When he passed a nurse with a child, he said, "Hello, Turkish nurse. Tell me, what's that great big palace at the edge of town? The one that has its windows up so high."

"That's where the Sultan's daughter lives," said the nurse. "It has been foretold that she will be unhappy when she falls in love, so no one is ever permitted to visit her except in the presence of her mother and father."

"Thank you," said the merchant's son. Back he went to the woods, sat in his trunk, and whisked off to the roof of the palace. From there, he climbed in at the Princess's window.

She lay fast asleep on a sofa, and she looked so lovely that the merchant's son couldn't help kissing her. She woke up and was terribly frightened, but he told her he was a Turkish prophet, who had sailed through the air just to see her. This pleased her very much.

As they sat there, side by side, he told her stories about her eyes. He said they were beautifully dark, deep lakes in which her thoughts went swimming by like mermaids. He told her about her forehead, which he compared to a snow-covered mountainside with its many wonderful halls and pictures. Then he told her about the stork, which brings lovely little children from over the sea. Oh, they were such pretty stories! Then he asked her to marry him, and the Princess said yes, right away.

"But you must come on Saturday," she told him, "when my mother and father will be here to have tea with me. They will be so proud when I tell them I am going to marry a prophet. But be sure you have a really pretty tale to tell them, for both my parents love stories. My mother likes them to be elevating and moral, but my father likes them merry, to make him laugh."

"I shall bring no other wedding present than a fairy tale," he told her, and so they parted. But first the Princess made him a present of a gold saber all covered with gold pieces, and this came in very handy.

He flew away, bought himself a new dressing gown, and went to the woods to invent a fairy tale. That wasn't so easy. However, he had it ready promptly on Saturday. The Sultan, his wife and the whole court awaited him at the Princess's tea party. They gave him a splendid reception.

"Won't you tell us a story?" said the Sultan's wife. "One that is instructive and thoughtful."

"One that will make us laugh, too," said the Sultan.

"To be sure," he said, and started his story. Now listen closely.

"There once was a bundle of matches, and they were particularly proud of their lofty ancestry. Their family tree-that is to say, the great pine tree of which they were little splinters-had been a great old tree in the forest. As the matches lay on the kitchen shelf, they talked of their younger days to the tinder box and an old iron pot beside them.

" 'When we were a part of the green branches,' they said, 'then we really were on a green branch! Every morning and evening we were served the diamond tea that is called dew drops. We had sunshine all day long, and the little birds had to tell us stories. It was plain to see that we were wealthy, for while the other trees' garments lasted only the summer, our family could afford to wear green clothes all the year round. But then the woodcutters came, there was a big revolution, and our family was broken up. The chief support of our family got a place as the mainmast of a fine ship, that could sail around the world if need be. The other branches were scattered in different directions, and now our task is to bring light to the lower classes. That's the reason we distinguished people came to this kitchen.'

" 'My lot has been quite different,' said the iron pot, who stood next to the matches. 'From the moment I came into this world, I've known little but cooking and scouring, day in, day out. I look after the solid and substantial part, and am in fact the most important thing in the house. My only amusement comes when dinner is over. Then, clean and tidy, I take my place here to have a sound conversation with my associates. But except for the watering pot, who now and then makes excursions into the yard, we always live indoors. Our only source of news is the market basket, and he speaks most alarmingly about the government and the people. Why, just the other day an old conservative pot was so upset that he fell down and burst. That basket is a liberal, I tell you!'

" 'You talk too much,' the tinder box flashed sparks from his flint. 'Let's have a pleasant evening.'

" 'Yes, let's talk about who among us is most aristocratic,' said the matches.

" 'No. I don't like to talk about myself,' said the earthenware crock. 'Let's have some entertainment this evening. I'll begin. I'll tell you the sort of things we already know. That won't tax our imaginations, and it is so amusing. By the Baltic sea, by the beech trees of Denmark-'

" 'That's a very pretty beginning,' the plates chattered. 'That's just the kind of story we like.'

" 'There I passed my youth in a quiet home, where they polished the furniture, and swept the floor, and hung up fresh curtains every fourteenth day!'

" 'How well you tell a story!' said the broom. 'You can hear right away that it's a woman who tells it. There's not a speck of dirt in it.'

" 'Yes, one feels that,' said the water pail, and made a happy little jump so the water splashed on the floor.

" 'The crock went on with her story, and the end was as good as the beginning.

"All the plates clattered for joy. The broom made a wreath of parsley to crown the crock, because she knew how that would annoy the others. And the broom thought, 'If I crown her tonight, she will crown me tomorrow.'

"Now I'll do a dance," said the fire tongs, and dance she did. Yes, good heavens, how she could kick one of her legs up in the air! The old chair cover in the corner split to see it. "Will you crown me too?" said the tongs, so they gave her a wreath.

"What a common mob," said the matches.

"The tea pot was asked to sing, but she had a cold in her throat. She said nothing short of boiling water could make her sing, but that was sheer affectation. She wished to sing only for the ladies and gentlemen in the drawing room.

"On the window sill was an old quill pen that the servant used. There was nothing remarkable about him except that he had been dipped too deep in the ink, but in that difference he took pride.

"The tea pot can sing or not, as she pleases," he declared. "In a cage, outside my window, there's a nightingale who will sing for us. He hasn't practiced for the occasion, but tonight we won't be too critical."

"I find it highly improper," said the tea kettle, who was the official kitchen singer, and a half-sister of the tea pot. "Why should we listen to a foreign bird? Is that patriotic? Let the market basket make the decision.

"I am most annoyed," said the market basket. "I am more annoyed than anyone can imagine. Is this any way to spend an evening? Wouldn't it be better to call the house to order? Everyone take his appointed place, and I shall run the whole game. That will be something quite different."

"Yes. Let us all make a noise," they clamored.

Just then the servant opened the door, and they stood stock-still. Not one had a word to say. But there was not a pot among them who did not know what he could do, and how well qualified he was. "If I had wanted to," each one thought, "we could have a gay evening. No question about it!"

"The servant girl took the matches and struck a light with them. My stars, how they sputtered and flared!

"Now," they thought, "everyone can see we are the first. How brilliant we are! What a light we spread." Then they burned out."

"That was a delightful story," said the Sultan's wife. "I felt myself right in the kitchen with the matches. My dear prophet, thou shalt certainly marry our daughter."

"Yes indeed," said the Sultan. "Thou shalt marry her on Monday." They said "Thou" to him now, for he was soon to be one of the family.

So the wedding day was set, and on the evening that preceded it the whole city was gay with lights. Cookies and cakes were thrown among the people. The boys in the street stood on tiptoe. They shouted, "Hurrah!" and whistled through their fingers. It was all so grand.

"I suppose I really ought to do something too," said the merchant's son. So he bought firecrackers, and rockets, and fireworks of every sort, loaded his trunk with them, and flew over the town.

Pop! went the crackers, and *swoosh!* went the rockets. The Turks jumped so high that their slippers flopped over their ears. Such shooting stars they never had seen. Now they could understand that it was the prophet of the Turks himself who was to marry their Princess.

As soon as the merchant's son came down in the woods, he thought, "I'll go straight to the town to hear what sort of impression I made." It was the natural thing to do.

Oh, what stories they told! Every last man he asked had his own version, but all agreed it had been fine. Very fine!

"I saw the prophet himself," said one. "His eyes shone like stars, and his beard foamed like water."

"He was wrapped in a fiery cloak," said another. "The heads of beautiful angels peeped out of the folds of it."

Yes, he heard wonderful things, and his wedding was to be on the following day. He went back to the woods to rest in his trunk-but what had become of it? The trunk was burned! A spark from the fireworks had set it on fire, and now the trunk was burned to ashes. He couldn't fly any more. He had no way to reach his bride. She waited for him on the roof, all day long. Most likely she is waiting there still. But he wanders through the world, telling tales which are not half so merry as that one he told about the matches.