



TIMELESS WISDOM  
FROM THE CLASSIC TALES OF

# Hans Christian Andersen

*J. L. Bunton*

“I shall come and sing for you,  
so you may be joyful —  
and thoughtful.”

*The Nightingale*

H. C. Andersen



# AN INVITATION

This tiny collection of tales is an invitation to relax and read the stories out loud, so you can hear the words that have spoken to people across cultures and generations. As you do, you will discover what every Dane knows: Hans Christian Andersen wrote for both children and adults.

H. C. Andersen, as he is known in Denmark, wrote 156 stories. They have been translated into 125 languages, and his popularity endures. Unfortunately, most people are unfamiliar with the cleverness of these tales, and the Anglo-American world has even pigeonholed him as a quaint, Victorian-era children's author. Most translations, therefore, show a bias towards a child's vocabulary and experience, and they miss the supple turn of phrase and the humor that speaks to the adult. My hope is that these faithful translations will remedy that.

The author's fairytales range from the whimsical to the profound. They may expose the silly sensitivity of a princess or ridicule the affectations of the court. They may offer a tender moment with a starving child or a heart-wrenching story of a grieving mother. Regardless of the topic, H. C. Andersen weaves a tapestry of heroes who are open, genuine, generous, and courageous; and villains who are selfish, small-minded, status-seeking, and smug.

This short selection reminds us to live in the moment and to treasure the natural world. It asks us to move beyond the fear that blocks pure self-expression. It invites us to find our "natural leadership voice" and to grow into our potential.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mette Norgaard". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial 'M'.

Mette Norgaard, Ph.D.  
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from the Classic Tales of Hans Christian Andersen*

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# The Nightingale

In China, as you know, the Emperor is Chinese, and all those around him are Chinese too. This story happened many years ago, but that is precisely why it is worth telling it before we forget it. The Emperor's palace was the most splendid in the world, made entirely and completely from fine porcelain that was precious, but so fragile that one had to be very careful when touching it. In the garden were the most amazing flowers, and next to the most beautiful ones were tied silver bells that rang, so that one could not walk by them without paying attention. Yes, everything was so cleverly arranged in the Emperor's garden.

The garden stretched so far that even the gardener did not know the end of it. If you continued to walk, you came to the most beautiful forest with tall trees and deep lakes. The forest went straight down to the sea, which was blue and deep, so large ships could sail right in underneath the branches. In these branches lived a nightingale that sang so sweetly that even the poorest fisherman, who had so much to attend to, would stop and listen when he was out at night pulling up his nets and heard the nightingale. "Dear Lord, how beautiful it is!" he said. But then he had to tend to things and forgot about the bird. Still the next night, when the nightingale sang again and the fisherman came out, he said the same thing: "Dear Lord! How very beautiful it is!"

From all the countries in the world, travelers came to the Emperor's city, and they admired it – the city, the palace and the garden. But when they heard the nightingale, they all said the same thing: "this is the very best!"

The travelers spoke about it when they returned home, and the learned wrote many books about the city, the palace, and the garden. But they never forgot about the nightingale – it was at the very top of the list. And those who could write poetry, wrote such beautiful poems, all of them about the nightingale in the forest by the deep sea.

The books made it around the world and some even made it back to the Emperor. He sat on his golden throne, and read and read. He nodded his head all the time, because he so enjoyed hearing the magnificent descriptions of his city, palace, and garden. “But the nightingale is the very best!” it was written.

“What’s this?” said the Emperor, “The nightingale! But I don’t know it at all! Is there such a bird in my empire? On top of that, in my own garden? I have never heard that! One has to read about such!”

And then he called his chamberlain, who was so distinguished that when anyone of lower rank dared to talk to him or ask him anything, he only answered “P!” – and that meant nothing at all.

“There’s supposed to be a most remarkable bird here called nightingale!” said the Emperor. “It is said to be the very best thing in my great empire! Why hasn’t anyone ever told me anything about it?”

“I have never heard it mentioned before!” said the chamberlain. “It has never been presented at court!”

“It must come here tonight and sing for me,” said the Emperor. “Here the whole world knows what I have, and I don’t know it!”

“I have never heard it mentioned before,” said the chamberlain, “but I shall look for it, and I shall find it!”

But where was it to be found? The chamberlain ran up and down all the stairs, through all the halls and corridors, but no one among the many he ran into had heard talk of the nightingale. And the chamberlain ran to the Emperor once more and said that this was

likely a fable – created by those who write books. “Your Imperial Majesty must not believe everything that is written! It is all made up, something called the black art!”

“But the book in which I read it,” said the Emperor, “was sent to me by the Mighty Emperor of Japan, so it cannot be untrue. I will hear the nightingale! It shall be here tonight! I shall grant it my highest favor! And if it doesn’t come, then the whole court shall be thumped on their bellies right after they have eaten their dinner!”

“Tsing-pe!” said the chamberlain, and once more ran up and down all the stairs through all the halls and corridors; and half the court ran along, for they did not want to be thumped on their bellies! They all asked about the remarkable nightingale the whole world, but no one at court, knew about.

Finally they came upon a poor little girl in the kitchen who said, “Dear God, the nightingale! I know it well! Yes, how it can sing! Every night I’m permitted to take a few leftovers and bring them home to my poor sick mother, who lives down by the shore. And when I walk back and get tired and rest in the forest, then I hear the nightingale sing! It brings tears to my eyes, it’s just as if my mother were kissing me.”

The chamberlain declared, “The little kitchen maid shall be provided with a permanent position in the kitchen and permission to watch the Emperor eat, if she will lead us to the nightingale, for it has been summoned for tonight.”

And then they all set out for the forest where the nightingale usually sang, and half of the court came along. As they walked along, a cow started mooing.

“Oh!” said the courtiers. “Here we have it! It’s really an unusual force for such a little creature. I have most certainly heard it before.”



“No, that’s the cows that are mooing!” said the little kitchen maid. “We’re still far from the place.”

Then the frogs started to croak in the pond.

“Wonderful!” said the palace chaplain, “Now I hear it. It’s like little church bells!”

“No, that’s the frogs!” said the little kitchen maid. “But now, I think we’ll soon hear it.”

Then the nightingale began to sing.

“That’s it!” said the little girl. “Listen! Listen! There it is!” And then she pointed to a little gray bird up in the branches.

“Is that possible?” said the chamberlain. “I had never thought it would look like that! How plain it looks! It must have lost its color by having so many prominent people come visit.”

“Little nightingale,” shouted the little kitchen maid quite loudly, “our gracious Emperor would so very much like you to sing for him!”

“With the greatest pleasure,” said the nightingale, and it sang most delightfully.

“It is just like glass bells!” said the chamberlain. “And look at the tiny throat. How it uses it! It is strange that we have never heard it before. It will be a great success at court.”

“Shall I sing for the Emperor again?” asked the nightingale, who thought the Emperor had come along.

“My splendid little nightingale,” said the chamberlain, “I have the great pleasure to summon you to the court celebration tonight where you will enchant his High Imperial Eminence with your *charmante* song!”

“It sounds best outdoors, in the green wood,” said the nightingale, but it gladly came along when it heard that the Emperor wanted it.

At the palace, everything had been properly polished. The walls and floors made from porcelain glowed to the light of thousands of golden lamps. The most wonderful flowers, which actually could tinkle, were placed along the corridors. And there was such a running about that with the draft all the bells tinkled, so you could not hear yourself think.

In the middle of the great hall, where the Emperor was sitting, was a golden perch, where the nightingale was to sit. The whole court was there, and the little kitchen maid had been given permission to stand behind the door, since she now had the title of “real kitchen maid.” Everyone was wearing their greatest finery. And everyone looked at the little gray bird, and the Emperor nodded at it.

The nightingale sang so beautifully that the Emperor got tears in his eyes, and the tears rolled down his cheeks. And then the nightingale sang even more beautifully! It went straight to the heart. The Emperor was most delighted, and he said that the nightingale was to have his golden slipper to wear around its neck. But the nightingale said no, thank you; it had already been rewarded enough.

“I have seen tears in the Emperor’s eyes, and that is the richest treasure! An Emperor’s tears have a strange power. God knows I have been rewarded!” And then it sang once more with its sweet blessed voice.

“This is the most adorable *coquetterie* I know,” said the ladies all around. And then they put water in their mouth so they could warble when someone talked to them, for they thought they were nightingales too. Even the footman and the chambermaids let it be known that they were content, and that is saying a lot, for they are the most difficult to please. Yes, the nightingale was certainly a success!

It was now to remain at court, have its own cage, plus the liberty to go for a walk twice during the day and once at night. It was given twelve servants to bring along. Each of them had a silk ribbon tied around one of its legs, and held on to it tightly. There was no pleasure at all in that walk.

The whole city talked about the amazing bird. When two people met each other, one of them would say only, “Night!” and the other, “Gale!” And then they would sigh and understand each other. Yes, and eleven butchers’ children were named after it, though not one of them could carry a tune!

One day the Emperor received a large package. On the outside was written *Nightingale*.

“Here’s another new book about our famous bird!” said the Emperor. But it was not a book, it was a small work of art that was lying in a box – an artificial nightingale, made to look like the real one, except it was covered with diamonds, rubies, and sapphires! As soon as the artificial bird was wound up, it could sing one of the melodies the real one sang, and then its tail went up and down, gleaming with silver and gold. Around its neck was a small ribbon, and on it was written, “The Japanese Emperor’s nightingale is cheap compared to the Emperor of China’s.”

“It’s lovely!” they all said. And the person who had brought the artificial bird was promptly given the title of “high-imperial-nightingale-bringer.”

“Now they must sing together. What a duet that will be!”

So they had to sing together, but that didn’t go so well, for the real nightingale sang in its own way, and the artificial bird went on automatic rollers.

“That’s not its fault,” said the Music Master about the artificial bird. “It keeps perfect time and is in line with my system.” The artificial bird was then to sing by itself. It was just as

much of a success as the real one, and it was so much more lovely to look at, as it sparkled like bracelets and brooches.

Thirty-three times it sang one and the same melody, and it still wasn't tired. People would gladly have listened to it from the beginning again, but the Emperor thought that now the living nightingale should also sing a little. But where was it? No one had noticed that it had flown out the open window and gone away to its green forests.

"But what's this?" said the Emperor. And all the courtiers scolded the nightingale and thought that it was a most ungrateful creature.

"We still have the best bird!" they said, and then the artificial bird had to sing again. That was the thirty-fourth time they got the same tune, but they still they did not know it by heart because it was so intricate. And the Music Master praised the bird highly and assured everyone that it was better than the real nightingale, not only because of the way it was dressed and the many lovely diamonds, but also on the inside.

"For you see, ladies and gentlemen, and above all your Imperial Highness, with the real nightingale one can never calculate what will happen, what will come next, but with the artificial bird everything is determined. So it will be and no differently! One can account for it, one can cut it open and show the human thinking, how the music rollers lie, how they move, and how one thing follows the next!"

"That's precisely what I think," they all said. And, on the following Sunday, the Music Master was permitted to show the bird to the people, for they should also hear it sing, said the Emperor. And they heard it, and they were just as delighted as if they had all drunk themselves merry with tea water, for that is so very Chinese. And everyone then said "Oh!" and stuck the finger we call the index finger high in the air, and then they nodded. But the

poor fisherman, who had heard the real nightingale, said: “It sounds beautiful enough, it also looks like it, but something is missing. I don’t know what!”

And the real nightingale was banished from the realm.

The artificial bird now had its place on the silk cushion close to the Emperor’s bed. All the gifts it had received, gold and gems, were lying around it. In title it had risen to “high-imperial-bedside-table-singer.” In rank, it was number one on the left side, for the Emperor considered that to be the most distinguished side because that is where the heart is, and the heart is also on the left side in the Emperor. The Music Master wrote twenty-five volumes about the artificial bird, which were very learned and very long and used all the most difficult Chinese words. Everyone said that they had read and understood them, for otherwise they would have been considered stupid and then they would have been thumped on their bellies.

And so it went for a whole year. The Emperor, the court, and all the other Chinese knew by heart every “cluck” that the artificial bird sang. But that was precisely why they liked it the very best. They could sing along, and that they did. Street urchins sang “Zizizi! Cluck-cluck-cluck!” and the Emperor sang it! Yes, it was so very lovely!

But one evening, as the artificial bird was singing and the Emperor was lying in bed listening to it, the bird went “Boing!” inside. Something popped. “Whirrrrrrrrr!” All the wheels spun around, and the music stopped.

The Emperor leaped out of bed and had his personal physician summoned. But what good was that! Then they had the watchmaker fetched, and after much talking and much looking, he more or less put the bird back together again. But he said that the bird had to be played sparingly, for the cogs were very worn and it was not possible to replace them in a way that the music could be guaranteed. That was terribly sad! Only once a year did they

dare let the artificial bird sing, and even that was hard enough. But then the Music Master gave a little speech with all the difficult words and said that it was just as good as before – and so it was as good as before.

Now five years had passed, and the whole country suffered a really great sorrow because, after all, they were all fond of their Emperor, who was sick and would not live, it was said. A new Emperor had already been chosen, but the people stood in the street and asked the chamberlain how it was with their Emperor.

“P!” he said, and shook his head.

Cold and pale, the Emperor lay in his great, magnificent bed. The whole court thought him dead and all of them had run over to greet the new Emperor. The footmen ran out to talk about it, and the chambermaids had a big coffee klatch. In all the halls and corridors cloth had been put down so one would not hear people walk, and it was so quiet, so very quiet. But the Emperor was not yet dead. Stiff and pale, he lay in his magnificent bed with the long velvet curtains and the heavy golden tassels. High up, a window was open, and the moon was shining in on the Emperor and the artificial bird.

The poor Emperor could hardly breathe. It was as if something were sitting on his chest. He opened his eyes, and then he saw that it was Death who was sitting on his chest. It had put on his golden crown, and in one hand it held the Emperor’s saber and in the other his magnificent banner. And around him, in the folds of the great velvet curtains, the most unusual faces peered forth, some of them quite hideous and others so blessedly mild: These were all the Emperor’s evil and good deeds looking at him, now that Death was sitting on his heart.

“Do you remember that?” they whispered one after the other. “Do you remember that?” And then they told him so much that the sweat poured from his forehead.

“I never knew that!” said the Emperor. “Music, music! The great Chinese drums!” he shouted, “so I don’t have to hear what they’re saying!”

Still they continued, and Death nodded, in the way the Chinese do, at everything that was said.

“Music, music!” cried the Emperor. “You blessed little golden bird, sing! Sing! I have given you gold and treasures. I personally put my golden slipper around your neck. Do sing! Sing!”

But the bird stood still. There was no one there to wind it, so it could not sing. Meanwhile Death, with its big empty eye sockets, continued to look at the Emperor, and it was so quiet, so dreadfully quiet!

At that very moment the loveliest song sounded near the window. It was the real little nightingale sitting on a branch outside. It had heard of the Emperor’s need and had come to sing him comfort and hope. And as it sang, the faces in the curtain became paler and paler. The blood came faster and faster to the Emperor’s weak limbs. And Death itself listened and said, “Continue, little nightingale, continue!”

“Yes, if you give me the magnificent golden saber! Yes, if you give me the great banner! Yes, if you give me the Emperor’s crown!”

And Death gave each treasure for a song. And the nightingale continued to sing. It sang about the quiet churchyard where the white roses grow, where the elderberries scent the air, and where the fresh grass is watered by the tears of the bereaved. Then Death began to long for its garden and drifted like a cold white mist out the window.

“Thank you, thank you!” said the Emperor. “You heavenly little bird, I know you well. I drove you from my realm, and still you have sung the evil visions away from my bed, and removed Death from my heart! How can I reward you?”

“You have rewarded me!” said the nightingale. “You gave me your tears the first time I sang for you. I’ll never forget it. They are the jewels that touch a singer’s heart. But sleep now and get well and strong! I’ll sing for you.”

And it sang – and the Emperor fell into a sweet sleep, a gentle and restorative sleep.

The sun was shining on him through the window when he awoke strengthened and healthy. None of his servants had returned, for they thought he was dead. But the nightingale still sat there singing.

“You must always stay with me,” said the Emperor, “You shall only sing when you want to, and I will break the artificial bird into a thousand pieces.”

“Don’t do that!” said the nightingale. “It has done the good it could. Keep it as always. I cannot build my nest and live at the palace, but let me come to you when I feel like it. Then I shall come in the evening and sit on the branch by the window and sing for you, so you may be joyful – and thoughtful. And I shall sing of those who are happy and of those who suffer. I shall sing of the evil and the good that is kept hidden from you. The little songbird flies far and wide: to the poor fisherman, to the farmer’s roof, to everyone who is far from you and your court. I love your heart more than your crown, although the crown does have a scent of something holy about it. I shall come and sing for you. Only you must promise me one thing.”

“Anything!” said the Emperor. He stood in his imperial robe, which he had put on by himself, and held his heavy gold saber up to his heart.



“Only one thing I ask of you. Don’t tell anyone that you have a little bird who tells you everything; then everything will be even better.”

Then the nightingale flew away.

When at last the servants came to take a look at their dead Emperor, well, there they stood. And the Emperor said, “Good morning!”

# A LITTLE HISTORY

Two events inspired *The Nightingale*: the opening of Tivoli Gardens in Copenhagen and the great singer Jenny Lind, in her time called the Swedish Nightingale.

In August 1843, Tivoli Gardens had just opened. It was a magical place with Chinese pagodas, colored lanterns, peacocks, fireworks, lakes, flowers, restaurants, theaters, and amusement rides.

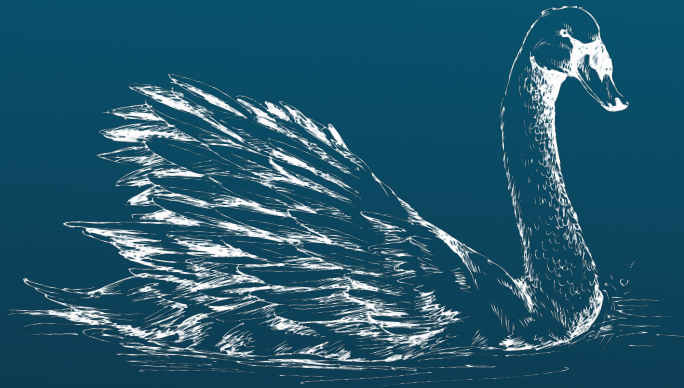
The next month, H. C. Andersen met Jenny Lind when she first performed in Copenhagen. She was later to become the toast of Vienna, have tea with Queen Victoria in London, and tour the United States.

At first H. C. Andersen thought Lind extremely plain, but when he heard her sing he was captivated and fell deeply in love. As a true romantic, however, he seemed to prefer feeling in love to having an adult love relationship; thus, even when he proposed to Lind by letter, he made sure to mention several reasons why she might not find him eligible. Lind, however, was never romantically interested in the writer, but always thought of him as a brother.

*The Nightingale* was written in an amazing burst of creativity. H. C. Andersen noted in his journal on October 11th, 1843, “In Tivoli Gardens. Started the Chinese fairy tale.” Already the next night he wrote, “Dined at home, visited, finished the Chinese tale.”

H. C. Andersen rarely included *The Nightingale* in his readings. But from his correspondence we know that he gave a reading of it in 1852 during one of his frequent visits to Weimar, Germany, and that it was the composer Franz Liszt’s favorite tale.





# The Ugly Duckling



**I**t was so lovely out in the country. It was summer! The wheat stood yellow, the oats green, and the hay was stacked down in the green meadow. And there a stork walked on his long red legs, chattering in Egyptian, for that was the language he had learned from his mother. All around the fields and meadows were large forests, and in the middle of the forests were deep lakes. Yes, it was so very lovely out there in the country.

The sun shone down on an old manor house with a deep moat all around it, and from the wall down to the water grew large-leaf weeds. They were so tall that little children could stand upright under the biggest ones. It was just as wild in there as in the thickest forest. And here sat a duck on her nest. She had to hatch her little ducklings, but she was getting tired of it, for it took a very long time and she seldom got any company. The other ducks liked swimming about in the moat more than running up and sitting under the weeds to chat with her.

Finally one egg after another started cracking: “Peep! Peep!” All the egg yolks had come alive and a little head stuck out each shell.

“Quack! Quack!” said the mother, and the ducklings then hurried as fast as they could, and looked all about under the green leaves. The mother let them look as much as they wanted to, for green is good for the eyes.

“My, how big the world is!” said all the ducklings, for they certainly had a lot more room than when they were lying in the eggs.

“You think this is the whole world,” said the mother, “but it reaches far beyond the garden, right to the minister’s field, though I myself have never been there! Well, now I expect you’re all here!” – and she got up.

“No, I don’t have everyone! The biggest egg is still lying there. How long is this one going to take? I’m beginning to get bored with it!” And then she sat down again.

“Well, how’s it going?” said an old duck that had come to pay a visit.

“It takes so long with this one egg!” said the duck that was sitting. “It won’t crack. But do come and see the others! They’re the loveliest ducklings I’ve ever seen. They all look like their father, that scoundrel; he doesn’t come to see me.”

“Let me see the egg that won’t crack!” said the old one. “Believe me, that’s a turkey egg! I was fooled that way once myself. And I had such grief and trouble with those youngsters for, I tell you, they’re afraid of the water! I couldn’t get them to go in! I quacked and snapped, but nothing helped. Let me see that egg! Yes, that’s a turkey egg all right! You just leave that one and teach your other children to swim.”

“Well, I’ll sit on it a little longer,” said the duck. “Now that I’ve sat here this long, I might as well sit it out!”

“Suit yourself!” said the old duck. And then she left.

Finally the large egg cracked. “Peep! Peep!” said the youngster as he tumbled out. He was big and ugly. The mother looked at him. “Now, that is one horribly big duckling!” she said. “None of the others looks like that! It couldn’t be a turkey chick, could it? Well, we’ll soon find out! Into the water with him, even if I have to kick him in!”

The next day the weather was glorious. The sun was shining on the green weeds. The mother duck with her whole family went down to the moat. Splash! she jumped into the water. “Quack! Quack!” she said, and one duckling after another plopped in. The water splashed over their heads, but they quickly came up again and floated along beautifully.

Their legs worked all by themselves, so all of them were soon out in the water, and even the ugly gray one was swimming along.

“No, that’s no turkey!” she said. “Look how nicely he’s using his legs, and how tall he carries himself. He’s my own all right! Actually he’s quite handsome when you really look at him. Quack. Quack. Now come along and I’ll take you out in the world and introduce you to the duck yard. But stay close to me so no one steps on you, and watch out for the cat!”

And then they came to the duck yard. There was a terrible ruckus in there, for there were two families fighting over an eel’s head, which the cat got in the end.

“See, that’s how the world is,” said the duck mother and licked her bill, for she also wanted the eel’s head. “Now use your legs!” she said. “Hurry up and bow to the old one over there! She’s the most distinguished of everyone here. She has Spanish blood, that’s why she’s so fat. And notice, she has a red rag around her leg! That’s something very special and it’s the greatest honor anyone can receive. It is so important that no one would want to get rid of her, and it means that she’ll be recognized by animals and humans! Now hurry along! Don’t keep your legs together! A properly brought-up duckling sets its legs wide apart, just like his father and mother. That’s it! Now bow with your neck and say ‘Quack!’”

And so they did, but the other ducks around them looked at them and said quite loudly, “Look at that! Now we’re going to have another bunch! As if we weren’t enough already! And yuck! How that one duckling looks! We won’t put up with him!” And right away one duck flew over and bit him on the neck.

“Let him alone!” said the mother. “He’s not bothering anyone!”

“Yes, but he’s too big and peculiar!” said the duck that had bit him, “and so he has to get picked on!”

“Those are pretty children the mother has!” said the old duck with the rag around her leg. “All of them are pretty except one; that one did not turn out well. I wish she could do that one over again.”

“That’s not possible, your grace,” said the mother duck. “He’s not pretty, but has a really good nature, and he swims as well as the others! Yes, I dare say, even a little better! I think he’ll grow handsome, or that in time he will become a little smaller. He’s been too long in the egg, that’s why he hasn’t got the right shape.” And then she nuzzled his neck and smoothed his feathers. “Besides, he’s only a drake,” she said, “and so it doesn’t matter so much. I think he’ll become very strong. He’ll make it, all right.”

“The other ducklings are lovely,” said the old one. “Just make yourselves at home, and if you find an eel’s head, you may bring it to me.”

And so they made themselves at home.

But the poor duckling, who had been the last one out of the egg, and who was so ugly, was bitten, shoved, and made fun of, and that by both the ducks and the hens. “He’s too big!” they all said. And the turkey rooster, who had been born with spurs and therefore thought he was an emperor, puffed himself up like a ship at full sail. He went straight at the duckling, and then he gobbled and turned quite red in the face. The poor duckling didn’t know whether he dared stay or leave. He was miserable because he felt monstrous and was mocked by the whole duck yard.

That’s how it went the first day, and after that it got worse and worse. The poor duckling was chased by all of them; even his brothers and sisters were mean to him, and they always

said, "If only the cat would get you, you horrid monster!" And his mother said, "If only you were far away!" The ducks bit him, the hens pecked him, and the girl who fed the animals kicked him.

Finally, he ran and flew over the fence, and the little birds in the bushes were startled and flew up. "It's because I'm so hideous," thought the duckling, and shut his eyes, but he still kept on running. Then he came to the large marsh where the wild ducks lived. He lay there the whole night; he was so tired and unhappy.

In the morning some wild ducks flew up and took a look at their new buddy. "What sort of creature are you?" they asked, and the duckling turned to all sides and greeted them as best he could.

"You're really ugly," said the wild ducks. "But that doesn't matter to us as long as you don't marry into our family!" Poor thing! The duckling certainly wasn't thinking about getting married; he scarcely dared lie in the rushes and drink a little marsh water.

There he lay two whole days. Then came two wild geese, or rather wild ganders, for they were two males. It had not been long since they had come out of the egg, and so they were quite lively.

"Listen, buddy," they said. "You're so ugly that I like you! Do you want to come along and be a migratory bird? Close by in another marsh are some sweet and beautiful wild geese, all of them maidens, who can say 'Quack!' You might get lucky, as ugly as you are!"

"Bang! Bang!" it sounded at that moment right above them. Then both wild ganders fell down dead in the rushes, and the water turned red as blood. "Bang! Bang!" it sounded again, and whole flocks of wild geese flew up out of the rushes, and then there were more shots. It was a great hunt. The hunters lay in different places in the marsh. Yes, some even



sat up on the tree branches that reached far out over the rushes. The blue smoke drifted like clouds through the dark trees and hung far out over the water. The hunting dogs came through the mud, splash, splash, and the rushes and reeds swayed back and forth. It was terrifying for the poor little duckling. He turned his head to tuck it under his wing, and, just then, a terribly big dog appeared in front of him. Its tongue was hanging way out of its mouth, and its eyes were glinting horribly. Its open jaws bore down upon the duckling, sharp teeth bared, and — splash! splash! — It ran off without taking him.

“Oh, dear God,” sighed the duckling. “I’m so disgusting that even the dog doesn’t feel like biting me!” Then he lay quite still while buckshots whistled through the rushes, as shot after shot rang out.

It didn’t get quiet until late in the day, but still the poor duckling dared not get up. He waited several more hours before he looked around, and then he hurried from the marsh as fast as he could, running across fields and meadows. It was so windy that he had a hard time moving.

Toward evening he reached a sad little farmhouse. It was so dilapidated that it did not know to which side it was going to fall, so it remained standing. The wind whooshed so hard around the duckling that he had to sit down on his bottom to stay put. And it got worse and worse. Then he noticed that the door had come off one of its hinges and hung so crookedly that he could slip into the living room through the opening, and he did.

There lived an old woman with her cat and her hen. The cat, whom she called Sonny, could arch his back and purr. He even threw off sparks, but for that one had to stroke him the wrong way. The hen had very short, low legs, so she was called Chickedy-Low-Legs. She laid many eggs, and the old woman was as fond of her as if she were her own child.

In the morning they noticed the stranger right away, and the cat began to purr and the hen to cluck.

“What’s this?” said the woman, looking around. She didn’t see so well, so she thought that the duckling was a fat duck that had gotten lost. “Well, that’s a nice catch!” she said. “Now I can have duck eggs, if only it isn’t a male duck. But we have to try!”

So the duckling was accepted on trial for three weeks, but there were no eggs. The cat was the master of the house, and the hen was the missus. They always said, “We and the world!” for they believed that they were half of the world – what is more, the very best half. The duckling thought that one could have a different opinion, but the hen would not stand for it.

“Can you lay eggs?” she asked.

“No!”

“Then, you’d better keep your mouth shut!”

And the cat said, “Can you arch your back, purr, and throw off sparks?”

“No!”

“Then you should keep your opinions to yourself when sensible folks are talking!”

The duckling sat in the corner and was in a bad mood. He began to think about the fresh air and the sunshine, and then he had a very strange desire to float on the water. In the end he couldn’t help himself, and he had to tell the hen about it.

“What’s the matter with you?” she asked. “You have nothing to do, that’s it! That’s why you’re getting these strange ideas. Lay eggs or purr, then it will pass.”

“But it’s so wonderful to float on the water,” said the duckling, “so lovely to get it over your head and dive down to the bottom!”

“Well, what a great pleasure that would be,” said the hen. “You must have gone mad! Just ask the cat, he’s the wisest I know, whether he likes to float on water or dive down! I won’t even speak of myself. You can even ask our mistress, the old woman, no one in the world is wiser than she is. Do you think she feels like floating and getting water over her head?”

“You don’t understand me,” said the duckling.

“Well, if we don’t understand you, who would? You’re not thinking that you’re wiser than the cat and the old woman, not to mention myself! Don’t make a fuss, child! And thank your creator for all the good we have done for you. Haven’t you come into a warm room and been able to be around people you could learn something from? Yet you’re a fool, and it’s no fun being around you! Believe me, it’s for your own good that I tell you the harsh truth, and that’s the way one can know one’s true friends! Now you just get started laying eggs or learn how to purr or throw off sparks!”

“I think I’ll go out into the wide world,” said the duckling.

“Yes, you do that,” said the hen.

So the duckling went out into the wide world and floated on the water and dived down. But all the other animals still ignored him because of his ugliness.

Autumn came. The leaves in the wood turned gold and brown, and the wind grabbed hold of them so they danced about. The air looked cold, and the clouds hung heavy with hail and snow. A raven sat on the fence and cried “Ow! Ow!” from sheer cold. Yes, one could really freeze at the thought of it. The poor little duckling most definitely did not feel good.

One evening, as the sun was setting so gloriously, a large flock of beautiful big birds came out of the bushes. The duckling had never seen anything so lovely. They were gleaming white with long graceful necks; they were swans! They uttered a strange cry and spread their magnificent great wings to fly away from the cold regions to warmer lands and unfrozen lakes. They rose higher and higher, and the little duckling felt most strange. He circled around in the water, and stretched his neck high up in the air toward them and suddenly let out a cry so loud and so strange that he even frightened himself.

Oh, he could not forget those beautiful birds, those happy birds. When he could no longer see them, he dove down to the bottom, and when he came up again, he was beside himself. He didn't know what those birds were called or where they flew off to, but even so he loved them – loved them more than he had ever loved anyone. He was not envious, for it never occurred to him to wish for such loveliness for himself. He would have been happy if the ducks had just tolerated him, poor ugly creature that he was.

The winter was cold, so very cold. The duckling had to swim about continuously to keep the swimming hole from freezing completely, but each night the hole became smaller and smaller. The frost was so deep that the ice groaned. The duckling had to move his legs all the time to keep the hole from freezing over. In the end he became so weak he lay quite still, and then he froze fast in the ice.

Early in the morning a farmer came by. He saw the duckling, went out and broke the ice with his wooden shoe, and then carried him home to his wife. There he was brought back to life.

The children wanted to play with him, but the duckling thought they wanted to hurt him, and, being scared, he rushed up into the milk pan so the milk splashed out in the room. The wife shrieked and waved her arms in the air. Then he flew into the trough with

the butter and then down into the flour barrel and up again. What a sight he was! The wife screamed and tried to hit him with the fire tongs, and the children stumbled over each other trying to catch the duckling as they laughed and screamed. It was a good thing that the door was open, and the duckling was able to rush out between the bushes that were covered with the newly fallen snow. And there he lay, as if hibernating.

It would be far too depressing to tell about all the danger and despair that he had to go through during the harsh winter. He was lying in the marsh among the rushes when the sun began to shine warmly and the skylarks began to sing. It was spring again!

Then all at once he lifted his wings. They swooshed stronger than before and powerfully carried him up and away. Before he knew it, he found himself in a large garden where apple trees blossomed and where the lilacs scented the air and hung on the long green branches all the way down to the winding canals. Oh, it was so lovely here, as fresh as spring! And straight ahead, out of the thicket came three beautiful white swans; they puffed up their feathers and floated ever so lightly on the water! The duckling recognized the beautiful birds and was overcome with a strange sadness.

“I will fly over to them, those regal birds! Though they will bite me to death because I dare to approach them, I who am so repulsive. But it doesn’t matter. Better be killed by them than be bitten by the ducks, pecked by the hens, kicked by the girl who takes care of the chicken yard, and suffer through another winter!” And he flew out into the water and swam toward the magnificent swans. They saw him and, with puffed up feathers, they rushed toward him. “Go ahead, kill me,” said the poor creature, as he bowed his head down toward the surface of the water awaiting his death – but what did he see in the clear water? He saw his own reflection. He was no longer a clumsy, black-gray bird, ugly and disgusting. He was himself a swan!

It doesn't matter if you are born in a duck yard, as long as you come from a swan's egg.

He then felt really happy about all the suffering and adversity that he had gone through, because now he truly appreciated his good fortune and all the loveliness that awaited him. The large swans swam around him and stroked him with their bills.

Some small children came into the garden. They threw bread and grain out into the water, and the smallest one yelled, "There's a new one!" And all the children shouted with joy, saying, "Yes, a new one has arrived!" They clapped their hands and danced around and ran to get their father and mother. Then they threw bread and cake into the water, and they all said, "The new one is the most beautiful! So young and lovely!" And the old swans bowed to him.

Then he felt quite shy and put his head under his wing – he did not know what to do. He was much too happy! But he was not proud, for a good heart is never proud! He thought about how he had been mistreated and mocked, and now he heard everyone say that he was the loveliest of all the lovely birds. The lilacs bowed to him, lowering the branches all the way down to the water, and the sun shone so warm and bright. And then he puffed up his feathers, lifted his slender neck, and rejoiced with all his heart: "I never dreamt there could be so much happiness when I was the ugly duckling."

# A LITTLE HISTORY

In November 1843 H. C. Andersen published a pamphlet of tales that included *The Ugly Duckling* and *The Nightingale*. For the first time the words “told for children” were deleted from the title page, as H. C. Andersen now saw himself as writing for both children and adults – the plot intended to entertain the child while the underlying ideas were meant to engage the adults. With this volume H. C. Andersen finally became a literary and commercial success.

*The Ugly Duckling* is the most autobiographical of his works, and scholars recognize every mood and feeling from his letters and journal entries. H. Topsøe-Jensen draws several parallels to the story observing that the author, just like the duckling, was “the poor one, dependent on benefactors who did not understand him, tormented and mistreated, full of feelings of inferiority, enduring long and difficult times troubled by doubts about his own worth, but deep inside secretly convinced that ‘the hour of reckoning’ would come.”

Like the hero of this tale, H. C. Andersen had an inclination towards self-pity and self-dramatization, but he too was surprisingly courageous. These tendencies were understandable, for there was nothing romantic about H. C. Andersen’s childhood. Not only was his family poor, but it was also less than respectable. His parents barely married before he was born, his grandmother had been jailed for having too many illegitimate children, his grandfather was in the lunatic asylum, and his illegitimate half-sister worked in a brothel. Furthermore, he was an effeminate and ugly boy, with feet that were too big, limbs that were too long, and eyes that were too small. Yet, through his own merit, H. C. Andersen made his way to Copenhagen, gained Royal patronage, and became one of the best-loved authors in the world.



# The Emperor's New Clothes



**M**any years ago there lived an Emperor who was so exceedingly fond of beautiful new clothes that he spent all his money on being well dressed. He cared little for his soldiers, and he did not enjoy plays or drives in the woods unless it was to show off his new clothes. He had an outfit for every hour of the day, and as you would say about a King that “he’s in the council chamber,” so it was always said here that “the Emperor’s in his wardrobe.”

The great city where he lived was very enjoyable. Everyday many visitors came, and one day two charlatans arrived. They pretended to be weavers and said that they knew how to weave the finest cloth one could imagine. Not only were the colors and pattern uncommonly beautiful, but the clothes made from the fabric had the strange quality that they would be invisible to every person who was unfit for his position or impermissibly stupid.

“These would be wonderful clothes,” thought the Emperor. “By wearing them I could find out which men in my realm were inept at their jobs; I could tell the wise from the dumb! Yes, this cloth must be woven for me immediately!” And he put a lot of money into the hands of the two impostors so they could begin their work.

They then put up two looms and pretended to work, but they had absolutely nothing on the looms. Bluntly they demanded the finest silk and the purest gold, and they stuck it all into their purses and worked with the empty looms late into the night.

“I wonder how far they have come with the cloth!” thought the Emperor. But he felt quite uneasy when he thought how anyone who was stupid or unfit for his position could not see it. He did not think he himself had anything to be afraid of. Even so, he would send someone else first to see how things were going. Everyone in the whole city knew of the

strange power the cloth had, and everyone wanted to see how incompetent or dimwitted his neighbor was.

“I will send my honest old minister to the weavers,” thought the Emperor. “He can best judge how the cloth looks, for he is intelligent and no one looks after his position better than he does!”

So the harmless old minister went into the hall where the two charlatans sat and worked on the empty looms.

“Dear God!” thought the old minister, opening his eyes wide. “I can’t see a thing!” But he didn’t say that.

Both charlatans invited him to step closer and asked him if it was not a beautiful pattern with lovely colors. Then they pointed to the empty loom, and the poor old minister continued to open his eyes up wide, but he couldn’t see a thing, for there was nothing there.

“Dear God!” he thought. “Could I be stupid? I never would have thought so, and no one must know! Could I be unsuited for my position? No, it will never do for me to say that I can’t see the cloth!”

“Well, you’re not saying anything!” said the one who was weaving.

“Oh, it’s beautiful. Quite charming!” said the old minister, looking through his glasses. “Such pattern and colors! Yes, I shall tell the Emperor that I am very pleased!”

“Well, we’re glad to hear that!” said both weavers, and then they described the colors by name and the strange pattern. The old minister paid close attention so he could say the same thing when he came home to the Emperor. And that he did.

Then the charlatans demanded more money, more silk, and gold for the weaving. They put everything in their own pockets while on the loom there was not a single thread. But they continued as before, weaving on the empty loom.

Soon after, the Emperor sent another harmless official to see how the weaving was coming along and whether the cloth would be finished soon. As with the minister, the official looked and looked, but since there was nothing but the empty looms, he could not see a thing.

“Yes, isn’t it a beautiful piece of cloth?” said both charlatans, as they showed and explained the lovely pattern that wasn’t there at all.

“Stupid I’m not!” thought the man. “Then it must be that I’m unfit for my important position. That’s strange enough, but no one must notice!” And then he praised the cloth he didn’t see, and assured them that he was delighted with the beautiful colors and the lovely pattern. “Yes, it’s most charming!” he said to the Emperor.

Everyone in the city talked about the magnificent cloth. Soon the Emperor wanted to see it for himself while it was still on the loom. With an entourage of carefully selected men – among them the two harmless old officials who had been there before – he went to visit the sly imposters who were now weaving at full speed without a thread or yarn.

“Yes, isn’t it *magnifique*?” said both harmless officials. “Will your majesty look – what pattern, what colors!” And then they pointed to the empty loom, for they thought that everyone else could see the cloth.

“What’s this!” thought the Emperor. “I can’t see a thing! This is terrible! Am I stupid? Am I no good at being Emperor? This is the most horrible thing that could happen to me!” But he said, “Oh, it’s most beautiful! It has my highest approval!” Then he nodded in a

satisfied manner and looked at the empty loom. He did not want to say that he couldn't see a thing. The entourage he had brought along looked and looked, but were not able to make more of it than all the others. But they all said, like the Emperor, "Oh, it's most beautiful," and they advised him to wear the magnificent new clothes for the first time in the upcoming great procession.

"It is *magnifique*! Exquisite! Excellent!" it went from mouth to mouth. And everyone was extremely pleased with it. The Emperor gave each of the charlatans a medal to hang from their buttonhole and the title of "Weaver-Squire."

The imposters were up all through the night before the morning of the procession, and they had more than sixteen candles lit. People could see they were busy finishing the Emperor's new clothes. They pretended to take the cloth from the loom, they cut in the air with big scissors, they sewed with needles without thread, and finally they said, "Look, now the clothes are finished!"

The Emperor himself came with his most distinguished gentlemen-in-waiting, and both charlatans held up an arm as they were holding something, and then said, "Look, these are the breeches! Here's the coat! And here's the cloak!" And so forth. "It's as light as spider webs! You would think that you have nothing on your body, but that's precisely the beauty of it!"

"Yes," said the gentlemen-in-waiting, but they could not see a thing, for there was nothing there.

"If your imperial majesty would most graciously take off his clothes," said the charlatans, "then we can dress you in the new ones here in front of the big mirror!"

The Emperor took off all his clothes, and the charlatans acted as if they handed him each of the pieces they should have sewn. They reached around his waist as if they were tying something—that was the train—and the Emperor twisted and turned in front of the mirror.

“My, how well it suits you! How well it fits!” they all said. “What pattern! What colors! It’s a precious outfit!”

“They’re waiting outside with the canopy that will be carried over your majesty in the procession,” said the chief master of ceremonies.

“Yes, I’m all ready!” said the Emperor. “Doesn’t it fit well?” And then he turned one more time in front of the mirror, so it would really seemed like he was looking at his finery.

The gentlemen-in-waiting, who were to carry the train, fumbled with their hands along the floor as if they picked up the train, and they walked holding the air. They did not dare to let it be known that they could not see a thing.

Then the Emperor walked in the procession under the beautiful canopy. And all the people in the street and at the windows said, “My, the Emperor’s new clothes are magnificent! What a beautiful train he has on that coat! And what an incredible fit!” No one would let it be noticed that he could not see anything, for then he would have been unfit for his position or very stupid. Never before had the Emperor’s clothes been such a success.

“But he doesn’t have anything on,” said a little child.

“Dear God, listen to the voice of the innocent,” said the father; and then someone else whispered to the next person what the child had said.

“He doesn’t have anything on! There’s a little child who says he doesn’t have anything on!”

“But he doesn’t have anything on!” everyone finally shouted. And the Emperor shuddered, for it seemed to him that they were right. But he thought, “I have to see the procession through.” And he then carried himself even more proudly, and the gentlemen-in-waiting followed carrying the train that wasn’t there at all.

# A LITTLE HISTORY

In 1837 H. C. Andersen published his third pamphlet of tales. It included the tragic fairy tale *The Little Mermaid* and the witty story *The Emperor's New Clothes*.

His two first pamphlets had been given a lukewarm reception. In the introduction to the third pamphlet, H. C. Andersen writes that people had found the fairy tales to be “highly unimportant” and advised him to not continue writing them. He further noted, that “a poet is always a poor man in his own little country. Fame is therefore the golden bird he has to catch! Time will tell if I catch it by telling fairy tales.” Well, time did tell. Not only did he invent a new literary genre, transforming written Danish in the process, he also achieved the fame and immortality he craved all his life.

*The Emperor's New Clothes* was inspired by a 14th century Spanish story by Infante Don Juan Manuel published in *El Conde Lucanor* (1335), a collection of instructive tales based on Jewish and Arabic stories. In the Middle Ages, birth instead of merit determined one's destiny. Therefore, in this earlier tale the swindlers' ruse was that if you could not see the cloth, your father was not whom you thought he was. A person seen to be illegitimate would lose his name, position, and inheritance.

The King liked this idea, for if someone were declared a bastard, the property would default to the crown. So, imagine the King's horror when, instead of getting a windfall, he discovered that he could not see the cloth himself. Was he not the legitimate heir to the kingdom?

In the end, an African, who did not know nor care about his father, told the Emperor that he was stark naked. After the Emperor admitted his folly, everyone set out to try to catch the swindlers, but they were long gone.

