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# **The Lovers**

**by**

# Hans Christian Andersen

(from Hans Andersen Forty-Two Stories [1930], translated by M. R. James)

The Top and the Ball lay in a drawer along with the other toys, and the Top said to the Ball: "Mightn't we be engaged? We lie in the same drawer." But the Ball, who was covered with morocco and thought as much of herself as any fine young lady, wouldn't reply to any such question as that.

Next day the little boy to whom the toys belonged came and painted the Top red and yellow, and drove a copper nail into it, which made a splendid appearance when the Top spun humming round.

"Look at me," said he to the Ball, "what do you say now? Mightn't we be an engaged couple—we suit each other so well. You jump and I dance; nobody could be happier than we two together."

"Oh, indeed, do you think so?" said the Ball. "You don't realize that my father and mother were morocco slippers, and that I have a cork in my body." "Well, but I'm made of mahogany," said the Top. "The Mayor himself turned me; he's got his own lathe, and he enjoyed doing it very much."

"Can I rely upon that statement?" said the Ball.

"May I never be whipped again if it's not true," answered the Top.

"You give a very good account of yourself," said the Ball; "still, I can't consent. I'm as good as half engaged to a swallow. Whenever I go up in the air he puts his head out of his nest and says 'Will you? Will you?' and recently I said 'Yes' to myself, and that's as good as a half engagement, but I promise never to forget you."

"A lot of good that is," said the Top; after which they had no further conversation.

Next day the Ball was taken out. The Top saw it flying high up in the air like a bird till at last it went right out of sight. Eight times it came down again, but always bounded high when it touched the ground; and this was due either to its aspirations or to its having a cork in its body. The ninth time the Ball disappeared and didn't come back. The boy looked and looked for it, but it was gone.

"I know well enough where it is," sighed the Top. "It's in the swallow's nest, married to the swallow."

The more the Top thought about it, the more absorbed he became in the Ball: for the very reason that he couldn't get at it, his affection for it increased. That it should have accepted another—that was the strange thing.

The Top danced round and hummed, but went on thinking of the Ball, which in his fancy grew more and more beautiful.

Thus several years went by—and the attachment was a thing of the past. The Top was now no longer young, but one fine day he was gilded all over. Never had he looked so splendid; he was now a Top of gold, and jumped about till his hum re-echoed again. That was indeed a triumph: but all at once he gave too high a jump and was gone. They searched and searched, even down in the cellar, but he couldn't be found.

Where was he? Why, he had jumped into the dustbin where there lay all manner of things; cabbage stalks, sweepings and rubbish that had fallen down from the gutter.

"Here's a nice place to be lying! The gilding will very soon come off me! And what sort of shabby creatures are these that I've got among?" he said, looking askance at a long cabbage stalk that had been stripped of its last leaf, and at an odd round object that looked like an old apple—but it wasn't an apple; it was an old ball which had lain for years up in the gutter, soaked through with water. "Thank heaven! At last here is someone of one's own class that one can speak to," said the Ball, looking at the gilt Top. "As a matter of fact, I am made of morocco, sewn together by a young lady's hands, and I have a cork in my body, though no one would think so to look at me. At one time I was about to be married to a swallow,

but I fell into the gutter, and there I have lain for five years, soaking: a long long time, as you may imagine, for a young lady."

But the Top said nothing; he thought of his old love, and the more he heard the plainer it became to him that this must be she.

Now came the maid to empty the dustbin. "Aha!" said she. "Here's the gold Top."

So the Top got back into the house, and enjoyed great honour and attention; but nobody heard anything of the Ball, and the Top never said a word more of his old attachment. That's apt to disappear when the beloved object has lain for five years in a gutter and soaked; indeed, if one meets her in the dustbin, one doesn't attempt to recognize her.

[End of *The Lovers* by Hans Christian Andersen, from *Hans Andersen Forty-Two Stories*, translated by M. R. James]