

*** A Distributed Proofreaders Canada Ebook ***

This ebook is made available at no cost and with very few restrictions. These restrictions apply only if (1) you make a change in the ebook (other than alteration for different display devices), or (2) you are making commercial use of the ebook. If either of these conditions applies, please check with an FP administrator before proceeding.

This work is in the Canadian public domain, but may be under copyright in some countries. If you live outside Canada, check your country's copyright laws. **If the book is under copyright in your country, do not download or redistribute this file.**

What the Old Man Does is Always Right was written by Hans Christian Andersen (1805-1875), and was translated from the Danish by M. R. James (1862-1936) as part of his *Hans Andersen Forty-Two Stories* (1930).

Title: Hans Andersen Forty-Two Stories — What the Old Man Does is Always Right

Author: Andersen, Hans Christian (1805-1875)

Translator: James, Montague Rhodes (1862-1936)

Date of first publication: 1930

Place and date of edition used as base for this ebook: London: Faber and Faber, 1953

Date first posted: 22 December 2009

Date last updated: 17 June 2014

Faded Page ebook#20091214

This ebook was produced by: David T. Jones, Mark Akrigg & the Online Distributed Proofreading Team at <http://www.pgdpCanada.net>

What the Old Man Does is Always Right

by

Hans Christian Andersen

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

I'm going to tell you a story now which I heard when I was little, and every time I have thought of it since it has seemed to me to become nicer; for it is with stories as with many people, they grow nicer and nicer as they grow older, and that is very pleasant.

Of course you have been out in the country. You have seen a good old cottage with a thatched roof; moss and weeds grow on it of themselves. There's a stork's nest on the roof-ridge—you can't do without a stork—the walls are crooked and the windows low; there is in fact only one of them that will open. The oven sticks out like a little fat stomach, and an elder bush hangs down over the fence to where there is a little pond with a duck or ducklings just underneath the gnarled willow tree. Yes, and there's a dog on a chain, too, that barks at everybody.

Just such a cottage there was out in the country, and in it lived two people, a countryman and his wife. Little as they possessed, they could manage to do without one article, to wit a horse, which used to go and graze in the ditch beside the high road. Father used to ride it to the town, the neighbours would borrow it, and he would get one service in exchange for another. Still, it would pay them better to sell the horse, or exchange it for something or another that would be of even more use to them. But what should that be?

"That you'll understand better than me, old man," said his wife. "It's market day in town; just you ride there and get the price of the horse or make some other good bargain. What you do is always right. Off with you to market!"

So she tied his necktie, for that at least she understood better than he did. She tied it with a double bow, which looked very smart, and then she brushed his hat with the flat of her hand, and kissed him on his warm mouth, and then off he rode on the horse that was to be sold or exchanged. Aha! The old man understood his job.

The sun was burning hot, and there were no clouds. The road was dusty; there were so many market people on it in carts or on horseback or on their own legs. It was very hot, and the road had no shade whatever.

Someone came along driving a cow, which was as nice a cow as can be. "I'm sure she'd give beautiful milk," thought the countryman, "it would be a good bargain to get her. Look here! You with the cow," he said. "Shall we have a word together? A horse, I suppose, is worth more than a cow, but that don't matter. I should make more out of the cow, shall we swop?"

"Yes, to be sure," said the man with the cow. So they swopped.

Now that was done, and the countryman might have turned back, for he'd done what he wanted, but as he'd made up his mind to go to market, to market he would go, if only to look at it. So on he went with his cow. He got along briskly, and the cow did too, so very soon he came abreast of a man who was leading a sheep: a fine sheep it was, in good condition and with a good fleece.

"I'd like to own that one," thought the countryman, "it wouldn't want for grazing on our bit of ditch, and in winter one could take it indoors. After all, it 'ud be more the thing for us to keep a sheep than a cow. Shall we swop?"

"Yes." The man who had the sheep was quite willing, so that bargain was made, and the countryman went with his sheep along the high road. By the stile he saw a man with a big goose under his arm.

"That's a heavy chap you've got there," said the countryman. "He's got fat and feathers too; he'd look well tethered out by

our pond, and be something for mother to save scraps for. She's often said, 'If only we had a goose', and now she can have one, and she *shall* have it: will you swop? I'll give you the sheep for the goose and thank you too."

"Yes," the other was quite agreeable, so they swopped, and the countryman got the goose. He was by this time close to the town, and the crowd on the road grew and grew. There was a swarm of people and cattle, they were on the road and in the ditch, right up among the turnpike-man's potatoes, where his hen was tethered so that she mightn't run off in her fright and be lost. She was a short-tailed hen who winked with one eye and looked very nice. "Cluck, cluck," said she. What she was thinking about I am unable to say, but the countryman, when he saw her, thought: "She's the prettiest hen I've ever seen, prettier than parson's brood hen. I'd like to own her. A hen can always peck up a grain, she can pretty near keep herself. I think it 'ud be a good bargain if I got her instead of the goose." "Shall we swop?" he asked. "Swop?" said the other. "Yes, that's not a bad idea." So they swopped. The turnpike-man got the goose and the countryman the hen.

A lot of business he had got through on the way to the town, and it was hot, and he was tired. He sorely wanted a dram and a bit of bread, and here he was close to the inn, and there he meant to go in. But the ostler was coming out, and met him in the doorway, carrying a sack chock-full of something. "What have you got there?" asked the countryman.

"Rotten apples," said the man, "a whole sackful, for the pigs."

"There's a terrible lot there! I'd like mother to see that. Last year we hadn't but one apple on the old tree by the peat-house. That apple had to be taken care of, and it lay on the chest of drawers till it burst. 'That's property, anyhow,' says mother; but here she could see property if you like! Ah, I'd like to make her a present of that."

"Well, what'll you give me?" said the man.

"Give? I'll give you my hen for it." So he gave his hen in exchange, took the apples and went into the inn-room, straight up to the bar. His sack of apples he leaned up against the stove, not thinking about what was in it. There were a lot of strangers in the room. Horse-dealers, cattle-dealers, and also two Englishmen—and they're so rich their pockets are bursting with sovereigns, and they make bets, as now you shall hear.

"Ss-ss!" What noise was that by the stove? The apples were beginning to roast.

"What is it?" Why, they found out very quickly—the whole story of the horse that was swopped for a cow, and all the rest, right down to the rotten apples.

"Ah, you'll get a smacking from Mother when you get home!" said the Englishmen. "There'll be the devil of a row."

"I shall get a kiss and no smack," said the countryman. "Mother'll say: 'What the old man does is always right.'"

"Will you bet on it?" said they. "Coined gold by the bushel, a hundred pound to the ton?"

"A bushelful will do," said the countryman. "I can only bet a bushelful of apples, and me and mother on the top; but that's more than strike-measure, that's top measure."

"Done! Done!" said they, and the bet was made.

Out came the landlord's cart. The Englishmen got in, the countryman got in, the rotten apples got in, and off they went, to the countryman's house.

"Good evening, mother!"

"Thanks, father."

"I've made my bargain."

"Yes, you know how to do that," said his wife, giving him a hug, and forgetting all about the sack and the strangers.

"I swopped the horse for a cow."

"Thank God for the milk!" said his wife. "Now we can have milk to cook with, and butter and cheese on the table. That was a splendid swop."

"Yes, but I swopped off the cow for a sheep."

"That's even better, for certain," said his wife, "you're always so thoughtful. We've got just a plenty of grazing for a sheep. Now we can have sheep's milk and sheep-milk cheese, and woollen stockings. Yes, and wool nightgowns too: a cow wouldn't give us that; why, she only drops her hair. You really are a man to take thought."

"But I swopped off the sheep for a goose."

"Then shall we really have a Michaelmas goose this year? Dear old man, you're always thinking of something to please me; it really is a nice idea of yours. The goose can be on a tether and get ever so fat by Michaelmas."

"But I swopped off the goose for a hen," said the husband.

"A hen! That was a good swop," said his wife. "A hen'll lay eggs and hatch 'em out and we shall have chickens, and a regular poultry yard. That's just what I've been longing for with all my heart."

"Yes, but I swopped off the hen for a sack of rotten apples."

"Now I really must give you a kiss!" said his wife. "Thank you, my own dear husband. Now I'll just tell you something. When you'd gone off, I thought about getting you a real nice supperomelette and chives. Eggs I'd got, chives I hadn't. So I went across to Schoolmaster's; they'd got some chives there, I know, but the wife's a stingy woman, a pretty dear! I asked her to lend me—'Lend?' says she. 'Nothing whatever grows in our garden, not so much as a rotten apple. I couldn't lend you even that.' Now I can lend her ten—I can lend her a whole sackful. That's a good joke, father." And with that she kissed him right in the middle of the forehead.

"That's what I like," said the Englishmen. "Always going downhill, and always as pleased as ever. That's worth all the money, that is." So they paid over a ton of gold sovereigns to the countryman who got a kiss and not a thrashing.

Yes, it always pays for the wife to see and to tell other people that the old man is wisest and what he does is right.

So there's a story for you. I heard it when I was little, and now you've heard it too, and you know that *what the Old Man does is always right*.

[End of *What the Old Man Does is Always Right* by Hans Christian Andersen, from *Hans Andersen Forty-Two Stories*, translated by M. R. James]