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Hans and His Wife Grettel

I. SHOWING WHO GRETTEL WAS.

There was once a little maid named Grettel: she wore shoes with red heels, and when she went abroad she turned out her toes, and was very merry, and thought to herself, "What a pretty girl I am!" And when she came home, to put herself in good spirits, she would tittle down a drop or two of wine; and as wine gives a relish for eating, she would take a taste of everything when she was cooking, saying, "A cook ought to know whether a thing tastes well." It happened one day that her master said, "Grettel, this evening I have a friend coming to sup with me; get two fine fowls ready." "Very well, sir," said Grettel. Then she killed the fowls, plucked, and trussed them, put them on the spit, and when evening came put them to the fire to roast. The fowls turned round and round, and soon began to look nice and brown, but the guest did not come. Then Grettel cried out, "Master, if the guest does not come I must take up the fowls, but it will be a shame and a pity if they are not eaten while they are hot and good." "Well," said her master, "I'll run and tell him to come." As soon as he had turned his back, Grettel stopped the spit, and laid it with the fowls upon it on one side, and thought to herself, "Standing by the fire makes one very tired and thirsty; who knows how long they will be? meanwhile I will just step into the cellar and take a drop." So off she ran, put down her pitcher, and said, "Your health, Grettel," and took a good draught. "This wine is a good friend," said she to herself, "it breaks one's heart to leave it." Then up she trotted, put the fowls down to the fire, spread some butter over them, and turned the spit merrily round again.

The fowls soon smelt so good, that she thought to herself, "They are very good, but they may want something still; I had better taste them and see." So she licked her fingers, and said, "Oh! how good! what a shame and a pity that they are not eaten!" Away she ran to the window to see if her master and his friend were coming; but nobody was in sight: so she turned to the fowls again, and thought it would be better for her to eat a wing than that it should be burnt. So she cut one wing off, and ate it, and it tasted very well; and as the other was quite done enough, she thought it had better be cut off too, or else her master would see one was wanting. When the two wings were gone, she went again to look out for her master, but could not see him. "Ah!" thought she to herself, "who knows whether they will come at all? very likely they have turned into some tavern: Oh Grettel! Grettel! make yourself happy, take another draught, and eat the rest of the fowl; it looks so oddly as it is; when you have eaten all, you will be easy: why should such good things be wasted?" So she ran once more to the cellar, took another drink, and ate up the rest of the fowl with the greatest glee.

Still her master did not come, and she cast a lingering eye upon the other fowl, and said, "Where the other went, this had better go too; they belong to each other; they who have a right to one must have a right to the other; but if I were to take another draught first, it would not hurt me." So she tiddled down another drop of wine, and sent the second fowl to look after the first. While she was making an end of this famous meal, her master came home and called out, "Now quick, Grettel, my friend is just at hand!" "Yes, master, I will dish up this minute," said she. In the meantime he looked to see if the cloth was laid, and took up the carving-knife to sharpen it. Whilst this was going on, the guest came and knocked softly and gently at the house door; then Grettel ran to see who was there, and when she saw him she put her finger upon her lips, and said, "Hush! hush! run away as fast as you can, for if my master catches you, it will be worse for you; he owes you a grudge, and asked you to supper only that he might cut off your ears; only listen how he is sharpening his knife." The guest listened, and when he heard the knife, he made as much haste as he could down the steps and ran off. Grettel was not idle in the meantime, but ran screaming, "Master! master! what a fine guest you have asked to supper!" "Why, Grettel, what's the matter?" "Oh!" said she, "he has taken both the fowls that I was going to bring up, and has run away with them." "That is a rascally trick to play," said the master, sorry to lose the fine chickens; "at least he might have left me one, that I might have had something to eat; call out to him to stay." But the guest would not hear; so he ran after him with his knife in his hand, crying out, "Only one, only one, I want only one;" meaning that the guest should leave him one of the fowls, and not take both: but he thought that his host meant nothing less than that he would cut off at least one of his ears; so he ran away to save them both, as if he had hot coals under his feet.



"So he ran after him with his knife in his hand, crying out, 'Only one, only one, I want only one.'"

II. HANS IN LOVE.

Hans's mother says to him, "Whither so fast?" "To see Grettel," says Hans. "Behave well." "Very well: Good-bye, mother!" Hans comes to Grettel; "Good day, Grettel!" "Good day, Hans! do you bring me anything good?" "Nothing at all: have you anything for me?" Grettel gives Hans a needle. Hans says, "Good-bye, Grettel!" "Good-bye, Hans!" Hans takes the needle, sticks it in a truss of hay, and takes both off home. "Good evening, mother!" "Good evening, Hans! where have you been?" "To see Grettel." "What did you take her?" "Nothing at all." "What did she give you?" "She gave me a needle." "Where is it, Hans?" "Stuck in the truss." "How silly you are! you should have stuck it in your sleeve." "Let me alone! I'll do better next time."

"Where now, Hans?" "To see Grettel, mother." "Behave yourself well." "Very well: Good-bye, mother!" Hans comes to Grettel; "Good day, Grettel!" "Good day, Hans! what have you brought me?" "Nothing at all: have you anything for me?" Grettel gives Hans a knife. "Good-bye, Grettel!" "Good-bye, Hans!" Hans takes the knife, sticks it in his sleeve, and goes home. "Good evening, mother!" "Good evening, Hans! where have you been?" "To see Grettel." "What did you carry her?" "Nothing at all." "What has she given you?" "A knife." "Where is the knife, Hans?" "Stuck in my sleeve, mother." "You silly goose! you should have put it in your pocket." "Let me alone! I'll do better next time."

"Where now, Hans?" "To see Grettel." "Behave yourself well." "Very well: Good-bye, mother!" Hans comes to Grettel; "Good day, Grettel!" "Good day, Hans! have you anything good?" "No: have you anything for me?" Grettel gives Hans a kid. "Good-bye, Grettel!" "Good-bye, Hans!" Hans takes the kid, ties it up with a cord, stuffs it into his pocket, and chokes it to death. "Good evening, mother!" "Good evening, Hans! where have you been?" "To see Grettel, mother!" "What did you take her?" "Nothing at all." "What did she give you?" "She gave me a kid." "Where is the kid, Hans?" "Safe in my pocket." "You silly goose! you should have led it with a string." "Never mind, mother, I'll do better next time."

"Where now, Hans?" "To Grettel's, mother." "Behave well." "Quite well, mother; Good-bye!" Hans comes to Grettel;

"Good day, Grettel!" "Good day, Hans! what have you brought me?" "Nothing at all: have you anything for me?" Grettel gives Hans a piece of bacon; Hans ties the bacon to a string and drags it behind him; the dog comes after and eats it all up as he walks home. "Good evening, mother!" "Good evening, Hans! where have you been?" "To Grettel's." "What did you take her?" "Nothing at all." "What did she give you?" "A piece of bacon." "Where is the bacon, Hans?" "Tied to the string, and dragged home, but somehow or other all gone." "What a silly trick, Hans! you should have brought it on your head." "Never mind, mother, I'll do better another time."

"Where now, Hans?" "Going to Grettel." "Take care of yourself." "Very well, mother: Good-bye." Hans comes to Grettel; "Good day, Grettel!" "Good day, Hans! what have you brought me?" "Nothing: have you anything for me?" Grettel gives Hans a calf. Hans sets it upon his head, and it kicks him in the face. "Good evening, mother!" "Good evening, Hans! where have you been?" "To see Grettel." "What did you take her?" "Nothing." "What did she give you?" "She gave me a calf." "Where is the calf, Hans?" "I put it on my head, and it scratched my face." "You silly goose! you should have led it home and put it in the stall." "Very well; I'll do better another time."

"Where now, Hans?" "To see Grettel." "Mind and behave well." "Good-bye, mother!" Hans comes to Grettel; "Good day, Grettel!" "Good day, Hans! what have you brought?" "Nothing at all: have you anything for me?" "I'll go home with you." Hans ties a string round her neck, leads her along, and ties her up in the stall. "Good evening, mother!" "Good evening, Hans! where have you been?" "At Grettel's." "What has she given you?" "She has come herself." "Where have you put her?" "Fast in the stall with plenty of hay." "How silly you are! you should have taken good care of her, and brought her home." Then Hans went back to the stall; but Grettel was in a great rage, and had got loose and run away: yet, after all, she was Hans' bride.

III. HANS MARRIED.

Hans and Grettel lived in the village together, but Grettel did as she pleased, and was so lazy that she never would work; and when her husband gave her any yarn to spin she did it in a slovenly way; and when it was spun she did not wind it on the reel, but left it to lie all tangled about. Hans sometimes scolded, but she was always beforehand with her tongue, and said, "Why how should I wind it when I have no reel? go into the wood and make one." "If that's all," said he, "I will go into the wood and cut reel-sticks." Then Grettel was frightened lest when he had cut the sticks he should make a reel, and thus she would be forced to wind the yarn and spin again. So she pondered a while, till at last a bright thought came into her head, and she ran slyly after her husband into the wood. As soon as he had got into a tree and began to bend down a bough to cut it, she crept into the bush below, where he could not see her, and sang—

"Bend not the bough;
He who bends it shall die!
Reel not the reel;
He who reels it shall die!"

Hans listened a while, laid down his axe, and thought to himself, "What can that be?" "What indeed can it be?" said he at last; "it is only a singing in your ears, Hans! pluck up your heart, man!" So he raised up his axe again, and took hold of the bough, but once more the voice sang—

"Bend not the bough;
He who bends it shall die!
Reel not the reel;
He who reels it shall die!"

Once more he stopped his hand; fear came over him, and he began pondering what it could mean. After a while, however, he plucked up his courage again, and took up his axe and began for the third time to cut the wood; again the third time began the song—

"Bend not the bough;
He who bends it shall die!"

Reel not the reel;
He who reels it shall die!"

At this he could hold no longer, down he dropped from the tree and set off homewards as fast as he could. Away too ran Grettel by a shorter cut, so as to reach home first, and when he opened the door met her quite innocently, as if nothing had happened, and said, "Well! have you brought a good piece of wood for the reel?" "No," said he, "I see plainly that no luck comes of that reel," and then he told her all that had happened, and left her for that time in peace.

But soon afterwards Hans began again to reproach her with the untidiness of her house. "Wife," said he; "is it not a sin and a shame that the spun yarn should lie all about in that way?" "It may be so," said she; "but you know very well that we have no reel; if it must be done, lie down there and hold up your hands and legs, and so I'll make a reel of you, and wind off the yarn into skeins." "Very well," said Hans (who did not much like the job, but saw no help for it if his wife was to be set to work); so he did as she said, and when all was wound, "The yarn is all in skeins," said he; "now take care and get up early and heat the water and boil it well, so that it may be ready for sale." Grettel disliked this part of the work very much, but said to him, "Very well, I'll be sure to do it very early to-morrow morning." But all the time she was thinking to herself what plan she should take for getting off such work for the future.

Betimes in the morning she got up, made the fire and put on the boiler; but instead of the yarn she laid a large ball of tow in it and let it boil. Then she went up to her husband, who was still in bed, and said to him, "I must go out, pray look meantime to the yarn in the boiler over the fire; but do it soon and take good care, for if the cock crows and you are not looking to it, they say it will turn to tow." Hans soon after got up that he might run no risk, and went (but not perhaps as quickly as he might have done) into the kitchen, and when he lifted up the boiler lid and looked in, to his great terror nothing was there but a ball of tow. Then off he slunk as dumb as a mouse, for he thought to himself that he was to blame for his laziness; and left Grettel to get on with her yarn and her spinning as fast as she pleased and no faster.

One day, however, he said to her, "Wife, I must go a little way this morning; do you go into the field and cut the corn." "Yes, to be sure, dear Hans!" said she; so when he was gone she cooked herself a fine mess and took it with her into the field. When she came into the field, she sat down for a while and said to herself, "What shall I do? shall I sleep first or eat first? Heigho! I'll first eat a bit." Then she ate her dinner heartily, and when she had had enough she said again to herself, "What shall I do? shall I reap first or sleep first? Heigho! I'll first sleep a bit." So she laid herself down among the corn and went fast asleep. By and by Hans came home, but no Grettel was to be seen, and he said to himself, "What a clever wife I have! she works so hard that she does not even come home to her dinner!" Evening came and still she did not come; then Hans set off to see how much of the corn was reaped, but there it all stood untouched, and Grettel lay fast asleep in the middle. So he ran home and got a string of little bells and tied them quietly round her waist, and went back and set himself down on his stool and locked the house door.

At last Grettel woke when it was quite dark, and as she rose up the bells jingled around her every step she took. At this she was greatly frightened, and puzzled to tell whether she was really Grettel or not. "Is it I, or is it not?" said she as she stood doubting what she ought to think. At last, after she had pondered a while, she thought to herself, "I will go home and ask if it is I or not; Hans will know." So she ran to the house door, and when she found it locked she knocked at the window and cried out, "Hans! is Grettel within?" "She is where she ought to be, to be sure," said Hans; "O dear then!" said she frightened, "this is not I." Then away she went and knocked at the neighbours' doors; but when they heard her bells rattling no one would let her in, and so at last off she ran back to the field again.

[The end of *Grimm's Fairy Tales; Hans and His Wife Grettel* by the Brothers Grimm]