

THE MONEY BOX

Hans Christian Andersen

In a nursery where a number of toys lay scattered about, a money box stood on the top of a very high wardrobe. It was made of clay in the shape of a pig and had been bought of the potter. In the back of the pig was a slit, and this slit had been enlarged with a knife so that dollars, or even crown pieces, might slip through—and indeed there were two in the box, besides a number of pence. The money-pig was stuffed so full that it could no longer rattle, which is the highest state of perfectness to which a money-pig can attain.

There he stood upon the cupboard, high and lofty, looking down upon everything else in the room. He knew very well that he had enough inside himself to buy up all the other toys, and this gave him a very good opinion of his own value.

The rest thought of this fact also, although they did not express it, there were so many other things to talk about. A large doll, still handsome (though rather old, for her neck had been mended) lay inside one of the drawers, which was partly open. She called out to the others, "Let us have a game at being men and women; that is something worth playing at."

Upon this there was a great uproar; even the engravings which hung in frames on the wall turned round in their excitement and showed that they had a wrong side to them, although they had not the least intention of exposing themselves in this way or of objecting to the game.

It was late at night, but as the moon shone through the windows, they had light at a cheap rate. And as the game was now to begin, all were invited to take part in it, even the children's wagon, which certainly belonged among the coarser playthings. "Each has its own value," said the wagon; "we cannot all be noblemen; there must be some to do the work."

The money-pig was the only one who received a written invitation. He stood so high that they were afraid he would not accept a verbal message. But in his reply he said if he had to take a part he must enjoy the sport from his own home; they were to arrange for him to do so. And so they did.

The little toy theater was therefore put up in such a way that the money-pig could look directly into it. Some wanted to begin with a comedy and afterwards to have a tea party and a discussion for mental improvement, but they began with the latter first.

The rocking-horse spoke of training and races; the wagon, of railways and steam power—for these subjects belonged to each of their professions, and it was right they should talk of them. The clock talked politics—"Tick, tick." He professed to know what was the time of the day, but there was a whisper that he did not go correctly. The bamboo cane stood by, looking stiff and proud (he was vain of his brass ferrule and silver top), and on the sofa lay two worked cushions, pretty but stupid.

When the play at the little theater began, the rest sat and looked on; they were requested to applaud and stamp, or crack, whenever they felt gratified with what they saw. The riding whip said he never cracked for old people, only for the young—those who were not yet married. "I crack for everybody," said the nutcracker.

"Yes, and a fine noise you make," thought the audience as the play went on.

It was not worth much, but it was very well played, and all the actors turned their painted sides to the audience, for they were made to be seen only on one side. The acting was wonderful, excepting that sometimes the actors came out beyond the lamps, because the wires were a little too long.

The doll whose neck had been mended was so excited that the place in her neck burst, and the money-pig declared he must do something for one of the players as they had all pleased him so much. So he made up his mind to mention one of them in his will as the one to be buried with him in the family vault, whenever that event should happen.

They enjoyed the comedy so much that they gave up all thoughts of the tea party and only carried out their idea of intellectual amusement, which they called playing at men and women. And there was nothing wrong about it, for it was only play. All the while each one thought most of himself or of what the money-pig could be thinking. The money-pig's thoughts were on (as he supposed) a very far-distant time—of making his will, and of his burial, and of when it might all come to pass.

Certainly sooner than he expected; for all at once down he came from the top of the press, fell on the floor, and was broken to pieces. Then all the pennies hopped and danced about in the most amusing manner. The little ones twirled round like tops, and the large ones rolled away as far as they could, especially the one great silver crown piece, who had often wanted to go out into the world. And he had his wish as well as all the rest of the money. The pieces of the money-pig were thrown into the dustbin, and the next day there stood a new money-pig on the cupboard, but it had not a farthing inside it yet, and therefore, like the old one, could not rattle.

This was the beginning with him, and with us it shall be the end of our story.

Source:

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