

The Penman

Hans Christian Andersen

There once was a man who held an office that required good penmanship. While he filled the office ably otherwise, he was incapable of good penmanship. So he advertised in the newspaper for someone with a fine handwriting; and so many applied that the applications could have filled a whole bucket. But one was all he needed. And so he chose the first he came to, one with a script as beautiful as that of the finest writing machine. The man in office was an excellent writer. And when his writings appeared in the handsome lettering, everyone said, "That is beautifully written."

"That's my work," said the fellow, whose mind wasn't worth a penny.

And after hearing such praise for a whole week, he became so conceited that he wanted to be the man in office himself. He really would have made a fine writing teacher, and would have looked well in his white necktie at ladies' tea parties. But that wasn't what he wanted, he wanted to outwrite all the other writers. And he wrote about painters and sculptors, about composers and the theater. He wrote an awful lot of nonsense, and when it was too dreadful; he would write the following day that it had been a misprint. As a matter of fact, everything he wrote was a misprint, but the sad part was that his only asset, his beautiful handwriting, couldn't be seen in print.

"I can break; I can make! I'm a hell of a fellow, sort of a little god, and not so little, at that!"

This was a lot of silly talk. And that he finally died of. On his death a flowery obituary appeared in the newspaper. Now, wasn't that a sorry tale - his being painted in glowing terms by a friend who really could write stories?

Despite the good intentions of his friend, his life story, with all its nastiness., clamoring, and prattle, became a very sad fairy tale indeed.