

The Talisman

Hans Christian Andersen

A Prince and a Princess were still celebrating their honeymoon. They were extremely happy; only one thought disturbed them, and that was how to retain their present happiness. For that reason they wished to own a talisman with which to protect themselves against any unhappiness in their marriage.

Now, they had often been told about a man who lived out in the forest, acclaimed by everybody for his wisdom and known for his good advice in every need and difficulty. So the Prince and Princess called upon him and told him about their heart's desire. After the wise man had listened to them he said, "Travel through every country in the world, and wherever you meet a completely happily married couple, ask them for a small piece of the linen they wear close to the body, and when you receive this, you must always carry it on you. That is a sure remedy!"

The Prince and the Princess rode forth, and on their way they soon heard of a knight and his wife who were said to be living the most happily married life. They went to the knight's castle and asked him and his wife if their marriage was truly as happy as was rumored.

"Yes, of course," was the answer, "with the one exception that we have no children!"

Here then the talisman was not to be found, and the Prince and Princess continued their journey in search of the completely happily married couple.

As they traveled on, they came to a country where they heard of an honest citizen who lived in perfect unity and happiness with his wife. So to him they went, and asked if he really was as happily married as people said.

"Yes, I am," answered the man. "My wife and I live in perfect harmony; if only we didn't have so many children, for they give us a lot of worries and sorrows!"

So neither with him was the talisman to be found, and the Prince and the Princess continued their journey through the country, always inquiring about happily married couples; but none presented themselves.

One day, as they rode along fields and meadows, they noticed a shepherd close by the road, cheerfully playing his flute. Just then a woman carrying a child in her arm, and holding a little boy by the hand, walked towards him. As soon as the shepherd saw her, he greeted her and took the little child, whom he kissed and caressed. The shepherd's dog ran to the boy, licked his little hand, and barked and jumped with joy. In the meantime the woman arranged a meal she had brought along, and then said, "Father, come and eat now!" The man sat down and took of the food, but the first bite he gave to the little boy, and the second he divided between the boy and the dog. All this was observed by the Prince and the Princess, who walked closer, and spoke to them, saying, "You must be a truly happily married couple."

"Yes, that we are," said the man. "God be praised; no prince or princess could be happier than we are!"

"Now listen then," said the Prince. "Do us a favor, and you shall never regret it. Give us a small piece of the linen garment you wear close to your body!"

As he spoke, the shepherd and his wife looked strangely at each other, and finally he said, "God knows we would be only too happy to give you not only a small piece, but the whole shirt, or undergarment, if we only had them, but we own not as much as a rag!"

So the Prince and the Princess journeyed on, their mission unaccomplished. Finally, their

unsuccessful roaming discouraged them, and they decided to return home. As they passed the wise man's hut, they stopped by, related all their travel experiences, and reproached him for giving them such poor advice.

At that the wise man smiled and said, "Has your trip really been all in vain? Are you not returning richer in knowledge?"

"Yes," answered the Prince, "I have gained *this* knowledge, that contentment is a rare gift on this earth."

"And I have learned," said the Princess, "that to be contented, one needs nothing more than simply - to be contented!"

Whereupon the Prince took the Princess' hand; they looked at each other with an expression of deepest love. And the wise man blessed them and said, "In your own hearts you have found the true talisman! Guard it carefully, and the evil spirit of discontentment shall never in all eternity have any power over you!"