

'Everything in its Rightful Place'

It's over a hundred years ago!

Behind the wood near the large lake lay an old manor house, and round it there were deep ditches in which bulrushes, rushes and reeds grew. Close to the bridge of the entrance gate stood an old willow tree that hung out over the reeds.

Down from the sunken road came the sound of horns and horses' hooves, and so the little goose girl hurried to get the geese away from the bridge before the hunting party arrived at a gallop; it came at such a speed that she quickly had to jump up onto one of the high stones at the bridge to avoid being ridden down. She was still little more than a child, fine and slender, but with a lovely expression on her face and two kind, bright eyes; but this the lord of the manor did not notice; passing at rapid speed, he reversed his whip in his hand, and out of coarse merriment prodded her right in the chest, so that she toppled backwards. 'Everything in its rightful place!' he called out, 'into the dirt with you!' and then he laughed, for he took that to be highly amusing, and the others laughed too; the whole party shrieked and guffawed and the hounds barked, it really was a case of:

'Rich bird comes a-tearing past'

– God only knows how rich he still was.

The poor goose girl tried to grasp something as she fell, and managed to catch hold of one of the hanging branches of the willow; this saved her from the dirt, and as soon as the fine party and the hounds were well inside the gate, she tried to work her way up, but the branch broke high up, and the goose girl fell back heavily into the reeds, but at that very moment a strong hand from above seized her. It was an itinerant hosier, who had seen the whole incident from a little way off and hurried to the scene to come to her assistance.

'Everything in its rightful place!' he said in jest, as the lord of the manor had done, and hauled her up onto dry land; the broken branch he placed back at the point where it had broken, but 'in its rightful place' doesn't always apply! and so he stuck the branch down into the soft earth, 'grow if you can and provide a good flute for them up at the manor!' he would happily see the lord and his men run the gauntlet; and then he entered the manor, but not the hall, for he was of too humble rank for that! He came in to the people in the servants' hall, where they looked at his wares and haggled; but upstairs from the banqueting hall there was much bawling and squalling that they thought was singing, they could not do any better. There was laughter and a howling of dogs, there was guzzling and swilling; wine and old beer foamed in glass and tankard, and the house dogs joined in the eating too; one or two of them were kissed by the young noblemen after having its muzzle dried with a drooping ear. The hosier was called up with his wares, but only so that they could make fun of him. Wine had entered and reason exited. They poured beer into one of his stockings, so he could join in the drinking, but quickly! it was so exceptionally ingenious and laughable. Entire droves of cattle, farms and farmers were bet on a single card and lost.

'Everything in its rightful place!' the hosier said, when once more he was well outside what he called Sodom and Gomorrah. 'The open road, that's my rightful place, up there I wasn't in my element at all.' And the little goose girl nodded to him from the gate.

Days passed and weeks passed, and it turned out that the broken-off willow branch that the hosier had stuck in the ground near the ditch was still fresh and green, indeed, it was even putting forth new shoots; the little goose girl saw that it must have taken root, and she was extremely happy about this, for it was her tree, she felt.

Yes, everything was going well for it, but all else at the manor was in sharp decline with all the guzzling and gambling: those two whirling wheels are not good to try and stand on.

Less than six years had passed before the lord of the manor was a poor itinerant with a bag and a stick, and the manor had been bought by a rich hosier, and it was precisely the man who had been mocked and derided and offered beer in a stocking; but honesty and industry lead to prosperity, and now the hosier was lord of the manor; but from that moment on, no card-playing was allowed there; 'it makes bad reading,' he said, 'it comes from the fact that when the devil first saw the Bible, he wanted to make a parody of it that was to be just like it, and so he invented card-playing!'

The new lord took a wife, and who should that be but the little goose girl, who had always been good-natured, devout and good; and in her new clothes she looked so fine and beautiful as if she had been born a distinguished young noblewoman. How did that come about? Well, it's too long a story for our bustling age, but that's what happened, and the most important part comes after that.

Everything flourished and thrived at the old manor, the mistress was in charge of everything indoors and the master of everything outdoors; it was as if abundance gushed forth, and where there is affluence, more affluence will take up residence. The old manor was plastered and painted, the ditches cleared and fruit trees planted; everything looked pleasing and attractive, and the living-room floor was as shiny as a chopping board. In the great hall the lady of the house sat on winter evenings with all her girls and span wool and linen; and every Sunday evening there was a reading from the Bible, and by the counsellor himself, for the hosier had become one, but not before he had reached a ripe old age. The children grew up – children came – and all of them were well brought up, though they were not equally bright, as is the case in every family.

But the willow tree outside had become a quite magnificent tree that stood there unpollarded on its own, 'it is our family tree!' the old people said, and that tree was to be honoured and revered! they said to the children even to those of them that were not all that bright.

And now a hundred years had passed.

It was now our own age; the lake had become a bog, and the old manor house was as if erased, there stood a rectangular pool of water, with some loose stonework on one side, it was all that was left of the deep ditches, and here still stood a magnificent old tree with hanging branches, it was the family tree; it stood there showing just how beautiful a willow tree can be when it is allowed to take care of itself. – Admittedly, there was a split in the middle of the trunk from its root up to its crown, the storm had twisted it slightly, but it stood there, and out of the splits and cracks in it, where wind and weather had deposited topsoil, grass and flowers grew; especially highest up, where the large boughs separated, there was what was like a small hanging garden, with raspberries and chickweed, yes, even a small rowan had managed to take root and stood so slender and fine up in the middle of the willow tree, which mirrored itself in the black water when the wind had driven the duckweed over into a corner of the pool. – A small path, out across the tenant fields, led close by.

High up on the hill by the wood, with a delightful view, lay the new manor, large and imposing, with glass panes so clear that one would think none were there. The large flight of steps at the door looked as if it had a bower there of roses and large-leaved plants. The lawn was such a rich green it looked as if every blade had been seen to both morning and evening. Inside in the hall precious paintings hung, and there were silk and velvet upholstered chairs and sofas that could almost walk on their own legs, tables with gleaming marble tops, and books in morocco and with gilt edges... oh yes, it was rich folk that lived here, people of rank, the baron and his family.

The one thing corresponded with the other. 'Everything in its rightful place!' they too said, and therefore all the paintings that had once graced and adorned the old manor had now been hung in the passageway to the farmhands' room; it was nothing but lumber, especially two portraits, one of a man in a rose-coloured coat and wearing a wig, the other a lady with powdered, high-piled hair and a red rose in her hand, but both of them surrounded in the same way by a large garland of willow switches. There were so many round holes in the two pictures, and this was because the small barons always used to shoot arrows from their bows at the two old people. It was the counsellor and his lady wife, from whom the entire family line was descended.

'But they are not really from our family!' one of the young barons said. 'He was a hosier and she a goose girl. They were not like Papa and Mama!'

The pictures were nothing more than lumber, and 'Everything in its rightful place!' one used to say, and that meant that great-grandfather and great-grandmother ended up in the passageway to the farmhands' room.

The vicar's son was tutor at the manor; one day he was out walking with the young barons and their eldest sister, who had just been confirmed, and they were taking the path down towards the old willow tree; and while they walked, she was making a bouquet out of what grew in the fields; 'Everything in its rightful place', and it became a truly beautiful bouquet of flowers. Even so, she listened most attentively to everything that was being said, and she was so glad to hear the vicar's son talk about the forces of nature and the great men and women of history; she had a healthy, fine nature, was noble in thought and mind, and had a heart well capable of embracing all things created by God.

They stopped down by the old willow tree; the youngest of the barons wanted so much to have a flute carved from it, this had been done before from other willow trees, and the vicar's son broke off a branch.

'Oh, don't do that!' the young baroness said, but it had already been done. 'It's our old illustrious tree! I am so fond of it! yes, I know people laugh at me back home for this, but I don't care. There is a legend about that tree —!'

And now she told them everything that we have heard about the tree, about the old manor, about the goose girl and the hosier who met here and became progenitors of the fine family line and the young baroness.

'They refused to be ennobled, the honest old folk!' she said. 'They had the saying: "Everything in its rightful place!" and they did not feel it would be their rightful place to be raised to the aristocracy because of money. It was their son, my grandfather, who became a baron, he is said to have been a very learned man, highly respected and fondly regarded by princes and princesses, and to have attended all their festive occasions. He is the one they are most

fond of at home, I am not sure myself, for me there is something about the old couple that draws my heart towards them! it must have been so cosy, so patriarchal at the old manor, where the mistress of the house sat weaving with all the girls and the old master read aloud from the Bible!

'They must have been splendid people, sensible people!' the vicar's son said; and then they got talking about the aristocracy and the lower classes, and it was almost as if the vicar's son did not belong to the middle classes, judging by the way he enthused about the aristocracy. 'It is highly fortunate to belong to a family that has distinguished itself! so that one has, so to speak, a line of blood to follow in the pursuit of what is excellent. It is delightful to own a family name that grants one admittance to the top families. Nobility means being noble, it is the gold coin that is stamped with what it is worth. – It is a fashionable belief, and naturally many poets adopt it, to state that everything that is noble is bad and stupid, whereas among the poor, the lower down one stoops, the more it glitters. But that is not my opinion, for it is completely wrong, completely false. In the higher ranks there are many touchingly fine features; my mother has told me one, and I could provide several more. She was visiting a fine house in the town – my grandmother, I believe, had suckled the lady of the house. My mother was standing in the living room with the old master, who was of the high nobility; he then saw that an old woman on crutches came into the courtyard; she used to come every Sunday and was given a few coins. 'There is that poor old woman,' the master said, 'she finds walking so difficult! – and before my mother realised it, he was out of the door and down the stairs, this excellency of three score years and ten, had gone down to the poor old woman to save her the exertion of going all the wearisome way up for the few coins she was to receive. That is only a small trait, but like the "widow's mite" it comes directly from the bottom of the heart, from human nature; and it is to this that the poet should point, in our present age it is precisely thereof he shall sing, it does good, alleviates and reconciles! But if an example of mankind, simply because he is of blue blood and has a family tree, stands on his hind legs, like Arab horses, and whinnies in the street, and in his living rooms says "people from the street have been here!" when someone from the middle classes has been there, then nobility has started to decay, has become a mask of the type that Thespis made, and one makes fun of the person and exposes that him to satire.'

That was the speech given by the vicar's son, it was rather long, but after it the flute had been carved.

There was a large festive occasion at the manor, with many people from the local area and from the capital. Ladies dressed tastefully and tastelessly. The great hall was packed with people. The local clergy stood deferentially clustered in a corner, it looked as if a funeral was taking place, but it was a festive occasion that was yet to get underway.

There was to be a big concert, and so the young baron had his willow flute along with him, but he could not breathe into it effectively, nor could his Papa, so it was considered worthless. There was music and singing, of the kind that is most agreeable to those performing it; quite acceptable otherwise.

'So you too are a virtuoso!' said a young gentleman present who was very much a child of his parents; 'You play the flute, you carve it yourself. It is genius that rules – sits to the right – Great heavens! I keep up with the latest fashion, one has to, doesn't one, you will surely delight us all with this little instrument!' and so he handed him the small flute that had been

carved from the willow tree down by the small pool of water, and in a loud, clear voice he announced that the tutor of the house would give them a solo on the flute.

This was, it was easy to understand, in order to make fun of him, and the tutor was unwilling to blow, although he knew how to, but they pressed him, they urged him, and so he took the flute and put it to his lips.

It was a strange flute! it let out a sound strong and sustained as that from a steam locomotive, even louder in fact; it could be heard everywhere in the manor, the garden and the wood, for miles out into the countryside, and along with the sound there came a gale which roared: 'Everything in its rightful place! – and then Papa flew off as if borne by the wind, out of the manor, and straight into the cowman's cottage, and the cowman flew up – not into the main living room, he wasn't able to get in there, no, up to the servants' chamber, among all the fine domestic staff that wear silk stockings, and the proud fellows were as if struck down by rheumatics that such a lowly person dared sit at table among them.

But in the great hall the young baroness flew up to the head of the table, where she fully deserved to sit, but the vicar's son was given the seat next to her, and there they sat the two of them, as if they were a bridal couple. An old count from the oldest family in the land remained firmly in his place of honour, for the flue was just, as one should be. The witty young gentleman who was responsible for the flute-playing, the one who was a child of his parents, flew head-first in among the chickens, but he was not alone.

The flute could be heard a whole league away in the countryside, and there major incidents were reported. A rich merchant's family, out driving in a coach and four, were blown completely out of it, and couldn't even get a place at the back; two rich farmers who in our present age had grown taller than their own cornfields were blown down into a muddy ditch; it was a dangerous flute; fortunately the first sound it made caused it to split, and that was a good thing, then it was pocketed again: 'Everything in its rightful place!'

The following day nobody spoke about the incident, which is why one has the saying 'don't blow the whistle!' Everything was as before again, except for the fact that the two old pictures, those of *The Hosier* and *The Goose Girl*, now hung in the great hall where they had blown up onto the wall; and since one of the real art connoisseurs said they had been painted by a master, they stayed there and were restored, before then people did not know that they were fine paintings – and how were they to have known that. They now hung in the place of honour. 'Everything in its rightful place!' and everything will indeed come to that! Eternity is long, longer than this story!