

# The Shadow

In the hot countries the sun can really burn! People become as brown as mahogany; yes, and in the hottest countries of all they are burnt quite black, but it was only to the hot countries that a learned man had come from one of the cold ones; he imagined he could run around there just like back home, well, it didn't take long to cure him of that. He, along with all sensible people, had to stay indoors, the shutters and doors were closed all day long; it looked as if the whole house was asleep or there was nobody at home. The narrow street with the tall houses where he was staying had also been constructed in such a way that the sunshine was trapped there from morning to evening, it was really intolerable! – The learned man from one of the cold countries was a young man, a knowledgeable man – it seemed to him that he was sitting in a red-hot oven; it sapped his strength, he became quite thin, even his shadow shrank, it became a lot smaller than back home. The sun also sapped its strength. – They only recovered in the evening, when the sun had set.

It was a real pleasure to look at; as soon as a candle was brought into the room, the shadow stretched right up the wall, even along the ceiling; it made itself that long, it had to stretch to recover its strength. The learned man went out onto the balcony, to stretch out there, and as the stars came out in the beautiful clear air, he felt as if he was coming alive again. On all the balconies in the street – and in the hot countries every window has a balcony – people came out, for one has to have air, even if one is used to being mahogany! There was so much life, both above and below. Shoemakers and tailors, everybody moved out into the street, tables and chairs were fetched, and candles were lit, yes, more than a thousand candles were lit, some talked and others sang, and people walked up and down, carriages drove past, donkeys walked by: tingalingaling! they have bells on; bodies were buried while hymns were sung, the street boys let off firecrackers, and the church bells rang, oh yes, there was plenty of life down in the street. Only in one house, which lay opposite where the foreign learned man lived, was everything completely quiet; and yet somebody lived there, for there were flowers on the balcony, they grew so delightfully in the heat of the sun, and they would not be able to had they not been watered, so somebody must have watered them; people had to be living there. The door of the house was also opened and left ajar during the evening, but it was dark inside, in the anteroom at least, from further inside there came the sound of music. The foreign learned man thought it was quite exceptional, but it could well be that he only fancied it, for he found everything exceptional out there in the hot countries – if only the sun had not been there. The foreigner's landlord said that he did not know who had rented the house opposite, one never saw anyone there, and as far as the music was concerned, he found it terribly uninspiring. 'It's as if someone was practising a piece that he can't quite work out, always the same piece.' 'I will work it out all right!' he will say to himself, but he won't, no matter how long he plays.'

One night the foreigner woke up, he was sleeping with the balcony door open, the curtain in front of lifted in the breeze, and he thought he saw a wondrous gleaming coming from the balcony opposite, all the flowers shone like flames, in the loveliest colours, and amidst the flowers stood a slender, lovely maiden, it was as if she too was alight; it really hurt his eyes, he now also opened them terribly wide and was immediately wide awake; he at once

leapt out onto the floor, crept very quietly in behind the curtain, but the maiden was gone, the gleaming was gone; the flowers did not shine at all, but stood there fine enough, as always; the door was ajar, and from deep within came the sound of music so soft and delightful it could really make one fall into a sweet reverie. It was like some sort of enchantment – and who lived there? Where was the actual entrance? The entire ground floor was lined with shops, and it was of course not always possible for people to walk through them.

One evening, the foreigner was sitting out on his balcony, inside the room behind him the candle was burning, and so it was quite natural that his shadow went over onto the wall of the house opposite; yes, there it was, sitting directly opposite among the flowers on the balcony; and when the foreigner moved, the shadow moved too, for that's what a shadow does.–

'I think my shadow is the only living thing one can see over there!' the learned man said. 'Just look at how neatly it is sitting among the flowers, the door is ajar, now the shadow ought to be so kind as to go inside, take a look round, and then come out and tell me what it had seen! yes, you should be of use!' he said in jest. 'Please be so good as to step inside! now then, are you going?' and he nodded to the shadow and the shadow nodded back. 'Well, off you go, but don't stay too long!' and the foreigner rose to his feet and his shadow on the balcony opposite also rose to its feet; and the foreigner turned and the shadow also turned; yes, if anyone had been taking proper notice, they would distinctly have been able to see that the shadow entered the half-open balcony door of the house opposite just as the foreigner entered his own room and let the long curtain slip back behind him.

The following morning the learned man went out to drink coffee and read newspapers. 'What's this?' he said when he came out into the sunshine, 'I've got no shadow! so it really did leave yesterday evening and has not come back. What a nuisance!'

And it irked him, not so much because his shadow was gone but because he knew another story existed about a man without a shadow, everybody knew it back home in the cold countries, and if the learned man now were to go and tell people about his own story, they would say that he was just a copy-cat, and that there was no need for that. So he decided not to talk about it at all – and that was a sensible decision.

That evening he went out onto his balcony again, he had made sure he had placed the candle directly behind him, for he knew that a shadow always likes to have its master as a screen, but he could not entice it; he made himself small, he made himself large, but there was no shadow, none came! He said hm! hm!, but that didn't help.

That was annoying, but in the hot countries everything grows so rapidly, and after a week he noticed, to his great satisfaction, that a new shadow was growing out from his legs when he came out into the sunshine – the root must have stayed put. After three weeks he had a quite tolerable shadow which, as he made for home in the northern countries, grew more and more during the journey, so that finally it was so tall and so large that half as much would have done fine.

The learned man arrived back home and wrote books about what was true in the world, and about what was good and what was beautiful, and days and years passed – many years.

One evening he is sitting in his living room and there is a very gentle knock on the door. 'Come in!' he says, but no one entered; so he opens the door and standing in front of him was such an exceedingly thin person that he felt quite strange. Apart from this, the person was extremely well dressed, he had to be a man of distinction.

'Whom do I have the honour of addressing?' the scholar asked.

'Yes, I thought as much!' the fine man said, 'that you would not recognise me! I have become so corporeal, and really put on flesh and clothing. You've probably never thought you would see me in my prime as I am now. Don't you recognise your former shadow? Yes, you've certainly not imagined that I would turn up again. Things have gone very well for me since I was last with you, in all respects I have become very prosperous. If I am to buy my release from serving you, I am in a position to do so!' and he rattled a whole bunch of expensive signets that hung from his watch, and thrust his hand into the thick gold chain he wore around his neck; oh, how all his fingers glittered with diamond rings! and all of this was real.

'No, I can't get my head round all of this!' the learned man said, 'what's it all about!'

'Yes, well it's certainly out of the ordinary!' the *shadow* said, 'but you yourself are also out of the ordinary, and I, as you very well know, have followed in your footsteps ever since I was a child. As soon as you felt I was mature enough to go alone out into the world, I went my own way; I am now in the most brilliant circumstances, but some sort of longing came over me to see you once more before you die, for die you shall! I also wanted once more to see these countries, for one is always fond of one's fatherland! – I know that you have acquired another shadow, is there anything I should pay it or you? Just be so kind as to say so.'

'No, is it really you!' the learned man said, 'that is quite remarkable! I never imagined that one's former shadow could return as a human being!'

'Just tell me what I owe you!' the *shadow* said, 'for I would hate to be indebted to you in any way!'

'How can you speak like that!' the learned man said. 'What debt could we be talking about! Be as free as anyone! I am delighted at your good fortune! Sit down, old friend, and tell me just a little about how things have done for you, and what you saw in that house opposite, down in the hot countries!' –

'Well yes, I'll tell you,' the *shadow* said and sat down, 'but then you will have to promise me that you will never say to anyone here in the town, where people may happen to meet me, that I have been your shadow! I have in mind to get engaged; I can feed more than one family!' –

'Rest assured!' the learned man said, 'that I will not tell anyone who you really are! here is my hand on it! I promise you, and a man's as good as his word!'

'And a word's as good as its shadow!' the *shadow* said, and it had to speak like that, of course. It was otherwise quite remarkable how much of a human being it was; clad completely in black clothes made of the finest cloth, patent-leather boots, and a hat that could be flattened so that it became nothing but crown and shadow, not to mention what we already know it had: signets, a gold chain round its neck and diamond rings; yes indeed, the shadow was exceptionally well dressed, and it was precisely that which made it exactly a human being.

'Now I will tell you!' the *shadow* said, bringing its legs with the patent-leather boots down as hard as it could on the sleeve of the scholar's new shadow, which lay like a poodle at his feet, either out of arrogance or perhaps to make it stick; and the lying shadow kept so still and quiet so as to hear all the better; it very much wanted to know how it too could free itself from its bonds and become its own master.

'Do you know who lived in the house opposite?' the shadow said, 'it was the loveliest thing of all – it was *Poetry*! I stayed there for three weeks and that was just as effective as if one had

lived for three thousand years and read everything that had ever been written and composed, for that is what I am saying and it is correct. I have seen everything and I know everything!’ ‘Poetry!’ the learned man exclaimed, ‘yes, yes – she is often a hermit in the great cities! Poetry! yes, I have seen her only for a brief instant, but my eyes were still sleepy! she was standing on the balcony and gleamed like the shimmering of the northern lights! Tell me more, more! You were on the balcony, you entered the door, and then – –!’

‘Then I was in the anteroom!’ the shadow said. ‘You always sat looking across at the anteroom. There was no light there, only a kind of twilight, but one door stood open in front of the next in a long succession of rooms and halls; and these were brightly illuminated, and I would have been simply struck dead with light had I gone as far in as where the maiden was; but I was level-headed, I gave myself time – and that is what one should do!’

‘And what did you see then, old chap?’ the learned man asked.

‘I saw everything, and I will tell you about that, but – it is not out of some personal pride, but – being free and having the knowledge that I do, not to mention my good position, my excellent circumstances – I would like you to refrain from simply calling me “old chap”!’

‘Please excuse me,’ the scholar said, ‘it is a familiarity that has become a habit. You, sir, are completely right! and I shall remember not to do so anymore! But would you please be so kind as to tell me everything that you saw!’ –

‘Everything!’ the *shadow* said, ‘for I saw everything and I know everything!’

‘What did it look like in the innermost halls?’ the learned man asked. ‘Was it like being in the freshness of the woods? Was it like in some holy church? Were the halls like the starry night sky when one is standing on the summits of high mountains?’

‘Everything was there!’ the *shadow* said. ‘I didn’t even walk all the way in, I stayed in the anteroom in the twilight, but I was well-positioned there, I saw everything and I know everything! I have been in the Court of Poetry, in the anteroom.’

‘But what did you see? Did all the gods of Antiquity walk through the large halls? Did the ancient heroes do battle there? Did sweet children play and relate their dreams?’

‘I tell you, I was there and you are to understand that I saw everything there was to be seen! If you had gone over there you would not have become human, but I did! and what is more I got to know my innermost nature, my innate being, the kinship I had with Poetry. Yes, back then when I was with you, I didn’t think about it, but always – you know this – when the sun rose and the sun set I grew so remarkably large; in the moonlight I was on the point of being more distinct than you are yourself; back then I didn’t understand my own nature, in the anteroom it dawned on me! I became a human being! – I came out mature, but you were no longer in the hot countries; I was ashamed as a human being to walk about as I was, I needed boots, clothes, all the human varnish that makes a human being recognisable. – I made my way, yes, I am telling you this, for you won’t put it in any book, I made my way to the cake-woman’s skirt and concealed myself under it; the woman was not aware how much she was hiding; I did not come out until it was evening; I ran around in the moonlight in the street; I made myself long up against the wall – it tickles one’s back so exquisitely! I ran up and I ran down, looked in through the highest windows, into the hall and onto the roof, I looked where nobody could look and saw what no one else could see, what no one was supposed to see! When all’s said and done, it is a wicked world! I wouldn’t want to be a human being were it not for the fact that it is reckoned to be quite something! I saw the most inconceivable

things in the women, the men, the parents and the sweet, incomparable children; – I saw,’ the *shadow* said, ‘what no humans are allowed to know but what all of them so much would like to know, wickedness in one’s neighbour. – If I had written a newspaper, it would have been read! but I wrote directly to the person involved, and there was dismay in all the cities I came to. They were so frightened of me! and they were so exceptionally fond of me. The professors made me a professor, the tailors gave me new clothes, I am well provided for; the mintmaster made coins for me, and the women said that I was so handsome! – and thus I became the man I am! and now I will bid you farewell; here is my card, I live on the sunny side of the street and am always at home in rainy weather!’ and with that the *shadow* departed.

‘Now there’s a strange thing!’ the learned man said.

Days and years passed, and then the *shadow* turned up again.

‘How are things with you?’ it asked.

‘Ah me!’ the learned man said, ‘I write about the True and the Good and the Beautiful’, but nobody is interested in hearing about such things, I almost despair – for it really grieves me!’

‘But not me I have no such feelings!’ the *shadow* said, ‘I put on weight, and that is what one must make sure one does! ah, you do not understand the way of the world. You will suffer from it. You must travel! I am going on a trip this summer; would you like to join me? I would very much like to have a travelling companion.’ Will you come along, as my shadow! I would really enjoy having you with me, I shall pay for both of us!’

‘That’s going a bit far!’ the learned man said.

‘It all depends on how you look at it!’ the *shadow* said. ‘Travelling would do you a power of good! If you’re prepared to be my shadow, you will get everything free on the trip!’

‘That is outrageous!’ the learned man said.

‘But that’s the way the world is!’ the *shadow* said, ‘and that’s how it will stay!’ and with that the *shadow* departed.

The learned man was really in a bad way, sorrow and torment followed him everywhere, and when he spoke of the True and the Good and the Beautiful, it was mostly like casting pearls before swine! – he finally fell quite ill.

‘You really look like a shadow of yourself!’ people said to him, and that made the scholar shudder, for it made him think.

‘You must go to a spa!’ the *shadow* said when paying him a visit, ‘there’s nothing else for it! I will take you along with me for old acquaintance’s sake, pay for the journey and you can write the account of it and amuse me a bit on the way! I want to go to a spa, my beard isn’t growing as it should, that is also an illness, and a beard is a must! Be reasonable now and accept my offer, we will after all be travelling as companions!’

And so they did – the *shadow* was now the master and the master his shadow; they journeyed together, they rode and walked together, side by side, ahead and behind, according to where the sun stood; the shadow made sure always to keep himself in the position of master; and the scholar didn’t give this all that much thought; he was a kind-hearted man, and particularly gentle and friendly, and one day he said to the shadow: ‘since we have now become travelling companions and what’s more have grown up together since childhood, perhaps we should be on first-name terms and drink to each other’s health, for that is more intimate!’

‘You have a point!’ said the shadow, who was now the real master. ‘It is said in a straightforward and well-meant way, so I will be equally well-meaning and straightforward.’

You, as a learned man, certainly know how strange nature is. Some people cannot bear to touch grey paper, for it hurts them; others feel a shudder pass through their whole body if one scratches a nail across a pane of glass; I get a similar feeling if you address me in a familiar fashion, I feel as if I am pressed to the ground as in my first position with you. You can see that this is a feeling, that it is not pride; I cannot let you use familiar language when talking to me, but I am prepared to do so when talking to you, and that's already going half-way!

And from then on the *shadow* spoke in familiar language to its former master.

'It is pretty outrageous,' he thought, 'that I must behave like a servant and my shadow behaves like the master!' but now he had to put up with it.

They then came to a spa where there were many people from other lands, and among them was a lovely king's daughter who suffered from being able to see far too well and that of course was quite alarming.

She immediately noticed that the man who had arrived was a completely different sort of person than all the others; 'he has come here to get his beard to grow, they say, but I can see the real cause – he is unable to cast a shadow.'

She had become curious, so on a walk she immediately engaged the foreign gentleman in conversation. As a king's daughter, she did not need to stand on ceremony, and so she said, 'your affliction is that you are unable to cast a shadow.'

'Your royal highness must be well on the way to recovery!' the *shadow* said, 'I know that your affliction is that you see far too well, but you do not any more, you are cured, it is just that I have an extremely unusual shadow! Are you unable to see the person who always accompanies me! Other people have an ordinary shadow, but I have no liking for what is ordinary. One often gives one's servant finer livery than one wears oneself, and so I have had my shadow polished up to a human being! yes, you can see that I have even provided *him* with a shadow. That is extremely expensive, but I like to have something no one else has!' – 'What?' the princess thought, 'am I really cured?' This spa is the first place it has happened! The water nowadays has quite remarkable powers. But I am not going to leave, for now things will be quite amusing here; the foreigner pleases me exceedingly. I only hope his beard doesn't start to grow, for then he will leave!

In the evening, in the great ballroom, the king's daughter and the shadow danced together. She was light on her feet, but he was even lighter – such a dancer she had never known before. She told him which country she came from and he was familiar with it, he had been there, but she was not home then, he had looked in through the windows high up and low down, he had seen both this and that, and so he was able to answer the king's daughter and suggest things that quite amazed her, he had to be the wisest man in the whole world! she acquired such a great respect for what he knew, and when they then danced again, she fell so much in love, and this the *shadow* was well able to notice, for she almost looked straight through him. Then they danced yet again and she was just about to say it, but she was a sober-minded person, she thought of her land and kingdom and of the many people she was going to reign over. 'He is a wise man,' she said to herself, 'that is good! and he dances delightfully, that is also good, but I wonder if he has sound knowledge, that is just as important! he must be put to the test.' And so she gradually started to ask him some of the most difficult things to which she had no answer herself; and the shadow made a very strange face at this.

'You're unable to answer that!' the king's daughter said.

'That is stuff I learnt when only a child,' the *shadow* said, 'I think even my shadow over there by the door could answer that!'

'Your shadow!' the king's daughter said, 'that would be very strange indeed!'

'Well, I'm not saying that he definitely can!' the shadow said, 'but I would think so, he has followed me now for so many years and listened, – I would think so! but if your royal highness would permit me to draw her attention to the fact that he is so extremely proud at being taken for a human being, that if he is to be in the right sort of mood, and he has to be that to answer well, he must be treated precisely as if he were a human being.'

'I like that a lot!' the king's daughter said.

And so she went over to the learned man at the door, and spoke to him about the sun and the moon, and about people both outside and inside and he answered so wisely and well.

'What sort of a man is this that has so wise a shadow!' she thought, 'it would be a great boon for my people and kingdom if I chose him as my husband – I'll do so!'

And they soon came to an agreement, both the king's daughter and the shadow, but nobody was to know before she returned to her own kingdom.

'No one, not even my shadow!' the *shadow* said, and he also had his own particular thought about that! –

They then came to the country where the king's daughter ruled when she was at home.

'Just listen, my good friend!' the *shadow* said to the learned man, 'I have now become as happy and powerful as anyone can become, now I intend to do something special for you! you are always to live with me at the palace, drive with me in my royal carriage and have a hundred thousand thalers a year; but in return you must let yourself be called a shadow by each and every one; you must not say that you have ever been a human being and once a year, when I am sitting on the balcony in the sunshine and allow myself to be seen, you must lie at my feet, just as a shadow has to! I can tell you: I will marry the king's daughter, this evening the wedding is to take place.'

'No, that is really too outrageous!' the learned man said, 'I won't do it, I refuse to! it's deceiving the whole country and the king's daughter as well! I'll reveal everything! that I am the human being and that you are just a shadow that has been dressed up!'

'No one will believe you!' the *shadow* said, 'be reasonable, otherwise I will call the guard!'

'I'll go straight to the king's daughter!' the learned man said. 'But I'll go first!' the *shadow* said, 'and you're going to be arrested!' – and so he was, for the sentries obeyed the one they knew the king's daughter was going to marry.

'You're trembling!' the king's daughter said when the shadow came in to her, 'has something happened? You mustn't get ill this evening, for we're to be married.'

'I've just experienced the most terrible thing possible!' the shadow said, 'just imagine – well, a poor shadow's brain can't put up with all that much! – just imagine, my shadow has gone mad, he believes that he is the human being and that I – just fancy – that I am his shadow!'

'That's frightful!' the princess said, 'he's been locked up, I hope?' 'Yes, he has! I'm afraid he will never get over it.'

'Poor shadow!' the princess said, 'he is very unfortunate; it would be a true act of kindness to release him from the fraction of life he has left, and the more I think about it, the more I believe that it will be necessary to get rid of him discreetly!'

'That really is hard to take in!' the shadow said, 'for he has been a faithful servant!' and he gave what seemed like a sigh.

'You have a noble character!' the king's daughter said.

That evening the whole city was lit up, and the cannons were fired: boom! and the soldiers presented arms. This was some wedding! The king's daughter and the *shadow* went out onto the balcony to let themselves be seen and to receive yet another Hurrah!

The learned scholar did not hear anything of all of this, for he had been done away with. –