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Close by the Door. I will stop in this long stretch of shadow, To think of it, I have a great story...

Eighty years! They hold shadow and sunshine, A home, a few acres of land, A few loving words from the children...

But, oh, such a poor little record To write underneath the fursore! What an item to buy me admission...

It is the beautiful, tender old story; How loving our father used to be, To send, out of mists and distraction...

Three Songs of the Hunchback. Translated from the French for the New York Times.

In a solitary chateau on the borders of the Rhine there once lived a young Knight who had just returned from the wars and married his cousin Yseult.

The Knight no longer cared for the excitement of the combat; his only desire now was for the pleasures of home life. His sword was allowed to rust in its scabbard, and he thought about it no more than if it were a distaff.

After a time a baby son was given to the cavalier, and as you may well think, this arrival made no end of rejoicing in the old chateau, for the new comer was the one link that bound still closer the Knight and the fair Yseult.

All the friends of the happy couple were now bidden to the castle, not forgetting a certain magician who lived on the other bank of the river, and whose life had once upon a time been saved by the Knight.

'That he may be brave,' replied the Knight. 'A noble wish,' said Theos, 'and it is the first that should have been made; but the boy would have been brave in any event, for are you not his father, and have you not the name of being one of the bravest knights in Christendom?'

'And you, Madam? what do you desire for your child?' asked Theos of Yseult. 'That he shall love me as I love him,' replied the mother.

'He will love you Madam as soon as he is able to know you.' (Here, my readers, you will observe that Theos was a very gallant magician.)

Then turning toward the older guests he said to one of them, 'What do you wish for the son of our host?' 'That he may live as many years as I have lived,' was the reply.

'And you?' he asked of another. 'That he may be always rich.' 'And you?' 'That he may be always strong.'

'Still there were three more wishes; three wishes to be made by the young girl-cousins of the baby. 'May he have beautiful blonde hair said the first. 'And eyes blue as sapphire,' added the second. 'And teeth like pearls,' wished the third.

'Sir Knight,' said Theos, 'your son will have all that his kinsmen and kinswomen have desired for him.' 'Thanks, Theos, but you have a crowning gift to add to all these.'

'Well, what is it?' 'You give me permission?' 'Yes, for I know that it will be the most precious gift of all, because of your great wisdom, and your great love for us.'

Theos seemed to turn over in his mind all possible things that might complete the happiness of the child. Everybody was silent. Then turning toward the frail creature, the magician said:

'Yes, with all my heart.' 'But why?' 'Just because you are unfortunate.' 'And why do you, a stranger, love me for that which causes my mother, who should care for me most, to hate the sight of me?'

'The world is so made, my boy.' 'Then the world is like me, illy made,' replied Herman, with a sad smile.

As the boy grew, his infirmity also increased, until he was frightfully deformed, while his brother sprang into a beautiful lad, so beautiful that they called him Phoebus. The young gentleman was quite aware of his good looks, and passed whole hours in marching up and down before a mirror, admiring himself.

The little hunchback also looked at his mirror, but only to laugh at his poor plight. One day he saw some children playing in the court of the castle, and said, 'I should like to play too.'

'Go down, then,' said the old servant. The child ran off eagerly, but a few minutes after he came back, his eyes full of tears.

'What has happened?' demanded the old man. 'They made fun of me, and threw stones. You see I am wounded, but that is nothing. And then they called me a bad name—'Esop.' What does it mean?'

'Esop is the name of a man.' 'Of a wicked man, is it not?' 'No, Master Herman, Esop was a very good man.'

'Why, then, did they call me Esop?' 'Because he was a hunchback like you.' 'And his hump did not prevent his growing to be a great man?'

'No.' 'What did he do?' 'He wrote fables, in which the man who was physically deformed made moral deformity ridiculous.'

'You have hurt yourself!' 'Never mind that. The laughter of the young girl has wounded me so that I feel nothing else. My friend, I want to die.'

'That is not possible.' 'Why not?' 'First, because you would be lost for killing yourself, and then you still have many years to live.'

'Who says so?' 'The magician.' 'What magician?' 'Then the old servant told the boy the history of his birth and baptism, and the family council over his cradle.'

'What will become of me then?' said poor Esop. 'I shall give you some advice,' continued the kindly old man. 'As you cannot enjoy the pleasures that your brother lives for, you must seek comfort elsewhere; your soul is pure and good, though your body is deformed; so if you learn the art of charming through your soul, the best men will envy you the gift.'

'Well, in my place, what would you do?' 'I would learn to play the flute.' 'What, blow into a bit of wood like a blind beggar! That would make my cheeks as ugly as my back.'

'It is, however, a fine instrument.' 'But there must be others.' 'Yes; there is the harp.' 'What is it like?'

When the old man explained, Esop said, 'Bring me the harp.' The poor boy was so sad that he felt the need of pouring out his sorrows in some way, even if he had no human ear to listen to him. With the instinct which God gives to the suffering soul, and to the poet, for poetry and pain are sisters, he soon learned to express himself in song, while his fingers produced the sweetest musical accompaniments to the equally lovely voice.

His heart would swell with the loftiest strains, while his sapphire eyes glistened with emotion. Grief had made him a poet, and his love soon found voice in delicious ballads, written in praise of the young girl that he had seen on the balcony. When he finished singing he would allow his hand to drop in his hands, while he dreamed.

Some one knocked at the door. 'Who sings here?' said a sweet voice. 'It is I, Esop.'

'Her name is Angelique.' 'How, does she live in the chateau that I can see from the window?' 'Yes.'

'Then she is the young girl who laughed the other day as I passed under the balcony?' 'Yes, I was there.'

'And you did not beg her to desist from laughing at you brother?' 'No, indeed! I laughed with her, you looked so droil in your fine clothes, with that hump on your back.'

'And you really want to learn my song?' 'And why not?' 'But it is only the unhappy that sing as I do.'

'Good gracious, I don't want to pay that price for your songs.' 'But think, if you indeed wish to sing like me I must give you my hump. It is my music box.'

'No, thanks. I would be too ugly.' 'Phoebus sought Angelique and told her of the hard conditions that his brother had made, if he wished to learn to sing.'

'Accept them!' said Angelique. 'How; are you willing to marry a hunchback?' 'Since it is the only price that he will take for his gift.'

'But you will hate me when I am deformed.' 'Am I not beautiful enough for both?' said the girl, 'and I do believe that I love the beauty of intelligence to mere outward grace.'

'But you laughed yourself at the hunchback when he rode by.' 'Yes; but I had not heard him sing. If I had, I should have pitied him first, and loved him afterward. Do you really love me?'

'Well go and learn to sing.' 'What a foolish fancy.' 'Make haste, or I shall never marry you.'

'Phoebus ran again to his brother's room, and said, 'Give me your hump!' he exclaimed. 'Why so?'

'Because you must.' 'Does your lady consent to marry a hunchback?'

'Yes.' 'Then I shall keep my hump.' 'Keep it!'

'But I want it—I must have it.' 'Not so. I have kept it through sorrow, and now that it promises love, I will not part with it.'

'What do you mean?' 'You say that the lady will marry a hunchback provided he sings as I do?'

'Yes.' 'Well, I shall not part with the hump. I shall marry the lady myself!'

'Phoebus sought Angelique, and Esop left the room and sought Angelique, and kneeling at her feet, he sang his third song, full of love and tenderness. He sang of a lovely lake, shadowed by the night, which left the first rays of the morning sun, and which moved the lily on the banks to trust himself to its gentle rocking.

'Before seeing you,' the song said, 'my soul was this shadowed lake, for all was dark in my life. You are here, and now I smile as did the lake at the first rays of light.'

'Sing again,' said the girl, 'You are as beautiful as Apollo, the divine.' The Count and Countess fell on their knees before their son.

'Do you see now, dear Knight, why I gave the hump to your son? If he had only the gifts wished for him by his kinsmen he would have been like my Lord Phoebus returned to the grand salon where his father and mother, with the Lady Angelique, waited him.'

'Where have you been?' said the young girl, poutingly. 'I have been to silence the young fellow who was singing.'

'Why have you done that?' 'Because I thought the noise would annoy you?'

'Oh, the contrary, I like it very much. It is ravishing. Can you not sing like that?'

'No, why should I?' 'Because I am determined that I will not marry you until you can.' Phoebus did not know what to do, for it was simply impossible for him to put together two ideas in a song, or to sing a single note. Always thinking of his body, he had quite forgotten his mind. He was beautiful as a peacock, and stupid as a goose.

All this time Esop was in tears, for he was very hard that the moment he began to feel some pleasure in singing his brother should command him to refrain from it. Phoebus knocked again at the door.

'Who is it?' said Esop. 'It is I, Phoebus, your brother.' 'What do you want with me, now that you call me brother for the first time?'

'I come to ask a favor.' 'Enter.' Phoebus shut the door, and though he had come to demand a service of his brother, he could not help laughing at the sad look of the hunchback.

'What can I do for you?' said Esop gently. 'I want you to teach me to sing the song you have just finished.'

'The one that you forbade?'

'Yes, said Phoebus, blushing. 'Why do you want to know it?'

'Because the lady of my love will not marry me until I can sing as you do.'

'And who is this lady?'

'She is the young girl who laughed at me the other day as I passed under the balcony.'

'Yes, I was there.'

'And you did not beg her to desist from laughing at you brother?'

'No, indeed! I laughed with her, you looked so droil in your fine clothes, with that hump on your back.'

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