

Little Tuck

Hans Christian Andersen

Yes, that was little Tuck. As a matter of fact, his name wasn't really Tuck, but before he could speak plainly he called himself Tuck. That was supposed to mean "Carl," but "Tuck" does just as well if one only knows it.

Now he had to learn his lessons and at the same time take care of his sister Gustava, who was much smaller than he; and it was pretty hard to manage the two things at once. So the poor boy sat with his little sister on his lap, and sang to her all the songs he knew, at the same time glancing into his geography book, which was open before him. By the next morning he was supposed to know all the towns in the counties of Seeland by heart, and everything there was to know about them.

Then his mother returned, for she had been away, and took little Gustava herself. Tuck ran quickly to the window and studied until he almost read his eyes out, for it was getting darker and darker, and his poor mother could not afford candles.

Suddenly his mother looked out of the window. "There goes the old washerwoman from down the lane," she said. "She can hardly drag herself along, and she has to carry a pail of water from the well, too! Be a good boy, Tuck, and run over and help the old woman."

And little Tuck jumped up and ran to help the old woman, but when he got home again it was quite dark. Nothing was said about candles, so all he could do was go to bed-and his bed was an old folding bench. He lay there thinking about Seeland, and his geography lesson, and everything the teacher had said. He should certainly have studied that lesson some more, but of course he couldn't do that now.

So he put his geography book under his pillow, because he had heard that this helps a great deal when you want to learn a lesson. But you can't depend on that!

There he lay, thinking and thinking, then all of a sudden it seemed as if someone kissed his eyes and lips. He slept and yet he didn't sleep, and he felt as if the old washerwoman was looking at him out of the kind eyes and saying, "It would be a great shame if you didn't know your lesson tomorrow. You helped me, and now I'll help you; and our Lord will help us both."

Then all at once the book under his pillow began to wriggle and squirm around!

"Kekelikee! Cluck, cluck!" It was a hen that came crawling out-and she was from Kjøge. "I'm a Kjøge hen," she said. And then she told him all about her town, and how many people there were in it, and about a battle that had taken place there once, though that wasn't really worth mentioning.

"Krible, kragle, bang!" Something dropped down. And a wooden bird appeared; it was the parrot from the shooting match at Praestö. The bird told the little boy very proudly that there were just as many inhabitants in its town as there were nails in its body. "Thorvaldsen used to live around the corner from me! Bang! Here I lie comfortably!"

But little Tuck was no longer lying in bed-all of a sudden he was on horseback! Gallopy, gallopy, it went! He was sitting in front of a splendidly dressed knight, with shining helmet and nodding plume. On through the woods they galloped to the old town of Vordingborg, and that was a big and lively town. High towers rose above the royal castle, and radiant lights streamed from its windows; inside there was singing and dancing, and King Valdemar led the lovely court ladies in the dance. But soon morning came, and as the sun rose the town seemed to melt away, and the King's castle sank down, one tower after another, until at last only one tower was left standing on the hill where the castle had

been, and the town had become very small and very poor. The schoolboys came along with their books under their arms, and said, "Two thousand inhabitants," but that wasn't true. There were not so many as that.

And still little Tuck lay in his bed, as if he were dreaming and not dreaming at the same time, but there seemed to be someone standing close beside him.

"Little Tuck, Little Tuck!" someone said. It was a sailor, a very little fellow, small enough to have been a midshipman, although he wasn't a midshipman. "I bring you many greetings from Korsör, that's a growing town, a lively flourishing town with steamboats and mail coaches. In olden times people used to call it ugly, but that's not true any more.

" 'I lie by the seashore,' Korsör says to you. 'I have highroads and beautiful parks, and I once gave birth to a poet who was very witty. That's more than can be said for all of them. I wanted to send a ship around the world, but I didn't. But I could have done it. Anyway, I smell deliciously, because close by my gates, the most beautiful roses bloom!' "

Little Tuck saw them, and everything was green and red before his eyes, but when the confusion of colors was over, they changed to wooden heights, sloping down to the sparkling waters of a fiord. A stately old twin-spired church towered above the waters. From out of the cliffside springs of water rushed down in bubbling streams, and near by sat an old king with a golden crown on his long hair. It was King Hroar of the Springs, and the place is now the town of Roskilde (Hroar's Springs). Up the hill and into the old church the kings and queens of Denmark walked hand in hand, all with their golden crowns, and the organ was playing, and the springs rippled.

"Don't forget the towns of the kingdom!" said King Hroar.

Then all at once everything vanished-and where had it all gone? It was like turning a leaf in a book.

Now an old peasant woman stood before Little Tuck; she was a weeding woman from Sorö, where grass grows in the market place. She had thrown her gray linen apron over her head and down her back, and it was soaking wet-it must have been raining.

"Yes, it certainly has been," she said. She knew many of the comic parts from Holberg's comedies, and all about Valdemar and Absolon.

But all at once she squatted down and wagged her head, just as if she were about to leap. "Ko-ax," she said. "It's wet! It's wet! It's quiet as a grave in Sorö!" Suddenly she was a frog, "Ko-ax!" and then she became an old woman again. "You should always dress according to the weather!" she explained. "It's wet! Very wet! My town is just like a bottle-you go in with the cork, and you have to come out the same way. In the old days I used to have beautiful fish there, and now I have red-cheeked little boys down in the bottom of the bottle. They learn a lot of wisdom there - Greek! Greek! Hebrew! Hebrew! Ko-ax!" It sounded like the croaking of frogs, or the creaking of big boots as you walk across the moor; always the same sound-so monotonous-so tiresome-yes, so tiresome that Little Tuck fell into a deep sleep, which was the best thing in the world for him.

But even in this sleep he had a dream or something like that. It seemed that his little sister, Gustava, with her blue eyes and golden curly hair, had suddenly become a grown-up beautiful lady, and she could fly without wings. Together they flew over the green forests and the deep blue waters of Seeland.

"Do you hear the cock crowing, Little Tuck? Cock-a-doodle-do! The hens are flying up out of Kjöge. You'll have a big, big chicken yard; you'll never suffer want or hunger; yes, you shall shoot the parrot, as the saying goes; you shall be a rich and happy man. Your manor shall rise up like King Valdemar's towers, and it shall be richly adorned with marble statues, like those in Praestö! Can you understand me? The fame of your name shall travel around the world, like this ship that was to sail from Korsör!" And from Roskilde

town came the voice of King Hroar, "Remember the towns of the kingdom!"

"There you shall speak wisely and well, Little Tuck. And when you are in your grave you shall sleep as peacefully as-"

"As if I were in Sorö!" cried Little Tuck, and then he woke up.

It was broad daylight, and he couldn't remember the smallest part of his dream. And he wasn't supposed to either, for we shouldn't know things that are going to happen in the future.

Now he sprang quickly out of bed and read his geography book, and at once he knew the whole lesson!

And the old washerwoman put her head in the door and nodded good morning to him.

"Many thanks (NB! = thanks) for your help yesterday, dear child," she said. "May the Lord make all your dreams come true!"

Little Tuck didn't know anything that he had dreamed, but you see-our Lord knew it!