

## Children's Department.

## The Golden Geese

## I.

"I wish I had a goose that laid golden eggs!" said Norah, throwing down her book, and clasping her hands energetically.

"Don't talk nonsense!" said the mother.

"What wouldst do with the gold, lass?" said the father.

"I would buy myself a white frock, and a blue sash, and a hat like the squire's daughter; a silk gown for mother, and a coat with a velvet collar for you to wear on Sundays, father."

"That would take only part of a golden egg," returned the father. "Go on, lass, and then we shall know all thee wants."

Norah drew closer to her father, and looked gravely up in his face.

"A donkey-cart for mother to go to market in, a carpet for the room, curtains for the windows, lots of beautiful flowers and fruit in the garden, and nothing to do. I should sell the eggs, and get so much money that you never need do any more work."

"Thank thee, lass, thank thee; it sounds very grand. Wife, dost hear what Norah is going to give us?"

"Aye, if wishes were horses beggars would ride!" returned the mother. "I wonder at thee, father, for encouraging the lass in her folly. Come, Norah, get the table ready for supper; the lads will be in from the fields before long, and they'll be hungry enough, I dare say."

Scarcely had she spoken when the gate swung open, and the two lads appeared, one of them carrying something very carefully in his hat.

"A present for you, Norah! Guess what it is in three guesses. Now!"

Norah sprang forward. "Is it a bird?"

"No."

"One of Mrs. Lovell's plum-cakes?"

"No."

"A goose's egg, perhaps," said the father, laughing.

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"Oh you shouldn't have spoken!" said Tom. "I wanted Norah to guess. But it's not one egg. Farmer Lovell has sent her six eggs; and he says if she will get the old hen to sit upon them she will have six as fine young goslings as need to be."

"Why, Norah, you're in luck," said the father; "and it will be hard, if out of six geese there should not be one to lay golden eggs for us."

"Golden eggs!" exclaimed Tom, in surprise.

"Ah, lad, thee dost not know all the fine things that are coming to us," returned the father, laughing; whilst Norah's cheeks grew red, and the mother said, "Father's making fun, lad."

## II.

The old hen sat upon the eggs, and in due time the goslings straggled forth, and Norah began to build castles in the air. She did not expect that any of the birds would lay golden eggs—she knew that could only happen in fairy tales—but she looked forward to the time when her geese would sell for at least seven-and-sixpence each, which would be two pounds five shillings, which, in Norah's eyes, seemed a little fortune.

And the goslings grew and grew, and became fine fat geese; and Norah lost sight of the golden eggs in the interest she took in the living creatures, who were so tame and so sensible. For as to thinking that geese are stupid, that is all a mistake, as people find who have much to do with them.

## III.

One sunny afternoon Norah sat knitting by the river side, whilst her geese were swimming and diving to their hearts' content, when Farmer Lovell passed by. Norah jumped up.

"Aren't they beauties?" said she, pointing to her geese, "I can never thank you enough for them."

"Make a good use of them," said the farmer, patting her on the shoulder; "but that I'm sure you will do; the daughter of a good father and mother need not be told that." And he went his way. And Norah fell to thinking of what he had said, and as she did so the visions of blue and pink ribbons, and stylish hats, vanished away, and

a sudden sense of the responsibility of having possessions of her own began to press upon her.

"I think the geese are making me wise," said she, unconsciously speaking aloud.

"Then they will be golden geese," answered a voice at her side.

"Oh, father! Did you hear what I was saying?"

"Only a bit of it."

"It's a great thing to have property," said Norah, "and to know what to do with it. It makes one feel older, and it's a weight as well as a pleasure."

"Why, lass," said her father, "the geese have taught thee a lesson thy mother and I failed to teach thee!"

## IV.

The older and fatter the geese grew the more important Norah felt. She and Tom had many consultations as Martinmas drew nigh, and at length it was decided that the time had come for the geese to be sold.

"I'm sorry to part with them, Tom, but they must go. I must have the money."

"What for?"

But Norah screwed up her mouth, and shook her head. She had her own plans, but she was not going to tell them.

"I wonder if they would bring seven shillings a-piece," said she.

"Here's Farmer Lovell coming, maybe he can tell us."

"I don't like to ask him," answered Norah.

But Farmer Lovell anticipated the question, for his first words were, "Well, Norah, if you're willing to sell your geese I've got a good customer for you."

Norah looked up, her eyes half filled with tears, for now that it came to the point, she found that she was very fond of her geese.

"Eight shillings each," continued Farmer Lovell; "it's a high price, and, though poultry's dear, you are not likely to get such an offer again."

"She'll sell them," said Tom.

"Let your sister speak for herself."

"Yes, thank you; I have made up my mind to sell them," said Norah, "and I'm much obliged to you for—"

And here Norah burst out crying.

"What a queer girl you are!" said Tom.

But Farmer Lovell patted her on the shoulders, saying, "I understand, child, and I'll send for them to-night."

That evening the geese had an extra feed of green meat from Norah's hand, an extra pat on the head for good-bye; and when Norah went to bed at night she put her two pounds eight shillings under her pillow, and cried herself to sleep.

"What will she do with it?" asked Tom.

"You'll surely not let her spend it all as she pleases," said the mother.

"Leave her alone," said the father; "the golden geese have been talking to her." The mother lifted up her hands, but said nothing.

## V.

The next morning Norah came down to breakfast pale and quiet, and ate her bread and milk in silence, and when her brothers had gone off to work she sat down beside her father, and asked, "what's the fare to Cloverdale?"

"Cloverdale! What put Cloverdale into thy head, lass? Art going to be a traveller? Let me see, third class would be about ten shillings, I fancy."

"Ten shillings there and ten shillings back, and ten more would be thirty. Father, I want you to go to Cloverdale, and bring grandmother to see us all."

The father gave a start. "What put that into thy thoughts, lass?"

"Grandmother said in her letter she would like to see you once again before she died; and as I minded the geese down by the river I thought of Joseph in the land of Egypt, and how his old father longed to see him; but I knew that you could not afford to send for grandmother as Joseph sent for Jacob; and then all at once it came to me that the geese would manage it for us."

The father was silent for a while; but he drew Norah closer to him, and kissed her; then he spoke, "Dost hear the lass, mother? Wasn't I right? and haven't the geese been as good as if they'd laid golden eggs for her?"

"Better," replied the mother, "thou art a good lass, my daughter, and thy father shall go and satisfy the desire of his heart—to see his mother again in the land of the living. It will do us more good than if thou couldst buy a dozen silk gowns and fine coats."

## VI.

And the father went, and the grandmother came; and as they sat round the blazing fire, full of happiness and joy, no heart was lighter and happier than Norah's; and when her grandmother laid her hand upon her head, and said, fondly, "Bless thee, my child, for this great happiness; the remembrance of thy good deed shall return to thee again and again, like refreshing waters!" Norah felt as if one of the patriarchs had pronounced a blessing.

"Amen!" said the father. "The golden geese have done their work well!"

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