

Evald Tang  
Kristensen.



# Two Tales from *Odds and Sods*

Stephen Badman

**D**enmark has an incredibly rich history of folklore, though to most English readers it begins and ends with the works of Hans Christian Andersen. Very few of Andersen's stories, however, can be regarded as folktales and those that have a basis in oral tradition ('Little Claus and Big Claus', 'The Wild Swans', 'Father always does Right', among others) are so reworked in the literary style that they can no longer be regarded as folktales.

One important contributor to Danish folktales was Evald Tang Kristensen, who published four volumes of *Stories from Jutland* in 1881-7. These were a set of folktales he had recorded firsthand in the speech patterns and dialects of the storytellers, who bring shrewd observation, humour, invention, and 'honest to God' common sense to their tales. Stephen Badman has recently released *Odds and Sods*, retelling these tales for English readers, and *Gramarye* is fortunate to be able to reproduce two of them here.

## **The Boy in the Mound and his three Gifts<sup>1</sup>**

There was once a king and queen who had an only son. The queen died and the king married again to a woman who took a dislike to the boy. She treated him badly and he would often leave the castle early in the morning to walk in the fields on the outskirts of the city; anything to get away from her. Things took a turn for the worse when the king was called away to war and without her husband around to curb her cruelty, she made the boy's life a misery. One day, the stepmother was particularly spiteful towards the boy and he ran from the palace into the surrounding fields, where he flung himself onto a mound and broke down in tears.

As he lay there sobbing, a little boy, wearing a red knitted hat, came out of the mound and lay by the side of him. He took the little boy in his arms and hugged him tightly to his chest until his tears dried.

"You can let go of me now," said the little boy.

"No," said the king's son. "I want to take you home with me and then things wouldn't be so miserable."

"Let me go," said the boy. "I'll grant you a wish if you do."

"What will it be?" asked the king's son.

"You must first buy a gun," said the boy. "Decide what you would like to shoot, point your gun and pull the trigger. You'll be able to shoot what you want and when you want. Now let me go."

"No," said the king's son. "I'd rather take you home with me."

"Alright," said the little boy. "I'll give another wish to go with the first."

"And what will that be?" asked the king's son.

"You must first buy a violin," said the boy. "When you play it, people will be forced to dance to its tune. Now let me go."

"No," said the king's son. "I'd rather have you as my companion."

"Let me go and I will give you one last wish," said the boy.

"And what will that be?"

"Whenever you look at your stepmother, she'll let off a loud fart!"

The little boy was allowed to go back into the mound. The king's son went home to find that his stepmother was entertaining foreign guests; he introduced himself to them before pointedly looking at his stepmother. She let out a thunder clap of a fart.

He could go anywhere in the palace, he was a prince after all, and often bumped into his stepmother; whereupon she would let out a thunderous fart. Whenever she invited guests around for tea, the stepson would wander into the room and she'd let fly a fusillade. It wasn't long before she realised that he was at the bottom of her flatulence. She hated him with a passion though there was little she could do; one look from him would set her petticoats rattling. She avoided him whenever she could.

The king had a successful war and drove home to the palace in his carriage. His wife hurried down the steps to greet him while his son followed on at a slower pace. As soon as she held her hand out to the king to bid him welcome, the boy stole a glance at her and she let out a fart.

"It's not often I'm greeted from both ends," said the king.

"Your wastrel son's to blame," she said. "He's caused me no end of embarrassment. If you don't get rid of him, I'll do away with myself."

She went on and on about the grief her stepson had caused her. "I can't live with the shame," she said. "He'll have to go."

In the end, the king had his son arrested.

"Confess that you are to blame for her flatulence and beg her forgiveness," he ordered his son.

The son would not admit that he was at fault and his stepmother pleaded, petitioned and nagged the king until he could take no more. He passed sentence on the son; he was to be burned at the stake.

The prince had bought a gun and a violin as the boy from the mound had suggested, though he'd not had occasion to try them out, and asked if he could take them with him to the place where he'd be burned.

The fire was already ablaze when The Red Knight<sup>2</sup> drove up with the prince in tow.

"Before I'm thrown on the flames, Father, would you grant me a request?" asked the boy.

The king could not refuse.

"May I shoot my gun for the first and last time?"

He was given the gun and wished to shoot a greylag goose. He pointed the gun, took aim and fired; the goose fell from the skies and landed in a thorn brake.

"Could The Red Knight fetch it for me, please?" he asked the king.

The Red Knight was despatched to fetch the goose.

The queen had come along to see the boy burn and watched on impatiently as The Red Knight fought his way through the thorns.

"May I play my violin for the first and last time, Father?" asked the prince. He was handed the violin and began to play; everyone began to dance.

The Red Knight wiggled and jiggled in the thorn brake and the king took the queen by the hand and danced around the fire; round and round they went until she slipped from his hand and fell into the flames where she burned to death. When the fire died down, all that was left of her were a few bones that they gathered up and put in a coffin ready for burial.

When the coffin was lowered into the ground, the prince looked down into the grave and she let fly one last thunderous fart.

"Ah well," said the king, "as you were in life, so shall you be in death."

The prince grew up, married a princess and inherited the kingdom; he lived in happiness for the rest of his days.

## Notes

1. *Bjergdrenghens tre gaver* – the Danes do not have the all-embracing term, 'fairy'; they tend to be given descriptive names: *Bjerg* (mountain), *Dreng* (boy), *Bjergman* (Mountain-man) can be what you wish it to be in the context of the story.
2. The Red Knight is a figure of villainy whenever he appears in a Danish Wonder Tale – here, he is merely the instrument of bringing the prince to the place of execution – a dishonourable act in itself as the boy's stepmother is the villain of the piece.

## Per Smith's Riding-Crop

Per Smith was a widower who remarried late in life to a beautiful and much younger wife. Per's property bordered the local estate and it wasn't too long before the steward<sup>1</sup> began to pop in on the young wife when her husband was out and about on his business; she was flattered by his advances and they soon became lovers. They talked of how they could get rid of Per.

"If you promise not to betray me," said the steward, "I'll soon get shot of him."

"You're not to kill him," she said. "I wouldn't wish that on him."

He had no wish to kill him either; he'd find a less hands-on means of bringing about his death.

"When he comes home, tell him that the squire wishes him to pave the courtyard and drive around the manor house; he has twenty-four hours to do it in. If he fails, he will be executed, but if he succeeds then he'll be paid thirty pounds for his trouble."

When Per returned home from work that evening, his wife repeated what the steward had said.

"He's asking the impossible," said Per. "I've never laid a cobblestone in my life; I wouldn't know where to start."

He decided to run away; he put some money in his pocket and left through the back door. The wife was thrilled to bits; she thought that if he ran away, there'd be no need to kill him.

Per ran for a long time until he entered a wood where he met an old woman.

"Where are you off to?" she asked.

"As far away as possible," answered Per. "The squire has asked me to pave his courtyard and drive in twenty-four hours; if I can't get it done on time, he'll kill me."

"Give me a shilling<sup>2</sup> and there'll be no danger of you losing your life," said the woman. "You can go back to the mansion house early in the morning and you'll find that the cobble stones have already been laid."

Per handed over the shilling, turned around and set off for home. When he reached the mansion house in the morning, the ground was covered in cobble stones that shone in the early morning sunlight; it looked as if it had been paved with newly minted silver florins.<sup>3</sup> Per walked straight to the door and knocked loudly; he wanted his thirty pounds.

The steward was concerned that Per had accomplished the task too easily and thought that he might have been dabbling with magic; he decided to give him a further task, one which he couldn't possibly do. There was a large swampy marsh on the squire's estate; it would be Per's task to bring it into use.

"Tell your husband that he is to plant the swamp with trees," said the steward to Per's wife. "It's to be covered in a forest of saplings within twenty-four hours. The squire will pay sixty pounds if the job's done in time; if not, Per will lose his head."

When Per arrived home, she repeated what the steward had said.

"That's insane," said Per. "I've never planted a tree in my life, nor do I have a clue where to start."

"It's either that or lose your head," said his wife.

Per shot out of the back door and ran as fast as his legs would carry him into the wood where the old woman was waiting for him.

"Where are you off to now?" she asked.

"As far away as possible," said Per, "I'm supposed to plant the marsh on the estate with trees. I've got twenty-four hours to do it in and if I fail, I'll lose my head. It's an impossible task."

"Just give me a shilling and I'll see that it's planted in time," said the old woman. "But take care you don't get lost on the way back; you'll be travelling through a dense, frosty fog and you'll be weaving in and out of trees all the way from your house and well into the squire's estate."

Per Smith handed over the shilling and went home; his wife was none too pleased to see him, but didn't let on. Per got out of bed at first light to see if the wood had been planted; if not he was ready to put as much distance between him and the squire as was possible, but as soon as he opened the front door, he could see that the trees had been planted all the way from his house and all over the marshland on the squire's property. He made his way across the estate, careful not to lose his way as he walked through the freezing fog. He banged on the steward's door and asked him to come out and inspect his work. As soon as he saw the trees, the steward realised that he'd have his work cut out if ever he was to be rid of Per Smith. He thought over the problem for many days before he came up with a solution. He paid a visit on Per's wife.

"Tell your husband that he is to make a fartflenser<sup>4</sup> that will have people rolling with laughter when they catch sight of it. He's got twenty-four hours to make it or else he's for the chop."

The wife passed on the message.

"How on earth can I make a fartflenser when I've never heard of a fartflenser, let alone seen one," said Per. "I'm off."

Per ran into the wood, terrified that he'd not meet the old lady again; he was desperate to find out what a fartflenser was. He needn't have worried; she was waiting for him.

"What are you running from now?" she asked.

"I've been asked to make a fartflenser," said Per. "And I've no idea where to start."

"Stay here a while and listen carefully to what I have to tell you," said the old woman. "You can thank the steward for all the grief you've been having. He wants you out of the way so that he can have your wife. They're both in on it; they want you either dead or running away in fear of your life. Give me a shilling and in return, I will give you a riding crop. So long as it is in one piece, it will do as you ask, but once you break it, it will no longer do your bidding. When you go home, the steward will be in bed with your wife. She will ask you to come to bed, but you will refuse. You must position yourself at the head of the bed and smoke your pipe. At some point, she will need to relieve herself and use the chamber pot. When she's finished and goes to put it away, tap her with the riding crop and say 'Hold tight!' She won't be able to let go of the pot and you can continue to say 'hold tight' for as long as you like until you are satisfied that you have made your fartflenser."

Per gave her the shilling and went home with the riding crop. He went in and strode over to the head of the bed and lit his pipe.

"Is that you, Per?" asked his wife from the bed.

"It is," said Per.

"Why don't you come to bed and warm yourself? You must be frozen."

"I'll just stay here and enjoy my pipe," he answered.

Soon after, she needed to use the chamber pot; it was the moment he was waiting for. When she'd finished and took hold of the pot to push it away from her, Per called out: "Hold tight!"

She couldn't let go, she wriggled and squirmed on the bed, but remained stuck to the pot. She got out of bed and tried to fling it out of the window, but to no avail. When it finally sank in that she was well and truly stuck to it, she called for the maid who slept in the box room next door. The maid sprang from her bed, naked as the day she was born, and dashed into her mistress's bedroom. When she saw that her mistress was waving the potty around, she went to take it from her, but as soon as she took hold of the rim, Per called out: "Hold tight!"

The two of them pushed and pulled at the chamber pot back and forth across the room.

The steward lay on the bed, hidden under the quilt; he thought it odd that that the two women couldn't let go of the chamber pot and decided to intervene. He jumped out of bed and grabbed hold of the pot, intending to tear it away from them.

"Hold tight!" commanded Per.

The three of them were glued to the pot. Per took hold of his riding crop and laid about all three of them, though he made sure that the steward got more than his share of the blows. He herded them out of the door and into a field where the farmhands had recently cut the hay. The maid grabbed a handful of grass and shoved it between her thighs to cover her nakedness.

"Hold tight!" said Per Smith.

He led them a merry dance across the field and through a gate into another field where the cows had been put out to grass. One of the cows saw the large clump of grass between the maid's thighs and began to graze.

"Hold tight!" said Per.

The cow became stuck to the clump of grass; the maid backed away in fright and the beast was forced to follow. They proceeded across the field and through a large gate into a field where a couple of bulls grazed. One of the bulls mounted the cow, thinking it was in season.

"Hold tight!" said Per and herded them over the fields and up the driveway to the manor house.

When they arrived at the manor house, the staff saw the whole kit and caboodle paraded in front of them and howled with laughter; they'd never seen anything so ridiculous in the whole of their lives.

The squire heard the goings on and couldn't understand why the steward hadn't given the workforce their jobs for the day. He leapt out of bed and looked out of the window. He saw his steward out on the drive tugging at a chamber pot. Quick as a flash, he got into his long johns and went down to the drive where he boxed the squire's ears for not paying attention to his job; he was furious.

"What on earth are you doing?" he asked. "Put that chamber pot down while I'm talking to you."



"I would if I could," said the steward, "but I'm stuck to it."

"We'll see about that," said the squire as he grabbed hold of the steward.

"Hold tight!" said Per.

The squire's wife couldn't understand why her husband had run from the room in his long johns and not returned. She got dressed and went looking for him; she found him in the driveway, pulling at the steward. She ran to her husband and grabbed hold of him, desperate to take him inside before he caught his death of cold.

"Hold tight!" said Per Smith.

The squire heard him give the command.

"Good morning, my dear Per Smith. Is this sorry mess of your making?"

"Yes it is," said Per Smith. "It's my fartflenser."

"Can you break the chain as easily as you made it?" asked the squire.

"I can," said Per Smith. "But only if you pay me a hundred and eighty pounds and shoot your steward or at least banish him from the estate."

The squire was happy to oblige. Per Smith broke the riding crop over his knee and the chain was broken. Everyone ran home as fast as their legs would carry them. The steward gave the estate workers their orders while the squire and his wife went indoors and made themselves presentable. As soon as he was dressed, the squire came back out and fired the steward; he was free to travel wherever he wished, but he'd never work on the estate again. Per never had any more trouble from his wife and the money from the squire was very welcome.

**Notes:**

1. The estate manager.
2. Three Marks (half a *Rigsdaler*).
3. *Rigsdaler specie(s)*.
4. The text reads '*pærtegøj*' – a nonsense word; I could equally have translated it as 'twotwangler' or 'tockiknock' though I feel 'fartflenser' is in keeping with the tone of the story.



**Stephen Badman**