

The Devoted Friend

by Oscar Wilde (A Novel Adaptation)

At the edge of a small, peaceful village, surrounded by rolling fields and quiet groves, there stood a modest cottage with whitewashed walls and a thatched roof. A man named Little Hans lived there. He was poor, yet widely known for his kindness, gentle nature, and strong work ethic. Although his life was far from easy, he rarely complained. He found joy in simple pleasures—the singing of birds, the scent of the earth after rain, and above all, his beloved garden.

Hans's garden was his greatest pride and most valuable possession. It was not large, but during spring and summer it turned into a vibrant display of colours. There were delicate roses, bright marigolds, shy violets hidden in the shade, and tall sunflowers that seemed to follow the sun across the sky. Hans took great care of every plant, tending them with patience and devotion, almost as if they were his companions.

The villagers often came to admire his garden. Some bought flowers, while others simply wandered among the beds, enjoying the beauty and calm atmosphere. Hans never charged high prices, and if someone could not afford to pay, he would often give them flowers for free.

"Beauty should belong to everyone," he would say with a warm smile.

Despite his generosity and friendly nature, Hans was quite lonely. He had no family, and the only person he truly considered a close friend was the Miller, Hugh.

Hugh lived nearby in a large mill by the river. He was a wealthy man, owning many sacks of flour, a flock of sheep, and a spacious house filled with supplies. The villagers respected him, and he regarded himself as a man of strong principles and refined judgment. He was especially fond of speaking about friendship.

"True friends," he often declared, "ought to share everything they possess."

His words sounded wise and admirable, and many people listened with approval. However, no one took them as seriously as Little Hans.

During the summer, Hugh frequently visited Hans's garden. He would stroll leisurely between the flower beds, carefully observing the plants before selecting the finest blooms.

"My dear Hans," he would say, "your roses are the most beautiful in the entire village. Naturally, friends should share the very best."

Hans would smile and generously hand him large bunches of flowers.

At times, Hugh would also take fruit or vegetables if they happened to be growing in the garden.

"It is only natural," he would explain. "True friendship is based on generosity."

Hans never objected. He trusted Hugh completely and believed his words. He felt proud to be such a devoted friend.

However, when summer came to an end and the first cold days arrived, Hugh's visits became less frequent. And once winter set in, he stopped coming altogether. Snow covered Hans's garden with a thick, white layer. The soil no longer produced anything, and his small supply of food quickly ran out. Without anything to sell, Hans's situation grew increasingly difficult. He often went to bed hungry. His clothes were worn and thin, and his cottage offered little warmth.

Yet Hugh did not visit him even once.

"I do not wish to disturb him," he told his wife. "When someone is struggling, it is best to leave them alone. True friendship requires sensitivity."

In reality, however, he had no intention of sharing his resources. His storage rooms were full, and his sheep provided plenty of milk, yet he never once considered helping Hans. Hans missed his friend deeply. He often recalled their summer conversations and Hugh's eloquent speeches about friendship.

"He will surely return in spring," Hans reassured himself. "True friendship never fades."

The winter was long and harsh. Hans sold his silver buttons, then his watch, and finally even his pipe, just to afford a little food. Day after day, he longed for the warmth of spring.

At last, the snow melted and the first green shoots appeared. Hans felt a renewed sense of hope. He returned to his garden with determination. Though still weak, he worked tirelessly. Then, one bright morning, he noticed a familiar figure approaching along the path. It was Hugh.

"My dear Hans!" he called out cheerfully. "I am delighted to see you!"

Hans hurried to greet him.

"I missed you very much," he said sincerely.

"And I you," Hugh replied. "True friends never forget one another."

After a brief pause, he added:

"I have decided to give you something quite valuable—my old wheelbarrow."

Hans was overjoyed. His own wheelbarrow was broken and barely usable.

"That is incredibly generous of you!" he said.

"Yes," Hugh replied, "although it does require some minor repairs. But that is of little importance. Friends do not concern themselves with such details."

After a moment, he glanced around the garden.

"And since we are speaking of friendship... perhaps you could give me some flowers? My wife is very fond of them."

Hans immediately filled his basket.

From that day on, Hugh began visiting more often—not to offer help, but to ask for favours. One day, he asked Hans to carry a heavy sack of flour to the town.

"I am extremely busy," he explained. "And you, as my friend, will surely assist me."

On another occasion, he asked him to repair a fence. Another time, he expected him to look after his sheep for an entire day. Hans always agreed. He was frequently tired, sometimes completely exhausted, yet he could never bring himself to refuse.

"Friends should support one another," he repeated, echoing Hugh's words.

With each passing day, he had less time to care for his own garden. The flowers began to wilt and weeds slowly took over. Still, Hugh continued to take, without ever giving anything in return.

The wheelbarrow he had promised remained at the mill.

"It is not ready yet," he would say. "I cannot possibly give you something in poor condition."

Hans trusted him and waited patiently.

One evening, a violent storm swept across the village. The wind howled, rain battered the roofs, and lightning repeatedly lit up the dark sky. Hans was sitting in his cottage, trying to rest, when he suddenly heard a knock at the door. He opened it and saw Hugh.

"Hans!" the Miller called urgently. "My son has fallen from a ladder and is injured. I must fetch the doctor. Could you go in my place?"

Hans looked out at the storm.

"It is very dangerous," he said quietly.

"I am aware of that," Hugh replied, "but a true friend does not hesitate when help is needed."

Those words were enough.

"Of course, I will go," Hans answered.

He did not even have a lantern. He stepped out into the darkness, guided only by flashes of lightning. The journey was extremely difficult. The muddy path made walking hard and the strong wind nearly knocked him over. Nevertheless, he continued, thinking only of helping his friend. After a long and exhausting walk, he reached the doctor's house and delivered the message. The doctor immediately set off toward the mill. Hans then began his journey back home. The storm grew even stronger. At some point, he lost his way. He wandered in the darkness, trying desperately to find the path. Suddenly, he slipped. He fell into a deep ditch filled with icy water. He tried to climb out, but he was too weak. The cold water drained his strength. No one heard his cries for help. By morning, the storm had passed and the village slowly returned to normal life. Later that day, some villagers discovered the body of Little Hans.

The news of his death deeply shocked everyone. Many people attended his funeral. They spoke of his kindness, his generosity, and his gentle spirit. Hugh was there as well. He stood quietly, looking serious and thoughtful.

"I have lost my best friend," he said loudly. "He was like a brother to me."

Some people nodded, while others remained silent.

"I intended to give him my wheelbarrow," he added after a moment. "Now I do not know what to do with it."

His words lingered in the air. Because although he spoke beautifully about friendship, his actions told a very different story...

peaceful village – spokojna wioska
rolling fields – falujące pola
modest cottage – skromna chatka
whitewashed walls – bielone ściany
thatched roof – strzecha (dach ze słomy)
widely known – powszechnie znany
gentle nature – łagodna natura/usposobienie
work ethic – etyka pracy / pracowitość
simple pleasures – proste przyjemności
beloved garden – ukochany ogród
greatest pride – największa duma
vibrant display – żywy, brawny widok
delicate roses – delikatne róże
tending (plants) – pielęgnowanie (roślin)
devotion – oddanie
admire – podziwiać
wander among – spacerować wśród

afford to – móc sobie pozwolić na coś
generosity – hojność
devoted friend – oddany przyjaciel
less frequent – rzadszy
harsh winter – surowazima
supplies ran out – zapasy się skończyły
increasingly difficult – coraz trudniejsze
struggling – zmagający się / mający trudności
eloquent speeches – elokwentne przemowy
renewed hope – odnowiona/ nowa nadzieja
overjoyed – bardzo szczęśliwy / zachwycony
exhausting journey – wyczerpująca podróż
cries for help – wołanie o pomoc