

Oscar Wilde (1854-1900) was born in Dublin, Ireland, and educated in Oxford, England. A playwright, essayist, poet and novelist, he is also remembered for his wonderful tales. Some of them are remarkable for their wit and humour, they are light-hearted and amusing; some tales delight readers by their charming beauty and romantic spirit; some are sad and make us think about the injustices and sorrows of life. Among the best-known of Wilde's tales are "The Canterville Ghost", "The Happy Prince", "The Nightingale and the Rose", "The Selfish Giant" and "The Devoted Friend". The most famous book of Oscar Wilde is "The Picture of Dorian Gray".

Read Part 1 of the tale "The Devoted Friend" and answer the question:
Why was little Hans so proud of having the Miller as his friend?

Part I

The Devoted Friend

Once upon a time there was an honest little fellow named Hans who was known for his kind heart. He lived in a tiny little cottage all by himself, and every day he worked in his garden. In all the countryside there was no garden so lovely as his.

Little Hans had many friends, but the most devoted friend of all was the Miller. Indeed, so devoted was the rich Miller to little Hans, that he would never go by his garden without picking some beautiful flowers, or filling his pockets with plums and cherries if it was the fruit season.

"Real friends should, have everything in common," the Miller used to say, and little Hans nodded and smiled, and felt very proud of having a friend with such noble ideas.

Sometimes, indeed, the neighbours thought it was strange that the rich Miller never gave little Hans anything in return, though he had a hundred sacks of flour stored away in his mill, and six cows, and a large flock of woolly sheep; but Hans never troubled his head about these things, and nothing gave him greater pleasure than to listen to all the wonderful things the Miller used to say about the unselfishness of true friendship.

Little Hans worked away in his garden. During the spring, the summer, and the autumn he was very happy, but when the winter came, and he had no fruit or flowers to take to the market, he suffered a lot from cold and hunger, and often had to go to bed without any supper except for a few dried pears or some hard nuts. In the winter, also, he was extremely lonely, as the Miller never came to see him then.

"There is no good in my going to see little Hans as long as the winter lasts," the Miller used to say to his wife, "for when people are in trouble it is better to leave them alone and not to bother them. That is my idea about friendship, and I am sure I am right."

"You are certainly very thoughtful about others," answered the Wife, as she sat in her comfortable armchair by the big fire; "very thoughtful indeed. It is quite a pleasure to hear you talk about friendship."

"But could we not invite little Hans up here?" said the Miller's youngest son. "If poor Hans is in trouble I will give him half of my porridge, and show him my white rabbits."

"What a silly boy you are!" cried the Miller; "I really don't know what is the use of sending you to school. You seem not to learn anything. If little Hans comes up here, and sees our warm fire, and our good supper, he may get envious, and envy is a most terrible thing, and can spoil anybody's nature. Besides, Hans may ask me to give him some flour on credit, and that I can't do. Flour is one thing, and friendship is another, and they should not be confused. The words are spelt differently, and mean quite different things. Everybody can see that."

"How well you talk!" said the Miller's Wife.

"Lots of people act well," answered the Miller; "but very few people talk well, which shows that talking is much the more difficult thing of the two, and much the finer thing also."

As soon as the winter was over and the flowers began to blossom, the Miller said to his wife that he would go down and see little Hans.

"Good morning, little Hans," said the Miller, "and how have you been all the winter? We often talked of you during the winter and wondered how you were getting on. How lovely your flowers are looking!"

"They are certainly very lovely," said Hans, "and it's a most lucky thing for me that I have so many. I am going to take them to the market and sell them, and buy back my wheelbarrow and other things with the money. I was obliged to sell some things because the winter was a very bad time for me, and I really had no money at all to buy bread with."

"Hans," said the Miller. "I will give you my wheelbarrow. It is not in very good repair; but in spite of that I will give it to you. I know it is very generous of me, and many people would think me extremely foolish for parting with it, but I am not like the rest of the world. I think that generosity is the essence of friendship, and, besides, I have got a new wheelbarrow for myself." "Well, really, that is very generous of you," said little Hans, "I can easily repair it, as I have a plank of wood in the house." "A plank of wood!" said the Miller; "that is just what I want for the roof of my barn. There is a very large hole in it. How lucky you mentioned it! It is quite remarkable how one good action leads to another. I have given you my wheelbarrow, and now you are going to give me your plank. Of course, the wheelbarrow is worth far more than the plank, but true friendship never notices little things like that."

"Certainly," said little Hans and he ran to the shed and came back carrying a large plank.

"And now, as I have given you my wheelbarrow," the Miller went on, "I am sure you would like to give me some flowers in return. Here is a basket, and mind you fill it quite full." "Quite full?" said little Hans, rather sorrowfully, for it was really a very big basket, and he knew that if he filled it he would have no flowers for the market, and he was very anxious to get his things back.

"Well, really," answered the Miller, "as I have given you my wheelbarrow, I don't think that it is much to ask you for a few flowers, I may be wrong, but I think that friendship, true friendship, is quite free from selfishness of any kind."

"My dear friend, my best friend," cried little Hans, "you are welcome to all the flowers in my garden." And he ran and picked all his pretty flowers, and filled the Miller's basket.

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Answer the questions about the text:

1. How did the Miller show that he was devoted to little Hans?
2. What did the neighbours think was strange about the Miller's friendship with little Hans?
3. What did the Miller think people should do when their friends were in trouble? Do you agree?
4. How did the Miller's youngest son show that he did not understand his father's idea of friendship and did not think his father thoughtful about others?
5. How did the Miller explain to his youngest son that it should be wrong to invite Hans to come to their pleasant home in winter?