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Kurt Schwitters: Lucky Hans and Other Merz Fairy Tales

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1 The Swineherd and the Great, Illustrious Writer

A swineherd was tending his pigs and playing his flute at the same time: “Tweet, tweet, tweet, tweet, tweet, tweet, tweet.”

A great, illustrious writer came by and asked him whether he was indeed happy. The swineherd opened his blue eyes and looked at him as though he were gazing deep into the sea. Then he spoke: “I am, indeed, serene and also content, but I’m not happy. Oh, if only I were a fairy-tale prince! Just think of how many swineherds are children of royalty! How many!”

And he pointed to his bible in which he had read about them, and which he used as a pillow. Well, the illustrious writer was so moved by the swineherd that he took him and set him *bim bam!* right into the middle of his masterwork, his very best fairy tale. And there he sat, the swineherd, with

his beautiful blue eyes, and he was a real prince, the genuine son of a king, and he tended his father's pigs and played his flute at the same time: "Tweet, tweet, tweet, tweet, tweet, tweet, tweet."

And the illustrious writer asked him whether he was now really happy. The swineherd prince opened his beautiful blue eyes and looked at him as though he were gazing deep into the sea and said: "I am, indeed, serene and also content, but I'm not happy. Oh, if only I had a lovely little woman who could tend the pigs as nicely as I do. Just think of how many swineherds have a tender, lovely little woman!"

The illustrious writer was glad that he had asked the swineherd ahead of time, for he still hadn't finished the fairy tale, his masterwork. And *bim bam!* he retrieved a tender, lovely little woman from somewhere in his imagination, a maiden with long blonde pigtails and with blue eyes and a little red skirt. A maiden who could tend the pigs just as nicely as the swineherd prince. And it did not take long before our swineherd prince fell in love with her and couldn't take his eyes off her. It was as if he gazed at the sun, for wherever he looked, he saw her slender figure, the red skirt, and the long blonde pigtails.

So the illustrious writer asked him whether he was now indeed happy. However, the swineherd prince began by saying: "Oh, my great, illustrious writer, I was serene and also content, even though I wasn't happy. However, now I am no longer serene and don't have any peace of mind. As for being happy—I'm certainly not happy!"

And so the illustrious writer asked him whether he would prefer that he removed the maiden with the red skirt and the long blonde pigtails from his masterwork, the fairy tale, in which the swineherd was now living. However, our swineherd prince opened his beautiful blue eyes and gazed at the great, illustrious writer, and his eyes were as wet as a sea whipped by a whirlwind, and he said, "I'm no longer serene and also no longer content. However, happiness can easily come from such a young maiden. So, leave me be! I have time. I can wait. If I can ever become happy, my happiness will depend just on my being with this maiden."

And our illustrious writer promised not to remove the little maiden from his masterwork without the swineherd's approval.

And now the sunset became so red, and the sun glistened so brightly at night, and the morning was so full of dew and freshness, and the fog was so wistful and beautiful like a bridal veil, and the first kiss was like a mother's blessing and was so sweet that there is not enough sugar to describe it. And now that they had learned how to do it, they began kissing each other every two or three minutes, and they continued kissing each other all the time except when they had to eat and do some other necessary things.

Once again the great, illustrious writer asked our swineherd prince whether he was indeed really happy. In response the swineherd opened his beautiful blue eyes and said: "Happy?—I was happy for a moment at the first kiss. Now it's over, and my serenity is gone, and I no longer have any peace

of mind. Everything is gone, and I must somehow regain my happiness. I must make that lovely maiden my wife. After all, most of the swineherds are married!”

Then the illustrious writer became very serious, for he couldn't give the simple peasant maiden with the little red skirt and the long blonde pigtails to the son of a king, and he said to the swineherd prince that he had to realize that he was not a lowly and simple swineherd, but the son of a king, and it was not appropriate for the son of a king to marry a simple peasant maiden. What would the king, his father, who graced this masterful and beautiful fairy tale with his elegant presence, say? What would the old dignified man say? Then the swineherd gazed at him with his beautiful blue eyes and said: “What's the purpose of my being the son of a king? I had thought I could marry whomever I wanted, and now I'm not even supposed to marry this lovely, beautiful, and delightful maiden, because she is too lowly for me. But I don't want anyone else, even if she might be from a better class. I don't like those scarecrows, who smell like violets and flap like flags. Let me remain a simple swineherd. I've had it with being the son of a king.”

Then the illustrious writer became very sad and said that he had placed the poor swineherd into his masterwork as a friendly gesture and had raised him *bim bam!* to the rank of prince, and he had given him a maiden as a gift for his amusement, and now this was the way the swineherd thanked him, by wanting to destroy this beautiful fairy tale, this masterwork. “Stubborn mule!” he yelled at the swineherd. “How can I let the king, your honorable father, become a beggar at

the end of my masterwork and reduce him to the father of a mere swineherd? How can I do something like this? Isn't there composition and tact and rhythm in my masterwork, and shouldn't I maintain my work just as it is? How would I come off as a great, illustrious writer if I were to reduce the good old king, your honorable father, to a beggar after I spent two hundred pages allowing him to be king and then said that everything I had written before had been an illusion, deception, and mere mess? Just because it would please you? Do you think that I'm your servant? I'd ruin my entire career all because of your stupid pubescent love! Let me tell you something: you can't marry that woman. She's not suitable for someone of your rank. You can love her, but you must marry someone else who is beautiful, smells like violets, and wears glorious floating and rippling gowns."

Our swineherd withdrew so deeply into himself and became so sad that he had to weep with his beautiful blue eyes and said: "Well then, remove me from your masterwork, my great, illustrious writer. I'm only disturbing it. I'm not fit to be the son of a king. Stick me into a minor work, but let me remain a swineherd."

"What good will all that do?" the illustrious writer responded. "If you appear in a minor work, you still wouldn't be happy in it. I've learned this from all the bad experiences that I've had with you because you've been so ungrateful. You'd only destroy that work as well. So, I won't do it!"

"Then set me free," said the swineherd. "Let me go off in peace and send me back to my meadow where I can tend the

pigs owned by my master as I was doing before, and let me take the maiden with the little red skirt with me.”

“I can’t do this,” said the illustrious writer. “I can certainly give you back your life and let you live in peace. However, the maiden is nothing but my imagination. I can’t give her to you. She isn’t even alive. What would you do with her? She’s only a piece of paper, printed on both sides, with words that you can’t even read.”

“Then set me free,” said the swineherd. “I must return to my meadow.”

And *bim bam!* our great, illustrious writer removed him from his masterwork and returned him to the meadow and the exact place where he had found him. And now he asked him whether he had finally become happy. Then the swineherd said: “My illustrious writer, I’ve become serene and also content. Through you I’ve seen happiness. However, I don’t want it. There’s happiness, but it comes at the cost of my serenity and peace of mind. What should I do with such happiness? Oh, don’t ask me whether I am now happy. I don’t want to be happy. Let me alone with my serenity. Let me alone with my peace of mind. Why don’t you live in the happiness of your imagination, my great, illustrious writer?”

“Swineherd,” said the writer, “you are wiser than I am. Why should a man run after happiness? There’s no happiness that lasts longer than a moment. Give me some of your serenity, something from your peace of mind, and I won’t want to be happy anymore.”

So the swineherd took the illustrious writer by his hand and gazed at him with his blue eyes as though he were looking deep into a sea and said: "Come, sit down beside me. We'll tend the pigs, you and me. We'll eat, drink, sleep, lie in the sun, and our entire concern will be the welfare of the pigs. That's not happiness, but it is serenity and peace of mind." ■