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 ***Anders' New Cap***

 **BY ANNA WOHLENBERG**

Once upon a time there was a little boy, called Anders, who had a new cap. And a prettier cap you never could see, for mother herself had knitted it, and nobody could make anything quite as nice as mother could. And it was altogether red, except a small part in the middle which was green, for the red yarn had given out; and the tassel was blue.

His brothers and sisters walked about squinting at him, and their faces grew long with envy. But Anders cared nothing about that. He put his hands in his trousers pockets and went out for a walk, for he did not begrudge anybody's seeing how fine he was.

The first person he met was a farm labourer walking alongside a load of peat and smacking at his horse. He made a bow so deep that his back came near breaking, and he was dumbfounded, I can tell you, when he saw it was nobody but Anders.

"Dear me," he said, "if I did not think it was the gracious little count himself." And then he invited Anders to ride on the peat load.

But when one has a fine red cap with a blue tassel, one is too fine to ride on peat loads, and Anders trotted proudly by.

At the turn of the road he ran up against the tanner's boy, Lars. He was such a big boy that he wore high boots and carried a jack-knife. He gazed and gazed at the cap, and could not keep from fingering the blue tassel.

"Let's swap caps," he said, "and I will give you my jack-knife to boot."

Now this knife was a splendid one, though half the blade was gone, and the handle was a little cracked; and Anders knew that one is almost a man as soon as one has a jack-knife. But still it did not come up to the new cap which mother had made.

"Oh no, I am not as stupid as all that!"

And then he said good-bye to Lars with a nod; but Lars only made faces at him, for he was very much put out because he could not cheat Anders out of his cap which his mother had made.Soon after this, Anders met a very old, old woman who curtsied till her skirts looked like a balloon. She called him a little gentleman and said that he was so fine that he might go to the royal court ball.

"Yes, why not?" thought Anders. "Seeing that I am so fine, I may as well go and visit the King."

And so he did. In the palace yard stood two soldiers with shining helmets, and with muskets over their shoulders; and when Anders came, both the muskets were levelled at him.

"Where may you be going?" asked one of the soldiers.

"I am going to the court ball," answered Anders.

"Indeed you are not," said the other soldier, and put his foot forward. "Nobody is allowed there without a uniform."

But just at this instant the Princess came tripping across the yard. She was dressed in white silk with bows of ribbon. When she became aware of Anders and the soldiers, she walked over to them.

"Oh," she said, "he has such an extraordinarily fine cap on his head, that that will do just as well as a uniform."

And she took Anders' hand and walked with him up the broad marble stairs, where soldiers were posted at every third step, and through the magnificent halls where courtiers in silk and velvet stood bowing wherever he went. For, like as not, they must have thought him a prince when they saw his fine cap.

At the farther end of the largest hall a table was set with golden cups and golden plates in long rows. On huge silver platters were pyramids of tarts and cakes, and red wine sparkled in glittering decanters. The Princess sat down under a blue canopy with bouquets of roses; and she let Anders sit in a golden chair by her side.

"But you must not eat with your cap on your head," she said, and was going to take it off.

"Oh yes, I can eat just as well," said Anders, and held on to his cap, for if they should take it away from him, nobody would any longer believe that he was a prince, and, besides, he did not feel sure that he would get it back again.

"Well, well, give it to me," said the Princess, "and I will give you a kiss."

The Princess certainly was beautiful, and he would have dearly liked to be kissed by her, but the cap which his mother had made he would not give up on any condition. He only shook his head.

"Well, but now?" said the Princess; and she filled his pockets with cakes, and put her own heavy gold chain around his neck, and bent down and kissed him.

But he only moved farther back in his chair, and did not take his hands away from his head.

Then the doors were thrown open, and the King entered with a large suite of gentlemen in glittering uniforms and plumed hats. And the King himself wore an ermine-bordered purple mantle which trailed behind him, and he had a large gold crown on his white curly hair.

He smiled when he saw Anders in the gilt chair.

"That is a very fine cap you have," he said.

"So it is," said Anders. "And it is made of mother's best yarn, and she knitted it herself, and everybody wants to get it away from me."

"But surely you would like to change caps with me," said the King, and raised his large, heavy gold crown from his head.

Anders did not answer. He sat as before, and held on to his red cap which everybody was so anxious to get. But when the King came nearer to him, with his gold crown between his hands, then he grew frightened as never before, for a King can do what he likes, and he would be likely to cheat him out of his cap, if he did not take good care.

With one jump Anders got out of his chair. He darted like an arrow through all the halls, down all the stairs, and across the yard. He twisted himself like an eel between the outstretched arms of the courtiers, and over the soldiers' muskets he jumped like a little rabbit. He ran so fast that the Princess's necklace fell off his neck, and all the cakes jumped out of his pockets. But he had his cap. He still held on to it with both hands as he rushed into his mother's cottage.

And his mother took him up in her lap, and he told her all his adventures, and how everybody wanted his cap. And all his brothers and sisters stood round and listened with their mouths open.

But when his big brother heard that he had refused to give his cap for a King's golden crown, he said that Anders was a stupid. Just think what splendid things one might get in exchange for the crown; and Anders could have had a still finer cap.

Anders' face grew red. That he had not thought of. He cuddled up to his mother and asked:

"Mother, was I stupid?"

But his mother hugged him close.

"No, my little son," she said. "If you dressed in silk and gold from top to toe, you could not look any nicer than in your little red cap."

Then Anders felt brave again. He knew well enough that mother's cap was the best cap in the world.

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