

The Folk- and Fairy-Tales of Ludwig Bechstein: **Ashgrubber**

A man and a woman had two daughters, and there was a stepdaughter also, the man's first, beloved child, who was very pious and good but was not regarded with favour by her stepmother and stepsisters; thence she was badly treated. She had to stay in the kitchen all day long, do all the kitchen-work, get up early, cook, wash, and scrub, and at night she had to sleep in the garret. Every now and then she would creep into the ashes on the kitchen-hearth to warm herself, and as it was impossible for her to look clean afterwards, then her mother and sisters, on top of everything else, called her Ashgrubber in mockery and malice.

One day the father went travelling to the fair, and he had asked the girls what he should bring them back. One of them had wished for beautiful dresses, the second one for pearls and jewels; but Ashgrubber had asked only for a green sprig of hazel. And the father granted these wishes. The sisters dressed and decorated themselves, while Ashgrubber planted the sprig on her mother's grave and watered it with her tears every day. So the sprig grew very quickly and became a beautiful little tree, and every time that Ashgrubber wept on her mother's grave a little bird would come flying up and look at her with compassion.



Then it came to pass that the King ordained a round of festivities to which all the maidens in the land were invited, for his son was to choose himself a bride from among them. And the sisters made themselves up to look extremely attractive, and Ashgrubber had to comb their hair and plait it into beautiful tresses; and the thought that she too would have liked to go to the dance did not cross a single mind. When she at length ventured to ask permission, everyone roared with laughter at her for having a fancy to go to the dance when she had no fine clothes, not even shoes. The wicked stepmother snatched a bowl of lentils, cast them into the ashes, and said, "There, there, Ashgrubber, set to work and pick those lentils; then you shall go with us, but you must be finished in two hours."



The poor child went into the garden and called to the bird on the hazelnut-tree, and also to the doves, that they should pick the good ones into the pot and the bad ones into their crop, and soon the air was filled with doves and other birds, so it did not take long at all for the bowl full of lentils

to be picked perfectly clean. But when the good girl joyfully presented the lentils, her stepmother was angry and now tipped two bowls of lentils into the ashes, and these also had to be picked in two hours. Ashgrubber wept, but she called the birds again, and soon this task was also done. However, the promise made to her was not kept, but she was laughed at, for she ought to consider that she had no clothes and no shoes, and with the way she looked, she could never show herself; also, the Prince would need to have to have bad taste, as would any other man, to dance with her; and so the proud ones departed, leaving behind a deeply sorrowful Ashgrubber. She went to her tree and wept bitterly, and the bird came flying up and cried:

“My darling child, O tell me true,
What you wish for, I’ll give you.”

Then Ashgrubber cried, grasping the tree:

“Dear little tree, shake your crown for me,
Dear little tree, shake your boughs for me,
Rain lovely garments down for me!”

Then a beautiful dress flew down, and sumptuous stockings and shoes, and Ashgrubber swiftly put them on and went to the ball; and the girl was so beautiful, ah, so beautiful that not a soul recognised her, not even her mother or her sisters, and the Prince danced only with her, and with no other maiden; and when she went home in the evening he would have followed her, but she escaped him, quickly slipped off her dress and shoes on the grave under the tree, and lay down in her ashes. The clothes and the shoes instantly vanished.

This happened two more times: Ashgrubber would come to the

dance unrecognised and in ever more beautiful clothes, the Prince would dance only with her, and would follow her, and on the third occasion she chanced to lose one small golden shoe; the Prince picked it up, admired its daintiness, and roundly declared – and also had it proclaimed by heralds – that only the maiden whose foot the little shoe would fit should become his wife; and he rode from house to house to put the shoe to the test.

In vain did the two sisters try on the little shoe; it just seemed to make their feet grow bigger, so the Prince asked if there were not three daughters there. And the husband said, “Yes, Your Highness! There is also little Ashgrubber!” and the mother at once added, “who is not fit to be seen.” Nevertheless, the Prince wanted to see her; Ashgrubber washed herself nice and clean and walked in, outshining her sisters with her beauty even in her ash-grey smock. And when she put on the golden shoe, it fitted marvellously, as if cut out for her. And at that moment the King’s son recognised her and cried out: “This is my fair dancer, my dear bride!” and he took her by the hand, conveyed her to the castle, and ordered that a magnificent wedding feast be prepared.

On the way to church Ashgrubber wore a dress all of gold and a golden crown on her head; her sisters walked, full of envy, to her right and to her left. Then the bird from the hazel-tree came and pecked at each of them in one eye, making it go blind. Now when the bride left the church, the bird came back and pecked out their other eye, and so for their envy and malice they were smitten with blindness for the rest of their lives.