

The Folk- and Fairy-Tales of Ludwig Bechstein: **Ducats-Angela**



Once upon a time there were three sisters who lived in the countryside, and one of them, by the name of Frannie, was very clever, but the second sister was foolish and the third one was still a very little child. The clever sister had gone to school and learned various things; the foolish one had, indeed, also gone to school, but had learned nothing, and it had not been possible to drum anything into her head. Therefore, their parents no longer being alive, the clever sister took care of the small household, cooking and

washing, and the foolish one had to serve her, washing up, scouring, chopping wood, running errands, carrying the child around, and being Cinderella in all things – except the prospect of becoming a Princess.

One day, the clever sister sent the foolish one to the neighbouring town and gave her money to buy bread. Now the town was holding its fair just at that time, and the foolish girl, never having visited a fair in her life, wandered around between all the stalls filled with the delights of the fair with gaping mouth and staring eyes, and so she came to a stall that was crammed and overflowing with dolls and dollies and doll's heads and doll's bodies, each doll more beautiful than the last – oh, how the girl would have loved to have a couple, or at least but one, of the dollies – and then the seller cried out very kindly, "Now, my dear, pretty child! Come closer! Take a doll for yourself! Pick out the prettiest one!"

"That's what I call a kind woman!" thought the foolish girl, "For allowing me to take one," and picking up a very pretty doll, she thanked the woman and made to leave, but the seller held her by the coat and cried, "Well! And what's this? The nerve, indeed! That's not part of the deal, my honest maiden! People pay when they buy, or are you perhaps a fingersmith who finds what no one has lost? Cough up! Or I'll call the police!"

At these stern words, the foolish girl felt a fear deeper than any she had felt in all her life, and in her fright she handed over all the money she was supposed to use to buy bread with, and the doll-seller took the money and screeched: "Hey! This junk isn't nearly enough!" and she tore the pretty doll from Nannie's hand – by this name was the foolish girl mockingly called, because she was short and stocky and resembled an old nana – and gave

her another, far inferior, one, which was old and had barely been cleaned up, shouting: “Such as is the money, so are the wares! Like saint, like offering!”¹ Run, little brat! Be off with you! Be happy that you’ve got such a pretty doll for your couple of shabby farthings!”

In spite of this ill-treatment on the part of the market-woman, poor little Nannie was happy to have a dolly, and she hugged it and kissed it and called it “Angela” – that is, Little Angel – and “my kiddie, my kiddie!” But oh, when Nannie came home from the fair bringing a doll instead of bread, Frannie became very angry and hit poor Nannie, making her cry bitterly, and did not speak another word to her all the rest of the day. Yet Nannie still had her Angela to comfort her, and she petted her, and took her to bed with her, laid her down beside her, and soon fell into a deep and sound sleep, for she was tired from the journey, tired from the blows, and weak with hunger: Frannie, as a further punishment, had not given her any food. Beside Nannie’s bed stood the little bed of the youngest sister, who was called Annie, and Frannie’s bed stood against the opposite wall.

Now, in the middle of the night – there was bright moonlight – the clever sister was awakened by a strange voice which came from her sister’s bed opposite, saying: “Mummy eggy! Mummy eggy!” and Frannie realised that this voice must come from the little puppet, for it was different from her sisters’ voices. Now as the foolish sister was fast asleep and did not hear anything, Frannie called over to the little child, “Annie! Wake Nannie up! Angela wants to lay an eggy!”²

Little Annie roused herself at this call and woke up Nannie, who got

¹ “Nachdem der Mann, nachdem brät man die Wurst” (Literally: “as is the man, so does one fry the sausage”).

² “eine Gackele legen” – Gackele is nursery language for “Eichen” (“little egg”).

up, took her Angela, and placed her on a little bowl.

Suddenly there was a clinking and tinkling in the bowl, and when Nannie lifted Angela back down from it, the latter had laid a golden egg that looked as like a ducat as one pea resembles another.

There was great joy among the sisters; the clever one was friends with the foolish one again, and they all kissed and hugged their good Angela, and wrapped her in pieces of silken cloth, and with the ducat they bought bread and cakes, sugar and coffee, and all kinds of tasty delights. And the biggest delight of all was this: every night Angela cried, "Mummy, egg!" and every night she laid a golden egg. Then the clever sister bought pretty clothes little by little and had the house she lived in with her sisters newly tiled, and its exterior painted anew, and inside she had the parlour wallpapered; and she bought hens, geese, ducks and pigeons for the yard and purchased a goat, then later a cow, and a little prammy for Annie, which Nannie would push while Annie had Angela on her lap, and a little lambkin, which was called Lammie, ran along beside her wearing a red ribbon with a tinkling little bell around its neck. Now the neighbours were amazed that the sisters were so well-off, and were becoming better-off with each passing day, and they could not comprehend where or what this prosperity came from. For although the clever sister was very industrious, they well knew that honest industry does not lead to rapid riches.

Now among the near neighbours of the sisters was a married couple, and they themselves were rich, but it was this very couple who envied the sisters the most, and husband and wife discussed them together: "If only we knew how in the world Frannie and Nannie with their Annie over yonder have become so very rich! Where *do* they get the money from? There's

something strange going on!”

“Wait, dear husband!” said the wife. “I’ll soon find it out and bring it to light; I’ll ask stupid Nannie, she’s so simple-minded that she’s bound to tell me everything.”

So a short while after this, when Nannie was taking Annie with her Angela for a walk in the pram, with Lammie running tinkling along at her side, the neighbouring wife blocked their way, saying: “Well, a very good day to you, dear Nannikins! And how is everyone? How is my dear Frannikins? I’m sure she’s working her socks off at home! Oh, the dear, good girl! And darling little Annikins here! Oh, the little angel! Well – and what a pretty doll she has there on her lap! And lovely Lambie! How he frisks! And the little golden bell, how it tinkles! And the clean little pram, painted in such pretty colours! Yes, we see the truth of the proverb: Beautiful people have beautiful things! O you delightful little treasures that you are!”

With this ostensibly so friendly and amiable prattle, the neighbour beguiled Nannie, who said: “Indeed, good neighbour,³ we’re doing all right, and we’re content.”

“We’re so happy about that, my husband and I, dearest Nannie!” the wife flattered. “You are all very good, *too good*, too worthy, and deserve to have it good, for the proverb says: Everyone receives his just deserts. Oh, to have it as good as you! But the proverb says: God gives blessings to his beloved in sleep!”⁴

“Certainly, good neighbour,” foolish Nannie replied. “The dear Lord

³ “Frau Nachbarin” – the equivalent “goody” is archaic, and “neighbour” sounds too abrupt.

⁴ “Den seinen gibt’s der liebe Gott im Schlafe” – one interpretation of Psalm 127:2.

gives to us every night! A golden ducat every night.”

“Oh my goodness me! Oh Lordy! Oh – where from, you charming, darling girl, you good, dear, clever Nannie that you are?” the wily neighbour coaxingly cried.

“Angela does it, what’s there in Annie’s lap!” simple Nannie blurted out. “Every night she cries, ‘Mummy poo-poo!’ and I sit her down on a little bowl, and then the ducat drops in.”

“I don’t believe it!” the neighbour cried, quite beside herself, and she reached out to snatch the dolly away, but Annie held it tight with both hands and started to shriek like a stuck pig and kick out.

“Now then, little fool, keep your doll! I won’t take it off you! I don’t need one!” the neighbour said soothingly, and desisted. “Little children don’t whine when you do their will, the proverb says. That’s true for big children too! Well, adyoo, farewell, good Nannie! Give my fondest regards to dear Frannie, and you and Annie and Lammie all stay nice and healthy” – (stupid heifer,⁵ you muttonhead!) she added in thought – and she joyfully hastened to her husband and arranged a plan with him how she could, using deception and duplicity, ask to be admitted to the sisters’ house for one night and make off with the sisters’ good and useful dolly, Ducats-Angela.

When night had fallen and it was time to go to bed, the children heard a terrible racket in the neighbours’ house over the way. There was a slapping and smacking, a thumping and thwacking, and a crashing and banging all over, and they could hear the wife howling pitifully and the husband dreadfully cursing and scolding, but it was all just a ruse and

⁵ “dummes Hammele, du Schaf!” (“stupid wether, you sheep!”) – a rhyming play on the girl’s name, which is Mammele in the original.

pretence; and finally the front door over the way flew open and the wife came out wringing her hands, her hair flying all over, in a state of undress, and she headed straight for the sisters' house, screaming incessantly, "Oh Lord have mercy! Oh the wicked man! Oh, oh, oh! Ah, ah, ah! Oh, oh, oh! Ah, ah, ah!" and she was not to be pacified. In the end she uttered the lie – with simulated tears and many sobs – that her cruel husband had given her an almighty beating and thrown her out of the house, and she would not go back over, not for love nor money, and the sisters might like, for God's sake, to put her up for this night only, for it was already dark; at the crack of dawn the next day she would set out on her way back to her home village and her parents.

The good-natured sisters took pity on the false woman and prepared a bed for her in their own bedchamber, for the little house had no guest room or guest bedroom to offer. Now when everyone had retired to bed, the neighbour took Ducats-Angela out of sleeping Nannie's bed, opened the window, climbed out, leapt into the garden in front of the house, trod the sisters' fairest flowers underfoot, and hurried over to her house, where her husband received her at the open door, and they were both as exultant as witches on Walpurgis Night⁶ and laughed their heads off at the easy success of the robbery.

And the moment the two of them entered the parlour, Angela said: "Mummy eggy! Mummy eggy!" which filled the wife's heart with joy, and instead of a little bowl she took the tureen, placed it under Angela, and said: "Don't hold back; don't do it so singly! Make a good pile, for the proverb

⁶ The night of April 30 when, according to legend, witches held a kind of conference on the summit of the Brocken, in the Harz Mountains, with the Devil as the Keynote Speaker and all kinds of diabolical revels on the agenda.

says: Means make the Master, and the more the merrier!” And Angela did her utmost after this encouragement, yet there was no tinkling clink in the tureen, but rather a squishing squelch, and when the husband saw this benefaction he thought his wife was making a fool of him, and now he became as angry in earnest as he had pretended to be shortly before, and taking the tureen and the doll, he threw them both out the window onto the dung heap, after which he grabbed a stick and beat the living daylights out of his wife, so she screamed blue murder in earnest: “Oh oh oh! Ow ow ow! Oh my giddy aunt! Oh my stars!” and the husband yelled, “I’ll give you giddy – I’ll beat the falling sickness into you! Can you see anything yet? Can you see those stars?”⁷ The proverb says: The more the merrier! Just wait, I’ll teach you to be merry!”⁸ and he rained blow after blow on her until she could barely raise a squeak.

The next morning, the sisters noticed that Angela had gone, and she had not wanted to go to the bowl the night before, and they were sorely distressed.

In the meantime the doll, Angela, lay on the dung-heap, and the tureen lay over her, with only a small strip of her colourful coat peeping out from under the brim; then a rag-and-bone man came by, and seeing the strip of cloth, he pushed the tureen aside with his stick and was delighted to find a doll; deciding at once to take it back to his little girl, he picked it up, and it not being very clean, as a result of circumstances, he went to the nearest well and washed Angela until she was spotless. At that same time, quite by chance, Nannie came to the well to fetch water, which was one of

⁷ Here there is an extended pun on the word “Ei!” (“Ow!” “egg”).

⁸ Yet more wordplay: “viel hilft viel ... ich will dir helfen” (“much helps much ... I’ll help you”). The second phrase has the idiomatic sense, “I’ll teach you.”

her chores, and seeing her doll in the stranger's hand she cried out in delight, "Hey, my Angela! Where *have* you been?" and the doll immediately cried, "Mummy poo-poo! Mummy eggy!" and gave the man's hand a fillip, thereby hopping out of it onto Nannie's neck and slipping under her neckerchief, and because she urgently needed to go, she swiftly laid an egg that once again looked as like to a ducat as one pea to another. Nannie took this ducat and gave it to the rag-and-bone man, saying: "Dear man, this puppet, wherever you may have found it, belongs to me. But here you have, for a finder's reward, a pretty tip, a ducat, because you found my Angela and washed her so nice and clean!" – and she quickly ran back home and delightedly showed Angela to her sisters and hugged and kissed her, and the elder sister and the younger, Frannie and Annie, rejoiced at Nannie bringing Angela into the house a second time, and they were mightily glad and hopped for joy – and Lammie hopped along –, and roasted double-brewed coffee and baked waffles.

And Angela kept her magic power and continued to lay her little yellow egg with a tinkling clink in the little bowl every night. This made the sisters very rich, but they remained on good terms and lived in peace with one another, and they brought Annie up and had her taught what was right and proper, for it comes to pass exceedingly rarely that little girls who have learned nothing and are foolish, like Nannie, find a Ducats-Angela. As the proverb says: You have as much chance of finding one as of landing an angel.⁹

⁹ "da hat sich was zu anglen" = "They cannot (simply) be fished for." The final word is a pun.