

The Folk- and Fairy-Tales of Ludwig Bechstein: **Fat Lollus and Lean Lollus**



A rich man died, leaving behind two sons and a handsome fortune and inheritance. The first of the sons chose a spiritual life, in particular, the life of a monk, while the second one chose a very worldly profession – he became an innkeeper or guest-giver; in fact, he gave his guests as little as possible and took from them as much as he could for it. He married for money and strove incessantly for money. He borrowed his brother's portion of the inheritance, the latter, as a monk, not requiring any money, and practiced usury with it – not, however, to his brother's profit but to his own. His beer-measures were short, and he had his wine-bottles blown so small at the glassworks that anyone who saw a whole bottle became very doubtful that it was not a half-bottle, and all of his half-bottles seemed to be gravitating towards the slender physical shape of a matchstick, for which reason the guests of this innkeeper invariably called them "matches". After the stable-lad had poured out the oats for a traveller's horse, the innkeeper would walk to the crib when he thought no one was watching, snatch whole handfuls of oats away from the poor beast's mouth, and shove them into his pocket. He said to himself that the crib got its name from people being able to crib from it. He was a crafty rogue, this innkeeper, and it was not his fault

that he did not become rich, for he had the aptitude to do so – but the biblical verse does not speak to no purpose, which states: They that will be rich fall into temptation and snares.¹ The innkeeper did not prosper in his doings. What did it avail him to steal a few handfuls of oats from the fodder of strangers' horses – when one of his own horses croaked? To slowly, gradually gain through his too short measures, an anker of wine, when the carelessness of his servants, whom he left unsupervised, spilled a whole ohm² in his cellar? He did not get ahead, this busy innkeeper, but he took backward steps in all matters, save his swindling and avarice, which became ever worse and worse, until guests stayed away and the taproom stood empty, the cards and dice lay untouched, the oven stayed cold, and the chimney left off smoking.

When the innkeeper's retrogression had reached this point, he was shaken in every limb by a new shock: his brother, the pious monk, arrived and said to him, "Dear brother, give me back the capital I lent you; I have pledged a sumptuous altar with splendid artwork, wood-carvings and gilding to my patron saint, and I shall use that money to have it made; what is left over – if anything be left over – will be used to endow requiem masses for our beloved parents, and for you and me, in perpetuity."

"Good God!" cried the innkeeper. "Brother, what nonsensical behaviour is this? I cannot return your money to you now because I do not have it – I am ruined; and if you insist on payment, then house and home will be put up for sale, I'll have to go begging with my wife and children, and you'll be certain to receive nothing, and your patron saint will not receive

¹ Timothy 6:9.

² An anker is around 35 litres or nearly 10 gallons; an ohm (or ahm) is 4 ankers.

any new altars. Listen to me and be reasonable, my dear, devout brother! Let me hold on to the money, allow me time to recover! You know that we have gone through a difficult time in which no one could thrive or prosper except for the farmers, who feathered their nests and are now laughing at us. Your saint was, without doubt, a philanthropist of a noble cast of mind, and if he has not had a deluxe altar in your monastery church over the last few centuries, then it will not matter to him if he receives such a one a few years sooner or later. The Lord God knows that I have spared no pains – I slave away unremittingly to earn money – but it's no good – I get nowhere."

"I am truly sorry to hear you say that, dear brother," the monk said sympathetically. "You have taken into your inn the worst guest there can be."

"Who would that be?" the innkeeper asked.

"It is Fat Lollus!" the monk replied.

"Fat Lollus?" the innkeeper asked in amazement. "Either you're joking, brother, or you're drivelling. There is no guest with such a name in my guestbook, and I have never heard that name mentioned, truly, never in all my days!"

"That may well be," said the monk, "yet this wicked guest is here, and he is the sole cause of your fortune falling to ruin and your always returning to square one."

"I'd like to see him! I'd –" the innkeeper burst out angrily.

"You won't get the better of him just yet, dear brother," the monk said with a smile, "you have faithfully nourished and cherished him all too long – yet you shall see him, this Fat Lollus. He is to be found in your cellar; let us

go down there.”

Astonished, the innkeeper took the cellar-key and a lamp, thinking: “Aha, my brother means the wine – he’s intimating that I am my own best guest, but he’s sorely mistaken.”

In the cellar the monk bid his brother set the lamp down on a barrel, so that its light shone into an empty corner, and then step behind him; and pulling out a little black book, he murmured an incantation from it while facing the corner. Then the ground heaved, a fat shape rose up out of it, a pair of fiery eyes glowed, and the innkeeper’s blood ran cold in his veins from fear and horror.

“Lolle, show yourself entirely!” cried the monk, and as the badly-swollen head rose up it was followed by a misshapen fat body, and short, ungainly feet smacked on the cellar floor, and a deformed, hideous beast, whose skin glistened as fatty and greasy as that of a seal, was crouching in the corner.

“Do you see your esteemed guest, my brother?” the monk asked very gravely, now turned towards him. “I think he has gorged himself pretty well in your inn! You see, brother – each and every fruit of your deception has benefitted not *you* but this Lollus. What you have extorted from guests and their animals has nourished *him*; the wine and other drinks you have deceitfully gained through too short measures and too small bottles – Lollus has guzzled it all – Ill-gotten gains do not prosper and ill designs are worst to the contriver. If things are to improve for you and your household, then do not cheat anyone any more, do not swindle anyone, do not diddle anyone. Ask for what is right, for what is right is praised by God. Keep honest and

correct weights and measures, look to your tasks yourself, every day, every hour, from the cellar to the corn-loft. Serve, as much as possible, your guests yourself, do not depend too much on the head waiter and the under-skinker, on the house-servant and the stable-lad, on the cook and the cooper. The more servants you have, the fatter Lollus feeds himself.”

After this warning the innkeeper became very thoughtful, and he said: “I thank you, my brother; I shall follow the advice you have given me.” Then the monk conjured Lollus again, saying: “Lolle, creep back,” and Lollus crept heavily backwards down into the ground again, and the corner of the cellar was as empty and smooth as before.

“I shall leave my money with you for *four* more years,” said the monk, “but then my word to my saint must be kept.” And he took his leave of his brother.

The innkeeper zealously followed his brother’s faithful advice and completely changed his management of the inn, putting everything in better order, saving in the right places, and misappropriating no more. His wife had to personally see that everything was as it should be in the kitchen, which she had not done before – correct measures were established, proper and complete wine bottles were blown at the glassworks and the little Lilliputian ones disappeared. As a result, the guests who had disappeared came back, the oven was cold no longer, and the chimney smoked again – almost night and day, rivalling a German Professor.

The innkeeper’s affairs improved in every way; his prosperity visibly increased with his rectitude; his good reputation and that of his inn spread far and wide, and the innkeepers in the neighbouring towns began to envy

him because travellers preferred to ride a few more hours through the night just to reach the good inn, and it was not unusual for it to be so overcrowded with guests that the cheerful host had to adopt a sad expression and turn the surplus guests away.

When, after the passing of four years, the monk, the innkeeper's brother, returned to ask for his share of the inheritance, the host received him in the friendliest fashion, placed before him a resplendent wine of the loveliest hue with all kinds of palatable confectionery, nut's puffs and suchlike, and laid long rolls of coins on the table for him, saying: "Here, dear brother, with my heartfelt gratitude, is your capital together with all the interest, honestly calculated down to the last farthing." But the monk said, "Dear brother, I will not take the interest, for not only does it ill become me as a man of God, but it is also written: Thou shalt not lend upon usury to thy brother.³ But I am glad that you are rid of the *fat* Lollus and now have only the *lean* one."

"Indeed?" said the innkeeper. "Does he live in the cellar, too? I'd like to see him."

"You shall see him!" the monk answered, and he bid the host lead the way down to the cellar, where he once again began his incantation. Then at the back, in the corner, the earth moved very slowly and, inch by inch, a thin little head peeped out with lustreless eyes.

"Lolle, show yourself entirely!" said the monk. Then Lollus writhed his way up, feebly and laboriously, from the ground, and he appeared emaciated in the extreme; his skin no longer glistened like grease but was crumpled and shrivelled like tree-bark, and looked exceedingly frail. "Now it

³ Deuteronomy 23:19.

is done; I am happy!" said the monk. "Lolle, creep back!" – So Lollus crept backwards, quite slowly, back into the cellar floor, and in the corner there was nothing to be seen.

"Take heed, brother!" said the monk, "if you continue as you are now, then Lollus will not stay with you another quarter; he will either perish or go on to the next house in search of a master who will feed him better than you do." The innkeeper was pleased beyond measure at these comforting words, and he blessed his wise brother's advice a thousandfold.