

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



Once, many years ago, a poor herdsman lived in a dense forest. He had built himself a little wooden house in the heart of the forest, and he lived in it with his wife and six children, who were all boys. Beside the house was a well and a little garden, and when the father fed the cattle, the children would go out at midday or at evening to take him a cool drink from the fountain or some vegetables from the garden.

The parents called the youngest boy only 'Goldie,' for his hair was like gold; and although the youngest, he was yet the strongest of all and also the biggest. Whenever the children went out into the fields, Goldie led the way with a tree-branch, and none of them would have it any other way, for every one was afraid of being the first to chance upon an adventure; but when Goldie went in front, they willingly followed on, one behind the other, through the darkest thicket, and even if the moon had already risen over the mountains.

One evening, on the way back from their father, the children amused themselves by playing in the forest, and Goldie had become so heated in play – much more than the others – that he looked as bright as the sunset. “Let us go back!” said the eldest, “it seems to be growing dark.” – “Look, there is the moon!” said the second eldest. Then a light suddenly emerged from between the dark pines, and a female figure, shining like the moon, was sitting on one of the moss-covered stones, spinning with a crystal spindle a light thread out into the night, and she nodded her head at Goldie and sang,

“The snow-white finch and the rose of gold,
The Queen in the lap of the ocean cold!”



She would doubtless have sung on, but her thread broke and she went out like a light. Now it was black night, the children were seized with dread, and they ran with pitiful cries, the one hither, the other thither, over cliffs and chasms, and became lost to each other.

For a good many days and nights, Goldie also roamed around in the dense forest, but he found neither any of his brothers nor his father's hut, nor any other trace of a human being, for the forest was densely overgrown, while there was one mountain over another and one chasm under another.

The brambles which twined round everything stilled his hunger and thirst, or he would have died most wretchedly. Finally, on the third day – others say not until the sixth or seventh day – the forest became light and ever lighter, and at last Goldie came out into a beautiful green meadow.

Then his heart was so light and he breathed the fresh air in full draughts.

Snares had been laid out in this meadow, for a fowler lived there who caught birds that came flying out of the forest and then took them to town to sell.

"Such a lad is just what I require," the fowler thought when he espied Goldie, who stood on the green meadow close to the snares and looked up into the wide blue heavens and could not have his fill of looking.

The fowler thought he would play a little prank, so he pulled his snares and whoosh! Goldie was caught, and he lay under the snare in total astonishment, not knowing what had happened to him. "That is how the birds which come out of the forest are caught," the fowler said, laughing loudly – "your red feathers are just fine by me. Are you an artful fox, by any

chance? Stay with me, I'll teach you how to catch birds!" Goldie was on board straightaway; it seemed to him a truly merry life among the birds, particularly as he had abandoned all hope of finding his father's hut again.

"Let's put what you have learnt to the test," the fowler said to him several days later. Goldie pulled the snares, and with the first pull he caught a snow-white finch.

"Clear off with your white finch!" yelled the fowler. "You must be in league with the Evil One!" and he pushed him very roughly off the meadow while stamping to death, with a volley of curses, the white finch Goldie had handed to him.

Goldie could not comprehend the fowler's words, and he went sadly, but confidently, back into the forest and once more resolved to seek his father's hut. Day and night he ran over rocks and old, fallen tree-trunks, and many was the time he tripped and fell over the black roots which everywhere jutted out of the ground. But on the third day the forest finally became lighter and he came out into a beautiful, light garden which was full of the most delightful flowers, and because Goldie had never seen their like before, he stood stock still, lost in admiration. The gardener did not descry him right away – for Goldie stood among the sunflowers, and his hair shone in the sunlight no differently from the flowers around him – then he said, "Ha! Such a lad is just what I require!" and closed the garden-gate. Goldie did not mind, for life among the flowers seemed to him to be a truly colourful life, particularly as he had abandoned all hope of finding his father's hut again.

"Go into the forest!" the gardener told Goldie one morning. "Fetch

me a wild rose-tree, so I can cultivate roses on it!" Goldie went and came back with a tree of the loveliest gold-coloured roses, which looked just as if the most dexterous goldsmith had forged them for the table of a King.

"Clear off with your golden roses!" yelled the gardener. – "You must be in league with the Evil One," and he pushed him very roughly out of the garden, while he trampled the golden roses into the ground with a volley of curses.



Goldie could not comprehend the gardener's words, but he went confidently back into the forest and again resolved to seek his father's hut.

He ran day and night, from tree to tree, from rock to rock. On the third day, the forest finally became light, and ever lighter, and then Goldie came out onto the blue sea; it lay before him as an immeasurable expanse, and the sun was smoothly reflected in its crystal-bright surface, so it looked like flowing gold; and prettily decorated ships with long, streaming pennants were afloat. There were several fishermen in a neat barque by the shore, and Goldie stepped aboard and looked out into the bright distance in amazement.

"Such a lad is just what we require," said the fishermen and whoosh! they pushed off from land. Goldie did not mind, for life on the waves

seemed golden to him, particularly as he had abandoned all hope of finding his father's hut again. The fishermen threw out their nets and caught nothing. "Let's see if you have more luck!" an old fisherman with silver hair said to Goldie. With clumsy hands, Goldie lowered the net into the depths, and drew it in and fished up – a crown of bright gold.

"Triumph!" cried the old fisherman, and he fell at Goldie's feet. – "I salute you as our King! A hundred years ago, the old King, who had no heirs, sank his crown in the sea as he was dying, and until the day which fate had determined for some fortunate one to draw the crown up from the depths, the throne had to remain without a successor and stay shrouded in mourning."

"All Hail to our King!" the fishermen cried, and they placed the crown on Goldie's head. The news of Goldie and the rediscovered royal crown soon rang from ship to ship and over the sea far into the land. Soon the golden surface was filled with colourful barques and with ships that were adorned with flowers and foliage; they all greeted the ship on which King Goldie was standing with loud and jubilant cries. He stood at the prow of the ship, the bright crown on his head, and calmly watched the sun as she was extinguished in the sea. His golden locks waved in the evening breeze.