

The Folk- and Fairy-Tales of Ludwig Bechstein: **Hans in Luck**

Once upon a time there was a peasant boy called Hans, an honest young lad who supposed himself nobody's fool, and he served a rich and powerful master faithfully and honestly for a number of years. But finally, Hans became homesick and wanted to be back with his mother, so he asked his master for the wages he had earned. He gave Hans a lump of gold as big as Hans's head, and Hans's head was not one of the thinnest or smallest. Hans was content with this, and wrapping the heavy gold nugget in a handkerchief, he set out on his pines. But walking became toilsome, and the sweat started dripping off him, for the gold nugget was frightfully heavy, carry it how he might, on his head or on his shoulders.

Now a rider trotted lightly and cheerfully past Hans, sitting on a horse as smooth as glass. "Well!" cried Hans, "horseriding is a fine skill, if you can do it and you have a horse!" The rider stopped his mount, for his ears had taken in Hans's words, and he asked him what he was lugging along so laboriously?

"Oh! It's gold, pure, heavy gold! Man is a burdened beast!" said Hans, throwing the nugget to the ground with a groan.

"Well!" said the rider. "If you'd like to ride, then let's make an exchange. Give me your burdensome lump and take my horse for it!" Hans did not need to be asked twice but cried out in joy, "Done! Shake on it!" and the deal was concluded. The rider took the gold and hurried out of Hans's sight, thinking that lad might come to regret the deal. Hans clambered onto the nag and rode off, kicking up dust from the road; but in no time at all the



horse gave a bound and Hans, who did not know how to ride, fell down like a sack of nuts. He could barely move a muscle. A farmer, who was coming this way with his cow, caught the riderless horse and led it to where Hans lay. He was crying and rubbing his joints. "No more riding for me, it does you no good! Lucky the man who has so gentle a cow as you have there, my friend! A man could have milk and butter and cheese every single day, and he won't be thrown off."

"Well," said the crafty farmer, "if the cow pleases you so well, it just so happens that your mettlesome horse pleases me – I'll give you the cow for the horse!"

"That's a good swap, I like that," said Hans, and he took the cow and drove her before him while the farmer mounted the horse and, they're off! Quick as a flash, he rode away.

When Hans came to an inn he spent his last few farthings, for he now thought that, having the cow, he had no need of money; and he marched on. But the day was very hot, and there was still a fair way to go to the village Hans was from, where his mother lived, and Hans was thirsty. So he got ready to milk the cow, but he did it so clumsily that no milk came out, and in the end the cow gave him a kick that near knocked the senses out of him, and he did not even know if he were boy or girl. Just then a butcher came along with a young pig, and he compassionately asked the stricken Hans what was the matter and offered him a swig from his bottle. Hans recounted his adventures and the butcher pointed out to him that no milk was to be expected from so old a cow; it must be slaughtered. "Hmm!" said Hans, "that will make no great roast, old cow-meat! Now, if only one had

such a nice fat piggy, that tastes delicious, and it gives cut sausages!”

“My good friend,” said the butcher, “if you like the little pig so much, let us make an exchange, right now: you take the pig, I take the cow! Is that alright?” – “I’ll say that’s alright!” exclaimed Hans, happy with all his heart at his good fortune. He continued cheerfully on his way, thinking: “You’re a real child of Fortune, Hans! Your loss is always made good again. O, how delicious this roast pork will taste!”



Soon a boy came down the same road and caught up with Hans, and he was carrying a plump and heavy white goose under his arm. He greeted Hans, and as the two of them fell into conversation, he told him that the goose was meant for a christening roast. That was sure to be a roast that was second to none. So saying, he let Hans weigh the goose and feel the lumps of fat under its wings.

“The goose is good, but my little pig here isn’t half bad either!” said Hans. “Where did you get the pig from?” asked the boy, and Hans told him that he had got it by bargaining just a short time before. Then the other

looked around anxiously and said, "Listen, a word in your ear! Back there in the nearest village a young pig was stolen from the mayor a little while ago. The thief has fenced it to you, and if the Field-Guard comes up with us now (it seems to me I can see his spear flashing over those ears of corn there), he will seize you for the thief, and instead of coming with the pig into your mother's kitchen, you'll find yourself in the devil's kitchen!"

"Oh Lord save us! What a luckless wretch I am!" cried Hans. "Pray help me for God's sake, my good, dearest friend!" "I'll tell you what," said the boy, "give me the pig right now, and you take my goose! I know the secret paths around here, and I'll soon make myself invisible!"

No sooner said than done – the deal was struck, and in two shakes the boy and the pig were lost to Hans's sight.

"I am a child of fortune after all!" Hans laughed to himself and carried the goose for a good distance. There was no sign of a Field-Guard or any other pursuer. Hans reckoned up the good meat, the fat, the feathers, his mother's joy; and so he came to the last village before his own. There a scissors-grinder was standing at his cart, looking as happy as a sandboy and whetting and whistling, whistling and whetting, so that the air was whirring; then he sang a merry country-ballad:

"A young knife-grinder once came here,
He whet the knives and ground the shears
With a joyful air!
He'll do it once more,
It's not your affair –
It's nothing to you – so there!"

Hans stopped in his tracks with his goose, quite astounded at the grinder's cheeriness, then he bid him good day and remarked, "You must be doing really well, to be so cheerful and happy! Oh, to be like you!"

"Oh yes, my good companion," said the knife-grinder, "I'm merry all the while, always money in my pocket, an' you can have it too with your goose. Where'd you get the goose?"

"I got it for a pig!" Hans told him. "And the pig?" – "Got it for a cow!" – "And the cow?" – "Swapped for a horse." – "And the horse?" – "Given me for a lump of gold the size of my head." – "Oh, you sly dog! And the gold came from?" – "Served seven years, received my wages!" – "You crafty devil, all you need now is to become a grinder, like me, then you'll have money clinking in every pocket. For that, you need only a good Headwhetstone; I have one lying here, and it's a bit worn-down, to be sure, but it'll go nicely for all that (if you take it!). I'll give you it for your goose. Do you want?"

"Do I want? Certainly!" cried Hans, quite delighted. "Money in every pocket, that's just the job."

The mischievous grinder gave good Hans an old whetstone and a pebble that was lying on the road, and Hans continued on his way, elated that everything had fallen out so well and thinking he must have been born under a lucky star.

But the sun shone with a burning heat, Hans was hungry and thirsty, he was weak and weary, and the stones were heavy, almost as heavy as the gold nugget had been, and he thought: ah, if only I did not have to lug these grindstones along. There was a small well by the road, and Hans

wanting to quench his thirst at it, he bent over, and as he bent the stones fell down the well. Who could be happier than Hans in Luck when he, all at once and without having done anything, found himself rid of the heavy stones! He joyfully leapt up, free of all cares, of all burdens; and counting himself the most fortunate of men he came home in high spirits to his mother – Hans in Luck.

