

The Folk- and Fairy-Tales of Ludwig Bechstein: **Hans the Tailor and the Animals who Knew**

A shoemaker and a tailor once went out into the world together. The cobbler had money, but the tailor was a poor devil. Both were fond of one and the same girl, who was called Liese, and each one of them intended to marry her once he had earned a tidy sum of money and become a master. The cobbler, called Peter, was filled with malice and had a black heart; the tailor was good-natured and easy-going, and his name was Hans. At first, Hans had not wanted to travel together with Peter because he had no money, but Peter, whose mind had nought but malignity for Hans because Liese made eyes at him and not at himself, plotted the tailor's ruin, saying: "Just come with me, I have pennies,¹ I'll pay your expenses, even if we don't find any work. We'll heartily eat our fill and drink our fill three times a day every day. Doesn't that sound good to you?"

"Well, I *am* a great one for eating my fill and drinking my fill!" replied Hans, and they both packed up their knapsacks and set out on their travels. For nine days they walked without finding any work, Peter in particular being unable to find anything; and even when Hans could have had work, he always enticed him not to accept it but to continue travelling with him instead. Now, at the end of these nine days, Peter said, "Hans, my money is diminishing, and for it to last a while longer we'll have to eat and drink only twice a day from now on."

"Alas!" sighed Hans, "Are we to have Hunger for our companion on the road so soon? I wish I hadn't gone with you! I could go hungry at home! At least there I had something precious that would have taken the edge off my hunger!"

¹ "Batzen". 1 batzen = 4 Kreutzers, or approximately one-and-a-half pence in the mid-19th century.

Peter, who always bought the food while they marched on their way, ate his bellyful in secret, for he had money enough to do so, but he gave food to Hans only twice a day, and it delighted him when his companion's stomach rumbled and grumbled and, like in the proverb, beggar-boys bandied blows inside Hans's body.

In this way did another nine days pass by, and there was still no work to be found; then Peter spoke: "Dear Hans, soon I won't have two pennies to rub together – my money will really no longer suffice for four daily meals, two for you, two for me. My purse has galloping consumption. Have a look – it's as thin as a roundworm. From now on, we can appease our hunger only once a day."

"Oh, oh, Pete!" Hans lamented. "What misfortune have you brought upon me? I won't be able to hold out! Just look at me, I've become so thin and transparent that I can barely cast a shadow. What's going to be the end of all this?"

"Buckle on a belt!" laughed Peter. "Practise the virtue of abstemiousness. Enter a Moderation Society!"

"Enter? Some hope of that!" moaned the tailor. "I'd say we're already up to our necks in moderation!"

But all this was no use; it had to be so, for better or worse; Hans steeled himself to go hungry, but as anyone can imagine, he did not increase in portliness. He became as thin as dry bones and his face took on the colour of twine. And still there was no work, and now there was no chance of any, for the masters said: "Go with God, Brother Moonlight! How can such a little fellow sew something to last when his own frame is coming apart at the seams? Tailors should be thin by nature, but only to the proper

degree; they really should not be so thin that they could be threaded through a needle!”

On hearing such mischievous words, Hans cried bitterly, and wicked Peter gloated secretly and heartily, and when another nine days had passed, and Hans was well-nigh lying on the road from hunger, then false Peter spoke: “Brother dear – it hurts me, it cuts me to the quick, to have to say this, but my purse is now thoroughly emaciated, and our days of eating and drinking at the bakery and the inn are well and truly over.”

“Merciful heavens!” cried Hans. “Have nothing at all more to eat or drink? That really is the limit! Who could stand it? O woe, woe is me! Why did I follow you? Woe betide you for enticing me!”

“My word, how ready you are to fly off the handle, Hans!” cried Peter. “As if we didn’t have quite enough to drink!”

“Where? Where?” cried Hans, panting with his tongue out.

“Everywhere! Water, brother dear! Water!” laughed Peter. “Water is very healthy, it thins the blood and the humours; it cures most illnesses, it strengthens the limbs. Look, I have to drink water too.”

“But water isn’t food!” complained Hans. “I can’t live on thin air, so get me something to eat, or I’ll have to bite grass and chew earth. I must have something to sink my teeth into.”

“Well, I’ll go to the baker’s and buy a roll with the last of my money, I’ll share that equally with you!” said false Peter; and bidding Hans sit on a stone, he went to a baker’s, where he bought four rolls, ate three of them up straight away, and washed them down with a schnapps – then he returned to Hans.

“But Peter!” said the hungry tailor. “You’ve taken a very long time.

Give me something to eat, I feel a fainting fit coming over me.”

“I had to wait for the bread to cool down,” Peter said in his defence, “warm bread isn’t good on an empty stomach. Here’s your half.” – “Peter, you smell of schnapps!” said Hans. “Indeed?” asked Peter. “It could be so, there was someone drinking inside, he bumped against me and clumsily spilled a few drops over my clothes.”

Hans wolfed down his half-roll, quenched his thirst with water, and journeyed on with his faithless companion. The two of them now exchanged barely a word.

When it became evening and they arrived in another village, Peter again went to the baker’s, ate his fill, and returned from the shop with a roll. Hans thought he would share the roll with him, but Peter shoved it into his pocket.

After a while, when they had left the village behind and were come into a forest, Hans said: “Now, Peter! Out with your roll! I’m famished.”

“I’m not,” Peter curtly replied.

“Not?” Hans cried in shock, and he stopped still, his legs trembling. “Monster that you are!”

“Glutton that you are!” sneered Peter. What I’ve always heard is very true of you: the skinnier the fellow, the bigger his appetite. The roll that I am carrying on my person is, as you very correctly observed, *my* roll, and you won’t get so much as a crumb of it because you said *monster*.”

“But then I’ll starve to death!” cried Hans in desperation.

“Die, in God’s name!” replied Peter. “The pall-bearers won’t strain themselves lifting you.”

“But I beg you, for God’s sake!” moaned Hans.

“What for?” asked Peter slyly.

“For half of your roll!” stammered Hans.

“Only death comes free – it cost me the very last of my money. How much money could I have now, if I hadn’t had to drag you around with me and feed you!” Peter declared.

“But really, you yourself talked me into going with you!” Hans interjected; yet vexation and hunger made it hard for him to disgorge the words. His tongue cleaved to his palate.

“You give to me, I’ll give to you,” said Peter. “My roll is as dear to me as my eyeballs, consequently, it is worth two eyeballs. Give me one of your eyeballs for half of it.”

“God in Heaven! How you are punishing me for following this one!” Hans whimpered, for the poor tailor was now too weak to cry out – yet he reached out his hand for the half roll and ate his fill, and then Peter gouged out one of his eyeballs.

On the next day all the sad events of the previous day repeated themselves with the two travelling companions. Peter again bought a roll and did not give Hans even a bite, and he demanded his other eye for half of it.

“But then I’ll be as blind as a bat!” the tailor wailed. “Then I won’t be able to work any more! I need at least *one* eye to thread a needle, don’t I!”

“He who is blind,” hard- and black-hearted Peter consoled with secret scorn, “has it good. He no longer sees how wicked, false, and faithless the world is; he no longer needs to work, for he has a valid excuse, and even the stingiest miser will feel compelled to make a donation to a poor blind man. You can even become rich, as a blind beggar, while I must

wretchedly drag myself through the world. Should this occur, then I shall visit you, and you will bless me as your greatest benefactor and share your wealth with me, as I previously shared my poverty with you.”

Hans was utterly unable to make any reply to these diabolical words – offering no resistance, he relinquished to his faithless companion, only so as not to die of hunger, his other eyeball. And when this was done, and Hans was hoping that Peter would now lead and guide him, the latter said, “And so adieu, my dear, stupid Hans! I have you where I want you. This is where the beggarman turns round. Now I’ll go back home and marry our Liese. You lose! Look to yourself, and see where you end up!”

Off went Peter, and the agony in Hans’s body and soul was such that he grew quite faint for a time, so that he sank down to the ground and lay by the wayside as one dead.

Then three wanderers came along the road, but not two-legged ones – rather, as chance would have it, four-legged ones: a bear, a wolf, and a fox. They sniffed at the senseless figure and the bear growled: “This man-beast is dead! Do you want him? I don’t want him!”

“Just an hour ago I consumed a fresh sheep, so I’m not hungry right now; besides, the fellow is as scrawny and as hard as a tree-branch!” said the wolf. “I would be sorry for my teeth, which I can’t afford to lose.”

“This hero must have been a tailor!” the fox scoffed. “I would rather have a fat goose than a scrawny tailor. If he had been a furrier, I would bite his nose off – but he can lie as he is, that suits me down to the ground. He was blind, so he certainly never shot a fox.”

The poor tailor returned to his senses, noticed the company he was in, and held his breath as well as he could while the three beasts lay down

at their ease in the grass, no distance from him at all.



“It is a great misfortune to be blind,” said the fox, “both for us noble beasts and for the foul two-legged monotremes who call themselves humans, and think they are so clever, but are so terribly stupid that they know nothing at all. If they knew what I know, there would be no more blind people.”

“Oho!” cried the wolf. “I too know what I know. If the man-beasts in the nearby royal capital knew it, they would not suffer the burning thirst they are suffering, and would not pay a crown for a small schnapps-glass of water.”

“Hmm, hmm!” the bear growled. “We ourselves are nobody’s fool either. I too have knowledge of a secret. If you tell me yours, I shall tell you mine, but none of us, on pain of death, shall betray the other.”

“No, we will not and shall not do that!” the fox vowed.

“Each of us must solemnly give the others his right paw on it!” affirmed the wolf.

“You’re on, it’s a deal!” said Bruin, and he held out his hairy paw, and when the others shook on it, the bear, for the fun of it, gave their paws such a squeezing and shaking that they howled out with pain, making the blind tailor fear for his life.

“I know,” the fox began, once the bear, after laughing at him for his sensitivity, had placated him again, “that today is a particularly holy night, in which a dew from Heaven will fall on grass and herb. Whoever is blind need only anoint his eyes with the dew and he will regain his sight; and even if he no longer has eyeballs, he will receive new ones.”

“That is a fine secret,” said the wolf, “but mine also is not to be despised. In the royal capital the water has dried up, and the people there are now living almost on spirit alone; at least, they say so, but if things go on this way just a while longer, they will have to give up the ghost. All the same, they have water in plenty under their feet; they just don’t know it. In the middle of the cobbles in the marketplace there lies a grey boulder, and once it is lifted up a spring of water will shoot up out of the ground as high as a steeple. Oh, how happy the dwellers in the royal capital would be, and how wholesome it would be to them, if they had water again. But let neither of you tell them this, or I’ll bite the tongues from your mouths!”

“Nothing will be told, Brother Isengrim!” said Bruin, growling. “What I

know is this. For seven years the King's only daughter has been ailing and no doctor can help her, for no one knows what is the matter with her, however brilliant they all imagine themselves to be. Many a suggestion has, up to now, been tendered in secret by the King's Privy Counsellors, but nothing suitable has seen the light of day. The Princess's illness has become so grave that the King has promised to give her in marriage to the man who helps her, just to see her kept alive; but *no one* can help her, who does not know what I know."

"You're arousing our curiosity, most gracious King Bruin!" said the wolf, and Bruin growled, "Just be patient, you'll hear soon enough. You've learnt to wait a little, haven't you?" Then the bear fetched a deep breath for starters, before continuing: "The Royal Princess was supposed to throw a gold coin into the offertory box in the church, but at that time she was still very young and bashful and timid, and she felt ashamed in front of the crowd of people in the church, so she threw the gold coin rather clumsily and it fell into a crack beside the box. After that, she was taken with her illness, which will not end until the gold coin is pulled out and cast into the slit of the offertory box. Such a cure is child's play – someone needs only go there and seek the gold coin."

When the animals had thus imparted their secrets to one another, they rose up from their resting-place and went on their way; as for Hans, he was overjoyed at what he had heard. He hurriedly rubbed his eye-sockets with the heavenly dew, which had fallen by this time, and new, clear eyeballs grew there, and he saw the golden stars twinkling in the sky and the dark tops of the forest trees. Soon the day broke and Hans could see highway and byway, and he walked down the road with renewed vigour. In

several of the villages he passed through, he got by begging as much as he needed to still his reawakened hunger and thirst, and at length he arrived in a city where the water shortage was so severe that everyone drank wine and many kinds of schnapps which they called *liqueurs*. Hans had no money for liqueurs; he walked up to an innkeeper and asked her to give him a large glass of water. The innkeeper stared at him and chided: “Will you look at this rogue! Doesn’t even have the money to pay for a liqueur, and wants to quaff water! Does the monshure Lord Threadbare think that water just springs out of the ground like that, for nothing, for free? That it costs nothing? Oh, far from it! Wash your mouth out for talking about water; you can have wine or liqueur, but I can’t serve water, and certainly not such a big amount.”

“Is everyone here really so afflicted with hydromania as I’ve heard elsewhere?” asked Hans. “Honestly, what do you have aldermen and district councillors for? Is there no Moses in the city council to strike water from a rock? I shall soon cure your illness; I am a *springs* physician.”

These words were heard by several young municipal councillors who were drinking both liqueurs and champagne there. They did this solely because of the lack of water, for they would certainly not have done it otherwise, asking each other “What’s your poison?” and calling the champagne *equinoxalic acid* as they did²; surely no one would imbibe poison and such a kind of acid unless they were in the direst need. These young gentlemen crowded around Hans and hastily asked how he would

² The original has the unique compound, “Äquinoktialsäure” (equinoctial acid). In the 19th century, imitation champagne was made from rhubarb stalks, which are rich in oxalic acid. -*The SAGE Encyclopedia of Food Issues* ed. Ken Albala (Los Angeles: SAGE Publications, 2015), p. 1097.

begin to remedy the lack. “My most esteemed gentlemen,” said Hans, “if I am to put an end to the shortage in question here, then it is necessary that I first be engaged. Should I give you confidential counsel, then the allocation to me of a small Privy Counsellor’s salary to thank me – some four to six thousand dollars annually – would satisfy me. Then you gentlemen shall see that I will *get something done*, which is a boast not every Privy Counsellors can make.”

The young city councillors gave the tailor to understand that he must not make such cutting and needling remarks, they would not be tolerated in the spirited royal capital.

“Well I never!” Hans replied. “If a couturier may no longer make *cutting* or *needling* comments, that really takes the biscuit.”

The matter was now carefully deliberated in the district and the city council, and every voice was united in the cry: “Water at any price – before we wither altogether into sand!”

Hereupon the city council presented the dire situation of the city at large to the King, as well as the means to remedy the same, and asked His Majesty to be so gracious as to vouchsafe to have a Privy Council Decree drawn up for the foreign Springs Physician, whose pay would readily be defrayed from municipal funds. The King acceded, with paternal graciousness, to this petition and had the decree drawn up, however – made wiser by experience – with the reservation that it not come into force until sufficient water had been procured; anyway, it would not count for anything, for strangers had wandered into the city before now, making so many promises which had made water like so many old ships. Hans now betook himself to the marketplace, accompanied by a quickly appointed

Water Commission, saw the grey ashlar from a distance – told the Commission’s technicians: break up this stone, gentlemen! – and when this was done, a jet of spring water suddenly rushed up into the air, strong and powerful and steeple-high, and it poured out so much water that, in every merchant’s shop in the royal capital, the price of waterproof items doubled on the spot.



Loud did the praises of the water-doctor ring throughout the royal capital; the people came nigh to making him out to be a prophet, like the tailor Hans Bockhold of Leyden, and glorifying him in operas full of pomp and nonsense.³

³ A reference to *Le Prophète* (1849), an opera by Giacomo Meyerbeer (1791-1864) about the Anabaptist leader John of Leiden (Johan Beukelszoon, 1509-36). Bechstein would seem to be in the minority in his judgement; the opera was a great popular and critical success, like many of Meyerbeer’s productions in the 19th century.

On that same day, the new Lord Privy Counsellor, who had equipped himself in the intervening time with robes of state, a state carriage, and a body of servants, was called to Court, and he proudly drove to the Palace. The King spoke many cordial words to him and, in recognition of the service he had done the royal- and capital city, awarded him a handsome medal, to be worn on a moiré⁴ ribbon. The conversation very soon turned towards the Princess's illness, and the King asked the new Privy Counsellor if he, being a skilled water-doctor, perhaps considered a hot-springs treatment to be sanative for the Princess? "No, Your Majesty," replied the Privy Counsellor. "I occupy myself with water once only – no more. If Your Majesty allows me to partake of the honour of seeing Your Magnificence's daughter the Princess, I firmly believe that I shall discover the seat of her illness." – The King was exceedingly pleased to hear this, and he took the doctor to the sick Princess himself. The doctor took her pulse and saw that she was very beautiful. Then he said, "High and Mighty King, if the most Serene Princess is to recover her health, then this cannot happen through any earthly medicine, but only through help from Heaven; may Your Illustrious Highnesses permit that we have the invalid carried to the Court Church; there she is sure to recover." This suggestion was at once pronounced good by the King, for he was a very pious man, and he rejoiced to have gained such a pious new Privy Counsellor. In the church the physician had the Princess show him the offertory box, and looking around it, he found the gold coin in a crack. He gave this into the hand of the Illustrious Invalid and requested her to now throw it properly into the box. The Princess did this, and she instantly made a complete recovery and

⁴ A fabric, originally silk, with a rippled or "watered" appearance.

began to bloom like a rose. In such a state did the Privy Counsellor convey her to the King. Words cannot express the great delight that ensued. The Privy Counsellor rapidly became, one after the other, an Imperial Councillor, a mediatised Prince,⁵ a Count, a Prince – and went from the last to a bridegroom for the recuperated Princess. After the wedding, the newlyweds went on a tour of the land, and one of the villages they passed through was the one the Prince had recently walked out of as Hans. In front of the inn there was a knife grinder, who was grinding while his wife turned the wheel for him – and it was Peter and Liese, who had positively refused Peter at first but accepted him in the end because he swore to her that Hans would never see her again. Hans recognised Peter straightaway by his false face and called to the coachman, “Stop!” then called to the other, “Peter!”

Peter pricked up his ears – and asked what the Lord commanded?

“I have no command to give, Peter,” said Hans, “but that you should recognise me as that Hans whom you have helped to such dizzying heights of fortune. There in the forest, I, poor and eyeless as I was – eyeless because of you – found Blind Fortune as many a blind pigeon finds its peas. There, under a tree where I lay, it visited me. Here is a heap of money for you from the blind beggar who regained his sight and became rich! Fare well, and drive on, coachman!”

Peter stood there as one fallen from the clouds and stared after the state carriage for a long time, then he gave his wife the money to keep and said, “I too must thither – must also find Blind Fortune.” And Peter got ready at once and walked as swiftly as his legs could carry him to the place where

⁵ A Prince of the Holy Roman Empire whose sovereignty was purely nominal, having had his principality annexed to a more powerful one, but who retained his rank and some rights.

he had perpetrated the final faithless deed against Hans. A fox had been running ahead of him – it was standing at that place. Then a wolf came bounding up out of the distance. Peter rapidly turned around – and saw a bear trotting down the road towards him. Terror-stricken, Peter now climbed up the tree under which he had gouged out Hans's remaining eyeball.

“Traitors! Traitors! Traitors that you are!” barked the fox, howled the wolf, growled the bear, and each one accused the others of having blabbed the secret which all three of them had given their paw to the others to keep; they were very waspish and gave one another unflattering titles. Finally, the bear and the fox sided against the wolf, who initially seemed to the traitor and was to be hanged for it, and the fox swiftly twisted a rope and a noose from a fir-branch, the bear held the wolf tight, and the fox threw the noose over the latter's neck and drew the wriggling figure up into the air. The wolf stared upwards with glassy eyes, then he saw Peter sitting in the branches of the tree, and he howled: “O false, unjust world! He sits up there, he who betrayed our secrets!”

Now both the other animals looked up, letting the wolf drop to the ground, and the bear climbed up the tree and fetched Peter down. At the bottom he was received by the fox, who was so hopping mad that he instantly scratched out both his eyes. Then the wolf throttled him, and the bear squeezed him stone-dead, and finally the three of them gobbled him up, with not the least little bone of him left over.