

The Folk- and Fairy-Tales of Ludwig Bechstein: **Husband and Wife in the Vinegar-Jug**



Once upon a time there was a husband and wife, and they had lived together for ages and ages in a vinegar jug. In the end they grew weary of it, and the husband said to the wife: "It's your fault that we have to live in this sour vinegar jug, I wish to God we weren't here!" But the wife said, "No, it's *your* fault." And so they began to quarrel and to wrangle with one another, and the one chased the other around the vinegar jug. Then a Golden Bird chanced to come by the jug, and it asked, "What is the matter with the two of you?" "Well," said the wife, "we're weary of this vinegar jug and would just like to live like other people; we'd be quite content with that." Then the Golden Bird let them out of the vinegar jug, took them to a new cottage with a neat garden at the back, and said to them: "This is yours now! From now on, live together in harmony and content, and if you ever need me, you have only to clap your hands three times and call:

"Golden Bird in sunbeam bright! Golden Bird in Hall of Light!

Golden Bird day and night!"

and I'll be there."

With that the Golden Bird flew away, and the husband and wife were happy that they did not have to live in the sour vinegar jug any longer, and they took delight in their neat cottage and green garden. But this lasted only a short while, for when they had been living in the cottage a few weeks and had walked around the neighbourhood, they had seen the large and splendid farms there, with big stables, gardens, fields, and many servants and cattle. And they no longer took any pleasure in their tiny cottage and had grown quite weary of it, and one fine morning the two of them clapped their hands almost at the same time and called out:

“Golden Bird in sunbeam bright! Golden Bird in Hall of Light!

Golden Bird day and night!”

Suddenly the Golden Bird came flying in at the window and asked them what they wanted now?

“Oh,” they said, “the cottage really is far too small, if we only had one of those large, splendid farms, we’d be content with that.” The Golden Bird blinked a little with its peepers but said nothing, and it took the husband and wife to a large and splendid farm with many fields, and byres with cattle, and workers and maids, and gave them everything.

The husband and wife leapt with delight and could not contain their joy. And now they were contented and happy a whole year long and could not imagine anything better. But this feeling lasted no longer, not even a day, for they sometimes travelled into town and saw the beautiful large houses and the beautifully accoutred gentlemen and ladies taking the air, and they thought: Well, life in the town must be marvellous indeed, and you don’t have to do much or work much there; and the wife could not take her eyes

off the splendour and the luxurious living, and she said to her husband, “We want to live in the town too, you call the Golden Bird! We’ve been on the farm quite long enough.” But the husband said, “Wife, you call him!” In the end the wife clapped her hands three times and called out:

“Golden Bird in sunbeam bright! Golden Bird in Hall of Light!

Golden Bird day and night!”

Then the Golden Bird flew in at the window again and said, “Whatever do you want from me?” – “Oh,” said the wife, “we are tired of the farmer’s life, we would like to be townspeople and have lovely clothes and live in a large and splendid house like they do, and we’d be content with that.” The Golden Bird blinked again with its peepers but said nothing, and it took them to the finest house in the town where everything was decorated with a nonpareil finery, and it had wardrobes in which there hung, and chests of drawers in which there lay, clothes after the latest fashion. Now the husband and wife thought there could be nothing better nor finer in the world, and were beside themselves with rapture. Unfortunately, this too did not last long, they grew fed up again, and they said to each other: “If only we had it as good as nobles do! They live in magnificent palaces and castles and have coaches and horses, and servants with gold-edged coats stand on the coaches. Yes, now *that* would be the life; what we have now is a mere miserable trifle.” And the wife said, “Now it’s your turn to call the Golden Bird.” But for a long time, the man would not do this; finally, as his wife would not cease nagging and badgering him, he clapped his hands three times and cried out:

“Golden Bird in sunbeam bright! Golden Bird in Hall of Light!

Golden Bird day and night!”

Then the Golden Bird flew in at the window again and asked:

“Whatever do you want from me?” And the man said, “We’d like to become nobles, and we’d be content with that.” But then the Golden Bird blinked its eyes very sharply and said, “You insatiable people! Will you *never* have enough? I shall make you nobles – for all the good it will do you!” and he instantly gave them a beautiful and magnificent castle, coaches and horses and a goodly suite of servants. – So now they were nobles and they went for a stroll every day, with not a thought in their heads but of how to pass their days in happiness and idleness (except that they read the newspapers). One day they travelled to the capital to see a great festival. There were the King and Queen sitting in their gilded coach in gold-embroidered clothes, and before and behind and on both sides marshalls, courtiers, squires and soldiers were riding, and all the people waved their hats and handkerchiefs when the King and Queen drove past. Ah, how the husband and wife’s hearts beat with impatience! No sooner were they back home than they said, “Now we must become King and Queen, but after that we’ll stop.” And they both clapped their hands and called out at the top of their voices:

“Golden Bird in sunbeam bright! Golden Bird in Hall of Light!

Golden Bird day and night!”

Then the Golden Bird flew in at the window again and asked,

“Whatever do you want from me?” And they both answered, “We would like to become King and Queen.” But then the bird blinked its eyes dreadfully,

ruffled all its feathers, beat its wings and said, “You awful people, when will you ever have enough? I shall make you King and Queen as *well*, but that will not be the end of it, for you are never satisfied!”

So now they became King and Queen, and they had dominion over the entire land and kept a large household, and their ministers and courtiers had to fall down on their knees when they descried either of them. They also had every official throughout the land come successively into their presence, and they issued the strictest orders to them down from their throne. And all that was expensive and exquisite in every lord’s land had to be procured, until they were surrounded by a radiance and a richness beyond description. And yet they were still not satisfied and kept saying: “We *must* become something more!” Then the wife said, “Let us become Emperor and Empress.” – “No!” said the husband. “We’ll become Pope!” – “Oho! That isn’t enough!” the wife cried in her zeal. “We will rather be God!” No sooner had she finished speaking these words than a mighty tempest came and a large black bird, with flashing eyes that rolled like wheels of fire, flew in at the window and cried in a voice that shook the very foundations: “Thou shalt *vegetate* in the vinegar jug!”

Crash! all the splendour was history, and there sat the two of them, the husband and the wife, inside their narrow vinegar jug again; there they are sitting still, and there they can remain until the Day of Judgement.

This is a lesson for those who never can have enough.

