

The Folk- and Fairy-Tales of Ludwig Bechstein: **Ingratitude is the World's Reward**

Once upon a time there was a poor baker's journeyman who came into conflict with his master because he always made the rolls and cracknels too big for the master's liking, the master always wanting them to be unchristianly small. The journeyman was the most upright and honest fellow in the world, and he had procured many new customers for his master through his cheerfulness and through his diligence, but all of that availed him nought, and the master said: "I am the Master here; you may be King outside." The lad sighed, "Aye, aye, Master!

It's small the rolls will bide,
And I'll be King outside."

And he tied up his bundle and went on his way.

When the baker's journeyman had wandered for a while, he saw a traveller approaching him with heavy steps and a stooped gait, so he greeted him and asked him what he was and whither he was heading. The traveller was frank enough to openly admit what so many men would not acknowledge of themselves for all the tea in China, saying: "Ah, friend! I am a poor old ass. For a long time did I faithfully serve my master, a miller, lugging heavy sack after heavy sack, grain into the mill, flour out of the mill, receiving many blows here and many blows there, and in course of this I grew old and feeble, and because of that, the miller chased me away, for: Ingratitude is the World's Reward."



“I fared but little better than you, poor Long-Ears!” said the baker’s journeyman. “Come, let us travel together, Miller’s-Lion. Bakers and millers belong together, and a trouble shared is a trouble halved.”

The two travelling companions had not gone far together when they met with a dog who was whimpering pitifully, for he was cold and hungry at the same time. He lay by the wayside, barely able to rise to his feet, and looked at the two wanderers through dull but sincere eyes.

“It seems that you, too, are not living the best of times, Old Sultan, or whatever your name may be – you seem in truth to be an invalid; you look as if you’ve eaten your last loaf!” the baker said to the dog.

“Oh, if only you were speaking the truth!” sighed the dog, “if only a little piece of bread were baked for me, even if it were my last, to at least save me from dying of hunger! – For many years did I guard my master’s house and home, I saved his life, at the risk of my own, from the hands of a murdering robber; but now that my voice has grown weak and hoarse from years of barking, and my teeth are blunt, and I no longer catch the worm, but only Zs, my master has driven me away from his house and home with blows, for: Ingratitude is the World’s Reward.”

“You poor dog, you poor devil!” the baker’s journeyman commiserated with the dog, handing him a piece of bread. “Come, join our company, for birds of a feather flock together.”

Its strength revived by the bread, the dog joined the two wanderers.

Now as the three of them journeyed on, they espied on a side road, which ran from another village towards the main road, into which it came out, a strange couple coming walking along, and all three stopped dead in

their tracks in amazement. They were an old cat and an old cock who had barely a feather left in his tail. Both travellers were very weary and unable to walk quickly.

When the three travellers had exchanged suitably courteous greetings with the two who had fallen in their way, the cat, which looked very scrawny, and appearances did not lie, for it really was *extremely* scrawny, complained that it had caught all the mice in a woman's house with tremendous activity, bursting with diligence and zeal, but now that the mice were all gone and she, the cat, had grown old, the woman had got hold of the idea that a cat always lives on mousing alone and had not given her the least little bite to eat. And when she – the cat – had risked the attempt to nibble a little something in the milk-pan, driven solely by hunger and a dreadful thirst, whereupon, being caught in the aforementioned attempt by the woman, she had, in her terror and wholly unintentionally, knocked over the milk-pan, then the woman had fallen upon her, the poor, innocent cat, like a fury, and had hit out at her, first with the broom, and afterwards with the toasting-fork and the iron fire-tongs, so that Moggie had been able to save her life only by breaking through a window-pane, terribly lacerating her nose, ears and feet on the glass in the process. "Ah!" the cat concluded with a deep sigh, "Ingratitude is the World's Reward!"

Now when the cat had finished the narration of her sad ultimate fate, the cock began to speak, relating how he had been always awake and watchful as well as courageous, fearless and faithful in his farmyard, but because the henfolk no longer wished to lay eggs properly, from laziness and a hankering to rebel, and through no fault of his, the cock's, own, and

because the lazy farmhands had put the blame on him whenever they overslept, saying he no longer awakened them with his crowing for he himself slept too long, a young cock full of strength and spirit and fire had been procured who had promptly bitten him out of the yard and away from the hens, and the cook had said, “We can slaughter the old cock now; his flesh is indeed not fit to be eaten, being too tough, but he will at least be good for a tasty chicken soup.” – “When I heard that,” the cock mournfully concluded his narration, “I decided to go wandering, and not far from the village where I lived, I ran into my companion, the cat. We lamented our common sorrows to one another and often said with a sigh: Ingratitude is the World’s Reward!”

The good baker’s journeyman was very much moved by the sad fate of these animals, which bore some similarity to his, and he decided to hold fast to their company and see if he might perhaps have the opportunity to test if animals were not more grateful than humans, for he had once read a fairy-tale, entitled ‘The Grateful Beasts’, which he still remembered very clearly, and which had depicted the gratitude of several animals as opposed to that of man.

Now as the smaller animals were very unsure on their feet, the cock never, as a spurred rider, having gone on long hikes, the cat feeling intense pain in his lacerated paws, in which some splinters of glass still stuck, and the dog hurting in every bone in his body, so the baker asked the ass kindly if he might not let the dog ride on him, and the ass said, “Hee-haw – if you like. The dog is nowhere near as heavy as three sacks of grain, and not even so heavy as one; also, my master the miller always boasted, when he

had a hangover in the early morning after having drunk too much the evening before, that you had to take the hair of the dog – the hair of the dog was most salutary.”

Thus spoke the ass; the dog clambered onto his back, seated himself firmly, and laughed for the first time in a long while, saying:

“At home I always slept next to the horse, so now the proverb is true of me: He has come from the horse to the ass.”¹

“And now you will carry the cat,” the baker’s journeyman said to the dog, who was not so keen on the idea; he scraped behind his left ear with his right forepaw and replied:

“Are you not afraid that we shall agree like cat and dog?”

“No!” the baker’s journeyman said. “The two of you must behave nice and properly, for the proverb says: The cat gets on (with) the dog.” Then the cat took two leaps, one onto the donkey and the second onto the dog, and exclaimed with a laugh: “As the saying goes, If you can get over the dog (days), you can get over anything!”²

Now the cock also wanted to mount – the cat – but she arched her back horribly and said, “Nowhere is that written, and there is moreover no proverb in existence that connects the cock with the cat.”

“Just do it, and – if only for my sake!” the baker urged.

“Fine, I will do so, but under the following three conditions of peace: First of all, he must comport himself with the utmost propriety, for I am an

¹ He has come down in the world; He has gone from midshipman to powder-monkey.

² *Kommt man über den Hund, so kommt man auch über den Schwanz* =It is idle to swallow the cow and choke on the tail; Who can do more can do less. The meaning is: When you have accomplished the most difficult part of a task, what remains is plain sailing; or, When you have accomplished the most difficult part of a task, there is no point in not seeing it through to the end.

animal who loves cleanliness above all; secondly, he must not claw me, or I shall claw him back, for it is written: As you do unto me, I shall do unto you. Thirdly, he must not take it into his head to crow, for his song offends my delicacy and wounds my nerves. It would be a completely different kettle of fish if he, the cock, knew how to sing as delightfully and beautifully as I, particularly on moonlit nights in March and May, on which even the nightingales, praised to the skies though they are, fall silent and listen to me lost in admiration – which is a universally known fact.”

“Hee-haw!” cried the ass. “That is quite correct. *Anch’io sono* – I too am a singing virtuoso, but the nightingale is an envious bird, as a famous German poet by the name of Bürger has previously declared, for he wrote:

Now, many asses think, I’ve found,
That nightingales should cart around
The sacks that donkeys tote each day.
So are they right? It’s hard to say.
But nightingales – of this one thing
I’m sure – don’t think an ass should sing.

And they will undoubtedly think the same way of the cats.”

After these dialogues, the peace treaty was established, following the proverb: Union is strength – to the effect that the ass should carry the dog, the dog the cat, and the cat the cock, but only on their backs, not on their heads, and it was amusing to see how the *four* conducted themselves with *one* accord.

In the meantime, night came; hunger and thirst had come to the travelling companions long before, but far and wide there was no sign of

any hospitable roof offering sojourn and refreshment; the road led through an inhospitable forest. Finally, the cat pricked up her ears and cried: "I hear a noise in the distance that almost sounds like the merriment of a feast." Then the dog snuffed, its nose in the air, and said, "Yes, I can smell the roast!" and the ass chimed in: "I can already taste the delicious evening meal and the sweetness of the night's rest!" – "Friends!" exclaimed the baker's journeyman, "That is all fine and good, I strongly feel your pleasant sensations, but the cat's *hearing*, the dog's *smell*, the ass's presentient *taste* and my *feeling* are no use to use if we do not see whither we should turn our steps."

When the cock heard these words, he flew off the cat's back onto a tree, and glad to be allowed to crow again, he crowed lustily.

"Cock-a-doodle-doo! I see a house in which all the windows are brightly lit, and in which a feast is surely being held! Cock-a-doodle-doo!"

"Very well!" cried the baker's journeyman, "We shall turn our steps thither!" and the cock quickly occupied once more the high position it had previously claimed on the cat's arched back, like an ape on a camel, and Master Baldwin, the ass, trotted gently with his animal pyramid towards the house that the cock had seen, which lay in the heart of a deep and desolate wasteland, surrounded by rugged forest and steep cliffs – a grim and eerie place.

This house was a lonely forest-inn, inhabited only by an innkeeper, and inside one knew what one sometimes does not know quite exactly, namely who is the cook and who the waiter, because the innkeeper united both of these dignities in his own person.

But when someone is seriously hungry, he does not care whether a house is creepy or cosy, but walks on straight towards it. Now, a feast really was being celebrated in this house: the foxes were holding a wedding there and were having a high old time of it; there was no lack of roast meats, of all kinds, or of other tasty treats, or of merriment all round. But what a fright ensued when the company of wanderers suddenly entered the banquet-hall, right in the midst of the general assembly of sojourners at the wedding-feast! – Everyone took to their heels, through doors and windows; even the host fled, for he thought that the Devil himself had come in the form of a grotesque monster or fabulous creature, and the foxes took the baker's man to be a wild huntsman.

Behind the house was a truly horrid place where the foxes generally wished one another good night, and they did so again this night, but with a quite particular sadness of spirit, and dispersed among the bushes; the innkeeper, however, had no idea what to do with himself outside his house – but all the better did his five uninvited guests know what to do with themselves inside, namely, to eat to their hearts' content and make themselves quite at home, and when they had drunk and eaten to satiety, each guest sought a sleeping place that was suited to him. The baker's journeyman lay down in the innkeeper's bed, the cat chose the hearth, the dog the threshold of the chamber in which his guardian was sleeping, the cock climbed up the henhouse steps, and the donkey trotted deliberately towards the open stable; and every one of them, in his particular place, was very comfortable indeed.

But now the innkeeper came creeping up, wanting to see the state of

his house, if it was actually still standing, and if an agreement and understanding could not be reached with the Evil One, who had taken it into possession. However, when the innkeeper stepped into his yard, the cock crowed; this awoke the dog, and when the host walked into the hallway, the former bit him good and deep in the leg; the innkeeper took flight into the parlour, where the cat leapt at him, hissing, and scratched him – the host hurriedly fled and sought refuge in the stable, where the ass let fly behind him and caught the innkeeper, hurting him badly, so he ran away again and bewailed his lot to the last foxes who remained in the vicinity of his house.



Now when day had dawned, the baker woke up, and the animals told him what kind of a rumpus there had been in the night with them and the innkeeper, and how badly treated he had been by them. The baker censured this hostile behaviour towards the rightful proprietor of the house in the forest, and he dispatched the dog to seek the innkeeper and bring him over. Now when the host appeared, shaking and trembling, the baker's journeyman politely apologised for all that had occurred, saying he had come with his animals without the slightest hostile intention and no one had needed to run away. The baker was to be answerable for the innkeeper

continuing to run the quiet forest-inn, but, for the sake of the cock, the latter must henceforth forbid the house to the foxes, for the cock must remain completely undisturbed and be free to crow or not crow according to his fancy, as a duly appointed emeritus. The ass was to receive an allowance of hay and an allowance of oats in the stable, and good straw for litter in case he wished to roll around, and also a green meadow for walking in. The cat was to keep mice and rats, by means of her dignified manner, at a suitably respectful distance from the house, and dine on bread rolls and milk every day. As for the dog, he was to, he had to, lie in the Sun and speak with the Moon for as long as he liked. The baker would work for everyone, baking the bread, helping the host to brew beer and to drink beer, as well as tending the kitchen garden and handling the cooking. All parties involved were well satisfied with this. To commemorate their journey and the newly-concluded alliance, the baker's journeyman planted in the house- and kitchen garden reed mace and spoonwort, cockscomb, cat's foot, hound's tongue, and donkey-ear,³ and from that time on they all lived together happily and forgot the world's base reward – base ingratitude.

³ The puns in the original have been preserved without injury to the meaning, with the exception of the final example: "Eselsgurken" (Lit: *donkey cucumber*) is "squirting cucumber," not "donkey-ear."