

The Folk- and Fairy-Tales of Ludwig Bechstein: **Little Broomstick**

Once upon a time there lived a merchant who had three daughters, of whom the two elder ones were proud and haughty, but the youngest, even though she far surpassed her sisters in beauty, was modest and demure. She dressed simply and so, unknowingly, accentuated her beauty more than they were able to do with the most sumptuous finery. Annie, as the merchant's youngest daughter was called, had one single bosom friend who was very poor but just as beautiful as virtuous; she was the daughter of a broom-maker, and therefore old and young alike just called her Little Broomstick. Both girls were as one heart and soul; they entrusted their small secrets to each other, and between them all class distinctions had fallen away. This made the two other sisters very angry, but Annie let them rail and loved her Little Broomstick none the less for it.

One day the merchant was ready to undertake a journey into distant parts, even though the year had already run most of its course. He asked his daughters what they wished him to bring them back. The eldest said, "Bring me back a golden necklace!", the second, "Bring me back a pair of earrings, so pretty as to make me the envy of all women!" The youngest said she had no wish, as her father in his goodness had already provided for her; but when the merchant pressed her, she answered with a smile: "Well, then bring me three roses which have grown on one stem." She was convinced that her father would not find this in the midst of winter. He kissed her for being so modest and began his journey.

He was already on his way back home when he remembered the presents he intended to take to his daughters. A golden necklace and a pair of splendid earrings were soon found, but not so the three roses for Annie.

The father had made up his mind to buy some other expensive present for his favourite when he suddenly found himself, to his astonishment, before a green enclosure; and after walking through a wide gateway he came into a large and blooming garden which adjoined a magnificent castle. Without, snow lay on the ground, but in the garden the trees blossomed, nightingales sang in the bushes, and at length he saw even a rosebush in bloom and, on one of its branches, three of the prettiest half-opened buds. The merchant was delighted to think that he would now be able to fulfil Annie's wish, and he broke the branch off. No sooner was this done than a monstrous beast with an ugly long snout, low-hanging ears, and matted fur and a tail, was standing before him, and it laid its paws, which were armed with long, sharp claws, on his shoulders. The merchant was scared to death, and his terror increased when the beast began to speak and threatened him with death for his trespass. The merchant pleaded, telling the end to which the roses were meant, and the beast replied: "Your youngest daughter must be a true pearl of her sex; well then, if you promise me to give me her hand in marriage in seven months' time, you shall return alive to your family." Deeply shocked as the merchant was at this unreasonable proposal, he promised everything nevertheless, in the fear of his heart, all the while thinking of how he could deceive the monster.

The merchant returned to his family and handed out the presents, but he was miserable and melancholic, and one could tell that some heavy care was weighing on his heart. Annie pressed him with pleas to reveal to her the cause of his heartache, but he had shift to excuses; he had discovered the secret only to his two elder daughters, who rejoiced at it in

the malice of their minds. Annie was hardly allowed to leave the house, so that her father could always keep an eye on her. She only visited Little Broomstick from time to time.

One day, the seventh month having just passed, she was together with Little Broomstick again when an equipage halted before the door and a silent servant handed the merchant a note on which nothing was written but the words: "Fulfil your promise!" The merchant started, but regained his composure and sent for Little Broomstick. The girl came, suspecting no evil; the merchant pointed at her, she was lifted up into the carriage, and off it went at a rattling gallop.

However, the monster was well aware of the deception when Little Broomstick was presented to him; he ordered that the girl be returned at once and the right one brought back. The coach halted once again before the merchant's house, and when Little Broomstick alighted Annie threw her arms around her neck to give her friend a heartfelt greeting. But she was instantly seized and pushed into the coach, which drove off with its booty as swift as an arrow.

As you may suppose, Annie was terribly shocked, but she soon regained her composure, and when she was received with deference, albeit in dumb show, in the strange, beautiful castle, she forgot her anxiety. Silent servants brought her the most exquisite dishes and showed her to a bedchamber where a dazzlingly white four-poster bed invited her to rest. She soon abandoned herself to the arms of sleep, after having said her prayers; however, when she awoke, she was horrified to see a loathsome shaggy monster lying beside her; but as it was quiet and still, she let it be; it

withdrew from the bedroom, and Annie had time to reflect on her adventure. The ugly beast gradually became her sleeping companion, and she grew ever less afraid of it; it snuggled up to her familiarly, Annie stroked its shaggy fur, and she even suffered it to touch her lips with its long cold snout. This lasted for four weeks, then one night the beast did not come. Annie could not sleep for worry and anxiety about what might have happened to the beast, whom she had come to hold dear. When she was walking in the garden the next morning, she saw, on the verge of the pond which served for bathing, the beast lying, stretched out; it did not stir a muscle and exhibited all the marks of death. Then such a bitter pain shot through her breast that she wept at the demise of the poor beast. But no sooner had her tears begun to flow than the monster turned into a surpassingly handsome youth, who rose up before her, pressed her hand to his breast and said: "You have delivered me from a dreadful enchantment. I was supposed to follow my father's will in wedding a wife I did not love; I steadfastly refused, and in his fury my father had an enchantress turn me into a monster, and a monster I was to remain until such time as a pure maiden would love me in spite of my hideous form and shed tears for me. You, with your angelic heart, have done it, and I cannot thank you sufficiently; but if you will become my wife, I shall repay what you have done for me, with love." Annie gave him her hand and he took her to wife; the deathly silent castle now awoke to bustling life. Joy reigned everywhere and the young husband and wife lived in blissful happiness. Now, it had been stipulated that the young wife was not to long to return to her father's house within a period of one year; yet she received a mirror in which she could see everything that

happened in the circle of her family and friends. Annie looked closely into the mirror and saw her father in great heaviness of heart while her sisters, on the other hand, were cheerful and in good spirits. She also saw Little Broomstick, and how she mourned for her lost friend. But at length, she neglected to look into the mirror for some time, and when she did look in again, she saw her father on his deathbed and her sisters in the next room among a merry company. This greatly distressed the good daughter, and she confided her sorrow to her husband, who comforted her with these words: "Your father will not die; in my garden there grows a plant whose sap can call back fleeing vital spirits. Your year is nigh at an end; then we shall fetch your father, and you shall not part from him again."

Annie was delighted at this, and when the year was up the married couple drove with a dazzling entourage to Annie's home town. The two elder sisters almost burst with envy and vexation, while the father regained his health from sheer delight at a stroke of bad fortune having turned out for the best. The sap mentioned by the Prince restored him to health and full strength. Little Broomstick was also delighted, and Annie was the same old friend to her. She and the merchant accompanied Annie to the Prince's castle.

Annie was of a forgiving temper, and although she had been so grievously wronged by her sisters, she wished to share her good fortune with them nonetheless. To this end, she sent for them and showed them all her riches. At the sight of all the splendour, the sisters became even more infuriated and they decided on the death of their fortunate sibling. One day, when Annie was bathing, they ducked her under the waves until she

drowned. But no sooner was this done than a tall female figure rose up before the sisters, her eyes flashing fury at them. She touched the dead girl with a rod, and she came back to life. "I am the enchantress who formerly laid the spell upon the Prince," the tall figure said, "I have seen the excellence of your heart and taken you under my protection. These wretched girls killed you; now you decide their fate!" Annie asked that they be shown mercy, but the enchantress shook her head, saying: "They must die, for you will never be safe from their malice, and once they have been punished, my power will be at an end." – "Then do with them what you will!" sighed Annie. "Then they shall be turned into pillars, so to remain until such time as a man falls in love with them, and that will never happen." She touched the sisters with her hand, and they were instantly transformed into two stone pillars, which stand in the garden of the magnificent castle to this day, for no man has yet taken it into his head to fall in love with cold, heartless stone.

Good Little Broomstick remained Annie's truest friend and is sharing her good fortune even now, if the two of them have not died in the meantime.