

The Folk- and Fairy-Tales of Ludwig Bechstein: **Millet-Thief**

In a town there lived a very rich merchant whose house had a large and splendid garden, a portion of which was sown with millet. Now one day, when the merchant was strolling around in his garden – it was springtime, and the seedlings were looking fresh and strong – he saw, to his great annoyance and irritation, that a patch of his millet-seedlings had been torn up by some impudent thieving hand the night before, and this particular plot of his garden, in which he sowed millet every year, was especially dear to him, as people sometimes have an exclusive predilection for one thing. He decided to catch the thief and then punish him severely, or give him over to justice. Therefore he summoned his three sons, Michael, George, and John, and said, “Last night there was a thief in our garden and he tore up a patch of my millet seeds, which vexes me greatly. This trespasser must be caught, and he’ll pay for it! You, my sons, shall now keep watch through the night, one after another, and whoever catches the thief shall receive a handsome reward from me.” The eldest, Michael, kept watch the first night; he took with him several loaded pistols and a sharp sabre, as well as some food and drink, wrapped himself in a warm cloak, and sat down behind a blooming elder bush, where he soon fell into a deep and sound sleep. When he awoke to broad daylight, an even larger patch of millet seeds had been torn up than on the previous night. And so when the merchant came into the garden and saw this, and realised that his son, instead of keeping watch and catching the thief, had slept all night, he became even angrier, and scolded and mocked him as a fine watchman, who might have been stolen himself, together with his pistols and his sabre, for all he cared!

On the second night, George kept watch; together with the weapons

his brother had worn on his person the night before he took along a cudgel and strong cords. But the good watchman George also fell asleep and found the next morning that the millet-thief had been lustily pulling out once again. The father was absolutely furious and said, "When the third watchman has done sleeping, the millet seed will all be gone to the Devil, and then there'll be no more need to watch!"

On the third night it was John's turn. In spite of all persuasion, he took no weapons with him, yet he had secretly furnished himself with tried-and-tested weapons against sleep: he had sought out thistles and thorns, and that evening, when he proceeded to his watching-place, he heaped them up before him. Whenever he began to nod off, the thorns pricked his nose and he woke up at once. When midnight came, he heard a tramping, which came nearer and nearer, then reached the millet-seedlings, and John heard a very vigorous grazing. Stay there, he thought, I'll catch you! and taking a rope out of his bag, he softly pushed back the thorns and carefully crept towards the thief. When he came up to him – who would have thought it? – the thief was – a delightful little pony. John was highly delighted; he had no difficulty in catching the thief, and the animal willingly followed him to the stable, which John securely fastened. And now he could leisurely lie down in his bed and sleep his fill. Early the next morning, when his brothers rose ready to go down into the garden, they were astonished to see John lying sound asleep in his bed. So they woke him and mocked him with all kinds of taunts, saying that he was the best watchman, who had not even lasted the night at his post. But John said, "Just hold your peace, I'll show you the millet-thief, I warrant." And his father and his brothers had to

follow him to the stable, where the marvellous pony was standing, and no one could say where it had come from or whom it belonged to. It was delightful to behold, of a delicate and slender build, and silver-white all over. The merchant was overjoyed and gave his valiant John the pony as his reward, and John accepted it with joy and named it Millet-Thief.

Soon after this, the brothers heard that a beautiful Princess was enchanted in a castle on the summit of a glass mountain, which was so slippery that no one could clamber up to the top. But the man who could successfully ride up the mountain, and then around the castle three times, would free the beautiful Princess from the spell and receive her to wife. No end of suitors had already tried the mountain ride, but every one had precipitated down and they now lay dead all around.

This wondrous tale resounded throughout the land, and the three brothers were also seized with the desire to try their luck, to ride to the glass mountain, and – if possible – to win the fair Princess. Michael and



George bought themselves strong young horses and had their hooves properly roughshod, while John saddled his little Millet-Thief, and so they set out on their ride for fortune. They soon reached the glass mountain, and the eldest rode first, but alas! – his steed slipped, tumbled down with him, and both horse and man did not rise again. The second rode, but alas! – his steed

slipped, tumbled down with him, and both horse and man did not rise. Now John rode, and with a clip clop clip clop clip clop – they were up at the top, and again clip clop clip clop clip clop and they had gone three times around the castle, as if Millet-Thief had ridden this dangerous path a hundred times before. Now they were before the castle-door; it opened and the beautiful Princess stepped forth; she was dressed all in silk and gold, and she joyfully stretched out her arms towards John. And he swiftly dismounted from his pony and rushed to embrace the fair Princess and, with her, his exceedingly great good fortune.

And the Princess turned to the pony, caressed it, and said, “Well, you little rogue, why did you run away from me, preventing me from enjoying the single hour of the night that was allowed me to tarry down below on the green earth? For you were not here to carry me down the glass mountain and back up again. Now you shall never leave us more.” – And so John became aware that his little Millet-Thief was the enchanted pony of his divinely beautiful Princess. His brothers recovered from their fall, but they did not see John again, for he lived happily, and removed from all earthly cares, with his angel in the enchanted castle on the glass mountain; and not a single soul ever again found the way to this mountain, for the spell was broken and the Princess released from her enchantment through her clever little steed, which had borne to her the right liberator and consort.

