

The Folk- and Fairy-Tales of Ludwig Bechstein: **Quaverling**



Once upon a time there was a poor day-labourer who had two children, a son by the name of Abraham and a daughter called Christiania. Both children were yet very young when their father died and benevolent souls had to take care of them to save them from perishing, so poor were they. The girl bloomed into a marvellous beauty who had no equal far and wide. Abraham grew into a sturdy youth and, through the agency of a patron, became servant to a wealthy Count. But before he parted from his sister he had a good friend paint her portrait, and he took this with him, for he loved her dearly. The Count was very well satisfied with Abraham, yet he often noticed him taking a woman's portrait out from his bosom and kissing it, and this astonished him because Abraham was quiet and modest, and rarely went forth from the house. Therefore he asked him if the portrait represented his beloved, and when Abraham said it was his sister, he looked at it more closely. "If your sister is so beautiful," said the Count, "she is certainly worthy of being a nobleman's wife!" "She is far more beautiful still!" replied Abraham. The Count was delighted and secretly sent his old wet-nurse to the place where Christiania lived, to bring her to his castle.

The nurse drew up in a four-horse carriage before the house of

Christiania's foster-parents, gave her greetings from her brother, and said she was to travel with her to the comital castle. Christiania, who ardently longed to see her brother again, was willing to obey. Now, she possessed a little dog that she had once saved from drowning, its name was Quaverling, and it clung to her most devotedly. This little dog leapt into the carriage beside Christiania. However, the nurse had made a wicked plan. When they were driving along the steep bank of a large river, she drew Christiania's attention to the dories which played in the blue waves, and when Christiania ingenuously looked through the coach door, she cast her down into the river while the coach drove on. The nurse had a cousin who was already an old maid, and they had previously arranged that the cousin should wait at a certain place; and when the coachman was watering his horses she secretly climbed into the coach. She wore a thick veil and the nurse instructed her to tell the Count she had taken a vow not to lift her veil before half a year was over.

The veiled lady was led before the Count, who implored her to raise her veil, but she steadfastly refused, making the Count all the more eager. He had trust in the honesty of his Abraham, who had described his sister as being far more beautiful than her portrait. He therefore offered to elevate her to be his wife. A priest was called and the wedding rites performed. After this ceremony the lady no longer refused to lift her veil, but how shocked was the Count when he saw a face of faded beauty instead of one fresh with youth! He fell into a raging fury and had Abraham thrown into a prison, in spite of his asseverations that this lady was not his sister; and the deceptive portrait he had hung up in the chimney.

One day, a strange apparition came to the servant who slept in the Count's anteroom. A white figure stood at the foot of his bed rattling its chains, and it spoke in a soft, lamenting tone: "Quaverling, Quaverling!" At this the little dog, who had hitherto been allowed to stay in the castle, crept out from under the bed, where it had been sleeping, and replied, "My dearest Christiania!" "Where is my brother, Abraham?" the figure asked. "He lies cruelly confined in chains and fetters!" the little dog answered. "Where is my portrait?" – "It hangs in smoke." – "Where is the old lady-in-waiting?" – "She lies in the Count's arms." – "Heaven have mercy! Now I shall come twice more, and if I am not delivered, I shall be lost to this life." And then the figure dissolved like mist. The servant thought he had been dreaming and said nothing to his lord about the apparition. But the following night the same scene was enacted at the foot of his bed, save that the figure rattled her chains more than on the previous occasion and said she would now come only one more time. This time, the servant went on sure ground, and he revealed the occurrence to his lord, who became thoughtful and decided to eavesdrop on the apparition. At the midnight hour he stood behind the bedroom door, which was left ajar, and he listened.



Finally, he saw the white figure suddenly appear in the darkness of the anteroom, and he heard it rattle its chains and say: "Quaverling, Quaverling!" and the little dog answered, "My dearest Christiania!" – "Where is my brother, Abraham?" – "He is cruelly confined and lies in chains and

fetters.” – “Where is my portrait?” – “It hangs in smoke.” – “Where is the old lady-in-waiting?” – “She lies in the Count’s arms.” – “Heaven have mercy!”

Then the Count swiftly opened the door, grasped the apparition and found himself holding a heavy chain which had that moment slipped off the figure. The ghostly apparition had become a fair lady who was smiling at him, and although she bore a similarity to that portrait, she far surpassed it in beauty. The Count was delighted, and he asked her to unriddle the mystery. Now Christiania recounted how the old nurse had maliciously cast her into the water, but the nixies had caught her with their green veils and taken her to their subterranean palace. She was to have become one of them, but she had refused, and in the end the nixies had allowed her to appear in the Count’s antechamber for three nights. If she was not freed of her chains on one of these three occasions, then she was irrevocably bound to become a nixie. The Count was as delighted as he was astonished at this account. Abraham was released from imprisonment and raised to the Count’s favour; the wicked nurse was thrown into the same dungeon, and her cousin was whipped out of the castle; Christiania’s portrait was removed from the chimney and the Count wore it on his breast, while Christiania herself became his wife. Quaverling coaxingly licked her mistress’s hand, but when she promised the little dog, with caresses, that it would now want for nothing, it changed into a beautiful princess who told the astonished Christiania her story. She had been bewitched by an evil enchantress, and Christiania’s deliverance had also delivered her.