

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

Once upon a time a poor couple lived in a village, and they had a little house and only the one daughter, who was wondrously fair and good beyond measure. She did the work, the sweeping, the washing, the spinning, and the sewing of seven people, and was as pretty as seven girls put together, for which reason she was called Sevenfair. But she felt ashamed because people always stared at her in wonder at her beauty, and on Sundays when she went to church – for Sevenfair was also as devout as seven others, and that was the most beautiful thing about her – she kept her face veiled. She was seen thus one day by the King's son, who took pleasure in her noble figure and her splendid stature, as slim as a young pine-tree; but he was sorry that he could not see the face behind the veil, and he asked one of his servants: "How comes it that we do not see Sevenfair's face?" "That comes," the servant replied, "from Sevenfair being so demure." Thereupon the King's son said, "If Sevenfair is so demure with her beauty, then I shall love her as long as I live and shall marry her. Go over and take her this golden ring of mine and tell her I need to talk with her, she is to come to the great oak this evening." The servant did as he was ordered, and Sevenfair, believing that the King's son wished to bespeak a piece of work, went to the great oak, where the Prince told her that he loved



her for her great demureness and virtue and wished to take her to wife; but Sevenfair said, "I am a poor girl and you are a rich Prince, your father would be very angry if you were to take me to wife." But the Prince kept pressing

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his suit, and in the end she said she would consider it, he should allow her a few days for deliberation. But the King's son could not possibly wait a few days; on the very next day he sent Sevenfair a pair of silver shoes with a request to meet him under the great oak once again. And when she came, he asked straightaway if she had made up her mind. She told him she had not had any time to reflect, there was so much household work to be done, and she was, after all, a poor girl and he a rich Prince, and his father would be very angry if he, the Prince, were to take her to wife. But the Prince pleaded anew, and kept pleading, until Sevenfair promised to certainly consider his suit and to tell her parents the Prince's intention. When the next day came, the King's son sent her a dress made entirely of gold brocade, and once again sent a request that she come to the oak. But when Sevenfair came there and the Prince asked again, she had to again express her distress at having once more had far too much to do the whole day long, and no time to take thought, and at not having been able to talk of this matter to her parents; and she repeated one more time what she had already told the Prince twice, that she was poor but he was rich, and he would only incense his father. But the Prince told her that all that signified nothing; just let her become his wife, and she would become queen later. And when she saw the sincerity of the Prince's intentions towards her, she finally said yes, and now she came every evening to the oak and to the King's son – and the King was not to learn anything of this. But at Court there was an ugly old lady-in-waiting who lay in wait for the King's son, discovered his secret, and told it to the King. Enraged, the King sent out servants to set fire to the house in which Sevenfair's parents lived, so that

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she would burn in the blaze. But she did not; as soon as she noticed the fire, she leapt out of the house directly into an empty well, but her parents – the poor old folk burnt to death in their house.

So now Sevenfair sat at the bottom of the well, grieving and weeping bitterly, but eventually she could not bear it down there any longer, so she crawled up out of the well, found some usable items in the rubble of the house, converted them into money, and used this to buy men's clothes. Then she went to the King's Court as a brisk lad and asked to be engaged as a servant. When the King asked the young servant his name, he received the answer, "Misfortune!", and the young servant pleased the King so well that he took him on at once, and soon even came to prefer him to all his other servants.



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When the King's son learned that Sevenfair's house had been burned down, he became despondent, believing no otherwise than that Sevenfair had died in the flames; and the King believed this also, and he would have his son now, at last, marry a Princess, so he made him woo the daughter of a neighbouring King. The whole Court and all the servants had to go in procession to the wedding, and there was no one sadder than Misfortune; it weighed on his heart like a stone. He rode along behind the tail of the procession, and sang a lament in a clear voice;

“*Sevenfair* I used to be,

Then *Misfortune* came to me.”

The Prince heard this in the distance and was struck by the song, so he halted and asked: “Now who is that singing so beautifully?” – “That will be my servant, Misfortune,” the King replied, “whom I have lately accepted into my service.” And they heard the song once more:

“*Sevenfair* I used to be,

Then *Misfortune* came to me.”

And the Prince again asked if that were really none other than the King's servant, and the King said he knew no differently.

Now when the procession had almost reached the castle of the new bride, the lovely clear voice rang out once again:

“*Sevenfair* I used to be,

Then *Misfortune* came to me.”

At this the Prince did not wait a moment longer but spurred on his horse and rode like an officer at full gallop down the length of the entire procession until he came to Misfortune and recognised Sevenfair. Then he

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gave her a friendly nod and raced back to the head of the procession, and rode into the castle. Now when all the guests and all the attendants were assembled in the great hall and the betrothal was about to proceed, the Prince said to his future father-in-law: "Lord King, before I am ceremonially betrothed to the Princess Your Daughter, be so good as to solve a small conundrum for me. I possess a beautiful cabinet, to which I lost the key some time ago, so I bought myself a new one; but soon afterwards I found the old one again. So tell me now, Lord King, of which key should I make use?" – "Why, the old one again, of course!" replied the King. "What is old should be held in honour and not lose precedence to what is new." – "Very well, Lord King," the Prince answered, "so do not be angry with me if I cannot wed the Princess Your Daughter, for she is the new key and the old one is there." And he took Sevenfair by the hand and led her to her father, saying, "Look, father, this is my bride." But the old King exclaimed, in shock and astonishment, "Oh dear son, but that's Misfortune, my servant!" – And many courtiers cried, "Lordy, but this *is* a misfortune!" – "No!" said the King's son. "There is no misfortune here, but there is Sevenfair, my dear bride." And he took his leave of the assembly and led Sevenfair to his finest castle as his lady and wife.