

The Folk- and Fairy-Tales of Ludwig Bechstein: **Snow White**



Once upon a time there was a Queen who had no children, and she wished for one because she was so very lonely. Now one day when she was sitting at her embroidery and looking at the frame of dark ebony, while it snowed outside and snowflakes fell from the sky, she was so lost in thought that she sharply pricked her finger, causing three drops of blood to fall onto the white snow; and then she could not help returning to the thought that she was without child. “Ah!” sighed the Queen, “if only I had a child as red as blood, as white as snow, as black as ebony!”

And after a time this Queen had a child, a baby girl. She had a body as white as snow and her cheeks bloomed like blood-red roses and her hair was as black as ebony. The Queen rejoiced, named the child Snow White, and soon afterwards she died. As the King had now become a widower but did not wish to remain one, so he took another wife, who was indeed a woman of a fine presence and great beauty, but was also full of

unspeakable pride, and so vain withal that she held herself to be the most beautiful woman in the whole wide world. She was particularly induced to vanity by a magic mirror, which invariably said to her when she looked in it and asked:

“Mirror, mirror on the wall,

Who is the fairest of them all?”

“You, my Queen, are the fairest of them all.”

And yet the mirror did not flatter, but told the truth as mirrors do.

Little Snow White, the Queen’s stepdaughter, grew up to be the most beautiful Princess there could possibly be, and became far lovelier than the beautiful Queen. When Snow White was seven years old, the Queen asked her faithful mirror once again:

“Mirror, mirror on the wall,

Who is the fairest of them all?”

The mirror did not answer as usual, but replied:

“My Majesty, you are the fairest here,

But Snow White is a thousand times fairer, I fear.”

These words gave the Queen a deathly shock, and she felt as if a knife were being turned in her breast; and so her heart turned against innocent Snow White, who could not help her excessive beauty. And because her wicked, envious heart gave her no rest, neither by day nor by night, she summoned her huntsman and said: “You are to take the child, Snow White, into the depths of the forest and kill her there. Bring me her liver and lungs as a mark that you have carried out my command!”

And so poor Snow White had to follow the huntsman into the wild

wood, and in a deep thicket he drew his weapon, ready to run the child through. Snow White wept piteously and implored him to let her live, for she had done no wrong, and the tears and the lamentation of the innocent child touched the huntsman to the heart, so that he thought to himself: Why should I burden my conscience by murdering this pretty, innocent child? No, I will rather let her go! If the wild beasts devour her, as they probably will do, the Queen may answer for it before God. And then he let Snow White go whither she pleased, and caught a young deer, cut its throat, disembowelled it, and brought its liver and lungs to the wicked Queen. She took these and fried them in salt and grease, and consumed them, and was pleased that she, as she supposed, was now once more the one and only fairest in the land. In the forest, Snow White soon became terribly afraid as she walked through the thicket so desperately alone, as she felt the hard, sharp stones for the first time, as the thorns tore her clothes, and, above all, when she first set eyes on wild beasts. But the wild beasts did her no harm at all; they looked at Snow White then passed into the bushes. And the girl walked all day long and passed over seven mountains.

In the evening Snow White came to a little cottage in the heart of the forest, and she went in to take her rest, for she was very tired, as well as being very hungry and very thirsty. Inside the little, little cottage everything was really too cute and dainty, and very clean to boot. There was a little table in the room that was covered with a snow-white cloth, and on it there lay seven little plates with a small portion of vegetables and bread on each one, seven little spoons, seven pairs of little knives and little forks, and there stood seven little goblets. And against the wall there were seven little

beds, all with pristine white covers. Hungry Snow White now ate from the seven little plates, only a very little bite from each, and drank a little drop of wine from each little goblet. Then she lay down in one of the seven little beds to rest, but the little bed was too small, and she had to try out another one, but none of them was the right size – until in the end she came to the seventh one, it was just right, so Snow White slipped in, pulled up the covers, prayed to God, and fell asleep, the deep and sound sleep of pious children who have said their prayers.

Meanwhile night fell, and there came the masters of the cottage, seven little men of the mountains, each one with a burning miner's-lamp on the front of his belt, and they saw at once that someone had been there. The first one asked: "Who has been sitting on my little chair?" The second one asked, "Who has been eating from my little plate?" The third one asked, "Who has been breaking my little bread?" The fourth one: "Who has been nibbling at my little vegetables?" The fifth: "Who has been cutting with my little knife?" The sixth: "Who has been stabbing with my little fork?" and the seventh one asked: "Who has been drinking from my little goblet?" After asking these questions, the dwarves looked round at their little beds, and asked: "Who has been lying in our little beds?" up until the seventh one, who asked not that question but rather: "Who is lying in my little bed?", for Snow White was lying in it. Then the miners all shone their lamps over the bed and were astonished to see the lovely child, and they did not disturb her, but they let the seventh one sleep in their beds, an hour in each one, until the night was over. Now when dawn shone its early rays into the dwarves' little, little cottage, Snow White awoke and was afraid of the

dwarves. But they were very kind and friendly, and told her she need not be afraid, and asked her what she was called. So Snow White now told them everything that had befallen her. When she had finished, the dwarves said, "You can stay with us in our cottage, Snow White, and you can keep house for us; you can cook our food, wash our linen, and keep everything spick and span, and also make our beds." That was fine with Snow-White, and she kept house for the dwarves. During the day they did their work in the mountains, deep underground, where they sought gold and precious stones, and in the evening they came and ate and lay down in their seven little beds.

In the meantime the wicked Queen had become glad in her evil heart that she was now the fairest once again, as she thought; and she tried the mirror again, asking it:

"Mirror, mirror, on the wall,
Who is the fairest of them all?"

And the mirror replied:

"Your Majesty! You are the fairest here,
But Snow White over the seven horns,
Where the seven good dwarves sojourn,
Is still a thousand times fairer, I fear!"



Again the Queen felt as if a dagger had been thrust into her vain heart, and she now passed her days and nights thinking of an expedient to take Snow White's life; and she finally came upon the idea of setting out herself, in disguise, to visit Snow White, and she made her face unrecognisable, put on shabby clothes, took a basket of trinkets, and travelled over the seven mountains, until she arrived at the dwarves' little, little cottage. Then she knocked on the door and cried, "Hallo! Hallo! Buy my pretty wares!" But the

dwarves had told Snow White that she should beware of strangers, and of the wicked Queen above all. Therefore the girl cautiously looked out, and she saw the pretty knick-knacks the woman had brought for sale, the pretty necklaces and laces and all sorts of finery. And Snow White suspected no evil but let the huckstress in and bought a necklace off her, and the woman wished to show her how to put this necklace on, and standing behind her she tied it so tightly around her neck that Snow White stopped breathing on the instant and fell down dead. "There you have your reward for your excessive beauty!" said the wicked Queen, and she took herself off.

Soon afterwards the seven dwarves came home, where they found their dear, lovely Snow White dead and they saw she had been throttled with the necklace. As quick as lightning they cut the necklace in two and dribbled some drops of potable gold on Snow White's pale lips; then she

began to breathe softly, and gradually came back to life. When she was able to speak, she told how the old peddler-woman had wickedly throttled her, and the dwarves cried: "That was no other woman than the false Queen! Be on your guard and do not let a single soul into the cottage when we are not here."

The Queen, when she had returned home from her evil errand, at once walked up to her mirror and asked it:

"Mirror, mirror, on the wall,

Who is the fairest of them all?"

and the mirror replied:

"Your Majesty! You are the fairest here,

But Snow White over the seven horns,

Where the seven good dwarves sojourn,

Is still a thousand times fairer, I fear".

Then the Queen's heart swelled with rage, like the stomach in a toad, and she again spent her days and nights plotting Snow White's undoing. Soon, she assumed the fake form of a different woman by disguising her face and donning outlandish clothes, prepared a poisoned comb which she put in amongst the other bits and bobs, and went over the seven mountains to the dwarves' little, little cottage. There she again knocked on the door, and cried, "Hallo! Hallo! Buy my pretty wares." Snow White looked out of the window and said, "I'm not allowed to let anyone in!" But the peddler-woman cried, "What a shame about the beautiful comb!" and she showed the poisoned comb, which sparkled golden all over. Snow White wanted a golden comb with all her heart, and suspecting no evil, she opened the door

and let the peddler-woman in and bought the comb.

“Now I will show you, my most beautiful child, how to pass the comb through your hair and how to wear it,” said the fake huckstress, and she raked it through Snow White’s hair; the poison instantly took effect, and the poor child fell down, dead. “Well, you won’t be able to get back up this time, I should think,” said the wicked Queen, and she fled from the cottage.

Soon afterwards – and that was fortunate – evening came, and the seven dwarves returned home, believed poor Snow White to be dead, and found the poisoned comb in her lovely hair. They quickly pulled it out of her hair and then she soon came round. And the dwarves cautioned her anew, very strongly, to let no one – *no one* – into the cottage.

At home the wicked Queen again stepped before her mirror and asked it:

“Mirror, mirror, on the wall,

Who is the fairest of them all?”

And the mirror replied:

“Your Majesty! You are the fairest here,

But over the seven horns,

Where the seven good dwarves sojourn,

Snow White is – a thousand times fairer, I fear!”

The Queen could neither contain nor restrain her venomous fury at all her evil intrigues against Snow White proving fruitless, and she swore a dreadful oath that Snow White must die, even should it cost her, the Queen, her own life. And thereupon she secretly put poison into a shining apple, but only into the side which was ruddiest, took a basket full of ordinary apples,

disguised her face, dressed herself as a peasant woman, and once again went over the seven mountains and knocked at the door of the dwarves' cottage, crying: "Hallo! Buy my lovely apples! Buy them!"

Snow White looked out of the window and said: "Go away, woman! I'm not allowed to open the door or to buy anything!"

"Very well, dear child!" said the fake peasant woman, "I'll get rid of all my lovely apples even without you! Here, you can have one for free."

"No, thank you very much, I'm not allowed to accept anything!" cried Snow White. "I suppose you think the apple might be poisoned, do you? Look here, I'm biting into it myself! Oh, that tastes good! You've never eaten an apple like this, never in your life." The deceitful woman had bitten into the side of the apple that was not poisoned, and Snow White's mouth began to water and she reached out for the apple, and the peasant-woman handed it to her and stood still. No sooner had Snow White taken a bite of the apple's other side, which had a lovely red cheek, than her red cheeks turned white as a sheet and she fell down, dead.

"And that is the end of you, wench!" said the Queen, and she departed; and at home she stepped before the mirror once more and asked:

"Mirror, mirror, on the wall,

Who is the fairest of them all?"

and this time the mirror answered:

"You, Queen, are the one and only fairest of them all!"

Now the wicked Queen's heart was satisfied, insofar as a heart full of malice and spite and murderous guilt can be satisfied.



But how shocked were the seven good dwarves when they returned home in the evening and found Snow White as dead as a doornail. In vain did they search for the cause, and in vain did they try their potable gold with its miraculous power: Snow White was, and this time remained, dead.

Then the grieving dwarves laid the dear child on a bier and sat down around it, and wept for three whole days, and after this they were going to bury her. However, because Snow White still did not look like she was dead, but rather had the fresh-coloured look of a girl in sleep, they did not want to lower her into the earth, and so they made a beautiful glass coffin, and laid her inside, and wrote on it: *Snow White – a Princess* – and then they laid the coffin on the summit of one of the seven mountains, and there was always one of them keeping watch over it. Then the animals came from the forest and wept over Snow White, the owl, the raven, and the dove.

And so Snow White lay in the coffin for many years without decaying; she rather looked as fresh and as white as newly-fallen snow, and still had red cheeks like fresh Mandarin Roses, and hair as black as ebony. Then a handsome young Prince, who had lost his way in the seven mountains, came to the dwarves' little cottage, and he saw the glass coffin

and read the inscription on it: *Snow White, a Princess* – and he asked the dwarves to let him have the coffin with Snow White, he wished to buy it from them. But the dwarves said, “We have gold in abundance and don’t need yours! We won’t part with the coffin, not for all the gold in the world!” – “Then make me a present of it!” pleaded the Prince, “I cannot be, without Snow White; I will hold her in the highest honour and revere her, and she shall stay in my finest room; I beg of you!”



Then the dwarves were moved to compassion, and they made him a gift of Snow White in the glass coffin. This he gave to his servants with orders to carry it away with care, and he followed them, deep in thought. And one of the servants stumbled over a tree-root, causing the coffin to shake, and they came very close to dropping it; and with the jolt, the poisonous piece of apple that yet lay in Snow White's mouth (for she had fallen down before swallowing the bite) shot out, and she suddenly came back to life.

The Prince quickly had her set down, opened the coffin and lifted her out in his arms, and told her everything, and now came to love her more than ever, and took her to wife, and conducted her straight away to his father's castle; and preparations for the wedding were made with great splendour, and many noble guests were invited, among them the wicked Queen. She arrayed herself most beautifully, stepped before her mirror, and asked again:

“Mirror, mirror, on the wall,

Who is the fairest of them all?”

to which the mirror answered:

“Your Majesty, you are the fairest here,

But the young Queen is a thousand times fairer, I fear!”

Then for envy and jealousy the Queen did not know what to say or do, and her heart sank, and at first she did not in the least want to go to the wedding; then, however, she wished to see the woman who was fairer than she, and so she went. And when she entered the hall, Snow White walked up to her as the most beautiful royal bride there has ever been, and she

was so shocked that she wished the earth would open up and swallow her.

Now, Snow White was not only the Fairest of Them All, but she also had a great and noble heart, which did not seek vengeance for the misdeeds the Queen had committed against her. However, a poisonous worm came and ate away at the Queen's wicked heart, and this worm was Envy.

