

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



Once upon a time there was an ogre who dined on nothing with more delight than young maidens, and he was so mighty and feared in the land that no one dared to fight him and drive this appetite out; on the contrary, as soon as he had consumed one maiden, another had to be delivered to him, and in order to proceed impartially in the selection, all the young girls in the land up to a certain age (not over eighteen years) had to draw a lot, with no distinction made for the rank or social standing of their parents. For *Soulless* – such was the name of this girl-guzzling monster – always averred that, aside from the flesh of maidens, he loved equality above all else.

Now it happened that one day the lot was drawn, which was invariably a sad lot, literally and figuratively, for the poor maiden on whom it fell, and that this lot fell on the King's daughter. Although the King sought to avert the fate that threatened his daughter through the offer of manifold treasures, yet Soulless said:

"No! What is right for the goose is proper for the gander. It's all *right* by me that the lot fell on the King's daughter, for I have never yet eaten a Princess, but I reckon that her flesh must be tender and good; and the King must find it *proper* that I do not rob him of his treasures but rather satisfy myself, honestly and honourably observing my principle of equality, with the flesh of his flesh."

However, as the Princess did not have to be delivered up directly after the lot was drawn, the King had it announced that whoever saved his daughter from the dreadful fate that threatened her would have her to wife with half of his kingdom as dowry. But no one presented themselves, for it is a tricky business to handle people who are *Soulless* by name and nature, and no one wants to meddle with them, even if they are not necessarily ogres. Then a young soldier heard of the King's proclamation, and he thought to himself: Hmm – in my service, I've seen so many soulless doings, and these have drummed so much valour into my veins, that I should think I have the courage to take on Lord Soulless. So he went to the King and requested the favour of being allowed to hazard his life against Soulless for him and the Princess. Thereupon the King gave him a substantial handsel and presented him with a sharp carving-knife, with which – if possible – to cut the Man of Equality up into pieces.

The courageous soldier set out and came to a meadow where a

dead donkey lay sprawled on the ground, and around the donkey were sitting a lion, a bear, and an eagle, while a large bluebottle fly was sitting on its nose. Each one wanted to have his share of the donkey, and the four of them could not, as is so often the cause with *divisions*, reach an agreement about the division; and they appealed to the soldier, as a neutral party, to carry out the business of the division on condition that he not wish to have a share of the donkey himself, for in that case all four of them would fall upon *him*.

“No!” said the soldier, “I want no truck with living donkeys, let alone with dead ones! But I shall divide with justice and conviction, and by following the splendid saying: *To each his own!*” He took out his carving knife, stropped it nice and sharp on his sword-sling like a barber whetting his shearing-knife on a razor-strap, and began to carve up the donkey to his heart’s content.

“To you, Lion,” said the astute soldier, “is due above all the lion’s share – the donkey’s *head*, with its fine brain, because you yourself are the *head* and King of the Beasts; then the broad, powerful breast of the donkey, which always sends joyful and jubilant brays out into the distance and fills the world with its glory; together with a chine and two hams.

“To you, courageous, hot-blooded Eagle, the King of Birds, is due the donkey’s heart along with all the noble entrails, the strong lungs in particular and also the liver and kidneys; and a ham, a chine as well, and a loin roast.

“To you, Master Bruin, bold warrior of the North, mighty growler and a King of Beasts in northern climes, is due the third chine, the second loin roast, and the fourth ham, and whatever else you want. And finally, to you,

blue-blown fly, little buzzer, is due the donkey's tail, its legs, and everything that the three others do not want and may deign to do you the favour of leaving. You will content yourself with that all the more readily as you are far too delicate to eat scurvy donkey-meat, rather choosing to drink your fill of dew and the scents of flowers, and only require a little rotten meat for your eggs and future larvae."

The four animals were extraordinarily satisfied with this division and paid the clever soldier the tribute of their gratitude. The bluebottle alighted on his hand, kissed it with his proboscis and fundament at the same time, and said: "Whenever you touch this spot with your finger, you will be able to change your misshapen and hulking great human form into just such a beautiful, delicate and admirable bluebottle, endowed with a talent for charming music, as I am." The eagle pulled a quill from its right wing with its beak, proffered it to the soldier, and said, "By means of this feather, which you have but to turn, you can change yourself into an eagle and do great things as such; you can also cut it, and whatever you sign with it, and bind or have bound by a writ, will last and persist three days longer than time without end."

"Capital fellow," said the lion, "I must give you a friendly paw, it will strengthen you and make you high and mighty in the world!" and the bear said, "Noblest of nobles! Come to my heart, I must embrace you and give you a kiss!" – but the soldier replied, "I thank you both so much! You are far too kind! I have quite enough!" for he feared the sharp claws of the lion's paw, also the bear's embrace and its teeth being close to his nose. So he hurriedly turned the feather and became an eagle, as which he rapidly rose into the skies; from there, he cast around for the house of Master Soulless,

and he discovered it very soon with his eagle eyes. That was certainly a big step in the right direction for the brave soldier; but he now had to devise a means of getting the better of Soulless, to whom the King's daughter had been delivered up in the meantime, but who was keeping her prisoner for a little while longer. Now the soldier first changed himself back into a man, then pressed his finger on the bluebottle's small memorial on his hand and turned into a fly; then he slipped through the window of the chamber in which the King's daughter sat imprisoned, where he changed himself back into his human form; and he informed the Princess of his intention to rescue her if she might only tell him how he could possibly effect this, for he considered it a rare trick and a hard task to unsoul someone who was Soulless by name and by nature. At any rate, Master Soulless's soul must be somewhere, and it was imperative that this *where* be discovered.

The King's daughter was highly delighted that the brave soldier purposed to set her free, and she promised him to gather in information. Hereupon the soldier executed his transformation and departed; while Soulless, the ogre, came to the Princess, bringing her splendid dishes and drinks so she would feed herself well until he thought the time right to dine on her. She asked him at once where his soul was. But he answered her, "I'll give it a miss, telling you that, for although I may be Soulless yet I am not brainless; and it could harm, if not my soul, at least my body, were I to entrust my greatest secret to you, a garrulous female."

But the King's daughter would not have done with her pleading until Soulless, in spite of himself, confided his secret to her, telling her that his soul was shut up in a small golden chest, this chest was on a glass rock, and the rock was in the middle of the Red Sea. An evil wizard had brought

all this about, making him soulless and consequently nymphocarnivorous; he could not help it; if he received his soul back, then he would no longer slobber over young maidens but would regard them with diffident eyes.

The imprisoned King's daughter repeated all of this to the soldier when he visited her again, and he instantly changed himself into an eagle and flew to the Castle of the Four Winds. The winds themselves had flown out but their mother was at home, and he asked the latter for lodging in her airy palace; and he told her his story, after which the Mother of the Winds was willing to give him assistance through her sons. Towards evening the South Wind and the East Wind returned home; the Mother of the Winds introduced the brave warrior to them both and presented him with a Flying-Wishing-Cap, which gave him the power to fly as fast as the wind. On the next morning, when the winds were quite rested, they rose afresh, and the soldier flew with them, and just as swiftly, in the form of an eagle, until he came to the coast of the Red Sea; on the way he had told the winds his intention, and so they did not pass over the sea, that it might stay calm. Then they commanded the fishes to seek the casket in which Master Soulless's soul was to be found. And the fish did so, and they did indeed find the glass rock on which the small chest lay, but they could not climb up. Finally there came the crooked merling or whiting, which shot up and caught the chest in one leap, clenched it in its mouth, and brought it to the eagle. This bird beat its wings mightily, waggled its tail, and danced with joy, making the winds laugh heartily, for they had seen many sights but never before had they seen an eagle making comical jumps. Hereupon the eagle expressed his great sense of obligation and gratitude, first to the winds, then to the whiting; and with the Flying-Wishing-Cap still on its head, it flew

back to its homeland, straight for the castle of Master Soulless, where it turned back into a man. He immediately had himself announced as a peddler from the Orient with a jewel to offer. Soulless took such an intrusive visit with very bad grace and allowed the announced visitor to enter only so he could cater for him with a course of invective, which he believed it was his right to serve any one at any time, equally; therefore, he approached him defiantly straight away, for a man without a soul cannot be otherwise than uncouth and snappish.

However, the peddler, or soldier in disguise, was not bothered by Master Soulless's wrathful face or his jibes, but was all the more courteous the ruder his host became, whose behaviour expressed nothing other than a desire to devour him as well.

"I have a treasure that is of inestimable worth for Your Grace," said the stranger, "and offer the same to you in exchange."

"It'll be a right piece of junk, your treasure!" grumbled Soulless. "What can a rogue like you offer me? Do you imagine that I couldn't pay you in ready money, so you have the audacity to talk to me of an exchange? What could I have that is fit for the likes of you? Tell me at once!"

"May Your Grace deign to confer his most gracious favour!" the stranger replied. "Your Excellency has a jewel in his keeping, namely the beautiful Princess, and the piece of junk, to use Your Esteemed Grace's own evaluation, which I venture to offer against this jewel, is Your Grace's – gracious *soul*."

"My soul!" cried Soulless in inexpressible amazement. "*You* have my soul? By my poor soul, lost to me and parted from me to my sorrow, I swear to you that were I holding a hundred princesses prisoner, you should

receive every one of the hundred, had I only my soul again.”

“I’ll content myself with the one,” replied the peddler, “it’s safe to say that a hundred would be a bit too much for me. But let us conclude the contract in writing!” With these words, the soldier pulled out a sheet of paper, on which everything was already written, briefly and succinctly, and he proffered Soulless the eagle’s feather to sign with, which Soulless did; then the latter had his beautiful prisoner brought in without further ado, and she was overjoyed to find the soldier with the ogre, who had already bidden the stranger sit down on the sofa, for the mere proximity of his soul had begun to tune him to a more human pitch. The King’s daughter had thought she was going to be taken into the kitchen to be slaughtered like a poor pigeon. Now the soldier took the little golden chest, which was bolted shut, out of his pocket, and placed it in Soulless’s hand. Soulless swiftly opened the bolt, held the opening to his mouth, and sucked his soul into his body with an agreeable sensation. And all of a sudden, the evil spell was broken. The King’s daughter was imprisoned no longer, and Soulless was soulless no longer, but rather in seventh heaven; he embraced the soldier in a stream of joyful tears, and would willingly have embraced the Princess as well had not a reverent diffidence held him back – the best proof that he had regained his soul; yet he asked both of them for their friendship. Hereupon the soldier departed with the Princess, was raised by the King, her father, to the princely rank, and, as a newly-made Prince, married the young Princess; and the man who was formerly soulless consumed no more young maidens, but rather became the most gallant gentleman in the world.