

The Folk- and Fairy-Tales of Ludwig Bechstein: **Table-Set-Yourself, Donkey-Stretch-Yourself, Cudgel-Out-the-Sack!**



In a small town there lived an honest tailor with his family, which counted five heads: the father, the mother, and three sons. These last were called not by their Christian names by their parents or all the inhabitants of the town, but purely and simply Lanky, Tubby, and Dopey. This was the order in which they followed one another, by age. Lanky became a carpenter, Tubby a miller, and Dopey a wood-turner. Now when Lanky finished his apprenticeship, his bundle was tied up and he was sent out into the world, and he walked out the gates of his hometown with long strides and a merry heart. For a long time the lad wandered from place to place without finding any work; now, as his travelling money, which had been meagre enough to begin with, was well-nigh exhausted, and he had no happy prospect of work and income, he became dispirited and walked softly on his way, with head hung low. This road happened to pass through a quiet, beautiful forest, and when the lad was some distance inside he met a small, rather portly man,

who greeted him most cordially and, staying his steps, asked: "Well, lad, and where are you off to? You look really sad – is there something you're wanting?" – "I want work," the lad said frankly. "That is my only sorrow – I've been wandering a long time – I've no money left." – "And what trade do you know?" the man inquired further. "I'm a carpenter." – "Oh, then come with me!" the little man joyfully exclaimed, "I'll give you work! You see, I live here in this forest – yes yes, just come along, you'll see it very soon." And barely a hundred steps further on there lay a lovely house, and around it was a thick, fresh green pine-fence, looking like a screen-wall, and by the entrance at the front two tall pine-trees stood just like giant sentries. The man led the carpenter's journeyman inside, who directly let go of his sadness and stepped with a cheerful face into the solitary master's cosy room. "Welcome!" cried an old grandma from the corner behind the stove, and she came toddling towards the lad to help him take his knapsack off. That evening the master talked with the lad for hours, and the grandma served dishes, and she also placed a jug on the table which contained something far better than water or small beer.

The young carpenter found life with his master most agreeable; he was not given all too much to do, he worked hard, and he behaved honestly and properly at all times, so that no complaints were made about him. Yet after several months the old man said, "My dear journeyman, I no longer have any use for you and must let you go. And I cannot reward the work you have done for me with money; but I shall give you a pretty keepsake that will help you more than gold or silver." So saying, he handed him an enchanting little table and continued: "Whenever you put up this

Table-Set-Yourself and say the words, 'Table-Set-Yourself' three times, it will serve you a meal of any dishes and drinks you might wish for. And now fare well, and see to it that you remember your old master." The journeyman left his former workplace with reluctance; happy and sad at the same time, he took the miracle-working table from the giver's hands and departed, with many expressions of gratitude, directing his steps back towards his beloved home. On the way, the table, whenever the lad spoke the magic charm, offered him its rich delights: in a flash the choicest dishes and the noblest wines appeared on it, and all the vessels were of silver, and under them shone the finest snow-white tablecloth. Naturally, the journeyman held his Table-Set-Yourself in awe. In the last inn before he arrived home he gave it to his host for safekeeping. However, as he had not eaten or drunk anything at the inn during his stay, but had locked himself in with the table, the innkeeper had peeked through a crack in the plank door and discovered the table's secret. So he was elated to have the table in his keeping, and its splendid peculiarity gave him immense delight. Making himself quite comfortable at the small table, he pondered the best way to appropriate it. Then it occurred to him that he possessed a very similar table, although it was no Table-Set-Yourself. So the crafty innkeeper hid the genuine table and, the next morning, delivered the fake one to the journeyman, who shouldered the load without thinking and hurried towards his home in a merry mood. With joy did the tall carpenter greet his family at home, and he lost no time in revealing to his father the delightful truth about the table. The father strongly doubted it, but the son put the table up, said "Table, set yourself" three times – yet it did not set itself, and the honest

master-tailor said to his son, “You jackass, did you go out into the world just to mock your old father? Get along with you, don’t make a fool of yourself!” The tall carpenter was completely at a loss as to what had suddenly gone wrong with the table. He tried all kinds of ways, but it did not set itself again, and Lanky had to take up the plane once again and work himself to the bone.



In the meantime the fat miller had finished his apprenticeship and wandered out into the world. And it so happened that he took the very same path and found the very same little man and was given employment by him. The house in the forest, however, was now a mill. When the young miller’s-man had performed his duties honestly, faithfully, and diligently for some time, his master gave him an excellent donkey as a keepsake and

said: "Take a small parting gift, and although I cannot reward your work with money, this will be of more use to you than gold or silver. Whenever you tell this miller's lion, 'Donkey, stretch yourself!' then it will – sneeze – ducats for you."

Just as often as Lanky had said, "Table, set yourself" on the way home, just so often did Tubby say, "Donkey, stretch yourself," and it did stretch itself, dropping ducats with a rattle and a clatter. It was a delightful thing to see – the shiny pieces of gold. – But the miller's journeyman also came with his donkey to the inn of the deceitful and crafty innkeeper, where he had the table served and treated everyone who wished to be treated; and when the innkeeper demanded the bill be paid, he said, "Wait a little, while I go and fetch some money." Taking the tablecloth, he went into the stable, spread it over the straw on which the donkey was standing, and said: "Donkey, stretch yourself!" – and the donkey stretched itself and sneezed, and ducats clinked on the cloth;

however, the innkeeper was standing outside looking through a knothole in the door, and he got the picture. The next morning there was, to be sure, a donkey there, but not the right one, and Tubby, not suspecting any deception, mounted in high spirits and rode away. When he came to his father, he announced his good fortune to him and, when all the family were standing around the donkey in happy amazement, said "Now pay attention!" And turning to the donkey, he commanded, "Donkey, stretch yourself!" The new donkey certainly



stretched itself, but what it let drop could not have been less like gold coins. All those to whom Tubby had wanted to show its ability now laughed at him uproariously; he beat the donkey black and blue but could not beat any ducats out of its skin, and from that time on he had to return to work and eat his bread in the sweat of his face.¹

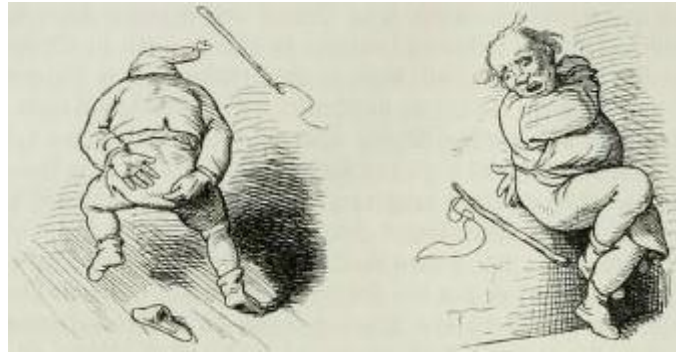
Now another year had gone by and Dopey had also come through his apprenticeship, and he went out into the world as a sprightly wood-turner. He purposely took the same road as his brothers, ardently wishing to also find employment with that little man who, as his brothers had told him, was well-versed in all fields, in trades as in erudition and wisdom, and had such pretty presents to give away. The turner's journeyman duly arrived in that particular forest and found the little man's secluded dwelling; and he too, being an industrious lad, was readily taken on. Several months later, however, it was once again a case of, "Dear journeyman, I can now keep you here no longer, your work is done." At parting the man said, "I would happily give you, like your brothers, a pretty keepsake, but what use would it be, as they call you Dopey? Your tall brother and your fat brother have lost their gifts through their stupidity – whatever would become of a gift I made to you? Yet take this simple sack; you may find it very useful. Whenever you say to it, "Cudgel out the sack!" then the well-turned club which sits inside will leap out to protect you, to defend and assist you, and it will keep clubbing until you give the command, "Cudgel in the sack!"

The turner courteously expressed his thanks and set out homewards with his sack; however, it was long before he needed its protection on his

¹ Genesis 3:19.

journey, for as he went his way lightly and merrily, everyone let him wander onwards unhindered. Only at times did he give a taste of the contents of his sack to an officious beadle, or to the village dogs which shoot out of every yard and bark at and after the wanderer. And so he finally came to that inn where the wicked innkeeper had cheated his brothers out of what was theirs, and was now living in clover, but nonetheless still had an appetite to appropriate a little something from travellers' effects. When going to bed, the turner gave the sack to the innkeeper for safekeeping and warned him that he should not say, "Cudgel out the sack!" to it, for there was a special story behind all this, and anyone who said the words could well find himself on the receiving end. However, the innkeeper liked his table and donkey too well not to want to secretly snatch away a third wonder-working object; he could hardly wait for the time when his guest had laid himself to rest, to say: "Cudgel out the sack!" And in a trice the cudgel shot out and rolled on the innkeeper's back like a drummer, bludgeoned on and on, and bludgeoned him so black and blue that he set up a pitiful yelling and woke up the turner's journeyman with his howls. The latter said, "Host, this serves you right! I warned you, didn't I? You have stolen the Table-Set-Yourself and the Donkey-Stretch- Yourself from my brothers." The innkeeper shrieked, "Oh just help me for God's sake! I'm being murdered!" (For the cudgel was still tirelessly working away on the innkeeper's back.) "I'll give everything back, the table and the donkey! Oh, I'm falling down, I'm a dead man!"





Now the journeyman commanded, “Cudgel in the sack!” and in a flash the club slipped back inside the sack. And the innkeeper was pleased to have escaped with his life, and he willingly returned the table and the donkey. Then the turner packed up his things, loaded his bundle on his back and himself on the donkey, and trotted towards his hometown. There was no little joy among the brothers when they saw that the exceedingly valuable presents and keepsakes had been won back, and still performed their wonders just as splendidly as formerly – won back by him they had always called Dopey, yet who was cleverer than them. And the brothers stayed together with their parents and no longer needed to work to gain their daily bread through merit, for from that time on they had an abundance of all that the life of man requires.

