

The Folk- and Fairy-Tales of Ludwig Bechstein: **The Birth of Fairy-Tale**

Once upon a time, there was no such thing as a fairy-tale, and it was a grievous time for children, for their youthful paradise was bereft of its fairest butterfly. And in this time, there were two royal children who played together in their father's magnificent garden. This garden was full of gorgeous flowers, and its paths, strewn with colourful stones and golden gravel, vied in brilliancy with the glistening dew on the flowerbeds. In the garden were cool grottoes with babbling springs, fountains spouting high towards the heavens, exquisite marble statues, and delightful benches for repose. In the reservoirs swam gold and silver fishes; in great golden aviaries fluttered the fairest birds, while other birds hopped and flew around at liberty and sang their songs in enchanting voices. The two royal children had these and saw these every day, and so they grew weary of the radiance of the stones, of the fragrance of the flowers, of the fountains and the fish, which were so mute, and of the birds, whose songs they did not understand. The children sat together in silence and were sad; they had everything a child could possibly wish for – kind parents, the most luxurious playthings, the loveliest clothes, delectable food and drinks, and they were able to play in the beautiful garden every single day – they were sad, although they did not know why, and they did not know what it was that they wanted.

Then their mother, the queen, a tall, beautiful woman with kind and gentle features, came to them, and she was worried because her children were so sad and merely gave her a wistful smile instead of gleefully flying into her arms; it grieved her that her children were not happy as children really ought to be, and as they can be, because they do not yet know care, and the sky of youth is mostly free from clouds.

The Folk- and Fairy-Tales of Ludwig Bechstein: **The Birth of Fairy-Tale**

The queen sat down with her two children, who were a boy and a girl, and wrapped a round white arm adorned with golden bangles around each of them, and asked most maternally and affectionately:

“What ails you, my beloved children?”

“We do not know, dear mother!” said the boy. “We are so sad!” said the girl.

“It is so beautiful here in this garden, and you have everything that can give you joy; does it then give you no joy?” asked the queen, and a tear welled up in her eye, from which there smiled a soul full of kindness.

“What we have does not give us enough joy,” the girl replied to this question. “We wish to have something, and do not know what!” added the boy.

The mother lapsed into a concerned silence and pondered what the children could possibly wish for that could give them greater pleasure than the splendour of the garden, the finery of their clothes, the profusion of their playthings, and the consumption of choice food and drinks, but she could not divine what it was their thoughts were seeking. “Oh, if I could only be a child again!” the queen said quietly to herself with a soft sigh. “Then the things that make children happy would surely come to my mind. To be able to comprehend the wishes of children, one must be a child oneself. But I have wandered too far from that Land of Youth where golden birds fly through the trees of paradise, those birds which have no feet, for beings who never tire have no need of mortal rest. Oh, if only such a bird would come here and bring my dear children that which would make them happy!”

Behold – as the Queen made this wish there suddenly hovered over

The Folk- and Fairy-Tales of Ludwig Bechstein: **The Birth of Fairy-Tale**

her in the blue skies a bird of wondrous splendour which emitted a radiance like flames of gold and flashing gems; it floated lower and lower, and it was seen by the mother, it was seen by the children. They could only cry “Oh! Oh!”, too astonished to find any other words. The bird was a truly marvellous sight as it, floating ever lower, descended from the sky, so shimmering, so gleaming, glittering with the colours of the rainbow, almost dazzling the eye and yet, every time, riveting the eye anew. It was so beautiful that the queen and the children shuddered softly with joy, especially now that they felt the wafting of its wings. And before they knew what was happening, the Wonderbird had alighted in the lap of the queen, the mother, and was looking at the children with eyes that were fashioned like the friendly eyes of a child; and yet there was something in these eyes that the children did not comprehend, something strange, something awful, and so they did not dare to touch the bird. Furthermore, they now saw that the strange bird of celestial beauty had some jet-black feathers under its shining coloured plumage which they had not noticed from a distance. However, the children had scarcely so long a time for the closer inspection of the beautiful Wonderbird as was needed to mention this observation, for the bird directly rose up, the Bird of Paradise without feet, soaring, shimmering, flying ever higher, until it seemed to be but a colourful feather swimming in the ether, then but a golden strip, and then it disappeared – yet up to that time, the Queen and the children watched it in amazement. But how wonderful! When the mother and children looked down again, how they were astonished anew! On the mother’s lap lay a golden egg, the bird had laid it, oh and it shimmered as golden-green and golden-blue as the

The Folk- and Fairy-Tales of Ludwig Bechstein: **The Birth of Fairy-Tale**

most exquisite Labradorite and the loveliest pearl-oysters of the ocean depths. And the royal children cried with *one* voice: “Oh! The beautiful egg!” The mother gave a beatific smile, suspecting, full of a sense of gratitude, that this must be the jewel that was wanting for her children’s happiness; that the egg must contain, in its magically-coloured shimmering shell, a treasure that would grant the children that which is denied to age, *contentment*, and would still their longing, their childish sorrow.

The children did not weary of gazing at the magnificent egg, and they soon forgot, for the egg, the bird that had brought it; at first they did not dare to touch it, but at last the girl laid one of her rosy fingers upon it and suddenly exclaimed, a purple blush suffusing her innocent little face: “The egg is warm!” Now the King’s son tapped the egg cautiously and gently to test by touch if his sister had spoken true. Finally the mother also laid her soft white hand on the precious egg, and lo! – what came to pass? The shell fell asunder in two halves, and out from the egg came a being that was marvellous to behold. It had wings and yet was not a bird, nor a butterfly; not a bee nor a dragonfly; and yet had something of all of these, but was beyond description: in a word, it was the Joy of Being a Child, iridescent and with wings of many hues, a child itself, namely that of the Wonderbird *Fantasy* – the *Fairy-Tale*. And now the mother saw her children sad no longer, for from that time Fairy-Tale stayed with children always, and they did not grow weary of it all the time that they remained children; and once they had Fairy-Tale, then they grew all the fonder of gardens and flowers, arbours and grottoes, forest and groves, for Fairy-Tale brought everything to life, to the delight of all children, Fairy-Tale even lent children

The Folk- and Fairy-Tales of Ludwig Bechstein: **The Birth of Fairy-Tale**

its wings and they flew far around in the measureless world and yet were always back home the very moment they so wished. Those royal children – they were mankind in his youthful paradise, and Nature was their beautiful, kind and gentle mother. She wished down from the heavens the Wonderbird Fantasy, which has such splendid golden feathers as well as some that are pitch-black, and it laid in her lap the golden egg of Fairy-Tale.

And as the children came to love Fairy-Tale dearly, for it embellished their childhood days, delighted them in a thousand different kinds of configurations and transformations, and flew over every house and hut, over every castle and palace, so it was also in the nature of Fairy-Tale to please even adults, and they drew delight from it who had carried something from the garden of childhood over into their years of maturity, namely the *childlikeness of the heart*.