

The Folk- and Fairy-Tales of Ludwig Bechstein: **The Boys with the Golden Stars**

Once upon a time there was a young Count who did not yet know love, handsome though he was, and so had still not yielded to the remonstrances of his mother and his friends that he should take a wife. But he took pleasure in sneaking around the village at night and spying on the young lads and lasses, what they were doing, singing, and saying in their spinning-rooms. Now one night he heard a conversation of which he was the subject. "Well, if our Count took a wife," said one of the girls, "then I would, if I were she, cook him the tastiest dishes." – "And I," a second girl put in, "would tend his children with the utmost care." – "While I," said the third girl, "would give him two boys, if he took me to wife, who should bear golden stars on their breast." The others laughed, but various thoughts passed through the Count's mind, and he went back to his castle.

On the following day he had the three girls summoned and they had to repeat to him everything they had said to one another, the day before, about his taking a wife. The last girl refused for a long time, for she was ashamed; but when she finally confessed her bold wish, the Count took her warmly by the hand and said, "You shall be my wife if you bear me two such children as you have said; if you do not, I shall drive you in disgrace from my castle." The girl consented, for she was in joyful spirits and bore in her heart hidden love for the Count. The wedding was celebrated accordingly, although the old Countess looked very sour about it. Now when several months had passed and the young Countess felt herself to be expecting, it came to pass that the Count had to travel far abroad, and he asked his mother, who affected a great deal of affability towards her daughter-in-law, to write to him the moment his wife gave birth. The time of labour

approached and the young wife was delivered of two fair little boys, each of whom bore a golden star on his breast, but she was so exhausted that she lay long in a swoon; when she came round and asked for her children, she was told she had given birth to two deformed cats which had been drowned. She wailed bitterly over this news, more than she did over the misfortune which now followed. Ignominiously was she ordered out of the castle, like a beggarwoman, and no one took pity on her except for one servant; he secretly confided to her that she had given birth to two lovely little boys with a golden star on their breast; they had been handed over to him in a basket with the order to throw them into the water, as if they were cats; but he had opened the basket, and as he felt sorry for the innocent little mites, he had placed them in the care of an aunt, who would raise them. At these words, the outcast greatly rejoiced amidst her grief, thanked the compassionate man many thousands of times, hurried to her children, and lived with them in secret seclusion for several years.

The boys grew up and became ever more handsome, and the poor woman thought again of her husband – if he could see the boys, he would make good all the injury his wicked mother had done her. Then she dreamed that she should look under a large lime-tree at the crossroads, she would find a heap of linseed husks there; she should fill her pockets with them but be sure to take no more, and then go to *Portugal*, where her husband was entangled



in a love-net cast by an enchantress or fairy. The young wife went to the tree, found the linseed husks, and filled her pockets with them.

In a forest she was attacked by robbers and utterly plundered, to the very last penny; she had to help herself along by begging, her feet were torn and bloody, and no end to her road could yet be seen. Then once again, a dream comforted her in her misery and promised her eventual success. One day she begged at the gate of a handsome castle; the noblewoman saw her boys and was greatly surprised at their beauty. She asked the poor wife for one of her boys and promised to grant any request in return. It touched the poor woman sorely to be without one of her children; however, she consented at last, requesting in return the golden spinning-wheel that the noblewoman had in front of her. The lady was surprised at this request, but she gave up the wheel, and one of the two boys stayed behind with her. The poor young wife walked onwards and onwards and eventually had to part with her second boy as well, for whom she received a golden reel. She was very careful to keep these precious items safe, and she continued her arduous journey.

After endless hardships, she arrived nonetheless in Portugal and came to the castle where her husband was living. The servants told her that their master was married, but no one had, up to that time, beheld the countenance of his wife, for she was only in the castle at night and no one knew where she went during the day. Now when the sun had set, she crept into the castle-garden, sat down under the Countess's window, and turned her spinning-wheel so that it shone like a star through the night. This was seen by the enchantress, the Count's wife, and she went out to the young

woman and asked her for the strange plaything. The young wife offered to make her a present of it if she would grant a request in return, namely that she might stay with her husband for one night. The Countess wondered greatly at this, but gave her consent; however, she secretly gave the Count a sleeping potion so that he never awoke during the night, and the despairing young wife at his side saw dawn beginning to break as the enchantress came to take her away. On the next evening, she sat before the castle again, turning her golden reel; again, the enchantress came and had to grant her the same request. This time, she made a mistake and did not mix her husband's sleeping potion to be strong enough; so before dawn began to break he awoke, and was surprised to find beside him an emaciated, withered woman, who now poured out her whole heart to him. Then the Count was seized with an unspeakable longing for his children, and he promised her that he would acknowledge her as his wife. And he pretended to be asleep when the fairy came and conducted the woman out. He then told the fairy that he had had a peculiar dream. A man had erroneously repudiated his wife and wed another; the first wife had sought him out, sacrificing her body and her beauty. Now what should the husband do, were she to find him?" "Then he must leave the second wife and return to the faithful one!" said the fairy." "You have pronounced your own sentence," replied the Count, and he told her all that had passed. Then the fairy sorrowfully parted from him. Now the Count returned home with his faithful wife after redeeming his boys. His wicked mother was not allowed to enter his presence again; his wife, on the other hand, he held very dear; and he richly rewarded the compassionate servant. The boys with the

golden stars grew up to the delight of their parents, and they later became great, valiant warriors, who fought and won many battles.