

The Folk- and Fairy-Tales of Ludwig Bechstein: **The Enchanted Princess**

(The 1853 version, completely rewritten by Bechstein)

Once upon a time there was a poor craftsman who had two sons, a good one called Hans and a bad one called Helmerich. However, as seems to be the way of the world, the father was fonder of the bad one than the good one.



Now it came to pass that one year was an unusually expensive one and the master's purse became empty. Well! he thought, one must do what it takes to stay alive. As your customers have come to you so many times, now it is your turn to show them courtesy by bestirring yourself to go to them. – No sooner said than done. Early in the morning he set out and knocked on many a grand door; but as it just so happens that the grandest gentlemen are not the best payers, no one felt inclined to settle his bill. So the craftsman returned faint and weary to his hometown that evening, and he gloomily sat down before the door of the tavern, all alone, for he neither had the heart to chat with his fellow tipplers nor looked forward to seeing his wife's long face. But as he sat there lost in thought, he could not help listening to the conversation being held inside. A stranger who had just arrived from the capital was telling the company how the beautiful Princess

had been placed in confinement by a wicked sorceror and would have to stay in her prison for the rest of her life unless someone could be found who would complete the three tasks the sorceror had set. If such a one were to be found, then the Princess would be his, as would all of her magnificent castle with every one of its treasures. The master heard this with half an ear at first, then with a whole one, and at last with both of them, for he thought: My son Helmerich has a quick brain, he could trim a billy-goat's beard were he told to – what are the odds he completes the tasks and becomes the husband of the beautiful Princess and lord over land and people? For so had the King, her father, let it be proclaimed. – He returned home straight away, all his debts and customers driven from his mind by the latest news, which he hastily imparted to his wife. On the very next morning he told Helmerich that he would equip him with horse and arms for the journey – and how soon Helmerich set out! When he took his leave, he promised his parents that he would, in next to no time, have them and his stupid brother Hans fetched in a coach and six, for he imagined himself to be King already.



As he rode arrogantly away, so did he vent his spite on everything that crossed his path. The birds, who sat on the branches and praised God the Father with song in their own wise, he scared away from the boughs with his riding crop; and no creature crossed his path without his unleashing some malicious prank on it.

And first of all he came upon an anthill; he had his horse trample it down, and when the enraged ants crept up on to his horse and so on to Helmerich himself, biting horse and man, he smote or crushed

every one of them to death. Afterwards, he came upon a clear pond in which twelve ducks were swimming. Helmerich lured them to the bank and killed eleven of them, only the twelfth one escaping. Finally, he came across a lovely beehive, and he did to the bees as he had done to the ants. And so it was his pleasure to torment and destroy innocent creatures, not to his own advantage, but from sheer malice.

Now when Helmerich reached, with the setting sun, the splendid castle in which the Princess was spellbound, he knocked violently on the locked gate. All was silent; the rider pounded ever more thunderously. Finally a sash window opened and an old woman with a face the colour of cobwebs looked out; she crossly asked what he wanted. "I want to free the Princess," cried Helmerich, "be quick and open up for me." – "More haste, less speed, my son," said the old woman. "There's always tomorrow; I'll expect you here at nine o'clock." And she slid the window shut.

At nine o'clock the next morning, when Helmerich came back, the old woman was there ready for him with a little cask full of linseed, which she scattered over a beautiful meadow. "Pick up the seeds," she said to the rider. "When I return in an hour, the task must have been completed." – But Helmerich thought it was a silly practical joke and not worth bending his back for; he went for a stroll the while, and when the old woman returned the cask was as empty as before. "That is not good," she said. Then she took twelve golden keys from her pocket and threw them one by one into the deep, dark castle pond. "Fetch the keys up," she said. "When I return in an hour, the task must have been completed." Helmerich laughed and did as before. – When the old woman returned and this task was not completed

either, she exclaimed twice, “Not good! Not good!” Yet she took him by the hand and led him up the steps into the Great Hall of the castle; three females were sitting there, each one covered with a thick veil. “Choose, my son,” said the old woman, “but take care to choose correctly. I shall come back in an hour.” Helmerich was no wiser when she came back than when she had gone away; but in his arrogance, he cried out at random, “I choose the one on the right.” – Then all three threw back their veils; in the middle sat the fair Princess, on the right and on the left two hideous dragons – and the one on the right seized Helmerich in its claws and cast him out of the window into a deep abyss.

A year had gone by since Helmerich had set out to rescue the Princess, and still no coach-and-six had arrived at his parents’ house. “Ah!” said the father, “if only our clumsy Hans had set out instead of our best boy, our loss would be the lesser.” –“Father,” said Hans, “let me go, I want to have a try too.” But the father was unwilling, for if the clever son had failed, what chance of success was there for the clumsy son? As his father refused him horse and arms, Hans started out in secret and went on foot for three days, more or less, down the same road that his brother had ridden in one. But he was not afraid, and at night he slept on the soft moss under green branches as peacefully as under his parents’ roof; the birds of the forest did not fear him but sang him to sleep with their finest melodies. Now when he came to the ants, who were busy completing



their new anthill, he did not disturb them but rather wanted to be of help; and the little creatures which crept up him, he picked off without killing, even when they bit him. He too lured the ducks to the bank, but to feed



them crumbs; for the bees, he threw down the flowers he had picked on the way. So he happily arrived at the King's castle and tapped bashfully at the window. The door opened immediately and the old woman asked for his wish. "If I am not too lowly, I too would like to try to free the beautiful

Princess,” he said. “Try it, my son,” said the old woman, “but if you do not pass the three tests, it will cost you your life.” – “Very well, Mother,” said Hans, “tell me what I’m to do.” The old woman now gave him the task with the linseed. Hans was no sluggard at stooping, but it had already struck three-quarters past the hour and the cask was still not half full. He was just about to abandon hope when black ants suddenly appeared, in more than sufficient number, and in a few minutes there was not a single seed left on the meadow. When the old woman came, she said, “That is good!” and threw the twelve keys into the pond, which he was to fetch up within the hour. But Hans brought no keys up from the depths; however deep he dived, he could not reach the bottom. In despair he sat down on the bank; then the twelve ducks came swimming up, each one with a golden key in its beak which they threw into the moist grass. So this task was also accomplished when the old woman returned to lead him into the hall, where the third and hardest task awaited him. Hans lost heart as he looked at the three identical veiled figures – who could help him here? Then a swarm of bees came flying in through the open window; they circled through the hall and droned around the mouths of the three veiled forms. But they quickly flew back from the ones on the right and on the left, for the dragons smelt of the pitch and brimstone that they lived on; the bees all circled around the figure in the middle and softly hummed and buzzed, “The middle one, the middle one.” For the aroma of their own honey, which the Princess loved to eat, had wafted towards them. Therefore, when the old woman returned after an hour, Hans said quite confidently, “I choose the middle one.” And then the evil dragons flew out the window while the beautiful Princess threw off her

veil, delighted to be set free and to have such a handsome bridegroom. And Hans sent the most express messenger to the Princess's father, and a golden carriage drawn by six horses to his parents, and they all lived in the lap of luxury; and if they have not died, they will be still alive today.



(The 1845 version, submitted to Bechstein)

Once upon a time there was a simple handicraftsman, and he had two sons who were called Hellmerich and Hans; one day, he left his little village to go to the nearby town and transact business of various kinds. On his way home that evening, while he was sitting in the outer tavern having a fortifying drink, his attention was drawn to a highly animated conversation that several tippling young men were having; he listened, all ears, for those people were talking about nothing less than a magnificent castle, with vast amounts of gold and valuables, being there for the winning. In this castle a fair princess was pining to be delivered from her enchantment, which Princess would give her royal hand to the happy man who set her free by punctually accomplishing the three tasks that would be imposed on him, raising him to be her husband. However, the man – this was the rider – who did not complete the three tasks would have to lose his life, for having desired the Princess, and would never return.

Absorbed in thought, with his heart racing, the honest master walked over the twilight-woven fields of his homeland towards his little village. In his mind's eye he already saw his eldest son, Hellmerich, whom he loved immeasurably more than his other son, Hans, in the Royal Castle, and the fair Princess as his highly esteemed daughter-in-law.

At home, he imparted the golden news to his beloved wife and his sons, and they were all lost in wonder at the tale. The father lost no time in ordering his favourite son, Hellmerich, to make his preparations and undergo the daring deed; the matter brooked no delay; for Hellmerich to gain possession of the beautiful castle and win the Princess, the work

would have to be speedily undertaken and executed, for the clever master saw it as being a matter of course that many others could and would make the venture. And Hellmerich was so enraptured and eager, and already so certain of victory in his prideful heart, that he eyed the petty world around him with haughtiness and contempt, and awaited with impatience the hour when he should fly away on his handsomely bridled steed and rush into the arms of the fortune that had been appointed to his lot. At last the longed-for hour struck. As he departed, Hellmerich, sensible of his royal dignity and full of inexpressible graciousness and goodness, promised his poor parents, who had converted their entire fortune into the proud steed, that he would have them fetched in a coach-and-six, along with his stupid brother Hans, as soon as he had delivered the Princess.

Hans wept, for he felt very badly neglected and hurt. However, he worked faithfully – and soon, happily again – to support his dear parents.

Hellmerich journeyed in style from place to place, while the flower-covered fields of summer spread out ever more delightful and refreshing before his eyes; the nearer he approached his glorious goal, the more enchanting and magnificent did nature show herself: rustling forests and cosy streams, sweet-scented meadows, gleaming ponds, charming heights and waving cornfields variously appeared in the most pleasant manner; here everything seemed to paradisaical that Hellmerich entertained no doubt of having already entering the royal realm to be won. And indeed, at length there shone in the sunlit distance a golden point. At the sight, Hellmerich's heart trembled with a wild joy. He exulted aloud and lashed out all around with his riding-crop. Thus did he trot up to the edge of

a green deciduous forest and scare the little birds, the golden-feathered, innocent songsters, off the branches. Soon he came to a large anthill which lay in his path, and he wilfully had his horse stamp and trample on it; so the incensed creatures crept onto his horse and onto Hellmerich himself and wreaked their vengeance with dolorific bites until he furiously crushed and stamped them all to death. And further on, he came to a silvery pond in which twelve little white ducks were swimming. Wicked Hellmerich lured them to the bank and trampled them to death; only one single duck escaped. Then he came to a beautiful beehive and killed, from sheer wanton malice, the industrious little artists also. Thus did he vent the spite of a malevolent heart on everything that fell in his way.

The Royal Castle rose ever more majestic in the distance; the roof was gilded, and brightly gleaming flags fluttered on the elegant towers. The edifice was constructed of marble, its high windows flashed like flaming mirrors, and around it there rustled shade-giving myrtle trees and there blossomed the most gorgeous flowers and rosebushes. Yet the silence that stretched over this enchantment became ever more mysterious.

Hellmerich now stood at the tall gate and knocked impatiently until an old woman, with a face the colour of cobwebs and fearsome spectral attire, appeared and reluctantly asked what we wanted. "Why, I want to free the Princess," was Hellmerich's impudent reply, "tell me what I should do, old biddy." – "Then you'll have to come back at nine tomorrow morning," said the old woman, "when I'll be waiting for you're here, and we'll go through the rest."

Hellmerich presented himself at the time appointed; the old woman

appeared carrying a little cask full of linseed, which she shortly scattered over a lovely meadow, saying to Hellmerich: "Gather up all of these seeds so that none of them is missing, when I return in an hour, my son, this task must have been completed." But arrogant Hellmerich did not want to bend over in his fashionably tight-fitting garments, and he treated the 'silly task' with scorn. He strolled up and down until the old woman came back and regarded the empty cask with sneering mien. Now she had twelve golden keys, which she threw into the nearby gleaming pond, and she said to Hellmerich: "You must fetch these keys back out so that not a single one is missing; when I return in an hour, my son, this task must have been completed."

Hellmerich peered into the water, he cut off branches and angled around, but he did not bring up a single key. He even entered the water and could come back to the bank only with difficulty, without having found a key. The old woman came, and Hellmerich had not completed his task. Then she led him up the beautiful marble steps and opened the tall golden doors of the castle, then she strode on ahead through stately rooms and halls until they finally entered a charming chamber where three veiled women were sitting in deep silence. Each one was dressed the same as the others. "Now choose one of these women for yourself," said the old woman, "two of them are evil and one is good; if you choose the good one, you will be happy ever after, but if you choose an evil one, then commend your poor soul to God. When I return in an hour, my son, this task must have been completed."

Now Hellmerich stood vacillating and irresolute until the hour struck

twelve and the old woman walked in. Then he hastily pointed to the one on the right. The enchanted figures rose to their feet and their veils rustled to the earth. The middle one was a lovely maiden; full locks fell in waves around her fair lily-white neck, her hands and breast were decorated with coruscating jewellery, and on her head she wore a golden crown. Her wistful, weeping look was fixed on Hellmerich's countenance for a brief minute, then she lowered her teary eyes and the veil softly sank back over the delicate fair figure. But the two on the right and left were horrible furies; their eyes cast out fiery bright flames, they ground and gnashed their teeth, and horns grew on their heads and loathsome claws on their hands. They rushed at the unhappy youth with diabolical glee and hurled him out of the window, where he disappeared for ever in a dark abyss. And then everything else – castle, princess, and enchanted grove – also disappeared.

A year has passed by, and Spring's rosy blossoms adorned the earth once more, but no coach-and-six had yet come to the poor handicraftsman, nor had any news of the Princess being set free. The parents sorrowfully gave their son Hellmerich up. And Hans felt in secret an ardent desire to give his luck a try, although he carefully concealed this intention from his parents. On a bright moonlit night he crept away, without horse or money for the journey, and he wandered cheerfully through country and city. He fed upon forest-berries and herbs, drank from pure springs, sang with the pious birds, and slept carefree and innocent on the soft moss of the dark forest. So did Hans wander happily onwards until, one noon-tide, he came to a shady deciduous forest; there the realm of the enchanted castle began.



With what bliss did his heart beat when he looked over this paradisaical land. Transfigured by a damask shimmer, it lay spread out before his eyes, and its powerful magic charm took so strong a hold of him that he fell to his knees, his senses enraptured. A sweet slumber encompassed Hans, and he dreamt a long while, resting on the cool forest-moss. A fair lady, in a brightly shimmering, billowing gown, came down to him and handed him a bowl filled with sweet water, which he drank, and which refreshed him like

ambrosia; and further golden glories opened up before his dreaming eyes: charming maidens in floral gowns danced around him and bore him up onto a golden throne, where the fair lady was sitting, and smilingly, with a look blessed by love, she presented him with a sparkling crown.

In this way was Hans's good and pious heart refreshed by a dream of felicities.

When he awoke, the morning sun emerged with a roseate glow from the dark portals of night; he quickly left that place and soon came to a large anthill, which lay on the path half crushed and torn to pieces, and he mused as he watched the industrious little creatures, how they busily collected and worked on their construction.

He wanted to help them; but the little creatures crept onto him and bit him. So he picked them all off and put them down, not killing any.

Wandering on, he came to a lovely pond, and once again twelve little ducks were swimming on it; their feathers shone like silver. And they swam to the bank, and he scattered feed for them, and so took delight in them.

Soon he also came to a large beehive, and he rejoiced at the industry of the little creatures and at their art. Observing in silence, he praised the might, the wisdom, and the goodness of the loving Creator.

The wondrously majestic castle now lay before him in golden clarity; his eyes were scarcely able to bear the glare that radiated all around it. Hesitantly he walked towards it, losing all hope that he would realise his bold intention; yet the thought of his wondrous dream fortified him immensely, and it drove him forward although he shivered and shook. Then he stood at the castle gate and knocked softly until the old woman

appeared and asked him what he wanted. He humbly said, "O Mother, do you think that I can free the Princess? You see, I'm a poor serving-lad, if you think that I'm too lowly, I'll just look at the beautiful castle then go back home." But the old woman cordially took the youth's hand and brushed the locks from his cheek with her cold, bony fingers, and scrutinised his fair figure and modest clothes. "If you pass three tests," she said, "the Princess and the beautiful rich castle are yours, and you will be King over this fair land. If you do not pass them, having desired her will cost you your life."

With the courage of a pure heart, Hans looked up and said, "Very well, Mother; tell me what I must do." And the old woman brought the little cask full of linseed and scattered it all over the virescent meadow, and said: "Gather up all the seeds so that none are missing; when I return in an hour, my son, this task must have been completed."

With boundless industry did Hans pick the seeds up from the meadow; but it struck three-quarters past the hour and the cask was not half full. He was on the verge of despair, yet he awaited the stern sentence with submission. But behold – suddenly an army of black ants crept up, and they carried all the grains into the cask, so that in a few minutes it was as full as before. The old woman came; oh, how joyfully did Hans carry the cask to her! Then she threw the twelve keys into the nearby pond and said, "You must fetch these keys back up so that not a single one is missing; when I return in an hour, my son, this task must have been completed." Now Hans took the greatest pains, but he did not bring a single key up out of the depths. He sat in despair on the bank and could already see the terrible judgement falling on him. And behold – twelve little silver-white

ducks came swimming up, and every one of them was carrying a golden key in its beak, and they cast them onto the fresh-green bank. – Hans elatedly carried the golden keys to the old woman and silently sent a prayer of thanksgiving up to Heaven for the wonderful help that had fallen to his lot.

“Now comes the last test, my son, but it is also the hardest,” said the old woman, and she led the youth into the enchanted castle and through high and luxurious halls and rooms until they reached the chamber of the three veiled women. “Now choose one of these women for yourself,” the old woman said, “two of them are evil, and one is good; if you choose the good one you will be happy ever after, but if you choose an evil one then commend your poor soul to God. When I return in an hour, my son, this task must have been completed.”

How Hans shivered and shook as he looked at the three silent enchanted figures! Each one sat as quiet and mysterious as the others. – His sight darkened, his soul hovered between mortal fear and rapturous hope. Then he fell to his knees and prayed. A quiet buzzing around his head – broke the fearful deadly silence, there were strange whispers, like spirit voices, around him. Then he looked up and saw innumerable bees circling round his head, and from every bee’s mouth came the words, very softly buzzed, “The middl’un, the middl’un, the middl’un.” Then the old woman walked in and Hans pointed to the enchanted figure in the middle.

The womens’ veils fell rustling to the ground. On both sides stood the horrible furies, with the lovely maiden in their midst. A thunderclap shook the air and made the earth quake; and the hideous furies pitched

themselves howling out of the window into the terrible abyss.

The inexpressibly charming Princess embraced the happy youth and whispered euphorically, "Thank you, dear youth! You see, your pure, devout heart has freed me, and only a pure, devout heart could free me. You are now mine and I am yours, my sweet bridegroom!"

Then Hans was delighted, and he could not wait to send a golden carriage drawn by six horses to his home to fetch his parents. And they all lived happily in the enchanted castle until the end of their days.