

The Folk- and Fairy-Tales of Ludwig Bechstein: **The Fair Young Bride**



Once upon a time a pretty country lass went into the forest to fetch fodder for her cow, and as she was cutting the grass in God's name, suspecting no manner of evil, four robbers suddenly appeared, surrounded her, and carried her off with them, without mercy or compassion, no matter how much she screamed and wriggled and begged and besought. In a gloomy forest far away from the girl's home the robbers had a house in which they dwelt – at least, there would always be some of them to stay at home while the others set out to rob. But the robbers did not do the girl any injury beyond taking her away from her home and holding her prisoner, as it were, in the house; she had to take care of the household, cook, bake, and wash. Otherwise she had it good, but she was always closely guarded. And the robbers had given her the name: The Fair Young Bride.

Now the girl had been in the robbers' nest for several years when it so happened that a major robbery was to be executed, and for it to succeed, every man jack in the band would have to take part.

As the girl appeared to have grown accustomed to life in the robbers' den, and had never made any attempt to escape, and would, no doubt, be

hardly able to find her way through the wild forest – so thought the chief – so this time she was left alone and unguarded in the house in the forest. But no sooner had the robbers left than the Fair Bride began to devise a way of escaping without being recognised. She swiftly made a straw figure, dressed it in her clothes and put her hood on its head; then she smeared herself with honey from top to toe and rolled over and over in a bed of feathers, making herself totally unrecognisable and looking like some strange kind of bird. She propped the dummy dressed in her clothes against a window over the front door so that it was looking out – but with its face hidden – and then she hurried away.

Now, whether it was that the chief had a presentiment of the girl's intended flight, or that something had been forgotten, at any rate, he sent some of the robbers back to the house, and it just so happened that they came upon the feathered oddity. They thought it was one of their cronies who had camouflaged himself, and they hailed the figure with the laughing inquiry:

“Sir Sack of Feathers, whither away?

What does our Fair Young Bride today?”

The figure being the bride herself, she was highly alarmed, but she took heart nonetheless and answered in a disguised voice:

“She sweeps our house and scrubs it clean,

While looking out the window, I ween!”

And thus she managed to pass out of the robbers' sight, then she came safely out of the forest, arrived at a village, bought herself clothes, and bathed; and she reached her home again safe and sound, albeit after a

long journey. And as she had not exactly left the best things behind in the robbers' lodge, but had made off with them (as her yearly wages), she was not short of means and she married an upright young man.

When those robbers she had met caught sight of the house, they saw the figure of the Fair Young Bride at the window, and they greeted her from a distance by calling out:

“God be with you, O Fair Young Bride,
Who kindly waits for us inside.”

But the greeting remained unanswered, to the astonishment of the robbers, and when they came closer they thought the Fair Young Bride had fallen asleep. In vain did they call her, she did not waken; in vain did they command her to open up, all their knocking and yelling, calling and scolding, was to no avail, and in the end they kicked the door to pieces in a fury, stormed up the stairs and roughly seized the figure of the Fair Young Bride – and the straw puppet fell into their arms. Then the robbers cried:

“Fare well, fare well, you fair young lass,
Who trusts in women is an ass!”