

The Folk- and Fairy-Tales of Ludwig Bechstein: **The Farthing**

An unknown traveller entered a farmer's house, where he found the whole family, the father with his wife and children, in a melancholy mood and dressed in mourning, for they had lost a dear and pretty child, a girl, only a few weeks before. The family let the stranger, who was actually a relative of theirs, partake of their midday meal. After grace was said, everyone sat down to table and the clock struck twelve. And with the last stroke the room door opened very quietly and a pale child came into the parlour. She did not greet anyone, nor look around her, nor speak a word, but passed with a floating motion into the bedroom. No one said a word, and the stranger asked no questions, but his blood ran chill in his veins.



Business detained the relative in that place, and with the family, who had taken him in as their guest, for the next day and the day after that; but he would rather have left, for on the second day the same apparition presented itself, the pale child coming in through the parlour door and

passing silently into the bedroom – with the family seemingly oblivious to her presence. It happened again on the third day, and the stranger could contain himself no longer but asked: “Oh, pray tell me – what child is that who walks so silently through the parlour and into the bedroom every midday at the stroke of twelve?”

“I don’t know of any such child, I haven’t seen one,” the father replied, while the mother began to cry. Now the stranger walked to the bedroom door, opened it slightly, and looked into the room. There he discerned the child. She was sitting on the ground, very earnestly grubbing with her fingers in a gap between two floorboards, and while she burrowed she softly sighed, “Oh, the farthing! Oh, the farthing!” But when the bedroom door creaked a little the child started back in fear and vanished. Now the guest told the family what he had seen, and described the child’s appearance, and the mother cried out sobbing: “Oh God, oh God! That was our child, who we buried four weeks ago! Why, oh why can she not rest in the grave?” Now the guest advised them to prise up the floorboards, and when this was done, a paltry farthing was found underneath, which the child ought to have placed in the collection bag in church; however, she had kept it until she could gain possession of a second one, then she would buy herself a penny roll. But at home, the child had dropped the farthing and it had fallen into the gap between the floorboards. That was why the child could not rest in the grave. On the following day the child’s mother threw the farthing into the collection bag, and from that time on the child did not come again.