

The Folk- and Fairy-Tales of Ludwig Bechstein: **The Garden in the Well**

Following the death of his first wife, who had borne him a girl and a boy, a farmer had married a second and received from her another son, who was called Casper. She was a wicked stepmother to the first two children, treating them badly, having them walk around in tattered clothes, and giving them barely enough to eat, whereas she did Casper's will in everything, saw that he walked around in the finest clothes, and gave him the preference in every way. The father could not say anything about this, no matter how often the poor children poured out their sorrows to him, for he became sickly little by little and was himself made to suffer extreme vexation by his wife. In the end, the wicked stepmother even took it into her head to put the two children out of the way and turn the inheritance solely towards her offspring. So one day she took the children deep into the forest to search for strawberries; evening drew near, and when the children looked around the mother had disappeared. The girl cried bitterly, for she thought she would have to perish in the forest; but the boy comforted her, saying: "We'll surely get back home, for on the way here I snapped twigs off the hedges and trees." And the children did indeed arrive back home, to their stepmother's annoyance. She thought to now manage the matter more cunningly and led them even deeper into the forest, but the boy had scattered peas on the way and the children again came back from the terrifying dark wilderness.

This failure of her plans made the wicked stepmother more and more furious, and one day when the boy was drawing water from the deep well in his father's garden, she threw him in. But instead of falling into the water, the boy came into a beautiful garden which was full of flowers and

trees. He could not look his fill, and he ran up to everything he saw; but eventually he realised that looking had not really filled him, for he was very hungry. Then he saw a tree full of lovely red apples, and full of longing, he said:

“Start shaking, start quaking, you dear little tree,
And throw your apples over me.”

And the tree shook itself, and a great many lovely reddish apples lay on the grass. The boy ate his fill and walked on. Then he saw a tree which was gold all over. It flashed very brightly in the boy’s eyes, and he said:

“Start shaking, start quaking, dear little tree,
And throw leaves of gold over me!”

No sooner were the words out of his mouth than his clothes were shimmering with the finest gold. But now a longing for his father and his sister came into his heart, and he sighed: “Oh, if only I were with my father!” Behold, a little grey man was standing before him, and he showed the boy a pathway and said: “Just keep going straight on until you come to the place whence you came; your sister will be drawing water, so hang on to the bucket.” The boy did so, and everything fell out as the little man had said. His sister was most astonished when she saw her brother, covered with gold, hanging onto the bucket. She was overjoyed to see him, and after her brother had told her everything, she had him lower her down the well too. The girl had the same adventures and she was pulled back out in the same way. Now both the children went to their father and said: “Be joyful, for now we have wealth enough, and we’ll be happy!”

The wicked stepmother was tremendously angry about this, but she kept her feelings to herself and had the children tell her everything exactly. Then she gave instructions to her son Caspar and threw him down the well.

Caspar came likewise into the beautiful garden. When he became hungry, he too saw a tree full of apples. Then he spoke:

“Start shaking, start quaking, dear little tree,
Throw your apples over me!”

Then the tree shook itself and the apples rained down very hard on Caspar’s head. He hastily grabbed the first one and bit into it, but the apple tasted so sour that it made him grimace, and there was a nasty worm inside. However, hunger forced him to eat of it. Soon afterwards he saw a tree that glittered like gold, and he said.

“Start shaking, start quaking, dear little tree,
Throw your blossoms over me.”

Then something began to drip down from the tree, and suddenly he was coated with a crust of pitch. He wept and bawled and longed for his mother, that she might release him from this uncomfortable skin. And the little grey man was standing before him, and he said: “Go over there and hang on to the bucket which your mother will draw water with.”

The stepmother had been waiting at the well, and when she felt a heavy load clinging to the bucket her greed made her rush to pull it up. She thought nothing could be more certain than that Caspar would return covered with gold. How furious she became when she found the young boy in such a state! She scolded and even struck him. The pitch would not

come off at all, and as she had just baked bread, she hit on the idea of sticking him in the warm oven; that will soon make the pitch run off, she thought. She did this, but forgot about the boy, and when she at last opened the oven the pitch flowed towards her – but Caspar had suffocated and been burned to a crisp.

Not long after this, the stepmother died of vexation and grief, while the father lived off the fat of the land with his happy children.