

The Folk- and Fairy-Tales of Ludwig Bechstein: **The Golden Roebuck**

Once upon a time there were two poor siblings, a boy and a girl, and the girl was called Margarete while the boy was called Hans. Their parents had died and had left neither house nor harbour, so they had to go out and beg to keep themselves alive. Both were still too small and weak to work; for Hans was only twelve years of age and Gretchen was even younger. In the evening, they would knock at the nearest house and request a bed for the night, and they had been received, fed, and watered by good, charitable people many times; also, many a merciful soul had made them a present of a garment.

And so they came one evening to a house which stood all alone; they knocked on the window, and when an old woman looked out directly



afterwards they asked her if they might not stay there overnight. The answer was, "If you like, come on in!" But as they were entering, the woman said: "Now, I'll keep you here overnight, but if my husband discovers this, then you are lost; for he likes to eat roasted young human, which is why he slaughters all the children who come his way." The children felt terribly afraid, but

they could go no further, for dark night had set in. So they readily let the woman conceal them in a barrel, where they kept perfectly still. But they took a long time to go to sleep, especially as they heard, after an hour, the heavy tread of a man who was presumably the ogre. They were soon made certain of this, for he began to scold his wife, bellowing because she had

not dressed any roasted human flesh for him. In the morning he left the house again, lumbering so loudly that the children, who had finally fallen asleep, awoke at the noise.

When they had been given some breakfast by the woman, she said: "You children must now do something in return – here are two brooms for you, go upstairs and sweep out my rooms for me, there are twelve in all, but you will sweep only eleven; you must not, for Heaven's sake, open the twelfth. I am going out at present. Be diligent, so that you've finished by the time I return." The children swept very busily and were soon finished. Now Gretchen was burning with curiosity to know what was in the twelfth room that they were not allowed to see, having been forbidden to open the door. She had a little peek through the keyhole, and she saw a splendid little golden cart with a golden roebuck harnessed to it. Quickly she called over to Hans that he too should have a peek inside. And after they had had a thorough look to check that the woman was not coming back, and there was still no sign of her anywhere, then they hurriedly opened the door, pulled out the cart along with the roebuck, sat themselves down in the cart, and drove up and away. But it was not long before they saw, in the distance, the old woman and the ogre as well coming towards them, on the very road they had taken with the stolen cart. Hans spoke: "Oh sister, what shall we do? If the old couple discover us, we're done for." – "Quiet!" said Gretchen. "I know a powerful spell, which I learned from our grandmother:

Rose-red roses prick and pain,

Think you see me? Think again!"

and they were instantly changed into a rosebush. Gretchen became a rose,

Hans became the thorns, the roebuck became the stalk, and the cart became the leaves.

Now they both, the ogre and his wife, came walking up, and she wanted to break off the beautiful rose, but she pricked herself so badly that her fingers bled, and she walked angrily away. When the old ones had gone, the children hastily set out and drove on and soon came to an oven which was full of bread. From inside they heard a hollow voice cry: "Pull my bread out, pull my bread out!" Gretchen quickly pulled the bread out and put it in the cart, then they drove on. And they came to a large pear-tree, hung all over with beautiful ripe fruit, and from the tree there sounded a voice: "Shake my pears down, shake my pears down!" At once Gretchen shook the tree, and Hans very eagerly helped to pick the pears up and pile them into the golden cart. And next they came to a vine which called out in a pleasant voice: "Pick my grapes, pick my grapes!" Meg picked these and stowed them in her cart.

But in the meantime the ogre and his wife had arrived home and had discovered, to their fury, that the children had stolen their golden cart together along its roebuck, just as this couple had stolen cart and roebuck many years before, committing murder on top of theft: they had slain the rightful owner. The cart with the roebuck harnessed to it was not only of great value in itself but also possessed the excellent property that its driver would be showered with gifts wherever he went, from tree and berry-bush, from oven and vine. And so these people, the ogre and his wife, had been in possession, albeit a wrongful one, of the cart for many years, had been the recipients of choice provisions, and had lived thereby in the lap of luxury.

Now when they saw that they had been robbed of their cart, they speedily set out in pursuit of the children to retrieve the exquisite spoils from them. While they ran, the ogre's mouth was watering at the thought of roasted human flesh; for it was his intent to catch and slaughter the children immediately. The old couple ran after the children with long strides and these soon came into sight driving ahead in the distance. The children now came to a large pond and could go no further; moreover, there was neither a ferry nor a bridge there for them to flee across. There were only a large number of ducks to be seen on the pond, merrily swimming around. Gretchen lured them to the bank, threw feed to them, and said:

“Little ducks, little ducks, all swim together,
Make me a bridge so that I can cross over!”

Then the ducks swam together with one mind, forming a bridge, and the children together with the roebuck and cart arrived safely on the far bank. But the ogre came racing along behind them, nastily growling:

“Little ducks, little ducks, all swim together,
Make me a bridge so that I can cross over!”

The ducks quickly swam together and carried both the old ones over – do you think? No! In the middle of the pond, where the water was deepest, the ducks swam asunder, and the evil ogre, together with his old wife, fell splash into the water and perished. And Hans and Meg became very affluent people, but they used their godsend to make many donations to the poor, and they did a great deal of good, for they always remembered how bitter life had been when they were poor and had to beg their bread.

