

## The Folk- and Fairy-Tales of Ludwig Bechstein: **The Hare-Keeper and the King's Daughter**



A rich King had a very beautiful daughter; when she decided to get married, all the suitors who had presented themselves had to assemble on a large green meadow, where she threw a golden apple up into the air time and again, and whoever caught it and ventured to complete three obligations or three tasks, which she set herself, would have her to wife. Now many of them had caught the apple, the last one being a handsome, cheerful shepherd-boy, but not of them had been able to complete the three tasks. So now it was the shepherd-boy's turn, as the last and lowliest of the suitors. The first task was this: the King had a hundred hares in a hutch, and whoever drove them onto the meadow, kept watch over them, and brought them all back in the evening, had accomplished the first task. When the shepherd-boy heard this, he said he would first like to have a day to think things over, but would most certainly decide on the following day whether he dared to undertake the task or not. Now the shepherd-boy ran around on the mountains and was sad, for he was afraid of the risky venture. Then he encountered a little old woman who asked him the reason for his sadness; but he said, "Oh, no one can help me." Then the little grey-haired old

woman spoke: "Do not judge so precipitately; tell me what concerns you, I may be able to help you." And so he told her the task. Then the little old woman gave him a whistle and said, "Look after it well – it will be of use to you!" and before the lad even had time to express his thanks, the little old woman had vanished. Now he went merrily to the King and said, "I'll keep watch over the hares!" And so they were released from the hutch. But by the time the last one was out, the first one could no longer be seen; it was over the hills and far away. The lad went out into the field, sat down on a green hill, and thought: What am I to do? Then he remembered his whistle; he quickly took it out and blew, and the hundred hares all came leaping back and cheerfully grazed around him on the green hill.

However, the King and the beautiful Princess were not at all desirous of the shepherd completing the task and winning the Princess to wife, for he was such a poor devil and not high-born, and they devised ruses they could employ to prevent the hare-keeper from bringing his flock home in full number.

So the King's daughter came walking up to him, dressed in disguise and with her face altered so he should not know her – but he knew her nonetheless. Now when she had looked at all the hares, she asked, "Can one perhaps buy one of the hares here?" And the lad said, "There are none to be sold, but to be earned." Then she asked, "What does that mean?" And the lad said, "If you submit to be my sweetheart and spend a shepherd's hour with me!" She would not. However, as she *did* want a hare and he would not give one any other way, she at length condescended to agree. Now when he had hugged and kissed her quite to his satisfaction, he

caught a hare for her and put it in her small basket, and she departed. When she was about a quarter-hour's walk away from him, he blew his whistle, and the hare swiftly pushed open the lid of the basket, leapt out, and came running back to him.



It was not long before the old King came, and he too had disguised himself, but the lad knew him nonetheless. The King came riding on a donkey with a basket hanging on both sides. The King asked, "Aren't there any hares for sale?" – "No, not for sale, but one can be earned!" the lad boldly replied. "What does that mean?" asked the King. "If you kiss this donkey here, under its tail," the lad began, "you shall have one!" But the King would not do that; and he offered him a heavy pile of money if he would sell one; but the lad did not sell. Now as the King saw that he would not get to buy a hare, he finally condescended to give the donkey a hearty smacker under its tail; then a hare was caught, put in one of the baskets on the donkey, and the King rode away. But he had not gone far before the lad

blew his whistle and the hare hopped out of the basket and came back.

After that the King returned home and said, "He's a slippery lad, I couldn't get a hare!" He did not say what he had done. "Indeed!" replied the Princess. "That is just what happened to me!" But she also did not confess what she had got up to. When it was evening, the lad came with his hares and counted them out to the King, all hundred, as they entered the hutch.

Now the King said: "The first task is completed, and now it's on to the second one! Pay attention! A hundred measures of peas and a hundred measures of lentils are lying in my loft; I have had them tipped out and mixed together thoroughly, and if you can separate them in one night without a light, then you will have accomplished the second task." The lad said, "I can do it!" And so he was shut in the loft and the door was locked fast. Now when all was quiet in the castle, he blew his whistle; then many thousands of ants came creeping up, and they swarmed and scurried until such time as the peas were back in one separate heap, and so were the lentils. Now when the King came to take a look early in the morning, the task was completed, but he did not see the ants; they had gone away. The King was surprised and did not know how the lad had done it. Then he said, "I shall now tell you the third task. If you can eat your way through a large chamber full of bread this coming night, so that nothing is left over, you will then have accomplished the third task, and then you shall have my daughter!"

And so when it was dark, the lad was put into a pantry which was so full that only a small empty space was left by the door, where he stepped in. Once all was quiet in the castle, he blew his whistle again; then there came

so many mice that it almost gave him the creeps; and when day dawned, the bread was all eaten up, with not even a crumb left over! He banged on the door and yelled, "Open up! I'm hungry!" And now the third task was also completed.

But the King said, "Tell us, for our amusement, a sack full of lies, then you shall have my daughter!" Then the lad set to, telling dreadful lies a half day long, but the sack still would not become full. So at last he related: "I have spent a shepherd's hour with the enchanting Princess, my bride!" At these words she turned scarlet and the King looked at her, and although this was supposed to be a lie, yet the King believed it, and he could certainly imagine how and where it had happened. "But the sack is still not full!" he cried. Then the lad began, "Also, His Majesty has kissed –" "It's full, it's full! Pull it shut!" cried the King, for he was ashamed and did not want the honour that his royal mouth had bestowed on the donkey to be known, as his entire royal household was standing around in a circle. And the wedding of the shepherd-boy to the King's daughter was celebrated, for fourteen days, and there were such lively goings-on, and such a merry time was had, that the teller of this tale wishes he had been a guest there too.