

The Folk- and Fairy-Tales of Ludwig Bechstein: **The Hazel Twig**



Once upon a time there was a rich merchant who had to travel to foreign lands on business. Now when he took his leave, he said to his three daughters: “Dear daughters, I would like to give you a treat on my return, therefore tell me what I should bring back for you.” The eldest said, “Dear father, a lovely pearl necklace for me!” The middle one said, “I’d like a ring with a diamond on it.” The youngest snuggled up to her father’s breast and whispered, “A lovely green hazel-twig for me, daddy.” – “Very well, my dear daughters!” said the merchant. “I’ll attend to that, and so farewell.”

The merchant travelled far away and made large purchases, but he also faithfully remembered his daughters’ wishes. He had already packed a valuable pearl necklace in his suitcase to delight his eldest with, and he had bought a diamond ring of equal value for the middle daughter. But he could not espy a green hazel-twig anywhere, however hard he tried. On the journey home he therefore covered long stretches on foot, and his way frequently taking him through forests, he hoped to eventually come upon a nut-tree; but for long he hoped in vain, and the good father began to feel his spirits sink at not being able to carry out the harmless request of his youngest and dearest daughter.

Finally, when he was walking so sorrowfully on his way, which just happened to take him through a dark forest and past thick bushes, he bumped his hat against a branch, and it rattled, as if hailstones were falling on it; when he looked up, he saw a lovely green hazel-twigh, from which there hung a bunch of golden nuts. The man was delighted, and reaching up with his hand he broke off the splendid twigh. But at that very instant, a wild bear shot out of the thicket and reared up on its hind paws, growling furiously, as though it intended to tear the merchant limb from limb. And in a terrible voice he roared, "Why did you break off my hazel-twigh, you? Why? I'm going to eat you." Shaking with terror and trembling, the merchant said, "O dear bear, don't eat me, and let me go my way with the hazel-twigh, I'll give you a large ham and lots of sausages for it!" But the bear roared again, "Keep your ham and your sausages! Only if you promise me to give me the first thing you meet at home will I not eat you." The merchant readily agreed to this, for he called to mind how his poodle usually ran towards him on his return, and he was willing to sacrifice it to save his own life. After a strong handshake the bear calmly lumbered back into the thicket; and the merchant, heaving a sigh of relief, strode rapidly and happily on his way.

The golden hazel-twigh shone resplendently in the merchant's hat as he hurried towards his home. Joyfully did the youngest girl skip towards her beloved father; the poodle came after her in wild bounds, and the elder daughters and the mother walked rather less quickly out the front door to welcome the arrival. How the merchant started when his youngest daughter was the first to fly towards him! Concerned and distressed, he evaded the happy child's embrace and, after the initial greetings, he informed his family

what had befallen him with the hazel-twigg. Then they all wept and were sad at heart, but the youngest daughter showed the most courage and resolved to fulfil her father's promise. And the mother soon devised a good expedient, saying, "Let us not be afraid, my dears, for if the bear should come and remind you, my dear husband, of your promise, then we'll give him the shepherd's daughter instead of our youngest, he will be satisfied with her." This suggestion was approved and the daughters were happy again and were delighted with their lovely presents. The youngest wore the hazel-twigg all the time; she soon completely forgot about the bear and her father's promise.

But one day a dark coach rattled through the street before the merchant's house, and the ugly bear climbed out and walked growling into the house and up to the startled merchant, desiring the fulfilment of his promise. Quickly and secretly, the shepherd's daughter, who was very ugly, was fetched, prettily dressed, and put in the bear's coach. And they set off. On the way, the bear laid its wild, shaggy head on the shepherdess's lap and growled:

"Scratch and scrabble behind my ears,
Do it gently, do it neatly,
Or I'll eat you up completely!"

And the girl began to scrabble, but she did not do it to the bear's liking, and he realised that he had been betrayed; and he was about to eat the well-dressed shepherdess, but she, in mortal terror, quickly leapt out of the coach.

After this, the bear drove up to the merchant's house once more and

demanded the true bride with fearful threats. And so the charming girl had to appear, to go away with her ugly bridegroom after a hard and bitter parting. On the way he growled again, laying his rough head on the girl's lap:

“Scratch and scrabble behind my ears,
Do it gently, do it neatly,
Or I'll eat you up completely!”

And the girl scrabbled, and so gently that it pleased him, and his fearful bear's expression was softened, so that the poor bear-bride gradually began to trust in him. The journey did not take very long, for the coach drove tremendously fast, like a whirlwind racing through the air. They soon arrived in a very gloomy forest, where the coach suddenly halted before a darkly gaping cave. This was the bear's dwelling. Oh, how the girl trembled! And all the more, when the bear enfolded her in his fearful clawed arms and said to her in a friendly growl, “Here shall you



live, little bride, and be happy, provided that you behave well inside so my wild beasts do not tear you apart.” And when the two of them had taken several steps inside the dark cave, he opened an iron door and walked with his bride into a room that was full of venomous snakes, which greedily darted their tongues at them. And the bear growled into his little bride's ear:

“Don't look around!
Not right, not left;
But eyes in line, and you'll be fine.”

And the girl did walk through the room without looking around, and as long as she did so, no snake wriggled or squiggled. And in this way did they pass through ten more rooms, and the last one was full of the most hideous creatures, dragons and snakes, toads swollen with venom, basilisks and lindworms. And the bear growled in every room:

“Don’t look around!

Not right, not left;

But eyes in line, and you’ll be fine.”

The girl trembled and shook with fear and anxiety, like an aspen-leaf, but she held her nerve and did not look around, not to the right, not to the left. But when the door to the twelfth room opened, a dazzling gleam of light shone towards them both, delightful music rang out from inside, and everywhere there were loud cries like joyful cheers – the sound of jubilation. Before the bride could begin to gather her thoughts, still trembling from the horrors she had seen, and now this surprising loveliness – there was a terrible clap of thunder, whence she thought that Heaven and Earth were breaking asunder. But all soon became calm again. The forest, the cave, the poisonous beasts, the bear – had vanished; a magnificent castle with rooms decorated in gold and handsomely dressed servants stood there instead, and the bear had become a handsome young man, the Prince of the marvellous castle, who now pressed his dear little bride to his heart and thanked her a thousand times for having so kindly and obligingly released him and his servants, the beasts, from their enchantment.

The girl, now so high-ranking and rich a Princess, still wore her lovely hazel-twigg at her breast, and it had the property of never withering;

and now she wore it all the more fondly because it had been the key to her fair fortune. Her parents and her sisters were soon informed of this favourable fate, and they were taken in to the castle by the Bear-Prince, where they lived a marvellous life of luxury for ever after.