

The Folk- and Fairy-Tales of Ludwig Bechstein: **The Juniper Tree**

It was a long time ago – perhaps two thousand years – there was a rich man who had a beautiful and pious wife, and they loved each other dearly; but they had no children and they wished for some very ardently, and the wife often prayed for this night and day, but they had none, they had none.



In front of their house was a yard, in which there was a juniper tree; one winter's day the wife stood under this tree peeling an apple, and as she was peeling the apple she cut her finger and her blood flowed into the snow. "Ah," said the wife with a deep sigh, and she looked at the blood before her and fell into a deep melancholy, "if only I could have a child who was as red as blood and as white as snow." And as she said this, her heart grew light again, she felt that it would

come true. So she went back into the house and when a month was past, the snow had gone; and two months, it was green; and three months, the flowers came up from the earth, and four months, all the trees in the wood crowded one another and the green branches had all grown into a tangle. The birds sang there and all the wood resounded with their song, and the blossoms fell from the trees. Then the fifth month was past, and the wife again stood under the juniper tree, where her heart leapt with joy, and she fell to her knees, quite beside herself with delight. And when the sixth month was past, the fruits became plump and firm and she became quite still, and in the seventh month she reached for the berries and ate her bellyful; then she became sad and ill. The eighth month went by and she called her husband and wept and said, "When I die, bury me under the juniper tree."

And she was quite comforted and glad until the ninth month was past; then she bore a child, as white as snow and as red as blood, and when she saw him she was so full of joy that she died.

Then her husband buried her under the juniper tree, and he began to weep torrents of tears. After a while his tears abated, and when he had wept a little his spirits rose again, and a while later he took another wife. From the second wife he got a daughter, while the child from his first wife was a little boy, as red as blood and as white as snow. When the wife looked at her daughter, she loved her dearly, but when she then looked at the little boy, it cut her to the quick every time, and it seemed to her that he was always in her way, and she constantly thought about how she would divert her husband's entire inheritance to her daughter. Those thoughts came from the Evil One. She now conceived a hatred for the little boy and pushed him around from one corner to the next, smacking him here and whacking him there, so that the poor child lived in constant fear. When he came home from school he had no place where he could sit in peace.

One day the wife had gone into the box-room when her little daughter also came in and said, "Mother, give me an apple." – "Yes, my child," said the wife, and she gave her a lovely-looking apple from the chest; this chest had a large, heavy lid with a large, sharp iron lock. "Mother," said her daughter, "isn't my brother to have one too?" That irked the wife, but she did not let it show, saying: "Yes, when he comes home from school." And when she caught sight of him through the window, it was as if she were possessed by the Evil One. Quickly taking the apple back off her daughter, she said, "You shall not have one before brother." Then she

threw the apple into the chest and closed it. Now when the little boy appeared at the door, she said to him very kindly, “My son, would you like an apple?” while giving him a look of pure evil. “Mother,” said the little boy, “why are you giving me such a horrible look? Yes, give me an apple.” – “Come with me,” she said, and she opened the lid. “Take an apple out yourself.” And when the little boy bent down into the chest – the Evil One guided her – Crash! She slammed the lid shut so the little boy’s head flew off and fell among the red apples. Then she was seized with shock, and she thought in terror: How can I shift the blame for this



away from me? And she went down into the parlour and took a white cloth out of the bottom drawer in the chest; she placed the head on the body and tied the neckerchief so that the severance could not be seen, then she sat him on a chair before the door and put an apple in his hand.

Soon afterwards Marlene came to her mother in the kitchen; she was standing at the fire, stirring in a pot all the time. “Mother,” said Marlene, “brother is sitting before the door and he looks very white; he has an apple in his hand, I asked him to give me the apple but he didn’t answer and I felt quite horrified.” – “Go there one more time,” said the mother, “and if he doesn’t want to answer again, then give him a clip round the ear.” So Marlene went off and said, “Brother, give me the apple.” But he kept silent, so she gave him a clip round the ear, and his head fell off; she was shocked and burst into a flood of tears; and she ran to her mother and said, “Oh Mother, I’ve knocked my brother’s head off,” and she cried and cried and

would not be pacified. “Marlene,” said her mother, “what have you done!



But just be quiet, so no one notices anything, there is quite simply nothing to be done about it; we shall boil him in vinegar.” Then the mother took the little boy, hacked him to pieces, put them in a pot, and boiled him in vinegar. Marlene stood by, weeping and weeping, and every one of her tears fell into the pot, so there was no need to add salt.

Then the father came home, sat down to table, and said, “Where’s my son?” The mother served him a big, big bowl of blood soup and Marlene cried, completely unable to control herself. The father said again, “Where’ my son?” – “Oh,” said the mother, “he has travelled to his great-uncle’s, he wants to stay there for a time.” – “And what is he doing there? He did not even bid me farewell.” – “He wanted to go there and asked me if he could possibly stay six weeks; he’s in good hands there, remember.” – “Oh!” said the husband, “I am very sad, and it really isn’t right, he should at least have bid me farewell.” Then he began to eat, and said, “Marlene, why are you crying? Brother will come back, for sure.” – “Oh, wife,” he said next, “this food really tastes delicious, give me more!” And the more he ate, the more he wanted to have, and he kept saying, “Give me more, you’re not to have any of this, I somehow feel it’s all mine.” And he ate and ate, and threw all

the bones under the table, until everything was finished. Marlene went to her chest of drawers and took her best silk handkerchief out of the bottom drawer; she picked up all the bones under the table, wrapped them in the silk handkerchief, and carried them out the door, shedding bitter tears. She laid them in the green grass under the juniper tree, and when she had laid them down there, her heart felt much lighter all of a sudden, and she wept no more. Then the juniper tree began to stir, and its branches parted and then closed again, like a person clapping his hands for sheer joy. At the same time, a mist passed through the tree and a fire burned through the mist, and out from the fire flew a beautiful bird, it sang so splendidly and flew high up into the air; and when it had gone, there was the juniper tree just the same as before, but the handkerchief with the bones had disappeared. But Marlene was really happy, as if her brother were still alive. So she went joyfully back into the house, sat down to table, and ate.

The bird flew away, alighted on a goldsmith's house, and began to sing:

“My mother, she slew me,
My father, he ate me,
My sister, little Marlene
Gathered all of my bones,
Wrapped them in a silken cloth,
Laid it under the juniper tree.
Peewit, peewit,
What a handsome bird am I.”

The goldsmith was sitting in his workshop making a golden chain

when he heard the bird who sat singing on his roof, and it seemed to him such a lovely song. So he stood up, and as he walked through the hallway he lost a slipper. But he kept walking, right into the middle of the street, wearing only one slipper and one sock. He had on his leather apron, with the golden chain in the one hand and his pliers in the other hand; the sun shone so brightly in the street. Then he positioned himself so that he could see the bird clearly. "Bird," he said, "how beautifully you can sing! Sing me the piece again." – "No," said the bird, "I do not sing twice for nothing. Give me the golden chain, and I shall sing it again." – "Here," said the goldsmith, "the golden chain is yours, now sing it for me again." Then the bird came to him, took the golden chain in its right foot, perched before the goldsmith, and sang:

 "My mother, she slew me,
 My father, he ate me,
 My sister, little Marlene
 Gathered all of my bones,
 Wrapped them in a silken cloth,
 Laid it under the juniper tree.
 Peewit, peewit,
 What a handsome bird am I."

Then the bird flew away and alighted on the roof of a shoemaker and sang:

 "My mother, she slew me,
 My father, he ate me,
 My sister, little Marlene

Gathered all of my bones,
Wrapped them in a silken cloth,
Laid it under the juniper tree.
Peewit, peewit,
What a handsome bird am I."



When the shoemaker heard this, he ran out the door in his shirt-sleeves, looked up at his roof, and had to hold his hand before his eyes to stop the sun from dazzling him. “Bird,” he said, “how beautifully you do sing!” Then he called through his door, “Wife, come on out, there is a bird here who can sing quite beautifully.” Then he also called his daughter, his children and journeymen, the apprentices and the maids, and they all came out into the street and looked at the bird, and how beautiful it was; it had such lovely red and green feathers, and its throat was like pure gold, and its eyes flashed in its head like stars. “Bird,” said the shoemaker, “now sing the piece for me again.” – “No,” said the bird, “I do not sing twice for nothing, you must make me a present.” – “Wife,” said the man, “go into the shop, on the top shelf there is a pair of red shoes, bring them out.” And the wife went and fetched the shoes. “Here, bird,” said the man, “now sing the piece for me again.” Then the bird came to him, took the shoes with its left foot, flew back up onto the roof, and sang:

“My mother, she slew me,
My father, he ate me,
My sister, little Marlene
Gathered all of my bones,
Wrapped them in a silken cloth,
Laid it under the juniper tree.
Peewit, peewit,
What a handsome bird am I.”

When he had finished his song, he flew away. He had the chain in his right foot and the shoes in his left, and he flew far away to a mill, and the

mill went click, clack, click clack, click clack. In the mill sat twenty miners cutting a stone; they hacked hick hack, hick hack, hick hack, and the mill went click clack, click clack, click clack. Then the bird alighted on a lime-tree that stood in front of the mill, and sang:

“My mother, she slew me,”

then one miner stopped,

“My father, he ate me,”

then another two stopped and listened,

“My sister, little Marlene”

then four more stopped,

“Gathered all of my bones,”

now only thirteen were still cutting,

“Wrapped them in a silken cloth,”

now there were only seven,

“Laid it under”

now only five,

“the juniper tree.”

Only one left,

“Peewit, peewit,

What a handsome bird am I.”

Then the last miner also stopped, having heard only the end. “Bird,” he said, “how beautifully you sing! Let me hear that too, sing it again.” – “No,” said the bird, “I do not sing twice for nothing; give me the millstone, and I will sing it again.” – “Indeed,” he said, “if it belonged to me alone, you should have it.” Then the others said, “If the bird sings again, it shall have the

millstone.” Then the bird came down and all twenty miners lent a hand and raised the millstone with levers. And the bird stuck his head through the hole and put the stone on as if it were a collar, then he flew back onto the tree and sang:

“My mother, she slew me,
My father, he ate me,
My sister, little Marlene
Gathered all of my bones,
Wrapped them in a silken cloth,
Laid it under the juniper tree.
Peewit, peewit,
What a handsome bird am I.”

When he had finished singing he opened his wings, and with the chain in his right foot, the shoes in his left, and the millstone round his neck, he flew off to his father’s house. In the parlour the father, the mother, and Marlene were sitting at table, and the father said, “Oh, I feel so light-hearted and in such good spirits.” – “Oh no,” said the mother, “I am anxious, as if a heavy thunderstorm were coming.” Marlene sat and cried and cried, then the bird came flying up; and when it alighted on the roof, the father said, “My heart is really full of joy, and the sun is shining so gloriously outside, I feel just as if I’m going to see an old friend again.” – “Oh no,” said the wife, “I am so afraid, my teeth are chattering in my head, I feel as if I had fire in my veins.” But Marlene sat in the corner and cried, and had a handkerchief before her eyes, and she soaked the handkerchief with her tears. Then the bird perched on the juniper tree and sang:

“My mother, she slew me,”

Then the mother stopped her ears and pinched her eyes shut, for she did not want to see or to hear; but it roared in her ears like the strongest storm, and her eyes burned and flashed like lightning.

“My father, he ate me,”

“Oh, mother,” said the man, “that is a beautiful bird, it sings so splendidly, the sun shines so warmly, and the scent of may-flowers fills the air.”

“My sister, little Marlene”

Then Marlene laid her head on her knees and wept unceasingly; but the husband said, “I’m going out, I must see the bird close up.” – “Oh, don’t go,” said his wife, “I feel as if the whole house is shaking and ablaze.” But the man went out and looked at the bird.

“Gathered all of my bones,

Wrapped them in a silken cloth,

Laid it under the juniper tree.

Peewit, peewit,

What a handsome bird am I.”

And with the song the bird dropped the golden chain, and it fell exactly around the man’s neck, just in a way that made it suit him very nicely. Then he went inside and said, “Look what a good bird that is – it has given me this beautiful chain, and it looks so splendid.” But the wife became so anxious that she keeled over, her cap falling from her head. Then the bird sang again:

“My mother, she slew me,”

“Oh, would I were a thousand fathoms under the ground, so I did not have

to hear that.”

“My father, he ate me,”

Then the woman fell down as though she were dead.

“My sister, little Marlene”

“Oh,” said Marlene, “I will go out as well and see if the bird gives me anything.” And so she went out.

“Gathered all of my bones,

Wrapped them in a silken cloth,”

Then he threw the shoes down to her.

“Laid it under the juniper tree.

Peewit, peewit,

What a handsome bird am I.”

And she became very happy and joyful; she put on the new red shoes and danced and skipped into the house.”Oh,” she said, “I was so sad when I went out, and now I feel merry; that is really a splendid bird, it gave me a pair of shoes.” – “No,” said the wife, leaping up, and her hair stood on end like flames of fire, “I feel as if the world is going to end! I’ll go outside too, perhaps my heart will become lighter.” And when she walked out the door, Crash! the bird dropped the millstone on her head, and she was squashed to a pulp. When the father and Marlene heard the noise, they went outside, and they saw smoke, flames and fire on the spot; and when these had gone out, the little brother was standing there, and he took his father and Marlene by the hand. All three of them were now very happy, and they went inside the house, sat down to table, and ate.