

The Folk- and Fairy-Tales of Ludwig Bechstein: **The Little Blue Flame**

Once a single old gentleman lived in an ancient house where he could seldom keep a domestic staff for long, and all the servants he had employed said that the house gave them the creeps: they had heard spectres crashing around, had seen flames in dark places, and had been terrified by sprites in sundry other ways. Now it happened that yet another new maid entered this gentleman's service, and her name was Anna; and after the first night the gentleman asked his servant how she had slept – for he was afraid he would yet again have to hear complaints about apparitions in the house. But the cheerful maid told him she had slept very well. The same answer to the same question ensued on the second morning. But on the third morning the maid overslept, and then she was embarrassed, and she said, "All night it seemed to me that a little blue light was dancing around my bed, and it whispered continually, 'Go Ann, Go Ann!' so that I couldn't fall asleep before morning, at first cockcrow."

Now as this disturbance continued for several consecutive nights, the girl showed an inclination to leave the service she had recently entered; the gentleman was sorry about this, and he said to Anna, "You know what, Anna, you should have a word with the priest about this, perhaps he can give you some good advice!"

The clergyman told Anna, when she asked for his guidance, "If the blue light is a spirit and it calls you, then quickly get dressed and follow it, but be constantly on your guard: do not accept anything from it, do not take anything it offers you, do not do anything it bids you, and always let it lead the way. If you follow my advice exactly, it may make your fortune."

In the evening the maid had no sooner got into her bed than the little

blue flame was dancing around it and whispering again, "Go Ann, go Ann!" "If that's how it must be," said Anna, getting out of bed and quickly into her clothes, "then let us go."

"Go Ann!" whispered the flame. "You go ahead!" said Anna, and the flame flickered before her as it passed along a corridor and down the stairs, right up to the cellar door. There the little flame whispered again, "Unlock, Ann!"

"You unlock!" said Anna, "I have no key."

Then the little flame seemed to gain the form of a little white woman who breathed against the keyhole, and the cellar door swung open. Now the bluishly shimmering figure floated down the cellar steps in front of Anna, towards the hindmost corner of the cellar. There a pickaxe was leaning against the wall, and the woman, whose bluish shimmer made the cellar passably light, pointed to the tool and whispered, "Hack a hole here, Ann!" "You hack a hole!" said Anna, "I don't need one."

And then the woman actually grasped the pickaxe and set to work with a will; after a short while a cauldron came into sight, in which there lay all sorts of beautiful things, old gold coins and jewellery with fine pearls and gems. "Lift, Ann! Lift it out, Ann!" whispered the ghost, but Anna said, quite calmly: "You lift it out, I might do myself an injury." So the woman lifted the cauldron up off the ground and set it down before Anna, so that all the gold and silver which lay heaped inside chinked and clinked.

"Carry 'tup Ann, to your chamber!" whispered the woman – but Anna said, "Carry 'tup yourself. It's too heavy for me." So the woman lifted the pot and whispered again, "Go Ann, go Ann!" but Anna replied, "That's not on!

The one with the light leads the way!” And so the woman did go on ahead, back up the steps, but slowly, for she had a job carrying the cauldron, and she moaned and groaned up every step and stair to Anna’s bedchamber. There she put the cauldron down and Anna lay back down in her bed, and the bluish light danced around the bed once more. Then Anna made the sign of the cross and said, “If you have helped me, then may you be helped by God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost in the Eternal Kingdom of Heaven, Amen!”



Then the white woman was standing before Anna once again, but distinctly outlined, and her face shone with the light of purest joy – then she suddenly disappeared. Anna slipped smoothly into sleep, and when she awoke the next morning, she thought it had all been just a dream. But behold – the cauldron was still there, and she was mistress of a considerable fortune. Never again did a ghost haunt the old gentleman’s house.