

## The Folk- and Fairy-Tales of Ludwig Bechstein: **The Little Tale of the True Liar**

The true liar is of so mendacious a constitution that he lies at all times, and he is happy only when lying. He lies at night and lies by day; he lies whatever lies he can tell, he lies to his father as to his mother, he lies to his sister and even better to his brother. Always and evermore, his gob is after lying: he lies here and lies there, he lies in secret and in public, he lies year out and he lies year in. You can hear the True Liar telling the lies that a staircase leads up to Heaven and a gnat pissed a stream which drove four mill-wheels. The True Liar can never have his fill of lies. He also lies that an ant drank up the sea, and that he blew a bear over with his breath. Ah, the more he lies, the happier his spirits become. Then he lies that mountains fly faster than falcons; he fulls and felts everything together to a sack of lies. He lies that the spleen of a mite is larger than that of a sturgeon; he lies that he caught a whale with a mouse and laid it on his table, and he lies that it was as long as three roads.

The Liemaster lies without cease: he lies that he took forty bricklayers contained in a nutshell into the middle of the sea, and he bade them build two towers on a lime-leaf and adjured them to use bricks of red marble for this, or he might have Hell to pay at home. The True Liar will make you a blazing fire from ice; he lies that this ice crackles and cracks and burns like dry wood.

This same Bag of Lies will lie: he saw a sledge travelling in the clouds, as fast as if it were flying; he lies that a donkey was pulling the sledge, and on the sledge were riding seven women dressed in their finest, and all wearing crowns; and beside them twelve young pages were running, blowing trumpet blasts which were heard far away. On the sledge were

hanging golden bells enough, which made a clear clinking. Behind, a thousand knights were riding on just as many packhorses. The Liar sees to it that the knights ride behind the sledge on the clouds and do not fall down from the sky, and so they pass over the sea. The True Liar lies that he saw, on a meadow, a dwarf and a giant fighting each other for half a day; then the dwarf took a sack, shoved the giant inside, ran away with it for the length of seven long roads, and tied the sack to a tree-branch a good thousand fathoms high. Then the dwarf went on his way and left the giant to dangle, and so the Liar lies on without end, and he tells you further: Before I was born on earth and came from my mother's womb, I heard a donkey and a cow exchange snide remarks. The wife and children of an old plate basket had died; lamenting, a haystack brought him money and corn-tax. The plate basket was about to enter confinement, so the pot-board was asked with all haste to stand godfather, and then he gave birth to a cote full of good fat sheep. An empty bag, a beggar's sack, a beer-jug and an oven-fork in ashes rejoiced and all came running up with their playmates. These were a trivet and a grill, a kettle-ring, a hatchel, a crossbow, and a junk-stand. With them there also came running a barrel of sauerkraut, and a sparrow who pecked a young dog from fear when he saw a stork's nest bounding along in a monk's cowl at his side. They all consulted an old cart as to how they might live in perpetual joy? A distaff and a reel were godmothers there and they all sat around the fire. An empty barn joined this company as a guest, and to feed her a bucket milked a dry wooden fence.

I was standing not far away when I saw a lame man running after three hares and catching all three of them; but then a stark naked man

came, took the hares from the lame one, and swiftly put them in his bosom. This was seen by a blind mute who told it to everyone. And a hedgehog pricked a bear, and a cat caught mice in a stream, and a cake boxed the cook's ears. The pots, kettles and pans all saw this with delight; an old fodder-bench danced with delight; a cow swung over the ditch on a rope, a donkey leapt for joy; a large black horse danced around, and a calf, it blew the pan pipes. You would not think a man had seen and heard all this! So does the Liar lie until the beams bend and many an old wall wobbles. He lies the blue from the heavens and the black from the soil, he runs off lie after lie. Newspapers, too, are run off.