

The Folk- and Fairy-Tales of Ludwig Bechstein: **The Man without a Heart**



Once upon a time there were seven brothers, all of them poor orphans, who had no sister, and had to do everything in the house themselves, which was not to their liking, so they all came to an agreement that they would marry. But where they lived, there were no brides for them, so the elder ones said they would travel abroad and search for brides, and their youngest brother was to keep house, and they would bring him a really lovely bride back. The youngest was very well satisfied with this, and the six set out happily and cheerfully on their journey. On the way, they came upon a small cottage which stood quite secluded in a forest, and in front of the cottage stood an old, old man; he called to the brothers and asked, “Hey there, striplings! Where are you heading, so merrily and so fast?” – “Oh, we’re going to fetch a pretty bride for every one of us, and one for our youngest brother at home as well!” the brothers answered.

“Oh, dear lads!” said the old man, “I live here so godforsakenly alone, do bring a bride back for me too, but make sure that she’s a young and pretty one!”

The brothers left that place, thinking: “Hmm, what use is a young and pretty bride to such a hoary old kobold?”

Now when the brothers arrived in a town, they found seven sisters there, as young and as pretty as they could possibly wish them to be, and they took the sisters back with them, with the youngest one for their brother. Their way led them back through the forest, and the old man was again standing in front of his cottage as if he were waiting for them, and he said, “Well, you worthy lads! You’ve brought me such a young and pretty bride, that’s just the ticket!” – “No!” said the brothers. “She’s not for you, she’s for our brother at home, we’ve promised her to him!”

“Indeed?” said the old man. “Promised? Why, you – I’ll give you ‘promised’!” and he took a little white staff and muttered a few magic words, and touched the brothers and the brides with the staff – except for the youngest sister – and they were all turned to grey stone. The man took the youngest of the sisters into the house, and she now had to set everything in order and keep the house tidy, which she did willingly, but she lived in constant fear that the old man might soon die, and then she would be just as godforsakenly alone in the isolated cottage in the wild and desolate forest as the old man had formerly been. She told him this and he replied, “Don’t worry, don’t be afraid, and don’t hope that I’ll die. You see, I have no heart in my breast! But if I were to die nevertheless, you’ll find my white wand over the door, and if you touch the grey statues with it, your sisters

and their suitors will be freed and you'll have company enough."

"But where on earth do you have your heart, if you don't have it in your breast?" asked the young bride. "Must you know everything?" asked the old man. "Well, if you really must know, my heart is in the coverlet."

So when the old man was away attending to his business, the young bride, in her loneliness, sewed and embroidered very pretty flowers on his coverlet, so that his heart might take joy of them. But the old man smiled at this and said, "You dear child, why, I was only joking, my heart is – it is – " – "Well, where is it, dear father?" – "It's in the house door!"

So the next day, when the old man was away, the young bride decorated the house door very prettily with colourful feathers and fresh flowers and hung it with wreaths. The old man asked, when he returned, what the meaning of this was, and she said: "I did it to do something for the sake of your heart." The old man smiled again and said, "Dear child, my heart is in a completely different place from the house door." Then the young bride became very distressed and spoke: "Ah father, so you do have a heart, and you can die, and then I'll



be so alone." Then the old man repeated to her what he had already told her twice, and she urged him anew to tell her where his heart really was. So the old man said: "Far, far from here, in the depths of a wilderness, there lies a large, age-old church. It is firmly secured with iron doors, around it

there runs a deep moat which no bridge leads over, and in the church a bird flies up and down, it does not eat and does not drink and does not die, and no one is able to catch it; and so long as the bird lives, so long do I live also, for my heart is in the bird.”

Then the bride became sad because she could not do anything for her old husband’s heart, and the time weighed heavy on her hands when she sat all on her own, for the old man was away from home nearly all day long.

Now one day a young travelling journeyman came by the cottage; he greeted her and she greeted him, and he liked her and came closer, and she asked him whither he was going and whence he had come. – “Ah!” the young journeyman sighed. “I’m really sad. I had six brothers, who started out from home to find themselves brides, and they were also going to bring one back for me, the youngest, but they never have come back, and so I too have now left home, to seek my brothers.”

“Oh, dear journeyman!” cried the bride. “Then you need not go any further! First sit down and have something to eat and drink, and then listen to my tale!” And she gave him food and drink, and told him how his brothers had arrived in her town, and how they had intended to take her sisters and she herself back home with them as brides, and that she had been meant for him, her guest, and how the old man had kept her with him and turned the others into grey stones. She told him all of this candidly, weeping the while, and also that the old man had no heart in his breast, and that it was far, far away in a secure church and in an immortal bird. Then the bridegroom said, “I will go forth, I will seek the bird, perhaps God will help



me to catch it.” – “Yes, do that, you will be doing a good turn, then your brothers and my sisters will become people again!” and she hid the bridegroom, for evening had come by this time; and when the old man had gone out again the next morning, she packed a great deal of food and drink for the travelling journeyman, gave it to him to take along, and wished him every fortune and God’s blessing on his journey.

Now when the journeyman had walked a fair distance, it seemed to him that it might well be time to breakfast, so he unpacked his provision-bag, regarded the many treats with delight, and cried out, “Hey! Now we’ll have a feast! Come here, whoever wants to be my guest!”

Then there was a “Moo!” behind the journeyman, and when he turned round, a large red ox was standing there and it said, “You’ve invited –I’d like to be your guest!” – “Welcome, and help yourself, what’s mine is yours!” So the ox lay leisurely down on the ground and ate with relish, and licked his mouth nice and clean with his tongue; and when he was full up, he said, “I am much obliged to you, and if you ever need someone to help you in a time of danger and need, call for me, your guest, even if only in your thoughts.” And he raised himself up and disappeared into the undergrowth. The journeyman packed up the remains of the meal and pilgrimised onwards; after covering another good distance, he thought from the shortness of the shadow he cast that it must be midday, and his

stomach thought the same. So he sat down on the ground, spread out his tablecloth, laid his dishes and drinks on it, and cried: "Come now! Midday meal! Present yourself now, if you wish to join me at table!" Then there was a tremendous rustling in the bushes, and a wild boar burst out, grunting, "Oui oui oui," and it said, "Someone here cried out an invitation to a meal! I don't know if it was you – and if you meant me?"

"Well, in any case, help yourself to what's there!" said the wanderer, and they ate cheerfully together and both enjoyed the food. Afterwards the wild boar raised itself up and said, "Thank you; if you have need of me, then call the boar!" and it shuffled off into the bushes. Now the journeyman walked a very long stretch, and had now covered a very great distance; the day was drawing towards evening, and he felt hungry again, and he still had provisions, and so he thought: How about an evening meal? I'd say it were about time. – And again he spread out his tablecloth and laid his food on it, and he still had something to drink, and he cried: "Anyone who would like to eat with me may consider himself invited. It's not as if there were nothing here!" Then there was a swishing sound of heavy wings beating above him, and the ground grew dark, as with the shadow of a cloud, and there came into view a large griffin, who cried, "I heard someone here below invite to table! I don't suppose there would be anything left over for me?"

"And why not? Alight here and make do with what there is, there won't be much left for long!" cried the youth, and so the griffin alighted and ate its fill, and then it said, "If you need me, then call me!", rose up into the air, and disappeared. Well, thought the journeyman, he's in an awful hurry; I

think he could have shown me the way to the church, for I'm not likely to ever find it on my own. And he bundled his things together, and thought he would walk a little further before going to sleep. And he had not been walking long at all when all of a sudden he saw the church before him, and he was soon at it, that is, at the wide and deep and moat without a bridge that surrounded it. Then he looked for a nice resting place, for he was tired from the far journey, and he slept; and the next morning he wished to be over the moat, and thought: Look, if the red ox were here and had a raging thirst, he could drink up the moat and I could get across dry. -No sooner had he made this wish than the ox was there, and it began to drink up the moat. Now the journeyman stood at the church-wall, which was very thick, and the towers were of iron, so he thought to himself: Oh, to have a battering-ram! The strong wild boar could perhaps accomplish more here than I could. – And behold, at once the wild boar came running up and crashed into the wall and rooted a stone out with its tusks, and when one was out, it rooted more, and ever more, stones out of the wall, until a large, deep hole had been burrowed through which one could climb into the church. The youth now climbed in and saw the bird flying around inside but was not able to catch it. So he said: "If the griffin were here now, he'd soon get a grip on you – that's why he's called a gryphon!" And the griffin was there on the instant, and it instantly caught the bird which had the old man's heart inside it, and the young journeyman kept that same bird very safe, while the griffin flew away.

Now the youth hurried back to the young bride as fast as he could, arrived before evening had come, and told her everything; and she again

gave him something to eat and to drink, and bid him slip under the bed, together with his bird, so the old man would not see him. He did this the moment he had finished eating and drinking; the old man came home and complained that he felt ill, that he was too weak to go on – this was the effect of his heart's bird being captured. The bridegroom under the bed heard this and thought: The old man has indeed done you no harm, but he has enchanted your brothers and their brides, and he has kept your bride for himself – that is no small wrong; and so he pinched the bird, and the old man whimpered, "Oh, something is pinching me! Oh, Death is pinching me, child – I'm dying!" And he fell from his chair, unconscious, and before the youth knew it he had pinched the bird to death, and that was the end of the old man. Now he crawled out, and the bride took the white staff, as the old man had instructed her, and struck the twelve grey stones with it, and behold, they became the six brothers and the six sisters again, and there was joy and embracing and hugging and kissing; and the old man was dead and stayed dead, no masterwort could bring him back to life, even if they had wanted him alive again. Then they all set out together, and got married together, and lived well and happily together for many a long year.