

The Folk- and Fairy-Tales of Ludwig Bechstein: **The Miller and the Nixie**

Once upon a time there was a miller who was rich in money and goods and led a life of contentment with his wife. But misfortune comes overnight; the miller became poor, and at last he could barely call the mill in which he lived his own. During the day he wandered around full of sorrow, and when he lay down in the evening he found no rest, but was wakeful all night with disconsolate thoughts. One morning, he rose before daybreak and went outside; he thought this would lighten the load on his heart. Now when he was pacing up and down, racked with care, on the embankment by his mill-pond, he heard a sudden roaring in the water, and when he looked over he saw a woman in white rising out of the waves. He realised that it could only be the nixie of the pond, and in his terror he did not know whether to run away or stay. While he vacillated, the nixie spoke, calling him by name and asking him why he was so sad. When the miller heard these friendly words he took heart and told her how he had formerly been so rich and blissfully happy, and now he was so poor that from sheer want and worry he was at a loss what to do. Then the nixie spoke words of comfort to him and promised that she would make him richer than he had ever been if he gave her, in return, that which had just been born in his house. Thinking she wished to have a whelp or a kitten, the miller promised to give her what she asked for and hurried to the mill in high spirits. A maid came out the front door towards him with a joyful gesture and called out to him that his wife had just that moment given birth to a boy. Now the miller stood there, unable to take pleasure in the birth of his child, which he had not expected so soon. Sadly he entered the house and told his wife and his relations, who were visiting, of the promise he had made the nixie. "May all the good

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fortune she has promised me fly to the winds,” he said, “if I can only save my son.” But no one could think of any advice to give beyond watching the child closely so that he never went too close to the pond.

The boy grew up and thrived, and in the meantime the miller came into money and goods little by little, and it did not take long for him to become richer than he had ever been before. But he could never truly enjoy his good fortune, for his vow was always in his mind and he feared the nixie would, sooner or later, insist on its fulfilment. But year after year passed by, the boy grew up and learned hunting, and because he was a dapper hunter the lord of the village took him into his service; and the hunter wed a young woman and lived in peace and pleasure.



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One day he was hunting a hare which at length swerved out into open country. The hunter pursued it eagerly and laid it low with one shot. At once he got down to hulking the hare, quite careless that he was in the proximity of that pond against which he had had to be on his guard from childhood upwards. He soon finished the disembowelling and went to the water to wash his bloody hands. Hardly had he dipped them in the pond when the nixie rose up, enfolded him with wet arms and drew him down with her, the waves closing over him.

When the hunter did not return home, his wife grew terribly anxious, and when he was sought for and his game-bag was found lying by the mill-pond, then she could no longer doubt what had befallen him. Without rest or repose, she wandered around the pond and called lamentingly on her husband day and night. Finally she fell, from sheer weariness, into a sleep, in which she dreamed that she was walking through a flowery mead towards a hut, where lived an enchantress who promised to restore her husband to her. When she awoke in the morning, she resolved to follow this inspiration and seek out the enchantress. So she set off and soon came to the flowery mead and then to the hut where the enchantress lived. She told of her sorrow and how a dream had promised her counsel and help from the enchantress. By way of answer, she was advised: she should go to the pond at the full moon and there comb her black hair with a golden comb before laying the comb on the bank. The young hunter's wife rewarded the enchantress handsomely and wended her way home.

The time to the full moon passed slowly to her; when the moon was finally at the full, she went to the pond and combed her black hair with a

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golden comb, and when she had finished she laid the golden comb down on the bank and then looked impatiently into the water. Then there was a roaring and a booming from the depths, and a wave washed the golden comb from the bank, and a little while later her husband raised his head out of the water and gazed at her sadly.

But soon another wave came rushing and the head sank, without having spoken a word. The pond lay tranquil again and shone in the moonlight, and the hunter's wife was not a whit better off than before.

Disconsolately she watched through days and nights, until she once more sank exhausted into sleep, and the same dream which had pointed her towards the enchantress came over her again. Once again she went in the morning to the flowery mead and to the hut and poured out her grief to the enchantress. The old woman advised her: she should go to the pond at the full moon, play on a golden flute and then lay the flute on the bank.

When the moon was at the full, the hunter's wife went to the pond, played on a golden flute, and then laid it on the bank. Then there was a roaring and a booming from the depths and a wave washed the flute from the bank, and soon the hunter raised his head above the water, and he rose higher and higher, until the water only reached up to his breast, and he held out his arms to his wife. Then another rushing wave came and drew him back into the depths. The hunter's wife had been standing on the bank full of joy and hope, and she sank down in profound grief when she saw her husband disappear into the water.

But comfort came with that same dream, which appeared to her again directing her to the flowery mead and the enchantress's hut. This

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time the old woman advised: she should, as soon as the moon was full, go to the pond, where she was to spin on a golden wheel and then place the wheel on the bank. When the time of full moon came, the hunter's wife followed the behest: she went to the pond, sat down and span on a golden wheel, and then placed the wheel on the bank. Then there was a roaring and a booming from the depths and a wave washed the golden wheel from the bank, and soon the hunter raised his head above the water, and he rose ever higher until he at last climbed onto the bank and flung his arms around his wife's neck. Then the water began to roar and to boom and flooded the bank far and wide, dragging both of them down with it as they held one another close. In the anguish of her heart the hunter's wife invoked the old woman's assistance, and suddenly she was turned into a toad and the hunter into a frog. But they could not stay together; the water tore them apart and bore them away in opposite directions, and when the inundation had subsided, they had both resumed their human forms, it was true, but the hunter and the hunter's wife were each of them in a foreign land and neither knew what had become of the other.

The hunter decided to live as a shepherd, and the hunter's wife likewise became a shepherdess. So they watched their flocks for many years, far removed from one another.

But one day it came to pass that the shepherd arrived in the land where the shepherdess lived. He liked the region and saw that it was a fertile spot for grazing his flock. So he brought his sheep thither and watched them as before. The shepherd and the shepherdess became good friends, but they did not recognise each other.

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Now one evening they were sitting together under a full moon letting their flocks graze, and the shepherd was playing his flute. Then the shepherdess remembered that evening when she had played on the golden flute by the pond in the light of the full moon; unable to restrain herself any longer, she burst out sobbing. The shepherd asked her why she was crying and lamenting so, and at length she told him all that had befallen her. Then the scales fell from the shepherd's eyes; he recognised his wife and made himself known to her. So they joyfully returned to their homeland and lived together in untroubled peace.