

The Folk- and Fairy-Tales of Ludwig Bechstein: **The Old Wizard and his Children**

Once upon a time there was a wicked wizard who had, a good while before, abducted two children of tender age, a boy and a girl, and he lived with them in a cave, quite solitary and hermit-like. He had promised these children, more's the pity, to the Evil One, and he practised his wicked arts from a book of magic which he safeguarded as his greatest treasure.

Now whenever it happened that the wizard went forth from his cave, and the children were left behind on their own, then the boy would read some of the book of magic, having espied the place where the old man kept it hidden, and so he learned many a spell and many a charm of the Black Arts, and he learned to do magic quite splendidly. Now because the old man allowed the children out of the cave only rarely, intending to keep them confined until the day when they would fall victim to the Evil One, so their longing to get away from there grew all the stronger, and they discussed with each other how they could secretly make their escape; and one day, when the wizard had left the cave very early, the boy spoke to his sister: "Now is the time, little sister! The wicked man who keeps us so closely confined has gone, so let us get ready and go away from this place, as far as our feet can carry us!" And the children did this, setting out and then walking all day long.

Now when it was almost afternoon, the wizard returned home and saw at once that the children were missing. Straightaway he opened his book of magic and read inside which region the children had gone towards. Then he set off without delay and followed the trail of the children, full of wrath and fury. And by the time evening fell, he had almost caught them up; the children could hear his voice roaring in anger, and the sister was filled

with fear and horror, and she cried: "Brother, brother! Now we are lost; the wicked man is almost upon us!" Then the boy made use of the magic arts he had learned from the book; he spoke a spell, and there and then his sister became a fish while he himself became a large pond in which the little fish swam cheerfully around.

When the old man arrived at the pond, he clearly perceived that he had been outwitted, and he crossly grumbled: "Just you wait, just you wait, I'll catch you yet!" Then he ran post-haste back to his cave to fetch nets to catch the fish in. Once he had gone, the pond and the fish became the brother and sister again, who hid themselves securely, had a good sleep, and set out again the next morning, once again walking all day long.

When the wicked wizard returned with his nets to the place, which he had carefully marked, there was no longer any pond to be seen, just a green meadow with no shortage of frogs but not a fish for the catching; and he grew even angrier than before, threw down his nets, and once more followed the trail of the children, who could not elude him because he carried in his hand a magic wand that showed him the way to go.

And when evening came he had again almost caught up with the wandering children; they could hear him snorting and roaring, and again the sister cried: "Brother, dear brother! Now we are lost, the Evil One is right behind us!"

Once more the boy spoke a spell he had learned from the book, and so he became a roadside chapel, while the girl became a beautiful altarpiece in that chapel.

Now when the wizard arrived at the chapel, he clearly perceived that he had been made a fool of once again, and he ran around it roaring



dreadfully; yet he was not able to enter, for it was always written in the pacts wizards made with the Evil One that they might never set foot in either church or chapel.

“If I can’t enter you, then I shall smite you with fire and burn you to ashes!” screamed the wizard, and he raced away to fetch kindling from his cave.

He ran throughout most of the night, and in the meantime the chapel and the beautiful altarpiece became brother and sister again; they hid themselves and slept, and on the third morning they set out again and walked all day long, while the wizard, who had a long way to travel, pursued them anew. When he came with his kindling to the place where the chapel had been, he banged his nose against a rock, which could not be smitten with fire and burned to ashes, and then he ran off at a furious pace, following the trail of the children.

Towards evening he was very close to them, and for the third time the sister quailed and gave herself up for lost; but the boy spoke another spell he had learned from the book, and he became a hard floor which people use for threshing, and his little sister was transformed into a corn, which lay as if lost on the threshing floor.

When the wicked wizard drew near, he clearly saw he had been made a fool of a third time, but on this occasion he did not hesitate, and he did not run off back home, but rather spoke a spell he had learned from the Book of Magic, and he was transformed into a black cock, which swiftly ran towards the barleycorn to peck it up; but the boy spoke yet another spell he

had learned from the book, and he quickly became a fox, seized the black cock before he could peck the barleycorn up, and bit his head off – and so the wizard came, like this tale, to a sudden end.

