

The Folk- and Fairy-Tales of Ludwig Bechstein: **The Race between the Hare and the Hedgehog**

This story sounds like a tall tale, lads, but it's true for all that, for my grandfather, whom I have it from, always used to say when he told it: "Well, it must be true, my sons, for otherwise no one could tell it, could they?" The story happened like this:

It was once upon a Sunday morning in harvest-time, just when the buckwheat was in bloom. The sun had risen golden in the sky, the morning wind blew fresh over the stubble, larks sang in the air, bees buzzed in the buckwheat, and people went to church in their Sunday best – in short, all creatures were happy, and the hedgehog was too.



The hedgehog stood before his door with his arms crossed, looking out into the morning wind and warbling a ditty to himself, neither better nor

worse than a hedgehog is able to sing on a bright Sunday morning. Now while he was singing to himself so moderately softly, it suddenly occurred to him that he could perhaps, in the time his wife was washing and dressing the children, have a bit of a stroll in the field and take a look at how his turnips were coming along. These turnips were the nearest ones to his house, and he and his family were in the habit of eating them, and therefore he considered them to be his. The hedgehog closed the door behind him and struck into the path to the field. He had not gone very far from his house and was just about to amble round the blackthorn bush which lay



before the field when he met the hare, who was out and about on similar business – to be precise, to take a look at his cabbages. When the hedgehog caught sight of the hare, he cordially bade him good

morning. But the hare, who was in his own way a very distinguished gentleman, and terribly arrogant to boot, did not respond to the hedgehog's greeting, but said to him, assuming a high and mighty air, "And how comes it that you're going around the field so early in the morning?" – "I'm taking a stroll," said the hedgehog. "A stroll?" laughed the hare. "It seems to me that you could put your legs to better purpose – don't you think?" This answer

vexed the hedgehog beyond measure, for he can bear almost anything, but he will not have a word said about his legs, on account of their being naturally crooked. “I suppose you imagine,” the hedgehog now said, “that you can do more with your legs?” – “I think so,” said the hare. “We should put that to the test,” said the hedgehog. “I wager that if we race each other, I’ll run past you.” – “That is ridiculous – you with your crooked legs!” said the hare. “But for my part, we’ll do it, if you have such an exceedingly great desire to. What will you wager?” – “A golden louis d’or and a bottle of schnaps,” said the hedgehog. “Agreed,” said the hare, “let’s shake on it, and then we can start straight away.”

– “No, there’s no need for such haste,” said the hedgehog, “I have not yet eaten anything; first I will go home and have a bite of breakfast. In half an hour I’ll be at the start.” Thereupon the hedgehog left, for the hare was satisfied.



On the way the hedgehog thought to himself, “The hare is counting on his long legs, but I’ll get even with him, assuredly. He may consider himself to be a gentleman, but really he’s a stupid fellow, and he shall pay.” Now when the hedgehog arrived home he said to his wife, “Wife, get dressed quickly, you must come out to the field with me.” – “Why, what’s the matter?” asked his wife. “I’ve bet the hare a golden louis d’or and a bottle of schnaps, I’m going to race him and I need you to be there.” – “Oh my God, husband!” cried the hedgehog’s other half. “Are you soft in the head, have

you taken leave of your senses? How could you want to race the hare?" – "Hold your tongue, wife," said the hedgehog, "that's my business. Don't ratiocinate in men's affairs. Get moving, get dressed, and come along." What could the hedgehog's wife do? She had to obey, whether she would or no.



And when they were on the way together, the hedgehog spoke to his wife as follows: "Now pay attention to what I tell you. Look, on that long field, that's where we'll run our race. To be precise, the hare will run in the one furrow and I in the other, and we'll begin to run from the top. Now, all you have to do is place yourself here at the bottom of the furrow, and when the hare arrives on the other side, you call to him, 'I'm already here.'"

By this time they had arrived at the field, and the hedgehog walked up it after showing his wife to her place. When he reached the top, the hare was already there. "Can we begin?" asked the hare. "Certainly," replied the hedgehog. "Then let's get going!" and each of them took his position in his furrow. The hare counted, "One, two, three!" and he was off down the field like a whirlwind. But the hedgehog ran only around three paces then ducked down in his furrow and sat quite still.

Now when the hare reached the bottom in full career, the

hedgehog's wife called to him, "I'm already here!" The hare pulled up and was not a little astonished. He did not doubt it was the hedgehog himself who had called to him, for the hedgehog's wife is known to look exactly like her husband.

So the hare thought, "There's foul play afoot here." He cried, "Let us run one more time, turn around!" And again off he went like a whirlwind, his ears streaming behind his head. But the hedgehog's wife did not move from the spot. Now when the hare reached the top, the hedgehog called to him, "I'm already here!" Then the hare, beside himself with exasperation, yelled, "Let's run once more – turn around!" – "Fine by me," replied the hedgehog, "as far as I'm concerned, as often as you please." So the hare ran seventy-three times and the hedgehog always kept up with him. Whenever the hare reached the top or the bottom, the hedgehog or his wife said, "I'm already here."



But the seventy-fourth time the hare did not reach the end. In the middle of the field he pitched down to the ground, blood flowed from his

neck, and he lay dead on the spot. The hedgehog took the louis d'or and the bottle of spirits he had won, called to his wife to come out the furrow, and they both went happily back home; and if they have not died, they will still be alive.

And so it came to pass that the hedgehog ran the hare to death on Buxtehude Heath, and since that time no hare has had a mind to race a Buxtehude hedgehog.

Now the moral of this story is, firstly, that no one, however refined he may consider himself to be, should have a notion to make fun of the little man, even if he be only a hedgehog. And secondly, that it is advisable for a man who marries to take a wife from his station, who looks just the same as he does. So whoever is a hedgehog, let him see to it that his wife be a hedgehog too.