

The Folk- and Fairy-Tales of Ludwig Bechstein: **The Starling and the Bathtub**



A handsome young horseman halted in front of a forest inn, and a pretty maid stepped out the door, greeted him demurely, and asked him what he desired. He called for a goblet of chilled wine, which the maiden brought him. But the horseman would not drink until the maid had sipped the wine with her rosy lips and proffered him the goblet. Now while he was drinking, the landlady stepped out, an ugly woman with a brown complexion and a repugnant appearance. The horseman addressed her: “Hallo, hostess! You have in truth a splendid daughter! Is that not so?” – “No, Sir!” the landlady replied. “This lass here is not my daughter, she is just a maid I adopted, who has no parents and no home. I took her in out of pity.”

The horseman felt love for the beautiful maid, and after dismounting he requested a bed for the night, and that the maid prepare a footbath for him, for he would like to talk with her. The landlady commanded the girl to go into the garden and pick rosemary, thyme, and marjoram for the bath. It gave her pleasure and joy to do this, and she went and picked the herbs, and a starling flew onto a bush beside her and sang and said, "Alas, O Bride! You are to wash the squire's feet in that bathtub in which you were borne hither! Your father died of a broken heart, and your mother almost grieved herself to death over you!

Alas, O Bride, you abandoned stray,

Don't know who your parents are to this day!"

Then the pious maid was startled and stricken with grief, and wept while preparing the bath in the little tub, and then carried it up to the room where the young knight was awaiting her. When he saw her weeping, he asked: "Why do you weep, fair one? Wouldn't you like to be merry with me?"

"How can I be merry with you?" she asked back through her tears. "I am crying over the words the starling sang when I was picking the herbs for your bath down there in the garden. The starling, he sang: 'Alas, O Bride! You are to wash the squire's feet in that bathtub in which you were borne hither! Your father died of a broken heart, and your mother almost grieved herself to death over you!

Alas, O Bride, you abandoned stray,

Don't know who your parents are to this day!"

Then the lord looked at the bathtub and saw on it the coat of arms of the King of the Rhine, and his astonishment knew no bounds, and he cried:

“That is my father’s escutcheon! How did this tub come to be in this low inn?”

Then a bird beat against the outside of the window; it was the starling again, and he sang: “She was borne here in the bathtub!

Alas, O Bride, you abandoned stray,

Don’t know who your parents are to this day!”

Now the young lord saw a birthmark on the maid’s neck, and he cried out with joy: “God bless you, fairest one! You are my dear sister! Your father was the King on the Rhine! Christine is your mother’s name! My name is Conrad, and I am your twin brother. That is why, the very first moment I saw you, my heart felt so intense a yearning for you!” Then they fell into one another’s arms and wept, went down on their knees and thanked God, and spoke affectionate words to each other all through the night. Now when dawn was breaking, the landlady, at the door, called out in a loud voice dripping with scorn: “Get up, get up, young bride, and sweep out your lady’s room!” But it was the voice of Lord Conrad which replied: “Neither is she a young bride, nor shall she sweep out the landlady’s room! Just bring us the morning wine yourself!” When the landlady had entered with the morning wine, Lord Conrad asked her: “From whom and from where do you have this noble maiden? She is a King’s daughter and my sister!”

The landlady turned white as a sheet and fell trembling to her knees, but could not utter a word; yet there was no need to, for the starling was there at the window again, revealing the landlady’s evil deed by singing: “In the green grass of a pleasure garden there sat a delicate child in a bathtub, and when her nurse had left her side just for a moment, the evil gypsy came

and carried both child and bathtub away!”

Hearing this, Lord Conrad was so incensed that he drew his sword and skewered it through the landlady’s ears, in one ear and out the other. Then he chastely kissed his beautiful sister, took the bathtub, led her out of the house by her snow-white hand, and lifted her into the saddle; and she had to carry the bathtub before her, on her lap. The starling perched on her



shoulder. So they rode to the Royal Castle on the Rhine, where their mother, the Queen, ruled; and as they rode through the gate their mother came to meet them. Greatly surprised, she asked: “Oh, my

dearest son! What a hussy you are bringing in here! Why, she bears a bathtub with her, as if she were bearing a child!”

“Oh, my dearest mother!” the young king’s son replied. “She is no hussy, but she is your daughter Gertrude, who was stolen from you in this tub!” Then the Princess climbed out of the saddle, and the Queen fell into a swoon for sheer delight, from which she came round in the arms of her children. The starling sang: “Today it is exactly eighteen years since the King’s daughter was abducted and carried over the Rhine in this tub!” So sang the starling, with these words as well:

“The gypsy’s ears now ache so sore,
She won’t steal children any more!”

The Princess had a goldsmith summoned and ordered him to forge a little golden grille for the bathtub, and she put the starling into it and took care of him until the end of his days.