

The Folk- and Fairy-Tales of Ludwig Bechstein: **The Transformed Mouse**



“Once upon a time there was a pious man who served the Supreme Being with prayers and penitence in a wilderness, and for his devoutness and immaculate virtue God was so gracious to him as to hear and grant every wish the penitent made. One day the godly man was sitting on the bank of a stream immersed in reverent thoughts when a sparrowhawk flew over his head, carrying in its claws a mouse it had caught; but the mouse wriggled and slipped from the sparrowhawk’s clutch, and fell down into the pious man’s lap. He took pity on the mouse, gently tied a little cloth around it, and carried it to his home, to care for and raise it there. But then he thought that his servants would take offence if he, the pure

man, were to be familiar with an unclean beast, and would shun him; and so he besought God to be so good as to turn the mouse into a girl. And behold – God heard the request and at once turned the mouse into a lovely girl. The pious man now joyfully took her to his house, where he raised her and took a fatherly pleasure in her; and his servants believed that their master had found her in the wilderness, or she had been entrusted to his care by relatives. Now when the girl, who was regarded as the pious man’s daughter, had come of age, he thought of marrying her to a good man, and

he asked the girl if she had an inclination to marry, and what kind of husband she would like to have. But the maiden was of a haughty and imperious mind, and she answered, 'Yes – but only the greatest ruler!'

Her foster-father replied, 'The greatest ruler, my child, that is the mighty Sun; he rules over all the world, illuminating and warming it with his rays; I will ask him to unite himself to you, and then people will call you Lady Sun.' – The pious man purified himself through prayer and ablution, and presented his request to the Sun; but the latter said, 'Willingly would I obey you, whose every wish the Supreme Being grants, O pious penitent! But I am not the mightiest. Look – the Director of the Clouds is mightier than me; one breath from him becomes a cloud, which takes my light from me so that darkness covers the Earth.' So the penitent went to the shore of the sea from which the clouds rise up and asked their mighty director what he had asked the Sun. Then the Director of the Clouds rose up on his Cloud-Throne out of the bosom of the sea, rising like a great smoke, and said: 'O pious and devout man! The Supreme Being has indeed given me more power than even the angels in His Heaven, yet there is still one who is mightier than I am. That is the Father of the Winds. When he arises and blows hard, then my clouds are scattered and fade away into an insubstantial nothingness, or fly and flee before him and his fury from one end of the world to the other; and I am nothing compared to him, and I am unable to resist him.'

So the penitent made his way to the Father of the Winds, who lived in a large, wide mountain cave where he kept the winds confined, only at times permitting one or the other to blow – and now presented his request

to him. But the Father of the Winds also explained that he could not deem himself to be the mightiest ruler. 'Look, O pious, pure, and flawless one,' he said, 'at this mighty *mountain*, how he stands there in silent pride! Let me and all of mine rage and roar as violently as ever we can or will, he remains unshaken, neither shrinking nor swaying before my fury, and for that reason, he is mightier than I, and for that reason, you should turn to him.'

After that, the faithful penitent headed towards the Mountain and expressed his wish to him, and the Mountain spoke: 'You call me the mightiest, and it is certainly true that I am large and mighty, the Sun serves me and makes my vertex green, the clouds have to water my meadows and woods with dew and rain, and the wind fans me, like a slave his master; but in the end, the mightiest can only be he who has nothing to endure. I will show you someone who is mightier than I, for I have to suffer him, whether I will or no.'

'Who could that be?' the penitent asked in total amazement.

'It is,' said the mountain, 'a tiny little grey mannikin who burrows into me and digs, and builds himself a home and chambers, and does not ask me for permission to do this.'

'What kind of tiny little grey mannikin would that be?' asked the pious man. – 'It is the mouse!' replied the Mountain. Hereupon the penitent carried his wish and request to the mouse, who replied: 'I am the one indicated by the mountain's words. But could I, even if I wished to, wed a female human and take her in to my low dwelling? See if you yourself can devise a wise expedient, devout one!' – Now the hermit went back to his daughter and said to her, 'I have long sought the mightiest for your husband,

and if you want him, then I must beseech the Supreme Being to make you into a mouse again, as you have been once already, then your will shall be fulfilled.’ And as the daughter persisted in her wish, because her guardian had explained to her how one mighty sovereign after another had directed him to one even mightier, so she was turned, at his entreaty, back into a mouse, and given to the male mouse for wife – for birds of a feather flock together, what is minted as a penny will never be a pound, and from a treacherous raven there will never rise a phoenix, even were he to be consumed by fire like this miraculous bird. But come now, give yourself to the flames, traitor, and let us see what rises up out of your ashes.”

The Eagle-King and his entourage heard these words not without serious consideration, and several shared the opinion of the faithful counsellor; but the raven artfully mocked his vehement adversary, saying:

“Pray bring wood, O noble one, for my funeral pyre! Stack it up with eagle fern, and fan the sparks into blazing flames with your own wings. You will then win immortal fame, and you will long be glorified in epic lays as a raven-killer.”

“You shall not burn!” said the Eagle-King, “neither shall you become one of us, for we ourselves have power enough to avenge you on your and our enemies; nor do we wish to avenge ourselves on you. Hold your peace!”

Next, and Last: *The Raven’s Guile and Ravens’ Revenge*