

The Folk- and Fairy-Tales of Ludwig Bechstein: **The Two Brothers**

Once upon a time there were two brothers, one of whom was clever while the other was foolish, and they were both shepherds, who watched the sheep of a rich butcher on alternate days. Every time when one of them was keeping watch over the flock, the other would stay at home, see to the food, and carry it out to the sheep pasture, where they would consume their meal together.

Now one day the turn to keep watch fell to the clever brother, and that to cook to the stupid one; and after the latter had cooked the food, he carried it out to his brother in the pasture. But on the way there he came to a rickety old bridge which crossed a stream, and it had many cracks, under which the water flowed along, and so the fool

thought to himself: This is a dangerous bridge, the time may come when a sheep or a man will fall through it; as it's hard to go over the bridge, you'd better mend it. And then the fool began to fill the cracks with the dumplings he had made – and they were hard enough, in any case – and he plugged the narrow gaps with sauerkraut, then he walked confidently over the bridge, which now



looked thoroughly firm and durable, and when his brother asked him, “Well, where’s the food?” the fool laughed and replied, “I haven’t any food, but I had a clever idea; I’ve repaired the footbridge so it will hold firm. I stuffed the dumplings in the cracks and the sauerkraut in the gaps, so we and our sheep don’t fall through.”

“Well, what a crafty devil you are!” the clever brother said scoffingly

to the stupid one. "It's a good job that you'll be keeping watch tomorrow and I'll be cooking, or we'd be fasting two days running. But let me tell you this: when you keep watch over the flock tomorrow, be so good as not to have any more of your brand of clever ideas. You need not concern yourself with anything other than the sheep lying down nice and orderly. If you do that, you won't do anything stupid."

"I'll do that," said the fool.

On the next day, when the clever brother stayed at home and cooked, and the stupid one drove the sheep to pasture, the sheep would not lie down in order, and the fool had no end of trials and tribulations with them, until in the end he grew waxy and yelled: "Just you wait – I'll – if you won't do what I tell you!" and he took a club and beat them all stone-dead, and laid them neatly beside each other in rows. Now when his brother came with the pot full of food, he was surprised to see the sheep lying in so very neat a fashion, and he exclaimed:

"Why, they're lying in splendid order!"

"Aren't they just?" replied the fool with great self-satisfaction. "At first they didn't want to, admittedly, and I had trouble enough; I struck them dead, the woollybacks, now none of them will defy me again."

"For Heaven's sake!" shouted the wise brother. "What have you done? Now we're both lost!"

"Oh, go on with you," the fool replied, as cool as a cucumber. "Lost? And if we were? Whoever finds us is sure to be an honest finder, he'll take us back."

"Idiot!" his brother roared in a rage. "The butcher will strike us dead

like you struck his sheep dead! Get packing! We must flee right away!”

And the two brothers fled, running as fast as their legs could carry them, and they came into a dense, dark forest; and when night fell they climbed up a tree, to sleep in its branches, and they took their pot up with them, which still had their food inside – broth and pieces of bread – for they had lost their appetites from shock and fear and intended to eat in the treetop that night.

But then two robbers came along, with a sack full of nuts and a sack full of money, and they hauled both sacks under the tree in which the two brothers were sitting, then they sat down ready to divide the money. Then some of the contents of the pot sloshed over and one of the robbers said to the other, “Hey – it’s spitting!” and then grains of pearl barley and pieces of bread fell out of the splish-splashing pot, and the other robber cried, “Hey – it’s sleeting and hailing!”

The brothers up above trembled with fear, and they were unable to keep hold of the pot, which would not stay still on the round branch – and then the whole pot tumbled down. – “God above! A cloudburst! The sky’s falling in! Hear the thunder drumming! That’s pretty music!” the robbers cried out, and they ran away, leaving their sack of money and their sack of nuts behind.

The brothers climbed down the tree and found the sacks, and the clever brother said to the stupid one, “Look, there are two sacks: one is full of hard things and is small, the other is big and has nuts inside. Now the question is, which sack do you want, for you are the elder and so you have the lead.”

“That’s right!” the fool replied. “I have the lead, the big sack is my due, the one with the nuts. I can eat the nuts, but the hard things can’t be eaten.”

So each of them took his sack and they wandered on together. The fool ate nut after nut from his sack, and also gave his brother a few, so that he had ever a lighter load to carry, until the sack was quite empty; but it seemed to the other brother that his sack of money was becoming heavier and heavier, and in the end he was unable to carry it any further.

“Now you can carry my sack for a stretch!” said the clever brother to the stupid one. “It’s getting far too heavy for me.”

“Nah! That’s not part of the deal!” the fool answered. “You haven’t carried my sack, have you? And another thing – I’ve given you nuts, but you’ve given me nothing. If you want to have it easy, let’s share and share alike, as brothers should – half of the hard things to you, and half to me, then neither of us will have to carry too much.”

At first the clever one would not hear of it; he had a go to see if he could not after all carry the sack of money by himself, but it was beyond his power to do this. And so they shared the money, and bought themselves sheep with it, and kept watch over them, and started all over again.