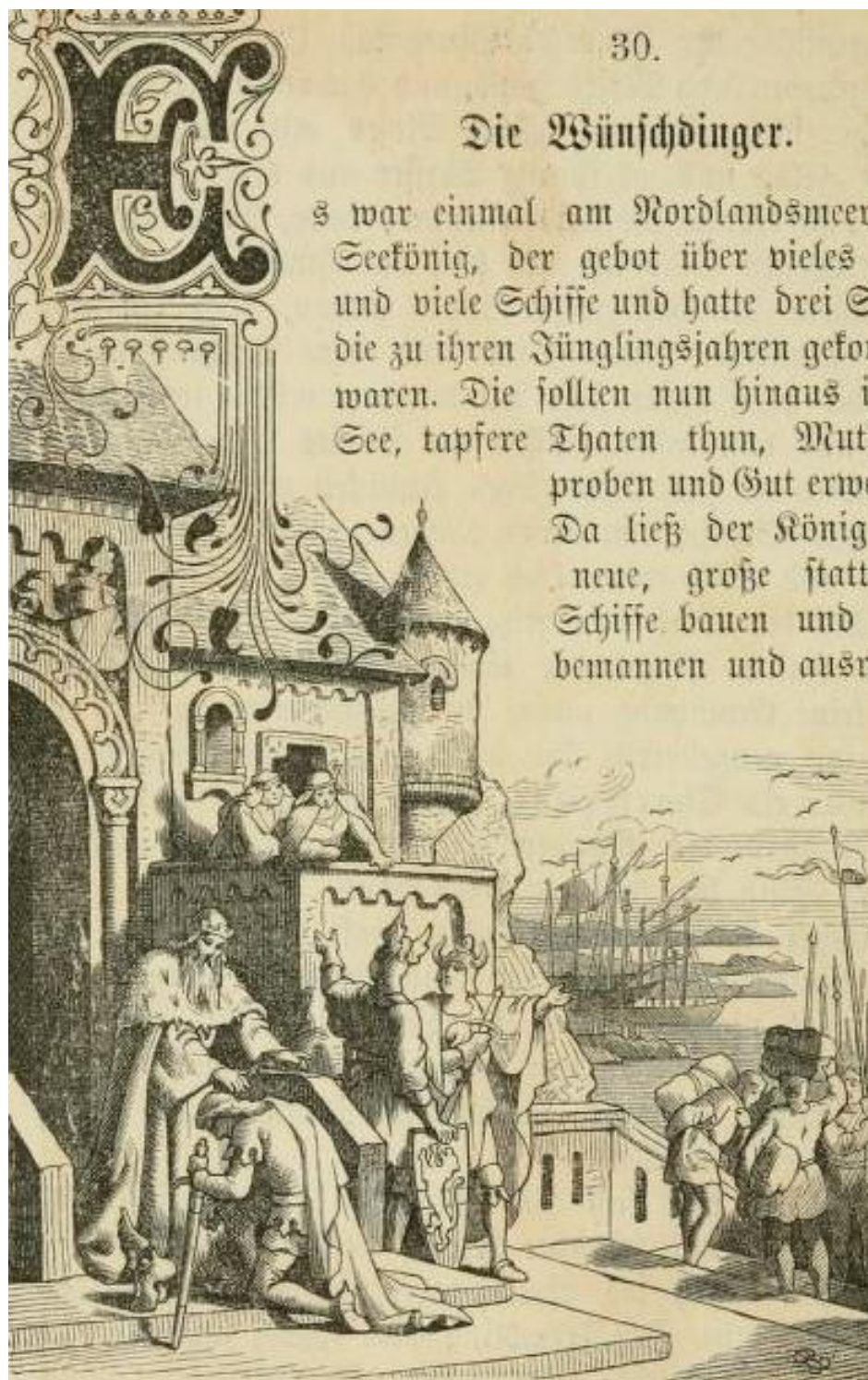


The Folk- and Fairy-Tales of Ludwig Bechstein: **The Wishing-Things**



Once upon a time, by a northern sea, there was a Sea King who was lord over a large swathe of land and a great navy, and he had three sons who had reached their years of adolescence and were now to put to sea, do brave deeds, put their courage to the proof, and acquire riches. So the King

gave order that three new, large and stately ships be built, well manned and well equipped; and after presenting one of these ships to each of his sons, he asked the eldest son: "What do you propose to do with the ship I have given you?"

"With that, my Father," the Sea-King's eldest son replied, "I propose to sail far over the sea to the east and win treasures from distant coasts and islands."

"Well done!" the King remarked. "Go now, and Fortune go with you!"

Then he asked his second son: "What do *you* propose to do with the ship I gave you?"

"With that, my Father," the Sea-King's middle son replied, "I propose to sail far over the sea to the west to discover new lands and islands, and bring a sizable share of their treasures home."

"Well done!" the King remarked to this son also. "Go you now too, and Fortune go with you!"

Now the King turned to his third son and asked: "What do *you* propose to do with the ship I have given you?"

"I propose, my gracious King, lord and father," the Sea-King's youngest son replied, "to set out in search of adventure, and prove myself worthy of your noble name and your love wherever my vessel may take me, and ever and always."

This answer surprised the King, for it was not what he had expected to hear; yet there was nothing to be said against it, so he remarked: "That's delightful! Go now, and Fortune go with you!"

Now a farewell banquet was held, after which the three Princes put to sea. For a time they sailed their three ships in company, but when they

came out into the open sea they separated – to the east, the west, and the south. The one who sailed to the east reached the Land of Silver, where it rained roubles, and he filled his ship with as much silver as it was able to carry. The second son, who had sailed to the west, had a much longer journey but reached the Land of Gold, which is called Eldorado, and he was able to load his ship full to the gunnels with as much gold as it could carry. Both brothers, the one with his ship of silver, the other with his ship of gold, voyaged homewards to their father's castle, where they arrived safe and sound and were joyfully received.

The third brother, who had steered his ship southwards, found neither a Land of Silver nor a Land of Gold, and almost no land whatsoever, and the provisions on his ship were beginning to run out. At last, he perceived a small dark point in the distance, which he headed for, with high hopes of finding at least a Land of Bread there; but when he came closer, he saw that it was a desolate island surrounded by coral reefs and full of sheer, precipitous cliffs and inhospitable rocks. It was the Land of the Starvelings – which might not have been its real name (for it did not seem to be inhabited by a single soul, nor was it on any map or sea-chart), yet that was the name the Prince gave to this inhospitable island after he had wandered around it for three days in search of food for himself and his crew but found nothing. On the third day, he collapsed from hunger and lay in a swoon. When he came to, he saw a fair maiden standing before him, regarding him with sympathetic eyes, and she asked him: "Whoever are you, and however did you come here?"

"Ah!" the King's son groaned, "If only I had not come here. I am a Prince who has nothing to eat, and I'm starving to death!"

“Well, if there’s nothing else that you need, I can certainly do something about that! Follow me, my Prince!” said the maiden, and these words were like music to the Prince’s ears.

His young guide brought him to a cottage, which they entered; inside an old spinstress was sitting, busy with her distaff, and the maiden said to the old woman: “Dear mother, here is a young Prince, and he’s hungry; let us give him to eat and to drink!”

“By no means – don’t think of it!” the old one objected. “The Wishing-Cloth is safely locked away in the reliquary. Won’t take it out, won’t take it!”

But then the old woman’s daughter began to cry and bitterly lament, exclaiming: “But I *promised* him! I *must* keep my word to him! Please, please, pretty please, take out the Wishing-Cloth!” – At this, the old woman unlocked a reliquary and took out a linen tablecloth that was embroidered with wondrous artistry in an ancient manner and had stitched fringes. The old woman spread it over the table and murmured the words:

“Spread yourself, O Wishing-Cloth mine,
Supply a man with food and wine.”

No sooner had she said this than the Wishing-Cloth was covered with bread and salt, marinated roasts and other meats, boiled red cabbage and other crucifers, and a bottle of wine with a glass, and a knife and fork. – Even in his father’s castle, the King’s son had never enjoyed a meal as delicious as this one. When he was full up, he drank to the health of his two benefactresses with words of gratitude and walked towards his ship, to continue his journey as soon as possible. The young maiden ran after him,

crying: "Take me with you – I'll die without you!" But he replied, "Dear, good child – I cannot take you with me, I would lead you to ruin; but if I see happy days again, I shall come back for you."

"Well, keep your word!" the maiden said, "and take the Wishing-Cloth to remember me by, and use it as you have seen my mother use it! Take good care of it, and do not forget me!"

The King's son received the precious Wishing-Thing with great delight and boarded his ship, where the crew were pulling pitiful faces from sheer starvation, and they had begun to murmur about casting lots and transforming one of their number into roasts and chunks of boiled venison. But the King's son laughed, had a large table brought onto the deck, spread the cloth over it, and said:

"Spread yourself, O Wishing-Cloth mine,
Supply my men with food and wine."

The crew stared wide-eyed as the table filled with pork roasts and other roasts, garden salad and cucumber salad, cow's cheese and other cheeses, port wine and other wines. It was a real banquet, and they put back out to sea in a merry mood. Towards evening, they landed on another island, which the Prince explored like the previous one. He found it to be just as uninhabited and inhospitable, and becoming hungry and weary from roaming around, he sat down at a suitable place on the grass, spread out his Wishing-Cloth, and partook of a meal. All of a sudden a man came walking along, who stopped dead in his tracks in amazement, and said: "What's this? Here you are, eating your fill, while I, I who was cast up by a storm on this Isle of Hunger, am about to keel over from starvation any

moment!”

“Be my guest!” the King’s son amiably said, and after bidding the cloth spread itself with new provisions, he told the man how he had come into possession of the same.

“Oh yes,” the stranger remarked, “such Wishing-Things do exist, but they do not all help us much. Look at my staff here – it too is a Wishing-Thing. If I twist the knob off and say: A hundred – or A thousand – or A hundred thousand men, foot or horse, then they appear and will do whatever I want; and if I screw the knob back on, they disappear. But what have I got out of this? What use are armies to me when I cannot feed them? Soldiers want to live too – and when you have nothing for yourself, what then? Such a worthy Wishing-Cloth, now that’s to my liking, and I’d give the Wishing-Staff for it at the drop of a hat.”

“Well, we could certainly swap, if that were alright by you!” said the King’s son.

“Indeed, you have second-guessed my secret desire, my noble friend!” the stranger cried with delight, and the exchange ensued on the spot, whereupon they went their separate ways. But a little while later the King’s son twisted the knob of the staff off and cried: “A hundred men on horseback!” And the riders clattered up to him. “Fetch me my Wishing-Cloth at once!” the King’s son ordered, and the troops executed his command as fast as the wind, and they came back as fast as the wind, brandishing the tablecloth as a standard. Then the Prince spread out the precious item and exclaimed:

“Spread yourself, O Wishing-Cloth mine,

Give five score men their food and wine.”

and he bid the men eat their fill and drink their fill, for which they gave him three cheers, and another three, and yet another three. Hereupon the Prince expressed his thanks most graciously, then he screwed the knob back on the staff and the men instantly disappeared.

After this, the fortunate possessor of the two Wishing-Things betook himself back to his ship and voyaged onwards, and on the next day he landed on a third island, which he also wandered around in search of adventure. On this island he met an old woman who was wrapped in a many-coloured cloak that was nothing but patches of cloth stitched together, and who looked very wretched, and groaned: “Ah, I’m ready to collapse from hunger and thirst, I haven’t eaten anything for two days. Do you perhaps have any bread on you?”

“No, grandma,” the Prince replied. “I have no truck with bread. Would you not like some other fare? I can give you whatever you wish!”

“Goodness me!” cried the woman. “If I could only have a small bowl of coffee! I’m really too empty inside!”

Then the King’s son produced his precious cloth, spread it out, and said:

“Spread yourself, O Wishing-Cloth mine,
For breakfast for two, with coffee and wine.”

Then the cloth was covered with cups and plates, with coffee-pots, cream-jugs and milk-jugs, all warm; with rolls and cakes, bread-cake and sponge cake, with cane sugar and rock candy, with butter and honey, with Westphalian ham and Pomeranian goose-breast, with wine from Malaga

and wine from Cyprus. Then the old woman was all smiles and she nibbled the candies for all she was worth, became very merry, and threw her cloak up into the air; and all the patches of cloth flew apart and fell down all over the island, and where a yellow or red patch landed it became a splendid castle or a villa, the ground where a green one lay became a park, and a blue one turned into a beautiful lake. Thus was the desert island transformed all at once into a paradise. On seeing this, the Prince was tickled pink, and he said to the woman: "I could truly envy you such a treasure as this cloak of yours."

"Yes, yes – it is very pretty," the old woman replied, "but what use to me is the most beautiful lake if it has nothing more in it than water, what use is the biggest park if the game inside is not cooked, and what use is the most magnificent castle if you cannot get any coffee there or anything to nibble? In sooth, I think I'd rather have your Wishing-Cloth."

"Then let us swap the Wishing-Things!" the Prince suggested, and the old woman agreed at once. She clapped her hands, and the castles, the parks and the lakes all became colourful patches again, and they came together to form a cloak; the woman placed it in the Prince's hand and delightedly received the Wishing-Cloth from him.

She had not gone far before he again unscrewed the knob from his Wishing-Staff, summoned a hundred men, and ordered his tablecloth back; and his command was executed right away. Hereupon the King's son betook himself back to his ship and sailed on. On the next day another southern island was discovered, which the Prince roamed around. He found no treasures there but kept walking until he was weary, and then he fell into a slumber at a picturesque place in a small forest.

He was woken by the supremely beautiful sound of violin strings, and, rising to his feet, he saw a violinist sitting on a rock above him, whom he greeted and wholeheartedly applauded. The violinist accepted the Prince's appreciation very urbanely as an act of well-deserved homage. He said, "I am very pleased that you have such correct judgement and such good taste. The violin is the queen of all instruments; he who cannot fiddle is a rogue; I, on the other hand, am the King of all Violinists; every fiddler in the whole wide world is a mere bungler beside me; I merely have to stroke a single string – the G-string, it is called – and people go into frenzies and ecstasies, close their eyes, fall down and pass out. But when I stroke the A-string, they come back to their senses and all cry out, "Ah! Ah!" and start raving from rapture and folly, and behave as if the earth and the entire human race could not bring forth anything nobler, greater, and more sublime than this little titillation of the ears and the senses; and that is why I hold all these fools in deep contempt, and, after I had been showered with gold and treasures by the ignorant crowd, I retreated to this wasteland where I live only for myself, listen to myself, and worship myself, for I am actually a god; at least, that word was frequently screamed at me when I played before the people, particularly by enraptured women, who did not know that my violin is a Wishing-Violin, on which whatever I have in my mind – the most sublime, the most audacious, the most tender, the most fantastic, the craziest conceit – plays itself the instant I but make the wish."

"That *sounds well* in every regard!" said the Prince. "In truth, I revere you and your violin, yet I would owe you a heavy debt of gratitude if you would give me a bite to eat; I am hungry and thirsty, and I have not found a single thing on this island to satisfy my appetite."

“O man of the mundane world!” cried the violinist. “So you have no *appetite* for my melodies? They did not *satisfy* you? Your thoughts and desires are given wholly to earthly pleasures? Truly I pity you. There is barely enough to eat and drink here to satisfy the requirements of my own weak, earthly body. Only too readily would I drink, once again, a glass of champagne, which used to flow in streams at my Artist’s Table when those who entertained me idolized me – that is out of the question *here*.”

“Hm, hm!” the King’s son hemmed. “Then it is a good thing, is it not, that there are other fine arts apart from yours, for virtuosi may feast their fill on melodies but mankind most certainly may not. I, for example, am a culinary artist, a cook, and as you are suffering a lack of dainties here, and you have refreshed me so delightfully, so I shall now let you see *my* art, and invite you to be my guest.”

“Oh? Where?” asked the violinist. “On this very spot!” replied the Prince, and producing his precious cloth, he spread it out and said:

“Spread yourself, O Wishing-Cloth mine,
And give two *artists* breakfast with the best wine.”

Then the cloth displayed its power like never before: there appeared on the table salmon and caviar, sardines and anchovies, Bremen lampreys and fresh soused herrings, lobsters and oysters, and Sillery champagne, the finest burgundy, sherry and Syracusan wine; and they both tucked in with great gusto, and the violinist became very merry, poured his glass so full of champagne that it bubbled and poured over, clinked glasses with the Prince, and jubilantly cried: “Long life to you, cook! You shall be my brother – Brother! – You *too* are a god!”

“I can have this every day,” laughed the King’s son. “Every day?” the virtuoso slurred. “Listen – brother – let us ex- exchange, give me the Wishing-Cloth – I’ll give you my violin for it – shake on it, dear brother! Every day! Yippee! Every day – a god! Living like a god!”

The King’s son agreed to the exchange, took the violin, gave the tablecloth, and left. The violinist took the cloth, mistook it, in his divine blissfulness, for a handkerchief, blew his nose into it, stumbled, fell down and fell asleep; and the one man that the King’s son sent to fetch the cloth back from him was enough.

And now the Prince decided to begin his homeward journey. This passed entirely without mishap, and after a long voyage the coast appertaining to the Sea-King’s realm was reached, and the Prince arrived in the vicinity of his father’s castle. However, night having fallen by this time, he did not wish to occasion any disturbance and so sought a pleasant place in the game park near the castle, where he laid himself down and slept.

On the next morning the King had arranged a hunt in the game park to shoot a stag, some fallow deer, and some pheasants, which had multiplied to excess, for his table. The hounds scented a stranger in the park and dashed, barking and baying, towards the tree under which the stranger lay, but when they approached they could instantly tell from his scent that he was the Prince – a knack unique to canine noses – and they wagged their tails, turned somersaults of delight, rolled in the grass, and cut all kinds of crazy capers. The King heard the noise the dogs were making and came in person to the tree, and he found his youngest Prince there, rising from his slumber, and being welcomed by the hounds in the most joyous manner. But the King was not at all pleased with the appearance of

his youngest Prince; rather, he said, "Well look, here you are back again, and you look like something the cat dragged in. I do not suppose that you have acquired any treasures and brought them with you; hitherto, I had, you know, lived in the happy hope that you – with your eldest brother arriving in the Land of Silver, and the middle one in the Land of Gold – had reached the Land of Diamonds and would return from it with a rich cargo, which would have given me great joy and been of use to the Kingdom, for I am embroiled in an infamous war with the neighbour to my realm; he is pressing me hard and has already destroyed many of my towns and castles. All the silver and all the gold that your elder brothers brought home with them has gone on the arming and upkeep of my army, and this army has already been defeated in several battles, so the immediate prospect is none other than our enemy conquering all of my realm and chasing us from our throne and our land."

"That will not be, my gracious King, father, and master!" the youngest Prince replied. "We shall give a new turn to these affairs, just let us set out at once for the enemy's camp, without any men!"

"Indeed?" said the King and his elder sons. "We are to deliver ourselves into the lion's maw? I take it that you sailed below the meridian and the equatorial sun scorched your brain? You have, at any rate, become just a little deranged."

"We shall see about that," said the youngest Prince. Meanwhile there came couriers with the tidings that the enemy had invaded with powerful forces from three sides simultaneously and was rapidly advancing at present, and so the King and his two elder Princes thought that, this being the case, they had no alternative but to flee by way of the fourth side.

The youngest Prince, however, would not hear of that, but rather asked them not to be in such a hurry; and unscrewing the knob of his stick, he commanded: "A hundred thousand men horse and foot! Rout the enemy and destroy him like snuff." Then the whole area was overrun with armed troops, to the unending astonishment of the King, and one hour later, not only was there no enemy left in the land, but the land of the antagonistic neighbour had been utterly vanquished to boot. Hereupon the King's son spread out his Wishing-Cloth and said, "Now let us enjoy the victory feast!

Spread yourself, O Wishing-Cloth mine,
Give a hundred thousand food and wine."

Once again everyone fell to with great gusto, and the blood of grapes flowed in rivers. "If you ask me, a festive mood should have music!" cried the Prince. "Let a large concert be arranged – I shall popularise myself, and make my bow as a musician, giving my right arm for the poor!" This came to pass: the Prince regaled his audience with a violin solo, first playing a usual piece, which won him usual applause, then something exceptional, which excited quite exceptional applause for him; then on the G-string, making everyone pass out, then on the A-string, causing everyone to shout *ah!* and *bravo*. The King, his elder Princes and his entire household were too astonished and amazed to come off cloud nine. All the more did the young Prince keep his feet on the ground; he said, "Let us restore everything that the enemy destroyed in our land, but to a more beautiful state; let us maintain our brave army in readiness for war, let us put our minds to beautifying our land, by this means shall we help the realm to flourish!" – And he pulled out the wishing-cloak and threw it up into the air,

and the whole land was filled with new castles and villas and parks and lakes, and then some of the castles were made into handsome barracks; the soldiers entered these, the colonels and captains moved in to the villas, and then everything else sorted itself out. With the Wishing-Cloth, the Prince gave the land food and prosperity; with the Wishing-Staff, which he named the General Staff, he secured for himself an assertive power and, at the same time, respect on the part of his neighbours; with the Wishing-Cloak, he carpeted the land with flowers, promoted luxury, and thereby trade and industry, and thereby a prosperous bourgeoisie; and with the violin he fostered the fine arts and elevated the aesthetic sense of the people by putting a stop to the bad taste of the drum-bangers and the harpers on the same string at one and the same time. He also set sail, fetched from that lonely isle the maiden who had extended so much kindness and help to him, and made her his wife, saying: "She kept her word to me, and it is only right that I keep my word to her." – Oh, if only all Princes possessed such Wishing-Things, and, in the event that they did, made such good use of them as this exemplary son of a Sea-King! – What a shame that this same Prince was not the son of a Land-King!