The Straw, the Coal, and the Bean

In a village dwelt a poor old woman, who had gathered together a dish of beans and wanted to cook them. So she made a fire on her hearth, and that it might burn the quicker, she lighted it with a handful of straw. When she was emptying the beans into the pan, one dropped without her observing it, and lay on the ground beside a straw, and soon afterwards a burning coal from the fire leapt down to the two. Then the straw began and said: 'Dear friends, from whence do you come here?' The coal replied: 'I fortunately sprang out of the fire, and if I had not escaped by sheer force, my death would have been certain,–I should have been burnt to ashes.' The bean said: 'I too have escaped with a whole skin, but if the old woman had got me into the pan, I should have been made into broth without any mercy, like my comrades.' 'And would a better fate have fallen to my lot?' said the straw. 'The old woman has destroyed all my brethren in fire and smoke; she seized sixty of them at once, and took their lives. I luckily slipped through her fingers.'

'But what are we to do now?' said the coal.

'I think,' answered the bean, 'that as we have so fortunately escaped death, we should keep together like good companions, and lest a new mischance should overtake us here, we should go away together, and repair to a foreign country.'

The proposition pleased the two others, and they set out on their way together. Soon, however, they came to a little brook, and as there was no bridge or foot-plank, they did not know how they were to get over it. The straw hit on a good idea, and said: 'I will lay myself straight across, and then you can walk over on me as on a bridge.' The straw therefore stretched itself from one bank to the other, and the coal, who was of an impetuous disposition, tripped quite boldly on to the newly-built bridge. But when she had reached the middle, and heard the water rushing beneath her, she was after all, afraid, and stood still, and ventured no farther. The straw, however, began to burn, broke in two pieces, and fell into the stream. The coal slipped after her, hissed when she got into the water, and breathed her last. The bean, who had prudently stayed behind on the shore, could not but laugh at the event, was unable to stop, and laughed so heartily that she burst. It would have been all over with her, likewise, if, by good fortune, a tailor who was travelling in search of work, had not sat down to rest by the brook. As he had a compassionate heart he pulled out his needle and thread, and sewed her together. The bean thanked him most prettily, but as the tailor used black thread, all beans since then have a black seam.
The Singing Bone

Once upon a time in a certain country there was great concern about a wild boar that was destroying the peasants’ fields, killing the cattle, and ripping people apart with its tusks. The king promised a large reward to anyone who could free the land from this plague, but the beast was so large and strong that no one dared to go near the woods where it lived. Finally the king proclaimed that whoever could capture or kill the wild boar should have his only daughter in marriage.

Now in this country there lived two brothers, sons of a poor man. They declared that they dared to attempt the task. The older one, who was crafty and shrewd, did so out of pride. The younger one, who was innocent and simple, did so because of his kind heart.

The king said, "In order to be more sure of finding the beast, you should enter the woods from opposite sides."

Thus the older one entered the woods from the west, and the younger one from the east.

After the younger one had walked a little while, a little dwarf stepped up to him. He held a black spear in his hand and said, "I am giving you this spear because your heart is innocent and good. With it you can confidently attack the wild boar. It will do you no harm."

He thanked the dwarf, put the spear on his shoulder, and walked on fearlessly.

Before long he saw the beast. It attacked him, but he held the spear toward it, and in its blind fury it ran into the spear with such force that its heart was slashed in two.

Then he put the monster on his back and turned towards home, intending to take it to the king.

Emerging from the other side of the woods, he came to a house where people were making merry drinking wine and dancing. His older brother was there too. Thinking that the boar would not run away from him any time soon, he had decided to drink himself some real courage. When he saw his younger brother coming out of the woods with his booty, his envious and evil heart gave him no peace.

He called out to him, "Come in, dear brother. Rest and refresh yourself with a beaker of wine."

The younger brother, suspecting no evil, went in and told him about the good dwarf who had given him the spear with which he had killed the boar.
The older brother kept him there until evening, and then they set forth together. After dark they came to a bridge over a brook, and the older brother let the younger one go first. When the younger brother reached the middle above the water, the older one gave him such a blow from behind that he fell down dead.

He buried him beneath the bridge, took the boar, and delivered it to the king, pretending that he had killed it. With this he received the king's daughter in marriage.

When his younger brother did not return he said, "The boar must have ripped him apart," and every one believed it.

But as nothing remains hidden from God, this black deed was also to come to light.

After many long years a shepherd was driving his herd across the bridge and saw a little snow-white bone lying in the sand below. Thinking that it would make a good mouthpiece, he climbed down, picked it up, and then carved out of it a mouthpiece for his horn. When he blew into it for the first time, to his great astonishment the bone began to sing by itself:

Oh, my dear shepherd,
You are blowing on my little bone.
My brother killed me,
And buried me beneath the bridge,
To get the wild boar
For the daughter of the king.

"What a wonderful horn," said the shepherd. "It sings by itself. I must take it to the king."

When he brought it before the king, the horn again began to sing its little song. The king understood it well, and had the earth beneath the bridge dug up. Then the whole skeleton of the murdered man came to light.

The wicked brother could not deny the deed. He was sewn into a sack and drowned alive. The murdered man's bones were laid to rest in a beautiful grave in the churchyard.
Once upon a time the little hen went with the little cock to the nut-hill, and they agreed together that whichever of them found a kernel of a nut should share it with the other. Then the hen found a large, large nut, but said nothing about it, intending to eat the kernel herself. The kernel, however, was so large that she could not swallow it, and it remained sticking in her throat, so that she was alarmed lest she should be choked. Then she cried, "Cock, I entreat you to run as fast as you can and fetch me some water, or I shall choke." The little cock did run as fast as he could to the spring, and said, "Stream, you are to give me some water, the little hen is lying on the nut-hill, and she has swallowed a large nut, and is choking." The well answered, "First run to the bride, and get her to give you some red silk." The little cock ran to the bride and said, "Bride, you are to give me some red silk, I want to give red silk to the well, the well is to give me some water, I am to take the water to the little hen who is lying on the nut-hill and has swallowed a great nut-kernel, and is choking with it." The bride answered, "First run and bring me my little wreath which is hanging to a willow." So the little cock ran to the willow, and drew the wreath from the branch and took it to the bride, and the bride gave him some red silk for it, which he took to the well, who gave him some water for it.

Then the little cock took the water to the hen, but when he got there the hen had choked in the meantime, and lay there dead and did not move. Then the cock was so distressed that he cried aloud, and every animal came to lament the little hen, and six mice built a little carriage to carry her to her grave, and when the carriage was ready they harnessed themselves to it, and the cock drove. On the way, however, they met the fox, who said, "Where are you going, little cock?"
"I am going to bury my little hen."
"May I drive with you?"
"Yes, but seat yourself at the back of the carriage, for in the front my little horses could not drag you." Then the procession went onwards, and they reached a stream. "How are we to cross over?" said the little cock. A straw was lying by the stream and it said, "I shall lay myself straight across, and then you can drive over me." But when the six mice came to the bridge, the straw slipped and fell into the water, and the six mice all fell in and were drowned. Then they were again in difficulty, and a coal came and said, "I shall lay myself across, and you will drive over me." So the coal also laid itself across the water, but unhappily just touched it, at which the coal hissed, was extinguished and died. When a stone saw that, it took pity on the little cock, wished to help him, and laid itself over the water. Then the cock drew the carriage himself, but when he got it over and reached the shore with the dead hen, and was about to draw over the others who were sitting behind as well, there were too many of them, the carriage ran back, and they all fell into the water together, and were drowned.

Then the little cock was left alone with the dead hen, and dug a grave for her and laid her in it, and made a mound above it, on which he sat down and fretted until he died too, and then everyone was dead.
Once upon a time there was a poor but pious girl who lived alone with her mother. When they had nothing left to eat, the girl went out into the forest, where she met an old woman who already knew about her troubles and gave her a small pot. She instructed the girl to say to it "Little pot, cook," for it would then make a good, sweet millet porridge. And the girl was to say "Little pot, stop!" to make it stop cooking.

The girl brought the pot home to her mother, and it put an end to their poverty and hunger. From then on they ate sweet porridge as often as they liked. One day, when the girl had gone out, the mother said, "Little pot, cook," and it began cooking. After she had eaten her fill, she wanted the pot to stop, but she had forgotten the right words. So the pot continued to cook, and the porridge ran over the rim and proceeded to fill the kitchen and the whole house, then the next house and the street, as if it wanted to feed the entire world. The situation was desperate, and nobody knew what to do. Finally, when only one house was left standing without any porridge in it, the girl returned home and merely said, "Little pot, stop!" It stopped cooking, and whoever sought to go back into the town had to eat his way through
The Little Shepherd Boy

Once upon a time there was a little shepherd boy who was famous far and wide for the wise answers he gave whenever anyone asked a question. The king of the country also heard about this, but he did not believe it and had the little boy summoned to his palace, where he said to him, "If you can answer the three questions that I'm going to give you, then I shall regard you as my own child, and you shall live with me in my royal palace."

The little boy responded, "What are the three questions?"

The king said, "The first one is, How many drops of water are in the ocean?"

The little shepherd boy answered, "Your Majesty, have all the rivers on the earth dammed up so that no more drops of water can flow into the ocean until I have finished counting them. Then I shall tell you how many drops of water are in the ocean."

Thereupon the king said, "My next question is, How many stars are in the sky?"

The little shepherd boy said, "Give me a large sheet of white paper," and he proceeded to make so many fine dots on it with a pen that they could hardly be seen and were almost impossible to count. One would have gone blind trying to do so.

Then the boy spoke. "There are as many stars in the sky as there are dots on this paper. Just count them."

But nobody could and the king said, "The third question is, How many seconds does eternity have?"

The little shepherd boy said, "The Diamond Mountain is the Lower Pomerania, and it takes an hour to climb it, an hour to go around it, and an hour to go down into it. Every hundred years a little bird comes and sharpens its beak on it, and when the entire mountain is chiseled away, the first second of eternity will have passed."

Then the king spoke, "You have answered the three questions like a wise man, and from now on you shall live with me in my royal palace, and I shall regard you as my own child."
The Louse and the Flea

A louse and a flea kept house together and were brewing beer in an egg-shell. Then the little louse fell in and burnt herself. On this the little flea began to scream loudly. Then said the little room-door, "Little flea, why art thou screaming?" "Because the louse has burnt herself."

Then the little door began to creak. On this a little broom in the corner said, "Why art thou creaking, little door?" "Have I not reason to creak?"

"The little louse has burnt herself,
The little flea is weeping."

So the little broom began to sweep frantically. Then a little cart passed by and said, "Why art thou sweeping, little broom?" "Have I not reason to sweep?"

"The little louse has burnt herself,
The little flea is weeping,
The little door is creaking."

So the little cart said, "Then I will run," and began to run wildly. Then said the ash-heap by which it ran, "Why art thou running so, little cart?" "Have I not reason to run?"

"The little louse has burnt herself,
The little flea is weeping,
The little door is creaking,
The little broom is sweeping."

The ash-heap said, "Then I will burn furiously," and began to burn in clear flames. A little tree stood near the ash-heap and said, "Ash-heap, why art thou burning?" "Have I not reason to burn?"

"The little louse has burnt herself,
The little flea is weeping,
The little door is creaking,
The little broom is sweeping,
The little cart is running."

The little tree said, "Then I will shake myself," and began to shake herself so that all her leaves fell off; a girl who came up with her water-pitcher saw that, and said, "Little tree, why art thou shaking thyself?" "Have I not reason to shake myself?"

"The little louse has burnt herself,
The little flea is weeping,
The little door is creaking,
The little broom is sweeping,
The little cart is running,
The little ash-heap is burning."

On this the girl said, "Then I will break my little water-pitcher," and she broke her little water-pitcher. Then said the little spring from which ran the water, "Girl, why art thou breaking thy water-jug?" "Have I not reason to break my water-jug?"

"The little louse has burnt herself,
The little flea is weeping,
The little door is creaking,
The little broom is sweeping,
The little cart is running,
The little ash-heap is burning,
The little tree is shaking itself."

"Oh, ho!" said the spring, "then I will begin to flow," and began to flow violently. And in the water everything was drowned, the girl, the little tree, the little ash-heap, the little cart, the broom, the little door, the little flea, the little louse, all together.
The Hare’s Bride

There was once a woman and her daughter who lived in a pretty garden with cabbages; and a little hare came into it, and during the winter time ate all the cabbages. Then says the mother to the daughter, "Go into the garden, and chase the hare away."

The girl says to the little hare, "Sh-sh, hare, you are still eating up all our cabbages."

Says the hare, "Come, maiden, and seat yourself on my little hare's tail, and come with me into my little hare's hut."

The girl will not do it. Next day the hare comes again and eats the cabbages, then says the mother to the daughter, "Go into the garden, and drive the hare away."

The girl says to the hare, "Sh-sh, little hare, you are still eating all the cabbages."

The little hare says, "Maiden, seat yourself on my little hare's tail, and come with me into my little hare's hut."

The maiden refuses. The third day the hare comes again, and eats the cabbages. On this the mother says to the daughter, "Go into the garden, and hunt the hare away."

Says the maiden, "Sh-sh, little hare, you are still eating all our cabbages."

Says the little hare, "Come, maiden, seat yourself on my little hare's tail, and come with me into my little hare's hut."

The girl seats herself on the little hare's tail, and then the hare takes her far away to his little hut, and says, "Now cook green cabbage and millet-seed, and I will invite the wedding-guests."

Then all the wedding-guests assembled. (Who were the wedding-guests?) That I can tell you as another told it to me. They were all hares, and the crow was there as parson to marry the bride and bridegroom, and the fox as clerk, and the altar was under the rainbow.

The girl, however, was sad, for she was all alone. The little hare comes and says, "Open the doors, open the doors, the wedding-guests are merry."

The bride says nothing, but weeps. The little hare goes away. The little hare comes back and says, "Take off the lid, take off the lid, the wedding-guests are hungry."
The bride again says nothing, and weeps. The little hare goes away. The little hare comes back and says, "Take off the lid, take off the lid, the wedding-guests are waiting."

Then the bride says nothing, and the hare goes away, but she dresses a straw-doll in her clothes, and gives her a spoon to stir with, and sets her by the pan with the millet-seed, and goes back to her mother. The little hare comes once more and says, "Take off the lid, take off the lid," and gets up, and strikes the doll on the head so that her cap falls off.

Then the little hare sees that it is not his bride, and goes away and is sorrowful.