



The Boar with the Golden Bristles

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Dutch

*Intermediate
10 min read*

Long, long ago, there were brave fighters and skilful hunters in Holland, but neither men nor women ever dreamed that food was to be got out of the ground, but only from the trees and bushes, such as berries, acorns and honey. They thought the crust of the earth was too hard to be broken up for seed, even if they knew what grain and bread were. They supposed that what nature provided in the forest was the only food for men. Besides this, they made their women do all the work and cook the acorns and brew the honey into mead, while they went out to fish and hunt and fight.

So the fairies took pity on the cold, northern people, who lived where it rained and snowed a great deal. They held a council and agreed that it was time to send down to the earth an animal, with tusks, to tear up the ground. Then the people would see the riches of the earth and learn what soil was. They would be blessed with farms and gardens, barns and stalls, hay and grain, horses and cattle, wheat and barley, pigs and clover.

Now there were powerful fairies, of a certain kind, who lived in a Happy Land far, far away, who had charge of everything in the air and water. One of them was named Fro, who became lord of the summer sunshine and warm showers, that make all things grow. It was in this bright region that the white elves lived.

It was a pretty custom in fairy-land that when a fairy baby cut its first tooth, the mother's friends should make

the little one some pretty present.

When Nerthus, the mother of the infant Fro, looked into its mouth and saw the little white thing that had come up through the baby's gums, she went in great glee and told the glad news to all the other fairies. It was a great event and she tried to guess what present her wonderful boy-baby should receive.

There was one giant-like fairy as strong as a polar bear, who agreed to get, for little Fro, a creature that could put his nose under the sod and root up the ground. In this way he would show men what the earth, just under its surface, contained, without their going into mines and caverns.

One day this giant fairy heard two stout dwarfs talking loudly in the region under the earth. They were boasting as to which could beat the other at the fire and bellows, for both were blacksmiths. One was the king of the dwarfs, who made a bet that he could excel the other. So he set them to work as rivals, while a third dwarf worked the bellows. The dwarf-king threw some gold in the flames to melt; but, fearing he might not win the bet, he went away to get other fairies to help him. He told the bellows dwarf to keep on pumping air on the fire, no matter what might happen to him.

So when one giant fairy, in the form of a gadfly, flew at him, and bit him in the hand, the bellows-blower did not stop for the pain, but kept on until the fire roared loudly, as to make the cavern echo. Then all the gold melted and could be transformed. As soon as the dwarf-king came back, the bellows-blower took up the tongs and drew out of the fire a boar having golden bristles.

This fire-born golden boar had the power of travelling through the air as swiftly as a streak of lightning. It was named Gullin, or Golden, and was given to the fairy Fro, and he, when grown, used the wonderful creature as his steed. All the other good fairies and the elves rejoiced, because men on the earth would now be helped to do great things.

Even more wonderful to tell, this fire-born creature became the father of all the animals that have tusks and that roam in the woods. A tusk is a big tooth, of which the hardest and sharpest part grows, long and sharp, outside of the mouth and it stays there, even when the mouth is shut.

When Gullin was not occupied, or being ridden by Fro on his errands over the world, he taught his sons, that is, the wild boars of the forest, how to root up the ground and make it soft for things to grow in. Then his master Fro sent the sunbeams and the warm showers to make the turned-up earth fruitful.

To do this, the wild boars were given two long tusks, as pointed as needles and sharp as knives. With one sweep of his head a boar could rip open a dog or a wolf, a bull or a bear, or furrow the earth like a ploughshare.

Now there were several cousins in the Tusk family. The elephant on land, and the walrus and narwhal in the seas; but none of these could plough ground, but because the boar's tusks grew out so long and were so sharp, and hooked at the end, it could tear open the earth's hard crust and root up the ground. This made a soil fit for tender plants to grow in, and even the wild flowers sprang up in them.

All this, when they first noticed it, was very wonderful to human beings. The children called one to the other to come and see the unusual sight. The little troughs, made first by the ripping of the boar's tusks, were widened by rooting with their snouts. These were welcomed by the birds, for they hopped into the lines thus made, to feed on the worms. So the birds, supposing that these little gutters in the ground were made especially for them, made great friends with the boars. They would even perch near by, or fly to their backs, and ride on them.

As for the men fathers, when they looked at the clods and the loose earth thus turned over, they found them to be very soft. So the women and girls were able to break them up with their sticks. Then the seeds, dropped by the birds that came flying back every spring time, from far-away lands, sprouted. It was noticed that new kinds of plants grew up, which had stalks. In the heads or ears of these were a hundredfold more seeds. When the children tasted them, they found, to their delight, that the little grains were good to eat. They swallowed them whole, they roasted them at the fire, or they pounded them with stones. Then they baked the meal thus made or made it into mush, eating it with honey.

For the first time people in the Dutch world had bread. When they added the honey, brought by the bees, they had sweet cakes with mead. Then, saving the seeds over, from one summer to another, they in the spring time planted them in the little trenches made by the animal's tusks. Then the Dutch words for "boar" and "row" were put together, meaning boar row, and there issued, in time, our word "furrow."

The women were the first to become skilful in baking. In the beginning they used hot stones on which to lay the

lump of meal, or flour and water, or the batter. Then having learned about yeast, which “raised” the flour, that is, lifted it up, with gas and bubbles, they made real bread and cakes and baked them in the ovens which the men had made. When they put a slice of meat between upper and lower layers of bread, they called it “broodje,” that is, little bread; or, sandwich. In time, instead of one kind of bread, or cake, they had a dozen or twenty different sorts, besides griddle cakes and waffles.

Now when the wise men of the mark, or neighborhood, saw that the women did such wonderful things, they put their heads together and said one to the other:

“We are quite ready to confess that fairies, and elves, and even the kabouters are smarter than we are. Our women, also, are certainly wonderful; but it will never do to let the boars think that they know more than we do. They did indeed teach us how to make furrows, and the birds brought us grain; but we are the greater, for we can hunt and kill the boars with our spears.

“Although they can tear up the sod and root in the ground with tusk and snout, they cannot make cakes, as our women can. So let us see if we cannot beat both the boars and birds, and even excel our women. We shall be more like the fairies, if we invent something that will outshine them all.”

So they thought and planned, and, little by little, they made the plough. First, with a sharp stick in their hands, the men scratched the surface of the ground into lines that were not very deep. Then they nailed plates of iron on those sticks. Next, they fixed this iron-shod wood in a frame to be pulled forward, and, by and by, they added handles. Men and women, harnessed together, pulled the plough. Indeed it was ages before they had oxen to do this heavy work for them. At last the perfect plough was seen. It had a knife in front to cut the clods, a coulter, a beam, a mould board and handles, and, after a while, a wheel to keep it straight. Then they set horses to draw it.

Fro the fairy was the owner, not only of the boar with the golden bristles, but also of the lightning-like horse, Sleipnir, that could ride through fire and water with the speed of light. Fro also owned the magic ship, which could navigate both land and sea. It was so very elastic that it could be stretched out to carry a host of warriors over the seas to war, or fold up like a lady’s handkerchief. With this flying vessel, Fro was able to move about like a cloud and also to change like them. He could also appear, or disappear, as he pleased, in one place or another.

By and by, the wild boars were all hunted to death and disappeared. Yet in one way, and a glorious one also,

their name and fame were kept in men's memories. Brave knights had the boar's head painted on their shields and coats of arms. When the faith of the Prince of Peace made wars less frequent, the temples in honor of Fro were deserted, but the yule log and the revels, held to celebrate the passing of the Mother Night, in December, that is, the longest one of the year, were changed for the Christmas festival.

Then again, the memory of man's teacher of the plough was still kept green; for the boar was remembered as the giver, not only of nourishing meat, but of ideas for men's brains. Baked in the oven, and made delightful to the appetite, served on the dish, with its own savory odors; withal, decorated with sprigs of rosemary, the boar's head was brought in for the great dinner, with the singing of Christmas carols.

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