



# *The Easter Hare*

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German

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*Intermediate*

*14 min read*

It is curious how little children of one country know about the lives and interests of the children of another. Perhaps if English people would send their children over to Germany, instead of their journalists, singers, etc., the danger of an International war would be lessened. The children would be sure to fall in love with Germany; for it is the land above all others that appeals to children. Women are said to come first in America, children are certainly the first consideration in Germany. Froebel's motto: "Come let us live with our children," is nowhere better carried out.

A little English girl, named Patsie, came over to visit her German friends, Gretel and Barbara, shortly before Easter this year; and she was much surprised to find all the shop-windows filled with hares; hares made of chocolate, toy hares, hares with fine red coats on, hares trundling wheelbarrows or carrying baskets full of Easter eggs. Moreover there was no end to the picture post cards representing the hare in various costumes, and in some connection with Easter eggs. One of these post cards represented a hare crawling out of a large broken egg just like a chicken.

Patsie asked her little friends eagerly what this all meant.

"Who is the Hare?" she said. "I do so want to know all about him."

“Why, of course, it is the Easter Hare,” they replied.

“Is it possible that you have not heard of him? O, you poor English children! Why, he brings us the eggs on Easter Sunday morning!” said Gretel.

“O don’t you know,” said Barbara, “he hides them in the garden, unless it rains or is very wet; then we have to stay in our bedrooms for fear of frightening him, and he lays them downstairs in the dining-room or drawing-room. However, this has only happened once since I was born, and I am nine years old; it must be always fine at Easter.”

“We have to let all the blinds down before he will come into our garden, he is so dreadfully nervous,” said Gretel. “Then he hides the eggs in the most unexpected places, we have to hunt and hunt a long time before we have found them all. Last year we discovered an egg some weeks afterwards; luckily it was a glass one filled with sweeties; for if it had been of chocolate, we could not have eaten it, after it had lain on the damp mould, where the snails and worms would have crawled over it. Some of the eggs are made of chocolate or marzipan or sugar, and some are real eggs coloured blue or red or brown, or even sometimes with pictures on them.”

“We had two dear little baskets with dollies in them, and a big Easter Hare made of gingerbread, as well as the eggs this year,” said Barbara. “We hunt and hunt in every corner of the garden, and then we divide our treasures afterwards on two plates, so that is quite fair.”

“You are lucky children, why does not the Hare come to England?” said Patsie. “I am sure little English children would appreciate him too!”

“Well,” said Gretel answering in verse:

“My dear mother says to me,  
That he will not cross the sea;  
That he fears his eggs would break  
And his precious goods might shake.

He’s a fairy you must know,  
Little Barbara tells you so;

When he cocks his ears and blinks,  
Then of Easter eggs he thinks.”

“Yes,” interrupted Barbara, “we really and truly saw him one Easter Sunday morning when we came back from church, just at the end of our street, where the gardens join the fields. He had a friend with him, or perhaps it was Mrs Easter Hare. They both looked very alarmed when they saw us, and tore off as fast as they could scuttle, and hid in the corn-fields. I can’t remember if he had his red coat on, can you, Gretel?”

“No I don’t think he had, he was quietly dressed in his brown fur suit, with a white tail to the coat,” said Gretel.

Now mother had been puzzled for some time to think whatever connection there could be between Easter Day and the Hare, and she could not find out. But the other day a kind friend told her: she could never have been able to think of it herself, it is such a queer reason. The legend is that as the Hare always sleeps with its eyes open, it was the only living creature that witnessed the Resurrection of our Blessed Lord, and therefore for ever afterwards it has become associated with Easter.

The Easter egg is easier to account for; the idea there is, that as the little chicken breaks through the hard shell, and awakes to new life, so Christ broke the bars of death on the first glorious Easter morning. So the simple egg has become a symbol or sign of a great heavenly truth. Even little children can understand this if they think about it, and they will be able to find out other things too that are symbols in the same way.

“One year,” said Barbara to Patsie, “we spent Easter Sunday at a farm in the country. We made beautiful nests of moss all ready for the Easter Hare. And just when father had called to us to come out and look for the eggs, we saw to our disgust that the great pigs with their dirty old snouts were already hunting for them, so we rushed down and had to drive them away first. The geese too seemed to want to join in the game; it was fine fun, I can tell you. We filled our pinafores with the eggs.”

“When we got home again, we found the Easter Hare had been there too; so we were finely spoilt that year,” said Gretel.

Several weeks before Easter this year, before Patsie came to stay with them, Gretel and Barbara went for an afternoon walk in the fields with their father and mother. It was getting late when they returned; white mists were rising over the River Nidda, until the trees in the distance looked like ghosts. There was a strange feeling

in the air, as if something were going to happen; the children felt excited without knowing why. Then they suddenly saw a bright light not far off from them, along the path by the river. It seemed to revolve, then to change its position, then it went out altogether. They thought they saw the crouching form of a man beside the light; indeed father said that it was probably a labourer lighting his pipe; but, when they looked again, it was unmistakably a bush that had taken a human form in the twilight. The children instinctively fell back nearer the grown-ups. There was something creepy about that bush.

Suddenly a weird cry, shrill and piercing, broke the silence. It seemed to come from just in front of them, and sounded awful; as if a baby were being murdered. The children clutched hold of father's hand. "It was all right as long as father and mother were there," they thought with the touching confidence of children.

No one could imagine what it was. The stretching, ploughed fields on one side could hide nothing, the little path along the river-bank was clearly visible. As they approached the spot whence the crying had seemed to proceed, all was silent again. Gretel had heard of the magic flower Moly which screamed when it was pulled up by the roots; could there be screaming bushes as well? But the cries had seemed to come from the ploughed field, not from the river.

The sun had gone down, the air became darker and chillier. Suddenly the cry began again; this time it seemed to proceed directly from an empty tin lying near them on the ploughed field, broken and upside down. The children stared with wide-open eyes at this mysterious old tin: they could not make head or tail of it, of the tin I mean.

Then mother stooped and picked up a piece of egg-shell coloured a beautiful red, that lay on the path, and held it up triumphantly. "What do you say to that?" she asked the children.

"Why, it is a piece of a broken Easter egg, how queer," said the children, "such a long time before Easter too."

"Do you know what I think?" said mother, almost in a whisper. "I think the Easter Hare has been along here, perhaps he lives here, and that tin hides the entrance to his house."

"Let's go and see," said the children. But at this moment the cries broke out again, coming just from their very feet it seemed. They sounded so uncanny that the children did not dare to move, or to investigate the tin.

“If you disturb him now, you certainly will not get any Easter eggs this year,” said mother. “He’s sure to be very busy painting them just now, I dare say he cries like that to frighten you away from his home.”

“I don’t think so,” said father, “he can hide and hold his tongue if he wants to; it is the little baby hares who make that noise; but just as we pass by, the mother hare manages to keep them quiet for a few minutes by giving them something to put in their little mouths, I expect.”

“I would like to see them,” said Barbara.

“No, come along, Barbara,” said Gretel, “leave them alone, it would be horrid to get no Easter eggs wouldn’t it?”

For many nights Barbara dreamt of the Easter Hare, and at last she made up the following story about him, which she wrote out beautifully in flowing German handwriting in an exercise-book. I thought little English girls and boys would like to hear a story written by a little German girl of nine years. So I have translated it for them here. It will give them a good idea too of how the Easter Hare is regarded by German children.

#### THE EASTER HARE FAMILY

Story by Barbara Arndt

Two children, Paulchen and Luischen, were wandering about in the country on Easter Day, they said sorrowfully to one another. “Has the Easter Hare quite forgotten us this year?” For three hours they tramped about, and hunted for eggs in every corner of the fields near the big forest. Suddenly Paulchen found a huge egg; he called to Luischen to come at once to see it, and she trotted along towards him, carrying a pretty little nest filled with Easter eggs in her hands, which she had also found.

The children were very happy; it was such a lovely sunny day, and they were so delighted with their treasures. However they did not give up hunting, and soon each of them found an Easter Hare made of the most delicious chocolate. Then Luischen discovered an egg which she called an April-fool’s egg; for when she tried to lick it to see what it tasted like, she found that it was made of soap.

“O, do come and see what a heap of eggs I’ve got,” said Paulchen, in tones of ecstasy.

Then little Luischen jumped up, calling out: “Look, look—O do come here, quick, quick, and see those two

beautiful big nests filled with Easter eggs, and two lovely silver baskets beside them! O how exquisite! The Easter Hare is too good, he is a darling, did you ever see such beautiful things as he has given us. I can hardly hold mine!”

“Neither can I,” said Paul, “but look over there, Luischen, there are two large baskets. I expect they are meant for us, how very convenient! We can put all our things into them.”

“Let’s go and fetch them at once,” said Luischen. “Do you see that pretty bush with silver palm-buds on it over there?” she continued, “we will go and pick a few twigs from it and tie them on to our baskets with some grass; then they will look more ‘Eastery.’”

“If only we knew where the Easter Hare lives,” they said somewhat sadly, “we would go and call on him at once and thank him for all his kindness to us.”

“O but just look, Paulchen,” said Luischen excitedly, “there is something written on the rocks over there; perhaps the Easter Hare lives there. Paulchen, you can read a little, do see if you can make out what is written.”

Paulchen read:

“I am the Master Easter Hare  
Lay eggs, in plenty, everywhere.”

“Come along, run, we will knock at the door,” said Luischen joyfully. So they went up to the rock and knocked.

“Come in,” said a clear voice.

They went in and turned to the door on the right from which the voice had come. They entered a comfortable room, and there on a cosy easy-chair, there sat father Easter Hare, who had just put on his spectacles to examine the eggs which his son, who was about seven years old, had painted.

“Good morning, dear Mr Easter Hare, we have come to thank you for the lovely eggs,” said the children.

“Dear, dear,” said Mr Easter Hare, “you found them of course in your garden, or——?”

“Alas, no, we have no home, we are orphans; the people in the orphanage did not treat us kindly, so we ran

away, and meant to seek our fortune in the wide world,” said the children. “Then we were so lucky as to find these beautiful eggs in the fields over there!”

“Dear me, so you are orphans!—well then perhaps you would like to stay here with us and learn painting and housekeeping,” said Mr Easter Hare.

“Oh yes indeed, we should simply love to!” answered the children, “but where is your wife? Perhaps she will be able to teach us to be of some use in the household.”

“Well, well, my wife is in the kitchen cooking cabbage, and carrots, and making a famous salad.”

“Oh!” said both the children, “may we help her dress the salad?”

“Certainly, my wife will be very pleased to find that you can be so useful; there, just opposite in the passage, is a door that leads into the kitchen where my wife is busy.”

The children followed his directions and went into the kitchen, and there sat Mrs Easter Hare.

“Good morning, Mrs Easter Hare,” said the children politely, curtsying and bowing, “we have come to help you in the household, and to stay with you till we are grown up; but now please let us make the salad.”

“Well, that is very kind of you, I’m sure, to want to help me,” said Mrs Easter Hare, and the children set to work at once.

After this the children helped her every day in the kitchen in the morning, and in the afternoon they learnt from father Easter Hare how to paint the eggs smoothly and prettily, and how to read and write; for the Easter Hare is educated, you must know, and far more intelligent than ordinary hares. When they grew up and went out into the world again, Paulchen became a celebrated artist and lived in the artist colony at Cronberg, and little Luischen married, and became an exemplary housewife; but their best friends throughout their lives were always MR AND MRS EASTER HARE.

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