

THE UNLUCKY MERCHANTS

ONE day, the Bat and the Sea-gull met
And said, 'Let us become merchants.'
And they put their heads together,
Argued out the terms and made a contract;
But, it so happened that they had no money!
They thought much about what they might do:
In the end, they went to the Thorn,
They pleaded and begged from him,
And by means of a promissory note,
With due interest and in proper order,
They borrowed sufficient money
To meet all their requirements.
The Bat stayed behind to mind their affairs;
Whilst the Sea-gull took a ship
And, together with all the money,
Went to Egypt, then to China,
Then Persia, India,
And Arabia...
Precious shawls from Kirman,
Pearls, emeralds and rubies,
Dates, pistachios and almonds,
And... oh, which ones shall I name?
Whatever he saw that pleased his eye,
He filled the ship amply with it.
Thus laden with a thousand good things,
He saw returning home full of joy,
By the same route as he had gone away,

When the sea was churned up
By a terrifyingly violent storm
That swallowed up both ship and goods.
The merchant Sea-gull alone escaped,
Completely naked, on that day.
True, he was rescued by the grace of God,
But how dared the poor Gull return home?
What would he say to their creditor?
And how would he face his partner?
Back at home, on the other hand,
The partner was waiting at the door:
With his eye on the road, his neck twisted,
He kept counting one day after another,
Oh, when would our Sea-gull return...?
He kept watch thus for a long time,
Looking down the road all the while;
He had many good and bad dreams,
Until the day for payment arrived,
And, with the promissory note in hand,
The Thorn settled on the edge of the roof:
'Well, my friend, what is happening,
Have you forgotten your debt...?
Bless my father, you started a business,
You must return my money now.
You gave me a promissory note, with a date,
Have you no shame, self respect or fear?
This is not a robbery! Have pity on me!
Have you ever seen such a thing, my friend:
A man gives you gold with his own hand
And cannot have it back by force?
How can anyone, after this, be expected

To lend a hand to a poor man?
Thus he roared away in the whole district,
Swearing at them and bringing them disgrace;
And everybody who heard him,
At once joined in and exclaimed:
'Shame upon you, Bat and Sea-gull,
What is this we hear? Alas, oh, alas!
You call yourselves merchants
And you behave so disgracefully...?
Alas, oh, alas,
Bat and Sea-gull...!'

And every time the Bat heard this
He would seethe within himself;
He would become furious inwardly,
Would curse, click his tongue and spit:
'May your home be ruined, Sea-gull,
And may the devil take you away!
What is this that you have wrought upon me,
What is this trouble that you have brought!'

And each time, he would beg and plead:
'Do not be angry, Thorn, my friend,
You have waited very long,
Wait a little longer still.
I had a letter from the Sea-gull yesterday,
Saying that he had left Arabia;
He will be here before long now
And will give you back more than you due.'
'I do not want more my friend,
Bring me back the money I lent you.
You have noted down the interest you owe,
As you have the time limit.

I am only repeating what is written down
And not asking any more from you!’
‘No, Master Thorn,
Sooner or later we will return
The money you lent us and the interest, too,
Each in turn, your honour, upon my word!
Then, I hope ever more: we owe it to you;
We are respectable beings, you know!
Whoever could forget what you have done,
Would also deny his very God!’
The poor creature spoke in this way,
And gave the creditor much hope;
He promised him a great deal,
And told him many untruths,
As he waited longer for his partner:
But his partner was not to be seen!
‘God be witness, what a worry that has been,
What business had I to get involved in this
And be faced with disgrace in the end!
How am I to get out of this mire,
And out of this enormous debt?
What more can I say?
How can I wait any longer?’
When will he come back? How will I know?
Where can I drown myself? To whom can I go?
He thought a great deal,
Flew about, here and there;
He collected all he had at home, the clothes
That he had on, and gave them to the creditor,
And was himself left naked:
But even then the debt was not cleared;

In the end, seeing that there was no way out,
He took wing and flew away;
He escaped and vanished, so that he would,
Thus unoccupied, bankrupt and ashamed,
No longer meet the creditor
Or appear to the world by day.

Thereafter, through his fate.
The Bat, unclothed and evading light,
Hides himself here and there in the daytime,
And always flies about in the dark at night,
That he may not appear to fellow-birds,
Or his creditor, Master Thorn.
Whilst the Gull upon the seas
Screams and screeches,
Dives into the water
And then dashes out,
Flaps about,
Roams around,
Hoping that his luck may return one day,
And he may retrieve his loss from the sea.
Whereas the Thorn, having lost all hope,
With claws and teeth well sharpened,
Tugs by the hem whoever goes past,
And inquires from him each time
If he has not seen the one or the other,
The shameless Sea-gull or the Bat;
And from that day, until the present,
Neither the one nor the other has been seen.