

The Folk- and Fairy-Tales of Ludwig Bechstein: Of Two Monkeys



‘An old monkey lived in a fertile spot where trees and fruit, water and meadowland were plentiful. As he lived a life of luxury, he came down with the mange in old age, and he was sorely plagued with it, becoming so thin and feeble that he could no longer obtain his food. Then another monkey came to him and asked him in astonishment: “Oh! How is it that I see you so ill and emaciated?” – “Ah!” the old monkey sighed, “I know no other reason than the will of God, which none may escape.” The other monkey said, “I knew a friend who bore the same infirmity, and nothing could help him but the head of a black viper. After eating it, he was restored to health – you should do that too!” – The old monkey replied: “But who will give me such a viper’s head, for I am so weak that I can barely take a fruit from a tree?” The other retorted: “Two days ago I saw a man standing before a cave in a cliff, and he was lying in wait for the black viper which lay inside, intending to pull out her tongue, for he stood in need of one; I shall take you there. If the man has killed the viper, then you can take its head and eat it.” – The old monkey said, “I am ill and infirm; should I become healthy and strong, I shall gladly repay your service.” Then the other monkey took the old one to the rock cave, which he knew to be inhabited by a dragon.

Before the cave there were large footprints like those of a man, and the old monkey thought that they had been left by the man who had killed the viper, so he crept in and searched for the head. Then the dragon sprang forward and slew and ate him. The young monkey was delighted to have enticed and deceived his companion, and to now be in sole possession of the lovely fruit trees.'

When Bird Holgott had told his wife this tale, he added: "I told you this for the sake of the lesson that lies inside: No sensible man should risk his life because of foolish and deceitful advice." But his wife said, "I understand you perfectly well, but here the case is completely different, for the fish I have in mind can be fetched without danger and will be of great use to our young."

When Bird Holgott saw that sensible persuasion would not work with his wife, he yielded: "If you really must, then go fetch the fish; but be on your guard against betraying either the one or the other secret to anyone, for wise men teach us: It is always commendable to exercise good sense, but the greatest good sense is shown by the man who buries his secret so that none may find it."

Then the wife immediately flew away to her dear friend Mosam and informed him of everything her husband had in mind, of his wanting to move to a pleasant spot where there was nothing to be feared from animals or from men. And she said, "I wish, my friend, that you might contrive a way to come thither too, yet with my husband's knowledge and desire, for even should fortune smile on me there, I can know no joy without you." Bird Mosam replied, "Why should I be forced to depend upon your husband's approval to stay there? Who has provided him with such power over me

and others? Who forbids me to go thither too? I shall fly there this minute and build my nest, as it is such a pleasant place. And if your husband should come and attempt to drive me away, I well know how to prevent him, by telling him that neither he nor his forefathers were resident there and so he has no more right to that area than I or anyone else.” The wife replied, “You are not wrong, but I would wish you to be present there on the condition that there be always peace and harmony among us. If you go thither against my husband’s will, we must needs expect to fall into ill repute, and our friendship will turn to sorrow. My advice is this: Go to my husband, do not tell him that we have spoken to each other, and say to him (before I have returned) that you have found that beautiful area and you have resolved to move thither, then he will retort that he discovered that place before you and is determined to move there; then you say, ‘O friend Holgott, then you are the first, and more worthy of that place than I am, but I beg you to let me live with you, then I shall be a true friend and companion to you there.’”

Bird Mosam followed this advice and flew with the utmost haste to Bird Holgott, while the wife caught two fish in the first pond she came to and took them home as if they were the healing wonderfishes; and Bird Holgott replied to the proposal that Mosam’s society was pleasing to him. But his wife pretended that she was not pleased with her husband’s compliance towards her friend, so that he would not notice her perfidiousness, and said: “But we have chosen that place for ourselves alone, and I worry that, if Bird Mosam moves there with us, his many friends will follow and, in the end, we shall have to retreat before their superior numbers.” Her husband replied to this: “You are right; but I trust Mosam, and I hope we shall ward off intruders

with his assistance, and so it may be a good thing if our friend lives with us. Let no one trust too completely to his own strength and his own power. We are, it is true, some of the strongest of the birds, but assistance helps the weak to overcome the strong, as the cats overcame the wolf.” “How did that happen?” asked Holgott’s wife, and he told her

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