

The Folk- and Fairy-Tales of Ludwig Bechstein: **Of a Hermit and Three Scoundrels**

“Through discernment and judicious resolve, a clever man will accomplish that which many a stronger man will fail to achieve,” said the wise raven, the counsellor to the Raven-King, to his lord. “This brings to my mind those scoundrels who used their artfulness and guile to so deceive a hermit that he no longer believed what he saw with his own eyes.”

“How did that happen?” asked the King, and the raven answered:



“Once upon a time there was a hermit who went and bought himself a nanny goat so he could keep it at his hut and drink its milk. This was observed from a distance by three thieves, who discussed among themselves how they might, without the use of force, swindle the pilgrim out of his goat. Soon afterwards they split up, so that they would encounter the hermit one after the other, with short intervals in between. The first one to come to him bid him good-day and said mockingly, ‘Pilgrim! You are worried, no doubt, that thieves intend to rob you of your precious things, so you have bought yourself a dog. What do you mean to do with your dog?’ – ‘It is no dog, it is a goat!’ the hermit calmly said, but the other stubbornly insisted that it was a dog, until the second scoundrel came on the scene, and gave a greeting also, and likewise asked what the pious pilgrim was doing with a

dog. 'A holy man,' he said, 'must have no truck with such an unclean beast; I would certainly rid myself of it, without delay. The barking of a dog disturbs prayers and devotions, and nowhere is it written that the Holy Apostles walked dogs or would even suffer the presence of such creatures!'

Now the third rogue came along, while the three men were still arguing about the alleged dog, and said, 'I see! You're holding a dog-market here! What's the asking price for the cur? I'm looking to buy a brute just like this one.'

Now the hermit believed in all seriousness that his goat was a dog, and the man who had sold it to him had betrayed him, and he cast the goat from him in anger, and hurried away to his hermitage where he washed and purified himself. Meanwhile, the three scoundrels took the goat, led it home, slaughtered and roasted it, and savoured the roast, laughing all the while at the hermit's simple-mindedness.

"I have told you this, my King," the wise raven continued, "so that you will bear in mind that, however clever and mighty the eagles may be, we can nonetheless rid ourselves of them through artfulness and guile.

And now, O King, it is time that I tell you my real secret, for the cause of the enmity between the eagles and the ravens is known to many, and having been passed down to us by our fathers, it still lives in the memory of many an old raven. The advice I give you now must remain the deepest of secrets between you and me. Firstly, shower me with the ostensible bowls of your wrath and disfavour in front of others; act as if I had given you false and perfidious advice, peck at me before the whole Court, wound me and leave me lying on the ground; then rise up with all your people, fly so far

away that no raven is anywhere to be seen, and quietly stay at that place until such time as I return to you announcing good tidings.”

The King of the Ravens followed this advice. And when the spies of the eagles perceived that the whole body of ravens, together with the King, had decamped, they came to the raven-forest in hordes with their King and destroyed the ravens’ nests; and one of them saw the wounded raven lying under a tree, and flew down to him.

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