

The Folk- and Fairy-Tales of Ludwig Bechstein: **Of The Wolf and the Mousers**



‘On the sea-strand there was a pack of wolves, one of whom was particularly bloodthirsty, and there came a time when he wished to win especial fame for himself among his companions, so he went into the mountains, where many animals of sundry kinds had their habitation, to hunt. But these mountains were enclosed, so its animals were safe from other beasts and lived together in harmony; among them was a clowder of mousers or cats, who had a King. Now the wolf, entering the enclosure by means of a ruse, hid himself, and every day he caught and devoured a cat. This caused the cats untold grief, and they gathered to deliberate the matter with their King; and there were in particular three wise, insightful tomcats, whom the King summoned to the council, and he asked the first of them for his opinion regarding the baneful wolf. The first tomcat said: “I can counsel nothing for this dreadful monster, save to commend ourselves to God’s mercy, for how might we offer resistance to the wolf?” The King now asked the second tomcat, who said: “I counsel that our entire commonalty leave this place and seek another, more peaceful locality, as we stay here only in great tribulation and in danger and hazard of our lives.” But the third tomcat, on being questioned by the King, said: “My counsel is that we remain here and do not migrate for the wolf’s sake. I might also know of an expedient to overcome him.” “Tell it,” the King commanded, and the tomcat

continued: "We need to watch out for the wolf seizing his next prey and see whither he carries and consumes it; then you, O King, I, and the strongest among us must approach him, as though we wished to eat what he had left, and he will think himself to be quite safe and fear nothing from us. Then I shall leap onto him and scratch out his eyes, and then all the others are to fall upon him, so that he will no longer be able to fend us off, and it must not confound us if one or the other of us loses his life or sustains wounds; for we shall thereby deliver ourselves and our children from the enemy, and a wise man does not depart faint-hearted and fearful from his patrimony; no, he puts life and limb on the line to defend it." The King pronounced this counsel to be good. Then it happened that the wolf made a good catch, which he was dragging up a cliff when the cats executed the deed that the brave, wise tomcat had advised; and under their claws and innumerable bites the wolf met an ignominious end.'

"This example, dear wife," Bird Holgott continued, "I have told you so you will comprehend that true friendship is a boon, and for that reason I shall gladly take Bird Mosam with us as my friend and companion." When his wife heard this, she inwardly rejoiced that her proposal had succeeded without arousing the slightest suspicion, and after her heart's desire. And then the three birds took wing to that pleasant locality; leaving their recently-hatched young behind in the old nest, they built nests there and lived together in peace and amity with plentiful food for a season. And Bird Holgott, who became old and weak, and his wife felt a far greater affection for Bird Mosam than he felt for them, as will presently appear.

There came a dry, hot time, when everything withered, and the lake dried up, and the fish died; then Bird Mosam said to himself, "True

comradeship is a fine thing, and it is laudable for friends to stick together. But charity begins at home. He who is of no use to himself, how may he be of use to others? He who does not foresee and avoid imminent harm will not escape it once it has come. Now I foresee that the company of these birds will be to my harm and detriment, as the food is growing less from day to day; and in the end they will drive me away. But I like it here very well, and I could live here alone, without that company; so it would be for the best if I anticipated them and rid myself of them, the husband first; the wife trusts me completely, so I can compel her all the more easily. She can even help me kill the husband.”

With such wicked and shameful thoughts did Bird Mosam fly to the wife, and he approached her sadly and despondently. She asked him, “Why do I see you so sad, my friend?” and he answered, “I grieve at the hard times, and see the frightful spirit of Hunger stalking towards us. And my heart grieves for you most of all. I know only one thing that would avail you, if my advice not seem unwise to you.” – “What is that?” the wife asked, and Mosam spoke: “The ties of friendship are worth more than the ties of blood relationships, for the latter are often more harmful than poison. A proverb says: ‘He who lacks a brother has one enemy the less, and he who has no relations has no enviers.’ I shall suggest to you something that will be to your benefit, dear friend, although you will find it hard to accomplish, and you will construe my disclosing it to you as a misdeed, even though it appears insignificant in my eyes.” The wife said: “Your words fill me with fear, I cannot imagine what you mean, and do not believe that you would advise me to evil. Yet it would be an easy thing for me to suffer death for your sake – so speak! Whoever does not risk his life for a true friend is very

foolish, for a friend is always more useful than a brother or than children.”

Now Mosam said with guile: “My advice is that you try to get rid of your weak old husband, whom you have to take such pains to care for; then you will enjoy the fruits of happiness and fortune, and I shall enjoy them with you! And do not ask for the cause of this counsel until you have carried it out, for if I had not good reason, then believe me, I would not advise you so. I shall find you a better and younger husband, who will always love and protect you. And if you do not act after my advice, you will fare as did that mouse who, also, scorned good advice.”

The bird-wife asked, “What happened to that mouse?” and Mosam narrated the tale of

Next (and finally): *The Cat and the Mouse*