

The Folk- and Fairy-Tales of Ludwig Bechstein: **Sambar the Mouse**



In a great forest filled with game there was a large tree with many branches in which a raven had its nest. One day he saw a bird-catcher come and stretch a net under the tree; alarmed, he reflected awhile, thinking: "Is this huntsman stretching his hunting gear for you, or on account of other animals? Let us wait and see!" In the meantime the bird-catcher scattered seeds on the ground, prepared his net, and lay down in wait. Soon afterwards there came a dove with a whole flock of other doves, of which she was the leader; and because they saw the seeds but paid no heed to the net, they went for the bait and the net drew together, covering them all. The fowler was well pleased, while the doves flapped to and fro in agitation. Then the dove who was the leader spoke to the other doves: "Let no one rely solely on her own strength, and let no one hold herself dearer than the others, but let us all soar up at the same time; it may be that we lift the net up into the air with us, and in this way everyone will free herself and the others with her." The doves followed this advice and flew up in concert, raising the net with them up into the air. The bird-catcher was forced to follow with his eyes and with his legs to find out where his net would fall back down to earth, while the raven thought to himself: "You want to follow to see what becomes of this wondrous occurrence, don't you?"

When the clever leader of the doves saw the hunter down below following their line of flight, she said to her companions: "Look, the huntsman is pursuing us; if we persist in flying over the path he will stay in sight of us, and we shall not escape him. But if we fly up hill and down dale,

he will not be able to keep us in his sight and will have to abandon his pursuit, as he will despair of finding us again. Not far from here is a gorge where there lives a mouse, my friend; I know that when we come to her, she will gnaw through the net and release us.”

The doves followed their leader’s advice and were soon lost to the fowler’s sight. The raven flew slowly along behind them, to see what the end of the matter would be, and in what wise the doves would free themselves from the net, and if he might not learn to use their means of salvation when in danger himself.

Meanwhile the doves reached that gorge where the mouse lived, and as they alighted they saw that the mouse had at least a hundred holes and exits and entrances to her underground habitation, giving her many places to hide in when peril was imminent. The mouse was called Sambar, and the clever dove now called to her friend: “Sambar, come out!” Then the mouse called from inside: “Who are you?” and the dove cried, “It is I, the dove, your friend!” And then the mouse came, peeped warily out of one of the holes, and asked: “O dear companion, who has been able to ensnare you so?” The dove said: “O dear friend! Don’t you know that there is no one alive who is not sent an adverse fate by God? And the most cunning of deceivers is Time! She scattered sweet grains of wheat for me and hid the deceitful net from my sight, so that I fell in with my friends. No one can provide against Providence which comes from above; indeed, the moon and the sun both suffer eclipses, and the wiles of men lure the fish from the bottomless depths of the sea, just as they pull the bird down from the airy ocean in their false snares.”

When the dove had finished her highly eloquent speech, the mouse began to gnaw at the net, and she began at the end where her companion the dove was lying. But the dove said: "Begin with the others, my sisters, and when you have freed them all, then free me also." But the mouse did not comply, even though she soon repeated her request; and when she made this appeal to the mouse yet another time, the latter asked: "Why do you say this to me so often, as if you did not also wish to be free?"

Thereupon the dove replied: "Do not be displeased at my request; these sisters of mine trusted me as their leader; they followed me willingly and confidingly, and through my carelessness they fell into the net; and so it is only proper that I think of their rescue before my own, especially as it was only through their united efforts that I too was successfully lifted up with the fowler's net. Also, you may grow tired while helping the others, but if you know that I, your dearest friend, am still in the net, then you will not forsake me."

Thereupon the mouse said: "O my dear, good dove, dear heart; these sentiments do you honour and can only strengthen the love between you and your companions." And she gnawed through the net on all sides, and the doves freely and joyfully flew on their way, while the mouse slipped back into her hole.



The raven, who had alighted on a nearby tree, had seen and heard everything, and he soliloquised: "Who knows," he said, "but that I, too, may find myself in the same situation and danger as these doves? Then it is a truly splendid thing to have noble friends who will help us out of our plight. The friendship of this mouse would assuredly be a boon to me!"

And then he flew down from his tree, hopped to the gorge, and called: "Sambar, come out!" And the mouse called from inside: "Who are you?" Then he said, "I am the raven, and I saw what happened to your dear friend the dove and how God released her through your faithfulness, and therefore I have come to seek your friendship." Then Sambar the clever mouse spoke, without coming out: "There can be no friendship between you and me; a wise man strives to attain only what is possible, and he who wants to achieve the impossible is considered a fool. One might as well try to sail ships over land and drive carriages over the sea. How could there be fellowship between us when I am food for you, and you feed on me?" The raven said: "Little mouse, listen carefully and ponder my words. How would I benefit, if I ate you up, from your death? Your life shall be helpful to me, and your friendship be as enduring as ambergris, which emits a sweet scent even when covered."

To this the mouse said: "Know, raven, that the hatred which comes from covetousness is the fiercest hatred. The lion and the elephant hate one another on account of their strength, and that is a noble and equal hatred, a matter of courage and feud; but the ingrained hatred of the strong for the weak, that is an ignoble and unequal hatred: so does the hawk hate the partridge, the cat the rat, the dog the hare, and you – me. You may heat

water over a fire until it burns you like fire, but that does not make it fire, nor ever a friend to fire; it will rather, if poured into the fire, douse it. Wise men say: "He who associates with his enemy is like the man who takes a poisonous snake in his hand; he never knows when it will bite him. The clever man never trusts his enemy, but he keeps his distance from him, or the same will happen to him which once happened to the man with the snake." The raven asked: "What happened to him?" and so the mouse told him the following fairy-tale:

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