

The Folk- and Fairy-Tales of Ludwig Bechstein: **The Cock and the Fox**



On a cold winter's night a hunger-starved fox crept out of its den to go hunting. Then he heard a cock at a farm crowing without cease; it was sitting up in a cherry-tree and had been crowing the whole night long. The fox now skulked over to the tree and asked, "Mr. Cock, why are you singing on this cold, dark night?" The cock said, "I am announcing the day, whose advent my nature has taught me to recognise." The fox rejoined, "O Cock, then you must have something divine inside you, if you know things which will come to be!" and the fox at once began to dance. The cock now asked, "Mr. Fox, why are you dancing?" The fox answered him, "As you are singing, O Wise Master, so is it proper that I dance, for it behoves one to rejoice with those who are joyful. O Cock, you Noble Prince among birds, not only do you have the talent to fly in the skies, no, nature has also given you gifts of high prophecy! Oh, how she has preferred you before all other animals! How happy would I be, were you to grant me your favour! How dearly would I like to kiss your revered head, permeated with wisdom! O how envied would I be, could I announce to my friends: I was the fortunate one to whom

a prophet inclined his head to be kissed!" The foolish cock, believing the flattering words of the fox, flew down from the tree and bent his head towards him to be kissed. With one snap it was bitten off and the fox said, laughing, "I have found this prophet to be quite devoid of intelligence."

Now when the mouse had finished the fable, he spoke further to the raven: "I have not told you this because I believe myself to be the cock and you the fox, I the fare and you the feeder; I rather wish to believe that your words are not spoken with a snake's bifid tongue." And then the mouse went into the opening of her door-hole. The raven asked, "Why do you take your place under the door? What makes you so fearful to come out to me? Do I still inspire you with fear?" And the mouse replied, "I have put my belief and my trust in you, for I like you, and it is not fear that you will prove dishonest that prevents me from coming out. But you have many brethren of your kind, yet not perhaps of your character, whose friendship is not extended to me as yours is. If one of them sees me, I cannot but fear that he will devour me." The raven said to the contrary: "True friendship requires before all else that one be the true friend of his friend, and the enemy of his enemy; rest assured, o friend Sambar, that I have no friend alive who will not be just as true a friend to you as I am myself. Also, I have power and strength enough to shelter and to shield you." Now Sambar the Mouse finally came out of her hole, and she and the raven swore an inviolable pact of friendship, and when this was done, they lived with and beside one another in peace and friendship, and told each other delightful tales every day.

But at length, the raven said to the mouse one day: “Listen, my dear friend Sambar, your dwelling is well known and too close to the road; I worry that some day someone will come who will kill or cripple you or me; besides, it is difficult for me to find my food here. But I know a pleasant and more convenient abode where there is water and meadowland, fruit and fodder, and in the lake there lives an old friend of mine, a true boon companion; I wish you would move there with me.”

“I shall happily do so for your sake,” said the mouse, “for I myself am afraid here and do not consider myself to be truly safe – hence you see the many entrances and exits for my dwelling. Believe me, dear friend, I have encountered manifold perils before now, and I shall tell you about them once we have reached our new abode.”

After that they both took their leave of their old dwelling-place, and the raven gripped the mouse’s tail in his beak and flew with her to the place he had in mind. Then an animal popped its head above the water but took fright at the mouse, which it did not recognise as the raven released her from his beak, and quickly ducked back under. The raven flew on to a tree and called: “Corax, corax!”



Then the animal emerged from the lake, and it was his friend, a turtle; she was pleased to see the raven again, and she asked him what had induced him to tarry abroad so long? Then the raven told her the story of the dove and the mouse, and introduced his friends to one another; and the turtle, astonished at the great good sense of the mouse, crawling over to her, gave her her hand, and was delighted to make her acquaintance.

Afterwards the raven asked the mouse to tell him and his old friend the story of her life, and Sambar, showing herself quite ready and willing to do so, narrated as follows:

Next (and finally): *The Life-Story of Sambar the Mouse*