

Whisperings under the copper beech tree

WHISPERINGS UNDER THE COPPER BEECH TREE

21 very short fairy tales
for grown-ups

Mars B. van 't Veer

For my children and grandchildren
For Nelleke

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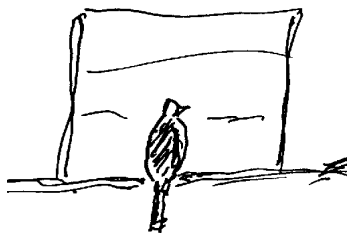
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1. The cupboard



It was early morning. It was cold. The sky in the east turned red. When the sun rose, it was always high time to sing. At least, that's what Mr. Blackbird thought.

This morning there was no song. The blackbird had gone to his cupboard, where he always kept his songs, but the cupboard was empty. And that's why he couldn't sing.

He sat down on a branch near his house and thought: Why is the cupboard empty? Had he left it open, or had the wind blown the door open? Was it something else? Or had someone...? He was disappointed. But he didn't know exactly what or who he was disappointed in. If his songs had been stolen by one of the animals in the Wood, then he would be disappointed with that animal. If he had lost his songs himself, he would be disappointed with himself. Because he didn't know what had happened, he didn't know who to be disappointed with: someone else or himself.

That made the disappointment even greater.

Downstairs, the hedgehog came by. He saw the blackbird sitting in the tree and said, 'Blackbird, why do you look so glum?' The blackbird, who didn't know what glum meant, replied, 'I don't know how I look, but I do know that I'm disappointed. I just don't know what or who I'm disappointed in, and that makes it even worse. Is that what you call glum?' The hedgehog looked thoughtful. 'You shouldn't ask who you're disappointed with, but why you're disappointed.' Mr. Blackbird said, 'Oh, that I do know. This morning, I went to my cupboard to fetch my songs. But the cupboard was completely empty. Now I can't sing.'

'Then I was right to say that you looked glum this morning.' The hedgehog walked on, very pleased with himself.

The blackbird didn't feel like thinking about what had been said, because he wanted to blame something or someone else.

However, he didn't get the chance, because Wopke, the friendly gnome, came by. Wopke was very cheerful as always and called out: 'Nice weather, isn't it?' Mr. Blackbird was not in the mood to appreciate the weather. He called out: 'It's much too quiet now that the sun is coming up.'

‘I like it that way,’ Wopke called back, ‘I like listening to nothing.’

‘What is nothing?’ asked the blackbird, ‘is that nice?’ Wopke shrugged his shoulders. ‘Nothing is nothing, so it’s not nice, but I like listening to it.’ Blackbird found that very difficult to understand, because how can you like listening to something that isn’t nice? Wopke tried to explain it more clearly: ‘Nothing is nothing, although it does exist.’

This was a very profound thought, and it left them both silent.

Later that morning, Mr. Owl flew by and saw the blackbird still sitting sadly on his branch. He turned and sat down next to him. ‘What’s the matter, Blackbird? I didn’t hear you singing this morning.’

‘That’s exactly it,’ said Mr. Blackbird, ‘I’ve lost my songs, so I can’t sing now.’

‘That would be terrible’, said the owl, shocked. ‘When I’ve been working all night, I always wait for you to sing, which helps me to fall asleep.’

The owl was known to all the animals for his wisdom and good advice, but now even he was at a loss. How could you lose your songs? The owl was never at a loss for words. Except now.

And thus, silence fell between the two.