

The elephant set out...

Soetkin Kesteloot

ONE DAY, THE MOUSE VISITED THE MOLE.

The mouse instantly noticed that the mole was not good-natured. He looked very depressed.

'Hey mole, what's wrong ?' the mouse asked, being very worried.

'Oh, it's the elephant.', the mole said while he turned in the earth with his nose, throwing some sand in the air. 'He finds me strange and egoistic.'

'How come, you ?'

'Yesterday, the elephant said that it was not common that I always lived alone under the ground. All the animals love the sun and also live together in wood. But I don't, I feel much better at night. Is that really strange ? Do I have, perhaps, a serious disease ?'

The mouse thought very hard about it. He took some honey out of the big jar and loosened up the soil with his teeth. How could he convince the mole that he was not strange, but just different ? Just like everybody says or does something different sometimes.

'You like to dig some tunnels, don't you ? You can make some magnificent masterpieces under the ground, right ?'

'Oh yes, but now I am not allowed anymore from the elephant to root in the earth. I have to wake up in the morning and sleep at night like all animals. I am not allowed anymore to stay in the darkness, I have to be more social.'

'Wait a moment, I have a solution,' the mouse answered understanding. 'Tomorrow you will dig a large tunnel. When you have it decorated with small branches and leaves and some pieces of moss, then you invite the elephant to eat together a piece of bilberry cake with honey. He will be overwhelmed with your excellent rooting. He will have to confess that it's actually very cosy under the ground.'

'And yes, a few weeks later the elephant got a letter.'

My dear Elephant,

I would like to offer you a piece of bilberry cake with honey under the ground. Then you can also see my home.

The Mole

He went and he had to confess that it was quite cosy, but a bit too small. He could not stretch his trunk in that small underground living-room. He understood that this house was ideal for the mole. He admitted that the mole was right, perhaps he had criticized him a bit too soon. The mole often had other ideas, but sometimes he was also right.

THE ELEPHANT WALKED FURTHER AND HE SAW THE LITTLE squirrel under the great oak. He was sobbing quietly and hid his face in his great bushy tail. The elephant took him up and softly sang a song. Suddenly the tears flew over his cheeks.

'Aw, sniff, sniff, aw, my tail.'

'What's wrong with you ?'

'My tail hurts enormously. Yesterday my daddy ordered me to collect beech-nuts for the winter. I worked so hard that my tail enlarged 4 inches. Today I was so tired that I couldn't lift up my paws anymore, but my daddy said that I had to help him more, that I was a softie. In winter we have to survive and that's the reason why I have to trail. But my tail aches so much, aw aw.'

The elephant listened and put him carefully back under the greak oak. He sang quietly further and began to build a camp with branches and leaves. In the beginning, the squirrel was too tired, but after a while he found it so beautiful and exciting that he forgot his aching tail. Together they made the largest and the most magnificent camp of the world.

'When you are tired, you can come here to sleep and to play. You can just whistle once and I'll come and play with you, Ok ?'

'Yes, of course !'

'I'll help to collect the nuts. Then we have lots of time to do funny things together ! Little squirrels have to play a lot too, haven't they !'

And dead tired, but very happy, the little squirrel fell asleep in the camp !

THE ELEPHANT SKIPPED FURTHER. UNDER THE HAZEL HE SAW A

white paper. It was a letter. Of course the elephant was very keen on reading the letter. On top there was :

'To the sweetest rabbit of the whole birchwood.'

Waw, perhaps it was a real love-letter or there were some secrets in it. The elephant opened it immediately.

Then the raven suddenly passed by:

'Hello elephant, have you received a letter ? How nice ! Whom from ?'

'Hello, stammered the elephant who had not heard the raven arrive, 'which letter ? I haven't got any letter at all.'

'Who it that paper for then ?'

'It's just fallen out of this tree,' the elephant lied. Of course, the smart raven didn't believe him.

'You wanted to read the letter, didn't you ? Typical of you, poking everywhere your trunk into. Fie ! Quickly give it to the rabbit. Perhaps it is very important.'

So the elephant stumbled to the burrow of the rabbit. He knocked three times with his trunk on the door. The rabbit put out her head of the burrow, being very surprised. When she saw that the elephant had a letter of her boyfriend for her, she was so glad that she started a round dance around the paws of the elephant. She read the letter and was extremely happy. Her boyfriend would visit her and wanted to marry her the day after.

When the elephant heard that, he trumpeted so hard that he alarmed the enormous wood. Finally, they would have a gigantic wedding party ! Yes !!

In fact it was good that he hadn't read the letter. He wouldn't like that himself neither. Imagine that someone read the letters of his girlfriend, he would be very angry. They were his letters and nobody was allowed to see them !

THE WHOLE WOOD WAS BEAUTIFULLY DECORATED, BECAUSE

the rabbits would marry. All the animals dressed themselves up for the party. The hedgehog combed his spines. The snail put his finest shell on and the bear knotted his best tie.

At last they caught sight of the rabbit's boyfriend. But... it was a white rabbit. Impossible !! All the rabbits in the birchwood had to be brown. Mum and dad rabbit were also brown. A white rabbit didn't exist.

'Only brown, normal and handsome rabbits are allowed here ! A white rabbit doesn't belong here,' the snake shouted. 'He has to leave ! Away with him !' And the snake chased the white rabbit, hissing after him.

This created a hellish row in the wood. The rabbit started crying, the owls shrieked that it was unfair, the snake hissed 'brown rabbits first !' and everybody started shouting.

'Come, on,' the mammoth roared. Let us list all the points. We will discuss what to do with the white rabbit. Tonight there is a crisis reunion near the high birch. Everyone can give his view.'

That evening the mammoth started the meeting. It would be very difficult to let all animals finish. Everyone was so excited.

'I find that the snake was right, a white rabbit doesn't belong here. Here everyone is brown.'

'When they love each other, it doesn't matter whether he has a white skin.'

'Maybe we can learn something of the white rabbits.'

'In a moment we will be flooded with the white ones. We have to protect ourselves from them.'

'When they take on our habits and don't devour all our bushes, the white ones can live here. But we are our own master !'

And so they didn't agree. Suddenly the mammoth got an ingenious idea :

'Perhaps under the high birch we can write down which are the bare necessities in our wood. So all the animals of other woods can see what is essential. If they adapt to it, they may live here too.'

'Ok ?'

'If they stick to our agreement, they may also come to our meetings and eat from all the plants in the wood. And then it is not important at all whether they are a white or a brown rabbit, whether they live at night or by day, whether they are small or big. Everybody can give his view.'

'Yes, this seems to be a good idea.'

So the elephant carved the following appointments in the soil :

1. All animals are equal, whether they are little or big, smart or less smart, everybody should live as friends.
2. Everybody can live free in the wood (whether they are white, brown, black,... whether they are born in the wood or not, whether they live at night or by day, whether they like the sun or the earth), everybody is free.
3. Nobody shall kill another animal.
4. Nobody shall take advantage of another animal or use someone as a slave.
5. Nobody shall hurt or torture another animal.
6. Everybody has to be treated like a real animal, how little or big he is.
7. All animals have to obey these agreements.
8. If someone has done something wrong, the smart owl has to investigate this. Everybody can tell why he did so.
9. Nobody will be punished undeserved.
10. Nobody shall read a letter of someone else or meddle in other animals' lives.
11. Everybody is allowed to walk about free in this wood and to visit another wood on condition that he comes back afterwards.
12. From 5 years onwards, everyone is allowed to marry (whether they are big or little, white or brown, live in our wood or not).
13. Everyone can give his view on the meeting.
14. Everyone had to relax in time.
15. All young animals have to learn from their parents how they have to live. It can also be that another animal teaches him something.

All the animals tried to agree. For the beasts of prey it was sometimes very difficult to leave the sheep and the chickens alone and daddy squirrel didn't understand that he wasn't allowed to let his son work that much. But the animals were very happy and brown or white, in fact it didn't matter. All animals were equal !