



## The birds' language

Once upon a time there was a very rich merchant who was very fond of birds, especially of nightingales. He found the nightingale's song to be very mysterious and so he decided to buy himself one and keep it at home in a cage so that he could try to understand what the bird's song meant. But no matter how hard he listened, he couldn't manage to make any sense of it. He spent his days sighing, because he couldn't understand: "The Birds' Language".

Every day, when he heard the nightingale sing, the merchant would say:

"If someone could tell me what this nightingale is saying, I would give that person half of my riches."

When he heard that, his little son, Vassili, said:

"I know what he's saying, but I can't tell you because it will make you very angry."

The boy's father was very surprised that his son could understand the nightingale and so he pushed and pushed the boy to tell him the meaning of the song.

Finally , the boy said to him:

"He says that business will go so badly that before the year is out I will have to look after you and mother, rather than you looking after me. And the two of you will be my servants."

Vassili's parents got very angry with him because they were sure that he had made that up just to make them angry.

"What have we done to deserve such an ill-mannered child? He doesn't lift a finger to do anything and now he wants us to be his servants."

They were so upset that they decided to send him off as an apprentice on a merchant ship so they wouldn't have to set eyes on him for a good long time.

The ship's captain was a good man and treated Vassili like a son but, not only that, he soon discovered that the boy had not come on board alone. The nightingale had escaped from the parents' home and decided to join Vassili in his sea crossing. Finally, one day Vassili decided to tell the captain some of the the secrets the nightingale had shared with him.

"Captain, the nightingale says that there is going to be a big storm tonight which will tear our sails and break our masts. We should head back to port."

But the captain didn't pay any attention to him.

That night the ship suffered the biggest storm the crew had ever experienced. It tore the ship's sails and broke the masts.

The next day they sailed into the nearest port for repairs. When everything was fixed, the captain

said to Vassili:

"I'm sorry, lad, but you've brought us bad luck: you won't be able to continue on with us."

And so Vassili was forced to stay ashore, watching as the ship sailed off into the distance. Vassili broke down in tears because he had no idea where to go in that strange land, but just then the nightingale flew up to him with a piece of paper in his beak. It was a notice from the King, which said,

"Whoever can understand what the crows at the Royal Palace are squawking about all day will be rewarded with half of the kingdom and my daughter's hand in marriage. But if that person is mistaken, he will have his head cut off."

That really frightened Vassili, but the nightingale talked him into trying and the two of them headed to the palace.

There they found the King utterly beside himself: he was kept awake day and night by the racket the crows were making and he was willing to do anything at all to quiet those birds.

Vassili listened to the crows, but he didn't have a clue as to what they were saying so, naturally, he pictured his head on the chopping block. But the nightingale joined the crows and exchanged squawks and warbles with them and then he went and told Vassili what they had said.

Vassili went to the King and said to him:

"Your Majesty, do you see that there are three crows? One is the father, the other is the mother and the third is the son. They are arguing about which one will get to keep their son and they've come to you so you can make the decision for them."

The King looked at them and said:

"The father."

That said, the father and son flew off in one direction and the mother in another. The King was so pleased that he adopted Vassili as his heir to the throne and offered him one of his daughters to marry. To celebrate the event he invited the two of them to visit the country that would eventually become his kingdom.

The princess and Vassili travelled all around the country. One night, when they were staying at an inn, the man and woman working there who had served them their dinner, made their bed and set out clean towels for them, came up to Vassili and said:

"We're at your service for anything you may need, Prince."

When he heard their voices Vassili recognized that it was his parents speaking; their business had gone so badly that now they were working at an inn.

Just as the nightingale had predicted, the parents ended up being servants to their son. The son was so happy to see them again that he wanted to take them back to the palace to live with him. So, just as the nightingale said just before Vassili's parents had become so angry, their son would end up taking care of them. And from that day on, no one ever again doubted the nightingale's word.

*Script: Jaume Esquius*

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