

The Tree and the Birds

One day, a gentleman was on the highway and he was wondering what was shining far away; there were these varying colors. Approaching them, we could no longer see them, his eyes closed by themselves; he arrived next to a young girl who was carrying a tree full of birds of all kinds, some with tails of gold, others with tails of silver, and decided to ask her the price.

“How much, young girl, for the tree full of birds?”

“It is not very expensive.”

“But tell me your price.”

“I would tell you, but I don’t dare.”

“It’s not your fortune that you want to trade!”

“No, I only want you to take me.”

He threw himself to her feet and said to her:

“As you wish, your birds are beautiful and you are still more beautiful. I’m going to my château to search for a carriage to carry you, you and your tree, because I do not want you to walk, nor for you to carry it.”

When the carriage arrived, the young girl went inside and, the whole way down the road, he asked her if she had ever found anyone who wanted her.”

“I couldn’t stop,” replied the young girl, “and I believed that I was flying.”

“But why did you stop at the place where I found you?”

“I had to rest there until you arrived.”

“You have never seen me, nor me you, why have we met each other?”

She replied to him:

“We have almost been carried to the place where you found me.”¹

“But who lead you there?”

“A korrigán², *monsieur*.”

“That’s right,” he said. “Korrigans are sorcerers, most of them, and then, did you see a korrigán?”

“I didn’t see him, but he promised to come see me.”

“I am happy,” said the gentleman, “for I would compensate you.”

Upon arriving at the château, he told his servant to prepare the meal. The tree was placed in the middle of the room and, all while eating, the young girl said:

“There needs to be a dish on the table for the birds.”

“But they don’t eat meat!”

¹ In French: *Nous avons été comme portés à l’endroit où vous m’avez trouvée*. I am not completely certain how to translate this sentence. – Trans.

² *Ozegan*.

“You have never seen,” she said, “birds like these. They don’t eat grains, but they feed themselves like Christians.”

“I have never seen anything similar,” he said.

They cut the meat into three small pieces and each at its turn went from the tree to the young girl’s head and baught a piece on the dish, then returned to the tree. The gentleman could not eat because of the pleasure that he had while watching this, and said:

“I will buy a cage to put them in.”

She replied:

“My birds will not live in a cage. You must leave them on the tree and they will come and go.”

“If they mustn’t, we’ll leave them be. What do you give them to drink?”

“Sweet milk.”

“We don’t lack it in the château.”

One day, the gentleman said to the young girl:

“Wouldn’t you like me marry me?”

“I would be happy to with all my heart,” she replied.

“Tomorrow, we will go get engaged³.”

The next day, they went to the city hall, but she said ahead of time:

“I’m going to keep the key to my chamber, because, if one of the birds goes away, they will all leave and I will only be unhappy.”

“We mustn’t lose them,” he said. “The servants who live in my château are capable of searching for them for us.”

They left, the notice of their engagement was published, and, one day, the night before their wedding, they heard knocking at the door. The birds all left the tree, flew around the chamber, and he said:

“What does this mean?”

“I know,” she replied. “The korrigan and his wife are at the door.”

He ran to open it for them as quickly as he could and, when they had entered, the birds were flying around them. He said:

“I have wanted to know you for a long time, but now, no matter where I see you, I will meet you and I will not forget you for having led me to encounter a young girl and birds so lovely. Tomorrow morning, we are getting married.”

“It’s because of that,” said the korrigan, “that we came, my wife and I.”

“You have done well to come, because we were planning to go take you in our carriage.”

The next day, they went into town, got married and, upon leaving the church, returned to the château. Everyone took their place around the table. The

³ In French: *mettre nos noms* (place our names). – Trans.

birds did nothing but fly all around the room, joyous and content. At the end of the meal, the gentleman said to the korrigán:

“We will be happy if they leave us here, my wife and me. You will remain with us however long you want, and, when you are tired of us, you will know where to go.”

“At that moment,” said the korrigán, “we will return to our house. We will remain a year at yours.”

“Remain for two, remain for three, it doesn’t bother us at all.”

A year passed, a little boy was born in the château, and the korrigán said to his wife:

“I’m going to the house. Remain here, and, in twenty-four hours, I will return.”

The korrigán returned and the gentleman, having gone to meet up with him, said to him:

“What have you wrapped in the beautiful paper that you have under your arm?”

“When you arrive at your house, you will see.”

When they arrived, the birds sung as loudly as they could and the gentleman said:

“They’re going to give my wife a headache.”

“No,” said the korrigán. “They are happy and they will know at what time to stop.”

He removed from the paper a cradle made from walnut husks. A little green fish was at the head of each corner of the head, and a little red fish was at each corner of the foot.

The gentleman saw this and said:

“I’m surprised to see such beautiful things! I have never seen anything similar.”

“When you hear the fish sing,” said the korrigán, “then you will be confused.”

“Do the fish speak as well?”

“Those that you give permission,” replied the korrigán.

He put the little boy into the cradle and the two little green fish who were at the head said to each other:

“What age will he live to be?”

One said, “to ten,” and the other, “to twenty.”

“I want him,” said the first, “to live twenty years.”

The mother and the father listened, cried, and thought that it was hard to raise a child to lose him at twenty years. The two little red fish who were at the foot said to each other:

“Why should we let these people cry?”

“He will live,” said one.

“And he will marry,” said the other. “He will outlive his mother and father.”

A discussion arose between the four fish, and the two little green fish said:

“We will not speak anymore. We will forever be angry.”

The two red fish said:

“The two of us will not be angry. We will remain here until he leaves his cradle, then we will leave and, two years later, we will return, because there will be a girl.”

The green fish did not speak anymore.

“There is a tree with some birds,” said the red fish.

One of them said:

“The birds will never leave here.”

The other added:

“If one bird is lost, then they all will be. There will be in this château an evil servant who will want to lay his hands on a bird. If he takes a bird with a tail of gold, you are lost, and, if he takes one with a tail of silver, you are saved.”

The mother and the father could not sleep anymore because of the pain and chagrin that they were in. They heard noises all the time and believed that it was the evil servant. One night, they heard knocking at their door, and it was the korrigan who had come from a room on the opposite side of the hall, and who said to them:

“Stop your sighing, you have done enough, now stop trembling. I have caught him tonight.”

“So, what have you done?”

“I killed the evil servant who was just searching for one of the birds, the door was closed, but there was a secret passage. He would have been able to open it, and, as soon as he would have put a hand on the bird, it would not have been possible for you to take him. Now, you can dismiss all of your servants; the birds will do all the work. Half of them are boys and the other half are girls, because they have been enchanted. We’re leaving, my wife and I, don’t tremble anymore at the idea of danger, your lives are secure, and we will not see you again until we are in the other world.”

Joseph Frison. “L’arbre et les oiseaux.” *Revue des traditions populaires* 29:4
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Translated by Michelle Collins.