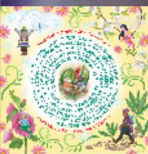


THE TREE AND THE BIRD



Weronika Madryas

BAJKOWE STUDIO



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Assembly of the Association of Forest Listeners

They gathered in the clearing just by the forest. They lit a bonfire with some small leaves, blades of grass and dried flowers. The last of these made the air fragrant and mildly intoxicated the revellers. The flutterbyes were sitting cross-legged, close to one another, knees and elbows touching. Their translucent, silvery, sparkling wings, though folded, still gleamed. To the right of these enchanting creatures sat the trudgers, known for their large feet and tendency to acquire all sorts of knick-knacks. The last group was composed of the forest wotsits, kind-hearted and sensitive, known for their love of unhealthy treats and laziness. But they told the best stories, though. Anyone who had occasion to listen to a wotsit knows that it's hard to find a better raconteur.

– Give us a love story – asked one of the flutterbyes, putting on her prettiest and sweetest imploring expression, which no wotsit could resist.

– Love? – Dufon slowly filled his pipe with dried, crumbled fern leaves, which was his way of preparing for a tale.

– But without bees in it, please – asked a flutterby.

– Ah, yes – sighed Dufon. – Well, they just fly from flower to flower.

– That's not love – said Bibon, one of the more philosophical trudgers.

– It's a fleeting infatuation – he explained.

– Precisely – the flutterby agreed. Just in case, she dropped her eyes and blushed, as she felt a little abashed at the topic she suggested.

– Perhaps you could tell us the one about how the Old Weaver wove the blue dragonfly? – suggested another wotsit, who could listen to an interesting story time and time again.

– I'd prefer something new – sighed one of the flutterbyes with a pouting expression.

She knew the story of the spider that fell in love with his victim too well to listen to it again. It was his web that connected the branch her cocoon dangled from with the neighbouring spruce tree. It was she who had first told the story to the members of the Association of Forest Listeners and deep down she felt that she was the only one who could really portray the drama and grand emotions of the spider and the dragonfly.

– Hmm... – Dufon pondered, closed his eyes, puffed his pipe and let out a blue smoke ring. Everybody watched as it dissipated into the air.

– Difficult choice – whispered Bibon, worried that nobody knew an interesting tale about love.



He was prepared to think something up on the spot if it would even momentarily attract the attention and earn a sweet smile from the flutterby Sisi who had asked for a love story.

– I have it! – Dufon burst into life, sensing the expectancy of the audience. – I shall tell you, dear friends, about the bird and the tree.

– The bird and the tree? – went round the amazed whisper.

– But where's the love? – inquired a fussy trudger.

– Be patient! – the angered wotsit thundered.

– It's a tale of love stronger even than death

– he said, his voice dropping to a whisper.

The chatting and mumbling died down. The eyes of the trudgers grew wide, the wotsits fidgeted excitedly and the flutterbys rested their chins on their folded hands, awaiting the tale in concentration.

