

The Goose and his Brother

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An extract

Original title De gans en zijn broer
Publisher Querido, 2014

Translation Dutch into English
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The wish

At the end of the evening the goose blew out the candle and said, “Goodnight.” There was an edge to his voice and it was that edge that got stuck in his brother’s head, changing the goodnight from a wish into something else.

His brother turned over onto his side. He tried to think about the day that had just passed and the lovely evening that had followed, but he couldn’t shake off the edge of that goodnight. Night came with all its darkness and a difficult silence closed in around him.

In that silence, the goose’s brother heard his own heart.

He knew he wasn’t the only living creature in the world, the goose was right next to him, but he couldn’t hear the goose’s heart, and the others were all too far away. Suddenly he realised that being together didn’t make you any less separate, it didn’t make you one. Everyone had skin or fur around them. Everyone had feathers or hair. Nobody could get closer than skin on skin.

The thought made him cry.

The goose didn’t notice. “I said goodnight, brother,” he said. “Goodnight. Aren’t you going to wish me something too?”

“Goodnight,” he replied, choking, and started to cry again, because he was sending his brother off into the night all by himself.

The Agreement

“Go ahead and sing,” the goose told his brother one day. “Just sing.”

“Why would I sing?” his brother said. “I never sing.” “Yes, I know that,” the goose said. “But if you feel like singing, just sing, even if we think you can’t hold a tune.” “OK,” said his brother.

“You can dance too,” the goose said. “Don’t be embarrassed.”

“Why would I dance?” his brother said. “I never dance.” “Yes, I know that,” the goose said. “But if you feel the urge, don’t resist, even if we’re embarrassed on your behalf.” “OK,” said his brother.

“Singing, dancing,” the goose said. “Whistling, skipping, jumping... Whatever you feel like doing, just do it. I wouldn’t want it any other way.”

“Why would I sing, dance, whistle, skip, jump or do whatever I feel like doing?” his brother said, blinking.

“They’re all things I never do.”

“That’s why,” the goose said. “That’s what I’m talking about. We’ve been together a very long time and maybe having me around makes you forget to do some of the things you feel like doing. Look at the woman and all the things she’s started doing again since the man left.”

Just then the woman came out of the farmhouse. She sung, she skipped, she jumped and danced and whistled a little tune while walking backwards across the yard, and that too was something she hadn’t done for a very long time.

“OK,” said his brother.

Memory

The dog, the sheep and the turkeys were reminiscing. They said, "Remember when?" and did something from the old days.

The sheep imitated gusts of wind. It could have been just the one. The gust of wind that blew the roof off the barn one night and left it upside-down on top of a cow.

"That was something," the sheep said. They made big gestures although they knew that gust of wind was really only a strong breeze. There hadn't been any cows under the upside-down roof, it hadn't killed anybody, in fact, the blown-off roof was only a piece of gutter, but meanwhile everyone was panting and the turkeys were rolling their eyes.

"Remember when?" they said and imitated the cooing of the pigeon. It couldn't have been any other pigeon than the pigeon from that one time, that was obvious. In three seconds the pigeon and the cap and the ditch and the postman had all come back to them and everyone was roaring with laughter. The dog even rolled over the floor hysterically and that made everyone laugh even louder although they knew that thing with the pigeon happens every day somewhere and things that happen every day really aren't that funny.

"And you?" the dog and the sheep and the turkeys said to the goose and his brother. "Do you have any good memories of the old days to share?"

"No," said the goose and his brother. "We prefer to keep our memories to ourselves. Inside our heads they're just the right size."

"You can share one little one with us, can't you?" the dog said.

"No," said the goose and his brother.

Because the others kept insisting, they finally let out a deep sigh and gave in.

"Alright, then."

The dog, sheep and turkeys waited for the memory that was about to come. They were already giggling a little because it was sure to be a beautiful, exciting memory.

It turned out to be one of hips and lying on the ground with big grins.

"So peaceful," the goose said.

"It was so peaceful," his brother said. "And that's all we're saying."

They didn't tell them they were remembering what it was like before the dog and the sheep and the turkeys started reminiscing and how lovely it had been, and they crept closer together and in their heads this new memory was just the right size.