



SAKI

**KONTALARIA/
TRASTE-GELA**

**THE STORYTELLER/
THE LUMBER ROOM**



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Kontalaria

Arratsalde beroa zen, eta, horren ondorioz, tren-bagoian, sargori zegoen, eta, hurrengo geltokira – Templecombera–, ia ordubete barru iritsiko ziren.

Neskato bat, txikiagoa zen beste neskato bat eta mutiko bat ziren bagoiko bidaiariak. Umeen izeba izkina batean zegoen eserita eta, haren parean eta bagoiaren beste ertzean, beste bidaiariak ezagutzen ez zituen ezkongabeko gizon bat. Baina neskatoek eta mutikoak okupatzen zuten bagoia: horren gainean ez zegoen zalantzarik.

Izeba zein umeak elkarrizketa mugatu eta etengabeak egiten ari ziren, eta gogogabetu ezin dugun euli bat ekartzen zuten gogora. Izebaren ekarpen gehienak “Ez” batekin hasten ziren, eta umeen ia guztiak, “Zergatik?” batekin. Ezkongabeko gizonak ez zuen ezer esaten ozenki. “Cyril, ez,” egin zion oihu izebak kuxinak kolpatzen hasi zen mutil txikiari, kolpe bakoitzarekin hauts-hodei bat ateratzen ari baitzen.

– Niregana etorri eta leihotik begiratu –esan zion.

Umea gogorik gabe hurbildu zen leihorantz.

– Zergatik ateratzen dituzte ardiak zelai horretatik? –
galdetu zion izebari.

– Ziur aski, beste zelai batera eramaten ari dira, belar
gehiago duen batera –erantzun zion izebak ziurtasun
handirik gabe.

– Baina belar asko dago zelai horretan –egin zuen
protesta mutikoak. – Belarra baino ez zegoen hor.
Izeba, belar asko dago zelai horretan.

–Beharbada, beste zelai horretan dagoen belarra
hobea da –erantzun zion izebak memeloki.

Mutikoaren galdera azkarra eta saihestezina izan zen –
Zertan hobea?

– Ai, begiratu behi horiei! –oihu egin zuen izebak.
Trenbide-ertzaren ondoan, ia zelai guztietan ikusten
ziren behiak edo idiak, baina gauza ezohikoa izango
balitz bezala esan zuen.

– Beste zelaian dagoen belarra zergatik da hobea? –
tematu zen Cyril.

Ezkongabeko gizonaren kopeta gero eta ilunago zegoen. Izebak bere artean pentsatu zuen gizon gogorra zela, besteengan pentsatzen ez zuen horietako bat. Ez zen gai beste zelaian zegoen belarrari buruzko azalpen gogobetetze bat asmatzeko.

Neskato txikiena dibertitzen hasi zen “Mandalayko bidean” poema errezitatuz. Lehenengo bertso-lerroa baino ez zekien, baina ezaguera mugatu hura ahalik eta gehien aprobetxatu zuen. Bertso-lerroa behin eta berriro errepikatzen zuen, ahots ameslari baina oso entzungarri batez. Ezkongabeko gizonari iruditzen zitzaion erronka joa ziola norbaitek neskari: ezetz neurtitza bi mila aldiz etengabe errepikatu. Erronka jo zuenak galdu egingo zuen, ziur aski.

– Etorri hona eta entzun istorio bat –esan zien izebak, ezkongabeko gizonak izebari bi aldiz begiratu ondoren eta larrialdiko botoiari, behin.

Umeak gogogabe mugitu ziren izebarenganantz, bagoiaren bukaera aldera. Argi zegoen kontalari hark ez zuela ospe handirik haien artean.

Ahots baxu eta isilpeko batez, entzuleen galdera ozen eta erretxinek askotan moztuta, neskato bati buruzko ekimenik eta interesik gabeko istorio deitoragarri bati ekin zion. Istorioko neskatoa zintzoa zen, eta, zintzotasun horri esker, guztion laguna zen, eta, azkenean, bere izaera morala miresten zuten lagun askok zezen ero batetik salbatu zuten.

– Zintzoa izan ez balitz, ez zuketen salbatuko? –desafio zion neskato handienak. Ezkongabeko gizonak egin nahi zuen galdera bera zen.

– Bada, bai –erantzun zien izebak ziurtasunik gabe – baina, beren gustukoa izan ez balitz, ez dut uste hain azkar korrika egingo zuketenik.

– Ez dut inoiz hori baino istorio ergelagorik entzun – esan zuen neskato handienak erabateko ziurtasunez.

– Hain zen ergela non hasieratik ez baitut entzun –esan zuen Cyrilek.

Neskato txikienak ez zuen istorioari buruzko iruzkin zuzenik egin, baina gehien maite zuen neurtitzaren errezitaldiari ekin zion berriz ere.

– Ematen du kontalari gisa ez duzula arrakasta handirik
–esan zuen ezkongabeak bat-batean, bere izkinatik.

Izeba berehala oldartu zen espero ez zuen erasoaren aurka.

– Oso kontu zaila da umei kontatzea ulertuko eta gustuko izango dituzten istorioak –erantzun zion zurrunki.

– Ez nago ados –esan zuen ezkongabeak.

– Beharbada, zeuk istorio bat kontatu nahi diezu –
erantzun zion izebak.

– Kontaiguzu istorio bat –eskatu zion neskato handienak.

– Behin batean –hasi zen ezkongabea –bazegoen Bertha zeritzon neskato bat, bereziki zintzoa zena.

Une batez esnatua zen umeen arreta berehala lokartzen hasi zen: istorio guztiak izugarri antzekoak ziren, kontatzen dituenak kontatzen dituela.

– Esaten zioten guztia egiten zuen; beti esaten zuen egia; arropa garbi zuen beti; ogiesnea marmelada-pastela balitz bezala jaten zuen; zintzo ikasten zuen, eta oso portaera adeitsua zuen.

– Ederra al zen? –galdetu zuen neskato handienak.

– Ez zuek bezain ederra –erantzun zion ezkongabeak – baina zintzo mortala zen.

Istorioaren aldeko olatu bat sortu zen: "mortal" hitza zintzotasunarekin lotzea laudatzeko moduko berritasuna zen. Ematen zuen, izebaren istorioetan ez bezala, halako sinesgarritasun bat ekartzen zuela.

– Hain zen zintzoa –jarraitu zuen ezkongabeak – non zintzoa izateagatik domina asko irabazi baitzituen, eta domina horiek soineko gainean eramaten zituen beti. Bazuen domina bat beti obeditzen zuelako; beste bat, garaiz iristen zelako; eta hirugarren bat, ondo portatzen zelako. Dominak handiak ziren, eta elkarren kontra egiten zuten talka neska ibiltzen zenean. Bizi zen herrian inork ez zuen horrenbeste dominarik;

beraz, guztiek bazekiten ume bereziki zintzoa izan behar zuela.

– Zintzo mortala –Cyrilek aipua errepikatu zuen.

– Guztiek hitz egiten zuten haren zintzotasunaren gainean, eta herrialdeko printzeak horren berri izan zuen; hain zen zintzoa, esan zuen, non astean behin haren parkean -herritik oso gertu baitzegoen- ibiltzeko baimena izango baitzuen. Parkea ederra zen, eta umeei ez zieten inoiz sartzen uzten; beraz, Bertharentzat, oso ohore handia zen baimen hori izatea.

– Parkean, ardirik bazegoen? –galdetu zuen Cyrilek.

– Ez –erantzun zion ezkongabeak – ez zegoen ardirik.

– Zergatik ez zegoen ardirik? –erantzunak sorrarazten zuen galdera saihestezina izan zen.

Izebak bere buruari irribarre txiki bat egiten utzi zion: ia maltzur samarra ematen zuen irribarrea.

– Parkean ez zegoen ardirik –azaldu zion ezkongabeak
– printzearen amak amets batean ikusi zuelako ardi

batek edo erortzen zen erloju batek hilko zuela printzea. Horregatik, printzeak ez zuen ardirik parkean, ezta jauregian erlojurik ere.

Izebak miresmena adierazten zuen arnasots bati eutsi zion.

– Ardi batek ala erloju batek hil zuen printzea? –
galdetu zuen Cyrilek.

– Oraindik, bizirik dago, beraz, ez dakigu ametsa beteko denetz –erantzun zion ezkongabeak axolagabe.
–Dena den, nahiz eta parkean ardirik ez egon, bazter guztietan, txerri txikiak zeuden.

– Zein koloretakoak ziren?

– Beltzak aurpegi zuriekin, zuriak tanto beltzekin, erabat beltzak, grisak orban zuriekin, eta batzuk erabat zuriak ziren.

Kontalariak eten egin zuen kontakizuna, parkean zeuden altxorren lilura osoa umeen irudimenean murgil zedin, eta, orduan, honela jarraitu zuen:

Bertharentzat, pena izan zen parkean lorerik ez zegoela jakitea. Izebei agindu egin zien, malkoak begietan, ez zuela printze atseginaren lorerik hartuko, eta agindu hori bete nahi zuen; beraz, hartzeko lorerik ez zegoela jakin zuenean, tuntuna sentitu zen.

– Zergatik ez zegoen lorerik?

– Txerriek lore guztiak jan zituztelako –erantzun zuen ezkongabeak azkar. –Lorezainek printzeari esan zioten ezinezkoa zela loreak eta txerriak aldi berean izatea; beraz, erabaki zuen txerriak izatea eta lorerik ez.

Printzearen erabakiaren bikaintasunak onarpen-xuxurla bat sortu zuen; hainbat pertsonak kontrako erabakia hartuko zukeen.

– Parkean, bazeuden gauza liluragarriak asko. Arrain urrezkoak, urdinak eta berdeak zeuzkaten putzuak; zuhaitzetan bat-batean gauza zentzudunak esaten zituzten papagaiak; kolibriak, pil-pilean zeuden abestiak abesten. Bertha gora eta behera ibili zen eta oso ondo pasatu zuen, eta honela esan zion bere buruari: ‘Hain zintzoa izan ez banintz, ez zidaketen baimena emango parke eder honetan sartzeko eta

dauden gauza guztiez gozatzeko,' eta hiru dominek talka egin zuten elkarren aurka, eta oso zintzoa zela gogorarazten lagundu zioten. Hain zuzen, orduan, otso itzel bat sartu zen parkean, isilpean, ea txerritxo lodi bat harrapatzen zuen afaltzeko.

– Zer koloretakoa zen? –galdetu zioten umeek, beren arreta bat-batean handituta.

– Lokatz-kolore erabatekoa, mingain beltzekoa, eta begi grisen distirak krudelkeria izugarria adierazten zuen. Parkean ikusi zuen lehenengo gauza Bertha izan zen: hain zen zuria eta garbia haren soinekoa, non urrutitik ikus baitzitekeen. Berthak beregana pixkanaka-pixkanaka hurbiltzen ari zen otsoa ikusi zuen, eta nahiago izan zuen bera parkean inoiz sartzen ez utzi izana. Ahal bezain azkar, korrika urrundu zen, eta otsoa jauzika eta saltoka joan zen beraren atzetik. Mirto-zuhaixka batzuetara iristea lortu zuen, eta zuhaixkarik trinkoenetan ezkutatu zen. Otsoa usainka hurbildu zen zuhaixketara, mingain beltza ahoaren ertz batetik aterata eta begi grisak amorrugatik dirdirka.

Bertha oso-oso beldurtuta zegoen, eta zera pentsatu zuen: 'Hain zintzoa izan ez banintz, orain, herrian eta seguru egongo nintzateke'.

Hain zen handia mirtoren usaina, non otsoak usainka ezin baitzuen Bertharen ezkutalekua aurkitu, eta hain ziren trinkoak zuhaitzak, non luze azter baitzitzakeen neska ikusi gabe: beraz, erabaki zuen hobe zuela joatea eta txerritxo bat harrapatzea. Bertha dardarka zegoen otsoa beregandik oso gertu zegoelako, usainka eta beraren bila. Dar-dar egiten ari zela, obeditzen zuelako jaso zuen dominak talka egin zuen ondo portatzen zelako eta garaiz iristen zelako jasotako dominekin. Otsoa alde egiteko zorian zegoen dominen soinua entzun zuenean, eta, ondo entzuteko, gelditu egin zen: dominek, berriro, dilin-dalan egin zuten berarengandik gertu zegoen zuhaixka batean.

Arrapaladan sartu zen zuhaixkan, begi argi grisak krudelkeriaz eta garaipenez distiratsu; handik, Bertha atera zuen, arrastaka, eta irentsi egin zuen, oso-osorik. Bertharen oinetakoak, arropa-zati batzuk eta zintzoa izan zelako jaso zituen dominak bakarrik geratu ziren.

– Txerri txiki batzuk ere hil al zituen?

– Ez, horiek guztiek ihes egin zuten.

– Istorioa gaizki hasi da –esan zuen neskato txikienak – baina amaiera ederra izan da.

– Ez dut inoiz hain istorio ederra entzun –neskato handienak, oso ziur.

– Entzun dudan istorio eder bakarra da –esan zuen Cyrilek.

Izeba ez zegoen ados.

– Oso ezegokia da istorio hori ume gazteei kontatzea! Urte askoko irakaskuntza hondatu duzu.

– Dena dela –erantzun zion ezkongabeak, bagoitik atera baino lehen bere gauzak biltzen ari zelarik – hamar minutuz isilik izan ditut; zuk ez duzu hainbeste lortu.

– Emakume gaixoa! –esan zuen bere baitan, Templecombeko geltokiko nasan barrena zebilela. – Hurrengo sei hilabetean, umeez egokiak ez diren istorioak exijituko dizkiote jendaurrean!



Traste-gela

Umeak Jagboroughko hondartzara eramango zituzten autoz; opari berezia zen.

Nicholas ez zen taldearekin joango; zigortuta zegoen. Goiz hartan, hain zuzen ere, ogiesne osasuntsuari uko egin zion, itxuraz gezurra zen aitzakia bat erabiliz: barruan igel bat zegoela. Nicholas baino helduagoak eta hobeak ziren pertsonak esan zioten ezinezkoa zela ogiesnean igela bat egotea eta tontakeriarik ez esateko. Hala ere, tontakeria hutsa zirudien hura esaten jarraitu zuen, eta balizko igelaren koloreak eta orbanak deskribatu zituen, xehetasun handiz.

Gertaeraren alde hunkigarriena zen Nicholassen ogiesne-katiluan bazegoela igel bat: Nicholasek berak jarri zuelako hor; beraz, uste zuen horren gainean zerbait jakiteko moduan zegoela. Luze eman zizkioten azalpenak igel bat lorategitik ateratzearen eta ogiesne elikagarrian sartzearen bekatuaren gainean.

Baina, Nicholassen ikuspuntutik, aferaren alderik azpimarragarriena zera zen: agerian geratu zen pertsona hobeak, jakintsuagoak eta zaharragoak, gai

baten gaineko erabateko ziurtasuna zutela esan zutenak, erabat oker zebiltzala.

– Esan zenuten ezinezkoa zela nire ogiesnean igel bat egotea, baina, nire ogiesnean, bazegoen igel bat – errepikatu zuen, temati, kokapen on batetik mugitzeko asmorik ez duen taktiko trebe batek egingo lukeen bezala.

Eta, horren ondorioz, lehengusua, lehengusina eta erabat interesik gabeko anaia txikia Jagboroughko hondartzara eramango zituzten arratsalde hartan, eta Nicholas etxean geratuko zen. Lehengusuen izebak – justifikaziorik gabe eta imajinazioa erabiliaz Nicholassen izeba ere bazela esaten zuenak– azkar asmatu zuen Jagborougherako txangoa, Nicholasi ondo erakutsi nahi baitzizkion gosari-mahaian lotsagarri jokatzegatik galdu zituen gozamenak.

Ume bat gaizki portatzen zelarik, izebak jai-ekintzaren bat asmatzen zuen, eta gaizkilea kanpo geratzen zen nahitaez. Ume guztiek bekatua eginez gero, bat-batean jakinarazten zien zirku bat etorriko zela gertu zegoen herri batera: zirku horrek elefante mordoa eta dohain paregabeak izaten zituen, eta umeak,

gaiztakeriarengatik izan ez balitz, egun berean eramango zituzketen ikustera.

Nicholasengandik behar bezalako negar-malko batzuk espero zituzten txangoa ateratzear zegoela. Baina, egia esan, malko guztiak lehengusinak egin zituen; belauna min handiz urratu baitzuen gurdi-eskaileran aurka korrika sartzen ari zela.

– Nola egin duen garrasi –esan zuen alai Nicholasek, taldea abiatu zenean; ez ziren espero zen aldarte onez joan.

– Laster pasatuko zaio –esan zion bere burua izebatzat zuenak. – Korrika ibiltzeko arratsalde zoragarria izango da hondartza eder hartan. Zer ondo pasatuko duten!

– Bobbyk ez du bereziki ondo pasatuko, eta ez du korrika luze egingo, –Nicholasek, irribarre txiki eta zorrotz batekin, zera esan zuen: – Botek min ematen diote. Estuegiak ditu.

– Zergatik ez dit esan min ematen diotela? –galdetu zion izebak zakar.

– Bitan esan dizu, baina ez diozu entzun. Askotan ez diguzu entzuten gauza garrantzitsuak kontatzen ari garela.

– Debekatuta daukazu andere-mahatsen baratzean sartzea –esan zion izebak, gaiaz aldatuz.

– Zergatik? –itaundu zion Nicholasek.

– Zigortuta zaudelako –esan zion harro izebak.

Nicholasek ez zuen akatsik gabeko arrazoiketa hura onartzen: bere burua erabat gai ikusten zuen zigortuta egoteko eta aldi berean andere-mahatsen baratzean sartzeko. Aurpegian nabaritzen zitzaion oso tematuta zegoela. Izeba ziur zegoen andere-mahatsen baratzean sartzeko asmo irmoa zuela. – Eta bakarrik –bere buruari esan zion – hori ez egiteko esan diodalako.

Andere-mahatsen baratzean sartzeko, bi ate zeuden, eta, pertsona txiki bat sartuz gero -Nicholas bezalakoa-, erraz desager zitekeen alkatxofa, fruta-zuhaixka eta mugurdi-makilen artean. Izebak beste gauza asko egin behar zituen arratsalde hartan, baina ordubete edo bi eman zituen parterretan eta zuhaixken artean, lan

txikietan: handik paradisu debekatuaren bi ateei ondo beha ziezaiekeen. Ideia gutxiko emakumea zen, eta kontzentrazio itzelekoa.

Nicholas etxe aurreko lorategira atera zen behin edo bitan: ate baterantz edo besterantz bihurka zebilen, ezkutuan eta asmo argiz, baina ezin zuen izebaren zaintza saihestu. Izan ere, ez zuen andere-mahatsen baratzean sartzeko asmorik, baina oso komenigarri zitzaion izebari sinetsaraztea asmo hori zuela: sinesmen horrek zentinelan-lanak eginaraziko zizkion izebari ia arratsalde guztian. Izebaren susmoak baieztatu eta indartu ondoren, Nicholas isilik sartu zen etxean, berriro, eta buruan luze izan zuen egitasmo bati ekin zion azkar.

Liburutegian zegoen aulki baten gainean zutik jarrita, apal batera irits zitekeen, eta, apal horren gainean, giltza potolo bat zegoen. Garrantzitsua zirudien, eta halaxe zen: traste-gelako misterioa babesten zuen, inor hara baimenik gabe sar ez zedin, eta izebentzat eta halako pertsona pribilegiatuentzat zabaltzen zuen bidea. Nicholasek ez zuen eskarmentu handirik giltzak sarraila-zuloetan sartzten, baina, aurreko egunetan, praktikatu egin zuen ikasgelako giltzarekin: ez zuen

asko sinesten zortean eta kasualitatean. Giltza kostata biratzen zen sarraila-zuloan, baina biratu egin zen. Atea ireki egin zen, eta Nicholas ezagutzen ez zuen herrialde batean sartu zen: horrekin alderatuta, andere-mahatsen baratzea gozamen zaharkitua zen, plazer materiala baino ez.

Behin eta berriro irudikatua zuen Nicholasek traste-gela nolakoa izango zen; begi gazteetarako, itxita zegoen eskualde hura, eta hari buruzko galderek ez zuten inoiz erantzunik izaten.

Bere itxaropenekin bat zetorren.

Hasteko, handia eta argi gutxikoa zen: baratze debekatura ematen zuen leiho batek bakarrik argitzen zuen. Bigarrenik, imajinatu ere ez zituen altxorren biltegia zen. Bere burua izebatzat zuenak uste zuen gauzak erabiliz zapuzten direla, eta, gauza horiek mantentzeko hautsez eta hezetasunez inguratuta gorde behar direla. Nicholasek gehien ezagutzen zituen etxeko aldeak biluzi eta goibel samarrak ziren, baina, han, begietarako oturuntza zegoen.

Lehenik eta behin, tximinia-holtza zen tapiz markodun bat zegoen. Nicholasantzat, istorio biziduna zen. Indiako gortina-biribilki baten gainean eseri zen (hautsgeruzaren azpian, biribilkiak kolore zoragarriak zituen), eta tapizaren marrazkiaren xehetasun guztiak barneratu zituen. Gizon batek, aspaldiko garai bateko ehiztarien arropaz jantzita, orein bat paralizatu berri zuen gezi batekin. Jaurtiketa ez zitekeen zaila izan, oreina gizonarengandik pare bat urratsera baitzegoen. Irudian zegoen landaredi trinkoan ez zen zaila izango bazkatzen ari zen orein batengana hurbiltzea. Eta ehizan parte hartzeko aurrera jauzten ari ziren zakur tantodunak hezita zeuden gezia bota arte atzean geratzeko. Marrazkiko zati hori sinplea zen, baina interesgarria ere bai. Baina ehiztariak ikusi al zuen, Nicholasek bezala, basoan lauhazka zebiltzan lau otso beregana zetozela? Beharbada, bazeuden otso gehiago zuhaitzen atzetik ezkutatuta. Gizonak bi gezi baino ez zituen gezi-ontzian, eta horietako batekin edo birekin huts egin zezakeen: geziak jaurtitzeko haren trebetasunaren gainean argi zegoen gauza bakarra zen orein handi bat distantzia oso laburretik jo zezakeela. Nicholasek minutu zoragarri asko eman zituen eszenaren posibilitateei buruz hausnartzen: uste zuen

lau otso baino gehiago zeudela, eta gizona eta zakurrak ataka estu batean zeudela.

Baina haren arreta erakartzen zituzten beste objektu gozagarri eta interesagarri batzuk ere bazeuden une hartan: suge batzuen forma zuten argimutil biribilkatu batzuk eta Txinako ahate baten itxura zuen te-ontzi bat; haren moko irekitik etorriko zen tea. Zein aspergarria eta forma gabekoa zen jolas-gelako te-ontzia haren aldean. Eta kotoi lurrintsuz bete-beteta zegoen sandalozko kutxa bat; kotoi-geruzen artean, letoizko figurak zituen: lepo lodiko zezenak, hegazterrenak eta etxejaunak, zoragarriak ikusteko eta ukitzeko.

Azal beltz eta leunak zituen liburu karratu handi batek ez zuen hain itxura erakargarria; Nicholasek pixka bat ireki zuen eta, hara! Txori-marrakzi koloredunez beteta zegoen. Eta zer-nolako txoriak! Lorategian eta landetan ibilbideak egiten zituenean, txori batzuk ikusten zituen, eta mikak edota usoak izaten ziren horietako handienak. Liburuan, bazeuden lertxunak eta basoiloak, miruak, tukanak, txori-zezenak, indioilar basatiak, ibisak, urrezko faisaiak; ametsetan ere ikusi ez zituen izakien museo bat zen.

Eta Nicholas mandarin ahatearen koloreak miresten eta ahateari biografia bat esleitzen ari zitzaiola, garrasi kirrinkari batean -izebaren ahots zorrotzean- etorri zitzaion Nicholas izena, kanpoan zegoen andere-mahatsen baratzetik. Nicholasek desagertze luzeak susmoa piztu zion izebari, eta ondorioztatu zuen lila-zuhaixken atzean zegoen hesiaren gainetik igoa zela. Alkatxofen eta mugurdi-makilen artean, haren bila joan zen, kemen handiz eta, egia esan, itxaropenik gabe.

– Nicholas, Nicholas! –oihu egin zion –Oraintxe bertan aterako zara. Alferrik duzu hor ezkutatzea: ikusten zaitut.

Ziur aski, aurreko hogeitun urtean, inork ez zuen irribarre egin traste-gela horretan.

Halako batean, Nicholas izena, ozenki esanda, garrasi bihurtu zen, baita norbait azkar etortzeko oihu ere. Nicholasek liburua itxi zuen; arreta handiz, bazter batean zuen lekura itzuli, eta, horren gainean hurbil zegoen egunkari-meta batetik, hautsa kendu zuen. Orduan, isilik atera zen gelatik; atea giltzatu eta aurkitu

zuen leku berean utzi zuen giltza. Izebak haren izena ozenki esaten jarraitzen zuen Nicholas etxe aurreko lorategian lasai sartu zenean.

– Nor ari da deika? –galdetu zion izebari.

– Neu naiz –hesiaren beste aldetik etorri zen erantzuna. – Ez didazu entzun? Zure bila ibili naiz andare-mahatsen baratzean eta euri-uren ontzian erori naiz. Zorionez, ez dago urik, baina ertzak labainkorra dira eta ezin naiz atera. Ekarri eskailera txikia gereziodo azpitik.

– Andere-mahatsen baratzean ez sartzeko esan didate –esan zion berehala Nicholasek.

– Nik neuk esan nizun ez sartzeko, eta orain sar zaitezkeela esaten dizut –erantzun zuen euri-ur ontzitik zetorren ahotsak, pazientzia ia galduta.

Nicholasek eragozpena jarri zion – Zure ahotsak ez du antzik izebaren ahotsarekin; beharbada, Deabrua izango zara, eta manugaitz portatzeko tentazioa eskaintzen didazu. Izebak askotan esaten dit Deabruak

tentatu egiten nauela eta ni beti erortzen naizela tentaldian. Oraingo honetan ez naiz eroriko.

– Ez esan tontakeriarik –esan zuen ontzian zegoen presoak – Joan eta ekarri eskailera.

– Askarian, marrubi-marmelada izango dugu? –galdetu zion Nicholasek gaiari garrantzi handirik eman gabe.

– Zalantzarik gabe. Bai –erantzun zion izebak, bere baitan erabakiz Nicholasek ez zuela marmeladarik izango.

– Orain, badakit Deabrua zarela, ez zarela izeba –oihu egin zion Nicholasek alai. – Atzo izebari galdetu genionean ea marrubi-marmeladarik zegoen, esan zigun ez zegoela. Nik badakit armairuan lau pote daudela, begiratu bainuen, eta, noski, zuk ere hori badakizu, baina izebak ez daki, ez zegoela esan zigun eta. Ai, Deabru, zure burua saldu duzu!.

Izeba bati Deabrua izango balitz bezala hitz egitea luxu oso ezohikoa zen, baina Nicholasek, umeen senari esker, bazekien halako luxuak kontuz erabili behar direla. Zarata atereaz urrundu zen handik, eta neskame

batek -perrexila bila zebilela- euri-uraren ontzitik salbatu zuen izeba azkenean.

Izugarrizko isiltasunean hartu zuten askaria arratsalde hartan. Umeak Jagborough Badiara iritsi zirenean, itsasgora zen, eta, beraz, ez zegoen hondartzarik jolasteko: izebak hain zuen azkar zigor-txangoa antolatu, non ez baitzuen kontu hori aintzat hartu. Bobbyren boten estutasunak eragin txarra izan zuen haren aldar-tean, arratsalde osoan, eta, oro har, ezin zen esan umek ondo pasatu zutenik.

Euri-uraren ontzian merezi gabeko zigorra hogeita hamabost minutuz jasan zuenaren isiltasun izoztuari eutsi zion izebak. Eta Nicholas ere isilik zegoen, asko pentsatu behar duen pertsona bat bezala: beharbada posible zen, hausnartu zuen, ehiztariak ihes egitea otsoek zaurituta zegoen oreina jaten ari ziren bitartean.



Itzulpena:
Amaia Lasheras eta Aritz Branton

Ilustrazioa:
Kepa Peñil

The Storyteller

It was a hot afternoon, and the railway carriage was correspondingly sultry, and the next stop was at Templecombe, nearly an hour ahead. The occupants of the carriage were a small girl, and a smaller girl, and a small boy. An aunt belonging to the children occupied one corner seat, and the further corner seat on the opposite side was occupied by a bachelor who was a stranger to their party, but the small girls and the small boy emphatically occupied the compartment. Both the aunt and the children were conversational in a limited, persistent way, reminding one of the attentions of a housefly that refuses to be discouraged. Most of the aunt's remarks seemed to begin with "Don't," and nearly all of the children's remarks began with "Why?" The bachelor said nothing out loud. "Don't, Cyril, don't," exclaimed the aunt, as the small boy began smacking the cushions of the seat, producing a cloud of dust at each blow.

"Come and look out of the window," she added.

The child moved reluctantly to the window. "Why are those sheep being driven out of that field?" he asked.

"I expect they are being driven to another field where there is more grass," said the aunt weakly.

"But there is lots of grass in that field," protested the boy; "there's nothing else but grass there. Aunt, there's lots of grass in that field."

"Perhaps the grass in the other field is better," suggested the aunt fatuously.

"Why is it better?" came the swift, inevitable question.

"Oh, look at those cows!" exclaimed the aunt. Nearly every field along the line had contained cows or bullocks, but she spoke as though she were drawing attention to a rarity.

"Why is the grass in the other field better?" persisted Cyril.

The frown on the bachelor's face was deepening to a scowl. He was a hard, unsympathetic man, the aunt decided in her mind. She was utterly unable to come to any satisfactory decision about the grass in the other field.

The smaller girl created a diversion by beginning to recite "On the Road to Mandalay." She only knew the first line, but she put her limited knowledge to the fullest possible use. She repeated the line over and over again in a dreamy but resolute and very audible voice; it seemed to the bachelor as though some one had had a bet with her that she could not repeat the line aloud two thousand times without stopping. Whoever it was who had made the wager was likely to lose his bet.

"Come over here and listen to a story," said the aunt, when the bachelor had looked twice at her and once at the communication cord.

The children moved listlessly towards the aunt's end of the carriage. Evidently her reputation as a story-teller did not rank high in their estimation.

In a low, confidential voice, interrupted at frequent intervals by loud, petulant questionings from her listeners, she began an unenterprising and deplorably uninteresting story about a little girl who was good, and made friends with every one on account of her goodness, and was finally saved from a mad bull by a number of rescuers who admired her moral character.

"Wouldn't they have saved her if she hadn't been good?" demanded the bigger of the small girls. It was exactly the question that the bachelor had wanted to ask.

"Well, yes," admitted the aunt lamely, "but I don't think they would have run quite so fast to her help if they had not liked her so much."

"It's the stupidest story I've ever heard," said the bigger of the small girls, with immense conviction.

"I didn't listen after the first bit, it was so stupid," said Cyril.

The smaller girl made no actual comment on the story, but she had long ago recommenced a murmured repetition of her favourite line.

"You don't seem to be a success as a story-teller," said the bachelor suddenly from his corner.

The aunt bristled in instant defence at this unexpected attack.

"It's a very difficult thing to tell stories that children can both understand and appreciate," she said stiffly.

"I don't agree with you," said the bachelor.

"Perhaps you would like to tell them a story," was the aunt's retort.

"Tell us a story," demanded the bigger of the small girls.

"Once upon a time," began the bachelor, "there was a little girl called Bertha, who was extra-ordinarily good."

The children's momentarily-aroused interest began at once to flicker; all stories seemed dreadfully alike, no matter who told them.

"She did all that she was told, she was always truthful, she kept her clothes clean, ate milk puddings as though they were jam tarts, learned her lessons perfectly, and was polite in her manners."

"Was she pretty?" asked the bigger of the small girls.

"Not as pretty as any of you," said the bachelor, "but she was horribly good."

There was a wave of reaction in favour of the story; the word horrible in connection with goodness was a novelty that commended itself. It seemed to introduce a ring of truth that was absent from the aunt's tales of infant life.

"She was so good," continued the bachelor, "that she won several medals for goodness, which she always wore, pinned on to her dress. There was a medal for obedience, another medal for punctuality, and a third for good behaviour. They were large metal medals and they clicked against one another as she walked. No other child in the town where she lived had as many as three medals, so everybody knew that she must be an extra good child."

"Horribly good," quoted Cyril.

"Everybody talked about her goodness, and the Prince of the country got to hear about it, and he said that as she was so very good she might be allowed once a week to walk in his park, which was just outside the town. It was a beautiful park, and no children were ever allowed in it, so it was a great honour for Bertha to be allowed to go there."

"Were there any sheep in the park?" demanded Cyril.

"No;" said the bachelor, "there were no sheep."

"Why weren't there any sheep?" came the inevitable question arising out of that answer.

The aunt permitted herself a smile, which might almost have been described as a grin.

"There were no sheep in the park," said the bachelor, "because the Prince's mother had once had a dream that her son would either be killed by a sheep or else by a clock falling on him. For that reason the Prince never kept a sheep in his park or a clock in his palace."

The aunt suppressed a gasp of admiration.

"Was the Prince killed by a sheep or by a clock?" asked Cyril.

"He is still alive, so we can't tell whether the dream will come true," said the bachelor unconcernedly; "anyway, there were no sheep in the park, but there were lots of little pigs running all over the place."

"What colour were they?"

"Black with white faces, white with black spots, black all over, grey with white patches, and some were white all over."

The storyteller paused to let a full idea of the park's treasures sink into the children's imaginations; then he resumed:

"Bertha was rather sorry to find that there were no flowers in the park. She had promised her aunts, with tears in her eyes, that she would not pick any of the kind Prince's flowers, and she had meant to keep her promise, so of course it made her feel silly to find that there were no flowers to pick."

"Why weren't there any flowers?"

"Because the pigs had eaten them all," said the bachelor promptly. "The gardeners had told the Prince that you couldn't have pigs and flowers, so he decided to have pigs and no flowers."

There was a murmur of approval at the excellence of the Prince's decision; so many people would have decided the other way.

"There were lots of other delightful things in the park. There were ponds with gold and blue and green fish in them, and trees with beautiful parrots that said clever things at a moment's notice, and humming birds that hummed all the popular tunes of the day. Bertha walked up and down and enjoyed herself immensely, and thought to herself: 'If I were not so extraordinarily good I should not have been allowed to come into this beautiful park and enjoy all that there is to be seen in it,' and her three medals clinked against one another as she walked and helped to remind her how very good she really was. Just then an enormous wolf came prowling into the park to see if it could catch a fat little pig for its supper."

"What colour was it?" asked the children, amid an immediate quickening of interest.

"Mud-colour all over, with a black tongue and pale grey eyes that gleamed with unspeakable ferocity. The first thing that it saw in the park was Bertha; her pinafore was so spotlessly white and clean that it could be seen from a great distance. Bertha saw the wolf and saw that it was stealing towards her, and she began to wish that she had never been allowed to come into the park. She ran as hard as she could, and the wolf came

after her with huge leaps and bounds. She managed to reach a shrubbery of myrtle bushes and she hid herself in one of the thickest of the bushes. The wolf came sniffing among the branches, its black tongue lolling out of its mouth and its pale grey eyes glaring with rage. Bertha was terribly frightened, and thought to herself: 'If I had not been so extraordinarily good I should have been safe in the town at this moment.' However, the scent of the myrtle was so strong that the wolf could not sniff out where Bertha was hiding, and the bushes were so thick that he might have hunted about in them for a long time without catching sight of her, so he thought he might as well go off and catch a little pig instead. Bertha was trembling very much at having the wolf prowling and sniffing so near her, and as she trembled the medal for obedience clinked against the medals for good conduct and punctuality. The wolf was just moving away when he heard the sound of the medals clinking and stopped to listen; they clinked again in a bush quite near him. He dashed into the bush, his pale grey eyes gleaming with ferocity and triumph, and dragged Bertha out and devoured her to the last morsel. All that was left of her were her shoes, bits of clothing, and the three medals for goodness."

"Were any of the little pigs killed?"

"No, they all escaped."

"The story began badly," said the smaller of the small girls, "but it had a beautiful ending."

"It is the most beautiful story that I ever heard," said the bigger of the small girls, with immense decision.

"It is the only beautiful story I have ever heard," said Cyril.

A dissentient opinion came from the aunt.

"A most improper story to tell to young children! You have undermined the effect of years of careful teaching."

"At any rate," said the bachelor, collecting his belongings preparatory to leaving the carriage, "I kept them quiet for ten minutes, which was more than you were able to do."

"Unhappy woman!" he observed to himself as he walked down the platform of Templecombe station; "for the next six months or so those children will assail her in public with demands for an improper story!"



The Lumber Room

The children were to be driven, as a special treat, to the sands at Jagborough. Nicholas was not to be of the party; he was in disgrace. Only that morning he had refused to eat his wholesome bread-and-milk on the seemingly frivolous ground that there was a frog in it. Older and wiser and better people had told him that there could not possibly be a frog in his bread-and-milk and that he was not to talk nonsense; he continued, nevertheless, to talk what seemed the veriest nonsense, and described with much detail the colouration and markings of the alleged frog. The dramatic part of the incident was that there really was a frog in Nicholas' basin of bread-and-milk; he had put it there himself, so he felt entitled to know something about it. The sin of taking a frog from the garden and putting it into a bowl of wholesome bread-and-milk was enlarged on at great length, but the fact that stood out clearest in the whole affair, as it presented itself to the mind of Nicholas, was that the older, wiser, and better people had been proved to be

profoundly in error in matters about which they had expressed the utmost assurance.

“You said there couldn’t possibly be a frog in my bread-and-milk; there *was* a frog in my bread-and-milk,” he repeated, with the insistence of a skilled tactician who does not intend to shift from favourable ground.

So his boy-cousin and girl-cousin and his quite uninteresting younger brother were to be taken to Jagborough sands that afternoon and he was to stay at home. His cousins’ aunt, who insisted, by an unwarranted stretch of imagination, in styling herself his aunt also, had hastily invented the Jagborough expedition in order to impress on Nicholas the delights that he had justly forfeited by his disgraceful conduct at the breakfast-table. It was her habit, whenever one of the children fell from grace, to improvise something of a festival nature from which the offender would be rigorously debarred; if all the children sinned collectively they were suddenly informed of a circus in

a neighbouring town, a circus of unrivalled merit and uncounted elephants, to which, but for their depravity, they would have been taken that very day.

A few decent tears were looked for on the part of Nicholas when the moment for the departure of the expedition arrived. As a matter of fact, however, all the crying was done by his girl-cousin, who scraped her knee rather painfully against the step of the carriage as she was scrambling in.

“How she did howl,” said Nicholas cheerfully, as the party drove off without any of the elation of high spirits that should have characterised it.

“She’ll soon get over that,” said the *soi-disant* aunt; “it will be a glorious afternoon for racing about over those beautiful sands. How they will enjoy themselves!”

“Bobby won’t enjoy himself much, and he won’t race much either,” said Nicholas with a grim chuckle; “his boots are hurting him. They’re too tight.”

“Why didn’t he tell me they were hurting?” asked the aunt with some asperity.

“He told you twice, but you weren’t listening. You often don’t listen when we tell you important things.”

“You are not to go into the gooseberry garden,” said the aunt, changing the subject.

“Why not?” demanded Nicholas.

“Because you are in disgrace,” said the aunt loftily.

Nicholas did not admit the flawlessness of the reasoning; he felt perfectly capable of being in disgrace and in a gooseberry garden at the same moment. His face took on an expression of considerable obstinacy. It was clear to his aunt that he was determined to get into the gooseberry garden, “only,” as she remarked to herself, “because I have told him he is not to.”

Now the gooseberry garden had two doors by which it might be entered, and once a small person like Nicholas could slip in there he could effectually disappear from view amid the masking growth of artichokes, raspberry canes, and fruit bushes. The aunt had many other things to do that afternoon, but she spent an hour or two in trivial gardening operations among flower beds and shrubberies, whence she could keep a watchful eye on the two doors that led to the forbidden paradise. She was a woman of few ideas, with immense powers of concentration.

Nicholas made one or two sorties into the front garden, wriggling his way with obvious stealth of purpose towards one or other of the doors, but never able for a moment to evade the aunt's watchful eye. As a matter of fact, he had no intention of trying to get into the gooseberry garden, but it was extremely convenient for him that his aunt should believe that he had; it was a belief that would keep her on self-imposed sentry-duty for the greater part of the

afternoon. Having thoroughly confirmed and fortified her suspicions Nicholas slipped back into the house and rapidly put into execution a plan of action that had long germinated in his brain. By standing on a chair in the library one could reach a shelf on which reposed a fat, important-looking key. The key was as important as it looked; it was the instrument which kept the mysteries of the lumber-room secure from unauthorised intrusion, which opened a way only for aunts and such-like privileged persons. Nicholas had not had much experience of the art of fitting keys into keyholes and turning locks, but for some days past he had practised with the key of the schoolroom door; he did not believe in trusting too much to luck and accident. The key turned stiffly in the lock, but it turned. The door opened, and Nicholas was in an unknown land, compared with which the gooseberry garden was a stale delight, a mere material pleasure.

Often and often Nicholas had pictured to himself what the lumber-room might be like, that region that was so carefully sealed from youthful eyes and concerning

which no questions were ever answered. It came up to his expectations. In the first place it was large and dimly lit, one high window opening on to the forbidden garden being its only source of illumination. In the second place it was a storehouse of unimagined treasures. The aunt-by-assertion was one of those people who think that things spoil by use and consign them to dust and damp by way of preserving them. Such parts of the house as Nicholas knew best were rather bare and cheerless, but here there were wonderful things for the eye to feast on. First and foremost there was a piece of framed tapestry that was evidently meant to be a fire-screen. To Nicholas it was a living, breathing story; he sat down on a roll of Indian hangings, glowing in wonderful colours beneath a layer of dust, and took in all the details of the tapestry picture. A man, dressed in the hunting costume of some remote period, had just transfixed a stag with an arrow; it could not have been a difficult shot because the stag was only one or two paces away from him; in the thickly-growing vegetation that the picture suggested it would not have been difficult to

creep up to a feeding stag, and the two spotted dogs that were springing forward to join in the chase had evidently been trained to keep to heel till the arrow was discharged. That part of the picture was simple, if interesting, but did the huntsman see, what Nicholas saw, that four galloping wolves were coming in his direction through the wood? There might be more than four of them hidden behind the trees, and in any case would the man and his dogs be able to cope with the four wolves if they made an attack? The man had only two arrows left in his quiver, and he might miss with one or both of them; all one knew about his skill in shooting was that he could hit a large stag at a ridiculously short range. Nicholas sat for many golden minutes revolving the possibilities of the scene; he was inclined to think that there were more than four wolves and that the man and his dogs were in a tight corner.

But there were other objects of delight and interest claiming his instant attention: there were quaint twisted candlesticks in the shape of snakes, and a

teapot fashioned like a china duck, out of whose open beak the tea was supposed to come. How dull and shapeless the nursery teapot seemed in comparison! And there was a carved sandal-wood box packed tight with aromatic cotton-wool, and between the layers of cotton-wool were little brass figures, hump-necked bulls, and peacocks and goblins, delightful to see and to handle. Less promising in appearance was a large square book with plain black covers; Nicholas peeped into it, and, behold, it was full of coloured pictures of birds. And such birds! In the garden, and in the lanes when he went for a walk, Nicholas came across a few birds, of which the largest were an occasional magpie or wood-pigeon; here were herons and bustards, kites, toucans, tiger-bitterns, brush turkeys, ibises, golden pheasants, a whole portrait gallery of undreamed-of creatures. And as he was admiring the colouring of the mandarin duck and assigning a life-history to it, the voice of his aunt in shrill vociferation of his name came from the gooseberry garden without. She had grown suspicious at his long disappearance, and had leapt to the conclusion that he had climbed over the wall

behind the sheltering screen of the lilac bushes; she was now engaged in energetic and rather hopeless search for him among the artichokes and raspberry canes.

“Nicholas, Nicholas!” she screamed, “you are to come out of this at once. It’s no use trying to hide there; I can see you all the time.”

It was probably the first time for twenty years that anyone had smiled in that lumber-room.

Presently the angry repetitions of Nicholas’ name gave way to a shriek, and a cry for somebody to come quickly. Nicholas shut the book, restored it carefully to its place in a corner, and shook some dust from a neighbouring pile of newspapers over it. Then he crept from the room, locked the door, and replaced the key exactly where he had found it. His aunt was still calling his name when he sauntered into the front garden.

“Who’s calling?” he asked.

“Me,” came the answer from the other side of the wall; “didn’t you hear me? I’ve been looking for you in the gooseberry garden, and I’ve slipped into the rain-water tank. Luckily there’s no water in it, but the sides are slippery and I can’t get out. Fetch the little ladder from under the cherry tree —”

“I was told I wasn’t to go into the gooseberry garden,” said Nicholas promptly.

“I told you not to, and now I tell you that you may,” came the voice from the rain-water tank, rather impatiently.

“Your voice doesn’t sound like aunt’s,” objected Nicholas; “you may be the Evil One tempting me to be disobedient. Aunt often tells me that the Evil One tempts me and that I always yield. This time I’m not going to yield.”

“Don’t talk nonsense,” said the prisoner in the tank; “go and fetch the ladder.”

“Will there be strawberry jam for tea?” asked Nicholas innocently.

“Certainly there will be,” said the aunt, privately resolving that Nicholas should have none of it.

“Now I know that you are the Evil One and not aunt,” shouted Nicholas gleefully; “when we asked aunt for strawberry jam yesterday she said there wasn’t any. I know there are four jars of it in the store cupboard, because I looked, and of course you know it’s there, but she doesn’t, because she said there wasn’t any. Oh, Devil, you *have* sold yourself!”

There was an unusual sense of luxury in being able to talk to an aunt as though one was talking to the Evil One, but Nicholas knew, with childish discernment, that such luxuries were not to be over-indulged in. He walked noisily away, and it was a kitchenmaid, in

search of parsley, who eventually rescued the aunt from the rain-water tank.

Tea that evening was partaken of in a fearsome silence. The tide had been at its highest when the children had arrived at Jagborough Cove, so there had been no sands to play on — a circumstance that the aunt had overlooked in the haste of organising her punitive expedition. The tightness of Bobby's boots had had disastrous effect on his temper the whole of the afternoon, and altogether the children could not have been said to have enjoyed themselves. The aunt maintained the frozen muteness of one who has suffered undignified and unmerited detention in a rain-water tank for thirty-five minutes. As for Nicholas, he, too, was silent, in the absorption of one who has much to think about; it was just possible, he considered, that the huntsman would escape with his hounds while the wolves feasted on the stricken stag.



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