

## The Dove Who Spoke the Truth

by Abbie Farwell Brown *The Curious Book of Birds*

The dove and the wrinkled little bat once went on a journey together. When it came toward night a storm arose, and the two companions sought everywhere for a shelter. But all the birds were sound asleep in their nests and the animals in their holes and dens. They could find no welcome anywhere until they came to the hollow tree where old Master Owl lived, wide awake in the dark.

"Let us knock here," said the shrewd bat; "I know the old fellow is not asleep. This is his prowling hour, and but that it is a stormy night he would be abroad hunting. What ho, Master Owl!" he squeaked, "will you let in two storm-tossed travelers for a night's lodging?"

Gruffly the selfish old owl bade them enter, and grudgingly invited them to share his supper. The poor dove was so tired that she could scarcely eat, but the greedy bat's spirits rose as soon as he saw the viands spread before him. He was a sly fellow, and immediately began to flatter his host into good humor. He praised the owl's wisdom and his courage, his gallantry and his generosity - though every one knew that however wise old Master Owl might be, he was neither brave nor gallant. As for his generosity, both the dove and the bat well remembered his selfishness toward the poor wren, when the owl alone of all the birds refused to give the little fire-bringer a feather to help cover his scorched and shivering body.

All this flattery pleased the owl. He puffed and ruffled himself, trying to look as wise, gallant, and brave as possible. He pressed the bat to help himself more generously to the viands, which invitation the sly fellow was not slow to accept.

During this time the dove had not uttered a word. She sat quite still staring at the bat, and wondering to hear such insincere speeches of flattery. Suddenly the owl turned to her.

"As for you, Miss Pink-Eyes," he said gruffly, "you keep careful silence. You are a dull table companion. Pray, have you nothing to say for yourself?"

"Yes," exclaimed the mischievous bat; "have you no words of praise for our kind host? Methinks he deserves some return for this wonderfully generous, agreeable, tasteful, well-appointed, luxurious, elegant, and altogether acceptable banquet. What have you to say, O little dove?"

But the dove hung her head, ashamed of her companion, and said very simply, "O Master Owl, I can only thank you with all my heart for the hospitality and shelter which you have given me this night. I was beaten by the storm, and you took me in. I was hungry, and you gave me your best to eat. I cannot flatter nor make pretty speeches like the bat. I never learned such manners. But I thank you."

"What!" cried the bat, pretending to be shocked, "is that all you have to say to our obliging host? Is he not the wisest, bravest, most gallant and generous of gentlemen? Have you no praise for his noble character as well as for his goodness to us? I am ashamed of you! You do not deserve such hospitality. You do not deserve this shelter."

The dove remained silent. Like Cordelia in the play she could not speak untruths even for her own happiness.

"Truly, you are an unamiable guest," snarled the owl, his yellow eyes growing keen and fierce with anger and

mortified pride. "You are an ungrateful bird, Miss, and the bat is right. You do not deserve this generous hospitality which I have offered, this goodly shelter which you asked. Away with you! Leave my dwelling! Pack off into the storm and see whether or not your silence will soothe the rain and the wind. Be off, I say!"

"Yes, away with her!" echoed the bat, flapping his leathery wings.

And the two heartless creatures fell upon the poor little dove and drove her out into the dark and stormy night.

Poor little dove! All night she was tossed and beaten about shelterless in the storm, because she had been too truthful to flatter the vain old owl. But when the bright morning dawned, draggled and weary as she was, she flew to the court of King Eagle and told him all her trouble. Great was the indignation of that noble bird.

"For his flattery and his cruelty let the bat never presume to fly abroad until the sun goes down," he cried. "As for the owl, I have already doomed him to this punishment for his treatment of the wren. But henceforth let no bird have anything to do with either of them, the bat or the owl. Let them be outcasts and night-prowlers, enemies to be attacked and punished if they appear among us, to be avoided by all in their loneliness. Flattery and inhospitality, deceit and cruelty - what are more hideous than these? Let them cover themselves in darkness and shun the happy light of day.

"As for you, little dove, let this be a lesson to you to shun the company of flatterers, who are sure to get you into trouble.

But you shall always be loved for your simplicity and truth.  
And as a token of our affection your name shall be used by  
poets as long as the world shall last to rhyme with LOVE."