

Seven Stories

The Story of the Ostrich

1

The Story of the Owl and the Crocodile

9

The Story of the Jackdaw

18

The Story of the Kingfisher,
the Nightingale, and the Magpie

24

The Story of the Bullfrog

36

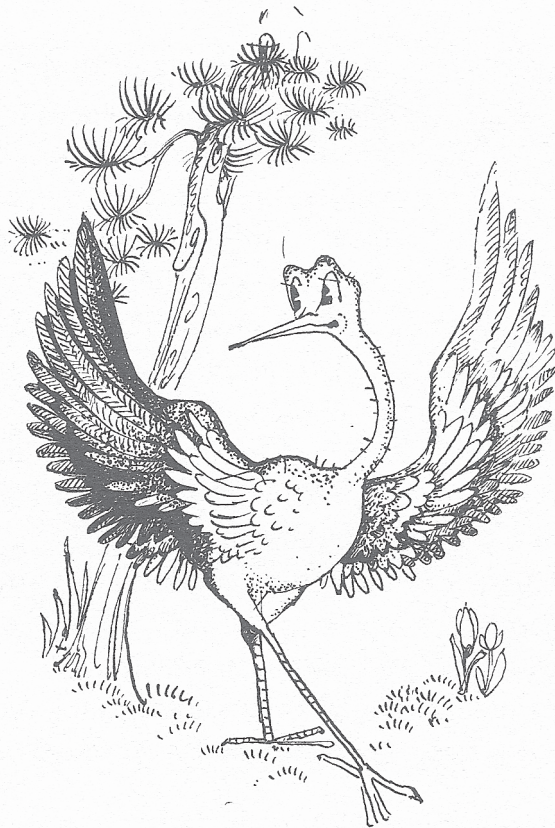
The Story of the Cat

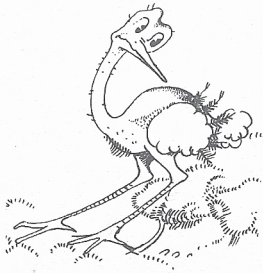
45

The Story of the Donkey

51

The Story of the Ostrich





In the beginning of things the Ostrich was the greediest and most conceited of birds. He had big, strong wings of which he was very proud, and whenever there was any food to be had, he flew very quickly indeed and got there before anyone else, so that when all the birds arrived, they found that there was nothing left for them. The Ostrich had eaten it all!

All the birds were very cross about this but did not know what they could do, for when they complained, the Ostrich would laugh and say proudly, "Why don't you grow stronger wings, then you could get there first? I have the biggest and strongest wings in the whole wide world, and I need a great deal of food to keep them strong, so it is only right that I should eat more food than anyone else."

At last they decided that something must be done, and met together in a quiet place in the forest to see what they could arrange.

The Yellowhammer, who had very short wings, and so hardly ever got any food at all, said, "We should clip the

Ostrich's wings." But the Ostrich was so big and strong that no one could think how it could be managed.

Then the Sparrow suggested that they should imprison the Ostrich in a cage and so prevent him from eating more than his share of food, but again nobody could suggest a way of doing it. Just as they were all beginning to think that there was no way of solving the problem, the Jackdaw said, "I have a plan. Leave it all to me, and you will see that soon the Ostrich will stop being such a nuisance."

"What is the plan, Jackdaw?" asked all the birds, but the Jackdaw would not tell them, and would only say mysteriously, "Wait and see," and flew away leaving everybody very puzzled and curious indeed.

The Jackdaw flew through the forest till he came to the Rabbit's burrow, and knocked on the door of the burrow, and the Rabbit let him in, and the two creatures talked together for a long time. When the Jackdaw flew away again he was laughing, "Haark, harrk, haark," and the Rabbit, as he waved goodbye, was looking mischievous.

The very next day the Ostrich was walking along the path through the forest when whom should he meet but the Rabbit.

"Good morning, Ostrich," said the Rabbit. "How are you today?"

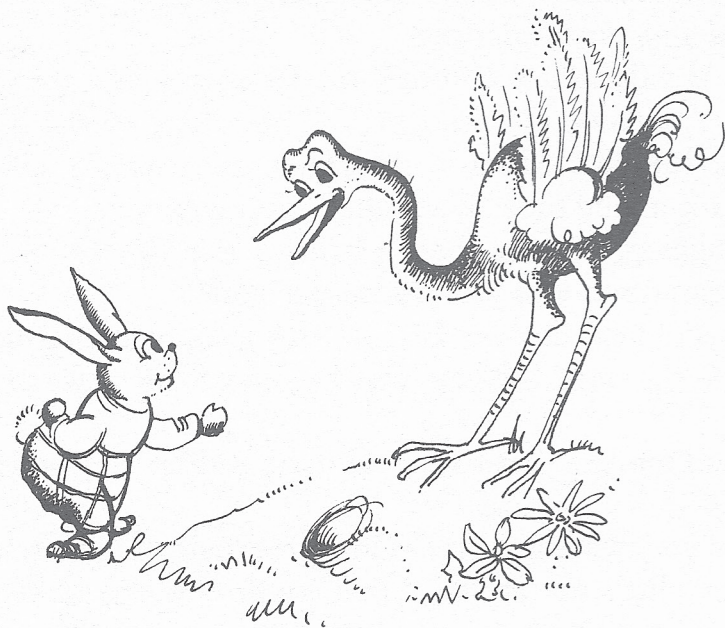
"I am very well, Rabbit," said the Ostrich. "How are you?"

"I am a little tired today," said the Rabbit, "for yesterday I went to visit a cousin of mine a long way from here, and I did not go to bed as early as usual. My cousin and I had an argu-

ment which may interest you. He said that a bird-friend of his had the biggest and strongest wings in the world, and I said that you had."

"You are quite right, Rabbit," said the Ostrich. "I have the biggest and strongest wings in the whole wide world, except, perhaps, for the great Eagle."

"My cousin said that his bird-friend had a race with the Eagle, and beat him," said the Rabbit, "so perhaps he was right after all—, but then he had magic feathers which my cousin had given him, so perhaps it was not a fair race."



"That seems likely," said the Ostrich. "If I had magic feathers in my wings I am sure that I could fly farther and faster than both the Eagle and your cousin's friend, though it seems to me that I might be able to beat them in a race as things are at present, if I tried hard enough, for my wings are very big and strong. Where did your cousin get the magic feathers?" he added, trying not to sound too curious.

"It is a great secret which you must promise to keep," answered the Rabbit. "My cousin knows a very wise gnome who lives in a cave deep below the surface of the earth, and in his cave he has a magic garden. Anything that is planted in this garden will grow a hundred times bigger and stronger. My cousin took the wing feathers of his friend and asked the gnome to plant them in this garden, and he did, and they grew and grew and grew until they were bigger and stronger than any other feathers in the whole wide world. Then my cousin took them back to his friend. That is how he managed to beat even the great Eagle in a race and why my cousin thought (though I think he was wrong) that you were not the biggest and strongest bird in the world anymore."

"Do you know where this cave is?" asked the Ostrich eagerly.

"My cousin told me," said the Rabbit.

"Do you suppose that the gnome would plant any of my feathers in his garden?" said the Ostrich.

"I could ask him for you," said the Rabbit. "As a matter of fact I am going to see him today to ask him to grow my

cousin some lettuce, for my cousin is very busy and cannot go himself. I will be home again before tea-time, and could tell you what he says."

"Thank you very much, Rabbit," said the Ostrich. He flapped his huge wings and flew away thinking of all the food he would get when he could fly even farther and faster than he could at that time, and saying to himself, "Even the great Eagle will have to look up to me then. I shall be the strongest bird in the whole wide world."

At tea-time that afternoon the Ostrich went to call on Rabbit. He was too big to get inside the burrow, so he knocked on the door with his claws, and stood outside waiting. After a few moments the Rabbit opened the door and said, "Hello Ostrich."

"Hello Rabbit," said the Ostrich. "Have you seen the Magician, and will he plant my feathers in his garden?"

"Yes," said the Rabbit. "You must come with me to a lonely place and give me your feathers, and I will take them to him straight away."

So the Ostrich and the Rabbit went together to a lonely place at the edge of the forest where it was very sandy and there were a lot of rabbit burrows and other holes in the ground, and the Ostrich pulled out all his wing feathers with his beak and gave them to Rabbit. He felt rather cold without them, but he said to himself, "Soon I shall have the biggest and strongest wings in the whole wide world, and even the great Eagle will admire me," and he felt proud and important.