

How the Goldfinch Got His Colours

Jean De Bosschère

Belgian

*Advanced
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When the Angel whose mission it was to colour the birds had finished his work, he began to scrape his palette and to make ready for departure. He had done his task well, for the plumage of the feathered creatures all around him glowed with a thousand glorious colours. There was the lordly eagle, arrayed in a robe of golden brown. The peacock had a tail of shimmering blue and green that looked as if it were studded with precious stones. The crow's black coat shone in the sun with a kind of steely radiance, very wonderful to behold. The canary was as yellow as a buttercup; the jay had a spot of blue sky on either wing; even the humble sparrow wore a handsome black neck-tie; while Chanticleer, the cock, was resplendent in yellow, black, and red.



“All of the birds were very proud of their appearance.” Illustration by Jean De Bosschère, published in Folk-Tales of Flanders by Jean De Bosschère (1918), Dodd, Mead and Company.

All the birds were very proud of their appearance, and they strutted about here and there, gazing at their reflections in the water and calling upon their neighbours to come and admire their beauties.

Alone among the birds the little goldfinch took no part in the rejoicing. Somehow or other the Angel had overlooked him, so that he remained uncoloured, a drab little creature, in his sober grey dress, among the gaily clothed throng. More than once he had tried to draw the Angel's attention to himself, and now, seeing him cleaning his palette in readiness to depart, he stepped forward and said: “Have pity on me, good Angel, and paint my plumage as you have painted that of the others, so that I may walk among them unashamed. I have nothing to commend me—no beautiful song like the nightingale or the throstle, no grace of form such as the swallows have. If I am to go unadorned, nothing remains for me but to hide myself among the leaves.”

Then the Angel took pity on the little creature, and would gladly have painted him with glowing colours, but alas, he had scraped his palette clean. Therefore he took up a brush, and going from bird to bird took from each a spot of colour, which he laid upon the goldfinch, blending a score of brilliant hues with marvellous skill. When he had finished, the tiny bird was transformed, and from being the saddest in that brilliant company he took a place among the most beautiful of them all.

It is not possible, by means of words, to describe the beauty of the colouring which the Angel gave to the goldfinch, but you may see him any day you like, sitting on a thistle, and chirping his song of gratitude and praise.

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