

Translated extract from

**Hubert Schirneck/  
Sonja Bougaeva (illustrations)**  
*Typisch Bär! Geschichten zum Vorlesen*

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**Hubert Schirneck/  
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*Typical bear! Stories for reading aloud*

Translated by John Reddick

## **Winning the apple but losing the core**

It's true: the bear *was* a bit nutty. People said it was because he owned a radio. Thanks to the radio he could listen to news from all over the world, and he heard a lot of interesting things. His friends thought the radio had filled his head with nonsense. He was always full of ideas, that's for sure. There were thousands of peculiar things in the world that he needed to think about. And whenever he went wandering through the forest lost in thought, seeing nothing and hearing nothing, all the other animals would shake their heads and say 'Typical bear!'

'What's wrong with them, for goodness' sake?' the bear grumbled. 'After all, I'm a spectacled bear. We're different from other bears. We're bearier somehow. That's just the way it is.'

And in this respect he was absolutely right. He wasn't a spectacled bear because he wore glasses (there was nothing wrong with his eyes). He was a spectacled bear because the fur on his face was coloured in such a way that he *looked* as if he was wearing glasses.

He was particularly fond of proverbs and sayings. Whenever he came across a proverb he would immediately write it down on a scrap of paper so that he would never, ever forget it. Immediately? Well, first of all he would fetch himself a drink to help him

concentrate. After that he sat himself down at the table, rummaged around amongst the countless bits of paper strewn all over it to find a blank one, cleared his throat noisily, then mumbled ‘Oh dear, what’s happened to my pencil?’

Once he had found his pencil, he generally discovered that it had no point on it. He would therefore sharpen it, settle himself down into a suitable posture, and begin to write. In the meantime he had often forgotten half the proverb, or mixed two of them together. One of his scraps of paper, for instance, bore the words ‘Tomorrow eats another day’. This is a saying that everyone knows, but which the bear never fully understood, since he’d mistakenly written ‘eats’ instead of ‘is’. He didn’t know whether Tomorrow preferred eating fruit or meat, or whether he cooked for himself or ate in restaurants.

Occasionally the bear would go rooting through all his bits of paper and happen on a proverb that he’d completely forgotten about — such as the saying ‘To win the apple but lose the core’.

What on earth could this mean? Perhaps that apples were much-prized trophies? Or that eating apples could make you absent-minded? The bear just didn’t understand it — but so what? It sounded good, and in the end that’s all that mattered. So he made it into his favourite phrase, and even used it to greet his friends. When he met someone, he didn’t say ‘Morning! or

‘Hello!’ or ‘Hi! Had any grub yet?’; instead, he said  
‘You can win the apple but lose the core’.

The other animals always just shook their heads;  
‘Typical bear!’ they sighed.

The bear was convinced that the saying had a deeper meaning. He decided to find out what it was. But how? Ah, yes: the first thing he needed to do was to fathom the usages and practices of apples. As it happened, there was a crab apple tree in the next clearing but one that would make a perfect case study. He therefore settled himself down in the clearing and kept the apples under observation for several hours. But they didn’t get up to much. They just hung there on the tree. Every now and again they swayed ever so gently in the wind — so gently that he could see it only if he looked really, really hard. Perhaps the saying doesn’t apply to crab apples, mused the bear; perhaps it only applies to other kinds of apples?

He could have asked someone — clever old Louisa, for instance — but that, he thought, was beneath his dignity. *He* was the expert on proverbs and sayings, after all, and no one else.

Keeping apples under observation was quite hard work, and it made him tired. Every now and again the bear would nod off, then wake up again with a start and mumble ‘Has anything happened? Hm — doesn’t look like it.’

Luise, aber das fand er unter seiner Würde. Schließlich war er der Experte für Sprichwörter und niemand sonst.

Das Beobachten war ziemlich anstrengend und machte ihn müde. Manchmal nickte der Bär auf der Wiese ein, schreckte später hoch und murmelte:

»Ist was passiert? Hm, sieht nicht so aus.«

Trotzdem wollte er, wie sich das für einen richtigen Forscher gehört, seine Beobachtungen zu Papier bringen. Er spitzte den Stift und schrieb:

*Der Apfel. Und darunter: Beobachtungsbjekt: Kornapfelbaum. Beobachtet: drei Tage lang. Ergebnis: Der Apfel an sich hängt am Baum, genauer gesagt an einem Ast, der zum Baum gehört. Leichte Bewegungen durch Wind. Sonst nichts Auffälliges.*

Der Bär las sich das Geschriebene noch einmal durch und kam zu dem Schluss, dass er seine Beobachtungen wohl noch eine Weile fortsetzen musste.

Eines schönen, federleichten Morgens traf er seinen Freund, den Löwen.



»Ein Apfel kommt selten allein«, grüßte ihn der Bär fröhlich.

»Aber wer«, sagte der Löwe, »wer von uns beiden ist denn ein Apfel? Niemand, siehst du. Ein Apfel kommt auch nicht, nicht mal zu zweit oder zu dritt. Ein Apfel fällt höchstens, wenn er reif ist, vom Baum. Dann aber allein.«

»Das ist doch nur ein Sprichwort«, sagte der Bär sanft. Diesem Löwen musste man aber auch wirklich alles erklären.

»Ich habe mich erkundigt«, erwiderte der Löwe. »So ein Sprichwort gibt es gar nicht. Du hast da wohl was Falsches gehört.«

»Ach ja?«, fragte der Bär. »Und bei wem, wenn ich fragen darf, hast du dich erkundigt?«

»Bei Luise.«

»Bei Luise?«

»So ist es.«

Der Bär war beeindruckt, und das sah man ihm an. Luise war die Freundin des Löwen, und sie war ziemlich klug, obwohl sie kein Radio besaß.

Aber was war jetzt mit dem Sprichwort? Hatte das Radio ihn etwa belogen? *Sein* Radio?

»Ganz bestimmt nicht«, sagte der Löwe. »Vielleicht hast du dir das Sprichwort nur falsch gemerkt, ganz sicher sogar. Irgendwas verwechselt oder so.«

Die Angelegenheit war dem Bären peinlich.

Even so, he wanted to write his observations down, as was only right and proper for a serious researcher. He sharpened his pencil and wrote 'The apple'. Below this he wrote 'Object observed: crab apple tree. Period of observation: three days. Results: Apples as such hang from a tree, or, to put it more precisely, they hang from a branch that is part of the tree. Slight movements, caused by wind. No other significant events.'

The bear read through what he had written, and came to the conclusion that he probably needed to continue his observations for a little while longer.

One fine gossamer morning he encountered his friend, the lion.

He greeted him cheerfully: 'You can win the apple but lose the core!'

'But who wants to win an apple?' replied the lion.

'Neither of us, don't you see? And anyway, apples don't get won. All they do is drop off the tree once they're ripe. No more, no less.'

'But it's just a proverb', the bear said gently.

Honestly, he thought, you have to explain *everything* to this lion!

'I've made enquiries', retorted the lion. 'There's no such proverb. You must have misheard.'

‘Is that so?’ said the bear. ‘And of whom, may I ask, did you make these enquiries?’

‘Louisa.’

‘Louisa?’

‘Yes, Louisa.’

The bear was impressed, that was plain to see. Louisa was the lion’s girlfriend, and she was pretty clever, even though she didn’t possess a radio.

But what was all this about the proverb? Had the radio lied to him? *His* radio?

‘I’m quite sure it didn’t’, said the lion. ‘Maybe you simply jotted the proverb down wrong — yes, that’s obviously what happened. You’ll have got yourself in a muddle — something like that.’

The bear was finding it all very embarrassing.

‘My dear friend’, he said gravely, ‘I am much obliged to you for this agreeable conversation. I must get off home now. Awful lot to do.’

The bear set off. His proverb — wrong?! Never! Out of the question! What else could it possibly be? ‘Lose the apple but win the core’ perhaps? Or ‘An apple a day makes the doctor stay’? Or ‘Two apples don’t make a football team’?

Such nonsense, thought the bear.

The next morning he wasn't quite so sure that Louisa was all that wrong. He decided to put the business with the apples behind him once and for all. It was time to find himself a new favourite phrase. He rummaged through his countless scraps of paper and found himself a replacement proverb that had been lurking there for a year or more.

Pleased with his decision, he set off on a little recce through the surrounding area. He wanted to see if he could track down a few blackberries.

Encountering a mother duck and her eight children, he casually remarked 'An apple never falls far from the sea'.

'Typical bear!' cackled the duck, slipping with a gentle splash into the pond that was her home.

The ducklings — just a few weeks old — followed her in, one after the other. Even they cackled 'Typical bear!' in their high-pitched little voices.

'Silly little feathered creatures', murmured the spectacled bear. 'But then what do you expect from folk who live on the water, don't have a radio, and don't have a store of proverbs? I mean, they don't even have paws!'

He pulled a face, turned on his heel, and shuffled off home.

## **Her Majesty the field mouse**

The bear heard all sorts of things on his radio. Sometimes the reception was so bad that he only caught half of what was said, but that didn't really matter. 'Better to hear half than nothing at all!'

That was his maxim, his motto, not to say the very essence of his life.

But there was no getting away from it: his aerial really was very short and very primitive.

On cloudy days his little box would sometimes give out nothing but whistling and hissing noises. That did get on the bear's nerves a bit as he had pretty sophisticated hearing and detested ugly sounds.

Once, though, he heard something so exciting that he immediately jumped to his feet and pressed the radio to his ear to make sure he didn't miss anything.

Someone was just saying that the lion was called king of the beasts because he is so big and so proud.

Just imagine: his friend, the lion, was a king!

He had to pass this news on to him straightaway. It so happened that it was the lion's birthday that very day, so as a present the bear made him a crown out of gold-coloured paper. It looked really good.



Man stelle sich vor: sein Freund, der Löwe! Ein König!

Das musste er ihm sofort erzählen. Zufällig hatte der Löwe auch gerade Geburtstag und so bastelte der Bär ihm eine Königskrone als Geschenk. Aus Goldpapier. Sah gut aus.

Er ging zum Löwen, warf sich vor ihm auf den Boden und rief: »Guten Tag, Löwe, Majestät! Ich gratuliere dir ... äh, Euch zum Geburtstag. Bitte nehmt dieses bescheidene Geschenk von mir an!«

»Was machst du denn da unten auf der Erde?«, fragte der Löwe. »Gestolpert? Oder hast du was verloren?«

Der Bär sah kurz auf, reichte dem Löwen die Krone und senkte sofort wieder den Blick. Er dachte, dass das einem König gegenüber so richtig wäre.

Der Löwe beschnüffelte das glänzende Geschenk eine Minute lang und sagte schließlich: »Du, sag mal, Bär, was ist denn das?«



He went to the lion, prostrated himself on the ground right in front of him, and cried ‘Good day, dear lion, I mean Your Majesty, happy birthday, sire. Please accept this humble gift from your humble servant.’

‘What *are* you doing down there on the ground?’ asked the lion. ‘Did you trip over? Or have you lost something?’

The bear looked up, handed the crown to the lion, and immediately lowered his eyes again. This seemed to him the right thing to do when confronted by a king.

The lion examined the shiny object from every angle for a minute or so, then said ‘Ok bear, spit it out: what *is* this thing here?’

‘It’s a crown’, replied the bear. ‘Because you’re the king of the beasts. That’s what it said on the radio, and everything they say on the radio is true.’

‘For goodness’ sake stand up — I can scarcely hear a word you’re saying.’

The bear leapt to his feet. ‘Yes, just imagine! Everyone regards you as king of the beasts. Everyone in the entire world. Except us: we’re the only ones not in the know — as usual. Just shows how provincial it is around here.’

‘Nonsense!’ said the lion. ‘If I were a king I’d be sure to know, wouldn’t I! And anyway, why should it be me, of all people?!’

‘Well, because you’re so big and so proud. And because you strut around in that very majestic way. At least that’s what it said on the radio.’

‘Strut?!’ asked the lion.

‘Well, “stride” then. You stride very elegantly.’

The lion thought about all this. Big. Proud. Majestic. Yes, that’s exactly what he was.

‘Why don’t you try the crown on?’ suggested the bear.

The crown fitted really well. It didn’t wobble around, or fall off when he walked.

‘Please excuse me for a moment or two’, said the lion.

‘I need to find a mirror.’

With that he was gone — and things began to turn seriously haywire.

For the lion thought himself so very grand in his gold-paper crown that he immediately decided that he was The Greatest. He swallowed hook, line and sinker everything the bear had told him: he was king, too right he was! King of the entire world!

And he began to treat the other animals accordingly. He insisted on them all bowing and scraping and calling him ‘Your Majesty’.

To begin with they chortled and played along with him as they thought he was just pulling their leg. But once they realised that the lion was just sitting around

giving out orders they began to get cross. They were particularly cross with the bear as it was he who had put the bee in the lion's bonnet in the first place.

The bear defended himself with all his might. 'What do you mean, "bee"? I can't see any bees. Can anybody see a bee?'

But secretly he was all too aware that he'd made a big mistake. His friend just wasn't himself any more. He made everyone wait on him hand and foot and became as lazy as a lump of lacquered wood.

Instead of saying 'Typical bear!', everybody now said 'Stupid bear!', and someone even said 'Utterly barmy bear!' That was mean and absolutely not true.

All the same, the bear knew perfectly well that he had to *do* something. It was his fault that his friend had changed so much. It was now up to him to get rid of that nasty bee. But how? You could no longer have any sort of proper conversation with the lion. He treated the bear as a servant, not as a friend. Instead of saying 'Hello, my dear bear, what shall we get up to today?', he would bark an order: 'Hey, underling, bring me food!'

The bear went to sleep that night with a heavy heart.

Tossing and turning, he brooded for hours before finally going to sleep.

‘The early bird catches the worm’, he thought as he woke up the next morning — and immediately had a brilliant idea.

He got out of bed straightaway, gave himself a bear-style cat’s lick, and left the house in search of the lion.

He found the ‘king of the beasts’ in a meadow, practising his strutting. Strutting in the right sort of way is of course especially important for a king, and has to be practised every day.

The lion stopped when he caught sight of the bear.

‘Well, underling, what do you want?’

‘Underling, my foot’, said the bear. ‘You aren’t king of the beasts any more. I just heard it on the radio.’

‘What do you mean?’ bellowed the lion.

‘Exactly what I said. A new king’s elected every year, that’s what I heard on the radio. It’s someone else’s turn now.’

‘But they can’t just boot a king out’, said the lion, his tone of voice already a little less bossy.

‘Nowadays they most certainly can. A king can’t simply do whatever he likes. It’s the people who decide what he can do. And if the people decide that they want a different king, then that’s that, done and dusted!’

The lion scratched his head. ‘So who’s the new king then?’

‘It’s not a king, it’s a queen’, replied the bear. ‘It’s the field mouse’s wife.’

The lion could scarcely believe his ears. He sat down, thought about things for a good two or three minutes, then whispered ‘Hey, bear, you *are* my friend, aren’t you?’

‘Well...’, said the bear.

‘We’re keeping this to ourselves, aren’t we?! A field mouse as queen of the beasts! If she ever finds out, it’ll be a disaster. Such a tiny creature... No, it’s simply not on. Me, bow down before a field mouse and call her “Your Majesty”?! Out of the question! We have to keep this absolutely secret.’

‘But how on earth could we keep such a thing secret? If a new king or queen is crowned, then the people are certain to know all about it. That’s how it is the world over, and that’s how it is here, too.’

‘What a catastrophe that would be for me’, the lion groaned. ‘I’d never live it down!’

The bear pretended to have a good long think, and then he said ‘Alright, it’s a deal. I won’t tell a soul — provided that *you* start behaving normally again.’

‘Done!’ said the lion with great relief. ‘You’re a true friend. Come on, let me offer you breakfast.’

‘Suits me’, said the bear, and the two of them went racing off to the lion’s house.

On the way the lion lost his crown, but he didn’t even notice.

Once the other animals realised that the bear had put everything to rights again, they nodded with contentment.

‘Well, honestly!’ thought the bear, ‘Just for a change, why don’t they say “Typical bear!” when I do something right? Because that’s typical of me as well. At least that’s what I think.’