

THE HAND-MOUSE

Once upon a time, there were an old man and an old lady who had no children. They begged God to give them a baby, even if that meant a hand-mouse.

- Oh, my old man, we have got all the good of the world. Our little house and our littlefields, we have each other, if only we had a baby!
- Yes, if only we had one, woman! We were not blessed by God. We would have cared for it and loved it.

Each day they woke up, they went to bed and this was the old man's and the old woman's sorrow.

One day, while the old woman was sweeping the floor, she saw something incredible behind the brush. Was it rubbish? No, it was a hand-mouse!

- Jesus Christ and Mother Mary! Get up, old man, get up unlucky man and come to see! Our baby has come! God has at last shown up mercy and he has sent a hand-mouse!
- Welcome it, welcome it! Thank you, Mother Mary for the good you have done us!

The old man and the old woman were overjoyed with happiness! They did not walk on Earth! They spoiled the hand-mouse! It was their baby! They adored it, they sang and danced with it, they dressed it in the prettiest clothes, they cooked whatever it felt like eating!

They went for walks, they bought it toys and they hugged it all the time! The old man even built a small bed for it to sleep. And whenever it called them "dad" and "mum" they melted like an Easter candle, they peed their pants out of joy!

God brought day in and day out and the hand-mouse grew up and went to school. But it was naughty and was constantly doing nasty things. It was always punished by the teacher.

- Miss, the hand mouse threw my food away!

- Miss, the hand mouse broke my writing board, the other children complained.

The hand mouse was disobedient. And don't think that it was obedient at home, it tortured them. It threw around its clothes, its toys, it got into the shelves and mixed up sugar and salt, it hid the old man's shoes! The old man and the old woman scolded it on the one hand, but they laughed on the other.

One Sunday the old man and the old woman went to church.

- Hand-mouse, we are going to church. Be quiet here. We will not be late. Keep away from the slip peas soup that is boiling in the fireplace.
- Ok, dad and mum, I will be waiting for you.

The old man and the old lady left. The split peas soup was boiling... bubble, bubble, bubble. The hand-mouse went close.

- Split peas soup be quiet. Don't go bubble, bubble, otherwise I will put on my good shoes and step on you. But the soup kept going.
- Ok, now you will see. The hand-mouse puts on its good shoes and jumps into the cauldron to step on the split peas soup.
- Mummy, oh mummy, I'm burning, my little feet are burning! Help...

At some point the old man and the old woman came back from the church.

- Hand-mouse, we are back, where are you, my child? The hand-mouse was nowhere to be found. They searched under the beds, into the shelf, behind the cabinet, they searched, they searched, nothing. They went out to the yard, it was not there either.
- Oh, old man, our hand-mouse is gone! Do you think it fell into the split peas soup and burnt? The old man wept and so did the old woman.
- Shall I put some soup for you to eat, my old man? You are going to faint hungry and thirsty like this.

- Nah, old woman. Maybe the hand-mouse fell into the split peas soup and I may end up eating its hands and feet. Oh, if only the stone and the mammoth eat me! The old man and his lady sat on the doorway, mourning.

At that moment, a swallow passed by, it saw them crying and asked them.

- What is wrong and you are mourning?
- Oh, birdy, we lost our hand-mouse, we lost our little baby!

The swallow heard it and it ripped off all of its white feathers and remained with the black. It threw them down and the river took them. It flew and it sat on a lilac.

- Why are you pitch black my swallow? Where are your white feathers, asked the lilac.
- Damn lilac, I'm very sad. The old man and the old lady lost their hand-mouse, poor them. They are crying and mourning.

The lilac heard it and it felt so sad that it dropped all of its flowers into the river and it took them away!

The swallow flew off and it stopped on a walnut tree.

- Why are you pitch black my swallow? Where are your white feathers, asked the walnut tree.
- Damn walnut, I'm very sad. The old man and the old lady lost their hand-mouse, poor them. They are crying and mourning.

The walnut tree heard it and it felt so sad that it dropped all of its walnuts into the river and it took them away!

The rooster also heard this as he was passing by, he left the chickens, and it started spreading the news. The whole village found out in a while. Everybody gathered at the old man's and the old woman's place. The best men arrived, the

in-laws arrived, the neighbours arrived, friends and family arrived!
Everybody was upset. How could they not be after what happened to the old man and the old woman? They were not going to leave them alone.
Sadness is tolerable once you share it.

The old man got thirsty and went to the fount to drink some water. But the fount had cried so much that it dried up and did not have a single drop of water.

- Go to the river to drink water old man, said the fount.

The old man went to the river. He was crying and mourning.

- Why are you crying old man, asked the river.

- We lost our hand-mouse, we lost our baby. I'm afraid it fell into the hot split peas soup and burnt!

- No, old man, wipe your eyes and don't be sad. Your hand-mouse did not get burnt, it only had its little feet a little scorched. It is here cooling off. It is lying on the feathers, the lilacs and the walnuts.

The old man could not believe it! He hugged it and ran to his old woman.

- Old woman, we are here, our child is alive! I found it cooling off by the river.

Everybody was overjoyed with happiness!

The swallow had new feathers, the lilac blossomed again, the walnut tree was full of walnuts, the rooster and the chickens clucked happily!

Everyone in the village was happy with the old couple's happiness, the best men, the in-laws, the neighbours, friends and family!

- Hand mouse, next time you will listen to my words, said the old woman, pretending to scold it and her eyes were full of tears of happiness!

- Yes, mum, I will listen to you and I will be a quiet child.

Then, the old man and the old woman, together with the whole village,
organized and huge feast under the walnut tree with drums and violins! And the
dances!

They were feasting for three days and three nights.

When the happiness is shared, it is three times happiness!

And they lived happily ever after!

And I was there too, wandering in the torn cauldron!