

The Forest Bride: The Story of a Little Mouse Who Was a Princess

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Finnish

Easy

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There was once a farmer who had three sons. One day when the boys were grown to manhood he said to them:

“My sons, it is high time that you were all married. To-morrow I wish you to go out in search of brides.”

“But where shall we go?” the oldest son asked.

“I have thought of that, too,” the father said. “Do each of you chop down a tree and then take the direction in which the fallen tree points. I’m sure that each of you if you go far enough in that direction will find a suitable bride.”

So the next day the three sons chopped down trees. The oldest son’s tree fell pointing north.

“That suits me!” he said, for he knew that to the north lay a farm where a very pretty girl lived.

The tree of the second son when it fell pointed south.

“That suits me!” the second son declared thinking of a girl that he had often danced with who lived on a farm to

the south.

The youngest son's tree—the youngest son's name was Veikko—when it fell pointed straight to the forest.

“Ha! Ha!” the older brothers laughed. “Veikko will have to go courting one of the Wolf girls or one of the Foxes!”

They meant by this that only animals lived in the forest and they thought they were making a good joke at Veikko's expense. But Veikko said he was perfectly willing to take his chances and go where his tree pointed.

The older brothers went gaily off and presented their suits to the two farmers whose daughters they admired. Veikko, too, started off with brave front but after he had gone some distance in the forest his courage began to ebb.

“How can I find a bride,” he asked himself, “in a place where there are no human creatures at all!”

Just then he came to a little hut. He pushed open the door and went in. It was empty. To be sure there was a little mouse sitting on the table, daintily combing her whiskers, but a mouse of course doesn't count.

“There's nobody here!” Veikko said aloud.

The little mouse paused in her toilet and turning towards him said reproachfully:

“Why, Veikko, I'm here!”

“But you don't count. You're only a mouse!”

“Of course I count!” the little mouse declared. “But tell me, what were you hoping to find?”

“I was hoping to find a sweetheart.”

The little mouse questioned him further and Veikko told her the whole story of his brothers and the trees.

“The two older ones are finding sweethearts easily enough,” Veikko said, “but I don't see how I can off here in the forest. And it will shame me to have to go home and confess that I alone have failed.”

“See here, Veikko,” the little mouse said, “why don't you take me for your sweetheart?”

Veikko laughed heartily.

“But you’re only a mouse! Whoever heard of a man having a mouse for a sweetheart!”

The mouse shook her little head solemnly.

“Take my word for it, Veikko, you could do much worse than have me for a sweetheart! Even if I am only a mouse I can love you and be true to you.”

She was a dear dainty little mouse and as she sat looking up at Veikko with her little paws under her chin and her bright little eyes sparkling Veikko liked her more and more.

Then she sang Veikko a pretty little song and the song cheered him so much that he forgot his disappointment at not finding a human sweetheart and as he left her to go home he said:

“Very well, little mouse, I’ll take you for my sweetheart!”

At that the mouse made little squeaks of delight and she told him that she’d be true to him and wait for him no matter how long he was in returning.

Well, the older brothers when they got home boasted loudly about their sweethearts.

“Mine,” said the oldest, “has the rosiest reddest cheeks you ever saw!”

“And mine,” the second announced, “has long yellow hair!”

Veikko said nothing.

“What’s the matter, Veikko?” the older brothers asked him, laughing. “Has your sweetheart pretty pointed ears or sharp white teeth?”

You see they were still having their little joke about foxes and wolves.

“You needn’t laugh,” Veikko said. “I’ve found a sweetheart. She’s a gentle dainty little thing gowned in velvet.”

“Gowned in velvet!” echoed the oldest brother with a frown.

“Just like a princess!” the second brother sneered.

“Yes,” Veikko repeated, “gowned in velvet like a princess. And when she sits up and sings to me I’m perfectly happy.”

“Huh!” grunted the older brothers not at all pleased that Veikko should have so grand a sweetheart.

“Well,” said the old farmer after a few days, “now I should like to know what those sweethearts of yours are able to do. Have them each bake me a loaf of bread so that I can see whether they’re good housewives.”

“Mine will be able to bake bread—I’m sure of that!” the oldest brother declared boastfully.

“So will mine!” chorused the second brother.

Veikko was silent.

“What about the Princess?” they said with a laugh. “Do you think the Princess can bake bread?”

“I don’t know,” Veikko answered truthfully. “I’ll have to ask her.”

Of course he had no reason for supposing that the little mouse could bake bread and by the time he reached the hut in the forest he was feeling sad and discouraged.

When he pushed open the door he found the little mouse as before seated on the table daintily combing her whiskers. At sight of Veikko she danced about with delight.

“I’m so glad to see you!” she squeaked. “I knew you would come back!”

Then when she noticed that he was silent she asked him what was the matter. Veikko told her:

“My father wants each of our sweethearts to bake him a loaf of bread. If I come home without a loaf my brothers will laugh at me.”

“You won’t have to go home without a loaf!” the little mouse said. “I can bake bread.”

Veikko was much surprised at this.

“I never heard of a mouse that could bake bread!”

“Well, I can!” the little mouse insisted.

With that she began ringing a small silver bell, tinkle, tinkle, tinkle. Instantly there was the sound of hurrying footsteps, tiny scratchy footsteps, and hundreds of mice came running into the hut.

The little Princess mouse sitting up very straight and dignified said to them:

“Each of you go fetch me a grain of the finest wheat.”

All the mice scampered quickly away and soon returned one by one, each carrying a grain of the finest wheat. After that it was no trick at all for the Princess mouse to bake a beautiful loaf of wheaten bread.

The next day the three brothers presented their father the loaves of their sweethearts’ baking. The oldest one had a loaf of rye bread.

“Very good,” the farmer said. “For hardworking people like us rye bread is good.”

The loaf the second son had was made of barley.

“Barley bread is also good,” the farmer said.

But when Veikko presented his loaf of beautiful wheaten bread, his father cried out:

“What! White bread! Ah, Veikko now must have a sweetheart of wealth!”

“Of course!” the older brothers sneered. “Didn’t he tell us she was a Princess? Say, Veikko, when a Princess wants fine white flour, how does she get it?”

Veikko answered simply:

“She rings a little silver bell and when her servants come in she tells them to bring her grains of the finest

wheat.”

At this the older brothers nearly exploded with envy until their father had to reprove them.

“There! There!” he said. “Don’t grudge the boy his good luck! Each girl has baked the loaf she knows how to make and each in her own way will probably make a good wife. But before you bring them home to me I want one further test of their skill in housewifery. Let them each send me a sample of their weaving.”

The older brothers were delighted at this for they knew that their sweethearts were skilful weavers.

“We’ll see how her ladyship fares this time!” they said, sure in their hearts that Veikko’s sweetheart, whoever she was, would not put them to shame with her weaving.

Veikko, too, had serious doubts of the little mouse’s ability at the loom.

“Whoever heard of a mouse that could weave?” he said to himself as he pushed open the door of the forest hut.

“Oh, there you are at last!” the little mouse squeaked joyfully.

She reached out her little paws in welcome and then in her excitement she began dancing about on the table.

“Are you really glad to see me, little mouse?” Veikko asked.

“Indeed I am!” the mouse declared. “Am I not your sweetheart? I’ve been waiting for you and waiting, just wishing that you would return! Does your father want something more this time, Veikko?”

“Yes, and it’s something I’m afraid you can’t give me, little mouse.”

“Perhaps I can. Tell me what it is.”

“It’s a sample of your weaving. I don’t believe you can weave. I never heard of a mouse that could weave.”

“Tut! Tut!” said the mouse. “Of course I can weave! It would be a strange thing if Veikko’s sweetheart couldn’t weave!”

She rang the little silver bell, tinkle, tinkle, tinkle, and instantly there was the faint scratch-scratch of a hundred little feet as mice came running in from all directions and sat up on their haunches awaiting their

Princess' orders.

"Go each of you," she said, "and get me a fiber of flax, the finest there is."

The mice went scurrying off and soon they began returning one by one each bringing a fiber of flax. When they had spun the flax and carded it, the little mouse wove a beautiful piece of fine linen. It was so sheer that she was able when she folded it to put it into an empty nutshell.

"Here, Veikko," she said, "here in this little box is a sample of my weaving. I hope your father will like it."

Veikko when he got home felt almost embarrassed for he was sure that his sweetheart's weaving would shame his brothers. So at first he kept the nutshell hidden in his pocket.

The sweetheart of the oldest brother had sent as a sample of her weaving a square of coarse cotton.

"Not very fine," the farmer said, "but good enough."

The second brother's sample was a square of cotton and linen mixed.

"A little better," the farmer said, nodding his head.

Then he turned to Veikko.

"And you, Veikko, has your sweetheart not given you a sample of her weaving?"

Veikko handed his father a nutshell at sight of which his brothers burst out laughing.

"Ha! Ha! Ha!" they laughed. "Veikko's sweetheart gives him a nut when he asks for a sample of her weaving."

But their laughter died as the farmer opened the nutshell and began shaking out a great web of the finest linen.

"Why, Veikko, my boy!" he cried, "however did your sweetheart get threads for so fine a web?"

Veikko answered modestly:

“She rang a little silver bell and ordered her servants [133] to bring her in fibers of finest flax. They did so and after they had spun the flax and carded it, my sweetheart wove the web you see.”

“Wonderful!” gasped the farmer. “I have never known such a weaver! The other girls will be all right for farmers’ wives but Veikko’s sweetheart might be a Princess! Well,” concluded the farmer, “it’s time that you all brought your sweethearts home. I want to see them with my own eyes. Suppose you bring them to-morrow.”

“She’s a good little mouse and I’m very fond of her,” Veikko thought to himself as he went out to the forest, “but my brothers will certainly laugh when they find she is only a mouse! Well, I don’t care if they do laugh! She’s been a good little sweetheart to me and I’m not going to be ashamed of her!”

So when he got to the hut he told the little mouse at once that his father wanted to see her.

The little mouse was greatly excited.

“I must go in proper style!” she said.

She rang the little silver bell and ordered her coach and five. The coach when it came turned out to be an empty nutshell and the five prancing steeds that were drawing it were five black mice. The little mouse seated herself in the coach with a coachman mouse on the box in front of her and a footman mouse on the box behind her.

“Oh, how my brothers will laugh!” thought Veikko.

But he didn’t laugh. He walked beside the coach and told the little mouse not to be frightened, that he would take good care of her. His father, he told her, was a gentle old man and would be kind to her.

When they left the forest they came to a river which was spanned by a foot bridge. Just as Veikko and the nutshell coach had reached the middle of the bridge, a man met them coming from the opposite direction.

“Mercy me!” the man exclaimed as he caught sight of the strange little coach that was rolling along beside Veikko. “What’s that?”

He stooped down and looked and then with a loud laugh he put out his foot and pushed the coach, the little mouse, her servants, and her five prancing steeds—all off the bridge and into the water below.

“What have you done! What have you done!” Veikko cried. “You’ve drowned my poor little sweetheart!”

The man thinking Veikko was crazy hurried away.

Veikko with tears in his eyes looked down into the water.

“You poor little mouse!” he said. “How sorry I am I that you are drowned! You were a faithful loving sweetheart and now that you are gone I know how much I loved you!”



“She beckoned to Veikko.” Illustration by Jay Van Everen. Published in *Mighty Mikko: A Book of Finnish Fairy Tales and Folk Tales* by Parker Filmore (1922), Harcourt, Brace and Company.

As he spoke he saw a beautiful coach of gold drawn by five glossy horses go up the far bank of the river. A coachman in gold lace held the reins and a footman in pointed cap sat up stiffly behind. The most beautiful girl in the world was seated in the coach. Her skin was as red as a berry and as white as snow, her long golden hair gleamed with jewels, and she was dressed in pearly velvet. She beckoned to Veikko and when he came close she said:

“Won’t you come sit beside me?”

“Me? Me?” Veikko stammered, too dazed to think.

The beautiful creature smiled.

“You were not ashamed to have me for a sweetheart when I was a mouse,” she said, “and surely now that I am a Princess again you won’t desert me!”

“A mouse!” Veikko gasped. “Were you the little mouse?”

The Princess nodded.

“Yes, I was the little mouse under an evil enchantment which could never have been broken if you had not taken me for a sweetheart and if another human being had not drowned me. Now the enchantment is broken forever. So come, we will go to your father and after he has given us his blessing we will get married and go home to my kingdom.”

And that’s exactly what they did. They drove at once to the farmer’s house and when Veikko’s father and his brothers and his brothers’ sweethearts saw the Princess’ coach stopping at their gate they all came out bowing and scraping to see what such grand folk could want of them.

“Father!” Veikko cried, “don’t you know me?”

The farmer stopped bowing long enough to look up.

“Why, bless my soul!” he cried, “it’s our Veikko!”

“Yes, father, I’m Veikko and this is the Princess that I’m going to marry!”

“A Princess, did you say, Veikko? Mercy me, where did my boy find a Princess?”

“Out in the forest where my tree pointed.”

“Well, well, well,” the farmer said, “where your tree pointed! I’ve always heard that was a good way to find a bride.”

The older brothers shook their heads gloomily and muttered:

“Just our luck! If only our trees had pointed to the forest we, too, should have found princesses instead of plain country wenches!”

But they were wrong: it wasn’t because his tree pointed to the forest that Veikko got the Princess, it was because he was so simple and good that he was kind even to a little mouse.

Well, after they had got the farmer’s blessing they rode home to the Princess’ kingdom and were married. And they were happy as they should have been for they were good and true to each other and they loved each other dearly.

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