

Wee Little Havroshechka

Wee Little Havroshechka had the unfortunate luck to be an orphan. Perhaps her life wouldn't have been so hard if she had been taken into the care of a kind family, but just as there are good people in life, there are also the wicked. Wee Little Havroshechka was taken in by the wicked.

She was a slave in a large house owned by a mistress and her three daughters. The oldest was called One-Eye, the second Two-Eyes, and the youngest was Three-Eyes. The sisters sat outside all day in the beautiful sunshine, watching as Wee Little Havroshechka toiled over her sewing and spinning.

When Wee Little Havroshechka was feeling sad, she would take comfort in the company of the family's brindled cow. One day, as she wrapped her arms around the cow's neck and cried over all the work she must do, he spoke to her.

"My Wee Little Havroshechka, all you have to do is climb in my one ear and out the other, and all your work will be done."

She did as the cow said, and as soon as she climbed out his other ear...there on the ground laid her cloth, all woven and spun.

Everyday Wee Little Havroshechka would go to the cow, crawl in one ear and out the other. And everyday, there on the ground lay heaps of cloth, all bleached, woven, and spun. She would take them to her mistress who became suspicious of the quick work her little slave girl could do.

The next day, the mistress called her oldest daughter, One-Eye, and told her to go watch the orphan to see who helps her finish her work everyday. One-Eye went down to the meadow where Wee Little Havroshechka worked. But when the orphan saw One-Eye spying on her, she murmured, "Sleep, little eye, sleep!"

One-Eye forgot her mother's command and fell asleep in the grass, basking in the sun. And Wee Little Havroshechka climbed into the cow's ear, and her work was all done.

The second day, the mistress called for her middle daughter, Two-Eyes. She asked this daughter to go to the meadow and find out who helped the orphan girl with her work.

Once again, when Wee Little Havroshechka saw the daughter, she murmured, "Sleep, little eye! Sleep the other little eye!"

Two-Eyes forgot her mother's command as she fell asleep in the soft grass, basking in the sunlight. Again, Wee Little Havroshechka got her work done quickly with the cow's help. The

mistress was very angry, as she still did not know who was helping her little orphan girl.

On the third day, the mistress called her youngest daughter, Three-Eyes. She once again told her daughter to find out who was helping Wee Little Havroshechka with her work.

Three-Eyes skipped and played down to the meadow where the orphan worked. Wee Little Havroshechka murmured, "Sleep, little eye! Sleep, the other little eye!"

Two of Three-Eyes fell asleep...but the orphan had forgotten about the third eye. That little eye watched as Wee Little Havroshechka climbed into the cow's ear and out the other.

Three- Eyes came home and told her mother what she had seen. The old woman was overjoyed to finally know the secret of this little orphan girl, and the very next morning she went to her husband and told him to kill the cow.

"Have you lost your wits, old woman? he said. "The cow is a good one, and still young."

But the mistress insisted, and her husband went to sharpen his knife. The young orphan overheard the conversation and ran down to the cow. She threw her arms around him and cried, "Oh cow, my dear! They want to kill you!"

"Do not grieve, and do what I tell you," replied the cow. "Take my bones, tie them in a kerchief, bury them in the garden, and water them everyday. Do not eat of my flesh and never forget me."

The old man killed the cow, and Wee Little Havroshechka did as she had been told. She went hungry, rather than eat the meat, and buried the cow's bones.

After many weeks of watering, a magnificent apple-tree grew where the bones had been buried. The branches were made of silver and gold, and produced the finest apples anywhere.

A short time later, a handsome young man was riding his horse past the mistress's house. He saw the beautiful tree and the three young maidens sitting under it. Seeing the juicy apples, he called to the girls, "Fair maidens! I shall marry whichever of you three brings me an apple off your tree!"

The girls grabbed for the apples, each trying to push the other out of the way. However, the apples, which used to hang low to the ground, now swung up higher on their branches. The girls could not reach them, no matter how high they jumped.

Wee Little Havroshechka walked up to the tree. At once, the branches bent down to her, offering a beautiful apple right into her hands. She gave the apple to the handsome young man, and they were married soon after.

From that day on, Wee Little Havroshechka never knew sorrow again. She lived with her caring husband in good health and cheer, prospering more and more from year to year.

Thinking About It...

1. Does this Russian folktale remind you of other fairy tales you have heard? Which ones? What are the similar elements?
2. Folk tales and fairy tales usually teach lessons. What lesson is taught in *Wee Little Havroshechka*?
3. What do you think happened to the three sisters? Choose one of these sisters and write a story about her life after Havroshechka's marriage to the prince. Does the sister change because of the apple tree incident? How does this sister now do things differently?