The Tablecloth, the Little Ram, and the Bag

Once upon a time there lived an old man and an old woman. One day the old man went to the river to catch fish. He looks — a crane has got caught in the net, crying out, struggling, unable to get free.

The old man took pity on the crane.

"Why should," he thinks, "such a good bird perish?"

He approached the crane and helped him get free from the nets. Then the crane says to him in a human voice:

"Thank you, old man! I will never forget your kindness. Come with me to my home — I will give you a good gift."

So they went — the old man and the crane.

They walked and walked and came to a little swamp, to the crane's hut. The crane brought out a linen tablecloth and says:

"Here, old man, is your gift. Whenever you want to eat and drink, spread out this little cloth and say: 'Feed and water me, little cloth!' — and you will have everything."

The old man thanked the crane and went home.

He got hungry on the way. He sat down under a bush, spread out the cloth and says:

"Feed and water me, little cloth!"

No sooner had he said it than everything appeared on the cloth: roasted and boiled, eat all you want!

The old man ate and drank his fill, rolled up the little cloth and went on his way.

Whether he walked long or short — dark night overtook him on the way. He went into the house of a rich peasant and asks:

"Let a traveler spend the night!"

"We'll let you sleep here," says the host, "but don't ask for food."

"I don't need any food," answers the old man, "I have such a little cloth that will always feed and water me to my heart's content."

"Well, show it then!"

The old man spread out the cloth and says:

"Feed and water me, little cloth!"

He hadn't finished speaking when everything the heart desired appeared on the cloth!

The host was amazed and decided to steal this cloth.

As soon as the old man fell asleep, he pulled the wonderful cloth out from under him and put his own in its place — a plain one.

In the morning the old man set off home and didn't notice that the cloth he had was not the right one. He came home and says to his old woman:

"Well, old woman, now you don't need to knead bread or boil soup anymore!"

"How come?"

"That's how, this little cloth will treat us!"

He spread the cloth on the table and says:

"Feed and water me, little cloth!"

But the cloth just lies there as it was laid.

"The crane must have deceived me!" says the old man. "I'll go and scold him: why does he deceive!"

He got ready and went to the crane.

The crane met him and asks:

"Why have you come, old man?"

"Well, this and that," answers the old man, "your little cloth doesn't water or feed me!"

"Don't grieve," says the crane. "I'll give you a little ram. This little ram is not ordinary. When you say to him: 'Little ram, shake yourself!' — gold will pour out of him."

The old man took the little ram and led him home.

Toward evening he came to the same rich peasant:

"Let me spend the night!"

"Go ahead."

"But I'm not alone, I have a little ram with me."

"Then leave the little ram in the yard."

"I can't: the little ram is not ordinary — he gives gold."

"That can't be!" says the rich peasant.

"But it can!"

The old man spread a mat in the middle of the room, placed the little ram on it and says:

"Little ram, shake yourself!"

The little ram shook himself, and gold poured out of him.

The rich peasant decided to take the little ram for himself too.

He put the old man to bed and hid the little ram. And in its place he put his own just like it: you couldn't tell the difference!

In the morning the old man said goodbye to the host and went home. He came and says:

"Well, old woman, now we'll live richly!"

"Where will this wealth come from?"

"This little ram will give it!"

The old woman looks at the old man, wonders, can't understand anything.

And the old man says to her:

"Now, spread a mat on the floor!"

The old woman spread it. The old man placed the little ram on the mat and says:

"Little ram, shake yourself!"

But the little ram stands as it was placed.

The old man again:

"Little ram, shake yourself!"

But the little ram stands there and only bleats.

"Ah, the crane has deceived me again!" says the old man. "I'll go to him, at least to scold him for the deception!"

He got ready and went.

He came to the little swamp, to the crane's little hut, and called for the crane. The crane came out to him and says:

"Why have you come again, old man?"

"Well, all your gifts are bad, there's no use in them!"

The crane listened to him and asks:

"Did you stop by anyone's place on the way?"

"I stopped at the rich peasant's."

"Did you boast about my gifts?"

"I boasted."

"Well, so be it," says the crane, "I'll give you a final gift: it will give you wisdom and return my previous gifts to you."

He went into the hut and brought out a bag.

"Take it and say: 'Forty, out of the bag!'"

The old man took the bag and says:

"Well now, forty, out of the bag!"

No sooner had he said it than forty fellows with clubs jumped out of the bag — and at the old man...

The old man guessed, and shouted:

"Forty, into the bag, Forty, into the bag!"

The fellows with clubs hid back into the bag in the same instant.

The old man took the bag, thanked the crane and went.

When it got dark, he came to the rich peasant's for the night. And he was waiting impatiently for him. He greeted him like a dear guest. The old man entered the hut and says:

"Where should I put this bag?"

"Just throw it by the threshold."

"I can't: this bag is not ordinary. You just say: 'Forty, out of the bag!' — and it rewards you better than you could wish!"

The host says:

"Well then, hang it on a nail."

The old man hung the bag on a nail, and climbed onto the stove himself and watches what will happen.

The host waited and waited, thought the old man had fallen asleep, and says:

"Forty, out of the bag!"

Forty fellows with clubs jumped out right there and started beating him. They beat him, beat him, wouldn't let him escape. The host cried out in a voice not his own:

"Oh, grandpa, grandpa! Wake up quickly, help me!"

And the old man asks from the stove:

"Who swapped my little cloth?"

"I don't know!"

"Ah, if you don't know, then don't ask me for help!"

"I swapped it! I swapped it! I'll give it back to you, just save me!"

The old man asks:

"And who swapped my little ram?"

"I'll give back the little ram too, just leave me alive!"

"Will you stop deceiving people from now on?"

"Oh, never!"

Then the old man says:

"Forty, into the bag!"

The forty fellows hid in the bag, as if they had never been there.

The host brought the cloth, led the little ram, and himself groans and moans.

The old man took his cloth and the little ram and went home. He came and began to live well with his old woman, feeding and treating everyone. And I was there too, I drank mead and beer, it ran down my chin but never reached my mouth!