

The Old Woman and the Mouse

In a small town, beyond the neighborhood market, around the corner, down a pleasant street and up three steps in a little apartment lived an old woman. The old woman lived all alone because you see, she didn't like people. So, every day the old woman would sit in her rocking chair at the window of her little apartment and yell at everyone who passed by.

"Get off my sidewalk!" she would shriek to the man with the brown briefcase who had to walk past her little apartment to get to work.

"Don't let your dog poop on my sidewalk," she barked at the woman in the red ball cap who often walked her little dog around the block for exercise.

"Stop making all that racket!" she'd scream at the children who laughed and skipped past her window on their way to school.

Big or small, young and old, she didn't care. She yelled at everyone. But the people walked by anyway without a care in the world, not paying any attention to the grumpy old woman who yelled at them through her apartment window.

But on Sundays, the street in front of her little apartment was quiet. Nobody went to work, hardly anyone walked their dogs and children didn't go to school. She could not yell at people through her window, so that was the day she left her little apartment to go grocery shopping.

Each Sunday after her breakfast of eggs, toast, and milk, the old woman left her little apartment, stepped down the three steps onto the sidewalk, and walked down the street, around the corner to the neighborhood market. On her way, she passed the barber, the deli, the coffee shop, the bakery, and the newsstand.

"Can't you let me walk in peace and quiet," she would yell to all the shop owners who liked to visit one another in front of their stores laughing and carrying on loudly without a care in the world that anyone could hear them.

As she continued her weekly walk, she grumbled bitterly to all the people who passed her on the sidewalk.

"Get out of my way," she sneered at couples who held hands and took up way too much room on the sidewalk before parting to let her pass them.

"Watch where you're going," she shrieked to the young people who were constantly texting on their cell phones and not paying any attention to where they were.

Finally, when she arrived at the market, she quickly made her way through the aisles, always putting the same items into her cart, bread, milk, eggs, meat, cheese, crackers, and apples. Then she would go straight to the cashier at the front of the store to pay for her food.

The cashier always greeted her warmly with a smile and a friendly, "Good morning!"

But every Sunday, the old woman snarled back at him, "What's so good about it?" This never bothered the cashier, though. He would just continue to smile while carefully packing her food into two bags that she could carry home.

On her way back home, she would grumble again at the babbling shop owners and the people who were unlucky enough to pass her on the sidewalk. Around the corner, down the street, and up the three steps she trudged until she was safely back inside her little apartment. Then she would put her groceries away and sit down again in her rocking chair by the window to eat some crackers and take a nap because, you see, there was no one passing by to yell at on Sundays.

This was her routine, week after week, month after month, year after year. Then, one morning after her usual breakfast of eggs, toast and milk the old woman was sitting on her rocking chair in front of her window waiting for someone to pass by her window so she could yell at them when she heard a scurrying noise behind her. She turned and saw a little mouse run across the apartment floor and stop under her kitchen table.

There were a lot of crumbs under her kitchen table because, of course, the old woman didn't have time to sweep her floors since she spent so much time yelling at the people who passed by her window. Her broom sat unused in the corner of her kitchen behind layers of cobwebs. In fact, a spider had made its home behind it and had been living there, quite happily, for some time.

The mouse picked up some crumbs from off the floor and began to eat them.

“Get out of my house!” The woman yelled at the mouse. She stood up and began to stomp toward him.

Frightened, the little mouse ran to a little hole he had bored through the wall in a corner, just behind her rocking chair, leaving the crumbs under the table.

The next morning, the same thing happened. Just as the old woman sat down in her rocking chair in front of the window waiting for someone to pass by so she could yell at them, the little mouse scurried across the floor, stopped under her kitchen table, and began to eat more crumbs.

“How dare you steal my crumbs,” the woman shouted, getting up to chase the mouse away. “Get out of my house!”, she demanded.

Again, the mouse ran into his little hole in the corner, this time picking up a few crumbs to take with him.

The next morning the same thing happened, and the woman chased the mouse off again, yelling, “Get out of my house!”

Expecting this, the little mouse gathered as many extra crumbs as he could, stuffed them in his cheeks, and ran to his little home in the hole in the corner of the wall behind her rocking chair.

The woman was furious. How dare this little mouse continue to eat her food. So, the next morning, after she ate her breakfast, she took her dusty broom from the corner of her kitchen and swept the crumbs up from under her kitchen table.

For the rest of the week, the mouse ran out of his little home in the corner looking for crumbs to eat because there were no more crumbs under her kitchen table. One morning, he found some crumbs under her credenza and another morning he found some next to her rocking chair.

Every time he scurried out of his little hole in the corner, she yelled and chased him away. The old woman would then sweep up every leftover crumb from where the mouse had found them so that he could not steal her food.

Finally, one morning, the mouse ran out of the little hole in the corner to eat more crumbs, but there weren't any to be found. So, the mouse walked right up to the old woman, who was sitting in her rocking chair waiting for someone to walk by her window so she could yell at them, and he asked her quite boldly,

“Why did you sweep up all the crumbs?”

The old woman was surprised that this mouse had such nerve to ask why she had swept her floors.

“Because I don't want to share my food with you,” she answered angrily. “Now get out of my house or I'll hit you with my broom.”

The mouse ran as quickly as he could into his little home in the corner behind her rocking chair. He did not want to get hit with her broom.

Just then, the woman heard a knock on her door. Wondering why anyone would be bothering her, she stomped over to the door and yanked it open. With a scowl on her face, she yelled, “What do you want?”

It was the woman who wore the red ball cap, and she was holding her little dog in her arms.

“Good morning,” the woman said. “I'm sorry to bother you, but I haven't seen you sitting at your front window all week. I was worried about you and wanted to make sure you were ok.”

The old woman was shocked. Then she realized that the woman was right. She had been so busy sweeping up all the crumbs in her apartment and yelling at the mouse that week that she had forgotten to sit at her window to yell at everyone who passed by.

Finally, the old woman's scowl disappeared, and a tear fell down one of her very wrinkled cheeks. But before she could reply, the cashier from the market also came to her door carrying two bags.

“I didn't see you at the market yesterday. I was worried about you and wanted to make sure you were ok,” he said, with a warm smile on his face.

The woman realized he was right, too. She had been so busy sweeping up her little apartment so that the mouse couldn't steal her crumbs, that she forgot to go to the market to buy her groceries. The cashier handed the old woman the bags he was carrying. The woman took them and looked inside. They contained some bread, milk, eggs, meat, cheese, crackers, apples, AND a small chocolate bar that he threw in just because. And another tear fell down her other very wrinkled cheek.

“I am fine,” she finally said. But this time, she didn't yell.

Then she said something she hadn't said to anyone in a very long time,

“Thank you,” and she smiled a very wrinkled smile at the woman with the red ball cap, her little dog, and the cashier from the market. Then she bid them all a grateful goodbye and closed her

door. But when she turned to put her groceries away, she saw the little mouse standing on her kitchen table. “Why are you crying?” he asked her.

“Why are you standing on my table?” the woman retorted with a snuffle. “Because it’s dirty. Just look at all these crumbs,” said the mouse.

The old woman realized that the mouse was right. Although her floors were clean, her kitchen table still had crumbs from many meals before.

“Will you help me clean it?” she asked the mouse.

“Of course, I will,” said the mouse, happily.

So, the woman put her groceries away, while the mouse ate up all the crumbs on her table.

That night the woman made a dinner of meat, cheese, crackers, apple slices, and a piece of chocolate for dessert. But this time she put a tiny plate on the other side of her little kitchen table for the mouse and invited him to dinner. The mouse gladly accepted her invitation.

That night, together in her clean little apartment, the old woman and the mouse shared a lovely dinner and laughed and carried on loudly without a care in the world that anyone could hear them.

The next morning, the woman and the mouse shared a breakfast of eggs, toast, and milk, then they both went and sat on her rocking chair by the window and waved hello to everyone who passed by.