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IMAGINATION OVER KNOWLEDGE

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The Woman Who Lived in a Shoe

There was an old woman
Who lived in a shoe,
She had so many children
She didn't know what to do;
She gave them some broth
Without any bread,
And whipped them all soundly
And sent them to bed.

A long time ago there lived a woman who had four daughters, and these in time grew up and married and went to live in different parts of the country. And the woman, after that, lived all alone, and said to herself, "I have done my duty to the world, and now shall rest quietly for the balance of my life. When one has raised a family of four children and has married them all happily, she is surely entitled to pass her remaining days in peace and comfort."

She lived in a peculiar little house, that looked something like this picture. It was not like most of the houses you see, but the old woman had it built herself, and liked it, and so it did not matter to her how odd it was. It stood upon the top of a little hill, and there was a garden at the back and a pretty green lawn in front, with white gravel paths and many beds of bright colored flowers.

The old woman was very happy and contented there until one day she received a letter saying that her daughter Hannah was dead and had sent her family of five children to their grandmother to be taken care of. This misfortune ruined all the old woman's dreams of quiet; but the next day the children arrived—three boys and two girls,—and she made the best of it and gave them the beds her own daughters had once occupied, and her own cot as well; and she made a bed for herself on the parlor sofa.

The youngsters were like all other children, and got into mischief once in awhile; but the old woman had much experience with children and managed to keep them in order very well, while they quickly learned to obey her, and generally did as they were bid.

But scarcely had she succeeded in getting them settled in their new home when Margaret, another of her daughters, died, and sent four more children to her mother to be taken care of.

The old woman scarcely knew where to keep this new flock that had come to her fold, for the house was already full; but she thought the matter over and finally decided she must build an addition to her house. So she hired a carpenter and built what is called a "lean-to" at the right of her cottage, making it just big enough to accommodate the four new members of her family. When it was completed her house looked very much as it does in this picture.

She put four little cots in her new part of the house, and then she sighed contentedly, and said, "Now all the

babies are taken care of and will be comfortable until they grow up." Of course it was much more difficult to manage nine small children than five; and they often led each other into mischief, so that the flower beds began to be trampled upon and the green grass to be worn under the constant tread of little feet, and the furniture to show a good many scratches and bruises. But the old woman continued to look after them, as well as she was able, until Sarah, her third daughter, also died, and three more children were sent to their grandmother to be brought up.

The old woman was nearly distracted when she heard of this new addition to her family, but she did not give way to despair. She sent for the carpenter again, and had him build another addition to her house, as the picture shows. Then she put three new cots in the new part for the babies to sleep in, and when they arrived they were just as cozy and comfortable as peas in a pod.

The grandmother was a lively old woman for one of her years, but she found her time now fully occupied in cooking the meals for her twelve small grandchildren, and mending their clothes, and washing their faces, and undressing them at night and dressing them in the morning. There was just a dozen of the babies now, and when you consider they were about the same age you will realize what a large family the old woman had, and how fully her time was occupied in caring for them all. And now, to make the matter worse, her fourth daughter, who had been named Abigail, suddenly took

sick and died, and she also had four small children that must be cared for in some way.

The old woman, having taken the other twelve, could not well refuse to adopt these little orphans also.

"I may as well have sixteen as a dozen," she said, with a sigh; "they will drive me crazy some day, anyhow, so a few more will not matter at all!"

Once more she sent for the carpenter, and bade him build a third addition to the house; and when it was completed she added four more cots to the dozen that were already in use. The house presented a very queer appearance now, but she did not mind that so long as the babies were comfortable. "I shall not have to build again," she said; "and that is one satisfaction. I have now no more daughters to die and leave me their children, and therefore I must make up my mind to do the best I can with the sixteen that have already been inflicted upon me in my old age."

It was not long before all the grass about the house was trodden down, and the white gravel of the walks all thrown at the birds, and the flower beds trampled into shapeless masses by thirty-two little feet that ran about from morn till night. But the old woman did not complain at this; her time was too much taken up with the babies for her to miss the grass and the flowers. It cost so much money to clothe them that she decided to dress them all alike, so that they looked like the children of a regular orphan asylum. And it cost so much to feed them that she was obliged to give them the plainest food; so there was bread-and-milk for

breakfast and milk-and-bread for dinner and bread-and-broth for supper. But it was a good and wholesome diet, and the children thrived and grew fat upon it. One day a stranger came along the road, and when he saw the old woman's house he began to laugh.

"What are you laughing at, sir?" asked the grandmother, who was sitting upon her door-steps engaged in mending sixteen pairs of stockings.

"At your house," the stranger replied; "it looks for all the world like a big shoe!"

"A shoe!" she said, in surprise.

"Why, yes. The chimneys are shoe-straps, and the steps are the heel, and all those additions make the foot of the shoe."

"Never mind," said the woman; "it may be a shoe, but it is full of babies, and that makes it different from most other shoes."

But the stranger went on to the village and told all he met that he had seen an old woman who lived in a shoe; and soon people came from all parts of the country to look at the queer house, and they usually went away laughing.

The old woman did not mind this at all; she was too busy to be angry. Some of the children were always getting bumped heads or bruised shins, or falling down and hurting themselves, and these had to be comforted. And some were naughty and had to be whipped; and some were dirty and had to be washed; and some were good and had to be kissed. It was "Gran'ma, do this!" and "Gran'ma, do that!" from morning to night, so that

the poor grandmother was nearly distracted. The only peace she ever got was when they were all safely tucked in their little cots and were sound asleep; for then, at least, she was free from worry and had a chance to gather her scattered wits.

"There are so many children," she said one day to the baker-man, "that I often really don't know what to do!"

"If they were mine, ma'am," he replied, "I'd send them to the poor-house, or else they'd send me to the mad-house."



Some of the children heard him say this, and they resolved to play him a trick in return for his ill-natured speech.

The baker-man came every day to the shoe-house, and brought two great baskets of bread in his arms for the children to eat with their milk and their broth.

So one day, when the old woman had gone to the town to buy shoes, the children all painted their faces, to look as Indians do when they are on the war-path; and they caught the roosters and the turkey-cock and pulled feathers from their tails to stick in their hair. And then the boys made wooden tomahawks for the girls and bows-and-arrows for their own use, and then all sixteen went out and hid in the bushes near the top of the hill.

By and by the baker-man came slowly up the path with a basket of bread on either arm; and just as he reached the bushes there sounded in his ears a most unearthly war-whoop. Then a flight of arrows came from the bushes, and although they were blunt and could do him no harm, they rattled all over his body; and one hit his nose, and another his chin, while several stuck fast in the loaves of bread.

Altogether, the baker-man was terribly frightened; and when all the sixteen small Indians rushed from the bushes and flourished their tomahawks, he took to his heels and ran down the hill as fast as he could go! When the grandmother returned she asked, "Where is the bread for your supper?"

The children looked at one another in surprise, for they had forgotten all about the bread. And then one of them confessed, and told her the whole story of how they had frightened the baker-man for saying he would send them to the poor-house.

"You are sixteen very naughty children!" exclaimed the old woman; "and for punishment you must eat your broth without any bread, and afterwards each one shall have a sound whipping and be sent to bed."

Then all the children began to cry at once, and there was such an uproar that their grandmother had to put cotton in her ears that she might not lose her hearing. But she kept her promise, and made them eat their broth without any bread; for, indeed, there was no bread to give them.

Then she stood them in a row and undressed them, and as she put the night-dress on each one she gave it a sound whipping and sent it to bed.

They cried some, of course, but they knew very well they deserved the punishment, and it was not long before all of them were sound asleep.

They took care not to play any more tricks on the baker-man, and as they grew older they were naturally much better behaved.

Before many years the boys were old enough to work for the neighboring farmers, and that made the woman's family a good deal smaller. And then the girls grew up and married, and found homes of their own, so that all the children were in time well provided for.

But not one of them forgot the kind grandmother who had taken such good care of them, and often they tell their children of the days when they lived with the old woman in a shoe and frightened the baker-man almost into fits with their wooden tomahawks.