



The Wooden Bowl

A story from many cultures. This German version is retold here by Allison Galbraith.

The young man and his wife were very happy to welcome old dad to their house. Now that he was alone, they wanted him to live on the farm with them where they could all live as one happy family. They made up a bed in the spare room and put in a chest of drawers for the old man's belongings. That evening they celebrated with a fine dinner served on the very best china plates. Old dad was so happy to be with his son again that he had to wipe tears of happiness from his eyes!

The very next morning the old man started to help out around the farm. He went to the byre and milked the goats, then to the chicken coop. Here he found an old wooden bowl and he filled it with chicken feed and began to feed the chickens. He laughed at the proud birds fighting over the grain he scattered for them. After feeding the chickens he had to sit down for a while to rest his back and stiff joints, he rubbed his sore fingers to ease the pain, but he was still feeling happy, it felt good to be helping out at the farm, it made him feel satisfied that he could still be of use around the place.

Every day the old man did what he could to help around the farm, and then he would rest his aching joints and doze off on the sofa. He woke each evening in time for dinner with his son and daughter-in-law. One evening, at the table he noticed that his daughter-in-law was pregnant, and he could hardly contain his joy at the thought of being a granddad.

As the months passed the old man felt himself getting slower and stiffer until all he could manage to do was to feed the chickens, but at least he was happy that he could still do that.

There was great joy when the baby arrived. Now the old man was a granddad at last. He waited his turn to hold the new-born boy in his arms. Holding the tiny child reminded him of the day his own son was born, but as a tear of joy run down his cheek, everyone noticed how shaky the old man's hands had become, and the baby was taken back off him, faster than he would have liked 'In case you drop the baby!' his son had said.

Day by day the old man's health deteriorated. His limbs became stiffer, his back stooped and his hands trembled. He could do less and less to help out. He still managed to feed

the chickens and sing to the baby, but as the little lad grew bigger and stronger and began to toddle, granddad struggled to keep up with him.

Bad weather brought poor harvests to the farm one year. The farm workers were laid off and the young man and his wife worked long hard hours to make ends meet. Feeding the family became a struggle. One evening all they had for their supper was porridge, and as the wife ladled it into everyone's bowls, old granddad's hands trembled and shook so much that he dropped his bowl, which shattered on the hard kitchen floor. Grumbling the young wife cleared it up and then she marched out to the barn and brought back the wooden bowl for feeding the chickens. She wiped it clean and then handed it to granddad and ladled more porridge in for his meal. 'At least this bowl won't break if you drop it!' she said to the old man. His son looked away and said nothing.

As the months passed the old man found it harder and harder to eat his meals without dropping his spoon or spilling something, and then he began to drool when he ate. The young wife could not stand it any longer and she began serving granddad's dinner in the wooden bowl at a separate table in the corner of the room, where she didn't have to see the mess he was making. Her husband never said a word about it.

When the young boy was older, he came home from school one day and went straight out to the barn with two solid chunks of wood and began to chisel and chip at them with his father's woodworking tools. When his dad asked him what he was so busy making, the boy replied, 'A present for you and mum.' His father was delighted and called his mother out to see. His mum asked what kind of present would it be? The young boy replied, 'I am making two new wooden chicken-feed bowls, one for you and one for dad, so that when you are old, you can have your very own wooden feed bowls like granddad and you can eat your dinner from them just like granddad does!'

The boy's mother and father stood in stunned silence, as their child's words rang clearly in their ears. Suddenly they saw what was awaiting them in their old age; to be left frail and alone, pushed into a corner away from the family. Then they both realised how unfair they had been to the old man, so they went back into the house and hugged and kissed him. That evening a place was set for granddad at the table, next to his delighted grandson, and his dinner was served on the best china plates. His food was cut up carefully for him and his son and daughter-in-law took it in turns to wipe his lips clean. From that day on, they treated the old man with the same kindness and respect they hoped to receive from their own son in their elderly years.