

Mallie an da paets

Contributed by George P. S. Peterson

A story from Shetland, told in true Shetland style. The theme of reward and punishment bears a great similarity to another story, 'Monday, Tuesday'.

Robbie an Mallie hed fower bonnie bairns. Dey hed no croft, bit Robbie wis a sailor man an he sent hame money ta feed da bairns, for dey wir hungry bairns, as strong helty bairns are.

Dan came wurd at his whip wis bön lost. An Robbie wid never be hame again. An dey wid be no more money ta buy maet wi. An poor Mallie wis sair pitten about ta fin maet for her bairns. But she got wark back an fore fae da ladies a da Haa, sewin dresses an blouses an sic like for dem, an hit helpit a scaar.

An so wan night dey cam in taerin, da door fled ta da back wi a doose, “Oh Mam, we’re fantin! Gie’s something!” An she says, “Oh bairns, I hae not a particle athin da door, inless just wan plate a beremeal, an I wis keeping dat for your brakoost da morn!”

Bit dey wir so hungry. So at last she says, “Aa right dan, I’ll tell you whit we’ll do. Tak a cup each o you, an go next door ta ald Rebecca, for she has a croft an a coo, an hens, an sheep. An ask her for a cup o milk an a bannock, for you’re fantin wi hunger. An she’ll maybe gie you each a piece a mutton too.”

An so dey took a cup each o dem; an dey göd ower ta ald Rebecca’s hoose. An da night wis comin doon.

An dey wir comin up for da door whin da aldest boy says, “Hey! See yon peerie man!” An dey saa a peerie man skuttin at dem aroond da corner a da yard daek. An hed a grey baerd, an hed on a grey hat, an his claes wis grey. An whin he saa dem lookin at him, he drew back.

So da eldest boy says, “Come on an we’ll see wha it is!” An dey ran around da corner a da yard daek. Bit dey wir nobody dere. Nobody at all.

An so dey go in, each wi da cup a da hand, an her lamp wis lighted, an she wis sittin spinnin at a lovely warm fire.

An whin she heard der errand, she says, “I hae no milk an bread ta gie you! I need my milk for my cats! So you needna come here seekin milk! Go on, oot a here wi you! Der nothing here for you! Clear oot a my hoose at wance!”

An dey cam hame. An Mallie says, “Oh weel dan, just go ta bed an cuddle you doon, an faa asleep. An I’ll hae a plate a beremeal gruel for you da morning.” An dey did dis. An da peeriest ane fell asleep greetin. For she wis just fower, poor peerie lady.

So Mallie wis sewin away trang, tryin ta get dis garment finished, an she wis wirkin wi da light a da paet fire; whin da door opened; an in ower da flör comes a peerie man. He hed a grey baerd; an a grey hat; an his claes wis grey. An she kent at dis wis ane o da Hill Folk. Bit Mallie wis na wyes faered; an she says, “Come in ta da fire an warm you. Ir dey onything I can gie you?”

He says, “I tink you can help me. My wife is bön very ill, bit noo she’s getting better. An da thing she craves abon every idder kind a maet is a corn a beremeal gruel.”

“Oh my,” says Mallie. “I hae a plate a beremeal for da bairns’ brakoost da morn’s mornin. Bit I’ll tell you whit I’ll do. I’ll divide it in two. See, tak your wife, an I hope it does her good, an she’s soon better again.”

An da Hill Man takes da beremeal, an he turns ta go; an he says, “I sanna forget your kindness.” An away he goes.

Noo da fire wis deein doon an still she hed a lot ta sew up, so Mallie recket for a paet ta lay apon da emmers, bit dey wir none left. So she hed ta go ta da stack a da hill for da fill o her kishie. An afore she set oot, she lookit at da sleepin bairns ta see at dey wir aa right. An dan she took a cup a cald water oot a da watter pail. For dey wir nothing idder a da hoose.

Away oot ta da stack, far across da moors she travelled. Da night wis calm an still, not even da sea made a murmur. Far a da distance a dog barkit. An da mön wis full, an sheenin in a cloodless lift.

Hame she cam, wi her burden a paets. Bit so tired wis she at she set aff her kishie at da hert stane. An she laid ower apo, da hard restin chair; an she fell soond asleep.

A da morning, she waakened cald an sore, an da fire wis oot. So she set aboot ta kindle him so at she sood hae a pot a haet gruel for da bairns. Da wid took up, an she brook a paet in twa so at da fire sood blaze up; an just wi dat, didn she hear a clink apo da hert stane. She looks, an here she finns a gold coin! My fadder, dis wis somethin! Mallie turned him ower in her hand. She wis heard about anes finnin things among da paet moor, a good brooch, a ring an so on. Wi a lichtsme hert she brook open a second paet. An oot fell anidder gold coin! Na na, dis couldna be right! An she brook open a third paet – a third gold coin fell clinkin apo da hert stane!

“Dis da reward fae da Hill Folk!” she whispered.

“Bairns! Bairns! Rise an haste you here dis meenit! Come an see dis at wance!”
But dey cam, gantin an rubbin oot o der een. An every paet dey brook hed a gold coin inside!

Millie gaddered dem aa in a roog apo da table; an her face wis sheenin wi happiness.

“We’ll be able to buy a croft noo! An we’ll buy sheep, an a milkin coo, an hens!
An we’ll hae mutton an eggs an milk! An we’ll never be hungry again!”

An dis is whit dey did.

Ah! Bit ald Rebecca cam ta hear o’t. An she deemed as if Mallie wis gotten money fae da Hill Folk, dye wid gie her some too, an ald body livin be hersel.

So she took da biggest kishie she hed, an away she goes ta her hill stack, an cam hame wi just whit she could drag.

An she opened a paet ta see da lovely sheenin gold faain oot. Somethin did faa oot.

Bit it wisna a gold coin.

Du’ll never guess whit fell oot a ald Rebecca’s paet! No du’ll never guess in a hunder year!

Shall I tell dee?

Hit wis a moose! A livin moose!

Yis, every paet hed a livin moose o da hert o’m.

An she waakened her fat cats ta eat dem. Bit da cats wis never seen such a swarm a mice – da flör wis covered wi dem. An she flang open da door ta caa dem ott. Bit dey just ran aroond an aroond. An hit wis da cats at ran oot! An dey never wir seen more.

An da mice jimpit up apo da table an da dresser an da brace. An Rebecca swilpit at dem wi her apron. An doon cam her clock in smithereens. An her bonnie plates, aa smashed. An she wis never clear a mice ever more.

An da day cam whin she lookit in her press for something ta aet. An her bread wis jist crumbs. Her butter wis aa eaten. An a dead moose wis flottin in her milk jug.

An she took a cup in her hand. An she göd ower to Mallie’s hoose. An she says, “Mallie, I winder if I could ask dee for a cup a milk an a bannock for I’m fantin.”

An whit tinks du did Mallie say ta her?

“Yis, yis! You can truly get dat! Never you be hungry! You can get dat anytime, as lang as you live!”