
Bhambhutia

~ Retold by Holly Koteen-Soulé

There are many versions of this story told in both India and Pakistan. The old woman outwits the forest animals with the help of a large pot. It has some motifs also found in the Norwegian story of “Three Billy Goats Gruff” and in the Russian story of “Mashenka and the Bear.” I adapted this story from Chandrika Bheda’s retelling in a collection of song-stories called *The Singing Sack*, compiled by Helen East on behalf of the National Folktale Centre. It works well as both a play and a puppet play. The lines delivered by the animals in the forest and by the pot are repetitive and the children enjoyed saying them with me.

Once upon a time there was an old woman who lived with her daughter, Sona, in a little house in a village in India. When Sona was grown and ready to be wed, she found a nice young man and they were married. She went to live with her husband in another village far away on the other side of the jungle.

The old woman lived by herself now, and after a while she began to feel lonely. She decided to go and visit her daughter. The jungle, however, was full of wild animals and there were no buses or trains in that part of the countryside. “I can’t even walk properly, now that I am so old,” she complained to herself. But she kept thinking and thinking, and at last she decided that she would take only a few clothes in a small bag, so that she wouldn’t have much to carry, and she would take a big walking stick to support her. So, one bright morning, she set off into the jungle.

Now, in the jungle there lived a lion. As the old woman approached him, the lion heard the sound of her walking stick, *thabook, thabook, thabook, thabook*, and said: “Who is coming by my way? *Thabook, thabook* is all they say!” Then he saw the old woman and he said, “*Docina* (old woman), I want to eat you.”

But the old woman replied: “Lion, oh lion, let me go, to my daughter’s a visit take. Round and plump will I grow, a finer meal will I make.”

The lion thought this was a good idea and he let her go, calling out behind her, “Old woman, mind you, come back soon!”

So the old woman continued on her journey. A little further on, there lived a tiger and when he heard in the distance the sound of the walking stick, *thabook, thabook, thabook, thabook*, he said: “Who is that coming by my way? *Thabook, thabook* is all they say!” Then he saw the old woman and he said, “*Docina*, I want to eat you.”

The old woman replied: “Tiger, oh tiger, let me go, to my daughter’s a visit take. Round and plump will I grow, A finer meal will I make.”

The tiger thought this was a good idea and so he let her go, calling out behind her “Old woman, mind you, come back soon!”

So the old woman continued on her journey. A little further on lived a bear, who also heard the sound of the old woman’s walking stick, *thabook, thabook, thabook, thabook*, and said: “Who is coming by my way? *Thabook, thabook* is all they say!”

And then he saw the old woman. “*Docina*, I want to eat you.”

The old woman replied: “Bear, oh bear, let me go, to my daughter’s a visit take. Round and plump will I grow, A finer meal will I make.”

The bear thought this was a good idea and so he let her go, calling out behind her “Old woman, mind you, come back soon!”

By this time the old woman had come to the edge of the jungle and there was a path leading to her daughter’s house. In a short time she arrived there safely.

There were many good things to eat and many enjoyable things to talk about and she lived at her daughter’s very happily for a whole month. Then the old woman decided that it was time to go home, but she was worried about the lion and the tiger and the bear, who all wanted to eat her.

“Stay a little while longer,” said Sona, “and we will think of something.”

So, another month passed while they thought about it and the old woman kept on eating and enjoying herself. By now she was so plump that she looked like a big round clay pot—a bhambhutia. That gave her an idea.

“I will become a bhambhutia”, she said to her daughter. “We will make a big clay pot and then I will get inside and you can push it so that it goes rolling down the path all the way home.”

They made a big round clay bhambhutia and the old woman squeezed herself into it. Her daughter put the lid on and pushed it off down the road from the front door.

The bhambhutia went rolling down the road and it made a sound like this: *Doolook, doolook, doolook, doolook*.

In the distance the bear could hear it coming. “What is making this noise?” he said to himself and when he saw the bhambhutia, he said, “Hey *doolook, doolook*, have you seen an old woman, a Docina?”

From inside the pot the old woman replied: “Which old woman we don’t know. To our village we must go.”

And on went the bhambhutia, *doolook, doolook, doolook, doolook*. But the bear was curious so it followed along behind.

When they came to the tiger, the tiger said, “Wait a minute, *doolook, doolook*, have you seen an old woman, a Docina?”

From inside the pot the old woman replied: “Which old woman we don’t know. To our village we must go.”

And on went the bhambhutia, *doolook, doolook, doolook, doolook*. But the tiger was curious too, and it followed along behind the bear.

Further along down the road, the lion was waiting for the old woman to come back. When he saw the bhambhutia coming he said, “Wait a minute *doolook, doolook*, have you seen an old woman, a Docina?”

From inside the pot the old woman replied: “Which old woman we don’t know. To our village we must go.”

This time the bhambhutia rolled all the way to the old woman’s front door. *Doolook, doolook, doolook, doolook*. But the lion had followed the tiger and the bear and they all sat down to see what would happen next.



The old woman didn’t come out. She just stayed in the bhambhutia and waited.

At last, it got really dark and quiet. The lion and the tiger and the bear all fell asleep one by one. At midnight the old woman crawled out.

Very softly she said to the bhambhutia, “Thank you bhambhutia, you have saved me. Now you may go and live where you please.”

But the bhambhutia could not go anywhere on its own, so it stayed outside the old woman’s house. And the bear went back to his cave and the lion and the tiger went back to the jungle. If they have not died they are still waiting for the old woman, but she is safe in her home with the bhambhutia to keep her company. ♦

Source:

This story is excerpted from the new WECAN collection *Truer Than True: A World of Fairy Tales for the Waldorf Kindergarten*, selected and edited by Holly Koteen-Soulé. The inspiration for the adaptation of this tale came from a version told by Chandrika Bheda in *The Singing Sack*, a collection by Helen East, published by the National Folktale Centre in 1989. We are so grateful for Ms. East’s permission to publish our adaptation.