

SAMPLE
TRANSLATION

ANJA ŠTEFAN
A SWING FOR EVERYONE

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TRANSLATED BY: DAVID LIMON

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Illustrated by: Marjanca Jemec Božič

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THE RAT WHO MADE SOME JAM

"I could make some jam," said Mother Rat.

"But first you must read us something," said her children.

"I could make some new curtains."

"But first you must read us something."

"I could clean the windows."

"But first you must read us something."

"Okay, first I'll read you something."

And she read them a long story about a rat that was looking for a husband for her daughter.

"That's a nice one," said the children. "Can you read it again?"

"Tomorrow," said their mother.

In this way the little rats heard stories every day, new ones and old ones. They grew up and the windows were still without curtains. They left home and Mother Rat could finally make some jam. And we wonder why rats are so clever that hardly anybody manages to catch them.

BOBBY GETS READY FOR BED

Bobby is getting ready for bed.

He puts the tractor in the basket and looks around.

A-ha, the duck is sitting on the armchair.

Bobby picks up the duck and carries it to the bed.

Little bull... Where's the little bull?

Bobby finds the little bull and carries it to the bed.

And where are Mr. and Mrs. Rabbit? Lying there beneath the table.

Bobby picks them up and carries them to the bed.

Just the Teddy bears are missing.

Bobby finds the bears, one, two, three, seven – and carries them to the bed.

That's it. Now we can sleep.

But there's no room for Bobby.

LUDO

Big Bear and Little Bear were playing Ludo. Big Bear was doing well, Little Bear badly. The die would not obey him, he got no sixes, and his dad kept knocking him off.

“I’m not playing anymore!” said Little Bear.

“Come on. Don’t get angry. It’s only a game,” said Big Bear with a smile.

“But I’m not game,” said Little Bear, throwing the pieces in the box and rushing into the garden.

AT HOME WITH THE POLECATS

It was early morning and the Polecats were getting ready to sleep. They were lying in bed when a smell spread around the room.

“Dad,” said Little Polecat, “did you fart?”

“No.”

“Did you, mum?”

“No ...”

“Then it must have been me,” said Little Polecat, as if reciting the story of the Little Red Hen. Do you think she didn’t know that before? Of course she did, but it was so nice chatting with mum and dad. It was nice to lie beside them, hear their voices, at least for a little while, and fall asleep.

LEFT, RIGHT

Little Rabbit put out his paw and said:

“Is that left or right?”

“Right,” said his dad.

“And that? That must be left.”

“Yes.”

“Hooray!” said Little Rabbit with a jump, already looking at his other paws.

“So that’s right?”

“Yes.”

“Hooray!” he yelled and put out his other paw.

“And that’s left!”

“Yes,” said his dad.

“Yes, yes, yes!! And this,” asked Little Rabbit, all excited, “is this head right?”

PEARLS

Mother Mouse had bought herself a blouse with lots of small glittery beads, like pearls. Little Mouse looked at it with eyes wide.

“I’d like a top like that,” she said.

“When you grow up I’ll give you one,” said her mum.

She often said that, when Little Mouse wanted something that she was too young for.

And that was alright. Little mouse sat playing with her dolls and singing:

“My mummy wears pearls,

I’d also like pearls...”

She kept on singing until she asked:

“Mum, could you sew just one pearl on for me now?”

“Okay,” said her mum and sewed it on. Just one little bead, but Little Mouse was as happy as if she had wings. She was a fairy.

FATHER AND SON RABBIT

Father Rabbit went to the door and his son hurried after him.

“Are we going?” asked Father Rabbit and the young rabbit nodded.

He liked running with his dad. It was completely different than with his mum. She was not so fast and deliberately let her little boy overtake her. With dad it was for real, although it was still fun. They ran so that at the end they were out of breath. With dad, he went a little bit further each day.

When they were running they saw many things. One day they saw a bear’s footprints in the mud. The young rabbit could hardly believe his eyes – he felt anxious and lots of thoughts ran through his head.

“They’re so big,” he murmured, “and mine are so small...”

But his dad knew what he was thinking.

“I’m sure,” he said, “that it’s good to be a bear. You’re as strong as an oak tree and look very powerful – everyone would like that. And it’s probably equally good being a wolf: you have sharp teeth and whenever you want you can howl. But being a rabbit is best of all – look how fast our legs are!” he said and ran on.

“Yes, yes, fast legs!” called his son, running after him, happy to be a rabbit.

CAKE

Mother Fox said:

“What are we doing today?”

“Baaaking!!” said the little foxes.

“Why? It isn’t a special day,” said Mother Fox.

“We can make it a special day,” said the little foxes.

Mother Fox liked this, she had always taught them that they could make any day special.

“Okay, a cake. What kind?” she asked.

“A cheesecake!” said the first.

“Nooo,” said the others, “cheesecake stinks. We’ll have a lemon cake.”

“No, lemons are sour.”

“You’re a sourpuss.”

“Mum! Did you hear what she said? She said I was a sourpuss. Well, you’re stupid!”

And things got very heated, just like that, which often happens with little foxes.

“Hey,” said Mother Fox, “are we going to quarrel or bake a cake? I don’t have any lemons or any cream cheese. I don’t know what we do have. Let’s have a look first...”

And that was how she distracted them. They brought flour, sugar and eggs to the table, and the scales and the biggest mixing bowl. Then Mother Fox weighed the flour and the little foxes checked she got it right. Then the sugar: she added it a little at a time, to increase the excitement. But she had barely picked up the eggs when the arguments started again.

“Me,” said the first.

“No, you did it yesterday.”

“You’re always doing it. Now it’s my turn.”

“You always break the yoke.”

“Not every time. Last time I did them all just right.”

“Will you let me? Mum, look...”

“Slowly,” said Mother Fox, handing out the eggs one by one. Oh dear, she thought, how quickly everything happens in our family: battles, celebrations, joy, arguments, sometimes a little bit of quiet and then it all starts up again. What are we doing now? Oh yes, baking a cake. “Let’s hope it’s a good one,” she added, mixing in the flour.

Then there was a delicious smell, the cake was done and to finish it they added chocolate icing, whipped cream and roast hazelnuts. They worked so hard to decorate it: a big heap here, a little heap there, white here, brown there. Before they finished they were all starving.

“We bake the best cakes in the world,” the little foxes all agreed, even before they tried it.

“That’s true...” said Mother Fox – and gave each of them a big, big piece.

BICYCLE

Little Wolf got a bicycle. He loved riding it - he rode and rode until he got a puncture. Then he said to his dad:

"Dad, please mend my tyre."

"I will," said his father and carried on reading his newspaper.

"Dad, will you mend my tyre?"

"Yes..." said his father, but he didn't move.

Evening came, the tyre was still flat and the next day Little Wolf could hardly wait for his father to come home from work.

"Dad, dad, can we mend my tyre?" he shouted, as soon as he saw him.

"Wait until I've eaten," said his father. When Little Wolf asked again, his father didn't even answer, perhaps he hadn't heard, perhaps he was lost in thought. The next day he went on a business trip, then he had a lot of other work and then winter came, when you don't really need a bike.

In the spring, Little Wolf asked again:

"Dad, will you mend my tyre?"

This time the wolf got up. He looked at the punctured tyre and mended it, and then said:

"Be careful you don't get another puncture. I'm not going to keep mending it."

Little Wolf was careful. He only rode where all children ride.

But nothing happened to them, while his tyre was soon flat again. He crept into the house and asked:

"Dad, will you mend my tyre?"

"What?" snapped his father. "I've only just done it. If you can't be careful, you'll have to mend it yourself. You run over sharp things, and I have to listen to: dad, dad, dad..."

Little Wolf went outside and looked at his bike. He had never mended it and his father had never shown him how to do it. Should he just get down to it? No, he dragged it into the garage and left it leaning there, all on its own.

It was only some years later that he mended it - without having to ask his father.

Little Wolf grew up and his father grew old and bent. Now he had so much time for his newspaper that he got bored with it. And he wondered:

"Where's my son? Why does he never visit? And why does he say so little?"

LIKE DAD

Three owlets were sitting in a hollow waiting for their parents.

“When I grow up, I’ll be great at hunting,” said the first.

“When I grow up, I’ll be great at hooting,” said the second.

“When I grow up, I want to be just like Dad,” said the third.

“Why?” asked the other two.

“Because Dad can do all that and he’s kind as well,” said the owlet. He straightened up, thinking he looked like his dad.

And what did his brothers say?

“If you don’t mind, we’ll be like Dad, too...”

LITTLE PIG GOES ON A JOURNEY

Mother Pig had a little boy. She took care of him day and night.

"My son is a wonderful boy," she used to say and did everything to make him happy. She cooked for him at least three times a day and put the dish right under his snout.

"Good boy, good boy," she murmured, while her son ate and became a bigger and bigger pig. When you grow up, you have to live your own life, that's the usual way. Even Little Pig thought that he should see the world. He tied his belongings in a handkerchief and set out on his own. But how could he manage when until now his mother had done everything for him? The further he walked, the less happy he became. He felt thirsty, hungry and tired, but didn't know what to do.

"If I was at home with my mum," he thought, "I'd be eating potatoes now."

But his mother wasn't there and there were no potatoes either. He walked on.

"If I was at home with my mum, I'd be eating turnips and barley now," he sighed. But wherever he looked, there was only grass and other wild plants – how could he know what to eat?

"If I was at home with my mum, I'd be eating fried cabbage or corn. Just the thought of it..." he thought.

He felt dizzy from hunger and everything that had happened. He collapsed and banged his head on a nearby oak tree. The tree shook and acorns fell from its branches. He tried one and it wasn't bad, so he banged the tree again and had a real feast.

"I'll be alright," he said, wiping his snout. Because he was full he became wise. "You see," he said to himself, "happiness can be found almost anywhere. But sometimes it appears only when you bump into it really hard."

HOLIDAY

Mr. and Mrs. Hamster are on holiday. Just a short break, three days, without the children. The little ones are growing up – it happens quickly with hamsters.

They are sitting on a boat feeling content and relaxed. They are watching the waves, eating grapes and occasionally scratching each other's neck.

They get to a small island where there are enough hamsters to fill a house. All familiar faces, in a good mood, grilling fish, exchanging greetings and swaying in hammocks. They are jumping from tall rocks into the sea and walking among the olive trees. In the evening they sing happy songs that they had forgotten they still knew.

On their way home Mrs. Hamster says:

“Everything is mixed up inside me. The scent of the sea, the scent of home – I love both.”

“Me too,” says Mr. Hamster. “And you, as well.”

STRAWBERRIES

Four black ants were walking through the countryside.

“Every strawberry I find, how happy I am,” said the first.

“And the redder it is, the happier I am,” said the second.

“And the riper it is, the happier I am,” said the third.

“And the more I get, the happier I am” said the fourth.

“Is that so?” said the other three quickly. “And what about us?”

The fourth black ant blushed. It was true, he had taken almost all of them and hidden them in his basket.

“Sometimes I’m so clumsy!” he said. “I hurry so much I don’t notice anyone else. Here, let me share them! I like you more than a full larder.”

HAZEL NUTS

The squirrel was looking for hazel nuts. She crawled over the branches, reaching out—one here, one there – it was hard work. On one of the branches she closed her eyes and said:

“What if I just spoke to them? If I just wished and it came true. Like this:

Where are you, nice nuts?

I’m so hungry it hurts.

Just drop down to me,

From the top of the tree!”

This is what she said and then it happened. They really did fall. On her head, her paws, her nose, her bushy tail – ouch, how they rattled down!

“Stop it! Stop it! I don’t want any more! No more nuts!” yelled the squirrel.

And in a flash they were gone. The squirrel sat there, petrified. Had it really happened? Or had she only imagined it? She was hurting all over, but perhaps just from searching and stretching... was she awake or dreaming? Should she tell someone? No. They might make fun of her. So when she got home she just said quietly to her little brother:

“Words are powerful things. Now I can really see it. So think before you speak. Your words can knock things down or build them up. You can get, lose, change, choose – I’m sure I’m right. Night, night.”

THE WIND

“If I played the piano, then everything would dance,” said the mouse.

“And if I played the trumpet, it would echo from the hills.”

“If I played the drums, the world would shake.” she said, banging on a tree stump. “But I don’t have a piano, a trumpet or a drum. I’ve got nothing. And yet... maybe...” she jumped and opened her arms wide.

“The wind!” she said. “I can play the wind.”

She danced beneath the branches, hunting the wind, humming with it.

And from that day she has always played the wind when it blows strongly. She sings with it and her songs are carried across the world. Children hear them, but grown-ups not at all. That’s how it is and the mouse doesn’t mind. She just waits for a new wind to blow.

ON THE LAKE

Mother duck had seven ducklings. Seven fluffy balls, that she took swimming for the first time.

“Follow me,” she said. “Water doesn’t bite. It carries us, feeds us, cleans us. We rest on it. We live free on it. You need to worry only when there is no water.”

And in she jumped, the ducklings following.

“Alright?” she asked.

And the ducklings:

“Yes! Yes!”

“Good,” she said, “then let’s begin: this is duck weed...”

“On which we can feed,” replied the ducklings.

“There is a stream ...”

“Flowing like a dream.”

“There’s a dragonfly ...”

“High in the sky”

“That’s a newt.”

“It’s very cute.”

“Now, now, how excited you are,” said their mother. “See that water lily.”

“Where?”

“It’s so pretty.”

“Can we pick it then?”

“When are we coming again?”

But their mother was already floating on: a willow, a swan, birds sang to them, they caught fish, discovered a bridge, heard frogs, a plane, a tractor and soon it was almost evening.

“Let’s go home, that’s enough for today. And tomorrow we may come again,” said mother duck to her ducklings.

“Again! Again! How big and beautiful the world is!” quacked the little ones all the way home. And they had seen but a small corner of their lake...

SEVEN BEARS

“Toot-toot-toot!” sings the trumpet, branches break, birds fly away, rabbits flee – the bears are coming. Seven bears, seven neighbours going up the mountain. Why? To see what’s on the other side.

They come to a clearing full of wild strawberries. The first one bends over and starts to pick. The others call for him to be quick:

“I like it here, it’s the end of my climb.”

“Alright,” they say, “have a good time.”

And only six walk on.

On the slope they come across a fine hollow. One lies down and says:

“I’m not going to follow. This will be mine. It’s the end of my climb.”

“Alright,” they say, “have a good time.”

And only five walk on.

There’s a rustling in the bushes: a pretty young girl bear is there. The heart of one bear starts to fly, he leaves the path and says, all shy:

“I’m staying here... It’s the end of my climb.”

“Alright,” they say, “have a good time.”

And so there are only four.

They become thirsty, there’s no water to drink, even the puddles are empty. One of them gets angry:

“I’ve had enough! It’s the end of my climb.”

“Alright,” they say, “have a good time.”

And so there are only three.

They walk and walk, the path gets so narrow and beneath it a frightening drop. One decides to forget the top:

“I don’t like this. It’s the end of my climb.”

“Alright,” they say, “have a good time.”

And so only two make it. They hug, they look around. What beauty! What valleys, what peaks – it’s hard to believe! They don’t want to leave. But the first one pinches himself:

“Come on,” he says, “let’s go.”

But the other one thinks: Oh no.

“I know,” he nods, “that’s where we live. But now all I wonder is what’s over there, beyond that hill... The view’s only just opened up! I don’t want to go home – I want to roam.”

They get up, hug each other and go different ways. But for certain they’ll meet again one of these days.

BEFORE SLEEP

Mummy Fox and Baby Fox were lying down.

“Can we talk a little?” asked Baby Fox.

“Yes,” said Mummy Fox.

“When will you die?” asked Baby Fox.

“I don’t know.”

“When you’re old?”

“Perhaps. Some die when they’re old, others earlier... All I can say is that I’ll take as good care of myself as I can. I’ll avoid traps and hunters, and rest like you will now.”

“And you’ll go only when I’m grown up?”

“Yes, when you’re grown up...” said Mummy Fox.

“Then that’s alright,” said Baby Fox with a nod – and peacefully fell asleep.

UNCLE MATT

When Uncle Matt was young, he was always ready for a dance and a bit of fun. But now, how can he dance if he can barely stand? No, he sits on a bench and looks into the distance: "I'm old," he thinks. "If I didn't have my guitar I would turn to wood." He strums and hums – and feels less lonely. He sings, forgets a bit and carries on:

"I'll climb the hill,
For water clear,
Drink my fill,
For health and good cheer ..."

"Really?" he hears from beneath the bench.

Uncle Matt looks and sees an old rat squatting at his feet.

"Oh," he says with a wave of his hand, "it's just a song..."

The rat is very enthusiastic.

"It's good, very good," he applauds. "Come on, let's practice. Even if it's not perfect it will still do people good. How does it begin?"

"I'll climb the hill,"

"You mean we both will."

"For water clear..."

"My cup is here ..."

"Drink my fill..."

"Not a drop will spill ..."

"For health and good cheer ..."

"That's right, my dear..."

They sing and the rat also claps and bangs on the bench.

A field mouse hears them.

"Music, music," it squeaks, running over, rattling its tambourine.

From a bush peeps a cat that has lived quite wild for some years. He cautiously joins them, pulls out a whistle, blows – wonderful, with real feeling. He hasn't been in company for a long time, but it is somehow okay...

A hedgehog hears the whistle. He grabs his trumpet and blows – ohh!

A squirrel hears the trumpet. He is trembling with delight as he brings his old zither. He does not play alone, but when others begin you can count on him.

A stray dog appears, sits on the pile and stretches his harmonica. He is not always in tune, but who minds. Certainly not Uncle Matt! There are more and more of them, and those who don't play sing. Fire flies light up and the evening stretches into night. They all hug, although they were strangers not long before. Uncle Matt struts among them, nodding happily. Whenever there is good cheer, he is so happy. "Maybe it's the last time," he thinks. He offers no advice, no lessons, even though he is the oldest. Only when morning separates them, does he say:

"You see, how good it was for you all. I'm here alone and when you feel the urge... well, I always like company."

Then they part, each goes his own way, only the stray dog lingers.

"What about you?" asks Uncle Matt.

"I don't know... I find it hard to walk, I'm often cold, I'm no longer young..."

“Will you stay?” asks Uncle Matt and the dog nods.

“Don’t you worry. Things will be different and it certainly won’t be boring. You don’t know all the places we’ll go. Wherever our desire takes us.”

And they started. Uncle Matt sang and the dog joined in. They sang of distant places they knew and others they had never seen. They sang of great heroism and gave each other courage. Both toothless, but what adventurers.

“If we can’t travel the world, then we can bring the world to us,” said Uncle Matt with a grin, softly strumming the guitar. “We’re still alive, we’re still here.”

That’s what Uncle Matt is good at. He is good with words and always finds the right thing to say. He may be old, but he drives away loneliness from himself and from others.

HOW THE HEN MADE SOME TEA

The hen got up and looked around. It was going to be a lovely day.

"I could paint the house," she said, for her house had long needed a fresh coat of paint.

She went to get a bucket, ladder and brush, put on an old shirt and said to herself:

"Right. I'll just make some tea and then I'll begin."

But if she wants to make tea she first has to wash her cup.

She is washing the cup, giving it a good scrub, when she runs out of water.

"Oh dear," she says, "I was going to make tea, but I can't do it without water, I'll have to go to the stream."

She grabs the bucket and reaches for her cardigan to wrap round her. But the cardigan is torn, she can't go out like that – no, she had better mend it. She takes it into her room, saying:

"Needle, needle, needle... Where's the sewing needle? It's not with the scissors, not with the spoons, not with the writing things, wherever can it be?"

She rummages through everything, throwing things to one side, empties the drawer and the button box – the needle is nowhere to be found.

"Never mind," she says in the end, "I'll just have to go without a cardigan – it has warmed up by now, anyway."

She goes to the door with her bucket. The sun is already quite high and it is getting warmer. So it's no surprise when the hen says:

"If I hang the washing now, it'll be dry by evening."

She goes back into the house for the pail of washing, carries it to the washing line and while doing so – who knows why – she looks at her neighbour's garden.

"It's not possible..." she says, "his beans are already sprouting?! And I haven't even sown mine! Oh dear, oh dear – how time goes. I'll go and soak them straight away."

She rushes to the cellar, finds the beans and tips them into a dish. "If I give them a good soak, they'll sprout quicker." But then she suddenly remembers:

"Of course. I have no water. There's nothing for it – I'll have to go and get some."

She grabs the bucket and hurries to the stream. She rushes along, panting, gasping:

"Oh, I've got so much to do. But that's how it is if you have to do everything yourself."

She dashes home and then sees that the washing still isn't on the line.

"What?!" she says in surprise. "Didn't I hang it?" She is about to do so when she notices the cellar door is open. And didn't I close the door?" she is horrified. "I hope a mouse hasn't got in!"

She goes to close it and remembers the hoe – without a hoe it will be hard to plant the beans. She brings it from the cellar and as she does so she realises she is hungry.

"I must have something to eat, even if it's only something small," she thinks and quickly fries herself some eggs. She eats them up, sighs and gets up again –

"Now where was I? Oh yes, beans... Soak the beans," she remembers and goes outside.

She is going to get some water when she sees that the washing is still not hanging. She heads for the washing line and trips on the hoe she left by the vegetable bed. She gasps in pain. She has enough on her plate already and now this!

She puts a cold compress on the bump and finally gets to the washing. She hangs her sheets, towels and undies, then takes the pail back inside.

“Dearie me,” she sighs when she comes through the door. “Such a mess again. It’s the same every day. I keep working and working, rushing hither and thither, and never get things finished.”

She moves the ladder, paint and brush out of the way, and clears from the bed everything she threw there when she was looking for the sewing needle.

Day turns to evening and the hen sinks onto the bench, exhausted. She sees her cup on the stove and remembers:

“Of course. I said I’d make myself some tea! It’ll have to wait until tomorrow.”

And she falls asleep, tired out from all her work.

THE SWING

The rabbit picked some mushrooms, sold them and bought a length of rope. He made a swing and climbed on. It was a good one, for the rope was long, the branch high and the seat he cut was just right. But he had hardly started to swing when he heard:

“Me too,” and a badger peeped out of a bush.

“Okay, you too,” said the rabbit. “Come on, give me a push, then we’ll swap places.”

And the badger pushes, they swing, yell, laugh – it’s not surprising that the dormouse hears them.

“Me too,” he asks and the rabbit nods.

“Of course, you too. First you push and then you get on the swing.”

The dormouse jumps on and there are already three of them – swinging, pushing, all happy.

Then a tiny voice is heard:

“Me too...”

But the rabbit can see no one.

“Who?” he asks.

“Me,” can be heard again and on the tree stump beside them appears an ant.

“Of course, you too,” says the rabbit. Does he ask the the ant to push? No, it is too small.

It just needs to get on and hold tight. “For you know,” explains the rabbit, “this swing really flies.”

And so there are four of them swinging.

Then a vixen trots past.

“Ooh-la-la,” she murmurs. “I’d like a go, too.”

“Of course,” says the rabbit. “Hold on, push, we’ll take it in turns.”

“Of course we won’t take it in turns,” says the vixen. For foxes are different – in a moment they want to be the boss. They give the orders and if anyone disagrees then there’s trouble. They follow their own interests – and the rabbit knows that it is wise to back down. He slides from the seat, the vixen climbs on and cheekily says:

“Push me, long ears...”

The rabbit hesitates.

“Push, I say!”

“Okay,” says the rabbit with a shrug. “You swing right away, although we already had a different agreement.”

He pushes once, twice, ten times and asks:

“Enough?”

“Enough?!” says the vixen in surprise. “We’ve hardly begun! Don’t you see how nice it is? Go on, put a bit of effort into it!”

This annoys the rabbit.

“We also get a turn,” he says to her.

“You can, I’m not stopping you.”

“We’re all going to swing!”

“You will – when I’m finished,” says the vixen with a laugh.

“It’s not your swing!” says the rabbit. “I went picking mushrooms and sold them. Then I bought this rope.”

“You’ve done a good job.”

“I’ll get you off it!” but the vixen snarls and shows her sharp teeth.

“Just you try!” she snaps and the rabbit falls silent.

Then a voice comes from a bush:

“Me tooo!”

And who appears? A wolf.

The vixen is not small, but she is a little scared. She knows who is stronger. So she says:

“Of course, you too,” and she slides off the seat. She waves as if she has to hurry off somewhere and the wolf gets on the seat. Like a prince, he commands:

“Come on, then! Get going!”

And the rabbit immediately starts pushing, while the badger, dormouse and ant try to help. The wolf growls in delight and swings his feet. He loves it, and so he swings and swings. He almost dozes off, he’s in no hurry, but the rabbit is getting more and more tired and fed up.

“Is he going to stay on it the whole time?” he whispers. “And what about us? Shall we get a turn?”

“I’m sure we won’t,” replies the dormouse quietly.

“You see how it is. The wolf is going to stay on,” replies the badger in a whisper. “And when he gets off the vixen will reappear. We have a swing, but who for? For whoever has the sharpest teeth. For the one who gives the fiercest looks...”

“Knock him off – or shall I do it...?” says the dormouse bravely.

“So that he eats us?!” said the rabbit in a tiny voice.

“We can hide in the brambles, he won’t follow us there,” suggests the badger.

“And then what? Can we swing there?”

The fall silent, dejected. Then the ant says quietly:

“I know what to do. Just help me get on the seat.”

The rabbit helps the ant up and it disappears into the wolf’s coat. Then the ant nips as hard as it can.

“Oww,” exclaims the startled wolf, jumping from the swing.

He collects himself and gets back on. But the ant nips him again.

“Owww!” howls the wolf. He looks at the seat, blows on it, has a scratch and cautiously gets on. And so the ant nips him for a third time.

“Owww!” howls the wolf, dancing with rage. “Something’s wrong? It’s this seat!” He kicks it in anger – but guess what happens. He hurts his foot and it starts to throb.

The rabbit comes over, gets on the swing and says:

“Maybe it’s not just for you.”

“Maybe it’s for everyone,” says the dormouse.

“Let everyone push a bit, even you,” adds the badger.

“Then try again,” says the rabbit. “You see, it’s not happening to me.”

The ant stays quiet. It winks at the rabbit. Everything is going smoothly.

“Will you join us?” asks the rabbit gently and the powerful wolf begins. Oooh, how he can push, the swing is really moving, really flying and the wolf thinks that is great. And the others too, of course. The fun begins again, everything’s going well and they are all having a good time. They all have a turn on the swing, flying and yelling in delight.

And the vixen? Not her. Not yet. She is watching through the leaves, but doesn’t come any closer. Let her watch. Maybe then she will realise that a swing can be for everyone.

AUNTIE MARY AND THE BEAR

Auntie Mary was out of firewood. She took her axe and went into the woods. She walked and walked until she came to a large fallen beech tree.

“Just the thing,” she said. “I’ll chop the branches off and one, two, three, I’ll have firewood.”

And she gets down to work. She chops and chops and it seems oh-so easy. She chops until all that’s left is a bare trunk without branches.

“Wonderful,” she says and sits down on it.

But then the trunk gives way. Auntie Mary looks and sees that it is hollow and full of honey.

“Even better,” she says. “The only problem is – how do I get the honey home? If I go for a dish somebody may come and take it. And in any case, all my dishes would be too small. There’s nothing for it, I’ll have to drag it home,” she says and starts pulling. But Auntie Mary is not a horse. She is strong, but not strong enough. The trunk does not move an inch.

“What now?” she wonders and looks around. She sees a mouse.

“Come and help me, mouse,” she says. “You pull as well.”

The mouse squeaks and pulls with all his might, but the trunk does not move an inch

They see a rabbit.

“Come on rabbit, come and help,” they say. “This trunk is heavy but together we can do it.”

The rabbit takes hold, and pulls and pulls – but the trunk does not move an inch.

They see a badger walking through the spruce trees.

“Come on badger,” says Mary, “help us drag this to my house.”

The badger takes hold, and pulls and pulls – but the trunk does not move an inch.

“This is ridiculous!” says Mary. “One trunk, four of us and we can’t do it. Who else could help? The fox?” And she calls: “Fox! Fox! Come and help. The more of us there are, the stronger we will be.”

The fox comes, and they pull and pull – but the trunk does not move an inch. And so the fox says:

“We should probably ask the bear...”

“The bear?! Are you mad?” says Mary in fright. “Definitely not the bear. Do you want him to eat my honey?”

But the bear is already coming their way.

“What is it?” he asks. “What have you got?”

“Nothing,” says Auntie Mary, “just firewood.”

But the bear wasn’t born yesterday and has a good sense of smell.

“I can smell honey,” he says, “and I like honey. Out of the way, all of you. That honey is mine.”

Auntie Mary thinks otherwise. She has an axe and she wants the honey, but she knows that the best way to beat a bear is to use her head. So she says:

“It could be yours, too, but it isn’t yet. It will be if you earn it. Listen, if you carry all this honey to my house, you’ll get half and if you like I will bake you some honey buns. You don’t know how to make them, but they are good, mmm, so good. So, will you?”

“I will,” says the bear, easily lifting the tree trunk on his shoulder. “But don’t you try and trick me.”

"I've never tricked anyone," says Mary, "I know how to keep my word. Are you coming?" she asks the others and off they set.

Auntie Mary goes first, clearing the way with her axe. Then goes the bear, with the tree trunk on his shoulder. Then the fox, the badger, the rabbit and the mouse. They keep walking until they reach Auntie Mary's house. They put the tree trunk outside the front door and huddle together inside. The woodlanders are sitting on a bench, but Auntie Mary is already rushing around: she finds flour, cinnamon and eggs, and she is as fast as lightning. She bakes and bakes but the buns disappear as quickly as she can bake them. No one is in a hurry to leave.

Eventually, the rabbit gets up and says goodbye, followed by the mouse, the badger and the fox. But not the bear, he is not going anywhere. He sits there and suddenly says:

"You know what? There's no need for us to share the honey."

"Don't you fancy it any more?" asks Mary in surprise.

"Oh, I do. But I'll eat it when you do. I'm staying with you. I'm not going into the woods any more."

Auntie Mary trembles. She is not afraid, of course not, but to have a bear in her house all the time – that's something she has not counted on.

"What will you do in my house?" she asks.

"Eat and sleep."

"And if that doesn't suit me?"

"It will," replies the bear. He gets into bed and falls asleep.

When he wakes in the morning he immediately says:

"Buns!"

"Difficult," says Auntie Mary. "Without any firewood the oven is cold. First chop me some wood, then we'll see."

The bear gets down to it. He chops and chops, and then says once again:

"Buns!"

"Without flour it's difficult," replies Auntie Mary. "Load up some grain, take it to the mill and bring me back some flour. Then we'll see."

The bear obeys. He takes the grain, brings flour back and says once again:

"Buns!"

"What?" asks Auntie Mary in surprise. "Without walnuts it's impossible. Knock some down, gather them, shell them and then we'll see."

The bear knocks down some walnuts from the tree behind the house and gathers them and shells them. When he brings them he says once again:

"Buns!"

"The chimney is blocked, it's smoking," replies Auntie Mary. "Sweep the chimney and then it'll be alright."

But now the bear has had enough.

"Is it always like this at your place?" he asks. "Always something to do?"

"All the time, if you are your own boss."

"That's strange," says the bear. "I've long been the boss in the woods, but I've never had to work as hard as this. I think I'll go back. It suits me better."

And she said that he should go and that she wasn't offended and that he could call in any time. And so he left, but he called in now and then, every few years, bringing sweet honey with him and asking for buns.

PAPER

Four black ants were sitting in the heather. They were looking into the air, when one of them suddenly said:

“Sometimes I feel that I’m so full of words that I’ll explode.”

“And then what?” asked the other three.

“Nothing. I get a sheet of paper ready and there are no words anywhere.”