



There was once upon a time an old woman who wanted an apple dumpling for supper. She had plenty of flour and plenty of butter, plenty of sugar and plenty of spice for a dozen dumplings, but there was one thing she did not have—and that was an apple.

She had plums, a tree full of them, the ripest and reddest that you can imagine. But, though you can make butter from cream and raisins of grapes, you cannot make an apple dumpling with plums, and there is no use trying.

The more the old woman thought of the dumpling, the more she wanted it. And at last, she dressed herself in her Sunday best and started out to seek an apple.

Before she left home, however, she filled a basket with plums from her plum tree, and, covering it over with a white cloth, hung it on her arm. For she said to herself: "There may be those in the world who have apples and need plums."

She had not gone very far when she came to a poultry yard filled with fine hens and geese and turkeys. "Ca, ca, quawk, quawk, poterack!" What a noise they made! And in the midst of them stood a young woman who was feeding them with yellow corn. She nodded pleasantly to the old woman, and the old woman nodded to her, and soon the two were talking as if they had known each other always.

The young woman told the old woman about her fowls, and the old woman told the young woman about the dumpling and the basket of plums for which she hoped to get apples.

"Dear me," said the young woman when she heard this, "there is nothing my husband likes better than plum jelly with goose for his Sunday dinner, but unless you will take a bag of feathers for your plums, he must do without, for that is the best I can offer you."



"One pleased is better than two disappointed," said the old woman then. And she emptied the plums into the young woman's apron, and putting the bag of feathers into her basket, trudged on as merrily as before. For she said to herself:

"If I am no nearer the dumpling than when I left home, I am at least no farther from it; and that feathers are lighter to carry than plums, nobody can deny."

Trudge, trudge, uphill and down she went, and presently she came to a garden of sweet flowers: lilies, lilacs, violets, roses—oh, never was there a lovelier garden!

The old woman stopped at the gate to look at the flowers. And as she looked, she heard a man and a woman, who sat on the doorstep of a house that stood in the garden, quarreling.

"Cotton," said the woman.

"Straw," said the man.

"'Tis not—"



“It is,” they cried, and so it went on till they spied the old woman at the gate.

“Here is one who will settle the matter,” said the woman then. And she called to the old woman:

“Good mother, answer me this: If you were making a cushion for your grandfather’s chair, would you not stuff it with cotton?”

“No,” said the old woman.

“I told you so,” cried the man. “Straw is the thing, and no need to go farther than the barn for it.” But the old woman shook her head.

“I would not stuff the cushion with straw,” said she. And it would have been hard to tell which one was the more cast down by her answers, the man or the woman.

But the old woman made haste to take the bag of feathers out of her basket and give it to them.