

# Wee Little Khavroshechka

*by Daria Apakhonchich*

Once upon a time, there lived a poor orphan girl named Khavroshechka, who everyone called Wee Little Khavroshechka. No loved ones had she, so she worked for a family to feed herself.

She was kind and merry, yet the family she worked for did not care for her at all. The Mistress and the Master of that house were cruel to Khavroshechka, made her do the work of three and grudged her the very bread she ate. The Mistress' daughters—One-Eye, Two-Eyes and Three-Eyes—paid no attention to the poor girl at all.

Every day, Wee Little Khavroshechka did the hardest work—fed the cattle, lugged sweet water from the river, tidied up and gardened—while the Mistress scolded and yelled at her. Hard it was for the girl to live like this. Her biggest joy was looking after the cows that grazed in the field near the river. There, in the peace and quiet, surrounded by the cows and meadow flowers, Khavroshechka listened to the bees buzzing and birds singing, spun yarn and sang her songs to the cows.



One day, Wee Little Khavroshechka dipped a blanket in the river to wash it. Oh, no! The water ripped it from her hands. And it was the Mistress' favourite!

Oh, how angry the Mistress got—how she scolded!

“Weave me a new blanket! Better than the lost one! You were smart enough to lose it in one day, so now you must be smart enough to weave it in one day!”

One day! Or the girl would be punished horribly.

Wee Little Khavroshechka went to the field and cried bitterly. Who could spin and weave a blanket in just one day?

Her favourite spotted cow approached and told her:

“Do not cry, Khavroshechka, I will help you!”

“Ah, my dear cow, you can speak!”

“Yes, but only to those who can listen. You healed my leg to save me from being slaughtered at the hands of the Mistress. You are kind. Climb into my ear and out of the other, and all your work will be done in the sound of a snap.”

Wee Little Khavroshechka was amazed, but she climbed into the cow's ear. What a miracle! She was smaller than she'd ever been, and the inside of the cow felt larger than she'd ever imagined. It was spacious, like in a chamber in this rich family's home. Dark, but not black like in a closet, instead sparkling like the middle of a meadow at night where stars shine and the air smells of herbs and dew. The more she explored, the more she came to realize that the cow was not of a cow's shape inside—inside, she was a woman!

When Wee Little Khavroshechka went out from the second ear, a ready blanket was lying in front of her—beautiful and smooth as if woven by magical hands.

“Thank you, dear Mother Cow. Did you know that you are like a human inside?”

The cow laughed:

“My dear Khavroshechka, did you know you are like a little calf inside?”

They both laughed, and Wee Little Khavroshechka rested among the cows in the field and enjoyed the sun, and the river, and the flowers.

In the evening, the girl drove the herd into the cow shed and brought the blanket to the Mistress. The Mistress’ eyes flashed wide. Instantly, she licked her lips.

“You’ve proved you can do it. Another blanket tomorrow, then.”

The cow helped Wee Little Khavroshechka the next day. When Khavroshechka handed the blanket to the Mistress, her eyes narrowed this time.

“I demand a blanket every single day!”

Soon, the Mistress demanded more—two blankets every day—and more—three, four blankets every day!

The cow helped Wee Little Khavroshechka each time, naturally. Every day, the girl climbed into one ear and out the other, and she found woolen goods in a pile, all in the amount of time it took to hear a snap.

But not every day was the same because the cow was different inside each time Wee Little Khavroshechka passed through her. Sometimes the cow was like a bird inside, sometimes like a little lamb.

Never in her life had Wee Little Khavroshechka had so many happy days as now and so much freedom as now. When all the spinning and weaving was done, the girl could listen, notice and think. Soon, she discovered that she could understand the inside shapes of people and animals without even going through their ears—it was enough for her to listen to them and to look at them.

The Mistress' inside shape was that of a big wallet, whereas the Master had the inside shape of a box and sometimes of an axe. What inside shape did their daughters have? One-Eye usually had the shape of a mirror—just like the mirror she gazed in every morning. Two-Eyes had the shape of a beaded necklace—just like the necklace she put on every morning. Three-Eyes had the shape of a doll—just like the doll she played with all day.

The Mistress sold all of Wee Little Khavroshechka's woolen work at the fair. One day, the Duke visited the fair and ran his hands over Wee Little Khavroshechka's work, picked it up and enveloped himself in the blanket.

“Who spun and wove this most delicate wool? Tell me, quickly! If this weaver is a young girl, I'll take her for my wife.”

The Mistress grabbed the opportunity and immediately lied to the Duke, telling him it was her daughters who weaved so beautifully. So she sent her oldest daughter to watch how Wee Little Khavroshechka managed to produce such fine work.

One-Eye quietly followed Wee Little Khavroshechka and the herd out to the field, sat off to the side to remain unseen and waited. But Wee Little Khavroshechka noticed her and sang a song to lull One-Eye to sleep:

*What a warm and sunny day,  
Sleep, a little eye, o-hey.  
Little mirror, go to sleep,  
Drop your ears and do not weep.*

As One-Eye fell asleep, Wee Little Khavroshechka went through the cow's ears, and all her work was finished in a snap.

One-Eye went home none the wiser. The next day, the Mistress sent her second daughter, Two-Eyes, to watch Wee Little Khavroshechka.



Two-Eyes also hid in the grass, but Khavroshechka knew she had been followed and sang another lullaby:

*River flows and knows no sorrow,  
Sleep, one eye, and sleep, another.  
Little necklace sleeps inside,  
Little girl will sleep outside.*

Two-Eyes also fell asleep, and Wee Little Khavroshechka finished her work.

The next day, it was the third sister, Three-Eyes, who went to the field to watch Wee Little Khavroshechka. The girl sang a new lullaby:

*Sleep, one eye, and sleep another,  
Sleep, the third one, don't you bother.  
Sun is shining like a pearl,  
Sleepy doll and sleepy girl.*

Three-Eyes fell asleep, and Wee Little Khavroshechka climbed into the cow's ear and noticed that the cow was like an apple tree, branches covered with juicy apples. Wee Little Khavroshechka climbed out of the second ear and asked the cow:

“Why are you an apple tree today?”

“Ah, soon I will become an apple tree. This is my fate, which I can predict: the third eye of the Mistress' daughter was not fully closed. She saw you pass through my ears. She will tell the Mistress, who will have me slaughtered. I am a cow, and every cow is predestined to such an end. But do not think that I will disappear! Bury my bones in the garden. An apple tree will grow from them, and it will help you as I have helped you. The Duke will come to your house, and I will help you marry him.”

Wee Little Khavroshechka cried:

“No, Mother Cow, that's not what I want! I do not need the Duke; I do not want to get married! I will not let them kill you!”

Wee Little Khavroshechka turned to see how close to home Three-Eyes had gone. But Three-Eyes had not gone anywhere! She still sat alone, and tears dropped from her three eyes. She was not a doll but a little kid goat inside. Three-Eyes approached and said:

“Please forgive that I wanted to tell your secret to my mother! I will not tell her because I see that you two are best friends. I understand how difficult it is when your outside self is not what you are inside. I do not want to marry the Duke either. He does not know me and will only make me weave every day because he does not care whether his wife is a human or a cow—he only wants someone to work for him. With my three eyes, I see the inside of people too. The Duke is a bottomless pit inside, meant only for money. I will not tell my mother about you. But you must flee.”

“Thank you, dear Three-Eyes! I will never forget you!”

Wee Little Khavroshechka hugged the Mistress’ youngest daughter, then ran through the fields with the cow, through the forest—away, away, away from the village.

Meanwhile, the Mistress had come to the meadow to see why her youngest daughter was still not home. She chased after Wee Little Khavroshechka and the cow, shouting:

“Stop, thief! That’s my cow. Come back right now! Come get your punishment!”

But Wee Little Khavroshechka and the cow were already on the riverbank.

“Dear Mother Cow, let us ask the river to help us.”

Khavroshechka faced the river, she did not look so wee or little any more:

“Dear river, please, help us flee from the evil mistress!”

The river murmured and splashed. It turned to the girl with the cow and raised its head out of the water. Khavroshechka and the cow





entered one of the river's ears, the river splashed one more time and fell back. When the Mistress arrived at the river, all she saw was river foam. Since that day, no one in the entire country has ever seen Wee Little Khavroshechka and the spotted cow.

But far, far away, as far as rivers flow, as the clouds fly, as a heart can see, in the fairyland of apple trees, live the girl and the cow, and the bees buzz, and the birds sing.