

The Marriage of the Mouse (An Ethiopian traditional story)

Once a beautiful white mouse was born. As he grew into manhood his friends and his family took note of his handsome face, his regal manner, and his unblemished whiteness.

His parents often asked themselves, "Where will we ever find a wife worthy of this young man?"

When at last the time came for them to find a wife for him they had decided that only in God's family would they find a young woman who had all the virtues worthy of such a creature.

So, as is the custom, three older people in the family were chosen to visit God to ask him for a wife for the young handsome mouse. They went to his house and stood before it.

"Why are you standing at the door?" God asked, which was an invitation to enter. So they entered and said: "We are sent by the family of the beautiful white mouse, of whom you have doubtless heard. He is white as snow, and the most beautiful of all creatures. We are looking for a wife who is worthy of him. Only your family can give us such a wife for him, for your family is the greatest and strongest in the world."

God thought a little and smiled at the messengers. "That is a good thought. It is true that the young mouse should have just the right wife. But, alas, you have come to the wrong house.

For there is a stronger family than ours. It is the family of the Wind."

"But," the messengers said, "are you not stronger than the Wind?"

"It would seem that way unless you know. But the Wind is stronger than I. When the Wind blows he covers the earth with dust, he even blows dust into my eyes. So you can see he is stronger."

The messengers talked among themselves, and agreed that in that case only the family of the Wind was worthy. "Where is the house of the Wind?" they asked. God smiled on them and pointed it out, and they left.

When they arrived they stood before the house, and the Wind asked: "Why are you standing at the door?"

"We are looking for a wife for the finest of all mice," they said. "We went to God's house, but he said the Wind is stronger than he. And so we have come to ask for a daughter of your family to be the wife of our mouse."

The Wind listened and thought. And finally he said: "Your idea is an excellent one, and I thank you. But you see I am not the strongest. When I blow with all my strength I raise the dust and uproot trees, but against the Mountain I can do nothing. I blow and blow, but the Mountain does not move, and I am forced to retreat. So you see that the Mountain is stronger than I am."

"Where is the house of the Mountain?" they asked.

The Wind pointed out the house of the Mountain, and the messengers thanked him and left. When they came to the Mountain's place they stood there, and he asked: "Why are you standing at the door?"

They came in and the Mountain greeted them as is the custom.

"How are you? Did you bring good news? How are your cattle? How are your children?"

They answered him politely and then spoke of the beautiful mouse for whom they were looking for a wife. He listened thoughtfully while they talked, and when they were through he said: "Yes, it is right that such a creature should have the best for a wife. But it is not my family who can give him such a wife. There is another stronger than I. He digs at my foundations day and night. He makes holes in my sides, and causes me to crumble. His family is the most powerful."

"Ah, such a creature is powerful indeed!" the messengers said. "Where can we find him?"

The Mountain pointed out his house, and the messengers went to it. It was the home of a Mouse.

"Why do you stand before the door?" the Mouse said.

Once again they explained why they had come. The Mouse listened and said: "You have found a wife for your son! What a joy that our most exceptional families should be united!" And in this way the beautiful white Mouse found a wife worthy of him.