

The Old Man

6-8th Grade

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There once was a man of very few possessions that lived in a very small house in a very big forest. To most people it simply would not have mattered if this man existed or not, because he was very old and had no family or friends to speak of. The old man kept to himself mostly, excluding when he went to a small market for groceries. Of the very few items the man possessed by far the closest to his heart were a very old book and a very small spoon.

The spoon was very small, to the point where it was obviously not to be eaten with. That was all very well because the spoon was made of pure silver. The spoon's handle was decorated with small intricate designs made to look like pearls or grapes. The design went to very near the end of the handle where it smoothed out into a small bowl just about the size of the man's thumb.

The other possession, the book, was old and blue with gold titles engraved into the cover that said *Children's Stories*. The book was full of of limericks and poems for children written by a very obscure, but very talented author. The man loved this book dearly enough to take it to his death.

Both items were from his beloved mother who had passed away many years before. He had grown up poor, with only his mother and his brother and sister. His sister had been sickly as a child and had passed away at a very young age without the required medical care that they could not afford. His brother had left to work far away when he was just old enough to send what little money he could to his family, he had died in a construction accident when he was 18. He had never known his father.

That had left just him and his mother from when he was five till she died at the age of 84.

She cherished him and every year she scraped up as much money as she could to buy him a proper birthday present. She had gotten him the spoon on his tenth birthday and told him to never lose it and keep it always. He promised he would. The old book was one that she had read him time and time again since he was born. He could remember almost every story, every word. He loved the book and as an old man still read it from time to time, it always reminded him of his mother.

After she had died, he moved out of their shabby old house that he had lived in his whole life. It made him too sad to stay there, to see where his mother had stood and imagine she was still there with him. He knew he would never be able to move on living in that house. So he moved far away into a secluded house in the forest, to be with just himself and his thoughts.

One day the old man heard a knock on the door. This was a rare occurrence, him living where he was, and it surprised him out of his sleep. He stood and slowly walked to the door rubbing his eyes and yawning. As he opened the door he saw a small boy, maybe six or seven. The boy had bright blue eyes and red hair, he wore tattered clothes and held a black work hat that was obviously too big for his head. "Excuse me kind sir, could you spare a dime for me and my mother? She is too sick to work and my father isn't with us any more." The boy looked down at his hat, it must have been his father's.

"I'm sorry, I don't have any money at the moment." said the old man, feeling a twinge of guilt even though the statement was true. The boy's face drooped. "But you are welcome to come in for some food and a drink," said the old man.

The boy's face lit up, "could I?" he said enthusiastically.

"Of course!" said the man.

The boy followed him into the house and the man began to make a sandwich for him and one for him to bring home to his mom. The boy looked around the house, not knowing that was bad manners. He saw the blue book and picked it up.

"Sir?" said the boy from the living room where he had found the book on a side table.

“Yes.” replied the man good naturedly turning towards the direction of the voice.

“Could you maybe...” the boy faltered for a moment “read me a story?” The man was caught of guard and paused for a moment to take in the question.

“Never mind,” said the boy, putting down the storybook. “It’s just that my father...” The boy faltered again. “And I don’t have any books...”

“No,” said the man. “I will read you a story.” The old man dropped the knife he had been using to spread peanut butter on the boy’s sandwich and walked to the living room. He took the book from the boys hand and sat down on the brown leather couch next to the table and the boy sat down next to him. He read the boy a story and then another story and another until it was nearly dark outside.

And the boy loved them all. The man was happy to share the stories that had been only his for so long. Finally he told the boy that his mother was probably getting worried and told him he should probably go. He put the boy’s sandwiches in a bag and sent him home. The old man thought about this encounter all night.

The next day the same knock came on the door. The man got up again and opened it, and this time was not as surprised to find the little boy on the doorstep. “My mother said to give this to you.” He held out a woven wicker basket. “She made it. And she also told me to tell you that she was sorry I caused you so much trouble.” The boy recited the last part as if trying to mimic exactly what his mother said.

“Nonsense!” replied the old man. “You were no trouble at all. In fact I have something for you,” said the old man. “Wait here.”

The old man came back with something in his hand. As he took it out from behind him the boy could see that it was blue. Soon he recognized it as the story book from the day before.

“I want to give you this book,” said the man. “It is very special to me and I want you to take very good care of it.” The boy took the book gingerly. He was awed at the old man’s gift.

“Thank you,” said the boy, that blunt thank you was all he could say and it was enough. The old man smiled.

“You’re welcome,” he said.

The next day the old man was found dead in his bed. He had not suffered any pain, he had died peacefully and quietly of old age. It was found that his will had been amended the day before. Leaving his one and only possession, his spoon, to the young boy and saying that he should never lose it and keep it always, and the boy swore to himself that he would.