

## Straw, coal, and bean

An old woman lived in a village. She had gathered a serving of beans and wanted to cook them, so she prepared a fire in her fireplace. To make it burn faster she lit it with a handful of straw. While she was pouring the beans into the pot, one of them fell unnoticed to the floor, coming to rest next to a piece of straw. Soon afterward a glowing coal jumped out of the fireplace and landed next to them. The straw said, "Dear friends, where do you come from?" The coal answered, "I jumped from the fireplace, to my good fortune. If I had not forced my way out, I surely would have died. I would have burned to ash." The bean said, "I too saved my skin. If the old woman had gotten me into the pot I would have been cooked to mush without mercy, just like my comrades." - "Would my fate have been any better?" said the straw. "The old woman sent all my brothers up in fire and smoke. She grabbed sixty at once and killed them. Fortunately I slipped through her fingers." - "What should we do now?" asked the coal. "Because we have so fortunately escaped death," answered the bean, "I think that we should join together as comrades. To prevent some new misfortune from befalling us here, let us together make our way to another land."

This proposal pleased the other two, and they set forth all together. They soon came to a small brook, and because there was neither a bridge nor a walkway there, they did not know how they would get across it. Then the straw had a good idea, and said, "I will lay myself across it, and you can walk across me like on a bridge." So the straw stretched himself from one bank to the other. The coal, who was a hot-headed fellow, stepped brashly onto the newly constructed bridge, but when he got to the middle and heard the water rushing beneath him, he took fright, stopped, and did not dare to go any further. Then the straw caught fire, broke into two pieces, and fell into the brook. The coal slid after him, hissed as he fell into the water, and gave up the ghost. The bean who had cautiously stayed behind on the bank had to laugh at the event. He could not stop, and he laughed so fiercely that he burst. Now he too would have died, but fortunately a wandering tailor was there, resting near the brook. Having a compassionate heart, he got out a needle and thread and sewed the bean back together. The bean thanked

him most kindly. However, because he had used black thread, since that time all beans have had a black seam.

\* \* \*