

IT was a warm summer evening. The sun had already put on its orange-red night dress to sink behind the horizon in peace and quiet. George sat in front of his cottage on the old, blue lacquered wooden bench and enjoyed the fresh bean stew he had cooked for dinner.

He liked to be alone. Only sometimes, in very beautiful, sad or lonely moments, did he long for a woman to share the whims of life with.

George was neither attractive, nor did he have much money. Only the small, whitewashed house by the sea and his fishing boat he called his own. At the age of forty, it would have been time to start a family. But the loneliness of his existence was not exactly inviting to women. And George had long since resigned himself to going through life alone.

When he had eaten his stew and brought the plate back to the cosy kitchen where the scent of onions and cooked vegetables still hung, he spontaneously decided to go up to the attic. There were the photo albums of his family, which he hadn't touched for many years. Since he was the only child of his parents who had died early, the photos showed only his childhood, only the family idyll of three.

George was a little melancholic that evening and wanted to sit down on the bench in front of the house with a glass of wine and the albums, enjoy dusk and reminisce.

He fetched his ladder, then pushed the flap in the ceiling upwards with effort and climbed up into the tiny, dark chamber.

It smelled musty. The coastal wind whistled slightly through the roof beams, as if to sing a secret melody intended only for George.

Slightly bent over, because he was too tall to be able to stand upright under the ridge of the roof, he purposefully walked towards the corner where he kept the memorabilia.

He was about to open the big box with the albums when suddenly something red shone towards him! Puzzled, he paused. Hadn't something moved there? Right there in the corner, behind the box with his mother's garden tools?

Astonished, he came closer, pulled back the wooden box a little bit - and was deeply frightened: in front of him stood a tiny creature with fiery red hair and stared anxiously at him with wide-open eyes!

George could hardly believe what he saw. He stretched out his hand to reach for the little creature and see if it was real. But it ran away quickly! You could barely recognize the black-and-white striped socks and the red, pointed boots before it had run around a shelf and disappeared.

"That's not possible!"

The fisherman knelt down, carefully reached behind the old wooden shelf with one hand and closed his fingers around something soft and warm. Slowly he pulled it out.

"Let me go! How dare you! Let me go right away!"

A woman just as big as a finger is long, with fiery red hair, light green trousers, an equally green blouse and shiny red boots, hang, wildly struggling with her little legs, between his fingers.

George held her a little closer to his face. Apart from her size, the little woman looked normal. Only the auricles were a little pointed, as was her nose.

"Who are you? And what are you doing in my attic? How do you get here?"

"Hey! Let go of my sister immediately!", it suddenly shouted from the corner. George looked again at the shelf behind which he had brought out the little woman and saw that there was a second one standing there, with arms angrily akimbo! Now they came crawling out everywhere until the fisherman had nine little women standing in front of him, all with fiery red long hair and the same clothes. The tenth wriggled in his hand.

"What are you doing here?"

Meanwhile, the woman between his fingers was impatiently boxing his index finger, without George really feeling it. He also perceived the fact that she once bit him vigorously as a vague pinch.

“Well, what do you think! We live here! What do you want from us?”

George began to laugh quietly and sat down on the floor. He was careful not to accidentally sit on one of the little women.

“I live here, too! This is *my* attic, and it belongs to *my* house. How did you get in here? And what is your name anyway?”

The woman in his hand spoke up again: “My name is Emma. And we all crawled in under the back door a few years ago. You have a pretty big hole in there, do you know that?”

George thought for a moment. “Oh, you mean the knothole that’s at the bottom of the door. Yes, that’s right, it’s big enough for you!”

Emma grinned. “Big enough? It’s like an open door! For mice, too, by the way.”

“So that’s where they come from! Thanks for the tip, little Emma. But what are you doing up here? And why are you so small?”

Now, finally, he dropped the woman in his hand on the floor, whereupon she quickly ran back to her sisters. Another of the red-haired creatures stepped forward.

“We belong to the people of little women. We live together in groups in secrecy, so that you humans do not find and kill us.”

Frightened, the fisherman looked at her. “But why should we kill you?”

“Well, you may not kill us, but lock us in cages like animals! Don’t shake your head, we’ve seen it often enough!”

George stood up. “People sometimes do strange things when they are dealing with beings they don’t know. We always want to control, explore and dominate everything. I’m afraid that’s in most of us. But I regard it differently.”

One of the women looked at him suspiciously. “Oh, and how do *you* see it then?”

George kindly smiled at her. “And your name is ...?”

“Linda. And this is my twin sister Sophie.”

The man looked from one to the other and then laughed again. “Yes, that’s right, you look exactly the same. Look, it’s not very homely up here. It is cold, humid and the wind whistles through the beams. In addition, it doesn’t smell particularly pleasant. Why don’t you come along and live in my kitchen? If you promise not to mess up, we will certainly find a place where you can make yourself comfortable.”

The beings of the little people looked at their landlord in surprise, and for a moment there was complete silence. Then they threw their legs in the air with joy and cheered and danced together exuberantly! No one had ever been so kind to them!

It didn’t take long for them to pack up their stuff and pull it out from behind the shelf. When George had put aside some boxes and old books, the whole world of the little women was revealed to him: in a cavity in the wall, they had created their own home. It almost looked like a doll’s house!

“In the kitchen we find a place that is just as beautiful. Promised.”

He packed all their things in a box and then lifted one woman after another into it. After making sure they held on well, he carefully brought them down, placed the box on the kitchen floor, and helped the women climb out again. It took less than an hour for the industrious little creatures to store their clothes, tiny dishes, blankets, pillows and many other little things in a spacious corner in George’s cleaning chamber. It was only separated from the kitchen by a colorful curtain and offered enough space inside for the small people to set up. In addition, it was much drier and warmer here than up in the attic.

Then George wished the little red-haired creatures a good night and went to sleep. Before he closed his eyes, he wondered what miraculous coincidence had brought him these strange women, and how nice it was that he would now have company.