

# The little people of Swabedoo



A long, long time ago, little people lived on earth. Most of them lived in the village Swabedoo and they called themselves Swabedoodahs. They were very happy: they walked around smiling from ear to ear and said hello to everybody.

What the Swabedoodahs liked most was to give each other warm, soft fleeces as a present. Everyone of them carried a pouch over his shoulder and this pouch was filled with soft fleeces. When Swabedoodahs met each other, the one gave a fleece to the other. It's very nice to give someone else a soft fleece. It tells the other person he's special; it's a way to say: "I like you!" And it's just as nice to get such a fleece from someone else. You feel how warm and fluffy it feels to your face and it's a wonderful feeling when you put it softly and lightly with the others in your pouch. You feel recognized and loved when someone gives you a fleece en and you want to do something good, something nice right away. The little people of Swabedoo liked to give and receive warm, soft fleeces and their life together was always happy and cheerful.

Outside the village in a cold, dark cave lived a big, green kobold. He didn't really want to live there, outside, all alone and, at times, he felt very lonely. He had already stood at the rim of the village, more than once, and wished he could live between the cheerful Swabedoodahs; but he had nothing to offer -- and, besides, to him, the exchange of warm, soft fleeces was big nonsense. If he met one of the little people at the edge of the woods, he would grumble something unintelligible en and quickly walk back to his humid and dark cave.

One night, when the big, green kobold stood at the edge of the woods again, he found a friendly, little Swabedoodah. "Isn't it a wonderful day, today?" the little one asked, smiling. The green kobold just made a drab face and didn't answer. "Here, take a warm, soft fleece," said the little one, "this one's especially beautiful. It's surely meant

for you, otherwise, I had given it away already." But the kobold didn't take the fleece. First, he looked around to all sides, to be sure no-one was watching or listening. Then, he bent over to the little one and whispered in his ear: "Listen, don't be so generous with those fleeces of yours! Don't you know that, one day, you won't have any fleeces left, if you just give away everything?" Surprised and a little helpless, the little Swabedoodah looked up to the kobold. Who had, in the mean time, taken the pouch of the little one's shoulder and opened it. He sounded very satisfied, when he said: "Didn't I tell you? Just hardly 217 fleeces you've got in your pouch -- so, if I were you, I'd be careful giving them away!" And with that, the kobold went off, on his big green feet, and left behind a confused and unhappy Swabedoodah at the edge of the woods. He was so confused, so unhappy, that he didn't realize that what the kobold had said was totally impossible. For every Swabedoodah had an inexhaustible supply of fleeces. If he gave away a fleece, he would get one in return from someone else, right away, and this would happen time and again, a whole life long. So, how could they run out of fleeces?

The kobold also knew this but he trusted the credulousness of the little people. And something else he trusted; something he had discovered within himself and of which he wanted to know if it was inside the little Swabedoodahs, as well. So, he consciously lied to the little Swabedoodah, sat down at the entrance of his cave and waited.

In front of his home in Swabedoo the little, confused Swabedoodah sat, brooding. It didn't take long, before an acquaintance passed by, with whom he had already exchanged many warm, soft fleeces. "What a beautiful day!" his friend exclaimed, reached inside his pouch and gave the other one a fleece. Who, however, didn't accept it joyfully but warded it off with his hands. "No, no! You'd rather keep it," the little one exclaimed, "who knows, how quickly your

supply will decrease. One day, you'll be without fleeces, just like that!" The friend didn't get it, just shrugged, put the fleece back into his pouch and walked away, saying good-bye softly. But he took confused thoughts with him -- and on the same night, in the village, one could hear three more times, how one Swabedoodah said to another: "I'm sorry, but I don't have a warm, soft fleece for you: I have to be careful not to run out of them."

The next day, all this had spread through the whole village. Everybody started saving their fleeces. They did give one away, every once in a while, but only after long and careful deliberation and very, very cautious. And they weren't usually the especially beautiful fleeces but those with little stains and already a bit worn-out.

The little Swabedoodahs became suspicious. They started observing each other distrustfully; they started considering whether the other person was truly worthy of a fleece, or not. Some even went as far as hiding their fleeces underneath their beds, at night. Arguments arose from the question, how many fleeces someone owned. And, eventually, people started exchanging warm, soft fleeces for things, instead of just giving them away. The mayor of Swabedoo had even traced how many fleeces there were in total and, then, announced that the number was limited and declared the fleeces to be currency. Soon, the little people were arguing about how many fleeces spending a night or having a meal in someone else's house was worth. There were even some cases of fleece robbery! In the twilight, they didn't feel safe, anymore; while, before, the Swabedoodahs liked to walk in the park or on the streets, in the twilight, to meet each other and give each other warm, soft fleeces.

At the edge of the woods sat the big, green kobold, observing everything and being very satisfied.

The worst of everything happened some time later. Something started changing regarding the health of the little people. Many complained about pain in their shoulders and backs -- and, in time, more and more Swabedoodahs were taken by surprise by this illness called spinal weakening. The little people walked around bent -- in serious cases even bent to the ground. The fleece pouches were dragged on. Many started to believe, that the cause of their disease was the weight of the pouches and that it was better to leave them at home and put them away, there. It didn't take long before one could hardly find a Swabedoodah with a fleece pouch on his back.

The big, green kobold was very satisfied with the result of his lie. He wanted to find out, whether the little people would act and feel like him, when he, as was the case most of the time, had selfish thoughts -- and they had acted like him! The big kobold felt very successful. He came to the village of the little people more often, now. But nobody said hello to him with a smile, nobody offered him a fleece. Instead, he was stared at distrustfully, just as the little people stared at each other. The kobold liked this: to him, this behaviour was the "real" world!

In time, even worse things started happening in Swabedoo. Maybe, because of the spinal weakening; maybe, because no-one gave them a warm, soft fleece, anymore - who knows? - some people died in Swabedoo. Now, all happiness had disappeared from the village. Their grief was immense.

When the big, green kobold heard about it, he was very shocked. "I didn't want this," he said to himself, "I surely didn't want this. I only wanted to show them what the world is really like -- I really didn't want them to die!" He thought about what he could do, now -- and, indeed, something came up.

Deep inside his cave, the kobold had discovered a mine with cold, prickly stones. He had spent many years digging the prickly stones out of the mountain and storing them in a quarry. He loved these stones because they were so beautifully cold and they prickled so pleasantly when he touched them. But not only that: he also loved these stones because they were all his -- and, every time he looked at them, the impression of possessing great wealth gave the kobold a satisfying feeling. But now that he saw the misery of the little Swabedoodahs he decided to share his stone wealth with them. He filled numerous little bags with cold, prickly stones, put them on a big barrow and went to Swabedoo with it.

How happy were the little people, when they saw the cold, prickly stones! They took them gratefully. Now, they had something to give to each other, again. However: if they gave someone else a cold, prickly stone to tell him they liked him, a cold, unpleasant feeling came into their own hand and also in the hand of the person, who received the stone. It was not as nice to give away cold, prickly stones as to give away warm, soft fleeces. Every time, one would feel a strange 'tugging' at the heart, if one received a prickly stone. One also wasn't quite sure what the giver really meant. The receiver often stayed behind confused and with stinging fingers.

So, slowly but surely, it happened more often that a little Swabedoodah crawled underneath his bed, took the pouch with warm, soft fleeces, ventilated them a little bit in the sunlight and, if someone gave him a stone, he would give a warm, soft fleece in return. And how did the eyes of the receiver shine! Some walked home quickly and dug up their pouch to give a soft fleece, instead of a prickly stone, too. However, they didn't throw the stones away. Moreover, not all Swabedoodahs fetched their pouches, again. The cold and prickly stony thoughts were embedded too deeply in the heads of the little people. One could gather it from the remarks:

- "Soft fleeces? What's the intention, really?"
- "How can I find out whether my fleece is really wanted, or not?"
- "I gave a warm, soft fleece and what did I get in return? A cold, prickly stone! I won't let that happen again."
- "You never know where you're standing: fleeces, today; stones, tomorrow."

Probably, all little people of Swabedoo would have gladly returned to the things that were only natural to their grandparents. A single one looked at the bags in the corner of his room, filled with cold, prickly stones, so heavy that they were hard to bring along. Therefore, often, one didn't even have a stone with one to give to a friend. Also, the little Swabedoodahs secretly, without saying it out loud, wished for someone coming to give them warm, soft fleeces. In their dreams, they imagined how they all would walk around on the streets with cheerful, smiling faces and give each other fleeces, like in good, old times. When they woke up, however, there was always something that kept them from really doing it that way. Usually, they went outside and, then, saw what the world was "really" like.

This is the reason that giving away warm, soft fleeces hardly ever happens, anymore -- and usually not in public. But it does happen! Here and there, time and again. And who knows... one day...?