

Omusubi Kororin

The tumbling rice balls - Japan

Long ago and far away across the wide blue sea, there lived a hard working old man and old woman. One day, the old man went up into the mountains to gather wood. When he sat down to eat his lunch, one of his rice balls tumbled away. Down the slope of the mountain it tumbled until it finally rolled into a large hole. The old man chased after the rice ball and stopped at the hole. He bent down to look inside and from within the hole he heard a soft song.

A Rice ball tumbling suttenton
A Rice ball tumbling suttenton.

The old man was very excited, so he climbed back up the mountain, picked up another rice ball and rolled it away. Down it tumbled into the hole. When he crouched down near the hole he heard the song once more.

A Rice ball tumbling suttenton
A Rice ball tumbling suttenton.

The old man peeked into the hole, but as he did he overbalanced and tumbled right into the hole itself. As he tumbled he heard another song.

An Old man tumbling suttenton
An Old man tumbling suttenton.

In the hole was a mouse world, where hundreds of little mice were happily singing and making rice cakes.

"Thank you for the rice balls, kind sir. We will treat you to a feast to repay your kindness. Come and join us in our song," they called.
And so the old man and the mice sang,

A Rice ball tumbling suttenton
A Rice ball tumbling suttenton
An Old man tumbling suttenton
An Old man tumbling suttenton
Little mice tumbling suttenton
Little mice tumbling suttenton.

The old man had a wonderful time singing and dancing with the mice.

"Thank you for the feast, but now it is time for me to go home," he said.

"Wait, old man," said the smallest mouse, and he gave him a box. "Here is our gift to you."

When the old man returned home, he opened the box and was astounded to find it filled with money and treasure.

“There are enough riches to last us all our days,” the old man said to the old woman. And they were very happy for the rest of their lives. However, when the old man told his story to a greedy, old neighbour, the greedy, old man thought he would do exactly the same thing, so that he too could receive a fortune from the mice world. He immediately went into the mountains and dropped two rice balls into the hole, then tumbled in himself.

A rice ball tumbling suttenton
A rice ball tumbling suttenton
An old man tumbling suttenton.

Hundreds of mice were happily singing and making rice cakes. After the greedy old man entered the mouse world, he decided to chase a way the mice and keep all of the treasures for himself. So he pretended to be a cat and began to miaow.

"Miaow, miaow."

The frightened little mice scattered every which way and disappeared. Just as the greedy, old man thought he could now take all the treasure, everything went black. He realized that the money and treasure had vanished with the mice and now he was left with nothing. Not even a rice ball. Only after a long time scrabbling around on his hands and knees in the darkness, was he able to find the entrance to the hole and leave the mouse world.

Since that time, no one has ever found the mouse world again. Although sometimes, if you are walking high up in the mountains of Japan, you may hear this song carried by the wind.

A Rice ball tumbling suttenton, suttenton, suttenton...