



Ririro

READ ANYWHERE, ANYTIME

Toinette and the elves

Susan Coolidge

It was the evening before Christmas eve. Toinette stood at the well in the forest to get water for her family. 'This is the perfect moment to make a wish,' she thought. 'It is said that you have to say a certain rhyme three times.' But the words of the rhyme Toinette didn't know. 'How great would it be if I was beautiful, rich and a good person.'

Toinette knew that she wasn't easy. She was often in a bad mood and not very kind to her brothers and sisters. Suddenly she heard a little voice. It seemed close, but she didn't see anything. Quickly she filled her jug and wanted to go home. Then she heard a sob. It was really close. 'Is somebody there?' she called. Suddenly she saw a small figure on the ground. It was so small that Toinette had to kneel down to see it clearly.

It had the shape of a small, strange man. He wore a bright green robe that looked like the wings of a beetle. In his hand he had a hat with a long feather. Confused, she said to herself: 'This is so funny.' 'This isn't funny at all!' spoke the little man. 'That's no way to speak to me Toinette.' Toinette looked surprised. 'You know my name? That is strange. What is going on? Why are you crying, little man?'



'My name is Thistle and I'm an elf,' answered the man. 'How would you like it if you were stuck to a big thorn? Look!' He turned around and Toinette saw a big rose thorn in the back of his green robe. 'That's it? I can get it out for you,' she said. 'Be careful,' the elf cried. 'Ok I will be careful,' said Toinette. And while she said that she broke the thorn and gently removed it. The face of the elf lit up. 'You are a good child,' he said. 'One day I might be able to help you in return.'

'I would've helped you sooner if I had seen you,' said Toinette. 'I was wearing my hat,' said the elf. He put it on his head and disappeared. There was just a voice that said: 'And then I'm invisible.' 'Oh,' sighed Toinette, 'it would be so cool to be invisible.' 'I could give you my hat,' said the elf. 'But if you really like being invisible I don't know. Sometimes it's nice. Sometimes it isn't. You can be invisible, but you will need the seeds of a fern. You have to put the seeds in your shoe. If you don't have the seeds, it's not possible to become invisible.'

'Where can I find these seeds?' asked Toinette. 'I have no clue what they look like.' 'Of course not,' said the elf. 'Us elves take care of the seeds. Nobody can find it, except for us. But since you were so nice to me, I shall give you a little bit. You can become invisible and see if you like it.' 'Awesome,' said Toinette, 'can I have it now?' 'What do you think?' said the elf. 'You think I have my pockets stuffed with it? Of course not! Leave your bedroom window open tonight. I will come to you.' He put his finger on his nose, jumped up like a grasshopper, tapped his hat and disappeared.

Toinette hurried home. Her mother was already waiting for her. 'Where were you?' she sighed, 'I don't like it when you stay in the forest that long.' The kids wanted to know why she stayed out so long, but Toinette snubbed them. The kids quietly left as they often did when Toinette was around. 'Story?' asked her baby sister Jeanneton. But Toinette didn't feel like it. 'No, not tonight,' answered Toinette, 'ask someone else.'



It was bedtime and Toinette opened her window and stayed awake until she fell asleep. Suddenly she woke up and on her blanket sat her elf friend. The elf asked: 'Do you still want to be invisible?' 'Yes, very much,' answered Toinette. So the elf gave her a box with the fern seeds. He gave it to Toinette. 'Put this in your shoe and you will be invisible,' he said. 'And when you want to become visible again, take the seeds out of your shoes.' Then Thistle left Toinette's bedroom.

Immediately after Toinette fell into a deep sleep. The next morning she woke up feeling strange. Did this all really happen? She put on her beautiful Christmas clothes and shoes. She was ready for Christmas breakfast. Her mother was stirring the porridge on the stove. Toinette went to her, but she didn't move and didn't turn her head. 'What's the time?' asked her mother. 'Where is Toinette?' 'Toinette isn't upstairs,' said her sister Marie. 'Her door is open, but she isn't there.' 'That's odd,' said her mother. She went to the door and called: 'Toinette! Toinette!,' while Toinette was standing right there! 'I am invisible!' giggled Toinette.

'If she doesn't return, whatever,' said her brother Pierre, 'I want her room!' 'Maybe she was eaten by the big, bad wolf,' said brother Marc. The brothers started laughing. But Toinette didn't think it was funny at all. Did her brothers care so little about her? The morning passed and her mother kept walking to the door in hopes of seeing Toinette return home.

In the meantime the children were playing happily together. They were used to

playing without Toinette and didn't seem to miss her. It was Jeanneton who once in a while said: 'Poor Toinette. Gone!' 'Who cares if she is gone,' said Marc. 'If she would be here, it wouldn't be this much fun. All she does is whine and grumble. I'm fine that she's not here. Life will be better.' 'Yes, don't worry about Toinette,' called Pierre.

Toinette never before in her life had felt so unhappy and unseen as when she heard the children say that. It was never her intention to be mean to her brothers and sisters. She hoped that they still loved her. She snuck out the house and sat down under a bush in the forest. She started crying and thought: 'Jeanneton misses me. Oh! And I pushed her away and didn't want to read her a story. For Marie I never have time. And I've never been nice to Marc and Pierre. Oh boy...'

Then she heard an inner voice. 'But you could be kinder and nicer if you tried, couldn't you?' And Toinette put her hands together and said out loud: 'Yes I could! And that's what I'm going to do.' She untied her shoes and shook the seeds from her shoes. She put on her shoes and ran home. 'Where have you been all day Toinette?' asked her mother. Then she fell into her mother's arms crying and told her the whole story. Her mother listened to her. When she felt Toinette's hands and head she said: 'You have a fever, I shall make you tea with honey.'

The next day Toinette did everything she could to be nice and kind to her brothers and sisters. She didn't always manage, but you can't change completely from one day to the next. Nevertheless the kids noticed the change in Toinette and started loving her more each day.

Another year passed until it was Christmas eve again. Toinette was in a deep sleep when she was awoken by a loud bang on her window. It was Thistle visiting her. 'Merry Christmas!' yelled the elf. 'I've brought something for you.' From his pouch he grabbed some seeds. 'Oh no,' she yelled. 'I didn't like being invisible at all. The seeds scare me. I don't want them.' 'Don't be silly,' said Thistle. His voice sounded kind and serious. 'Last year it wasn't nice for you to be invisible. But take my advice and try again. You won't regret it, I promise.'

So Toinette put the seeds in her shoes. The next morning she went to the breakfast table without anyone seeing her. The little ones were sitting around the table with their eyes on the door, waiting for Toinette to surprise her. They all made a little surprise for her. 'It's going to be fun to surprise her,' said Marc. 'I can't wait until she's here,' said Marie. Everybody spoke kind words about Toinette. How beautiful and sweet she was. How nice it was to play with her.

Toinette couldn't wait any longer. She ran upstairs to take off her shoes. Within minutes she was downstairs. This time visible. 'Merry Christmas!' yelled the kids.

She received the presents and was never before so happy. That night Toinette kept her window open. Thistle came around midnight and brought his elf friends. 'How was it?' asked Thistle. 'Oh, this time it was great!,' said Toinette, 'I want to thank you!'

'You can do me a favor,' said Thistle. 'We really enjoy the broth of fern seeds. But you have to make it on a real fire. We're too scared to get close to fire, because of our wings. Could you make us some broth?' Thistle explained how to make it step by step and dozens of elves enjoyed the broth in the kitchen. Then they said goodbye. The last thing Thistle told Toinette was: 'Be happy, have a good mood and be kind, because that's where you'll find true happiness.'

And those words Toinette remembered forever. She lived happily ever after.

Stories help us explore cultures, learn moral lessons, connect with nature — or simply have fun. That's why ririro.com offers 3,000+ free stories — fairy tales, fables, bedtime stories, myths and more — for every age, in 13 languages, with free printable PDFs and often audio. Reading should be a right, not a privilege. Share ririro.com and spread the joy of reading.

Instagram: @ririro_reading · Pinterest: pinterest.com/ririrocom