



Ririro

READ ANYWHERE, ANYTIME

The Gingerbread Rock

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Once there lived near a forest a little boy named Hans and his sister, whose name was Lisbeth.

Their parents had died when they were tiny and their uncle had taken them because he thought they could do all the work and so save the money he would have to pay for a servant.

But this uncle was a miser and gave Hans and Lisbeth very little to eat, so very little that often they went to bed very hungry.

One night when they were more hungry than usual, for they had worked hard all day, Hans whispered from his cot in one corner of the room: "Lisbeth, let us get up and go into the woods. It is bright moonlight and we may be able to find some berries. I am so hungry I cannot go to sleep."

So out of the house they went, making sure their uncle was sound asleep, and soon they were running along the path through the woods.

Suddenly Hans stopped and drew Lisbeth back of a tree. "Look!" he said, in a whisper, "there is smoke coming from the side of that great rock."

Lisbeth looked and, sure enough, a tiny curling smoke was coming from a little opening in the rock.

Very cautiously the children crept up to the rock and Hans stood on tiptoe and sniffed at the smoke.

"It is a pipe," he whispered into Lisbeth's ear. "Some one is inside the rock, smoking."

"No one could live inside a rock," said Lisbeth, creeping closer and standing on a stone that she, too, might sniff at the curling smoke.

Lisbeth became curious when she discovered it was the smoke from a pipe. "You could boost me, Hans," she said, "and I could peep in and see if some one is inside."

Hans told her he did not think it was nice to peek, but Lisbeth told him it was very different from peeking into a house, and so Hans boosted her, for he was just as curious as his sister.

Lisbeth grasped the edge of the opening in the big rock with both her little hands, when, to the surprise of both children, it crumbled and Lisbeth lost her balance.

Over went both of them on the soft moss, and when they sat up Lisbeth held something in both her little hands.

"It's cake!" she said, with wide open eyes. "No; it is gingerbread!" she corrected, as she tasted it.

And, sure enough, it was gingerbread; the rock, instead of being stone, was all gingerbread.

Hans and Lisbeth forgot the smoke and their curiosity in the joy of their discovery, and soon both of them were eating as fast as they could big pieces of the Gingerbread Rock.



Hans and Lisbeth were not greedy children. So when they had satisfied their hunger they ran off home without taking even a piece of the gingerbread with them to eat the next day.

They were soon in bed and asleep, and if each had not told to the other the same story the next morning they would have been sure they had dreamed it all.

The next night they were hungry, as usual, and when the moon was well up in the sky out they crept again and ran into the woods.

But this time there was no curling smoke to guide them, and they tried several rocks before they found the gingerbread. For, strange to say, the place they had broken away did not show at all and there were so many rocks the children could not find it.

But at last Hans cried out with joy, "Here it is, Lisbeth!" and held up a big piece of gingerbread he had broken off.

Lisbeth, in her hurry to get a piece, broke off much more than she intended, and, to the surprise of both children, a big opening was made, large enough for them to step through.

"Perhaps we may find out where the smoke came from," said Lisbeth, suddenly remembering the smoke they had seen the night before.

Eating as they went, both of them stepped inside the rock and walked into a big room where, by the table, sat an old man asleep.

His glasses had tumbled off his nose and the pipe he had been smoking was on the floor beside him, where it had tumbled. His lamp had gone out and his paper

had slipped from his hand.

Lisbeth and Hans looked at him and then at the gingerbread they held. "It is his house," said Hans.

"And we are eating it up! What shall we do?" asked Lisbeth, looking very much frightened.

"Better wake him up and tell him," said Hans, "and perhaps he will let us bake some more and mend the place we have broken."

"I'll pick up his paper and pipe and brush up the ashes," said tidy little Lisbeth, "and you light his lamp, and perhaps he will forgive us when we tell him we did not know it was his house we were eating."

But instead of being cross when he awoke, the old man smiled at them and asked, "Did you eat all you wanted of the gingerbread?"

Hans told him they were very sorry and that they did not know any one lived inside when they ate the gingerbread.

"We will bake you some more and patch the place we made," said Lisbeth.

"Right through that door you will find the kitchen," said the old man. "Run along, if you like, and bake it."

And such a kitchen as Hans and Lisbeth found, for Hans went along, you may be sure, to fix the fire for his sister!

The shelves and cupboards were filled with flour and butter and eggs and milk and cream and meat and pies, cookies, puddings, but no gingerbread.

"We will get breakfast first for the man," said Lisbeth, "for I am sure he must be hungry and it is growing light. Look out the window."

To Hans's surprise there was a window. Then he saw a door, and when he looked out he found they were in a pretty white house with green blinds and not a rock, as he had supposed.

Hans and Lisbeth became so interested in cooking they quite forgot their own home or the unkind uncle who almost starved them, and when the breakfast was ready they put it on the table beside the old man.

"I thought you would like your breakfast," explained Lisbeth, "and now we will make the gingerbread and repair your house."

"After breakfast you may, if you like," said the old man, "but first both of you must eat with me."

My, how Hans and Lisbeth did eat, for while Lisbeth had cooked only ham and

eggs enough for the old man's breakfast, there seemed to be quite enough for them all.

And while they are eating we will see what the miser uncle was doing, for he had called the children at break of day and they were not to be found.

It happened that the ground was damp and the uncle saw the prints of their feet from the door to the road and along the road to the path in the woods, and then the soft leaves and moss did not show where they went.

Thinking they had run away and gone into the woods, their uncle hurried along, calling their names at the top of his voice.

As he came near the Gingerbread Rock the children heard him and began to tremble. "It is uncle," said Hans. "He will be very angry because we have not done our work."

"Sit still," said the old man as the children started to leave the table, and, taking his pipe, the old man sat down under a little opening like a tiny window and began to smoke.

Soon the children could hear their uncle climbing up outside, and they knew he had seen the smoke just as they had the night before, and was trying to look in.

Then they heard him tumble just as Lisbeth had when the Gingerbread Rock broke off in her hands, and they knew he had discovered it was good to eat, for all was still for a few minutes.

Nothing was heard again for a long time, and then the sound of some one breaking off big pieces was heard, and when Hans and Lisbeth climbed up, as the old man told them to do, and looked out of the opening they saw their uncle with a shovel and a wheelbarrow.

He was breaking off big pieces of gingerbread and filling the barrow as fast as he could.

But when he had filled it he could not move it, for it was no longer gingerbread, but stone he had to carry.

The old man motioned to the children to keep quiet, and he opened a door they had not noticed and went out.

Just what he said the children never knew. But they soon found out that instead of being poor, as they had thought, their miser uncle had taken all the silver and gold their parents had left and hidden it in his cellar under the stones.

The miser uncle disappeared and was never seen again, and the old man, who was really a wizard, told them where to go and what to do with their wealth. So they were happy ever after.

Of course, they never forgot the Gingerbread Rock or the kind old man. But because he was a wizard they knew they would never see him again, for fairies and witches and wizards are all enchanted and disappear in a very strange manner.

“Our good fortune came to us because we tried to be kind to the old man, I am sure,” said Hans one day, when they were talking about the Gingerbread Rock.

“Yes, and because we wanted to repair the damage we had done he knew we did not mean to do any harm,” said Lisbeth; “but I shall never eat gingerbread again without thinking of him.”

“Nor I,” said Hans.

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