



Ririro

READ ANYWHERE, ANYTIME

The plate of pancakes

Maud Lindsay

Once upon a time a woman was frying some pancakes, and as she turned the last cake in the pan she said to her little boy: "If you were a little older I would send you with some of these fine cakes to your father while he's at work, but as it is, he must wait till dinner for them."

"Oh, let me take them," said the little boy, whose name was Karl. "Just see how tall I am. And only yesterday my grandmother said I was old enough to learn my letters. Let me go!"

And he begged and begged till at last she gave him the brownest and crispest cakes, and putting them in a plate with a white napkin over them.

Now the path that led from Karl's home to the saw-mill where his father worked was easy, but it ran through the wood that was called Enchanted. Fairies lived there and goblins that liked to do mischief; and never before had the little boy been allowed to go there alone.

As he hurried along with the plate of pancakes in his hand he glanced into every green thicket that he passed, half hopeful, and half fearful that he might find a tiny creature hidden in the leaves. Not a glimpse of fairy or goblin did he see, but when he came to the blackberry bushes where the sweetest berries grow something seemed to whisper to him: "Stop, Karl, and eat."

"But I am taking a plate of pancakes for my father's dinner," said Karl speaking aloud.

"A moment or two will make no difference. You can run fast," came the whisper again.

"Oh, yes, I can run fast," said Karl; and he put the plate down under the bushes and began to pick the berries. They were as ripe and sweet as they had looked and every one that the little boy put into his mouth made him wish for another; and if he turned away from the bushes the whisper was sure to come: "One more and then go."

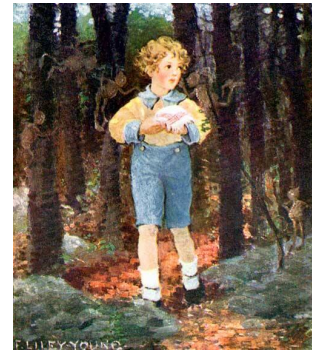
The pancakes grew cold in the plate, and the sun which had been high in the sky when Karl started from home slipped farther and farther into the west; but still he lingered, till suddenly the evening whistle of the mill sounded sharp and shrill in his ears.

"Why, it is time for my father to come home," he cried. "Dear me, what shall I do?"

There was nothing for him to do but to go home, so home he went with the plate of cold pancakes in his hand and the tears rolling down his cheeks. When he told his mother and grandmother what had happened they looked at each other wisely as if they thought more about it than they would say; but they didn't get angry at him.

"You will be more careful another time," they said and so the matter ended.

But Karl did not forget it. It was many months before his mother fried pancakes again, but as soon as he saw her turning the cakes in the pan he said: "I wish daddy had some of these fine cakes for his dinner, don't you, mother?"



"Indeed I do," said she, smiling at his grandmother as she spoke; and as soon as the cakes were done she selected the brownest and crispest, and put them in a plate with a white napkin over them and he could take them.

"I'll get there in time for my father's dinner today," he said as he started out; but in a very short while he was back with an empty plate in his hand, and the tears rolling down his cheeks.

"I only put the plate down for a minute while I chased a rabbit that said, 'If you catch me you may have me;' and when I came back every pancake was gone," he sobbed.

His mother and grandmother looked at each other wisely when they heard this.

"It is just as I thought the first time," said his mother. "The goblins are at work in the wood. He must never go there again."

But to this the grandmother would not agree. "Leave it to me," she said, and the very next day she fried pancakes, and selecting the brownest and crispest she put them in a plate with a white napkin over them and gave them to Karl to take them to his father.

"And if anyone asks you to stop or stay, just say the word that is spelled with the fourteenth and fifteenth letters of the alphabet three times in a loud voice, and all will go well with you," she said.

"All right," said Karl, nodding his head proudly, for he knew all his letters by this time and could spell hard words like c-a-t, cat, m-a-t, mat. "All right," but he did not stop to count the letters then for he was in a great hurry to be off.

"I guess my father will be glad to have pancakes for his dinner," he said; and he ran so fast that he was halfway to the mill before he knew it. There was no whispering voice in the wood that day and no talking rabbit to tempt him to a chase; but as he came to a place where another path crossed his own, a bird called out from the heart of the wood: "Quick, quick, come here, here, here——"

"Where, where?" cried Karl; and he was just about to start in search of the bird when he remembered what his grandmother had said:

"If anyone asks you to stop or stay, just say but the word that is spelled with the fourteenth and fifteenth letters of the alphabet three times in a loud voice, and all will go well with you."

"A, B, C, D, E, F, G," he chanted, counting the letters on his fingers as he said them, "H, I, J, K, L, M, N, O:" N was the fourteenth letter and O was the fifteenth. N-O; that was easy.

"No! No! No!" he shouted; and—do you believe it?—in less time than it takes to tell it he was at the mill door with every pancake safe and hot.

And the story goes that though he came and went through the Enchanted Wood all the days of his life he was never hindered by anything there again; and he never saw a goblin though he lived to be as old as his grandmother had been when he was a little boy.

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