



Ririro

READ ANYWHERE, ANYTIME

The raspberry worm

Andrew Lang

'Phew!' cried Lisa.

'Ugh!' cried Aina.

'What?' cried the big sister.

'A worm!' cried Lisa.

'On the raspberry!' cried Aina.

'Kill it!' cried Otto.

'What a fuss over a poor little worm!' said the big sister scornfully.

'Yes, we had cleaned the raspberries so carefully,' said Lisa.

'It crept out from that very large one,' put in Aina.

'And supposing some one had eaten the raspberry,' said Lisa.

'Then they would have eaten the worm, too,' said Aina.

'Well, what harm?' said Otto.

'Eat a worm!' cried Lisa.

'And kill him with one bite!' murmured Aina.

'Just think of it!' said Otto laughing.

'Now it is crawling on the table,' cried Aina again.

'Blow it away!' said the big sister.

'Tramp on it!' laughed Otto.

But Lisa took a raspberry leaf, swept the worm carefully on to the leaf and carried it out into the yard. Then Aina noticed that a sparrow sitting on the fence was just getting ready to pounce on the poor little worm, so she took up the leaf, carried it out into the wood and hid it under a raspberry bush where the greedy sparrow could not find it. Yes, and what more is there to tell about a raspberry worm? Who would give three straws for such a miserable little thing? Yes, but who would not like to live in such a pretty home as it lives in; in such a fresh fragrant dark-red cottage, far away in the quiet wood among flowers and green leaves!



Now it was just dinner time, so they all had a dinner of raspberries and cream. 'Be careful with the sugar, Otto,' said the big sister; but Otto's plate was like a snowdrift in winter, with just a little red under the snow.

Soon after dinner the big sister said: 'Now we have eaten up the raspberries and we have none left to make preserve for the winter; it would be fine if we could get two baskets full of berries, then we could clean them this evening, and tomorrow we could cook them in the big preserving pan, and then we should have raspberry jam to eat on our bread!'

'Come, let us go to the wood and pick,' said Lisa.

'Yes, let us,' said Aina. 'You take the yellow basket and I will take the green one.'

'Don't get lost, and come back safely in the evening,' said the big sister.

'Greetings to the raspberry worm,' said Otto, mockingly. 'Next time I meet him I shall do him the honour of eating him up.'

So Aina and Lisa went off to the wood. Ah! how delightful it was there, how beautiful! It was certainly tiresome sometimes climbing over the fallen trees, and getting caught in the branches, and waging war with the juniper bushes and the midges, but what did that matter? The girls climbed well in their short dresses, and soon they were deep in the wood.

There were plenty of bilberries and elder berries, but no raspberries. They wandered on and on, and at last they came . . . No, it could not be true! . . . they came to a large raspberry wood. The wood had been on fire once, and now raspberry bushes had grown up, and there were raspberry bushes and raspberry bushes as far as the eye could see. Every bush was weighed to the ground with the largest, dark red, ripe raspberries, such a wealth of berries as two little berry pickers had never found before!



Lisa picked, Aina picked. Lisa ate, Aina ate, and in a little while their baskets were full.

'Now, we shall go home,' said Aina. 'No, let us gather a few more,' said Lisa. So they put the baskets down on the ground and began to fill their pinafores, and it was not long before their pinafores were full, too.

'Now we shall go home,' said Lisa. 'Yes, now we shall go home,' said Aina. Both girls took a basket in one hand and held up her apron in the other and then turned to go home. But that was easier said than done. They had never been so far in the great wood before, they could not find any road nor path, and soon the girls noticed that they had lost their way.

The worst of it was that the shadows of the trees were becoming so long in the evening sunlight, the birds were beginning to fly home, and the day was closing in. At last the sun went down behind the pine tops, and it was cool and dusky in the great wood.

The girls became anxious but went steadily on, expecting that the wood would soon end, and that they would see the smoke from the chimneys of their home.

After they had wandered on for a long time it began to grow dark. At last they reached a great plain overgrown with bushes, and when they looked around them, they saw, as much as they could in the darkness, that they were among the same beautiful raspberry bushes from which they had picked their baskets and their aprons full. Then they were so tired that they sat down on a stone and began to cry.



'I am so hungry,' said Lisa.

'Yes,' said Aina, 'if we had only two good meat sandwiches now.'

As she said that, she felt something in her hand, and when she looked down, she saw a large sandwich of bread and chicken, and at the same time Lisa said: 'How very queer! I have a sandwich in my hand.'

'And I, too,' said Aina. 'Will you dare to eat it?'

'Of course I will,' said Lisa. 'Ah, if we only had a good glass of milk now!'

Just as she said that she felt a large glass of milk between her fingers, and at the same time Aina cried out, 'Lisa! Lisa! I have a glass of milk in my hand! Isn't it queer?'

The girls, however, were very hungry, so they ate and drank with a good appetite. When they had finished Aina yawned, stretched out her arms and said: 'Oh, if only we had a nice soft bed to sleep on now!'

Scarcely had she spoken before she felt a nice soft bed by her side, and there beside Lisa was one too. This seemed to the girls more and more wonderful, but tired and sleepy as they were, they thought no more about it, but crept into the little beds, drew the coverlets over their heads and were soon asleep.

When they awoke the sun was high in the heavens, the wood was beautiful in the summer morning, and the birds were flying about in the branches and the tree tops.

At first the girls were filled with wonder when they saw that they had slept in the wood among the raspberry bushes. They looked at each other, they looked at their beds, which were of the finest flax covered over with leaves and moss. At last Lisa said: 'Are you awake, Aina?'

'Yes,' said Aina.

'But I am still dreaming,' said Lisa.

'No,' said Aina, 'but there is certainly some good fairy living among these raspberry bushes. Ah, if we had only a hot cup of coffee now, and a nice piece of white bread to dip into it!'

Scarcely had she finished speaking when she saw beside her a little silver tray with a gilt coffee-pot, two cups of rare porcelain, a sugar basin of fine crystal, silver sugar tongs, and some good fresh white bread. The girls poured out the beautiful coffee, put in the cream and sugar, and tasted it; never in their lives had they drunk such beautiful coffee.

'Now I should like to know very much who has given us all this,' said Lisa gratefully.

'I have, my little girls,' said a voice just then from the bushes.

The children looked round wonderingly, and saw a little kind-looking old man, in a white coat and a red cap, limping out from among the bushes, for he was lame in his left foot; neither Lisa nor Aina could utter a word, they were so filled with surprise.



'Don't be afraid, little girls,' he said smiling kindly at them; he could not laugh properly because his mouth was crooked. 'Welcome to my kingdom! Have you slept well and eaten well and drunk well?' he asked.

'Yes, indeed we have,' said both the girls, 'but tell us . . .' and they wanted to ask who the old man was, but were afraid to.

'I will tell you who I am,' said the old man; 'I am the raspberry king, who reigns over all this kingdom of raspberry bushes, and I have lived here for more than a thousand years. But the great spirit who rules over the woods, and the sea, and the sky, did not want me to become proud of my royal power and my long life. Therefore he decreed that one day in every hundred years I should change into a little raspberry worm, and live in that weak and helpless form from sunrise till sunset. During that time my life is dependent on the little worm's life, so that a bird can eat me, a child can pick me with the berries and trample under foot my thousand years of life. Now yesterday was just my transformation day, and I was taken with the raspberry and would have been trampled to death if you had not saved my life. Until sunset I lay helpless in the grass, and when I was swept away from your table I twisted one of my feet, and my mouth became crooked with terror; but when evening came and I could take my own form again, I looked for you to thank you and reward you. Then I found you both here in my kingdom, and tried to meet you both as well as I could without frightening you. Now I will send a bird from my wood to show you the way home. Good-bye, little children, thank you for your kind hearts; the raspberry king can show that he is not ungrateful.' The children shook hands with the old man and thanked him, feeling very glad that they had saved the little raspberry worm. They were just going when the old man turned round, smiled mischievously with his crooked mouth, and said: 'Greetings to Otto from me, and tell him when I meet him again I shall do him the honour of eating him up.'

'Oh, please don't do that,' cried both the girls, very frightened.

'Well, for your sake I will forgive him,' said the old man, 'I am not revengeful. Greetings to Otto and tell him that he may expect a gift from me, too. Good-bye.'

The two girls, light of heart, now took their berries and ran off through the wood after the bird; and soon it began to get lighter in the wood and they wondered how they could have lost their way yesterday, it seemed so easy and plain now.

One can imagine what joy there was when the two reached home. Everyone had been looking for them, and the big sister had not been able to sleep, for she thought the wolves had eaten them up.



Otto met them; he had a basket in his hand and said: 'Look, here is something that an old man has just left for you.'

When the girls looked into the basket they saw a pair of most beautiful bracelets of precious stones, dark red, and made in the shape of a ripe raspberry and with an inscription: 'To Lisa and Aina'; beside them there was a diamond breast pin in the shape of a raspberry worm: on it was inscribed 'Otto, never destroy the helpless!'

Otto felt rather ashamed: he quite understood what it meant, but he thought that the old man's revenge was a noble one.

The raspberry king had also remembered the big sister, for when she went in to set the table for dinner, she found eleven big baskets of most beautiful raspberries, and no one knew how they had come there, but everyone guessed.

And so there was such a jam-making as had never been seen before, and if you like to go and help in it, you might perhaps get a little, for they must surely be making jam still to this very day.

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