

# The Wee Bannock

Flora Annie Steel

Once upon a time there was an old man and his old wife who lived in a wee cottage beside a wee burnie. They had two cows, five hens, and a cock, a cat and two kittens. Now the old man looked after the cows, the cock looked after the hens, the cat looked after a mouse in the cupboard, and the two kittens looked after the old wife's spindle as it twirled and tussled about on the hearthstone. But though the old wife should have looked after the kittens, the more she said, "Sho! Sho! Go away, kitty!" the more they looked after the spindle!

So, one day, when she was quite tired out with saying, "Sho! Sho!" the old wife felt hungry and thought she could take a wee bite of something. So she up and baked two wee oatmeal bannocks and set them to toast before the fire. Now just as they were toasting away, smelling so fresh and tasty, in came the old man, and seeing them look so crisp and nice, takes up one of them and snaps a piece out of it. On this the other bannock thought it high time to be off, so up it jumps and away it trundles as fast as ever it could. And away ran the old wife after it as fast as she could run, with her spindle in one hand and her distaff in the other. But the wee bannock trundled faster than she could run, so it was soon out of sight, and the old wife was obliged to go back and tussle with the kittens again.

The wee bannock meanwhile trundled gaily down the hill till it came to a big thatched house, and it ran boldly in at the door and sate itself down by the fireside quite comfortably. Now there were three tailors in the room working away on a big bench, and being tailors they were, of course, dreadfully afraid, and jumped up to hide behind the goodwife who was carding wool by the fire.

"Hout-tout!" she cried. "What are ye a-feared of? 'Tis naught but a wee bit bannock. Just grip hold o' it, and I'll give ye a sup o' milk to drink with it."

So up she gets with the carders in her hands, and the tailor had his iron goose, and the apprentices, one with the big scissors and the other with the ironing-board, and they all made for the wee bannock; but it was too clever for them, and dodged about the fireside until the apprentice, thinking to snap it with the big scissors, fell into the hot ashes and got badly burnt. Then the tailor cast the goose at it, and the other apprentice the ironing-board; but it wouldn't do. The wee bannock got out at the doorway, where the goodwife flung the carders at it; but it dodged them and trundled away gaily till it came to a small house by the road-side. So in it ran bold as bold and sate itself down by the hearth where the wife was winding a clue of yarn for her husband, the weaver, who was click-clacking away at his loom.

"Tibby!" quoth the weaver. "Whatever's that?"

“Naught but a wee bannock,” quoth she.

“Well, come and welcome,” says he, “for the porridge was thin the morn; so grip it, woman! grip it!”

“Aye,” says she, and reaches out her hand to it. But the wee bannock just dodged.

“Man!” says she, “yon’s a clever wee bannockie! Catch it, man! Catch it if you can.”

But the wee bannock just dodged. “Cast the clue at it, woman!” shouted the weaver.

But the wee bannock was out at the door, trundling away over the hill like a new tarred sheep or a mad cow!

And it trundled away till it came to a cowherd’s house where the goodwife was churning her butter.

“Come in by,” cried the goodwife when she saw the wee bannock all crisp and fresh and tasty; “I’ve plenty cream to eat with you.”

But at this the wee bannock began dodging about, and it dodged so craftily that the goodwife overset the churn in trying to grip it, and before she set it straight again the wee bannock was off, trundling away down the hill till it came to a mill-house where the miller was sifting meal. So in it ran and sate down by the trough.

“Ho, ho!” says the miller. “It’s a sign o’ plenty when the likes of you run about the countryside with none to look after you. But come in by. I like bannock and cheese for supper, so I’ll give ye a night’s quarters.” And with that he tapped his fat stomach.

At this the wee bannock turned and ran; it wasn’t going to trust itself with the miller and his cheese; and the miller, having nothing but the meal to fling after it, just stood and stared; so the wee bannock trundled quietly along the level till it came to the smithy where the smith was welding horse-nails.

“Hullo!” says he, “you’re a well-toasted bannock. You’ll do fine with a glass of ale! So come in by and I’ll give you a lodging inside.” And with that he laughed, and tapped his fat stomach.

But the wee bannock thought the ale was as bad as the cheese, so it up and away, with the smith after it. And when he couldn’t come up with it, he just cast his hammer at it. But the hammer missed and the wee bannock was out of sight in a crack, and trundled and trundled

till it came to a farm-house where the goodman and his wife were beating out flax and combing it. So it ran in to the fireside and began to toast itself again.

“Janet,” says the goodman, “yon is a well-toasted wee bannock. I’ll have the half of it.”

“And I’ll take t’other half,” says the goodwife, and reached out a hand to grip it. But the wee bannock played dodgings again.

“My certy,” says the wife, “but you’re spirity!” And with that she cast the flax comb at it. But it was too clever for her, so out it trundled through the door and away was it down the road, till it came to another house where the goodwife was stirring the scalding soup and the goodman was plaiting a thorn collar for the calf. So it trundled in, and sate down by the fire.

“Ho, Jock!” quoth the goodwife, “you’re always crying on a well-toasted bannock. Here’s one! Come and eat it!”

Then the wee bannock tried dodgings again, and the goodwife cried on the goodman to help her grip it.

“Aye, mother!” says he, “but where’s it gone?”

“Over there!” cries she. “Quick! run to t’other side o’ yon chair.” And the chair upset, and down came the goodman among the thorns. And the goodwife she flung the soup spoon at it, and the scalding soup fell on the goodman and scalded him, so the wee bannock ran out in a crack and was away to the next house, where the folk were just sitting down to their supper and the goodwife was scraping the pot.

“Look!” cries she, “here’s a wee well-toasted bannock for him as catches it!”

“Let’s shut the door first,” says the cautious goodman, “afore we try to get a grip on it.”

Now when the wee bannock heard this it judged it was time to be off; so away it trundled and they after it helter-skelter. But though they threw their spoons at it, and the goodman cast his best hat, the wee bannock was too clever for them, and was out of sight in a crack.

Then away it trundled till it came to a house where the folk were just away to their beds. The goodwife she was raking out the fire, and the goodman had taken off his breeches.

“What’s yon?” says he, for it was nigh dark.

“It will just be a wee bannock,” says she.

“I could eat the half of it,” says he.

“And I could eat t’other,” quoth she.

Then they tried to grip it; but the wee bannock tried dodging. And the goodman and the goodwife tumbled against each other in the dark and grew angry.

“Cast your breeches at it, man!” cries the goodwife at last. “What’s the use of standing staring like a stuck pig?”

So the goodman cast his breeches at it and thought he had smothered it sure enough; but somehow it wriggled out, and away it was, the goodman after it without his breeches. You never saw such a race—a real clean chase over the park, and through the whins, and round by the bramble patch. But there the goodman lost sight of it and had to go back all scratched and tired and shivering.

The wee bannock, however, trundled on till it was too dark even for a wee bannock to see.

Then it came to a fox’s hole in the side of a big whinbush and trundled in to spend the night there; but the fox had had no meat for three whole days, so he just said, “You’re welcome, friend! I wish there were two of you!”

And there were two! For he snapped the wee bannock into halves with one bite. So that was an end of it!

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