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A Really Good Little Reindeer Herder

We are grateful to the storytellers of the past and of those of today, because they keep the stories alive for us.

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This all happened a long time ago.

Siblings Johan, Nella and Jakob are in the mountains. Jakob is the youngest. He is only a little boy.

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They have a nice room under a big stone in Grovhtemehkie. They are hungry. Nella cooks porridge for them.

Big brother Johan has been minding the family's reindeer for several days. His clothes and shoes are wet. He sits by the fire, warming himself.

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At last the porridge is ready. Nella lifts the pot away from the fire with a stick. Oh, no! The pot falls off the stick and turns over. Burning hot porridge splatters everywhere.

The porridge spills onto Johan's bare foot. He gets a nasty burn that hurts a lot. He must go home.

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Nella and Jakob don't leave. They are the family's reindeer herders.

The weather becomes warm, and the two children decide to move the reindeer to a better place. They begin to herd the reindeer. But some of the animals run off in another direction.

It's hard work to find the animals that got away. The children must bring the rest of the herd with them while they run back and forth looking for them. They get very, very tired. Jakob is crying. Luckily they find the animals, and finally herd them all to Skaaloevaajje.

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It's nice to be in Skaaloevaajje. Nella and Jakob herd the reindeer there.

But they themselves don't have much food to eat. Every day they have less and less food in their rucksack. They don't have any nets or hooks to go fishing with.

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One day they get some bad news. Three wolves have killed many of their neighbours' reindeer. Now the days and the nights become difficult for the little reindeer herders.

They must mind the animals all the time so the wolves don't attack them. The children are afraid. Little Jakob is so frightened that he is trembling. All the same, they do a good job herding their reindeer. No animals from their herd are eaten by wolves.

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Nella and Jakob think it's best if they move their reindeer herd to Raerienguevtele. It's peaceful there.

When they arrive there, Nella must go home to get food for them. Before she leaves, she tells her little brother sternly that he must take very good care of the animals while she is away. The animals must stay together, so they don't spread out over a large area of land.

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Jakob is all alone up in the mountains. He is sad. And he is hungry.

Gujm comes over to his side. Jakob strokes the dog while he sits watching the animals grazing. He rests his head on the dog's soft fur. A bird chirps from a little hill nearby. It sounds as though the bird is sad. It is alone, just as he is.

There are two lakes here, Säälejaevrie and Mehkienjaevrie. Between these lakes is an overhanging rock that forms a roof, where he can find shelter. That's a fine place to stay.

That evening, Jakob goes to the shelter. He thinks that tomorrow Nella will return with food for them – good bread, butter, cheese, meat and potatoes. He imagines this until he falls asleep.

The herd of reindeer stays quietly out on the headland by Säälejaevrie Lake.

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When morning comes, Jakob lets the animals leave the headland. He takes them to places where there is good grazing land for them. In the evening he leads them out to the headland again. Gujm helps him. Afterwards he goes up to the shelter.

In the shelter, Jakob lights a little fire so there will be smoke. That's good for both him and the dog, because the mosquitoes don't like smoke, and will stay away. It's also a good way to keep warm.

His rucksack is empty. There is no food left. How long will he have to wait for Nella? Isn't she coming soon?

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Jakob is hungry.

He takes out his cup. Then he takes a lasso, and throws it to catch a female reindeer. He milks the reindeer, and drinks the milk. Oh, that tastes good! Afterwards it is the dog's turn. Jakob milks the reindeer into the cup, and pours it out onto the rocks. Gujm slurps it up.

Every day Jakob does the same thing. He milks the reindeer and drinks. Gujm sits beside him and waits. Then Jakob milks the reindeer again and gives it to the dog. Afterwards he lets the herd leave the headland.

When evening comes, he gathers the reindeer and leads them out to the headland again. Then he goes into the shelter.

He does this every day.

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Early one morning something awakens Jakob suddenly. Half asleep, he hears Nella calling his name. Oh, he is so happy – she is coming at last!

He sits up. Listens. It is completely quiet. Nella isn't coming after all.

Gujm doesn't know what is going on. The dog jumps around, back and forth, chases his tail and barks. Jakob chases him away. Silly dog.

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There are a lot of mosquitoes and midges early in the morning. Jakob can't sleep. It is cold. He can't understand what has become of his sister. Will she come today?

He gets up and runs down to the herd of reindeer on the headland. He lets the animals out. Jakob is frightened when he thinks of the wolves. Will they come here? He minds the herd and keeps the animals together. He listens. He looks carefully in every direction. Could there be wolves nearby? He has a stick that he can use to defend the reindeer. He listens and watches while he holds the stick tightly in his hands.

In the evening he goes back to the shelter. The sad bird follows him, and chirps from every little hill. Have the bird's family all flown away from here?

Jakob thought that Nella would come today. But she didn't.

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One day while he is herding the reindeer, he comes up with the idea of trying to fish. He has seen that there are fish in the stream. He walks along the banks of the stream and thinks. His mother has told him how children caught fish in a stream when she was a little girl. Could he also try to catch fish with his hands?

He cuts as many birch twigs as he can manage to carry. Then he sticks the twigs into the stream, making a sort of fence. But there are big holes in his fence that the fish can swim through. He must cut more twigs.

At last Jakob is satisfied, and thinks that he has managed to make a fine birch fence. He walks up alongside the stream. He must walk carefully so he doesn't scare the fish away, and he must not make a shadow in the stream. When he thinks he has gone far enough he turns and wades out into the stream. He whips the water with large birch branches to scare the fish towards the fence. In this way he struggles down the stream. When he comes to the fence, he bends down quickly and sticks his hands in the water. He wants to grab the fish and throw them far away onto the moor.

But there isn't a single fish there. The fish have all swum through his fence.

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Then the fog comes. It begins to rain. There is water everywhere, and it is cold.

In the evening Jakob is completely worn out. His clothes are wet. His shoes are wet. He is freezing. Luckily he has dry wood in the shelter. He wants to light a fire to get warm.

But what has become of his matches? Jakob pats his stomach to see if the matches are under his jacket. No, they are not there. He looks in his rucksack. He looks between the birch twigs he is lying on. At last he finds them in his little leather pouch.

But what has happened? Jakob's matches are wet. He can't light a fire with them.

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Little Jakob lies in the shelter, crying. Why doesn't anyone come?

p 42

The next morning, Jakob is awakened by hearing Gujm growling. He is frightened. Are the wolves coming? What will happen to the reindeer? He quickly finds his stick. His whole body is trembling while he stands, listening.

Jakob looks at Gujm and sees that the dog's tail has begun to wag. Then Gujm begins to bark. It is clear that the person who is coming is someone the dog knows. Then he sees – it is Father who is coming!

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The first thing that Father does is to embrace his son. He holds Jakob in his arms for a long time. Father doesn't say anything. He can see that Jakob has been crying, but doesn't talk about it.

Father has brought food and dry clothes in his big rucksack. He lights a fire, makes coffee and cooks some food. Jakob tells him how he has minded the animals and found good grazing land for them. He tells Father about the wolves. And he tells him how he milked the reindeer.

Jakob says nothing about how hungry he has been. And he says nothing about how frightened he has been – during both the days and the nights.

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Father listens to everything that Jakob tells him. He is proud of his son. Then he smiles and says, "He is a really good little reindeer herder, this boy of mine!"