

THE CAKES

Written in 1850

By Christoph von Schmid

Chapter 1

A Welcome Surprise

Young Fred, a happy lively boy about ten years old, was the son of the woodranger at Grunenthal. His father received a letter one morning, which he was to carry from Mr. von Grunenthal to Rauhenstein, a castle that lay beyond very high mountains and in the heart of a thick forest.

“It will be a hard journey,” said the father, “especially as the hurt I got the other day in the foot, when we were hunting, is not yet healed. The journey will take full three hours. But since our good master orders, I must obey.”

“Give the letter to me, father,” said Fred, offering his services. “The whole road, I know goes through a forest, but it will not be heavy for me. I know it well from this to our own bounds, and can easily find out the rest of it, and safely give the letter into the hands of Mr. von Rauhenstein.”

“Into his own hands, and to no other, you will give the letter,” said the father, “you know him well. There is a large sum of money in the letter, perhaps you may get something for your trouble.” He then described the road for Fred, from their own bounds to Rauhenstein.

The little fellow buckled on his hunting pouch, and slinging his piece over his shoulder, started on his journey.

He arrived safe at the castle and told the servants, that by orders, he was bound to deliver the letter into the master’s own hand. The servant led him up the broad stone steps into a splendid apartment, where von Rauhenstein was engaged with a party of officers at the card table. Fred made his best bow to the gentlemen, and delivered his letter, in which, it appeared, there were one hundred gold pieces. Mr. von Rauhenstein went to his writing desk and scrawled a few lines, acknowledging the receipt of the money. “All right,” said he, sitting down in a hurry to the card table. “You can retire now—no other answer is required—it will follow you.”

With a heavy heart, poor Fred returned down the broad stone stairs, for he was hungry and thirsty, and heartily tired. But as he was passing through the court, he was met by the cook, who was coming out of the garden, with a large knife in one hand and cauliflowers in the other. She knew by the poor boy’s face the state of his feelings.

“Come with me, little forester,” said she, kindly, “and I will give you some bread and a good drink. You would not be able for your journey—you are far from home—and there is not a single house on the way. You must not take it ill of our master, that he offered you nothing. He does not mind those things himself, but he allows us to give something to persons in your state.”

The cook brought Fred into the kitchen, where the large fire was blazing on the hearth. “Lay aside your pouch and fowling-piece and sit down here,” said she, pointing to a little table in the corner of the kitchen. There she gave him plenty of soup and meat, vegetables and bread, and a small drinking pot. Fred thought he had never been feasted so sumptuously. He was refreshed and ready for his journey, but before he started, he said, one hundred times, at least, “God reward you,” to the cook, and that, too, with as much

reverence as if she had been the lady of the castle. He would have even kissed her hand, had she allowed him.

Happy as a prince, Fred set out on his journey. But when he had been nearly a half hour on the road, he saw a squirrel in an open space in the forest. The little animal was a perfect stranger to him, for he had never seen any of them in the forest of Grunenthal. Fred was young and he resolved to take the squirrel alive. He flung a piece of a rotten bough at the little animal and started in full chase, from oak to oak, into the depths of the black forest, where he lost sight of his game, and what was much more serious, lost the road.

He wandered about during the rest of the day, and half the succeeding night, through the thick forest, till at last, sinking under hunger and fatigue, he flung himself down on some brambles and fell into a troubled sleep. He rose in the morning, more faint than he had before he lay down.

He looked around and advanced he knew not whither. The place was utterly unknown to him. The wild deer, starting up and bounding off in terror when they saw him, convinced him that he must be in the heart of some unfrequented wood. A herd of swine crossed his path and among them a huge boar, which bristled its neck, and grunted, and skinned its teeth at him, and made the poor boy scream in agony, and fly for his life.

He continued to wander about until noonday, when, unable to move farther, he tottered and fell exhausted to the ground. He cried and called as loud as he could, but there was no answer except the echo of his voice in the silent forest. He could not get a berry or a drop of water to quench his thirst.

There he lay, faint and despairing at the foot of a pine tree. He earnestly prayed to God not to desert him. He took his pouch to get, if possible, a few crumbs of the bread which he had brought with him from home and eaten on the road to Rauhenstein. But what was his joy—his rapture, on finding a large piece of a cake and some fine rich pears.

“Oh!” said he, “it was the cook put these here without my knowledge.” The poor boy shed tears of gratitude and resolved that he would be always charitable to the needy, especially if they were strangers, and also that if ever he were rich enough, he certainly would not forget that kindness of the good cook. “Under God,” said he, “it was she that saved my life. If she had not given the cake and pears, I never could get out of this forest alive.”

Chapter 2

The Good Way Taught & Walked Therein

Standing up with refreshed strength and better courage, he moved onwards once more. He walked on in the direction of Grunenthal, as well as he could judge by the position of the sun, and after having worked his way for more than an hour, he heard the cheering sounds of the woodman's axe in the distance. Hurrying on in the direction of the sounds, he found two men cutting down a large pine tree. They pointed out the road to Grunenthal, where he arrived safely to the great joy of his parents, who had been dreadfully alarmed on his account.

His father reproved him severely and gave him good advice. “Thus it is,” said he, among other things, “when men allow themselves to be drawn away from the right road to follow their pleasures. You might have perished in that wild wood far from your father's house, without the poor consolation even of catching that squirrel. Our way through life is like a road through a wild forest, where pleasures, like ferocious animals, lie in wait to destroy us, if we are tempted from the right path. As I told you the road through the forest,

so does God point out to us in His commandments the right path in our pilgrimage through this world. Let no earthly pleasure ever seduce you to the right or the left from the way of virtue. One false step might ruin you forever and prevent you from entering your true Father's house beyond the grave."

"The love of pleasure," he continued, "perverts the heart of man and makes him insensible to noble and generous feelings. Mr. von Rauhenstein, with whom you are so much displeased, is not a bad man. But he was so much taken up with his play that he never thought either of giving you some refreshment, though you stood so much in need of it, or some money, though the hundredth part of what he had staked that morning would have sent you home as happy as a prince. Do you guard yourself against that which displeases you so much in another. Let your pleasure or your own will never engage you so as to make you insensible to the wants and happiness of others. Imitate whatever you find good in others. Be ever as kind and generous to all men, as Rosalie, the cook, was to you in the castle of Rauhenstein."

Fred was a good forester, faithful and true to his employer, open and generous to all, and without one stain on his good name. But he was particularly remarkable for his kindness and charity to travellers and the poor. He never forgot Rosalie's kindness. He went to the castle one time to tell her how much she had done for him, but she had left the service and no person could give him any account of her. From that day forward, he never got any intelligence of his kind benefactress.

In the course of some years, Fred was promoted for his integrity and intelligence to the office of chief huntsman under the king's woodranger, and afterwards was made forester of Tannek, one of the most lucrative posts in the gift of his master.

After his marriage, he often told his wife, who was as good as himself, of many adventures of his boyish days, and especially how he had been saved from certain death in the forest by the kindness of Rosalie. They resolved that since they could not find her, they would prove their sense of her goodness by as liberal charity to travellers and the poor as their means allowed. They had a good opportunity of indulging their charitable dispositions as the forester's lodge, in which they lived, lay on the border of the forest near the high road.

Chapter 3 The Poor Stranger

Fred's wife went one very sultry day to bring a glass of water from the well. There she found a poor woman sitting on the bench, which her husband had made under the shady pines near the well for the accommodation of travellers. The strange woman, though clean and neatly dressed, was evidently poor, and appeared very tired and unhappy. A wicker basket and her walking-stick lay near her on the bench.

Struck by the mild and woe-be-gone expression of her countenance, Fred's wife saluted her cordially and invited her to lodge to take some refreshment. The offer was gratefully accepted and after the poor woman had taken some bread and drink, she and her host became so happy together that the stranger told the whole history of what was weighing so heavy on her heart.

"I live," said she, "about twelve leagues from this. My husband is a gunsmith and was able to earn a good deal of money by muskets, pistols, and other firearms. He worked day and night so that we were able not only to support ourselves and the two children with whom heaven has blessed us, but also to lay aside some provision for the future. But latterly it has been the will of God to send us many hard trials.

“My husband’s hand was hurt so severely by a musket he was trying that he has not been able to work during the last year. The war then came down on us and stripped us of the greater part of our property. The doctor’s bill still continued a heavy drain and as we had no money coming in, we were badly able to meet it—but to crown all our misfortunes, we lost our only cow by the murrain. We had already raised money on the credit of our lands and house, and had no means left of replacing our cow as the neighbors would not lend the money.

“Without a cow, we could not live. So I resolved to undertake a long journey to my brother, hoping that he would give the money. I did make that long journey and I am now on my way home. I told him my hard case and begged his help. Twenty or thirty crowns would have bought a cow for me. My brother was willing enough to help me, but his wife would not allow him to give me a penny. She was displeased with me, she said, because I married a man who had no property. All I got was a small sum, that my brother slipped secretly into my hand, but it will hardly cover half the expenses of my journey. But it was all the pocket money he had then at his disposal. Ah!” said she, “I pity my brother, and still more my poor husband and children. They are anxiously praying for my return and expecting some help. What a grief it will be to them when I meet them with empty hands.”

Chapter 4 The Discovery!

At this moment, the forester was returning home with his bag well-stocked with game. He saluted the poor stranger kindly. His wife told him how she had invited her to come in and what a melancholy tale had just been told.

“Right, right, Dora,” said Fred, “it makes my heart glad to see you acting as I would, consoling the poor stranger and giving her share of what God has given to us. Generosity, especially to strangers and travellers, is a most sacred duty.”

“And good reason I have to say so,” said he, taking a chair and sitting down near the woman, while his wife placed a glass of water on the table before him. He then told his boyish adventure in the forest and how he had been saved from certain death by the kindness of Rosalie, the good cook of Rauhenstein.

“O the Lord is good!” exclaimed Rosalie, clasping her hands, “I am that cook. Rosalie is my name. Frederic is yours—and your father was forester of Grunenthal. I can tell you some particulars you omitted in your story. It was green peas I gave you with the soup and roast meat—and the drinking glass had a pewter cover with a stag stamped on it, which particularly struck your fancy. You were very much displeased with Mr. von Rauhenstein and remarked that he was true to his name, but I told you he was a better man than he appeared to be. Words cannot tell how happy I am that the bit of cake saved your life, and that I see you now so happy and independent. Wonderful are the ways of God—I could never recognize you. The slender, little forester is now grown an able and fine looking man. God’s blessing has been on you—as everything around me shows.”

The forester now expressed his joy on meeting his old friend and bade her a thousand welcomes. “I thought I knew you,” said he, “when I met you first, but I could not distinctly remember who you were or where I saw you. The thought struck me that you might be my friend Rosalie, though time had made some change in you. To be sure of the fact, I told you my adventure in the forest. God be praised! I have found you at last. I am the happiest man under the sun—You must not stir this day. Come, Dora—the best in your kitchen and cellar for our friend.”

Rosalie pressed hard to be allowed to depart. "Tomorrow morning I must be at home," said she. "I will walk a few leagues in the cool of the evening—the twelve leagues would be too long a journey for tomorrow."

"That matter can be easily managed," said Fred. "I will yoke my pony tomorrow and drive you in my light wagon as far as you like. I will drive you to your own door, if I am not obliged to attend the prince with the hunting party that are on a visit with him."

Fred's wife was as happy as himself on finding Rosalie. There was no resisting their united entreaties. She consented to stop that night. The hostess prepared a dinner in her best style and produced at the dessert a large cake, prepared in the same way as that which Rosalie had given to Fred. It was wreathed with garlands of the most beautiful flowers and in the center the words "To Gratitude," were formed with white sugar in imitation of pearls.

"Oh!" said Rosalie, "don't put the knife in that beautiful cake. I have dined so heartily I will not touch it."

"Very well," said the hostess, "but you must put the cake in your basket and bring it home in the morning to your children."

Fred had ordered his best wine from the cellar and he and his wife drank to the health and happiness of Rosalie and her family. "We are bound to do so," said he, "were it not for you, this house, where I and my Dorothy are so happy, would have other tenants."

Chapter 5 The Odd Cake

Next morning, at break of day. Fred was busy preparing to escort his old friend to her family. His wife had a good breakfast on the table and when all was ready, she put the large cake into Rosalie's basket, together with other provisions for the road, and some few presents for the children.

Fred accompanied Rosalie half the journey. When he took his affectionate leave of her, he promised to visit herself and family as soon as possible, and get his fire arms repaired by her husband—a promise which he faithfully performed.

Rosalie continued her journey in good spirits. When she approached her house, she saw her two children, William and Theresa, advancing on the road to meet her. When they saw her, they sprung forward with joyful cries, and asked what she had in the basket. "O wait until we go home," said she, "we must not be so impatient and curious."

Her husband met her at the door and all entered together. Rosalie told the hard reception she had got from her sister-in-law, and also announced the sad news, that she brought home no money. Her husband was sadly disappointed, nor could all she said of the happy night she spent with the forester dispel his gloom.

Rosalie opened her basket and produced the cake. The sight of it made the children forget all their sorrows, but when the father saw them clapping their hands and loudly expressing their joy, he could scarcely repress his tears.

"What good is the cake," said he, "where are we to get twenty or thirty gilders to buy a cow?"

But lo—when the mother tried to cut the cake for the children, the knife stuck so fast in it that all her strength could not divide it.

"This is an odd cake," said she, "it must have been baked too much." She broke the crust—and the first thing that met her eye were two thalers of gold—and below them, in order a dozen others of the same value.

Fred's joy on finding the cake in his pouch was not greater than hers when she saw the glittering coin. "Gracious heaven," said she, "Frederic told his wife to put them in the cake to enable us to buy a cow and to raise us from poverty."

"The gold is worth thirty-two gilders and some crowns," said little William, who was learning his table of coin in school. "It will buy a fine cow for us."

And then we can have milk and butter again," said Theresa, hopping about and clapping her hands."

The father's face brightened and with fervent heart he thanked God for the favor. "That cake which you gave, many years ago, to the little boy," said he, "was capital well-laid out. It has been paid back one hundred thousand fold."

"Yes," said the mother, "and the smallest act of kindness, to one of our brethren, will be much more amply rewarded in heaven."

"O, my children," adds the father, "let us be always merciful that we may obtain mercy."

THE END

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