Reader's Digest

70 Favorite Stories for Young Readers

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The Reader's Digest Association, Inc.
Pleasantville, New York Montreal

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Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 76-19444
ISBN 0-89577-031-8
Printed in Hong Kong

OSB/285

INTRODUCTION

All children love a good story. And here is a book brimming with good stories—for your children to read and for you to read to them.

Teachers and librarians agree that children must be exposed to books in the home and to parents who read for their own enjoyment if they are to develop a true enjoyment and appreciation of reading. *70 Favorite Stories for Young Readers* provides you with a rich resource for family reading, both alone and aloud, that will help them to develop a lifetime reading habit and an enduring love of books.

Reading aloud brings pleasure to the parent and child alike. To the child it brings a special sense of closeness, reassurance and security. To the parent it brings a sense of personal satisfaction in one more act of devotion and tenderness. Although reading is usually a private activity—especially in later years—the act of reading aloud creates a special fellowship that thrives with the shared companionship and mutual enjoyment of characters met through the printed page, memorable scenes described, and beautiful language mutually savored.

What stories do parents choose to read to their children? Many will want to pick stories which were their favorites when they were young. This book gives ample opportunity: stories by Washington Irving, Nathaniel Hawthorne, O. Henry, Lewis Carroll and Richard Bennett are among the old favorites to be found here. And parents will be delighted to discover in this book little-known stories by authors of old favorites—such as the choices by Louisa May Alcott, Dorothy Canfield and Mary Mapes Dodge.

This collection will help you to make accessible to your children a selection of the best and most interesting stories for reading aloud. But it goes far beyond the preschooler or the beginning reader. Here are tales that satisfy the needs of young readers right up to the teens who want to curl up with a good book of almost endless variety. For this book provides a selection of stories from almost every category that appeals to children. Fantasy, magic and the fairy tale are well represented, with the incomparable "Many Moons," by James Thurber, "How to Tell Corn Fairies if You See 'Em," by Carl Sandburg, "The Griffin and the Minor Canon," by Frank R. Stockton, and many others. And here is a wealth of folk literature representing the many ethnic and national groups from around the world. In these tales you and your children can visit Pakistan, Burma, Finland, Italy, West Africa, Rumania, and sample one of the many facets of Jewish life in Isaac Bashevis Singer's beautiful "Menaseh's Dream."

You will find in these pages funny stories, animal tales, realistic stories of mystery and adventures past and present, stories with a spiritual message and scary stories like "Godfrey and the Werewolf," by Halina Gorska, "The Crow Child," by Mary Mapes Dodge, and "El Eñano," by Charles J. Finger. Just a word about these last: psychologists today agree that the tingle of anxiety such stories arouse is a pleasurable one because the safe return home of the child in the story only reinforces the young reader's own sense of a secure home and family.

But this is enough of introduction. In these *70 Favorite Stories For Young Readers* a world of enjoyment and adventure awaits you and your children. Read on!

—Mary Virginia Gaver

Past president American Library Association; editor *Elementary School Library Collection,* Bro-Dart Foundation

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The Reindeer Slippers

The slippers were now too small for Alan's feet, but his mind and his imagination had not yet outgrown them

BARBARA WILLARD

The two suitcases were out on the beds. Alan and his mother were packing to go away for Christmas, trying to fit in not only their clothes but also presents for Uncle Jumbo and Auntie Sue and Sammy. Sammy was Alan's cousin, and he and his parents lived in the country. His father, Alan's Uncle Jumbo, was landlord of a very old inn beside a road that ran across the forest. As Alan's mother was a widow and had a job in London, Alan spent a lot of his holidays with Sammy. It did not matter that Sammy was a year younger, for he knew a lot of things that Alan could not know about, living in London as he did. Sammy knew very little about London, so the cousins were useful to one another.

Alan's mother kept putting things into his suitcase and then pulling them out again and trying to fit them in differently.

"Need you take these?" she asked, holding out a pair of slippers. "They take up so much room and anyway they're too small for you."

"They're all right," said Alan. "I must take them."

The slippers were made of reindeer hide. Uncle Stephen, who gave the best presents of anyone, had brought them back from a visit to Lapland, a little more than a year ago. Of course Alan's feet had grown a good deal in that time. He did know the slippers were getting too small for him, but he could not part with them and he would never admit that they were at all uncomfortable.

"Promise you'll be good about them, then," his mother said. "Don't go stuffing Sammy up with a lot of tales about them—you know how it annoys Auntie Sue."

"Okay," said Alan, not looking at her, pushing the slippers back into his suitcase.

There was a kind of magic about the reindeer slippers, but they were not by any means the first magic things Alan had possessed. He had a knack of finding such treasures. When he was very young there had been a mysterious bluish pebble which, at least in his own opinion, could make him invisible. Later, a couple of swan's feathers had had extraordinary powers—he could all but fly down the stairs when he was holding them. Then there was a wonderful double horse chestnut that everybody at school tried to get hold of, for such a thing had never been seen—that was strongly magic.

None of these things had been as good as the reindeer slippers.

Alan had been in the middle of measles when they came. When, hot and aching, he woke in the night, he put out his hand to touch the slippers of reindeer hide and he thought that a whole reindeer was there beside him. He felt the hard bones of the beast, like a strong framework over which the beautiful skin was fitted. Then he seemed to be riding on the reindeer's back, hanging on hard to the strong thick neck, sheltering behind the great antlers as he was carried many miles over snowy wastes beneath a huge sky sharp with stars. What is your name? he had asked the reindeer. My name is Swiftly, the creature had replied.

In the morning there were only the reindeer slippers, but night after night, Alan and Swiftly rode through deep forests together and across wide plains. As they went, Swiftly would tell Alan of life in the Arctic, of the herds moving darkly over the winter land, of battles when the clash of antlers rang for miles in the ice-bound distances; of the soft-eyed does and their fawns, stepping so lightly that their hoofs barely marked the ground. It was all exactly as described in the book Uncle Stephen had given Alan at the same time as the slippers.

The box that the slippers had been packed in was kept on the high shelf in Alan's bedroom cupboard. It was a sort of magic museum—the pebble, the swan's feathers, the double chestnut, now shrivelled and small, were laid inside; and one day, no doubt, the reindeer slippers would find a place there, too.

Alan's various magical experiences had got him into trouble with Sammy's mother. Somehow Auntie Sue could only see Alan's tales of being invisible, flying downstairs, riding Swiftly over the snowy uplands, as a lot of silly fibs. Alan, she claimed, was teaching her Sammy to tell lies. At last Alan promised his mother that he would never speak to Sammy again about Swiftly or anything else of the kind. This promise he had already kept for months so he hardly needed his mother's warning to "be good" about the reindeer slippers this Christmas.

"The best idea," she said, as she watched him push the slippers back into his case, "would be to let Sammy have them. They'd be just about right for him."

"H'm," was all Alan said.

The inn where Sammy lived with his parents was called The Forester's Quarry. This was because, so some people said, there had been a quarry close by from which had come the soft-colored stone of which the house was built, and all the useful barns and stables and pig sties belonging to it, where Alan and Sammy were able to play in bad weather. Where's the quarry now, then? Uncle Jumbo would demand. He preferred the other kind of quarry, meaning something hunted—there had been wild boar roaming the forest once, and there were still deer and rabbits and game birds. He was always promising himself a new sign for the inn in place of

he dull old one that only had the name ainted on it. Uncle Jumbo wanted a pic- ure, a stag's head or a leaping deer, per- aps, or a hunter with bow and arrow.

There were not a great many trees in the orest. There were clumps and thickets of hem, but mostly the forest was made up of olling stretches of moorland where eather and gorse and bracken grew. There the wind swept bleakly in winter. Alan loved it then, for there was hardly a oul about. He and Sammy would go out or hours. Sammy was the best sort of companion at such times, for young as he was he knew a good deal about birds and animals. He was a good foresty boy, they said in the village. In the early dusk of December there was a mysterious blueness over all the forest and owls were out by half-past four. In the depth of the cold night foxes barked. Sometimes two or three deer passed quietly by, but mostly those were in the more wooded parts two miles or so away.

This Christmas was as good as all the others Alan and his mother had spent with Uncle Jumbo and Auntie Sue. Uncle Stephen drove down on Christmas Day and stayed the night. As usual, his presents were the best. Among them was a huge flat parcel for Uncle Jumbo. It was the new inn sign he had been talking about for so long and it was exactly what Uncle Jumbo wanted.

"The fitting screws still haven't come," Uncle Stephen explained. "They should arrive in the post any time. But I suppose you could always use the old ones."

On the day after Christmas, Boxing Day, the sky was black from early morning and anyone could see there was snow on the way. In the middle of the afternoon, Uncle Stephen decided he had better get back to London. Because she had to be at her job next day, Alan's mother went with him. As Alan and the others waved good-bye, the first careless flakes of snow were idly spinning through the dusk.

Alan hardly knew how to wait until the morning. He had never seen the forest

covered with snow. When he went to bed he put the reindeer slippers close beside him. In the darkness he put out his hand and felt the fine tough hide. Then he laughed to himself in a rather shamefaced way. Did he still expect the slippers to turn into a full-grown reindeer? Did he still think Swiftly might come to carry him over the snow? He was growing out of the reindeer slippers, so wasn't he perhaps growing out of Swiftly, too?

All night the snow fell. Next morning a grey swollen sky hung low over the stretches of forest. There was lots more snow to come but already everything was changed. Whole bushes had disappeared. The lower branches of the trees, bowed down under their load, had then been trapped and frozen to the ground. No bird was seen or heard. Up in the village the road was silent, for nothing on wheels could enter from any of the side-roads. Soon a wind came howling out of the gray sky and the snow started to fall again. By next morning it took shovels and spades to clear a pathway enough to leave the house.

Then the sky cleared, the sun shone. The snow, hard underneath, dry as powder on top, began to sparkle. Alan and Sammy went out in gumboots and thick gloves. They shouted and yelled in their excitement and their faces tingled with the sharpness of the air, their cheeks and noses turned red.

"Suppose we had a toboggan," Alan said.

"Make one," said Sammy.

All that afternoon they hunted about for something to make a toboggan. It was getting dark, a strange snowy dark like silver, when suddenly Alan saw hanging high up on the wall of the barn where the cars were kept the very thing they had been looking for.

"It is a toboggan, Sammy." Between them they hauled it down. The seats needed a bit of repairing, but that was all.

When they had fixed the seats, they hid the toboggan behind bales of straw in the corner of the biggest barn. Then they went indoors and said nothing to a soul about what they had found.

Half a dozen times in the night Alan woke and heard the frost humming in the telephone wires. The reindeer slippers were close to his hand. Was it really too late for Swiftly to come and run beside the toboggan? Magic seemed easy because the whole world was under a spell. If there was indeed no Swiftly at such a time, then he would know he had gone for good. Then he would give the slippers to Sammy.

The night's frost had bound the snow as hard as cement. Where the snow had melted in yesterday's sunshine, dripping down the branches, there was now a film of ice. The glittering twigs tinkled when the wind blew them.

The two boys kept trying to escape with the toboggan, but there were jobs to be done. The snow meant that ordinary things were difficult and everyone was needing help. There was shopping to be fetched from the village, snow to be swept or shovelled, post to be collected because the van could not get round.

"Ask if there's a small parcel," Uncle Jumbo told the boys. "I could get the new sign up if only I'd got the fittings."

"Use the old ones as Stephen suggested," Auntie Sue said.

But for the toboggan, Alan would have wanted to help with the hanging of the new sign. The afternoon came and they had still not pulled the toboggan from its hiding place. Then without warning Alan heard Sammy shouting. "Now! Now!" He went pelting off to the barn without waiting for Alan to reply. Alan followed, snatching his duffle coat from behind the door and pulling it on as he went. He looked wildly around for his boots, but

Auntie Sue must have been tidying up again. There was no time to search. It was already after three. As soon as they were out of sight of home they were facing down a long shallow hillside and here they decided to give the toboggan its first run.

"I'll sit in front," Alan said. "You hang on to my middle." He sounded breathless.

"You've got your slippers on!" Sammy cried.

"They're my reindeer slippers, stupid."

"You'll get soaked! You'll die of frostbite!"

"What's the good of a reindeer if its skin can't keep out the snow?"

At first it seemed as though the toboggan was not going to work. Then it began to move, slithering, slipping sideways, then settling to a straight course as it gathered speed. Suddenly the slope took it and pulled it, and at last Alan and Sammy were rushing over the snow, down the slope towards the hollow, shouting with excitement. Sammy yelled wordlessly, but Alan heard himself crying, "Swiftly! Swiftly!" in a loud excited voice. The toboggan was certainly not Swiftly, but it brought back some of his most magical memories and he felt wildly happy.

Now they were both enchanted. They dragged the toboggan up steep and steeper tracks. Soon Alan discovered how to make it swoop and swerve. It skimmed the snow, avoiding the sudden drifts against hidden bushes and humps of heather, leaping gullies that could have caught its nose and hurled them into a somersault.

The sun had vanished long ago, but the endless whiteness of the ground for miles kept the forest light and it was a surprise when a few flakes of snow came down on all the rest. The boys had been too busy to notice that the darkness in the sky was not night but clouds.

"Come on. Home," said Alan.

"One more!" Sammy cried. "If we go up there we're near a short cut to my home."

They toiled up as Sammy directed. When they reached the top they were looking over a part of the forest Alan had never seen before. It was not only the snow that made this seem unfamiliar territory. Dotted about the forest were various cottages and farms, lonely and cut off, with only well water for their supply. But here there were no roofs at all, only the open rolling plain, empty and mysterious.

"Where are we, Sammy?"

"I told you. Down to the bottom and then there's a short cut."

"But that's in the wrong direction. We go back that way," Alan said, turning and pointing.

"I tell you it's a short cut. I should know. Who lives here—me or you?"

"All right—if you're sure. Hop on. Buck up."

The toboggan shot off once more. But now neither of the boys shouted. They made the downhill run in silence, Sammy a bit sulky, Alan worried. The snow that had started to fall was very slight, but now the sky did indeed seem to grow darker.

Things Alan had been too much occupied to notice now became horribly obvious—that his feet were soaked and numb—that Auntie Sue would be getting worried and Uncle Jumbo would be getting furious—that Sammy should not have been allowed to come so far. And that no one knew where they had gone.

"Which way now?" he demanded, when they reached the bottom of the run.

"This way," said Sammy positively.

He plodded ahead and Alan followed, dragging the toboggan. Now his legs were soaked, as well as his feet. The snow was deeper here—it was over the top of Sammy's boots. The heads of low bushes broke the surface of the snow like swimmers in a choppy sea. The smoothness all around was crisscrossed with tiny tracks

where mice had run out from shelter, searched desperately for food, then scuttled for home. By the edge of a frozen pond, birds of all sizes had come and gone, frantic for water, patterning the snow with their delicate prints. A fox had come to the pond, too, and rabbits—Sammy knew all about such things and even now he stopped to look at the tracks and tell Alan which was which. Further on there was a patch where the snow was flattened and scattered, and there were some drops of blood and a few feathers.

"Fox caught a pheasant," Sammy said.

All these things made the forest seem wilder and lonelier than ever, given up to animals and birds, with no time or place for boys who had been silly enough to come so far from home.

Sammy was first at the top of the slope. He stood quite still with his back turned. The newly falling snow had given his red woolly cap a white top. Quite suddenly, in that expanse of snow and sky, he looked a very little boy, much more than a year younger than Alan. He needed to be looked after, rescued from danger.

"It looks different today," he said in a small voice, as Alan came up with him. He sat down on the toboggan, trying hard not to cry. "I thought I knew the way."

"Oh, we can't be far from home," Alan said jauntily. "I wish Swiftly was here. He'd take us."

They had not spoken about Swiftly since Alan made his promise, but for all that, Sammy remembered.

"But he's only a pretend reindeer. Mum says he's just a lot of imagination."

Alan looked about him. He had so often seen Swiftly in the past, had spoken to him confidently. What had once been so easy was now quite impossible. He knew that the huge proud antlers he had seen were only dead upstanding branches; he knew that everything Swiftly had told him about his home in the Arctic was what he remembered from books. He was too old; the magic had gone. But Sammy was younger—surely Swiftly was just the thing to help Sammy now.

"Come on," he said. "You'll freeze if you sit there. We'll leave the toboggan and fetch it another day. Oh, do come on. Swiftly may be waiting just ahead. He often shelters where there are trees. Look! There's a clump of gorse and stuff ahead. The quicker we get to it, the quicker we'll be home."

He pulled Sammy to his feet and hurried him along, hanging on to his hand.

Swiftly was not at the next clump of bushes nor at the next. By the time they reached the third clump Sammy was dragging behind, the snow was falling much faster and Alan could not pretend any longer that he was not afraid. What if they were really lost? The forest was so big. You could go for a comfortable walk of a mile or two, or what Uncle Jumbo called a real walk of ten, fifteen, twenty miles. What if they were on a real walk now?

"There are some trees, Sammy—look, I can just see them. Beside the track. Perhaps Swiftly likes trees better than just bushes."

"Don't you know if he does?" Sammy cried, bitter and disbelieving.

They reached the clump of trees. Snow whirled, not in big flakes but in little hard balls that blew over the white ground until it found a mound or ledge to stop it. It was difficult to see, but the trees seemed to offer some hope. They ringed a clump of snow-covered gorse, and here was another small frozen pond.

"He isn't here either," Sammy said. "Mum was right. Swiftly's just a made-up story. He's not a reindeer at all."

Alan did not answer. His throat felt hot and tight. He did not know what to do next. Around him he saw the tracks of