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I—The Four Hungry Children

ONE WARM NIGHT four children stood in front of a bakery. No one knew them. No one knew where they had come from.

The baker's wife saw them first, as they stood looking in at the window of her store. The little boy was looking at the cakes, the big boy was looking at the loaves of bread, and the two girls were looking at the cookies.

Now the baker's wife did not like children. She did not like boys at all. So she came to the front of the bakery and listened, looking very cross.

"The cake is good, Jessie," the little boy said. He was about five years old.

"Yes, Benny," said the big girl. "But bread is better for you. Isn't it, Henry?"

"Oh, yes," said Henry. "We must have some bread, and cake is not good for Benny and Violet."

"I like bread best, anyway," said Violet. She was about ten years old, and she had pretty brown hair and brown eyes.

"That is just like you, Violet," said Henry, smiling at her. "Let's go into the bakery.

Maybe they will let us stay here for the night.”

The baker’s wife looked at them as they came in.

“I want three loaves of bread, please,” said Jessie.

She smiled politely at the woman, but the woman did not smile. She looked at Henry as he put his hand in his pocket for the money. She looked cross, but she sold him the bread.

Jessie was looking around, too, and she saw a long red bench under each window of the bakery. The benches had flat red pillows on them.

“Will you let us stay here for the night?” Jessie asked. “We could sleep on those benches, and tomorrow we would help you wash the dishes and do things for you.”

Now the woman liked this. She did not like to wash dishes very well. She would

like to have a big boy to help her with her work.

"Where are your father and mother?" she asked.

"They are dead," said Henry.

"We have a grandfather in Greenfield, but we don't like him," said Benny.

Jessie put her hand over the little boy's mouth before he could say more.

"Oh, Benny, keep still!" she said.

"Why don't you like your grandfather?" asked the woman.

"He is our father's father, and he didn't like our mother," said Henry. "So we don't think he would like us. We are afraid he would be mean to us."

"Did you ever see him?" asked the woman.

"No," answered Henry.

"Then why do you think he would be mean to you?" asked the woman.

"Well, he never came to see us," said Henry.

"He doesn't like us at all."