

## The Bannock Made of Ashes

Once there lived a man called Havrilo. He had no property, but he did have a house full of children. In order to feed them he used to go amongst the rich people and the landowners to work.

One day Havrilo said to his wife, "There is no way to make a living for me here, because justice is written in sand, and injustice is written in stone. I'm going out into the world, so bake me a bannock for the road."

"And what am I going to bake it out of? There is no flour," remarked his wife.

The husband was very worried. He couldn't wander around the world with an empty sack. Then his wife had an idea "Go to the rich man and beg for at least a handful of flour from him."

So Havrilo ran to see the rich man to whom he told his problem, saying, "I plan to go off into the world to seek my fortune but I need some bannock for the road. Maybe you could give me some flour? I worked for a whole year for you and all I earned was some salt for my herring."

The rich man scratched himself and didn't answer. He called his wife and whispered something into her ear. She went out of the house but soon returned.

"I have a paper sack of flour for you," she said to the poor man.

Havrilo was overjoyed because he would have enough not only for a bannock, but there would be some left over for his children. He raised his sack onto his shoulders and went home. His wife too was happy. She opened the sack, but what was in it? Some ashes!

"What a fool?" she said and clapped her hands. "But if you say this is flour, I'll bake you a bannock from it." She brought out the kneading trough and mixed some dough. And in the

morning Havrilo prepared to go on the road. He took his bag with the bannock of ashes, and went to seek his fortune.

He walked and walked until he began to get hungry. He broke off a piece of bannock and raised it to his mouth. When he touched it to his lips the bannock became very white, just like a wedding cake, and very tasty, too. Havrilo ate and couldn't get enough of it.

“It's as though it was spread with honey! And the wife called me crazy!”

He drank some water, rested, and then continued his journey. Soon he reached the city. There were many such paupers around who gazed at the world with hungry eyes and waited for someone to call them to do some kind of work. Havrilo spent the night with them in a public square.

In the morning he thrust his hand into the sack and brought out a bannock and began to eat it.

The paupers from all sides of the square stretched out their hands toward him. He gave each of them a big piece of bannock but it still remained the same size.

The man wandered for some time in foreign lands. He didn't do any work at all. The bannock of ashes provided him with food. But he wore out his clothes. Tattered and tired, the poor man turned homeward to his village. He was walking along the street when lo and behold, before him there stood the rich man.

“Well, did you earn any money?”

“There is poverty everywhere.”

“How come you didn't die of hunger?”

“It was like this,” said the man. “The wife baked a bannock from the flour that you gave me for a year’s work. I ate from the bannock for two years and even fed poor people and, as you see, it is still whole in my sack.”

The rich man opened his mouth and remarked, “As long as I have lived I have never seen such a thing—that people have eaten bannock made of ashes. Come now—give me a taste of it.”

The poor man gave him a piece. The rich man smelt it and was amazed to find that it smelt like cake. And when he had eaten a large piece he smacked his lips and hurried off home.

“Woman!” he shouted, all out of breath. “Remove the ashes from the stove and make some bannock. I’ll take it to the city and sell it!”

The rich woman baked a full trough of bannock from the ashes and covered it with a towel. The rich man couldn’t wait. He broke off a piece in order to taste it. But the bannock couldn’t get down his throat, for his mouth was full of clay. The greedy rich man chewed and gulped so that his wife shouldn’t scold him for causing so much foolishness, but in the morning he gave up the ghost! And that’s the end of the tale.