

The Mouse and the Cake

ELIZA COOK
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A MOUSE found a beautiful piece of plum cake,
The richest and sweetest that mortal could make;
'Twas heavy with citron and fragrant with spice,
And covered with sugar all sparkling as ice.

'My stars!' cried the mouse, while his eye beamed with glee,
'Here's a treasure I've found: what a feast it will be;
But, hark! there's a noise, 'tis my brothers at play;
So I'll hide with the cake, lest they wander this way.

'Not a bit shall they have, for I know I can eat
Every morsel myself, and I'll have such a treat.'
So off went the mouse as he held the cake fast;
While his hungry young brothers went scampering past.

He nibbled, and nibbled, and panted, but still
He kept gulping it down till he made himself ill;
Yet he swallowed it all, and 'tis easy to guess,
He was soon so unwell that he groaned with distress.

His family heard him, and as he grew worse,
They sent for the doctor, who made him rehearse,
How he'd eaten the cake to the very last crumb,
Without giving his playmates and relatives some.

'Ah me!' cried the doctor, 'advice is too late;
You must die before long, so prepare for your fate.
If you had but divided the cake with your brothers,
'Twould have done you no harm, and been good for the others.'

'Had you shared it, the treat had been wholesome enough;
But eaten by *one*, it was dangerous stuff;
So prepare for the worst--; and the word had scarce fled,
When the doctor turned round, and the patient was dead.

Now all little people the lesson may take,
And some large ones may learn from the mouse and the cake;
Not to be over-selfish with what we may gain,
Or the best of our pleasures may turn into pain.

from the Oxford Book of Children's Verses; ed Iona & Peter Opie