



Gianni Rodari and his fantastic tales

Old Mr Hans liked living in New York, even though he hadn't been born there. He found it enormous, noisy and very exciting. And what he liked best of all were the fantastic bookshops where he could spend entire afternoons browsing. Hans was crazy about books. One rainy day, his grandson ran into the bookshop. He wanted grandpa to buy him a copy of "Little Red Riding Hood."

Just as Hans was about to step outside the shop, he stopped in his tracks. There, in the window, was a book that brought him memories of when he was as small as his little grandson, and had to escape from his country –Germany, because of the war.

Little Hans and his family hid in the Alps, in Italy. But they didn't speak a word of Italian, so the local people sent a teacher to help them. His name was *Gianni*, and he was nothing like the serious teachers they'd had in Germany. Gianni liked playing with words to invent stories, fables and fantastic tales. Suddenly the woods became African savannahs, and clouds became Zeppelins in which, with Gianni's help, they travelled to the world of the imagination.

GIANNI RODARI AND HIS FANTASTIC TALES

With Gianni, learning was fun. They went for walks in the wood, they picked strawberries, and the young teacher asked them to invent a completely new version of the tale of Little Red Riding Hood. They had a whale of a time! In their new version of the story, Little Red Riding Hood was tired of the wolf chasing her, tired of wearing the same colour and tired of always doing the same thing.

The wolf was also fed up of always being the baddie, so they both decided to change. The wolf became a shepherd. He made his sheep eat strawberries until their wool turned pink, so Little Red Riding Hood could knit herself a brand new bright pink cape.

On another occasion, Gianni strung a line between two trees, and they watched in bewilderment as he pegged a stripy sock, a photo of the leaning tower of Pisa and a lollipop to the line. His line turned into the story of a travelling sock that went round the world looking for the best lollipop that anyone had ever tasted. He found it in Pisa: a lollipop that tasted like spaghetti arrabiata! And the sock was so overjoyed that it decided to stay in Pisa and open a lollipop shop.

Next day, when Gianni hung up a ladle, a flower and a handkerchief, Hans and the other children took less than two seconds to invent another story -about a ghost who was in love with the ghost of the tablecloth. He gave her a flower as a token of his love, but the ghost ignored him. It was only when he made her a delicious bowl of soup that the

tablecloth ghost accepted his hand in marriage and they lived together happily ever after.

In his hands, letters were the pieces in an endless game. He moved them around and... abracadabra! The children read out a word... ORCA.... Then he mixed them up again and... surprise! A new word appeared before their eyes: ROCA. They played and they played, and without even realizing, Hans learned to love letters, stories and imagination.

But the war came to Italy and Hans and his family had to run away once more. He never heard of his teacher ever again. Until that day, so many years later, when the rain stopped, and suddenly he discovered that the book on the counter was none other than "The Grammar of Fantasy" by Gianni Rodari. Old Hans smiled happily. His teacher had written a book about how to invent endless stories, a map of the imagination! His grandson came out to find him.

"Let's go back in," whispered Hans, "I want to buy a story too. I'm going to buy a story that will teach me how tell a thousand and one stories."

Script: Anna Manso