

were going. Don't you remember—and when Hanzel and Grethel found that the path led them only into the thickest part of the wood, all tangled with brambles, they knew that they were lost. They began to feel very hungry."

"Are we going to begin to feel very hungry?"

"Undoubtedly!"

"O—well." Ann's words slid off dreamily. She watched the sunlight on her white hands. "I have never been hungry," she began again. "I suppose there are lots and lots of people—"

"Who have never been hungry either," I finished hastily. But Ann was not to be diverted.

"Who are often hungry," she went on. "Do you know, I have often thought that if there is ever going to be a general evening up you and I am going to be in for a bad time, Angel."

"Who said?"

"About the evening up? Oh, I don't know. It's a kind of general belief. People who haven't things must naturally think that their turn is coming."

"And people who have things?"

"They don't bother about it, usually. Now you and I—"

"Get up, Pagasus. How is his off ear, Ann? So you think that some great dispenser grudges us things and will make us pay up in the end?"

Ann nodded.

"Well, I don't see it. Especially you. You didn't make the money."

Ann snuggled closer. "If it's you, it's me, goose! But you haven't any cotton factory or coal mines or things with children in them have you, angel?"

"Not much! Children, indeed! You're thinking of the old witch in the gingerbread house. Only she kept hers in an oven."

"Yes, and gave them lots to eat to make them fat."

"Well, they don't do that in cotton factories anyway, Ann, I suspect you of reading the magazines?"

"Only one. And that was an article and pictures, such awful pictures! I thought that if you—"

"Well, I don't. Make your mind easy. I haven't such a thing as a child—anywhere."

In the little silence that followed I realized how awkwardly the last sentence had been worded and called myself several kinds of fool. It was just like my idiocy to spend my time for three years in showing Ann that I didn't care for children anyway and then in a moment, by a careless infelicity of expression, to risk detection. But perhaps Ann had not noticed; only she was usually so very quick to notice!

"People become morbid," I began again, "in thinking"—my sentence was cut short by a sudden jerk on the lines and a little shriek from Ann. "Oh, Jack, look at his ears! They're getting stiff. Oh, hold him—oh—!"

"It was that woodpile!" I explained when some five minutes later I wiped the sweat of strenuous exertion from my brow. "I expect woodpiles are just a little too much for his extraordinary self-control. Once in his extreme youth his haughty spirit was compelled to draw wood, and, ever since, the very sight of it—you won't mind if I need both hands for a while? Lucky you noticed his ears, Ann—see, they are still at half-mast—were you frightened?"

"Of course I was! It was lovely. Motors aren't nearly as exciting. They just run into things and smash but Pagasus did a whole vaudeville programme by himself. Weren't you surprised?"

"No. His owner told me not to be surprised at anything Pagasus did, so I wasn't, but I can quite understand how anyone else might be. His ears are quite floppy now. Shall I—"

"Yes. I like it. I'm tired. He must have run a long way. Do you know where we are now, Jack?"

"Lost!" I said. "I was wondering how we would manage it, but you see, it was quite easy. And look, away down the road, that purple line, that is the forest. If Pagasus continues to think that the woodpile is following him we will be there in a few moments and then we will begin the real search for the gingerbread house."

Ann's blue eyes looked up with a gleam of suspicion from under the brim of her hat. "I believe—," she began and hesitated.

"Belief," I assured her blandly, "is all that is necessary."

The forest was very close now. Its cool greenness seemed to stretch out restful arms across the long white road. Pagasus forgot the woodpile and looked so very floppy that he seemed to have no ears at all. Almost at the first tree he stopped of his own accord and with a determination not to be mistaken.

"I think we get out here," I said to Ann. "I will tie Pagasus to the fence—"

"There oughtn't to be a fence," said Ann dreamily.

"Perhaps it sprang up in the night like the fence around the sleeping beauty."

"Well, here goes." There was whisk of skirts, a smothered shriek and Ann lay limply on the other side. "No, I'm not hurt. It's fun. Only don't fall on me! Oh," sitting up and fanning herself, "did you ever see such greens and browns and golds and smell it!"

"I wanted you to go to the country a month ago," I reminded her reproachfully, "and you said—"

Ann sniffed, "Oh, the country! The country has lawns and tennis courts and bowling greens and gravelled walks and gardens and houses and servants and everything and everybody. This isn't the country! Here there is nothing and nobody—just us. It's heavenly. Let's go on!"

"It's rather clean, isn't it?" she wondered, "but I suppose we haven't come to the brambles yet. I put on this skirt especially for brambles." But her facile attention was easily diverted from the strange absence of brush and thickets. First, she saw a squirrel and then a whole family of chippies racing along a fallen log, their brown tails waving. They were friendly chippies, and not at all averse to a game of hide and seek and we chased their bright eyes and enticing tails until Ann's hair began to come down.

"We are quite lost, now, aren't we?" she said exultingly, as she stopped to coil it up.

"Quite," I assured her, and presently night will be coming on and we shall be tired and very hungry so that when we see the witch's house through the trees we shall have no misgivings. I say, Ann, stand still a moment and I'll show you something—gently, now!"

Right at our feet lay a piece of hollow log. It looked as if it had not been touched for years, and yet—unless I was mistaken—I stopped and lifted it carefully and instantly there was a slight stirring and a tiny squeal. Ann leaned forward eagerly. There, in a slight hollow in the ground, a soft, warm hollow, lined with delicate grey and white and brown fluff, lay six tiny whity-fawn baby creatures that curled and wiggled and squealed and blinked blind eyes at the unaccustomed light.

"Oh!" said Ann, and the "Oh!" again. With a fearful hand she touched one of the silky things which squirmed determinedly away. "How exquisite! What beautiful babies. Whose are they?"

"They belong to Mr. and Mrs. Field Mouse. Mrs. Mouse is a splendid housekeeper. Isn't it clean and comfy? But if I don't put the roof on the children will have hysterics."

Ann straightened up. There was a queer little smile about the corners of her mouth.

"You're a dear old fraud, aren't you?" she said, seemingly apropos of nothing.

"What do you mean, Ann?"

"Nothing, only it seems odd that anyone who dislikes children as much as you do should grow pink and happy over infant mice."

"Oh, mice are just—just mice," I said vaguely.

Ann laughed. "Oh, Jack, you goose!" she said. "When are we going to get to that gingerbread house? We must have walked miles."

"Are you hungry?"

"How does one tell?"

"One feels it. Imagine that you have a slice of thick bread and butter, very thick, with crust on, could you eat it?"

"N—o."

"Then you are not hungry. Put your ear against this tree. Do you hear the twittering and chipping? That is Mr. Highhole Woodpecker's family. That is the noise they make when they are hungry and could eat thick bread and butter. Mrs. Highhole will soon dispense the family rations. Did you ever hear such a racket!"

"Can't we see them?" asked Ann.

"No, we are rank outsiders this time. The door is too high up. And say, Ann, if you are not hungry, I am. Let's get on."

"Perhaps I am hungry. If you had that bread and butter I think I could eat half."

"Isn't it a nice feeling?"

"Yes, if there is anything to eat. But—"

"Well, you see, it is not having anything that makes it the real thing. Hanzel and Grethel—"

"Oh, bother Hanzel and Grethel! Jack, I believe I could eat the whole slice. I'm starving—," a look of uneasy awe came into Ann's face.

"That's right. So am I. We are both in exactly the proper frame of mind and here is a turn in the path and night is coming on (or will be after an hour or two) so the witch's house must be around here somewhere. Right through those trees here we ought to see—"

Ann clutched violently at my arm. "Why, Jack! It is there—look!" She rubbed her eyes vigorously and looked again through the screen of trees. When she turned to me her eyes were wide like a child's. Then we both peeped through at the little brown house which stood quite alone in its little clearing as if dropped down by enchantment.

"That's it," I whispered, "the Gingerbread House! Don't you smell it?"

"Smell it? How absurd. Oh, I believe I can! Why, Jack, this is getting curiousest and curiousest like Alice when she fell down the rabbit hole. Whatever is it?"

"Gingerbread, anyway, or I'm a heathen. That smell was the incense of my youth. My mouth is watering already. Let's go and see."

"But if somebody—"

"The witch is sure to be out. She is always out at first, you know. Gently now. If you can keep your petticoats quiet—"

"They are quiet," indignantly.

"Well, hold them tight. I'll go first." The little brown house was very close now and no one was anywhere about. The door was closed but the window was open and on the window-sill sat a big pan of something that smelled deliciously.

"Gingerbread!" gasped Ann. "A whole pan and warm. It's years since I tasted it!"

She peeped in at the window. There was certainly no one there. The door swung on the latch. With a glance of invitation to me Ann pushed it open. Inside was a small room containing a plain table and four stools. Upon the table stood a blue jug of fresh milk and beside it four thick blue cups.

"Why four?" asked Ann stupidly.

"Why not?" I replied brilliantly, "one for you and one for me and one each for Hanzel and Grethel, who will probably be along soon."

"Do you really think we might have some? Oh, I must. I'm so hungry!"

"Then we must hurry before the witch returns. Ah! Is that you, Hanzel? Come right in."

A shock of brown hair and two bright brown eyes had appeared miraculously around the side of the door. At my invitation their owner followed them, wondering. Ann gave a little gasp and then surrendered herself unreservedly to the situation.

"Come all the way in, Hanzel," she said, encouragingly. "If Grethel is there she had better come in, too."

The child made a comprehensive gesture. "Come in Grethel," called Ann, and as if by incantation another brown baby appeared, just like the first one, only browner, smaller and dressed in a girl's straight frock.

"Now that we are all here," I remarked, "let us hasten in