



THE GINGERBREAD HOUSE

The Story of a Magic Dwelling Place

By ISABEL ECCLESTONE MACKAY

"I WONDER how it would feel," said Ann, "not to have absolutely everything that one wants?"

I am Ann's husband and I am supposed to understand her, so I said "What is it that you want now, Ann?" And passed my cup for more coffee.

"I was just saying," she went on, "that I have absolutely everything that I want and I was wondering how it would feel to—"

You can't bamboozle me that way, Ann. I knew you wanted something. You have wanted it for exactly three weeks."

"Oh!" said Ann, "how did you know? I mean, what ever made you think such a silly thing?"

"I know it because I am your husband and I understand you."

"Really?"

"And I know it further by—well, I don't know that I know just exactly how I know but—"

"Goose!"

"Well, anyway, I do know. You may as well tell me what it is?"

"Nothing, absolutely nothing. I have everything in the world—except, perhaps," Ann's eye grew pensive, "a gingerbread house."

"Ah, ha!" I cried. "But why gingerbread?"

"Because there isn't any such thing, silly."

"Well, it seems to me that you have answered your own question. Since there is something that you want that you can't have you must know what it feels like to feel that way."

"Um—m," said Ann.

"Seems to me, though," I went on, "that there was a gingerbread house—once. Do you remember anything of it?"

"Oh, yes. Hanzel and Gretel found it, you know, in the forest. But that was a long time ago." Ann's gaze wandered away from the sugar she was dropping into my cup and the little shadow that had worried me lately came back into her eyes.

"Oh, well—time—what's a few hundred years? It was probably a well built house. Run away and get your hat. We couldn't have a better day for house-hunting."

Ann's eyes returned to the sugar. "Don't be absurd, Jack."

"Don't be prim, Ann. I am going to have a day off."

"Really? How nice. How dear of you. I shan't be a moment. Not more than twenty minutes, really. Be sure to finish your coffee."

"Wear something for the country, Ann!" I called after her and her laugh floated back.

When she had gone I did not finish my coffee but did a little thinking instead and then a little telephoning and then a little hurrying around in the car which had been waiting to take me down town, and then quite a bit of waiting for Ann.

When she came at last, radiant, she wore her very daintiest enveloped in a motor coat and veil. "Is my hat on—oh!" She broke into a little shriek of laughter.

"What is it?" I asked anxiously.

"Are we going in that?" asked Ann.

"Certainly."

"What is it?"

"It is a phaeton and a horse. Did you never see a phaeton before?"

"I'm not sure—if that's one! Or a horse either. Oh, Jack, are we really—" Ann's laughter left her helpless.

"If you don't hurry up we shall have a runaway. This horse—" but Ann had retreated. When she came back she wore a plain short skirt, a white shirt waist, a sailor hat and looked five years younger.

"Has it run away yet, dear?" she enquired kindly.

"No, but its efforts have tired it out and it has gone to sleep. Hi! Wake up Pagasus—gee—whoa—I declare I have forgotten how to talk to the brute! Are you comfortable, Ann?"

"Perfectly. I have broken thirteen engagements and ruined a new frock trying to get it off quickly. I am more than comfortable. I am divinely happy. Why doesn't he go?"

"He will in a moment. Can't you give him time to think? Get up. Get up. He's going now!"

"Is he? Yes, I believe he is. How carefully he does it! I hope you have made preparations for an extended trip?" And Ann hummed gaily "I don't care if I never come back."

"Neither do I," I agreed. "But Pagasus has to come back. His owner was very particular about it. He is an heirloom; a remarkable horse; goes very fast when properly warmed up. You see, Ann, we couldn't have found a gingerbread house in a motor. It's one of those things that aren't done. But if there is a gingerbread house anywhere this outfit ought to go straight for it."

"Yes." Ann drew off her gloves and spread her white hands in the sun. "Yes," she repeated dreamily, "I see. Is he afraid of trains?"

"Y—es. You see, there probably weren't any trains when he was young, and he likes the old days best. Naturally he has a prejudice against steam whistles and things, but I think I can hold him. We'll go by quiet roads. He dislikes motors extremely."

"Horrid things, motors," said Ann.

"Yes, dangerous, too. With a motor you never know—now with Pagasus you have his ears. His eyes are a sure warning of danger. Watch his ears and there you are. If they look floppy we are quite safe. If they stand up straight very suddenly—well, its probably all over with us then and nothing matters!"

Ann gave a little shiver of appreciation and came closer. "They are floppy now," she said and came a little closer still. "Don't you think you could manage—"

"Yes. I was just going to. It's not fair to steal my ideas like that. You see, I put both lines in one hand, like this, and I twist the loop around my foot, so—it comes to me quite naturally. Strange how these half-buried instincts recur. Probably my immediate ancestors did all their driving this way. Is that comfortable? He seems to be quite used to being driven with one hand and we can watch his ears. You may lean your head back if you like. Really, it's quite the proper thing."

"I am. Do you know, Jack—oh, look, it's a motor—oh, hold him! Why, I thought you said he was afraid of motors!"

"So he is. It is a sign of remarkable self-control that he conceals his fear. Did you hear him snort? That was a snort of intense terror and yet so great was his self-mastery that his pace scarcely quickened as the motor passed. I doubt if even a steam whistle could move him—outwardly. Get up, Pagasus!"

Ann settled herself cosily. "I suppose you know where you are going, Jack?"

"Certainly not. Hanzel and Gretel didn't know where they



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"Be Careful! Don't Waken Her."