

**Goldilocks**

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musn't ever go there again, Billy; nobody goes to her house."

"I do," asserted Billy, independently,

"and I say she's all right. Folks are jus' jealous of her. Gee, hain't her hair grand!"

"Yes," agreed Rosa, soberly. "She's got awful swell clothes, too." Billy went on. "I should think folks would like her 'stead of being so down on her."

"But Mrs. Rensalaer Brown says she's simply impos's'ble," insisted his cousin, "and nobody does know her."

"Hold this basket," ordered Billy, with masculine decision. "I'm going to sneak around and ask. 'I'll bet we get a slew."

Rosa waited, timorously. Miss Thompson, it appeared, was not at home, but her maid good-humoredly collected a great many bottles, at least fifteen cents' worth they reckoned as they trotted home with the heavy basket. They found the twins busily scrubbing in the kitchen. It was Meg's afternoon out and Eloise had been seized with a brilliant notion. The bottle man might pay more for clean bottles! Billy and Rosa joyously agreed it was a splendid idea. And as they smeared themselves with soap they squabbled happily over what should be the division of profits, and speculated gleefully over the probable envy of their less energetic neighbors.

"Ole Miss Johnson's rheumatism comes in grand bottles," chuckled Elsa, as she tried a nutmeg grater on a refractory label.

"Currycomb couldn't get that off," Billy grunted, throwing down the can-opener in disgust. "Gee, girls always want to wash things. I'll bet he won't pay a cent more. I'm not going to wash. Jake said I could go to the blacksmith's with him. Mind you don't touch mine while I'm gone." But late in the afternoon when he counted up his bottles he was certain that one was gone. He wasn't exactly sure, but he thought it was a very large two-cent one, and he vehemently accused the twins of having smashed it. After their mother had quelled the inevitable strife she sighed a little.

"Children are such savages," she said to Meg as she helped the irate maid clear the disordered kitchen. "Seems to me they wrangle constantly."

"Miss Rosa doesn't," drawled Meg. "She's still as a lamb 'nd she helped wash oop a bit, too."

"She's a dear little soul," agreed Mrs. Remson. "But then," she added in humorous defense of her own, "just before father comes she's good as she can be!"

For it was only two days more! Two days and a night and then he would come! Rosa asked shyly for light-blue hair ribbons instead of the customary dark ones.

"And I want my birthday dollar," she said. "I guess I won't wait till Christmas to spend it."

Aunt Remson patted her cheek as she gave her the money. "Is father going to have a present, too, this time?" she laughed.

Rosa nodded, her eyes shining. "A lovely one!" she sighed, "a lovely one that's a surprise. You couldn't guess it at all!"

Her happy anticipation made Mrs. Remson sigh. She seemed filled with delight, quivering with joy. Her cheeks flushed softly, her eyes shone. The chubby prettiness of the twins seemed ordinary enough beside the tremulous happiness that made the plain little face lovely. Mr. Stephenson would arrive on a seven o'clock train. That meant late supper and naps for the girls. For dear Aunt Remson, who couldn't keep secrets at all, hinted broadly that Uncle Frederick was planning an evening treat.

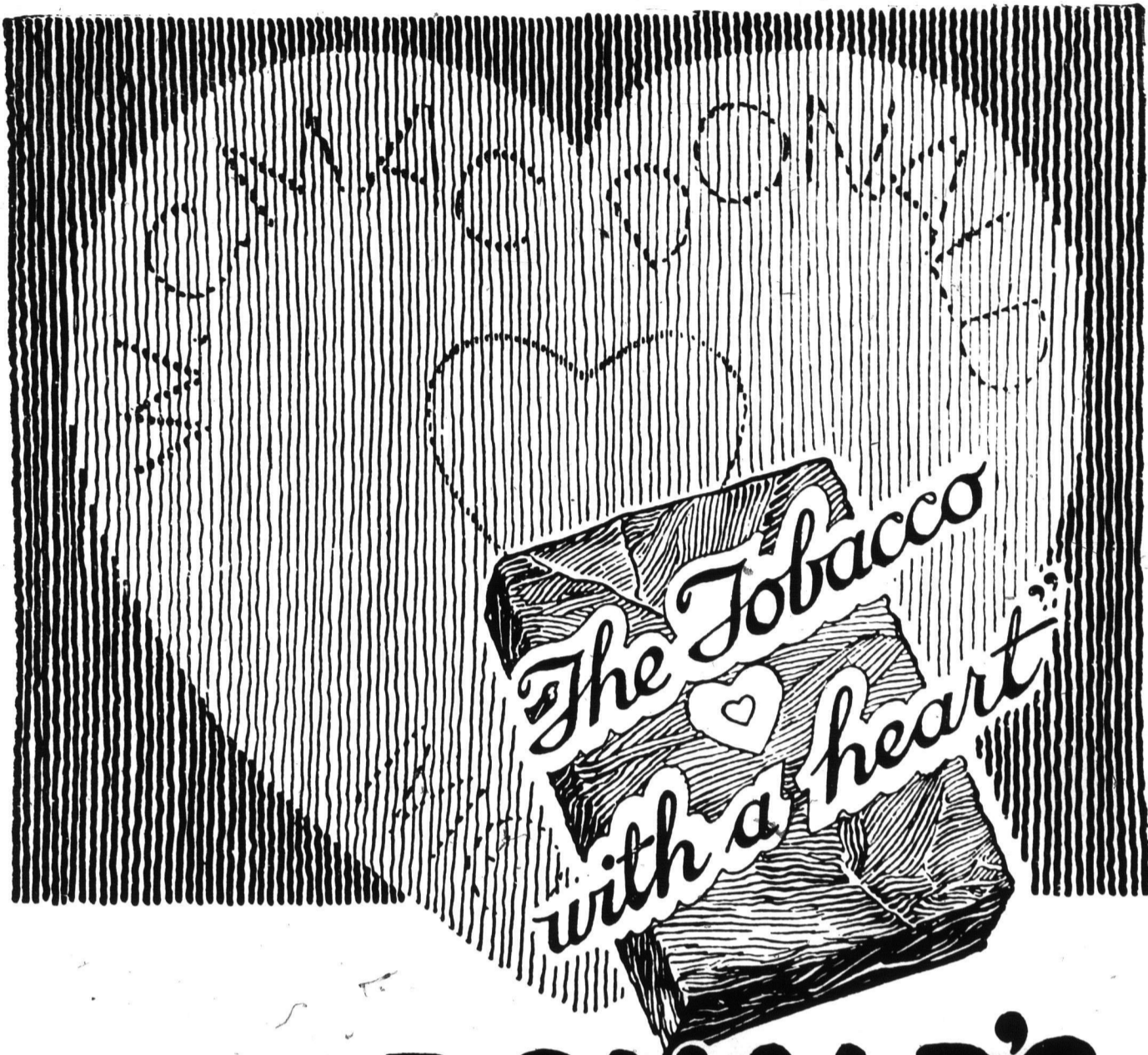
Climbing the stairs for the nap, Rosa looked down at her aunt in the hall and kissed her hand prettily. She shut the door of her room softly, locked it, and danced gleefully to the mirror.

"Rosa Fredericka! Rosa Fredericka!" she whispered. "you're going to be jus' lovely! Perfectly lovely!"

Aunt Remson tapped softly at her door at six o'clock. "Wake up, lazy bird!" she cried.

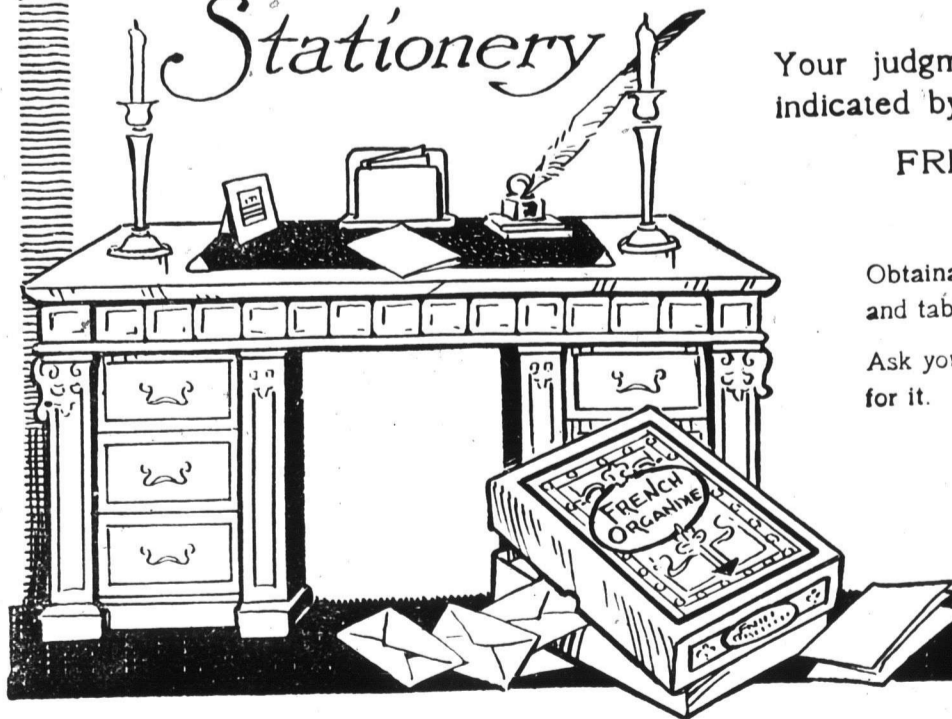
A muffled sound reached her. "Rosa, open the door for me. I want to help

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