



The Children's Corner

Hänsel and Gretel

CHAPTER III.

WHEN the children had finished their prayer, they sank back upon the moss and were soon asleep, their arms about one another. It was not long, however, before a light began to show through the mists which still covered part of the open space where the children were. This light seemed to come from heaven, and the mists gradually gathered and made steps, as the light grew brighter and brighter. Down these steps, stretching away up into the sky so far that they reached heaven, came fourteen angels, walking in pairs. They were all dressed in beautiful garments of different colors and their faces were shining.

At last daylight appeared again. A bird twittered sharply in the glade where the children slept. Gradually the eastern sky grew rosy and then turned to a pale yellow as the sun appeared. A few rays of sunshine shone through the treetops and made patches of light about Hänsel and Gretel.

"Where am I?" said Gretel, sleepily. "Am I awake? Is this a dream?" She held out her hands, looking up into the branches and then, suddenly, caught sight of Hänsel, still asleep. Hänsel opened his eyes, yawned and stretched himself.

He went toward the back of the glade, where the mists which hung about the Iron Stone were gradually vanishing under the rays of the morning sun. Even as Hänsel approached, the last trace of mist disappeared, and in place of the pine trees, which had been there on the previous evening, stood the Crunching Munching House, glittering in the rays of the rising sun. At a little distance to the left was a large baker's oven, and, on the other side, a huge cage with iron bars, the whole surrounded by a fence made of life-sized gingerbread girls and boys. The house itself was all made of cake and good things that little girls and boys like to eat.

When the children saw this wonderful house and smelt the delicious smell of dainties which came from there, they stood still in amazement. Then Hänsel started to go forward, but Gretel threw her arms about him, crying: "Stay where you are, stay where you are!"

But Hänsel was so charmed that he scarcely heeded Gretel's words. "See how the house seems to smile upon us," and he added eagerly, "the angels have brought us here!"

Hänsel's suggestion was too tempting for Gretel to resist, so each one taking the other's hand, the two children cried:

"Yes, let's nibble like two little gnawing mice."

The children hopped a few steps nearer and then waited to see if they could hear any sound. As all was silent they stole forward on tiptoe. After waiting a moment, Hänsel cautiously broke a little piece of cake off the right-hand corner of the house. As he did so there came a shrill voice from within:

"Nibble, nibble, little mouse. Who nibbles at my little house?" Hänsel, in terror, let the cake fall to the ground, but Gretel, with a

woman's wit, answered in a frightened voice: "The wind."

Hänsel followed Gretel's example and said, just as timidly: "The wind." Then, together, the children said: "The child of heaven."

Gretel picked up the piece of cake and tasted it. "Hm-m!" she cried.

Then Hänsel asked, looking at Gretel enviously: "How does it taste?" "There, try it," answered Gretel, giving him a bit of her cake.

"Ah-h!" said Hänsel, laying his hand on his breast in delight and closing his eyes.

"Ah-h!" said Gretel likewise. Then both the children cried in glee:

delightedly. "Look out; a mouse will soon make a hole in your house."

Hänsel here broke a large piece of cake off the wall. The voice from inside again repeated the same question as before:

"Nibble, nibble, little mouse. Who nibbles at my little house?" Hänsel and Gretel then called together: "The wind, the wind; the child of heaven."

As they said this, the upper half of the door of the Crunching Munching House opened, and the awful old ogress of a witch, of whom Hänsel's father had spoken the day before, put out her head. The children were so busy over their feast of dainties that they did not notice the evil, wrinkled face leering at them.

Gretel said tauntingly to Hänsel: "Wait, you nibbling little mouse, the cat will soon come out of the little house."

Hänsel answered rather gruffly:

The children then burst out laughing. During this last scene the door of the witch's house opened and the

chief Hänsel, horror struck. "Let me go!" To this the witch answered in her sweetest tones: "Now, dear heart,

"Good, my child," answered the witch; "great good. I am now going to make him tender and delicious with all sorts of dainties and then, when he is very good and gentle, patient and as willing as a sheep, then—but listen, Hänsel, I will whisper it in your ear."

And she tiptoed towards him. "Say it out loud and not in my ear," said Hänsel, bravely. "What pleasure is waiting for me!"

"Ah, my dear pretty child; sight and hearing will both leave you in the midst of this pleasure," said the witch, rubbing her hands and chuckling. During the preceding conversation Hänsel had been working his arms so as to loosen the noose which bound him. In this he had been successful and, by this time felt that he had the noose so loose that he could easily slip it over his head, so he called defiantly: "Oh, my eyes and ears are very good. Have a care how you harm me. Gretel," he called to his sister, "don't believe these fair words."

Gretel had now come close to him and he whispered: "Come, let's run for it." Quickly he slipped the noose over his head, and taking Gretel by the hand, started to run towards the woods. But the witch was too sly for him. She raised her staff and cried in a commanding tone: "Halt!"

Then, making the witch's motion with her stick, she stopped the children from going any further.

The yard about the house began to grow dark; it seemed as if a heavy cloud had covered the sun. The children stood motionless. Then the witch cried in a voice so terrible that it seemed to freeze Hänsel's and Gretel's blood:

"Hocus pocus, witches' spell. Move and you shall rue it well! Spellbound are you by my glance; Move your head and you shall dance!"

Then the witch began to make new motions with her staff, turning the children around so that they faced her. The end of the staff began to glow, and she held it up before them.

"Hocus pocus, here comes Jocit: Children, see the magic head! Eyes front now, as I have said! To your stall, or you are dead! Hocus pocus, hocus pocus, Malus locus, hocus pocus."

As she said the last words of this spell, she led Hänsel, who kept his eyes fixed on the end of her staff, to the iron cage, which she made him enter, closing the iron-barred door behind him. Meanwhile Gretel stood motionless in the darkness began to fade slowly away.

After the witch had locked the door behind Hänsel, she came over to Gretel and said, rubbing her hands with pleasure: "Now, little Gretel, be nice and obedient; Hänsel will soon be fat again. We'll feed him upon almonds and raisins; feed him the best things, I am going into the house and will bring them right out. Don't you move from where you are."

The witch then hobbled off muttering to herself. Gretel stood stiff and immovable. Finally, she sighed deeply and said, in a tone of disgust: "Whew, how terror-stricken I am before the witch!"

"Gretel, sh!" called Hänsel from the cage in a loud whisper. "Don't speak so loudly. Be very clever and notice well everything that the witch does. Appear to do everything she wants you to—here she comes back again—sh, keep still!"

"Who are you, you ugly woman?" Gretel asked. "I don't want to be taken for a horse!"

"Oh, everybody's got to have the measles. You won't be a big girl till you have 'em," said her mother. "Don't you want to ever grow up?" "Not that way," said Maysie.

"It's the only way they is that I know of. It gets rid of your bad blood, and you'll be all the better for it. You see?" Maysie's father grinned. "You'll like it," he added.

To Maysie this sounded sinister. The project alarmed her. She felt as she always had when the subject of a loose tooth was mentioned. She feared immediately that the thing like pulling the tooth, was inevitable, and a black foreboding came over her. She reached over and clutched at her mother's sleeve.

"Oh, ma, don't please! I'm scared!" "That's all right, May; the sooner you get sick the sooner you get well."

"But it's a vacation! I don't want to be sick in vacation!" Maysie pleaded. "Not if you have currant jelly and butter toast!" said her mother, insistently. "I tell you what I'll do; I'll let you have my olive-wood workbox to play with all the time you're in bed."

"And the silver tape measure—and the gramophone!" Maysie determined to drive as good a bargain as possible while her mother was conciliatory.

"Oh, yes, anything you want." Pa added, wickedly. "You won't want much but to be let alone, I guess."

"Now, pa!" Maysie's mother expostulated. "Will my face come out all over blotches?" she inquired fearfully.

"Oh, they'll go away. It ain't really being sick at all. Now, I tell you what you do. You run over to the Brown's right after supper, and you tell Miss Brown that you want to see Helen, 'cause you want to catch the measles. That's a good girl."

Maysie obeyed, and, without hope, if without fear, knocked at Mrs. Brown's door and was admitted. A small of disinfectant greeted her nostrils.

"Good evening, Mrs. Brown; I've come to catch the measles, Ma sent me."

Maysie modestly assumed a martyr's pose, her eyes cast down, her hands behind her back.

"Do tell!" Mrs. Brown exclaimed. "Are you sure your mother wants you to come here?"

"She made me come. Is Helen very bad?"

"Why, Helen's in a dark room, now, if without fear, knocked at Mrs. Brown's door and was admitted. A small of disinfectant greeted her nostrils.

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"WHERE AM I?" SAID GRETEL SLEEPILY.

"O wonderful cookies! each one I eat makes me eager for more. I feel as if I were already in heaven."

"Oh," said Hänsel, "how good this tastes! It's a confectioner lives here," said Gretel.

"Oh, go on nibbling and leave me in peace."

Gretel grabbed a piece of cake out of Hänsel's hand, crying: "Not so quickly, Sir Wind!"

Hänsel promptly took the piece of cake away from her crying: "Child of heaven, I take what I find."



THERE STOOD THE CRUNCHING, MUNCHING HORSE.

witch herself came out, carrying in her hand a rope with a noose at one end of it. She stole cautiously up as if to find the children, who never heard her, and threw the noose quickly over Hänsel's head, pulling the rope tight and holding the laughing boy a prisoner.

"He-he, he-he, he-he-he!" laughed the witch, when she saw Hänsel's plight.

The two children stood looking at her, frightened and amazed.

Hänsel, in terror, struggled to free himself, crying: "Let me go! Who are you?"

Hänsel's struggles were vain and the witch did not bother to answer his question. Instead, she went up to Gretel and patted the little girl's pink cheek with her rough, ill-shaped hand.

"Dear little angel," she said. "And you, my little sugar clown. You came here to find me, did you? That's fine! Dear children; so plump and round!"

The witch again broke into peals of laughter and a wicked light shone in her eyes.

"Who are you, you ugly woman?" Gretel asked. "I don't want to be taken for a horse!"

"Oh, everybody's got to have the measles. You won't be a big girl till you have 'em," said her mother. "Don't you want to ever grow up?"

"Not that way," said Maysie. "It's the only way they is that I know of. It gets rid of your bad blood, and you'll be all the better for it. You see?"

Maysie's father grinned. "You'll like it," he added.

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She feared immediately that the thing like pulling the tooth, was inevitable, and a black foreboding came over her.

She reached over and clutched at her mother's sleeve.

"Oh, ma, don't please! I'm scared!" "That's all right, May; the sooner you get sick the sooner you get well."

"But it's a vacation! I don't want to be sick in vacation!" Maysie pleaded.

"Not if you have currant jelly and butter toast!" said her mother, insistently.

"I tell you what I'll do; I'll let you have my olive-wood workbox to play with all the time you're in bed."

"And the silver tape measure—and the gramophone!" Maysie determined to drive as good a bargain as possible while her mother was conciliatory.

Maysie's Measles

By GELETT BURGESS

Illustrations by HARRY LINNELL.

MAYSIE! "Yes, ma." "What are you doing?" "Paper dolls." Maysie did not look up. "Well, I want you to pick up those chips and blocks around by the ell, now." "But it's vacation!"

"Never mind; and you must do some practicing to-day, too."

"Oh, dear, they's only two weeks left. I should think I might have some time to play in!"

"Put up your dolls, now, and get in the chips!"

Before the apron was filled, and while Maysie was still mumbling the formula to herself, Lucy herself appeared, coming down the road. Maysie tried to her.

"Come on and help!" cried Maysie. Lucy leaned over the fence, but did not come nearer.

"I desent," she said. "Helen's got the measles."

"What of it?" said Maysie approaching. Lucy withdrew. "You better look out—they're catching!"

"Have you got 'em?" "No; but ma' wd not to go near anybody till I was sure I wasn't going to get sick, too. They won't let me go near her."

"What's she doing?" "Playing with her hands."

Maysie laughed, and came nearer. "Tooh, I ain't afraid!" she boasted. "But Lucy was conscientious, and not a little proud of the danger she carried. She withdrew with dignity.

headaches, and your nose runs just like you got a cold. I feel kind of funny in my nose already."

"It means to have to be sick in vacation," said Maysie.

"It's mean any time. It's horrid. Helen is crying all the time. She got 'em from Nan Bryant. Ma says I ought to have had 'em when I was five. Did you ever have 'em, Maysie?"

"I don't remember. I guess not. Do they hurt?"

"It's awful. You ought to heard Helen."

"Perhaps I better go in," said Maysie, abruptly. "Ma'll be waiting for these chips, and I got to practice. I hope you haven't got 'em yet."

Lucy walked off, evincing great importance, and Maysie immediately went to her mother and related the news. Her mother only smiled. Maysie was surprised to have her show so little interest.

"Go and practice now for a half an hour."

"But it's vacation!" "That's no reason why you should forget all you's learned."

"That night, at supper time, her mother showed that the news had not been so unimportant as Maysie had thought."

"I suppose they's going to be a spell of it amongst the children round here," Maysie's mother went on.

after thinking awhile she remarked meditatively, "If Maysie's gone to have the measles, I wish'd sh'd ketch 'em right now. It'll be awfully convenient to have to nurse her in September, just when I want to put up those crab apples and wild grapes."

"Oh sho!" She ain't a-going to have 'em. Keep her out in the air and she'll be all right. Don't go to work and borrow trouble!"

"That's just it. I'd like to borrow a little and have it off my mind! Maysie's bound to come down with the measles when school begins, anyway. I tell you what I'm going to do, Eli-shah; I'm going to send her over to the Brown's and let naturally have it over with before school opens. These she'll be out of the way and I can do my work."

Maysie, who had been listening in wonder, now set up an emphatic protest. "But I don't want to have the

measles!" she wailed. "I don't want to be took sick at all!"

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