Wimbleton of the forest

Alan L. Andersen
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Wimbledon of the forest

by

Alan Lance Andersen

A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Partial Fulfillment of The Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Major: English

Approved:

Signature redacted for privacy

Iowa State University
Ames, Iowa
1976

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This thesis has been accepted by the Department of English, Iowa State University, in lieu of the research thesis prescribed by the Graduate Faculty in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in English.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DEDICATION</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LITTLE TUCKER</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WILT GIBBS</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JENNY BRANCH</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A WINTER STORY</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ROBIN'S DAY</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ST. BERNARD'S WALTZ</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JILL TINKLER</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THE BOG WITCH</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Magic Box</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tucker Gumby</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Danu Stone</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Journey</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Marshlands</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Marsh Princess</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Bog Witch</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Black Birds</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Great Forest</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX A: NOMENCLATURE</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX B: VERSE SOURCES</td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX C: MUSIC</td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AUTHOR'S NOTE</td>
<td>146</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
DEDICATION

For Kathy and Karla, Jenny, Lorrie, Poppy
and the other Forest Children I have known.
"Where waters gushed and fruit trees grew,  
And flowers put forth a fairer hue,  
And everything was strange and new;  
The sparrows were brighter than peacocks here,  
And their dogs outran our fallow deer."

Robert Browning  
"The Pied Piper of Hamlin"
"Yet in the morning may be seen
Where we the night before have been."

"The Fairy Queen"
from The Mysteries of Love and Eloquence & c. 1658

The little town of Wimbleton lay hidden deep in the forest among the great oak, walnut, and hickory trees. Many big cities have very few trees at all, and other towns have trees here and there, but Wimbleton was a town in the trees. No tree had ever been cut down to make room for houses, but rather the houses were placed where there was room between the trees. There were no roads to speak of in Wimbleton-In-The-Forest, just some little footpaths leading from one house to another.

The oldest house in the village was not even among the trees, it was in one. About halfway up a giant hickory was the treehouse home of the town's founder and leading citizen, Wimbleton himself. Wimbleton was a tall, straight, furry person with gray eyes and cat whiskers. He was a most remarkable character, as were all the residents of Wimbleton-In-The-Forest. He had built his beautiful home in the treetop because, he said, he did not care to have visitors who did not like climbing trees. So whenever he was not having adventures, Wimbleton spent his time in the treetop writing wonderful books and drawing beautiful pictures.
One midsummer morning as the sun was shining warmly through the trees from the East, Mrs. Gumby waddled toward the base of the old hickory tree. She was a nice, rosy old lady with a head-kerchief and walking stick. When she at last stood under Wimbleton's house, she raised her head and called:

"Wimbleton, Wimbleton
Up in the tree
Get yourself down here
And talk with me."

At that a furry face appeared at the window and smiled. A moment later the tall, cloaked form of Wimbleton dropped lightly out of the tree to stand beside her.

"Good morning Mrs. Gumby!" said Wimbleton, twitching his whiskers merrily. "What can I do for you today?"

"Well, it's Little Tucker," she said. "He's gone and got 'is self lost, and not be come home all night. I come to tell you so you can fetch him."

"What? Tucker lost?" said Wimbleton. "Well, I'd better go find him. Though I don't think I need to hurry; he's able to take care of himself."

"He was last seen following the Crystal Brook just after midday-meal yesterday," called Mrs. Gumby as Wimbleton started off.

Little Tucker was the smallest child in the village, standing exactly three feet tall. He had a round face and hair that
hung in his eyes, and he was the cleverest boy his age in the world. At the Crystal Brook, Wimbleton picked up Little Tucker's scent and strode off through the woods following the trail. That was one of the remarkable things about Wimbleton; he had a nose like a raccoon and could follow a scent better than could a bloodhound. The morning air was crisp and full of fragrances; and Wimbleton wondered, as he walked along, what adventures Little Tucker was getting himself into.

* * *

"And whose little boy are you?" Mary Ellen asked the small figure that crouched by the roadside regarding a frog.

"What?" said the child, looking up.

"Who are you and where are you from?" asked Mary Ellen with an amused smile.

"My name is Tucker. I live in there," he said, pointing.

"In the woods?" asked Mary Ellen (who was on her way home from the market). "Where could you live in there?"

"Wimbleton," he replied, flashing his big eyes at her from under his hair.

"Go on with you!" she said. "Wimbleton-In-The-Forest? That's the old faery tale Grandfather used to tell me when I was a little girl. The place where the furry-faced magician lived. Where do you really live?"

"Uncle Wimbleton isn't a magician, really," said Tucker.
"He just knows things, more than anyone else."

"Well, wherever you're from," said Mary Ellen, "I think you'd better come home with me to my father's farm until we can find your parents. Imagine a boy saying he lives in those woods!"

The boy said something to the frog that Mary Ellen couldn't understand, and then he got up and said, "All right. Let's go."

At the farm, which lay at the edge of the Great Forest, Little Tucker was warmly welcomed by the girl's parents and was given a bowl of hot porridge.

"Look at him eat," said Mary Ellen's grandfather. "He probably hasn't eaten since yesterday. Where'd you find him?"

"Up the road, where the brook leaves the forest," said Mary Ellen. "He says he's from Wimbleton."

"From Wimbleton!" exclaimed her father.

Mary Ellen's mother looked at Little Tucker. "Who is your mother, child?" she asked.

"Mrs. Gumby," said Tucker.

"Wasn't she the woman who grew the Wishing Flowers?" asked the grandfather.

"Yes," said Tucker.

"Wouldn't it be wonderful to have wishes granted!" sighed Mary Ellen.

"I never wanted anything I didn't already have," said
Little Tucker.

"Aye, he could be from Wimbleton," said the grandfather. "He has that look about the eyes."

"Hush, Grandfather!" said the mother. "You talk like there really is such a place. His parents are probably worrying about him . . . ."

"If he were from . . . there," said the grandfather, "he could talk to animals and run like the wind without making a sound."

"May I take a nap?" asked Tucker as he finished his meal. "I'm tired."

"You may sleep in Alice's old bed if you like," said Mary Ellen's mother. "Come, I'll show you where it is."

"I guess I'd better go to town and see if I can find out who he belongs to," said the father, getting up from his chair.

"Aye," said the grandfather. "If you can . . . ."

***

The late afternoon sun shone red upon the farmhouse as the family sat in the kitchen having tea.

"Did you find out anything in town?" asked Mary Ellen.

"No," said her father. "No one had ever heard of such a boy. Where is he now?"

"He's on the porch," said the mother. "Tucker! What are you doing out there?"

"Feeding the cat some milk," came the reply through the
kitchen window. The grandfather's eyes opened wide.

"How can he be doing that?" asked Mary Ellen. "We don't have any milk."

"I don't know," said her mother. "Let's go see."

The family hurried out onto the porch where, sure enough, Little Tucker was sitting by the old farm cat, who was lapping milk greedily from a saucer.

"Where did you get that milk?" asked the mother.

"The cat said he wanted some," said Tucker.

"Yes, but where did you get the milk? We didn't have any."

"From that cow over there. The one you call Betsy."

"That cow's been dry for three years," said Mary Ellen. "We only keep her because she's Grandfather's favorite."

"That's where I got the milk," said Little Tucker. "I called it from her."

"Let's see you do it again," said the grandfather.

"All right," said Tucker and purred something to the cat, who hopped up onto his shoulder. He took up an empty pail and went over to where the black-and-white cow stood. The family followed. Tucker reached up his little hand and stroked the cow's neck for a minute. Then he knelt down and put the bucket in place.

"A dry cow takes singing to," he said, and then spoke a few strange words to the cow, after which he began to milk,
singing:

"Cushy Cow bonny
Let down thy milk
And I will give thee
A gown of silk.

A gown of silk
And a silver tee
If thou wilt give
Thy milk to me."

The milk began to pour into the bucket at a tremendous rate, and in a few moments the pail was full.

"Let me see that," said the father. He took the bucket from Tucker and tasted the milk. "That's like no milk I've ever seen. It's almost pure cream!"

Just then a bluebird flew down and lit on the cow's back and began chirping at Little Tucker.

"Would you look at that," said the grandfather. Tucker glanced up at the family.

"He says Wimbledon is coming for me," said Tucker. "I guess I'll be going home soon."

The evening meal passed in silence that night, except for the father's occasional muttering and shaking his head. The family went to bed early, and Little Tucker slept in the same bed he had used for his morning nap.

The moon rose cold and still over the rolling farmland and the dark forest that lay to the one side. In the
distance, the town bell was chiming the hour when a tall, gray-cloaked, furry figure appeared in the field and walked toward the house. It was singing a beautiful song, like the wind in aeolian harps and the chiming of silver bells. The family all heard the song in their sleep, and slept more deeply and more contentedly. No one woke save Little Tucker, who arose and went out to meet his friend.

"So here you are at last," said Wimbleton as Tucker approached. "Are you ready to go home now?"

"Yes," he replied. "But ... the people here. They were kind to me."

The tall figure smiled.

"Then we must reward them," he said, and began looking into the pockets of his great gray cloak.

* * *

"Mother!" cried Mary Ellen as she rushed from her bedroom the next morning. "See what I found hanging above my bed. Silver Bells! Look how they move about as they chime."

"Yes," said her mother. "Little Tucker has gone, and he left each of us a gift."

Her father spoke.

"I have a carved pipe. I've never seen this kind of wood before. It's beautiful."

"And I have a necklace," said her mother. "See, it is a
faery cross. They say they're formed when a faery's tear hits the dust and turns to rock."

She held up the perfect little stone cross on its golden chain.

"What did you get, Grandfather?" Mary Ellen asked.

"Aye," said the grandfather as he reached into his coat-breast. "I got this."

He drew forth from his pocket a little old leather-bound book. Mary Ellen took it and thumbed through the pages.

"What beautiful stories and pictures," she said. "But there is no title or author. What book is this?"

"Look at the end," said her grandfather. "The author has autographed it."

Mary Ellen looked, and on the last page, at the bottom, was written in furry handwriting, the name:
Wilt Gibbs

"Take a straw and throw it up into the air, - you may see by that which way the wind is."

John Selder
Table Talk

Wimbledon of the Forest was a most remarkable person. Not only did he live in a treetop and have fur and cat-whiskers, not only could he follow a scent like a hound and breathe underwater, but he could also write stories, sing, dance, and paint. Wimbledon once said he learned to paint from watching Jack Frost. If anyone but Wimbledon had said this, you would think he was joking, but with Wimbledon you couldn't be quite sure.

Of course, all the people who lived in the little village of Wimbledon-In-The-Forest had some remarkable talent. Wimbledon would not let people live near him unless they could contribute to the well-being of the community. For instance, Bill Tinkler the silversmith made enchanted silver bells that you could hear with your soul instead of with your ears. Mrs. Gumby grew Wishing Flowers, and her little son Tucker milked the goats to make cheese. Wilt Gibbs made little straw dolls that came to life on Christmas Eve.

Some of the children, like Jenny Branch and Little Tucker, had been born in the Great Forest, and they, of course, could
run like the wind and speak to animals. But many of the townfolk had been born elsewhere in the world and were brought to the forest by Wimbleton on some of his adventures. For instance, Wilt Gibbs had come to Wimbleton-In-The-Forest when he was a little boy. Here's how it happened.

* * *

Wimbleton was walking down a dusty road one August afternoon. Where he was coming from nobody remembers anymore (except Wimbleton himself, for he never forgets anything). But that isn't really important. What is important is that he saw a little boy with dirty-brown hair up ahead, sitting behind a picket fence, crying. So Wimbleton twinkled his gray eyes at the child, wiggled his cat-whiskers in a friendly way, and said, "Hullo, there. What seems to be your trouble?"

Wilt had never been spoken to by a furry person before, and it surprised him so much that he stopped crying.

"Here now, dry up and tell me what's the matter," said Wimbleton.

"It's my daddy," said Wilt. "He's dead. He was killed."

"Well," said Wimbleton, sitting down beside the boy on the grass. "That is serious. How did it happen?"

"He was a soldier, and the War killed him. And now my mother has no money, and I'm too young to work, and . . . . and . . . ."
"I know," said Wimbleton. "There's nothing I can do for your poor father, but maybe you and I can figure out a way to help your mother. Let's go and talk to her, all right?"

"All right," said Wilt, and the two of them got up and headed for Wilt's house.

"Land-o-Promise!" exclaimed Mrs. Gibbs as Wilt and Wimbleton walked in the door. "It's gone to my brain now, as sure as I'm thinking I see Wimbleton of the Forest standing here in my own house!"

"Pardon my intrusion, Mrs. Gibbs," said Wimbleton. "But your son found me outside and has been telling me about your troubles. I came to see if I can help."

"What help can there be for a crazy woman who thinks she's seeing the Tuatha? But if you're as real as you appear to be, then God bless you and welcome to my home."

"Your son tells me you're hard pressed for money," said Wimbleton.

"That's true enough," said Mrs. Gibbs. "And how I'll earn money I don't know, when all I can do is cook and keep house."

"Then come live in my forest, where no one needs money," said Wimbleton.

"We share the work
And share the fun--
One for all
And all for one."
"The forest!" exclaimed Wilt's mother. "Then the stories are true? There is such a place!"

"And you shall be welcome—we need a good cook."

"Then so be it."

* * *

Wilt Gibbs helped Wimbleton and his mother load their household belongings into the family oxcart and, with little ceremony, they started off for the Great Forest.

A short way down the road, Wimbleton halted the oxcart, raised up, and yelled "Caw!" at the top of his lungs. One of the black crows circling overhead suddenly plunged out of the sky and landed on the cart beside them. Wimbleton crackled and cawed a few words to the big bird, which immediately flapped into the air and flew off into the distance.

"I sent him to tell the townfolk you're coming, so they can prepare for your arrival," said Wimbleton.

It was a journey of several days to the Great Forest, and at the slow speed of the oxcart, it was two more days from the forest's edge to the hidden village of Wimbleton-In-The-Forest. When they finally rolled into the forest village, the townfolk poured out to greet them. Wilt had never seen such strange, beautiful people, all living in little cottages set among the great trees. For you see, no trees were ever cut down in
Wimbledon to make room for houses, but rather the houses were built where there was room between the trees.

The oxcart rolled along the dirt path that was the town's only road and came at last to a beautiful house built of great stones and huge oak timbers. It was by far the biggest house in the village. A little stream ran beside it and turned an old-fashioned water-wheel.

"This," said Wimbledon, "is your new house. The people built it for you when they heard you were coming."

"In six days?" exclaimed Mrs. Gibbs.

"We are very fast workers here," said Wimbledon. "It leaves more time to play."

Wimbledon took Wilt and his mother inside the new home. To one side was a great dining hall large enough to seat everyone in the village. In one wall it had a huge fireplace in which a cheerful fire was burning. Adjoining the dining hall was the kitchen, which was so beautiful and well-supplied that Mrs. Gibbs kept exclaiming "Oh" every time she saw something that pleased her.

"Such a kitchen is God-sent for a woman as loves to cook as much as I do," she said.

The kitchen had a smaller fireplace all its own, as well as a stone oven and great iron pots and copper pans hanging on the walls. There was a hallway leading back to the front
door and to the parlor, and upstairs were rooms for Mrs. Gibbs and Wilt to live in. The pantry adjoining the kitchen was stocked with goat-cheese, sausages, flour, cereals, fruit, and all sorts of wonderful things.

"Oh, my," said Mrs. Gibbs. "How ever can I repay you for all of this?"

"By doing what you love to do best," said Wimbleton.

"And that is cooking," said Mrs. Gibbs.

* * *

As the days went by, Wilt got to know the town people, especially the other children. They could run like the wind and talk to animals and do all sorts of wonderful things. One boy tended the strange goats that lived in the village. Another was a shoemaker. Some of the girls were carpenters, and others were horse-trainers.

Everyone in the town of Wimbleton, from the smallest child to the oldest man, had some special job or craft he or she could do better than anyone else. There was Bill Tinkler, the silversmith, and Old Grue, the woodcarver. There were a brother and sister who made red wagons, and a family who tended the gardens. Everyone did something to help—except, of course, Wilt, who didn't know how to do anything.

This began to bother Wilt a good deal and, when he was upset, he would sit behind a fence someplace and pull up the
long grasses and twist them around his fingers. One day
Wimbledon came across Wilt when he was feeling bad. Twitching
his whiskers, Wimbledon sat down and said, "Hey, why the long
face?"

"There's nothing I can do around here to help," said Wilt.
"Of course there is," said Wimbledon. "What are you good
at?"

"Nothing," said Wilt.
"Then what's that in your hand there?" asked Wimbledon.
"That's just some old straw I put knots in to make a
little man."

"Here, let me see him," said Wimbledon. "Why, that's very
good, Wilt. From now on, your job is to make straw men for
me."

"Aw, that's no use," said Wilt. "What are they good for?"
"That you'll have to wait and see," said Wimbledon. "Just
make me the best little straw dolls you can, and we'll see what
happens. I'll even get you some nice new straw."

The next day, Wimbledon found Wilt working on his dolls at
the base of the tree where Wimbledon had his house.

"I wanted to show you these," said Wilt. "See, I wrapped
the straw around the knots so the bodies are thicker and look
real."

"Say, that's really fine, Wilt," said Wimbledon. "How did
you make the heads?"
"I kinda weaved a ball out of straw. I'm going to try putting clothes on 'em next, and maybe hair."

* * *

Over the next few weeks, Wilt's straw dolls improved every day. As the fall progressed and the winter came on, Wilt began designing straw animals as well as people. But privately he wondered what good it all was and thought Wimbleton was just humoring him. One day, a few weeks before Christmas, Wimbleton stopped by Wilt's house to see how he was doing.

"I've got fifty people-dolls and twenty animals," said Wilt. "And you know something? Yesterday, while I was working, Mrs. Gumby's cat told me it liked the doll I was making."

"That's fine, Wilt," said Wimbleton. "You're beginning to understand animal-talk! Say, do you think you could make fifty more dolls by Christmas?"

"I think so," said Wilt. "I can work a lot faster now than I used to. But why do you want all these straw people?"

"You'll see," said Wimbleton.

* * *

The snow began to fall and fill the forest with a quiet beauty and calm. The only sounds to be heard on the dark winter nights were the silver bells Bill Tinkler hung on the trees all around town. Wilt would sit by the fire and work with his
straw while his mother finished the dinner dishes.

Wilt's mother was busy every day planning the meals she served the villagers in her great dining hall. She, too, found since coming to the forest that she could work faster than before, without ever getting tired. She sang as she worked now, which she hadn't done since Wilt's father went to the War. And the food she made now was more delicious than anything ever made anywhere else in the world.

There was to be a great feast on Christmas Eve, with a Yule log in the fireplace and singing and dancing and merriment. Mrs. Gibbs planned for weeks what she'd serve: hams and puddings and eggnog and sweet corn and candy and everything you can imagine. On Christmas Eve, all the town children came to help decorate the Dining Hall with evergreen boughs, holly and mistletoe and beautiful candles. Wimbleton helped, too, setting Wilt's straw dolls here and there all around the big room. There was a great deal of excitement, and wonderful smells coming from the kitchen promised that this evening's meal would indeed be special.

Wimbleton took Wilt aside and told him he was especially pleased with the straw people, and that after the banquet he would reveal why he'd had Wilt make them. Wilt was excited, but he couldn't guess what Wimbleton had in mind. He'd have to wait and see.
After the dinner that evening, Wimbleton sang some special songs he'd just written. The townfolk, stuffed with Mrs. Gibbs' good food, smiled and listened, joining in on the choruses and singing along heartily. It was a joyous celebration. As the sun sank behind the trees, every man, woman, and child in the village was having the merriest time imaginable, when suddenly Wimbleton called a halt to it.

"I have a special announcement," he said. "As you know, tonight is the most enchanted night of the year. In the distance, even now, you can hear the chiming of the Evening Bells. In a minute, when they have finished and the sun is set, I think you will all have a special surprise, which has been prepared for you by our town's newest citizen, Wilt Gibbs."

The villagers looked quizzically from one to another. The Yule log crackled in the fireplace as the last tone of the distant bells died away. Night had fallen. And slowly, all around the room, the little straw figures Wilt had made--began to come alive! They began to move and walk and bend just as if they were real little people.

"You see!" said Wimbleton. "Welcome my new little friends. It is time to dance!"

Wimbleton took up his dulcimer and began to play a merry tune, and all the straw toys started dancing around the room--on the tables, on the floor, and on the mantlepiece. The
children of the village clapped and the older people sang, and soon everyone was dancing and having a grand time.

Wilt could hardly believe it. His dolls were all alive and bringing happiness to the children of Wimbleton. Several of the dolls were climbing on his lap and shoulders, patting him on the back and smiling at him.

It was an evening such as you or I shall never see. It lasted until the stroke of midnight, when all the dolls suddenly marched out of the Dining Hall into the snow. The children rushed to the windows in time to see them all getting into a big old sled driven by a man they couldn't see very well in the dark. He cracked his whip and drove his team off into the forest as the little dolls waved good-bye from the back of the sled.

"Who was that?" asked one of the boys.

"A fellow I know," said Wimbleton. "He's going to take the dolls and give them away to children outside the forest."

"Will they always be alive?" asked Wilt.

"No," said Wimbleton. "Tomorrow they will be just dolls again. You children here in the forest are the only ones who will ever see them alive. But the magic that was in them tonight will stay with them and make the child who gets one of them love it all the more. And next year, if Wilt is willing, we will have even more and better dolls to send into the
world."

"Sure!" cried Wilt Gibbs.

* * *

So every year Wilt makes straw dolls that come to life on Christmas Eve. He is grown up by now, and his brown hair is now the color of straw. With his freckles, the girls think he is quite the handsomest fellow in the forest. Except, of course, for Wimbleton himself—but then there are girls who don't much care for fur and whiskers, either.
JENNY BRANCH

"Oh fairest of the rural maids!
Thy birth was in the forest shades . . .
Thy step is as the wind, that weaves
Its playful way among the leaves."

William Cullen Bryant

Jenny Branch was the prettiest girl in the woodland village of Wimbleton-In-The-Forest. She could also run faster and climb better than any boy, for which she was greatly admired and envied. Jenny could scramble up a tree like a squirrel quicker than you or I could go upstairs. And she knew more about flowering wildplants than anyone in the world. Her garden was the whole forest, and Jenny would wander through it planting hillsides with Violets, Wild Sweet Williams, and Dog-tooth Lilies.

Her hair was long and brown, like leaves in the fall, and her fawn-like eyes were pale green. She always smelt of green moss and wildflowers. Every morning before the village was awake, Jenny would slip out of her house and make her way quietly along the paths leading out of the town. Sometimes she would hear old Wimbleton humming in his treetop home as he wrote or painted. Then she would run before the morning wind with her silken hair flying behind her, to a hidden pool in the Crystal Brook where she would bathe and gossip with the birds and squirrels. Leaving her bright green dress on a rock, she
would plunge into the still waters, diving and turning like an otter, swimming deep among the weeds on the river-bottom.

After her swim, Jenny would put on her dress and set off to tend her wildflowers, often rambling into far-distant stretches of the Great Forest and not returning till after dinner-time. Sometimes young deer and fox cubs would creep shyly out of the bushes to sit on her lap and be stroked or to play tag around the base of a tree.

One early morning as Jenny was having her daily swim, she heard strange noises in the forest. Peering through the rushes at the brook's edge, she saw beyond the trees a group of strange men with horses and bows and arrows.

"Hunters," she whispered to herself in awe. And then her eyes saw what the men were stalking. A beautiful young buck deer stood nibbling the tender bark from a sapling half a mile away.

Now the wild animals of Wimbleton's Forest were protected by the villagers, and it was forbidden to hunt them. Jenny's heart went out to the deer, who was upwind of the hunters and did not know they were coming. Moving quickly through the underbrush, running from tree to tree so swiftly no eye could see her, Jenny Branch circled the hunting party through the forest to get between them and the deer. The hunters left their horses with the grooms and were fitting their sharp
arrows to the bowstrings as they moved in for the kill.

Curled up behind a bush, Jenny waited, her muscles coiled like springs ready to move in a second. One of the hunters took aim, his razor-sharp arrow pointed at the deer's heart. The arrow was let fly, and at the same moment, Jenny sprang up and ran like the wind, catching the arrow lightly in mid-air and vanishing behind a hickory tree before any of the hunters saw her.

Jenny's heart was beating quickly as the men rubbed their eyes and stared at the deer, now bounding to safety, his white tail up like a flag as he disappeared into the woods.

"Where did the arrow go?" asked one of the hunters. The grooms had come up with the horses and were looking around them with wide eyes. "That arrow was going straight for him."

The man who had shot the arrow sent his groom to look for it. As the boy moved forward through the trees and bushes, Jenny scampered up the back side of the hickory the way a squirrel does, moving so that she was always out of sight of the groom and the hunters. The boy looked all over for the arrow, but of course he did not find it, for Jenny had it in her hand as she sat on a high limb and watched him search.

At last he gave up, and the hunters moved off into the forest mumbling and cursing. Jenny climbed down the tree and
ran back to her village. She stopped under a quite different hickory tree, the one where Wimbleton had his tree-house home. She called:

"Wimbleton up in
Your tree so high,
Come to me quick
Or your deer will die."

Wimbleton's furry self appeared in the doorway above her head. Grinning, he dived out of his house, falling fifty feet before he caught a branch, swung up and hooked his knees on another branch, flipped, and landed lightly on the ground beside Jenny.

"Well, what's this about my deer, my dear?" he said, and Jenny showed him the arrow and told him about the hunters.

"It looks as if we'll have to teach them a lesson," said Wimbleton, and the two of them headed off towards the brook where Jenny had last seen the hunters.

The afternoon was long and hot, and the hunters traveled far without finding signs of any more game. In fact, since they missed the deer that morning, they had seen no wildlife at all; no deer, no squirrels, no birds. The woodland was mysteriously empty, yet the hunters felt activity all around them. Light footsteps sounded on all sides, there were rustling movements and murmurings in the brush, but whenever they looked, there was never a creature seen.
At last the forest became suddenly silent. There was no sound but that of their own boots trampling through the undergrowth. Then, with a start, the hunters discovered a magnificent buck standing just ahead of them in a clearing. It was the biggest deer they had ever seen, with twelve points already on its velvet-covered antlers.

The men stopped, hardly daring to breathe, for the deer was but a few yards in front of them. It seemed not to notice them as it stood nibbling tender bark from some young bushes. The eldest hunter notched an arrow to his bowstring. Just as he shot, the deer shifted its footing and twisted a bit, so that the arrow missed and stuck in a small tree beyond.

The deer paid no attention. It blinked its brown eyes and stooped to chew a twig with a particularly delicious-looking leaf. The men could not believe their good fortune. The deer hadn't run! Slowly they began to move up for another shot. Just then the deer snorted, stomped its hoof, and pranced a few steps further away from them. Their shot was now blocked by trees, so the eldest hunter motioned for the grooms to stay back with the horses as he and the other men moved in on the deer.

The hunters circled warily, each man with his arrow ready to shoot at the first opportunity. The deer seemed unaware of their movements until the last minute, when it pranced a few
steps, as two arrows crossed in mid-air where the deer had just stood and buried themselves in the ground.

The deer reared and trotted a few yards further into the forest. It seemed to wait a few moments as the men moved up, and then it began walking, slowly and deliberately, down a deer-trail at a pace just fast enough that the men had to trot to keep sight of it.

It was almost humorous, the two grooms thought as they watched their masters hurry off after the deer, who kept just far enough ahead that none could get a shot in. Then the rustling movement began in the brush again, and the grooms turned to see what it was.

* * *

It was late evening before the hunters returned. They had stalked the deer for miles into the deep forest, getting few chances to shoot, and those somehow always barely missed the mark. They had followed the deer until sunset, when it had suddenly turned and run straight towards them, dancing amid their flying arrows and then vanishing like the wind into the forest.

The hunters had found themselves lost, their arrows spent, and night falling cold and fast. It had taken hours to find their way back to their grooms, and it would be another hour's
ride to take them to their homes outside the forest. When they came to the glen where the chase had started, they found the grooms sitting despondently by a big rock. There was no sign of the horses.

"What's going on here?" asked the eldest hunter. "Where are the horses?"

The two grooms were on their feet in an instant. "Just after you left, sir," the taller boy explained, "a girl came out of the bushes. She was beautiful, with long brown hair and green eyes. She said the horses were so pretty, and she wanted to pet them. We saw no harm, sir, though we wondered what she was doing out here in the forest.

"As she stroked the horses manes, she spoke to them, and her voice was like music. Then she whispered something to the horses, and they bolted off into the forest. We ran after them, but they kept on going and we couldn't keep up. When we came back, the girl was gone too."

The hunters became very angry with the boys and were about to beat them, when in an instant the big buck they had chased bounded out of a thicket directly into their midst, snorting and stomping. The arrows were all spent, and the men fell back in fear as the great deer reared high on its hind legs. It seemed to pause in the air for a long moment, and then the deerskin fell away and there stood before them a tall, cloaked
man, his determined eyes fixed sternly on them from a furry face.

"I am Wimbleton of the Forest," he said, and the men gasped. "The animals in this forest are under my protection. You tried to poach my deer, and for this you are all punished. You have walked a long way, and you will walk much farther before this night is over, for we have sent your horses to their stables."

He paused and looked at each man in turn. "I would give it serious thought before I hunted in this forest again, if I were you. Next time I will not be so generous."

With that, he cast on the deerskin again, and the next moment the great buck was bounding off through the forest. The men were silent in the cold of the night.

* * *

There was no victory celebration when the hunters reached their homes, weary and weak. But the story they told was remembered and often repeated in the districts near the Great Forest. It was a long time before any of them had a desire to hunt deer again.

There was a celebration in the little forest village of Wimbleton. Mrs. Gibbs cooked a special feast, and Jenny Branch
was the heroine of the day for having found the poachers. The arrow she had caught in mid-air to save the young deer was hung over the fireplace in the town Dining Hall, and it is most likely still there, unless something has happened to it since.
A WINTER STORY

"Let us have a tale of elves that ride
By night, with jingling reins,
Or gnomes of the mine or water-faeries
Such as you know how to spin."

William Cullen Bryant
"The Little People of the Snow"

Wintertime in Wimbleton's Forest was always a time of quiet and peace. When the first heavy snows fell on the little woodland village, all activity was moved indoors, and people seldom went out, except to visit neighbors or to go to the Dining Hall at Mrs. Gibbs' house. No work was done in the winter, but rather the townfolk gathered in each other's homes to read books aloud and tell stories and play parlour games.

Everything the people needed for the winter was laid in months ahead. Firewood was stacked and the coal-bins were filled, the pantries were well supplied, warm clothes had been made, and there was little for the people to do once the snows fell but to be happy and warm in their cottages.

Of course, Mrs. Gibbs still cooked the meals, but she never really considered this to be "work." For her it was rewarding and fun, and the children would often hang around the Dining Hall after supper to clear the tables and help with the dishes. On cold, dark evenings you could almost always find Little Tucker, Jenny Branch, and Bill Tinkler's nephew
Jimmy in Mrs. Gibbs' warm stone kitchen, helping as much as they could, so that they could listen to Wilt Gibbs and Wimbledon talk. For they, too, usually found their way to the kitchen after supper, to sit and drink hot cider before the fire. Their stories were the best any children could ever have the chance to overhear. Even Mrs. Gibbs would join in sometimes, and then the stories would become really exciting.

Wilt and Wimbledon never talked about stock markets or grain futures or football, but about strange happenings and ancient peoples and unsolved mysteries. Sometimes Wimbledon would talk about the days before he came to the forest, when he had toured the continent and been received at the courts of kings. He would occasionally tell about dragons he had known, for he had been alive when there were such things.

At such times, Wilt would lean forward on his long elbows and rub his sandy hair, and was as spellbound as the children were by Wimbledon's stories.

"I can remember one time," said Wimbledon on a dark evening in November, "when I encountered the Bronze Griffin of Mondspitze. It was a terrible monster, big as an elephant, with a huge eagle's head and beak, with owl's ears and red dragon's eyes. It had taloned foreclaws, great bronze wings, and the body of a giant lion. Unlike other griffins, which have lion's tails, this one had a dragon's tail, for it was
more than half dragon, its father being an imperial bronze
dragon from Egypt. Thus, this was a particularly clever
Griffin, for it had the cunning and wisdom of a dragon."

"Gee," said Jenny Branch.

"How did you meet it?" asked Wilt.

"Well," said Wimbleton. "Far to the south of here, there
is a beautiful wide valley surrounded by towering mountains
that stretch for miles in all directions on either side. The
valley itself is long and winding, and in its center there
flows a lovely river that connects a series of beautiful still
lakes of turquoise-colored waters. The people of this valley
are good and honest and happy. I happened to be traveling
through this valley in the company of an old curly-haired dog
and heard tell of a village nearby that was said to be having
problems. We headed in that direction.

"The little mountain village of Schattentier was not
actually in the valley, but was part way up the mountainside.
A steep road led to the village, which was nestled at the base
of a sheer cliff, and it was at the top of this cliff that the
Bronze Griffin lived.

"The Griffin's nest was on a pinnacle of rock at the mouth
of a small cave, which was said to contain a great and ancient
treasure. The nest itself was solid gold, and from it the
Bronze Griffin could look out over the entire valley and see the beautiful lakes glistening in the distance.

"This was a very old Griffin, and no man had seen it for many years. But the people of Schattentier knew it was there, for they heard its cries, and on dark nights they could see the fire of its wings as it circled and dived among the mountain peaks."

***

"When we got to Schattentier," said Wimbleton, "I learned the nature of their difficulty."

"What was it?" asked Tucker.

"It's a long story," said Wimbleton. "There was a church in the town, which was in the care of an old Bishop. For many years, this Bishop had worked hard for the people of his little church, and they loved him very much. Also for many years, the Bishop had tried to get a new bell for the church tower because the old bell was cracked and broken, and he had written many letters to his Archbishop. But no bell had ever been sent, and now the Bishop was too old to write again.

"So the people of Schattentier had saved their money and secretly bought the Bishop a new bell. It was a beautifully carved bell of solid silver, as big as a barrel, and had come
all the way from Geneva. The Bishop knew nothing of the new bell, for he was sick in bed, but the townpeople planned to surprise him with it the next Sunday after it came, which was the Bishop's 70th birthday. In the meantime the bell was being kept in one of the town's shops.

"On the second day after the bell had arrived, it was sitting on display in the shop where the townpeople could see it. Mothers were showing it to their children, and men were admiring the handicraft that had gone into the bell's making, when suddenly a great commotion began in the shop's doorway. The Bronze Griffin had swooped out of the sky and burst into the tiny shop with a shriek! Beating with its gleaming wings as it entered the store, the monster seized the silver bell in its beak and carried it off.

"For a moment everyone was stunned, and by the time the men came to themselves, the Griffin was outside with the bell. Flapping its mighty wings, the monster rose from the cobblestone street, perched for a moment on the church belfry, and then soared off up the face of the cliff with the Bishop's bell swinging from its beak!"

"Oh!" said Little Tucker.

* * *
"When my dog and I reached the town," said Wimbleton, "it was two days later, and only two more days remained until Sunday. The Bishop was an old friend of mine, and so we paid him a visit, being careful not to mention the silver bell or the Griffin. I left Mopp (that was the dog) with the Bishop and went to see the Mayor to learn what had become of the bell. He told me they had sent several parties of men to try to reach the monster's lair, but the cliffs were too steep and the Griffin had seen them coming and had pushed rocks down on their heads. That evening, I decided I'd have to get the bell back for them myself, and so the next day I started alone up the face of the cliff."

* * *

The fire crackled in the fireplace and Wimbleton paused to look into the faces of each of his listeners. Outside Mrs. Gibbs' kitchen, the wind howled as a new snowstorm was building.

"Go on!" said Jenny Branch.

"Yes," said Jill and Jimmy Tinkler. "What happened next?"

"Well," said Wimbleton, "it was much easier for me to climb the cliff than it had been for the others, and I knew how to be quiet so the Griffin didn't hear me coming. At last I reached a little ledge just below and several yards to the
left of the monster's den. I could see the mouth of the cave and the pinnacle of rock with the Griffin's golden nest. I climbed a bit higher to see better. There, in the nest, crouched like an enormous lion with its burnished wings gleaming in the last rays of the setting sun, was the Bronze Griffin of Mondspitze. Its dragon eyes roamed the distant valley below, and I could hear its breath hissing. Fortunately I was downwind of the Griffin so that it didn't smell me. I sat down on my ledge for some time to think what would be best to do next.

"I thought I might try to sing the Griffin to sleep, but if it were to attack me before I finished the sleep-spell, I would probably be killed. Besides, I would have no way of getting the bell down the cliff again even if the monster were asleep. If I could somehow learn the Griffin's true name, I would be its master and it would have to obey me. But how could I learn the Griffin's name? Like dragons, griffins never tell anyone their real names, and this one was a particularly cunning griffin.

"A few minutes later the Bronze Griffin rose from its nest. As the sun set and darkness covered the mountaintop, it gave a loud cry, spread its wings, and flew off into the night. Quickly I climbed to the mouth of the Griffin's cave and looked inside. I could dimly see that it contained a vast treasure,
with trunks of gold and silver and piles of jewels. But there was no sign of the Bishop's bell. Being careful to cover my scent, I crept to the back of the cave to await the return of the monster."

** **

"The next morning," said Wimbleton, "with the first light of the dawn, the Bronze Griffin returned. During the night, I had called to the birds that nested on the mountaintops to see if they knew the Griffin's true name. I had spoken to the mice that lived in its depths, and to the insects that crawl on the Griffin's nest, and to the mountain goats on whom the monster feeds, but none could tell me the Griffin's name.

"So that morning (it was still night down in the valley), I waited until the Griffin fell asleep, for it had been feeding, and then I crept up to its nest. There nestled between the sleeping monster's claws, was the Bishop's bell! Gently, so gently, I lowered myself into the nest, being careful not to awaken the beast. And then, the monster's breath heavy upon me, I laid my hand on the Griffin's enormous head, and entered its dreams.

"The dreams of a Griffin! What can I say, how can I describe them? But I came to know this animal as it knows itself, and I felt as it feels. In one part, I was in Egypt,
far away, in a nest of baby griffins who were being tended by their mother. The youngest of these was the Bronze Griffin herself, and I heard the mother griffin call her by name in the language of Griffins!"

"Her?" exclaimed Jenny Branch.

"Yes," said Wimbleton. "Old and battle-worn as she was, the Bronze Griffin of Mondspitze was a female! And I had learned her name."

"What was it?" asked Wilt Gibbs.

"I can't tell you," said Wimbleton. "It's too dangerous. The Bronze Griffin is still alive, and anyone who knows her name can be her master. If that name ever fell into the wrong hands . . . . Well, you can imagine what might happen."

"Finish the story, please," said Jill Tinkler.

"All right," said Wimbleton. "Let's see, I sat on the edge of the Griffin's nest to wait until she woke up. There was quite a view from way up there. You could see . . . . Well, that's another story.

"About four hours later the Griffin began to stir, and so I said, 'Good Morning!' She came wide awake suddenly and fixed her baleful red eyes on me."
'Good morning ______,' I said again before she could attack, this time I called her by name. The Griffin's expression changed to resigned submission, and I knew I'd won.

'What do you want?' asked the Griffin.

'I want to talk for a while,' I replied, 'and then we have a bell to return.'

'We talked together for a couple of hours; it was really most interesting. We traded stories and looked at the view, and the Griffin showed me her treasure. Finally she let me climb on her neck and we flew down to Schattentier with the great silver bell.

'Of course by then it was Sunday morning, and the villagers were all in the church. The Bishop had felt better that morning and was conducting the service when they all heard the bell ringing as it dangled from the Griffin's claws. We flew the bell directly to the church tower so it could be hung right away.

'The Bishop was tremendously surprised and pleased, but not nearly as surprised as the villagers! I then sent the Griffin back to her lair with orders never to bother the village again.'

'What about the treasure?' said Jimmy Tinkler.
"I suppose it's still up there," said Wimbleton. "I didn't want it."

"And what happened to Mopp?" asked Jenny.

"Mopp?" said Wimbleton. "Well, it seems my old dog had developed a great affection for the Bishop, and the two of them lived together for the rest of their days."

"That's a good story," said Jimmy.

"Yes," said Wimbleton. "But it isn't nearly as good as the one the Bronze Griffin told me! You see, once upon a time . . . ."
ROBIN'S DAY

"I am that merry wanderer of the night."

William Shakespeare
"A Midsummer Night's Dream"

The little village of Wimbleton is well-hidden in the Great Forest, and it is most unusual when someone from the outside world finds his way there, especially if he is not led there by Wimbleton or one of the other villagers. And yet it did happen, one day in March, that an outsider made his way well into the town before anyone noticed him, which was even more unusual, for the townfolk are unusually sharp-sighted. It was Jenny Branch who saw him first.

He was a bright-eyed little brown man, wearing a green tunic and brown breeches, standing with his hands on his hips surveying the town. He had short-cropped shaggy hair and high, pointy ears and an impish grin on his face as he caught Jenny's glance.

"What ho," he said. "Tell me, laydee, where may I find thy master?"

"What?" asked Jenny. The other townfolk had spied the fellow now and were staring. He laughed merrily.

"Where is the Bard of this Forest?" he said. "I seek the home of Wimbleton!"
Now, of course, Wimbledon lived in a treehouse a good sixty feet up an old hickory tree. Jenny was still too surprised to speak, but pointed to Wimbledon's house. The man, who was no taller than Little Tucker, laughed again and walked briskly to the base of the tree.

"Wimbledon, Wimbledon, Listen you here A visitor's coming And drawing near.

"Get yourself out And come you down To Welcome the Hob That's come to town."

In an instant, Wimbledon's furry face appeared at the door. Upon seeing the little man, he shouted "Robin!", and was so excited that he jumped the sixty feet from his door to the ground in one unbroken leap.

"Robin!" he exclaimed again. "What brings you all the way from England to this far corner of the forest?"

"For some time I've been hearing of your village, and I decided it was high time I came to see it in person," Robin replied, his eyes sparkling from his dark face.

Several of the children had gathered round and were staring at Robin and Wimbledon, who at last said, "Friends. This is my blood-brother, an old friend from the days before I came to the forest. I declare today a holiday, the day my friend Robin has come to visit."
"Is he really your brother?" asked Tucker.

"No," said Wimbleton. "We are blood-brothers. This fellow is much too old to really be my brother."

"But you are the oldest person in the village," said Jenny. "You are older than any of us."

"Ah, but my friend here is older than all of us put together. What is your age now, Old Thing?"

Robin grinned. "I am older than Oberon and older than Danu. Beyond that I cannot say, for in years I do not know my age."

"You don't look old," said Tucker. "Who is Oberon?"

"Who is Oberon?" cried Robin. "Have you never told them of our old adventures with the faery-king, Wimbleton?"

"No," he admitted. "I'm afraid I haven't. Oberon was the King of the Faeries, and Danu was their goddess."

"You knew the faery king?" asked Wilt Gibbs.

"Yes," said Robin, "and so did your friend Wimbleton here. I fear this story-teller of yours has been negligent in telling his own life history."

"Be that as it may," said Wimbleton, "we must celebrate your coming. Jenny, tell Mrs. Gibbs we have special company for dinner. Perhaps afterwards Robin and I can talk over old times and you shall hear some of the stories. But if I know this old fellow, he is ready for a good meal."

"The truth," said Robin, with an impish grin:
"Cheese and bread for gentlemen
Hay and corn for horses
A cup of ale for good old wives
And kisses for young lasses."

With that he winked at Jenny Branch, who hurried off to find Mrs. Gibbs.

* * *

After dinner, Robin and Wimbleton sat before the fire in the great Dining Hall and talked and joked and sang. The town-folk crowded around to hear their stories, and even Mrs. Gibbs put off doing the dishes to listen to them.

"I have heard tell," said Robin to Wimbleton at last, "that the children of your village are the fleetest-footed in the World. Is this true?"

"Well, you know my speed of old," said Wimbleton, "and yet some of these children can outrun me in a minute. Little Jenny here is the fastest, for she can outrun the flight of an arrow."

"Good," said Robin, "for as you know, I too am known for my quick agility and swift travel:

"More swift than lightening can I flye
About this aery welkin soone
And, in a minute's space, can spy
Each thing that's done belowe the moone."

Wimbleton smiled and Robin laughed. "What I have in mind," said Robin, "is nothing less than a race! For a long time I have looked for someone who could give me a go for a
run. I'd hoped to find such a person in your village."

"Well, Jenny can do that and more," said Wimbleton. "We shall have the race first thing tomorrow morning."

This met with general approval, and the rest of the evening went by quickly with Robin and Wimbleton telling tales of olden times and great adventures.

"Tell us about Oberon," said Jenny Branch.

"Well," said Wimbleton, "Oberon was King of the Faeries in England at the time of Queen Elizabeth I. You see, each country has its own faery rulers just as it has a human King or Queen. At this time, Finvarra was Lord of the Tuatha in Ireland, Knurremurre was the Dwarf-King in Denmark, and Oberon ruled England."

"And I," said Robin, "was Oberon's jester!"

"Really?" asked Jimmy Tinkler.

"Really!" said Wimbleton. "Robin, do you remember the time we stole a changeling?"

"I remember it well!" said Robin.

"What's a changeling?" asked Wilt Gibbs.

"Someone who has been stolen by the faeries," said Wimbleton. "It happened like this: I had been traveling a great deal in Scotland, and I then made my way south through Wales to visit a friend of mine in Cornwall, which is the far southeast corner of England and a very rugged land. My friend was a young man named Johnny Benburr, and I'd heard he was
getting married. When I arrived, I found poor Johnny in a sad state of unhappiness. His fiancée was the daughter of a farmer I knew, a dark-haired girl named Lorna, with bright eyes and a soft voice that made the harsh Cornish dialect sound sweet and melodious.

"Their wedding was to have been the day before, but it seems that a band of faeries had seen Lorna in the meadow that morning as she picked her bridal bouquet.

"Wee folk, good folk
Trooping all together
Green jacket, red cap,
And white owl's feather."

They were so captivated by her beauty that they "took her," and Oberon left a changeling in her place. Poor Johnny didn't discover the difference until they were in the church and he lifted the bridal veil to find - not his bethrothed but a laughing goblin in the wedding gown."

"How awful!" said Jenny Branch.

"Aye; 'twas but a jest, though," said Robin. "And then Wimbleton told Johnny he'd get his bride back for him, and set off toward the nearest elf-hill, where Oberon was holding his court in a Crystal Palace underground. While on his way there, I spied him, and he enlisted my help in an Ash Grove."

"But you were Oberon's jester," said Wilt Gibbs.

"Aye," said Robin, "but I owed more to Wimbleton than to
the faery king, for he and I were both much older than Oberon, even then. Besides, our plan was such a fine jest, I couldn't pass it by."

Robin laughed merrily, and Wimbleton continued the tale.

"We went to the faery palace and I presented myself to Oberon as a minstrel," said Wimbleton. "They were having a grand party, as usual, and I was easily prevailed upon to sing a ballad or two."

"And I plugged my ears!" laughed Robin.

"That wasn't nice," said Jill Tinkler.

"Ah, but he had to," said Wimbleton. "For the song I sang was a lullaby, an ancient lullaby, so sweet that any who hear it fall asleep. I soon had all the Faery Hosts sleeping soundly all about the banquet hall. And then Robin here led me to where they had hidden Lorna, and we freed her."

"But what we did then was the best part," said Robin.

"What?" asked Jenny Branch.

"I traded clothes with her," said Robin, "and Wimbleton took her back to Johnny Benburr while I took her place. Oh, but you should have seen Oberon's face when he awoke next morning and found me in Lorna's cell!"

With that Robin fell into gales of merry laughter, joined by Wimbleton and the rest. When, at last, it was time for the villagers to go to bed, Wilt Gibbs posed Robin a question.
"Where will you be spending the night?" he asked. "My mother and I have a guest room if you have need of a bed."

"Robin spend the night in a bed?" laughed Wimbleton. "No, Wilt, this good fellow would sooner cut off his hand."

"The night-time is when I live," said Robin. "I wander the forests and fields, and sleep in hay-stacks or chimney-tops when I feel the need. I thank you anyhow for the offer."

And then he was gone, so quickly none saw him go except Wimbleton, who had been expecting him to do so.

***

The next morning was bright and crisp. Tiny droplets of dew touched the grasses along the pathways, and a few early spring flowers showed their heads. The sky above the forest was clear, and the breezes carried fresh scents to fill the morning air.

The whole village had turned out early for the race, but Jenny had been there before any of them. She wore her short green dress and had tied her long brown hair at the back for running. Wimbleton was there, too, but as yet there was no sign of Robin. Then, from down the lane came the sound of singing, and Robin appeared around a bend in the path and walked up to the group of villagers.

"Well, the day of the race has come," he said. "Are you ready?"
"Yes," replied Jenny.

"Then what is the race-course to be," asked Robin.

"To the edge of the forest," said Wimbleton, "where there is a woodcutter's cottage and a path leading down past the Golden Ram tavern. Round the tavern, and then follow the Crystal Brook back to the village. The winner will be the first to reach the base of my hickory tree. That will give you a good fifteen-mile-run, which I am sure both of you can handle easily."

"Shall we start, then?" said Jenny.

"Yes," said Wimbleton. "Runners to your marks:

"Bell horses, bell horses,
What time o' day?
One a clock, two a clock,
Time to away!"

When Wimbleton said the word 'away,' Jenny and Robin sprang up and ran off down the forest path. Mrs. Gibbs complained because she couldn't see them go, but they were too quick for her old eyes to follow.

"Well," said Wimbleton, "shall we go over to my tree and wait for the winner?"

* * *

I would describe the race to you, but that would take longer to tell than the race did to run. In the end, Jenny and Robin burst into the village neck-and-neck and touched the base
of the tree at the same time.

"What do you know?" said Wimbleton. "A tie."

"No," said Jenny. "Robin won. It's his fault."

"What do you mean?" asked Wilt. Robin blushed and grinned.

"He was ahead the whole time," said Jenny. "He had reached the tavern before I was even out of the woods. But when I got there, he'd stopped to have a drink."

"That's true," said Robin. "That cask of ale looked too good to pass by. In fact, I drank the whole thing."

"So you see, he really could have won," said Jenny. "I thought I could anyway!" said Robin. "This girl's far faster than I gave her credit for. But it's not the winning of a race that counts; it's the running. She ran the race fair and true, and I strayed. I say she wins!"

"The race stands a tie," said Wimbleton. "So be it."

Robin smiled. "So be it. I thank you, laydee, for you've given me such a race as I'd never hoped for."

Jenny blushed and took Robin's outstretched hand. "It was fun," she replied.

And, suddenly Robin was gone. The villagers looked about in amazement, but there was no sign of him. Wimbleton shook his head.

"He always goes like that. He never was one for good-byes."
"Quite a fellow," said Wilt Gibbs. "I wonder why I've never heard of him before."

"Perhaps you have," said Wimbleton, twitching his cat-whiskers. He has many other names, that Robin Goodfellow. Some call him Hob, or Puck."

"Puck!" exclaimed Jenny Branch.

"Of course," said Wimbleton. "The oldest Old Thing, as Kipling calls him."

"Puck," whispered Tucker.

"No wonder he was so fast," said Jenny.

* * *

That was the last time Robin Goodfellow was seen in Wimbleton's Forest, for he had gone back to England, some say to Romney Marsh and others say to Sherwood Forest. But he is remembered in the village of Wimbleton to this day, and the anniversary of his coming is celebrated each year by the town-folk.
ST. BERNARD'S WALTZ

"I'm the Hit of the Hall,
You're the Belle of the Ball,
At St. Bernard's Waltz!"

British Folk Song

There was once a Prince who lived in a little country near the Great Forest. It was not long ago, your grandfather was alive at the time. This Prince was not a handsome fellow, though he didn't look bad, and the Princess he loved was not beautiful. She was attractive, but the Prince loved her for her sweet spirit and gentle ways. Because she lived in another country and didn't know he was alive, the Prince was very sad.

Otto, for that was the Prince's name, had seen the Princess while he was traveling with his father. They had been guests of the foreign King who was Nora-Anne's father. She was shy, and they had not been introduced, but Otto had watched Nora-Anne from his balcony as she played with her dog in the garden below. Now that he was home again, Otto found that he could not stop thinking of her, so he went each day to the forest to wander among the hills and streams, or to sit beside a waterfall and listen to its sparkling sounds.

Otto's home was near the mountains, and hills stretched in all directions from his father's castle. But to the north-east the land eventually became less hilly and more wooded, and
because that was also the direction in which her Kingdom lay, Otto found himself heading more and more often in that direction. Of course Nora-Anne's home lay many hundreds of miles away, and Otto knew he could never get there on foot. Still he loved to explore the woodlands in that direction, and he would take a wineskin and a sack of bread and cheese and spend whole days away from home sighing for his love.

One day when Otto had stopped for lunch on a log beside a fast-running crystal stream, he was drinking from his wineskin when he heard a soft beautiful voice close behind him. He turned and peered through the leaves. There he saw a small figure. At first he thought it was an elf, and then he saw that it was a little girl, with a short green dress, long thin legs, and large green eyes that smiled at him. The girl came out of the bushes and walked over to Otto.

Because Otto was a prince, he was not used to having common people around him. Yet there was something about this girl that made him feel comfortable and natural.

"Hi," she said as she sat beside him on the log. "My name's Jenny. What's yours?"

Her green eyes flashed at him.

Ordinarily the Prince would have given his full name and title, which was long and impressive, but this time he simply smiled and said "Otto." He offered the girl some of his lunch,
which she accepted gladly.

"What are you doing way out here in the forest?" he asked. "Are you lost?"

"No," she replied. "My village is not too far from here. What about you? You're not a hunter."

Otto sighed.

"I was just wandering. The forest is so beautiful."

Then, for some reason, Otto told the girl about Nora-Anne and his love for her. Jenny listened eagerly, smiling coyly at times, laughing when he spoke of the Princess and her dog, and looking sad when he told of returning without her.

"Well," said Jenny when he had finished his story, "I think I know a fellow who can help you. He lives in my village, come on and I'll take you to see him."

"Do you really think he can help?" asked Otto.

"Of course," said Jenny, and they got up and started off through the forest. They walked for the rest of the afternoon, following the course of the stream downward to where it leveled into a wide beautiful brook that flowed gently through the forest.

"I thought you said your village was close by," said the Prince.

"It wouldn't take me long to get there if I ran," said Jenny. "But I don't think you could keep up."
"Try me," said the Prince, and got ready to run. Jenny smiled at him for a moment, and then suddenly, while Otto was blinking, she disappeared.

"Where are you?" he called, looking around in surprise.

"Here," came a small voice in the distance. Otto looked and saw Jenny standing in a grove a hundred yards ahead waving at him. She ran back to where he was standing before he had time to open his mouth.

"I see what you mean," he said, and they walked on slowly side-by-side.

***

As they walked, Prince Otto wondered what village this girl could be from, so far out in the forest. Then he heard, faintly, laughing voices ahead, and looked up to see a town of beautiful cottages hidden among the trees, with strange happy people going about their business. He began to remember tales he had heard as a child, bedtime stories and old wives legends, of such a place as this. The Prince began to tremble, for he realized that he was being led to the village of Wimbleton-In-The-Forest!

Ahead was a large hickory with a treehouse high in its branches. Farther along the trail Otto saw a large Dining Hall, with its great water-wheel turning slowly. All around were scattered half-timbered homes with thatched roofs, and
the little mill-stream made its way along the edge of the village as it flowed down to join the Crystal Brook.

Jenny stopped at the base of the great hickory tree and turned to Otto.

"Can you climb?" she asked.

"Yes, but probably not as well as you can. Is this the home of . . . Wimbleton?" he asked.

Jenny smiled.

"Come on," she said. "I'll introduce you to him."

And with that, they both started up the tree.

Wimbleton was sitting at his desk writing when they knocked at the door of his treehouse.

"Come in, enter!" he called. "Well! Jenny, my girl, you do manage to come up with the most unusual people! Prince Otto, I believe . . . ."

Otto blinked.

"You know me?" he asked.

"Certainly!" said Wimbleton. "Come in and sit down. Tell me what you're doing here in the Great Forest."

Otto sat next to Jenny on Wimbleton's sofa and stared at his host in wonder. He had never seen a person with such fine beautiful fur and shiny black cat-whiskers. Wimbleton winked at Jenny and smiled at the Prince. At last Otto settled down
"Yes, that's a problem, all right," said Wimbleton when Otto had finished. "You know, it isn't much farther from here to Nora-Anne's castle than it is to yours. Distances get rather mixed up when you get to my part of the forest, you see."

Wimbleton thought for a minute.

"I think I have an idea," he said at last. "Jenny, go over to Mrs. Gibbs' and ask her if Prince Otto can use one of their guest rooms. Then ask Old Grue and Bill Tinkler to stop by."

When Jenny had left, Wimbleton turned to the Prince.

"I used to be friends with Nora-Anne's father when he was a boy," he said. "I may be able to arrange a little something special. Now if only the Dwarf-King will cooperate . . . ."

That evening Wimbleton talked to Bill Tinkler and Grue the woodcarver, who were the elders of the village. Bill was the town silversmith, and it was said that he bought his raw silver and coal from the Dwarf-King, who lived under the mountains to the south. Messengers were sent during the night, and by dawn the plan was complete.
Early the next morning, Wimbleton tacked up a large parchment on the base of his hickory tree. It read:

Announcing
A GRAND BALL
to be given by the Village of Wimbleton-In-The-Forest
and to be held
MAY EVE
in the Imperial Underground Ballroom at
THE HALL OF DWARF-KING!
Refreshments Orchestra
8:00 p.m.
(formal wear only)

A May Eve Ball! There had not been a formal ball in the forest as far back as anyone remembered. Usually the village had bonfires and folk dancing, but this year was to be something special! The girls of the village began working on their gowns and the boys practiced their waltz steps. The old people talked of balls they had attended in other lands, and everyone was excited. Wimbleton busied himself writing special invitations to friends all over the world. The first one he wrote was to Nora-Anne's father.

***
When Wimbledon's invitation was delivered, the King was very excited. He was a good King, but he had worked hard for many years and was tired, and had almost forgotten that as a child he had once visited the Great Forest and had known wonders and enchantments in the village of Wimbledon. When his page read the invitation, the King jumped up and looked at it himself, almost in disbelief. But sure enough, there at the bottom was the familiar signature -- in furry handwriting -- of Wimbledon. The King was so pleased, he ran to tell his daughter in person.

The town of Kenmore lies just outside the Great Forest. It is about a day's walk from Wimbledon, though few of the people who live in Kenmore believe in the woodland village, and none can tell you where it lies. Nevertheless, the King's invitation said for him to come to the Golden Ram Inn on the outskirts of Kenmore on the last day of April, and that a guide would be sent to escort his party to the Hall of the Dwarf-King.

The lords and ladies of the King's court laughed a good deal. They thought the King had gone daft, and the old ladies wondered what would come of it. A ball in Wimbledon's forest! What nonsense for a grown man!

Only Princess Nora-Anne did not laugh. She loved her father very much, and she had been hearing his talks about
Wimbledon since she was a little girl. She had begun to suspect that they were just stories, but now -- well her father would certainly not make up something like this.

So, when the last week in April came, she and her father boarded a train headed south. There were several small countries between theirs and the Great Forest, but in time they arrived and journeyed the last miles from Nordby to Kenmore by coach. It was May Eve when they arrived, and already the farmers and townsfolk were busy building piles of firewood for the evening bonfires. There was a great deal of hustle and bustle in the streets as the King and his servants approached the Inn.

The town of Kenmore is small and quiet, and never is it more lovely than at sunset, as twilight creeps over the woods and farms, and evening bells chime in the church belfry. At six o'clock, a coach called at the inn for the King and his daughter, and shortly after they were making their way towards the Great Forest, which lay dark and still before them.

When the coach was out of the sight of Kenmore, the driver spoke some strange words to the horses, who lifted their heels and ran like the wind, their hooves scarcely touching the ground. For all their speed, the coach scarcely rocked, and the Princess held her breath at the pace they were keeping.

"Yes," said her father. "These are horses from Wimbledon!"
He nodded his head as memories returned. The coach traveled scarcely an hour before it reached the woodland village, and Wimbledon came out to meet them.

"Your Highness," smiled Wimbledon.

"My Lord," said the King. "This is my daughter, Princess Nora-Anne."

"Ah, I've heard a great deal of you, my dear," said Wimbledon. "I hope Wilt's driving didn't upset you; we built the coach especially for your coming, and he's been practicing."

"It was beautiful," said the Princess.

"It's good to see this place again, Wimbledon," said the King. "There's so much I'd forgotten."

"Well, I hope you can stay for a few days and get reacquainted," said Wimbledon. "But now we must be going if we are to get to the ball."

Wimbledon, Jenny, and Tucker joined the King and Princess in the coach, and Wilt headed the coach through the dark forest toward the Hall of the Dwarf-King.

"The others have gone ahead," explained Jenny Branch when everyone had been introduced. "We stayed to meet you."

Jenny was wearing a special long white lace gown, and Tucker and Wilt wore evening clothes. Wimbledon was wearing a
great velvet cape with a fur collar and a large golden chain, and beneath the cape a handsome white satin suit with medals and ribbons.

At last the coach entered a steep ravine which came to a dead-end a short way further on. Here Wilt stopped the coach and they all got out. It was quite dark by now, and the Princess could hear distant music. Wimbleton raised his hands and called:

"Hall of the Dwarf-King
Open wide
That we may join
Our friends inside."

A great door opened in the side of the hill, and a little man rushed out to escort them in. Bright lights shone through the doorway, and the group walked down a short tunnel which opened out into a high-roofed ballroom. The Hall of the Dwarf-King! At one end of the room was a throne, upon which the Dwarf-King himself sat with dignity. The ceiling was like that of a cathedral, and diamond chandeliers hung on silver chains. Torches burned on the walls, and an orchestra of dwarfs was warming up at the opposite end of the room from the throne.

The little man presented the King and Princess to the Dwarf-King, who quickly began an earnest conversation on politics with Nora-Anne's father. This left Nora-Anne free to look about the beautiful ballroom more carefully. There was a table
of refreshments along one wall, to which Wimbleton and the others had wandered after greeting the Dwarf-King. Several other people were engaged in conversations about the room.

There were, besides the villagers from Wimbleton, also some princes and princesses from among the finest families in the world, and Nora-Anne also saw one or two tall fair lords, whom she knew were rulers of no lands on any map, but who were from beautiful places that have no names and are seen only in childhood's sweetest dreams.

The orchestra was warming up, yet their music was more beautiful than that of many orchestras when they are playing in earnest. Nora-Anne looked about the room and wondered who she would dance with. There were so many fine-looking people that she had to keep reminding herself that she was a Princess.

Just then, a silver bell chimed, and the orchestra began to play. Couples were forming around the room, when suddenly Wimbleton himself appeared before Nora-Anne and presented his arm. Then, together, they walked to the center of the hall and led off the dancing.

The first waltz was a slow, simple one to warm up, but Nora-Anne found that Wimbleton was a graceful dancer, and they gliding around the floor easily. At the end of the first dance, a young Prince cut in on them, and Nora-Anne thought
she saw Wimbleton wink at him as he turned away. The young Prince was not particularly striking. She had not noticed him in the crowd, yet Nora-Anne had the feeling she had seen him somewhere before.

Just then the orchestra began the second dance, the beautiful and haunting "St. Bernard's Waltz."

"Come let's dance tonight
St. Bernard's Waltz;
We'll go gliding,
Just as they did
In the old days that used to be . . . ."

Gliding across the floor, spinning, waltzing, Nora-Anne looked at her Prince, and he looked at her. Wimbleton was dancing now with Jenny Branch, Wilt Gibbs with Molly Pedersen, old Grue's granddaughter. Tucker Gumby waltzed with Jill Tinkler, and even the old silversmith himself danced with Mrs. Gibbs.

"Dreams of yesterday
That great old-time Waltz . . . ."

And though Nora-Anne had many partners during the rest of the evening, she never danced the Waltz of St. Bernard with anyone but Otto.

* * *
Some folk claim there is an enchantment to dancing St. Bernard's Waltz on May Eve -- that you should only dance it with someone special. I wouldn't know. But after Otto and Nora-Anne had danced it together for the seventh time, the Princess suggested they get some fresh air, and the two of them slipped out of the Hall of the Dwarf-Ring into the quiet of the moonlit ravine.

They heard the tinkling of running water and found that they were near the Crystal Brook, not far from the falls where Otto had met Jenny. The two of them walked quietly as Otto led them to the log where he had eaten his lunch.

"You know," said Nora-Anne. "You seem very familiar. Weren't you at my father's castle last winter?"

"Yes," said Otto. "But I didn't think you'd remember."

"I'm glad I danced with you more than the others," Nora-Anne continued.

"Why?"

"Those other princes were so grand and royal. I felt small next to them. The people of Wimbleton are nice, but they're magical. You and I were the only ones who are just... humans."

"Yes," said Otto. "Just people. But, then, that's kind of nice... . . ."

* * *
Wimbledon's ball was a grand success. It lasted till dawn, and then some. Otto spent most of the night talking with Nora-Anne about his country, for there weren't mountains where she came from.

The next year Nora-Anne and her father visited Otto's castle, and the year after he was invited back to theirs. I never heard whether or not the two of them were ever married. But, you know, it wouldn't surprise me a bit if they were.
"And when I am a silversmith
I'll make such special things
Like candlesticks and drinking cups
And magic Wishing Rings . . . ."

"Ballad of Jill Tinkler"
Wimbleton

In Wimbleton's Forest, everyone had something special he or she could do to help. Mrs. Gibbs cooked, Old Grue carved wood, Tucker Gumby made cheese, Molly Pedersen raised horses. And Bill Tinkler made magic silver bells. No one in the world has ever worked silver like Bill. Some of his bells were engraved with beautiful scenes or designs. Others were smooth and polished like mirrors. There were bells shaped like ladies with long skirts, or like little houses with high roofs. Bill made big bells and tiny bells, thick bells and delicate bells, all of silver and all beautiful as the day.

Bill Tinkler had a little niece and nephew. Jill and Jimmy Tinkler were twins, and they each had blond hair and brown eyes. Jimmy was a gardener, for he loved nothing more than digging in the dirt, planting, and watching things grow. He had the finest vegetable garden in the land, and during winters he could even grow things indoors.

When they were little, Jill and Jimmy both worked in the garden. Jill never cared for gardening, though, the way Jimmy
did. For one thing, she was not as good at it as he was. But more important, there was another thing that fascinated Jill much more. In the evening, after the gardening was finished, Jill would walk over to visit her uncle's workshop and would stand in the shadows watching her uncle work the silver with his hammers and tools. She would watch him heat the silver ore on his forge and then process and purify the metal, casting it into silver ingots and stacking it in his storeroom.

Bill Tinkler was an old man with soft white hair, thick crystal glasses, and a bald forehead. His wrinkled hands were gentle but firm, working the silver with precise craftsmanship. Jill, who was two years younger than Jenny Branch, and two years older than Little Tucker Gumby, loved nothing more than to watch her uncle as he worked. When she was seven, Jill gave up gardening and became his assistant.

* * *

No one you or I know could become a silversmith's assistant at that age, but things are different in the town of Wimbleton-In-The-Forest. There is a special magic, and people can work faster and learn things more quickly than they ever can outside the Great Forest. No one ever gets tired or bored in the village - at least not very easily.
Jill Tinkler became an assistant to her uncle on her seventh birthday. It wasn't as much fun as you might think. Jill had to carry heavy loads of silver ore from the storage bins to the fireplace, she had to bring firewood and coal and start the fire each morning, she had to work the bellows and sweep the floor and clean the shop - it was a lot of work. But Jill didn't mind.

The villagers were pleased that Jill was helping Bill, for now he could spend more of his time working silver and less taking care of the shop. But no one knew that, secretly, Jill hoped to learn the craft of silversmithing herself so that she could someday make beautiful things out of silver. The people in the village had never thought about anyone else learning to work silver, because everyone knew that no one could ever do a better job than Bill Tinkler.

However, Jill had ideas of her own. She didn't tell anyone, but at night she would dream of all the things she could make if she were a silversmith: toys and statues and silver spoons, cups and rings and boxes, candlesticks and . . . even magic bells! Oh, the things she wanted to make with silver.

There was one person in the town who guessed Jill's secret, for there was not much that slipped past the attention of Wimbledon of the Forest. Sometimes in the evenings he would
watch Jill in Bill's shop as she cleaned up, and occasionally he would walk with Jill in her dreams at night while she slept. Wimbleton knew what lay in the hearts of all the town children, and when he learned of Jill's secret desire, he spoke a few words to Bill, who agreed to teach her to work silver.

One day, when her uncle felt she was ready, Bill called Jill over from the bellows to his workbench.

"So you want to be a smith," he said slowly. Jill's eyes went wide.

"Yes," she said, "but how did you know?"

Bill Tinkler smiled and told her what Wimbleton had said.

"It will take time," he explained. "But I won't be living forever, and it will be nice to have the craft still in the family. You are now my apprentice. I'll teach you."

Bill showed Jill each of his tools and explained how they were used, and each day after that he set aside an hour for Jill to practice. At other times he would stop to explain each step of his own work as he went.

* * *

By June, Jill could make several little objects out of silver - letter openers and napkin rings and things like that. Within another month she could do engraved designs and even made a drinking cup. One day, when she and her uncle were
finishing her daily lesson, Jill looked thoughtful for a moment and then asked a question.

"How do you get magic into your silver bells?" she said.

"Magic?" repeated her uncle. "That's a tough question. Part of the magic is already in the silver, and part of it comes from skill. It takes many years to learn to make Enchanted Bells. Why do you ask?"

"I was thinking of Wimbleton," said Jill. "If it weren't for him, I wouldn't be learning silverwork. I want to make him something special."

"Well, it will be a long time before you can work silver-magic," said Bill. "Do you want me to make something?"

"No," said Jill. "I want to make it myself."

* * *

That afternoon Jill visited Mrs. Gumby's house. Mrs. Gumby was a plump, rosy woman with a red-and-white head scarf. She was busy, as usual, in her flower garden.

"Hello Mrs. Gumby," said Jill.

"Well, if it isn't Jill Tinkler!" said Tucker's mother. "What can I be doing for you?"

"I wanted to ask you about your wishing flowers," said Jill. "Do they truly grant wishes?"

"Their magic is strong," said Mrs. Gumby. "Provided the wisher has a kind heart! And what would you be wishing for
now?"

"Oh, nothing," said Jill. "Tell me, do they grow in the winter?"

"The flowers? No, of course not," said Mrs. Gumby.

"Well, thanks anyway," sighed Jill, and Mrs. Gumby went back to her digging. Jill went off to look for her brother. She had a plan to discuss with him.

* * *

About a week later, Jimmy Tinkler came into the smithy shop just before suppertime. Jill hurried over to him.

"Did you see her?" Jill whispered.

"Yes," said her brother. "I think it'll work. How's the gift coming?"

"All right so far," said Jill. "I'm just starting, though."

* * *

Wimbleton's birthday happens to be the third week in December, and it took Jill the rest of the summer and most of the fall to make the special gift she had in mind. By September Jill had become quite talented and could make many of the things she had once dreamed about. But the gift for Wimbleton was something so special that she took her time and worked carefully so it would be perfect.
Of course it was a secret. Not even Bill Tinkler knew exactly what she was making, for Jill only worked on it when no one was around. Sometimes she even missed supper to work on Wimbledon's birthday present.

The snows began to fall in early November, and it wasn't till the end of that month that Jill finished her project. It was a ring, a beautiful carved ring of tiny silver wishing flowers and leaves all interlacing together. Jill finished it late in the evening, and then hurried through the snow to her own home where she found her brother in his bedroom.

"Is it ready?" he asked as she came into the room.
"Yes," said Jill. "Is the flower?"
Jimmy led his sister to the windowsill, and there in a pot, beautifully blooming in the moonlight, was one of Mrs. Gumby's wishing flowers! Jimmy had cared for it since summer.

Jill opened the windows and held the ring and the flower together in her hands. A cold breeze blew gently into the room and stars twinkled in the night sky outside. Jill closed her eyes.
"I wish," she whispered. "That this ring be a Wishing Ring, and that it grant all of Wimbledon's wishes and make him happy."

The wishing flower trembled a moment, and then vanished. Jill and Jimmy looked at the ring in surprise. One of the tiny
silver flowers on top of the ring had changed. It was no longer silver, but was now colored like the real flower that had just disappeared.

"I think it worked," said Jimmy.

* * *

When Wimbleton's birthday came at last, there was a great celebration. It was an exciting time, and less than a week till Christmas Eve, for Wimbleton was born on December 18th. Mrs. Gibbs cooked a special meal and baked a giant pineapple upside-down cake with whipped cream. This was Wimbleton's favorite birthday cake.

After dinner there was singing and the exchanging of presents - you see, Wimbleton always gave other people presents on his birthday in exchange for the ones they gave him. Everyone had a good time. The last present that Wimbleton opened was Jill's, and when the townfolk saw the silver ring they were amazed and stared in wonder.

"It's beautiful," whispered Jenny Branch.

"Aye, it truly is!" said Bill Tinkler.

"And it's a Wishing Ring!" added Jimmy Tinkler.

Wimbleton smiled and put the ring on his furry finger. It fit perfectly.

"Make a wish," said Little Tucker.
"Yes, make a wish!" cried the other children.

"All right," said Wimbledon, and he made a special wish. His wish came true, too.

"I wish," said Wimbledon of the Forest as he rubbed his magic ring. "I wish all of you . . . a very Merry Christmas!"
THE BOG WITCH
"Theirs are slenderness and grace and lightness of foot, and they love all quick-moving things and music and dancing."

Georgess McHargue
The Impossible People
"But theirs is the dower of bird and of flower
And theirs are the earth and the sky."

Rose Fyleman

The woodland village of Wimbleton-In-The-Forest was hidden among the trees and leaves of the Great Forest. It was so well hidden, in fact, that people outside the forest had forgotten that it was really there and thought the place was only a faery tale. But it was real. The houses were small cottages made of wood and stone, so neatly placed among the trees that they looked as if they had grown there.

The people of the village were the caretakers of the woodlands. They cut out the dead trees and pruned the live ones to make them grow better. They were grand foresters, the people of Wimbleton. They also took care of all their own needs; they grew their food and spun cloth and raised ducks and chickens, goats and honeybees. Their orchards had different kinds of apples growing on the same tree.

And -- there was magic in the village! Bill Tinkler made enchanted silver bells, and Mrs. Gumby grew wishing flowers. The children could all talk to animals and understand what they said back. They could run like the wind without making a sound and could hear the grass growing.
Jenny Branch could catch an arrow in mid-flight, and Little Tucker could milk a dry cow. Wilt Gibbs made magic straw dolls that came alive at Christmas, and Old Wimbleton could . . .

Do you know about Wimbleton? He was the founder of the village, and they say that it was he that made the place magical. Wimbleton was tall, and had fur. He wore a long cloak and had sparkling gray eyes and cat-whiskers. His house was in the top of a big old hickory tree, and he painted pictures, wrote poetry, and made up songs. He could breathe under water and had a nose like a raccoon. He was a most unusual person.

Of course, Wimbleton hadn't always lived in the forest. In the old days he wandered about the countrysides and was a welcomed guest in royal courts and pubs from England to Denmark, from Holland to Italy.

But now he was happy to spend most of his time in the Great Forest, for he loved the trees and animals, and he loved the people of his village -- just as the trees and animals and people loved him.

One day, Wimbleton was busy with his spring cleaning. Usually, if you looked into Wimbleton's treehouse, you found it cluttered with books and paint brushes and musical instruments and all sorts of other odd things he was always coming up
with. But once a year he cleaned everything up, put everything away, and found places for new things that had never been put away before.

Wimbledon didn't really need to clean more than once a year, because there was never any dust or dirt in his house. This may have been magic, or it may have been because the tree-house was so high that dust couldn't get up to it. Nevertheless, Wimbledon was very busy that day.

While Wimbledon was mumbling over a chest full of trinkles, a small face appeared in the doorway. It belonged to a long-haired young girl with pale green, fawn-like eyes. She was wearing a short green dress, she had long thin legs, and her hair was soft and brown. It was Jenny Branch.

Jenny was the prettiest girl in the village, and she could run faster and climb better than anyone else. Many of the boys admired and envied her. It was Jenny's special job to tend the wild flowers that grew in the woodlands of the Great Forest. She had beautiful hillside gardens of wild Violets and Dutchman's Breeches, Fox Glove, Dog-Tooth Lilies, Bluebells and Sweet William. Her hair was the color of autumn leaves, and she always smelt sweetly of moss and wild flowers.

"Hullo, there, Jenny," said Wimbledon when he saw her. "Come on in. Don't mind me, I'm busy. Make yourself at home."
Jenny was standing on a branch of the great hickory below Wimbleton's door, a good fifty feet above the ground; but in less time than it takes to blink your eye, she climbed the last few feet up the tree and stepped into Wimbleton's house.

"Hi," she said as she walked in. For a moment she watched Wimbleton sort trinkles, and then she became curious about some of the other things in the room. The sun was shining through the curtains on some pretty figurines on the windowsill, and Jenny ran her fingers over the smooth surface of a delicate little Rapunzel and then lifted a dog-on-a-chest to see if it was heavy. It was.

She looked up at the old bees' nest that hung on the ceiling and at a set of discarded deer antlers Wimbleton had found in the forest. Then she saw something else.

"Oh, what a beautiful painting!" She crossed over to the 3-legged easel. It was a large canvas with a blue and white winter scene of a frozen brook. Frost hung on the boughs of the plants and bushes, and tiny faery-like creatures were dancing and skating on the ice.

"Yes, the 'Is-fayre'," said Wimbleton. "That picture isn't quite done yet . . . ."

"Oh," said Jenny.

A large oak cabinet against one wall had many shelves lined with books and other valuable objects. There was a robin
egg that never hatched, a ball of string, an old fountain pen, 
an inlaid wooden box, a rubber ball, and a musical toy piano 
that wound up. There were also pan pipes, a gold watch, and 
other things, but Jenny noticed the wooden box in particular.

It was about four inches square, made up of thousands of 
tiny pieces of wood of all different kinds, all interlocking 
like a great puzzle, and forming fascinating patterns and de-
signs. Jenny picked up the box and turned it over. There was 
no lid. Something shook inside, and it was heavy, but there 
was no way of opening the box that Jenny could see.

"What's this?" she asked Wimbledon.

"What?" said Wimbledon, raising his eyebrows and twitching 
his cat-whiskers. "Oh, that. It's a magic box."

"What do you do with it?" asked Jenny.

"Nothing much," said Wimbledon. "Sometimes I use it for 
a paperweight."

"Oh," said Jenny and set it back on the shelf. "What kind 
of magic is it?"

"No one can open the box unless he or she is very clever 
and very pure of heart."

"Can you open it?" asked Jenny.

"I don't know, I never tried," said Wimbledon.

"Do you know what's inside?"

"Yes," said Wimbledon, flashing his eyes and smiling. 
"But it's a secret."
"Can't you tell me?" asked Jenny.

"I suppose I can, sometime," said Wimbleton. "But not now. I hear Mrs. Gibbs' dinner bell, it's time to eat. Race you to the Dining Hall?"

"OK," said Jenny, her eyes dancing as she smiled. "Go!"

Now if you or I had been there, we would have thought the two of them disappeared, they left so fast. But what really happened was that Jenny darted out the door and down the tree trunk the way a squirrel does, while Wimbleton swung down from branch to branch like a monkey. When they hit the ground, they were off in a twinkling up the path to Mrs. Gibbs' house.

Mrs. Gibbs lived in a large, old-fashioned stone house with a thatched roof. A big old water wheel at one end turned slowly as a little stream ran beneath.

One whole wing of the house was the Dining Hall for the entire village of Wimbleton-in-the-Forest, for there was nothing in the world Mrs. Gibbs liked better than cooking. Many of the girls and women in the village were carpenters, or blacksmiths, while others plowed in the fields; and they were very happy with their jobs. But Mrs. Gibbs truly loved to cook, for that was what she did best. Perhaps your Great-Great-Great-Grandmother was like that too.
Mrs. Gibbs had a beautiful kitchen, with cast-iron pans and big copper pots, hand-carved wooden spoons, a stone oven and a little fireplace, large cupboards, and a sink with a real hand waterpump. In the Dining Hall there was a huge fireplace and a long, heavy old wooden table with benches. Each day when the meal was ready, Mrs. Gibbs' son Wilt rang the big old bell outside their house, and all the townfolk of Wimbleton would begin to appear like magic out of the forest, some coming from the trees, some from their houses, others from the fields or the Crystal Brook. Supper was ready!
Jenny Branch sat on the wooden bench, the rough-hewn timber feeling good against her bare legs. In front of her was a steaming plate, full of delicious-smelling stew, fresh hard-bread, brussel sprouts, corn, and lots of melting butter. Next to her, with an equally huge plate of food, sat Little Tucker Gumby, Jenny's best friend next to Wimbleton.

Tucker was the smallest boy in the village, standing exactly three feet tall. He was the cleverest boy in the whole world, for he could milk cows and goats and make cheese, and he could answer any riddle and figure out any puzzle. He had a round face with huge blue eyes and hair that hung down to his eyebrows.

"Did you know that Wimbleton has a magic box?" Jenny asked Tucker as they ate.

"Really?" said Tucker.

"Yes," said Jenny. "I saw it today on his shelf. It's very beautiful and very mysterious."

"What's in it?" asked Tucker.

Jenny helped herself to some more corn before she
answered.

"I don't know," she replied. "It's a secret, I guess."

"Didn't you look?" asked Tucker.

"No. There's no lid to the box. You can't open it."

"Oh," said Tucker, and smiled. But to himself he thought, "I bet I could open it."

After supper, Tucker went over to Wimbleton and asked if he could play with the magic box.

"Sure," said Wimbleton. "Go on, help yourself. I'll be up in a bit to tell you about it, as soon as I begin and sing and finish this song."

Wimbleton was playing his dulcimer for a group of bright-eyed children. The song he was singing was about Jill Tinkler, the silversmith's niece, and it went something like this:

"Standing by the burning fire
Watching the embers mellow,
The silver ore in an iron pot,
Her hand upon the bellows,
Jill Tinkler of the Golden Hair
Watched the coals burn red.
She stirred the ore, and to herself
'I'll be a Smith,' she said.

'And when I am a silversmith,
I'll make such special things
Like candlesticks and drinking cups
And magic Wishing Rings,
A little silver music box,
A tiny loom that weaves,
And, yes, some magic silver bells
To ring on Christmas Eves."

"
Little Tucker did not wait to hear all the song, though. He walked out of the Dining Hall and down the path to Wimbleton's hickory tree. Tucker was much smaller than Jenny, and he could not climb as well as she could; but still he made his way up the tree at least as well as you or I would have done if we had been there.

***

It was some time later when Jenny Branch and Wimbleton climbed up to Wimbleton's treehouse to see what had become of Tucker. Wimbleton could climb like a cat, but Jenny was so much quicker that all he could see of her was a flash of her green dress and a scramble of her legs as she scampered up the tree ahead of him.

When they got to the treehouse, Jenny called, "Tucker!" But there was no answer. Jenny peered into Wimbleton's house as she stepped up on the threshold, but there was no sign of Tucker Gumby. Wimbleton hopped up onto the threshold as Jenny walked over to the oak cabinet.

"Where is he?" asked Wimbleton. "I thought he came up here to see the box."

"He's been here," said Jenny. "The box is gone."

***
When Tucker had entered Wimbledon's tree house, he had found the carved box straight away. And when he picked it up, he had quickly found that the little pieces of inlaid wood could slide.

"It's like a puzzle," he said. "If I slide all the pieces around just right, I'll bet it opens."

Tucker's chubby little fingers moved rapidly over the surface of the box, sliding the tiny pieces of wood one way, then another, trying to find the right combination. Then, suddenly, the lid flew open and Tucker saw what was inside.

* * *

"I wonder if he got it open," said Jenny.

"I didn't think he could," said Wimbledon, raising his eyebrows and twitching his long black cat-whiskers. "But with Tucker, you never can tell."

"Maybe we'd better go look for him," said Jenny, looking seriously at Wimbledon.

"Yes, let's," he replied, and they both started back down the tree.

It was never hard for Wimbledon to find someone who was lost in the village, because he had a nose like a raccoon and could follow a scent like a hound. They found Tucker's tracks at the base of the hickory tree, and followed them down the path out of town.
Before long, they left the path altogether and walked through the green leafy forest. At last they came to the hidden pool of the Crystal Brook, and there, sitting under an old willow, they found Tucker, holding the open box in his lap.

"Well," said Wimbleton, taking the box from Tucker. "You did get it open! That's quite a trick."

Wimbleton closed the box without looking into it. Tucker didn't say anything, but just sat looking into the water of the pool.

"Tucker," said Jenny softly.
He looked up at her.
"Say something. What's the matter?"
Tucker sighed and looked back at the water.
"What's wrong with him?" asked Jenny.
"He's looked in the box," said Wimbleton, securing the lid and latching the catches.
"Come on, Tucker," he continued. "Let's go home."
Wimbleton held out his hand and Tucker got up. But all the way back to the village, Tucker did not say a word. Jenny was worried. Wimbleton was thoughtful.
"Can't you talk?" Jenny asked.
Tucker shook his head slowly and looked at the ground.

* * *
When they got back to the village, the townfolk gathered round to see what was the matter. Tucker's mother, Mrs. Gumby, hurried out of her cottage.

"What be the matter with him?" she asked Wimbleton as she picked up Little Tucker. "Why can't he speak?"

"He has looked into the box," said Wimbleton. "He has seen the Danu Stone."
"What is the Danu Stone?" asked Jenny Branch.

"It's a long story," said Wimbleton. "Let's all go over to the Dining Hall, where everyone can sit down and I can take my time."

When they were all in the Dining Hall, Wimbleton sat on the end of the table and the others gathered around, sitting on benches or chairs or on the floor.

"It's a very old story," said Wimbleton. "My mother told it to me when I was little."

"I didn't know Wimbleton had a mother," whispered Wilt Gibbs to Jenny Branch.

"Of course, he must have," said Jenny. "But I've never heard him talk about her before either."

"Long ago," continued Wimbleton, "there was a blue stone that lay at the very foot of the Tree of Knowledge. It lay there for millions of years, from the beginning of time, until at last it was carried off by the priests of the ancient goddess Danu."
"The stone was rough and uneven, but the priests ground and polished it like a jewel, until it was the size of my fist, and was very beautiful.

"It was then they found, in the depths of the great stone, that there was captured in crystalline form the Great Truths of the Universe. Whoever gazed into the Danu Stone, if he were good and honest, was given great insight and true learning. But if he were an evil person, woe unto him that looked into the stone, for he would go mad or be struck dead."

"Oh!" said Jenny.

"The ancient priests of Danu used the stone as a final test for young men who were entering the priesthood. At the final initiation, the new priests were required to look deep into the Danu Stone. Those who were worthy became great and wise. Those who were not, deserved what they got."

"But how did you get the Stone?" asked Wilt Gibbs.

"Over the years," said Wimbleton, "the worship of Danu fell out of favor. New gods and new religions replaced her, and young men stopped entering the ancient priesthood. Then the Tribes of Danu -- the Tuatha -- came to the last of the priests and took the stone. It was too dangerous to fall into the wrong hands, and so the Tuatha took it away.

"Along the banks of the rivers in those days there lived tribes of little creatures called Grinnets, no bigger than
ground squirrels, who made beautiful objects with their hands. They were master craftsmen, the Grinnets, and were knowledgeable in magic, too. The Tuatha came to the Grinnets and had them fashion an enchanted box to keep the stone in, one that was so complicated to open that no one could do so unless he were worthy of looking into the stone. The box was then kept by the Tuatha and was handed down from generation to generation, until they, too, began to vanish from the Earth. At last the box came into my keeping, and I have never opened it."

"Then what's wrong with Tucker?" asked Jenny Branch.

"The Danu Stone was meant for the eyes of grown men -- for priests. This is the first time in history that it has ever been gazed into by a child."

"But he must be worthy," said Wilt Gibbs. "He opened the box."

"Yes," said Wimbleton. "Tucker is the cleverest boy in the world. But even so, to look into the Danu Stone . . . ."

"How can we help him?" asked Tucker's mother, looking at Tucker, who sat silently on the floor.

"I don't know," said Wimbleton.

"Well, if you don't know, who does?" asked Jill Tinkler.

"There is only one person I can think of," said Wimbleton slowly. "The Bog Witch!"
THE JOURNEY

"Come away, O human child
To the waters and the wild . . . ."

William Butler Yeats

A shudder passed through the townfolk at the very mention of her name. The Bog Witch! Who in the village had not heard tales of her before the fire on dark winter nights? The Wise Woman who lived alone in the wild Northern Marshes, in the very heart of the dominion of the Marsh King himself.

"The Bog Witch!" echoed Jenny. "What can she do?"

"What can't she do?" asked Bill Tinkler.

"There is no one else to turn to," said Wimbleton. "Tomorrow I shall leave to take Tucker to her. I have little choice."

"Let me come too," said Wilt Gibbs.

"And me," cried several others.

"No, it will be dangerous," said Wimbleton. "I think we should go alone."

"At least let me come," said Jenny. "It's my fault, I told him about the box. Please?"

Wimbleton looked at her for several moments. "All right," he said at last. "There are things in the Marshland I think you should see, Jenny. And you can come too, Wilt; we should have someone older. But that's all. Come now. Let's prepare
the oxcart. We will leave at dawn tomorrow."

* * * *

All night Jenny secretly hoped that Tucker would be all right by morning, but she also trembled with excitement at the thought of the mysterious journey that lay ahead. Tucker himself slept the night soundly in his bed at his mother's cottage.

Wimbleton had little hope for a sudden recovery, and sure enough when Tucker got up the next morning, he still could not speak. He seemed healthy enough otherwise, although he still had a far-off look in his eyes.

The oxcart was the same one Wilt Gibbs and his mother had come to the village in when Wilt was a boy. Even the old ox was still alive, for he had grown younger and healthier since coming to Wimbleton's forest.

The villagers packed the cart with everything needed for a long journey: cheeses and sausages; grapes, apples and pears; buns and bread; carrots and potatoes; two or three pies; rhubarb cider; and all sorts of other good things. As the early light of the dawn washed the woodland village in golden sunlight, Wimbleton, Jenny, Wilt, and Tucker climbed into the oxcart and drove off down the path, waving and saying good-bye to the townfolk.
An early morning mist hung over the spring woodland as they made their way along the trail among the dark tree trunks and green leaves. This was Jenny's favorite time of year in the forest, for it was the time when the wild flowers bloomed. Further along, clusters of Wild Sweet Williams - wild blue phlox - nodded their heads at her, and she could smell their fragrances on the morning breeze. She wondered whether they would still be blooming when she returned to the forest.

The oxcart creaked and bumped over the dirt path. Everyone in the cart was unusually quiet. Tucker had not said a word all night, and his silence was beginning to affect Wilt and Jenny too.

After a time, Wimbleton began to hum softly to himself as he held the harness straps and guided the ox. This cheered the others, and even Tucker smiled. His eyes were bright now, and he looked happy, though he still did not say anything.

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The Marshlands lay many miles to the North of Wimbleton's Forest. To get there, one had to leave the Great Forest entirely and pass through low-lying farm lands, beyond which were towns and villages, and further on still more farm lands.

It took them the rest of the day to reach the edge of the forest, and Wimbleton then turned the cart onto a dirt highway.
In the blue twilight, they could see the lights from the windows in the little village of Kenmore, which lay near to the forest's edge. The evening bells from the church tower had died out a while before, and Wilt could see the dark forms of bats flying around the belfry in the distance. A cool breeze was blowing across the meadows, and Wimbleton was humming a lullaby he had heard many years before.

Jenny leaned back in a corner of the oxcart. The wind lightly teased the ends of her long dark hair and she counted the stars as they appeared in the evening sky. Little Tucker had his hands on the cart's edge and was resting his chin on his knuckles as he looked out over the fields. Crickets chirped in the grasses along the roadside. A little later the moon came out.

It was quite late when they came to a house where Wimbleton knew the farmer, where they could stay the night. They were up and off again early the next morning; the new day was warm and sunny. Huge fluffy clouds were piled high in the blue skies, and the sun shone brightly.

The breeze carried strange scents to the children, for they were used to the smells of the forest, not of farm lands. Even Wilt noticed the difference, although his nose was not as sharp as Jenny's or Tucker's, for they had been born in the magical village of Wimbleton, while Wilt had been born in the
outside world.

The journey to the Marshes took many days. The oxcart passed towns and cities, rivers and streams. At night they would stay with friends or camp along the roadsides.

Sometimes they passed people on the highroad, but few ever noticed them. Those who did, though, were fun to watch, for when they saw Wimbleton's fur and cat-whiskers, or Jenny and Tucker's eyes, they would stop and stare, and sometimes they would even run into things. One man fell off his horse while he was looking.

It's not every day you see someone from Wimbleton. And you can always tell when you do. There is a certain something, a beautiful and elusive something, about anyone who was born in Wimbleton's Forest.
THE MARSHLANDS

"Beyond this lies nothing but sandy deserts full of wild beasts, and unapproachable bogs."

Plutarch
Lives

For two days, Jenny noticed fewer and fewer houses as the oxcart drew closer to the Northern Marshes. The wind carried a strange new scent - salt water; for they were now less than thirty miles from the sea.

The land was becoming rougher, the soil was sandy, and heather grew among the dunes. They came across small salt bogs. Then the land began to rise as they neared the high marshes. They passed peat fields and came, at last, to the great bogs.

Wilt and Jenny stared at the strange and beautiful landscape. Through the fog that hovered over the Marshland, they could see slender leaves of flowering reeds waving gently in the wind; here and there were a few white birch trees with hanging branches and fine green leaves. On the top of a dead alder tree a family of storks perched, watching the sun set.

"We'll have to make our camp soon," said Wimbleton, "before it gets dark."

He stopped the oxcart on a meadow of heather and clover, among the swamps and marshes. Jenny watched as Wimbleton and
Wilt unloaded the cart. Wimbleton with his long gray coat and the sleek fur on his face and hands in the twilight. Wilt, a handsome young man with sandy hair, a square jaw, and bushy mustache.

Wilt had lived in Wimbleton's Forest since he was younger than Jenny. He and his mother had come after Wilt's father was killed in a war, and Wilt had become the village straw-craftsman. He could make beautiful little figures out of straw: men, women, children, animals, houses. During their trip to the Marshlands, he had been working on a model of the oxcart, and he said that when he finished he'd make figurines of themselves to put in it.

Tucker and Jenny gathered pieces of wood and dried grasses. Jenny built a campfire, while Wimbleton spread out their quilts and Wilt unpacked the food. For supper they ate sesame buns, hard sausages and cheese, roasted vegetables, and they drank sweet rhubarb cider from a stone jug. By the time they were finished it was quite dark, and the sounds of Marshes at night filled the air, above the crackling of the campfire.

"I had hoped to get here earlier," said Wimbleton. "Before dark."

"Tell us a story," said Jenny, and even Tucker's eyes lit up at that prospect.

"Yes," said Wilt. "Why don't you tell us more about this
Goddess Danu?"

"Well," said Wimbleton, sitting up on a rock so he could see each of his listeners. "Danu was one of the most ancient of the Wise Ones in Britain. Older than men, older than the faeries. She was an Earth-Mother; beautiful, loving, and kind. Her name meant 'plenty.'

"Danu lived in Ireland and was the mother to the Hosts of Sidhe, the Tuatha, who were both gods and faeries. They came to Ireland, descending in a magic cloud one May morning before the dawn of time, and were the first inhabitants of that country. They were tall and beautiful and good, and they brought wisdom, music, and poetry into the world.

"But long before the Tuatha were born, Danu lived in another land. Then, she was young, and her beauty was the beauty of youth. She fell in love with a god from the Northland, and he loved her. He was a poet, with a voice like a harp; and together they had a child.

"But then, the Northland god had to return to his own country, and there he was killed by an evil giant."

"He was killed?" asked Jenny. "How could that be?"

"That's what everyone wondered, for his life was enchanted. He was protected by strong magic from all plants, animals, and minerals. But there was one herb, one insignificant little plant, from which he was not protected, and his enemy found
this out and used it to murder him. The world has never seen the likes of him since. When my . . . when Danu . . . learned of his death, she grieved for him; and then she left that country and went with the Dagda to Ireland."

"Who was the Dagda?" asked Wilt.

"He was an Earth-Lord, ruler over created things. He was the great father of the Tuatha, and was their first King. He was very fat, and happy, and was a powerful force of good in ancient Ireland."

Jenny was just about to ask another question when Wimbleton suddenly stood up and announced,

"Now, before we all go to sleep, there is something we must do! Look, each of you, among heather of this meadow. We are hunting Four-Leaf Clovers!"

"What?" said Wilt. "Why?"

"As charms," said Wimbleton. "To protect us from the evil things in the Marshlands."

Jenny smiled and began searching.

"What sort of evil things?" asked Wilt as he, too, began looking for clover.

"Ghosties and Ghoulies and Will-o-the-Wisps," said Wimbleton. "Goblins and Beasties and maybe even chiggers."

"Go on," Wilt laughed.
Jenny found five Four-Leaf Clovers, and Tucker found seven, one of which was a Six-Leaf Clover.

"Why aren't you looking?" asked Jenny.

"Because I've already got a pouch-full," said Wimbleton, holding up a small leather bag that he took from his coat-pocket. "I've been to these Marshes before, remember."

"Then why don't you give me a couple?" asked Wilt, who was still searching on his hands and knees.

"Each person has to find his own," said Wimbleton.

* * *

Later, they all rolled up in their blankets around the warmth of the campfire and listened to the frogs croaking. Wilt hadn't found a Four-Leaf Clover, but he didn't tell anyone. They are hard to find, you know, unless, like Jenny and Tucker, you were born in the Great Forest.

"Sing us a lullaby," asked Jenny Branch, and Wimbleton got up and pulled his dulcimer out of the oxcart. Then he sat cross-legged on a clump of heather and began playing softly. After a time, he sang.

It went like this:

"Now old Brian Wise
He had beautiful eyes,
Sing Aloo-aroo Roo-aloo Arloo,
His hair it was brown
And in front it hung down,
Loo-aroo Roo-aloo Aloo Arloo."
"Brian lived in a tree
And yet no one could see
Brian's house, sing Aloo-aroo Arloo,
It was half-a-league wide
Brian Wise lived inside,
Singing Roo-alooh Loo-aroo Arloo.

"With a 'Hi' and a 'Hey'
Brian flitted away
And died, sing Aloo-aroo Arloo,
But you'll hear people say
He's alive to this day
Singing Loo-aroo Roo-alooh Arloo.

"Loo-aroo, Roo-alooh,
Aroo-looh to you too,
Singing Roo-alooh Loo-aroo Arloo."

* * *

The sky was clear overhead, although a mist still hung
low over the Marshes. Wilt Gibbs lay on his back with his
hands behind his head. The children had fallen asleep while
Wimbleton was singing, but Wilt had stayed awake, looking at
the stars and watching an occasional meteor fall across the
sky.

Wimbleton had continued to play for a time after finishing
the words of the song; humming softly to himself as he gently
brushed the strings. Then he, too, had rolled up in a blanket
and gone to sleep.

Wilt thought he might have dozed a little himself, but he
couldn't remember. It was a bit cool on the ground, even with
the blankets, and so Wilt lay awake, smelling the Marsh air
and listening to the crickets and frogs, and to the other sounds that the Marshes themselves make as they settle and ooze.

An insect was brushing against Wilt's cheek when he first noticed a faint bluish light that was dancing far out over the swamp. Wilt flicked the insect away with the back of his hand and then rolled on his side to get a better look at the light.

It was there, sure enough. An indistinct globe of blue fire moving about over the Marsh. Then it was gone, only to reappear on another part of the landscape. As Wilt watched the light, fascinated, as it glowed there, among the reeds, he fancied he heard thin voices calling his name in the far distance. He could hardly hear them at first, then more and more clearly he heard the voices calling, "Wilt . . . Wilt Gibbs!"

Wilt wondered who could possibly know his name here. He threw off his blanket and stood up. The lights danced over the marsh - there were several of them now. Beautiful balls of light, calling . . . calling . . . .

He decided to go see what they were, and walked after them into the Marshes.
When Jenny Branch awoke the next morning, the others were still asleep. This was not unusual, for Jenny was always the first one up in the village at home, for she loved tending her wildflowers during the very first light of the dawn.

So now Jenny woke before the others, but she was miles from her beloved woodlands. She got up and stretched her legs and straightened her clothes. The sun was sitting on the horizon looking large and red. Fog still hung over the Marshes, and a large old stork was flying nearby. Otherwise everything was still and damp.

On the edge of the meadow were a number of marsh flowers, the likes of which Jenny had never seen. She went over to look at them and then spied some pretty purple ones further beyond. Picking her way carefully through the reeds, Jenny went over and examined them, and then some large orange ones, and a tiny white one. Soon Jenny had wandered away from camp without ever realizing it, and without realizing that Wilt was gone too.

** ** **
When Wimbleton woke, he found that he, Tucker, and the ox were the only ones left of their expedition. He called Wilt and Jenny's names, but there were no answers.

"I was afraid of this," he said to Tucker, and began following scents like a hound. "They went in opposite directions. I can't track them over marsh land. What shall we do, Tucker?"

Tucker didn't say anything but looked sadly into Wimbleton's eyes. "Well, come on," said Wimbleton. "We'd best get to the Bog Witch as soon as we can, and then worry about the others."

He and Tucker got in the oxcart, which Wimbleton headed towards a grove of ash trees in the distance.

"We can't go far in the swamps with this big cart," he said. "We'll leave it and the ox in the Ash Grove, the magic of which will keep them safe until we return."

Wimbleton took his hickory walking staff from the cart along with a satchel of food and drink. They left the ox where he could get water and food, and then Wimbleton and Tucker set forth on foot into the heart of the Marshlands. The fog and mist began to rise about them, for the Bog Witch was brewing again.

***
Jenny walked among the wild marshes and bogs for some time before she realized she was lost. She found that there were little paths and trails of solid ground between the lakes, quicksands, and mudpools, and everywhere there were beautiful wild plants such as she had never seen at home. Jenny was a bit upset when she discovered that she couldn't find camp again, but she wasn't really afraid. Forest children grow up used to getting lost and finding their own way, and Jenny was more concerned about the others than about herself.

She had wandered into a less foggy part of the Marshes. There were little wisps of mist on the surface of the waters, but the sun shone warmly on the higher ground where she walked among the tall reeds and bushes. The sky was blue, and the wild beauty of the Marshlands filled Jenny with excitement and wonder. Here and there were the rotting stumps of ancient trees, and swans or storks, and other birds which Jenny did not recognize.

For some time Jenny had been following the top of a high ridge. Then the trail turned sharply around an oak tree and ran down into a little depression, at the bottom of which Jenny saw something, shining like gold in the sun. She climbed down the slope, and there, at the bottom, half-nestled in a clump of reeds and brush, was a young deer caught in a snare.
Its fur was a light brownish-yellow, quite unlike the deer Jenny knew at home. The fawn looked at Jenny with its brown eyes, stretching its muzzle to smell her as she approached. Then, sensing no danger, the fawn relaxed and allowed Jenny to sit in the grasses beside her. Jenny rested the deer's head on her lap and stroked its ears while the fawn licked Jenny's bare knees.

In the Great Forest, all children know the languages of animals, and Jenny spoke softly to the deer. But whether because the speech of forest-deer was different than that of marsh-deer, or because the golden fawn was too young to speak, Jenny could not tell whether the fawn understood or not.

The snare had caught the deer's hind leg, which she had injured trying to pull free. Jenny carefully unhooked the snare and used her handkerchief to bandage the leg where the snare had cut it. For some time after that the two of them remained nestled in the reeds. Then the fawn got to its feet and disappeared down the trail.

Jenny continued to sit for a few minutes more, her dark brown hair falling on her shoulders, feeling the warmth of the sunshine on her face; the coolness of the reeds and grasses on her arms and legs. Then a change of the breeze brought a strange sound to Jenny's ears. It was the sound of a girl singing.
The trail Jenny had been following divided in the depression and went in two different directions. One was the path the fawn had taken, to the east, but the other led to the southwest and seemed to be where the music was coming from. Jenny got up and walked curiously down this path, which skirted the edge of a large green pond covered with lily-pads, till at last she came to a clearing with a large willow tree.

Beneath the tree, sitting on a log, was the most beautiful girl Jenny had ever seen, with long blond hair and great star-like eyes. She sat looking out over the lake. The girl was not a child - she looked to be about Wilt's age - but her skin and her face were those of a child, and she sang as she sat alone in the Marshes.

"Who are you?" asked Jenny. The girl turned to look at Jenny and smiled.

"I might ask you the same thing," she replied. "I am Elsa, the Marsh-King's Daughter."

* * *

"The Marsh-King!" exclaimed Jenny. "I've heard of him, but I don't know much about him . . . ." 

"He is very evil," said the Marsh-Princess. "He lives in the bottom of the bogs and lures people into them to drown."

"How awful," said Jenny.

"Yes," said Elsa. "He is a horrible creature, with great
round eyes and wrinkled skin - he looks like a huge dark frog."

"And you are his daughter?" asked Jenny.

"Yes. My mother was a Danish princess who had come to the Marshes seeking magical herbs to help her people. My father lured her into a bog and held her prisoner. That's how he always gets his wives. He keeps them captives until they die or escape, and then he gets a new bride the same way. He's had many wives this way.

"I have nine brothers and sisters, and they are each awful creatures like he is. But the tenth child of the Marsh-King always resembles its mother, and I was the tenth child."

"Where is your mother?" asked Jenny.

"When I was born," said the Princess, "my mother decided to escape and take me back to her father's palace. When I was old enough, we went to the Bog Witch for help. There was a great Wizard from a far-off land who came to help us.

"The Witch gave my mother two swan-skins, which had once belonged to my father's first wife, an Egyptian princess. With the swan wings, we could fly from the Marshland and my father could never catch us. The Wizard, who was the Marsh King's enemy, led my father off to another part of the bogs while we tried to escape.

"In the form of swans, my mother and I flew high above the Marshes, on our way to freedom. But my father saw us as we
flew overhead, and took his great bow and shot my mother with an arrow. Then he called to me and said he'd shoot me, too, unless I returned. But all I cared about then was my mother, and I flew to her. By the time I reached her, she was dead."

"Oh," said Jenny. "I'm sorry."

The two of them sat quietly on the log for some time. The breeze rustled in the reeds, and somewhere a bird cried.

"The Wizard helped me to bury my mother, and we planted marsh flowers on her grave. He offered to take me to my grandfather's palace, but I knew it was too dangerous, and besides I could never leave my mother's grave alone here in the Marshes. I have never returned to my father's palace beneath the bogs, but have stayed here planting flowers and tending her grave. The Wizard returned to his homeland. He said he would return some day, but I've never seen him since."

"And you've never tried to leave again?" asked Jenny.

"No," said the Princess. "The Marshes are my home, I belong here. But tell me, now. What ever are you doing here?"

Jenny told Elsa about Tucker and the journey to see the Bog Witch, and about the Four-Leaf Clovers and the golden fawn. When she had finished, they sat quietly for some time while the Marsh Princess thought.

"Well, Jenny," she said at last. "You are in great danger. My father has tried to capture the golden fawn for years,
and when he learns that you've freed it, you won't be safe anywhere in the Marshes."

"But how will he find out?" asked Jenny.

"There's nothing that happens in the Marshes he does not find out about eventually. Come, I think we'd best get you to see the Bog Witch. I know many short-cuts to her house, and perhaps we'll find your friends there."

Elsa took Jenny by the hand and led her through the Marshes, amid the growing reeds and heather and oozing green pools. The Marsh Princess moved slowly and gracefully. Her golden hair hung below her waist in back and fell in soft curls around her shoulders and breast in the front. She wore a long white dress tied at the waist with a golden cord.

The Marshes were wild and beautiful, and Elsa knew them as well as Jenny knew her own forest. As they walked, the Princess pointed out hidden nests and baby birds and animals, each of which she called by name. Once, they caught a glimpse of the golden fawn, from a distance, as it stood browsing in a sunlit meadow.

"What is her name?" asked Jenny.

"The golden fawn? Her name is Heidi," said the Princess. "She is an Earth-Spirit, a Tutelary, a symbol of lightness and freedom."

***
After a time, the two girls came to a place where the fog rose and grew thick about them, but Elsa led the way on, sure-footed amid the dangerous bogs. Jenny could see little but the dark shapes of occasional trees as they passed by them. Then, suddenly, she heard someone ahead coming towards them in the mist.

The Marsh-Princess heard it, too. "Quick, hide in these bushes," she whispered. "We are near the Bog Witch's, but we are not there yet, and this would not be her. My father often searches for her house in this area, and it may be him!"

She and Jenny hid, and the footsteps grew closer in the fog. "Doesn't the Marsh-King know where the Bog Witch lives?" asked Jenny.

"No," said Elsa. "She is always moving her house about so he can't find it."

The two girls held their breath as a tall dark figure with a walking stick appeared through the mist. It came towards them, and Jenny saw another figure beside the first. She could not see their faces, but she could faintly hear one of them humming. Suddenly Elsa gasped and sprang to her feet.

"It's him!" she cried. "The furry Wizard! The one who tried to help my mother!"
The Marsh-Princess ran forward and threw her arms around the tall figure, and as Jenny stood up, she saw to her surprise that it was Wimbledon!

"Well, hullo there!" said Wimbledon as Jenny came up to them. "Hiding in the bushes, are you? I'd been wondering how long it would take you two to get together."

"What?" asked Elsa. "Jenny, you know him too?"

"This is my friend Wimbledon," said Jenny.

"I'd never heard him called that," said Elsa.

"I have many names," said Wimbledon, "depending on what country you're in. I'm glad to see you again, Elsa."

"Where's Wilt?" asked Jenny.

"He's lost too," said Wimbledon. "I'll tell you about it, but first let's hear your story, young lady."

* * *

"We are near the Bog Witch's house now," said Wimbledon when they were all done telling their adventures. "Perhaps we'd best move on."

"What did you mean about 'us two getting together'?" asked Jenny as they walked along.

"You and the Marsh-Princess are very much alike," said Wimbledon.

"What do you mean?" asked Jenny. "She's tall and blond and I'm small and brown."
"Ah, but you're alike inside!" said Wimbleton. "And you both love wildflowers. I'd hoped you'd meet, that's why I brought you along. Do you like her?"

"Yes," said Jenny, and the Marsh-Princess, who overheard this, smiled too.
"The large red sun went down, and from the meadows vapours rose. The bog witch was brewing something."

Hans Christian Andersen
"The Will-o' the Wisps Are In Town!"

By the time Wimbleton, Jenny, Elsa, and Tucker reached the home of the Bog Witch, it was late afternoon. The mists were so thick they could not see more than a few feet. The Marsh-Princess led the way, for she knew the Marshes even better than Wimbleton did. Jenny walked between Wimbleton and Tucker, and she was the first to hear the sound that floated like the vapours over the swampland.

"Listen," she said, and then they all heard it. A low voice somewhere ahead in the mist was chanting the following words:

"Aie, a day, and well-away,
Tongue of newt and frog,
Myerlie Byerlie
Bump and Bay,
Sings te Witch of te Bog."

"It's her," said Wimbleton, and they all moved forward slowly down into a hollow from which the voice was coming.

Then, ahead in the gloom, Jenny saw an old figure turning the crank of an iron press, from which liquid flowed into a bucket.
"She doesn't look much like a witch," said Jenny. "Just old and dark."

"Shh," whispered Wimbleton, and motioned for the others to stay back. Then he and Tucker stepped forward.

"Good morrow, woman," said Wimbleton, and the Bog Witch looked up. She said nothing, but gazed at Wimbleton and Tucker. Then, at last, she spoke.

"Good day, Baldursson," she said slowly. "What brings De to te Marshlands?"

"It's this child," said Wimbleton. "He has looked into the Stone of Danu."

"I know," said the Witch. "Child, come De here."

Tucker walked over to the Witch, who stared into his eyes. For a long time, no one spoke.

Then the Bog Witch turned to the others.

"I am Wise, Wimbleton, but De are Fay. What can I do if De can do nothing?"

"I don't know," said Wimbleton, "but I'd hoped you would try."

"Aieh," said the Witch. "For De, I will try. But I can not promise."

* * *

The mist lifted a little, and Jenny looked around in wonder. They were in a cave, though she did not remember coming
into it. There was a bed of coals on the floor, with the Witch sitting in front. The stump of an old alder tree stood behind her, and to one side was a rune-stone covered with ancient writing. On the other side was a wooden barrel into which the Bog Witch poured the liquid from her press. On the wall of the cave hung a pair of long curved bronze horns, beautifully carved.

"Those are called Lurs," Elsa whispered to Jenny.
"They're found in the bogs, and always come in twos."

Jenny and Elsa sat down in the corner of the cave so as to be out of the way. Wimbleton and Tucker stood before the Bog Witch, the bed of coals between them. Wimbleton's eyes shone in the dark, and his black cat-whiskers stood out stiff and straight.

"Dis stump," said the Bog Witch, "is my Medicine Chest. It belonged to te Devil's great-grandmother."

She patted the large alder stump lovingly.

"It has many doors, and yet De cannot see dem till I open. I keep my potions here."

The Witch opened a door in the side of the stump. Inside were many tiny bottles and flasks. She took an empty flask and set it before her. Then she took a small vial.

"Dis is te essence of Knowledge," she said, and poured some liquid from the vial into the flask. Then she replaced
the vial and took forth a bottle.

"And dis is Visdom," she said. "Some tink dey are te same ting, but dey aren't. It takes Visdom to use Knowledge."

She poured some into the flask.

"Dis is te most rare," said the Witch, taking another vial and adding a drop. "It is Prophecy!"

Then she added several other things to the flask, stirred the liquid with a long thin bone, and then drank. The mist began to rise again, and the Witch chanted in an ancient tongue.

Jenny was beginning to be afraid. The fog was growing thicker until all she could see was the fire and the Bog Witch's eyes. The Witch was singing now, but no words ever heard before by man. The cave seemed to sway and grow dark as the Witch's voice grew very deep and low, and then suddenly she spoke the following words:

"When te Poet's staff is broken
And te Marsh-King's will holds sway,
When te Wind Words must be spoken
O'er te land where te Princess lay,
Then shall te tongue of te Stone Child speak
And his words shall win te day."

When the Witch finished a gust of wind swept through the cave, dispelling the smoke and fog, and Jenny could see the walls of the cave clearly for the first time. The Bog Witch looked up at Wimbleton.
"I can give De no more help than dis for te child," she said. "I am sorry."

Wimbleton sighed.

"Thank you all the same," he said.

"I can tell De of thy missing companion," the Witch went on. "Te one called Vilt Gibbs. He was led off by te Will-o'-te-Wisps, and was captured . . . by te Marsh King. He lies now under te Vikings Barrow. He had no Clovers . . . ."

At that moment the sun rose over the Bog. It was morning already. The spell, which seemed to take only a few minutes, had lasted all night. Wimbleton, Elsa, Jenny, and Tucker found themselves standing in an open meadow. The walls of the cave had faded away like mist, and there was no sign of the Witch. Only an old alder stump standing among the heather.

"What shall we do now?" asked Jenny.

"We must rescue Wilt, of course," said Wimbleton.

"Come then," said the Marsh-Princess. "I can lead you to the Viking's Barrow. It is not far."
THE BLACK BIRDS

"Fear the birds of prey"

William Shakespeare
"All's Well that Ends Well"

The Viking's Barrow was a burial mound, built long ago by an old Viking who lived with his wife on the edge of the Marshes, not far from the sea. The barrow looked like a hill from the outside, but it was hollow and full of many strange things. It was also one of the entrances to the Marsh-King's underground palace.

All of this Elsa explained as she led the others through the Marshes. The new day was gray and overcast, and the mists billowed and moved as if they were alive. Soon they all came to the barrow, which stood dark and forbidding in the fog. On the hill itself nothing grew but grass. However, around the base of the mound there were bushes and clumps of heather and some young birch trees.

"Come on," said Elsa to the others as she led them to the foot of the barrow. "There is an entrance behind these bushes."

She pulled aside a few leafy branches from the base of the hill. There, sure enough, was a little round hole just big enough for a man to crawl through. It looked like a fox hole, only bigger, and inside it was dark.
"I'll go first," said Elsa, and dropped lightly out of sight through the opening.

"Who'll be next?" asked Wimbleton.

"I will," said Jenny, although she didn't like the idea of going down into that black hole.

There was a drop of about five feet from the mouth of the opening to the floor of a cavity-like room hollowed beneath the barrow. When her eyes got accustomed to the dark, Jenny saw that the room was about twenty-five feet long, not quite as wide, and perhaps ten feet high. There were roots supporting the ceiling, and three or four tunnels led out of the room in different directions. There was a funny smell, and there were old swords and armour lying about on the floor.

And in the middle of the room, lying flat on his back as though dead, was Wilt! Jenny ran to him as Wimbleton and Tucker dropped through the opening behind her. The Marsh-Princess stood silently beside Wilt.

"Is he dead?" asked Jenny.

"No," said Elsa. "The Marsh-King has cast a sleeping spell on him."

She turned to Wimbleton.

"You must get him out of here quickly," she said. "The spell cannot be broken in the barrow, and my father will know we are here. These tunnels lead to his palace, and he'll be
Wimbleton quickly picked Wilt up and carried him to the opening. Jenny and Elsa scrambled out the hole to help pull Wilt out when Wimbleton lifted him to them. Within a few minutes, they were all outside again. They laid Wilt on the grass, and Elsa knelt beside him with her head bowed, her golden hair hanging on his chest.

"Can you break the spell?" asked Wimbleton.

"I'll try," said Elsa. She put her right hand on Wilt's eyes and her left hand over his heart. Then she began to whisper some words, a faint charm, and after a few moments Wilt's eyes opened.

"Where am I?" he asked. "Who are you?"

Wilt gazed at Elsa in wonder.

"Come on, old chap," said Wimbleton. "We don't have time to look at pretty girls. We've got to get away from here. I'll explain as we go."

Wilt got to his feet, and they all started off along a path Elsa showed them.

"My father will be furious when he finds what you've done," said Elsa. "No place on the Marshes will be safe then, and it's almost dark. If we can get to the sea you'll be safe. His powers end where the bogs meet the beach."
There was a flat marshy plain ahead of them, which ended in a series of rocky hills. Elsa told Wimbleton that the ocean lay just beyond those hills, so they all started hastily across that last stretch of marshes. Wilt had to go slowly, for he was still groggy from the Marsh-King's spell. Jenny and Tucker could have easily outrun the others, but there were the bogs and quicksands to watch out for.

The Marsh was calm, with a silent stillness that made Jenny nervous. The sun was bright, and there was little fog, yet the ground beneath their feet seemed to shift with each step, and their progress was slow.

They were finally nearing the base of the rocky hill when an ear-piercing scream shattered the silence of the Marshes. Jenny turned and saw on the horizon, flying low over the Marshes, a cloud of great black birds, with strong wings, sharp beaks, and great taloned claws.

"The soldiers of the Marsh-King!" gasped Elsa. "Run!"

***

Jenny glanced at Wimbleton, who saw them too and clenched his staff tightly.

"Go on," he said. "The ground is solid between here and the hills. Run! Get to the beach on the other side. I'll try and hold them off."
The sky darkened as the great dark birds grew nearer. "Come on!" screamed Elsa, and she started running for the hills. Tucker and Wilt followed her. Jenny took one last look at Wimbleton, standing with his feet braced and his hickory staff ready for battle. Then she, too, turned and ran, not a minute too soon. The birds were upon them.

Jenny ran like the wind, her hair flying. She could run faster than the birds could fly, so she wasn't worried about herself. But Wilt and Elsa were only two-thirds of the way to the hill, with Tucker running lightly beside them. She and Tucker could easily leave the others behind, but what would happen to Wilt and Elsa? And what was happening to Wimbleton?

Jenny could hear the cries of the birds behind her, and she thought she heard the thump of Wimbleton's staff as well. She caught up with the others just as they reached the foot of the rocks, and she heard the beating of heavy wings close behind her. She turned to see three of the big birds swooping down on them. Just then Wimbleton ran past her at a trot.

"Come on, girl, don't dally!" he shouted, and started up the rocks after the others. He gained a footing and turned to swat at two of the birds with his staff.

"Get out of here," he said to the birds. "Go on, shoo!"

Wilt, Elsa, and Tucker were at the top of the hill now, and Jenny swarmed up the rocks to join them. Most of the birds
were still several yards off, except for the three that were attacking Wimbleton. But when Jenny got to the top of the hill, she saw that the other side of the hill was a steep cliff, a straight drop of more than twenty-five feet to the beach. There was no way down!

Jenny was stunned for a moment, but then quickly realized they must do something. She picked up a stone and threw it at one of the birds that was attacking Wimbleton. The stone hit the bird and startled it, and it flew away squawking. This gave Wimbleton a chance to climb the rest of the way up the hill and join them. At the same moment the main body of birds arrived.

Jenny had never seen so many birds, screaming and pounding with their wings. Wimbleton tried pushing them off with his staff, but there were more and more birds coming all the time. Wilt and Jenny began throwing rocks at the birds. A huge wing caught Jenny on the back of her head and nearly knocked her off the cliff. Tucker, standing under the protection of Wimbleton's great cloak, watched the battle intently, his alert eyes darting about.

Then there was another cry, like the first which had summoned the great birds. Jenny turned towards the sound. On the next hilltop, half-crouching on a rocky pinnacle ... stood the Marsh-King!
He does look like a frog, Jenny thought. Like a great
dark frog, big as a man, with wild eyes laughing as he directed
his 'soldiers.' The Marsh-King himself! What hope was there
now?

A great wave of birds attacked together, under the direc-
tion of the Marsh-King. Wimbledon beat at them with his staff.
Jenny and Wilt crouched low as the birds hit. There was a
scream, and Jenny turned to see Elsa, a great bird beating her
with his wings, the Princess falling off the cliff! At the
same moment there was a sharp crack, and Wimbledon's hickory
staff broke in two places. The Marsh-King laughed horribly.
Jenny cried. And Tucker . . . .

Tucker Gumby stepped forward, looking from the Marsh-King
to the broken staff to Elsa lying on the beach below. Then he
faced the sea, raised his hands, and spoke! One word - no
more, his voice high and clear. And above the noise of the
battle, above the cries of the birds and the laughter of the
enemy, that one word was heard over the whole Marshlands.

It was a word even Wimbledon had never heard before, and
at the sound of it the birds stopped attacking. The Marsh-King
stopped laughing. All was silent. Far out over the ocean, a
form arose. A great gray cloud formed, the sky grew dark, and
a rushing sound was heard from the far distance.
When the birds heard it they fled. The Marsh-King's face filled with terror. Wimbleton stood astonished.

"My god," he said. "Tucker's summoned the West Wind!"

The wind rushed towards them at a tremendous speed. Great waves rose up and the seas churned. The sound grew into a roar as the wind grew nearer.

"The West Wind!" said Wimbleton. "It's the Marsh-King's worst enemy . . . it dries his skin . . . ."

The wind rushed up the shoreline and raced across the beach. Jenny felt the cold blast hit them on the hilltop. The Marsh-King shivered in the wind's fury, looked frantically about, and then sprang in two giant leaps from rock to rock, and dove into the nearest bog, gurgling down into the green ooze. The West Wind rushed on across the Marshes, bending the reeds and trees before it.

* * *

Wimbleton watched from the hilltop, his great cloak billowing out like great wings. Jenny stood beside him, watching the bubbles rise in the pool where the Marsh-King had fled.

"Well, I guess that's it," said Wimbleton. "We're safe, as long as the West Wind blows like that. Where's Elsa?"

Jenny pointed to the Princess' body lying at the base of the cliff behind them. Tucker was already climbing down
towards her, and was half-way to the bottom. Wimbledon and the others followed. Now that the birds were gone they could make their way down where it would not have been safe before.

When Tucker reached Elsa, she was lying on her back, blood flowing from a gash on her forehead. Her back was broken. Wimbledon and Jenny came up behind Tucker as he knelt beside her.

"Is she dead?" asked Jenny.

"No," said Tucker. Then he gently put his hands on Elsa and spoke some ancient words. The gash on her forehead closed, her back healed, and the blood went away. She began to breathe and opened her eyes.

"Well done, Tucker," a voice behind them said, and they turned to see the Bog Witch standing a few yards away on the beach.

"Who's that?" whispered Wilt to Jenny, for he had never seen the Witch before. The Bog Witch walked over to help Elsa up, and then turned to Wimbledon.

"It was a good battle, Baldursson," said the Witch. "Look, I brought De something."

They all looked, and there on the beach were the ox and cart, harnessed and ready to go.

"Thank you, Good Woman," said Wimbledon.

"I didn't want to miss te battle," said the Witch. Then
she turned to Little Tucker.

"Come De here, Tucker," she said.

Tucker walked over to the Witch, who bent down and kissed him on the forehead, saying:

"Good luck befrend De, child, for at Thy birth Te faery ladies danced upon te Earth."

Then she faded away like swamp mist, and there was nothing to be heard but the cry of seagulls and the blowing wind. Tucker sighed and turned to the others.

"Well," said Tucker. "Shall we go home now?"
THE GREAT FOREST

"Lo! In the middle of the wood,
The folded leaf is wooed from out the bud
With winds upon the branch, and there
Grows green and broad, and takes no care . . . ."

Alfred, Lord Tennyson
"The Lotus Eaters"

They drove along the beach, the surf pounding up around the wheels of the oxcart. The ox seemed to enjoy the water on his legs. Jenny and Tucker ran alongside the cart, pausing occasionally to play in the breakers and then running to catch up.

The West Wind blew steadily all afternoon. The rocky hills soon gave way to sandy dunes, beyond which they could see the mists of the bogs rising. The old Witch was brewing again.

At last they came to a road that led down to the beach from a stretch of higher solid ground edging the Marshes here. The children got in the cart, and Wimbleton turned the ox up the road away from the sea. The road gradually turned east. As the sun set, they saw the Great Marshes stretching away on the left, but on the right were farmlands, and in the distance, villages and towns. Elsa put her hand on Wimbleton's arm, and he stopped the oxcart.

"Won't you come with us to the Forest?" asked Wimbleton.
"No," said the Marsh-Princess. "The Bogs are my home. But I'll come visit, some day. And maybe, if my father ever dies, I'll be the Marsh-Queen and can bring peace to this wild domain."

"Good luck Elsa," said Jenny.

"Good-bye," called the others as the Marsh-Princess got down from the cart and walked gracefully into the Marshlands. Wilt waved his hand. The last they saw of Elsa, she was by a cluster of Marsh-Flowers waving her hand.

* * *

The return trip to the Great Forest was slower than the trip to the Marshes, for they had much to talk about. Wilt told about being led off by the Will-o'-the-Wisps until he was hopelessly lost. After that, he remembered nothing until he awoke in the arms of the Marsh-Princess. Jenny told of meeting Elsa by the lake and of helping the golden fawn.

Tucker was his old self again, and seemed bent on making up for lost time by talking constantly. When Jenny asked him why he hadn't been able to talk, he said he didn't have anything to say.

"I don't understand," said Jenny.

"No," said Tucker. "But then you haven't looked into the stone."
Wilt spent most of the return trip finishing his straw models. He made one of Elsa and one of the Bog Witch, as well as ones of each of themselves. They spent the night at an inn where Wimbleton told stories, and for the rest of the trip they took their time and enjoyed themselves.

* * *

When they at last reached the borders of the Great Forest, it happened that Wilt and Tucker were taking turns driving the ox while Wimbleton took a nap. Jenny sat at the edge of the cart peering ahead for a glimpse of her wildflowers. At last she saw the place where the Sweet Williams had nodded their heads at her, but the season was past and there were no blossoms. Jenny sighed.

Wimbleton slowly opened one eye and looked at her. Then he opened the other eye, and then he winked.

"What's the matter, Jenny?" he asked.

"I'd been hoping the Sweet Williams would still be blooming," said Jenny. "They're my favorites."

Wimbleton smiled and sat up. "Well, I guess it's time I gave you something," he said, and rummaged through some books and things at the back of the cart. Finally he pulled out a big folded piece of paper and handed it to Jenny.

"Compliments of the Marsh-Princess," he said.
Jenny unfolded the paper. Inside, dry and crisp, was a colorful bouquet of marsh-flowers that had been pressed in a book.

"Elsa gave me those for you," said Wimbledon. "I saved them till now. We can make a frame for them to hang in your room. If you like."

"Oh, yes," said Jenny, giving Wimbledon a kiss. "Thanks."

The villagers had heard of their coming long before, so when Wimbledon and the others rolled into town, everyone was out to greet them and welcome them home. Mrs. Gibbs had a special dinner ready, and a holiday was declared.

Mrs. Gumby was the first one they saw, and Tucker ran to her to tell her all that had happened. Jenny's family met her, and Wilt's mother gave him a great bear-hug that lifted him clear off his feet. Most of the town children ran to see Wimbledon, but a few ran to pet the ox.

* * *

The meal was an especially enjoyable one that evening, for not only had everyone returned safely from the great adventure, but Tucker could talk again. Later in the evening there was to be a celebration. The village children did the dinner dishes so Mrs. Gibbs could make some punch, and afterwards everyone gathered in the Dining Hall to help push back the table and
chairs to make room for singing and dancing. Everyone, that is, except Jenny and Tucker, who had stayed in the kitchen after helping with the dishes.

The two children had not had a chance to talk to each other alone since Tucker had gotten his voice back. So they sat together quietly on the bench at the kitchen table and listened to the noises and laughter in the next room.

"What was it like when you couldn't talk?" asked Jenny.

"I don't know," said Tucker. "I suppose I could have talked if I had to. I just didn't feel like talking. The Stone . . . ."

He paused and sat looking at the little fireplace. Jenny sighed. A breeze blew softly through the kitchen window.

"What did you see in the stone?" asked Jenny.

"Oh," said Tucker, "I saw . . . all things. The wooded hills, the meadows and streams, cities and oceans. I saw the whole world, and even more. I saw behind the Moon and beyond the Rain -- the future and the past. Ancient wandering tribes, longships, the sleeping warrior. I saw the Butterfly and the Sheep, and the evil painter. I even saw you and Wimbleton, and what will happen to you . . . ."

"You saw us?" asked Jenny.

"Yes. It was when the Poet was talking to the Butterfly. I don't remember exactly . . . except that it made me glad."
"Hey!" cried Wimbleton, opening the door from the other room. "Come on, you two. It's time for songs. You're late!"

With that, he disappeared, and the two children ran after him.

* * *

The town folk were all in the Dining Hall. Wimbleton sat on a high stool with his dulcimer in his lap. Jenny and Tucker sat on the floor at his feet, and the others gathered around.

"Well," said Wimbleton. "What shall we sing about?"

"Let's sing about us," said Jenny Branch.

"All right," said Wimbleton, and they all started singing a beautiful song of the forest. It went something like this:

"In the forest green there's a place to be seen
Where there's never a worry or frown,
Where we work and we play the live-a-long day
And it's known as Wimbleton-town.

"If we're happy, we sing, and that's a good thing,
When we work, we play a bit, too,
In our homes 'neath the trees, with the cool summer breeze,
We have fun in whatever we do.

"Sing a 'Hi' and a 'Hey' for a warm summer day
In Wimbleton-town by the brook,
Or a warm fire's light on a cold winter night,
Hearing stories from Wimbleton's book."

* * *
"Thus done the tales, to bed they creep,  
By whispering winds soon lulled asleep."

John Milton  
"Allegro"
APPENDIX A

NOMENCLATURE
Baldursson - see Wimbledon of the Forest.
The Bog Witch - a brewer of potions and essences, from H. C. Andersen's *Eventyr*.
Brian Wise - a brownie or nisse found in Wimbledonian mythology.
The Dagda - father of the Tuatha Dé Danann.
Danu - Goddess-Mother of the Irish Tuatha.
Finvarra - Lord of the Tuatha Dé Danann, successor of Manannan mac Lir, Bove the Red, and the Dagda.
The Great Forest - this forest exists in its entirety only in the Faerie Realm, however it encroaches upon the real world in many places, such as the Black Forest of Germany, Sherwood Forest in England, and the great northern forests of Scandinavia and North America.
Grinnets - small creatures inhabiting riverbanks, skilled as artisans, found in Wimbledonian mythology.
Hob - see Robin Goodfellow.
Is-fayre - "Ice-Sprites," their dancing forms hoarfrost on trees and rivers.
Knurremurre - ruthless ruler of Trolls and Dwarfs in Denmark at Brondhoj Hill; his death is the subject of a well-known ballad.
The Marsh King - a horrible creature who rules Danish bogs, from H. C. Andersen's *Eventyr*.
Oberon - King of the Faeries in Germanic folklore; he is often found in Elizabethan literature.
Puck - see Robin Goodfellow.
Robin Goodfellow - mischievous sprite of Germanic literature, also called Hob or Puck; he is found in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and Kipling's *Puck of Pook's Hill*.
St. Bernard's Waltz - popular British folk dance.
Tuatha Dé Danann - children of the Goddess Danu in Irish mythology, identified with the Hosts of Sidhe (shēe); high elves.
Wimbledon of the Forest - legendary woodland Hulder-Lord, identified with the Irish Tuatha Dé Danann and the Norse god Balder; he is also called Baldursson, the Furry Wizard, and Bard of the Forest.
APPENDIX B

VERSE SOURCES
Page

7 - "Cushy Cow Bonny" - from the 19th C. Mother Goose Rhyme, quoted in The Annotated Mother Goose.

45 - "Cheese and Bread" - from the 19th C. Mother Goose Rhyme, quoted in The Annotated Mother Goose.

45 - "More swift than lightning" - from Robin Goodfellow in the Roxburghe Collection, modernized.

47 - "Wee folk, good folk" - from "The Fairies" by W. Allingham.

50 - "Bell horses, bell horses" - 19th C. child's race-starting rhyme, quoted in The Annotated Mother Goose.

65 - "Come let's dance tonight" - from St. Bernard's Waltz.

87 - "Standing by the burning fire" - from The Ballad of Jill Tinkler, an early 20th C. folk dance, attributed to Wimbleton of the Forest.

104 - "Brian Wise" - 18th C. lullaby, attributed to Wimbleton of the Forest. See music in Appendix C.

132 - "Good luck befriend thee, child" - from John Milton's Anno Aetatis, adapted.

138 - "In the forest green" - 19th C. ballad, attributed to Wimbleton of the Forest.
APPENDIX C

MUSIC
New Old Brian was so beautiful, his eyes, sings A-

A-100, Roo A-100, Ar-100.

Hi and a 'way, Brian floated away, and
died, sings A-100. But will

hear people say he's a - like to this day, singing

Loo A-100, Roo A-100 Ar-100. Roo A-

Loo A-100 A-100 A-100 to you too, Loo A-

Loo, Roo A-100 A-100 A-100. Roo A-

100, Loo A-100, Roo A-100 to you too, Singing

Loo A-100 Roo A-100 Ar-100.

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

These stories of Wimbleton are very old, for nothing has been heard of the woodland village for many years. But the old people who live in the countries that border the Great Forest still remember and tell tales of Wimbleton on cold winter nights. By now, Jenny, Tucker, Jill, and the other children of the forest will have grown up and have children of their own. Assuming, of course, that the stories are true. Many mothers and fathers say that Wimbleton is just a faery tale. But the fellow who told me the stories of Wimbleton-In-The-Forest said they were true, and he should know, because he was born there.