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Opening extract from

The Enchanted Wood

Written by

Enid Blyton

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HERITAGE
EGMONT

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Foreword

The Enchanted Wood is a children's classic in the very purest sense. Published by Newnes in 1939, its popularity with its readership has never waned – it has been read and treasured by successive generations of children for well over seventy years.

Born in 1897, Enid Blyton began training as a teacher aged nineteen, and her experiences teaching at a school for boys in Kent, as well as her role as governess to four boys in Surbiton, informed much of her early work. By 1926 she was the editor of the Newnes magazine *Sunny Stories*, which became *Enid Blyton's Sunny Stories* in 1937. It gave her the perfect platform from which to communicate with her growing audience of loyal fans. Each edition featured an editor's letter that encouraged readers to send her feedback on the stories contained within and, every week, replies in their hundreds would wing their way to Green Hedges in Beaconsfield, Blyton's home from 1938 until her death thirty years later.

The Enchanted Wood itself first featured in *Sunny Stories* in 1938, as the magazine's main serial adventure. Readers clamoured to see Moon-Face's adventures collected together in a book all to themselves; a wish that was fulfilled less than a year later. Blyton found great delight in corresponding with children and took their requests seriously – something that comes across very clearly in all of her work, but never more so than in Moon-Face's visit to the Land of Toys. When he reaches Santa's castle, he's astonished to find that the great man knows all about him:

> '"Oh, I've heard about you from the children," said Santa Claus. "They keep asking me for books about you, to go into their Christmas stockings, and they looked so exciting that I read them all."'

Blyton continued to keep her readers at the heart of her writing, and she had well over five hundred works published in her forty-year career. This Egmont Heritage edition of one of Blyton's best-loved books, featuring illustrations by Jan McCafferty, marks her enduring ability to capture the imagination of children the world over.

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How they found the Magic Wood

There were once three children, called Joe, Beth and Frannie. All their lives they had lived in a town, but now their father had a job in the country, so they were all to move as soon as they possibly could.

'What fun to be in the country!' said Joe. 'I shall learn all about animals and birds!'

'And I shall pick as many flowers as I want to,' said Beth.

'And I shall have a garden of my own,' said Frannie.

When the day came for the move all the children were excited. A small van came to their door and two men helped their father and mother to pile everything into it. When it was full the van drove away, and the children put on their coats and hats to go with their mother to catch a train to the station.

'Now we're off!' cried Joe.

'The country, the country!' sang Beth.

'We might see fairies there!' said Frannie.

The train whistled, and chuffed out of the station. The children pressed their noses to the window and watched the dirty houses

and the chimneys race by. How they hated the town! How lovely it would be to be in the clean country, with flowers growing everywhere, and birds singing in the hedges!

'We might have adventures in the country,' said Joe. 'There will be streams and hillsides, big fields and dark woods. Oooh, it will be lovely!'

'You won't have any more adventures in the country than you will have in the town,' said their father. 'I dare say you will find it all very dull.'

But that's where he was quite wrong. My goodness, the things that happened to those three children!

They arrived at last at the tiny station where they were to get out. A sleepy-looking porter put their two bags on a trolley, and said he would bring them along later. Off they all went down the winding country lane, chattering loudly.

'I wonder if we've got a garden?' said Frannie.

But before they reached their new home they were tired out and could not bother to say a word more to each other. Their cottage was five miles from the station, and as the children's father could not afford to do anything but walk there, it seemed a very long way indeed. There was no bus to take them, so the tired children dragged their feet along, wishing for a glass of warm

milk and a cosy bed.

At last they got there – and dear me, it was worth all the walk, for the cottage was sweet. Roses hung from the walls – red and white and pink – and honeysuckle was all round the front door. It was lovely!

The van was at the door, and the two men were moving all the furniture into the little house. Father helped, whilst Mother went to light the kitchen stove to make them all a hot drink.

They were so tired that they could do nothing but drink hot milk, eat some toast and tumble into their roughly made beds. Joe looked out of the window but he was too sleepy to see properly. In one minute the two girls in their small room were asleep, and Joe too, in his even tinier room.

What fun it was to wake up in the morning and see the sun shining in at strange windows! It didn't take Joe, Beth and Frannie very long to dress. Then they were out in the little garden, running through the grass that had grown so long, and smelling the roses that grew all around.

Mother had cooked eggs for them, and they ate their breakfast hungrily.

'It's lovely to be in the country!' said Joe, looking out of the window to the far-away hills.

'We can grow vegetables in the garden,' said Beth.

'There will be glorious walks all round,' said Frannie.

That day everyone helped to get the little house straight and tidy. Father was going to work the next day. Mother hoped there would be someone to give her washing to do, then she would make enough money to buy a few hens. That would be lovely!

'I shall collect the eggs each morning and evening,' said Frannie happily.

'Let's go out and see what the country round about is like,' said Joe. 'Can you spare us for an hour, Mother?'

'Yes, run along,' said Mother. So off the three children went, out of the tiny white front gate and into the lane.

They explored all round about. They ran across a field where the pink clover was full of bees. They paddled in a small brown stream that chattered away to itself under the willow trees in the sunshine.

And then they suddenly came to the wood. It was not far from their cottage, at the back. It looked quite an ordinary wood, except that the trees were a darker green than usual. A narrow ditch separated the wood from the overgrown lane.

'A wood!' said Beth, in delight. 'We shall be able to have picnics here!'

'It's rather a mysterious sort of wood,' said Joe thoughtfully.

'Don't you think so, Beth?'

'Well, the trees are rather thick, but they seem about the same as any others,' said Beth.

'They don't quite,' said Frannie. 'The noise the leaves make is different. Listen!'



They listened – and Frannie was right. The leaves of the trees in the wood did not rustle in quite the same way as other trees nearby did.

'It's almost as if they were really talking to one another,' said Beth. 'Whispering secrets – real secrets, that we just can't understand.'

'It's a magic wood!' said Frannie suddenly.

Nobody said anything. They stood and listened. 'Wisha-wisha-wisha-wisha-wisha!' said the trees in the wood, and bent towards one another in a friendly way.

'There might be fairy-folk in there,' said Beth. 'Shall we jump over the ditch and go in?'

'No,' said Joe. 'We might get lost. Let's find our way around before we go into big woods like this.'

'Joe! Beth! Frannie!' suddenly came their mother's voice from the cottage not far off. 'It's time for lunch, time for lunch!'

The children felt hungry all at once. They forgot the strange wood and ran back to their new home. Mother had new bread with strawberry jam for them, and they ate a whole loaf between them.

Father came in as they were finishing. He had been shopping for Mother in the village three miles away and he was hungry and tired.

'We've been exploring everywhere, Father!' said Beth, pouring him out a big cup of tea.

'We've found a lovely wood,' said Joe. 'The trees really seem to be talking to one another, Father.'

'That must be the wood I've heard about this afternoon,' said Father. 'It has a strange name, children.'

'What is it called?' asked Joe.

'It's called the Enchanted Wood,' said their father. 'People don't go there if they can help it. It's funny to hear things like this nowadays, and I don't expect there is really anything strange about the wood. But just be careful not to go too far into it, in case you get lost.'

The children looked in excitement at one another. The Enchanted Wood! What a lovely name!

And each child secretly thought the same thought – 'I shall go and explore the Enchanted Wood as soon as ever I can!'

Their father set them to work in the overgrown garden once they had finished their meal. Joe had to pull up the tough thistles and the two girls had to weed the untidy vegetable bed. They spoke to one another in joyful voices.

'The Enchanted Wood! We knew there was something magical about it!'

'I guessed there were fairies there!' said Frannie.

'We'll do some more exploring as soon as we can!' cried Beth. 'We'll find out what those whispering trees are saying! We'll know all the secrets of the wood before many weeks are past!'

And that night, at bedtime, all three stood at the window, looking out on the dark, whispering wood behind the cottage. What would they find in the Enchanted Wood?