

HIDEY-HOLE

The "Hidey-hole" was at the end of the long orchard just before it met the primeval forest.

While the trees were young in the new orchard, they had grown fast in the virgin soil of the wilderness land. There were snow apples, russets, yellow pippins, crabs and a special tree of "sweet boughs" producing large pale yellow globes as sweet as sugar. The chickens as well as the children coveted those apples and often arrived first in the morning to peck at the three or four which had fallen to the ground during the night.

There were pear trees too, which bore small succulent sickle pears. There were berries and plums.

In one corner at the edge of the orchard were three or four walnut and butternut trees. During the fall when these nuts were gathered and shelled, the children's hands became a dark brown or a very dark green. The dye was so penetrating it had to wear off, soap and water having no effect whatever.

All the length of the orchard, under the trees grew purple violets. The ground was a riot of color in early spring, and the children ran races to see who could pick the largest bouquet in the shortest time. These bouquets were afterwards taken to the two elderly sisters who lived down the street and (poor souls) could never have the fun of picking flowers for themselves anymore.

Along one side of the orchard were raspberry and blackberry bushes and a grape vine, trained on long narrow trellises. The grapes were large and a deep purplish-red when they were ripe. The grape at the base of each cluster ripened first. The children would walk up and down the trellis, parting the leaves, and being too impatient to wait for the entire bunch to mature, would pick and each each lone grape as it ripened. One grape would disappear, then two, then three more, until finally only the skeleton stems were left.

My grandmother would come out to inspect the vines and mourn. "The blackbirds must be at the grapes again!" She never seemed to realize that Sara and Anna were the blackbirds who did the thieving!

But the grape-vine which made the Hidey-hole was a wild vine. The vine had grown almost unnoticed up the trunk of a stunted fruit tree, then in a seeming spurt, spread umbrella-like over the tree's branches and reached down to earth again. The growth was dense and rank. In the fall the vine produced a mass of small wild-grape clusters, very sour and tart, but making the most colorful and delicious jelly in the world. If the children's hands were brown and green from nuts in their faces, for days on end, were purple and blue from grape juice.

One eventful day the children had realized that the vine made a complete tent--the canopy and sides of green. The growth was so thick and luxuriant that in only one place could it be easily parted to afford an entrance. When the children made this discovery, and crept on hands and knees into the bower, they thought they had found a real fairy land and resolved to keep it for their own private SECRET. So it came to be known as the "Hidey-hole".