

ACT ONE

Scene One who lives in the house

The breakfast room of a dilapidated medieval-type house. A very large hearth, thickly blanketed with ashes. A massive sideboard, laden with foods. The room is dark.

RUTH and JUDY enter. As they come in, there is a movement in the ashes, a ripple, no more. The two girls skip to and from the sideboard, lifting the heavy silver covers and helping themselves with glee.

RUTH. Chicken.

JUDITH. Pigeon.

RUTH. Casseroled pheasant.

JUDITH. Boiled swan.

RUTH. Wild boar.

JUDITH. Pig's ears with juniper berries.

RUTH. Clotted cream.

JUDITH. And damson jam.

RUTH. I feel full.

JUDITH. I feel fat.

RUTH. Mother says we must be thin.

JUDITH. Why?

RUTH. Because girls must be thin.

JUDITH. Why?

RUTH. How *do* you get thin?

JUDITH. You stop eating.

RUTH. Stop eating damson jam! Swan and sausages?
Never.

JUDITH. We could start getting thin tomorrow. Today, I
want an unborning day.

RUTH. We could practise our dancing.

JUDITH. Boring. I want a good gallop over the fields.

RUTH. Father took away the last horse.

JUDITH. Took the horse and vanished.

RUTH. Into thin air.

JUDITH. Into a bear.

RUTH. A thin, a hairy, a grisly bear.

JUDITH. Waits in his lair ...

(They burst out laughing. A movement in the ashes.)

RUTH. We could read a book.

JUDITH. I'm bored with happy endings. Why can't the
monster eat everyone?

RUTH. What about that book on manners?

JUDITH. We don't need manners, we never see anyone.

RUTH. I'd like to paint, but Mother says it makes me look
a mess.

JUDITH. I'd like to find a worm, open it and see what's
inside. Open the stomach of a mouse, cut the legs off an
ant, see if they move. I'd need one of those glasses that
make everything big.

RUTH. There's one in Father's study, shall we take it?

(A movement in the ashes.)

JUDITH. Mother keeps the key: wait till she's asleep, steal
the key, take everything out of the study. That would be
very unborning.

RUTH. When he finds out?

JUDITH. He's never coming back. Never never—

RUTH. Ever after ...

JUDITH. A grizzly bear ...

RUTH. In his lair ...

*(Movement in the ashes. And now a figure emerges,
grey, spectral, skeletally thin, a girl of about seventeen.)*

JUDITH. Ashgirl. Eyeing us.

RUTH. Spying.

JUDITH. Look and tell.

ASHGIRL. I will tell Mother you're planning to steal the
key.

(They seize her arms.)

RUTH. You won't!

JUDITH. She won't believe you.

ASHGIRL. I always tell the truth.

RUTH. It's the way you tell it!

JUDITH. Boring. Very boring. Lies are more interesting.

ASHGIRL. How can the truth be boring? Father admon-
ished me always to tell the truth.

RUTH. And where is he now?

JUDITH. The grizzly bear ...

ASHGIRL. Stop it!

(The GIRLS laugh.)