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Front cover painting by Robert Gibson Jones, illustrating a scene from "Diana and the Golden Ring."

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# DIANA and the GOLDEN RING

*By S. M. Tenneshaw*

**This golden ring was the key to a problem in two separate worlds. But could it exist in both of them at the same time?**



A palace throne room seemed to appear amid the trees as the goddess pointed





“CAN I read with my picture book after supper, mommy? Can I mommy, huh?”

Hazel Fremont gazed across the supper table at her golden curled little daughter. The child was looking at her with big blue eyes, an eager expectancy in them. Beside her, Sam Fremont snorted as he drew his napkin over his lap.

“Do we have to hear this every night, Hazel? It seems to me that

Dianne would rather bury her nose in that silly fairy tale than eat.”

Hazel Fremont shot a reproving glance at her husband. “Now, Sam, that’s not the proper attitude to take with the child. You know better than that.”

The child’s father sighed. “I suppose you’re right. But I am getting a little tired of hearing this every night when we sit down to eat. When Betty was younger she didn’t act this

way.”

Dianne glanced from her father to the fourth member of the family seated at the table. Her big sister, Betty was staring at her plate in a way that told Dianne that Betty was thinking of something else besides supper. Her little mind, quick to grasp things in the family, knew that it must be Jim Craig Betty was thinking about.

“You may be right about what Betty did as a child, Sam,” Hazel Fremont was saying, “but after all, children are all different. If Dianne wants to read her book I don’t see why we should do anything but encourage her.”

Dianne’s face beamed at her mother’s words. She knew now that her small battle was being won. The protecting cloak of her mother’s words was wrapped around her.

“Thank you, mommy, I—”

“Don’t you ever get tired of reading that silly book, Dianne?”

The little girl turned her blue eyes to stare at her sister across from her. Betty was looking at her with a frown of annoyance on her otherwise pretty features. The thumb of her left hand was idly toying with an exquisite gold ring on her fourth finger, and the light from the dining room chandelier caught the ruby jewel in its center with a flash of scintillating color.

Dianne’s small features sobered. Somehow, she always felt unhappy when Betty looked and spoke to her like that. For it meant that Betty was annoyed at something. And it made Dianne’s little heart sad. For she looked up to her big sister with all the respect and admiration her young mind could understand. Betty was what she wanted to be some day. Tall, and willowy and pretty. Betty who had always been so kind to

her, played with her, laughed at her small games.

But Betty had changed recently. Dianne had seen it. She no longer played with her. She no longer laughed and frolicked her around the house. Was it because Betty thought only of the boy next door, Jim Craig? Dianne felt that this could not be true, really. For Jim had always been there. And Dianne liked Jim. She even thought she must love him since Betty did. Jim was nice, and Dianne was glad that they had finally become engaged.

Now, as she looked at her older sister, seeing the annoyance on her smooth features, Dianne could not understand the change that had come over Betty. In the month that she had worn Jim’s ring she had grown distant from Dianne. And it hurt. For Dianne didn’t know why this should be.

“My book is not silly!” the little girl blurted out, her tiny voice resentful. “You never used to talk like this with me, Betty. All you think about is that silly old ring Jim gave you...”

**B**ETTY TURNED angrily to her mother. “I won’t have Dianne speak like this about Jim’s ring, mother! It’s a family treasure, handed down for hundred of years! I value it more than anything else!”

Hazel Fremont sighed. “Right now I’m not sure which of you is the child. This is no way to start our supper. I want you both to apologize.”

Dianne pursed her small lips and looked at her mother. She saw the stern look on her mother’s face and then dropped her eyes. When she lifted them again she was looking across at her sister.

“I—I’m sorry, Betty. I didn’t mean

what I said about your ring. It's really beautiful."

The annoyance left Betty's face then and she smiled at her small sister.

"I'm sorry I was rude to you, Dianne. Tell you what, I'll buy you a new book tomorrow. There, does that make up for it now?"

Dianne's eyes brightened again at the smile on Betty's face. But she shook her curly little head. "Oh, no, Betty. I don't want a new book. I like the one I have."

Sam Fremont put his fork down as he finished a piece of meat. He looked at his youngest daughter curiously.

"That's strange, Dianne. I should think you'd like to have Betty get you a new picture book. Goodness knows you've worn this one out reading it through every day."

Dianne's little face was smiling as she danced her eyes up to her father. "Oh, but daddy, I find something new in my book every day. And when the sun is just right in the afternoon, I can see Pan from the parlor window!"

There was a high note of laughter from Betty. It was not a kind laughter. And little Dianne stared at her big sister with a frown covering her small face.

"Dianne! That's the funniest thing I've heard yet! You're letting your childish imagination run away with you!"

Dianne pouted. "It is not funny. And I don't just imagine it. I do see Pan—but it has to be just at the right time."

Sam Fremont sighed and settled himself back in his chair. "All right, since this meal just doesn't want to be eaten, I'll give in. Now what's this, Dianne? You think you can see this Pan outside our parlor window?"

Dianne bobbed her small curly head emphatically. "Yes, daddy. He runs around the grass, bent over—as if he were looking for something."

"Hmm. And just what is it that this fairy tale person looks for?"

Dianne's blue eyes looked stubbornly at her father. "He is not just a fairy tale, daddy. I really see him—just like I see you.... But I don't know what he looks for."

Sam Fremont sighed and looked over at his wife. She was watching the little girl with a mixture of humor and motherly concern.

"D'anne, dear," Hazel Fremont said, "what your daddy means is that Pan is not a real person like we are. He's just a character in mythology—one of the pictures in your book. You just think you see him."

Dianne's lips quivered and she shook her curly head again. "No, mommy, he's real. Just like you and daddy, and Betty—and me. I know."

Betty laughed again. "He's really only a part of your make-believe world, Dianne. You mustn't believe that fairy tales are real. The next thing you know you'll be seeing witches and goblins. You wouldn't like that, would you?"

The quivering was now a tremble on Dianne's small lips. "Maybe there are witches—and even goblins! But I do see Pan. I do!"

Sam Fremont leaned across the table and ran his hand over the little girl's head. "Now look, D'anne, it's one thing to enjoy reading a fairy story. But it's quite another to actually believe that such things exist. Now let me ask you a question. Have you ever talked to Pan?"

**T**HE LITTLE girl quieted somewhat and stared up at her father. Slowly she shook her head.

"No—but I called to him a few

times. He—he never seemed to hear me.”

“There!” Sam Fremont laughed. “You see? Now if Pan was a real person, just like we are, he would have answered you. He would at least have heard you and looked up. He didn’t even do that, did he?”

A troubled frown was creasing Dianne’s smooth little forehead, and her eyes held a sudden look of doubt. “No, daddy, he didn’t look up...”

“Then you see, Dianne? It’s just like your mother and Betty mean. Pan is only a character from your picture book. You don’t want to really believe that there is such a person in a make-believe world. It isn’t healthy for you.”

Dianne gazed questioningly at him. “Why?”

“Why?” Sam Fremont lost his assurance. He glanced swiftly at his wife, but she had quickly averted her eyes. Then he looked back to his small daughter. He cleared his throat. “Hmmp. Why? Well, it’s just not healthy. You see, Dianne, if you were older and you tried to convince people of something like Pan, they would, well, they would think that maybe you were not the bright little girl you really are.”

Dianne’s frown deepened. “You mean people would think I was—crazy?”

Sam Fremont cleared his throat again. “Well, Dianne, I didn’t exactly say that. But, well, maybe they would. So you can see that it’s not good for you to believe fairy tales too strongly.”

A tear fell from Dianne’s blue eyes and wet her cheek. “Do you think I’m crazy, daddy? Do you?”

Sam Fremont leaned forward again and patted her shoulder. “Of course not, Dianne. I didn’t mean that at all. I—”

“What your daddy means, dear,”

Hazel Fremont spoke smilingly, “is that you’ve got to learn what is real and what is make-believe. Your Pan is only make-believe. Now do you understand?”

The little girl shook her head. And her small voice quivered when she spoke. “I, I guess so, mommy. But Pan is real—I do see him...”

Hazel Fremont sighed. “We can’t keep this up all night, Dianne. The food is getting cold. Now you just forget about Pan and all the fairy people and eat your supper.”

Dianne sniffed. “But can I read my story book, mommy?”

Hazel Fremont shook her head. “I think you had better wait until tomorrow, Dianne. It’s Saturday and you don’t have to go to school. We’ll see about it then.”

Dianne watched as her mother filled her plate with food, the disappointment showing in her eyes. She looked over at her big sister. Betty was eating and looking at her with a smile. But Dianne knew it wasn’t really a smile. It was a laugh. Betty was laughing at her.

Tears bubbled in Dianne’s eyes as she stared down at her plate. She wasn’t really hungry—now...

“YOU SAID this morning that I could read my picture book in the parlor this afternoon, mommy. It’s afternoon—can I read it now, mommy?”

Dianne held her fairy tale book in eager little fingers and danced around her mother’s skirts in the kitchen.

Hazel Fremont turned to her daughter and lifted a finger to her lips.

“Not so loud, Dianne. It’s rude to shout. Besides, Jim and Betty are in the living room. You’ll have to wait until they leave.”

“But I won’t bother them, mommy.”

They won't even know I'm there!"

"No, Dianne. Jim and Betty want to be alone. You wouldn't want to embarrass your sister, would you? Why don't you go upstairs and read? Maybe it's better that you read there anyway. I don't want you looking out the parlor window and seeing things that don't exist! Now be a good little girl and do as mommy says."

The eager smile faded from Dianne's bright little eyes at her mother's words. Once again she felt the tears coming, but she turned and pushed through the swinging door of the kitchen and ran across the dining room rug toward the hall stairway. As she reached the stairs she heard voices in the parlor.

"Jim Craig! It's not decent—after all, we *are* engaged!"

It was Betty's voice. And her big sister was speaking angrily. Dianne paused at the foot of the stairs. She heard Jim answer.

"You're just being jealous, Betty. What makes you think I was out with Mary Scott last night?"

"I heard some of the girls talking this morning! How could you do such a thing?"

Dianne tip-toed to the edge of the parlor and peeked around the corner of the wall. She saw Betty standing in front of Jim, her face pale and angry. Jim was staring at her with surprise in his eyes. Then Dianne glanced beyond them to the window seat. She looked hungrily at it, saw the curtains move gently on either side of the open window as a cool afternoon breeze stirred them. And the sun was slanting in, spilling its golden light across the rug. She held her picture book close to her. If only she could be in the window now. It was nearly time...

"This is ridiculous, Betty. Good heavens, if you can't take my word now, what will you do after we're

married? I tell you the girls were playing a joke on you. They know you always were jealous of every other girl who even looked at me!"

Dianne's eyes swept back to her sister and Jim. She saw Jim bite his lips guiltily, as if he had said something he hadn't meant to. She heard her big sister reply angrily.

"Well! So I'm just a jealous shrew! Maybe you're right! Maybe I wouldn't be able to trust you—after we were married!"

Dianne saw Jim's handsome features suddenly harden. And when Jim spoke, there was anger in his voice too.

"If that's the way you feel about it, maybe we better call the whole thing off. At least until you get some sense in your head!"

"I've got all the sense I need! I wouldn't marry you, Jim Craig if you were the last man on earth!"

Dianne saw Jim clench his lips.

"That's all right with me. We'll leave it that way."

**H**E TURNED suddenly and came toward the hall. Dianne scooted back out of sight as Jim's big figure entered the hall and strode to the front door. He opened it and slammed it behind him as he went.

Dianne stared after him with wide eyes. Then she peeked around the edge of the wall again and saw Betty standing, trembling.

"And you can take your ring with you!" Dianne heard Betty cry out. She watched as her big sister pulled the gold, jewelled ring from her finger and turned and threw it through the parlor window. Then a hoarse sob rose in her throat and she ran to the hall.

Dianne moved back against the wall as Betty entered the hall. She saw tears falling from her sister's face and then Betty was rushing past



her and up the stairs.

Dianne stared for a long moment after her sister. And as she looked, a sadness crept into her heart. It was not right that Betty should cry this way, that she should be unhappy. And she had thrown Jim's ring away. Mommy must know. Mommy would know what to do.

Dianne hurried away from the stairway and ran to the kitchen.

"Mommy! Betty and Jim had a big fight! Jim ran away—and Betty threw his ring out the window! Betty's crying, mommy!"

Hazel Fremont looked up from her baking and stared at her daughter.

"Dianne! What are you talking about?"

Dianne's tiny voice repeated the story, and there were tears in her own little eyes as she told it. "He ran away, mommy. And Betty threw his ring out the window. Then she ran upstairs—crying..."

Hazel Fremont wiped her hands swiftly on her apron and strode to the kitchen door. Dianne followed her into the hall.

She watched as her mother paused at the foot of the stairs.

"Betty! I want to see you. Come down here!"

A silence followed her mother's words, and Dianne felt the sadness grow in her little heart.

"Betty! Do you hear me? Come down at once!"

Dianne heard the door of Betty's room open then, and she saw her sister come slowly to the head of the stairs. Betty's face was tear-streaked, and her lips were quivering.

"I don't want to come down, mother. Please let me alone..."

"Betty!" Hazel Fremont's voice was firm. "I'm not going to interfere in your relations with Jim. But Dianne tells me you threw his ring out the window as he left. That I

will not stand for. You go and bring that ring back before it gets lost. I'm surprised at you, acting like a child!"

Dianne watched as Betty came slowly down the stairs. "I'm sorry, mother. You're right. I shouldn't have thrown the ring away. I'll get it—and then give it back to him!"

"What you do with it I'll leave up to you, Betty," Hazel Fremont said. "But I'm sure you and Jim can patch this silly quarrel up."

"It's not silly. I never want to see him again!"

Dianne watched as Betty ran past them and out the front door. Then Dianne felt her mother's hand on her shoulder.

"Now you go in the parlor and sit on the couch, Dianne. Read your book. And don't bother Betty any more this afternoon. She's upset."

Dianne bobbed her head. "All right, mommy. But can I sit by the window? Can I mommy?"

Hazel Fremont had already turned toward the front door. She looked back at Dianne. "You better sit on the couch and read. I've got enough trouble right now without having you playing make-believe games. Now do what mommy says."

Sadness crept into Dianne's eyes as her mother turned away. And a hurtness filled her little heart. A hurtness that she had almost forgotten about. But now it was back. And it crowded away the unhappiness she felt for Betty. She had so wanted to see Pan this afternoon. The sun was nearly right...

**S**HE WALKED over to the couch and sat curled in one corner, her picture book over her knees. She looked at the laughing face of Pan in the book. And a small frown crossed her forehead. Was mommy really right? Was daddy right too?

Was Pan really only make-believe? Just a picture in her book? She looked unhappily at the book, and now, somehow, she didn't want to read in it. It just wasn't fun this way.

She heard the front door open and Betty's voice came excitedly.

"Mother! I can't find it! It's not there!"

Then she heard her mother: "It has to be there. Come along, I'll help you look."

Dianne raised her eyes from the picture book and stared toward the hall. She heard her mother and Betty walk out of the house and then their voices came from just outside the open window.

"Now you couldn't have thrown it far from the middle of the living room. And it would have to be just in front of the window on the grass."

"I know, mother, but it isn't!"

Dianne heard Betty speak frantically. She heard them both moving outside the window, and minutes passed. Finally she heard her mother say: "Well, it isn't here. You don't suppose someone came along and saw you throw it?"

"I don't know, mother. Oh, what am I going to do? The ring was an heirloom in Jim's family—how can I tell him!"

"I don't know, Betty. We'll have to wait until your father comes home. I'll call him at the office right now."

Dianne moved slowly from the couch. She heard her mother and sister move back toward the front door. She knew her mother had told her not to sit by the window, but she was curious. She remembered seeing Betty throw the ring through the window. It must have landed on the grass. Why couldn't they find it?

Her small feet moved across the

rug and up to the window. Warm friendly sunlight flooded through it, setting a sparkle to her curly, golden hair. Somewhere in the back of her tiny mind was the thought that the sun was nearly right...

She climbed up on the window seat and lay the picture book on the side of the leather cushion. Then she looked from the open window.

The yard spread like a green velvet carpet to the edge of a small grove of trees. She could see her mother and Betty just disappearing around the corner of the house leading to the front door.

Her eyes swept across the grass then—and she saw it.

It lay in plain sight, a short distance from the window, the sun glinting from the ruby jewel.

"There it is!" Dianne's small voice piped. Then a puzzlement entered her voice. "Now why couldn't they see it?"

She was about to turn back in the room and call to her mother and sister. She wanted to tell them she had found the ring. But she didn't.

She saw something else out there, beyond the ring, at the edge of the grove. A figure moved from the trees.

"Pan?"

The demi-god stood for a moment, his goat legs spraddled in an awkward pose, while his arms, in the human upper half of his body were crossed in front of his chest. One hand held a set of eight reed-pipes, thin tubes that tapered in various lengths. As Dianne looked at him, Pan seemed to be sensing something. His head cocked to one side and his pointed ears seemed poised in an attitude of listening.

As Dianne stared, forgetting for the moment the ring that lay on the grass outside the window, she remembered what her parents had said

about Pan. That he did not really exist. That he was a make-believe being. She looked at him now with a doubt in her wide blue eyes. And as she looked, the color of the trees, the very grass itself, seemed to change. Where before they had been a brilliant green, they now were a dull, patternless gray. And Pan himself seemed to be wrapped in shadow, a hazy figure that grew almost transparent.

Wonder grew in Dianne's small mind at this. It was something she could not understand. But then, suddenly, she saw Pan point a finger in sudden excitement. And the demi-god started forward from the tree grove.

**D**IANNE'S EYES swept back to where the ring lay. She knew somehow, that Pan had been pointing at the ring, and that he was hurrying toward it. And that could mean only one thing. Pan was going to take the ring. The ring that belonged to Betty. The ring that was so valuable and so beautiful.

Dianne didn't stop to think any longer. She only knew that she must get the ring first. That she must give it to Betty. That Pan must not take it.

She lifted her small body to the top of the window sill and jumped to the ground a few feet below her. Her small legs buckled for a moment as the grass met her feet, but then she had scrambled erect and was running to the ring.

She reached it and plucked it from the ground in her little fingers.

And she became aware of a strange thing as she touched the ring. There was a wavering in the air, as if heat waves were being shaken by the sun before her eyes. She swayed for a moment on her feet, a swift dizziness grasping her. Then, as swiftly as it

had come, it faded away.

She lifted her eyes to stare at the demi-god, standing a few feet from her.

There was a look of surprised astonishment on Pan's features. He had stopped in his advance toward the ring, and was staring at the little girl.

"What is this? A tiny mortal female? Where did you come from, little girl?"

Pan's voice was deep and vibrant. And to Dianne it seemed so out of place with his half-animal half-human body.

"You can talk, Pan! You talk just like people!" Dianne's voice showed surprised delight.

The demi-god frowned at her. "Of course I can talk! But just who are you, little one, and how do you know my name?"

Dianne smiled, trying to shake the shadows that seemed to obscure her vision of Pan. "I am Dianne!" she told him in a thrilled, eager little voice. "And I know all about you. You're in my picture book—and every day I see you from my window. You always look for something in our front yard."

Pan's front deepened. "Your front yard? Window? You speak in riddles, little one."

Dianne turned to point to her house. And a look of astonishment came into her eyes. Astonishment that was tinged with wonder. For the house was transparent, shimmering. Only the parlor window seemed to have solidity.

She heard Pan snort, goat-like, as he followed her gaze.

"By the beard of Zeus! A breach to the mortal world! So that is where you came from!"

Dianne turned back to him. "Yes. This is my front yard—only—somehow it looks different..."

A brief smile flashed across the demi-god's face, then vanished. His gaze swept down to the small hand of the little girl, the hand clutching the golden, jewelled ring.

"That ring belongs to me, little one. I've been looking for it for a long time."

As Pan spoke, he held out one hand, reaching for the ring. But Dianne stepped back quickly, shaking her curly head.

"Oh, no, Pan. This ring belongs to Betty. That is, it really doesn't belong to Betty, it belongs to Jim. But Betty threw it through the window and couldn't find it. I've got to give it back to her or Jim will really be angry."

Pan frowned again, looking at the little girl. "I don't understand you, child. But that ring means a great deal to me. You say a mortal named Betty threw it from the window of your house?"

Dianne nodded. "Yes. And I've got to give it to her right away!"

**A** THOUGHTFUL look entered the demi-god's eyes and when he spoke it seemed to Dianne that he was speaking to himself.

"So that's what happened to it! It dropped into the mortal world. And the breech was here all the time!"

Then Pan stepped around Dianne suddenly until he was standing between her and the window. He held out his hand again.

"I don't know this Betty you speak of, little one, but I do know that the ring belongs to me. Now give it to me like a good little child, and return to your mortal home."

Dianne stiffened her small body, shaking her head stubbornly.

"Oh, no, Pan. I can't do that. I must return the ring to Betty. She and Jim had a fight and Betty is very unhappy. Please let me go back into

my house."

She started to move around the demi-god, but Pan blocked her path. His face was frowning as he stared down at her, and there was a determination in his eyes.

"I can't let you return until you give me the ring, little one. Now hand it to me ere my patience is exhausted."

Once again he held his hand out. Once again Dianne scuttled away from him. And now there was worry on her small face. This was not the Pan she had known, the smiling demi-god who played his pipes as he skipped through the woodlands. This was not the Pan of her picture book. Could her parents have been right? Was he really only make-believe?

She suddenly wanted to get away from Pan. She wanted to return to her house. To the warm coziness of the window seat in the parlor. But Pan didn't want her to leave. Pan wanted the ring. Betty and Jim's ring. She knew she could not let him have it.

Her lips quivered and a tear fell from her wide blue eyes. "Please let me go back to my house, Pan."

He shook his head. "Only after you hand the ring to me."

"I won't! I won't!"

The words left her lips in a tiny cry. And then she tried to run around Pan toward the window.

But her small legs could not move swiftly enough. As she skirted the demi-god, Pan reached out with a quick movement and snatched the ring from Dianne's fingers.

"I'm sorry, little one, but I can't allow you to take the ring back to your world. Now you run along like a good little mortal."

Dianne had stopped as Pan took the ring from her. She was staring up at him with tearful distrust.

"You're mean! You stole the ring from me!"

Pan laughed. "By the beard of Zeus, little one, that is funny! Steal something that belongs to me? Now be off with you, crawl back through your window. I am long overdue at the court of Zarad."

The demi-god turned as he spoke and pointed to the window. A look of astonishment swept over his features and his hand dropped to his side in surprise. At the same instant, Dianne's little voice squealed in dismay.

"My house—it's gone! It's gone!"

Pan's lips pursed into a thoughtful pose. "That is strange. It is indeed gone. It would seem, little one, that the breach to your world has closed. I am afraid you cannot return."

The words of the demi-god impressed themselves upon Dianne's small mind with fearful clarity.

"I want to go home! I want my mommy—give me Betty's ring and help me go home!"

**P**AN STARED at the ring. And his head slowly nodded as he looked at it. "I think I know what has happened, little one. When I lost the ring it opened a breach into your world. Now that I have regained possession of it the breach has closed. Without it you cannot return. And yet, I cannot give it to you. Prince Zarad would call down the wrath of Zeus upon me. I am afraid you have no choice but to stay."

"But I don't want to stay—I don't like this world! My mommy told me it was only make-believe, and I am afraid!"

Pan sighed. "It distresses me, little one, but I cannot help you. At least, not now. I must go at once to Zarad. Afterwards I will return, and

possibly something can be done."

The demi-god started to move away from Dianne. The little girl cried out tearfully and ran after him.

"Don't leave me! Please don't take Betty's ring! I'm afraid!"

But Pan ignored her. His goat legs gathered speed and he hurried across the shadowy grass toward the darker shadows of the trees. Dianne's small legs could not keep up with Pan and though she called after him, the distance grew greater between them, and finally Pan vanished in the darker shadows of the forest.

Dianne reached the edge of the trees and stopped, a fear sweeping through her little figure. She looked at the towering giants of the shadowy gray trees, and they seemed to be limbed goblins that leered down at her. The last bit of courage left her then and she fell to the ground, sobs wailing from her trembling lips.

Beyond Dianne, in the thickness of the towering forest, a figure flashed by between the trees. As the sound of the wailing child reached it, the figure suddenly came to a halt. It moved slowly to the edge of the trees and stared down in surprise at the trembling little girl on the grass.

"What is this? A mortal child at the edge of my forest? And one in tears?"

Dianne looked up, startled at the sound. She heard a calm, melodious voice, pleasant and warm. And her eyes widened as she stared at a tall, beautiful young woman dressed in white, standing a few feet from her, one hand holding a hunter's bow, while a quiver of arrows hung from a band at her waist.

The figure seemed to glow with color amid the shadows of the grass





Pan reached out with a quick movement and snatched the ring from Dianne's fingers.

and forest, and Dianne felt her sobs subside as she looked into deep, friendly blue eyes.

"Who are you, child?"

Dianne's voice quivered. "I am Dianne..."

"Dianne?" The beautiful features of the woman showed pleasant surprise. "We have something to share then, little mortal, for I am Diana."

The little girl's head bobbed knowingly, her eyes wide with wonder. "I know. You are the beautiful lady in the picture book..."

Diana's face smiled at the child's words. "So you know of me from your mortal world. But tell me, little Dianne, what are you doing at the edge of my forest, and why are you in tears?"

Dianne's features trembled. "I was chasing Pan. He stole my ring. That is, Betty's ring. But it really belongs to Jim. —And now I can't go home..."

Diana hefted the bow in her hand and laughed lightly. "I'm afraid I don't quite understand, little Dianne. Now tell me all about it."

**T**HERE WAS warmth in Diana's voice and it soothed the fear from the little girl's face. She blurted out the story then, her tiny voice filled with worry. "—and when Pan took the ring from me my home disappeared. Now I can't go home —and I don't like this make-believe world..."

A thoughtful look edged the smile from Diana's features. "This ring, child. What did it look like?"

"It was gold, with a big red stone that sparkled. Betty said it was very valuable..."

Diana nodded slowly. "So. It is the ring of Zeus. Now I understand. But why do you feel fear, little Dianne. There is nothing to harm you in my beautiful forest."

The little girl shook her head. "I am afraid of the dark trees. And everything is shadowy—I want to go home to my real world—and I want the ring Pan stole from me..."

Diana frowned. "You don't believe this world is real, little Dianne?"

"I used to—but my mommy and daddy told me it wasn't."

"Am I not real? Am I not just as your picture book showed you?"

Dianne gazed up at the now smiling face. And some of the doubt began to leave her. "Yes...you are the same—but Pan isn't! He's mean, and I don't understand why..."

"I see." Diana reached out and patted the little girl's head. "I think I know why Pan acted as he did. But you're right, he was mean. I think we better have a talk with that rascal."

As she said the words, Diana reached behind the quiver and drew a small golden horn from her belt. She raised it to her lips and blew a long note. The sound was like a tinkling bell, soft and sweet. The little girl stared wide-eyed, puzzlement on her small features.

"Pan will be here in a moment, child," Diana said as she replaced the horn at her belt. "And I want you to trust me. You do trust me don't you?"

Dianne bobbed her head slowly. "Yes, pretty lady...I think so."

"Good. I want to help you, Dianne. But you've got to help me too. And trusting me is the only way. Ah. Here comes the rascal now."

The little girl followed Diana's gaze to the edge of the forest. Out of the shadowy depths came the figure of the demi-god, a frown of annoyance on his face. He approached Diana and knelt before her.

"You called me, Diana, and I came. But I was nearly to the court of Zarad. I am long overdue there."

"Yes, Pan, I know. And that is why I called you back here. I have talked to the mortal child and she tells me you took Zeus' ring from her. And now she cannot return to her world. That was very unkind of you, Pan. I am shocked at your behavior to a child whose faith in us has been shaken."

Pan's head raised to look at Diana. There was a guiltiness around the demi-god's eyes, but his mouth was set stubbornly.

"That may be true, Diana. But it is also true that the ring the child had belongs to me, and—"

"It belongs to Zeus, as a gift for the marriage of Zarad. You were only the bearer, or have you forgotten?"

Pan shrugged. "I did not mean to offend the Gods with my statement. But is it not true that as bearer the ring was mine to guard, that in effect it belonged to me until I delivered it at the court of Zarad? And have I not, Diana, suffered greatly these many centuries since the ring was lost? Have not my pipes been cursed to silence until such a time as happiness is restored to the young prince?"

Diana nodded. "All that is true, Pan. But your actions in this matter have been purely selfish. Did you think at all of this child? Did you consider the plight you cast her into when you took the ring from her? And worse, do you know that by your actions her faith in us has been shaken so that she fears what she should love?"

Pan dropped his eyes away from the goddess.

"I am sorry, Diana. It is true that my motives were selfish."

**D**IANA FIXED a stern glance at Pan. "It is not to me that you should tender your apology, Pan.

It is to the child you have hurt. Tell her."

The demi-god turned slowly to Dianne. The little girl saw Pan's features become contrite.

"I am sorry, little one. I should not have acted as I did. I hope you will forgive me."

Dianne got to her feet and looked from Pan back to the goddess. Her little face was puzzled.

"But he took my ring, pretty lady. How can he be sorry when he still keeps it?"

Diana sighed. She turned to Pan. "The child is right. You must return the ring to her."

Pan looked startled. "But I can't! I have searched these many centuries—and now finally I can bear it to the young prince and remove the curse Zeus punished me with. I can't return the ring, Diana!"

Diana shook her head. "I am sorry, Pan. As long as this child is unhappy because of the ring, there can be no joy for Zarad—or lifting of the curse of Zeus for you. We have a grave responsibility for those of the mortal world who believe..."

Pan fidgeted from one hoof to the other. Finally he looked at the little girl and sighed. "Very well, Diana. You are right... Child, here is the ring I took from you. It will return you to the happiness of your world, but it will leave me with a great sadness."

Dianne's eyes softened at the contrition in the demi-god's voice as he handed her the ring. She saw the shoulders of Pan sag in a dejected attitude. Then she stared down at the ring. She turned her head and looked off across the drab-colored grass and an eager note crept into her voice.

"My house—it's there! And the window!"

Diana nodded. "Yes, child. You

may return to your world with the ring. But as Pan says, it will leave a great sadness here."

Dianne stared back at the goddess, and her small face was frowning.

"But I don't want to leave Pan unhappy. I'm sorry I called him mean. Can't I help him some way?"

The eyes of the goddess were tender. "Not as long as you do not believe, little Dianne. You see, the ring really does belong in this world. It has a magic power of love and trust. But those who possess it must love and trust too. If your trust is great enough you will not need the ring."

Dianne tried to understand everything the goddess had said. Her child's mind groped with the words, trying to analyze them. She thought of what her parents had said about make-believe and that it was wrong to have faith in a fairy world. But the kindness in Diana's eyes, the contrition in Pan's, were the things she could really understand. They were more than words. They were the symbol of love and trust so important to her little mind.

"I do love you, pretty lady! And I do trust Pan! I really believe in you both—I always have!" Dianne blurted the words out suddenly, and she reached out to the demi-god and offered him the ring. "I don't want to leave you unhappy, Pan."

There was a shimmering in the air around Dianne as she handed the ring to the demi-god. And suddenly the shadows lifted and the forest was green and friendly, the grass a soft velvet carpet beneath her feet.

"Everything is bright again!" the little girl cried out, looking up at Diana.

The goddess smiled. "Everything is clear to eyes that believe, child.

And I am glad you returned the ring to Pan. He may now return to Zavad and carry out the mission Zeus entrusted him with. Go, Pan."

The demi-god's face was smiling as he looked at the little girl. "Thank you, little one. When I reach the young prince I will play my pipes just for you."

He turned then, and vanished into the woods, his goat legs flashing.

**D**IANNE stared after him for a moment and then looked back across the grass. It was her front yard. And the house was there. And in the house mommy and Betty would be waiting. Betty...

Dianne saw the tear-filled face of her sister once again in her mind. She heard again the frightened voice of Betty: "Oh, what am I going to do? The ring was an heirloom in Jim's family—how can I tell him?"

She had forgotten about Betty for a brief moment. But now she remembered. And she knew that it would be her fault now. She had had the ring. She had given it away...

She stared longingly at the window—and it faded before her eyes. Faded and was gone.

"My house—it's gone again—I can't see it!"

Her tiny voice filled with terror and she turned to the goddess.

Dianne stared off across the lawn and a puzzled frown crossed her forehead. "This is strange, child. You believe and show your trust and love. Surely Zeus is satisfied..."

"My sister!" Dianne cried out. "I forgot about Betty when I gave Pan the ring. I love my sister too!"

A thoughtful look entered the eyes of the goddess. "I think I understand, child. You still think the ring belongs to your world. Here,

sit beside me on the grass and listen to what I tell you. Maybe then you will understand that the ring never really belonged to your sister."

The goddess laid her bow on the grass and sat beside Dianne. She put her arm around the small shoulders of the little girl and spoke in a distant, dreamy tone.

"Once upon a time, child, there was a very handsome prince. This prince, named Zarad, fought against a cruel king who held his people enslaved. The prince was in love with a beautiful princess who had been taken captive by this king. And no one had ever been able to vanquish the king because he held the evil magic of hate as his weapon.

"But the prince knew only love and courage in his heart, and he led an army against the stronghold of the evil king. In the course of the battle the prince's army was being destroyed. He faced the evil king then, and with the purity of his heart overcame the magic spell of hate that was the king's great weapon. Then with the power of his sword and strong arm he slew the king and released the land from tyranny.

"The great God Zeus was pleased with the young prince, and he granted him any wish he might have for his bravery. The prince wished that he might marry the beautiful princess, and when Zeus saw that she returned the prince's love, the great God sanctioned the marriage.

"He fashioned a special ring to be the symbol of this love and gave it to Pan to bear to the wedding. But Pan, returning from Olympus, playing his pipes in carefree abandon, lost the ring in the glade. And though Pan searched everywhere, he

could not find the ring. Zeus, in great wrath, called Pan before him and punished him for his carelessness. Until Pan could find the ring, and return it to Zarad for the wedding ceremony, the pipes he had played so happily and carelessly, would remain silent. For the prince and princess were very unhappy. The ring had a magical spell that would keep them from uniting their love until it was returned. Without the ring they could never be happy. And Pan must carry the curse of Zeus until he regained the ring.

"Now you will be able to see what happened. The ring was lost by Pan and by accident fell into your mortal world where it has remained until now. So you see, it belongs here with us."

**D**IANNE'S little face was lifted, staring in awe at the words of the goddess. The little girl spoke eagerly.

"If my mommy knew this she wouldn't say that it was all make-believe! I know now, and I do believe you!"

Diana shook her head. "To your mother, and all older people of your world the ring would be only a ring, child. For older people do not have the trust and faith that you have. Now look, little Dianne—over there where Pan went into the glade. What do you see?"

Dianne followed the goddess' direction and stared off into the woods. At first she saw only the tall, friendly trees. But then, strangely, the trees seemed to shimmer and fade away. In their place a glistening palace appeared, and as the little girl watched, she saw a wondrous room of gold and jewels, filled with men and women in shiny costumes.



"I see Pan!" Dianne's voice was hushed with awe. She saw the demigod loping up the great hall and into the palace throne room. Pan made his way through the crowded courtiers and to the front of the room where a great throne rose in majestic splendor. And standing before the throne were two people. A young man, handsome and resplendent in his military uniform, and a dark-haired, beautiful girl. A gasp left Dianne's lips as she stared at the two people.

"They—they look like—like Jim and Betty! It is my sister!"

The voice of the goddess came to Dianne's ears as she looked in awe.

"You see their faces because you trust and love them in your own world. You see them because the ring is finally bringing happiness where it has belonged for so great a time. They are not really your sister and her lover, but a symbol of the ring that has been taken from them. See how happy they are now as Pan approaches?"

Dianne watched, spellbound. She saw Pan hand the ring to the young prince and the prince turned to the beautiful princess and held it out to her. The princess gave him her left hand and Dianne saw him smile as he slipped the ring on her finger.

There was a shimmer of radiance around the couple as the ring was placed on the princess' hand, and at the same time, Dianne saw Pan lift his pipes happily to his lips and blow.

The shimmer faded to a dark shadow that suddenly covered Pan and the royal couple. And though Pan's cheeks puffed and strained at the pipes he held to his lips, no sound came forth. And the shadow grew darker across the throne room and the royal couple looked at each other in dismay.

"What is happening? Why is everything dark? Why can't Pan play his pipes now?" Dianne's voice echoed sudden fear.

The goddess frowned. "I don't know...something is wrong. Surely Zeus is pleased—and yet Zared and his princess are unhappy..."

Dianne stared back at the princess. The features that so resembled her own sister's were tearful. And to Dianne, she looked just as Betty had looked after Jim left the house. And suddenly she knew.

"I know what is wrong, pretty lady! Betty was unhappy when she threw the ring away, and she wanted it back. She still is unhappy. You see, the ring does belong to her after all!"

A strange look came into Diana's eyes as the little girl spoke, and she looked down at the child with wonder. Finally she nodded, and there was admiration in her voice when she said softly: "The mind of a child can see more than I...Of course, little Dianne. The ring does belong to your sister. It was given to her in love, and cannot be taken away...It must be returned."

Dianne was not sure she understood all that the goddess had said. But Diana had said that the ring would be returned. And that made Dianne very glad. She watched then as the goddess lifted her horn once again and blew another long tinkling note. Almost at once there was a fluttering sound in the air and a white dove appeared. It landed on the shoulder of the goddess and Diana spoke softly to it. Then the dove rose and vanished in flight.

The little girl watched with wide eyes as the palace room appeared again among the trees. She saw the dove flutter above the princess and take the golden ring in its tiny beak. Then the dove flew off with

it and the room faded away.

**D**IANNE looked back to the goddess. She had risen from the grass and picked up her bow. Almost at once the dove reappeared and fluttered in the air over Diana's head. The goddess lifted her hand and took the ring from the dove's beak. She turned to the little girl and smiled.

"Here, little Dianne, take the golden ring. Return to your world and give it to your sister. I am sure it will bring her the happiness she thinks she has lost."

Dianne took the ring from the goddess and turned to gaze across the grass. A cry of joy left her lips as she saw her house standing there, full and real, just as it had always been.

But then the happiness left her as she stared back at Diana.

"But what about the prince and his sweetheart? And what will happen to poor Pan? Will he never play his pipes again?"

Diana smiled. "Do not worry, child. Return to your home and the world you are part of. You will know in due time."

The little girl nodded her curly head. "Mommy will have to believe me now, and wait until I tell Betty about the ring!"

A sad smile crossed the face of the goddess. "No, little Dianne. It is best that you keep this secret to yourself. I'm afraid your mother and Betty would not understand—as you do. It is enough that you believe. Someday, when you are older you will know why."

The goddess leaned forward then and kissed Dianne lightly on her forehead. When Dianne looked up to smile at her, she was gone.

"Mommy! Betty! I found it! I found it!"

Dianne ran up the steps of the front porch and pushed open the door. She ran into the living room and saw her mother and sister turning to stare at her.

"Dianne! Where did you go? I left you here in the parlor just a minute ago! You—"

Hazel Fremont's voice broke off as she saw the golden ring in Dianne's fingers. And Betty let out a cry of surprise.

"It's my ring—Jim's ring! Dianne—where did you find it?"

Betty ran forward and took the ring from Dianne. Dianne looked up at her with a smile.

"Why I got it from—I mean, I saw it from the window on the grass and I climbed out to get it. It was there all the time!"

Betty turned to her mother.

"That's strange. We looked everywhere. I don't see how we could have missed it..."

Hazel Fremont laughed. "Well let's be thankful that Dianne found it. The child sees more than we do, and it must have been right under our eyes!"

Betty leaned forward and kissed Dianne. "You're a dear and I love you. You don't know what this means to me. I—"

She had straightened and her voice broke off as she stared beyond Dianne. The little girl turned and saw Jim standing in the front hall. There was a worried look on his face as he stepped into the room.

"Betty—I had to come back. I'm sorry I said what I did. I'm a fool. Can you ever forgive me?"

Dianne stared up at her sister. There was a look of tearful happiness on Betty's face. "Oh, Jim! I really didn't mean what I said either! I trust you Jim, and I do love you..."

A smile spread over Jim's face

and then, as he looked at the ring in Betty's hand, he frowned.

"Here, what's this? The ring belongs on your finger—for good!"

He stepped forward and took the ring from Betty and placed it on her finger. They stared at one another for a long, tender moment. Then Jim said, "Come on, Betty, let's take a ride into town."

Betty flushed prettily and followed him from the room. Dianne watched them go, a gladness in her little heart. She turned to her mother.

"Can I read my picture book by the window, mommy? Can I mommy?"

Hazel Fremont smiled and patted her daughter's curly head.

"You certainly can, dear. And I hope your story book has as happy an ending as ours."

Dianne skipped to the window as her mother left. She crawled onto the window seat and picked up her book. As she opened the book and saw the picture of Pan on one of the pages, she heard a strange sound.

It came from outside. Down past the green velvet lawn, in the grove of trees. As she looked hard, she seemed to see a figure dancing in the glade. And the sound was a tinkling music that swelled with gladness.

Dianne smiled knowingly as she saw the figure. It was Pan, dancing there, gaily blowing his pipes...

THE END