



Not so long ago, two sisters inherited land from their father. The younger sister, Etta, received land that was hilly, dry, and rocky. The older sister, Gretta, was given land planted with fields and orchards. There was even a stream nearby so she could easily water her plants and trees.

Etta didn't complain about her rough land. It was a gift, and she was grateful to have it. She set to work removing rocks, terracing the hills, and cultivating the soil. The work was hard, and she had to walk to the river for water when there wasn't enough rain. Within a few years, however, her land was producing twice as many crops as her sister's fields and orchards.

Gretta harvested her crops, but she never bothered to prepare the soil for the next planting. Soon, her fields grew more weeds than crops. She gathered fruit from the trees in her orchard, but she never took the time to prune the trees. Each year, they had fewer blossoms and produced less fruit. Gretta had no time for her land. She was too busy with meetings and other activities in town. Gretta liked to feel important.

One year, as she watched her sister unload cartloads of produce, Gretta wondered why she had so much less to take to market than Etta. She could not understand how Etta managed so well with land that had never grown anything before.

Wanting to know her sister's secret, Gretta started spying on Etta and overheard her talking to a little pear tree.

"Soon, dear tree," said Etta, "you will grow tall and strong, and your magic blossoms will turn to fruit. Then I will take your juicy pears to the marketplace for everyone to admire."

Gretta confronted her sister. "It's magic!" she cried. "I knew it! It would be impossible to grow fruit or vegetables on your worthless land without magic. I will tell everyone that your produce is enchanted."

"It is enchanting perhaps, dear sister, but not enchanted," Etta replied.

"Do you deny that you are using magic to grow your plants and trees?" Gretta demanded.

"I cannot deny that it is magical to see plants and trees grow," Etta answered.

That night, Gretta went back to Etta's orchard and dug up the little pear tree. The next day, she planted it in her own orchard.

"Now I have the magic tree," she said. "Its juicy pears will grow for me, and my sister will have none at all."

When Etta saw that the tree was missing, she guessed what had happened to it.

She was sad to lose the tree, but she reasoned that if her sister learned to care for it, Gretta's orchard would be prosperous again. Gretta, however, did not take care of the little tree. She didn't water it. She didn't prune it. She had no time for the little tree, so it soon died, just as her other trees had.

Gretta became very angry. "I don't know my sister's magic words," she said to her cat. "I should have listened more carefully. I must go



back and find out.”

Etta was watering her apple trees when Gretta sneaked into the orchard. Gretta hid behind a tree, unaware that Etta could see her purple shoes and flowered hat poking out.

“Dear tree,” Etta said loudly enough for Gretta to hear, “you rewarded me with sweet fruit this year. So that your magic will continue, I will give you water when your roots are dry and trim your branches when your leaves cloak the ground. Then you can work more magic and fill my baskets with sweet fruit again.”

Gretta waited until dark. Then, in the moonlight, she dug up the apple tree and dragged it back to her own orchard. She planted the tree in a large hole and watered it faithfully. When the air was cold and the tree’s golden leaves cloaked the ground, she carefully trimmed the branches.

The next spring, the tree was covered with blossoms. Gretta continued to water and care for the tree. Soon, it was covered with apples. Gretta proudly took baskets of the fruit to the marketplace.

One afternoon, Etta came to Gretta’s house with a cartload of young trees.

“Dear sister,” she said, “now that you know my secret, I have come to help you replant your orchard.”

“I just happened to hear your magic words,” said Gretta, “so I said them to my apple tree every day, and the tree grew baskets and baskets of fruit.”

“Magic words?” Etta asked. “I don’t use magic words. My magic comes from two strong branches and from sturdy roots that are not planted in the ground. Perhaps you discovered my real magic without realizing it.”

“Nonsense!” Gretta said. “If I had seen any magic branches or roots in your orchard, I would have brought



them home with me. Then I would not have had to work so hard.”

“If you didn’t see them,” said Etta, “then you weren’t looking in the right place. Watch now. I will put those branches and roots to work once again.”

Etta began to dig holes and plant the young trees. When she finished, she hugged her sister and said, “My arms, you see, are the two strong branches, and my legs are the sturdy roots. I create my own magic, Gretta. You have the same roots and branches. If you use them well, you don’t need magic words.”

Questions About Two Sisters

1. How was the land that Etta inherited different from the land that Gretta received?
2. What did Etta do to make her land productive?
3. What did Gretta think Etta was doing to get cartloads of fruit and vegetables?
4. What did Gretta think was the reason she was growing so much more fruit after she took the apple tree from Etta's orchard?
5. In what ways did Etta try to help her sister?
6. Explain what Etta meant when she said, "It is enchanting perhaps, dear sister, but not enchanted."

Vocabulary

A. Match each word to its definition.

worthless	terracing	enchanted	prosperous	orchards
complain	confronted	sturdy	inherited	cultivating

1. strong and steady
2. under a magic spell
3. received from someone who has died
4. making steplike tiers of earth on a sloping hillside
5. preparing land for planting crops
6. met face to face to challenge or accuse
7. without value
8. fields of trees that produce fruit
9. successful and productive
10. to express unhappiness about something that seems wrong or unfair

B. Find words in the story to complete each list below.

words that refer to plants

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.

words that refer to farm work

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.

Homographs

Homographs are words that are spelled the same and sound the same but have different meanings.

Example: long—describing a great distance or amount of time long—to want very much

Find each word below in the story. Then write the letter for the meaning of the word as it is used in the story.

1. land

- A. a large section of ground
- B. to bring down from the air to the ground

2. crops

- A. plants grown in large quantities to supply food for people or animals
- B. removes from around the edges, usually by cutting

3. fields

- A. catches something (as a baseball) thrown or hit out into the open
- B. large areas of land used for growing crops

4. roots

- A. the parts of a plant that grow underground and hold the plant in place

B. digs around in the dirt

5. cloak

A. a loose-fitting, capelike garment

B. to cover or hide from view

6. trim

A. a decorative material or design along the border or edge of something

B. to clip or cut off a small amount

7. prune

A. to trim off or cut away excess or unwanted parts

B. a dried plum

8. rocks

A. moves back and forth

B. large stones

9. leaves

A. goes away from a place; departs

B. the flat green parts of plants that are attached to the stem

10. stream

A. a narrow flow of water

B. to flow into or out of

11. watch

A. a device for telling time that can be easily worn or carried

B. to look at or observe attentively

12. branches

A. the limbs of a tree

B. separates and goes off in other directions

Compare the Characters

Think about the behaviors and personalities of Etta and Gretta. How are the two sisters alike? How are they different? Write at least four words or phrases from the story in each section of a Venn diagram to compare the two characters.

