

SWINGING

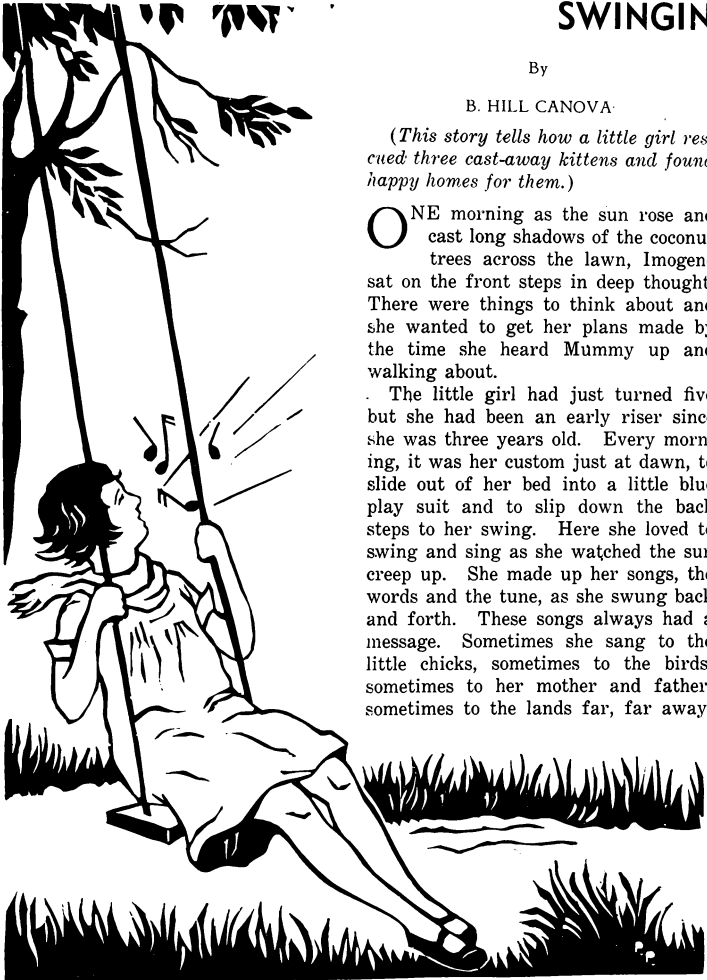
By

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(This story tells how a little girl rescued three cast-away kittens and found happy homes for them.)

ONE morning as the sun rose and cast long shadows of the coconut trees across the lawn, Imogene sat on the front steps in deep thought. There were things to think about and she wanted to get her plans made by the time she heard Mummy up and walking about.

The little girl had just turned five but she had been an early riser since she was three years old. Every morning, it was her custom just at dawn, to slide out of her bed into a little blue play suit and to slip down the back steps to her swing. Here she loved to swing and sing as she watched the sun creep up. She made up her songs, the words and the tune, as she swung back and forth. These songs always had a message. Sometimes she sang to the little chicks, sometimes to the birds, sometimes to her mother and father, sometimes to the lands far, far away,



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etc. To the chicks she sang:

"Do not worry, chicks, there will be plenty food,
There will be plenty if you are very, very good."

To the little birds she sang:

"Be brave, little birds, be brave one and all,
I'll catch you, little birds, if you should fall."

When she sang to her mother and father she often made promises to be a good girl or told them of the animals and pets. One morning her song said:

"I have a good Mummy, and a good Daddy too,
They have a little girl and she must be true."

And so on her swinging and singing went.

This morning, however, she was silent and thoughtful. And what had made her so? Why was she not swing-

ing and singing as usual? The evening before, Anita, the little daughter of the *lavandera*, had said to Imogene: "Do you know what we have at our house?"

"What?" asked Imogene interestedly.

"Three baby kittens."

"How lovely. May I have one?"

"You may have all three of them," replied Anita sadly.

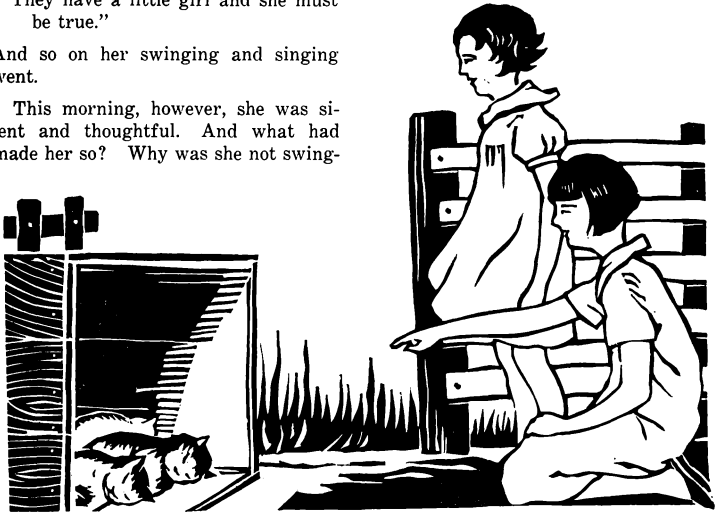
"Do you like to give all of them away?"

"No, I do not like to, but my mother says that in a few days when Pedro comes home from Bais he will have to take the babies far, far away."

"Take the babies far away?" questioned Imogene in disbelief.

"Yes, far, far away."

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SWINGING AND SINGING

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"Why, Anita?"

"Because we are many in our house, and we are very poor. When the kittens are big there will be no food for them. My mother says it is more kind to take babies far, far away before they can open their eyes than to have them starve when they are big."

"What will the babies do?" asked Imogene.

"I don't know," was Anita's plaintive answer.

"I will take them and my Mummy will give them food."

At this point Imogene ran into the house and announced, "Mummy, Anita is going to give me three little kittens."

"No, no, dear, you must not take Anita's kittens. You have two cats and those are enough for one house."

"But, Mummy . . ."

"Now, Imogene, do not nag. Run right out and play. I must finish these letters."

"But, Mummy . . ." Anita said.

Imogene's mother waved her out of the room and continued her correspondence. She hesitated with a heavy thud on each step as she returned to the back yard. The ideas going through her head were something like this: If big people would listen—if Mummy would let me tell her—if she only knew about the poor little kittens.

"Then Pedro will take them away."

"Far, far away," echoed Imogene mournfully.

Both little girls dug their toes into the dirt and said no

more about the kittens that afternoon.

All of this happened late in the afternoon of the day before, and that is why Imogene sat on the steps at dawn thinking hard. How to save the kittens was very important. Soon she heard her mother's steps in the dining room and decided to try once more to explain about the kittens. Slowly she went up the steps and entered the dining room.

"Good morning, my little girl," greeted her mother, "you are very quiet this morning. I did not hear any little songs."

"Mummy, you know the little kittens . . ."

"Now, dear, you must not be thinking about them any more. Anita loves kittens as well as you do, and I am sure she does not want to give them away."

"But these little kittens . . ."

"No, let's not talk about them. Two cats are enough for one little girl. Breakfast is ready. Hop into your chair."

Imogene ate her breakfast in silence. She was too busy thinking to try to talk. Her thoughts were: "Pedro will be home in a few days. Mummy will not let me tell her of the poor little kittens. We have plenty of food. I love little kittens so much. There are many in Anita's family—Pedro, Rufina, Anselma, Concepcion, Jose, Anita and the little baby. We are only three in our family. Daddy buys our food, but Anita's father is dead. The poor little kittens."

Before she had finished her breakfast she heard the *lavanderas* outside, and hoped that

Anita would be with her mother this morning.

In the back yard Imogene had a play house in a very large box. Inside of this were several small boxes which she played with as if they were her stove, icebox, etc. The house girl had made a small rag rug for the playhouse. When breakfast was finished Imogene hurried down to the playhouse, took one of the small boxes, placed the rag rug in it, gave it to Anita and told her: "Anita, you put the mother cat and the babies in this box."

Anita's round, dark eyes brightened as she asked, "Then you will take the kittens?"

"No, I will not take them. Mummy says we have plenty of cats at this house."

At this point the little girls held a short conference in whispers. Anita took the box and was soon out of sight in the direction of the barrio. Later in the morning she was back in Imogene's back yard.

Soon it was, "Mummy, may I have a cup of milk?"

"Why, sure you may."

"May I give Anita some also?"

"Yes, do give her some."

"There are many in Anita's house, but they have only little food."

"Yes, give her some milk."

The mother went about her morning duties, paying little attention to the little girl who usually played in her playhouse most of the morning.

Later it was: "Mummy, may I have bread and butter and some for Anita?"

"Yes, sure you may."

When Imogene finished her

lunch that day she went without a word to her *siesta*.

Her father remarked to her mother, "The kiddie is very quiet today. Do you think she is feeling well?"

"I think so. Twice this morning she came and asked for something to eat, once for milk and once for bread and butter."

"Well, as long as she eats like that, there can't be much wrong with her. Maybe she has something on her mind."

"Anita told her of some kittens at her house, and of course she wants them."

"If we offered Anita twenty centavos I expect she would gladly part with one of them. The young person loves kittens so."

"It isn't a problem of Anita's willingness to part with the kittens. I think she would give Imogene her head if Imogene wanted it. But with two cats, a duck, a chick, a lamb, some canaries and a turtle, it seems to me that is enough animals for one child. After all it means one more creature for me to look after."

"Right, right, our zoo is large and varied enough as it now stands."

"She will soon forget about it."

About four o'clock that afternoon Mrs. Connes and her little daughter, Bella, came to visit Imogene and her mother.

"I'm so glad to see both of you, and Bella. My little Imo-

gene will be delighted to have Bella play with her. Shall we go around this way to find her? She asked for a cup of milk a few minutes ago and I expect she is in her playhouse." Imogene's mother led the way around to the box playhouse. The little girl was not in sight. "Santa," called the mother to the *lavandera*. "di-in Imogene?"

The answer was a point towards the bodega.

As the two callers and their hostess approached the bodega they heard a new song and a new tune: the words were:

"Good, mother cat, don't cry,
don't cry.

To save your babies, I'll try,
I'll try."

Imogene was so busy stroking and comforting the mother cat that she did not see her mother and their friends until they were at her side. The old mother cat eagerly lapped the milk as the little girl sang to her. From the box which Anita had taken to the *barrio* that morning came faint news from the three kittens.

"My dear little girl, what have you here?"

"Oh, Mummy, please don't tell Pedro where the kittens are. They are such sweet baby kittens."

Bella's eyes beamed at the squirming little animals in the box. "Mother! mother! you promised me a kitty if you could find one."

"But," protested Bella's mother, "these belong to Imogene."

"No, Mummy says I can't

have them because I have two cats already."

"They belong to Anita..." Imogene's mother started to explain but Imogene took up the explanation herself.

"Mummy, in Anita's house there are many brothers and sisters. They have little food. They are very poor. They have no Daddy to buy food for them. By and by when the kittens are big there will be no food for them. When Pedro comes home he will have to take them far, far away. We are only three. Daddy buys plenty of food. Don't tell Pedro where the kittens are. Only Anita knows."

"Why didn't you tell Mummy that the kittens had to be taken away. Maybe we can find homes for them."

"You said I must not talk about it."

"I promised Bella and two of her playmates each a kitten if we could find some. We would love to give them a home," explained Bella's mother.

"Oh! goody, goody," cried Bella and hugged her mother's neck as tight as she could, "now I shall have a kitten."

Just at the break of dawn the next morning Imogene's mother heard her little daughter's voice singing happier than usual. The swing was going back and forth as high as it could and the song rang out:

"Little kittens, you are so nice,
You are so nice.

You shall have happy homes,
With plenty fish and rice."