



Jub's job was important and she was very proud of it. Each evening when dusk was removing the outline of things, like a rubber, Jub had to shoulder her big green sack and carry all the Happy Endings of stories from one end of the forest to the other in time for everybody's bedtime. Once she had reached the edge of the forest, Jub had to climb to the top of a huge old oak tree, still with her sack on her back, and sit on the tallest branch.

Then, very carefully, Jub would open the sack and shake out the Happy Endings into the violet evening air. She was good at this because she had six fingers on each small hand.



and because she loved and they happy

the very end



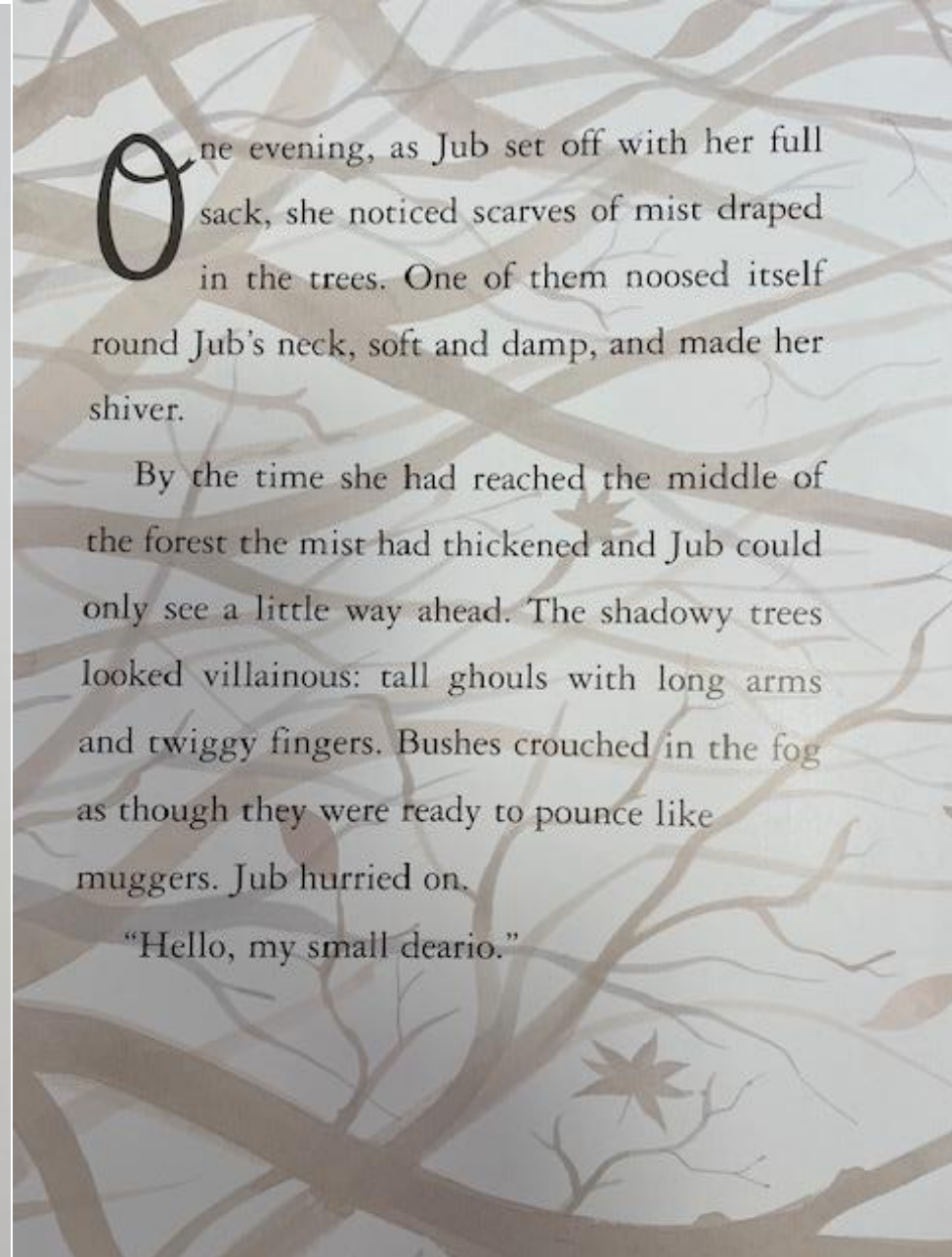
Some of the Endings drifted away like breath and others fluttered upwards like moths fumbling for light. Some looked like fireflies disappearing among the kindling of the leaves and twigs and some were fireworks, zipping skywards like rockets and flouncing off in a jackpot of sparks high above the forest.

When the last Ending was out of the sack, Jub would scamper and rustle her way down to the ground and set off homewards through the darkening woods. Sometimes the eyes of owls flashed from the trees like torches and made her jump, or bats skimmed the top of her head like living frisbees and she squeaked with alarm, but Jub trotted quickly along and was soon home in her own cosy hole.

and they all in



She would sleep quite late the following day. By the time she'd shopped, cooked, laundered, ironed, read a bit of her new book and perhaps visited a neighbour in another hole, the Happy Endings had flown back to the forest like homing pigeons and were hanging from the ancient silver birch all ready for Jub to collect once again.



One evening, as Jub set off with her full sack, she noticed scarves of mist draped in the trees. One of them noosed itself round Jub's neck, soft and damp, and made her shiver.

By the time she had reached the middle of the forest the mist had thickened and Jub could only see a little way ahead. The shadowy trees looked villainous: tall ghouls with long arms and twiggy fingers. Bushes crouched in the fog as though they were ready to pounce like muggers. Jub hurried on.

"Hello, my small deario."



Jub jumped. A twisted old woman with a face like the bark of a tree and horrible claw hands was standing on the path in front of Jub. She had fierce red eyes like poisonous berries.

"What's in the sack?"

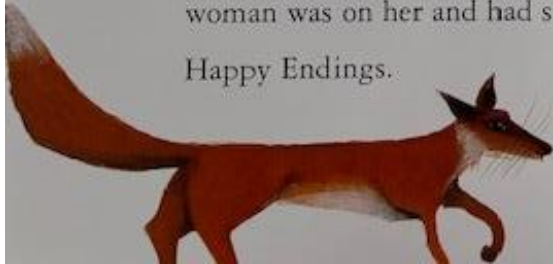
"Let me pass, please," said Jub.

"What's in the sack, I said!"

The old woman had grabbed hold of Jub's arm. Her touch nipped like pepper.

"Let me alone!" gasped Jub. "I must go on."

"Shut up!" said the vicious old woman, and she spat green spittle in Jub's face. Jub was so shocked that she took a step backwards and tripped over a tree-root. Faster than fury, the old woman was on her and had snatched the sack of Happy Endings.



"I'm having this, my six-fingered deario," she snarled. Then she spat at Jub again and hobbled rapidly away into the darkness and the fog. Jub lay there for a long time, terrified that the witch would return.

The fog began to lift and the moon turned the narrow path through the forest to a long silver finger. An owl's hoot questioned sadly. Jub got to her feet. The Happy Endings were lost! She turned and ran back down the path towards her home, scattering bitter tears into the cold black night.





As Jub ran sobbing through the forest, children in their beds were listening to their bedtime stories. But tonight there were to be no Happy Endings. Hansel and Gretel were trapped screaming in the Gingerbread House while the wicked witch made the oven hotter and hotter. Some of the children started to cry.



Cinderella's foot was too big for the glass slipper. Some of the children started to howl. Snow White died when she bit the poisonous apple and she stayed dead for ever. Some of the children started to scream. The Big Bad Wolf gobbled up Little Red Riding Hood and enjoyed every red mouthful. Some of the children had hysterics. On and on the parents of the children read and worse and worse the stories became. Soon the night was filled with the awful sound of frightened or disappointed children weeping and wailing in their beds.

