

'They must be modern types of houses,' said Gretel. 'Father hates modern things.'

'Then he won't like them very much,' said Bruno.

'No,' replied Gretel. She stood still for a long time staring at them. She was twelve years old and was considered to be one of the brightest girls in her class, so she squeezed her lips together and narrowed her eyes and forced her brain to understand what she was looking at. Finally she could think of only one explanation.

'This must be the countryside,' said Gretel, turning round to look at her brother triumphantly.

'The countryside?'

'Yes, it's the only explanation, don't you see? When we're at home, in Berlin, we're in the city. That's why there are so many people and so many houses and the schools are full and you can't make your way through the centre of town on a Saturday afternoon without getting pushed from pillar to post.'

'Yes . . . ' said Bruno, nodding his head, trying to keep up.

'But we learned in geography class that in the countryside, where all the farmers are and the animals, and they grow all the food, there are huge areas like this where people live and work and send all the food to feed us.' She looked out of the window again at the huge area spread



out before her and the distances that existed between each of the huts. 'This must be it. It's the countryside. Perhaps this is our holiday home,' she added hopefully.

Bruno thought about it and shook his head. 'I don't think so,' he said with great conviction.

'You're *nine*,' countered Gretel. 'How would you know? When you get to my age you'll understand these things a lot better.'

'That might be so,' said Bruno, who knew that he was younger but didn't agree that that made him less likely to be right, 'but if this is the countryside like you say it is, then where are all the animals you're talking about?'

Gretel opened her mouth to answer him but couldn't think of a suitable reply, so she looked out of the window again instead and peered around for them, but they were nowhere to be seen.

'There should be cows and pigs and sheep and horses,' said Bruno. 'If it was a farm, I mean. Not to mention chickens and ducks.'

'And there aren't any,' admitted Gretel quietly.

'And if they grew food here, like you suggested,' continued Bruno, enjoying himself enormously, 'then I think the ground would have to look a lot better than that, don't you? I don't think you could grow anything in all that dirt.'