

# ROBIN HOOD'S BARN



*The Confessions of  
A Garden Adventurer*

MARGARET EMERSON BAILEY

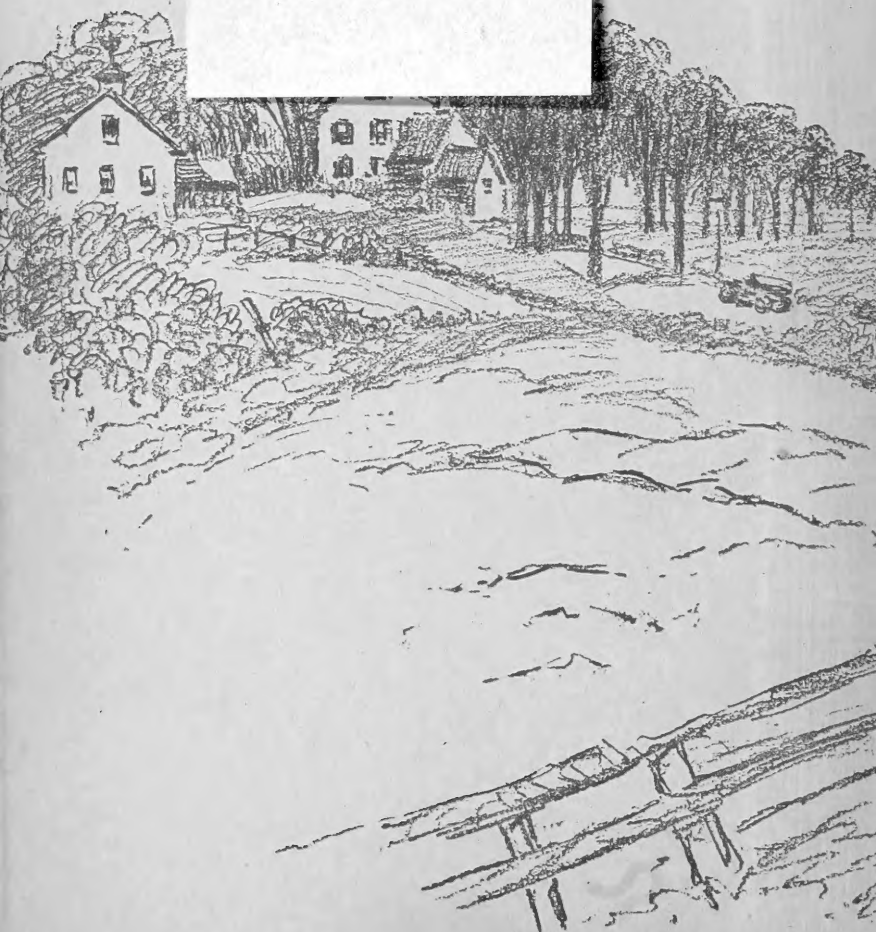


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West in a Valley.



*Robin Hood's Barn*









EACH JUNE I TURN INTO THE COW LANE THAT LEADS TO  
NEIGHBORING FIELDS

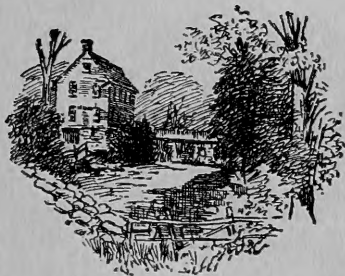


# ROBIN HOOD'S BARN

*The Confessions of a Garden Adventurer*

BY

MARGARET EMERSON BAILEY



WITH DRAWINGS BY  
WHITMAN BAILEY



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ROBIN HOOD'S BARN. I

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TO  
WILLIAM WHITMAN BAILEY  
A SLIGHT RETURN FOR RICH INHERITANCE





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I: *Pen Pricks*





## I: *Pen Pricks*

**I**F," said my brother as he turned the last page of an article I had contrived to fit his drawings, "if I could only write."

"If," said I, as I scanned a pen and ink that somehow failed to illustrate my article, "if I could only draw."

By which you are to understand that it is not only in the matter of technique that we fall behind the Hales or Pennells. That is as it may be. But what stops us short is the irksomeness of double harness. We do not wear it easily. One it makes balkish and the other skittish; one "whoas," the other "goes." Liking to

## *Robin Hood's Barn*

prance alone, to express our individual moods by dancing or curvetting, we could do without that yoke-fellow who holds down our high-stepping and keeps us steady to his pace.

So it is that while my brother turns the pages of "Our Sentimental Journey," those early adventures of the Pennells made by tricycle through France and Spain, you must not think he is admiring solely the genius of the master-craftsman. True, he cannot help lingering over the small sketches scattered through the volume; poplars blown against a wind-swept sky; lanes winding in and out beside a hedge of bristling willows; courtyards set cool and deep in shadow by the foreground's sultry blaze; or peasants caught in an unconscious attitude by dextrous and unerring stroke. But deeper than his envy of the artist lies his envy of the man. That cantankerous curmudgeon, old Joe Pennell, who will admit no illustrator save himself since the brave swaggering days of Howard Pyle! Let him bluster, let him grumble. Why, the man has the patience of a saint. Witness the books—a whole half-dozen—he has turned out with his wife.

## *Pen Pricks*

And I, too, have my own reflections. My lesson in humility comes from the Hales. It is my country, that New England which they rediscovered on their last happy trip. Gay are the sketches, full of beating light and sunshine, whether it falls on pastures, self-sown with rocks and little cedars, on the uncompromising bleakness of the village church, or on mill towns huddled close about a dingy river side. But there is the tartness of a Rhode Island greening to the text. It delights where it most piques. To some I know it has given a wry mouth. And why not? What else would you expect from her who recently played "Mamma Bett"? Impossible that that peppery old lady who could so chastise with the valor of her tongue, should write with other than a caustic pen. In "Beyond the Horizon," too, did not her grim humor crackle like a lightning flash across the blackness of the sky? Inimitable, but, so you insist, a person of one part. Last year she had recovered from a spell and was meddlesomely up from her wheel-chair. She would be lost without her "tantrims." I tell you I know better. For many years she played

## *Robin Hood's Barn*

Griselda, patient and submissive. Look at the books she wrote to provide her husband with a text.

Now when we compare ourselves to Joseph Pennell and Louise Closser Hale, we feel that we are better tempered publicly. My brother cannot growl and I can never snap. One of us is mellow and the other mild, though I prefer not to say which. But let us take our pens in hand and they inevitably turn upon each other. We fence, cross-hatch with spluttering jibe. Prick follows prick.

"You see," my brother was now thinking how he would have liked to write my article on Poe and Mrs. Whitman. How differently it would have read! "I don't know the meanings of the words you use. Decorum, I don't see where that comes in."

Yet it was that word I knew that had fought and stifled passion, single-handed. Alone, it had held bound Poe's "Helen of a thousand dreams."

"And there's another." This time my brother's manner was reminiscent of the nursery. You might think that I had taken some unfair ad-



## *Pen Pricks*

vantage of his age and size. "It begins with 'trans.' I thought that it was never going to end."

"Transcendentalism," I finished out politely. Then I paused. It was as well that he should not know that writers sometimes use words which they too cannot explain. In any case his interest in it was merely in its length of buzz. He made it clear that he was unpleasantly impressed.

"If I should come to call on you," he said, "I could last out just fifteen minutes. I could talk that long on art. Then I should have to make a bolt."

"But suppose I talked on literature."

The bolt was an accomplished fact.

He had gone to the piano which serves him oftenest as an easel and stood looking at his sketches with an appreciative eye. One was Mrs. Whitman's house, prim and square, set rigidly upon the pavement, a little smug in the self-consciousness with which it toed the mark. From my point of view it offered opportunity for contrast. Poe, crying out the anguish of his parting within those spare, unyielding walls. His

## *Robin Hood's Barn*

Helen recovering from the precautionary fumes of ether just long enough to say farewell. Bleak harborage for tragic romance! But for my brother, this lady whose inheritance had kept her fluttering in bondage, had chosen her house wisely. Certainly for his convenience. Nice perspective to the silent empty street. Nice the shadows on the roof and doorway that fell spattering from the high elm. And that other picture of the garden! There he felt that I had had my chance. A tale of moonlight and midsummer madness. Past twelve o'clock, and Poe abroad in Providence, that staid New England city that still kept curfew and tucked itself so early into bed. The drift of perfume in the darkness. Sweetbrier and flowering currant, misty in the radiance. And below them, with a silver glamour full upon her, Helen seated on a flowery bank. Was there ever such a meeting? They two in the whole slumbrous town, awake. And I had stopped to talk of literary coteries and transcendentalism. Yes, it really was a pity that a fellow could not write.

My failure, of course, was unintentional. But

## *Pen Pricks*

it was a giddy business, teaming. He never knew when I would walk soberly past crossroads or when take the bit between my teeth. Now in matters more prosaic, I plodded forward with decorum. You see he had learned the meaning of the word and now used it as a sidewise prankish nip.

There was that article I did on the American Screw Industry. He had dropped it on me suddenly because he liked the chance it offered him; chimneys smirching a clear sky; the plant itself, great slabs of light and shadow; the mill-stream tumbling forward from obscurity in curds of foam. But he had not guessed that I could write so well the history of tacks and cold-cut nails. And that square in a provincial suburb; a dowdy little row of shops where business came to life at six o'clock with the closing of the mills. I had never seen it and he had had to draw for me a map. Baker here and butcher there, department store and notions, with the druggist's just around the corner. Yet somehow, constructed on such slight foundations, it stood firm. He had gone out to see in the eager fashion that he has,

## *Robin Hood's Barn*

the night his picture went to press. And the people liked it. What's more they liked my article. It was a ten strike. Why, the market man had said I wrote as easily as he himself cleaned fish. I remember the elation with which my brother bore that tribute home.

But when it came to romance, I showed myself a college woman. You understand that I belong to a generation when education was regarded as a virus left forever in the blood. I was overcultivated, timorous of sentiment. I stumbled and fell down before it. When I met it in the road, I balked.

Such times, however, as I ask my brother to illustrate my articles, it is he who strains the harness. In an unhappy day he saw the work of Lester Hornby and at the same time heard the application of the word "quaint." No use since then to give him the freedom of your city. You may shut off your boulevards, wrap up your monuments, exclude him from your public hospitals and libraries, from all that stirs your civic pride. He will not give a rap. For already he will have wandered down a by-way, have set his stool upon

## *Pen Pricks*

a dump, and be hard at work on a prospect of the backs of houses, of tumbled shanties, and old sheds. No use to put on a good front. He will catch your city from the rear.

So at least he caught my garden. It was a sketch made at my request and to accompany a fantasy for *Country Life*. Not hard to imagine the kind that I desired. Some corner of my own half-acre that could be entered in a competition with a fine estate. Now he had skill at omissions. Wouldn't he be willing, just by the mere blankness of the paper, to tell a convenient white lie? Let the pathway trail off to a distant prospect, and couldn't the whole thing at the edges be left a little vague? In other words, I had been a braggart with my tongue and with his hand, I expected him to help me out.

He promised solemnly and disappeared. For a good two hours, whenever I peered cautiously between the curtains, I saw his white cap gleaming in the distance. Then in he came. At first he would not let me see his handiwork. It must not be grabbed and regarded at close range. A shade was drawn, another shade pulled up until

## *Robin Hood's Barn*

the light was properly adjusted. But when at length he unveiled his vision of my garden, I beheld, not the circling pathways and trim hedges I had boasted; not the bird-bath and arbor, my sole garden ornaments; no, not even flowers. He had done the onion patch, bald pates nodding in the sunlight; and behind a shelving rock loomed two dead scraggly trees!

Nor is it safe to let him have his way with country rambles. I must act as guide and take the lead. Even then I dare not skirt a barn, but make for open pastures and go far afield. For let a weathervane but tip the hilltop and he makes straight towards it, as though homing to his stall. The attraction—if you will have it—comes from his knowledge that somewhere below a murky pit lies darkling, rich in blacks. I have told him firmly that it is trite, that it has been done a thousand times before. Of no avail. Let him once find it and it seizes hold of his imagination. Talk as I will, he does not even hear. Look at that oblong window festooned with silver cobwebs. Look at that silver light that filters through it to the muck below. How it throws



BELOW A MURKY PIT LIES DARKLING, RICH IN BLACKS.

[27]





## *Pen Pricks*

back in shadow every dim recess. And that Leghorn rooster on the pile. Can't I see that he adds the necessary touch of utter white. Nor does my brother wait for me to answer. Without more ado he has perched himself upon the wall that binds the cowlane, his pad upon his knees, his pencil out.

It is not merely his delight in homely scenes, however, that works havoc with my articles. Sometimes it is his way of jumping facts. Historical accuracy is for him no bar. In contrast to my own heavy-footed plodding, he does not see his obstacles and clears them nimbly without knowing they are there.

Not long ago in an old volume, I ran foul of a pirate who lurked about New England shores. A satisfying brigand so I found him. In fact, "his deeds of prowess could not be related," said the author, "without giving Nature a too grievous shock." Such, however, as I might considerably retell for a still more queasy generation called for a background, sinister and grim. Triumphantly, my brother called it forth; a coast where tumbled boulders were pitched high, clouds omi-

## *Robin Hood's Barn*

nous and brooding, the running dash and foam of heavy seas. With desperation to her leeward tack and slanting masts, a boat was speeding, small, defenseless, towards the skyline. And overhauling her, a brig had set its sails full to the gale and had clapped upon its mizzen-mast an ugly flag. There was no question but the sketch was done with cruelty and gusto. Yet in one corner in the pettifogging way I have, I noticed something not quite congruous. By 1724, my buccaneer had come to his bad end, and high on the cliff a modern lighthouse blinked its star.

"It's needed by the composition," said my brother firmly. "It cannot come out."

So in it stayed, its beacon thrown a little disconcertingly upon my scholarship. Still while I yielded, I could not help thinking that instead of deacon and divine, it was a pity that the Puritans had not begot an artist. It would have been so much more practical. The *Hesperus* had not been wrecked. A lighthouse would have stood on Norman's Woe, sprung complete and Jove-born from the artist's brain.

After so much frankness, it is only fair to state

## *Pen Pricks*

that very different is our attitude when we invade each other's province. Let my brother bring a caption he has written for a drawing and I do not carp or criticize. At most I twist a clause or clip a participle and not before I tell him that I like his use of words. Or happier times there are on Sunday mornings when I too go sketching, a pleasant fiction on our part, sustained chiefly as it brings companionship. At most I have what in music would be called a natural touch and surprise as one of those prodigies who "has never had a lesson." But for all that I do not fear my brother's comments. Inevitably at the end of a long silent morning in which we sit just out of sight, yet warmly conscious of each other's nearness, a shadow falls across my work and I hear a voice exclaim, "You've hit on a nice composition." In a moment my brother is cross-legged on the grass beside me. "You don't mind." He lays an accent on my walls, picks out the high-lights on my haystacks, sweeps in a sky. Nor does his generosity refuse me a whole foreground. Before I know it, he has pulled the

## *Robin Hood's Barn*

scattered details all together. I am bewildered. It seems that I have done a sketch.

"That's nice," he says, as he returns it to me. "It's a pity really that you do not draw."

I reach my handiwork before me until it balances against my upturned toes. Then I smile broadly at him.

"It's a pity," I reply, "that you don't write."

II: *Among the Prophets*



## LISTENING

These are the sounds I listen for:

The lift of the gray dawn.

It rises up inaudibly

Like breath of wind, newborn.

The rush of speeding clouds that race

Elate above the gale.

They spread their sheet rebelliously

With smack of unfurled sail.

The liquid notes that sunshine spills

On sheltered roofs and walls.

It spatters down as merrily

As spray from waterfalls.

The quivering of noonday glare

Upon the stubborn hill.

It chips off light relentlessly

As though with workman's drill.

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The murmur that blue shadows make  
In settling down to rest.  
They drop to ground as tenderly  
As brooding bird to nest.

The moon's arrest of ecstasy  
In coming on the bay.  
I've heard it pause exultantly  
Before it took its way.





## II: *Among the Prophets*

**I**T was my fortune recently in an old New England primer to come upon a list of the true prophets, the spelling of whose names and the facts of whose existence every Christian child should know. And among those who had known and followed the true God, I found not Saul, but Mahomet—branded. “A celebrated impostor who pretended to be a prophet.” Clearly there was no more to be said. Nor should

## *Robin Hood's Barn*

I myself have dared to question this authoritative dictum, had not its spokesman later lowered his eyes from spiritual realms to the kingdom of this earth. A little further on, where he had placed the essentials of geography meetly following the essentials of religion, there was another list, this time of our great rivers—and in their midst I hailed the Mississippi with a burst of pride. Not national, mind you. Personal. I still could spell it. My tongue was already playing hop-scotch with its double consonants as in more agile days. “I-double-s, i-double-s, i-double-p.” I had made it and landed firm on the last i. But there I stopped dismayed. Flowing just beneath it, racing it, almost outrunning it across the page, was the Piscataqua of Maine. By a more successful imposition than Mahomet’s, it had disguised its real importance and taking on false dignity, was out on masquerade.

I like to think how many years it sidled by and went uncaught. For I am on the side of all pretenders, whether they lay claim to a mantle of green hills and snowy mountain sources or to the mantle of Elijah; whether it be Mahomet the

## *Among the Prophets*

unbeliever, or the Piscataqua of Maine. It is enough for me that there was aspiration. To filch the title of great river was at least to dream upon the beauties consequent. To steal the title of true prophet was for the first Mussulman to seek his revelations in the desert solitudes; and in praying with his face towards Mecca, to lift his eyes upon the glory of the setting sun. Who would not play false when he so might wrongly win?

Not I at least; for it is much in the same spirit that I pretend to paint. To be sure I do not bring my revelations home. I seek no converts. I fear that should I do so even with the sword, I could but martyr truth. And though in these usurping days any upstart may arise self-knighted, I make no attempt to take my place among the master painters and to head their formal list. My pretensions are set forth with a far different intent. Not that I may win great place, but a remote one. Not that a multitude shall greet me with acclaim, but that they shall grant me to depart in peace. I would have them gain for me the privilege of an occasional hegira,

## *Robin Hood's Barn*

a pilgrimage where I may seek my shrines in solitude, be rapt clean out of myself.

And without pretensions, it is not so easy. Even with them, the Piscataqua must have found it hard to persuade those who knew its sluggish habits, that it was fitted for other than a serviceable life. And without them, Mahomet, faring forth into the desert, would have found a staying hand upon his camel's bridle and the Widow of Medina impertinently asking at what hour she might expect him home. I know; for let me, like any other person, say that I am going off to walk, that I have need of solitude, and there are a hundred duties that intrude. The votary of woods and fields is soon transformed to vestal, a common bondswoman of the hearth. Such rags and tatters of the day as I may gather will do at best for comfortable gossip. It is in the gleaming widespread raiment of the morning that I would set forth to commune.

If I am to don it, I must announce a far different intention. Boldly must I make it known that I am starting off to paint. But not, you understand, so baldly. There must be prepara-



I COME BACK FROM MY PILGRIMAGE WITH BRUSHES CLEAN, MY CANVAS  
ALL UNTOUCHED.

[41]



## *Among the Prophets*

tions as for service. With a quiet stir, I must lift the vessels of my priestly office from the desk which is their shrine. Then as I begin to lay them out, canvas, brush, and palette, and to prepare them with solemnity, the voices of demand are stilled; there is a reverent hush. The wives of Joseph Smith would as soon have asked for a distribution of affection at the moment that he placed the golden spectacles upon his brow and took down the golden book.

But should you too desire a right to your escape, you must first acquire a legend. My own dates back, as any prophet's should, to childish days when wide-eyed in wonder at the honor that had come upon me, I reported the authoritative voice. Impossible then to suspect one so conventionally round and rosy, so stolid in acceptance, of subterfuge or guile. Moreover, I could lead all scoffers to the very place. It was at East Gloucester. At the end of a long walk through bayberry and bracken, I had come upon a beach scooped out between red cliffs. And here with sketch pad on my knee, I sat among the salvage, washing in crude surfaces of black and white.

## *Robin Hood's Barn*

Little enough had they to do with the prospect before me; a sky of windy power, a sea where purple shadows raced the clouds above them, and where a fitful sun struck sparks of glinting steel. As I dipped my brush into the ink-well, I heard a crunching step, a pause, and then the sound of laughter rising through a shaggy throat.

“Does nothing tell you, young one,” said a voice behind me, “that you can’t do a day of mystery with a bottle of black ink?”

I answered honestly that nothing did.

“Suppose then that I tell you.” There was a chuckle.

“And who are you?”

“Twachtman, the painter.”

But as he crossed his legs and dropped in friendly fashion on the beach beside me, I knew him for the goat-god, Pan. How not know the thatch of hair thrust upward as by horns, the grotesque face, the shaggy pelt? Yet though I had heard him to be wayward and arrogant in the glimpses of himself he gave to mortals, there seemed no reason for alarm. Mirth was in his eyes and round his bearded mouth and the shout



## *Among the Prophets*

of merriment he gave was at my young presumption. I had refused his lore on trust.

“Shall I show you?”

I snuggled close to watch beside his arm.

In a second he had begun to pour forth strange melody upon a canvas and the pipes he used were brushes flecked with paint. Against the sunny brilliance of the sky, clouds sped, free-moving. Wind stirred the deep troughs of the water and lifted from it foam that was as fugitive as dreams. And where the waves curved and broke in rout of white along the shore, there was exultancy that had behind it, the whole wild pushing tumult of the sea. It was the sea grown conscious, with rhythm and with pulse.

Then swiftly with its satisfaction, the Piper's mood had gone. His eyes that had been staring out with stern intelligence turned downward, lightly mocking at the silence of my wonder; and with a shaking free of sand, he had risen to his feet.

“Now run home, youngster,” with a smile both prankish and companionable, he sped me on my

## *Robin Hood's Barn*

Marathon, "and tell your mother that I'll teach you how to paint."

He was to disappear, however, far too soon for that. And though I like sometimes to think he might have worked his miracle, I know that I am blinking facts. Still, a little he did teach me of his close companioning with earth. That trees were not to be interpreted alone by outline and by color, but by an understanding of their growth. There was the timidity of aspens that put them in a flutter before they felt the breeze, the light way of willows in the wind, the compassionate nobility of elms. The oak drew stuff for gallantry from its far-reaching roots. The pine was always solitary with loneliness a-stirring in its heart. And he made clear the ways of clouds. The wanton ones that frisked across the sky to little purpose and must be rendered with a gaiety just equal to their own. Those bolder ones that went adventuring. And thunder clouds, brigands that ran up their great black flags against a western sky-line and bore down upon a world they robbed of gold. Nor was the wind always the same mad bullying fellow with his

## *Among the Prophets*

cheeks outpuffed. If you were to catch him thus, you had to work with gusto. But there were better days when he was content with whistling; and then you showed his presence by the bend of branch and tree-top and the dancing shadows that he shook. Or on other days he came slowly, liling; and you could only hint his presence gently by the play of light among the leaves. Sometimes, moreover, he was drowsed by summer heat; and you had to give the clew to fitful slumber by the stir of grass or bracken on the moors. Water, too, like wind, was undependable, never twice the same. Here at the coast it was often fierce and often sullen, yet threatening always in its power. But in hidden inland places the aspect that you tried to give it, was one of delicacy and shimmering grace. And lucky were you if you could contrive to show the surface faintly warmed above the icy springs below. Line and rhythm you might hope to capture, but never space. Nor depth—that was not final, though mysteriously deepening, fold on fold. But whatever you were after, you were to look with eyes of wonder, with perpetual astonishment. The

## *Robin Hood's Barn*

new beauty of each day was your very own to seek.

However, as I later came to know, this beauty was no light-of-love to be forced and hurried into yielding. Sought roughly, come on carelessly, it escaped the memory after a faint tingling of the sense. If it was to draw close, to show its open face, it must be sought as the painter seeks it, in quietness, in patience, and in peace. Each bravery of color, each grace of line, must be taken first into the mind, considered carefully, and reverently held. So only would it give itself into possession; a possession so complete that it merged with consciousness and became a part of one's own self.

What matter that I cannot set such wonders down, translate them to a testament; that I come back from my pilgrimage with brushes clean, my canvas all untouched? Surely it is something awesome to have seen; and to have in the holy places of my mind a beauty beyond my own capacity to paint. Tarnished might grow the clear yellow of the mustard fields beneath my touch, and dulled the azure that slopes down so bril-

## *Among the Prophets*

liantly to meet the rising crest. Muddy might turn the purple richness of the cedar plumes and the red shafts that rise so straight from tugging with the open clefts. The mast of the old button-wood might soar less straight and white up to its broken rigging and the brave tatter of its sails. And surely the scurrying clouds that stream across the sky would lag, the wind among the corn would pass less fleet. But in my imagination they keep their beauty in a high clean solitude. There, inviolate, they rest secure.

And so conscious of their haunting presence am I, that I too would take my place among the prophets; those who go forth to desert and to wilderness for the communication that will come to them, alone. Should you, however, meet me returning empty-handed and, like many another skeptic ask what I had gone to seek, I could only give you an old answer,

“A reed shaken by the wind.”

Aye, verily, and in my answer there would be the reverence of one to whom this vision has been once vouchsafed.



### III: *Keeping One's Place*





## LOT'S WIFE

I like to think that Lot's Wife,  
Defiant of the Lord,  
Could brave His flaming anger,  
The flash of His bright sword,  
To turn a backward look upon  
The city He abhorred.

I hope she saw her roof-tree  
Before the brimstone came,  
The little plot in Sodom  
That Lot bought in her name,  
And that it stayed untouched until  
Her eyes were seared with flame.

She turned perhaps half-doubting  
A Righteousness so grim  
As to destroy her hearthstone  
For some strange Man-God's whim.  
Before she turned to salt, I'm sure  
She had strange thoughts of Him.

*Robin Hood's Barn*

No matter what compelled her,  
Some treasure she forsook,  
A wish to ease the burden  
Of memories she took,  
I know I should have pardoned her  
For that brave, backward look.



### III: *Keeping One's Place*

IT is a fortunate matter that my misalliance with Touisset was contracted not with a person, but a place. Had it been the former, I should have proved an intolerable wife. Not unfaithful, mind you. There have been at least twelve summers to show how eagerly I make return to bed and board. But times there have been when my fidelity was a discomfortable virtue,

## *Robin Hood's Barn*

attended by too zealous prodding. In Puritan days, I should have found my duck-pond inconvenient; for beshrew me, I am sharp of tongue. I nag.

Not that I have ever had excuse for railing. Touisset won me by no false pretense. On that first day when I alighted at its little station, it made no promise of prosperity and laid bare its prospects manfully in the full blaze of a June sun. So easily it might have met me with deception and have tricked me with a mist. As I later came to know it has its days of silver beauty when fog hangs low upon the shallows and the headlands, fusing even ugly features to a blur and giving an unearthly glamour to the distant city on the hill.

This day, however, it was in no mood for compromise or for concealment. It made it evident what I might take or leave. With a stark honesty it had sent out the tide that comes swelling up the bay until it brims each cove and marshy inlet; and with the ebb that sucked back to a narrow gut of channel, a waste of ooze and clamshells lay revealed. Waves there were, windshadows ruffling the sedge grass. But I might

## *Keeping One's Place*

go elsewhere clearly if I wished a beach. So might I, if in the accepted sense I wished a view. Across an estuary a causeway ran off sidling without a decent shred of green to veil its flank. More remote, tide water shanties were cast up pitch and toss like so much wreckage about the farther shore. And above this sandy bluff of land which turned and ran out sharply at right angles, the mill turrets of Fall River rose grim and harsh against the sky. Entrenched on its high seat, Capital looked down on Labor even while on holiday. Was I eager then for romance? Here was no strange wildness to enchant me and to make me fall an easy conquest. Was I wistful after sentiment? Here was no appearance to deceive me by tenderness of color or by suavity of line. The humdrum facts of life were what confronted me. I must face them if I wished to settle down.

Nor need I—at least if I had social aspirations—dally on the single sandy road that looped about the shore. One house there was, set cool and deep in shadow, that had a patriarchal dignity. Its first owner had built its chimney big

## *Robin Hood's Barn*

and made broad its eaves to give a generous and lasting shelter. Staunch it stood, timbered with great beams. The elms which surged around it had not struck a deeper root. But the other houses were of a new domestic architecture, constructed hastily, scrub growth arising from the boles of old out-buildings and low-lying sheds. Slant of roof and width of front, dovecot still worn cap-a-pie, told of the forced conversion from an earlier purpose. Where there was narrow entrance, a wider door had once stood open to the garnering of crops. The small bungalows, waist deep in grass, told plainly that they had kept, not chosen, a humility of rafters to which fowls at dusk had fluttered up to roost. Summer cottages, these now were advertised. Yet they wore their new adornments with no swagger of prosperity and rising fortunes. Rather with a tolerant good humor. Though they had put on porch and stoop, they could not put on airs. It was only when it came to simple human needs that they were willing to oblige.

So inconspicuous was the position which I was to occupy among them that it was hard to find.



What was Baby  
+ Aunt. Mary.

UNKNOWN TO ME, THE GARDEN HAD BEEN REACHING OUT.





## *Keeping One's Place*

No doubt it was my own young arrogance that blinded me. I remember that I had just chanced upon a writer who referred to his place rapturously as "the seat of his soul." The seat of mine! It demanded—so at least I thought—a gate, high hedge, stone walls for its protection from all casual contact; a flagged pathway, adrift with the perfume of spiced pinks or phlox for its delicate approach. What perversity of fortune then or what acknowledgment of crudity had turned my feet up a glaring clam-shell drive? My sanctuary, moreover, was to be withdrawn a little from the common highway. With a certain hauteur and detachment I was to watch its curious doings and to furnish—so I liked to fancy, glimpses of enticement for the passer-by. A willful aloofness, not enforced retirement was the vision I had held. Yet once I had reached the circle that had as its pivot an urn of gay petunias, I realized that my front might as appropriately be termed some one's else back yard. This was democracy undreamed!

When, however, I beheld the settlement that might be mine in return for a most modest dowry,

## *Robin Hood's Barn*

I took a liking to it at first sight. And not the tepid feeling that makes a woman warm to her one chance. True, it was a mere frame house, not much to look at in the common parlance. A child might easily have planned it, adding its wide porch as a fine place to romp on and extending it above the marsh that it might have the semblance of a deck almost a-wash above the rising tide. What I saw in the place, I should—to worldly minded folk, sure to think I might do better—find it most difficult to explain. But it had a character its own. A candor that was not my blurring frankness, close following each attempt at reticence. It had no failings which in a shame-faced way, it felt called on to “discuss.” Even its drive, its urn, its wooden chimney caught drying off upon the grass, left it completely unabashed. Suppose they were all wrong, though to it they seemed all right. Even so—there was its youth, its newness. Mellowness and dignity? Those came with years, the touch of time. What it offered was a trig readiness for the play of wind and weather. The fun was all before. Tranquillity and brooding hush? What

## *Keeping One's Place*

was the torpid dozing over memories, the mere pottering in the past beside the eager quiet of expectancy? No, it had not seen better days. None better than that which now sunned its shingles and first coat of paint and drew up the fragrance of pink ramblers and syringas planted close about it. Surely it was something to stand there clean and fresh, untouched by past affections, unbattered by experience, with traditions still to make.

The impression was not superficial for it was confirmed inside. The two main rooms on which the door directly opened, gave forth no hint of mustiness, no empty odor of disuse. From ceilings, walls, and floors, came the savor of pine, as keen and resinous as though the trees had just been felled. Their matched boards were innocent of all design, but the arrested sap had left a pattern on their yellow surface that shimmered like a watered silk. Whatever history they held was this frank tracing of their last year's growth. Nowhere, moreover, were there the remnants left from old and intimate associations; no books, no ornaments, no pictures to mark the peccadillos of

## *Robin Hood's Barn*

an earlier fancy, no signs of an allegiance which I might find it wise to overlook. The closets, too, were guiltless of all subterfuge, the corners of evasion. Search as I might, I could not find the shadow of a past. The place was almost too immaculate, too young for its year. It seemed absurd to have nothing more to show. Why I, at two and twenty was scarce older, and yet at a pinch, I had more that I might find it provocative to confess. However, it had a simplicity to which I had not then attained. It dared to state its poverty, a poverty so neat, so bare, so stripped of all save fundamentals that the room seemed like the cabin of a ship in dry-dock before her maiden trip. And as though it were lying snug in harbor, the port-holes held little landscapes of bright color. The arch and sweep of elms, elders breaking into foam above an old gray wall, a stream seen only where it caught the light in filtering through the sedge; and rolling back from this deep trough of marshland, pastures that broke into green crest against a western sky.

As I stood confronted by this brightness, immediate and inescapable, I felt a strange reversal

## *Keeping One's Place*

of my earlier desire. Seclusion had grown moldy and by many shades too somber. I could not live so furtively. Arrogance now seemed austere. Surely there was something more approachable, more gracious even in this openness of manner that let the whole world in. Thus I accounted later for my quick surrender and the hurried ceremony necessary to the sealing of our bond.

In our first summer, still so happy to remember, it was I who claimed indulgence. Ours was, in fact, a poor one-sided bargain in which I shirked my part. I was no housewife. What's more I was wayward; and the sober ritual set me I made no attempt to learn. That New England ancestor of mine who in virtuous reproof wrote the word "Slut" upon her neighbor's dusty table would have called my easy going by a harsher name than "slicking up." It was much simpler than the lazy efforts of a slattern, for I raised the windows high to a sea gale that raked the place from end to end. A more sweetening process to my way of thinking, this that smacked of salt and bayberries, than the stir of dust from mop or broom. I had, too, my own blithe ideas about

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bed-making and preferred for thorough airing those mornings when I answered to the call of a full tide. And if my dishes did not "stand," my tidiness was due to the position of the kitchen sink. This was no solitary place of penance to transform the gadabout to drudge. Through the window just above it, I had clear access to the fields and orchard and might watch for all that stirred the world outside. Quite often, as I rinsed, and scoured, and scrubbed, I was spectator at a quiet drama. A quail with courting crest erect would come mincing down my path and secure of solitude would call softly to his mate. A pair of yellow warblers, always debonair and unconcerned at my appearance, would calm down to their domestic duties and make discovery of their small nest. Or a heron would fly up from the stream and settling on the wall, would slyly preen his quaker plumage. But as a rule I played unseen official and reviewed maneuvers on the duck pond where a white flotilla was at sea. A far different business this, that was the mere accompaniment to pastime, than any earlier encounters I had had with pots and pans. Even

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provisioning took on a zest since I did not have to compromise myself by telephone and might go out to fill my basket inspirationally from the truck teams on the road. Suppose things were not ordered. Suppose at my caprice, I dropped them, overlooked them, let them wait. My house was no domestic tyrant. When I chanced to look its way it was complacent and brought me up with no sharp reminders of indifference or of neglect. It was there it seemed to say to hold my peace in keeping. So long as I was happy, it would not interfere.

It was not long, however, before our security was threatened from outside. Those friends with whom I thought to break off short by disappearance, had got wind of my whereabouts. Sweetly rustic, so it sounded. But was my attachment sordid or romantic? They would not drop me until they had been to see. And so one afternoon I met the first outrider scouting on the road. She had been looking for my place, she couldn't seem to find it. Some one had said something of a marsh. I pointed to it lying tawny in the sunlight and then to the strip of shells that

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edged its girdling wall with a white stare. Could she drive in? Much better not, unless she wished to back the whole way out. So this then was my entrance? How amusing. But was it healthy to have the swamp right there beneath my nose? Surely, too, I must find it living at close quarters to have neighbors quite so near. And the cottage! In one second, she had taken in its size and the brave errors of its taste. Still she had no doubt that it was handy. By that, she meant that I had not even had an eye for looks. And of a sudden I saw my house only as she saw it, small, hot, violently flushed, devoid of spaciousness and cool repose.

Nor had I that high loyalty of silence that meets criticism with contempt. I affected to disclaim my own. This affair of mine was, I protested, a free union, not a settled matter. I had entered on it lightly; I had incurred no responsibilities. When I felt myself growing weary, there were no ties to keep me bound.

No ties? Were places where birth and love and death had written in their history, the only ones that held? Were human happenings all that



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counted and not the recollections of things seen and felt? Not that of the dimness that preceded dawn, the bay all silver smoke, the city looming faintly on the hill. Not that of mornings when every branch was swinging in the wind, when there was the scurry of white clouds from the northeast, and little waves came spanking in towards shore? Or the noontide drowse of pastures, or the golden light of afternoon that tipped the spires of cedars and the crown of oaks as it came sliding down the fields? And what of the steady drip of rain so close above the roof, the fine sift of mist through open windows, the gurgle of the stream beneath the stars, the rustle of the trees outside? As I sat that night upon my porch and watched the moonlight take the valley, I knew that I should find these hard to leave.

Suppose then, that I abided by my choice, cherished it and kept it. At least I had the sense to know that I should be making no mistake. Vulgarity and commonness alone were irretrievable. The more one tried to hide them, the more blatantly they showed. But this place of mine was different. It simply didn't know. It had

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gone wrong not from any pushing wish for self-advancement, but from a desire to please. Surely if I worked with it and showed it, insinuated here and prodded there, it would make response.

How cleverly it would catch on, how far it would outdistance me, my condescension did not let me guess!

My first proposal it acceded to with little hesitation. If, in truth, we had lived too much alone and were in need of company, there was an easy remedy. It was in a position to spread out. Not much—we could not splurge. But we might manage a small guest room. And while we were about it, why not a maid's room. No doubt my affection had turned critical from the strain of doing my own work.

And reticence, on which I had so evidently set my heart! That, too, was something which might be easily acquired. From its own stolid point of view there seemed small need for hurry. Before we shut out prying eyes, we should have something worthy to enclose. Still once I had made selection of materials, it did the manual labor. It built the underpinning firm with privet and

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with barberries, then turned its energies to rearing maples, willows, and small fir trees in a high green wall.

But cultivation was a different matter. At first it couldn't get the hang of it. There was no telling how things worked. I hadn't seemed to mind its running wild. When it looked frowsy and unshorn, I hadn't made remarks. Even its gay fancy for a scarlet poppy springing up before the steps, an ox-eyed daisy glowing in the path, I was apt to pardon and protect. But the path itself in which it had felt pride—its one attempt at social manners—I had avoided from the first. And now I was attempting to put that gleaming front aside and overlay it with a garb of weeds. Women surely had odd ways!

It was only when I mapped out our first course, a front garden binding our pretense at lawn—that the place awoke to interest and took hold. Here was a tongue that it might learn to speak, if I would only give it time. At least one winter it must have for thorough grounding in this language and a sober study of the roots. And sure enough by spring, it roused it-

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self from its brown study and displayed its learning gayly. If it had not acquired real fluency, it was "spelling it with flowers."

No wonder that I felt pride in its teaching. No wonder that I pushed and overworked it, gave it no summer holiday for rest. Peonies, sweet-william, phlox. Those in simple forms it had already mastered. But there were subtleties, rare shades of meaning which they could not express. Fringed pinks would add both edge and spice to our remarks, and iris spears a point. Campanulas would give a purity of diction. Spirea and gypsophila would veil our meaning by elusiveness and shy half-hints. And why not violas for roguish chuckle and primroses for running comment or convenient small talk? It had not occurred to me that the place might grow too voluble, that I might provoke a clamorous ambition not easy to suppress.

Proper gardens, so I soon admonished, didn't talk so loud. They showed that they were carefully brought up. I had seen them, always on their good behavior, unobtrusive and controlled. They had silences of leaves between their bursts

## *Keeping One's Place*

of merriment. They held in check their gayety by falling into sober moods of purple or reveries of blue. There were things, moreover, that when uttered in a tone of insolent magenta had better not be said.

All very well—the answer showed precocity—the less one suffered from restrictions, the easier to be subdued. Things popped out from the very effort to hold in, things like those jolly primroses, unapropos beside the phlox, but quite pat in their own place. The trouble was this garden had to get a hearing all at once. If I wished for more than jargon, for both brilliancy and depth, I must give more space for utterance. How have any sequence of ideas, how emphasize by repetition, how work towards any climax in an impromptu speech of at the most nine feet by twelve? We must have extension courses before its public speaking could be done with any form.

Then should I have stilled the aspirations of my place, with confession of my inability. Before worst came to worst, I should have abdicated from my chair. However, I had known most fallible instructors who managed somehow.

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Surely I might keep a step ahead if they could keep a page. Unfortunately I depended on the limitations of mere human energy. I did not realize that natural energy proceeds by leaps and bounds. Before I had grown glib on "yellows," their height, their habit, and their time of bloom, the place had started off on its own explorations. It did no good to murmur "papaver nudicaule" and "rudbeckia." It was not going to stop for Latin names. There they were, the plants, their former pertness now transformed to joyousness behind a springing hedge. All right in their way. But what it wanted was a harder problem. Well, what next?

As I faltered it came forward with its own suggestion. It had chanced upon its real vocation. Unknown to me it had been reaching out. And really I had no idea how well those seedlings looked against the grape-vine arbor enclosing the north walk. They weren't right for it of course. They spoke too humbly. It was just that fact that had given it the clew. This was a spot for loftiness and piety, for spires of delphinium and hollyhocks, slim tapers of white phy-

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sostegia, foxglove chimes and canterbury-bells. And were there not platycodons and veronicas to bind these soberly to earth? Let's see what we could do with preaching against a chancel of green leaves.

There was no doubt that here it felt the call. But before the benedictions fell, before I had completed my novitiate, it had turned foreign missionary. Restive at its cincture, it was off unsmocked, itinerant to proselyte among the neighboring fields. The great thing now was a revival meeting in that open plot of ground behind the house. Let's sing lustily all the old favorites, morning bride and mignonette, marigold and candytuft. They went better with lay sermons since they had a rousing burden to their chorus and gave a message to take home. What's more they were popular, they drew a crowd.

Not long thereafter rumors of eloquence began to go abroad. My garden has now its steady congregation, its increasing band of converts. Pilgrims even seek it from afar. Moreover, since they do not recognize a formal time for service, they drop in upon it at all hours. And

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as I join them at the entrance, I know how they will greet me. There will be no personal interest in their comment, "I came in for a moment just to see your place."

For the most part I am little jealous, proud of its success, and well content to serve. Meekly, I take part in its parochial duties. I act as verger without fee. In great armfuls, I distribute tracts. I bear its messages among the sick. By menial labor, I make possible its public life. But in such times as we are left alone, I turn unpleasantly domestic. What was its humble origin, I beg leave to remind it. Who gave it its start? In spite of all its airs and graces where would it be without me? Not for a moment will I let it so outgrow me as to think it was self-made.



**IV: *Dinner With Diversions***



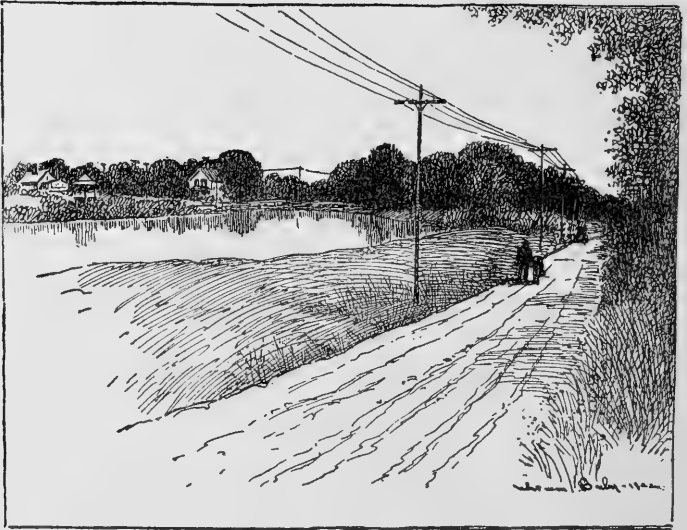
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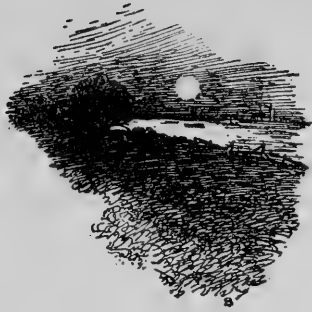
If we might have one hour to be  
Each other's silent company,  
We'd choose the gray tranquillity  
That broods in the half-light.

When one small breeze on nimble feet,  
Left frisking with the meadow-sweet,  
Goes searching after winds more fleet  
And vanishes from sight.

When every careless bird that sings,  
Feels purpose in its nomad wings,  
And wheels from its adventurings  
Resolved on homeward flight.

When spider drops from dusky beam  
To weave the pattern of her dream,  
Half gossamer, half silver gleam  
Against the velvet night.





#### IV: *Dinner With Diversions*

**I**N setting forth a banquet, it was no small part of the Elizabethan magnificence to furnish diversion with the feast. Enough was never as good to those exuberant people who accounted poor the pleasures that came singly, and who held as paupers' fare, whether it was peacock-pie or swan, roasted ox or venison, the bounty which left the outer vision still unoccupied. Young in spirit, they ate as they lived, with a child's lusty appetite and half-attention; their appetite in the very moment of enjoyment, racing on to further quest. So it was that any proper host provided pomp and revel, masque and pageantry, not to

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interrupt, but to enliven the mere business of the feast.

There is, I confess it frankly, nothing Elizabethan about my fare. For the most part it is inspirational. At the close of work as I come in from my garden, my eye is caught by a crisp head of lettuce or by slim hanging pods as I pass by the beanpoles. Or again it may be at a later season that, as I run my hand along the corn stalks, I feel with a kind of ecstasy, the proper swell. In a few moments I am emptying out upon the kitchen table, the contents of full pockets and of apron; my selection made at the eleventh hour.

Nor is there for that matter anything Elizabethan about the capacity of my enjoyment. It coincides exactly with the contents of my plate; and there is a wholeheartedness about it that no minstrelsy could woo. But there are times on summer evenings when the breeze drifts hot across the meadows, that I like best those pleasures of the outer vision, a dinner with diversions, and in full view of the stage.

In my case, my point of vantage is a platform

## *Dinner With Diversions*

extended for the purpose, open to the sky and above a little marsh where the tide makes in until it has set the tall sedge grass awash beneath my very feet. Certain advantages it has, moreover, in that my table bears no marks of rank, no place below the salt from which to crane one's neck for better view. It matters not which seat you choose; though in one case you may look off upon the distant city, its spires slim and delicate, its windows flashing back the sun; and more close at hand a stretch of water, unrippled on such evenings, save at the edge where you may see it brimming faintly to a bar of richest green. Or if you look off to the westward, there are meadows outlined with stone wall and thicket, rolling softly upwards to where a generous barn and wood stand out against the deepening sky.

At first you might think my stage was empty and that I had come out to watch the slow processional of cloud and shadows; of color that brightens suddenly before it dies. And, in truth, there is much to occupy me in mere shift of scene. Often it is gradual, a matter of month and season; a change so slow that in the day time, I have

## *Robin Hood's Barn*

scarcely time to notice it. But as I sit here, if it is June, I become aware of a brightening to the sharp sedges as they push through the matted growth below me, or of a creamy mist upon the elder bushes that overhang the farther bank. It is here as a rule that I see the first wild rose, flaunting its gay pink along the water's edge; or in August, the transparencies of the sea-lavender lifted just above the tide. Here, too, with a sinking of the heart, I am first aware of the advance of autumn, and realize that already it has touched the marsh with tawny gold. There are other changes that come more swiftly and are a matter of the hour. The trees lose their play of light. The shadows creep farther and farther down the hillside, sharply pointed where they mark the outline of the cedars, spreading fanwise from the roots of buttonwood or oak. Gradually the bay has lost its color and turned to purplish blue; and behind it, the city is marked now by the refulgence of its lights. With a sudden wink, the road lamps flash on; the meadows melt to silver; and below me the little stream gathers darkness until a place of mystery, of soft gurgles and



## *Dinner With Diversions*

squelching noises, it runs an intermittent line of black.

But all the while there has been more active drama, unexpected and spontaneous; for my actors have no more formal prompting than their instinct, and no notion of their cues. Often they will leave the stage quite empty. As often they will be upon it, taking possession of it with an onslaught from both wings. But even if they are absent when I take my seat, I know where to find them; for this little gully is a thoroughfare for birds who find it the clearest course to their nests behind my house, and for creeping things who use it as their mart and build their houses in the swale.

Out over the bay the fishhawks are still circling, the sweep of their great wings now dark against the sky, now glinting white as they soar aloft and catch the last splendor of the sun. Down they drop, sometimes to rise after a fruitless plunge, sometimes to wing straight towards me as they make their way to the gaunt buttonwood midway upon the hill. Often they fly so high that I can see only the regular beat of their great

## *Robin Hood's Barn*

pinions, but occasionally so low that for a second I am darkened by their shadow and make out the booty clutched in their crooked claws. Already there is a clamor from the outlook on the nest and an answering querulous cry. They are a fretful family. There is no affection in that wail that has just shrilled above my head. There is neither respect nor gratitude in the outcry that has brought it forth. And as the hawk in spiral flight, settles over her unruly brood, I can imagine the squabble that ensues over the partition of the meager meal.

Better I like the kingfisher with his neat front and jaunty crest, who is waiting on the rock for his last dive. He takes his time about it and gives no warning. His performance is for his own interest, not for mine. But of a sudden there is an unswerving plunge, a scattering of silver, and he too is speeding towards me up the thoroughfare. His flight is low and on a level with my porch. At first he does not see me. But as I move, he gives a rattle of defiance, a ruffling of his crest at my impertinence, and veers off across the fields.



THIS LITTLE GULLY IS A THOROUGHFARE FOR BIRDS.

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## *Dinner With Diversions*

Now come the real lovers of twilight, the swallows at their game of tag. They are my circus acrobats. How they dart and circle overhead as though from invisible trapezes, vaulting high into the air, then dipping in swift flight to the very surface of the water, skimming it so nearly that I expect to see the momentary feathering of oars. They have marked out one of their number for pursuit. After him they go, light as gossamer until their gay chatter grows more distant and they have disappeared around the corner of the house. Back they come. This time, mad wags, they make me their mark and their game is to see how near they may approach me. Many a time I have been startled by their presumption and have fancied as they gave a sudden swerve that I have felt the stiff vibration of their wings. In the twitter that they give as they pass by me, there is much of the chuckling satisfaction of the performer who has pulled off a clever trick.

At this time, moreover, if the tide is low, there are other visitants; a pair of night herons who come slowly down the stream, their shoulders hunched, their necks close-furled, their feet lifted

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fastidiously, for all the world like old aristocrats who in their old age have been forced to indulge in gainful toil. There is a delicate melancholy about their companionship, a dignity and reserve to their silent mood. Do they never communicate? Is theirs the silence born of understanding, or was their courtship one of those late makeshift affairs, based not on passion but respect? I think pleasantly of the jolly companionship of robins, their fresh undisciplined squabbles, their frank approaches and am sure that my elderly couple would take as lack of breeding, so much chatter of vituperation and acknowledgment of a mistake.

Nor is their formality exacted only of each other. I, too, have paid my tribute of immobility and of respect. One evening as I sat late in the twilight, I was surprised to see a pair of great wings sailing towards me and a figure settle on the very pillar of the porch, wobbling there for a moment on ungainly leg. No hint did the bird give of his surprise at finding me, no ill-mannered squawk of embarrassment or of rebuke. With lank neck held erect, he accorded me an eye of

## *Dinner With Diversions*

gleaming red that sheathed itself suspiciously from time to time as though he had let up a screen against my observation. Nor was he to be hurried to unseemly flight. He stretched himself to his full height, shook out his mouse-gray plumage. And it was only after I had had time to notice the green around his nostrils and the regularity of the white spots that circled his wings as though spilled there thickly from a paint-brush, that he gave a decorous flap and trailed his legs behind him in swift transformation from gawkiness to grace.

All the more marked in contrast with their dignity, is the zest with which these birds devour their evening meal. At the moment they have stationed themselves below me, where the stream runs swift and shallow, and stand there patient and ungainly, pursuing without comment their silent task. But let a beak strike out with lightning stab and a fish be tilted up as in a vise, and there is real gusto to the gulp that sends him rippling down a shirt front. It is, however, but the momentary betrayal of an appetite. In a second the neck is again refurled, the sharp eyes

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are watching, and the birds stand together, dusky silhouettes among the sedges, until they fade to phantoms in the twilight.

If, on the other hand, the tide is high, their place is taken by the muskrat. I have never known the secret of his swims. Is he washed out of his hole by the slow rise of the tide that seeps little by little into the stone wall, or does he come out for diversion? Leisurely he moves as though his exercise were pastime, now lost to view among the tussocks of long grass, now barging his way among the floatage. Sometimes when the drift clogs the channel, he will clamber out upon the bank, dragging his flat naked tail behind him, and throwing off the water in dense spray, will sit there busily working his small paws at furbishing his whiskers. A solemn business that, and one that calls for gravity.

Despite the sobriety with which he polishes his snout, his eyes have a twinkle, as though a clown at heart, he made a conscious joke of all efforts spent at foppishness. You would not think to see him sitting there so comfortably on his plump quarters that he could vanish easily. But an in-



## *Dinner With Diversions*

cautious movement on my part will send him scurrying for his tunnel. There will be a slap of the tail, a quick dive, and he will leave no hint of the direction he has taken. Better I like to leave him to his whims, to watch him disappear into the night, sculling ahead with widening furrows left behind him.

But as he leaves the curtain slowly falls. Softly it descends over the hill-tops and the valley until rustling in the nimble wind, it settles on the stream below. And when at last it has concealed my stage in shadow, the last actor comes upon it from one corner of the porch, invisible at first, until in one tiny corner of its black immensity, he begins to weave with silver thread his delicate design.



**V: *Friendly Spying***



## MY COVERLID

Your coverlid is homespun,  
Warp and woof of loom;  
White tassels are the flowers  
Shorn before they bloom;  
A clipped fringe for a border,  
Primness in each fold.  
Linen, smooth, immaculate,  
It turns a body cold.

But mine is bright in springtime,  
Stitched with thread of green.  
Slim needle buds come pricking  
Through its satin sheen.  
Adorned with lace of cobweb  
Woven in the rain,  
Is it not a coverlid  
To make a body vain?

In summer it is motley  
Patched with every hue,

*Robin Hood's Barn*

Appliqué of foxglove bells,  
Snips of larkspur blue,  
Purple of campanula,  
Coreopsis spray.

Is it not a coverlid  
To make a body gay?

In autumn it is yellow  
Overcast with leaves,  
Orange quilt of marigold  
Spread among the sheaves.

Dim trceries of asters  
On a tawny ground.  
Is it not a coverlid  
To keep a body sound?

A counterpane in winter  
Made of driven snow,  
Pillowing of feathered down,  
Flounce and furbelow,  
A blanket folded over,  
Brown beneath the white.

Is it not a coverlid  
To warm my thoughts at night?



## V: *Friendly Spying*

**I**N the formal days of the eighteenth century every visit to a garden was a personally conducted tour. There was no dropping in and poking about in our intrusive modern fashion; no roving eye caught and drawn by some glad bit of color, no triumph of discovery. Perspectives in those days were solemn matters and permitted of no prying. Vistas repelled all unmannerly advances and allowed no intimacies of approach. One was led with decorous steps from labyrinth

## *Robin Hood's Barn*

to grotto, from grotto on to wilderness, in an unswerving circuit designed to prove an artificial stimulus to varying moods. No pleasant progress that, made under the close scrutiny of a guide who found the test of one's gentility in one's manner of response.

And yet it could be made with gayety; for there was, the story goes, a prankish gentleman who had access to Pope's garden from a strategic position at the rear, and who with every show of innocence and flattery would lead his guests through the famous Twickenham by a reversal of its intended order, upsetting its perspectives, despoiling its vistas, routing its moods, and provoking its ill-tempered little owner, "the wicked wasp," to sally forth to implant what proved to be an ineffectual sting.

There are no formalities to my own little garden and yet I must confess I should not want that gentleman residing at my gates. No, not at either; whether in the rear it led to wilderness, or in front to what in the elegance of his own language, he would term my "desert." I, too, wish to lead my guests on a personally conducted



## *Friendly Spying*

tour. My motive, however, is humility, not pride. I desire not to display, but to conceal; and the test is of my own gentility, not theirs.

Am I to let them chance alone on that long arid stretch of iris which lines my pathway and which when out of bloom, despite all efforts spent at furbishing, is a waste of rusted spears? To be sure I do disclaim it as outlying territory, and obviously it is not under my control. Yet half the greeting which I call out from my doorstep is to distract the gaze; to lead visitors well up the path before they have a chance to look. Once there, moreover, I still try to put on blinders. It is a pleasant prospect, this first border, circling from maple tree to little cedar and flanked all the way by a green hedge. In June, they cannot fail to be entranced by the anchusa, bright against the fir tree and showering in great sprays its flowers of gentian blue; or by the stretch of salmon pink sweet-william among which the campanulas lift snowy chalices and primroses droop their delicately tinted heads. No clashing color there, not even later when it is a mass of subtly blended phlox. For one not given to

## *Robin Hood's Barn*

restrictions, it represents an admirable effort to harmonize and to subdue. But it is my one fling at estheticism and my guests must look ahead; for behind them—I hope safely—is a gorgeous patch of zinnias. If they turn, they will ask me in a moment, their reproof veiled with politeness, if I have never tried the pastel shades. Nor will any protestations on my part that to me a zinnia bed looks peaked when it is put on diet, reinstate me as a person of good taste. Have they not as evidence against me those tawny oranges and dull magentas? If I like them in their garishness, their place is in the cutting garden, not where in the early morning I may see them flaunting in the sunlight, the bumblebees tumbling over their great scarlet cones.

When my guests pass through the arch, moreover, and come upon my yellow border, I must follow close at heel. Even as it is the chances are that they will overlook my Iceland poppies, the primroses and yellow loosestrife, all proper garden flowers. Their eyes will fall with disapproval on the tarnished gold of tansy or the black-eyed Susans which they will think have wan-



IT IS A PLEASANT PROSPECT, THIS FIRST BORDER.

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## *Friendly Spying*

dered in upon me from the roadside or strayed in from neighboring fields. I must be there to tell them that both were diligently sought for, lifted with protestations from surroundings where they felt themselves at home, and encouraged to accommodate themselves to a more cultivated life. And the blueweed in the border just beyond, first cousin to anchusa, but descendant of some rude pioneering branch. Are my guests not to know that at the risk of ridicule I stopped for it at a grimy little station, a mere place for backing and filling, and lifted it from the cinders in which with its rough hardihood it chose to live? They will not see, unless I tell them, that it is needed by the yellow daisies; that its uncouthness and unconsciousness of its rough beauty, lend a contrast to the daisies' airy and sophisticated grace.

But while such arrangements for the most part have been planned and have reason behind their apparent shiftlessness, what am I to say when they walk through my rose garden and are halted by a mullein in the very center of the path? Of one thing I am certain: they must not treat with violence that stalwart sentinel. The countersign

## *Robin Hood's Barn*

I have discovered, is a friendly hand laid on its great stalk and woolly leaves. And while its protection was never sought for and all unasked it mounted guard, now that I have grown accustomed to its sharp arrest, I should miss it from its post.

So it is that no matter where my visitors may wander, there are matters that must be explained. The pea-bed that has run to poppies! Why, they cannot see the vines for all the nodding heads. If there be a choice I tell them quickly the preference is shown to poppies. Peas I can buy. They are in the market, things of barter. But where could I purchase those great somber blooms of wine dark red? No, my garden needs too much explanation to permit of any browsing. All visitors I must keep close at hand.

But when it comes to others' gardens, with true perversity and little of the spirit of reciprocity, I like best to make my way alone. If I am to catch their charm, the owner must not be there to distract me with her pride in her possessions. I must chance upon her treasures if I am to know their worth.

## *Friendly Spying*

I remember one time in particular when I indulged in friendly spying, while supposedly I was quite safe in bed. I had arrived at dusk and from the windows I could see no garden, only a stretch of lawn closely cropped in contrast to the marshlands which lay just beyond it, and twisted pines, massed dark against the evening sky. But in the room about me there were flowers which could be the product of no greenhouse; tea-roses, heliotrope, nicotiana with its sweet-scented stars, little vincas, dead white against their glossy leaves.

I resolved that night to find them growing and before they were displayed, so at an early hour I rose and unobserved, slipped out upon the lawn. The mist had risen from the sea, but shreds of cloud still lingered in the marshlands, and the pine trees were cutting through their silver shroud. At first, however, I could not find the garden, not a sign of blossoms; only shrubs, their leaves sparkling with a myriad little jets of flame. Then suddenly a heavy fragrance came upon me—clethra, its feathery spikes still wet with dew—and I made my way to what had

## *Robin Hood's Barn*

seemed an impenetrable hedge. There, led by earthy smells and languorous perfumes, I was soon inside. But not even then were all the mysteries revealed. In a small enclosure I had come upon the roses, some still pointed buds, others cupping in their depths the radiance of approaching day. But the garden itself was a labyrinth in the true sense; no mere matter of clipped hedges and intricate design, but fashioned out of natural growth from clethra and wild clematis. Elusive and provocative, they led me by their fragrance to what they held beyond. Sometimes they opened out upon a prospect of gold-banded lilies, their spotted petals and bronze stamens just unfolding to the first pale rays of sunlight; or upon begonias, so low the sun had not yet reached them and flaming like great moths that had ventured forth into some tropic twilight. At times, they closed in upon a niche of green where, as though left undisturbed, tall ferns uncurled their fronds amid a tracery of leaves. And suddenly, when I had grown accustomed to the dimness and the shadows, I came out upon the world ablaze, the sky bare and



## *Friendly Spying*

cloudless overhead, and below me, beyond a rosy stretch of mallow, the glitter of the sea.

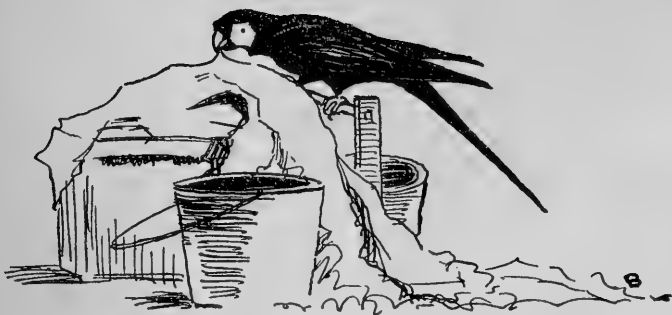
Later in the day I revisited the garden, but the praise which I expressed then to my hostess was not for its noontide beauty as I saw it with her guidance, but for that which, stealthily and unobserved, I had chanced on earlier; beauty born of a magic hour.

In these autumn days when my cottage is closed already for the winter, but the garden is still blooming as though it had laid by a store of gold, I like best to think about that stolen ramble. It gives me confidence. Is it possible that my own garden, which is now unguarded, has not needed my protection; that chance visitors, coming in upon it from the roadside and responding to an invitation more confident than mine, will find a beauty for themselves in its haphazard growth; a charm which I myself perhaps by reason of my stewardship have but half guessed.



**VI: *Solomon or Sheba?***





## VI: *Solomon or Sheba?*

“Neither was there any such spice as the Queen of Sheba gave King Solomon.”

**T**H**ERE** was never a question of regality—scarcely of identity. It was Solomon—or Sheba from the first. How else explain the glory arrayed in which our prisoner came to exile save as his arrogance—or hers? For no sooner had we pried apart the box that formed a rude incarceration than there came a flash of the imperial scarlet from breast, from crested head-dress, and from flaunting train. Surely, too, the wisdom in the wrinkled cheeks and shrewd, cold eyes was either hers who came to put hard questions,—or

## *Robin Hood's Barn*

his who left no spirit in her before the half was told. The nose, moreover, aristocratic in its curving downward sweep, was unmistakably the son of David's—or hers of some collateral line.

But it seemed a little academic to debate the problem with the triumphal march of occupation in full swing above our heads. Our monarch, flinging back the wings of a blue mantle, had swept off to search the confines of a narrow kingdom and to take possession of a throne. Thus was our wise concern just then court etiquette, the proper manner of approach and of retreat. Those couchings and low-crooked curtsies so spurned by Cæsar, were, I am afraid, the very forms we used. We dodged the royal wrath, we bent before it; we quailed, I know I shook. Gone was our republic with its traditionary rights of man. Life was no longer safe. Liberty was threatened. "Lord God Almighty," said my father, as foregoing his pursuit of happiness, he fled upstairs. One thing alone was clear. We were in the grip of the relentless tyrant, subjects not of the mailed fist, but of the iron beak. It even seemed a pity that such an instrument of

## *Solomon or Sheba?*

torture should be confined to so few victims. It might more properly have been Inquisitorial. With mechanical precision, it would have wrung a full confession and extorted a complete return to faith.

When, however, we had formed our Royal Household, we began to have our speculations. It was not that we were troubled over the succession. Why worry over scions when the dynasty established was likely to outlast our time? But the proprieties! They set us thinking! With a retinue so scarce, we were hard-pressed to fill all offices and allotted the appointments as the need arose. And was it altogether fitting—we could not help wondering—that at twilight my mother should convey a sleepy monarch up to bed? Should she, Lady-in-Waiting, be the first to answer to all morning calls? Once a week, moreover, she took her station on the lawn, a small green watering pot her insignia of office. Efficiently she wielded it—still who knew how decorously?—as Mistress of the Bath. My brother had avoided all such menial duties. He insisted on his rights as Chamberlain, High Chan-

## *Robin Hood's Barn*

cellor, and Minister of State. It was his privilege to grant an audience and to present. Yet might he not more becomingly have installed himself as Knight of the Bedchamber or First Groom? About my father and myself, it did not much matter. We were the trembling populace whom fear makes neuter. We kept a proper distance from the throne.

For the most part we were convinced that we were servitors of Solomon. More terrible than an army with banners he had come among us and had seized upon his kingdom with a predatory clutch. Sheba, we knew, for a lady fond of panoply and trappings. She would have insisted on full coronation rites, preferring a graceful exaltation to her chair of state to any greedy downward swoop. And being feminine, she would have striven for a personal adulation and have contrived to win her subjects' hearts by luring wile.

Besides our sovereign's appetite was masculine. So was his thirst. Sheba would have simulated delicacy at the table and have sought indulgence in a woman's nibbling way between her



## *Solomon or Sheba?*

meals. Not so Solomon. He was not content with his own ever ready banquet or to be in his own cups. He must be in ours. We were reduced to humble tasters of his fare with no safe social barrier below the salt. Unimpeded by his sweeping length of train, he progressed from plate to plate and course to course. And let there be the pop of cork, the sound of contents flowing, and he was close at elbow before a glass was filled. There was a deep intake, a guzzling chuckle, a roisterous head thrown back, and a large bead gathering on his beak. Sheba, too, would no doubt have liked her nip. But this was Solomon who stood his liquor like a man and guttled down a swig.

His pastimes, also, were the traditionary ones of the war-lord in exile. A good part of the day he spent in splitting wood. Clothes-pins, spools, cigar boxes, tribute furnished him in desperation, he regarded as mere child's play. They were reduced to jackstraws before our backs were turned. What suited him exactly as fit material for exercise were window frames and cornices, banisters and doors. Indeed, had he been

## *Robin Hood's Barn*

forced to earn an honest living, he might have traveled as a journeyman house-wrecker with his kit in beak.

But it was as a bagger of big game that he found his chief exhilaration. A ring of the front door bell was the jolly flourish that proclaimed the hunt was up. The old sport of routing Philistines! His father's blood was in him. David had slain his ten thousands. Then could not Solomon rest until he, too, had shown his prowess. He must secure his captives or send the cravens scurrying in flight. And did less worthy sport provide, he would content himself with any minion who dared pop a black face from the burrow below the kitchen stairs. A low taste and he knew it. Far different was his pursuing scuttle from the grand manner of his usual charge. It was, however, as though Balkis, Queen of Sheba, had left rankling the bitterness of an unfinished conquest, so deep-lying was his anger against the least member of her dusky race.

Late in the afternoon with wrath expended, it was his habit to sit at the western window, the

## *Solomon or Sheba?*

sunlight robing him in the full splendor of scarlet and barbaric gold. With head ruffled up in thought or held pensively in one crooked claw, he formulated proverbs which were the residue of his old, wicked mind. They were, indeed, dark sayings. I could not understand the words of wisdom though I inclined my ear. But it was impossible to miss the balance, the biblical monotony of repetition, so forcible in driving home the truth. And who knew better the way of sinners; of those "whose feet run to evil and make haste to shed blood"?

One evening, though, the words grew suddenly articulate and I was troubled with a doubt.

"Poor Solomon. Poor old Solomon. Solomon is a bad boy. Poor Sol."

The voice was deep and gruff, yet full of a commiseration that decency and natural pride forbade to be expended on oneself. And Sol? The use of the absurd diminutive! A pet name no doubt bestowed by Sheba, in a moment of affection daring to make free. Was this then she, lamenting with that mothering instinct that

## *Robin Hood's Barn*

is always mixed with passion, the one whom she had loved?

There were other reasons for so thinking. What of those days when she showed a zest for house-cleaning and set her servants by the ears? Solomon would have detailed his administrative duties. Sheba, on the contrary, was a good housewife, trained in domesticity. She must know herself how everything was run. Seated on the carpet sweeper, she went back and forth across the floors, her eye vigilant for pins or thread. And when apparently the rooms were cleaned, she would run her beak along the floor cracks until she had left a narrow strip of lint as her reminder of our laxity with dust. She lowered herself to supervise the scrubbing and was never happier than when tagging after brush and pail. Such times, too, as she penterated to the kitchen, she was in and out of everything. Often she inspected all the ironing and in her high-handed fashion cast upon the floor a garment not turned out to the queen's taste. Or she sat upon a gas fixture, the very place for outlook, and surveyed the baking, frying, scouring

## *Solomon or Sheba?*

that went on below. Had we been servants and not slaves, we should have told our mistress she was "nosey" and have promptly taken leave.

Moreover, she had a daintiness about her person that would in Solomon have been offensive, and have marked him as a dude. On a rainy day she would go over her whole raiment until she was quite sure that it was free from blemish and that every feather was in place. Her azure mantle must fit sleek to show the curves of her trim figure. Her train must be spread out until it hung in proper folds. Since her subjects were dowdy even in their court dress, she herself must be the quintessence of finery and of good style.

In odd contrast were her moments, sometimes weak and sometimes wanton, when she simply must be fondled and caressed. Such moods would have come to Solomon when the affairs of state were over and when legitimately he might seek affection as a mental rest. But they came at any time to Sheba as they come to every woman. No use to tell her that at office hours her demonstrations were unseemly, hampering, ridiculously out of place. As little to impress

## *Robin Hood's Barn*

upon her that a living must be earned for her provision. She refused to see that she was breaking business rules. Really she was not intruding, she would be quite good, she wouldn't say a word, she only wanted to be near. And in a moment of persistence she had attained to her desire. Many a sketch has my brother made with her upon his shoulder. Many a page has my mother written with Sheba snuggled in her lap.

It was to Solomon, however, and apparently absorbed in deviltry, that I told the story that let the secret out.

In New York not long before, I had met a woman who had charmed me with the tale of Harry, her own pet macaw. A nice fellow was he, likable and democratic, and with no pretensions to great place. And since he was living in his own tropic land where the choice was large and there need be no great to-do about the matter, she had decided to set him up in housekeeping and provide him with a mate. There was no doubt at all that Harry was amenable. He was young then, and impressionable; and before the introduction ended, he was deep in love. Too

## Solomon or Sheba?

guileless to conceal his feeling and to feign indifference, he put on his courting crest, shook out his plumage, and danced a "buck and wing." He had supposed, you see, that he had found a willing partner. Not for some time did he realize that she had failed to join him and that he was executing a *pas seul*. Whether he was clumsy, loutish, less skilled than some earlier acquaintance, I do not know. In any case he had put his heart into the dance and she had fled.

Were that all, it would be a trite story—scarcely worth the telling. The pathos lies in the memory she left behind. For had she loved Harry, it would have been his duty, according to the strange marriage vows of his own tribe, to relieve her of maternal cares. He, not she, would have had to build the nest and hover and keep warm the eggs. And deep down in Harry's consciousness, she had stirred all his paternal feeling. He wanted children—if not his own, then those of some one else.

He sought the farmyard where the chances of adoption seemed most likely. The hens, settled to their duty, he drove from off their nests. Their

## *Robin Hood's Barn*

big, brown likely eggs he tried to convey to some shelter of his own, propelling them by beak and claw. Disaster naturally awaited each attempt. There was a crash, a spill. In despair at last Harry made choice of six stones, conveying them beneath the porch where he arranged them in a neat round clutch. And on these, with loss of voice and appetite, of temper and of plumage, he expended his paternity for three long weeks. Such faith in the Creative Power, I felt deserved a miracle, and not the cynicism of defeat.

My own emotion was deeply shared by Solomon; but at the moment I could not guess from the cold calculating eye turned up to mine, how profoundly my audience was moved. In two days, however, there was a marked change in his demeanor. It was clear that I had given pause for thought. Suddenly turned seer, he sat hunched in speculation on the banisters and as though darkness lent reality to visions, he tucked his head beneath his wing. That he was not asleep, I knew, for when I prodded him with some inducement to his old-time deviltry, he rebuked my trivial interruptions with a rumi-



## *Solomon or Sheba?*

nating gaze. And since I alone had been the cause of his unsettlement, he began to treat me with a caustic beak. In a snug shelter beneath the bed or bureau he lay in ambush for me. If I walked through my room, forgetful of my peril, there would be a sudden sally. And lucky was I if I won the bath-tub as a safe retreat.

Yet never once did I hit upon the cause of his disturbance. It was, I thought, a mood to be put to flight by trickery; and with jester's bells, I sought to win a chuckle and a return to his old care-free ways. With music I sought to break in upon his meditations, much as his own father had attempted to let in a gleaming ray upon the darkened mind of Saul. I even danced before him. I danced with psalter and stringed instruments. Of no avail. Nor could the Court Physician whom I called in consultation, give diagnosis of the ailment. With professional patter, he prescribed a tonic and a rest to nerves. And since our royal patient had grown delirious and wandering at night time, my brother must play night-nurse and keep him safe in bed.

Then, just when our temper had turned brittle

## *Robin Hood's Barn*

and we had resolved on insurrection, the miracle was worked. Protesting a right mind and able body, Solomon declared that for the moment he intentionally was not himself. If formerly an infant had aroused him to his highest feat of justice, this time the mere idea of one had stirred him to compassion. Moved beyond belief, he had transformed himself to Sheba and had done his best for Harry. Rank had not mattered, nor had distance; not even sex, or the long years that lay between. There had been a tragic hole left in my story and he had proudly filled it with the contribution of one large, beautiful, white egg.

But there his responsibility was ended. In the morning when I laid the gleaming shell before him he eyed it without tenderness, without solicitude, and shook off all claim which it might have upon him by a firm, destructive kick.

**VII: *Job's Pool***

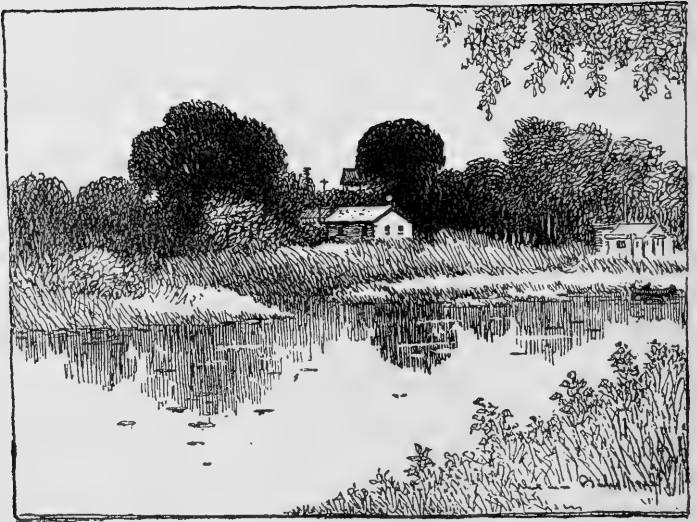


## SOLACE

Job's Pool. In what still mood  
Did he who wandered from the common way  
So name your solitude?

Misdoubting, did he guess  
That at the roots of revery there lay  
A well of bitterness?

Or did he stoop to hear  
Beneath the earth's corruption and decay  
A cleansing spring run clear?





## VII: *Job's Pool*

**I**N one of the five porches of Bethesda stood a sheepman who looked upon the pool with unimaginative eyes. About its rim he saw a crowd collected, eager and expectant, and he wondered at the faith that drew them to this place. It was, you see, his sheep-pond and as such a mere convenience. In the morning and at noontide and again at evening, he led his flock to its cool water and stood waiting while they drank. So did it lose its mystery by the very act of ownership and by its practical importance in the day's routine.

## *Robin Hood's Barn*

Though he listened with the multitude, he could not hear the angel coming, and though he watched he could not see the swift approach. For what was to the pilgrims a celestial radiance, was to him the first white peep of dawn or sunlight striking a dark place. What to them was the firm beat of pinions, was to him the stir of wind that left him blinded not by vision, but by dust. It was not that he was irreligious; he believed in miracles. His, however, he knew that he must seek afar. He must come upon them, weary, footsore, after pilgrimage. He could not hope to gain a benediction by sauntering down to his own pool from his own porch.

Thus, though Job's Pool is but a stone's throw from our house, my father would not visit it by method so direct. Instead, on a brisk autumn morning, he would set forth in the opposite direction, his pack upon his back, his stave in hand. Nor did he speed like Christian, too breathless for his soul's salvation to take pleasure by the way. Such ingratitude for the world's abundance he would have thought an arrogance of spirit, and he sauntered down the highway with



## *Job's Pool*

his eye alert for all enticements and with no protective fingers in his ears.

Indeed, while I walked along as the observant Faithful, I used to think that Christian was miscast. Had he only been a naturalist, with what rapture he would have chanced upon the Slough! How he would have botanized it! With what delight he would have catalogued its flora, forgetting in the joy of recognition and discovery all commandments laid upon him to preserve the straight and narrow path. Once, moreover, that he had made his way through the white flutter of buck-bean, through thrusting arrow-heads and slim clean sheaths of cat-tail, with what regret he would have reached the farther bank. Certainly my father made no gesture of entreaty or of supplication as he prodded for tight-fisted little plants that clutched the base of tussocks or ventured on the quagmire for small spreading growths. Curiosity made for his valiance and he even plunged for treasure held remote. Nor did I hear him make a feint of weariness about his pack soon filled with a rich freight. Sometimes, to be sure, he would call me

## *Robin Hood's Barn*

forth from dalliance, but it was never for assistance or for those heartening counsels that one calls out safe from shore. He had found the elderberries thriddled with a vine whose misty blossoms gave out rare fragrance. He had come upon a gentian too exquisite to pluck. Or close by the culvert and buried underneath high brake, he had discovered wealth of hard metallic gold. And as I heard him call "Bidens Chrysanthemoides" or "Mycania Scandens," I did not need his terms of praise translated to the vulgate. It was, I knew, another version for the cry of "Life, eternal life."

The Hill of Difficulty, too, which Christian took at a slow trudge, my father made a glad ascent. Why not, when it ran upward with a rush of crimson and of russet that smoldered into fire against the sky. In this season of the year when all the world went gorgeously appareled, it was as though each growing thing combined for his elation. Blare of orange from the poison-ivy, blast of scarlet from the sumach, rich notes of gold and bronze and umber from the ferns along the wall, even the deep bass of purple

## *Job's Pool*

ironweed and aster were to him like martial music. They gave his step a quickness and a spring, put an eagerness into his pulses until he scaled the height and stood beneath the hornbeam that was ruddy as old wine and crowned the hill-top, a triumphal arch.

Beyond it, where among thin blowing grass, fall dandelions lay like sifted stars was the Delicate Plain called Ease, and here my father walked with much content. The lure for me lay backward in the valley, surcharged with the full power of the tremendous sunshine, and in the gusty clouds that went speeding down the slope, took the bay at a fine gallop, and went racing out to sea. But from the gray-headed ledge, from stone wall and from the flowering of the open meadow, more intimate demands came tugging at him for response. Not always was it the botanist who answered, though it was he who always marveled at blue grass for its fine bee track or wild carrot for the clew it offered by its single fleck of blood. The man would draw himself erect before the dignity of mullein and admire its steadfastness and calm repose. And let

## *Robin Hood's Barn*

my father come upon a thistle. It was not all fun and still less mockery that brought him quickly to attention, his stave held erect in a salute. The fighter in him that so firmly underlay his mildness, made him pay his tribute to this knight who took his solitary stand against the cattle and held his plume so valiantly erect above the silver spikings of his shield. And if the boy in him went searching milkweeds for a chrysalis—and found it too, green pendant to the rib of leaf, it was the child who would break open a full pod and send its gossamer afloat to the four winds.

Suppose, too, a late quail called out its single note from By Path Meadow. Entreaty met with swift assurance; back and forth until all questioning was stilled. Not so blithe would my father have whistled back his answer to the call of any inner voice.

And once that I had urged him forward to a path close-walled with clethra and swamp blueberry, I found it was no use to warn him out of hurly-burly, pool, and pitfall. These murky dangers from which Christian fled so piteously were



THE LURE FOR ME LAY IN THE CLOUDS THAT TOOK THE BAY AT A FINE GALLOP  
AND WENT RACING OUT TO SEA.

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## *Job's Pool*

the very places that he searched for; and unerring instinct led him to their hoard. Even turtle-head was worth a scramble and though he would not filch the casket, he would risk a tumble to look upon the gentian's tight locked box of blue. But should he catch the glimpse of scarlet robe, no papal guard of bush or briar could withhold him from a fine conference of Cardinals. He must see their Eminences at their sitting, though he was too reverent to disturb their meditations with a word.

At last, however, of his own accord, he headed for a beech, wedged tight against a cliff and holding to the rocks below with silver sinuous roots. This beech he used to say was like some jolly friar with ruddy face and comfortable girth who understood the frailties of men and took a greater interest in their gossip than their sins. In its companionship could one talk freely, tell a jest, or open up a bottle, and be sure of hearing a quick chuckle in the leaves.

The pine ahead was of a different order, of an austere brotherhood whose vows set it apart. To such a one, a sinner made confession not of

## *Robin Hood's Barn*

little venial errings, but of some grave cardinal sin that weighed upon his soul. And having eased himself through stern reproof and penance, he went forth upon his way forgetful, leaving his confessor brooding over the secret he had told. For all that my father would draw near the pine tree and listen to the little grieving sigh that went running through its boughs.

But from the great elm that stood solitary in the open pasture, he preferred to keep apart. At a distance he could best realize the beauty of its holiness, see its unhurried dignity of growth, and feel the import of the faith that drew it upward in a single prayer.

Strange that the path should slip so quickly down—from this mood of exaltation to a tangle where all was tussle, a midsummer passion, and hot lust. Here was flamboyancy to brightness, and a heavy sensuality to fragrance that was different from the wholesome smell of earth. Freebooting vines reached out, rapacious, and strangled with a leap, a clutch. And in the mad jostle and abandon that took place among them, the purple aster lost its comeliness, the joebye-



## *Job's Pool*

weed its delicacy. The goldenrod turned brazen and wore its yellow like a harlot's robe.

Yet not ten yards beyond, it was as though we had stepped out of the traffic with its discordant jargon, into a dim cathedral, vaulted high with boughs and buttressed to its slender groinings with the trunks of trees. Dank coolness rose up from the floor as in a place long closed to sunlight. The air had ceased to breathe. And in the center of this silence lay a little pit-black pool. The ferns that grew about it were the very fringe of mystery for at their roots we saw the miracle take place. Mold and sodden leaves were cleansed of their decay. Softly, irresistibly, the creative power drew all things to itself and informed them with new birth. Corruption put on incorruption and revealed itself as means of the eternal life.

Communion at this service was too profound for utterance. But as we stood in silence there together, we were bound more close in the companionship of those who acknowledge the same God and who rise to the same creed.



VIII: *Garden Hospitality*

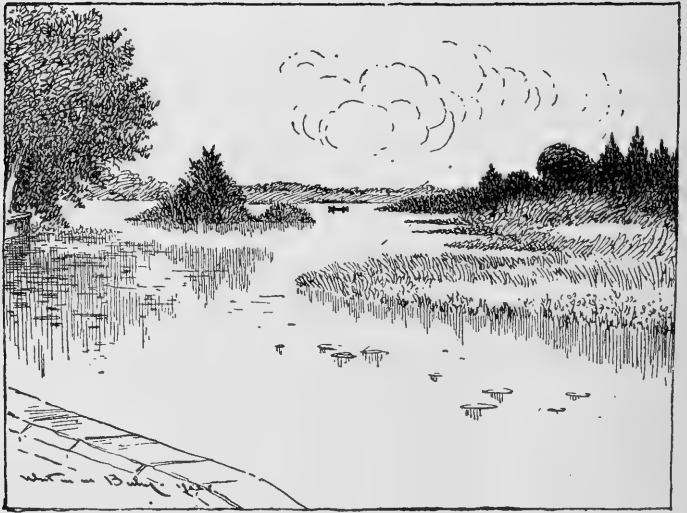


## CONTENT

The symbol of the soul, you say,  
Is that gay butterfly  
That dreams upon a scarlet phlox  
Beneath an azure sky.

Will all the trancèd ecstasy  
Which I have missed on earth,  
Be mine upon a scarlet phlox  
When my soul finds rebirth?

Then Christian heaven is beyond  
The aim of my surprise;  
I'd rather dream on scarlet phlox  
In pagan Paradise.





### VIII: *Garden Hospitality*

**T**H**ERE** is no doubt about it—I am not a genial giver. From the moment that I am a guest with scissors, I am acutely miserable until her appetite is satisfied. I offer them, indeed, much in the manner of a spoiled child who has been told that it is but courteous to share her playthings and who does so perfunctorily, and with an air of pained politeness. At first I look

## *Robin Hood's Barn*

carelessly in the opposite direction. I stir the earth or stiffen a stake as if that were my sole preoccupation. But, in reality, I am casting a glance over one shoulder at the depredations that I have invited.

She has begun with my sweet-william, a just scourge to my vainglory. Will she spare that one of cherry-red of which I wish the seedlings? No, it is laid low. She has reached the variety called Newport Pink. At this moment I call her attention swiftly to the skill with which I have attained a continuous stretch of bloom; but she has already opened up a breach. I know without turning what she will lay her hands on next. Just around the corner there are Iceland poppies, orange and scarlet. She cannot miss the nodding of their delicately crinkled cups. In a moment they are tufts of leaves. And it will be a week before their soft, fuzzy buds, so tightly curled like little fronds, will straighten out upon the crooked stems.

With an eager eye for acquisitions she has come upon the roses—not the perpetuals of which one gives so gladly—but the York and Lancaster of



## *Garden Hospitality*

which there is one remaining bud. I want that bud! I want to see its yellow center and jaunty streaked face. But swiftly it disappears. By this time, I am at her heels. Will she never reach the calendulas in their first gaudy bloom and clamoring to be cropped? She has passed them for those she has at home; so has she bachelor's buttons. And hastily she makes her way to my sweet-peas.

Once there, you would think I might breathe freely, as indeed I might; for do not I have to toil twice daily to keep them giving bounty? But in a moment she has snipped off a whole gadding vine with I know not how many buds, how much capacity of growth. I recognize perfectly that hers is the proper way to pick sweet-peas; that arranged in a cluster of pure color they are hideous, and that they need to nod among their own green leaves. But I have never had the courage to pick such a bouquet for myself.

While I am merely martyred during the customary ravage, there are certain plants where an attack will transform me to Knight Templar with my sword unsheathed. To be sure these plants

## *Robin Hood's Barn*

seldom need armed intervention. There is a kind of sanctity that guards the canterbury-bells, the tall spires of foxglove and delphinium. They have a dignity that repels the invader. To fell them would be sacrilege indeed!

Once my guest has departed a keen shame sets in. "The gift without the giver is bare." But I plead, my complaint is that too much of me has gone out with my gift. I think, however, of a garden not far off. When I visit it I can scarcely recognize it for what it is. Hens wallow out their sun-baths in its midst or crane their necks to crop a bloom. Children romp through it carelessly. There is scarcely a blossom in sight. And yet I have never visited it without in some miraculous fashion leaving it full-handed. Sometimes it is with great bunches of California poppies which its owner knows I cannot grow in my clay soil. Sometimes it is with mignonette. In my father's day it was usually with some treasured offering that had been grown almost as it were to find pleasure in his sight. This garden yields itself as the famous pitcher yielded milk, from the source of hospitality abounding.

## *Garden Hospitality*

Another friend I have who is a source of much reproach. To be sure she has more space at her command, but hers is only generosity expanded. Almost any day she will stop her household tasks to take you "farming"; a delightful word in her own whimsical interpretation. Little enough has it to do with grubbing and hoeing. There are vegetables on her farm I know, but I have never seen them; she keeps them out of sight. But once among her flowers she will present you with a basket for each arm and a formidable pair of scissors and lead you to a low swamp where her Japanese iris unfolds its crumpled flowers. Or if it is August, to a sunny patch where in neat long rows she grows her new and rare gladioli, the primulinus hybrids. Then she will disappear quite carelessly about her tasks. And when she returns a good half hour later to find that you have but helped yourself in the manner expected of your guests, she lays about her, until you go home staggering under your gay burden.

After so much frankness I can only plead that much different is my own feeling when I part with plants. A rainy day in August is a sign that

## *Robin Hood's Barn*

he who runs may read; and I welcome any guest who comes armed with box and trowel. There are many plants that do not count—sweet-rocket, garden heliotrope, the yellow primrose. These are current coin. But the same sweet-william that I hoarded in its bloom, I can now lift eagerly; and the same Iceland poppies. The peach-blow canterbury-bells where a rash hand laid earlier would have routed my politeness, I can now spade up recklessly in great clumps each one of which when wedged apart would fill a border. Nor is the seed-bed, the inner sanctuary now inviolate. Here dwell mysteries, plants that have never flowered. Is the plant one lifts the Rocky Mountain columbine? Is the one that stays the usual dingy double purple? No matter. Somewhere next June it will be expanding its long spurs and pendulous buds.

So to salve my pride I have come to this conclusion, that what may seem my stinginess is not really that. Plants from my garden you may have in plenty. You may even dig them yourself and I shall not look. I, too, will go unconcernedly about my tasks. And flowers you may

## *Garden Hospitality*

have, those which if cut will come again. But I offer my hospitality with restrictions. Nip it tenderly and as it were from the rear. Seek out those blossoms that perversely turn their faces to the wall. And on your life, touch not those that have lain dormant a full year to store vigor for their bloom. For such flowers, even when they are given me from others' gardens, fail in beauty when I know that the plant has been sacrificed in strength.



**IX: *Round Robin Hood's Barn***





## THE HUNTRESS

Artemis, the huntress,  
Loves all small, wild things.  
Little bears on tumbling legs,  
Birds with unfledged wings,  
Fox cubs peering out of holes  
With a strange surprise  
At the baying of her hounds  
In their puzzled eyes,  
Doe with spots on tawny flanks,  
Lion whelps at play;  
These she spares when she sets forth  
With intent to slay.

Artemis, the huntress,  
Slays them when they're grown;  
Makes their beauty and their power  
Tribute to her own;  
Traps the lion in his lair,  
Flays him of his pelt;

*Robin Hood's Barn*

Brings the stag with antlers down  
For a doe-skin belt.  
Tiger's jagged lightning stripes,  
Panther's sleek black hide,  
She must wear as ornament,  
Robing for her pride.

How shall I blame Artemis?—  
I, who wear a coat,  
Lined with tiny squirrel skins  
Soft at wrist and throat,  
Trimmed with beaver's borrowed warmth,  
Pretty, so I think,—  
Though I wish I could afford  
Richer gloss of mink.

I would free a silver fox  
From the hunter's trap;  
Yet how carelessly I buy  
Beauty, for a wrap.



## IX: *Round Robin Hood's Barn*

I AM not one who would see the sun rise daily from beyond a new horizon or set behind a different verge. When it dawns above the distant city, I consider that it is but turning in the proper groove; and when it disappears behind a ridge of cedars, I feel that it has finished out its proper circuit and gone becomingly to rest. Neither do I wish to-morrow's gift to be fresh woods and pastures new. I would far rather have the warm security of pasturelands with which I am familiar and, with none of the ex-

## *Robin Hood's Barn*

plorer's spirit, I would wander through them on those narrow cow-paths that have been thudded out by daily passage of the herd. For the miracle I wonder at is sameness and not novelty. I breathe quickest when I find that every stick and stone, every bush and tree and thicket is marvelously as it was.

So, after a winter's absence, I find a real exhilaration in tugging at the gate that leads into the cow-lane and starting off upon a visit to old haunts. How much have I forgotten? Will remembrance come back sharply by some gaunt omission or gently by the presence of familiar scent and shape and sound?

As I pick my way through the clutter of the barnyard, assurance greets me swiftly in the earthy smell. When have I ever failed to catch in this rich reek, the pungency of fever-few, and when on looking down, have I failed to find the groundmallow rounding out its little cheeses in this churn of muck. On either side of the straight way are open fields which surely some day must be planted to ground crops. To-day they are as I best remember them. Theirs is a surface yield

## *Round Robin Hood's Barn*

of springing corn and grain that takes the wind in ripples, and the shadows of the clouds above. And suddenly as I grow fearful of the stillness, there is a song of chuckling merriment and in a parting of the timothy, I see a bobolink's tan pate. I might have known that he would be there, a part of the June lushness, brimming the meadows with his song. From the high cross-yards of the buttonwood, a conkoree sends out his warning. His scarlet epaulettes must be, I think, the badge of some patrol; for never yet have I passed by his watch-tower without arousing his alarm. It is he who always brings to my attention the silver mainmast of his old square-rigger and leaves me wondering how late it will hang out its sails. Beneath, along the wall, the blackberry vines are putting out their long green feelers and the poison-ivy wears its summer gloss. Through their leaves a chipmunk scampers nimbly, turns tail, and disappears. I know, however, from old habit, that curiosity will have the best of him. Ten feet ahead, I shall look into some dim crevice and catch a bright, unwinking eye. Nor does the woodchuck fail me. There he is in midfield

## *Robin Hood's Barn*

above the same old dug-out, sitting plumply on his haunches with fore-paws upheld. Unvaried is the greeting that he gives me, a shrill whistling note. Never yet, moreover, have I escaped to open pastures before my way was blocked by the slow, forward browse of the returning herd. In all the years of our acquaintance these sober Holsteins have acquired no grace of manner. My feet have but to come within their range of vision and each head lifts upward for a long, slow stare. With feigned stolidity they wait for the encounter; but as I come near there is a tentative warm breath, a swift withdrawal, a frantic edging to the further wall. In a moment horns are prodding into flanks and haunches in the effort to get by me. There is panic and a clumping rout.

The field that lies behind them on the hill-top is a place of open sunlight and slow shadows that come pointing from the west. Its outer edge is rough and hubbly, each scar of rock concealed by spires of hardhack and tufts of meadow-sweet. As I make my way among them, I am reminded of those wiseacres who preach philandering with nature as proof against a later disillusionment

## *Round Robin Hood's Barn*

and shock. They have not, they say, the courage for revisiting. It was their mood that tricked out the scene with false adornments. Imagination tends to magnify; and beauty recollected, is beauty safely kept.

Theirs is, I think, a rare presumption. Certainly my own imagination is not big enough to hold the spread of the gigantic elm tree that confronts me, nor so fine as to conceive an imitation of its perfect curve and droop. It cannot put so delicate an edge upon the blades of cedars, nor place below them where they flank the wall, a blue shadowing so cool. And how should it keep pace with the clouds, how conjure up a brilliance so intense? My memory of comeliness, of radiance, of fleetness, may well be measured with reality. I dare take the risk.

Through lawless growth of clethra and of button-ball, there are a hundred little cow-paths, intersecting, doubling, but each driving wedge-like backward to the pond. This pond is for me a place of high excitement. Suppose for once, I should come out from a lane of bumpy darkness to find it quite unoccupied, emptied of

## *Robin Hood's Barn*

the flittings, dartings, scurryings, that make up its busy life. It will not be to-day, for already I catch a well-known "chip," and am upheld by the yellow-throat in his diminutive black mask. Is he the same highwayman who so ineffectually crossed my path last year? I am more certain of the catbird as an old acquaintance; for I recognize in his agility with notes a sudden drop to plaintiveness. Some years ago he heard and made his own the wistful song of the chewink. He also has acquired no knowledge of my friendliness, and with one glimpse of me he stops his careless practicing and reiterates an expostulating "mew." Surely, too, I have disturbed before, just here, a pair of redstarts; have seen their restlessness acquire a sudden purpose, and watched the female keep before me, flirting at me the full spread of her buff tail. Always it is she whose uneasiness reminds me that the pleasures of renewal are mine alone, and that I must move warily, if I am not to put to flight the very ones I seek.

Not that I expect to get a glimpse again of the Carolina rail, his long beak held even with the





THIS POND IS FOR ME A PLACE OF HIGH EXCITEMENT.

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surface of the water, his white tail bobbing through the sedge. But the rock-island in the center has its accompaniment of turtles, their shells baked gray by the hot sun. On the pickerel and the arrow-heads, I catch already the gleam of iridescent wings. Where is the muskrat? Those are his waterways that have broken the green scum and pushed aside the lily-pads in a straight reach from dock to dock. As I keep a quiet place, I hear a chew and nibble and know where to find him by the stir and shake of grass. Then suddenly I recognize quite close beside me, an undercurrent of small sounds. Somewhere along the water's edge, a sandpiper is clucking softly to her brood. With tip and tilt of her small form she comes, picking her way among the cat-tails at a pace too rapid for her little scuttling balls of fluff. Were I to appear, how frantically would she gather them about her and how swiftly would they slip from sight. But she does not fear the taciturnity of the old bittern who for many years has made this pool his haunt. And no wonder. He is a crabbed bachelor who will

## *Robin Hood's Barn*

not lower his gaze to watch the chicks who run so impudently close about his yellow legs.

Even my later presence at his side, he regards as no great matter for disturbance. With one blink of his red eye, he has decided that I am not worth the trouble of a flight. And this despite the fact that many a time I have been guilty of an intimate approach. It is his proud indifference that provokes me to such rudeness. With a motive not dissimilar, a barbarian reached out to stroke a Roman senator's white beard.

The rest of the inhabitants have not developed such philosophy of fear. They stand not upon the order of their going, but go at once. Quickly the muskrat has sprung to his oars and is steering for the farther shore. And before I reach the hoof-holes at the margin, the frogs spring out from beneath my steps and make the pond in one lean dive. The kingfisher gives an angry rattle at invasion of his privacy and darts past me in a flash of blue. The turtles, always a little late in realizing danger, rear inquiring heads at the commotion. Then slipping slowly forward, they drop beneath the surface with a heavy plop.

## *Round Robin Hood's Barn*

Bubbles rise that mark the ways of swimmers down below. Save for the bittern who is imperturbable, the pond is quite deserted. I must return a good hour later, if I am to find the drama on, the rôles resumed.

There is small cause to linger solitary, grilling in the sunlight, for if I skirt a cape of swampy undergrowth, I shall come into a tunnel walled with bayberry and roofed with boughs and drooping vines. You would never think that I could find a break in all this tangle, and yet I know that I could foot it blind. Much would I miss of color, the flecks and shafts of sun on solemn green, the tawny brown in which each winter leaves the oak trees standing ankle deep. Yet by a most sweet perfume that assails me, I should know where the swamp azalea was blowing out its sticky trumpets and breaking the cool shadows with white gleams. And with its scent would come back an old association. I should image close below the Canadian lily lifting up its single scarlet cup. Moreover, where the path turns slippery with needles and is charged with resin, I should go scrambling up until I made my

## *Robin Hood's Barn*

way to my accustomed seat by the soft feel of moss. Surely, too, the breeze that comes so nimbly up this height, would carry with it much of the quickness and the frolic of the birch trees down beneath. I am glad, however, that I may look out upon this brilliant clearing and see the slim lithe trunks, the leaves so sensitive to wind and light.

Their memory is too gay to carry with me on my backward journey through the woods. Under this vault is no snug intimacy, no small loveliness; rather an apathy of gloom, a loneliness too deep to share. Between the colonnades there reigns a twilight stillness and the stir in the high branches is elusive and subdued. What plants there are, have the fragility and reticence of long seclusion. Set in the sun, the pipsissewa could not send forth so delicate a fragrance or put forth so shy a bloom. Something would the mitchella lose if forced out in the open. It must feel its way beneath a covering of leaves. The Jacks and lady-slippers, too, have an appropriate sobriety in their dim luster and dress to a somber mood. And in contrast to the frank

## *Round Robin Hood's Barn*

dismay I met with in the open pastures, here I have the sense of being watched by infinite sly life. I may not come upon it in the trooping shadows. It creeps warily upon the farther side of some great trunk, lurks under cover, or in burrow, peers at me from above. Yet though I hear no sound save my own deadened footfall, I know I am observed.

Straight through the silence and the dimness runs a belt of rock, heaved up in tumult and split asunder in great slabs and clefts that are a miracle of accident and poise. Along this ridge, tradition has it that the Indian chief, King Philip, dogged by the white man, sped homeward to Mount Hope to die. A strange sense of justice was it surely that condemned the body of this warrior to be drawn and quartered as a traitor's for his fierce loyalty to these, his woods. It is in his steps I walk; at first along a low outcropping, a reef washed over by the surge of leaves. Then as the cliff mounts, my mind begins to leap ahead. Somewhere to the left I remember a great boulder that has sagged and slipped until it rests, a wedge, between high walls. I must

## *Robin Hood's Barn*

see it for its cap of bladed ferns. And just beyond, I shall come upon the roof of a deep cavern where through a gaping slice of rock, I may gaze down into the dripping darkness and make out, just faintly, the oven-bird on her high shelf. Or if I wish, I may descend and push through the blackness where the air is close and dank and cold. But best of all I like the last ascent, a great protruding shoulder where the rocks run up, a mountain range in miniature, its valley padded with green moss and freshened by the fall of tiny streams. Here I must hand myself across diminutive ravines by tug at branch and grasp of trunk, and scramble to each higher ledge by the firm clutch of bush.

At last I stand even with the tops of trees and look down and out upon a surge of green. In no other place have I had so completely the sense of suspension, of being held among the boughs and moved by wind. With each sway new glimpses open and before the branches close again, I catch the glimmer of a pool, the soft unfurling of an oak, the soar of one dark pine. Or at my feet, where the parapet drops sheer,



## *Round Robin Hood's Barn*

I see the fierce grappling roots of trees and vines that scale the heights. Sometimes, too, as the branches lift, my spirit is lifted with them to the open sky. In such moments, reality gives new vigor to the mind's possession, freshens the color that has faded in a winter's memory, and restores a beauty that has blurred.

No wonder that when I make my way down a descending trail, I have no capacity for further seeing—no, not even as I cross the bog for a glimpse of the treasures that it holds in its black heart. I have enough to carry with me out across the pastures still filled with the warmth and savor of the day. For what I have brought back is the sense of security that springs from great possessions; possessions not bewildering in their novelty or grandeur, but rich by reason of familiarity and the habit of past years.



**X: *Fair Game***





## X: *Fair Game*

“She drew herself up and looked him from top to toe.”

**S**O Dido at Æneas, according to Virgil who was a great stickler for the dignity of sex. Over goddesses, of course, he could not exert control. No use to struggle with a younger generation that was endowed perpetually with youth. They were, he admitted, buccaneers in courtship. Let a personable youth go strolling unattended, let him dispose himself to rest upon a hillside, and some one of them would be sure to take pity on him pitilessly in a way to compro-

## *Robin Hood's Barn*

mise him and sweep him off his feet. But when it came to women folks—the best of them—the Mantuan saw to it that they were quick to put presumption in its place. A glance, swift and sure as the arrow of chaste Artemis, was the weapon they employed.

It is, I confess it frankly, an envy complex that makes me remember from the whole *Æneid* that sole line. *Æneas* awakened in me no filial piety, *Achates* no fidelity, *Hector* no valorous zest for the unequal combat. *Ulysses* taught no trippings to my tongue. But when I came to *Dido*, I was “thrilled” by her decorum. “There,” said I, seizing on a model for my conduct, “that is the kind of woman I shall be.” I was fifteen at the time and I forgot that my two stubby pig-tails must first be turned up and under to a crown of hair; that my red flannel shirt-waist and plaid skirt must be transformed to less serviceable and more alluring raiment; that my chubbiness must first pass through the state of figure before it could attain to noble form. Exhilarated I looked forward to the time when I might emulate the

## *Fair Game*

fair barbarian and by a sacrosanct propriety make some man feel mean.

Well, I have never done so—though I am a long way now from my first aspiration. Why, I cannot tell you. My intention certainly has been unswerving. Opportunity has not been lacking. There is no reason why my presence, with both height and weight to lend assistance, should do other than command. And yet, and yet, . . . I have drawn myself up like Dido only to feel a chuckling commotion force me to unbend. I have shot my arrow, that death-dealing glance, only to see it fall short of the mark or twinkle as it hit. And in a moment I was quarry and not huntress. The safeguarding of my dignity lay in my flight.

Fortunately the climax of my failure was long withheld, though even in my college days I think I had an inkling of disaster. Strange place to serve apprenticeship to prudery, that cool cloister where learning was pursued with a self-consciousness and where we set ourselves apart not with a vow of maidenhood, but of contempt. Gareth in his scullery a-burnishing his pots and pans felt

## *Robin Hood's Barn*

himself not more remote from the sharp frays that were to win him knighthood than I from those encounters where I was to queen it with a classic art. Yet as I look back upon the campus, clean-swept of men save ministrants, I see grotesque figures against the past horizon and myself, breathless and startled, ignominiously on the run.

This is, you are to understand, not a vaunt of prowess, but a confession of defeat. Boast comes not from the attitude of flight, but from the fortune and the face of the pursuant. And imagine Dido picking up her train and scuttling from the druggist's clerk, who left her potions and love filters in the lower court. The fact that I ever saw his shuffling figure and came to know the patience expressed in his cadaverous face as personal, was proof of my long distance from Decorum's throne. Once, moreover, that I had tried the blinding flash and seen it fizzle out, it was my glance that changed, not his. It grew furtive, peering. I looked before I leaped. Instead of passing with my academic robes afloat,





I MISSED THE WHIR OF KNIVES, THE RATTLE OF CHAINS, THE DRIVER'S  
RINGING CALL.

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## *Fair Game*

I gathered them about me and slipped out by the back door.

And would Dido as a damsel intent upon her sacrifices and their omens, have stirred the aspirations of her priest or been conscious of them if she had? She saw him, I feel sure, but as an intermediary who should make her hetacombs acceptable to jealous gods. Think you, as they smoked upward to the quiet heavens that he would have broken in upon her piety with the request that she breakfast with him at the "templum domesticum" next door. A sense of fitness would have told him that it were better to incur the wrath of Jove and Juno for once united though in anger, than to so presume. His chariot, a snug two-wheeler, suited modestly to his parochial duties, but otherwise the legendary vehicle for courtship, was—he would have known—not quite the thing to convey her from devotions home.

A bizarre memory comes back to me of myself, round-eyed in wonder at my own predicament, sharing at the rectory a breakfast that I had not known how politely to refuse. Very dark the room and very far removed from the bright com-

## *Robin Hood's Barn*

mon aspects of the world outside. Very bleak the empty table. And across it a looming figure still frocked in the habiliments of office—rather like Silenus in his coffee cups. I should like now to know of what during that strange inclusion in the morning service, I found it appropriate matter to converse. Of one thing I am certain; that when the old white horse and buggy had shambled to my dormitory, I sprang too quick for courtesy or dignity from my place of privilege beside the Cloth.

Where was my demeanor, where my composure? Too late to recall them as I fluttered safe to my retreat. Still I had excuses and a-plenty with which to prop my toppled pride. The encounter I expected was to leap from under cover with a step both rash and gamesome. And instead it had borne down upon me in the open with a heavy and encumbered tread. The target for which I kept my arrows pointed was a gay sprig, at most a summer wilding. I could not—for very sportsmanship—have let one fly against such a massive bulwark of the church. Now, however, I was on my guard and should go

## *Fair Game*

armored in my piety. It was only necessary to look rapt.

But with an eye fixed vigilant upon me, it seemed the part of prudence not to trust too far the right of sanctuary. The benediction fell upon the multitude as I put safe space between me and the chancel door. The self-confidence of Dido was not in me. I lacked her regality of aspect. I wanted the assurance of her slow-traveling gaze.

Far better to try graciousness, that other queenly attribute. Since it came more easily to stoop the head than rear it, I might, by condescending to grant favors, conceal my inner quakings and the tremor in my limbs. Besides in my next ordeal as preceptress in a Western university, I was not given chance for flight. A subterranean cavern was my throne room. Here with my sole barricade my desk, I must sit imperative, grant interviews, and levy tax of daily themes. I could not abdicate. There was no egress save where my servitors came crowding through the door. Indeed, my bleak cellar vault was so devoid of all appurtenances—is not that

## *Robin Hood's Barn*

the name for royal furnishings?—that I could not even step behind the arras. Turn where I would, I had my back against a white-washed wall.

I shall not forget the first time that I passed within to grant an audience. A mob awaited me that had no thought of breaking into serried ranks at my approach. Caps fluttered not in doff and flourish. Rather as a gay salute above my head and often perilously near. I was, it seems, a “dame,” a “queen.” Doubtful titles when conferred with such rejoicing upon the evident approachability of my young years. But after all my business was to administer the King’s English. By precept and example I might make clear the doubtful meaning of the terms. And wise provision—in the case of failure I might pronounce sentence of exile or of execution, for the reins of government were in my hands. Surely though, for the moment it was wiser with these roguish faces all about me, to err a little on the side of clemency, to try first to win my people by my leniency and my compassion. Even Dido had her melting moods.

## *Fair Game*

My brief reign was, in short, an era of good feeling until abruptly terminated by a council of the larger powers.

Now of us two, Dido and I, I paid the higher price for my capitate humanity. The Carthaginian queen, when once she won to Hades found a splendid isolation waiting for her where conspicuously aloof and with no appeasements for the easy conscience of Æneas, she might still uphold her desperate pride. But as tutor I went into exile also in a plutocratic region, where I lived a wandering shade somewhere between an upper and a lower world. And in this indefinite twilight, I had not even an allotted place. I was supposed to hover, delicate and indeterminate. Whenever I was chanced upon, I was conveniently to fade away or merge. Yet even so my fancy did not lose its knack at quick embellishment. Romantically I viewed myself. Where all else was positive, to be negative was, I felt, to go conspicuously attired. Who knew? I might attract a dangerous attention by the mouse-colored robes of my obliterating tact. Then would not the eldest son, a languid exquisite,

grow mettlesome? Then would he not rouse himself from feigned indifference, and choosing so to speak, the leaden casket, give and hazard all he had? And with what clemency and high disdain—I had not decided which—should I be led to spurn my glittering chance.

Daydreaming I was caught. It was not the scion, but the butler who took flame from my quiet dignity, and stepped forth from the pantry to champion my cause. Had not stout hearts once beat beneath the weight of breastplates? Then why should I suppose his paralyzed to a mechanical inertia by a mere starched front? It was moved kindly from the first by my imprisoned youth. Constant were his little acts of liberation. Sometimes a nosegay from the garden where flowers were not to pluck. Sometimes a tidbit from the kitchen where he ruled as Chanticleer. Sometimes a shilling-shocker from the library that circulated below stairs. And all proffered with impassive mien, silently, obsequiously, with no comment for offense. How should I suspect I had a "follower" even when one day upon a solitary ramble, I heard his hur-



## *Fair Game*

ried, overtaking steps? It was for something which apparently I had forgotten that I slowed my pace.

“I thought,” he said, “you might be lonely going.” And before I knew it, he had fallen into step.

There seemed no two ways about acceptance of his conduct. Not as an upstart surely could I rebuke so grave and dignified a cavalier. Nor as we walked out along the country roads did I regret my escort. For in him, of all men alone, I found the humble attitude which I, in emulating Dido, had so zealously desired. At the same time I recognized the tristful prelude to departure. On the morrow I must again assume the attitude of flight.

But it was at Touisset, a place of small adventure, that the ultimate irony took place. Its hero this time was a farm-hand, a Portuguese of roguish, impudent good looks, who delighted in what undeniably was his, and in a spendthrift way that would have put Narcissus as a niggard quite to shame. Seated upon a load of hay, he was elate upon a throne; and the quick-flashing

## *Robin Hood's Barn*

smiles which he dispensed along the highway were the largess of a generous king. Indeed, as he drove his plowshare through the field behind our house, or charioteered his steeds in a round inclosing course, I must confess that I took pleasure in him as part of the primitive beauty of the landscape. He was eloquent of the rich and untamed vigor of the earth. But I protest not once had it occurred to me to detach him as a person from the scene.

Still of his drama that was so ignominiously to include me, I was aware with just the tail-end corner of my eye. In the hot, sultry morn, I had seen him drive into the meadow, ripe for mowing with a clattering of his machine and a loud heartening of his steeds. And for a space, I had paused to watch the timothy as it fell over stiffly in broad silver swathes. But later as I worked about my place, I was disturbed by unaccustomed stillness. I missed the whir of knives, the rattle of the chains, the driver's ringing calls. Then looking out I saw the horses standing idle munching, belly deep in grass, what should have been a winter meal. From the cool

## *Fair Game*

gloom beneath a distant cedar, I heard, more over, the sound of mellow, careless laughter and saw the flutter of white skirt.

Well, why not? Hay-making and love-making went ever arm in arm together since tillage first began. The work fared better for admiring eyes that watched the prowess, for the snack brought to the bars, for the cool drink offered as excuse for dilly-dally and an hour's repose.

In this field, however, love-making had the best of it. At eve the shadows fell across a rippling sea of green. And not for three days was the summer idyling interrupted; were the culprits caught.

The first herald of disaster was a rap upon my door. Had I seen Manuel? His master's eye was humorously upon me. Not since early morning when we had passed the time of day. Where was the fellow anyhow? I supposed he must be knocking off for lunch. Knocking off from what? A contemptuous gesture took in the whole upstanding field of grain. Still, soft-hearted towards young romance, I did my best for the

## *Robin Hood's Barn*

rapsallion, not guessing how completely I had been made to serve.

His master gave a chuckle of derision at the zealousness of my defense. It did not equal in conviction Manuel's own. Could I guess what the rogue had answered when he was accused of sloth? I shook my head, but the appropriate gesture would have been to shield my face.

It was not the heat that he had offered as excuse, not the whole back-and-forward length of burning course. Such would have been reflection on his manly vigor. It was, so he had claimed, my own impending interest that has stayed his hand and clogged his wheels; the encumbrance of what was after all a very natural tribute. How could he ~~w~~ork when I came out to talk? I could imagine the explanatory shrug of his broad shoulders. Certainly the full implication of his grudging courtesy, his master made quite clear to me with a shrewd Yankee twinkle that took for granted my enjoyment of the joke.

My quick answer was to point to where a distant figure in blue jeans lay stretched at length beneath the tree, engaged if I might judge in

## *Fair Game*

pleasant dalliance. Retribution I delivered over, but I sped it on its course.

All mythology, however, this daring act had tinted for me with new colors. The goddesses, flushed so wantonly in all their amorous histories, I now saw chaste of hue, downcast, and modest-pale. Their lovers, self-professed and known to be obedient only to divine solicitations, I knew for tricksters, hypocrites, and cheats. Father Anchises, reverend patriarch! He had been frisking with some rustic in a daisy-field, not led by any Queen of Love to meadows set with asphodel. Endymion, that shy, gauche youth who drooped before the moon's advance. He had slept snug beneath some cottage roof, not out upon a dewy hillside where Artemis had held him captive by her beams. And I by right of my humiliation now stood firm with Venus and with Artemis, those innocent celestials. Of such stuff as theirs, at least, was my last legend made.



**XI: *Garden Airs and Graces***





## TRIBUTE

I can afford some modesty  
With Patsy by my side;  
He'll never let my garden droop  
For lack of proper pride.

He makes inspection of the sprays  
While I toil at the roots.  
Say I, "They're doing fairly well."  
Says he, "Now ain't they beauts."

The salmon phlox and larkspur blue  
Cause us astonishment.  
Say I, "They're making a fine show."  
Says he, "They'll raise the rent."

When mullein throws out blood red stars  
From leaves all silver white,  
Say I, "I like a silky pink."  
Says he, "My fav-o-rite."

*Robin Hood's Barn*

If York and Lancaster blooms full,  
We wonder at our luck.  
Say I, "It has eight perfect buds."  
Says he, "Each worth a buck."

And when we ask the neighbors in,  
I mix my boast with leaven.  
Say I, "The garden's at its height."  
Says Patsy, "Come see heaven."



## XI: *Garden Airs and Graces*

**I** HAVE no pride in my personal appearance. At least I can endure such comments on it as are made for my own good. You need only tell me that my petticoat is hanging to see how pleasantly I will say "thank you" and depart for remedies upstairs. Or you may pick a thread from off my coat, slip a button into place, tuck in a hair-pin, and you will not see me flinch from under your corrective hand. Even when you inform

## *Robin Hood's Barn*

me that my hat has slipped back on my head—a sure sign of advancing years—I will let you bring it forward to the proper youthful tilt.

But when it comes to pride in the appearance of my garden, that is a different matter! You had best not wound it. There is no remedy to bring quick healing and each slight will leave a scar. I know; for my vanity quite consciously divides all visitors into those who show me garden graces and those who show me garden airs.

It is easy to tell one of the toplofty in her first surveyal of my place. As I stand beside her, I may watch the deadly working of her glance. Each quarrelsome, bold color starts to blare its challenge at her loudly. Each soft mediating hue, in an effort to escape, goes colorless and drab. And every plant at once becomes “vulgaris,” not “splendens” or “elegans” as I had fondly hoped. Before her is a bed of German iris, its pennants shifting out of saffron into lavender, then deepening into purple and maroon. There is, I know, nothing rare in these varieties; and yet I had not thought that princes met in conclave lost anything of royal blood.

## *Garden Airs and Graces*

They remind her, however, only of her recent acquisition. Have I tried the "pallida dalmatica"? It has much more distinction. Indeed, she has dispensed with German iris. Had she known that I still grew it, she would have sent me down some roots. And my spirea, that I grow as an edging, with a liking for its little feathered tufts. How it dwarfs and dwindles in her sight. The thing to get is that new hybrid—Alexandria—it makes a better showing with its rosy sprays. Or her eye turns to my columbines, a hundred nodding heads of palest yellow, lavender, and pink. Despite the beauty of their upturned faces, she detects a shortening to their spurs. How quickly plants run out; and a kindly prompting makes her tell me where she gets her seed. It is the same with the sweet-william. She sees that I have striven for a bed of Newport pink; a lovely color to my way of thinking when lightened by the sprays of white campanula and softened by small violas that run below it in a band of mauve. But there is one clump that has reverted, gathering in the greedy way it has a sprig of every colored bloom

## *Robin Hood's Barn*

into one head. Why don't I pull it out? I protest with little hope of understanding that I never lift a plant in flower. I dare not tell the truth that I have taken an odd liking to this mixed bouquet.

Perhaps instead, a little later in the season, she confronts the larkspur which I have grown so patiently from seed. There is, so far as I can see, no lack of beauty to its blueness that ranges from the azure of a noonday sky to the dull purple of shadows falling somberly at dusk. Her one comment, however, is to ask me, if I have ever thought of sending over to Lemoine. She has found his French seed so satisfactory in producing new varieties and, just for a start, she may be able to spare me a few plants. Inevitably, she is a person with a preference for double flowers. She would muffle up my canterbury-bells in whose great dusky cups the pollened clappers lie so lightly. The rosettes of hollyhocks, reflexed in such fine curves, so delicately fluted, she would have resemble the artificial pompons of a Pierrot. Even the petticoats of single poppies are too frank in their allure. She would turn a

## *Garden Airs and Graces*

gypsy to a ballet dancer, overskirted, crinolined, befrilled. Nothing will she have as God designed it, in simplicity. It must be improved into a season's novelty by hand of man.

You may imagine then that her own taste in beauty is one based on size. No doubt wisely, it had not occurred to me to put a yard stick to my zinnias. It was enough for me that they had bloomed in other colors than magenta, and I had felt relief when each tight bud disclosed itself as ivory, a rich canary yellow, salmon, or dull pink. But she has measured hers, and though I may not believe it—they are each a good six inches; Mammoths, curled and crested are the variety she gets. She does not need to inform me what she thinks of my sweet-peas. I, too, long ago succumbed to Giant Spencers, and there they are, great butterflies atilt upon the vines. Still close by I grow the old varieties that yield so much more perfume from their smaller hooded bloom. The Lady Grizel Hamilton with fragrance in her very name! I cannot save her from a snub. I wish, moreover, if it is their season, that I might keep my new gladioli close-hidden. I like them not

## *Robin Hood's Barn*

too tropical and in ordering pass over those starred as an extra size. Yet in a moment I shall see, not the slender grace that I have sought for, but the ruffled hugeness that there should have been. My friend's, of course, are a prize mixture and gold-medaled. Why, she has had to stake each plant.

But in late summer it is my dahlias that suffer most from condescension. Hers are her hobby. She grows them with the greatest care, with such selection, with such rigorous exclusion of those which have not toed the mark. And the result! Each plant, its stalk as big as her own arm, yields exhibition flowers. Not, I am to understand, the old varieties, but those not yet upon the market and secured by hook and crook. With mine, she long ago cut her acquaintanceship. Lady Carmichael! I learn that she has grown plebeian for all her high-bred air and golden gown. And Queen Wilhelmina! Clad in white samite, she looks entirely regal, yet for all that a high tribunal has voted her dethroned. No wonder that I give the shelter of my back to Bobby, that perennial urchin who every summer sticks up his



## *Garden Airs and Graces*

round head to show he is not crowded out. In all my wealth of bloom, I grow only two varieties which this connoisseur has in her garden. You will not be surprised to learn that they are a scarlet British Lion and an apoplectic Millionaire.

Well, dahlias aren't my hobby. The thick stuff of their petals is to me as inappropriate as felt hats worn in summer, and I only like them in the autumn months. But about the weakness of my own clay soil, I am as sensitive as though it were a personal defect. Like a cripple, I attempt to hide it, displaying my full strength in peonies, in phlox, in all rank growers, so that you may not guess how much I miss of grace. At once this friend of mine perceives that I go halting. Do I never use gypsophila to soften my effects? She has found it useful in veiling a crude color, like that of my salmon phlox, for instance, that needs to be subdued. Or I might try lavender. It gives such subtlety with its fine mists. Unluckily mine has never reached precipitation and I must use globe-thistle, platycodons, and veronicas to give more solid shadow-

## *Robin Hood's Barn*

ing of gray or blue. And snapdragon! Do I never grow it? Quite as though I had not tried a hundred times for a gaudy-sunset colored bed of coral and of amber, and with such pitiful few gleams. How odd! She has no trouble with it, nor with salpiglossis, another of my failures. She cuts great bowlsful of them every day. There, too, against the dark green of the hedge and among the sky blue of delphiniums she spies the right place for Madonna lilies. And I, too, have spied them there in my imagination, but I may not translate them into facts. Hers again increase if anything too rapidly. She has to give away whole baskets of their little corms.

No wonder with such wealth in mind, she is surprised at coming to the end of my small garden. "Is that all?" she questions. "Oh, that next border is your neighbor's." Then back we come by the same path.

Now is the time for giving me prescriptions and sound advice on questions of the common weal. My roses should not be grown in and out of other plants that take their nourishment and they would do far better for harsh pruning to a

## *Garden Aims and Graces*

central bud. My iris needs transplanting. Surely I can see that its tuberous roots have crowded to the surface in the search for space. Phlox needs to be divided yearly, if I am to keep grass from its roots. And she hopes that I won't mind. She can't resist a weed. There! Out it comes, yanking with it a whole tuft of columbine. Then as she thrusts back a naked root, her eye is caught by a suspicious silvering on the larkspur's lower leaves. Mildew! And in her bated breath there is the horror of pestilence and death. What a pity that my plants are done for. But possibly I may still save them by administering Bordeaux. That's good, too, for rust on hollyhocks. She has noticed that mine have it. Hers she has kept safe from taint.

Before she can go further, I turn her to the praise of her own garden and save the remnants of my own. An act of malice, envy, and bad temper, I admit it. Had she come to rifle me, I should forgive her. I could bail out a robber for the compliment he paid me by his act of theft. But how be generous to one who passes by your

## *Robin Hood's Barn*

gold as trumpery and leaves a tarnish on your heap of coin?

Fortunately for my pride I have another friend whose visitation is an act of grace. How swift she is to understand my problems and the goal towards which I work. My front garden she remembers as a place of bleakness and of grilling sunlight. How then have I transformed it to this dim retreat? The gloss of willows, the shadowing from maple and from fir tree will not alone account for a breath of freshness and of coolness like the breath of woods. And at once she sees that the hint is not accidental; that here I have chosen plants not only for their delicacy, but their fragrance; not for their intrinsic beauty, but for the associations they suggest. Campanulas and primroses, starry in their whiteness. So pale anemones add depth to forest gloom. Purple columbines, too heavy and too dingy in the sunlight, lend a richness to the shadows and an appropriateness to the little blades of ferns. And planted close about the pool, the English iris speaks the hidden moistness of the swamp. Any one would think of using foxgloves; but how

## *Garden Airs and Graces*

had I guessed that valerian transferred from the open border would acquire the delicate transparency of meadow-rue; or that sweet-rocket, a drift of mauve beneath the willow, has the same light fluttering grace of wild geranium, that always blows in the half-shade. Even the sudden blue of the anchusa, I need not explain to her. She knows it plays the part of sky glimpsed through the tops of trees.

It is thus with a feeling of elation and of confidence that I persuade her forward from sobriety to the sunny stretch of color that flows backward from my house. Here I may set her free of guidance and be sure she will find company; for to her no flower is dowdy because it is old-fashioned, or vulgar because common, or poor if it but does its part. I prefer, however, to follow at her heels, waiting on her quick discoveries and her slow loitering, and finding all the while a pleasurable freshness in my handiwork as seen through her enchanted eyes.

Her first comment is a chuckle at my obedience to fashion. So I too like yellow—that discarded color; yet not so bravely that I do not keep my

## *Robin Hood's Barn*

fancy hid. She would flaunt such Iceland poppies, their flame crinkling through spirea and anthemis so that it leaps more vivid in contrast to cool whiteness and pale buff. And surely columbine—a rare canary, the primroses and golden iris are not so shameful that I must conceal illicit fondness for them behind a high green hedge. I protest with news of the late comers who will be my give-aways; hypericums that force a gay disclosure, rudbekia that for all their single petals, make a brazen proclamation to the sky. But she will not be convinced of me as a great lover until she finds that I have given blue anchusa to enhance the beauty of a yellow briar rose.

Fortunately she finds other combinations that grow to prove a greater hardihood and these she eagerly commends. If it so happens that her visit is in early June, there are the Oriental poppies, their silver caps a-tumble on staid spires of lupin or caught in their fall by delicate five-fingered leaves. She, too, has Victoria Louise, though she cannot resist a fallen petal and spreads out on her palm its sheen of salmon

## *Garden Airs and Graces*

splotched with black. But how came I by its neighbor which is new to her? How well its deep maroon tones down the brilliance of the others to the purple lupin hoods below. Mahoney, is it? It ought at least to be Prince Regent. For its rebuke to gayety she would call it, John of Gaunt. Or perhaps instead she stops before a group of peonies. They came from my father's garden and you might call old-fashioned, their rich, glowing red. But was it art or accident, she asks me, that placed beside them the perennial cornflowers that have caught the crimson just above them in their shaggy disks? She professes, too, that she would never dare to try her hand at my long border where my courage lies in my restraint. Have I the faith to think that in all those lavenders and pinks a magenta is not lurking, or that a hectic rose will never spread through the cool pinks? All very well, now that I have columbine to help me. It is a mediator despite its spurs. Yet let the phlox once come into its own and she will wager that I have a quarrel on my hands. She has, however, a long pause for the rising mist of garden heliotrope, for clumps of

## *Robin Hood's Barn*

white and purple iris, for the thridding of spiced pinks and tufted pansies that is my signal of success.

Better still I like to have her come upon my favorites, so inevitably do they prove her own. No hybrid perpetual in the market can compare in fineness with the damask rose. Let Frau Karl Droschky lift her wax white petals. She is too immoderate and too soulless in her chastity. So is the Lady Alice Stanley too arrogant in her reserves. Even Ophelia will go mincing beside this thoroughbred of old colonial gardens, with her light yielding grace and frank simplicity of heart. Surely, too, it is not the flavor of a name that gives its bravery to York and Lancaster. With what a swagger, it displays its badge of blood! At the same time, my friend feels as I do myself, that roses I could best spare from my garden. Much would it lose of richness. But to do without campanula would be to extinguish all its starry lights. Without the columbine it would lose all its dancing gayety, and without the larkspur, aspiration. For sense of humor it must have the chuckle of the violas. And how might



## *Garden Airs and Graces*

it keep its mystery without the opium poppies that hold strange dreams close-curtained in their folds. My friend, in short, has caught the spirit of my garden and does not see its failures for the quickness of its charm.

To such a one I offer all my bounty and care not how lavishly she helps herself. At the same time I am not surprised by her last act of courtesy, which is refusal. To sheer off bloom, would be to spoil her vision of my garden. In the autumn she will hope for a remembrance. Her present compliment she pays by making out for reference a list of all the seeds and roots which she desires:



**XII: *Aid and Comfort to the Enemy***





## XII: *Aid and Comfort to the Enemy*

**W**E live each summer threatened with invasion. On the side where danger lies we are protected for a little by a marshy inlet, a moat flooded at full tide. But just where it passes out from under the high rampart of our wall and makes its way into the hostile country, it widens suddenly and is lost among the open fields.

## *Robin Hood's Barn*

Here, knee-deep among the brackish pools or at their ease among the meadow bowlders, the enemy, a tribe of Holsteins, are encamped. Their concern apparently is in their cud, and you would never guess that they were laying siege. There is not even speculation in their mild glance. It is demurely innocent of all design and speaks placidity, not patience. If, however, you go farther through the orchard and look over its tumbling barricade, you will see a narrow wavering path that is the sign of their unceasing vigilance. What time that path is worn I have never made discovery. I cannot catch my adversaries at their spying. But I suspect on starlit nights they keep their scouts on duty, beating their way among the bayberries until at last they come upon a breach. For usually it is at dawn that I hear a blast of bellowing which is the signal of an onslaught, or a triumphant proclamation of success.

Unarmed and unaccoutered, I leap to the encounter, and as I plunge through dripping grass with hoe or rake already couched for combat, my anger rises high against my landlord who is

## *Aid and Comfort to the Enemy*

keeper of the gate. His duty it is to repair my fortress and to make it safe against assault. For a moment I resolve in malice to turn the tide of war against him, and by a swift flanking movement to send the enemy scattering through his cornfield, destruction in the wake of thudding hoofs. Full tilt I charge. But as I come upon the foe, the spoils still sweet upon their tongues, I am brought up short by the shock of their reproachful stare. Where there should be dismay and guilty rout, there is only confidence. Once they have seen who it is that shouts at them with lusty lungs, they fall again to cropping. And in the very friendliness with which they take my prods, I know myself for an arch-traitor. Never would they have raised their heads so high in aspiration, had it not been for our stolen meetings; had I not discovered to them the riches of our kingdom; and let them savor furtively of the wealth behind its walls.

My betrayal is not a matter of intention. I have the missionary spirit, not the Christian. I like to give, not share. Self-consciously I dole out bounty, and supposedly from the safe

## *Robin Hood's Barn*

abundance of my own preserves. Awake, moreover, to the insurgency of knowledge, I start each summer resolute that I shall have no dealings with these upstarts; that ignorance shall be the price of past presumptions. They shall nip the bristling tops from little cedars or munch their field grass as though there were no better food.

But at last there comes a day when the first peas are shelled. As they drum into the pan and I feel them spring from under my prying fingers, temptation stirs. How green and luscious they look, those tight round jackets as they glisten in the sunlight. How eagerly would they be snuffed up; how searchingly each long rough tongue would curl for the last pod. Before I know it, I have stowed them in my basket and am off to make my overtures. Warily my trip is made and with avoidance of all open places. For let me come within the range of kitchen windows and I shall meet with sharp arrest. But at length, after careful reconnoitering, I reach a place protected by a grove of maples, and seated on the top of an embankment, I spread my bait enticingly upon my lap.





SEATED ON THE TOP OF AN EMBANKMENT, I SPREAD MY BAIT ENTICINGLY UPON  
MY LAP.



## *Aid and Comfort to the Enemy*

At first I have to do some courting. Under the shade of a big oak the enemy are standing, their heads drowsed forward; and though as I appear they come quickly to attention, they recognize no flag of truce. Nor is their conquest to be made by a mellifluous call. Their bare, bright world of hillside and of lowland pastures has contained few human beings save their owner, whose voice on his chance visits is one of gruff command. But as I lift a handful of the pods and scatter them below me, they catch the flash of green and recognize the signal with an arrested gaze. Their ears prick forward with a strange slow wonderment. There is a pause, low mutterings of confidence, and at last the first ambassador steps forth.

Timidly she comes, with nostrils wide for the first scent of danger, though flinging back from time to time a look of high disdain for the craven hearts who will not even follow at her heels. She stops midway and to conceal an ebb in courage, falls to cropping or lets the spikes of a scrub apple tree rake along her legs. But despite her halts the glamour of adventure is upon her, and

## *Robin Hood's Barn*

she will not cease her solitary march until she has investigated the terms laid down in my glancing heap. At last she is within my range and pauses there for parley, the sunlight hot upon her glossy flanks. Once, however, that she has accepted my silence for safe conduct, her head goes down and a cautious breathing faintly stirs the pods. In a moment her stertorous snuffle is followed by a gulp, and soon I hear the steady crunch of fresh young green. From then on she has no eyes for me. It is only when her earthen platter is swept clean that she lifts a solemn, eager face to mine and proclaims with the last ruminating mouthful that a compact has been sealed.

By the next morning confidence has spread. No sooner do I appear upon the parapet than I am hailed by all the host. This time my ambassador transforms herself to general and with a new swagger comes attended by a cavalcade in single file. She is a stern believer in officialdom, and once she has her head deep in my basket, she insists as ranking officer upon sole rights. Her staff may only salvage what she lets fall. If

## *Aid and Comfort to the Enemy*

they so much as crowd around her in their maneuvering for place, she administers a reprimand by kick or butt. Such autocracy is not to be endured. Insubordination follows and in a few days by mass formation they reduce her to the ranks. The old marching order gives place to a wild charge in which all leadership is gained by wind. And as I recognize myself as the object of this jostling tumult, I make a swift retreat behind my breastwork and receive it with a solid wall between.

From now on my effort is to conceal my perfidy. I cannot teach the enemy that ours is a secret treaty and to be pursued by stealth. They are barbarians, innocent of diplomatic knowledge, and at a glimpse of me they will proclaim conspiracy to the four winds. Let it be borne from the south and it will reach headquarters. I shall be court-martialed, broke, confined. So it is that I attempt to silence their accusing voice.

And indeed I might well silence it forever. For as peas grow scarce, I reënforce myself with apples, early wind-falls crammed into bulging pockets. Dangerous fare they look, as I bring

## *Robin Hood's Barn*

them forth. The very food for colic. But before I yield to doubt, a moist nose is nuzzling at my palm. There is a quick wet slip, a crunch, and a hot breath upon me. At once the horde perceives that here is matter for contention, and a dozen pairs of horns are swiftly tilting in the fray. Lest I be brought to earth, I dissipate the ranks by flinging wide my whole stock of provisions and by stirring up a civil strife, I make my own ignored retreat.

I need, however, but a glimpse of the pushing, crowding heads behind me to know that I have made a tactical mistake. Peas were as nothing, a mere side dish in comparison. This time I have whetted appetite, aroused a conquering lust. Never again will my antagonists be content with simple rationing. Gone are the bleak beggarly days. They will have satisfaction, if not supplied, then seized. Better the earlier summons that drifted plaintively across the meadows in terms of question and entreaty than this full-voiced demand that swells in volume if I venture forth. I cannot even go about my household tasks or creep about my garden without the consciousness

## *Aid and Comfort to the Enemy*

of the disturbing chorus; and as it grows insistent, I am surprised before accusing eyes into a guilty start. Moreover, there are signs of feverish activity. The path about my fortress is now beaten brown. Its battlements are stripped for scaling, freed from the grape vines' curling tendrils and glossy leaves. In panic I attempt to shift my front by strategy and make my entry, not from my own but from my neighbors' fields. But the enemy are not to be diverted by such feints. They change their bivouac methodically, moving up from under cover of the oak tree to a first line trench, held in the open and not ten feet from my wall. There, mustering their number, they stand in close formation, their bayonets lifted, awaiting the signal of assault.

When it comes, it is unheralded. Dusk has settled in the valley; and as I sit off guard upon my porch, I hear only the chafing of the tide and soft squelching noises as a muskrat fares his hidden way among the swale. Then suddenly a sentry gives the sharp alarm. "The cows are in the corn. They're at your Peep of Day." Sack and pillage, desecration! Gone is my weak-kneed

## *Robin Hood's Barn*

altruism, my missionary spirit of enlightenment and of assuagement. With the sacred fury of a medieval knight, I rush forth to the battle, and the challenge that I cry is "a l'outrance." There shall be no quarter. As I bear down, however, on the first invader, she nods a careless recognition and refuses to give ground. Even when hard-pressed with shaft and bludgeon, she sets her legs and raises questioning eyes. And stolidly all the while her mouth travels down a disappearing corn-stalk. It is only after a last tug has ripped it from the earth and secured it with roots dangling, that she turns tail. Then hastily I engage in a new contest and brandishing aloft my weapons, I hurl myself upon each foe. What though I be outnumbered ten to one? My blood is up. No force can stand against my holy rage. I beat them back. I drive them fleeing in disorder. The orchard rings with war-cries and the tumult of the rout. But when at last they are repulsed and there is a lull in combat, I send for reënforcements and recover strength while I mount guard.

They are a long time in arriving. Darkness



## *Aid and Comfort to the Enemy*

closes in and as sentinel, I face a wall of silent, solid black. Somewhere behind it in their ambush the enemy are lurking; and though I cannot guess their movements, I know that they are rallying to attack. With a clutching of the heart, I hear at last the footing of their cavalry. It deepens ominously as it gathers speed. There is a rending of the apple boughs and soon the whole orchard is swaying to the charge. Dim shapes rush forth that gather size as they plunge from the shadows until they loom like legendary beasts. Gone is my elation, gone my valiance. I am no Viking to contend with monstrous hosts. I would make offer of an armistice and before I am battered to consent of half my stores. It is only my pride that keeps weight in my heels. However, just as the column dashes forward I find myself sustained upon both wings. On the left it brings up against my mother's outstretched lance and wheeling suddenly to the right, it is confronted by my landlord whose weapon is his voice. Back it reels, repulsed, into the dark.

But though beleaguering, we are beleaguered. There is no chance of pressing forward to a mil-

## *Robin Hood's Barn*

itary victory. Nor may we bring our prisoners in. For we have set a trap we may not spring and to make good our conquest, we must hold painful vigil at the mouth. We should be in for a long night's watch were it not that at last a lantern wavers down the hillside and that succor comes. This time it is brought by the commander of the enemy who has had news of the fray. Little he cares for our predicament. He gives no greeting, makes no comment, but goes silently to work. Thud follows thud as he levels a portion of the rampart and opens up a breach. And once he has made an exit for escape, he musters quietly his forces till with a crackling of the underbrush he leads them through.

As we make repairs by reconstructing a temporary entanglement, I know that the nice moment for recriminations has arrived. There is no commendation for any meritorious service, and no reward for valor. By my landlord I am accused of willful treason in treating with the enemy and hotly I make countercharge of sloth. Reprimands fly back and forth. Now pressure is removed there is division in the ranks. But when

## *Aid and Comfort to the Enemy*

at last I stand convicted before a high tribunal, there is no need for my judges to affix a penalty. I have brought one on myself. The enemy have learned the way to storm my citadel and in this preliminary skirmish they have been repulsed, not vanquished. Next time they will select their hour more wisely and make profit of the dawn. Gone for the summer is our pleasant intercourse, and gone is my security. I have made sacrifice of slumber and never—not until next season—shall I know “glad confident morning again.”



XIII: *This Thornbush, My Thornbush*



## GROWTH

So far the willow reaches down,  
It meets a hidden spring;  
And in the ripple of its leaves  
Is water murmuring.

So hard the cedar cleaves the ledge,  
It finds its strength renewed;  
And shapes its somber blade and hilt,  
From granite fortitude.

So close the beech tree keeps within  
The dusk which it has made,  
That every silver root receives  
Companionship of shade.

So strong the elm has felt the swell  
Of growth beneath the turf,  
It flows up to a reef of clouds  
And breaks into green surf.







### XIII: *This Thornbush, My Thornbush*

I LIKE color, swads of it." I remember many a morning at Touisset when, as I toiled about the roots of plants noticing only an increase in girth or a new sturdiness of growth, my father would stand behind me, uttering patiently these mild words of censure. In those early days of our garden only the hollyhocks contented him. When in a stalwart array they began to unfold their crumpled petals, salmon, maroon, blood red, he would stand before them, watching the bees tumble over their dusty stamens with a look of

## *Robin Hood's Barn*

infinite satisfaction. But the moment that they had lost their ruffled skirts and I had borne away their stalks to ward off an army of small seedlings, there followed the old complaint, "I like color in a garden, swads of it."

How could one procure it? Even the gardener with an unlimited acreage of seed-beds would have had difficulty in satisfying so exigent a critic; one who took the fields and swamps as his own garden and would lead me, when I made protest of my inability, to a special tangle that he loved, ablaze with our own Turk's cap lilies. They were often some five feet tall, towering well above his shoulders as he stood among them, cap in hand, in token of no mock respect. This place, I think he regarded as peculiarly his own. Certainly he had a scowl for each marauder, and would, had he been able, have stationed as its guard, an angel with a flaming sword.

It was there that I had my inspiration. I could not, to be sure, lift unharmed one of its glories from this cool swamp. But might I not in a smaller, less pretentious way make the fields my seed-bed. Not much later and in secret, I

## *This Thornbush, My Thornbush*

made my first attempt. In a neighboring meadow, I found the furry tufts of the rudbeckia (ox-eyed Susan) which shorn by the scythe of its first crop, was just ready for an autumn blossoming. I waited for a rain. Then all unbeknownst I toiled, lifting each plant with a thick ball of earth. For several days their green concealed them. Then little by little their calyxes relaxed, until one morning I looked out to see their petals open to the sun, a flaunting glow of orange. I had achieved success. At last we had color, "swads of it."

Our walks after this took on an added zest, though we were now encumbered with a spade, and though we were often forced to make return trips to the scene of pillage. We were ambitious in those days and had not yet known failure. That came later when we tried to make our own the ironweed with its deep purple, funereal almost in its gloomy splendor. Our next attempt was the cardinal flower, lifted only by sinking the arms deep in muck. Hectic days followed that act of bravado. Each morning as part of his routine, my father would hurry forth with his own

## *Robin Hood's Barn*

pitcher to fortify it against the summer heat. Many a time during the day, moreover, its drooping stalk would reveal the need of further sustenance. But when at last it had unfurled its crimson banner in the shade of our old maple, as if indeed it had sought there its own habitation, we had again achieved success. Less arduous, though not in transportation, was our garden of fall asters. The most beautiful of these, *Aster Novae Angliae*, only whose full title my father thought was consonant with its dignity, we placed at the rear, a background of rich purple, its flowers folding at dusk their petals over starry yellow centers. And before them, the wild white aster that in autumn silvers our fields like hoar frost.

Then at last content with present store we laid in a treasure for the coming year; *Aquilegia Canadensis*, the scarlet columbine, and the ferns surrounding it, "little polys," as my father affectionately called them, moved together that they might not seem incongruous among our more pretentious purchases; *Iris Prismatica* that grows so thickly through our open swamps that it lends them in its season violet shadows; sweetbriar from

## *Comrades in Crime*

pea-leaves steeped in dew or beans just free of their petals. And for salad, something far better than hearts of lettuce, the tiny twin leaves. By this time they had to take a stroll and straighten their waistcoats before arriving at a wide choice in sweets. My banquet, in short, was progressive, of the sort once in fashion, its object being, however, not the acquaintance with more guests but more food. I am not sure that in my sleep I did not long to be with Shellover and Creep, an unprincipled epicure, too, and with a capacity equal to theirs. In the approved modern fashion I did understand the psychology of my criminals. But that was before I had caught them. Once they were mine, I felt that the obligation should have been mutual and that it was not too much to ask of my criminals to have entered into the psychology of their judge.



**XV: *Followers of Saint Francis***







## XV: *Followers of Saint Francis*

SOME years ago when friends were young and found a bravery in bluntness, there was one who objected frankly to my character. It was, she said, too amiably rounded. It had no corners. In its adjustment to a convex world, it had become concave; and the Olympian serenity which its amplitude suggested might just as well be termed a stodgy calm. I think she even added that mine was a lowly nature, that it hugged the ground, and basked in mellow sunlight, looking never so absurdly bland as in a time of storm.

## *Robin Hood's Barn*

In short, I have never been a wind-break. Gales surge above that never reach me. Mares' tails whisk across an open sky and never catch upon my crown. A mackerel sky will lower and still not rest its sullenness upon my roof. Huddled close along the base of nobler structures, I intercept at best ground flurries. Only such unpleasant little gusts as otherwise would whirl into a corner, only such spiteful little puffs as would find a niche for spiral or for eddy, do I make it my business to send glancing off.

How it happened thus I could not tell you. For my family considered architecturally, are Gothic. Their passions have a loftiness about them and go soaring upward to a dizzy peak. Their prejudices raise sharp battlements, their dislikes will shut like massive doors. Their convictions, too, fly out like buttresses with an opposing jog and thrust. And whereas you might walk around my smooth exterior and not discover where I pointed, their base you would immediately recognize as square and built to face north east.

You will be wise then if you visit me but in

## *Followers of Saint Francis*

the mildest weather. A pavilion built for pleasure is no refuge. When tempests rage, when troubles brew, you had best seek out my people and the girdling safety of their convent walls.

Only you need not hope to enter unless you are possessed of four legs, a creeping belly, or a pair of wings. If you were a dinosaur, they would give you a God's rest from leaping and offer you the porch. If you were leviathan and wallowed up the tide-stream, they would shine with interest and keep dinner waiting while they eased you of your hook. Were you behemoth, they would lead you to the marsh, and in its ooze invite you to cool off your sides. Even were you Adam's serpent, they would apply cold cream and lotion to your head so grievously afflicted and erase the bruise of human heel. But as man, you will not win attention. To gain more than a passing notice, you must crawl or flutter in. For they are followers of St. Francis, that friend of hide and fur and feathers. So are the retreats they offer never cots, but nests and burrows, crevices and lairs.

## *Robin Hood's Barn*

If you do not believe me, drop unwarily into the water-lane that winds slowly backward past our house and act as though you thought it public property. Its chuckling pools are in reality the very place for bait and your net will come scooping up with treasure. But before you have waded to mid-channel, my mother will have heard your splash and stir and be making down the path in a mad scurry. Then will you learn that your presence is affront and that you have intruded on her convent close. In fact, quite as though you thought yourself upon the highroad, you are trampling through each still recess.

Her rebuke is breathless. "Don't you touch my turtle."

Startled, you protest you have not seen him. Nor has she. Some three weeks at least he has spent in retreat, executing doubtless some strange vow of solitude. Even on feast days he is unapproachable and reticent, capricious in his gratitude. At the same time, if you were not there, she might perhaps detect his ugly head thrust forward from the folds of his black cowl and a



HERE HE FINDS IT PLEASANT TO LIE STILL AND WATCH THE FLICKERING  
SHADOWS OF THE WILLOW.

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## *Followers of Saint Francis*

lackluster eye that blinked at her inquiringly. Or under the dark arch of the bridge, she might catch him lying coolly at his ease, his great body stayed against the tide by just the laziest waving of fringed claws. So at least he oftenest finds it pleasant to lie still and watch the flickering shadows of the willow. That twice or thrice a season in the past six years she has so found him or has heard his flop and squelching footfall in the night, is his title to domain and hers to intimate possession.

Only since my mother finds it good to watch her brethren dwell in unity, she makes him share his quarters. They are also the muskrat's who takes them for his swims, emerging from the dankness of his cell in the stone wall for his due share of exercise and pastime. A more quiet purpose, too, they serve when they grow dim in the half-light. For here at dusk night herons come like monks austere hooded in chill gray, the embodiments of a pale spiritual melancholy. Slowly they steal down the corridors of sedge and once they reach the pool stand silent at

## *Robin Hood's Barn*

their vespers. Their quiet service, as lay-sister, I am privileged to share, but your presence, I assure you, will be taken as an act of sacrilege.

Nor need you imagine that you may take delight in the garden which lures you from the road by its bright wave of color. Not for human eyes are its inducements offered. Each fir tree and spruce which you regard for shape and shade or for fine subtleties of texture, my mother judges for the practicable thickness of its walls for nests and by the stoutness of its scaffolding. The gooseberry or cherry which you would plump so carelessly into your mouth with pleasure in its spurt of coolness, is meant to be pouched whole by chipmunk or pecked by robin to a juicy froth. Should you idly beg a spray of columbine, you will be made to understand that its deep cups are serviceable beakers set to assuage the thirst of a long bill or of a curved proboscis. Indeed, the privet hedge I think serves less with its green shield from curious eyes than with its public pegs on which fat yellow spiders may stretch taut their silver clothes-lines. Down this path and down



## *Followers of Saint Francis*

that, you may go only under guidance. Else is it certain that you will stroll blundering in on shy domestic rites. And lest your carelessness turn to intentioned prying, my mother leads your steps with apparent reasons that are her subtle feints. "Would you like to have some roses?" she implores you, as you stand precariously near the pear tree. "There are more buds for cutting in the border just beyond." And how are you to guess that all the bounty she snips off for you, is her glad exchange for your dull blindness to the yellow warblers who were flitting just above you and to a little horse hair cup built snug in a low crotch? Never would you be sharp enough to take your yieldings from the seed-bed as a service to the catbird. Yet how else save by such proffer were you to be induced from the syringa where a clean and brisk-eyed fellow was waiting to take the froth of blossoms in a dive. Only my mother will grow frank in desperation if you disturb the wood-thrush, a shy visitant who in rare times of drouth will deign to use our pool. It is not for you to catch a glimpse of her white breast in an upthrown shower of spray no more

## *Robin Hood's Barn*

than it was meet for Acteon to gaze on the fleet form of Artemis.

Not more welcome are you on the porch, for it long since was taken over and converted to a nursery and hospital for vagrants. At one end, to be sure, there is a private room, decently withdrawn, close-curtained with the broad flat leaves of pipe-vine. This bed is, I think, perpetually endowed. Certainly the same family of robins refurbish it each spring and in late summer leave it waiting, trim and tidy. But at the other end, walled with wistaria and stanchioned by a climbing briar, there is a public ward where berths are given out without regard for race or creed or color. Even English sparrows, pariahs from all other charitable organizations, are given welcome here. Indeed, in the top tier they take the adventure of maternity like the coarse peasants that they are, with a frank talk of all its signs and symptoms. Certainly they shock their little chirping cousin upon whom they look down with no regard for her shy reticence and nervous apprehension.

It is because of her, however, that you may not

## *Followers of Saint Francis*

stretch out in the Gloucester hammock and let your mind fill with the peace that brims rich pasture lands and sun-soaked valley. For with each slow creak and swing of the long chain, my mother sees a tiny cinnamon cap upraised until at last a fluttering bravery has end in rout. Then will talk grow distrait until the house physician has explained that you had better change your seat since eggs are perilously cooling for your pleasure.

But, if when nesting time is over and the nursery left vacant, you sup with us upon the porch, you will find the shoe upon the other foot. It is you who are imperiled. You will not think perhaps the quiet scene in front could hold a threat. The pale arc of sky, the spreading shadows that reach softly out from waning light, the salt breeze that smells of dusk, lead you to expect a meal where all is dilly-dally and calm leisure. But in a moment you are springing from your seat as a black wasp, straightforward and direct, comes swinging towards you with his long legs trailing. He is a lean and vigorous fellow, you are sure of that, and of his personal malice. It

## *Robin Hood's Barn*

is only quick avoidance on your part and an uncertain lunge on his, that prevent the parry and thrust of swift collision. As you seat yourself again, you find another wasp has dropped upon your plate and is punctuating his slow progress round its rim with tilt of tail and quivering vicious stabs. Then to calm your perturbation, my mother will explain that if you pay him no attention, eat so to speak around him, the chances are he will not harm you. You are merely in the right of way to his especial vaulted cell beneath the eaves.

It is within the house that you will find the strangest topsyturveydom and most extravagant reversal. A window that must not be opened, less for the danger it will bring to you than for the disturbance to the yellow-jackets whose nest of wattled silver hangs pendulous outside. Another window that must not be raised except with careful courtesy for the spider, a black ogre, lurking in his cavern. Or perhaps pinned on a door there is a notice that forbids all entrance until a sparrow, too late rescued, has been given chance for quiet and unhurried death. Last summer,

## *Followers of Saint Francis*

moreover, I received a hurry call from town to make ready for an inmate, this time a wounded pigeon. To me a roomy box upon the porch seemed the largess of hospitality. But once my brother saw a desperate agate eye fixed on him from this prison gloom and a sleek silver breast pressed rounding through the bars, the free habit of his own bureau top came as his natural suggestion. Its usual adornments were not among the real importances of life. Its narrow glossy surface was adapted to quick cleanliness. Newspapers might be spread, a bowl of water might be placed, grain for delectation might be scattered here and there, and lest the coral feet might weary with long standing, there might be sprinkled a soft cool covering of dirt. Suppose the kernels of round corn did whisk upon the floor, or that dust was lifted in a cloud by stretching wings, or water slopped in a long creeping puddle. Was this not after all my brother's room? To share it was small price to pay for the bestowal of emancipation. Not once did it occur to him that such as looked within might find as matter for their mirth, the squatting fig-

## *Robin Hood's Barn*

ure whose plumpness took the place of pin-cushion. There was even nothing to remark when the whole explanation of the matter was so simple.

Yet not so simple seem those folk who hold a different attitude of mind; and it is in conflict with them that I could wish my people in addition to their other vows, had sealed their lips with vow of silence. If my Franciscans you would see at their Gothic best, be with them when they chance upon some victim of man's tyranny or ignorance. Brute cruelty, they call it. A hen too tightly cooped and pecking through the wires for a near blade of grass will send them out to proselyte at once and with no pleasant mincing of their charges. A flock of geese left quacking-dry upon a sultry day will drive them forth to preach the gospel of assuagement and beneficence. A horse, yanked and beaten on the road will transform them to Knights Templars. In a second they are up in arms; the cudgel, not the gospel their stern method with such heathen. And no matter what the provocation for it, let them come upon a biting steel-edged trap, and

## *Followers of Saint Francis*

you are in to hear in a blood-curdling volley the whole round of their anathemas. To expiate such curse, there is no sufficient penance. To them it is nothing that our neighbors look at us askance, that the market-man will pass us by, that we shall be cut off from provisions and from friendliness. Theirs is the blood of martyrs; and though for it they starve or are cast out, they must defend the truth that rises in them. There is no finesse to your convinced fanatic.

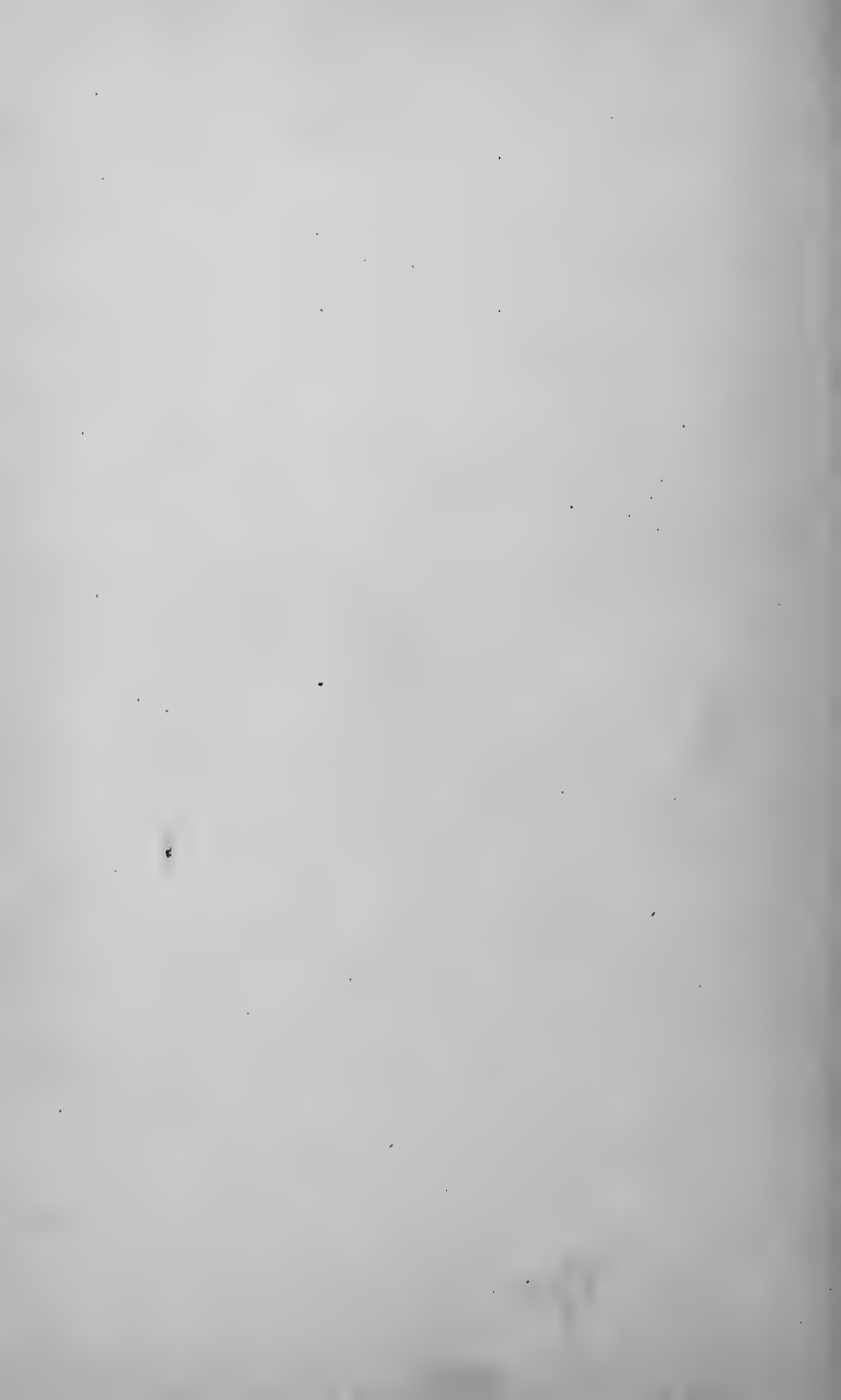
It is these attempts at forced conversion that I make it my business to forestall by my own lowly means of guile and subterfuge. For the hen,—if at least the chances are that she will come within my brother's range, I offer half my store of chicken wire and the suggestion that she might lay better for a little freedom. For the geese, I fetch and carry surreptitiously on a warm day until I set them guzzling. You might even think that I was one of the devout and not a lover of mere human amity. For the horse, left waiting in the road and likely to gain punishment for his willful edging towards the hedge, I idly amble down the path and keep him out of

## *Robin Hood's Barn*

mischief by stuffing with long wisps his eager, quivering muzzle. I have even contemplated planting lettuce at the burrow of the woodchuck in little weekly crops. Such at least as I conceive them are my duties as lay-sister to this order of Franciscans; those humble offices which preserve relationship between the austere brethren of the convent and the unprofessed and unenlightened who so blithely go their gait outside our walls.



**XVI: *Parting Guests***



## RAG-TAG AND BOB-TAIL

Rag-tag and bob-tail,  
Finery won't last;  
All display is laid aside  
Now that summer's past.

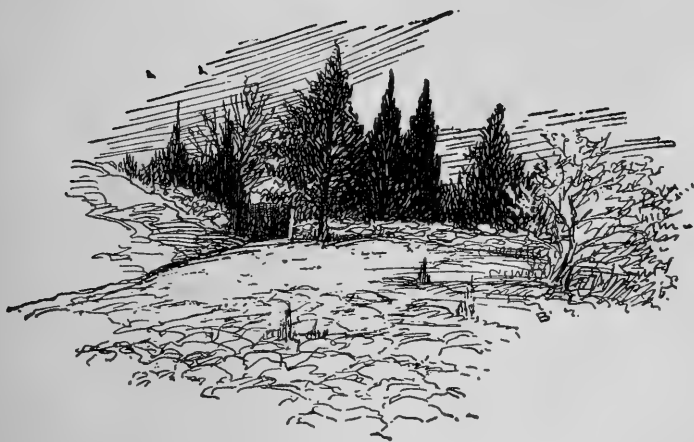
The catbird's doffed his cutaway,  
The robin, his loud vest;  
The oriole, his robe of flame;  
The quail, his visored crest.

There's tarnish on the marigold,  
The corn-flower's blue cockade  
Is rent and tattered. At their edge  
The dahlia cuffs are frayed.

The poplar's lost its glossiness,  
The willow tree its gleams,  
The facing of the maple leaves  
Shows wear along the seams.

Rag-tag and bob-tail,  
Who would ever guess  
Spring's young joy in foppery  
And in gaudiness?





## XVI: *Parting Guests*

**I**N the Chinese language there is a picture for the word "hospitality," which any foreigner might guess. Two quick strokes of the pen in a fork to represent a biped, a flat stroke above him, the proffered roof. Take the horizontal stroke away and you have mere man, destitute and seeking shelter. Add it and you stand committed. What you have is his. That that simple act is fraught with responsibilities, we discovered, when in a similar attempt to communicate by

## *Robin Hood's Barn*

sign language, we planted vines about our porch. And how lavish we were with our offer, much as if the Chinaman had repeated his symbol down the length of an interminable page to catch first, not the understanding, but the eye. At one end it took the form of a pipe vine, its great leaves a flat curtain against the sun. In front, of rambler roses whose comfortable crotches could not be missed; and over them to eke out the foliage, the akebia twined its delicate five-fingered leaves. At the other end were tangles of soft clematis and a wistaria to furnish stiff support. Was it any wonder that those who flew might read?

Such an offer we should never have extended to human beings. We live in a churlish fashion back from the road and talk a great deal of our privacy and the length of our approach. We like people to come when invited. We do not like them to drop in. But let there be a flicker from an early redbreast and there is a supply of string already cut. In a moment it is strewn about the grass where a quick eye may see it. Let the chipmunk scamper across the lawn. He will hardly have assumed his pauper's attitude and

## *Parting Guests*

have settled himself upon his little haunches before a supply of grain is under his quivering nostrils. It takes bird or beast to find our manners.

When, thus, on our arrival for the summer, we found a robin had installed herself upon the porch we at once surrendered ownership. If she had taken possession of the front door, well then, as proper hosts we took the back. There was a magnificence about that act of surrender that should have been attended with a greater pomp. No royal abdication could have wrought more personal inconvenience. Bags, boxes, trunks, were heaped up at the rear by an irate expressman who had no patience with such fineness of courtesy and who refused to manipulate them through the smaller door. It seemed a pity that it should look less like an act of hospitality than an eviction. But that day no foot was set upon the porch, and when night came, the curtain was drawn early that the light might not shine into the robin's eyes.

Later we found that we had acted with an excess of courtesy. Our guest was quite willing

## *Robin Hood's Barn*

to share her province. Indeed, I think she preferred to; for, as she sat spread out above her eggs with the tip of a tail and her shy head showing, she would cast a friendly eye upon me as I passed beneath, quite as though I gave diversion to her patient vigil. Sometimes her mate would scold me as I whisked a broom about the porch and from his vantage point on the top maple twig, would flap his wings and give sharp testy squawks. But his displeasure seemed to come from a masculine aversion to my house-cleaning rather than from any personal distrust. And surely on the day the eggs were hatched, I was taken into confidence. There was a tap of the bill, a quick turn of the head to see if I was watching. Then as I betrayed my eagerness, the mother bird would settle to her task again with an upward tilt of the beak that was sure reproof to my mere spinster's patience.

But after that day she had little time for me in the midst of her busy, flurried trips. Her mate, with whom I now made close acquaintance, was far more formal. His advance was methodical and made in calculated stages. Three hops up



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the steps and a flick of the tail, a flutter to the chair-back then a quick dart to the nest while all the time a worm was dangling down his waist-coat. It was his duty to provide, but he took his time about it and gave it an air of pompous condescension.

In a short time three yellow beaks appeared above the rim, opening at the first sign of approach. Then only I learned the meaning of the word "maw." There was no closing them. A quick gulp and again they were open. A few more days and three long necks were visible. It was at this stage that I marveled at maternal pride. But when at last the birds had feathered out and sat facing me, their beaks tilted upward and their white bibs showing, I berated myself for my distrust. By this time they had begun to give themselves airs. They would plume themselves like old fops, they resented cuddling; and even on cold days when their mother tried to hover them, she found it awkward work. No sooner would she settle over them, than a head pried up each wing and a small plump figure would sprawl out from her breast.

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At last an evening came when protection was no longer possible. That night as I pulled the curtain down, I think I sensed their danger, tucked in for the first time without a sheltering wing. But I was not prepared for the sharp cry of anguish that later brought me to my feet. I arrived just in time to flash my torch upon two beady eyes and a large gray figure scampering down the vines. When at last I had clambered to the nest and put my hand in, it was empty. Then as my mother held a flaring lamp, I reached about the ground below. In a moment my hands were on something soft and warm, a fat, downy, little ball. Then another. The last I thought that I should never find. Indeed, had I not had in mind the evil face among the vines, I had given up the search. But finally I came across it, cowering perilously under foot. The first receptacle that we found in our desperation was the fireless cooker. There, after covering it with a warm cloth, we left our charges ill-contented with their new abode.

I slept impatiently that night. I could not bear to think of the long patient weeks of brood-

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ing and with no avail. At an early hour I heard a quick eager caroling. It was followed by a hush, the silence of discovery. When into the cool gray dawn I had rushed out with my burden, the father was already on the trellis, a worm dribbling from his beak, the mother making frantic search among the leaves. As I moved the tin upon the lawn and waited, they eyed me with suspicion. Was I making sport of tragedy? But as I lifted one fledgling in my hand, then placed it fluttering on the grass, there was an instant sign of recognition, a quick tilt of the head. Back I put the bird and disappeared. In a moment I saw the mother swoop to within a foot of the can, hop towards it cautiously, peck its gleaming surface and then listen, head cocked on one side. Round and round she went, much as I might have encircled an oil tank had I known it to contain my offspring. At last after a breathless pause, she hopped upon the rim and regarded fixedly the miracle before her eyes. But she was above all things practical and was soon on the wing in search for food. Once I was sure that the tank had conveyed the idea of home, I moved

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it to the porch, and as she fluttered to it, almost before I had set it down, I knew that I at least was vindicated in her eyes.

And well I might be, for from that day my labors far exceeded hers. Each morning, to be sure when I arose at dawn to put out my hungry charges, their parents were already waiting, though now quite patiently with worm in beak. But after all they were providers and their duties were intermittent. I was nurse-maid and mine never ceased. There was no reasoning with my foundlings. No amount of pressure could convince them of their present safety. They simply didn't like the fireless cooker. They had only tolerated their nest because it gave them an unimpeded outlook on the world outside. Sometimes a bee had buzzed by and they had opened their little beaks, or a fish-hawk had swooped by and they had cowered in a delightful terror. But this was prison without a view. They protested, they summoned up their growing strength and in two days the strongest of the trio had fluttered to the rim where he sat hunched like an old man, yet with a look of inquiry and daring in his young

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eyes. Nor was it long before one and all, they had passed from my control. I could only guard them from afar, heading them off from places of danger by driving them in a quick succession of hops across the lawn.

In the daytime the mother seemed quite confident. As I met her running down the path attended closely by her hungry brood she would scold me roundly for my officious watchfulness and bid me cease my interference. But at dusk she grew plainly anxious and would summon me to her assistance by sharp squawks, fretful at first, but insistent if I delayed. Then as I appeared bearing in one hand the fireless cooker, she would flutter low before me until one by one I had gathered in her flock. They, too, seemed to expect me as they crouched low in the grass like young runaways, their beaks uptilted for a peek at my covering hand. With that one sign of resistance, however, their bravado vanished and they were ready to snuggle down. In these bedtime rites the father took no part. He would merely select his perch as spectator and watch with an interest which, if keen, was detached,

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and held nothing of obligation. But once I had started homeward with my burden he would follow me with song, uttered just before flight as an act of exquisite courtesy.

One evening I was suddenly aware that I had heard no summons. I suspected that silence meant my discharge, but I wished to make sure. Low on the syringa bush I found the mother. This time she made no move to share her secrets. She flew by without sign of recognition. Indeed, I might have been a nurse-maid whom she had dismissed. Yet, glad as I was to be rid of my charges I could not return her slight with indifference. I had been in the family too long for that. Instead I continued my search until high in the grape vines, I came upon a figure, wee and defenseless, but with a determined clutch to his claws and a set to his stubby tail that bade me defiance. Protection I saw at a glance would be an insult. He was no mollycoddle, but a man of the world.

Lonely as I was at their departure, I was determined that I should have no more guests. Had I been the Chinaman with the scroll I should have

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quickly made an erasure and scratched out the roof. Unfortunately, however, my offer of hospitality had been put in more permanent form. I could not uproot it. Whenever it met with an eager acceptance, I could only rush forth with a broom and proclaim by acts of persistent discourtesy that my invitation had been recalled.





**XVII: *Condescension that Withers***





## XVII: *Condescension that Withers*

**I**F you purchased a cheap car, you would not, I know, engage a chauffeur who had run only those of an impressive make. You would have the wisdom to foresee machinery turned mulish and an engine stalled. But I have never hired a gardener who, because of his own garden, did not have a snobbish attitude towards mine. The worst of it is that these men are not really gardeners but such as “oblige me” with scant extra hours of daylight. They have other tasks in which they exert professional skill. I employ

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them, moreover, as mere implements to turn the soil. Certainly I do not hire them as advisers, as scientific producers of crops, and least of all as critics. Yet let them set a foot upon my place. What a swift glance of appraisal they cast! What a look of contented rivalry! The most that they can hope to accomplish for my garden is to make it approach a little distantly, the patriotic vision that shines forth so jubilantly from their eyes.

To see them you might not believe me. There is Healey, the flagman. All day he slumbers by the station, his chair tilted in the sunlight, his cap drawn down over his purple cheeks and heavy jowl. His insignia of office droops in one lax hand. Even when he trundles to the track his red flag is only half unfurled. Yet somewhere under his slouching figure there are muscles that are firm with hoeing. His rounding shirt-front has been double creased in a stiff fight with weeds. I know—if at least there be any justice; for I ache in every limb, and Healey's tomatoes have begun to flower while mine are but a single

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stalk; Healey's beans are up the bean-poles while mine have not begun to coil.

And there is Tim. He shovels coal of nights at the pumping station, sleeping in the morning and emerging late in the afternoon like a little gnome who has ventured forth to find the daylight blinding. There are certain tasks that I should never think of giving him. Even as he turns the sod, his small legs staggering under his big shovel, it is only my sex and his boasts that keep me from lending him a hand. But while my potatoes are a scant two bushels, mere little brown eggs that leave my fervor at low ebb, Tim's have grown unblighted and in half my ground he has tripled my yield.

With Patsy I feel less humiliation. As he comes up the drive in his scarlet blazer, his broad face and gold teeth shining under his visored cap, you could best imagine him chinning with the bleachers or sending a swift ball to third. In reality he is a barber. Is it that I often wonder that makes him so skillful with his clippers? What trim edges he leaves. Is the gravel path a collar to his imagination? Do the peony bushes

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stand out from it in the place of ears? In any case when he has finished, the garden has a professional cut. But leave him for an instant. In that instant all the children of the neighborhood will have gathered close about him. Or he will have wandered up the track to borrow a hoe, or he will be sending his great voice down the drive to hail every passerby. Even under my direction, he works with half an eye. The other eye is down the road where human interest travels. "There is a man who can take the heart out of your razor for you." He points with a flourish at an indistinguishable figure. And a moment before he had been telling me that my roses threw a lovely bloom. Now when I work I set my mind upon my task. I look firmly to the end of the row that dazzles in the sunlight and bend my back towards it like a mole, my mind closed to all distractions. Yet this man who can work so nonchalantly has kept me enviously peering through my pea vines for the first white bonnet.

Nor does the pride of these men stop with their own prowess. It has other forms with which it is as hard to cope. Healey's father was a gar-

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dener on an English estate. He himself was thus brought up on ribbon beds. If you will listen, he will tell you. First a row of lobelia, then feathery-few, then Phlox Drummondii. He rolls out the last name as the proudest part of his inheritance, and with a contemptuous glance looks down upon my edging of clove pinks. His foot is already on his spade in menace. Mine to him is a grubby little place. There, there were "h'acres and h'acres of h'orchids." Do you wonder that he cannot keep to my diminutive paths? His feet once strode up avenues of green sward. Is it strange that he tramples carelessly upon my seed-bed? What was even a "h'orchid from a whole h'acre?" Tim's pretensions rest on one sole day when he toiled in a famous garden in the neighborhood. Since then I may not grow my dahlias as the vulgar grow them in the open earth. They must rise out of grass; though underneath their branches if you look, you will find circles of brown soil cut with a compass and trimmed with disproportionate care. Tim, too, knows what's right. But for sheer undermining growth no condescension equals Patsy's. It

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would be impossible to uproot it. You cannot tell to what inconspicuous places it has reached. It has forced itself indoors. Surely not its province. "Ain't you got electric lights?" you find yourself asked suddenly. And before you can retort, he adds, "I got 'em in my cellar." Or it may suddenly turn personal. As we lean upon our hoes, his eye will fall upon my earth-caked hands. Now he couldn't afford to have his hands look like mine. His he must keep in condition. So it is that when the noon hour comes and I serve him dinner underneath the peach tree, I spread before him the whole bounty of our larder. Unobserved I dine on scraps. So far, at least, I have not learned what he would have had at home.

Is it any wonder that when I am so craven under condescension, the garden should be struck as by a blight. Christian Scientists, they tell me, by holding the thought of infinite affluence may add to their estate. May not these men by an inverse process be devastating mine. Infinite poverty! They would express it differently, but that they hold the thought is evident in every



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glance. Certain it is that under the malevolent spell, my peas must be twice planted, my tomato plants replaced. Even the feelers of my beans that usually reach forth so lustily, must ignominiously be coaxed with twine around the poles. What wonder that they need assistance. Jack's bean stalk grew not so fast as those with which they must contend.

One remedy I have and loyalty compels its use. I should visit some of those other gardens. I suspect them. I have grown their kind myself. But, to tell the truth, though one is but a stone's throw from my cottage, I have never seen it. Instead, I skirt it gingerly, afraid, lest unawares, I shall receive one rash illuminating peek. For if I too have "played the braggart with my tongue," I have also paid the price. And I want mercy, I do not cry for judgment. The devastation that would follow, the ruthless tearing down of jungle growth, is a toll that I for one cannot exact.

THE END

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View in an Daley.

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