

# An OLD COUNTRY HOUSE



ELIZABETH MITTEN GREEN

By RICHARD  
LE GALLIENNE

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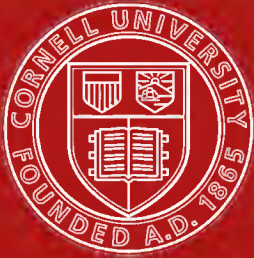
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ELIZABETH ZOTTEN-GARD



E TOO WILL HAVE A GARDEN SOME DAY









*An* OLD  
COUNTRY  
HOUSE

*By* RICHARD  
LE GALLIENNE

ILLUSTRATED

*by*

ELIZABETH SHIPPEN GREEN

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*H. T.*

*Kære lille danske Moder—  
busk Din Stue venter altid  
paa Dig i det gamle Hus!*

*The Old Manor, Chiddingfold  
18, September, 1902*



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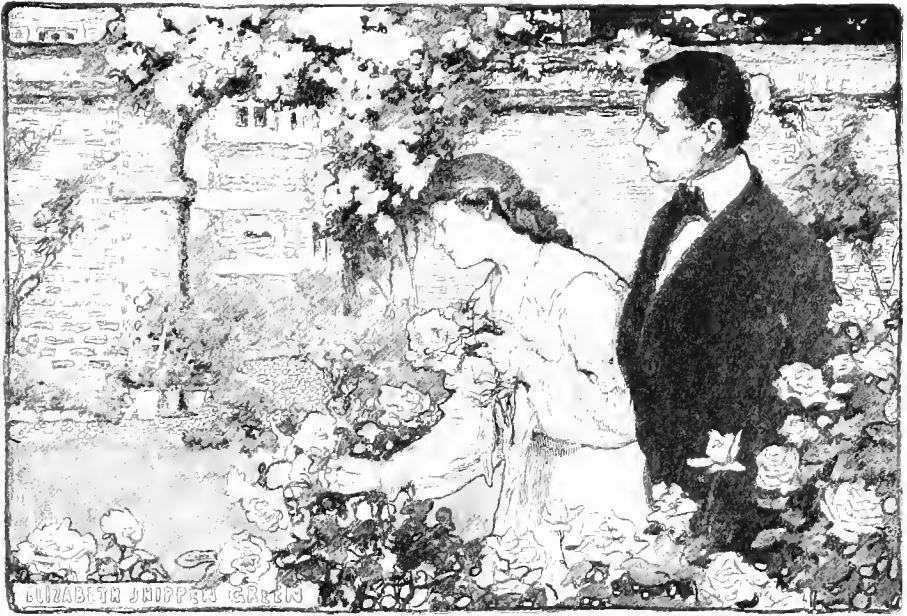






An Old Country House





## An Old Country House

### I

PERHAPS, dear reader—if you will excuse so old-fashioned a manner of address, not inappropriate in the connection—perhaps it has not happened to be one of your dreams to live in an old house. Perdita and I, however, almost as soon as we dreamed of keeping a house together at all, had agreed that, if possible, it must be an old house. Of course, to live together was the main thing, though we could afford no higher rent than that of a hollow tree in the forest; but to live together in an old house would be best. It was a dream that had to wait. Waiting is said to be good for dreams. Meanwhile we did not live in a tree in the forest, but in a little red brick box, one of a neat row of suburban cottages facing a bit of old woodland which still defied the steadily encroaching town. Things had prospered with us the year or two in the little red

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brick box, and the dream of the old house came back. An old house with an old garden—cut trees, a lawn of green velvet, and a sun-dial. Already I knew that Perdita saw herself on that lawn in the spring sunshine, leading a flower by the hand, with the sun-dial and two white peacocks against the well-clipped yews.

“We must have espalier roses,” said Perdita.

“Certainly,” I said.

“*La France, Anna Olivier, Gloire de Dijon, Étoile de Lyon,* and, of course, *Maréchal Niel,*” said Perdita, dreamily.

“It will be like growing beautiful words,” said I—“publishing little books of rose leaves.”

“And we must have old brick walls, with peaches and nectarines ripening in the sun.”

“And pear-trees,” I said, “in a trim attitude of crucifixion.”

“We shall have to look after the wasps and earwigs,” said Perdita; “they are terrible with the peaches.” . . .

“We must have nets,” I said, vaguely.

“To keep off the birds, you mean—yes! We must have nets for the strawberries.”

“Will it be necessary to protect the asparagus?” I asked.

And then we both laughed, for our dream had not yet advanced even as far as a single earwig. We had not even consulted a house-agent.

It was a bright morning.

“Take your bicycle,” said Perdita, “set up a stick, and ride in the direction it falls—till—”

“Till I come to the asparagus.”

“But, whatever you do, don’t forget the sun-dial,” cried Perdita, as I sped away in the green direction of Surrey.

Now, though of course Perdita and I knew nothing about

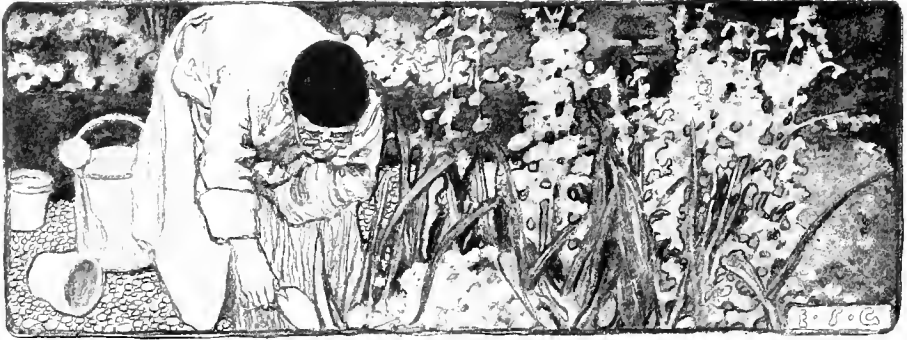
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it, it had happened that, about a month before, in the very house Perdita was dreaming of, an old bachelor gentleman had died. He was a great Shakespearian scholar, we afterwards learned from one of the church-wardens, and somehow we got to think of him as a sort of Edward Fitz-Gerald. A bookish, smoky old man, fond of stopping and talking to children, we decided him to have been. He had lived in the old house for nearly thirty years, had sat with his pipe looking out upon this village green before either of us had been born. We have always felt a sort of gratitude to him for keeping the house for us so long. If he had died even a few months earlier—as an old tired man might have been forgiven doing, for he was up on eighty, as you can read in the church-yard—we should certainly have missed it. And now that we really live in it, and Perdita has her nurseries and white peacocks, and we set our clocks by a sun-dial, we sometimes catch our breath as we think how terribly near we came to losing it. Only yesterday Perdita gave a little shudder, and laughed as I asked the reason.

“You never will guess,” she replied, “but I just thought of that fat man who walked in front of us from the station the first day we came to look over the house, and who we were sure was walking straight to take it before we did. Do you remember?”

Indeed I did, for I never felt so sure of anything. He was the only passenger except ourselves by the train, and he walked eagerly, just as people do when they are going to look over a house they dread some one else is going to take. He looked prosperous too—a man who would keep horses, we said—a man who would outbid us, give the landlord twice the rent he asked just to get the place . . . (rich men always

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do this). Therefore you can imagine our relief when he turned off sharp to the left half a mile from our village. So far we were safe. There was no other enemy in sight, though we almost dreaded to set eyes on the dream-house, lest the "To Let" notice should be missing from the windows, and a busy stir of painters and paper-hangers in the old rooms.

But no! We were safe as yet, though we had many tremors to go through before the old house really became ours. Of course, like people of the world, we offered the landlord less than he asked, and were sorry next day, when the agent told us how two colonels and one general were already after it, men who were willing to spend quite large sums on the place. Finally I signed the agreement with a hurrah, and the two colonels and the general shivered houseless in our imaginations. We felt quite sorry for their disappointment.

## II

We are sometimes asked if we don't fear ghosts. Perdita once made a charming answer.

"Of course," she said, "if it were some terrible ghost

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with its head underneath its arm, I should be frightened; but if one day I were to meet some wistful poor shadow on the staircase, some wandering, unhappy soul, I should only be sorry for it, sorry to have intruded on its reverie."

And I am sure Perdita spoke the truth.

As a matter of fact, an old house would hardly be worth taking without its ghosts. Not, of course, dreadful, visible ghosts such as Perdita spoke of, but those memories, or rather suggestions of memories, those hints of long-abandoned habits, those marks of masterful characteristics no longer heeded, which a sympathetic imagination piously materializes.

The nearest we have as yet come to a ghost apprehensible by the senses, was a ghost that appeared, so to say, to our noses—the ghost of an old man's tobacco. It met us almost as soon as we entered the house on our first visit. It was unmistakably present in the room to the left of the hall, which has now been transformed into Perdita's boudoir. It disappeared with the dainty new paint and the Perdita wallpaper, and though I have since sat alone in the room for hours at a time, I have observed no trace of it. A jar of Japanese pot-pourri seems to have overpowered it forever.

For this I confess I am sorry. For what more pathetic ghost than an old man's tobacco! I wish now that I had



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chosen the room for my study, for then it need not have been banished, but might have mingled, indeed, with congenial company. Perdita's cigarette smoke is hardly so potent as her presence, and there can be little doubt but that that old ghost would strongly disapprove of Perdita's smoking at all.

Yes! I think we might have done so much for our old predecessor—allowed lodging, so long as it cared to stay, literally for his kindly old breath in one of our rooms. We have more rooms than enough for ourselves. In fact, there are several we do not use at all. Unfortunately these seem to have been unoccupied by him too. Evidently his fancy was for that front room looking out across the green. There it was that he was still unmistakably present the day we invaded his peace with our noisy future-running feet. And now it is no use asking him to come back—though, I assure him, should he chance to read this, that if he will give us fair warning, so that our first introduction to each other need not be of too startling a nature, nothing would make us happier than to make his old room ready for him at any hour of the day or night, as near like its old self as we can guess it. Only let him convey us some message that he will accept our invitation. We might leave a Shakespeare closed on the table, and if on our next entering the room we found it open at, say—a passage which I'm sure the old man loved—the lines about Perdita's flowers in the "Winter's Tale," we would prepare ourselves to receive him, have a jar as near as we could guess of his favorite tobacco, and a church-warden, all in readiness for him.

Kindly old man, come back if you will to your old room. We would not drive you away with the sound of our young



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voices. There is room enough in the old house for all of us. You who loved young voices love ours, bless our little children, and you shall find us tender to your old dreams! But if "Old Fitz," as we call him, has not appeared to us since the day his tobacco smoke was cruelly driven from its hiding-place in his old and, it must be said in all reverence, hideous wall-paper, we have frequent indications that he is as yet far from having given up possession of our old house, though he smokes in it no more. There are many of our neighbors who, it is evident, plainly see him still sitting at his window and moving about our rooms. This is particularly true of a charming middle-aged lady who is our next-door neighbor. She also has looked on the village green for nearly thirty years; and for all that time our old ghost was one of her dearest friends. Can you wonder that it is *we*



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who seem the ghosts to her, and that when she comes to take tea with us she seems hardly to see us, to be, in fact, looking through and beyond us—at the kind old friend who is gone, and is still there?

Though as yet he is far from completely created in our imaginations—and we hope to know him much more intimately through traditional hint and glimpse—he is still real to us beyond all the other ghosts who have left marks of themselves, dim or more or less clear, upon our old house, and to whom we owe so much for its beauty and comfort. Of these there are several of whom we desire some information. We would, indeed, particularly like to meet:

1. The three ghosts who in August of the year 1762 carved their names unostentatiously—quite obscurely, in fact—on three of the red bricks built in the side of the Georgian part of the house. Their names are Coates, Diddlesfold, Chalcroft. We surmise them to have been three friends whose fancy it was, while the new house was building, to take each an unset brick, write his name on it, and then get the bricklayer to set the three bricks in the building as a memorial that in August, 1762, Coates, Diddlesfold, and Chalcroft were good friends and glad to be alive. If that surmise is correct, the present occupiers of the house are just the people to appreciate the fancy. We desire, therefore, further acquaintance with these three ghosts.

2. The ghost who laid out the garden, and every ghost who contributed to its present charm; the ghost who thought of the sun-dial; and the ghost who planted the cut yews.

3. The ghost who sings Lillibullero in the low-roofed dining-room at three in the morning. Perdita has not yet heard him.

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4. The particular ghost who was so fond of roses.  
5. The ghost that makes a noise like soft snow against the window on February nights.

6. The ghosts of the little children who lived in the nursery in Elizabeth's time ; and the nearer ghost of a very little girl, aged between one and three, who once sat on my knee, but is now quite a grown-up lady and goes to boarding-school.

Yes! our old house is full of ghosts. But no!—we are not in the least afraid.

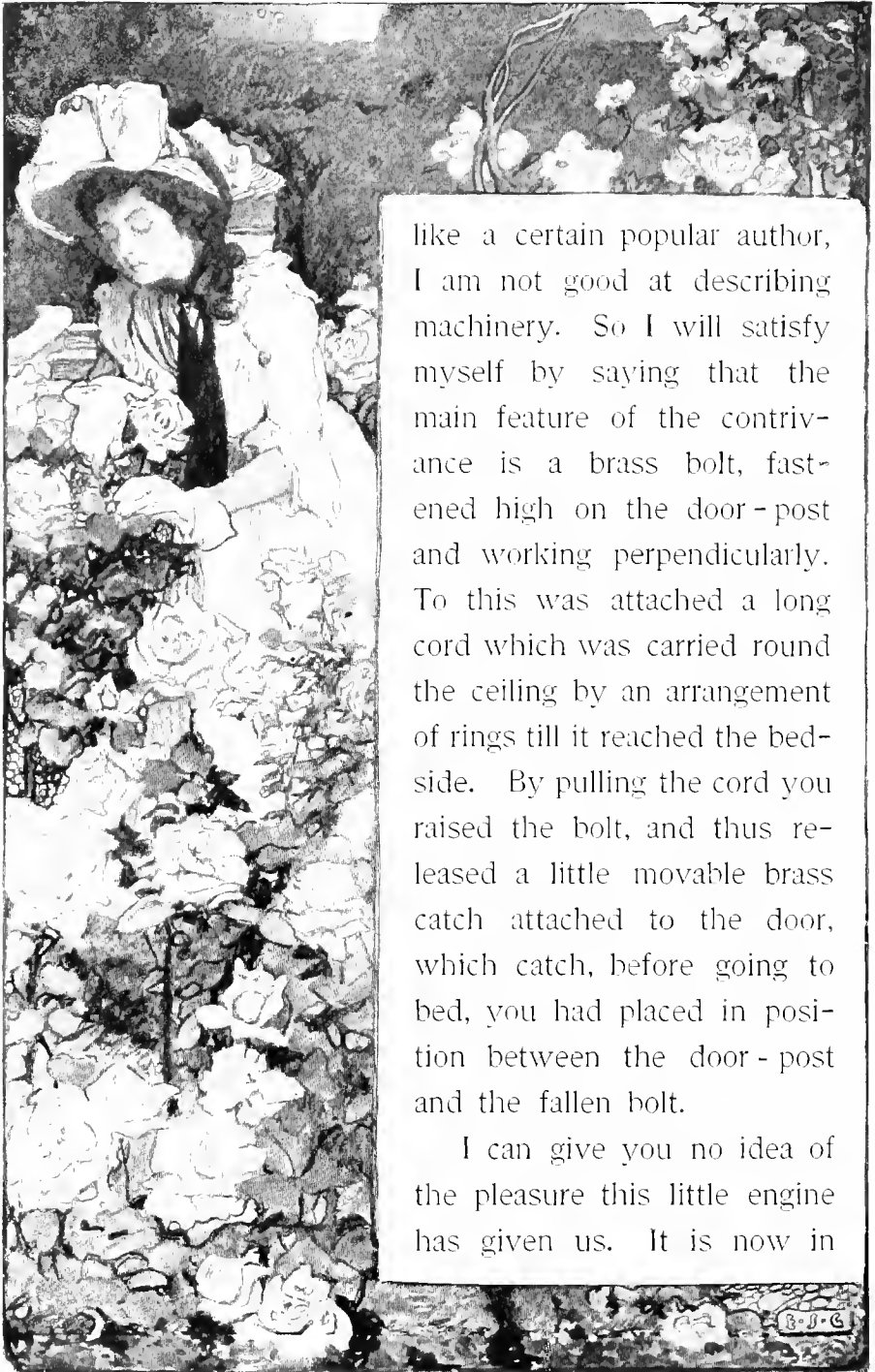
### III

Perhaps one of the greatest charms of an old house is the number of superseded contrivances which it contains, naïve engines of the antique domestic economy long since improved upon, the apparatus of methods no longer a part of the living science of existence.

That powdered wigs are no longer common, are, in fact, seldom worn nowadays, by no means subtracts from our delight in the powdering closet attached to Perdita's bedroom, with the hole in the door through which the fine lady or gentleman meekly placed her or his head as on a block, so that the great puffs should not shower their whiteness over the whole exquisite figure. I am sure we are far happier in it than if we actually put it to its proper use.

In Perdita's room, as in two other bedrooms, there is another device of the use of which we were ignorant till a young eighteenth-century friend of ours explained it to us. It is a curious brass arrangement attached to door and door-post, by which you were able to fasten your door at night and unfasten it in the morning without leaving your bed. Un-

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like a certain popular author, I am not good at describing machinery. So I will satisfy myself by saying that the main feature of the contrivance is a brass bolt, fastened high on the door-post and working perpendicularly. To this was attached a long cord which was carried round the ceiling by an arrangement of rings till it reached the bedside. By pulling the cord you raised the bolt, and thus released a little movable brass catch attached to the door, which catch, before going to bed, you had placed in position between the door-post and the fallen bolt.

I can give you no idea of the pleasure this little engine has given us. It is now in

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ancient working order, and we bolt our door at night just for the pleasure of unbolting it in the morning in the way they unbolted it a hundred years ago. This, you may observe, is childish; but a certain childishness is of the essence of enjoying an old house. That enjoyment, more than most of our pleasures, is largely one of the imagination. It is a kind of intellectual play-acting, a running accompaniment of make-believe, which must not be allowed, of course, to become obtrusively dramatic. One lives in an old house to live one's own life, after all—not seriously to ape the life of its former inhabitants. But that life is lived, so to say, in the atmosphere of a strange old perfume,



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to a faint music of old violins. It is the modern uselessness of those various naïve contrivances of which I have spoken which is no small part of their charm. They have ceased to be useful—and so are become beautiful.

To understand the full truth of this axiom, you must visit the kitchen quarters. These form a veritable museum of the culinary art. It is a museum from which I am debarred during the day, for obvious reasons; but sometimes at midnight, unseen save by the cat and the black beetles, I take a candle and explore its Egyptian silence. I am never tired of looking at the old spit with all its wonderful clock-work. Following the stout string that runs from it through the wall, I come to the little cupboard of clock-weights that work it. I open the door each time with new wonder. Strange that an ancient method of roasting beef should seem so romantic. It is the astrology of cookery. Hard by is an ancient apparatus for brewing beer. How I dote on the old copper boiler, inspect the various taps, raise the copper lids! The whole thing affects me like the word “home-brew”—“tasting of Flora and the country green.” But we do not brew our own beer, all the same.

That reminds me of the cellars—wonderful catacombs which once more illustrate that charm in uselessness which belongs to an old house. I stand among the whitewashed wine-bins as I might stand among the ruins of Thebes. I call up old vintages as one might recall the names of old dynasties. Ah! what illustrious lines of the royal grape have made their successive dwelling-place where—Oh! abominable!—we now house our coal. Names of vintages of wine rise before me, splendid as the names of old kings, and famous dates emblazon the cobwebbed dark. Ah me!—not one bottle left of

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all that ancient glory. Sometimes I dream that on one of my midnight explorations I shall come upon a secret door, and, by the lucky working of a spring, find myself standing before a hidden treasure of old wine. Meanwhile we cannot think of mocking those underground palaces of the grape with our modest store of claret and whiskey—for which a humble cupboard gives ample room.

### IV

However, if we do not make its proper use of the spit—that astrolabe of the kitchen—or brew our own beer, at least we make our own time of day. So long as the sun shines we are independent of the village clock or our own watches—which is fortunate, as those new-fangled time-pieces seldom agree. We take our time fresh from the maker. No mechanism intervenes for us between the birth of time and its registration. For us time is born and registered at the same moment. The sun has no sooner made a minute than it is ours, and we can watch him making the next. It is not, I understand from learned authority, unimpeachable Greenwich time—except on four days in the year. These four days are April 15, June 15, September 1, and December 24. On these days you may rely on catching your train by sun-dial. During a few days of November, however, it is apt to make you miss it, by—not more than—sixteen minutes. You will hardly miss your train by so much. Sixteen minutes is the maximum. You may only miss it by ten.

The fault—if fault it can be called—is, of course, with the sun, not with the dial. As every encyclopædia knows, the

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sun, compared with the stars, is something of an idler. He takes an average of some four minutes a day longer than the stars to his daily round. The stars may be relied on to a second. But while, in a sense, the sun is equally punctual, his is that subtle punctuality which has the appearance of unpunctuality. So to say, he is always punctually late. This is one of those conditions of being a dial—instead of a sun—of which it is useless for the most beautiful bright-faced dial to complain. And, after all, an average unpunctuality of four minutes a day is nothing to make a fuss about,—there is something endearingly human about it,—whereas that cold punctuality of the stars perhaps accounts for our feeling them so unsympathetic to our warm mortality. All really human beings miss trains. And, if this axiom be conceded, the sun-dial is thus seen to be a friend to human nature.



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Not Greenwich time, but garden time. The time made by sun-dial is time as superior to that made by city clock as milk fresh from the cow is superior to milk fresh from the can. Each minute of it is superior to a town minute as a new-laid egg is superior to a town-laid egg! It is, so to speak, real, unadulterated time, time running pure as the running brook, and possibly purer—time which tastes of wild flowers, like honey in the mouth, time whose hours and quarters are chimed by birds, and whose minutes are ticked by grasshoppers ;

So many hours must I tend my flock ;  
So many hours must I take my rest ;  
So many hours must I contemplate ;  
So many hours must I sport myself.

So is the good time of the dial well spent ; or say thus ;

So many hours must I read my book ;  
So many hours must I smoke my pipe ;  
So many hours must I walk abroad ;  
So many hours with my children play ;  
So many hours with their mother talk.

It is the natural clock by which to do the beautiful work of idleness ; the clock, as Lamb beautifully said, “appropriate for sweet plants and flowers to spring by, for the birds to apportion their silver warblings by, for flocks to pasture and be led to fold by.” As that motto which took Hazlitt’s fancy on a sun-dial near Venice declares—*Horas non numero nisi serenas*—it only counts the sunny hours. And these it counts with a gentleness that makes one forgive the inevitable record. It is not, like the clock, a Cassandra crying aloud of the swift-coming end, interrupting our happiest hours with grim re-

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mindes that they are surely passing. It is only too glad that we should forget; and sometimes, with the connivance of a friendly cloud, it affects that time is not passing at all, or at least mercifully refuses to tell us that we have already out-stayed our appointed hour in the sun. This friendly characteristic of sun-dials is sometimes frustrated by mournful people who will insist on the *memento mori*, and inscribe the kindly dial with lugubrious reminders of our mortal state. Sun-dials should have cheerful mottoes. Here is one I made for Perdita's:

Shadow and sun—so too our lives are made—  
Yet think how great the sun, how small the shade!

The optimism here is, I fear, somewhat too sententious. Yet better be sententiously cheerful than sententious after the manner of a death's-head. Here is a homely rebuke of such worm-ponderers:

*Sic transit*, sayst thou? Well, then, let it pass!  
Wouldst be a glutton at the feast of life,  
And eat and eat, and ever fill thy glass?  
Well-fed, Content lays down his fork and knife.

Were one careful to celebrate sun-dials after the manner of Izaak Walton, one might proudly produce august spiritual authority in their favor; and I confess that I never look at our sun-dial without thinking of the good king Hezekiah, whose life was prolonged by the Divine consent, apparently for the sole but excellent reason that he loved it: "*O Lord, by these things men live, and in all these things is the life of my spirit.*" So cried the King of Judah in deadly fear that his hour had come, and that he should "behold man no more

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with the inhabitants of the world." Perhaps there is no more human cry in the whole of literature; and so great was the humanity of it that God, at the intercession of His prophet Isaiah, took pity upon the king who loved His world so well, and granted him a reprieve of fifteen years. Fifteen years! It must have sounded like eternal youth.

Fifteen years more of springs and summers—measured (and this is the point) by "the sun-dial of Ahaz." For, said the prophet: "This shall be a sign unto thee from the Lord, that the Lord will do this thing that He hath spoken: Behold, I will bring again the shadow of the degrees, which is gone down in the sun-dial of Ahaz, ten degrees backward." "So," we read on, "the sun returned ten degrees, by which degrees it was gone down."

This, it is said, is the most ancient reference to sun-dials in literature, and it is curious,



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therefore, to note that on this, the first recorded occasion of its use, that should be seen to happen which has so often been declared impossible since—that the hand should be seen going back upon the dial! Ah! to be Hezekiah, King of Judah—with fifteen new, unexpected years to spend! “O God, put back Thy universe, and give me yesterday!”—as the hero of a famous melodrama cries in a moment of agony. No! Says the *memento mori*:

Soon shall the shining circle cease to run;  
Soon shall to-morrow turn to yesterday.  
That knife of shadow cutting in the sun  
Cuts patiently thy light of life away.

But all these sad thoughts have nothing to do with our sun-dial. It only counts the sunny hours. Finally, I would make a practical scientific claim for sun-dial time over time as told by ordinary clock and watch. If it is unreliable compared with Greenwich time, it has compensating advantages. Personally I have never felt any real curiosity as to the time of day at Greenwich. I never find myself saying: “Now I wonder what time it is at Greenwich?” Who would not forego Greenwich time for a clock that will tell you the time at such fascinating places as Peking, Agra, Surat, Bagdad, Constantinople, Aleppo, Rome, Madrid, Amsterdam, Bantam, Mexico, Charlestown, Moscow, Barbadoes, the Bermudas, Jamestown, New York, and Madeira—and such a clock is our sun-dial.

Think of the wonderfulness of being able, thousands of miles away on an English lawn, to tell the time at Peking! What will science do next? It is like knowing the time of day in the moon. And that reminds me that Perdita's latest

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fancy is for a moon-dial. I confess, too, that if one can imagine anything more fascinating than a sun-dial, it would be a moon-dial—the veritable clock of lovers! A certain famous horologer of the sixteenth century, Sebastian Münster, of Basel, invented a moon-dial; and there is a wonderful sundial in one of the college courts at Cambridge which can be used as a moon-dial too.

Yes! we must certainly have a moon-dial in our garden.



CARPE DIEM HORA ADEST VESPERTINA











I

PERHAPS, dear reader, it has not chanced to be one of your dreams to build a library in a tree-top. If you ever thought of it, maybe the recollection of our arboreal ancestors deterred you. Perdita did not miss this opportunity for a joke at my expense when she discovered my project.

“You monkey!” she laughed; “are you never going to grow up? Are you always going to stay a baby?”

“If I possibly can,” I answered.

About that time Perdita and I were somewhat anxiously awaiting the event in regard to a certain business matter; and we had said to each other that if all came about as we hoped, we might each buy our heart’s desire—however useless and absurd it might seem to others—to the extent of ten pounds apiece.

Now I well knew what Perdita’s desire was, though I would not tell it, at present, for the world; and I was equally certain that she could never guess mine. At all events, we were pledged to each other not to ask or tell—till the money came true.

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Meanwhile, however, we both secretly plotted so to prepare our plans that, whether the luck came our way or not, the plans must be carried out. The idea which gave me so much secret happiness was only indirectly my own. I trace its inception to a little, adventurous daughter of ours, aged two and a half, who had been strictly forbidden to stray outside the children's corner of the garden, and on no account to tap on the prison window of work from which I daily look out on the lawn, and the great trees, and the whole dewy, shining, lazy world.

There are exceptions, however, to all rules. Freya is old enough to understand that. And when you have found a strange and somewhat terrifying bunch of young birds fallen from the big tree and making sad little noises on the ground, surely there is no harm in clutching one firmly round its long, yellow neck, as though it were a turkey, and tumbling across the grass to that forbidden window to tell the studious supreme being of your little life what has happened. You may have an idea in your small head, born of previous escapades, that that mysterious being who scratches inside there all day with a pen rather likes to be interrupted ; so you go bravely on. Within a few yards of the goal nurse spies you and calls reprovingly, but you know it is only stage-thunder and take no notice. You know in your baby heart that if you fall down a yard or two from the window, it will be all the better. But this time you don't ; instead, you arrive proud and safe with a choked fledgling in your firm fat little hand.

Now when Freya brought me to the foot of the two giant oaks which make a temple of green shade in one corner of our garden, and showed me, with plaintive baby explanation, a fallen broken nest, I forgot for the moment that I was the

## OUR TREE-TOP LIBRARY

decorous supreme being of her blue-eyed life, and became a bird-nesting boy again. "Why, how long it is since I climbed a tree!" I said to myself. "How much has happened since then!"

"I wonder if I can," I said presently, looking up the latticed bark longingly. "Anyhow, here goes." After some tough scrambling, which would have been nimbler a few years ago, I found myself firmly seated in the first fork, some twenty feet above Freya's wondering eyes, looking up at me like daisies from the grass.

And then, I confess, I momentarily forgot my little friend, for a great desire to climb up and up, to explore this green heaven of fresh leaves, had come upon me. I was only a few feet from the ground, yet how hidden it seemed! How secret and alone I felt! My memory told me that a few yards away was a busy house running in my humble name, that a minute or two ago I had been writing at a desk, that my wife was writing her letters for the afternoon mail, that nurse was sitting lengthening a frock for Hesper under the Japanese fir, and that presently Emma would be carrying the tea-tray to the shady side of the great rhododendrons. My memory told me all this—but I didn't believe it. I was alone in a palace of leaves, chamber and chamber of which opened out before me as I climbed higher, and the sky came nearer. I firmly believe I should have reached the stars but for a voice that presently came up to me from the foot of the tree, fathoms deep in leaves—

"Hush-a-bye, baby,  
In a tree-top—"

It was Perdita singing derisively, and while I hastily descended,

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Emma caught sight of me as she was carrying the tea-tray across the lawn.

But I could see that Freya respected me all the more.

### II

I didn't mind Perdita's banter. I had got my idea—thanks to Freya, who was presently carried in tears to a less exciting world. I had found a fascinating way of spending my ten pounds.

"Your eyes are very bright this afternoon," said Perdita, as we sat over our tea amid the mellow light and sound of a country sunset.

"They are bright with bird-nesting."

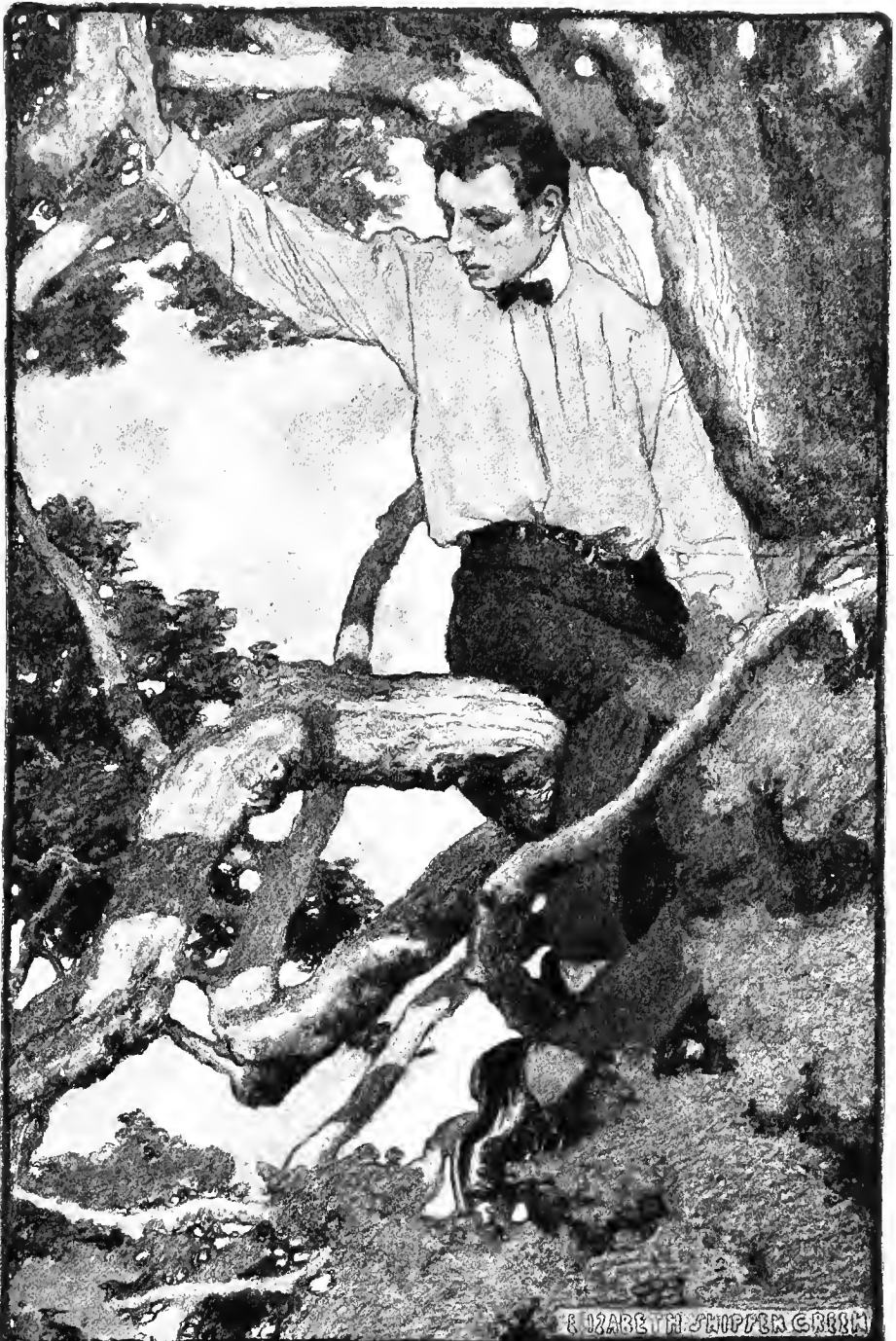
"I believe you are up to some mischief," she added.

I was.

For when dinner was over I pleaded the necessity of midnight oil over an unfinished page, and so soon as all seemed safe I left my study by the postern-gate, and, stealing over the extremely wet meadows, went softly under the rising moon to my friend and fellow-conspirator, the village carpenter.

We call him "carpenter," but such a description implies a limitation which, if he were a more conceited man, he would resent as insulting, for I have never found anything that "Mr. Lee" could not do in an emergency. He should be called "the man of general genius"—and he lives in our village.

I can scarcely hope to make clear to the town reader how absolutely worth his weight in gold is such a man as Mr. Lee in a country village. There is hardly any form of household



WAS ALONE IN A PALACE OF LEAVES

## AN OLD COUNTRY HOUSE

trouble in which Mr. Lee cannot help you. He knows the veins and arteries of an old house like a physician.

No mystery lurks for him in any cistern, however mysterious. No question of water supply or drainage is too baffling for Mr. Lee. When you give up the behavior of the kitchen boiler—you send for Mr. Lee. When the autumn gales choke the old chimneys with smoke—you send for Mr. Lee. When tiles are torn from the roof and the rain is coming in through the counterpane—oh, how glad we are to see you, Mr. Lee! When the well has grown doubtful and the pump refuses to act—please send for Mr. Lee. And in winter, with its romance of snowlit roofs, and its inner agony of burst pipes—well, then, of course, Mr. Lee can just take his pick of the universe.

So over the moonlit meadows I went with my project to Mr. Lee. The little workshop adjoining his cottage was unwontedly lit up. Looking inside, I found Mr. Lee hard at work—on a coffin.

“Why, who’s dead now?” I said.

“Widow Remnant,” he answered. “Dead this afternoon, poor old soul!”

And Mr. Lee ceased his work a moment and touched his hat. He was a boyish-looking little man, with an impish tilt to his nose, and small, clever eyes; and you would hardly have taken him for the father of twelve children. But such is village productiveness. Widow Remnant was well known to me, a bent, witchlike old woman, whom I had often come upon in my walks, gathering sticks, in a scarlet cloak. She lived entirely alone in a remote cottage on the edge of a solitary bit of woodland, and a certain halo of romance had always invested her in my imagination from a village story which connected her with a lawless, adventurous past, in which our

## OUR TREE-TOP LIBRARY

corner of the world was known to have had somewhat more than its share. Widow Remnant, it was said, had been a highwayman's love—in the days, sixty or seventy years ago, when your coach was still liable to be stopped at the cross-roads and your pockets rifled by the light of the moon. The highwayman had evidently loved and ridden away many years ago, but it was confidently stated that she lived still on money that he had given her; and I had never passed her cottage without picturing in fancy some secret corner inside where, perhaps in an old teapot, or an old tea-caddy, she kept her store of antique gold pieces—gold pieces with such various histories: gold pieces, maybe, of some paunched justice of the peace on his way to hang knaves at the next market-town; gold pieces of bronzed sailors walking from Portsmouth to London with their prize-money jingling in their pockets; gold pieces of homespun merchants clucking with terror like over-fed turkeys at the sight of the cocked horse-pistols; gold pieces even of some dandified young officer of the King's Own on his way to visit my lord on his outlandish country estate. I had often been tempted to try to learn Mrs. Remnant's story from her own lips, but she had a proud, uncommunicative old face that didn't encourage conversation, and a sinister something that warned you off. So, beyond occasionally passing the time of day to each other, we had never spoken. Now it was too late to learn her secret, and Mr. Lee told me that there were already several rival claimants for the highwayman's gold.

“When do you expect to finish the coffin?” I asked Mr. Lee.

“In a couple of hours or so.”

“Could you meet me at six o'clock to-morrow morning under the big oaks in the garden? I have a new plan to discuss.”

## AN OLD COUNTRY HOUSE



Mr. Lee was not unaccustomed to humoring my fancies, so he replied with a ready "Certainly, sir"; and next morning when I arrived twenty minutes late at the rendezvous I found him awaiting me. It didn't occur to me till afterwards that for him it was already late in the day. I was a little shy at broaching my scheme, but when at last I ventured to confess it, I was touched by the sympathetic reception Mr. Lee gave it. Unexpectedly, it seemed, I had touched some old spring of boyhood in this father of twelve children, a boyhood I soon found far from being rusty.

Mr. Lee also, it seemed, was still a bird-nester—in spite of his large family. It made me blush to see how nimbly he climbed the tree, I lumbering and crashing after him. When we had climbed to within a few feet of the top, we sat, he in one fork, and I in another, to take measurements. There were three strong forks capable of carrying a stout triangular foundation, each side of which would measure about twelve feet. On this, Mr. Lee assured me, it would be easy to build quite a comfortable little room. That was all I wanted to hear. Thus Mr. Lee aided and abetted me in



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what, in country speech, will no doubt come to be described as my “folly.”

Then we walked the stream-side together, I accompanying Mr. Lee to some distant day's work, discussing estimates, and incidentally talking trout, for I found—whisper it not—that Mr. Lee was an expert night fisherman.

I had never suspected, till Mr. Lee told me, how that little thread of brook, proceeding pastorally under its gnarled willows, so idle on summer days as to be hardly able to crawl its way through the daisied landscape—how it could possibly lead so different a life after sunset. When I had gathered purple loosestrife on its banks, or stood on stones in midstream to pluck the exquisite wax and wool of the arrow-head, I had no suspicion that hidden lines were lying all about me, cunningly moored below the water's edge, fastened to roots of old trees, or anchored by heavy stones, or attached to cunningly unobtrusive floats. But Mr. Lee assured me that such was the case, and that if I could manage to rise some morning as early as three o'clock and brave the dews of the meadow, I should find the river-banks haunted by misty forms—forms that in the daytime were, say, the village plumber, or the barman at the Red Cow, or Tim the Thatcher, or Jack the Broom-squire—anxiously groping for their sunk lines.

So strong is the poaching instinct in man that he will risk an appearance before a justice of the peace for the sake of a paltry trout or two—which it would cost him far less trouble to buy from the fishmonger. Ah, it is not the trout, but that blessed wild instinct in all of us, that makes it worth while to lose rest and run risks for a few ounces of stolen fish. It is not the fish, but the delight of catching them, we seek.

It is to be out under the stars, out in the dew, with the

## AN OLD COUNTRY HOUSE

keen smell of the dawn turning our heads, out under the free, untaxed heaven, hand in hand with the wild things that hate a roof and die in a cage, playing truant from civilization with the warm-hearted, wanton earth—it is for this we poach trout, and it is for this we are absurd enough to build a library in a tree-top.

As I left Mr. Lee and walked back home through the meadows, I heard afar off the breakfast-gong making mellow curves of sound through the house and garden, and I half resented the harmony of that civilized existence, all the wheels of which, thanks to my dear Perdita, run so smoothly and with such a sweet chiming. But as I bade Perdita good-morning in the sunny breakfast-room, and turned to my letters neatly awaiting me on the breakfast-table, I became a civilized being again—though my head was still a little tipsy with the dew.

### III

Of course Perdita knows all about it by this time—you cannot build a library in a tree-top on the sly—and my arboreal library is now one of my many acknowledged follies. It has become licensed by discovery, and passes unnoticed from very familiarity. When I press the secret spring that lets down the ladder by which I climb to the first fork of the oak-tree, and then draw the ladder up carefully after me, nobody cares enough to watch. The need of secrecy is long since passed. This is, of course, all the better, for thus my stronghold of quietness is so much the more my own.

As to quietness, most people, I am sure, would think there was enough quietness in my in-door study to satisfy any rea-

sonable being; but then in-door quietness and out-door quietness are two different things—each charming in its way. Anything more exquisite than the in-door quietness of our old house I cannot imagine. We rented it no little on that account. Indeed, several of the rooms are furnished entirely with silence. Many people would call them empty, and in a sense, of course, they are; for we keep nothing in them but light and darkness. For us, one of the charms of living in an old house consists in having more space about one than one actually needs—from the utilitarian point of view. A house every part of which is actively occupied is spiritually, if not physically, over-crowded. The soul takes up so much more room than the body. It needs long corridors of silence, rooms in which are stored nothing but lonely sunlight—and perhaps apples. Rooms which contain other furniture are really inhabited, and, however carefully vacated by their customary occupants, are apt to distract by alien human suggestions.

In every wisely arrayed house there are always two or three empty rooms—the larger the better—and, of course, in the case of an old house these are not



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only cisterns of silence, but by the fact of our leaving them unfurnished with our modern belongings they may fairly be held to preserve the more completely the delicate aroma of antiquity. I won't say that we keep our stable empty for this reason, though it is quite true that it gives us as much pleasure—of a different kind!—empty (or all but empty), as if it were filled with the champing of the whole —shire Hunt, for which our house was once the centre. Fourteen horses once whinnied and rattled their chains in our old stable—where now a very humble pony dwells, like a peasant in the corner of some forsaken palace.

But I don't think real horses would give us half so much pleasure as the thought of those old hunters, some of which, no doubt, survive in colored sporting prints in inn parlors to this day—equine immortals. Were we rich enough to fill our old stable again with the warm sounds that once filled it—horses, and the purring of grooms, and the sound of pails on the cobbled floor—we should be too rich to enjoy such pleasures of the imagination as those of which I write. Money turns the pleasures of the imagination into realities—which is not the same thing. That, perhaps, is the meaning of the fable of Midas. Were we rich we should probably complain that the stable was too old-fashioned, dark, and ill-ventilated; we should need a bigger saddle-room—charming old saddle-room!—whereas now the stable suits us very well, and the granary and the hay-loft and the coach-house are all equally to our mind. In fact, nothing about our old house gives us more satisfaction than our cluster of russet-roofed out-houses. The beauty of their grouping is most useful to us.

But, Heavens! What a digression! And yet not so irrelevant, after all, for I would have done an injustice to our old

## OUR TREE-TOP LIBRARY

house had I not gone out of my way to give some hint of the catacombs of old vatted silence which it contains.

But in-door silence, as I said before, is one thing; out-door silence is another. However silent your in-door study may be—even at six of the morning sun or of a lamplit winter evening, with the fire-light flickering cosily on your dozing folios—it is quietness in a cage. Silence out-of-doors is the free, uncaptured silence. It is a running brook of silence, as compared with silence caught in a pitcher. It talks all the time—and still is silence. It is silence awake; a silence of gossiping leaves, of visiting lights and shadows, of soft, brooding sounds, of butterflies tilted on a sudden impulse of breeze; a silence which includes the brooding dove, and the lowing, impatient cattle, sweet with milk in the far pasture, the sudden neigh of some old horse, resting a week or two in the meadow, the village clock, the clink of the blacksmith's forge, the crying of village children, and the barking of village dogs.

Were it only for the enjoyment of such silence, it would be quite worth any one's while to build a library in a tree-top.

Apparently, too, since men began to read at all, they have found a peculiar charm in reading out-of-doors—witness the old song, "A book in a shady nook." However rare the page, it has seemed the more attractive from the illuminated traceries of sunny shadows softly swaying across it; tendrilled leaf shadows, and little darting shadows of birds. Our tree-top library systematizes and extends this pleasure. In place of one book we have a whole library practically out-of-doors. For as much as possible of the little room is glass. It is windowed all round like a light-house, and every window is caressed by soft leaves and little tapping boughs. And all around you are birds' nests, and the dreaming chrysalis hidden

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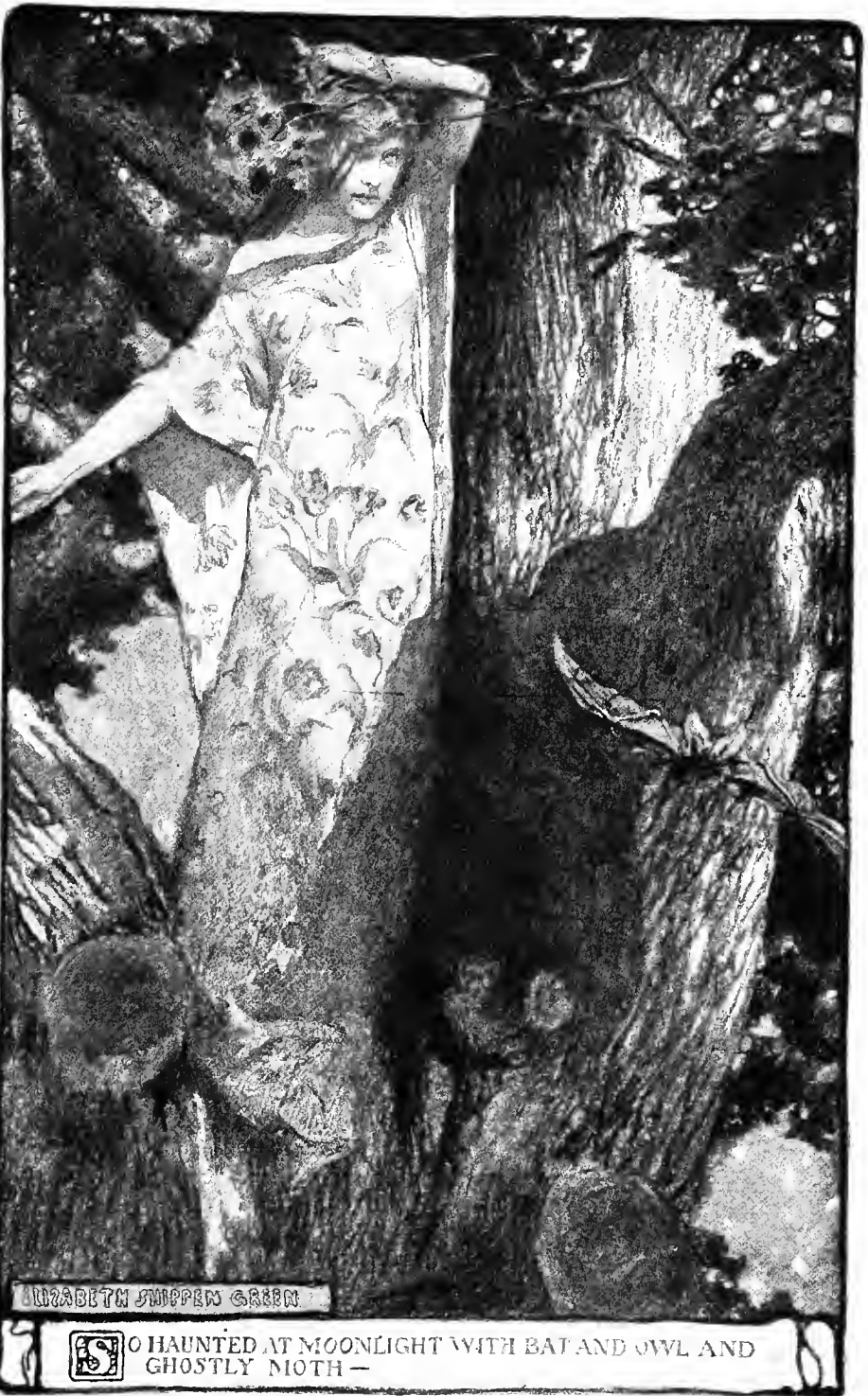
in the wrinkled bark. You can never know till you build your own nest high up in the boughs how much goes on within a seemingly idle tree during a summer day: all the hard work and the pretty play, the tragedies and comedies, the war that is waged and the love that is made, from morning till moonlight; so mirthful at morning with bands of singing birds, so haunted at moonlight with bat and owl and ghostly moth; and maybe, if you blow out your lamp and keep very still, somewhere about midnight the dryad who lives in a dainty cupboard down below will open her hidden door and steal up to peer in through the windows at the moonlit shelves.

This fancy of mine has enabled me to gratify another fancy for the first time in my life.

### IV

I have always wished to sleep a night out-of-doors, but till I built this library I never found an easy opportunity. Somewhat feebly, I admit, I had hitherto given in to the advice of friends who talked oracularly of night-air. Night-air is popularly supposed to be bad for every one, and I was told it would be particularly bad for me. Perhaps for that very reason I have been so anxious to try it.

Of course I didn't tell Perdita—that would have ruined all—and I chose a still, summer night made of soft, warm stars, and I waited till Perdita was fast locked up in the fairyland of sleep. Like all children, she sleeps, without knowing it, from moonrise to cock-crow, and even later; and I knew she would not miss me. Nor did she. Had I been leaving her forever, she could not have slept a deeper sleep. So, without the



ELIZABETH SWIPPEY GREEN



SO HAUNTED AT MOONLIGHT WITH BAT AND OWL AND GHOSTLY MOTH —

## AN OLD COUNTRY HOUSE

slightest hinderance, and with no single alarm, I presently found myself out in the strange, fresh night, with a cushion in one arm and a travelling-rug on the other, and soon I was away up among the leaves, quite near to the moon. No doubt it may seem strange that a man should leave a warm bed and a dreaming wife to sleep out in a tree—as strange as that a man should have a cosey in-door library, with busts, and rugs, and a ruddy, talkative fire, and yet think it worth while to do his reading in a tree.

But before any one mocks me, let him make the experiment himself. If he is at all jaded, if the salt of life has lost its savor, if nothing new seems left, let him lie on his back out-of-doors a summer night and watch the mighty march-past of the stars. If he needs a new sensation, let him try that.

For my part, after that summer night in a tree-top I never want to sleep in-doors again. What nonsense it all proved about the night-air! I never rested so well, and never woke up so refreshed in my life. I admit it took me some little time to fall asleep. But that, of course, was due to the novelty of the experience, as well as to the many gentle presences breathing about me, moaning and sighing in their sleep—not to mention a troublesome nightingale—all in their green beds in the same blue bedroom as I.

And wonderful as the night, no less wonderful was the morning. O, the dew and the lustral light, and the awakening sound and color of things, and all the aroused luxurious perfumes of the world!

Everything preening and washing itself in the dewy glitter, and the morning star kissing its hand to the new day.

Every night a new heaven; every morning a new earth—to be seen in the very act of creation—yet we see them not.



## OUR TREE-TOP LIBRARY

We shut them away behind heavy curtains, and the miracle goes on with none to see it, save the shepherd rubbing his eyes in his little hut on the down, or the workman wearily walking towards six o'clock, or the sailor on the sea.

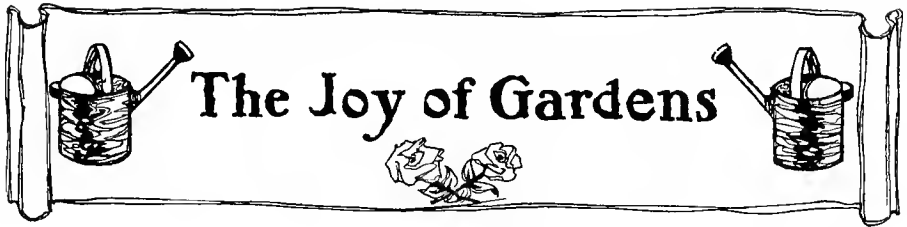
When I was dressed next morning, I peeped in at Perdita. She was still fast asleep, with her head upon her arm, dreaming still—but never dreaming how I had spent the night. I didn't waken her, and I have never told her till now.











PERHAPS no word of six letters concentrates so much human satisfaction as the word "garden." Not accidentally, indeed, did the inspired writer make Paradise a garden; and still to-day, when a man has found all the rest of the world vanity, he retires into his garden. When man needs just one word to express in rich and poignant symbol his sense of accumulated beauty and blessedness, his first thought is of a garden. The saint speaks of "The Garden of God." "A garden enclosed is my sister, my spouse," cries the lover; or, "There is a garden in her face," he sings; and the soldier's stern dream is of a "garden of swords." The word "heaven" itself is hardly more universally expressive of human happiness than the word "garden."

And you have only to possess even quite a small garden to know why. A small, old garden. So long as it be old, it hardly matters how small it is, but old it must be, for a new garden is obviously not a garden at all. And most keenly to relish the joy which an old garden can give, you should perhaps have been born in a city and dreamed all your life of some day owning a garden. No form of good fortune can, I am sure, give one a deeper thrill of happy ownership than that with which one thus city-bred at last enters into possession of an old country garden. O. that first dewy morning, when, before

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the rest of the house is up, you steal out into the exquisite purity and peace of the young day, mysteriously virgin in its clear-eyed freshness! Some of the strangeness of starlight still lingers in the air, and the sunlight slants over the shimmering grass with an indescribable suggestion of loneliness, a look of blended romance and pathos which seems to hint at some lost immortal meaning. Everything your eye falls upon seems to wear something of the same look, and as your eye ranges with a sumptuous sense of proprietorship from end to end of your little domain—the great oaks still sleeping in mist, the quiet shrubberies, the gossamered flower-beds, the sheets of shining lawn, the walls of mossy bricks trellised with long-armed pear-trees, the russet-roofed out-houses—and at last rests lovingly on the warm chimneyed gables where your loved ones still lie asleep, your heart is filled with a sense of home more profound, more unshakable, and more pathetic than you have ever felt before—before you owned a garden.

Perhaps, when we analyze it, it is this deep sense of home which is the most real, the most vital, part of our joy in gardens. A house without a garden is only a temporary home. It is not immediately connected with the great life-supplying currents of the universe. To live in town, in a row of houses where all the necessities of life are delivered daily by parasitical, piratical tradesmen, is to live by proxy. It is a life where all the real work of living is done for you, and therefore not life. Till you grow your own potatoes, you do not really begin to live. You have no true home—though you may rent a charming flat. But with everything you grow for yourself and do for yourself the nearer you approach the possession of a real home; for thus you become literally at home in the world. You are as immediately fed by the life-blood of the

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Great Mother as a deep-rooted tree, or a sturdy little spring laughing up from the foundations of the earth.

That this is no mere sentiment you can soon prove by the easy test of growing your own flowers. So soon as you cut your own roses you will wonder how you could ever have been satisfied with “bought” roses from the florist. Nothing we buy is really ours—particularly flowers. It is only the flowers we grow, or at least gather for ourselves, that are really ours. Suppose you are giving a little dinner. Of course it would save time—and perhaps even money—to send an order to the florist for some flowers for the table; but bought flowers are really artificial flowers, and if instead you have early in the day put on a pair of gardening-gloves and gone out and killed a few of your own home-reared roses, you will be surprised, over dinner, what a difference it will make. The guests may not notice the difference, but you will know; and you will have the same satisfaction as you look at your own home-made roses as you have when at breakfast you beg your friends to try some of the honey from your own honey-combs. Your guests may taste no particular reason for your being so proud of your own honey. There is even better to be bought in the shops. But let them start a garden of their own, with a row of tiny thatched bee-cottages, and they will soon understand. Naturally you love this honey more than any other honey in the world—for aren't the bees that made it your own personal tenants and friends, and don't you say “good-morning” to them every day as you go for your walk over the hill through your neighbor's clover? You know so well where the honey came from, and the rose-bushes from which you gathered these roses are as individual to you as the face of a friend.

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It is with home-grown roses as with home-made bread and home-brewed ale. The accent must always be placed on the word "home." They grow better roses in nurseries, they bake better bread in the professional bakeries, and brewers who have made a study of the subject are said to brew better ale than you can accomplish in your antiquated coppers; but then the prefix "home" makes such a difference to the quality of fragrance and flavor. Yes! our fathers and mothers were right. Nothing is really made that is not "home" made. And nothing can be home-made without a garden. A garden! To grow one's own vegetables, to nurse one's own flowers, to rear one's own chickens, to milk one's own cow, and to keep one's own carriage! This is to be personally acquainted with the universe. All this, you may say, is to take gardens a little portentously. It is to treat of gardens with somewhat of a cosmic seriousness. Well, any one who has a garden knows that unless you take it seriously—there is no garden.

A garden is a thing of leisurely aristocratic old roots and carefully escorted flowers. It brooks no forgetfulness, and will not flourish on perfunctory attentions. It has no blossoms for an absentee lover. Nothing in the world needs so much love, but nothing gives you so much pure love in return. A man really in love with a garden is perhaps safer from the usual human temptations than any other. What, indeed, is there outside his garden to compare for him with the joy and fascination he finds within? What mortal honors can weigh with him against his pride in his distinguished chrysanthemums? And woman has no seductions for the man who cannot take his eyes from his magnolias. And as for riches, no mere money in the bank can bring one-half such a sense of aggrandizement as that with which you walk a friend round your



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garden to show him your rhododendrons in particularly prosperous flower.

Then the mere names of certain flowers and fruits give their happy owner a sense of romantic wealth and distinction in their very mention. "I must show you our old tulip-tree," you say, just as the possessor of a gallery leads you off to see the portrait of one of his ancestors painted by Van Dyck or Gainsborough.

Mulberry-trees carry with them, too, a certain distinction; and think what a romantic suggestiveness there is in the words "quince" and "medlar." Will you ever forget your thrill of happy pride when, soon after you had come into your garden, and were as yet only half aware of all its hidden wealth of sleeping seed and dreaming bulb, a friend better read in the green book of nature cried out, "Why, this is a medlar!" A medlar-tree—think of it! It is like having the Order of the Garter in one's family.

And such surprises as this are among the earliest joys of possessing an old garden. You need to have lived with your garden at least a whole year before you know half it contains: for so many loving hands have been busy burying hidden treasures there long before you came. This demure, out-of-the-way bed may be the coffer containing one knows not what precious spices. Some morning you will accidentally visit that neglected corner and find the lid wide open in the morning sun. Snowdrops have a wonderful way of thus taking one by surprise. They come up through an ambush of dead leaves with the suddenness of fairies in a Christmas pantomime. And perhaps there is no wile of one's garden that so captivates one as this coquetry of surprise. To find a bed of violets you knew nothing of all in full bloom and scent is as though your sweet-

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heart should be waiting for you in the shrubbery without your knowing it, and suddenly throw her arms around your neck. To think that she was there all the time, and you had no idea of it. And all these days the violets have been working away at ascending stem and unfolding leaf and sweetening flower. Oh, the patience and the punctuality of natural things! Maybe you have been idle these past days. Day has been added to day, and you have nothing to show for them; but meanwhile the violets have been hard at work, and in all your garden there has been no such thing as an idle root or leaf. But excuse this lapse into moralizing. Perhaps the only fault you can find with keeping a garden is that it induces to moralizing, and, if not watched, is apt to develop a sententious wisdom, such as you may have observed in gardeners. But gardeners are no part of my present subject, which, you will observe, is—the joy of gardens.

As far as possible, the lover of a garden is his own gardener. A man who leaves all the care of his garden to a paid servant is like a mother who leaves the entire care of her children to a nurse. Need I say that the pleasures of a garden are by no means only in its product, but far more in its processes. If you really love your garden, you know everything that is going on in every bed and in every corner. There is no need to read the little labels on the little pieces of split stick. When once you really know your garden, you know exactly what to expect from every inch of it, and you expect it with all your heart. How lovingly you set your ear to the ground to know if this or that green child of yours is awake and stirring beneath; and when the sap rises again in the old trees, you know it almost as soon as the trees themselves. It is only at first, as I said, that the snowdrops can steal a

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march upon you. Next year they cannot hope to take you by surprise.

Then a garden is full of little secrets and confidences which you lose if you leave it entirely to the gardener, and it brings also little cares that, if you really love it, you would not miss for the world. There are sick plants and ailing trees to think of that no one can look after like yourself, and morning by morning you visit them anxiously and carefully attend to their needs. I knew a strong man who passed for big and brutal with the rest of the world, but I once saw him with his rose-trees. A delicate grafting operation had recently been performed upon one of his favorite roses. You should have seen his face as he examined the tiny, bandaged limb. He could hardly have been more tender had he stood by his wife's bedside during some dangerous illness. He was not always like that, I have heard; and it is true that all a man's goodness and gentleness will sometimes thus exhaust itself through an apparently trivial outlet.

A gentleman who is responsible for one of the cruellest wars in the history of the world is known to have a passion for orchids—though those who see something evil and abnormal in the orchid, in spite of its beauty, will perhaps see a certain fitness in his taste; for that flowers impress one as having a certain secondary spiritual—one might almost say moral—meaning, will certainly not be denied by any one with a garden. And the impression is one which does not always seem explained by association—though, indeed, the extent to which literary association enters into our feeling for flowers, dear for their own sakes, are dearer still to us because of that “laureate hearse where Lycid lies.” Yet literary association alone is far from accounting for all we feel about certain flowers. Why, for example, do some flowers strike such a note of old-world dis-

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tingtion and poignant reminiscences—so much so that we call them old-fashioned flowers, though actually, of course, they are no more old-fashioned than any others. Why do stocks and wall-flowers and hollyhocks seem thus especially to breathe the fragrance and wear the air of antiquity, as though they were ruffs and went in farthingales; and seem, indeed, out of place except in an old-world setting of Jacobean gables and formal walks and clipped yews; whereas geraniums unfailingly suggest the crude, newly made garden of some modern villa. And to say this is to be reminded of an old garden quarrel which cannot be ignored by the lover of gardens—the quarrel always being waged between the formal garden and the so-called “natural” garden. To take an image from another art, as I think is permissible, a garden is at once as formal and as natural as the art of a poet is formal and natural. All art is, at least, three parts nature. But as, in the quaintly ritualistic shapes of some flowers and the courtly attitudes of some trees, nature herself is seen to choose of her own accord a ceremonial way of expressing herself, so oftentimes does poetry, as she dances her glad message from the sources of life, of her own free-will approach us in measured steps of that finished art which, as he who must have known best has told us, only nature can make. A lyric is none the less a “natural” expression because it conforms to a certain rhythmic shape, and a “yawp” is no more natural than a sonnet—in fact, it is less so, for nature is no little of a precision, and, at all events, always insists on organic structure, and therefore form, in all her works. The quarrels between the partisans of the formal and the so-called natural gardens arise from a misconception of this truth, from an idea that to be “natural” you have only to be careless, or imitate in miniature certain “wild” features and broad effects

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of nature, the introduction of which into the limited space of a garden is incongruous and affected to the last degree. A lion or a polar bear would hardly be less in keeping with an English garden than some of the "natural" effects the landscape-gardener occasionally introduces there.

A garden, it must always be remembered, is an out-door extension of the home. It is, so to speak, the green withdrawing-room. It is meant to suggest human occupation no less than the house, and not the untamed wilderness. It is no more that than your blue Persian cat is a panther. Its necessary formalism begins with the smooth-shaven lawn. Could anything be more "unnatural"? Yet even the landscape-gardener does not insist upon grass in its wild state. Of course we know how beautiful it is with its silken, sworded stems and its seeded spires; but the place for it in that state of nature is the meadow, not the garden—for in the garden its purpose is that of a rich carpet, on which delicately shod ladies may walk to and fro, and dainty children may dance. It must be smooth as a sheet of paper to take accurately the white lines of the tennis-court, with its trimly strung nets and its swift-glancing players.

And so with the rest of your garden. It must be just as much natural and just as much artificial as a beautiful woman, and the precise compromise between art and nature is as difficult to hit in one case as in the other. Indeed, there can be no precise rule. Individual temperament and preference must always decide, and thus gardens should necessarily be as different in style and character as their owners. In some the trim and the architectural, the courtly side of a garden, will be accentuated. There will not be seen a grass blade in the walks, nor a daisy on the lawn—oh, slovenliness unpardonable!—nor a

## AN OLD COUNTRY HOUSE

rose-leaf out of place, nor a tree that is not as well groomed as my lady's poodle.

In other gardens that exuberance of green vitality against which the gardener is ever sternly on the watch with hoe and pruning-knife and clashing shears is permitted a license of intrusion which sometimes threatens to engulf the garden altogether. The rose-trees revel in a riotous allowance of unpruned shoots, and wind-blown seeds are allowed to form promising young republics on the lawn. The ivy does as pleases it, getting into the eye of the windows; and if you suggest that so much of their own way is really not good for the fruit trees, you are looked upon as a vivisectionist. You need your winter boots to walk the lawn, and if you are a wearer of skirts, must needs lift them high to guard them from the damp and the various small inhabitants of the grass that seldom hear the whirring music of the lawn-mower.

Both gardens are good in their way. For myself I like best a garden where the balance between formalism and anarchy is somewhat better struck. It seems fit, I think, that the most formal part of a garden should be that near the house, and that it should wander away into wildness in its distant corners. It is happily devised, I think, if, as with many English gardens, it should be walled in on three sides—the house itself counting as one of the three walls—and open to the wild country on the fourth. Your garden is thus, so to say, like an arm of the sea. It is sheltered from the undue violence of the elements, but it is also open to the great life-bringing tides. Many a fascinating waif of the old wilderness will come blown up on autumn gales through that open door, and perhaps stay awhile, with their wandering eyes, in your garden—small, storm-tossed sailors from the great deeps far out yonder—and there are always more

## THE JOY OF GARDENS

stars to be seen at the wild end of your garden. There, too, the dew is freshest, and the morning sun nearer to the heart.

It is strange, if yours is a garden like that, to steal out sometimes after sunset and walk up and down between the home end of the garden and the wild end, and listen to the sounds at each end. At the home end what warm, human, domestic sounds float out through the windows, confidentially opened to the coming night. The day is through in the kitchen, and the servants talk and laugh together with an off-duty ease and expansiveness good to hear; from the nursery come the merry sounds of the bed-time bath, and the nursery rhymes; a restful square of lamp-lit window speaks of some one within slowly sipping her coffee and a quiet book—the housewife, her cares ended, also enjoying the end of the day. The village near by also contributes its warm sounds of relaxation, which will soon be sleep.

Man went forth to his labor until the evening, and now it is evening; and the prayer of his thanksgiving sends a happy murmur up to the evening sky. Such are the sounds at the home end of the garden.

Then you wander towards the wild end of the garden, and the light seems to grow spectral and the air haunted. Here are no warm windows or friendly human murmur, only whispering gleams and beckonings and half-frightened sounds calling you out, calling you away, calling you beyond. The casements of the moon are being opened. The night meaning of the world is being written all over the day meadows; and the woods are filling with witches. As the daylight fades and the stars take courage, the wild voices raise themselves out of the silence. A sudden unearthly laughter comes on the night from some far-away covert, and the night is still again. Then

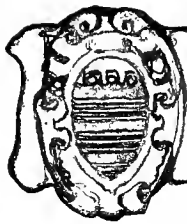
## AN OLD COUNTRY HOUSE

wicked chucklings begin here and there in the darkness, and something sighs at your elbow, and a hidden bird drops a hint of the secret, and a starbeam offers to show you the way. The night wind, perfumed with all the spices of a day's wandering, throws her arms about you, and you hear the little stream that slept all day softly serenading the evening star. O, you gypsies of the night!—with your wind-swept, heather-scented hair; with your waving arms, and your eyes like pools hidden in a wood; with your breath sweet as the new-mown field which the farmer leaves because the day is done; with your voices deep as the voice of the wind in the pines, and sweet as the voice of a nymph in a well—O, you gypsies of the night!

Such is the wild end of the garden.

But it is the home end of the garden that is the real garden—the end where the roses climb the warm wall and look in through the nursery window; the end where you take tea in a shady corner of the lawn, and even dine out on warm summer nights under the great mulberry-tree; the end where the children make daisy chains and play at horses and ring-a-ring-o'-roses; the end near the deep-set door in the old wall that opens into the kitchen-garden—with the asparagus and the artichokes and the strawberry-beds and the netted fruit trees; the end near the dove-cote and the beehives and the chickens: the home end of the garden.





PERDITA'S LOVERS







WHEN I say "Perdita's Lovers" I should explain that I don't mean all the men who have loved Perdita, and been refused—for my sake! Heavens! I am not going to write a History of My Own Times. I am thinking only of two young lovers whom Perdita took under her young matronly wing last summer, and whom—unless they have pleasanter things to do—we hope to have with us once more this July.

"Why, who do you think is married?" said Perdita, reading her letters one August morning at breakfast.

"Julie Fay!" I answered, with exasperating promptitude.

"I hate you," answered Perdita. "Why do you always guess right away—just as though you were a scientist? You

## AN OLD COUNTRY HOUSE

leave nothing to the imagination. You have no idea of the pretty pretences of life. Surely you could have pretended a little interested surprise, connived at a little mystery, for my sake. The longer I live with you the more I realize that you are hopelessly prosaic and matter-of-fact."

"It is Julie Fay, then?" I said, rather proud of having guessed right. But Perdita was once more deep in sixteen prettily covered pages of note-paper, and I waited humbly till she felt the need of my existence once more.

"Dear little people! brave little people!" she cried, as she set down the letter by her tea-cup. "I am so glad! It was the only thing to do—and they have done it."

"Really irrevocably done it?" I asked.

"Yes! Listen to some of Julie's letter—and I wouldn't read it to you if I wasn't dying for sympathy. Oh, how can you be so cynical and middle-aged—at your age!"

"Oh, Perdita—oh, Perdita, kiss me—I am so happy! At last Lloyd and I are married. We ran away last Wednesday, and we've been married just four days. We couldn't bear it any longer. You know how dear home is to me, but Lloyd is dearer; and you know I've been a good girl, and waited and waited and tried to win father round; but it was no use. Mother has all along done her best for us—that dear, naughty, wise old mother of mine—but for once she couldn't get her way. You know father's ambitions for me—and I think you once met Lord ——. Of course I can see father's point of view—dear, good thing. What right-minded father, with the good of his daughter at heart, would willingly see her reject a foolish young lord for a wonderful young musician? The worst of father is that he forgets he was young once and had his romance too. Didn't he run away with mother—when he

## PERDITA'S LOVERS

was quite as poor as Lloyd? But mother remembers, and I know she'll forgive us; and, indeed, though she wouldn't have felt it loyal to father to tell us to do what we have done, yet I don't think it will surprise her a great deal; and I don't think she'll grieve at all—for she'll be quite sure of father taking us back—now that it is actually done. For you know father always liked Lloyd for himself. The only fault he had to find with him was that he was a musician—it was not so much that he was poor. He was a musician! Isn't it strange, dear, how fathers hate musicians?"

So the happy letter ran on.

Presently I interrupted, perhaps unnecessarily anxious to vindicate myself against Perdita's suggestions of hard-heartedness. "Perdita," said I, "what do you say to these little people spending some of their honey-moon with us?"

"You dear!" cried Perdita, changing her opinion of me with illogical suddenness. "Do you really mean it?"

"Of course I do," I replied. "Why should you think otherwise? What's this new idea you have of me? When have you known me deaf to romance, and for how long have I been so prosaic and matter-of-fact?"

"You would really like them to come?" asked Perdita again.

"Certainly," I answered. "Wouldn't you? For one thing, it will be the greatest fun in the world to have a newly married couple to study."

"Cynic! What do you call newly married couple to study?"

"How old is Joyce?" I retorted.

Joyce, I may add—as Perdita declined to answer—is eight, and is just gone to boarding-school.

## AN OLD COUNTRY HOUSE

So it befell, as a result of this breakfast-table dialogue, that Perdita's Lovers came down to stay with us three or four days later.

### II

The two "little people"—though both old friends of Perdita's—were as yet strangers to me. I looked forward with a certain amused curiosity to making their acquaintance. Why, by-the-way, do married people, though they have perhaps only been married a year or two, and are not exactly such Methuse-lahs themselves, always speak of young lovers such as ours as "little people," and also contemplate them with a lurking sense of looking at a comedy?

"What dear little people!" said Perdita and I once more to each other, as, shortly after their arrival, they had gone up to their room to dress for dinner.

"Let me show you to your room," Perdita had said, with, I thought, the most imperceptible of sly smiles. I watched their young faces. *Their* room! Bless them! Oh, God of Love! Oh, Seventh Heaven! Oh, Julie! Oh, Lloyd! Think of it—*their* room!

"Aren't they perfectly dear?" cried Perdita, with that curious, happy elation which a woman—though she be merely a bridesmaid or a maiden aunt—feels in any participation, however indirect, in the hymeneal mysteries.

"And how fascinatingly young!" I chimed in.

"Aren't they? And don't you think she's pretty; and isn't he a fine fellow?"

All of which was quite true, though, as I said to Perdita, it was absurd to call them "little people," seeing that the

## PERDITA'S LOVERS

musician must stand at least six feet two in his stockings—a very viking of the violin—and that Julie stood far higher than his heart.

“Never mind; they are ‘little people’ all the same—just babies.”

“Aren’t we?” I asked.

“I didn’t say we weren’t,” Perdita answered.

“Meanwhile, Perdita,” I said, “they are looking at each other just like this, and saying, ‘Isn’t it wonderful!’”

“Ah, poor children! they little know,” retorted Perdita, maliciously.

“But you forget that Julie has not married a prosaic being like me,” I answered. “Think, dear, if you had only married a musician—how different your life might have been!”

“I do hope he has brought his violin,” said Perdita.

Then we too went to dress for dinner; and when I was dressed I tapped on Perdita’s door, and being allowed admission, I took her hands, and looking into her eyes, said, softly,

“Perdita, is it wonderful?”

“Idiot, is it wonderful?” she asked as I kissed her.

“And how old did you say Joyce was?” I asked, and I added, “It will never do for them to think themselves the only young married couple in the house, will it?” . . . Then holding her at arm’s-length, and critically admiring the new evening gown which I knew she had practically made for herself, “How dear you look!” I said.

### III

If I had really been cynical—and of course I hadn’t been—my last show of cynicism must surely have passed away with

## AN OLD COUNTRY HOUSE

the happy sight of our two young people at dinner. Oh, it was a fair sight! How radiantly reliant they looked in all the pride and perfume of their blossoming lives! Their joy shone about them, literally filling the room with light; it made a sweet atmosphere of spring-time, like a hawthorn-bush in its first milky abundance of bloom. Yes, it is a wonderful thing to marry the woman you love. No wonder the musician looked like a newly crowned king, and Julie, like her name, a fay with the morning-star in her hair. But it was soon evident that she had the sprightliness as well as the beauty of her race. She was not one of your sad little sighing fairies who can only talk moon-beams. By no means. She had the humor as well as the beauty of a fairy. And she had, too, an impulsive naïveté of appeal which made her at home with you in a moment, and caused me to ask her if she were not an Irishwoman—which it turned out she was, on that dear, naughty, wise old mother's side.

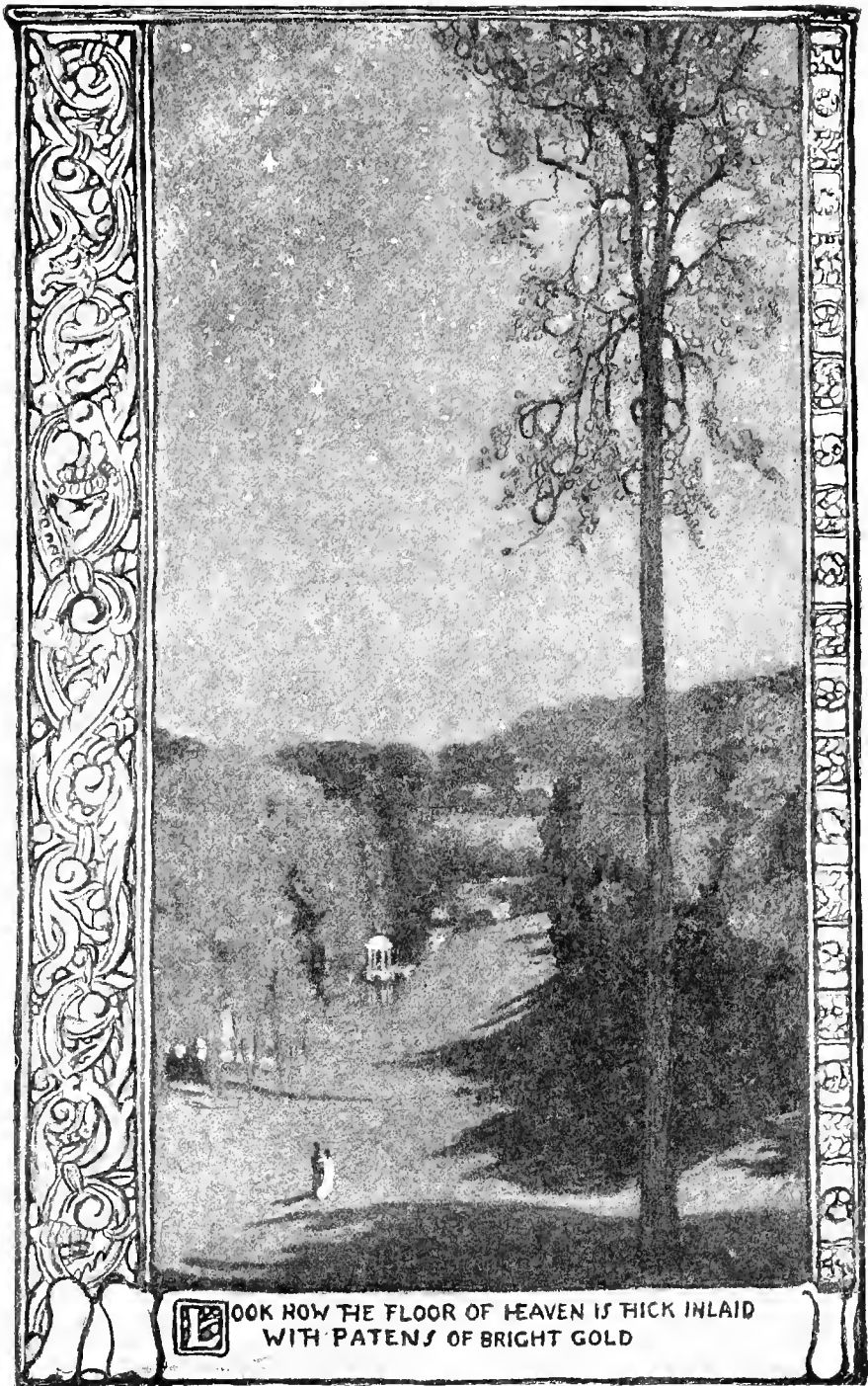
It made us both happy to see how evidently our young lovers felt themselves in their own atmosphere. Almost literally you could see them taking long breaths of it. Poor children! It was so wonderful, I dare say, to find themselves with two grown-up people who knew all about it—two old-established dreamers, who had not forgotten their dreams. They were as eagerly grateful to us as though they had taken sanctuary with us from a pursuing, unsympathetic world.

With the most winning grace, Julie impulsively stretched out her hand and laid it on Perdita's. "Don't laugh at us, dear, for being so happy—but really we are *so* happy! And you know what we've gone through—haven't we, Lloyd?"

At this the serious young-husband lines already forming about the musician's mouth deepened a moment. Then he



PERDITA'S LOVERS



LOOK HOW THE FLOOR OF HEAVEN IS THICK INLAID  
WITH PATENS OF BRIGHT GOLD

## AN OLD COUNTRY HOUSE

smiled at her—a smile to break your heart. Is there anything more terribly beautiful than the love of two young people who are literally all the earth and all the heaven to each other?

“Yes, dear,” said Perdita, sympathetically, “but it will all come right.”

“It *has* come right, don’t you think?” I added, with my eyes on the Two Shining Ones—a remark which won me a beaming smile of gratitude from Julie.

“Indeed it has,” she said; “hasn’t it, Lloyd?”

It was pretty to see how the young bride nearly always concluded her remarks with some such deferential appeal to “Lloyd”: “Isn’t it so, Lloyd?” or, “Don’t you agree with me, Lloyd?” or, “Lloyd thinks so too—don’t you, Lloyd?”

Ah! the present writer was once a similar Rock of All Strength and Well of All Wisdom for a brief enchanted season in a certain young wife’s eyes. But since then the deferential formula has changed sides, and nowadays it runs: “I think Perdita agrees with me too,” or, “What do you say, Perdita?” or, “This is, of course, only my opinion. Ask Perdita!”

Presently, as we grew more and more at home together, we encouraged our little people to tell us of their plans, and I wouldn’t be surprised if there were tears in our eyes as Julie explained to us the wondrous life they proposed to live on some three hundred pounds a year.

“You know we are exquisitely poor,” she said. “But then, after all, if two people who love each other cannot be happy on three hundred pounds a year, they don’t deserve to be happy,” she added, with decision.

I couldn’t help thinking, “It depends how happy you want to be!” But I kept so base a thought to myself.

“Of course,” Julie continued, “our little flat is the tiniest

## PERDITA'S LOVERS

thing in the world. Poor Lloyd can hardly stand up in it, can you, Lloyd? Just love in a cottage—or, rather, love in a four-roomed flat—with a bath. Lloyd had to have a room to do his work in, you know, or we might have managed with three. . . .”

At this Lloyd looked unutterable masterpieces—and so the happy dream-talk prattled on and on.

“I hope Lloyd has brought his violin,” suggested Perdita, presently.

“Indeed he has!” said Julie, with adoring eyes upon the young maestro. “He couldn’t be happy anywhere without it.”

So, of course, Lloyd played for us in the drawing-room after dinner, and Perdita assured me that he played with something like genius. As for me, to my own shame, I must confess a limitation. Music is one of the many languages which I don’t understand. I am sure that Lloyd played divinely, but, like Julie’s father, I’m afraid I don’t properly appreciate musicians—I mean, of course, as musicians. As a mere man, Lloyd was all you could wish. The only barrier between us was his music, and as, after the manner of true artists, his interests were almost entirely confined to his art—and, of course, Julie—our intercourse was not as intimate as I should have wished. To have a musician as your guest, when you yourself know nothing of music, is much as though you should invite a Russian to spend a few days with you—without knowing a word of Russian. Yet, as people speaking different languages manage to communicate with each other by means of signs, so Lloyd and I managed to pick up a sort of acquaintance, and I venture to believe took quite a hearty liking for each other. And I need not say that I listened to Lloyd’s performances in his unknown

## AN OLD COUNTRY HOUSE

tongue with all those airs of eager reverence which the non-musical auditor of music invariably assumes—in pathetic ignorance of the fact that no true lover of music ever looks so uncomfortably enraptured. It is curious how difficult it is to lie successfully about the arts. It takes an exceedingly clever man to look as though he has read a book which he really hasn't read, and I almost think it still harder to look as if you are enjoying music when really you are not.

Of course I knew that Lloyd was not taken in by my painful attitudes of appreciation, any more than I would have been had he pretended to admire some fine passage in my favorite poet. I felt half inclined to try him, say, with one of Shakespeare's sonnets, and see how he would listen to *that* music.

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day ?

Thou art more lovely and more temperate :

Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,

And summer's lease hath all too short a date. . . .

"Ah, what is a violin compared with that?" I would have liked to ask. In fact, later on, I did make just that quotation and ask that very question of Perdita. My insensibility to music is perhaps our only dividing-line.

She replied: "You have no ear for music, dear! Why parade your infirmity?" Then suddenly she remarked, "Listen . . ."

The violin was somewhere in the garden, out under the harvest-moon. We had thought our young people safe in bed, for they had taken their candles fully half an hour ago.

Perdita threw open the lattice and listened. I looked over her shoulder. The garden lay in a dream, all shadows and silver. There was no one to be seen, but, hidden somewhere

## PERDITA'S LOVERS

in one of the shrubberies, a violin was singing like a night-  
ingale. I confess that it sounded mysteriously beautiful, and I  
listened as intently as Perdita. Presently it ceased, and two fig-  
ures came out of the shadow and stood looking up at the stars.

“Shall I tell you what they are saying?” I whispered to  
Perdita—

“‘On such a night. . . .’”

and

. . . “‘Look how the floor of heaven  
Is thick inlaid with patens of bright gold.’”

### IV

Next evening, in the high-strung moments just before the  
dinner-gong, I chanced to be alone with Julie in Perdita's  
study. Perdita and Lloyd had not yet come down.

Julie had been looking over Perdita's bookshelves with  
natural envy. “Don't you think,” she said, “it would be  
worth while marrying if only just to read aloud of an even-  
ing in the lamplight?”

“It depends which of you reads aloud,” I couldn't help  
saying.

“No, but really, don't you like reading aloud?” asked  
Julie, smiling, to show that she had not missed the joke.

“Very much.”

“Doesn't Perdita?”

“Not quite so much as I do—for the simple reason that I  
always do the reading. Haven't you noticed, Julie, that the  
world is divided into two classes: those who love reading  
aloud, and those who don't? Those who don't are those  
who are compelled to listen.”

## AN OLD COUNTRY HOUSE

“Hush!” said Julie, with a charming gesture of disapproval. “You know well enough what I mean. . . . Perdita will agree with me, I know, and here she is!”

Of course Perdita agreed—bless her!—and, so encouraged, Julie continued:

“Lloyd and I have started to read Chaucer aloud together. We are just in the middle of the Prologue. Of course we haven’t had much time—” she continued, with a blush.

“How far did we get with Dante?” I asked Perdita, gravely.

In the nick of time Lloyd entered the room, and we went in to dinner.

This little conversation was but one of many which made Perdita and me look at each other furtively now and again, with a look which I can only call the “initiated look”—a look which said, “Do you remember?” and which said, too, “Is our love any less because it has changed, developed, lost some of its self-consciousness, made itself more at home with us, become day by day more of a certainty, less and less a mere promise, more and more a promise fulfilled?”

We sometimes thought we saw a look in the eyes of our young lovers which seemed to say that we were perhaps a little casual with the mysteries, took them too much for granted, didn’t appreciate with sufficient awe the heaven we lived in. So an acolyte may criticise an old priest for his familiar way with the sacred vessels, or remark upon an omitted genuflection. But not till the acolyte has been a servant of the altar as long as the old priest will he understand that the old priest’s way with the vessels means but a deeper knowledge of and reverence for the mysteries they represent.

## PERDITA'S LOVERS



Young married people are naturally ritualistic in their manners towards each other. To marry has been a very solemn thing to them—as it is to all of us—and they are still a little frightened; particularly when, like our two young lovers, they have run away from established authority. Besides, their happiness is such that they dare not believe it real. If they speak above a hushed whisper, who knows but that it will suddenly vanish away? It seems a thing intended for heaven. How, then, can they assume that it has every chance of becoming prosperously established on earth, and that, indeed, in course of time it may go abroad in a carriage and pair?

Young lovers, like all dreamers, fear the world. They hold each other close and listen. Any moment may bring the lightning. As, after a while, the lightning doesn't come, and

## AN OLD COUNTRY HOUSE

as, after repeated cross-examination, they have become comparatively sure that they really do love each other still—well, Julie dares leave Lloyd's arms long enough to pay a visit to the kitchen, and Lloyd thinks that perhaps he may practise half an hour on his violin without any risk of Julie's being spirited away. So at length, day by day, the leisurely processes of lasting love become revealed to these young people, who once used to kiss in such a hurry that you might have thought the end of the world was due in five minutes.

Perdita and I knew all this, for we had been servants of the altar for nine years. So if occasionally, as I shall admit, the somewhat brand-newness of this young blessedness jarred on our nerves, we took each other's hands on the sly, and smiled understandingly at each other. As, for example, at Lloyd's pontifical way of saying "my wife"! You would have thought that no one in the world had ever owned a wife before. "*My wife*," he was always saying, as though he were saying the responses in the litany. Now Perdita and I call each other casually by our Christian names, and I don't think that, except in occasional legal documents, do I ever refer to Perdita as my wife. But with Lloyd, of course, it was different. He had only been married a week.

The other night we sat out in the garden a little late, and it grew somewhat chilly. Lloyd disappeared into the house a moment, and reappeared with a shawl for Julie.

"Forgive me," he said, "but my wife soon takes cold."

Indeed, he was always running around with wraps and things for "my wife." I know it was childish of me to feel irritated, and Perdita and I laughed over it later on.

"You know you used to be just the same," she said, slyly.



## PERDITA'S LOVERS

“Would you like me to be like that now?” I asked.

“No!” she answered, promptly.

“What does it begin with?” I said, in a whisper.

“W,” she answered, putting her head on my shoulder.

“And end with?”

“E.”

Then presently she asked, shyly, of me, “What does it begin with?”

“H,” I answered, manfully.

“And end with?”

“D.”

### V

Many another such incident during the visit of our young people illustrated the kind of imaginative pleasure, apart from the social pleasure of four people who liked each other being together, which our guests found in staying with us, and which we found in their being with us. They enjoyed us because, in a relative way, we embodied their future; we enjoyed them because they brought back our past. We had done what they were still dreaming of, and that dream-look in their eyes took us back to the days when all was a dream with us as well, and all was still to do.

As they walked our garden they said to each other, “We, too, will have a garden some day.”

And, as we watched them, we said to each other, “Do you remember how once we dreamed of a garden, and how wonderful it was to have our own crocuses?”

As they took part in the nursery revels, their eyes said to each other, “We, too, will have a nursery some day.”

And, as we watched them, our eyes said to each other:

## AN OLD COUNTRY HOUSE

“Do you remember? How strange it would be if there were no Joyce and no Freya!”

So all the while we were unconsciously exchanging our dreams—their dreams of the future for our dreams of the past.

There are few more delightful services done by one friend to another than such rejuvenation of the past as our young people brought us. Dreams, however wonderful and close to the heart, have a terrible way of forgetting they were once dreams, as soon as they are fulfilled. They either petrify into duties, or settle down into habits. The most vital dream is to some degree subject to the operation of use and wont. Dreams rest on their laurels, and even nod over them. Most welcome, therefore, is the reveille of some young dreamer, who, when maybe the somnolence of accomplishment is stealing over you, suddenly takes you by the shoulder and awakens you to all the marvel of your lot—so that again, like the old poet, you exclaim,

“What wondrous life is this I lead!”

To be married—instead of stolen meetings, or other inadequate superintended intercourse—to have all your days and hours and minutes to spend together as you please; not to have to think, “To-day is Monday, we can’t meet again till Wednesday,” but to know that you have only to open your eyes and she is there, but to reach out your hand and you can touch her; to know that, though she is out of your sight, she is still to be found in the next room; to know that your love, after many wanderings and vicissitudes, has at last come to live under the same roof. Ah, to be married! To marry the woman you love!

But then, after a miracle has gone on for nine years, it is only human of you if you sometimes take it a little for granted,

## PERDITA'S LOVERS

without meaning any irreverence, and, as Carlyle said, "live at ease in the midst of wonders."

Since our friends have left us, Perdita and I—in the absurdity of our young hearts—have invented a new game, which we call the game of the Clandestine Meetings. You play it like this (of course you understand that it is only a game for old married people):

With the utmost secrecy I arrange for the delivery of a letter which shall be given into Perdita's own hands—and on no account fall into mine—a letter running something like this :

"LITTLE STAR-GIRL,—Can you meet me at nine to-night in the meadow, under our elm-tree? Take care how you come, for I have reason to think that we are watched. I will wait an hour. Don't be unhappy if you cannot come—I mean unhappy for keeping me waiting. I shall know you are prevented, for I know you will come if you can. But, oh, be there, won't you ?

"YOUR OWN TRUE LOVER."

This letter being duly delivered, Perdita and I meet together over dinner, as usual, but, as the clock turns half-past eight, we grow a little nervous and consequently fidgety.

"I'm so sorry, dear, but I think I must go and finish that chapter," I may say. "I had bad luck with it to-day."

"Never mind, dear," Perdita will say, with unspeakable cunning; "I have to go up into the nursery for a while. Freya's chest is making me quite anxious."

"Poor little thing!" say I. "Shall I come and kiss her?"

"No, dear; she's a little feverish; it will only excite her. Go and get on with your chapter."

So we part.

Half an hour later, Perdita, inhumanly neglectful of her

## AN OLD COUNTRY HOUSE

motherly duties, may be perceived stealing along the shadowy edges of the moonlit garden. She opens the little wicket into the park, and soon, with a cry of joy, we are in each other's arms there under the great elm-tree.

"Oh, I hope you won't catch cold, dear. What have you got on your feet? Your in-door slippers! Oh, you baby! Why, your stockings must be wet through. Oh, Perdita, Perdita! How wonderful it is to see you again! But, child, how long is this to go on? I can't bear it."

"Nor can I," sighs Perdita.

Then presently Perdita adds: "I think we might dine together to-morrow night, if you care. I have to go to town to do some shopping, and I shall be staying with dear Sissie—you know? Couldn't we manage it?"

"You darling! Where shall we meet? The Comedy? At seven? Oh, what a surprise! Oh, Perdita! Are you quite sure, sure you will be there—sure it will be all right?"

"Perfectly. And now you must let me go. Listen—the church clock is striking ten. Good-bye, dear—oh, good-bye. To-morrow—don't forget—seven at the Comedy. Good-night."

"Let me carry you over the grass—just over to that shadow—please do. It will be all the better for—your slippers."

"All right, little child. Now, good-night! . . . O love! good-morrow!"

A little later I will sleepily stroll into Perdita's study, and find her innocently occupied with a book.

"How is poor little Freya?" I will ask.

"Oh, she is much better. I think she will be all right to-morrow. . . . And how about the chapter?" Perdita will

## PERDITA'S LOVERS

ask, with what I may perhaps call the delicate threat of a smile.

“All but finished,” I will answer. Then, somewhat timidly, I will add, “I don’t think, dear, that I told you that I am going to town to-morrow.”

“No, you didn’t,” Perdita will answer, somewhat frostily. “But,” she will continue, “I didn’t tell you that I am going too.”

“Oh, that’s fortunate!” I will retort, with a feeble effort at dissimulation. “Suppose we go together. We can part at Waterloo, you know—if you wish it.”

So next afternoon, both of us being a little in need of the town, we catch the 3.40 train together, and as soon as we arrive at Waterloo we ostentatiously take cabs in opposite directions.

“Give my love to Sissie,” I will say.

“Please remember me to Jim,” Perdita will answer.

I will first drive to our little Comedy restaurant, and reserve our own historical little corner table, and then go on to the florist for a bunch of our own flowers. Punctually at seven I will be seated at our table, cutting the leaves of some new *édition de luxe*, which I have brought as a souvenir for Perdita—just as we used to do. She will come in, ten or twelve minutes late, with a flush of escape in her face.

“Do forgive me, dear,” she will say. “I had such a time getting away. I almost thought I wouldn’t be able to come at all.”

Then the waiter, who has watched our love at dinner for something like ten years, will come to us, with one of those smiles with which a waiter who is at the same time an old friend knows so well to make you feel at home in the world.

## AN OLD COUNTRY HOUSE

Of course he doesn't know about our little play-acting. He assumes that we are married.

"We have one of madame's favorite dishes to-night," he will say.

"Don't speak too loud, William," I will say, with a smile; and you may be sure that I am not going to tell here what Perdita loves to eat better than anything in the world.

"What shall we drink, dear?" I ask. "Suppose we try some Rudesheimer?"

"Yes, let us," Perdita will answer.

"You are quite sure you wouldn't like some champagne?"

"Not for the world. I thought you knew that I hate champagne."

"Forgive me, dear. Rudesheimer, then. I like nothing better."

Rudesheimer, I may add, is, so to say, our sacerdotal wine. We have said for ten years that we have never drunk it with any one else, and that we never will.

So, like children, we make-believe together a past which, thank God, is still a living, loving present—a present which we know will grow into a future—a future that we pray may some day become an eternity.

Before we part I will say to Perdita: "I bought this book for you to-day. You know it, of course; but it is such a pretty edition. May I give it to you in memory of to-night?"

"Oh, you dear!" she will answer; "but you know you cannot afford it—any more than I can resist it. Isn't it beautiful? How good of you! You dear boy! How good you are to me—and I don't believe I ever gave you a thing!"

## PERDITA'S LOVERS

I look the only possible answer, and Perdita, thereupon giving me one of her golden smiles—all for nothing—says,

“But you must write my name in it.”

“Do you think it wise?” I ask. “Your people are sure to see.”

“Nice people don't read inscriptions in gift-books.”

“It's true they don't—if they can help it. But they might by accident; and you know, little impulsive child, I have to think of you.”

“Well, don't write our names, but write something.”

“Suppose *you* write what *I* mean—and then nobody can be sure—though they may guess. You know they know my writing at home, don't they?”

“All right. What shall I write?”

“Would you like a poem?”

“I have no objection.”

“Have you a pencil?”

“No.”

“Never mind. William will lend us one. . . . Are you ready?”

“Yes.”

“For the Princess of the New-born Heart :

“Princess of the new-born heart,  
Of the new-born heart of me . . .”

Then I shall stop short, hunting for rhymes, and perhaps finally give up the chase.

“It is so hard to write in the immediate presence of the Muse,” I may offer as a feeble excuse.

“Never mind. Finish it later, and bring it to me to-morrow.”

## AN OLD COUNTRY HOUSE

“To-morrow—do you really mean we can meet again to-morrow? Don’t tease me, Perdita—you really mean it?”

“Of course. But how about our theatre? I’m sure we have missed the first act. . . .”

So Perdita and I play truant from each other—together.

### VI

A few days after our young people left us, Perdita, with an air of mystery, came to me holding two or three crumpled pages of manuscript in her hand.

“I have just made a terrible discovery,” she said.

“My dear!”

“Or, rather, John” (the gardener) “has just made it.”

“Go on.”

“He came to me just now with these—which he had found in the garden; and he said that he thought they might be ‘the master’s,’ but, dear, it is worse than that. What do you think?—Lloyd is not only a musician; he is a poet as well! Isn’t it terrible? Listen!”

Thereupon Perdita read from a tattered, rain-soaked manuscript as follows:

“Grace o’ God,  
Flower face,  
Silver feet,  
In what place,  
Heaven or earth,  
Did we meet?  
At what time  
Of the day?  
In what way?”



## PERDITA'S LOVERS

Was it near,  
Was it far,  
In some star,  
Or just here,  
Quite, quite near?

'Tell me, dear—  
Grace o' God,  
Tell me, dear.

“Grace o' God,  
I know well  
When we met ;  
It was first,  
Grace o' God,  
When I knew  
I loved you—  
Then we met—  
That was just,  
Grace o' God,  
Flower face,  
Silver feet ;  
When I first  
Looked—oh, looked—  
On your face—  
Silver feet,  
Golden heart,  
Grace o' God.”

“Read another,” I said, critically. Then Perdita read this:

“Dear little hand in mine I hold,  
Dear little hand of molten gold,  
Dear great big eyes of berry brown—  
The brownest eyes in all the town ;

## AN OLD COUNTRY HOUSE



Dear pattering walk, the timid bride  
Of my long, slouching, manly stride ;  
Dear head, dear hair, dear hands, dear feet,  
Dear love—dear everything complete !"

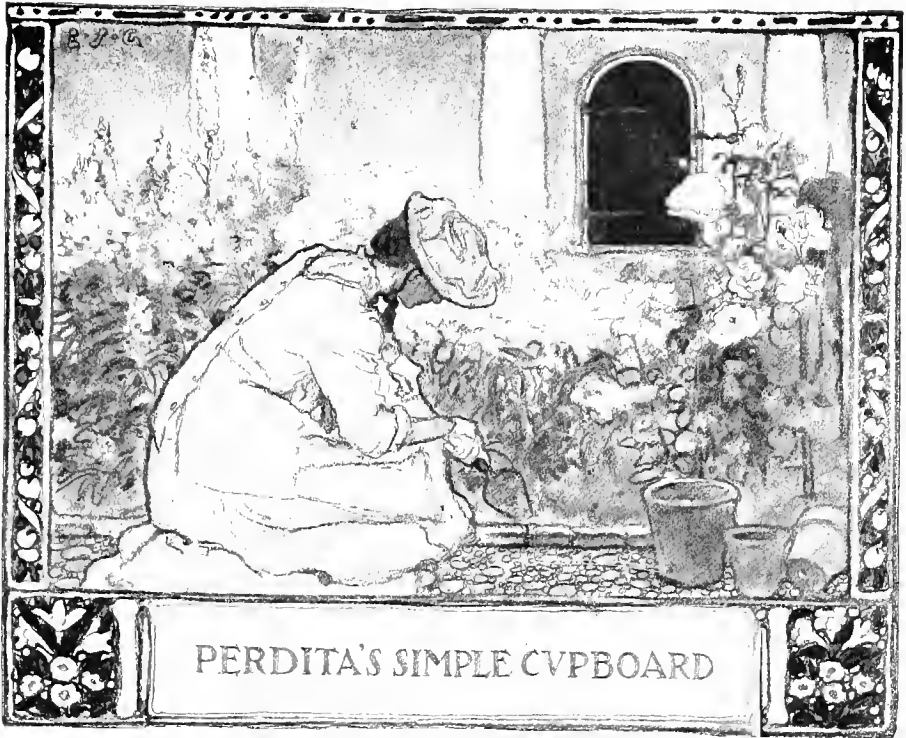
"I wish people wouldn't leave poetry lying about like that—such good poetry, I mean. I'd no idea that Lloyd had it in him," I said, as Perdita finished, with evident pleasure in the verses.

I didn't tell her—till some time after—that the verses were a part of our Clandestine Meetings game, and that I had got Lloyd to write them out for me on the backs of envelopes addressed "Lloyd —, Esq.," and that our old friend John, the gardener, was also in the plot. I wish, for the sake of my reputation with the reader, that they were really Lloyd's verses instead of mine.



PERDITA'S SIMPLE CVPBOARD





I

NO form of stage lends itself so sympathetically to play-acting as an old garden; and when I say play-acting I mean the word to stand for any form of fanciful make-believe that delights the heart of men and women, that curious delight in "pretending" which begins in our earliest childhood, our very babyhood, and is never forfeited by any one who has really been a child. For long before a child is instructed in the mysteries of the alphabet or the multiplication table it is initiated in the noble, consolatory art of make-believe. If the child is a girl, she is taught to nurse her own destiny; if the child is a boy, he is taught to play at soldiers—though he is as yet so many years away from a commission. No wonder that the human race produces such an overwhelming percentage of actors, when you consider that the first lesson

## AN OLD COUNTRY HOUSE

we teach a child is—how to pretend to be something or somebody else.

And as you grow up, as you grow older and older, how thankful you are to the traditional nursery lore which has thus implanted in you the defensive habit of make-believe! If it had not been for some comfortable, old, sweet-breathed nurse, with her fairy-tales and her nursery wisdom, you might have been nothing but your dull self. But, thanks to her and her far-sighted training, you have most successfully pretended to be—something else; perhaps a doctor or a lawyer.

But, leaving aside the useful learned “professions”—properly so called—think how much you owe to the nursery for a trick of self-comfort, of which, though you may not need to be a soldier, a sailor, or a candle-stick maker, you may still stand some day no less appealingly in need, for the no less practical purpose of self-distraction.

You may only need your trick of self-deception for yourself, merely to persuade you, say, that you are living in another century, in another country, in prettier clothes, and with more interesting people. The serious uses of such self-dramatization I do not propose to enlarge upon in this essay. Every one knows that many a bank-clerk only gets through his day's work by dreaming that he is in command of a crack regiment, and that the alacrity of our messenger-boys is chiefly due to their firm belief that they are really burglars or buccaneers. You may not take yourself so seriously as that, and yet you may need to “pretend” all the same. You feel the need of—getting out of yourself. Even your doctor advises it. It may seem a very attractive self to others, yet you want to get out of it! Well, there are many ways. One

## PERDITA'S SIMPLE CUPBOARD

of the most satisfactory, and one of the prettiest, is Perdita's way: to put yourself into a garden. Why Perdita should need to get away from herself I cannot guess—for I have never wanted to get away from Perdita. Indeed, when I come to think of it, I believe that Perdita's gardening—and all the occult sciences which go with it—are not so much self-escape as self-expression. Perdita—and why not!—is really an egoist; and her idea is to write her name over and over again in flowers. If so, she has certainly chosen that form of page on which one can most legibly and lastingly write one's name—a page of the good green earth; in her case only quite a small page, a mere three acres at most, yet what clever, tender things she does with it!

Perdita is a learned lover of our old poets—as we call those poets who are young forever—and one corner of her garden, which she calls the Poet's Corner, she has reserved for flowers mentioned by several poets whose original octavos and even folios make a cosey nook of warm old leather in her little library: a nook to which her eyes turn always with the greatest affection, particularly when the lamp has been brought in and the fire is flickering dreamily on their friendly old faces.

It is one of her truest pleasures, and prettiest vanities, to take you into the garden and show you how she has translated one of these musical old fellows into phlox and daffodil and sweet marjoram. If you want to make Perdita happy you have only to ask her to be allowed to take tea in the garden of Herrick's "Hesperides," while she turns over the leaves—I had almost said petals—of a precious first edition as yellow now as his own daffodils, yet no less fresh and fragrant.



One of these votive gardens to which she is particularly devoted is called the "Garden of the Faithful Shepperdess," for here grow the many flowers dear to Fletcher, that sweet lyrist whose English honey keeps sweet against decay, as no mere dramatic strength of Beaumont could—that beloved lumber-room of Elizabethan drama, that apple-loft of old English pastoral, that vast old fireside folio of Beaumont and Fletcher, which Charles Lamb took home one night, with such glee, from Barker's in Covent Garden.

Then Perdita has a little garden for Campion—he, you know, who sang, "There is a garden in her face"—and another garden reserved for those flowers which deck the laureate hearse where Lycid lies. Next to Shakespeare, no other poet except Milton has made flowers so much more wonderful than they are—by the mere inspired mention of their names.

Perdita, like many dream-gardeners, had conceived the idea of a garden in which only Shakespeare's flowers should be grown. But when she came to consider, she realized that Shakespeare had loved too many flowers for her to give him a whole province of her



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limited space to himself. Taking further thought, however, she came to see that the whole garden was Shakespeare's, and that there was no flower in any particular garden which was not his too—which was not, indeed, more his. For take the daffodil. It is true that Herrick had written :

“Fair daffodils, we weep to see  
You fade away so soon”—

and that in later days Wordsworth's eyes and heart had gone dancing with the daffodils in a northern English meadow; but before either of them Shakespeare had noted how the daffodil

“Comes before the swallow dares,  
And takes the winds of March with beauty.”

And so with almost all the other flowers. Shakespeare had loved them first and sung them best. Except the daisy! Ah, yes! except the daisy—for is that not pre-eminently Chaucer's flower?—and not even Shakespeare himself can rob him of it. Remembering this, Perdita had begged from the gardener a corner of the lawn “ypoudred with daisy,” and there the lawn-mower never came—only that Queen Alceste “That turned was into a dayesie.” And almost over-



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grown with the happy rioting grass was an inscription, like a gardener's label, written in Perdita's fine hand—

“Every day this May or thou dine  
Go look upon the fresh daisie.”

This, as a charming American writer has pointed out, was the prescription of the nightingale in one of Chaucer's most delightful poems; and the writer adds: “A blessed pharmacy this, freely found in meadow and field.”

## II

This quotation brings me to the more immediate subject of my thoughts, Perdita's latest fancy, her “Physick Garden”—*Hortus Medicus et Philosophicus*, as the learned Joachim Camerarius, physician, of the Republic of Nuremberg, entitled his treatise upon healing herbs published at Frankfort-on-Main, 1588—a quaint little quarto of some rarity, which Perdita picked up from a catalogue a short while ago.

Sometimes we call this garden “The Astrologer's Garden,” for Perdita has taken pains, so far as her astrological lore permits, to select her plants on purely astrological principles—as one of her herbalist friends, Nich. Culpepper, Gent., in his *English Physician*, most urgently advises. We may need to speak of Mr. Culpepper later, but on this point it will be convenient to quote him just here. Mr. Culpepper has a fine, high-stepping contempt for his non-astrological reader, as you shall hear:

“I shall deliver myself thus :

“ (1) To the Vulgar.

“ (2) To such as study Astrology; or such as study Physic astrologically.

## PERDITA'S SIMPLE CUPBOARD

“First. To the Vulgar. Kind souls, I am sorry it hath been your hard mishap to have been so long trained in such Egyptian darkness, even darkness which your sorrow may be felt. The vulgar road of physic is not my practice; . . . in the mean season take these few rules and stay your stomachs. . . . Secondly—To such as study astrology (who are the only men I know that are fit to study physic, physic without astrology being like a lamp without oil) you are the men I exceedingly respect, and such documents as my brain can give you at present (being absent from study) I shall give you.”

Among the valuable hints which the learned Culpepper then proceeds to give, the following as to the proper time for gathering simples is not the least valuable: “Let the planet that governs the herb be angular, and the stronger the better; if they can, in herbs of Saturn, let Saturn be in the ascendant; in the herbs of Mars, let Mars be in the mid-heaven, for in those houses they delight; let the moon apply to them by good aspect, and let her not be in the houses of her enemies; if you cannot well stay till she apply to them, let her apply to a planet of the same triplicity; if you cannot wait that time neither, let her be with a fixed star of their nature; . . . gather all leaves in the hour of that planet that governs them.”

The dead are seldom more pathetically amusing than Nich. Culpepper, Gent., but as an authority upon a physic garden he still claims respect, and, for all his sententious airs, cannot be ignored.

His pompous little volume has its place in Perdita's shelf-garden of old herbals—almost as fragrant a collection of old leather and copper-plates as her shelf-garden of old poets; but, of course, the chief fragrance comes from the Gerarde, of which Perdita possesses a particularly fine copy. How

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differently our men of science write nowadays! It may be that they are more accurate—but then they are, oh! so much duller. Nowadays a botanist, by the river's brim, is just a botanist, and he is nothing more. But in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and even as late as the eighteenth century, your botanist was something of a writer, something even of a poet, too. Take, for instance, Parkinson's Herbal, which is another of Perdita's treasures: "*Theatrum Botanicum—The Theatre of Plants*—collected by the many years travail, industry, and experience in this subject, by John Parkinson, Apothecary of London and the King's Herbarist, and Published by the King's Majestyes Especial Priviledge, London. Printed by Iho Cotes, 1640." Listen how Parkinson opens his first chapter on "Sweete Smelling Herbes—the First Tribe":

"From a Paradise of pleasant flowers I am fallen (Adam like) to a world of profitable Herbes and Plants (*ut omne tulit punctum qui miscuit utile dulci*) namely those Plants that are frequently used to helpe the diseases of our bodies." Where will you find a modern botanist writing as prettily as that? Can the reason be that the modern botanist has lost his faith in Adam?

Take a still rarer volume on Perdita's shelf—(I may say that she pays for these bibliophilic treasures quite legitimately from the profits of her bee-hives and poultry-yard)—a translation by one Henry Lite of "A New Herball, or Historie of Plants . . . (London: 1619), not long sithence set forth in the Almaine or Dutch tongue by that painfull and learned Physition, D. Rembert Dodoens." It is a delicious little folio in the prettiest black letter, and, dipping at random into it, you can find such charmingly imparted information as this: "Of Serpent's Tongue, or Adder's Tongue: This leafe

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is found with his little tongue in Aprill and May: the whole hearbe vanisheth away in June.”

Here are two more titles and title-pages from Perdita’s herbal corner:

*“Adam in Eden: or Nature’s Paradise—The History of Plants, Fruits, Herbs and Flowers with their several names. . . .*

“A Work of such a Refined and Useful Method that the Arts of Physick and Chirurgerie are so clearly laid open that Apothecaries, Chirurgioes, and all other ingenuous Practitioners may from our own Fields and Gardens, best agreeing with our English Bodies, on emergent and sudden occasions compleatly furnish themselves with cheap, easie and wholesome Cures for any part of the Body that is ill-affected.

“By William Coles, Herbarist.

“London: Printed by J. Streater, for Nathaniel Brooke at the Angel in Cornhill, near the Royal Exchange, 1657.”

*“A Curious Herbal, Containing Five Hundred Cuts—of the most Useful Plants, which are now used in the Practice of Physick.*

“Engraved on folio Copper Plates, after Drawings taken from the Life of Elizabeth Blackwell.

“To which is added a short Description of ye Plants and their common Uses in Physick.

“London: Printed by John Nourse, at the Lamb without Temple Bar. M DCC XXXIX.”

Though Perdita tries to make you believe that she takes her Physic-garden seriously from a medicinal point of view, and is prepared to vindicate the hedge-row pharmacy of the

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old wives of the country-side, yet I am sure it is the haunted names of the various old romantic weeds rather than their medicinal virtues that prompt her to spend whole days in following up the waifs and strays of the highways and waste-places, and persuading them to accept a comfortable home and live a respectable life in her garden. Some are glad of the good food she gives them, and the freedom from vegetable strife, but many others seem incorrigibly devoted to a vagabond existence and sicken in their polite surroundings.

Plants whose very names made the blood of our ancestors run cold are to be found in Perdita's garden, side by side with sober-coated pot-herbs put to no more dangerous uses than the stuffing of turkeys or the seasoning of omelets. There grow the roots "that take the reason prisoner"—hemlock and henbane and hellebore; vervain and rue and many another unholy ingredient of the witches' caldron; and Perdita particularly congratulates herself on her mandragora bed. Strictly speaking, as the reader must be aware, the mandrake will only grow under a gallows-tree, for it finds its most sustaining nutriment in the juices that drip and drip from the bodies of decayed murderers. Its fat, fleshlike root is said to be shaped like a man, but in this particular Perdita has been disappointed, as, indeed, Gerarde was before her. "I myselfe and my servannts also have digged up, planted and replanted verie many; and yet never could either perceive shape of man and woman," says the old herbalist, in disgust with those "idle drones" that have nothing better to do but circulate such idle superstitions. At the same time, Perdita is inclined to hold it true that mandrakes are to be found most plentifully under the shade of some old gallows-tree,

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or on its site. Else, why should the hill close by us on the high-road, known as "Gallows Hill," be the one spot all the country round where she has found the ill-famed vegetable growing. It is known without a doubt from current tradition that "Gallows Hill" is well manured with the bodies of departed highwaymen, and there are very old people still living who have seen the moon through the ribs of emaciated malefactors, and heard their chains creaking and whimpering on windy nights. One of the scarred and shattered old trees has a rusty chain hanging to it to this day, and it was beneath this very tree that Perdita found her first mandrake. She was no little afraid of uprooting it, because, as you know, the mandrake in old times, when uprooted, used to give forth strange groans and screams as of a human being in agony. However, in this respect our mandrakes were a disappointment. They came up out of the ground quietly enough, and took kindly to the corner provided for them in the *Hortus Medicus et Philosophicus*. Perhaps they have grown milder with the more peaceful times. It is so long since they had a taste of highwayman.

Plants less darkly associated with forbidden mysteries, yet powerful to possess the mind of man with a madness no less desperate, "the cruel madness of love," grow, too, in Perdita's garden—for love-philters are a branch of country medicine which Perdita has made a special study. Two of the wicked plants already named, vervain and mandrake, are known to wield strange power over the affections. Rosemary and the innocent thyme also turn the heads and hearts of man and maid, particularly when used on St. Agnes's Eve. Basil, purslane, cumin-seed and cyclamen, wormwood and marjoram, are strong ingredients of the magic loving-cup, as likewise are



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**I MYSELF AND MY SERVANTS**  
ALSO HAVE DIGGED UP PLANTED AND REPLANTED  
verie MANY and yet never could either perceive  
*Shape of Man and Woman*

## AN OLD COUNTRY HOUSE

the simple-sounding pansy, crocus, periwinkle, mallow, and marigold.

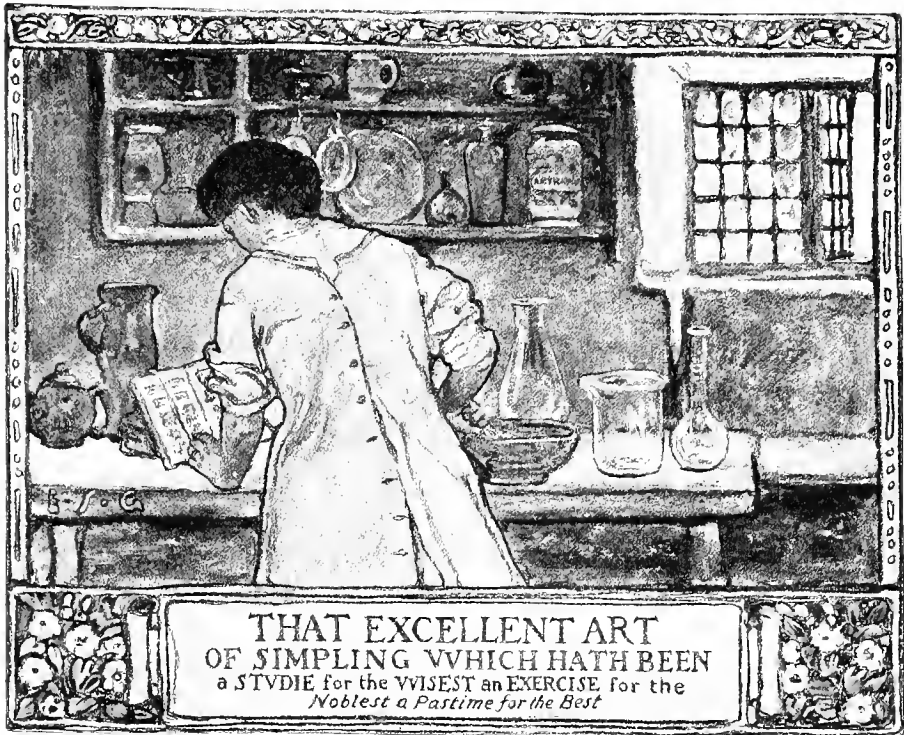
I sometimes feel a little shiver as I pass by Perdita's physic garden; for it seems like so much sleeping dynamite. Were not Perdita a tender-hearted Medea, there is no estimating what fantastic mischief she might not work with all these charged roots and poisonous leaves and flowers.

Along with these enchanted herbs grow simpler plants for simpler uses—plants distillations and decoctions of which are efficacious for lotions and cordials and balms: the little celandine, which, even the swallows know, is good for dim eyes (hence another name for it, the swallow-wort); agrimony is there, too, in case of sore throats in the household; and the velvet-spired mullein, invaluable for coughs, as valerian for the nerves. Borage, the herb of courage, is, of course, not forgotten. *Ego Borrage gaudia semper ago*—"I borage bring allwaies courage"—ran the old saying, and, according to old Robert Burton, who ought to know, it is so powerful against melancholy that "all thy dearest friends may die and thou couldst not grieve." Dittany and camomile and bugloss are there also, and these may be held indispensable, for there is nothing like them to cure snake-bites—unless, indeed, it be the smoke of juniper, which always "drives away venomous beasts, and doth astonish them." Beware, however, how you admit money-wort or fennel into your garden, for these plants attract serpents.

### III

Having got her physic garden well established, Perdita's next step was to set up her own still-room and stock her simple cupboard. It is no use making-believe unless you

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make-believe seriously, and Perdita will never admit but that she takes her simpling quite seriously—"that excellent art of simpling which"—she sometimes quotes at me from Gerarde—"hath been a studie for the wisest, an exercise for the noblest, a pastime for the best, . . . a science nobly supported by wise and kingly favourites; the subject thereof so necessarie and delectable, that nothing can be confected either delicate for the taste, daintie for smell, pleasant for sight, wholesome for bodie, conservative or restorative for health, but it borroweth the relish of an herbe, the flavour of a flower, the colour of a leafe, the juice of a plant, or the decoction of a roote; . . . who would therefore look dangerously up at Planets that might safely look down at Plants?"

As I have said before, one of the charms of an old house is the number of out-of-the-way rooms and cupboards which

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you don't know what to do with. In one of these rooms—prettily looking out across the sun-dial and the cut yews—Perdita set up her herbal laboratory, and there you may often find her nowadays, like some fair young alchemist, surrounded with alembics and mortars and gallipots and other mysterious-looking vessels, and poring with knit brows over some old folio, endeavoring to wrest from it the secret of some sententiously elaborate recipe or mysteriously worded process. From the ceiling hang neat brown-paper parcels containing dried or drying plants, and shelves crowded with bottles and jars carefully labelled run round the room. These are filled with precious roots and seeds and flower-heads and wonder-working withered leaves. On such occasions Perdita's business may not always be so mysterious as it seems. She is not necessarily brewing a subtle and deadly poison or compounding a love-philter or distilling the elixir of life. She may only be making cowslip wine or spirits of violets or conserve of roses. As Perdita is reckoned very successful with her conserve of roses, you may care to know how she makes it. Here is her recipe: "Take Roses at your pleasure, put them to boyle in faire water, having a regard to the quantitie; for if you have many Roses, you may take the more waters; if fewer, the lesse water will serve; the which you shall boyle at the least three or fower howers even as you would boyle a peace of meate, untill in the eating they be very tender, at which time the Roses will lose their colour that you would think your labour lost, and the thing marred. But proceede, for though the Roses have lost their colour, the water hath gotten the tincture thereof; then shall you adde unto one pounce Roses fower pounds of fine sugar in pure powder, and so according to the rest of the Roses. Thus shall you

## PERDITA'S SIMPLE CUPBOARD

let them boyle gently after the sugar is put thereto, continually stirring it with a wooden Spatula untill it be cold, whereof one pound weight is worth six pound of the crude or rawe conserve, as well for the virtues and goodness in taste, as also for the beautiful colour."

As an example of at once the lucidity and the mysteriousness of some of these old instructions, here is the process recommended by an eighteenth-century herbalist for the distillation of "Spirits: Take the Herbs, Flowers, etc., beat them in a Mortar and Pickle them with Salt, in an Earthen Vessel, by mixing the Salt therewith; put all well into a well-glazed Earthen Jar, pressing them well down; Stop the Vessel very close, and put it into a cellar for 3 or 4 months, till they have a sharp or Wine-like Smell, then distil in a Vesica, in Balneo, or Sand, or Ashes to driness. Cohobate the Spirit and distil again, after which rectify it in a Glass Matrass, in a gentle Balneo, or Sand-heat."

"Vesica" — "Balneo" — "Cohobate"; here are words of mystery which the reader will not need to have explained, but which, of course, Perdita understands.

When you come to think of it, and if you care to picture Perdita in her still-room, I think you will agree with me that few games you could play at could be more stimulating to the imagination or more rich in comprehensive suggestiveness. Perhaps no single study concentrates so much of the romance of human thought as the study of simples. All the lore and all the legend of the ages, so much of all the dark and shining history of time, the strange old beginnings of wisdom, the eternal poetry in the child-like heart of man—all this is implicit in the very sap and shape and fragrance of every storied herb and flower you gather. Terrible mysteries

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of fearful old creeds, beautiful stories of dead gods and goddesses, adventurous guesses at the starry sky, picturesque experiments in the unknown properties of things, dark tales of human passions; yes, the whole wandering history of the soul of man is to be found written somewhere in leaves and flowers. Take for a moment a few plants with the simplest, most familiar associations. Mistletoe, we say, or asphodel; think of the immediate vividness with which those two words call up a mysterious religion and a whole mythology. Or, again, hyssop and hemlock. Is it possible to use those words without thinking in the same instant of the two great death-scenes in human history—death-scenes which together symbolize from different points of view the whole extended tragedy of human thought? Is not the long agony of a noble race stamped forever on the little shamrock as the sorrow of a god is printed each spring upon the “lettered hyacinth”? and who can pluck the narcissus without seeing a beautiful Greek boy loving his own face in a spring? How much of human dream and human history is bound up with these seven plants alone, chosen at random as being most obvious to the memory!

The names of many other plants hardly less familiar, and generally significant in their associations, could readily be recalled. And if the plants thus growing on the broad highways of human history are so fragrantly learned, it is easy to understand into what fascinating byways of forgotten thought and forgotten story plants less familiar can lead us. Yes! I am inclined to think that Perdita cannot be gainsaid in her statement that there is no single study which can compete with the study of simples as an attractive general introduction to all other studies whatsoever. Here, indeed, is the primrose path of knowledge.

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Besides, consider the delight of the mere method of the study. Other studies crook your back, contract your chest, and impair your complexion, but to go a-simpling means day after day of fresh air, and hardy trudging of the country-side. You do your work knee-deep in daisies, and birds and butterflies and sweet smells are your fellow-students all day long in the blue-domed library of the green earth. Should you miss the plant you are after, you have at least found a fine exhilaration of the blood, you come home with cheeks like wild roses and all the sweetness of the racing breeze in your lungs. Therefore, say I, be advised to go a-simpling.

### IV

As a passion for simpling probably begins in that library corner of warm old leather—a fancy for collecting old herbals—so it necessarily consummates itself, through the intermediate ardors of the physic garden and the still-room, in the simple cupboard, where are hoarded all the gains of your herb-craft, the various thrilling secrets you have wrested from nature—the potent distillations, the sovereign balms, the subtle essences, the stealing opiates, the magic roots, the deadly tinctures, the dreaming gums. Perdita's simple cupboard is a little, dimly lighted closet most effective in its air of mystery. The light falls into it stealthily through some small squares of green bottle-glass set in the top of the door. At first you can barely distinguish the dim array of phials and jars upon the shelves, and a mystic aromatic odor pervades the room; but as you grow used to the light you find yourself able to read the prettily written labels, and to realize



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with a smile the decorative thrift which has inspired Perdita to dignify, with such romantic uses, many a household flask and pipkin previously associated in your mind less with the mysteries of astrologic botany than with the more accustomed mysteries of delicate gastronomy. You think first rather of a delicatessen shop, with its quaint pots and picturesque glass jars come together from so many classic corners of the gastronomic world. Here surely is your old friend *pâté de foie gras* in its prescribed earthenware mug, with the rimmed lid. But you look at the label and read: "*An excellent paste of rue, walnuts, figs, and juniper berries, eaten by the great Mitbridates as a defensive against poison.*"

Again your eye falls on one of the slim, urn-shouldered wine-bottles of Capri; looking at the label you read: "*Distilled water of broom-flowers as used by Henry VIII. against surfeits.*" A tiny pot, looking for all the world as if it had once held Liebig's extract of beef, contains, you read: "*Asb-sap—against serpents.*" Here is a fluted glass jar indissolubly associated in your mind with olive-orchards and violets. You look at the label and read: "*Juice of arum—good for the plague.*" Yonder is a nabob-bellied jar that must contain ginger. No—" *Peony roots—against convulsions.*" And here is an old scent-bottle labelled, "*Sap of dog-wood from East Prussia—to fulfil your every wish.*"

So with delightful incongruity the larder and the laboratory meet on every label. Perhaps you might care to read a few more of the labels:

"*Water of Thyme—for passion of ye hearte.*"

"*Linden Bloom.*"

"*Elder juice to anoint the eyes that they may see Witches.*"

"*Princess Elizabeth her Cordial against Melancholy. Nov. 1540.*"

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*“De Luce Leaves—for staunching Blood.”*

*“Spikenard—very precious.”*

*“A marvellous Snail Water for weak babes and old people.”*

*“Marsh mallow roots.”*

*“Euphrasy—to purge the sight.”*

“Then purged with euphrasy and rue  
His visual orbs.”—MILTON.

*“The Green Ointment—for Swellings.”*

*“Hempseed—to show you your true lover at midnight on Mid-summer Eve.”*

“Hempseed I sow thee, hempseed I sow thee,  
And he that must be my true love  
Come after me and mow me.”

*“Hypericum—culled on a Friday in the hour of Jupiter—  
wherewith to scare away fiends.”*

*“Honey from Mount Hybla.”*

*“Against Vapours.”*

*“Bawme for ye Warriors Wounds.”*

*“To induce Sleep.”*

*“Dent de Lion roots.”*

*“Aqua Mirabilis (Sir Kenelm Digby’s way, and approved by  
Him).”*

*“Dittany—Proven to draw out arrows from wild beasts and  
mankind.”*

*“Camomile flowers.”*

*“A Singular Mint  
for to Make Merrie*

*the  
♡”*

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*“A Sovereign Remedy against ye Spleen.”*

*“Fernseed—whereby to pass Invisible.”*

*“Wine of Marigolds to Inspire Love.”*

*“Water-Lily Roots to cool the Affections.”*

*“Webs of Spring Gossamar for Wounds.”*

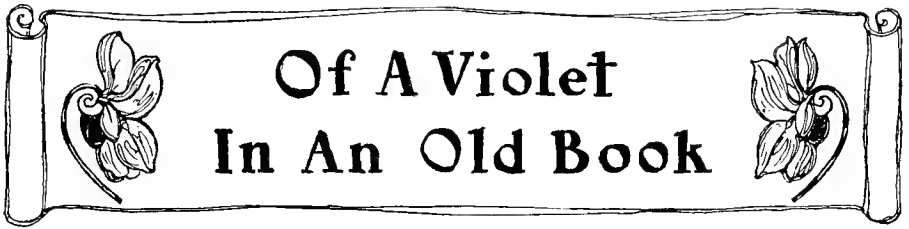
*“Water from St. Winifred's Well drawn therefrom between Sunset and Sunrise.”*

*“Sprigs of Yew ‘slivered in the moon's eclipse.’”*

*“May-Dew—for the cheeks of young Maids.”*

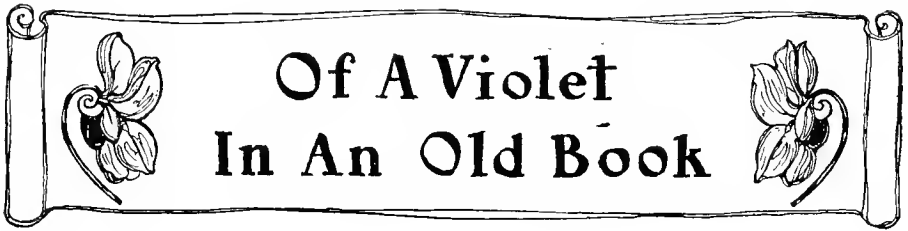
So Perdita touches old science with the wand of her fancy, and makes-believe like one of her own babies. As I have said before, we must all play at something. Surely there is no prettier and more appropriate game for an old house than to play at simpling. To-night, I may add, being St. John's Eve, Perdita and I are off to gather fern-seed, our stock having run rather low.





Of A Violet  
In An Old Book



A decorative banner with a scroll-like border. On the left and right sides, there are detailed illustrations of a violet flower with its stem and leaves. In the center, the title "Of A Violet In An Old Book" is written in a bold, serif font.

## Of A Violet In An Old Book

### I

IT had been autumn when Perdita and I had taken possession of our old house, and the glory of the garden was all but gone. The flowers that remained wore a funereal aspect, as though they were being grown for the bier of the dying summer—chill chrysanthemums and rigid, bitter-breathed dahlias, to which no hollow pomp of color could give a convincing air of being real flowers—soft, warm flowers—such as June lets fall from her deep bosom.

The trees were beginning to look like trees in a stage setting, curiously spectral and artificial, and drifts of dead leaves rustled beneath our feet with a thin, sharp sound, curiously mournful, and even ominous. Everything was fading and sighing and passing away. Even our young hopes were hardly proof against the melancholy of the dying year, and we drew closer together, with a shiver of fear.

Then, too, as I have said, this was the first time we had possessed a garden, and we were naturally impatient with these chill, empty beds and shivering trees. We were eager for buds and blossoms, and busy wings, and all the green armies of the spring.

To enter into your garden in September is like buying

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seats for an empty theatre, or as the curtain is going down on the last act of the play. You come in as the lights are being put out, and soon there will be nothing but the haunted, empty stage. And you have to wait at least four months for the return of the players. Not till late in February will there be any sign of life in the theatre. By then, green shoots here and there will tell you that the actors, in their silks and satins, are on the way, and a precocious primrose may make a soft little shining in an out-of-the-way corner, and perhaps even a whole line of crocuses will suddenly flash awake, like a row of footlights. You hear the orchestra tuning up in the shrubberies and about the eaves, but, practically, you have to wait until the end of March for any active stir in the theatre—and, if you have taken your seats in September, that is a long time to wait. However, a rarely picturesque winter filled in the interval with so many surprises of beauty that we didn't find the waiting so long as we expected; and at last, towards the middle of March, there seemed to pass a sudden quiver of joy through the earth. You could distinctly feel it. It was almost as though the meadows heaved a sigh of awakening; there was a curious kindness in the air; though you walked alone, you could almost have sworn some one kissed your cheek; and overhead were warm, rolling clouds, laden with more violets and primroses than they could carry.

Just at this moment, before anything had really happened in the garden, Perdita and I were compelled to pay a family visit of a fortnight—just, I say, at the very moment when the music was about to strike up. To lose a fortnight of the garden then was vexatious. It was like leaving a child you love for a whole year between the dear ages of two and three. We were to miss all the first baby-talk of



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the spring. However, there was no help for it. We had to go. At last we returned, all impatient to see what the garden had been doing in our absence, but, alas! it was dark before we reached home. We must still wait a whole night, till the curtain of darkness had gone up.

“But why?” said Perdita. “Let us take a lamp and see as much as we can.”

We laughed, for the suggestion was something like seeing the Alps by candle-light. However, the fantastic motion was carried, and out into the garden we went, I carrying a big lamp from my study-table, and Perdita following close at my side. It was a dark, brooding night, not a star to be seen. But there was a curious friendliness about the darkness. It was not the darkness that makes you feel afraid. You would have trusted yourself with it anywhere. And, dark as it was, though as yet we could see nothing, we had hardly crossed the threshold before we were aware of a great difference in the garden. An indefinable sense of occupation pervaded it. Just as you may go in the dark into a room you had thought empty, and immediately be quite sure that some one is there. We had a strange feeling of there being less room in the garden, of an unaccustomed cosiness, so to say. In our absence, furniture had been brought in, carpets laid down, and tapestries stretched along the walls.

“Hush!” said Perdita, laying her hand on my arm. “They have come back. The garden is full of them. Listen.”

And true it was that we seemed to be surrounded with little sleeping presences on every side.

“Why, look!” said Perdita. “Oh, look at this rose-tree!”

And sure enough, the great old rose-tree that climbs

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the outside of my study wall—the inside is tapestried with old poets—was packed with close-set shoots.

“Lower the lamp a moment, dear,” said Perdita. “I want to see if the violets are out yet. Why, yes. Oh, look at them! And now let us look at the mulberry-tree.”

The mulberry-tree was bursting with buds sitting along his old arms like tiny, roosting birds, and the cherry-tree was crowded with blossoms, like butterflies asleep. We almost expected them to fly away with the light of the lamp.

So all round the garden we carried our lamp, and everywhere we found the spring at work with surreptitious shoot or sweetening bud.

As we returned in-doors with our hearts wonderfully happy, Perdita bent down and gathered two of the violets.

“Keep one of these,” she said, “and I will keep the other. Think, they are the very first violets from our very first garden.”

So, going into my study, I placed my violet between the leaves of my rare first edition of Sir John Suckling.

## II

When the spring was at length so grown-up a maiden as to necessitate one's addressing her as summer, when the clouds had long since unloaded their cargoes of crocus and daffodil, and other cloud galleons had come up laden with roses and honeysuckles and a thousand sweets of garden and meadow, Perdita and I made an exciting discovery.

We were sitting in the garden over our tea, at the lazy end of the afternoon, our eyes resting lovingly on the old

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house with its piled-up gables and russet-roofed outbuildings. Nothing disturbed the warm summer silence but the sleepy croon of doves and the occasional soft lapping of white wings round the old granary.

“I wonder why we don’t do something with that old garden-house?” said Perdita, suddenly. “I am sure it could be made charming.”

Her eyes had fallen upon a little tumble-down place of two stories, away from the house itself, and tucked into an angle of the garden wall like a wasp’s nest. An elder-tree flourished beside it, and its shingle roof was overrun with a vast old vine. The eaves extended down in front and were supported by the trunks of unbarked trees for pillars, so as to make a sort of veranda, and you entered by a pretty, lancet-shaped French window, set with lozenges of old glass. It was picturesque at its best.

So far, we had paid as little attention to it as to our haunted stables, or our wine cellars, for which we possessed no wine, and on our going through the place on our first taking it, it had seemed of no importance to us that the key of the top room was lost. There seemed no immediate hurry for finding it, for the place was all damp and ruinous, the very boards of the floor were rotting away, and here and there were broken in holes. We had tacitly decided that it would cost more money than it was worth to put it into any sort of repair. So we had left it to the spiders and the creeping mould.

But suddenly this afternoon, as I say, it had struck Perdita’s imagination, and nothing would satisfy her but that we should take another look at it.

“This could really be made into quite a pretty room,” said

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Perdita, as we stood inside, with a housewife's eye for an interior. I could see by her preoccupied glances around that she was already choosing the paper for the mouldering walls, and was furnishing it in her imagination. Meanwhile, by the aid of a lighted match, I was exploring a mysterious chamber at the back of the first room. Rough shelves ran around it, and it had evidently been used for storing fruit. But the interesting feature of the room, which, indeed, was hardly more than a big cupboard, was a narrow staircase which led to the room above. At the top of the staircase a door barred the way, the door of the lost key. The fascination of a closed door is eternal, though there be nothing behind, and the whole mystery is in the lock. At this door my imagination was fired and my interest also aroused. I determined to solve the mystery without the key. But the door was a stout one, and the lock evidently strong. Though I threw my whole weight upon it, it showed no signs of giving; so I went off to the house in search of a hatchet and some candles—Perdita, in her turn, mocking my unexpected enthusiasm.

“What children we are, to be so excited about an empty room!” said Perdita, as I returned, and, lighting one of the candles, gave it to her to hold.

“How do you know that it is empty? We may find it filled with bags of gold, and a skeleton sitting at a table piled with rose-nobles or doubloons from the Spanish main.”

I little knew how near to the truth my jest was to prove; for, when two or three determined blows with the hatchet had broken the lock and we pushed open the door, we did not, indeed, come upon a skeleton at a table, nor hoards of ancient gold, but we did come upon a surprise

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which we had not bargained for, and which interested us no less.

At first we could see little, for the three skylights which were the only windows were so smothered with the vine that not a ray of sunlight could steal in, and the candle-light was slow in finding its way about in the darkness. But almost immediately we had realized that the room was filled with books!

Yes! filled with books! Perdita and I literally shouted with surprise and joy.

“We must have a lamp!” Perdita exclaimed. “We can see nothing with these candles.” So off she ran, and presently returned with the lamp which we had carried round the garden that spring night. But on what a different picture now it poured its rays! Everywhere on the floor were books hurled in indescribable confusion, books of all shapes and sizes, folios, quartos, duodecimos, and over all ran a thick network of cobwebs, black and heavy with the dust of years. At first sight one would have said that an army of bats were feeding on the old leather. Never were books in such a sad plight of dirt and decay. Many of them, too, had been half eaten away by learned rats, and many were falling to pieces with the damp, and the drill of the book-worm had more or less travelled through them all. Great garden spiders had made snug quarters for themselves in the old bindings, beetles and wood-lice fled in dismay as we dislodged them from immemorial strongholds, and in a fine old folio Lucretius, which had chanced to lie near a chink in the decaying wall, we came upon a deserted nest.

When we had recovered from our first surprise at our treasure-trove, we naturally fell to wondering how the books

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had come there, to whom they had belonged, and how they had come to be so entirely forgotten? It seemed evident that they had lain there for many years, and the scholarly habits of the old bachelor who had lived in the house before us, and of whom I have already spoken, made it certain that he must have been unaware of their existence too; for surely he could never have allowed so much noble learning and elegant belles-lettres to rot in such unmannerly oblivion. We tried one theory and another as we fought our way through the cobwebs and the wood-lice, but none seemed satisfactory. So far we had but one clew. In each book was pasted an armorial book-plate of old design with the legend, "Ex libris Gulielmus Chalcroft," and in one of the volumes we had come across the inscription, "William Chalcroft; Balliol College, Oxford, 1751." The books had then evidently been the library of one William Chalcroft, a gentleman and man of taste, who had been a student at Oxford in 1751. Chalcroft! The name struck both of us with an indefinable familiarity. It seemed to us as if we had heard it recently or seen it written somewhere, but it was in vain we tried to fix it.

For the moment we gave up the puzzle, trusting that a more careful examination of the books would throw more light upon it. Meanwhile it was evident to us, from our first cursory dip into his long-forgotten library, that William Chalcroft had been a man of uncommonly fine taste in literature, with a strong leaning to its gentler branches. He had evidently been a great reader of poetry, and of poetry, too, not much in fashion in his day. A cruelly dilapidated black-letter Chaucer, which Perdita discovered with a cry of delight, bore witness to a taste for a fresher, more natural style

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of poetry than was being written in 1751. There was a Sidney's "Arcadia," too, of which I shall have more to say later on, and several old Elizabethan song-books and "garlands." That the great Greek and Roman poets were also his familiars was witnessed by many of those stately, sumptuously printed editions with which the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries knew how to honor a classic. I will confess that any distinction my little library possesses in this respect is due chiefly to Gulielmus Chalcroft.

As this last remark may have a larcenous sound to the tender-conscienced reader, I may as well, here and now, deal with the moral dilemma which Perdita and I realized that we had to face, but which we soon disposed of with robust criminality.

"But won't these books come under the head of 'treasure-trove'?" said Perdita, with sudden alarm—"won't we have to give them up to the lord of the manor?"

I suppose that there is no need to explain to the reader that by the English law the lord of the manor is not only lord of the fowl of the air, the fishes in the river, and all four-legged, two-legged, and creeping things upon the surface of his particular corner of the earth, but also of all old coins, Saxon fibulæ, Roman urns, and such like under the surface of the earth. If a field-laborer, working one day in a lonely field, strikes his spade into a jar of old coins, or disturbs the sleep within her grassy tumulus of some Saxon princess lying there with all her gold and silver ornaments about her, ready for her hurried toilet at the last trump, let the poor field-laborer beware lest he deem the luck is his and secrete the coins or the gold tiring-pins in the thatch of his cottage. The luck is not his but his lord's, and his

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humble duty is to present these glittering antiquities to the lord of the manor, who may give him a guinea for the find, or send him to the kitchen for all the beer he has a mind to.

Similarly, might it not be our duty to deliver up our treasure-trove, the library of Gulielmus Chalcroft, to our landlord, sky-lord, grass-lord, fish-lord, rabbit-lord?

“Never!” said Perdita. “If he cared for books it would be different, but you know his tastes. And, anyway, if he did,” she added, with determined moral obliquity, “books are different!”

There, indeed, Perdita expressed one of the deep-rooted, moral peculiarities of the bookman in all times and among all peoples. In regard to all other human possessions a bookman is as honest as his fellows, but with books his moral judgment is not to be trusted, and though he would die rather than steal a pin, he is apt, as the history of bibliomania abundantly proves, to say with Perdita, “Books are different!” His unconscious, or sometimes even outspoken, argument is that a book belongs to the one who can best appreciate its value—that one, of course, being himself. Anarchists say much the same thing about other forms of property, and an application of the principle all round might somewhat startle the gentle bookman out of his peaceful dreams; but then, as Perdita said, “books are different”—and, after all, to keep something no one else wanted, for which no one else had cared for over a hundred years, there could hardly be any great harm in that, could there?

Had it been our skeleton with the rose-nobles that we had found, believe us that we would have behaved with be-



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fitting honesty—but, books were different; so we decided thereon, in consideration of our having rescued it from dire distress of decay and unseemly neglect, and of our giving it a home and honor on comfortable, petted shelves, to appropriate the library of the late Gulielmus Chalcroft to ourselves, until such time as his uneasy ghost should miss his books and demand them back again.

Meanwhile, however, we deemed it wise to take precautions. It would never do for the village to know that we had found some five hundred old books in a garret, for, while having no use for books themselves, country people have quite a superstitiously inordinate idea of the value of an old book in the market, and are apt to think that any book whatsoever, with so remote a date as 1799 upon its title-page, is worth untold gold; just as the arduous and old oak collectors have given cottagers the most inflated notions of the value of the most commonplace old chest or chair. Therefore, we didn't even confide in our friend John, the gardener, and we decided that the only sage way was to sort and renovate them where they were, and remove them to the house in instalments stealthily by night. Meanwhile a stout padlock and a staple would secure the door. Having done all we could for that day, we lay down to sleep—and dream of Caxtons, First Folios, Aldines, and Elzevirs till morning.

### III

The sun and I were up together on the morrow, and the unheard-of hour of six o'clock found me already at work amid the must and dust of Chalcroft's ghostly library. Mine was no light task, grimy beyond description—a task for the

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very oldest clothes—and often it was almost heart-breaking to see the ravin which time had wrought upon all this goodly company of books—there eager scholars and sweet singers huddled together in such an ignominy of decay, yet, as the old poet said, still smelling sweet and blossoming in the dust. The destruction of the Alexandrian Library had never appealed to my imaginative pity like the slow rotting away of these books, some of which, at least, I had just come in time to save and bring back to the light of the sun. For, after all, the Alexandrian Library had disappeared in a holocaust of splendid fire. The books had gone to their death shining martyrs of a lost learning. They had been spared the slow-soiling process of corruption. But here were the grewsomeness of the very sepulchre, the foul cynicism of the grave. Across this lordly binding was the recent track of the snail, and within the pages the earwig had made his filthy nest. Nature had sent all her vermin to desecrate the oblivion of all this beautiful wisdom, all this wise beauty.

“Lilies that fester smell more rank than weeds”; but whether that be true or not, certainly the decay of fair things comes to us with a greater shock of paradox than the decay of things less fair. We can hardly believe that nature can treat them so. We expect for them more delicate processes of dissolution. Books, of all things—with these fair white pages which we so lovingly turn, are so careful to preserve from soilure of careless hands; exquisite vessels, frail and rare, in which are mysteriously hoarded the potent influences and sweet-smelling thoughts of the finest spirits; these carefully guarded, lovingly tended familiars of the perfumed shelf, taken down with such reverence, put back

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with such care, fondled in the lamp-light, and cherished all the day; dainty creatures whom one dare scarcely trust into the hands of a friend, at once so omnipotent and so fragile. Oh, bookman, take a glance over your own pampered and petted shelves, and shudder for the time when, maybe a hundred years hence, in some forgotten garret, the rats will tear at your Rivière bindings and the wood-lice swarm in your first editions. Perdita delivered me from these wormy moralizings by coming in to me with a piece of news. She had traced back our shadowy recollection of the name of Chalcroft to its source.

“Come with me,” she said, “and I will show you.”

Then she took me to the corner of the house, where, as I have previously told the reader, were three names inscribed on three bricks set side by side.

“There it is!” she said, triumphantly, pointing up at the wall, and there, sure enough, was the name “Chalcroft,” accompanied by “Coates” and “Diddlesfold”—all dated “August, 1762.”

When we had first found these inscriptions we had surmised, as I have said, that Coates and Diddlesfold and Chalcroft had been three friends whose fancy it was, while the new house was building, to take each an unset brick, write his name on it, and then get the bricklayer to set the three bricks in the building as a memorial that in August, 1762, Coates, Diddlesfold, and Chalcroft were good friends, and glad to be alive. We had also at the time of the discovery given an invitation to these three ghosts to give us the pleasure of their acquaintance. Chalcroft had at last responded, and I went back to my work on his library with an absurd sense of being nearer to the old bookman.

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When we met at lunch Perdita had still more news for me. On her morning walk it had occurred to her to call on the old sexton, an old man over eighty, and yet strong as an oak. The old man was a veritable charnel-house of village history, and it had struck Perdita that if any one could tell us about our friend Chalcroft it would be old Mr. Snowball. Nor was she mistaken. What that gnarled and garrulous chronicle of the country-side didn't know about the Chalcrofts was not worth knowing, and Perdita came back home a mine of information.

The Chalcrofts were, it appeared, an extinct family to-day, but they had lived very vigorously in their times and were still very much alive in old Mr. Snowball's memory. When quite a lad, the old man had helped his father, who had been hereditary sexton before him, to place the last of them in the family vault, which, somewhat moss-grown and ruinous, stood in a dark, umbrageous corner of the church-yard.

They had been lords of the manor for many generations, and had occupied our old house for some two hundred years. They had been a hard-living, hard-riding stock for the most part—stalwart drinkers and mighty hunters before the Lord.

“But,” old Mr. Snowball had said, impressively, “there is one Chalcroft you won't find in the church-yard, and God Almighty alone may know where he is to this day. Not till the last trumpet sounds, lady, will it be known what became of William Chalcroft—‘Young Master William,’ as my grandfather used to call him. They say he was a great scholar, and they do say, too, that he and his elder brother fought one moonlight night down in the Monk's Meadow for

## OF A VIOLET IN AN OLD BOOK

the sake of a young maid they both loved. No one rightly knew even then, and surely no one will ever know now. But certain it is that one morning 'Young Master William' was missing from the old house, and he never came back to it again."

"Old Mr. Snowball should write a historical novel," I laughed, as Perdita told me this picturesque story. "I'm afraid he's been reading *The Master of Ballantrae*—and shall I tell you something, Perdita? I don't believe one little bit in your old Mr. Snowball's story. But, all the same, we won't say that you made it all up out of your own head, shall we? Let us both swear to believe every word of it, and tell it to each other till it comes true."

"You can ask Mr. Snowball for yourself, if you like," retorted Perdita, with a sturdy blush of detection upon her face.

But of course I didn't; and, indeed, I have since come to the conclusion that Perdita was not romancing after all. For what so well as Mr. Snowball's story will fit in with the corroborative theory which I conceive will account for the strange neglect of William Chalcroft's library? My theory is, that after William's brother had killed him in the duel, and in some mysterious way disposed of his body, he, being a coarse, fox-hunting man, with no taste for learning, and being, moreover, haunted by the presence in the house of the books which so vividly reminded him of his scholarly brother, had had them thrown into the lumber-room where we had found them, and that as years went by their very existence had been forgotten in a household which read so little and drank so much. Such, at all events, had come to be our accepted story of the library of Gulielmus Chalcroft,

## AN OLD COUNTRY HOUSE

and as there is no competition, I see no reason why it is not as true as any other.

### IV

I said that Chalcroft's library numbered some five hundred volumes. As a matter of fact, when I had completed my examination of it, there were barely three hundred books remaining in a state of readable preservation. The rest were so cruelly maimed and nibbled and worm-eaten, and rotten with damp, as to be beyond the aid of any book-doctor, however skilful. For many days Perdita turned her still-room into a sort of a book-hospital, and, working together, we did all we could to restore life to volume after volume. Thanks to our efforts, many a crippled folio stood firm on its feet again, marred pages were practically mended, and though some of the books we cared for most went painfully limping, without title-pages, and others betrayed the evidences of amputation and the various severities through which they had passed, you may be sure we loved them the more for that, and were more than rewarded to see their look of pleasure as, installed upon comfortable, lamp-lit shelves, they found themselves once more alive in a world of living books.

What to do with the poor, battered remnants was our next problem—the pathetic torsos of noble tomes, the mouldering mummies of books that fell and faded at a touch. At first we thought to burn them, but Perdita had a prettier idea.

“Let us bury them in the garden,” she said.

And so one night by lantern-light I dug a deep hole in the garden, and together Perdita and I filled it with tattered

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black-letter and old print of Italy and France, hopelessly eaten of the moth and the worm, old leather and calf still glinting here and there with gold, and all manner of learned and musical *dissecta membra*.

“I wonder what sort of flowers they will make,” I said, as I shovelled in the last spadeful of earth.

“And from her fair and unpolluted flesh may violets spring!” quoted Perdita, and somehow the epitaph seemed not wholly irrelevant, for there in that grave we had just dug was many a buried song, and as much beauty as any drowned maiden.

A day or two after this Perdita came to me and said, almost with tears in her eyes:

“Did you notice this in the Sidney’s ‘Arcadia’?”

It was an old violet, almost colorless.

“This dropped out with it,” added Perdita.

It was a sheet of paper, yellow with age, and on it, in an old-time, scholarly hand, were written these lines:

“My love is like the violet  
That sweetens all the waking year.  
Alas! as short a time she stays,  
Too soon she leaves my garden bare.

“For what though rose and lily bloom,  
In vain they teach me to forget,  
One flower the garden grows for me,  
One flower—a VIOLET!”

The lines were signed “Will: Chalcroft.”

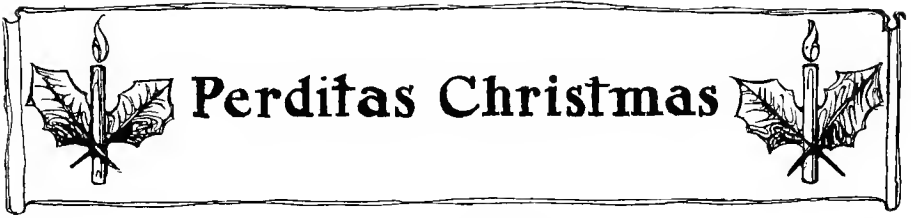
## AN OLD COUNTRY HOUSE

I looked suspiciously at Perdita, but she bore my gaze unflinchingly.

“It looks as if the story were true,” I said.

“I thought that too,” said Perdita—and presently she added: “Isn’t it awful to think that there were violets a hundred and fifty years ago?”







A decorative horizontal banner with a hand-drawn border. Inside the banner, on the left and right sides, are illustrations of holly leaves and a lit candle. The title "Perditas Christmas" is centered in a bold, serif font.

## Perditas Christmas

WHEN we first came upon our old Surrey house, the same day that Perdita and I went house-hunting among the honeysuckles and the wild roses, almost her first exclamation was:

“What a wonderful old place for a real, old-fashioned Christmas-card Christmas!”

It was the very top of midsummer, and the air was all musk and the droning of bees; the old place seemed fast asleep in the thick afternoon sunlight. A strange moment to think of snow, and gleaming roads, and carol-singers, and mince-pies! But Perdita is remarkably sensitive to the dramatic possibilities of her surroundings; and even on that hot summer afternoon it only needed her hint to realize that Slumberfold Old Manor would certainly look its best some keen, yet kindly, Christmas night, with hoods of snow drawn down over its warm gables, ruddy windows pouring welcome across the frozen village green, and muffled feet going by under the braced-up, bright-eyed stars.

One afternoon two or three months later, when dahlias and chrysanthemums were beginning to take the place of the more warm-blooded flowers, I found her in the garden with several books about her. I took one up.

“*Pickwick*,” I said. “Heavens!”

## AN OLD COUNTRY HOUSE

I took another. "Washington Irving's *Sketch-Book!*" And again, "Brand's *Popular Antiquities*. Why, what can be the matter?" I asked, anxiously.

"Leave me alone," she answered. "I am preparing for Christmas."

Later Perdita condescended to tell me something of her plans. She was bent on a real, old-fashioned Christmas, and she had been reading up authorities. She had been refreshing her memory of Mr. Wardle's way of spending Christmas, and of Christmas at Bracebridge Hall, and she was hunting in Brand for absurd old customs that might possibly be revived.

"If you wish to make yourself useful," she said, "you can write me a new Christmas carol. You had better set to work on it at once. There is no time to be lost. You know how stupid the village choir is. It will take them quite two months to get it into their heads."

I meekly assented, and the result of my poor labors may be divulged later. By the time that Christmas was nearly at hand poor Perdita had much extended her experience of village stupidity. Unless the fact chances to have been brought home to you by similar experiments with it, you can have no idea what hopeless material is the English peasantry for any purpose of beauty or fancy. Dealing with it, you do indeed come to realize that man is made of clay—a stubborn, deadening clay, in which the fieriest seeds of the imagination are immediately quenched. The peasantry of many other lands dream and invent and sing. They make fairies, and weave dances, and out of their hearts come songs like bees out of a hive. But the English peasant can do none of these things. He is a clod, who, at his highest, may graduate as a carpenter, or shine, maybe, as a skilful paper-hanger;

## PERDITA'S CHRISTMAS

but as for the other arts, the arts of innocent joy, they have been lost to him for more than two hundred and fifty years. You can still be taught dancing in England, but since Cromwell became Lord Protector no countryman has danced naturally, as before his sour shadow fell across English village greens our merry Englishmen knew well enough to do. The wild flowers of popular art are dead in England this many a year; but Perdita, coming as she does from a land where even bricklayers dream dreams, and every village lad has seen his ghost and met his fairy and heard the Karelei singing at moonrise among the rushes, took long to be convinced.

Poor Perdita! She had actually dreamed of a morris-dance! She, too, would have a mumming, and she did so want a hobby-horse and a Lord of Misrule. But every age has its own pet way of making a fool of itself, and it was in vain that she tried to interest the members of her village Bible-class in these ancient methods of foolishness. There was not a lad in the whole of Slumberfold that could dance a step, still less was there a lad, or a grown man, with the smallest dramatic sense or a spark of natural comedy. Her material could be relied on to sing carols not so badly, and there were three or four fair performers on musical instruments. But the resources of Slumberfold could no further go. We were not Oberammergau, and Perdita was compelled to give up some of her most cherished fancies in despair.

Yet if Perdita was thus robbed of some of the picturesque pedantries of Christmas, she soon found enough in the surviving realities of Christmas to keep her busily occupied for two or three weeks before Christmas came in earnest, with a determined hard frost and ruddy skaters and bursting pipes.

## AN OLD COUNTRY HOUSE

Two or three months ago, as we strolled over a neighboring common, Perdita, with the murderous instinct of the foreseeing housewife, had bespoken a string of twenty geese that filed by us into a neighboring farm-yard. There were at least twenty kind country folk in Slumberfold, she said, to whom she would owe a goose at Christmas, and with every goose went a plum-pudding, some mince-meat, a bottle of wine, and a sprig of mistletoe. No prime-minister, at some crisis of his nation's history, and holding in his hands the strings of international destiny, could be more hummingly occupied than Perdita while these momentous hampers were a-packing. For two whole days she never kissed me once. And, of course, she had so much else to think of besides. Pause for a moment and think what was on her mind! She had to buy presents and address cards for something like five hundred friends, she had to issue invitations for an old English Christmas dance, she had to train the village choir in their capacity as waits, she had to decorate the house with holly and mistletoe, she had to think out every detail of the Christmas tree, not to speak of making the mince-meat and plum-pudding with her own clever hands. For it is one of the many curious convictions of your true housewife that no cook, however skilful, can be trusted with the manufacture of these mysterious, sacred dishes. Perhaps this accounts for the proverbial indigestibility of both.

We are poor people, and cannot afford the true manorial equipment of servants. I confess that most of our servants are "contrived a double debt to pay"; and it is to their everlasting credit that they are kind-hearted enough to understand the situation and help us out with great good-nature. Perhaps none of us lose by it in the long run. Certainly

## PERDITA'S CHRISTMAS

Perdita and I gain, if only by the sense of kindly household folk around us, who will not haggle over some nicety of their duties, but deem a friendly smile and a kind word a good human equivalent. Should John the gardener be called upon, in some crush of events, to clean the knives, he would never dream of saying that he is not paid for cleaning them. He is gentleman enough to understand that a courtesy is asked of him, and he does it with a smiling heart; and he knows that, if some day he should need a courtesy in return, it is his before he asks it. Similarly, nurse, whose stipulated duties cease at the nursery door, is only too glad to lend cook a hand in the kitchen, particularly when such excitements as Christmas festivities are going forward. Even I, myself, who am not paid for any such arduous work, do not mind leaving the mysterious pen-and-ink duties in the study, so that nurse may help cook in the kitchen. Perhaps deep in my heart I may be really glad to escape from my desk to my children—though, if you know anything of children, you will know that they are about the hardest work in the world, and I make no pretence to being an expert infantile entertainer.

Joyce is a little girl of eight. There is, therefore, nothing to tell her about Christmas. She already clearly remembers six Christmas trees, and can tell you, with reliable particularity, the various shining fruits that hung on each. But Freya is not yet quite two, and this is, practically, her first Christmas. Yet, strangely enough, she seems to know all about it. So wonderful is the power of certain words—spell-words, one might call them—that even a baby is immediately impressed with their significance. The word Christmas is already so real a thing for little Freya that her tiny spirit is in as great a state of expectant commotion as though, some

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twenty years hence, you had whispered in her ear the word "trousseau"! Already, though not yet two, the human being craves excitement. Christmas is to be Freya's first excitement. Already a word which, of course, she cannot pronounce means romance to her and the blowing of trumpets and the waving of plumes. Already the nursery has grown dull to her. She is weary of its daily round. If only she could walk better, she would run away. Already the world is growing stereotyped, and she welcomes Christmas as a bright break in the monotony of existence.

She doesn't really appreciate poetry as yet, but Joyce has not spared her many nursery rhymes on that account, to which Freya has listened with a rather alarmed respect. Here is one that Joyce is fond of, and of which Freya can say some three and a half words:

"O the big red sun  
And the wide white world,  
And the nursery window  
Mother-of-pearled;

"And the houses all  
In hoods of snow,  
And the mince-pies,  
And the mistletoe;

"And Christmas pudding,  
And berries red,  
And stockings hung  
At the foot of the bed;

"And carol-singers,  
And nothing but play—  
O baby, this is  
Christmas Day!"



## PERDITA'S CHRISTMAS

Well, at last, on the afternoon of Christmas Eve Perdita threw herself into a chair with a tired sigh, and audibly thanked Heaven that her arrangements for Christmas were completed. She had worked so hard, dear thing; and I couldn't help wondering why—for I confess that I am neither young enough nor old enough really to enjoy Christmas. Christmas was made for grandmothers and grandchildren: those who are happy because they are beginning life, and those who are happy because they are so soon to end it. Those "in the midway of our mortal life" Christmas is apt to inspire with a melancholy peculiar to itself, a melancholy which young laughter rather deepens than dispels. But such reflections are, I know, unworthy of the season, and as the snow-laden twilight darkens the windows nurse comes in with Joyce and Freya, who are to help light the Christmas candles which are to shine a welcome out across the green to Auntie Tess and Uncle Jake, who are expected from town in time for dinner. At the very thought of Auntie Tess and Uncle Jake the children's eyes grow bright, for Auntie Tess means chocolates, and Uncle Jake can play any game or pull any face you can think of, and there is no animal whose voice he cannot imitate. Grown-ups are particularly interested in his imitations of extinct animals; but Joyce and Freya, childlike, prefer his impersonation of cows and barn-yard fowls. They simply adore him when he imitates a pig, as I confess that I do, too. If Uncle Jake is a melancholy man—as I have heard whispered—he contrives to conceal his melancholy beneath a mask of infectious laughter which the saddest soul finds it impossible to resist.

Christmas trains are always allowed to be late, and the candles had burned quite an inch when at length we heard

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the crunching of wheels on the snow, and saw the kind lamps of the carriage coming across the green. Then we threw open the wide door that they might have a golden carpet of welcome across the snow, and from the carriage came a view-halloo in fine style, and Joyce cried "Uncle Jake!" as loud as she could, and Freya tried to imitate her, and Perdita took a last quick glance at the decorations in the hall, and then we heard John running over the cobbles in the stable-yard to open the carriage door and help with the luggage. John's "Good-evening, sir; a merry Christmas!" as Uncle Jake stepped from the carriage, had something good and kind in it that makes it worth while for the human heart to go on beating, and you may be sure that Uncle Jake knew how to respond to such a welcome. John and he were no strangers. Uncle Jake was too good judge of a terrier not to have won John's heart long ago.

At an unseen signal from Perdita a great horn of mulled wine, warm as a winter fire and subtly spiced, had been carried in by a waiting-maid dressed so prettily in an Elizabethan frock that I had some difficulty in recognizing our little country Martha. When Auntie Tess and Uncle Jake had been duly comforted by this grateful beverage, and the loneliness of an hour or two's travel warmed out of them, Perdita made another signal, whereupon a feudal retainer dressed in Lincoln green, but still, I surmised, one of the many transformations of our honest John, stepped into the hall, and, doffing a hat decorated with hawk's feathers, raised a cow's horn to his lips and blew a merry blast. He blew it three times, and I never heard a cow's horn blown better. As the third blast died away, from the little gallery at the far end of the hall there began quite a pretty music, a little

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timorous at first, but soon gaining courage; and presently there came from the kitchen quarter quite a populace of heartily sung words to match it. While the song was still singing one of the great doors of the hall was thrown open and a dozen stout lads, clad in green—à la John—appeared, harnessed to a mighty log, on which was perched the best singer in the village choir, a graceful lad whom I knew still better as a skilful wicket-keeper. Having been drawn in upon the log, in spirited style, he vacated his throne, and, doffing his hat, rendered Herrick's old song in a way that made me whisper to Perdita that there was something to be done with the English peasantry after all:

“Come bring, with a noise,  
My merry, merrie boys,  
The Christmas Log to the firing;  
While my good Dame she  
Bids ye all be free,  
And drink to your heart's desiring. . . .”

You may be sure the noise was not lacking, and when the lads had dragged the log on to the hearth, and it was already beginning to crackle, Perdita was not forgetful of a further important feature of the ceremony, and I heard her warn Martha to be careful that, should we stay too long over dinner, the whole log should not be burned, but a brand of it preserved to light the yule-log next year.

We had hardly sat down to dinner, however, when new strains of music interrupted us, like angels lost in the snow and gently pleading for admittance. It was the carol-singers telling of good King Wenceslaus, and how, so many years ago,

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as shepherds watched their flocks by night—this very night, nearly two thousand years ago—the Angel of the Lord came down, and brightness shone around. The familiar tears came into our eyes as we listened, and we ran to the door to welcome the great-coated, snow-shod singers.

When the singers had been duly refreshed to their taste and content, and Joyce and Freya had gone to sleep dreaming of little stockings bursting like cornucopias with precious eatables, we old folk returned to our interrupted meal, and talked of those we loved who were coming on the morrow, and perhaps even more of those who could never come again. And then, remembering how busy the coming day was to be for Perdita, we bade each other quite an early good-night and the old house fell quiet. The embers of the log-fire in the hall opened a drowsy eye occasionally, like a sleeping hound; the frost tightened its white grip on the world outside, till you could hear it creak with pain; and the windows were being stealthily overlaid with ghostly flowers.

The morning sun rose jolly and red as only the sun can rise on Christmas Day, but he had been up none too long when there came a knocking at the door and more singing. Perdita was already dressed, but I confess I had been hoping for another half-hour in bed, as it was yet barely seven.

“Was this really necessary, Perdita?” I asked.

“Come and look through the window,” she replied, “and don’t be so lazy.”

I looked, and had to confess it was a pretty fancy; for six village lads, dressed like foresters, stood with branches of mistletoe in their hands, and as they beat upon the door with the mistletoe they sang, “Yule, Yule, Yule,” skilfully intoned

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with many variations, of which I surmised Perdita had got the hint from one of those old books of airs which she was fond of studying and trying over on her harpsichord.

“Now listen again,” she said, “or, if you don't want to hear your own miserable carol, go back to bed again and draw the sheets over your ears.”

Was there ever a more flattering inducement to early rising? Of course I stood and listened. It sounded well in that crystalline morning air, I must confess; but as I fear it would not sound so well in print, I spare the reader a copy of it here.

“It was dear of you, Perdita,” I said, “but I wish we had kept to ‘Christians, awake, salute the happy morn’; for association is three-quarters of the battle in such songs, and bad old poetry that has been loved for centuries by good old people is better for such purposes than good new poetry by the cleverest of young persons.”

A moment or two later we heard a laughing chatter coming along the corridor to our room, and suddenly the door was thrown open by two happy fairies in tiny morning wrappers, and holding in their hands stockings bursting with treasures. Oh, the treasures! Oh, the happy little girls! What a wonderful world! We covered the bed with them, wondering how they possibly could have come and who could have sent them. “Father Christmas, of course,” said Joyce; and Freya, who always deferred to her elder sister's knowledge of the world, agreed that it could be no one else.

“Well, I really believe it was Father Christmas,” said Perdita, “and if you are very good little girls perhaps he will come and give away the presents from the Christmas tree this afternoon”—for poor Perdita had a children's party on her hands as well as the other pleasure-business of the day.

## AN OLD COUNTRY HOUSE

Uncle Jake has impersonated Father Christmas now for some years, and, when the time for gathering the Christmas fruit had come, I wish you could have seen him among the children. Still a child, in spite of his thirty years, how well he understood instinctively just what would make them laugh or take their fancy. Well might the children go away with the firm conviction that they had indeed seen Father Christmas! To doubt so veritable a Father Christmas would have been a form of infantile atheism worthy of ostracism in every kindergarten. Dear Uncle Jake!

Now I think I can safely leave you to imagine the rest of the day. Perdita contrived to give it many little touches of originality, but, had she been too original, it would hardly have been an old-fashioned Christmas Day. Yet there are one or two particulars worth naming in regard to the dinner and the dance. The first is the spirited manner in which Uncle Jake, disguised as a huntsman, carried in the boar's head, and the way in which he gave the old song—

“The Bore's Heade in hande bring  
With garlandes gay and rosemary,  
I pray you all synge merely,  
*Qui estis in convivio.*”

But a still greater sensation was the mammoth pie which it took two strong lads to carry in. Perdita had found the recipe in an old book, and, having somewhat reduced the proportions of the ingredients, had built up her pie as follows: one bushel of flour, ten pounds of butter, two geese, one turkey, one rabbit, two wild ducks, one woodcock, three snipes, two partridges, one neat's tongue, one curlew, four

## PERDITA'S CHRISTMAS

blackbirds, and three pigeons. The pie was a good six feet round, and weighed about ninety pounds. It was set in a case, underneath which were four wheels by which it could be the more easily passed along the table—the which, as you can imagine, caused great merriment. When we had done with it, it was wheeled round the village in triumph, stopping at cottage doors till it was finally consumed.

The dance was the gayest thing in the world, but I know it was somewhat of a disappointment to Perdita, for, though she had coached some of our young neighbors in several pretty old dances, the majority of her guests found themselves awkward in the old measures; and I regret to say that very soon her old Christmas dance had degenerated into an orgy of the modern waltz and Washington Post. Yet, as I explained afterwards to Perdita, you cannot expect young people to be pedantic over their pleasures, and they naturally prefer to be young in the latest fashion. When youth is dancing with a pretty girl it doesn't want to have to pay too much attention to the steps of the dance.

And certainly, for the most part, Perdita had every reason to be satisfied with the success of her Christmas-card Christmas. Every one and everything had worked together to assist her in her enterprise, and particularly the weather, which was the severest known in our parts for many winters. We felt quite proud of the snowdrifts that all but overtopped the gate-posts of our Old Manor, and we forgave the frost its painful tricks with our water-pipes for the sake of the beautiful arabesques on our windows. When we came down to breakfast we felt quite a personal gratification in saying that we had found the water frozen in our jugs. Why is human nature as boyishly pleased with such

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things as though it had made them itself? And is there anything that makes the soul of man so happy as some masterful display of the elements—fire in its splendor, or water in its might, or the wind in its wrath, or the drowsy snow, so thick, so gentle, so irresistible?

Well, the guests are gone; their laughing good-byes have died away with the sound of their carriage-wheels, like far, aërial music; the fires once more burn low; we have had our last nightcap together, and the snow is making an eery noise against the old windows. It is time to go to our Elizabethan beds. Good-night! Let us hope Martha has not forgotten the hot-water bottles.

THE END













