THE POET
MISS KATE AND I

By

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To
C. F. W. M.

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CHAPTER I

Miss DOROTHY WAREHAM *fears there are corruptions of the ayre*

MARCH 17th

MISS KATE and I ride down every morning to get the mail, that is "ef we live an' nothin' 't all don't happen." It is not well to make so positive a statement without adding this modifying clause of Aunt Cindy's; which reminds me I must be more exact, and explain, that when I say, "Miss Kate and I ride," I mean that I ride on Miss Kate, she being a small chestnut mare of about fourteen hands. And I? Well, it does not matter about me. It is sufficient to say that I have the advantage of Miss Kate by a few hands, noticeably the whip hand — and am generally known as Miss Dorothy.

It is three miles to the post-office, and it is also three miles back, so one may see, after a slight mental calculation, that Miss Kate and I have traveled six miles before we are again at home, and many things may happen in six miles.

There are two roads to our destination, the hill road, and the one through the meadows, and each has its special attractions which should be duly considered before choosing either in haste. The hill road, which is really the county road — "de big road" — as its name implies, winds up and down all the way. Down in the little sunny hollows the frogs sing, while from the hill-tops there are lovely views of shimmering creeks, gray and white dwellings, soft meadows, and most of all mountains, mountains; little cheerful mountains, and fierce towering ones, green mountains and brown, and distant blue ones. For Miss Kate and I are but a half day's ride from one of the highest points in the Alleghanies, and these mountains have been our familiar friends from

the beginning, whether clothed, as in early spring, with mists of faintest green, or luxuriating in the eager growth of summer, or later wrapped in the warm coloring and white expanse of autumn and winter.

The meadow road is flat, with broad fields lying on either side, at least they are broad for this country, though I suppose one used to the wide stretches of the West would smile at them. Here the blackbirds discuss politics in hoarse gutturals, and when one is worsted in an argument he changes the subject abruptly, and showing the glint of fire on his black wings, swoops away to alight on the slenderest of stalks, and there, swaying up and down, in reedy notes discourses sweetly of love and sunshine. Here also, a little later, in pleasant gossipy groups, the mandrakes will be spreading their green umbrellas to protect their pretty waxen faces from the May sunshine, and the grass will have a purple haze of violets, checkered everywhere with dandelions. And sometimes, just sometimes, riding along this road,

one may be startled by the swish of a wild duck rising from the pond, and always there are flowers here which do not grow along the more traveled highway. In short, in the meadows one bows to nature, while along the road "shadows of the world appear," which is to say, on the latter one may exchange health inquiries and weather truisms quite half a dozen times before reaching the village. On the whole the most satisfactory plan is to go down one road and return by the other, by which means, when home is reached, one has touched life in a variety of refreshing ways.

This morning, however, Miss Kate and I kept to the hill road altogether, for it had rained a day and a night, and the ford in the meadows would be high and the way muddy. So, ready for whatever might befall us, we turned our heads gaily toward the hills.

The weather was still rather uncertain and raw, but we told ourselves that spring was certainly here, for was not the wild

ginger in bloom, and were not the frogs singing in choruses? To be sure the frogs had sung on warm days in January, and in consequence had looked through several sets of glass windows since, so perhaps the wild ginger is a truer prophet of spring. How well I remember the first time I discovered its queer little blossoms! I had known the plant since its round, shiny, sometimes mottled leaves, had fascinated me in childhood, but its bloom I never thought of, until one day in early spring I pulled up the leaves, idly wondering what its root was like, and there suddenly, looking at me, were little bell-shaped flowers, growing, as I thought then, under ground. They were so dark, and looked so like mouths gaping at me, and saying, "There! There!" that I was almost frightened, out in the woods alone. But we have been friends ever since.

Yes, spring is certainly here! Even if one can only surprise her in certain new sounds and subtle odors. Soon the hepaticas and spring beauties will be in bloom, then the

bloodroots and dog-tooth violets, and the children will all be wearing tight little bunches of trailing arbutus. And one sunny day almost a week ago I heard the snap and click of the opening pine cones in that five-acre lot of young pines which has always fascinated me. It is so different from most woods. You climb a rail fence and drop upon the slippery needles and everything is changed. There is only a half light and no underbrush, only pine trees everywhere, all exactly alike, all about half grown; no old ones, no little ones. They have a strange allurement for me, and on hot days I dream

there for hours in the subdued coolness. But it must be stupid for the pine trees, never to have any companions but just those of their own age, and just like them. It is as though in a community, for some reason, all but the children had been swept away, and as these grew up no more children took their places, so that they finally came to middle age, and forgetting their youth sought to remember it, and found nothing young to remind them. As though they looked forward and saw that they were growing old, and cried out to know how they should bear it, and there was nothing old to tell them;

all around them beings one with themselves. One would start to tell of something which happened in its youth, but would be stopped by the others chorusing that it had happened to them in the same place when they were the same age. Is it any wonder the pine trees are silent and their voices are not heard among them?

On days like this the mountains look fierce and dark. Look, for instance, at Allen's Knob. Could anything be more forbidding than its purple gloom? And yet at times I have seen it almost smile, and that in spite of its tragic story; for it has a tragic story of old times. Long ago, *long* ago, before the war, a stranger took board with a farmer on Hope's Mountain, the mountain next to Allen's Knob. I do not know anything about him, whether he had the nervous interest of the city man, or the large-eyed placidity of the countryman. All I know is that he was a stranger, that he gave his name as Allen, and paid his board with honesty.

One day he was missed, and looking for him they found him on the top of Allen's Knob killing himself with a pocket knife. They tried to stop him, but he besought them earnestly to leave him alone, and as they were of a simple nature they went away, and when he had quite finished they came back and buried him there and named the knob for him. But that happened long and long ago, and if any one were to try to kill himself before our eyes now we should certainly stop him.

Here a gleam shone over all the land, and Miss Kate and I saw Tony in front of us wandering vaguely toward the village, his bag of milling slung across the back of his saddle, and were glad to turn to more cheerful things. It is safe to speak to Tony on his way down, but coming home it is best not to see him. I spoke to him one day last summer when his face was turned the wrong way, and he responded affably, "Bye-Bye!" getting the words out with a lurch and a roll that threatened to unseat him. He is one

of the meekest specimens of humanity that I know, that is to say, on his way down, and even on the way home he is always ready to reform, for a time and a donation. Certain ladies, who frequent the Springs in the season, have found him, for the sum of five dollars or so, a most promising subject for reformation and temperance. Tony's father owned a corn field which for its yield had been the talk of the countryside at shucking time. Now we also had a corn field of about the same size, and for reasons pertaining to bottom land and fertilizer, or mountain land and none, I wished to know just how many bushels theirs had brought.

"How many bushels did your father get from his corn field last fall, Tony?" I inquired.

Tony gave me a faraway look. "Aw, ther was a chanst of it," he replied.

"But how many bushels?" I persisted.

He shook his head.

"I dunno 'bout the bushels," he answered, "but ther was er lot, fer we fed er pile an'

sold er heap, an' ther's er right smart left."

And Miss Kate and I trotted on, trying in vain to add together a pile, and a heap, and a right smart, and then reduce it to bushels.

It was on our way home that we met the stranger — a Mr. Selwyn — so we were informed at the post-office, where we had been warned that there was such a phenomenon roaming the country, so that we were somewhat prepared, but nothing can wholly prepare one for such an occurrence at this time of the year. In the summer there are a good many strangers about, and one gets almost used to coming upon them at sharp turns in the road; but in the spring, fall, and winter, a stranger may mean anything, and is looked upon with almost as much distrust as were comets of old, and an early English writer says of them — "Cometes signifie corruptions of the ayre. They are signes of earthquakes, great dearthe of corn, yea a common death of man and beast."

Well, I hope this unseasonable Mr. Selwyn

won't affect our corn crop! It was at the graveyard that Miss Kate and I met him. I do not know why I should say *the* graveyard, for certainly it is not the only one. They are scattered about in all directions, generally on the tops of the steepest hills; why, I am not sure. I asked old man Corbin once, and he said, "So *they* could see out good." Evidently he would have been oppressed at the idea of being tucked away in a valley after having spent his life on the hilltops.

There is rarely a fence around these burying grounds, and in a quiet walk in the woods, if you are not noticing, you may quite unexpectedly find yourself in the midst of one. For as old man Corbin (my authority on this subject) says, "Yer turn er graveyard loose in ther woods, an' ther's no tellin' *where* it'll go ter."

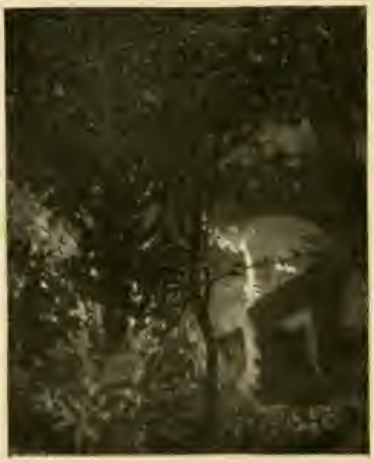
Probably the reason I call this *the* graveyard is because it has a very special interest for us; for Miss Kate and I know what is hidden here. Summer people go riding and

driving by, and say, perhaps, "What a sweet resting place!" and never dream of anything else, but Miss Kate and I know, that if they only knew where to look, and had the courage, they would find a buried pot of gold. "A pot of gold!" you exclaim. "Then this is the end of the rainbow!"

But wait until I have told you how we know, and you too will be convinced.

Ed Saunders, one of our neighbors, had a dream. He dreamt that he went to this graveyard at night, and there under a pile of stones he found a pot of gold buried in the ground. He told his wife in the morning about his dream, but neither of them thought much about it. On the following night, however, he dreamt the same thing, and the third night too. And then he said that he would go to the place and look, and though his wife, a prudent woman, begged him not, he was obdurate, and when the moon rose clear and full he shouldered his shovel and set forth. On his way he fell in with two of his cronies, and perhaps because his

heart already failed him, he told his story and invited them to come with him for company. Arrived at the graveyard he went down to the lower side as in the dream, and there indeed was the rock pile. This startled him somewhat, for he had not known that there was one there in truth. His friends seated themselves on a log with their hands in their pockets; it is a creepy place where tall trees stand, and the grapevines loop and twist, and doubtless the moon made queer little shadows: "An' ef ha'nts hed anything ter do with it, *they* weren't er goin' ter hev no hand in it." So Ed re-



moved the stones unaided, trembling a little as he began to dig, and when he had made but a few strokes the cold perspiration broke out on him. The others shuffled their feet irresolutely. "I reckon I must be travelin' on," one of them ventured. "Wait!" Saunders commanded. He was digging furiously, shaking all over. Suddenly his shovel struck something that rang like metal. He dropped it from his hands and turned to the others. For a terrified second the three gazed into one another's eyes, then — "Boys," said Saunders, thickly, "let's go home!"

Afterwards brave people tried to get Ed to go back and dig again, but he was not to be persuaded. When he came face to face with the matter he preferred his money-getting not to be the subject of supernatural attentions; which all goes to show he should have minded his wife in the first place and stayed at home. I have heard people say it was only a stone Ed's shovel struck, but few believe that, for if nothing was there, why were they all so frightened?

Here, then, at this graveyard, I was startled by a whinny from Miss Kate, and looking up I saw the stranger appearing around the turn. He was riding the gray horse that belongs at the livery stable in the village, with whom Miss Kate has a slight acquaintance. But I had never in my life seen the stranger, and I found Miss Kate's cheerful greetings somewhat embarrassing. The gray horse responded with heartiness, and Kate continued with a remark on the weather.

This was dreadful! It is Kate's one bad habit. What should I do? Masculine ad-

vice is: "Switch her like the nation." But that would be undignified and show temper. In the tales of adventure when the enemy is so close that a breath can be heard, they always pinch the horses' noses to keep them from whinnying. Should I dismount and pinch Kate's nose violently until the horse and his rider were past? On the whole I decided that it was better to maintain a serene indifference, and appear deaf to Kate's and the gray horse's remarks, which became softer and more confidential as we approached.

The stranger took off his hat and bowed gravely, but I caught a gleam of amusement in his eyes as we passed. Perhaps it was this gleam, or perhaps it was because he rode unlike the usual slouchy equestrian whom we are in the habit of passing; at any rate there was something about his appearance which made me turn in true mountaineer fashion and glance after him. Instantly I was sorry I had done so, for I was met at once by his clear, scrutinizing eyes. I turned away indignantly. What right had he to do

so? It is the native's not the stranger's prerogative to stare, and I was vexed.

Later we learned that he had been looking at the old Duval place, with the idea of renting it for the summer. And I doubt not that the surrounding neighbors are already speculating how much he can be induced to pay for eggs and butter, to say nothing of prospective spring chickens. But I have no eggs or butter either to sell, so why should his possible advent interest me?

Miss Kate and I trotted home in a shower of rain. We overtook old Donald riding his cow. He is an importation from Scotland, and in his earlier days he was gardener to the Duke, so we feel when we pass him that we have almost brushed elbows with aristocracy. What Duke? Indeed I do not know; he always says "*the* Duke"; so I fancy there is but the one, for him at any rate. He called out to us that it was "gey wet." We should not have minded "*its*" being wet if we had not been also, but then we too were gay wet so that it did not matter.

CHAPTER II

"I feel two natures struggling within me"

April 3d

David Selwyn, dreamer and versifier,

To David Selwyn, lawyer and man of affairs:

WELL, my other and altogether practical self, what is your opinion of this latest development in our career?

Surely you do not blame me for it. Of all the enormities which I have committed against your smug practicality, you can hardly lay to my account the fact that we have developed an insidious disorder which, the learned tell us, is known as chronic nephritis, and which, according to the best authorities, has crept upon us to such an advanced stage that it will most certainly

carry us off inside of a year, possibly, nay probably sooner. But for this my conscience does not prick. Indeed had I consented to be stuffed up in an office all day long, year in and year out, in accordance with your scheme of existence, — and you must admit that, backed by relatives, you fought hard enough to have your way, — we should in all probability have been dead and gone long ere this, instead of having survived to the ripe age of thirty-two. But let us set forth clearly the enormities which I have committed against you, for our own satisfaction if for that of no one else.

I, David Selwyn, aged thirty-two, whom all oracles and fates, as well as desires of friends and relatives (not to mention the inclinations of one half of myself), had seemingly destined for the law, have nevertheless, by the other half of my nature, imbued with poetical tendencies inherited doubtless from a riming grandfather, been diverted from the conservative legal highways into the uncertain and illusive paths of verse.

Truly, myself, when I am thus confronted by my poetical transgressions, I realize that my riming grandfather and myself have indeed sinned greatly against the designs of my relatives and my other self. I even feel, as elderly feminine connections have frequently hinted in the past, that I am my own worst enemy. But no, bad as I may be, surely I cannot be as bad as that insidious disorder ending in an 'itis which will so soon carry off David Selwyn, lawyer and poet.

It is a paltry, almost an irreverent amusement, jesting over death, yet if I jest it is only to keep myself from coming face to face with the grim reality. But indeed as yet I am too stunned by the sudden knowledge, which fell out of as clear a sky of life as ever a man had, fully to grasp the truth. I, to die? Oh! it cannot be! I cry out to myself that it is monstrous, an impossibility. I am only thirty-two, and have but so recently set my feet upon the threshold of success. Surely it is all a hideous dream — the remembrance of Dr. Horton's grave face,

the ponderous tick of his watch, the manifold curious smells from his medicine cases, all are but phantoms in the dream, from the terrible grip of which I shall presently awake.

But wake I cannot. And those strange sensations and stabs of sudden pain seem set as grim sentinels to whisper now and again, "In a year you will be dead."

But if I can never again wake to my old life of health and vigor, neither, on the other hand, can I make myself grasp the solemn fact that I have but a year left to me. I have said it to myself again and again. I have repeated endlessly the empty words, but their meaning as being applied to myself has not yet taken shape. I am still stunned, still dazed by it all, and I think of myself, and contemplate my fate, almost as though it were that of some stranger. Then why try to wake myself? Best be thankful that nature has, as it were, supplied me with a mental anesthetic to alleviate the knowledge.

Besides there are ameliorations to the situation. In the first place, I remind myself that I am merely paying somewhat sooner than I had reckoned a debt which I have always expected ultimately to settle. This should give me satisfaction, for the prompt payment of our indebtedness has always been a matter of pride with us Selwyns. Also I may hope for comparative painlessness. Nature will not have to apply her thumbscrews unduly, at least not until I am nearer the end; perhaps just enough then to make me glad to go.

Dr. Horton also tells me that I may possibly die in my boots, this particular 'itis having an insidious tendency to carry people off sometimes before they have realized even there was anything seriously wrong with them. Though I am glad for myself of the possibility of not being incapacitated until the last, still I am sorry to be associated with such an underhand, sneaking, stab-in-the-dark kind of an 'itis. A good enemy I have never despised, but this peculiarity of

my 'itis forces me to look askance at its moral character. It is this very underhandedness which has enabled it unawares to creep upon me to such a hopeless stage. However, this insidiousness prevents me from knowing which one of my numerous uncomfortable sensations is characteristic of the disease, and for this I am glad. Given more knowledge I might yield to the weak-minded temptation of discussing my symptoms with others similarly afflicted. Note that, though I may call others afflicted, I confess that should any one apply the epithet to me I should be far from pleased. It is as bad as saying at once that a person is mentally wanting, and also implies that it is the Hand of Providence that has dealt the blow, and therefore the afflicted person should bear it thankfully — truly, the bald meaning of a word is as nothing compared to the third and fourth generations of interpretations stored within it.

But to return to the ameliorations. I have no family to be distressed over me.

Friends I have, thank God, in plenty, who will, I hope, miss me a little — I am sure I should pay them the same compliment — but no near relatives, therefore I shall be able to slip more or less unobtrusively out of the world. Nor is it necessary to inform any one of my intended departure. What's the use of bothering one's friends about the matter? It isn't as though they could give any advice about what sort of preparations to make. Then, too, it is always possible that Dr. Horton may be mistaken, doctors are not infallible — a straw of comfort which I hug very close. And suppose I did not depart at the time specified, if I had confided my expectations to any one, I should feel as flat as a Seventh Day Adventist, the day after the world didn't come to an end.

These are some of the ameliorations, yet amid them all there is no doubt the black truth remains, that I am horribly afraid of death — and so are you, my smug lawyer self; here we shake hands. But then I am almost as curious about it as I am afraid.

It gives undoubted sensations to reflect that within a year I may possibly have erased the question mark after existence. And all my life I have believed, and trust I shall continue to believe to the last, that there is through all a guiding Power of Truth and Goodness on whom we may rely.

For another amelioration, I have plenty of money, quite a small fortune indeed, thanks to a lucky turn of events, wisely foreseen by my competent man of business, —there, my practical self, accept this humble tribute to your business ability. Last of all the ameliorations, and one of the best, I have a definite object in view for these months. There is my book to finish. With a long life in front of me I should perhaps have liked two years for it, but half the time will do when death rides post. And let me tell you, my lawyer self, you are not to say law or order again to me. I have a year's grace left, and in that time legal matters do not figure in my scheme of existence; for I cherish the thought that if I die,

possibly what I write first may yet live a little while. You smile? But let me remind you that the verse which in your sarcastic, practical moments you style doggerel has been called poetry by people competent to judge.

Poetry, Monsieur! Spell it with a capital. To be sure, as you remind me, it has by other critics, almost equally competent to judge, been called a weak imitation of poetry. Be that as it may, the fact remains that David Selwyn, poet, is not unknown in two countries, whereas David Selwyn, lawyer, has yet to be recognized in one city. But never mind, old self, you might have made a good enough lawyer, if half of you had not been born a second-rate poet, and anyway, much as we have struggled against each other in times gone by, we have at last one secret in common from the rest of the world.

But I must finish my search for some place in which to write, and in which to die decently and in order. Some quiet country place I desire. The city's too crowded to suit my present taste. As a rule I am as

fond as misery herself of company. But now I feel that I have little in common with the crowd. I know of not one among them all going so immediately my way. If I did I might feel differently toward humanity; I might then feel like the little Christianized Chinese girl, who said at the time of the Boxer rising, when it was feared that every one in the Mission school would be massacred: "Well, if we must die, won't it be fun for fifty little Chinese girls all to go to Heaven together!"

I have already inspected a few country places, and of them all, for some reason, I incline most to a weather-beaten old stone

farmhouse, set among mountains, and known as the old Duval place. I was inveigled by advertisements into visiting it last month, though to do so took me many a weary mile from New York; and the place and its surroundings have been perpetually in my mind ever since. Why I do not know, or if I do half guess, it is too preposterous an idea under the circumstances to acknowledge.

Well, then, the first number on our programme is: Decide on a country house, and all the other numbers are, Write; write; write; until the finale, which we won't have to bother about, as it will be arranged for us.

CHAPTER III

"All in the merry month of May"

May 20th

MISS KATE and I felt a little sad this morning cantering along between thorn bushes the tenderest shades of green, for May has been here in all her glory and now she is passing. The crab-apple blooms are fading and the air is full of their dying breath, and June, with her high carnival of growth, is almost here. I am sorry to part with May, it has been such a happy month! I have lived out of doors. I wonder if I should get tired of a year of Mays? I should like to try. But perhaps, after all, it is as well we should only meet and part once in a year; for otherwise she might lose her zest for me, her perpetual sweetness might pall, for one tires of choco-

late creams as an all-day diet, and needs something more every-day and substantial. Besides, after May comes June, and are not the crab-apple blossoms most fragrant when dying? And after them come the real apples.

I went into Fairyland once when I was little. The road was a very simple one. I went by way of the porch roof, then a long step, an uncertain scramble, and I was there, — there among the branches of the old sweet apple tree in its drifts of bloom, bathed in its rich perfume, and surrounded by the drone of bumblebees, honey-bees, and all the myriad other buzzing people; while with a whirr and tiny twitter a pair of humming-birds flashed back and forth across the bees' monotonous way like comets across our Earth's path. That is Fairyland, and the porch is there, and the tree is there, and the bees and humming-birds. But I have never been again; why I do not know, unless it is that one never goes more than once to Fairyland.

I never saw young humming-birds, and if they are as ugly as most young birds, I do not wish to see them, it would destroy too many illusions.

All spring I have been charmed by a pair of redbirds, that came early and inspected a great many thorn bushes with an eye to building, and I counted as lost the day I missed seeing them. At last I found the nest with two eggs, and the bush that held it I looked upon as sacred. Then the little birds hatched — Oh! so ugly — regular "blind mouths." I wonder their own parents succor them. Well, ugly little things that they are, they make up for it when they are grown, and no one can be beautiful all the time.

This month the birds have taken possession of our grove. I went there yesterday, hoping to have a peaceful time for reading, and the birds literally drove me home. I made first for a little circle of thorn bushes which shelter one nicely from the road, but as I approached, a startled

twitter and rush of wings reminded me that I was too close to the shy redbird's nest, so I considerately moved away and settled in another spot. Here I had barely opened my book when I became aware of a very plaintive "cheep cheeping" near me, and looking up I saw that I was again intruding, upon a little sparrow's nest this time. I got up again and wandered off, afraid to settle myself anywhere, and even then I blundered upon a pair of brown thrushes, who made such a fierce and passionate attack upon me, scolding so harshly, that I felt almost frightened, and quite crestfallen. I retired to the house, but all day I could not rid myself of the feeling that I was a thief and housebreaker. How unjust those birds were! I would not have harmed them for worlds. But I could not make them understand. That is one of the griefs of this world, the difficulty of explaining oneself. I never cared for the power of seeing myself as others see me, but I should very much like to make other people see me as I see myself. But

one cannot blame the poor birds for having suspicious natures, when their lives are so continually full of danger. Take, for instance, that little pair that have elected to live in one of our grape-vines. I passed by there this morning and just below the nest lay our three old cats sunning themselves, while their respective families played about them. Startled by me one of the birds flew off the nest. Quick as lightning a cat leaped high after it, settling down once more with disappointment in her hard, pale eyes; yet a few hours after I heard the bird singing with all its joyful might. The world must be meant to be a happy place where care can be so easily forgotten in joyous industry. But perhaps even we human beings might throw off care if our homes were swung in grape-vines and we were surrounded by their heavenly perfume.

How little we really know about these wild things of which we talk so glibly. When I go into the grove and stand among the underbrush, I know there is a life of mystery

about me, a mystery of growth and living which one can never hope fully to understand. Perhaps one of the joys of being out of this body will be the possibility of understanding creatures better.

Aunt Livie says when dogs run about barking apparently at nothing, that they "sees ha'nts," so perhaps animals are quicker to see spirits than human beings.

Which reminds me that Miss Kate and I passed Aunt Livie this morning on our way down — funny little old woman that she is! She is not very long, but she is very broad, with a face creased all over with wrinkles, and she has a most cheerful and determined expression. I remember one hot summer day going to the little cabin where she lives and finding her taking a nap in the baby's cradle. All the rest of the family, the owner of the cradle included, being away at a church festival.

She was not the least disconcerted, but greeted me with perfect self-possession, as

though great-aunts had as much right in cradles as babies themselves.

She strode along this morning with little emphatic steps which reminded me of her short-clipped remarks. In her hand she carried a huge walking stick, some inches higher than herself, and on her head she wore a short-brimmed hat originally belonging to a man. If she had come from the mountain she must have walked already three miles, yet she was stepping as briskly as ever. By her side walked a half-grown girl with a thin, eager face. She is Aunt Livie's niece, and I hear she is a poet, "an' kin make things cum out an' rime jist like Shakespeare." So you see even here we have our geniuses.

Also we overtook Jake Eastborn before we got to the post-office; he, however, is not a poet. He is a large man with a strong arm and a face so meek and deprecatory that, coupled with extremely fair, almost white hair, it gives him such a forlorn appearance that strangers feel sorry for him; but his

acquaintances say — "Ef Jake hits er feller an' he don't fall, we allers steps 'round behind ter see what's er proppin' him up."

I believe, however, that Jake does not go out of his way to knock people down. I am afraid, gifted with such powers I should be tempted to use them with less moderation. There are some people I should like extremely to knock down — people who have never done me personally any harm, but of whom they say, "They're mean enough ter steal ther sody outen er biscuit, an' never crack ther crust."

As for Jake, as I remember a story I overheard him telling our stable boy, I do not believe, after all, there is much danger of his letting his pugnacious faculties rust. The two were seated on the back steps of the kitchen, and did not know that I was at my window just above them sewing, and undoubtedly eavesdropping as well. Jake told his story in low, drawling tones, and he has a habit of sucking in his lips squeakily at intervals, usually at dramatic climaxes.

He began in his sad way — "I was over ter ther railroad ther other day, where ther're layin' ther new double trackin'."

"Wus yer?" said the other with anticipation.

"Yes," said Jake, thoughtfully, "an' ther wus er feller thar hed er pistol. I reckon 'cause I cum outer ther woods an' had white hair, he sorter thought he could skeer somebody; anyhow he kep' er pullin' hit out an' stickin' hit back in his pocket, til' I ast him after er while what thet wus fer, an' he said hit wus er mighty handy thing with ther right man behind hit. An' I said *he* wa'n't

ther right man, an' at thet he pulled hit out ergin an' stuck hit in my face. I hed er quart bottle er whiskey in my pocket"—he paused, sucking in his lips—"an' when I cum erway," he went on, "they wus tryin' ter sort ther glass outen his face. Hit wus er awful waste er good liquor," he said regretfully, "but I reckon hit wus necessary." As I said, Jake's genius is not that of poetry.

After we had got the mail and were on our way home, Miss Kate and I were tempted off our usual route and rode some little distance up one of the mountain roads, for we

knew the azaleas and wild lilies-of-the-valley were in bloom, and hoped that we might find some lady's-slippers. Most people do not know that we have lilies-of-the-valley all through our mountains, "apparently identical with the European lilies-of-the-valley of the gardens," and quite as sweet.

I found the woods so full of azaleas — they flamed everywhere — that I had no hands for the lilies, or to bring home a clump of yellow lady's-slippers, which I should have liked for a shady corner of my wild-flower garden. Miss Kate did not at all approve of my bunch of azaleas. At first

she pretended to be very much afraid of them, but when she discovered they were to go home with us, she changed her tactics and tried to eat them.

We were rather late, and when we got into the meadows again, we hurried along. We had not gone far when we overtook and passed a more leisurely rider. Through the azalea blossoms and branches I could not see who it was, but I bowed as usual, receiving in return a salutation which surprised me, for not only did he bow, he took off his hat — took it off all the way! Now this we are not used to outside of the village, and

even there it is not the rule. The ordinary passer nods and raises his hand to his hat, but gets discouraged half way and lets it fall again, while the genuine mountaineer believes so firmly in the saying "Mountaineers are always free," that rather than bow down to any one, he gives his head an upward jerk, in recognition, and does not trouble at all about his hat. So I wondered a good deal whom we had passed, until diverted by Miss Kate's going lame.

Craning over I discovered she had picked up a stone. I slipped off, pinched her leg to make her lift, and investigated. Masculine advice is: Pound the stone with another in toward the broad part of the shoe. This I did, with the result that it went a little way and then stuck tighter than ever. Upon which I decided that I had the advice wrong and should have pounded toward the open. This I tried, but only succeeded in pounding my fingers. I would not have my readers suppose that I have never before encountered a stone in a horse's hoof, for I have a great

many times, and come off triumphant. But this one seemed to require very special treatment. Evidently Miss Kate thought so, for she jerked her foot impatiently away and set it down on my skirt, just missing my foot, for which I was devoutly thankful. I took her foot up again firmly and renewed the attack.

"Can I help?" said a voice close by me, and looking up I saw the March stranger, and Miss Kate whinnied softly to the gray horse. It was he I had caught a glimpse of through my azaleas. Dismounting he produced a tool-chest knife with an attachment for extracting stones, and, taking Miss Kate's hoof up, gave that refractory stone a few deft waggles and a poke, upon which it promptly dropped out. But which way it came I cannot say.

I thanked him, and after I was mounted again he inquired the way to the Duval place.

"I have been there before," he said, "but to-day I thought I would try a new road,

and between the directions given me in the village, which were beautifully vague, and my own ideas, I am entirely mixed up."

The lane into the Duval place turns off the meadow road a mile or so ahead of us, but as there are several other turnings which are confusing, and as it lay straight on our road, it seemed more sensible to let him ride with us as far as that; an offer which he accepted with alacrity.

"Do you know," he said, as he swung into his saddle and took my flowers, "when you passed me just now I came near catching your rein; not seeing you, I thought a bunch of azaleas was being run away with."

I smiled. "But did you not think their behavior was a trifle erratic?"

"Oh, no!" he answered gaily, "at home it would have been, but here I am prepared for anything, since I passed an old man placidly riding his cow, and rode some distance with another man who told me he always took a supply of maple sugar on his riding trips, having found, so he said, that

a pound of sugar and nine biscuits made an excellent meal."

I laughed, being familiar with both of his friends, and capped his story with more anecdotes, until we had reached the turning into the Duval place, where we parted, he to trot along the lane to his new abode, Miss Kate and I to canter homeward speculating on our neighbor. His appearance, at any rate, is in his favor. Though not strikingly handsome, yet his pleasant expression and general manner would go far to launch him in any one's good graces. But the mystery to me is, what can have brought him here at this quiet and uneventful season of our year. In the summer, the near-by Springs account for many strangers. To be sure our vicinity can boast of timber and a few minerals, but I feel that this stranger is hardly interested in either of these things. And aside from these, beautiful as the country is, there is little excitement in it for a stranger. We have nothing particularly rare either in the animal or vegetable king-

doms. No mountains high enough to entice mountain climbers; no earthquakes to give a tang to existence. Even really good, thorough-going eclipses pass us by, or put us off with just an eclipse of the moon or a partial one of the sun. In short, to an outsider our interests at this time of the year are so few that I am at a loss to account for this stranger's appearance in our midst, and I feel like "Mistress Jean" in the song, "What brings the Laird here at siena like time?"

When we reached home we found the house in a state of siege, doors shut and windows down; evidently, Mrs. Cubie, our tortoise-shell cat, was moving her pussies again. There indeed I found her on the door mat, her favorite child, wearing an unhappy and far-from-home expression, wriggling at her feet. I saw her little plan was to up with her baby and nip in, when I opened the door, so I was very cautious and let myself in at the very smallest crack.

Lately we have had an inundation of

kittens, "little, little cats," a regular "Sending of Dana Da." There are three sets of them, and one of the mothers, the above-mentioned Mrs. Cubie, cannot find a suitable place in which to bring up her family. She was consigned to a comfortable corner of the tool shed, an abiding place which I thought most desirable. But evidently I did not know, for she has decided that the house offers more educational advantages for young pussies. Accordingly they are found in every conceivable place, from which they are picked up and carried back to the shed, Mrs. Cubie following with perfect good humor, but with a gleam in her yellow eyes which means that she will put her pussies where she pleases.

The other day a very stately old gentleman, a professor and friend of my father's, came to dine with us. I was on my very best behavior, trying to live up to his dignified manners. In the stately atmosphere I felt a certain distinction growing upon me, which serene feeling, however, was rudely

dispelled, when the old gentleman gave me his arm in his courtly manner and conducted me into the drawing room, for there upon the hearth rug lay one of Cubie's blind babies, left to toast its toes, while its mother hunted up a suitable nest for it. With a grave air and perfect silence, the old gentleman picked it up between thumb and forefinger and handed it to me, and I removed it at once.

It is dreadful being thus tyrannized over by the animals. But it always has been so. We used to have an old cat who would insist on waking us up in the dead of night to admire her skill in rat catching. As the rat was usually alive, and frequently escaped when she played with it, the habit was, to say the least, an undesirable one. In the daytime, if she caught a rat and was put sternly out, she simply climbed up on the window-sill outside and held it up defiantly to view.

CHAPTER IV

DAVID SELWYN *sees* BIRNAM WOOD
come to Dunsinane

MAY 30th

WELL, so I have done it at last! And why? Why, oh why, my practical self, will you persist in asking unnecessary questions? Why did I pick the Alleghanies, so far from New York, for my country place? Why did I take a big, old-fashioned farmhouse, instead of one of all the small, accessible and well furnished houses, supplied with all modern improvements, and so essentially comfortable to die in, which were offered me? Well, then, I will tell you the unvarnished truth. I came so far from New York because I did not care to be near New York. And I picked out this particular house be-

cause, because — well, because it is big, and roomy, and sunny, and has walls two feet thick, in one of which is buried a cannon ball; and is built of gray stone of the neighborhood, and sits on its own little knoll all surrounded by apple trees, that now are in full bloom. Why need you tell me that in March, when I first saw the house, I did not realize that the unawakened trees about the house were apple trees, and that it was a cloudy day, so that the place gave little hint of sunshine? Oh, you persistent pursuer after truth, why won't you be satisfied with good fiction? Very well, then my incorrigible self, here is the real truth for you. I took this place — known as the old Duval place — for the sole and simple reason that on March 17th (St. Patrick's Day in the mornin') when returning to the village from its inspection, after having, in my own mind, negatived its desirability, I met, mounted on a small sorrel horse, who whinnied sociably to my mount, a little lady whose brown eyes smiled adorably, though her mouth was

demure, and whose hair twisted and looped in little curls all about and about her face. Then it was that I said to myself that the country that could produce such an inhabitant must surely be full of virtue, and straightway up went the Duval place ten points in my estimation. And though I have trotted about inspecting innumerable other country places, I have nevertheless finally established myself in this old gray house, hoping that when I die the good fates may permit me to be reincarnated in some such gay personality as that of the little lady on horseback.

I have been here about ten days and I have written as I never wrote before, for there never was such a country, and, well, I have seen Miss Dorothy Wareham — the little lady of the sorrel horse — once, and then she was entirely enveloped in a bunch of azaleas, in colors pink, orange, and yellow, great branches of them like "Birnam Wood come to Dunsinane." I could barely see her, and she on her little horse passed

me and my sober mount like a flash, everything dancing, her own dark hair, the light on the sleek little horse's side, the nodding flowers, all, all dancing and radiant with sunshine and life.

She passed me, as I say, like a flash, but in half a mile or so I overtook her. She had dismounted and her azaleas lay like a flame on the ground. Hoping to be of some help I dashed up and jumped off my own horse. She raised a flushed little face to my inquiry if I could be of any assistance, and I saw that she had been wrestling with a stone stuck fast in her little mare's shoe. Oh, that good, solid, imperturbable stone! Like the "Heathen in his blindness" I could have bowed down to it. It took me all too short a time to dislodge it, and all the while she stood by with great serious eyes, intent upon the process. When she was once more mounted and would have been gone in a minute, deception came to my rescue. I asked the way to the Duval place. I said I had become confused — that was true, for

I think I blushed when I asked her. Very kindly she said she would show me the way, as it was somewhat difficult to explain and lay in her direction.

I would have ridden slowly, I would have made my horse crawl, but her little horse pranced and curveted and danced sideways across the road and would not be satisfied with a sober gait; to which she may have been instigated by her rider's small foot hidden under her habit. However, in spite of the rapid pace, I improved the opportunity, and we fell into conversation which brought a smile to her eyes and a charming vivacity to her whole face.

But I take credit to myself for the decorous manner in which I behaved. I did not say "Madame, in eight months or so I shall be dead, so you are perfectly safe in vouchsafing me a smile or two now." No, I behaved in all respects as any real, live man would have done, and in all too short a time we came to the turn into the Duval place, and pointing it out to me, in a moment she was gone.

"But who can she be? Hardly a product of these environments altogether, but Southern she undoubtedly is by her intonation — I am convinced that she would say "gyarden and cyards." So perhaps after all her foot is on her native heath. Her name, and that my place adjoins her father's, I have learned from the old colored woman I have engaged, and on these bare bones of fact I have built endless romances.

My ménage is small. It consists of Jackson, an old, old colored woman for cook, and a scrawny cat rented with the place. It is a mistake to have too much paraphernalia when it comes to dying. King Cole is to be sent down next week and I am anxious to get my leg over him. Miss Dorothy and her little sorrel mare will not so easily escape us then. Jackson, though he has wandered around over a good portion of the world with me, is mystified now, and often I catch him regarding me with an uneasy question in his eyes. I wonder if he suspects the existence of something ending in an 'itis. I hope not.

I want sympathy from just one person, and that person, Willis White, happens to be abroad at present, enjoying himself hugely, off the beaten track of tourists, so what's the good of breaking into his holiday, and inviting him home to watch me go along the stepping stones to Eternity? However, as I get nearer the last number on my programme I may let him know, and in the meantime there is the comfort of feeling that there is a Willis White to be appealed to in case of panic, for I quite admit the possibility of such panic.

But to return to my ménage. My cook, whom I picked up on the spot, is a source of much entertainment to me. She has as much idea of figures as the scrawny cat. She looks as though she might have fried chickens for George Washington; but when I asked her how old she was she answered with pride, "I d'know, Sur, but I'se right ole, I 'spec' I'se nigh onter thirty."

Oh dear! Oh dear! Then we must be near of an age, yet she is a grandmother,

and did I hear her say great grandmother? But her fried chicken is a thing to dream of; and I sometimes wonder if my 'itis does not metaphorically rub its hands as it sees me fall upon the crisp legs and backs and breasts, no doubt delighted to see me hastening to my destruction.

But my 'itis reminds me that my lawyer friend calls my attention to the fact that before we can die comfortably we should make some disposition of our money, which otherwise will go to my cousin, John Selwyn, one whose saving grace is that he has to work for his living.

It is rather tough luck when a fellow hasn't known what it is to be rich very long, that he should have so soon to leave his newly acquired shoes of affluence for some one else to disport themselves in; but needs must, and I am perplexed to know on whom to bestow my discarded shoes. Willis White would be the man had he not at his birth stepped into a pair far surpassing mine in affluence, while at the same time he held a

silver spoon in the corner of his mouth at the same fierce angle at which now he is wont to tilt his cigar, thus proving incontrovertibly that the child is father to the man. So there, my practical self, I leave you to work out the problem of our wealth, while I write and dream dreams.

CHAPTER V

DAVID SELWYN *tests his invention*

JUNE 10th

I HAVE seen her again! I have even penetrated the Wareham stronghold. My open sesame was a glass of water and an old uncle. How often the simplest means are the most effective. The glass of water established me upon the Wareham front steps, the old uncle won me her father's heart. But I will explain. I had written most of the night, and in the morning I was blue; blue as blue, in spite of sunny weather and things all in bloom — or perhaps because of them — for in all probability they bloom for me for the last time. So to exorcise the blue devils I set out for a walk. I give you my word of honor, my practical self, though you may smile as much as

you please, that the vision of the azalea blossoms was not in my mind when I set out. But chance, or something better, led me along a woody path which terminated in a rustic bridge across a stream, then a low stile, and I found myself at the foot of a long stretch of lawn that gradually swept up to a red brick house, ornamented with white pillars; and I realized from Mirandy's description of "er powerful big house settin' on er hill," that this was the Warehams' place. And immediately I realized as well that I was extremely thirsty, and that it was very warm — it can be cruelly hot in June. Surely I might ask for a glass of water here. I myself would not refuse that to the veriest tramp. I approached, therefore, in spite of the unpleasant barking of a small spaniel, for I am a brave man when it comes to the getting of what I want, and in this case I was willing to risk the calves of my legs, or that which is even dearer to me, namely, my dignity. Accordingly I proceeded, though not without a chill down my calves as the

spaniel insisted on investigating them, in spite of my endeavors to draw him into light conversation, in which subtle compliments, such as "good dog" and "nice old fellow" figured largely. An old gentleman at work on the flower beds at the front of the house met my request for a glass of water with cordiality, and trotted indoors to fetch it. On his return he made me sit down sociably beside him on the steps, from which we looked across at the varying play of light and shade on the opposite mountains, though I fancied he still eyed his unfinished work on the flower beds rather longingly. An odor of upturned earth hung about him, and his hands were browned by the sun. His hair was white, and his eyes were blue and serenely clear, as the eyes of those who live much with nature are inclined to be. It was very still and shady on the porch, and the air was filled with the perfume of shrubbery in bloom. I wanted to stay and look at the old man whose features were so fine and delicate and sensitive, and perhaps,

too, I was waiting for some one else, so — "This is a beautiful country," I ventured. One must say something if one will persist in sitting on a gentleman's front steps, and it is not given even to the elect to be original always.

"Most beautiful," he answered, "and this is one of its most beautiful times. You show your wisdom in choosing to come now."

"I have rented the Duval place for the summer," I said. "My name is Selwyn."

"Yes," he said, "yes, so I heard." Then suddenly he grew quite confidential and animated. He even laid his hand upon my knee.

"Be careful," he said, "how you fertilize your garden too much, it won't stand it — its rich — there's clay if you go too deep, but the surface is rich. Just a little top dressing's all you need, and dig it thoroughly. I meant to come over and tell you as soon as I heard you'd come."

"I hope you will come now," I said eagerly.

"Yes," he said, "yes, I'll try and come. But I'm busy, very busy. June's a busy month. You think when you are at the height of the May work that you couldn't be busier, and then along comes June, and there you are just as busy again. But that's always the way with gardening." He looked at me for corroboration.

"I know," I said; "I had an uncle who was interested in it, and he was always at work. He even wrote a book about it — 'With Hoe and Rake.'"

"Indeed!" said the old gentleman delightedly, "Indeed! So Edward Selwyn was your uncle! His book is most valuable. I turn to it constantly myself, and I am delighted to welcome to our neighborhood a connection of so distinguished a gardener." Here we exchanged polite bows over my illustrious relative, who with his "Rake and Hoe" had won me such a cordial welcome.

"Though mind," the old gentleman went on, "I don't hold with all his theories. What he says about dahlias, for instance.

His treatment might be well enough for his soil and climate, but it wouldn't work here. But after all you can't follow implicitly any one book on gardening."

It was here, at this favorable point in my reception, that she made her appearance. First there came out of the darkness of the wide hall at our backs a voice clear as running waters in spring, with a bubble of laughter hidden somewhere in it. "Gather ye rosebuds while ye may," the voice was chanting; and in a moment she flashed out of the gloom of the hall like a green plumed humming-bird lit by a sunbeam. For her dress was all the softest shade of green, and in one hand she held a spray of yellow roses. She did not pause as she saw me, though the smile on her lips grew a trifle more reserved, but she came straight on. The old gentleman turned at her approach, "My daughter, Mr. Selwyn," he said simply, but with a world of pride in his tone.

She put her slender brown fingers in mine with absolute ease and naturalness. "Did

you find your way all right?" she asked, "And are you safely landed at the Duval place?"

She seated herself upon the top step and leaned back against one of the pillars, her rose spray in her lap. We drifted into talk on the weather, the flowers, and the country again — truly, Dame Nature could give lessons on conversation made easy. The old gentleman listened politely for a space, throwing in now and again a remark, but soon his eyes began to turn longingly to his flower beds. He grasped his spade once or twice indeterminately, and finally yielding altogether to temptation, he drifted back to his digging, doubtless feeling that his daughter was safe with any relative of so distinguished a gardener as Edward Selwyn.

Suddenly, as we chatted, the desire seized me to put in practise a whimsical conception which had lain in my mind some time.

"I have invented a conversational method," I said, "the practicability of which I am most anxious to test."

"Indeed," she said, wondering.

"Yes," I went on quickly, "and of course before having it patented I must be sure that it really will work. The invention," I explained, "is a method by which two people just introduced may become reasonably well acquainted with each other inside of fifteen minutes."

"Oh," she said, wondering. (Please note, my practical self, that her voice has a perfectly bewitching cadence when she says "Oh.")

"It presupposes," I hastened on, "the introduction of a man and a girl, and necessitates a little conversation on both sides, which is divided up into periods of five minutes; these periods being divided again into spaces of two and three minutes each."

"It sounds very complicated," she ventured, "I never was very good at arithmetic, I'm afraid."

"Wait," I pleaded. "It is really very simple. The first period of conversation they talk of their family. In this the lady talks three minutes and the gentleman two,

ladies being generally better posted on ancestors than men. In the next period they talk about themselves."

"In this," she interposed all in a hurry, "of course you allow the gentleman the lion's share of the time."

"Oh, well," I said, "I had divided the time evenly, but these little details will have to be arranged after the system has been tried. In the last period they discuss their friends. In five minutes they are almost sure to discover a friend in common. And there you see in fifteen minutes you have the essentials of acquaintanceship — family, self, and friends. I feel," I said, "that it is an invention that will revolutionize modern conversation, but how can I apply for the patent until I am sure it is really practical?"

"If I can be of any assistance to science and future conversation —" she hesitated, a little smile curving her lips.

"Thank you," I exclaimed enthusiastically. "If the system proves a success I will name it after you, and present you with

ten shares in the company I shall get up to promote it. Let's try it at once. First five minutes, family — the lady begins." I bowed and drew out my watch.

She flushed a little, wrinkling her forehead in perplexity. "Goodness," she said, "I'm afraid I don't know anything to tell."

"Time flies," I suggested, glancing at my watch.

"Oh, dear! Well," she began breathlessly. "The first Wareham came over from England in — in —"

"The Mayflower," I suggested.

"No, in 1656 — how could he have come over in the Mayflower? He was a Virginian — at least after he landed he was."

"I beg your pardon," I said humbly, "I merely thought the Mayflower more safe and seaworthy for coming over in than 1656."

She scorned my interruption and went on.

"And so he landed in Virginia and fought Indians and tilled his land, or saw that others tilled it, and went to the Assembly.

And his family grew up with the country, and then the war came — "

"The Revolution?" I asked.

"No, of course not. The War," she said, accentuating a trifle her Southern pronunciation.

"Oh!" I said, and lapsed into silence, trusting that the little syllable had not too aggressive a Yankee intonation.

"And so of course he went to the War and fought."

"Excuse me one moment," I begged. "You say the Wareham who came over in 1656 fought in the Civil War? I hope you inherit the family trait of longevity."

"Oh, dear!" she exclaimed, "talking on time like this is as bad as talking over the long-distance telephone, and anyway I know my three minutes are up."

"They are, and somewhat over," I said, "which leaves me just time to say that my ancestor did come over in the Mayflower, hackneyed as it may appear — and was planted upon Plymouth Rock, in the vicinity

of which most of his descendants have waxed and waned, and waned and waxed, ever since."

"Now that ends the ancestors and we proceed to ourselves."

"It's your turn to begin this time," she said.

"Well, let me see, I will begin at the beginning. I was born in Massachusetts of respectable parents in 18—, please notice that I leave it blank. Went through the usual vicissitudes of school and contagious diseases, and finally went through Harvard as well, and later was graduated from the Law School there. After which I went abroad for a few years to finish up, and then entered the firm of Jackson and Brownlow, in New York, where I practised until — well, until I began to preach — which is infinitely easier than practising."

"Are you a clergyman?" she broke in, round eyed.

"Are clergymen the only people in the world who preach?" I asked.

"Great-aunts sometimes do," she said reminiscently. "Are you a great-aunt?"

"I decline to be cross-examined," I said. "Besides you are trying to lead me on and so evade your own life history. Begin, please."

"Well, I was born here in Virginia, where I have spent all my summers and where I hope to die. We spent our winters in Richmond until my father was made Professor of the Romance languages at Columbia University, and then we spent our winters there, until two years ago, when his health broke down and he had to give up all work and rest, so we have been here ever since. And, and I think that's all," she ended.

"Rather meager details," I said, "but I can fill up the cracks with my imagination. Now let's get on to the last period, which deals with our friends. Do you know Miss Cartwright, of Washington?"

"No," she answered, "but I know Colonel Halstead of Richmond, do you?"

"No. First draw a blank — try again."

"Let me see," she said, considering. "Oh," suddenly struck by an idea: "Do you know, or are you connected, with David

Selwyn the poet? I don't know him, but I thought you might be a relative of his — the name is not common."

I was altogether floored. Her question fell so unexpectedly out of a clear sky. I had tried to hide my poetic side with this natural maiden, and develop my practical self. But there was no help for it now.

"I am David Selwyn," I said.

"You are the author of 'The Higher Places'?" she exclaimed.

I bowed. She looked at me with new interest which piqued me. Before I was only a man — now I was a poet.

"It was no good your leaving the date of your birth blank," she said. "I can look you up in the Anthology." And then she added, frankly and simply:

"I like your book very much."

And I like a fool could think of nothing more original to say than "Thank you."

Oh, why haven't I practised a more suitable reply for these occasions? (It is not necessary for you, my practical self, to sug-

gest that it is only very lately that I have stood in need of such phrases.) I must really get up something polite and deprecatory. Somehow just "thank you" sounds high and mighty. What I want is something dashed with humility, with a hint that because that particular person admires my things they have gone up immensely in my own estimation. But I could think of nothing easy and gracious on this occasion, and anyway it dawned upon me that it was late and that the cook, Jackson, and the cat, would be waiting for me. Accordingly I made my adieux and so departed, followed by assurances from the old gentleman that he would be over to see about my garden.

CHAPTER VI

The man of genius

JUNE 20th

MISS KATE and I had company to-day. It was the first of our summer riding parties, and a day of joy! All night it had rained, clearing off at daybreak, and as we set out in the early freshness, the catbird that has built in a thorn bush in the lane piped us a gleeful matin song. The dampness brought out all the subtle odors of the woods. Surely more than sound, more than sight, more than touch, fragrance stirs the memory and questions it. One might become intoxicated on perfumes alone.

This morning, passing under the wild grape-vines, we came upon spaces of such redolent sweetness that Heaven itself must

have been their birthplace. Sometimes the pungent sweetbriar called to us, and all along the wayside the little blush roses glistened. Each month for me has its especial combinations of flowers. For April, purple violets and dandelions, in a creamy white bowl; May, yellow azaleas and purple iris in a soft gray jar; and for this month, wild roses and ox-eyed daisies in a sage green setting.

Our road lay over the mountain, and down into the brush country on the other side, across the river, round the mountain, at a gap, and home.

Miss Kate kept up the excitement all the way by pricking her ears before each turn, and though we rounded the turn and found nothing, there was generally another bend which might conceal almost anything. And occasionally on our jaunts Miss Kate and I do really come on something interesting. The other day, for instance, returning from the post-office, we met Quill Johnson with a glowering expression on his face, riding one

horse and leading another. He is a bridegroom of a month or so, and I wondered where the bride was. Afterwards I heard all about it. It seemed he and his wife had had "er fallin' out," and she had returned to her home at the county seat, and when I met him he was on his way there to find out how much a divorce would cost, meaning to indulge in one if he found they were cheap; if, however, he found it too expensive, he was going to bring the lady back, for which contingency he had provided the other horse. I may add here that he found the divorce too great a luxury, and had to bring his wife back with him after all, and now I hear they are living very happily together. But he does not seem to belong to a family fortunate in matrimonial affairs. Some one asked his brother shortly after his marriage how he and his wife were "making it." He gave the inquirer a rueful look, but all he said was, "Kin *you* live with er wildcat?"

This morning, however, we met no one

except Mrs. Corbin, creeping along on her old mule. Sometimes I wish I could look into other people's minds without losing my own personality and see what goes on in them.

Some day we shall, perhaps, be as familiar with our friends' thoughts as we now are with their outward appearance, and doubtless we shall find it very convenient, saving many labored explanations. But as for me, in this present state of imperfection, while I might enjoy the power for myself, I do not wish to have it placed in any one else's hands, much as I have always admired that ancient remark, "A man should use himself to think only of those things about which if one should suddenly ask, 'What hast thou in thy thoughts?' with perfect openness thou mightest immediately answer, 'This or That.'"

But to return to Mrs. Corbin — what I want to know is, what thoughts pass behind those colorless eyes? What do those pale cheeks, pale hair, and square chin hide?

She does not know how to read or write, she has, I fancy, never been out of this little district, and she has never known, through childhood, girlhood, or womanhood, what it is to be free from want. In the winter and spring her family fight colds and pneumonia, in the summer and fall the dread of "the fever" hangs over them. Can such an existence spare time to smell the sweetness of the pine trees, or listen to the swallows chasing each other twittering through the evening sky?

One of her little boys is very ill now. Some of them are a little so most of the time.

I inquired how the child was.

"He ain't no better," she answered, with a challenge in her voice which made me feel that it was in some way my fault.

"Does he care for any special thing to eat?" I ventured.

"No," gloomily, "he did seem ter relish this here canned meat they hes to ther store, but er kind friend cum in an' tole him hit

wus nothin' but mule meat dodged up in ther fer West an' now he won't tech hit."

She struck her mule sharply and the two moved slowly off on their weary road. Well, at any rate she does care for her children in a fierce, resentful sort of way.

On the way up the mountain the track was broad, and our party rode all together making general conversation, but as we began to descend on the other side to the river, after a halt at the farm on top for our first taste of cherries, the path narrowed, and we spun out in single file, with little opportunity for conversation, for which I

was glad, for one misses the charm of a mountain ride if one must think constantly of what to say next.

In front of me rode Mr. Selwyn, no longer the stranger, and no longer riding the gray horse, for he is quite established at the Duval place and has his own horse now, a splendid animal, the gem of our party in horse-flesh, a fact which I fear makes Miss Kate jealous.

It was rather a shock to me to discover that this Mr. Selwyn was David Selwyn, author of "The Higher Places," a poem I sat up nearly all night to finish and re-read next day, living in it for weeks after. I was

the "Wood Nymph" and Miss Kate the "Lightsome Mare," and together we rode triumphantly through the pages to the splendid rhythm of the verse.

But I did not wish to meet the author, for I hate long hair and a far-away expression, and absent-mindedness irritates me. So I felt to know the affected author of such a book would be trying, for it was not the personal idiosyncrasies of the man, but his mind, I wished to know, and that I had already met in "The Higher Places."

He has taken the Duval place, I surmise, because he can write there in peace and quiet. Except for the servants he has no one with him, and indeed seems to have no near relations. So far, though I have watched him closely, he has shown none of the eccentricities or dishevelment of a man of genius. Can it be possible, — Oh! happy but unlikely conjunction — that art and common sense have met? I cannot yet believe it, and I am constantly expecting an outcropping of singularity. Now, as he

rides before me, unconscious that any one is observing him, is an excellent time to study the back of the man of common sense. Surely it will presently unbend into poetical slouchiness, and some thought striking him, his reins will hang loose, his head go up in the air, and I shall know him for what he is, a poet.

I began my inspection with severity, but I was not successful in unmasking him. The back in front of me was as erect and firm as that of the best rider I ever saw, and the short black hair might have belonged to any one of a commonplace disposition. I caught occasional glimpses of his hands managing King Cole firmly and lightly, and his face I knew, except for the deep eyes and a certain set of the mouth, might have been that of any agreeable man, and not of a poet already great in one hemisphere, and winning distinction in the other. His dress was quite correct and ordinary. As for the inward man, if he had any lofty aspirations he kept them to himself, and to all appear-

ances was simply interested in nature's attractions, such as the pretty irregularity of the path, and the little squirrel that ran across our road, a sign of bad luck, by the way.

As I watched him he turned in his saddle and smiled at something by the side of the path, and when I came to the same place I pulled Miss Kate up and jumped off. The rider behind me hurried up with concern. "What's the matter?" he exclaimed. Evidently the ladies he was used to stayed "put" when once they were mounted.

"It's this lovely clump of Indian pipe," I explained, pointing to the pretty pale cluster. "No wonder they call it corpse plant."

"Why didn't you tell me? I would have picked them for you."

"I don't want to pick them," I answered. "If I picked them they would be all black and bruised before I could get them home."

"Then why did you get off?"

"They are the first I have seen this year,"

I explained, with a humbleness I fear was affected. I should no more have passed them by than I should have passed an old friend without speaking.

Mr. Selwyn rode back to see what kept us.

"Oh," he said, "you stopped to admire that plant of Indian pipe." And he got off his horse to look at it more closely. The other gazed at us in a puzzled way, and then, not understanding, rode on to join the next rider, and as I heard them discussing the latest arrivals at the Springs, I knew they were happy. After that I am afraid we dawdled a good deal. There were so many things we had to stop and admire, that when at last we rode out into the "Bresh" we were far behind the rest of our party.

The "Bresh" is so called because here there are no large trees, only stunted underbrush everywhere, through which are scattered here and there small farms and cabins.

Mr. Selwyn and I missed the regular bridle path, and failed to make the others

hear our shouts; but a small girl came out of one of the few cabins and offered to show us the way to the river. She was about ten years old, with hair tumbling all over her sharp, almost cunning face. But she was cheerful, and kept up a flow of conversation as she walked briskly beside our horses. A few questions brought out the facts that her mother had "give her away when she was er little bit er thing. She give her ter Mis' Page. And Mis' Page was awful good ter her, but where her own mother was she didn't know."

Mrs. Page! She had been over to see me

in the winter with an awful account of her family. Her husband too ill to do "er lick er work," her mother dying of consumption, her two little brothers and her baby ill with something else, and yet she is able to be "awful good to er little throwed erway thing," as the child called herself.

When we rode out on to the river bank, the others were already across. They called something to us which we did not hear, and did not trouble ourselves very much about, for we had caught sight of a most beautiful patch of swamp pinks. This latest of the azalea tribe is always a joy to me, blooming

as it does after all of its immediate family are gone. It is as though May had come back again for an instant, after all her farewells for a year had been said.

Mr. Selwyn and I took the river absently by the azaleas, calling out to the others who were still shouting excitedly, "We can't hear what you say. Wait till we get across." It was only when the horses with a stumble and plunge began to swim, that we realized the others were trying to tell us that the ford was higher up. Fortunately the hole was not a large one, and we presently got to land and crossed at the proper place.

I had never had a horse swim under me before, and a rocky, seasick motion it is. And as the water crept up about me, I said naughty things in my heart about the poetic nature that is too intent on azalea beds to take note of the right ford. I acknowledged with disgust that I was even more to blame than the Poet, for I had crossed there before and he had not.

When our friends had us safe on their side of the river, they made sundry impolite remarks and insisted on lighting a fire to dry us. When, however, after half an hour of being smoked, we were still as wet as "Alice" was after the mouse's historical recitation, which was, if you remember, as wet as ever, and as we did not feel sufficiently energetic to try a "caucus-race," the others ordered us off to a little cabin from which we saw smoke issuing, to see if it was as difficult to get dry indoors as we found it out of doors.

As we approached, however, we began to think we preferred to trust to the June sunshine rather than to be permeated with the indescribable smell which hung about the place, and we were just turning back when a woman standing in the doorway hailed us to come on. Over a high log door-step we entered a forlornly dark little cabin.

Just the one room, no chimney, — the stovepipe went out at a hole in the wall, — no window, it must have been pitch black with

the door shut. We were devoutly thankful it was open. Two children stared at us with open eyes and mouths, and beside the door sat the woman's husband, his foot wrapped in soiled bandages. He told us how he hurt it.

"I was over ter Eldred on er little business," he began (Eldred being the place across the State line where there is a barroom, I guessed what his "little business" was), "an some fellers over thar got ter pleggin' me, an' we hed some words, an' one er um drawed er cheer on me, an' ther other commenced er giggin' at me with er knife, an' I jest tole um ef they didn't min' I'd mek er openin' fer myself, but they kep' right on, an' so then d'reckly I hit out an' skinned one er um's hed an' knocked the tother down, an' then I cum erway; but they hollered after me, ef I cum acrost ther crick thet night I wouldn't go back agin. After I got home I got ter studyin' on what they'd said an' I jist low'd I'd take my ole Winchester an' see what 'ud happen ef I did go

acrost ther crick. But jist's I stepped over ther door I ketched ther trigger in sompum an' she went off right through my foot, an' I reckon ther's er piece er my ole shoe in ther hole yit," he concluded.

"Have you had a doctor?" I asked.

"No, I ain't had none. It's so fer from enny, an' I ain't much confidence in doctors no way."

Mr. Selwyn stooped down quietly and began taking off the bandages.

"I'm a doctor," he said with a smile, "at least enough to know something about gunshot wounds," he added, seeing my look of surprise.

The foot looked very bad to me, but Mr. Selwyn, with a professional air that had suddenly descended upon him, said the injury was not serious, and prescribed frequent application of hot water.

I sat down on a rickety chair and tried to talk to one of the children while the examination was going on, but the child was too frightened to do more than hang its head

and squirm uneasily. So I gave up the attempt and sat watching Mr. Selwyn's deft hands as he replaced the bandages, feeling rather useless and a little cross, as is sometimes the way when I see others doing so well the very things I should like to do. However, I gained some little feeling of importance by adding my voice to that of Mr. Selwyn, who was trying to impress them with the necessity of keeping up the hot-water treatment, for I knew well enough that behind his back hot water as a remedy would be sniffed at.

Last winter I remember, when one of our neighbors woke with a terrible pain, great was the indignation of the whole family when the doctor, on being summoned in great haste, merely prescribed a dose of soda. "A little sody water!" they exclaimed wrathfully, "fer sich er pain!" And I am sure Mr. Selwyn's patient would have thought a great deal more of him if he had prescribed boiling oil to be poured into the wound, or some such heroic measure. A

little hot water! Why, that one may get any day! As the little boy at the party said, when asked if he would have a glass of water, "No, thank you, I can have that at home."

The foot tied up again, there seemed nothing further for us to do, so we joined the others, and gradually got dry in the sunshine.

A little farther down the river we picnicked, and spent a couple of lazy hours sitting under the trees, or roaming in the underbrush in search of flowers or other specimens of wild interest, and toward the end of the afternoon we mounted once more and rode homeward.

Our way back took us by a road running through cultivated meadows from which came all the little myriad voices of the evening.

We were riding somewhat silently, looking at the delicate sunset tints in the sky, when —

"A penny for your thoughts!" broke the stillness.

It was the man who did not understand why I got off to look at the Indian pipe, and he addressed Mr. Selwyn.

"A penny," I laughed, "when the *Observer* gives him pounds and pounds!" But I made this remark only into Miss Kate's little sorrel ear, which she tipped conveniently back for the purpose, and no one else heard it.

Mr. Selwyn made some careless answer and reined his horse back beside me, letting the man-who-did-not-understand pass on. But he did not say anything, and I guessed that the poetic nature was uppermost now, and I was content to let it be so and be silent, for as yet we are only sufficiently intimate to respect each other's thoughts, not to inquire into them.

CHAPTER VII

A talk of many things

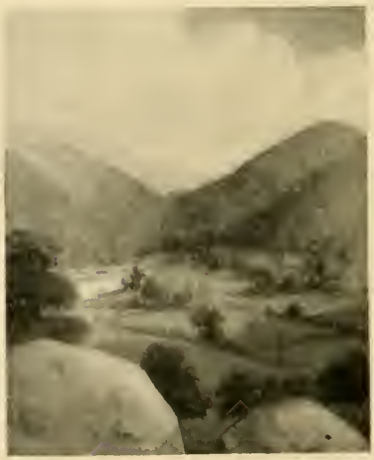
JULY 8th

I LAY flat on my back and looked up past the boughs of the Wishing Oak into the soft blue gray of the evening sky. I saw the leaves quiver and one transparent cloud poised motionless, and as I looked and looked into the depths of the firmament, thinking of the time when I shall be at one with it all, the other clouds moving just enough to make me feel the dizzy motion of the world through space, it seemed as if I too were up there, a part of that soft blue, lying at full length just below the motionless cloud, so close that I could almost push it away from me. At least a part of me was there, my other self still lay on the grass under the Wishing Oak.

Presently the cloud just above me turned a delicate faint golden, and I knew that below my present horizon the sun was setting, and to see it I sat up. Instantly the charm was broken; I was back on the grass once more, my ordinary self. I sighed a little —

"Why, if the Soul can fling the dust aside,
And naked on the air of Heaven ride,
Wer't not a shame — wer't not a shame for him
In this clay carcase crippled to abide?"

Just then I heard the far-away thud of a horse's feet upon the soft earth, and away across the meadows I saw Mr. Selwyn



coming at a gallop on King Cole, and the joy of this existence that had been mine a few hours earlier returned.

This afternoon, when Miss Kate and I set out, it was perfect, one of those pure, cool days that sometimes come in summer, stirring the blood with a touch of autumn.

We took our way along one of the mountain roads, running for some little distance, high above, but parallel with, the Meadow Road, which it eventually joins. Riding on this road one may easily recognize any one in the meadows.

Looking down I saw below me two trav-

elers: one, Mrs. Wilkins, walking slowly and carrying her baby, the heaviest gentleman of his years that I know; the other, Mr. Selwyn on King Cole. Now it was a pleasant day for riding, but for walking with a heavy baby on one's arm it must have been hot.

Evidently the Poet thought so, for when he overtook Mrs. Wilkins I saw her hand up Master Baby, who rejoices in the name of Monte Cristo, Mr. Selwyn receiving him with awkward care.

Thus I watched them turn off the road, Mr. Selwyn riding slowly and making, I

doubt not, many polite remarks, while Mrs. Wilkins, walking beside him, glanced apprehensively at King Cole's pricking ears and tried in vain to pull down Monte Cristo's scant garments, which in Mr. Selwyn's hands threatened to become nothing more than a wisp about his neck.

Then it was, looking down on them in the glorious sunlight, that I felt the joy of life as David did:

"How good is man's life, the mere living! how fit to employ
All the heart and the soul and the senses for ever in joy!"

It was one of those blessed times when my joys are as deep and varied as the cloud shadows on the mountains, and my griefs no more serious than the bursting of the strings about my lettuce heads, or the breaking of an egg under a sitting hen. I struck the Meadow Road as Mrs. Wilkins and the Poet disappeared, and made my way to the Wishing Oak.

The Wishing Oak grows just at the edge of the creek, in the meadows, stretching out over the stream. And when I let Miss Kate drink at the ford here, she plunges into the swift water, too eager to cross to the still

reaches (so that her nose is carried down by the current, necessitating her constantly placing it up stream again), and I am in a splendid position to make wishes, for any wish made under the branches of this tree comes true, that is, if it is kept a secret. I must confess that none of mine ever materialized, but that is probably my own fault for not being able to keep them to myself.

The tree and the creek have been at war with each other for years, and now I am afraid the water has cut so far into the bank that unless reinforcements come speedily the tree will be torn away. But they have

fought a long time, these two! Every freshet is a fierce engagement. The water laughing and bubbling to itself, as it tears away a clod of earth, a stone, or a piece of the bank, and crying, "The next time! The next time, the whole will come!" Only to find on its next rising that the tree has sent its fibers deeper in new places, gaining a fresh hold, and all the little rootlets cry to one another, "Hold tight, Brothers! Hold tight!"

It is pretty to think how nature's children sometimes work together; as the little rootlets fight against the stream, so, in the spring, the seeds planted in my hotbed make common cause against the earth on top of them. The florist tells me to put them in thick, so that the stronger ones may make a place for the weaker to push through, and I imagine them hidden away there in the dark earth, whispering to one another in tiny voices, "Push! Push, little Brothers! Now, all together, push!"

King Cole's hoof-beats grew nearer, and

in a little while Mr. Selwyn drew up under the tree. He fastened his horse by Miss Kate, where they could both pull at the long, swampy grass, and threw himself down in the shade.

He looked tired and worn, and I wondered if late night work and early rising were as bad for poets as they are for other people.

"How does the poem grow?" I asked.

"Oh," he answered, "sometimes it is all hammer and tongs, and my chariot wheels drive heavily, and then suddenly it is all illumined, and before that state leaves me I know something of what I might do."

I put my head back against the Wishing Oak and quoted:

> "We cannot kindle when we will
> The fire which in the heart resides;
> The spirit bloweth and is still,
> In mystery our soul abides.
> But tasks in hours of insight will'd
> Can be through hours of gloom fulfill'd."

"I know," he said, "but *why* can't I kindle it when I will?" He asked the ques-

tion half petulantly and half whimsically, as if amused at himself for putting it to me.

"I suppose," I ventured, "for the same reason that that blue butterfly's wing only glints at intervals; the rest of the time the light does not strike it right."

He was silent a time and when he spoke it was on another subject.

"I went over the mountain to the river yesterday, to see that man who shot himself."

"Oh!" I said with interest, "how is he getting on?"

"Much better than could have been expected."

"Has he been putting on the hot water?"

"Of course," he laughed, "or how could he be getting better? but really he said he had, though I could not help having my doubts."

"But what an awful life they live," he went on presently. "Think of that little cabin in the winter, the door shut and no window! But surely they will move before then."

"I don't know," I answered. "If they do, it won't be to anything very much better."

"What a way to live!" he repeated. "And what a field for mission work. Why don't people start college settlements and industrial schools in the country? Worn-out town philanthropists could come here and work and recuperate at the same time."

"Perhaps they would not be very practical while the distances are so great," I suggested.

"Well, then," he said impatiently, "we must leave them alone for a time, I suppose, and let the pure atmosphere and the mountains work out a salvation for them."

As he finished we heard slow steps, and saw Mrs. Corbin approaching us. She was mounted on her old mule, and in all respects presented the same monotonous, dead-alive appearance as ever. It is one of her brothers who is ill now and I stopped her to inquire how he was.

"Brother Jack is mighty sick," she answered. "Yes, indeed! He's got this yer final-eum-an-git-us, an' I'm mighty 'fraid it'll kill him too."

Though we laughed at the appropriateness

of her name for spinal meningitis, her figure as she moved on was too pathetic to allow of much merriment.

"It strikes me," I remarked, "that your pure atmosphere and mountains need a little assistance in the salvation line. They have been at work on her family for a good many years. This scenery started on them when a wagon was called a wain, and a bag a poke, and the descendants still use the same words, and are, I suppose, morally about the same, without the hardy push of their forefathers."

"You say a 'good many years'; how long do you suppose her people have lived here?"

"Oh," I said at a venture, "about a hundred years."

He laughed. "And you think nature has given them up as a hopeless case, when with her a century is only the wink of an eye! How long do you suppose it took the almond tree to develop into the peach?"

"I am not interested," I answered a little impatiently, "in what nature in her beau-

tiful setting may accomplish for the ten-times-great-grandchildren of Mrs. Corbin, I want something done for her and her children at once."

He laughed again. "Well," he said a trifle mockingly, and with a great show of eagerness, "just tell me what I am to do, to straighten out this affair that nature has made such a failure of, and I will be delighted to do it, 'at once.'"

This was mean of him. He knew well enough that I did not know what to do. Besides, he had played a trick on me, leading me on by his show of eagerness, and then suddenly dropping his own seriousness he stood by and laughed at mine.

Suddenly a glory lit our faces, and turning, we saw that while we talked, the sun had flung out golden banners over all the sky, a beautiful combination of soft gray clouds and golden ones, and through the little rifts of gray and gold the blue sky showed dazzlingly clear.

"Suppose," I said, "you could give a

little spring and float up there among all those clouds, and plunge through into the blue beyond, would you prefer to go by way of the gold clouds or the gray ones?"

He gave me a curious, startled look, but when he answered his tone was matter-of-fact enough, just as though I had not asked a ridiculous question.

"Oh," he said, "by way of the gray ones, by all means. If the path had been all bright the beyond would not seem so glorious."

"But," I said, "if the way had been all dull would it not be too dazzling to be entire happiness, when you went through?" Then we both laughed, recognizing the absurdity of it.

"But look!" I went on, "there is the best way, there in the south, a pathway judiciously mixed with gray and gold, with a beautiful broad sea of blue to plunge into at the end."

"Well," he said pleasantly, "I hope your way will be all gold."

"I don't," I answered promptly.

"After all," he said, turning thoughtful once more, "whichever way you go the blue at the end is all alike."

"And that means —?" I questioned.

"Perhaps it means that you haven't chosen a true type for your simile."

"Well," I said, "whatever else it may mean when the sky looks like that, it means one thing certain for me, and that is that it is high time my chickens had their supper."

Miss Kate was eager to be off. She had eaten a large circle around her, and now that there was no more grass in reach, she began to think of her legitimate supper; but Mr. Selwyn held her head a moment after I was mounted.

"What did you decide was the best thing to do for Mrs. Corbin and her genus?" he asked.

I looked down in surprise, suspicious of the mocking air again, but he was perfectly grave now.

"Don't ask me," I replied. "There does

not seem to be any one thing we can do — but 'Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, — '" but here Miss Kate tore her head away and went skimming across the meadows before I could finish.

When I got home it was almost dark and my old hens had put themselves to bed all in the wrong coops, and when I brought out their supper, so sleepy were they, that at first all I could elicit was a drowsy chorus from the little chickens, and a long drawn, half querulous croon of content from the old hens, as though they echoed the Lotus Eaters' plea:

> "Let us alone. Time driveth onward fast,
> And in a little while our lips are dumb.
> Let us alone."

But I was very persistent, and presently the tone of indifference changed to one of animation, as they awoke to the remembrance that they had gone supperless to bed. In a little while the yard was full of conversation. The sharp "Quick! Quick! Here's a delicious bit!" And the quieter "Cluck!

Cluck! Now eat your supper, my dears," mingled with the pleasant gastronomically satisfied chirps of the little chickens, and the occasional forlorn cry of one that had strayed.

I have never found, in my limited experience of birds, any with the range of tone possessed by an old hen and her family, or by hens in general.

They have cries that express fright, warning of danger, courtship, triumph, motherly affection, and pain, besides a number of other notes the exact significance of which I have not yet made out. What, for instance, does an old hen mean when she goes about singing at the top of her voice? Some say she is proclaiming the all-important fact that she means to present an egg to a startled world. I doubt it. In my opinion it means nothing more than — "It's-a-delightfully-sunny-day-and-I-feel-accordingly-thank-you-very-much-for-kind-inquiries."

As to chickens, let me give a word of advice: if you live in the country, by all

means take an interest in them, particularly if you are not interested in rag carpets and do not know a "log cabin" square of patchwork from the basket pattern. For chicken-raising will give you a never-failing topic of conversation with your neighbors of every class, one that is as varied as the weather, and a little newer.

I drew the coops together with little cracks left for any belated chick to creep through, thinking, as I did so, what a prodigal's return his would be, if, after gallivanting forth to see if all the other chickens had just the same supper his family were enjoying, he should find himself entirely turned round, and after being hunted and pecked from half a dozen strange coops, he would at last creep tired and cold into his own home, to be greeted, as he snuggled under his warm mother, with a relieved sigh of "My dear, where *have* you been? Mother's been so anxious." Truly, for such a home-coming prodigality would not have its proper terrors.

As I went into the house in the soft twi-

light a strange oppression hung heavy upon me. I know that there is something the matter with Mr. Selwyn. There is a look of dread on his face that I do not understand. He seems well enough, though he does not look strong. He is young, rich, I think, has a manner which gains him friends wherever he goes, and yet at times there comes this unaccountable look which I cannot fathom. He seems like a spectator at a play, as though he saw everything going on about him, but almost as though he were aloof from it all. It is a strangely lonesome expression, and haunts me. It has grown more upon him lately, I think, or else I notice it more, and I know he is facing something alone.

CHAPTER VIII

A day of life, and a sunset supper

JULY 27th

"Your ghost will walk, you lover of trees,
(If our loves remain)
In an English lane."

MINE won't. The ghost of David Selwyn, if my love remains, will haunt the field on the top of Hope's Mountain, when Dorothy goes there to watch the sunset; for if I were to have a million eons of death, I still have had one day of life on Hope's Mountain with Dorothy Wareham. A day that cannot die, for out of all the thousands of drab-colored days which go to make up a life, this golden afternoon has achieved individuality; therefore it must live forever, for I tell myself that surely individuality must win immortality.

"Have you seen the sunset from the top of Hope's Mountain?" Dorothy asked me once when we sat under the Wishing Oak in the meadows and watched the sunset; and when I said I had not, she set a day to take me there. And all the elements that go to make up the weather, hearing that Miss Dorothy had an engagement for the 24th, put their heads together to produce a day that should be worthy of her. Accordingly, wind, sun, and clouds all joined to make such a heavenly combination of light and shadow, sunshine and breeze, that I know it has gone down in the weather annals as Miss Dorothy's Perfect Day. It was so obviously perfect, that all the time I could imagine the elements shaking hands with one another, and congratulating themselves, as though they said, "Really, you know this isn't half bad. Who says we can't toss up a pretty decent little day when we put our minds to it?"

That is, I could have imagined their complacency if I had not had all my thoughts

and imagination entirely occupied with Miss Dorothy. What a creature of sunshine she is! As a rule she is all light and vivacity, and her appearance on the sometimes dull scenes of my life is like sudden flashes of mirth and radiance. Yet she has her still moments, too, when her eyes look dark and grave, so that one longs to question them. Yet at all times she is unlike any one I have ever seen, and I am convinced that there could never be a second Dorothy. No, it is impossible! There have been Richard, Henry, and Edward seconds in the course of history; there are also second floors, second cousins, and second fiddlers, likewise sixty seconds; but a second Dorothy? Never! Nature has produced but the one specimen, never to be duplicated. And fate, taking that Dorothy by the hand, has led her across my path a year too late.

All the way up the mountain she rode through the lustrous green light, chatting and laughing with me, and as it were nodding to her woodland acquaintances, which she

watched for in the underbrush along the way. And while she watched them I watched her. I saw the color come and go in her cheeks, and the sparkle dance in her eyes, and that tender mystery of shadow and depth overspread her face, that one sometimes sees on a woman's mobile countenance. I watched as I say, and adored her, and she seemingly did not think as much about me as she did about the butterflies that drifted across our path.

Oh, my little lady! can you ever be awakened to take as much interest in a man as you do in the butterflies? Could you in me, for instance? If I forgot for once, and caught you in my arms and whispered to you the things I have thought — of how your hair curls just above your ear, and of that dimple by your mouth, so tiny that I do not believe that even you know about it, and a thousand other things. Would you wake then? Ah! my lady, God keep me from trying to wake you, for truly there are times when I fear I shall forget.

When we reached the top of the mountain, we rode out into a field still redolent and sweet with the newly cut hay.

"Isn't it a pity," said Dorothy, "that people's ends and aims in life are not as obvious as a field's; now here we see just what this field's ambition was."

"But people wouldn't be half so attractive," I objected, "if they were bristling all over with good deeds and accomplished ambitions, like this field with its haycocks. There would be no motives left to be guessed at."

Dorothy declined to pursue the subject

further, and slipped off Miss Kate, as I had hoped she would, near a little thicket left for some reason in the middle of the field. I fastened the horses to the fence and came back to a seat by her on an old log, from which we could look out over a panorama of mountains and little valleys. Just below us we could see the Wareham garden, and with a pair of field-glasses we made out Mr. Wareham at work among his flowers. Dorothy even declared she could see what kind of weeds he was pulling. Across our valley, the opposite mountains were patched here and there with little fields, so steep that

they looked as though they had just been hung up on the mountain side in the sunshine to dry. It was very still away up there on Hope's Mountain, with just Dorothy Wareham and myself. Far away a woodpecker tapped, and nearer at hand a little bird gave forth a monotonous plaint of "Whee, whee, whee!" and that was all to break the stillness, except the bees. They chaffered and buzzed and bargained, filling their market panniers from the brilliant tangle of summer flowers that bloomed in the fence corners. Their hum sounded querulous and worried, and when I called Miss Dorothy's attention to this, she said it was probably because the dames of the flower stalls drove hard bargains with them — only so much honey given, for so much pollen carried.

But for the most part Dorothy was silent now, content to sit still and look out over the mountains, her face illumined with serene happiness. And I was satisfied to be quiet too, for the next best thing

to Dorothy's conversation is her silence.

But it was a full half hour before the sun could be expected to set, and perhaps Miss Dorothy did not find my silence as satisfying as I found hers, for after a time she turned to me with — "I'm hungry. I ought to have known I should be," she complained. "Looking at views always does make me hungry. It is so soul-satisfying that I suppose the body feels a void by contrast."

Secretly I was elated, but I pretended to be at a loss, and able to suggest nothing better than blackberries, which were indeed plentiful enough. But she made a little face at the suggestion.

"For dessert they might do, but I want something more substantial to pave the way for them."

"Then why don't you affirm for something nice to eat?" I asked. "The theory nowadays is, that if you want anything very much, all you have to do is to tell your subjective mind to get it for you, and believe

that you've got it, and the first thing you know there it is."

"What beautiful simplicity," she laughed. "And I am very, very hungry."

"Then by all means affirm," I said.

"But how do you do it? I never made my subjective mind run errands before."

"Just hide your face in your hands," I ordered, "and then driving every other thought out of your mind say to yourself, 'Little self, I am very hungry, I must have something to eat. You must get me something to eat at once'; say this over and over very positively, until you have really made yourself believe that there is something to satisfy your hunger before you, then open your eyes, and if you have affirmed with sufficient faith, your supper will be ready." Laughingly she buried her face in her hands and began her silent affirmations.

"Affirm for enough for me too," I pleaded.

"Hush," she said, "you interfere with my concentration, and I doubt if I have faith enough for two anyway."

I know she must have concentrated very hard indeed, for the tips of her little ears grew deliciously pink. Cautiously I rose and stole to the little thicket at her back. Jackson said he had hidden it there, but suppose some stray dog or man had discovered it between the time he had placed it there, and our arrival on the scene! Nervously I pushed the leaves aside, and there, oh, joy! it sat, demure but inviting, the basket I had seen Aunt Mirandy prepare so carefully a few hours earlier. I crept back to Miss Dorothy and softly deposited it at her feet. As I did so I heard her murmur, "chocolate cake."

"Don't give your subjective mind too minute orders," I cautioned her. "It is hampering, and besides it is probably as good a caterer as yourself."

She affirmed a little while longer intently; then she said, "I certainly smell fried chicken."

"Then you have reached the desired point in your affirmations and can stop," I said.

She raised a flushed and eager face, and

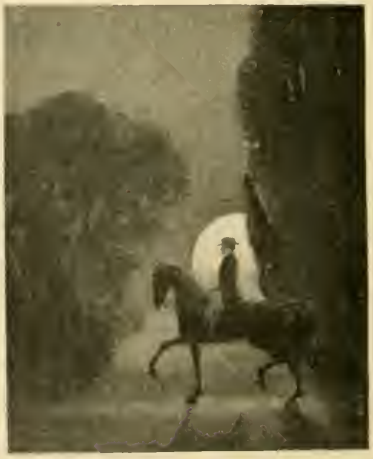
immediately her eyes fell upon the basket. She gave a gasp of surprise and a little startled cry; then she caught herself and turned her glance on me suspiciously. I must have looked guilty, for she exclaimed:

"If I had only known you had a luncheon up your sleeve all the time I should not have wasted so much mental exertion on my subjective mind."

She investigated the basket eagerly.

"No wonder I smelt fried chicken," she cried; "you and my subjective mind have got up a delicious sunset supper."

I suppose the sunset when it arrived was



beautiful, but I have only confused memories of varied colored clouds with Dorothy outlined against them in the foreground. She is always in my foreground now. Dorothy said it was the most beautiful thing she ever saw, and certainly what I saw was the most beautiful thing I had ever seen, but then it was not the sunset that I was looking at. When I left her at last upon her own front steps she breathed —

"How perfect it has been!"

And as I rode home through the dusk I thanked the fate that had permitted me to be a sharer in Miss Dorothy's "Perfect Day."

CHAPTER IX

David Selwyn *fights weeds and devils*

August 12th

AT a certain hour, early, early in the morning, when all night long one has but snatched at the illusive trail of sleep's garments, tossing between whiles through age-long periods of blinding wakefulness, and comprehension that the dreaded thing is a reality, and not a grim phantom of Night and all her train of devils, there comes a time, when vitality is at its lowest, and dying people slip most easily from detaining arms, for to struggle against anything seems no more worth while: and then it is that it comes home to me that I am going to die. At first I could not realize the thing, and through the daytime, even now, when I am at work or there are other things to interest

me, I can force the realization from me. But more than once in the early morning I have been caught in that flood of despair, and sometimes I have drowned in it, and struggled in a black gulf of fear, until sleep, or dawn, came to my rescue; and sometimes I have fought against it, and rising, I have sought to wear out the devils of despair in work or reading, and sometimes I have sought the woods, and on the edge of dawn I have walked, and even run up and down their silent pathways, seeking to numb the fiends within me with physical exhaustion, and many devils I have exorcised in Miss Dorothy Wareham's little garden.

I found her one day quite forlorn and conquered by some bumptious docks and thistles, flaunting themselves in her most cherished flower-beds. The next morning at an early hour, when I wandered aimlessly, seeking to elude the devils, I came upon the Wareham house faint in the early light, and remembering Dorothy's troubled face, I then and there fell upon them

with savage relief, while Miss Dorothy slept peacefully on, and never dreamed that out in her little perfumed garden I fought with weeds and devils. And when the full dawn and first streaks of sunlight came, there were no longer any devils, but all about on the grass lay dead and dying weeds, that had so short a time before rejoiced "as a strong man to run a race" for existence in the midst of Miss Dorothy's treasured verbenas.

But this morning, when the devils came, I was very spent with the long night, and very alone, and to die without one friend by, seemed monstrous and unnatural. Therefore I rose, and striking a light, wrote a letter to Willis White, and I know that when he gets it, wherever he may be, he will turn and come home.

As I finished the letter and sealed it, half sorry already that I had written, and yet glad, far, far away, I heard the first rooster crow for dawn, and the vigor of the morning crept into the air. I was very tired and worn, and I put my head down upon my

desk, and again far away the rooster crowed. And something, farther away even than the rooster — or infinitely closer — stirred and whispered that in spite of devils, in spite of death and fear, it was all right. Everything in the end was all right. Though I died it was — what was it? Oh, yes, it was all right — everything was all right.

And when I waked again the dawn and the devils were both gone, and the morning was well-nigh gone too. The birds sang in the old apple trees about the house, and the sun shone, and I was alive, alive! I had gone to sleep a dying man and I awoke alive — at least for a few months more — such is the grace of a few hours' sleep.

CHAPTER X

Miss Dorothy *questions the pine tree and the sunrise*

August 23d

THIS is our gay season, when we have friends staying with us, and are not surprised by meeting strangers at almost any turn in the road. So of late Miss Kate and I have not had many rides alone. But this morning, for some unknown reason, I waked very early, even before it was light, and as I lay awake trying to answer a certain question that has been on the waiting list several weeks for solution, but which I have had only just time to glance at occasionally, I decided that a sunrise seen from the "Lone Pine Tree" might assist me in answering it.

I dressed silently and crept out of the house and down to the stable, from which I stole Miss Kate long before she had her breakfast, and because of certain curious little knots in her mane, I knew that all night long the witches had been riding her, for the little knots are their stirrups. For this my authority is Uncle Jim, our old darkey, who explained their presence to me long ago, when I used to watch him combing them out of my saddle horse's mane—a horse in those days black instead of sorrel.

To find these witch tangles in Kate's mane this morning gave me a delightful whiff of childhood once more, an eery feeling that while I have been asleep in my safe little bed, Miss Kate, bridled with a cobweb, has been raced across the spaces of the moonlit sky. A feeling that goes altogether with the days when my skirts, ticking skirts they were, the only material strong enough to answer all I demanded of it, were short, and the world for me was full of the delights of blowing hot, shrill blasts on petunia trum-

pets, and racing the cloud shadows all a summer's day.

The witches must be light riders, for Miss Kate was as fresh as though she had spent the whole night peacefully in the stable.

It was just growing light as I mounted, and there was a freshness and stillness about the air that I had not known for weeks.

"We will get off the beaten track which is so dusty this morning, Missy," I whispered as I mounted, "and set our thoughts in order on the hilltops."

There is no better place when, after weeks of amusement, you wish to readjust your thoughts and inquire of yourself where you are, on such and such subjects, than the Lone Pine Tree field. It lies on top of one of the lower ridges of mountains; in the middle of it stands the Pine Tree all alone, gazing about on the surrounding mountains, and the little valleys that lie in their arms.

When Miss Kate and I jumped the fence and rode over to the Pine Tree, everything

below us was wrapped in mist, except the mountain tops, which rose through the white fleeciness like little purple islands in a lake; and I wished that I could spring from top to top of them, occasionally plunging riotously into the opal depths between, enveloped and drenched in their whiteness, as perhaps the angels do.

As the sun gradually absorbed the gray in the sky, disclosing the blue of perfect weather, the mists below azured delicately in response, and then touched with golden rays they lifted softly, and gradually melted into the warmth and glow around them; and I watched and wished that I were one in the chorus of morning stars. I wonder, if I were to sit there gazing off at the hills and down into the valleys, and morning after morning see the sun rise, and evening after evening see it set, as the Pine Tree has for fifty years, if then enlightenment would come.

But that is a large subject, and not the one I had come to question the Pine Tree about this morning.

I slipped off Miss Kate and turned her loose to wander where she pleased in the field, and regardless of the fact that the rag weed, springing in the place of the harvested wheat, was soaked with dew, I waded through it and seated myself on a stump a little over the crest of the hill, where the cleared part of the field, becoming too steep for work, runs into stout weeds and low underbrush and then into woods again.

There is a certain question I have been evading for weeks past, and now, with nature's serene assistance, is a good time to settle it. Very well then, my dear self, let me put it — I am sure Miss Kate will not repeat anything she may chance to overhear.

How do you like having a tame genius constantly about the house? How do you like saying you have never read such and such a book and being supplied with it almost at once? It keeps you rather busy reading books you never attempted before, does it not?

How do you like going to bed oppressed

by the weeds in your flower garden and waking up next morning to find them pulled? (To be sure I never caught the Poet at them, but ever since that day he found me almost in tears over my verbena bed, the weeds have had a hard time. I say it is a lob-lie-by-the-fire that pulls them, and like the good housemaid I set him "cream bowls" in the shape of apples, ginger snaps, or home-made caramels.) And how do you like *marrons déguisés?* Oh! doubtless very much indeed! But they are not for an ordinary person like yourself. They make you feel too luxurious.

And where may all these things lead to?

When I asked myself this question I paused, and before continuing, looked out over the mountains for a little while, then I thought: Look at the mountains and look at Miss Kate, and think that if you chose you could stay out here all day chasing butterflies, and not feel at the end that you had left irretrievably undone anything that you

ought to have done — that apple jelly could wait until to-morrow to be put up.

How would it be if you belonged to a poet?

What poor lady was it who endorsed her husband's letter: "Hebrew verses sent me by my honored husband. I thowt to have had a letter about killing the pig, but must wait."

How would you like to have to make a pathetic statement like that?

I faced myself with these questions expecting an emphatic denial that I ever intended to belong to a poet. But none came. In fact my self was so determinedly silent that at length I grew alarmed, and catching Miss Kate once more, I rode restlessly out of the field and homeward, leaving my question still unanswered.

As I jumped the fence I noted in one of the corners a patch of golden-rod not yet in bloom, just a faint, glowing promise of what it will be in a few weeks. But that means — oh! what does it not mean? It means the

bidding good-by to our summer friends, and the looking toward winter. It means the changing of the trees, and that the late garden flowers must be tucked up at night from the frosts, and it means a great deal more besides, over which the katydids have been rasping for the last fortnight. We have a saying up here that "When the katydids begin ter holler it's six weeks ter frost."

Now why should that saying send a chill through me? I do not mind the autumn, on the contrary I love it! There is such strength and vigor in the air then; such a survival of the fittest. It is all sturdy preparation to win through to the spring.

Then why should it make me shiver? I did not know, and I turned with pleasure from the thought of autumn, to remember that yesterday I saw the Virgin's Bower throwing its starry blossoms over the little willows at the Wishing Oak ford, for she is a child of July and August, with no hint of autumn about her, until, getting her seed children ready for their flight, she changes

her name and becomes Old Man's Beard. And to comfort me as well, I thought of the bunch of summer flowers I had gathered there, black-eyed Susans, jewel weed, iron weed, wild carrot, blue lobelia, and cardinal flower; and on the railroad banks the yellow primroses are clinging. Why do they grow on those black cinders? To hide the ugliness? Or do they know, the cunning things, that with that dark setting they look their very best? But after all, now that I think of it, almost all these flowers run into the autumn, and so the katydids are right after all.

On my way home I stopped at Mrs. Anderson's, whose only son is very ill with the fever.

"Yes'm, Miss Dorothy, he's mighty low an' I've hed a terrible scuffle fer hit. An' las' night seemed like I would er giv' out, but Mr. Selwyn cum up jist 'bout dark ter fetch sum ice, an' seein' I wus all erlone, 'cept fer ther childurn, he set up all night with Joe, so's I got er right smart rest."

She turned wearily back into her cabin and my heart went with her.

How does Mrs. Anderson manage? Her son so ill and four little children, all girls, to look after! I suppose her relatives and friends help her a little, but as a rule they are only too apt to come merely out of curiosity, and take dire offense if they are not allowed to see the patient and tell him just how ill he is.

I remember a little old woman who lived near us when I was a child. Her face was all crinkled with age, but her eyes were as bright and snappy as ever, and the world for her was full of interest so long as it held "battle, murder, and sudden death." One day my mother, who was ill in bed with a cold, heard a slight movement in the room, and looking up saw before her this old woman, her face drawn into lines of melancholy enjoyment, but her eyes as beaming as ever.

"Well," she said, flopping down on the foot of the bed, "we've all got ter die sometime."

As I rode through the gate and out of the woods into the field back of our house, I could look straight down into our cheerful little garden smiling up at the departing mists. And there among the flower beds I saw a figure hard at work. Good, gracious! Lob-lie-by-the-fire caught at last!

I rode hastily down and captured him, though he tried to escape through the shrubbery, and we both went in to breakfast, I at least with a good appetite — but of the Poet's appetite I have my doubts.

CHAPTER XI

Miss Dorothy *discovers the wrongfulness of climbing trees*

September 8th

I DO not know why persons of my age should not climb trees if they wish to, but I suppose the objection is that as a rule they do not wish to. As my great-aunt Lydia says, looking at me over her spectacles, "Of course there is no actual harm in it, but people at your age, my dear, do not usually want to do such things." And her tone, because I do want to do such things, convinces herself and her hearers that I am a very peculiar person, and peculiar has none of the pleasant, suggestive flavor of original. Therefore, when I am moved to climb a tree I cover my tracks as carefully as I can, for though I tell myself defiantly that there is no

harm in it, I am driven to submission by my other self rising up to say tantalizingly, "Of course not, if you want to do it."

But I have reaped my reward! Never again shall I be caught in a tree! I have vowed it!

Miss Kate and I did not go out to ride to-day until after dinner, and glad enough we were to be free as we set forth, for we had been in all day; I in a hot kitchen, preserving, Miss Kate in the stable stamping at the flies, and we felt reckless and ready for anything, as who does not on a golden afternoon in September?

We took our way along the same woody road from which in July we had watched the Poet carrying Monte Cristo in the meadows below.

The sun slanted through the trees and made pretty streaks of light and shadow along our way. And presently we came upon a maple tree all golden yellow, with the blue sky showing through in little patches. I stopped Miss Kate under it, and as the leaves gently floated down around me it seemed as though I was in a wonderful dream-shower of golden lights.

The road here is cut out of the mountain,

and this tree, standing a little way from the others, springs from the lower side of the road and flings its branches out over the steep descent of the mountain side.

When I saw that, I straightway desired to be up on one of those branches in all that gold and blue, poised between heaven above and the valley below.

Deference to my other and more proper self made me ride Miss Kate a little way down the road and leave her hitched there, that her nearer presence might not betray me.

Then I went back to my tree and swung myself up into the lower branches, for in spite of my twenty years I am still active. I found a delightful seat where I could see all down the mountain, over the tops of trees just beginning to color under Autumn's warm fingers, and into the little hazy valleys beyond.

It reminded me of when I was little, and used to spend hours in a big maple tree near the house, reading a book of familiar quo-

tations, particularly selections from the "Ancient Mariner." It was so pleasant reading,

> "The many men, so beautiful!
> And they all dead did lie:
> And a thousand thousand slimy things
> Lived on; and so did I."

while I was all safe in my tree. It was like sitting before a great cheerful fire, with a cat purring on the rug, while outside a storm rages.

Few people are acquainted with all the joys of tree climbing. For instance, some might not suppose that a tree was a good place in which to spend a rainy day, and yet I remember one wet morning, long ago, that I spent in a big maple. I stayed there all the morning, watching delightedly the occasional wet figures that scurried to the stable and house; and I have no recollections of ginger tea as a consequence, and I am sure I should have, if it had been administered. It was the one great drawback to catching cold.

Another delightful place to spend a rainy day is a large pile of dried leaves with rubber coats spread on top. Inside under the leaves it is all so still, just the distant patter of the rain, until one moves, and then, what a crashing noise!

But I have not tried this for some years, and it is possible time has thrown about it a glamour which now it would not possess.

"Oh, what a pretty horse!"

My recollections of old delights were broken in upon by a high, sweet voice.

I peeped cautiously between the branches and beheld the Poet on King Cole, and with him a girl I did not know. I could not hear his answer to her remark about Kate, but whatever it was it must have satisfied her on that point, for when they passed under my tree they were discussing the view. I sat very still and close, expecting the Poet to discover me at every minute, or to give a shout to find out where I was, for he must have recognized Miss Kate, and would know I was not far off, and I did not wish to be

seen by his companion in such a position, for she rode with a certain unbending grace which made me feel that she and my great-aunt Lydia would have the same opinions on tree climbing.

But to my surprise the Poet passed on talking and laughing gaily, without a thought apparently of where I might be, as though it was the most natural thing in the world for Miss Kate to be hitched in the woods and no sign of me.

Why, all sorts of things might have happened to me, and yet he rode on supremely indifferent!

I think my jellies and preserves must have made me cross, for I felt unreasonably hurt and angry — or was it, could it be — nonsense! At any rate I am not given to jealousy.

As soon as they were out of sight I slipped out of the tree and mounted Miss Kate, who was tired of standing and glad to be off. I held her in down the mountain, for even if I was angry with the Poet, that was no

reason why Kate's knees should be broken — or my neck.

When we reached the meadows, however, I let her out into a long, eager gallop, checked only by the gates from one field into another. At the end of the first quarter of a mile life did not look so gloomy; at the end of the second quarter, I began to think I was very foolish; and when I had completed the third quarter, I remembered there were other things in the world besides poets, and that I had come out to gather pine cones with which to make a sweet-scented fire for our chilly evenings.

I pulled Miss Kate down to a walk and turned along the Hill Road to the grove of pines, reflecting that even if the Poet did not care to ascertain whether I lay dead by the roadside or not, the purple asters which we call here the farewell-summers still bloomed in the gray fence corners with a splash of golden-rod to set them off. And in one of the little swampy runs I passed a colony of ladies' tresses rearing their pretty heads

through the rank grass, tiny dames of the "Cranford" type, whom the botanists address as Madam Spiranthes. By the time Miss Kate jumped the low fence from the road into the pine grove, we felt, in spite of poets, that life held many pleasures, and as I made my first movement among the bushes, a covey of partridges whirred up, exhilarating me still more.

I told myself nature was always the same, always ready to be loving and beautiful to those who love her, forgetting the many days I go forth to seek her and she tantalizingly hides her face. But perhaps on those days I do not truly love her; my heart is filled with other things, the last book I have read, or a receipt for pickles, and though she spreads all her treasures before me I do not see them, through my own fault.

"Whoa!"

I had heard the hoof-beats far down the road and suspected who it was, but with a fine show of indifference I went on talking to myself, and when he and King Cole landed

as we had done on the silent needles, we greeted them unconcernedly, Miss Kate with a "Good afternoon," in her language, and I with the same in mine.

He was alone now, evidently having taken his companion back to the Springs.

"I am glad to see you safe on the ground again," he remarked, as he dismounted and began helping me gather pine cones.

I looked at him in astonishment. Then he had seen me after all!

"What do you mean?" I inquired, but I felt myself blushing guiltily.

"Aha! You thought you could sit aloft like the cherubs, and see without being seen! As soon as I saw Miss Kate I knew you were somewhere about, and going by my rule of looking where I least expected to find you, I was presently rewarded."

I blushed again with annoyance. Really, it was dreadful to have been caught so, and I was angry with myself.

"At any rate," I said stiffly, "I hope your

companion did not see me in such an undignified position."

He chuckled delightedly.

"No," he said, "I did not point you out to my cousin."

"That was good of you," I said with growing frigidity. "She probably thinks as my Aunt Lydia does, that it is only proper to climb family trees, and even in them one may chance on a decayed branch and get a fall. Will you please hand me my bag of cones?" I said, turning toward Kate.

He saw I was vexed and the amusement died out of his face.

"No," he said, "I will not give you the cones until you tell me what I have done to make you angry."

"I am not angry," I answered. (Why is it that one is never willing to admit that he or she is angry or has been asleep?) "But I am sorry that I should have appeared ridiculous to anybody."

"What do you mean? I never said you appeared ridiculous."

"Then you thought it," I retorted.

"Do you want to know what I really thought?" he asked suddenly, almost fiercely.

"No," I answered hastily, turning toward Miss Kate again.

But he placed himself in front of me.

"You may not want to hear," he said, "but nevertheless I am going to tell you. I thought when I saw you swinging in that golden tree between earth and heaven, that the angels themselves could not look sweeter or more beautiful, and that I loved you; that I had loved you from the very first minute I saw you, that rainy day last March, and that I wanted to hear you say you loved me."

He stood quite still when he had finished, just holding my hands and looking straight down into my eyes.

At first I tried to meet his eyes, but I could not, and shifted my gaze to the mountains over his shoulder. My mountains! They have been mine ever since I could remember and before that. And now?

Now here was a man asking me to give them up for him; for that is what it would mean. One cannot lead the irresponsible life I have led when one belongs to a poet. A delicate free wind touched my cheek, the pine trees above us swished faintly. Uncertainly I turned my eyes back to his; was he worth to me the sacrifice of all my free life? And then in an instant my answer came.

In the moment that I had looked away to my mountains his face had changed. The face that had been all warmth and pleading, in an instant had gone gray and worn. In his eyes was a great dismay, and he looked like one who had suddenly waked to find himself on the brink of a precipice. For a moment I was stunned; then, still looking into his appalled eyes, I shook my head slowly and drew my hands away, and in that moment I saw relief leap up in his face — yet pain was there also. Without a word he turned and unfastened Kate, and in silence I mounted and took my pine cones. I did not look back, but somehow I knew

that he was watching me until I made the bend in the road, and then I think he too mounted and rode home.

"And this," I said, "is what comes of climbing trees and losing one's temper over nothing."

All the way home nature's children called to me, showing their pretty secrets, and crying, I imagined, "Could the Poet do this for you?" and each time I answered, "No! No!"

But at night, when all the house was still, and I sat alone in my room, and burned the pine cones, I saw things in the flames I had never seen there before, and I felt a little — just a little —

"And oh!" I cried to myself, "what brought that hateful look to his eyes just in the instant that I looked away?"

CHAPTER XII

When death rides post

September 10th

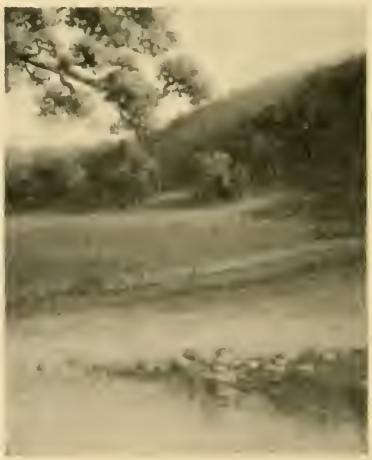
I HAVE acted like a madman and a scoundrel, and only narrowly escaped a terrible predicament. I do not yet know what insane impulse made me do it — I only know that I did it, and that Providence — or was it the look of horror she must have seen in my face — made her shake her head.

Why did I do it? Did I forget? Surely I must have, and it was a day to make any one forget — a September day with a hint of autumn, yet still with the ardor of summer.

I came up what she calls the Hill Road, at a gallop, until I came to that stretch of the way where tall old pines have stood sentinel for years, and here I checked my horse. I

was all elate with the swift pace and the vigor of the air. There I came upon her. She and her little horse were all in a mystery of gloom and sunset lights, and over-bending pines and late afternoon perfumes, and she was gathering pine cones — and yes, I must have forgotten.

For a little space after I had told her, she looked away from me, her gaze for the trees and the mountains, as though she questioned nature, always her confidante, how she should answer me. And in that moment of pause the black curtain of knowledge which somehow I had pushed aside for a



space, in forgetfulness or recklessness, shut down upon me, and I realized too late what I had done. She turned her eyes back from her mountains to my face and started to speak; but suddenly she paused, looking at me in alarm. Then slowly she drew her hands away, and still with her startled eyes gazing into mine, she shook her head for answer.

And afterwards she rode away on her little horse; across sunshine and shadow I watched her go until the dip of the road hid her from me.

I have come away to the city, and left

Aunt Mirandy, and the scrawny cat, and all that went to make up the old Duval place. And I have only taken with me, of all the things which this summer has brought into my life, my completed book and a thousand memories. I have a great desire to see my book in its new guise of print and binding, and after that there is nothing out of all the multitude of things that I should like to do that is really necessary.

I have left most of my money to Dorothy — if I had lived perhaps she would have had the owner as well — and I have tried to explain things to her in a letter to be sent to her afterwards. And now there is nothing further to be done.

CHAPTER XIII

"Or when the moon was over head,
Came two young lovers, lately wed;
'I am half sick of shadows,' said
The Lady of Shalott."

October 31st

OCTOBER, fall, autumn! What do these words mean to other people? To me they mean a thousand delights. Chilly nights, frosty mornings, and genial, reverie-full days. And in the air that vigor of nature when she is preparing her children for winter.

Melancholy days indeed! I do not think so! For what if the first frosts do kill our tender garden flowers, nature's own children are safe enough. It is only those that man has taken under his careless protection that suffer. Many of the sturdy little wild things indeed, welcome the frosts to complete their

summer work. We say here that the frosts fatten the rabbits, and without them what would ever help the chestnut and hickory trees to discharge their crops? And the haw berries, those delicious little things all skin and bone, if there were no frosts would they ever turn black?

I went up on a high ridge at the back of our house the other day and looked down into the valley beneath. It was all a sheet of blue haze because somewhere there are forest fires. But the tiny streams lit by the sun blazed through the dimness like threads of gold. Far below me from one of the little dwellings I could hear Mrs. Sizer's voice, high and sweet, calling, "Duck-ie! Duck-ie!" Immediately from one of the streams came a clamorous response, and though I could not see them, I could imagine the single file of waddlers hurrying to supper.

There is one week in October, sometimes in the early part, sometimes toward the end, when, if the frosts and rains have been propitious, one would not sell the privilege

of being out of doors for all the gold of Ophir.

In the beginning the trees color softly, lazily, one after another reaching perfection and flaring out on the hillsides, until of a sudden there comes a day when the mountains are wrapped in a mist of indescribable color, yellow, orange, red, light green and dark, and the oak-bronze, with the trunks of the trees showing through the leaves.

Over the far hills hangs the October haze, and under our feet the fall pasture is a sheet of green.

For a week we glory in this. Then the frosts and winds slowly stripping them, the trees fade to mere wraiths of color against the sky; then bare branches and it is winter.

While this splendor lasted, Miss Kate and I were happy.

Over all the land was the odor of ripe apples and cider, and in the gray fence corners the milkweeds had split their silver pods, and were sending forth their fleecy children to seek their fortunes, personally

conducted by the wind. And in me I felt stir the possibilities of life. In those inspired days I might be almost anything, artist, scientist, philanthropist. Why, in autumn I might even be a notable housekeeper! Such is the bloom with which these days inspire me.

This is a joy of life that to all, even the most commonplace, must come sometimes in a divine hour, a realization of the possibilities hidden in every nature, showing what we may eventually be when all these possibilities are attained.

But most of all its pleasures, autumn spells for me bulbs — those delightful prize packages of nature's, innocent brown bundles from which may come such wonders. In the last of September and beginning of October I live in the gay catalogues setting forth their virtues. Indeed, I do a great, and by far the most successful, part of my gardening in the catalogues.

I plunge recklessly into the depths of a new one, pretending that I have an enormous

amount to spend, and in my imagination fill the garden with bulbs enough to make it blaze with color next spring. This effect I contemplate for some time with pleasure, then I begin sternly to rein in my ambition, until by dint of much hauling I finally get it down to my ordinary amount of expenditure, and after all, I love the few I do get better than I could possibly love the many.

But there is something the matter with me this autumn; something in me is out of tune. In the midst of my most eager pursuits a black pall of indifference will suddenly fall upon me.

The other day I had been searching for hens' nests in the stable loft, and coming down into the deserted stable I found Miss Kate all alone in her stall. It was very still there, the cooing of the pigeons and the soft conversational tones of a few old hens only made it all the more silent, and suddenly the loneliness and stillness overwhelmed me, so that I buried my face in Miss Kate's yellow

mane and cried, while she turned upon me big, mild eyes.

I do not know what the trouble is, but this I know, I shall take care it does not get possession of me, for the black void of indifference into which I look at those times is not pleasant.

I had reached this point in my thoughts while riding this morning, when, as I made one of the turns on the Hill Road, I caught a delicate, elusive odor, a mere suspicion of fragrance.

"The witch-hazel is in bloom!" I whispered. And then I looked around for its tiny yellow flowers perched along the stems among the fast falling leaves, and there, indeed, I presently discovered them. I broke off a branch and rode on for the mail, the subtle fragrance giving a tang to existence I had missed of late. When Miss Kate and I reached the post-office, the old darky who carries the mail was sitting on the porch soaking up a good supply of sunshine for the coming winter's use. He must have been

asleep, for when we came up he quite jumped.

"What were you thinking about, Jerry?" I asked.

"Ain't thinkin' 'bout nothin'; just setting here studyin'," he answered. He is an old-time darky, and when one speaks to him he makes a very sweeping bow and says "Howdy, Mistis."

From the post-office I got a small parcel, evidently a book, and though I was eager to open it I waited until we were clear of the village and reached a quiet spot in the road before I paused; then I let Miss Kate's head down that she might crop whatever took her fancy in the fall herbage, and untied the string of my package.

The paper fell away from a simple little volume bound in soft gray; but oh, I knew it so well! All summer I had been its friend. I turned the pages eagerly, searching for familiar passages in their new garb.

It was the Poet's book of verses, the first word I had had from him since he went

away in September. It was a great book and I knew it; a book with messages in it for those of the present day, and for those who come after, by one whom people knew already to be great, high above the common, in short, a poet.

A deep exultation rose in me, that I should have been by the worker of this great thing and watched its progress.

But now?

I turned to the front of the book and read its dedication. "To a Summer that is gone." That was all. A summer that was gone, an episode that was passed.

A memory laid away in mental lavender, to be revived occasionally on certain days in summer, until there shall come another summer to which will cling no regrets, and for the last time those old perfumed memories will be taken out and metaphorically burned, to make room in that chamber of his heart for another tenant.

And I?

Truly, I have had a narrow escape, for

might I not have been tied to that poetic nature, receiving Hebrew verses when I hoped for instructions about the pigs?

Miss Kate and I had started on again and were passing under the pine trees where I gathered the cones a month ago, and the needles must have come down very thick, for two people in front of us did not hear Miss Kate's footsteps at all. And oh! It was very shocking! For he was walking with his arm around her waist, and she did not seem to mind. He is John Lacy and she is Mary Ellis, and this is altogether wrong, for her parents have set their faces most decidedly against the matter; for John's actions are not always above reproach. Only the other day I heard of this performance of his:—

He and some other hands were busy shucking in Mr. Black's field of corn which lies almost in the heart of the village, when along crept old man Corbin, as forlorn a specimen of humanity as his wife.

He is always around with a little "poke"

and a grievance; into the former he puts whatever comes his way, and the latter he divides with his friends. He begins to talk as soon as any one appears, and is still at it as they hasten out of sight.

On this particular day his grievance was that both he and his wife were "clean outen terbaccer an' jist didn't hev er cent ter buy more with."

John has a sympathetic nature. Also, he too was out of tobacco. Accordingly, without going into explanations, he borrowed Mr. Corbin's little "poke" and stepped behind one of the corn-shocks.

Now there were some chickens that had pecked about idly all the morning in the languorous sunshine, but when they saw yellow grains of corn falling invitingly near them, their interest in life revived, and presently without any outcry — John is an adept, I regret to say — the plumpest of the chickens, secure in the "poke," rode over to the store on John's shoulder, returning presently in the shape of two and a half plugs of

Liberty Bell tobacco, which John generously divided with the old man. John said afterwards that he did not know to whom the chickens belonged, but he did know, righteously indignant, "Thet they hed no business er peckin' 'round in Joe Black's corn field."

But I was forced to agree with Mary's father, an attenuated church member, who said, "When he takes them little funny spells John don't act altogether right."

Mary should think of these things, but I am afraid she does not. I am afraid she thinks instead of that bitter cold night last winter when John and her brother, the one next to her, were coming out from camp together.

It was so cold that it made a constriction in the throat, making them cough and catch their breath, and overhead the stars flashed with an icy sparkle.

Coming up the long pull on the other side of Cold Knob, Mary's brother sat down abruptly, and declared that there he would

spend the night, and no amount of persuasion or force could get him on his feet again.

Then John, because he is strong of body and determined of mind, and because the other was Mary's brother, the one next to her, took him up in his arms and carried him up that long steep hillside, which it is no joke to climb when there is no wind in one's teeth and no load to carry. I wonder, when he slipped and stumbled and felt his own strength failing, if he never thought the task impossible, or was tempted to leave his burden behind. But at last he reached the top, and there in a dilapidated barn which stands in an old run-out corn field, he dropped his load and went to work again. All night long he pitched the other about and thumped him, and in the morning Mary's brother was sore and stiff, but he was alive. And that, I suppose, is what she thinks about.

I had time to remember these things, for I made Miss Kate walk very slowly while I tried to make up my mind whether to pass them quickly with averted face, or to wait

until they assumed a less embarrassing attitude, when I might come up at a brisk trot as though just arriving on the scene.

As I hesitated, however, Kate's hoof rang against a stone and they both looked around. I expected to see them jump apart with confusion. But no indeed! They did not seem to be at all disturbed, and as I rode hastily by they looked up with vacuous smiles of perfect bliss. For some reason the sight irritated me and I struck Miss Kate rather sharply.

Who was I to be made a lover's confidante?

But after all as I rode along I did not wonder at them, for who would be troubled over the conventionalities under the blue sky of autumn with its spicy redolence in the air?

Thus far I had written this morning as I sat on the porch, when I was aware of the figure of a man approaching. As he came nearer up the long drive I saw that he was a stranger, was young, looked curiously grave, and was walking very fast. When he

got to the porch steps he paused and asked for my father. He was not at home.

"Will you wait until he comes?" I said, "Or shall I take a message for you? I am his daughter."

He bowed. "I am Willis White," he said "I came to see if Mr. Wareham knew anything about my friend, David Selwyn. They told me in the village that he had gone, and said Mr. Wareham might know his address. I have just come from India," he added. He said it as one might say, "I have just come from the post-office," but there was such seriousness in his manner that I was kept from smiling.

"I don't think my father knows his address," I said. "He left quite suddenly about two months ago, and I don't think any one here knows where he is."

"I must find him," he said restlessly. "Tell me, how was he when he went away? Did he seem very ill?"

"Ill?" I cried, startled.

He nodded. "He wrote to me in August

that the doctors only gave him about four months more."

My face must have showed my shock, for he said, "You did not know?"

I shook my head; I could not speak. All the summer flashed back upon me, as seen in the light of this terrible revelation. While we had ridden and jested together, all the time he had been facing this awful fact. No wonder, in spite of his gaiety, there were times when he looked haunted and as though he were a spectator at the drama of life, instead of a player.

"If I had only known," I whispered.

Mr. White must have caught the whisper, for he said, "I should not have told, but I never guessed he was keeping it secret. I must find him," he broke off. "I suppose his publisher will know his address." He started down the steps, but I followed him quickly and touched his arm.

"When you find him," I said, "you will let me know?"

He hesitated a moment; but he looked at

me and seemed to understand — he seemed a man who would understand. I could guess why he was David Selwyn's friend.

"Yes," he said, "I will let you know, if he is willing."

"No," I begged, "let me know anyway."

Again he paused. And again he seemed to understand, for he looked at me as though he were very sorry, and he said, "I will let you know anyway."

And then he swung off quickly down the drive on his search for David Selwyn. And half stunned I sat down upon the top step, and for the first time I acknowledged to myself in all bitterness, what my answer would have been to David Selwyn that September day, if I had not caught the dismayed look upon his face.

CHAPTER XIV

The butterflies a bad second

November 4th

IS it possible that a short three hours can so change a man's outlook? A short three hours ago I thought myself on the brink of death, and now I find myself with as good a chance of a long life as the next fellow. It is laughable; it is ridiculous. For the last eight months I have felt that the sword of Damocles hung above my head. At night I have gone to bed saying to myself, "This may be your last night upon earth." I have looked out upon the morning with the same thought. Every loved sensation I have gripped at eagerly to get the fulness of its joy for perhaps the last time. And now I find it is all a grim, laughable mistake.

Why did I not listen to the inner voice of me that has cried out so often, "Oh, you are not going to die!" and so have been alive all summer instead of half dead? I suppose because I was too busy listening to the other voice that, backed by Dr. Horton, cried out just as positively, "In a year you will be dead." And now I find myself as well as I ever was, with the exception of a tendency to indigestion, which will at times produce most alarming conditions. Poor old Dr. Horton! I had to concede him the indigestion, he was so upset by finding me so indisputably alive. He seized me, poked and pounded me, but all to no purpose. In no dusty, musty corner of my anatomy could he discover my whilome 'itis—my 'itis that I have so long pictured as insidiously at work on my most cherished possessions. At last he said, "I made a mistake in my diagnosis; you are in perfect health, except, of course, for indigestion, which misled me."

Joyfully I granted him the indigestion. I would have done anything I could to lessen

for him the shock of my abounding good health.

"I congratulate you, sir," he managed to drag out; and then he turned to his medicine cases. I saw that I had lost interest for him. Now I was nothing more than a live man like millions of other healthy and uninteresting people, while before I was a somewhat rare and absorbing case. I thanked him for his congratulations and fled from his office. I could not escape the feeling that if I remained longer I should again be tagged with a fatal disease, and sent forth to drag through another year's furlough.

And so good-by old 'itis, you've lost your job this time, but call around say, about fifty years from now, and you can have it again. I believe you would do the business as well as the next one. And I am alive! alive! I could shout it out at the top of my voice that the whole world might know of my reprieve. And if I am no longer of interest to Dr. Horton, I am ten times more interesting to myself than I have ever been. It is as

though I had just met myself, as though I struck hands for the first time with my new, joyous, vigorous self, and together we took gaily the road of life.

How often I have wished myself the same strong man I was a year ago, and now a turn of the wheel and my wish is granted, except that a man can never be quite the same again when he has looked for eight months into the face of death. And a year ago, too, I had never met Dorothy Wareham. And now I know what fortune has been up to all this time. She ticketed me with my 'itis, — sent me flying to the country on the search for a country house, and guided me to the old Duval place for the sole and simple reason that there would dance across my path a little lady on horseback, the sole and only little lady in all the world for me. Alive and strong and at liberty to strive for Dorothy! Truly, when I think of what this reprieve has given me I can envy no one in all the world.

And here in my felicitations in walked

Willis White, brought home over half the world by my letter which the devils of August wrung from me, and having discovered from my publisher the whereabouts of the hole in which I had thought to die. In he came, as I say, wrapped as it were in the spicy breezes of Ceylon, and with a face a yard long. And when I apologized and explained how it was all a put-up job by the doctor and the devils, his relief and joy was just another of the delights of being alive.

"But how long," he said at length, "do you mean to lie perdu, hugging to yourself the fact that you are alive? For I promised a little lady of lustrous eyes and riotous hair, whom I encountered when I pursued you to your mountain fastnesses, that I would let her know your whereabouts willy-nilly."

"Then she guessed something was the matter?" I asked eagerly.

"I blurted it out, not knowing you had gone on all summer hugging it to yourself."

"And she said she wanted to know where I was?" I persisted. I wanted to hear it

over again, the mere sound of the words was sweet to me.

"She made me promise to write to her whether you would let me or not," he repeated.

Then she did care, she did care! And I was ahead of the butterflies in the race.

"So you must write to her unless you'd rather have me do it," White went on, bringing me back from the remembrance of Miss Dorothy's Perfect Day in July, when I had been so jealous of those butterflies, and all of nature's children that took Dorothy's attention from mankind, and one man in particular.

"Thank you," I said, "I will write myself." I spoke arrogantly, insolent with pride; but I was alive and Dorothy cared, and I ask anybody how could I be humble?

With a laugh White jumped up and gave me a tremendous hug.

"And to think," he cried, "that it's a wedding instead of a funeral that I've raced

home for." He stood a moment laughing joyously and then turned to the door.

"I will leave you now," he said, "to write, while I go and rub against some of my fellow countrymen, just to be sure I am really at home."

And I was left to write to Dorothy, for go to her I could not just yet; a tiresome bit of business — not my own, or I would have dropped it — still held me fast in the city.

And so I wrote to Dorothy, my first letter, telling her a few of the thousand things which I had choked back from my lips all summer, because then I had only a few months to offer her, but now I had my life and fame, and a great love. And all were hers.

CHAPTER XV

Miss Dorothy *rides for a letter*

November 20th

TO-DAY we had our first snow-storm! That is, our first real one. There have been chilly mornings, when on waking we found that the tops of the distant blue mountains stood white against a turquoise sky, and knew that in the night a snow-storm had trodden their peaks, leaving us in the valley only tiny siftings of white in hollows and corners; and that has been all until to-day.

All the month it has been a time for wandering in the woods, under the bare gray branches, which now, stripped of their leaves, disclose the tiny bird's-nests — little monuments to the careful fulfilling of nature's laws — that all summer were so carefully hidden

But all that is over now; the snow is coming down with a silent determination to blot out all in sight, and already one cannot see the barns from the house.

Nothing short of a blizzard, however, keeps Miss Kate and me at home, and besides, ever since a certain radiant day two weeks ago, when a wonderful letter changed in a twinkling the whole complexion of my life, there has been each day a letter to post, and one to receive, and no mere snow-storm could keep me from riding for that.

Accordingly we set out, not finding it very cold except when the wind tore through the white mists in fierce gusts.

At first we enjoyed it; we had not been out in a snow-storm for so long we had almost forgotten the hollow stillness, and the beautiful shapes of the crystals as they lay against my dark habit and on Miss Kate's mane, and the fairy arches that the snow-laden branches flung across the road.

We started gaily enough at a trot, but in a little while I felt as though Miss Kate were

walking on stilts which occasionally broke with her, and I saw that the wet snow was balling so heavily on her feet that unless we wanted to try a fall it would be better to keep to a sober pace. So I pulled down to a walk, and proceeded in this subdued manner to the post-office.

Somehow, as I rode along slowly, an unaccountable feeling of dread began to creep upon me. The snow-storm was beautiful and I should have been almost wild with the exhilaration of the air and the feeling of the soft flakes against my face, but for this strange apprehension. I tried to fight the

feeling sternly down, telling myself that fear and dread had been the heritage of love since the world began, and if I wanted again my old serenity I must let go of the new life; but that vague foreboding would not down, and when I passed the grove of pine trees where I gathered cones that September day when I had last seen the Poet, I shivered miserably, not knowing why.

When we reached the station I saw an unusually large crowd gathered there, which made me wonder; but when a boy ran down with a telegram for me I thought no more of the crowd, for the telegram said David

Selwyn would arrive that morning. I laughed to myself, and rode on gaily to the post-office. But there upon the steps, cold as it was, was another sinister crowd, standing in excited groups, and my throat tightened with fear. Above the other voices I heard that of old man Ellis.

"Yes, sir," he was saying, "ther West-bound train! She wus late and wus trying to make up time, and now she is layin' at ther bottom er Solomon's Run, ther engine an' four coaches!"

"Who's killed?" some one asked.

"They ain't heard yit, but why they ain't all killed I don't know."

The West-bound train! It was the train that David Selwyn would be on!

It took a moment for the full meaning of the disaster to creep into my mind; then I struck Miss Kate fiercely and pulled her out of the post-office enclosure, the thought "David Selwyn! Solomon's Run!" beating itself on my brain.

When I gathered myself together a little

I was already turning into the road that leads to Solomon's Run.

Well enough I knew the way. Dozens of times I had picnicked there with gay parties, and sometimes laughingly we had wondered what it would be if one of the passing trains were to come plunging down that distance of gravel filling, on to our white tablecloth spread upon the grass. And now that very thing had happened! The engine and four cars! In my imagination I saw them rolling, bumping, and mangling each other. And the Poet? Oh! if I could only get there!

I struck Kate wildly.

"Kate," I said, "you *must* gallop, you must!"

She plunged forward for a short distance, but the deepening snow caught her feet, making her stumble and slip until she slowed into a walk again.

A weary mile dragged itself behind me, and we had not passed anybody or any house; the road lay straight, unchangingly in front. On either side immense pine trees,

all white with their burden of snow, stretched endlessly as far as I could see through the silent storm. Oh! if they had only been any other tree!

The soft, unceasing curtain of snow hung ever before me, and closed in upon me from behind as I passed, and seemed to press upon me from above so that I almost put up my hands to push it away.

At last the unchangingness and the loneliness, with the horror in my heart, drove me almost frantic, and again I urged Kate into a gallop. But it only lasted a short time. Suddenly she slipped, struggled to catch herself, slipped again, and came down flat.

I do not remember how I extricated myself and got on my feet. The first thing I realized was that I was no longer galloping along the road on Miss Kate, but was running up it alone, the snow clogging my feet.

"Oh! you idiot! You poor little idiot!" I said, as though I were speaking to some one

else; and I turned and went back to Kate, who had struggled to her feet unhurt, and had not moved far. Mounting her, I set out once more on that endless, slow walk. After that I think it began to turn colder, or perhaps it was because I was wet and chilled that the wind went through me in such piercing gusts. I shook so that I could hardly stay in the saddle, and my hands and feet ached intensely, until I ceased to feel them any more.

Then I began to hear voices and have little spaces of unconsciousness, and to forget if I had passed that pine tree that had been just in front of me, or if that was it that I was just coming to. It was all so motionless, so silent and lonely. I remember watching one other track besides mine in the snow, and when that was obliterated I almost cried out with loneliness.

And all the time I felt that this was not the worst, that something awful, unspeakable, awaited me at the end of the long white road and the endless pine trees.

At last I passed a cabin, and a little dog's barking roused me to fuller consciousness; and then I saw approaching out of the whiteness a slow-moving crowd of men carrying something heavily.

I turned Kate to one side of the road and waited.

On they came without a word, and forever it seemed to me I should hear the dragging shuffle of their feet in the snow.

I kept my eyes away until they were just abreast of me, and then I looked down.

The white face was not his, nor would he wear heavy overalls. It was evidently one of the crew.

The men, seeing my frightened look, called out cheerfully, "Don't be skeer'd; he ain't much hurt. He'll be all right d'rectly."

I thanked them and rode on. About the Poet I could not ask.

I watched dully the broad tracks they made in the snow, and then suddenly I looked up, and there, there before me, was

a figure — a figure I knew — walking, as firm and erect as ever.

I felt a warm rush of joy go over me, and all my frozen terror melted in it. But just as he caught sight of us a sharp gust of wind tore through the pine tree overhead, and sent its powdery burden down in a little avalanche, shutting out all in front, for an instant only, but long enough for me to wonder if I had seen into Heaven, and if, when the curtain lifted, it would all be gone again, with nothing left but the long blank road and endless pine trees; but when it cleared the Poet was close beside me!

"Dorothy, why Dorothy!" he exclaimed, with a world of tenderness in his voice.

I said nothing but slipped off Miss Kate beside him.

* * * * * * *

"But who was hurt?" I asked after a long time.

"Only three people, none of them very badly, and we have them all settled pretty comfortably," he answered reassuringly.

"You must have heard a very exaggerated account of the whole thing."

And that is all. Only this, through that long ride I woke fully to the fact that there are other things besides nature in this world that are needful to my happiness.