

On Saturday afternoons, I used to beg of my mother to let me go and see Susie; and my sisters, nothing loth, used to brush my hair and put on me a stiff, clean, checked apron, and send me trotting off, the happiest of young lovers.

How bright and fair life seemed to me those Saturday afternoons, when the sun, through the picket fences, made golden-green lines on the turf—and the trees waved and whispered, and I gathered handfuls of golden-rod and asters to ornament our house, under the button-wood tree!

Then we used to play in the barn together. We hunted for hens' eggs, and I dived under the barn to dark places where she dared not go; and climbed up to high places over the hay-mow, where she trembled to behold me—bringing stores of eggs, which she received in her clean white apron.

This daintiness of outfit excited my constant admiration. I wore stiff, heavy jackets and checked aprons, and was constantly, so my sisters said, wearing holes through my knees and elbows for them to patch; but little Susie always appeared to me fresh and fine and untumbled; she never dirtied her hands or soiled her dress. Like a true little woman, she seemed to have nerves through all her clothes that kept them in order. This nicety of person inspired me with a secret, wondering reverence. How could she always be so clean, so trim, and every way so pretty, I wondered? Her golden curls always seemed fresh from the brush, and even when she climbed and ran, and went with me into the barn-yard, or through the swamp and into all sorts of compromising places, she somehow picked her way out bright and unsoiled.

But though I admired her ceaselessly for this, she was no less in admiration of my daring strength and prowess. I felt myself a perfect Paladin in her defense. I remember that the chip-yard which we used to cross, on our way to the barn, was tyrannized over by a most loud-mouthed and arrogant old turkey-cock, that used to strut and swell and gobble and chitter greatly to her terror. She told me of different times when she had tried to cross the yard alone, how he had jumped upon her and flapped his wings, and thrown her down, to her great distress and horror. The first time he tried the game on me, I marched up to him, and by a dexterous pass, seized his red neck in my hand, and confining his wings down with my arm, walked him ingloriously out of the yard.

How triumphant Susie was, and how I swelled and exulted to her, telling her what I would do to protect her under every supposable variety of circumstances! Susie had confessed to me of being dreadfully afraid of "bears," and I took this occasion to tell her what I would do if a bear should actually attack her. I assured her that I would get father's gun and shoot him without mercy—and she listened and believed. I also dilated on what I would do if robbers should get into the house; I would, I informed her, immediately get up and pour shovelfuls of hot coal down their backs—and wouldn't they have to run? What comfort and security this view of matters gave us both! What bears and robbers were, we had no very precise idea, but it was