

START THE YEAR RIGHT



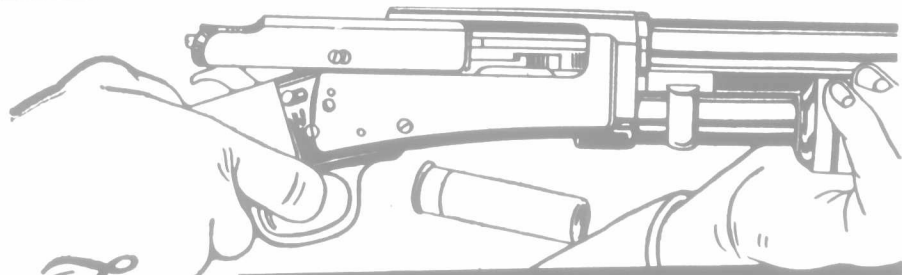
SAY TO YOURSELF

THIS YEAR I'LL USE
NOTHING BUT

'CREAM OF THE WEST' FLOUR

MADE AT A MUDDY MILL
AND GUARANTEED BY
YE OLDE MILLER

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The Marlin Repeating Shotgun

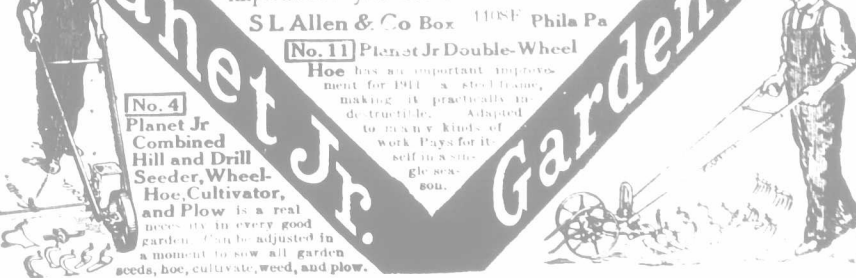
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basis supplied by an itinerant baker. Later, I shall doubtless get up my courage to ask her to take lessons of Mrs. Mullins, an old ex-cook.

The commuter's wife should have a hen rampant as her coat of arms, and adopt it as her patron saint. I swear daily gratitude to this commonplace and songless bird—for, given eggs, my household need not go breakfastless either to town or to hospital. Both father and Evan are not only satisfied but eager for eggs at breakfast and other odd times. They may be cooked in any of a dozen ways, or at a pinch not cooked at all, but shaken up in a deft way with a few other ingredients. If a man regards eggs seriously, there is no need for him to run to the train breakfastless, leaving wife or maids in a state of exhaustion, one having stayed awake half the night to wake the other. A late unsavory breakfast is never pardonable, for fruit needs no cooking, and good coffee, a cereal, hot toast, and eggs "a l'infinité" can be as well gathered together in half an hour as in half a day. You see, a country doctor's daughter has a good chance to learn the ways of ministering to the physical needs of a man who must always be well fed, though often not lengthily.

The bacon and eggs had scarcely disappeared and father had begged a third cup of coffee in honor of my birthday, when there was a vigorous scratching at the back door. I had been wondering all the time what had become of the dogs, who usually were the first to take their places either under the table or beside the chairs of their favorites.

I could hear Tim outside, admonishing them and evidently trying to chide them into order, which was instantly departed from the moment the door opened. They entered like rockets with a flash of color. Lark, Pat, and the hounds ran to me with every symptom of joy. Bluff alone crawling under the table with an evident desire to hide. Each dog had a red ribbon tied around his neck, from which hung a large pasteboard heart, bearing a birthday greeting and a quotation, something of the penny Valentine order, appropriate to, if somewhat derisive of, gardening.

One by one, much to the relief of the dogs, I gathered in the trophies, stringing them on my arm as I used to the hoops of wonderful paper flowers that were used as favors at the dancing-class cotillions that vexed my youthful spirits. I called Bluff to yield his ribbon, but he would not come out.

Father commanded him in an unmistakable voice, and then he crawled groveling to his feet, as if in abject terror, the cardboard heart chewed to pulp, in his effort to get rid of it.

"I believe he thinks the dangling thing some sort of a punishment for an unknown crime," said father. "Once when he was a year or two old, I tied a quail about his neck to punish him for eating some game he should have retrieved, and I believe the old fellow remembers it. Untie the ribbon, Barbara, and see what he will do."

The moment the bow was loosened, I tossed the whole necklet across the room, out of sight. Bluff sat up, still trembling and looked about, then, with two joyful barks, gave me his usual caress, the veriest scrap of a lick on the nose, and, with self-respect restored, began to coax for toast.

By this time the sun was shining bright and strong above the maples, and the air blowing through the door that the dogs had burst open was full of unexpected softness. Father and Evan disappeared each to his lair, to return smugly armed with pipe and tobacco pouch, which promised me two outdoor companions. For these beloved men, in strictly avowed saturating the mind with pipe smoke, knowing without a word from me that a woman's sensitive organization has a right to a certain share.

Then we three strolled down toward the long walk to take the first step toward capturing the Garden of Dreams, that I might live my life in it. A song sparrow sang merrily, a bluebird perched away from the Mother Tree, the soft bright air bore the fragrance of Russian violets, and a bit of the tangle was gay with the hardy pompon chrysanthemums, tawny, red, yellow, pink, and white. My heart beat joyously, for love held me by either hand, and before me there was work to be done, and work is life. Still, it is the first day of November! Fie upon you, melancholy autumn poets!

VIII.

SETTING THE SUNDIAL.

November 1 (continued). Last night I told Evan my plan of turning the old strawberry bed into a bit of formal garden, and he agreed that it would be a natural resting place for the eye in its journey from the seat under the apple tree down the walk and across the fields.

He emended the somewhat crooked design that I had traced on a slate found in the attic desk, and made me a fascinating water-color sketch in which the strawberry bed appeared as a small level lawn, in the center of which stood the sundial, acting as the hub to a large, wheel-shaped flower bed, or, rather, group of beds as the wide spokes, each of a different but harmonizing color, were separated by narrow grass walks. A similar walk circled the spokes, and was bounded in turn by a circular bed that might be called the tire of the wheel, and divided the grass walk into four, in order that one might get to the center without walking through the outer bed. Four graceful wing-shaped beds filled the corners of the grass plot, which by actual measurement proved to be forty feet square. This plateau was on three sides enough higher than the surrounding ground to allow an arbitrary grass slope of two feet, with a couple of steps where the long walk joined it.

Without suggesting what plants should be used—that is to be settled on some dreary day in midwinter when the first seed catalogue appears, bringing its tantalizing mirage of possibilities—Evan washed in a color scheme that he knew would satisfy my rather savage taste, and make this formal bit a blaze of light without the aid of a single "foliage plant." For it is really astonishing how few colors are in harmonious when they are profusely massed and have green for a background.

One thing we decided about my Garden of the Sun, as Evan calls this formal bit, because it stands out in the open, entirely without shelter. It is to contain only the perishable summer flowers, really flowers of the sun, and fit companions for the sundial. Gorgeous blossoms that come into being in June after the hardy roses have vanished, and glow and blaze until they fairly bloom themselves to death, before the frost touches them.

Of these flowers, some are annuals, and others tender perennials or so-called florists' flowers that it is always a mistake to mix with bulbs or hardy perennials, for in the early season they are overpowered, and in their turn choke the hardier plants, exhausting the goodness from the soil by their rank growth.

As for the spring bulbs, I do not like them in set beds, each of a kind, and arranged in stripes or figures, any more than I do the formal beds of foliage plants. Grown in this way, as soon as the bulbs are out of bloom they must be replaced, or the space will look ragged and unsightly. This does away with the natural seasons of the garden. I think that one of the greatest charms of nature to women is that she is, like ourselves, a creature of moods, phases, seasons, and not always equally radiant.

Her wild garden has its spring, summer, autumn and winter seasons.