

Our New Serial.

The Garden of a Com-muter's Wife.

(By Mabel Osgood Wright.)

CHAPTER I.—Continued.

Where was the dog going? Down between the weigelias and lilacs through the stiff little arbour to the garden, to the great bough apple tree whose trunk was encircled by a seat.

Surely Bluff had not forgotten. Then as he saw that I hesitated, he ran to a corner where stepping stones led up the bank to the open fields, gave a short bark, and waited for me.

"Not to-night, old fellow; to-morrow we will go there," I said, seating myself by the apple tree. Instantly he thrust his nose into my hand, then curled himself up at my feet.

Before me was the garden where I had played all my childhood, until playing had turned into dreaming. It was unkempt, but it seemed to have more dignity and meaning than the garden of my memory; the unpruned rose bushes reached out long bare arms, or formed briery tangles according to their kind, the shrubs were massive and well-grown, and had the soothing influence of permanence. In a sheltered corner a cluster of chrysanthemums, unharmed by frost, showed their silvery disks, and a single crumpled pansy looked up from the path where it had found footing. What was that perfume? Stooping, I separated the cold, damp leaves of a mat of Russian violets that grew from under the seat. Yes, there were a dozen of the flowers themselves, anticipating spring after their hopeful habit.

Violets were my mother's flowers, and this was her seat. She went away when I was five years old, but I have not forgotten, and I always called this great apple, with its ample branches that furnished nooks alike to me and to the robins and bluebirds—the Mother Tree. I used to make bouquets and wreaths of my best flowers, and stick them in the knot-holes or hang them on the branches the particular day in June when father always shut himself into his study, and would not speak even to me.

Aunt Lot had said that I was a pagan to make an idol out of a tree and hang flowers on it, and scolded until I cried bitterly. Father, hearing my distress, came out to find the cause, and sat with me under the tree all the afternoon. From that day we understood each other, and the study door was never closed between us. Here, too, it was that he told me of his plans for the hospital that now stands over yonder by the town, where he meant to help all women for mother's sake. I only understood his moods gropingly in those days; for the subtle language of the human heart cannot be imagined, but may only be read by those who love and are loved in return, and the other love also came to me through loving father.

Beside the gift of healing and sympathy with everything living, father had the book madness. Not the disagreeable stuffy kind of mania that Nodier's Theodore died of, simply the hunger for the friendships that books offered him, and the desire to keep such boon companions in the best of health and raiment. Woe was upon me even in my babyhood if I ever ate cookies over the lap of the meanest volume or cut the leaves of a magazine with anything less smooth than a paper knife! So it came about that when we took our winter holidays in Boston and New York, we mingled music, theatre and pictures with many eager hours in a dingy auction room where books were sold, that stood at the meeting of three crossways. It is impossible to word the keen joy we both found within those smoke-calls, father in the chase and bringing down the prey, I in retrieving, so to speak. This sport consisted in rushing the precious volumes safely past Aunt

Lot's custom-house inspection and mixing them with the older residents in the book shelves until their identity was lost.

The risk of retrieving varied greatly with the size of the book itself. The "New English Canaan" and Josselyn's "Rarities" were easily pocketed, and they modestly kept the secret of their own value, but to smuggle in the clumsy bulk of Gerard's "Herball" in its snuffy sheep cover was an impossibility, and father had to suffer from weak, muddy coffee for a fortnight. Good coffee was one of his few luxuries, and Aunt Lot knew well how to make her mild wrath felt. Exactly why she grudged father his precious old books I never could discover, possibly because she could not imagine any other point of view than her own, which narrowness she called economy. I very early found, however, that we were not the only buyers obliged to retrieve. Men came to that auction room whose word was law to hundreds of their fellows, and packed away their winnings in mysterious pockets like so many crimes, and I once helped an old thumb-fingered gentleman, who owned a railroad, to stow away a glorious missal illuminated on vellum in a pasteboard box marked "one ream legal cap!"

Since then, as a married woman, I have mingled with others of my class, and I find that this stupid book grudge among us is a more fatal disease than the book madness of men, and I only hope that some one will discover the bacillus that causes it. I also often wondered why father cared about Aunt Lot's protestations; such money as he had was his own to spend, but it was doubtless owing to his medical rule of never reasoning with the unreasonable, and Aunt Lot surely belonged to the latter class, even allowing for her little kindnesses that were set edgewise like thin streaks of lean in overwhelmingly fat bacon.

In fact, her very name came from her habit of looking backward instead of forward at all the turning-points of her life and thus missing her best chances, until father had so often quoted "Remember Lot's wife" to her, that unconsciously she became Aunt Lot to us, though outsiders to this day think her name Charlotte.

My book-shelves also shared in the spoils, and each winter saw me more keen for the hunting. In summer I almost forgot books. What need was there for them when I had all outdoors around and above and below me, everything belonging to me through the sight, and telling its own story without the chilly intervention of print? All outdoors, and father to take me everywhere.

Said the Marquis of Carrabas to Puss in Boots upon one of the rare occasions when he offered any advice: "We have but little money, but as long as we use our eyes faithfully, everything that they see under the sky is ours." In this way Puss grew up with the idea that all outdoors belonged to her. By the way, did you ever know that the Marquis was really a country doctor, and that Puss was a female child?

It was from father's shoulder that I peered into my first woodpecker's hole, receiving a sharp reproof in the nose from the bill of the irate owner. Who would compare printed thoughts to those long drives through the woods to the charcoal-burner's camp, the horseback rides single file along the river path to the sawmill where a lumberman seemed always to be ill of ague from the dankness of the mill pond? Or the jolting trips in a buckboard over the corduroy road across the marshes to the bar, where the lighthouse boat waited for us, or yet the tramps in pursuit of plover and woodcock through the bottom lands? Do not be shocked, kind ladies of the Audubon Society; we obeyed the game laws, the birds always went to the sick, and I knew no better; also, father was quite proud of me when I shot an old

crow on the wing. If you try it, you will understand why!

Then again I would stay for days in my garden, grubbing in the few ragged borders that the vegetable greed of the man of all work and Aunt Lot's love for spunky foliage beds left me, planning what I should do in the "some day" that always seemed a matter of course to me. The very first thing that I should do in that happy time would be to send away the gardener, and then I would have an iron pot painted red, with red geraniums in it, and conch shells to edge the beds, like those in the garden of the grocer's wife, for my taste was then in the Indian war-paint stage.

When autumn came, and outdoors put on her iron mask to shield herself from cold, I crept back to the study and made friends again with books, and read each new catalogue, lying flat on my face upon an old hair-cloth lounge, with Timperley's "Dictionary of Printing" (which, being lumpy, heavy, and weak in the back, was constantly falling off its shelf) for a reading-desk. Ah! web of fate! it was well that I did not see you weaving the pattern of my life among those pages; being young, I might have resented you and spoiled the fabric.

One day father discovered in a catalogue among some curious medical books a copy of Dodoens's "Herball." This he had long wanted for its absurdly quaint descriptions of the medical properties of plants. It was the English translation made by Henry Lite, and printed in London in 1586. It bore the autograph and notes of "J. Oldham, chirurgien," and a verse from his pen:

"Reader! (where Lite is in the Right)
Peruse in grateful strain,
And where Dodoneus is Erroneus
Correct him clear and plain.
J. O., 1799."

Evidently Oldham had differed so much from the author that his corrections were both clear, plain, and plentiful. Though valuable from father's standpoint, it was a volume safely within the limits of his purse, and the day of its selling he settled back in his chair, determined to hold the book against the field.

It was a stormy February day, and there were only two or three bidders of the class that buy on general principles, who dropped out after a little, leaving my father's terse bid to be echoed by one other in a distant corner. The price began straightway to climb hand over hand. What would Aunt Lot say?

Finally the hammer fell, and father flushed with victory gave his name as the purchaser; the voice in the corner did likewise. The seller paused, saying that there was a mistake somewhere, and proceeded to put up the book again.

I could see that father was going to be stubborn, and I trembled for the other person. I saw him clearly as he stepped forward, a man of thirty, slightly built and muscular, with a strong face and a pair of steel-gray eyes that could see through a wall.

The two men looked each other in the face, the younger gave a quizzical little smile, at me, it seemed, waived his claim, and the clatter of selling recommenced.

Afterward, as we picked our way downstairs in the dusk, father hugging his Dodoens, Gray Eyes was close in front of us, and, during a moment's pause, father held out his hand, and thanked him for his courtesy. In short, the book of contention became the book of introduction, for they instantly found that they had mutual friends. Before a year was out they discovered in truth that they had almost tastes in common; they liked the same breed of books, cigars of the same shape and moisture, country life better than that of the city, and finally they agreed that they both loved me; but in this rivalry it was father who stepped aside, and Evan was retriever.

Evan was English born, and like

many a younger son of that vigorous race preferred free flight to sitting underneath in an overcrowded nest, with no more interesting view before him than that of his elder brother's legs. So, after circling the globe, he settled in America to ply his craft of landscape architect, for which the time was ripe, and furnish the newly genteel with manor houses, Italian gardens, and pleached alleys, all made to measure like a suit of clothes.

When we were married, alack! family matters called Evan to England, so for two years we lived away. One year was spent in travel, the other in a quiet English country home, these two years being divided by an illness of the kind where through sheer weakness one loses gravity, and seems to float through space seeking a footing either in heaven or earth, and finding neither.

The English life was mildly pleasant; the country with its myriad touchstones, glorious. The rambling stone house, garden, and pleasure in Somerset that fell to Evan's portion, overflowed with such flowers as would gather pilgrims for miles around any New England village. Jasmine half way to the eaves, Marechal Neil roses and Gloire de Dijons firm as cab-bages, bushes of picotee pinks, begonias, fuchsias grown to trees, sweet violets carpeting the orchard, and ivy making dignified haste to conceal everything unsightly. Herbaceous beds rioting in color, and all to be had for the picking, and the limited care of an erratic old fellow who had been under-gardener once on a great estate, but was climbing down in the world, led by rheumatism, the English agriculturist's latter-day companion.

In the middle of this garden, opposite my morning seat, was an old stone sundial that had a strange influence upon me. I could watch the shadow creep across its face for hours without tiring; the half-obliterated letters of the legend carved upon it read: "I only mark the sunlit hours."

It was a good moral and a pleasant influence to grow strong and readjust oneself under. Domestic life flowed easily with Martha Corkle, Evan's old nurse, for majordomo, and a couple of the well-trained maids that cost so little there.

For a few months Evan was boyishly happy. He tramped the countryside over in visiting his old haunts, and the smell of the may and cowslips made his breath come short and the veins in his forehead grow tense with suppressed emotion. Did you know that the men of this race have a passion for flowers, and are knit thew and bone with the homing, soil-loving instinct which they call loyalty? The morning of our wedding day, Evan laid a bunch of bride roses in the branches of the Mother Tree in the garden, so there are three now that understand.

The old days cast their spell upon him, days from which time had removed the sting and left only the fragrance. Together we rowed on the deep, narrow river, and in the shadowy cathedral listened to the music that seemed to come from the organ without human intervention; in fact, we discovered each other anew.

The newly-mated should always go away for a space, among strangers, if possible. Readjustment cannot take place in the old nest; but, after all, that is safe. Then, too, not to go away is not to know the joy of return.

After a time Evan grew restless; his scrap of the family raiment was too small, he must weave his own and mine, and for the worker the looms of England are as crowded as the nests.

One September morning we sat by the sundial trying to unravel our "weird" and see clearly what was best. Evan held in his hand the offer from a prosperous manufacturer to lease the place for ten years, and while he brooded over the matter I held my peace. I could not trust myself to speak, though the words were crowding thick and fast to my lips.