

and Patsy he got up from his two knees, and to kape his word went out and drowned hisself in drink before witnesses in Grogan's saloon."

Mrs. Mullins talked so rapidly, hurried by a keen relish of her subject, that I followed her with difficulty, divided between laughter and admiration of Delia's spirit. So when Mrs. Mullins creaked downstairs, she carried the tidings to the girl that, failing of being a bride, she might still be a waitress without reproach.

Having a healthy appetite, and no woman being within reach with whom I could discuss the morning's happenings, thereby magnifying their importance, I went in search of luncheon, and by the time it appeared, together with father, the only part of the trilogy of woes that seemed worth repeating was Mrs. Mullins's account of the failure of Delia's venture in real estate.

X. WINTER.

The GARDEN OF BOOKS.

December 3. Winter has come in a single night, the picturesque winter of Christmas cards, wrapped snugly in ermine robes and travelling to the jingle of sleigh bells. It is only occasionally that he travels in this guise, more often coming as gaunt Black Frost, with the north wind for pace-maker, trampling the naked fields with mailed feet, freezing the very pith of the leafless trees, numbing the huddled birds as they glean seed in the furrows, and making us feel the hopeless cruelty of Nature's sterner moods when unassuaged by human kindness.

However fickle our climate may be, it is never monotonous, and so, after three open, or at least snowless winters, to-morrow many sleighs will be let down from the lofts where they were fast sinking into a Rip van Winkle sleep, while wolf skins and buffalo robes, the relics of a vanished tribe, will leave the camphor chests, and again see the light of day.

Night before last was the time of the "watch fires." The sun went down with the clear red afterglow that in summer usually indicates the coming of hot, dry weather. The air, in fact, was warm, of the real Indian summer softness, such as often continues for many weeks after the killing frosts of middle November.

I am glad that the watch fires are still kept up. I remember being awakened, wrapped in a blanket, and taken out to light my first fire. Father himself started the custom, and I feared that it might have died out during my absence, with other signs of the seasons that add so much to country living.

All through the autumn, as the farmers cut the brush from meadow edges, or cleared weeds and stubble from the corn fields, fires would be seen at night, the leisure time they took for burning the rubbish. Oftentimes these fires were lighted, and being left to tend themselves, spread, doing much damage, or else a conflagration of house or barn was thought to be merely a brush fire, and so neighborly aid was withheld.

For these reasons, father had suggested that every one should gather his rubbish as usual, but wait to burn it until the first night of winter, when all the neighborhood could be out and on the watch to see and enjoy the bonfires that flickered from hill to hill, quite out to the point that runs into the bay, and make a festival of "watching in" winter.

Evan and I went together to the hilltop well back of the house and woods, where Bertie had collected a grand pyre of stubble, shrub trimmings, and weed hay from the roadsides, all capped and held in place by pine and hemlock boughs that had been cut away in clearing the meandering cowpath that was to be the walk through our wild garden in the wood-lot.

It was a beautiful night, the many voices coming from afar and the vivid flames lent an air of newness and mystery to familiar surroundings. Every time Evan stirred the pile with his fork, the landscape perspective

changed, and now and then a weasel, a fox, or some other little night-prowling animal, startled from its lair, would dart across a streak of light, to be instantly swallowed by the darkness again.

Finally the last flicker died away; and when nothing remained but a glowing circle of embers that could do no harm in the middle of the plowed field, we strolled slowly home, Evan with his coat on his arm, and I fanning my face, which the fire had toasted, with my useful but rather dilapidated hat, which had seen service as carrier for nuts or small tufts of ebony spleenwort, pipsissewa, or partridge berry that from time to time I added to the little wild fernery that lives in the middle of the dinner table.

"Are you ready for winter?" asked Evan, who had been away for a few days' visit to an F. M. (an American title signifying Financial Mightiness) whose recent purchase of a tract of forest, field and river was to be turned into a home park.

"Is anyone ever ready to be shut in or see the friendly earth so seemingly dead? But if you mean have I done all the outdoor gardening that is possible before spring, I can certainly say that I have, and that I am ready for winter. The narcissus, Bermuda lilies, Roman hyacinths, early tulips, and freezias are all potted and buried in the cold frame, ready to be brought in succession as house plants. I've sown ounces, in fact quite half a pound of Shirley poppy seed in front of the hardy plants, the entire length of the walk on the way to the sun garden; the perennials have cedar-bough wind-breaks over them, the old roses are mulched with coarse litter, and the new ones are all bonneted with straw after the most approved fashion. The only thing remaining to be done when the ground freezes for good is to cover the bulbs outside the study windows."

"Then," said Evan, slyly, "I think I shall not be interfering with your garden operations if I bring home some plans to-morrow night and work over them here, where I can be free from interruptions. Incidentally, I might spare a few hours of daylight to unpack my bachelor belongings, and get our books into winter quarters."

He knew exactly what I should say, or rather do, and he slipped around a tree that we were passing, thereby causing me to embrace it fervently in the dark, bumping my tip-tilted nose.

Ah, the joy of unexpected holidays! their ecstasy must be forever missing to the habitually leisure class. Even the dogs sniff the news in the air on the rare autumn field-days that father takes, and by the time he brings out his gun and examines stock and muzzle, they are running circling about in a frenzy of excitement.

Precisely this feeling possessed me when Evan said that he could do his planning here. Yet such a creature of contrariety am I, that I can imagine nothing more deadly to motive and affection than to have one's husband belong to the American branch of that pernicious institution known as "The Men Who Stay at Home." The subtle art of being agreeable, though unemployed in the technical sense, requires both heredity and greater preparation than most of the learned professions, and to be done well must be the outcome of an older and possibly more degenerate civilization than ours. For here, save in exceptional Newport-like communities, "The Man Who Stays at Home" must, as far as male companionship goes, suffer the pangs of Robinson Crusoe loneliness, which does not improve his temper.

But it is pure joy to have Evan for a few precious days all to myself in the den, where I can sit in the window and watch him make his free-hand water-color plans from the necessary but stiff scale drawings, knowing when he is satisfied by the way in which he rumples his hair, and, when perplexed, by his horse-shoe scowl. There is something



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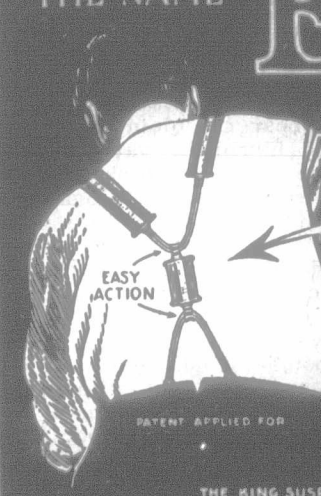
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