

ELIZABETH VON ARNIM

ELIZABETH AND HER
GERMAN GARDEN

Elizabeth von Arnim

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Elizabeth and Her German Garden

INTRODUCTION TO THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EDITION

Originally published in 1898, “Elizabeth and her German Garden” is the first book by Marie Annette Beauchamp—known all her life as “Elizabeth”. The book, anonymously published, was an incredible success, going through printing after printing by several publishers over the next few years. (I myself own three separate early editions of this book by different publishers on both sides of the Atlantic.) The present Gutenberg edition was scanned from the illustrated deluxe MacMillan (London) edition of 1900.

Elizabeth was a cousin of the better-known writer Katherine Mansfield (whose real name was Kathleen Mansfield Beauchamp). Born in Australia, Elizabeth was educated in England. She was reputed to be a fine organist and musician. At a young age, she captured the heart of a German Count, was persuaded to marry him, and went to live in Germany. Over the next years she bore five daughters. After her husband’s death and the decline of the estate, she returned to England. She was a friend to many of high social standing, including people such as H. G. Wells (who considered her one of the finest wits of the day). Some time later she married the brother of Bertrand Russell; which marriage was a failure and ended in divorce. Eventually Elizabeth fled to America at the outbreak of the Second World War, and there died in 1941.

Elizabeth is best known to modern readers by the name “Elizabeth von Arnim”, author of “The Enchanted April” which was recently made into a successful film by the same title. Another of her books, “Mr. Skeffington” was also once made into a film starring Bette Davis, circa 1940.

Some of Elizabeth’s work is published in modern editions by Virago and other publishers. Among these are: “Love”, “The Enchanted April”, “Caravaners”, “Christopher and Columbus”, “The Pastor’s Wife”, “Mr. Skeffington”, “The Solitary Summer”, and “Elizabeth’s Adventures in Rugen”. Also published by Virago is her non-autobiography “All the Dogs of My Life”—as the title suggests, it is the story not of her life, but of the lives of the many dogs she owned; though of course it does touch upon her own experiences.

In the centennial year of this book’s first publication, I hope that its availability through Project Gutenberg will stir some renewed interest in Elizabeth and her delightful work. She is, I would venture, my favorite author; and I hope that soon she will be one of your favorites.

R. McGowan San Jose, April 11 1998.

The first page of the book contains two musical phrases, marked in the text below between square brackets [].

ELIZABETH AND HER GERMAN GARDEN

May 7th.—I love my garden. I am writing in it now in the late afternoon loveliness, much interrupted by the mosquitoes and the temptation to look at all the glories of the new green leaves washed half an hour ago in a cold shower. Two owls are perched near me, and are carrying on a long conversation that I enjoy as much as any warbling of nightingales. The gentleman owl says [[musical notes occur here in the printed text]], and she answers from her tree a little way off, [[musical notes]], beautifully assenting to and completing her lord's remark, as becomes a properly constructed German she-owl. They say the same thing over and over again so emphatically that I think it must be something nasty about me; but I shall not let myself be frightened away by the sarcasm of owls.

This is less a garden than a wilderness. No one has lived in the house, much less in the garden, for twenty-five years, and it is such a pretty old place that the people who might have lived here and did not, deliberately preferring the horrors of a flat in a town, must have belonged to that vast number of eyeless and earless persons of whom the world seems chiefly composed. Noseless too, though it does not sound pretty; but the greater part of my spring happiness is due to the scent of the wet earth and young leaves.

I am always happy (out of doors be it understood, for indoors there are servants and furniture) but in quite different ways, and my spring happiness bears no resemblance to my summer or autumn happiness, though it is not more intense, and there were days last winter when I danced for sheer joy out in my frost-bound garden, in spite of my years and children. But I did it behind a bush, having a due regard for the decencies.

There are so many bird-cherries round me, great trees with branches sweeping the grass, and they are so wreathed just now with white blossoms and tenderest green that the garden looks like a wedding. I never saw such masses of them; they seemed to fill the place. Even across a little stream that bounds the garden on the east, and right in the middle of the cornfield beyond, there is an immense one, a picture of grace and glory against the cold blue of the spring sky.

My garden is surrounded by cornfields and meadows, and beyond are great stretches of sandy heath and pine forests, and where the forests leave off the bare heath begins again; but the forests are beautiful in their lofty, pink-stemmed vastness, far overhead the crowns of softest gray-green, and underfoot a bright green wortleberry carpet, and everywhere the breathless silence; and the bare heaths are beautiful too, for one can see across them into eternity almost, and to go out on to them with one's face towards the setting sun is like going into the very presence of God.

In the middle of this plain is the oasis of birdcherries and greenery where I spend my happy days, and in the middle of the oasis is the gray stone house with many gables where I pass my reluctant nights. The house is very old, and has been added to at various times. It was a convent before the Thirty Years' War, and the vaulted chapel, with its brick floor worn by pious peasant knees, is now used as a hall. Gustavus Adolphus and his Swedes passed through more than once, as is duly recorded in archives still preserved, for we are on what was then the high-road between Sweden and Brandenburg the unfortunate. The Lion of the North was no doubt an estimable person and acted wholly up to his convictions, but he must have sadly upset the peaceful nuns, who were not without convictions of their own, sending them out on to the wide, empty plain to piteously seek some life to replace the life of silence here.

From nearly all the windows of the house I can look out across the plain, with no obstacle in the shape of a hill, right away to a blue line of distant forest, and on the west side uninterruptedly to the setting sun—nothing but a green, rolling plain, with a sharp edge against the sunset. I love those west windows better than any others, and have chosen my bedroom on that side of the house so that even times of hair-brushing may not be entirely lost, and the young woman who attends to such matters has been taught to fulfil her duties about a mistress recumbent in an easychair before an

open window, and not to profane with chatter that sweet and solemn time. This girl is grieved at my habit of living almost in the garden, and all her ideas as to the sort of life a respectable German lady should lead have got into a sad muddle since she came to me. The people round about are persuaded that I am, to put it as kindly as possible, exceedingly eccentric, for the news has travelled that I spend the day out of doors with a book, and that no mortal eye has ever yet seen me sew or cook. But why cook when you can get some one to cook for you? And as for sewing, the maids will hem the sheets better and quicker than I could, and all forms of needlework of the fancy order are inventions of the evil one for keeping the foolish from applying their heart to wisdom.

We had been married five years before it struck us that we might as well make use of this place by coming down and living in it. Those five years were spent in a flat in a town, and during their whole interminable length I was perfectly miserable and perfectly healthy, which disposes of the ugly notion that has at times disturbed me that my happiness here is less due to the garden than to a good digestion. And while we were wasting our lives there, here was this dear place with dandelions up to the very door, all the paths grass-grown and completely effaced, in winter so lonely, with nobody but the north wind taking the least notice of it, and in May—in all those five lovely Mays—no one to look at the wonderful bird-cherries and still more wonderful masses of lilacs, everything glowing and blowing, the virginia creeper madder every year, until at last, in October, the very roof was wreathed with blood-red tresses, the owls and the squirrels and all the blessed little birds reigning supreme, and not a living creature ever entering the empty house except the snakes, which got into the habit during those silent years of wriggling up the south wall into the rooms on that side whenever the old housekeeper opened the windows. All that was here,—peace, and happiness, and a reasonable life,—and yet it never struck me to come and live in it. Looking back I am astonished, and can in no way account for the tardiness of my discovery that here, in this far-away corner, was my kingdom of heaven. Indeed, so little did it enter my head to even use the place in summer, that I submitted to weeks of seaside life with all its horrors every year; until at last, in the early spring of last year, having come down for the opening of the village school, and wandering out afterwards into the bare and desolate garden, I don't know what smell of wet earth or rotting leaves brought back my childhood with a rush and all the happy days I had spent in a garden. Shall I ever forget that day? It was the beginning of my real life, my coming of age as it were, and entering into my kingdom. Early March, gray, quiet skies, and brown, quiet earth; leafless and sad and lonely enough out there in the damp and silence, yet there I stood feeling the same rapture of pure delight in the first breath of spring that I used to as a child, and the five wasted years fell from me like a cloak, and the world was full of hope, and I vowed myself then and there to nature, and have been happy ever since.

My other half being indulgent, and with some faint thought perhaps that it might be as well to look after the place, consented to live in it at any rate for a time; whereupon followed six specially blissful weeks from the end of April into June, during which I was here alone, supposed to be superintending the painting and papering, but as a matter of fact only going into the house when the workmen had gone out of it.

How happy I was! I don't remember any time quite so perfect since the days when I was too little to do lessons and was turned out with sugar on my eleven o'clock bread and butter on to a lawn closely strewn with dandelions and daisies. The sugar on the bread and butter has lost its charm, but I love the dandelions and daisies even more passionately now than then, and never would endure to see them all mown away if I were not certain that in a day or two they would be pushing up their little faces again as jauntily as ever. During those six weeks I lived in a world of dandelions and delights. The dandelions carpeted the three lawns,—they used to be lawns, but have long since blossomed out into meadows filled with every sort of pretty weed,—and under and among the groups of leafless oaks and beeches were blue hepaticas, white anemones, violets, and celandines in sheets. The celandines in particular delighted me with their clean, happy brightness, so beautifully trim and newly varnished, as though they too had had the painters at work on them. Then, when the anemones went, came a

few stray periwinkles and Solomon's Seal, and all the birdcherries blossomed in a burst. And then, before I had a little got used to the joy of their flowers against the sky, came the lilacs—masses and masses of them, in clumps on the grass, with other shrubs and trees by the side of walks, and one great continuous bank of them half a mile long right past the west front of the house, away down as far as one could see, shining glorious against a background of firs. When that time came, and when, before it was over, the acacias all blossomed too, and four great clumps of pale, silvery-pink peonies flowered under the south windows, I felt so absolutely happy, and blest, and thankful, and grateful, that I really cannot describe it. My days seemed to melt away in a dream of pink and purple peace.

There were only the old housekeeper and her handmaiden in the house, so that on the plea of not giving too much trouble I could indulge what my other half calls my *fantaisie dereglee* as regards meals—that is to say, meals so simple that they could be brought out to the lilacs on a tray; and I lived, I remember, on salad and bread and tea the whole time, sometimes a very tiny pigeon appearing at lunch to save me, as the old lady thought, from starvation. Who but a woman could have stood salad for six weeks, even salad sanctified by the presence and scent of the most gorgeous lilac masses? I did, and grew in grace every day, though I have never liked it since. How often now, oppressed by the necessity of assisting at three dining-room meals daily, two of which are conducted by the functionaries held indispensable to a proper maintenance of the family dignity, and all of which are pervaded by joints of meat, how often do I think of my salad days, forty in number, and of the blessedness of being alone as I was then alone!

And then the evenings, when the workmen had all gone and the house was left to emptiness and echoes, and the old housekeeper had gathered up her rheumatic limbs into her bed, and my little room in quite another part of the house had been set ready, how reluctantly I used to leave the friendly frogs and owls, and with my heart somewhere down in my shoes lock the door to the garden behind me, and pass through the long series of echoing south rooms full of shadows and ladders and ghostly pails of painters' mess, and humming a tune to make myself believe I liked it, go rather slowly across the brick-floored hall, up the creaking stairs, down the long whitewashed passage, and with a final rush of panic whisk into my room and double lock and bolt the door!

There were no bells in the house, and I used to take a great dinner-bell to bed with me so that at least I might be able to make a noise if frightened in the night, though what good it would have been I don't know, as there was no one to hear. The housemaid slept in another little cell opening out of mine, and we two were the only living creatures in the great empty west wing. She evidently did not believe in ghosts, for I could hear how she fell asleep immediately after getting into bed; nor do I believe in them, "mais je les redoute," as a French lady said, who from her books appears to have been strongminded.

The dinner-bell was a great solace; it was never rung, but it comforted me to see it on the chair beside my bed, as my nights were anything but placid, it was all so strange, and there were such queer creakings and other noises. I used to lie awake for hours, startled out of a light sleep by the cracking of some board, and listen to the indifferent snores of the girl in the next room. In the morning, of course, I was as brave as a lion and much amused at the cold perspirations of the night before; but even the nights seem to me now to have been delightful, and myself like those historic boys who heard a voice in every wind and snatched a fearful joy. I would gladly shiver through them all over again for the sake of the beautiful purity of the house, empty of servants and upholstery.

How pretty the bedrooms looked with nothing in them but their cheerful new papers! Sometimes I would go into those that were finished and build all sorts of castles in the air about their future and their past. Would the nuns who had lived in them know their little white-washed cells again, all gay with delicate flower papers and clean white paint? And how astonished they would be to see cell No. 14 turned into a bathroom, with a bath big enough to insure a cleanliness of body equal to their purity of soul! They would look upon it as a snare of the tempter; and I know that in my own case I only began to be shocked at the blackness of my nails the day that I began to lose the first

whiteness of my soul by falling in love at fifteen with the parish organist, or rather with the glimpse of surplice and Roman nose and fiery moustache which was all I ever saw of him, and which I loved to distraction for at least six months; at the end of which time, going out with my governess one day, I passed him in the street, and discovered that his unofficial garb was a frock-coat combined with a turn-down collar and a “bowler” hat, and never loved him any more.

The first part of that time of blessedness was the most perfect, for I had not a thought of anything but the peace and beauty all round me. Then he appeared suddenly who has a right to appear when and how he will and rebuked me for never having written, and when I told him that I had been literally too happy to think of writing, he seemed to take it as a reflection on himself that I could be happy alone. I took him round the garden along the new paths I had had made, and showed him the acacia and lilac glories, and he said that it was the purest selfishness to enjoy myself when neither he nor the offspring were with me, and that the lilacs wanted thoroughly pruning. I tried to appease him by offering him the whole of my salad and toast supper which stood ready at the foot of the little verandah steps when we came back, but nothing appeased that Man of Wrath, and he said he would go straight back to the neglected family. So he went; and the remainder of the precious time was disturbed by twinges of conscience (to which I am much subject) whenever I found myself wanting to jump for joy. I went to look at the painters every time my feet were for taking me to look at the garden; I trotted diligently up and down the passages; I criticised and suggested and commanded more in one day than I had done in all the rest of the time; I wrote regularly and sent my love; but I could not manage to fret and yearn. What are you to do if your conscience is clear and your liver in order and the sun is shining?

May 10th.—I knew nothing whatever last year about gardening and this year know very little more, but I have dawns of what may be done, and have at least made one great stride—from ipomaea to tea-roses.

The garden was an absolute wilderness. It is all round the house, but the principal part is on the south side and has evidently always been so. The south front is one-storied, a long series of rooms opening one into the other, and the walls are covered with virginia creeper. There is a little verandah in the middle, leading by a flight of rickety wooden steps down into what seems to have been the only spot in the whole place that was ever cared for. This is a semicircle cut into the lawn and edged with privet, and in this semicircle are eleven beds of different sizes bordered with box and arranged round a sun-dial, and the sun-dial is very venerable and moss-grown, and greatly beloved by me. These beds were the only sign of any attempt at gardening to be seen (except a solitary crocus that came up all by itself each spring in the grass, not because it wanted to, but because it could not help it), and these I had sown with ipomaea, the whole eleven, having found a German gardening book, according to which ipomaea in vast quantities was the one thing needful to turn the most hideous desert into a paradise. Nothing else in that book was recommended with anything like the same warmth, and being entirely ignorant of the quantity of seed necessary, I bought ten pounds of it and had it sown not only in the eleven beds but round nearly every tree, and then waited in great agitation for the promised paradise to appear. It did not, and I learned my first lesson.

Luckily I had sown two great patches of sweetpeas which made me very happy all the summer, and then there were some sunflowers and a few hollyhocks under the south windows, with Madonna lilies in between. But the lilies, after being transplanted, disappeared to my great dismay, for how was I to know it was the way of lilies? And the hollyhocks turned out to be rather ugly colours, so that my first summer was decorated and beautified solely by sweet-peas. At present we are only just beginning to breathe after the bustle of getting new beds and borders and paths made in time for this summer. The eleven beds round the sun-dial are filled with roses, but I see already that I have made mistakes with some. As I have not a living soul with whom to hold communion on this or indeed on any matter, my only way of learning is by making mistakes. All eleven were to have been carpeted with purple pansies, but finding that I had not enough and that nobody had any to sell me, only six have got their

pansies, the others being sown with dwarf mignonette. Two of the eleven are filled with Marie van Houtte roses, two with Viscountess Folkestone, two with Laurette Messimy, one with Souvenir de la Malmaison, one with Adam and Devoniensis, two with Persian Yellow and Bicolor, and one big bed behind the sun-dial with three sorts of red roses (seventy-two in all), Duke of Teck, Cheshunt Scarlet, and Prefet de Limburg. This bed is, I am sure, a mistake, and several of the others are, I think, but of course I must wait and see, being such an ignorant person. Then I have had two long beds made in the grass on either side of the semicircle, each sown with mignonette, and one filled with Marie van Houtte, and the other with Jules Finger and the Bride; and in a warm corner under the drawing-room windows is a bed of Madame Lambard, Madame de Watteville, and Comtesse Riza du Parc; while farther down the garden, sheltered on the north and west by a group of beeches and lilacs, is another large bed, containing Rubens, Madame Joseph Schwartz, and the Hen. Edith Gifford. All these roses are dwarf; I have only two standards in the whole garden, two Madame George Bruants, and they look like broomsticks. How I long for the day when the tea-roses open their buds! Never did I look forward so intensely to anything; and every day I go the rounds, admiring what the dear little things have achieved in the twenty-four hours in the way of new leaf or increase of lovely red shoot.

The hollyhocks and lilies (now flourishing) are still under the south windows in a narrow border on the top of a grass slope, at the foot of which I have sown two long borders of sweetpeas facing the rose beds, so that my roses may have something almost as sweet as themselves to look at until the autumn, when everything is to make place for more tea-roses. The path leading away from this semicircle down the garden is bordered with China roses, white and pink, with here and there a Persian Yellow. I wish now I had put tea-roses there, and I have misgivings as to the effect of the Persian Yellows among the Chinas, for the Chinas are such wee little baby things, and the Persian Yellows look as though they intended to be big bushes.

There is not a creature in all this part of the world who could in the least understand with what heart-beatings I am looking forward to the flowering of these roses, and not a German gardening book that does not relegate all tea-roses to hot-houses, imprisoning them for life, and depriving them for ever of the breath of God. It was no doubt because I was so ignorant that I rushed in where Teutonic angels fear to tread and made my tea-roses face a northern winter; but they did face it under fir branches and leaves, and not one has suffered, and they are looking to-day as happy and as determined to enjoy themselves as any roses, I am sure, in Europe.

May 14th.—To-day I am writing on the verandah with the three babies, more persistent than mosquitoes, raging round me, and already several of the thirty fingers have been in the ink-pot and the owners consoled when duty pointed to rebukes. But who can rebuke such penitent and drooping sunbonnets? I can see nothing but sunbonnets and pinafores and nimble black legs.

These three, their patient nurse, myself, the gardener, and the gardener's assistant, are the only people who ever go into my garden, but then neither are we ever out of it. The gardener has been here a year and has given me notice regularly on the first of every month, but up to now has been induced to stay on. On the first of this month he came as usual, and with determination written on every feature told me he intended to go in June, and that nothing should alter his decision. I don't think he knows much about gardening, but he can at least dig and water, and some of the things he sows come up, and some of the plants he plants grow, besides which he is the most unflaggingly industrious person I ever saw, and has the great merit of never appearing to take the faintest interest in what we do in the garden. So I have tried to keep him on, not knowing what the next one may be like, and when I asked him what he had to complain of and he replied "Nothing," I could only conclude that he has a personal objection to me because of my eccentric preference for plants in groups rather than plants in lines. Perhaps, too, he does not like the extracts from gardening books I read to him sometimes when he is planting or sowing something new. Being so helpless myself, I thought it simpler, instead of explaining, to take the book itself out to him and let him have wisdom at its very source, administering it in doses while he worked. I quite recognise that this must be

annoying, and only my anxiety not to lose a whole year through some stupid mistake has given me the courage to do it. I laugh sometimes behind the book at his disgusted face, and wish we could be photographed, so that I may be reminded in twenty years' time, when the garden is a bower of loveliness and I learned in all its ways, of my first happy struggles and failures.

All through April he was putting the perennials we had sown in the autumn into their permanent places, and all through April he went about with a long piece of string making parallel lines down the borders of beautiful exactitude and arranging the poor plants like soldiers at a review. Two long borders were done during my absence one day, and when I explained that I should like the third to have plants in groups and not in lines, and that what I wanted was a natural effect with no bare spaces of earth to be seen, he looked even more gloomily hopeless than usual; and on my going out later on to see the result, I found he had planted two long borders down the sides of a straight walk with little lines of five plants in a row—first five pinks, and next to them five rockets, and behind the rockets five pinks, and behind the pinks five rockets, and so on with different plants of every sort and size down to the end. When I protested, he said he had only carried out my orders and had known it would not look well; so I gave in, and the remaining borders were done after the pattern of the first two, and I will have patience and see how they look this summer, before digging them up again; for it becomes beginners to be humble.

If I could only dig and plant myself! How much easier, besides being so fascinating, to make your own holes exactly where you want them and put in your plants exactly as you choose instead of giving orders that can only be half understood from the moment you depart from the lines laid down by that long piece of string! In the first ecstasy of having a garden all my own, and in my burning impatience to make the waste places blossom like a rose, I did one warm Sunday in last year's April during the servants' dinner hour, doubly secure from the gardener by the day and the dinner, slink out with a spade and a rake and feverishly dig a little piece of ground and break it up and sow surreptitious ipomaea, and run back very hot and guilty into the house, and get into a chair and behind a book and look languid just in time to save my reputation. And why not? It is not graceful, and it makes one hot; but it is a blessed sort of work, and if Eve had had a spade in Paradise and known what to do with it, we should not have had all that sad business of the apple.

What a happy woman I am living in a garden, with books, babies, birds, and flowers, and plenty of leisure to enjoy them! Yet my town acquaintances look upon it as imprisonment, and burying, and I don't know what besides, and would rend the air with their shrieks if condemned to such a life. Sometimes I feel as if I were blest above all my fellows in being able to find my happiness so easily. I believe I should always be good if the sun always shone, and could enjoy myself very well in Siberia on a fine day. And what can life in town offer in the way of pleasure to equal the delight of any one of the calm evenings I have had this month sitting alone at the foot of the verandah steps, with the perfume of young larches all about, and the May moon hanging low over the beeches, and the beautiful silence made only more profound in its peace by the croaking of distant frogs and hooting of owls? A cockchafer darting by close to my ear with a loud hum sends a shiver through me, partly of pleasure at the reminder of past summers, and partly of fear lest he should get caught in my hair. The Man of Wrath says they are pernicious creatures and should be killed. I would rather get the killing done at the end of the summer and not crush them out of such a pretty world at the very beginning of all the fun.

This has been quite an eventful afternoon. My eldest baby, born in April, is five years old, and the youngest, born in June, is three; so that the discerning will at once be able to guess the age of the remaining middle or May baby. While I was stooping over a group of hollyhocks planted on the top of the only thing in the shape of a hill the garden possesses, the April baby, who had been sitting pensive on a tree stump close by, got up suddenly and began to run aimlessly about, shrieking and wringing her hands with every symptom of terror. I stared, wondering what had come to her; and then I saw that a whole army of young cows, pasturing in a field next to the garden, had got through

the hedge and were grazing perilously near my tea-roses and most precious belongings. The nurse and I managed to chase them away, but not before they had trampled down a border of pinks and lilies in the cruellest way, and made great holes in a bed of China roses, and even begun to nibble at a Jackmanni clematis that I am trying to persuade to climb up a tree trunk. The gloomy gardener happened to be ill in bed, and the assistant was at vespers—as Lutheran Germany calls afternoon tea or its equivalent—so the nurse filled up the holes as well as she could with mould, burying the crushed and mangled roses, cheated for ever of their hopes of summer glory, and I stood by looking on dejectedly. The June baby, who is two feet square and valiant beyond her size and years, seized a stick much bigger than herself and went after the cows, the cowherd being nowhere to be seen. She planted herself in front of them brandishing her stick, and they stood in a row and stared at her in great astonishment; and she kept them off until one of the men from the farm arrived with a whip, and having found the cowherd sleeping peacefully in the shade, gave him a sound beating. The cowherd is a great hulking young man, much bigger than the man who beat him, but he took his punishment as part of the day's work and made no remark of any sort. It could not have hurt him much through his leather breeches, and I think he deserved it; but it must be demoralising work for a strong young man with no brains looking after cows. Nobody with less imagination than a poet ought to take it up as a profession.

After the June baby and I had been welcomed back by the other two with as many hugs as though we had been restored to them from great perils, and while we were peacefully drinking tea under a beech tree, I happened to look up into its mazy green, and there, on a branch quite close to my head, sat a little baby owl. I got on the seat and caught it easily, for it could not fly, and how it had reached the branch at all is a mystery. It is a little round ball of gray fluff, with the quaintest, wisest, solemn face. Poor thing! I ought to have let it go, but the temptation to keep it until the Man of Wrath, at present on a journey, has seen it was not to be resisted, as he has often said how much he would like to have a young owl and try and tame it. So I put it into a roomy cage and slung it up on a branch near where it had been sitting, and which cannot be far from its nest and its mother. We had hardly subsided again to our tea when I saw two more balls of fluff on the ground in the long grass and scarcely distinguishable at a little distance from small mole-hills. These were promptly united to their relation in the cage, and now when the Man of Wrath comes home, not only shall he be welcomed by a wife decked with the orthodox smiles, but by the three little longed-for owls. Only it seems wicked to take them from their mother, and I know that I shall let them go again some day—perhaps the very next time the Man of Wrath goes on a journey. I put a small pot of water in the cage, though they never could have tasted water yet unless they drink the raindrops off the beech leaves. I suppose they get all the liquid they need from the bodies of the mice and other dainties provided for them by their fond parents. But the raindrop idea is prettier.

May 15th.—How cruel it was of me to put those poor little owls into a cage even for one night! I cannot forgive myself, and shall never pander to the Man of Wrath's wishes again. This morning I got up early to see how they were getting on, and I found the door of the cage wide open and no owls to be seen. I thought of course that somebody had stolen them—some boy from the village, or perhaps the chastised cowherd. But looking about I saw one perched high up in the branches of the beech tree, and then to my dismay one lying dead on the ground. The third was nowhere to be seen, and is probably safe in its nest. The parents must have torn at the bars of the cage until by chance they got the door open, and then dragged the little ones out and up into the tree. The one that is dead must have been blown off the branch, as it was a windy night and its neck is broken. There is one happy life less in the garden to-day through my fault, and it is such a lovely, warm day—just the sort of weather for young soft things to enjoy and grow in. The babies are greatly distressed, and are digging a grave, and preparing funeral wreaths of dandelions.

Just as I had written that I heard sounds of arrival, and running out I breathlessly told the Man of Wrath how nearly I had been able to give him the owls he has so often said he would like to have,

and how sorry I was they were gone, and how grievous the death of one, and so on after the voluble manner of women.

He listened till I paused to breathe, and then he said, "I am surprised at such cruelty. How could you make the mother owl suffer so? She had never done you any harm."

Which sent me out of the house and into the garden more convinced than ever that he sang true who sang—

Two paradises 'twere in one to live in Paradise alone.

May 16th.—The garden is the place I go to for refuge and shelter, not the house. In the house are duties and annoyances, servants to exhort and admonish, furniture, and meals; but out there blessings crowd round me at every step—it is there that I am sorry for the unkindness in me, for those selfish thoughts that are so much worse than they feel; it is there that all my sins and silliness are forgiven, there that I feel protected and at home, and every flower and weed is a friend and every tree a lover. When I have been vexed I run out to them for comfort, and when I have been angry without just cause, it is there that I find absolution. Did ever a woman have so many friends? And always the same, always ready to welcome me and fill me with cheerful thoughts. Happy children of a common Father, why should I, their own sister, be less content and joyous than they? Even in a thunder storm, when other people are running into the house, I run out of it. I do not like thunder storms—they frighten me for hours before they come, because I always feel them on the way; but it is odd that I should go for shelter to the garden. I feel better there, more taken care of, more petted. When it thunders, the April baby says, "There's lieber Gott scolding those angels again." And once, when there was a storm in the night, she complained loudly, and wanted to know why lieber Gott didn't do the scolding in the daytime, as she had been so tight asleep. They all three speak a wonderful mixture of German and English, adulterating the purity of their native tongue by putting in English words in the middle of a German sentence. It always reminds me of Justice tempered by Mercy. We have been cowslipping to-day in a little wood dignified by the name of the Hirschwald, because it is the happy hunting-ground of innumerable deer who fight there in the autumn evenings, calling each other out to combat with bayings that ring through the silence and send agreeable shivers through the lonely listener. I often walk there in September, late in the evening, and sitting on a fallen tree listen fascinated to their angry cries.

We made cowslip balls sitting on the grass. The babies had never seen such things nor had imagined anything half so sweet. The Hirschwald is a little open wood of silver birches and springy turf starred with flowers, and there is a tiny stream meandering amiably about it and decking itself in June with yellow flags. I have dreams of having a little cottage built there, with the daisies up to the door, and no path of any sort—just big enough to hold myself and one baby inside and a purple clematis outside. Two rooms—a bedroom and a kitchen. How scared we would be at night, and how completely happy by day! I know the exact spot where it should stand, facing south-east, so that we should get all the cheerfulness of the morning, and close to the stream, so that we might wash our plates among the flags. Sometimes, when in the mood for society, we would invite the remaining babies to tea and entertain them with wild strawberries on plates of horse-chestnut leaves; but no one less innocent and easily pleased than a baby would be permitted to darken the effulgence of our sunny cottage—indeed, I don't suppose that anybody wiser would care to come. Wise people want so many things before they can even begin to enjoy themselves, and I feel perpetually apologetic when with them, for only being able to offer them that which I love best myself—apologetic, and ashamed of being so easily contented.

The other day at a dinner party in the nearest town (it took us the whole afternoon to get there) the women after dinner were curious to know how I had endured the winter, cut off from everybody and snowed up sometimes for weeks.

“Ah, these husbands!” sighed an ample lady, lugubriously shaking her head; “they shut up their wives because it suits them, and don’t care what their sufferings are.”

Then the others sighed and shook their heads too, for the ample lady was a great local potentate, and one began to tell how another dreadful husband had brought his young wife into the country and had kept her there, concealing her beauty and accomplishments from the public in a most cruel manner, and how, after spending a certain number of years in alternately weeping and producing progeny, she had quite lately run away with somebody unspeakable—I think it was the footman, or the baker, or some one of that sort.

“But I am quite happy,” I began, as soon as I could put in a word.

“Ah, a good little wife, making the best of it,” and the female potentate patted my hand, but continued gloomily to shake her head.

“You cannot possibly be happy in the winter entirely alone,” asserted another lady, the wife of a high military authority and not accustomed to be contradicted.

“But I am.”

“But how can you possibly be at your age? No, it is not possible.”

“But I *am*.”

“Your husband ought to bring you to town in the winter.”

“But I don’t want to be brought to town.”

“And not let you waste your best years buried.” “But I like being buried.”

“Such solitude is not right.”

“But I’m not solitary.”

“And can come to no good.” She was getting quite angry.

There was a chorus of No Indeeds at her last remark, and renewed shaking of heads.

“I enjoyed the winter immensely,” I persisted when they were a little quieter; “I sleighed and skated, and then there were the children, and shelves and shelves full of—” I was going to say books, but stopped. Reading is an occupation for men; for women it is reprehensible waste of time. And how could I talk to them of the happiness I felt when the sun shone on the snow, or of the deep delight of hear-frost days?

“It is entirely my doing that we have come down here,” I proceeded, “and my husband only did it to please me.”

“Such a good little wife,” repeated the patronising potentate, again patting my hand with an air of understanding all about it, “really an excellent little wife. But you must not let your husband have his own way too much, my dear, and take my advice and insist on his bringing you to town next winter.” And then they fell to talking about their cooks, having settled to their entire satisfaction that my fate was probably lying in wait for me too, lurking perhaps at that very moment behind the apparently harmless brass buttons of the man in the hall with my cloak.

I laughed on the way home, and I laughed again for sheer satisfaction when we reached the garden and drove between the quiet trees to the pretty old house; and when I went into the library, with its four windows open to the moonlight and the scent, and looked round at the familiar bookshelves, and could hear no sounds but sounds of peace, and knew that here I might read or dream or idle exactly as I chose with never a creature to disturb me, how grateful I felt to the kindly Fate that has brought me here and given me a heart to understand my own blessedness, and rescued me from a life like that I had just seen—a life spent with the odours of other people’s dinners in one’s nostrils, and the noise of their wrangling servants in one’s ears, and parties and tattle for all amusement.

But I must confess to having felt sometimes quite crushed when some grand person, examining the details of my home through her eyeglass, and coolly dissecting all that I so much prize from the convenient distance of the open window, has finished up by expressing sympathy with my loneliness, and on my protesting that I like it, has murmured, “sebr anspruchslos.” Then indeed I have felt ashamed of the fewness of my wants; but only for a moment, and only under the withering influence

of the eyeglass; for, after all, the owner's spirit is the same spirit as that which dwells in my servants—girls whose one idea of happiness is to live in a town where there are others of their sort with whom to drink beer and dance on Sunday afternoons. The passion for being for ever with one's fellows, and the fear of being left for a few hours alone, is to me wholly incomprehensible. I can entertain myself quite well for weeks together, hardly aware, except for the pervading peace, that I have been alone at all. Not but what I like to have people staying with me for a few days, or even for a few weeks, should they be as anspruchslos as I am myself, and content with simple joys; only, any one who comes here and would be happy must have something in him; if he be a mere blank creature, empty of head and heart, he will very probably find it dull. I should like my house to be often full if I could find people capable of enjoying themselves. They should be welcomed and sped with equal heartiness; for truth compels me to confess that, though it pleases me to see them come, it pleases me just as much to see them go.

On some very specially divine days, like today, I have actually longed for some one else to be here to enjoy the beauty with me. There has been rain in the night, and the whole garden seems to be singing—not the untiring birds only, but the vigorous plants, the happy grass and trees, the lilac bushes—oh, those lilac bushes! They are all out to-day, and the garden is drenched with the scent. I have brought in armfuls, the picking is such a delight, and every pot and bowl and tub in the house is filled with purple glory, and the servants think there is going to be a party and are extra nimble, and I go from room to room gazing at the sweetness, and the windows are all flung open so as to join the scent within to the scent without; and the servants gradually discover that there is no party, and wonder why the house should be filled with flowers for one woman by herself, and I long more and more for a kindred spirit—it seems so greedy to have so much loveliness to oneself—but kindred spirits are so very, very rare; I might almost as well cry for the moon. It is true that my garden is full of friends, only they are—dumb.

June 3rd.—This is such an out-of-the-way corner of the world that it requires quite unusual energy to get here at all, and I am thus delivered from casual callers; while, on the other hand, people I love, or people who love me, which is much the same thing, are not likely to be deterred from coming by the roundabout train journey and the long drive at the end. Not the least of my many blessings is that we have only one neighbour. If you have to have neighbours at all, it is at least a mercy that there should be only one; for with people dropping in at all hours and wanting to talk to you, how are you to get on with your life, I should like to know, and read your books, and dream your dreams to your satisfaction? Besides, there is always the certainty that either you or the dropper-in will say something that would have been better left unsaid, and I have a holy horror of gossip and mischief-making. A woman's tongue is a deadly weapon and the most difficult thing in the world to keep in order, and things slip off it with a facility nothing short of appalling at the very moment when it ought to be most quiet. In such cases the only safe course is to talk steadily about cooks and children, and to pray that the visit may not be too prolonged, for if it is you are lost. Cooks I have found to be the best of all subjects—the most phlegmatic flush into life at the mere word, and the joys and sufferings connected with them are experiences common to us all.

Luckily, our neighbour and his wife are both busy and charming, with a whole troop of flaxenhaired little children to keep them occupied, besides the business of their large estate. Our intercourse is arranged on lines of the most beautiful simplicity. I call on her once a year, and she returns the call a fortnight later; they ask us to dinner in the summer, and we ask them to dinner in the winter. By strictly keeping to this, we avoid all danger of that closer friendship which is only another name for frequent quarrels. She is a pattern of what a German country lady should be, and is not only a pretty woman but an energetic and practical one, and the combination is, to say the least, effective. She is up at daylight superintending the feeding of the stock, the butter-making, the sending off of the milk for sale; a thousand things get done while most people are fast asleep, and before lazy folk are well at breakfast she is off in her pony-carriage to the other farms on the place, to rate the

“mamsells,” as the head women are called, to poke into every corner, lift the lids off the saucepans, count the new-laid eggs, and box, if necessary, any careless dairymaid’s ears. We are allowed by law to administer “slight corporal punishment” to our servants, it being left entirely to individual taste to decide what “slight” shall be, and my neighbour really seems to enjoy using this privilege, judging from the way she talks about it. I would give much to be able to peep through a keyhole and see the dauntless little lady, terrible in her wrath and dignity, standing on tiptoe to box the ears of some great strapping girl big enough to eat her.

The making of cheese and butter and sausages *excellently* well is a work which requires brains, and is, to my thinking, a very admirable form of activity, and entirely worthy of the attention of the intelligent. That my neighbour is intelligent is at once made evident by the bright alertness of her eyes—eyes that nothing escapes, and that only gain in prettiness by being used to some good purpose. She is a recognised authority for miles around on the mysteries of sausage-making, the care of calves, and the slaughtering of swine; and with all her manifold duties and daily prolonged absences from home, her children are patterns of health and neatness, and of what dear little German children, with white pigtails and fearless eyes and thick legs, should be. Who shall say that such a life is sordid and dull and unworthy of a high order of intelligence? I protest that to me it is a beautiful life, full of wholesome outdoor work, and with no room for those listless moments of depression and boredom, and of wondering what you will do next, that leave wrinkles round a pretty woman’s eyes, and are not unknown even to the most brilliant. But while admiring my neighbour, I don’t think I shall ever try to follow in her steps, my talents not being of the energetic and organising variety, but rather of that order which makes their owner almost lamentably prone to take up a volume of poetry and wander out to where the kingcups grow, and, sitting on a willow trunk beside a little stream, forget the very existence of everything but green pastures and still waters, and the glad blowing of the wind across the joyous fields. And it would make me perfectly wretched to be confronted by ears so refractory as to require boxing.

Sometimes callers from a distance invade my solitude, and it is on these occasions that I realise how absolutely alone each individual is, and how far away from his neighbour; and while they talk (generally about babies, past, present, and to come), I fall to wondering at the vast and impassable distance that separates one’s own soul from the soul of the person sitting in the next chair. I am speaking of comparative strangers, people who are forced to stay a certain time by the eccentricities of trains, and in whose presence you grope about after common interests and shrink back into your shell on finding that you have none. Then a frost slowly settles down on me and I grow each minute more benumbed and speechless, and the babies feel the frost in the air and look vacant, and the callers go through the usual form of wondering who they most take after, generally settling the question by saying that the May baby, who is the beauty, is like her father, and that the two more or less plain ones are the image of me, and this decision, though I know it of old and am sure it is coming, never fails to depress me as much as though I heard it for the first time. The babies are very little and inoffensive and good, and it is hard that they should be used as a means of filling up gaps in conversation, and their features pulled to pieces one by one, and all their weak points noted and criticised, while they stand smiling shyly in the operator’s face, their very smile drawing forth comments on the shape of their mouths; but, after all, it does not occur very often, and they are one of those few interests one has in common with other people, as everybody seems to have babies. A garden, I have discovered, is by no means a fruitful topic, and it is amazing how few persons really love theirs—they all pretend they do, but you can hear by the very tone of their voice what a lukewarm affection it is. About June their interest is at its warmest, nourished by agreeable supplies of strawberries and roses; but on reflection I don’t know a single person within twenty miles who really cares for his garden, or has discovered the treasures of happiness that are buried in it, and are to be found if sought for diligently, and if needs be with tears. It is after these rare calls that I experience the only moments of depression from which I ever suffer, and then I am angry at myself, a well-nourished person, for allowing even

a single precious hour of life to be spoil: by anything so indifferent. That is the worst of being fed enough, and clothed enough, and warmed enough, and of having everything you can reasonably desire—on the least provocation you are made uncomfortable and unhappy by such abstract discomforts as being shut out from a nearer approach to your neighbour's soul; which is on the face of it foolish, the probability being that he hasn't got one.

The rockets are all out. The gardener, in a fit of inspiration, put them right along the very front of two borders, and I don't know what his feelings can be now that they are all flowering and the plants behind are completely hidden; but I have learned another lesson, and no future gardener shall be allowed to run riot among my rockets in quite so reckless a fashion. They are charming things, as delicate in colour as in scent, and a bowl of them on my writing-table fills the room with fragrance. Single rows, however, are a mistake; I had masses of them planted in the grass, and these show how lovely they can be. A border full of rockets, mauve and white, and nothing else, must be beautiful; but I don't know how long they last nor what they look like when they have done flowering. This I shall find out in a week or two, I suppose. Was ever a would-be gardener left so entirely to his own blundering? No doubt it would be a gain of years to the garden if I were not forced to learn solely by my failures, and if I had some kind creature to tell me when to do things. At present the only flowers in the garden are the rockets, the pansies in the rose beds, and two groups of azaleas—mollis and pontica. The azaleas have been and still are gorgeous; I only planted them this spring and they almost at once began to flower, and the sheltered corner they are in looks as though it were filled with imprisoned and perpetual sunsets. Orange, lemon, pink in every delicate shade—what they will be next year and in succeeding years when the bushes are bigger, I can imagine from the way they have begun life. On gray, dull days the effect is absolutely startling. Next autumn I shall make a great bank of them in front of a belt of fir trees in rather a gloomy nook. My tea-roses are covered with buds which will not open for at least another week, so I conclude this is not the sort of climate where they will flower from the very beginning of June to November, as they are said to do.

July 11th.—There has been no rain since the day before Whitsunday, five weeks ago, which partly, but not entirely, accounts for the disappointment my beds have been. The dejected gardener went mad soon after Whitsuntide, and had to be sent to an asylum. He took to going about with a spade in one hand and a revolver in the other, explaining that he felt safer that way, and we bore it quite patiently, as becomes civilised beings who respect each other's prejudices, until one day, when I mildly asked him to tie up a fallen creeper—and after he bought the revolver my tones in addressing him were of the mildest, and I quite left off reading to him aloud—he turned round, looked me straight in the face for the first time since he has been here, and said, “Do I look like Graf X— (a great local celebrity), or like a monkey?” After which there was nothing for it but to get him into an asylum as expeditiously as possible. There was no gardener to be had in his place, and I have only just succeeded in getting one; so that what with the drought, and the neglect, and the gardener's madness, and my blunders, the garden is in a sad condition; but even in a sad condition it is the dearest place in the world, and all my mistakes only make me more determined to persevere.

The long borders, where the rockets were, are looking dreadful. The rockets have done flowering, and, after the manner of rockets: in other walks of life, have degenerated into sticks; and nothing else in those borders intends to bloom this summer. The giant poppies I had planted out in them in April have either died off or remained quite small, and so have the columbines; here and there a delphinium droops unwillingly, and that is all. I suppose poppies cannot stand being moved, or perhaps they were not watered enough at the time of transplanting; anyhow, those borders are going to be sown to-morrow with more poppies for next year; for poppies I will have, whether they like it or not, and they shall not be touched, only thinned out.

Well, it is no use being grieved, and after all, directly I come out and sit under the trees, and look at the dappled sky, and see the sunshine on the cornfields away on the plain, all the disappointment

smooths itself out, and it seems impossible to be sad and discontented when everything about me is so radiant and kind.

To-day is Sunday, and the garden is so quiet, that, sitting here in this shady corner watching the lazy shadows stretching themselves across the grass, and listening to the rooks quarrelling in the treetops, I almost expect to hear English church bells ringing for the afternoon service. But the church is three miles off, has no bells, and no afternoon service. Once a fortnight we go to morning prayer at eleven and sit up in a sort of private box with a room behind, whither we can retire unobserved when the sermon is too long or our flesh too weak, and hear ourselves being prayed for by the blackrobed parson. In winter the church is bitterly cold; it is not heated, and we sit muffled up in more furs than ever we wear out of doors; but it would of course be very wicked for the parson to wear furs, however cold he may be, so he puts on a great many extra coats under his gown, and, as the winter progresses, swells to a prodigious size. We know when spring is coming by the reduction in his figure. The congregation sit at ease while the parson does the praying for them, and while they are droning the long-drawn-out chorales, he retires into a little wooden box just big enough to hold him. He does not come out until he thinks we have sung enough, nor do we stop until his appearance gives us the signal. I have often thought how dreadful it would be if he fell ill in his box and left us to go on singing. I am sure we should never dare to stop, unauthorised by the Church. I asked him once what he did in there; he looked very shocked at such a profane question, and made an evasive reply.

If it were not for the garden, a German Sunday would be a terrible day; but in the garden on that day there is a sigh of relief and more profound peace, nobody raking or sweeping or fidgeting; only the little flowers themselves and the whispering trees.

I have been much afflicted again lately by visitors—not stray callers to be got rid of after a due administration of tea and things you are sorry afterwards that you said, but people staying in the house and not to be got rid of at all. All June was lost to me in this way, and it was from first to last a radiant month of heat and beauty; but a garden where you meet the people you saw at breakfast, and will see again at lunch and dinner, is not a place to be happy in. Besides, they had a knack of finding out my favourite seats and lounging in them just when I longed to lounge myself; and they took books out of the library with them, and left them face downwards on the seats all night to get well drenched with dew, though they might have known that what is meat for roses is poison for books; and they gave me to understand that if they had had the arranging of the garden it would have been finished long ago—whereas I don't believe a garden ever is finished. They have all gone now, thank heaven, except one, so that I have a little breathing space before others begin to arrive. It seems that the place interests people, and that there is a sort of novelty in staying in such a deserted corner of the world, for they were in a perpetual state of mild amusement at being here at all. Irais is the only one left. She is a young woman with a beautiful, refined face, and her eyes and straight, fine eyebrows are particularly lovable. At meals she dips her bread into the salt-cellar, bites a bit off, and repeats the process, although providence (taking my shape) has caused salt-spoons to be placed at convenient intervals down the table. She lunched to-day on beer, Schweine-koteletten, and cabbage-salad with caraway seeds in it, and now I hear her through the open window, extemporising touching melodies in her charming, cooing voice. She is thin, frail, intelligent, and lovable, all on the above diet. What better proof can be needed to establish the superiority of the Teuton than the fact that after such meals he can produce such music? Cabbage salad is a horrid invention, but I don't doubt its utility as a means of encouraging thoughtfulness; nor will I quarrel with it, since it results so poetically, any more than I quarrel with the manure that results in roses, and I give it to Irais every day to make her sing. She is the sweetest singer I have ever heard, and has a charming trick of making up songs as she goes along. When she begins, I go and lean out of the window and look at my little friends out there in the borders while listening to her music, and feel full of pleasant sadness and regret. It is so sweet to be sad when one has nothing to be sad about.

The April baby came panting up just as I had written that, the others hurrying along behind, and with flaming cheeks displayed for my admiration three brand-new kittens, lean and blind, that she was carrying in her pinafore, and that had just been found motherless in the woodshed.

“Look,” she cried breathlessly, “such a much!”

I was glad it was only kittens this time, for she had been once before this afternoon on purpose, as she informed me, sitting herself down on the grass at my feet, to ask about the lieber Gott, it being Sunday and her pious little nurse’s conversation having run, as it seems, on heaven and angels.

Her questions about the lieber Gott are better left unrecorded, and I was relieved when she began about the angels.

“What do they wear for clothes?” she asked in her German-English.

“Why, you’ve seen them in pictures,” I answered, “in beautiful, long dresses, and with big, white wings.” “Feathers?” she asked.

“I suppose so,—and long dresses, all white and beautiful.”

“Are they girlies?”

“Girls? Ye—es.”

“Don’t boys go into the Himmel?”

“Yes, of course, if they’re good.”

“And then what do *they* wear?” “Why, the same as all the other angels, I suppose.”

“Dwesses?”

She began to laugh, looking at me sideways as though she suspected me of making jokes. “What a funny Mummy!” she said, evidently much amused. She has a fat little laugh that is very infectious.

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