

THE BUNGALOW

"There is a little place in me,
That cries like any child
To be as forest things are, free
Lonely, and strange and wild." Unknown.

Throughout my childhood, teens and early twenties, there was a cabin with a brook in my life which I suspect was considerably responsible for the direction which most of my life has taken, sentimentally and intellectually. Yet, as I write this chapter, in a summer more than forty years beyond the impressionable years of childhood, I sit on the brook bank in Bloomfield, Connecticut, literally burning up that beloved cabin, piece by piece. But that part of my tale is up ahead. This simple but most fabulous structure of my whole life has been known to family and friends as "The Bungalow."

Around the turn of the century, two young ladies, cousins by adoption, known as Kittie and Nellie, made the usual acquaintances in school in Hartford. A new high school friend, who lived away out in the country in North Bloomfield, traveled to school every day by trolley. Presumably her father or a brother drove her in a wagon or carriage the three miles from her home to the trolley in Bloomfield center, and picked her up at the end of the day. I will call her Mary D.

Nellie and Kittie were great hikers, so it wasn't long before they were riding out to Bloomfield on the trolley on a Saturday or Sunday to visit Mary D. They walked the three miles in long skirts and high button shoes. Years later, when Helen was gone and Kitty was a

house-bound invalid. I listened in amazement to her stories of their hiking in local country towns, of hitch-hiking on sleighs or milk wagons up over Avon Mountain. Hitch-hiking then had none of the connotations of today. These were prim, well-behaved young ladies, engaging in what was then daring but safe adventure.

We mostly think of girls in those days busy with knitting, sewing, playing the piano or croquet, walking sedately in a groomed park under a parasol. But a little research into the history of the period reveals some of the more independent ones vying with me in mountain climbing in the Sierras, or taking daring rides down rivers on steamers. We must never forget, of course, the pioneer women of covered wagon days who helped make westward expansion possible. I once met an elderly lady who told me that as a bride in 1900 she accompanied her young husband through the pathless jungle of the everglades, seeking a homestead. As Kitty told me of her summer trips on boats off the coast of Maine, I realized it was quite natural that she should love Bloomfield and help dream up a cabin there.

I was three and a half the first time I remember seeing the Bungalow. There must have been ten people or more in the party, for we were having Thanksgiving Dinner at the Bungalow. I recall seeing all of us standing around on the green in Bloomfield center, at the end of the trolley line, where horses and carriages were tied to hitching posts for hire. My sister and I and my mother and another lady rode in a fringed-topped surrey. We have a picture of that time, with my sister, no more than two and a half, sitting on someone's lap on the back seat of the carriage. I could only have been three and a half; I give the half years as we were both born in May, and this was November.

While the older ladies in the group, Nellie and Kitty's mother, and the aunts, were getting the big dinner ready in the cabin fireplace, those two young ladies took my sister and me for a walk across the brook, to explore the pasture beyond. Both cabin and bridge had been built two to three years before by "the uncles." The small but very active, gurgly brook ran along the west side of the cabin, down a steep bank. Then, down at the bottom of the open clearing it took a sharp left turn to the east. Thus you could cross it either on the bridge, or by stepping stones down front.

When we returned from our short pasture walk neither of the cousins could find the bridge, which was hidden behind a dense thicket of alder and other brookside shrubbery. I suppose because they had long skirts on Kitty and Nellie preferred crossing the bridge, and we were too young to think of the crossing below the cabin. When we heard them saying they couldn't find the bridge we reacted like all young things, who KNOW they are lost. My sister began to cry, and I grabbed first one long skirt then the other. Our fears were greatly blown up when both cousins began to shout, and halloo, trying to get attention from the group at the cabin. That scared us half out of our wits. We had never before heard a grown-up yell for help. But our rescue was quite sudden, for it was my father who sprinted across the bridge and appeared very suddenly in an obscure break in the bushes, for he could tell by our voices just where we were. That is the only time in my childhood that I remember being seriously frightened outdoors.

I was ^{nine}~~eight~~ the first time our parents took us to the Bungalow for a two week vacation in August. The Bungalow became my private paradise. It was an Eden created for me. The central

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raison d'etre of my life. I was selfishly pleased, that World War summer, when I was nine, when an epidemic of infantile paralysis, which always reached its height in August, caused my parents to plan the whole month of August in Bloomfield. My father had only two weeks off, but he came out the other two week-ends to bring food and gather firewood and water for us, and to check on our safety.

The adventures of summermonths spent at the Bungalow were not earth-shaking; you would have to be a Thoreau or a Gilbert White to make literature out of them. But, as with many childhood daily events, the golden hours spent at the Bungalow burrowed peace and beauty into my soul deep enough to last a lifetime. My parents were not so affected, nor my sister, I gradually realized in later years, but it was a retreat for them from the usual routine of child raising.

The cabin was a brown shingled structure with one major room, about twenty-five feet square, one story high, with no insulation covering the open studs and beams. Attached to its back, northeast corner was a sort of over-size pantry which could have been called a kitchen if there were any way to cook in it. Mostly it was an assortment of cupboards and shelves for storage of food items. Its walls, too, were unfinished, but out in the big room Japanese lanterns, pennants, and other trinkets hung from the rafters. A large dining room table was placed against the east window, which was pulled out into the center of the room when there was a crowd for a meal; it had center boards which could be used to extend its size.

There were two windows on the front of the building, with the front door between them. Under each of those windows was a long windowbox; they had mattress tops with covers, and could be opened up. ~~These window boxes were where pillows and blankets were stored.~~

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There was one more window, a smaller one, on the north wall, where you could look out into the woodlot.

The outstanding feature of the Bungalow was the stone fireplace, in the center of the west wall. It was constructed of rounded stones from the brook; each layer of stones, Kitty once told me, had been laid carefully and allowed to dry before the next layer was laid. Which added to the sturdiness of the fireplace and the chimney. The whole thing was inside the building, including the slanting shoulders of the chimney; the upper part extended through the roof, so that there was a chimney above the roof, but not a tall one.

Throughout my childhood there had been a pile of seasoned firewood in the south chimney corner and kindling in the north corner; outside the back window there had always been stacked cordwood, for it was brought down by wagon from the farmhouse.

Within my memory there was always a large tan-colored couch hammock on a metal stand. Most of the time it stood down near the brook out front, under two old apple trees, where on a hot summer day cool air convections from the brook created a refreshing microclimate. But in rainy or chilly weather it was brought into the cabin, where it was placed in front of the fireplace. I have no memory of seeing anyone move it; but I remember seeing it in both places

A simple porch extended all across the front of the cabin, and in my earlier years also around on the brook end. It was merely a board platform, with no railings; though at one point someone did put up a crude railing in one spot to which was tied a canvas roof. There were usually big green rockers on the porch, at one time mostly occupied by elderly aunts in long, voluminous skirts, now and then by an

old uncle. We have snapshots of them, the oldsters in the rockers, which, despite the rustic simplicity of cabin and porch always remind me of Saratoga. Life may have been more uncomplicated at the Bungalow but it looks as if stiff dignity was the same as at Saratoga.

The large pasture, ~~across the brook~~, both westward and southward across the brook, supported cows which twice daily came crashing through the underbrush to the brook for a drink. Somehow they just never continued on across the brook into the clearing. To me they were as fascinating as wild beasts, but their size kept me at a respectful distance. I never quite got over the feeling that if I approached too closely to one of them I would get chased. But I longed to pet their soft noses.

Getting in to this hidden cabin site, after the three miles beyond the trolley line, you turned into a narrow gravel road off the main road, heading due west. You made the left-hand turn where there was a huge tobacco shed in the land angle between the main road and the turn-off one. About a half mile in from this shed, after ~~there~~ a stretch of woodlot, there was an opening on the right, with a grassy, south-facing slope. Atop it was an old farmhouse, built in the 1700's. As you faced west from in front of it Talcott Mountain stood in a high, long ridge across the western sky and was so close you could distinguish some of the individual trees on it. In that farmhouse lived Mary D, her father and two brothers. Just outside the back door was the feature most important to us children, a hand pump drinking well.

A rail fence followed along the road opposite the farmhouse; it closed in a huge field where there were two huge, long tobacco sheds off to the left, a wagon track down through the middle, and

a long wide cornfield on the right, a quarter mile long.

To get to the cabin you let down bars of the gate near the road, or crawled through them, and walked or drove down through the field all the way to the woodlot at the bottom. There the tracks veered to the right, into the woodland a short ways, then a ~~sharp~~ sharp turn to the left, along the ridge of a small, narrow cornfield, which sometimes was planted to tobacco. This strip of woodland on the right, and plowed strip on the left, continued southward for a quarter of a mile, ending at another rail fence. To continue, you again had to let down bars, or climb through or over them, but all wagon or car tracks ended there.

Inside the rail fence the cabin stood a few feet to the right. To the left was a tall, slender privy under a big shagbark hickory. Straight ahead was the clearing, all the way to the brook, which edged the clearing on the west and across the bottom to the south.

The brook, a major attraction for us children, ran over loose rounded rocks which lay helter skelter on a bedrock bottom of large squares and cross-ridgels of dark gray rock. These flat ledges formed several small pools, with water pouring over the rock lips like tiny waterfalls. Most of the rocks were slippery with green algae or water mosses. My sister was afraid of some of the wriggly things we found in the water-soaked moss, but my father insisted they couldn't bite. He was right, for they were but mayfly and stonefly larvae, a favorite food of trout. The water was so icy it made our feet ache even on hot summer days, for the brook was spring fed, though it flowed deeper and warmer, of course, during rainy periods. Water striders and whirrigig beetles skimmed over the surfaces of

the larger pools, where we kept out of their way.

The brook ran due east along the bottom of the clearing, into an open forest of very tall trees. There was a big swamp in there and we had been told to stay away from it lest we fall into some big pool. It was many years before I did anything but look down the brook in that swamp direction.

But east of the cabin, along the rail fence, a footpath led to a high, dry edge of that swamp. My father often led us along there, through weeds and bushes, to a spring which seeped out from under the path at a spot near a big tree where it formed a crystal-clear spring hole. We gathered cooking water here in small cans and bottles, which my sister and I helped carry. A frog was always waiting for us at the spring; I suppose it was his private habitat, his selected, fought-for home. To us, of course, he was there for one ~~purpose~~^{purpose} only. To greet us. But I am sure he was just patiently waiting for his normal invertebrate food to fly by, and the damp site kept his amphibious skin comfortably moist. He was there at least three seasons, though of course he could have been a different individual each year. We doted on him.

Rising up out of the edge of the brook just above the bridge there was a large flat-topped, slanting rock or boulder. A water snake sunned himself on it every afternoon; I spent many moments sitting on a close-by rock, watching him, admiring his color pattern. To me he was a beautiful, fantastic creature. I knew he wasn't poisonous, but that he could bite if I tried to touch him. I was contented to love him with my eyes.

The last summer that we vacationed there as a family I had

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a strange experience. This being an old stream, geologically speaking, it meanders with many right-angled turns. There was a section of it at the far wand of the western side of the pasture, it having arrived there after making a sharp turn/^{westward}near the cabin, then another turn, just as sharp, southward.

At a spot under a huge sugar maple, the brook spread out into a large, dark pool. It was surrounded by mud, which made the water so dark we couldn't see anything in it. There was a bank nearly two feet high above it, an easy place to sit and dangle legs. On this particular day, when I was eleven, my sister and I were both trying our fishing luck. My father had cut us each a pole from the bushes, tied a line to the outer ends, put a hook at the end of each line, and positioned a cork far enough up the line to hopefully keep the hooks off the bottom. Sitting watching corks lying idle on the surface of a pool may be an ideal past time for older folks who need to sit and rest, but for us it soon became too inactive. My sister left her pole lying on the bank and went off to play by herself under the further ends of the big maple. Then soon she just silently took off for the cabin. That left me with two corks to watch. For a few moments I felt rather important about such a responsibility, but the very still corks began to pall.

I pulled in my sister's line, and laid pole and line on the ground near the tree trunk. Then I sat down to watch my cork at least a little longer. Becoming conscious of something moving on the ground on my right I took my eyes off the cork to look and see what was there. I stared unbelievably for several moments, then dropped my pole and stood up, looking down at a weird creature. It was shaped something like a spider, but if it was a spider it

was the largest I had ever seen, then or since. It had chubby rounded legs, almost tube-like in shape, with a curve at the "Elbow" sections; the legs were all around the body though not as close as in a centipede. The body was plump, slightly oval, and flattish on top. When I put this incident into a high school theme many years later my teacher wrote at the top of the page, "A catawaumpus, no doubt."

At the time, however, even I was scared, and I ran, yelling all the way, to the cabin. ^{my father} He returned to the pool with me. We searched every inch of ground, and even the trunk of the big tree as far up as we could see. But the strange visitor had vanished. My father hurt my feelings by insisting I had imagined it. I was so sure he knew me better. To restore his faith in me I chose to sit on the bank alone again, and watch my cork, which was still afloat in the same place. I wanted to prove I wasn't afraid, that I wasn't imagining wild nonsense. I picked up my pole from where I had left it and sat valiantly, determined to watch that cork until dark.

But my afternoon's adventures were not over. I wasn't alone five minutes before suddenly, without a sound or any dimpling of the surface water, my cork disappeared. For a split moment I sat there staring at the dark corkless water. Then the tip end of my pole moved. I jumped to my feet and gave one great yank on the pole and the line. Out of that stygian dark water, making an awful splash and commotion, came a long, dark thrashing creature of unbelievable, seeming mythical size. I had been expecting a shiner, or at best a small sunfish. But here was a snake-like monster which looked bigger than I. It flew up over a branch of the maple, my line snagging in the tree. As I stood staring in disbelief at the creature dangling and squirming there, I knew it was an eel. For the second time, I

ran across the pasture screaming for my father. He came running, appearing through the brook-edge bushes rather abruptly. But I was all smiles as I skipped up to him. "I caught an eel! I caught an eel!"

"Where is it?" he asked, almost as excited as I. "Couldn't you unhook him? He didn't fall back into the brook did he?"

"Up in the tree," I shouted over my shoulder as I ran ahead of him. My father had a time of it getting that eel down from the tree. We had no ladder, of course, and there were no low branches to help us climb into the tree. The eel was dangling and squirming, almost over the water. Neither of us wanted to lose him. I hesitate now to say how large he was but he seemed immense to me. But only an eel or a snapping turtle could produce so much biomass from that seemingly foodless muddy pool. Had he fed on bloodsuckers?

My father skinned and eviscerated him on the cabin porch floor, and cut him up into small enough ^{pieces} for easy frying. He cooked it on the outdoor fireplace; all four of us enjoyed the sweet fresh meat for supper, as we ate the eel and our vegetables sitting on the edge of the porch. Usually my mother demanded we sit at the table, but this time she went along with the mood of more primitive family members.

As eating that eel was a form of living off the land I might add here that the only woodchuck I have ever eaten was one my father caught out in the big cornfield. He cooked it like stewed chicken over the fireplace by the brook and my mother cooperated by making dumplings. I don't remember which of them made the gravy but it was so delicious I have never forgotten it. A wild food which we often ate in those Bungalow days, and which didn't have to be killed first, was purslane. This weed-wildflower, cooked like spinach, is abundant in farm fields; when

creamed we kids rath~~e~~d it far above spinach.

It was one lovely summer afternoon that summer when my sister and I left our mother in the couch hammock down by the cool brook, where she was reading one of the books we had toted along. We crossed the brook near her and headed up into the pasture, veering a bit south of west. I knew a sturdy old apple tree over that way which I suggested we climb. For once my sister was ahead of me so she was in the upper branches, above me, when, looking down I saw something moving in a small shrubby path close to the ground. Soon I could see a very handsome, very long black snake. I scrambled down after it, and as I jumped the last couple of feet a dead branch stub jabbed into the junction of my left arm and chest. It hurt, but I dove for the now fast-moving snake.

He saw or felt me coming so he quickly turned and slithered toward a dense clump of bushes. I reached and grabbed him before he could disappear. He was strong and so smooth he slid right through my hand, which was too small and weak to hold onto him. He could have bitten me, but he wasn't a poisonous snake as I could see by the shape of his slender head. I was surprsied at his slipperyness although he wasn't wet, nor was he he covered with slime. He had a hard smoothness, more like glass.

My father had often discussed snakes with me, and he had seen a large black one which I'd hoped I come across some day. This must have been it, and the only scared one was the snake.

With the snake lost I became more aware of the smarting spot where I'd been stabbed by the apple tree. I considered its location. The position frightened me. This was a day when babies were nursed

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in public. Expecting any moment that milk might gush out I ran for my mother, leaving my sister to yell for me to wait for her. I ran pell mell down the bank and across the brook to the couch hammock. I didn't tell my mother what I was scared about, but I pulled back my short sleeve to show her the wound, expecting her to express nervous alarm. She just looked at it, laid her book down and led me back to the brook where we kept soap, a washcloth and towel, where she quietly washed off the blood from the wound and my blouse.

As she walked back up the slope to the hammock she threw a very common comment over her shoulder which was a familiar refrain throughout my childhood. "If you would stop acting like a wild Indian things like this wouldn't happen." The gash proved to be a three-corner cut, which to this day is the only scar from my supposedly rough outdoor life.

I consider my twelfth year the most lucid of my life, and scientific studies support this idea for some individuals; those born to observe are not yet distracted by the endless veneers of additional years. I looked around me and was not pleased at much of what I saw of the adult world into which I would soon enter. I decided to pick and choose what was best for me in life, and by-pass the rest. High heels were stupid and I was never going to wear them. All ladies, including my mother, wore tight corsets, which I was sure had a crippling effect. I would find some way to escape such unnatural confinement. I would have nothing to do with anyone who drank liquor.

Most women and girls were afraid of bugs, bats, snakes, frogs

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and dragonflies. I would be afraid of nothing in nature. Besides, those creatures were my friends. I observed that most women spent their whole lives indoors, dusting, polishing, cooking, mending, washing, ironing and sewing. I would make an effort to learn how to do all those things, then whenever I wanted to I could walk away from them, and stay outdoors as long as I wanted to.

Some people swore, or used other kinds of vile language; some stole little things. People hit other people. People lived in crowded treeless cities. None of these stupid things would I do. In fact, I was just not going to grow up to be a woman, and get stuck living with all those things. As I had no intention of growing up to be a man, either, only God knew what I thought I was going to be.

If I followed through on these ideas, however, I was due to become a maverick. An odd ball. But there must have been something about the Hartford air, for living just across town from us was another little girl, with very similar ideas. I knew of her existence at the time, but that was all. My father was her mailman and he used to feel very sorry for her as she swung on the gate waiting for him. He used to tell us how homely she was going to grow up to be because her face was covered with freckles. We asked him her name. "Katherine Hepburn," he said. I often wonder since then what devilry would have been committed if we had lived in the same neighborhood and she had been one of six Indian Club members.

One thing I was sure I was going to be was an explorer. I began training myself my twelfth year for the arduous life of someone traveling far from civilization. I refused to drink any liquids between meals, no matter how hot the day; I was pleasantly surprised to find that being up in the park with nothing to drink on a breathless day

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was rather comfortable though my playmates were moaning over how thirsty they were. I set myself to not be afraid of the dark outdoors. Weren't little animals asleep in it? I would be brave in thunderstorms. And I would learn to like dried bread for out in the wilderness all bread would be stale. I practiced this by hiding slices of bread and doughnuts, even cake, on a tiny shelf under the table where the table legs were in corners. Sometimes when I woke up hungry in the night, or if I knelt looking at the moon long after our bedroom door was closed, I'd sneak out and glean a hard ^epiece of bread or doughnut and munch on it contentedly, as if I had found a great food treasure in darkest Africa.

Most people reading this will consider these but notions of childhood, yet, as it is best for the ballet dancer and the musically inclined child to begin practice in childhood, so these exercises proved ^lmighty useful in later years. While I never did become the professional explorer I hoped to be, over the years I have frequently found myself far from the comforts of civilization; to this day I don't get thirsty no matter how hot out in the field, and at many a camp I was happy with ^astale bread which I deliberately dried further to keep it from moulding. The determinations of my childhood added substance to my innate sense of self reliance.

When Santa Claus left a five dollar bill in my stocking that year, the most money I had ever had at once, I decided it was enough to start me on my way to independent outdoor adventure far from the restraints of foolish adults. My parents refused to move to the country, so I would refuse to live in the city.

There was much planning, much thinking to be done. I was going to run away, to the Bloomfield Bungalow. The fact that is was mid

winter didn't matter; the country was as beautiful in winter as in summer. But being of a gregarious nature I wasn't yet quite ready to face life alone. I would need someone to talk to. There was no sense in taking my sister. She had neither the will nor the nerve. I talked a playmate down the street into going with me. She was only ten years old, but a redhead with plenty of fire and push. And her name was Catherine, an appropriate one for the Bungalow.

For weeks I gradually and secretly filled a suitcase for Catherine, and one for myself. I kept them hidden in the closet of the bedroom I shared with my sister. On the pretext of coming to play, Catherine smuggled the kind of clothes I asked for into our house. My mother was working afternoons then, as due to the war every mill was working full blast and asking neighbors to help. That was a boon to me; I was home from school a full hour and a half before my mother got home. In addition to the clothes, I accumulated for the suitcase such items as candles, soap, pencils, and a few small games as we had always taken games to the Bungalow for rainy days.

Food I didn't bother with. It was too heavy, it took up too much space in a suitcase, and it might spoil. I knew that the old converted commode in the kitchen of the Bungalow was always stocked with canned goods, flour, sugar, tea, coffee, oatmeal and many other things. I didn't bother to pack matches as there was always a jar of them on the fireplace mantle. With my five dollars we could buy eggs, bread and milk, potatoes and apples at the farmhouse. With bread less than ten cents a loaf and hamburger fifteen cents a pound that five dollar bill would last all winter.

We chose an early February date, a Saturday afternoon when both of our mothers would be downtown shopping. We planned to take the three o'clock trolley for Bloomfield over on Albany Avenue. I

had instructed Catherine to be at my house at 2:30, to be sure we had time to lug our suitcases across the field to the trolley.

But no Catherine at 2:30. Nor at 3:00. I had our suitcases out in the front hall at the top of the stairs, a rather secret place as no one ever used the front hall. Now we would have to try for the 4 o'clock trolley and one of our parents could appear before then. I sent my sister to look for Catherine while I guarded the suitcases. She quickly returned saying Catherine wasn't home. I gave up my suitcase vigil and went looking for her myself. After combing her neighborhood for her in vain I suddenly saw her strolling into her yard about 4:20. She was pulling a sled and looked tired.

"Where were you?" I demanded. "We missed two trolleys!"

"I forgot," she said simply. I had never seen Catherine look so meek, so vapid. I couldn't tell if she looked that way because she was disappointed that she had forgotten, or if she forgot on purpose and was disappointed because I had waited for her.

"You get your best coat on. It's the warmest," I ordered her. Then come help me get the suitcases down the stairs. We'll just make the five o'clock trolley." I waited out back for her and soon we were hurrying to my house. I was so sure my mother would walk in on what we were doing that I kept begging her to hurry.

I vaguely recall the struggle of getting those suitcases down the stairs, sliding them on their tread edges. But get them down we did, and across the street, and up the steep bank to the field above. There were many stubby clumps of grass, half buried in the soft snow, which we kept stumbling over. The suitcases felt as if full of bricks. We could move slowly, only, step by step, and every now and then

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then I had to set mine down and help Catherine with hers.

My sister, I knew, was watching us from the upstairs front windows and I wondered if she could see us as it was beginning to get dark. She was under solemn oath not to tell anyone where we went. On the kitchen table I left a note, saying that I wanted only to live in the country; I signed it, then added the initials W.L. This, I was sure would be interpreted as Windsor Locks, where several cousins lived. If they went to Windsor Locks looking for us when my father got home, then that would give us plenty of time to get to Bloomfield and find a place to hide the next day before they could get out there. Telephones were so uncommon I forgot they existed.

We made Albany Ave. in plenty of time. We had about a ten minute wait, during which time I agonized that one of our parents would happen by, afoot or on a trolley, though I knew of no reason why any of them would be over that way. Downtown was in the opposite direction. The Bloomfield trolley did come, and the conductor helped us get our luggage up, and to a seat. "Such little girls!" he exclaimed. "Where are you going with such big, heavy suitcases?"

I hadn't anticipated questions from strangers. "We are going to cousins in Bloomfield for a week," I explained, knowing in my heart I was going to live there.

"Don't you have school next week?" he asked as he rang up our fares.

"I glibly lied. "Our school is closed next week because of measles."

"I didn't hear of that," he said. I had forgotten newspaper reports such stories.

It was dark night when we arrived at Bloomfield center, where I could instantly see that no horses and carriages were tethered. It was now snowing, and beginning to blow around. The conductor carried our suitcases across the street for us, where I told him a cousin was going to pick us up.

The trolley must have been a little late for instead of waiting while, as it usually did at the end of a line, it started right back. It looked so warm and brightly lighted as it receded back to Hartford, leaving us there in the dark and cold wind. No sooner were we alone and started moving up the street, shuffling our heavy suitcases, than Catherine began to whimper.

"What's the matter?" I demanded, a little alarmed and surprised. Tough little red-headed Catherine crying?

"I gotta go to the toilet," she whimpered.

I was exasperated. You never could go anywhere with little kids without them having to go.

In that dark wind and cold, the snow blowing down our necks ~~up~~ and up our sleeves, I was puzzled what to do. Suddenly I remembered. I could dimly see the outline of the cemetery in back of the church up ahead. Catherine was almost as used to cemeteries as I was and I knew she would n't be afraid to go over there. Leaving the suitcases by the side of the road I led her across and down the street to the cluster of headstones. Catherine was so miserable she made no fuss about pulling her clothes down in the cold wind.

It was a long, bitter cold trudge up that north Bloomfield road, the wind blowing hard against us, pushing us back a step for every two steps, almost knocking the breath out of us for we were moving right into the teeth of the wind. Though we had gone only about

half a mile we were long past talking to one another. Every breath was necessary for the next step, the next tug on the suitcases.

Suddenly we heard the clopping of hooves and the creaking of wheels coming behind us, so muffled by the snow we couldn't tell how far. Deliberately we moved ourselves and our suitcases only an inch at a time, closer to the middle of the road. The wagon rumbled near, sooner than I'd hoped. A man shouted "Whoa" to his team, and held his lantern down closer to the wheels. When the light shone on our faces the man climbed down from the high seat of his milk wagon and stepped close to us.

"Where are you going?" he shouted above the wind.

I spoke to him of Mary D's farm. He picked up our suitcases and tossed them as if light as feathers in among the milk cans. Then he lifted us one by one unto the high seat, and tucked a horse blanket around us. He slapped the reins on the horses rumps, the milk cans made a great clatter as they jangled together, and we were off. Soon Catherine's head was leaning against my arm. In just moments she was sound asleep. Such a baby! I was disgusted. This was fun now, and I wasn't going to miss a minute of it by sleeping.

Once again I tried the measles ruse in answer to the now expected questions. "I just read the evenin' paper," the man said. "I didn't see nothin' about a measles epidemic."

"It's just at our school," I explained, trying to sound both convincing and important. But I really didn't care if he believed me or not. It was a relief he knew the farm we were going to, and we wouldn't have to walk all the way.

"I can only take you to the corner of that road," he said. "If I weren't late for milkin' I'd drive ye right in there. But I can

Sherwood
take ye as far as the shed at that corner. Once you turn in there ye'll be out of the wind."

Though the horses had only clopped along slowly, it seemed but a few minutes to that road corner. I hated to give up the horse blanket, but I was once more eager to be on our way when the man lifted us down, then placed our suitcases beside us. He was hesitant about leaving us there. "Mighty heavy for ~~z~~ such little gals," he said. "But I'm nearly two hours behind milkin' time now."

We could barely see the hulking form of the big tobacco shed in the snow, but it looked very familiar sitting there in that corner, back in a ways from the roads. We started moving along, westward now, and as the man had said, it wasn't as windy here for there were woods protecting us on the north side. The snow was now falling ^astright down so we didn't have to scrotch our chins into our scarves to keep the snow out of our necks. But it was still a struggle with the suitcases, for this road was gutted and the ruts frozen into hard grooves with ridges. We slid and stumbled, falling over our feet and the suitcases. Then at last, there was the farmhouse on a small open knoll on our right, with warm lights glowing in the kitchen windows.

We left our suitcases at the edge of the road. Catherine, who hadn't spoken a word since she woke up after sleeping on the wagon, followed me silently up to the kitchen door. As often as I had been there I had never been in the house. The eggs, milk, potatoes and other things we had bought there had been handed to us out in the yard, or on the front porch where we all often sat to talk. The pump near the back door now seemed strange, all but its upright parts buried in snow.

I knocked on the kitchen door, with relief that we had gotten so far safely. But I was truly relieved when Mary D. opened the door, not her father or one of her brothers. She stared at us a moment, then in her familiar voice which had a built-in trill, she said, "Come in. Come in.," and she reached to pull me in out of the swirling snow. I must have seen her in winter when I was very small, when we had gone to the Bungalow for picnics, but mostly I saw her in summer, when her voice ~~k~~ always seemed to me full of warbling birds, the breeze in the trees and the gurgling of the brook. Now she sounded like a fairy godmother who lived in a friendly house in the forest. We were safe. Nothing would stop us from getting to the Bungalow now.

No doubt she was mighty amazed to see us, but wisely she didn't show it. Completely lulled, and at ease, as we stood there in the overly-warm kitchen, I frankly told her we had run away from home because I never wanted to live in the city again. Glancing around, however, my spirits were a little depressed by dark smoke-smudged walls and ceiling. The big kitchen range was throwing out almost too much heat; I could tell it was woodsmoke from it which had the walls and ceiling so discolored. The room was cluttered with old dark clothes, mostly overalls, draped over chairs and hanging on wall hooks, some of them obviously drying out by the stove.

Mary D. busied herself making us some hot cocoa, and heating up a big kettle of soup. "You girls had better stay up here for the night," she urged. But I was eager to get to the Bungalow. Besides, I was suspicious that the rooms beyond the kitchen door were cold as a barn, as were back and upstairs rooms in most houses in those days before central heating. The fireplace at the Bungalow would be warmer, and had more appeal. But we ate the hot food at the table.

Sherwood
Mary's father was nowhere in sight, but her two brothers kept wandering in and out from their chores out in the barn. They were not present when we started on our way again. Very shortly we were pushing our suitcases through the fence at the top of the big field. We clambered through after them. Once down in the field, away from the shelter of the house knoll and its trees, we were once again out in the open wind with snow blowing down our necks. But at least this time it was at our backs. The vast field was wide open except for the big, long tobacco sheds off to our left.

About a third of the way down through the field Catherine started to whimper again. "Now what's the matter!" I demanded, though ^adreading to find out. If it was what I suspected she would just have to wait until we got to the shelter of the woodlot down at the end of the field, else she might freeze to death.

"My feet are cold," she whimpered. "I can't walk." I noticed then that she had been stepping stiff-leggedly. She refused to take another step, sat down on her suitcase and bawled.

I was so impatient to get to the ^aBungalow, now so close, so possible, it didn't make sense to dally out in the cold wind, where the swirling snow ^{was} ~~was~~ half smothering us. I sat down on the edge of my own suitcase and took off my arctics. Nothing was going to stop us now. My own feet weren't all that warm but I was determined Catherine was going to get up and walk.

In a conciliatory tone I babied her as I pulled my arctics on over her much smaller shoes and rubbers. She started to kick at the arctics, showing her old spunk.

"Catherine!" I said sternly. "You will freeze to death if you sit there without exercising. I can't carry you, you are too

heavy. You have to get up and walk." Though she was no longer kicking she wasn't cooperating by pushing her feet into the arctics. "It isn't much futher," I said, in a wheedling voice, beginning to chatter myself with the cold. "But if you don't come along I am going to leave you here alone in the cold and the dark." She started silently pushing into the arctics.

Those proved ~~more~~ more effective words than I'd expected, for she stood up and started lugging her suitcase. I had begun to realize that not only was she cold and tired, but she must have been quite scared for she had never been here before. She didn't have my wonderful memories. She was a city child, and a vast, dark, snowy, blowy field, hemmed in by dark bulks of big sheds on one side and dark trees around other sides must have been more than she could bear alone. She followed me silently the rest of the way.

The field seemed twice as long as in summer, and the walking was so uneven in the crusted snow with stubble hidden underneath and hard bumpy ridges where we hit the wagon road, we both did much stumbling. At last we reached the woodlot at the bottom of the field, and we turned into the wagon road along it. It was quiet and relatively warm in the shelter of the woods. There was no wind. We could hear the falling snow pattering on branches and tree trunks. It was darker in here, but the wagon tracks were easily discernible. Walking had become easier, but the suitcases were almost beyond our endurance. Occasionally I set mine down and helped Catherine with hers.

At last we reached the rail fence. I stepped up on its lower rail and looked over into the clearing. There was the Bungalow, a big, square, dark object just visible through the swirling snow. I tried pulling one of the fence bars down but it was frozen in place.

I pushed Catherine through, then the suitcases, then squeezed through into the blessed clearing myself.

The key, which Mary D. had given me, was now in my bare hand, for I'd pulled my mitten off. I was deliriously happy. I wanted to shout and sing, but Catherine's gloomy presence subdued my effervescence. That long, long trip in from the trolley, and down that endless field in the wind and smothering snow, were now as nothing.

Since it was too dark to see I had to feel for the keyhole. My fingers fumbled, getting stiffer by the moment from the cold. I was afraid I would drop the key and not be able to find it in the snow which was now more than a foot deep. Several times I had to stop and flog on my numbed fingers. Suddenly the key slipped into place! It turned! I opened the magic door.

"I'm afraid," whimpered Catherine. "There might be a boogey man in there."

"Now you stop that," I impatiently ordered her. Here we were on the threshold of the magic Bungalow. And she was afraid to go in. "If you don't want to come in you can stay out here in the dark and the wind," I said, remembering the lesson I'd learned out in the field with the arctics. Exultantly I stepped over the doorsill into the tiny kitchen. Suddenly feeling remorseful I reached out the door and helped Catherine climb the high step for I knew that little kids are afraid of the dark even in a room with which they are familiar, and she had never seen this one. I led her the two or three steps into the big room. Slowly, guiding her as if she were blind, past the big table on the left, across the big room to the window seat just ahead of us, I gave her a little shove and said "Sit down. I'll light a candle."

My very silent companion sat quietly while I fumbled my way

to the fireplace and felt along the mantel for the matches. Nothing was on the mantle except dust. I had stumbled against the couch hammock, which was standing in front of the fireplace. "That will be my bed," I murmured exultantly aloud.

Knowing Catherine could hear me changing directions I said, "I'm going to the kitchen for some matches." There wasn't a sound out of her and for the moment I wondered if she were still in the room. Thinking of it in later years, I suppose she was huddled in abject fear, expecting something to jump out at her from the dark. But at the time everything was an adventure, for me. I was in heaven.

Out in the small kitchen there was a shock awaiting me. There were no jars, or cans atop the commode, or on the shelf next to it. I opened the commode top and felt around, sure I'd bump my fingers into the match jar. But there was nothing. Absolutely nothing. Where was all the food we kept here? The sugar, and flour, and salt, and tea and coffee, and cans of things. I shut the commode lid and opened its doors to the cupboard below. The shelves there were bare, too. I was so sure matches would be in the Bungalow that I just hadn't brought any. This disappointment I could face myself. But Catherine! Oh why did I bring her?

One more hope. The big table in the large room. I felt my way back there, my eyes now accustomed to the darkness and the white snow outside cast a faint glow through the windows. I could see, as well as feel, that there was nothing on the table. Not even the usual tablecloth. I leaned against the table in the almost cave-like darkness, trying to decide what to do. Were I alone I would go to bed in the hammock and hope to find matches in the morning.

Sherrill

"Catherine, I just can't find any matches," I finally said. "There used to be a lot of them here." My voice sounded weird to me in the hollowness of the dark room. "We'll have to go back to the farmhouse for matches, so we can light a candle, and the fire, and make hot tea in the morning." ^UQuickly, before she could start crying again I said. "You can stay here if you want to. I'll cover you up nice with warm blankets. I'll be right back."

But I suddenly wondered if the blankets had been taken away too. I stepped over to the window seat ~~xxxx~~ on the other side of the front door from where Catherine was sitting. It had the usual mattress-like pad on it, but I opened it, and felt inside. To my relief it was filled to the top with pillows and blankets, as it always had been.

"No! Don't leave me alone!" Catherine almost screamed.

I reached for her arm, and pulled her up. My feet were beginning to get too cold, but at least I could make myself walk so I let Catherine keep my arctics on.

"No crying if you come with me," I ordered. I led her out of the cabin and shut the door behind us to keep out the wind. Even I hated to go back out into that wind and cold again, but I was determined to have a warm and pretty fire, and in the morning we could make hot tea or cocoa. "We can move faster this time," I said cheerily, "because we don't have the suitcases."

The trip back up to the farmhouse seemed relatively easy, even though the wind was in our faces. Catherine, afraid of being left alone, trudged silently as if she had lost her tongue. When we reached the farmhouse Mary D. smiled and trilled, "I thought of

Shirwood
matches after you left. I sent John out to call you back but he couldn't see you. Do you have candles?"

"A whole dozen of them," I crowed. "But there were always matches down there so I didn't bring any." "I mentioned my surprise at the empty commode.

"Oh, we always clean everything out for the winter. Mice get in, you know, and canned things freeze. If mice chewed on matches they could burn the Bungalow down." She put some tea/^{leaves} in a small bag for us, and some slices of homemade bread.

On the way back my feet were beginning to grow numb. The snow was piling up, now almost as deep as half way up our legs. I ^p jumped, and hopped and skipped, trying to prevent my feet from **nearily** freezing. Catherine just plodded along, heavy-footed in her own rubbers on over her shoes and my arcti^cs over those.

But the world seemed light and easy without the suitcase. Back at the cabin I steered Catherine to the soft window couch, opened it and pulled out a big quilt which I wrapped around her. Then I struggled with my suitcase on the floor, trying to open it with my almost immovable cold fingers to get in at the candles. It was painful work but eventually I opened the straps, then the buckles. To my relief the candles were just where I had put them. Soon we had a blessed light on the mantel, where I had to drip some wax as it melted to have a firm base in which to stand up the candle as even candlesticks weren't to be seen. At least Catherine was no longer in a dark, unfamiliar room.

The first job was to get Catherine to ^bed. I had ironed sheets and pillow cases in my suitcase, a civilized notion I'd been brought

up to consider essential. Clean sheets was good housekeeping. If sleeping bags were invented by then I never heard of them. I stood Catherine up and pulled blankets, a quilt and a pillow from her window box, and, using sheets, I made up a bed for her. I helped her undress and get into her flannel nightgown, for no one I ever heard of went to bed in daytime clothes. It must have been a cold shock to climb into those cold sheets, but she submitted to the inevitable. I tucked her in to make sure should would be warm on all sides.

Now for the fireplace, a major goal of my dreams. The usual pile of cordwood in the southwest corner of the chimney was not there, as I'd seen the moment I lit the candle. But outdoors, by the back window, behind the kitchen, there was always stacked cordwood. It was impossible to take the candle outdoors as the wind would blow it out. I felt my way around to the back only to find no cordwood there, either. I kicked at the snow, removing the older crusty snow as well as the new, and gradually found a few sticks, and one larger piece. The snow wasn't quit so deep under the big beech back there, where I found a few more sticks.

In the kitchen I had already found a small pile of old newspapers. With crumpled paper, some of the sticks, and the large piece laid on top of them I soon had a fire going. Ecstasy consumed me.

Bringing bedding over from the other window box, and getting out the last of the sheets, I made up a cozy nest of a bed in the couch hammock. I locked the back door by sliding the big bolt, with which I was familiar. As we hadn't opened the front door, it was locked. I sat on the edge of the hammock awhile, reveling in the small fire. I could hear the brook gurgling outside. The world would be so beautiful in the morning, covered with a new white blanket of snow, But for now I was singing throughout my being, like a plucked harp string. I fought off sleep, I was so happy.

Sherwood

Slowly I got undressed and put on my flannel nightgown, unmindful of the cabin's chill air. The hammock creaked as I settled into the nest of blankets. What a summer sound! I lay cozily looking at the tiny, flickering fire which was too small to make its heat felt in the big cavernous room. The light of the flickering flames danced on the overhead rafters. Having eaten its way/through what little fuel there was the fire died down, leaving small glowing coals like lights in a distant fairy town. I was so warm and snug I was soon half dreaming of the water snake, wondering where he spent the winter; I was sure I wouldn't see him out there in the snow in the morning.

Suddenly I nearly jumped out of my skin. There was a terrific pounding on the back door. My father's voice shouted, "Mary! Mary! Open the door!"

Catherine, who had been sound asleep, sat up in bed and cried, "Daddy, Daddy!"

I ran over to her, grabbed her pillow, forced her to lie back down and held the pillow over her head to smother her cries. Why she didn't really smother I have often wondered since, but no doubt events moved too fast for that. I was sure that if we kept still, and didn't open the door, they would think we weren't there and would go away. It must be nearly midnight. I thought of our tracks down through the field and woodlot, which led right to the cabin, but I was sure that the still falling snow and blowing snow would have them filled in by now.

There were several voices outside. More than just our two fathers. Someone held up a lantern to the window. I scrooched down close to Catherine. When I heard them all fumbling again with the back door I ran for the couch hammock, whose high canvas back

Shenwood
would hide me. I dove into my protective blankets, hiding like a chipmunk, trusting I wouldn't be seen.

They all pounded on the back door again. Then we could hear them trooping around to the front door. They pounded on that, many voices ordering us to let them in. Catherine must have been more afraid of me and a smothering pillow than them as she kept silent.

I peeked out at two tiny still glowing coals in the fireplace. A Japanese lantern overhead seemed to promise serene shelter. I was determined I was not going home. Maybe I could sneak out whichever door they were not pounding at, and hide in the woods. Then I remembered I was in my nightgown and my feet were bare; but even if I could get dressed they would see my tracks in the snow and could follow me.

The voices all gathered around at the back again. Suddenly there was a loud crash as the back door broke in. Catherine cried out, "Daddy, Daddy, I'm over here!"

My father quickly found me. He gathered up my clothes ^{from} ~~for~~ the chair where I'd dropped them and threw them over the top of the hammock on top of me. "Get dressed!" he ordered, in a sterner tone than I'd ever heard from him.

I sat up and peered over the top of the hammock at Catherine. The men had a large lantern and it was easy to see she was sitting on her father's knees and he was helping her get dressed. "What a baby," I murmured to myself. "If only I hadn't brought her I bet no one would have found me."

I sat there with the blankets pulled up around my neck, suddenly very shy in the presence of all those strange men. My father, noticing, shooed them out into the back room and order me to get dressed. "Fast!" he added.

Sherwood

As we trudged through the snow back up to the farmhouse, the men taking turns with the suitcases and now and then carrying Catherine, my father tried to explain to me that we had to live in the city. "My work is there. Someone in every family has to work in order to have food and clothes and pay the rent and for heat. You'd have found out quickly that your five dollars would soon be gone."

"But you could work in the country. If we lived in the Bungalow we wouldn't have to pay rent. And wood in the fireplace would keep us warm."

"There is no work in the country except farming. I'm not very good at that. I would have to own more land for farming than I could ever be able to buy. Then I'd have to hire someone to help me; it takes more than one man to run a farm. The only jobs where I can earn a living for us all is in the city."

I wasn't convinced. I promised myself, as we trudged up through the snow, my fourth trip through that windy cold field that night, that some day I would learn how to live in the country and have food, and roof, and heat and candles too.

"Who are all these men?" I asked at one point, thinking they might be friends or relatives of Mary D's, as it had been so easy for them to find us.

"The taxi driver, a constable, two sheriffs and a Hartford policeman," said my father, in a tone intended to impress me.

No special tone was necessary. The list was enough. All were a shock to me. A taxi! No wonder our fathers got out there so quickly. Properly scared at last I walked all the rest of the way to the road below the farmhouse in silence.

The taxi was so crowded that Catherine and I had to sit on our father's laps. One sheriff was dropped off in Bloomfield and I

insisted upon having the independence of his seat. As we approached the north end of Hartford we passed a small store with the lights on. "That store stays open all night," mum lied one of the men. At his words Catherine sat straight up and wailed, "I'm hungry, Daddy."

The men didn't just laugh, they guffawed. I'd seen that word in a story book. Now I knew what it meant. I never forgave any of them, even my father, for that coarse, ridiculing guffaw. It's one of those things which happen in childhood which you never forget. I can still hear them, and feel again the inner rush of anger. One of the men had stopped laughing and said, "That's what they all say when they run away. They get hungry might fast."

"I'm not hungry!" I stated definitely. They all guffawed again.

"Don't tease her," my father said, partially redeeming himself.

When we reached home my mother was sitting in the kitchen crying. It was the only time in my life that I saw her cry. On the table was our usual Saturday night supper,- baked beans, turnips, mashed potatoes, and apple pie. It looked as if only one portion had been touched,- no doubt my sister's. Stubbornly I refused my supper. I stood definitely in the middle of the kitchen and said, "When I am twenty-one I am going to move to the country and I will only come to the city to visit." I stomped off to bed.

I woke up an hour or so later too hungry to stay asleep. I sneaked out to the kitchen, hoping supper was still on the table. But the table was empty. I reached underneath and gathered up an old doughnut and a dry slice of bread. When I got back to bed my sister was awake. "Did you tell them we were in Bloomfield?" I demanded. "No, " she said, "they called Windsor Locks on the telephone somewhere and when you weren't there they guess you were in Bloomfield at the Bungalow." A telephone! I had forgotten such a thing existed.

I wasn't spanked in the morning, as I rather expected to be. But my father pointed out to me a story in that Sunday morning's paper about our running away to Bloomfield and being found by a taxi full of police officers. He and my mother made me go to church and face whatever anyone wanted to say. I only remember encountering Catherine's mother, who almost spit the words in my face that I was never to so much as speak to her daughter again. Catherine wasn't with her. No doubt still home in bed, recuperating.

I have often wondered how today's psychologists would have handled me. What chance did my parents have, in pre-child psychology days, of properly guiding a child who seemed to be a throw-back to Neanderthal days. I wasn't bad. Just born in the wrong century.

Yet there are, were, and always will be others who prefer the cadences of the natural world to the dissonances of the artificialities of civilization. There was Sherman Adams, once a power in Washington, who said of his childhood, "The outdoors, the woods, affected me deeply." Donald Worster has written of nature that it is the Household of life. Emerson was often moved by the essence of wild things, as when he wrote, "Welcome, the wood god murmured through the leaves." There are all the people who go on safaris to Africa, or to the Amazon, and those who have spent time in the real wild of the South Pole region. I now know of a gal named Alexandria in Maine, one named Anne in the Adirondacks, and a Shirley and a Bobbie in the everglades, who live as close to nature as I ever did.

The one who comes closest to mind, of course, and who would have more deeply influenced my life if I had "met" him sooner, is Henry David Thoreau. In classic, poetic prose he put his own inner yearnings for the wild, as well as mine. He speaks for me when language fails me.