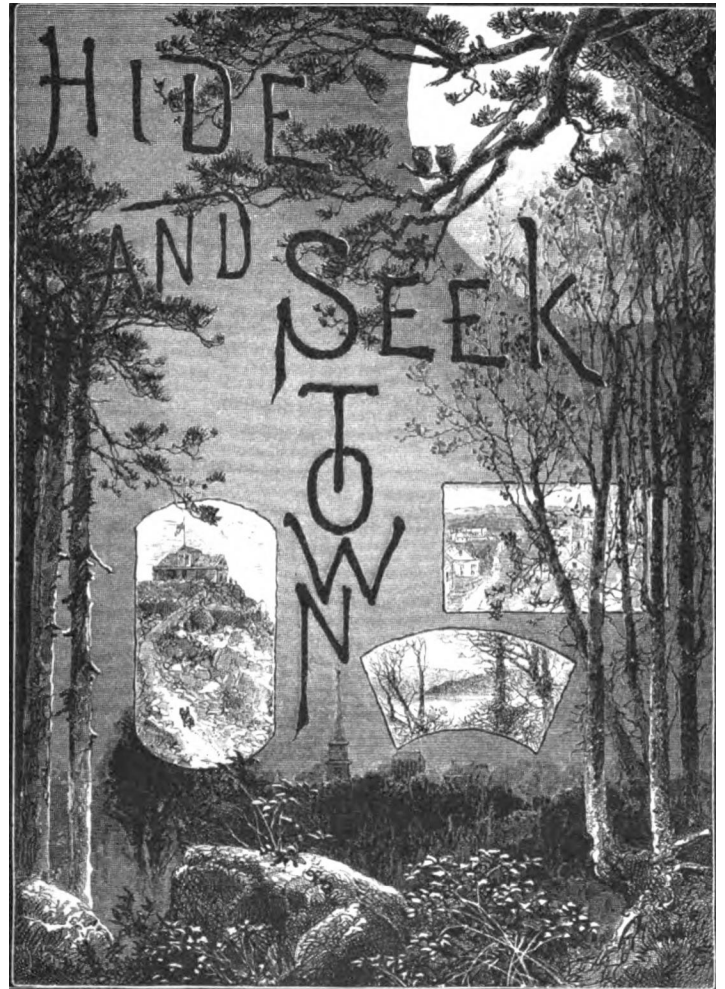


Midsummer Holiday Number
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It lies in the uplands, and you can go within a mile of it by rail. But where are the uplands, and whence departs the train to find them, and what is the real name of the town, it is far from my purpose to tell. I christened it "Hide-and-Seek Town" myself one day as I was drawing near it, and observed how deliciously it dodged in and out of view while it was yet miles away. One minute it stood out on its hill like a village of light-houses on a promontory of the sea, the next it skulked behind an oak grove and was gone, then peered out again with its head of meeting-house spires, and then plunged down between two low hills, as lost as if it had leaped into a well; and so it behaved for a half hour, its white houses laughing like white teeth in a roguish mouth, as we vainly strained our eyes to get one good sight of the unknown place to which we were bound.

You can come, as I said, within a mile of it by rail; but when the little insignificant train drops you in a silent nook at the entrance of a wood, and then crawls away between two sandy banks of sweet fern and red lilies, you are overwhelmed with a sudden sense of the utter improbability of a town anywhere within reach. The stage - why does New England say "stage," and not "coach"? - which waits for you is like hundreds you have seen before, but here it looks odd, as if it were Cinderella's chariot; and when you find that there are nine to ride outside, besides the nine in, the inexplicableness of so many people having come at once startles you.



A MILE UP HILL.

They become seventeen mysteries immediately, and you forget that you are the eighteenth. No questions are asked as to your destination - with a leisurely manner the driver puts his passengers into the coach and shuts the door gently - no hurry. There is a mile to go up hill before you reach town. On some one of the longest, steepest hills, he will swing himself round in a marvelous bit of amateur acrobaticism in

from the top of the coach to the lowest step, and, putting long arms into windows, collect the fares, and find out to which of the Hide-and-Seek houses you wish to go. If you are a stranger arriving without prejudices, and ready to take your chance anywhere, it is a beautiful thing to watch the impartiality of his tone in giving to you the names of the different hotels and like white teeth in a roguish mouth, as boarding-houses. The most jealous and we vainly strained our eyes to get one exacting landlord could not find fault with him.

At the end of his enumerations, you are as much at a loss as you were in the beginning, and probably end by jumping out before the first house at which the stage stops. Pages have been written about the inquisitiveness of the rural New Englander; comparatively little has been said about his faculty of reticence at will, which is quite as remarkable. I doubt if any man can be found to match him in a series of evasive and non-committal replies. This habit or instinct is so strong in him, that it often acts mechanically when he would not have it, as, for instance, when he is trying to tell you the road to a place.

There is a mile to go up hill before you reach the town. The first part of the road is walled on the right hand by a wood - a thick wall of oaks, birches, maples, pines, chestnuts, hickories, beeches, ashes, spruce, and cornels; yes, all these growing so close that none can grow broad, but all must grow high, and, stretch up however much they may, their branches are interwoven. This is one of the great pleasures in Hide-In-Seek Town - the unusual variety of tree growths by the roadside and in the forests. I do not know of a single New England tree, which is not found in luxuriant abundance.



eye, a charm and fascination which smooth, fulsome meadow levels cannot equal. There can be no more exquisite tones of color, no daintier mosaic, than one sees if he looks attentively on an August day at these fields of gray granite lichen-painted boulders lying in beds of light-green ferns, bordered by pink and white spiraeas, and lighted up by red lilies.

The stretches of stone wall tone down an even gray in the distances, and have a dignity and significance, which no other expedient for boundary-marking has attained. They make of each farm a little walled principality, of each field -in approach to a fortress; and if one thinks of the patience, which it must need to build them by the mile, they seem at once to take a place among enduring



WILD GRAPES.

On the left-hand side of the road are what are called by the men who own them, "pastures." Considered as pastures from an animal's point of view, they must be disappointing; stones for bread to a cruel extent they give. Considered as landscape, they have, to the trained



OUR HOTEL

records or race memorials. I suppose that a hundred years would make little or no impression on a well-built stone wall. I know that I spent many happy hours in my childhood on one which was even then very old, and must be now well on the way to its centennial.

There was a mile to go up hill. We have come half way. The wood wall has ceased; open fields on either side give us long stretches of view to the north and to the south. The road-sides are as thick set with green growths as the sides of English lanes. To my thinking they are more beautiful; many of young locusts, birches, thickets of blackberry and

raspberry bushes, with splendid waving tops like pennons; spiraea, golden rod, purple thistle, sumac with red pompons, and woodbine flinging itself over each and all in positions of inimitable grace and abandon. How comes it that the New Englander learns to carry himself so stiffly, in spite of the perpetual dancing-master lessons of his road-sides? With each rod that we rise the outlook grows wider; the uplands seem to roll away farther and farther; the horizons look like sea horizons, distant and misty, and the white houses of the town might be signal stations. Presently we come out upon a strange rocky plateau, small, with abrupt sides falling off in all directions but one, like Cliff walls.

This is the center town. It is simply a flattened expanse of a mountain spur. The mountain itself is only three thousand feet high, and this plateau is nearly half way up. It would seem a brave thing, the climbing up here to build frame houses to take the brunt of such winds as sweep across this ridge, but the Indians were so much fiercer than the winds, that I dare say those early settlers never observed the howling of the gales which today keep many a nervous person wide awake of nights. The mountain was a great rendezvous of hostile Indians in the days when the Colony of Massachusetts Bay was fighting hand to hand for life. There are some old tattered leather-bound books behind the counter of "the store," which are full of interesting records of that time. There are traditions of Governors visits a hundred years before the Revolution ; and a record of purchase of twelve square miles, "not including the mountain. for twenty-three pounds, from three sachen of the Nipmucks.



In 1743 the first settlement was made on the present town site, by a man who, being too poor to buy, petitioned the Colonial Government to give him the land for his home, setting forth, "that your petitioner, though a poor man, yet he humbly apprehends he hath the character of an Honest and Laborious man, and is minded to settle himself and his Family thereon."

It was given to him on the condition that he should keep a house for the accommodation of travelers "going West!" Immortal phrase, which only the finality of an ocean can stay. Twenty years later, the handful of settlers. voted "to hire four days preaching in May next, I to begin ye first Sabbath, if a minister can be

conveniently procured," and that Christian charity was as clearly understood then as to-day may be seen by another record a few pages further on, of the town's vote to pass on to the next settlement, a poor tramp with his family: "Hepzibah, his wife, Joseph, Isaac, Thankful, Jeduthun, Jonathan and Molly, their children." There is an inexplicable fascination in this faded old record on the ragged page. Poor fellow; a wife and six children in such a wilderness, with no visible means of support! Why did they call that first girl "Thankful"? And what can it be in the sound of the word Jeduthun, which makes one so sure that of all the six children, Jeduthun was the forlornest?



THE STORE.

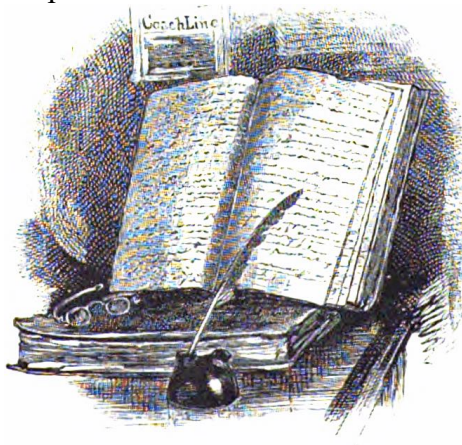
As we approach the Revolutionary period the records grow more distinct. There is even a sort of defiant flourish in the very tails to the y's and g's, with which that ancient clerk, God rest his soul, records that the town had voted, "not to pay the Minute Men for training;" and that the minister is to be "inquired of" for his conduct in "refusing to call a Fast," and for his "Publick Discourses to the Minute Men, as tending to discourage people in defending their Rights and Liberties," and, "for taking cattle suspected to be Colonel Jones's." A wide range of delinquencies, surely! A little later, a committee is appointed to "keep him out of the pulpit." One wonders if in those days ministers were in the habit, or under the necessity, of knocking down in the aisles all parishioners who didn't wish to hear them preach.



A LEAF FROM THE OLD TOWN RECORDS.

Even while the town was training its Minute Men, the records open, "In his Majesty's name;" but a few months later, comes a significant page, beginning, "In the name of the Government and

People of the Province of Massachusetts Bay." This page records the vote of the town, To concur with the Continental Congress in case they should Declare Independence." Five months later is a most honorable record of a citizen who went to the Provincial Congress, rendered his account for fifty pounds for his expenses, and then, so that no heirs of his should demand it in future, presented it to the town in a formal receipt, "from him who wishes them every good connected with this and the Future State." Could any strait of the Republic today develop such a Congress man as that? After spending a few hours in looking over these old records, one feels an irresistible drawing toward the old graveyard where sleep the clerk and his fellow townsmen. It is the "sightliest" place in the town. On the apex of the ridge, where the very backbone of the hill sticks out in bare granite vertebrae, it commands the entire horizon, and gives such a sweep of view of both land and sky as is rarely found from a hill over which runs



OLD HIDE-AND-SEEK TOWN RECORDS.

a daily used road. By common consent, this summit is called the Sunrise Hill; it might as well have been named for the Sunrise also, for from it one sees as far east as west; but the Sunrise has no worshipers, and all men worship the Sunset.

In summer, there are hundreds of strangers in Hide-and-Seek Town; and every evening, one sees on Sunset Hill crowds who have come up there to wait while the sun goes down; chatting lovers who see in the golden hazy distance only the promised land of the morrow; and silent middle-aged people to whom the same hazy distance seems the golden land they long ago left behind. The grave-yard lies a few steps down on the south-west slope of this hill. In August, it is gay with golden rods, and the old gray stones are more than half sunk in high purple grasses. The sun lies full on it all day long, save in the south-west corner, where a clump of pines and birches keep a spot of perpetual shade. Many of the stones are little more than a mosaic of green and gray lichens. Old Mortality himself could not restore their inscriptions. The oldest one which is legible is dated 1786 and runs:



THE HOUSE WITH A ROMANCE.

*"Thy word commands our flesh to dust;
Return, ye sons of men;
All nations rose from earth at first,
And turn to earth again."*

Another, quite near, bearing the same date takes the same uncomfortable license rhyme:

*"Alas ! this brittle clay,
Which built our bodies first,
And every month, and every day,
'Tis moldering back to dust!"*

Seven years later, a man, who was, as his grave-stone sets forth, "inhumanly murdered" by one of his townsmen, was laid to rest, under the following extraordinary stanza:

*"Passengers, behold! My friends, and view,
Breathless. I lie; no more with you;
Hurried from life; sent to the grave;*

*Jesus my only hope to save;
No warning had of my sad fate;
Till dire the stroke, as! too late!*

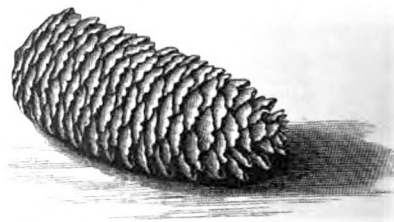


"LOOKING TOWARD SUNSET."

*"This languishing head is at rest;
It's thinking and aching are o'er,
This quiet, immovable breast
Is heaved by affliction no more.
This heart is no longer the seat
Of trouble and sorrowing pain;
It ceases to flutter and beat;
It never will flutter again."*

But one cannot afford to spend in the old grave-yard, many of his summer days in Hide-and-Seek Town. Fascinating as are these dead men's sunny silent homes with the quaint inscriptions on their stone lintels, there is a greater fascination in the sunny silent homes of the living, and the roads leading to and fro among them. North, south, east, and west, the roads run, cross, double, and turn, and double again; as many and as intricate as the fine-spun lines of a spider's web. You shall go no more than six or seven miles in any direction without climbing up, or creeping down, to some village; and the outlying farms of each meet midway, and join hands in good fellow ship.

There is a fine and unbroken net-work of industry and comfort over the whole region. Not a poverty-stricken house to be seen not one; not a single long stretch of lonely, wilderness; even across the bareness and rockiest hill-top, and through the densest woods, run the compact lines of granite walls, setting the sign and seal of owner ship and care on every acre. The house are all of the New England type; high narrow-angled, white, ugly, and comfortable. They seem almost as silent as the mound in the grave-yard, with every blind shut tight, save one, or perhaps two, at the back where the kitchen is; with the front door, locked, and guarded by a pale but faithful "Hydrangy;" they have somehow the expression of a person with lips compressed and finger laid across them, rigid with resolve to keep a secret. It is the rarest thing to see a sign of life, as you pass by on week day. Even the hens step gingerly, if fearing



Side by side with him sleeps a neighbor, dead in the same year, whose philosophical relatives took unhandsome opportunity of his head-stone to give this posthumous snub:

*"How valued once, avails thee not;
To whom related, or by whom begot;
A little dust is all remains of thee;
'Tis all thou art,-and all I soon must be."*

The sudden relenting candor of the last phrase but imperfectly atones for the gratuitous derogation of the first two lines. Surely, in those old days only the very queer survived! And, among the queerest, must have been the man who could carve upon a fellow-man's tomb such a light tripping measure as this:

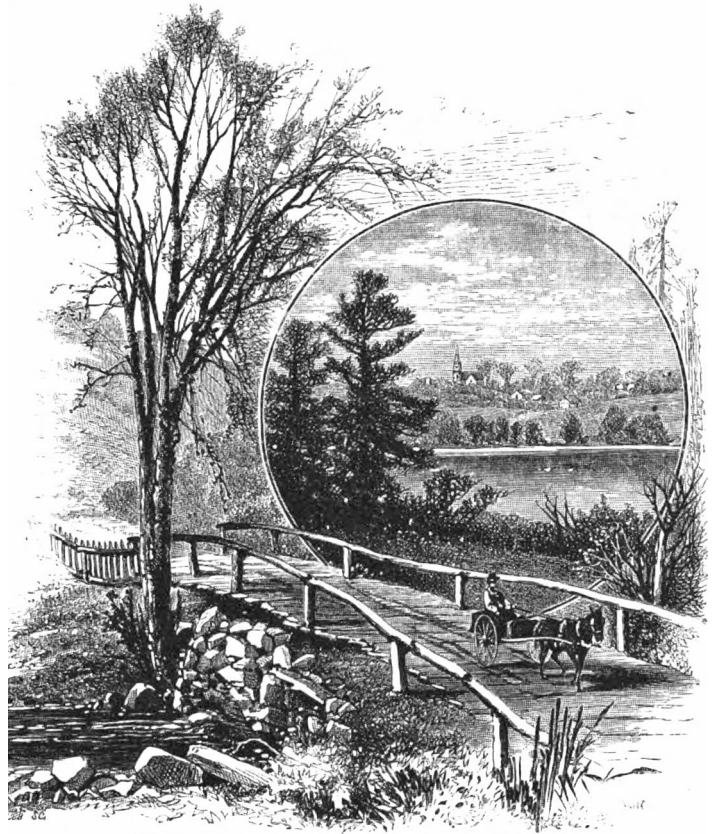


ROAD THROUGH "THE LONG WOODS."

to make a noise on the grass; the dog may bark a little at you if he be young but, if he is old, he has learned the ways of the place, and only turns his head languid at the noise of wheels. At sunset, you may possibly see the farmer sitting on their porch, with a newspaper.

But his chair tipped back against the side of the house, the newspaper is folded on his knee, and his eyes are shut. Calm and blessed folk! If they only knew how great is the gift of the quiet, they would take it more gladly, a be serene instead of dull, thankful instead of discontented. They have their tragedies, however tragedies as terrible as any that have ever been written or lived. Wherever are two human hearts, there are the elements ready for fate to work its utmost with for weal or woe. On one of these sunny hill-sides is a small house, left unpainted so many years, that it has grown gray as a granite boulder. Its doors are always shut, its windows tightly curtained to the sill. The fence around it is falling to pieces, the gates are off the hinges; old lilac bushes with bluish moldy-looking leaves crowd the yard as if trying their best to cover up something.

For years, no ray of sunlight has entered this house. You might knock long and loud, and you would get no answer; you would pass on, that nobody could be living there. No one is living there. Yet, in some one of the rooms sits or lies woman who is not dead. She is past eighty. When she was a girl she loved a man who loved her sister and not her. Perhaps then, as now, men made love idly, first to one, next to another, even among sisters. At any rate, this girl so loved the man who was to be her sister's husband, that it was known and whispered about. And when the day came for the wedding, the minister, being, perhaps, a nervous man and having this poor girl's sad fate much in his thoughts, made the terrible mistake of calling her name instead of her sister's in the ceremony. As soon as the poor creature heard her name, she uttered a loud shriek and fled. Strangely enough, no one had the presence of mind to interrupt the minister and set his blunder right, and the bride was actually married, not by her own name, but by her sister's. From that day the sister shunned every one. She insisted that the bridegroom had been married to her - but she wished never again to see a human face. She is past eighty, and has not yet been able to die. Winter before last, in the time of terrible cold, it was noticed for a day or two that no smoke came out of the chimney of this old house. On the fourth day, the neighbors broke open the door and went in. They found the woman lying insensible on the floor, nearly frozen. A few embers were smoldering on the hearth. When they roused her to consciousness, she cursed them fiercely for having disturbed her; but, as the warmth from fire and wine began to steal into her blood, she thanked them; the only words of thankfulness heard from her lips for a half century.



THE "VILLAGE ON THE SHORE OF A LAKE."

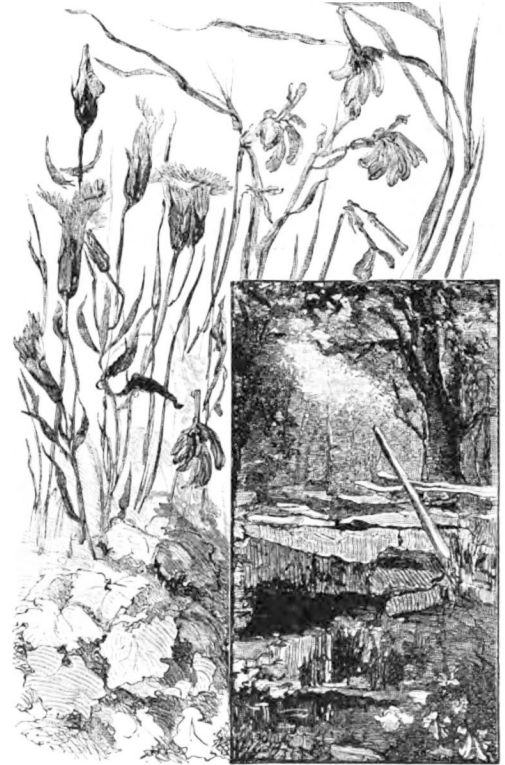


A HIDE-AND-SEEK TOWN LAKE

After all, she did not

want to die! She has relatives who go to the house often and carry her food. She knows their voices, and, after parleying with them a few minutes through the closed door, will open it, take the food, and sometimes allow them to come in. I have twice seen her standing at twilight in the dank shade of her little yard, and fumbling aimlessly at the leaves of the lilacs. She did not raise her head nor look toward the road, and I dared not speak to her. A gliding shape in a graveyard at midnight would not have seemed half so uncanny, so little of this world.

He who stays one month in Hide-and Seek Town, may take each day a new drive. and go on no day over a road he has seen before. A person of a statistical turn of Mind, who knows the region well, has taken pains to find this out. We are more indebted than we realize to this type of person. Their facts furnish cloth for our fancies to come abroad in. There are souls of such make, that, to them, any one of these roads must seem enough for a summer; for that matter, enough for any number of summers; and in trying to frame a few of their beauties in words, to speak of them by the mile would seem as queer and clumsy, as if one in describing a sunset should pull out his almanac and remind you that there were likely to be three hundred and sixty odd of them in a year. Yet, there is no doubt that to the average mind, the statement that there are thirty different drives in a town, would be more impressive than it would be if one could produce on his page, as on a canvas, a perfect picture of the beauty of one, or even many of its landscapes; to choose which one of the thirty roads one would best try to describe, to win a stranger' between children. There is such an excelling quality in each. After all, choice here, as elsewhere, is a question of magnetism. Places have their affinities to men as much as men to each other; and fields and lanes have their moods also. I have brought one friend to meet another friend and neither of them would speak; I have taken a friend to a hill-side, and I myself have perceived the hillside grew dumb and its face clouded.



A HIDE-AND-SEEK TOWN BRIDGE.

If I may venture, without ever after feeling like a traitor to the rest ' to give chief name to one or two of the Hide-and-Seek roads, I would speak of two-one is a highway, the other is a lane. The highway leads in a north-westerly direction to a village on the shore of a lake. It is seven miles long. Three of those miles are through pine woods – “the long woods” they are called with curt literalness by the people who tell you your way. Not so literal either, if you take the word at its best, for these miles of hushed pines are as solemn as eternity. The road is wide and smooth. Three carriages, perhaps four, might go abreast in it through the pine stretches. There is no fence on either side, and the brown carpet of fallen pine needles fringes out to the very ruts of the wheels.

Who should reckon our debt to the pine? It takes such care of us, it must love us, wicked as we are. It builds roofs; no others keep out the sun so well. It spreads a finer than Persian mat under our feet, provides for us endless music and a balsam of healing in the air; then, when it finds us in barren places where bread is hard to get. It loads itself down with cones full of sweet and wholesome food, and at last, in its death, it makes our very hearthstones ring with its resonant song of cheer and mirth.

Before entering these woods, you have driven past farms and farmhouses, and meadow lands well tilled: old unpruned apple orchards, where the climax of ungainliness comes to have a sort of pathetic grace; fields of oats and barley and Indian corn and granite boulders, and not an inch of road-side all the way which is now thick grown with white clover. Rabbit's foot, Mayweed, shepherd's purse, ferns, blackberry,

raspberry, elderberry, and here and there laurel and in September blue gentians. There is one bit of meadow, I recollect on this road. It is set in walls of opines; four little streams zigzag through it. You cross all four on narrow bridges in a space of two or three rods; the strips of meadow and strips of streams seem braided together into a strand of green and blue, across which is flung your road of gray, bordered with dark alders. This is the way it must look to a bird flying over.



GLIMPSES FROM THE LANE.

The lane is one of many ways to a village on a hill lying west of town. The hill is so high that, as you look westward, its spires and house-tops stand out against the sky, with not even a tree in the background. In this lane nature has run riot. It is to all the rest of the Hide-and-Seek roads what California is to New England. All the trees and plants are millionaires – twenty, thirty percent interest in every square foot. One ignorant of botany has no right to open his mouth about it, and only a master of color should go into it to paint. It is an outburst, a tangle, an overflow of greens, of whites, of purples, of yellows; for

rods at a time, there are solid knitted and knotted banks of vines on either hand – woodbine, groundnut vine, wild or “false” buckwheat, clivis, green-brier, and wild grape. The woodbine wreaths the stone walls; groundnut vine springs from weed to weed, bush to bush, tree to tree, fantastically looping them all together, and then at last, it leaps to the top of a golden rod or sumac bough, waving a fine spiral taper tendril, a foot long, loose in the air. The false buckwheat, being the lightest, gets a-top of the rest and scrambles along fastest, making in July, a dainty running arabesque of fine white flowers above everything else. The clivis and green-brier fill in wherever they can get a corner. They are not so pushing. Then comes the wild grape, lawless master of every situation. There is a spot on this lane, where it has smothered and well-nigh killed one young oak, and one young maple and a sumac thicket. They have their heads out still, and very beautiful they look – the shining jagged-edged oak leaves, and the pointed maples, and the slender sumacs waving above and in the matted canopies of the grape; but they will never be trees. The grape vine is strongest. This lane leads over high hill-crests, from which you have ever-changing views – now wide sweeps to the south horizon, now dainty and wood-framed bits of near valleys or lakes, now outcropping granite ledges and spots strewn thick with granite boulders, as grand and stony as Stonehenge itself. Now the lane dips down into hollows in woods so thick, that for rods the branches more than meet over your head; then it turns a corner and suddenly fades away in the queer front-door yard of a farm-house flanked by orchards and corn fields; then it dips again into a deeper hollow and denser wood, with undergrowth’s, which brush your wheels like hands thrust out to hold you back; then it comes out on a meadow stretch, where the lines of alders and milk-weeds, and eupatorium’s and asters, border it so close, that you may pick on any September day your hands full of flowers, if you like, by merely leaning out of your carriage; not only flowers, but ferns, high three-branched brakes and graceful ostrich plume ferns you can reach from your seat. These are but glimpses I have given of any chance half mile on this lane. There are myriads of beautiful lesser things all along it whose names I do not know, but whose faces are as familiar as if I had been born in the lane and had never

gone away. There are also numberless pictures which come crowding – of spots and nooks and pictures on other roads and lanes in the rarest of regions. No one who knows and loves summer, can summer in Hide- and-Seek Town without bearing away such pictures; if he neither knows nor loves summer - if he have only a retina, and not a soul, he must, perforce, recollect some of them. A certain bridge, for instance, three thick planks wide, under which goes a brook so deep, so dark, it shines not like water, but like a burnished shield. It comes out from a wood, and in the black shadow of the trees along the edge of the brook stand, in August, scarlet cardinal flowers, ranks on ranks, two feet high, reflected in the burnished shield as in a glass; or a meadow, there is which is walled on three sides by high woods, and has a procession of tall bulrushes forever sauntering through it with lazy spears and round-handled halberds, points down, and hundreds of yellow sunflowers looking up and down in the grass; or a wood there is which has all of a sudden, in its center, a great cleared space, where ferns have settled themselves as in a tropic, and grown into solid thickets and jungles in the darkness; or another, which has along the road-side for many rods an unbroken line of light-green feathery ferns; so close set it seems, that not one more could have grown up without breaking down a neighbor; under these a velvety line of pine-tree moss, and them moss dotted thick with "wintergreen " in flower and in fruit; or a lake with three sides of soft woods or fields, and the fourth side an unbroken forest slope two thousand feet up the north wall of the mountain. These are a few which come first to my thought; others crowd on, but I force memory and fancy together back into the strait-jacket of the statistical person, and content myself with repeating that there are thirty different drives in Hide-and-Seek Town!



Next winter, however, memory and fancy will have their way; and as we sit cowering over fires and the snow piles up outside our window-sills, we shall gaze dreamily into the glowing coals, and, living the summer over again, shall recall it in a minuteness of joy, for which summer days were too short, and summer light too strong. Then, when joy becomes reverie, and reverie takes shape, a truer record can be written, and its first page shall be called A ROAD-SIDE.

I.

WHITE CLOVER.

In myriad snowy chalices of sweet
 Thou spread'st by dusty ways a banquet fine,
 So fine that vulgar crowds of it no sign
 Observe; nay, trample it beneath their feet.
 O, dainty and unsullied one! no meet
 Interpretation I of thee divine,
 Although all summer long I quaff thy wine,
 And never pass thee, but to reverent greet,
 And pause in wonder at the miracle
 Of thee, so fair, and yet so meekly low.
 Mayhap thou art a saintly Princess vowed,
 In token of some grief which thee befell,
 This pilgrimage of ministry to go,
 And never speak thy lineage aloud!

II.

WILD GRAPE.

Thou gypsy camper, how earnest thou here,

With thy vagabond habits full in sight,
In this rigid New England's noonday light?
I laugh half afraid at thy riotous cheer,
In these silent roads so stony and drear;
Thy breathless tendrils flushed scarlet and bright,
Thy leaves blowing back disheveled and white,
Thyself in mad wrestle with everything near;
No pine-tree so high, no oak-tree so strong,
That it can resist thy drunken embrace;
Together like bacchanals reeling along,
Staying each other, ye go at a pace,
And the road-side laughs and reaps all your wealth;
Thou prince of highwaymen! I drink thy health!

III.
MILKWEED.

O, patient creature with a peasant face,
Burnt by the summer sun, begrimed with stains,
And standing humbly in the dusty lanes!
There seems a mystery in thy work and place,
Which crowns thee with significance and grace;
Whose is the milk that fills thy faithful veins?
What royal nursling comes at night and drains
Unscorned the food of the plebeian race ?
By day I mark no living thing which rests
On thee, save butterflies of gold and brown,
Who turn from flowers that are more fair, more sweet,
And, crowding eagerly, sink fluttering down,
And hang, like jewels flashing in the beat,
Upon thy splendid rounded purple breasts.



The above was written by Helen Hunt Jackson 10/15/1860 to 8/12/1885. She was an American poet and writer who became an activist on behalf of improved treatment of Native Americans by the United States government. She described the adverse effects of government actions in her history *A Century of Dishonor*. To learn more: [Click here ...](#)

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