



Likings and Longings.

We had been married not quite two years, Jerome and I, and I think we had contrived to be as happy as married couples generally are.

Jerome wasn't rich, but he had a good salary in his uncle's shipping house, and I had learned the lesson of economy, and continued to get along nicely with only one girl.

To be sure, Aunt Penelope helped after the baby was born, but after all, Penelope, though she was a good soul, and meant well, was more in the way than otherwise.

We had gone to housekeeping in apartments.

It was a very nice place, though aunt declared from the first that it wasn't genteel.

"It is more genteel than running in debt for a whole house that you can't afford," said Jerome; and so I didn't care, although some of my school mates who had married rising young lawyers and merchants, left off visiting me.

And you may be sure I didn't miss them much after baby came, like a blue-eyed sunbeam, to fill my heart and hands with those delicious cares that are so sweet to a mother's soul.

"Amy," said aunt, one day, "don't you think baby is looking pale?"

I dropped my needlework, flew to the cradle, and took a good survey of my dimpled treasure as he lay there asleep, with one tiny fist tightly clenching his corals and bells.

"Pale? No, Aunt Pen."

"I do," said aunt, shaking her head, "and Dr. Roper says this is likely to prove a very sickly season for babies."

I looked at her aghast.

"In the city, I mean," corrected aunt. "Now I've thought of a plan."

I winced a little at this.

Aunt was always thinking of plans,—and her plans invariably turned out failures.

"My friend Mrs. Outerbridge, owns the sweetest place up the river," she went on, blessedly unconscious of my perturbation. "My friend, Mrs. Outerbridge, is going abroad, and has requested me most politely to reside at Outerbridge Park during her absence and look after things a little. And when I mentioned that I was devoted to my niece and her baby, she was kind enough to say that it would make no difference if you came there too. For four months, from the first of May to the first of October, and what a splendid thing it would be for the baby to have four months in the country!"

My eye glittered at the prospect.

The first tooth had already begun to gleam like a pearl in his rosy gum, and I dreaded the hot sultry air of summer for little Bertie's sake.

"Yes," said I, doubtingly. "But Jerome!"

"Its only twenty-five minutes by train," said aunt. "He can come out

every evening."

The more aunt and I discussed the project, the more feasible and delightful it appeared to us.

We could revel it in country cream, velvet mown lawns, and fresh strawberries.

Baby's perambulator could roll over graveled walks and paved terraces.

Jerome could hear the nightingales sing of a summer twilight, and watch the moon, reflected in the waters, and aunt and I could be for the once fine ladies, at the head of a large establishment, for all the Outerbridge servants were to remain until the return of the mistress.

Veritably it seemed a delightful idea.

When Jerome came home, I could hardly wait to give him his first cup of tea before I unfolded the story of Outerbridge Park, aunt sitting graciously by, feeling like the fairy godmother who had done it all with one whisk of her enchanted wand.

"Well!" quoth I restlessly, as soon as I had finished the recital.

"Well," said Jerome, who by this time had the baby on his lap, and was tickling his plump ribs.

"Of course we'll go."

"Of course we won't," said this most impracticable husband of mine.

"Jerome!"

"Amy!"

"But why not?"

"In the first place, because I've no idea of your turning housekeeper for an old woman who wants to enjoy herself abroad, and foist off her household cares on somebody else. In the second place, I like to make my own arrangements instead of having them made for me."

At this aunt bridled a little and tossed her head.

I looked with eyes full of tears at my husband.

"Jerome," cried I, "now you are unreasonable. It would be such a fine thing for baby."

"I don't see but what baby is doing well enough," retorted Jerome. "I do not approve of your plans, Amy. Let aunt accept the position if she pleases. I am able to furnish a home for my own wife."

"A home!"

"Yes," cried he indignantly.

"In a first floor, without so much backyard as one could bleach a table-cloth in."

"You have contrived to exist in it for two years," said Jerome, with what seemed to me the most heartless indifference.

I began to cry.

Aunt Penelope rose up and with a great rustling of silk and lilac satin cap-ribbons.

"I shall certainly accept my friend Mrs. Outerbridge's kind offer," said she with dignity. "Of course, Amy, you will do as you please. And I am going upstairs now to pack. Mrs. Outerbridge is anxious for me to come as soon as possible. And, of course, Amy, you will remember that I shall always be glad to

receive you and your family as my guests at Outerbridge Park."

I looked imploringly at Jerome.

"May we go, dear? I am so heart-hungry for apple-blossoms, and green grass and buttercups," pleaded I.

"Of course, if you wish it."

"And you will come, too?"

But Jerome shook his head.

"My evenings, for the present, must be spent in town," said he. "I have some extra work to do which won't bear postponing. If you go, Amy, you must go alone."

Aunt was loud in her denunciations of husbands in general, and Jerome in particular, when I came up to her room with heavy eyes and pale cheeks.

"I could have told you how it would be before you were ever married to him," said aunt shaking her head; "but—"

"You shall not talk so, aunt!" flashed I. "I dare say Jerome is right, only—"

And then I vindicated my cause right royally by bursting into a new flood of tears.

Aunt went away next day, and lonesome enough it seemed.

It was a showery April morning, with a blue sky, dappled with clouds, and faint sweet scents of growing things in the air.

Oh, how sick I was of the pavements and brick walls, and all the items which go to make up a city.

Baby was more fretful and restless than usual, and I easily persuaded myself he was pining.

"Oh, Jerome!" cried out I passionately, when at last my husband came home with a tired look on his face and a roll of papers under his arm, "have we always to live so?"

"Live how, my darling?"

"Cooped up like rats in a trap, away from all the beautiful sights and sounds of the world,—shut up in mere lodging houses. Can't we live in a house that has at least a piece of ground full of green grass, and a little flower border, and a grape-vine or two in its rear?"

"I hope we can afford to some time, my dear," said Jerome, gravely.

And then he drew out his inkstand, opened his roll of figures, and went to work.

The April days beamed on, all bright skies, soft winds and kaleidoscopic glimpses of sun-showers, and I became almost heart-sick for the country.

If Jerome cared for me as he used to care," I told myself, with feverish impatience, "he would at least make some effort to find a home where I could be happier than in this human hive, where a few pot-plants in the window are all I have to remind me of the green world outside."

Stung by these reflections, and still further incited by a letter from aunt, full of descriptions of lambs, daisies and little streamlets edged with peppermint, I one day packed my valise.

"Hallo!" said Jerome, when he came

home, "where are you going?"

"To aunt, for a week's visit. I need it, and so does Bertie."

"And leave me?"

I looked keenly at Jerome.

He too was paler and thinner than was his usual wont.

Nights of figuring and days of counting-house toil were beginning to tell upon him.

"No, no," I cried, throwing my arms around him. "I won't leave you, dearest, not if I never see the country again!"

"That's my own brave little girl," said Jerome, stroking back my hair with a loving touch. "Wait a week, dear, and I'll take you myself for a little trip."

So I waited.

The day-week came to my infinite delight.

I dressed baby in a long white frock, with blue ribbon sash and shoulder-knots, and put on my own dainty little spring hat, trimmed with primroses, and away we rolled in a comfortable open barouche, Jerome, Bertie and I.

Until—we came to the prettiest bird's nest of a dove-colored cottage in the world, just a little distance out of the city, where vines garlanded the porch, and a little lawn extended down to a crystal clear brook.

Tulips and daffodils made the borders gay, and a magnolia bush by the gate was just bursting into creamy clusters of bloom.

"I should like a home like this," said I, gazing abstractedly out at its blooming spring beauty.

"Should you?" said Jerome, laughing, as he drew up the horses in front of the gate. "I am glad to hear that, because it is your home."

"My home?"

I stared at him as if he was half crazy.

"Yes, little, patient, homeless wife.—I have not forgotten your likings and longings all this time. Your home."

"But—is it paid for?"

"Not entirely, but it will be soon.—Uncle Joseph has helped me, and that night-work was well paid. A quarter of an acre, Amy, strawberry patch, currant bushes, and a nice place to keep fowls.—So you like it, eh?"

My face answered him.

We moved out the following week, and kept our May Day among the roses and buds.

And little Bertie grows like a weed in the sweet scents and greening grass: and aunt has all sorts of trouble with the Outerbridge servants. And I am the happiest little wife in all the world.

There are miles enough of railroad in the United States to go three times around the world, and yet there are not enough to go once around among us, which shows what a big country this is.

Thiers complained that the sunshine hurt his eyes and a friend proposed blue spectacles. "Change the color of my spectacles!" said the veteran. "Oh, no! France would be agitated for a month."