

A detailed illustration of a woodpecker perched on a tree trunk, rendered in a sepia or brownish-orange tone. The woodpecker is facing left, with its beak pointed towards the top of the frame. The tree trunk shows vertical bark texture. The background is a light, warm gradient.

Outdoor Secrets

SAMPLE

Margaret P. Boyle

Delightful nature stories for the young and young at heart!

Learn the secrets that may be hiding in your own backyard:

- Where does the apple blossom go?
- Of what use is an earthworm?
- How can a golden-rod save a person's life?
- What message might a robin bring?
- Why should a cherry-tree grow in every direction?
- What good does the March wind do?

First published in 1903 and here reproduced with the original whimsical artwork, Outdoor Secrets includes simple life lessons woven into the living stories—gentle lessons about respecting others, working hard, and being patient.

Come discover the secrets that are awaiting you and your child in the great outdoors!

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Charlotte Mason
.com

Outdoor Secrets

by
Margaret P. Boyle

Illustrated by
Augusta T. Tappan

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*And Nature, the old nurse, took
The child upon her knee,
Saying "Here is a story book
Thy Father has written thee."
—H. W. Longfellow*



OUTDOOR SECRETS

by

Margaret P. Boyle.

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OUTDOOR SECRETS



Once upon a time, not so very long ago, there stood in a large orchard a beautiful Apple-Tree. All through the long winter it had held out bare branches. The March sun whispered to it that spring had come. But the cold March winds were not a bit polite, and would say: "No, it hasn't."

At last, however, Apple-Tree began to feel so warm and comfortable that she thought the March sun was right, and began to think of getting a spring gown. The warm April rains helped her, and her buds opened and grew, first into tiny leaves and then into larger ones, until Apple-Tree was wearing a beautiful apple-green dress. All through April she wore it and was very happy. Then, as the trees about her put on bright colors, and she saw Peach-Tree in pink and Cherry-Tree and Pear-Tree in white, something seemed to tell her to try what she could do.

I am sure she could never have succeeded without help,

How the Apple Blossom Came Back

but with the showers, the gentle winds, and the warm sun as dressmakers, Apple-Tree's green dress was soon covered with lovely pink and white flowers. And the air all around seemed as sweet as though she carried many handkerchiefs with different perfumes on each. Then Apple-Tree felt very glad and proud and was much pleased when every one who passed said: "Oh, see, how lovely!"

But only a week or two later a damp wind and cold rain came and beat down on her spring suit until it was quite spoiled. Then Apple-Tree was so sorry that she let her teardrops fall with the rain. Kind Mother Nature did not scold her at all, but only said: "Don't cry about the blossoms, dear; sometime you will see them again."

So all summer long Apple-Tree looked and waited, for she knew that Mother Nature always told the truth. Her arms grew full of apples, and sometimes they seemed too heavy to hold any longer. Whenever she was very tired, there would come the whisper: "Wait a little longer. Your time is coming—the time when you will find the blossoms."

And at last, one sunny September day, one yellow apple after another slipped from her hold and lay on the grass beneath. While Apple-Tree was wondering what would happen, a lady and her little boy wandered through the orchard and stopped to pick and eat some apples.

"Robert," said the mother, "have you ever seen the blossom in an apple?"

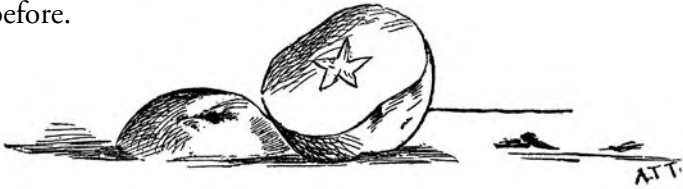
"Oh, no, mother; please show it to me!"

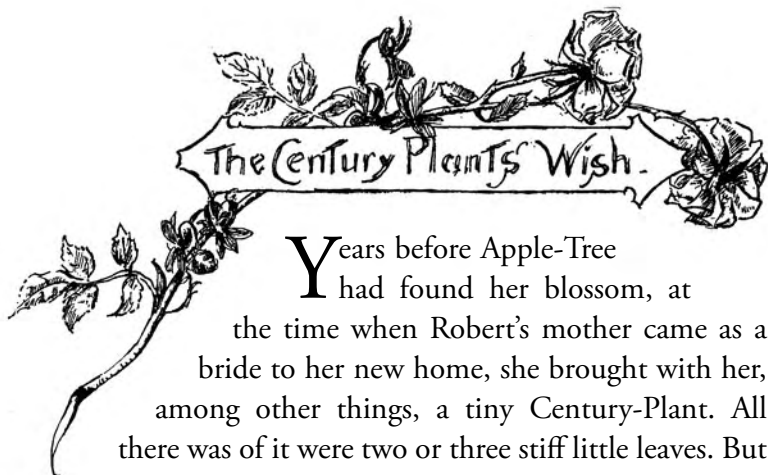
Apple-Tree bent her tall head so that she might hear and see. Could it be that now she was to find the flowers she had lost in the spring?

The lady carefully cut an apple all around, half-way

How the Apple Blossom Came Back

between the blossom end and the stem. And as she laid the halves before her little boy, she pointed to the blossom which showed plainly in both pieces of the apple. And Apple-Tree held the rest of her fruit tightly in her arms, sure that in each one was a blossom she had loved months before.





Years before Apple-Tree had found her blossom, at the time when Robert's mother came as a bride to her new home, she brought with her, among other things, a tiny Century-Plant. All there was of it were two or three stiff little leaves. But it was placed in a beautiful conservatory with the stately palms, the graceful ferns, and all the rare and lovely plants that lived there.

As the years passed on, the leaves grew a little longer and a little broader, and one or two more were added, but that was all. So, even in that beautiful home, life for the Century-Plant was very dull. The years were just the same: all winter long she was shut up in the hot-house, and when the days and nights had grown warmer, showing that summer had really come, she was placed in some conspicuous place on the lawn. The only real change she ever knew was an occasional transplanting into a larger box.

So the Century-Plant began to murmur, and to wish, oh, so many things! Why could she never be set in the ground like some of her winter companions, the brilliant Jacqueminot, or American Beauty Roses, the Lilies, the Carnation Pinks, or even the sweet little Violet? She knew that when she was out of doors she had the same warm

The Century-Plant's Wish

sunshine, and the same refreshing rain as these friends of hers had, but that did not satisfy her. She wanted to live in the earth and send her roots out into it, as plants were intended to do.

But she could have borne this trouble if only she might have had some flowers to show, or could once have been admired for her loveliness. The Rose family, all the Pinks, the Heliotrope—in fact, many of the plants about her—would often get sweet new gowns. And visitors to the conservatory would admire them, or sniff their fragrance, saying: “Oh, how lovely!” or, “Isn’t it perfectly beautiful?”

Even the Palms and the Ferns, though they never showed a blossom, were praised for their lovely greens.

But when visitors reached her corner they would say only: “Oh, this is a Century-Plant. Curious thing, isn’t it? Has it ever bloomed?”

And always would come the same answer: “No, not yet.”

It was hard always to be called “curious,” like some strange wild animal.

The fair young bride who had brought the tiny plant to her home grew gray and wrinkled. One day she failed to visit the flowers; the gardener said she was ill, and the Century-Plant saw her no more. Robert and the other children who had played about the Century-Plant on the lawn grew into men and women, and their little ones toddled about the box that held the old plant, and still there were no flowers.

Even though Century-Plant had grown very tall by this time, she still had to keep on wishing that she had something to wear besides the same old green and white.

The Century-Plant's Wish

For many years Mother Nature had promised her something else, and it had never come yet. So sometimes she almost gave up hope.

But there came a day, when, in answer to her wistful sigh, she was told: "Just be patient; you haven't much longer to wait."

And Century-Plant really began to think so herself. A day or two later a strange thing happened.

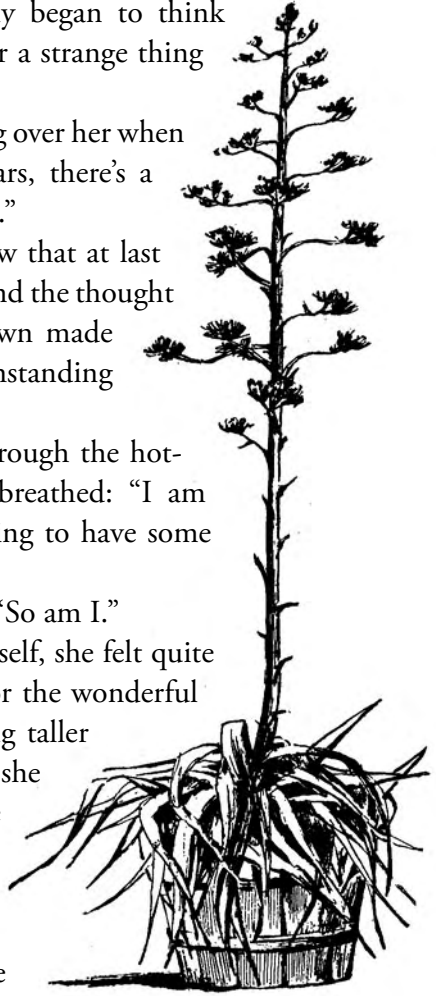
The gardener was bending over her when he exclaimed: "Bless my stars, there's a bud! I must go tell the ladies."

Then Century-Plant knew that at last her wish was to be realized, and the thought of having a flower of her own made her glad and happy, notwithstanding her old age.

Gentle whispers went through the hot-house. The Violet sweetly breathed: "I am so glad Century-Plant is going to have some blossoms."

And the Rose answered: "So am I."

As for Century-Plant herself, she felt quite above her neighbors now, for the wonderful new flower stalk kept getting taller and taller, until from its top she could look down even on the stately palms. And still she grew, until her tall head touched the roof. Now, after all these years, must she



The Century-Plant's Wish

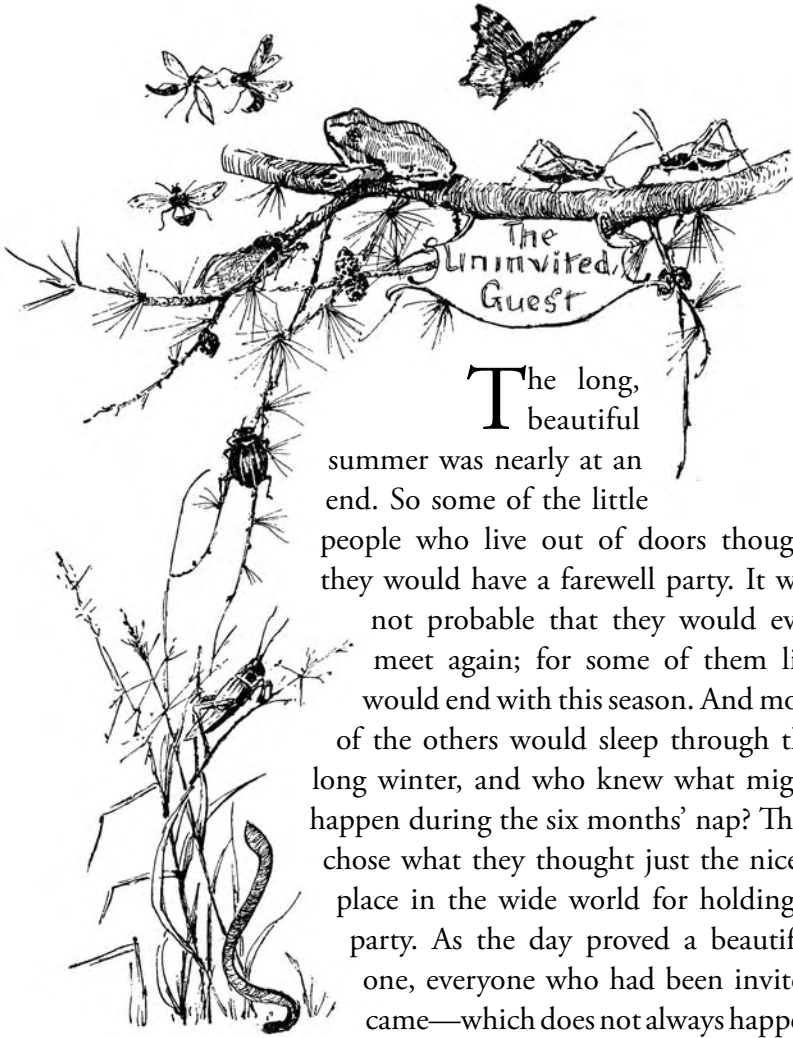
stop for lack of room? Century-Plant trembled through all her leaves at the thought; but the thoughtful gardener had provided for this, too, and the roof was lifted higher and higher until the stalk was thirty or forty feet in the air. Then Century-Plant was so full of pride that she hardly noticed the perfume Violet was sending up to her.

At last the curious flowers up at the top of the stalk opened and looked so strange that it seemed as though Century-Plant were wearing an imported bonnet. People came from far and near to gaze at her.

And though they used to exclaim, it was much in the way they always had, and the remarks were generally: "How queer! Have you ever seen one before?"

And it seemed as though they still loved the sweet modest flowers best. Century-Plant never noticed that, but was very happy so long as her new bonnet kept fresh and bright. But one day the flowers fell one by one, and the stalk began to grow so limp that at last that, too, dropped. Then Century-Plant, herself, began to feel very ill. Nothing she ate or drank seemed to agree with her. She had gained her wish, but was more unhappy than ever. Probably she never had known that when a Century-Plant has bloomed it must die. Day after day she faded away until one morning the gardener pulled the old plant up by the roots and threw it out on a brush heap.

Century-Plant's corner is empty now, and a banana palm takes her place on the lawn, but whenever some impatient young thing wishes that Mother Nature would hurry her plans a little, some wise old resident of the conservatory is sure to say: "Remember the sad end of poor Century-Plant."



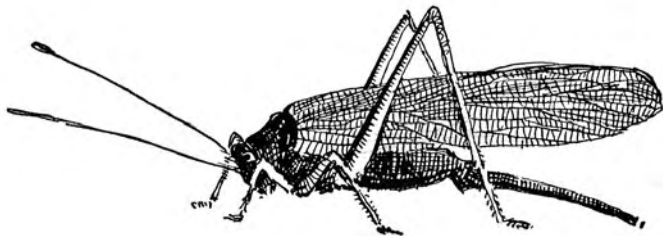
The long, beautiful summer was nearly at an end. So some of the little people who live out of doors thought they would have a farewell party. It was not probable that they would ever meet again; for some of them life would end with this season. And most of the others would sleep through the long winter, and who knew what might happen during the six months' nap? They chose what they thought just the nicest place in the wide world for holding a party. As the day proved a beautiful one, everyone who had been invited came—which does not always happen when real folks have parties.

Among the guests were the Butterfly, in her satin gown of black and orange; the Cicada, prepared to help with the music; the Katydid, who really are not very pleasant visitors, because they contradict so much; the Beetles, fat,

The Uninvited Guest

lazy and black, like most beetles; the Grasshoppers, who also are musicians, and had their wings in fine order; the Bees, who had gathered enough honey to last all winter; the Tree-Frog, and ever so many others.

They all had a merry time out on the meadow, and yet they were a little sad, too, for they knew that Jack Frost was coming soon, and that he would put an end to all their good times.



Just as they were the very jolliest, a strange thing happened. That was the arrival of a long, brown, wriggling Earth-Worm. Fortunately for the Earth-Worm, he has no eyes. So he could not see how cross all the little meadow people looked because he had come. I wonder if we should sometimes look cross just as they did, if no one had eyes to see us.

They did not invite him to stay, nor offer him any refreshments. Though, really, I think he would not have taken anything if it had been offered, for earth-worms do not care much for honey and the other things that this company were eating.

When they found that he did not notice their cross looks, they began to whisper to one another.

“Oh, dear!” said the Butterfly, “see that horrid, crawling Earth-Worm. I do dislike anything that crawls!”

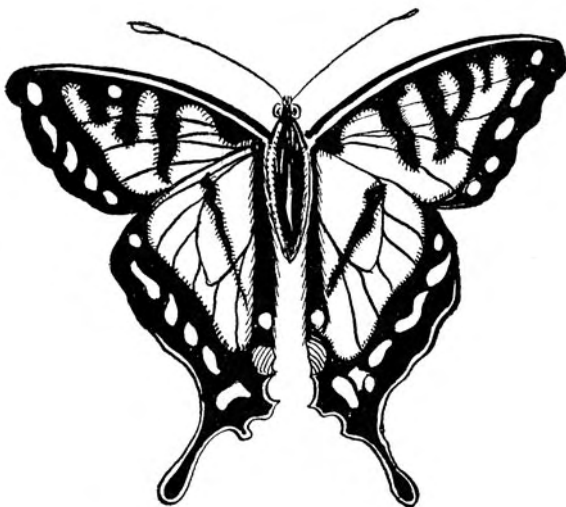
“Yes,” chirped the Cicada. “And only fancy, he lives in

The Uninvited Guest

the ground. How dreary that must be!”

“For my part I don’t see how anyone can stand it,” said the Beetle.

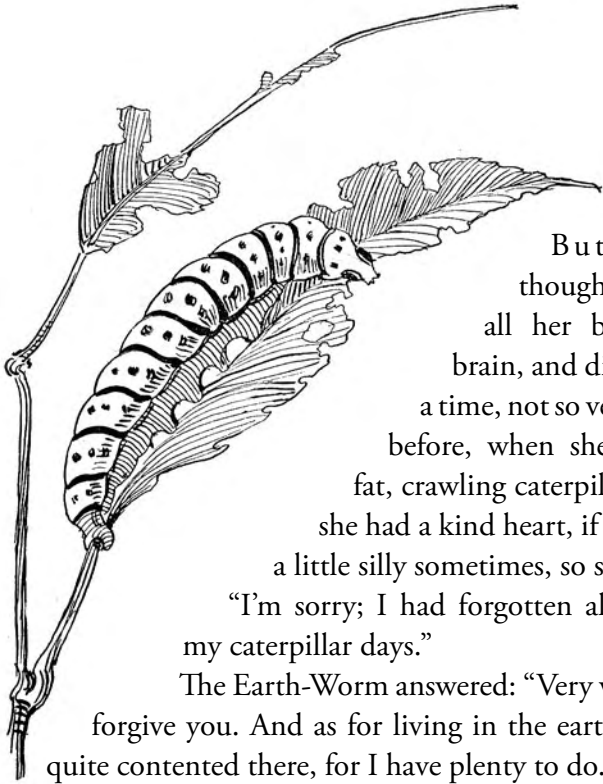
“Katy did,” broke in a shrill voice.



“Katy didn’t,” said another.

“Yes, and they actually live after they are cut in halves,” said the Tree-Frog. “I once knew an Earth-worm that met with such an accident, and then there were two of him, for the head part grew a tail, and the tail piece grew a head.”

They did not mean the Earth-Worm to hear their unkind remarks. But he did hear, and they were very much surprised when he began to speak: “I am sorry I came to your party if you didn’t want me, but I thought I’d like to come out once more before the cold weather gets here. And, really, you shouldn’t feel so bad to see me crawling, for it is not so long ago that some of you used to crawl. Don’t you remember, Miss Butterfly?”



The Butterfly thought with all her butterfly brain, and did recall a time, not so very long before, when she was a fat, crawling caterpillar. But she had a kind heart, if she was a little silly sometimes, so she said, "I'm sorry; I had forgotten all about my caterpillar days."

The Earth-Worm answered: "Very well, I'll forgive you. And as for living in the earth, I am quite contented there, for I have plenty to do. I really am not lonely, either, for I have a good many neighbors. One of you lived near me—or, rather, near my family—for seventeen years!"

At this, everybody looked at the Cicada, for there was an old story that everyone knew, about how it took the Cicada seventeen years to appear.

As for him, he was so ashamed that he wanted to change the subject at once, so he said: "Well, friend Earth-Worm, you said you were very busy. What do you do all the time?"

"Oh, I have to get the soil in good order—that is, make

The Uninvited Guest

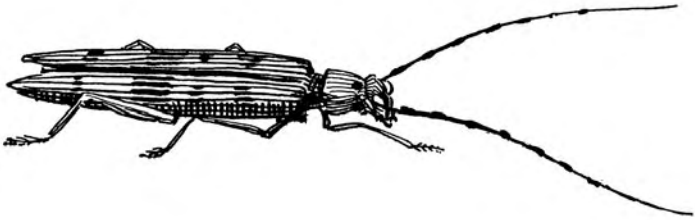
it fine and soft so the tiny rootlets of all the green growing things can spread through it and thus give you something to eat. Were it not for us, many of you might go hungry. For if they could not send forth their roots, the plants could not grow. There would be no tender green leaves for Mr. Beetle, and certainly no flowers, and then where would Busy Bee go for his honey?"

"How do you know all that?" asked a Grasshopper. "I thought—"

"Katy did," interrupted some one.

"Katy didn't," said his sister.

At that they all laughed.



Then the Earth-Worm went on: "We Earth-Worms keep taking soil into our stomachs. We digest all of it that we can. In our stomachs is some kind of acid that acts on the rest of the soil and makes it fine and soft. After a while, we let this earth out of our stomachs and take in a fresh supply, until the soil all around us is so light and fine that the plants can grow fast and send out the tender green leaves many of you like to eat. But I must go now," and the Earth-Worm began to wriggle away.

He couldn't go far, however, for one after the other had something nice to say to him. They told him he seemed to do more good in the world than any of them. They thanked him for all his hard work, too, which had really been so

The Uninvited Guest

much help to them, though they had not known it. And all their kind speeches made the Earth-Worm feel very happy.



This was not their farewell party, after all. Before they separated they decided to hold one the next day. And you may be quite sure that they did not forget Earth-Worm then. Indeed, he was the first one to have an invitation, even before Katy-Did.