

HOLIDAY MEADOW

***Books by
Edith M. Patch***

NATURE STUDY

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HOLIDAY MEADOW

by

Edith M. Patch

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Sandy looked back with a question and invitation in his eyes.

CHAPTER I

HOLIDAY MEADOW

THERE is an open grassy field so crowded with flowers that the summer winds blowing over it are loaded with fragrance. A bobolink, gay in black and white and yellow, takes happy flights. He sings as he goes and his joyful music is like clear and sudden laughter. Then a meadowlark calls slowly a few sweet piping notes.

You do not need a map to tell you how to reach this place. It is along a pleasant country road that leads north or south or east or west. You can tell when you find it by the scent of the blossoms and by the songs of the birds and by the happy feeling you have when you look at it. Then you say, "Why, this must be Holiday Meadow!"—and sure enough it is!

Young dog, Sandy, knows one way to the meadow. He trots across a little brook on a rough bridge of old logs and planks. He looks back with a question and an invitation in his eyes. "Coming?" he seems to ask.

If you go with Sandy, he will be glad of your company for a while. Soon, however, he is likely to forget everything else in his hurry to find the nest of a

HOLIDAY MEADOW

mouse under a hummock of dry grass. Sandy would do well to be careful how he digs into that nest; for it may be that the mouse has moved out and that bumblebees have set up housekeeping there instead.

A crow flies scouting over the field. When he sees you he calls “Caw” several times in a way that seems to mean “Who comes here?”

Two little animals hear him and stand up on their hind legs while they look and listen and sniff. One is Wejack, the ground-hog, who presently slips into the doorway of his tunnel. The other is a rabbit with



The children named the cow “Daisy.”

HOLIDAY MEADOW

a quivery nose who decides to hide under the thorny tangle of blackberry branches by the pasture wall.

But Daisy, the young cow, does not heed the crow. She comes straight across the meadow to meet you. She likes boys and girls. When she was a little calf the children at Holiday Farm played with her and fed her. They named her “Daisy” for the white flowers with yellow centers that grow so thick in the field. Daisy, herself, does not care for these pretty blossoms. She much prefers the taste of grass.

Indeed Daisy takes little interest in many of the meadow affairs. She does not wonder how the frothy masses of bubbles come to be on the grass stems or what may be inside of them. She does not guess what the Black Swallowtail butterfly puts on the under side of a caraway leaf. She never watches a slender green grasshopper to see how he makes music with the edges of his wings. She does not find out what happens when . . .

* * * * *

The field across which Daisy comes to meet you is full of puzzles. The more answers you can find by hunting and watching the better you will enjoy your holiday in a meadow.

CHAPTER II

“SPRING IS HERE”

MAGNA, the meadowlark, was sitting on the broken top of an old tree trunk which stood at the edge of Holiday Meadow. The upper parts of his feather coat were mostly dark. His throat and breast were bright yellow. Between the yellow of his throat and the yellow of his breast he wore a black bib shaped somewhat like a new moon.

“Spring is here!” Magna’s voice was sweet and a bit sad-sounding. The singer, himself, was not sorry about anything, though. He was happy. He was glad to be home again at Holiday Meadow. Perhaps he had spent his winter in Maryland or perhaps not so far south. He did not mind rather cold weather.

It was pleasant for Magna that he did not feel chilly while he sat on top of the old tree trunk that first day of April. For it was a nipping sort of morning. The air was cold. When Magna opened his mouth and sang, his breath came out in white frosty puffs. It showed plainly because the sky beyond was clear deep blue.

If you had been there at six o’clock that morning you could have seen the bird’s song while you were hearing it. That is it would have seemed like seeing a

“SPRING IS HERE”



“Spring is here,” sang Magna, the meadowlark.

song,—with the notes floating up from the bird’s mouth like frosted music.

“Spring is here!” Magna sang his song again and again. Way up the road a bird like him was sitting on the tip of a telegraph pole. He was singing rather slowly. He sounded as if he was saying, “Swe-e-et spri-i-ng is he-ere!”

Over by the pasture a third bird was perched on top of a fence post. He was calling in a quick voice, “Spring’s here!”

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Young Dick, in his room at Holiday Farm, rubbed his eyes and then sat up in bed to listen. A few minutes later he was rapping on his cousin's door.

“Wake up, you lazy Anne,” he called, “and look and listen out of the hall window.”

Anne pulled on her warm bath robe and joined her cousin at the open window. First she looked, and what she saw was a fresh sprinkling of snow that had fallen on Holiday Meadow the evening before. Next she listened, and what she heard was “Spring is here!” “Swe-e-et spri-i-ng is he-ere!” “Spring's here!”

Then Anne danced on her toes and said, “The meadowlarks have come—three of them and each with his own way of telling us that spring is here.” And Anne was so glad that her voice sounded like a song, too.

Dick chuckled. “Doesn't look much like spring with last night's snow, does it? And see our breath going out of the window, all white and frosty!”

“Spring is here!” sang Magna.

The cousins laughed. “I think that is his April Fool Song, to-day,” said Anne.

Dick and Anne had learned from their bird book that the meadowlarks of western prairies had much longer and sweeter songs than those that came to Holiday Meadow. The cousins hoped that some time they might visit places where they could hear the full rich music of the western meadowlarks. Meanwhile they enjoyed Magna's song—what there was of it.

It was a short tune, to be sure, but he sang it a great

“SPRING IS HERE”

many times. One of his favorite singing places was the top of the old broken tree where he perched the first day of April, but often he sang while he was standing on the ground. Sometimes he sang a warbly sort of twitter while he was flying.

Early in the season Magna met his mate and they passed pleasant days together. For a while they were most interested in their nest.

They did not make a hanging nest like the one a pair of orioles put on a swinging branch of an elm that stood in the yard of Holiday Farm. They did not attach their nest to a low willow bush over in Holiday Swamp as did a pair of red-winged blackbirds. They built their nest on the ground.

Even though it was in a different sort of place, the nest of Magna and his mate was, in one respect, somewhat like the nest in the elm and the one in the swamp bush. All three nests were carefully woven. Perhaps it is because meadowlarks and orioles and blackbirds are rather closely related that they all weave their nests, instead of making them with sticks laid criss-cross as some other birds do.

Magna's mate found a house lot that suited her exactly. There was a little hollow just right to fit a nest into. Close to the hollow grew a tall tuft of sheltering grass. This house lot was near one edge of the meadow not too far from the swamp where a thirsty bird could find a shallow stream and drinking pools. A water supply is as important to a bird as it is to a person.

When the nest was finished it had coarse grass on

HOLIDAY MEADOW

the outside and fine grass on the inside, and it had a dome-shaped roof of woven grass. Of course all the grass in the nest was brown and dry. That is, it was dry when the nest was finished. But while Mrs. Magna was working on it she used damp grass fibers which were so soft they could be woven without breaking. She gathered these in the morning while they were wet with dew. Afterward the grass dried in the sunshine.



It was a charming nest.

“SPRING IS HERE”

It was a charming nest even while it was empty. But about a week later when it had six eggs in it, it was such a dear nest that Mother Magna could not bear to leave it except when she was very thirsty or very hungry indeed. The rest of the time she brooded her eggs and kept them warm. They were white eggs with brown and purple speckles on them.

Dick and Anne had been watching the meadow through their bird glasses and had noticed that Magna quite often alighted near a certain spot when he flew down to the meadow. They thought that he was visiting Mother Magna.

One day Dick said, “Let’s go and find the meadow-lark’s nest.” When they reached the place near where Magna had disappeared, the bird flew up from the ground. While he was flying he showed the white outer feathers of his short tail. He went to the broken tree and called “Yert” in an anxious voice. That was his way of warning Mother Magna of danger.

The cousins walked slowly and were careful where they stepped. They hunted for more than an hour without finding the nest. Then Anne said, “Let’s stop. That poor old meadowlark is staying on guard in the tree and he is worried. I’m worried, too. There is so much dry grass next the ground that it would be easy to step on a hidden nest without seeing it. If we do, we’ll be sorry all summer.”

“All right,” said Dick, “we can go to the swamp and hunt for the red-winged blackbird’s nest. There is no danger of stepping on that. Maybe there will be eggs

HOLIDAY MEADOW

to see now, and later we can visit the young birds and see how fast they grow.”

Magna watched Dick and Anne walk toward the swamp. When they had gone far enough so that he no longer felt anxious about his mate and her nest, he stopped calling “Yert” and flew down to the meadow to hunt for food.

The old bird had a keen appetite and enjoyed stalking along in the tall grass to find something to eat. But it was not until the speckled eggs had hatched that his hunting season began in earnest. Then Father Magna hunted from dawn until dusk.

For there were six mouths always open to give him a hungry greeting when he went to the nest. And much fresh meat must be poked into those mouths before the young birds could grow up and be able to do their own hunting.

The food that was best for the young meadowlarks was insect-meat. Magna caught grasshoppers, both old ones with wings and young ones without. He pounced on grown moths and young caterpillars. He picked up beetles and grubs.

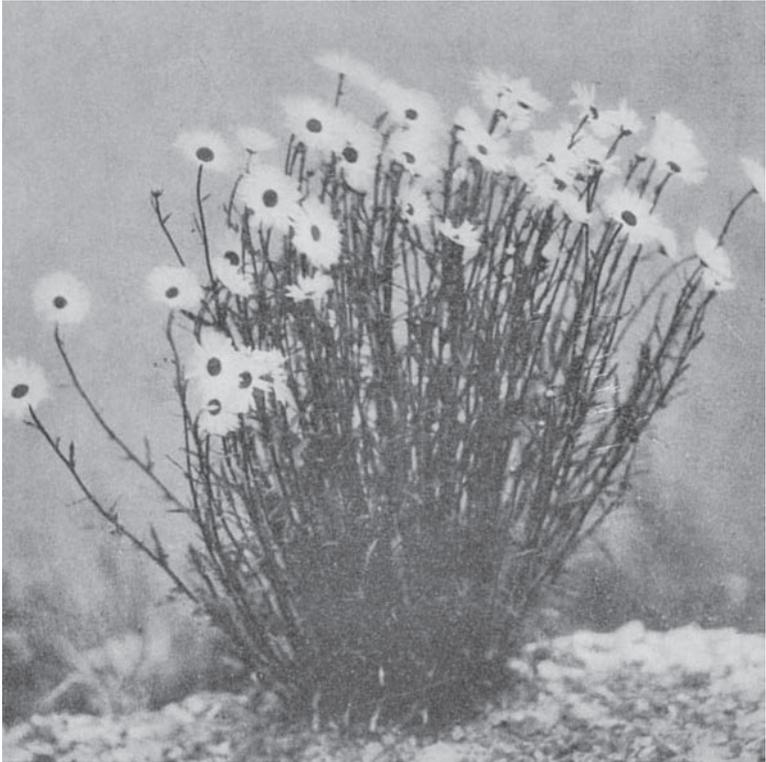
And every time he carried insects to the nest, he found six little birds with mouths wide open and ready to swallow what he brought.

Of course Magna did not provide all the family meals. Mother Magna was as good a hunter as he was and she kept as busy. As soon as her eggs were hatched she did not need to stay on the nest. So she hurried here

“SPRING IS HERE”

and there and did her full share of the day’s hunting.

When the Man of Holiday Farm saw these birds busy in the meadow he smiled. “The meadowlarks help take care of the hay,” he said. “Most of the insects they catch are such as feed on grass. So the more of these birds there are in the field, the better the hay crop will be.”



Daisies are pretty but they do not make good hay.

Each time Magna and Mother Magna went to feed their young ones they brushed against the woven roof of the nest from the outside. Each time the growing birds reached up for food they brushed against the roof from the inside. The dome-shaped top was not very strong,

HOLIDAY MEADOW

so before the birds were ready to leave the nest they were without any roof to cover them. However, they did not really need a roof, so they were well enough off without it.

Besides they were growing rapidly for their diet of insects agreed with them. In due time they were too big and strong to stay crowded together in so small a home.

One day when Dick and Anne were running along the edge of the meadow, eight birds flew up ahead of them. They all showed white outer tail feathers. One of the birds went to the top of the old broken tree and said “Yert” in an anxious voice. One of them alighted on a fence post and moved her tail in a fidgety way. The other six flew a little way over the grass and then dropped to the ground as if they were a bit tired.

“Look,” said Dick, “those must be the young meadowlarks. Perhaps that is the first time they ever flew. They did not go far. Aren’t you glad they are out of the nest before it is time to cut the hay?”

Just then Magna sang from the top of his tree. “Spring is here!” was what his song sounded like to the cousins.

“It is summer, now, old chap,” Anne called to him, “and next it will be fall.”

“Perhaps,” said Dick thoughtfully, “it always seems like spring to a meadowlark—when he is happy.”

CHAPTER III

DAUCUS

IN her early life Daucus was a seed. At that time she had a stiff coat with rows of barbed prickles on it. She wore this strange spiny baby coat for more than half a year.

At first she lived with seven or eight hundred sister seeds in a hollow cup-shaped cluster that looked somewhat like a bird's nest. This seed-cluster grew at the tip of a wild carrot stem. There were many of these plants, each with several such stems, in a weedy field not far from Holiday Farm.

During the frosty fall weather the stems and the "birds' nests" at their tips became dry and brown. Later, when the winter storms came, the snow often piled in little fluffy white mounds on top of the nests. Sometimes the snow would be blown off by the wind while it was light. At other times it would melt a bit during the sunny part of the day and then freeze at night in icy crusts. Then when morning came the seed-clusters looked as if they were in sparkling glass cases.

Little Daucus never knew whether the winter days were sunny or stormy. She and the hundreds of sister seeds slept in the brown nest on the tip of the slender stem. They stayed there until nearly March. Then one

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Blossoms and "Birds' Nests"

day a blustering wind snapped the brittle stem and broke off the nest of seeds.

Away the round cluster rolled over the crusty snow like a feather ball before the wind! And all about were other similar clusters scurrying in the same direction.

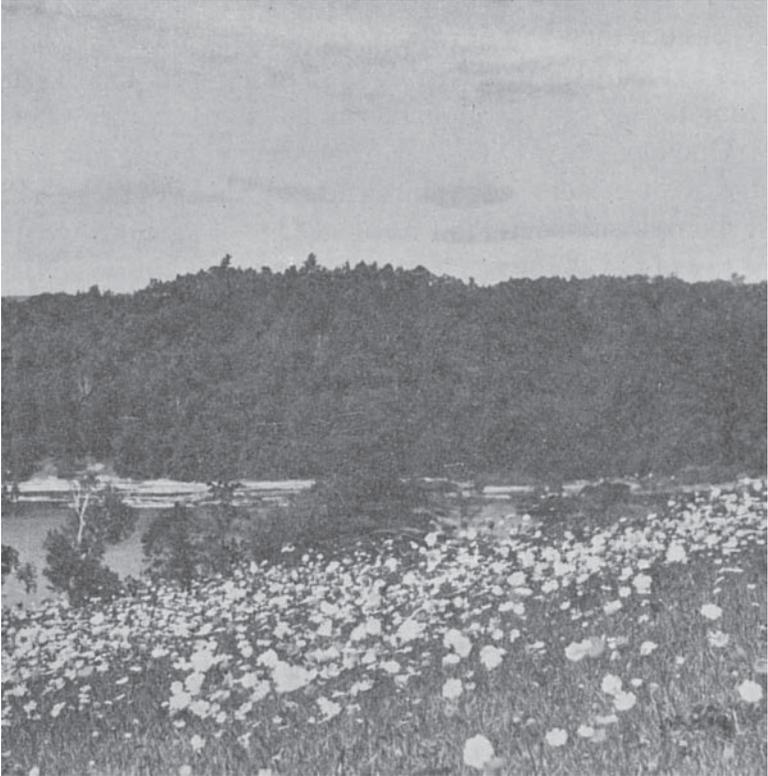
Dick and Anne were coming home from school that afternoon while the field looked as if the winds there were playing a game with the little round balls.

"See," said Anne, "the birds' nests have broken off the wild carrot plants and they are rolling along like tumble-weeds."

DAUCUS

“They are blowing toward Holiday Meadow. Let’s race with them!” said Dick.

Just as Dick spoke, the seed-cluster with Daucus in it blew by and the cousins began to run. Daucus reached Holiday Meadow first. But the slope near the river was sheltered a bit from the wind; and the children overtook Daucus there.



The slope near the river was covered with Queen Anne’s lace.

“I’ll beat you to the bottom of the slope,” Anne said to the seed-ball with a laugh. But just then she slipped on an icy spot and sat down on top of Daucus’s ball.

When Anne stood up she saw that the frail cluster

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was crushed and mixed with broken snow crust. So the cousins chose another ball with which to race.

Daucus was not harmed by the accident. Her hard coat protected her. But a lump of icy snow had rolled on top of her and held her still. The wind could not blow her any farther. She had reached the end of her journey.

In due time spring days came. Melted snow soaked the ground of Holiday Meadow and fresh rain fell. Daucus's coat was wet. Her little seed-body was moistened by water and warmed by sunshine; and it began to grow. She pushed sprouting roots down into the ground. She reached tiny leaves up into the air. She no longer needed her baby clothes.

The meadow slope was well drained and the ground did not stay too wet for the best health of wild carrot plants. So, before her first summer was over, Daucus had a tough pale yellow tap-root shaped somewhat like a scrawny little carrot; and she had a crown of beautiful feathery leaves. She did not have any tall stems and flowers; for, unlike many kinds of plants, wild carrots wait until their second summer before they blossom.

Although Daucus had no flowers that summer, she did have a butterfly for a guest. Of course the butterfly did not visit the green leaves for nectar. She came on a different sort of errand. One day at noon when the sun was bright she stopped for about a quarter of a minute on one of Daucus's soft feathery leaves. During that brief call she glued one egg to the under side of the leaf.

She was a rather large butterfly. When she spread her wings they measured more than three inches from

DAUCUS

the tip of the right fore wing to the tip of the left one. She was a beautiful creature whose black velvety wings were bordered by two rows of yellow spots. On the hind wings there were spots of pale blue on the black space between the yellow rows. Each hind wing was tipped with a slender black tail.

After Black Swallowtail, for that was her name, left Daucus she flew to a caraway leaf and glued one egg to the under side of that.

The carrot and the caraway both belong to the Parsley Family; and it is a wonderful fact that Black Swallowtail butterflies never lay an egg on any plant that does not belong to that family. They may leave their eggs, one in a place, on parsnip or dill or celery or parsley or other plants of this family; but they never waste their eggs by putting them on other kinds of leaves.

Of course you would like to know how a Black Swallowtail chooses plants of one family from all the other plants of fields and gardens. So should I. But no one can tell us exactly for no one has the senses of a butterfly. People think that when she is ready to lay her eggs, carrots and related plants have for her such an attractive scent that she cannot help stopping at such leaves.

All the plants belonging to the Parsley Family have certain likenesses in the shapes of their flowers. Perhaps to a Black Swallowtail they have the same sort of odor. Even to a human nose certain of these plants have somewhat similar smells.

If you wish to find out what plants belong to the

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Parsley Family you might follow a Black Swallowtail.
That would be one way to study botany.

It is fortunate for the caterpillar youngsters of Black Swallowtail butterflies that their mothers never mislay their eggs, for leaves of plants belonging to the Parsley Family are the only sorts of food that agree with them.



*A handsome caterpillar who likes celery and other plants
of the Parsley Family.*

When a tiny caterpillar crept out of the eggshell that had been left on Daucus's leaf he made himself quite at

DAUCUS

home; and as soon as he felt hungry, he helped himself to carrot-leaf salad.

He did not waste any of his food but ate every bit that he cut off with his little tooth-like jaws. So he grew rather fast.

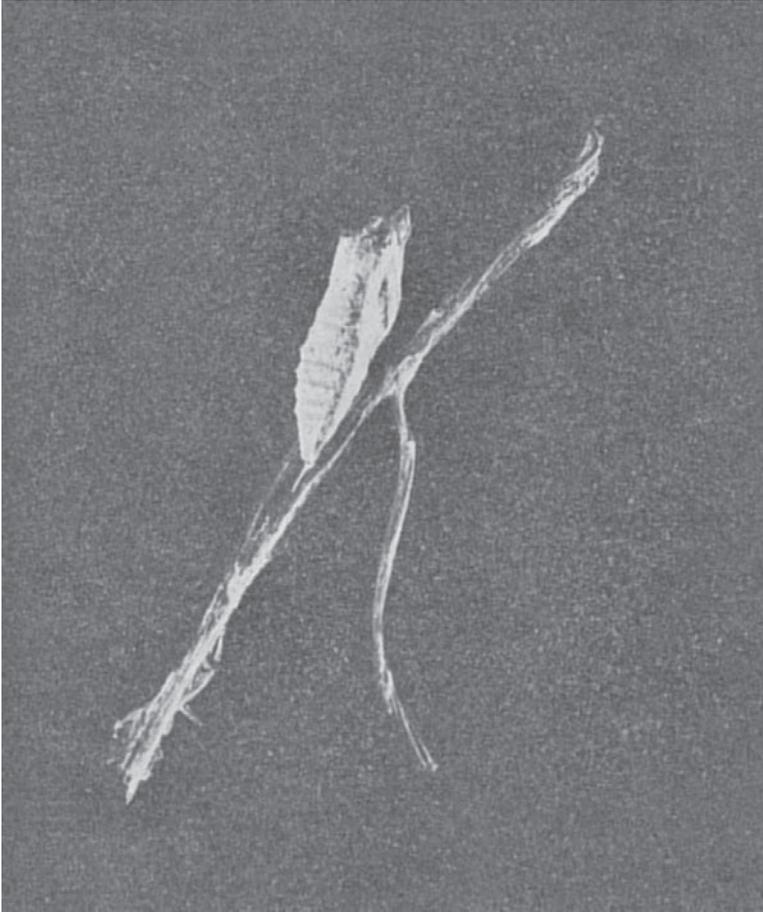
At first he was black with some white marks and rows of little fleshy spines; but by the time he was in his last caterpillar stage he was much more handsome. His skin was then smooth and gayly colored. He was green with cross-bands of black and on each black band was a row of orange spots. He had two soft orange-colored horns but these were usually drawn in under the skin just behind his head and did not show.

One day a young bird, not yet much used to hunting for itself, saw this bright-colored caterpillar and poked him with its beak. When the bird touched him he thrust out his horns quickly and the air all about him was filled with a strange strong odor. The young bird did not like that smell and went away in a hurry. Left to himself, the caterpillar drew in his horns and crept along the leaf.

Daucus's nearest plant neighbor was an older wild carrot, one of whose lower blossom stems was resting across the feathery leaf on which the caterpillar was creeping. When he touched this stem he climbed up on it and began to munch the leaves he found there.

It was fortunate for Daucus that the caterpillar went when he did for he had grown old enough to need larger and larger carrot-leaf salads to satisfy his greedy appetite. The hungry visitor, however, had left Daucus enough of her feathery leaves so that her health was

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*One day Daucus's guest stopped being a caterpillar
and became a chrysalis.*

not injured. Her hardy tap-root was well and strong when fall came.

She rested quietly all winter and when the snow had melted and the ground was warmed by the spring sunshine she began her second season's growth.

Instead of having just a single tuft of leaves, as she had when she was one summer old, she grew a long branching leafy stem. At the tip of this stem and at the

DAUCUS

end of each branch there was a large compound cluster of small flowers. The slender little flower-stalks which formed a cluster started from a common center like the ribs of an open umbrella.

Such a blossom cluster is called an umbel. Since members of the Parsley Family have their flowers growing in this manner they are called umbel-bearing plants.

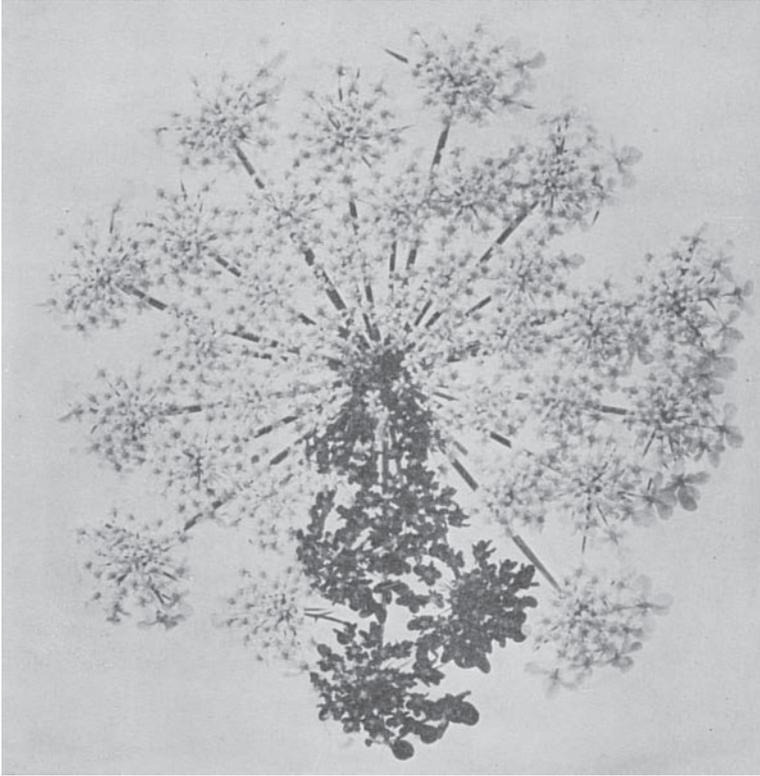
Wild carrot blossoms are white or very pale creamy yellow or sometimes tinged with light pink. And in the center of each large flat umbel is one flower (and sometimes several) of a dark rich red color.

All of *Daucus's* blossom clusters were like that except one of them. The flat cluster of blossoms that grew at the tip of her main stem was different from all the rest of her clusters. It was, indeed, different from all the other wild carrot clusters in Holiday Meadow. This cluster had a whole three-cornered section of dark red flowers which reached from the center of the umbel to the outer edge.

This flower-cluster of *Daucus's* was so different from ordinary wild carrot blossoms that you may call it a "freak" or an "oddity" if you like. Perhaps no other wild carrot in the world ever had one exactly like it.

People have long admired the fine lacy blossoms of wild carrot. One name given the plant many years ago and still used is "Queen Anne's Lace." The graceful leaves have had their share of admiration, too. It is said that in the time of James I the court ladies wore them for plumes.

HOLIDAY MEADOW



This blossom had a whole section of dark flowers.

One day when Dick and his cousin were walking through Holiday Meadow they decided to find out how wild carrots tasted. So they dug up some of the tap-roots and were carrying them to the house when they met Uncle David.

“They are rather scraggly and lean looking,” said Anne, “but I think I’ll cook them so we can eat some for dinner.”

“Please don’t,” said Uncle David, “that would be an unwise experiment.”

“Why?” asked Dick.

DAUCUS

“Well, it is commonly thought that wild carrots are poisonous.”

“Are they really?” asked Anne.

“I do not know,” replied her uncle. “I have often wondered whether some one once tasted a raw tough second-season root and it did not agree with him or whether even the cooked young roots are somewhat poisonous. But I never wanted so much to know that I was willing to find out by eating them, myself.”

“You see,” he went on, “the Parsley Family includes many plants that are not fit for food for man or beast and some of them are deadly dangerous.

“Poison hemlock is one of these. If cows eat the tender young leaves in the spring, they die. Children have died from eating the seeds which they mistook for those of the caraway. The ‘cup of death’ which was given to Socrates in Athens many centuries ago is thought to have been a brew of poison hemlock.

“Water hemlock is quite as bad. Its fleshy roots are said to have rather a pleasant taste, but one root is enough to kill a cow, and a person would risk death by eating a very little piece of a root.”

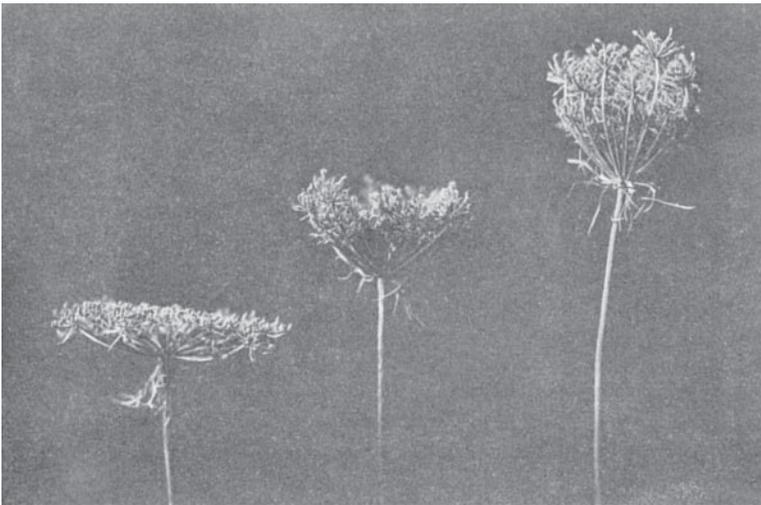
Uncle David looked down at the roots Dick still held in his hand. Then he said gravely, “Some of the poisonous relatives of the parsley are not easily told from the harmless ones. Suppose we have an agreement that you two youngsters refrain from eating seeds, leaves or roots of wild umbel-bearers until you know more about them than you do at present.”

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“All right,” said Dick, “only I don’t understand about carrots. I thought I was being careful. I read my plant book and it said that garden carrots were descended from wild carrots.”

“Most botanists believe that that is so,” said his uncle, “and they call both the wild Queen Anne’s lace and the cultivated carrot by the same name (*Daucus Carota*).

“It may be that in a certain locality in Europe some of the wild plants had plumper, more tender and better tasting roots than other strains. It may be some such variety that was first cultivated and continued to have edible roots. It is not unlikely that the *roots* of these wild plants differ somewhat in appearance and quality. You see how different this *blossom* is from all the others in the field.” And he pointed to *Daucus*’s freak flower-cluster.



*First the seed-cluster is flat, then like a bird’s nest,
then like a ball.*

DAUCUS

Perhaps (who knows?) if the seeds of Daucus's rich red blossoms had ripened and grown, her daughter plants might have had dark flower-clusters and Holiday Meadow might have had a new color of Queen Anne's lace!

One day as the clusters of green unripe seeds were becoming hollow like cups or birds' nests Dick and Anne heard their uncle say to his helper, "That meadow slope isn't fit for hay. Better plow the weeds under before the seeds are ripe. We'll put cultivated crops into that piece of land for a few years before we seed it to grass again."

Then the cousins remembered the gusty winter day when they had raced with the tumbling "birds' nests."

"They have been *jolly* weeds!" said Dick with a grin.