

"We played on the night of Christmas Day and afterwards we were given a supper in the queerest sort of hall. All the houses were mud and white-washed, terribly poor-looking but cosy enough inside, with rushes on the earth floors and peat fires glowing.

"This hall seemed rather the shape of an attic, with sloping roof almost to the floor and rafters.

"I had to stay behind to put some costumes and props away and when I came at last I entered by a wrong door—a few steps leading down instead of up. I found myself in a gloomy cavernous place round which were stacked what looked to be dinghies of every size.

"Of course I heard the fun up above me and ran up. But the dinghies puzzled me—we were ever so far from a coast. 'But what are all the little boats downstairs?' I inquired. 'Sure,' said the local undertaker, 'They're not boats, yer must be thinking, but coffins!'"

"But what did you eat?" someone said.

"O, pork, of course," said Paddy. "The best pork and 'taties and buttermilk I ever tasted anywhere. Your turn, Susan."

SUSAN'S STORY

"O MINE?" laughed Susan. "Mine was in the Rockies.

"My sister and I spent six months trailing through America, you know, with an old Ford we bought for £15. We were mad to see a certain canyon where there was a natural bridge. We took the car as far as we could and had to clamber the rest.

"It was pretty hard going and we got absolutely ravenous on the way back. We'd been hours without anything and we knew all we had left in the car was a huge iced cake my Aunt had presented us with three days before. My birthday's on Christmas Day, you know. This was for both.

"Well, we'd left it in an old fibre suitcase on the back seat and I tell you we couldn't get to it quick enough. I think we actually ran those last few yards.

"When we opened the car door I don't know if we were more scared or furious at what we saw. The opposite window was smashed in, the suitcase broken and torn to pieces and there, sitting in all the confusion, was a great brown bear pushing the last of our cake into his mouth.

"We just shouted in his face and told him exactly what we thought of him and he fell through the window and lopped off into the woods with the last of our Christmas feast still sticking to his fur."

ANN'S STORY

"If it's a matter of food," I said, "I suppose my most miserable Christmas was a boiled egg—alone, and perched high in a London Square in a bare room without another penny for the gas.

"But I wasn't the only miserable wretch and it turned out a lovely day in the end. An English writer who was well known and really far from poor lived round the corner. My telephone bell rang.

"O, please come and see me. Come now," said the voice at the other end.

"Coming," I cried, and hung up.

"Whatever's the matter?" I said, when I got there.

"Everything," he said, "It's Christmas Day and I've just had the most melancholy Christmas Dinner."

"So have I," I said self-pityingly. "What did you have?"

"A boiled egg," he replied.

LAURIE'S STORY

LAURIE looked up and laughed. "I had a boiled egg once," she said, "Or rather—I didn't. And it wasn't in London, it was in Australia," she added.

"I was rooming with a friend but she'd left to take a job. Everyone seemed to have gone. I was apparently the only one in that beastly gloomy house. It was Christmas Eve. And then someone rang to take me to a show. It was 'Carter the Great.' Do you remember him? I think he came here too.



"The first thing I saw was a frightful thing hanging from my light in the middle of the ceiling . . . I turned and fled"

"I don't know if I was just miserable or whether the show was too grim. Anyhow, when I let myself into my room somewhere about midnight the first thing I saw—I'm still positive I saw it, sure and certain—was a frightful thing hanging from my light in the middle of the ceiling. It looked like some kind of rat or bat or something. Anyhow it was terrifying, with long hairy legs and claws and just hanging there upside down, and I turned and fled.

"I remembered that my friend Rona on the floor above never left her door locked even when she was away, so I fled upstairs and without attempting to undress or turn on the light flung myself into her bed. I was instantly frozen with horror to find myself beside, not Rona but the old landlord—an old Swede, filthy dirty, dressed and obviously drunk.

"I spent a perfectly vile night on a settee in the fusty sitting room.

"I must have been pretty exhausted because I slept rather late and crept back through that dead, silent house to my room. There was no sign of the apparition on the lightshade. I was just too miserable to go out. I curled up and tried to read.

"Somewhere about noon a tap came to my door. It was the landlord. He stood there and looked at me through bleared and drink-stupid eyes. 'I jus' come to see . . .' he muttered, 'shall I boil you an egg?'"

"No," I answered, and locked the door.

"Ooo," said Sheila, suddenly, "I'm going to sleep. See you to-morrow," and she pulled the clothes over her head.

WHILE THE KETTLE BOILS

Dear Friends,

Well, our playtime is over. The last Christmas carol has been sung, the echo of the New Year chimes are already dim in our ears. All the stars and the spangles and the festive array are laid away for another twelve months. Most of us have put our holiday moods behind us and are facing the New Year in earnest.

I want to tell you of a very pleasant experience I had over the holidays—it may offer an inspiration to some of my readers in the decoration of their own homes.

I was invited by a friend to visit a very lovely home just outside Wellington. It would take too long here to describe the house in detail, but there was one room that I specially marked out, and of which, I think, you will be interested to hear.

This sunny lounge-room had cream colour-washed walls hung with a few choice pastels and etchings. The carpet was a lovely vivid wine colour, and the curtains that outlined the curved bay-window were of linen tweed run through here and there with a line of jade green. The cushions heaped on the cream-coloured Chesterfield suite were covered in jade linen—with one large cushion repeating the wine toning of the carpet.

But it was the bay-window that caught my eye, for circling it was a glowing indoor garden. The effect was exquisite. Tawny nasturtiums and morning glories growing side by side. Fuschias and Martha Washington geraniums like gaily painted butterflies. Carnations springing from a mist of green fern. In the centre of all this was one of those fascinating miniature Chinese lakes, complete with tiny bridge, pagodas, and dwarf trees. The whole thing was so compact, so beautifully planned, that it seemed incredible so much could be achieved in such a limited space. The boxes were all metal-lined and covered with the same wood as the window fittings, so that they became part of the general scheme. At each end of the garden were two lovely hanging baskets of English ivy.

My hostess assured me it is the easiest form of gardening and the most successful, as accidents of weather are practically eliminated. She allows a certain amount of fresh air and sunlight to her garden each day, and the metal-lined tubs conserve all moisture. She gives her flowers the correct amount of watering, and the result is an exquisite garden always within view.

I have often wondered why more homes do not favour these indoor gardens. In our variable climate they should enjoy a wider popularity. One could experiment with all kinds of different plants and garden schemes.

This fascinating hobby need not be confined to the living-rooms. For a bedroom a fragrant garden of aromatic herbs is an inspiration. Night-scented stocks, the sweet-smelling rose, or nutmeg geranium, the spicy fragrance of basil, thyme, and the ever-sweet mignonette—all wooing one to perfumed slumber.

For the kitchen a culinary herb garden is both artistic and practical. Instead of having to run out to the garden every time you require parsley or herbs, all you need do is to reach out and pluck them from your window-box.

Apart from the artistic effect of these indoor-gardens, they really make a fascinating hobby—and if father insists on the outside garden being his own particular domain, well, mother can go one better with her own little garden within the home.

Yours cordially,

Cynthia