

A Blue Day

By Opal Whiteley

Written 1917 for a class at UO

Helen stood in the doorway. The usual brightness was gone from her face as she exclaimed in a disappointed tone, "O, I feel so blue. Our plans are all upset. Darty's car had a breakdown at the very last minute, some old friends of the Campbells had to come and now Minnie can't use their car because her mother wishes to show the guests around. Now we can't have the jolly picnic we had planned for the last two weeks! This whole day is just going to be a blue day!"

Just as she said the last words, her grandmother with whom she had been making her home for the past six months, paused at the door on her way to the garden. She had heard the girl's last words, and glancing at the clouded face, stopped to make the suggestion that as it was going to be a blue day anyhow, why not make it a joyous blue.

"A joyful blue day! Why the very idea. Who ever heard of a joyful blue day, grandmother?"

"Well I have heard of them and have had joyful blue days."

"O, tell me about it, grandmother."

"Yes, Helen, of course I should be glad to tell you about it, but I shall be more glad to start you in your search for a joyful blue day."

As Mrs. Harlow followed her tall graceful granddaughter down the garden path, her tender, motherly eyes rested lovingly upon the girlish form of this, her youngest granddaughter whom she had tried so hard to come close to in the six months she had been with her. When they reached the garden, she said, "The secret of a joyous blue day is just finding blue things."

"O, grandma, that's plenty easy. Why I've found enough things this morning to be blue about for a whole week."

And grandmother laughingly replied, "Dear girl, the secret of the day is not in finding things to be blue about, but in finding blue things to be happy about."

After going a few steps farther she softly said, "We'll begin with these" as she pointed to a bed of purplish blue flowers. Helen noticed the quivering note in her voice as she went on softly, "These grew wild in the moist woods by the old home back in Virginia. The last time I went back there I brought them with me because when a child I

Commented [1]: A Blue Day is a story with a message. It contains a treatment for what today we call depression but in Opal's day was known as melancholia or simply "the blues". The purpose of her story is not to tell a drama but to tell a method for getting over a "blue day".

Commented [2]: Note: I looked up all the poets for the poems, most of which were uncredited by Opal. She had a habit of memorizing a verse of poetry each day.

Commented [3]: could this be Prince Lucien Campbell?? He was President of UO when Opal wrote this.

Commented [4]: Opal's use of the term "joyous blue" in the same way she uses it in Aurelius Evangel.

Commented [5]: Opal is undoubtedly "Helen", but she was short, not tall and graceful as the young woman in this story is

Commented [6]: "The secret of a joyous blue day is just finding blue things" ... "The secret of the day is not finding things to be blue about, but finding blue things." This is how you can feel better when you are feeling "blue".

found them there and father left them growing wild because I loved them. They are called Job's Tears, and I wanted you to see them this morning while they are wide awake and pert for shortly after noon their petals will begin to change and watching them you can understand why they were so named. They are cousins to the Wandering Jew plant on the porch. Helen, it was back on the old home place where these grew, that I had my first joyful blue day and it was a glorious May morning much like this."

Since her keen disappointment, Helen had not stopped to notice the glory of the morning until now, when looking over the garden to the meadows and hills beyond and up to the sky, she said with a glad light in her eyes and a new determination in her voice "Grandmother dear, I am going to start on my way to find the joyous blue. Which path is best to follow?"

Grandmother pointed to the path that led through the orchard and meadow into the winding road near the hills.

Helen had not gone far when she suddenly stopped as she heard a familiar whistle, and turning her head she saw her Uncle Fred coming quickly down the path. When he reached her he asked in a teasing tone, "And may I go along Miss Joy Seeker?" To her surprise she found herself answering, "Why of course" to this young uncle she had never taken much time to get acquainted with, as she had thought him queer, because during his leisure time instead of going with their set, he had preferred to roam over the hills and through the meadows.

Commented [7]: Helen has an Uncle Fred who is exactly like Opal's Uncle Henry - both teach about nature, poetry and overcoming feeling blue by finding blue things in nature.

Commented [8]: Uncle Fred calls her "Miss Joy Seeker"

Commented [9]: this uncle is young and she used to think of him as "queer" because he liked to roam over fields and meadows rather than going out with his peers.

As they came into the orchard Uncle Fred suggested that they go very quietly. She wondered why and was just going to ask him when she saw a flash of blue and a beautiful bird alighted on a bough close by and burst into a rapturous song. As they listened she felt a new joy in her heart.

"Why Uncle Fred, I never heard such a song before."

"Yes," replied her uncle, "and it is one of the sweetest songs you ever will hear. E.E. Rexford, a lover of birds, has written a poem in which I remember that he tells of the blue bird blending in a silver strain, the sound of laughing water, the patter of Spring's sweet rain, the voice of the winds, the sunshine and fragrance of blossoming things."

"My! What a wonderful blue its color is. I would just almost believe that it took a part of Heaven's blue."

"Helen, you are one of many who have thought of that. Another poet who loved the bluebird has said:

'Heaven loves to scatter earthward
Flakes of its own soft hue
The first bird, the last flower
Wear the same shade of blue.'
by Lucy Larcum

After the singer had flown, her Uncle suggested that they go on to the meadow. As they emerged from the orchard, Helen cried out: "O! I didn't suppose the meadow was so big."

"Father has always left it wild because, (and there was a thoughtful look on his face) because mother loved it so." He was indeed his mother's son and like her, he loved this great meadow.

They stood silently looking over the meadow for some time until her uncle was aroused from his reverie by Helen's eager voice, "Why who would have thought of there being so many different flowers in one meadow."

To which her uncle answered, "Yes, there is a greater variety of wild flowers found in this meadow than for many miles around. I have found pleasure since childhood in helping mother and father to keep it as you see it now - a garden of wild flowers. Although father takes much pride in the cultivation of the big grain fields which you see to the east and north, he finds greater joy in leaving this as nature planted it."

As they walked on slowly, Helen noticed many clusters of violet blue flowers, and as he told her that they were the wild Hyacinths, he also explained why the ants, bees and butterflies visited them.

Next she caught sight of some gorgeous violet blue flowers. Her uncle pointed out that these blue Iris were relatives of the Fleur-de-Louis chosen by the pious crusader Louis VII as emblem of his house, and were also called fleur-de-lis.

At this time she laughingly told him how when her English teacher had read from Ruskin about the fleur-de-lis being the sword of chivalry, with a sword for its leaf and a lily for its heart, that she had wondered what that flower was like.

When they had gone some distance farther, Helen ran ahead and dropping lightly on the green meadow grass among many small flowers of ultramarine blue, called gaily, "I think I have found one that I know - the Blue Eyed Grass."

"You are right and did you know that it is sometimes called little sister of the stately blue flag?"

"No I didn't know that, but I do know that I have always loved it since I first found it back home. I wonder why when the poets have written about so many beautiful things of nature that they have kept still about this dainty flower."

"And her uncle with a merry twinkle in his brown eyes said: "Why Helen, the poets have not kept still, for one who loved this little flower has written this:

'Blue-eyed grass in the meadow
And yarrow blooms on the hill
Cat-tails that rustle and whisper
And winds that are never still;

Blue-eyed grass in the meadow
A linnet's nest near by
Blackbirds caroling clearly
Somewhere between earth and sky

Blue-eyed grass in the meadow
And the laden bees low hum
Milkweeds all by the roadside
To tell us Summer is come."
by Mary Austin

Helen began to understand her uncle's interest in nature. After being silent for some time, she gently said: "I thought I knew lots but I am beginning to see that many of the things which mean so much in our everyday life I've yet to learn."

Then her uncle pointed to the lower end of the meadow which was a mass of vivid blue. She hastened on with him, eager to find out what it was.

"Say, did you plant this?"

"No, we did not plant it. 'Tis the wild lupine, a member of the pea family."

"I think they reflect the blue of the sky."

"Yes," remarked uncle Fred, "they reflect the blue of the sky until, as Thoreau wrote, 'the earth is blued with it.' And lupines are interesting also because they are one of the curious plants which go to sleep at night."

Leaving the meadow, they started down the winding road where Helen, now constantly seeking for blue, saw several small butterflies flitting over a damp place by the roadway.

"O, Uncle Fred, what are they called" Helen asked eagerly.

"What color are they" said her uncle laughing.

"Why blue - are they just called blue butterflies?"

"Yes, that is their common name. But look yonder!" he suddenly called "over there is a pair of Shasta Blues. The Judge will want those for his butterfly garden."

He had no sooner finished speaking than who should they see coming up the road a few steps from them, but the judge. A merry twinkle was in his eyes as he said with a jolly laugh, "Right you are for I do want them."

After they had secured the pair, Helen told the judge why she had noticed them. He was very much interested in the idea of a joyous blue day and asked them to come to luncheon, as he had thought of something which might help in the carrying out of that idea.

When luncheon was over, he showed them a case of butterflies among which was one with such beautiful blue iridescent wings that Helen could not help but admire it. The judge, noticing her admiration, told her how he had found it in a land across the sea. Then he led the way into his study where, above his desk hung a small panel picture of deep, bright blue flowers at the sight of which Uncle Fred exclaimed "Why bless my heart if it isn't fringed gentians."

The judge, keenly looking at him said, "So you too like them. For years they have been my favorite flower, for mother loved them best. She found much pleasure on bright October days just to see them growing wild about the place. That was the last picture she painted and it was not more than two hours after she had written that verse from Bryant on the panel when we found her with the picture in her lap, facing the setting sun."

Then in the hushed stillness of the room, he softly read to them the words written by the Fringed Gentians.

"Thou waitest late, and com'st alone
When woods are bare and birds have flown
And frosts and shortening days portend
The aged year is near his end.

Then doth the sweet and quiet eye
Look through its fringes to the sky,
Blue - blue - as if the sky let fall
A flower from its cerulean wall."

by William Cullen Bryant

They went slowly from the room and when they reached the garden, he pointed out a pale lilac blue flower as he said, "That is the wild blue phlox. I found it growing in a moist rocky wood some years ago while on an eastern trip and brought it home because I, too, find joy in blue things."

From the garden, they followed a path through the lower edge of the woods. There Helen noticed how much larger the blue violets were than those she had seen in the meadow, and as she decided to share a part of the joy of this blue day with a little shut-in neighbor, she stopped and gathered a handful of these. As they went along they talked of the flower. Uncle Fred told her of how the Arabians sang its praises and that their prophet Mohammed liked the violet best of all flowers. He also told her about Shakespeare's proverb that the violet is for faithfulness.

"Yes" interrupted Helen, "I remember that when we were studying about the renowned Napoleon, we learned that it was his favorite flower and that it became the emblem of the Bonapartists."

Uncle Fred then spoke of her fondness of quoting from Scott and asked if she could recall his lines concerning the violet. She studied for several minutes but had to admit that she could not. And he began:

"The violet in her greenwood bower."

Then Helen joined in with
"Where birchen boughs with hazel mingle
May boast herself the fairest flower
In forest glade or copsewood dingle."

The path wound out from the grove along a mountain stream. As they were resting by the stream listening to the music of its rippling waters, Helen saw a faint glimpse of blue among the ferns waving over the water and she lost no time in climbing down the bank to investigate.

There among the graceful ferns she found the loveliest fairy-like bells of blue, swaying daintily on slender stems, growing out from the moist rocks. As she stood wondering what they were, she heard her uncle singing from the depth of his heart the old song -

"Let the proud Indian boast of his jessamine bower",
His pastures of perfume and rose colored dells
While humbly I sing of those little wildflowers,
The bluebells of Scotland, the Scottish bluebells."
by Charles D. Sillery

Commented [10]: The violet is loved around the world, it was the prophet Mohammed's favorite flower and it became the emblem of Napoleon Bonaparte.

Commented [11]: The same poem is in Aurelius Evangel chapter of Fairyland Around Us

As she stood there taking in the beauty of the flowers and listening to the singing waters, she gaily called to him "Why I thought that the bluebells of Scotland were found only over there." Her uncle answered "Not only in bonnie 'Land of o'lakes and brither Scots' but also in some parts of our own America are found these, which are to me, the loveliest of all flowers."

They silently went homeward. Helen was thinking of this blue day so different from all other blue days she had ever known. She was aroused from her thoughts by her uncle's eager voice, and looking to where he pointed she saw a solitary fisher, the great blue heron, dressed in colors of sky and water, fishing in the valley stream.

"My blue day is not yet complete," she remarked.

"No," he replied as he pointed to the blue larkspur. "Notice how much smaller it is than the purple mountain larkspur which you brought home from the last picnic, and how blue it is."

Even yet her blue day was not over for on arriving home as she entered the door, she saw there in the center of the room on the table many tiny, fragrant flowers of turquoise blue, in grandmother's best cut-glass bowl.

Running to the table, she buried her face among the flowers. A moment later she called to her grandmother, "O, are these the tiny forget-me-nots you were talking about the other day?"

Her grandma assured her that they were and her aunt who had just come into the room, noticing her interest in the flowers, told her they had been sent by the professor who had gathered them far up in the mountains.

"Aunt Mary, can you tell me more about the forget-me-not?"

And looking at the eager face of the girl, her aunt replied with a smile, "Most certainly for this afternoon at our literary meeting, while discussing folk tales, one of our members told of the pretty folk-tale of the Persians from their poet Shiraz about an angel in the golden morning of the early world, sitting outside the closed gates of Paradise, weeping on account of his having fallen from his high estate because of his love for a daughter of earth; he was not allowed to enter until the one he loved had planted the flowers of the forget-me-not in every part of the world. On his return to earth he started out to help her and together they went hand in hand. And when the work was completed, they entered Paradise together, for his companion became immortal like he whose love her beauty had won, as she sat by the river twining forget-me-nots in her hair."

Then grandmother said in her own sweet way, "There are many legends about this wee, dear blue flower, but the one I love best is the one that tells how...

"When, to the flowers so beautiful

The Father gave a name
There came a little blue-eyed one
(All timidly it came)
And standing at the Father's feet
And gazing in His face
It said in low and trembling tones,
Yet with a gentle grace
'Dear Lord the name thou gavest me
Alas I have forgot,
"Kindly the Father looked Him down
"And said, forget-me-not."
Anonymous

Commented [12]: The same poem is in Aurelius Evangel chapter of Fairyland Around Us

They went slowly across the room and looked toward the west. 'Twas the hour of sunset and the rays of the setting sun vivified the glorious beauty of the snowy summit of Mt. Hood until it seemed to Helen that it had never been quite so beautiful. Finally when the pink clouds had drifted over and the last golden rays had faded away, Helen brought her grandmother's big old armchair to the window and when grandmother had sat down, she nestled close beside her and quietly said "This has been one of the sweetest days of my life and O, now, grandmother I understand better why you have found so much joy in life. I shall always remember my first blue day!"

And there in the twilight the girl opened the door of her heart and grandmother had come into her own.

- Opal Whiteley

Ed. Note: it's interesting to read Opal's story Aurelius Evangel in Search of the Joyous Blue in Fairyland Around Us. Both stories are about curing "the blues" - a term for depression. Here is the link to the Aurelius Evangel story:

https://archive.org/stream/fairylandaroundu00whit_0#page/18/mode/2up