

# HOLIDAY HILL

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Edith M. Patch***

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# HOLIDAY HILL

by

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*Holiday Hill*

## CHAPTER I

# THE SIGNS ON THE HILL

DID you ever see a signpost with a mark pointing to a place called “Holiday Hill”? Perhaps not. Yet a holiday hill is not very hard to find. It has certain signs of its own and so it does not need guideboards.

There may be a stream of water running down its steep side. A very little brook will do, if it makes a jolly sound when it splashes against the mossy rocks.

For, of course, there must be rocks on a really satisfying hill. The rocks will have rounded ends and sides, looking as if their corners had been rubbed off. And many of them will have cracks through which bushes are pushing their stems.

If it is really the right sort of hill on which to spend a holiday, it should have berries, don't you think? Of all the berries in the world, those that grow on plants belonging to the Heath Family seem best for a hill.

The stems and leaves of mountain cranberries will lie like a flat mat on the very top of the hill. Their berries will be crimson and as sour as those other cranberries that grow on taller plants in bogs.

## *HOLIDAY HILL*



*Blueberry bells waiting for bees*

Blueberry bushes will cover part of the slope. Their blossoms will hang like tiny pink and cream-colored bells. Little bees will be going here and there on humming wings, carrying pollen from flower to flower. Because of the visits of these insects during blossom time, there will be berries on the bushes later—beautiful blue berries powdered with wax, sweet in the summer sunshine.

## *THE SIGNS ON THE HILL*

For the third kind of heath plant we might choose to find the checkerberry with leaves that stay green all winter and with red spicy berries that cling to the stems all winter, too, unless they happen to be picked and eaten by some hillside wanderer.

As you climb the slope of Holiday Hill, you may meet Chickaree among a clump of arbor vitae trees. If you do, he will probably scold you, and his voice will sound like his name. But Chickaree will not frighten you for he is only a little red squirrel trying to tell you that he wishes to have all the cones that grow on the evergreen branches for his own.

Sir Talis will not frighten you, either, if you are a sensible person. For Sir Talis is a harmless creature, gliding out of sight among the rocks in a quiet well-mannered way.

The small being in a strange cloak, who sits on a sweet fern bush and munches its fragrant leaves, will fill you with curiosity, I think. He did me, the first time I met him.

If you hear a springtime song like a soft tinkling of gentle bells, you may suspect that Junco is near. When he flies, he will show you the white outer feathers of his spread tail.

During the fall of the year, you may take the colors of Holiday Hill for a sign that you have reached the right place. For then there will be gay leaves of crimson shades and some of gleaming gold.

But if you wait until winter, what will the hillside

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be, then, except a pleasant slope for coasting? Well, if you are lucky enough, you may chance to see the tracks that Little Snowshoes made when he passed that way. And, if you are much more fortunate still, you may even have a glimpse of the little fellow himself—all snug in his white winter furs.

So, springtime or summer or autumn or winter, you may know “Holiday Hill” when you climb it, even though there is no guidepost to tell you its name.

## CHAPTER II

# THE OLD BOULDER

THE granite rocks with rounded corners that sit on Holiday Hill year after year seem like idle things. They have a settled look as if they had been there always and would stay forever.

That giant stone, the biggest one of them all—what has it ever done? On a hot summer day, it casts a shadow where children can play comfortably or where they can sit and read without the glare of sunshine in their eyes. On blustery days, the wind breaks against the rock, leaving a quiet place on one side of it.

Perhaps you may think that is enough for a great rock to do, to make a pleasant shelter from sun and wind. What else, indeed, can it ever have done than just sit still? You will feel better acquainted with Holiday Hill itself, I think, if you know something about that huge piece of granite which looks so steadfast and unchangeable.

For the old boulder has a story of its own quite as marvelous as the tale of anything else on the hill. And in spite of the rock's quiet way of sitting there, its story

## *HOLIDAY HILL*

is one of travel and adventure and mystery.

The mystery was a matter that kept many wise men guessing for many years.



*Granite rocks with rounded corners*

Vast numbers of such boulders, large and small, may be found in different places all over the northeastern part of North America. And wherever they are, there are reasons to think that they have been brought from somewhere else.

For such boulders are quite likely to be some kind of rock that is different from the solid bedrock that

## *THE OLD BOULDER*

lies under the soil in which the boulders rest. In many places the bedrock is limestone and yet the boulders, big and little, may be granite like those of Holiday Hill.

Although they are different from the bedrock of their locality, they are like the bedrock in some other region, often far away. Certain granite boulders are like the granite mountain tops a hundred miles or more distant.

Indeed, the boulders and the mountains are so much alike that men who studied them came to think that the boulders had been broken off the mountains and scattered about the country for many miles.

The shape of the boulders puzzled people, too. They are so much like huge pebbles with their rounded sides and ends.

Of course it is easy to understand why pebbles which are touched by moving water are without sharp corners. If they are on the seashore the waves splash over them and rub them together until they become smoother and smoother. And if the little stones are in the bed of a river they are pushed against one another by the swift water currents and their rough edges are rubbed down.

But how had the great heavy rocks, in the soil or on top of it, come to be similar in shape to the little stones in rivers and on the seashore? How had their corners been worn off?

The longer people studied boulders, the more they came to believe that the large rocks had their blunt

## *HOLIDAY HILL*

edges, as the pebbles had, by being pushed against some hard objects. It was because they thought these big stones had been knocked or rolled or bowled from one place to another that they gave them the name of boulders.

You can see what a mystery this was. What could have broken the rocky tops of mountains? What could have carried the broken pieces of rock about the country and dropped them here and there?

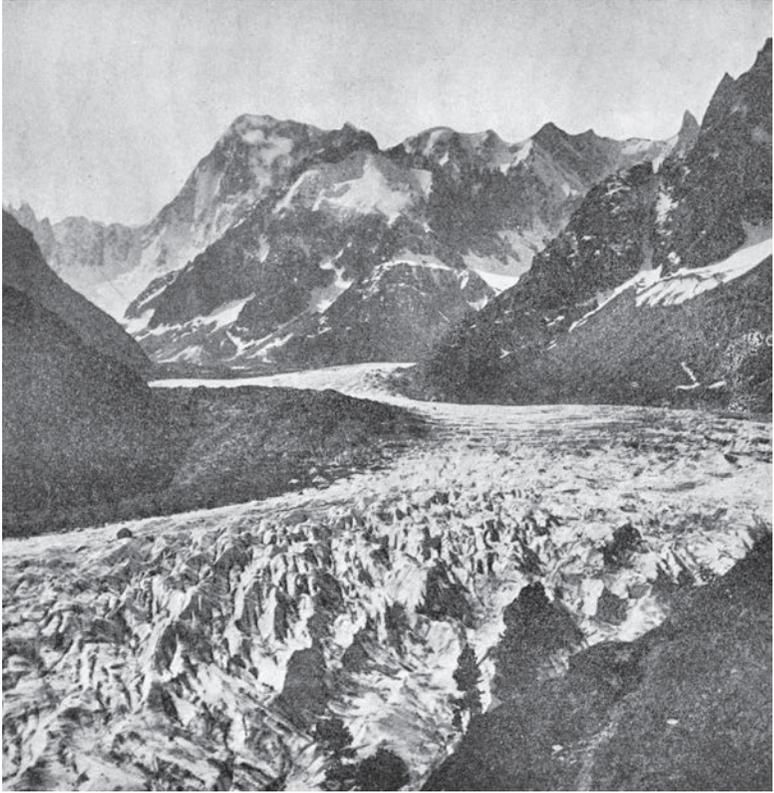
At last a man found an answer to these questions. His name was Louis Agassiz. In another country he had seen some high rocky mountains that were covered by enormous, deep masses of ice and snow. He knew what happened when great bodies of ice, called glaciers, pushed slowly down the mountains.

Louis Agassiz knew, too, what such a glacier did while it moved. It broke off parts of the rocks beneath it. The rocks became embedded in the ice and were carried with it. A glacier was like a solid river of ice, hundreds of feet deep, pushing rocks and soil as it went slowly on its way. And as the ice melted, of course the embedded stones dropped to the ground beneath.

It seemed to Louis Agassiz that the boulders and much of the soil in the northeastern part of North America looked like boulders and soil that had been carried by glaciers and dropped as the ice melted.

So he believed that once, long, long ago, the mountains in this part of our country were covered with enormous weights of ice and snow. He reasoned that glaciers from these must have pushed across the

## THE OLD BOULDER



*A glacier is a slow-moving river of ice.*

land, grinding off the hilltops, broadening the valleys and shoving rocks and soil from place to place. Then, finally, as the ice melted, the boulders were left wherever they chanced to drop.

The more men thought about what Louis Agassiz told them of the movements of glaciers, the more reasonable his answer to the boulder mystery seemed. And now you may find in certain books, accounts of how the travel-worn boulders were carried by moving ice.

## *HOLIDAY HILL*

So we understand that the ancient stone on Holiday Hill is one of many that came from some far mountain. After a long and remarkable journey, it was left there a stranger.

But the boulder is not a stranger, now. It has sat on the same hillside for no one knows how many hundreds of years, and it seems quite at home there.

Though its travels were over long ago, its adventures were not, for changes came to the old boulder of Holiday Hill from year to year.

Air and moisture acted upon the surface of the rock, season by season, crumbling bits of it somewhat as iron is rusted when left outdoors.

Rain and snow fell upon the stone and settled in its hollows. When the water froze in winter, the rock was cracked in places.

Dust and brown dry leaves were blown upon the boulder. Some of these were later washed into the cracks by rain and formed tiny beds of soil.

Seeds, brought by wind or birds or squirrels, fell on this soil and grew. The roots of the plants reached into the cracks and pushed as far as they could into the crumbled spots.

Fires swept over that part of the hill, burning dry leaves and woody stems and tree trunks and leaving ashes and charcoal near the boulder and blackening its sides with smoke. Perhaps lightning had started some of the fires. Perhaps others had spread from Indian camps.

Plants grew on the hillside that had been cleared

## *THE OLD BOULDER*

by fires. They scattered their seeds and spread their roots until in time the black ground was hidden under green leaves.

There were other plants of a quite different sort touching the boulder. They spread like a mat over the rock and covered much of its surface. These were the greenish gray lichens that lay with their flat parts so close against the rock that it was hard to tell where lichen left off and stone began.

Lichens had been living on Holiday Boulder ever since some tiny spores from lichens on other rocks had floated through the air and settled on this one.

The spores were finer than dust you can see in the air, but they were not too small to hold life. Young lichens grew from them, as some other plants start from seeds. The lichens had acid in them that softened the surface in which they grew. So they were able to get a firmer and firmer hold on the particles of rock to which they clung. They gave the rounded sides of the great stone a soft and lovely color.

One plant grew from a crevice in the very top of the boulder. It was a very large plant to be growing out of so narrow a crack. It was, indeed, a pine tree nearly twenty feet tall, and it was old enough to have cones with seeds.

Had that pine tree sprouted from a seed that had been blown to the top of the boulder years ago? Or had a bird perched there and dropped it? Or had a squirrel chosen that crack for a pantry and filled it with pine seeds, one of which had sprouted and grown?

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*Lichens covered the sides of Holiday Boulder and a pine tree grew in a crack at its top.*

You may ask that old giant rock as many questions as you like. But Holiday Boulder will be silent. It has no memory of any pine seed that was placed in its crevice. It does not feel the roots of the tree that are even now crowding against the sides of the crack. It does not know that blueberry bushes are brushing its surface with their branches and pushing their stems through its crumbling granite base. It does not feel the touch of the acid lichens or sense the difference between fire and frost.

## *THE OLD BOULDER*

Yes, you may question that ancient stone; but it has no knowledge of any of the events in all the marvelous story of its existence. Not even of that strange and icy journey that took place during those years before it came to sit on Holiday Hill!

## CHAPTER III

# HEATH BELLS AND BERRIES

HEATH is a name for open uncultivated land. Many kinds of plants cannot live on certain heaths. The soil is not right for them. Other plants, however, thrive in such ground. Indeed, one family of plants is called "Heath Family" because so many of its members grow on heaths.

Blueberries belong to the Heath Family. As you already know, there are blueberries growing on Holiday Hill. Some of them, which are close to the old stones, are neighborly enough to reach through cracks in the crumbling granite.

There are blueberry bushes growing away from the rocks, too. Their roots have run in all directions until one whole slope of the hill is covered with them.

No man planted these blueberry bushes. They were growing there long before any man found them. For many years the berries were picked and the seeds were scattered without any help from people.

Bears and smaller furry animals, with a fondness for sweet fruit, had countless pleasant picnics on the

## HEATH BELLS AND BERRIES

sunny hillside.

Sometimes gulls flew away from the sea and the shore to the hill where they gathered blueberries for a change. Fruit-eating song birds came often to feast there.

Doubtless both the furry and the feathered berry-pickers scattered seeds here and there; and doubtless some of these seeds grew to make more bushes. But, except for such seeds as they chanced to drop, animals of those sorts could do little to aid the blueberry plants.



*Blueberry bushes pushed their stems through cracks  
in the crumbling granite.*

## *HOLIDAY HILL*

But there were certain other animals that helped in a different and more important way. These were the insects that hovered over the heath while the blossoms dangled like little pink and creamy bells.

Among the visiting insects, none were more abundant and useful than bees. For bees flew to the bushes to drink the sweet nectar they found in the blossoms; and while they were sipping nectar they did a good deed to the plants that fed them. The service which bees and some other insect guests performed was to carry pollen from blossom to blossom.

Each blueberry flower needed pollen from another blueberry flower to enable its juicy fruit and its seeds to grow. Wind could not carry the pollen for them and drop it into the nodding bell-shaped heath blossoms. Nothing could help these plants in this way except the insects. Such heath plants and insects have lived together for ages. They need each other.

Of course these insects never knew they were helping the blueberries. They simply felt thirsty for nectar and went to the blossoms to drink.

When a visiting bee thrust her strong tongue up into a blueberry blossom, she moved the parts inside that held the pollen. The golden dust poured down upon her and stuck to her body. Then when she reached another blossom and brushed against its moist sticky stigma, some of the pollen came off her body and stayed on the stigma.

All through blossom time thousands of bees have

## *HEATH BELLS AND BERRIES*

been carrying their dusty loads of pollen year after year. But, of course, the birds and the beasts have never known that they had little insects to thank for all the sweet juicy berries they picked on the hillside!

The open blueberry slope of Holiday Hill once had trees growing on it so close together that but little sunlight could get through their branches. Some of these trees were cut and some were burned by white men. It is quite likely that some were burned by Indians before that. And perhaps lightning may have set some blazing fires that spread over the hillside.



*Lightning may have set some blazing fires.*

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No place could have been more inviting to blueberry bushes than such sunny land free from overhanging branches. Their roots and underground stems reached into the soil that had been cleared by fires. More and more new bushes sprouted from the old ones until, after a long time, these plants covered most of the ground that had once been shaded by trees.

It has been several years since a bear was seen on Holiday Hill, though certain smaller furry animals still come and go. So do birds with a liking for good sweet fruit. Their happy chirps may be heard from time to time.

There is another cheerful sound, too, that often floats about the hillside nowadays. The laughter of children is in the air—children with berry-stained fingers and faces.



*Bearberry blossoms are bell-like.*

## *HEATH BELLS AND BERRIES*

Even though they spend much of their time among the blueberries, they find other plants of the Heath Family, too.

Bearberry shrubs with trailing stems grow in rocky places. Their red fruits are pretty to look at, but the children do not find them good to eat.

Another member of the Heath Family grows well in the granite gravel on the hillside. Spicy red checkerberries may be found on this plant almost any time of year. They have a pleasant flavor in the late summer before they are full-grown. They stay on the plant all winter and are still good early the next summer when they are nearly a year old. These berries are firmer than blueberries and not so juicy.

Checkerberry plants, too, have insects to thank for all their seeds. And no animal could enjoy the rosy fruit if it were not for the little pollen-bearers.

Of course the feathered and furry berry-pickers do not know about heath blossoms and insects. Children, however, are wiser and can learn to think thankfully of little wild bees whenever they gather tasty heath berries.

But the fruit is not the only good-flavored part of a checkerberry plant. When the leaves are young and tender, they are quite as good as the berries to eat. The leaves are fragrant. "Aromatic" is the word that a botanist uses when he speaks of checkerberry leaves.

That is a pleasant-sounding word for spicy leaves. Wintergreen is another name for a checkerberry. That is a good name for it, as its leaves stay green all winter.

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*Checkerberry, or wintergreen, or teaberry*

You do not really need to eat checkerberry leaves or fruit to learn about wintergreen flavor. You can find out, if you wish, by eating certain kinds of candy.

But, of course, it is much pleasanter to visit the plants themselves. And while you are there on Holiday Hill, you may like to think that once long ago some Indians climbed that slope and found the same kind of heath plants growing.

For Indians used to gather the aromatic wintergreen leaves and steep them in hot water for tea. And if you wish to learn how that sort of drink tastes, why not make some for yourself? As you sip it you may be interested to know that this member of the Heath Family has still another name and is sometimes called teaberry.