

The Girl of the Orchard

By HOWARD FIELDING

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TO SUBSCRIBERS

"The Girl of the Orchard" was begun in the first issue of The Evening Teller, October 26.

So many complaints were made of irregular delivery of the paper during the first week by readers of this interesting piece of fiction, and so many new subscribers placed on the list who expressed a desire to have the first installments of the story that it has been decided to republish the story in installments of six columns a day. Seven chapters have been printed. Thursday, November 5, the last of the reprinted story will appear, together with a continuation of the interesting tale.

"The other gentleman?"
"Yes," said she. "We have a Mr. Derringer from New York, who wants to live in the orchard."

"Mr. Derringer?" I exclaimed. "Well, upon my word!"

She looked at me with mild surprise. "I seem to be meeting, or at least hearing about, an extraordinary number of my acquaintances in this place. I've met Mr. Derringer in New York, and as for Miss Jones—by the way, is she a rather tall girl with very beautiful blond hair?"

"Really, I hardly noticed," said Mrs. Witherspoon. "I couldn't tell you what she looks like. She keeps a good deal to herself; never comes to the house, but goes down to the lake with her painting things and sits there all day."

"This is very interesting," said I. "Can you give me a room in the house? Here is my card. I am the son of Sumner Terry of Chicago."

"Certainly," said Mrs. Witherspoon. "You can stay with us."

She rose as if to show me the way and looked about for a place to set down the pan of peas. At that moment Jimmy Lamone appeared as if through the ground and without a word took the pan from the old lady's hand and carried it into the house.

"Is that boy dumb?" I demanded.
"No," she replied, "but he's a curious child, cur'ous. He's a kind of a mystery, I call him."

"His sister is far from an ordinary girl," said I, "and something of a mystery herself."
"That's right," said Mrs. Witherspoon. "She is."

CHAPTER V.

ON THE LAKE.

MRS. WITHERSPOON offered me a room on the ground floor of the house in the end nearest the highway, the latest of the parts which had arisen in the growth of that remarkable structure. It was in every way inviting, being large and cool and furnished with a simple elegance quite beyond my expectations. There was a mahogany bedstead of the old style, yet not ugly, and the most cursory investigation revealed modern springs of the best pattern. The chairs, the writing table and the sofa were all equally fraudulent; they all concealed the comforts of today behind a thin mask of the antique.

It was pleasant that these things should seem to be the solid, cheerless lumber of our grandfathers and should so readily betray themselves for products of a time less rude. Indeed it was the chief charm of Mrs. Witherspoon's hospitality that it was not what it seemed. The place pretended to be a farmhouse and was nothing of the sort. Few people in these days like a farmhouse. We have outgrown the sincerity of a life so near the soil. It would not be well to go out of modern business or modern society into any form of sincerity. Such a pretense as Mrs. Witherspoon provides is very nice, but the reality is like the lead "tub" in the morning, a thing that some men talk about and never take.

There were three windows, and two of them looked out toward the lake. I could catch a glimpse of the little house under the apple tree, and the view down the gentle slope was very refreshing to the eye. The quarters pleased me, and I made a prompt bargain for them at a price that would have given me a spasm of the pocket.

I had come without any baggage at all, and it was necessary to return at once to St. Jo. In that city I experienced some small delays, and it was after 2 o'clock when I came again to Mrs. Witherspoon's and helped the man who had ridden out with me to carry in my trunks. When he had driven away, I sat down by a window and enjoyed the view. The place savored of romance. It was delightfully unreal, and I was beginning to fancy myself floating on the lake in the moonlight with Anna Lamone when the baser craving of hunger shattered the dream.

The vision had endured for a few seconds only, for I was in a state to gnaw the bark of the apple tree that shaded my eastern window. Indeed I had some thought of its fruit, scarcely out of the bud, and glanced in that direction for an instant. Turning again to look out toward the lake, I stared straight into the face of Jimmy Lamone, whose head just reached above the window sill.

Jimmy enjoyed my surprise. He had a way of grinning with his eyes, the lower part of his face remaining as expressionless as a slice of beefsteak.

"I told Mrs. Witherspoon I'd show you the dining room," said he.

"You don't mean to tell me that there is anything to eat at this hour?" I exclaimed.

"You can always get something to eat here," he said. "There ain't any hours."

In previous experiences with rustic living I had been burdened by the rigidity of mealtime regulations, and I had had no thought that Mrs. Witherspoon would serve lunch as late as half past 2.

"You are taking a starving sailor off a raft," said I to Jimmy, and I gave him half a dollar, which he received with the solemnity of a rite.

He laid the coin in the palm of his hand, closed his fingers upon it and opened them again. My money had vanished. Having performed this mystery, Jimmy gravely led the way toward the dining room, seeming to know by some sort of intuition that I should make my exit by the window instead of taking the longer route.

Mrs. Witherspoon's dining room was in sections, like the house, and each section had its exits and its entrances. I was aware, in the course of my meal, that several persons were lunching in my neighborhood, but I saw none of them. I sat at a little table by the window and was well served by a neat maid. The bill of fare was ample, and everything was cooked to admiration.

After luncheon, being entirely upon my own resources in the matter of amusement, I wandered down to the lake. The path led alongside the orchard, but the view in its direction was obstructed by bushes that overran the fence. There was no one to prevent my walking across the orchard. No signboard interdicted it, but there was a law in the air, and this was a peculiarity of the place.

At the foot of the path I found a small boat drawn up on the shore, and I felt privileged to take it. I pushed the craft off and sat in the stern, using one oar as a paddle, Indian fashion. The lake was very pretty and blessed by a cool breeze. I paddled out a little way and lighted a cigar.

To the left the hill came down, verging upon the water in a singular wall of rocks that would have seemed the work of man but for the vast labor it would have cost. Glancing along this wall and so on to the bare field that fringed the orchard, I perceived a girl in a pale green dress at work before an easel. She was shaded by a large umbrella, such as artists use, planted in the ground and set at so nice an angle that it accurately beheaded her image in my eyes.

The distance was not so great but that I might have recognized a person very well known to me, and I stared at her, expecting every moment that she would stoop and reveal her face. Whom should I see? Pretty Miss Jones from St. Jo or—some one else? I was conscious of a most unusual thrill of anxiety.

I could see her right hand plainly; at least, there was nothing but distance to prevent. It seemed a pretty hand, and it wielded the brush with engaging grace. Yet in my present calm frame of mind I am willing to admit that one human hand looks much like another at 300 yards. But this consideration did not come to me at the time. Such things are for the best; they make up the joy of youth. Thank heaven, I am still subject to such illusions, for all this did not happen long ago.

I watched the lady's hand with a most agreeable fascination and tried to remember a hand which it was my chief business to forget. But one's memory in such matters is not what the romantic would like to believe that it is. The actual fact is that I probably could not have identified Anna Lamone by her hand alone if it had arisen from the lake beside my boat.

After a long while, as it seemed to me, the lady stooped. I had warning that she would do it, and my heart gave a leap. It was great sport; I enjoyed every second of it. And then her head came slowly down into the visible area. She was veiled, not heavily, but quite enough. I should not have known her had she been the dear old aunt who brought me up.

It was very strange that an artist should work with a veil over her eyes; indeed it was not to be believed. I had seen a motion of her left hand just before she bent down. She must have been lowering the veil, and this could not have been done except upon my account. No one else was in sight.

The hint was sufficient. I took up my oar and gently propelled the boat toward the other side of the lake. There, with my head upon the rail at the stern and my feet almost in the bows of the little craft, I lay for a long time thinking.

At this distance the girl was a mere dot in the landscape, yet the nearer view was present in my memory.

"She is some one I have seen before," said I, "but she is not Miss Lamone, nor Miss Jones of St. Jo, nor any possible remodeling of Sibly. Who is she, and why do I feel this peculiar interest in her? Really she is only a nuisance of a girl who prevents my living in that little house under the tree."

Having reached this conclusion I began the serious business of the day, which was forgetting. This must not be neglected, and so I lay there and remembered—remembered all I could, with poignancy of regret at first and frank self-accusation of weakness. I never should have fled like this; I should be up and doing. Every moment was precious, for who can tell what is happening in the world to influence his destiny? Your friend breaks his arm, and you grieve for his mischance, but the good and the bad that make him what you love happened before you knew him. You could neither grieve nor rejoice; you could not help him, for in the moment of his most desperate peril you were laughing with that day's acquaintance, and you were cast down for a trifle in the nick of his triumph. The same is as true now



She was shaded by a large umbrella, as it was then; the great battle of your cause is being fought, perhaps, and you not there.

This philosophy is the father of blue devils. As it deals entirely with what one does not know, it gives unlimited scope to the imagination. It was perfectly easy for me to imagine a hundred combinations of circumstances every one of which would result in the loss to me of the woman who of all in the world I could love, for in following these lines of thought I never failed to reach the conclusion that Anna Lamone was that woman.

In the face of all my manifest good fortune I fell into a miserable despondency. It seemed to me a particularly glaring outrage that a man situated as I was, with every possible chance to be happy, should have it all spoiled by the thwarting of a single desire. I was far from blaming my father or any human agency. The thing was in the order of nature and could not be otherwise. There is a worm for every fruit, and when one is not enough it is no trouble at all for nature to invent a few more. It is evidently not the intention that we shall be happy, but why not?

I became excited about it and stared fiercely up at heaven. And then I noticed that the sky was beautifully blue and the arch of it immeasurably vast. My boat dwindled to a speck. Looking over the rail, as I could do by turning my head lazily, I saw this dome completed to a sphere. I was an atom in a great blue egg, an egg that miraculously holds the germs of an infinitude of creatures. Considering that I have not yet pecked the shell of it, why be impatient? There is a time, no doubt, when we shall all go forth.

Yet undeniably we suffer now, the big and the little of us. There was a swallow chasing a fly, and winged love was after me with no better intentions. Around me in the air and water innumerable creatures preyed on one another, the stronger on the weaker and, indeed, the weaker on the stronger almost as commonly. Yet the scene impressed the deeper parts of me as a scene of peace, and I was happy.

Why not play the game according to the rules thereof and be cheerful about it? The like is done by those gay colored insects and by the little people down there in the water. The tiny pickerel under that leaf is not protesting, though his very father would eat him if he could catch him. It is only when a man transfers to these light hearted creatures his own elaborate and far-reaching terrors that he is constrained to shudder at the carnage of the under realm. It is but life and death, after all—the life agreeable for the most part, and the death preserved from cruelty by methods which you will better guess in the fields than shut up in a study with cold reason for a counselor. For in the winning of this reason you have lost some part of nature's mercy or, at least, the power to feel that her exactitude requires no mercy to season it.

Idle speculations, leading nowhere except, thank heaven, away from one's own personal and exaggerated troubles. It was for this, indeed, that I came to Mrs. Witherspoon's. I have had a fine afternoon on her lake.

CHAPTER VI.

THE SPECIAL GUARD.

WHEN I went to dinner, there were several people in my section of the dining room, all very quiet and well bred. An elderly couple and their daughter were at one of the tables and two young men at another. In ordinary circumstances

I might have been interested in the young woman, who was a dainty creature, having wide blue eyes full of light. But as matters stood, I gave my attention to John Trask and Alexander Scovel, whose names, of course, were a later discovery.

Trask was undoubtedly an artist by dress and manner, but his face would have been ideal for a judge, being strongly indicative of perception both broad and deep and calmly severe in its expression. He had the look of one who has engaged in the more violent athletic sports in youth and has begun to take on flesh for the lack of them. His hair was reddish brown, wavy and remarkably ornamental.

Scovel was a thin man, tall and high shouldered. His hair and drooping mustache were dark and his eyes were gray. Watching him languidly during dinner, I made two accurate guesses—first, that he was a lawyer, and, second, that he had come to Mrs. Witherspoon's to recuperate after an illness.

After dinner I wrote a letter to my father and then went out to take a walk. When upon the steps, I became aware of a faint strain of music proceeding from nowhere in particular. It was a different kind of music from that which I had heard on the veranda in St. Jo, and I was conscious of a wish that it were more distinct. A woman was singing to the accompaniment of a guitar, and, though I could not recognize the song, it touched that chord of memory vaguely sad which vibrates in the heart.

Strolling toward the road, I saw the flare of a match and then the glow of a cigar. A man was sitting on the stile beside the carriage-way, and when I came nearer I recognized Mr. Derringer.

I greeted him with something like cordiality and said that I was glad to have the pleasure so early, for I judged that two people might live a month at Mrs. Witherspoon's and never run together.

"Delightful place, isn't it?" he said gloomily.

The tone and the words were matched so ill that I smiled, and he perceived it, though there was not much light.

"I am down on my luck, and that's a fact," he said. "Queer too. I ought not to be feeling this way. There's nothing the matter with me. There's nothing, more to the circumambient night than to me. 'Health good, prospects first rate, plenty to do, if I could find the 'sand' to do it; not broke or anything of that kind.'"

"Looks like a girl on the evidence thus far presented," said I. "It's none of my business, of course; but I'm in somewhat the same trouble myself."

He brightened perceptibly.
"You were looking a bit low in your mind when I met you at Cushing's," said he.

It is strange how two men become confidential. The thing usually happens without warrant, as in this instance, and the ordinary habits of concealment struggle with a selfish desire to relieve the mind. The result is that a fellow carries away from such an interview a remarkable mixed shame for having both lied and told the truth when neither was necessary.

What I told Derringer did not do either of us any good. As for his story, it was quaintly vague. He was an open hearted, practical fellow, who might have presented the plain facts with excellent effect, but he stumbled in the byways of evasion.

"The truth is," said he, "that I thought I was persona grata to the finest woman in the world, and I wasn't. So I came out here to forget about it." "Another fellow?" I suggested.

He seemed to ponder deeply, and in the silence I heard the music more plainly than before.

"Hanged if I know!" said he at last. "Beautiful voice, isn't it?"

"I heard it when I first came out," said I, "and had a vision of an angel flying over the house. Who is it?" "The girl in the orchard," said he. "That's the extent of my information. She was here when I came day before yesterday. Wanted the place for myself, but it wouldn't work. I told Mrs. Witherspoon that it wasn't safe for a girl to live out there all alone, and she said 'M-m-m' or 'Well, now!' I forget which. She always says one or the other. It's a blamed sight easier to tell Mrs. Witherspoon something than it is to get her to tell you anything."

"The girl isn't alone in the orchard," said I. "There's Miss Scott."

"Speaking with all possible respect," rejoined Derringer thoughtfully, "it's a simple fact that in an emergency a good dog is worth a dozen old maids. I've been tempted to send her one. Of course she wouldn't accept him."

"It is customary to make the gentleman's acquaintance first," said I, and Derringer kicked the stile softly, reflectively, as if there might be another view of the matter. "My own notion," I continued, "was to buy some blood and thunder stories—some of these historical dime novels that sell for a dollar and a half in cloth. An armful of those things ought to drive her out of that cabin in 24 hours. But, to be serious, I'd rather she'd stay, though I really do want the place very much for myself. The girl is perfect; she fits the orchard even as the blossoms of the trees. I've seen her at a distance, and—"

"Well," said Derringer, as if I had hesitated, "what did you think?"

"Why, nothing in particular," said I, "except what I've told you."

He had got down from the stile, and as it seemed to be his intention to return to the house I fell in beside him. His room was directly over mine, and at my invitation he inspected my quarters before ascending to his own. When I struck a light, it happened that the print of Sibly was lying on the table beside the lamp, though I had supposed that I had put it away. I saw Derringer glance at it and start.

"Any one you know?" I queried.

He took it up.

"Charming girl," said he, "for as much as one may see here."

"When a photographer takes the back of a girl's head," said I, "the circumstance is suspicious."

"I've seen her somewhere," said he. "Would it be intrusive to inquire?" "Not the least in the world. She is Miss Sibly Wayne. She has been my father's ward from her youth."

Derringer shook his head. "I can't have had the honor of meeting her," he said. "I always remember names much better than faces. She's not staying here? Well, that's odd."

He turned to his study of the picture. "It's a matter of perfect certainty," he went on, "that I've seen this young lady recently within a day or two, I should say, yet the time's uncertain. She hasn't been out here? I would have said—"

He paused and stared up at the ceiling.

"Strange how one forgets"—he began.

"The picture doesn't show much except an ear," said I.

He tapped the print lightly with his finger.

"It's the hat," he said. "Pretty bit of millinery, isn't it? I have an eye for such things, though you'd hardly believe it. Yes, sir," he added slowly, "I've seen that hat!"

He seemed to take a deeper interest than the facts warranted. By my way of thinking the matter was of importance to me rather than to him. However, he was not in possession of all the facts, and could not know my motive for treasuring this picture. I had contented myself with explaining to him that there was a young woman in the world whom I wished to meet with a perfectly free heart and mind, and that therefore I had come to Mrs. Witherspoon's for the purpose of shaking off a certain fascination, a spell of modern witchery, under which I had fallen.

Was Derringer right in believing that he had seen Sibly recently? Was she among the guests of Mrs. Witherspoon? It concerned me much to know.

Derringer and I became so much absorbed, each in his own reflections, that we were unfit for conversation, and he presently withdrew.

I lit a fresh cigar and sat down by that window which gave the best view down the orchard. The slender crescent of the moon looked bright against the darkness of the sky, but could not light the earth. I pictured the girl looking out upon it from the veranda of the apple tree lodge, and upon the lake and the rough hill, both as God made them. She might well imagine herself in the primeval wilderness. It was pleasant to think of her there, glorifying the scene with her own sweet fancies. And yet it must be very lonesome and not altogether safe.

I did not then know that the Witherspoon estate was patrolled by night, so that a faint cry from the orchard would have brought swift rescue. It came into my mind that I would perform that duty as a volunteer, and under the influence of this idea I went out to the road again, for an invader of the orchard would probably be no worse than a homeless wayfarer seeking shelter. A thief would not look for plunder there.

A well kept path ran beside the fence toward the shoulder of the hill that bent the road. I had scarcely set foot upon the path when I perceived two suspicious characters loitering near by. Advancing boldly upon them, I discovered that they were Derringer and Trask, and it was thus I came to know the artist's name.

"I have thought," said Derringer, when he had made us acquainted, "that there might be tramps along this way in the early part of the night. It seems that the same idea occurred to Mr. Trask. I met him here."

Then we began to speak of the warmth and sweetness of the night, the excellence of Mrs. Witherspoon's cuisine, the advantages of the country in hot weather—many things, indeed—but not the girl.

We walked slowly toward the break of the hill, and having reached it turned back. Presently we saw a spark of fire approaching, and it proved to be a cigar between the lips of Alexander Scovel.

"Lonely bit of road this, isn't it?" said the lawyer to me as we shook hands. "I wonder if tramps ever come along this way. I got to thinking about it in my room."

"Yes," said Trask; "we all did." And he added a trivial remark obviously intended to turn the conversation. It is a lawyer's business, however, to hold fast to the essentials unless he be paid to do otherwise.

"It is strange," said Scovel at the first pause, "how mystery and romance walk hand in hand. Why are we here? Why do we speak with a certain restraint, as if we were influenced by a superior presence? We do not know this young lady. Speaking for myself, I should not recognize her if I should meet her face to face, and I have no present hope of ever doing so."

Derringer smoked hard and Trask took off his hat and rubbed his rough red hair with a gesture of impatience.

"It is the mystery," Scovel continued, waving his hand gently and gracefully toward the orchard. "Our interest might vanish if we saw her. By the way, I came very near doing so yesterday afternoon. I was out on the lake and she was sketching by the shore, so I rowed in a little way—"

Instantly there was a strong chill in the air, and Scovel, who, to do him justice, was in some respects a sensitive animal, detected it and stopped.

"Well, I didn't exactly row in," he said after a pause; "I let her drift."

"A distinction without a difference," said Trask. "An unwritten law circumscribes that orchard."

"No man can be less inclined to intrude than I am," protested Scovel. "However, if without intrusion one might have a glimpse of her face?"

He did not finish the sentence, but it

had the effect of a question. The silence of Derringer and Trask was as loud as any voice I ever heard.

"For instance," the lawyer persisted, "we are clearly within our rights here. Now to state a hypothetical question: Suppose you, Mr. Trask, were standing in this spot during the hours of daylight and saw the young lady approaching, would you not hold that the responsibility of a meeting, if one should occur, would rest with her?"

"How natural it is," said Trask, addressing the moon, "for a lawyer to break the law."

"But I should be inclined to argue!"—Scovel began.

"Of course you would," interrupted Trask. "That is what you are on earth for."

Scovel laughed.

"Will the court please rule on the matter of Miss Scott," said he, "as to whether it would be within the statute for me to make her acquaintance?"

"If she requests the pleasure of having you presented," said the artist, "the court will not interfere. But don't make any advances."

Scovel sat down on the fence and appeared to consider these rulings. The conversation waned and died. We wandered silently back to the house.

For my own part I was too deeply perplexed to talk much. The situation was extremely unusual. It was evident that the girl was of vital interest to Trask and Derringer, while no more than an object of romantic speculation and natural curiosity to Scovel; that the lawyer did not even attempt to guess who she was, though the other two men had settled convictions upon the subject.

Moreover, I would have made oath that Trask and Derringer were not in each other's confidence, and that their views about the girl were utterly at variance. It would be impossible for me to state the grounds of this belief or to quote a word spoken by either of them in support of this theory. The thing was in the air. I held it for certain that one of these men was deluding himself with a romantic notion that had no basis in fact. Indeed both might be mistaken.

CHAPTER VII.

THE GIRL IN THE PICTURE.

THE next morning after breakfast I sat in my favorite window and cut off the end of one of my mildest cigars. I was feeling for my matchbox when there was a crackling sound at my elbow, and there stood Jimmy Lamone offering me a light.

"James," said I, accepting the match. "I observe that you rarely use any form of salutation. That is why the pleasure of seeing you is so often heightened by surprise."

"Good morning, sir," said he gravely. "Good morning, James. Have you seen Miss Witherspoon today?"

He shook his head. "I don't see her very often," said he. "She's always at work. But she wouldn't tell you."

"Wouldn't tell me what?" I demanded.

"About the young lady who lives in the orchard," said he.

Now, it really had been in my mind that I would ask Miss Witherspoon a few questions, not directly about the girl, but of a general character designed to fix the limits of the problem. I would like to know, for instance, about how many young ladies there were in the house who might be Sibly, for it would be disturbing to my mind to meet a new one every day without having any notion how long this process might continue. It had not been my intention to question Jimmy Lamone, partly because of the difference in our years, but more because I had a great and growing distrust of his veracity. Yet since he came flaunting his cloak of mystery in my face and with somewhat the air of a champion sent forth by the other side I set him down for fair game.

"Why should I wish to know anything about the young lady?" said I. "What is she to me?"

Jimmy shifted from one foot to the other and finally said:

"I thought you wanted to get her to move out."

It would have been a good answer if he hadn't been obliged to hunt for it. I decided to converse further with this precocious youth and opened my lips to say "Come in," but he anticipated the words, nodding and pointing to the other window. It was so aptly done that I did not speak at all. I merely nodded in response, and he climbed into the room.

There was a heap of pictures on my desk, mostly small photographs of scenes and people abroad. I put the print of Sibly among them and then invited Jimmy's inspection. For a few minutes the boy dropped his mask. He viewed the pictures with hearty interest, asking questions which proved that he was well taught and more than ordinarily mature in mind. Yet once or twice I caught him cleverly pretending to know more than he did, and I gained some small acquaintance with the methods by which he delighted to anticipate the thought and speech of his elders.

At last he came upon the print, and it was a genuine surprise. Beyond question he recognized it at a glance, but when I asked him in the most ordinary tone I could command whether he knew the lady he led with a counterfeit of sincerity quite shocking in one so young. Indeed I could not have done it better myself.

(To be Continued.)

Postal Appropriations

WASHINGTON, Nov. 4.—The estimated appropriations for the postal service for 1905 was handed in by Postmaster General Payne today. It calls for a total of \$155,985,000, an increase of 20 cents and one-half million over 1903 and 1904.