



All's Fair

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by Gelett Burgess

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"You must have been a romantic youngster," she said, her eyes fixed on the distant landscape.

"I was, decidedly," he answered, his eyes fixed on her. Then he added, "And I am yet."

"Indeed?" She raised her eyebrows, smiling.

"I spent my childhood here and I feel now, somehow, as if I owned the place."

"It's very good of you to let me stay here—" she began.

"I'm so glad you came—at last! I missed you when I was a boy. I knew you would come, sometime."

"Indeed? How dear of you! How long ago was that?"

"Let's see—I was ten years old—eighteen years ago. Just think of it!"

"And I was eight. I'm afraid I wasn't very romantic myself. I was a matter-of-fact little thing, though I did have some queer fancies now I remember it." Her eyes had come back from the hills, fluttered about him and alighted on his face. "Tell me what you did here when you were a boy," she said, impulsively, almost warmly.

"I was alone most of the time and so I had to make up games that only *one* could play."

"But I thought you were expecting *me*."

His eyes fell from hers. "I used to pretend you were here. You did not keep me awake then as you do now."

She laughed, with a note of pleased incredulity.

"You don't believe me?" he said. "I believe you do stay up later than is good for

you,” she replied. “You were out late last night. Am I to believe *that* was my fault?”

“I was thinking about you all the time,” he said.

“I suppose I ought to be sorry that I came down here to trouble you, but really I didn’t know you were to be here, and I had no idea that it was your farm. The advertisement led me to believe that it belonged to Mrs. Briggs. But go on about your happy childhood hours. I don’t believe you were half so silly then as you are now.”

“Well, I used to play Indians all by myself, and hide behind that stone wall there to shoot arrows at the pumpkins on the vines. I lived for a whole day on a desert island in the brook. Oh! And I buried a treasure in this very orchard! I had almost forgotten about that.”

“What fun! That *is* exciting! What was it you hid?”

“I can’t quite remember whether it was a punched nickel or a manuscript in a tin box. It was something very mysterious and very important, at all events.”

“Where did you bury it?”

“Somewhere over in that corner by the pear-tree. I know I painted a lot of cabalistic marks on the roof of the barn to locate it by. They ought to be there yet.”

“Let me see them! We *must* dig up the treasure. I’m dying for some excitement.” Her intonation was imperative.

“Oh, it was only schoolboy nonsense. It might be something I wouldn’t wish you to see. Besides, you never could get near enough to read the painting—the rafters are frightfully dusty.”

“I don’t care. I insist that you show me the place.”

He smiled and rose to lead the way. The barn was dark and cool, odorous with the freshly garnered hay. He helped her up the ladder and over the springy mows to where a rickety set of cross-bars led to the sparsely-floored beams above. This she reached in triumph, though the victory brought ruin to a fresh white

duck gown.

“Where is it?” she said, craning her neck to peer into the shadows under the roof.

“I’m afraid you can’t get any nearer unless you dare to walk along that timber,” he said.

“No, thank you. I won’t try it at present. You go over there and read it to me.”

He walked boldly across the narrow beam to where, in the gloom of the roof, a patch of lettering, done crudely in red paint, shone out. There, he read aloud:

“Under nail in knot number two pear tree, line to summit 18, toward S corner barn 5. Down 3.”

“Do you want me to write it down?” he asked.

“Yes,” she cried, “we must dig it up immediately.”

He drew out a pencil and note-book and copied down the directions and rejoined her on her perch. In a few moments more they were standing in the sifted sunlight of the orchard, and she pored over his memorandum.

“I don’t understand it,” she complained.

“That’s because you’ve never been a boy. Any youngster who has ever read Poe would find this as clear as day. Wait until I get a spade and I’ll show you.”

Returning from the house with a spade and a yardstick, he walked over to the pear-tree and drew up a barrel, which he ascended. “I used to think this bough was terribly high, when I was a boy, but I can reach it easily from here. This must be the knot, although the bark has closed over the nail. Now watch where this stone falls.”

“Oh, I see, now! You go eighteen feet towards the summit, I suppose,” she said, referring to his notes, “is that hill it over there? My! you *did* take a lot of trouble over it, didn’t you?”

“Yes, especially as I did it at night.”

“Why, you couldn’t see the hill at night.”

“*You* don’t know anything about romance! You have to dig the hole first and measure afterward when you’re a truly pirate.”

With her assistance he gravely measured off the distance, then went five feet toward the corner of the barn where a single sprig of wild turnip grew. Here he removed his coat and took up the spade.

“I’m almost frightened,” she said, putting her hand for an instant upon his; “it does seem so terribly real—almost as if we were digging up your dead childhood.”

“Well, you can bring it to life if anybody can,” he laughed, sinking his spade in the soil.

She jumped atop the barrel and watched him as the hole grew deeper and the mound of earth beside it grew larger. She was smiling through half-closed lids, ceasing suddenly whenever he looked up. “I’m afraid you’re going to be a boy again and allow me to remain an old lady,” she said. “*I* didn’t ever bury any old treasure at all. I never did *anything* interesting but play with my dolls and write in my diary.”

He stopped, buried to his knees in the excavation, and looked up at her eagerly. “Did you keep a diary?” he asked. “By Jove, I’d like to see it! I tried it once, but I gave it up after the first week—the weather part bored me so. Won’t you let me see it?”

“Go ahead and dig! This suspense is terrible.”

“I won’t dig another stroke unless you promise to let me see it.”

“You’re taking an unfair advantage of me, but I’ll see if I can find it in my trunk. I *think* I brought it down here with me. But you *must* hurry now.”

“I haven’t told you I’d let you see this yet.”

“Then you’ll never see my diary, and it’s a good deal more interesting than your old treasure.”

He dug furiously for a few moments and then his spade struck against a rock. "Ha-ha!" he cried, "didn't that sound hollow and sepulchral enough?"

She jumped off the barrel and kneeled excitedly upon the edge of the hole to look. He lifted a fiat slab of stone and threw it up. Underneath, in the rusty remains of what had once been a tin box, he scraped the earth aside and discovered a glass bottle whose cork was buried in a mass of red sealing-wax. He held it aloft in triumph.

"Behold," he cried, "the lost treasure of the Incas!"

"I'm going to open it," she announced. He nodded and she dropped it on the flat stone. A roll of brown stained paper fell out.

As she unfolded and read the scroll his head was perilously near hers. She did not seem to notice it, though the color swept up over her cheeks. She felt his hair brush against her temple, but read on without moving.

The manuscript was printed in crude letters, some backwards, the large mingled with the small in childish guise. At the bottom where his name was signed a discolored dime was fastened by a faded ribbon to a blob of sealing-wax.

The document ran thus:

"I, hereby, sware, bing of sound mind that I will not marry or wedd any body unless they are named Jane and must have light brown hair. I must be two years older or the wedding will be null and void notwithstanding. In tesstimony, whereof, I have hereby signed my name and seal.

RICHARD MONTGOMERY,

Captain-general. "

She looked up, and, seeing him so near, started suddenly aside. He didn't spare her in his glance, and his eyes questioned hers anxiously.

"I feel as♦if I'd been eavesdropping," she said; "I had no idea little boys took things so seriously."

"No more seriously than men do," he said, meaningly.

“Little boys always change their minds.”

“This one never did.”

Her eyes dropped and her fingers plucked at her handkerchief. Then, seemingly against her will, a smile blossomed on her face. “I’d like to keep this for reference,” she said. “I don’t quite understand it yet.”

“You may have it on condition that you get me your diary immediately.”

“My diary is very silly. It’s much sillier than this.” She hesitated, watching his pleading look.

“Please hurry and bring that little girl here. A little boy of ten is waiting for her.”

She tossed him a smile and was off, running through the trees to the old house. It was some time before she returned, much more slowly. She was reading a little book as she walked.

“I’m sorry,” she said, “but I really can’t show it to you. It’s altogether too foolish.”

“You promised.” He reached out his hand.

“Did I? Well, take it then.” She handed it to him and walked away through the trees toward the barn, while he sat down beneath the pear-tree to examine her gift. He smiled, as he turned the pages of the little book, at her conscientious records of fact and fancy. Upon the fly-leaf was written in a girlish hand the name Jane Gladden, and the dates were those of eighteen years ago. He read for a while in silence, tasting her experiences day by day, until at last he turned a leaf to find a more introspective chronicle. Then he laughed aloud.

“I have decided that I shall not marry until I am twenty-six years of age like mamma was and He must be twenty-eight like papa. I like the name of Richard best of all names because it means brightness.”

He put the book in his pocket and went after her. As he reached the barn-door a voice greeted him from high among the rafters. “Come up here,” she cried, “if you’ve finished your vivisection.”

He climbed up to find her balanced perilously upon the upper beam. It was his turn to blush now. He held his breath as she came boldly towards the platform.

“Have you read it?” she asked.

His answer was to take her in his arms and seek her lips. From this comfortable position, her next question came a bit shyly.

“Weren’t we silly when you were ten and I was eight?” she said softly; “almost as silly as we are now,” she added.

“I think we are very wise,” he replied. “It’s very comfortable to think that this has been going on so long.”

“We must have written our confessions at just about the same time,” said she.

“Yes,” he assented, “it doesn’t seem eighteen years ago, does it?”

She broke into a little storm of laughter. “No,” she exclaimed, “by the looks of that red paint on your sleeve, I should really think it was only yesterday.”

“And by the looks of the new ink spot under your finger nail,” he replied, “it might *almost* have happened to-day.”