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## OUR CITY VISITOR

Our folks expected a visitor from the city. The young lady's name was Clara Osgood. Her father and mine had been friends in boyhood, and the friendship had always continued, and now Mr. Osgood had written to ask father if his daughter might come and spend a few weeks with us, and see if country air would not improve her health, as she was drooping in the close atmosphere of the city.

The Osgoods were very wealthy, and were ordinary country people, but father did not hesitate a moment. He wrote a warm invitation to Clara Osgood to come at once and see us, and we would make her as comfortable as our means would allow. So she wrote that she would be with us on the 18th day of July. (You see I remember the date).

Mother and the girls dreaded having her come, I know, for we lived in the very plainest style, and of course she would be proud and "stuck-up"; but father talked to them, and got them to feeling better about it. He said that we need not be ashamed of our circumstances because we were poor, and if she despised us on that account she wasn't worth minding.

As for me, I was in perfect agony. I was a great, tall, awkward six-footer, as bashful as I could be, and just twenty-two. It was as much as I could do to hold a conversation with one of our country girls, to say nothing of making the acquaintance of a city belle. At first I thought I'd clear out and leave home, but then I had promised to work for father that season, and I couldn't back out very well. But I inwardly resolved not to speak to her, the whole time she was there, my sisters to the contrary notwithstanding. I had to take lectures from Hattie and Elsie every morning and evening, about being polite and paying attention to her.

"Now don't act as you commonly do. Will," they would say, "but help us to entertain her. It won't be fair to throw it all on us."

My sisters declared that I would be decidedly handsome if I were properly rigged out, but that was all in their eyes. I guess girls are apt to think their brother rather good-looking.

Well, the long-expected day arrived at last. The girls said that I must come home from my work about the time for the stage to arrive, and be there to welcome her; but you didn't catch me doing that. I was away off in the farther field, at work, about that time, and my sisters had to receive her themselves. When I came home I dreaded going in worse than a whipping. I did all the chores that were necessary, and some that were entirely unnecessary, before I went near the house, though the girls called me several times to come to supper. Then I went up stairs and slicked up a little. I put on my second best pants, and my linen coat, and washed my face, and combed my hair.

I didn't have the slightest intention of going where she was, though.

By that time it was nearly dark. I went down stairs the back way, and listened at the kitchen door a moment, but hearing them talking in the front room, I ventured in, and finding the table cleared away, I slipped into the pantry to get something to eat.

I had a huge piece of bread and butter in my hand, and was devouring it eagerly when suddenly there fitted into the kitchen the prettiest little fairy I ever saw in my life. She was dressed in white, with the most beautiful yellow tresses floating over her shoulders, complexion of the purest white and red, and a mouth so sweet and lovely it was enough to set a fellow wild. She came out to the water-pail, which was just in front of the pantry door, saying:

"Here is where you get water, isn't it?"

Before I could possibly shut the door, she raised her pretty blue eyes and saw me. I was sure I saw an amused sparkle in her eyes, and a little dimple came and went in either cheek, but she drank as quickly as possible, and went back into the front room with mother and the girls.

If I could have had the floor open and let me through, I'd have done it in a moment. I felt perfectly "awful." The sweat stood in great drops all over my face, and my appetite was entirely gone. I could no more swallow the remainder of my bread and butter than I could have swallowed chips.

The girls came and tried to get me to go into the front room, but I declined, and as she had faced a cannon's mouth as

that little blue-eyed, fairy-like creature. "What makes you act so, Will?" said Hattie. "You will like her ever so much. She isn't stuck up a bit, as I thought she would be. Do come in."

But I wouldn't. The next morning I made out to come to breakfast. I wouldn't have done it, but I knew I never could exist without eating, and I thought I might as well come to the table as to have her find me eating in the pantry. That morning she was dressed in a blue wrapper, with a snow-white collar and coral pin, and she looked just as I have imagined angels look. She seemed already acquainted with the rest of the family, and was as sociable and merry as if she had always made it her home with us.

Elsie introduced me by saying, "This is brother Will," and Miss Osgood gave me a sweet little bow and smile that made my heart beat like a trip-hammer.

It seemed as if there was no awkward thing in the world that I didn't do that morning. I tipped over nearly everything on the table; when mother requested me to pass the bread, I passed her my cup of tea, spilling half of it; when our visitor asked for the butter, I handed over the salt; and, finally, when I went to get up from the table, my chair went over backward with a terrible bang, capping the climax of my mortification.

The days passed on, and Miss Clara made herself perfectly at home in our farmhouse. She helped the girls to wash dishes, make bread and pies, and I would often come in and find her with an immense apron on, engaged in some culinary operation. Sometimes she and the girls would come out in the field, and rake hay, and she did not even take pains to cover her hands to keep them from tanning.

"You will get your hands as brown as a gipsy's," I said to her one day.

"I don't care," said she; "it will be all the more fun."

She was the daintiest, prettiest, sweetest little creature in the world, and if I hadn't fallen in love with her I should have been more than mortal. I did. You may believe it didn't improve my manners to be in love. If I had been awkward before, I was three-fold more so now. I never could do a thing as I wanted to.

One day we didn't have so much to do as usual, and the girls declared that I must take the team and let them all go huckle-berrying. I was willing, so I tackled up Dobbin, and took our waggon, and off we all started for the pasture.

Clara looked prettier than she ever had before. She wore a gipsy hat, with a broad brim, a calico dress which she had got since she had been with us, for she didn't bring any calico with her, and she had on an apron as white as the driven snow.

I told her she ought not to wear such a white apron huckle-berrying; it would get all stained with berries, but she said she didn't care, as there were plenty more aprons where that came from.

We had a gay time berrying. We broke down bushes and sat under the trees the most of the time, for Clara declared she couldn't stand it to have the hot sun beating down on her head; and as it would not do of course answer to leave her alone, I broke down bushes enough for us all. We picked a good many berries, though I should say, judging by appearances, that more went into Clara's mouth than into her basket.

Sure enough, the white apron was covered with great black stains before night, and Clara's mouth had a very marked appearance. Her fingers, too, showed her occupation, to say nothing of her hands being scratched with briars, and her curls being one whole mass of tangles.

We rode home in the merriest kind of mood. Clara insisted on occupying the front seat with me, and I continued to talk quite sociably. When we drove up to the gate, whom should we see but a strange fellow talking with father, in the dooryard. He was all dressed up, and looked exceedingly stylish in his fine broadcloth and glossy stove-pipe hat.

Clara coloured up as soon as she saw him and I mistrusted in a minute that it was some city chap that she was acquainted with, perhaps her beau, though it made me dreadful to think of that. He looked at Clara as we drove up to the door, and for a moment she seemed puzzled. I didn't wonder at it, for she didn't look much in her present plight as she did when she was all dressed up in her city clothes. But when I helped her out he seemed to recognize her, for he went up to her and shook hands as heartily as could be, and said:

"Miss Osgood, I am delighted to see you."

I could have kicked him with a good grace; but as it wouldn't have been exactly polite before the ladies, I didn't do it.

Clara introduced him as Mr. Taylor. He didn't seem particularly cordial to any of us, but he was all attention to Clara. I couldn't tell whether she was glad or sorry to see him. She was rather stiffer than usual. I thought, and she went up stairs and fixed up, and came down looking as fresh as a pink.

"Can you make out who that fellow is, Hat?" said I, when we chanced to be alone together a minute after supper.

"Why, it's Clara's beau, you booby," said Hat. "It does seem as if you fellows can't understand anything." Here Will, where are you going? Don't go off in

that style. Come back and help entertain the company.

"I won't," said I, savagely, walking off with rapid strides.

I went to Squire Morgan's and spent the evening, and stayed till eleven o'clock, and the girls couldn't guess which of them I came to see. There were five of them in all.

I went home and dreamed of taking Mr. Taylor to the horse-pond and throwing him in, and punching him back with a pole when he attempted to swim out.

The next day I was in a desperate frame of mind, and it didn't improve my condition when I saw from the field where I was working Mr. Taylor and Clara, walking together in the orchard. I would have liked to have had my dream come true just then. If he had stayed long I should have done something desperate. I know; but he went away the next morning.

I was rather surprised that Clara didn't go back with him, but I supposed she had concluded to wait till next time.

I was as moody and sullen as I could possibly be the next few days. I didn't take any notice at all of Clara, and went to Squire Morgan's almost every evening. They began to think I went there to see Maria, the old maid.

One evening I had put my hat on, just ready to start, and was standing in the door, when Clara glided up beside me, raising her sweetest of blue eyes to my face, she said:

"Will, are you mad at me?"

"Mad at you? How can you ask?"

"Because you act so strangely. You won't hardly speak to me. Have I done anything to offend you?"

"No, but I thought Mr. Taylor would be about all you could manage for the present," said I, growing angry as I thought of my rival.

"Mr. Taylor was managed long ago. I don't know what he has to do with me, or you, either, for that matter. But I see you are just as hateful as you can be, and if you want to get mad you may, and stay so," and the little lips were pouted, and tears fell, one by one, from her eyes.

She turned to go in, but I caught her and held her fast.

"Let me go, you bad boy!" said she, trying to release herself from my grasp.

"Not till you tell me one thing," said I. "Isn't Mr. Taylor your lover?"

"No, and never will be," said Clara, veiling her eyes with the long lashes. "I perfectly detest him."

"Clara," and my face grew very hot, while every vein in my whole body was throbbing wildly, "supposing an awkward homely, country fellow should tell you he loved you, and ask you to be his wife, what would you say?"

"I will wait till one asks me before I tell that," said she, pouting.

"I love you, Clara. Will you be my wife?"

Just one lifting of the long lashes, one glance from the pretty blue eyes, and the next moment the sweet face was hidden entirely from sight on my bosom. In my transport I clasped her frantically in my arms, and not satisfied with a silent consent, I made her say that she loved me; and then I stole a kiss from the pretty lips that had uttered such sweet words.

It was too good to be true, almost; but as I glance at the little lady sitting opposite me, looking at me with those same blue eyes, I realize that my happiness was not all a dream. I have found out, by actual experience, that city girls make most excellent farmers' wives.

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