

# BOYS AND GIRLS

## The 'Spite' Fence.

(Laura Alton Payne, in 'Forward'.)

As the cab rolled away, Blythe Harper paused a moment on the stone coping of the little front park, to feast her eyes upon the dear old place.

It was nine o'clock of a fresh, sweet morning in early April. No one was watching for her, as she was expected on the evening train. She knew exactly where they were—her father at the office, and her mother in the kitchen.

Blythe's eyes greedily took in the smooth, green park and yard with their neat iron fences, the plain but commodious frame house in cool French grey with white trimmings, the background of vines and shrubbery in their budding foliage—then she saw it.

There it stood in all its ugliness—the 'spite' fence her mother had written her about; two of them, rather, back to back, stubborn, insensate things. For, when Jason Harper—never a patient man—provoked beyond endurance by the trespassing of his new neighbor's dog and chickens and children, resentfully put up, just within the dividing line of the two premises, an almost solid board fence six feet high, Amos Thorne, though ill able to do so, promptly retaliated with a similar fence fully six inches higher, and not more than four inches from the original or aboriginal, as it now seemed to Blythe.

'Oh, dear!' she sighed, in a tone of dismay, 'this will never do!' Then she had a sudden inspiration. With a laugh, she caught up her suit case and hurried around the house to surprise her mother. Mrs. Harper, her back to the door, was kneading sponge for her Saturday's baking, wholly unconscious of the tall girl tiptoeing across the porch, until she was clasped in a close embrace.

'Blythe!' Two floury arms went around her tall daughter. 'O Blythe!'

When Blythe saw the look on her mother's face she realized how much that little mother had missed her. With a pang, she wished that she had not stayed away so long—that her father had written sooner. But she would make up for it now.

'I'm here to stay, mumsie dear,' she said, smiling through misty eyes at her mother, who hovered around her while she ate her belated breakfast, touching her with clinging hands, and saying over and over, 'Oh, dearie, it does seem so good to have you home again.'

An hour later, Blythe stood in her own spotlessly neat blue-and-white room, gazing around with the joy of possession. How delightful it all was after nearly two years' absence! She went from window to window to gaze upon familiar scenes.

'Oh, dear!' Again the involuntary exclamation of dismay. She had paused at the window overlooking the Thorne premises, and that awful fence! As her gaze roved over the general untidiness on the other side of it, Blythe's objections moderated. She understood what a vexation, aside from the trespassing, the mere sight of such a state of affairs had been to her father, whose own trim place was the pride of the street.

A score or more of fowls were pasturing on the oasis of sward in the front yard, and vigorously remodelling the relief form of the leaf-covered desert at the back. The 'desert' was promiscuously decorated with tin cans, a broken chair, a dilapidated cart with three wheels, an old barrel, two swill pails, and a huge cinder heap. Hanging in a conspicuous apple tree was a hoe, a mop, a piece of ragged carpet, and two or three cast-off garments. Tubs and other household utensils cluttered the back porch. The house and small barn and dilapidated fences were in dire need of a coat of paint.

The place had not looked so in old Mr. Hallam's time. Mr. Hallam, who was somewhat of a recluse, had lived next door ever since Blythe could remember. At his death, just after she went away to school, the property fell to his nephew, Amos Thorne, in Ohio. The Thornes had promptly taken possession of their Kansas home—the only home they ever had owned. Early the following spring the 'spite' fence had been built.

Blythe had laughed over her mother's account of it, but now it seemed no laughing matter. Its only redeeming features were a coat of paint—on the Harper side—and a

gradual slope at the front to a level with the street fence. But for fully three-fourths its length, it loomed high and aggressive, proclaiming to every passer-by its origin and purpose. Indeed, at that very moment there came a loud laugh from the street, and a voice exclaimed, 'Look at that fence, will ye?'

Blythe felt her cheeks tingle as the second farmer twisted around to gaze back with a broad grin that ended in a guffaw. She turned and shook her fist at the offensive cause of their mirth as she admonished:—

'Just wait awhile, you ugly, inartistic old heathen!—just wait till my magic box comes! We'll give those farmers, and everybody else, a crick in the neck gazing at you.'

Changing to a fresh print gown, Blythe hastened to the kitchen to help with the dinner. A loud 'whoa' at the barn announced her father's arrival. Simultaneously, came shrill whistles, shouts, and loud talking beyond the Janus-faced fence.

'The Thorne children home from school,' explained Mrs. Harper. 'It's that way morning, noon, and night.'

Blythe went flying down the back walk to be caught in her father's arms with a cry of surprise and welcome.

'O daddy,' she said eagerly, 'I am so glad you wrote me—mother does look bad. I sent in my resignation the next day and—here I am.'

'Too bad you had to give up your school when you were doing so well, but your mother was pining for a sight of her little girl. She doesn't know I wrote, and you must not tell her; remember.'

'All right, daddy,' assented Blythe. 'But, merrily, if I'm the tonic mother needs, she will soon be well, for I intend to give her large doses of me—and you, too, daddy.'

'I feel better already,' laughed her father. As they started to the house, arm in arm, three heads bobbed down on the other side of the 'spite' fence. A moment later, as Blythe glanced back from the kitchen door, she saw two boys, of probably eleven and thirteen years of age, astride the fence, propelling themselves along with leapfrog tactics.

As Blythe's merry laugh rang out, the two forms, with an agile turn peculiar to boys and cats, disappeared head-foremost, to alight on their feet, Blythe felt sure.

'Dear me!' exclaimed her father, irritably. 'Those boys are the bane of my life. If it isn't one thing it's another from early to late. School is our only relief. I only wish they'd double the hours there for little savages like the Thorne boys.'

'I'll tame them for you, daddy,' smiled Blythe, across the table. 'I've learned a great deal about boys in the last seven months.'

'You don't know those boys,' discouragingly.

'I'll get acquainted,' encouragingly.

The next Saturday morning brought Blythe's 'magic box.' Nat and Chris Thorne sat on top of the 'spite' fence, and watched her prepare to open it on the back porch.

When Blythe smiled at them in a friendly way and called, 'Boys, come here a moment,

please, and help me,' they responded promptly, but somewhat shyly. Wise Blythe sat down, and let them do bunglingly what she could have done deftly—pry the box open.

'I wonder if I couldn't hire you boys to do some work for me to-day,' she said persuasively.

'Yes'm,' they chorused, their eyes brightening.

'Can you spade?'

'I can,' said Chris, the elder, eagerly.

'Can you rake?' to Nat.

'You bet!'

'The very boys I want!' smiled Blythe. 'You may consider yourselves engaged for to-day at ten cents an hour.'

'Goody!' exclaimed Nat, 'I can get me some new—'

Chris's hand cut short Nat's revelation. 'Huh! wait till you've earned it, silly,' he scoffed.

'Oh, he'll earn it,' assured Blythe. 'There's the rake, Nat; you may clear off the vegetable garden yonder. Bring the spade, Chris, and we will get a place ready for some of these bulbs.'

'Going to set them here?' There was incredulity in Chris' tone, as they paused by the front of the 'spite' fence.

'Yes, indeed; this is a fine spot for them,' returned Blythe. 'Please spade good and deep the whole length of the fence, and twice the width of the spade.'

Chris stared in amazement. 'Vines all along?' he queried, still doubtfully.

Blythe nodded, and said, 'They'll look so pretty.'

With a queer look on his face, Chris fell to spading vigorously. Both boys worked faithfully all the forenoon, and with a word of praise, and a generous square of her mother's fresh gingerbread, Blythe sent them home for dinner just as her father drove up.

'What are those little savages doing here?' he demanded, as Blythe went to meet him.

'Working for me and, incidentally, getting tamed, daddy, dear. Now, you shan't say a word against my hired men—not a word,' she warned playfully. 'I'm proving a theory, namely, the more work a boy has, the less breath he has for shrill whistling, catcalls, and war-whoops. They will help again this afternoon.'

'Well, have it your own way,' laughed Mr. Harper; 'you usually do. I'll not object if it saves me the bother of spring cleaning. But keep an eye on them.'

'I'll keep two eyes on them. But, really, daddy,' she said earnestly, 'they don't need watching. All they need is work, as a vent for their high spirits. I don't wonder that boys grow wild in town.'

Nat and Chris were back promptly at one o'clock, eager to go on.

'If you please, Miss Harper, mother wants to know if you can spare Chris long enough to go on an errand for her.'

Glancing up, Blythe, who was down on her knees setting out bulbs along the low front of the 'spite,' saw a thin, lank girl of fifteen gazing at her timidly across the fence.

'You're Gusta, aren't you?' Blythe inquired, with a smile. 'Chris has just been telling me about you. Of course, Chris can be spared whenever your mother needs him.'

Gusta lingered after seeing Chris off. Possibly Blythe's cordial reply had something to do with it.

'What you putting out?' she ventured.

Blythe was quick to take advantage of the opportunity she had been waiting for. 'Maiden tubers,' she answered. 'The vines will look so pretty on this low fence. Wouldn't you like some for your side?'

'Oh, yes, indeed!' her thin dark face flushing until she looked almost pretty. Then her face fell as she added, dejectedly. 'But what's the use? Those dreadful chickens would scratch them up.'

Cover them with brush until the vines get well started,' suggested Blythe.

'Well, I'll try it, and thank you very much, Miss Harper,' Gusta said, with sudden decision. 'If the chickens bother, I'll wring their necks. I'm tired of this yard looking like a barnyard, and I intend to have flowers like other people. Oh, I forgot!—we haven't a spade.'

'Chris can spade it with ours.'

'I'll spade it myself, if you will let me use

## BOYS! MONEY FOR YOU!

and

## Splendid Premiums

Watches, Knives, Fountain Pens, Cameras (and outfits), Baseball requisites, Fishing Rods and Tackle, and hard cash, are only a few of the good things any bright boy in Canada can earn for himself, by selling the 'Canadian Pictorial,' Canada's leading illustrated Magazine (10 cents a copy).

Send a Postcard TO-DAY for full particulars; also some copies of the 'Pictorial' to start your sales on. It will cost you but a cent and will put money in your pocket if you follow it up.

Address JOHN DOUGALL & SON, 'Witness' Block, Montreal. Agents for the 'Canadian Pictorial.'