

Martin Pippin in the Apple Orchard

**Martin Pippin in the
Apple Orchard**

Eleanor Farjeon

a selection from the Prelude to the First Tale: AND now, said Martin Pippin, what exactly do you require of me? If you please, said little Joan, you are to tell us a love-story that has never been told before. But we have reason to fear, added Jane, that there is no such story left in all the world. There you are wrong, said Martin, for on the contrary no love-story has ever been told twice. I never heard any tale of lovers that did not seem to me as new as the world on its first morning. I am glad you have a taste for love-stories. We have not, said Joscelyn, very quickly. No, indeed! cried her five fellows. Then shall it be some other kind of tale? No other kind will do, said Joscelyn, still more quickly. We must all bear our burdens, said Martin; so let us make ourselves as happy as we can in an apple-tree, and when the tale becomes too little to your taste you shall munch apples and forget it. Will you sit in the swing? asked Jennifer, pointing to the midmost apple-tree, which was the largest in the orchard, and had a little swing hanging from a long upper limb. Close to the apple-tree, a branch of which indeed brushed its mossed pent-roof, stood the well-house. It had a round wall of old red bricks growing green with time, and a pillar of oak rose up at each point of the compass to support the pent. Between the south and west pillars was a green door, held by a rusty chain and a padlock with six keyholes. The little circular court within was flagged, and three rings of worn steps led to the well-head and the green wooden bucket inverted on the coping. Between the cracks of the flags sprang grass, and pink-starred centaury, and even a trail of mallow sprawled over the steps where Gillian lay in tears, as though to wreath her head with its striped blooms. What luck you have, said Martin, not only to live in an orchard, but to have a swing to swing in. It is our one diversion, said Joyce, except when you come to play to us.

It is delightful to swing, said little Joan invitingly. So it is, agreed Martin, and I beg you to sit in the swing while I sit on this bough, and when I see your eyelids growing heavy with my tale I will start the rope and rouse you thus! So saying, he lifted the littlest milkmaid lightly into her perch and gave her so vigorous a push that she cried out with delight, as at one moment the point of her shoe cleared the door of the well-house, and at the next her heels were up among the apples. Then Martin ensconced himself upon the lower limb of the tree, which had a mossy cushion against the trunk as though nature or time had designed it for a teller of tales. The milkmaids sprang quickly into other branches around him, shaking a hail of sweet apples about his head. What he could he caught, and dropped into the swingers lap, whence from time to time he helped himself; and she did likewise. Begin, said Joscelyn. A thought has occurred to me, said Martin Pippin, and it is that my tale may disturb your masters daughter. We desire it to, said Joscelyn looking down on the well-house and the yellow head of Gillian. The fear is rather that you may not arouse her attention, so I hope that when you speak you will speak clearly. For to tell you the truth we have heard that nothing but six love tales will wash from her mind the image of Of whom? inquired Martin as she paused. It does not matter whom, said Joscelyn, but I think the time is ripe to confess to you that the silly damsel is in love. The world is so full of wonders, said Martin Pippin, that one ceases to be surprised at almost anything. Is love then, said little Joan, so rare a thing in the world? The rarest of all things, answered Martin....

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