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On the subject of what was or what was not best for Tom the small monitor assumed large airs of gravity and decorum which tempted one to smile into her dimpled face. Not that she would have countenanced such levity for an instant. She took herself in her relation as semiguardian to the last of the Broxtons quite seriously. Ever since that dismal day on which they had laid the dear colonel to rest under the weeping willows of the Mandeville churchyard and brought Tom to stay temporarily at the Matthews cottage while "arrangements for his future" were perfecting she had come to look upon him as in some sense her personal charge.

That had been four years ago. The years have healing properties for the young which they lose in later years. A correspondence had been one of the inevitable consequences of Ollie's self elected guardianship and Tom's craving for friendship.

His 11 months of seniority, which counted for little on the calendar, were entirely reversed in their social relations. In their letters he figured as quite 11 years her junior. She never forgot his birthday. It was always remembered by a gift chosen with a view to a man's ever recurring demand for neckties, gloves or the like and always sent accompanied by a neat little homily on the approaching years of responsibility, prettily indited on her best society stationery.

Fresh from the perusal of an effusive letter of thanks for the latest donation of gloves and advice, Olivia sagely wrinkled her brows and looked across the breakfast table at her father.

"Just to think, papa, the dear boy is 18 years old! I suppose he will be putting on all the airs of a grown man when he gets back. I can hear the beating of restless wings in each letter more distinctly. That is as it should be. If I were a man, I know I should strain at the leash violently long before the college doors closed upon me."

Her mataphors were somewhat mixed, but as she was preparing her father's second cup of coffee with just so much sugar plus so much cream metaphor had to look out for itself.

The lawyer, deep in his own mail matter, glanced up quickly, showing a dark, unsmiling face.

"Who is straining at the leash, my dear?"

"Oh, that was just a figure of speech I was talking about Tom. I've got and absurdly grateful letter from him thanking me for his gloves. If I had sent a shoestring, he would have waxed just as eloquent over it. Tom is a time will tone all that down."

She was conscious of a very abstracted auditor.

Her father's head had been lifted just so long as his hand had been extended for the cup of coffee. He was once more poring over his morning's mail with knitted brows. Her maltese cat, always discreetly observant of the progress of the meal, gently reminded her by a velvet pawed caress that he was waiting to be served. Her canary bird, swinging in its gilded cage in the sunny bow window, shrilly monopolized the realm of sound.

Her father's absorption in letters which properly belonged to his office work was an infringement of her most cherished household regulation. She interfered despotically. "Papa, you know I regard the break-

fast hour as my exclusive property. You are breaking my rules."

The dark face opposite her was lifted. The light of a mighty love illumined its gloomy eyes. Lawyer Matthews pushed his letters from him in a heap and smiled.

"You are right, my queen of hearts, as you always are. I beg your pardon for my rude inattention. I am all yours. You were saying"-

"Nothing very profound." She smiled ness. That is a bad sign." with restored good humor. "I have been wondering what we are going to do with Tom Broxton when he comes back to Mandeville for good. He can't en, father, and inclined to underrate live alone in that great barn of a house. He would meet a ghost at every turn. And he could not live here with us. Every old woman's tongue purpose. Tom is essentially well balin Mandeville would chorus 'improp- anced. I have seen plentiful signs of living but the soft dimpled child who er.' What on earth can we do with restlessness." the poor boy?"

· Twice during her remarks her fa them abstractedly and replaced them on his nose with nervous energy. Instead of the direct answer her direct the shrilling canary.

noise?"

not know it annoyed you."

sert a lump of sugar between the bars of the birdcage. Returning, she perched on the arm of her father's chair, retaining her precarious vantage ground lawyer's grasp. He stooped to recover by elutching his coat lapels firmly with one hand.

"Father, you must be working too bard. You are horribly nervous of late. I shall have to take you in hand." She passed a caressing hand over the lawyer's troubled forehead. "There are at least a dozen new worry lines here. This will never, never do.

"What about Thomas?" Her caressing failed of soothing. He drew her

"What are you going to do with him when he leaves college and comes home to live? You know we must plan for it."

"There is no immediate call for agitating that point, my love. Thomas is to go abroad for two years after leaving college."

"Does he want to go?" "I want him to go."

"Of course, papa, as his guardian you may advise him to go, and I think every boy ought to travel. But has Tom expressed any wishes of his own on the subject?"

"I have not broached it to him as yet. I anticipate no objections on his part. His father was a great traveler in his day. Indeed, I may say he was passionately fond of it."

"Then you have not consulted him about it yet?"

The lawyer rose from the table with his hands full of letters. A slight frown contracted his forehead, bringing his bushy gray brows almost into contact with each other. He loved this breakfast hour above all the hours of the day. It was full of peace and pleasantness. It was pleasant to look across the table into his child's beautiful, spirited face, a face which always brimmed over with intelligence and with love for him; it was pleasant to look beyond her, out through the vine encircled bay window into the tangle of beauty and perfume which Ollie called her garden; it was pleasant to contemplate the fact that this dear child had but to express a wish and he was able to gratify it. Things had gone well with him the last four years. Men said he was waxing rich as no lawyer of Mandeville ever had before him. It was pleasant to prolong this communion time.

Presently he would go off to his office, and the sweet music of his darling's voice would be swallowed up in the harsher tones of angry men chaffering for their rights. But just now Olivia was growing a trifle inquisitorial, and it was that which sent him away from the table somewhat abrupt-

"No," he said, standing on the hearth rug; "I have not written to him yet. I don't want the pleasant anticipation of travel to get between him and the closing exercises of his college. I am somewhat apprehensive that Thomas may be lacking in energy."

"I don't know why you say that, wee bit sophomoric, I must admit, but | papa. His reports from the very beginning have been just splendid. He stands first in all of his classes and"-

"Oh, as a student Thomas has made a fair record. but I should prefer more fire, more vim, more fervor of antici-



You stupid papa-to want a fretful, puny baby always under your wing!" pation for the future, in so young a man. He shows no signs of restless-

Olivia championed the absent with warmth and decision.

"I think you are altogether mistak-Tom. His letters to you, I suppose, are more restrained and formal. I see abundant evidence of ambition and of

"I hope I have molded him fittingly," said the lawyer, with pious self gratuther had taken off his glasses, wiped lation. "Yes, I think he may be called essentially well balanced."

"He is just what I fancy Colonel Broxton was at his age," Ollie resumquestion invited, he looked straight ed, with unconscious point. "He is not over her head through the vine clothed one of those tiresome boys who bore bow window, frowning incidentally at | you to distraction with wordy vaporings about what they are going to do "Is there no way of silencing that and be, winding up by doing and being and, flinging his bridle rein over the nothing. Moreover, the fact of his be-"Dick's yodeling? Certainly. I did ing so rich would incline him to deliberation. The spur of necessity is not from the dense shading of the untrim-She left the table long enough to in- pricking him to select a career in wild haste. Tom is very rich indeed, is not he, papa?"

Some of his letters slipped from the them. His sallow face was deeply flushed when he straightened himself almost defiantly. He did not look at Olivia as he answered curtly:

"By no manner of means. That is the care taker and his wife. He would one of the current local fallacies, a great mistake. Thomas' personal expenses have been heavy, and some of ping the cedars. That must do for tohis dear father's investments turned

out very pagiv .--Ollie soared superior.

"I am rather glad to hear that. Rich young men are so apt to wax conceited and worthless on the strength of their father's hoarding. They lose the incentive to personal endeavor." Her father rewarded this flight with

a somewhat acid smile. "Your worldly wisdom becomes startling, my love. I think I shall have to get you a new doll to dress."

"Doll, indeed!" She mimicked bis gravity. "Your capacity for insulting a helpless female becomes startling, my love. I think I shall have to get you a new pair of eyes the better to see, my dear." She came toward him, a riant, sparkling creature, and stood before him with crest uplifted. "Observe the length of my gown, if you please, and hands down with almost a petulant the Psyche knot which tops my mature and classic head."

Her father drew her to him almost roughly. "Olivia, you startle me in earnest. You are a young lady. The fact has burst upon me in a second. You are no longer my loving, trusting, unquestioning little darling. You will be measuring your strength with mine, demanding your place at my side rather than under my wing. It frightens

She laughed musically up into the furrowed face.

"And it delights me. You stupid papa-to want a fretful, puny baby always under your wing in place of a wise young woman by your side! And, you naughty papa, to let my eighteenth birthday almost dawn without a breath touching appropriate celebrations!"

"Celebrations?" He repeated the word perplexedly.

"Don't you even know, father, that a girl comes of age when she is 18? She doesn't come into a vote and all that sort of nonsense, but she comes out, and I propose to do that appropriately."

"Appropriately! Why, bless my soul, ves, of course! What shall we do, Ollie?"

"I should like a fete champetre, said Ollie grandly, "such a fete as the people of the country shall date back to and from for generations to come. I shan't come of age but once in my lifetime, you know, papa."

Her father looked overhead out of the bay window into her garden and upon the grassy terraces intervening between it and the cobblestone street. The Matthews cottage, perched upon its well kept terraces, was one of the

mensions were by no means imposing. In land it was conspicuously cramped. "A garden party, my love? I believe that is your idea done in English. Do

show places of Mandeville, but its di-

you think our modest little yard"-She interrupted him with a gay laugh. "Oh, no, papa! That would be absurd, ridiculously so. Over at Tom's house is where I mean to hold my fete. We could give a lovely garden party among the grand old trees on Broxton lawn and such a delicious dance in the long, yellow parlor."

"But the people?" "The Westovers are expected back from Europe on Monday. I should especially like them to see that one does not have to go abroad to know what to do on occasion. Oh, I want it to be very grand indeed, papa! Miss Malvina Spillman will help me to make it just perfectly lovely. She can act chaperon too. I can make out quite a splendid list of guests."

A strange hesitation seemed to bind her father's tongue. He, who was generally eager in his readiness to gratify her slightest wish, stood mute and frowning in face of her very dearest

"You have a guardian's right to use the house, papa, haven't you?" "Yes. Oh, yes, of course!" "And I know Tom would be only too

glad. I shall write for his permission." Still that unfriendly silence. "My heart is quite set upon it, papa."

Her father's surrender was sudden, but complete. "Then so is mine," he said almost violently, lifting her sweet face near enough to kiss her on both cheeks. "So it is settled. We will have our garden party over at Broxton Hall, and I will stop there this evening as I drive home from Rosecliff to give orders about having the house opened and properly aired. A good deal of weed chopping will be needed."

"Oh, I forgot court was in session! You truant papa! You ought to have been in Rosecliff half an hour ago. I am going to send Reuben over with the ponies for Miss Mally. I am dying to talk with her all about the affair." And she dismissed him with a shower of kisses and the injunction: "Don't be late in getting back, papa. There is so

much to see about." The day held more than its full quota of trials for the iron nerved man who never yielded a point to anything held his very heartstrings in her care-

less grasp. Night had fallen before he mounted his horse and turned its head homeward. Seven lonely miles stretched between him and Mandeville. He gladly would have foregone the stop at Broxton Hall on his way home, but he had promised Olivia, and that was enough. When he reached the outer gate to the gloomy old mansion, he dismounted horse rack, made his way on foot up the crumbling brick walk, slimy now med cedars.

There would be much to do in order to make Ollie's birthday fete a success, but it should be done. The cedars must be trimmed up tomorrow and the brick walls all scraped clean.

Reaching the house, he made a circuit around it. In a remote corner of the large back yard he knew he should find give them general directions for opening the house, sunning the rooms and clip-. night, just by way of keeping his

He was tired, harassed, unhappy; but, whatever befell, the shadows that sometimes crowded thick and fast about his own resolute head should not infold her. To make Olivia happy was the law of his life, the mainspring of his every action, his one earthly de-

The care taker and his wife had closed their cottage for the night and were preparing to retire when his knock startled them. He heard them draw the bolt with reluctant caution to answer his summons.

"What! Not abed thus early, Si-

"Not just abed, sir, but since the master's been gone Jess and me are jus' as willin as not to lock up early and shut things out. It be awful lonesome and gloomsome here now. Mr. Matthews, and unless things brighten up when Mr. Tom gets through schoolin I doubt if Jess and me can hold on at this gait."

And then Mr. Matthews told Simon how he was going to break the gloom spell by a garden party on his daughter's birthday, and Simon espoused his cause gladly. Broxton Hall used to be a happy and a gay house.

"Anything to bring back the old gladsomeness, sir."

Mr. Matthews gave his orders about opening the house, clipping the cedars, etc. When he turned away, he heard the old man promptly bolt the door again, and as the wooden shutters were of solid boards the little cottage immediately offered but a dark, square bulk for observation. He returned as otherwise have achieved. he had come. Making the circuit of the house from rear to front, by the side en which Colonel Broxton's study was located, involuntarily he glanced upward at the closed shutters, then started and stood still, wondering. A faint

light, so faint that it might have been a phosphorescent glimmer, shone through the slats of the dark green shutters.

Whatever else his shortcomings, physical cowardice was not among them. Some one was in the Broxton house and in the colonel's study. To go back for Simon would be useless. He would not come. He must depend upon his own address and his own

Stealing noiselessly to the front of the house, the lawyer mounted the low front steps and tried the front door handle softly. It was locked. With a strong grip he next seized one of the shutters of the long French windows that opened from the parlor to the veranda floor. It yielded readily. So did the sash. He slipped his shoes from his feet and sped with swift noiselessness across the hall. The study was at the rear of the house. It connected with the room in the parlor suit by the doors glazed with dead ground glass. Through the dim glass of these doors the pale phosphorescent gleam came steadily. He would catch the thief red handed. His hands were planted firmly on the silver doorknobs. He sent the sliding doors gliding noiselessly in their grooves with a resolute touch. Then he staggered and held fast by the lintel to keep himself from falling.

Bending over the dead man's study table was a tall, shadowy form in white. The sound of scattering loose paper fell on his ears with a ghostly rustle. He saw a restless hand three times distinctly. In a sighing whisper he heard the words, "Lost, lost, lost," all this in a second of time. The night wind swept through the open front windsw. The pale light was suddenly extinguished. The house lay in utter darkness. A faint, slow movement, like the rustle of garments, came nearer to the terror palsied man, passed by

him, died away entirely. How long he staid there he never could have told, nor how he ever groped his way back to the spot where he had left his shoes and from there to his

Once in the saddle, with the cold night air fanning his cheeks, his courage came back and with it a flood of self contempt.

"Bah! Am I in my dotage? he cried angrily. "Tomorrow I will investigate this ghostly trickery and run the trickster to earth."

But he slept very little that night, nor did he run that ghostly "trickster" to earth on the morrow nor the next day nor any day thereafter.

CHAPTER V.

Mandeville confessedly never saw its

PREPARING FOR THE FETE.

like, never expected to see its like again. There were those in that conservative village who flatly maintained that such magnificence was entirely out of place. They were sure history never recorded a greater ado made over the coronation of royalty or the installation of presidents.

After all, Mandeville was only Mandeville, and she in whose honor the world had just been turned upside down was nobody but little Ollie Matthews, who had grown up among them with no particular claim to universal homage, a nice enough girl, "such doings over her coming of age

was just nothing short of nonsensical." Mandeville possessed, among its antiquities, those who remembered the very day when Horace Matthews first | bers." put foot in Mandeville, the only son of a poor widow music teacher whom Rufus Broxton's father befriended as he always befriended the needy ones of | Spillman?" the earth. The antiquities shook their hoary heads and groaned inscrutably, "And look at him now!"

Such a "coming out party" had never is certainly turning queer." been dreamed of in the wildest fancies of the most imaginative Mandevillian. "Coming out party" had sense and sound of its own. It meant what it like you to go out without overshoes. sounded like. "Fete champetre" was a combination of the alien and the incomprehensible. One language was more than sufficient for all of Mandeville's philological necessities. frowned down all others.

But there was no disposition to frown down the glittering fact that from funereal gloom to dazzling hilarity the old Broxton place had passed without the saving grace of an entr'acte-such | kled audibly. a painting of fences, and trimming of long neglected shrubbery, and stringing of lanterns, and planting of pallid statuary that rather made some of the oldest ladies blink with amazement, and grouping of tubbed exotics, and waxing of floors for giddy feet, and cartloads of crockery and glass, and a band of music in blue breeches with red stripes down their legs, and-and-

Mandeville was absolutely breathless with excitement. There were those who said it was a good thing for the town, because it gave "jobs" to so many idlers. Miss Greenfield, whose dressmaking had been found good enough for Mrs. Colonel Broxton and for this very Miss Matthews' mother, didn't see where the good of the town was being consulted when nobody this side of New York could make a good enough dress for the coming out heiress. That was what they called her, "the heiress," and Lawyer Matthews' reckless expenditure of money on the coming fete warranted any amount of wildness in the matter of nomenclature and conjecture.

Miss Malvina had been retained as general superintendent of the whole magnificent business. She was to act as Miss Matthews' chaperon on the occasion. She had been privileged to select the very sample the gown had been made from, all of which invested her with an importance she could never

The Spillman cottage became the most popular resort in the neighborhood. The few who had been bidden and the many who only expected to enjoy the fete through the medium of their ears all found urgent call to the cottage.

"Mother" Spillman's cottage was virtually on the Broxton grounds. It had originally been built for the porter's lodge to Broxton Hall by a wealthy Englishman, who, having invested largely in some tile factories on this side, fancied he should like to live in close proximity to them.

It was a fancy that died in its early infancy, and the lodge, with all that appertained thereto, passed into the Johnny's mother passed into the shed ownership of the late Colonel Broxton's father, a stockholder in the same company. The Englishman returned to the country where porters and porters' lodges were a genteel necessity, and the little lodge was closed up.

When the Rev. Isham Spillman was called to preach and to teach in the neighborhood of Mandeville, the porter's lodge had been donated by Tom's grandfather for a parsonage. When the Rev. Isham died, full of years and honor, it was decided that his venerable widow should live on in the pretty cottage and call it hers.

The womankind of the Broxton family and of the Spillman had always been the best of friends, and now that there was no womankind left in the Broxton family Miss Malvina and her mother felt a hovering sort of interest in the lonely boy representative of what had once been the most important family in the county. It was natural that Miss Malvina should have a hand in things connected with Broxton

Mrs. Spillman held that nothing short of Tom's own marriage would have warranted such "a turning upside down of things," adding indignantly, "I suppose all Mrs. Broxton's silver and china will be used just like it was their own."

Miss Malvina sounded a placating note. "Oh, that's all right, mother. Ollie wrote to Tom that she wanted to have her birthday celebration on hi grounds, and he wrote back he would be only too glad to have her chase the shadows out of the old house, to use everything as freely as if it was her

"Trust them for doing that; but, as for her chasing the shadows out, that's more'n she can do, Malvina-more'n anybody can do. They are gathering thicker and blacker and heavier, and the storm will burst over that poor boy's head without one friendly voice to give him warning." "Dear me, mother, how you do worry

over Tom! He's all right. His father trusted Mr. Matthews if you don't. Give him warning of what?"

Miss Malvina performed as many of her daily duties within reach of her mother's ear trumpet as was practicable. It saved time and steps. Just then she was hurriedly buttoning up her stoutest pair of boots. They would be waiting for her up at the Hall. There was no end of things still to be done.

The stand for the band was to be decorated, and Jess would be wanting to know how many turkeys were to be dressed, and all that cut glass was to he washed. Glancing up from her low stool, she saw something that made her stare curiously-marks of damp yellow clay on the soles of her mother's ample Oxford ties, which were crossed conspicuously on the hassock pretty, amiable, social, and all that, but | in front of the chair. She fired an indignant protest through the old lady's ear trumpet.

"Mother, you have been walking about out of doors without your rub-

"Rubbers! Out of doors! Walking about! Who says so? Who saw me? What are you talking about, Malvina

Her voice was so shrill and her manner so excited that Miss Malvina looked at her in growing alarm. "Mother Aloud she said soothingly: "Well,

you've got a right to prowl around if you feel like it, mummer. I only don't Good old ladies are getting scarce, and I want to keep mine a great many years to come."

you think I had been out of the house?" "Clay on the soles of your shoes,

and your white nannel wrapper to bedraggled about the hem, mothers A look of intense cunning came in the faded eyes. The old woman cha

"Well, you are one for finding a hoa out. I thought I heard somebody the chicken coop last night, Malving

"You heard, mother?" "Oh, I'm not as deaf as you think am nor as blind neither! Why, I cont go from here up to the Hall the darker night that ever came and go all on the house without stumping a toe we wanted to."

"I hope you won't want to, mother Just then, with a swish of starche petticoats and a catching of hurris breath, Mrs. Deb Lyons presented be self in the cottage doorway. She he a roll of cloth in her hands.

"I just thought I would step over Miss Malvina, and ask you if I mist run up Johnny's breeches on your ma chine. Mine's got the very old mischie in it, and the child'll die outright or a plum crazy if he don't have a pair new breeches to wear to the coming out party."

"Is your Johnny invited to the tex. ty?" asked "Mother" Spiliman, with, slight infusion of sarcastic increduling in her voice. "Not that he ain't good enough."

Mrs. Deb laughed frankly.

"After a fashion, he's invited. Mis-Ollie told him if he would fix up real nice he might pass lemonade around among the folks. He is in her Sundan school class, you know. She is a real sweet young lady. My, but what as affair it is going to be! They say Mis Ollie's dress is going to outshine ant. thing Miss Jeanne Westover's fetchel over from Paris."

"I'd be rather glad," said Malvina in consequently, "to have you sit with mother while I'm gone." Then, wife lowered tones: "She's been so restless lately. I don't know what she'll be m to when she's alone. I have put the machine in the back room so that I can sew when mother's asleep. Some times I think she hears the buzz."

"I'll watch her. Thanks for the mschine. I guess you'll be on hand be fore I have to get back home to sa about Deb's dinner." "Oh, yes, long before then." An

room, closing the door between. "I'm going now, mother. I won't stay any longer than I'm obliged to," said Malvina. She bent a few me ments later and kissed the withered forehead. She omitted to announce Mrs. Lyons' occupancy of the shed room. Nothing irritated the old woman more than to be put under survelllance, and after that recent outburst

"She can't hear the machine in here nor see it neither unless she was to come across the room and look into the shed room for something. She ain't likely to do that. Sometimes her eyes do her a good turn. It might ver her if she thought you were watching

discretion was advisable. To Mrs. Ly-

ons Malvina spoke a final word of car-

"All right," said Mrs. Lyons, drop ping into a husky whisper. "I'll be as still as a mouse."

Left to herself, as she imagined "Mother" Spillman developed an activity that made Mrs. Lyons forget all about her Johnny's breeches as she sa with her hand on the wheel and her eyes stretched wide with astonishment Presently she stole from the machine and glued her eyes to a crevice in the

Rising from her chair, the old woman began feebly shaking its cushions about with quick, impatient motions Getting down on her knees, with outspread hands she felt over the entire surface of the chair. Evidently keep disappointment was the only result Whatever she was looking for she did not find. With a sigh of discourage ment she finally rose to her feet, a tall gaunt, masculine figure, and stood with folded hands gazing down upon the vacant chair, muttering audibly:

"Lost, lost, lost! And it is my fault Somebody has stolen it. Poor Tom. poor laddie, I'm the only friend you've got left! I'll find it, Tom, trust me. promised your mother I'd be a friend to you, and I will be. I'll find it, Tom I'll never give over till I do."

A fluttering sigh, and the tall form dropped back upon the cushions, the white head drooped upon the headrest and "Mother" Spillman was soon lapped in sudden slumber, so profound and so prolonged that Miss Malvins had been home half an hour before she was aware of it.

Mrs. Lyons considered it her duty report the strange episode of the cush ion beating and the dreamy monologue to Miss Malvina, who looked anxious and perplexed.

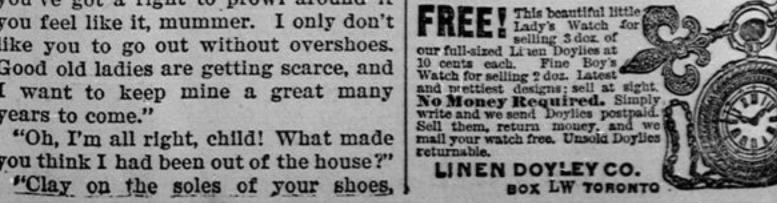
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