

The Free Press Short Story

THE JUNK-ROOM DELEGATE

BY MURIEL VAUGHAN

Lela Bennett parked her shabby automobile expertly before the station and wriggled from behind the wheel. Every muscle in her body ached with fatigue. All day she had spun like a top; there were so many tasks to do. Her mother was sick and the children had to be cared for; the house had to be cleaned; meals had to be prepared; and there were two delegates to entertain. The great convention was in session, and Lela would have no chance to attend until the following night. Oh, well, that did not matter if only they could raise the money for mother's sea voyage. Doctor Scudder had been most imperative. Where in the world could they get it? As she sat, drooping and depressed, a great automobile slid to a halt beside her. Elinor Poindexter's handsome new sedan. Behind the wheel sat Elinor herself, the richest the most insolent, and the most beautiful girl in town. Lela envied Elinor Poindexter with her cool poise, her assured position, her streams of money. Elinor lived in the show place of the city. The rug on the floor, alone, had cost a thousand dollars besides, she was so pretty. In turn Elinor envied Lela Bennett, who made her own clothes, washed, and ironed them. Lela was pretty, too, in her own fashion, and people liked her. Elinor was not popular, and it drove her almost to despair when Lela walked off with some coveted honor, the dramatic class medal, for instance. Elinor had worked hard for it. The two girls had an almost equal amount of talent and advancement, but on the night of the contest the scales had tipped in favor of Lela. Elinor had cried bitterly, later, so humiliated was she that Lela Bennett the daughter of a penniless preacher, could beat her! She would show her! She called Lela triumphantly. "What are you doing here? Getting a delegate?" "No," called Lela, "mailing a letter for father."

"We are to have a delegate," offered Elinor importantly, "the honor guest of the convention, Doctor John Borden, from New York."

"He must be wonderful," breathed Lela.

"Oh, as to that—" Elinor shrugged; "but he's a very important man, and he's in a position to be of help to me. You see, I'm going to New York to study dramatics."

"Oh!" gasped Lela, her face drained of color. How wonderful it would be to be able to study dramatic art in New York! "Do you really go?"

"Yes, mother has consented at last." Lela tried hard to be enthusiastic. Some people seemed to have everything. "This Doctor Borden," continued Elinor, "is the pastor of a big church in New York. Many rich and really important people belong to it, and he is on terms of intimacy with them. I can meet these people through him. They'll show me a good time." She stepped out of the sedan importantly. "I'm meeting Doctor Borden now. I'll have to take him right on to the church, because he's to speak to-night. Come to see him, she invited.

The two went into the station. A train had just come in, and the passengers were coming from it. The reception committee was meeting delegates and assigning them to homes. "I don't believe he's here," worried Elinor. "I don't see anybody important-looking, do you?"

"The members of the reception committee lingered at the gate, then came through the station on the way to their car. One of them came over to Elinor. "He has come," she announced. "He's out there, just outside the news stand." She hurried on.

"It's a pity she couldn't bring him in and introduce me," sighed Elinor. "Let's go look for him."

From the door the girls looked into the brightly-lighted train shed. "There he is," whispered Elinor. "Just look at him!"

A rather queer-looking man was leaning against the wall near the news stand. He was deathly pale. Undoubtedly he would have looked better if his clothes had been well-pressed. His shirt was rumpled, and he carried his coat over his arm. A battered suit case lay at his feet.

"Of all things!" ejaculated Elinor. "Do you think I'm going to take a scavenger like that? I don't believe he's Doctor Borden! Lela, look! He's drunk! See him stagger! You stay here. I'll go find out about him!"

Lela walked a few steps into the station and wavered. In a moment Elinor came alone, furtive. "His name is Barton," she said angrily. "He looks like a hobo. He must be drunk, he talks so funny. He says that woman told him to go with me. I can see the way mother would look at him! I'm going home," and she flung out to her car.

Lela waited uncertainly. She wondered where the man would go. He came in, staggering, made for a seat, and fairly fell into it. She looked at him closely. He was sick, and he was a delegate. She hesitated, then crossed to him. "Are you sick?" she asked softly. "Did you come to the convention?"

"He raised, haggard eyes to her face. "I'm about to die," he answered hoarsely. "Child, hurry and get me a doctor!" Lela flew to a telephone booth; then she

"I'll put Mr. Barton in my room now," planned Lela, "and I can have the junk room again."

"How grand we are!" complimented Mr. Barton, as she came out dressed for the night session. The young people of the state were to be featured, and the local organization was presenting Lela in a dramatic reading. "What are you going to give?" he asked.

"Number Six," she told him. "It's the story of an artist who painted a great picture, 'The Last Supper,' and used a beautiful young man for the human suggestion of Jesus. Ten years later he found a degraded man in prison, under sentence of death, and used him for the portrait of Judas. He was the same man. The people who planned the programme thought it was appropriate for the young people's programme. Doctor Borden was to have talked at the close of the service."

"He'll be there," remarked her father. "Wilbur Trask received a message from him. I meant to tell you."

At last the audience was in the great church. Lela was upon the platform with the others destined to appear upon the programme. Slowly her nerves became calm. She looked for Mr. Barton. There he was in the back of the building a half dozen dignitaries of the church around him.

The meeting began, and Wilbur Trask fairly dragged the protesting Mr. Barton to a pulpit chair. Lela thought it very kind of Trask and smiled sweetly upon Mr. Barton as he came over and sat beside her. At last she heard her number announced. Her imagination stirred, flamed. She rose from her chair and knowledge of the audience faded away. She was alive only to the story she was telling.

A deep, breathless silence hung over the house when she sat down. In the awed hush Wilbur Trask began to sing: "Take my life and let it be, consecrated Lord, to Thee." Lela sat very quietly, huddled in the great pulpit chair. She felt very humble, very grateful. This was a great moment in her life. The ability to rivet and hold the attention of a great multitude, to make it feel as she felt, that was power. She bowed her head and prayed silently to be able to develop and use it rightly, always.

The president was introducing Doctor John Borden, that great man of international fame. Lela looked around for him. Possibly he was that man on the front bench. Open-mouthed with astonishment, she saw Mr. Barton arise and step forward, saw the whole convention stand to greet him, understand in a flash just how matters were.

"To think of it!" she wailed to herself. "The great Doctor Borden, and I put him in the junk room!"

The next night the convention closed. Lela could have cried when she told Doctor Borden good-by, and promised to visit him and his family.

A week later three letters came from New York, one for Reverend Bennett, one for Mrs. Bennett, and one for Lela. She opened hers first. It was from Doctor Borden, in which he repeated his thanks and enclosed a receipt for the summer term and the whole of the following year's tuition in the most famous dramatic school of which New York can boast. She turned it over and over. It did not seem possible. It was wonderful, the dream of her life come true! Suddenly she began to cry. "I won't go, with things like they are at home."

"Of course you'll go," her father and mother assured her. "You don't know how happy this makes us."

"Open yours, Mother," wept Lela.

Mrs. Bennett tore open the long envelope and spread the contents on her lap. "What in the world?"

"Tickets!" exclaimed Lela. "Steamer tickets! Two of them! Oh, Mother! Father!"

"Hush," begged her father, "people will think we are crazy. Tickets sure enough." They read the letters from the steamship company. There were one hundred and twenty-five days all paid for, including hotels, drives, fees, guides, everything.

"Open, yours Father," breathed Lela. Slowly he tore it open, read it through once, twice. "It's an offer from Doctor Borden, or from his church, through him. I'm offered the position of second assistant pastor."

"When do they want you to come?"

"The middle of October. Tickets sure. Oh, Father, that will give you time for your trip. You can resign here and have a wonderful place to come back to. Grandmother will take care of the children. Oh, glory! Isn't it the most wonderful gift?"

A still, small voice within her answered: "Bread cast upon the waters."

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**THE TIME TO DRESS UP**

When you have a good job, it is natural to be careful to polish your shoes and comb your hair; but the time you need to take pains with your personal appearance is when you are out of work. The girl in a happy mood dresses up as a matter of course; but it is when she is downhearted and discouraged that she should take the most trouble to wave her hair and should put on her gayest gown. To let your appearance reflect your mood is a mistake. Your appearance has a strong effect on your mood, and when you feel that you have not the ghost of a chance that is the time to wear a flower in your buttonhole.

**CATERING TO CHILDREN'S WHIMS**

Much has been written during the past few years about the diet of grown-ups. They are told to eat this and that and apparently many of them follow the advice given and find it to be good advice. Much has been written also regarding food for children. Mothers are advised to serve this and that. Many of them probably try to follow this advice. A few may be successful. I am afraid, however that others meet with trouble.

It is all very well and good for a writer to suggest giving a daily plate of spinach to Jane or Joseph—but Jane and Joseph may refuse to touch their spinach.

Not only does this apply to unusual food like spinach, but unfortunately it even applies to food like milk—for far too many mothers know that all children are not partial to even this healthful food.

Sometimes it is possible to force unwelcome foods upon children. When this is done some ultimately come to like these foods. Others, I am afraid, acquire a greater dislike than ever, and sometimes I wonder whether forced feeding really accomplishes any good.

To my way of thinking the wise mother should cater to her children's whims. If the child refuses to eat lettuce, try serving delicious fruit-salads or dainty pieces of crisp lettuce. Sooner or later the children are likely to learn to like this lettuce flavored with fruit juices. Ultimately they will probably eat lettuce in other forms.

If the child does not care for milk in its natural form, serve it in forms that please him. Scalloped potatoes call for milk and so does fried beef. Ice cream contains plenty of milk. So do desserts such as, creams, puddings, some whips and dishes of junket.

Junket is particularly valuable to the mother anxious to see that her child secures a considerable quantity of milk each day. It completely transforms milk changes it from a liquid to a custard-like form, adds flavor in natural colors, appeals to the appetite of children and is much easier to digest. This latter quality makes junket very desirable for a lunch between meals, because by the time the child comes to his regular meal the between-meal-bite has been digested.

Here are two recipes that will be of interest to mothers. The first is for an economical dessert suitable for both children and adults. The second is a delicious recipe for the children's party.

**EGG JUNKET**

1 tablet for junket  
1 tablespoon cold water  
2 egg yolks  
3 tablespoon sugar  
1 pint milk  
1 teaspoon vanilla flavoring  
Small pinch salt

Dissolve tablet for junket in one tablespoon cold water. Beat egg yolks slightly, add sugar, salt and vanilla flavoring to milk. Warm to lukewarm—not hot, stirring constantly. Add dissolved tablet for junket. Stir quickly a few seconds and pour into dessert glasses. Chill in refrigerator. Recipe makes five servings.

**SO-PEEPS PARTY PUDDING**

1 tablet for junket  
1 pint milk  
1 tablespoon cocoa  
1 teaspoon vanilla flavoring  
3 tablespoons honey  
½ cup heavy cream  
Crisp rice, corn or wheat flakes

Mix honey and cocoa to a smooth paste. Heat slowly to boiling, stirring constantly. Let boil one minute, continuing to stir. Dissolve tablet for junket in lukewarm—NOT HOT. Add vanilla flavoring, honey and cocoa mixture to milk. Warm to lukewarm—add dissolved tablet for junket. Stir quickly for a few seconds. Pour at once into dessert glasses. Let stand until firm, then chill in refrigerator.

Serve in same glasses topped with honeyed whipped cream and cereal flakes. Allow 1½ tablespoons strained honey to each cup of whipped cream. Add 1 cup crisp cereal flakes and mix well. Garnish top with flakes also. The cereal should not be added until serving time.

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