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Miss Caxton's Father

A Household Disturbed by a Lover's Advent

By VAUGHN KESTER

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If Miss Caxton's father had been called upon to give a detailed account of Miss Caxton's life he would have described it as a perpetual round of gayety. By what process of reasoning he arrived at any such conclusion is known only to himself, but from out the depths of his ignorance this belief had sprung, and it bore fruit in an inclination to curtail any pleasure other than the purely domestic in which Miss Caxton might have desired to indulge.

It was his custom to observe that if one had a good home that home was decidedly the best place for one, and on occasions when he knew Miss Caxton was desirous of spending an evening out it was his wont to introduce this statement at the supper table as the moral to sundry fables.

Likewise he manufactured numerous fictitious conversations supposed to have taken place between himself and others, in which Miss Caxton was held up as a shining example of domesticity. Then he would light his cigar and saunter downtown to play at whist until a late hour of the night.

That there was anything incongruous in his conduct or any discrepancy between his words and his acts never occurred to him.

Once, when Miss Caxton ventured to point out this apparent difference in word and deed, he had explained that the noise the children made wore upon his nerves, but he was quite sure that no man loved his home more than he did and that when Thaddeus, Roderick and Leander, the twin, grew up and attained a decent age he would greatly enjoy spending an evening now and then with his family. Nothing could have induced him to believe that the noise wore upon Miss Caxton's nerves. He knew very well that women liked that sort of thing immensely.

He was not a man of imaginative temperament or he might have wondered what he would have done had there been no elder sister to look after the children when Miss Caxton's mother followed the youthful Leander's mate out of this world. If this thought ever gained a place in his mind he had put it aside with the convincing argument that in supplying the little boys with an elder sister he had placed himself beyond reproach. Miss Caxton was a living proof of that forethought that marked the serious operations of his life, nor was Miss Caxton overlooked in this happy adjustment. She had Thaddeus and Roderick, not to mention the twin, and even half a twin was better than no twin at all.

This satisfactory arrangement had continued for some years when the advent of "the fool" upon the scene disturbed the serenity of the Caxton household. Of course "the fool" was not the name bestowed upon him by his sponsors in baptism. It was an appellation conferred by Miss Caxton's indignant parent, and he made use of it only in his daughter's hearing. He thought it very mean that any one should slip in and supplant him in his daughter's affection while he was away playing whist. He also was astonished that his daughter should seem to care for "the fool." Though he seldom saw him, he was was aware that most of his unoccupied time was spent in Miss Caxton's society, and he also knew that each night as he came in at one door "the fool" was taking his leave of Miss Caxton at another. But the young man's departure was so nicely timed with reference to the charms of whist that he had never actually set eyes upon him in Miss Caxton's presence.

Never before having come in contact with the inevitable, Miss Caxton's father had a poor opinion of it. He began a vigorous campaign, in which he was uniformly worsted. They had Bunker Hill for breakfast. Miss Caxton triumphantly crossed the Delaware for dinner, and Cornwallis surrendered at supper time and withdrew to play whist, leaving Miss Caxton and "the fool" in possession of the field.

Miss Caxton's ability to keep her temper and preserve that equanimity which was her most marked characteristic gave her undoubted eminence in this species of warfare, for the cloud of battle hung forever over the house. Her calmness exasperated her father more than any words could have done.

Under these trying circumstances a man of less fixed habits would have taken to drink as a means of relief. Miss Caxton's father took to abusing the children. The little boys and the twin began to lead a dog's life, particularly the youthful Leander, who seemed to possess a great though unconscious power of enraging his parent far in excess of all endurance. At dinner and supper, the only meals they took with their father, they were barely permitted to speak in whispers, and then only to make known their wants in the most direct English at their command.

How long it would have been possible for this unhappy state of affairs to continue there is no telling. Miss Caxton saw fit to bring matters to a crisis. One day, in company with "the fool," she left the paternal roof. At the same time she dispatched a communication to her father requesting his immediate presence at home. When he received the summons it had a mystifying effect upon him, but in obedience to the request he repaired to the scene of his domestic joys. He had no sooner crossed the threshold than something within him corresponding to intuition made manifest to his mind's eye that all was not right. The little boys were not visible. Even Leander's voice was hushed. Most assuredly something was wrong.

But what?

Miss Caxton's father inspected the various rooms comprising his establishment. In his own room he found conspicuously tucked in one corner of his looking glass a neatly folded note directed to himself in Miss Caxton's familiar hand. This evidently was meant to explain the mystery. He tore it open. He read it. Then he read it over.

That the contents of the note were exercising a powerful and not wholly pacifying influence upon him was easy to be seen. Miss Caxton had eloped with "the fool."

She asked him to look after the children until she should return, which would be as soon as she was married. Miss Caxton's father held the note out toward his angry reflection in the glass:

"Here's gratitude for you. Well, she needn't come back here. I'm done with her."

Then, being only a man, he swore, and while he swore he made up his mind to a course of action that he intended should very much astonish Miss Caxton when that young lady returned as Mrs. Somebody Else.

"Does she think I will stand this? I see myself forgiving her. If I lay my hands on "the fool" he will spend his honeymoon with broken bones!"

Suddenly he bethought him of the little boys. They no doubt had availed themselves of the absence of all restraining force to do as they pleased. As this flashed through his mind he turned a trifle pale. He rather regretted that he had been so severe with Leander, for supposing—

He ran downstairs and into the yard, only stopping to glance at the kitchen stove with a vague dread lest Leander had crawled into it and been cremated. On reaching the yard he examined the well and was greatly relieved to find it empty of everything except water.

Then he espied the little boys, with the twin between them, perched upon the roof of a convenient coal shed in the rear of the house, whither they had withdrawn, knowing that something unusual was about to happen.

"HE WAS IN THIS POSITION WHEN MISS CAXTON OPENED THE DOOR."

The instant his eyes fell upon him his habitual acrimony for the twin asserted itself.

"Come down off of that. Do you want to break your little necks?" he gasped. "Come down, I say!"

This the little boys were reluctant to do. They knew their father was an exceedingly irate gentleman. Therefore when they caught sight of him it begot no special joy in their hearts. Roderick and Thaddeus started to descend from the roof, while the twin, lifting up his voice, howled forth his dismay.

"Hold on to the twin!" called Miss Caxton's father. "Do you wish him to fall?"

What activity the little boys possessed was dispelled by their father's evident anger. They sat upon the ridge of the roof, motionless and speechless. Their parent inspected the premises.

"How in the name of sense did you get there?"

A sob from Leander was the only answer. Thaddeus and Roderick maintained a discreet silence.

Miss Caxton's father was a very busy man for the next fifteen minutes. He secured a long pole and poked the little boys off the roof, one at a time, beginning with the twin. Then as they rolled from the shed he ran and caught them. A good deal of physical energy was required in the operation, and when Roderick was dislodged, he being the last, Miss Caxton's parent was hot and exhausted. There was also a baleful gleam in his eyes, suggestive of the wrath to come.

He picked up the twin, whose small lungs seemed to distill shrieks, and, followed by the little boys who skulked at his side, entered the house. During the next hour or two he gained a larger experience in the pure joys of domestic life than are usually crowded into so brief a period.

He gave Roderick and Thaddeus their supper—and something else as well—and put them to bed. Then he took Leander in hand and tried to get his faculties into a condition for sleep. The twin refused to be comforted. He wanted Miss Caxton and Miss Caxton only. It was the burden of his woes. His father looked at him. In his glance paternal love seemed to be in abeyance.

"You had better make up your mind to going to bed without her, for she has put you to sleep for the last time."

Whereat Leander howled afresh.

"If you don't stop and let me have a moment's quiet I shall punish you. You hear?"

Leander choked down a sob and was silent.

"There," said his father approvingly. "I guess we can get along all right. Now, you go to sleep—right off."

Leander's sobs broke forth again.

"What's the matter now?"

More sobs and a howl.

"I thought I told you to keep still. Why don't you?"

Then he grew persuasive.

"Don't you love your papa?"

The twin looked at him with wide eyes.

"I am appealing to his better self," reflected Miss Caxton's parent. "The instinct of affection which a child has is a most wonderful thing."

Leander dissolved into tears.

"Hang the brat! What's got into him now?"

Miss Caxton's parent arose and paced the floor. Leander's grief continued unchecked. His father regarded him in amazement. The twin's capacity for sorrow was very astonishing, and his anger merged into something akin to wonder.

"He must be very wet inside," he thought.

He addressed the twin in conciliatory tones.

"See here, Leander. Do you think it safe to cry like that?"

But Leander wept on, unheeding him, in a highly original manner. His father grew uneasy.

"Why don't you stop? Hush! There! There! To please papa, who loves you so much! Confound you! How long is this going to last? Will it be all night?" he asked himself. "I wish—I wish my daughter were here. If she would only come back now I think I could almost forgive her."

His resentment was weakening. Each sob of the twin lessened the enormity of Miss Caxton's crime. Her father was willing to take her back at any price—and "the fool" into the bargain. In desperation he brought the sugar bowl and placed it as an offering of peace at Leander's feet.

"That should stop him," he muttered.

But it didn't. With a guilty blush he went down upon his knees in a vain effort to seduce the twin into the belief that he was a horse. He was in this interesting position when Miss Caxton opened the door and entered, smiling and serene. "The fool" was with her, but he was by no means so serene as he could have wished to be, and his smile was not an easy one.

Miss Caxton mastered the situation at a glance. Without a word she possessed herself of the twin's small person.

"I am sorry, papa, that you missed your game of whist, but it won't occur again," she said as she walked from the room.

When she returned twenty minutes later, after having put Leander to bed, she found her father peacefully drinking cold tea—"to restore the tone to his nervous system," as he explained—while he gave "the fool" a detailed and truthful account of his adventure with the twin.

Royally Welcomed.

Some time ago the minister was expected to visit the home of a good brother, but it was not absolutely certain that he would come. Finally, however, the dominie appeared, and little Willie, who had been watching at the gate, sounded the tidings with glad acclaim.

"Whoopee!" joyously cried the youngster, widly tossing up his hat. "Hip, hip, hurrah! Here he comes, mamma! Here he comes!"

"You seem very glad to see me, Willie," smiled the preacher, patting the boy on the head and shaking hands with the family.

"You just bet I am!" enthusiastically replied Willie. "I have been afraid all the morning you wouldn't show up!"

"That's awfully nice of you, Willie," said the parson. "Why were you afraid I wouldn't come?"

"Because," was the startling rejoinder of the youngster, "if you hadn't come we wouldn't have chicken for dinner."—Philadelphia Telegraph.

Almost at Rest.

A kind hearted but somewhat close fisted man who was sorely afflicted with a conscience came to a friend, holding a visiting card in his hand. He looked deeply troubled. "I know," said he, "this man wants to borrow money. I know he will drink it. What am I to do?"

"It is perfectly simple," said the friend. "Send down word that you are out."

"I cannot," he said. "I have never told a lie in my life."

"Then," said his friend, "lend all your money to me, and you can tell him you haven't a penny in your pocket."

After some hesitation the kind hearted man complied and, having seen his caller, returned.

"Well," asked his friend, "are your conscience and mind at rest?"

"Not quite, man," he replied, "but they will be as soon as you have given me my money back."

Today's Actions.

What a man chooses today he chooses for tomorrow; what he overcomes today he is overcoming for tomorrow; what he yields to today he is still more likely to yield to tomorrow.

Victoria and Her Dram.

One wet day her late majesty Queen Victoria took refuge in the cottage of one of her Balmoral tenants. The guid wife brought a glass of whisky to the queen, which the royal lady graciously put to her lips. With highland hospitality the good woman asked the queen to take more, to which her guidman rejoined: "Hoots, wummun; dinna press her majesty. She mabbe had a drap afore she came here."

Satisfaction.

During the South African war letters sent home by British soldiers had to pass through the hands of a censor. A certain private had sent four or five letters home, and portions had been obliterated by the censor and were therefore illegible on their arrival at their destination. He decided to even accounts with the censor, and at the foot of the next letter he wrote, "Please look under the stamp."

At the censor's office the letter was opened and read as usual. The officer in charge spent some time in steaming the stamp from the envelope, but his feelings can be better imagined than described when he read these words:

"Was it hard to get off?"

BATTLING SPIDERS.

When They Fight It Is Really a Combat For Existence.

When two or more spiders fight there is usually a good reason for the furious attack and vigorous defense that always follows.

It is not generally known that after a certain time has elapsed spiders become incapable of spinning a web from lack of sufficient material. The glutinous substance from which the spider spins its slender web is limited. Therefore, spiders cannot keep on constructing new snares for their prey when the old webs are destroyed.

Very often when the web material is exhausted they are able to avail themselves of the web producing powers of their younger or more fortunate neighbors, and this they do without any scruple whatever.

As soon as a spider's web constructing material has become exhausted and its last web destroyed, it usually sets out in search of another home and unless it should find one that is unoccupied a battle usually ensues, which ends only with the retreat or death of the invader or defender.

Such a struggle is intensely interesting and will reveal some wonderful tactics and skill in spider warfare. The invader usually comes off victorious, although in some cases the defender puts up such a stiff fight it is able to hold its own in spite of the attack of the intruder which is in desperate straits.—New York American.

CARLYLE AND THE SEA.

The Ebbing Tide Gave the Philosopher a Text For a Sermon.

In "John Foster and His Friendships" the author records an incident markedly characteristic of Thomas Carlyle. The author finds the great Scot at 8 o'clock one morning in 1876 on the Chelsea embankment gazing at the Thames. Here is the incident, hitherto unpublished:

I should as soon have thought of assaulting as of addressing him. Happily I was spared anything of the kind, for the old man, reserved as he was to the point of moroseness—surliness, his enemies called it—hoarsely flung a query at me. The tide was out, I may mention, the river being at its lowest. "Where goes it? Where goes it?"

The very manner of his saying it sharpened my wits, and I gathered, of course, that he referred to the stream or what there was of it.

Smilingly I replied that it returned to the sea.

"Right, sir, right!" he snapped out. Then, relapsing into his meditative mood, he said softly, but impressively: "The great, great sea of God Almighty's goodness, and we are all returning that way. Don't forget that, sir—returning to the sea—the great illimitable sea!" With that he abruptly turned away and moved across the roadway toward Cheyne row with that curious slow shuffle habitual with him, and I saw him no more.

MASSENET'S HOBBY.

A Story of the Composer and His Dear Friend, the Bookbinder.

In the recollections of Massenet a story is told, says the Hamburger Nachrichten, illustrating the composer's passionate admiration for beautiful bindings. Not a week passed without a visit from him to his bookbinder when he brought a new book or a new edition to be bound. In the course of time he and his bookbinder became the best of friends, and when Massenet arrived the talk was at first of everything on earth except the real object of his visit.

"Look here!" Massenet would say eventually, giving the man the volume to be bound.

"Splendid!" replied the bookbinder, and then for his customer and friend he would devise some fresh wonder in the art of binding.

One morning Massenet suddenly learned that his friend was giving up business. He hurried to his shop. "Heavens! Is it true you are leaving Paris?" he asked.

"Why, certainly! I have bought a charming little country house near Nantes."

"What! A country house! And in the provinces!" And he added sadly, "Ah, my poor friend, I am partly responsible for that!"

Who Am I?

Last leap year I did not want to embarrass my best girl to make her propose to me, so asked her to be my wife, and she said, "I would rather be excused," and I, like an idiot, excused her. But I got even with the girl. I married her mother. Then my father married the girl. Now I don't know who I am.

When I married the girl's mother the girl became my daughter, and when my father married my daughter he is my son. When my father married my daughter she was my mother. If my father is my son and my daughter is my mother, who in thunder am I? My mother's mother (which is my wife) must be my grandmother, and I being my grandmother's husband, I am my own grandfather.—National Monthly.

A Bargain.

A young society woman met a count and fell in love with him. Her father was opposed to a match of this kind and declared the foreign nobleman was simply after his money.

"Count," said the young woman one evening, "you can't imagine how my love for you distresses my parents. My father told me he would give $10,000 if I would never see you again."

"Ah, darling," said the count, "ees your fazaire in hees offees now, you sink?"—Chicago Record-Herald.

Very Complimentary.

Mrs. Gray (meeting two acquaintances on the parade)—Oh, I didn't know you were here, Mrs. Greene! Awfully pleased! You must come and spend an evening with us.

Mrs. Greene—It's very kind of you, but you must really excuse us. You see, we've never been in the place before, and we're only here for a few days, so, of course, we must make the best use of our time.—London Express.