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SACCOETTES LOQUACI

"Myron, did you notice what a stir Luella made in meeting this morning? You know it is the first time she's been since she came home from the seminary," chirped Mrs Judge Thayer throwing back her pink cap ribbons and setting her head complacently against the cushion of her favorite chair.

"Well, I can't say that I noticed any particular stir," the judge began, slowly "What—"

"Oh, of course you didn't! I might have known!" the little lady broke in. "When did you ever notice any thing? Unless it was a new statute or a town meeting, or—maybe a mad bull! Why when she struck up in the choir everybody in the meeting-house was craning round to see who it could be. I heard that deaf Mr. Davitt asking his wife what the matter was. And when we came down the aisle, I suppose you didn't notice David Kellogg and Burton Ames, and I don't know how many more of the young fellows hanging round the door. It's plain we shan't want for young company this summer."

Mrs. Thayer let her gaze wander to the garden, where syringas and snow-balls glimmered faintly in the moonlight, and went on rocking contentedly. "Luella is the best girl in the township, and the prettiest too. I guess I don't need any young fellows to tell me that!" growled the judge.

"Well, there, you needn't get so excited. One would think you were her father at least, instead of her great uncle by marriage. I will say, though, Myron, you've been as good as a father to her. Yes," she continued placidly, "Luella's a good girl, and does credit to my bringing up. She's nice and pleasant and restful, not always putting her oar in like—What's that you say? 'Never got any chance?'"

But the judge had gone to lock up for the night; and by the time old Towser and the elusive "kitty" had been coaxed in from their wanderings and the doors and windows fastened his wife had forgotten the insinuation.

"Yes, Myron," she resumed, although her husband had not spoken since they climbed the stairs to the big front chamber, "I feel that I shall enjoy it. It will be very interesting to study the views of the rising young men of this generation. I'm free to confess I've

got rather tired of hearing old deacon French and Mr. Bassett lay down the law. One ought to keep up with the times."

"You'll enjoy it!" chuckled the judge. "You'll enjoy it! Minerva, I believe you think the young fellows are coming to see you instead of Luella!"

Mrs. Judge Thayer, the most "literary" person in Wynsboro, was too securely entrenched in the admiring regard of family, church and community to mind even so open a taunt as this. "Luella has been trained by me and by Mrs. Emma Willard, and she knows what a young woman owes to her elders—if you do not!" she retorted, severely, and tying the strings of her lace-ruffled nightcap beneath her chin, she lay down to pleasant dreams.

If the dreams promised green fields and pastures new, they were richly fulfilled. Evening after evening the brass knocker rose and fell discretely. The Misses Campbell at the window across the way found it quite exciting. And so did Luella's devoted aunt, who, seated in state in the rose-scented parlor, clothed in her second best black silk, cast her pink ribbons back from her shoulder and tossed her head gently in pleased anticipation of the coming fray.

"Conversation? Conversation, sir, is argument!" said Dr. Johnson. Mrs. Thayer would have said it if he had not forestalled her. And in spite of all their efforts to escape it, that was what the youths encountered who came to the rose-scented parlor.

Good-natured, curly-pated David was the first victim.

"Good evening, David!" said Mrs. Thayer, heartily, beaming upon him all bright expectancy.

"Good evening!" murmured Luella, in her low sweet tones. And not another word did she utter until the clock in the hall having struck ten times, David rose, and she murmured, "Good night!"

But not so her aunt. "Well, David," she began, hitching her chair a little nearer, "I hear you young folks are talking of getting up a citizen's ticket this fall. I guess that's a good thing, but as for nominating Judge Greene for the legislature, you might as well nominate the revised statutes—they'd run as well."

"Yes'm," conceded David absently. He was watching the light shift on the girl's smoothly banded hair as she

bent her head above the bit of sewing she held. "Are you going to join the chorus for the music festival, Miss Luella?" he blurted out desperately.

Luella lifted her eyes; but her aunt, leaning forward on the edge of her chair, struck in volubly.

"No, she ain't. She has about all she can do in the choir, seeing that the tenor and the alto get mad and leave once a month. Mr. Scudder says he don't know what he'd do without her. Well, that's so. Luella; you needn't shake your head at me. And, speaking of churches, what is your opinion as to painting the steeple of the First Congregational? Do you go for white or dark colored?"

This was a question that had all but rent Wynsboro in twain, and Mrs. Thayer ceased articulate speech for an instant while she waited for the answer. But a shrill sibilant of inquiry filled the pause, and finding that no response was immediately forthcoming, she caught her breath and launched out upon a flood of comment and conjecture, ranging from the political outlook to the minister's last baby, that lasted until, with a final despairing glance at the placid beauty on the sofa opposite, David rose and took his leave.

"Really, I'd no idea that boy had grown up so sensible. He talks very well indeed," remarked Aunt Minerva, rocking gently, in a pleasant retrospective glow. Uncle Myron stole a glance at Luella, and then heaved a sigh, but Luella laughed.

Once or twice, when a special favorite of his called, the judge tried to make a diversion. At other times he hung round on the outskirts, mildly distressed. But no one ventured upon open rebellion, and Mrs. Thayer, all unconcerned, rejoiced in the influx of new ideas, and quoted "the modern point of view" to Mr. Bassett.

All pleasant things must have an end. The roses had faded and dropped their petals and the asters had begun to bloom when Mrs. Thayer found that her evening conversation class had closed. The routed callers would have felt themselves avenged if they had seen the little lady fidgeting in and out of the empty parlor as the twilight fell. But as for Luella, she sat on the porch, pink and composed as ever, half hidden by the hollyhocks that lifted their slender spires about her like a row of sentinels.

"I'm afraid the poor child's lonesome" said Aunt Minerva, feelingly.

"I guess nobody's lonesome much when you're round and got your breath," said Uncle Myron. "Seems to me you're pining considerably more than she is."

"There she is!" growled David to Tom Buford, as they strolled by the house, their eyes on the glimmering white figure beyond the flowers. "I don't believe she's got any feelings or gumption either!"

"Come now, give her a chance! Who knows? She hasn't seen all there is," suggested the young doctor, who had come from Kentucky to court fortune in this New England village.

"You mean she hasn't seen you, I suppose!" scoffed David.

"Granted. She hasn't seen me, but she will."

"I wish you joy of the old lady!" was David's parting shot.

A night or two later, having achieved an introduction in the interim, Dr. Buford presented himself at the pleasant old house on the hill. If his frank and gallant bearing and his candid smile brought an answering smile to Luella's eyes, the deep deference with which he bowed above the nervous little hand of his elder hostess was no less effective.

"They say Tom Buford about lives up to the Thayer's," remarked one of Luella's ex-suitors to another, as they loitered, gossiping, in the village bookstore.

"Well, he's welcome to—for all me! I suppose he's workin' his way through the encyclopedia about now, unless he's so smart he knows it all. I bought a whole library that fortnight I was trying it."

Although Luella's lips were still shyly silent, Tom Buford did not fail to note that more and more often the long strip of embroidery fluttered forgotten to her lap, while she followed his nimble speech with eager eyes and joined softly in his laughter. And the hope grew that although the talk was obviously for her aunt, the girl felt vaguely the subtle message it bore beneath its sparkling surface—a message that grew plainer daily as he took her hand to say good-night.

Meanwhile Mrs. Thayer was having "the best time in her life," and in the pleasure of this right conflict of wits did not notice the wistful look dawning in Luella's eyes, and scarcely observed that her antagonist was gradually withdrawing into himself and leaving her possession of the field.

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But, at last, one evening, in spite of her preoccupation with the doctrine of predestination as expounded by herself and Jonathan Edwards, she grew nervous under the keen eyes fixed upon her in watchful silence.

"For goodness' sake, why don't you talk? What's the matter?" she quavered, lifting her hands instinctively to the lace cap with the pink ribbons. "Am I all right, Luella?"

Reassured on this point, she turned again to Tom, who looked strangely serious.

"Forgive me if I startled you, Mrs. Thayer," he said, thus appealed to. "I confess I have been watching you. Do you often have so much color?"

The little lady flew a pink flag in each cheek, and hurried to the mirror over the mantel, scanning herself nervously, while the doctor continued: "And that twitching of your chin? Your tongue? No, never mind," for she was advancing obediently. "Would you mind letting me take your temperature?"

(To be continued)

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