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The Sentimental Side of Child Psychology

By C. RANDOLPH LICHFIELD

CLIVE, a small, slim figure in a white jersey suit and striped red and white socks, stood with hanging head and hands behind him, in sullen silence.

"Do you, Clive?" Mrs. Fullerton inquired, the suggestion of tears in her voice. "Do you think it is nice of you?—do you think it is gentlemanly? Even putting me out of the question, is it being kind to your father? Your father asked me to come and live with him here—to be a wife to him and a mother to you—to love you both and make you happy, dear. He wants me to be happy, too, but you won't let me. Is that nice and right of a little boy, barely eight? We ought all to be happy together—ever so happy, but you won't let us. Daddy doesn't want to part with you; I don't want to part with you. But you make us so unhappy."

She leant forward in her chair, and put out her hands to him.

"Come here," she said gently; "come here, Clive!"

"I don't want to, thank you," he murmured, looking up at her furtively under his eyelids.

"Won't you?" she pleaded.

"I left my Teddy-bear somewhere, an' I don't know where, an' I want to go an' find it," he said, under his breath.

"I will come and help you look for it in a minute, but—"

"I think I know where it is; you couldn't find it."

She dropped her chin into the palms of her hands, and sighed.

"Why will you persist in calling me Miss Talbot to the servants?" she asked. "That is another thing I don't like. You called me Miss Talbot to your father, too, for he told me."

"I thought you were," he murmured, treading down one sock with his other foot.

"So I was, but I am not now; when I married your father I became Mrs. Fullerton — mamma. Why won't you call me 'mamma'?"

He looked up at her swiftly, then down again. "My mamma's dead," he said stoutly.

"But I am your mamma now," she faltered, her lips trembling. "And I want you to be my own little boy—I want to love you, to play with you, have fine games with you. Think of the fun we could have, if you didn't always shun me—never come where I am. Clive, dear, your father loves me; won't you love me, too?"

"I expect Sarah will find my Teddy-bear, an' I didn't want her to," muttered Clive, pulling up his sock.

"The end of it will be that daddy will send you right away," she said emphatically; then her voice trailed off: "and he will feel I have parted you, Clive!"

"If it clears up—"

"Clive!" she repeated, reaching out to him.

"Sarah says she'll take me out."

"Clive, I'm speaking to you."

"If daddy sends me, I shall hate him all my life," he returned.

"But, dear, if you're not a good boy, he'll have to send you away. Why should he be made unhappy?"

"Sarah says I *am* a good boy. Sarah says daddy made a mistake."

"Sarah makes mistakes, too, at times," Mrs. Fullerton muttered, a little viciously perhaps. "If it clears up, I will take you out myself," she added persuasively. "Would you like that?"

"I want to play with Teddy-bear in the nursery," he said slowly, slipping a foot out towards the tail of the cat which sat under the table, washing its shoulders.

"Very well, then, Clive," she said coldly, rising and turning to the window; "go and play with Teddy-bear. Tell Sarah that I want her."

"DO you deny it?" Mrs. Fullerton insisted sharply.

"What I said, m'm, was this—"

"I have told you what I believe you said, and I don't want any explanation, but simply to know whether you admit or deny it."

"I never said it in the manner of thinking you mean," Sarah expostulated, with rising excitement; "I wasn't for saying that master had made any mistake as far as himself went, for nobody, I'm

sure, could make him a better wife, or no servants—"

"Thanks for your commendation, Sarah, but you needn't say any more. It is a matter of perfect indifference to me whether you think Mr. Fullerton made a mistake or not when he married me; what I regard as so serious is that you, who have charge of Master Clive, should have so little discretion as to make such a remark in his presence, knowing, as you do, the difficulty we are having with him and how sharp he is. I am sorry, very sorry, but you will make the necessary preparations to leave my service this evening."

"Well, I never!" gasped the astonished woman. "Dismiss me for a little thing like that?"

"Don't be mistaken; it is not a little thing! And don't think I am treating you harshly, Sarah; I will pay you two months' wages in lieu of notice, and can give you an excellent character. But, understand me, you have said in Master Clive's hearing, and he has remembered it, that his father made a mistake in marrying me; you put into words the thought or feeling which has been rankling in his mind these weeks past—the feeling which has been evolved from his loyalty to his own mother. By enabling him to *express* that idea you have given it such a hold on his little imagination as to treble our difficulty in eradicating it, and every time he saw you—every time you washed and dressed him, put him to bed—he would remember it, and it would soon become a fixed principle of his little life that his father had made a mistake in marrying again. He would regard you as an ally, an abettor; he would do so instinctively."

The second Mrs. Fullerton paused, drawing in her lips, and glanced down at the hem of Sarah's apron.

"I'm sure, m'm, it isn't as bad as that," stammered the maid, half crying; "I never—"

"It may seem absurd that I should make this explanation to you, Sarah," said Mrs. Fullerton, looking up into the woman's face again; "but I prefer that than you should think I am an unjust, harsh mistress; I am not. I love that little boy, as though he were my own child, and he must be reconciled to me. When he will come to me and voluntarily put his little arms round my neck and call me 'mamma,' I shall be only too pleased to take you back into my service. But while his mind and heart are in the balance, it would be most dangerous to have you here. Does he—does he always refer to me as Miss Talbot?"

"Not—not always," Sarah answered brokenly, stanching her tears with a corner of her apron. "Sometimes he says 'she'—*she* says she wants you, Sarah." Sometimes he's quite rude, that I shouldn't like to tell you, though it's quite child-like."

"What is?"

"He calls you Lynda, like his father does."

"What has he done with that fur monkey I bought him?"

"He said it was dead, m'm, so he buried it the same day. Of course, I dug it up and made it nice again, and put it in his cot when he was asleep. But next morning he'd torn it all to pieces, and strewed it over the room."

"And the box of bricks?" Mrs. Fullerton inquired softly.

"Cook found them in the wood-cupboard, m'm. So I put 'em away, thinking he might take to 'em later, p'r'aps."

"He plays with nothing I have given him?"

"Nor with what his father's given him lately, either, m'm. Nothing'll make him say his prayers properly. Last evening I had to get quite cross with him; instead of saying 'God bless dear papa and dear mamma,' as he used to do, he will say, 'God bless poor papa and take Miss Talbot away.' I scolded him for it, and tried to make him say it properly, but couldn't get anything different from him. In the end I wouldn't let him finish, and bundled him into bed. I was quite cross with him, m'm."

"There was nothing to be cross about, Sarah," Mrs. Fullerton murmured. "They were men who had hearts like his who made England what England is," she said reflectively.

"WHERE'S Clive, Lynda?" Fullerton inquired, turning suddenly from the window, as he heard his wife move across the room. "I have not

seen him for more than a minute all day. It is strange how he avoids me now."

She did not misunderstand the challenge his tone rather than his words conveyed, and she turned back from the door slowly, to give herself a space to consider how she should meet it.

"I am very sorry, Bernard," she said gently. "I am doing my best."

"What do you mean? I don't understand what you mean, dear," he returned, almost stammering in his confusion.

"Oh!" she exclaimed softly, drawing back into the room and resting her elbows on the top of the piano, "don't let there be any attempts at deception between us, Bernard; we are both conscious of what is going on."

His eyes fell before her fixed scrutiny, and, taking a pipe from his pocket, he moved across to the mantelpiece; then, apparently recollecting they were in the drawing-room, he put his pipe away again, and turned to her:

"If you think that obstinate little beggar's going to make trouble between us, dearest," he said, with an effort to speak carelessly, "then you're jolly well wide of the mark." He laughed, and glanced at her swiftly. "Pon my word, I wonder he didn't forbid the banns!"

"My dear," she answered gravely, "he has."

"Of course, you're talking nonsense," he said reflectively, after a short pause. "You haven't been out to-day, I suppose; you never talk nonsense except when you've been cooped up indoors."

"You know I'm not talking nonsense, Bernard," she replied earnestly; "and I don't want you to pretend this is nonsense; I want you to realise it is a tragedy, so that you may fight against it. Sooner or later, I shall win Clive's love—sooner or later. My sole fear is that it may not be until I have lost—yours. Oh, you may laugh! But you *know* as well as I do the trend of events—how we are drifting."

"D'you mean that that mighty atom is—that a mere wilful child like that is likely to estrange us?" he cried, with boisterous good-humour.

"Bernard, you have already begun to shun me because he does."

"Begun to shun you, Lynda?" he repeated incredulously, regarding her wonderingly. "Oh, you mean—oh, well, you seemed so interested in the book, that—that it didn't occur to me that you would care to come."

"It happened on Tuesday also; it has happened quite frequently of late. And there are other signs."

"Nonsense!" he exclaimed impatiently. "Don't talk such utter nonsense, Lynda. I took Clive out with me on Tuesday, and you know—you know—"

"Yes, I know," she said quickly; "he would not have come if I had. So you shunned me because he did, dear."

"Oh, come! You're unreasonable," he cried.

"No, no; not in the least. I don't want you to neglect him for me; but I want you to see—to realise the danger. We are drifting apart, Bernard—we, who love each other, who love that little man so much; we are having our lives endangered by that little life that lies between us. I want you to realise it, so that you may—"

"My dear girl," said Fullerton, in a strange voice, squaring his shoulders, "you are talking like a threepenny novelette. D'you mean to suggest that a man of thirty-seven can have his love deflected from such a woman as you by a child of seven? I—I'll give him a jolly good thrashing, and end his nonsense once and for all. Shun you?—the little microbe! I—I never heard of anything to equal it in all my life."

"Still the fact remains. I would not—"

"Then it shan't remain!" he cried. "He and I will have an understanding—at once, too."

She barred his way to the door, putting her hands on his broad shoulders, and looking up into his face.

"You cannot compromise with such an antagonist, nor intimidate him," she said. "And, if you could, the victory would be worthless. Leave him to me, dear. Love him, but love me, too."

MRS. FULLERTON rubbed the chubby little face briskly with the soft towel, for since Sarah had gone she had made a point of washing and dressing him herself. She had, indeed, hoped that by doing more for him she might make an impression on his stubborn little heart. But, so far, she had not succeeded to any appreciable degree, and the pleasure of her self-imposed task was fast waning under her growing sense of disappointment and discouragement. By his lack of interest and monosyllabic conversation he had already strangled her customary light chatter to him at such times, and almost unconsciously she had