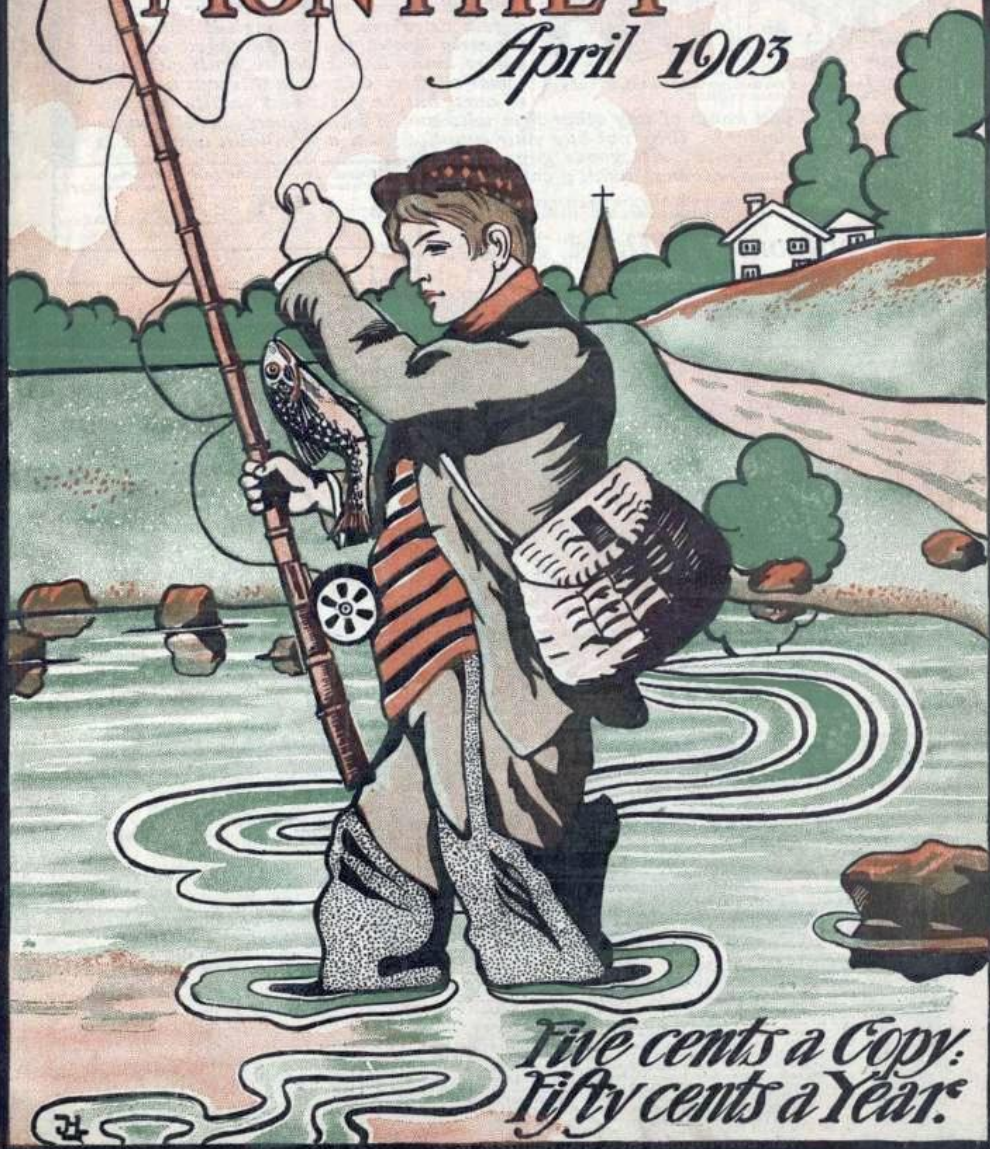


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A Patent Medicine Testimonial

The Overreaching of Uncle Abimelech

L. M. Montgomery

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You might as well try to move the rock of Gibraltar as attempt to change Uncle Abimelech's mind when it is once made up," said Murray gloomily.

Murray is like dear old dad; he gets discouraged rather easily. Now, I'm not like that; I'm more like mother's folks. As Uncle Abimelech has never failed to tell me when I have annoyed him, I'm "all Foster." Uncle Abimelech doesn't like the Fosters. But I'm glad I take after them. If I had folded my hands and sat down meekly when Uncle Abimelech made known his good will and pleasure regarding Murray and me after father's death Murray would never have got to college—nor I either, for that matter. Only I wouldn't have minded that very much. I just wanted to go to college because Murray did. I couldn't be separated from him. We were twins and had always been together.

As for Uncle Abimelech's mind, I knew that he never had been known to change it. But, as he himself was fond of saying, there has to be a first time for everything and I had determined that this was to be the first time for him. I hadn't any idea how I was going to bring it about but it just had to be done and I'm not "all Foster" for nothing.

I knew I would have to depend on my own thinkers. Murray is clever at books and dissecting dead things but he couldn't help me out in this, even if he hadn't settled before hand that there was no use in opposing Uncle Abimelech.

"I'm going up to the garret to think this out, Murray," I said solemnly. "Don't let anybody disturb me and if Uncle Abimelech comes over don't tell him where I am. If I don't come down in time to get tea get it yourself. I shall not leave the garret until I have thought of some way to change Uncle Abimelech's mind."

"Then you'll be a prisoner there for the term of your natural life, dear sis," said Murray sceptically. "You're a clever girl, Prue—and you've got enough decision for two—but you'll never get the better of Uncle Abimelech."

"We'll see," I said resolutely and up to the garret I went. I shut the door and bolted it good and fast to make sure. Then I piled some old cushions in the window seat—for one might as well be comfortable when one is thinking as not—and went over the whole ground from the beginning.

Outside the wind was thrashing the broad, leafy top of the maple whose tallest twigs reached to the funny gray eaves of our old house. One roly-poly little sparrow blew or flew to the sill and sat there for a minute, looking at me with knowing eyes. Down below I could see Murray in a corner of the yard, pottering over a sick duck. He had set its broken leg and was nursing it back to health. Anyone, except Uncle Abimelech, could see that Murray was simply born to be a doctor and that it was flying in the face of Providence to think of making of him anything else.

From the garret windows I could see all over the farm, for the house is on the hill end of it. I could see all the dear old fields and the spring meadow and the beech woods in the southwest corner. And beyond the orchard were the two gray barns and down below at the right-hand corner was the garden with all my sweet peas fluttering over the fences and trellises like a horde of butterflies. It was a dear old place and both Murray and I loved every stick and stone on it but there was no reason why we should go on living there when Murray didn't like farming. And it wasn't our own, anyhow. It all belonged to Uncle Abimelech.

Father and Murray and I had always lived here together. Father's health broke down during his college course. That was one reason why Uncle Abimelech was set against Murray going to college, although Murray is as chubby and sturdy a fellow as you could wish to see. Anybody with Foster in him would be that.

To go back to father. The doctors told him that his only chance of recovering his strength was in an open-air life; so father rented one of Uncle Abimelech's farms and there he lived for the rest of his days. He did not get strong again until it was too late for college and he was a square peg in a round hole all his life, as he used to tell us. Mother died before we could remember so Murray and dad and I were everything to each other. We were very happy, too, although we were bossed by Uncle Abimelech more or less. But he meant it well and father didn't mind.

Then father died—oh, that was a dreadful time! I hurried over it in my thinking-out. Of course when Murray and I came to look our position squarely in the face we found that we were dependent on Uncle Abimelech for everything, even the roof over our heads. We were literally as poor as church mice and even poorer, for at least they get churches rent-free.

Murray's heart was set on going to college and studying medicine. He asked Uncle Abimelech to lend him enough money to get a start with and then he could work his own way along and pay back the loan in due time. Uncle Abimelech is rich and Murray and I are his nearest relatives. But he simply wouldn't listen to Murray's plan.

"I put my foot firmly down on such nonsense," he said. "And you know that when I put my foot down something squashes."

It was not that Uncle Abimelech was miserly or that he grudged us assistance. Not at all. He was ready to deal generously by us but it must be in his own way. His way was this.

Murray and I were to stay on the farm and when Murray was twenty-one Uncle Abimelech said he would deed the farm to him—make him a present of it out and out.

“It’s a good farm, Murray,” he said. “Your father never made more than a bare living out of it because he wasn’t strong enough to work it properly—that’s what *he* got out of a college course, by the way. But you are strong enough and ambitious enough to do well.”



“WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?”

But Murray couldn’t be a farmer, that was all there was to it. I told Uncle

Abimelech so, firmly, and I talked to him for days about it but Uncle Abimelech never wavered. He sat and listened to me with a quizzical smile on that handsome, clean-shaven, ruddy old face of his, with its cut granite features. And in the end he said,

“You ought to be the one to go to college if either of you did, Prue. You would make a capital lawyer, if I believed in the higher education of women, but I don’t. Murray can take or leave the farm as he chooses. If he prefers the latter alternative, well and good. But he gets no help from me. You’re a foolish little girl, Prue, to back him up in this nonsense of his.”

It makes me angry to be called a little girl when I put up my hair a year ago and Uncle Abimelech knows it. I gave up arguing with him. I knew it was no use anyway.

I thought it all over in the garret. But no way out of the dilemma could I see. I had eaten up all the apples I had brought with me and I felt flabby and disconsolate. The sight of Uncle Abimelech stalking up the lane, as erect and lordly as usual, served to deepen my gloom.

I picked up the paper my apples had been wrapped in and looked it over gloomily. Then I saw something and Uncle Abimelech was delivered into my hand.

The whole plan of campaign unrolled itself before me and I fairly laughed in glee, looking out of the garret window right down on the little bald spot on the top of Uncle Abimelech’s head, as he stood laying down the law to Murray about something.

When Uncle Abimelech had gone I went down to Murray,

“Buddy,” I said, “I’ve thought of a plan. I’m not going to tell you what it is but you are to consent to it without knowing. I think it will quench Uncle Abimelech but you must have perfect confidence in me. You must back me up no matter what I do and let me have my own way in it all.”

“All right, sis,” said Murray.

“That isn’t solemn enough,” I protested. “I’m serious. Promise solemnly.”

“I promise solemnly, ‘cross my heart”” said Murray, looking like an owl.

“Very well. Remember that your role is to lie low and say nothing like Brer Rabbit. Alloway’s Anodyne Liniment is pretty good stuff, isn’t it, Murray? It cured your sprain after you had tried everything else, didn’t it?”

“Yes. But I don’t see the connection.”

“It isn’t necessary that you should. Well, what with your sprain and my rheumatics I think I can manage it.”

“Look here Prue. Are you sure that long brooding over our troubles up in the garret hasn’t turned your brain?”

“My brain is all right. Now leave me, minion. There is that which I would do.”

Murray grinned and went. I wrote a letter, took it down to the office and mailed it. For a week there was nothing more to do.

There is just one trait of Uncle Abimelech’s disposition more marked than his fondness for having his own way and that one thing is family pride. The Melvilles are a very old family. The name dates back to the Norman conquest when a certain Roger de Melville, who was an ancestor of ours, went over to England with William the Conqueror. I don’t think the Melvilles ever did anything worth recording in history since. To be sure, as far back as we can trace, none of them has ever done anything bad either. They have been honest, respectable folks and I think that is something worth being proud of.

But Uncle Abimelech pinned his family pride to Roger de Melville. He had the Melville coat of arms and our family tree, made out by an eminent genealogist, framed and hung up in his library and he would not have done anything that would not have chimed in with that coat of arms and a conquering ancestor for the world.

At the end of a week I got an answer to my letter. It was what I wanted. I wrote again and sent a parcel. In three weeks’ time the storm burst.

One day I saw Uncle Abimelech striding up the lane. He had a big newspaper clutched in his hand. I turned to Murray who was poring over a book of anatomy in the corner.

“Murray, Uncle Abimelech is coming. There is going to be a battle royal between us. Allow me to remind you of your promise.”

“To lie low and say nothing? That’s the cue, isn’t it sis?”

“Unless Uncle Abimelech appeals to you! In that case you are to back me up.”

Then Uncle Abimelech stalked in. He was purple with rage. Old Roger de Melville himself never could have looked fiercer. I *did* feel a quake or two but I faced Uncle Abimelech undauntedly. No use in having your name on the roll of Battle Abbey if you can’t stand your ground.

“Prudence, what does this mean?” thundered Uncle Abimelech, as he flung the newspaper down on the table. Murray got up and peered over. Then he whistled. He started to say something but remembered just in time and stopped. But he did give me a black look. Murray has a sneaking pride of name too, although he won’t own up to it and laughs at Uncle Abimelech.

I looked at the paper and began to laugh. We did look so funny, Murray and I, in that advertisement. It took up the whole page. At the top were our photos, half life size, and underneath our names and addresses printed out in full. Below was the letter I had written to the Alloway Anodyne Liniment folks. It was a florid testimonial

to the virtues of their liniment. I said that it had cured Murray's sprain after all other remedies had failed and that, when I had been left a partial wreck from a very bad attack of rheumatic fever, the only thing that restored my joints and muscles to working order was Alloway's Anodyne Liniment and so on.

It was all true enough although I dare say old Aunt Sarah-from-the-Hollow's rubbing had as much to do with the cures as the liniment. But that is neither here nor there.

"What does this mean, Prudence?" said Uncle Abimelech again. He was quivering with wrath but I was as cool as a cucumber and Murray stood like a graven image.

"Why, that, Uncle Abimelech," I said calmly, "Well, it just means one of my ways of making money. That Liniment company pays for those testimonials and photos, you know. They gave me fifty dollars for the privilege of publishing them. Fifty dollars will pay for books and tuition for Murray and me at Kentville Academy next winter and Mrs. Tredgold is kind enough to say she will board me for what help I can give her around the house, and wait for Murray's until he can earn it by teaching."

I rattled all this off glibly before Uncle Abimelech could get in a word.

"It's disgraceful," he stormed. "Disgraceful! Think of Sir Roger de Melville—and a patent medicine advertisement! Murray Melville, what were you about, sir, to let your sister disgrace herself and her family name by such an outrageous transaction?"

I quaked a bit. If Murray should fail me! But Murray was true-blue.

"I gave Prue a free hand, sir. It's an honest business transaction enough—and the family name alone won't send us to college, you know, sir."

Uncle Abimelech glared at us.

"This must be put an end to," he said. "This advertisement must not appear again. I won't have it!"

"But I've signed a contract that it is to run for six months," I said sturdily. "And I've others in view. You remember the Herb Cure you recommended one spring and that it did me so much good! I'm negotiating with the makers of that and—"

"The girl's mad!" said Uncle Abimelech. "Stark, staring mad!"

"Oh no, I'm not, Uncle Abimelech. I'm merely a pretty good business woman. You won't help Murray to go to college so I must. This is the only way I have and I'm going to see it through."

After Uncle Abimelech had gone, still in a towering rage, Murray remonstrated. But I reminded him of his promise and he had to succumb.

Next day Uncle Abimelech returned—a subdued and chastened Uncle

Abimelech.

“See here, Prue,” he said sternly. “This thing must be stopped. I say it *must*. I am not going to have the name of Melville dragged all over the country in a patent medicine advertisement. You’ve played your game and won it—take what comfort you can out of the confession. If you will agree to cancel this notorious contract of yours I’ll settle it with the company—and I’ll put Murray through college—and you too if you want to go! Something will have to be done with you, that’s certain. Is this satisfactory?”

“Perfectly,” I said promptly, “If you will add thereto your promise that you will forget and forgive, Uncle Abimelech. There are to be no hard feelings.”

Uncle Abimelech shrugged his shoulders.

“In for a penny, in for a pound,” he said. “Very well, Prue. We wipe off all scores and begin afresh. But there must be no more such doings. You’ve worked your little scheme through—trust a Foster for that! But in future you’ve got to remember that in law you’re a Melville whatever you are in fact.”

I nodded dutifully. “I’ll remember, Uncle Abimelech,” I promised.

After everything had been arranged and Uncle Abimelech had gone I looked at Murray.

“Well?” I said.

Murray twinkled.

“You’ve accomplished the impossible, sis. But, as Uncle Abimelech intimated—don’t you try it again.”

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been fixed.

[The end of *A Patent Medicine Testimonial: The Overreaching of Uncle Abimelech* by L. M. (Lucy Maud) Montgomery]