

At the Old Horse Sale

By Sara Beaumont Kennedy

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"You must not go in there. It is no place for you." There was more than protest in his voice. There was positive command, which, perhaps, was the reason why she walked directly under the auctioneer's red flag into the express office, already thronged with idle, curious buyers.

"I never was at anything more exciting than a dry goods bargain sale. This will be positively like Monte Carlo."

"Our uncle will disapprove!"

"Of course he will. He disapproves of most things I do since you took up the role of social mentor for the family. That year abroad spoiled you, Adolphus. You have never been en- durable since you took to patent up- pers and a monocle. Now, Nick would have brought me in here without a word of remonstrance and lent me every penny out of his pocket if I needed it to bid with—lent me even his car fare and walked home uncom- plainingly and carried my parcels."

"If he had not happened to see an old woman or a lame cat to help over the crossing, in which case, very likely, he would have laid the parcels down and quite forgotten to pick them up."

"Perhaps, for Nick is a bit absent- minded, but he is perfectly adorable when it comes to giving a girl her own way."

"My brother is happy in winning your good opinion. It is my misfor- tune!"

"No, it's your fault; you are so frightfully conventional. Dear me, what curious people!"

"They are the drift from the street. None of our set ever!"

"There, the auctioneer is beginning again. It will be perfectly delightful to buy something and not have the least idea what it is—so weird and mysterious!"

"Nellie, surely you are not going to bid out loud in this crowd!"

"I certainly am. There is no harm in it, and I am sick to death of the right angle rules by which you and uncle measure my life. Wonder what that woman found in her parcels? There goes up a bandbox. I shall bid on that."

"Nellie, don't!" he first commanded, then entreated vehemently, but she was as a deaf adder that stoppeth her ears.

"Fifty cents," she called, in answer to the auctioneer's challenge, at the same time stepping upon an empty box by the wall, so that she was in plain view of the whole crowd.

"Seventy-five cents!" screamed a feminine voice across the hall.

"One dollar," flashed back Nellie, her color rising, her eyes shining, for her cousin's voice came up to her in agitated whispers.

"One fifty," came from her opponent.

"Three dollars," cried Nellie, pushing Adolphus' hand from her sleeve.

"Three dollars," shrieked the other woman, nervously counting the change in her purse. No one else was bid- ding, the entire crowd having centered its attention on the nervous woman and the "swell" girl, and there were cheers and counter cheers as the bids rose dollar by dollar until at last the coveted box was knocked down to Nel- lie.

She was still laughing and flushed with her triumph when they emerged from the door over which flew the red flag, but Adolphus felt miserable and compromised, and this feeling was not abated when he saw the astonishment in the eyes of Miss Curtis, whose lan- dau happened at that moment to pass, for Miss Curtis was the personifica- tion of rigid conventionality. He counted the meeting as one more misfortune in an unlucky day.

Nellie's excitement waned as they walked, and by the time they entered her uncle's gate she was strangely silent. Adolphus evidently took this for a hopeful sign, for presently he cleared his throat, adjusted his monocle and began:

"Nellie, we must talk seriously. The time has come!"

"No, it hasn't come," she said, in- terrupting him good naturedly, "so stop right there. I don't know whether this is a lecture or a proposal of mar- riage—your private talks with me vi- brate between these two subjects—but I am in no mood for either. For heaven's sake, Adolphus, throw that glass away. I hate to be spied at like that!"

With a reproachful sigh he removed the offending glass and said: "Nick not only lectured you yesterday; he posi- tively scolded you, and!"

"And I deserved it, but I answered him back spitefully, like the little beast I am, and he—he hasn't even noticed me since." She turned her head so that he did not see the quiver of her red lips, the passionate protest of her eyes.

All their set knew that her dicta- torial old uncle intended she should marry Adolphus, who satisfied his so- cial ambitions, while Nick, who cared nothing for society, smoked a pipe and got to have his trousers creased, and a thorn in the old man's side, between these two were constant dis- agreements, which Nellie had hitherto managed to make up, but yesterday there had been a quarrel of unusual violence, and there was even some talk of Nick's leaving the house. It was

ed the steps, "can't you do something— anything—to patch up this new quar- rel between Nick and uncle? It isn't Nick's fault that he is—that he was—was born different from you and un- cle."

"I quite agree with my uncle about this slumming business. A man in Nick's position owes something to— to appearances."

"Stuff!" she scoffed and ran by him into the house.

In the library, to stem the tide of Adolphus' wooing, she hastily opened her box and lifted out the contents, a quaint and curious bonnet of a decade ago, a bonnet with a scooped brim piled high with flowers and nodding plumes. As she put it on her head, shrieking with laughter, her uncle and Nick entered the room, both of them showing in their manner strong excite- ment. The girl paused in her prouct- ing and paled at the sight of the stern faces. Her uncle saw her strange head- gear and angrily demanded its origin.

Adolphus explained very carefully, not forgetting his own expostulations against the caprice. The old man turned wrathfully upon the girl.

"You and Nick are of a piece in your attempts to humiliate and make a laughingstock of me. My niece, the female head of my family, bidding at a common auction against a washer- woman! Take that hideous thing out of my sight!"

But the spoiled girl only made him a daring little courtesy which set all the bonnet's varnished plumes a-nodding. Nick crossed the room to her side.

"Nellie," he said wistfully, "I am going away for good; my uncle and I have agreed it is best. He has for- gotten me to speak to you of marriage (and that is the cause of our quarrel), but I love you with all my heart. You know what I have to offer you, dear, but will you come with me as my wife?"

It was as if a bomb had exploded at the old man's feet. The words of in- terruption he would have uttered were only splutterings of anger. By the table the girl paused, trembling and going from white to red. Then her uncle found his voice.

"Out of my sight, sir! Your disobe- dience shall cost you dearly. I dis- own you—I cut you off without a penny for your inaudience! Your in- heritance shall be!"—he glanced about for the most worthless thing in sight, and his eye lit on the empty box on the table—"that trash, sir! Take your inheritance and go!"

He was pointing to the door, but Nick's eyes were on Nellie and into them there flashed a radiant joy as at a sign from her he approached the table.

"You give me this box and its con- tents as my fortune, sir?"

"Yes."

"Then I am content, for you have given me that which I most desire in all the whole world."

The old man looked sharply at the two smiling faces. "What mummery is this?" he demanded. Then he, too, approached the table and peered into the box where Nick's eyes were fast- ened. "What is that?" he cried, ad- justing his glasses.

"If you please, sir, it is Nick's heri- tage," answered Nellie shyly.

For in the side of the pasteboard box was a hole through which the rogue of a girl had thrust her dimpled hand. And that was how Nellie obtained her uncle's consent and how Nick won his heart's desire as the aftermath of the old horse sale.

Giant Monument to a Child.

Mount Grace, in Warwick, Mass., seems to be in a way a giant monu- ment to a little child. According to tradition, the Indians captured a Mrs. Rowlinson and her child. As the party were passing through the woods on their way to Canada the child died and was buried at the foot of the mountain. The child's name was Grace and the mountain has been Mount Grace ever since.

Worse Than Lost.

"You lost your money in Wall street, did you?"

"I wouldn't say I lost it," answered the precise though unworlly man. "The word 'lost' implies a remote possi- bility of its being found again."—Exchange.

Progressing.

"Don't you find it hard hustling for yourself?"

"Yes," replied the ambitious young chap, "but it's not half so hard as hus- tling for other people."—Detroit Free Press.

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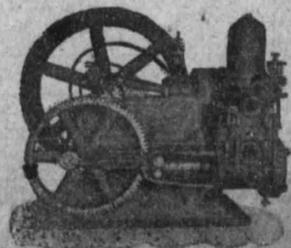
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