

The Four-Handed Bargain

BY ETTA WEBB IN THE CATH. TRIBUNE

Amelia Burr was chopping up a few bits of slab to make a supper-fire from when she looked down the road and saw her husband coming home from the town. He was driving airily along behind a lank horse. Amelia was pale and tight-mouthed with dismay and astonishment. For Silas had gone away driving a white horse and here he was returning with a sorrel!

"He has traded again!" she gasped.

By this time the children had seen their father's approach and with excited yells had dashed off down the road to meet him. All but the baby, a lumpy two-year old whose movements resembled somewhat those of a loaded dice. Amelia dropped both wood and axe to take up her weeping child, soothing her and wiped her snudgy face on a corner of her apron.

"There, there," she said, "don't cry; see poppy's new horse." The baby was still crying when the equipage drove up with Alec and Susie each slashing a rein upon the back of the meek sorrel. Amelia tried to find Silas's eye with her own but it sheepishly evaded her.

"Well, where did you get that critter?" she asked. When a woman has a horse trading husband who invariably gets the worst of every deal, she grows resigned in time to the inevitable.

"Now see here, Amelia," Silas began in the usual foolish tone. "I had to get rid of the grey. She was going back on me. She was all right when I got her but I don't know what she went all wrong of a sudden. There was a spavin coming on her left hind leg. That meant doctoring. And liniment costs money. I met Kin Wade with this here beast and we swapped. I tell you, I've got a nag here."

Amelia drew a long breath. There were a thousand things she could have said without saying too much. But she was a patient woman and, besides, what was the use of saying anything to Silas? He had always traded horses and she always would, as long as he had one to trade. It was his one bad habit. Men always had some sort of bad habit—drink, or tobacco, or cards. She supposed she ought to be thankful that Silas merely traded horses. Of course, it would not be so bad if he did not always get beaten and by the same man. Old Kin Wade forever lay in wait for Silas and as soon as Silas drove into town Kin was after him with a fresh temptation in the way of crowbait. Once long ago they had owned a good horse, old Doll; but Kin had got her away from Silas. And since then their horses had been getting worse and worse, until now there was this one, the worst of them all.

Amelia's sigh became a gulp. Silas had been away all day trading horses when he should have been at home hoeing in the garden or splitting up some wood or doing any one of a dozen chores that waited. As if they were not poor enough already! And with four children to feed! That creature of a horse did not look as if it could plough a furrow.

Amelia felt a sudden resentment against old Kin Wade for putting such a crowbait off on her husband. She wished she could get even with him some way.

"I believe though," she thought wearily "I'd know better than to trade off a good work horse for one that couldn't drag a harrow."

Presently Silas came in from the barn with the children hanging around him.

"Did you get the groceries I asked you to be sure and remember?" Amelia inquired, "we're all out tea."

She knew that he had not got the groceries, but she wished to remind him that he should have done so. Besides, she had a suspicion that he had not merely forgotten to bring them but had spent the money for something else.

"I said we're all out of tea, Silas," she repeated. "You hadn't ought to forget that. If you'll hand over the money, I'll see if I can't send in by Miss Peterson and get some soon."

Silas felt in his pocket, but only pulled out an empty hand. His eyes fell before his wife's accusing gaze.

"That two dollars—I sworn," he said feebly. "I'm going to be out and out with you, Amelia. I had to give it to Kin in the swap. He said—"

"What difference what he did say?" blazed Amelia. "He always lies to you and you always believe him. I'll be right glad when he's got you traded out of a horse. Then maybe you'll go to work instead of farming the road betwix here and town when you ought to be doing something to support your family."

"Amelia, why, see here now—" Silas began in sheer helpless astonishment at this unexpected outburst.

But Amelia's eyes were flashing. For the first time her patience had given way. The look she gave Silas silenced him. He picked up the baby and sat down to await supper while she moved about with lips set tightly and her face glowing with anger.

Next day Silas appeared resolved to make amends for directly after breakfast he harnessed the new horse to the cultivator and went forth to labor.

Encouraged by this show of industry, Amelia got her ironing and proceeded to press off the family supply of clean clothing. But she was soon interrupted by the headlong entrance of Alec and Annie.

"Ma! Ma!" they were shouting. "Come and look at the new horse!" Amelia left her work and ran. In the field before the harrow stood the sorrel, head drooping, scarcely alive save for the twitch of her tail now and then. Silas was gazing at her in despair.

"Balky," he groaned. Amelia did not speak. She was too much disturbed. It was the first time Silas had ever brought home a balky horse and she had a great horror of balky horses.

"Can't you tell me something to do, Amelia?" Silas asked at last. Amelia clenched her hands.

"Yes," she breathed. "Unhitch her from the harrow. She'll move soon as you do that. Then hitch her up to the buckboard and come round to the front door."

"My land. What are you going to do?" cried Silas.

"I'll show you," Amelia answered. She hurried into the house and got ready for town. She was ready almost as soon as Silas was. As she came out he said:

"She'll go all right now, but she won't work."

"I know that. Get out, Silas. I'm going to take her alone."

He obeyed.

"Where are you going?" he inquired, anxiously.

"I'm going to town," Amelia replied. She climbed into the buckboard and the horse began to move.

Amelia turned down the side street and came to a neat gray house with an air of prosperity. There was a large barn of the same kind behind the house. She drew up with a loud "Whoa!" and a man who was sitting on the porch smoking came down to speak to her.

"Well, I see you are driving the sorrel yourself today," he said, jocularly. "How'd she act with ye?"

"Good as gold," Amelia replied, readily. "Only I never did like sorrels. I've come to trade her off with you for some other color."

The old horse trader laughed. "You women folks beat all," he said. "Well, if you want to trade, Amelia, I suppose I'll have to humor ye. You wait here and I'll bring ye out the only hoss I happen to have that I care to swap today."

Presently he returned leading a horse at the sight of which Amelia gasped. Such a spindle-legged, rack-a-bones certainly never was seen.

"Here's a hoss," said Kin, "that needs a woman's care. All he needs is a little mothering. You can do wonders with him, Amelia."

"Well—" Amelia bit her lip. "One thing he ain't sorrel. She patted the animal's nose. He responded by trying to nibble her fingers. There was something beseeching in his liquid eyes and Amelia's heart went out to him. Besides he didn't balk; she was sure of that.

"Take out the sorrel and put Good Luck in the sharts," she bade Kin.

"What's that you call him?" asked the old man.

"Good Luck," retorted Amelia.

Kin laughed himself double. Then he put his hand into his pocket and pulled out a battered wallet.

"I guess I owe you about two dollars for that laugh," he said. "Here ye be," and he laid a bill on her hands.

Amelia flushed. She knew that it was intended for a joke, but two dollars was two dollars. She bravely drew up the lines over the new purchase and drove away. But her heart was heavy. Now, that the excitement of the deal had died down she felt that she had out-Silas Silas.

However, she had her two dollars back and with them turned toward home. When she reached Hammond's Woods with a long clear stretch of road with nobody to see, she decided to put Good Luck through his paces.

Amelia was late home. She put Good Luck out herself while Silas looked on grinning.

"I claim this horse," she said. "You needn't bother your head about him, Silas. I'll look after him myself."

And she did. Silas hired an old horse to do the farm work while Amelia coddled and fed and curried Good Luck. Very soon everybody was laughing, over how Amelia Burr had turned "Hoss trader". All the same Good Luck lost his mangy appearance, took on flesh, and limbered up considerably. By fall no one would have recognized in him the rack-a-bones Amelia had brought home that day. Even Kin failed to do so.

One day after he had had to put his registered trotter to his best speed to overtake Amelia as she returned home from town, he made her an offer for the horse. Amelia shook her head.

"What'll you take for him then?" Amelia named a price that made Kin wince.

"Not on your life," he shouted.

"Then," said Amelia calmly. "I'll let Dick Brew have him and see if he don't take every race away from you at the fair next month."

In the end Kin reconsidered and bought the horse. And he paid Amelia her price. With part of it she bought a steady, good horse. The rest she put into the bank for the children.

"I'm done with horse-trading," she told Silas, emphatically. "And so are you."

HOW IT READ.

At a recent wedding the bride was Miss Jane Helper and the bridegroom was Mr. Newton Lord. The bridegroom, however, was very angry when he saw in the newspaper an account of their wedding, headed in the usual way: "Lord—Helper."

GERMAN PRESS ADMITS CLAIM

Laments the Fact that all the Catholic Peoples Outside the Central Powers are in Arms Against their Aims

(Catholic War News Service)

The "Passau Donauzeitung" tackles the subject openly:—

"Even in the ranks of the clergy there are ever more frequent expressions of anxiety about a possible alienation from Rome; they fear that, in view of the great rise of national sentiment in the war, the attachment of the Catholics to the Holy See is slowly growing cold. They fear this all the more because they conclude from certain events that the Entente Powers are making attempts to obtain influence upon the policy of Rome."

The plain fact it is drawing upon the German peoples, a fact which is admitted by the Vienna "Arbeiter Zeitung", that with the exception of the German Catholics, all the Catholic peoples of the world are on the side of the Entente, and, says this journal, it is useless for the German Catholics in Austria to fight against the inevitable. The day is past when the propagandists of Germany hoped to bring dissension into the ranks of the Entente peoples by depicting a non-existent holding off by the Catholics. The religious statistics of the American forces, for one thing, have quite dispelled that idea, even if it had any real existence. The forces of Catholicism are arrayed in arms against Germany and her allies, and the Catholic peoples within the Central Empires are finding that their religious compatriots of practically the entire world are in opposition to them and for which they are standing.

The "Postzeitung" of Augsburg a few days ago pointed out to its readers that the Vatican has the whole world in its purview, not forgetting North America as well as Russia. This newspaper says:

"In comparison with these tremendous duties, what is the importance of the Vatican's little Catholic branch in Protestant Germany? ... When the Catholics of Germany are discussing their future political reorientation, they should also ventilate the question whether their salvation in future does not lie in the renunciation of certain national aspirations and in a stronger and more deliberate attachment to the policy of Rome."

Why don't the Farmers Unite?

What do the Canadian Farmers really want? The National Council of Agriculture in Winnipeg are busy drafting a national platform for farmers. The United Farmers of Ontario recently met in committee to decide on something similar. One resolution debated by the U. F. O. provides that any officer of the Association elected to Parliament shall at once resign his office, for fear the Government use him against the Union. Another, that if any farmer M. P. fails to support the policy of the Union in Parliament, he shall at once resign from Parliament.

Are these conditions acceptable to the N. C. A.? We do not know.

But one thing we do know—that the biggest union the farmers can ever consummate will be the union among themselves. The western farmer wants a great many things, but one virtue he has is that he always knows what he wants because he keeps a head of the newspapers and comes to a focus in the Grain Growers' Guide. Conspicuous among the things he wants is that old elaborate, free trade, both ways across the border, in wheat, other grains, cattle, implements, boots and shoes, clothing and furniture. He buys implements, etc., and sells grain, etc. He has little or no competition in what he sells, because at present the great purchasing population is on the other side of the border. He can get more nett for what he has to sell over the border because he avoids the high rate in the long haul. Conversely he could, under limited free trade, buy a self-binder made in Chicago cheaper than one made in Toronto.

But what does the Ontario farmer want? Free trade in wheat and cattle? No. Because he has the short haul now for cattle to centres of consumption and for water-borne wheat. In fruits and vegetables? No, because he would then be in competition with the farmer just over the line. B. C. fruit farmers and Quebec habitants are not anxious for free trade in farm products.—Canadian "Courier".

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