

## The Daily Short Story

BOUGHT BY AUCTION

"Courtney, lend me your ears for half an hour, for I am in a pickle," exclaimed Fred Sawyer to his friend. "Come up to my quarters. I have something to show you, and—no joking—I need your advice."

"If you take it, it will be for the first time," laughed good-natured Courtney. "Lead on, and don't lose any time in relieving this suspense. I'm not fond of riddles, you know."

"Why, yesterday, I dropped into the salesroom at a London station. You know, they sell off the uncalled for luggage at intervals, and a sale was just going on. A number of the bays were there, and we each commenced to bid for a trunk. I selected rather a small one, and—here we are! Come right in and view the burden of my woes."

He led the way into a pleasant apartment and pointed to a small leather trunk which stood in the middle of the room.

"Open it, if you want to," he said. "I've had enough of the confounded thing. It's full of women's stuff, and what do you suppose I can do with it? I haven't an aunt or a cousin in the wide world."

"Keep it till you're married, Fred. These seem to be good clothes," said Courtney, peeping into the box and lifting dainty garments with a half reverent touch, in spite of his laughing face.

"Humph! The idea of such advice from you! Why, old boy, I shall not marry for ten years—five anyway—and I'm not going to risk keeping these things here and being taken for a lady burglar. Mrs. Gaffney would find them in spite of everything—small murder in the air and hunt around for the skull bones. No, I'll dump the trunk in the river, that's what I will do."

"Pshaw! You're too sensible for that. These things cost money, lots of it, I imagine, and you paid something for them in the bargain. You might sell them to the second-hand—no, I've a better scheme than that. Why not go through the trunk systematically, find out the owner's name and address—there are surely letters or something—and write to her, offering her the whole thing for a reasonable sum?"

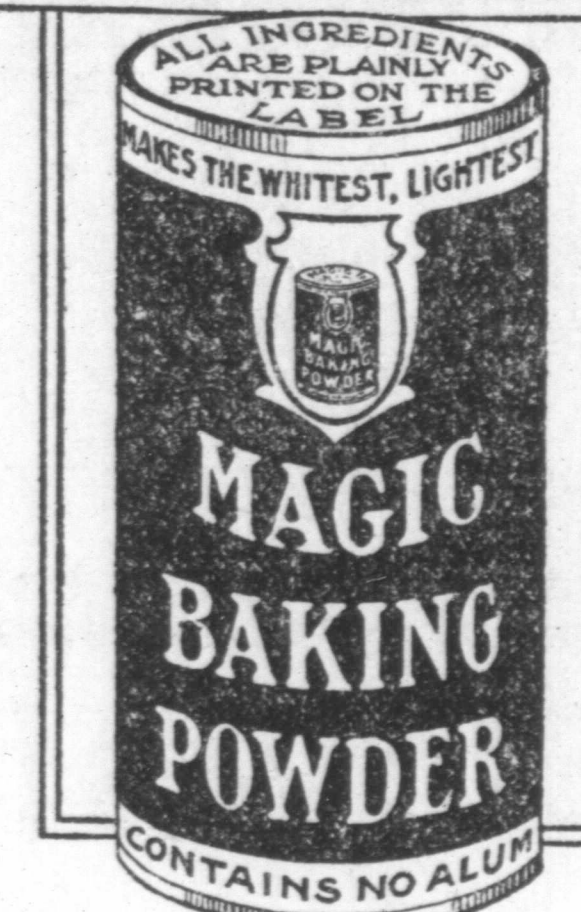
"Do an act of charity and yet turn an honest penny. Anyone would know you are Scotch. But I must go back to the store, and—Here! You have all the time there it; suppose you go through it for me. All I ask is that you will keep Mrs. McGaffney out. Fare-deu!" And off he went.

Courtney laughingly locked the door, but the smiles soon left his face as he proceeded with his task. He wondered if the little battered trunk had been lost in some of the dreadful catastrophes he had read of. He imagined the owner killed and her body as well as luggage unidentified in the horrible excitement.

They were girlish things—dainty veils and ribbons, gingham, silks and snowy linen. He lingered over a small, worn slipper and felt a thrill akin to that awakened in Cinderella's prince.

"No clue yet," he murmured. "Perhaps there are letters in this box."

## NO ALUM



Its catch was bent, but he wrenched it open and out flew—his own photograph!

He sat down plump in a box of laces and stared. On the other side were his initials and a date he had been trying for three years to forget, "June 2, 1890."

"Nell Burr's trunk!" he exclaimed. "Oh, my dear little girl, what has happened to you? Maybe someone—No, here are your initials on this belt buckle, and your gloves were No. 6 and this slipper would just fit your dear little foot."

The young man grew excited and rapturous over each article. Presently he lifted a package of letters from one corner.

"My own—and they express the greatest happiness life ever brought me. They are like the leaves that flutter down in the November rain. I wonder why she kept them? How many there are!"

Unfastening the cord, he turned the letters over and found many of the envelopes scribbled upon by a familiar hand. There were items jotted down to be remembered in answering, and scraps of poetry which had not long since reached his eye and been ever since cherished in his memory. Upon the last one—

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for they were all numbered—was written in ink this girlish confession, "Al Courtney, I love you, but will never marry anyone so incalculable." Resting his head on the empty tray in silence, he exclaimed:

"I was a fool—a consummate fool—and now perhaps she is dead."

A noise aroused him, and in a bewildered way he surveyed the garments strewn on every side and gazed mournfully at the beautiful hat, through which he had run one foot, and the box of laces he had unconsciously used as a cushion. Fred would be coming in a few minutes. He began repacking the things with ruthless haste, and stowing the letters in his own pockets, was lying lazily on the couch reading the paper when his chum entered.

"Well," he cried, "what mystery did you unearth?"

"No mystery at all," was the deliberate answer, "but the 'stuff,' as you call it, is worth something and would be a regular gold mine to a girl. I've a notion to buy it from you and present it to my sisters. What will you take?"

"Oh, come! You're just doing that to help me out. I know your benevolent old heart. No, I'll follow your first advice and hunt up the owner. It would be quite romantic, and, besides, you hinted that I might make a shilling or two by it. You found her name and address here, didn't you?"

"Yes," Al reluctantly answered. "I found her name and an address, but it is hardly likely you could find her after so many years. You know they keep luggage a long time before it is sold."

"I'm not sure about that," said Fred. "I've thought about it all the morning, and the idea grows on me. It will be rare fun to try, anyway. What did you say the name was?"

"But no doubt this girl was killed—luggage is seldom lost except by some such accident, and—maybe she is an old woman."

Fred laughed immoderately. "Just as if that would make an act of charity less meritorious. Old women don't usually wear white lace hats, though. You must have found something precious in there—jewelry or something—which makes you anxious to martyrize yourself. It's mine, however, and I am not anxious to part with it as I was—no till I've looked it through anyway."

As he turned the key, Al remembered that his own photograph was lying in a conspicuous box, and exclaimed:

"Wait until after dinner, then. I am half starved!"

"Perhaps it would be better," was the answer, and the passed out together.

When fairly downstairs, Al said he had forgotten his handkerchief and flew back three steps at a time to get it. Securing the picture and placing it in an inside pocket, he said to himself:

"Surely there is nothing else to give me away. But I must wheedle him out of the trunk."

After dinner, Fred "went through" the contents of the trunk, making boyish remarks concerning each article as he threw it aside. Al inwardly winced at these remarks and could scarcely restrain himself from knocking him over on the spot.

"What makes you so crusty?" queried Fred suddenly as one of his choicest jokes was met by a gruff "H'm!" "There's no fun in you, and why you want this stuff beats me."

## ROYAL



Your sisters would turn up their noses at second-hand clothing, if it is pretty. But it isn't worth fussing over, so take it along. No doubt it would prove a white elephant on my hands sooner or later."

Not until the trunk was safely in his room could Al breathe freely. Even then it was no easy matter to keep it out of his sisters' sights. They made both a pet and a confidant of their one brother and had a fashion of dropping into his room at all hours to tell him of their schemes and woes. He had pushed the trunk under a mahogany table in the corner, the old-fashioned cover of which reached almost to the floor.

When he told them he was going away for a little business "trip," they beset him with questions and petitions to be taken with him, finally declaring they would clean house while he was gone and "sort out his trash."

"So behold him, in the dead of night, carrying the 'white elephant' up the narrow attic stairs, bumping his head on every rafter and getting sobwees in his moustache. He covered it with old clothing, pushed a big box in front of it, and then crept down stairs, feeling as guilty as if he had been concealing some crime. At breakfast the girls both talked at once about the burglar who tried to get in and how they pounded on Al's door and could not even get an answer."

At noon he was off, and as the rain whirled onward he became possessed with fears. She might not be at Hastings; she might not care for him after these three years; she might even be married or dead.

Arriving at his destination at last, he only stopped to leave his bag at a hotel and walked rapidly to a familiar house in the suburbs. Ringing the bell, he inquired for Miss Burr in a matter of fact way, as if he had seen her the day before. He watched the girl's face as she spoke and saw no trace of surprise. She simply said:

"Miss Burr may not be able to see you, but come in and I will ask."

Presently he was shown into a small, sunny room, where, on a couch, lay the one girl he had ever loved. He meant to explain at once the cause of his foolish going and eager coming, all of which he had framed into frank, beautiful sentences, but somehow they forsook him, and he fell back on the common-place. She received him with quiet words of welcome, and then said:

"Pardon my position, but I am such an invalid that it is a trial to sit up."

"An invalid!" he echoed faintly. "Yes," she answered. "Did you not hear of my accident several months ago? On coming home from a visit, I stopped for a day or so in a London hotel. The building caught fire a few hours after I entered it. The horror of the scene is stamped—branded would be a more appropriate word—on my memory that I cannot bear to talk of it. I lost everything except the ulster which was wrapped about me, and would have lost my life but for the brave firemen who broke my fall. Oh, no, I am not seriously injured," she continued, in

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answer to his half spoken question, "though I have been ill ever since. It was such a shock, you know."

By deft questioning he succeeded in making her say:

"Yes, I lost my trunk. It was left at the station (I expected to go on in a day or two), and the deposit ticket was destroyed with my pocketbook. Railway people are necessarily particular about identifying luggage, and for weeks I was too ill to even remember it. Besides, I had only gone for a short outing, and it held nothing of much value, except some keepsakes that were dear to me."

A deep flush stole over her face at these words. He watched it for one delicious moment, and then gathered her up in his arms, exclaiming: "I will bring them back if you will pay the reward I want."

Then—or, rather, after he had tortured her impatience mercilessly—he told her of Fred's "bargain" bought at auction. She begged for it, coaxed, pleaded, all in vain. He declared she could only have the little leather trunk as an edging present. And a very happy wedding party it was, too.

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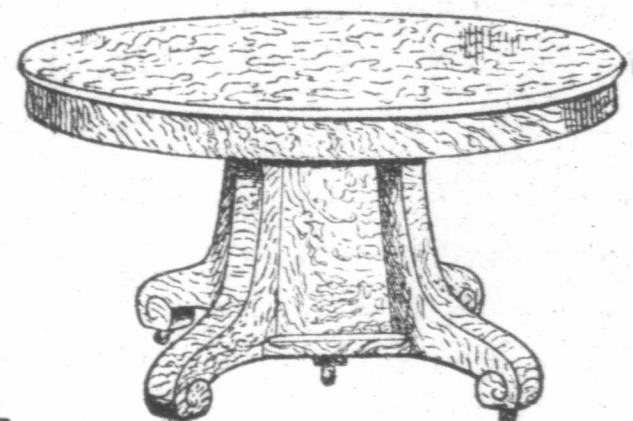
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