

A Case of Natural Selection

By Florence Woolston

WHEN Brady, the photographer, moved to Pearl Street his friends predicted failure. For Pearl Street was a neighborhood of poor people and money for luxuries was scarce. Photographers had come and photographers had gone but Brady was different. His studio was enriched by a variety of second-hand costumes, some of the more striking ones having been discarded by his actress wife, while others had been sold to him by members of the profession. Brady reasoned that soiled and discolored clothes, although unsuitable for the stage, might still do very well for decorative photography. Thus his patrons might appear in any character they desired. Few of the residents of the vicinity could afford the fashionable attire suitable for successful portraiture, but garbed as a Japanese, a Martha Washington, a fisherman, or an Indian, they shone resplendent in the eyes of their friends. Brady was also versatile in the matter of background, using with large prodigality Niagara Falls, the Alps, the ocean, or a snowstorm.



"These examples of Brady's skill captivated the neighborhood."

Milly Linden, who secretly cherished histrionic ambitions, was taken as Camille and experienced thereby at least half the pleasures of a stage career. Mrs. Blish, whose nautical adventures had been confined to an occasional ride on a ferry, was equally delighted to see herself in yachting costume, seated on a coil of ropes, a life preserver at her feet. James Boyle, once ambitious to be an Indian fighter, was able to distribute post cards on which he appeared as a scout of the Custer variety. All these examples of Brady's skill captivated the neighborhood and nearly every family was taken, either singly or en masse. Among those who followed these achievements with envious eyes was Mrs. Schwind, who ardently desired to possess a group picture of herself, Mr. Schwind, and the twelve little Schwinds.

On the day that Mrs. Middleton dropped in to show Elvira's latest picture in peasant costume, Mrs. Schwind's longing again asserted itself and she ventured to ask her neighbor's opinion on the subject.

"I hear," she said, "that Brady's takin' tradin' stamps for cash. I've got a book most done and I was kinder thinkin' of gettin' us taken. Eloise wants me to get the hand-painted picture over in the premium parlor instead—that one of the cats—but Jim ain't favorable. He says there's enough cats with kittens in the Alley without hand paintings of them."

"Yes," assented Mrs. Middleton, "I think a picture of your own folks would be more satisfaction than oil paintings. You'd make a grand picture, too, having so many children. Why don't you try for the prize?"

"I never heard there was any. Whose givin' prizes?"

"The Elite Ladies' World is offering prizes to the largest families. It was in last month, but I didn't read it careful; having only Elvira I seen it was not for me."

"Could you give me the lend of the Elite Ladies' World?" asked Mrs. Schwind eagerly. "Maybe we could get in it. We're large enough, land knows."

The thought of a photograph with the possibility of a prize was new and delightful. Mrs. Schwind could hardly wait for her guest's departure that she might send Mary over to borrow the precious magazine. When it came, she turned over the pages anxiously, and breathed a sigh of relief on discovering a family picture of seven, with this inscription underneath:

IS YOUR PICTURE HERE?

IF NOT WHY NOT?

GRAND FAMILY CONTEST

FIFTY DOLLAR PRIZES IN GOLD

Mr. Thomas Blackwell, believing with ex-President Roosevelt that large families are a national asset, offers a prize each month for the best picture of a large family. Send your picture at once. This is the greatest contest of the age.

"Mother of Pearl!" exclaimed Mrs. Schwind, "if that ain't a gift from heaven. We can take a prize dead easy and it will more than pay for the picture."

She waited impatiently for Jim to come home, and as soon as he entered the house, she called to him:

"Say, Jim, how'd you like to make fifty dollars?"



"It was no small matter to get the entire family ready."

"You're talking big, ma. What's struck you?"

"Well," she affirmed, "we could do it easy."

"The easiest way I know of is to get life insured and then die," returned Jim skeptically.

In answer she put the Elite Ladies' World into his hand.

"Read that," she commanded triumphantly.

Jim read the brilliant offer of the magazine and then exclaimed contemptuously:

"Now, ain't that just like a woman. Of course it's dead easy, but how are you going to get the picture took? Brady

ain't giving them away. How much does he charge?"

"I ain't sure, but he takes tradin' stamps for cash and I've got a book most done. Run over there after supper and see what he'll take us for."

"Ma," put in Eloise, "could we be taken fancy? The Sullivans are in Japanese, and it's grand, all wrappers and fans and paper flowers."

"No, sir," announced Jim firmly. "No Japs for mine. According to the papers there's likely to be a war any day, and then where'd we be in Jap clothes? No, sir."

"I thought," said Mrs. Schwind, "bein' so many of us we might get a variety. Eloise, you could be historic and the twins as Indians. Pa and me could be like country folks. Mrs. George had one that was awful cute. Her in a big hat carryin' a basket of eggs."

"That might do," Jim answered somewhat mollified. "But Brady'll know best how we ought to look. That's his biz."

While Jim was over making inquiries, Mrs. Schwind organized a rehearsal and expressed great satisfaction as she viewed her family arranged as a series of steps, from tall Eloise to tiny Thomas Murphy, Junior.

"You're lots of bother," she declared, "but you're all right and I wouldn't care if they was more of you. Helene, run over and get Mrs. Middleton. I want her to take a look."

Mrs. Middleton responded at once, bringing Elvira.

"Jim's over to Brady's," explained Mrs. Schwind. "We may try for the prize, if it ain't too expensive. Here was only seven in the picture that got the prize this month and there's twelve of us."

"It's too bad that little Mabel died on you," said Mrs. Middleton, who always remembered Mabel tenderly as she was just Elvira's age. "If you could get credit for her you'd have thirteen. Elvira, step in there between Mary and Willie."

"That's elegant," Mrs. Schwind exclaimed, viewing the completed steps with admiration. "It makes them just even. It does seem too bad if we're goin' in the Elite Ladies' World that Mabel should have to miss it. Maybe you'd be willing to let Elvira take her place. She favors Mabel and bein' her size, it helps out."

Elvira, who thoroughly enjoyed the excitement of a visit to Brady's jumped up and down with delight. Mrs. Middleton, always glad of an opportunity to exhibit the charms of her only child, readily complied. When Jim returned, he agreed that the group thus completed could hardly fail to out-distance all competitors.

"Brady charges according to the clothes," he explained. "It would be \$3.50 if we was all in different styles, but he'd take us at the North Pole with the baby in furs for \$2.50. I didn't make no bargain. I wasn't sure about your stamps."

"There's fifty cents in stamps," Mrs. Schwind assured him. "And the rest we'll get somehow."

She spoke with easy confidence, but in her heart she knew that raising \$2.50 was a serious matter for the Schwind family. Jim earned \$10 a week, and they had hard work to get along. Each successive Schwind meant a little less food and a great deal more pinching for the others, but Mrs. Schwind did not care. Why should she complain? Did she not love them and were they not welcome, one and all? In her philosophy, the chief need of a child is mother love, and this she gave abundantly, distributing bread, tea, shoes, stockings, and other necessities impartially, as the family purse permitted.

It is true that the neighbors were often compelled to lend a helping hand. Sometimes the Visitor from the Associated Charities supplied coal and wood; again, St. John's Mission, the Social Settlement, and Tom Murphy who kept the corner saloon, found their sympathies enlisted. But always, Mrs. Schwind felt justified

in accepting aid from any source. She was the mother of twelve, and this in itself was sufficient compensation for any community. To be sure, the twelve were sometimes hungry, occasionally the rent was not forthcoming, but she bore all these vicissitudes with courage, looking forward philosophically to the time when the older children should go to work and help support the younger ones. For Mrs. Schwind believed in family co-operation. Her system of letting each child care for the one younger, leaving always the new baby for herself and the twins for Eloise, was very satisfactory. Equally successful was her method of allowing all the welfare agencies in the neighborhood to co-operate with her in times of financial stress.

As she reflected upon ways of getting together money for the photograph, however, she was conscious that this was a problem that she must solve alone. In view of the probability of the prize, it looked like a mere matter of investment, but she was not sure that her friends



"Eloise's rendition of her favorite selection netted her forty cents."

would regard it in the same light.

The stamp book was a good beginning and the fund was soon increased to seventy-five cents by a boycott on jam. Then Eloise was invited to appear at Solenski's amateur night. Once a week talented members of the community might occupy the stage, and if their efforts pleased the audience they were rewarded by showers of silver pieces. If they failed, however, they were hissed off the boards with scant ceremony. Eloise's rendition of her favorite selection, "Mid the Orchard's Fragrant Blossoms," netted her forty cents.

It was three weeks before the silver in the teapot aggregated two dollars, and this represented innumerable sacrifices and the exercise of much ingenuity in household management. Then the stamp book was cashed and the long-coveted \$2.50 was actually in hand.

On Jim's account, Brady agreed to give them a Sunday sitting. On the Saturday before there was great activity in the Schwind household. All the best clothes were laid out, pressed and repaired. It was necessary to borrow a few pairs of white slippers, but they were plentiful in the Alley and everyone was willing to lend. Then the washtubs were made ready for the bathing and the younger children were put to bed to keep clean. Preparations were resumed at four o'clock on Sunday, for it was no small matter to get the entire family

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