

"Oh, Dick, do you think so?" his wife asked. "And I thought I was getting them so cheap! It was all on account of that woman!"

"What woman?"

"Why, a stylishly dressed woman kept bidding as fast as I did. Every time I bid she raised it five dollars. I heard her talking about rugs. She seemed to know all about them, and she said those blue Bokharas were particularly handsome specimens. That made me think they were bargains, so I kept bidding till I outbid her."

Bruce began to grin.

"What is it, Dick?" Mary asked anxiously.

"Well, I don't know, of course, who your stylish woman was, but I suspect she was what they call a 'by-bidder'—some one the auction people have to bid against innocent buyers."

"Do you suppose she was, Dick? I almost believe so, because she bid on lots of things. She bought one rug for three hundred dollars."

"That looks suspicious. I may be wrong; but if she knew enough to buy a three-hundred dollar rug and not get cheated, she ought to have known better than to bid forty-five or fifty dollars for those Baluchistans."

"What shall we do, Dick?"—tell them we don't want them and ask them to give back my fifteen dollars?"

"I'm not sure we could do that. What do they say in that catalogue you had? Let's see: 'Upon failure of complying with conditions here mentioned, the money deposited as part payment for articles bought shall be forfeited, and all lots unclaimed within stipulated time shall be resold, and the deficiency—if any—between the sum bid by the original bidder and the sum realized at the re-sale shall be made good by the defaulter at this sale, together with all charges attending a forced re-sale.' Um! they seem to make conditions pretty much all in their favor."

"What does it mean, Dick?"

"It means that if you've bid on a thing, they intend to make you take it."

"Perhaps they wouldn't make us. I'm going in to see them to-morrow. If say we've decided we want a large rug

instead of small ones, they ought to let us off. I might say we'd give them five dollars of the fifteen as a sort of commission. Not at first, though. I'd wait and see what they said. I don't think we ought to be made to take some rugs we don't want. Why, see how ridiculous 'tis, when you compare it with the way other stores do. The regular stores will send things out to your house—anything you want—and you can return them without any question. And for an auction-room to make you take something you haven't sent home—something you don't want at any price—why, it's preposterous—preposterous—simply preposterous! And I'm going to tell them so if they say we've got to take those rugs. I'm going to ask them, too, if they have boy bidders."

"By-bidders, my dear," interpolated Bruce.

"That's what I said; and I'm going to ask them if they think that it's fair and honorable to have some woman—there, all dressed up, bid against you, and tell others, so you can hear her, that this or that rug is a great bargain. If they do, I shall tell them I think it's nothing short of fraud and they ought to be prosecuted for getting money under false pretenses."

"Don't you think you'd better let me attend it, my dear?"

"No, Dick; I'm going myself. I'm to blame. I needn't have gone in and bid on their old rugs. Besides, they'd let a woman off when they wouldn't a man. I shall simply tell them we don't want the rugs. They can't make us take them."

Mary's pretty face wore a look of gloom when Bruce came home the next evening. "They say we bought the rugs, and they can't take them back," she told him. "They said they'd be foolish to do business that way. They have to pay salaries and rent, the man said, and are not in business strictly for their health. That was vulgar, wasn't it? But it was really the only

rude thing he said. I told him we were not under any legal obligation to take them, and he said he begged to differ: it was the law in this State that when people bid on a thing at a public auction and it was knocked down to them, they had to take it. If they refused to pay for it, they could be sued, he said, and the purchase money and costs of suit could both be collected. I'm afraid we'll have to take them, Dick. You wouldn't want to be sued, and him I'd heard they had by-bidders, and that made him angry. He wanted to know who told me, and said he defied any one to prove it. I asked him who Mrs. Camp was, and he said he didn't know, except that she was a customer who bought things of them occasionally. But he looked funny when I mentioned her name, and went right to talking about something else. Every little while he'd repeat, 'A sale is a sale.' He said that when they bought anything themselves they expected to pay for it; and when they sold anything they expected others to pay for it: they treated others fairly and honestly and expected to be treated fairly and honestly in return. He talked in that strain so much that I got feeling it wasn't fair not to take the rugs. Suppose that woman wasn't one of their own bidders—I'm sure she was, though—and would have paid what she bid for the rugs, they would have got almost as much as we'll have to pay. When you look at it that way it seems only right we should take them. But I hate to dreadfully. I went into Meadows & Company's and saw the loveliest large rug—just what I'd like, it would go beautifully in the parlor. And 'twas only a hundred and fifty dollars. Those wouldn't cost much more than those horrid blue Bokharas. I know I shall never like them if we take them. I should never look at them without feeling that they'd been crammed down our throats, so to speak. Wouldn't it be dreadful to have to live with them forever?"

"Oh, you'd get over it, my dear," comforted Bruce. "Anyhow, they match the Baluchistan, which was what we set out to do."

The next day Bruce sent his check for ninety-three dollars to the auction



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