

MRS. THRALE'S TEAPOT

Mrs. Bell entered her lodger's room with the 'Times' of the previous day in her hands.

'There, Miss Trevor,' she remarked, pointing to a particular column, 'there's one of them sales I told you about. John had the paper home from Mr. Dean's.'

Agnes Trevor looked up from the skirt she was engaged in remaking.

'Oh, thank you, Mrs. Bell! Where is the sale, and when?'

'At Hazzel's to-morrow,' Mrs. Bell replied promptly.

'Oh! Hazzel's? I'm afraid only very wealthy people go to Hazzel's.'

'Everyone can go,' Mrs. Bell returned dogmatically. 'And it was at a place of the kind my sister's mother-in-law bought a picture for next to nothing, and she afterwards got twenty pounds for it. Things sometimes go very cheap. You might get some nice article for Miss Grant.'

Agnes sighed. Three years previously her father and mother had died within a few weeks of each other. Dr. Trevor had had a very large, but scarcely lucrative practice; and at his death it was found that he had made no provision of any kind for his only child. One or two relatives had offered Agnes a home; but the girl had a strong wish to be independent. She went to London, and, after a good deal of difficulty, found employment as clerk in a large commercial house. Her salary was not a very generous one, and it was lucky for her that her home was under Mrs. Bell's roof.

Mrs. Bell had at one time been a servant to Dr. Trevor. She had married a middle-aged butler in the service of a certain Mr. Dean, well known in learned circles. John Bell's duties were not onerous, and he was able to return each night to the little house occupied by his wife. It was indeed fortunate for Agnes that Mrs. Bell was able to take her under her roof, for the kindly shrewd woman managed the girl's housekeeping in a more capable and economical fashion than she herself could have done.

'I should like to,' Agnes said. 'Miss Grant was very kind to me when father and mother died; and, now that she is getting married after so long an engagement, I should like to send her a nice, useful wedding present. She won't be very well off, you know.'

Mrs. Bell retired, and Agnes began looking over the announcement of the Hazzel's sale. The lot had belonged to a deceased banker who evidently had a mania for collecting old and valuable articles. Agnes smiled to herself as she set out for the famous sale-rooms next day, in spite of Mrs. Bell's numerous instances of the bargains sometimes acquired at 'such places.'

'I'm not likely to buy much,' she said to herself; 'however, I can at least admire the things.'

The auction was in full swing when she entered the rooms, which were by no means crowded; and Agnes found herself supplied with a seat and catalogue before she had time to look about her. When she did turn her attention to the gentlemanly auctioneer, she found he was holding up a large silver teapot marked 'Lot 15.' On searching for that number on her catalogue, she found it to be a solid silver teapot, which had once belonged to Johnson's hostess, Mrs. Thrale.

'How Miss Grant would like it!' she said, half aloud. 'Dear me! Somebody is bidding two shillings and threepence only!'

With an effort Agnes raised her voice and cried: 'Two-and-sixpence.'

The auctioneer nodded.

'Three shillings,' a man at some distance from Agnes said.

'Three-and-sixpence,' Agnes looked to the salesman.

'Four shillings,' the man near said briskly.

Agnes added a sixpence to her last offer, and after a short pause the auctioneer's hammer fell. Agnes was the happy possessor of Mrs. Thrale's teapot. The usual questions were put and answered; and the auctioneer had put up Lot 16 when a young man in evident haste entered the room. His disappointment was evident when he noticed how far advanced the sale was. He stopped a minute or two to speak to an acquaintance, who made a sign in the direction where Agnes sat.

The girl, having acquired the teapot, soon tired of the sale, and returned to her rooms. Mrs. Bell listened to her account of her purchase, and lifted her hands in delight, partly at Agnes' pleasure, partly at her own sagacity in recommending the mode of acquiring a wedding present.

'Four and six,' she repeated over and over, 'for a good silver teapot! I call it a marvellous bargain.' But I'm glad you are pleased, Miss Trevor.'

'Oh, yes, I'm pleased. The gentleman Miss Grant is to marry is very learned. He will value the teapot on Mrs. Thrale's account, and Miss Grant will value it for the workmanship. Oh, yes, I'm quite pleased!' Agnes said.

She was very much the reverse a few hours later. The afternoon post brought her a bill notifying her the amount of her indebtedness to Anthony Hazzel. When she glanced at the slip of paper, she rushed to Mrs. Bell's kitchen.

'Oh, Mrs. Bell, look at this Bill! It is dreadful! What am I to do? The teapot isn't four shillings and sixpence. That is the price per ounce.'

'Four and six an ounce!' Mrs. Bell ejaculated in dismay. 'I never knew teapots were sold that way.'

'Nor I,—Agnes was almost in tears. 'Oh, I couldn't pay it at all! What am I to do!'

What she did after much talk was to write to Mr. Hazzel explaining the matter; and at a very early hour on the following morning she was summoned to Mrs. Bell's parlor.

'Tis about the teapot, I'm certain,' Mrs. Bell remarked. 'He's a very nice-looking young man, too—not one of the kind who seem to know all about everything.'

Now, Agnes Trevor was a very pretty girl at all times; and she was certainly looking her best when she entered the room where her visitor awaited her coming. Her cheeks, at most times pale, were flushed, and her blue eyes brighter than usual. She did not notice that the young man who stood awkwardly in the middle of the room was not quite at ease.

'You have come about the teapot?' she inquired hastily.

'Yes,' Percival Carleton replied, 'I have come about the teapot.' Then he stood silent and constrained.

'Won't you sit down?' Agnes said; and Mr. Carleton did so. 'You see I hadn't the least notion that such things were sold by the ounce. I couldn't, as I explained in my letter, pay for the teapot. I bought it for a wedding present for a very dear friend. Have you a message from Mr. Hazzel?'

'I'm not from Hazzel's,' the young man began.

'Oh!'

'I—my name is Carleton—Percival Carleton. I was sent by my uncle, Sir Francis Carleton, to secure Mrs. Thrale's teapot at any price. He is a collector of curiosities of one kind and another. I was late for the sale, and when I got your address I decided to offer you any fair price for the article. You see my uncle is ill, and he is not to be thwarted or annoyed.'

'Oh!'

Agnes said again. 'I wrote to the auctioneer last night telling him of the mistake I had made. I thought you were one of his people.'

In a few minutes more the two young folk were laughing merrily over the mistake Agnes had made.

Percival Carleton secured the teapot for his relative, who was proud of the new addition to his curios. So pleased was he, indeed, that he took an unusual interest in what his nephew had to tell him of Agnes.

'Trevor! Is her name Trevor?' he remarked.

'George Trevor and I were at Stonyhurst together. He married a distant relation of my mother's. I should like to know if the girl is my old comrade's daughter.'

This curiosity necessitated Percival's making a second call on Miss Trevor; and when Sir Francis learned that she was the only daughter of his early friend, he insisted on an afternoon visit from her. Later on, when she and his nephew were married, he had serious thoughts of presenting them with the article which had brought about their acquaintance; but finally contented himself with leaving it to them in his will.

'For,' the old gentleman said, 'I really can't during my life relinquish Mrs. Thrale's teapot.'—Ave Maria.

The Hon. Mary Spring Rice, daughter of Lord and Lady Monteagle, is one of the latest additions to the list of those who are not only anxious to support but to acquire a knowledge of the Irish language.

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