

AUCTION DAY

by

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Wonder should I pack my bacon grease up to Gladys's house? She ain't much of a cook, but everybody's got grease I reckon. Maybe I should give it to the hogs. God I'm going to miss them old hogs. I had Red ever since she was a piglet. Got her from old man Slocum. No, Margaret, you old fool, Red was one of Nifty's litter. Born right here. You wouldn't think pigs would want to eat their own grease. Wonder if humans would know human grease if they was fed it? Reckon not. My word, how morbid.

Where was I? Oh yeah, trying to decide what else to take. The washtub's already overflowing, and my suitcases are full of clothes. Don't know why I'm bothering to drag them old housedresses with me when I'm moving into town, but I can't bear the thought of Elsie Anderson buying my clothes for a dollar a bushel then examining every hem and seam for flaws. No, they'll just have to go with me, and I'll cut them up for quilt pieces if I want to.

I declare I'm not getting a thing done. Can't seem to bend my mind to the task. If Donald was here it'd be a sight easier. Leastwise I'd have somebody to talk to. Of course, if Donald was still alive we wouldn't be having the auction. Oh Law, don't get me started on that. If I start into bawling, I'll be a mess when folks get here.

Funny, I can almost hear Mom's voice calling, "Maggie May, pull yourself together and get on with it. You're wasting your days." Mom and Donald both gone. Wonder do they

see each other now? Wonder when it'll be my turn? I'm not but sixty-four, but then Donald weren't even sixty. Maggie May, get the job done. Let's see, have I got all my sewing stuff? Crochet thread? All my quilts and tops and pieces? Don't want Elsie Anderson getting hold of nothing I made. Can't stand that gloating thing. Anybody could enter the county fair. Honest folks is too blamed busy.

Land sakes, here's somebody driving in already and sun ain't hardly up. I knew I wouldn't be ready. Well nothing to do but make the best of it.

Hello! You boys come on in here and get a cup of coffee. How do. How do. Call me Margaret.

Call me the Widow Lawson. The idea. I ain't no black widow spider and I ain't that old. Now what'd they say their names was?

You'ns take cream and sugar? What'd you'ns say your names was? Jim? and Jim junior. Of course. I've got a lot on my mind. You can say that again. Yeah, I'm about packed up. Just need to clean up the kitchen, but I was kind of waiting to see did you'ns want me to make up a bunch of coffee.

Wanted the stove cold. I don't recall them telling me that. Probably dismissed the idea as too stupid to entertain. Surely they don't expect a body to skip breakfast on the day she sells all her worldly goods and goes to live with her only daughter. Donald, am I doing the right thing? I don't know why I'd ask you, you never lived in town in your life. I can get a job, meet some new people, maybe have me some fun.

What? Wait a minute, where're you going with that washtub? Hold on! I'm taking that television with me -- that was a Christmas present. That tub, that TV, those

suitcases, that sewing machine, that basket of quilt pieces, them pillows -- I'm taking all that stuff with me, so leave them be until my daughter gets here.

Law, they're a carrying stuff out to the yard faster than if the house was on fire. I don't know if I can stand this. How can I just sit here while all the neighbors poke and paw through my and Donald's belongings and offer up a nickel or a dime for things we saved up a year for?

Junior, don't be so rough with that table, it's got a leg that -- now look what you done! What do you mean you'll put her in the junk pile? I ain't got no junk pile on this place. I can fix that table, just need a bit of glue and some

They ain't got time. The nerve of these fellows. I and Donald always had time to take care of things. Oh the hell with it. I reckon they're right. Let them give her a toss. Some poor fool'll get her out of the trash heap and then they can fix that blamed table leg. Thank the good Lord, here comes Gladys. Now I can get loaded up and just wait till this is over.

Gladys, sugar, how was the drive? Good, good. Want a cup of coffee? Yeah, they said that too, but I can't make breakfast on a cold stove and I'll be damned if I'm going to give up everything I got and move in with you on an empty stomach.

Oh Law, she's taking it personal. Am I going to have to watch everything I say for the rest of my life? Donald, you jackass, why'd you have to go and die so blamed young? Seems like we had just about got used to each other's ways. Now I got to go live with Gladys and her easy-to-hurt self, plus little Howdie who probably won't think her old grandma is so wonderful once she sees me around day in and day out. Guess I better start learning how to hold my tongue, beginning now.

Gladys, I didn't mean to hurt your tender feelings. I'm a little edgy that's all, and I expect you are too. Let's get a cup of coffee and get out of these men's way. We'll pick out the best spot to watch the auction and have us a good old time. I always did like to hear a good auctioneer. How about you?

See, Margaret? That wasn't so hard, now was it? Poor little thing, she lights up like a kid when I give her some attention. I should of been a better mother to her. Well, maybe I can make it up to her in the years I got left. I'll get me a job and then I can buy her some pretties for her house, or some nice shoes, she likes shoes.

Gladys, come here and sit down by me, I want to show you something. There, just pull up a patch of ground like I did. Okay. Here, hold this coffee while I dig in my pocket. I was going through my jewelry box that Diana May made me when she was little, remember that? I packed it. Well anyway, I was looking at all my old rings and things, and I thought maybe you'd like to have Mom's wedding band. Here, see does it fit you. It ain't much, just plain gold, and thin where she nearly wore it out Good, good. And then I was thinking, remembering how Diana May always wanted to wear this gaudy topaz set with the filigree necklace. Reckon she'd want that? Well I thought so too, so I'm holding it out for her. You want to take it and give it to her? Oh, that's right, I probably will see her next time you do. Reckon we'll both be right there when she comes home for a visit. Funny, I can't get used to the idea.

Here they come, all the neighbors, all the gawkers, all the old fools with nothing better to do. Guess I'll just grit my teeth and bear it. God, give me strength.

Gladys, sugar, this feels to me almost worse than Donald's funeral. I don't know how I can get through it except for your help and God's. Will you help me to bear up? Thank you, daughter, thank you.

Thank you, God. Thank you for giving me this one child. One daughter I can lean on in hard times. And thank you too for the chance to do better by her before it's too late. I see now why you took Donald first instead of me. Now, God, can you take time out of your busy day to walk me step by step through this blamed auction?

Oh my Lord, would you look at that, Gladys? They're fixing to try to auction off my old bacon grease. Get up there and tell them it ain't for sale, would you?

God? It's going to be a long day, ain't it?
