

THE SUNDAY BEE

MAGAZINE SECTION

VOL. 52—NO. 3.

OMAHA, SUNDAY MORNING, JULY 2, 1922.

FIVE CENTS

Probability and Error



By Sophie Kerr

Laura Wished More Than Anything Else in the World to Make Heaps of Money, but She Didn't Know How to Go About It; Then Came Kendall with a Recipe.

THE phrase belongs, strictly and technically, to the artillery, but it is vividly capable of translation into almost any affair of humanity, intellectual, financial, or emotional. It is, in fact, a military transmutation of the old proverb of the slip betwixt cup and lip, for it represents the little, incalculable margin left to explain why, after range has been mathematically found, humidity, wind, and such atmospheric vagaries allowed for, and the hundred and one other conditions which go to the firing of big guns toward any definite mark have been taken into consideration—even then, when all this has been done, with uttermost exactness, a hit is not invariably scored. Therefore, the miss is accounted for and blamed on "probability and error." A good, euphonious phrase. The civilian sometimes finds it as useful as the soldier.

"I want to pay all these bills, Miss Woodford. But first, please write each committee chairman to come to the meeting on Wednesday, and bring a full report of what their committee has done." Mrs. Hilles gave this direction in her usual tone of calm majesty. Then she announced, with a violence that spread a hot, purplish flush beneath her well-applied rouge and strained at the strings of her oversnug corset:

"Never, never again will I manage another bazar! It's the most thankless job in the world. Jealousy! Irresponsibility! I'm leaving for Palm Beach, dear Mrs. Hilles, but I know you can easily get some one to fill my place." She paused to glower in righteous indignation. "O, well, this gets us nowhere. You can take your typewriter to the library, Miss Woodford. I'll sign the letters before I go out. I'm going to begin my morning siege with the telephone now."

Laura Woodford's almost childlike blue eyes darkened with real sympathy. In the three years that she had been secretary to Mrs. John Ganzevoort Hilles she had seen that capable lady manage many bazars, and all with the same friction, the same appalling waste of time and effort and money, the same minimum of financial return. She had come to regard bazars as one of the subtle ways in which the possessors of great wealth are chastened.

She had come to know the whole layout—the pretty debutantes who sell flowers and cigars; the plain debutantes who are relegated to be waitresses in the badly run tearoom; the young matrons who dote on doing dances in fancy dress provided they can get bachelors or other women's husbands for partners; the dowagers who bedeck themselves in costumes of southern Europe and preside inefficiently over the sale of things no one wants; the photographer from the society magazine; the background of weary governesses, secretaries, and maids who do all the hard work, whose helpless hate and fatigue peep now and then from eyes usually subservient. O, yes, Laura Woodford knew it all, perfectly.

She picked up her little typewriter and a box of stationery and prepared to leave the apricot and gray-green Louis Seize boudoir where Mrs. Hilles parked her 190 pounds each morning and provided the motive power of her complex household and her even more complex social existence.

"Just one moment, Miss Woodford. Mr. Hilles is sending a man from his office who will take charge of all the financial details. He will, of course, co-operate with you, but his presence will relieve you of any responsibility about the accounts, which—and I quite understand it—you do not care to assume."

Laura Woodford heard this announcement with real gratitude. At the last bazar there had been one scatter-brained committee chairman whose report showed a wide discrepancy between money received and money turned in, and when Laura, as Mrs. Hilles' representative, ventured to call the erring one's attention to the matter, there had been an unpleasant scene. Scatter-brain had turned nasty, and suggested that the deficit had not occurred until after the funds were in Laura's hands. Laura had retorted with heat that, in such a case, she'd be a fool to have made the loss public. And there were more words. Scatter-brain proved herself to have a large supply of them. Laura herself was not deficient in vocabulary. In the end Mrs. Hilles proclaimed peace, made up the deficit herself, and pacified her indignant secretary by showing her how futile and silly it is to row with a scatter-brain, and also by assuring her that she would never be forced to endure another such contretemps. The coming man from Mr. Hilles' office made good her promise.

The library was a fine, richly-colored room, and usually Laura loved to work there. Today there was so much to do she set up her machine and fell to without giving herself the pleasure of even the shortest glance about her. Blank sheets of Mrs. Hilles' gray paper went in, and quickly came out again, bearing perfectly typed summons to committee chairmen.

At about the sixth or seventh letter the curtain of dusky

red velvet were pushed aside and a young man entered. "Hello," he said, with a rather forced blitheness.

Laura did not look up. "Good morning, Mr. Hilles," she answered, as shortly as the click of her machine.

It was the son of the house. His nickname was Tiddy, and he was said to be good at billiards—which completes his description. He lounged on the corner of the carved oak table.

"I hear there's a beauty shop downtown that sells eye-lashes by the yard—you cut off what you need and gum 'em on. Great improvement over mascara, I'd say," he remarked. "But that wouldn't interest you. You don't need 'em."

Laura went on with her letters, deaf to this small news item. Tiddy continued: "Can't understand why a girl as pretty as you keeps on beating a typewriter and taking orders from the Empress"—an allusion to his mother—"when Ziegfeld's simply weeping for another perfect blonde."

a cheerful greeting from the lighted sitting room, proving that Callie was already at home.

"Lo," she returned shortly. She dumped her packages on the kitchen table and stopped to light the oven of the gas stove. Then she went into the bedroom, flung off her hat and coat, retrieved an apron by the simple process of reaching one hand into the closet—she could stand in the middle of the floor and touch everything in the room—and went back to the kitchen.

She worked with a swift, ferocious efficiency. Callie, 10 years older than Laura, an incredibly homely girl of an imperturbable good nature, glanced up from the pile of papers which eternally occupied her hours, even as all school teachers.

"Want any help?" she asked.

Laura shook her head. They sat down without further words and ate the grapefruit. Then Laura brought in the rest of the dinner. Callie raised her eyebrows at the corn pudding. "Aren't we rather going it?" she asked. "Salad and vegetable?"

"An 11 cent can of corn and one egg. O, I wish I didn't know how much it cost," broke forth from Laura fiercely.

"Ah, I see our little friend has an economy complex, or a wealth complex, or something. What's the matter, honey-child?"

"Callie, I hate these little cramped up rooms, with the furniture we found in second hand shops and repainted, the curtains we made ourselves, all our little shabby-genteel box of tricks. I want huge rooms, with great, high ceilings, and wonderful old Georgian furniture, and Italian mirrors, and fireplaces, and velvet hangings, and people to wait on me! I want lovely frocks and pink silk undies, and soft, luxurious furs, and strings of pearls—O, everything!"

"You might marry Tiddy."

Laura dropped her voice as one making a shameful confession. "Yes—I've considered that. Now you know how desperate I am. O, it takes so long to save, so endlessly long, and at the end what have you got? I've saved for two years—you know that first year I had to pay back Aunt Lizzie's loan—saved and scrimped and pinched, and I've got exactly \$600, not enough for one real good bust. In another year I'll have \$900, and in another \$1,200, and by the time I'm an old woman I'll maybe have \$5,000, just enough to give me a starvation income, provided I keep out of an old ladies' home."

"You're too silly for words, Babe. You'll never end in an old ladies' home. And though I suggested that you marry Tiddy—you will note that I carefully refrained from saying anything about Dick. Dick's a rising young man, as the success books would say. Some day he'll be able to give you a big house and giddy gowns galore—if that's what you want, which I doubt."

"I don't want to marry Dick Long. I don't want to marry anybody. I want a lot of money all my own, so I can fly around and see the world all on my own, without any husband to fuss about trunks and hate looking at the things I want to look at."

"You sound as if you'd traveled with husbands for years."

"There are women who are smart enough to get big salaries and do big things. That's what makes me so sore—that I haven't got it in me. I'm a hopeless mediocrity—I know it. You know it. So—marriage is my only graft. You practically admit that when you suggest Tiddy and Dick."

Callie stared across the table at the lovely flushed, unhappy creature before her. "It's no good, Laura. You might as well accept things as they are. Look at me. Every time I get in front of the looking glass I loathe myself. Nor am I any more in love with teaching than I am with my face. But you can't live when you're using up your energy in rebellion. Take things as they are, and—well—take things as they are."

It was the first time Callie had ever alluded to her physical appearance, and Laura was touched and a little awed, as we always are after a peep into a friend's deeper feelings.

"O, Callie, don't. You know I don't grouch so very much. Only once in a while. . . Well, we may as well eat the eclairs."

She jumped up, cleared the table, and brought on the simple dessert. "I love these yellow plates," she said, and Callie knew that the remark was intended to convey that the storm was over. "You doing themes again tonight?"

"Yes, about a million. On the highly original subject of 'What I Like Best in Winter.' Not one of the poor little guttersnipes has ever had a sleigh ride or gone coasting. Is Dick coming?"

"Yes, but don't you clear out of here. We'll probably go to pictures or do something equally inexpensive and unentertaining. Don't look so horrified, Callie. I know Dick can't afford to spend a lot of money, and I don't want him to. But, O golly, how I wish I had a suitor who could—and would!"

With that she rose and began to pile the dishes on a big tray. Presently she was scraping them and sloshing the soap in the dish water with drawn-back, distasteful fingers. Laura hated hot dish water, but even so, she would not slight the dishes. She rinsed her tea-cloth and hung it up to dry, snapped out the kitchen light, and went back to her own little sleeping room to prink a bit before Dick Long appeared—Dick, who'd take her to the movies or somewhere else cheap. Dick with his struggling printing business that he'd financed on a shoestring, and in which he had such a profound and magnificent confidence. Laura had had that confidence, too. But tonight she hadn't a grain of it. And



"I want to make money more than anything else in the world—heaps of it" cried Laura.