

The Auction Block

By REX BEACH

beauties, and, while no creature woman in general and the painted favorites of Broadway in particular, he had forced himself to write the common laudatory stuff which the public demanded. Only once had he given free rein to his inclinations and written with a poisoned pen. Tonight, however, as he entered the stage door of Bergman's Circuit theater, it was with a different intent.

Regan, the stage-door tender, better known since his vaudeville days as "The Judge," answered his greeting with a lugubrious shake of a bald head. "I'm a sick man, Mr. Pope. Same old trouble."

"M-m-m. Kidneys, isn't it?"
"No. Rheumatism. I'm a beehive swarmin' with pains." The Judge leaned forward and a strong odor of whiskey enveloped the cellar. "Could you slip me four bits for some liniment?"

The critic smiled. "There's a dollar, Regan. Try Scotch for a change. It's better for you than these cheap blends. And don't breathe toward a lamp, or you'll ignite."

The Judge laughed wheezingly. "I do take a drop now and then. See here, you know all the managers, Mr. Pope. Can't you find a job for Lottie Devine?"

"Lottie Devine. Why, she's your wife, isn't she? She's a trifle old, I'm afraid."

"Hub! She wigs up a lot better'n some of the squabs in this troupe. Be here me, she'd fit any chorus."

"Why don't you ask Bergmann?"
Mr. Regan shook his hairless head. "He's dippy on 'types.' This show's full of 'em; real blondes, real brunettes, bold and dastin' ones, tall and stables, bluishers, shrinkers, laughers, and sardings. He won't stand for make-up; he wants 'em with the dew on. They've

got to look natural for Bergman. That's sense of 'em now." He nodded toward a group of young, fresh-checked girls who had entered the stage door and were hurrying down the hall.

"I've come to interview one of Bergman's 'types,' that new beauty, Miss Knight. Is she here yet?"

"Sure; her and the back-drop, too. She carries the old woman for scenery." Mr. Regan took the caller's card and shuffled away, leaving Pope to watch the stream of performers as they entered and made for their quarters. There were many women in the number, and all of them were pretty. Most of them were overdressed in the extremes of fashion; a few quietly garbed ladies and gentlemen entered the lower dressing rooms reserved for the principals.

Meanwhile he exchanged greetings with the star—a clear-eyed man with the face of a scholar and the limbs of an athlete. The latter had studied for the law; he had the drollest legs in the business, and his salary exceeded that of Supreme court justice. They were talking when Mr. Regan returned to tell the interviewer that he would be received.

Pope followed to the next floor and entered a brightly lighted, overheated dressing room, where Lorelei and her mother were waiting. It was a glaring, stuffy cubbyhole ventilated by means of a hall door and a tiny window opening from the lavatory at the rear. Along the sides ran mirrors, beneath which was fixed a wide make-up shelf. One section of the wall was devoted to telegraph and cable forms, bearing messages of felicitation at the opening of "The Revue of 1913." A zoologist would have found the display uninteresting; but a society reporter would have reveled in the names—and especially in the sentiments—inscribed upon the yellow sheets. Some were addressed to Lorelei Knight, others to Lilius Lynn, her roommate.

Pope found Lorelei completely dressed, in expectation of his arrival. She wore the white and silver first-act costume of the Fairy Princess. Both she and her mother were plainly nonplused at the appearance of their caller; but Mrs. Knight recovered quickly from the shock and said agreeably:

"Lorelei was frightened to death at your message yesterday. She was almost afraid to let you interview her after what you wrote about Adoree Demorest."

Pope shrugged. "Your daughter is altogether different to the star of the Palace Garden, Mrs. Knight. Demorest trades openly upon her notoriety and—I don't like bad women. New York never would have taken her up if she hadn't advertised as the wickedest woman in Europe for she can neither act, sing nor dance. However, she's become the rage, so I had to include her in my series of articles. Now, Miss Knight has made a legitimate success as far as she has gone."

He turned to the girl herself, who was smiling at him as she had smiled since his entrance. He did not wonder at the pronounced beauty that brought her, for even at this close range her make-up could not disguise her loveliness. The lily had been painted, to be sure, but the sacrifice was not too noticeable; the lips were curiously red now, but the expression was none the less sweet and friendly.

"There's nothing 'legitimate' about musical shows," she told him, in reply to his last remark, "and I can't act or sing or dance as well as Miss Demorest."

"You don't need to; just let the public rest its eyes on you and it will be satisfied—anyhow, it should be. Of course everybody fatters you. Has success turned your head?"

Mrs. Knight answered for her daughter. "Lorelei has too much sense for that. She succeeded easily, but she isn't spoiled."

Then, in response to a question by Pope, Lorelei told him something of her experience. "We're up-state people, you know. Mr. Bergman was looking for types, and I seemed to suit, so I got an engagement at once. The newspapers began to mention me and when he produced this show he had the part of the Fairy Princess written in for me. It's really very easy, and I don't do much except wear the gowns and speak a few lines."

"You're one of the principals," her mother said, chidingly.
"I suppose you're ambitious?" Pope put in.

Again the mother answered. "Indeed she is, and she's bound to succeed. Of course, she hasn't had any experience to speak of, but there's more than one manager that's got his eye on her." The listener inwardly cringed. "She could be starved easy, and she will be, too, in another season."

Pope resented Mrs. Knight's share in the conversation. He did not like the elder woman's face, nor her voice, nor her manner. She impressed him as another theatrical type with which he was familiar—the stage mamma. He found himself marveling at the distinctness of the two women.

"Of course a famous beauty does meet a lot of people," he said. "Tell me what you think of our flourishing little city and our New York men."

But Lorelei raised a slender hand. "Not for worlds! Besides, you're making fun of me now. You are counting a very dangerous person, Mr. Pope."

"You're thinking of my story about the Demorest woman again," he laughed.

"Is she really as bad as you have described her?"
"I don't know, never having met the lady. I wouldn't humiliate myself by a personal interview, so I built a story on the Broadway gossip. Inasmuch as she goes in for notoriety, I gave her some of the best that I had in stock. Her photographer did the rest."

The door curtains parted, and Lilius Lynn, a slim, black-eyed young woman, entered. She greeted Pope cordially as she removed her hat and

shed out upon the stage. Through theophile curtain the orchestra could be faintly heard; a voice was crying, "Flowers!"

"Some Sort Kluge with this troupe," remarked Slosson, when the scampers had disappeared.

"Yes, Bergman has made a fortune out of this kind of show. He's a friend to the 'Tired Business Man.'"

"Speaking of the weary Wall street workers, there will be a dozen of our riddon winners at the Hammon supper tonight."

"Tell me, is Lorelei Knight a regular—or frequent—of these affairs?"
"Sure. It's part of the graft."

"I see."
"She has to piece out her salary like the other girls. Why, her whole family is around her neck—mother, brother and father. Old man Knight was run over by a taxicab last summer. It didn't hurt the machine, but he's got a broken back or something. You had to wait for him, I never heard of Lorelei's doing anything really—bad."

For the moment Campbell Pope made no reply. Meanwhile a great wave of slinging flooded the regions at the back of the theater as the curtain rose and the chorus broke into sudden sound. When he did speak it was with unusual bitterness.

"It's the rottenest business in the world, Slosson. Two years ago she was a country girl; now she's a Broadway belle. How long will she last, d'you think?"

"She's too beautiful to last long," agreed the press agent, soberly, "especially now that the wolves are on her trail. But her danger isn't so much from the people she meets with as the people she eats with. That family of hers would drive any girl to the limit. They intend to cash in on her; the mother says so."

"And they will, too. She can have her choice of the wealthy rounders."
"Don't get me wrong," Slosson hastened to qualify. "She's square; understand?"

"Of course; object matrimony." It's the old story, and her mother will see to the ring and the orange blossoms. But what's the difference, after all, Slosson? It'll be hell for her, and a sale to the highest bidder, either way."

Continued Next Week

Its Kind.
"Look at Jones leaving the third house he has rented in two years. There is a picture of unrest for you."

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Pope nodded. "I am, and I'm ashamed of my entire sex when I hear of them flocking to the Palace Garden just to see a woman who has nothing to distinguish her but a reputation for villainess."

"Did you see the crown jewels—the King's 'cabachon rubies'?" Lorelei asked.

"Only from the front. I dare say they're as counterfeit as she is."

Miss Lynn inhaled, revealing a countenance as shiny as that of an Eskimo belle. With her war-paint only half applied and her hair secured loosely to her small head, she did not in the least resemble the dashing "countess" of the program.

"Oh, they're real enough. I got that straight."

Campbell Pope scoffed. "Isn't it true about the king of Seldovia? Didn't she wreck his throne?" eagerly queried Mrs. Knight.

"I never met the king, and I haven't examined his throne. But, you know, kings can do no wrong, and thrones are easily mended."

But Mrs. Knight was insistent; her eyes glittered, her sharp nose was thrust forward inquisitively. "They say she draws two thousand a week and won't go to supper with a man for less than five hundred dollars. She says if fellows want to be seen in public with her they'll have to pay for it, and she's right. Of course she's terribly bad, but you must admit she's done mighty well for herself."

"We'll have a chance to see her tonight," announced Lilius. "Mr. Hammon is giving a big supper to some of his friends and we're going—Lorelei and I. Demorest is down for her 'Dance de Nuit.' They say it's the limit."

"Hammon, the steel man?" queried the critic, curiously.

"Sure. There's only one Hammon. But his on the newspaper story; this is a private affair."

"Never let us speak ill of a poor Pittsburgh millionaire," laughed Pope. "Souds' must never darken the soot of that village." He turned as Slosson, the press agent of the show, entered with a bundle of photographs.

"Here are the new pictures of Lorelei for your story, old man," Mr. Slosson said. "Bergmann will appreciate the boost for one of his girls. Help yourself to those you want. If you need any more stuff I'll supply it."

"Don't go to the trouble," Pope hastily deprecated. "I know the story. Now I'm going to leave and let Miss Lynn dress."

"Don't go on my account," urged Lilius. "This room is like a subway station, and I've got so I could 'change' in Bryant park at noon and never shock a policeman."

"You won't say anything mean about us, will you?" Mrs. Knight implored. "In this business a girl's reputation is all she has."

"I promise," Pope held out his hand to Lorelei, and as she shook it her lips parted in her ever-ready smile.

"No girl, that," the critic remarked, as he and Slosson descended the stairs. "Which one—Lorelei, Lilius, or the female gorilla?"

"How did she come to choose that for a mother?" muttered Pope.

"One of nature's inscrutable mysteries. But wait. Have you seen Brother Jim?"

"No. Who's he?"

"His mother's son. Need we say more? He's a great help to the family, for he wears 'em from getting too proud over Lorelei. He sells introductions to his sister."

Campbell Pope's exclamation was lost in a babble of voices as a berry of "Swimming Girls" descended from the enchanted regions above and ascended.



Tell Me What You Think of Our Flourishing Little City.

handed it to the woman who acted as dresser for the two occupants of the room.

"I'm late, as usual," she said. "But don't leave on my account." She disappeared into the lavatory, and emerged a moment later in a cooling jacket. "Lorelei's got her nerve to talk to you after the insulting you gave Demorest," she continued. "Aren't you ashamed of yourself to strike a defensiveness start?"

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Get Off the Scrap Heap

If you are forty and thinking of crawling on the scrap heap, or if you are letting the old age idea possess you, causing you to feel that the best of your life is spent, you have been a "pig-like human," over-fed and under-worked, and have acquired one of those fat, flabby, bulgy waistlines, -- in other words, if you are not "forty, stout," -- the best of life is yet before you.

Even the fat man at forty is not irreparable if he is still free from the onset of degenerative diseases, such as hardening of the arteries, heart diseases, Bright's disease, etc. He may never be able to lick a Jess Willard or win an athletic championship for the simple reason that he has lived short on exercise and long on appetite, but by adopting a rational plan of living -- proper diet, exercise, rest, and freedom from alcoholics and other harmful indulgences -- he may live yet twenty years, thirty or even to be twice his present age and keep in useful service.

To the man that is forty who has made moderation in all things his rule, life has only well begun and fame is still possible. Someone gives the following examples as proof that the best things in a man's life usually come to him after the age of forty:

"E. H. Harriman was hardly heard of before he was forty, and he began his great work, the reorganization of the Union Pacific, at fifty-two. Cromwell never saw an army until he was forty-three. Grant was a clerk in a store at thirty-nine. Woodrow Wilson became president of Princeton at forty-six. Sir Wil-

liam Oler himself would never have been heard of if he had died at forty, while Gladstone did not introduce the first Home Rule bill until he had reached something like maturity at seventy-seven."

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