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ELEPHANT'S BOARD AND KEEP

It Cost Nothing—That Wonderful Gift. But, Oh, the Horrors of Ownership That Followed.

By ELEANOR PORTER
Author of "Pollyanna," "Just David," Etc.

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to put into it?" he muttered dismally, as he rose to lock up the house for the night. "Well, I fancy that's what we'll have to do—sell the automobile to get money enough to move it!"

Two days later the automobile came. Perhaps the grocer waited. Perhaps the laundry bill went unpaid. Perhaps an obliging friend advanced a loan. Whatever it was, spic and span in Dearborn's garage stood the three-thousand-dollar automobile, the admired of every eye.

June had gone, and July was weeks old, however, before the preliminaries of license and lessons were over, and Mr. and Mrs. Herbert Wheeler could enter into the full knowledge of what it meant to be the joyous possessors of an automobile which one could run one's self.

"And now we'll take our friends," cried Jessica. "Who'll go first?"

"Let's begin with the A's—the Arnolds. They're always doing things for us."

"Good! I'll telephone Mrs. Arnold tonight. Tomorrow is Saturday, half holiday. We'll take them down to the lake and come home by moonlight. Oh, Herbert, won't it be lovely?"

"You bet it will," exulted Herbert, as the thought of the Arnold's admiring eyes when their car should sweep up to their door.

At three o'clock Saturday afternoon the Wheelers with their two guests started for the lake. It was a beautiful day. The road was good and every one was in excellent spirits—that is, every one but the host. It had come to him suddenly with overwhelming force that he was responsible not only for the happiness but for the lives of his wife and their friends.

What if something should go wrong? But nothing did go wrong. He stopped twice, it is true, and examined carefully his car; but the only result of his search was a plentiful dabbling of oil and gasoline on his hands and of roadway dust on his clothing. He was used to this and did not mind it, however—until he went to dinner at the Lakeside House beside the fresh daintiness of his wife and their friends; then he did mind it.

The ride home was delightful, so the Arnold's said. The Arnolds talked of it, indeed, to each other, until they fell asleep—but even then they did not talk of it quite so long as their host worked cleaning up the car after the trip. Wheeler kept the automobile now in a neighbor's barn and took care of it himself; it was much cheaper than keeping it in Dearborn's garage.

There were several other friends in the A's and B's and two in the C's who were taken out in the Wheeler automobile before Herbert one day groaned: "Jessica, this alphabet business is killing me. It does seem as if Z never would be reached!"

"Why, Herbert!—and they're all our friends, and you know how much they think of it."

"I think of it, too, when the dinner checks and the supper checks come in. Jessica, we just simply can't stand it!"

Jessica frowned and sighed. "I know, dear; but when the car didn't cost anything—"

"Well, lobster salads and chicken patties cost something," mentioned the man grimly.

"I know it; but it seems so—so selfish to go all by ourselves with those empty seats behind us. And there are so many I have promised to take. Herbert, what can we do?"

"I don't know; but I know what we can't do. We can't feed them to the tune of a dollar or two a plate any longer."

There was a long pause; then Jessica clasped her hands. "Herbert, I have it! We'll have basket picnics. I'll take lunch from the house every time. And, after all, that'll be lots nicer; don't you think so?"

"Well, that might do," acquiesced the man slowly. "Anyhow, there wouldn't be any dinner checks a-coming."

August passed and September came. The Wheelers were in "M" now; they had been for days, indeed. Even home-prepared luncheons were beyond the Wheelers' pocketbook now, and no friend had been invited to ride for a week past. The spilling of two tires and a rather serious accident to the machine had necessitated the Wheelers spending every spare cent for repairs.

In the eyes of most of the town the Wheelers were objects of envy. They had an automobile. They could ride while others must plod along behind them on foot, blinded by their dust and sickened by their noisome odor of gasolines.

As long as the Wheelers were "decently hospitable" about sharing their car, the townspeople added to their envy an interested tolerance based on a lively speculation as to when one's own turn for a ride would come; but when a whole week went by, and not one of the many anxious would-be guests had been invited, the interest and the tolerance fled, leaving only an angry disdain as destructive to happiness as was the gasoline smell of the car itself.

There were some things, however, that the townspeople did not know. They did not know that, though the Wheelers had a motor-car, they had almost nothing else; no new clothes, except dust coats and goggles; no new books and magazines, except such as dealt with "the practical upkeep and operation of a car"; no leisure, for the car must be kept repaired and shining; no fresh vegetables to eat, for

Huston estate, has been filed with the probate court. The estate is valued at \$3714. Hearing is set for Aug. 7, as stated in an advertisement elsewhere.


Wednesday of last week a \$50 cow belonging to C. L. Falk jr. was killed by a railroad train at the Shaw crossing, a couple of miles south of Halsey. A Pacific highway crew had taken down a section of Mr. Falk's pasture fence and failed to replace it in a safe condition. Bossy wandered through into the road and onto the

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C. P. STAFFORD, Agent.

ON TWELVE HUNDRED DOLLARS a year the Wheelers had contrived to live, thus far with some comforts and a few luxuries—they had been married two years. Genial, fun-loving, and hospitable, they had even entertained occasionally; but Brainerd was a modest town, and its Four Hundred was not given to lavish display.

In the bank Herbert Wheeler spent long hours handling money that was not his only to hurry home and spend other long hours over a tiny lawn and a tinier garden, where every blade of grass and every lettuce-head were marvels of grace and beauty, simply because they were his.

It was June now, and the lawn and the garden were very important; but it was on a June morning that the large blue envelope came. Herbert went home that night and burst into the kitchen like a whirlwind.

"Jessica, we've got one at last," he cried.

"One what?"

"An automobile."

Jessica sat down helplessly. In each hand she held an egg—she had been selecting two big ones for an omelet.

"Herbert, are you crazy? What are you talking about?" she demanded.

"About our automobile, to be sure," he retorted. "Twas Cousin John's. I heard today—he's left it to us."

"To us! But we hardly knew him, and he was only a third or fourth cousin, anyway, wasn't he? Why, we never even thought of going to the funeral!"

"I know; but he was a queer old codger, and he took a great fancy to you when he saw you. Don't you remember? Anyhow, the deed is done."

"And it's ours?—a whole automobile?"

"That's what they say—and it's a three-thousand-dollar car."

"Oh, Herbert!" When Jessica was pleased she clasped her hands; she clasped them now—or rather she clasped the eggs—and in the resulting disaster even the automobile was for a moment forgotten. But for only a moment.

"And to think how we've wanted an automobile!" she cried, when the impromptu omelet in her lap had been banished into oblivion. "The rides we'll have—and we won't be pigs! We'll take our friends!"

"Indeed we will," agreed Herbert.

"And our trips and vacations, and even down town—why, we won't need any carfare. We'll save money, Herbert, lots of money!"

"Er—well, an auto costs something to run, you know," ventured Herbert.

"Gasoline, 'course!—but what's a little gasoline? I fancy we can afford that when we get the whole car for nothing!"

"Well, I should say!" chuckled the man.

"Where is it now?"

"In the garage on the estate," returned Herbert, consulting his letter. "I'm requested to take it away."

"Requested! Only fancy! As if we weren't dying to take it away!"

"Yes, but—how?" The man's face had grown suddenly perplexed.

"Why, go and get it, of course."

"But one can't walk in and pocket a motor-car as one would a package of greenbacks."

"Of course not! But you can get it and run it home. It's only fifty miles, anyhow."

"I don't know how to run an automobile. Besides, there's licenses and things that have to be tended to first, I think."

"Well, somebody can run it, can't they?"

"Well, yes, I suppose so. But—where are we going to keep it?"

"Herbert Wheeler, one would think you were displeased that we've been given this automobile. As if it mattered where we kept it, so long as we had it to keep!"

"Yes, but—really, Jessica, we can't keep it here—in the kitchen," he cried. "It's smashed two eggs already, just the mention of it," he finished whimsically.

"But there are places—garages and things, Herbert; you know there are."

"Yes, but they—cost something."

"I know it; but if the car is ours for nothing, seems as if we might be able to afford its board and keep!"

"Well, by George! it does, Jessica; that a fact," cried the man, starting to his feet. "There's Dearborn's down to the Square. I'll go and see them about it. They'll know, too, how to get it here. I'll go down right after supper. And, by the way, how about that omelet? Did our new automobile leave any eggs to make one?"

"Well, a few," laughed Jessica.

There was no elation in Herbert Wheeler's step when two hours later, the young bank teller came home from Dearborn's.

"Well, I guess we—we're up against it, Jessica," he groaned.

"What's the matter? Won't they take it? Never mind; there are others."

"Oh, yes, they'll take it and take care of it for fifteen or twenty dollars a month, according to the amount of work I have them do on it."

"Why, I never heard of such a thing! Does it cost that—all that? But then, the car doesn't cost anything," she added soothingly, after a pause.

"Oh, no, the car doesn't cost anything—only eight or ten dollars to bring it down by train, or else two dollars an hour for a chauffeur to run it down for us," retorted her husband.

"Eight or ten dollars! Two dollars an hour to run it!" gasped Jessica.

"Why, Herbert, what shall we do? There is only ten dollars now of the



"The Idea of Giving Up a \$3,000 Automobile Because One Owes a Grocery Bill and \$1.80 for Laundry."

household money to last the rest of the month; and there's this week's grocery bill and a dollar and a half for the laundry to pay!"

"That's exactly it—what shall we do?" snapped Herbert. This thing was getting on his nerves.

"But we must do," laughed Jessica hysterically. "The idea of giving up a three-thousand-dollar automobile because one owes a grocery bill and a dollar and a half for laundry!"

"Well, we can't eat the automobile, and it won't wash our clothes for us."

"Naturally not! Who wants it to?" Jessica's nerves, also, were feeling the strain.

"We might—sell it."

"Sell it! Sell our automobile!" flamed Jessica; and to hear her, one would think the proposition was to sell an old family heirloom, beloved for years.

Her husband sighed.

"Isn't there something somewhere about selling the pot to get something