



# The Liar

By Carlton Stoddard ●

---

*This Farmer Plays a Gay Act As the Auctioneer  
Swings His Hammer.*

---

**H**IS GRIZZLED NEBRASKA neighbors looked into his eyes and knew he lied.

He smiled and joked with them as they came to buy him out, tractor, plow, and horse. His smiles and his jokes were not genuine.

He pushed his dusty chore hat far back on his head, when it should have assumed a forward slant to shade the hurt his steady eyes alone revealed. He put on a gay act, as skillfully as any ever played by a legitimate stage celebrity in order that the "show go on".

As his eyes took final inventory of the chattels neatly arranged about the farmyard, now being scrutinized by the township auctioneer, they betrayed his synthetic cheer. Satisfied that every shovel and harrow and milk bucket was in its place, he turned back to the group to revive a momentary lull in the merriment. "Well, boys," he laughed, "tomorrow morning it'll be cold enough to freeze the ears off a tin monkey. About that time, think of me in by the fire. No cows to milk. No hogs to feed. Ah—a soft life.

"You know, I always did think husking corn was the world's worst job. From now on you old suckers can do it. No more

for me. I've been looking for a chance to retire for years, so I'm much obliged to the government for that chance now!"

**B**UT HIS NEIGHBORS with frost-nipped ears and toil-toughened hands knew that he lied. They understood very well the hardship of which he spoke. But they knew that his closing-out sale was the culmination of long years of indebtedness and crop misfortune. They had only to read the sheriff's notices to learn that their neighbor's prospective retirement was not financially underwritten, that contemplation of it was a torment to him.

"The sale must go on," he thought, and he laughed aloud at every feeble witticism, countering with the best of his stock of "back East" yarns. His last chance to save what he could from thirty years of work depended upon the group mood of half a hundred men, some close friends, others only acquaintances. Sprightly bidding might net him enough to cancel what he owed. If the bidding lagged—well, that simply dare not occur; so he laughed and chatted, desperately.

If only he had three more months of grace. The hog market showed signs of picking up. His fall pigs were a thrifty lot. He believed he might be able to pull through and save everything. But he could prove this neither to his creditors nor the sheriff who was supervising the sale. No, the sale must go on.

Everything appeared in readiness as the wizened auctioneer, veteran of the farm sale block, mounted a hay rick, which had been freshly painted with an eye to increasing its sale value, and danced a stiff-jointed jig to focus the crowd's attention. The sale clerk, authoritative in demeanor since he was president of the Farmers' State Bank, also mounted the rick as soon as the indignities of the jig and ensuing jeers had died away.

The auctioneer minced no words. "Hosses fust. Lead out, Gus! Clear the way there, you. Now, gents, here comes the finest little Belgian mare in Wayne County. Foaled 'leven years ago last December by Hank Evans' state champion mare, Breadwinner. Sound ever since. Weighs 1,500 without the harness. Trot her, Gus."

**T**HE AUCTIONEER SANG out his first challenge. "Who'll start her off at seventy-five?" he queried with absurdity in his voice because of the lowness of the price. He anticipated

a chorus of replies, since similar mares had been selling for as much as a hundred dollars.

He turned to the horse, murmuring affectionate patter, before waking to the fact that not one bid was voiced.

His shrill bark shattered the interval of embarrassing silence. "Gents, I beg your pardon. But this is a sale and here is a sound mare to be sold. You know you can't buy a sound mare only 'leven years old for less than a hundred now-a-days! In case you didn't hear the fust time, we are starting this mare out at twenty-five less than that. Do I hear a measly little bid of seventy-five?"

There was a nervous stir in a far corner of the crowd. A single voice sounded, brusque and unfriendly. "Yeh, sure. Seventy-five cents!"

The auctioneer gasped and glared. But his glare diffused into a grin as it occurred to him that he might be the object of a practical joke. "Well, what am I bid then, now that you've had your fun?" He searched the crowd for a bona fide bid, to no avail.

Seventy-five cents was the first bid and the last. Wise voices advised the auctioneer that his job that day was a futile one. With an explosion of tobacco juice he departed without argument or ceremony.

The crowd thinned quickly, many of the men stopping to grip the hand of the man with the smile that lied, saying nothing, but winking at him broadly.

After the last one had gone, he led his Belgian mare back to the stable, with a smile that spoke the truth.



## Dark and Light

By Betty Blanco

**N**ARCISSUS in a copenhagen bowl—  
 Its lacy perfume brings me thoughts  
 Of love just burst in bloom.  
 What star it searches, little known to me;  
 But whene'er drabness clutches all,  
 Its spires reach toward the sun.