

**A BORN
ARISTOCRAT: A
STORY OF THE STAGE**

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A Born Aristocrat: A Story of the Stage by Jr. White

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JR. WHITE

**A BORN
ARISTOCRAT: A
STORY OF THE STAGE**

A BORN ARISTOCRAT

A STORY OF THE STAGE



BY
MATTHEW WHITE, JR.



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FRANK A. MUNSEY

1898

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A BORN ARISTOCRAT.

I.

BARBARA MAKES UP HER MIND.

THE crowd extended across the sidewalk, almost to the curbstone. Wailing cries of children were heard even above the clang of the cable cars.

"They are starving," some one exclaimed, and he almost ran into Barbara Van Dyke as he dashed off towards the drug store, on the opposite corner of the street.

"Starving!" she repeated to herself, and the impulse to hurry past suddenly gave place to a sort of morbid desire to look on the result of a condition the very mention of which chilled the blood at her heart.

The throng was clustered about the open door of a store, and Barbara's progress was quickly barred. But there were many eager to tell the facts, and it did not take her long to learn that a man in search of work had dropped in exhaustion from lack of food, that his wife had fallen beside him from the same cause, and that it was

their three little children from whom the cries proceeded.

Sick at heart Barbara turned away and came face to face with a woman who had just stepped out of her carriage.

"Why, Barbara Van Dyke!" she exclaimed. "I haven't seen you in ages! Where are you keeping yourself? And how is your dear sister? Such a charming girl, I am sure, and so talented. That plaque she painted for me has been so much admired. But whatever is the matter here?"

"Only a couple of people starving to death."

Barbara's voice sounded to her own ears as though it came from some one else. She had never realized before that her unhappy lot was making her bitter, but Mrs. Stanton's conventional tones seemed to rouse all the cynicism within her.

This sleek, well fed, well dressed woman of the world would have passed her with merely a nod did she know that the Van Dyke girls were seen no more in "society" because they were poor.

Yes, that was the word—*poor*. Barbara repeated it grimly under her breath while she listened to Mrs. Stanton's "Dear me, how shocking! I wonder if they have no friends."

"Yes, they have found some now," she replied the next instant, as women pressed past

them with loaves of bread in their hands or bundles of groceries, which they were eager to bestow on the sufferers.

"How good the world is, after all!" Mrs. Stanton remarked complacently. "But come, Barbara, my dear, won't you let me drive you home? I wanted to ask about a package at the express office, but it is quite impossible to get in the place now."

Barbara hesitated an instant, then a sudden resolve possessed her.

"You are very kind, Mrs. Stanton," she said, "but I am afraid it would take you too much out of your way. We are living now quite a distance over on the west side."

"That is my direction, you know. Just give John the number and step inside after me. I must get to my vinaigrette. This crowd has quite upset me."

The carriage once started, Mrs. Stanton began to talk on the trials of having to go to the dress-maker's so many times to be fitted, and the annoyance her servants caused her, or the burdens imposed by having to keep up with the conventions of "society."

Barbara sat back amid her unwonted luxury of coach cushions and listened to it all.

"What will she say when she sees where the carriage stops?" she asked herself. "It will be

a dramatic way in which to break our 'come down' to her."

But already they were well over toward the river. Mrs. Stanton looked out of the window, noted the throngs of noisy children in the street and the dingy look of the flat houses.

"Do you think John understood your directions, my dear?" she remarked.

"Oh, yes. We are almost there now. You know I warned you that it would be taking you out of your way. Here we are now. See the number? 435. I am almost afraid to ask you to call, for it is up four flights of stairs, and there is no elevator except the kitchen dummy. So much obliged. Good night, Mrs. Stanton. Pray remember me most kindly to your husband."

Barbara shut the carriage door with a bang and then dashed through the swarm of children that had suddenly sprung up in her path, till she gained the shelter of the narrow hallway. But it was not a shelter for long.

"Say, Miss Van Dyke, you came home in a coach, didn't you?"

A small boy had hurried in after her, and there were more to follow.

"Yes, Billy," she said, as she started wearily up the stairs. "I'm a regular Cinderella, didn't you know it? That was my fairy godmother, and the coach will be a pumpkin and the horses

turn into white mice before she ever comes here again. Which is perfectly true," she added to herself as, half hysterical, she burst into the little flat on the top floor.

"I've seen Mrs. Stanton, people," she announced. "She brought me home in her carriage, and now I've sent her home in a fit—of mortification and disgust."

A pretty girl, with big, innocent blue eyes, looked up from the bristol board on which she was outlining a drawing by the center table. A tall woman, with lines of anxiety impressed on a face that was intensely patrician in its contour, came out from the kitchen beyond, bread knife in hand.

"What have you done now, Barbara?" the latter asked patiently, sinking into a chair.

"Met one of our fashionable friends, and let her understand the truth. Surely there can't be anything wrong in that."

Barbara laid off her hat, went over to her sister, took the fair face between her two hands, and kissed it.

"What truth?" Mrs. Van Dyke wanted to know. "I don't understand you, Barbara."

"The truth about us; that we are no longer in the ring; that our money has gone, and that consequently we are not now fit persons for her to associate with."

"Oh, Barbara, you didn't *tell* her that?"

Freda looked up with a startled expression, and put her hand gently into her sister's.

"No, pet. I was perfectly polite. I allowed her to do all the talking. I simply gave her an object lesson by letting her see where we live."

"But why was there necessity of doing that, Barbara?" began Mrs. Van Dyke, when her daughter interrupted her.

"Because, mother, Mrs. Stanton is as shallow as the brook that ran through our old place in Vermont. She has no use for anybody who cannot move in her set, and the quicker we let her know the truth the better it will be."

"But she might be able——"

"Well, what could she do for us?"

Barbara sat down and calmly faced her family.

"Could she make editors see any good in my little stories they are always sending back, or in Freda's drawings that they never use? Pardon me, dear, but we might as well admit the truth. We must try to get something else to do, something besides so called respectable work. I'm going to answer advertisements at once."

Barbara ceased suddenly, and there was a silence in the little box of a room. Mrs. Van Dyke, heaving a deep sigh, went back to her preparations for supper. Freda's head dropped suddenly on the sketching board before her.