

AUNT NELLIE'S TWO CENTS WORTH

by
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A 10-Minute Hoosier Play

SYNOPSIS

Flo's son has not only rejected his parents' plans for his future, he just might end up marrying outside his religion. Whether Flo likes it or not, she'll get Aunt Nellie's two cents worth of advice on the situation.

CHARACTERS

FLO. Farm woman in her forties.

NELLIE. Flo's Aunt. Seventies. ("Aunt" is pronounced like the insect.)

SETTING

Farmhouse kitchen, summer, 1950's. Implied by a table, a couple of chairs, and a wicker laundry basket full of clean towels.

HOOSIER DIALECT

Flo and Nellie should speak in a country accent in which nearly all vowels sound like "uh." Initial vowels and final consonants are mostly ignored. Present tense often substitutes for past tense. Adding "l" to Wabash and "r" to "wash" and shortening "iron" to "arn" are typical Hoosierisms.

To get an idea of how Aunt Nellie sounded in the author's head, seek out YouTube videos of the late actress Marjorie Main performing as "Ma Kettle."

RELIGIOUS ATTITUDES

In Indiana, Protestant animosity toward Catholics goes way back. In the 1920's, the KKK even parlayed that attitude into a successful takeover of state and local government. Thirty years later, at the time of the play, those feelings lingered on.

NOTE

When quotation marks appear in the script, please do not use "finger quotes." They weren't a thing in the 1950's.

Perhaps the scene is set by a recording of a line or two from "Back Home Again in Indiana." Lights come up on a farmhouse kitchen implied by a table and chairs. An exit is assumed to a back-door entryway. FLO, a housewife in her early forties, is taking clean towels out of a wicker basket and folding them on the kitchen table.

NELLIE (off)

Yoo-hoo! Flo? Anybody to home?

FLO

In the kitchen, Aunt Nellie!

Flo's aunt NELLIE enters from the assumed back door area. She's a full generation older than her niece.

NELLIE

Why ain't Floyd never fixed that back step of yours? I like to fell and broke a hip.

FLO

I swear. Sometimes I gotta light a fire under that man to get him to get anything done around this house. Go ahead and sit yourself down. Can I get you anything?

NELLIE

(Sits)

No. I'm good. What're you up to today?

FLO

(Goes back to folding.)

Tryin' to catch up on my warshin' and arnin'. Spendin' all day yesterday workin' the church food stand at the 4-H fair put me way behind.

NELLIE

(Helping fold the last few towels.

I'm takin' my shift durin' the supper hour tonight.

FLO

We were so busy yesterday we ran outta desserts so I baked a couple more of my Hoosier sugar cream pies this mornin'. Would you mind takin' them when you go? It'd save me havin' to make a special trip.

NELLIE

Of course not. Happy to do it. People just love your sugar cream pies. *(Beat.)* So what's this I hear about Rodney fixin' to go to Walbash College this fall? I thought Floyd wanted him to go to Purdue and take agriculture.

FLO

Then come back here and take over the farm when Floyd gets too old to work it. But Rodney suddenly got "other plans." He like to broke Floyd's heart. This land's been in his family for four generations. But Rodney says he's had it up to here with milkin' cows and sloppin' hogs. And besides, *so he says*, Marie grew up in town and wouldn't know the first thing about bein' a farm wife.

NELLIE

I can't believe he's still smitten with that Alexander girl. Why didn't you nip that in the bud long before now?

FLO

He thinks she hung the moon. So anything we say to him about Protestant boys datin' Catholic girls just goes in one ear and out the other.

NELLIE

Well, I can't imagine *her* parents are any happier about it than you are.

FLO

On the contrary. For some reason unknown to me, Herb and Josephine Alexander have taken quite a shine to him. I suspect all he'd have to do to get their blessin' to marry her once he's through with college would be to agree to let their kids to be raised Catholic.

NELLIE

If he did that, your daddy'd roll over in his grave. He surely didn't approve of mixin' religions. If I remember rightly, my brother, God rest his soul, didn't even approve of you marryin' Floyd. And *Floyd's* family was just Presbyterian. Of course when he saw he didn't have no choice in the matter, he couldn't walk you down that aisle fast enough.

FLO

Just what're you implyin'? You know Rodney was just born premature.

NELLIE

Of course he was. Like my mama always said, all babies take nine months—'cept maybe the first one. Marie ain't pregnant, is she?

FLO

Not that I know of. We're just hopin' once he starts college he'll meet some other girls and thing's'll cool off.

NELLIE

You forget. Walbash is an all-boys school. If you don't mind me askin', how're you and Floyd ever gonna afford to send him to that fancy-priced private college anyhow?

FLO (unhappily)

We're not. Marie's folks are.

NELLIE

What?! They must really like that boy. I know ownin' a farm implement store, they probably got all the money in the whole wide world, but ...?

FLO

When Herb Alexander found out he was plannin' to go to Purdue, he started tellin' him what a good education he got at Walbash and how that contributed to his success in life. And how much better it is sellin' tractors in an air-conditioned showroom than it is ridin' one out under the hot Indiana sun. So when he offered to foot the bill for Rodney to go to Walbash, he jumped at it. Apparently the deal is, Rodney'll work at the store every summer and then after he graduates he'll come back and work for Herb full time.

NELLIE

And marry the boss's daughter. And eventually inherit the whole shebang. And be set up for life. Sounds like Rodney's got it all figured out.

FLO

Aunt Nellie, I'm just afraid I'm gonna lose my son to those people.

NELLIE

Florence Elizabeth Williamson. How can you dare to stand there and talk to me about losin' a son? You know good and well I only got to hold mine for five minutes before the Good Lord decided he needed another little angel up in heaven. And then I couldn't never have no more, and I've been feelin' guilty my whole life that I failed in my duty as a woman. But you, you give Floyd a son and two daughters and instead of praisin' God for givin' you that privilege, here you are cryin' to me because that boy you were blessed to be able to watch grow up into manhood, just might marry a Catholic.

FLO

I'm sorry if I spoke outta turn. I didn't mean to dredge up painful memories. But Rodney and Marie, it goes against everything I believe in.

NELLIE

Everything we both been taught to believe in all our lives. I know it's hard to go against that. But sometimes I wonder—and you better never tell Reverend Barringer I said this—sometimes I wonder whether God really cares as much as we think He does, about some of the stuff we mere mortals down here on earth get ourselves so all fired heated up about. (*Beat.*) You want my opinion?

FLO

Do I have a choice?

NELLIE

Rodney's almost as hard-headed as *you* are. If he gets his heart set on marryin' that girl and sellin' farm implements the rest of his life, tryin' to fight it'll just be like beatin' your head against the wall. Yeah, it's right sad Rodney ain't gonna take the Williamson farm on down to another generation. But if he gives you grandkids, Catholic or not, least those kids'll carry the Williamson *name* on into the future. It's my greatest regret your uncle Hank's family's name stops with him. So just tell yourself you're gonna welcome Marie into the family if it ever comes to that, and count your blessin's

(Stands)

... Now I need to get on outta here and let you get back to your chores. Where're them pies you wanted me to take to the fair for you?

FLO

On the table next to the back door. You be careful goin' down that back step or you'll end up face down in a mess of sugar cream.

NELLIE

I can think of a lotta worse ways to go.

FLO

... And thanks for givin' me the advice.

NELLIE

About all this old woman's good for nowadays, puttin' in her two cents worth whether people like it or not.

FLO

Well I appreciate it, and I'll take it to heart and pray on it. See you in church Sunday?

NELLIE

If the Good Lord's willin' and the crick don't rise.

Nellie exits toward the back door. Flo picks up the laundry basket full of folded towels and exits in the other direction.

END OF PLAY