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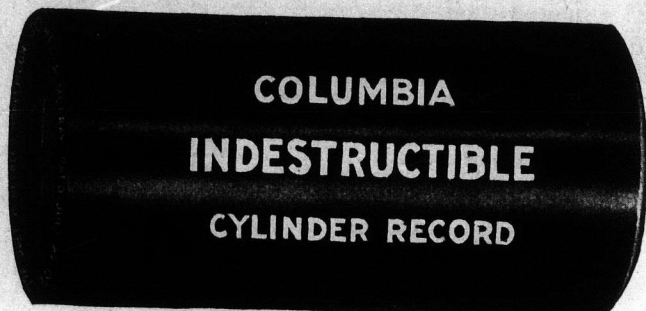


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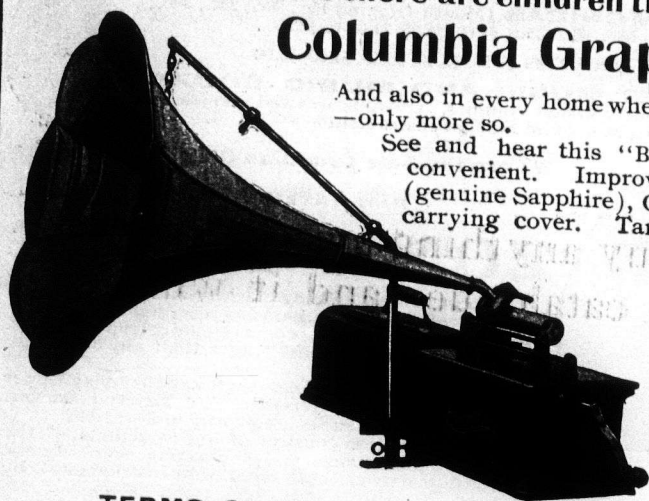
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WINNIPEG

small round eyes at her in lazy triumph! It was too much. Was an immortal woman to be outwitted by a couple of finite hens? The little widow renewed the conflict, but not daring to lay hands again upon the belligerent bipeds, she resorted to the discreet expedient of poking at them through the open window, thus affording to Mr. Butterkin, as he rounded the corner, a confused vision of agitated calico dancing about a distracted rake handle.

"What! setting again, Mrs. Ebbeson?"

The small lady, till then unconscious of the gentleman's proximity, hastily withdrew her head from the window and looked down in some confusion from her perch on an inverted barrel. "Yes, they're settin' again; but it's just as well—just exactly as well," said she, rather incoherently, harrowed by the fear lest she were displaying her ankles.

"Now, now, we must see about this," responded Mr. Butterkin, fishing in his pocket for a small ball of twine he had bought that day for stringing the tomatoes, and meanwhile glancing over his shoulder, apparently to assure himself that the orchard was where it should be. He would have liked nothing better than to lift the little widow down, but his instinct told him she would prefer to descend by herself, unobserved, and he was a man capable of self-sacrifice. "We'll tie the hens to the fence," he added, presently, conscious of a thrill of delight as he pronounced the "we."

He knew himself better than in the early morning, and could not disguise the fact that he felt a personal satisfaction in entering into even the humblest partnership with Mrs. Ebbeson—a satisfaction evidently not shared by the Brahmas, who, resenting his continued interference, tore his coat mercilessly. It was a jagged rent, from pocket to hem, in his Sunday garment, too, which in Roxanna's time had never gone to the village on a week day; but who was there now to watch over Mr. Butterkin's apparel? Not Mr. Butterkin, surely, to whom the distinctions of dress were but as sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal.

"What a wicked, wicked shame!" cried Mrs. Ebbeson, in distress. "But I'll darn it just as well as I can."

"No, no, thank you; it's of no consequence," replied Mr. Butterkin, with manly indifference.

"But Esther can't mend broadcloth."

"Can't? You don't say so!"

Imbued with the masculine superstition that incapacity with the needle betokens idiocy, Mr. Butterkin looked aghast.

"No; she's young, you know, and not used to sewing. Besides, I'm responsible for this rent. Let me attend to it, please."

He removed the garment without a word, his face flushing like moose-berries in autumn. Not a thought that, since Esther was incapable, he must be indebted to the widow for past favors with the needle—indeed, he would have unblushingly declared that this was the first occasion since Roxanna's decease that garment of his had needed repair—but he felt a reluctance at being dependent upon Ruth for a menial service, when it was now the growing desire of his heart that she should lean upon him.

Seeing him color, Mrs. Ebbeson, out of sympathy, colored, too, and such a vivid and lasting crimson that her mother at dinner mildly chided her for going out without her bonnet.

Busy over his coat that afternoon, Ruth naturally thought of Mr. Butterkin, while he, weeding the late turnips, recalled her blushes, and clumsily tried to analyze them. On the whole, he couldn't believe she went so far as to dislike him. And so night came, the mended coat hung in its place, and under the fence the undiscouraged Brahmas brooded over imaginary eggs. Next morning they brooded there still, and there, had they been his own, might they have continued to brood, forgotten by Mr. Butterkin, who, as his late wife often said, complainingly, never charged his mind with hens; but these especial Brahmas possessed peculiar interest as giving him audience with the charming widow. Accordingly,

in the days that followed, he hovered about the luckless bipeds like a bird of prey. He bought the latest treatise on hens, and patiently tried in succession all the experiments therein suggested for subduing the wills of obdurate sitters, Mrs. Ebbeson assisting, as in common gratitude she must. This without producing the least effect upon the Brahmas. It was the widow that grew restive, conscious of the absurdity of Mr. Butterkin's sudden and ostentatious regard for fowls. She knew, the very moment when his heart turned toward her, but whether hers inclined similarly toward him wasn't for her to say till he asked; yet, coy little woman, she gave him no chance to put the question.

And, such is human perversity, the more she seemed not to care for him, so much the more was Mr. Butterkin resolved that she should care for him. Before July was ended he had fully made up his mind to propose, inwardly assured that his late wife would sanction the proceeding, not if she were returned to the flesh, of course—in that case he would not ask it—but as a shade she would not stand between him and her beloved Ruth. Of Mr. Ebbeson's shade he scarcely thought, doubting, perhaps, whether a man on earth destitute of moral substance could at death attain the dignity of a heavenly shadow. But there is a vast difference between purposing to propose and proposing. Mr. Butterkin learned this to his chagrin after repeated abortive attempts at giving his frequent interviews with Mrs. Ebbeson a sentimental turn. At each advance of his she sped away as shyly as a girl, and in the secure retreat by her mother's couch was as unapproachable as if seated aloft in the chair of Cassiopea. In regard to a written declaration of love, Mr. Butterkin would sooner have attempted an essay on protoplasm. August found him still waiting for an opportunity. He, usually so prompt and unhesitating—the first selectman of the town! The better he loved the widow, the more he despised himself, till one soft twilight, when the zephyrs were whispering tender thoughts to the leaves, he rose with desperate resolve, and strode boldly round to the open door of the L. Mrs. Ebbeson sat just within the sitting-room, but he was too crafty to enter.

"If you'll kindly step this way a moment," he said, "I've another experiment we might try on those hens."

But having lured her to him, his next words were wide of the mark:

"I came to ask—that is, I wanted to know—in fact, I wanted to have a serious talk with you."

She believed in free-will, he in foreordination; but his "serious talk" would not savor of theology, she knew. She nervously essayed to confine it to poultry.

"Really, Mr. Butterkin, you take too much trouble about those hens. They—"

"Nothing I do for you, Ruth, is a trouble."

"They're fairly rheumatic from standing in that barrel of water, and, for all that, they're not cured of setting."

"As I was saying, Ruth—"

"Don't say any more about 'em, Mr. Butterkin, I beg."

"I'm not speaking about 'em, Ruth. Here Mr. Butterkin, wiped his brow with his handkerchief. "I came to talk about you. Don't go. Your mother didn't call. Why won't you marry me, Ruth?"

She gave him a dozen reasons on the spot, but the fallacy of feminine logic being proverbial, Mr. Butterkin was not the man to heed them. At least this I know, before the snow came the Widow Ebbeson had become Mrs. Butterkin, and frosty evenings she and her husband might have been seen carefully sheltering two late broods of chickens, for in the end the Brahmas had their way.

To keep palms green and fresh-looking and remove the dusty and faded appearance of the leaves, wipe each leaf separately with a cloth dipped in milk. This will at once give back their natural gloss and fresh green appearance.