

"Oh, I've sorter taken a likin' to that methodist circuit rider of your'n, and he seems to need some way to get to his appointments. I figured that span of blacks and that spring wagon would just about fit him. And I guess we'll send that washin' machine to Tom Todds' wife. She has about enough cradle rockin' to keep all the churnin' done."

There was silence in which Mrs. Houck breathed a happy sigh of perfect relief; but she wanted to ask one more question.

"But Billy," she said directly, "supposin' he'd got away with them papers yesterday?"

Billy looked up at the moon and squinted his left eye. And then Billy looked up at the moon and squinted with his right eye. Perhaps it was only a passing cloud, but it really seemed as if the moon winked back. There seemed to be a quiet, friendly understanding between the moon and Billy.

"Them papers warn't no good, ma," chuckled Billy. "While the feller was tryin' to console you squire and me dated 'em a hundred years ago, so they was some considerable out of date before they was due."

By Scarecrow Proxy

By Holman F. Day

Corvus was communistic that year. He was anarchistic as well. He settled in throngs all over the countryside, and he believed thoroughly in the destruction of property.

There never was a greater pest of crows. They began to trail and caw overhead in the first warming days of March, and as soon as the fields were bare they waddled and waggled their tails over the ploughed grounds, or sat at a distance in the tall trees and watched the toil of the farmers with great complacency.

Bial Barton was one of the first of the Palmyra farmers to realize that no common scarecrow was going to avail against the hordes that season. No mere spraddle of an old rag flapping on a spreader would intimidate the black robbers. Therefore he fell to an examination of his wardrobe on the first rainy day. It didn't take him very long. Bial had kept "bach hall" for more than twenty years, and when one is shy of all assistance from women-folk and is slow with the needle himself, and doesn't much care how he looks, anyway, the stock of attire gets "slim."

After some meditation and inspection Bial gave up to the cause the patched trousers he had been wearing that spring for the muddy work.

There was a tail coat in the attic that he had sometimes thought might be revamped into something wearable. But this was an exceptional year. A scarecrow would need to have much individuality. The tail coat, an old pillow case, a hard hat whose brim was broken and the aforesaid trousers—he sighed and carried them to the barn and set about creating.

It was a very rainy day, offering no possibility of outside work, and he had plenty of time. As he progressed he became interested in the artistic possibilities of the thing. It is remarkable what one can do with meadow hay and old clothes when one has the time and inclination. The upper end of the pillow slip modelled finely into head. When the battered hard hat was set tightly upon this knob and the coat buttoned over the rest of the stuffed pillow case, the blank, staring face rather shocked Bial by its ghastly emptiness of features. So he brought his little pot of lampblack and gave the visage eyes, nose and mouth—form and expression. He wanted to make it look savage. But Bial was of a bland and mellow disposition himself. Had he been a true artist he might have been able to sink his own individuality. But as it was he only succeeded in reproducing a crude and mild image of himself. The corners of the mouth even turned up in a benignant smile. Bial had really purposed a fiendish grin. But he nailed a club upon the end of the cross bar that held out a sun-faded sleeve, and hoped that crows were to be more impressed by attitude than by physiognomy.

When it was all finished it was so elaborate a job that Bial was a little ashamed of it, with the shame of a man who has been brought up to

and has himself grown to shrink from showing interest in frivolities. For instance, the fact that Bial Barton classed any expression of attention to or affection for womankind as frivolity accounts for the existence of bachelor hall at his place, and explains his general character pretty plainly.

"Wimmen," he used to say, "ain't contented unless they've got a man jumpin' at the end of a string all the time. I've known 'em all here in Palmyra from the time they was girls in school with me, and they'll all hornswoggle a man the same way—make him wait and 'tend and kowtow."

Therefore the Palmyra girls had grown up and got married or lived old maids all around Bial Barton, and he had gone alone along his own way. They called him selfish and set. But it was because he knew them all so well and all their own little selfishnesses, perhaps, that he feared to commit himself.

He went in the first flush of the dawn that followed the rainy day and set up his scarecrow. He went early to avoid any pertinent questions or sly grins.

"It don't pay to get too fancy in this town, if you don't want to be sassed," he mumbled. He said this with a spite he would not have displayed a few weeks before. He had caught himself stopping to put on a collar and necktie before he ventured past the next farm, on his way to the village, and he had caught himself thus not once, but many times. And what's more, the men at the store had mentioned it to him with sly grinning.

That a widow, a mere woman and a city woman at that, should cause him to alter his habits he would not admit even to himself. He simply put on the collar and necktie because—well, because! Whose business was it? Admitting that she was a mighty smart-looking widow, what of it? They said that she had money and had bought a farm so that she might live the simple life—whatever that was—but he didn't care what she was trying to live, so he repeated to himself whenever he straightened from his work in his fields and looked across the dividing fence.

He looked across this morning when he came out upon the knoll in his cornfield where he proposed to plant his new-made friend. He promptly laid the latter down, put his hand at his brow and gazed more intently. His first astonished thought was that this was the widow living a new phase of that simple life she talked of—standing in the center of her cornpiece at five in the rosy morning. But the figure was too—too—well, too stiff and angular for the real widow. He admitted to himself, standing there, that he had studied her enough to know that much at least.

The widow had been there before him that morning. He was forced to that conclusion. The attire on the simulacrum was fresh and not dragged by rain. Well, she was truly a mighty smart woman, as they all

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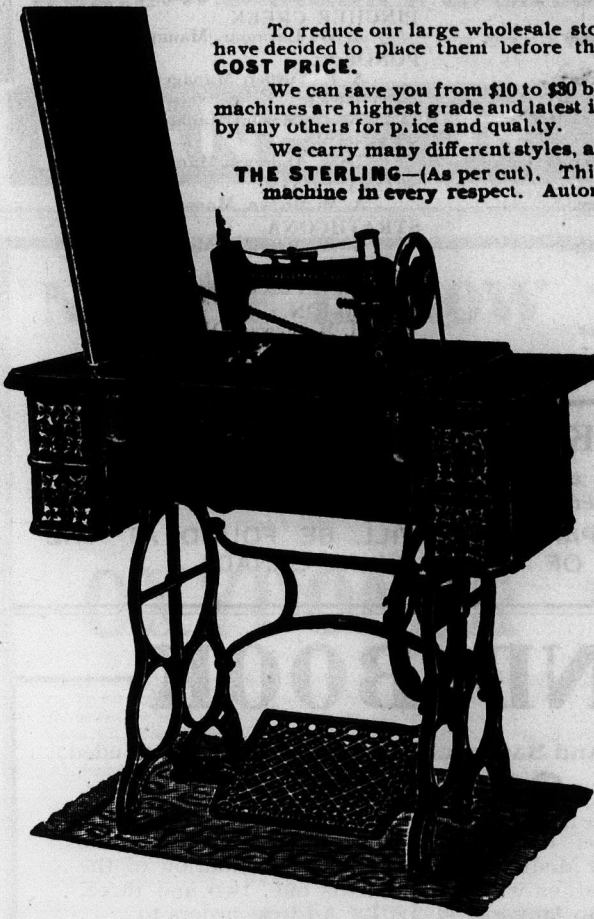
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