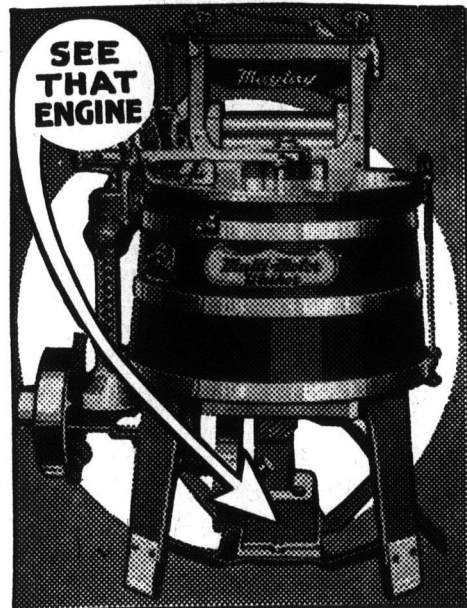


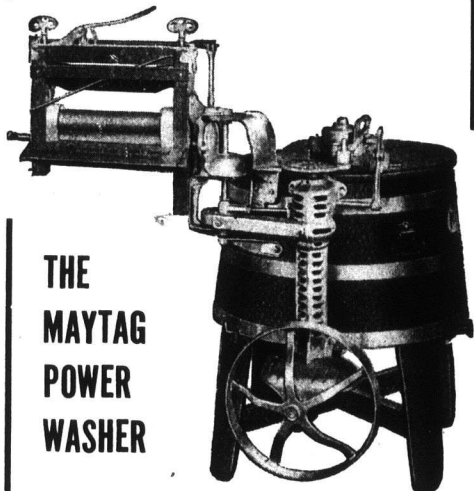
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"A Woman o' Me Own Heart"

By Rae Lunn

A WISTFUL, longing look haunted her homely face that could not deny a rounded forty summers. About her hung four children, equally as freckled and stub-nosed and gaunt as herself. Mrs. Sarah Stebbins—it was scrawled on her barrel-top trunk—gazed after the departing train and drawing her bedraggled widow's weeds from the clutches of the wailing twins, she seated herself on her trunk and added her tears to those of the chorusing quartette.

Sam Hatfield, station master and mayor of Fraserville, dropped his truck and scratched his head. A woman's tears to Sam, whether of anger, trouble or sorrow, were as water to a lump of brown sugar.

"Mrs.——?" Sam glanced at the trunk, "er—Mrs. Stebbins, is there anything that I can do for you or your children?" and Sam picked up seven-year-old Jenny and tried to look six ways at once.

"My name is Jenny Thusana White," Sam's charge lisped in a Poll-parrot treble.

"Er—Mrs. White—excuse me, ma'am," Sam hastened to apologize, "I looked on your trunk and seen' Mrs. Sarah Stebbins' I thought 'twas your name."

"M-my f-first husband's name was W-White," Mrs. Sarah Stebbins explained between sniffs.

Sam rubbed his chin and shifted uneasily, blew out his tobacco quid and reached to the right back pocket of his overalls, from which dangled the third of a bandana handkerchief. "It's plenty o' trouble that you've had, Mrs. Stebbins," Sam coughed and wiped his eyes. When the sniffs had subsided, Sam settled the twins in his vacant arm and began again, "Where are you headin' for, Mrs. Stebbins?"

"I—I—don't know," Mrs. Sarah Stebbins wept. "I c-came here to look for a p-place to b-bb-board. The doctor said that I m-must stay in the c-country for my h-health. Do you k-k-know—would it be too much t-tt-trouble for you to t-tell me—help me f-find a p-place?" and Mrs. Sarah Stebbins lifted a tear-stained face to Sam.

"Er—let me see," Sam pondered, glancing down the street to the Fraser Inn, where, on its veranda, Fraserville's boarding trio—Mary Ann Watson, Maria Hanfrey, school teachers, and Lydia Jane Seaworth, piano and vocal instructor—had left their rockers and crochet hooks for the front gate, so as to get a better view of the little group on the station platform.

"Gabbler" old hens. They'll pick her to pieces before she gets there, but there haint no other place this side o' Clifton," Sam groused to himself as he placed barrel-top trunk, Jenny and the twins in his truck and followed by Mrs. Sarah Stebbins carrying her worn hand bag and the squalling infant, Sam conducted his charges to the Inn.

Instead of spending his evenings smoking on the station house steps, Sam now held a one-sided conversation with Mrs. Sarah Stebbins or trotted the twins on his knee and, to the open disapproval of the boarding trio, played "bear" with Jenny, while Mrs. Sarah S. crooned to the dimpling Sammy, as she had named him.

One morning after Mrs. Sarah S. had been the nucleus of Fraserville's bacon-and-eggs for six weeks, Sam's peace of mind and the boarding house trio received an unsuspected upheaval. The cause—Mrs. Sarah S. discarded her dull black for a jaunty, strawberry foulard and arrayed her quartette in their spic-and-span best out on the back porch, where the bubble of excitement—a man, citified and with a charming smile, sedately sallied forth.

He held Mrs. Sarah S.'s hand for a full minute by Lydia Jane's alarm clock, patted the quartette's heads, gave each a bright new penny and a stick of striped yellow and red candy—the kind that corner stores dole out in the same kind of paper bags; had lunch under the grape arbor and departed whence he had evidently come—oblivion.

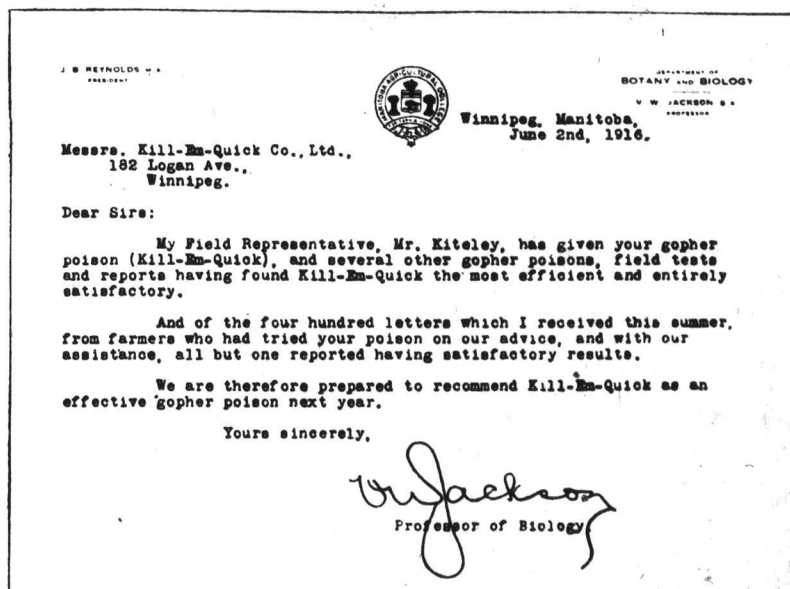
"That accounts for the letters that she's been getting and sending every week," Mary Ann confided to the remainder of the trio. "Sam better look out or he'll be getting the mitten. It would serve him right for picking up with strangers and thinking those of his own town too good to associate with. But, that's the way with these widows, the men

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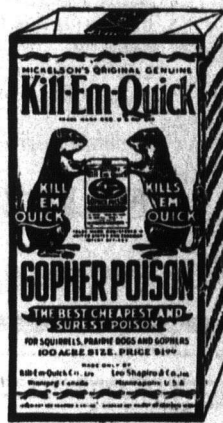
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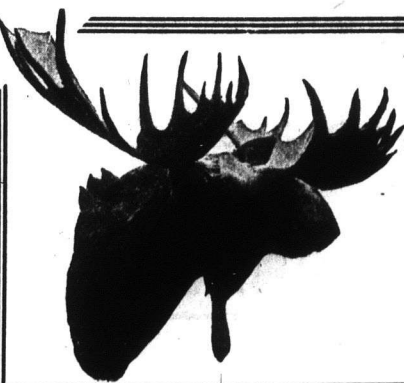
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