

was the Hoosier who was the intruder and usurper, and not the radiant creature before him.

The predicament of Jonathan Wobbles had increased considerably since morning, and at this moment it was not only dreadful, but alarming.

He sat staring intently at the floor for fully two minutes without saying a word or venturing to look up, in as profound a state of meditation and abstraction as he was capable of. At last an idea seemed to take possession of him—a very assuring, pleasing idea, evidently, from the way he took up with it—and he smiled, made some common-place remarks about the weather and her solitary condition, and departed.

The idea that had taken possession of the Hoosier and had given him so much evident satisfaction was to frighten this timid young widow so badly—so effectually—that her life would scarcely be worth living—there, at least. The idea was a very foolish one, it must be confessed; so silly, in fact, that Jonathan would have been ashamed of it in his sane moments; but he had become so frenzied by the hopelessness of his case that he was desperate, and was not himself.

Before carrying any of his plans into execution, however, he called on the widow again. His mission this time was to ascertain if she would sell, reasonably—if she would abandon the tract, for a small consideration, say, for the value of her improvements. But the widow was resolute, though very mild and sweetly innocent. She came to stay. The land and location suited her so well that she doubted exceedingly whether she could better herself, or, indeed, do half so well a second time; and as the laws would undoubtedly uphold her rights, she would remain where she was.

The only peaceable way out of his dreadful predicament now, he thoughtfully reflected all the way home, would be to marry her. The land had never seemed so valuable to Jonathan as just now—since he discovered that it did not belong to him.

"At the same time," he continued to reason with himself, "she aint bad looking by a darned sight."

Of course, the widow would not object—widows never do. A widow could have no other object in life but to ensnare another husband. Like Peggoty's Barkis, she was always "willin'."

Jonathan therefore prepared himself for the sacrifice. He presented himself before her door one afternoon, arrayed in his very best. His mission was love and mercy this time, and not land. Land had nothing whatever to do with the feelings of reverence and devotion he entertained for the lovely young creature he would make his bride. He had pictured the whole proceeding so frequently in his mind, days beforehand, that there could be no confusion about it whatever. He knew just what to say and how to act,

and the little love passages were well mapped out—in his mind.

Just what did occur, however, will never be known, I fear, but Jonathan came rushing out of the house five minutes later at break-neck speed, swearing like a trooper, with hot water streaming down over his clothes and face. He was not so badly scalded as at first he supposed himself to be, but sufficiently so to keep him in doors for several days, applying baking soda plasters and slippery elm bark, and endeavoring to devise some means of revenge.

That something would have to be done quickly in regard to getting rid of the widow was evident to Jonathan the moment he again presented himself at the village. The news of his unmerciful handling had not become known as yet, as he discovered by all manner of suggestive queries, but a growing disposition on the part of the settlers was manifesting itself to get rid of him. Public sentiment was decidedly against him. If he had no right to the land, they argued, he should get off of it, or be made to, and cease annoying a defenseless female by his presence. The prospect of remaining much longer, therefore, was very unpromising to Jonathan, and he had too wholesome a fear of hemp to persist among a class of people who frequently took justice into their own hands, suddenly and effectually.

He thought he would do a little reconnoitering first, however, to feel the enemy, as it were, and to ascertain what condition things were in. The widow had kept very closely within doors since the memorable exit of Jonathan, and as he had neither seen her during the day nor her accustomed light at night, he was strongly inclined to believe he had scared her off. He took courage at the thought. His arterial thermometer bobbed away up immediately. He would investigate that very night, as soon as the moon was up so that he could see without being seen. He was going to use a little more discretion this time, however, and not take so many things for granted, nor act so recklessly hasty. He merely wished to ascertain whether she was there, nothing more. Like numerous members of the Wobbles tribe, Jonathan frequently devised plans that he never had the remotest intention of carrying out—his bravery was more in thought than in action.

As soon as her lunar majesty made her appearance that night, therefore, a dark figure could have been seen stealthily picking its way across the prairie in the direction of the widow's. It was Jonathan on the reconnoitre, with his pants tucked in his boots, his coat turned inside out, and an old slouch hat on. It was a calm, beautiful night, almost as light as day. Bands of marauding coyotes howled dimly from all parts of the compass, sometimes so near that he im-