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THE WIDDER'S WILD TURKEY.

A Thanksgiving Episode
In the Ozarks.

By ROBERTUS LOVE.

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"BEGINS to 'pear to me," remarked Ezzy Edwards of Hoopole, "that some of us ain't goin' to have no turk meat for Thanksgiving dinner this year. Turkeys goin' to be powerful high, I 'low."

"If it wuzn't for the mean, triflin' nature of some folks in this here neck o' the woods," put in Squire Summers, whose name should have been Winters on account of his chilli attitude toward things in general, "they'd be a plenty o' turk meat all right. If some o' these here fellers that's alwuz fartin' up on their hind heels an' kickin' 'bout high prices 'd jist turn to an' raise some turkeys, they'd be a plenty for all of us an' some left over for the widder."



"YES, SHE NEEDS A MAN."

"It wuz the widder that I wuz jist a-thinkin' of when I spoke up," said Ezzy. "Here she's had no man to do for her these two years, an' her place is all run down, an' she surely needs a man to keep it up for her."

"Yes, she needs a man," said Squire Summers, with the accent on the last word, "but she don't need no such ornery little hop-toads as this here neighborhood has hoppin' around the roads. What she needs is a man old enough an' well off enough—here the squire puffed out his own chest—"to keep her sensible and proper-like."

Squire Summers mounted his ancient horse and rode off toward his 400 acre bottom farm. Ezzy Edwards looked after him with daggers in his eyes.

"The blamed old runt!" he said to the country storekeeper, Hiram Samuels. "I do b'lieve he's runnin' after the widder himself."

Hiram laughed, a loud ha-ha! He looked quizzically at Ezzy.

"Where's your eyes been all this time, Ezzy?" asked Hiram. "In the back o' your head, I reckon. W'y, don't you know, consarn your plecter, that Square Summers 's been tryin' to annex the widder ever sence her cow loped into his back yard an' he brought her—the widder—up before him an' fined her \$5 an' costs for trespassin'!"

"I don't quite see," said Ezzy, "jist how a jedge that could do a thing like that to a pore widder woman would ever have the nerve to ast her to marry him."

"The square's nerve," Hiram returned, "is equal to any emergency, specially sence them eighty acres of the widder's jines his'n. He'd like to marry them two farms, an' to do it he's got to marry the widder first. Her land's powerful rich, it somebody would take hold an' work it. The square knows that."

Ezzy walked off down the road toward his own humble bachelor shanty muttering to himself. He was just a year or two older than the widder, while Squire Summers was at least thirty years her senior. Ezzy had loved her ten years before, when she married Jim Brandon, but he had lacked the courage to ask for her in time. He remained unmarried, working his eighty acre farm. Since Brandon's death Ezzy had "set his cap" for the widder, but he thought no one knew it save himself. In fact, he kept it so closely to himself that not even the Widder Brandon knew of his intentions. The widder lived alone but for her two small children. Ezzy had called at her house two or three times, "jist to ast how the children is," he told her. Once he stayed to supper. The widder's corn bread and sweet potatoes, with baked pork and apple pie, still made his mouth water.

"The old runt!" he muttered as he stepped inside his two room shack and lit the kitchen stove to cook his lonely meal. "I'll cut him out yit! Turkeys? W'y, he's got a hundred o' the finest birds ever raised in these parts, an' the stingy old dried up mummy'll sell all of 'em in town an' put the money in the bank an' make his darters eat salt pork for Thanksgiving dinner. All right, Ezzy—you jist git the widder a turk an' take your Thanksgiving dinner along with her an' pop the question right after dinner."

Having made this high resolve, registered in heaven, Ezzy slept well that

night. Thanksgiving was just one week off. Ezzy made overtures to Squire Summers for the purchase of a gobbler, but his rival apparently suspected his intentions regarding the disposition of the bird. He refused to sell at any price. Ezzy tried all the other neighbors, but was amazed to find that Squire Summers had bought up their entire turkey output the week before and was finishing their fattening so that he could sell them in the town market at an increased figure. Turkey promised to bring 20 cents a pound at wholesale—the highest ever known in the Hoopole country.

Returning home, Ezzy took down a rusty old shotgun from its pegs above his door and inspected the works. He extracted the old load with a corkscrew fitted upon the end of the ramrod and put in a fresh one. He aimed at a crow in a tree across the road. The gun was in commission. The crow was out. Ezzy was satisfied.

"They used to be a lot o' wild turks in these here woods," said Ezzy, "but these city hunters has scared most of 'em off. But I seen a flock o' seven yistiddy, an' if I can find one nex' Wednesday I'll shoot it for the widder."

Ezzy laid off from work on Wednesday and went to the woods early, his shotgun carefully cleaned and oiled and a large supply of ammunition for the old muzzle loader in his possession. The old time powderhorn swung from his side. The shot was in a bag tied to the horn, and a box of percussion caps was in his pocket.

Nearly all day, until the sun began to decline behind the hills, Ezzy hunted, but saw no wild turkeys. He began to 'low he'd have to wait till Christmas to get the widder's turk.

When suddenly he heard in the bushes at his right the familiar call of the big wild bird which used to be king of the Ozarks.

The hunter pulled out a whistle-like affair on which he could imitate the call. He made several turkey calls and was rewarded by seeing a big gobbler, with the reddish brown feathers peculiar to the wild turkey, fly up into a neighboring tree.

Ezzy, his hand on his forehead, trembled with ALWAYS LIKE HIM "buck ager" and WELL ENOUGH love, sighted his gun at the gobbler, which sighted him at the same instant and began to fly swiftly away.

"Stiddy now, Ezzy!" he said softly, and on the instant his hand ceased its trembling. Ezzy took deliberate aim slightly ahead of the bird and shot him on the fly. The gobbler dropped in a fluffy heap. The shot had decapitated him.

The triumphant hunter's way home lay past the widder's house. He picked up his bird by the feet and trudged happily right up to Mrs. Brandon's door.

"How's the children, Mrs. Brandon?" he asked. "I've got a little Thanksgiving present for 'em."

The widder was grateful, but she "faggergasted" Ezzy, as he told his wife later, when she informed him that Squire Summers already had sent her a fine turkey gobbler and was coming over with his two daughters to help her eat it.

Ezzy braced up then. He looked the widow squarely in the eye.

"Mrs. Brandon," he said, "I worked all day to git this here critter for you, an' you're goin' to eat my turk—it's yore turk, too—an' I'm goin' to eat with you, an' the square an' his darters can eat their own turk. We'll cook both of 'em up. An'—Mary—uh—you know the square's orthorized to issue marriage licenses an' likewise to perform marriages. Them two gals can be our witnesses, as the law says we got to have. Are you willin'?"

"Hang Mr. Edwards' turkey up in the shed, Johnny," the widow said to her son, "an' you go along with Johnny, Mirandy."

When the two children were out of earshot something like a smack was heard by the two "contracting parties." The widow told Ezzy she believed she'd always liked him well enough, but he'd been so backward.

They say in the Hoopole country that Squire Summers was so mad he didn't even offer to kiss the bride. But that omission merely added to the joy of the bridegroom.

How to Slaughter Turkeys.
Turkeys are sometimes sent to market with their plumage on, but they should not be. A properly prepared turkey should be slaughtered after the old formula—as old as the Indians—and set down as follows by the late Thomas Hazard, the well known Rhode Island turkey expert, who was known as "Shepherd Tom" for many years:

"The turkey should be shut up and kept without food for eighteen hours. Then suspend the sacred creature from a pike above carefully by a stout cord or string tied around both legs and, holding the head downward, reverently but quickly cut asunder the jugular vein and just as soon as the breath leaves pluck off the feathers before the body gets cold. This done, remove the crop and entrails without loss of time, restoring the liver and gizzard when the latter has been cleaned of its gravelly contents and its inside skin. Then tie a string around both wings and both legs and hang it up in a cool, dry place for two or three days."

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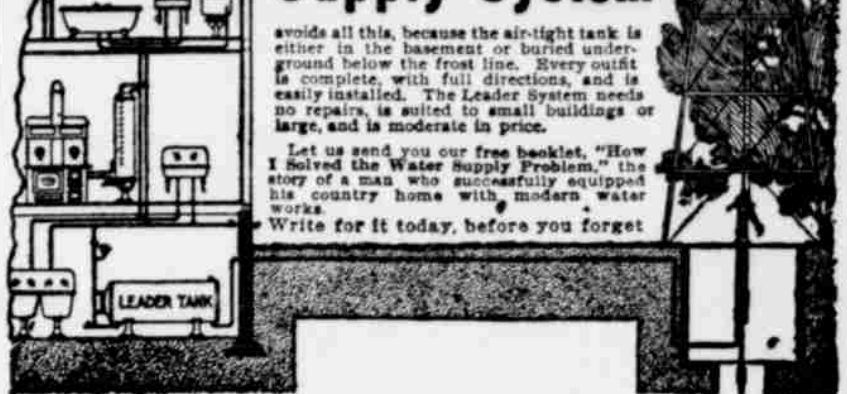
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