

THE HARMON'S ECONOMICAL CHRISTMAS

By Kate Haws Miles

"This Christmas business is all over during breakfast the following morning," growled John Harmon and he stirred his coffee so vigorously that it splashed a portion of it into his saucer. He looked at his wife and only daughter enquiringly as though inviting denial but none was forthcoming.

"It's nonsense I say," he continued in a tone of great argument, the more pronounced as he was meeting with no opposition. "You people think you must go through the same performance every year and cook the same mess of stuff that you don't need and that costs goodness knows how much. We'll have a change this year and celebrate in proportion to our circumstances."

"Very well John," returned his wife quietly and John finished his coffee with deep and audible gulps of satisfaction, although his glance wandered in side fashion to his daughter's face which was expressionless, her eyes on her plate.

"I nearly forgot to tell you that Stanley from Johnstown will be here for dinner," John remarked as he pushed his chair back from the table. "He's coming to look at my beef cattle and the chances are I can drive a good bargain for the whole dozen head. Have a good dinner for us at twelve and after that I ought to get him down to business as I want him."

"All right," smiled Mrs. Harmon once again, but her foot stole noiselessly under the table to her daughter's and pressed it gently lest the outburst of feeling which she saw near the surface should come too soon.

"Oh mother how can you?" came in passionate tones as soon as the kitchen door closed behind the head of the house. "You let father talk of spoiling everything and never say a word. And I was looking forward to this Christmas so much." Tears choked further remarks.

"We will have as pleasant a Xmas as usual and Harold Striner will not be ashamed of your home," said Mrs. Harmon very quietly but so positively that Lucy forgot to sob and looked at her mother in amazement.

"But mother" she said—and the tears came again. "I don't see why you ever married such a contrary man."

"Don't be childish Lucy. I suppose if I told you that your father was once quite as considerate as Harold and that Harold will grow just as matter of fact in his ideas as your father you wouldn't believe me."

"No indeed I wouldn't. Why father never gives in for if he does change his mind he won't acknowledge it."

"Well the sooner you find that the bitter and sweet go together the quicker you will discover how to sweeten the bitter and how to change some of the tragedies of every day life into pleasures. Your father doesn't mean to be unkind and will change his mind about the Christmas preparations. A woman can always show a man when he is in fault if she just goes about it the right way. If she can't he isn't worth bothering about and we know that isn't so far as your father is concerned. Now don't look so doleful. You change your dress and go to town for me. I'll give you a list and you can have dinner with Alice and drive back before night."

"But the man for dinner?" objected Lucy, although her face brightened at the prospect of a day in the shops in company with her bosom friend.

"Well I guess I can feed one more man along with your father and Tim. How do you suppose I managed before you were born? Come now hurry along so we'll both have a long morning."

Mrs. Harmon spent a busy morning yet when her husband and his visitor arrived at the house promptly at twelve she had a hearty and appetizing meal ready to put on the table. The pleased and complacent smile which spread over Mr. Stanley's countenance as he glanced over the inviting array before him did not escape John Harmon and he realized that his wife had done much to finish the bargain he had not succeeded in clinching before dinner.

At supper time John was pleased with his business transaction and Lucy was delighted with her day in town. Mrs. Harmon seemed satisfied too, yet, although she was flushed and tired with her day's work, she apparently had nothing to show for her labor and the house was quite free from any tell tale odours. The subject of Christmas did not come up.

"Poor old Miss Murray is in bed again Lucy," Mrs. Harmon announced.

him.

During supper John Harmon was uneasy. He was restless while he smoked and read his daily paper, and glanced uneasily around the odorless kitchen and at his placid wife, usually so busy at this season and at his daughter, silent and depressed.

If his wife was aware of his uneasiness she gave no sign and John retired without relieving his mind. In the morning his peace of mind had not returned to him. He could not seem to settle to his work but made frequent trips into the outer where his wife was quietly going about her every day chores. Finally he came upon her dressing a plump chicken and then he made a start.

"Do you expect that chicken to make a dinner for all of us?" "I haven't asked anyone except Harold Stringer. Tim will be home so I guess there will be plenty for four of us."

"Four of us!" John echoed her words then swallowed hard. "Well I've asked all of Charlie's and Sam's folks so I guess there'll be more'n four."

"How lucky I brought a roast of pork in to thaw. I'll cook that and it will help."

John took several turns around the kitchen, pulled off his cap and wiped his brow with his mitten, yawning, cleared his throat and at last found speech.

"Damn," he said most fervently and although he was not in the habit of expressing himself thus his wife showed no surprise. "Mary, can you go to town this afternoon?"

"Why yes John, I'd like to go. I haven't been to town on Christmas Eve for several years. Can't you take the pony and let Lucy go too?"

"Yes, I'll take the pony. I'll need it," was the grim response.

"Meet me at Horne's in an hour," John instructed his wife as he left her to take the horses to the stable and, proof that she was a wonderful woman, Mrs. Harmon was first at the appointed spot.

"Why John you do look pleased," she exclaimed as he hurried towards her, his look of uneasiness quite gone.

"Well I feel relieved anyhow. The fact is Mary," John swallowed hard and his wife patted his arm, taking no glory in the bitterness of the pill that he was struggling with—"I was a little outspoken in my notions about Christmas and I didn't mean you to take me quite so literal like."

"I thought perhaps you didn't," his wife hastened to assure him, "so I did the usual Christmas cooking in case you changed your mind but I

"I was Crippled, could hardly walk and had to Crawl"

down stairs at times on my hands and knees. My doctor told me I had an acute attack of inflammatory rheumatism. I was in the hospital for weeks, but was scarcely able to walk when I left it. I read about

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did it quietly so it wouldn't annoy you. Why I had so much faith in your good judgment that I even dared take one of the turkeys and lay it away so it would be ready if we wanted it."

"I guess it does a man good to make an out on out foot of himself," John said slowly. "It's like a dose of senna tea like mother used to make us take. I might have known you'd come out all right. I've just come from Jackson's where I bought most everything in sight that was supposed to be eaten, including three scraggy turkeys at five cents a pound more than I got for my own. I even bought some stuff they called Mince-Meat-like-Mother-used-to-Make and a black hunk which is labelled 'Home made plum pudding.'"

Mrs. Harmon was wiping her eyes by this time, wiping away tears of merriment and sadness. "Oh! John we'll go right back and change those things. I won't have such stuff in the house."

"Now don't be in a hurry. I came here to do some shopping. I want you to pick out the nicest set of furs in this establishment for Lucy and I'm going to see that you get enough I stuff for the swellest dress you ever

had. Mind you, no black silk for any one as young as my wife and I guess I can afford to get enough stuff to make a real skirt, not one of those imitations they palm off on women nowadays. This Christmas business isn't bad at all when a man gets properly roused up to it."

ARBITRARY ENGLISH LANGUAGE.

We'll begin with box, and the plural is boxes. But the plural of ox should be oxen, no oces.

This one fowl is a goose, but two are called geese. Yet the plural of mouse should never be mice.

You may find a lone mouse on a whole nest of mice.

But the plural of house is houses, not hices. If the plural of man is always called men, Why shouldn't the plural of pan be called pen?

The cow in the plural may be cows or kine. But a bow if repeated is never called bine. And the plural of vow is vows, never vine.

If I speak of a foot, and you show me your feet, And I give you a boot, would the pair be called beeth?

If one is a tooth and the whole set are teeth, Why shouldn't the plural of booth be called beeth?

If the singular's this and the plural is these Should the plural of kiss ever be nicknamed keese?

Then one may be that and three would be those.

Yet hat in the plural would never be hose. And the plural of cat is cats, not cose. We speak of a brother, and also of brethren.

But though we may say mother, we never say methren.

Then the masculine prououns are he, his, him, But imagine the feminine she, shis and shim!

So the English, I think, you all will agree, Is the funniest language you ever did see.

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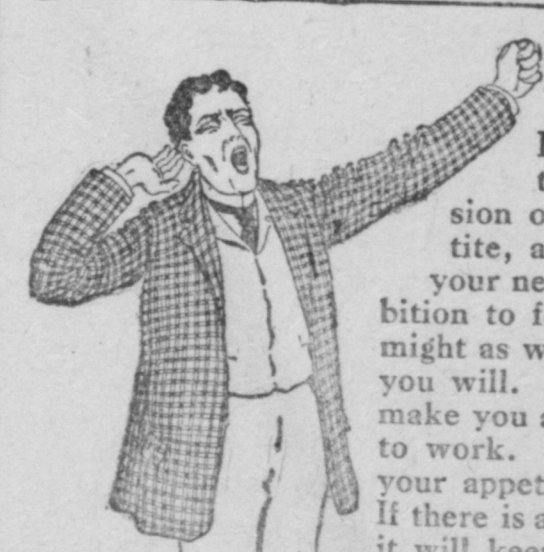
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