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A DECEIVIN' WIDOW.

(Boston Herald.)

In order that I may have a fair understanding with my reader at the outset, I wish to admit that I was one of the group of fools who will be referred to later on. I was the biggest fool of the lot, as will be discovered, but that wasn't exactly my fault. I was willing to accept that honor but circumstances over which I had no control willed it otherwise.

One day there arrived in the town of R., state of Pennsylvania, a sunburst of feminine humanity. This expression is not original with me. It was invented by one of the fools I am going to tell you about. This sunburst came in the shape of a little woman named Mrs. Laura Roberts, who gave out that she was a widow and lived in New York. She was a blonde and she was a stunner. I do not seek any credit for originality in saying that she was a stunner. All the other fools said so, and I am only repeating the term second-hand. She was petite, vivacious, witty and magnetic. She had peachy complexion, red lips and long eyelashes, and all of us fell in love with her at first sight. She couldn't help being petite, as nature stopped her growth at five feet, but I have every reason to believe that all the rest was put on for the occasion, even to the blonde hair.

It was rather strange, but nevertheless a fact, that in the prairie office building in the town named seven bachelors had offices on the same floor. We embraced all the professions and were all well-to-do and each one of us used to boast that he had never been inspired by the sentiment of love. The widow Roberts descended upon our building one day with the ostensible purpose of consulting a lawyer in regard to the title of a valuable coal mine, but the result proved that this was only a sort of excuse or stepping stone. Several years have passed since that day, but I am still so mad at the lawyer, whose name was Stebbins, and who had just started out on his career, that I cannot help but refer to him as a red-headed idiot. He fell head-over-heels in love with the widow before she had fairly stated her errand, and in his eagerness to serve her interests he made out that she had a clear and undisputed title to the coal mine worth a million and a half dollars of Uncle Sam's green-backs. I think this fact influenced the other fools more or less, but I positively deny that it had any thing to do with my falling in love with the widow Roberts. I loved her for her bleached hair—her painted lips—her penciled eyebrows and her make up complexion, and her coal mine didn't count. Next to the lawyer was an artist, and the widow walked in on him and admired his work and flattered him until she had made a conquest. Then she laid herself out for the noodle-headed young man whose rich father had set him up as a banker and broker, and he surrendered in a day. It was so with the architect— with every man of the seven. Somehow or other one by one, we got in the widow's way, or she got in ours, and an introduction was followed by love. It was all one-sided love, as you will come to know, but that made no difference at the time.

The town of R. is a summer town, notwithstanding its size and manufacturing interests, and the widow Roberts was a guest at one of the most expensive hotels. She was combining business with pleasure you know, or at least she said she was. Every one of the seven of us called on her—walked with her—took long drives with her. Seated on the long veranda in the gloaming I held her hand and talked love to her. So did each of the other six, but she played that hand so well that each one thought he was way ahead of the game. I don't think she would have engaged herself to me but for the fact that I am a short, fat man with thin eyebrows and a bald head. While she was in no hurry to accept my diamond ring, she gave me to understand that she loved me because I resembled her late husband. There were times when I saw her alone, and there were other times when I saw her in the presence of from three to six of my hated rivals. I steal this term "hated rivals" from a dime novel. They were not my rivals, and I didn't hate them. The little widow was mine—mine alone—as she had positively assured me on more than one occasion, and she was just amusing herself with the other six. She was far from home and lonely and why shouldn't she have fun at the expense of six dough-headed bachelors who didn't know the feeling of love from a box of sardines.

One evening I caught the architect with her in a bye-path. His arm was around her waist and their heads were bumping each other. I happened to mention the incident the next day, as a lover will, you know, and she explained that he was simply assisting her to a house after a sudden attack of her old complaint. She didn't say what that old complaint was, and as she gave me her hand to squeeze I forgot to ask her. On another occasion I stumbled upon the widow and the banker in a dark corner of the veranda. It wasn't so dark but that I saw him stroke her hair as he murmured words of undying love. Next day I laughingly referred to the matter and she said she was glad I did. The banker had an idea that her hair was

bleached, and she asked him to stroke it and convince himself to the contrary. He had been fully convinced, and that of course pleased me. After I had married the widow he couldn't go blowing around that she was a strawberry blonde. He must either admit that she was the real quill or shut up entirely. Again, one evening when I slipped in on my charmer unexpectedly, I found that she was out for a moonlight walk. I followed. I found her on the edge of a cliff, and beside her was the owner of three cloth mills, whose office was next to mine. As a matter of fact she was leaning on his shoulder as they sat, and I went near enough to hear him say that he would cover the whole earth with cloth that her feet might not come in contact with the vulgar dirt. Some men in my position would have rushed forward and yelled: "Traitor!" at her and pitched them both over the cliff, but I only slapped my leg and chuckled. After offering to spread millions of yards of cheviot, tweed, satinnet etc., for her to walk on the big-eared jack couldn't turn around after our marriage and say she used carmine on her lips.

I think I had been acquainted with the little widow from New York about 13 days when I proposed marriage and was accepted. It wasn't a straight-from-the-shoulder acceptance, but you understand how coy widows get around giving a square answer to such proposals. They blush or they try their best to blush. They murmur something about its being very sudden—giggle a little—cast down their eyes—and all of a sudden a plump little hand steals into yours and you have gained the victory. Yes after 13 days of blissful anticipation I was accepted, and as near as I can remember, it was on the 19th day that I began to beg the dear charmer to name the wedding day. She didn't have an almanac with her, and so put me off, but she did it so beautifully that I fell in love with her all over again. The days went by and went by. The days couldn't help it, you know, but I didn't realize it then. I had known the widow exactly 25 days, six hours and 15 minutes and had been engaged to her exactly 12 days, eight hours and 11 minutes, when she sent me a note asking me to call on her. I had no wings to fly with, and there was no express train from my office to her hotel, but I got there as fast as I could, and found her in tears. They were tears of grief and anxiety. Several things had happened her all at once. Her lawyer in New York had gone out of town and failed to forward her quarterly allowance; two or three bills had come in unexpectedly; a friend of hers from California had telegraphed her for a loan, and all in all she wanted \$5000 for a week. She could telegraph her broker to sell some of her stocks—she could sacrifice some of her bonds—

What did I do? Why I put my arms around my dear little Laura and patted her blonde head and laughed at her at being troubled over such a trifle as that. The idea of her being distressed for the sum of \$5000, when I had a cool hundred thousand where I could realize it in a day! Didn't she want \$10,000—\$15,000—\$20,000, instead of \$5000? It was all the same to me—all in the family. No she didn't want but \$5000. Stay! If I could just as well spare \$10,000 she would use the odd \$5000 to set decorators at work in her New York mansion, and give an order for her trousseau. I handed her the money within an hour. I was vexed with her because she wouldn't accept \$15,000 instead but she was firm on that point, and that's why I'm \$5000 ahead of her. When I handed her the vulgar dross I printed three kisses on those ruby lips—the first and last. Those kisses cost me just \$3333 33 apiece, and at that I thought them cheap. After the kisses the widow named the Wedding day. I was to meet her in Pittsburg two weeks from that day and be quietly married, and later on we would arrange to live in New York or elsewhere. Three days later she left for Pittsburg to close up that coal mine business, and the light of my life went out as if some one had hit a candle with a war club.

Two weeks! It was an eternity, especially as I only received one brief letter from her. The hours and days crept away and one morning I started for Pittsburg. So did the banker, the architect, the cloth man and the rest of the six. The seven of us happened to ride in the same car. We smiled superciliously at each other. Each pitied the other. I explained that I was going to Pittsburg on private business, and each one of the others made the same explanation. I said it was curious that all seven of us should have private business up there on the same day, and no one had mentioned his journey to the other, but they only smiled and put on knowing looks. I then threw out a hint that I was glad of their company, as they would be on the spot to congratulate me but they looked at me in a vacant way and didn't see the point of the joke, if joke there was. We reached Pittsburg in due time, and curiously enough we all went to the same hotel. On the way up I smiled and remarked the coincidence, but no one tried to explain it. I was the first to register and ascend to the ladies parlor. I expected the other six to go about their business, but they came sneaking up one after the other, and presently all seven of us were scattered about the room. I remarked that it was a singular thing, but the other six looked at the toes of their

boots and made no reply. I finally got tired of waiting for the widow to appear and sent up my card. She wasn't there to receive it. Whether she was in Halifax or Texas the landlord didn't know. When satisfied on this point I made a little speech to the other fools. I told 'em I had come to marry the widow. They had come for the same purpose. I told 'em I had loaned her \$10,000 in cash. There was only one fool who had made a smaller loan, while the biggest fool of all had put up \$25,000, and taken paste diamonds as security. The dear little blonde had raked in a pot of \$70,000 and gone off with it, and was not legally responsible to one of us. She was engaged to each of the seven. She has worked each of us the same way. We were about to fall upon each other in deadly fury in that hotel parlor when—we didn't. We went down and fell upon the bar and took a drink—two—five—seven drinks. We shook hands. We swore each other to secrecy, and each one became a liar under the influence of drink and declared that he saw through the widow from the very start and that he had not even spent 15 cents for her benefit.

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Patrick Kenney	3	3.18	3.09
Teddy Lynch Estate	3	1.17	1.24
Bernard McAffrey	3	3.18	3.40
James McDougald	3	1.17	1.24
James Scott	3	1.17	1.24
William Wallace	3	1.17	1.24
Mrs John Campbell	3	1.17	1.24
Mrs George Moody	3	1.17	1.24
Joseph Bennett	4	1.51	1.51
George K. McLeod	4	1.84	1.98
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B. McLEOD,
Harcourt.
May 31 1897.

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Dated, December 14, 1896.
J. D. PHINNEY.

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