

Mariposa READ
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Thursday, January 12, 2023 at 7:30 PM
Sunday, January 15, 2023 at 2:30 PM

An Original Idea

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Mariposa Adult & Family Literacy Program

An Original Idea

By O. Henry

There is a lady in Houston who is always having original ideas. Now, this is a very reprehensible thing in a woman and should be frowned down. A woman should find out what her husband thinks about everything and regulate her thoughts to conform with his. Of course, it would not be so bad if she would keep her independent ideas to herself, but who ever knew a woman to do that? This lady in particular had a way of applying her original ideas to practical use, and her family, and even neighbors, were kept constantly on the lookout for something startling at her hands.

One day she read in the columns of an Austin newspaper an article that caused her at once to conceive an original idea. The article called attention to the well-known fact that if men's homes supplied their wants and desires, they would have no propensity to wander abroad, seeking distraction in gilded saloons. This struck the lady as a forcible truth, and she boldly plagiarized the idea and resolved to put it into immediate execution as an original invention.

That night when her husband came home, he noticed a curtain stretched across one end of the sitting room, but he had so long been used to innovations of all sorts that he was rather afraid to investigate. It might be stated apropos to the story that the lady's husband was addicted to the use of beer. He not only liked beer, but he fondly loved beer. Beer never felt the slightest jealousy when this gentleman was out of its sight.

After supper the lady said: "Now, Robert, I have a little surprise for you. There is no need of your going downtown tonight, as you generally do, because I have arranged our home so that it will supply all the pleasures that you go out to seek."

With that she drew the curtain and Robert saw that one end of the sitting room had been fitted up as a bar—or rather his wife's idea of a bar. A couple of strips of the carpet had been taken up and sawdust strewn on the floor. The kitchen table extended across the end of the room, and back of this on a shelf were arranged a formidable display of bottles, of all shapes and sizes, while the mirror of the best dresser had been taken off and placed artistically in the center. On a trestle stood a fresh keg of beer and his wife, who had put on a coquettish-looking cap and apron, tripped lightly behind the bar, and waving a beer mug coyly at him said:

"It's an idea I had, Robert. I thought it would be much nicer to have you spend your money at home, and at the same time have all the amusement and pleasure that you do downtown. What will you have, sir?" she continued, with fine, commercial politeness. Robert leaned against the bar and pawed the floor fruitlessly three or four times, trying to find the foot rest. He was a little stunned, as he always was at his wife's original ideas. Then he braced himself and tried to conjure up a ghastly imitation of a smile. "I'll take a beer, please," he said.

His wife drew the beer, laid the nickel on the shelf and leaned on the bar, chatting familiarly on the topics of the day after the manner of bartenders.

"You must buy plenty, now," she said archly, "for you are the only customer I have tonight."

Robert felt a strong oppression of spirits, which he tried to hide. Besides the beer, which was first rate, there was little to remind him of the saloons where he had heretofore spent his money. The lights, the glittering array of crystal, the rattle of dice, the funny stories of Brown, Jones, and Robinson, the motion and color that he found in the other places were wanting. Robert stood still for quite a while and then an original idea struck him. He pulled a handful of change from his pocket and began to call for glass after glass of beer. The lady behind the bar was beaming with pleasure at the success of her experiment. Ordinarily she had made quite a row if her husband came home smelling of

beer—but now, when the profits were falling into her own hands, she made no complaint. It is not known how many glasses she sold her husband but there was quite a little pile of nickels and dimes on the shelf, and two or three quarters. Robert was leaning rather heavily against the bar, now and then raising his foot and making a dab for the rod that was not there, but he was saying very little. His wife ought to have known better, but the profits rendered her indiscreet.

Presently Robert remarked in a very loud tone: “Gozzamighty, se’ ’m up all roun’ barkeep’n puzzom on slate ’m busted.”

His wife looked at him in surprise. “Indeed, I will not, Robert,” she said. “You must pay me for everything you have. I thought you understood that.”

Robert looked in the mirror as straight as he could, counted his reflections, and then yelled loud enough to be heard a block away: “Gosh dang it, gi’ us six glasses beer and put ’em on ice, Susie, old girl, or I’ll clean out your joint, ’n bus’ up business. Whoopee!”

“Robert!” said his wife, in a tone implying a growing suspicion, “you’ve been drinking!”

“Zas d—d lie!” said Robert, as he threw a beer glass through the mirror. “Been down t’ office helpin’ friend pos’ up books ’n missed last car. Say, now, Susie, old girl, you owe me two beers from las’ time. Give ’em to me or I’ll kick down bar.”

Robert’s wife was named Henrietta. When he made this remark, she came around to the front and struck him over the eye with a lemon squeezer. Robert then kicked over the table, broke about half the bottles, spilled the beer, and used language not suited for the mailable edition.

Ten minutes later his wife had him tied with the clothesline, and during the intervals between pounding him on the head with a potato masher she was trying to think how to get rid of her last great original idea.