THE COURTSHIP OF WESLEY

By

Lulie Wells Smith

As Wesley plodded down the main road he glanced guiltily back over the green fields where straight rows of tobacco spread their broad leaves ripe for cutting. There was deeper guilt in his heart, too, when he thought of the project upon which he was bent. Never before had he done anything that he would have been ashamed to tell out in class-meeting at the little cross roads chapel where he was one of the younger leaders. The tall, gawky shadow he cast along the white road seemed a sort of premonitory figure of that better self that would follow him the rest of his life like an accusing angel. And it was all on account of a woman; not that she was to blame, except for the fact that she had soft white skin and fair hair, and the tiniest of feet that made his own seem monstrous, and the daintiest little figure, the kind that a big muscular fellow like Wesley yearns to hold in his arms.

Wesley had never been a ladies' man until the school teacher came into the neighborhood but he had been captured from the evening he drove to the station and she had sat beside him in the little spring wagon during the five miles they had to go in the September twilight. The scent of her gauzy handkerchief played about his senses for a week afterward; it was different from any perfume that had entered his nostrils, before acccustomed to the odors of "sweet basil," marjoram, and a generous sprinkling of musk in the closely packed little chapel of Sunday mornings.

Propinquity, that strong promoter of the tender passions, sealed his doom, for the school teacher boarded in his own house and came to bear upon him all the varied and wonderful charms of a woman.

He felt himself the most highly favored man in the universe to be able to live under the same roof with her, and to keep the little box behind the sheet-iron stove filled with wood sawed and split to a nicety, to handle a refractory boy behind the school house as an example to all others who should dare to defy the teacher's authority, and a hundred other offices that a big, strong man can perform for a young and fragile member of his household, that brought him unspeakable joy.

So far, however, from believing these offices were gaining for him the desired favor, Wesley would have dispensed with half of his muscular power to replace a deficiency that he feared would be an unsurmountable barrier between him and the young school marm.

It was a common enough failing in the neighborhood in which Wesley lived, and six months before, the fact that he could not write his own name, would not have embarrassed him a great deal. Since the school teacher had come into his life, however, it had become a real thorn in the flesh. Vainly he struggled with the little imps of the alphabet in his room by candle light when all the other members of the household were wrapped in slumber; but the goal of his ambition measured a distance that was beyond the feverish impatience that possessed him.

Wesley had been trembling on the verge of a proposal many times and would have committed himself long ago but for this barrier. For the idea of addressing the school teacher in writing seemed to have fixed itself in his mind as being the only method of procedure through which he could hope for a reciprocation. So it was an overwhelming desire to settle his fate, coupled with a hopelessness of attaining the educational qualification of being able to pen his own epistle, that led him to procure the agency of another party, upon which errand he was bound this afternoon.

The party he had decided to utilize was one Silas Mansur, postmaster and general groceryman combined; and as Silas was under obligation to him for a small loan, Wesley thought he might be glad to have it canceled in this way. He had chosen a time of the day when he could run the least chance of encountering loungers about the store, and sure enough the coast was clear and Silas was seated on a high chair behind the counter regaling himself with the latest postal card news that had come in.

"Howdy, Wes'," he greeted, reluctantly placing the cards in their respective pigeon holes as the visitor came behind the counter, "Air ye through cuttin'?"

"Well, I-I ain't clean through," was the embarrassed answer—"but I lef' off for a little spell, as I got a matter I want fixed up, an' I thought this would be the bes' time of day to ketch you—"

"Well, ef it's that little loan, I reck'n—"

"No, I ain't after pesterin' you 'bout that, Si," Wesley interrupted, to the other's relief, and tattooing awkwardly on the desk, he blurted out:

"Si, I've come down here to git you to do sump'n I can't do myself, an' that's to write a letter fer me!"

"Oh, that's it, is it?" Silas asked, with a grin, noticing the other's embarrassment. "Well, I reck'n I kin 'commodate you," he added, taking his pen from behind his ear. "Who's the lady?" eyeing Wesley suspiciously.

"I reck'n you know," was the answer, with a responsive grin to hide his embarrassed flush.

Then as Silas began to drawl the school teacher's name, writing it at the same time with many flourishes at the top of the sheet he had spread before him, Wesley grinned broader, and confessed with more blushes that that was the young lady in question.

"Now about the beginning?" was Si's next question with his most professional air, making ready to start. "You kin make it a little stronger by adding some words on the next line." Silas indicated with his pen the line below the one upon which the lady's name was inscribed, for the benefit of the uninitiated Wesley—"but that's accordin' to your intentions to the young lady." He paused for Wesley to intimate.

"Then you might make it a little stronger," the other suggested sheepishly after a pause.

"To the young lady that has my heart, how is that?" Silas poised his pen inquiringly.

Wesley nodded approvingly. "That's it," he said, and as Silas waited for further instructions he squirmed awkwardly in his seat and began to wipe the perspiration off his face.

"It's kinder hard to know what to say when you ain't exactly certain 'bout the young lady's feelin's," he stammered, "but I like that beginnin' an' I reck'n you kin put it more fancy like; but I want you to be sure to say I'm waitin' for her answer very patient, an ef she'll say yes, I'll be the happies' man in Chinkapin Hundred, an' ef she says no, it'll drive me to do what it will hurt her Tell her I'm able to take kere of her, that I'm workin' the place on sheers this year, but pa, he's promised to deed me a strip of lan' down by the fur gate, an' ef she ain't a mind to live with the old folks I'll build her a house on my own lan', an' say I'll make her a sober, industrious husband, an' 'll treat her like the apple of my eye, which she is, an' ever will be, even if she don't reciprocate my affections, an' then you kin win' up, Si," he finished, taking the first breath, "only as I'm partic'lar 'bout ... signin' other folk's name, suppose you jes say good-bye, my angel, till I hear from you, an' that'll do."

It seemed an age before Wesley had converted all this in a sure enough letter, even taking into consideration the beautiful flourishes with which it was embellished, and he had it in his coat pocket on his way to deliver into the hands of the school teacher. Then it seemed another age after he had intrusted it to the care of one of the school children and watched through the open window to be sure it was laid on the teacher's desk, before school was let out, though at last when he saw the children pouring out the door, the pretty school marm bringing up the rear, a real stage fright possessed him.

The idea of flight presented itself, but he dismissed it with a manly determination to stand his ground. When the teacher came up by him he could not look her in the face, but began to walk at her side, forgetting to offer to take her books as usual, until they had gone some distance and he made an awkward attempt to relieve her, dropping half of them on the ground in his confusion.

As he stopped to gather them up the fateful letter rolled out from between the pages of one of the books, and there was nothing for him to do but to pick it up and hand it to her. A shamed, side-long glance at her face told him that his doom was to be settled. He walked along, waiting for the verdict like a hero.

"Did you tell Jack Crawford to put that letter on my desk?" the school teacher asked, at last.

"Yes, Miss Elmira," was all he could say.

"Then I presume that you want my answer?" was the next question delivered in a suppressed tone.

"I-I—come here to git it," Wesley stammered.

"Then I'll give it to you now, and it's just no!" she said bluntly, not slackening her pace and looking straight ahead of her.

It came like a thunderbolt, even though he was in a measure prepared.

"Miss Elmira, I'm sorry, but—"

"I hate Silas Mansur, and he had no business writing that letter," she interrupted.

Wesley hung his head, his face flushed to the roots of his hair.

"I didn't know you'd be able to tell by the writin', 'deed I didn't; I reck'n it warn't actin' square, but Silas kin write an—"

"I don't care if he can write," she interrupted again. "Do you suppose I'm going to marry a man just because he can write; and after all, I'd rather marry the man I loved if he couldn't write his own name than one I don't care a straw about, even if you are so anxious to make the match for Silas Mansur, and I thought you'd be the last one to—" She broke off with a sob, turning to dash away the tears that sprang to her eyes.

Wesley felt the earth slipping under his feet, the sky seemed a dazzling, crimson vortex whirling above him through the dark tree tops.

"Miss Elmira!" he cried at last, "did you think that was Silas's own letter? for it warn't, 'deed it warn't!" he panted. "It was my letter, Miss Elmira, every word of it, only I got Silas to write it fer me, 'cause—'cause,—well, I ain't shamed fer you to know now, I can't write my own name."

"MARRY A MAN JUST BECAUSE HE CAN WRITE"?

Wild Geese Killed in Flight.

The southern migration of wild fowl this winter was unusually late and resulted in many disasters. The wild geese are reported from the northwest to have been especially severe sufferers.

The large black-headed goose is a strong, hardy bird, generally remaining on its own native water until the ice forms firmly. In the South it is only a visitor for the winter months. Born on some lake beyond the northern watershed, or perhaps on some inlet in Hudson Bay or the Arctic Ocean, its heart is ever loyal to the land of its birth.

Sometimes, when the cold weather sets in late up North, as in all probability it has this year, the wild geese suffer from their devotion to their native place. They may at this late season fly right into a streak of real winter, with driving snow to blind their vision and bitter frost to halt their flight.

If there is storm, their way leads right through it, until the leader's eyes are closed by the freezing of the snow about its head or its feathers become too heavy weighted. When the sight has gone and the birds are wearied, it is easy to see how misleading is much of the talk about the leadings of an extra sense. Like a ship without a rudder, the V-shaped flock will make for any low places.

Once a flock came tumbling into the street of an Eastern township's village, where the half-blinded things became the easy prey of the boys and the dogs.

In another place a farmer chanced one spring to find the frozen carcasses of more than thirty fine geese in a drift in one of the fence corners. The birds had evidently come to earth in some blinding storm, and, imagining they were nearing water, found instead the hard, snow-covered ground.

There are several instances recorded of flocks of geese in a storm running full tilt into the ends or sides of farm buildings. A large brood flew at full speed against the rigging of the whaling steamer Dart this month off the Newfoundland coast. A damp, snow-laden wind was blowing at the time, and eleven dead or dying geese fluttered on to the deck, the others alighting in a half-dead condition upon the waves.

A more pleasing story is of domestic geese in a large, well-appointed farmyard hailing with their hearty honks, a short time ago, a passing drove of twenty-two black bills. The strangers came down and followed their tame relations into the stable, where they have since stayed.

Re-Using Old Shoes.

Janitors collect the shoes cast away by tenants and send them to auction rooms, where they are sorted into piles marked "Men," "Women," "Children."

In a recent sale in one of the big cities, says the "Shoe Retailer," several poor people made fair bids, but the auctioneer did not seem eager to sell. Finally, a red-faced man pushed his way through the crowd and offered 10 cents apiece for the whole lot. His bid was successful.

"I was killing time with talk waiting for that fellow," said the auctioneer afterward. "He always pays high for these shoes and he does not want them for wearing, either. He wants to beat them out for the leather in them. He gets what material there is, puts it through a process and makes stamped frames, bags, pocketbooks, penknife holders, and even chair backs and seats. He finds a ready sale for these novelties and gets a good price for them."

There is a cherry stone at the Salem, Massachusetts, Museum which contains the fac-similes of one dozen silver spoons. They are so small that their shape and finish can only be distinguished by the microscope.

SUCCESSFUL WOMAN BUILDER.

Mrs. Theodos a Beacham, of Michigan Enterprising Railroad Contractor.

There are few fields of endeavor in which woman has not acquired a foothold. She is conspicuous in the arts, sciences and professions and she makes her presence felt in trade. Yet it is believed that one of the few of her sex to essay and succeed in railroad contracting and construction is a Michigan woman—Mrs. Theodosia Beacham. She is not notable for home-staying or house-keeping qualities, for her business calls for her presence in many parts of the United States and she has to deal with vast engineering problems—felling forests, tunneling mountains, bridging gorges, cutting through hills, filling gulches, setting and tamping ties and laying rails. The work demands that she be a skillful manager of men. She knows man as few women do—she directs their energies, gets out of them the most work possible, pays their wages, employs or discharges them. Men, mules, steam shovels and dynamite are her obedient agents. Necessarily she is a financier, talks and figures in the hundred thousands and the millions as readily as most men talk of dollars. In the parlance of the street she long ago made her stake and today is accounted the richest woman in Michigan and one of the very rich women of the world.

MRS. THEODOSIA BEACHAM.
A Manager of Men.

She has made estimates and carried out contracts on some of the longest and heaviest pieces of railroad construction in the country. Though her occupation is strenuous it would do Mrs. Beacham rank injustice to say that it has roughened her. There is a certain set of determination and firmness about her features, but her manner is feminine, and so are her tastes. She is such a good judge of men that she rarely has any trouble with them and it is not often that an employer is so genuinely popular with employees as Mrs. Beacham.

Mrs. Beacham has been making and executing railroad contracts for twenty years. She has two sons Claud and Erwin and her husband, though living is an invalid.

Much of this remarkable woman's work has been done in the southern states where railroad building has gone forward with Titantic strides in the last two decades and where a vast amount of building is now under way. On one contract with the Tennessee Central railroad, Mrs. Beacham's profit was $80,000, and it is calculated that her average annual earnings are about $50,000. The contract which she is now engaged in executing is the construction of five miles of railroad from Kirby Station, Virginia, westward. It is part of a contract for one hundred miles of the coal mine to sea railroad which was secured by Sands and Oliver of Richmond. These contractors sublet a short stretch of the work to Mrs. Beacham.

At present she is employing only about one hundred and fifty men but the proper control of this force and the purchase of the necessary supplies calls for the exercise of no little executive ability.

Royal Quarrels Over Chess.

King Edward, we are told, is developing an enthusiasm for chess. In that case, according to a writer in Tid-Bits, he is only following in the steps of many of his predecessors on the throne, including his namesake, the first Edward. Says the writer:

Whether or not players were more irascible in those old days than now, it is a curious fact that chess was often more stimulating to the royal tempers than is golf in these latter days, and many a game peacefully begun ended in broken heads. When Prince Henry—afterward Henry I.—once paid a visit to the court of France, "he wan so much at chesse of Louis, the king's eldest sonne, as he, growing into choler, called him (a naughty name) and threw the chesse in his face. Henry takes up the chesseboard, and strake Louis with that force as drew blood, and had killed him had not his brother Robert come in the meantime and interposed himselfe, whereupon they suddenly took horse and gat away."

King John in his younger days had a similar experience; for a game of chess in which his opponent was one Fulk Warine ended in a royal row, during which Fulk gave the prince "so grievous a blowe as almost to slaie him on the spot." John never forgot the blow nor forgave his tracible opponent, and punished him, when later he came to the throne, by withholding his heritage—Whittington castle—from him.

William the Conqueror more than once lost his temper over the game, and on at least one occasion with serious consequences. He was playing with the son of the king of France when a dispute led to hot words, and culminated in William bringing down the board so heavily on his opponent's head as to render him unconscious.

Louis XIII. of France was so infatuated with the game that wherever he went he was accompanied by his chessboard and men and invariably played it in his coach when he took drives abroad. Charles I. found it so fascinating that he almost literally played it to the foot of the scaffold; and when once his game was interrupted by news that the Scots had decided to sell him to the parliament he proceeded with his move as unruffled as if, instead of hearing his doom, he had received a summons to dinner. And when John Frederick, Elector of Saxony, heard over the chessboard the news that he had been condemned to death, he completed his move and was again immersed in the game before the messenger had had time to withdraw.

New Chinese Methods.

Chan Chun Man, head of a Canton firm employing over ten thousand hands, has been studying American industries. In Philadelphia, apropos of the Chinese awakening, he said: "China has for thousands of years been highly enough civilized to despise war. Her new-born respect for war is not an unmixed good. There is, perhaps, a little of degeneration, of barbarism, in it. But at least China will no longer be the laughing stock of nations more warlike than herself. It will no longer be possible to say of her, as a Chinese general once explained a defeat with the following report: 'The ignorant enemy, unaware that guns could not be fired against an object behind them, came upon us from the rear and thus rendered all our cannon useless.'"

She Bested the Emperor.

The great opera singer, Mme. Grisi, who was married to Signor Mario, the tenor, was singing in St. Petersburg. The emperor, the father of the present Czar gave Mme. Grisi permission to walk in his private park. One morning the emperor met Mme. Grisi, accompanied by two little girls. The emperor saluted her and said: "Are these two Grisettes?" "No, your majesty," replied Mme. Grisi, "these are two Marionettes."

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