

A Long Distance Marriage

By S. T. STERN

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With most people the story ends after the heart interest has been properly adjusted. Thus: Proposal, acceptance, tableau, final.

In our case the situation reversed itself. I had suggested to Veryl, fervently, of course, that proper economy would sanction the practice of sending out her wedding invitations and my own in the same envelopes. With the money saved thereby I agreed to purchase outright a ring—a gleaming, glistening affair—with a large single stone. To this day I do not know whether she said yes. I have a vague impression that she said nothing at all. Presently I found myself seated by her side holding her hand, which leads me to suspect that some manner of affirmation must have greeted my proposal. We were engaged. With that our story starts. Thus: Proposal, acceptance, tableau, chapter one.

For the next few moments neither of us spoke. We sat gazing into the fire, quiet and deliciously happy. "What are you thinking, dear?" said I at length.

"I am thinking of our wedding, John. It will be splendid to be married in England."

"England?"

"Of course," she replied. "Don't you remember? Father is at Matlock, in Derbyshire. When I last left him he exacted from me a solemn promise that I should never be married during his lifetime unless in his presence. I know, dear, it means a long trip for both of us and the absence of a great many of your friends from the ceremony. But dad has my promise, and it must be kept. Why, John, you are starting at me as though I had committed a crime. Don't—don't look at me like that. Are you afraid of the ocean voyage?"

"Not that, Veryl. The situation is worse—far worse. My mother is no longer young, and I am the last of



"SHE LEFT FOR AMERICA LAST THURSDAY."

the brood. When I told her last night what I expected to say to you she asked me to be married at once. 'Laddie,' she said, 'I am getting old, and before I go I want to see you married and settled down. Promise me, son, that you will be married as soon as possible, so that I can be here to see my boy united to the woman of his choice.' I promised."

"But your mother can go to England with us, dearest."

"Impossible. She has a horror of the ocean that nothing can conquer. Why not bring your father to America?"

"If I waited for father to come to America to see me married, John, I must die a splinter. The last time we crossed it took him four months to summon up his courage to the point of embarkation. Three times we bought tickets; twice we forfeited our deposits. Once on shore, he assured me that he had suffered his last trip. John, you are such a resourceful, clever fellow that you must devise some way out of our dilemma."

At first I suggested to Veryl that had the ceremony be performed at Matlock and that we proceed by different steamers to America, where the remaining portion might be read. Veryl would have none of it. She had covenanted to be married in the presence of her parent—not half married.

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"And, besides, John," she added reproachfully, "if anything should happen to you on the return trip I would be a semiwidow." The lugubrious prospect of semiwidowhood invited tears, and I desisted. The plan of marriage by cable, next advanced, met with like discouragement as being "too much on the order of an international chess tournament." Wireless telegraphy offered some slight prospect of solution, but Veryl retracted on account of its uncertainty. With the rattle of the first milk wagon on the street outside and its reminder that morning had arrived came the scheme that we finally adopted. Veryl was to go to England, I to remain behind in America. On the 14th day of June at high noon, Greenwich time, she was to stand before her father in Matlock and repeat her responses. At the same instant I agreed to go through the ceremony at my mother's home in Belmont. That necessitated a slight postponement of our honeymoon and the omission of a bridal procession.

Veryl grieved over both features. I shared only half her sorrow.

As time went on Veryl became quite reconciled to our marriage plan despite the separation it involved. She is a most unconventional little person at all times, and the oddity of the arrangement doubtless appealed to her strongly. With me it was otherwise. The glory of our engagement was quite dimmed by the prospect of her departure for the other side. When she sailed on the 1st day of June my grief was abysmal. Mother has since assured me that for three entire days I ate not a morsel of food. My thoughts were with a certain ocean greyhound speeding over its Atlantic lane, and I read and reread nothing but storm reports and derelict statistics.

One Friday evening I found two small trunks in our front hallway. The maid informed me that they were there by order of my mother. When she came down for dinner that evening I noted at once an air of suppressed excitement about her, but I asked no questions.

"Son," said she after we had seated ourselves. "I bought your wedding present today. See?"

Imagine my astonishment when she held out for my inspection passage tickets for Southampton by next day's steamer.

"But, mother," I protested, "I cannot leave you. I intend to keep my promise. I know I am a selfish brute in acting as I have been doing, but I cannot help myself."

"Son," said my mother, "the Rodney is safe in every way. I have seen her captain, who is an old friend of your father, and he assures me his boat is perfectly seaworthy and that a trip at this season of the year is a mere pleasure jaunt. Yes, I am going with you. We sail tomorrow morning. Don't bug me like that! I go with you on one condition."

"And that is?"

"That our departure be kept a secret from Veryl. We must surprise her."

We had an uneventful trip. I remember very little of it. Some time during the second day we passed a lonely whale. He excited my sympathy at the time. Somehow, somewhere, we landed and took train for London. We rushed through London in a cab and found ourselves on another train. As near as I can remember we spent four months on that train, though mother says it was nearer five hours. Late that afternoon, she tells me, we reached Matlock. We climbed a long, steep hill and found ourselves in front of a very large and very gloomy hotel, bearing a sign which read "The Matlock Arms."

The next scene will abide with me to my dying day. A fat clerk stood in front of us and held out a long pen.

"Is Miss Veryl Preston at home?" I asked.

"No, sir."

"Where is she?"

"She left for America last Thursday with the general, her father. She said something about being married over there and planning a surprise for her fiancé."

Yes, we were married, after all. Veryl cabled that she was coming back at once after I had cabled my own whereabouts. She insisted on being married in England. I insisted on New York. We compromised on New York.

Unbidden guests are often welcomed when they are gone.—Shakespeare.

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7:45 a.m.	for Portland and way points	11:30 a.m.
6:10 p.m.		10:30 p.m.

SEASIDE DIVISION

Leave	ASTORIA	Arrive
11:35 a.m.	for Seaside Direct	5:50 p.m.

Leave	ASTORIA	Arrive
7:15 a.m.	for Warrenton, Hammond, Ft. Stevens, Seaside	*10:45 a.m.
5:50 p.m.		7:40 a.m.

Leave	SEASIDE	Arrive
4:30 p.m.	for Astoria Direct	12:30 p.m.

Leave	SEASIDE	Arrive
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9:30 a.m.		7:20 p.m.

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