

# A Knight Who Fought For Lady's Smile

By ELIZABETH McCracken

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The knight sat on a small folding chair of the kind used in some kindergartens. The lady had, in fact, had the chair brought up to her room from the settlement kindergarten room for this very purpose. The lady sat opposite in a low rocking chair, holding a hank yellow kitten in her lap.

The knight was young in years, but patriarchal in experience and point of view, as his mother said, with a pride but feebly echoed by the long suffering college settlement family.

"He be only twelve, sure; but, faith, who'd be knowin' it? He be that forward!" He was forward—prominently forward, distinctly forward, constantly forward.

The name of the knight was Warren Flanagan, but he was commonly known as Wary, and one of the younger residents of the settlement once almost shattered the dignity of the institution by declaring that it was an excellent name for him because one had continually to be wary in dealing with him.

"He is the black sheep of the settlement," the head resident explained to the lady the day of her arrival, when she had asked, in that ignorance which is bliss, "Who is that interesting looking boy with ragged clothes and searching blue eyes?" The head resident continued: "He tenses the kindergarten children, fights with the other boys, is cruel to animals, torments the girls—and wears us to shadows. He is in two clubs, and when they meet—well, he becomes a nuisance. We don't like to expel Wary. The settlement is for the benefit of just such boys. We try to help him, to make him, to make him different, but he is the black sheep of the settlement."

"The black eye would be more apt a name," one of the residents murmured. "Wary always has one."

The head resident and the other members of the family smiled pityingly and indulgently when the newest, the youngest, resident—the lady—said, "Have you told him how unchivalrous all this is?" The lady had pale brown hair and dreamy blue eyes, and her name was Ellen—Ellen Douglas—but her own family, and within a week the settlement family also, called her Elaine.

"My dear," said the kindergarten, "we have told him how uneverything else it all is, but we never happened to remember chivalry when remembering Wary. The two don't combine. They would explode with surprise if they were brought within speaking distance of each other," she explained, with a fine disregard for mixed metaphors.

The lady was the newest and the youngest, but her blue eyes were not altogether dreamy, and she was of the clan of Douglas.

"Then, if you've tried everything else, I shall try chivalry," she said.

"If at first you don't succeed, try, try again!" laughed the family. "Try anything you like," they said. "You won't touch Wary. He is invulnerable, like Achilles."

"Achilles had one vulnerable spot," nuzzled the new resident. "I shall first get acquainted with Wary and then try chivalry." She announced this double intention to the family. They again smiled pityingly.

"Oh, you'll get acquainted with Wary soon enough," they said darkly. The new resident did. Ten days after her arrival, as she emerged from the house with a list of names, the owners of which she was commissioned to invite to the next mothers' meeting, she met Wary, in the act of ringing the doorbell. His cotton shirt



ELLEN LOOKED INTO THE SHREWD, MISCHIEVOUS FACE.

was torn and dusty, his brown feet were tanned and dusty, and his black eye was blacker than usual. He had, in fact, just completed a victory, and while waiting for other worlds to conquer he was improving the moment by ringing the settlement bell. The sudden appearance of Ellen, in her exquisitely dainty pale brown linen and floating blue scarf, did not overpower him. Wary was accustomed to such visions of delight known as "kisses."

"Hello," he observed. "I ain't seen you afore."

"I came yesterday," said Ellen. "How do you do?" She held out her hand. It was pale brown, too, and strong, and on one finger of it was a ring set with a turquoise. Wary grasped it with his bright eyes. "You seem to be all brown an' blue," he observed.

Ellen smiled, but she said, "Why were you ringin' the bell?"

"Jes' for fun," Wary said and smiled in return.

"It isn't nice of you. It gives some one the trouble of coming to the door all for nothin'."

"Wasn't you already at the door?" Wary queried.

"Yes, but I hadn't been!"

"But you was, you see. An' fac's is fac's. Women never thinks o' that," said Wary, who was forward.

Ellen looked into the shrewd, mischievous face, with its unfaltering eyes. "You understand what I mean," she said gravely.

"And"—Wary had this effect upon her—"women think of more than you imagine!" With this remark this very, very young gentleman worked swept down the steps and went to make her calls. Wary started after her.

"Well, I'll be jiggered!" he ejaculated. "She ain't jes' like the rest. She talked like—a was a man."

As she turned into the street on which the settlement was situated, after the last call, he was forcibly brought again to her mind and before her horrified eyes. The portion of the street in the vicinity of the settlement was in a state of wild excitement. The settlement steps were crowded with little children, chiefly girls, and the curbstones were lined with older children, chiefly boys. In the middle of the street stood, or, more accurately, danced and cavorted, Wary before two bedraggled cats, whose tails were tied together with an old red necktie. Ellen, for an outraged moment, stood rooted to the spot. Then, with her lips in a line that would have done credit to the Douglas to whose race and clan she loved to think she, Ellen Douglas, belonged, she approached Wary. With one hand she seized him. "Cute that string!" she said.

"Ain't no string," said Ellen Douglas. And Wary untied the red necktie, which technically was a string.

One of the cats rushed furiously away, but the other, a yellow kitten with green spots, covered up to Ellen. She took it in one arm. With the other hand she held Wary. "Come with me," she said. She expected Wary to resist, but he did not.

He even opened a cheerful conversation. "You'll get yourself all scratched up with that cat," he said sweetly, as they entered the hall of the settlement.

Ellen declined to reply. She led the way up to her room. Ellen had but one chair. She did not offer her couch. She sent Wary down to the kindergarten room for a kindergarten chair. Wary seated himself in the kindergarten chair, and Ellen sat opposite with the kitten.

"Wary," Ellen began, "it surely cannot be necessary to tell you that it is positively wicked to be cruel to animals." She stroked the yellow kitten and she met Wary's eyes squarely. "How could you do it, Wary?"

"It was fun," Wary said. "My, how they powled!"

"But, Wary, it was cruel. It couldn't be fun."

"You ever tied two cats' tails together?" Wary inquired.

Ellen's voice was inflexibly stern. "No, I never did," she said.

"Then how do you know it ain't fun?"

At a similar point the family usually dismissed Wary, but Ellen did not. "Wary!" she said reproachfully.

Wary was unprepared by experience for this. He wriggled, but he replied, "Women's got such upside down ways o' arguin'."

"I am not intending to argue with you, Wary," Ellen said. "I only ask how you could be so cruel to those cats, and so thoughtless to people too?"

"You are. Why are you, Wary?" She lifted her eyes and looked gently and steadily at the boy. "Why are you?"

Wary was but twelve, in spite of the fact that he was forward. He was having a new experience, and he found himself unprepared for its handling. He had frequently been rebuked; he had frequently been asked, "Wary, how could you?" but this questioner was the first to ask and then to expect and to desire a reply. The vulnerable spot of the child of the street is acutely responsive if one can but touch it.

This girl was unconsciously trying to understand Wary, and Wary happened to need to be understood more than he needed to be made different. He had had so many monitors—and so few friends.

"Why do you, Wary?" Ellen persisted.

Wary regarded her frankly. "Well, nobody cares wot I do—less it bothers 'em, so I jes' do wot I thinks on an' have fun."

"But, Wary, that doesn't excuse you. You ought to do right, because it is right," said Ellen a trifle uncertainly.

"Don't people care wot you do?"

"Yes," said Ellen. "Oh, yes. There are people who do so much—people who are fond of me."

"Don't you care whether they cares? How'd you feel if nobody cared, less it bothered 'em?"

"I care, Wary," Ellen said earnestly. "I haven't known you long, but I do care. Do you think knowin' it will make any difference to you?"

"I dunno," Wary said, staring at her. "I'll kinder have to git used to thinkin' it."

Ellen looked at him in silence. Then she smiled. She suddenly recollected her announced resolution to try chivalry with Wary. She impulsively unfastened the blue scarf that she wore and held it out to the boy. "In old, old days," she said, "when men fought they were called knights, and they didn't tease animals and little girls, and they didn't fight for fun."

"Wot did they fight for?"

Ellen smiled dreamily. "They fought for lady's smiles."

"Kinder silly of 'em," said Wary scornfully.

"Oh," Ellen hastened to explain. "They didn't fight just for that. They fought for good causes—to protect weak people and save poor people, and it pleased the gentle ladies, and they smiled."

"Did the knights git in much fightin'?"

Ellen was moved to a faint smile by the knight's question. "Not any more than was needed," she said. "And each knight wore—something belonging to the lady who was his—his best friend, to remind him to do things that would be good and kind. Now, Wary, I'll be your best friend, and you be my knight, and here's my scarf. You can wear it for a necktie, and it will remind you. Now, won't you? I'll lend you some stories about the other knights, so you can see how they did. Won't you? Just think how I shall enjoy having a knight!"

Wary stared at her with wide eyes. She was at least different from the other people of his experience. He took the pretty blue silk scarf in his dirty fingers. Then he smiled, with the mischievousness still

in his eyes. "I'll think 'bout it," he said guardedly, but he allowed Ellen to tie the scarf around under his torn collar.

"Women is queer," he meditated as he bounded down the stairs, "but I wish I'd been along of them knights with plumes an' swords an' fightin' such as people like I an' didn't git scandalized over."

During the fortnight that immediately followed Wary reflected upon more than he admitted to his knights. He wore Ellen's blue scarf; he read Ellen's book of knightly tales, and both scarf and book became ruffled and soiled, and still did people get scandalized over Wary. They had almost the usual provocations. Wary continued to fight for other cause than lady's smile, and the lady was in despair, and the family, it must be confessed, humbly triumphant.

"You know how much good the other Elaine's token did Lancelot," they said, but the spirit of the twentieth century was in this lily maid, and she said, "You told me yourself, if at first you don't succeed, try, try again! I'll give him one more day, then I'll take back my token."

"Elaine, fair Elaine, fly to your casement window!" called the kindergarten excitedly early next morning before breakfast as Ellen stood brushing her pale brown hair. Ellen dropped her brush and "flew to the window. In the street stood Wary, a red can under one arm and a dog under the other.

"You hold the dog," Ellen heard him say to another boy, "an' I'll be on the can."

The boy held the dog, and Wary seized the dog's tail; then he fumbled in his pocket. "Ain't got no string," he said ruefully.

"Take yer tin," said the other boy.

Wary quickly untied the blue token of Elaine, while Elaine groaned and the family were mercifully silent. Wary grasped the can; he grasped the dog's tail, and then he stopped. He let the can fall. "You ain't let the dog go 'tats time," he said. "The tin—ain't strong enough."

He stuffed it into his pocket and turned away. Ellen threw up her window.

"Wary! Wary!" she called joyfully. She smiled and waved her hand.

Wary glanced at the window, turned fiery red and ran around the corner. The lady, whose remote ancestor was the Douglas sung in Scottish lay, had highland flings in her usually undancing gray eyes when, some moments later, her hair no longer flying, she met the family at breakfast.

Unhappily knights are not made in one day or even in two weeks. Wary had, figuratively speaking, fought once for lady's smile. He had even enjoyed the smile of the lady, but nature and habit were strong, and the next day he tied the can to the dog's tail with a piece of twine. Ellen saw the deed; the family saw the deed. Ellen said not a word; she ran downstairs, out the door and down the settlement steps.

"Wary!" she called. "Untie that string!" Wary dropped the can, and

away the poor tormented dog sped, followed by Wary's complaints. "How kin I?" the knight said to his lady.

She did not reply. "Come here," she said, and Wary went. He was unembarrassed and not very defensive. The lady was different, but he had known her not more than two weeks, and two weeks is so short a time in which to hope to change very materially a boy of the streets. The blue scarf was wound round Wary's neck. Ellen untied it with firm hands and removed it.

"A knight who is cruel isn't a knight at all, and can't wear my token," she said gravely. She turned without another word and went into the house, bearing her maltreated blue scarf. Wary was amazed.

"Well, I'll be jiggered," he exclaimed, with a long whistle. "If she don't care! Who'd er thought it? If I'd known she cared! But, land, who kin live up to women?"

During the next week he was seen less than usual. He was less forward than usual. Ellen's conscience smote her. She wished that she had not taken away the token.

She watched for him anxiously. She was perversely glad to see him one day, his old time gaiety recovered, as momentarily she came to her window to lower the shade. About half an hour later as she came downstairs the bell rang furiously. "That's a Wary ring," said one of the family boldly from the library door. "Don't answer it, sweet lily maid."

"I'm going out anyway," said the lily maid. And she bravely turned the door knob. The door burst open, and Wary, more torn, more dusty, than usual, with one eye swelling to an alarming and purple size, scrambled in, dragging a howling, terrified small girl by the hand.

The small girl was as disheveled and as dusty as Wary, and Ellen was attired for calls not to be made in the neighborhood. But, regardless of her crisp and spotless white pique and white gloves, she gathered the small girl in her arms and indignantly turned upon Wary.

"Wary, how could you?" she said in a tone that would have melted a heart of granite.

Wary stared at her with his uninjured eye. He sighed. "Women ain't got no idea o' things," he said. "I ain't hurtin' her. She had a cent, an' a feller grabbed it an' hit her, an' I jes' grabbed her an' pounded the feller—beat him, too—an' got her cent. She's scared to go home, an' I ain't got no time for girls, so I brung her here. You talked a lot 'bout goin' 'bout redressin' human wrongs, an' then w'er I does it you gits mad an' says, 'Wary, how could you?' There ain't no countin' on women!" The knight regarded the lady plaintively.

"Wary," the lady pleaded, "please forgive me. You see, I didn't know. It helped."

"Women order fear, not to go by books, said the knight sternly.

"Of course they ought," agreed the lady. "I won't again, Wary. Now, please forgive me or I can't smile, when you've fought for lady's smile too." She smiled now and held out her hand in its white glove.

Wary relented and took it. "Well—all right," he said nobly.

"Kin I have back the blue token now?" he said eagerly. "She'd 'ave been pounded awful if I hadn't rescued her."

The tears came into Elaine's eyes, and she was obliged to dry them before she replied. "This very moment!" she said. She took the two children to her room. She bathed the small girl's face, and she put white hazel on Wary's eye. Then she found the blue scarf.

"It is so—old, Wary," she said. "Wouldn't you like me to get you a new one just like it?"

Wary shook his head. "I sorter want that one, 'cause it was the one I had first," he said.

Some fresh tears came into the lady's eyes. "You'll keep it this time, won't you, Wary?"

"You bet!" said the knight. "It won't be so easy, though, 'cause w'en I sees a dog I jes' aches ter tie a can ter its tail—but I'd jes' as soon git along 'bout doin' it, if you find it so awful." This shows Wary's forwardness, but as he went home with the small girl he gave voice to a sentiment which shows it most and best.

"Women is queer," he said. "They's got no eye for fac's, an' they cry when you'd expect 'em ter smile. They's that usartin' there's no countin' on wot they'll do." But they's sorer nice, an' they's that tender they takes all the fun outer tyin' cans ter a dog's tail an' sich like. They sorter makes a feller want ter do wot they expects, so's not ter disappoint 'em. Wot they expects cuts more ice than wot they thinks, if they only knowed it!"

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Pretty flowers and queens;  
Gnats now have a gay time—  
Hoist your window screens.  
—Cleveland Plain Dealer.

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