

THE COURTSHIP OF WESLEY

By Lollie Wells Smith

Wesley plodded down the main road, glanced guiltily back over his shoulder, and saw straight rows of tobacco fields spread their broad leaves ripe for harvest. There was deeper guilt in his heart, too, when he thought of the prospect upon which he was bent. Never before had he done anything that he would have been ashamed to tell out in the street, meeting at the little cross roads where he was one of the younger leaders. The tall, gawky shadow he saw along the white road seemed a sort of premonitory figure of that being 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 faintest of a smile that made his own seem monstrous, and the daintiest little figure, the kind that a big muscular fellow like Wesley years 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 handkerchiefs played about his senses for a week afterward; it was different from any perfume that had entered his nostrils, before accustomed to the odors of "sweet basil," marjoram, and a generous sprinkling of musk in the closely packed little chapel of Sunday mornings.

Propitiously, that strong promoter of the tender passions, sealed his doom, for the school teacher boarded in his house and came to hear 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-lead stove filled with wood sawed and split to a nicety, to handle a refractory log behind the school house as an excuse to all others who should dare to deny 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

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—come here to get 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 reckon it wasn'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. 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 wasn't, 'deed it wasn't!" he panted. "It was my letter, Miss Elmira, every word of it, only I got Silas to write it for me, 'cause—'cause, well, I ain't ashamed fer you to know now, I can't write my own name."



MRS. THEODOSIA BEACHAM.
A Manager of Men.

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.

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, Clark 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 Titanic 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 Oiler 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 is the purchase of the necessary supplies calls for the exercise of no little executive ability.

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 his 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 to 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.

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"MARRY A MAN JUST BECAUSE HE CAN WRITE?"

with half of his muscular power to replace a deficiency that he feared would be an insurmountable barrier between him and the young school marm.

It was a common enough falling 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 seen 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 would run the least chance of encountering loungers about the store, and sure enough the coast was clear and

young lady's feelin's," he stammered. "but I like that beginnin' an' I reckon you kin put it more fancy like; but I want you to be sure to say 'I waitin' for her answer very patient, an' ef she'll say yes, I'll be the happiest man in Chinkapin Hundred, an' ef she says no, I'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 sheets 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' I'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 folks signin' their place on sheets 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' I'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 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