

PAPA'S HEAD has always been turned by a pretty face and a neatly turned ankle, so we weren't at all surprised when he came home with Lady Washington. Mama, especially, wasn't surprised.

I remember it was just before the Fayette County Fair, and just after Speedwell died.

Speedwell was Mama's lanky, long-legged old buggy horse. Completely trustworthy, and with a heart of gold, he was much too long in the face to be considered handsome. His ears lopped to either side, more like antlers than ears, and his bones poked out every which way. My brother, Haywood, said he looked like someone had thrown an old brown carpet over the back fence.

What Speedwell looked like, though, didn't matter, for he took excellent care of Mama on her many jaunts to town and around the countryside. Regardless of weather or time of day, he just shuffled along wherever Mama pointed him, head nodding, ears flopping. Mama called him her "treasure."

I always imagined Speedwell had been named by someone hopeful when he was a frolicking young colt. Haywood said he thought he was named by someone who liked to play tricks. Papa said it didn't

Mama and Lady Washington Part 1



matter who named him, or for what reason, we were not to make jokes about Speedwell in front of Mama. So we hardly ever did.

Still, despite Speedwell's appearance, we knew he *was* a "treasure," and the morning our neighbor, Mr. Scofield, came tapping at our back door was a sad one.

Mr. Scofield told Papa he'd better come and have a look at old

Speedwell, as he seemed to be "sleeping" in a mighty strange way, with his head under the fence in Mama's roses.

We buried Speedwell at the edge of the rose garden and put up a headstone. I painted his name on it and the words "SLEEP WELL TRUSTED FRIEND." Later, Haywood crossed out the T in TRUSTED. When it was discovered, he said he thought RUSTED was more fitting, anyway. And now he was a BURIED TREASURE. This made Mama cry, so Haywood was sent to his room to reflect on his inner self.

As I mentioned, the other event marking the arrival of Lady Washington was the Fayette County Fair. The fair is held the last week in August and has something for everyone. Haywood and I love the carousel. Mama likes the flower show. Papa likes the livestock judging. But he especially likes the horse racing. There is

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supposed to be a sideshow with dancing girls and musclemen, but Haywood and I have only heard about it.

Getting back to Lady Washington . . .

One morning Haywood and I were keeping Mama company in the parlor, when Papa came striding in. "Livinia!" he bel-lowed. "Please, come outside! I want you to meet Lady Washington!" Papa almost always speaks in exclamation points.

Mama is used to Papa's interruptions, so with a small sigh, she put down her sewing and followed him outside. Haywood and I were right on her heels.

Out on the veranda, Papa made a grand sweep with his arm. "This," he announced as if introducing royalty, "is Lady Washington!"

Tied to the hitching post at our front gate was a beautiful chestnut mare. The sun glinted on her red coat so that she glowed like a new penny. She had big, bright eyes and little ears that pricked up like two tiny crescent moons. A white stripe ran down her face, and each dainty hoof wore a perfect white stocking. She was the prettiest horse I had ever seen.

"Dash it!" exclaimed Haywood.

I glared at him in annoyance. Haywood and I are twins, and we are both exactly twelve years old. We both have red hair and freckles and we both hate liver and Brussels sprouts. So I don't think it is fair that he can use expletives and I cannot.

Mama tried to explain. "It is different for boys, Annabelle. After all, they have to grow up to be men and will need to use expletives to make themselves fully understood." She looked pointedly at Papa.

This time, though, no one was listening to Haywood. Papa was charging on in his usual way. "Pure Vermont Morgan, my dear! Best bloodlines anywhere! A great-great-granddaughter of old Justin Morgan himself! Why, she's as neat a little package as can be found! Don't you agree, my dear?" Papa didn't wait for Mama to agree or disagree. He hooked his thumbs under his suspenders and rocked back on his heels. He was very pleased with himself.

When I glanced at Mama, I had the feeling she wasn't as pleased as Papa. Mama is on the small side and looks like a French doll, so people sometimes make assumptions about her. But she actually has strong opinions about nearly everything. She scanned Lady Washington with a critical eye.

"She certainly has a lot of white on her, doesn't she, James?" she said, looking down her nose ever so slightly.

I knew Mama had already decided Lady Washington was much too flashy to be a lady's buggy horse.

"Nonsense, my dear!" Papa said heartily. "Those old rules don't apply any longer! Why, this is 1890! Times have changed. Besides, a touch of white dresses her up! Catches the eye!"

Mama disagreed; I could tell by the set of her chin. But, wanting to appear reasonable, she nodded and headed down the walk. Haywood was strides in front of her. The mare lowered her head to him. She nickered and nuzzled his hand. Papa beamed in satisfaction.

Then Mama approached. Lady Washington snorted and flung up her head,

EXPLETIVES ARE EXCLAMATIONS.
YOU SHOULDN'T USE IN
POLITE COMPANY.



OH MY!
NOPE!
NOT LIKE
THAT.



MORGAN IS A BREED OF HORSE DESCENDED
FROM JUSTIN MORGAN, A HORSE CALLED
AFTER HIS OWNER, A VERMONT SCHOOLMASTER
AND SINGING TEACHER.



pinning her ears back flat. Those limpid, doelike eyes turned steely. Mama stepped back and assessed things.

Then, squaring her shoulders, once again she stepped up, and once again, those tiny ears flew back. This time the mare swished her tail irritably.

"James," Mama said turning to Papa, "she doesn't like me."

"Bosh, Livinia! Of course she likes you. She's merely unsettled. New home and all that! She'll come around in a day or two!"

I could tell Mama didn't believe a word of it. And neither did I, to be honest. Lady Washington didn't look one bit unsettled.

It wasn't until later, when the Lady, as we began calling her, was safe in Speedwell's old stall, and we were at dinner,

LIMPID
MEANS
CALM AND
CLEAR.



PURRY-PURRR
..(BLINK, BLINK)

that Mama inquired, "Tell me, James, where did you get *my* new mare?" The way Mama said *my* had a fine red line drawn under it.

"Oh yes . . . Well, that brings me to a point I meant to discuss with you, my dear. . . ."

Mama rested her chin on her hand and looked straight at Papa. "Yes?"

"You see . . . I was thinking; that is, I was wondering—" All at once he plunged on. "You see, dear Livinia, Lady Washington is such a speedster, I thought it might be great fun to enter her in the race at the fair this month!"

"I see," said Mama. "You would like to enter *my* new buggy horse in the trotting race?"

"Why, I think that's a splendid idea!" Papa said with gusto. "You could use her for your little jaunts, and I could try my hand at racing!" Papa chuckled. No doubt he was seeing himself steaming across the finish line. He was lost in the glow of victory. He chuckled again. "And then wouldn't I have the last laugh on old Solomon Derby!"

"Solomon Derby!" Mama was horrified. "James, you don't mean to tell me you bought her from that old scoundrel!"

All at once, Papa became intent on his dinner plate. "Annabelle," he said turning to me, "would you kindly pass the piccalilli?"

Mama was not to be put off. "James, I cannot believe you would patronize that horse thief again. Haven't you had quite enough from him? Nothing good has ever come from Mr. Derby's stable, and never will!"

I knew exactly what Mama meant.

For after Speedwell died, Papa went right out to get Mama another buggy horse. He went straight to Derby's Blue Ribbon Horse Sales.

The first horse Papa came home with was a nice gentle gray. His name was Bertie. He was quiet and willing, just like old Speedwell. But he kept bumping into things. In short order, Mr. Scofield discovered Bertie was blind in one eye. His vision wasn't too good in the other one, either. Mr. Derby was only too happy to take Bertie back. Probably because he sold Papa another horse, for even more money.

This horse, whose name was Firestone, had perfect vision, but the first time Mama drove him to town, he broke down—right in the middle of Main Street. He just stood there, wheezing and sputtering and coughing, unable to go another step. Quite a crowd gathered to see. Haywood and I felt sorry for him, and also for Mama, who turned red with embarrassment.

This time Papa didn't need Mr. Scofield to tell him what was wrong. Mama told him in no uncertain terms.

"James, that poor horse was blowing like a pair of bellows before we even got to town! Oh, to be made such a spectacle of! You must return him to Mr. Derby at once and demand your money back!"

Papa did as he was told, and for a week Mama was without a buggy horse.

Finally, at breakfast one morning, she heaved the biggest sigh I'd ever heard her heave. "James, dear, I simply must have another horse. Mrs. Snelling is hosting a lawn party on the twenty-fifth in Hemlock

Falls. The children are invited, too, for ice cream and a magic lantern show. It should be a marvelous day—if we can get there.”

“Dash it!” exclaimed Haywood.

Mama raised her eyebrows. “Manners,” she reminded.

“Papa,” I said, “do you think we’ll have a new horse by then? Do you think we’ll be able to go?”

“Not to worry, dear heart! I’ll look into it at once!” He wiped his mustache and bounded to his feet.

“James,” Mama said, “you will try someone other than Solomon Derby, won’t you?” It sounded like a question, but I knew it was not.

Papa muttered something into his napkin that sounded like, “I’ll try,” and left. A few minutes later we heard Papa and his horse, Reynard, trotting down the drive.

This, of course, brings me right back to where I started, with Lady Washington.

For the first few days after the Lady arrived, Mama did her best to make friends. She took the mare apples and carrots every morning. The Lady took the treats ever so gently from Mama’s hand. But, as soon as the treats were gone, back would go the ears and *swish* would go that long, graceful tail.

As soon as Mama realized she wouldn’t be able to win the Lady’s affection, she determined to make the best use of her she could. After all, Lady Washington was a driving horse, and drive she would.

Haywood and I were at the gate the morning Papa hitched the Lady to Mama’s little runabout.

“James,” Mama said, stepping into the

buggy, “it might be best if you went once around with me before I set off for town.” Papa happily agreed.

Haywood and I watched them drive off. Lady Washington arched her neck and tucked her nose, looking as dainty as a dancer. She was so light in Papa’s hands, the reins could have been made of thread. Papa looked handsome, sitting straight and tall, and Mama was a picture in her new hat covered with pink cabbage roses. As they trotted by, Mama smiled delightedly.

In a short time they were back. Papa stepped down and handed Mama the reins. “There you go, my dear; you’ll be just fine! Remember, a light touch is all that’s called for!”

For once Mama seemed 100 percent pleased. “Yes, James, I do believe we’ll be fine.” And off they trotted.

They were back in no time at all. Only this time Mama didn’t look so pleased. “James,” she called, “will you come out here?”

Papa appeared, face lathered, razor in hand. “Yes, Livinia, what seems to be the difficulty?”

Mama flicked her hand in the Lady’s direction. “She slowed to a walk as soon as we were out of sight and refused to go any faster. I could get to town more quickly walking backward!”

“You must be firm with her, Livinia! It will do no good to let her pick the pace. If necessary, touch her lightly with the whip. But mind, just tickle her with it!” He gazed fondly at the mare. “Remember, use caution, Livinia, or she’ll give you more than you bargained for!”

A MAGIC LANTERN SHOW WAS AN EARLY FORM OF SLIDE SHOW; A MAGIC LANTERN ENLARGED AND PROJECTED SLIDES OR PICTURES ONTO A WALL OR BACKGROUND.



A RUNABOUT IS A SMALL, LIGHT CARRIAGE OR BUGGY.



I held my breath as Mama took the whip out of the whip socket. She balanced it in her hand and, with a little bounce, just touched it to the Lady's back. It was less than a touch, really—more like the *suggestion* of a touch. Lady Washington leaped forward as though struck by a bolt from above. Grabbing at her hat, Mama flew back against the seat, and off they went at a spanking trot.

"See, my dear!" Papa called. "A touch of the whip is all that was needed!" Mama didn't answer. She was already out of earshot.

It seemed we had just waved goodbye and they were back. Mama's face was flushed, and her hair disheveled. The cabbage roses on her hat looked weather-beaten. After securing the Lady to the

hitching post, she marched up the walk. The big front door closed none too quietly behind her. From the porch swing, Haywood and I heard every word.

"James, take her back!" Mama's voice was sharp as glass.

"Why, Livinia, whatever is the trouble *now*?" Papa's tone implied that whatever the problem was, obviously it was Mama's fault. "She trotted off just fine. I saw it myself!"

"Yes, she did trot off just fine. I was in town in five minutes flat! But this time she wouldn't stop! We went round and round the promenade. She circled it *four* times! People were beginning to laugh and point. She wouldn't stop until we reached our front gate!"

"Well, Livinia, it's quite clear," Papa



began confidently, "that you didn't ask her to stop *properly*."

That was it. Simple.

"James," Mama said slowly, "I have been driving all my life. I know when you want a horse to stop, you pull back on the reins and say, 'Whoa!' I did that, over and over! But that—that beast wouldn't stop!"

With exaggerated patience, Papa put his paper down. "Very well, Livinia. I will show you how it's done."

When Lady Washington saw Papa, she whinnied a greeting. Right then, I realized this was a horse that knew which side of the bread her butter was on.

"Get up, my beauty!" Papa sang out after he seated himself next to Mama. Away they went, as neat as you please.

Papa put the Lady through her paces. Stopping, starting, turning, stopping again, starting again. Up and down past our gate. Every time Papa asked Lady Washington to stop, she did. Right on a dime.

"There you are, my dear, no problem whatsoever!" he said handing her over to Mama. "Now, you try it."

The Lady trotted up and down obediently, stopping every time Mama asked.

"See, my dear, mannerly as they come!" Papa stepped out of the buggy. "Now, off you go!"

Even though I knew Mama wasn't convinced, she has what you call "pluck." Off she went. But Lady Washington had more than a few tricks in her pocket, and I knew it. That's why Haywood and I weren't at all surprised to hear quick, ladylike hoofbeats heading our way again much sooner than we should have.

Papa had heard them, too, and started down the walk. When she spotted him, the Lady whinnied and tossed her head, stopping right at the front gate.

For once Haywood didn't utter an expletive, and Papa was speechless. The buggy was empty.

to be continued

