

Mama and Lady Washington

Part 2

A vibrant, cartoon-style illustration depicting a scene of teamwork. A large, brown horse is harnessed to a dark-colored carriage with a large, tufted cushioned seat. A man with a beard and a blue shirt stands behind the horse, holding its bridle. A young boy with red hair, wearing a white shirt and green pants, is crouching and pulling the reins. A young girl with red hair, wearing a pink patterned shirt and a purple skirt, is running alongside the carriage, holding one of the long wooden poles. The background is a simple, light-colored ground. The number '51' is visible in the bottom right corner.

But the Lady has more than a few tricks in her pocket, and the family isn't surprised to suddenly hear quick ladylike hoofs and see the Lady whinnying and tossing her head at the front gate.

One rein was still securely fixed to the brass rail on the dashboard, but the other rein dangled like a shredded shoelace. Undoubtedly, the rest of it was still attached to the hitching post in front of Shield's Emporium.

"Well," said Papa, wiping his brow, "it's obvious your mother left her standing too long. No doubt, the Lady—oh dear . . ." His words trailed off. Then, "Haywood, fetch me another rein. I must go in search of your mother!"

AN EMPORIUM IS
A DEPARTMENT
STORE THAT SELLS
A VARIETY
OF GOODS. . .

Illustrated by Meredith Johnson



The words were no sooner spoken than we heard another horse coming down the road. This time it was our neighbor, Mr. Scofield. Next to him sat Mama. Even at a distance, I could see her mouth pulled taut as a clothesline, and her eyebrows aiming straight down at her nose like two arrows.

"Ho there, James!" Mr. Scofield called out. "Look what I found chasing that new horse of yours! I told your missus, even though she's pretty fleet of foot herself, she's no match for that little mare!" Mr. Scofield laughed heartily.

"Half the town was chasing her, James!" Mama cried. "It was too humiliating!" She pulled out a handkerchief and blotted angrily at a tear.

Mr. Scofield didn't notice and went right on. "I tell you, James, that mare's a dandy! Not a horse can touch her. Not even Solomon Derby's good pacer. Why, every time he closed in on her, she'd lean into the harness and turn on the steam! By ginger, she's a goer!"

Papa's eyes gleamed with enthusiasm.

"This is the final straw, James!" Mama declared, wiping the gleam right out of Papa's eye. "She took off down Main Street like she was going to the races. Poor Mr. Peavey nearly got run over, and Mrs. Snelling barely made it onto the sidewalk in time to save herself! I'm telling you, that mare is bad, through and through. She dislikes me, and I absolutely refuse to drive her again!" Mama began to weep. "Oh, if only I had dear old Speedwell!"

"Well," said Mr. Scofield, suddenly having more sense than he had a minute ago, "I guess I'd better be getting home.

My missus will be putting dinner out.”
He slunk away.

“Haywood,” said Papa, “will you please put Lady Washington in her stall while I discuss this with your mother?”
He rolled his eyes at me and followed Mama inside.

Somehow, and we’ll never know how, Papa convinced Mama to keep Lady Washington until after the Fayette County Fair. Haywood thinks he promised her a dozen new hats, or the walnut parlor suite at Shield’s Emporium. But I think she agreed because she loves Papa and can’t stand to see him disappointed.

In any event, in a little while, Papa strolled out. “It’s all settled,” he explained. “I helped your mother see the sense of keeping the Lady until after the fair. After all, the prize money is nothing to be sneezed at. And then I shall sell her—for a considerable profit, of course. In the meantime, your mother will drive Reynard.”

I had my doubts about this plan and I was right. Using Papa’s horse, Reynard, didn’t prove satisfactory. In the first place, he is so big, he looked foolish pulling Mama’s little runabout. And even worse, he’s so strong and pulls so hard that Mama had to rest on her bed after every trip. Still, she had promised and she would keep her word.

I guess we were all glad to see the twenty-fifth approaching, and even more glad to know the fair was opening the following week. Our ordeal was about to end.

The morning of Mrs. Snelling’s lawn party, Haywood and I scrubbed and

combed ourselves and dressed in the new clothes Mama laid out.

Eager to help us on our way, Papa went to the stable to harness Reynard. He returned immediately, a stricken look on his face.

“What is it, James?” Mama asked in alarm.

“Reynard is lame.”

“Curses!” breathed Haywood.

Mama threw him an angry look, then, “Lame? Are you sure?”

Papa nodded miserably. “He must have injured himself in the night. His foreleg is as big as a gallon jug.”

Haywood and I groaned in unison. There went the ice cream and the magic lantern show.

All at once, Mama rallied. “Well, there’s nothing to be done but to drive Lady Washington.”

We stared in amazement.

“But—,” Papa began.

Mama cut him off. “I’m going to drive Lady Washington to that party if it takes my last breath. She won’t get the better of me this time!”

Papa’s face flooded with relief. “That’s the spirit, Livinia! Don’t let her get the upper hand. Why, you just show her—”

“James,” Mama interrupted, “we haven’t much time. We’ll meet you at the front gate.”

I sat next to Mama on the buggy seat, and Haywood squeezed into the back where Mama usually puts her parcels. We were off.

The morning was pleasant, and we were all in high spirits. Lady Washington





must have been enjoying herself, too, for she made the miles fly by. In no time at all, we were nearing Hemlock Falls. Huge tents were set up, and carriages and buggies were parked all around Mrs. Snelling's circular drive. As we looked for a place to tie up, friends waved and called to us. This was going to be a wonderful day!

Up ahead, Mama saw a nice, shady spot. "Whoa," she said calmly, pulling on the reins.

The Lady didn't notice, so Mama pulled a little harder. "Whoa," she said more sternly. Still, the Lady paid no attention. Mama set her jaw. She released the reins slightly, then tugged for all she was worth. "WHOA!" she commanded.

Lady Washington picked up speed.

Faces on the lawn began to blur as we whizzed around the drive.

"Blazes! What's happening?" Haywood cried out from behind the seat.

I held on tightly. About the third time around, Mama turned the Lady's nose to the road and headed her toward home.

Children came running after us, and someone yelled, "Hey! Don't you want to stay for ice cream?"

And that was the last we saw of Mrs. Snelling's lawn party.

It is not surprising that the rest of the week was a very silent one at our house. But somehow, the days limped by, and the fair drew closer, until at last it was opening day.

Papa left early with Lady Washington



hooked to his speedy red sulky. Mama and Haywood and I were to leave later with Mr. Scofield.

When we arrived, the fairgrounds were buzzing. Horses whinnied, and vendors called. Pennants flew from every building.

Mama gave Haywood and me fifty cents apiece and sent us on our way. She didn't tell us what to do, or not to do. It was the same every year. No sideshow, no games of chance, and no riding on the carousel after we ate. Off she went to the flower show.

About three o'clock, just when Haywood and I were tired of having so much fun, a giant bell clanged, calling all horses to the racetrack.

We searched the grandstand for Mama, but couldn't find her anywhere. She must still have been too angry with Papa and Lady Washington to care about the race. Haywood and I nudged our way to a spot on the rail.

The horses filed onto the track. We saw several of Papa's friends from town—Dr. Coffin, Mr. Shields from the Emporium, and old Mr. Peavey, driving his ancient, high-wheeled road cart. Then came Lady Washington, prancing as though she knew just how beautiful she was. Last out was Solomon Derby and his horse, Pirate. They won the race nearly every year. Mr. Derby slouched down lazily, a cigar hanging from the corner of his mouth, and the reins gripped in one hand.

The bell clanged again, and they were off, the drivers whooping and hollering to beat the band! Around the track the horses went, shoulder to shoulder, nose to tail. One

by one, they began to drop back, until only three were still going strong—Lady Washington, Pirate, and Dr. Coffin's horse. One more time around, and Dr. Coffin fell back. Now it was only the Lady and Pirate. Papa had ceased his whooping and hollering. Solomon Derby began slapping madly at Pirate with the reins, growling at him around the cigar still clenched between his teeth. Pirate surged ahead, first by a nose, then by a shoulder. The Lady was losing ground!

Behind us, someone pushed through the crowd. It was Mama. Just as the horses were passing, Mama cupped her hands to her mouth. "Dash it, Lady Washington! Come on!"

Haywood and I looked at each other, not believing what we'd just heard.

With every ounce of that extra steam Mr. Scofield had described, the Lady pulled ahead. Those well-turned little ankles in their white stockings worked like pistons. As soon as she was nose to nose with Pirate, Lady Washington flattened her ears. She swished that long, graceful tail and snaked her head at him. Pirate hesitated and dropped back. Lady Washington chugged across the finish line. She had won by a nose!

Papa was fairly bursting his buttons when he drove into the winner's circle. The judge stepped up holding the prize money and an enormous blue ribbon. Just as he was about to hand the ribbon to Papa, Mama swept in. With a white hanky, she wiped the froth from the Lady's face and, taking the ribbon, fixed it to her bridle. True to form, the Lady pinned her ears back and swished her tail. Mama just



smiled, gave her a pat, and relieved Papa of the prize money. "After all," she said, "she *is* my horse."

The end of the story is a lot shorter than the rest of it.

The next morning, bright and early, Mr. Solomon Derby knocked on our door.

"Well," he said to Papa, looking right over Mama's head, "I have some business I'd like to discuss with you. That's not the horse for your little woman. I saw it from the get-go. 'Sides, she's got too much white on her for a proper lady's horse. Too flashy, if you know what I mean. Now, I'm prepared—"

Mama didn't let another word escape his lips. "This is 1890, Mr. Derby, and those old rules don't apply any longer. Besides, she's not for sale. Thank you for stopping." She nearly closed the door on his cigar.

As for the prize money, Papa was right; it was nothing to be sneezed at—though *he* never saw it again. For the very next day, Mama took the ferry across the river. She would answer none of our questions upon her return. But a few hours later, we heard hoofbeats coming our way. Haywood beat me to the door, and Papa was not far behind.

"Am I at the right place?" asked a young man on horseback. He led another horse on a rope behind him.

"You certainly are," Mama said. "Children, meet Quickstep, my new buggy horse."

Haywood grinned and whispered in my ear, "He looks like someone threw an old brown carpet over the back fence, doesn't he?"

Haywood was right, I had to agree. 🐜

