The Lady Man

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By Carlton Stoddard •

Old Chris Confuses Duty and Moonlight, and We Learn That Appearances Are Deceiving.

CYRIL SIMON knew what the home town folks thought about him. But he kept right on living up to his reputation of being a "lady man," as distinguished from "ladies' man."

Littleton's most meticulous housekeepers could not hold a candle to Cyril, Emily mused as her tired young limbs plumbed the soothing depths of Cyril's new divan. She had had a tempestuous day at the high school with her unmusical pupils of music. Tune and tempo were alien to their souls, she had concluded in desperation as classes adjourned. Now she sought consolation and rest in Cyril's consoling and restful bachelor quarters.

CYRIL sat on the bench of his piano, with his straight back ignoring Emily, and his house-slippered toe beating a three-four time on the waxed floor. Beside him was his last piano pupil of the afternoon. The boy had a smudged face and wore overalls which smelled of catfish, but his urchin lips were pursed in determination. Cyril had captured the boy's sense of rhythm, and held it in the grip of cadence pulsing through his own body.
“This is how music is taught,” Emily told herself. “I see now. You’ve got to go fishing. You’ve got to come down off the platform. Why—I could do it that way!”

Then from his leather roll, Cyril produced a shiny new sheet of music and swept into it with fire and flourish. His fingers were slim and long—like a woman’s—but they were strong, and now they fairly rocked the mellow old piano. The boy listened raptly, with his bare, black toes digging into the deep nap of the rug. Cyril’s deep voice caught up the chorus and sent it booming from room to room. That startled Emily, as it always had. She never quite could associate Cyril’s bass voice with his soprano physique and fine features which so strangely resembled her own. She was not startled, however, to read hero-worship burning in the boy’s eyes. She understood that, and sensed the boy’s resolution to learn to play “Wagon Wheels” as well as it had just been played.

DISMISSING his protegé with a promise to go swimming Saturday afternoon, Cyril turned to Emily with a mock scowl. “Young woman, the town of Littleton would be shocked to know of your presence here. Please leave—or marry me.”

In answer Emily burrowed deeper into the cushions, closed her soft, gray eyes and put sweet witchery into her smile. “Simple Simon, I am in great trouble,” she confided. “Believe me, I am in need of sage advice.”

Cyril’s brows lifted interestedly. He stuffed rough tobacco in his pipe and from a sewing basket drew forth bone knitting needles and yarn. With fascinating deftness he caught and looped. His workmanship already had taken the form of a sweater, size 34. It would fit Emily so-so, Cyril calculated. Emily understood that it was to be hers, and smiled in contemplation of what the gossips would say if Cyril’s anonymity as the knitter was betrayed.

“What can we do about Old Chris?” Emily asked worriedly. Old Chris, as president of the Littleton school board, held Emily’s fate in the palm of his hand. Financially and educationally, Chris domineered Littleton, and Emily was no exception. A widower he was, and author of the rule which Emily
thoroughly hated, the rule which made it practically a crime for a high school teacher to appear publicly in the company of a local person of the opposite sex.

Emily abided by the rule—until she met Cyril the night the church choir held practice at his cottage. Instantly she had sensed his fine intelligence and warm, vibrant spirit. From the first, Cyril found in Emily the fresh, alert affection he hungered for. So they became friends, and learned to hate Chris's iron rule.

Then one Sunday night they had slipped away secretly to the movies in a neighboring town. They had been seen, and gossip had spread its destructive tentacles. Public exposal and dismissal from the faculty awaited Emily, she knew. In despair she awaited formal action by the school board that weekend.

BEING HERE WITH Cyril was reckless. "But what have I to lose?" she reasoned. Cyril knew the time had come when the situation had to be threshed out. Now his knitting needles spat staccato evidence of his wits at work.

"Our one asset is Old Chris himself," he announced. "We should capitalize on this business of his annoying you. As chief witness for the defense, will Miss Emily Hutchinson please take the stand?"

Emily sat up solemnly and volunteered to tell all kinds of the truth.

"Now will you explain to the court in what manner Old Chris annoys the accused?" Cyril queried with legal intonation.

"Well, your honor, Old Chris threatens to fire me. Is not that an annoyance? Incidentally the old duffer stops me on the street every afternoon with the generous offer of a ride home. I'd much rather walk, but I ride—and get lectured on morality!"

"My dear, your testimony astounds me! In fact, it inspires me! Tomorrow night you will stay after school. Now get out—the back way!"

As per habit, Old Chris pulled up at the curb the next afternoon and with great dignity invited Emily to share the front seat. She assented meekly and mounted the huge conveyance.
Emily was silent. Impulsively she shifted closer to Old Chris. He became conscious of her perfume enveloping him gently, softly, enticingly. They drove past her corner and on out into the country. In the gloom of dusk, Chris’ hand caressed Emily’s. For the first time, Emily spoke. “This is heavenly, isn’t it?” she breathed—in deep, very masculine bass. Chris jerked his hand away and looked into the fine features and soft gray eyes of Cyril Simon.

“Emily Hutchinson and I are to be married this spring,” Cyril said quietly. “In the meantime we shall continue to go places together. If you feel inclined to publicly protest our fracture of your precious rule, I would advise you to think over the time when you broke that rule yourself. Now take me home or I'll scream!”

“But—Emily...” Old Chris stammered.

“Emily stayed after school,” Cyril informed him.

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THE LOST COW

By Frances Flindt Hammerstrom

The cow in the meadow
Lifts her head high in the fog,
And she bellows out toward the pearl gray sea.
The sound is muffled, low;
Nearby it fades away,
As though someone with a horn
Had blown down a hollow log.