

MENTORS AND TORMENTORS

Clyde decided to tell Wendall the story of how he met his wife, Mary. Or rather, Clyde bragged about how he “picked a peach.”

Clyde married the love of his life when he was twenty. Unlike many of his high school classmates, he did *not* marry a girl from his high school in Ames, Kansas. Instead, he met an “out of town girl” at a barn dance. Dances were the 1930s equivalent of today’s computer dating services. At a spring dance in 1939, Mary wore a sleek black dress that highlighted her long blond hair. Clyde said she was a “hidden angel” at Drummond High School.

“I could tell right away that she was a sincere girl. I couldn’t take my eyes off her. I scribbled my name on every line of her dance card before we even started to dance.”

Clyde added that he almost got into a fistfight with Mary’s “damn fool” boyfriend when he tried to cut in on them. Clyde explained as a matter of fact, “He couldn’t get it through his thick head that Mary and me were gonna end up gettin’ hitched.”

Wendall asked Clyde if he felt bad about stealing Mary away from another fella.

“Oh hell no! He deserved to lose her. What kind of an idiot takes his girl to a dance and gives her a dance card?”

Clyde and Mary were married within months. They worked hard, saved their money, and raised a daughter. Thirty-five years later, they were still happily married in the same two-bedroom farmhouse.

Clyde was determined that Wendall’s love life would be as fortunate as his own. “Findin’ the right woman is the most important thing in a man’s life.”

“You know, Clyde, I hadn’t thought of it that way.”

“Well, you better. ’Cause it’s true.”

“So...how do you know the right girl when you see her?”

“She’ll be a *sincere* gal, and you won’t be able to stop thinking about her. And everything you do, you’ll want to do better because of her.”

Wendall was surprised by this romantic streak hidden under Clyde’s tough crust. But Wendall wasn’t clear about something. “What do you mean by *sincere*?”

Clyde frowned. "You know. She's kind and considerate and hardworking, and *never* petty."

"Of course. It helps if she's pretty, right?"

Clyde slowly shook his head. "Believe it or not, looks don't really matter. Looks are like paint on a barn. It doesn't tell ya how strong the barn is, and the paint fades and peels off when the barn gets old."

Wendall smiled at the comparison.

Clyde nodded. "Yes, sir. You'll do well to marry a sincere, hard-workin' girl instead of some beauty queen who thinks she's a diva. Then you treat her like an angel and pray to God that she's forgiving enough to accept all your bad habits."

Wendall had been around Clyde long enough to know that the best way to get on his good side was to compliment Mary. So he brown nosed a little. "You know, Clyde, you are so *lucky* to have a wife like Mary." His grin gave him away.

Clyde immediately knew that he was being baited, but he didn't mind. "I made my own luck."

Wendall laughed.

"With my temper and foul mouth, I could have run Mary off a thousand times. But I'm no dummy. I know when I got somethin' wonderful. I work hard every day to appreciate her and everything she does. That's how an old cuss like me can keep such a beautiful woman around for thirty-five years."

Clyde shook his finger at Wendall. "You remember that. When you find a sincere gal, you compliment her every chance you get. Never swear at her. Never call her a bad name and never *ever* lay a hand on her."

Wendall nodded respectfully. "Yes, sir."

"Cause if you do...and I find out about it, I'll kick your ass all the way to Wichita."

Wendall smiled. "Fair enough. I won't forget."

Years later, Wendall would consider Clyde's relationship philosophy to be the best advice he had ever received.

There was no doubt, Clyde and Mary's marriage was rock solid.