

The curious courtship of Captain Conrad

by Latane Lewis



CONCEALED. NEARBY, a troop of Union cavalry watched the Confederate spy enter a house in northern Virginia. The lieutenant in command smiled grimly. "Conrad won't escape this time," he said, motioning his men to surround the mansion. For weeks they had hunted the wily Southern intelligence officer, Captain Thomas Conrad. If captured, he would be hanged.

The lieutenant drew his pistol and rapped on the door. It was opened by an old colored woman who showed him to the parlor. There stood two young Southern belles. They wore heirloom jewelry and dresses in the height of fashion, with tight, low-cut bodices and hoop skirts.

Reluctantly, the officer remembered his duty. "I have come for Captain Conrad," he said. The older woman replied she was alone with her sister and the servants.

"I beg your pardon," the lieutenant said. "He entered this house minutes ago. We must search it."

Soldiers scoured the house but found no trace of the spy. To the women, the lieutenant said, "Unless you tell me where he is hiding,

I will have to rip your house apart.”

“If you are determined to make war against women,” the older girl said, “we are powerless to stop you.”

The Union officer ordered his men to rip up floor boards, walls and ceilings. Conrad could not be found. Red-faced with frustration, the lieutenant rode off with his troopers.

Years after the Civil War, he passed the same house again. On a whim, he turned into the yard, where he found the older sister with the one-time master spy. Upon learning who the lieutenant was, Conrad greeted him warmly. “Thank you for doing me the greatest favor of my life,” he said.

“A favor?” asked the Yankee.

“I had been courting this lady a long time without much success when you and your men surprised me. When we heard you coming she raised her hoop skirt and motioned me to crawl under. I was there while you searched the house. After I came out, we were so embarrassed, I told her there was only one honorable thing for a virtuous young lady to do.

“Next day we were married.”

Coronet

February, 1960: p. 119