



**“You do not want any woman simply because she is good. Sometimes goodness is only another name for imbecility.”**

# FIND A GOOD WOMAN

Beware those slatterns and sausages! **Therese Oneill** surveys some 19th-century courtship guides for men.

So, young man. You've decided 21st-century dating isn't quite your style, what with all its Snapchats and pickup artistry. You want to find a gal the old-fashioned way, through proper courtship.

Luckily for you, 19th-century libraries contained pages upon pages of dating advice. All you need to reap their wisdom is disregard any and all social advances that have occurred in the past 150 years.

Written by relationship 'experts' of the day, these early self-help books advised young men on the virtues they should seek out in a wife, and how to best weed out the spoiled fruit. Modesty, restraint and the correct etiquette were paramount. For the upper echelons of society, at least, courtship was a formal affair, with its ultimate manifestation – marriage and children – viewed through a wildly practical lens. Much rode on your choice of spouse, to put it mildly.

So, let us peel back the pages of time and learn how our great-great-grandfathers were advised to woo and win their wives.

The first step of successful Victorian courtship is to beware the Wrong Woman; she who would pollute your home and degrade your soul.

Joseph Bush, author of *Courtship and Marriage*,

*A Lecture* (1863), lays it out flat. “Don't court a slattern,” he writes. “A woman in liquor is one of the saddest sights in this fallen world; a woman in dirt is one of the most repulsive. It was said by one of the ancients, ‘Of all tame beasts, I hate sluts the worst.’”

George Hudson, who wrote *The Marriage Guide for Young Men: A Manual of Courtship and Marriage* (1883), agrees. The slattern thrives in the dark and fetid haunts of humanity and is best avoided:

“The right kind of women will not thrust themselves upon you; neither will they advertise themselves to the world. Bear this in mind: the best women hold themselves at too high a price to be picked up on street corners, and in dance-halls and theaters.”

Of course, your future wife must also know how to manage a household. And if she doesn't know how, don't fool yourself that you can wait around while she learns. “You will find many [women] who say they can learn: you may be inclined to try one of them,” cautions Hudson. “But suppose she should not learn! And then think, too, of that fearful period of learning, during which your stomach must be made the receptacle for all sorts of messes, and your home remain in a chaotic state! You may die of dyspepsia, or go mad before she succeeds.”

Charles Bullock, author of *Courtship and Marriage* (1899), illustrates the seriousness of this issue with the story of a man sued for breach of promise for breaking his engagement. The potential wife seemed suitable enough, until the Sausage Incident.

“One night, he went to the place where she was staying, and took with him a pound of sausages for supper,” he writes. “I will not say she ‘made a hash’ of them; but she made such a bungling mess in cooking the hungry swain's sausages, that, from that moment, he began to draw in, and to think, ‘If she can't cook a pound of sausages nicely, what sort of a wife will she make?’ And he gave her up.”

Were you born sickly, or smart as a potato? It may not be your fault. (In fact, it was probably something your mother did – perhaps she startled a horse during the quarter moon?)

However, it *is* your fault if you marry someone of inferior stock, says Hudson.

“Why should men with good mental endowment, good physique, good lungs and sound in every part, marry poor, sickly, weak-minded, consumptive, scrofulous women, and bring into the world families of children doomed either to sink into premature graves

or drag out a sickly, whining existence?" he queries. "It is a sin against God, in whose image we were made, and a sin against our race. You do not want any woman simply because she is good. Sometimes goodness is only another name for imbecility."

But don't worry – Hudson provides a nifty shortcut for determining a girl's suitability: just check her noggin.

"Whenever you see a woman with a good, full, round back head, combined with a good front, you may be sure that she is capable of giving a good degree of energy and pluck to her children; that she is well sexed, capable of loving husband and children devotedly, and capable of giving her children a good sexual endowment."

Furthermore, if you like sex, it would be best to marry a woman who doesn't. And if you're gay but forced by 19th-century society to conceal it, marry the hottest-blooded lass you can find. It's the only way to save your children from becoming ravenous perverts:

"A man with sexual desires, ready to break over every bound and find unlawful gratification, should choose a woman somewhat deficient in this regard, cold and indifferent, lest his children should all be libertines and harlots. Or, if he care but little for the opposite sex, and have but little passion, he should marry a woman of strong passion, not a harlot, but one who knows what it is to wrestle with a sexual desire, which clamors for indulgence."

**"Do not hold her hand, do not lay your head on her shoulder, do not whisper together; much less should you think of putting your arms about her waist."**

When it comes to doing the actual wooing, you must convince your lady you are a man worthy of her bulbous head and meticulous sausage skills. That means no-touchy.

"Do not hold her hand, do not lay your head on her shoulder, do not whisper together; much less should you think of putting your arms about her waist," Hudson instructs. "If she be a sensible, sensitive young lady, such conduct would greatly mortify her. Besides, it looks so horridly soft in the eyes of sensible people, that it will make you a laughing-stock. Make this vow, that you will lead your betrothed to the hymeneal altar, as pure as you found her at the beginning of your courtship."

But don't be a sissy, either.

"Be a thorough manly man. It is important to appear well in society, to be polite, gentlemanly, easy, neat,

and all that, but, after all, nothing can take the place of true genuine manhood. Sensible women will choose the man, though backward, awkward, and even a little uncouth, in preference to the polite, agreeable dandy."

This isn't permission to swan around town swigging gin, though. Be worthy of your eugenically suitable mate. "Suppose that you were in the habit of becoming intoxicated," poses Hudson, "and spending your time and your money with drunken companions; how could you have the brass to ask her to marry you? Or suppose you were of depraved morals, that you were in the habit of frequenting the haunts of disreputable women, or ruining weak-minded girls, how could you expect a pure-minded, virtuous young woman to take you with that load of impurity and sin upon you?"

Finally, if you suddenly realise this marriage is wrong for you even though the engagement has been announced – well, tough nuts, buddy: "Sometimes a young man simply tires of his girl. He concludes to break off his engagement; he does not obey reason, but Satan. He is guilty of a crime. Never break an engagement; never disappoint a confiding girl unless fully convinced that you would do her a greater wrong to marry her."

And there you have it. The Do's and Don'ts of finding your bride. Though it must be said, the people who abided this advice weren't necessarily backwards or wrong – they were simply of their time. And time has a tendency to warp the sturdiest common sense of one era into a puzzling horror show the next. ●



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