A PASSION FOR THE WOOL

By

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THE PASSION FOR THE WOOL

CHAPTER ONE

The title to this story is a gross exaggeration. Malcolm Steele was never passionate about wool, or, to be more exact, steel wool pot scrubbers. They were really just his business, the products he manufactured. The same products which his father, Earl had made before him.

Earl Steele had really loved being in the steel wool pot scrubbing business more than Malcolm. It had taken him away from the auto parts junkyard that the family operated and which he despised. Anything was better than that, and it had proved to be a better business, even though it was still a very small regional company compared to Brillo and Scotch Pads, the industry giants. These big boys didn't even remember that Steele's Steel Wool Pads existed.

Changing the family name from Schlomann to Steele was partly because of the product's name recognition, and partly from gratitude for being taken away from a business where, if one were successful, Schlomann would have been taken to mean "Dealer in junk."

So, Steele had been Malcolm's family name before he was even born and when he considered it, he was grateful to his dad for that.

After his parents died, the business had been pretty rewarding to the junior Steele and his wife Clara. They could live moderately well, or perhaps a little better than that, but the thought that Steele's Steel Wool Pads was only a little local industry dependent on about a hundred janitorial services in the midwest had rankled him for years. If there was truly anything passionate in Malcolm's soul, it was an overwhelming feeling of injustice. He just knew it was a matter of having either to grow or to wait for the day that the major steel wool magnates would take notice and kill him financially like a squashed ant.

He felt he knew the answer…advertising. He must get into the janitorial services house publications with some attractive, eye catching ads. But how? He was a steel wool man, not an ad exec. He understood that it would be necessary to give in and hire a big time agency to design a program for him to go country wide.

He did some research into the matter and went for the best company he could find. The name of the company is unimportant…just think of the one you know… it's that one!

His request for an appointment had been referred to Jimmy Blair, oh, we beg your pardon, that's James Blair, as he preferred to be addressed now that he had "arrived" in the business.

James Blair considered himself a self made man. He had started at the bottom, in the mail room and clawed his way up until last week when he had been taken out of that department and put in his present position as a client representative, with a warning not to ever forget again to wear a tie to work. This promotion was due to his persistence and determination … that's ad talk for being a pest. Anyway, Steele's Steel Wool Pads was to be his baby, and James was passionate, there's that word again, to make this business a success story his first time out of the box.

If Malcolm had paid any attention to the minuscule office or the relative youth of his prospective personal ad executive, he didn't show it. He just looked around giving momentary nods of appreciation at the framed high school and associate's diplomas mounted on the otherwise bare wall.

"So, tell me Mr. Steele, what do you expect from me and this agency?" James asked as he tilted himself back in the typist's chair he'd been issued and assumed the praying hands to the lips pose of an expert.

The way his client saw it was that the ads must appear in such publications as Services Magazine, I.C.S. Cleaning Specialist and Home Cleaner. He thought that his ad should emphasize that Steele's was just about as good as any other cleaning pad and a lot cheaper, even with shipping costs added.

"But what about the housewives who all use cleaning pads," Blair asked. "Not one in a thousand, maybe 10 thousand reads these industry publications. What good does it do when they can't be persuaded to take a box of your product off the shelves in the supermarket?"

Malcolm admitted that none of his pads was ever sold in stores. He would have loved to sell them in the stores of course, but the market chains only had about half a shelf of space they allotted to pot scrubbers, and they wouldn't even talk to him. Did Mr. Blair think he hadn't been trying for years?

James jumped on this as if he'd been waiting for a challenge like this all his life. Well, it had only been a matter of waiting for the challenge since a week ago Thursday. Anyway, a lifetime or a week, what did it matter? It was all the same to him .

"One thing my experience has taught me, Mr. Steele," he said, "and that is the uselessness of setting your sights too low. You are perfectly correct in trying to expand your consumer base. You're just giving up too soon. We're going after your housewives

and we're going to take these supermarket chains and stuff your cleaning pads down their throats. Now, lets get down to the specifics of your campaign. We're going to market your product on television, through direct sales country wide. First we'll change your packaging to read: Steele's Amazing Steel Wool Pads."

'How can we say amazing?' Malcolm asked. 'They're not amazing. They're only just about as good as any other pads.'

"Come on now," was the rejoinder. "You've heard other products on TV described as amazing."

'Sure, lots of times.'

"So, how many of them are really amazing?"

'Well, not many I can think of.'

James gave his client a sideways leer. "How many?"

'OK…I guess none of them are.'

"Right you are!" the newest ad exec agreed. "The word 'amazing' is just about required in today's mass marketing advertising."

'But aren't they all lying if they say that word and they don't mean it?'

" No sir," James said,"you have to remember, that in the advertising business, the word 'amazing' is considered merely a vivid term possessing a certain sparkle. That's the excuse we always use to get away without having to call it a lie. Now we definitely have to stop referring to your product as 'cheap.' That's no way to describe Steele's Amazing Steel Wool Pads, the cleaning miracle…and before you ask, 'miracle' falls under the same ad exemption from the truth as amazing… consider it sort of poetic license without the poetry. Besides, nothing is cheap when it costs 50% more than any competitor's product."

Malcolm had to interrupt. His pads didn't cost 50% more. Perhaps 15% less would be more accurate.

No, he was told, they were now going to be 50% more than any others. Why, he was asked did he think anyone would pay so much more for a product than all the other brands? Obviously the only answer he could think of was that the customers thought that product would be better. Once Malcolm had that figured out, he didn't need any further explanations.

The new chief ad executive of the Steele's Amazing Steel Wool Pads told his client to just trust him. He'd have the first TV ad prepared within a week, 10 days at the most, and it would be a blockbuster, guaranteed.

Still, Malcolm wondered aloud if his father Earl would approve?

" You say your father's name was Earl? James asked. He was THE Earl of Steele's Steel Wool?"

'Sure, why are you asking?'

"Oh, no reason, I was just thinking. I'll call you soon, Mr. Steele, I promise."

CHAPTER TWO

He'd been telling himself to calm down, but Malcolm could hardly keep his excitement at bay. Finally, ten days after the first appointment, his bookkeeper yelled down to him from the front office, "Hey Mal, some guy named Blair's on the line."

The first ad was ready to be viewed as soon as he could get there. It took a minimum of 30 minutes to drive downtown to the agency. He made it in 25.

James was waiting for him in a viewing room, and he too was trying his best not to appear nervous. After all, this was his first client presentation.

The lights lowered and on the screen, a tall, impeccably dressed and distinguished looking man with a touch of gray at the temples of his perfectly arranged hair smiled pleasantly at them. His British accent bespoke class beyond any doubt. He said:

> *"Good day Madam. We wanted to talk to you frankly about your cooking utensils. Are you less than satisfied with the results you get in keeping them clean after the guests at your home soirees have left? Do these pots and pans remain stubbornly spotted with burnt foods that your kitchen staff are simply unable to remove? No, the answer is not to hire new servants."*
>
> *"We are delighted to announce the new improved Steele's a-MAY-zing Steel Wool Pads --- the cleaning miracle. But don't look for them in any stores, we don't sell to stores. You can only get them by calling the number at the bottom of the screen."*
>
> *"Just look at the results you get." The scene faded out to a sink, and standing over it was a woman, clearly dressed as an English kitchen maid holding a filthy frying pan. She immersed the pan in the water filled sink and reached into a box of Malcolm's pads. The scene changed and the maid was brandishing a beautiful pan looking as pristine and sparkling as new.*
>
> *"You can get these same results with Steele's a-MAY-zing Steel Wool pads. Of course they are a bit more expensive, but ask yourself, don't you deserve them? Doesn't your staff deserve them? What about when they talk to other people's servants. Don't you want to make them proud?"*
>
> *"But wait! call now and you also get absolutely free a 12th pad included with our standard 11 pad box. Again, call the number at the bottom of the screen…*

operators are standing by."

The ad faded out and the lights came on. Malcolm was sitting there mesmerized. It had been beautiful. Much more than he had expected. First of all he was compelled to tell James that the idea of using an Englishman to do the commercial was terrific… it just dripped quality. He'd heard that the British were hesitant to be seen as enthusiastic over anything. To have been able to get a British subject with that distinguished accent feeling the same way as he himself was beginning to feel about his own steel wool pads was simply marvelous.

"That is totally true, the Brits really are hesitant." James told him. "That's why we used this guy named Schwartz, from Gary, Indiana. You ought to see his Italian wine salesman pitch, a knockout sell. Besides we don't use British guys as announcers on TV. Most of them don't look authentically British. Now, Schwartz HE looks authentically British. In fact, he's famous for being the best in the business for faking authenticity."

'But I still have a few comments' Malcolm admitted. "We don't sell to stores because they won't take them.'

"That's right, and it makes what we had Schwartz say perfectly true. We don't sell to stores."

' OK…I guess you're right,' Malcolm admitted. 'Aside from that, I really was impressed with the way you got that crusty pan so shiny. I make these pads and still can't believe how great it cleaned up. You actually got it looking brand new. How did you do that?'

"We used a brand new pan, for the after shot" James explained. "You can't take chances with these things. Production costs are high and duplicate frying pans are inexpensive, even when you buff them by hand with metal polish before the shoot."

'I'm still a bit confused though. Our pads normally come in boxes of a dozen. How can we claim one is free?'

"Because they now come in boxes of 11 and they get the 12th free. You wouldn't begrudge a free pad to someone who's paying so much for your product, would you?"

Malcolm was still hesitant. 'You talk about the audience as having a staff of servants like a royal family. How many families watching our commercial do you think are really like that?'

"At a rough guess…none," he was told. "We're just catering to the average listener's snobbish aspirations. Why are you worried about this anyway?"

'No reason. I guess you can go ahead with the campaign.'

The commercial was tested in selected markets around the country, including the Steele family's home area. Malcolm and Clara watched it when it appeared right after the toenail fungus ad. It sure looked great on their large screen TV, but they might have been prejudiced. Anything would look good compared to a toenail fungus commercial.

Ten minutes later the phone rang. It was James Blair with the news that the operators weren't just standing by. They were being buried with orders. He figured that they would recoup the costs of buying the air time within 4 or 5 days. His arm was almost aching at the shoulder from patting himself on the back.

Malcolm agreed that it was time for a full blown campaign. He gave the go ahead to proceed, then called the office and told them to hire a second shift of workers.

Once the campaign started, even two shifts weren't enough and the factory was running around the clock, trying just to keep up. All the advertising trade papers were praising the Steele's Amazing Steel Wool Pads campaign, and James was being held up as the new gee whiz wunderkind of the industry. All the major supermarket chains were now begging for a chance to stock the product.

CHAPTER THREE

Malcolm was shown into James' new office one morning for their quarterly meeting. These new digs were expansive and featured an oversized solid oak desk, and the client found his new star executive sitting in a leather chair, this time complete with arms. Another diploma had been added to the wall, joining the high school and associate's credentials, declaring the holder had been awarded the title of Doctor of Commercial Marketing (Honorary) from some university most people had never heard of. However, the diploma was mostly in Latin, with a lot of gold seals and ribbons attached. It was well worth the cost, even figuring the added charge for the optional extra fancy ribbon.

James opened the meeting with a question: "If you could imagine the greatest commercial the world has ever seen, and it is a Steele's Amazing Steel Wool Pads ad, what do you think it would look like?"

Malcolm was mystified. "I haven't got a clue. Anyway, you're the ad exec…you tell me."

"OK I will," James said. "Visualize this: the Queen of England in a fancy gown with a jeweled tiara, shoving a scullery maid aside in the kitchen at Buckingham Palace, avid to try out a Steele's Amazing Steel Wool Pad with the added soap and the new secret ingredient. And on the bottom of the screen is the message: 'By appointment, purveyors of amazing steel wool pads to H R H. How does that strike you?"

"It strikes me as fantastic. Can you actually get her to do that?"

"Come on Malcolm," he answered, "be realistic. Of course not! It *would* be the greatest commercial. I didn't say it was possible, but just the thought, ridiculous as it is, started a mental process in my head. Wait till you see the new commercial I'm preparing. It'll wipe you out when it's finished. Every other agency in the whole world will be eating its' heart out that they didn't think of it."

Malcolm was a bit hesitant. "Well, I don't know how you think you can improve on Schwartz's commercial, but I'll be looking forward to it. Just make sure you don't talk about any secret ingredient. We only just added soap, nothing secret about that."

"Oh, I'm sorry Malcolm," he was told, "I must apologize for jumping the gun a bit here, but the packaging has already been printed with the words 'secret ingredient.' Worry

not, it's still honest. We're talking about a secret, right? The fact that there's no secret ingredient…that'll be our little secret. Problem solved."

While Malcolm was mulling the logic of this around in his head his agent, plunged right into the second part of his plan. It involved getting both he and Clara known throughout the country as the very fashionable couple responsible for the product. It had worked beautifully for Dave, the hamburger king and his daughter Wendy, as well as Orville the popcorn guy. Why wouldn't it work for a married couple?

"We'll start slowly," he was told. "Take, for instance the letter I'm preparing for our answers turning down all the supermarkets who now want to stock the pads. We'll be polite with them but will be adamant that we don't intend to sell our product to them or any other chain, and see here where It'll be signed 'The Honourable Malcolm Steele, president? ' "

"Why would you sign it with the title <u>honourable</u>? Besides you spelled honorable with a <u>U</u>."

"That's the English spelling. It's high class and fits in with the image of you as British nobility. Besides, it's the proper term for addressing the son of an Earl."

'Now wait a minute,' Malcolm said. 'My father wasn't a royal type Earl he was a just plain American Earl.'

"Don't be petty Malcolm," he was told comfortingly. "You told me yourself that he was THE Earl Steele. I'll bet we're not going to have the same trouble with your wife Clarise being addressed as 'The Honourable Mrs. Clarise Steele.'"

" I suppose we can act like quality folks if that's what you're talking about, but we'll still answer that we're Americans and proud of it any time we're asked. By the way, my wife's name is Clara, not Clarise."

James answered matter-of-factly,"Not anymore it isn't."

So, they put themselves, bodies and souls into James' hands. He saw to it that they visited a select group of custom designers for completely new wardrobes, which they were encouraged to wear at all times of the day and evenings. Both the Steele's felt strange at first in their new clothes. He was specially aware that he looked somehow *different* from other men he met at business meetings. He did look different, but didn't realize that all his new duds were a standard British fit. This wasn't at all by accident, but was the result of the orders the tailors had been given that he never knew. Clarise never really got used to the weird hats she was supposed to wear whenever she left the house, but realized why she had to wear them when she saw pictures of the queen and all the princesses attending the royal wedding. Up until the present, the only headgear she normally wore had a bill and the Chicago Cubs logo on it. On the plus side, she did like her new name.

Along with their proper and high quality appearances, James hired Schwartz, the Gary, Indiana wonder to instruct them in “proper elocution.” The lessons were a great success and their vocabulary and syntax became faultless. They never realized that somewhere along the line, it had been seen to that they developed a British public school accent, which, due to their master teacher was to prove ingrained and permanent in their speech.

When they were interviewed by media though, and asked about their nationality, both answered that they were 100% Americans and proud of it. This endeared them to the entire nation, taking them for grateful and high class immigrants.

The new commercial, with which James had promised to floor his client was finally ready. It started with a London Symphony recording of Pomp and Circumstance and then a regal, yet erotically beautiful woman appeared on screen with the title Edwina, Queen of Upper Luringia superimposed along the bottom. Her voice was, at once, cultured, yet intensely sexual, with perhaps a trace of some Mediterranean origins. She didn’t really need the jeweled tiara she was wearing to show that certain queenly style.

Edwina spoke about how “we” (using the royal form of address) had become enthralled with Steele’s Amazing Steel Wool Pads, the cleaning miracle. In fact, she would “gladly order our ladies-in-waiting to step back so that we might have the privilege of doing our own pots and pans.” She most heartily recommended them to all those in her royal class. Now, the title appeared before the last fadeout:

STEELE’S AMAZING STEEL WOOL PADS

BY APPOINTMENT

PURVEYORS OF AMAZING STEEL WOOL PADS

WITH ADDED SOAP AND THE SECRET INGREDIENT

TO

HRH EDWINA, QUEEN OF UPPER LURINGIA

Just this brief,one minute exposure had left Malcolm mad with passion… something he’d rarely experienced before. Edwina made the Queen of England look positively frumpy.

“James, where did you find her?” he panted. “You’ve got to introduce us. She’s so incredibly beautiful. Clarise may never forgive me, but I simply must meet her or I’ll go raving mad.’

“You have met her,” James crowed. “I *TOLD* YOU SCHWARTZ WAS TALENTED!”

‘That was Schwartz? Are you absolutely certain that Schwartz is a man?’

James was a bit evasive. “Let me get back to you on that.”

The Steele’s were making so much money it was as if they were being allowed to print it themselves. Yet they were beginning to feel hemmed in by the idea of having to be dressed for a social occasion at any time except when they went to bed. Malcolm now began to appreciate how difficult it was to be a member of British royalty. To be always on your guard, and appearing at all times completely coordinated in your wardrobe, and having to watch each word you spoke, so that it wouldn’t have the wrong meaning.

It was getting so onerous that one night both of them rebelled, locked the doors and went for comfort.

Malcolm took off his tuxedo and put on a pair of his old shorts. He came down to the living room, swung back in his chair and wiggled his bare toes in comfort. Clarise appeared similarly dressed and they switched from the BBC in America channel to a domestic situation comedy.

Before 15 minutes had passed, both realized that they still didn’t feel exactly right. He got up again and reappeared in a pair of pressed slacks, a silk smoking jacket and cravat, to find she was now dressed in gold lame‘ lounging pajamas. They put on a DVD of Oliver Twist which they quietly watched.

They had passed a point of no return. This was as informal as they could get. James had worked his magic for better or worse.

At the very same time, James was sitting in his own new home. He was also wearing a silk smoking jacket and cravat. He’d promised himself he’d get used to this kind of wardrobe if it killed him.

His mind was racing with plans for a new ad campaign, and now for a brand new client…a manufacturer of various metal and jewelry polishes. Again, the ridiculous picture arose in his mind of the Queen of England in the Tower of London, enthusiastically and radiantly polishing one of her crowns with his client’s amazing products. Well, he realized that this would never happen, but now he began to figure.

Why would he bother, even if it were possible to get her, when he just never could imagine her as fitting the part? She didn’t seem at all believable to him as an image of a queen. She just appeared to be a nice kindly older lady, good for a margarine commercial and little else. Why would any ad executive, especially he, consider it for even a moment?

He felt he had developed a certain reputation in the industry and was now compelled to maintain. His ads must appear, above all else, honest.

No indeed! He owed it to the public. Above all, his ads must be realistic…and for true realism, THERE WAS ALWAYS SCHWARTZ.