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"You get nicer every day of your life."

Eve to the Rescue

BY

ETHEL HUESTON

AUTHOR OF
PRUDENCE OF THE PARSONAGE,
PRUDENCE SAYS SO,
LEAVE IT TO DORIS, ETC.

ILLUSTRATED BY
DUDLEY GLOYME SUMMERS



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To Carol

Who came to us in the form of Duty,
but who has brought us only Pleasure

CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I IN DEFIANCE OF DUTY	11
II THE COTE IN THE CLOUDS	21
III EVERYBODY'S DUTY	30
IV THE IRISH-AMERICAN LEAGUE	40
V HER INHERITANCE	59
VI A WRONG ADJUSTMENT	84
VII PAINFUL DUTY	98
VIII SHE MEETS A DEMONSTRATOR	112
IX ADMITTING DEFEAT	124
X THE ORIGINAL FIXER	137
XI THE GERM OF DUTY	156
XII THE REVOLT OF THE SEVENTH STEP	175
XIII SHE FINDS A FOREIGNER	195
XIV NEW LIGHT ON LOYALTY	214
XV SERVICE OF JOY	226
XVI MARIE ENCOUNTERS THE SECRET SERVICE	248
XVII SPONTANEOUS COMBUSTION	266
XVIII CONVERTS OF LOVE	282
XIX SHE DOUBTS HER THEORY	301
XX SHE PROVES HER PRINCIPLE	312
XXI HER ONE EXCEPTION	332

EVE TO THE RESCUE

11

CHAPTER I

IN DEFIANCE OF DUTY

"To-morrow being Saturday afternoon," began Eveley, deftly slipping a dish of sweet pickles beyond the reach of the covetous fat fingers of little niece Nathalie,—“to-morrow being Saturday afternoon—”

"Doesn't to-morrow start at sunrise as usual?" queried her brother-in-law curiously.

"As every laborer knows," said Eveley firmly, "Saturday begins with the afternoon off. And I am a laborer. Therefore, to-morrow being Saturday-afternoon-off, and since I have trespassed on your hospitality for a period of two months, it behooves me to find me a home and settle down."

"Oh, Eveley," protested her sister in a soft troubled voice, "don't be disagreeable. You talk as if we were strangers. Aren't we the only folks you have? And aren't you my own and only baby sister? If you can't live with us, where can you live?"

12

"As it says in the Bible," explained Eveley, truthfully if unscripturally, "no two families are small enough for one house."

"But who calls you a family?" interrupted the brother-in-law.

"I do. And nice and sweet as you all are, and adorable as I am well aware am I, all of you and all of me can not be confined to one house."

"But we have counted on it," persisted Winifred earnestly. "We have looked forward to it. We have always said that you would come to us when Aunt Eloise died,—and she did—and you must. We—we expect it."

"England expects every man to do his duty," quoted Burton in a sepulchral voice.

Then Eveley rose in her place, tall and formidable. "That is it,—duty. Then let me announce right now, once and for all, Burton Raines and Winifred, eternally and everlastingly, I do not believe in duty. No one shall do his duty by me. I publicly protest against it. I won't have it. I have had my sneaking suspicions of duty for a long time, and lately I have been utterly convinced of the folly and the sin of it. Whenever any one has anything hateful or disagreeable to do, he draws a long voice and says it is his duty. It seems that every mean thing in the world is somebody's duty. Duty has been the curse of civilization for lo, these many years!" Then she sat down. "Please pass the jam."

13

"Oh, all right, all right," said Burton amiably, "have it your own way, by all means. Henceforth and forever after, we positively decline to do our duty by you. But what is our duty to you? Answer me that, and then I guarantee not to do it."

"It is our duty to keep Eveley right here with us and take care of her," said Winifred, with as much firmness as her soft voice could master. "She is ours, and we are hers, and it is our duty to stand between her and a hard world."

"You can't. In the first place I am awfully stuck on the world, and want to get real chummy with it. Any one who tries to stand between it and me, shall be fired out bodily, head first."

14

"Oh, Eveley," came a sudden wail from Winifred, "you can't go off and live by yourself. What will people think? They will say we could not get along together."

"That is it,—just that and nothing more. It isn't duty that bothers you—it is What-will-people-think? An exploded theory, nothing more." Then she smiled at her sister winsomely. "You positively are the sweetest thing, Winnie. And your Burton I absolutely love. And your babies are the most irresistible angels that ever came to bless and—enliven—a sordid world. But you are a family by yourselves. You are used to doing what you want, and when you want, and how you want. I would be an awful nuisance. When Burton would incline to a quiet evening, I should have a party. When you and he would like to slip off to a movie, you would have to be polite and invite me. Nobody could be crazier about nieces and nephews than I am, but sometimes if I were tired from my work their chatter might make me peevish. And you would punish them when I thought you shouldn't, and wouldn't do it when I thought you should, and think of the arguments there would be. And so we all agree, don't we, that it would be more fun for me to move off by myself and then come to see you and be company,—rather than stick around under your feet until you grow deadly tired of me?"

15

"I do not agree," said Winifred.

"I do," said Burton.

"Then we are a majority, and it is all settled."

"But where in the world will you live, dear? You could not stand a boarding-house."

"I could if I had to, but I don't have to. I have been favored with an inspiration. I can't imagine how it ever happened, but perhaps it was a special dispensation to save you from me. I am going to live in my own house on Thorn Street. Of course it will be lonely there at first, since Aunt Eloise is gone—but just listen to this. I shall rent the down-stairs part to a small family and I shall live up-stairs. Part of the furniture I am going to sell, use what I want to furnish my dove cote in the clouds, and the rest that is too nice to sell but can't be used I shall store in the east bedroom, which I won't use. That will leave me three rooms and a bath—bedroom, sitting-room and dining-room. I can fix up a corner of the dining-room into a kitchen with my electric percolator and grills and things. Isn't it a glorious idea? And aren't you surprised that I thought of anything so clever by myself?"

16

"Not half bad," said Burton approvingly,—for Burton had long since learned that the pleasantest way of keeping friends with in-laws is by perpetual approval.

"But you can never find a small family to take the down-stairs part of the house," came pessimistically from Winifred.

"Oh, but I have found it, and they are in the house already. A bride and groom. The cunningest things! She calls him Dody, and they hold hands. And I sold part of the furniture yesterday, and had the rest moved up-stairs. But there is one thing more."

"I thought so," said Burton grimly. "I remember the Saturday-afternoon-off. I thought perhaps you had me in mind for your furniture-heaver. But since that is done it is evident you have something far more deadly in store for me. Let me know the worst, quickly."

17

"Well, you know, dearie," said Eveley in most seductively sweet tones, "you know how the house is built. There is only one stairway, and it rises directly from the west room down-stairs. Unfortunately, my bride and groom wish to use that room for a bedroom. Now you can readily perceive that a young and unattached female could not in conscience—not even in my conscience—utilize a stairway emanating from the boudoir of a bridal party. And there you are!"

"I am no carpenter," Burton shouted quickly, when Eveley's voice drifted away into an apologetic murmur. "Get that idea out of your head right away. I don't know a nail from a hammer."

"No, Burtie, of course you don't," she said soothingly. "But this will be very simple. I thought of a rambling, rustic stairway outside the house, in the back yard. You know the sun parlor was an afterthought, only one story high with a flat roof. So the rustic stairway could go up to the roof of the sun parlor, and I could make that up into a sort of roof garden. Wouldn't it be picturesque and pretty?"

18

"But there is no door from your room to the roof of the sun parlor," objected Burton.

"No, but the window is very wide. I will just cover it with portières and things, and I am quite active so I can get in and out very nicely. And when I get around to it, and have the money, I may have a French window put in."

"But, Eveley, I can't build a stairway. I don't know how to build anything. I couldn't build a box."

"But you do not have to do this alone, Burtie. Just the foundation, that is all I expect of you. You will have lots of assistance. Not experienced help perhaps, but enthusiastic, and 'love goes in with every nail,'—that sort of thing. I have sent invitations to all of my friends of the masculine persuasion, and we have started a competition. Each admirer is to build two steps according to his own design and plan, and the one who builds most artistically is to receive, not my hand and heart, but a lovely dinner cooked on my grill in my private dining-room. I have the list here. I figured that twelve steps will be enough. Nolan English, two. Lieutenant Ames, two. Captain Hardin, two. Jimmy Weaver, two. Dick Fairwether, two. Arnold Bender, two. Arnold is Kitty's beau, but she guaranteed two steps for him. Won't it be lovely?"

19

"To-morrow being Saturday afternoon," said Burton bitterly.

"I ordered the rustic lumber last night, and it was delivered to-day."

"And you consider it my duty as the luckless husband of your long-suffering sister, to lay the foundation for the wobbly, rattly ramshackle stairs your pet assortment of moonstruck admirers will build for you?"

"Not your duty, Burtie, certainly not your duty. But your pleasure and your great joy. For without the stairway, I can not live there. And if I do not live there, I must live here. And remember. When you want vaudeville, I will incline to grand opera. When you would enjoy a movie, I shall have a musicale here at home. When you are in the midst of a novel, I shall insist on a three-handed game of bridge. When you are ready to shave, I shall need the hot water. When your appetite calls for corned beef and cabbage, my soul shall require lettuce sandwiches and iced tea. Not your duty, dear, by any means. I do not believe in duty."

20

"Quite right, sweet sister," he said pleasantly. "It shall afford me infinite pleasure, I assure you. And to-morrow being Saturday afternoon, you shall have your stairway."

CHAPTER II

THE COTE IN THE CLOUDS

As Eveley had prophesied, what her carpenters lacked in experience and skill was more than compensated by their ambition and their eagerness to please. On Saturday afternoon her back yard was a veritable bee-hive of industry. The foundation was in readiness for the handiwork of love, for Burton Raines, feeling that he could not concentrate on business in such sentimental environs, explained patiently that he was only an ordinary married man and that love rhapsodies to the tune of temperamental hammering upset him. So he had taken the morning off from his own business, to lay the foundation for the rustic stairway.

Nolan English, listed first because he was always listed first with Eveley, appeared at eleven o'clock, having explained to the lofty members of the law firm of which he was a junior assistant, that serious family matters required his attention. This enabled him to have the two bottom-most steps of the stairway, comprising his portion, erected and ready for inspection by the time Eveley arrived home from her work. He said he had felt it would be lonely for her to sit around by herself while everybody else worked for her, and having provided against that exigency by doing his labor in advance, he claimed the privilege of officiating as entertainer-in-chief for the entire afternoon.

Arnold Bender appeared next, accompanied by Kitty Lampton, one of Eveley's pet and particular friends. Although Kitty was extremely generous in proffering the services of her friend in behalf of Eveley's stairway, she frankly stated that she was not willing to expose any innocent young man of her possession to the wiles and smiles of her attractive friend, without herself on hand to counteract any untoward influence.

Captain Hardin and Lieutenant Ames came together with striking military *éclat*, accompanied, as became their rank, by two alert enlisted men. After introducing their enlisted men in the curt official manner of the army and having set them grandly to work on the rustic stairway, Captain Hardin and Lieutenant Ames immediately took up a social position in the tiny rose-bowered pergola, with Eveley and Kitty and Nolan and the lemonade.

A little later, Jimmy Weaver rattled up in his small striped gaudy car, followed presently by Dick Fairwether on a noisy motorcycle. They took out their personal sets of tools from private recesses of their machines and plunged eagerly into the contest.

So the afternoon started most auspiciously and all would doubtless have gone well and peacefully, had not Captain Hardin most unfortunately selected an exceptionally good-looking young soldier for his service,—a tall, slender, dark-skinned youth, with merry melting eyes. Eveley never attempted to deny that she could not resist merry melting eyes. So she left the young officers and Kitty and Nolan and the lemonade in the rose-bowered pergola on the edge of the canyon which sloped down abruptly on the east side, and herself went up to superintend the building of her stairway.

The handsome one required an inordinate amount of superintending. The other soldier detailed by Lieutenant Ames, an ordinary young man with a sensible face and eyes that saw only hammer and nails, got along very well by himself. But the handsome youth, called Buddy Gillian, required supervision on every point. He first consulted Eveley about the design of the two steps entrusted to him for construction. He could think of as many as two dozen different styles of rustic steps, and he explained and illustrated them all to Eveley in great detail, drawing plans in the gravel path. It took the two of them nearly an hour to make a selection, and then it seemed the style they had chosen was the most difficult of the entire assortment, and was practically impossible for any one to construct alone. So Eveley perforce assisted, holding the rustic boughs while he hammered, carrying the saw, and carefully picking out the proper size of nails as he required them.

"Didn't you have more sense than to bring a good-looker?" Nolan asked Captain Hardin in a fretful voice. "Don't you know that Eveley can't resist good looks?"

"I told him he had no business to bring Gillian," put in the lieutenant. "Look at Muggs, whom I brought. Nobody notices that Muggs needs any help. See there now, he has finished and is ready to go. Can't you do something to stop this, Miss Lampton?" he pleaded, turning to Kitty.

"As long as she leaves my Arnold alone, I shall mind my own business," said Kitty decidedly. "If I cut in on her affair with your Buddy, she will try her hand on Arnold to get even. Captain Hardin got you into this, it is up to him to get you out."

And Kitty heartlessly left the pergola and went up to the rustic steps to hold the hammer for Arnold.

Then Captain Hardin, after rapidly drinking three glasses of iced lemonade to drown his chagrin and to strengthen his flagging courage, left the cozy pergola which had no attraction for any of them with Eveley out at work on the rustic stairway, and went up to the corner where she and Buddy Gillian were carefully and conscientiously matching bits of rustic lumber.

"I do not think I should keep you any longer, Gillian, since Muggs is ready to go," he said kindly.

"I can finish this myself now, thank you."

"Yes, sir," said Buddy Gillian courteously, and stood up. Then to Eveley, "Shall I gather up the scraps, Miss Ainsworth, and tidy the lawn for you? It is pretty badly littered. Only too glad to be of service, if I may."

"Oh, thank you, Mr. Gillian, that is sweet of you," said Eveley gratefully. "Suppose we begin down in that corner by the rose pergola, and gather up the scraps as we come this way. I'll carry this basket, and you can do the picking."

But even this humble field of usefulness was denied Private Gillian, for Lieutenant Ames came out from the pergola and said with official briskness, "Oh, never mind that, Gillian. I can help Miss Ainsworth with it. You'd better run along with Muggs and enjoy your liberty period. Much obliged to you, I am sure."

So the handsome Buddy looked deep into Eveley's eyes, and sighed. Eveley held out her hand.

"You have done just beautifully," she said, "and helped me so much. And when are you coming to tell me the rest of that thrilling story of your life in the trenches?"

"The question is, when may I?"

"Well, Tuesday evening? Or can you get off on Tuesday?"

"Oh, yes, since the war is over we can get off any night. Tuesday will suit me fine."

"Sorry, Gillian," put in Captain Hardin grimly. "But unfortunately I have arranged for a company school on Tuesday night—to be conducted by Lieutenant Carston."

Gillian turned his beautiful eyes on Eveley, eyes no longer merry but sad and wistful.

"Let me see," puzzled Eveley promptly. "Could you come to-morrow night then, Mr. Gillian? Captain won't mind changing with you, I know, and he can come on Tuesday. Captains can always get away, can't they? Is that all right?—Then to-morrow evening, about eight. And I will have a little evening supper all ready for you. Good-by."

After he had gone she said to the captain apologetically, "Hasn't he wonderful eyes? And I knew he must be quite all right for me to know, or you would never have introduced him."

Taken all in all, only Kitty Lampton and Eveley considered the raising of the rustic stairway an entire success, although there was much light talk and laughter as they ate the dainty supper the girls had prepared for them in the Cloud Cote, as Eveley had already christened her home above the earth. But the men, with the exception of Nolan, were doomed to disappointment.

When Dick Fairwether asked her to go to a movie with him in the evening, and when Jimmy Weaver invited her to go for a night drive with him along the beach, and when Captain Hardin suggested that she accompany him to the Columbine dance at the San Diego, and when Lieutenant Ames wanted to make a foursome with Kitty and Arnold to go boating, she said most regretfully to each,—“Isn't it a shame? But my sister is having some kind of a silly club there to-night, and I promised to go.”

But to Nolan, very secretly she whispered: "Now you trot along to the office and work and when I am ready to come home I will phone you to come and get me. And we will initiate the Cloud Cote all by ourselves."

So the little party broke up almost immediately after supper, with deep avowals of gratitude on the part of Eveley, and equally deep assurances of pleasure and good will on the part of the others. After they had gone, as Eveley inspected her stairway alone, she was comforted by the thought that she could fairly smother it with vines and all sorts of creeping and climbing things, and the casual comer would not notice how funny and wabby it was. But as she went gingerly down, clinging desperately to the rail on both sides, she determined to take out an accident policy immediately, with a special clause governing rustic stairways.

CHAPTER III

EVERYBODY'S DUTY

Due to the old-fashioned, rambling style of the house, the rustic stairway did not really detract from its beauty. And as there were already clambering vines and roses in profusion, an extra arbor more or less, could, as Eveley claimed, pass without serious comment. Although the house was old, it was still exquisitely beautiful, with its cream white pillars and columns showing behind the mass of green. And the lawn, which was no lawn but only a natural park running riot with foliage coaxed into endless lovers' nooks and corners, was a fitting and marvelously beautiful setting for it.

The gardens were in the shape of a triangle, with conventional paved streets on the north and west, but on the east and south they drifted away into the shadowy canyon which stretched down almost to the bay, and came out on the lower streets of the water-front.

Eveley stood on her rustic stairway and gloated over it lovingly,—the rambling house, the rambling gardens, the beautiful rambling canyon, and then on below to the lights on the bay, clustered together in companionable groups.

“Loma Portal, Fort Rosecranz, North Island, Coronado, and the boats in the bay,” she whispered softly, pointing slowly to the separate groups. And her eyes were very warm, for she loved each separate light in every cluster, and she was happy that she was at home again, in the place that had been home to her since the days of her early memory.

Eveley’s mother had been born in the house on Thorn Street, as had her sister, Eloise, the aunt with whom the girls had lived for many years. And after the death of her husband, when Eveley was a tiny baby, Emily Ainsworth had taken her two girls and gone back to live with her sister in the family home. There a few years later she too had passed away, leaving her children in the tender, loving hands of Aunt Eloise. And the years had passed until there came a time when Winifred was married, and Eveley and her aunt lived on alone, though always happily.

But investments had gone badly, and returns went down as expenses went up. So Eveley studied stenography, and took genuine pleasure in her career as a business girl. With her salary, and their modest income, the two had managed nicely. Then when Aunt Eloise went out to join her sister, the Thorn Street house was left to Eveley, and other property given to Winifred to compensate. So that to Eveley it was only coming home to return to the big house and the rambling gardens. But to meet the expenses of maintenance it was necessary that part of the large house should be rented.

Eveley, always adaptable, moved serenely into her cote at the head of the stairs, and felt that life was still kind and God was good, for this was home, and it was hers, and she had come to stay.

She almost regretted the impulsive promise to her sister that drew her out of her dwelling on the first night of her tenancy. Not only did she begrudge the precious first-night hours away from her pretty cote in the clouds, but she was not charmed with the arrangement for the evening. She was an ardent devotee of clubs of action, rowing, tennis, country, dancing and golf, but for that other type of club, which she described as “where a lot of women sit around with their hats on, and drink tea, and have somebody make speeches about things,” she felt no innate tenderness.

It was really a trick on the part of Winifred that procured the promise of attendance. For Eveley had been allowed to believe they were going to play cards and that there would be regular refreshments of substance, and perhaps a little dancing later on. All this had been submitted to by inference, without a word of direct confirmation from Winifred, who had a conscience.

So it was that Eveley Ainsworth, irreproachably attired in a new georgette blouse and satin skirt, betook herself to her sister’s home for an evening meeting of the Current Club. And it was a decided shock to find that neither a social game nor a soul-restoring midnight supper were in store for her, but the proverbial tea and speeches. She resigned herself, however, to the inevitable, and shrank back as obscurely as possible into a dark corner where she might muse on the charms of Nolan, the beauties of the new Buddy Gillian, the martial dignity of Captain Hardin, and the appeals of all the rest, to her frivolous heart’s content.

In this manner, she passed through the first part of the evening very comfortably, only dimly aware that she was floundering in the outskirts of a perfect maze of big words dealing with Americanization, which Eveley vaguely understood to be something on the order of standing up to *The Star Spangled Banner*, and marching in parades with a flag and shouting “Hurrah for the President,” in the presence of foreigners.

The third speaker was a minister, and ministers are accustomed to penetrating the blue mazes of mental abstraction. This minister did. He began by telling three funny stories, and Eveley, who loved to exercise her sense of humor, came back to the Current Club and joined their laughter.

In the very same breath with which he ended the last funny story, he began breezily discoursing on everybody’s duty as a loyal American. Eveley, to whom the word “duty” was the original red rag, sniffed inaudibly but indignantly to herself. And while she was still sniffing the speaker left “duty as American citizens” far behind, and was deep in the intricacies of Americanization. Eveley found to her surprise that this was something more than saluting the flag and shouting. She grew quite interested. It seemed that ordinary, regular people were definitely, determinedly working with little scraps of the foreign elements, Chinese, Mexican, Russian, Italian, yes, even German,—though Eveley considered it asking entirely too much, even of Heaven, to elevate shreds of German infamy to American standards. At any rate, people were doing this thing, taking the pliant, trusting mind of the foreigner, petting it, training it, coaxing it,—until presently the flotsam and jetsam of the Orient, of war-torn Europe, of the islands of the sea, of all the world, should be Americanized into union, and strength, and loyalty, and love.

It fascinated Eveley. She forgot that it was her duty as a patriotic American. She forgot that nobody had any business doing anything but minding one’s own business. She fairly burned to have a part in the work of assimilation. Her eyes glowed with eagerness, her cheeks flushed a vivid scarlet, her lips trembled with the ecstatic passion of loyalty.

In the open discussion that followed after the last address, Eveley suddenly, quite to her own surprise, found that she had something to say.

“But— isn’t it mostly talk?” she asked, half shyly, anxious not to offend, but unable to repress the

doubt in her mind. "It does not seem practical. You say we must assimilate the foreign element. But can one assimilate a foreign element? Doesn't the fact that it is foreign—make it impossible of assimilation? Oh, I know we have to do something, but as long as we are foreigners, we to them, and they to us,—what can we do?"

37

The deadly silence that greeted her words frightened her, yet somehow gave her courage to go on. She must be saying something rather sensible, or they would not pay attention.

"We can not assimilate food elements that are foreign to the digestive organs," she said. "Labor and capital have warred for years, and neither can assimilate the other. Look at domestic conditions here,—in the home, you know. People get married,—men and women, of opposing types and interests and standards. And they can not assimilate each other, and the divorce courts are running rampant. It does no good to say assimilation is a duty, if it is impossible. And it seems to be."

"Your criticism is destructive, Miss Ainsworth," said a learned professor who had spoken first, and Eveley was sorry now that she had not listened to him. "Destructive criticism is never helpful. Have you anything constructive to offer?"

38

"Well, maybe it is theoretic, also," said Eveley smiling faintly, and although the smile was faint, it was Eveley's own, which could not be resisted. "But duty isn't big enough, nor adaptable enough, nor winning enough. There must be some stronger force to set in action. Nobody could ever win me by doing his duty by me. It takes something very intimate, very direct, and very personal really to get me. But if one says a word, or gives me a look,—just because he understands me, and likes me,—well, I am his friend for life. It takes a personal touch, a touch that is guided not by duty but by love. So I think maybe the foreign element is the same way. We've got to sort of chum up with it, and find out the nice things in it first. They will find the nice things in us afterward."

"But as you say, Miss Ainsworth, isn't this only talk? How would you go about chumming up with the foreign element?"

39

"I do not know, Professor," she said brightly. "But I think it can be done. And I think it has to be done, or there can not be any Americanization."

"Well, are you willing to try your own plan? We are conducting classes, games, studies, among the foreigners, working with them, teaching them, studying them. We call this our duty as loyal Americans. You say duty is not enough, and you want to get chummy with them. Will you try getting chummy and see where you come out?"

Eveley looked fearfully about the room, at the friendly earnest faces. "I—I feel awfully quivery in my backbone," she faltered. "But I will try it. You get me the foreigners, and I will practise on them. And if I can't get chummy with them, and like them, why, I shall admit you are right and I will help to teach them spelling, and things."

CHAPTER IV

40

THE IRISH-AMERICAN LEAGUE

Several days passed quietly. Eveley went serenely about her work, and from her merry manner one would never have suspected the fires of Americanization smoldering in her heart ready for any straying breeze of opportunity to fan them into service.

She was finding it deliciously pleasant to live in a Cloud Cote above a bride and groom. Mrs. Bride, as Eveley fondly called her, was the dainty, flowery, fluttery creature that every bride should be. And Mr. Groom was the soul of devotion and the spirit of tenderness. To the world in general, they were known as Mr. and Mrs. Andrew Severs, but to Eveley, they were Mrs. Bride and Mr. Groom. It served to keep their new and shining matrimonial halo in mind.

She was newly glad every morning that the young husband had to start to his work before she left home for hers. When she heard the front door open down-stairs, she ran to her window, often with a roll or her coffee cup in her hand, to witness the departure, which to her romantic young eyes was a real event. Mrs. Bride always stood on the porch to watch him on his way to the car until he was out of sight. Sometimes she ran with him to the corner, and always before he made the turn he waved her a final good-by.

41

It was very peaceful and serene. It seemed hard to believe that recently there had been a tremendous war, and that even now the world was writhing in the throes of political and social upheaval and change. In every country, men and women were grappling with great industrial problems, and there were ominous rumblings and threatening murmurs from society in revolution. But in the rambling white house in the great green gardens at the top of the canyon, one only knew that it was springtime in southern California, that the world was full of gladness and peace and joy, and that love was paramount.

42

Several days,—and then one evening there came the call of the telephone—the reveille of

Americanization in the person of Eveley Ainsworth. A class of young foreign lads had been gathered and would meet Eveley at the Service League that evening. No instructions were given, no suggestions were forthcoming. Eveley had asked for foreigners with whom she could get chummy and call it love. Here were the foreigners. The rest of the plan was Eveley's own.

She was proud of her mature comprehension of the needs of reconstruction, and of her utter gladness to assist. She felt that it signified something rather fine and worth while in her character, and she took no little pleasure in the prospect of active service. She went about her work that day wrapped in a veil of mystery, her mind delving deep into the ideals of American life. She carefully elaborated several short and spicy stories, of strong moral and patriotic tone, emphasizing the nobility of love of country. And that evening she stood before her mirror for a long time, practising pretty flowery phrases to be spoken with a most winsome smile. Remembering that her subjects were boys, and that boys are young men in the making, she donned her daintiest, shimmeriest gown, and carefully coaxed the enticing little curls into prominence. Then with a final patriotic smile at herself in the mirror, she carefully climbed through the window and crossed the roof garden to the rustic stairway.

43

As she walked briskly up Albatross to Walnut, then to Fourth where she took the car, and all the way down-town she was carefully rehearsing her stories and the most effective modes of presenting them. She knew the rooms of the Service League well, having been there on many occasions while there was still war and there were service men by the hundreds to be danced with. Half a dozen men and boys were lounging at the curbstone, and they eyed her curiously, grimly, Eveley thought. She wondered if they knew she had come there to inspire them with love of the great America which they must learn to call home. She straightened her slim shoulders at the thought, and walked into the building with quite a martial air, as became one on this high mission bent.

44

A keen-eyed, quick-speaking woman met her at the elevator, and led her back into what she called "your corner" of the room. Evidently the room was divided into countless corners, for several groups were clustered together in different sections. But Eveley gave them only a fleeting glance. Her heart and soul were centered on the group before her, eight boys, dark-eyed, dark-skinned, of fourteen years or thereabouts. They looked at Eveley appraisingly, as we always look on those who come to do us good. Eveley looked upon them with tender solicitude, as philanthropists have looked on their subjects since the world was born.

The introductions over, the keen-eyed one hurried away and Eveley faced her sub-Americans.

Then she smiled, a winsome smile before which stronger men than they have fallen. But they were curiously unsmiling in response. Their eyes remained appraising almost to the point of open suspicion. Perhaps her very prettiness aroused the inherent opposition of the male creature to female uplift.

45

Eveley began, however, bravely enough, and told them her first and prettiest story of sacrifice and country love. They listened gravely, but they were not thrilled. Struggling against a growing sense of incompetence, Eveley talked on and on, one story after another, pretty word following pretty word. But each word fell alike on stony ground. They sat like graven images, except for the bright suspicious gleam of the dark eyes.

Finally Eveley stopped, and turned to them. "What do you think about it?" she demanded. "You want to be Americans, don't you? You want to learn what being an American means, don't you?" Her eyes were fastened appealingly on a slender Russian lad, slouching in his chair at the end of the row. "You want to be an American, I know."

Suddenly the slim lithe figure straightened, and the dark brows drew together in a frown. "What are you getting at?" came in a sharp tone. "I'm an American, ain't I? You don't take me for no German, do you?"

46

"No, no, of course not," she apologized placatingly. "Oh, certainly not. I mean, you want to learn the things of America, so you can love this country, and make it yours. Then you will forget that other land from which you came, and know this for your own, now and forever."

Eveley was arrested by the steady gleam of a pair of eyes in the middle of the row. There was open denial and disbelief written in every feature and line of his face.

"Why?" came the terse query, as Eveley paused.

Eveley gazed upon him in wonderment. "Wh-what did you say?"

"I said, why?"

"Well, why not?" she countered nervously. "This is your country now. You must love it best in all the world, and must grow to be like us,—one of us,—America for Americans only, you know."

"You tell us to forget the land we came from," he said in an even impersonal voice. "Is that patriotism,—to forget the land of your birth? I thought patriotism was to remember your homeland,—holding it in your heart,—hoping to return to it again,—and make it better."

47

"But—but that is not patriotism to this country," protested Eveley, aghast. "That is—disloyalty. If you wish to be always of your own land, and to love it best, you should stay there. If you come here, to get our training, our education, our development, our riches,—then this must be your country, and no other."

"Why?" he asked again. "Why should we not come here and get all the good things you can give us, and learn what you can teach us, and take what money we can earn, and then go back with

all these good things to make our own land bigger and better and richer? That is patriotism, I think."

"No, no," protested Eveley again. "That is not loyalty. If you choose this country for your home, it must be first in your heart, and last also. This is your home-land now,—the land you believe in, the land of your love, America first."

"But America was not first. The home-land was first."

"Yes, it was first," she admitted pacifically. "But America is last. America is the final touch. And so now you will learn our language, our games, our business, our way of life. You will live here, work here, and if war comes again you will die for America."

Then she went on very quickly, fearful of interruptions that were proving so disastrous. "That is why we are organizing this little club, you boys and I. We are going to talk together. We are going to play together. We are going to study together. So you can learn American ways in all things. Now what kind of club shall we have? That is the American way of doing things. It is not my club, but yours. You are the people, and so you must decide."

A long and profound silence followed, evidently indicative of deep thought.

"A baseball club," at last suggested a small Jap with a bashful smile.

"That is a splendid idea," cried Eveley brightly. "Baseball is a good American sport, a clean, lively game. Now what shall we call our baseball club?"

Again deep thought, but in a moment from an earnest Jewish boy came the suggestion, "The Irish-American Baseball League."

Eveley searched his face carefully, looking for traces of irony. But the pinched thin features were earnest, the eyes alight with pleased gratification at his readiness of retort.

A hum of approval indicated that the Irish-American League had met with favor. But Eveley wavered.

"Why?" she asked in puzzled tone. "There is not an Irish boy here. You are Italians, and Spanish, and Jewish, and Russian, so why call it Irish-American?"

"My stepfather is an Irishman, his name is Mike O'Malley," said a small Mexican. "So I'll be the captain."

"G'wan, ain't it enough to get the club named for you?" came the angry retort. "What you know about baseball, anyhow?"

Eveley silenced them quickly. "Let's just call it the American League," she pleaded.

"The Irish-American League is well known, and gets its name in the paper," was the ready argument in its favor.

And this fact, together with the strong appeal the words had made to their sense of dignity, proved irresistible. They refused to give it up. And when Eveley tried to reason with them, they told her slyly that the proper way to decide was by putting it to vote.

Eveley swallowed hard, but conscientiously admitted the justice of this, and put the question to vote. And as the club was unanimously in favor of it, and only Eveley was opposed, her Americanization baseball club of Italians and Mexicans and Orientals went down into history as the Irish-American League.

When it came to voting for officers, she again met with scant success. They flatly refused to have a president, stating that a captain could do all the bossing necessary, and that baseball clubs always had a captain. In the vote that followed the result was curiously impartial. Every boy in the club voted for himself. Eveley, who had been won by the bright face of a young Jewish boy sitting near her with keen eyes intent upon her, voted for him, which gave him a fifty per cent. majority over the nearest competitor, and Eveley declared him the captain.

A few moments later, Eveley was called away to the telephone by Nolan, wishing to know what time he should call for her and the moment she was out of hearing, the club went into noisy conference. Upon her return, the argumentative Russian announced that the vote had been changed, and he was unanimously elected captain.

"But how did that happen?" Eveley demanded doubtfully. "Did the rest of you change your votes, and decide he should be captain?"

There was a rustle of hesitation, almost a dissenting murmur.

The newly elected captain lowered his brows ominously. "You did, didn't you?" he asked, glaring around on his fellow members.

"Yes," came feebly though unanimously.

"Did—did you vote?" questioned Eveley tremulously.

"Sure, we voted," said the captain amiably. "We decided that I know the game better than the rest of the guys, and I can lick any kid in this gang with one hand, and we decided that I ought to be the captain. Ain't that right?" Again he turned lowering brows on the Irish-American League.

No denial was forthcoming, and although Eveley felt assured that in some way the American ideal of popular selection had been violently outraged, it seemed the part of policy to overlook what might have occurred. Some minor rules were agreed upon, and the club decided to meet

for practise every evening after school. Eveley could not attend except on Saturdays, and a boy near her, whose features had seemed vaguely and bewilderingly familiar, announced that he must withdraw as he worked and had no time for baseball. The captain professed his ability to fill up the club to the required number with exceptional baseball material, and the meeting adjourned without further parley.

53

This one meeting sufficed unalterably to convince Eveley that she was totally and helplessly out of her element. She was not altogether sure those quick-witted boys needed Americanizing, but she was sure that she was not the one to do it if they did require it. She realized that she had absolutely no idea how to go about instilling principles of freedom and loyalty in the hearts of young foreigners.

It was with great sadness that she began adjusting her hat and collar ready to go home, leaving defeat and failure behind her, when a blithe voice at her elbow broke into her despair.

"So long, Miss Ainsworth; see you in the morning."

Eveley whirled about and stared into the face of the small lad whose features had seemed so curiously familiar.

"To-morrow?" she repeated.

"Surest thing you know, at the office," he said, grinning impishly at her evident inability to place him. "I knew all the time you didn't know me. I am Angelo Moreno, the Number Three elevator boy at the Rollo Building."

54

"Do—do you know who I am?"

"Sure, you're Miss Ainsworth, old Jim Hodgkin's private secretary."

"How long have you been there?"

"About a year and a half."

"I never noticed," she said, and there was pain in her voice.

"Oh, well," he said soothingly, "there's always a jam going up and down when you do, and you are tired evenings."

"But you are in the jam, too, and you are tired as well as I, but you have seen."

"That's my job," he said complacently. "I got to know the folks in our building."

"How much do you know about me?" she pursued with morbid curiosity.

He grinned at her again, companionably. "You're twenty-five years old, and you're stuck on that fellow English, with Morrow and Mayne over at the Holland Building. You used to live with your aunt up on Thorn Street, but she died and you got the house. B. T. Raines is your brother-in-law, and he's got two kids, but his wife is not as good-looking as you are. You stayed with them two months after your aunt died, but last week you got a bunch of your beaux, soldiers and things, to build you some steps up the outside of your house and now you live up there by yourself. Gee, I'd think you'd be afraid of pirates and Greasers and things coming up that canyon from the bay to rob you—you being just a woman alone up there."

55

Eveley gazed upon him in blank astonishment. "Do—do you know that much about everybody in our building?" she asked.

"Well, I know plenty about most of 'em, and some things that some of 'em don't know I know, and wouldn't be keen on having talked around among strangers. But of course I pays the most attention to the good-lookers," he admitted frankly.

"Thank you," said Eveley, with a faint smile. Then she flushed. "What nerve for me to talk of assimilation," she said. "We don't know how to go about it. We have been asleep and blind and careless and stupid, but you—why, you will assimilate us, if we don't look out. You are a born assimilator, Angelo, do you know that?"

56

"I guess so," came the answer vaguely, but politely. "I live about half a mile below you, Miss Ainsworth, at the foot of the canyon on the bay front. That's all the diff there is between us and you highbrows in Mission Hills—about half a mile of canyon." He smiled broadly, pleased with his fancy.

"That isn't much, is it, Angelo? And it will be less pretty soon, now that we are trying to open our eyes. Good night, Angelo. I will see you to-morrow—really see you, I mean. And please don't assimilate me quite so fast—you must give me time. I—I am new to this business and progress very slowly."

Then she said good night again, and went away. And Angelo swaggered back to his companions. "Gee, ain't she a beaut?" he gloated. "All the swells in our building is nuts on that dame. But she gives 'em all the go-by."

Then the Irish-American League, without the assimilator, went into a private session with cigarettes and near-beer in a small dingy room far down on Fifth Street—a session that lasted far into the night.

57

But Eveley Ainsworth did not know that. She was sitting in the dark beside her window, staring out at the lights that circled the bay. But she did not see them.

"Assimilate the foreign element," she whispered in a frightened voice. "I am afraid we can't. It is too late. They got started first—and they are so shrewd. But we've got to do something, and

quickly, or—they will assimilate us, beyond a doubt. And weren't they right about it, after all? Isn't it patriotism and loyalty for them to go out to foreign countries to pick up the finest and best of our civilization and take it back to enrich their native land? It is almost—blasphemous—to teach them a new patriotism to a new country. And yet we have to do it, to make our country safe for us. But who has brains enough and heart enough to do it? Oh, dear! And they do not call it duty that brings them here to take what we can give them—they call it love—not love of us and of America, but love of the little Wops and the little Greasers and the little Polaks in their own home-land. Oh, dear, such a frightful mess we have got ourselves into. And what a dunce I was to go to that silly meeting and get myself mixed up in it."

58

CHAPTER V

HER INHERITANCE

59

The worries of the night never lived over into the sunny day with Eveley, and when she arose the next morning and saw the amethyst mist lifting into sunshine, when she heard the sweet ecstatic chirping of little Mrs. Bride beneath, she smiled contentedly. The world was still beautiful, and love remained upon its throne.

She started a little early for her work as she was curious to see Angelo in the broad light of day. It seemed so unbelievable that those bright eyes and smiling lips had been in the elevator with her many times a week for many months, and that she had never even seen them.

So on the morning after her initiation into the intricacies of Americanization, she beamed upon him with almost sisterly affection.

"Good morning, Angelo. Isn't this a wonderful day? Whose secrets have you ferreted out in the night while I was asleep?"

60

Angelo flushed with pleasure, and shoved some earlier passengers back into the car to make room for her beside him.

"I thought you'd be too sick to come this morning," he said, with his wide smile that displayed two rows of white and even teeth. "I thought it would take you twenty-four hours to get over us."

"Oh, not a bit of it," she laughed. "And I am equally glad to see that you are recovering from your attack of me."

This while the elevator rose, stopping at each floor to discharge passengers.

At the fifth floor Eveley passed out with a final smile and a light friendly touch of her hand on Angelo's arm.

This was the beginning of their strange friendship, which ripened rapidly. Her memory of that night in the Service League with the Irish-American Club was very hazy and dim. Except for the tangible presence and person of Angelo, she might easily have believed it was all a dream.

61

In spite of her deep conviction that she was not destined to any slight degree of success as an Americanizer, Eveley conscientiously studied books and magazines and attended lectures on the subject, only to experience deep grief as she realized that every additional book, and article, and lecture, only added to her disbelief in her powers of assimilation.

So deep and absolute was her absorption, that for some days she denied herself to her friends, and remained wrapped in principles of Americanization, which naturally caused them no pleasure. And when a morning came and she called a hasty meeting of her four closest comrades, voicing imperative needs and fervent appeals for help, she readily secured four promises of attendance in the Cloude Cote that evening at exactly seven-thirty.

At seven-forty-five Eveley sat on the floor beside the window impatiently tapping with the absurd tip of an absurd little slipper. Nolan had not come.

Kitty Lampton was there, balancing herself dangerously with two cushions on the arm of a big rocker. Eveley called Kitty the one drone in her circle of friendship, for Kitty was born to golden spoons and lived a life of comfort and ease and freedom from responsibility in a great home with a doting father, and two attentive maids. Eileen Trevis was there, too, having arrived promptly on the stroke of seven-thirty. Eileen Trevis always arrived promptly on the stroke of the moment she was expected. She was known about town as a successful business woman, though still in the early thirties. The third of the group was Miriam Landis, whose inexcusable marriage to her handsome husband had seriously deranged the morale of the little quartet of comrades.

62

Eveley looked around upon them. "It is a funny thing, a most remarkably funny thing!" she said indignantly. "Every one says that girls are always late, and you three, except Eileen, are usually later than the average late ones. Yet here you are. And every one says that men are always prompt, and Nolan is certainly worse than the average man in every conceivable way. But Nolan, where is he?"

63

"Well, go ahead and tell us the news anyhow," said Kitty, hugging the back of the chair to keep from falling while she talked. "But if it is anything about that funny Americanization stuff, you needn't tell it. I asked father about it, and he explained it fully, only he lost me in the first half of the first sentence. So I don't want to hear anything more about it. And you don't need to tell me any more ways of not doing my duty, either, for I am not doing it now as hard as I can."

Miriam Landis leaned forward from the couch where she was lounging idly. "What is this peculiar little notion of yours about duty, Eveley?" she asked, smiling. "My poor child, all over town they are exploiting you and your silly notions. Even my dear Lem uses your disbelief in duty to excuse himself for being out five nights a week."

"That is absurd," said Eveley, flushing. "And they may laugh all they like. I do believe that duty has wrecked more homes and ruined more lives than—than vampires."

Miriam smiled tolerantly. "Wait till you get married, sweetest," she said softly. "If married women did not believe in duty, and do it, no marriage would last more than six months."

"Well, I qualify myself, you know," said Eveley excusingly. "I do think everybody has one duty—but only one—and it isn't the one most people think it is."

"For the sake of my immortal soul, tell me," pleaded Kitty. "It was you who led me into the dutiless paths. Now lead me back."

"Get up, Kitty, and don't be silly," said Eveley loftily. "This is not a driven duty, but a spontaneous one. And you don't need to know what it is, for it comes naturally, or it doesn't come at all. Isn't that Nolan the most aggravating thing that ever lived? Eight o'clock. And he promised for seven-thirty."

"Go on and tell us, Eveley," said Eileen Trevis. "Maybe somebody is sick, and has to make a will, and he won't be here all night."

"Oh, I can't tell it twice. You know how many questions Nolan always asks, and besides I want to surprise you all in a bunch. Look, did I show you the new blouse I got to-day? I needed a new one to Americanize my Irish-Americans Saturday. It cost ten dollars, and perfectly plain—but I look like a sad sweet dream in it."

Then the girls were absorbed in a discussion of the utter impossibility of bringing next month's allowance or salary within speaking distance of last month's bills, a subject which admitted of no argument but which interested them deeply. So after all they did not hear the rumble and creak of the rustic stairway, nor the quick steps crossing the garden on the roof of the sun parlor for Nolan was forgotten until his sharp tap on the glass was followed by the instant appearance of his head, and his pleasant voice said in tones of friendly raillery:

"Every time I climb those wabby rattly-bangs that you call rustic stairs, I wonder that you have a friend to your name. Hello, Eveley."

"Inasmuch as you made the wabbiest pair of all, and since you climb them more than anybody else, you haven't much room to talk," returned Eveley tartly, drawing back the portières to admit his entrance, which was no laughing matter for a large man.

"You positively are the latest thing that ever was," she went on, as he landed with a heavy thud.

"Me? Why, I am the soul of punctuality."

"You may be the soul of it, but punctuality does not get far with a soul minus willing feet."

"Anyhow, I am here, and that is something," he said, making the rounds of the room to shake hands cordially with the other girls.

Eveley hopped up quickly on to the small desk—shoving the telephone off, knowing Nolan would catch it, as indeed he did with great skill, having been catching telephones and vases and books for Eveley for five full years. She clasped her hands together, glowing, and her friends leaned toward her expectantly.

"I have called you together," she began in a high, slightly imperious voice, "my four best friends, counting Nolan, because I need advice."

"Do you wish to retain me as counsellor?" asked Nolan, with a strong legal accent "My fee—"

"I do not wish to retain you in any capacity," Eveley interrupted quickly. "My chief worry is how to dispose of you satisfactorily. And as for fees—Pouf! Anyhow, I need advice, good advice, deep advice, loving advice. So I have called you into solemn conclave, and because it is a most exceptional occasion I have prepared refreshments, good ones, sandwiches and coffee and cake—Did you bring the cake, Kit? And ice-cream—the drug-store is going to deliver it at ten, only the boy won't climb the stairs; you'll have to meet him at the bottom, Nolan. So I hope you realize that it is an affair of some moment, and not—Miriam Landis, are you asleep?"

Miriam flashed her eyes wide open, denial on her lips, but Kitty forestalled her. "That is a pose," she explained. "Billy Ferris said, and I told Miriam he said it, that with her eyes closed, she is the loveliest thing in the world. And since then she walks around in her sleep half the time."

Miriam turned toward her, still more indignant denial clamoring for utterance, but Eveley, accepting the explanation as reasonable, went quickly on.

"Now I want you to be very serious and thoughtful—can you concentrate better in the dark, Kit? Because I know at seances and things they turn off the lights, and—"

"Oh, let's do. And we'll all hold hands, and concentrate, and maybe we'll scare up a ghost or

something." Then she looked around the room—four girls and Nolan—Nolan, who had edged with alacrity toward Eveley on the telephone desk—and Kitty shrugged her shoulders. "Oh, what's the use? Never mind. Go on with the gossip, Eveley. I can think with the lights on."

"The ice-cream will be here before we get started," said Eileen Trevis suddenly.

Eveley clasped her hands again and smiled. "I have received a fortune. Somebody died—you needn't advise me to wear mourning, either, Miriam. I never saw him in my life, and never even heard of him, and honestly I think he got me mixed up with somebody else and left the fortune to the wrong grand-niece, but anyhow it is none of my business, and since he is dead and the money is here, I suppose there is no chance of his discovering the mistake and making me refund it after it is spent."

"A fortune," gasped Kitty, tumbling off the arm of the chair and rushing to fling herself on the floor beside Eveley, warm arms embracing her knees.

"Root of all evil," murmured Miriam, gazing into space through half-closed lids, and seeing wonderful visions of complexions and permanent curls and a manicure every day.

"How fortunate," said Eileen in a voice pleased though still unruffled and even. "A fortune means safety and protection and—"

"Who the dickens has been butting into your affairs now?" demanded Nolan peevishly, and though the girls laughed, there was no laughter in his eyes and no smile on his lips.

"Well, since he calls me his great-niece, I suppose he is my grand-uncle."

"How much, lovey, how much?" gurgled Kitty, at her side.

"Twenty-five hundred dollars," announced Eveley ecstatically.

Nolan breathed again. "Oh, that isn't so bad. I thought maybe some simp had left you a couple of millions or so."

Eveley fairly glared upon him. "What do you mean by that? Why a simp? Why shouldn't I be left a couple of millions as well as anybody else? Maybe you think I haven't sense enough to spend a couple of millions."

"And why did you require advice?" Eileen queried.

"Oh, yes." Eveley smiled again. "Yes, of course. Now you must all think desperately for a while—I hate to ask so much of you, Nolan—but perhaps this once you won't mind—I want you to tell me what to do with the money."

This was indeed a serious responsibility. What to do with twenty-five hundred dollars?

"You do not feel it is your duty to spend the twenty-five hundred pounding Americanism into your Irish-American Wops?" asked Nolan facetiously.

Eveley took this good-naturedly. "Oh, I got off from work at four-thirty and went down to their field, and we had a celebration. We had ice-cream and candy and chewing gum, and I spent twenty-five dollars equipping them with balls and bats and since I was with them an hour and a quarter, I feel that I am entitled to the rest of the fortune myself."

"Well, dearie," said Eileen, "it is really very simple. Put it in a savings account, of course. Keep it for a rainy day. You may be ill. You may get married—"

"Can't she get married without twenty-five hundred dollars?" asked Nolan, with great indignation. "She doesn't expect to buy her own groceries when she gets married, does she?"

"She may have to, Nolan," said Eileen gently. "One never knows what may happen after marriage. Getting married is no laughing matter, and Eveley should be prepared for any exigency."

"But, Eileen, she won't need her twenty-five hundred to get married. No decent fellow would marry a girl unless he could support her, and do it well, even luxuriously. You don't suppose I would let my wife spend her twenty-five hundred—"

"If you mean me, I shall do whatever I like with my own money when I get married," said Eveley quickly. "My husband will have nothing to say about it. You needn't think for one minute—"

"I am not your husband, am I? I haven't exactly proposed to you yet, have I?"

Eveley swallowed hard. "Certainly not. And probably never will. By the time you get around to it, getting married will be out of date, and none of the best people doing it any more."

"You may not have asked her, Nolan," said Eileen evenly. "And that is your business, of course. She will probably turn you down when you do ask her, just as she does everybody else. But—"

"Who has been asking her now?" he cried, with jealous interest.

"But while we are on the subject, I hope you will permit me to say that I think your principles are all wrong, and even dangerous. You think a man should wait a thousand years until he can keep a wife like a pet dog, on a cushion with a pink ribbon around her neck—"

"The dog's neck, or the wife's?"

"The dog's—no, the wife's—both of them," she decided at last, with never a ruffle. "You want to wait until she is tired of loving, and too old to have a good time, and worn out with work. It isn't right. It is not fair. It is unjust both to yourself, and to Eve—to the girl."

"But, my dear child," he said. Eileen was three years older than Nolan; but being a lawyer he called all women "child." "My dear child, do you realize that my salary is eighteen hundred a year, and I get only a few hundred dollars in fees. Think of the cost of food these days, and of clothes, and amusements, to say nothing of rent! Do you think I would allow Eve—my wife, to go without the sweet things of—"

74

"You needn't bring me in," said Eveley loftily. "I have never accepted you, have I?"

"No, not exactly, I suppose, but—"

"Eveley," said Miriam, suddenly sitting erect on the couch. "I have it."

"Sounds like the measles," said Kitty.

"I mean I know what to do with the money. Listen, dear. You do not want to go on slaving in an office until you are old and ugly. And Nolan is quite right, you certainly can not marry a grubby clerk in a law office."

Nolan laughed at that, but Eveley sat up very straight indeed and fairly glowered at her unconscious friend on the couch.

"You must have the soft and lovely things of life, and the way to get them is to marry them. Now, sweet, you take your twenty-five hundred, be manicured and massaged and shampooed until you are glowing with beauty, buy a lot of lovely clothes, trip around like a lady, dance and play, and meet men—men with money—and there you are. You can look like a million dollars on your twenty-five hundred—and your looks will get you the million by marriage."

75

"Miriam Landis, that is shameful," said Nolan in a voice of horror. "It is disgraceful. I never thought to hear a woman, a married woman, a nice woman, utter such low and grimy thoughts. Could any such marriage be happy?"

"Well, Nolan," said Miriam sadly, "I am not sure that any marriage can be happy, or was ever supposed to be. But women are such that they have to try it once. Eveley will be like all the rest. And if she has to try it, she had better try it with a million, than with eighteen hundred a year."

"There is something in that, Miriam, certainly," said Eveley thoughtfully. "What do you think, Eileen?"

"I think it is absurd. The notion that woman was born for marriage died long ago. Ridiculous! Woman is born for life, for service, for action, just as man is. Look at the married people you know. How many of them are happy? I do not wish to be personal, but I know very few married people, either men or women, who would not be glad to undo the marriage knot if it could be done easily and quietly without notoriety. They are not happy. But we are happy. Why? Because we work, we think, we feel, we live. We are not slaves to the contentment of man. Go on working, my dear. Keep your independence. But play safe. Put your money in the bank, or in some good investment, and let it safeguard your future. Then you can go your way serene."

76

"That is certainly sound. Marriage isn't the most successful thing in the world."

"I should say not," chimed Kitty. "Husbands are always tired of wives, their own, I mean, inside of five years."

"Well, if it comes to that," said Eveley honestly, "I suppose wives are tired of their own husbands, too. But they are so stubborn they won't admit it. In their hearts I suppose they are quite as sick of their husbands as their husbands are of them."

"Eve," said Nolan anxiously, "where are you getting all these wicked notions? Marriage is the most sacred—"

77

"Institution. I know it. Every one says marriage is a sacred institution, and so is a church. But nobody wants to live with one permanently."

"But, Eveley, the sanctity of the—"

"Home. Sure, we know it is sanctified. But monotonous. Deadly monotonous."

"Eve," and his voice was quite tragic, "don't you feel that the divine sphere of—"

"Woman. You needn't finish it, Nolan; we know it as well as you do. The divine sphere of woman is in the sanctified home keeping up the sacred institution of marriage while her husband—oh, tralalalalalala."

"Yes, sir, I'll go you," cried Kitty suddenly, leaping up from the floor, and waving her hand. "Europe! You and I together."

"She has come to," said Eileen resignedly. "There's an end of sensible talk for this evening."

"Yes, Kit, what is it? I knew you would think of something good."

"We'll go to Europe, you and I. I think I can work dad to let me go. I can pretend to fall in love with the plumber, or somebody, and he'll be glad to trot me off for a while. And he likes you, Eveley. He thinks you are so sensible."

78

"Why, he hardly knows me," cried Eveley, astonished.

"Yes, that is why. I tell him how sensible you are when you are not there, and when he gets home I hustle you out of his sight in a hurry. He likes me to have sensible friends."

"And what shall we do with the money?"

"Travel, travel, travel, and have a gay good time," said Kitty blithely. "All over Europe. We'll get

some handsome clothes, and have the time of our lives as long as the money lasts, and then marry dukes or princes or something like that.”

“Two of you,” shouted Nolan furiously. “Well, Eve, it is a good thing you have one friend to give you really decent advice. Of all idiotic ideas. Buy fine clothes and marry a millionaire. Save it to pay for potatoes when you get a husband that can’t support you. Travel to Europe and marry some purple prince.”

“Why purple?” asked Eveley curiously.

“Do you mean clothed in purple and fine linen?”

“If you mean blood, it is blue,” said Kitty. “Blue-blooded princes. Whoever heard of a purple-blooded prince?”

“What did you mean anyhow, Nolan?” asked Eileen.

Driven into a corner, Nolan hesitated. He had said purple on the spur of the moment, chiefly because it sounded derogatory and went well with prince.

“What I really mean,” he began in a dispassionate legislative voice, “what I really mean is—purple in the face. You know, purple, splotchy skin, caused by eating too much rich food, drinking too much strong wine, playing cards and dancing and flirting.”

“Does flirting make you purple?” gasped Miriam. “It does not show on Lem yet.” And then she subsided quickly, hoping they had not noticed.

“Why, Nolan, I have danced for weeks and weeks at a stretch, evenings, I mean, when the service men were here,” said Kitty, “and I am not purple yet.”

“Oh, rats,” said Nolan. Then he brightened. “You have never seen a prince, so of course you do not understand. Wait till you see one. Then a purple prince will mean something in your young life.”

“I should not like to marry a purple creature,” said Eveley, wrinkling her nose distastefully. “I am too pink. And my blue eyes would clash with a purple husband, too. But maybe the dukes and lords are a different shade,” she finished hopefully.

Nolan turned his back, and lit a cigarette.

“Yes, you may smoke, Nolan, by all means. I always like my guests to be comfortable.”

“What is your advice then, Nolan? You are so scornful about our suggestions,” said Eileen quietly.

“I know what Nolan would like,” said Kitty spitefully. “He would advise Eveley to give him the money and make him her executor and appoint him her guardian. That would suit him to a T.”

“My poor infant, Eveley can not use an executor and a guardian at the same time. One comes in early youth, or old age, the other after death. An executor—” he began, clearing his throat as for a prolonged technical explanation.

Kitty plunged her fingers into her ears. “You stop that right now, Nolan English. We came here to advise Eveley, not for you to practise on. If you begin that I shall go straight home—no, I mean I shall go out on the steps and wait for the ice-cream.”

“What do you advise, Nolan?” persisted Eileen.

“Well, my personal advice is, and I strongly urge it, and plead it, and it will make me very happy, and—?”

“He wants to borrow it,” gasped Kitty.

“Go on, Nolan,” urged Eveley eagerly.

“Put it in the bank on your checking account.”

“Put it—”

“Checking account?”

“Yes, indeed, right in your checking account.”

A slow scornful light dawned in Eileen’s eyes. “I see,” she said coldly. “Very selfish, very unprofessional, very unfriendly. He would have his lady love absolutely bankrupt, that he may endow her with all the goods of life.”

“Why, Nolan,” said Eveley weakly, lacking Eileen’s sharper perception, “don’t you know me well enough to realize that if I put it into my checking account it will be gone, absolutely and everlastingly gone, inside of six months, and not a thing to show for it?”

“Yes, I know it,” he admitted humbly.

“And still you advise it?”

“I do not advise it—I just want it,” he admitted plaintively.

Eveley sat quietly for a while, counting her fingers, her lips moving once in a while, forming such words as marriage, travel, princes and banks. Then she clapped her hands and beamed upon them.

“Lovely,” she cried. “Exquisite! Just what I wanted to do myself! You are dear good faithful friends, and wise, too, and you will never know how much your advice has helped me. Then it is

all settled, isn't it? And I shall buy an automobile."

In a flash, she caught up a pillow, holding it out sharply in front of her, whirling it around like a steering wheel, while she pushed with both feet on imaginary clutches and brakes, and honked shrilly.

But her friends leaned weakly back in their chairs and stared. Then they laughed, and admitted it was what they had expected all the time.

CHAPTER VI

A WRONG ADJUSTMENT

Eveley's resolve to spend her fortune for an auto met with less resistance than she had anticipated. It seemed that every one had known all along that she would fool the money away on something, and a motor was far more reasonable than some things.

"I said travel," said Kitty. "And we can travel in a car as well as on a train—more fun, too. And though it may cut us off from meeting a purple prince—a pretty girl with a car of her own is a combination no man can resist. And maybe if we are very patient and have good luck, we may save a millionaire from bandits, or rescue a daring aviator from capture by Mexicans."

Miriam nodded, also, her eyes cloudy behind the dark lashes. "Very nice, dear. Get a lot of stunning motor things and—irresistible, simply irresistible. You must have a red leather motor coat. You will be adorable in one. But you'll have to shake Nolan, dear. You stand no chance in the world if you are constantly herded by a disagreeable young lawyer, guardianing you from every truant glance."

"It isn't at all bad," quickly interposed Eileen. "I believe that more than anything else in the world, a motor-car reconciles a woman to life without a husband. She gets thrills in plenty, and retains her independence at the same time."

"Eileen," put in Nolan sternly, "I am disappointed in you. A woman of your ability and experience trying to prejudice a young and innocent girl against marriage is—is—"

"You are awfully hard to suit, Nolan," complained Eveley gently. "You shouted at Miriam and Kitty for advising a husband, and now you roar at Eileen for advising against one."

"It isn't the husband I object to—it is their cold-blooded scheme to go out and pick one up. Woman should be sought—"

"Well, when Eveley gets a car she'll be sought fast enough," said Kitty shrewdly. "She hasn't suffered from any lack of admirers as it is, but when she goes motoring on her own—*ach*, Louie."

"Then you approve of the car, do you, Nolan?"

"Well, since I can not think of any quicker or pleasanter way of spending the money," he said slowly, "I may say that I do, unequivocally."

"Why unequivocally?"

"What's it mean, anyhow?" demanded Kitty.

"Can't you talk English, Nolan?" asked Eveley, in some exasperation. "You started off as if you were in favor, but now heaven only knows what you mean."

"Get your car, my poor child, by all means. Get your car. But a dictionary is what you really need."

The rest of the evening they were enthusiastic almost to the point of incoherency. Kitty was in raptures over an exquisite red racer she had seen on the street. Miriam described Mary Pickford's rose-upholstered car, and applied it to Eveley's features. Nolan developed a surprisingly intimate knowledge of carburetors, horse-powers and cylinders.

When at last they braved the rustic stairway, homeward bound, with exclamatory gasps and squeals, gradually drifting away into silence, Eveley sat down on the floor to take off her shoes—a most childish habit carried over into the years of age and wisdom—and was immediately wrapped in happy thoughts where stunning motor clothes and whirring engines and Nolan's pleasant eyes were harmoniously mingled. And when at last she started up into active consciousness again, and rushed pellmell to bed, mindful of her responsibility as a business girl, sleep came very slowly. And when it came at last, it was a chaotic jumble of excited dreams and tossings.

The life of the bride and groom in the nest beneath Eveley's Cloud Cote had progressed so sweetly and smoothly that Eveley had come to feel it was quite a friendly dispensation of Providence that permitted her to live one story up from Honeymooning. So the next morning, in the midst of the confusion that came from dressing and getting her breakfast and reading motor

ads in the morning paper at the same time, she was utterly electrified to hear a sudden sharp cry of anguish from little Mrs. Bride beneath—a cry accompanied by sounds caused by nothing in the world but a passionate and hysterical pounding of small but violent feet upon the floor.

“Ooooooh, ooooooh, don’t talk to me, Dody, I can’t bear it. I can’t, I can’t. Oooooh, I wish I were dead. Go away, go away this instant and let me die. Oh, I shall run away, I shall kill myself! Oooooh!”

“Dearie, sweetie, don’t,” begged Mr. Groom distractedly. “Lovie, precious, please.” And his voice faded off into tender inarticulate whispers.

For a long second Eveley was speechless. Then she said aloud, very grimly, “Hum. It has begun. I suppose I may look for flat-irons and rolling-pins next. Hereafter they are Mr. and Mrs. Ordinary Married People.”

After long and patient, demonstrative pleading on his part, Mrs. Severs was evidently restored to a semblance of reason and content, and quiet reigned for a while until the slam of the door indicated that Mr. Severs had heeded the call of business.

Almost immediately there came a quick creaking of the rustic stairs and a light tap on Eveley’s window.

“Come in,” she called pleasantly. “I sort of expected you. You will excuse me, won’t you, for not getting up, but I have only fifteen minutes to finish my breakfast and catch the car.”

“You are awfully businesslike, aren’t you?” asked Mrs. Severs admiringly. “Yes, I will have a cup of coffee, thanks. I need all the stimulation I can get.”

She was pale, and her eyes were red-rimmed, Eveley noted commiseratingly.

“We are expecting an addition to our family this afternoon, Miss Ainsworth,” she began, her chin quivering childishly.

“Mercy!” gasped Eveley.

“Our father-in-law,” added Mrs. Severs quickly. “Dody’s father. He is coming to live with us.”

“Oh!” breathed Eveley. “Won’t that be lovely?”

Mrs. Severs burst into passionate weeping. “It won’t be lovely,” she sobbed. “It will be ghastly.” She sat up abruptly and wiped her eyes. “He is the most heart-breaking thing you ever saw, and he doesn’t like me. He doesn’t approve of dimples, and he says I am soft. And he has the most desperate old chum you ever saw, a perfect wreck with red whiskers, and they get together every night and play pinochle and smoke smelly old pipes, and he won’t have curtains in his bedroom, and he is crazy about a phonograph, and he won’t eat my cooking.”

“I should think you would like that,” said Eveley. “Maybe he will cook for himself.”

“That is just it,” wailed Mrs. Severs. “He does. He cooks the smelliest kind of corn beef and cabbage, and eats liver by the—by the cow, and has raw onions with every meal. And he drinks tea by the gallon. And he cooks everything himself and piles it on his plate like a mountain and carries it to the table and sits there and eats it right before company and everybody.”

“I don’t see how Mr. Severs ever came to have a father like that,” said Eveley in open surprise.

“Well, the funny thing about it is that he would really be very nice if he wasn’t so outrageous. And he swears terribly. He says ‘Holy Mackinaw’ at everything. But he loves Dody. They lived together for years, and it nearly killed him when Dody got married. And Dody said, ‘You will live with us of course, father,’ and so we expected it. But he went off for a visit after we were married—he and the red-whiskered friend, and we sort of thought—we kind of hoped—miracles do happen, you know—and so I just kept believing that something would turn up to save us. But it didn’t. Dody got a letter this morning, and he will be here this afternoon. Oh, I wish I were dead.”

“Is he terribly poor?”

“Mercy, no! He’s got plenty of money. Lots more than we have. Enough to live anywhere he pleases.”

“I see it all,” said Eveley ominously. “You won’t be happy with him, and he won’t be happy with you, but you are all putting up with it because it is your—duty.”

“Yes, that is it, of course.”

Eveley poured herself another cup of coffee and drank it rapidly, without cream, and only one lump of sugar. “I am upset,” she said at last. “This has simply shattered the day for me. Excuse me, you’ll have to hurry, I only have five minutes left. I haven’t explained my belief and principles to you—you being young and newly married and needing all the illusions possible—but I do not believe in duty.”

“Gracious,” gasped the bride. “You don’t?”

“Absolutely not. No human being should do his duty under any conceivable circumstances. You see, there are two kinds, the pleasurable ones, and the painful ones. Pleasurable duties are done, not because they are duties, but because they are pleasurable. So they do not count. And a painful duty can not be a duty or it would not be painful. My idea is, that there must be a happy adjustment of every necessity, so when a duty is painful, it is the wrong adjustment. You and your father-in-law are giving yourselves pain because it is the wrong adjustment.”

"It sounds very clever."

"It is the only beautiful plan of life," said Eveley modestly.

"And then we would not have to live with father at all?"

"Most certainly not."

"It certainly is a glorious theory," said the bride enthusiastically. "You explain it to Dody, will you? He is positively death on duty, especially when it is painful. He'd do his duty if it killed him and me, burned the house down and started a revolution."

"I have to go now," said Eveley. "Excuse me for rushing you off, but I am late already. I'll explain it to you another time."

Very skilfully she piloted her caller out the window and down the rustic steps.

"Remember this," she said as they reached the bottom. "As long as duty is painful, it is not a duty and can not be. Now find another adjustment. That is the end of it." And she started on a quick trot for the corner.

"But father will be here this afternoon just the same," called Mrs. Severs after her in mournful tones.

Being very businesslike, Eveley made a set of notes about the case on her way down-town.

Liver and cabbage.

Raw onions.

Smelly pipe.

Red-whiskered friend.

Pinochle.

Hates dimples. (I'll keep my left side turned his way.)

Money enough to live on.

Crazy about Dody—christened Andrew.

Dody believes in duty.

"Of course it is up to me to save them," she decided cheerfully, and was quite happy at the prospect of an engagement in her campaign. "But I can't neglect getting my car, even to save human nature from its duty," she added. And then her mind wandered from the duties of brides, to the pleasures of young motorists.

Her plan of expenditure was most lucid. She would invest eighteen hundred dollars in a car, and spend two hundred for clothes "to sustain the illusion." Nolan did not understand exactly what she meant by that, but on general principles was convinced it was something reprehensible and sneered at it. The other five hundred was to be deposited in the bank as a guarantee for future tires and gasoline and repairs. Nolan said that according to his information it would be wiser to buy a second-hand car for five hundred, and keep the eighteen hundred for tires and gas and repairs.

But Nolan was a struggling young lawyer—even more struggling than young—and the girls were accustomed to his pessimistic murmurs, and gave them no heed at all.

Although Eveley had determined to confine herself to eighteen hundred dollars for the car, she was not morally above accepting demonstrations of cars entailing twice, and even thrice, that expenditure. "For," she said, "for all I know somebody else may die and leave me some more, and then I can get an expensive one. And besides, I feel it is my duty—oh, no, I mean I feel it would be lots of fun, as a conscientious and enthusiastic motorist to know the good points of every car."

So Nolan assured her of his complete support and assistance in her search, even to the detriment of his labors at the law office, where he hoped one day to be a member of considerable standing. Nolan had two fond dreams—to become a regular member of the firm, and to marry Eveley. They were closely related, one to the other. If he could not marry Eveley, he had no desire for a partnership nor anything else but speedy death. But until he had the partnership, he felt himself morally obligated to deny himself Eveley in the flesh. For he was one of those unique, old-fashioned creatures who feels that man must offer position and affluence as well as love to the lady of his choice. So it was no mere mercenary madness on his own account that kept Nolan living a life of gentle and economic obscurity, patient struggling for a foothold on the ladder of fame in his profession.

He knew better than to propose to Eveley. He realized that if they were once formally and blissfully engaged, he, being only mortal man with human frailties, could never resist the charm of complete possession, and he foresaw that betrothal would end in speedy marriage to the death of his determination to bring his goddess glory.

Thus Nolan's lips were sealed—on the subject of marriage. "Though goodness knows, he has plenty to say about everything else," Eveley sometimes complained rather plaintively. And his attentions took the form of a more or less pleasant watch-dog constancy, and an always more and never less persistence in warding off other suitors not handicapped by his own scruples in regard to matrimony.

CHAPTER VII

PAINFUL DUTY

When Eveley arrived home late that night she smiled to observe that all the down-stairs windows were wide open to the breeze, and in the corner bedroom, apportioned to Father-in-law, the curtains were down. At the back of the house she found Father-in-law himself, with the proverbial whiskered friend, critically inspecting her rustic steps through the clouds of smoke from their pipes which they removed to facilitate their interested stares as she approached.

"How do you do?" she cried brightly. "You are Mr. Severs, Senior, aren't you? Welcome home! And this is your friend, I know." She shook hands with them both, with great cordiality. She must disarm them, before she could begin working them into a proper adjustment with life. "I am Eveley Ainsworth. Are you admiring my steps? I am very eccentric and temperamental and all that, and I have to live alone. I do not like being crowded in with other folks. I like to do as I please, and not bother with anybody else."

99

"Very sensible, I'm sure," said Father-in-law.

"Sure," echoed the whiskered one breezily.

"That was the first little seed," she chuckled to herself, as she ran blithely up the stairs. Later, when she heard Mrs. Severs in the room beneath, she went to the head of the inner stairway and called down to her.

"Come up a minute. I want to see you."

Mrs. Severs lost no time. "My husband says it is simply absurd," she began breathlessly. "He says people have to do their duty. He says a thing is right or wrong, and that settles it. We are all father has in the world, and Dody says it is plainly our duty to keep him with us. He says a fellow would be taking an awful chance to marry you, if that is a sample of your principles. Don't you believe in any duty, Miss Ainsworth?"

100

"Only one," said Eveley with great firmness.

"Oh, what is that?" came the eager query.

"That," was the dignified reply, "is something that doesn't enter into this case at all, and doesn't need to be discussed."

"Well, Dody says—"

"Dody may be a very sweet husband, but he is not progressive. His idea is old, outworn and antedeluvian. Simply musty. Now, this is my plan—the plan of progress according to new ideas which means happiness for all. Father-in-law and the whiskered friend are born for each other. They are affinities, and soul-mates, and everything. I saw it at the first glance. We'll get them a little cottage off somewhere beyond the odor of onions, and they can revel in liver and pipes to their hearts' content."

"Impossible! Whiskers has a wife of his own."

"What?" Eveley was much disconcerted. "Well, maybe she will get a divorce so her husband can marry your father—I mean—maybe it won't stick, you know."

101

"It's been sticking for forty years, and I suppose it will go on forever. You see she doesn't have him around much and so she probably forgets how he is. He is always out with father, and she is asleep when he gets home."

"Well, don't worry about it. He had no business being married, for it was a lovely plan—but it can't be helped now. Never mind."

"Listen," said Mrs. Severs suddenly. "Hear the sizzling. That's onions. Didn't I tell you? I was going to have chicken croquettes and creamed peas, with lettuce salad and fruit jello. But how can Dody and I sit down to a decent meal with the whole house reeking with tobacco and onions?"

"Never mind, dear. We'll find the adjustment in time. Just try to be patient."

For another night, and another day, Eveley puzzled and pondered—during intervals of studying motor folders and reading advertisements. And the next evening she found Mrs. Severs wringing her hands on the front porch.

102

"What is it?" she asked anxiously. "Did he kill himself?"

"No such luck," wailed Mrs. Severs. "He won't sleep in the bedroom because he says it is too shady under all those vines, and he has moved himself out into the living-room on the couch. He says there is no sense having a house all cluttered up with rooms anyhow, he doesn't believe in it. He says two rooms are enough for anybody. You can cook and eat in the kitchen, and sit and sleep in the other room, and anything more is just plain tony."

"I tell you what," suggested Eveley brightly. "Be mean to him. Be real snippy and bossy. Don't

let him have his own way. You just fire him right back into the bedroom. Tell him you are head of this house, and he's got to mind. Then he'll be only too glad to move out and then you'll have some peace."

"I can't," moaned Mrs. Severs. "He's really kind of nice if he wasn't so awful. I couldn't be mean to Dody's father. And Dody would not let me if I wanted to."

"Well, don't worry," said Eveley automatically. "I am still working. We will try every different adjustment, and in time we shall hit the right one. Just keep happy and—"

"Keep happy," wailed Mrs. Severs. "Don't be sarcastic, Miss Ainsworth, please. I never expect to be happy again."

Then she went home, and Eveley called Nolan on the telephone.

"You must come immediately and have supper with me. And stop on the way and get a small steak, and ask the drug-store to deliver a pint of ice-cream at six-thirty sharp. And you might bring a nice tomato if you can remember, and I shall have everything else ready. We won't have much to-night, just steak and salad and ice-cream. I need professional advice."

Nolan never dreamed of refusing an invitation of any sort whatever from Eveley, and he started immediately, gathering up the dinner on his way. As he put his foot on the lowest step of the rustic stair, Eveley's head thrust itself suddenly from between the curtains.

"There is a proper adjustment," she said, in a stern voice. "Just keep your mind on that. Painful duty is no duty, and can not be. There is a right adjustment—and we must find it."

Nolan continued warily up the rickety stair, greeting her at the top cordially.

"Hello, Eveley. My, the coffee smells good. I am hungry as a bear, too. I saw you out last night with that sad-eyed Buddy soldier, and I do not approve of it. I shall deem it my duty to administer a proper adjustment of his facial characteristics if he doesn't mind his own business. The ice-cream will be here at six-thirty sharp. How is Kitty? You have flour on your ears. Shall I fix the tomatoes?"

"I did not bring you here in a social capacity to discuss personal matters," said Eveley coldly. "I told you yesterday that my home is saddened by the grotesque figure of maladjustment stalking in our midst under his usual guise of Duty. As I have explained so many times, there is bound to be a happy adjustment. But this time I can not figure it out. Now I call on you."

"Retainer's fee, one hundreds dollars. Payable, of course, in advance."

"Oh, well, it is not strictly legal. Let's just talk it over nicely as dear good friends, and if you have an idea I can absorb it. Nolan, Eileen said she saw you at lunch to-day with a woman."

"Eileen? How is Eileen? I haven't seen her for days. Let's have a party soon, and invite Kitty and Eileen and Miriam and me, and you give us a midnight supper here in the Cote, will you?"

"It was at the Grant."

"I did not see Eileen, but of course I was busy. Was she alone? We had a nice luncheon—grilled pork chops and country gravy. The gravy was good—no lumps. It made me think of yours."

"My gravy is not always lumpy," she said with a frown. "It just happened that way the last two times because I was called to the telephone while I was making it."

"Oh, sure, that's all right."

He carefully adjusted her chair at the table, and drew his own close beside it, pulling his plate and silverware half-way around the table from where Eveley had placed them.

"You look sweeter than ever, to-night, Eve. But I hope the gravy is not lumpy."

"She wore a black dress and white gloves, and a black hat."

"Eileen did? Was it a new dress?"

"No, the one with you."

"Sure enough, I believe she did. A georgette dress, beaded in front. Quite pretty. But there was a rip in her glove. She showed it to me herself. She said she did it on the car, but it looked like an old rip to me."

"And after luncheon you went away in her car, didn't you?"

"Her uncle's car. Just for a short run through the park, and then she dropped me at the office. Quite a pleasant woman. She was so polite to me, and treated me with such gentle deference. It was quite a change. It made me think of you."

Eveley put down her fork. "Who was it?"

"Bartlett's niece from San Francisco. Visiting here. He had promised to take her for luncheon, but at the last minute Graves came in and they were busy, so he turned her over to me."

"I do not see why you are always the one to take their nieces and daughters out for luncheon. This is the fourth time in two months. I believe you do it on purpose. Why should they always pick on you?"

"Partly because of my beauty, perhaps, and my charming manners as well as my generally winsome demeanor in the presence of ladies. I suppose Eileen also informed you that this niece is Mrs. Harmon Delavan, and has three children in addition to a husband."

"Oh, Nolan, how you do burble along. I didn't bring you here to discuss Bartlett's relatives. Now get down to business. How can we adjust the honeymooners and the father-in-law—though honestly I think he is great fun myself, and would a whole lot rather live with him than with Dody. Only he does not fit in with the honeymoon scheme of life."

"Well," said Nolan dreamily, "why don't you marry him, and bring him up here?"

"Oh, Nolan, you are clever. I never thought of that."

At the evident delight in her voice, Nolan stared.

"Not to me, goosey, he would never consent, for I have a dimple and he does not approve of them. So far I have kept it on the off side, and he has not noticed, but I couldn't always turn the left side to a husband, could I?"

"Well, then—"

"Marry him to somebody else, of course. I can't just decide who—but there will be some one. You are such a help, Nolan. Now let's not bother with the duties of our neighbors, but have a good time. To-morrow I shall find him a wife." Then she leaned toward Nolan, refilling his cup, and said gurglingly, "Was he working awfully hard at the stupid old office?"

"Eveley, just one thing, while we are on our duties," he said, catching her hand. "You have made one exception, always, but you have never told me what it is. And it is so unlike you to except anything when you get started. What is the one duty that is justified and necessary?"

Eveley promptly pulled her hand away. "That," she said, "is purely personal. It will not do any one any good to talk about it. So it is all sealed up on the inside."

"And I shall never know what your one duty in life is?" he asked, with mock pleading, but real curiosity.

"It may hit you sometime—harder than anybody else," she said, laughing. "But in the meantime let's talk of other things."

As soon as Mr. Severs had started to work the next morning, without the tender farewells, for the presence of Father-in-law placed an instinctive veto on such demonstrations—Eveley kicked briskly on the floor as a summons, and Mrs. Severs answered.

"Eveley?" she called up to the ceiling.

And Eveley shouted down to the floor of her room, "Come up—I've got it."

At that Mrs. Severs fairly flew up the stairs.

Eveley caught her on the landing, and whirled her around the room in a triumphant dance, stopping at last so abruptly that Mrs. Severs was almost precipitated to the floor.

"Now listen. I've got it. The proper adjustment, that will make you all happy and prove my theory."

"Yes, yes, yes," chanted Mrs. Severs ecstatically.

"He must get married."

"But—"

"Now don't interrupt. Let me finish. Of course he has no notion of such a thing, but leave it to me. We shall marry him off before he knows it. We must find the woman first. Out at Chula Vista there are a lot of beautiful elderly ladies in the Home who are all alone and would be only too glad to have a cozy home and a—a—pleasant husband and—all that. So we'll go out on Saturday afternoon and look them over and pick out a good one. Then I'll invite her to visit me for a week, and you and I will both be busy so Father-in-law will have to entertain her, and she'll cut out old Whiskers in no time at all."

Eveley flung out her hands jubilantly.

Mrs. Severs showed no enthusiasm. "That is what I wanted to tell you. He can't. He is already married."

Eveley dropped into a chair. "Married!" she stammered. "You told me Dody's mother was dead."

"She is, of course. But what I did not tell you is this. Three years ago while Dody was in France, father must have sort of lost his mind or something, for without a minute's warning, he up and married somebody—a woman, of course. When Dody got home from the war she was not there, and when he asked about her, father just sort of laughed and looked sheepish, and said, 'Oh, she's gone on a visit.' 'Where to?' Dody asked. 'Oh, somewhere around,' said father. 'Is she coming back?' asked Dody. 'Holy Mackinaw, I hope not,' said father, and that is the last we ever heard of her. But of course he is still married."

It was a hard blow, but Eveley rallied at last, though slowly. "Don't worry," she said monotonously. "There is another adjustment. Just keep happy—and give me time."

"You've simply got to sneak off on some pretext or another, and meet me at the Doric agency at three o'clock for a demonstration. They say it is perfectly wonderful—why, it hardly takes a look of gas to go a thousand miles, and its tires are literally cast iron."

This was her summons by telephone. And Nolan, determined not to desert trusting little Eveley to the tender mercies of motor sharks, went to the Middle Member, whose position he confidently expected one day to possess, and announced that important business of a personal nature required his presence that afternoon. And because Nolan never abused privileges—or if he did was never detected in the act—and because his firm was composed of human beings and not the granite machines common to fiction, Nolan encountered no difficulty.

113

And Eveley went to her own employer, and smiling seductively upon him, said vaguely that some awfully important and unexpected things had come up, and could she please get off at three, if she would work particularly hard in the meantime to make up?

And because Eveley was very pretty, and withal very businesslike, and pleasant about trifles like working after hours and special grinds and such things, and because her employer was acutely conscious of her soft voice and bright eyes, he smiled in return and said:

"Yes, indeed, Miss Ainsworth, I heard you phoning about it. Go, by all means, but I do not think you will like the Doric. The tires are all right, but the cylinders are under size, and this causes a constant friction with the magneto which impairs the efficiency and makes the car a poor climber and weak on endurance runs."

That is probably not what he said at all, but it is what Eveley understood him to say, and from it she gathered that she might go at three, but that there was something perfectly terrible about the Doric that made it impossible for her to buy it, but of course she could not disappoint the salesman with the deep blue eyes, and so she would have the demonstration anyhow.

114

From three o'clock on, the afternoon was a perfect daze of magnetos and batteries and gas feeders and real leather upholstery. But Eveley interrupted once, to run into a drug-store to the public telephone, to call Kitty, and when she had her friend on the wire she said eagerly:

"Oh, Kit, we are trying out the Doric. It is awfully good some ways, and rotten some ways, and so of course I can't buy it, but the salesman has the most irresistible eyes you ever saw in your life, and so I am wearing my new blue veil, and I look a dream in it. Now you scoot up to the Cote, will you, and have supper ready for us at six—Nolan and me. If Nolan were not along I might bring the blue-eyed Doric man, but he is so overbearing about those things—Nolan, I mean. Get a nice juicy steak, he needs nourishment. I think if I could feed him constantly for a month and save him from the restaurants he might develop enough animal magnetism to—anyhow, he needs the steak, so get a good one at Hardy's and charge it to me. And will you go by the cleaners, and get my motor gloves—they said it would only be a quarter for the cleaning, so don't pay them a cent more. Will you? That's a nice girl."

115

At six o'clock, wearily, happily, still discoursing earnestly of magnetos and batteries, Eveley and Nolan climbed the rickety rustic steps, brightening visibly as the odor of broiling steak and frying potatoes was wafted out to them. Nolan went in first, carefully stepping out of the way before he reached a hand to assist Eveley, for he knew that she would fall headlong among the cushions she kept conveniently placed for that purpose. "It is easy enough getting in, if you take your time," she always said defensively to criticizing friends. "But I am usually in a hurry myself, so I keep the cushions handy."

On this evening, being tired, she remained on the floor where she had comfortably landed, and lazily removed her hat and veil, tossing them lightly into a distant corner.

116

"If it wasn't for the carburetor rubbing on the spark plugs," she said plaintively, "I'd get the Doric in spite of everything. Did you ever see such blue eyes in your life, Nolan?"

"The Mason is a better car in every way," he said flatly. "Strongly built, low hung, smart-looking, and the engine perfect."

Eveley frowned. "Isn't that like a man? The Mason! I wish you could have seen him, Kitty. Fifty years old if he was a day, and bald, and two double chins. And talked through his nose. And what do you suppose he talked about? His wife—and how she loves the Mason. What do I care what his wife thinks about the Mason? I wouldn't have the Mason if he offered me one. I'll bet it is so easy riding that it fairly sprouts double chins—on the drivers."

"You are buying a car, Eveley—not a driver," Nolan explained.

"But the Doric is rather light in weight, and very high in price. How I wish you could have heard him tell about it, Kitty. When he said carburetor it was just like running up a scale of music. And his fingernails were manicured as nicely as my own."

117

"Is dinner ready?" Nolan interrupted furiously. "Come and eat. Great Scott! That girl would buy a bum car and a costly one, because the demonstrator has shined his nails."

"And, Kitty, he said if we could go to-morrow evening at five-thirty he would take us to La Jolla to show us how she climbs the grades. She will go up on high."

"When did he say that?" interrupted Nolan. "I can not go with you to-morrow night. Don't you remember I told you we had a meeting—"

"I know, dear. I am so sorry. But Kitty will go with us, won't you?"

"Will I?" echoed Kitty ecstatically. "Won't I? Do you suppose they have another one, with brown eyes, to go along to—to change tires, or anything?"

"I don't know, but we can ask. He is going to phone me at the office to-morrow to find out where to call for us. He is very respectable. He goes to the Methodist Church, and his uncle is a banker in Philadelphia."

118

"Pass the potatoes, for heaven's sake," urged Nolan. "I feel sick." And after a while he went on, persuasively: "There is no use to try that car out again, Eveley. It is no good. Or if you insist on it put it off until the next night, and I will go with you. We'll all three go. Make a foursome if you like, with Kitty and the blue-eyed mutt."

"Kitty does not like blue eyes. And besides, I am the one to be demonstrated to. And besides," she winked at Kitty drolly, "I am sure he will be busy the rest of the week. For when I mentioned that you had an appointment to-morrow he said most particularly that to-morrow was the only free evening he had for weeks to come. And that reminds me, Nolan, that your advice about Father-in-law was no good. He is married already, and it is your fault, getting me buoyed up with hope, all to no purpose."

Nolan was properly regretful.

"Do you think the old man likes to live with them?" he asked.

119

"No, of course not. He hates it. He almost shudders when I tell him how lovely it is to have a son and daughter to live with. But I suppose he thinks it is his duty to stick, just as they think it is theirs to make him stick. People are so absurd, aren't they?"

"Yes, very," he said soberly, his eyes intent on Eveley's hair curling so tenderly about her ears. And he was really thinking how very absurd it was that a rising young lawyer should find it so tempting to touch that bit of curl, and to kiss it. Very absurd indeed!

"Are you thinking of something?" she asked hopefully, looking into his earnest eyes.

"Yes, indeed." And he forced his eyes away from the distracting curls. "Yes, indeed I am."

"What is it?" she begged, leaning toward him and slipping her fingers with childish eagerness into his hand.

"Why—just tempt him," he stammered.

"Tempt him, Nolan. 'Holy Mackinaw,' as Father-in-law says, what do you mean, tempt him?"

120

In this predicament, Nolan was forced to concentrate. Why in the world had he said, "Tempt him?" The temptation of Eveley had nothing whatever to do with father-in-laws and the adjustment of duty. But Eveley expected him to produce a tangible and reasonable explanation.

"Why, just tempt him, Eveley. You know what temptation is, don't you? Then do it." This was merely playing for time, seeking for illumination. "Just—keep it always before him, you know—how nice it would be to get off alone and be independent." Nolan was a lawyer, and having forced a foothold, he made it secure. "Tempt him with freedom, talk to him about the joys of privacy, unrestrained intercourse with his whiskered crony, the delights of unlimited liver and onions, a bed in the sitting-room, meals by the kitchen fire, and a jar of tobacco on every chair. See? Tempt him until he can't stand it."

Eveley looked at him appraisingly. "Nolan English, you are a whole lot cleverer than I ever thought you were. That is real talent. You have found the adjustment this time. I feel it."

121

Nolan, intoxicated with the warmth of her voice, the subtle flattery of word and tone, rushed on.

"Let's find him a house, just a bit of a shack with a little garden and a mangy dog, and then razzle him with the vision of independence, and show him the house."

Then Eveley stood up. "Will you help me do this, Nolan? You get nicer every day of your life."

And Nolan, except for the presence of Kitty, would surely have said what he had no earthly business to say to Eveley yet—until circumstances and the Senior Member made it justifiable.

He sat glowering and grim at the Important Meeting the next evening, when he should have been gratified that his presence was desired—for Maley wasn't there, nor Garland, nor Alverson. But in spite of the Honor, and the Significance, Nolan's mind was wandering. He lost sight of the Truly Greats, and saw only a cloudy picture of Eveley, soft, sweet and dimply, sitting rapt by the side of the Darned Blue Eyes. And that night, at eleven o'clock, on his way to his modest room, he suddenly started. Coming demurely out of the Grant, he saw Eveley and the blue-eyed one, and laughing beside them, Kitty and some other equally reprehensible being. Nolan could hardly believe the evidence of his own eyes.

122

He fumed openly while he allowed them a decent interval for reaching home, and then called Eveley by telephone.

"Eveley, I thought I saw you and Kitty coming out of the Grant with some men a little while ago."

"Oh, did you?" Eveley's voice was vibrant with surprise.

"Yes."

"Isn't that funny?" she laughed a little, softly.

"Well, were you?"

"Were we what?"

"Were you there?"

"Why, yes, of course. We stopped for a sandwich. We missed our dinner. The engine broke down on the Biological Grade, and held us up for quite a while."

"Eveley—"

"Oh, it was perfectly all right. He found out to-day that he had a friend who is a life-long friend of Kitty's and he brought him along, and we were all nicely introduced and everything was as proper as you please."

"Did you buy the car?" he asked witheringly.

"Oh, no, he advised me, confidentially, not to. He is going to change to the Bemis agency tomorrow, and he thinks he will find it much more satisfactory. Wasn't it a lovely night? Did you have a nice time with the High and Mighties? Kitty is going to stay all night with me, and we are just making some hot chocolate. Won't you come for a cup?—Oh, just Kitty and I, and it is quite early. Come along, and we'll tell you all the bad points about the Doric. But they say the Bemis is a wonder."

CHAPTER IX

ADMITTING DEFEAT

The first Saturday after the organization of the Irish-American League brought a blessed spring rain, especially heaven-sent on her account, Eveley felt quite sure, for she was greatly worn from coping with motor salesmen and the father-in-law situation. And this was a rain that not even boys could stand, so she had a blissful afternoon alone, purring and puttering about contentedly in her Cloud Cote.

But on the second Saturday, according to agreement, the League met in the appointed field for a game. This was Eveley's first opportunity to witness the development of American principles in her chosen flotsam. The meeting had been called for one-thirty, and although Eveley arrived fifteen minutes early she found the field occupied by fully twenty youths of varying sizes, colors and brogues. She gazed upon the motley array in helpless horror.

"Ern Swanson is going to be the captain," said John Hop, with his ingratiating Oriental smile. "We just had an election and elected him."

"But we already have a captain," protested Eveley, looking not without sympathy to the corner where Ivan Kerensky nursed his humiliation.

"We didn't know Ern was coming in," said Alfredo Masseno, who had hurried up with half a dozen others to greet her. "Ern, he ought to be the captain. He's awful rough; and baseball, why, he eats baseball alive! And he won't come in unless he is the captain, and if he don't come with us he'll join the Red Dogs on National Avenue, and we want him with us because we have challenged them to a game and if they get Ern they'll lick us."

Then the newly elected captain sauntered up, his good-natured face reflecting the glory of his new command as well as his natural Swedish temperament.

"He doesn't look rough," said Eveley critically.

"No'm, not when things suits him, but you ought to see him when he is mad. Golly! Why, even the cops lets that kid alone."

"But it isn't parliamentary—I mean, it isn't proper to have one election after another like this. We chose one captain, and we ought to stand by him."

"That wasn't no quorum what elected him, ma'm," said Ern Swanson, smiling broadly. "They was only eight in the club then, and now we got twenty-three. That little bunch o' Greasers couldn't represent us. No, ma'm. We want regular Americans at the head of this club, and so we had a regular election."

Eveley knew this was dead against American principles, and she looked once more toward the sulking ex-captain. Then she remembered that he had won his own election in her absence by plain coercion, and decided to pass this one irregularity, but never again.

"Very well, then," she said weakly, "have it your own way this time. But there must be no more elections until the right time. Now, what are you going to do? Have a practise game? Then suppose we let Ivan be captain of the second team, anyhow, and you can pick your men and have a good game."

This seemed a simple proposition to Eveley in her innocence, but on a sudden, pandemonium reigned. The whole crowd of boys propelled itself violently into the air, and there was a

shrieking of voices and a tossing of bats and gloves, and a seemingly endless number of arms flying about. From out the clamor Eveley could distinguish repeated hoarse roars of "Pi-i-i-tcher," "Pi-i-i-tcher," "Ca-a-a-a-atcher," "Ca-a-a-a-atcher," and she retired to a remote spot to await the proper moment for gathering up the remains. Being a lady, she could make no sense at all of the deadly uproar, and she was quite thrilled and charmed when of a sudden the tumult subsided, and she found that out of that apparently aimless clamor, two teams had been selected and the players assigned to their various positions on the field. It was black magic to her.

128

Eveley thought she knew baseball. She knew what a "foul" was, and she knew what happened when one passed four balls, and she knew when one was out. And she had often said fatuously that she loved baseball, because she understood it. But she did not understand it. She understood a mild respectable game that was played by scholarly young men in college. Baseball as played by the wild creatures on that Saturday afternoon was a sealed book to her. And she devoutly hoped and prayed it would remain sealed. She felt that death would be preferable to a full working knowledge of what went on in the Irish-American Club that afternoon.

For an interval of perhaps three minutes the thing progressed with some degree of reason. Then issued a sudden roar from a dozen throats, every one came tearing in from his proper location on the field, and there was a yelling, huddled group in the center. Then Eveley crept timidly from the corner where she was engaging in prayer for the safety of herself and her club, and advanced cautiously toward the swaying pile of shrieking boys.

129

She placed soft entreating hands on the outside layer, she even jumped up and down and yelled "Boys," at the top of her healthy voice. But she was only an atom in a world gone upside down. Presently, however, and from no reason she could determine, the mob disentangled itself into distinct entities, the roar subsided into a few threatening growls and murmurs, and Captain Swanson hitched up his trousers and yelled "Play ball" triumphantly. Then the game went on. This identical thing occurred at intervals of about eight minutes during the entire afternoon.

Eveley hoped devoutly that she was by her very presence helping to Americanize these particular bits of flotsam and jetsam—she trusted so. She was quite confident that so much personal agonizing on her part ought to be doing something to the wild beings. But there was no apparent development.

She stood her ground bravely until four o'clock, and then, thanks to the merciful Providence who protects the fools gone in where angels would not dare, it seemed the whole club had to set about delivering papers. But as there were important details to be attended to, such details as arranging for a permanent place to play, and providing protection for the balls and bats bought from Eveley's inheritance, and paying dues, it was decided to have a meeting in the Service Hall that evening at seven.

130

Eveley went home, and to bed.

At six-thirty she got up, made a percolator full of strong coffee and drank it all.

Then she went to the Service Hall to meet the Irish-American Bloodhounds, as she irreverently called them in her inner heart.

Eveley was out of her element, and she knew it.

She was bent on Americanization, but not this kind. She would be glad to assist in the development of quick and kind-eyed Angelo at the office, or the courteous Jap in the tea garden, but for a baseball club she had no talent. She explained her needs and her deficiencies to the manager of the Recreation Center, and he finally agreed that the Bloodhounds needed a young virile athlete as their director. "And for his own sake," said Eveley almost tearfully, "he ought to be a pugilist. I say this for his good. We need all our assimilators and should not expose them to sudden and violent death."

131

Then Eveley talked to the boys, and told them how she had enjoyed and liked them, but explained that being only a woman she was terribly handicapped, and so would leave them to the discretion of one yet to be selected. She hoped they would remember they were good Americans, that they stood for honor and loyalty and right. Then she thanked God she was free, took her coat and hat and went out.

"Why, Miss Ainsworth! Is it really you? What in the world are you doing here?"

Eveley, startled on the threshold of the Service Club, looked up into the face of the blue-eyed Bemis salesman.

"Oh, Mr. Hiltze," she said mysteriously. "It is a deadly secret. You must never breathe a word of it. But since you have caught me in the act, I may as well confess. I am an Americanizer."

132

"Great Scott!"

"You know what that is, don't you? Helping to sort out and assimilate the flotsam and jetsam of the foreign element, and imbue it with sturdy American principles, and all that."

Mr. Hiltze laughed.

"Perhaps you do not understand the new great movement of Americanization," she said with dignity. "It is the one immense fine movement of the day. It is to effect the amalgamation of all the riff-raff of humanity into a new America." Eveley did not mention the quotation marks which circled her words.

"That is wonderful," he said warmly. "It is a great surprise and a great pleasure, to find women of your type taking an interest in this progressive movement."

Eveley leaned excitedly toward him. "Oh, Mr. Hiltze, are you interested in it, too?"

"None more so, though like yourself I feel the best work is done silently and unobtrusively, and I prefer not to be exploited from the housetops."

133

"Oh, this gives me courage again—and I had nearly lost it. Have you been working to-night? Are you through for the evening?"

"Yes, and if your labors have been as exhaustive and soul-wracking as mine, perhaps you can spare an hour for nourishment with me at the Grant. Of all the jobs in the world! Selling motors is a game beside it."

"We agree again. I think it was rather foolish of me to tackle it in the beginning. I haven't brains enough. Those boys may be flotsam and jetsam and all that, but they know more about patriotism than I do. Why, one little Italian, the cutest thing, with dimples and curly hair, told me more about country-love than I could have thought up in a month. He says, isn't it patriotic for them to come here and pick up all the good they can, and take it back to enrich their own country? And when you come right down to it, isn't it? Anyhow, the little Italians and Mexicans and Jews and I have organized an Irish-American Baseball Team, and I suppose we are amalgamating something into something. I think they are amalgamating me. I feel terribly amalgamated right now."

134

"I am not in sympathy with the club idea," said Hiltze thoughtfully, as they turned down Broadway toward the Grant. "It is such a treat to find your kind of woman in this—I mean, the womanly kind—I abhor the high-brow women that are so full of forward movement they can't settle down to pal around comfortably and be human."

Eveley, too, was kindling with the charm of a common interest and enthusiasm. Nolan took a very masculine stand on the subject. He said brusquely that the growth of Americanization must come from Americans. He said you couldn't cram American ideals into the foreign-born until the home-born lived them. And he said the way to "teach Americanization was by being a darned good American yourself inside and outside and all the way through." Which may have been good sense, but was no help in the forward movement.

So Eveley looked upon Mr. Hiltze with great friendliness and sympathy, though she did glance up at the National Building as they went by, noticing the light in Nolan's window, wondering if he was working hard—and if the work necessitated the presence of the new, good-looking stenographer the firm had lately acquired.

135

"Now, my idea of Americanization," Mr. Hiltze was saying when she finally tore her thoughts away from the National Building, "is pure personal effort. You take a club, and mix a lot of nationalities, and types, and interests up together—they work upon one another, and work upon you, and you get nowhere. But take an individual. Get chummy with him. Be with him. Study him. Make him like you—interest him in your work, and your sport, and your life—and there you have an American pretty soon. Club work is not definite, not decisive. It is the personal touch that counts. You could fritter away hours with a baseball club, and end at last just where you began. But you put the same time into definite personal contact with one individual foreigner—a girl, of course it would be in your case—it is young men in mine. You take a girl—a foreigner—win her confidence, then her interest, then her love—and you've made an American. That is the only Americanization that will stick. Suppose in a whole year you have won only one—still see what you have done. That one will go out among her friends, her relatives, she will marry and have children—and your Americanization is sown and re-sown, and goes on multiplying itself—yes, forever."

136

"You are right," said Eveley. "And you find me a girl, and I will do it."

"It is a bargain," he said quickly, stopping in the street to grasp her hand. "You are a little thoroughbred, aren't you? It may take time, but as I go about among the young men I work with—well, I am pretty sure to find a girl among them."

CHAPTER X

THE ORIGINAL FIXER

137

"Oh, Nolan," came Eveley's voice over the telephone, in its most wheedling accent, "I am so sorry to spoil our little party for to-night, but it is absolutely necessary just this once. The most utterly absurd case of painful duty you ever heard of. And although you do not exactly approve of my campaign, you would simply have to agree with me this time. And—"

"Well, since I can't help it, I can stand it," he said patiently. "What is it this time? Some silly woman finding it her duty to house and home all straying and wounded cats, or a young girl determined to devote her life to the salvation of blue-eyed plumbers, or—"

"It is a man," she interrupted, rather acidly.

"Ah," came in guarded accents.

There was silence for a tune.

"A man," he repeated encouragingly, though not at all approvingly.

"Yes. A long time ago he very carelessly engaged himself to a giddy little butterfly in Salt Lake City, and he doesn't want to marry her at all, but he feels it is his duty because they have been engaged for so many years. Isn't it pitiful?"

"But it is none of your business," he began sternly.

"It is another engagement with the enemy in my campaign," she insisted. "Oh, just think of it—the insult to love, the profanation of the sacrament of marriage—the—the—the insult to womanhood—"

"You said insult before."

"Yes, but just think of it. I feel it is my duty to save him."

"Where did you come across him?"

"He is the new member of our firm. I told you about him long ago. The good-looking one. He has been with us six months, but I am just getting acquainted with him. We had luncheon together to-day, and he told me about it. He doesn't like social butterflies at all, he likes clever, practical girls, with high ideals, and—"

"Like you, of course."

"Yes, of course. I explained my theory to him, and he was perfectly enchanted with it. But he could not quite grasp it all in those few minutes—it is rather deep, you know—and so he is coming up to dinner to-night to make a thorough study of it. He feels it is his one last hope, and if it fails him, he is lost in the sea of a loveless marriage."

"I do not object to your fishing him out of the loveless sea," Nolan said plaintively. "But I do object to his eating the steak you promised me."

"Think of the cause," she begged. "Think of the glory of winning another duty-bound soul to the boundless principles of freedom. Think of—"

"I can't think of anything, Eveley," he said sadly, "except that good-looking fellow eating my steak, cooked by the hands of my er—girl."

As a matter of fact, he took it very seriously. For while he was still firmly wedded to his ideal of fame and fortune, he was unceasingly haunted by the fearful nightmare of some interloper "beating his time," as he crudely but patently expressed it.

He spent a long and dreary evening, followed by other evenings equally long and dreary, for the Good-Looking Young Member found great difficulty in mastering the intricacies of a Dutiless Life, and Eveley continued his education with the greatest patience, and some degree of pleasure.

Her interest in the pursuit of motors did not wane, however, and after trying every known make of car, and investigating the advance reports of all cars designed for manufacture in the early future, she blithely invested her fortune in a sturdy blue Rollsmobile, and was immediately enraptured with the sensation of absolute control of a throbbing engine.

She found it no trifling matter to attend to her regular duties as private secretary, to keep her Cloud Cote dainty and sweet as of yore, to be out in her little blue car on every possible occasion, and still not neglect the Good-Looking Member and the Father-in-law in her campaign against duty.

First of all, she invited the elder Mr. Severs to dinner, and forestalled his refusal by saying: "Please. I have a perfectly wonderful calf's liver, and I want you to cook it for me. The odor that comes up from the kitchen below is irresistible."

No father-in-law who loved calf's liver and a kitchen could withstand that invitation and he found he had accepted before he knew it. To his boundless delight, the dinner was as though designed in Heaven, for his delectation. Clam chowder, calves' liver and sliced onions, watermelon preserves, and home made apple pie—made by Kitty, who had received rigid orders to provide the richest and juiciest confection possible, overflowing with apples and spice.

As they sat chummily together over a red table-cloth, which Eveley had bought especially for this occasion, she said thoughtfully:

"I believe I am the only really happy person in the world. Do you know why? It is because I am free. I am not dependent on the whims or fancies of any one. I eat what I like, go where I like, sleep when I like. It is the only life. I often think how remarkable it is that you can be so happy living down there with those honeymooners, doing everything to please them, eating what they like, going to bed when they get sleepy. It is wonderfully unselfish of you—but I couldn't. I have to be free."

"You are a sensible girl," he said thoughtfully. "I never saw any one more sensible. Don't you ever get married. You stay like you are. Holy Mackinaw! Don't this liver melt in your mouth?"

"I do not really care for an apartment like this," Eveley went on. "I prefer a cottage, off by itself, with a little garden, and a few chickens in the back yard, just a tiny shack in a eucalyptus grove,

a couple of rooms where I can eat in the kitchen and sleep in the living-room.”

“Oh, mama, it sounds like Heaven,” and he rolled his eyes to the ceiling.

“I am looking for a cottage now. If I find exactly what I want, I may move. I should think you would prefer something like that yourself—a little rusty cot and a garden and a dog, where you could smoke all over the house, and have your friend come in for pinochle every night. I do not see how you can live as you do cooped up with a bride and groom.”

He sighed dolorously.

“But I suppose some people like it. It wouldn’t do for me. That is why I am looking for a cottage. Do you drive a car?”

“A Ford. I wanted to buy a Ford, but daughter said no, they would not have a Ford. They would wait till they could afford an electric. She wouldn’t let me buy a Ford for myself either. Said it looked too poor.”

“Did you ever have one?”

“Me? Sure I did. But I accidentally drove off the road into the sand when I was fishing once, and the tide was coming in and it washed the car down. And when I got back with another car to tow mine out, it was gone. Some said the tide carried it out to sea, and some said a thief stole it, but it was gone, so it didn’t matter how it went.”

Then Eveley was content to talk of other things.

The next day she called up from the office, and asked to speak to Father-in-law.

“I am going up to see a little cottage to-night,” she said excitedly. “And my car is in the garage for adjustment. I unfortunately hit a curb and banged my fender. So I have rented a Ford for an hour or so, and want you to come along and drive it for me. Will you? Good! I will be there at five o’clock.”

“She is a sensible girl,” he said to his son’s wife as he hung up the receiver. “A nice sensible girl. She ought to help you a good lot.”

Mrs. Severs only sniffed. She knew this was the working out of Eveley’s plot, though Eveley had not confided in her, knowing instinctively that the bride would tell the groom, and that the groom would be sure to stop it. So Mrs. Severs saw her father-in-law clamber into the little car at five o’clock, with something like hope in her breast.

For a time, he was intensely absorbed in the manipulation of the gears, and the brakes, his lower lip clutched tightly between his teeth, breathing in full short gusts like a war horse champing for battle. But when at last they were fully started and running with reasonable smoothness, he said:

“Who says this isn’t a car? You talk to daughter about it, will you? You explain to her that this is a regular car like anything else.”

“Some people are so funny, aren’t they? How well you drive it! It is lots of sport, isn’t it? I should think it would be fine for you to have a car to run around in. Then you and your friend could go to Ocean Beach, and fish, and up to the mountains and shoot, and have a wonderful time.”

“I hadn’t thought of that. I—you talk to daughter, will you? Tell her she won’t have to ride in it.”

“Turn to the right here,” said Eveley suddenly. “The cottage is the cunningest thing you ever saw, just two rooms, high on the hill overlooking the bay. I am so tired of being cooped up in a house with a whole crowd. I want to be absolutely free to do as I please.”

He sighed heavily again. “It is the only life. The only way to live. But shucks, folks can’t always have what they want.”

“There it is, that little white house, third from the corner,” she said, pointing eagerly, as he drew up the car to a spasmodic halt.

He looked critically at the small lawn and the tiny cottage. “Those rose-bushes need trimming,” he said, frowning. “There’s a loose corner on the porch, too. Bet that grass hasn’t been watered for three weeks. Why folks don’t keep up their property is more than I can see.”

“Look at the view,” said Eveley suddenly. “See the ships out in the bay, and the aeroplanes over North Island. Isn’t it beautiful? If we had field-glasses we could see the people walking around in Tent City, and the lemon in the tea on the veranda at Coronado.”

“I’ve got field-glasses at home,” he said wistfully. “In my suit-case. But I didn’t unpack. Daughter does not like a lot of trash around the house. I’ll bet we could see the gobs on that battle-ship if we had the glasses.” He turned again to the yard. “It’ll take a lot of work keeping up this place. And you busy every day wouldn’t have much time for it. I reckon you’d be afraid alone nights, too. An apartment is better for a woman by herself.”

“But the freedom—”

“Women hadn’t ought to have too much freedom. It spoils ’em. This is the born place for a man—and a dog—and field-glasses—and a Ford.”

“Let’s go inside and look it over,” said Eveley. “Did you ever see such a place for chickens? Nice clean little coops all ready for them. Wouldn’t it be a paradise for half a dozen hens?”

“It’s a lot of work raising chickens,” said the old man. “It’s a job for a man, really. You wouldn’t

like it." Then, thoughtfully: "Half a day's work would make that place fit for the king's pullets."

"And look at the cunning little garden," urged Eveley.

"Needs hoeing. All run over with weeds. Whole place going to rack and ruin. Needs a man around here, anybody can see that."

"Come in, come in," cried Eveley, unlocking the kitchen door. "See the little gas stove, and the tiny table—and the cooler. Isn't it fun? Couldn't you have the time of your life here, reveling in liver and cabbage and pinochle? Wouldn't your friend be crazy about it?"

The old man squirmed restlessly, and passed into the next room. Eveley dropped down on the side of the bed, and set the springs bounding.

"It is a good bed. That table seems made for pinochle, doesn't it? I can just see this place, with you and your friend, the room thick with smoke—and no one to say, 'Oh, father, it's terribly late.'" Eveley put up a very fair imitation of Mrs. Severs' ripply, bridal voice.

"A phonograph—there ought to be a phonograph, to play *Bonnie Sweet Bessie*, and *Nelly Gray*."

"Just the thing. A phonograph. That is the one thing lacking. I knew there was something needed."

Father-in-law was quiet after that. He walked about slowly, peering into every nook and corner. But finally he went out to the car, and climbed in. Eveley followed silently. He started the car with a bang and a tug, and drove home swiftly, speaking not one word on the way. But Eveley was content.

Quite late that evening he came up the rustic stairs and knocked on her window.

"Say, Miss Ainsworth," he asked anxiously, "did you decide to take that cottage and live alone? Pretty risky business, I'm afraid. And it's a sight of work keeping up a garden like that—and chickens are a dickens of a lot of trouble."

"I am afraid so," said Eveley wistfully. "I believe your advice is good. It is a darling little place, but I suspect I'd better give up the idea entirely."

"That's right. You're a sensible girl. Very sensible."

And he turned abruptly and went creaking down the stairs once more.

The next evening as she swung her car up to the curb, Eveley found him waiting.

"I'm afraid I'll have to give it up," he said, and added apologetically, "I thought since you didn't want it, I might take it myself. But if I went away they'd think I was dissatisfied, and maybe they hadn't been good to me or something. I wouldn't like to hurt their feelings."

"Can't you pretend you hate to leave, but you feel it is your duty?" Eveley almost choked on the word, but she knew it would be only folly to explain her advanced ideas to this kindly conscientious soul. "You tell them that you think it is your solemn duty to go and leave them alone, and that you can't be happy unless you are doing your duty. Tell them that honeymooners need to be alone."

"That's a good idea. I'll try it on them right away."

When he timidly, then enthusiastically pressed his case, Mrs. Severs, seeing in his sudden determination to do his duty the happy fruition of Eveley's plan, voiced only a few polite words of mild protest, but her husband was flat-footed and vociferous in his objections.

"Just cut out the nonsense, dad, and behave yourself. It is your duty to stay here where you belong, and you can stick around and get used to it. You can't go off by yourself, and that settles it."

"I wouldn't be lonesome," said his father meekly. "I could get along. And I could come and visit you. I think—maybe—I'd like it pretty good."

"Oh, I'm on to you, dad. You just say that because you think it would be better for us. Why, you'd be lonely as the deuce." And he went off into the other room and considered the subject closed.

Late that night, Mrs. Severs ran up the stairs.

"Eveley, he really asked to go, but Dody wouldn't hear of it. And I do feel ashamed of myself. We can't turn the poor old fellow out. It would not be right. Just let it go, and I'll try to get used to it. He really is a dear old thing."

"Listen here, Mrs. Severs, do you mean that you are selfish enough to keep that poor old man here with you spooners when he really wants to be off alone where he can fish and cook and roam around to his heart's content? Can't you see it is your plain duty to make him go where he can live his own life? I—I am surprised at you."

"Oh! You think—you mean—maybe he would be happier?"

"Why, of course he would. And it is your duty to deny yourselves in order to make him happy."

"Oh, I see." Mrs. Severs was quite radiant. "Talk to Dody about it, will you? He wants to do his duty, but he sees it the other way round."

"Leave him to me."

Some time later, Father-in-law himself crept softly up the stairway and tapped on the window.

"Hist," he whispered. "It's no good. Andy won't hear of it. Can't you think of something?"

"Leave him to me," she said again. "I am the original little fixer, and I'll attend to Andrew Dody." 153

The next morning, quite willing to sacrifice her last nap in her desire to crush all duty, she started for work half an hour earlier than usual, and invited Mr. Severs to ride down-town with her. And as they started off, Father and Daughter-in-law from separate windows of the house watched their departure, and prayed that success might crown her efforts.

"I want to talk to you confidentially, Mr. Severs," she said softly. "I—I think you misunderstand some things. I have been with your father such a lot, and I have discovered that he really wants to live alone. He likes to be free to do things when he likes, and how."

"He can do that in our home, Miss Ainsworth," Andy said stiffly.

"Of course he can, but he thinks he can't. He wants to do as Mrs. Severs likes. He is only pretending it is his duty to go, because he thought it would hurt your feelings if *you* knew he wanted to leave you. He is just crazy about both of you, but he is so used to doing every little thing in his own sweet way. It almost seems your duty fairly to make him go, because he would be happier." 154

"I am not one to shirk my duty, Miss Ainsworth. I will sacrifice anything for my father."

"Of course it will be lonely for you when he goes, but think how happy he will be following his every desire. I should think you would fairly force him to be selfish enough to leave you."

"You may be right. He does not care for our way of living, I know, and he does like messing around. And then, too, it upsets our plans a lot having him there, but whatever is right for dad, is right for us."

"Then he must certainly have the little shack we saw the other day—he adored it. You just tell him how lonely you will be, and how you will miss him, Mr. Severs, and then make him take the little cottage."

Talking it over afterward with Nolan, Eveley admitted regretfully that she could hardly call this a victory—because Father-in-law only moved to do his duty, and the children only allowed him to go for the sake of doing theirs—but since everything worked out right, she was satisfied, though she alone knew that happiness came to the three because each one followed his own desire to the exclusion of other considerations. 155

CHAPTER XI

THE GERM OF DUTY

The case of the Good-Looking Member strained Nolan's patience almost to the breaking point, but after many days of fruitless chafing, his forbearance was rewarded.

Eveley invited him to dinner.

"Have you rescued the good-looking one from the loveless sea?" he asked sarcastically.

"I have sown the good seed," she said amiably.

"I never heard of sowing seeds in a loveless sea," he sneered.

"I have thought up a wonderful scheme. But you will have to help me out. I always fall back on you in an emergency, don't I?" Eveley's voice was sweetest honey. "So you must come to dinner."

"Is the Handsome Member to be among those present?"

"Oh, Nolan, this is our party—to talk things over all by ourselves. It seems such ages since I saw you, and I've been so lonesome." 157

Nolan was fully aware that this was fabrication, but being totally male, he found himself unable to resist.

"You do not know what lonesomeness is, Eveley. I nearly died. I almost wished I would die. I shall come early, and please wear the blue dress, and be good to me."

That evening, after a long and satisfying preamble, they sat before her tiny grate with their coffee, and she broached the wonderful plan.

"He is the most utterly married-to-duty thing you ever saw. He says he can not in common decency refuse to marry a girl who has been engaged to him for five years. He hasn't even seen her for three, and isn't a bit interested in her. Why, they only write once a month, or so. That's no love-affair, anybody can see that. But he won't ask her to let him off, and so we have thought up the most scientific scheme to work it. He is inviting her to come here for a visit, and she is to stay with me. She hates sensible businesslike men, and she adores scatter-brain, fussy ones. So 158

when she comes, he is going to be as poky as duty itself, and wear old grimy clothes, and work day and night, and you are going to don your sunshine apparel and blossom out like a rose, and beau her around in great style. Result, she will fire him, hoping to ensnare you—but don't you make any mistake and get yourself ensnared for keeps, will you?"

"He is going to work evenings, is he?"

"Yes, day times and night times and all times."

"And I am to cavalier the lady?"

"Not the lady," she denied indignantly. "Both of us. You shan't go out with her alone. She is a terrible flirt, and very pretty. Where you and she goeth, I shall goeth also."

"Well, I can stand it. But what is to become of my own future? Why should I neglect my legal interests to beau another fellow's sweetheart about the town?"

"Because you always help me out of a tight place," she said wheedlingly. "And because you do not approve of my campaign. But if you are nice and help me this time, I think I can everlastingly prove that I am right."

"If I do the work, seems to me I do the proving."

"Yes, but it is my theory, so I get the credit. Of course you must be very gay and make quite a fuss over Miss Weldon, but don't you carry it too far, or you'll be in bad with me."

Anything that meant the eclipse of the Handsome Member could not be other than satisfactory to Nolan. He agreed with a great deal of enthusiasm, only stipulating that all evenings previous to the arrival of the pretty fiancée should be devoted to private rehearsal of his part under the personal direction of the Duteless Theorist.

So it was Nolan and Eveley who met Miss Weldon at the station upon her arrival. They stood together beside the white columns, searching the faces of the passengers as they alighted. When a slender, fair-haired girl swung lightly down, they hurried to greet her.

"Miss Weldon?" asked Eveley, with her friendly smile. "I am Eveley Ainsworth, and this is my friend, Mr. English. Mr. Baldwin could not get away to-night—'way up to his ears in work. But he is coming up to see you later this evening."

If Miss Weldon was disappointed she gave no sign. Instead she turned to Nolan with frankly approving eyes, remarking his tall slim build, his thin clever face, his bright keen eyes.

"Are you so devoted to business, Mr. English?" she asked, as she opened her small bag and took out a solitaire, which she placed on the third finger of her left hand. At the smiles in the eyes of Eveley and Nolan, she only laughed. "Why flaunt your badge of servitude? But don't tell Timmy, will you?"

She was indeed very pretty, with warm shining eyes, and a quick pleasant voice. She was full of a bright wit, too, and the drive to Eveley's Cote in the Clouds was only marred for Eveley by the fact that she, being driver, had to sit in front alone.

"We shall not do much cavaliering in the car," she thought grimly. "Not when there are only three of us. We'll walk—three abreast."

Miss Weldon was enchanted with the rustic steps, but a little fearful of them as well, and appropriated Nolan as her personal bodyguard and support. She squealed prettily at every creak and rumble.

"I shall never try these steps alone, Mr. English," she said, clinging to his not-unwilling hand. "I shall always wait for you."

"I'll roll her down, if she begins that," thought Eveley.

But in spite of her disapproval, even to her there was something very attractive in the pretty girlish merriment and interest of her young guest.

"I do not see why Nolan had to squeeze in on this," she said to herself most unfairly.

Miss Weldon was charmed with the dainty apartment, and loved the cunning electric fixtures in the tiny dining-room. She tucked an apron under her belt, and appointed Nolan her assistant in making toast, while Eveley finished the light details of serving dinner.

"It certainly is a silly business all the way around," Eveley decided.

After their coffee, and after Nolan had finished his second cigar, Miss Weldon said, "Now since Miss Ainsworth got dinner, we must do the dishes. I shall wash, and you must dry them, Mr. English, and be sure you make them shine, for I am very fussy about my dishes."

And Eveley had to sit down in a big chair and rest, though she did not feel like sitting down and hated resting—and look quietly on while Miss Weldon fished each separate dish from the hot suds and held it out playfully for Nolan to wipe. It made a long and laborious task of the dish washing for Eveley, and she was quite worn out at its conclusion.

"Funny that some people can't do their plain duty without getting the whole neighborhood mixed up in it," she thought resentfully.

At nine o'clock, came Timothy Baldwin. Miss Weldon met him at the window, looked at him, half curiously, half fearfully, and after lifting her lips for a fleeting kiss, backed quickly away from him into a remote corner.

Then Nolan, according to prearranged plan, suggested that he and Eveley run down and put the car in the garage. "And if there is a moon, we may go for a joy-ride, so don't expect us back too soon."

And as they rode he spoke so unconcernedly of Sally's smiles and curls and pretty hands, that Eveley was restored to her original enthusiasm for the campaign.

"Won't she be wild?" she chuckled, snuggling close against Nolan's side, but never forgetting that she was mistress of the wheel. "Tim is going to talk business all the time, and at ten-thirty he is going to say he must hurry home to rest up for a hard day's work to-morrow. We are not to get in until eleven, so she will be utterly bored to distraction. Isn't it fun?"

They drove slowly, happily around the park, over the bridge and under the bridge, around the eucalyptus knoll above the lights on the bay, and then went down-town for ice-cream. At exactly eleven o'clock, Nolan took her hands as she stood on the bottom step of the rustic stair.

"I can't say it is your duty to—be good to me—but I hope it will make you happy. And by the rules of your own game, I have a right selfishly to insist on your being always sweet and wonderful to me, and to me alone."

"Just what do you mean by that, Nolan?"

"Nothing, of course, but can't you use your imagination?"

"No, I can't. That is for brides and fiancées, not for unattached working girls like me."

Then she ran on up the stairs, and Nolan went home.

True to arrangement, Tim had gone at ten-thirty, and Miss Weldon in a soft negligee was sitting alone pensively, before the fire.

"Tim has changed," she said briefly. "I think he has more sense, but a little less—er—warmth, I might say."

"Do you think so? He works very hard. He is fearfully ambitious and they think everything of him at the office."

"Yes? Then he must certainly have changed. He was not keen on business at Salt Lake. He lost three jobs in eight weeks. That is why he came west. And his father has financed half a dozen ventures for him. But perhaps he has settled down, and will do all right. I love your little apartment, and it is dear to call it a Cloud Cote, and Mr. Nolan is perfectly charming. Timmy asked us to meet him at Rudder's for luncheon, you and me and your Mr. Nolan, also."

"Oh, that is nice," said Eveley. "I'll come up for you in the car a few minutes earlier. You won't mind being alone most of the day, will you? I work, you know."

"No, I rather like being alone. I sew some, and I shall read, and there are letters to write. I do not mind being alone."

Eveley found her really very agreeable, quite pleasant to entertain. And after all Nolan had only done as she requested, and there was nothing personal in it. It was lots of fun, but it must stop before Miss Weldon had time to grow really fond of Nolan, for of course she could not have him under any circumstances. Eveley absolutely disbelieved in any form of duty, still she would not feel justified in carrying her animosity to the point of wilfully breaking innocent hearts.

At twelve-thirty the next day, Eveley and Miss Weldon entered the small waiting-room of Rudder's café. Nolan was already there. They waited fifteen minutes for Timothy, and then a messenger came down to them with a note. Mr. Baldwin was so sorry, but business was urgent, and they must go right ahead and have luncheon without him. He would telephone them later in the evening if he could come up.

Sally Weldon pursed her lips a little, but she smiled at Nolan. "Can you beau us both, Mr. English? We think we are mighty lucky to have half a beau a piece on working days. Are you the only man in this whole town who does not work like a slave?"

So they found a pleasant table in the café, and dawdled long over their luncheon, laughing and chatting. Then they took Nolan back to his office, and Eveley and Sally went for a drive on the beach to La Jolla.

"But don't you have to work?" asked Sally, observing that it was long after two when they finally turned back toward the office.

Eveley shrugged her shoulders prettily.

"Oh, nobody works much but Mr. Baldwin," she said. "He does the grinding for the whole force."

Miss Weldon frowned a little, but said nothing.

That evening she had the dinner nicely started when Eveley reached home, and Eveley was loud in praise of her guest's skill and cleverness.

"It is just lovely, but you must not work. You are company."

"I rather like to cook. I took a long course in it four years ago when Timmy and I were first engaged, and I have done all the housekeeping at home since then. Daddy pays me double the salary we used to pay the cook, and I provide better meals and more cheaply than she did. Daddy says so himself."

"Why, Sally," cried Eveley warmly, "I think that is wonderful. I am surprised. I thought—I

supposed—”

“Oh, I know what you thought,” laughed Sally brightly. “Everybody thinks so, and it is true. I am very gay and frivolous. I love to dance and sing and play. And I abhor solemn ugly grimy things, and I think the only Christian duty in the world is being happy.”

Eveley flushed at that, and turned quickly away.

Later Nolan joined them for dinner, and the little party was waxing very gay long before Tim called. Then it was only to say that he would be working late, but was sending them tickets for the theater and would join them afterward for supper at the Grant.

“Does he always work as hard as this?” asked Sally, looking steadily into Eveley’s face.

“He always works pretty hard,” said Eveley truthfully, “but he does seem busier than usual right now.”

Miss Weldon only laughed, and they talked of other things. Nolan went down with them in the car, Eveley driving alone in front, but somehow she felt her pretty guest to be less of a menace since she was guilty of sensible things like cooking and sewing.



“Just what do you mean by that?”

Eveley did not explain that Timothy had felt inclined to join them for dinner and the show that night after disappointing them at luncheon, but she had been firm with him.

“Not to-day,” she insisted. “You can only have one hour with us to-night. To-morrow you can join us for luncheon and a short drive afterward, if you will fix it so I can get off.”

He was at the Grant waiting when they arrived, and rather impatient.

“Did you have a pleasant time?” he asked, looking into Sally’s bright face.

“Lovely. And did you hurry terribly to meet us? We don’t want to interfere with your work, or bother you.”

He searched her face for signs of guile, but her eyes were unclouded, and her manner indicated only a friendly concern for his interests.

It was a very happy party that night. Both girls were merry, and Nolan was really more solicitously attentive to Sally than was quite necessary even in the interests of a campaign directed against her. When at a late hour, they trooped out to the car, it was he who helped her carefully into the machine, though, with seeming reluctance, he permitted Timothy to sit with her while he joined Eveley in the front seat.

“Timmy is good-looking, don’t you think?” Sally asked that night, as they were preparing for bed.

“Yes, if he did not work so hard. Young men should not kill themselves with labor.”

“Your Nolan is handsomer, perhaps,” said Sally pleasantly.

The next day Timothy did meet them for luncheon, after keeping them waiting for twenty minutes, and later they went for a fast ride out Point Loma. But that night he did not see them at all, though he told Eveley he thought she was rather rubbing it in, cheating him out of so many pleasant parties and good times.

"I may not want to marry her, but it is good sport chasing around," he protested.

But Eveley was very stern. He had put himself in her hands, and he must obey without argument, and that settled it. And when he suggested that it would look better if he and Sally had one party by themselves without Nolan tagging at their heels, she frowned it down.

"One private party can spoil a whole week of hard work," she decreed.

So the week passed. Once even Eveley pretended business, and Sally and Nolan had luncheon together, and a drive later in Eveley's car. But Timothy put a stop to that.

"She is my fiancée. And I may have to marry her after all. And if I do, hanged if I want everybody in town thinking she was Nolan's sweetheart to begin with."

So Eveley waived that part of her plan, and the parties were always of three, and sometimes, but infrequently, of four. That Sally accepted their arrangements so easily, and took so much pleasure in their entertainment, argued well. One night she said:

"Of course, men have to work, but I shouldn't like my husband to dig away like a servant, should you, Eveley?"

And Eveley felt the time was ripe. The next day she told Timothy he might take Sally out alone in the car for a drive, and ask her if they should not be married right away. Eveley was willing to wager that she would reject him. Timothy consented with alacrity, seeming to feel the burden of his semi-attached state.

That evening at six-thirty, when Nolan came up for dinner, Eveley met him on the roof garden over the sun parlor.

"Nolan, something has happened. They went at two o'clock, and they aren't home yet. What do you suppose is the matter? Maybe they had an accident. Maybe she got mad and wouldn't ride home with him. He wouldn't put her out, would he? Shall we notify the police?"

"I should say not. Don't worry. Let's have our dinner. They can eat the leavings when they come. He has probably learned, as other and wiser men have learned, that a pretty and pleasant girl is not half bad company. I'll bet he is having the time of his life. My, it is nice to have you alone again. She is very sweet, and it's been lots of fun, but after all I am used to you, and this is nicer."

Nolan's prediction proved far from wrong. At ten-thirty, a messenger boy shouted up from below, and Nolan ran down. When he came back he carried a small yellow slip addressed to Eveley, which he promptly opened. And as she peered over his shoulder, they read it aloud, together, in solemn chorus.

"Three cheers and a tiger. She has accepted me, and we were married at Oceanside this afternoon. On our way to Yosemite for honeymoon. I am the happiest man on earth. Tell Nolan to go to the dickens. Love from Sally and Timothy Baldwin."

Nolan lit a cigar and blew reflective rings into the air. "When a man is bitten with the germ of duty," he began somberly.

For a moment Eveley was crushed. Then she rallied. "Just as I told you, Nolan. As long as it was a painful duty, marriage between them was impossible, and would have wrecked both their lives. But our campaign brought about the proper adjustment and tuned them to love again. So it was not duty, but love, and marriage is a joy. Now I hope you are convinced that I am right, and won't argue with me any more. And if I ever had any doubts about that one exception I make in regard to duty, they are all gone now. I am dead sure of my one exception."

But when Nolan pressed her for an explanation, she begged him to smoke again, and let her think.

CHAPTER XII

THE REVOLT OF THE SEVENTH STEP

The sharp tap on Eveley's window was followed by an impatient brushing aside of the curtains, and Miriam Landis swung gracefully over the sill in a cloud of chiffon and silk.

"Lem is waiting in the car," she began quickly, "but I came up to show you my new gown. Are you nearly ready? Lem is so impatient, you know." Fumbling with the fasteners of her wide cape she drew it back and revealed a bewilderingly beautiful creation beneath.

Eveley went into instant and honest raptures.

"Do you like it, Eveley? Am I beautiful in it?" There was a curious wistfulness in her voice, and Eveley studied her closely.

"Of course you are beautiful in it. You are a dream. You are irresistibly heavenly."

"I wonder if Lem thinks so," said Miriam, half breathlessly.

"Why, you little goose," cried Eveley, forcing the laughter. "How could he think anything else? There, he is honking for us already. We must hurry—Why, Miriam, you silly, how could any one think you anything in the world but matchlessly wonderful in anything—especially in a dream like that?"

Miriam fastened her wrap again silently, and got carefully out through the window.

"Twelve steps," cautioned Eveley. "You'd better count them, it is so dark, or you may stumble at the bottom."

Miriam, clinging to the railing on one side, passed slowly down. "One, two, three, four, five, six." Then she stopped and turned.

"Seven." Looking somberly up to Eveley, standing above her, her face showing pale and sorry in the dim light, she said, "I have been married five years, Eve. You do not know what it is to spend five years struggling to maintain your charm for your husband. And never knowing whether you have failed or won. Always wondering why he finds more attraction in other women less beautiful and less clever. Always wondering, always afraid, trying to cling to what ought to be yours without effort. It isn't funny, Eveley." She turned slowly, to go on down, but Eveley laid a restraining hand on her arm.

"Five years? That is a long time," she said in a tender voice. "It must almost be his turn now. Five years seems very long to me."

Miriam passed on down the stairs, counting aloud, eight, nine, ten, and on to the last. At the last step she turned again.

"He is my husband, Eveley. One must do what is right."

"Yes? Yet five years of duty does not seem to have brought you much happiness. At least you should not be selfish. You ought not to deny him the pleasure of doing his by you for the next five." Then she added apologetically: "Forgive me, Miriam. You know I should never have mentioned this if you hadn't spoken."

Miriam clung to her hand as they felt their way carefully around the house, Lem in the machine still honking for them to hurry.

At the corner she paused again. "You are very clever, aren't you, Eveley?"

"Well, yes, I rather think I am," admitted Eveley.

"How would you go about it?"

"The way Lem does," came the quick retort, and Miriam laughed, suddenly and lightly.

She was very quiet as they drove down Fifth Street. Only once she spoke.

"It was the seventh step, wasn't it, Eveley?"

"Yes, the seventh."

"The Revolution of the Seventh Step," she said, laughing again.

This was nonsense to Lem Landis, but he did not ask questions. Women always talked such rot to each other. And he was wondering if Mrs. Cartle would surely be at the ball?

"The way Lem does."

The words were startlingly sufficient. From five years of painful experience, Mrs. Landis knew how Lem did it. And so on this evening, as she stood beside him in a corner of the ballroom after their first greetings, and looked as he did with eager speculative eyes about the wide room, seeking, seeking, she felt a curious sympathy and harmony between herself and her husband. She knew without turning her head when the sudden brightening in his eyes came; and then he slowly made his way to the dim corner where Mrs. Cartle sat waiting.

But Miriam was not so quickly satisfied. There was Dan O'Falley, but his was such fulsome effrontery. There was Clifford Eggleton, but he had been a sweetheart of Miriam's in the old days before Lem came, and that seemed hardly fair. There was Hal Jervis, but he was too utterly wax in woman's hands to give her any semblance of thrill. Then her eyes rested on a profile in another corner of the room—a dark sleek head, a dark thin face, and the clear outline of one merry eye. Miriam appraised the head speculatively. Who in the world could it be? That merry eye looked very enticing. Ah, now she could see better—he was talking to the Merediths. Then the merry-eyed one was a stranger—so much the better, the uncertainty of him pleased her. She was very weary of those she knew so well. She moved happily that way, suddenly surprised to know that she was not at all concerned because her husband sat in the distant corner with Mrs. Cartle. She felt for him to-night only a whimsical comradeship. Stopping many times on her way to exchange a word and a smile, she finally drew near the corner where the sleek dark head and the merry eye had drawn her. Mrs. Meredith, seeing her, came to meet her, and drew her forward impulsively.

"Oh, Miriam, you must meet our friend, Mr. Cameron. He has only just come here to be with my husband in business, and we are going to love him, I know." And so immediately Miriam found herself looking directly, and with great pleasure, full into the merry eyes. The gown was beautiful upon her, she knew it positively, whether Lem had been stirred by the vision or not.

"Oh, she is lovely enough," said Billy Meredith plaintively. "But don't be lured by her, Cameron. She is still in love with her husband."

Miriam smiled at her victim with disarming friendliness. "But I like to be amused," she said. "And I have been married long enough now to feel like playing again."

Cameron laughed at that, and the laughter fulfilled the promise of the merry eye. Miriam was quite intoxicated with the game her husband had taught her. That Eveley was a clever little thing, wasn't she?

"Suppose we dance then," Cameron suggested eagerly. "It is the approved method of beginning to play."

"We resign you to your fate," sighed Billy Meredith once more. "I warned you, you laughed me to scorn. Now plunge and die."

"He seems to think I am dangerous," said Miriam, as they stepped lightly away to the call of the music.

"Well, far be it from me to say he is wrong. But I am sure you will prove a charming playfellow. You seem fairly to match my own mood. I suppose we can not climb trees and go nutting and fishing and wade in the creek as we might have done together years ago, but if you will be patient and teach me your way of playing in your ladyhood, I think you will find me an apt, and certainly a willing playmate."

182

"Then let's begin to-morrow night. Come to my house, and let's play pool. It is the most reckless thing we can do. I have a sweet little friend and she has a deadly admirer, and they will come with us. She is very clever, too, and full of fun. See, that is she there, dancing—the one with the golden frock. Her name is Eveley Ainsworth and the solemn young man is Nolan English, and they are unannounced but accepted sweethearts. You are not afraid of Friend Husband, then?"

"Not until Friend Husband gets afraid of me," he said.

Later in the evening, as they were having ices in a wonderful nook in the ballroom, he said seriously, and with no laughter in the merry eyes:

"Are you trying to make a truant husband jealous? Just be frank with me, and I will do my best. I know you wanted a pal to-night. Do you mind telling me why?"

183

For a moment she hesitated. Then she smiled. "If my frankness loses me a pleasant comrade I shall regret my candor. But I do want to play fairly with you. So hear then the bitter truth. I have been married five years, and I have worked like a common slave to make myself beautiful and winsome and irresistible to my husband. And you know that a wife can't do it, if the husband isn't in the mind for it. And so to-night I am starting a revolution. I do not want to struggle forever. I want to play and be happy. I have no notion of making my husband jealous. That has not even occurred to me. I just want to be joyful—to learn to be joyful—regardless of him."

"Then may I be a disagreeable old preacher, and say one thing? You know this may be fun, but sometimes it is dangerous. Human beings are not machines, and often they make mistakes and fall in love, when they had only meant to play. You would not find it at all pleasant to be married to one man, and in love with another. And maybe you would not enjoy having a husband and a lover in two persons, I am not trying to foretell the future, or make unpleasant predictions—I am only sounding the warning note."

184

Miriam considered this very solemnly. Then she said: "Well, I think I should not mind. It does not seem to bother Lem to be married to me, and at the same time be involved in stirring friendships with other people."

"Just one more sermon then, and I am through," he said, laughing. "It is this. Men and women are very different. A man can play his head off with a dozen women, and still stay in love with his wife, and want no one but her. But a really nice woman, and you are awfully nice, can not have love-affairs without love. When she loves a man, she wants him, and will not have any one else. Your husband can have a dozen affairs, and still want you. But if you have a pleasant affair—you may not want your husband."

185

"Well, of course, Mr. Preacher, one must take a chance. And it is to be only play, you know. That must be understood right in the start. I am really not a bit advanced nor modern, nor anything. I have no forward ideas in my head. I am just tired of trying to please my husband; I want some one to please me. It does not seem to offer you much for your pains, does it? But you may find me fairly amusing."

"I am sure of it," he agreed warmly. "And it is all settled, and we are going to play together. And if sometimes you get tired of me, and fire me off, I shall bob up serenely the next day and start over, just as we might have done when we were little children."

When Miriam reported her progress in revolution to Eveley the next day, Eveley was greatly perturbed.

"You went too fast," she said with a frown. "And besides—it is not fair. He isn't married. He will fall in love with you."

"Oh, no, we have a regular understanding," said Miriam confidently. "It is all settled according to rules, and we are only going to play. Lem goes to his club to-night, and you and Nolan are to come and play pool with us. Doesn't it sound emancipated and free?"

186

"Almost bolshevistic," said Eveley grimly. "I do not approve of it—not exactly—though I do think you are justified. But it is so risky—and people talk—"

"Well, Eveley, I think it is better to have people say, 'What do you think of the way Miriam Landis is carrying on?' than 'Isn't Miriam Landis a little fool not to get next to her husband in all these years?' Shouldn't you?"

"Well, we'll be there," said Eveley evasively. "We'll be right there. If he just wasn't so good-looking, and sort of—decent? Why didn't you pick out a roue? They are lots safer than these decent young chaps."

Nolan, always a willing sacrifice when Eveley bade, joined them without demur, and a more rollickingly gay time they had never had. Even Eveley admitted that things seemed innocent and harmless enough, but she shook her head.

"He is too good," she whispered to Miriam. "When he falls, he will fall hard. And if he is once in love, I have a feeling he will work like—like the dickens—and you haven't much spinal column yourself, you know. And I do not believe in home wreckers, and things."

Nolan, also, frankly disapproved.

"It doesn't make any difference what kind of husband she's got," he said decidedly. "As long as he is her husband, it is her duty to stick to him and leave other men alone."

"Don't say duty to me," said Eveley crossly. "Five years is long enough for any woman to do her duty. I think she is quite justified in giving Lem a good scare. Maybe he will wake up, and behave himself. But this Gordon is too good-looking, and too desperately nice. How can they play together like two children? You know what will happen."

"I think it has already happened. He is head over heels right now, and she is not breaking her heart over Lem, either. I give them two weeks to develop a first-rate rash."

"But Miriam believes in duty," said Eveley hopefully. "Maybe that will save them. She would never elope with him, and I do not think he would even ask her, he is so sort of respectable and set."

But Nolan was pessimistic. "Folks talk about duty until they fall in love, and then they forget it and everything else. And Lem has acted abominably. I thought she did not know it."

"So did I. But—"

"Well, no use to worry. We'll stick around with them and sort of boss the job. I am glad you invited them to the Cote to-morrow night."

"And for supper, too. When Lem finds she is coming here for a supper party and he is left out, he may begin to think."

"The trouble with Lem is, he can't help himself. He loves Miriam all right, but women go to his head. He may get jealous and promise everything on heaven and earth, but he can't keep his word."

"Then he shouldn't have married."

"She should never have married him. When women understand that a man who can not look at a woman before marriage without making love to her—can't do it afterward—they will save themselves a lot of trouble."

"Well," said Eveley hopefully. "No one can say you hurt yourself making love."

So the playing went on, Nolan and Eveley acting as constant and merry chaperons, and the little grouping grew more and more congenial. Lem realized that a convulsion was going on in his home, and reformed desperately for days at a time, but a secluded corner and a lovely woman invariably set him pleading for forgiveness. Miriam always forgave him promptly and said it did not bother her; and was at first frightened, and then delighted, to know that it truly did not bother her any more.

Then one evening, Eveley had a mad telephone call from Lem, quickly followed by a flying rush to her little Cote.

"See what you've done," he shouted, half-way through the window. "That is what comes of your interference. Miriam was the most contented woman on earth till you began feeding her up on this notion of revenge."

"You sit down and talk sense, Lem Landis, or get out," said Eveley. "Contented! She hasn't known a contented day since she married you. You have had five years of jollying with other women. Now because another man smiles on her, you go into a rage and tear your hair. You make me sick."

"Look here, Eveley, you got me into this, and you've got to get me out. I didn't care how much they smiled. I thought at first it was a put-up job to make me jealous, and I laughed at it. But it has gone too far."

"Everything is all right," said Eveley soothingly. "They are just playing. Nolan and I are with them all the time. There is nothing serious between them."

"Don't be a fool," he said rudely. "You know that men and women can't play like kids. Miriam wants a divorce."

Eveley sat down and swallowed hard.

"A divorce," he raged, champing wildly up and down the small room. "She says there is nothing between them, and she does not love him, but she can't stand me any more. Why can't she stand

me? She stood me for five years. What's come over her all of a sudden that she says it makes her sick to kiss me? She won't even let me hold her hand. She says it is blasphemous. Blasphemy to touch my own wife's hand! You know what that means, don't you? She is in love with that—that—"

"You can't swear here," Eveley broke in quickly. "I won't have it. I think you are mistaken, Lem. She doesn't want a divorce. Not really. She wouldn't, you know."

"But she does, I tell you. She says it is sacrilege to live with me, and so she is going off by herself to desert me, and says I've got to get a divorce on those grounds when the time is up, or heaven only knows what she'll do. Now, you got us into this mess, and you've got to stop it."

"I'll do what I can, Lem," she promised. "And so will Nolan. But between you and me, I do not blame her. I wouldn't have lived with you two months, myself."

"I have never wanted another woman in my life," he said brokenly. "It has always been Miriam with me from the very minute I saw her. I have fooled around a lot, I know, but it's always been Miriam for serious."

"Yes," she said bitterly. "That is it. It is just as Gordon says. A man can fool around and still love his wife. But a nice woman can't. She is strong for one man—at a time. When she falls for a new one, it is all off with the last. You could love a dozen at a time, but Miriam is too nice for that."

"But you promised—"

"Oh, yes, I'll do what I can, and I will advise her to stick it out, but I think she will be very foolish if she takes my advice."

Nolan was immediately summoned, and a desperate struggle began with Miriam. But it was really no struggle.

"Why, Eveley," she said reproachfully, "I am surprised at you. Can't you see that a woman can not live with a man she dislikes? It makes the shivers run down my back when he touches me. It— isn't nice. It—makes me feel like—well, not at all right. You can see that, can't you, Nolan?"

"I am afraid I can."

"But he is your husband," protested Eveley. "Isn't it your place as his wife to—to—"

"Do you mean my duty, dear?" asked Miriam, smiling faintly. "I am surprised at you, Eve. No dear, it isn't. Your theory that duty is happiness is half right. But a woman has one other duty also—self-respect. I am all packed up, dear, and going to-morrow. You do not mind my not leaving my address, do you? I want to go off very quietly by myself. I do not want Gordon to know. I am afraid he will blame himself for it. You will make him see that it was not he, at all, won't you? And after it is all over, I shall write, or maybe come to see you. You will ask him not to look for me, won't you? There has not been a thing serious between us, Eveley, you believe that, don't you?"

"Of course I do. I know it. I've chaperoned you two till I am fairly sick of it."

Miriam smiled again. "Be sure to tell him everything I said, will you?"

Nolan and Eveley were very quiet after she had gone. And Eveley cried a little.

"I hope she will be happy," she said tearfully.

"She will be. Gordon will wait for her, and not crowd her. He is like me. He can talk to a woman without loving her."

"You can, at least."

"At least, I do not talk about it all the time," he amended. "What I mean is that his affection is for the one, and not for the sex."

"Do you think she did right, Nolan?"

"I do not think it is my duty to judge," he evaded cleverly. "She had one chance for happiness, and she lost. Now she is to have one more. We are her friends, and we love her. We can not begrudge her one more opportunity, can we?"

"No indeed, and you put it very nicely," she said more comfortably. "Isn't it nice that we do not believe in duty? But we shall miss them. They were very nice playmates for us, as well as for each other—Nolan, there was something sort of sweet about Lem, after all? Something very human and lovable and—but of course it was Miriam's duty to be happy."

CHAPTER XIII

SHE FINDS A FOREIGNER

Eveley had very nearly lost faith in assimilation. She had thought it over carefully, attempted it conscientiously and decided it could not be done.

"One individuality can not be absorbed by another," she would say very sagely. "Whether it is husbands and wives, or whether it is nations. The theorists are right in stating that America is for Americans only, and that it is the patriotic duty of those who come here to be Americanized as rapidly as possible, and the duty of the regular Americans to Americanize everybody else at top speed—but it can not be done. They are they, and we are we. It may be our duty, but we are not big enough."

She did not call her friendship with Angelo Moreno by any such big and formal term as assimilation. They had just grown to be enormously good friends. She had forgotten about Americanizing him, but she found him charming, with the fresh frank abandon of the unspoiled south-European. She liked his open admiration, she enjoyed his mature cynicism, she reveled in his buoyant enthusiasm. She had not believed that such opposing elements could dwell in one small person. In Angelo, she found them, and she found the combination good.

He was helpful to Eveley, as well as pleasing. He did endless small jobs for her about the car and upon the lawn of her home. And when she noticed that he quickly adopted some of her own little customs of speech and manner, she was freshly pleased and interested.

Still she could not harden her heart to the clamorous call of the world struggle. She lived so happily and so securely in her Cloud Cote, going to business by day, doing her small bits of housework in between whiles, frolicking with her friends, chumming with Angelo, playing with her sister's babies, running about in her pretty car. It was like living in the clouds indeed, with the world of chaos beneath. For there was the struggle of reconstruction going on, the tremendous heave and pull of masses seeking to dominate, the subtle writhe and twist of politics, a whole world straining and sinewing to rise dominant out of the molten bed of human lava left from the volcanic eruption of war.

And although Eveley still lived serene in her Cloud Cote, it was like living on the edge of the crater of a volcano. The eruption would come, must come. And when it came, her pretty Cloud Cote might be caught in the upheaval. Sometimes in the evening she stood breathless in the little pavilion on the edge of the canyon stretching down below her home, and looked far into the shadows. Being a vivid imaginer, down in the darkness she seemed to see the world in turmoil, and although she stood above it on the heights, she knew that when the final reckoning came, there would be no heights and no canyon.

"And the only thing that can stop it is Americanization, and it is impossible," she would say helplessly. "And there you are."

But being of a light and happy heart, she tried to forget, and plunged into her work and her play once more. The consciousness, however, of a world in travail was always with her.

This was why, when Amos Hiltze came to her with an appeal for help in a new phase of Americanization, he found such prompt and eager interest.

"It is not much, Miss Ainsworth," he said earnestly, "and to you it may seem very aimless and trifling indeed. But it is something definite at least, a real tangible piece of Americanization, and you are the only woman I know who can help us out."

"Yes, yes, yes," she cried eagerly. "I will, of course. What is it?"

"It is a girl, a Spanish girl from Mexico. Her relatives joined the revolutionists, and pouf,—were blown out. By rare good fortune she escaped across the border. But what chance has she? No friends,—no training. She has never learned to meet and mingle with people. And now after the years of horror, she is afraid. She has lost her nerve. She needs a place where she can be alone, and quiet, with no one to observe or criticize. I can vouch for the girl, that she is all right. And I wondered if your spirit of Americanization would carry you to the point of temporarily adopting her."

"Oh, mercy!" gasped Eveley, thinking with great tenderness of her cozy little Cloud Cote, her home, and hers alone.

"I know it is asking a great deal, but it will only be for a few weeks. Just until some proper arrangements can be made for her. Unless she is taken care of, and quickly, she will fall a prey to some anarchistic Bolshevik, or something worse. She is living with a bunch of low Mexicans away out in the country, and the Greasers come there from all around,—and I am afraid for the girl. If she can be taken now, treated kindly, shown the charm and wholesomeness of American customs and principles, she will be won for America. A beautiful girl, educated, talented, charming. Think what a power she can be in the Americanization of her people, when she herself has been given love and tenderness and confidence."

Eveley decided instantly. "Very well, bring her. I can move the extra furniture out of the east bedroom, and store it in the garage, and she may have that room. She will be alone and quiet all day. But I hardly know a word of Spanish—"

"Oh, she speaks English perfectly. You are a wonderful girl, Miss Ainsworth. Not one in a thousand would have risen to such a sacrifice. If American women were all like you, there would be no need of Americanization. A country stands or falls by its women-kind. And you will not find her burdensome. She does not wish to meet people, her only desire is to be quiet, and let alone. She will keep your little home tidy for you, and she likes to cook and sew. She will not bother you much. How soon can you have her come?"

"It will take about two hours to get ready. Can you come and help me to-night? Angelo will help, too. We must move the furniture and boxes out, and then the room will be ready for her."

"Then suppose we go for her to-night? She is about forty miles out in the back country in a little shack a mile off the Viejas grade. If we could leave about supper-time, we'd get there a little after dark. She wants to slip away without attracting attention. She is a nervous wreck, literally scared to death. It will take a long time to give her confidence again, but if any one can do it, it is you. Her faith in humankind has been bitterly shattered."

Eveley was fairly quivering with excitement and delight. Her faith in herself had gone leaping skyward. She was not a slacker, not a quitter. She was a regular American after all, making a real sacrifice for a principle she believed in,—and oh, how she was going to assimilate this pretty little Mexican! Poor child! Of course she was shattered and stunned and shocked. Who wouldn't be? Things must have been ghastly in Mexico. Eveley herself was rather vague on the subject, because her philosophy was one of peace and joy, and she found that reading of affairs in Mexico did not tend to increase either peace or joy. But she was dimly aware that the spirit of unrest prevailing in all the world had risen to open and bloody warfare across the Rio Grande.

Her work suffered very sadly that afternoon, and long before the appointed hour she was ringing furiously for the elevator. From her incoherent chatter on the way down, Angelo gathered that he was literally to fly to her the very minute he was off duty, and then she was clambering blindly into the car and rushing around for Mr. Hiltze.

She was quite in an ecstasy as they set about moving out the pieces of furniture to be stored in the back of the big garage, and fitting up an attractive home for the wounded little Mexican who was to be her guest,—and her food for assimilation.

Amos Hiltze was a great help, and worked with enthusiasm.

"I do what I can, but men are helpless when it comes to women. And when I knew of this child,—well, I thought of you. If you refused, I had no notion where to turn. But you did not refuse."

"No, indeed," chirped Eveley. "I am only too happy. I want to do things, real things, and be of use. It—it is right, I suppose, and lots of fun besides."

At six o'clock Angelo came, and looked for a moment with speculative eyes upon Mr. Hiltze. He was not enthusiastic,—rather he was frankly pessimistic.

"Why don't you send her to a hotel?" he demanded aggressively. "You don't want a dirty Greaser in here, messing things all up."

"Oh, Angelo, you mustn't," protested Eveley, deeply shocked. "She isn't a Greaser. She is a high caste Mexican girl."

"There ain't no such thing," he said gloomily. "You'll see. She'll litter the whole place up with a lot of smelly bandits, and they'll cut your throat, and steal your money, and then where'll you be?"

Then Amos Hiltze turned on him, with something compelling in his eyes. "Cut out that nonsense, and mind your own business. This is not your affair."

So Angelo resigned himself to the inevitable, and fell to work, not with good will, but with efficiency. And when the room was ready, while the man and boy were carrying the extra furniture out to the garage for storage, Eveley hastily prepared a light supper for the three of them. It was eaten in utter silence. Eveley was excited almost to the point of suffocation, and the others were immersed in their own thoughts. She hastily cleared the dishes from the table, and put on her heavy coat and a small hat.

"Where do you go to get your Spanish queen?" demanded Angelo.

"Oh, a long way out in the country," said Eveley nervously. "We must hurry, Angelo. It is getting late."

"Are you going in your car?" he persisted.

"Yes. Now, please, Angelo, I hate to rush you off, but we must go."

"Take me along, Miss Eveley. Please—you've got plenty of room. Won't you take me?"

"Nothing doing," cut in Amos Hiltze shortly. "We've got to keep the girl quiet, and you would let out some rudeness that would spoil everything."

"Honest I won't, Miss Eveley. G'wan, be a sport. You promised to take me for a night ride, and you never have. I won't say a word to the Grea—lady, honest I won't. Be a sport, Miss Eveley, sure I can go along."

"Let's take him," said Eveley. "He can sit in front with me coming back, and you can ride with Marie. He won't say a word, will you, Angelo?"

Mr. Hiltze seemed not altogether satisfied, but Angelo was already half-way down the rustic stairs and headed for the garage, so he contented himself with one final word of warning.

"Just keep quiet," he said to Angelo. "Do not even look at her. There must be no fuss or confusion, or she will be afraid to come."

There was a heavy fog rolling up through the canyons, and Eveley, in her state of excitement, found the car prone to leap wildly through the misty white darkness. There was a great ringing in her ears, and her pulses were pounding. Hiltze at her side was silent and preoccupied, and Angelo in the rear sat huddled in a corner, in the rug which Eveley had tucked about him.

"We do not want any frozen passengers to bring home," she had said, with a smile.

They spun swiftly along University, slowing for East San Diego where there were officers with bad reputations among speeders, through La Mesa, the cross on Mt. Helix showing faintly in the pale moonlight, through El Capon, out beyond Flynn Springs where the pavement left off.

"Are you tired?" asked the man, stirring closer to Eveley's side.

"No," she said, with a laugh that was really a sob. "But I am so out of breath, and thrilled, and—all stirred up, like a silly little schoolgirl. I believe I am frightened."

"Do not be frightened, Miss Eveley," said Angelo suddenly, reassuringly. "I'll look after you. If we do not like the little Greaser, we'll just ditch her."

"You must not be afraid," said Hiltze, pressing his arm companionably against her elbow. "You know I will take care of you. And you will like the girl. She is just a timid, nerve-racked child. You will love her in time. But this is not a question of love, only of service,—one phase of the scheme of Americanization that is sweeping the country. It has to come through the women, Eveley, you know that. It has to be born into the babies of the next generation."

An audible sniff came from the back seat, but Angelo was lustily clearing his throat.

"You sound like a stump speaker," he said critically. "Did you get that way selling autos, or did you used to be an agitator or something?"

Mr. Hiltze made no reply. He was leaning forward now, anxiously scanning the road. "We turn soon. Drive slowly, please. I do not know the road very well. Oh,—there it is,—I see it now. Just beyond the little clump of trees, this side of the big rock. Turn to the right,—the road is safe enough, but a little rough. We only go a little farther,—yes, to the right a little more,—downgrade, but it is not very steep. Now, pull off a little and stop. Yes, you wait here now, will you, while I go on to the shack? The road does not lead up to it. You need not be afraid, you are close to the main road though you can not see it for the shrubs and rocks. She does not want the Mexicans to know where nor how she goes."

"Will you be gone long?" asked Eveley, gazing somewhat fearfully into the black shadows about her.

"Oh, just a few minutes. It is only a little bit of a way, and Marie is ready to come at once."

"How does she know you are coming after her?" asked Angelo.

"I told her I would come to-night if I could make arrangements for her, and she said she would be ready. She has only a small bag, so her preparations are simple. Now, don't be frightened, Eveley. You know I would not leave you if there were any danger. Angelo will be with you."

"You bet I will. Beat it, Mister, and cop the lady."

Eveley and Angelo listened in silence, as Hiltze strode quickly away. When the last sound had echoed to silence, Angelo leaned over the seat, his thin dark face close to Eveley's.

"Say, Miss Eveley, where did you pick up that guy?"

"He was the salesman who sold me my car, but he has many friends who are my friends also, so I have met him often. He was only selling autos temporarily, and is making plans now to go into business for himself."

"I'll bet your friend English ain't stuck on him."

"Not unnaturally," admitted Eveley, laughing. "He is not."

"Well, he's a smart guy, English is," said Angelo shrewdly. "You can pretty well put it down he's on the level about folks."

"You do not seem partial to Mr. Hiltze, Angelo. But he is most kind and sympathetic, and no one works harder for the Americanization of the foreign element than he does."

"Lots of folks work hard for something to keep the real things dark. I guess he's got a mash on this dame."

Eveley was silent.

"Don't you think so?"

"No, I hardly think so."

"Oh, you can't tell. Some guys can have mashes on two or three at a time, you know."

"Angelo, please, let's not talk this way. I do not like it. And I do not wish my friends to criticize my other friends. I know you like Mr. English best of all, and that is why you try to underrate the others—but please don't."

"Oh, I think he is smart enough," said Angelo ingratiatingly. "It ain't that. I just don't like his wishing foreign dames off on to you because you are easy and will stand for it."

"Listen—they are coming."

Angelo got out then and clambered in beside her, and they both peered into the darkness whence footsteps came. The two were walking slowly, Hiltze leading the girl carefully. She walked shrinkingly, her face showing deathly pale in the shadowy night.

Eveley got out at once and went to meet them, surprised at the great wave of tenderness sweeping over her. She felt somehow that it was a daughter of hers, coming back to her out of suffering and sorrow. She put her arms protectingly about the girl, and kissed her cheek.

"Marie," she said softly, "you are going to be my sister. I—I think I love you already. I felt it when I saw you come out of the darkness."

The girl did not speak, but her slender fingers closed convulsively about Eveley's, and there was a catch like a little sob in her throat.

Eveley herself helped her into the car, and pulled the rugs and blankets about her.

"It is very foggy, and the air is cold. We do not want a little sick girl on our hands. Pull them close about you. Oh, your cape is very light—you must take my furs. It is much warmer in front, and I do not need them. Now, are you all ready? This is my little pal Angelo Moreno with me, but don't pay any attention to him to-night. You will see him again. Now, all ready and off we go."

Angelo sat silently musing in his corner during the long ride back to town, and Eveley sang softly almost beneath her breath. In the back seat there was silence, too. Only once Eveley turned to call to them blithely:

"I was frightened and anxious at first, but now I feel happy and full of hope. I think you are going to bring me great good fortune, Sister Marie."

"You are—most heavenly kind," said Marie, in slow soft English, with the exquisite toning of her Spanish tongue.

"Oh, Marie," cried Eveley rapturously. "Those are the first words I ever heard you say—such kind and loving words. I shall never forget them."

The rest of the ride was taken in absolute silence, and at the door of her cottage when she ran the car into the garage, Angelo carried Marie's bag up the steps silently, and Hiltze helped her, while Eveley ran hospitably in front to have the window open and the lights on. She thrust out an eager hand to help Marie through the window, and then she gaily faced their escorts.

"Not to-night," she cried. "You can not come in even for a minute. Sister Marie and I are going to have hot chocolate all by ourselves, and—and find out how we like each other's looks. Many thanks—good night."

Then she closed the window and turned to the slender shrinking figure at her side, drawing back the heavy hood that shielded the girl's face to look into the features of the little foreign waif she had taken to her heart.

CHAPTER XIV

NEW LIGHT ON LOYALTY

A quick thrill of pleasure swept over Eveley as she looked into the face of her young guest.

"Duty?" No, it would be a joy to teach this soft and lovely creature the glorious principles of freedom, justice and equality. This was Eveley's sphere—she felt it—she knew it. She took Marie's slender hands in both of hers, and squeezed them rapturously.

"Oh, I am so happy," she cried ecstatically. "I think you are adorable."

For Marie's soft dark eyes, the soft waves of dark hair drooping over the low forehead, the slender oval of the olive tinted face, the crimson curving lips, the shrinking figure presented such a picture of exquisite helplessness that Eveley's brave and buoyant soul rose leaping to the appeal.

She removed the dark cape from Marie's shoulders, and took her bag, leading her into the small east bedroom which had been so charmingly dressed for her.

"This is your home now, Marie, I hope for a long, long time. It is your home, and you are as free as a bird. You are not my servant, but my sister and my friend. I want you to be happy. You are to think as you like, do as you like, go or stay as you like. You are mistress of your own life, now and all the time."

"It is very lovely," said Marie softly. "And you are an angel from Heaven."

"Not a bit of it," laughed Eveley. "You do not know me. I am the humanest thing you ever saw in your life." She lifted Marie's bag lightly to a low table. "Now, this door opens to the bath—my bedroom door leads into it from the opposite side. And this is your closet, and these drawers are all empty, so use them as you wish. Why don't you put on a negligee, now, and rest? And while you are alone for a minute, to collect yourself and unpack your bag, I shall run out and put on the chocolate. We must have a hot luncheon after our cold ride. Are you very cold? I think I'd better light the fire in your grate—it is all ready. There, that is better now. If I ever do get married I must certainly have wonderful luck, if there is any faith in signs, for I do build the fieriest fires. Now, do not hurry, I'll come back in a few minutes. I think I shall put on a negligee too," she added, as Marie drew a silk gown from her bag. "And then we'll be surely settled down and right at home together."

With a warm and dazzling smile, she ran out to put the chocolate on the grill, and arrange the sandwiches and fruit and cake on the table around the bowl of drooping roses, and then, humming blithely, hurried into her own room to change from her heavy dress to a soft house gown.

When, a few moments later, she returned to Marie, she found her standing pensively in the center of the room, the heavy folds of a dark red gown falling about her graceful figure, her head sunk on her breast in reverie. Eveley put her arms around her tenderly.

"You are beautiful," she said. "Don't worry, dear. You are going to be very happy, even yet. Just trust me—and—do you know the song of the Belgian girl—Well, we shall make an American Beauty of you, sure enough. Just try to be happy, and have confidence in me, Marie. I shall never go back on you. My, how quick you were! Your bag is all unpacked, isn't it?" She glanced with quickly appraising eyes at the heavy silver articles of toilet laid out on the dressing-table, and at the gowns swinging from the pole in the closet.

"Come along, baby sister," she said affectionately, "or the chocolate will run all over the grill."

There was deep if unvoiced appreciation in Marie's eyes as she observed the fine heavy furniture of the little dining-room, the lace doilies on the mahogany table, the fine pieces of china, and the drooping roses. Eveley led her gaily to her place at the table, and sat down beside her.

"We really ought to ask a blessing," she said. "I feel such a fountain of gratitude inside of me. My own sister was ten years older than I, and there were no babies afterward for me to make a fuss over. This is a brand-new experience, and I am just bubbling over."

"But I am no baby," said Marie, smiling the wistful smile that suggested tears and heartaches. "I think I am quite as old as you."

"Oh, impossible," gasped Eveley. "Why, I am twenty-five years old."

"Really!" mocked Marie, and she laughed—and Eveley realized it was the first time Marie had laughed. "Well, I am twenty-three and a half."

"Oh, you can't be. Mr. Hiltze said you were a child, and you are so little and slim and young."

"You have been a woman, living a woman's life, with all a woman's interests. But our women are sheltered, kept away from life, and that is why I am like a child in facing the world—because I have never faced it. I look young, and act young, because—well, with us, our women marry early. If they do not, they must retain the charm of youth until they do. That is what we are taught, it is our business as women to be young and lovely until we marry."

"I love to hear you talk," said Eveley irrelevantly. "You are just like a chapter out of a new and thrilling story—See, I have let my chocolate grow cold just looking at you, and listening. I am very glad you are nearly as old as I—we can not only be sisters, but twins if you like."

Marie sipped her chocolate, daintily, dreamily. Then she looked at Eveley searchingly.

"Is this your patriotism?" she asked at last. "To throw open your home on a moment's notice, to a stranger from a strange land?"

"We call it Americanization," said Eveley. "We call it the assimilation of—of—" She hesitated, not wishing to speak of "flotsam and jetsam" to this soft and pliant creature. "We call it the assimilation of the whole world into American ideals."

"Then," said Marie slowly, dark eyes still searching Eveley's face, "I suppose, having this vision of patriotism yourself, you can understand patriotism of others from other lands? You can understand why people plot, and steal, and kill—for love of country? My own land, for instance—so many call us bloody butchers because we fight for our country and for freedom. But you—you know what patriotism is. And you can understand, can you not?"

"Of course I understand," said Eveley rather confusedly, for the Mexican business was a terrible muddle to her. "I understand that your men must fight to save their country from the rebels and anarchists who would wreck and ruin her."

"Yes, but—it is the rebels and anarchists who would save her," said Marie, with childish earnestness. "I—we—I am of the revolutionists. My father was killed. My brothers were killed. My sisters were made captive. But still the struggle goes on. The best of our men must fight and die. Poor Mexico must struggle and blunder on from one disaster to another, until at last she rises triumphant and free among the nations of the world. It is those in power in her own land from whom Mexico has most to fear—those who would sell her, body and soul, land and loyalty, to foreign devils for gold. It is not against the outside world we fight—it is the vile, the treacherous ones inside our borders."

"But how can you tell who is for, and who against?" asked Eveley bewildered. "They all promise so much—and peace is assured—but there is no peace. And who can tell where freedom really lies?"

"Alas, it is true," said Marie sadly. "But those with eyes that see and hearts that love, know that Mexico is still in the hands of traitors, and that the spirit of revolution must live."

"Of course you know more about it than I do," admitted Eveley. "We—we do not understand the situation at all. I—think perhaps they are too shrewd for us. Let's not talk of it—it excites you, dear. I want you to rest and be quiet. I did not know that any one could love—Mexico—like that."

“Have you seen Mexico? Oh, not the dry, barren border country, but my Mexico, rich with jewels and gold, studded with magnificent cities, flowering with rare fruits and spices, a mellow, golden, matchless land, peopled by those who are skilled in arts and science, lovers of beauty, and—Ah, you do not know Mexico. You know only the half-breed savages who run the borderland, preying on Mexican and American alike. You do not know the real Mexico of beautiful women, and brave and gallant men. How could you know?”

222

Then her voice became soft and dreamy again. “I visited here long years ago. I was out in your Old Town, where the Indian maid Ramona lived. I stood in the square there. Do you know the story, Eveley, of the early days when your Captain Fremont and his band of soldiers stood there, ready to lower the flag of Mexico and to raise in its place your Stars and Stripes? As your soldier stepped forward to tear down our flag, a little girl of Mexico, another Marie like me, who was watching with aching heart from the window of the ‘dobe house on the other side, shocked at the outrage, leaped from the casement forgetting her fear of the foreign soldiers, and with one tug of her sharp knife cut the rope. As the flag of Mexico fell, she caught it in her bare hands, and pressed it against her lips, her little form shaken with sobs. ‘Forgive me,’ she said to the soldiers, but it is the flag of my country, I could not see it dragged in the dust.”

223

Eveley leaned over and put her hand on Marie’s arm. “I have heard the story many times, but I never caught the glory of it before. It was the feeling in her that is in me now—that is in all America—only ours is for America, and hers was for Mexico—as yours is.”

“When I look at you, and know the tenderness of you, and the great heart of you, I feel that America must be the heaven of all the world, and Americans the angels.” Then Marie’s face darkened, and her lips became a scarlet line. “But who then has stood heartlessly by, and watched the writhing and anguish of my Mexico, withholding the hand of power that could bring peace? Who has stood by and smiled while Mexico lay crushed and bleeding beneath the heel of despotism and treachery?”

224

“We haven’t understood, Marie,” begged Eveley. “We could not understand. We—we naturally trust people, we are like that, you know, and—”

“And whom can one trust? My faith has been as my faith in God—yet when so many falter, and then turn back in betrayal—how can one trust? Perhaps we are all deceived—perhaps every faction in my country is seeking only to despoil and enslave.” Then her face grew bright and luminous as she said, “But there are those who are princes of sacrifice and love, risking all their world, their lives, their honor, for my Mexico. If there be any faith, it is in them. You call them bandits—Yes? I call them sons of God.”

Eveley changed the subject as quickly as she could. The bandits who had been driven desperately from crag to cranny, berated in the press, denounced in the pulpit, deprecated on the platform—were these the princes of Marie’s Mexico, the idols of their women’s hearts, the saviors of their faith, their hope of freedom? It was very confusing.

225

She told Marie how she worked every day down-town, and how the little Cloud Cote would be her own all day, how she had friends coming often in the evening, friends who would love Marie, but whom she never need to see except when her heart desired. And she told of the lovely lawn, with its pavilions and pergolas and crevices and vines, and of the canyon drifting away down to the bay.

And Marie sat with her chin in her hands, her eyes soft and humble, dog-like, on Eveley’s face.

CHAPTER XV

SERVICE OF JOY

226

It was not often that Eileen Trevis, who was manifestly born for business, waxed hysterically enthusiastic. And so one morning a few days later, when an incoherent summons came from her over the telephone, Eveley was astonished almost to the point of speechlessness.

“What is it?” she gasped. “What has happened? Is it bad news?”

“Good, good, good,” exulted Eileen. “Wonderful, delicious, thrilling. Please hurry. It is nearly lunch-time, isn’t it? I have been trying to get you all morning,—come quickly.—Never mind about your luncheon.—Are you coming?”

“I am on the way,” shouted Eveley, crashing the receiver on to its hook, and flying with scant ceremony from the office, hoping it was truly the luncheon hour, but scorning to waste the time to look.

227

“She is in love,” she said aloud as she ran down the stairs, spurning a tardy elevator. “She is in love, and she is engaged, or maybe she has eloped and is already married. Eileen Trevis,—of all people in the world. Whoever would have thought it?”

Only the absence of traffic officers in that part of the city kept Eveley from arrest that day, and

only the protection of Heaven itself saved her from total wreckage, for she spun around corners, and dodged traffic warts at a rate that was positively neck-breaking. The last block before she reached Eileen's home was one long coast, and she drew up sharply with a triumphant honk.

Eileen was on the steps before she had time to turn off the engine.

"Is it a husband?" cried Eveley.

"No, babies," chortled Eileen.

Eveley put her fingers over her lips, and swallowed painfully.

"It isn't your turn," she said disapprovingly. "You have to do these things in proper order. You can't run backward. It isn't being done."

228

"Don't be silly," said Eileen. "Hop out, and come in. I am having a nursery made out of the maid's bedroom that has never been used. It is perfectly dear, with blue Red-Riding-Hoods, and blue wolves and blue Jacks-and-Jills on a white background."

"There is something wrong about this," said Eveley solemnly, as she followed Eileen into the house, and up the two flights of stairs to her apartment.

"It is Ida's babies, stupid," explained Eileen at last. "I am to have them after all. Poor Jim's sister is ill, and I must say, it almost serves her right,—she was so snippy about the children."

"Oh, Ida's babies! And has the Aunt-on-the-Other-Side-of-the-House had a change of heart?"

"Yes, a regular one. Heart failure, they call it. I tried so hard to get them when Ida died, but Agnes flatly refused to give them up and since her brother was their daddy and he was alive, I could not do much. I asked for them again, you know, when Jim died, and she was ruder than ever. But since the dispensation of heart failure, she can not keep them. I got a letter this morning, and wired for them to start immediately and I just got an answer that they will be here to-morrow afternoon. Then I sent for the decorators."

229

"You aren't any mother for small children," protested Eveley, with an argumentative wave of her hand. "You are born for business. Everybody says so. You do not know anything about babies."

"Oh, yes I do," cried Eileen ecstatically. "They have fat legs and dimples, and Betty sucks her thumb and has to be scolded, and Billy shouts 'More jam' and smudges it on his knees."

"Are you giving up your position?"

"Oh, mercy, no. We have to live. Poor Jim only left them insurance and nothing else, and that did not last very long. I sent the other aunt a small check every month to help along and sort of heap coals of fire on her head at the same time. No, I shall have to work harder than ever now. But I get one seventy-five a month now,—and lots of families live on less."

230

"Who will keep house then—Betty?"

"Don't ask silly questions, Eveley, I am so nervous anyhow I hardly know what I am saying. You remember my laundress, don't you? She is so nice and motherly and a Methodist and respectable and all that,—only old and hard up. She is coming to live with us,—she will have the den for her room, and is closing her cottage. She is to keep house and look after the babies while I am at work. She only charges twenty-five a month, so I can manage. The rent does seem high, fifty dollars,—but we need the room, though you all thought it was so extravagant for me to have such a large apartment to myself. But you know how I am, Eveley,—I like lots of space,—a place for everything, and everything where it belongs. So I was willing to stand the expense, and now it is a good thing I did. Come and see the baby room."

Eveley duly admired the blue Red-Riding-Hoods and Jacks-and-Jills, exclaimed over the tiny white beds, and tiny white tables and chairs, and then said:

"You seem to be enjoying this experience, so I suppose you do not feel it is your duty, nor anything sordid like that?"

231

"Oh, no," laughed Eileen. "I am doing it because I am just crazy about those babies, and I am sort of lonely, Eveley, though I have never realized it before. And when I think of coming home to a frolic with fat little babies in white dresses and blue ribbons,—well, I am so happy I could fairly cry."

So Eveley put her arms around her, and kissed her, and offered a few suggestions about appropriate food for angel babies,—feeling very wise from her recent experience with Nathalie and Dan, and invited them all to go driving with her on Saturday afternoon, and mentally planned to send them an enormous box of candy in the morning after their arrival, and then said she must hurry back to work.

"Oh, you poor thing," cried Eileen in contrition. "You did not have any luncheon at all, did you? Wait until I fix a sandwich and you can slip into the dressing-room and eat it. It will only take a minute. You may have some of these animal cookies too,—I got a dollar's worth,—I knew the babies would love them. Now, Eveley, won't you come to dinner to-morrow night and meet my little blessed? The train comes at six-ten, and Mrs. Allis, I mean, Aunt Martha,—we have decided to call her Aunt Martha,—will have dinner all ready for us."

232

"Certainly I'll come," said Eveley promptly. "I shall love it. And I'll come for you in the car and take you to the station."

After work that night, Eveley went into the ten-cent store, and bought a startling array of drums and horns and small shovels, and sent them out to Eileen's for the babies. And that night she

insisted that Nolan must come to dinner with her to hear the great good news.

"It is just because she wants to do it," she said happily. "That is why she is so full of joy. It is plain selfishness,—she has no thought of doing her Christian duty nor any such nonsense. And—well, you would hardly know Eileen. Her eyes are like stars, and her voice runs up and down stairs in beautiful trills, and she forgot to wear her hair net."

233

"Wait till Billy gets jam on her lace bedspread, and Betty cuts up her new bonnet to get the pretty flowers, and wait till they both get mad and yowl at once,—she'll be lucky if she remembers her Christian duty then."

"Isn't he crabby, Marie?" asked Eveley plaintively. "He doesn't like to see people happy and thrilled and throbbing."

"Oh, yes, I do. I am thrilled and happy and throbbing myself right now. There is something about this Cote in the Clouds that—"

"And dear Eileen has lived alone so long, poor thing."

"I can sympathize with her all right. I have, too."

"And now she will have a home, a real home—"

"My own dream for years."

"Sweet companionship—"

"Heaven on earth, Eveley, heaven on earth."

"Something to live for—"

"Alas, how I envy her."

"Nolan, if you do not keep still and pay attention, I shall stop talking and let you propose,—right before Marie,—and then where will you be?"

234

"Married, I hope."

So Eveley decided there was no use to try to talk sense with Nolan, but she arranged to call for him at eight o'clock the next morning to take him to Eileen's and show him the blue Red-Riding-Hoods and the toys.

As she left the house to keep her engagement with Nolan, she was surprised to see Mrs. Severs starting out, for Mrs. Severs was not used to being out so early.

"Why, little Bride, whither away?" laughed Eveley.

Mrs. Severs flushed. "I am going to spend the day with father," she admitted, rather shyly. "It is sort of lonesome here alone all the time,—and we have lots of fun in the little cottage on the hill. And sometimes we go out on the beach and lie on the sand,—he takes me in his jitney. He thinks I need more sunshine and fresh air."

"He is great, isn't he?" said Eveley warmly.

"He is dear," cried Mrs. Severs, the quick color surging her face. "I am not very well, and he is so gentle and sweet to me. I—wish I had been more patient,—I am very lonely now. But we are great chums. He has taught me to play pinochle, and I fill his pipe for him. And onions aren't so bad."

235

"Hum," thought Eveley, as she drove down-town. "You can't suit some people, no matter how finely you adjust their difficulties." Then she brightened. "Still, it is better to love each other in two houses, than to be bad friends in one,—as they were."

That evening, she and Eileen stood at the station impatiently waiting,—having arrived at five-thirty, fearing the train might come ahead of time.

"Oh, Eveley," Eileen wailed. "Suppose they should not like me?"

Eveley laughed at that. "Suppose you do not like them?" she parried.

"I do. I haven't seen them for over two years, but they are adorable. They are seven now. The prettiest things,—long yellow curls, and—"

236

"Billy will probably be shaved by this time,—I mean barbered."

"Oh, never. No one would cut off curls like his. Their hair will be longer I suppose, probably darker,—and Betty licks and swallows while she is talking,—"

"Oh, she will be over that now."

"In two years? Why, certainly not. They will be just the same, only more so."

Eveley began to experience a curious internal sinking. Eileen was too deliriously optimistic about those children. They were angel babies, of course, for Eileen said so, but Eveley remembered Nathalie and Dan, angels, too,—but how they shouted and tore through the house. And they were always exhibiting fresh cuts and bruises, and Dan had insisted on the confiscation of his curls at four years. If Billy was still wearing curls at seven, he needed a tonic for he was not regular.

"Eileen," she began very gently, "you—you mustn't expect too many dimples and curls. Children are angels,—but they are funny, too. They are always bleeding, you know, and—"

237

"Bleeding!" gasped Eileen. "Agnes never mentioned bleeding! Do they always do it?"

"Always. They are always getting themselves smashed and scratched, and blood runs all over them, and gets matted in their hair, and their hands are constitutionally dirty, and—they always have at least one finger totally and irrevocably smashed. Some times it is two fingers, and once in a while a whole hand, but the average is one finger."

Eileen looked at her friend in a most professional manner.

"I do not know if you are trying to be insulting, or just amusing, but I saw those children. I was right there for three weeks only two years ago, and they were always clean, they had curls, and they were certainly not smashed or I should have noticed it."

"They shout, too, Eileen," Eveley went on wretchedly, determined to prepare Eileen for the shock that was sure to follow. "They—they just whoop. And—"

"If you can not be a little pleasanter, dear, suppose you go and wait for me in the car. I am too nervous. I simply can not stand it."

"I do not want to be unpleasant, and I shall not say another word. I just wanted to remind you of—of the shouting—and the blood."

"One would think they were savages, Eveley, instead of my own sister's little babies."

"Here comes the train," cried Eveley, and added in a soft whisper that Eileen could not hear, "Oh, please, for Eileen's sake, let 'em have dimples and curls, and don't get 'em smashed before the train stops."

Hand in hand, with eager shining eyes, the girls ran along the platform, and when the porter put down his stool beneath the steps, the first thing that appeared was a small dimpled girl with golden curls, and a flower-like face beneath a flower-laden bonnet.

Eileen leaped upon her, catching her in her arms, and in her rapturous delight, she did not hear a small brusque voice exclaiming, "Oh, pooh, I don't need your old stool."

And she did not notice Eveley's gasp,—for Eveley had seen a small sailor-clad form hurtle itself from the step and fall flat upon the gravel platform. It was not until a sudden lusty roar went up that Eileen remembered she had two babies en route. She dropped Betty like a flash, and turned.

The porter very grimly picked up the child, and held him out, and Eileen saw with horror that his face was fairly sandpapered from the fall, and blood was starting from a dozen tiny pricks.

"If this is yourn, for Gawd's sake, take 'im," begged the porter. "He's fell off'n everything and into everything between here and Seattle."

Eileen clung desperately to Betty's moist hand.

"Don't get scared, Auntie," chirped the small bright voice. "Billy always falls into things, and he ain't never broke anything yet,—himself, I mean, arms or legs or necks,—he breaks lots of dishes and vases and things like that."

Eileen was stricken dumb, but Eveley took the writhing roaring boy from the porter's hand, and dusted him lightly with her handkerchief.

"Why, where are your curls, Billy?" she demanded, hoping to distract his attention. And she succeeded only too well, for he stopped so suddenly in the midst of a loud wail that he almost choked. When he finally recovered his breath, he snorted derisively.

"Curls! Huh! I ain't no girl. I ain't got any curls. I never did have curls."

"Oh, yes, you did," she argued. "Two years ago you had beautiful, long golden curls just like Betty's."

Billy hunched up his shoulders and clenched a small brown fist.

"You got to say, 'Excuse me for them words,'" he said belligerently. "Ain't so, and you got to say it."

Scenting battle, Eveley hastily muttered the desired words, and passed him over to Eileen.

Billy thrust out a sturdy hand, but to Eileen's evident delight he refused to be kissed.

"Betty's got to be whipped, Aunt Eileen," he announced. "Aunt Agnes told me to tell you all she did on the train, and you would whip her. She stuck a pin in a fat man that was asleep,—that's the man right there,—Say, didn't Betty stick a pin in you?"

But the fat man gave them a venomous glare, and hurried away. "And she pulled the beads off of that blonde lady's coat,—and if you don't believe it, you can look in her pocket 'cause she's got 'em yet. And she swiped a box of candy from that lady in the yellow suit, and the lady said the porter did it, and they had an awful fight. And she sang *The Yanks Are Coming* in the middle of the night and everybody swore something awful. And she wouldn't eat anything but ice-cream at the table, and one meal she had five dishes."

Eveley and Eileen had listened in fascinated silence during this recital of his sister's wrongdoing. But Betty stuck a fat thumb between rosy lips, and drooped her eyes demurely behind her curling lashes.

"Did—you do all that, Betty?" demanded Eileen at last, very faintly.

"I did more than that," she said proudly. "I put the pink lady's bedroom slippers in a man's traveling bag, and they haven't found it out yet. And I slipped Billy's wriggly lizard down the

black lady's neck, and she said a naughty word. And—"

"And what did Billy do?"

Betty's lips curled with scorn. "Billy? He didn't do anything. He's too good. He don't ever do anything."

Billy advanced with the threatening hunch of his shoulders and clench of the brown fists.

"You say, 'Excuse me for them words,'" he said in a low voice. "And say it quick."

Betty jerked her finger from her mouth and mumbled rapidly in a voice of frightened nervousness, "Excuse me for them words, please excuse me for them words." And then, as her brother's shoulders relaxed, she sidled up to him, rubbing herself affectionately against his arm, and whispered, "Aw, Billy, I was only joking. You ain't mad at me, are you?"

"Let's go," said Eileen. "I feel—faint."

"Sticking pins is good for faintness," said Betty hopefully. "I did it to Aunt Agnes twice when she nearly fainted, and she came to right away."

"And she gave Betty a good whipping."

"Yes, she did, and I only did it to cure her," said Betty in an aggrieved voice.

"Let's go fast," begged Eileen. "Take your handkerchief, Billy, and see if you can wipe a little of the dirt and blood off your face."

"He mustn't do that," interrupted Betty promptly. "Handkerchiefs is full of germs, and if he gets the germs in his scratches he gets blood poison and dies. You got to wait till you get home, Billy, and then lie on your back on Aunt Eileen's bed, and she'll take clean gauze and soak 'em off in cold water. If you haven't got any gauze handy you can use mine, but you'd better buy some. Billy uses as much as a dollar's worth of gauze in no time."

Eileen put her hand over her face, and turned away. The children followed, looking about them in frank interest and pleasure.

"Is that a palm tree?" asked Betty. "Billy says God never made 'em grow like that. He says men just tie those fins on top to make 'em look funny. Did God do it, Aunt Eileen? What did He do it for?—Oh, is this your car, Aunt Eileen? Billy knows how to start a car so you better not let him in it by himself." Then as the small boyish shoulders assumed the dreadful hunch, she cried excitedly, "Oh, no, he can't either, honest he can't. He doesn't know what to turn, nor anything. I was joking. You ain't mad at me, are you, Billy?"

Eveley slipped silently into her place behind the wheel, and Billy opened the door for his aunt and sister, banged it smartly after their entrance, and climbed in front with Eveley.

"They oughtn't to let women drive cars," he said in a judicial tone. "Women is too nervous. There ought to be a law against it."

Eveley laughed. "I think so, too," she agreed pleasantly. "But until there is such a law, I think I shall keep on driving."

Billy stared at her suspiciously. "You don't need to agree with me to be polite," he said. "It won't hurt my feelings any. I ain't used to it, anyhow."

Betty, in the rear seat, cuddled cozily against her rigid aunt and kept up a constant flow of conversation in her pretty chirpy voice.

"Are you an old maid? Aunt Agnes said you were. Did you do it on purpose, or couldn't you help yourself? I am not going to be an old maid. I am engaged now. Billy tried to be engaged, too, but Freckle Harvey cut him out."

Billy suddenly squared about in his seat, and Betty shivered into a small and terrified heap. "Aw, no, he didn't either. Billy didn't like her worth a cent. He thinks she is just hideous, don't you, Billy? You ain't mad at me, are you, Billy?"

When Eveley drew the car up before the big apartment-house on Sixth Street, Billy forgot his temporary burst of manners. With a hoarse shout he slid deftly over the door and dashed up the steps. Shrieking gleefully, Betty followed swiftly in his wake.

"Oh, Eveley," faltered Eileen, "I am afraid they scratched the car." She got out hastily, and caught her lips between her teeth as she saw the long jagged scratch on the door where Betty's sharp heel had passed.

"Never mind," said Eveley bravely. "It doesn't make a bit of difference. We all know how children are."

"I—I didn't," said Eileen weakly. "I—guess I am an old maid. I hadn't realized it."

In Betty's extravagant delight over the new room, and Billy's quiet but equally sincere pleasure, something of Eileen's own enthusiasm returned, and although her ministrations upon Billy's marred countenance, performed under the critical and painstaking eye of Sister Betty, left her weak-kneed and pale, she took her place at the table with something very much akin to pleasure, if it were not the jubilant delight she had anticipated.

Eveley went home immediately after dinner, stopping on her way for Nolan. They spent an uproarious hour over her account of the twins and their reception. And at last, weak with laughter, Eveley wiped her eyes, and said with deep sympathy:

"Poor Eileen! And the twins are adorable. But I believe one needs to be born with children and grow up with them gradually. For when they spring upon you full grown they are—well, they are certainly a shock."

248

CHAPTER XVI

MARIE ENCOUNTERS THE SECRET SERVICE

In the beginning Eveley had hesitated to leave her newly adopted sister alone in the Cloud Cote in the evening, but as Marie seemed absolutely to know no fear, and as time did not hang at all heavily upon her hands, Eveley was soon running about among her friends as she had always done. But with this change: there was always a light in the window at the top of the rustic stairs when she came home, and a warm and tender welcome awaiting her.

Marie had come to be charmingly useful in the Cloud Cote. She prepared breakfast while Eveley dressed, and did the light bit of housework nicely and without effort. Eveley usually had her luncheon down-town, but in the evening dinner was well started before she reached home. Her mending was always exquisitely done, even before she knew that mending was necessary, and among her lingerie she often came upon fine bits of lace she had not seen before.

249

After long and loving persuasion, Marie had consented to meet Eveley's sister and brother-in-law, and Eveley had them in for dinner. Marie was quiet that night, scarcely speaking except now and then to the babies. The next week, however, when Winifred asked both girls to dinner, Marie went without argument, and seemed to take a great deal of quiet satisfaction in the visit.

Kitty and Eileen she met often in the Cloud Cote, but always withdrew as quickly as possible to her own room to leave Eveley alone with her friends. With Nolan, Eveley openly insisted that Marie should develop a friendship.

"Why, he will very likely be my husband one of these days, when he gets around to it," she explained frankly.

"Your husband," echoed Marie. "I thought Mr. Hiltze—"

"Oh, no," denied Eveley, flushing a little. "He is just a pleasant in-between-whiles. We are fellow-Americanizers, that is all."

250

"Does Mr. Hiltze know that?" queried Marie.

"Oh, everybody knows that I belong to Nolan when the time comes," said Eveley, laughing.

Nolan, urgently warned by Eveley, met Marie with friendly ease and asked no questions. He took her hand cordially and said in his pleasant voice. "Well, if you are Eveley's sister, I have a half-way claim upon you myself, and you must count me in." And then he promptly began mashing potatoes for their dinner, and Marie did not mind him at all.

When Amos Hiltze came to the Cloud Cote she joined serenely with them, very easy and comfortable, always careful to go to her room before he left, that he might have a little while alone with Eveley. For she saw plainly that while he interested Eveley only in his enthusiasm for Americanization, for him Eveley had a deeper and sweeter charm.

One Saturday afternoon when Nolan was busy, the two girls went out for a picnic on the beach, a well-filled basket in the car for their dinner. On a sudden impulse, Eveley turned to Marie and cried:

251

"Oh, little sister, how would you like to learn to drive? Then you can take me to the office and have the car yourself to play with while I am busy."

"Eveley," came the ecstatic gasp, "would you—let me?"

"Would I let you?" laughed Eveley. "Should you like it? Why, you have been wanting to, haven't you? Why didn't you ask me, Marie?"

"Oh, I couldn't."

"Yes, you should have," said Eveley gravely. "I would have told you honestly if I did not wish it. I said you must feel free to ask me for anything, didn't I. And don't I always mean what I say—to you, at least?"

"Does your love for Americanization carry you so far?" asked Marie curiously.

Eveley was silent a moment. "I can not exactly count you Americanization," she said honestly. "I do not believe Americanizing you could add anything to your sweetness, anyhow. You are just fun, and—You may not believe it, Marie," she added rather shyly, for she was not a demonstrative girl, "but I—really I love you."

252

Quick tears leaped to Marie's dark eyes, and she placed her head softly against Eveley's shoulder, though she did not speak. Almost instantly Eveley brushed away the wave of sentiment and gave her quick bright laugh.

"Now listen, sweetness," she said. "It is like this. This is the clutch that controls the gears. When it wobbles like this it is in neutral and the car will not run. When you shove down with your left foot, and pull the clutch to the left and backward, it is in low gear, and the car will go forward when you let your foot back. You must do it very slowly, so there will be no pull nor jerk. Like this."

So the afternoon wore away, the two girls laughing gaily as Marie made her first bungling attempts to drive; but later, Marie was aglow with exultation and Eveley with deep pride, because the little foreigner showed real aptitude for handling the car.

253

Then in a lovely quiet part of the beach a little beyond La Jolla, they had an early supper and drove home, Eveley at the wheel, singing love songs, Marie humming softly with her.

"This is almost like sweethearting, isn't it?" asked Eveley turning to look into the dark eyes fixed adoringly upon her. "Next to Nolan you satisfy me more than anything else in the world. But don't tell Nolan. He is jealous of you,—he thinks I like you better than I do him."

"You say you love me, Eveley. But do you? Is it the kind of love that can understand and sympathize and forgive—yes, and keep on loving even when—things are wrong?"

"Nothing could change my feeling for you, Marie," said Eveley positively.

"But if things were wrong?" came the insistent query.

"Well, I am no angel myself," answered Eveley, laughing again. "If you are a naughty girl, I shall say, 'I will forgive you if you will forgive me,' and there you are." She stopped again, to laugh. "But I can't think of any wrong you could do, Marie. You just naturally do not associate with wrong things."

254

"And you will always remember, won't you, what you have said about love of one's country? That it excuses and glorifies everything in the world?"

But Eveley was singing again.

Eveley had made an arrangement to call for Nolan at the office at eight, as they were going to Kitty's for a late supper with her and Arnold Bender, so she kissed Marie good night when they reached home, and said:

"Will you be lonesome without your big sister, and boss?"

"I think I shall go down and watch the dark shadows in your beautiful canyon," said Marie, clinging to Eveley's hand, and looking deeply into her eyes.

"Aren't you afraid down there at night?" wondered Eveley. "I have lived on top of the canyon all my life, and we played hide-and-peek there when we were children, and I love it,—and yet when night comes, I do not even go so far as the rose pergola unless Nolan is there to hold my hand and shoo away the ghosts and things."

255

"That is our difference. You are afraid of the world and the night, I am afraid only of men and women. I have lived alone, and have had wide dark gardens to wander in. They have never harmed me. Only men have injured me, and my family. So I love to slip down into the soft fragrant darkness of the canyon and sit on the big stones or on the velvet grass, and see my future in the shadows."

"But do not stay long. The whole canyon is yours to dream in, if it makes you happy. But wear a heavy wrap and do not get chilled."

Then with a hasty kiss she ran down the steps to the car.

Eveley was tired that night. The first lesson in driving, the lazy supper on the beach, and the long ride, left her listless and indolent. So after their merry dinner, and a dance or two around the Victrola, she said she had a headache and wanted to go home.

They drove very slowly along the winding road, and were quietly content. Nolan opened the doors of the garage and Eveley ran the car into place; then, as she was really tired, at the foot of the rustic stairs he said good night, while she crept slowly up the steps.

256

For the first time, there was no Marie to welcome her. The room, though lighted, looked dreary and forlorn without the pretty adopted girl.

"The little goosie," said Eveley, with a tender smile. "I suppose she is still dreaming down in that spooky canyon. Maybe she has fallen asleep. I shall have to go after her."

She took a small flash-light, and hurried down the rustic stairs and the well-known path beyond the rose pergola, where she hoped to find Marie.

But Marie was not there.

Eveley knew every foot of the canyon by heart; she went surely and without hesitation along the twisting, winding, rocky path, half-way down the narrow slope.

"Marie," she called softly, "Marie."

But there was no answer.

"Maybe she is behind the live oak in the Rambler's Retreat," she thought, and climbed up the steep bank from the path, clinging to bits of shrubbery and foliage. But Marie was not there. And then as Eveley turned, she heard quick running steps in the pathway under the swinging bridge that spanned the canyon lower down.

257

Eveley sighed aloud in her relief,—then her breath caught in her throat,—a gasp of fear.

For sounding clear and distinct above the light steps came a pounding of heavier feet. Some one was following Marie up the path,—no, there were two for there was another pounding a little fainter, farther away. Now Eveley could hear the frightened intake of Marie's breath as she ran. Two girls alone in the dark canyon.

Eveley clung desperately to the heavy shrubbery among which she was crouching. She was about three feet above the path on the steep bank. Clinging for support with one hand, she reached noiselessly about for a stone, but there was nothing upon which she could lay her hand.

Below the path, the canyon dropped sharply for a long way, fifty or sixty feet perhaps, not a precipice, but with a decided drop that could only be descended with care. If Marie would only lie down and roll, she might be able to hide among the bushes at the bottom. But Marie did not think of that. Her one idea was to run faster and faster, in the hope of escaping her pursuers.

"Marie," whispered Eveley sharply as the girl came up the path near her, and Marie, hearing the faint sound, stopped suddenly in her tracks, swaying, more frightened than ever.

"Lie down, lie down," urged Eveley, but Marie did not hear, and before she could gather her wits to run on, a man leaped toward her, both arms outstretched.

"I got you," he panted.

Marie, following the terrified instinct of every hunted animal, swung her lithe body and ducked beneath his arm. And at that moment, Eveley, tightening her hold upon the branches of the bush, drew up her feet, braced herself against the bank for a moment, and then sprang heavily against the man with both feet and sent him reeling head-first down the canyon.



"Marie," whispered Eveley sharply.

Like a flash, Marie flattened herself against the bank—one more dark shadow among the others—and none too soon, for the second man was close upon them, so close they could hear the heavy rasp of his breathing. Eveley had not time to raise herself for another spring, so she crouched against the bank in terror, hoping in his haste that he might pass them by. But as he came near he paused suddenly, his attention attracted by the sound of tearing brush, and the incoherent cries of his companion as he rolled down the canyon. Taking it as an indication that the chase was in that direction, he turned blindly to follow, and not knowing the lay of the land, lost his footing at once and fell headlong.

Eveley was upon her feet in an instant.

"Run, Marie," she whispered, and in less than a moment they were hurrying up the path behind the rose pergola under the magnolias and beneath the light from their Cloud Cote.

"Wait," whispered Marie. "Let's hide a moment. They might see us going up the stairs. Wait beneath the roses until they are gone."

Only faint sounds came up to them as the two men, bruised and sore, painfully picked themselves up from the rocks and the prickly shrubs. Evidently they realized there was no hope of further pursuit, for in a short while the girls could hear the faint echo of their heavy footsteps as they retraced their way down the canyon.

Eveley held Marie in her arms until the last sound had echoed away, and then silently they climbed the stairs, crossed the little garden on the roof, and crawled through the window into the safety of the Cote.

"Are you hurt, Marie?" asked Eveley, the first to break the tense silence that fell upon them when they were conscious of shelter and security.

Marie shook her head. Then she moved one step toward Eveley, and asked in a pleading whisper: "Are you angry with me? Do you hate me?"

"Oh, Marie, don't talk so," cried Eveley, nervous tears springing to her eyes. "How could I be angry with you? But I was so frightened and shocked. I did not know how very much I loved you. You must never go into the canyon again at night. Never once,—for one minute. Will you promise me?"

"I will promise whatever you wish, Eveley, you know."

Eveley smiled at her weakly, and turning to take off her wraps saw with surprise that the sleeves were torn almost from her coat.

"I must have come down with quite a bang," she said faintly, suddenly aware that her shoulders were quivering with pain.

With a little cry of pity, Marie ran to her, and tenderly helped to remove her blouse. The tears ran down her face when she saw the red and swollen shoulders beneath.

"Oh, my poor angel," she mourned. "All bruised and sore like that. For me. You never should have done it."

Very sweetly she bathed the shoulders, and when Eveley crept painfully into bed, she arranged soft compresses of cotton and oil for her to lie upon. And she asked, shyly, if she might sit by the bed.

"Until you fall asleep," she pleaded. "I can not leave you like this, when you are in such pain,—for me."

"Come and sleep with me, then," said Eveley. "I do not want to let you go off alone, either, when—something so terrible might have happened to you."

Eagerly and with great joy Marie availed herself of the privilege, and slipped into her place beside Eveley.

"If you suffer in the night, please ask me to help you," she begged. "I will not sleep, but I do not wish to speak until I know you are awake."

"You must sleep," said Eveley.

But Marie did not sleep. Sometimes Eveley would moan a little, turning heavily, and then, without a sound, Marie was out of bed, replacing the bandages with fresh ones, crooning softly over Eveley as a mother over a suffering child.

Fortunately the next day was Sunday, and Eveley remained quietly on a couch, with Marie waiting upon her like a tender Madonna. Nolan came up, too, and insisted upon the full story of what had happened.

"I fell," said Eveley positively.

"You did not fall on your shoulder-blades," he said. "You girls have been up to some monkey business, and I want to know."

After long insistence, Eveley told him of the night's adventure, Marie sitting erect and rigid during the recital.

"Where did you go, Marie?" he asked, in deep concern.

"I went too far," she confessed regretfully. "But it was an exquisite night, and I was happy. I went down farther and farther, and did not realize it. Suddenly I looked up, and knew I was far, far down. I turned at once.—Then some one called. A man's voice. I ran, and the steps came pounding after me."

"You must not go into the canyon at night again, please, Marie. You are too young. And—the canyon goes away down to the water-front where there are a lot of Greasers and—I mean, half-breeds," he stammered quickly, "all kinds of foreigners along the road down there! You must stay on top of your canyon and be good."

The next morning, although Eveley knew her arms were too stiff and sore for work, she decided to go to the office anyhow to see the day well started.

"They will send me home, and I shall be here for luncheon with you. I can not drive yet, so I'll just cross the bridge and go on the street-car."

As she stood on the swinging bridge, looking down into the lovely canyon, it seemed impossible that there in the friendly shadows such horrible dangers had menaced them. Of a sudden impulse, she ran back, and climbed carefully down to where she had clung so grimly to the tangled vines and had knocked Marie's assailant from the path.

No, it was no dream. The vines were torn and mangled and on the path were the marks of trampling feet, and peering down the canyon she could discern two distinct trails where the men had tumbled and reeled. She slowly followed the trails, picking her way carefully, clinging to bits of shrub. Her lips curved into a grim smile as she pictured their surprise and pain. At the

foot of the canyon she saw something shining among the rocks.

She lifted it curiously, and turned it in her hand. It was clean and shining,—a small steel badge marked Secret Service.

Eveley's eyes clouded, and her brows took on a troubled frown, as she put the badge carefully into her purse.

"I shall never tell Marie," she said. "It would not help much with the Americanization of a sweet and trusting foreign girl to know she had been followed at night by a steel badge marked Secret Service."

And Eveley followed the path back to the bridge again with a grieved and troubled air.

CHAPTER XVII

SPONTANEOUS COMBUSTION

As the weeks passed, Eveley noticed a change in the conduct of the honeymoon home beneath her. Many times in the early morning, she saw Mrs. Severs going out with a covered basket and wearing an old long coat and a tight-fitting small hat. And sometimes she met her in the evening, coming home, dusty, tired and happy.

"I am going to father's," she would explain lightly. Or, "I have been out with father to-day."

And at the quizzical laughter in Eveley's eyes, she would add defiantly: "He is a darling, Eveley, and I was very silly. Why didn't you bring me to my senses?"

For Mrs. Severs was feeling less well than usual, and in the long absence of her husband every day, she was learning to depend on the brusque, kindly, capable father-in-law. And many days, when she was not well enough to leave home, he came himself, and the girls up-stairs could hear him in the kitchen below, preparing dinner for Andy and his ailing bride.

"Whatever should I do without him, Miss Ainsworth?" she sometimes asked. "He does everything for me. And I think he likes me pretty well, now he is getting used to me. He is good to me,—his little funny ways are not really funny any more, but rather sweet. I spoiled everything with my selfishness, and he will never try to live with us again."

One evening, when Father-in-law had been particularly tender and helpful, she looked at Eveley with brooding eyes, and said, "You are such a nice girl, but I sort of blame you because father is not with us. You are so much cleverer than I,—couldn't you have opened my eyes before it was too late?"

And Eveley ran up the stairs shaking her slender fists in the air. "Deliver me from brides," she said devoutly to the rose in the corner of her roof garden. "Grooms are bad enough, but brides are utterly impossible. I would not live with one for anything on earth. To think of the wretched life they were living until I helped them to a proper adjustment,—and now she holds me responsible. I always said Father-in-law was the most desirable member of the family."

But even he disappointed her.

"Well, are you getting enough freedom?" she asked him pleasantly one evening as she met him coming in.

He looked about cautiously before he answered. "Excuse me, miss," he said apologetically, "but you are away off on some things. Freedom is all right, but a little of it goes a long ways. Sometimes folks like company. She," he said, with an explanatory wave of his thumb toward the house, "she is a pretty fair sort. I've got so danged sick of having my own way that, Holy Mackinaw, I'd try living with an orphan asylum for a change. You see, I was just getting used to her, and so I kind of miss her cluttering around under foot."

Eveley was quite annoyed at this turn of events, and her feeling of perturbation lasted fully half-way up the rustic stairs. But by the time she had crossed the roof garden and swung through the window she was herself again. She caught Marie about the shoulders and danced her through the room with a spinning whirl.

"Such a lark," she cried. "The most fun we are going to have. Listen, sweetest thing in the world, we are going to have a party to-night, you and I, and Nolan and Jimmy Ames. They are coming here, Jimmy for you of course, for I always get Nolan if he is in the party."

"Oh, Eveley," gasped Marie, paling a little. "I can't. I—Mr. Hiltze said I should not meet men, you know."

"Well, he is not the head of our family. And besides, he will not know a thing about this. You will love Jimmy Ames. I nearly do myself. He is so big and blond and boyish,—you know, the slow, good, lovey kind."

"But he'll ask—"

"Don't worry. I know Jimmy Ames. After one look at you, he will not be able to ask questions for a month. Come, let's hurry. You must wear that exquisite little yellow thing, and I'll wear black to bring you out nicely."

"Oh, Eveley, you mustn't—"

"Well, Nolan likes me in black, anyhow. He says it makes me look heavenly, and of course one ought to sustain an illusion like that if possible. Now do not argue, Marie. We are going to have a perfectly wonderful time, and you will be as happy as a lark."

For a moment longer Marie hesitated, frowning into space. Then she suddenly brightened, and a wistful eagerness came into her eyes.

"Eveley, I am going to do whatever you tell me. If you wish me to be of your party, I will. And if you say, 'Do not tell Mr. Hiltze,' I shall never tell him. And if you say, 'Like Mr. Ames,' I shall adore him."

"That's a nice girl," cried Eveley, happily whirling into her chair at the table and dropping her hat upon the floor at her side. "I couldn't have planned anything nicer than this. Kitty and Arnold often have parties with us, but it will be much better having you and Jimmy. He looks very smart in his uniform."

"Uniform," faltered Marie suddenly.

"Yes,—Lieutenant Ames, you know,—Jimmy Ames."

"Lieutenant? Oh, Eveley, please, let's not. I—am not fond of the military. I am afraid of soldiers. Let me—Have some one else dear, please. Get Kitty this time, won't you? I am afraid."

"Wait till you see Jimmy. He isn't the snoopy overbearing kind that you are used to. Can't you trust me yet, Marie? I wouldn't have you meet any one who would be unpleasant or suspicious. You have found the rest of my friends all right, haven't you?"

"Well, never mind," Marie decided suddenly. "I will come to the party, but do not ever let Mr. Hiltze know, will you? He would be raging."

"Marie, do you love Amos Hiltze?"

"Love him! I hate him."

"Hate him? Then why in the world are you so afraid of him? You obey every word he says, and follow every suggestion he makes. I thought you were great friends."

Marie flushed and paled swiftly. "It is because I am grateful to him," she said at last, not meeting Eveley's eyes. "He brought me to you,—and he helps me,—and I am, willing to do whatever he tells me except when you wish something else. But I do not like him personally by any means, and I wish he did not come here so much."

"I thought you were friends," Eveley repeated confusedly.

"He is in love with you—don't you know that?"

"Yes,—perhaps so. But Angelo says men can love two women simultaneously. Angelo says there is something strange about his bringing—I mean," she interrupted herself quickly, "Angelo wondered where he found you, or—or something."

"Angelo is a good friend to you, Eveley. You might pay better heed to his suggestions, to your own good," said Marie faintly.

"I thought,—oh, I do not know what I thought. Well, we can shunt Mr. Hiltze off a little, if you wish. But you should not dislike him. He is greatly interested in you, and so full of enthusiasm and eagerness for this Americanization idea. He has been a great help to me, and he is very clever. And since he brought us together we should love him a little. Any one who struggles with Americanization deserves my patriotic and sympathetic interest, at least."

"Yes, I know." And she added slowly: "One can show enthusiasm for the things one hates worst in the world,—if there is a secret reason."

"You do not mean Mr. Hiltze, do you?" asked Eveley, with quiet loyalty.

"No, to be sure not. I only said one could."

"Mr. Hiltze is nothing to us. Toss him away. Come now, let's doll up for our party."

They were two radiantly lovely girls who stood in the little garden on the roof of the sun parlor, waiting for the men who ran up the wavering rustic stairs to join them.

"Oh, girls," cried Nolan plaintively, as he saw them in their beauty. "It is not fair of you to look like this. Marie, you are exquisite. Eveley, you ought to be ashamed of yourself."

"Yes, we are," said Eveley pleasantly. "Jimmy, I want you to meet my darling and adorable little friend, Marie Ledesma. This is Lieutenant Ames, Marie."

Lieutenant Ames stood very tall and slim and straight as he looked into Marie's face. Then he saw the soft appeal in her eyes.

"Be good to me," they seemed to beg, "be generous, and kind."

It was in answer to this plea of the limpid eyes that he held out his hand with sudden impulse, and said:

"Miss Ledesma, when Eveley speaks like that, I know your friendship is a priceless boon, and I

want my share of it. I am receiving a sort of psychic message that you and I are destined to be good comrades."

A sudden wave of light swept over her lovely face, and her lips parted in a happy smile.

"Lieutenant Ames," she whispered in her soft voice, "do you really feel so? And then you also are my friend?"

275

"Jimmy Ames, you stop that," cried Eveley. "Marie belongs to me, and you must not even try to supplant me. I won't have it. Come on in, everybody, and let's play, play, play to our heart's content."

Marie went through the window first, with a light slender swing of her feet. But Eveley, as always plunging impulsively, lost her balance and fell among the cushions. Nolan and the lieutenant followed laughing.

"We must take a day off and teach Eveley the approved method of making entrance to a social gathering," said Nolan. "Are you all black and blue, you poor child?" he asked, helping her up, for she had waited patiently for his assistance.

It was a wonderfully happy party. They played the Victrola, and danced merrily through the two rooms, around the reading table, through the archway, winding among the chairs in the dining-room. When they were tired, Marie brought her mandolin,—for having remarked once idly that she could play it, Eveley that night had brought her one as a little gift of love. And she played soft Spanish love-songs, singing in her pretty lilting voice. Then altogether they prepared their supper and because the night was still young and lovely, and they were happy and free from pressing care, they decided suddenly for a drive. They crossed the bay on the ferry to Coronado, and went down on the sands of the beach for a while, standing quietly to watch the silver tips of the waves shining in the pale moonlight. Then they drove out the Silver Strand and so home once more.

276

Before they parted, they arranged for another party, two nights later, and after long discussion agreed that it should be an evening swimming party in the bay at Coronado, with a hot supper afterward in the Cloud Cote.

"How did you like our Lieutenant Jimmy?" Eveley demanded, as soon as they were alone.

"He is incomparable," said Marie simply.

"I knew it," cried Eveley ecstatically. "Nolan and I both said so. Spontaneous combustion, that is what it was. Come and sleep with me again to-night. It is such fun to go to bed and turn out the light and talk. Did you ever do it?"

277

"No, my life has not been of that kind."

"But you will learn. I never saw any one learn as quickly as you do,—especially things about men.—Now I shall begin by telling you how adorable Nolan is, and you must interrupt me to say how wonderful Jimmy is.—Did you ever have a sweetheart, Marie?"

Then she added quickly: "Wait, wait. I—I did not mean to ask questions,—Excuse me, I am sorry. Let's talk of something else."

"No, let's talk of lovers," said Marie, snuggling close to Eveley, her head lying against her shoulder. "I have never had the regular kind of a lover,—your kind,—the kind that women want. My life was full of war and horrors, and I had not time for the thrills of love. And the men I knew were not the men that one would wish to love one."

"Then, this is your chance," said Eveley happily. "Now I am positively sure that one of these days you will be a matchless American woman. You are just ripe and ready for love. You can't escape it, you sweet thing, even if you could wish. War and horrors were left behind in your old home. Here in your new home you will know only peace and contentment and love. Aren't you glad I adopted you? We must give Mr. Hiltze credit for that anyhow, mustn't we?"

278

There was a sudden tension in the slender figure at her side. "Eveley, are you so innocent? Do you never attribute evil motives to any one? Do you always believe only good and beautiful and lovely things of those you meet?"

"Well, I have no real reason for thinking mean or ugly things of any one—not really. I never had any horrors in my life until the war came. I have just lived along serenely and contentedly, and being fairly nice and kind, I have no guilty conscience to trouble me, and no one has ever been hateful or mean to me—not in anything that really counted."

Both were silent a moment, thinking, each in her different way, of the contrast in their lives. Then Eveley went on, more slowly:

"I feel sometimes that we are living on the crest of a terrible upheaval—that we are on the edge of a seething volcano which is threatening and rumbling beneath us, each day growing fiercer and more ominous, and that presently may come chaos, and we on the crater of life will be dragged down into the furnace with the rest. I suppose," she added apologetically, "it is because of the conditions that always follow a war, the political unrest, the social chaos, the anarchistic tendencies of every one. I am not in the midst of things enough to understand them, but even up here on the top of our canyon, we sometimes get a blast of the hot air from below, and it troubles us. Then we try to forget, and go on with our playing. But the volcano still rumbles beneath."

279

Eveley slipped her hand out to take Marie's and found it icy cold.

"Did—did you ever feel so before?" asked Marie in a low strange voice. "That you were living on the rim of a volcano, ready to catch and crush you?"

"No, not before. It is just now—after the war. Conditions were never the same before."

Then Marie burst into a passion of tears. "It is my fault," she sobbed. "It is because I am here. All my life I have lived in the crater of a volcano, and I have brought it upon you. It is a curse I carry with me. It is the chaos from which I have come, and to which I must go again when I leave you—it is that which destroys your peace."

Frightened and astonished, Eveley soothed her, cradling her in her arms. "You little silly," she said tenderly. "You dear little goose. Don't you believe any such nonsense as that. We are in a condition of turmoil, our United States and all the rest of the world. It is not the affairs of your Mexico that worry me—it is the tempest in my own country. And don't you ever talk any more about going back. You shall never go back. You are to stay here with me forever and ever, world without end, amen. You will, won't you?"

Marie only stirred a little, and did not answer.

"Marie," cried Eveley, her voice sharp with fear. "Do you ever think really of going back to—that? Answer me." And she gripped Marie's soft shoulder with strong fingers.

"I do not think any more," said Marie gently. "But one always has a feeling that one must return whence one has come, do you not think? It is only that. It seems incredible that I, alone out of our struggling thousands, should be let to come away and live serenely in a cloud cote, does it not? And the struggle in Mexico goes on."

"The same kind of peace and contentment will come to all your country when the world is settled down to law and order once more," said Eveley, with the sublime faith of the young and the unsuffering. "It just takes time. And God was good enough to carry you away before the end of the conflict. Just wait. When our country is thoroughly Americanized, and returns to joyful work and love and life again, the contagion will spread to your people, and peace will reign there also. So do not talk any more nonsense about leaving me. Now let's go back to the beginning, and talk about—the men."

CHAPTER XVIII

CONVERTS OF LOVE

A very warm intimacy developed rapidly between the four friends, and every evening for nearly two weeks found them joyfully, even riotously, making merry together in the Cloud Cote. As Eveley had prophesied, Lieutenant Ames was hopelessly lost from the first, and Marie yielded herself very readily to the charm of an ardent wooing.

But with Eveley, Marie was different, more quiet, less demonstrative, sometimes plainly listless and absent-minded. Eveley ascribed the change to her newly developed interest in Lieutenant Ames, and patiently awaited the outcome of the ripening romance. For Eveley had a deep-seated sympathy with every appeal of love.

For many weeks she had received no word from Miriam Landis. Although she had passed in an hour from all connection with their daily plans, yet she was never far from their thought. Even without their tender and sympathetic memories, they could not have forgotten her, for her husband was a frequent and always tumultuous visitor in the Cote.

He invariably began talking before he was through the window, and his first words were unflinching the same.

"I can't stand it, Eveley, I simply can't stand it. You've got to do something about it."

Again and again he came with this appeal, always overlooking the fact that Eveley had no faintest idea of Miriam's whereabouts, for, true to her word, she had kept her hiding-place unknown to them all.

Then for several weeks he did not come, and Eveley felt that perhaps he was reconciled, and had returned to his old pursuit of secluded ballroom corners. But Nolan assured her of the injustice of this. Lem had forsaken all his former haunts, and had become a recluse, brooding alone in his deserted home.

"It will do him good, even if it does not last," Nolan said. "Almost any one would grieve for a woman like Miriam for a few months."

"Perhaps it is permanent this time, and there will be a reconciliation, and both live happily ever after," said Eveley, with her usual buoyant faith in the cheerful outcome.

Gordon Cameron she had seen only once since Miriam's departure, and that was when he came at her request to receive Miriam's message. He had listened quietly, while she repeated the words of her friend.

"I expected it, of course," he said at last gravely. "The pity of it is that her little revolution was so hopeless from the beginning. As long as a woman loves her husband, she can not hope for happiness, nor even for forgetfulness."

"Oh, she does not love her husband any more," said Eveley confidently. "Not a bit. She is over that long ago."

"That was the whole trouble," he insisted. "If she had not loved him, she could have stood it and gone her way. But loving him, the situation was impossible for a woman of spirit and pride. Well, there is always one to pay in every triangle, and this time the bill comes to me. But I had anticipated that from the beginning. She is a wonderful woman."

"Do you think she will go back to her husband?" asked Eveley breathlessly.

"I hardly think so. She might as well, though; perhaps it would be better. She can not be happy without him, and she was certainly not happy with him. It is only a choice of miseries. As long as she loves him, she will suffer for it. I begin to think that one who loves can not be happy."

"Oh, yes, one can. One is," asserted Eveley positively.

"Perhaps I should say, when one is married to it," he added, with a sober smile for her assurance.

Then he had gone away, and when Lem's pleadings had suddenly ceased, Eveley felt that the little tempest would live its life, and die its death, and perhaps Miriam at least would find happiness in the lull that followed.

So it was something of a shock to have her pleasant Sunday morning nap disturbed by Lem pounding briskly upon her window.

"Get up, immediately," he said in an assertive voice quite different from his futile and inane pleadings of a short while before. "Hurry, Eveley, I want you. Dress for motoring, my car is here. I shall wait in the garden—give you ten minutes."

"He must want me for a bridesmaid for his second wedding," thought Eveley resentfully, as she hurriedly dressed. But accustomed to obey the calls of friendship, she put on a heavy sport skirt and sweater, and had even pulled her soft hat over her curls before she went to the window.

"I am ready, but I do not approve of it," she began rather unpleasantly.

"You'd better take a doughnut, or a roll, or an orange, or something, for we have no time for breakfast," he said in the same assertive voice. "She will not be back until afternoon, Miss Ledesma. Sorry if it interferes with any of your plans, but it can not be helped. Get your coat, quickly, Eveley."

"It does interfere with our plans," she said crossly. "We were going up to the mountains for a beefsteak fry with Jimmy and Nolan."

"Never mind," said Marie softly. "It may come another Sunday. Mr. Landis seems to need you."

"All ready, Eveley? Let me help you. Good-by, Miss Ledesma."

And Eveley found herself marching briskly down the rustic steps away from her own plan and her own desire, and with no knowledge of what lay before her.

"You might at least tell me where we are going," she said at last, after he had hurried her into the car and started away.

"To see Miriam," he answered.

"Oh!" Eveley's voice was a long gasp. She was content to wait after that for his explanation, although it was very slow in coming.

"She is at a ranch up in the mountains," he said finally. "About fifty miles. We just located her last night. I have been looking, for her all the time. You are going to talk to her for me."

"Oh, am I?"

"Yes. I was afraid to come alone for fear she would not see me. She will not refuse to see you."

"Do you mind telling me what I am going to say to her?"

He was silent a while, thinking. "She refused to take any money from me," he said, presently. "And she has very little. If she persists in this, she will have to work for her living. Miriam can not do that."

"No," said Eveley softly.

"She does not want me for a husband yet," he said humbly. "And that is right. But I must have Miriam, and she shall never have any one else but me—not that I think she would ever want anybody else. You are to tell Miriam she must come home, and live her life just as she wishes and do as she pleases in everything, and allow me to be a servant for her, to provide what she wants and needs, to take care of her if she is sick. Tell her she may have any friends she likes, lovers even if she wishes, but that she must let me work for her."

Eveley laid her hand affectionately upon his arm. "I have never done you justice, Lem; forgive me. I think Miriam will come home. I hope she will."

"She has to. And after a while, when she sees in me what she used to think was there, she will love me again. But in the meantime, I shall ask nothing and expect nothing. But Miriam has got to be in the house."

Eveley only spoke once after that.

"If she will not come?"

He turned upon her then, a sudden grim smile lighting his face. "I know what I shall do then," he said. "But you will think it is madness. If she refuses to come, I shall make the necessary arrangements, and kidnap her. She's got to come."

Eveley burst into quick laughter at the picture that came to her—a picture of the old-time, immaculate Lem of the ballrooms, carrying his wife away into the mountains to live a cave-man life.

He laughed with her, but the dead-set of his face remained. "It sounds like a joke," he admitted. "But I have made up my mind. Miriam is mine, and I am going to have her. We'll just go up into the mountains for a few months, and she will see that I am cured."

Mile after mile they drove in silence up the steep mountain grades, and after a long time he drew the car off beside the road under a cluster of trees.

"That is the ranch, but I will not drive in. If she saw us coming she would not talk to us, so you must catch her unawares. I shall wait here for you. You'd better not tell her I am going to kidnap her, I think I would rather take her by surprise. She has to come, Eve, now make her see it. Just a servant that is all I want to be to her for a while. But she did love me, and she will again."

So Eveley walked swiftly up the drive to the house, keeping in the shadow as much as possible, surprised to know that after all the years of her disgust for the husband of her friend, her sympathies now were all with him.

At the kitchen door she assumed her most winsome and disarming smile and asked for Mrs. Landis.

"She does not wish to see any one," said the woman quickly. "She said particularly that she would not see any callers."

"But she will see me, I am sure," said Eveley coaxingly. "You ask her. Tell her it is Eveley Ainsworth. She always sees me."

"But she told me particularly," repeated the woman. "And she is not here anyhow. She has gone over the hill. She likes to be among the pines. She is not well, either. I am sorry, miss, but she is not here, and she would not see you if she were."

"How far is it to the hill? And does she stay long?"

"It is not far," said the woman, with a wave of her hand toward the east. "But she will not come home for luncheon. She has no appetite. And the boys are out, so I have no one to send for her. I am sorry, miss."

"You think there is no use to wait, then?"

"Oh, no use at all, miss. She will be gone for hours, and she would not see you if she were here."

"Tell her I came, won't you? Eveley Ainsworth. Thank you."

And with another disarming smile Eveley turned back to the path. But as soon as she was out of sight of the house, she slipped off through the trees, and started on a light run for the pine grove on the hill to the east.

"As Lem says, poor thing, she has to," she said to herself, with a smile. And very soon she was among the big pines, looking eagerly back and forth, quite determined not to return to Lem until she had seen Miriam and talked her into reason. And so at last she came upon her, sitting somberly under the big trees, her back against a huge boulder, staring away down the mountains into the haze of the sea in the west, where her husband lived in the city by the bay.

"Miriam," Eveley called in a ringing voice, and ran joyously down the path.

Miriam sprang up to meet her. "Eveley!" she cried, catching her hands eagerly. And then, "Have you seen—Lem? Is he—all right?"

Eveley held her hands a moment, looking searchingly into the thin face and the shadowy eyes.

"Revolutions are hard work, aren't they?" she asked with deep sympathy.

"Oh, Eveley, they are killing, heart-breaking, soul-wracking," she cried. "And yet of course it was right and best for me to come," she added gravely. "Does Lem seem to—miss me?" And there was wistfulness in her voice.

"He is out there now," said Eveley, waving her hand toward the road. "He brought me up."

At the first word, Miriam had turned quickly, ready to run down—not to the house for shelter, but to the car for comfort. But she stopped in a moment, and came back.

"I shall not see him, of course," she said quietly.

"I brought a message from him. He says you must come home, Miriam, he says his madness is all purged away, and that you are his and he must have you. But he wants you to come and live your own life and do as you wish, only allowing him, to stay in the home not as your husband, but as your servant until you learn to love and trust him again. He says you must come, and let him work for you, and take care of you."

Miriam's face was very white, and her eyes deep wells of pain.

"Poor Lem!" she said tenderly. "So sweet—and so weak."

"I think he is finding strength," said Eveley.

For a long time, the two girls stood there, side by side, Eveley looking into the haze of the sea miles below, Miriam staring down through the pines to where she knew a car might be waiting in the shadows.

"We must not keep him waiting," she said at last.

Without a word, they turned, hand in hand and started down to the road again. When she saw the little, well-known car beneath the trees, and Lem standing rigid beside it, she caught her breath suddenly. Eveley would have hung back, to let her greet her husband alone, but Miriam clung to her hand and pulled her forward.

He came to meet them, awkwardly, a gleam of hope in his eyes, but meekness in his manner. He held out his hand, and Miriam with a little flutter dropped her own into it, pulling it quickly away again.

"Are you—all right, Lem? You look—thin," she said with shy solicitude.

"I feel thin," he replied grimly. "Are—you coming with us?"

"Yes, of course," said Eveley.

"Yes, of course," Miriam echoed faintly.

"Shall I drive?" suggested Eveley, anticipating complete reconciliation for the two in their first moment of privacy.

"I will drive," said Lem. "You girls sit in the back. Did Eveley explain that I only expect to be—your driver, and your valet, and your servant—for a while."

Tears brightened in Miriam's eyes. "Oh, Lem," she cried, holding out her hands. "How can people talk of servants who have loved—as we have loved?"

Eveley immediately went into a deep and concentrated study of the rear tires, for Miriam was close in her husband's arms, and his tears were falling upon her fragrant curls.

After a while, he held her away from him and looked into her tender face.

"It isn't—you aren't coming, then, just because it is your duty to give me every chance," he whispered.

"Oh, no, dear, just because I love you."

Eveley was still utterly immersed in the condition of the tires.

"We'll try it again, Lem—"

"Oh, Miriam," he broke in, "it isn't any trial this time. This is marriage."

Eventually they got started toward home and had driven many miles before Miriam noticed that her uncovered hair was blowing in the wind, and remembered that she had left the ranch without notice and that all her things were there. But what were simple things and formal notices when human hearts were finding happiness and faith?

In the Cloud Cote, Eve's friends were patiently awaiting her return. Nolan was reading poetry aloud to himself in the roof garden, and Lieutenant Ames was laboriously picking chords on the piano, with Marie near him strumming on the mandolin.

The first creak of the rustic stair brought them all to the landing to greet her.

"Reconciliation," shouted Nolan, before she was half-way up. "Miriam is home, and they have already lived happily ever after."

Eveley began immediately to give an account of the day's happenings standing motionless on the third step from the top until she finished her recital.

Then she went back down, and gave an impatient tap on the seventh stair.

"Well, you started something," she said to it solemnly. "And you ought to be satisfied now, if anybody is. To-morrow I shall crown you with a wreath of laurel."

Then she went up again. "Does this do anything to your theory about duty?" asked Nolan. "Does it prove it, or disprove it, or what? I can not seem to get any connection."

"But there is a connection," she said, with a smile. "It absolutely and everlastingly proves the Exception."

"Eveley Ainsworth, don't ever say exception again until you can explain it," cried Nolan. "I dream of exceptions by night, and I legalize them by day. Be a nice girl, and do a good deed this Sabbath Day by expounding the virtues of the One Exception."

But Eveley was hungry, and said she could not expound anything when her system clamored for tea.

Eveley's Sabbath, however, was not yet ended. While she was blissfully sipping her tea, the three she loved best in the world about her, there came a gentle tap upon her window, and Mrs. Severs walked in.

"So sorry to bother you, Miss Ainsworth," she began apologetically, "but I want to ask a favor. Father is moving back with us to-day, and—"

"What!"

"Yes, indeed he is," she cried blithely. "I was so lonesome, and some days I am so ill, that I asked him as a personal favor if he wouldn't come and try me just once more, and he said, Holy Mackinaw! he had been aching to do that very thing."

"Well," Eveley said judiciously, "I suppose you will all be satisfied now that you are back in your old rut wretchedly doing your duty by each other."

"I should say not," denied Mrs. Severs promptly. "I asked father to come because I—like him awfully much, and it is so lonely without him, and he is coming because he missed us and is fond of us, and there isn't any duty about it. You have converted us. We do not believe in duty."

"And the favor?"

"Yes—father is bringing the flivver of course—and the garage is so big. Do you mind if we keep it there with your car? We will pay any extra rent, of course."

"Keep it there by all means," said Eveley generously. "And there is no rent. And when I get stuck anywhere I shall expect you to tow me home for love." And when Mrs. Severs had gone, Eveley said: "Make another pot of tea, please, Marie. Make two pots—three if you like."

"Pretty hard to keep some people properly adjusted, isn't it?" asked Nolan soberly, but with laughter in his eyes.

"What is proved by the case of Father-in-law and the Bride, Eveley?" asked Marie with a soft teasing smile as she refilled Eveley's cup.

But Eveley went into a remote corner of the room, and brandished the bread knife for protection, before she cried triumphantly:

"The Exception. It is another positive proof of the utter efficacy of my One Exception."

CHAPTER XIX

SHE DOUBTS HER THEORY

One morning Eveley telephoned from the office to Marie that she would not be home for dinner that night, as she was going with Kitty to hear the minute details of her engagement, and the plans of her coming marriage with Arnold. She assured Marie that she would be home early, begged her not to be lonesome, cautioned her once more not to venture into the canyon after nightfall, and went serenely on her way.

At ten o'clock that night she guided her car into the garage whistling boyishly, and ran up the rustic stairs, stopping with painful suddenness on the landing as she observed there was no light in the Cote.

"Marie," she called, "Marie!"

She looked anxiously over the little roof garden, and peered down to the canyon. Twice she went up to the window, and each time drew back again, afraid to enter.

She leaned over the railing on the roof, calling aimlessly and hopelessly.

"Marie, Marie!"

A moment later she heard a light step below, "Oh, Marie," she cried and her voice was a sob.

"It's me, Miss Eveley, what's the matter?"

It was only Angelo running up the steps to her.

"Angelo, what are you doing here?" she demanded sharply, her nerves on edge.

"Oh, I was just fooling around," he said evasively. "I thought I heard you calling."

But Eveley's nerves were too highly strung this night to brook an idle answer. She caught him by the shoulder.

"Tell me where you have been and what you were doing," and there was something like suspicion in her voice.

And then suddenly the little bit of foreign flotsam became a man, to give her courage.

"Come inside and sit down," he said authoritatively. "I'll tell you what I've been doing, but don't stand out here like this and get yourself all worked up for nothing."

He threw up the window, and went in first, turning on the light, and Eveley followed him numbly.

"Now sit down and I'll tell you. I have been sleeping in the garage ever since you got mixed up with that bunch of Bolsheviks and—er Greasers. I thought something might happen and I've sort of stuck around. I had a key made to the garage, and I've got a nice bed fixed up in the

attic.”

Eveley held out her hand with a faint smile. “You are a good friend, Angelo, sure enough. But there was no danger. And oh, where can my Marie have gone?”

“Are her things here?”

Acting instantly upon the suggestion, Eveley ran into the other room followed closely by Angelo. Every slightest scrap and shred that had been Marie’s had disappeared.

“Maybe she left a note somewhere,” said Angelo.

Frantically Eveley flashed through the small rooms, searching eagerly for some final word or token. But there was nothing to be found.

“Some one has kidnapped her,” she cried, wringing her hands. “We must phone the police.”

“I wouldn’t do that—not yet. I’d phone for Mr. Nolan first. Let me do it. And why don’t you go down-stairs and ask them if they saw any one around here to-day, or saw her leaving?”

“Oh, Angelo, that is fine,” she cried. “I’ll go—and you phone Nolan quickly.”

By the time she returned, Nolan was on his way to the Cote.

“She—she left herself—just walked away with her bag—alone,” said Eveley faintly. “I am afraid she did not—care for me.” And there was sorrow in her voice.

“Oh, sure she did,” said Angela reassuringly. “That’s why she left I guess. She may be in bad in some way, and so she went off not to get you mixed up in it.”

“Do you think that, Angelo? Do you really? But she should not have gone for that. I would have stood by Marie through any kind of trouble.”

Angelo walked impatiently about the room, fingering endless little objects, puzzling in his mind what to say and what to do.

“He could be here if he had taken a taxi,” he said restlessly. “I told him to beat it.”

“We might phone Mr. Hiltze,” said Eveley suddenly. “He may know where to find her.”

Angelo smiled scornfully at that. “Aw gee, Miss Eveley, ain’t you on to them yet? Sure they are working in cahoots.”

Eveley sat down at once and folded her hands. “Now, Angelo, tell me everything you know, or suspect about them. Begin at the beginning. You may be wrong, but let me hear it.”

But before Angelo could begin his little story, Nolan came springing up the steps, and knew in a word all they had to tell.

“Sit down now, Nolan, and listen. Angelo thinks he knows something.”

“Well, when Carranza got in, a lot of Mexicans had to get out. Political refugees they call them. Marie is one of them.”

“That is no secret,” said Eveley. “She told me that herself. And it is nothing to her discredit—rather the opposite I should think.”

“Yes, but they are looking ahead to the next election. That guy Obregon has promised to let all the refugees come back free and easy if he is elected, and no questions asked. But they’ve got such a lot running for president, that maybe they won’t elect anybody and then Carranza will stick on himself. And so the refugees on this side are working up a new little revolution of their own, to spring on Carranza the day after the election. And that is against the law, and the Secret Service is on to it, and after them hot and heavy.”

“The Secret Service,” said Eveley slowly. “The Secret Service.”

She crossed the room, and from her bag took out a small bit of steel which she had carried there for weeks.

“The Secret Service,” she said again, and held the badge tightly in her hand.

“What have you there, Eveley?” asked Nolan.

“Nothing,” she said, gripping it so tightly the sharp edges cut into her hand. “Just a little souvenir—of Marie. That is all.”

“Well, is there anything else, Angelo?”

“That guy Hiltze is a crook, too. He’s what you call a Red. He’s mixed up with all the funny business going on.”

“Are you sure, Angelo? You must only tell us what you really know.”

“Well, they’ve got a lot of crazy shacks around town, and they hold meetings. My dad goes to ’em. So a few times I went, too. This guy Hiltze does the talking. He’s got enough money. He don’t have to sell autos for a living, he does that for a blind, just like he strings Miss Eveley on the Americanization hot-air stuff.”

“Did you ever hear him speak?” asked Nolan.

“Sure. He says they are chasing him from cellar to garret, from mountain to desert. He says they are the damned rich, and they got to keep him harried to earth so they can grind the laborers under their heel. He gives ’em all money for doing things, and hauling stuff, and getting things across the border. I was there. He says they must pray God to strengthen them to

fight to the last ditch. He says the army and navy are the slaves of the God of Money."

"I know he had rather—advanced ideas," said Eveley gravely. "But these are such troublous times. Every one feels the lack, and the need in the social life. He may have gone too far—but these are the days that try one's soul. If it was only talk—"

"Aw gee," interrupted Angelo. "They ain't got no room to talk. I know all about that stuff. I was over there with the rest of 'em, and I know. We slept on straw, and dressed in rags, and lived like dogs. And they come to a decent country, and get soured because they ain't fed up on chicken and wine like a lord. It's a darn' sight more than they ever had before, and the Secret Service needs to watch 'em. For they're the ones that did for Russia—yes, and they're doing it for Germany now, and trying it on Italy."

The Secret Service—the diagnostician of social unrest, with professional finger on the pulse of the foreign element—had that finger touched the wrist of Marie?

"But this isn't finding my Marie," said Eveley. "I want her."

"Let's call Lieutenant Ames," said Nolan suddenly. "I rather imagine this will hit him."

"Oh, poor Jimmy," cried Eveley. "He told me he wanted to marry her."

Far into the night, they puzzled and pondered, not knowing which way to turn, but all in their love of Marie resolved that she must be found and saved again from the chaos. The next day, against the advice of all the others, Eveley sent word to Amos Hiltze and seemed to feel some comfort in his evident surprise and perturbation.

"I can not understand it," he said. "She was so happy, and loved you so much. I will look for her. She may have taken fright at something—but what could it possibly have been?"

"Tell her I do not care what has happened, nor what she fears. She must come to me and I will help her."

In spite of the insistence of Nolan, Angelo and Jimmy Ames, Eveley would have given the matter into the hands of the police, trusting to her own promises and her own standing to save Marie from whatever they held against her. But at her first suggestion of this to Amos Hiltze, he took a most positive stand against it.

"If you do that, you have lost her forever. It is the police she fears. She would never forgive you for putting her into their hands, even if you could afterward extricate her. You must not dream of such a thing."

So Eveley gave it up and tried to reconcile herself to patient waiting, and to prayers of faith, determined to believe that the persistent search going on in all sections of the town would be effective, and believing still more fervently that God must return to her again the sister she had learned to love.

This time, because Eveley was suffering no one connected the disappearance of Marie with Eveley's theory of duty. And to herself Eveley made no claims, not even for her favorite Exception.

For if Marie had loved her, would she not have left at least one word of sympathy, and affection, in farewell? Indeed, if she had loved her, would she not have preferred the investigation of the Secret Service to separation? For Eveley would have braved every court in the country for her little foreign sister.

She tried to interest herself in the affairs of her friends, as of old. She tried to return to her old whimsical routine of living alone in her Cloud Cote, but from being a little nook of laughter and love, it became ineffably dreary and dull. And Eveley was suffering not only because her love had been slighted and her hospitality abused, but because everything she had undertaken had failed. Americanization—what was it? For to Marie she had given every good thing in her power—and Marie had used her as long as she could be of service, and then had gone back to her own life, to her own people.

CHAPTER XX

SHE PROVES HER PRINCIPLE

All of Eveley's friends, realizing the loneliness and the sickness of heart which possessed her, united to plan little entertainments and bits of amusement for her. And Eveley accepted their plans gratefully, and acted upon their suggestions gladly, but the bitterness remained in her heart.

"I loved that girl," she would say to herself. "How could she do such a thing to any one who loved her? It isn't as if I had only tried to do what was right and kind by her. She owed me something for all that love."

One evening she went to Eileen's for a rollicking dinner with the twins in clamorous evidence.

Eileen's home was a new creation; every day, she said frankly, was a new cycle of life. Her years of sober, studied business had not at all prepared her for the raptures and the uncertainties and the annoyances and the thrills of a household that had young twins in it.

313

"Billy bosses Betty unmercifully, and I do not believe in the dominance of men," she told Eveley. "And Betty charms Billy into submission, and I do not approve of the blandishments of woman upon man. And yet my sympathies are with both of them, and I adore them both. And I can never find anything when I want it, and when I do find it there is something wrong with it, and they both talk at once and I have to talk at the same time or I never get anything said, and yet we have wonderful times."

"You are certainly doing your duty by those babies," said Eveley tentatively.

Eileen took it quickly. "Um, not a bit of it. I am just fulfilling the desire of my heart. So you may take it that I am proving your theory if you like."

"At least you are proving my exception," said Eveley, with a smile.

"What is the exception?" Eileen questioned eagerly. "It seems to get all the proving, doesn't it?"

314

"It used to," said Eveley gravely. "But I have lost faith in it for myself. It worked for everybody else, but it failed for me. Now let's talk of something else."

They were in the midst of a merry game with the children, when the bell rang, and Eveley was called to the door, to look into the face of Amos Hiltze.

"You have found Marie," she cried out at once.

"Yes. She is at the ranch in the mountains where we found her first. She is in trouble, and sick. I told her I would come for you, but I suppose you can not leave yet?"

"Not leave—when Marie is sick and wants me? Wait until I get my wraps. Shall we go in my car?"

"Yes, please. I was up at the Cote for you, and Mrs. Severs said you were here. I let the taxi go."

Eveley's face was alight with joy, and her heart sang with happiness. Marie had been sick—it had not been cold neglect that kept her away and silent. And she had sent for Eveley.

315

"You are certainly a wonder," said Amos Hiltze, as she slipped into her place behind the wheel, and he took his seat at her side.

"You do not know how happy I am," she cried, turning the car toward the country. "You—do get so awfully fond of a girl like Marie, don't you?"

"Yes, of course."

"Is she very sick?"

"Not very. She will be better when she sees you."

"Why did she really leave me?"

"Oh, she was afraid the Secret Service would locate her, and it would get you into trouble."

"I might have known it was her duty. Wait till I get my hands on that girl. I'll tell her a few things about duty that will astonish her."

Already they were wheeling rapidly through East San Diego, and when a motorcycle pulled up beside them, Eveley stopped with a gasp. Of course she had been speeding—a thousand miles an hour, probably, though it had seemed like crawling.

316

"I am so sorry, Officer," she began quickly. "But I have to hurry. I have a little friend in the country who is sick and needs me."

"Oh, is it you, Miss Ainsworth?" And the officer smiled. "I did not recognize you. That is all right. Your car is a Rolls, isn't it? We are looking for a man in a Rolls—but I can hardly hold you." He turned his pocket flash upon Amos Hiltze.

"This is my friend, Mr. Hiltze," she explained. "I think you do not want him, either."

"No, I think not. Yet our man is supposed to have come this way. If you see any men on foot, or any one in trouble, better not stop. We'll have a man out that way pretty soon."

"Thank you," said Eveley. "Good night." And again they were on their way.

"Poor Mr. Man in the Rolls," she said after a while. "I wonder what mischief he has been into."

"I wonder."

"I hope he gets away. Perhaps he is not so bad as they think, and may do better next time. Or maybe he had a reason."

317

"I am sure of that," said Hiltze with some earnestness. "There is always a reason, I think."

Through La Mesa, through El Cajon, they drove in silence as they had driven once before, when they went for Marie the first time. Only then Eveley had been quivering with anxiety and nervousness—and now it was only hope and joy. But was it only hope and joy? For she realized suddenly that her hands were gripping the wheel with nervous intensity, and that she was shivering.

"Are you cold?"

"I do not know," she faltered.

He turned slightly in his seat, and reached for a rug.

"A disorderly pile on the floor as usual," he said with a slight smile. "Don't your friends ever put the rugs back on the rack, Eveley?"

"No, never," she replied, smiling, too, but gravely.

He tucked the rug closely about her, but she still shivered, and a sense of dread was heavy upon her.

When they came at last to the branch in the road, he looked carefully about in every direction, and then told her to drive quickly. Under his direction she took the car far back from the road in a sheltered place, and stopped the engine.

"Please hurry, will you? I have not Angelo with me this time, and I am afraid."

"Eveley, I must talk to you first. You know I love you, you must know it. You have tried to discourage me, but I will not take discouragement. I shall never go away without you."

"Are you going away?"

"Yes, to-night. Business takes me away. I am going to South America. I have money—lots of money, and we can start afresh and do well. But I can not go without you."

"Mr. Hiltze, it is impossible. I do not love you. I told you that before."

"But you will love me. If you come away with me, and take time, you can love me. I will be good to you, and not hurry you. You must let yourself go, and try."

"But I do not wish to. Love should not be forced. It ought to come spontaneously of itself. And I love Nolan."

"Damn Nolan! Oh, I don't mean that, but—Eveley, you will forget him. Just come with me, and give yourself time. Marie will go with us—"

"Marie."

"Yes, she has promised to go with us, to help make you happy."

"Then she is not sick?"

"No, not sick."

"You only brought me here to—"

"Yes, Eveley. I am sorry, but I had to. We are going out by aeroplane to-night, and there is a fishing fleet at sea waiting to pick us up. I hated to trick you, but it was my love that forced it. I can not give you up. I will not. Did you think I was a fool to be with you, and know your loving lovely ways, and—and—"

Suddenly he crushed her in his arms, and for a moment she was helpless. Then he released her.

"Your bag is here—yes, in the back of the car."

"My bag?"

"Yes, I took Marie to the Cote this afternoon and she packed it for you—things necessary until you can shop again."

"Marie did that?"

"Oh, I told her to. I told her you wished it. Oh, yes, I lied, but I would do worse than that for you, yes, I would kill for you. Now be reasonable, Eveley, and come with us nicely. You shall have all the time you wish. I know you will love me."

"Love you. Love you after this! I hate you, I despise you. Do not say you love me."

"Eveley, be quiet, this will do no possible good."

"Then it was you they were looking for, in the car? You are a common criminal."

"Not a criminal, no," he cried furiously. "Yes, they wanted me, of course. You should have known there was a reason why a man like myself should live as I have done here. But we are not criminals—we are advance agents of freedom."

"Anarchists," she interrupted, in a cutting voice.

"Some time there must be justice and equality in the world—"

"And you have got rich by preaching lawlessness."

"Eveley, do not talk like that. I—I lose my head—and I do not wish to frighten you. Sit quietly, and let me tell you. Peace can come only through warfare—and out of the death throes of an old world, a new world of peace will—"

"You are traitors."

"Eveley, you know I was in the service, but there must be a union of the free men of the world against oppression—"

"Do not make stump speeches to me. I will not stand for it. Justice and freedom will come to the world, but not through lying and trickery and bloodshed. Justice must come through sympathy and love and comradeship."

"It did not get you far with Marie, though, did it?"

"Marie."

"Certainly. That was my interest in her. Marie was working with us, doing what she could for us, for what we could do for her in Mexico. She is a regular traitor if you like, putting things over in great style, on you and Nolan and Ames—the whole bunch of you. She is a slick little devil. But I fell—because I loved you."

Sudden illumination came to Eveley. "Then that is why she left me. When she learned to love me, she would not profane our friendship. That is why she left."

"She left because the cops were getting wise, and she had to get out in a hurry or get pinched."

"And she is going with you—"

"Sure. She will be the idol of the revolutionists for what she has done—they will carry her about on a tin platter."

"You will let me go now, Mr. Hiltze, please. But tell Marie that I understand everything, and when she wishes to come back to me, the Cote is open. It was only a mistaken loyalty to a wrong principle. Please go, I want to hurry home."

He laughed a little. "Eveley, you are going to South America with me."

In a sudden panic she turned, flinging open the door of the car, hoping to rush away into the darkness, but his arm held her.

"You will love me. I may not care for your Americanization, but I love you. I am going to be good to you. Don't be a fool, Eveley, it will do you no good. You've got to go."

Struggling was in vain, as Eveley realized at once, and she subsided quickly, trying to think. The thing was impossible. It could not be. Such things did not happen any more—not in real life in the United States. It was cruel, preposterous, unbelievable.

"Please let me go," she pleaded. "I shall not try to report you, you can get away without trouble. But let me go home, please. I could never change toward you—I am not the kind that changes."

"I shall have to tie you for a few minutes. I am sorry, but I do not wish you to go to the shack. I have wasted a lot of time trying to reason with you. Put out your hands—yes yes, that way, and let me tie them to the wheel. I hate to do this—there is no use for you to yell, Eveley, for no one can hear, so I shall not gag you. Let me wrap the blanket about you; it is very cold. Sit still, dear, and do not shake it off. I love you very much. We are going to start the world afresh with a clean slate, and leave the past behind. The future shall be of your choosing, only it must be with me."

Then he went away, and Eveley began a valiant tugging on the straps that bound her.

"Wait a minute, Eveley, I'll cut them," came a friendly whisper, and Eveley with a cry turned to look into Angelo's face.

"Sure, I come along," he said. "I saw him up at the house, and when he came down for you, I followed his taxi on my bike. And when he went in to get you, I got into the back under the rugs. Lucky he only took one rug for you, or he'd got hold of my legs. Gee, he uses good straps."

All this, while Angelo was sawing on the straps with his rusty knife, and almost before he finished talking, Eveley was free.

Like a flash she was starting the engine.

"Suppose you get out and hide a while, and let me scout around," he said. "I hate to leave a decent sort like your Marie with those cutthroats. Maybe I can get hold of her."

"Yes, do try. I'll hide among the bushes for fear they come while you are gone. Be careful, Angelo. We are going to need you."

Eveley waited what seemed an endless length of time, crouching almost breathless under the shrubs. But finally she heard light running steps, and in a moment Marie was in her arms.

"Oh, my poor child, they told me you wanted to go. And did they tie you—the cruel straps? You are free now, and you will go back to your Cote and be happy. But do not forget your poor Marie. And never play with fire again, sweet; in the end it always burns. American women never know what a tempest love can be. Now, kiss Marie, and say your forgive her, and then go quickly."

"Marie, come with me," begged Eveley, clinging to her. "You must not go with them. They are treacherous, selling their honor for money. Do not trust them. Come with me. Nolan and I will take care of you, and Nolan will straighten out your tangles with the law. And Jimmy is wild for you, raging all over town trying to find you. Please, dear, let all the ugly past lie dead, and live a new life with us here. Oh, I can not let you go."

"For them I care nothing," Marie cried, with a smart snap of her fingers. "They are dogs. They only help us for money, and they wish only to embroil the world in war. It is no love for us—but they are cheap—we buy them. When the time comes, we tramp them under our feet. Eveley, if you wish me, I will come."

Then in a moment they were away, the car swinging dizzily down the steep grade rocking from side to side.

"How did you get Marie, Angelo—you angel?" asked Eveley, after a while.

"They were all running around moving things, and Marie was helping. So I pitched in and

helped too. When I walked by Marie she understood and came. And they did not notice. There isn't much difference between a Wop and a Greaser."

"And you will never leave me again, Marie?"

"I am all through with hatred and strife, now. I want only a home, where I can be happy, and live as you and I have lived. That is the only Americanization. Talk is nothing. Social service is a game. But when one makes living so fine that every one in the world wants to live that way—then it is Americanization. I am satisfied now."

"Say, you'd better cut the talk and watch the road," said Angelo suddenly. "You've been half over the grade a dozen times."

"Yes, I will," promised Eveley. "But I must hurry. They will follow us—will they follow us, Marie?"

"Oh, surely, when they miss us. They have motorcycles. Listen. Hear them far back? Of course they would follow."

"Sit tight, Marie, and do not worry. I know this road all right."

"They are gaining on us, dear. Can you do better?"

But Eveley was afraid to go faster on those sharp curves, though she strained her eyes to see the road before them.

"We are nearly to Flynn Springs," she said. "We must be. We can stop there."

"They will soon be up with us," said Angelo, looking back.

"We must leave the car, and hide in the woods," said Marie.

"Oh, I am afraid to leave the car."

"The woods will not hurt us. It is only men who harm. Come, we must. If they catch us, we are lost. Pull out here to the left, and turn off the lights. They may pass us in the darkness. Take the key with you. And hurry."

Acting upon this plan, they were soon slipping over the small stones and pebbles down a shallow gully and up among the rocks and shrubs of a little cliff.

Already the tremendous roar of the motorcycles was close upon them.

"Quick, Eveley, behind this bush.—Lie down flat. Yes, all right, Angelo. Sh, quiet now."



"Please let me go," she pleaded.

At that instant the motorcycles whirled past—a sudden call from the familiar voice of Amos Hiltze, and with a great tearing and crashing of brakes, the cycles stopped and the men ran back to the car.

"It is her car," cried Amos Hiltze. "They have deserted it. They must be very close, we shall find them quickly. You go—"

"We can not find them," said a new authoritative voice. "The cops may be here any moment. We've got to get away to-night, or it is everlastingly too late. You have lost the girl—lost them

both. Now make the best of it.”

And one motorcycle was started again.

“I’ll slash their tires for luck,” said Amos Hiltze. “And we can send a couple of men to look for them. Then we can send back for them later on if they find them.”

Eveley ground her teeth at the ripping of the tires, for the rubber is to a motorist as a baby to a loving mother. But in a moment came the sputter and roar of the motors, and the men had gone again back the road they had come.

“We’ll just have to crawl into Flynn Springs on the rims, and phone for Nolan. It can not be far.”

But even that was impossible, for with devilish foresight, Amos Hiltze had taken the timer from the carburetor, and the little Rolls was powerless.

“We’ll walk then,” said Eveley bravely, and hand in hand, the three of them set out on the rocky winding road to Flynn Springs.

“Nolan will not waste any time coming for us,” said Eveley confidently.

“And perhaps Lieutenant Ames is in town and can come also,” suggested Marie softly.

Some time later, wearily, weakly, they limped into Flynn Springs, and Eveley hurriedly put in her call.

“Nolan? It is Eveley. I am at Flynn Springs. You must come for me, and bring Jimmy Ames. Yes, Marie is with me, and Angelo.—Yes, we are all right. And have a man from the garage with extra tires and a timer for the carburetor. No, we do not need the police. No guns either. Nolan, your voice is sweeter than any angel’s.”

Then they went into a small room where there was a bed, and Eveley took off her ruined pumps, and bathed her burning feet, and they fixed their hair, and had hot coffee, always looking at each other with tender eyes.

“Will you never go back on me again, little sister?”

And Marie kissed her in answer.

So they waited patiently for the men breaking all known speed laws to come to them, and the time did not seem long, for they lay on the bed together, each with an arm across the other’s shoulder. And in the small dark hallway outside, Angelo sat before their door, his arms clasped around his knees, his head sunk upon his breast, sound asleep. But even in his sleep keeping guard over his Americanizer and the “little Greaser.”

CHAPTER XXI

HER ONE EXCEPTION

All evening Kitty had been trying to get Nolan by telephone, always being told that he was not at the hotel and had gone to the office, and then hearing that the office line was busy. It was after eight when she finally got him on the wire.

“Nolan, whoever have you been talking to? If it was anybody else besides Eveley, I am going to tell. I have been trying to get you all evening. I want you to come over here immediately. Something terrible is about to happen, and you must stop it.”

Nolan hesitated. “I am to be at Eveley’s at nine, but if you promise to talk fast I will come.”

Receiving her fervent assurance, he immediately closed his desk, and in ten minutes Kitty was drawing him feverishly into her favorite corner of the living-room.

“Nolan, you could never guess what is going on.”

“No,” he admitted, with a reminiscent smile. “So many odd things have been going on lately that I confess my inability as a guesser.”

“Listen to this. Eveley’s sister has fallen in love with some crazy aviator, and is going to elope with him. And she wants Burton to get a divorce so she can marry him.”

Nolan was plainly dumfounded at this revelation.

“And that is not the worst. She is going to desert those two children, and Eveley—You know Eve. She says she will be the willing sacrifice to save the honor of the family, and has decided to marry Burton herself, to be a mother to Winifred’s children.”

“Preposterous!” gasped Nolan, looking into her flushed face for symptoms of delirium.

“True,” came the grim answer. “But we must never allow such a bloodcurdling thing to happen. It wouldn’t be right. I want you to go right over to Eveley’s as fast as you can, and make her marry you. You can pretend you do not know anything about this, and sweep her right off her feet. Get her promise before she knows what is going on, and marry her before she realizes it.”

Then perhaps Winifred will come to her senses and not do this outrageous thing."

"But, Kitty—"

"You love Eveley, don't you?"

"Yes, of course, but—"

"Then do you call yourself a man, and yet stand idly by and see the woman you love sacrifice her life for her sister's honor—and—er babies—and—"

"And husband," he said gloomily. "I could stand the honor and the babies, but I object to the husband."

"Of course you do. I have my car here, and I will take you right over to Eveley's and you can settle it immediately."

"I do not believe I could propose before you, Kitty," he objected shyly. "I could not think of the words."

"I shall wait in the car until it is over. Then I shall come sauntering up later on and wish you joy, etc., and Eveley need not know I had a thing to do with it. Just you get her promise, and I shall be witness for you. If she tries to back out we shall sue her for breach of promise."

335

"All right," he decided suddenly. "We certainly can not submit to any such nonsense as this. Let's go."

All the way to the Cloud Cote they kept up hearty agreement that the idea was utterly wild and preposterous, and that Nolan should never stand for it. As she stopped the car, two doors down where Eveley could not see from her window, Kitty said:

"Arnold and I want to take a honeymoon trip to Yosemite after we are married, and we want you and Eveley to get married in time to go along. It is so much more fun when everybody's married."

"Now, you fix it up with Eveley, and when you are through pull back the shade in the living-room, and I'll take it for a sign and come up to make my call."

So Nolan went up the rustic steps to Eveley, and Kitty settled down in a corner of the car. For thirty minutes she chuckled gleefully to herself, but after half an hour she began to feel that he was decidedly slow.

336

"I could be engaged to a dozen people in that time," she thought impatiently, "Oh, the poky thing. But I suppose they are waxing demonstrative, and he has forgotten me."

She toyed restlessly with the keys and screws on the car, still watching the black window in the Cloud Cote with only the faint gleam of light from behind.

"An hour," she cried at last furiously. "If that isn't the limit! I have a notion to go right home, and let him settle it as best he can—but I do want to see how Eveley takes it. Oh, well, I shall give him fifteen minutes more, and then if he has not signaled I'll go up and see for myself."

So she waited another uneasy quarter of an hour, and then banged stormily out of the car and up the rustic steps. Her sharp tap brought a sudden scurry and scramble from within, but Kitty did not wait for a summons. She drew back the portières and climbed in, uninvited.

Eveley was standing flushed and brilliant in the center of the room, trying to tuck up badly straying curls, and Nolan was adjusting himself to the davenport with an air of studied ease.

337

"Well, Kitty," cried Eveley nervously. "Why didn't you phone you were coming over?"

"You do not seem any too glad to see me," said Kitty rather peevishly, and then at their flushed and shining faces, she laughed. "My, how happy you look! Just like newlyweds—or something."

"Yes—something," said Eveley. She flashed a questioning look at Nolan, and received a reassuring nod. "Nolan and I are engaged, Kitty."

"Really," cried Kitty. "After all these years. How surprising." She put her arms around Eveley lovingly. "When did all this happen?"

"Last night, coming down from Flynn Springs," said Eveley. "We—we had a whole car full of it."

"Last night!" Kitty quickly disengaged herself from Eveley's arm and looked sharply at Nolan, smiling in great contentment on the davenport. "Last night?"

338

"Yes, last night. It was an awfully big night all around, wasn't it, Nolan?"

"It was for me," he said, coming over and taking Eveley's hand in his.

"Last night," Kitty repeated again, glaring intently at Nolan.

He nodded.

"Then you knew I was lying all the time."

"Well, since Eveley and I had luncheon with Winifred and Burton to-day to announce our engagement,—yes, I may say that I was fairly well assured you were lying. They seemed on their usual tender terms at noon."

"What are you two talking about?" wondered Eveley.

Kitty drew her small hat over her ears with a vicious tug.

"But we shall be glad to motor to Yosemite with you and Arnold this summer," Nolan went on

pacifically, "we think it will be great sport. We asked Marie and Jimmy Ames to go along. They are going to be married to-morrow. They are in Marie's room now, so go in and congratulate them if you like. But do not bring them out here, because we are a crowd already."

339

"I am going home, anyhow, if you mean me," she said pettishly. She looked at Eveley. "I suppose you think it is very clever for you to be engaged to Nolan twenty-four hours without notifying me, after all the trouble I have taken in the last five years to bring it about. And as for you, Nolan, I think you have a lot of courage to marry a woman who openly and notoriously refuses to do her duty in any shape, size or form. I call it a pretty big risk, myself." She clambered crossly through the window. "Congratulations," she called back snappily. And again, from half-way down the stairs: "And we shall hold you to the Yosemite bargain, too."

Then Nolan took Eveley in his arms again and kissed her. "It may be pretty risky," he said tenderly. "A wife who steels her heart against her duty—"

Eveley smiled into his eyes. "Don't worry. The One Exception will save you. I still claim that duty isn't the biggest thing in the world. And hasn't my theory held good? Patriotic duty could not Americanize Angelo nor Marie, nor anybody else. And filial duty could not make the Severs live happily with the Father-in-law. And domestic duty could not bring Miriam and Lem Landis into harmony. But there was something else big enough to work all the miracles, and it was the Big Exception."

340

"Yes, tell me, Eveley—the Big Exception that is Everybody's Duty—what is it?"

"Well," she said, snuggling a little closer into his arms, "I believe it is everybody's duty to love somebody else with all his heart and mind and soul and body. And that is what has worked all the transformations for our friends. And it will protect you, Nolan—for I do."

Nolan kissed her again. "Then it is no risk at all," he whispered, laughing tenderly. "Don't try to do your duty by me—just go on loving me like this."

THE END

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