

ALL DONE BY KINDNESS—Continued.

door yawning. "Tired," he said. "Goin' to take a nap before dinner. But, Marcia, forget the kindergarten day dreams. We won't have it, see?"

"You needn't talk as if you came from the Zoo. And if I felt it to be my duty, nothing could stop me!"

"I know that all right, but you don't own this house."

"Aunt Marcia left me enough to rent another."

"Why don't you marry Jimmy?" asked Isabel, when they were alone. "I can't see why not; he loves you more than anyone else ever will, Marcia. Look how he hugged home that cat that the man's car half squashed! Most men wouldn't have done it. And time and time again he's been perfectly silly just to please you."

"If you regard an act of mercy as idiotic yes, admitted Marcia."

"Well, why don't you?"

"Isabel," said Marcia standing up, "I was almost ready to say yes to Jimmy, but then I saw the orphans, and the matron said such heart-rending things. Jimmy had bought the ring, too; he said he hoped it might influence me, and Isabel, it is wonderful, but when you think of those children! It was set in platinum."

"That raised setting?"

"Yes, with a cut design. Everyone should help, you know, Isabel. And when you think of your own happiness, compared to—"

The telephone bell broke into Marcia's sentence, and she answered it fretfully. When she found it was Jimmy, she was not soothed and her words came abruptly. "No, you can't," she said. "I told you so. I'm going to think this evening. No, I can't with you about. What? Oh, you silly!" There was more, then her good-bye, and she stood for a moment by the telephone. "Isabel," she said dreamily, "if a man would marry you to help you carry on such a work, that would prove his love, wouldn't it?"

Isabel thought that without doubt it would. "My heavens," she said, "I pity Jimmy!"

II.

THE next day at four-thirty two very angry young people faced each other. They were out in the country, again in the small two-seater. The car was still, but Jimmy Gibbs' hands were gripping the wheel until his knuckles showed white.

"Marcia," he said, "I can stand the cats and the dogs, or anything with four feet that you feel you must lug home, but kids—no! It maddens me to think of it! And you propose, seriously to take three of 'em along on a honeymoon!"

"I thought they'd like it," said Marcia, "and no one has any business to have a purely pleasure trip, so I thought that would give us our excuse. You know every farthing ought to go to someone who needs it, Jimmy, you know it! And then think how they would enjoy it!"

Jimmy laughed, but his laugh was hollow. "No doubt they would! And no doubt they'd be the only ones that would. Why, Marcia—think of it, and, my dear girl, think of what people might say!"

"My dear Jim!"

"Well, it would look queer. You'd behave like a bride, you know, people can't help it, and I know perfectly well I'd look like a man on his honeymoon. Then there'd be this chorus of little toddlers,

Now, Marcia, don't get cross. You forced me to say that!"

"We could tell them," suggested Marcia.

"Make a nice story for the papers, wouldn't it? 'Young Couple elope Taking Three Orphans on Honeymoon!'"

"We wouldn't elope," she commented stiffly.

"Please don't be so literal Marcia. People would never stop ragging me about it. I can see myself!"

"Well, those are the conditions." Her voice was inflexible.

"Are you serious?" he asked, turning to her.

"Absolutely, James. If you are my knight, you must prove your love by—"

"Adopting three squalling infants? I think not!"

"Very well."

Jimmy looked down at the set little person and laid a large hand on her arm. "Don't you think you're being a shade unreasonable?" he asked. "You know I love you, frightfully, and all that sort of thing—but to ask a man to wipe snout noses and play 'Ring o' Roses' on his honeymoon is too much. Haven't you any conception of what I feel for you?"

"Yes, but I know that we must forget ourselves—"

"Oh, damn that orphanage!"

"Jim!"

"Excuse me," he said tensely, "Go on."

"Well, I think," said Marcia, turning and looking up at her companion, "that we must all take up our burdens."

"I'm offering to. I've asked you to marry me."

"And, went on Marcia, not noticing the interruption, "that these children are the greatest. The boys can fend for themselves after a certain age, but the girls must be tenderly cared for, or else they'll—they'll not have a fair chance."

"Put lamp-black on their eyelashes and let them wink at anything under eighty-two."

"Please don't interrupt, Jimmy. I thought that three little girls would be lovely for us to have!"

"Um!"

"Your income is large enough, Jim."

"I'm glad to hear it. I've never found it so."

"You'll think over my plan, Jim?"

"My dear," said Jim, "I've thought it over. If you say so, I'll give some money for the upbringing of three (although, Marcia, it will come off your frock allowance, but I won't have them in the house."

"You won't?"

"No, dear, I won't. For many and various reasons I think it would be crazy, and as for taking a Froebel picnic along on my honeymoon—not quite! Will the money do as well?"

"No."

"What?"

"Absolutely no, Jim. If you don't love me enough—"

Jim took her hands and, holding them tightly, spoke. "Going to throw me over for three children you never saw, kiddy?"

"But, Jim—"

"Going to?"

Jim's eyes were unpleasantly solemn as he asked the question, and Marcia, tired of the opposition to her orphan plan that she had met at home and everywhere, answered, "Yes!"

"Very well," said Jim, "but you're going to kiss me good-bye. I'm going to have one to remember, anyway." And he kissed her.

Butterfly

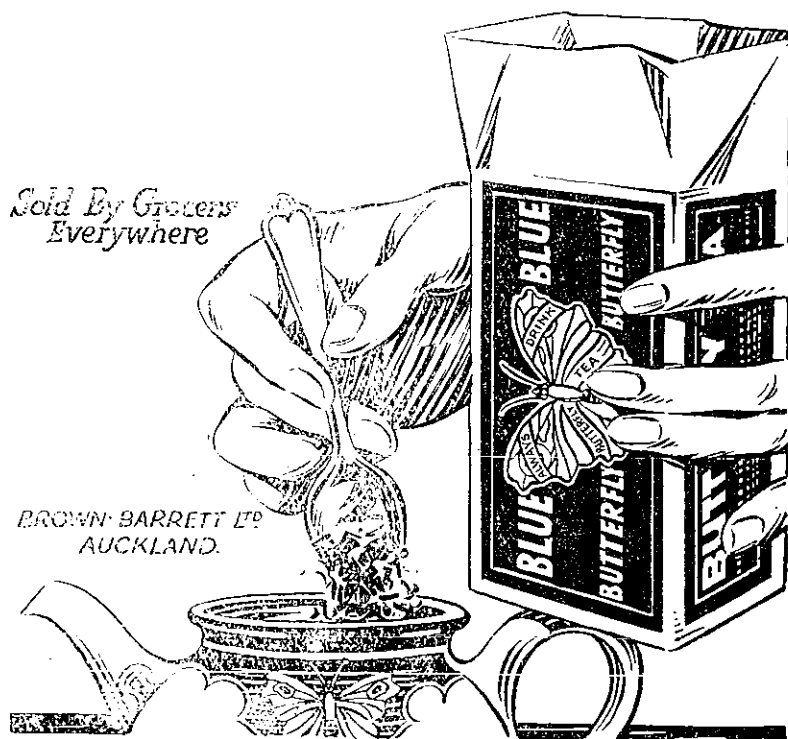
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