

'No—but he was the first one ever fell in love with me.'

'She means, father, that if she had waited a while longer she might have made a different choice.'

'I don't mean anything of the kind.'

'But it isn't fair, mother, to ask me to make some man happy for the next thirty or forty years if I can't care for him.'

'There's truth in that,' acquiesced General Wyndon. 'After all, Mary, that is the one thing in which we have no right to interfere.'

'I can't help it. I was very much interested in Roland Martin. As for making a man happy'—Mrs. Wyndon raised her fine eyebrows—'when you are not tormenting him with your whims you'll be worrying him sick. It's either blow hot or blow cold with you, Theo, and people of that sort are not always the most agreeable to live with.'

'Oh, mother,' said Theo, rising and going over to her, 'don't scold me, please. How can I help it? Are you really angry?'

Mrs. Wyndon smiled.

'Would it make any difference?'

'Indeed it would. I should be tempted to marry the very next man that came along.'

'Until he got there. I understand.'

'This is what one must endure who is an only child,' said Theo, her dimples showing, and the subject was closed.

'I do wonder why Theo is so different,' mused the General as he went for his usual morning walk up the avenue and along into the park. 'Mary was so quiet, so unassuming—I fell in love with her for her extreme reserve. Yet Theo—there is something beneath all this. She's as fond of fun as any girl, but she draws the line so closely. The others pair off, but not Theo. Yet she isn't a man-hater—in fact, she thoroughly enjoys the society of men. There is no reason why she shouldn't marry if she cares to—yes, I'd really like to know Theo's true sentiments. But, indeed, as Mary says, I have a very slim chance of finding them out. Well,' a little defiantly, 'why should we know them? It's her life, her future, her choice, not ours.'

A smile curved the corners of his mouth as he remembered his wife's oft-repeated assertion that Theo was his second self. In his secret heart General Wyndon knew he spoiled her.

'You look as if some one had left you a million dollars, General,' said a genial voice beside him suddenly. 'What is the good word?'

The General looked up.

'Why, hello, Forbes! Where did you come from?'

'Oh, I'm on leave,' said Angus Forbes. 'Two months' leave of absence, so I'm here to see all my old friends. How is Mrs. Wyndon?'

'Mrs. Wyndon keeps well, thank you. What's the matter? You don't seem quite fit.'

'Had a bad spell of typhoid last spring; takes a while to get back after a thing like that. How is little Miss Theo? Still the sauciest girl in the Wyndon barracks? The sauciest in any barracks.'

'She must be almost a young lady now,' said Angus Forbes.

'Almost,' said the General. 'But where are you going? Won't you come home with me?'

'I'd be shamelessly delighted, General, if you'll invite me. I should like to see Mrs. Wyndon and Theo again. I wonder if she remembers me? She was my true-blue sweetheart once, you know.'

The General's eyes twinkled under their shaggy brows. 'How long ago is that, Forbes? Eight years, isn't it?'

'Yes,' said Forbes. 'Doesn't seem that long.'

'And you haven't met Mrs. Forbes yet?'

'Not yet, General,' with a laugh. 'I'm beginning to think that it's a life of single blessedness for me unless Theo takes pity on me when she grows up. Think she will?'

'Don't know,' laughed the General. 'You might ask her. But it doesn't seem as if Theo ever will grow up. Let's jump into this car and we'll get home a bit before luncheon. Mrs. Wyndon will like to have a chat with you.'

'All right,' said Forbes.

Mrs. Wyndon was delighted to see the young officer again. He had been a great favorite with her in the old days before the General's retirement, and both she and her husband united in begging him to make their home his during his leave. They had totally forgotten their charming daughter, until Forbes, suddenly pausing in the midst of a sentence, made them turn toward the door at which he was staring.

Theo Wyndon came forward with a look of inquiry on her face.

'Good gracious, this isn't Theo!' cried Forbes. 'General, you said she'd never grow up.'

'And she never will, Forbes. You wait until you know her. This is Captain Forbes, my dear girl—Angus Forbes, of the —th Cavalry. Do you remember him?'

'Why, of course!' cried Theo, extending her hand, her lovely face breaking into the sweetest of smiles. 'Better than he remembers me.'

'I can scarcely believe my eyes,' said Angus Forbes. 'I expected to see a very small young lady, with possibly one braid instead of two.' His glance swept her

admiringly. 'I shall not dare to recall old days now, Miss Theo, nor allude to the promises you made, or the tokens I keep in my treasure-chest.'

'Oh, please,' she said, with a little laugh, 'don't treat me formally. Father's friends are so dignified always. There isn't one of them could stand a good old game of "give-and-take."'

'Ah, you do remember!' said Angus Forbes, quite gravely. 'But if you imagine you can classify me at the outset as one of "father's friends," when I have your written promise to marry me in my trunk in the hotel, you are very much mistaken.'

The General laughed loudly.

'Good, good!' he said.

'Promises of eight years' standing have little value, I'm afraid,' said Theo demurely. 'But I rather recollect that promise—yes, it was the day Jacky King and I sold the dozen new eggs for a packet of salt-water taffy. You saved both of us from a good whipping.'

The General glanced up with a merry twinkle in his eye.

'By the way, Angus,' said he, 'you don't hate the Church of Rome, do you?'

Angus Forbes looked his blank astonishment.

'What is this? A joke?' he asked. 'Why should I hate the Church of Rome?'

A flash of color swept across Theo Wyndon's face.

'That's one of father's pleasantries,' she said. 'Perhaps—'

'Come, come,' interrupted Mrs. Wyndon, a little hurriedly. 'Luncheon is waiting. Angus, where are you stopping? We'll have your trunks sent for at once.'

'I must go myself. I have some packing to do,' said Angus Forbes. There was an odd look on his face. Mrs. Wyndon glanced at him curiously several times, wondering if she imagined that he had grown graver, more reserved. Angus had been such a rollicking, boyish chap! 'But are you sure,' he added, 'that you are quite prepared to take me in this way? Perhaps,' he looked thoughtfully at the General without seeing him, 'it would be better—'

'Nonsense! You don't mean to say that you are hesitating!' exclaimed the General.

'I half promised Shirley,' said Forbes. 'Make it a week, Mrs. Wyndon?'

'A week if you like, Angus—but we don't want to lose you.'

A few hours later Angus Forbes was safely domiciled in the Wyndon household. He adopted a rather odd manner with Theo Wyndon—a coldly courteous, stand-offish manner that puzzled her. But she was herself—friendly, merry, perverse, sarcastic, frigid as an iceberg, bubbling over with sentiment. The General looked on, wondering.

'Doesn't seem much danger of Angus falling in love with Theo,' he said to his wife a few days later, 'and I'm glad. Martin I didn't mind so much, but I'd hate to see Theo lead one of ours around by the nose!'

'There is something wrong with Angus,' said Mrs. Wyndon, 'or else he is greatly changed. Why, it seems at times as if he is almost melancholy.'

That night the two men sat smoking in the library. Angus Forbes had very little to say. The General talked on many subjects, but could not interest his guest. Finally the young man laid aside his cigar and folded his arms. The General squirmed in his chair—he had been placed in a similar position on several other occasions. This time, however, the unexpected happened.

'I don't think I'd better stay any longer, General,' said the young man gravely. 'You and Mrs. Wyndon are kindness itself, but— Of course, I want to meet Major Saunders—I wouldn't like to miss a chat with dear old Sandy—but I'm going to break camp Friday morning.'

'What is the matter, Angus?' asked the General. 'Mrs. Wyndon was remarking that you hardly seem—well, happy. Are you in any kind of trouble?'

'No, General, thank you.'

'But there is something wrong?'

'Nothing—nothing at all, I assure you.'

They were quiet for some moments. The General frowned and puffed hard at his cigar, which had gone out. He tossed it into the receiver at his elbow.

'I suppose when I see you again,' said Forbes in a low tone, 'some lucky chap will have captured Miss Theo's heart.'

'If she has one,' said the General.

'She is all that is attractive and lovable.'

'Oh! You think so? Unfortunately, two or three have found out that her coldness matches her other qualities. Theo is not of the marrying kind, I'm afraid. Angus, she doesn't care enough.' The General hesitated an instant, then he went on, somewhat cautiously. 'I was rather glad than otherwise to notice that you—' he paused, not liking to complete the sentence.

'That's why I'm off Friday morning, General. I'm going to get away from temptations.'

'Why, Angus—'

'I can't say any more.' He rose hurriedly from the chair. 'I shouldn't have said that much.'

The General was bewildered.

'Are you sure, Angus? Don't you think that Theo could grow to care—'

Angus Forbes became suddenly much interested in one of the ornaments on the mantel.