

LITTLE EVELYN

By Algernon Tassin

DONALD was a butler. He was also a man who all his fifty years had known and kept his exact place as he saw it out of Scottish Presbyterian eyes. The unobtrusive dignity of his bearing showed that he felt and knew that others felt, that he was part of his family. Service of this sort was manly. It gives him a livery that cannot be made to fade, and any one who has eyes to see it increases in self-respect through recognizing what long and personal service can make us all if we are willing.

Just now he was glancing with disappointment at the table, upon which he had set the parlor lamp and carefully turned down the flame under its red shade. The table, except for an ornament or two, was empty. He went to one of the bookcases, and, kneeling before it, scanned in the half-light the titles of the books. As he came upon the one he sought he gave a little grunt of expectation confirmed, and taking out a volume of *Tennyson*, he began to turn over the leaves. The book, however, opened naturally of itself at the page he wanted. Placing it so upon the table, he gazed on it reverently. "Eh! my dear mistress," he mused aloud; "an' ye left it lyin' open there when ye were called to the Palace o' the King."

Sighing, he turned, and with a far-away mind ran an habitual eye over the room. "Na, na," he muttered, "there's na true home here since the mistress died. There's one thing ye canna touch, McKenna." His glance made the circuit and came back again to the open book on the table. "It's a sad house," he muttered, "that has no head." He roused himself from his reverie, and, going to the closet, took from it a bright-colored smoking-jacket and placed it upon the back of the arm-chair drawn up in front of the open fire. In doing so, he touched an object under the chair, and, stooping, he drew forth a child's knit-worsted slipper. He picked it up tenderly. "It's a wee thing," he said— "a wee thing to be toodlin' all alone!"

Sighing again, he put the slipper into his pocket, and satisfying himself once more that the room was all in order, he was about to go. A suppressed snicker stopped him. It came from the direction of the chair. His mouth relaxed its seriousness as he crept toward it and looked over the back. There in its capacious leather depths huddled a little girl in her nightgown; her hair tumbled about a face so pink with merriment that it threatened disaster if it were kept in another moment. She was shaking with mirth.

"Aha! I caught ye," he cried, and pounced upon her. Her laughter spouted out in a breathy gurgle, seemingly not a moment too soon. "You are so funny, Donald," she bubbled, "when you mutter to yourself! I laughed inside till I almost burst my head."

He eyed her with transparent sternness. "Miss Evelyn, what are ye doin' there? I left ye in bed. Have ye no' been asleep yet?"

Evelyn shook her tumbled curly gleefully. Then sobering her face, she spoke with plaintive pride:

"Not one single tiny bit. I just can't go to sleep, Donald. And my room is so big and dark." She doubled her feet up under her, tailor-wise, and put more importance into her tone in anticipation of his protest.

"I'm going to sit here and watch the fire."

"A pretty time o' night, indeed, to be watchin' the fire! We'll no' have that. Come, dearie, let me carry ye upstairs and bed ye down."

Evelyn increased her impressive air. "But I am natchaly wake-ful. And when I'm wake-ful I can't go to sleep without any one to sing to me. Mama always had to sing me to sleep when I was wake-ful."

"I'd sing ye to sleep myself," said Donald grimly; "but Heaven knows ye'd be a long time awake. It wad be like an old corbie on the fence-rail croakin' to a wee lambkin in the meadow." He held out his arms. "Cudlie doon noo, and I'll give ye a free ride to Noddie Land."

"Oh, Donald," coaxed the little girl; "please let me stay here till Kenneth comes. I won't go to sleep. I'm really very, very wake-ful to-night. And I want to see him so much. And it's so awful late now, he'll be home soon, won't he?"

"I canna say, dearie," he said gently. "There's no tellin' that. He doesna' come in sae—" he moved a step away uncomfortably—"sae regular."

Evelyn felt that she was gaining her point by the mention of her brother's name. She had had her doubts about it before, but now she strategically pursued the topic. "And I don't see Kenneth at all any more, because I'm always in bed—o' he is when I'm not at school. Then when I come home he's gone. And to-night, ken, I shan't go to sleep for hours and hours! So I shall just sit here and see him when he comes in." She settled back pleasantly, aware that an assumption of careless confidence is often half the battle. "Won't he be surprised?"

"To see you curled up sound asleep and catchin' your death o' cold! But it's a surprise he'll no' get this night. Come now, my wee lassie!" He scooped her up suddenly.

"Please, please, Donald!" she cried. "I'm not sleepy a bit!"

"Tubs, ye wee beggar! The sandman'll be snatchin' ye in twenty winks. There ye go!" He hoisted her lightly to his shoulder in spite of her wriggling protestations. "And I'll tell ye all about the brownies and the guidwife's charm."

"Oh, will you?" cried Evelyn, delighted. She made one trial more, however, relapsing into plaintiveness.

And Evelyn churred the butter, *Chug! Chug!* went on Donald in a pleading tone. At each chug he took an artful step toward the door. "To pay for the wee cakes she left on the hearth for them. Every time one took a nibble, the others pushed the churn-handle doon, and then pulled it up again. *Nibble-chuggety! Nibble-chuggety!* And one o' the brownies on the churn wad jump doon and the one at the cake wad clamber up. And then it would begin again. *Nibble-chuggety! Nibble-chuggety!* and they went out into the hall and up the stairs.

A live coal dropped from the grate and soon afterwards the mantel clock struck ten. Left to itself the room took on the well-kept air of a hotel apartment kept ready for transient occupation. The butler was right. It was a room from which the personality had departed. It was no longer a center of household life. There lay about it the subtle melancholy of a place which created lovingly to be lived in, is now committed to the orderly care of servants.

A short while only was it left alone, however. For a young man, letting himself in at the street door and taking off his overcoat in the hall, entered briskly. He was a good looking, clean-built fellow, wearing youth in a buoyant fashion, though with a suggestion of over-drawing upon his vitality. His fine-grained face had begun to harden; somewhat defiantly to dissipation, and although the hardening was as yet but a superficial little uneasiness from a man who had to live it!

He rubbed his hands together before the cheerful fire. "Birth!" he said aloud. "I'm nearly frozen." Then as he warmed his back comfortably to it, he saw the smoking-jacket spread out upon the arm-chair. "Good old Donald!" he thought, as he took off his Tuxedo and put it on. It was really cozy in the pleasant room and he was glad he hadn't gone—after all, it was better than the other places. He shrugged his shoulders impatiently. How flat all these things got after the first taste!—the same old round, night after night; everything like everything else—everything tiresome!

The butler came noiselessly into the room. Seeing the young man, he gave an unconscious movement of surprise. "Ah, Master Kenneth, you're home!" he said.

Kenneth was quick to discern and resent its slight note of censure. "Well," said he, with a touchiness only partially controlled, "don't stand there as if it petrified you."

"Fardon me, sir," answered the butler quietly, "I didna look for ye so soon."

The boy was a little ashamed of his irritability and the tone he found himself taking, but the man's conciliatory respectfulness annoyed him. "I know well enough," he said shortly, "that I'm back earlier than usual. Now that I am here, however, let us both try to make the best of it."

"Ye have no reason, Maister Kenneth," said the butler without raising his voice, "to speak to me in that way. I'm real glad to see you home again—at so guid an hour."

"I shall come home when and as late as I please," retorted Kenneth aggressively. Then, feeling that the man deserved to know his place, "Please to understand that. And make no comments on it in the future."

"Verra weel, verra weel," the other answered. "If anybody could have prevented ye, it wad have been done lang since."

"See here, Donald," broke in the young man, catching fire. "I am child. And I'm sick of this everlasting attitude o' yours. Don't take it on yourself to control my behavior."

Donald's mouth had settled grimly. "Maister Kenneth!" he interposed with dignity.

no longer trust himself to speak. Kenneth's glance fell upon the book lying on the table. "Is it you," he cried, his exasperation suddenly shooting out again, "who keeps putting this book here and leaving it open as if—as if some one had just been reading it?"

Donald hesitated. He felt the subject had come up at an inopportune moment. Then, after a brief silence, he decided to make the best of it. "Ay, it was me put it there," he said gravely.

"In spite of the fact," said Kenneth, "that I have repeatedly put it back on the shelf again, you would take it out?"

"I wad take it out," repeated the butler slowly.

"Is this my house or yours?" cried Kenneth passionately.

The butler paused again. "I'd rather na' tell ye," he said at last, "when you're in this mood."

"What did you do it for?" thundered the boy.

"I thought you would see it and—"

"Well, I have seen it," Kenneth broke in. "I've seen it many times. Could anybody miss it? What did you do it for?" he persisted imperiously, although he knew the answer he would get.

Donald went on simply. "It was one o' the books she loved—and the last time—she left it there."

Now that the answer had come, Kenneth did not know how to meet it. He felt that he had been cutting a sorry figure, yet once in it, he had been at a loss how to get out of it otherwise, without seeming to countenance the

a child, that every trivial move he had made but confirmed his pettiness. Worse than all, he had not behaved like a gentleman; Donald, for all his presumption, had shown far better breeding than he had.

"What a contemptible cad I am!" he thought. "He was insolent, of course, but his devotion to—all of us, gave him some right to talk as he did. Heaven knows it's true enough. I have forgotten my place. I haven't meant to—but everything has gone wrong somehow."

He rose from the piano in a moment, and, after wavering a little, he went to the book. Stooping suddenly, he picked it up. The quick action released the sob at his heart, and as, still kneeling, he caught the book to his breast, his face broke in response to the gasp of his mounting breath.

"Oh, mother, mother!" he spoke to her softly. "I've thrown everything of yours down—everything that you loved. Can't you see how it all is? And how ashamed I am!"

He rose with the book in his hand and without meaning it known it, went to the piano and placed it open still, on the music-rack. He sat down upon the stool again and gave himself up to sharp, biting memories of all that happened since his mother had held it in her hand and read to her children her favorite tale of Arthur and the Round Table. Suddenly he leaned and put his lips to the page on the lines where she had unexpectedly left off, and his boyish shoulders shook with dry, strangling sobs. When he straightened up he began to play gently, staring before him at the lines and through them to something beyond. It was an old tune he played, as simple and as sweet as his boyhood had been.

"Sing me the songs that to me were so dear

Long, long ago; long ago."

Playing so, the hardness went out of his heart, and with it the recklessness out of his young face.

Into the doorway, creeping warily past the danger-point, came Evelyn, again escaped from bed. Her face was roguish, and she had finger on her lip as if to impress upon herself the idea of silence. She stood there until he had finished the familiar strain. Then she tiptoed cautiously toward him, with the careful concentration with which children always perform this hazardous act, balancing herself with her arms as if she were walking a tight-rope. But suddenly she darted and sprang upon him as he wheeled on the stool. He seized her in his arms and swept her far above his head. She caught her breath with delight and as he let her down to a level with his face, she wound her arms about his neck, half-laughing, half-crying. He hugged her to him passionately, himself between tears and laughter, and carrying her to the arm-chair, plumped her with a playful threat of violence down into its soft depths.

"Why aren't you in bed?" he said. "And in your bare feet, too!"

Evelyn raised her nightgown daintily and disclosed her other foot in its knit-worsted slipper. "I couldn't find but one," she explained. She wriggled her bare pink toes gleefully. "How de do, my son John!"

"My son John?" asked Kenneth, mystified.

"One shoe off, one shoe on. Diddle, diddle, dumpkin, my son John!"

she quoted, and doubled the whole pink row roguishly.

"But why aren't you and your son John sound asleep by this time?" said Kenneth austerely. "And your other son Peter?" he added, quite spoiling the effect of his paternal air.

"Peter?" cried Evelyn joyously.

"Certainly," glibly returned Kenneth.

"The one that has the shoe looks neater, And so you call him my son Peter."

His voice had broken into hushed sobs, and the words came out in little groups of threes and fours.

The tears flowed down his cheeks and dropped on the tousled head on his breast. Finally, his eyes blinded, he tried to brush them away; but Evelyn held his fingers fast, and as he raised her arm in doing so, she murmured and nestled closer to him. The trivial, confiding movement of the child, so helpless in her sleep, lifted him suddenly out of his own emotion to a feeling which he had never had before—that he had a charge to keep, that he was responsible for her happiness, and that she was a part of himself. A passion of fondness, of protectiveness, swept him like a culminating wave. He leaned his wet cheek upon her tumbled hair.

"Ah!" he cried in a yearning whisper. "Keep tight hold, little hand, and don't let me wander away again."

Donald had entered quietly while Kenneth was repeating the last verse, and, much stirred by the young man's emotion, and by memories and hopes of his own, had come up with his noiseless step behind the chair.

Now, feeling that he was in the presence of something too sacred to be spied upon, and fearing, also, lest the detection of his presence might spoil everything, he turned to steal away as softly as he had come.

But Kenneth heard him and, rising carefully with Evelyn in his arms, saw him just before he left the room. He called to him in a low voice:

"Donald!"

The man paused, his worst fears allayed by the boy's tone; but, still apprehensive, he went toward him hesitatingly.

"Forgive me, Donald. I was very rude—and wrong—and—" He stopped chokingly, but he still looked firmly into the man's answering eyes. Then, forgetting Evelyn, he held out his hand to the butler.

The child, disturbed and finding the comfortable hollow of her nestling-place unaccountably changed, cuddled and twisted until she had made herself a new one.

Both men regarded the movement anxiously, fearing she would wake. Satisfied that she was asleep, Kenneth turned toward Donald again. But the butler's glance had fallen on the little bare foot, and, taking the missing slipper from his pocket, he put it on tenderly.

When this operation was finished, Kenneth stretched out his hand again. "And—I'm sorry, Donald," he said.

The butler took it in a firm, moveless grip. "Whisht, mon!" he whispered, "dinna wakken the bairn."

HE EYED HER WITH TRANSPARENT STERNNESS. MISS EVELYN, WHAT ARE YE DOIN' THERE?"

"Now listen to what I have to say," Kenneth stopped him sharply. "I don't forget your long service in this house or the position you hold here; but remember I am my own master and you—" He broke off abashed at the crudeness of his sentence. Then he added gruffly, "Kindly hold your tongue when they're here." He turned abruptly to the fireplace and began to warm his hands.

The butler did not move. He stood quietly facing his young master, whose black forehead he could see in the mirror before him. Nor, when he spoke, was his voice lifted above its customary minor level, but the words came with a tremendous inciseness that showed how much he was stirred. "Maister Kenneth! I have held my tongue over lang while. Ye forget your ain place when ye tell me I have forgot mine. Did I forget it after night when I was sittin' up to the peep o' day, waitin' for ye to come home? Did I forget it when I was doin' my best to be the heid o' the hoose, an' the real head was carousin', forgetfu' o' his duties? Did I forget it when I had to lie to the wee mistress, hushin' her innocent prattle for fear o' disturbin' your noonday sleep, because she mauna guess her bairn's shame and disgrace? It's me, when it should have been you, who tried to comfort the bairn's said he's breakin' already wi' loneliness for her mither. Ah, Maister Kenneth, that I should live to say it! It's you who have forgot your ain place!"

Kenneth whirled upon him furiously, smarting at the tone of conscious authority which for all its quietness vibrated in the old man's voice. "How dare you speak to me in this way? Nothing but the remembrance of your faithfulness to my mother keeps me from dismissing you on the spot."

"He wad well to mind that, Maister Kenneth," returned Donald, gazing firmly into his angry eyes, "faithful to your mither! I will be fotherfu' to the bairns. Dinn fer them when ye forget your ain place!"

"Oh, we're going to keep it up, are you?" cried the young man defiantly. He clamped his jaws stubbornly for the turn his outburst had taken; but he stifled it and went to the piano instead and dashed into a gay and flashy waltz. After a bar or two, however, he broke it abruptly and leaned his head upon the music-rack, his face flushed with shame. He felt that he had acted like

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NEXT WEEK: "Daniel of the Lion's Den." Carroll Watson Rankin