

CHAPTER VIII

MRS. LESLIE, mother of Angeline Leslie, never was found. John ascertained, beyond all doubt that she had not arrived at the headquarters of General Windischgrätz to whom she had gone to appeal for aid. Much of Vienna was burnt. It seemed probable that she had been killed by the rebels; it was to be hoped without antecedent violence; and then all that was left destroyed by one of the fires, or gone into the Danube.

“Where is mama?” asked Angeline, with a quaver in her voice as the days passed and her mother did not appear.

Not being able to answer this in either an earthly or a theological sense, John had to become evasive. It was probable that Angeline’s father would be better able to answer that question than he; at all events application should be made to him, and for that purpose John proposed to take her to England.

On these lines he comforted the child, but on the way home his heart smote him for a coward, and in Coblenz, where they stayed at an inn, he took her one night on his knee and put the position fairly before her.

“It is right that you should know, Angeline,” he said, “Your mother may be safe and sound—I hope she is. I have given you the facts.”

There were tears in the blue eyes, and she hid her face against his coat-sleeve. He stroked the short, dark hair.

It was strange at that moment that the thought of Eliza-

beth Bonvill should come to him. He felt somehow that it would have been better had that incident not been in his past.

It was a momentary weakness. Even John Woden had his weaknesses, but they were all momentary.

A grim smile wreathed his lips. "Written off the books," he murmured.

"What did you say, John?"

"Eh? Oh, nothing, Angeline. I was just thinking of something. Now, I think it's about time all little girls of ten were in bed."

"Oh, not yet, John. Talk to me."

"About what?" he began, and then reflected that in the light of what he had already told her, idle chatter would be the best thing for her mind. So he talked of England, and himself and his school and his ambitions and divers other matters, really exerting himself to keep the interest in those blue eyes, and when he was rewarded by a little laugh, he felt triumphant, as he had rarely done except at some successful financial stroke.

Mercifully children have short memories. Besides, even at ten, Angeline showed signs of being unusually calm and collected.

"And how long have you been in business, John? You seem such a very young man."

"Not quite four years, but I haven't done badly. And I'm over twenty-one Little Miss One-Shoe-Off-and-One Shoe-On."

"Dear, you have bought me two shoes, quite pretty ones, and ever such a nice nightie."

"It was the best in Vienna."

"It is so charming and ravishing," said Angeline, "that I think papa will not allow me to wear it. He will say that it will encourage my vanity."

John was beginning to dislike Mr. Leslie.

"He ought not to see it considering how and when you

will be wearing it. You can tell him that no gentleman should ever go to a lady's bedroom. It is much better," he added, forgetting his audience, "to encourage the lady to come to yours."

"What is that you said, John?"

He recollected himself. "Nothing at all of any moment."

"I know the gardener," said Angeline, reflectively, "always used to go to Rosa's bedroom, when the house was quite quiet. Why do you suppose he did that?"

"He may," answered John, gravely, "have desired to consult her on some matter concerning the kitchen-garden. You know these gardeners? Born enthusiasts, all of them."

"But wasn't it funny his going to see her 'bout anything at night? He saw quite a lot of her in the day-time."

"Possibly he thought the night-time was an opportunity for seeing a little more. But if the house were quite quiet, why weren't you? You should have been asleep."

"He used to give me apples and things, John, as a reward for saying nothing about the kissing. I'd eat them in bed, and get such a pain in the tummy. And so of course, I couldn't sleep for ages."

"As far as the gardener is concerned, it looks like a clear case of retribution."

"What's retri—what you said?" asked Angeline.

"Pains in the tummy after apples in bed, Angeline. Which reminds me that it is getting very late for a young lady of ten. You'll excuse my referring to that subject again, won't you? I'll escort you as far as the door of your room if you like?"

"You can come in and help me undress, John. Mama always d—. There are buttons and tapes and things, and I'd like your help."

John laughed. "Do you think your papa would approve?"

"Why ever not, John? There's nothing wrong in that is there?"

"No, I'm damned if there is." Her innocence went right to his heart, "Come along then, Angeline."

All that was best in John Woden was uppermost now; all the innate instinct of the strong to protect the weak; the desire of the male to protect the female. And this beautiful child of ten had brought it to the surface——

——"I'll say my prayers now, John. May I say them at your knee like I did mama's?"

"Why, of course, dear."

"Do you say prayers, John?"

"No, Angeline—I don't."

"Why ever not? I like saying prayers, it makes one feel so *safe*. I've got to say a special one for mama—I'm rather troubled about her, John."

"You mustn't worry. Leave matters to your father in England."

"Well, a special prayer won't hurt. And I'll say another for you, 'cause you've been so good to me."

John the infidel listened in silence.

"——and bless John, 'cause he's been so good to me, and make me a good girl, Amen—There. I'll get to bed now." She clambered in. "I miss mama *frightfully*, but you're next best, John. You don't mind being a next best, do you? . . . I like someone to tuck me in bed. Have you a mama, John?"

"No, Angeline."

"A papa?"

"No."

"You haven't a wife, have you, John?"

"Not I."

"Would you like me to be your wife, when I'm grown up? You've been so splendid to me that I don't want to lose you. Of course, you'll have to wait; I must go to school first.

But if you don't mind waiting a few years I'll be your wife, John? "

"A proposal of marriage," he said, teasingly, "I accept. You can consider yourself betrothed, Angeline. In the meantime, being a fair exchange I give you a good-night kiss and take away the candle."