

If you have to kick Andover kick her in the rear, so she will go forward.

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CHAPTER I

"Tony"—For Short. Another winter had lifted its icy fingers from the Storm Country and Lake Cayuga, and an early spring had brought from the South the red-breasted robins and thousands of other birds to build their homes in the Forest city, as Ithaca, N. Y., is well called, for to the south, the east, the west, and even to the north where the lake cut sharply around a corner, broad forests stretched their lengths and heights of leaf and bough on miniature mountains.

One evening on the western side of the railroad tracks, a girl stood before a small building over which, like ropes of green, draped the branches of a weeping willow tree. This building was different from any of the other habitations near it in that it was well painted, and the door stood open all day.

"Was a strange little girl that gazed up with searching eagerness at the two lighted signs that had arrested her attention. In her arms she held a diminutive guinea pig, and the way she hugged it close demonstrated her love for it.

"Everybody is welcome here," she read slowly. That meant that anyone could enter if he wanted to, she decided, and as Tonibell Devon did want to go in, she softly tiptoed up the steps and peeped into the room. As there was nobody in sight, she sidled in and looked about.

"Welcome" was carved in letters of red above a table, and the silent young stranger sighed. She couldn't understand how a girl could be really welcome anywhere. Of course her mother liked her and missed her when she was away, but Tony knew of no other place where she was really wanted but the canal boat, called Mary and Dirty Mary for short, which had been her home ever since she could remember.

"Glory be to God in the highest," swung in letters of gold across the right wall, and to the left, "Stand Still and See the Salvation of the Lord," kept her attention a little longer. She didn't know what they meant, but the varied colors shining brilliant in the bright light calmed her turbulent spirit and made her happy. She hugged the pig closer, bent her head and kissed the top of its ear.

"I guess we're in a church, Gussie," she said aloud, "and you mustn't grunt or squeal like you do on the Dirty Mary. It's awful nice and quiet; ain't it, honey?"

"Were you speaking to me?" said a voice from near the door. Tonibell Devon struggled to her feet, turned around and saw a young man looking at her. A flame of red rushed over the tanned skin, but because he was smiling and kindly, she smiled back, a dimple coming to life at each corner of her mouth.

"Nope," she flung out in confusion. "I was talkin' to Gussie-Piglet here. Mebbe her and me hadn't ought to be here. You can kick us out if you want to."

"Every one is welcome here," he quoted, coming forward. "Where'd you come from? I've never seen you before."

"I'm staying up Hoghole way," replied Tony. "I ain't been around Ithaca long. This is an awful nice room, ain't it, huh?"

"Yes, very. We like it," replied the young man. "Sit down; don't be in a hurry. I want to talk to you."

Tonibell did sit down but not very comfortably. She was embarrassed in the presence of this handsome young stranger, abashed in the glamor of his uniform, and all the beauty of him.

With boyish admiration he was contemplating the sparkle of her gray eyes, shaded by long lashes as ebony black as her hair which hung in ringlets to her waist. He decided that she was very pretty, and that he liked to have her in the Salvation army quarters.

"Can't you stay for meeting this evening?" he asked presently. "We have singing here."

"Tony's eyes deepened almost to lustrous black. "Oh, I'd love that! Then she shook her head. "Nope, she went on. "I got to go home to mummy. She's all alone! Mebbe when my daddy gets back, I'll come some time and sit clean through the night."

thing unusual on his mind, she knew, and she knew, too, it was about Tonibell, for hadn't he looked for the kid the moment he returned?

"It's about time we was doing things, Edie," he said, turning grimly. "I've waited as long as I dared, Regge says 'Halt! Pendlehaven hasn't an inch left way before he's in his coffin.'"

"Who?" came sharply from the woman. She shivered, fearing that the law lay in wait for her absent husband.

"Who, brat?" she repeated imploringly. Tonibell bent over and looked straight into the girl's face.

"God, just a plain lovin' God!" she replied, her countenance expressing unusual exaltation. "Sit a minute while the tea's makin' good, and I'll tell you."

Side by side they sat together on the bunk while with lowered reverent voice the girl told the story of the Shepherd who had said long ago with infinite pity, "Feed my sheep."

"And mummy," the girl continued, leaning her head against her mother's arm. "Darling mummy, that beautiful man said, 'Love'd make crooked things straight, and—and it's so.'"

"I hear God d—n more'n a hundred times a day," she replied. "Is that what you mean?"

"Not quite," answered Phillip, started. "No! Not that."

"Then what?" demanded Tony. "What kind of a God do you mean?"

"One that is good," explained Phillip. "There isn't any God but the one who helps—"

"My mummy?" breathed the girl, misty tears shadowing her eyes.

"Where is he, then?" The words shot forth with such insistence that something within Phillip MacCauley rose to its demand.

"Some one's got to be good to my mother," the girl ran on before he could speak. "She's sick—and lonely. Oh, I've got to do something for her. Where's your helpin' God, mister?"

"Right here in this place," said Phillip, a strange emotion sweeping over him. "In fact there isn't any place where God is not."

"He wouldn't come in a dirty canal boat, would he?" demanded Tony, breathlessly.

Astonished at such crudeness, Captain MacCauley shifted himself about so he faced her squarely. Was it pretended ignorance or innocence in the searching gray eyes? Then he decided that truth was stamped on every line of the upturned face.

"Of course, everywhere," he exclaimed brokenly. "Why, dear child—"

Tony Devon interrupted him swiftly. "Tell me how to manage it," she pleaded. "How can I wheedle your God to the Dirty Mary?"

"To the what?" was the question the boy asked in shocked swiftness. "The Dirty Mary," repeated Tony. "My mummy and me live on a canal boat. Once she was just called 'Mary.' But she's so—d nasty, Edie calls her the Dirty Mary. She's a nice boat just the same as long as my mummy's there. But I can't see how a clean God could come on an—"

"I guess you're foolin' me, mister," Phillip swallowed hard. Then slowly and gently he talked to her, trying to make her understand as best he could what he meant by God, Spirit.

"And you can help your mother; little—what's your name?"

"Tony, just Tonibell," she mumbled. Then her voice rose and she uttered sharply, "Now tell me how to help my mother."

von with his frowning brow, then at length let her gaze settle on the woman.

"I s'pose I been doin' something bellish," she ventured presently in a low tone. "Have I, Edie?"

"Nope, not this time, Tony," thrust in Devon. "But we've got to tell you something. You're gettin' to be a woman, Tonibell, and you got to do something for your mother and me."

"I'm always wantin' to do something nice for you, Edie, darling," she said, looking at her mother. "Yap it out quick, sweet, and I'll jump to do it!"

"The woman began to cry softly. "Go on, Edie," said Uriah. "Why in hell are you blubberin' over a thing you can't help?"

"But I can't help it," cried Edith. "And what's more—I will. Run away, baby, and I'll have it out with your pop—while you're gone."

Devon reached forward and laid a strong detaining hand on the girl's arm.

"It's this," he got out between his teeth. "You got to get married. You been livin' on me long enough."

The girl stared at him blankly. "Get married," she repeated dully. "Who'd marry a brat like me? I'm nothin' but a kid yet, and I'm gona to stay right here with my mother. See? I don't have to—do I, mummy darlin'?"

"Your man's word ain't law on this boat," answered Uriah in an ugly tone. "Mine is, though. Fire ahead, Edie, and tell the kid my will."

Mrs. Devon coughed spasmodically and toyed with the fabric of her skirt. A slender brow had went up and closed over her twitching fingers.

"I wouldn't marry any of the mutts you know, daddy," the girl burst out in desperation. "So get that notion clean out of your mind."

Her face settled sullenly into little lines that pursed up the lovely young mouth, and Uriah Devon moved his feet nervously. Perhaps his task wasn't going to be so easy after all.

"Kid," he said huskily, "if you don't do what you're told, I'll make you. You ain't too old to gad yet, and you'll be missin' one of the best lickin's you ever got if you mind what I tell you."

The girl eyed him curiously, making a sidewise gesture with her head. "Who's the duffer you've chose out for me?" she asked at length. "You might as well tell me."

"My friend, Reggie," said Devon, bending over and starting at her. "Tonibell's mouth widened until two rows of teeth gleamed through the red of her lips. She made a wry face. "Nothin' like that for me—eh, Edie?"

Edith Devon was coming to a resolution that meant trouble for herself and for Tonibell.

"I ain't fought it all out with your daddy, kid," she sniffed weakly. "You got to the cabin and mend them old clothes—"

Uriah Devon laid his pipe beside him and uttered an oath. "You'll stay right here, brat," he cried, "and yap head to me."

"Uriah," screamed the woman, "if you go on with this, I'll tell 'em all I know. I swear I will—Tony, honey, Tony, baby, I—I ain't—"

With a roar the man sprang forward and in his effort to reach his wife knocked the girl flat on the deck. When Tonibell rolled over and sat up, her mother was stretched along the boat rail, and Devon was standing over her. She lay so dreadfully still and limp that the girl scrambled to her feet!

It wasn't the same Tony who had come fearfully to them but a short period before with the little pig in her arms; nor the same girl who had swung in the treetops making play fellows of the squirrels and answering the shrill calls of the forest birds. She seemed suddenly to have grown taller, and as she flung herself on Devon, the very strength of her little body sent him sprawling against the side of the cabin. "Now you killed her, d—n you," she screamed. "If you kick 'er—I'll—I'll—"

She dropped at the side of her mother, her throat broken in two by the awful pallor on the woman's face. "Oh, God, mummy darlin', mummy darlin'," she ended in a bitter cry.



Side by Side They Sat Together on the Bunk.



"Go On and Finish Me."