

A CALIFORNIA GIRL.

A Continued Story.

CHAPTER XXIV.

Lady Garth had told the truth in saying that Sir Roy had made up his mind to marry Evangeline. He had thought it all over carefully during his illness, through which his cousin had nursed him with sisterly care. Lilac was lost to him. He never doubted for a moment that the letter she had left for him was a truthful one, and that she had quitted the ball simply because she cared more for Mowbray than for himself. With all chance of personal happiness gone, Roy set himself to think of how he could best act for the happiness of those around him. In her last letter Lilac had told him that Evangeline loved him, and the news did not altogether surprise him. In his youth—in fact, up to the time that he met Lilac—he had looked forward in an indefinite way to one day making Evangeline his wife; and although the meeting at Deadman's Gulch had shown him very plainly that the regard he had for his cousin was certainly not love, he could understand the feeling having grown to more than sisterly affection on her part. He accepted a certain responsibility in the matter; for he had never disguised his affection for her, and had sometimes even spoken playfully of their marriage. He knew that the fondest ambition of his mother was to see him married to the heiress, and in sheer hopelessness of his own happiness he resolved to secure that of the two whom, after the faithless Californian girl, he loved best in the world.

On the first day that he was allowed out of his room, as he walked leaning upon his mother's arm through the sunny garden, Lady Garth could not resist broaching the subject.

"I hope that this illness will be a warning to you, Roydon, not to go abroad again," she said, with anxious solicitude in her voice, which always lost some of its hauteur and coldness when she spoke to her son.

"Do not talk of the future, mother," he said quickly, "I cannot bear to hear of it yet."

"But the future ought to look very bright to you, dear," she urged. "You have a splendid career before you if you choose to adopt it."

"But I do not want a career," he said, with the irritability that his illness had left. "All that I wanted I have lost."

"You take too gloomy a view of things, Roydon," said his mother, and the young man turned upon her quite fiercely.

"A gloomy view! What other view is there to take? Is there the possibility of a doubt that the woman I love has forsaken me?"

"But, my dear, the result may be all the better for you," said her ladyship, toying with her pince-nez. "Miss Marvel had good points, certainly, and was much more ladylike and refined than one could have expected from her origin—"

Roy interrupted her.

"Mother, you must not talk like that. You madden me! She was everything that one could desire in a woman, but she has left me, so what now is the good of talking about her?"

"I do not wish to do so," said her ladyship. "I was going to speak about somebody else, who has every attribute, including wealth and birth, to fit her to be your wife. You read the letter that Lilac—that was left, did you not?"

"Yes, mother."

"Haven't you thought over the advice that it contained?"

"Yes, mother."

"Then why do you not secure your real happiness by acting upon it?"

"I am going to act upon it."

"You are going to ask Evangeline to be your wife?"

"Yes, mother."

There was no sign of any emotion beyond a hopeless carelessness in his voice, but her ladyship ignored that, and embraced him with every show of pleasure.

"You have made me very happy, my son!" she said, with feeling. "You will speak to her at once?" "Before there is any chance of your meeting or hearing news of Lilac Marvel," was in her thoughts; but she kept back the words.

"I am ready to speak to Evangeline now, if you will send her to me," said Roy in tones as gloomy as if he were meditating suicide.

Lady Garth had time to find her niece before her son had time to change his mind.

The gloomy expression was still on the baronet's face when Evangeline joined him a few minutes later on the rustic seat where Lady Garth had left him, for he was still too weak to walk far alone, but he tried to smile.

"Aunt Gwendoline says you want to speak to me about something very important," said his cousin, brightly; "and she kissed me as solemnly as if I were going to be executed! What can it be?"

"Let us walk across the grass, Evie, and I will tell you," he said, with an earnestness that surprised her as much as Lady Garth's caress had done.

Evangeline gave him her arm at once, and they walked backwards and forwards across the lawn as he made his proposal. He did not attempt to disguise the love that he had felt for Lilac—it was useless to think of doing so—but he had always had for her—Evangeline—and said that, if she did not mind taking a disappointed man, he believed that they would be very happy together.

Evangeline heard him through to the end, with her eyebrows a little raised. Then, when he had said his say, very

gently and kindly she startled him by the matter-of-fact voice in which she responded, wonderingly—

"My dear old Roy, what on earth has made you talk such nonsense? You know perfectly well that you are not in love with me; and you ought to know that I am certainly not in love with you—not in that way. Of course, I am very fond of you as a sister; but, as for marriage, I would as soon think of marrying Aunt Gwen!"

Roy stared at her calm face, and could not believe that she was acting a part. Still he had Lilac's assurance that his cousin had confessed her love for him to her. In his astonishment he blurted out the fact.

"But you told Lilac that you cared for me!" he said; and Evangeline opened her eyes.

"I told Lilac that I loved you?" she echoed incredulously, with a pause between each word. "Did she say so in her letter?"

"Yes."

"Then that is why Auntie Gwen would not let me read it. I wish I had known!" For some reason her manner was becoming quite excited.

"Show me the letter at once!" she cried imperatively; and, when Roy produced it obediently, she stood still upon the grass to read it through from beginning to end.

"Poor Lilac!" she said when she had finished; and Roy was surprised at her tone, for on the only occasion that Lilac had been mentioned Evangeline had been much more bitter against her than Lady Garth.

A new suspicion which was very near the truth had come into the heiress's mind, but she was afraid to express it yet, lest it had come too late to save Lilac from sacrificing herself, if that was what she intended doing. When Roy spoke again she started as if from a reverie.

"Well, there is the statement written clearly enough," he said, with a touch of playfulness in his voice.

"What have you to say in reply? Surely this confession of ours has not been invented by—Miss Marvel? Really, Evie!" he went on more seriously, "if it is true, and you do care for me, you must marry me. I am very fond of you and would try to make you a good husband."

Evangeline laughed outright.

"My dear Roy, don't be so absurd! I tell you that I do not care for you like that. It is very kind of you to be willing to make such a sacrifice on my behalf, but it is really not necessary. I told Lilac that I was in love with—somebody, and the silly girl jumped to the conclusion that it was you. I never dreamed of her misunderstanding me like that, or I should have told her all about it, poor girl!"

"You are making this up to deceive me, Evie," he said, as the suspicion crossed his mind; and his cousin smiled bitterly.

"Really, Roy, I shall begin to think you stupid and conceited if you insist upon believing that I want to marry you! Will you believe me when I tell you that the man I spoke about to Lilac, unfortunately without giving his name, was somebody that I met two years ago in Yorkshire?"

"Not a fellow called Eric Damian?"

Evangeline blushed crimson and then turned pale.

"What do you know of him?" Evangeline asked quickly.

"I met him in Nevada. He is trying to find gold on your account, he told me—he wants to grow rich in a hurry to marry an heiress. It occurred to me that it might be you that he was speaking about, because he talked so much about you, but I did not think you cared for him, as you never mentioned him."

"It was not I he was speaking about," said the girl coldly, her face white to the lips. "It must have been Sabina Emmott, to whom he was engaged before he last his fortune."

"Sabina? I swear it was not!" said Roy impetuously. "And I am sure that they were never engaged. Why Damian told me how she had run after him, and he said I was a fool to choose her as a companion for Lilac! We got very confidential, you see. I told him my love story and he told me some of his. He met the heiress at a place called Westwood, and, on the very day he would have proposed to her, the news of the bank smash came, and altered his position altogether. It must have been you that he spoke of."

"Don't—don't! Roy! It could not have been," she said, afraid of the new hope that had come into her life.

"But it must have been," said the baronet, deliberately. "On the night before he was telegraphed for, you were in the conservatory with Damian when Sabina Emmott interrupted you?"

Evangeline nodded, unable to speak.

"Then, in another two minutes, if that little mischief maker, as Damian calls her, had kept out of your way, you would have had a proposal of marriage, because Eric Damian told me so himself. By-the-way, I believe that I promised never to tell a soul. He is desperately proud. He said that he would never marry a woman with money while he himself was poor; and at that rate I do not think he will marry at all, because he has had desperately hard luck, and was almost starving when I met him and we struck upon our friendship."

The girl's eyes filled with tears.

"You know where he is," she asked excitedly—"where he is now?"

"He was at Blue Creek Camp, Nevada, when I passed through on my way home. It is very likely that he may be there still."

"Then I pray that he may be!" said the girl, all excitement. "If not, you must go and find him for me, Roy."

"Why, ask him to marry me, of course!" said she with flashing eyes.

"I told Aunt Gwen that I would make an offer of marriage to the man I loved if he was too proud to ask me because of my money and I knew that he cared for me. I shall telegraph to the Blue Creek Camp at once. Is that and Nevada the full address?"

Roy nodded, quite taken aback by her impetuosity.

"Why did you let him go away?" he asked.

"Because after he had gone that evening, Sabina Emmott told me that she was privately engaged to him, and that she had broken off the engagement because of his unexpected poverty. I cannot think what made her say it."

"Spite," said Roy—"because it was certainly a fib. I am glad that you have a chance of being happy, Evie!"

The stress on the "you" was pathetic, and the girl threw her arms impulsively around her cousin's neck and kissed him.

"You have made me the happiest girl in the world, though not quite in the way you expected, you silly boy! I do hope that there is as much happiness in store for you!"

Evangeline little thought how much that very caress was spoiling the slender chance that remained of Roy's being happy, as she had begun to hope that he still might be, with the woman he really loved.

She ran into the house to take the photograph of Eric Damian from the drawer in her room and cover it with kisses, before setting herself to compose the telegram that should recall him from America.

If Lilac, when she found her in such grief in her room the very night before she left the hall, had really believed all the time she was speaking of Eric, that she was actually referring to Sir Roydon Garth, why, it would supply a very different reason for the girl's unexpected departure. Lilac's sudden decision, after always speaking as if she were in love with Roy and intending to marry him, to become the wife of somebody else had been a standing enigma with Evangeline, who could only explain it by deciding that her whole estimate of Lilac's character had been wrong, and that she was as deserving and unscrupulous as she had believed her to be open and innocent. But, if Lilac believed that she was dying for want of Roy's love, her renunciation would be a heroic perfectly consistent with the character that she—Evangeline—had credited her with. The very thought of such a thing made her hate herself for the bitterness she had felt against her.

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THE BIGGEST DINNER.

Two Thousand Men Will Sit Down to This Feast.

The biggest dinner given on earth since the emperor Nero banqueted 4,000 on his royal barge will be partaken of in St. Louis during the month of May under the roof of the Coliseum. It will be a political dinner, a democratic dinner. Two thousand men will be feasted. The dinner will cost \$4,000, at the very least estimate. William J. Bryan, Carter H. Harrison, mayor of Chicago, and other speakers of national reputation will be present. The western hemisphere has never seen such a dinner as this will be. Yet the cost will be small, compared with the great number to be entertained. The expense to the committee will be only \$2 a plate.

The idea of holding this great feast originated in the brain of Harry E. Hawes, president of the Jefferson club and vice president of the board of police commissioners of St. Louis. It all came about through the postponement of the annual banquet usually given by it, the birthday of Thomas Jefferson.

Mr. Hawes communicated with Sam B. Cook, chairman of the Finance committee of the national democratic committee. Mr. Cook is also chairman of the democratic state central committee of Missouri. They conferred and decided to give a monster political dinner—a democratic love feast—under the auspices of the democracy of Missouri, managed by the Jefferson club of St. Louis.

The idea met with the approval of party men everywhere. It was decided that true Jeffersonian simplicity should prevail. The cost of the feast as set before the guests should not exceed \$2 a plate.

The actual work of preparing this greatest of modern banquets has not yet commenced. A committee of twenty-five has been appointed to assume the responsibility. Two regiments of men are to be fed.

How can this gigantic feast be prepared?

How many men will be required?

What quantities of edibles will be consumed