

TO THE WIVES OF UNCHURCHED MEN

Edith Swinehart, in "Gospel Trumpet"

Eve sat alone in the church pew. A quick glance told her that the other husbands were there—all but Don. He was at home, still dawdling over his coffee and the Sunday paper in slacks and T-shirt, unshaven and grumpy.

He would be hungry again and want dinner as soon as she returned from church. Then likely as not he'd go off to a man-sized sport for the afternoon, and they would be separated the rest of the day. Sunday was a ruined day for her, week after week.

Tears filled Eve's eyes. The choir merged into an unreal mist, and she scarcely heard the sermon. She was wondering what she would say this time to the friendly inquiries about Don. Why, sometimes people she didn't know well thought she was a widow!

Eve managed a cheerful face and manner, but today she let the pastor clasp her limp, clammy hand, afraid to meet his discerning gaze. Then she began to tremble, and a sob caught in her throat. This would never do, she thought quickly, and she hurried on out of the church.

There was no time now for a talk with Brother Brown, and she was not sure he would understand her problem anyway.

Don was a top salesman. Not only did he have a gift for getting "John Henrys" on the dotted line; he was a friend indeed on the follow-up. He did not intend to have a kickback on a purchase. He intended that a customer should remain satisfied and tell others about the product.

This meant that Don was not a man who worked just so many hours a week and had the week ends to do as he pleased. He was an active salesman all the time. He thought Eve ought to appreciate that and the better way of life it provided. Why couldn't she see that a man had to let go—relax? There had to be a time to unwind from the tensions of his working days and evenings.

But as sure as Fridays came, every week, when other men were checking their gear for a Saturday and Sunday outing and Don knew he couldn't make it to get away, Eve would start talking about going to church. She began talking on Friday, mind you, and church wasn't until Sunday! She really went all-out to get him in a church-going mood well ahead of time. But the mood just wouldn't come. Don didn't feel like going to church, and what good would it do to drag himself there by the nape of the neck just to please Eve?

After the hasty leave-taking from church, Eve decided to have a talk with Mrs. Winston. Mrs. Winston had patted her arm that morning and had not tried to detain her. Mrs. Winston was the kind of motherly Christian woman who never seemed too busy to talk. Or, rather, she didn't talk; she listened, and you felt she understood.

As Eve expected, Don came alive after lunch and went fishing. (She hated fishing, and Don hadn't asked her to go with him for a long time.) Soon she was at Mrs. Winston's house, seated beside her. But this was a time when she couldn't get the words out. Her feelings welled up and seemed to choke her. Finally she said, "I've tried to be a good Christian, but Don—"

"Eve," Mrs. Winston spoke quietly, reflectively, "you know George, my son. You don't know him well, because he just recently moved here with his family and began directing the choir only last Sunday. Once George was like Don! There was a time when he would not go to church—before he was married, when he was still living at home with his father and me."

Eve thought of the clean-cut, wholesome-looking man who had so recently taken over the choir directing. She exclaimed, "Mrs. Winston, what did you do? Tell me

what happened. How did you manage in your well-ordered house to have a Christian home with a person living in it who was so unchristian?"

"Dad and I didn't think of it that way, Eve. Our hearts ached not because of a confused schedule but for George. He needed Christ. He wasn't happy, and the more unsatisfied he felt, the more frantic he seemed to search for a good time. He was doing well in his business, was planning to marry, was working hard like your Don. We longed to be able to reach him with the peace we knew in Christ, but he seemed completely out of our reach. So on Sunday mornings especially, we committed him to the love of God and went our way. We left him to get his own breakfast or do without as it pleased him, and said nothing about the disorder we found in the house because of his habits. We just kept that committed to the Lord, too. You see, Eve, I'd had practice on this years before when George's father was not a Christian and didn't go to church."

"Not Mr. Winston, too," Eve cried, thinking of the amiable elderly man who sat with Mrs. Winston every Sunday. He always seemed bubbling over with joy as he sang the hymns and followed the Scripture readings and pronounced an individual "amen" in a kind of explosive undertone as the minister prayed.

"I'm afraid I delayed my husband's salvation by several years, Eve," Mrs. Winston went on, more quietly. "You see, for a long time I was rather Pharisaical—was a holier-than-thou person. And this attitude in my heart made me critical. There is nothing winsome about that, of course. Actually, when I came to see myself, I wondered how my husband could have lived with me. I had developed quite a way of picking the wrong times to approach him about things I thought of as the Christian way of life for our family and home. And in my over-anxious efforts, I was surely not very Christian."

Mrs. Winston continued, "That was a heart-breaking time, Eve, when I discovered that I needed to repent. To repent means to turn around and take the opposite direction. Well, I stopped criticizing and nagging. I learned to keep still in a friendly, loving way. I learned to let the Lord take over. And he did, Eve!"

"The changes you describe seem so impossible."

"Every salvation experience is a miracle, Eve, and every Christian you know was once not a Christian. Take yourself. Wasn't there a time when you didn't want to do the things that are right?"

Eve pondered a long moment, then said, "My family were church people... We always went to church. We enjoyed going. I met Don at a church party; someone had invited him. When we married, I took it for granted that we would live as my family had always lived. But he had been brought up to live as he lives now. His folks are decent, hard-working people, fine people. But they haven't much idea what it means to be a Christian."

Suddenly Eve jumped up. "Mrs. Winston, how could Don know anything about it? What have I ever done to manifest the spirit of Christ to Don? Oh, Mrs. Winston!" Eve buried her face in her hands.

There was a deep, cleansing prayer session in Mrs. Winston's living room before Eve left for home. It was nearly time for the evening service when she got home. Don had not yet returned. Eve considered the possibility of missing church and waiting for him, although she had never missed church in her life since she could remember.

Then she thought of a better plan. She turned on a low light and placed a note for Don where he would see it. The note said, "Be home soon, darling, and I have something to tell you. Eve."

It took her only a minute to arrange his favorite

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The King's Highway