



She Revises Her Writings Endlessly



Her Daily Routine is a Considerable Whirl

DEAR MRS. POST

By
MARGARET CASE HARRIMAN

Color Photographs Taken for The Saturday Evening Post by Ivan Dmitri

LAST year, when the forty-first printing of Emily Post's *Etiquette: the Blue Book of Social Usage* was released to the public, some of its readers were a little startled by the touch of lavender that persisted in its pages. "The bachelor girl can, on occasion, go out alone with any unmarried man she knows well, if the theater she goes to, or the restaurant she dines at, be of conventional character," Mrs. Post's book stated tranquilly in 1936. "The strict rules of etiquette demand that the divorced meet as total and unspeaking strangers" it set forth in another chapter, and "A lady having her portrait painted always takes a woman friend, or her maid, who sits in the studio, or at least within sight or hearing."

All over the country, bachelor girls were going out alone with unmarried men they knew only slightly, in the hope, perhaps, of getting to know them better; divorced people were greeting each other, when they met accidentally, with just as much kindness as though they had never been married; and whatever ladies were having their portraits painted had very few women friends, or maids either, who were content to spend a whole afternoon just sitting within sight or hearing. But Mrs. Post pretty thoroughly ignored the modern trend. The 1936 edition of *Etiquette* also contained an entire chapter devoted to the Chaperon, and, although she was, in fact, referred to as "The Vanishing Chaperon," the reader

could hear in those simple words an echo of the author's own wistfulness over the whole hellish situation.

Etiquette in Society, in Business, in Politics and at Home has sold nearly 500,000 copies—at four dollars apiece—since it was first published in 1922, and it has been slightly revised three times, but it was not until this year that Mrs. Post—apparently convinced that people are going to go right on behaving in the unfettered way that has become fashionable and convenient—decided to broaden the standards of behavior she established fifteen years ago. This spring a completely revised and up-to-date version of *Etiquette* is appearing, in which bachelor girls, divorcees and ladies who like to hang around artists' studios are considered patiently, even perhaps with a twinkle. The *Vanishing Chaperon* almost entirely disappears, and is replaced by a sprightly chapter on *The Modern Man and Girl*. The author has named this couple John Strongheart and Louise Lovely, and plans to let them spend a good deal of time just drifting around together, without anybody within sight or hearing. Mrs. Post is a gentlewoman of the old school, and she likes the old ways best, but she is a businesswoman as well. With scarcely a sigh for the decorous past, she has made up her mind to march sturdily abreast of the times.

Although her word is accepted as gospel by millions of readers, Emily Post has always been somehow

at the mercy of the public she created when she wrote *Etiquette*. When the publishing firm of Funk & Wagnalls suggested that she write the book, she was skeptical; she disliked the word "etiquette" as being both fancy and phony, and she felt uncomfortable about setting herself up in print as an authority on correct social behavior, which was something she had always taken more or less idly for granted. Richard Duffy, of Funk & Wagnalls, pointed out that, although there were plenty of etiquette books on the market, none had been written by a woman of recognized social position since Mrs. Sherwood—grandmother of Robert Sherwood, the playwright—wrote *Manners and Social Usages*, back in the 80's. He followed up his argument by sending Mrs. Post all the current books about etiquette he could lay his hands on, and a few days later she telephoned him.

"These people," she said, referring to the etiquette writers, "don't seem to know what they're talking about."

"Well, you tell 'em," said Mr. Duffy simply.

Goaded, Mrs. Post sat down on a high stool at the architect's drafting table she likes to write on and, in the next ten months, turned out 250,000 words on etiquette. She wrote about all the problems that occurred to her, and it was scarcely surprising that they were mainly the problems within her own experience or within that of her friends in New York, at Newport or at Tuxedo. The book, when it was published, was a curiously lively and readable work through which the Toploftys, the Eminentes, the Bobo Gildings, the Notquites and other characters—all based on real people, as the author confessed in





Her Face Still Has That Fine Transparency of Line and Texture That Never Quite Leaves a Woman Who Has Been Beautiful

the dedication—moved symbolically, forever preoccupied with the right livery for their footmen, the order of precedence at formal dinners, the duties of a kitchenmaid in a staff of twelve servants, and similar high-toned nuances of the mannered life.

Before it had been out a month, however, Emily Post began getting letters that staggered her. Women readers throughout the country wrote to her, saying, "Dear Mrs. Post, You didn't say in your book whether a widow ought to sign her letters 'Mrs. John Jones' or 'Mrs. Mary Jones,'" and "Dear Mrs. Post, How can I give a formal dinner for eight people without a servant?"

Shocked and puzzled, Mrs. Post informed such correspondents that no lady, whether married, widowed or single, ever signs a letter "Miss" or "Mrs. Anything"—except in parentheses after "Mary Jones"—and that nobody can give a really formal dinner without any servant.

When letters kept coming in, asking whether it was true that bread must be broken into pieces exactly one inch in diameter before it was eaten, and whether, when passing your plate for a second helping, you must hold your knife and fork in your hand, Mrs. Post began to realize that here, in this vast unsuspected throng of seekers after polite behavior, was her real public. In time for the next edition of the book, she wrote a new chapter called American Neighborhood Customs, dealing with showers, sewing circles, singing circles and all the other cozy activities of outlying America which she was just beginning to learn about. She also invented a new character—a wonder woman named Mrs. Three-in-One who, without any servant whatever, contrived

to be cook, waitress and charming hostess to a dinner party—informal—of eight people, without getting up from the table. To test the system she had thought up for Mrs. Three-in-One before she brought it out in print, Mrs. Post invited six of her own friends—the Toploftys, the Gildings and the Worldlys—to dine with her and her son, Bruce, at her apartment in New York. Seated serenely at the head of her table with a stack of soup plates before her, she served the soup from a hot tureen and put the empty plates, as they were handed back to her, daintily out of sight on the bottom shelf of a tea wagon at her elbow, while Bruce, at his end of the table, ladled out the meat course from a chafing dish. Everything went smoothly without a servant in the place—except the cook, who stayed in the kitchen—and the glittering guests handed plates around from one to another as flawlessly as though they had been doing it all their lives.

Emily Post looks considerably younger than her age, which is sixty-four. In her youth she was a pretty distinguished beauty—portraits and photographs of her were included in all the collections of famous American beauties—and her face still has that fine transparency of line and texture that never quite leaves a woman who has been beautiful. She is tall and compelling, and she might seem formidable if it were not for her rather fluttery way of talking and a nervous habit of moving her hands continuously in small gestures—pleating a fold of her dress, fussing with a cushion or a letter or anything that happens to be within reach. She doesn't smoke or drink, but her hands are as unrelaxed as those of any habitual cigarette smoker or cocktail nurser. She is

endlessly careful about her own choice of words in formal conversation, and it makes her faintly uneasy to hear anyone say "phone," for instance, instead of "telephone." During business hours, however, her contacts with the world of industry have conditioned her to a more colorful language. She says "damn" in a definite way when things exasperate her, she describes furniture or clothes she doesn't like as "godawful," and one advertising man who asked her opinion of a layout showing a table set for a formal dinner got it in one word. Mrs. Post said it was lousy. Not long ago, she went to a cocktail party given by one of the younger and giddier couples among her friends at which a newspaper columnist and his wife, who were also guests, got into an argument, intense enough to attract everybody's attention, about what time he had come home the night before. The husband stated flatly that he had been home, in bed and asleep, at midnight. "You're a damn liar, dear," his wife told him casually, out of long habit, and then, with a glance at the quiet lady sitting on the couch, hastily added, "if you'll excuse me, Mrs. Post." Mrs. Post was a little embarrassed, mostly by the silence that suddenly fell around her, but she just smiled.

In her own apartment, on East 79th Street, Emily Post likes to sit on a wide sofa in the window, generally with one foot tucked under her, and talk in a low, rather breathless voice broken by a good deal of laughter. She laughs easily about the jokes that appear about her in magazines and comic papers, about the strange significance her name has come to have for millions of Americans—about everything, in fact, except etiquette

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DEAR MRS. POST

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itself, which she has come to respect fiercely as a code governing practically all human relationships. She will tell you, with an air of mild astonishment, that nothing ever happened to her until she was nearly fifty, but that is not quite true. Things started happening to her more than thirty years ago, when she became a double-barreled pioneer in New York society by divorcing her husband in New York State—a pretty bold move at the time—and by going to work for a living. Nothing in her life up to that time had promised such unconventional goings-on, and for a little while even her intimate friends were shaken to the core.

She was born in Baltimore, the only child of Bruce Price, an architect who later designed the Château Frontenac in Quebec and most of the buildings in Tuxedo Park, New York. A portrait of her father, looking handsome and almost sensationally distinguished, hangs in Mrs. Post's study now, and she likes to tell about the time he traveled through Canada with the late Duke of Connaught. Every time they arrived in a town the reception committee, alert on the station platform to greet the royal visitor, passed lightly over the Duke and rushed in a body to heap their flowers and speeches of welcome upon the startled Mr. Price. "Never mind, Bruce," said His Royal Highness tolerantly, when this had happened four or five times; "it isn't your fault that God made you in the perfect image of a duke."

The Prices moved to New York when Emily was five, and sometimes her father would take her along with him when he was working on a building and let her climb around on the scaffolding. But apart from these excursions, her childhood moved in a conventional pattern of summers at Bar Harbor, and winters in her family's brownstone house in Tenth Street, with lessons in the mornings with a German governess and a walk in the park in the afternoons.

A Cardboard Architect

As a debutante, in 1892, Emily Price was tall, cool, and so dashing that four men were often required to carry her cotillion favors to her carriage after a ball; and at the end of her first season she married Edwin Main Post, a banker, by whom she had two sons, Edwin, Jr., and Bruce. She was peacefully established in the routine of a wife, mother and hostess when Edwin Post abruptly lost all his money following the panic of 1901. Emily Post's father died shortly afterward and, since he was a generous and popular man, left almost nothing to his heirs. Her mother, who had managed to save a little out of what her husband had given her during his lifetime, moved to a small house at Tuxedo. With disaster fresh upon them, the Posts with their two babies went to live with Mrs. Price. If the marriage had lasted Emily Post's career might never have begun.

She was the first divorcee to combine her maiden name with that of her ex-husband, and it was as Mrs. Price Post that she went to work, after the divorce was granted, to earn enough money to buy clothes for Ned and Bruce, and to educate them. She had picked up a considerable knowledge of architecture from her father; so, at first,

she tried making cardboard models of houses, mounting them on cigar boxes and decorating each room with papier-mâché furniture and, sometimes, with tiger-skin rugs made of wax and painted in stripes. John Russell Pope and a few other architects bought some of her models, but there was little money in it for Mrs. Post.

One day a literary friend said to her, "Why don't you try writing? You write such marvelous letters!" And those words—which from one person or another, have probably started more pens traveling over paper than any words ever spoken—sent Mrs. Post hurrying up into her mother's attic to dig out the bundles of letters she had written to her father from Europe during a summer she spent there when she was seventeen. With a little editing and the addition of a hero named Lord "Bobby" Kirth, the letters made a lively and frivolous book called *The Flight of a Moth*, which Dodd, Mead & Co. published in 1904. Mrs. Post made about \$3000 out of it, and followed it rapidly by other novels: *Purple and Fine Linen*, *The Title Market* and *The Eagle's Feather*—all of them pretty classy, swarming with easygoing earls and princes, and laid against a dizzy background of high life.

The Evolution of a Best Seller

When some of her conservative friends murmured that writing was a pleasant hobby for a woman of gentle birth, but that taking money for it seemed to them not a little crass, Emily Post pointed out that Mrs. Wharton was doing well in a literary way without noticeably losing caste, and that the Duer girls were still asked to decent people's houses, although they gladly accepted pay for whatever they wrote whenever they could get it. The Duer girls were Alice, who later became Alice Duer Miller, and Caroline, who wrote a book of etiquette of her own a few years ago.

Mrs. Post's novels sold fairly well, and soon she began writing pieces for magazines—mostly "confessions" by imaginary ladies of title surprised in a moment of exaltation or, conversely, in one of extreme fatigue. These articles and her books brought her varying amounts of money in the years that followed, but the small fortune which her mother managed to leave her at her death in 1910 vanished in bad investments; and in 1922, when Funk & Wagnalls began to badger her about writing the *Book of Etiquette*, she was living in a New York hotel, had sent two sons to Harvard, and was working away on her sixth novel, *Parade*, to pay for it all.

After *Etiquette* was published, the question of whether Emily Post should take money for what she wrote was lost forever in the newer problem of how much money it would take to get her to write anything at all. It was not that she was temperamental about writing—she likes to work, and is always ready to plunge into prodigious chores at the slightest rustle of a contract—but she was in terrific demand. When a ginger-ale company asked her for a testimonial to advertise its product, Mrs. Post wrote pleasantly that ginger ale was a refreshing drink to serve at parties, and avoided the taint of commercialism attached to most

testimonials by declining to mention any particular brand. The ginger-ale people said that that would be quite all right, and paid her \$3000 for the use of her name. Linen, silver and glass manufacturers paid her as much as \$5000 for each pamphlet she wrote for them, describing the correct use of linen, silver or glass.

In 1929, she was given her first radio audition. "There's scarcely any use in my doing this," she said into the microphone, while seven potential sponsors listened critically in another room. "My son tells me that my voice is too thin and too feminine to be any good on the air, and I'm quite sure myself that it isn't very good, so I really don't know why you bother to listen. I guess that will be enough about my voice. Thank you." Her voice was so good, it turned out, that all seven sponsors rushed in, afire to sign her up for their programs, and asked her to name her price.

"Well," Mrs. Post said placidly, "what do Amos and Andy get?" She didn't get as much as Amos and Andy, but the sponsor with whom she finally signed did pay her \$500 a broadcast.

In addition to her income from various side lines, Mrs. Post's royalties from the book of *Etiquette*, which has sold steadily throughout the years, have, since 1922, seldom fallen below \$300 a week.

By 1931, she was broadcasting daily over a national network, she had written *The Personality of a House*—a book about architecture and decorating which is used as a textbook in several schools and colleges, although it has never attained the freakish popularity of *Etiquette*—and she had joined a syndicate which now publishes her column of questions and answers about etiquette in 150 newspapers throughout the United States and Canada. On the radio, Emily Post was originally presented as *The First Lady of the Air*, but her sponsors had to renounce that title when Vaughn De Leath, a female crooner, insisted pretty violently that, if it belonged to anybody, it belonged to her, since she had been crooning over the air since radio began. Vaughn De Leath became *The First Lady of the Air* after that, and Emily Post was announced simply as "Emily Post."

The Peak of Etiquette

Radio engineers, announcers, musicians and other studio technicians, who have come to accept delays, mistakes in timing, and a general unremitting panic as their portion, have always revered Mrs. Post because she carried a stop watch to every broadcast, timed herself every fifteen seconds, and never failed to finish courteously on the nose. She seemed to infect her radio listeners, too, with a sudden, Old-World punctiliousness. One woman wrote to her, saying that, the day before, she had called to her sister in the kitchen to come and listen to Mrs. Post, who had just come on the air; the sister hurried into the room, taking off her apron as she came. "Do you think," she replied proudly to the other's glance of inquiry, "that I would dream of receiving a visit from Mrs. Post with my apron on?" Another woman, living alone somewhere in Westchester, wrote

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that she usually had her tea at five o'clock but she had changed the tea hour to half past four, so that she could listen to Mrs. Post at the same time. "I sit by the fire, with my Persian cat and my Scotty dozing on the hearth," wrote this one, who appears to have been notably carried away by her feelings, "and I pour fragrant China tea into thin yellow cups. One cup for me, and one cup always, dear Mrs. Post, for you."

Mrs. Post liked getting letters like these, and she misses them. Last year, four operations were performed in fairly rapid succession on her eyes, and although she has entirely recovered from them and sees well with the aid of special glasses, she has had to give up the strenuous routine of daily broadcasting for a while. When she was in the hospital, Walter Winchell broadcast the news of her illness one Sunday night. Within an hour, Mrs. Post had received 100 telegrams and a roomful of flowers from people who had heard Winchell—mostly strangers to her. Her acknowledgment to Mr. Winchell startled him, for he had never got around to thinking of Emily Post as a reader familiar with his column and the phrases he uses in it. She sent him an orchid.

Letters from the readers of Mrs. Post's own newspaper column are less intimate and more urgent than those she used to get from her radio fans, and there are more of them. Some 26,000 letters a year, addressed to Emily Post, come in to the syndicate in New York, in addition to the letters received by individual newspapers in other cities. One year, a Detroit paper got 33,000 letters addressed to her column—people in Detroit, it seems, are great hands at writing letters to the papers. Most of the correspondents are women, and about half of them want to know details of etiquette for weddings. Letters from affianced brides almost invariably begin, "Dear Mrs. Post, I plan to be married," and there is a certain blunt quality to this phrase that faintly depresses Mrs. Post; she wishes sometimes that the girls would find a softer, a tenderer way of referring to the holy event. Occasionally the plans stated in full by these dewy brides-to-be include strange whimsies. "My intended has a lovely voice," wrote one. "Would it be all right for him to sing at our wedding, and if so, when and what?" Another woman—not a bride, this time, but a troubled hostess—wrote that she had recently given a formal dinner at which everything had gone well until a cake was passed and served first to the guest of honor, an old lady whose eyesight was poor; she took a slice and was tranquilly eating it, when "to our horror," the hostess wrote, "we saw that it was simply crawling with ants. She had already eaten quite a lot, and we didn't like to say anything. Mrs. Post, what would you have done in a situation like this?" Mrs. Post replied coldly, "I would have seen to it, in the first place, that the servants in my kitchen had better eyesight."

Putting the Fork in Its Place

Almost all the letters from her readers are addressed to "Mrs. Emily Post," which is incorrect. Her name on the fly-leaf of *Etiquette* is followed by "Mrs. Price Post" in parentheses, but she realizes that to those readers of her column who haven't bought the book, she is known by no other name than Emily Post. It still gives her a

slight turn, however, to see "Mrs. Emily Post" on an envelope. She is not fussy about small matters of behavior, beyond the occasional mild recoil in the face of bad manners that is instinctive to any woman of taste, and she likes to think, and to impress upon her readers, that "etiquette" is a question of common sense and consideration rather than a study of how to speak to a visiting prince or eat an ear of corn on the cob. "No rule of etiquette is of less importance," she has written patiently, time and time again, "than which fork we use." And once, when she got fifteen letters in one day, asking which fork the writers should use when confronted with several, she answered all fifteen grimly in four words: "Oh, use any one."

The Great American Rudeness

Her only fierce campaign connected with table manners is against the practice of serving the hostess first, which Mrs. Post has branded as the Great American Rudeness. There is no excuse for it, she says, unless the food is apt to have been poisoned—which is unlikely in a well-ordered house—or unless the guests are such louts that they don't know how to serve themselves—in which case it would be impolite, anyway, for the hostess to call attention to it by showing them how. Mrs. Post's followers, docile in other respects, definitely decline to string along with her on this question. American hostesses are accustomed to being served first, and servants in America are used to serving them first; they get stumble-footed and sullen if they are asked to begin with the guest of honor and come around to the hostess last, and some of them have been known to quit rather than give in to such a notion.

In connection with this determination of servants to attend to the lady of the house before taking any notice of her guests, Mrs. Post brings to light a fairly deep psychological point. She says that investigation has proved it to be based on the fact that it is generally the lady of the house who hands out the wages.

Whatever the reason, Mrs. Post's staunch fight against the Great American Rudeness has been a losing battle for fifteen years.

Questions that cannot be answered by mailing correspondents one of the hundreds of "slips," or pamphlets, written by Mrs. Post on Wedding Details, Small Afternoon Teas, Cards and Visits, and other departments of etiquette, are sent by messenger from the syndicate and mailed from out-of-town papers to Mrs. Post's apartment in New York. Most of these letters, with her answers, go into her daily column, but she dictates about forty personal replies a day, as well, to people who enclose stamped envelopes with the request that their dilemmas be kept out of the newspapers. Their problems are seldom sensational, but the writers are shy. Mrs. Post's secretary, Miss Kent, works in a small morning room, charming with chintz and sunlight; Miss Kent's name is really Miss Keppner, but, feeling that Keppner was not, perhaps, just the right name for Emily Post's secretary, Mrs. Post changed it to Kent, and Miss Keppner doesn't mind. The business of etiquette extends down to the ground floor of the apartment house where, in an office off the entrance hall, two dark, pretty girls whom Mrs. Post gaily addresses as "darlings" take care of the overflow. Shelves around the office walls hold piles of "slips," each

pile labeled with a square of white paper thumb-tacked to the shelf and lettered in black initials such as "W. S." or "Z. E."; and Mrs. Post, wandering into the office, is endlessly taken aback by this clear-cut evidence of efficiency. "Darlings, what is 'W. S.'?" she will say, and the girls reply, "'Widows' Signatures," Mrs. Post." (Here, the ill-advised Mrs. Mary Jones crops up again.) Or, "What is 'Z. E.'?" Mrs. Post wants to know, and the darlings look shocked. "Why, Mrs. Post," they murmur, "you remember 'Zigzag Eating'?" (Zigzag Eating is the practice—condemned in the Post litany—of shifting the fork from the left hand to the right before raising it to the mouth.)

Mrs. Post's apartment is in a building at the corner of Madison Avenue and 79th Street, leased twelve years ago under a co-operative arrangement by herself and seventeen of her friends who were united by the common complaint that nowhere in New York could they find a medium-sized apartment with big closets, wide windows and a servants' dining room. Once the lease was signed, Mrs. Post and her son, Bruce, who was beginning to be a successful architect, were assigned to remodel the building, and they went happily to work tearing down walls, installing great windows, putting in closets as big as rooms. Mrs. Post's own apartment is cheerful, comfortable and feminine, and it is run without any great formality. Sometimes a parlor-maid opens the door for a visitor; sometimes, if she is busy in another room, the door is left open and people who want to see Mrs. Post come up in the elevator—without being announced a good deal of the time—and simply walk in.

West Meets East

She makes no secret of her address or telephone number, both of which are listed in the Manhattan telephone directory, and she will see almost anybody at almost any time. It may be a boy from Dartmouth who has stated passionately on the telephone that he will lose his job on the college paper unless he can get an interview with Mrs. Post on the question of whether girls ought to wear shorts—or it may be someone with an even more personal problem.

One man, a hearty fellow from the West, brought her a letter of introduction from an acquaintance and laid his trouble before her in a shaken voice. This was his first trip to New York, he said, and, on account of his business connections in the West, he had been invited to a dinner to be given the following night at a great Fifth Avenue house. His hosts were people of staggering social importance. He had to go to the dinner, he wanted to go, but he was terrified for fear he wouldn't know how to behave.

"My dear man, stop worrying," Mrs. Post advised him. "Just be natural."

"Do you really mean that?" he asked eagerly.

"I certainly do," she said.

Two days later Mrs. Post heard, from some other people who had been at the party, that her Westerner had taken the advice so joyfully to heart that he had greeted ancient and distinguished gentlemen throughout the evening by slapping them on the back and shouting "Hello, old pops!" and that he had, more than once, left bruises on the arms of delicately nurtured women in an unaffected effort to

be chummy. "In the end, I believe, he was unobtrusively thrown out on his ear," Mrs. Post says reminiscently, when she tells about this.

In 1927 Mrs. Post's younger son, Bruce Post, died. From that time until last year, when she was obliged to follow a little less arduous routine, she worked with a furious concentration, taking on whatever jobs came along, until they often occupied sixteen hours out of twenty-four. Because of her knowledge and love of architecture and design, and because Bruce had been an architect, she somehow found her greatest comfort in fiercely remodeling old farmhouses, or even shacks, into charming country houses. In the last ten years she has designed and decorated twenty-three houses for friends, who are asked to pay her no fee, or for strangers, who pay her plenty, especially if she has to travel to whatever part of the country they live in, in order to do the job. People who want their houses designed by Emily Post are seldom daunted by the question of money, and sometimes they contentedly pay her just for staying in New York and giving them long-distance advice.

One man, who was settling down in Memphis, Tennessee, had the plans for his house drawn up by a local architect, but refused to accept them until the architect had brought them to New York and submitted them to Emily Post. The architect was pretty sore about the whole thing, but he came to New York just the same and had such a pleasant time with Mrs. Post that he swept doorways, mantels and staircases around into the position and form that she suggested in a kind of dizzy fascination, and all without a whimper. Mrs. Post has a sure-fire method of talking to people. She tells them what she thinks and what she wants, quickly, in a level voice; and then, before even the most embattled antagonist has time to argue with her, she says "You see, don't you?" leaning forward a little and speaking in a tone so suddenly warm and winning that there is no possible answer except "Yes, Mrs. Post."

Architectural Give-and-Take

She often gives in easily, however, to whatever notions her clients have about their houses, and she is a notoriously peaceful architect, especially when dealing with fretful chatelaines. "But I want the side door, not the front door, to give onto the garden," some woman will complain, bristling in preparation for a long argument about it. "All right," says Mrs. Post, "we'll have the side door facing on the garden," and with a stroke of her pencil on the plan, she shifts the side door around to where the client wants it. She is genuinely amenable about such things, but frequently her instant submission frightens people more than the iciest resistance on her part could do. They think that she is just being gracious, and it worries them.

In spite of the restrictions put upon it in the past year, Mrs. Post's daily routine continues to be a considerable whirl. She wakes up regularly at half past five in the morning and has her breakfast—coffee in a percolator which she plugs into an electric-light socket in the early dawn, and a slice of zwieback—from a tray arranged beside her bed the night before. After breakfast she works, lying in bed in a flurry of pencils, paper and galley proofs, until half past seven, when her servants get up. She writes fluently, and has no

difficulty in thinking of the right word; and her passion for writing so often overflows after she has finished her daily stint that she always carries a fountain pen and notepaper with her during the day, and dashes off notes to friends and acquaintances, generally three or four pages long, while she is riding from one place to another in a taxi. When she is writing for publication, however, she is seldom satisfied with the first frenzied burst of prose that occurs to her, and she revises so endlessly that once, after she had rewritten the first chapter of *Etiquette* thirty-eight times for a new edition, her publishers waggishly sent her a slate and a sponge for Christmas, with a card saying, "Many happy revisions."

The Day of a Social Arbiter

By eight o'clock the Post household is wide awake, secretaries begin running in and out, and the telephone starts ringing. Hilda, the dour and devoted woman who has been Mrs. Post's housekeeper and personal maid for thirty-five years, sets out on her daily, faintly suspicious and apparently never-ending tour of the apartment. Hilda is not, in appearance or manner, the perfect maid. "I suppose you'll be wanting me to go to the movies again tonight?" she is apt to say, pausing somberly in the doorway of her employer's room. This remark refers to Hilda's long losing fight against the motion pictures. She hates them, but Mrs. Post likes to go occasionally, and she would rather have Hilda go with her than anybody else. Like most people who are resigned to what life has brought them, Hilda is a fine restful companion. Mrs. Post's cook has been with her almost as long as Hilda, but the parlormaid waitress, who came to work only five years ago, is referred to dryly by the other two as the "new" girl.

Mrs. Post spends the morning dictating letters and her column—since the trouble with her eyes she has been forbidden to type it herself, as she used to do—and generally lunches at home, sometimes with her son, Ned. Except for the sound advice which he regularly gives her about the chapters in the book of *Etiquette* dealing with correct clothes for gentlemen, Ned is an almost completely silent young man, tall, dark and graceful. His mother speaks of him as her "beautiful black swan." Frequently she invites business associates for lunch—burly, cigar-smoking live wires who have built Emily Post's career in radio, books or newspapers, and who are almost always startled into a fawnlike timidity by the idea of lunching with her.

One man who had helped syndicate her column in newspapers all over the country was so alarmed at the thought of lunching for the first time in her apartment that he stopped at a bar on the way, and had a couple of old-fashioneds to give him poise. To his surprise, he found a shaker half full of Martinis waiting for him when he arrived and, feeling poised as anything by that time, he drank three. It was in a pleasant haze that he finally sat down at the luncheon table. The table

was highly polished and set with little doilies, but he just stared at it, thinking that he was as good as it was any day, until the nightmare moment came when he cut into an English mutton chop on his plate, saw the plate skid under his knife and fork, and the chop leap into the air and come to rest, greasily and finally, on the edge of the table. Still in his nightmare he rescued it, put it back on his plate and said, "Good God, Mrs. Post, you wrote the book! What do I do now?"

Mrs. Post looked at him thoughtfully over her own fork. "I think you did the best thing," she said. "Just pick it up and begin all over again."

When people are shy with her, Mrs. Post gets, inwardly, just as nervous as they are. But when any vast national question of taste is at stake, her own poise can best be described as immeasurable. A few years ago, when the battle concerning precedence between Alice Roosevelt Longworth and Dolly Gann put Washington into a turmoil, reporters clamored at Mrs. Post's door for a statement for their papers. She gave them a statement of several thousand words, in favor of Alice Longworth, and later sent eight copies of it to diplomats of her acquaintance, and four to the Department of State in Washington. She never got any official reply, but, unofficially, a rather tired letter came from Washington. "If Mrs. Post will settle the precedence question," the letter said, "the State Department will be most grateful."

Every spring, in the face of possible contracts that would keep her in town, of thousands of potential dollars waiting to be earned, Mrs. Post declines all work except her daily column and sets out, with Hilda and the rest of her staff, for her house at Edgartown, Massachusetts. She stays there until autumn, spending most of her time with her fifteen-year-old grandson, Billy, the son of Ned Post and his former wife, Barbara Loew Post. Some of Billy's activities are pretty brisk for her, but she stops at nothing where he is concerned, and the other summer people have learned not to be startled by the sight of Mrs. Post whizzing around the bay like a water bug in Billy's outboard motorboat, obviously terrified, but game.

Star-Spangled Manners

Her curious prestige follows her to Edgartown. Whenever the young people in the colony organize a scavenger party—that daft pursuit in which the players are sent off in all directions with orders to bring back unlikely and difficult loot—Mrs. Post can hear them pounding down the road to her door with urgent pleas for her autograph, a sheet of her notepaper, or maybe as intimate a token as a pair of her bedroom slippers. She gives them whatever they want with the graciousness that carefully marks all of her dealings with her public. Sometimes she wishes, a little plaintively, that she were celebrated as an architect and designer of houses rather than as an etiquette expert, but she has no quarrel with the kind of fame the years have brought her. When she thinks of etiquette in its larger aspects, she becomes reverent. She says, sincerely and often, that the future of America is bright with promise; for no harm, no widening flame of revolution, according to Emily Post, can come to a land where millions of people are forever cozily intent upon the right fork to use for an avocado, and how to remove grape seeds inconspicuously from the mouth.

