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MARIE ANTOINETTE PARK, Editor

Volume 3

August, 1945

Number 5

FEATURING

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LILLIAN MEISEL, Managing Editor

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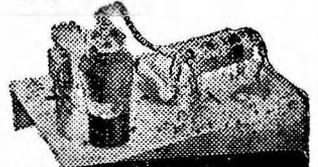


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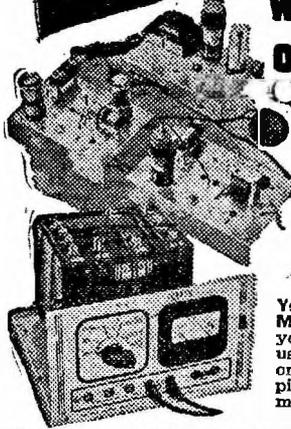
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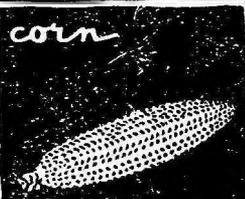
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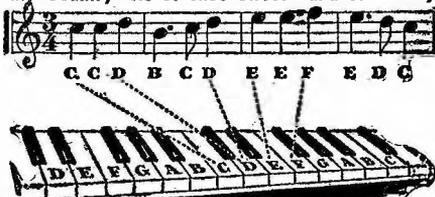
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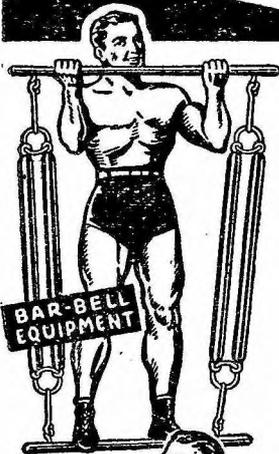
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The TYPE for TANYA

By VINA LAWRENCE

Wistful novelette,
about a young
girl and very, very
young love - -

THE DAYLIGHT was fading from the big north skylight of the studio. The pale blue San Francisco sky was turning gray outside. Nic dropped his paint brush and rubbed his black beard thoughtfully. Tanya relaxed on the chair in the center of the model's stand and let the black lace shawl fall from her long golden hair. . . Nic had finished painting for the day.





*"Nonsense,"
Nic cried, "She's
a baby. I'll
have no talk
of love!"*

"Tanya," Nic said, "tonight we must go out and find a sailor—a sailor who is just the type for you. For the magazine cover I am to paint."

Tanya opened violet-blue eyes and her lovely childish face grew bright with eagerness. She pushed back the heavy golden hair and stood up, her young figure round and young, lovely with being just seventeen. She looked at her father, blinking her violet eyes hard.

"A sailor!" Tanya cried. "Are you going to paint me and a sailor together? A young sailor?"

"That is the order for the cover I am to paint," Nic said, gathering up his paint brushes and beginning to clean them. "A handsome young sailor and a pretty girl in love."

"A handsome young sailor. . ." Tanya half whispered. Nic had never painted her with a man before. Only this past year had he painted her as a grown girl. Always he had painted her as a child, although she had been his favorite model since she was a little girl.

"Certainly a handsome sailor," Nic said. "And he must be just the right type. With your golden hair and your violet eyes and your bright coloring, we have to be careful to have just the right type of man. A very dark man would be too obvious a contrast, would cheapen the painting. A blond man would never do—two blonds kill each other. Red hair would dull your color. I don't know just what type, yet, but I must look around. That's why I'm going to take you with me. We shall go along the taverns where the sailors hang out and look for him together. If I have you right there to compare with the men, I'll save time and money."

"I am to go with you to the taverns—!" Tanya gasped, happily.

While Nic cleaned his brushes, she tripped over to the window, the high, wide skylight window. It looked down the three stories to the ragged old garden below. It looked down the steep hill, Telegraph Hill, upon all San Francisco.

It was a narrow old house, one of the ancient stone houses in the old Artist's Quarter. Nicolas Orloff was a Russian artist. He had thick black hair and a thick black beard and soft violet-blue eyes. He had married a little French blond named Maria in Paris twenty years before, and they had come together to San Francisco and had bought this house, and here Nic had painted. Here Tanya, with her mother's blonde hair and her father's violet eyes, had been born and had lived all her life.

IT HAD been a nice life. The lovely ragged, walled garden had been her playroom. The hollyhocks and bleeding hearts and climbing yellow roses, the buttercups and violets in spring, the asters in fall—they had been her friends. Because she had never had many friends her own age. Maria had been a French governess and so she and Nic had taught Tanya at home, and Nic had painted Tanya again and again.

Nic and Maria had artist friends who came to the big drawing room on the second floor, for parties. And Nic and Maria had taken her to many ballets and concerts and museums. And Tanya loved being a model for Nic. She loved watching Nic paint other models, for he often went off around town and hunted up the perfect model for some picture—an old flower woman, a little boy with just the right freckled nose, a waterfront bum, a chorus girl—

Oh, it was nothing unusual for Nic to go out searching for models but he had never taken Tanya with him before. A man who was the right type for Tanya!

"Perhaps," Tanya said, looking down on the early lights coming to life in the big city, "perhaps he will fall in love with me. . .this handsome sailor."

"Nonsense!" Nic roared. "You are a baby!"

"I am old enough to have boy friends. If I knew any," Tanya said. Just then Maria called up the stairs to them. "Come to tea, Nic!"

Tea, in the faded pink and gray of the old drawing room, was always ready at exactly the moment Nic finished cleaning his brushes, for Maria was the perfect wife. Strong black Russian tea in dainty French cups. Perfumed lump sugar. Cinnamon candies. French pastries. Jam and bread for Tanya—because they still thought she was a baby.

"Tea, infant!" Nic called now over his shoulder.

Tanya pouted. "You and Maria don't worry about me being an old maid!" she said. "How would you feel if I should be an old maid?"

"Excellent!" Nic cried, pinching her cheek. "I have never painted a really authentic old maid. It would be very fine to paint one."

"All you think about is painting!" Tanya cried but she laughed and held his hand as she went down the stairs.

She loved Nic, but it was true that all of her life, she had never known him to really think of anything except his painting. Always every little detail of the house and the garden and the little world they lived in revolved around Nic and what he was painting. . . .

Maria thought this was right. Nic thought it was right. But Tanya was beginning to wonder if all of her life would be like this. For several years now she had wanted to go away to school, so she could meet people. But always Nic said he needed her for just a few more poses. Always it was maybe next year. . . .maybe. . . .

Tanya had tears in her eyes as she went down to the tea table that was drawn before the crackling fire at the hearth. And her chin was lifted a little. Well, she didn't mean to be an old maid! And, at least, there was going to be a handsome sailor in her life—and soon.

"Maria," she said, for she called both her mother and father by their names, "Maria, Nic is taking me to find a handsome man who is my type. I'll get to go to taverns. I've never been to taverns—or anything like that!"

"Immediately after dinner, we shall

go," Nic said. "So put on a warm coat. It is foggy near the harbors."

Maria's dark eyes were anxious. "Should you take her around sailors?" she asked. "I mean—well—she is growing up."

"Nonsense!" Nic cried. "She's a baby. I'll have no talk of love!"

AS IF to prove his point, he poured some hot water and some milk, half and half in a cup, sugared it, to make cambric tea. He gave this to Tanya, along with a well jellied piece of bread.

"She's a baby!" he insisted, as he took his own black tea from Maria's hand. "That is why I don't want her going to school and becoming a what-you-call-it? A jitterbug! Why, in no time she would be putting lipstick all over her mouth and learning jazz songs and all the things you hear of the modern girls doing! No! My little Tanya has been brought up the way we want her to be and we will keep her that way!"

Maria looked at Tanya's pouting face uneasily. "When you are grown up, dear, then you can do as you like. It is just that Nic loves you so much, you see."

Tanya said nothing. It was better to say nothing, she knew. Otherwise Nic might change his mind about taking her to the taverns tonight. She ate her jelly sandwich and drank her cambric tea thoughtfully. Her eyes were beginning to shine again. Tonight they were going to hunt for a young, handsome sailor, and even if he didn't fall in love with Tanya, maybe he would dance with her. . . .

Tanya danced beautifully. Maria had taught her that, too. And she often danced with Nic or some of his friends when a few couples were in for the evening but she had never danced with a boy. She had never been to a dance nor to a nightclub. She longed, secretly, to try to jitterbug.

After dinner that evening, she rushed to her room to get ready to go to the taverns with Nic. Maria had told her to wear her warm suit, a

little navy blue woolen suit, and the heavy navy blue boy's coat that matched, and her blue beret. She dressed quickly, looking anxiously in the mirror. Her long golden hair was braided in twin pigtales and tied with little plaid ribbons. Her lovely face was innocent of make-up—her violet eyes and pale pink lips giving a flower-like charm to the sweetness of her features.

She looked warm and snug in the blue outfit—like a well-dressed school girl, she decided. She longed for a glamorous dress and lipstick. Even if they found the perfect sailor, he probably would have a dozen girls who were much more interesting than Tanya!

But her spirits rose again as she and Nic went into the first tavern down near the harbor. It was a gay, sawdusty nightclub. The bar was crowded with sailors, and in the back room there was a three piece colored orchestra making with the hottest swing music in town. At the little tables around the dance space were more sailors, some alone or in groups, others with their girl friends. A half dozen couples were dancing and waiters were passing around with trays of beers and sandwiches.

The air was blue with smoke and the noise was terrific, but Tanya was thrilled about everything she saw. Especially the sailors. They were mostly young and a lot of them were nice looking and some of them grinned at Tanya or winked at her. She was delighted.

Nic held her arm tightly and moved among the sailors, looking at them with his keen artist's eyes. When Nic was looking for a model, he didn't think about anything else. He was oblivious to the noise and the stares, alike.

"I don't see one who looks right," Nic sighed, after they had been in four or five nightspots. "Unless I can find just what I'm looking for, I might as well hire one of the professional models. But the professional models never are just right, either. I want a real sailor—one who is just

the type for my little Tanya—Wait! Look there—!"

THEY HAD just entered a new spot. It was a Gypsy Club. There was a dim red fire burning under a great black pot in the giant fireplace, moss hung from low dark rafters on the ceiling, a gypsy girl was dancing among the tables. The gypsy music, sad and wise and very wistful, throbbed in the air.

But Nic had not yet noticed any of this. He was staring at a lonely young sailor at the table near the door. He was a young giant, bronzed and broad, but his face was appealingly boyish with questioning hazel eyes and a shock of sun burnt golden brown hair. He wore his sailor suit with a bit of a swagger that was apparent even as he sat over his lonely beer.

"Hello!" Nic said softly to himself. "This is something like it!"

And before Tanya could get her breath Nic led her over to the sailor and pushed her close to him, then stood off, his eyes narrowed, and looked at the two of them together.

"Good!" Nic said. "Very good. His coloring is subtle enough not to dull yours, yet soft enough not to give a sharp contrast. Very good. . . ." He looked at the startled sailor and added, "Nice shaped head. Good facial contours. Fine character there. . . . Just the thing. . . ."

Nic was speaking dreamily, happily, as if the sailor were a sunset he had just discovered. Tanya was going all blushes as the sailor rose to his feet—to six feet, three, to be exact. He was looking from Tanya to Nic and blinking.

"Hey. . . what gives?" he asked.

Nic had gone off into a narrow eyed dream in which he was obviously already seeing the finished picture rather than the boy and girl before him.

"Oh, my father in an artist," Tanya explained hurriedly. "He wants to paint you. Or rather, he wants to paint us. You and me together."

"That will be cozy," the sailor said

and grinned. "My name is Bill. Bill Harrington. I've got a furlough and I'll be in town about another week. When is all this painting going to take place?"

Nic had come to himself and was shaking hands heartily with Bill by now and introducing himself and Tanya, explaining about the magazine cover he had been asked to paint and so on.

"I always go around town and look up my models until I find just the right person," Nic said. "I brought Tanya along tonight because it was necessary to have someone with coloring that compliments hers. You seem about right. Appealing but rugged. All that. I'll pay you the regular model rates. I'll need you for about five hours a day, during the best light, for the rest of the week, at least as long as you have. . . How about it?"

"Well. . ." Bill said and he was still looking at Tanya. "Why not? I was pretty lonesome here. My home is in New England and I didn't have time to go home and come back, so I'm just hanging around this town during my week's leave. I don't mind modeling, I guess. . ."

"Sit down and have a beer with us," Nic said, and the three of them sat down at the table while Nic called to the waitress, a wild haired little girl in gypsy costume.

Bill and Tanya looked frankly and curiously at each other and Nic, for the first time, began to look about the place. And suddenly Nic's eyes began to narrow, a sure sign that he was thinking of a new picture. He began to rub his thick black beard and hum the gypsy music, then he took his sketch pad from his coat pocket and began to draw the gypsy violinist beside the fireplace.

"Great atmosphere," Nic muttered. "Wonderful characters. I have to get some of this. . . You kids have a sandwich. . . go ahead. . ."

AND SO, that quickly, Nic buried himself in some sketches of the place, forgetting Tanya and all the

rest of the world for the moment as he always forgot everything and everybody when he began to draw or paint.

Tanya recognized Nic's mood. For a little while he wouldn't know nor care what she was doing. Now was her chance to dance with Bill.

"We could dance, if you like," she said softly to Bill, nodding toward the big dim room that opened off the cafe. The room was filled with dancers, moving slowly and dreamily to the wailing music.

"Sure," Bill said.

Nic just nodded absently as they asked his permission, and Tanya slipped out of her heavy coat, took off her beret, shook her twin braids loose on her shoulders. She was curved and blond and shiney eyed and her cheeks were flushed deep pink, and Bill took her in his arms with a sort of reverent awe.

"Gee," he whispered as they began to dance, "you are a sweet little chick. Gosh, *violet* eyes. . ."

"Do you mind?"

"*Mind?*"

"I heard one of Maria's friends say that I was on the spun-sugar side. I always wish I could be worldly and mysterious," Tanya confided, and then he held her closer and they both giggled.

"You are about as worldly as—as a new kitten," he said.

"Do you like—kittens?" she asked.

"I go nuts over kittens."

The gypsy music got softer, the lights lower. Peeping over Bill's shoulder, by standing on tiptoe, Tanya saw that Nic was sketching away like mad. She relaxed and let her cheek touch the rough wool blouse just over Bill's heart.

It was during the third dance, while they were over in a dim corner that she felt Bill's lips touch her hair. It was during the fourth dance that Bill told her all about New England and about the farm he had waiting there.

About the snowdrifts in winter and the apple blossoms in spring. About the making of apple cider and

the making of maple syrup. About the old stone wall along the hillside back of the garden—the wall he had made himself. About his mother's baked beans and gingerbread. And how the moonlight, like a misty chiffon veil, fell across the big winged farmhouse on summer nights.

"I never knew about farms," Tanya said, her eyes shining as he told of the hayloft and the sleigh bells and the wild flowers and the great silo.

"You'd be swell on a farm," he said. "You'd fit, like wild flowers."

And then the music stopped and they were standing in one corner and for a moment they just stood there, his arms still about her, his eyes looking down at her. His voice was husky.

"I've got a dream boat I've been building for someone like you," he said. "Would you like to live on it?"

"What kind of dreams?"

"Only extra special kinds. The rosiest possible. Gilt edged. With wings," he said.

"I think I'd like to come live on your dream boat," she said.

"From now on," he promised, "I'll never dream without you."

"Maybe," she said and her eyes were shining, "maybe I'll put you in my dreams too. If you want me to..."

"I do swell in dreams," he said. "Lots of girls prefer me to Alan Ladd."

He looked into her eyes then so long and his fingers tightened on hers so close that she felt her face growing pink, and she remembered Nic.

"We'd better go back to our sandwich that Nic ordered for us—" she said breathlessly.

SHE led her back into the other room to the table where they had left Nic. But Nic was not there. The sandwiches were waiting and the waiter was hovering over them, but Nic was across the room standing by the windows where he could get a better view of the gypsy orchestra which he was sketching now. They

were all dark, exciting looking men, dressed in gypsy costumes and looking like real gypsies.

"Nic has forgotten everything," Tanya explained, sitting down before her sandwich. "He sketches these things that he finds and paints them later from the sketches. I guess he thinks this place has a lot of atmosphere."

"It is very colorful," Bill said. "It used to be an old stable and there is a courtyard in the back with the old watering trough and stuff. Very exotic by moonlight. They serve dinner out there in the summer time. I've been to San Francisco several times when my ship puts in. I've been in this place in the summer time. Nic should get some sketches of that courtyard in the moonlight. It is like a bit of old Spain."

"Wonderful. Let's go look at it when we finish our sandwiches," Tanya said.

"Tell me about you," he ordered, as they ate. "I want to know everything about you. What you've been doing all your life. Where you got those violet eyes. If you are in love..."

He leaned toward her a little as he said that and his eyes were questioning. Her eyes were happy. She pushed back her golden hair and looked at him.

"You—you really like me?" she asked, like a child. "You don't prefer girls who—who have lipstick and sleek clothes and—stuff—"

"I really like you," he said earnestly. "I think you are so swell that I—I feel like wrapping you up in tissue paper and sort of keeping you until—well, until after the War when I'd take you to my farm and unwrap you and sort of put you in the proper setting."

"What would be the proper setting?" she asked.

"Oh, spring," he said. "Always spring for you, because you look like April. Spring with the sky very blue and the apple blossoms in full bloom, and you swinging from the old swing we have in the lower orchard near the

stone wall. You swinging, with your yellow hair flying, and me—me pushing the swing. That would be the proper setting—”

“That would be so wonderful,” she whispered. “That will be my favorite dream from now on.”

And so they fell in love. It was so easy. Maybe it is always easy for a lovely little blond, just seventeen, and a handsome young sailor to fall in love. Maybe it is easier when there is gypsy music and pale pink lights and time is short—and when they have both been lonely for love.

Anyway Tanya and Bill fell in love. Like that. And soon they were dancing again, close and breathless, eyes looking deep into shining eyes. Glowing hazel eyes, filled with dreams. Shining violet eyes, filled with stars.

Another hour. Another dance—and another. And Nic was still sketching madly, lost to the world, while he got just the expression of the waiters and the dancers and the musicians. . . . An hour while Tanya told Bill all about her life, to date. And Bill told Tanya about his dreams, to date. An hour in which they grew to know each other so well that talk had become sweet nothings.

“H’m-m-m, hair like corn silk,” he whispered, his cheek touching her hair.

“I like your voice,” she answered. “Deep and—sort of exciting.”

“You’re exciting. . . .”

“You, too.”

“Sweet. . . .”

“Oh, I feel lovely when you say that. . . .!”

AND THEN, of course, he took her out the back French windows, into the empty courtyard that lay in a silver haze of foggy moonlight, empty and magic in the early summer night. And the moon poured down around them and he forgot to point out the old world charm of the cobblestones and the water through and the ancient courtyard lanterns. And she forgot to look at them. They just stood in the flowing silver light

and purple shadows, looking at each other.

“Your hair is like a cloud about your face. . .” he said.

And then, of course, he kissed her.

He held her very gently and his lips touched first her cheek and moved slowly, softly, to her lips. She clung to him and her lips yielded to his. For a moment their shadows blended into one with the purple and silver haze in the courtyard. For a moment they were no longer Tanya, the artist’s daughter, and Bill, the sailor on furlough. For a moment they were just Boy and Girl. A moment lost in space, perfect in bliss, dark with magic promise, while his lips clung to her lips.

She was trembling when his lips left hers but he held her, yet, in his arms, and his lips rested on her hair. There was no need to speak. They *knew*. They both knew that this was not just a stolen kiss, not just a foolish moment to be forgotten when the sun was shining again. They held each other close and were silent in the wonder of knowing that this was only the beginning. . . .

“Tanya!” It was Nic’s voice, roaring at them from the French windows.

They sprang apart, automatically, returning to themselves, becoming Tanya and Bill, again. Tanya and Bill who had stolen a kiss when Nic’s back was turned. Tanya and Bill who must be ashamed, who must apologize for their glimpse of heaven. . . .

Nic was coming toward them with long strides. Tanya thought, *If he could only understand. . . .*

“Oh, Nic, you see—” Tanya began, and Bill spoke at the same time, with a husky note in his voice.

“It was like this, sir—” Bill began.

But Nic stopped them both. Nic reached them and caught Tanya by the arm, his hand closing tightly over her elbow. Even in the dim light, Tanya could tell that Nic was crimson with fury.

“What do you mean coming out into this courtyard with that sailor?”

Nic demanded, giving Tanya a little shake. Then he turned on Bill and roared: "How dare you take advantage of my daughter the moment I look away! I'll not hire you for a model, if I never paint another picture! Come, Tanya, I'm taking you home!"

"Nic—Nic—!" she pleaded, weeping, but Nic was racing, half dragging Tanya behind him, across the courtyard, through the crowded dance room, while Bill was lost in the crowd in a moment, and Tanya's eyes were blinded by tears so that she couldn't even see to wave goodby to him.

They were out of the club, into a taxi, on their way home, before Nic spoke again. He was in such a rage that he was crumbling his sketch pad absently between his hands.

"I had no idea that I had been drawing for three hours!" he cried. "It is my fault. You are too young to have any sense! I turned you over to that crazy sailor and left you in that romantic atmosphere—"

"He's not just a crazy sailor! He's wonderful! I love him!"

"Tanya—!" and Nic's voice was shocked and anxious.

AFTER they got home to Maria and the bright fire of the drawing room, there was an awful scene. Tanya, weeping and heartbroken, tried to explain to them how wonderful Bill was, how fine and good and sweet, how well she knew him, how she must, must, *must* see him again. While Maria, weeping a littler herself, tried to calm them both, Nic walked the room and roared, his face white.

"You are right, Maria," Nic cried. "You have been right all the time. We should have sent her to a girls' school years ago. I was wrong to think that I knew how to bring up a girl. She needs discipline and training and she needs to learn the ways of the girls her age. If she had been sent to school, she would not be falling for the first boy she sees! We'll pack her off to school this next term.

I'll write tomorrow and get the school catalogues!"

"Wonderful," Maria cried, trying to comfort Tanya. "You see, Tanya, now you'll get to go to school, just as you have always wanted to! Now, just forget all about that sailor!"

"I'll never forget Bill! Never! I don't want to go to school, now!" Tanya cried. "Oh, if I had only given him our address! He knows my full name but not the address. And we have no phone—!"

Nic couldn't bear being interrupted by a phone and so there was none in the house, so Bill couldn't find them by looking in the phone directory. And Nic didn't belong to any clubs, so there was no listed names in town in which their address could be found. Bill didn't even know that they lived on Telegraph Hill. Bill could never find them, no matter how hard he tried!

"And I don't know where *he* is stopping," Tanya wailed. "I don't even know the name of his ship! Oh, the only chance of seeing him again is to go back to the Gypsy Club. He may come there again. . . ."

"You aren't going to see him again," Nic said grimly. "You are going to forget him. I'll ship you off to school the moment I can get you entered. In the meanwhile, I'll keep a sharp eye on you. Maria, don't let her out of this house alone! She is hysterical and can't be trusted!"

"I hate you!" Tanya screamed, and both Nic and Maria looked cut to the quick, but she didn't care. "All you care about is your painting! You don't want me to have any life of my own. I'm grown and I've met a boy I care for. I tell you I know as much about him as if I'd known him a year. You have no right to forbid me to try to see him again."

Tanya ran to her room and fell across her bed, sobbing. She had both her father's and mother's temperament and she was displaying it. She locked her door and refused to leave her room the next day or the next. Maria brought her trays of

food which she barely tasted. Nic tiptoed up and down the hall in front of her door, abjectly miserable.

FINALLY Nic had an idea.

"Tanya, he called into her room to her, "I suppose I've been too strict with you. You want a little fun. You want to meet boys, that is all. I think the cure for that sailor, will be another sailor. We'll go down to the waterfront again tonight and find another sailor, one who is the right type for the cover painting. Then I'll go ahead with the painting and you can have the sailor to tea every day and dance in the drawing room and—forget this Bill. And also I'll get that cover job finished up. We'll go after dinner, okay?"

Tanya went, one unvoiced hope in her heart. The hope of finding Bill again. And so, of course, since Bill was her Fate, after all, they did find him. In the fourth smoke filled tavern they went into, hunting for the right type for Tanya, there was Bill sitting at a little corner table alone.

"Bill—!" Tanya cried and ran to him with outstretched hands, and Bill caught her hands and looked down at her as she looked up at him.

"Darling!" Bill said. "I've been hoping and hoping you'd come back. I've been down here every night, waiting, going from tavern to tavern—"

"Hey, there—" Nic said and Tanya turned, defiantly, to face Nic.

But the expression on Nic's face had changed entirely. He was staring at them with the narrowed eyes that meant that he was thinking of a painting.

"That's it!" Nic cried and he hit one hand with his double fist, and then began to stroke his beard thoughtfully. "That's just the expression I want for the cover painting! Young love! Warm, young love just awakening! Hold it—!"

"Oh, Nic. . ." Tanya began turning away from Bill for a second.

"Look back at him, up at him, the way you were!" Nic roared, grabbing his sketchbook out of his pocket.

"I've got to get this expression on paper!"

She looked back at Bill and he caught her hands reassuringly, and for a second Nic just wasn't there. Only Bill and Tanya and life just beginning. . . .

"That's it!" Nic cried. "Hold that pose!"

They held the pose and Bill whispered to Tanya:

"We'll hold it—always—"

"Quiet!" Nic cried. "Don't move—!"

Nic was sketching madly, but Bill said aloud, firmly:

"I was asking her to marry me, sir. If you don't object. . ."

Nic's pencil paused. He glared a moment, then his eyes softened. He gave a wistful shrug.

"Well, after all, Maria was only seventeen when I met her. Anyway, what good will it do me to object. It is better that I said yes. So—Yes!"

"Oh, Nic—!" Tanya cried blissfully.

But Nic was sketching again.

"Hold the pose!" Nic pleaded. "I've got to get this right, then you two can run away and get married tonight, if you like. I suppose you will have some beautiful babies and I can paint them as they grow up. . ."

Nic was relenting fast, even smiling now.

Bill went red, but Tanya was used to Nic.

"Don't mind Nic," she whispered.

"I love you," Bill whispered, holding the pose carefully.

"I love you. . ." Tanya whispered back.

"Not so much profile, Tanya, please!" Nic cried. "But keep that look in your eyes!"

"I will keep this look in my eyes," Tanya promised and her eyes, glowing with love and happiness, were on Bill's face. "I'll keep this look—forever."

(THE END)

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By

India Frances Braden

THE NOISE was getting worse by the minute. It sounded like the jumble of a dozen foreign languages. Libby stuffed cotton in her ears as she set up her easel and prepared her oils. But it was no good. She would have to be stone deaf to work against the bedlam coming from upstairs.

There was only one thing to do, Libby decided smudging out her cigarette. Go up and see what the animal was that could produce such sounds and try to quiet it. She took the stairs in angry haste and knocked on the first door to the right.

It was opened presently by a man in tweed trousers and a sport shirt. He was young and

his hair was close-cropped and brown and his eyes were grey and amused. Libby glared at him. But he didn't glare back, he only smiled and looked down on her auburn head from his six feet of hard muscular frame, and waited for her to speak.

"Hello," she said in a small angry voice, "I'm Libby Drake, an artist and I'm trying to paint under you. Those awful noises, can you tell me how you make them?"

The young man smiled, displaying white even teeth, "That is chanting," he explained. "Like this, see."

He displayed his accomplishment and Libby put her fingers in her ears.

"You see I chant in Hebrew, converse in Latin and sing in Russian."

"And what language do you cuss in?" Libby asked.

"Oh, I use good American slang for that. But I've worked out a system, with the language I mean. It is"

"Ruining my painting," Libby finished. "I came to this Arizona mining town to do Desert Sunset. If it's as good as my agent thinks I'm capable of making it, it is going to be shown at the famous Brookhill Art Gallery. And I cannot work with all

this noise going on up here. So if you don't quiet down I shall have to report you to the landlord."

The young man was looking at her with such a gleam in his eye that Libby felt a shiver of uneasiness go over her.

"I am the landlord," he announced

in such a firm voice that it made Libby's shiver turn into real goose pimples, "and if I'm not mistaken," he continued, "you are the young lady who moved into my downstairs apartment without my consent, without anybody's consent apparently. No, don't get out your checkbook. That won't do you any good. I had your number from the first moment I glimpsed you outside my door in that artist smock. Wealthy, spoiled, arrogant, a social artist who thinks she can buy the moon and stars and even our desert sunsets, with that little checkbook."

LIBBY BURNED with white hot anger through and through. But she couldn't say anything because what the young man accused her of

Libby would never forget the way Blink looked at her when he said: "You're just what I thought you were at first and hoped so desperately that you weren't. Goodbye, Libby, I'm sure your painting will be a flaming success!"

Again, Libby was at a loss for words. But there was no use to lie. "Yes, Blink, it's true," she said slowly.



was undeniably true. She had been exhausted from apartment searching. All the houses in this small mining town were up on the side of the mountains and she had to walk up innumerable steps to ask at each door if there was a vacancy. When she came to this house and found the for rent sign in the window, she had tried the door and found it open, gone inside, taken the for rent sign out of the window and torn it up. When the landlord came to settle she had in mind the convenient checkbook which, as the young man accused, had always bought her everything she had ever wanted.

Libby stood before her accuser with a deep flush on her pretty face. She had thought of turning on the charms, making her brown eyes big and innocent and begging off. But somehow she knew that this young man wasn't the kind you could put anything over on.

"I ought to put you out," he said, "but I'll tell you what I'll do." He drew a deep breath and sat on the arm of a chair near his door, "I just got home from overseas, and all the time I was over there I dreamed of one thing. I thought about it night and day, in the damp uncomfortable fox holes it was constantly before me."

"Oh, heavens," Libby thought, "he's going to command me to go out with him and I'll have to go or move into the street."

"It is a super, beautiful, delicious cherry pie. The kind of a cherry pie my mother used to bake. And, Miss Gorgeous, I'll let you stay in the apartment only under one condition. That you bake me this pie I've been dreaming of. I'll expect it at my door by three o'clock this afternoon. And if you don't show up with it out you go."

Libby had never in all her twenty years felt so humiliated. She only fried an egg with painful effort, how on earth could she bake a cherry pie?

The next four hours were the most miserably Libby had ever known. She had to walk five blocks to the grocery after walking up all those

steps to the next door neighbor's to ask for her cherry pie recipe. Then there was the tortuous process of making the crust and the filling and getting the two together to bake.

Finally with a burned hand and the kitchenette in wild disorder, Libby took the pie out of the oven. It would probably be runny and the crust a bit tough, but it looked okay. Beginner's luck no doubt.

Libby put the pie in the window to cool and at the designated hour she knocked timidly on her landlord's door. She had worked off some of her anger in the cooking procedure, but she still had enough left to wish that the pie would choke him.

HE OPENED THE door with a big smile on his sun-tanned face, "My this looks perfect," he said taking the pie out of her hands, "Come in and have a slice with me?"

"No, I couldn't. I must get back to my painting."

"Oh, but you must! You see, that was the other part of my dream, eating cherry pie with a beautiful redhead. It isn't good for my digestion to eat alone, and you know it's up to you to finish up the dream."

Libby reluctantly walked inside his neat kitchen. She really shouldn't stay but the landlord was so persistent, and so attractive, she couldn't help but scold her weaker self.

He told her as he got cold milk out of the ice box and poured two glasses, that his name was Blink Fielding. They sat across from each other at a tiny little breakfast table and the pie wasn't bad at all. Neither was Blink Fielding's conversation. As a small boy he had followed his uncle, a missionary, in and out of foreign countries. That was where he had accumulated such an assortment of languages. But now that he had been wounded in Sicily he had come back to Copper Town to open up his father's mine.

"The government needs copper badly and I'm going to give it to them," he declared.

When they finished the pie he said, "The pie was perfect. You may

stay on in the apartment and I have a jalopy outside. I would like to show you Copper Town. You can't paint a true to life picture of the West without first knowing it's people, their ambitions, their habits and dreams. I'd like to take you to Mount Hathway. From this point you can see the real desert sunset."

Libby didn't really want to go. She was thinking of Preston Crain, her agent who was also her fiance. He wouldn't approve of her jaunt with this care-free, good-looking young man.

And she didn't want to displease Preston. After all, he was going to be her future husband and no more perfect arrangement could have even been thought up. Pres was wealthy as herself and she wouldn't have to lose a moment of her career catering to his whims. He would always play second fiddle to her art. In fact Pres was the only person a girl so fiercely ambitious as Libby, could afford to marry.

But again she yielded to her weaker self and went with Blink Fielding to take in the sights of Copper Town. His jalopy reluctantly took the sharp curves of the mountain roads. First they stopped at a little adobe hut where an old woman came out with her head wrapped in a black mantilla. She seemed overjoyed at the sight of Blink and conversed with him excitedly in Spanish.

Blink turned to Libby. "She says her rheumatism is much better, thanks to my lemon juice and soda remedy, and won't we sit down so she can bring us wine."

The old woman had brought thick tumblers of dark sweet wine before Libby was hardly seated on the crude cain bottom chair. Libby sipped the wine and was frightfully bored. Blink was too keen to be wasting his charms on old people. She wished suddenly that he would say adios to the woman and that they could go to the mountain. It was almost time for the sun to set.

THEY LEFT the adobe hut but didn't go back to the jalopy.

"We'll walk to the mountain from here," Blink suggested. As they walked he impulsively reached out and took her hand. He held it in a firm grip and Libby thrilled to the warmth and strength of his clasp. No, Preston definitely wouldn't approve of this jaunt.

They had walked but a few yards when a small boy of about six ran out of a tiny vine covered cottage to greet Blink. He had on cowboy boots and a little brown spotted fox terrier ran at his heels. "Gee, Blink I'm glad you came by," the little boy cried. "I want you to meet Tiger. Ain't he cute? Pop brought him to me yesterday and he's awful smart. He can almost stand up on his hind legs and shake hands, can't you, Tiger?"

Blink leaned down and admired the dog and seemed to have all kinds of things in common with Tommy Sparks. They talked about guns and going fishing and Libby thought their conversation would never come to an end. Blink must surely lead a dull life, going fishing with infants and talking for hours to old women about their rheumatism.

They reached the top of Mount Hathway just as the dun dipped its brush into the vista of the desert. Like a restless ocean the colors began to roll across the sand, deep blue amid green and amber and pale rose, that melted into crimson just as though it were painted in blood.

It was beautiful. It was real. "If you can get that on your canvas, Libby Drake," Blink said, "the critics will uooo and ahhh."

Libby was drinking it in big gulps, the beauty of the moment and trying desperately to visualize it on her canvas. She wasn't conscious of Blink's nearness until his hands were gently on her shoulders and he was turning her around to face him. Suddenly he was drawing her to him and his arms were tightening about her.

This was a strange moment in Libby's life. She knew she should pull away from Blink but her heart was thudding wildly and an excitement that left her weak ran through

her entire body as Blink's mouth found her own and clung. For an instant that might have been an eternity had the ecstasy been measured, Libby clung to Blink without realizing it.

It was Blink who 'ook his mouth away first. Libby was still in his arms, her eyes half closed and a pulse hurting her throat.

Blink said almost reverently, "Heavens knows, you're sweet! I didn't dream that a little ball of fire could be such an angel in my arms."

Blink didn't say more, he didn't need to. Libby knew that together they had found something as overpowering and consuming as a flaming forest fire. And the thought frightened her. This wasn't good for her work. Preston's mild ardor and platonic kisses never made her forget for an instant that she wanted to be a great artist. Blink's one kiss had made her whole past melt into nothingness for the time he held her close. She mustn't see Blink again, she must foregt him. His way of life bored her anyway. Libby Drake would spend her free afternoons at artists' teas and studio parties.

"We'll come back again tomorrow," Blink suggested, and in his eyes was a promise, "He might as well have added, 'tomorrow I'll kiss you again and make love to you'."

THE NEXT morning Libby was up early and before her easel. She was trying to recall the sunset, every color, every outline but the only thing she could remember clearly was Blink's kiss. It was maddening. The harder she tried to blot it out of her mind the more vivid it became.

She walked the floor, smoked innumerable cigarettes. Finally she worked up enough steam to bury the kiss and begin work. It went good, better than she had dreamed. She worked furiously for several hours and then was interrupted by a knock at her door.

Libby's first thought was to ignore it but it was so persistent it demanded attention. Outside stood the little boy they had talked with yes-

terday, Tommy Sparks. He was crying, big tears running down his thin little face. "I'm looking for Blink," he explained between sobs, "he's gone to the mine but his car's out front. Will you drive me to Dead Man's Gulch, lady?" the little boy implored.

"What do you want to go to Dead Man's Gulch for?" Libby inquired in an irritated voice.

"Well, you see Tiger ran away over the hill to the Gulch. He's new here and he'll get himself killed." Tommy's face was white with fear. His voice was full of panic.

"I'm sure Tiger can take care of himself," Libby explained, "you see I'm terribly busy and I can't take you in the car."

"But, Miss, dogs and kids ain't safe in the Gulch," his voice was a plea.

"I'm sorry, Tommy," Libby was firm, "you just go home and wait patiently. I'm sure your dog will come home presently." Libby closed the door and Tommy's cowboy boots retreated down the steps.

Libby had heard about the Gulch. It was on the other side of a steep hill, a row of saloons and pool halls. In the olden days there had been a saying that every morning at least two dead men, if not more, were found in the Gulch. That's how it got its name. But in this modern era a dog certainly wouldn't be in danger just because he wandered over a hill.

Libby worked furiously all afternoon. She forgot to eat lunch and by late afternoon she had flung herself exhaustedly onto the divan out in the sun room. Here she would watch for Blink. She was entertaining, quite against her better judgment, the idea of fixing up a little supper for them. It would be cozy. Perhaps tonight she could find a stronger defense to use against his charms.

When she saw Blink coming up the walk she ran to the door. Even in work clothes Blink, big and powerful looked more handsome than most men in evening clothes. But before he reached the top of the

steps Libby knew that something was wrong. Blink's face was frighteningly grim, his eyes seemed to measure her with dark scorn.

“WHAT'S WRONG?” Libby asked.

“It's Tommy. He and his dog were run over this afternoon in the Gulch. The dog was killed and Tommy is in the hospital with a broken leg, cuts and bruises and a sprained wrist.”

“Oh, that's—awful!” Libby did not know what to say. She lowered her lashes against her white cheeks.

“When Tommy came out from under the anesthetic I was in his room,” Blink continued, “he told me that he asked you to go get Tiger for him but you wouldn't. Is it true Libby?”

Libby felt her face flushing. Again she was at a loss for words. But there was no use to lie. “Yes, Blink. It's true,” she said slowly.

Libby would never forget the way he looked at her. It hurt clear down to the soles of her sandals. He said, “You're just what I thought you were at first and hoped so desperately that you weren't. Goodby Libby. I'm sure your painting will be a flaming success.”

With these words he walked away from her.

“Blink—,” Libby called his name faintly.

She went inside her apartment and closed the door, and for the first time in her life she was shedding tears that were not from anger. The lump in her throat was big and choking and it frightened Libby.

“Why should it matter that he hates me?” she chided herself. “I have my work—and Preston. That is all the life I want.”

For three days Libby labored over her painting. It was good. She knew it. Many times she had had to brush the tears out of her eyes to go on. Blink had said she thought she could buy the sunset with her checkbook, but she had bought it with heartache instead.

When it was finished Libby felt numb and strange and none of the

satisfaction she had dreamed of was present in her being. She was lonely and restless. She was in love. For the first time in her selfish self-centered life Libby found herself putting something ahead of her own desires and ambitions. Blink. He was ever before her, in her dreams he smiled at her, once he danced with her on a flower scented terrace under a ripe April moon, once he kissed her like the kiss on the mountain top. She couldn't forget him, nor Tommy and his funny little dog.

Blink had stayed out of her sight completely and Libby knew that no matter what she said to him he would still hate and condemn her. Blink wasn't a man you could flirt with and wrap around your little finger.

But Tommy. Surely there was a way to make some amends for what she had done to him before she left Copper Town.

IT TOOK two whole days of searching to find another dog and then he wasn't exactly like Tiger. The spots were darker and in a different place but he might substitute.

Tommy's mother was a tiny little woman with kind grey eyes and a ready smile. When Libby explained who she was and her reason for coming the woman just smiled, “You shouldn't hold yourself responsible!” she said.

When Libby handed her the check that was large enough to cover Tommy's hospital and doctor's bill with a good sum left over, Tommy's mother was reluctant to take it.

“I want him to have it,” Libby said with the tears close, “I would go to see him but I don't think he would be very glad to see me. And I hope he likes the dog. It's the only one that even slightly resembled Tiger.”

Libby went back to the apartment to pack and the next day she left Copper Town. She didn't try to see Blink because she knew there was no use. Blink who had time always for little boys and their dogs, for old women with the rheumatism, wouldn't find it easy to forgive such

selfishness as she had displayed.

Preston met her at the train. He was full of enthusiasm, what about the new picture? Was it finished? Was it good? Did she have a nice time in Arizona? Did she find the inspiration she had hoped for?

Libby just stared at his slightly stocky figure and wondered how she had ever woven her future about her thirty-nine-year-old agent. She wasn't in love with him, of course. She wondered vaguely if she ever had been. He possessed none of the charm and virile masculine appeal that had drawn her to Blink. Preston seemed suddenly old and his sophistication was a poor substitute for Blink's mature understanding of life and people.

When Preston saw the picture he was delighted. "It is brilliant," he declared, "it has not only craftsmanship, it has a heart. It lives and breathes. So help me, Libby, I didn't dream you could paint like that!"

Preston was right. When the picture was shown at the Brookhill it drew only favorable comments from the best critics. Libby should have been happy but even the smart studio party that Preston gave in her honor was an unpleasant ordeal. She felt dead inside. The fierce ambition that had burned inside her like a bright flame had suddenly become ashes. Knowing and loving Blink had changed everything. The selfishness Libby had always indulged in seemed to have vanished. She found herself, for the first time in her life, conscious of the pain and need of other people. Yes, Love had changed Libby Drake.

THE OLD LIBBY would never have listened so intently to the woman who lectured at the Red Cross about the urgent need for trained nurse's aides in the hospitals. The new Libby volunteered that very afternoon.

Preston wouldn't approve of course. He would complain that it would take too much time from her art. But Preston's viewpoint wasn't important anymore now that he was

no longer her fiance. His hardy disapproval of Libby's new outlook on life had resulted in bitter words that had rung with finality in their last quarrel in which Libby had returned his ring.

Libby's heart ached for Blink in the days that followed but in the children's ward of the hospital where she was now a trained nurse's aide, carrying trays, giving baths and cleaning floors, she seemed to find peace. Somehow she felt in serving these youngsters she was making up for what she had done to Tommy. As time went by Libby learned to have patience and sympathy for these children. Love can learn all things, especially how to give without weighing the gift.

Late one afternoon just as Libby was taking temperatures in Ward-C, a nurse came up to her. "There is someone waiting to see you in the sun parlor, Miss Drake," she said. "I'll take over so you can leave now. It's almost five-thirty."

Libby ached with weariness and when her tired eyes drew out the one handsome young man in tweeds seated on the sofa, she thought it was another figment of her imagination. She was always imagining she saw Blink. Once she had actually touched the shoulder of a man on a street corner.

But this Blink was real. He stood up and came forward with bright, questioning eyes. He took Libby's hand and they sat down on the sofa. He said, "I came back, Libby, because I had to see you again. I had to tell you that no matter how I scorned you, no matter how bitter I seemed, when I summed up my heart after you went away I always got the same answer. Darling, you spell it y-o-u."

Libby felt sudden happiness washing over her. But even in this moment of bliss she was remembering the past. "How is Tommy?" she asked.

"Much better. He is at home now. And how is your painting, Libby?"

Libby felt those annoying tears again. "Oh, Blink, something has

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DUEYELL

THEY HAD AN AGREEMENT

By Ruth McCaslin

VERONICA KENT flung open the front door and said, "Hello, Drake." And then she discovered that it wasn't Drake smiling at her. It was Mitch! Her smile deepened and she flung both arms around him, burying her cheek against his shoulder.

"Darling!" she cried. "I wasn't expecting you for a week yet. I'm so glad to see you." She pulled him into the living room where her mother was listening to the radio and knitting.

Mrs Kent smiled her welcome, made perfunctory excuses and escaped. Ronny went back into Mitch's arms.

He held her close his blue eyes tender his red head gleaming against her dark

curls. "I missed you more this time than ever before," he murmured. "We—had a rough trip. Things happened, and once I thought I'd never hold you like this again. I—got to thinking—about-us."

Ronny smiled gently, her brown eyes soft. "It's over now," she consoled him. "You are back and every thing's okay."

He nodded soberly. "Yes. Everything's okay when I come in and find my girl waiting for me in a blue traily dress and with a pink rose in her hair. I dreamed of you like this a million times!"

"I dreamed of you, too, Mitch. I thought of you out there with the Merchant Marine, sliding through the night with your precious cargo.

I thought of how the Axis would love to know just where you were so they could stop the delivery of that cargo. I-it's a tricky business, Mitch." Ronny frowned a little.

Mitch laughed. "Well, since you're all dressed up, let's not waste you. Let's go out and wallow in bright lights and dance a rhumba. Let's be gay and forget war for a few days. Shall we?"

Ronny made a little gesture of regret. "Ah, Mitch I wish we could. But you see, I didn't know you were coming and I promised Drake Lester I'd go out with him. I'm so sorry. But I'll save all the rest of my time for you while you're ashore. That's a promise."

They wanted to be modern, so they made a pact which they both expected to keep.

THE BRIGHTNESS drained from his face as if it had been wiped with a sponge. His blue eyes took on a hard coldness and his mouth twisted. "I might have known you weren't waiting for me," he said. "But tonight, I just sort of hoped you could feel that I'd come. Tonight—I need you, Ronny."

She moved closer to him and laid her hand on his arm. "I'm sorry, dear," she said. "I do love you, you know that."

He smiled then. "Then tell Drake to go hang," he told her. "After all, you are my girl. Call him up, send him a wire or something. For once, I'm being old-fashioned and insisting on taking my own girl out. Will you,

Drake was different from Mitch. He was eager, impetuous — never difficult! Yet there was something about him that baffled Ronny — She began to realize that only Mitch would ever have her heart!



Ronny? Give Drake the gate for tonight."

Ronny smiled reproachfully at him. "Back-slider!" she accused gaily. "We agreed that we wouldn't be corny and bore each other and other people by being possessive. We said we'd both have dates, and live normal lives until such time as we could marry. That's what we said, isn't it?" She tried to make it sound light but his eyes held hers and she knew he wasn't convinced.

"I know what we said," he said, gravely. "But I've changed my mind, Ronny. I didn't have any dates this last trip. Didn't want any. I—just wanted to get back to you. I think we were both crazy to make such a fool agreement. I've been thinking if we are really in love—then we'd WANT to wait for each other. We wouldn't want dates with any one else.

He smiled at her and Ronny was filled with dismay. Mitch was changed this time. Something had happened to change him, or maybe he was just so glad to be home safely that he was being a little childish when he found she had a date.

"Don't be a goon, Mitch," she reproached. "Drake's lonely, too. He was in the French Invasion, was wounded and got a medical discharge. He lost his girl—she was a nurse in Southern England and a robot bomb fell on the hospital. He needs me, too, darling." She put both arms around him and kissed his tanned cheek. "He doesn't mean anything to me," she whispered. "I just can't let him down because he's terribly low. Says he's just a civilian now and that soon no one will ever remember that he was a hero. I want to show him that we don't forget what they've done for us."

Mitch's eyes didn't soften. "Does that mean you won't break the date with him?" he asked tersely.

Ronny laughed, but she frowned at the same time. "Of course it does," she said firmly. "I promised to save you all the rest of my time—"

"Okay, okay," he cut in. "Skip it. If the goose is going stepping—maybe the gander better go, too. I wonder

if Edie Harper's busy tonight?" He moved toward the telephone.

Ronny watched him, with sinking heart. He was so strange this time. She'd had dates before when he came home but he'd never been the least bit stuffy about it. He'd always shrugged and said, "Tough luck for me. Then he'd pick up another girl and they'd make it what he called a gruesome foursome. But he'd never given Edie a tumble before. He knew she didn't like Edie much—but she knew he didn't like Drake either. He'd met him the last time he was ashore. Then she shrugged the whole thing off. He was just tired and perhaps he had a right to be difficult. Only—they had made an agreement—and she resented him falling down on it.

H E CAME back to her, his lips smiling but his eyes still hard. "Edie said she'd be delighted. She's waiting so I'll run along." He moved toward the door, and Ronny trailed after him, her mind in confusion. Something was all wrong and she didn't know what to do about it.

"Mitch," she said, hesitantly, "I'll—see you—tomorrow?"

"I'll give you a ring," he promised, "but if you want to do something with Drake—it's okay. So long, Ronny. I'll be around." The door closed behind him and she went slowly back to the living-room. Well! How dared he be so high handed? He was the one who'd said they wouldn't interfere with each other's lives until they could be married. He was the one who'd said he had no right to cramp her style. He'd even said he had no right to marry her until he could come home and make her a decent home and living. And—he'd said there was to be no griping in case their dates and calendars refused to get together. He had a nerve acting like this.

Her brown eyes sparked with anger when she let Drake in. Drake was never difficult. He asked so little and gave so much. He had brought her an orchid. It was green and had tiny golden stripes. He held it out smilingly.

"The most expensive one I could find," he said, "for the sweetest girl I know."

Ronny took it with mixed emotions. It was a lovely thing—but it certainly didn't go with a pale blue chiffon dinner dress. She lifted troubled eyes to his and the look of bright expectancy in his drove away her indecision. "Thanks, Drake," she said, smiling. "The orchid and compliment were both—lush." She pulled the pink rose from her hair and substituted the one he'd brought.

"Where tonight?" he asked. "I've got a taxi waiting."

Ronny thought swiftly. Mitch would head for the Empire Room at the Palmer House. Hildegarde was there and he loved her sophisticated patter. It might be fun to watch how he got on with Edie. She laughed a little to herself. Edie was so obvious. She was perfectly sure that Mitch would come crawling back tomorrow and tell her he'd had a lousy time. And tomorrow she'd tell him they'd break up that silly agreement. She'd stick to him forever.

So she smiled at Drake and suggested, "Empire Room? I want to show off this orchid."

Drake's eyes clouded. She glanced at him in surprise. His Captain's uniform fit him snugly, his gray eyes were sharp and clear, his dark hair was sleek as sable. Ronny sighed. He was certainly a good-looking man and yet—there was something about him that baffled her. For instance, he never wanted to go any place where there were crowds. He always chose any out-of-the-way places to dine and dance. He hated street cars or buses. Taxis were his favorites. He made his usual plea, now.

"I hate places like the Empire room. Crowds make me uneasy."

Ronny stifled an urge to retort impatiently. Instead, she spoke wheedlingly. "But Drake, you've got to get over all that. I suppose it is a sort of battle shock and then losing your girl the way you did—its all sort of knocked you out. The thing to do is wade right back into things."

He smiled at her but shook his head. "Not just yet, please, Ronny?

I'd feel smothered. Remember the day we met? It was last Christmas I was walking along your street when you and your mother opened the front door to let in six soldiers. I thought you were the loveliest thing I'd ever seen and I stared so hard you impulsively asked me to come in." He smiled again and Ronny's resentment fled.

"But you wouldn't come in," she said, softly. "You—came back hours later and asked if it was too late."

He laughed. "And you said the others had gone but if I was willing to take left-overs I was welcome."

Ronny made a move toward the door. "And you were willing," she said lightly. "That's been over eight months."

He followed her out to the door. "I've always had to be satisfied with—left-overs," he told her cryptically, and then added swiftly, "Until I met you."

Ronny thought soberly as they had dinner in a small uncrowded place in the suburbs. "And even I am well on my way to becoming a left-over—unless I can make Mitch see reason."

BUT NEXT day her heart soared. Mitch called and said he was coming over. Ronny laughed softly. So, he'd had enough of Edie. He was coming to tell Ronny so. She dressed carefully in one of his favorite gowns. Rose color, to match her mood. Tonight all would be well between her and Mitch. She'd never known until now how much she really loved him. It took a quarrel sometimes to make you know—but she'd heard making-up kisses were the sweetest of all.

She was smiling happily when she let him in. She took his hat and brought him a long cool drink and then fluttered down on the sofa beside him.

"I'm sorry I was so stubborn last night," she began. "I don't think I realized how much it meant to you. I'll never do it again, Mitch." She turned her face until her hair brushed his cheek. Now he would take her in his arms and forgive her. She closed her eyes and waited with parted lips.

Only—nothing happened. After a moment of silence, her eyes flew open. He was staring moodily at the cover of a magazine on the floor at his feet.

"Mitch," she said, sharply. "Are you still angry with me?"

He moved suddenly, then, and ran his hands through his thatch of red hair. His blue eyes met hers squarely.

"Look," he said, unsmilingly. "You and I have always rated ourselves as being sensible and level-headed, haven't we?"

"Y—yes," she mumbled, trying to read what lay back of his words by studying his face. It was inscrutable.

"Okay, then. Let's face this thing like normal adults. We were so damned modern when we made that pact. Well, let's just be as modern on mashing it into its."

Ronny's confusion fled. He was trying to tell her that from here on, she was not to have any dates except with him. Her heart ascended swiftly. That was wonderful! She'd found out that she didn't want any dates unless Mitch was the other half.

"Darling," she cried, "that's my idea exactly. It was a silly theory that didn't work, anyway. Let's make a brand new one. I—"

He stood up suddenly. "Well, I guess it's a good thing we found out before it was too late. If we'd really been in love, we'd never have made a fool pact like that. I think I'd like a girl who waited for me. One who couldn't have any fun unless it was with me. Maybe I'm expecting the impossible—but I'll take a look anyway." He looked tall and wonderful in his blue uniform with white strips on the sleeve. He picked up his hat with its spread eagle and fouled anchor. He'd never looked so desirable—

Ronny's eyes were heavy with shock and pain. She'd been so sure of Mitch, so sure that if the rest of the world fell—Mitch would still be there like the Rock of Ages. Now he was brushing her off—just like that. Her heart seemed to be swept clean of any emotion. She sat and stared at him in frozen numbness. Mitch was through! The words flashed on her

brain like a neon sign. What had made him so willing to throw her over? Who—and the name Edie Harper popped up like a jack-in-a-box. Edie!

"It's not your fault, Ronny," he went on. "Drake Lester can do a lot of things for you that I can't. If it's Drake—well, the best man won." He grinned crookedly at her then. "No hard feeling, Ronny? We made a mistake, but who doesn't sometimes?" When she made no answer, he added, "Shall—I return all your kisses—just to square things?" He laughed a little and it brought a swift anger to her heart and eyes.

"No, thanks," she managed to drawl, icily. "Those kisses had no value—so let them go." It was the biggest whopper she'd ever told but she couldn't let him know that. She watched him move toward the door while her heart broke soundlessly. Mitch was through and her grief was as bottomless as a circle.

SOMEHOW, she got through the following week. She went to her office every day and did endless legal reports for her firm of lawyers. She came home every night to either a date with Drake or her Red Cross stint. Nothing seemed to matter any more. Edie called her on the phone and told her all the fun she was having with Mitch—and then three days before Mitch was due to report for duty, Edie called and said,

"I want you and Drake to come over tonight. It's—sorta special. We want to celebrate—something."

At first, Ronny was about to refuse. But she thought a moment and changed her mind. "We'll come," she promised.

When they arrived, Edie was flushed and talkative. Her wide baby-eyes were sparkling like blue fire, her cheeks were pink with excitement and she wore a pink rose in her blond curls. Her dress was pale blue. Ronny scowled inwardly. Edie knew what Mitch liked and was playing it up with a vengeance. Ronny suddenly hated her own black chiffon and the red rose behind her ear. She hated her sophisticated hair-do—even

if every one had told her it was stunning. Drake had loved her dress and on the way over had asked her to marry him. She'd stalled for time.

Then Mitch had come, looking slick in navy blues, with his red hair still damp from brushing. His eyes were so blue, Ronny wanted to cover her own to shut out the brilliance.

Ediw went to meet him and slipped her arm through his.

"Mitch has news, kids," she chirped. "Tell them, Mitch."

He laughed. "I've got another week furlough."

Ronny's heart, weighted so recently with fear, leaped wildly. She'd been expecting—something entirely different.

"That's wonderful," she cried and then wished she hadn't sounded so relieved.

Eddie studied Ronny with narrowed eyes. Ronny had a feeling that Eddie wasn't nearly so naive as she tried to appear. Even this house she lived in had an oddly unstable appearance. It was big, but the furniture looked as if it might have been picked up at a second-hand store. It looked shopworn—just as Eddie's mother.

Mrs Harper was friendly—too friendly. But back of her smile there was a—hungry look. Ronny laughed silently at her own fancy. But Eddie's sisters all had that same greedy look. Eddie had it, too. Ronny shrugged. Eddie had five sisters and you couldn't tell by looking at them which was the oldest or youngest. They all looked about the same age. They were all noisy and used too much slang and dressed too blatantly. Queer that Mitchell Davis should give Eddie Harper a rush. Unless—he was doing it to punish Ronny for not breaking that date. She met Eddie's cool stare with a new nonchalance. Eddie couldn't take Mitch from her.

Then Eddie said, "Mitch, tell them the rest. That isn't the big news." She smiled sweetly at him.

Mitch lit a cigarette before answering. Then he said slowly, "Eddie says she'll marry me in three days." He laughed softly. "I guess that's—news—or is it?"

Ronny's heart curled up and died. Mitch married to Eddie? It was preposterous. Why only last night he'd kissed her and told her—. But maybe also last night he'd found out that Eddie was the girl he really wanted. He'd said he'd had an illusion. She stared numbly at a button on Drake's uniform. Her eyes went on up to find Drake watching her. He smiled when she looked at him and then said, "Why don't you say yes, too, Ronny? We—could have a double wedding."

HER EYES fled to collide with Mitch's steady blue stare. Anger flooded her heart. She wanted to strike out at him—and that baby-eyed Eddie who'd stolen him from her so easily. Eddie, who'd swarmed over the boys at the canteen in a way that was undignified, to say the least. Ronny laughed suddenly, recklessly.

"I think a double wedding would be—fun," she said. The moment she said it, her heart turned over in protest. What was she letting herself in for? She didn't really want to marry Drake Lester. There was something of weakness in his fear of crowds and his nursing wounds that were more imaginary than real. He'd told her about his home in Virginia, his dogs, his sister—he'd even laughingly shown her his credentials. Birth certificate, his sister's picture, the lovely home with its white pillars, his dog tag—she sighed. Drake was very eligible—but the trouble was, she still loved Mitch! Her eyes narrowed. Eddie had said they'd be married in three days. That gave her three days to make Mitch see that he was taking the wrong boat. Three days—

Mitch broke into her thoughts after the stunned silence that had met her remark about double weddings.

"That," Mitch said, smiling at her, "calls for a celebration. He turned to clap Drake on the shoulder. "Congratulations, old man," he said heartily. "What say you and I go out and get some firewater to toast the coming event?"

Drake smiled at Ronny. He looked sort of dazed. Ronny had a feeling that he couldn't even stand good

news. Shock of any kind seemed to knock him speechless. But she smiled back at him and nodded and he followed Mitch out.

Edie stared at Tonny with narrowed eyes. "You—don't mind if I marry your—boy friend?" she asked, frowning slightly.

Ronny smiled coolly. "Edie," she said, her heart beating rapidly, "if I tell you something, you promise not to tell?"

Edie nodded, her eyes wide with curiosity. "I won't tell."

Ronny laughed softly. "Well then—I'm so relieved that you're going to marry Mitch." She choked a little over that lie. But all was fair in love and war, wasn't it. So she leaned confidentially toward Edie. "You see, I'd promised to marry Mitch—but that was before I met Drake."

"You mean—you're really in love with Drake?" Edie stared.

"Well—I just said there'd be a double wedding didn't I?" Ronny grinned. "Why else would I say it?" She watched Edie carefully.

Edie shrugged. "Well, I thought you might be doing it to get even—"

Ronny laughed scornfully. "Look, Edie. I can tell you this because you'll understand. Why should I want to marry Mitch—when Drake can do so much more for me? Drake has a family in Virginia, a beautiful home, money—and as his wife, I'll really be somebody." She let that sink in and then added. "Mitch hasn't any thing. He's just a merchantman. Before the war, he was a bank clerk. Now I ask you, why wouldn't I use my head and choose the right man? You can fall in love with a man with money just as easily as one with no future." Ronny thought, "What I mean is—you could. Not me." But she looked straight into Edie's eyes and smiled triumphantly. "That is exactly what I've done, Edie, only—" She broke off and sighed deeply.

EDIE'S tone was avid. "Only—what?" she demanded.

Ronny lifted her eyes to Edie's. "Only—I've had my work cut out for me making Drake see it," she confessed.

Edie hooted. "He's followed you like a shadow for months—"

"Yes, I know," Ronny agreed. "But a girl can manage that if she's clever. You see, he really was crazy about you, Edie. I had all I could do to keep him busy—and then I told him you wanted Mitch." She laughed when Edie began to protest. "I saw you making with the goo-goo stuff every time you were around Mitch. You can't tell me you didn't like him."

Edie sank back, bewildered. "I never knew Drake liked me," she said thoughtfully.

"Well, he did and I was so jealous of you. But when you and Mitch announced your engagement tonight—I took a chance and sort of snapped up Drake on the rebound. I guess he thought if he couldn't have you—I might do." She smiled at Edie and wondered how in the world she'd ever thought such a crazy impromptu plan would ever work. But she only had three days—and she had to work fast.

Edie's face was a study. Bewilderment and flattered ego chased each other across her pink and white brow. "To think," she muttered, "I might have had Drake." She shook her head wearily, "I could have been a Captain's wife and lived in an old southern home in Virginia. My mother would have been wild with delight. She says having six girls on her hands is driving her crazy. That's why she moved here where we could meet a lot of servicemen." Edie seemed to be thinking out loud.

Ronny shivered with excitement. "Well," she said slowly, "I guess it's too late to think about that. In three days we'll have a double wedding and I'll go to Virginia to live with Drake."

Edie's eyes met Ronny's and Edie's were filled with an odd light. Outside, they could hear the boys coming back. Edie stood up but her eyes still glittered. "You're a smart girl, Ronny," she said. "But this time I think you've outdone yourself."

The boys came in and Mitch held up a bottle of champagne. "It's iced," he announced. "It's not imported but who cares? Anything made in the

U. S. A. is good enough for me."

Eddie went for glasses. She stayed a long time but when she came back her mother was with her. She helped pour the wine and then said, "I don't want Eddie to get married so suddenly, Mitch. I don't think you two have taken enough time to think about it. Why don't you wait a little longer?"

Mitch sipped his champagne thoughtfully. "I'm getting married in three days," he said, stubbornly.

Ronny's heart twisted. Maybe he really cared about Eddie. Maybe she'd done all this maneuvering for nothing. What if she wasn't able to show Mitch that Eddie wasn't the girl for him?

EDDIE said quietly, "Maybe my mother's right. After all, Mitch, we did jump into this rather suddenly. Let's not be—impulsive." She went over to Drake and laid a hand on his arm. "Drake," she said softly, "don't you think a girl should—be—sure?" She looked into his eyes and made her own wide and wistful. "Supposing a girl found—some one—else she liked better?" There was no mistaking her meaning. She was telling Drake in no uncertain terms that she'd just found him and he was staring at her, his face comical in shocked surprise.

Ronny stifled a giggle. Poor Drake. He was getting one shock after the other. He was finding civilian life was almost as battering as life in the army! Then she saw Mitch staring at Eddie.

"What is this?" he demanded. "Are you giving me the run-around, Eddie? We had an agreement—"

Eddie turned then, and her eyes were malicious. "I know, Mitch," she said sweetly. "I agreed to pretend to be in love with you because you were mad at Ronny. I'm sorry, but I can't go through with it. I guess—I'm sorry for you, too, Mitch." She flicked Ronny with a cold blue stare. "You lose all the way around, Mitch." she said slowly. "I was to make Ronny jealous—only it didn't work. She didn't care about you. She didn't care about Drake, either. But she did care

about Drake's money and his home in Virginia."

Ronny felt her blood freeze. Her plan was going astray and even if Eddie convinced Drake he was the man in her life, it wasn't going to bring Mitch back to Ronny. He'd hate her—

"Eddie," Ronny broke in, desperately. "What are you saying—?"

"I'm telling Mitch just what a schemer you are, Ronny Kent. You knew Drake liked me and you deliberately pushed Mitch at me so you could have Drake. Well, I said you'd outdone yourself this time and you have." She turned to Mitch. "She told me all this not fifteen minutes ago," she said. "She thought I'd just take it lying down—but I won't. Now that I know Drake really wanted me— Well, I like him, too. I believe in clearing things up by telling the truth." She turned and laid a hand over Drake's. "We've a lot of lost time to make up, Drake," she cooed. "I've always been crazy about you but I thought you loved Ronny." She smiled at him and lifted her face close to his. Mrs Harper went out smilingly. Ronny knew that Eddie had told her what to do.

She met Mitch's angry blue stare and flushed guiltily.

"Did you tell Eddie that?" he asked, slowly.

Her flush deepened. "Mitch, I can explain—"

Drake suddenly shook off Eddie's clinging hands. His face was like a marble mask but for the first time Ronny saw decision in his eyes. He threw back his shoulders and moved out into the middle of the room. His lips curled scornfully.

I THOUGHT you were the nicest girl I'd ever known, Ronny," he said. "I'd never known any one like you. I've always been a louse but after I met you, I thought you could make a man of me." He laughed bitterly. "Here I've been dodging things and hiding and being miserable just because I thought you cared. I wanted to tell you—about

me—but I was so damned afraid of losing you. I don't know why you told Edie whatever you told her. But it isn't true. I never even noticed her. I was too crazy about you."

Ronny winced under his lashing scorn. All this was getting too deep for her. Whatever was Drake hinting at. She stared at Edie's white, angry face and was afraid to look at Mitch.

Edie's voice cut in, high and shrill. "D'you mean you didn't care about me, Drake Lester?" she demanded. "But Ronny said you did. She said she was jealous of me and she had hard work keeping you away from me. She said she was only marrying you for your money and that home in Virginia—"

Drake's hoarse laughter stopped her. "What a laugh," he said. "I have no money, I have no home in Virginia. I'm AWOL from boot camp. I've never been outside this country. My credentials I stole on a troop train from the real Captain Drake Lester. I've forged checks in his name—and the police are hunting me this minute. I knew I should go on—keep moving—but I got stopped by Ronny and her soft words and gentle ways." He moved toward the door. "Now I've had enough of hiding. I'm going back and take my medicine. I'd just as soon be in the army as with a bunch of chiselers." He jeered at Ronny. "I guess I don't mind being court martialed, now. I'll have the satisfaction of knowing that both of you got stung, too." He went out and the door slammed after him.

Edie stared at the closed door for a moment. Then she turned on Ronny and Mitch. "Get out of here, both of you," she stormed. "To think I was so dumb as to fall for Ronny's lies. Well, go on! What are you staring at me like that for? You can have her, Mitch Lewis. I wish you luck." She turned and rushed out of the room like a small blue tornado.

Mitch looked at Ronny with sober face and grim lips. "I'll take you home, Ronny," he said.

Outside he hailed a cab and they rode in silence to Ronny's home.

At her door, he lifted his hat. "Goodnight, Ronny," he said.

Ronny caught his arm with both hands. "Mitch," she said, "did you really only pretend that you were going to marry Edie?"

"That's right," he snapped. "What a fool I was. I thought I'd make you see light, about that agreement we made. Only I got my eyes opened instead." He shook off her hand and tried to go but she flung both arms about him tight.

"YOU'RE still blind, you idiot," she said breathlessly. "I told that stuff so she wouldn't marry you. I guess it was a crazy thing to do—but Mitch, I'm crazy anyway. I'm crazy about you. I always have been. Always will be. Mitch—"

He stared at her coldly. "It's no go, baby," he growled. "I can't help remembering you wouldn't break a date with Drake."

"Oh, darling," she pleaded, tears hanging on her lashes. "I was wrong about that. I didn't realize what it meant to you. I'm sorry. I was so sure of your love—and I guess I was fooling with dynamite. Mitch, I love you, I never intended to marry Drake. I had to make you see Edie wasn't the girl for you. I did the only thing I could think of. Mitch—honey—your plan worked. You did make me jealous. Edie said I was a schemer and I am. I was scheming to hold my man. Is—that—wrong—Mitch. . .?"

Her face was lifted to his, her lips very close, her heart in her eyes. "I love you, Mitch," she whispered.

For another moment he hesitated, his eyes probing hers. Then his lips found hers and Ronny's heart swung giddily on a star.

Later he said, "I guess we're both a couple of sad sacks. It was all on account of that damned agreement—"

She put one hand over his lips. "Let's make a new one," she told him softly. "I'll never have another date with any one but you."

"Ha," he said grimly. "I'll see to that. I said I was getting married in three days and I am. To you. And if I ever hear of you having any dates after that—I-I'll beat you black and blue. D'you hear?" He shook her gently and kissed her at the same time.

"Why, I've been framed!" Andrea gasped.



"I can think of no more whole-hearted retraction," he grinned

RETRACTION IN PRINT

By Hope Campbell

Ken decided that reading one's obituary might have a certain weird entertainment value — But not one such as Andrea Lambert had written!

THE OFFICES of the Weekly Clarion—turn left off Main at the bank, third building on the right-hand side of the street and down two steps—were in the midst of a day after publication lull. Old Tom was tinkering with the presses

in the back room and muttering that he'd get at the Auction Sale printing job presently. Johnnie Oakes stuck his red head in the door and said that if there weren't any off jobs for him to do after school, coach would like him to be at baseball practice and he'd heard there was a haystack fire out at the Ferris farm that might be worth a phone call.

Andrea Lambert sat at the scarred desk both her father and grandfather had used, and struggled to decipher Mrs. Allway's handwriting to discover just what had happened in the Willow Ridge district last week. As usual it had arrived too late, after the forms were locked, and not only that but Mrs. Allway had been so carried away by her description of a bouquet of spirea and pussy willows that she had neglected to mention why for the bouquet. It could have been a wedding, an engagement or a luncheon. Of all the thorns in a country editor's flesh, district correspondents pricked sharpest, Andrea decided.

Andres wrinkled her tilted nose, gave a last despairing tug at her short black curls and penciled out the whole spirea and pussy willow incident, consigning it to oblivion. She hoped that Mrs. Allway just liked to write descriptions and the great event in somebody's life hadn't been slighted.

"Did you write this?"

Andrea's big pansy blue eyes blinked rapidly, three times. If there was anything like *this* around town, certainly the editor should know about it. But she couldn't imagine why or how a man like this could get here.

Those bars of ribbons with stars told that he had played plenty of mahjong in a lot of places where they were playing for keeps. He'd been wounded too, which could be the reason his lean, square jawed face showed only a light coat of tan rather than the deep bronze that normally went with that kind of blue eyed, tawnily auburn haired coloring. He wasn't too tall, just magnificently proportioned except that possibly his

shoulders were a shade too broad, and he carried himself like an athlete.

A Navy Lieutenant, Andrea thought, scrambling around in her memory and finding not one scrap of light. Most of the men in this town, except for the youngsters, had belonged to the National Guard and gone into the army as a unit.

"Did you write this?"

"Don't bark at me," Andrea said crisply. "Did I write what?"

"This somewhat exaggerated report." He thrust a clipping at her.

IT WAS Andrea's private opinion that she wrote a very fine obituary and she recognized this as being, though not in quite the usual way, one of her bang up jobs. Usually she gave more space than she really could afford to saying anything nice there was to say, even stretching a point in generous interpretation here and there. But what good had there been to report of Kenworth Lance?

The obituary was notable for what it did not mention and Andrea thought she had showed commendable restraint. The clipping merely reported the death in the Pacific of Lt. (s.g.) Kenworth Lance, son of Mr and Mrs J. W. Lance, formerly of this town and still owners and operators of the Lance Flour Mills and Lance Stock Farms in the district, although they had resided for many years in the east, due to Mr. Lance's financial interests there. Lt. Lance had been on active duty at the time of his death, although not with the air branch from which he had been discharged for dangerous stunt flying shortly before the completion of his training.

All that was fact. Not one word had Andrea put in about the rumors and gossip that had drifted back to town at various times. How could she say anything about his education, when everybody knew that he had entered and left, with record breaking speed, three different colleges before he found one willing to overlook his escapades for the sake of his broken field running? There

wasn't any wife to mention, although dozens of girls were reported to cherish bracelets of various types as consolation prizes. Kenworth Lance had never in his life done anything except a lot of hard playing and, possibly at the end, a little hard fighting.

"I suppose you were a pal of his and you're mad about this," Andrea said. "What I knew about the man I didn't care to print. Was there anything commendable to say? If there was, I suppose I could put a little additional news item in the Service Column."

"Additional item? I want a retraction."

"Retraction? Certainly not. There's nothing here that requires one. Don't be absurd."

"Absurd?" the Lieutenant drawled musingly and swung one long leg across the desk and sat there, squinting down at Andrea's curls. "You know, by contrast with the eulogies you usually print, that piece is a downright insult. And the only service record detail you mention is the one bad spot. No good ones to offset it. I could almost prove a case in court. Quite aside from its being completely inaccurate, of course."

"Inaccurate? There's not even an initial wrong," Andrea swore fiercely.

"No? Well, to quote Mark Twain, it's at least greatly exaggerated." Carefully he picked up the clipping and put it in his pocket. "Still I suppose living to read one's own obituary does have a certain wierd entertainment value."

Andrea gurgled and tried to turn it into a gasp and ended up by choking.

Ken leaned over and patted her briskly on the back. "There. There. I know I make a tremendous impression on all the girls but they don't usually take it this hard."

"I DON'T believe it," Andrea cried. "I won't believe it."

"If I didn't know better, I'd almost think you were implying that you

hated to see me still cluttering up the earth," he reproved.

"I . . . I . . ." Andrea was feeling downright wild eyed but she snatched at the last remnants of her self-control with an effort. "Next week I'll—I'll print, 'Lt. Lance is not dead.' Does that satisfy you? No? Oh, heck, I'll even box it on the front page."

"Not good enough," Ken said firmly. "I want a lovely flowery description of me and how wonderful I am."

"Never." Then Andrea turned cunning. "I'll have to see your papers and proof of your identity too, before I do anything."

Ken grinned. "Certainly. And you'll want the material for the wonderfully flowery little piece you're going to write too. A full column. Nothing less. If you'll call at the hotel for me this evening about eight, I'll give you the first few highlights of my extraordinary career."

"Call for you?" Andrea sputtered. "I'll . . . No. Definitely, no. Why did you ever come back to this town? You left it at the age of three and we've all been so happy ever since."

"Hank suggested this might be a good place to rest up," Ken said and started nonchalantly toward the door.

"Hank," Andrea shrieked and dashed from behind the desk and grabbed him by the arm. "You've seen Hank?"

"Further details in our next installment. The hotel at eight."

Andrea absolutely danced up and down with rage. "Oh, I hate you. I hate you. You're just mean. You've seen Hank and you won't tell me about it. How is he?"

"Unaware that his daughter has turned into a feminine jumping jack, I'm sure."

"I think I'm going mad, completely mad," Andrea said, tensely quiet. "I think I am mad. I think I'm going to commit violent physical injury on a man and afterwards I won't be able to remember a thing about it." Her fists clenched menacingly.

Ken chuckled. "Hank said you had a temper and I should have known

Hank never exaggerates. Hey, calm down." He caught her hand, aimed at slugging him right where Andrea considered a slug would do the most good. "All right. I know better than to tease a wild cat. Handle them with kindness."

Andrea was amazed at the steely strength of Ken's arms as he drew her close to him. Then, with a sense of shock as his lips pressed against hers, she decided that no kiss could stir her this deeply. It simply couldn't. This was still angry rage she was feeling, but it was odd how the little tingles that kept creeping up her spine seemed almost pleasant. "Still want to hit me?" Ken chuckled.

"I never slap people but I almost wish I had," Andrea muttered, unsteadily defiant.

"Hank would not have been pleased," Ken grinned, and took the bound.

ANDREA wasn't worth a plugged nickel around the office all the rest of the day. She was counting the minutes until eight o'clock and wishing fiercely that she could think up an equally refined mental torture to inflict on Ken. He had seen Hank, talked to him, and she was so crazy anxious for the news that she couldn't stick to one job for five minutes at a time.

She hadn't seen Hank or had a really personal report about him for a year, and they had always been much closer than most fathers and daughters. Hank had not cared to remarry after his wife's death and then too he was almost young enough to be just Andrea's older brother. They had chummed around together always.

But there had been no holding him at home after Pearl Harbor. Hank had fought in the first World War, running away the day he graduated from High School and lying about his age. He had come back to marry his High School sweetheart and work on the paper his father had founded. Hank was over-age for fighting this

time, but he could maneuver a job as war correspondent.

Hank calmly informed Andrea that she was a big girl now and she'd been around the paper all her life and if she couldn't run it by herself, it was just too bad. It hadn't been bad at all, even with labor and paper shortage problems. Andrea missed Hank and sent him the paper every day and wrote him teasingly plaintive notes about it being a fine thing that the older generation wouldn't get out of uniform to give the younger generation a chance to get into one. Actually, Andrea loved running the paper and lived very comfortably with her aunt.

Besides, Andrea was so proud of what Hank was doing that, even if she did worry about him sometimes, she wouldn't have willingly let anything in the world interfere. All his years on a country newspaper had prepared Hank to do a special type of story and do it superbly. He wrote the little homely details of life in the Pacific, not the big sweeping panorama of battle, just as he always had written the details of community life for the Clarion and left it for the nearby big city paper to handle the world news. His stories were becoming quietly famous and recently a number of papers had started to carry them as a syndicated feature.

But how wonderful to have actual news of Hank from someone who had seen and talked with him, Andrea thought, alternately beaming with anticipation and glowering at the thought of Ken. In spite of the source, it was going to be heaven.

ANDREA simply couldn't stop herself. She was a shameless fifteen minutes early at the hotel.

Ken grinned and got up out of the lobby chair where he had been waiting.

"I win," he announced. "I had a bet with myself that you'd be not less than ten minutes early and maybe a half hour."

"It wasn't your charms that brung me," Andrea said, being cheerfully

impudent. He wasn't going to trick her into anger again. Bland indifference was the line to take with him.

Ken could be bland too. "You don't want to stay here, do you?"

"No. This place is a conversation killer," Andrea admitted, turning up her nose at the tan paint and green linoleum and golden oak furniture around them. "More interviews have died half spoken here than at any other known spot."

"Is that the reason Hank says he sometimes wonders whether you're publishing a newspaper or a review of past events to remind people of things they've practically forgotten?"

Andrea's eyes narrowed but she remembered to count to ten. "I'm not suggesting we turn this into a social event but I've two ideas. Oh, and by the way, I've decided to do better than a front page box for you. I'll push you clear up into the society column and just say, 'Lt. Lance is staying at the hotel here. He is not dead yet'."

"And then the hotel can sue you. I'd better write Hank he can plan to spend the rest of his life in the Pacific if he doesn't care to spend it all in a courtroom here when he gets back."

"Not this hotel. I write their ads, free from charge, as well as print them, and they know I believe every kind thing I say. Except about their lobby. Now I could take you home. If you don't mind that Aunt Clara's a little deaf and you'll have to repeat it all to her twice."

"Anyplace else," Ken rejected cordially. "You can repeat it twice afterwards."

"That leaves the Show Boat."

"Show Boat?"

"You wouldn't remember the creek that widens into a sort of lake over on the south side of town. Al Jackson, who runs the movie too, built a pavilion on the edge of it, shape of a boat and decorated inside like a show boat. They serve dinner and there's dancing, but if we sit out on the deck part, it's a nice place to talk. About the only place in town."

"Let's go."

Andrea always had liked the Show Boat. Even on days when everything possible had gone wrong and the office had been like a mad house, she could enjoy the place, and be relaxed and having a good time before she knew it. They found two deck chairs beside the rail, where they could look out over the placid water and up at the star filled sky.

"Hank's swell," Ken reported. "Thin, of course, and working too hard but having the time of his life. He was visiting hospitals when we met. Then, after he got that copy of the paper with your masterpiece in it, that tickled him and he brought it around and we struck up quite a friendship."

ANDREA couldn't imagine Hank liking Ken, but she just gave an encouraging murmur and sat there drinking in all the little details about Hank's life as Ken reported them.

"That's the works," Ken said at last. "Now we begin on the story of my life."

"I'm afraid I'm only a good listener when I'm interested," Andrea smiled and got up to leave.

"And here I was just telling myself that at least I'd discovered one good quality in the girl. She could listen," Ken mourned mockingly. He jumped up to tower over her. "And you'd better listen. Because you should never have mentioned that air force deal, unless you also went on to say what I've done since that was estimable. As it stands, that item is detrimental to me."

"Not detrimental. Just characteristic," Andrea snapped.

"For use in your retraction, would you prefer that I start with the P. T. boat assignment or the subs?"

So he'd done both! Andrea thrilled with startled admiration in spite of herself. Of course, she'd known he hadn't won those ribbons playing gin rummy but she hadn't realized the extent of his activities.

"On second thought, I'm talked out for the night," Ken decided abruptly.

"Let's dance, Andy."

Only Hank called her Andy. She flared, "The name's Andrea. Or preferably Miss Lambert."

"Oh, no. Don't like either of them. Let's see. Ann? No. Anns are sweet, pretty, quiet girls and that's not you. Drea? Awkward. I've got it. Lambie."

A lambie that was meant to get her goat, Andrea knew. She set her teeth and made a mental note to try to hasten his departure before he managed to spread the horrid thought around town. Things like that stuck.

"Just plain 'you' would be better."

"All right, you. Come on. We're dancing. Or else. I mean or else you listen to the story of my life."

"I'll dance," Andrea agreed hastily and pointedly.

Andrea loved to dance and she knew it when she found a perfect partner. You could like a man's dancing without liking him, couldn't you, she argued and let it go at that. They were still dancing when the musicians folded up their music and the waiters began to pile chairs on the tables.

They were on deck, waiting their turn at the short gangplank, when Ken suddenly exclaimed, "What time is it? Midnight. Oh, oh. I got troubles. Is there a pay phone on this thing?"

"Inside."

"I promised to make a New York call this evening and it slipped my mind completely. Mimi will be furious, wasting an evening waiting for a phone call when she probably wanted to go someplace. I'd better do it right now. Wait here."

FIFTEEN minutes later Andrea came to, and she had never been more furious with herself. What was she doing waiting here, shivering a little in the chill night breeze off the lake, just because Ken had told her to wait in that commanding tone? She was obviously asleep with her eyes open or mad.

At least she was glad she's snapped out of her daze in time to make it

clear to Ken that he wasn't anybody she hung around waiting for while he made a long call to another girl. Andrea struck off briskly along the darkened street toward midtown.

So the girl's name was Mimi, huh, and she was the sort who regarded any evening as wasted if she didn't have a date. Sounded like a hussy, Andrea concluded. But she also concluded further that Ken must rate dangerously well with Mimi, if she'd wait all this time just for a phone call. And what did she mean herself by thinking 'dangerously well'? She must have cracked her brain cell or something.

"Hey. What's the idea? I said to wait." Ken caught up with her at a run.

"It was cold and I saw no reason for waiting."

Ken groaned. "All right. Go ahead. Say whatever you've been thinking. I don't want it, but I know I'm going to get it. Only don't forget I've just been listening to one bawling out along the lines of 'I'd better get back to New York or else.'"

"An excellent idea," Andrea said cordially.

"As soon as I get my retraction."

"This town never expected you to become its oldest living inhabitant."

"I won't," Ken promised blithely. "Now I think perhaps we'd better take up the P. T. boat details first thing tomorrow."

"Impossible." Andrea did some very fast thinking. Once a week she did try to drive around her district and pick up news in person. Right after publication day wasn't a good time but gas couldn't be squandered in a better cause. "I'll be out all day. Have to drive around and check up on my correspondents every so often."

"Sounds fine. You drive. I talk. And maybe I'll get a look at some of our stock farms. Dad would regard that as a commendable act."

"I've got a pretty tight schedule."

"Doesn't matter. I'll ride along and if I just get a look at a barrier through the dust, as we pass, that'll help."

That's what you think, Andrea decided furiously. I'll be out of sight of this town by the time you probably consider a proper going to bed hour.

Aunt Clara had left the hall light on for her and Andrea started to open the outside door without even offering to shake hands. That was just the way she felt about the man.

But Ken chuckled and swung her around until Andrea's black curls were pressed against his shoulder. He kissed her, just a nice goodnight kiss, but Andrea thought dizzily, before her good sense came to her rescue, that it could be chalked up as definitely among the very nicest kisses. And why not? Hadn't Ken kissed dozens of girls, if not hundreds, including that Mimi person? Andrea felt like kicking herself, because she had a horrid suspicion that Ken knew perfectly well she had kissed him back.

"See you tomorrow," Ken promised cheerfully and took the front porch steps two at a time.

ANDREA set her alarm for just past dawn, hating the thought of it but knowing it had to be done. She did hate it, even worse than she had expected, when it went off.

Sleepily she put on the old gray suit that she saved for driving over dusty country roads, and added a yellow blouse and handkerchief for her hair, so it wouldn't be too grim looking. She was yawning over the coffee pot, waiting for it to perk, when someone rattled the back door briskly.

It couldn't be, but it was.

"Hope you made enough for two," Ken said as happily as if he thought he were welcome. "Hotel's still asleep. Don't apologize for getting me up so early. I'm used to it."

"Apologize," Andrea blazed. Her temper was never too certain before her first cup of coffee and particularly at six in the morning. "I'm not apologizing. I just don't care for your company today. I didn't dream you were so stupid you didn't realize it."

Ken hunted through the cupboard for a second cup and saucer, and he poured the coffee and handed hers to Andrea before he answered.

Sipping chummily, he drawled, "You know what's wrong with you, don't you? You're suffering from a completely closed small town mind. You just don't know what the score is."

Is any mind ever open enough to approve of you?" Andrea snapped.

"I never boast before ten in the morning," Ken said. "But I will state a few facts. We lived in this town at one time and because we had a little more money than is usual here, the town continued to be interested in us. People in towns like this love to gossip about their former inhabitants. They'll repeat something good if they feel they get a sort of reflected glory out of it. But scandal is even more fun, because it has the novelty and glamour of something that's completely outside their scope and understanding. I had a playboy period and this town got a kick out of batting around a few distorted accounts that drifted back here. That types me for life with them and how they love to hash over the juicy morsels."

"That's not true."

"I admit I've made out the worst possible case," Ken agreed. "But there's truth in it. In my case they gave the dog a bad name and everyone enjoys adding to it. But do you really like being as dopey as everyone else around here?"

"I'm not biting on that specious little argument," Andrea said evasively. He did have something there and she knew it.

Ken knew too that he'd made an impression. He chuckled and said, "Let's go. Been a long time since I've rambled around my own, my native land. This will be fun."

To Andrea's amazement, they had a fine time. The climate and the countryside seemed to be showing off, especially for Ken. It was a clear bright day and a rain early in the week had left the fields fresh and washed looking.

She had feared that perhaps the name Lance or the presence of a stranger with her would make the people she wanted to see uncommunicative. But they took to Ken. He was interested in everything and everybody, and they opened up to him astonishingly.

They had lunch with Mrs. Allway who was surprised that Andrea hadn't guessed the pussy willow and spirea bouquet had been at the Red Cross meeting. Didn't she always mention the weekly Red Cross bandage folding?

IN THE late afternoon, they headed back toward town, a little tired but pleasantly content and companionable.

Suddenly Ken exclaimed, "Do you know our stock farm, the one where Williams is the tenant? He's been writing Dad about plowing up one of the big meadows for corn, and Dad can't quite remember the piece of land. Would it be out of our way to pass there?"

"It's just down the road. We can stop perfectly well."

At Williams' suggestion, after he had explained why he thought too large a proportion of the land was being kept to meadow, they walked up the hill and beyond a small natural spring to the part he had pointed out.

Ken was puffing a little from the climb up the hill. He grinned a wry apology and sank down under a tree.

"That extra lead I'm carrying around gets a little heavy once in a while."

Andrea sat down beside him. "Of course. You're just out of the hospital, aren't you? An I've dragged you all over the county," she said contritely.

"Liked it," Ken said tranquilly and looked off across the countryside, with a few white clouds drifting along. "Like this too. Nice."

Casually he put his arm around Andrea and drew her close against his shoulder. They just sat, resting

and perfectly content, for a long while.

Then his arm tightened and he was kissing her. Andrea was off guard, just happy with the moment and, unthinkingly, her arms went around his neck. How long they clung together she couldn't be sure, because it was something entirely out of the world, an emotion that carried her away so completely that it was wonderfully unbelievable.

Ken tucked a curl back of her ear and drawled teasingly, "I thought so. In spite of everything, you are sort of crazy about me."

Andrea's eyes dilated and she jumped to her feet, her heart pounding. Why, she must have been crazy there for a few minutes all right, but not about Ken. She had simply been out of her mind and out of the world.

"I'm—I'm not. I heartily dislike you. I just wasn't thinking."

"Stop thinking those small town thoughts and we'll get along fine," Ken grinned.

"I'm no Mimi," Andrea snapped and could have sunk right into the earth.

Ken threw back his tawny head and roared with laughter. "Oh, Lambie, how you do give yourself away. You're green with jealousy. Now I admit there's no one like Mimi but. . ."

"Then you'd better get back to her as fast as possible," Andrea cried and turned and frankly fled, running.

Andrea was in the car and a half mile down the road before she realized what she had done. Then, angry as she was, Andrea giggled a little to herself. There was nothing like making the man walk home.

How the town would enjoy that story, Andrea thought, and she just didn't care. But she didn't really think Ken would have to walk into town or she would have gone back, remembering how white he had been for an instant after the climb up the hill. However, Williams would either drive him in or get Ken to a bus.

This should, Andrea decided with vicious satisfaction, finish both her and the town with Ken. No man

RETRACTION IN PRINT

would forgive a public humiliation and she gravely doubted if Ken would care to face the grins around town for even one day.

ANDREA went home for dinner and then strolled down to the office to sort out her notes from the day and write a couple of short items while they were still fresh in her mind. The office was quiet and dark, except for her desk lamp, and Andrea typed slowly, trying to decide if the Ferris haystack were worth more than a very short paragraph. She didn't hear the door open.

"Haystacks. I'm disappointed," a deep voice laughed from behind her chair. "I thought you'd be writing a social note. 'Lt. Lance, a visitor in our town, spent the afternoon hiking between the Williams farm and town, and not enjoying it'."

Andrea gave a short shriek and bit her lip in reproof. "So you had to walk. How nice," she exclaimed with mock pleasure.

"Naturally not. But I don't recommend the bus service around here. In fact, there are a lot of things around this town I don't like."

"Including me," Andrea deduced pertly, in spite of the queerest sinking feeling in her middle.

"Oh, I like you about as well as you like me," Ken drawled. "If you won't be sensible, won't you at least be reasonable? Leaves are short and time is fleeting and New York is far away."

"Trains run several times daily."

"If Hank had spanked you oftener, mine would be a happier life," Ken said sadly. "Look at it this way. If Hank himself wrote out a retraction, would you print it?"

Silly boy, Andrea chortled inwardly. It was the perfect out, an absolute impossibility. "Of course. This is still Hank's paper."

"Fine enough. Here it is," Ken grinned and reached into his pocket and drew out a couple of sheets of paper.

Andrea jumped to her feet. "Why, you—you framer-upper. You double-



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crosser. If . . . If you had that all along, why didn't you say so? I don't believe it anyhow."

"Making a fool out of me," Andrea sputtered. "Why didn't you just mail that to me? That would have been enough, more than enough."

"You still miss the point," Ken reproved.

"What point?"

"This one, naturally."

Andrea knew perfectly well that Ken was going to kiss her and somehow she just walked right into his arms. It was perfectly infuriating and she had never been more annoyed with herself. But she had seldom been happier either. Being kissed by Ken was lovely. She hoped he liked having her kiss him too. The whole thing was entirely outrageous but she couldn't seem to do a thing about it.

"Love. Naturally the point is love," Ken pointed out. "Hank thought it might take me a week to sell you on it. I told him that he underestimated me. I was pretty sure I'd found my girl after I read half a dozen of those letters you wrote to Hank and saw those terrible snapshots of you both duck hunting that he carries around. Hank, like my family when I wrote that I was breaking my trip home to stop here and meet a girl, thought I was crazy but he rode along on the deal. But of course I had to make sure, had to see you, and I still want that retraction."

HOW ABOUT Mimi?"

"Mimi? That's my mother."

"What? Why you said. . ."

"Sure. I had to work fast and I figured if I could add a dash of jealousy to the situation, it might help. I just capitalized on calling Mimi to get the latest dope on the Williams' situation. The family had written me to check up on it as long as I was stopping here. You bit nicely, thanks."

"Sometimes I hate you more than I love you at other times," Andrea snapped and kicked herself inwardly. Why did she say those things?

Ken chuckled. "You still don't appreciate my efficiency to the full.

One of Hank's pals picked up a nasty fever and had to come home. I can wire and get him here in twenty-four hours. Running this weekly will be just enough to keep him from moping while he gets his strength back. You come to New York with me. The whole thing's already arranged. But your last official act will be to run this. Maybe you'll see now why I didn't give it to you at first sight. Even I'm not that sure of my hunches, on the strength of a few letters and some snapshots."

Ken flipped the papers open and Andrea leaned down to read.

"Andrew Lambert takes pleasure in announcing the marriage of his daughter, Andrea, to Lt. Kenworth Lance. Lt. Lance. . ."

"Why I've been framed," Andrea gasped, reading no further.

"I can think of no more whole hearted retraction. But I think it was your whole heartedness about everything, liking or disliking, approving or disapproving, adoring Hank the way you do, that made me sure I'd made no mistake," Ken agreed. "Still you look pretty as a picture in that frame."

"You'll look pretty too, in a bridal picture right smack in the middle of the society column. I knew I'd land you there somehow," Andrea murmured demurely.

"I like the how," Ken chuckled.

So did Andrea. Sooner or later they would have to go tell Aunt Clara about this, she telling it once and Ken the second time, but meanwhile she was perfectly content to be in Ken's arms and have him go on kissing her.

And if Aunt Clara had one single solitary word to say against Ken, she would just tell her that Ken was practically the greatest hero this town had ever produced and a fine person in every way, and not to be dopey and small minded about gossip. Because Ken was simply wonderful and everyone who met him, instead of just talking about him, loved Ken. Including Hank. Including her.

(THE END)

DON'T

Set Your Cap For Me

By
Venees Fairfield

JANET WAS in the slat-house, grafting gardenia buds onto thunbergia stock when she heard the tinkling of the gate bell that announced the arrival of a customer.

She called out, "Be with you in a minute," and finished fastening the tape around the stem she had been budding.

As she came out of the slathouse she saw that her customer was not examining the plants growing in cans, but was standing by Donny's play-pen, looking down at the plump two-year-old with curious intensity. Donny was being his most ingratiating self, chuckling with joy and trying to give away one after another of his toys to the tall, thin man.

Janet pushed an ash blonde curl back from her forehead, smoothed her neat blue slacks over her hips and asked politely: "What can I do for you?"

With an effort the man drew his dark eyes away from the baby and turned them solemnly on the girl. "Are you—" he began slowly, while incredulity built itself into the brown depths of his eyes—"You're not Janet Rockwell?"

"Yes, I am," she said firmly. "Who are you, and what do you want?"

He didn't answer at once. Instead, he resumed his absorbed study of Donny. "So that's my baby," he said aloud at last, talking to him-

"When did this intense interest in your son's welfare begin?" she asked with a touch of bitterness.



★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

*Weston insisted that he'd make
a better father than a man hating
old maid!*

self, more than to the girl.

Janet bristled, immediately on the defensive. She reached down and snatched the baby up into her arms, hugging him so protectingly close that he grunted his dismay. "He's happy here with me," she explained breathlessly. "It would upset him to have to get used to someone else taking care of him. I've saved every cent of the allotment money and you can have it all, if only you'll agree to let me adopt Donny. I've gotten so fond of him—" She broke off, choking, unable to go on.

"It's a mistake," he said gently, "to let yourself care so much about someone who doesn't belong to you. However, there's no need to get all excited. I'm not going to start throwing my weight around and making high-handed demands without considering all the angles."

"Thanks," she said curtly. "That's big of you, I'm sure. You marry a girl and then go away to war and forget all about her. When she dies giving birth to your baby, you take up the business of ignoring the baby where you left off with ignoring the mother, your wife. And now, two years later, you show up here in civilian clothes and magnanimously agree to consider all the angles. Pardon me if I fail to appear impressed!"

"Did Maida tell you that I ignored her?"

"Yes. She said if it hadn't been for the allotment checks, she'd have thought she merely dreamed she was married. And after she died, I knew what she meant. I wrote you all about it, and about wanting to keep Donny. The only answer I got was that the checks started coming in, for him." Seeing the glint in his eyes, she rushed on, "I know that fighting the war was no picnic, and probably you were wounded or you wouldn't be out of it yet—" Her eyes brushed the Discharge Button on his lapel—"but there must have been some times when you could have written a line or two, just to let Maida know that you still loved her—"

HE LAUGHED harshly. "A lot she cared whether I loved her or not! I did write her three letters, though, and got no reply. After that I didn't bother. All Maida cared about was the money she got from me. She told me that, even before I sailed." His eyes had shifted from her face to that of the baby again. "He does look like me, doesn't he?" he observed wonderingly, as though still finding it hard to believe.

"His hair is blond; yours is brown," Janet pointed out. But she knew that was no item of importance. The child's big brown, widely spaced eyes were an almost perfect copy of the man's eyes, as were the high cheek bones and well shaped nose. The baby's mouth was more softly curved but that, too, was to be expected.

"My hair was blond, too, when I was his age," Weston Barfield said. "May I—may I hold him a minute?"

Janet nodded, and blinked the tears out of her eyes when she saw the gentle clumsiness with which this strange man handled his young son.

"Look here, young fellow," Weston said, "how would you like to go bye-bye with your old man?"

"Bye-bye. . . .bye-bye," Donny echoed, bouncing up and down with enthusiasm.

"You're not taking him anywhere now," Janet said firmly. "It's time for his nap."

"I've got a car," the ex-Marine said cautiously. "I thought maybe I could take Don to the beach and sort of get acquainted with him. You could come along, of course, if you like," he granted as an after-thought.

"That would be very nice," Janet said primly, "But you'll have to wait until after his nap. That will be about three o'clock."

"Okay, I'll be back at three." He handed her the squirming child, waved good-bye to him and walked slowly out through the gate to his car, waiting for him at the curb.

As Janet took the baby into the house to get him ready for his nap, her heart felt heavy with foreboding.

If I should lose Donny, she thought I don't know how I could go on. . . .

She had been so completely confident that the Marine Sargeant would not want his son, because there had been no letters or anything. She had thought that she would have to look him up to get him to sign the adoption papers. It never once had occurred to her that he would show up like this.

She thought back to that day, a little over two years ago, when Maida Barfield had stumbled through the swinging gate of the little nursery garden and fainted on the path, her suitcase sprawling open beside her, spilling baby clothes all over the petunia bed.

In one hand the blonde girl had clutched an ad from the morning paper—Janet's ad, reading:

WANT TO SHARE MY HOME WITH YOUNG WOMAN BETWEEN EIGHTEEN AND THIRTY. WILL EXCHANGE REFERENCES.

She had included her Coral Gables address and telephone number. Naturally she had not expected a war wife who was going to have a baby most any moment to reply, but after the girl was there, she could do nothing but call the doctor and hope for the best.

The doctor had announced at once that there would not be sufficient time to get Maida to the hospital, even if there were any beds available in the maternity ward, which there were not.

Maida had lived twenty hours after the baby was born. Long enough to tell Janet about her faithless husband in the South Pacific, and to beg her to "look after the baby."

If the strange girl had any other living relatives, Janet had been unable to find any trace of them. She finally made the funeral arrangements herself, wrote Donny's father, whose address she found among his wife's things, and settled down to being the baby's adopted mother.

THERE had been only one person who objected to this arrangement, and that was Janet's fiance, Victor Ardmore, a struggling young attorney who had been devoted to Janet even back in the good days when her father was still living. But they had kept postponing their marriage until Vic's legal practice should grow profitable enough to keep them both.

The first, last and only time they had a serious disagreement was when Janet insisted on keeping Donny.

"Just because some strange woman faints on your doorstep, that doesn't make you responsible for her baby!" Vic had contended.

And Janet had said stubbornly, "I want to be responsible for Donny. He's such an adorable baby, I couldn't stand to put him in an orphanage."

"You'll just get more and more attached to him and then his father will come home and take him away from you," Vic pointed out sensibly.

"I don't think so," Janet insisted. "I think that when he comes home he'll let me adopt the boy."

Vic's horrified anger had arisen to the boiling point. "Well, that lets me out," he had snapped. "I'm not getting married to any ready made families. I want kids, sure, but I want them to be my kids, not somebody else's orphaned brats."

So that had been the last time she had seen Vic, and she heard that he had started keeping company with another girl. Janet would have been unbearably lonesome if it hadn't been for Donny. The baby had taken almost all of her time that was not devoted to tending the flowers and selling them. All but the evenings, after he was asleep. Then she missed Vic, and her Dad. She finally had gotten a girl to share the house with her, for a time, but she was a popular girl who went out on dates almost every evening, and a week ago she had gotten married and moved away.

Once in awhile, when she could get a neighbor woman to come in and stay with Donny, Janet had gone along on a double date with Yvonne

and her friend, but she never had so very much fun because she had to steer clear of her favorite topic of conversation: Donny. The soldiers and sailors whom Yvonne knew were not interested in hearing about orphaned baby boys.

And now here was this man who had every legal right to take the baby away from her, threatening to upset the whole pattern of Janet's life. She'd given up the thought of marriage, in favor of Donny. Now she had no intention of giving up Donny without a struggle. If his father really cared anything about him, it would be different, but this was the first time he had shown the slightest interest in his son. And she told herself fiercely it was more curiosity than interest.

She had to admit that the ex-Marine Sergeant was attractive, and not at all like she had imagined him. For such a long time she had thought of Weston Barfield as a cynical, heartless guy who thought nothing of getting married and then breaking the girl's heart by ignoring her existence. It was something of a shock to see him looking so grave and serious-eyed and tired. He didn't look like a hard-boiled, cheating type of man who broke female hearts as carelessly as he broke open a package of cigarettes.

Of course you couldn't always tell by appearances, though, she reminded herself grimly. True, she'd heard only Maida's side of the story, so far. But she must not let herself change her opinion of the man at once just because he looked nice. The only thing to do was to wait. Wait and see.

SHE WASN'T sure why she should bother about how she looked, but for some reason it seemed important to look her best when Weston called at three that afternoon. Janet put on her white eyelet embroidered dress and the tiny, Dutch styled bonnet that matched. Her soft light hair curled childishly around the bonnet, making her look

like a storybook nursemaid. She pulled her white sandals onto her well shaped bare feet and fastened the buckles. She wore no rouge and only a touch of lipstick, but she had a healthy coat of tan and looked anything but pale.

Donny, in his handkerchief-size playsuit, was ready for the excursion to the beach when his father arrived.

Weston scarcely glanced at the girl who had taken such pains to look attractive. He had eyes only for the chubby baby boy. "Well, son, ready to go bye-bye with your old man?"

"Bye-bye. . . .bye-bye," Donny chirped.

"Is that all he can say?" Weston asked Janet.

"He knows a few other words," she defended the child. "He calls me 'Net. Water is 'wa-wa.' And the neighbor's cat is kiy-kiy. He's really very alert, and understands everything I say to him, but they seldom learn to talk so very young when there are no older children around, and only one adult."

"He's missed his daddy," Weston asserted, carrying him out to the car. "I'll take his education in hand now. Make a real man of him."

Janet felt a lump of premonition in her throat. She choked, "Don't you think he ought to be a boy first? I hate to see children who are forced to grow up too fast."

"Oh, sure," Weston granted easily. "This lad is going to have the kind of boyhood that I only wished I had. No orphanages for him. And no being farmed out at ten to people who only want him to work for them without pay. I don't know yet how I'm going to give him all the things I want him to have, but I'm going to!" he asserted.

Janet looked at him incredulously. "When did this intense interest in your son's welfare begin?" she asked with a tinge of bitterness.

"A couple of hours ago, when I first set eyes on him."

"That's fine! Yes, *that's just fine!*" she snapped. "Did it ever occur to you that Donny didn't just auto-

matically become two years old and cute and cuddly and health and normal? After ignoring his existence for two years, you suddenly show up and announce your intention to disrupt his whole life. Do you realize that if it hadn't been for me, Donny would have spent his first two years in an over-crowded, under-staffed orphanage—the very kind of life you blandly assert he never should have?”

He slowed the car and sent a side-long glance in the direction of his companion. “Say, you're kind of pretty,” he observed irrelevantly. “Especially when you're mad. But I don't see what you're so burned up about. Didn't I send enough money to take care of the kid's needs? If not, I'll make it right with you—”

“Money!” she scoffed. “No doubt you think money will buy anything, even affection. I couldn't love Donny more than I do if he was my own, and you think your money will compensate for my having to give him up! He loves me, too, but you think you can pay him to forget me! Well, I don't need your money and I haven't spent any of it. And if you care anything at all about Donny, you won't disrupt his whole life just for the sake of a sudden whim—”

“Sudden whim?” he echoed. “What sudden whim?”

“Now don't try to tell me you've been planning for the child's welfare all his life, and dreaming of the wonderful things you were to provide for the future! Why don't you admit that you haven't given him a thought until now? That you only came here to see him out of curiosity and that, finding him more appealing than you'd expected, you acquired this fine whim that you have labelled fatherly devotion?”

SHE HAD expected him to flare back at her, spouting bromides like, “Blood is thicker than water,” but his voice was quiet and thoughtful when he spoke:

“I don't know how well you knew Maida, and far be it from me to talk against someone who is dead and

can't defend herself, but the fact is that she was divorced only a few days before I met her, and I knew her less than a week before we were married. When you wrote me about the baby, you took it for granted that he was my son, but I wanted to see him before I built up any dreams around him.”

“I told you his birth was premature,” Janet pointed out.

“Yes, I know you did, but you must remember, I didn't know you from Eve. You might have been saying that just to get me to dole out some money for the kid's support—”

“If I'd done that, I'd have spent the money when it came, wouldn't I?” she demanded defiantly.

“I'm not doubting you now, I'm just pointing out the way things looked to me away out there on a little island in the Pacific. After one good look at Donny I could no more doubt that he's mine than I could doubt that I've got two eyes to see him with. And I am grateful to you for taking such good care of him. I'm also sorry you've grown so attached to him, because as soon as I can provide a good home for him, and hire a nurse to take care of him, I'm going to take him away from you—”

“You won't be able to find anybody reliable, and she won't take as good care of Donny as I would!” Janet cut in fiercely.

His grin was amused. “Are you offering your services?” he taunted. “I'm afraid you're a little too young to be my housekeeper, cook and nursemaid. People would talk—unless, of course, you're setting your cap to marry me?” He tilted a mocking eyebrow at her.

Janet's face turned an angry brick red. “Of course not. I hate you,” she told him crossly. “Besides,” she added, not quite truthfully, “I'm already engaged to be married.”

“And how does your fiancee feel about Donny?”

“He—he wanted me to turn him over to an institution,” she admitted.

— “There, you see? I'm really doing you a favor by removing an obstacle to your marriage. Still, having charge

of Donny has been good experience for you. When you have children of your own, you'll know exactly how to take care of them."

"I'll never have children of my own," she said bitterly, more to herself than to him.

"Why not?"

"Because I'll never get married!"

"But you just said. . . Hey, what is this?"

"I just said I was engaged. I was, but not any more. He—he made me choose between Donny and him, and I chose Donny!"

"Well, he'll come back to you, won't he? When he finds out you've given up Donny after all."

The girl's lips protruded sulkily. "No. I hate him now, too. I hate all men."

He was grinning teasingly again. "Donny will be a man some day. Maybe he's lucky that I am rescuing him from your future hatred."

"All right laugh," she snapped. "Laugh while you can. Maybe it won't seem so funny after the court decides who should have custody of Donny. They are apt to give major consideration to the welfare of the child, you know. They will realize that I'm a better mother to him than you and a hired housekeeper ever could be!"

"And they'll also agree that I'd make a better father than a man-hating old maid," he chided. "But here we are at the Hammock now, so let's forget our quarrels and see if we and Donny can't have some fun for a little while."

IT WAS pleasant Janet decided a few minutes later, as she sat on a blanket, propped her back against a palm tree and watched Donny and Weston build a castle out of a mound of white, sugary sand.

"'Ook, 'Nette!' the baby squealed with glee.

"Janet is looking," she assured him warmly. "My, that's a big one."

"Big 'un, big 'un," he chorused happily, paddling down the beach for another pail of water.

His father's eyes followed him. "Isn't he terrific?" he said with intense pride.

An elderly woman, leaning against another palm tree nearby, laid down the book she had been trying to read and commented sadly: "I wonder if you young people realize how lucky you are."

"I beg your pardon?" Janet said politely.

"Don't ever let anything or any person separate the three of you," the woman went on. "When I was about your age I divorced my husband because of a silly misunderstanding. I brought up my baby the best I could by myself, but I'm afraid I coddled him, made a weakling of him. When he thought he was going to be sent into battle, he couldn't take it, he killed himself. I don't even have the satisfaction of knowing that he died bravely. And I have only my own stupidity to thank for his cowardice. I'm a lonely woman, old beyond my years—believe it or not, I'm only forty-six—and all because when I was your age I didn't use my head."

"I'm sorry," Janet said, "but you see—"

"That won't ever happen to us," Weston interrupted gently. And to Janet's surprise he reached out, put his arms around her and pulled her close to him. Over her head he smiled at the older woman. "Thanks for the warning," he said, "we won't forget it, will we dear?"

And before Janet could utter one word of shocked protest, Weston's mouth closed on hers in a quick, fierce kiss. And a moment later, against her ear he was murmuring the hurried warning, "Don't you dare embarrass and disillusion that poor woman. Let her think she's done her good deed for the day."

Donny, feeling neglected, put a chubby arm around each of them and presented his cheek for them to kiss, which they obligingly did.

"That's a sweet picture," their self-assigned mentor commented smilingly. "I'll never forget it." She stood up, waved good-bye to them, and

walked slowly toward the parking lot.

Janet felt strangely shaken by the incident, and the tingling memory of Weston's kiss stayed with her all night and through the following day. Try as she would, she could not keep her heart hardened against him. Outwardly, he was so very different from the way she had visualized him, it was hard to keep on thinking of him as cold and calculating and heartless.

As for Donny, he obviously was quite taken with his newly arrived father. Before the afternoon was over, he was calling the man "Daddy" as though he had known him always, and during the days that followed, he looked forward eagerly to his dad's visits.

Sometimes they went to the beach or park, and on these trips Janet was invited to go along. At other times, Weston just played awhile with his son on the porch or in the yard.

But never, after that first afternoon, did he make any personal advances toward Janet. In fact, whenever he took Donny from her, he seemed to be avoiding touching her. She was annoyed to find herself feeling hurt and puzzled by his attitude. "After all," she told herself grimly, "I'm not poison, am I? And if he's afraid I'm setting my cap for him, he's crazy. I wouldn't have him as a gift."

She did not entirely deceive herself, however. She knew that the memory of the kiss that had been meant only to impress the sad old lady had made an indelible impression on her own heart. It hurt to know that Weston had forgotten it so completely. Or, if he remembered it at all, it was something he had no desire to repeat. In spite of all her resolutions, Janet knew that she was more strongly attracted to Weston than she ever had been to any man in her life, and the attraction had little, if anything, to do with Donny. She also knew that it wasn't going to do anything but hurt her to fall in love with the ex-Marine.

THE BEST antidote for love, she thought would be another man. So when Stanley Gray asked her to go to a show with him, she accepted without even mentioning her responsibility to Donny. "His father will be delighted to take care of him," she thought. And when he called for his daily romp with the baby, she asked him:

"Could you take care of Donny this evening, Weston? I've got a date."

He gave her a queer, unreadable look. "You mean stay here with him until you get home? How late will you be out?"

"I don't know, exactly, but shortly after midnight, I suppose. The curfew, you know—" She broke off, found herself blushing for no particular reason. "If—if you object to staying up that late, maybe you could take Donny's folding basinette home with you and keep him overnight. Or, if you have other plans, I'll try to get Mrs. Dawson to come in—"

"No. No. I haven't any plans. I'll stay here with him if you don't mind. If he should cry I don't know how my landlady would react. And with rooms to rent being as scarce as they are, I wouldn't want to antagonize her. But you wouldn't object to my taking a little nap on your couch if I get sleepy, would you? You see, I start on my first civilian job in the morning, and I wouldn't want to show up half asleep—"

"You do? Why that's just grand. What kind of a job is it?" she asked enthusiastically.

"It's not much, at the start. I'm to drive a delivery truck for a wholesale bakery, but if I show initiative, there's a chance I may work up to being sales manager some day."

"You'll do it," she said. "I'm sure you will. I'm so happy for you."

"Are you?" he asked curiously, studying her radiant face with a perplexed frown. "I thought you'd be happy for me to stay unemployed indefinitely, because then I wouldn't be able to take Donny away from you."

She bit her lip and avoided his eyes. "I hope I'm not as selfish as

all that," she said stiffly. "I like to see the ex-servicemen make good when they come back home. And now that you are going to work right here in the Miami area, surely you won't object to my seeing Donny sometimes?"

"No," he said slowly, "I won't object. You've been a wonderful foster mother, Janet, and I can't ever thank you enough."

"Skip it," she snapped. "I didn't do it for you; I did it for him, and because I enjoyed it, and I don't want any thanks." She walked resolutely into the house and closed the door behind her.

IT WAS A good picture but Janet couldn't keep her mind on it. She was remembering Weston's clumsy but gentle brown hands as he helped his son into his sleepers. She was remembering the peculiar expression in his eyes when he had looked up to see her standing there in the doorway in her pretty new fawn colored soft crepe dress.

"Have a good time," he had said, but the words had come out flat and dull.

"The latest magazines are at the end of the library table," she had pointed out, "and the radio won't wake Donny, once he's sound asleep. Don't let him talk you into playing with him after his bedtime. . . ." She turned away and went out to join Stanley, who was waiting for her on the porch.

Stanley was nice looking and pleasant and she tried her best to enjoy her date with him. When he suggested that they stop in at The Open Door on the way home, she assented just because she wanted to refuse and go rushing home to the child and the man who had come to mean so much to her.

She had met Stanley at a Garden Club dance a few weeks ago, and was glad he was new in town, and didn't know any of her friends who would tell him about Donny. She encouraged him to talk about himself so that she could avoid telling him

anything about her own major interests in life. She knew that if she wanted any more dates with him, she would do well to refrain from mentioning her devotion to Donny.

As the cab slowed to a stop in front of her home, Janet was surprised at first to see the house in complete darkness. Then she recalled Weston's mention of the fact that he might take a nap. Probably he was asleep on the davenport.

"Good night," Janet said to Stanley, while he was paying the driver, "I surely had a nice time and I want to thank you—"

"Not so fast," her escort said with a teasing laugh. "I'm not going to be brushed off like this. You've at least got to let me come up on the porch with you for a little while."

"But it's late and I'm tired—"

"Uh-huh, the old routine. I've heard it all before. You spend your hard-earned dough on a gal and then she refuses to reciprocate with even so much as one tiny good-night kiss—"

"Oh, all right," she agreed crossly, "just one then. But after that I'm going in and you're going home."

They were standing in the darkness of the screened porch, and Stanley was putting his arms around her, when she heard Weston calling her name, hoarsely, as though he was in great pain:

"Janet! Janet! Help me! I need you-u-u. . . ." His words trailed off into an indistinguishable mumble.

"Who's that?" Stanley demanded. "What's the matter with him?"

"It's Weston," Janet said, as though that explained everything that needed explaining. "He sounds like he's been hurt. Maybe you'd better come in with me, if he needs help—" She was hurrying on into the house ahead of him, turning on the light in the living room.

Weston was lying on the couch with his back toward her. She ran over to him, leaned down and looked at his face. His eyes were closed, and his breathing even. "He's asleep," she thought, "he talks in his sleep."

"Who is he, your brother?" Stanley asked. "What's wrong with him?"

"He talks in his sleep," she said aloud. "He must have been having a bad dream—"

"Well, let's wake him up then."

BEFORE she could stop him, he had Weston by the shoulder and was shaking him. "Wake up, old man. You'll sleep more comfortably in bed."

Weston stirred, rolled over on his back, his eyes still closed. "Janet," he mumbled. "Where are you, Janet?"

She touched his arm gingerly, "I'm right here, Weston."

His next act was as startling as it was unexpected. He caught her shoulders and pulled her down to him, closing his arms around her fiercely, possessively. "I thought I'd lost you," he said with a deep sigh of relief. "Don't ever leave me again, Janet. I can't live without you. I need you with me, like this, for always—" He broke off, finding her mouth with his in a long and soul-stirring kiss.

"Hey, what is this?" Stanley's puzzled voice came to her from a great distance. He was noticing a kiddy-car, standing near the table. "If you're married, why didn't you tell me—"

"Please go, Stanley," Janet said brokenly. "I'm sorry if you think I played a mean trick on you, but I had no idea Weston cared anything about me. If he talks like this in his sleep he must care—a little—"

"I care a lot more than a little," Weston said, sitting up. "I care so

damned much that I've been going slowly mad, all evening, thinking of you with that guy, wishing I hadn't let you go with him—"

Stanley had marched out of the house, but neither of them noticed.

"Then you weren't asleep, at all?" Janet asked dazedly.

"I think I've been asleep all my life, until tonight," he said slowly, "when I woke up to the fact that none of my theories were important enough to stand the risk of losing you.

"You see, when I kissed you that first afternoon, I suspected I was falling in love with you, but I wouldn't let myself give in to it until I could be sure of you. I thought you might marry me to get my son, just as Maida married me to get my allotment checks. I wanted you to love me for myself, but now I'm afraid I'll lose you altogether if I wait for that. So, if you'll marry me now, I'll take a chance on winning your love, later—"

"It won't be much of a chance to take," she was saying, smiling shyly up at him.

"You mean you love me already?" he cried eagerly.

"I'm pretty sure," she nodded. "I think one more kiss might decide it."

One more kiss was not needed to decide anything, but it was worthwhile for its own sake. Some day Janet might get around to being cross with Weston for playing such a trick on her as he had tonight, but right now she was too happy to worry about it."

(THE END)



OF COURSE HE LIKES YOUR
LETTERS

But a Pint of Blood May
Save His Life!

MAKE YOUR APPOINTMENT WITH
THE RED CROSS TO DONATE
BLOOD — TODAY!

Cupid Was A ★ ★ ★ Kitten

By
Betty Webb Lucas

IF IT hadn't been for MacTavish, Candy Wilson might never have met the young playwright living across the hall. As it was, Candy walked out of her apartment one Sunday morning, to find the door across the hall open, and MacTavish swinging from the chandelier, while someone with dark, curly hair and incredibly broad shoulders, stood down below, dangling a tempting bit of liver.

"Here, kitty, nice kitty," he was saying in deep, conjoling tones. "If you don't come down from there right now—" little by little his voice changed to a roar, "I'm coming up there and break your damned neck!"

Candy leaned against the doorway, looking absurdly tiny in blue denims and a plaid shirt,



*She fled past him
with MacTavish
huddled sheep-
ishly in her
arms.*

*Candy Wilson turned Dare's life topsy-turvy,
but that was nothing compared with what
he did to her heart.*

with her copper-colored hair twisted into pigtails on top of her head. "Aren't you afraid," she murmured sweetly, "that you might look a trifle foolish up there?"

Candy's words were as shattering as a bombshell. First, the man whirled around with a startled exclamation, and secondly MacTavish made a flying leap from the chandelier and landed right in her arms.

"Poor MacTavish," Candy murmured softly. "Was he very unkind to you?"

"Unkind!" He sounded furious. Candy thought inwardly. Even without looking up, she knew that his eyes would be very blue, and snapping with anger. "If you call using my last ration points for liver being unkind—"

"I wasn't talking to you," Candy retorted spiritedly, "but now that you mention it, just why did you entice my kitten into your apartment in the first place?"

"Entice him! For the love of sweet heaven!" He sounded a little strangled. Candy thought uneasily, and when she glanced up, he was watching her in perplexed silence. He was awfully handsome, Candy decided excitedly. His eyes were as blue as she'd anticipated when she watched him moving into the apartment a couple of weeks ago.

Oh, Candy had had her eyes on him, of course. The minute he rented the apartment, word had traveled like wildfire that Dare Gaylord, the famous playwright, was going to live at the Burlington Arms. One rumor had it that he'd come there to work on a new play. Another rumor said he was going to be married soon. Inwardly, Candy decided the first rumor was probably right, since men as handsome and eligible as Dare Gaylord didn't usually get married. They just went through life collecting sweethearts—in bunches.

For a week now, Candy had tried wistfully to think of some way of getting acquainted with her new neighbor. Night after night she'd lain in bed, listening to the steady rat-tat-tat of his typewriter, and trying to picture just what Dare Gaylord was

like. She'd even made up stories about him, for the benefit of MacTavish.

MACTAVISH was a black cat of uncertain species, with snowy white whiskers, and soulful eyes. He'd been Candy's companion for three years; ever since she came to New York to work as a fashion designer in one of the large department stores, and he always listened attentively when Candy talked about Dare Gaylord.

"He's shy," she would declare earnestly one night. "He's brilliant and charming, but inwardly he's terrified by women. That's why we haven't seen him out in the hall, MacTavish, but one of these days he'll weaken, and that is when you and I will take over."

Now, at last, they were actually face to face, and Candy discovered that Dare Gaylord had a pretty wonderful face, too. He had a square, bronzed jaw, and smouldering eyes, and a firm, flexible mouth; a potent combination of Clark Gable, Van Johnson, and t. n. t.

"Look, young lady," he exclaimed in an impatient voice, "for the last time—"

"It's Wilson," Candy interrupted happily. "My name, I mean. It's really Candace Wilson, but my friends call me Candy."

"That's very nice, I'm sure," he answered stiffly. "As I was saying, I didn't entice your cat into my apartment. I found her—him—that is, it clinging to the chandelier when I came in, and if you don't mind, I'd appreciate it very much if you'd take it away."

Candy stared at him dreamily, hardly aware that he was talking at all. He was taller than she'd realized. Younger, too. There was a sort of magnetic charm about him, even though he was angry. "Of course," she agreed vaguely. "You're perfectly right, Mr Gaylord."

"Thank you," he nodded, waiting for her to leave, but Candy didn't move. Her dark eyes were as wide as saucers, and her red lips parted softly.

"Well?"

"Y-yes, Mr Gaylord?" She was thinking, dizzily, who ever would have believed I'd fall in love like this? One look, and—bingo, and I'm crazy about the guy!

"I don't think you've been listening to a word I said," he exclaimed impatiently. "Look, Miss Wilson, I'm asking you to take that da—that cat away, if you will please."

"You don't like cats?"

"That's beside the point, Miss Wilson. It just happens that I'm expecting my fiancée up here any minute now, and—"

Candy jolted back to earth with a bump. "Did you say—fiancée?" she whispered mournfully.

Dare Gaylord didn't seem to notice that she was upset, because he nodded proudly. "Marsha Major," he said. "The actress. She has the leading role in my new play, and we're going over it tonight."

"I—see," Candy murmured softly. She remembered seeing pictures of the actress in the paper, and Marsha Major was definitely on the glamorous side. "She doesn't like cats?"

"Cats? Cats? How should I know whether she likes cats or not." Dare said impatiently. "That has nothing to do with it, Miss Wilson."

"I think it has everything to do with it. Your life, I mean," Candy argued recklessly. "After all, if she doesn't like cats, she probably doesn't care for children, either, and if that's the case—" Candy's voice dropped ominously. "—you may be making a grave mistake, Mr Gaylord. Don't you think you ought to think things over for awhile? Say—for three or four years, or so?"

"This nonsense has gone far enough," Dare broke in, "and I'll thank you to leave my fiancée's name out of it." All the time he was talking, Dare was piloting Candy toward the door, and then, almost before she knew what had happened, Candy was standing in the corridor with MacTavish in her arms, and the door had been closed not too gently, in her face.

For a minute Candy didn't move, and then she sighed dreamily. "Oh,

MacTavish," she whispered to the furry ball in her arms, "Dare Gaylord isn't at all the way I thought he'd be. MacTavish, he's simply *wonderful!*"

A FEW hours later, Candy had to concede that her first meeting with Dare Gaylord had been a dismal failure. She sat curled up in a chair listening wistfully to the sound of voices across the hall, where Dare and his fiancée were rehearsing his new play. Now and then she heard the tinkle of low, feminine laughter, and Candy's spirits sank to a new low.

"No wonder he didn't look twice at me," she thought disconsolately. "He's engaged to someone glamorous, and I walked in wearing blue jeans and pig-tails. Why, he probably thought I was only a child!"

Almost before she realized what she was doing, Candy jumped out of the chair and ran to her closet. And then, before she could change her mind, she'd slid into her best white evening gown, and started doing magic things to her face and hair. She put a thin film of shadow on her lids to make the deep, bronzed glow in her eyes more pronounced. She wore a deep shade of lipstick, and twisted her copper-colored curls into chignons on the back of her neck, and then she finished things off with a dab here and there of her most alluring perfume.

When she was finished, Candy took a deep breath, and walked across the hall to tap softly on the half-opened door leading into Dare Gaylord's apartment.

When Dare came to the door, Candy blinked a little with surprise, because in evening clothes he was more handsome than ever. His eyes traveled rapidly over her slim sheath of gown, her white column of throat, and then narrowed slightly when they rested on her face. "Oh," he said without enthusiasm, "it's you."

Candy smiled determinedly. "I do hope I'm not interrupting anything," she said sweetly, "but MacTavish has disappeared again, so naturally I thought he'd be over here." She looked around the room so expectantly that there was nothing else Dare

could do but introduce her to the lovely girl seated on the sofa.

The minute she met Marsha Major, Candy wanted to turn and run the other way, because close up the actress was positively dazzling. She was taller than Candy, with a gorgeous figure sheathed in chartreuse crepe that set off her white skin and black, black hair rippling around her slim shoulders.

"Well," she said in her famous husky drawl, "I didn't know that Dare had already made friends here."

"You mean Dare didn't tell you about—us?" Candy asked politely, ignoring Dare's startled look.

Marsha Major's black eyes narrowed, and she looked beyond Candy's bright head to where Dare was standing beside the door, looking as though he could cheerfully strangle his uninvited guest. "Just how long has this been going on, darling?"

"Oh, we haven't any idea," Candy put in chattily, "but I suspect it's been going on for quite some time now, because MacTavish seemed completely at home here. Why, he's as much at home here as in my apartment."

"Indeed!" Marsha's voice sounded a little taut. "I presume that MacTavish is your—husband?"

"Husband? Oh, dear, no," Candy giggled protestingly, but before she could say anything more to add to the confusion, Dare broke in loudly:

"Marsha, you don't understand. MacTavish happens to be a cat belonging to Miss Wilson."

"A cat!"

"I—I guess I'd better run along now," Candy said hastily, catching a glimpse of Dare's angry face. She hurried toward the door, with Dare right behind her.

"I'll see that you reach your apartment safely, Miss Wilson," he said pleasantly, but once they were out of earshot, he whispered heatedly: "Now if it isn't asking too much, what is this all about?"

"I—I don't understand."

"You don't understand!" He sounded despairing. "First you come in and deliberately mislead my fiancée into thinking that you and I—that some-

thing—" he stopped, started again: "You say you don't understand that you're turning my life topsy turvy!"

THEY were standing close together in the softly lighted hall, and Candy thought dreamily that she could almost reach out and touch the angry line etched around Dare's mouth, or the unruly curl that had tumbled over his square forehead. Almost imperceptibly, the expression on Dare's face changed; his mouth gentled, and his eyes lost their angry look.

"Candy," he said faintly, "maybe I'm wrong about you, after all. Maybe you're not really—" And then suddenly he stiffened, staring over Candy's head into her apartment.

Candy backed away from him slowly, eyes widening with dismay. Without even looking, she knew what had drawn Dare's attention away from her. There on the davenport in her apartment, in full view of the hall, sat MacTavish, calmly washing his face!

Candy was so miserable she hardly slept a wink that night. Every time she remembered the expression on Dare's face when he saw MacTavish, she burst into tears. If only she hadn't fibbed about MacTavish being missing from her apartment, she thought ruefully, but now Dare would never finish what he'd started to say. She'd probably never even see him again.

By morning, Candy had reconciled herself to the fact that she didn't have a chance with Dare Gaylord. That's why it was such a shock to find him waiting for her when she came home from the office that night. He looked surprisedly chastened, and the first thing he said was: "I thought perhaps you'd have dinner with me this evening, Candy."

Candy was so surprised she nearly fell over, but she managed to look thoughtful for a moment, mentally turning pages in a date book that had been blank for weeks. "Why, I believe I can," she said finally.

All the time she was dressing, Candy kept pinching herself to make sure it wasn't a dream, and Dare had

asked her to have dinner with him in spite of what she'd done last night. In spite of everything.

Because it was such a special occasion, Candy wore her new short evening dress of lime-colored crepe, and looked as smart as her own fashion ads when she met Dare in the hall and they went downstairs to a taxi.

All the way to the El Troubador where they were dining, Dare was very quiet, but Candy didn't mind. She chatted excitedly until they'd been seated at a table overlooking the dance-floor, and Dare had ordered cocktails and dinner. And then, unexpectedly, Dare said: "You are a very clever girl, Candy Wilson."

Clever, Candy thought in surprise, was hardly the sort of compliment a girl in love likes to hear, but she managed to look demure.

"In fact," Dare pursued gravely, "you didn't waste time getting to your point, so we shouldn't have any trouble making a deal."

"A—deal?" Candy's eyes widened. "Just what sort of deal do you mean?"

"Oh, come now," Dare objected lightly, "you don't have to pretend any longer, Candy. You did a very convincing bit of acting last night. Too convincing, I might add, because you even have Marsha thinking there was more to—to things, than just a chance meeting over a cat. That's why I brought you here, so we could talk things over and decide what to do. As it is, Marsha is furious. She won't believe me when I say I scarcely know you, but if you were to explain why you'd put on that act last night, I'm sure everything will work out okay. In exchange, I'll see that you get a role in the play. That's what you want, isn't it?"

Candy swallowed painfully, her dark eyes blurred a little as they rested on his face. So that was the reason he had brought her out to dinner tonight—because Marsha was angry with him, and he was expecting Candy to patch things up. What a crazy little goon she'd been to actually believe he liked her!

There was such a lump in Candy's throat that she could hardly talk, but

not for anything in the world would she let Dare know what was really going on inside her heart.

"I'll be glad to explain to Miss Major," she evaded his question. "I guess I—I do owe her an apology after all."

CANDY winced at the relief on Dare's face. "I knew you'd understand," he said cheerfully. "Ordinarily, it wouldn't be necessary, because in time Marsha would realize it was all a mistake, but I can't take any chances now. The play goes into rehearsal next week, and Marsha's got to be in it. Why, it wouldn't stand a chance on Broadway without Marsha Major in the lead."

"I—see," Candy toyed dully with her dinner, not daring to look at Dare for fear he'd see the tears dotting her lashes. She hardly tasted a bite and when they finally rose to leave the restaurant, she breathed a sigh of relief.

When they reached her apartment again, Dare paused. "Goodnight, Candy." His eyes rested on her flushed, upturned face, and he said irrelevantly: "You're such a little thing—not any bigger than a minute."

Candy's breath quickened with hope at something she saw in his eyes; a little pulse pounding in his cheek. And then, before she could stop herself, she stood on tiptoe and pressed her lips against his for one fleeting, wonderful moment. She could sense Dare's surprise, and then, all at once he caught her close in his arms and kissed her again.

Oh, it was wrong of course, Candy thought dizzily, but she didn't care, because this was the last time she'd ever be in Dare's arms. When she drew away, her eyes were shining and there were two flags of color burning in her cheeks.

"Goodnight, Dare," she whispered unsteadily. "That's thanks—for everything." And then, before he could stop her, Candy had hurried inside her apartment and closed the door.

So that, she thought bleakly, was that. As Dare walked across the hall and opened his apartment door, Can-

dy sank into a chair with tears rolling heartbrokenly down her cheeks. So this was the way it felt to be in love, she thought bleakly. All numb and miserable and lost inside. Even when MacTavish jumped up in her lap, purring like a P-38, Candy scarcely noticed. If it hadn't been for MacTavish, she thought rebelliously, she might never have met Dare and fallen so hopelessly in love with him.

Dare had told Candy that Marsha was coming the next evening to discuss the play with him, and Candy had promised to talk to the actress then. As soon as she heard them come in, Candy stiffened her small shoulders bravely, and walked across the hall, but when Dare opened the door, her courage almost evaporated. The look of relief on his face seemed more than she could bear.

"Well, if it isn't Miss Wilson again," Marsha said in her low, throaty voice. "Don't tell me you're looking for your cat again?"

"No," Candy shook her head, her hands clenched into small fists. "I know where MacTavish is, Miss Major. As a matter of fact, I came to apologize for the other night. You see, I—" she swallowed hard, "—I wasn't really looking for MacTavish, and I—I deliberately let you think Dare and I were friends. As a matter of fact, I'd never even met him before that day."

"Really," Marsha smiled knowingly, and then shot Dare a triumphant glance. "I told you she was putting on an act, darling, because she wanted a role in your new play. And now you can see I was right."

"Marsha—" Dare called to her warningly, but she went on lightly: "Well, after all, when she implied that you two were friends, what else could I believe? Naturally, I knew you couldn't possibly be interested in—her."

Candy flushed scarlet at her mocking tone, and she couldn't look at Dare to see what his reaction had been. Besides, what did it matter now, she thought dully. Candy's only desire was to get out of the apartment before she burst into tears.

"If you'll excuse me now," she said levelly, "I'll go back to my own apartment. I—" And then, suddenly, Candy stiffened. From the region of the tiny study, she could hear MacTavish's low, mournful wail, rising to a sharp yowl, and then the sound of a fierce struggle.

The light was dim, and when Candy reached the door she could barely make out MacTavish, locked in a struggle with a large, furry animal.

"MacTavish," Candy screamed, "Oh, save him, someone!"

"Don't worry," Dare shouted, "I'll save him, Candy." There was a lot of confusion, the sound of MacTavish's pitiful whine, and then the lights flashed on, and Candy caught her breath. There, almost at her feet, stood MacTavish, and from his mouth dangled Marsha Major's silver fox scarf!

Afterwards, Candy didn't know how she got back to her own apartment. The sound of Marsha's angry accusations still echoed in her ears, and every time she closed her eyes, she recalled the look on Dare's face as she fled past him with MacTavish huddled sheepishly in her arms. Dare had followed her across the hall, saying:—

"I told you I'd give you a role in the play, Candy, so was it necessary to put on another scene? Marsha's almost in hysterics, and I—"

"Marsha!" Candy whirled furiously, her eyes glinting with anger. She was so mad she didn't know what to do. "Go on back to your precious Marsha," she'd said recklessly. "As for your play—I'm not one bit interested, and I never have been. I'm an artist, not an actress, and as far as I'm concerned, I never want to see you again as long as I live!"

Well, she probably will never see Dare again, Candy thought ruefully. If he had anything to do with it. She spent the rest of the evening trying to coax MacTavish out from behind the sofa. Probably he was sulking, she decided with a trace of humour, after the nasty names Marsha had screamed at him when they fled across the hall.

SOMEHOW, Candy managed to get through the next couple of days without meeting Dare in the hall. She invented excuses for staying downtown after work. She ate leisurely dinners, and went to movies, and visited friends, but she couldn't get Dare out of her mind—or her heart. Nothing would ever be the same again, she thought wistfully, unless she got Dare completely out of her system.

It was the third night when Candy came home early, to find MacTavish missing from the apartment. "Poor kitten," she murmured sympathetically. "I have been deserting him lately, and he's probably gone to find another home."

Candy opened her door to call him, and then stopped short. The door leading to Dare's apartment was standing wide open, and he was seated on the sofa apparently engrossed in a book. Sitting beside him, purring contentedly, sat MacTavish!

Candy hesitated uncertainly, and then she tossed her head. She walked to Dare's door, rapped sharply, and entered the room, her heart pounding violently when Dare looked up and grinned, almost hopefully.

"Don't let me interrupt you," she said shortly. "I only came after my cat."

With MacTavish held firmly under her arm, Candy turned and fled back to the sanctuary of her own rooms. She collapsed weakly in a chair while waves of emotion rolled over her. Darn Dare Gaylord anyway, she thought indignantly. Why couldn't he have at least said *something!*

She was still seated in the chair, staring moodily at the floor, when she saw MacTavish's furry tail whisk around the door, and by the time she'd reached the hall, he was back in Dare's apartment again. Only this time he wasn't sitting still, he seemed to be in raptures over Dare.

"It's treason," Candy murmured. "If MacTavish keeps acting like this, Dare will believe it's a put-up job."

This time, Candy didn't even bother to knock. She just marched into the room, nodded coldly, her face

scarlet at Dare's amused glance, and started out again with MacTavish wiggling indignantly in her arms.

And then, just as she reached the door, Candy stiffened, because Dare was saying softly: "Is this trip really necessary? You know you aren't going to accomplish anything this way, but—" he sounded almost shy, "—if we were to join forces—"

"W-what do you mean?"

"I mean maybe we ought to get married, so MacTavish wouldn't have to divide his time between us. Just think of the wear and tear this must be causing him."

"M-m-married?" Candy stammered weakly. She thought she must be dreaming it, but when she turned around, Dare looked perfectly sober. There was even a wistful look in his blue eyes. "Y-you don't really mean that," Candy said disbelievingly.

"I MEAN it more than I've ever meant anything in my life," Dare answered humbly. With widening eyes, Candy watched him rise from the sofa and come across the room toward her. "For a couple of days now, Candy, I've been trying to see you, so I could tell you the way I felt about—things. Whenever I got enough courage to try to explain, you were out, and frankly, I was almost afraid to tell you this. I was afraid maybe I'd just imagined that you—that you might feel the same way about me. You see—when Marsha blew up the other night, I realized that everything you said about her was true. She is selfish and spoiled and unreasonable, and we'd never be happy together."

"B-but your play—"

"Oh, she's still taking the lead in it," Dare smiled. "As a matter of fact, I'm beginning to think it was really the play instead of the author that she cared about. As soon as I'd convinced her she could keep the leading role, she was very willing to release me from our engagement."

"Candy, you little minx," he shook her gently, "can't you understand what I'm talking about? I'm in love with you. I think I fell in love with you the minute you walked in here the other day, and gave me the dick-

ens for abusing your cat. But when you admitted you were only acting, because you wanted a part in the play, I was all mixed up. Somehow I couldn't believe you were telling me the truth, but I couldn't understand what other reason you might have, and it didn't occur to me that you might—you might—"

"Might be in love with you?" Candy whispered softly, because now she wanted Dare to know everything. She was close in his arms, and they were strong and gentle around her, just as she'd dreamed they would be. "As a matter of fact, darling, I wasn't really mad when I found MacTavish in here. I could have kissed him for bringing us together. And, Dare, I—"

Candy stopped short, sniffing suspiciously. "Dare," she said accusingly, "you're a fraud! You've got catnip in your pocket, and that's how you lured MacTavish into your apartment this afternoon!"

Dare grinned, unperturbed. "It was the best way I could think of to lure you in here, Candy, darling. Especially since you'd declared you never wanted to see me again. You see, sweetheart, MacTavish is the greatest actor of us all," Dare's lips were against her hair: "Without even knowing it, he's played his finest role—as Cupid."

(THE END)

For The September Issue of

IDEAL LOVE



WARRIOR IN PARADISE

By Ruth McCaslin



She heard a noise at the window that caused her to sit up stiffly, her heart in her throat.

HE BELONGS TO

★ ★ ★ ME ★ ★ ★

By

June Rutherford

“SO SORRY,” the room clerk said, and Judy Grey, hearing those words for the tenth time that day, turned away with a heavy, frightened heart. It was almost dark and she was very tired. For hours she had trudged from one hotel to another, lugging a small suitcase. A cold March wind had tangled her gold-brown hair, whipped her short pleated skirt against her legs, lifted the powder off her small straight nose.

She walked slowly up Fifty-sixth Street toward Broadway. At the corner she ducked into a drug store and ordered a cup of coffee. While hunched on the stool, sipping the hot drink, she studied the list of hotels Gregory Ames had given her, and crossed out the last one.

She was supposed to have had a reservation at one of the hotels—the one at the top of her list—but that had fallen through. Now, she really was on her own, as far as finding a place to stay was concerned. Judy swallowed her anxiety and sipped her coffee.

Gregory had opposed her coming to New York to seek her fortune, and so had her parents. But she had been adamant. She simply couldn't marry Gregory and settle down in Plattsburgh without trying her wings first.

Her mother and father thought she was very foolish to put Gregory off like that, not only be-

cause he was mad about her, but because he had a great deal of money. Gregory was a lawyer, with a finger in a dozen profitable pies. He was twenty-nine, good looking, and popular in a high-handed way.

“I'll take you to New York and buy you the town,” he had told her.

“But—but that isn't the answer. Don't you understand, Gregory? I want to get a job, make my own way. I want to—to spend a year on my own before I settle down.”

SOMEHOW SHE had leaped the first hurdle. She was in New York, on her own. But Gregory had insisted upon giving her a list of hotels and a list of legal firms that might employ her. She had been his secretary for a year, and he had written her a glowing recommendation. Judy appreciated his help, es-

It was then that she saw Mary and Terry close together, Mary's head on Terry's shoulder.

Terry was gay, his touch was magic, and Judy knew that she was falling in love.



pecially when she remembered that she had less than a hundred dollars in her bag.

Cheered by the coffee, Judy went swiftly along the sidewalk, and turned into the next hotel she came to. There was a commotion in the small lobby. The room clerk was talking excitedly to three men, apparently about one of the guests.

"It's unfortunate," Judy heard her say. "This sort of thing can happen to any hotel, but I wish it hadn't happened here."

Judy waited hopefully beside the desk. "What can I do for you?" the woman asked her finally, having disposed of the three men.

"I—I'm looking for a room," Judy said anxiously. "I—I. . ."

"I have one room available," the woman said crisply. "It is four dollars a day."

"I'll take it," Judy said promptly, although that was more than she had planned to pay.

"Sign here," the woman said. "Your room will be ready in an hour."

It was a bleak four dollars worth of room and bath. The windows faced a brick wall and served as a resting place for pigeons. There was a faded blue rug on the floor, a faded pink tufted spread on the single bed. Outwardly there were no clues, but Judy knew, without being told, that something dreadful had happened in this room that very day. Perhaps a murder. She shuddered at the thought, but she told herself that this room was better than no room at all, no matter what had happened to the previous occupant.

Humming to keep up her courage, she locked the door, took a hot bath, and crawled into bed. Tomorrow she must be rested and fresh for her job hunting expedition. As soon as she found a job, she hoped to make some friends and perhaps room with some other girl who worked for the same firm. Until this happened, she was going to have to go light on eating, for after paying for her room, she would have little left for food and incidentals.

IT WAS ten o'clock before Judy was able to drift off to sleep. Ten minutes later she heard a noise at the window that caused her to sit up stiffly, her heart in her throat. In horrified silence she watched a man climb through the window into her room. Judy tried to scream, but only a small, strained cry came through her lips.

"Don't be frightened Mazie," the man said hoarsely. "It's only me. Turn on the light."

Judy turned on the light, and they stared at each other blankly. He was a thin, pale young man with green, unsteady eyes, thin lips, and rumpled blond hair.

"Where's Mazie?" he gasped, looking wildly around the room.

"I—I don't know. Who are you?"

"Never mind who I am. How long have you had this room?"

"I—I checked in today."

"Something's happened to her," he groaned. "I'm too late. I knew it. I knew it." His face was white and haggard. "Listen," he said, "don't tell anyone I was here. Just forget it. Do you understand?"

Judy nodded. She watched him climb out the window and vanish into the night. Then she sprang from the bed, closed the window and locked it. Trembling uncontrollably, she put on her robe and slippers, and sank down in a chair. Should she call the management and report the man, or should she keep silent?

Judy felt sorry for Mazie and her young man, and she had about decided to keep silent, when a light knock sounded on her door. She hurried across the room and flipped the lock. She opened the door only a crack, but instantly a man's foot prized it open a little wider.

"Hello," the man said in a low, friendly voice. "Don't be frightened. I won't bite you." He came in without invitation and looked at her and then at the room.

Judy backed slowly away from him, her gold-brown eyes wide and dark, her chin quivering, her fist pressed tightly against her hammering heart. Two strange visitors on her first night in New York were

too much for her to take without going to pieces. "Who—who are you?" she cried.

"I'm Terry Hart," he said, smiling "a—a perfectly harmless reporter on a perfectly lousy newspaper. Ever read the Sentinel?"

"What do you want? Why are you here?"

"I want your story," he said. "If you'll spill it quickly, I'll be on my way."

"What story? I—I don't know what you're talking about."

"Oh yes, you do." He was walking around the room examining everything with blue, microscopic eyes. He even stooped and looked under the bed. Judy watched him in helpless silence. There was a lanky six feet of him between her and the door, and the telephone.

"There was a man in your room!" he exclaimed accusingly, eyeing her alertly. "What goes on here?"

"Don't—don't look at me like that!" Judy's eyes blazed at him. "He didn't come to see me. He thought I was Mazie. He—he was looking for the girl that—that isn't here any more. He came through that window."

The reporter's eyes narrowed. "A likely story," he snorted.

"I'm telling you the truth," Judy said anxiously. "It happened just fifteen minutes ago. Don't you believe me?"

"Why, yes, I—I do." He studied her briefly. "How old are you, Judy Grey?"

"Nineteen."

"And you live in Plattsburgh?"

"How did you know?"

"Did you love the man?"

"What man?"

"You know what man."

LOOK," JUDY said wearily, "you're not making sense. You're wasting your time and mine. I've got to get some sleep. I'm going job hunting tomorrow, and it's important that I look my best. If you don't go, I'll—I'll . . ."

"You look hungry to me," Terry Hart said abruptly. "Didn't you have any dinner?"

Judy had forgotten about dinner. She shook her head.

"Put on your clothes," he said. "I'll wait for you in the lobby. Terry Hart is going to buy you a hamburger. My good deed for the day. I'm just a Boy Scout at heart, Judy Grey, whether I look like one or not."

Because she was starved, and because she liked Terry Hart, Judy dressed hurriedly and went with him across the street to a quick lunch place. She had been warned by her parents and by Gregory not to talk to strange men, yet here she was talking to Terry Hart as if she'd known him for years. He didn't seem strange at all, watching her eat hungrily, with a curious smile on his face.

It wasn't a handsome face, though the blue eyes were large and keen and friendly. His hair was dark and his nose was big and he had strong, square jaws. She told him all she knew about Mazie, and her visitor, which was very little, and asked his advice.

"Better keep mum," he decided, "otherwise you might lose your room. Rooms are as scarce as tenderloin steaks. Are you afraid to stay there?"

"No. That is—not any longer."

"You're lying," he said. "You're scared to death. Why did you come to New York anyway?"

"To—to seek my fortune."

"What kind of fortune? What can you do? Dance? Sing? Act?"

Judy shook her head. "I'm a secretary. I want a job with a legal firm."

"Got any recommendations?"

"Yes. You see, I worked for Gregory Ames for a year. In Plattsburgh. He wrote me a wonderful letter" She dug into her bag, but the letter was not there. "Oh dear," she wailed. "I've lost it. Now what am I going to do?"

"If I were you," he said slowly, "I'd go home and marry the guy."

Judy flushed. "What guy?"

"There's always a guy wanting a pretty girl like you."

"I—I almost married Gregory Ames," she told him. "But then . . ."

"Why didn't you?"

"I guess I just didn't love him enough."

"But he loves you?"

She nodded. "I'm afraid he does."

"How do you mean—afraid?"

"You ask entirely too many questions," Judy said, rising. "I must go now. Goodnight and thank you for the hamburger."

"Thank you," he said, walking back with her to the elevator, "for being such a nice kid. I'd forgotten there were girls like you, Judy. Goodnight and good luck."

THE MORNING papers gave Judy a vivid account of what happened in her room. A girl named Mazie Brown had slashed her wrists because she was desperately lonely. She had left a note saying she was choosing this way out because she did not want to live without the man she loved. "I've waited and waited and waited," the note said, "and I know now that he is never coming back."

Judy read about it while she was having her breakfast at the corner drug store. Poor girl. If only she'd waited another day. For undoubtedly the man who had entered by the window was the man Mazie had waited for so long.

She read the Sentinel story last. It was by-lined Terry Hart, and he had scooped the other papers with the startling information that Mazie's man had come to see her, just a few hours after she had taken her life. "He's a mystery man," the story continued, "for he came by way of the window and left the same way. He was a thin, nervous man, with green unsteady eyes, thin lips and pale blond hair. The present occupant of the room saw and talked to him, but only briefly."

Judy was pleased that she had helped Terry Hart scoop the other papers. She appreciated his leaving her name out of the story. She felt that Terry was her friend, and she went job hunting with a light heart. But her luck was all bad that day. She heard the same words "No.

sorry," a dozen times, and she crossed out the names on her list so rapidly that by dusk, she had exhausted her last prospect.

She was walking tiredly back to the hotel, trying to keep her spirits up, when Terry grabbed her arm and said, "Hello, Judy. I've been waiting for you. Did you have any luck?"

She shook her head.

"That's too bad. Let's eat. Are you hungry again?"

"I—I've got to go to my room first and freshen up. I look dreadful."

"You look wonderful to me. I don't want you to go to your room. There are two policemen and three reporters waiting to question you about your visitor last night. Be a sport and come with me."

They ate a delicious Russian dinner and Terry told her about himself. He had been out of the army only a few weeks. He wanted to become a columnist. He'd had one year at Yale. His parents were dead. He liked to cook. "I can turn out a wicked steak," he told her. "Some day I'll do one for you."

After dinner he took her to the Music Hall and they held hands throughout the picture. Judy felt a strange stirring in her heart. She liked his gay, comradly manner, and his touch was magic. "I'm falling in love," she told herself, and she was suddenly so happy that she lost the thread of the plot, and forgot about the policemen and reporters waiting to question her.

AFTER THE show, Terry said, "Judy, I've got to go back to work now. I'll put you in a cab. If those dopes are still waiting for you, don't be afraid. Just tell them nothing as nicely as possible."

Judy grinned. "All right," she said.

"And don't worry about a job. I'll help you find one tomorrow. I'll call you early. Goodnight." He squeezed her hand and helped her into a cab.

The policemen and reporters were waiting for her in the lobby. "I'm sorry gentlemen," she told them brightly, "I haven't anything to tell you, really."

"Young lady," one of the policemen exclaimed, "all we want from you is a description of the man who came through your window."

"You can find a description of him in Terry Hart's article in the Sentinel," she told them.

"I don't believe there was a man. Terry Hart made that up out of his crazy head, and she's. . ."

"He did not!" Judy flared. "I saw the man with my own eyes." Talking very fast she gave them the information they wanted, not realizing until they had gone, that she had been outsmarted.

The next day, when Terry called, she told him what she had done and apologized for talking.

Terry laughed at her distress. "That's all right, honey. I didn't expect you to outsmart them. It doesn't matter. We stalled them long enough for me to get the jump on those guys. Did you read the Sentinel this morning?"

"No, not yet."

"It's all there on the front page. Your visitor escaped from a convalescent hospital. He's a mental case, Judy. Thank heavens he didn't harm you."

"Where is he now?"

"Back where he belongs in the hospital. Don't feel badly about it Judy. Things like that could happen anywhere—not just in New York. I think I've lined up a job for you. It isn't what you want, but it will do until a better one comes along. Meet me at the corner of Forty-Second and Sixth Avenue in thirty minutes."

"Thanks, Terry. I'll be there."

It wasn't much of a job. She was cashier in a small restaurant near the Sentinel offices. But Terry ate there often and she saw him every day. He introduced her to a girl named Mary Hinton, who, at his suggestion, offered to share her tiny efficient apartment with Judy. Judy accepted gladly, so that, thanks to Terry, she was soon settled in her new life.

Mary worked in the advertising department on the paper. She was very pretty, with dark hair, blue eyes and very fair complexion. She smoked

constantly, and wore stunning clothes, and she too was in love with Terry.

At first Terry played no favorites. He was nice to both of them. But Judy felt that Mary resented her and regretted having taken her in. However, in spite of their rivalry over Terry, she was happy. She loved New York, she loved Terry, and spring was definitely in the air.

ONE MORNING, only two weeks after she had started to work, the manager told her that he would not be needing her after that day.

"But why?" Judy asked. "Haven't I been satisfactory?"

"I'd rather not discuss it. You're fired."

"But I want to know what I've done. . ."

"Sorry." He left her abruptly, but she ran after him.

"Will you give me a recommendation?"

He shook his head.

It was such a sudden slap in the face, that Judy walked the streets with tears streaming down her cheeks. She arrived at the apartment at dusk, only to barge in on Mary and Terry, sitting close together on the sofa, Terry's arm around her, Mary's head buried against his chest. She stared at them blindly, mumbled an apology for intruding, hurried into the bedroom and shut the door. She was lying on the bed staring dully at the ceiling when Mary came in and sat down on the side of the bed. "Terry and I are engaged," she said in a low, happy voice. "I hope you'll leave him alone from now on. I hope you realize that he belongs to me."

Judy couldn't say anything. Her throat had closed. Mary went back to Terry, and Judy turned over on her face. She had lost her job and she had lost Terry and she was a very unhappy girl.

"I'm going home," she decided finally. "I'm going home and marry Gregory."

She got up and started throwing her things in her suitcase. But then suddenly she remembered the girl Mazie, who had given up just one

day too soon. And she hastily put her things back in the drawer.

Presently Terry stuck his head in the bedroom. "What's the matter, Judy?"

"I lost my job."

"What happened?" he asked slowly.

"I—I don't know."

"He can't do that to you! That lousy so-and-so! Don't worry about it, honey. Come on. I'm taking you girls out to dinner."

"I'm not hungry," Judy said. "You and Mary go ahead." . .

"But you've got to eat, child."

"Aw, come on Terry. She wants to be alone." Mary pulled him toward the door.

They left together and Judy wandered about the tiny apartment in restless uncertainty. If she stayed in New York she would have to find another job, and another place to live. Mary was anxious to get rid of her. She tortured herself with the vision of Mary and Terry living here as man and wife.

At nine o'clock the doorbell rang sharply. Judy ignored it at first, but it rang again and again. Finally she went to the door. Gregory Ames stood in the hall smiling at her. He was very tall, faultlessly dressed, his reddish-brown hair beautifully groomed, his grey-blue eyes intent upon her pale, drawn face.

"Why Gregory," she exclaimed, brightening at sight of a familiar face, "How nice to see you. Come in."

"I thought by this time you might be glad to see me. I couldn't stay away any longer." He pulled her into his arms and kissed her. "I had to come to see how you were. I was worried about you."

"I—I'm fine," Judy assured him. "And you?"

"Plattsburgh is a very lonely place without you, Judy."

"How are mother and dad?"

"All right. They sent their love. They hope you will come home with me. They hope you've had enough of the big city. And so do I. Have you had dinner?"

Judy shook her head.

"Go put on your gladdest rags. We'll make the rounds. Cocktails at the Stork Club, dinner at the Iridium Room, and a late supper wherever we happen to be."

IT WAS a wonderful evening. Gregory had a flair for securing the best table and the most devoted service. He seemed to know New York intimately, he tipped heavily and often, and he made an impression wherever they went.

So did Judy. For she had put on her one stunning dress, a black crepe with rhinestone butterflies scattered across one shoulder, and a gay dab of a hat. Gregory was showing her a side of New York that she had never seen before, and she was radiant. They danced to the music of famous orchestras, drank champagne cocktails, ate stuffed capon and a fabulous desert. It was a memorable experience.

At two thirty he took her back to Mary's apartment. Somehow Judy still referred to it as Mary's apartment although she paid half the expenses.

"I'm coming in," Gregory said. "I want to talk to you."

They sat down together on the sofa. Gregory reached for her and took her in his arms. "You're coming home with me," he said commandingly. "You're not happy here. That job you have doesn't sound like much to me."

"I—I lost it today," Judy confessed.

"Then, that settles it! There is no reason in the world for you to stay in this dump when I have a lovely home just waiting for you. I'll bring you back to New York on our honeymoon. I'll make you happy, Judy. Please darling."

Judy took a deep breath. What he said made sense. "All right," she agreed. "I—I'll go home with you tomorrow."

"You won't regret it." He pulled her closer, kissed her eyes, her cheeks, her lips. She tried to give him back kiss for kiss, but her heart

wasn't in it, though she pretended that it was.

Terry and Mary came in presently and Judy released herself from Gregory's arms to make the introductions and break the news.

"We're going to be married next week," Gregory added triumphantly.

Mary looked pleased and wished them happiness. But Terry scowled and said nothing. Judy looked at him with veiled eyes.

There was a moment of awkward silence which Terry finally broke in the strangest way.

"Somebody," he said, glaring at Gregory, "ought to knock you silly. And I guess I'm elected." He let go a hard right that sent Gregory reeling against the wall.

"Why, you dirty, double-crossing. . ." Gregory rushed at Terry with flaying arms, his face contorted with anger. But a cool, swift upper cut put him on the floor.

IT HAD HAPPENED so suddenly that Mary and Judy had time only to climb upon the sofa, out of the way.

"Have you lost your mind?" Mary screamed at Terry.

"No," Terry said, smoothing his hair and straightening his tie. He stooped and jerked Gregory to his feet. "Now tell Judy what you've been up to these last two weeks. Then if she still wants to go home and marry you, that's her business. She'll be doing it with her eyes open."

"What are you talking about?" Judy asked Terry, but he was too busy prodding Gregory to answer.

"I'll get you for this," Gregory muttered, rubbing his swollen jaw. "I don't have to make an accounting to Judy. . ."

"All right," Terry said. "Then I'll tell her myself." He turned to Judy. "He's been in New York these past two weeks making life difficult for you. He gave you a list of hotels, then bribed the room clerks to turn you down. He wrote you a glowing recommendation, then destroyed it. He gave you a list of legal firms then somehow persuaded them to re-

fuse to give you a job. He asked me to go to see you at the hotel that first night and frighten you into going home."

"You mean," Judy said, "you knew him before. . .?"

"Yes. I covered a trial once at the Court House in Plattsburgh. Gregory did me a favor. That's why I agreed to act as his henchman. But the moment I saw you, Judy, I realized I couldn't frighten you again. I—I had to look after you."

"You looked after her," Gregory jeered, "by getting her a job as cashier in a greasy restaurant."

"And you had her fired!" Terry retorted. "That was the last straw."

Judy stared at Gregory with slowly widening eyes. "No wonder I couldn't love you," she said.

"Judy, please, I—I couldn't let you spend a year away from me. I wanted you to sicken of New York and come home quickly. Surely you can forgive me."

"Yes," Judy said. "I can forgive you. But I can't marry you, Gregory, ever. And I'm not going home tomorrow. I'm going to stay in New York and find myself a job. I—I don't want anybody's help. . ."

"You're in love with him," Gregory said accusingly, motioning to Terry. "You're going to stick around and try to take him away from Mary."

"Get out!" Terry said. "What Judy does from now on is none of your business."

GREGORY GAVE them all an angry look, put on his hat, and departed.

"Terry," Judy whispered, "are you in love with Mary? I saw you. . . she said. . ."

"Never mind what you saw, or what she said. Mary knows I'm in love with you. I told her tonight. Judy, darling, how do you feel about me?"

"I feel like my heart will burst wide open unless you kiss me."

He scooped her up in his arms and kissed her. Judy knew that this was the fortune she had come to New York to find.

(THE END)



"Ronnie
will
understand
I only
wanted to
get back
at you—"

DON'T CENSOR MY LOVE!

Julie disliked Mike, so she entered him in the Herald "Dream Man" contest.

When he won, things really began to happen!

ALICIA, Julie's roommate, shouted down the stair-well, "A letter from Ronnie; a thick one."

Julie took the next twelve steps in high, because Ronnie's letters from overseas had been painfully thin of late. It wasn't Ronnie's fault. He wrote reams in his beautiful fine penmanship, on both sides of the paper. But the censor went through Julie's love letters like a bulldozer. The lacy remains were no good at all.

She was breathless when she dropped on the studio couch in the modest apartment. Her bronze hair spread like a russet fan against the turquoise cushion. Small and delicately formed with hazel eyes and a humorous mouth, she didn't exactly look like a newspaper woman who was on her way to the top. The "Shopping with Julie" column had caught on. By the time the war was won, she'd be a featured writer or something, and Ronnie would be proud of her. They weren't really engaged, but Ronnie wrote intimate, exciting letters that fairly breathed of such an outcome of their friendship.

Alicia tactfully withdrew to the

By
Kathryn
Keeley

tiny kitchen. Julie could smell the ham and eggs and potatoes, Alicia's specialty. Not a particularly romantic atmosphere for one of Ronnie's perfect love letters. Ronnie could say "I love you" a thousand ways without repeating himself.

Julie felt a delirious tremor as she tore open the envelope. The letter said:—

Somewhere in England

Dear Bunny:—

You wanted my photograph and here it is. I hope you aren't disappointed that I'm no Apollo. I have only one picture, a little the worse for wear. I could use a dozen more. Although I have never met you, we have some swell pow-wows in the long nights.

Don't laugh, but I'm one of those slow retiring guys. Girls never look at me. I don't know how to write a sugar letter. I should have plenty of experience for I am the camp censor and the drivel that runs from the pens of some of the boys is sickening. I can't believe men actually write that stuff so it must be a code of some sort.

I'm hoping you like me, Bunny, enough to write often. I don't get any letters.

Mike Jamieson, Capt.
U. S. Air Force

JULIE almost missed the Postscript. It was at the bottom of the page, in neat block printing "I love you."

Alicia stuck her sleek dark head in the door. "As good as you expected? Is Ronnie still in England?"

Julie looked up blankly. "It isn't to me. It is for someone named Bunny, although the envelope is addressed in Ronnie's hand. Captain Mike Jamieson must have gotten the letters mixed."

Alicia curled up beside her with the sheet, while Julie worked on the knots in the string around the tissue wrapped picture. It was postcard

size, which gave the letter its misleading weight. A slow, outraged anger was growing inside her.

"Mike Jamieson is the censor who has been mutilating Ronnie's letters," she raged. "He is too stupid to understand a real love letter, but he certainly gropes around trying to write one himself. Code! No wonder girls don't write to him. He must have a pitch-black soul."

Alicia dropped the letter on the table. "'P. S. I love you.' that's cute. Well, let's see what shy Romeo looks like."

Julie let her struggle with the string. She cried, stricken.

"That means Bunny somebody probably has Ronnie's letter. She's getting all thrilled over words that were meant for me. Oh, I could murder that Jamieson!"

"Take it easy, Julie. The last one from Ronnie all Mike left was 'the weather is rotten.' I'll bet any girl by the name of Bunny isn't interested in the weather."

Julie's loafer shoes dropped with a bang, no louder than the clatter within her. "I'd like to do something to him. Report him, or boil him in oil." She rummaged in her purse for a cigarette. It didn't relieve her feelings any that she found none. "Ronnie's letters aren't drivel. They are sweet—"

Alicia whistled appreciatively. "Not bad," and passed the shy Mike over to Julie.

Even to her prejudiced gaze Mike was special. Close-cropped wavy dark hair, friendly eyes, either blue or gray, a stubborn chin and a smile that went right through her.

"Can't compare to Ronnie," she decided loyally, eyeing the picture with an active dislike. "Nobody writes to him. I'll fix that. I'll enter him in the Herald's contest 'My Dream Man' with a little tip Mike is terribly lonely. Every girl in town will write a sympathetic note."

"I thought you had entered Ronnie."

Julie smiled ruefully, "Not yet. I don't want the she-wolves howling over his picture."

Alicia shrugged, "I wouldn't mind

sending Mike a few bon mots myself."

"Julie's eyes narrowed. "So will I, only I'll dip my typewriter ribbon in arsenic."

Propping the picture against a vase of daffodils, she cried, "There, Dream Man, we'll see if you can take it."

Mike went right on smiling and his blue-or-gray eyes had an annoying way of following her around the room while the green ruffled pinafore covered the tailored blouse and beige gabardine skirt. Julie let a scornful smile curl her lips. Captain Mike was going to get his and good!"

THE NEXT day Mike's picture and blank naming Julie Westcott his sponsor, went on the top of the huge pile growing on Jim Hayden's desk. Jim was handling the contest of the Philadelphia Herald and circulation was a skyrocket.

"Nice-looking lad," Jim said. "Thought Ronald Evans, the Herald's cub reporter, was your dish."

Julie colored. "He is. Mike is just a friend and lonely. Kind of shy, not the Casanova type. I thought it would be a good way to interest the women readers. Maybe they would write him, send him cookies and things. I know Mike would reply."

"A face like that shouldn't be lonely."

Julie's 'phone was ringing. He called after her, "Don't forget if he wins, you'll have to do the honors. Take him night-clubbing, paint the town red at our expense."

Her heart gave an uneasy lurch. Mike wouldn't win.

"He's in England," she returned.

"When he comes back then."

Julie picked up the receiver and jotted down the tip on the sale of costume jewelry rather distractedly. If Mike won, he'd insist on Bunny accompanying him. Imagine having a name like Bunny! And Mike talked to her in the dark. He hadn't met her, yet he loved her. The boy needed educating all right.

That thought quieted her conscience a few days later when the evening edition of the newspaper appeared on the streets. Mike's picture

smiled at her. She read that the lonely captain would welcome V-mail, and would answer anyone who cared to write him. Julie bubbled with laughter. It was better than she expected.

On the El, her triumph mounted. The women passengers were devouring Mike. They could hardly wait to get home to write to him. Alicia was right. There was an irresistible attractiveness about his rugged features.

Alicia, in a red robe, greeted Julie at the door. "I don't want any dinner. Give me his address, Julie. I'm going to buy Mike a pipe and I don't want to send it to the Herald."

Julie dropped the groceries on the table. "What are you talking about?"

"Mike Jamieson! Isn't he divine? I cut out his picture. He looks so wistful and wonderful, enough to tear your heart right out."

Julie shook the red-robed shoulders in exasperation. "I think he is nuts. You are crazy. All the glittery-eyed gals on the El are goofy. Mike Jamieson is just a nosy old censor who—"

Glaring, Alicia shook herself free. "A letter came from your precious Ronnie, a fat one," She slammed the bedroom door.

"More pictures to Bunny, I'll bet."

Julie was wrong. It was Ronnie at his flowery best, not a line deleted. He rambled, he quoted Browning. Julie read it twice without making much sense out of it. Now there was a letter Mike should have censored! The simplicity of Mike's "P. S. I love you" popped into her mind.

Through the panelling she called, "I'm sorry Alicia. I'll take back everything I said because Mike let a letter come through from Ronnie unscathed."

More silence.

Julie cajoled, "You have to eat somewhere, so why not with me? If Mike wins the contest, you can be his official hostess."

The door was flung wide. "Can I wear your pink net?" Alicia demanded, goodnatured again.

"Gosh, if it isn't in ribbons by that time! The boy is in England, remember."

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GAY LOVE

"I can't eat here, Julie. I do have a date."

Alicia hadn't been gone five minutes when the buzzer sounded. Julie unlatched the downstairs door without question, thinking Alicia had relented. Julie detested eating alone.

TO JULIE draped over the banister, it was a long pair of khaki legs mounting the stairs. Her heart rose on the thought of Ronnie, then fell again. Ronnie was blond, rather slight and far away. These shoulders were as broad as a football player. Her heart stopped beating entirely for the face floating up from the dim hallway belonged to Mike Jamieson.

She felt all gone inside, thinking he was going to demand an explanation of the picture in the Herald. Could he send her to Moyamensing Prison for printing it without his consent? She shivered.

His deep resonant voice asked, "Are you Miss Westcott?" He used a warm, heart-catching smile. He couldn't be furious and still smile.

A relieved sigh escaped her. "Won't you come in?" She hoped he didn't notice the nervous squeak in her voice.

"I don't want to trouble you," he grinned.

Julie stared frankly. The photograph didn't do him justice, she decided. His eyes were indigo, framed with laugh lines. There was a little cleft in his chin that she wanted to touch. She had the impression he would give off sparks of magnetism if she obeyed the impulse.

Abruptly, Julie snapped out of it. She was getting as silly as Alicia. "What can I do for you?" her manner decidedly chilly.

Mike fumbled with his cap. "I'm Mike Jamieson," he told her, "lately with the same outfit as a friend of yours, Ronald Evans."

She nodded. "Ronnie has spoken highly of you," and sat down quickly at the unexpected lie.

Mike looked surprised. "Has he? I'm glad he has mentioned me because I've done an embarrassing thing. I've put a personal letter in

(Continued On Page 78)

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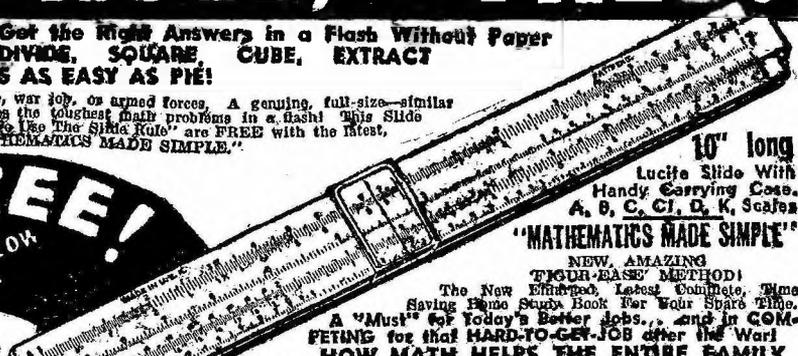
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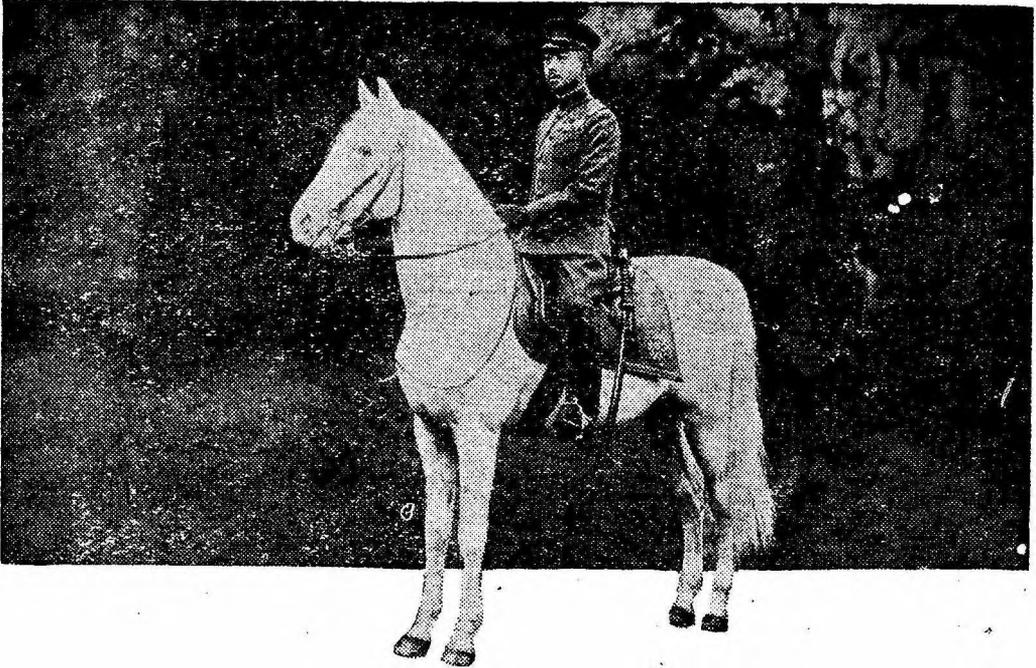
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GAY LOVE

(Continued From Page 74)

the wrong envelope. I thought it might have come to you."

He looked young and helpless and her heart wavered, until she recalled the remains of many letters he had poked in the right envelope.

Her silken eyebrows arched. "Was it a business letter?"

"Not exactly," he assured her, his cheek bones reddening. "Just a friendly letter and my picture. I checked with the boys and they gave me the addresses of the people to whom they had written. I've just arrived in this country on a furlough, and came here first. I don't know how the mistake could have happened, except I was called away from my desk and when I returned, I hurried too much."

"Oh." In spite of her efforts to keep a disinterested poise, Julie's eyes danced. "No one wants a love letter to go astray."

"Then you didn't get it?" He looked crushed.

"Does it matter so much? You can always have another photo taken." She kept her mockery out of her voice by a miracle.

"Sure, but—you see this girl means a lot to me. I wanted things to go right and then I do a fool thing—"

"Now don't you worry," Julie cooed. "I'll help you. I work for a newspaper and I know the sort of letters a girl wants. You can make it very ardent—"

"I don't know her very well."

"Then be restrained, and she'll read into it all the wonderful things you wanted to say and were afraid to."

"Okay," he said relieved, "You're pretty swell to me."

JULIE sat at the spinet desk, a little ashamed. He was so trusting and eager and anxious to please Bunny. She hoped Bunny was worth it.

She chewed the end of the penholder, feeling his admiring gaze on her slim back, on the bronze hair that curled under like a shimmering bell. One of those funny little sparks ignited a series of little flames in her wrists.

(Continued On Page 80)

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GAY LOVE

(Continued From Page 78)

"What is her name?" she demanded swiftly.

Startled, he asked, "Is that necessary?"

"How can I begin?"

"How does Ronnie begin with you?"

Ink spattered in a cloudburst on the white paper. She almost choked "You should know." Instead she said primly, "Dearest."

Mike brought his chair closer until she could feel his breath on her cheek. "I like to make up my own names. How about, 'Dear little cupcake'?"

With a determined air Julie closed the desk. "I think it would be better to write the letter after the photo is taken. There is a good place two blocks over on Chestnut Street."

His pleasant face was crestfallen. "I'll never find it. Flyers get dizzy in crowds."

She gave him a level look. It might be true. "All right, I'll be your guide." Her mocking smile covered the thought of how dizzy he would really be when the V-mail shower began.

"You're wonderful." He gave her another of those potent grins, disturbing, thrilling.

Walking beside Mike, listening to him, she was compelled to revise some of those acid thoughts she had distilled about him. He was frank, direct, down-to-earth. He must have a line. All servicemen on furlough had a de-luxe one, but Mike didn't use his. She didn't know whether to be provoked or flattered.

The woman photographer enjoyed working with Mike. She said he was a natural. Mike said Julie was a natural and he couldn't pose properly without her. Before she realized it, Julie was blinking into a camera, profile, full face, smiling with Mike at her side. It was all very gay and Julie found herself laughing without restraint, as if Mike was the best fun in the world.

When they learned it would take several hours for the negatives to be developed, Mike steered her into a restaurant bright with neon signs.

(Continued On Page 82)

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GAY LOVE

(Continued From Page 80)

The food was good. The juke box played her favorite tunes. Just to look at Mike, you'd know he would dance with effortless ease, as if the music was in his shoes. He had a little step that was super.

She hadn't realized how much she had missed dancing, just solid dancing. Ronnie always talked and became so lost in words, he missed his steps.

Mike hardly said a word. By adroit questioning she drew from him he was from a barren New England coast town, that his father was a captain on a freighter that had been torpedoed. Mike should have followed the sea, but the Army Air Force seemed quicker. He wasn't sorry. His plane the "Holy Mackerel" had chalked up fifty missions all told. Julie listened, wide-eyed, finding it increasingly difficult to hold tight to the wrath she had stored up for him.

ON THE way back to the photographer's, a light spring rain spattered their faces. They ran for shelter, Julie's small hand lost in his. The streets were dark, deserted, shimmering with the wet glow from the arc lights. Excitement was a breathless lump in her throat.

Abruptly Mike paused in the middle of the pavement under a street lamp. He tipped her chin, chuckling, "No June moon, no heady scent of jasmine blossoms. I have a feeling we don't miss the beauty. It will be inside us wherever we are."

Some deep urgency within him reached out and Julie moved into his arms in a kind of sweet paralysis. His eyes were brighter than flames. She could see the little cleft in his chin, hear the ragged intake of his breath. Her upturned face was wet, but her lips were suddenly warming, yielding under his. Then she was whirling in a rosy cloud, with all the bands in the world playing.

Then Mike scooped her up and ran to an awning. He placed her on the wooden newsstand, his movements brusque yet gentle, as if she were fragile and precious.

"You do like me a little, Julie?" he asked anxiously.

DON'T CENSOR MY LOVE!

"Oh, Mike—" she paused while the wild beats of her heart crowded her chest.

She was still reeling in an unbelievable wonder when the youngster lounging against the dark window came to life. He stared at them curiously, and Julie straightened, trying to look dignified on her perch.

The boy muttered, "Gee!" and pulled a newspaper from the bunch under his arm. "So you're Dream Man! You don't look so lonely to me, Captain."

Julie stiffened. It was as if every bit of her was slowly freezing. She had forgotten the contest, Ronnie, everything. She had been too busy falling in love with Mike.

Mike, with an impatient gesture, was thrusting a coin in the lad's hand, and waited until the small fellow had scampered off. Then he opened the newspaper which the newsboy had given him. For an endless eternity Mike faced his picture. Julie slid to the pavement, white and shaken. She wished she had prepared him for this.

"I didn't mean it, Mike. It was a silly thing to do. I entered your picture in the contest—"

"I can't see very well in this light," Mike said tonelessly, and moved to the doorway of the next store. She had the sudden fantastic notion he was stepping out of her life. The night was very still except for the weary drop of the rain on the awning and the dull leaden beat of her heart.

Mike folded the paper. His mouth was grave, his whole manner withdrawn. "My Dream Man! It proves one thing. You did get my letter."

She was fluttering inside. "Of course. It came in Ronnie's envelope. I thought it would be a good joke on you to enter it."

"I'd be proud if you really meant it. It makes me sound an awful fool. As if I'm too much of a dope to get a girl of my own. Do you think I'd advertise a thing like that, no matter if I didn't know a soul in the world?"

"I'm sorry," she said in a small defeated voice.

"I'll bet you are! You've taken a



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GAY LOVE

letter and picture that I meant for the girl I love and put them in a newspaper for anyone to grin over. You've lied, strung me along, making me believe you were trying to be helpful, while you were laughing at me. What have I ever done to you? Boy, oh boy, Nature plays some funny tricks! A girl as lovely as you could turn out so cruel, so heartless."

"Mike, I didn't mean—"

"You knew I was crazy about someone that I've kept in my dreams, but you made a bashful Romeo out of me for a million readers to giggle over."

HE STOOD close beside her, not touching her, but his suppressed violence was as if he were shaking her fiercely. Then his tone altered, became kinder, "Was it a case of holding your job? Did your paper insist that you enter a picture?"

"No, no." She moistened her lips. "It was because Ronnie's letters were censored so much. I thought it would be a good return to you—" the words trailed off at the slate gray gaze.

"Apparently you don't realize there is a reason for censoring."

"Oh, I do, but Ronnie—" A new fear struck her. Was Ronnie dropping vital information carelessly?

"I'm wondering what Ronnie will think of the Dream Man contest."

Julie swallowed, "He needn't know anything about it."

"You don't think you could keep it quiet! Hometown newspapers have a way of catching up with G. I.'s."

She lifted her chin. "I'll tell Ronnie. He'll understand I only wanted to get back at you—"

"For doing my job?" he asked quizzically.

"For being so painfully efficient."

"Okay, baby, if you want to take my personal life and make it public property, I won't complain. But you'll share the burden."

She looked at him dazed. "How can I share it?"

"You offered to write a letter to my girl. You can handle any correspondence that flows in."

"I will not," she flared.

DON'T CENSOR MY LOVE!

"I think you will. Make the answers gushing."

Their eyes met and held. Julie's heart jerked and began to pound with such violence she could scarcely talk. Under the violence was a miserable forlorn feeling. There was a girl in Mike's dreams, Bunny. He had kissed Julie because he was so grateful that she was going to help him. On impulse Julie had returned his kiss, but something had happened, and she was fathoms deep in love. Mike Jamieson was not going to learn of it. She would get over it, if she had to pull her heart up by the roots.

Over her shoulder, she drawled, "It was nice meeting you, Dream Man. I'll see you in the funnies." Her laughter sounded quite gay coming from a closed throat.

"I'll walk back with you," Mike returned.

But Julie was racing along the gleaming sidewalks. A trolley had stopped at the crossing and she was inside before she knew where it was bound.

For the next few days, Jim Hayden sent Julie hourly bulletins of the voting for her Dream Man candidate, thinking he was doing her a favor. Everyone learned Mike was Julie's entry and joked with her because she had kept such a prize package under cover. Until she could have shrieked with the nervous tension.

She told Alicia all about Mike's visit. Alicia insisted that Mike be brought to the apartment for dinner, and accused Julie of being a dog in the manger. It was a dreadful three days. Julie's eyes were smudged with weariness. She was determined to get Mike Jamieson out of her mind. She re-read the remnants of Ronnie's letters. Ronnie was worth six Mike Jamiesons. Ronnie called her a bisque and russet flower, not a dear little cup-cake. She didn't fool herself one bit. She was hopelessly in love with Mike.

WHEN the official count was recorded, Mike was acclaimed the winner. Jim said, "I guess I'll have to cable him. It will give him a lift to know some day he has a swell time waiting for him."



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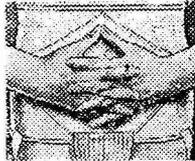
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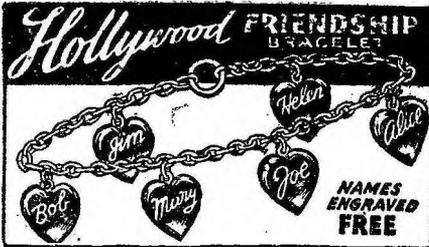
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GAY LOVE

Julie said faintly, "Mike is in town. At least he was."

"Why didn't you say so? What hotel?"

"I don't know."

"I'll find him. Letters are coming in in bales. He'll want his mail."

When Mike was finally located Jim called to Julie, "Jamieson is on his way here. He says to turn anything over to you. You are his confidential secretary."

"Mike can answer his own love letters," she blazed, but no one paid any attention to her.

Mike was ushered straight to her corner when he reached the Herald. Julie gazed helplessly at the stacks of letters.

Mike slit open the flaps. "I know a way to stop all this," he said as another wire basket crammed to overflowing, joined the confusion.

Julie bit her lip. "If you can, I'll believe anything is possible."

From his pocket he brought one of the pictures they had taken. Was it only the other night? It seemed centuries. All at once Julie's eyes blurred. The photo was meant to be a caricature. Mike standing stiffly erect with his hand on Julie's shoulder. She remembered in posing Mike had donned a hang-dog look and she, a fatuous grin. It didn't come out that way at all. Mike looked proud and radiant, touched with love.

Mike offered calmly, "Your editor could print this, saying Dream Man has found his mate."

"You'll have a harder time explaining it to—to Bunny."

He shrugged, "We'll have to do something."

They worked in silence; Julie was acutely conscious of Mike, his blue eyes scanning each letter, his bold scrawl giving a courteous reply. Through lowered lashes, she watched him while she addressed envelopes. He should be conceited to know all these girls found him attractive. There was only one girl he wanted.

At this prolonged silence, Julie looked up to find him tucking a violet sheet under the pile. Julie simply had to see that letter. When Jim called Mike aside for a moment, it was a small matter to find it. She

only skimmed over the odd handwriting.

"Dearest:—

I am sending this special delivery. I did not know you were in this country until your picture stared at me out of the newspaper. I'm perfectly furious. You promised to write to me, and I have been waiting—"

"That one is from Bunny," Mike said suddenly, appearing out of nowhere "I'll have to telephone her—"

She stared at him through a mist. "Couldn't I explain?" she asked humbly. "It was my fault."

"If you carry out your part tonight, it will be enough. Jim tells me we have a ringside table at a night spot as a prize."

"Oh, I'm not going. I promised Alicia she could go. She is my roommate."

Mike looked at her with frowning eyes. "Still arranging things? Give my regrets to Alicia. Tell her Julie Westcott started this ball rolling and Julie Westcott will be in on the fin-

ish. I've given Hayden the picture of us, so you'll have to be present to bear out that fiction."

He smiled then. It was like the sun after a dark storm. "For the next couple of hours, Julie, practice looking starry-eyed at me. Don't you think you owe me that much? I'd like this dream man thing to blow over as soon as possible."

IT WASN'T difficult to look starry-eyed when she was dressing for Mike. The frock probably had something to do with it. Chalk white satin, artfully draped, backless, with a little jacket embroidered in sparkling stones. It cost a hundred dollars that had been saved to buy a trousseau if Ronnie should ever come home. The smart Chestnut Street shop had called suggesting that she mention it in one of her columns but Julie had bought it herself, her heart galloping.

Her bronze hair lay in soft curls about her shoulders, and her lips were scarlet. Julie couldn't stop the radiant glow that was spreading

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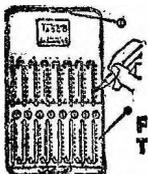
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GAY LOVE

through her although Alicia was grumpy, and didn't believe Mike had insisted on Julie as his hostess.

"It isn't as if Mike wants me," she told Alicia who sat on the bed watching Julie outline her mouth. "He just wants to kill off the letters that are coming in like wildfire. He despises me, Al. I made a fool of him by naming him in the contest. I've wrecked his chances with Bunny."

Alicia hugged her knees. "I told Ronnie all about it."

Julie topped over a perfume bottle. "Ronnie! Did you write him?"

Alicia inspected her nails. "Wouldn't you like to know?"

When Mike arrived, Alicia wouldn't come out of the bedroom to meet him. Julie lingered at the head of the stairs fearful Alicia might change her mind and say something insulting. Mike had suffered enough.

His blue eyes warmed as he mounted the stairs. "If I were a poet, I'd probably say you look like a princess out of a fairy tale book. Being Mike Jamieson, I'll say you look super. I couldn't even buy you flowers. The Herald delivered a corsage at the Ritz for you."

Julie tucked her hand in his arm. "Oh, Mike, let's call a truce for tonight. I've never been to the Ritz Empire room. I've never worn a beautiful dress like this before. Alicia is mad because I promised she could go. She has written Ronnie telling him about the contest. Oh, I should have told him myself."

Mike looked at her, a curious stillness in his eyes. "Yet you want to dance while Rome is burning."

She snatched her hand away, her cheeks crimson, "I don't want to cry. I know this appearance tonight is to scare away your loving public."

"We had better stop at the Herald office to see if there are any more letters."

"In violet envelopes?" she asked frostily.

When Mike dashed into the Herald office and back, he said glumly, "No violet stationery. The craze must be dying down. I found only one letter."

Julie held her breath, then said

(Continued On Page 90)

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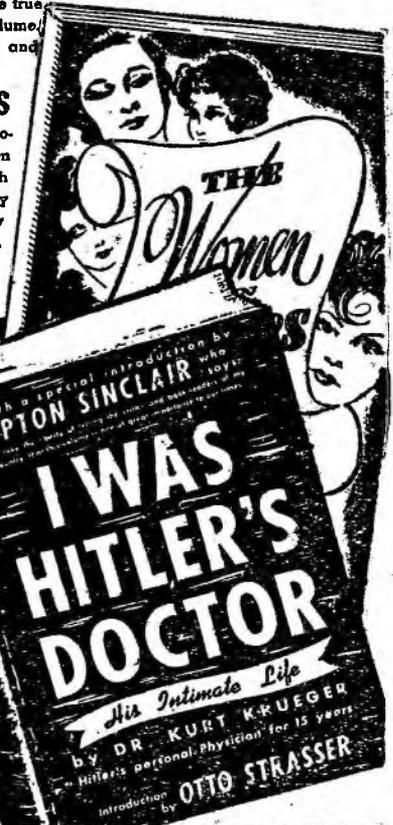
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GAY LOVE

(Continued From Page 88)

quickly, "Read it later. It might give you a laugh."

"I'm sick of laughs. I didn't realize a simple mistake could cause so much trouble."

He means Bunny, Julie thought as the car slid along a bright street. She wondered if he had explained everything to Bunny. She must be a stupid goon not to believe him. A girl by the name of Bunny must be too frivolous to realize how wonderful Mike was. Simple, direct, tender. He had fallen in love with a girl's picture and dreamed about her. Julie sighed thinly. She wished she were Bunny. Ronnie meant a lot to her, but she never felt sure of his flowery phrases. She dismissed the thought as disloyal.

THEN they were in the lobby, waiting for the elevator. From behind a palm, a khaki figure came toward them, rather slight, blond, smiling broadly. "Mind if I join you?"

Julie's heart tripped. "Ronnie!"

Mike turned around. "Hello," his voice noncommittal.

Mike guided Julie on the elevator. Ronnie squeezed in too. Drawing her arm through his, Ronnie touched each finger tip in a caress.

"Alicia told me where to find you. Just arrived this morning. You look like an angel. I'll get you a green orchid to match your eyes."

"Sorry, the table is for two," Mike's voice was cool.

Julie swallowed, feeling torn. Mike didn't have to be so rude. People were staring curiously.

"Suits me," Ronnie's voice was edged. "You won't mind taking a walk. Julie is my girl. Thanks for taking care of her for a few days. But I'm her Dream Man. So sorry, please."

The elevator stopped and Julie was glad they were carried along by the surging crowd. She paused by a pillar, looking desperate.

"Ronnie, this night is Mike's prize for winning the contest. It is only fair that he should enjoy it."

"What are you, his prize too?" Ronnie's mouth was ugly.

An imperceptible movement from

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Mike. Panic flooded through her. They couldn't have a scene here.

"Tell him, Mike," she implored, "tell him how it happened."

Mike gave an infuriating smile. "What is there to tell? Julie entered my picture in My Dream Man contest. I knew she liked me a little, but I had no idea—she's a pretty swell gal, old man."

Speechless, she stared at Mike. How could he twist the situation to suit his own ends? Now he was getting back at her. There was a tense waiting look about Mike she didn't understand.

Julie faced Ronnie. His nostrils were pinched with anger.

"I don't know what kind of double-crossing this is," Ronnie said thickly.

"Double-crossing!" Mike repeated the word like an ominous threat.

She was close to fainting but she steadied herself. She put out a hand and held tightly to Mike's arm. Somehow she felt she needed Mike close beside her, steady, dependable Mike.

"How could Mike possibly double cross you?" she asked faintly.

Ronnie hesitated. "A couple of months ago, Mike saw your picture in my gallery."

"Gallery?" Julie whispered.

"In our quarters. We were stationed in a famous college in England. I wrote you all about it."

Julie shook her head. Mike had censored it and rightly so.

"I had a lot of pictures over my bunk," Ronnie continued. "Betty Grable, some girls who weren't movie stars. Girls I had met places. You know how girls are always giving you pictures of themselves."

"I didn't know," she said tonelessly. Mike stirred under her tight clasp. Her fingers dug deeper into his flesh.

"I could tell Jamieson had fallen for you by the way his eyes always seemed to light on your picture whenever he came through our corridor on the way to his section."

Julie looked at Mike. He was impassive, remote.

Ronnie frowned. "Then another detachment moved in with us. We were pretty cramped. I wrote you

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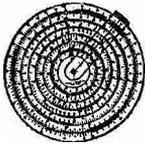
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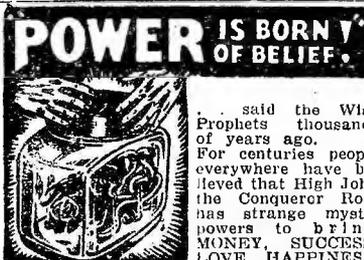
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GAY LOVE

about it Julie. We had to take down some of our wall scenery. I remember one day debating which girls to pack away."

For the first time Mike spoke. "I offered to help Evans make a decision. I told him which girl I would choose. He didn't see it my way."

Ronnie said, "Then an order came through. We had to move fast. A lone Jerry came through who had our number. When we were located again, a long time later, your picture was missing, Julie."

"I found it in the ruins of the building," Mike's clipped voice offered. "Lying in the rubble, undamaged, looking up at me like an omen. I kept it."

JULIE broke in, her voice thick in an aching throat. "I've been accusing Mike of going to ridiculous lengths in censoring your letters."

Ronnie looked startled. "Oh, I don't know. I did shoot off too much. I let words run away with me. Even Jamieson gave me a friendly tip on some of my other sugar letters." He paused, a dismayed red staining his cheeks.

"Other sugar letters?" Julie repeated in a small voice.

Ronnie swiftly recovered his poise. "Sure, I wrote to a lot of girls, but they didn't mean anything. Not like you, Julie. Why are you complaining? What about this Dream Man contest? You entered Mike. Alicia told me when I phoned."

Julie cried, "I entered Mike as a punishment for all those censored letters. Only I thought he was clipping out the intimate personal references that were meant for me alone. I didn't even know Mike until he came to the apartment. He had sent a letter to his girl Bunny, and it got in your envelope by mistake."

Ronnie's mouth gaped. "His girl Bunny! You are Bunny! You. That's what he always called you. Don't kid yourself. Jamieson doesn't make mistakes. Once he asked me to address another envelope for one of your letters. He said he had spilled ink all over the address. He used that one I guess when he found he rated a fur-

(Continued On Page 94)

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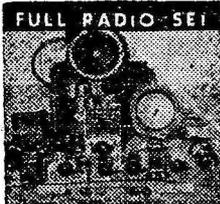
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(Continued From Page 92)

lough. It was a cute way of meeting you, following up his lost letter in person."

Stunned, bewildered, Julie turned to Mike. "But there is a Bunny. A letter did come from her, in a violet envelope in the flood of mail to the Herald."

Mike took her two hands, his eyes compelling her gaze. "I wrote it. Once when I cracked up in France, I learned to use my left hand. The writing was crows-feet, but a good disguise. I had to cover up, pretend it was on the level. I had to make you believe there was a girl named Bunny and I was really hunting for my letter. I couldn't let you know I was a scheming faker.

"You see in England you were in Ronnie's gallery, but I didn't think you were THE GIRL. There was a chance that you had given your picture to Ronnie without giving your heart. Any means seemed fair, if I could meet you. I've been in love with you so long. I've carried your picture, talked to you, dreamed about you. I do make mistakes though. You are in love with Ronnie."

Julie swung around to face Ronnie. He seemed a nice boy, much too unstable, when Mike was looking at her with beseeching eyes.

She said sweetly, "Why don't you call Alicia, Ronnie! You two can have our ringside table. Mike and I have some last letters to attend to regarding the contest."

Astounded, Ronnie sidled to a phone booth. Mike whispered raggedly, "You know there was only one letter. If you mean what I think you do, I'm going to kiss you right here and now."

He did, his lips imprisoning hers for an ecstatic moment.

"You'll read your mail, Captain," she said with a determined lilt in her voice. Julie drew back. She was shaking from head to foot, her heart soaring. Mike loved Bunny. She was Bunny. It was terribly confusing, yet terribly sweet.

From his pocket, Mike brought the last letter of the contest. He opened it gingerly, his arm holding Julie tight against him. It was a single

(Continued On Page 96)

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DON'T CENSOR MY LOVE!

(Continued From Page 94)

sheet with a square cut from the center.

He grinned, "Somebody kidding the censor." He read, "My darling cup cake—it's from you." He laughed happily.

"There is more," she said very low. "There is a P. S. I love you. Oh, Mike I don't care if I'm Julie or Bunny to you, as long as you love me forever."

There was a solemn vow in his bright gaze. "We are going to be married on this furlough."

With a catch in her throat, she whispered, "Yes, my dream man."

(THE END)

A WOMAN TO LOVE

(Continued From Page 26)

happened to me," she cried, "I can't paint any more."

She held her face up to the strong light coming through the big window. "What do you see, Blink?" she asked.

He stared into her upturned face. "Not a fluffy paper doll. A lovely woman. A woman with a generous spirit and an unselfish heart. The woman I love. Oh, Libby, I wanted to come sooner, but I couldn't leave the mine. I've been through hell wanting to see you, wanting to hold you in my arms, like this. . ."

Blink's mouth was so close, and it was a reality. The sun was setting only they were in a hospital sun parlor instead of on top of a mountain; but he was cradling her in his arms and that was heavenly.

Blink held her at arms length and there was amusement in his eyes. "Tell me, darling, how did you ever make that pie? When I saw you standing in my door that day that seemed the most impossible request I could make."

"Oh, quite simple," Libby replied, "One cup of cherries, four burned fingers and all of my love."

"The last part of that recipe is the best. Will you include that in everything from now on, darling?"

On Libby's lips was the only answer Blink wanted.

(THE END)

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