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Vol. XVIII, No. 2

MARTHA TRASK, Editor

May, 1945



A Complete Romantic Novel

LADY OF THE MIDNIGHT SUN

By GEORGIA CRAIG

Eve Marshall flings the very thought of romance aside and flees from sunny Florida to icy Alaska in order to forget her heartbreak—but love follows her on swift wings!

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- Your NUMEROLOGY READING FREE! Coupon on Page 80*

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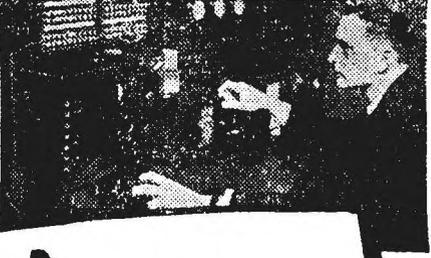
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RADIO SERVICING (left). N.R.I. Graduates operate their own successful full time Radio repair businesses. Others hold regular jobs, make \$5-\$10 a week EXTRA fixing Radios in spare time.

BROADCASTING STATIONS (right) employ N.R.I. trained men as Operators, Installation and Maintenance Men and pay well.



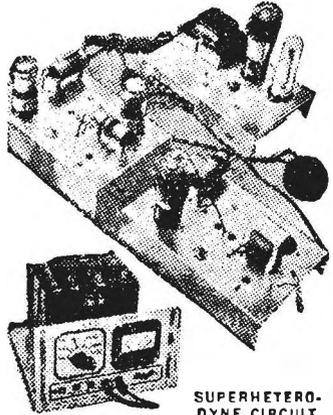
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Love NUMEROLOGY

By SYLVION

THE April-Number 4 girl is one who crosses her t's and dots her i's and is dependable for details and correct procedure in matters of etiquette, love and business. She is not one to take things for granted or accept fantasy for fact.

She won't believe that a man loves her unless she has seen that love demonstrated beyond any question. She is a realist and she can endure hardships when she has set her ship of hope on the seas of common sense.

She also knows that her ship cannot come in unless there is power enough to keep it sailing in her direction! She does not live on dreams, but believes in action.

Loyal and Efficient

Her great quality is loyalty. She has no use for mere promises, for you will always see her with the doers and the workers. Life seems to demand effort and she is ready to give it!

She does not look for short cuts and the easy way to do things. She knows, naturally, that she is born to strive, and thus she is ever ready to do her share of the work. There isn't an ounce of laziness in her make-up.

There are times, however, when some other girl seems to be winning without effort, and she begins to wonder why she has been so unlucky. Then she is given to self-pity and thinks the breaks are against her.

That is the very time for her to double her efforts, because it means that her good break is just around the corner.

Nature seems to like to test the number 4 girl. And if she can only be patient, great is her reward. This law of justice seldom fails for her. It is her birthright.

Because she is a natural big-sister, some people take advantage of her. She must learn early in life not to be fooled by flattery.

Men, particularly, may take advantage of her because she is always so eager to be of service. Her sweetheart, for example, might ask her to meet him at the depot instead of coming for her at her house. But if she lets him know at the start that she isn't so willing to cooperate he will soon appreciate her and give her the attention she deserves.

It is so easy for the Number 4 girl to spoil her sweetheart or husband by being too willing to serve! Sometimes she should pretend frailty, and even timidity. And most of all, she should stay feminine. It doesn't pay for her always to be the "good fellow."

A Typical Number 4 Girl

Doris Perry was a typical Number 4 girl. She was a hard working stenographer in the office of a machine company. For several months she had been going out with one of the assistant engineers, who in his spare time wrote articles for various trade journals. He wasn't a very good typist and Doris had volunteered to type his manuscripts at home.

Several times she had stayed home nights typing instead of going out with him, urging him too to stay home and write some more. She felt that all the extra money would someday come in handy, for she was sure he intended to ask her to marry him.

Then one morning a girl friend, Madge Morley, stopped at Doris' desk.

"Say, Doris," said Madge, "weren't you

(Continued on page 74)



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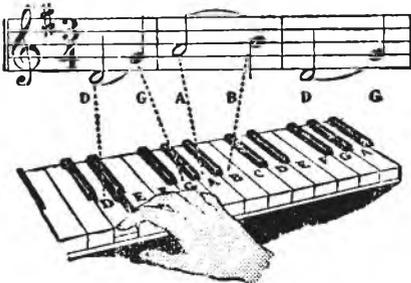
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*Actual pupils' names on request. Pictures by professional models.

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NOTICE

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Lady of the Midnight Sun

By GEORGIA CRAIG

Eve Marshall flings the very thought of romance aside and flees from sunny Florida to icy Alaska in order to forget her heartbreak—but love follows her on swift wings!

CHAPTER I

Kiss in the Moonlight

EVE huddled in the shadow of the coquina-rock wall, and held her breath. All about was the soft murmur of a January night in Palm Beach. The low wall was splashed with the breath-taking loveliness of bougain-

villea in coral and purple, and the patio was revealed in the soft brilliance of the silver-white tropic moonlight.

That moonlight shone on the blond head of Randy Johnson, and on the silver bars on the shoulder of his tunic and on the white-and-silver suaveness of Ilsa MacLain's superlative dinner gown. And Randy's arms were close about Ilsa, and he was kissing her with an expert-

ness and an obvious pleasure that was like tiny stilettos driven deep into Eve's quivering heart.

For on Eve's finger was a star-sapphire that Randy had put there only a few days ago. And warm and bitter-sweet was the memory in Eve's heart of the plans they had made.

Ilsa broke from Randy's arms, with a soft little laugh that prickled along Eve's shrinking body like tiny whips. Randy reached for her again and said something gay and ardent, and Eve's shaking fingers fumbled with the latch of the little green gate set into the coquina-rock wall. Blinded with tears and dazed with pain she found her way to the beach.

She dropped down on the last step, huddling there like a suffering small animal caught in a trap.

"Randy! Oh, Randy, darling, how could you do this to me?"

The anguished words were in her heart. She could not have spoken them even to Randy. Her lips were stiff, and in her heart was an aching desolation unlike anything she had ever known or dreamed.

She had first met Randy almost a month ago when, invalided home from the South Pacific after having conducted himself in a manner to get himself awarded medals and decorations and a great deal of newspaper space, he had come to the hospital in Palm Beach for convalescence. His plane had been shot down and he had been reported officially "missing." He had lain, badly wounded in a native village, cared for by the natives until able to travel. Then, guided by the natives he had managed to make his way back to a base from which, eventually, he had been sent home.

Now, almost completely well of his wounds, but still fighting the malaria that had been an inescapable result of his experiences, he was hoping to be sent back for active duty soon.

IN EVE'S official capacity as secretary to a member of the Chamber of Commerce whose duty it was to welcome celebrities, she had been one of the first to meet the returned hero. He had hated being called a "hero."

"The heroes, my sweet," he had said in one of his rare moments of gravity, "are those who didn't come back! Who won't ever come back."

From the moment Eve had looked into his steady blue eyes, warming with interest as they took her in from the top of her softly curling ink-black hair to the tips of her brown-and-white spectator sports pumps—almost standard equipment for business girls in the Florida resort area—she knew she loved him. Her own eyes, gray and long-lashed, had not been able to endure the scrutiny of his,

and he had chuckled a little at the warm tide of color that had flowed into her face beneath his look. And almost from that moment she had been his.

He had made no secret of his admiration, of his growing ardor. He had pursued her with a singleness of purpose that had made her friends envious. The men at the hospital and at the air base, toward which Randy naturally gravitated every time he could leave the hospital had looked at him with that same envy.

Within a week he had told her he loved her and that he intended to marry her. When she had tried to laugh at him, he had simply taken her into his arms and kissed her until she was breathless and radiant, and all the cool common sense and caution had vanished.

"Of course," he had told her, "we'll fool around and waste a lot of time, while I pursue you in the old-fashioned manner. We'll take a week or two, if you like, to get acquainted. But I'm warning you, Honey-chile, that it's a criminal waste of something we haven't much of—time!"

He had kissed her and she hadn't been able to point out to him that they barely knew each other and that he could easily be mistaken about loving her. He had insisted on talking things over with her father. And her father had been distressed.

Sam Marshall, Eve's father, was a plump, middle-aged, genial person who conducted a small curio-and-gift shop opposite the City Park. It was a favorite meeting place for the retired and elderly men who grew lonely during the winter here in this lovely, tropic country and who came to play checkers or chess, and to swap stories.

Mr. Marshall had unexpectedly—to Randy—opposed their marriage. Though Eve hadn't been surprised.

"I was in that other little shindig, boy," he had said quietly. "I know how easy it is for a fellow to go overboard about a girl he barely knows . . . No, no, wait a minute, now. I admit you could look the world over and not find another girl like Eve! But what about Eve's side of the picture? She hasn't known you long enough to be sure that what she feels for you is love—or just spring and the tropics! The lure of the uniform and all the rest of it! Of course, if she wants to marry you tomorrow I won't raise a finger to stop her. But you asked for my advice and I'm offering it. Wait until you know each other a little better."

Randy's jaw had set hard and Randy had grown a little pale, his eyes dark and hostile.

"Wait a little while," he had suggested dryly. "A year or two, I suppose?"



"Hank," Eve said suddenly, "I owe you an abject apology!"

"A year's not long to wait to make a decision that's going to last a whole lifetime, is it?" Sam Marshall had pointed out.

"Under ordinary circumstances, no sir," Randy had agreed grimly. "But may I point out the fact that these are not quite ordinary circumstances, sir? That in another thirty days I will be returned to active duty? That I may never see her again?"

"In that case," said Mr. Marshall, "mightn't it be just as well if you were not married to her?"

Randy had stood up, his tall body drawn to its full six feet, and he had looked somehow hard and cold.

"It's for Eve to decide, don't you think?" he had said grimly. "If we should be married tomorrow, we'd have a bit of a honeymoon—something to remember." He had looked at Eve, his handsome mouth thin-lipped. "Well, how about it, sweetheart?" he had demanded almost curtly.

Eve had drawn a long, shaken breath and spread her hands palm up.

"I love you, darling," she had said.

"Well, then!" said Randy triumphantly and moved to sweep her into his arms, but she had evaded him and put a chair between them and leaned on its back to steady her knees.

"At least I think I do," she had amended honestly. "I don't know, for certain. I've never felt like this before—but oh, Randy, Dad's right. I can't decide all in a minute something that means our whole life, because marriage is for life, with me."

"I don't want to be crude, angel," Randy had said grimly, a little glint of anger in his eyes, "but nowadays, life may not be very long."

"Give me a week, Randy—just a week—then we'll still have time for a honeymoon."

THEY had left it at that. He had been resentful, at first, that she should have the tiniest doubt that the emotion that shook them was the love of a lifetime. Then he had accepted her decision and had been gay and sweet and almost arrogantly sure of himself, and of what her decision would be.

She shivered now on the bottom step of the beach stairs and knew that the damp evening air across the ocean was striking chill against her body. She didn't know how long she had been sitting there, fighting down the pain and the shock that had swept her at the sight of Randy, to whom she was to be married in three days' time, with his arms about Ilsa MacLain.

She didn't want to think about Ilsa MacLain but she had to. Ilsa was another celebrity who had come to town and been

greeted officially by Eve's special office. Ilsa was a well-known woman photographer, here on an assignment to do a series of fashion photographs for a nationally circulated magazine.

Eve had disliked her at sight. She didn't bother to try to deny that. She had met too many like Ilsa to find it difficult to make up her mind. Women who had been born to wealth and social position and to the calm assurance that they and their affairs were the most important things in all the world. That the world had been designed for their special pleasure and gratification, and that anyone else who happened to be in it was there on sufferance.

Ilsa had developed her hobby of photography into a really important business. An Ilsa MacLain photograph was a work of art and hailed as such.

She was not beautiful. Mere beauty, Eve felt, she might have been able to fight. But Ilsa was what every girl in love dreads far more than beauty—a sophisticated lady.

In her early twenties, with a shining mop of rusty-red hair worn in a fashion that no one else would ever have dared, Ilsa was too tall for actual beauty. Her shoulders were too broad and she was too thin. But where most women would have ordered clothes designed to minimize such figure defects Ilsa deliberately emphasized them, and so achieved a distinction that far transcended mere good looks.

She had a malicious tongue, a wit that did not spare friend or enemy. She boasted that she took her fun—and her men!—where she found them. The world for her, even in its present stage of upheaval was an amusing place, and she had attained a certain fame that made her a celebrity.

Eve knew now that it had been inevitable that Randy would be attracted to Ilsa, and it had been a foregone conclusion that Ilsa would be attracted to Randy. They had been gaily insulting when they had met. Randy had spoken admiringly of Ilsa, but until tonight, when Randy had brought Eve to a dinner party here in Palm Beach, and Ilsa had been a fellow guest, Eve had not been at all uneasy.

Then, going out to the patio to look at the moon like silver on the blue-satin ocean, she had witnessed that romantic scene.

Eve drew a hard breath, and straightened. The delicate turquoise-blue tulle of her frock with its silver threads—she had thought it so lovely until she had seen it beside the severely simple, suavely cut white jersey that Ilsa wore—was sodden with dew. It clung damply to her body that ached as she rose to her feet.

CHAPTER II

She Must Leave Him

THE thought of going back into the beautiful villa and facing the other guests, of seeing Ilsa and Randy again, was unbearable. So, instead, Eve walked down the beach, climbed the steps there, and set off for home.

She crossed the long white arching bridge that spans the Lake, separating the year-round city of West Palm Beach from its more lordly neighbor. She was achingly tired when she crept upstairs to the apartment that she and her father occupied above the shop, but was unable to go to sleep. Lying wide-eyed in her bed, looking into the darkness beyond the oblongs of silver moonlight that flooded the room, she faced facts.

Randy was not in love with her—not the way she was in love with him. She had held back from that headlong rush into marriage for which he had begged because of that little uneasy fear that Randy's love might be a passing thing. When she gave her love, it was for always. She couldn't bear it if Randy should grow tired of her—and he might, if he didn't really love her.

She hid her face in her pillow and was ashamed that she could not control her tears. For Randy didn't love her at all, or he would not have enjoyed kissing Ilsa MacLain. And it had been painfully plain that he had enjoyed it—far too much!

Eve knew too, that she could not hold out against Randy. He wanted her to marry him, and the fact that she had held back had only whetted his eagerness. If he kept on asking her, in spite of what she had seen, she would give in. Eve smothered the sound of her sobs in her pillow, and somehow dropped off to sleep. . . .

Randy was waiting for Eve when she left the office for lunch the next day. His jaw was set and his eyes were angry. But they were a trifle wary, too.

"Hi, what was the idea of running out on me last night?" he demanded as he fell into step with her. "Didn't you have fun?"

"Much fun," she assured him dryly, and tried to steady her voice.

Randy looked down at her, the hint of wariness more than ever apparent in his eyes. "You wouldn't by any chance have been in the patio at a—er—certain moment?" he hazarded cautiously.

She looked squarely up at him, her face pale but composed.

"You mean when you were kissing Ilsa MacLain?" she said flatly and uncompromisingly. "Yes, I was there."

Randy flushed, and then he laughed. She could almost see his determination to brazen it out.

"Oh, for Pete's sake, so that was why you took a powder on me!" he said. "Why, you baby! Don't you know that sort of thing doesn't mean a darn thing?"

Eve's taut face did not relax.

"It does to me, Randy," she said evenly.

"Oh, look here now, sweet," he said, startled, "she practically asked me to kiss her." He flushed, and added defensively, "Oh, I know, a gent never tells on a lady, but I never claimed to be a gent. And Ilsa would be terribly amused, if not indignant at being called a lady! It was all just a silly bit of horse-play. It didn't mean a thing."

"It meant that if you could enjoy kissing her, then you were not in love with me," Eve told him quietly. "I couldn't any more kiss another man, loving you, than I could fly."

He caught her hands and his eyes blazed with eagerness.

"So you do love me! I knew it, but I've been waiting for you to discover it! Come on, darling, what are we waiting for? We can be married quicker than you can say 'Jack Robinson!'"

She pulled her hands free.

"I'm not going to marry you, Randy—ever," she told him so flatly that the words were like a slap in the face.

His jaw set, his eyes grew angry and a little frightened.

"Never's a long time," he said at last.

"And never is just what I mean, Randy," she told him, and set her teeth in her lower lip so she could steady her voice to go on, because it was terribly important that he should understand how she felt. "You see, Randy, I could never be sure of you. If you can go around kissing other women just a few days before we're married, you'd be doing it a few days afterwards. I—I just couldn't trust you, Randy, and I've got to trust my husband."

"You're being a little silly, don't you think?" Randy said. "Making a mountain out of a mole-hill? After all, what's terribly wrong about a casual kiss here and there?"

"There was nothing casual about the way you and Ilsa were kissing each other last night," she pointed out, glad that she could talk steadily, without giving way to tears.

RANDY had the grace to flush a little, then his blue eyes grew angry again.

"Well, what would you like me to do—raise my right hand and solemnly swear that I'll never kiss another woman as long as I live?" he demanded shortly.

"No, because you wouldn't keep the promise," she told him quietly. "So it



Ilisa and Captain Stacy were standing

wouldn't be any good. You see, Randy, I just don't trust you."

She would have turned away, but Randy's hands caught her by the arms and held her so that she couldn't get away. They were in the doorway of a shop, and people looked at them curiously, or wisely, understanding the lack of privacy a soldier and his sweetheart have nowadays, and forgiving them.

"Look here, Eve, you're my girl and nothing you can do or say will ever change that!" he told her firmly. "I could marry you this minute if I cared to exert—pressure. You can't get away from me, so you needn't try. You're all angry and upset now, but gradually you'll learn to see things my way and agree that what happened last night was unimportant. It hasn't anything to do with the way I feel about you.

"It might happen again after we're married—for in spite of what you say, we're going to be married and don't you ever forget it. I say I might kiss another woman, any time and anywhere, but if I

kissed 'em by the dozens it still wouldn't have anything to do with the fact that you are the one girl I love and the only girl I've ever wanted to marry!"

"But not the only girl you want to kiss," she reminded him.

He was thoroughly angry now, his blue eyes stormy. "Don't you think you're being a little silly about this, Eve?" he demanded. "After all, what's so devilishly important about a kiss?"

"Nothing to you since you feel that way about it," she told him evenly. "But it's terribly important to me that you should—well, sort of lose interest in other women if you want to marry me."

For a moment her eyes blurred with tears, before she could say swiftly and hotly:

"We might as well face it, Randy! Our ideas, our ideals are far apart. We don't even think alike. I'm not sophisticated enough to laugh it off when the man I love, and who says he loves me, enjoys making love to another girl.



In the doorway, staring at Eve and Randy

"The mere fact we were married wouldn't change you. And I'd be hurt and angry—I couldn't help it, Randy, any more than you could help kissing Elsa MacLain! And—and we'd quarrel, and it would be pretty unpleasant, and the first thing you know, we wouldn't love each other. We wouldn't even like each other any more. And I'd rather give you up now before we hurt each other again. So this is good-by, Randy!"

"Like blazes it is!" said Randy, his face so white and set that there was a little white line about his mouth. "All right, run along now—but this isn't the end. I'll be around, and sooner or later you're going to come over to my way of thinking that we're living on borrowed time, our generation. We can't count on tomorrow, because maybe we won't have a tomorrow, so we have to get what happiness we can now—today, this minute."

And because she was badly shaken and because she was hurt to the quick she lashed out at him, wanting to hurt him,

her voice brittle with anger:

"Was that why you kissed Ilsa McLain last night?"

His eyes flashed, and his lips were thin and grim. He looked at her as though he didn't care much to look at her at all.

"Maybe it was, come to think of it—maybe it was," he said shortly.

She turned swiftly, lowering her head so that he could not see the tears in her eyes and this time he made no effort to stop her.

"Good-by, Randy," she said over her shoulder. "It's been fun knowing you."

"Good-by, my eye!" snapped Randy. "I'll be around!"

She hurried off down the street, not daring to look back, because he would be standing there, watching her. And unless she were careful she might turn and run back and fling herself into his arms and beg him to marry her, even without any promises about fascinating, sophisticated ladies like Ilsa MacLain.

When, at the corner of the street, she dared a small glance toward where she had left him, he was still standing there, his arrogant shoulders drooping a little. He lifted his hand in a little mocking salute that was a stab, because it showed her how superbly certain he was that she would come to terms—his terms.

"It's not his fault," she told herself as she hurried, trying against her own common sense to defend him. "It's the way he was brought up—his mother and father divorced when he was a child, being shunted back and forth between them, any time they married again, seeing his friends going gaily into marriage and as gaily and carelessly out of it. He's suspicious, and wary of being tied down. He thinks I'm old-fashioned because I believe marriage should be for always, and that married people should be faithful."

HER rebellious heart was pleading his cause more eloquently than Randy, in his most inspired moments could have done. And against the wild, urgent plea of that throbbing heart of hers she had only her common sense and the example of her father and mother who had loved each other faithfully, and neither of whom had ever looked at anyone else romantically from the day of their marriage.

"If I marry him," her head told her clamorous heart, "we'll have a little bit of grand happiness. Then he'll go away and I won't know where he is. But there will be women wherever he is going, and I'll be torn to bits wondering whether he's met somebody he likes better than he does me, somebody to kiss. Oh, can't you see what it would all mean? It's better just not to see him again—ever!"

And suddenly the bright tropic sunshine was blotted out and it was as though a cold, damp wind blew harshly upon her. She shivered at the dreariness of the thought of never seeing Randy again.

"But that's the way it's got to be!" she told herself savagely, tilted her pretty chin, squared her shoulders, and faced the truth. It was better to be hurt terribly for a little while than to be torn to bits slowly and agonizingly, wondering whether her husband was loyal to her, or amusing himself with some other girl.

Sheer force of habit led her into the cafeteria where she always lunched and, with her tray, to a small corner table where she always met Trudy Owen, her best friend since kindergarten days.

Trudy was half-way through her meal when Eve reached the table.

"Hi, keed—how goes it?" Trudy greeted her happily.

Then, startled, Trudy saw Eve's white face and the soft, tremulous lips that would have been pallid without the gera-

nium-colored lipstick.

"Eve, what's wrong?" she asked sharply. Eve managed a grimace that was meant for a smile.

"Just a fight with the boy-friend," she admitted huskily. "What goes with you?"

"Me?" answered Trudy, her brown eyes eager and excited. "I'm shoving off tonight at six, and I'm so excited it's all I can do to keep from floating about the room like a suddenly released balloon! And no cracks, please, about I've got just the figure for it."

Eve eyed the girl with warm affection. Trudy was plump and brown-haired and good-natured. Not pretty, but she had an abounding vitality, an exhaustless energy that made her attractive. She was always "going on a diet" and being tempted off it by lemon chiffon pie with meringue. She was lugubriously sure that no man would ever want to marry a girl who was fat—and she quite frankly wanted to be married.

"Not to just any old lug, of course," she would explain hastily. "And not a tall, dark and handsome dream man. Just an average fellow who'd like a wife and a home and kids as much as I'd like a husband and ditto!"

When news had come through that the Government was planning to send two hundred clerical workers and stenographers to Alaska to release soldiers who were now doing those jobs, Trudy had caroled gaily:

"That's for me! Twenty thousand GIs and practically no gals! If I can't snag myself a husband out of that gang, and without competition, I deserve to be an old maid!"

Because she was an expert stenographer, she had passed the necessary Civil Service examination, and the physical, and she was leaving tonight for the new job.

Eve, looking at her, was startled by a sudden thought. If she stayed here where she would be seeing Randy constantly, her heart would win out over her head, and she would marry him and let herself in for some very real heartache and misery. But if she took herself away, to a strange place among new people, under conditions completely foreign to her experience—wouldn't that help rid her mind of its unrest? Wouldn't it, to be brutally frank, help her to forget Randy?

"Trudy," she said suddenly, her eyes glowing, "I'm going with you! I'm an expert stenographer, too, remember. And I passed the Civil Service exams, and the physical just in case I am needed too."

Trudy choked on her lemon chiffon pie, and stared with saucer eyes.

"Ye gods and little fishes!" she said. "Then let's get going! You've got things to do, pal!"

Trudy knew her so well she knew Eve meant what she said. She wanted to get away. Though it puzzled Trudy vastly that any girl in her right mind could honestly want to get away from anyone so tremendously attractive as Randy Johnson!

CHAPTER III

Ice and Snow

IN EDMONTON, where Eve and Trudy left the train, they found half a dozen other girls en route to their own base, which housed an Engineering Unit in which they were to work. The other girls were big-eyed, awed, and a little frightened, Trudy and Eve were desperately tired and Trudy announced firmly that she was so cold she never expected to be warm again as long as she lived.

Florida seemed millions of miles away, and palm trees like something that were only the background of a pleasant dream. It wasn't that Trudy was any less patriotic here in the frozen North than she had been in sunny Florida—only it was all so different.

They were met by a briskly competent woman in her middle thirties who rounded them up like a mother hen rounding up a batch of frightened chicks. When the woman, whose name was Miss Cameron, hurried them off on a shopping trip, Trudy rebelled firmly, in the town's biggest store.

"Hi!" protested Trudy when the sales-girl spread before them some garments of which Trudy had vaguely heard, but had been quite sure never really existed. "What the heck—is this a joke?"

"You object to red flannel undies?" asked the competent Miss Cameron. "You'll learn, dear—you'll learn!"

"You mean we're supposed to wear things like that?"

Miss Cameron smiled wearily. "Look, pal," she said. "I don't care two straws what you wear. You're up here as a stenographer, a civilian employee, and the Army doesn't give a hang what you wear. But pneumonia is such a nuisance. And after all, if you freeze to death you won't be much use to the war effort, will you?"

Trudy shivered and looked out at the street, piled deep in snow. Trudy had never even seen snow until this trip. It continually amazed her that there could be so much of it, and that the icy wind that blew across it could be so cold.

"Two suits for each of the girls," Miss Cameron told the amused and understanding saleswoman. "Give her your sizes, girls."

"Glamour!" said Trudy, under her breath. "And red flannel underwear! Is my morale taking a beating?"

There were ski pants, sweaters, fur-lined parkas. And Trudy ceased to protest, though there was an harassed look in her eyes when at last Miss Cameron shepherded her charges to the waiting Army transport plane, already piled high inside with mail and boxes of freight. The girls disposed themselves as comfortably as they could and the plane took off.

Eve was fascinated by the scenery. Although it was only a little after two o'clock, the sun had already set and the world beneath their plane was bathed in a queer, greenish dusk, not like any twilight she had ever seen.

There was a magnificence that was almost terrifying about the giant trees, their feathery tops lifting high above the snow-clad world. She shivered a little at the loneliness of the country, and the thought of a human being caught in that vast white silence made her a little sick with terror.

"Does it get very cold here?" Trudy, still a bit grim about the red flannels, asked Miss Cameron.

"Seldom below sixty," Miss Cameron assured her.

"Why, goodness," Trudy said, wide-eyed, "it gets down to forty at home sometimes—though the Chamber of Commerce would hate me for mentioning it."

Miss Cameron gave her an amused glance. "I meant sixty below," she said sweetly.

"Oh, sixty below," said Trudy casually, and then the full implications of that shook her. She gave a little scream, "Sixty below zero?" she repeated in horror.

"Even so," said Miss Cameron, and her eyes, that had seemed frosty, twinkled a little at the look on Trudy's face.

"Something tells me I'm not going to like it here one little bit," Trudy said after a moment.

Miss Cameron's amusement fled and her eyes were definitely unfriendly.

"I was afraid a girl from Florida couldn't take it when I saw your papers," she admitted frankly. "But there's a plane out of the post for Edmonton every day. In spite of the year's contract you have signed, there are ways of leaving if you want to. You volunteered, you know—we didn't draft you!"

Trudy eyed her grimly.

"Keep your shirt on, pet," she said coolly. "I didn't say I was leaving. But you don't mind if I say I don't think I'm going to like it, do you?"

"Certainly not," Miss Cameron assured her pleasantly. "We have freedom of speech up here, too. Where we are going in Alaska is a part of the United States, you know."

"That makes me happy," said Trudy sweetly.

AFTER a while, the plane circled. The pilot spoke into his radio, asking permission to land. The permission and instructions were given. The plane circled again and headed into the wind, and Eve and the others peered out as the ground below them seemed to rush up to meet them.

The plane settled down like a weary bird, the door swung open, and half a dozen eager khaki-clad soldiers peered in. One sent up a shout.

"Oh, boy—oh, boy! Girls!"

The girls laughed.

"Oh, girls, oh, girls—men!" Trudy said gaily, mockingly.

There was a little flurry as the girls were helped out of the plane. A jeep was waiting to taxi them to their quarters and as the jeep raced through the camp, there were cheers and hails, and soldiers came running to wave at them.

"Two thousand miles of country, some thousands of soldiers, and a couple of hundred girls!" said Miss Cameron, and sighed.

But Trudy beamed radiantly.

"Happy hunting, girls!" she caroled, and the boy who was driving the jeep turned to her.

"Hi, how about a date tonight?" he asked.

"Just a minute, soldier," protested Miss Cameron. "Give them time to get their feet on the ground and straighten out a few impressions. They'll be here a long while."

Trudy gave her an unfriendly glance, and spoke to the soldier.

"What sort of excitement can be stirred up in these parts?" she wanted to know.

"There are a couple of movies in town, and a place to dance, and the USO." He asked eagerly, "Do you like to ski?"

Trudy chuckled. "I was born and brought up in Florida and this is my first trip north of Jacksonville," she confessed.

"Swell—then I'll teach you to ski," the boy assured her. "It's great sport!"

The jeep had left the post and was entering a small town that Eve thought looked like a technicolor movie. The town itself was dwarfed by the beauty and magnificence of the giant trees that surrounded it. Pines, she told herself, and wondered if they were, or were some other growth peculiar to these vast frozen wastes. Like Trudy, she was Florida-born and bred and her knowledge of trees was confined to water-oaks, Australian pines and cypress of her own native state.

The jeep turned down a street between barrackslike buildings. It was a wide street, and there were deeply rutted tracks

that the jeep followed through the snow. At one of these buildings the jeep stopped, and the girls piled out, stiff with cold.

The soldier driver spoke to Trudy aside from the others, and Trudy laughed.

"Why not?" she said. "After I thaw out a bit. If I was any colder, I could refrigerate a house."

The soldier chuckled and drove off.

"I think you'll be glad of the red flannels, Miss Owen," Miss Cameron said.

"Maybe you're right," Trudy agreed, and scampered into the building after the others.

There was a large room furnished with comfortable-looking chairs, tables, a few lamps. A hall was outside it, and at one end of the room logs were blazing merrily in a huge fireplace.

Several girls hailed Trudy and Eve and their companions.

"Hi, refugees! Welcome to the salt-mines and the wide-open spaces! You're going to lo-o-ove it here!"

There was friendly mockery in their voices but Miss Cameron introduced the new girls, and then they were assigned to rooms, down the hall, two girls to a room.

The one assigned to Trudy and Eve was small—just large enough to hold two army cots, one on each side of the door, a small dressing-table, a chair, and a clothes-locker, divided neatly into two parts. There were a few shelves about the room, a gay, cheap rag rug on the floor, and that was all.

Trudy looked about, thoughtfully.

"Well, of course, it's not like the Breakers in Palm Beach, nor the Roney-Plaza in Miami Beach—still, it's home," she said gravely. "Small, but undoubtedly cozy, though I don't believe it."

"Well, it's warm," Eve said with a little gusty sigh, "and there are lots of blankets and the cots look comfortable. And the scenery is gorgeous."

"I hate to be a spoil-sport," admitted Trudy reluctantly, "but right this minute, I could do with a shot of the moon coming up through the palms across the lake, and a soft, warm wind that smells of orange blossoms and verberna caressing my cheek!"

EVE stood very still, and suddenly a pain shot through her so hot and so sharp that she all but cried out. The golden moon through the palms, Randy's arms about her, Randy's heart beating hard against her own, Randy's lips compelling, demanding, yet exquisitely tender.

Trudy looked at her and was stricken with remorse.

"I'm sorry, honey," she said, and put her arms about Eve. "If it gets too much for you, the Cameron lady said you could

manage to go back."

"I don't want to go back Trudy . . . That—that's a lie, of course. "I do, Trudy, but I mustn't—I mustn't! This is the way it's got to be, Trudy!"

Eve burst into tears on Trudy's shoulder, to her own shame and Trudy's horror. . . .

After the first day or two, though, the girls adapted themselves to the strangeness and the new routine of the job. Trudy's boss was a stout, amiable captain in the Engineers who sighed with relief when Trudy took the new job in her stride and in her first two days reduced his somewhat chaotic office to neatness and order. To his innocent amazement it was possible to find a blue-print, or an important paper in moments.

Eve was assigned to a captain whose job it was to see that supplies flowed smoothly and freely to where the great Alaskan highway was slashing through the frozen wilderness, and to the men stationed in lonely camps and air-bases along the two-thousand-mile route. Now and then the captain took an inspection flight over the route, and Eve was expected to go with him.

Clad in her warm undies, her ski pants, her thick sweater, the fur-lined parka, its hood drawn closely over her head, her feet snug and warm in clumsy-looking but most comfortable boots with fur-lined anklets, she climbed into the plane, settling herself as comfortably as she could on piles of freight, or sacks of mail, or anywhere that there was the small amount of space she needed. She would tumble out of the plane at lonely spots where men all but fought for a glimpse of her, the first white girl some of them had seen in months. Her eyes misted with tears as they vied over making her comfortable, seeing that when she ate with them, she had the best of everything the camp afforded. They would watch the plane take off, looking so forlorn and lonely that she could have wept.

"It's the boredom and the inaction that

get them most," sighed Captain Stacy one afternoon, his blunt, good-humored, unhandsome face a little sad as he looked up from some papers he was checking. "Their officers try to keep them busy, but what can they give them in place of the action they want so badly? Mail from home is the most important thing for their morale, of course, though I'll admit I'd like to kick some of the people back home who write them worrying letters. This is a vital job they're doing up here, but it lacks the excitement and the tension they're keyed up to expect."

He gave Eve a grave smile and added lightly, "If we could just manage to have you drop in on them once a week or more, what a help that would be."

"If we could just manage to have their wives and sweethearts drop in on them, you mean," Eve said quickly. "I'm just a symbol to them of all the women in their lives, that spell 'home' to them."

And Captain Stacy nodded in agreement.

The first strange weeks passed. Trudy was crazy about her job, she said happily. She bullied her boss exactly as she had bullied her boss back in Florida, and the boss loved it. He had a wife and three daughters back home, and he had missed their affectionate bullying.

And in the first week Eve and Trudy had discovered the amusements offered by the little town that had awakened to a startled and unbelieving life when the supply base had been dropped practically on its doorstep, peopled by an incredible number of lean, brown, hardened young men in GI winter uniform. Those young men had demanded something to kill time in between soldiering.

There was a dance-hall where the owner protested proudly that the floor was hardwood, the orchestra good, and the general atmosphere one in which the primmest of old-fashioned spinster ladies would have felt entirely safe.

Here most of the Civil Service girls who

[Turn page]



**TOPS
FOR
QUALITY**

were willing to brave the numbing cold for the trip from their barracks, came to dance. Admission was two dollars for a couple, three dollars for boys who "staged" it, but to girls who came in groups or without escort, the management was happy to pay the sum of one dollar!

"Something I never thought would happen," said Trudy, when instead of buying a ticket to enter the place, she received a silver dollar.

But the moment the girls were inside the ball-room, there was a concerted rush from the hundred or more men waiting wistfully around the wall. Each girl had so many partners that Trudy said, after she and Eve were home, that for the first time in her life she had known the wild, heady excitement of being a belle of the ball.

CHAPTER IV

"I Want Him Myself"

ONE night shortly after Eve and Trudy had settled down into their new jobs, Eve was at the dance-hall dancing with a tall, ruddy-faced young man who had just proudly displayed a snapshot of his wife and the new son he had never seen, when Trudy pushed her way across the floor. Behind her walked a lanky, red-headed, pleasant-faced young man.

"Hi, Eve," Trudy said cheerfully. "This is Hank. He wants to meet you! How's about trading partners?"

The two men seemed quite content with the change.

"My name's Henry Barker," said Eve's new partner and she realized at once that he was shy and a little awkward. "My friends call me Hank, though."

"I'm Eve Marshall," she told him lightly. "And my friends call me Eve."

"It's a pretty name," said Hank. "I don't think I've ever before met a girl called Eve."

In between the intervals of being cut in on by his fellow GI Joes, Hank told Eve a little about himself. He was a sergeant instructor of Ski Troops, a detachment of which was training here at the base. He had won a lot of medals for skiing before he had entered the Service, and had been an instructor at Sun Valley.

Eve liked Hank enormously. He was slow and shy, but there was something so steadfast and honest in his slowness and his diffidence that she felt as though she had known him a long time. When he offered to teach her to ski during his free time, she accepted gladly, and suggested that Trudy learn, too. Trudy was eager,

and before the week was out, Hank was taking them out to the Beginner's Run, showing them the basic principles of a sport definitely not designed for amateurs.

He taught them to wear snow-shoes, and they went for long hikes through the strange, almost terrifying majesty of the giant woods. The sport was a little too strenuous for Trudy, so after the first few trips she begged off.

Eve told herself that she was getting over Randy Johnson. And knew she lied! She went sometimes for hours at a time and did not even think of him. But when she did, it was with a stab of pain so sharp, of a lonely hunger for the sight of him, the sound of his voice, that she grew faint with it. She did not cry herself to sleep, but that was only because of a self-control exerted to its fullest limit, and because she despised girls who wept into their pillows for love.

She was busy at her desk late one afternoon, long after the sun had sunk at a little after two o'clock, when she heard the mail plane go over. Captain Stacy was at the airport to check the supplies the plane was bringing in, but he would be back soon and she would have a report to type and important papers to file. So she was anxious to finish the job on hand and did not look up, a little later, when the door opened and closed.

"Be ready in just a second, Captain," she said, without turning around.

"Take your time," said a voice that made her heart leap as though it were a puppet on a string inexpertly handled.

She whirled around and looked up, dazed and incredulous, into Randy Johnson's laughing brown face, though his eyes were not laughing.

She couldn't believe that he was really here, that she wasn't just imagining this.

"I'll open my eyes in a minute," she told herself, "and he'll be gone, because he isn't really here at all."

But when she opened her eyes and looked again he was still there. Leaning negligently against the doorway, his arms folded, his eyes studying her with an almost curious intentness.

"Not what I'd call exactly a warm welcome, after all the effort I put in to get here," he drawled. "Still, it's not exactly a warm climate."

Eve's control snapped. "Oh, Randy, why did you come?" she cried out hotly. "Oh, why? Why?"

"I warned you it would do you no good to run away from me, Eve—remember?" Randy said coolly. "I told you a long time ago you were my girl."

Her knees were trembling so that she could hardly stand and her heart was melting toward him and throbbing with the memory of the last time his arms had been

about her. Frantically she sought for something to say—something that would make him angry.

"I can't imagine your tearing yourself away from Ilsa MacLain just to follow me," she said thinly.

RANDY grinned ruefully. "Oh, I brought her along," he said coolly, and waited to see how she was going to take that.

Her body stiffened. Her eyes were wide in disbelief.

"You—didn't!" she whispered, stunned.

"Oh, it wasn't my idea, I assure you," Randy answered her hastily. "It seems she's been trying to wangle an assignment to come up here and shoot some pictures of you Civil Service gals in action. As soon as I found out where you'd gone, I applied for a transfer up here, and because the malaria bugs are still doing a conga in my blood stream, and the doctors felt a few whiffs of good cold air might slow 'em down, I got the transfer. I'm a postman now, and it's a spot not many combat pilots care about, so I had little competition. I'm going to fly the mail and freight and supplies in and along the line, and mail and stuff out. Quite a job—but I had to find you, and I couldn't think of any other way."

"I see," said Eve, and now she could steady her voice because she was so hurt and so angry. "And I suppose Ilsa came along for the ride?"

"I just told you she wangled an assignment from her magazine for pictures, and when she found I was being transferred here, she pulled a few wires and got herself a seat on my ship, and here we are." Randy straightened and stopped looking negligent and amused. "Did you miss me, darling?" he asked, very low.

She set her teeth hard against the beguiling warmth and tenderness in his voice and made her own voice cool as she said: "Scarcely at all."

He shook his head sadly.

"You're a poor liar, darling. You should have your pretty little mouth washed out with soap and water—only I'd much rather kiss it."

And before she could suspect his intention, he moved suddenly and she was in his arms and his lips were on hers, and everything else ceased at the moment to be at all important.

Dimly, after ages it seemed, Eve heard Captain Stacy's voice saying pleasantly: "This way, Miss MacLain."

Eve looked up to see Captain Stacy and Ilsa standing in the doorway, staring at her and Randy.

Randy took his time about releasing Eve, whose face was scarlet and whose eyes could not quite meet the malice and laughter in Ilsa's.

"Miss Marshall's an old friend of mine," Randy said to Captain Stacy, pleasantly casual, and drew out a package of cigarettes, and lit one.

Eve told herself that she hated him because his manner was so casual, and his hand didn't even shake as he lit the cigarette. While she was so agitated that only the fact she was leaning back against her desk kept her from falling flat on her face!

"I see," said Captain Stacy politely, and to Ilsa, "My secretary, Miss Marshall, Miss MacLain."

"We've met," said Eve flatly.

Ilsa's airy brows went up with a look of polite surprise.

"Oh, have we?" she said wonderingly, obviously trying to remember.

"Several times," Eve told her. "When you arrived in Palm Beach, and again at the Marbury's dinner party."

"Oh, of course," said Ilsa sweetly. "You're the little girl Randy brought to the party."

"And you're the one he took home," Eve finished succinctly.

Captain Stacy's pleasantly blunt, unhandsome face looked puzzled. There were tensions and undercurrents in the room that he could not have helped feeling, and they bewildered him. But he tried to do his job neatly and efficiently.

"Miss MacLain will be with us a few days, Miss Marshall, doing some pictures of you girls and your activities and amusements and the like," he said. "I imagine you can fit her up with a room in your barracks. It will be more comfortable than the hotel."

Eve drew a deep, hard breath and Captain Stacy looked at her almost pleadingly.

"I hope you will make things pleasant for her, Miss Marshall."

And Ilsa, looking from Eve's white, set face to Randy's guarded, wary one, laughed a little.

"Oh, I'm sure she will!" she said. "And by the way, may I have Miss Marshall as my model? She should photograph well—sort of 'typical Civil Service girl'?"

"I'm sorry, but I'm afraid I won't have time," said Eve with a crispness of which she was proud. "Captain Stacy is pretty busy."

"Oh, I'm sure I can muddle along a few days, Miss Marshall," protested Captain Stacy, so quickly that Eve sensed that somebody important in Washington had arranged Miss MacLain's tour. "You run along and help Miss MacLain. We can use a lot more girls up here. And who knows? Miss MacLain's pictures might easily be the means of recruiting more."

Ilsa laughed lightly.

"Thanks, Captain, you are very kind!" she said sweetly. "And now if I could go to

my room for a bit—it's been rather a tiresome trip!" Her lovely eyes flickered toward Randy and she laughed again as she added significantly, "Even with all its attractions!"

"You can see Miss MacLain to her quarters, Miss Marshall. Perhaps you'll join the Officers Mess for dinner, Miss MacLain? I'll call for you."

And that, obviously, was Captain Stacy's dismissal.

OUTSIDE in the bitter cold and the slowly increasing darkness, Randy, carrying Ilsa's bag, followed Eve and Ilsa along the icy walk from the office to the girls' barracks. He set down the bag. "I'll see you at dinner, of course," he said to Eve.

Eve looked at him levelly.

"I have a dinner engagement," she told him firmly.

He frowned, looked about, and shivered.

"A dinner date in this howling wilderness?" he scoffed.

"You'd be surprised at the social possibilities of this howling wilderness," Eve assured him coolly, and walked ahead of Ilsa into the barracks.

Ilsa looked about with eyes alight to picturesque possibilities. Eve introduced the half-dozen girls who had already come in and who were lounging about the day-room, waiting for five o'clock mess call. Ilsa was pleasant and friendly, and Eve told herself grimly that Ilsa's charm was something that could be turned off and on like a water-faucet.

There was a vacant room at the end of the hall and here Eve opened the door and stood aside.

"I hope you'll be comfortable," she said quietly. "There are extra blankets in that cupboard in the hall, if you are chilly in the night."

Ilsa shot a cursory glance about the bare little room, and grimaced. Then she said curtly to Eve:

"What's all this nonsense about your running out on Randy, just because you saw him kiss me?"

Eve stiffened and said as curtly, "I really don't think that's any of your business, do you?"

"Certainly it's my business," snapped Ilsa. "Because I'm after Randy myself, and it might complicate things if you suffered a change of heart and decided you wanted him back. That is, if your maneuver means what I think it does—that you're just playing hard to get."

"You may have Randy Johnson, with my compliments," Eve flashed recklessly.

Ilsa's eyes darkened and a little spot of color showed high on her cheek-bones.

"Thanks for practically nothing," she said sharply. "I shall have Randy Johnson,

if I decide that I want him, and without your compliments!"

Eve nodded. "Then that seems to say it all, doesn't it?" she answered, and walked away.

CHAPTER V

Red Head—Green Eyes

EVE was sitting huddled up on her own bed when Trudy came in, flushed and bright-eyed with the cold and with the excitement of her news.

"Hi, Evie, my pet, there's big doin's!" she announced, as she all but bounced into the room. "You and I are having dinner at the hotel with Hank and Jed. Hop out of them pants and into something fluffy and frilly—like four or five extra sweaters and a skirt or two!" And then as she took in the picture Eve made, she said, concerned, "Holy cats, pardner, what happened to you? Toothache?"

"Randy Johnson got in this afternoon!" Eve said huskily.

"My sainted aunt's feathered bonnet!" Trudy gasped, wide-eyed.

"He's going to be stationed here, flying the mail and freight and personnel," said Eve, and her lips were a little twisted painful line. "But that isn't all. He brought Ilsa MacLain with him."

"No!" was the best Trudy could manage to that.

Eve nodded. "She's going to shoot a lot of pictures showing what a rousing good time we girls in the Civil Service have up here, and I'm going to pose for her—and isn't everything just perfectly James-Dandy?"

She set her teeth hard and blinked hard to keep back the tears.

Trudy was impressed by Eve's self-control. In Eve's position, Trudy knew that she herself would be screaming like a fish-wife and smashing things. She had loved Eve like a sister since they had gone to kindergarten together, but she had never loved her more or admired or respected her more than in this moment of what she knew to be a supreme test of Eve's character.

"Look, honey," said Trudy, after an awkward moment, "maybe you're being slightly loopy about this whole business. You're so in love with Randy you're sort of walking around in a daze. He wants to marry you, so why torture yourself? Why don't you give it a whirl? I know he's a wolf and all that, but maybe you could reform him!"

Eve shook her head. "That's what I've been trying to tell myself all along, Trudy,

only I know I'm wrong. If I can't trust him before we're married, how do you suppose I'd feel, afterwards, when he might be half-way around the world from me? Trudy, I've got to believe in the man I marry. I love Randy, but it doesn't blind me to his faults. He's spoiled, and arrogant, and overly-sure of himself.

"I don't mind that. He's like a cocky small boy who thinks he can lick anybody in school, but who sobers down into a little gentleman when somebody bigger than he is pins his ears back! I don't worry about that. I like Randy to be the way he is—except that I know he wouldn't be faithful to me, and if a man can't offer you that, then nothing else is worthwhile. Is it?"

Her voice broke suddenly in a plea that Trudy would have given a great deal to answer as she knew Eve wanted her to answer it.

But Trudy couldn't lie. So she said quietly:

"No, Eve. Unless you've got that, you haven't got anything. A good-looking husband, as attractive as Randy, and with his roving eye, is a pretty poor matrimonial prospect. Come on, let's get dressed and out of here."

She stood up and stepped swiftly out of her warm daytime garb, down to the hated red flannels. She eyed herself in them and shuddered.

"Glamour!" she said grimly. "Phooey! How the blazes can a girl feel glamorous, or be attractive, when she knows she's wearing anything like this?"

Eve grinned, and the moment was eased a little of its tension.

Hank and Jed were waiting when Eve and Trudy came out into the day-room. The boys sprang eagerly to their feet. Outside in the cold night, Hank frankly mopped his brow and grinned shyly at Eve.

"I don't know why it is, but more than one girl at a time scares me to death," he confessed boyishly. "Maybe it's because I don't know many girls. I've never been interested in them—before."

Eve smiled at him and let him tuck her hand through his arm and tried to say something bright and cheerful. She was determined that she was not going to let him see that she was miserably unhappy, or that she would rather have been back in her own small, cell-like room. This night meant a great deal to Hank. Escorting a pretty girl to dinner in this lonely wilderness where there were hundreds of men to every girl was a thrill that she mustn't spoil by being anything but gay and vivacious.

Trudy was in her customary high spirits and the fact that the hotel dining room, crowded to the doors, but with not more

than half a dozen girls scattered among the men, was warm and brightly lighted added to the air of festivity that Jed's and Trudy's natural high spirits created.

THEY were half-way through dinner when the door opened letting in a flood of crisp, cold air, and also two people. A man tall and blond and good-looking in his uniform of an air pilot, and a woman whose rusty-red fabulous mop of hair shone above the sleek, shimmering lustre of a mink coat. In short, the opening door admitted Ilsa MacLain, escorted by Randy Johnson.

"Ugh-oh!" said Trudy. "Here comes trouble!"

But Jed and Hank were staring at Ilsa, wide-eyed.

"Boy, oh, boy—what a gal!" Jed said softly, his eyes wide.

Trudy eyed him severely. "Naughty, naughty! Little boys can get burned looking at gals like that!"

"What a swell way to get burned!" sighed Jed, soulfully.

But Hank was looking straight at Eve, whose face was white, and whose eyes were on her plate.

"Do you know her?" he asked quietly.

"I've met her," said Eve.

Hank nodded as though he understood.

By now the fact that every table in the small dining room was occupied had registered itself on Randy's attention, and he spoke to Ilsa and turned toward the door. But Ilsa's long-lashed, faintly tip-tilted green-gray eyes had found the table where Eve and Trudy and their escorts sat. She said something to Randy and began threading her way to their table, superbly, arrogantly aware of the awed wonder in the eyes of the entire roomful of people as they watched her lithe, felinely graceful walk.

"Hello," she said cheerfully, standing above Eve and Trudy and smiling down at them, quite sure that they must consider themselves deeply privileged to be acknowledged publicly by her. "Randy and I are roaming in search of a little local color and we dropped in for a drink. What a fascinating spot! I'll photograph it tomorrow!"

Hank and Jed were on their feet now. "Won't you join us?" Jed was saying almost foolishly. "The waiter can scare up a couple of chairs."

"But how nice of you, Sergeant," said Ilsa sweetly, and gave him the full benefit of her really lovely eyes. "We'd love it. Does everybody know everybody else?"

A rather goggle-eyed waiter had produced two more chairs and they were crowded about the table. Ilsa dropped into one, giving Jed a pleased smile as he helped her drop the mink coat from her shoulders.

Trudy's eyes turned a little green as she saw the superbly simple white wool evening gown that Ilsa wore, a gown that was suavely cut, exquisitely simple, the sleeves buttoned from shoulders to wrist with small golden buttons, a golden kid belt clasping Ilsa's slim waist.

"Simple," said Trudy to herself. "Simple and cost a fortune, and darn her, she's just as warm as though she had on my red flannels."

In the seating arrangements Randy was beside Eve, with Hank on her other side. Eve had not spoken beyond acknowledging Ilsa with a murmur. She sat now with her hands in her lap, not daring to try to drink the cooling coffee before her, lest her hands shake and betray her secret agitation.

"Quite a country you've got up here," said Randy, as though he and Eve were the most casual acquaintances and he was making polite conversation.

"We like it," said Eve stiffly.

Randy studied her a moment. "Never miss the palm trees and the moonlight and the Australian pines? I seem to remember you were fond of the ocean wind through the pines."

She set her teeth hard above the little rushing, poignant tide of memory his words brought. But when she spoke she had managed to steady her voice so that it sounded cool and remote.

"Oh, we have some handsome pines up here," she told him. "And now that I've learned to walk on snow-shoes, and to ski a bit, it's lots of fun."

"Oh, so you've gone in for winter sports," said Randy, still politely.

"Sergeant Barker here is an instructor in the Ski Patrol and he's been very kind about teaching me," she murmured.

"Nice work, Sergeant, if you can get it," said Randy dryly, but there was a glint in his blue eyes that Eve did not see, but that Hank did.

"And I've got it, Captain," Hank said gently.

The two men looked at each other steadily for a moment, before Randy turned away and said something to Ilsa.

But Ilsa wasn't listening to Randy. She had been watching Hank. She leaned across the table and said brightly:

"The Ski Patrol, eh? That should make an excellent picture for my book, Sergeant. How about posing for me, tomorrow—you and Miss Marshall? I've selected her as a typical Civil Service Girl—not too pretty, distinctly not plain; intelligent, efficient. The sort of girl the post would definitely like more of! Haven't I made a good choice?"

HANK and Jed looked at her, then at Eve.

"You couldn't have made a better

choice," Hank said.

Trudy decided that the scene had lasted long enough.

"If we're going to have time for a few dances," she said briskly, "it's time we were running along. We'll leave you our table, Captain! Have fun, you and Miss MacLain!"

Ilsa protested. "But we refuse to be abandoned. Where are you going to dance? That definitely would be a shot for one of my pictures."

Short of actually refusing to allow her to accompany them—which Trudy was glumly sure would have had no effect on her whatever—there was nothing to do but allow her to go along. She chattered gaily to Hank and Jed, deliberately setting herself to charm them, leaving Randy to the other two girls, yet flinging a gay little smile and a word over her mink-clad shoulder to keep Randy's attention centered on her as they walked the short half block to the favorite—and only—dancing place.

"What's the penalty for murder in these parts?" Trudy wondered aloud. "I mean do they still have the Northwest Mounted to go out and round up murderers? I mean if they did, it would be an added inducement—though I don't really need an inducement for what I'm thinking!"

Randy looked startled. "Oh, see here now, you girls have Ilsa all wrong. Why she's harmless."

"Phooey!" said Trudy simply and vigorously.

Eve said nothing, and Randy looked down at her.

"Don't worry," he said curtly. "She's only amusing herself with your Sergeant. She'll hand him back, as good as new."

"He's not my Sergeant, but he's much too nice a boy to have his head turned by a glamour girl," answered Eve swiftly. "And I think any man Ilsa plays around with is usually slightly damaged property when she's finished with him. I don't think I'd care to have him back."

Randy glared at her furiously.

"I'll look into that little matter of the penalty for murder, Trudy," he said through his teeth. "I might even join you in a spot of it!"

"Thanks," said Trudy, frank and open hostility in her tone. "You do your murders and I'll tend to mine."

CHAPTER VI

"You're My Girl"

BY NOW Eve, Trudy and Randy reached the dance-hall and the others were

waiting for them. They all went in together with a little gust of laughter brought on by some witty, if slightly malicious remark of Ilsa's. Once inside the ball-room, Ilsa turned to Randy and held out her arms as though it had been a foregone conclusion that he must have the first dance.

"What a gal!" Jed sighed, and Trudy all but snapped his head off when he held out his arms for her. Jed looked a little bewildered as they started to dance.

"Would you like to dance?" Hank asked Eve quietly.

"I'd like to go home if you don't mind," she told him huskily. "You can come back, if you like."

"I don't want to stay if you don't," Hank answered promptly and they turned toward the door.

Randy, watching them, surrendered Ilsa with obvious relief to a bright-eyed young lieutenant, and hurriedly followed Hank and Eve. Before they had reached the corner, Eve knew that Randy was behind them. She moved swiftly so that he could not overtake them without running, and her hand on Hank's arm urged him along with her.

By the time they reached the steps of the barracks that was "home" to her, Randy was still some distance from them, though close enough for his voice to have carried to them had he raised it. He was close enough to see Eve turn impulsively, put her arms about Hank and set her lips on his. Startled, Hank didn't move at first, then his arms went hard about her and he drew her close and kissed her.

The next moment she pulled herself free, afraid she would burst into tears, and ran into the barracks.

She was thoroughly ashamed of herself. It had been an impulse, that kiss—an impulse born and carried out so suddenly that there had been no time for thought. Her heart had beat wildly at the idea that Randy was sufficiently interested in her to follow her home.

Obviously he had wanted to talk to her, and had expected to present himself at the barracks when Hank had gone. And for some reason she had lashed out at him in the only way she could think of, on the spur of the moment. She had kissed Hank.

Now in her own room, remembering how eagerly, how ardently Hank's arms had closed about her, how enthusiastically she had been kissed in return she felt a burning remorse. Hank was much too nice to be used as a whip to keep Randy away. Hank was fine and decent and honest, and the girl he loved would never need to worry about his loyalty.

Eve could have wept for shame that she had used Hank. She would tell him the truth tomorrow, she promised herself,

and offer her most humble and abject apologies.

She fell asleep at last, to dream that Randy had come to her and told her that she was the only girl in the world for him and that he would never so much as look at a girl again. And she believed him.

That proved, Eve told herself when she awoke in the morning, just how much faith you could put in dreams!

Eve had tried to plan some way by which she could avoid posing for Ilsa. But it was quite obvious that Ilsa was to be treated with kid gloves, and Captain Stacy refused to listen to any excuses. And so Eve and several soldiers who could be spared from their duties to assist Ilsa, spent the next few days driving about the base in a jeep. Ilsa photographed everything she was permitted to photograph, and her pictures of Eve were excellent.

"You photograph nicely," she said to Eve one day. "Pretty girls never do, so I was lucky to find you."

"Your flattery is enchanting," said Eve dryly.

Ilsa looked at her with wide eyes.

"My dear, did I say something?" she protested, prettily bewildered.

"Nothing that was of any importance," Eve answered promptly.

Ilsa's eyes narrowed a little, and there was an unpleasant glint in them. But she laughed, shrugged, and went on with her work.

On Sunday, the first chance Eve had had to see Hank since that night when she had impulsively kissed him for no other reason than that Randy was looking on, she and Hank had a date for a skiing lesson. She was being graduated from the Beginner's Slope, and ordinarily she would have been excited about it.

But today, shouldering her snow-shoes, with Hank carrying her skis and his as they set out, her heart felt low. She hadn't seen Randy since that night when she had kissed Hank, but she knew where he was. He was on a flight north carrying mail and supplies, and due back tomorrow, barring unexpected heavy weather that might ground him for a few hours or a day.

AS EVE and Hank left the base behind and the roads ended and snow-shoes were required, Hank knelt to strap her snow-shoes into place. She looked down at him, as his big, strong-looking fingers were busy with the buckles.

"Hank," she said suddenly, "I owe you a very deep and humble and abject apology."

Hank looked up at her swiftly, buckled the last strap, and stood up.

"You mean because you kissed me good

night?" he said quietly, and grinned a little. "Haven't we got our lines mixed somewhere? Shouldn't I be the one to apologize? I kissed you—remember?"

There were tears in her eyes, but she smiled tremulously.

"I—well, Hank, there was a reason," she stumpled and was still.

Hank nodded quietly.

"You mean you kissed me only because Captain Johnson was watching us?" he suggested, and Eve stared at him, startled. "You're in love with him, of course. I guessed that almost from the first."

Eve set her teeth hard. "I was in love with him," she said tightly. "I'm getting over it, though."

Hank looked at her with level, almost pitying eyes, much too kind-hearted to fling the lie in her pretty teeth.

"Sure you are," he said with a false heartiness. "And if I can help in any way, let me know, will you? You're quite a girl, Eve—much too nice to be made miserable by a love affair that won't come out even!"

"You're awfully nice, Hank," Eve said, smiling, blinking the tears away. "Thank you!"

"Oh, I've already been thanked—when you kissed me good night!" said Hank, and grinned at her boyishly. "Any time you need me I'll always be around! Between us, we ought to be able to convince Captain Johnson that he's off the beam, and heading for a crash landing."

Eve drew a deep breath and smiled again.

"I've felt very badly about—seeming to use you, Hank," she said huskily. "You're too grand a person to be used against somebody else."

"Under the circumstances, it's a pleasure!" said Hank and grinned at her some more. "And don't worry about my side of the matter. I'm making out all right, too!"

Eve put her shoulders back, lifted her head, and sniffed the crisp, cold air. She felt as though a vast load had rolled from her shoulders.

When finally they returned to the base, flushed and healthily tired, Eve felt that Hank was more closely her friend than any man she had ever known. She paused on the steps of the barracks to say good night to him. Through the uncurtained windows of the day-room, the yellow lamplight spilled out cheerfully. Inside, the girls were entertaining boy-friends at tea, and it was all gay and happy.

Suddenly, to Eve's surprise, Hank put his arms about her, drew her close against him, and kissed her with emphasis. Then he released her, grinning, and touched his fingers to his cap in a little salute.

"Be seein' you," he said. And marched off.

Startled, puzzled to account for the

sudden kiss, Eve shivered in the intense cold and let herself into the day-room.

The girls greeted her happily. Some of the boys called to her to join them. But Eve was conscious of just one person—Randy Johnson, back before she expected him. He was standing near the big, open fire, looking at her with a queer, hard gleam in his eye. Suddenly she laughed a little, knowing that Hank must have seen Randy through the lamplit windows, and that that was why he had kissed her. Her eyes danced with amusement, and when Randy spoke to her she looked up at him, her eyes still mischievous, remembering Hank.

"It must have been quite a skiing session!" he said sourly.

She raised her eyebrows in delicate surprise.

"Skiing session?" she repeated, then laughed and said, "Oh—skiing session. Yes, of course. It was a lot of fun! I'm getting quite proficient at skiing!"

"I can well believe it," growled Randy. "Do you want to change, or will you come to dinner just as you are?"

"I'm having dinner in the mess-hall, so of course I won't change," she told him quickly.

"You're having dinner with me at the hotel, and you can change or not, just as you choose," said Randy firmly. "As a matter of fact, you look cute as the dickens—like a robin-redbreast in that navy blue and red get up—so come on."

SHE PULLED her arm free of his and faced him with her head up.

"Please don't be ridiculous! I'm not dining with you, now or ever. We've been all over the subject, Randy—and I'm all washed up. Finished. I came up here to get over being in love with you, and I'm doing all right."

"You've done a rotten job of it," Randy cut in arrogantly. "You're as much in love with me as you ever were."

"That's not true!"

"And flaunting that nice sergeant in my teeth is pretty cheap, if you ask me!" Randy went on, as though she hadn't spoken. "You're trying to make me jealous, and that's a waste of time. Because I know you're my girl, and any little flirtations you indulge in from time to time don't mean a darned thing. But it's pretty cheap to play around with a fellow like the sergeant. He might not be able to take the—er—sophisticated view. He might fall in love with you and get badly hurt when he knows I'm the only man you could ever be willing to marry!"

She stared at him, wide-eyed, furiously angry, and more than a little frightened. Because there was truth in what he said. She would never be free of the love she

felt for Randy Johnson, nor of the fear of the future that kept her from yielding to that love.

He was watching her white, expressive face. Suddenly he said, very low, his voice warm and husky:

"You're such a little fool, Eve darling. Such a dear little fool!"

Quick tears misted her eyes and she set her teeth in her lower lip. But before she could manage her voice for an answer she heard a cool little laugh. Ilsa came up to Randy and thrust her hand through his arm with a proprietary gesture that made Eve weak with helpless fury.

"Randy, darling," Ilsa said coolly and sweetly. "If we're going to attend the C. O.'s dinner, hadn't we better get going? After all, we did break our necks to get back here in time for the dinner!" And then as though she had just recognized Eve she said gaily:

"Oh, hello! It's my little model. You look like the spirit of the snow-country, my dear."

And Eve despised herself that she could think of nothing to say that would be sufficiently biting to guarantee that she wouldn't break down and weep. For to weep in the presence of her enemy was something her code sternly forbade. So she made a little gesture, murmured something indistinguishable, and turned toward her own room.

CHAPTER VII

Second Choice?

LIGHTS were out, and Eve's room was in darkness. She stood for a moment, her slim back pressed hard against the door panel, breathing hard to fight back the tears. She thought she was alone until Trudy's voice spoke out of the darkness from the cot where Trudy lay.

"Hello—back?" said Trudy, and her voice sounded a little thick. "Did you have fun?"

"Oh, yes, gobs of fun—too, too much fun," said Eve, her own voice as thick as Trudy's.

"That's good," said Trudy, cleared her throat, and spoke with something approaching her customary briskness. "I suppose you ran into the MacLain and her boy-friend? They've been to Edmonton on a binge!"

"Edmonton?" protested Eve, puzzled. "But I thought Randy was due for the mail run north?"

"Oh, it seemed the MacLain had some pictures and stuff to send out very, very

special and Randy traded runs with one of the other boys, so MacLain could go into town," Trudy explained angrily. "Fun, to be MacLain—do you suppose?"

"I suppose," agreed Eve, carefully non-committal, and moved toward the light fixture.

As she flooded the room, Trudy rolled over on her face, against the pillow.

"What's the matter, Trudy?" Eve asked, concerned.

"Oh, just a headache," answered Trudy, her voice muffled by the pillow. "Pay me no mind—run along and have dinner. I don't want any. I suppose Hank's coming back to see that you are properly fed?"

"No, he's on duty," said Eve, and began to divest herself of the ski suit.

"He's a swell egg, isn't he?" Trudy's voice was carefully casual, but still muffled by the pillow.

"He's a grand person, Trudy!" Eve said quickly. "I like him an awful lot! And I think he likes me."

"Swell!" said Trudy, her voice more muffled than ever.

But she seemed disinclined for further conversation and Eve was quite willing to close herself into a wall of silence behind which her thoughts were not happy. . . .

Things ran on in their usual course for a time after that, then a few days later, Captain Stacy announced that he was making a routine inspection flight with the mail plane and that Eve, of course, would accompany him.

"Miss MacLain is going along, for the ride," he added casually.

Eve's hands were suddenly tight on the notebook in which she began taking his dictation.

"Is that permitted?" she protested swiftly. "I thought regulations were strict about that."

Captain Stacy spread his hands in a little gesture that said he merely accepted orders.

"It seems she has special permission, though she is not permitted to take her camera," he answered, almost carelessly. "She has to wait here until the pictures she sent out are approved, to be sure no retakes are necessary. She expressed a desire to see something of the country and perhaps entertain some of the boys in the more isolated stations."

Eve set her teeth hard.

"I suppose she sings, dances, and what-not?" she asked coolly.

Captain Stacy grinned. "I believe she only talks to the boys," he admitted, and laughed a little. "I imagine they'll consider that quite enough. She's a very beautiful girl."

"Isn't she?" Eve's words agreed with him, but her tone protested furiously.

Captain Stacy eyed her, a twinkle in

his eye.

"You—er—don't like Miss MacLain, do you?"

"No!" said Eve, promptly and recklessly.

Captain Stacy grinned and eyed the silver-framed picture on his desk, the picture of the girl to whom he had been married three weeks before he had been assigned to this post, and whom he had not seen in almost a year.

"My wife," he said, and his voice lingered fondly over the word, "says that it is impossible for two beautiful women ever to be friends."

Eve smiled at him. "Thanks," she said lightly.

"But you must surely realize, Miss Marshall," Captain Stacy said, surprised, "that you are quite as beautiful as Miss MacLain. For my money, more so! I'm not crazy about the—er—sophisticated type."

ONCE again his eyes sought the picture of the wholesomely pretty girl in the silver frame.

"Captain Stacy," said Eve impulsively, "do you believe a man can be truly in love with one girl, yet like to—go around kissing others?"

Captain Stacy looked a trifle startled, and he colored a little.

"What a question! Personally—no! But you'd have to get a psychoanalyst to give you a genuinely helpful answer to that."

Eve was scarlet with confusion that she could have been reckless enough to ask the question, and Captain Stacy seemed to share her feeling. He looked at her curiously, frowning a little, but when she looked up, he turned his eyes swiftly away.

"Er—we take off at five A.M., Miss Marshall," he said hurriedly, his manner almost stern.

Eve nodded, and asked quietly, knowing the answer before she put the question:

"That's Captain Johnson's flight, isn't it?"

"I—ah—believe so," answered Captain Stacy. And waited.

But Eve had nothing more to say, either then or the next morning when, in the bitter cold, huddling inside her fur-lined parka, she followed Ilsa into the giant plane and selected a reasonably comfortable seat atop some of the freight and the mail-sacks.

Ilsa was frankly grumpy. Obviously she was one of those people who boast brightly, "I'm never really myself until ten o'clock in the morning."

But she curled up on top of a pile of freight and either went to sleep or gave that impression, while Captain Stacy and Randy settled themselves for a routine

flight that was, to both of them, about as exciting as a postman's daily round.

It was almost noon when they circled the first stop, and dropped down. Ilsa had roused herself, had made motions with a beautiful and superbly fitted toilet case and looked as fresh and lovely as though she had just risen from a many hours' sleep in the most luxurious bed.

She was an instant success, from the moment she stepped out of the plane, wrapped in a beautiful mink coat, a little mink hood tied beneath her chin. The men swarmed about her. They had learned to look forward to Eve's regular trips, and while they welcomed her, Ilsa was new and strange and a breath of the outside.

Watching Ilsa with the men, laughing, chattering, taking down names and addresses of girl-friends and mothers and fathers to whom she would telephone when she returned to the States and deliver messages from these boys, Eve's jealous, sore heart had to admit that Ilsa showed up well. If she had thought that Ilsa would make a bad impression, after the inevitable hardship and discomfort of this trip, she saw now that she had been badly mistaken.

While Captain Stacy conferred with the officer in charge of this lonely little outpost of the world, Eve finished her job of checking the supplies that were being unloaded and of seeing that outgoing mail-sacks had been put in place. Then she stood withdrawn a little, watching Ilsa in the midst of a clamorous group of men.

"She's quite a girl, isn't she?" said Randy, at Eve's shoulder.

"Quite," Eve agreed impersonally, hating herself because her unruly heart leaped a little at his tone.

Throughout the journey, the two full days and one night that was spent on the trip, Ilsa continued to radiate good cheer and beauty that was a distinct morale booster.

Returning to the home camp in the late afternoon of the second day, Eve told herself drearily that she might as well give up the fight. Ilsa was everything any man could want, and it was evident that Ilsa wanted Randy and meant to have him. No man, who had been exposed to Ilsa's charms as Randy had been, could possibly be expected to turn to a girl like Eve, and be content with her.

It had taken this journey, hard and dangerous and under difficult conditions to convince Eve that Ilsa was fundamentally sound. Her spite and malice, her arrogance and self-satisfaction were on the surface. Underneath, Ilsa was a rival almost impossible to defeat.

On the night of the return to the base, Hank and Jed came by prearrangement to take Trudy and Eve to dinner at the

hotel. Eve was tired, but she would not disappoint Hank, so she and Trudy dressed and were ready when the boys arrived.

"I missed you," Hank said, smiling down at Eve. "The base seems kind of home-like when you are here. It's lonely as the dickens when you're gone."

Trudy overheard, and her face went white. She shot him a strange, hurt look. But before Eve could be sure she had really seen that look, that she had not merely imagined it, Trudy was speaking in her exuberant way.

"I tried my darnedest to cheer him up, Eve, but it was no go. He just went around with his chin dragging the ground."

EVE tucked her hand through Hank's arm.

"Thank you for missing me, Hank," she said gently. "It's nice to know that somebody does!"

Hank looked down at her as they walked through the bitter cold, and his voice was quiet and gentle when he spoke.

"Still not having too much fun, chick?"

Eve's throat filled and there was a mist in her eyes but she made herself say thickly:

"I'm a double-starred fool, Hank, but I'll get over it!"

"Sure you will, chick—sure you will," Hank said quickly, comfortingly.

"You're sweet, Hank!" Eve said unsteadily. "I like you a lot! A whole lot!"

And in Hank's eyes she saw something that startled her. It was a sudden intensity that shook her badly, a warmth, and an ardor that said suddenly deep in her heart, shocked and appalled, "Why, he's in love with me! Oh, Hank, Hank, you mustn't be! You mustn't be! Hank, I mustn't hurt you!"

But Hank said merely, "Thanks, chick. I like you, too—a big whole lot!" He tried to laugh, but it wasn't a too successful laugh.

Trudy looked back and called.

"Hi, you two, step on it. You want to be frozen into statues standing out here in this wind? Besides, I'm starved!"

During dinner, Eve tried hard to be gay and vivacious, but she couldn't quite rid her mind of the memory of that look she had seen in Hank's eyes out there in the bitter cold night. Or the little shock that she had felt at the discovery that he loved her.

He knew that she loved Randy. He had no hope that she could forget Randy and learn to love him. And yet he was there beside her, ready to extend the helping hand of his sympathy and understanding, ready to let her make what use of him she wanted, without so much as a word of his own need. His love that was completely honest and selfless, and that asked nothing

for itself beyond the happiness of its beloved.

Oh, but she was wicked, to have let this happen, she told herself despairingly. It was useless to tell herself that she was not to blame for she knew she was. From the very first she had not tried to hide the truth from Hank, that she loved Randy. But she had let him hope that she would "get over" Randy, and he had meant to stand by in the firm faith that eventually she would turn to him. Yet she knew that she never would!

Dancing with Hank, sitting at the table with Jed while Hank danced with Trudy, trying hard to be gay and in a party mood, Eve's thoughts whirled bleakly around the fact that she had let Hank fall in love with her and that she must hurt him terribly!

And then, a little while before they started back to the barracks, another thought occurred to her, with such force that its impact was almost physical. After all, why shouldn't she marry Hank? Wouldn't that be the quickest, surest, most definite way of freeing herself once and for all from any lingering claim or urge that she might feel toward Randy?

The thought dazed her, but she clutched at it swiftly and went on trying to analyze it. Hank knew that she had been in love with Randy, but Hank loved her, anyway. If Hank thought that she had forgotten Randy—she could make Hank believe she had—she could make Hank happy. And through making Hank happy, she would achieve happiness herself!

CHAPTER VIII

Surprise for Eve

NEW hope had come to Eve and her eyes were bright and her face flushed with more than the cold, when at last they started back to the barracks.

She and Hank walked behind Trudy and Jed.

"Hank, I've something to tell you," Eve said suddenly, eagerly.

Hank looked down at her, smiling warmly.

"Must be pretty exciting, judging from the way you look," he said lightly.

"It is," she told him swiftly. "I hope you'll think so, too. It's—I've made a discovery, Hank."

Hank grinned at her eagerness.

"Gold, silver, platinum, or oil?" he wanted to know.

She paused and looked up at him quietly.

"I've discovered that I more than like

you, Hank. I've discovered that I love you."

Hank stood perfectly still, rigid almost. She saw the startled, incredulous look that swept his face. She heard the sharp, swift breath that he drew. And she knew that she was going to have to work hard to convince him.

So she stepped close to him, stood on tip-toe, framed his face between her mittened hands, and set her lips on his. At first his face, cold in the night wind, was stiff against hers and his lips were unresponsive. Then automatically his arms went about her and held her close and his lips warmed beneath her own.

Sometime later she laughed a little, tenderly, when they stood on the steps of the barracks. Hank was still too dazed and incredulous to do more than kiss her and say uneasily:

"Look here, chick. Are you sure?"

"Of course I'm sure, darling," she told him gently. "And to prove it, I'll marry you tomorrow if you want me to!"

Hank drew an unsteady breath.

"Well, I don't think it can be attended to quite that fast," he said a little wryly, "but we'll look into the matter."

He kissed her again, and because it was only a few minutes before "lights out" he left her then, moving swiftly.

Eve stood on the steps until he was out of sight, then she turned and went inside the building and to the room she shared with Trudy. She felt light of heart and a little triumphant. But her first look at Trudy startled her.

"All right, let's have it," said Trudy determinedly. "Which is it going to be—Randy or Hank? Or do you plan to marry both of them?"

Eve was puzzled to account for Trudy's new but quite definite hostility.

"Well, since you ask," she said, "I'm going to marry Hank, as soon as it can be arranged. Why?"

Trudy stood still, drawn to her full height, her hands clenched hard at her sides, her face going paper-white. Her eyes were enormous and bleak.

"Oh, no, Eve—no!" she said in a little ragged breath of sharp protest. "You can't do that to him! You can't just use him to get rid of Randy! Hank—Hank's swell! He's much too good just to be used!"

"Trudy, for goodness sake!" Eve was appalled at the sudden breaking up of her ordinarily light-hearted and good-natured friend. "Hank knows all about Randy."

Trudy's eyes flew wide and the pain in their depths silenced Eve's surprised words. They stared hard at each other.

"Trudy," Eve said then, in a tone of surprise and compunction, "you're in love with Hank, aren't you?"

Trudy's face worked convulsively before she could answer.

"Yes, of course!" she flung out desperately. "I've been crazy about him from the first moment I set eyes on the—big lug! He's all there is for me, Eve, and I thought I was doing all right with him, until you started playing around with him. And of course I knew then I didn't have a chance. I've never had a chance, since the day we went to kindergarten together. The minute a boy starts getting interested in me you take him away from me."

"Why, Trudy!" Eve, white-faced and stunned, gasped in sharp unbelief.

"It's true!" Trudy flashed, and in that moment she was a stranger, a hostile and angry stranger. "I'll let you in on a little secret, now that we've got down to plain speaking! Why do you suppose I really signed up for this job up here? To get as far away from you as I could!"

"Trudy!" Eve was appalled.

TRUDY was flushed and her eyes were blazing.

"Because I knew that as long as we went around together, no man would ever give me a second glance!" Trudy flashed on. "All you have to do is wave your eyelashes and that cute grin of yours, and they forget there's anybody else around! So I came up here—and you had to come!"

"Aren't you getting a little mixed up?" demanded Eve, with a grimace. "That doesn't sound like me you're describing. That sounds like Ilsa MacLain!"

"Oh, Ilsa MacLain—phooey!" Trudy's voice dripped with contempt. "A girl with any common sense can fight the Ilsa MacLains of this world. It's girls like you who are a menace! Girls who are soft and sweet and pretty and with beguiling ways, and who are so used to a lot of attention that they can't make up their minds which man they want. You are not in love with Hank. You're just taking him to spite Randy Johnson, and you'll make Hank miserable—and I could make him happy because I'm his kind of people! I'd love living on that big apple farm his family's got, and working myself to death to look after him and make him comfortable! But you'd want him to look after you!"

Eve, concerned for Trudy who was in hysterics, caught her by the shoulders and shook her hard.

"Trudy, for heaven's sake, snap out of it," she pleaded. "You'll make yourself ill!" When Trudy wrenched herself free, Eve said as quietly as she could, "I'm terribly sorry you wanted Hank, Trudy, but I didn't know it."

"You didn't care!" flashed Trudy hotly. "You were too busy trying to make a fool out of Randy Johnson!"

"But, Trudy, be sensible! If Hank

wasn't attracted to you— well, that's not my fault, is it?"

"He was, though," insisted Trudy. "He liked me, at first. Only you made him teach you to ski and snow-shoe and all the rest of it, and he forgot I was around!"

"I'm sorry, Trudy," said Eve helplessly.

"Oh, sorry!" Trudy scoffed hotly. "What good does that do me?"

"None, I'm afraid," Eve admitted honestly. "But if I broke my engagement to him, I mean if I told him I didn't love him—"

"That would only hurt him," Trudy said through her teeth. "I don't want him hurt. It wouldn't make him turn to me, and anyway I don't want him on the rebound, always remembering you, and that he loved you first and most."

She drew a long, hard breath and dug the heels of her hands firmly into her eyes for a moment, smearing the tears childishly.

"Let's forget about it, shall we?" she said huskily. "I don't seem to want to talk about it any more."

She made ready for bed, without even looking at Eve again.

Eve lay wide-eyed in the thick darkness, staring into space. She was aghast, and appalled at Trudy's revelation. She felt a burning shame and guilt that she should not have realized Trudy's interest in Hank. As Trudy had said, she could have stopped Hank's interest in her at first. Instead, she had encouraged it as a shield against the crying of her heart for Randy, whom she loved but dared not trust.

Now it was too late. She could not hand Hank over to Trudy, as though he had been a rag-doll over which, as children, they had once fought. Hank was not in love with Trudy; he was in love with Eve. And there was no way under the midnight sun that Eve could turn that love back to Trudy! Nor could she break with Hank, without hurting him deeply, and making him feel cheap.

Her thoughts kept her unhappy company and when she awoke, she felt tired and low-spirited and headachy. But it was a heavy day at the office, and she was there on time. She and Captain Stacy worked hard all morning, but at twelve o'clock, when Captain Stacy left for the officers' mess and a conference with the C. O. she leaned back a little and relaxed her aching muscles and let her mind dwell unhappily on Trudy's revelation.

She was lost in such unhappy thoughts when the door opened and, startled, she looked up to see Hank coming toward her. She saw the white, unhappy set of his face, and his eyes that were dogged, despite their misery.

"Why, Hank, I was thinking about you," she said inanely.

Hank's grin was tight and without humor.

"Thanks," he told her. "I've done a lot of thinking about you, too, Eve."

She looked at him puzzled.

"I saw Captain Stacy making it for the C. O.'s quarters and I knew he wouldn't be back right away," he went on, with the air of a man who faces an unpleasant task and wants to get it over with as quickly as possible. "I'm taking a gang of fellows out for some field maneuvers later on and we'll be gone several days. But there was this little matter to be settled between you and me, and I didn't like to leave it hanging fire until I got back."

"Goodness, you sound mysterious," Eve said, bewildered.

"Look, Eve, it's about—what happened last night," Hank told her carefully, and she tensed a little, and her heart quailed.

SHE was going to have to make him believe that she loved him, she told herself, and it wasn't going to be easy. But she couldn't let him off to what he lightly called "field maneuvers" with his mind unsettled and ill at ease.

"You're not in love with me, Eve," said Hank, and she knew her worst fears realized.

But every woman, she had read somewhere, is at heart an actress when it becomes necessary to convince a man of something, so she conjured up her most dewy-eyed look and her warmest smile.

"But I am, Hank, and that's what I was trying to tell you last night," she told him, and hoped with all her heart that she sounded convincing. For a man in love wants to believe the girl he loves returns his affection, she reminded herself desperately, her hands clenched hard in her lap to still their shaking.

But Hank gave her a long, level look and she saw the hard, white look about his jaw and the little grim line about his mouth.

"You're not, Eve," he told her flatly. "You couldn't be! A girl like you couldn't possibly be in love with a big, awkward, bashful lout like me. I don't know much about girls. I never cared much about girls—not since I was seventeen when the prettiest girl in High School slapped my ears down, when I tried to date her, by calling me a 'back-woods clod-hopper.' She was right, too."

"Hank, darling, she wasn't!" wailed Eve, sick with pity for him, desperate with the need of convincing him that he was beloved. "She was—she was . . . I hate her!"

He grinned at her, an unhappy grin. The brick-red of painful confusion fought valiantly with his ruddy, wind-burned face, and lost the decision.

"The truth is, Eve, I—I'm not in love

with you, either," he blurted out, and drew a sharp breath as though the words had been difficult and painful and he was glad that they had been spoken.

Eve sat there wide-eyed, every drop of color seeping from her face, leaving it white and strained, and her eyes were stunned and unbelieving.

As though he could not endure that look on her face, and in her eyes, Hank rushed on, trying desperately to make her understand.

"You're pretty and sweet, and any man who was lucky enough to have your love, Eve, is the luckiest man alive. But I know I'm not that man! And—well, I've been crazy about Trudy ever since the first time I saw her."

Eve caught her breath. "Trudy?" she gasped.

Hank nodded unhappily.

"Go ahead and laugh at me, if you want to," he said defiantly. "I know what a fool that makes me. A—a clod-hopper like me, falling for the cutest and most popular girl on the post. All the fellows are crazy about Trudy, because she's—well, she's always such good fun, yet she's warm-hearted and gentle and kind, the sort of girl any man would give his right arm to have for a wife. Oh, I know she wouldn't give me a second look, except out of the kindness of her heart. But that doesn't keep me from loving her with all my heart."

"But—but, Hank you never even tried to date her," Eve said unsteadily, because she was dazed.

Hank's grin was still unhappy, tight-lipped, more a grimace than an attempted smile.

"I know—because I was scared to death of her," he admitted wryly. "I tried to kid myself out of thinking that I loved her, so I was afraid to try to date her, or let her guess how I felt about her—because if she'd laughed at me, I'd have—well, gone into a wing-ding. I'm that crazy about her!"

CHAPTER IX

Lost in the Wilds

FOR moments Eve was too stunned for speech. Then finally Hank went on talking in that same dogged tone, his eyes bleak with misery.

"You and Trudy were always together, Eve. By dating you, I could be with her. I knew you were in love with Captain Johnson, and I thought maybe if he saw you around with me a lot, it might sort of wake him up. I thought maybe by being together you and I could help each other

get what each of us wanted. I knew there wasn't the slightest danger of a girl like you really falling for a big lummock like me."

"Will you stop low-rating yourself, Hank Barker?" Eve flashed at him childishly. "You're a grand person and any girl would be crazy about you, given half a chance."

He looked almost frightened, and there was an appeal in his eyes she could not ignore.

"But you are still in love with Captain Johnson, aren't you, Eve?"

She managed a wry little smile.

"Well, let's just say that I'm freeing you from any claims I may have tried to establish, Hank. I like you enormously! And," she told him frankly, "so does Trudy."

Momentarily his eyes lit with a warm, ardent glow, but it quickly went out.

"Sure she likes me," he said glumly. "But I just about worship her."

Eve hesitated. But his humility was such that she knew he must have a strong shove, if he were to go in the right direction, and Trudy would not mind Eve betraying a confidence under the circumstances.

"Lock, Hank," Eve told him quietly. "Trudy and I quarreled last night—about the first serious quarrel we ever had in our lives, and we've known each other since we were children. We quarreled about you, because Trudy is in love with you, and jealous of me."

It took an unbelievably long time for the implication of what Eve said to hit Hank. Then he straightened, and such a look of awe and wonder came into his rugged, boyish face that Eve felt almost blinded by it.

"No foolin'?" he whispered, as though fearful that he had not really understood her.

"No foolin', Hank," she answered him, and added quickly, "See her before you leave, Hank—get things straight. She's no happier than you are. You'll find her at the PX about this time."

Hank stood still for a breath of time, then suddenly his eyes blazed, and he let out a little gasp of pure joy.

"Eve!" he cried. "You're the nicest girl I know! You're the tops! Oh, good grief, Eve, I don't know what to say."

"Say it to Trudy—and hurry, before she goes back to work," said Eve.

Hank plunged out of the room and, glancing through the window, Eve saw him racing down the street toward the Post Exchange.

She sat down at her desk in thoughtful silence. She had been badly shaken by the scene with Hank. There was humiliation in the thought that she had been

so sure of Hank's love that she had traded on it. She had been willing to make sacrifices in order to guarantee Hank's happiness, and suddenly she saw just how complete a fool she had been.

Absorbed in her love for Randy, convinced that marriage for them was impossible, that she must give him up to spare them both future misery, she had built up a picture of herself stifling her own emotion for Randy, and being a good wife to Hank! And all along Hank had been in love with Trudy!

Suddenly Eve couldn't sit still another instant. Recklessly, she closed her desk and went out. She had to be alone, to adjust herself to this astonishing upheaval in her neat, silly plans.

The only place she could be alone was taking a long walk, so she buckled on her snow-shoes and set out from the camp and the little town, into the wilderness of snow that stretched for endless miles. The tall, dark firs stood stark against a pallid sky. The snow was unbroken, blue-white in the shadows beneath the trees, glistening white in the pale sunshine. It would be gone within another hour.

Lost in her unhappy thoughts as she swung along, Eve paid no attention to direction, anxious only to put as much distance between herself and the camp as she could. Wanting only to bring some sort of order out of the chaos of her jumbled thoughts.

She was deeply glad for the happiness of Trudy and Hank. They loved each other, were completely adjusted to each other in mutual tastes and interests. When the war was over and Hank came back, Trudy and he would live happily and usefully on that ranch of his family's, of which he talked so much. Trudy, who had never had any family except a maiden aunt, would adore being a part of a big, boisterous, good-natured farm family like Hank's. She would be the ideal wife for Hank.

BUT for Eve herself . . . She paused, set her teeth hard in her lower lip and plunged on, hands sunk deep in her pockets, the fur-lined hood of her parka drawn well across her face, against the bitter, icy wind that swept down snow-clad slopes. For herself, she could see no hope save to take "sick leave" and go back home to Florida. Randy would not be able to follow her again. Randy was stationed here now, and the Army was not likely to grant him another transfer for quite a while.

Her heart caught on the pain of that. And yet she was just as inexorably certain as ever that marriage to Randy, for all that she adored him, would not mean happiness for her. For a little while, as long as they were together; but after-

wards, when he was shipped overseas again—and that would be in a few more months, as soon as he was completely free of the malaria that had made it possible for him to be transferred here—she knew that she would be miserable, wondering if he were true to her. There could be no happiness for her, if there was any doubt as to her husband's loyalty!

The shadows beneath the trees were growing longer and darker. The wind that whipped down the snow-covered slopes seemed to have more ice in it. Eve suddenly realized that she was deadly tired.

She looked about, and for the first time realized the danger of her position. She and the other girls had been warned repeatedly that they must not leave the precincts of the little town or the camp alone. Distances here were deceptive, and so was the scenery. It would be terrifying to be lost and alone in this vast wilderness of snow and ice.

But she pushed the panic-inspiring thought down and turned to resume her journey back to town. She walked hard, despite her growing weariness and the increasing chill of her body, even with her warm clothes and the fur-lined parka. She should be in sight of town when she crossed that next slope, she told herself, and hurried a little, her limbs aching.

She pulled her way to the top of the slope and looked down—on an empty valley of snow and fir trees and lengthening shadows. It was a valley in which there was no faint indication of any human habitation.

Panic rose, threatening her self-control. She had taken the wrong turning at the foot of the slope. She had only to go back and take the other turn. These slopes looked so much alike. Of course she was within a short distance of the camp, so she mustn't lose her head.

She did not dare pause to rest now, because she was shivering with cold. She pulled her parka more closely around her, went back down the slope, and took her bearings. She thought she remembered the fir tree to the left that looked so much like a Christmas tree, with its clumps of snow clinging to the thick-needed branches, its bits of ice that had glistened in the last rays of the dying sunset.

Her spirits lifted, sending her weary feet ahead with new strength. That was the trail. She had just taken the wrong turning.

The slope was steeper than she remembered it, but that was because she was tired she reasoned, as she fought her way to the top. There she looked with anxious eyes through the twilight for a sign of the town, or the camp. But once more only emptiness stretched away before her.

All she could see was a snow-covered, tree-dotted landscape without a sign of human habitation.

She was shaking now with panic as well as with chill. She lost her head for a moment, and screamed wildly, and did not know that she screamed, "Randy! Randy!" instead of "Help!"

She fought her way back to a semblance of self-control at last, and tried desperately to remember some way to orient herself, and to get fixed in her mind the direction in which the town lay. But she could not remember what direction she had taken when she left the barracks. She had been so absorbed in her thoughts, so worried and depressed, she hadn't even noticed.

And while she stood there, straining her eyes to peer through the mysterious twilight in search of something that would be familiar, something that would give her some inkling as to the direction she must take, she thought she saw something move. It was a slim, gray shadow that melted from one tree trunk to another. The shadow of a large dog, perhaps. And then with a stunning shock that jerked the breath from her body, came realization! The shadow had not been a dog, but a wolf!

That was all that was needed to complete her panic. Her screams had brought, not help, but a menace before which the last bit of the composure to which she had held was wrecked. She was here, helpless, terrified, almost exhausted—and through the twilight moved evil gray shapes drawn by the sound of her screams, the human scent of her on the icy wind.

She had seen only one wolf. But she knew they hunted in packs. Where there was one, her dazed mind told her, there would be more.

HER teeth sunk hard in her lower lip to keep back the screams that fought in her throat, she turned and sped down the slope and away from that smoothly flowing gray shadow that she had only glimpsed against the blue-white of the tree-shadowed snow. She ran as hard as she could and as fast as she could, until the breath pounded in her body, shaking her violently, and there was a sharp pain in her side. She stumbled, picked herself up and went on—and stumbled again until at last she could not rise again.

Warmth began to creep through her body as numbness set in. She was so terribly tired, so terribly sleepy, that not even the thought of that frightening gray shape could drive her on any further. She had lost fear now, beneath that creeping, comfortable oblivion that slowly absorbed her. . . .

A long time later—how long, Eve could not even guess, she fought her way slowly and reluctantly back to consciousness. The place where she lay was still, except that someone was breathing loud. Her chest hurt, and somehow she realized that she was the one who was breathing so loud. Slow, stertorous breathing that hurt her so that she tried to hold back each breath and only let it go when she couldn't hold it any longer.

Dimly, she knew that she was in a bed, a rough, not too comfortable bed, but there were piles of blankets over her, and there was leaping firelight in the room. But she was still cold. She felt that she would never be warm again as long as she lived, and shook with a violent chill.

She moaned a little and suddenly above her swam into her vision a face so horrible that she screamed with terror. The face went away. But not out of her memory. Against her closed eyelids she could see it—a man's face, rough, dark, with thick-looking dark whiskers and eyebrows that came together, thick and bushy, above piercing gray eyes.

"Ain't no call for you to carry on like that, Missy," she heard an apologetic voice saying, trying hard to sound gentle and soothing. "I ain't goin' to hurt you. I found you out there in the snow when I was visitin' my traps. I been doin' everything I could for you. Ain't my fault you was hurt."

CHAPTER X

Back to Life

DAZEDLY, she forced herself to open her eyes again and look at that rough, terrifying face. And as her mind cleared a little she saw that the eyes were kind and anxious, and that the bearded dark face was as friendly as its lack of good looks permitted.

"I'm sorry." She could only whisper it, because of her sore throat and her scanty breath. "I remember being—so frightened. There was a wolf!"

She shuddered and set her teeth against the terror that welled up in her.

"Yessum, I reckon there was," the man admitted, as though that were no surprise to him. "But I reckon I must have come along and found you before he did."

Tears slid from beneath Eve's closed eyelids.

"Look here, Missy," said the old man anxiously, "I got to get you a doctor. There ain't nobody to send, so I got to go myself. You reckon you'd be all right here till I could get somebody? I could make it to

the camp in a day. Reckon they could get back right fast."

"Oh, no—oh, no!" she wailed, and the pain in her throat silenced her effectively.

"It's the only way, Missy," he told her anxiously. "You're right sick and I ain't much on takin' care of folks. I could build up the fire, and I could heap a lot of skins and rugs over you, so's you wouldn't freeze, did the fire go out."

In the end, that was the way they left it. Eva was so ill by then, delirious partly, that she was scarcely conscious of him. There were animal-skin rugs on the floor, more skins nailed to the wall, and he piled them over her, in the hope of keeping her warm even though the fire went out.

He left her with obvious reluctance, but he knew that unless he could get help to her, and soon, she would die. Dimly, without his saying a word, she sensed this thought in his mind, so she lay still and watched him go out of the cabin. She heard the door shut behind him, then movement outside as though he barricaded the door for her safety.

For a little, after he had gone, Eva was frantic with fear. The fear sent heat rushing through her aching body and she thrust the covers down. Then some remnant of consciousness made her scramble, for all her weakness and her dizziness, to pull them about her.

Outside the cabin she could hear sounds

that chilled her. Was that the soft snuffling of an animal prowling about the cabin, seeking an entrance? Again she seemed to see that lean gray shape, low against the blue-white snow, and terror forced a scream from her lips. In her own ears it sounded loud, but in reality it was little more than a painful gasp.

She remembered then that she mustn't make a noise. It had been her screams out there on that snow-covered slope that had brought that evil thing to menace her.

Whether Eve slept, exhausted, whether she fainted, or whether delirium swept over her, she never knew. She only knew that it was long after the fire on the hearth had died to embers and the cabin was so icy cold that she burrowed beneath the heavy covers even in her delirium, that there were voices outside—hurried, anxious voices.

The door opened and the room seemed full of people, and gentle hands touched her. Men's voices, sharp with excitement and concern, were all about her. Then once more she slipped into that oblivion that was so dark and comforting. . . .

When next she awoke it was in a small room that she knew to be a hospital room. This time the face that bent swiftly above her as she stirred and moaned was a woman's face beneath a white cap—the face of an Army nurse. And the fingers

[Turn Page]

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on her wrist were gentle and warm.

Each breath she drew hurt and she was so tired and so weak that she wept a little. But the nurse held something to her lips and she slept again.

There were intervals of waking, of hearing that loud breathing, and of sleeping again. Intervals of hearing voices about her, the movement of white-clad men and women, of feeling the touch of gentle hands, and of slipping once more into unconsciousness.

But eventually there was a morning when she awoke with a feeling of being completely at peace. She was not hurting any more, and the loud breathing had gone away. But she was so tired and so limp and weak that she could not lift so much as a finger. She was quite conscious though, and aware of all that went on about her.

The nurse smiled at her warmly.

"Well, my girl," she said, "we can't quite make up our minds whether to spank you for being such a little idiot as to get yourself lost, or to kiss you because we're so darned glad we found you! Or rather, that the old sour-dough did! You just about scared us all to death."

"I'm sorry," Eve whispered weakly.

"I guess we'll forgive you," the smiling nurse told her. "No punishment that could be handed out to you could equal what you've had, so I feel sure you'll never do it again."

EVE, shuddering away in memory from that moment when, chilled to the bone and aching with weariness, she had seen that lean gray shape slip against the blue-white snow, agreed with the nurse.

It was three days before she was allowed to have a visitor. And that the visitor was one of importance was made plain by the nurse's efforts in getting her ready.

She was bathed, her hair brushed, and she was put into a brightly flowered little bed jacket. Her cheeks were delicately dusted with rouge and powder, and there was a touch of lip-stick. The nurse held up a hand-mirror for Eve to see the results.

Eve stared, incredulously, at the girl who looked back at her from the mirror, then she looked at the nurse.

"Who's that?" she demanded.

The nurse chuckled.

"A silly little kid who took herself for a snow-shoe trek out in the wilderness and got lost and had pneumonia," she said firmly.

"That's not me," Eve cried, and looked again at the big-eyed, hollow-cheeked girl. "How long have I been sick?"

"You were brought into the hospital three weeks ago yesterday," said the nurse.

"You'd been in the sour-dough's cabin a night and a day before we found you. The old sour-dough had left you in his cabin and started for help, when he met one of the searching parties sent out from the camp. They brought you in. And you're a mighty lucky girl, let me tell you!"

Soberly Eve put down the mirror.

"I'm sorry I've been such a nuisance," she apologized humbly.

The nurse smiled, and gave her a little pat on the shoulder.

"Now you're going to have a visitor—for five minutes!"

She went out, and when the door opened again, it was to admit a tall young man in the uniform of an Army pilot. Eve stared at him. Then she gasped:

"Why, Randy! You've been sick, too. What happened?"

Randy stood just inside the door, turning his cap between his fingers, looking at her with an odd, almost frightened look. Not coming any nearer, making no move to touch her, almost as though afraid of her.

"Hello," he said finally, and his voice was a little hoarse, as though he had a cold. "What's happened to me? Plenty! And all of it unpleasant, to put it mildly."

Wide-eyed, Eve waited, fear clutching at her heart.

"I sort of caught a glimpse at myself, Randy Johnson, and I'm afraid I wasn't any too happy about the kind of fellow he turned out to be!" he said humbly, his mouth thin-lipped and a trifle grim.

Eve pushed her frightened heart back where it belonged, with all the force of her mind.

"Please, Randy," she begged, "come and sit down. And tell me."

Randy walked to the side of the bed and stood looking down at her. As though the movement had been involuntary, and he had had no thought or realization of making it, one hand went out and touched the softness of her hair, where it had been brushed back from her face and a ribbon tied about it to hold it in place.

"I was out on a run when you took a run-out on us," he said after a while, his voice still faintly husky, his eyes tired and still a little afraid. Randy, who had been gay and arrogantly sure of himself and never afraid of anything. "When I got back and found out that you were lost—"

His face broke up and he dropped into the chair and leaned forward, his elbows on his knees, his face hidden by hands that jerked convulsively.

Eve put out a hand that was not too steady and touched his bowed head. "Oh, Randy, darling, I'm so sorry!" she said, tears thick in her voice. "Forgive me for scaring you."

Randy looked up at her, his face drawn and white.

"Forgive you? Look, Pretty Thing, don't turn the screws any tighter! I'm licked!"

She waited, and almost absently his hand caught hers and held it tightly between both his own as he leaned forward to look down at her. Only a few inches separated them, and Eve could all but feel the tingling, exquisite ecstasy of his kiss. But he didn't kiss her. He just looked at her, his eyes probing hers with an almost desperate entreaty.

"It sounds unbearably corny to say it, but a lot of corny things are the truth," he said slowly. "I guess that's why people use 'em so much they become corny. But I didn't begin to realize fully how much you meant to me, Eve, until I almost lost you. Until you so nearly slipped away from us."

HIS face twisted again and he was silent until he had himself under control.

"Just at the first," he said then, "after we brought you back from the old prospector's cabin, the doctors let me stay in the room here with you. You were delirious. I guess they thought hearing you plead with me not to be a heel was bitter medicine for me, but good for what ailed me.

"I never took such a beating in my life. Eve, hearing you, knowing what you'd been thinking, enduring, and not able to get through to you that I was changed, had sort of grown up. It was plain, unvarnished, copper-riveted Hades, Eve. The doctors finally threw me out, and not a minute too soon, for I'd have blown higher than a kite if they hadn't!"

"Oh, darling!" Eve's whisper was faint, threaded with tears, her soft lips tremulous, as she put out a shaking hand to be clasped once more in both his own.

Randy's thin-lipped mouth, with that little white line about it, twisted a little and he looked down at her hand, held between his own. One thumb moved back and forth across the softness of her wrist.

"You kept saying," he went on, as though the words would ring in his ears as long as he lived and as though they lashed him with small, bitter stinging whips, "'I love you, Randy—I love you—but I can't trust you.'"

"Darling, I'm sorry." It was a ghost of sound.

"It was true, sweet," Randy said honestly. "That's why it hurt so. You see, I'd gone along thinking this Johnson was quite a lad, that he was independent, that no woman could put chains on him. He was in love with you in his own, cock-sure way, but it had to be his way! He was sophisticated—thought you were a prim

little prude and that if he once gave in to you, you'd always dominate him. See what a blasted fool he was? The wonder was that you'd ever let him take up your time."

She tried to say something but he looked down at her with a little smile and said:

"Might as well let me get it off my chest, honey. I'll never know another moment's peace until I do!"

CHAPTER XI

Back to Love

ALL Eve could say was, "Darling!" But her voice was warm and tender, and there was a shining light in her eyes that kindled an almost abashed radiance in Randy's own.

"Well, so then," he went on after a short silence, "I began to think. About time, don't you agree? And I had already discovered that you were all the lovely girls in the world rolled into one, and that we had quarreled over something that didn't matter one single bit. I remembered the night you saw me kiss Ilsa—I think that I was honestly ashamed of having kissed her, even then, and too darned stiff-necked to admit I was ashamed—and we sort of went on from there.

"I kept piling barriers up between us because I was so suspicious of what love can do to a fellow. I've seen it make monkeys of some mighty grand boys! And I promised myself I wasn't going to be like that. I was going right on being Randy Johnson and doing as I darned pleased. No girl, not even you, was going to stop me!"

He grinned wryly, entirely without mirth.

"See what I meant by saying a lot had happened to me?" he asked. "All of it unpleasant? I sort of took stock, and knew that I had one chance in a million of straightening things out with you. You were under an oxygen tent by then and the doctors were looking mightly grave and saying frankly, 'Her condition is critical—we have to face it.'"

His face twisted again, and Eve put up her hand and cupped his cheek.

"The Marshalls are a tough breed of people, darling," she said swiftly. "It takes more than a little cold and a night under the stars, even with wolves complicating the picture, to stop us!"

Randy grinned at her. Tenderly, adoringly, admiringly.

"Oh, sure, you're terribly tough—almost as tough as tissue paper. From here on out, believe me, I'm never going to for-

get that. Looking after you from now on is my job, and I intend to devote a great deal of time and attention to the problem. That is, if you'll let me, sweetheart?"

There was an unbearable humility and tenderness, a pleading in his voice that brought more tears to Eve's eyes.

"There never was, there never could be anybody else," she told him steadily, as his arms went about her and held her close to him. She felt the little trembling that shook him as she tipped back her head and gave him her lips.

Neither of them heard the door open and close. Neither was conscious of the presence of anyone else until they heard Ilsa MacLain laugh a little silky, almost malicious laugh.

"Oh, do forgive me," she said, "I'm intruding, I hope?"

Randy raised his head, but he did not release Eve from the warm pressure of his arms.

"You are intruding, you know!" he said over his shoulder. "Go out and leave us alone!"

Ilsa's eyes widened, her mouth made a little startled "O," and she drew a deep breath of anger.

"Well, really!" she protested indignantly.

Randy's eyes were cold and unfriendly, and his voice was uncompromising.

"You heard me!" he told her. "Eve and I want to be alone."

Ilsa laughed again, and now the malice was stronger than the silk in her voice and she made play with her eyebrows.

"Oh, I get it—an act! To comfort the little gal who's been so ill."

Randy put Eve back against her pillows and stood up, facing Ilsa, his head up, his shoulders back.

"Look, lady," he said, through thinned lips, "I've never lifted my hand against a woman in my life, not even in self-defense. But if you've come here to make trouble, you're going to be sorry—plenty!"

Astonishment wiped out any other emotion in Ilsa's wide eyes.

"Don't be a darned fool!" she said sharply. "Why should I make trouble between you and this little—sap? After all, you're neither of you important to me in the slightest—except that you're a darned good pilot and Eve's a darned good photographic subject. I stopped in to say good-by to Eve, and get a couple of pictures to illustrate the follow-up on the story of her adventure in the frozen North!"

"Follow-up?" asked Eve sharply. "You mean there's already been a story about me?"

"Naturally." Ilsa shrugged. "It was a story that had everything, and I got some good pictures of you being brought in

from the old prospector's cabin. I got some of the old prospector himself and his story of finding you unconscious in the snow and of caring for you twenty-four hours or more until he sensed that you were in the first stages of pneumonia. Then he got scared."

Eve looked at Randy in shock and dismay.

"Then Dad must have been worried sick about me!" she wailed.

"He was, but I've talked to him Long Distance every night," Randy soothed her quickly. "He wanted to come up here, but he couldn't get a railroad reservation for love or money, and he couldn't get a priority for a trip by plane. But I've kept him from being too worried, and everything is fine."

THERE was the small, brisk pop of a flashlight exploding. "That was a good one," Ilsa said cheerfully. "I think that's all I need. And now, Randy, if you're ready, suppose we get going."

Randy stared at her as though she had been speaking some foreign language whose meaning he could not guess. In his hand, Eve's fingers clenched a little.

"You're saying words, lady," he told Ilsa, "but they don't make sense."

"Oh, don't be so stuffy," snapped Ilsa. "I'm ready to leave and the C. O. said you could fly me back to Edmonton."

"Sorry," said Randy, and his tone gave the lie to the word. "It's my day off, and I'm flying north tomorrow on my regular run. Afraid you'll have to pick yourself another boy, lady."

Ilsa made an impatient gesture.

"But you're a good pilot, Randy, and I'm never nervous when I'm up with you," she protested sharply.

"Thanks, but the answer is still no!" said Randy firmly.

Ilsa looked at Eve, and her lips curled in an unpleasant smile.

"This is your work, of course," she drawled, and her tone added insolence to the words. "You are afraid to trust him with me."

Eve laughed outright—a warm, bubbling little laugh.

"I wouldn't be afraid to trust him with Lana Turner, or Hedy Lamarr—or the Queen of Sheba," she said happily. "I know he loves me. And I'm sure he'll fly you to Edmonton. Won't you, darling—if I ask you?"

Ilsa stared at her, wide-eyed.

"Well, now that's big of you," was the best she could manage, and again her tone made it as insolent as anything she had ever said to Eve.

"Oh, not specially," said Eve lightly, and her eyes were warm and tender on Randy's delighted face. "It's just that Randy and

I understand each other, and that I trust him implicitly, under any and all conditions!"

Ilsa said under her breath, "Well, I'll be darned!"

But Randy was looking down at Eve's flushed face and shining eyes and there was a look in his eyes that startled Ilsa and dazzled her a little and made her wonder, a little frightened at the novelty of such a thought, how it would feel to have a man look at her like that.

"You mean that, angel?" said Randy, and it was obvious that he had forgotten that Ilsa was in the room. "You're forgiving me—taking me back?"

"I never let you go, darling, not really," said Eve, and smiled at him with such a wealth of love and faith that the room seemed lighted by it. "Even when we quarreled the most, and I tried to tell myself I'd forget you, my heart knew I was lying. You were never out of my heart

for a moment, Randy, from that first day when you stepped out of the plane at Morrison Field in Florida, and my boss and I walked out to greet you."

There wasn't anything Randy could say to that. He couldn't have spoken past the lump in his throat, and he had a crazy feeling that if he tried to speak he would burst into tears, which would be shameful beyond all bearing.

So he drew Eve once more into his arms, and held her close like a sweet white flame against his heart, and once again he knew the blessed, beautiful, shining ecstasy of her lips, warm and petal-soft, and faintly tremulous beneath his own.

Ilsa, looking on, caught her breath unwillingly at the look on his face, and at the glow in Eve's eyes. She went out and closed the door with a gentleness to which she was entirely unaccustomed, and knew that those two back there didn't even know she existed.



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(Adv.)



A Chat with the Editor

BEAUTY is more than skin deep. How often have you seen a girl with a beautiful face and figure—but her good appearance ruined by wrinkled, spotted and generally sloppy clothes?

Your clothes are as important to your good grooming as is the makeup you apply to your face and the care given to your hair. No matter how smart your hairdo and face-do, untidy clothes, destroy the picture.

If you follow a few simple rules about clothes care faithfully, you can save lots of wear and tear on them and look well-dressed.

The way you take your dresses and coats out of the closet is important. Don't grab the garment at the neck and pull. That wears out the neckline of a dress, destroys its shape and takes the nap off the collar of a coat. The right way to do it is to take the hanger from the rod with one hand, slip the other hand underneath the collar and lift the dress or coat off.

Beware That Clothing Odor!

To keep your clothes odorless is another important factor in good grooming. Basic requirements are body cleanliness and the use of an effective deodorant, but a certain amount of odor will get into your clothes.

Hang your clothes near an open window after you take them off and let them air during the night. Then hang them in the closet. The closet can have your favorite perfume in it by way of sachet bags or hanger. Never overstuff your clothes closet.

Clothes should be cleaned regularly by a reputable dry cleaner. And don't wait that extra time to take them there!

Spots can be removed at once, or as soon as possible, with spot cleaning fluids. Brush your dress and then brush around the shoulders and all over after you have put it on. No matter how clean the dress is, if it isn't pressed, you'll still look mussed and crumpled. Either press a dress before you hang it back in the closet, or plan the next day's ensemble the night

before and have it ready before you put it on.

Make sure buttons, hook, snaps or zippers are ship-shape.

Shoe and Hat Care

Shoes and hats must come in for their share of care. Watch the heels of your shoes so that they don't wear down and sway over to one side. Having a heel repaired costs little and prolongs the life of the shoe.

Hats should be brushed before putting them on, and periodically blocked, cleaned and put in shape, if they're that kind of hats.

There's nothing very involved about simple clothes care and it's worth the effort. Give your appearance and personality a lift!

An Easter Party

Comes the first breath of balmy air and I think of Spring—and Spring means Easter—and you can celebrate Easter with this party.

Write your invitations on cards cut in the shape of eggs and draw on each one a face like Humpty Dumpty. On the other side of the card write:

Miss Anne Brown
hopes you will come to her Easter Party

Date
Please come prepared to illustrate by action the word "eggs-aggregate." (This word is a deep secret known only to you.)

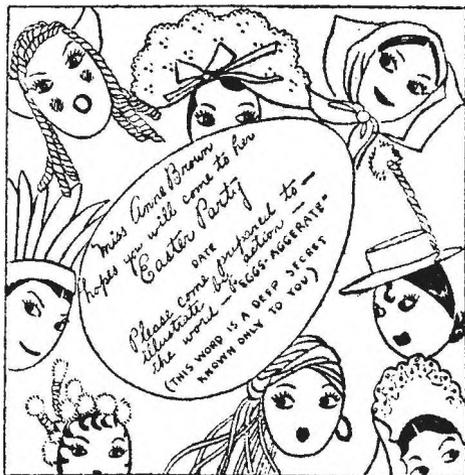
Have a different word for each invitation—eggs-claim, eggs-asperate, eggs-cited, eggs-treme, eggs-tra and any others that suggest themselves to you. Be sure they are words which can be acted out.

When the guests arrive they find hanging in the center of the room a large basket. Out of it are falling bright colored ribbons of various colors with a paper flower tied to each one. Each guest pulls out a ribbon and finds attached to its other end a curiously shaped piece of cardboard.

The hostess announces: "You hold in your hands a portion of scrambled egg. On this table-top you will unscramble the egg."

When the pieces are fitted together they make a perfect egg-shaped picture. Prepare this by pasting a pretty picture to an egg-shaped piece of cardboard and cutting it into pieces. The more curious the shapes, the better.

After the egg is unscrambled, the guests are told to leave the room, one at a time,



and then come in and act their word. It is permissible for the actor to call others to his assistance, if necessary. Of course, this is just the old and popular game of charades, only in this case each word begins with eggs. By the time this game is over, the ice will be thoroughly broken.

Egg Art

Now supply your guests with colored crayons and an egg for each one. Ten minutes is given in which to draw or paint a face on the egg. Each egg must be signed by the artist. When they are decorated, place them in a row on the floor and provide each guest with a spoon.

The egg must be carried in the spoon and placed in a nest, which is in some far corner. It must not be touched with the hands either in lifting it from the floor or carrying it. A prize goes to the first person to land an unbroken egg in the nest.

For supper serve assorted sandwiches, fruit punch and a chocolate cake. Here are some swell sandwich fillings:

Chopped chicken and ham will be every man's favorite. Honey and chopped walnuts between brown bread is delicious. One very thin slice of Bermuda onion and one slice of orange between whole wheat bread is an amazingly tasty combination.

Trim Your Figure!

While your Easter finery this year may not be an all-out new ensemble, you want a figure for whatever that wardrobe is. If you are going to be a very good girl and make last year's outfit do, exercise those

new pounds away! Don't be a corset slave!

Flabby stomach muscles are out for the duration. Your man certainly can't go around uniformed with a paunch, can he? And you know what an improvement there is with the paunch giving way to hard, firm muscles.

Here are some exercises that will get you into form:

1. Stand with feet fairly close together. Place hands on top of the head, elbows out straight. Slowly, without jerking, twist around hard to the left, then, without stopping your rhythm, twist hard to the right. Repeat ten times.

2. Kneel down, holding body erectly from knees up. Raise arms sideways to shoulder level. Lean to the left and touch fingers to the floor. Don't bend arms while doing it. Your left arm should be down straight and right arm up straight, so the arms form a vertical line. Go back to starting position and reverse, bending to right side. Repeat ten times.

3. Lie on your stomach on the floor. Bend knees and bring feet up in back. Grasp feet with hands and rock backward and forward on your knees. Ten times for this one, too.

Make this part of your daily routine. You can trim down to fit that dress!

Toaster Cleanliness

I'll bet you don't give your toaster a thought, except to wonder what shade your toast will be. Quick, efficient toasters are a great convenience, but for steady, good service, they must be kept clean.

They deserve special care these days when it is difficult to replace all kinds of home equipment and every piece is precious.

Keep the outside of the toaster clean by rubbing it with a damp cloth and then with a dry one.

When crumbs gather inside, among the wires and beneath them, do not poke around with a knife or anything else that is sharp. The wires are delicate. Once broken, toasting in your house will have to be postponed for the duration.

To dislodge crumbs, shake the toaster gently. Then use a soft brush. Do this after each time the toaster is used. Put the toaster away in its special spot in the pantry or kitchen, or have a cover for it to keep it clean between meals.

Spring Fashion News

Accessories from head to toe will keep right on being important fashions. Women have become hat conscious again, so more hats will be worn, but fancy combs, snoods and flowers, real and artificial, will not lose their popularity.

Semi-precious jewelry will be designed in smaller and dainter pieces. Much pret-

tier than the large hunks of "junk" jewelry we wore.

Bright colors, especially the electrified pinks and greens, will be found in scarves, gloves, handbags, and belts. Brilliant blue is enjoying a new wave of success in fashion headlines.

And look for much more elaborate shoes, decorated with nail-head, higher heels and platform soles. Lots more dressy than we've seen in quite a while.

The leading fashions will feature cape suits, elbow or fingertip length. The capes are removable, of course, and reveal a slim suit silhouette when you take them off.

A Yummy Dessert

Having company for dinner? Try this dessert recipe. It should go over big.

Lemon Prune Ice Cream

1 cup chopped, cooked prunes
1 teaspoon grated lemon peel
¼ cup lemon juice
2 eggs, well beaten
salt
1 cup light corn syrup
½ cup cream or top milk
1 ½ cups milk

To the chopped cooked prunes, add the lemon rind and juice. Beat the eggs light; beat in a few grains of salt, the corn syrup, cream and milk. Add the prune mixture and blend well. If you like a stronger lemon flavor add two tablespoons more of juice. Pour into the freezing tray of the refrigerator with the control set at the coldest.

Freeze till it is mushy, then turn it out into a chilled bowl and beat with a fork. Return it to the freezing tray and continue freezing until it is firm. This will serve six.

Accent Your Eyes

A famous photographer of Hollywood stars advises us to accent our eyes if we're planning a photograph. He says they'll remember your eyes long after they've forgotten your face, if your makeup is planned to accent this most important feature. He suggests a few tips:

Natural brows are in vogue again. They have replaced the heavy-pencilled brow. Your browline should be in harmony with the contour of your face. Tweeze out stray hairs that won't line up with the natural arch. Use an eyebrow pencil only if your brows are thin or too light in color. A touch of cream, rubbed in thoroughly, or a little brilliantine will usually accentuate well-groomed brows.

Apply face powder carefully, making sure that it gets into every tiny crease and crevice at the corners of your eyes. A little extra fussiness in spreading the powder with your fingers, and then patting it evenly, will give you that professional touch.

Apply eye shadow with your fingertips at the lower edge of the lids and from inner edge outward. Blend it carefully upward toward the eyebrows, graduating the shade from a lighter tone to a darker one down along the line of the eyelids.

Apply mascara with a brush that has first been dipped and then blotted to semi-dryness with a tissue. This will avoid a

"beady" appearance on the lashes. Make sure that every single hair is evenly tinted.

Give your eye makeup a final, critical inspection. Using a cotton swab, remove every trace of excess powder which may be clinging to the lids, and also give a final smoothing down to the eyeshadow.

You should come through with flying colors. Don't let him forget the "it" in your eyes.

Decorating Note

Don't overlook those handy little wall-paper borders and cutouts at sale in five-and-ten cent stores all over the country. They add a fresh note if you're re-doing your kitchen, nursery or bathroom.

You can use them on cupboard and dresser drawers, on kitchen canisters and bathroom bottles. Bright flowers and amusing animals all ready to be glued on!

Your Victory Garden

It's not a bit too early to start thinking about your Victory garden. Here are four major points to remember:

Make charts showing the vegetable needs of the family. Plant the foods required for good health.

Plant good quality seeds. Poor seeds are a waste of money, time and energy. Water the young plants when they need it.

Fight weeds and insects.

Take good care of your garden tools. They are scarce and having them repaired is next to impossible.

Need a Permanent?

To wave or not to wave—that is the question. If you've just piled your hair on top of your head in an effort to keep it out of the way, perhaps you haven't noticed how much you need a new permanent. But as soon as you put on that new Spring suit and charming bonnet, you'll see that something must be done about those straggly ends.

Glowing claims are made for the new cold wave methods. I do know that they're faster and much more comfortable to sit through than the other kind. After consulting with some of the experts, here are the things to look for in a good cold permanent wave:

The solution used on your hair should be odorless. The old cold waves with the badly smelling lotion were taken off the market because it was found that many women were allergic to the sulphur solutions. If the operator doesn't wear rubber gloves, and the solution does not harm her hands, you can be reasonably sure that it won't hurt your scalp.

To insure a good wave all over your head, the solution must penetrate the hair to an equal degree of saturation at all

points. Cold waves may be a bit more expensive but the wave lasts longer.

Your hair is your most essential beauty asset. And a good permanent is the basis for lovely hair styles. So don't skimp on your permanent.

For That Black Gown

The basic black gown you have is swell—but it needs help. I doubt that we will ever abandon black as our favorite wardrobe number. Don't forget, though, that it



often has a deadening and color-draining effect that calls for more careful makeup.

On a gray day, when you feel like adding a spot of color to your black dress, try one of these ideas:

Tie a mammoth, beguiling, pussy-cat bow under your chin. Make it crisp, stand-up checked taffeta in a gay color.

For dash, tuck a smart taffeta ascot in the neckline of the dress. Spice it with a wide belt to match.

Or try a prim little Peter Pan collar and cuff set. Make it of bright striped crepe or contrasting color faille.

I especially like a satin shoulder rosette and a flat satin headband to match.

Window-Cleaning Time

Spring means new clothes and window-cleaning time, too. But clear, shining windows can do so much to brighten your home, you shouldn't mind too much.

There are ways to make window-washing speedier and easier. A frequent dusting of the windows, inside and out, will cut down on actual washing. Every few weeks go over the glass with soft tissue paper. Brush off outside window ledges and dust inside sills and frames.

For best results, either use one of the prepared solutions or use warm water containing a little household ammonia, alcohol or vinegar. Alcohol and ammonia help cut greasy dirt on the pane. Vinegar helps loosen dirt caused by road dust and smoke.

For washing use chamois or a soft lintless cloth. Squeeze the chamois or cloth dry, then wipe the window from the top down. If very dirty, rinse the chamois and wipe the glass again. Dry the pane with a clean dry cloth. Polish with soft tissue paper.

Toe the Mark

Toeless and backless shoes will be with us for a good long time, but do be careful about selecting them. I have seen far too many gals wearing toeless shoes that are a little too small for them—and the result is not pretty. The big toe sticks out well beyond the sole of the shoe and tells the world you are wearing shoes that are too small. The effect is downright ugly.

If you go in for toeless shoes, remember to get them plenty long enough. That's the least you can do if you want your feet to look pretty.

And if you wear a backless shoe that is too small, it's quite evident, too. Your heels will slip around when you walk and will creak and creak, in the most unmusical way.

Marketing Pointers

Doing the family marketing is a far from easy chore these days. If it's your job, remember these pointers. You will find them helpful.

Count up points in the family's ration books and know just how much food to buy each time.

Shop where ceiling prices are posted and never pay more. Read the labels to find out as much about the food as possible—weight, quality, number of servings.

Buy meats by grade. Choice AA and Good A for steaks and roasts; Commercial B or Utility C for stews, soup, hamburgers and meat loaves.

Buy eggs that are stored in a cool, clean place.

Buy most fruits and vegetables by weight—not by the dozen or the bunch.

Buy foods that are plentiful and get better buys.

Something to Remember

It's interesting to note that in a noisy, chattering crowd, the person who really makes an impression is the one who is poised, dignified and quiet.



The shutter clicked, even as Lalie stood there

This Is for Bill

By LILY K. SCOTT

Lalie Thomas liked to woo the tragic muse, but budding composer Bill Gray sold her on a better kind of wooing!

LALIE THOMAS had legs—but legs! She went twenty-two years without discovering that very apparent fact. Then one day, at the corner of Broadway and 45th, she met a strong west wind and a sailor all in one gasp.

The wind went *whoosh!* Lalie's skirts went four inches above the accepted fashion. And the sailor went:

"Woo-man! Them's stems!"

Lalie dived at the misbehaving skirt with one small, desperate hand, while the other shoved the lemon yellow curls out of her face. Then she stared—just stared.

No one ever spoke to Lalie Thomas that way, and it floored her. She forgot to be angry. Instead, she sized up the stranger through wide purple eyes; and because he was in uniform and you were supposed to be nice to men in uniform, she refrained

from lifting her tip-tilted nose a degree higher and swishing on past him. Not that she stopped to talk—Lalie Thomas just didn't do such things.

But she walked on into the howling March blast thinking that sooty lashes did exciting things to laughing gray eyes. Especially when the gray eyes were set in a lean, bronzed face beneath a shock of blue-black hair. And she was wondering about her legs, too.

Lalie should have known about her legs. She had spent tireless months watching their reflection in a mirror, but she had been so concerned with the technique of dancing that she never thought to look at their shape.

She could have told you all about her hair and eyes, and the proper way to face an audience. And she knew everything there was to know about theatrical make-up and the effect the spots or the footlights had on them. Lalie could tell you just how to make your voice carry so the man with the ear trumpet in Row Z could hear even a tiny whisper. You learned those things when you rose to the place in the theater that was Lalie Thomas'.

But she never had the faintest idea about her "stems." Her bright mouth widened mirthfully, thinking of the way the long-legged sailor had phrased it. She tried to visualize Don Thurston saying that to her. She had been engaged to Don for seven months, and he had never said, "Woo-man, them's stems!" Lalie laughed quietly to herself.

"I dote on screwballs that laugh on the street!" a deep voice said at her elbow, and Lalie stopped dead in her tracks. The big sailor was following her!

She gave him a blank stare and hurried on. Not that that did any good because she had to take two steps to every long, easy one of his, and she had to keep her face straight—and altogether it was very disconcerting.

"I've got a passion for purple eyes," the gray-eyed sailor went on in a slow drawl. "I've been known to climb the bulkhead when a pair of purple eyes showed up."

"Well, there's the loveliest bulkhead I ever saw," Lalie cried exasperatedly, pointing to the wall of the nearest building. "Go climb it!"

The sailor chuckled, quickened his pace to hers.

"See here!" Lalie spoke crisply. "What do I have to do to get rid of you?"

"Well, I won't guarantee it'll work, but you might try a double slice of onion on the hamburger we're going to eat now." He grasped her resisting elbow and steered her through the revolving door at McGinnis' on 48th. "Mind, though," he cautioned, "I've

been known to stick through garlic, even."

Lalie laughed aloud despite herself. There was something breezy about him, and she hadn't been with breezy people since—since long before she became "Lalie Thomas" in neon lights. Don Thurston would be shocked clear out of his swivel chair, and there would be a lecture, she felt sure, about the future wife of a future ambassador, maybe, picking up sailors on Broadway.

Don was with the State Department in Washington. He was very ambitious and deadly serious, and he had sound notions of conduct for people in diplomatic circles. He even frowned on Lalie's theatrical career. But as long as it didn't include abbreviated costumes in musical comedy, and as long as she appeared in uplifting, serious-minded drama, he could put up with it.

THEY call me Bill, sugar, when they're not calling me sweetheart and darling," the sailor informed her when they were leaning on the counter sniffing hungrily at the tantalizing odors. "Bill Gray," he elaborated. "And you, cherub?"

Lalie hesitated. She glanced up into the merry gray eyes and an imp in her brain whispered: "Tell him Mary Smith or Janie Jones. It's only for now. Have fun!" But Lalie Thomas of the Boston Thomases said: "Lalie!" And instantly regreted it.

"L-Lalie?" he repeated, his dark brows drawing together swiftly. "Well, I'll be—I should have known!"

Bill Gray suddenly straightened up, and the teasing light fled from his eyes. His wide mouth was serious, and his manner all at once formal.

"Lalie Thomas, aren't you? I hope you'll pardon my rudeness, Miss Thomas, but I didn't recognize you, although I've seen you on the stage dozens of times before the war, and admired you no end." He paused, glancing around. "I'd like to take you to a better place for dinner, Miss Thomas, if I may."

"This is perfect, Bill," she assured him, "and I'll take onion on my hamburger."

They both laughed after that, but the breeze was gone. Lalie thought ruefully: "This is what I get for glooming all over the boards in tragic rôles. People don't know I can laugh, too."

She tried laughing up into Bill Gray's eyes when their hamburgers arrived, but he was very polite. He offered a napkin, mustard, relish, as though she were a grand old dame of the theater.

Then she noticed the brown paper envelope that seemed crammed to bursting. He had been carrying the thing all the way under his arm, she recalled. Bill Gray saw her glance, hesitated a moment.

"Funny," he remarked suddenly, "running into you like this, today of all days. I'm on leave right now, and I've just been around to the agents' offices with that thing, but they don't want any part of it."

Lalie looked surprised.

"What is it?"

"My brainchild!" he replied, with a faint bitterness. "It's the book, score and lyrics for a musical I wrote. The theater was a passion with me before the war, and the day I signed up for my first part, I got my induction notice. That was all right, I knew I'd have to go sometime. But I kind of wanted to get a start in the theater first. And then the two things came the same day.

"Well," he shrugged, grinning, "there were plenty more like me. And I thought, anyway, I'd still have spare time enough to keep my hand in the game and maybe have something to start on after the war. So I wrote this. I called it 'Hey, Gob!' The agents took a quick look and said, 'Outside, gob!' so I guess it's not so hot."

Lalie's dark eyes softened as he spoke. It was a tale she had heard many times before. It was a story of dreams that ended too soon. Of longings and hopes and desires that never even struggled to life; and in many cases, would never again rise from distant battlefields to taste a breath of promise.

"Let's sit at a table, Bill. I'd like to look at it, may I?"

"Why not?" he agreed, shrugging with a hopeless air.

"Hey, Gob!" was not very good. But the important thing was that neither was it very bad. Lalie shrewdly placed her finger on several bad spots that would have to come out. But just as readily she observed that the music and lyrics were catchy and timely. Bill Gray really had a flair for songs.

An hour or more they sat there while Lalie carefully perused each page, making mental notes as she went along. She felt the big sailor's clear gray eyes fixed on her, and once, glancing up, he flushed a deep scarlet. Bill Gray wasn't thinking of his script right then!

At length, Lalie turned the last page, and shuffled the script back in order.

"You've got something here!" she said smiling cheerfully.

"You really think so, Miss Thomas?"

"I know so, and the name is Lalie, Bill."

Their eyes clinched for a brief instant; then Bill grinned a flash of white in his bronzed face. In a moment, he was serious again.

"That's very nice, of course, and I really appreciate your opinion, but that doesn't get my show produced."

"Why—I'll produce your show for you, Bill Gray!" Lalie declared, amazed at hearing herself say it. "And I'll have the S.R.O. sign up, too!"

Almost at once, she wished she had inherited more of her staid New England ancestors' caution, and less of her flighty Uncle Tim's disposition to go off half-cocked. But if she had, she would never have inherited, also, Uncle Tim's neat little fortune that was going to fulfill young Bill Gray's dreams.

"Our money," Don Thurston called it, ever since they were engaged. Lalie understood fully Don's diplomatic ambitions, and being so terribly in love with him, wanted to help in every way she could. And money, Don explained, meant a great deal in his game.

But this would be an investment and should pay good dividends, and surely Don had enough business sense to realize it.

Bill was staring at her in sheer disbelief.

"But, Lalie, the agents turned it down. It couldn't be much good."

"Agents make mistakes, too, Bill. I think I know how to improve it, and I have enough confidence in it to back it with my own money."

Bill colored warmly.

"I'd hate for you to lose on it, Lalie."

"I won't lose," Lalie assured him, trying to convince herself at the same time. "It'll need a lot of rewriting. And I'll have to cut some of the more elaborate scenes. It costs a lot of money to produce a musical, Bill. And an out-of-town opening is out of the question. But I think I can do it—if you'll trust me."

"If I'll—oh, golly, Lalie, I feel as though everything I ever dreamed about before the war was coming true!"

Lalie swallowed hard. *That* was what she wanted to do! Give this man with the laughing gray eyes his dreams! And all at once she knew that nothing, and no one, not even Don Thurston, was going to stop her.

DON came up from Washington unexpectedly. It was between the matinee and evening performances of Lalie's play and he found her in her dressing room, carefully blue-pencilling Bill Gray's script.

The sight of Don looming up in her doorway sent Lalie's heart skimming to the clouds. Distinguished was the word for Don. Tall, slim, with ashy-blond hair, he was the kind of cultured man that wandered in and out of smart photographs advertising somebody's pet brand of cigarette or perfume.

Lalie flung down her pencil and flew to his arms.

"Darling! How nice!" she cried, lifting

her warm red mouth for his kiss.

"Flew up, sweet, and I'm flying right back in an hour. Just had to see my Lalie for a few minutes," he whispered close to her ear.

Lalie smiled, thinking there weren't many men who would go to all that trouble; nor many men important enough to get plane reservations just like that!

"So good to be with you," she murmured, still clinging to him. Then, "See what I'm doing, honey." She pointed to the script, and briefly explained about Bill Gray and his musical.

"You—you're not intending to—" Don began.

"To produce it! For Bill!" Lalie told him emphatically.

"But you won't be acting in it, will you, dear?" Don asked eyeing her closely.

"No, Don, of course not. I've a run-of-the-play contract here, and I can't be in two shows at once."

"Well, I hope not, darling. You know, a musical—bound to be risqué."

"This one isn't, terribly. It's just gay and full of fun."

"The costumes," he persisted. "Too brief. Not that I don't appreciate that myself," he assured her. "But after all, the future Mrs. Donald Thurston—"

"I know, I know," Lalie broke in impatiently. The smell of greasepaint was in her nostrils, the sweet cosmetic odor that permeates all of backstage; the catlike tread of fast-moving stagehands lingered in her ears; the glow of the spotlight still warmed her after the last performance—and she was in no mood for Don's hair-splitting arguments.

"Of course, you understand," he murmured, quite satisfied, and changed the subject. "Look, sweet, I'll have to duck in about ten minutes if I'm to make that plane back. I've a chance to make a really good investment through a South American colleague. It might mean a lot to us after the war. Could you let me have a little check, say a thousand or two?"

"A th-thousand or two?" Lalie cried aghast. Don seemed to have a notion Uncle Tim left a few million, from the way he drew against her inheritance. That would make pretty nearly ten thousand dollars in only six months. "Darling—I really couldn't. Don't you see, I'm going to use my money for Bill Gray's show."

Don's pale blue eyes flashed with cold fire.

"Who is this Bill Gray anyway, Lalie? You don't seem to care a hoot about tossing all our money into some fool venture for a perfect stranger. But when I ask for a thousand, you have a fit."

Lalie drew herself up, her lips stiffening

across set teeth. This would be the first time she had used any of her own money for something *she* wanted to do.

"Sorry, Don, you don't seem to understand. I've got a chance to give a man something he's been dreaming about. He may never—even get back to enjoy it, but I mean to do it for him."

"Very well, if that's the way you feel about it, Lalie," Don said icily, "I'll get the money somehow. There are still people who think more of me than a stray sailor!"

Abruptly he turned and left her. Lalie bit her lip to keep from calling him back and giving him the money he wanted. But his last words, "stray sailor," had planted a seed of rebellion in her heart, and already it was taking root.

When Bill Gray came backstage according to plan, after that evening's performance, Lalie was daubing cold cream generously over her make-up. All that evening she had doubted the wisdom of doing Bill's show, but at the sunny hope she read in his lean face, there was nothing but surety and gladness.

"If I lose every cent of Uncle Tim's," she said to herself, "at least Bill will see his name on a program!"

A little later, they were about to leave for Lalie's apartment where they could work undisturbed as long as they wished. Lalie paused. She had been fighting this impulse ever since Don left her.

"Wait a minute, Bill," she said, reaching into her bag for a checkbook.

Leaning on her dressing table, she wrote out a draft for a thousand, together with a hasty note to Don. She slipped both into an envelope, and dropped it in the box on her way out. "Might as well be a pat of putty," she told herself angrily, "but I love him too much to quarrel with him. I'll have to cut one more scene from Bill's show."

FAR into the morning hours they worked, and when they called it a night, Lalie was firm in her belief that Bill Gray's musical would go over. She leaned back, smiling at him.

"I've been making inquiries," she said. "We're in luck as far as a theater goes. The roof floor of our theater is vacant. It used to be an elaborate night-club, but it folded, and it has a stage and lots of necessary equipment. It will be doing things on a small scale, but we'll save money, and then if we're a success we can move to a larger house."

Bill nodded approvingly.

"There's the question of our cast," Lalie went on. "There are still scores of young people who would jump at a chance to get started. We'll find them, lots of them, down in Walgreen's basement lunch, or over at

Ralph's on 45th. If they're not Equity members, they soon will be. I'd like to use people who never had a chance before, Bill—just like—you."

He smiled and his gray eyes lit up warmly.

"That's swell, Lalie. Then, about the feminine lead—" Lalie looked up sharply, but Bill went right on. "I wonder if you'd mind if we gave the feminine lead to my girl," he said quietly.

Lalie's breath caught in her throat. So the sailor had a girl. So what? So every sailor has a girl. And Bill Gray has a girl, too. And anyway, what difference could it make to Lalie Thomas? None at all. . . . Only it was as if someone had pulled down a dark-green blind in a room full of sunshine.

"Well, you understand, Bill," she informed him coolly, "we need a girl with talent—and looks!"

Bill grinned. "She's got puhlenty of this-a!" His big hands described an elaborate curve.

Lalie froze. "This-a is not enough. Can she sing? Can she dance?"

"Wait till you see her, Lalie!"

It turned out next day that Bill Gray's girl, Linda Clare, had not only this-a, but liberal supplies of these-a and those-a! More than that, she had a lilting contralto, and she danced like a dream in rhythm. She was small and dark with soft, black eyes, and a bewitching dimple in one cheek. And there wasn't a reason in the world why she shouldn't have the part of Suzy.

Three trying weeks of rehearsal were past, when Bill Gray's leave was up.

"We're usually out about six weeks at a time, though it's hard to tell for sure about *Gallop in' Gertie*," he told Lalie at rehearsal one morning. He was referring affectionately to his ship.

"When you come back, you'll be a name on Broadway, Bill," she promised.

"Even if I'm not, I'll never forget you, Lalie, and what you're doing for me." His dark face suddenly glowed with gratitude.

Lalie swallowed at a painful lump in her throat, aware suddenly that she was holding his hand longer than was necessary. She let go abruptly, saw him turn wistfully to Linda Clare and gather her in his long arms. And then she was tearing blindly through the passageways to an empty dressing room, digging fiercely for a handkerchief in her suit pocket.

A crumpled piece of paper popped out instead. That note from Don, she recalled. He had thanked her for the thousand, knew she would see things his way. She tore the note to shreds and let them flutter from cold, nerveless fingers.

Meanwhile, "Hey, Gob!" was shaping up. Wisely Lalie had enlisted the aid of several

experienced theatrical friends, who on learning the origin of the musical, had volunteered their expert suggestions. The show was advertised on two counts: book, score, lyrics, all by a U. S. Navy man, and the first production of Lalie Thomas. Opening night was a sellout!

Lalie was a vibrant bundle of nerves the night "Hey, Gob!" opened in the Little Roof Theater. She had given the cast of Bill's musical a good old-fashioned pep talk, before going downstairs for her own performance, assuring them that all signs pointed to a sure-fire hit. Then she crossed her trembling fingers, heartily wished she felt that way, too, and went out to face her own critical audience.

A slightly-dazed gathering sat through the speediest rendition of a serious play that Lalie Thomas ever offered. Her mind and her heart were seven flights skyward and fortunately for her own show closing almost an hour sooner than "Hey, Gob!", Lalie could catch part of the musical. She came flying upstairs in time for what proved to be the hit song of the show, "Sailor's Suzy," and she watched with happy, tear-dimmed eyes as Linda Clare ran through her song and dance routines.

From the first, Linda had shown herself eager to learn, and she had listened with earnest attention to everything Lalie had to tell her. The results were heart-warming. The audience was hers, she, theirs; and at the end of the number they whistled and howled for an encore.

At the back of the darkened theater, Lalie stood taut and trembling, the hot tears rolling down her cheeks. "There's your dream, Bill," she sobbed softly to herself. "If you could only be here now!"

WHEN it was over, and the audience was pouring out of the theater, the air of "Sailor's Suzy" on every lip, Lalie slipped backstage to a dizzy whirl of congratulations.

Later, hours later, she and Linda Clare nervously paced the streets awaiting the early morning editions of the papers that would carry the critics' reviews. They came, and they were raves, all of them. But their enthusiastic praise of the show, the songs, the producer and author, faded before the paeans they sang for Linda Clare.

Every paragraph rang with her name, and while one or two of the more exacting suggested that experience would enrich her acting, they unanimously agreed that a new star was born! One after another, over steaming cups of coffee in a neighborhood restaurant, Lalie read aloud the reviews to the eager girl at her side.

But all at once, she was aware that Linda had gone unusually silent. She glanced up

and a little startled gasp escaped.

Linda was staring straight ahead, eyes wide, dazed; her face had gone white, and her body rigid. Lalie grasped her arm and shook her gently. Linda brought her gaze around with difficulty.

"Lalie," she whispered, "I'm a success! I'm—I'm an actress! They say I'm great! I'm going places, Lalie!"

"Of course," Lalie agreed quietly, studying the girl through suddenly narrowed lids. "Don't forget, you owe a great deal to Bill."

"Bill? Well, maybe," Linda replied forcefully. "But he didn't make an actress of me."

Lalie bit her lip. "That's bad," she thought. "It's going to her head right off." Aloud she said, "You must concentrate on improving the little weak spots some of these reviewers mention, Linda. They're pretty good at catching things like that."

Linda's only response was a half-hearted, "Mmm," and a slow protrusion of her pretty underlip.

Lalie was worried, and plenty. But not a shadow as worried as she was several days later when Linda, instead of heading home with her as usual after the show, dated "Buzz" Palmer, one of the wealthiest and screwiest playboys around town. The Army wouldn't even look at him twice.

"Look, Linda, it's none of my business," Lalie told her bluntly the next day, "but are you being fair with Bill?"

"Oh, don't be corny, darling," the dark-haired girl laughed derisively. "I'm not going to throw away the chance at Hollywood that Buzz Palmer and his connections mean to me, just because Bill would rather have me sit home and knit for the Red Cross while he's away."

"You little dope, since when do you need Buzz and his connections to get a chance at Hollywood? You made enough of a sensation—"

Linda spun around irritably.

"All right, if that's the way you feel," Lalie called after her frigidly, "only don't go making any dates for a week from Monday night. We're normally closed that night but I've arranged a special benefit for the War Fund."

"A week from Monday!" Linda cried, dismayed. "That's Buzz's birthday and we're celebrating together."

"Linda," Lalie spoke very solemnly, "there are two ways to ruin a perfectly good theatrical career. One is, take up with the wrong kind of people and get yourself talked about in the wrong way. The other is, refuse to play benefits."

Linda shrugged impatiently and walked off, leaving Lalie battling her first real dislike of the girl.

Nobody knew just where it started, but the first time Lalie heard it, a blade of ice hurtled straight to her heart. It was an hour before the scheduled Monday night benefit, and Lalie had dropped into Sargi's for dinner. She was congratulating herself because, due to the fact that her own show was not playing, she could watch "Hey, Gob!" in its entirety.

Suddenly her head rose sharply and she strained to catch the conversation at the table behind her.

"That's what I heard," a man was saying in low tones. "She's a troopship, you know, *Gallop'n' Gertie*. I had a pal on her, too. They say she went down with not more than ten or twelve saved."

Lalie's white-knuckled fingers clutched the table edge.

"I don't believe it," another of the party scoffed. "They're too heavily convoyed. Uncle Sam takes care of his men—I happen to know—"

"I'm only tellin' you what I heard this afternoon from Freddie, the newsman. He got it from a sailor who got it from . . ."

Lalie didn't wait for the rest. She paid her check at that point and sped out into the soft spring night.

"It's rumor," she told herself. "You're not supposed to listen to rumor. That's all it is—still—oh, Bill!"

Linda mustn't know, she decided—if she hadn't already heard it! Linda always bought her papers from Freddie at the corner, too. And Freddie was as reticent as a blockbuster!

Linda had heard. She was staring into her mirror when Lalie entered her dressing room, but she didn't appear particularly dazed, or shocked. So she was treating it as a rumor, too, Lalie thought.

"I don't feel very much like going on, tonight," Linda said in slow even tones.

"It's an important benefit, Linda," Lalie reminded her. "Besides, in the theater, you always go on—even in the face of things like this."

"I know—but—there may be something to it. According to what Bill said, they should have been back about four days ago."

Lalie bit her lip, remembering.

"Chin up, girl!" she murmured kindly. Then, "I'm going out front. Don came up from Washington for this performance. He has a party of family friends and relatives. I have to join them. See you later."

LALIE found Don's party in Row C, center, all distinguished in evening dress. After the preliminary greetings were over, she studied the house. She was glad to see the large number of Navy men present. Civilians had been urged to buy a seat for a

sailor, or soldier, as well, and they had responded in a big way.

It was getting near curtain time, when an usher slipped a note into Lalie's hand. She gasped when she read it, hastily excused herself and slipped backstage again. "Linda Clare took a powder," the stage manager had written. "We go on in ten minutes. What to do?"

The girl must actually have been violently shocked to pull this, Lalie thought as she flew to Linda's dressing room. She couldn't have known what she was doing. Suddenly Lalie came to a decision.

"We still go on in ten minutes," she told the frantic stage manager, closing the door in his bewildered face.

When she opened it again, she was in Linda's first-act costume, and it fit her like a moon does June. Even the blasé stagehands gaped when she slipped through the wings into the brilliance of a white spot. And Lalie Thomas of the Boston Thomases, Lalie of the husky-voice dramatic rôles, was as saucy and flirty a Suzy as Bill Gray ever dreamed to life.

Lalie tried hard not to meet Don's eyes. But from the first, she was conscious of his black glare dogging her across the boards, laying a suffocating restraint on her performance. She didn't exactly blame him. Her songs were the least bit risqué, her costume—well, brief. And she, the "future wife of a future ambassador, maybe!"

But the thing that really disturbed her was the magic in Bill's songs, magic that brought him too close to her. And behind her dazzling smile and flirty eyes, she kept hearing how the *Gallopin' Gertie* "went down with not more than ten or twelve saved." Once when she should have laughed, a trilling, musical laugh, the sound caught in her throat.

At the second act curtain, Lalie hurried to Linda's dressing room for a cigarette. Desperately she grabbed up the paper Linda had left, and turned the pages in some dim hope that she would find an obscure item about the *Gallopin' Gertie* that would relieve her suspense. But at an inside page, she paused, studying the vaguely-familiar face of a girl in evening dress, with a magnificent jeweled pendant 'round her throat.

She stared through widening eyes. It appeared, from the caption, that all social Washington was agog over the fabulous diamond pendant that this South American beauty lately took to wearing, and could it be, the reporter wondered coyly, that a certain wealthy member of the State Department, whose initials were D. T. and who was seen nightly with the lady, was invoking the good-neighbor policy so handsomely?

Lalie's first reaction was: "South American, huh? I've seen that face in a chorus line somewhere, I know! Not that it matters."

It didn't matter. Suddenly, it mattered less than anything in the whole world. She had been very naïve, but now she knew. Don had called it a "South American colleague" when he asked her for the money. Once before it had been a Free French, and if she recalled rightly, it was a Russian associate before that.

"The point is," she exulted suddenly, "it's release for me!"

Hurriedly, eagerly, she slipped into the scant little number for "Sailor's Suzy."

"I don't care what Don thinks, any more, because *this is for Bill!*"

Lalie brought the house down with "Sailor's Suzy." She was pert! She was gay! She was adorably naughty! The audience reared up on its hind legs and howled! For all at once, she was more than Lalie Thomas playing Suzy. She was Suzy! A sailor's Suzy! A very—particular—sailor's Suzy!

Only when the last curtain fell to rousing cheers, did she remember that that sailor would probably never know.

DON met her in the wings, his features distorted with rage.

"Do you know what they're saying out there, you little fool?" he stormed. "They're saying 'Who ever knew Lalie Thomas had legs like that?' Those servicemen out there are trying to petition you for some candid camera shots for their lockers. In *that* excuse for a costume, no less!"

"They are?" Lalie laughed gleefully. "Where are they? I'd be delighted. Me! A pin-up girl!"

"Lalie, you're a disgrace!" Don said acidly. "I hope you're satisfied with mortifying me before my family and friends!"

Lalie noticed for the first time that all his party had accompanied him backstage and were standing at a discreet distance.

"You might remind your family and friends," she said, "that their eyes are about to pop out of their heads, staring at me and the other girls." And she swept past him, straight to Linda's dressing room.

Don followed, but Lalie paid no attention whatever. She flung open her door—stopped short on the threshold.

Two sailors were inside. One was a little red-haired man with a puckish grin and one arm in a sling. The other, the tall one, held a small candid camera before his eyes. The shutter clicked, even as she stood there, and he lowered the instrument, smiling broadly.

"Bill!" Lalie cried, half a whisper, half a gasp. "You—you're all right!"

BEFORE he could answer, Lalie was thrust aside, and Don's party swarmed into the room. Both sailors looked up startled. Then suddenly Bill swerved to one side, but not before Don's long arm had crashed forward, sending the little camera spinning off to a corner.

"Get out of here, you rowdy!" he spat at Bill. "Miss Thomas isn't your kind!"

Lalie's protesting cry died on her lips as she watched Bill's face harden into lines of granite. His arms hung long and loose at his sides, swinging a little, his big hands balling into fists. In another moment, he would bring one of those balls of iron straight up to Don's jutting chin.

But all at once, Lalie saw the men of Don's party close in, slowly forming a menacing ring around Bill. Bill's narrowed eyes betrayed the rapid calculations of his brain. Suddenly he let go, a terrific blow that caught Don on the underside of his jaw and sent him staggering backward. Instantly, Don's friends fell on Bill and the room was a mass of flying fists.

Just then Lalie saw Bill's friend dart to the open door and yell. His arm may have been injured but his voice wasn't in a sling! It rang down the corridors and into the wings. It pierced the gloom onstage, slashed the thickness of the asbestos curtain and ripped through the chatter of the departing audience like a giant blade.

And it carried the time-honored Navy cry for aid:

"Hey, Gob!"

There was a moment's startled silence. And then there was a sound like a distant cattle stampede. It started as a low rumble, it rose to a furious roar, and ended with the corridors and dressing room overflowing with men in blue!

"What's the trouble, bud?" one big blond sailor demanded, hands ready for business. But he might have saved his breath. For at sight of the threatening mob, Don's friends fell back, nursing cuts and bruises, and leaving Bill who rubbed his chin speculatively.

"It's all right now," he assured his buddies. "These chaps wanted to play Com-mando."

"Yeah? Yuh don't say!" the other returned. "Why doesn't the draft board hear about these things?"

One by one, Don's party shuffled off through the menacing lines that surrounded them. But the sailors, taking their cue from their leader, let them be. Only Don remained, and advanced a step toward Lalie.

But Lalie waved him aside.

"Don't bother waiting, Don," she said quietly. "Tonight, or ever. We're finished, you and I. We were finished after that so-

called South American investment."

She turned her back on him then, cutting off his burbling explanations. And after a moment she heard him walk slowly from the room. Only then did she smile up at Bill whose gray eyes were fixed on her with suddenly heightened interest.

Alone, a few minutes later, she explained Linda's absence; the rumor that had shocked her so she couldn't go on.

"She must be home now, and we both better hurry over and see her."

"Sure thing, Lalie," Bill agreed, though his voice sounded strangely hollow. "We did see a couple of subs," he explained, apropos of the rumor, "but they won't be telling *their* friends about it."

Bill went on explaining things as they rode down in the elevator.

"When I got liberty tonight," he said, "the first thing I heard was somebody in the street whistling 'Sailor's Suzy,' and I knew it was all right. Then I bought a paper and saw the notice about the benefit tonight. I only got here for the last act, though—and Lalie—you were really something out of this world."

Their glances locked, and the brightening glow in the gray eyes stole a beat from Lalie's heart. "But there's Linda," she reasoned with herself all the way out to the street. "He's grateful, and he thinks I'm a swell actress. But she's the one he'll take in his arms. I guess she loves him, or she wouldn't have gone all to pieces tonight."

"One hamburger with onion," Bill said unexpectedly, when they reached the street. "Just to celebrate first. What do you say? Up at McGinnis', where the show was really born. Remember?"

As if she could ever forget!

But three minutes later, she wished they had gotten straight into a cab and headed downtown. Lalie saw it first, stopped dead in her tracks, resumed walking so jauntily that Bill's big hand clutched her arm.

"I saw it, too," he murmured. "Never mind the act."

They were at a table in the Astor Bar, Linda and Buzz Palmer. Celebrating Buzz's birthday, with their heads together over their drinks—and their fingers linked across the table.

"Boy, is she broken up!" Bill laughed dryly. "I'll bet she spent all of thirty seconds in mourning."

The hamburgers, after that, were tasteless, Lalie thought. Mechanically, she lifted hers to her lips, but every time she swallowed a bite, she also swallowed a lump of pain. And Bill wasn't even eating his. He was running his tongue along dry lips, and occasionally he'd look straight at her, and then away again quickly.

Suddenly he spoke. It was so abrupt that

the onion dropped from Lalie's sandwich and scattered all over her plate.

"Let's get married—tomorrow!"

"I wouldn't marry any man on the bounce," she told him heatedly, while the salty tears raced down her cheeks and dropped in her lap.

"Lalie—do you really think this is rebound stuff with me?" he asked urgently. "Listen. Lonely night, dark nights at sea, I've looked up at the constellations and thought they were the loveliest things God

ever dreamed up. But I wouldn't think of putting my hand out and owning them. They were too remote, too far above me.

"Don't you see, darling—right from the start, it's been that way with you. I might have married—her. But I'd always go on dreaming about my constellations."

For a long, wondering minute, Lalie stared through tear-spangled lashes. Then she murmured:

"Sailor, if you kiss me in here—I'll yell, 'Hey, Gob!'"



Two of the year's most entertaining complete novels—MONEY'S MY AMBITION, by Herman R. Struck, and HEART'S HAVEN, by Ruth Anderson, plus many other scintillant stories, featured in the May issue of our companion magazine

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LINK TRAINERS

DOING their part to axe the Axis are WAVE technicians Louise Nott (left) and Josephine Fiorello, on duty in the Link trainer room at the Anacostia, D. C., Naval Station. It is their job to check the records



Official U. S. Navy Photo
Louise Nott and Josephine Fiorello

of the student pilots in the sealed cabins and see that they read the instruments correctly. WAVE Nott is from Bloomfield, New Jersey, while WAVE Fiorello comes from New York City.

HIGH IRON WOMEN

IN 1917, when millions of American men were fighting in the first war against Germany, Miss Hazel Cornell was put in the roadmaster's office of the Northern Pacific Railroad—the first woman to be employed in any but a secretarial position by an American Railroad.

Before the Armistice, more than 100,000 of her sisters were doing all sorts of jobs keeping the trains going through. But this is a small number compared to the women who are, today, serving not only in railroad offices, but in locomotive cabs and in switchyards.

"There is no finer job than this," one girl doubling as a baggage smasher said recently. "If it releases a man for the armed forces, then here I stay."

SPAR LIEUTENANT RUNS COAST GUARD KITCHENS

WHEN she was an undergraduate in Home Economics at Iowa State Col-

lege, Spar Lieutenant (jg) Dorothy Stewart never dreamed that one day she would trade a kitchen for a galley. But as head of the Cooks and Bakers School at the Coast Guard Training Station, Palm Beach, Florida, she's hard at it.

Solidly-cooked meals which will appeal to the men and women of the Coast Guard are her concern in supervising trainees who prepare all food for the officers' mess of sixty persons.

Graduates of the school are assigned to Coast Guard shore stations from Miami to Seattle. A graduate of Iowa State, Miss Stewart won her master's degree from the University of California in Berkeley. Before joining the Spars, she taught home economics in high school at Wilmington, California, and in Los Angeles.

SOVIET SHE-SNIPER WINS HERO'S AWARD

ANNA MOSLOVSKAYA, one of the most daring guerrilla fighters in the Russian Army, has been awarded the title of Hero of the Soviet Union. Among her many heroic exploits was the dynamiting of an entire German garrison.

Learning that a conference of officers had been called in a certain occupied city to discuss ways and means of wiping out her guerrilla detachment, Anna went alone to the city and, when the debate was at its height, exploded a mine under the building, thus settling the argument.

WOMEN AID SALMON INDUSTRY

THOUSANDS of women in the Northwest are putting in ten hours a day, plus, helping to can salmon for the armed forces, according to Ruth Weijola, chairman of the canning division of the CIO International Fishermen and Allied Workers of America.

"It used to be," says Miss Weijola, "that skilled work, such as butchering or filleting fish, was considered exclusively a man's job. Today women have had to learn such skills and, believe me, they have proven themselves every bit as able as men at them."

WAVES' MASCOT

IF YOU rate a salute from Impee Wu, I you're officially in the WAVES. The

Pekingese, mascot of the San Diego Navy Recruiting Station, gives a decision on every applicant with the appropriate motion of his stubby right paw.

The property of Lieutenant (jg) E. C. Pherson, U.S.N. (Ret.) officer in charge of the recruiting office, was officially sworn into the Navy at the Hollywood sub-recruiting station in January, 1942, and he carried full Navy service and health records. He will be nine years old on June fifth.

MOTHER OF THREE BACKS SERVICEMAN SONS

MR. NANCY ASH, night matron of the Star Shell Area at the Crane Naval Ordnance Plant, is backing her three sons in the armed forces to the limit of her ability. Not only does she put in a full week's work on the job, but, every month, she purchases seven War Bonds for her boys at the front, beyond the ten per cent of her

pay already allotted to this purpose. Her husband, Joe, is also an employe of the Crane Plant.

SISTERS TEAM UP FOR THE NAVY

PASSERS-BY who call "Hi, sis!" at the U.S. Naval Hospital in San Diego had better know what they are about. Employed in the great institution are six sets of sisters—Ensigns Mable and Gretchen Cressy of Bradford, New Hampshire, nurses, Ensigns Maureen and Patricia McElroy, also nurses, of Dallas, Texas, and Yeomen Wanda and Ethel Stresow, Hospital Apprentices, Second Class, of Jamaica, New York.

Other sister teams at the hospital include Yeomen Edna and Pauline Haase of Boxholm, Iowa, Mary and Pearl Walter of Richmond, Indiana, and Dorothy and Helen Hauer, from Miami, Florida, and Trenton, New Jersey, all also Hospital Apprentices, Second Class.

I'm Not Complaining

*You can't get this, you can't get that,
There's so much that one misses—
But shortages don't worry me,
If I can have your kisses!*



*Let others long for earthly things,
My thoughts are far above—
And I can do without a lot
If I can have your love!*

—HELEN ARDSLEY

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"Which alics do you use most ordinarily?" Carrie asked

Seeds of Romance

By HOPE CAMPBELL

Carrie longs for the life of a riveter—until a farmer comes along and plants a new idea in her pretty little head!

CARRIE STEPHENS was depressed. She jammed her hands down into the pockets of the red wool that had seen its hey-day three years ago and now, being somewhere between the not-good-enough-for-a-picnic and too-good-for-a-housedress stage, did very well for the office.

She and her little seedlings, just they alone together in the basement; and watta life, Carrie thought. Above them ten million dollars' worth of state capitol reared its golden head, but what good did that do her? Stuck in the basement with a couple of white germinators, and envelops of seeds. And the glamor of think-

ing that each of those envelopes represented acres of waving ripening corn and wheat and oats had long since died the death of a dog in Carrie's mind.

Her for the gay life, the riveting gun, the swing shift, even the graveyard shift, the overalls and the turban, the Great Not-So-White Way, the speeding wheels of industry. And where was she? Counting seed sprouts in the middle of the Nation's bread basket. Carrie chewed an unlipsticked underlip and prepared to call it a day.

She dropped a beanie on the top of her straight black hair and let it lay where it hit. Who cared what a state seed analyst looked like?

Files. Carrie made a face at them just in passing to put them in their place, and then remembered that their little iron insides were bulging with undigested seeds. The heck with them. The heck with everything. But birds gotta eat, don't they?

Carrie sighed deeply and jerked out a desk drawer and pulled out a big brown paper sack and stuck it open in the center of the floor. She grabbed a handful of manila enveloped seed samples from the files and began to empty them in the sack.

"Hey, hey, hey and a hi, hi, hi," Carrie sang drearily. "And I'll hate you till the day I die," and dumped the last sample, germ 86, weed content 6.8, noxious weeds 1.4, into the sack.

"Hey, hey, hey and a hi, hi, hi," and she reached into the file again.

"Vocal exercises?"

"Hymn of hate," Carrie said absently.

"Indian war-whoop?"

Carrie straightened as if someone had stuck a pin in her practically nonexistent derriere and glared. Those were still fighting words in the bread basket, though she would have been the last to deny her hair was black and straight, and her eyes black and tilted, and her skin like heavy unskimmed cream.

At least that was what all the romantic-minded dairy farmers told her, and Carrie never had disliked a simile more. What small amount of the milk of human kindness three years in the seed laboratory had left in her practically curdled at the thought.

IT WAS curdling now. Because while the young man was just about the size Carrie always had felt she could take with ease, something the right side of six feet, and dark and handsome, except for one eyebrow that wore a perpetual look of distrustful astonishment and a nose that undoubtedly was not as straight as nature had made it originally, he wore overalls. And he carried a little sack of seeds.

"Drop it on the desk. Name and address

on one of those white cards. Report in ten days." Carrie said that like a tired phonograph record and turned her back.

"You're a servant of the state and all that. You put my name and address on a white card."

So he wanted to play like an illiterate. "They have evening schools, you know." Carrie said wearily, and pulled out a card and picked up a pen. "Name?"

"Wellington Deale Allsworth Turner." Carrie ran out of space along toward the second W.

"Which alias do you use most ordinarily?" Carrie asked.

"Deale Turner. Route Eight. And what's yours?"

The words, the tone and the voice were all extremely personal. Carrie gave him the glassy eye.

"Just address me care of the janitor. It won't reach me."

The eyebrow was not astonished. It was sardonic. "I'm touched at your courtesy."

Flirtatious farmers were nothing new in Carrie's life. They rated somewhere between bindweed and stink grass.

"Usually pronounced 'teched'." That should get him, if he got it at all.

"Are you asking to be fired?"

"I have. They won't." Carrie brightened slightly. "You might write a letter of complaint. To the Governor. Mark it personal and urgent, and make it strong."

"Don't you like being a seed analyst?"

"It was one of my cornier ideas."

Deale was a gentleman. He winced slightly and ignored that.

"But you do run the tests?"

"I run them and they run me. And if I ever get out of here, I'll run so far and so fast that I won't even have a speaking acquaintance with whole wheat bread for the rest of my life. Now you run. The office is closed."

Carrie picked up the sack filled with seeds for the little feathered fiends that awakened her at dawn each morning, tossed a beaver jacket no self-respecting beaver would have been caught dead in over her shoulders, and locked the door. She struck out down the marble corridor.

"Why won't they fire you?" He was a most persistent young man.

"Seeds are plenty and analysts are few. Law of diminishing returns. Or something."

"Oh." Interest lapsed. "Well, don't beard any wild oats in their den."

Carrie groaned automatically, turned left outside the door where Deale turned right, and skidded over two blocks of icy sidewalks to the furnished room she never by any chance called home. She shed the beaver on the floor, the beanie on a chair, and flung up her window.

Just sowing her little seeds of kindness for the day, Carrie thought drearily, as she tossed handfuls on the outside sill. And added a few unkind thoughts about a fiend in need being a fiend indeed as a lethargic robin that had not got around to going South and six sparrows power-dived at her.

Then something suddenly registered on what Carrie would have been the first to admit was the blank film laughingly referred to as her brain, a sort of a time exposure.

"Huh?" Carrie cried, and slammed the window shut.

Had come the dawn and by the dawn's early light, Carrie had caught a glimmer, on the fly so to speak, and so hard it practically knocked her off her feet. Carrie considered for five seconds, blinking rapidly in the blinding light of what could not be less than a thousand-watt idea.

"Yippee!" yelled Carrie and did some power-diving herself in the direction of the phone book.

Deale Turner was not listed. Carrie gnawed her nails and mentally connived, with all the passion of a prisoner seeing a lovely, lovely little steel file just out of reach. Because while iron bars might not a prison make, job freezing was giving Carrie a very fine imitation of same. But the Governor had said he would give her a release, a full lifetime pardon no less, if she could find a substitute.

Bearding wild oats in their den. That Turner man knew something. For that was the sort of erudite professional joke considered simply excruciatingly funny in the better college seed labs throughout the nation. Not that they ever got more than a hollow groan from Carrie. Was it possible she had had a real live genuine seed analyst practically in her clutches and presented him with nothing more encouraging than her glassy stare? The thought was sickening.

BUT when better mouse-traps were made, Carrie knew how to be one. And the rat she had in mind to trap was named Deale Turner.

All state-house employees invariably had a whole phone book of weirdly wonderful social and political connections. Carrie dived in, made a few and came up with the red apple.

Pleasantly filled with the very worst intentions, Carrie dialed a number.

"This is Carrie Stephens of the seed laboratory," she murmured sweetly. "And do you know I've done the most terrible thing? I was fixing a sack of seeds for my birds when you came in and I must have mixed yours in it. Were you really awfully anxious for a test right away?"

Beaming happily Carrie waited to see what her little crop of lies would reap her. For some moments, however, the receiver was so full of furious mutterings which seemed to range from sarcastic remarks about Mother Carrie's chickens to bird-brained females to other less mentionable things that she considered it best for the sake of her innocent girlish mind not to listen too closely.

The mutterings finally simmered down to a mere steam bath and dissolved into a tangible suggestion, mingled with side remarks about the condition of country roads at this season and gas rationing and killing two birds with one stone, preferably with a certain Carrie Stephens first in line. Carrie didn't follow it all, just the main point. Deale would be at her door, clutching another sample of seeds in his not-at-all grubby paw in a couple of hours.

Carrie felt that life suddenly had acquired any number of silver linings, all leading to a brighter and happier land. She dressed and she really did herself a job, from black sandals to a gold knit dress with swish and clinging ideas to a gold flower in her black hair. Carrie seldom had felt happier.

The doorbell rang in less than two hours and, for once in her life, Carrie beat her landlady to the door by a nose, and her landlady had a long nose in more senses than one.

Deale's erratic eyebrow did an elevator act.

"Whew, what is this? Your pre-midnight Cinderella incarnation?"

"You seem to be doing a first class Farmer in the Dell yourself," Carrie said, the natural acidity of her nature, distilled of too long exposure to too many seed sprouts, asserting itself as she saw he was still in overalls.

"Dinner coats are not being worn in the stock-yards this season."

Carrie reeled slightly. Somewhere in the back of her mind, and put there logically too by the way Deale had been looking at her this afternoon, had been the idea that this might very well drift into one of the better dates. With her worming her way into his confidence and laying the groundwork for future operations.

"What stock-yards?"

"The only ones I know of in this section of the country. Omaha. I was going to take these hogs down the first of next week, but considering I had to make this trip to town tonight, I thought I might as well load up and drive on through."

Carrie clutched desperately at a rapidly fading vision of Navy Es and boomtime pay.

"My," she said faintly, "I haven't been to Omaha in simply ages."

"I never take hints. But I just love suggestions."

Carrie lowered long lashes over a look that badly needed dry cleaning.

"I don't know when I've had a nice long drive in the evening. Why don't you take me with you?"

"Sure. Get your brown bearskin, Many Sprouts on the Blotter, and we'll be skidding into Omaha in high before midnight."

Carrie danced upstairs, picked her coat up off the floor and absently shook some of the larger pieces of dust off it, and struck a fighting pose in front of her mirror.

"I call it beaver and he calls it bearskin," she chanted happily. "So get in there, team, and win, win, win!"

Because Carrie knew now that she had something. Many Sprouts on the Blotter, indeed. That Turner man knew his onions, and probably his wheat and oats and corn too. At least he knew how to run a germination test. So by the time they reached Omaha Carrie intended to be operating in high herself and, if she knew her own strength, Deale would be on the skids.

The cab was warm and cozy, and the ice had been cleared off the highway. Carrie pushed down a wavering suspicion that there might be madness in her method, and went to work.

"You haven't been on that farm long?" she asked silkily. "Not long enough to be listed in the phone book?"

"Not long. My cousin who owned it wanted to go over and I was just coming back, so that fixed it."

"I'm sure it did," Carrie said politely. "But please diagram. I follow better with pictures."

"North Africa—discharged," Deale explained. "I flunked my final. Paratroopers are not supposed to land on their heads."

"Were you hurt?"

"You don't need to sound so doubtful. Of course I was hurt. Where'd you think I got this nose?"

"Parents sometimes have something to do with it."

"Mine won't have anything to do with this one. And I cracked my neck. Can only turn my head this far to the side. See?"

CARRIE watched, fascinated.

"Makes it a little hard for you to say no, doesn't it? But can you shake it up-and-down-yes?"

Deale nodded, up and down.

"Fine," Carrie sighed contentedly. "That was all that was worrying me. Continue."

"My cousin was stuck on the farm, with all his brothers in the Army. And I didn't see myself sitting behind a desk in an insurance company again. I'd snuck in all

the ag course I could in college. Liked them. So! All cleared up?"

"Stripped for action," Carrie admitted truthfully. "Seed testing too?"

"Sure. The works in that, all they gave. But I haven't the equipment on the farm to run the tests properly."

"Of course. You were absolutely right to bring them in." Carrie was all warm agreement. "I'd never have forgiven you if you hadn't."

"And what are you doing in that laboratory?"

"I formed the habit of eating early in life and I've never been able to break myself of it."

Deale took his eyes off the highway long enough to run off the road and back on again. It didn't seem to bother him. But something, the look of the ditch or something, sent a little chill down Carrie's spine. It was not an altogether unpleasant chill.

"Some girls get married."

"Some do. I haven't."

"Why not?" It was more than just a question.

"No offers. No offers." Carrie lied speciously.

"I don't believe that."

Carrie hadn't really expected him to. She would have been hurt if Deale had believed it. As it was, she felt wonderful. The beautiful vision of the speeding wheels of industry went round and round in Carrie's mind. Now *there* was life! There was the pounding life blood of the nation. There was her heart's desire. Ah, rivets, ah, blowtorches. But this, Carrie felt, was not the moment to mention it.

Into every girl's life, Carrie supposed, came one evening when she helped deliver hogs to a commission house. As they left, Deale swung the truck toward the center of town.

"I've been holding out on you."

"Surprise? Surprise?" Carrie questioned. "I suppose we're taking cows back?"

"No. Surprise, surprise, I suppose we're going dancing. You do dance?"

Carrie eyed his overalls dubiously. She loved dancing, but head waiters gave her an inferiority complex even without an escort in overalls. Oh, watta life indeed. Could you entice a man into doing your blotter work for you and still refuse to dance with him?

"Don't look now," Deale whispered mysteriously, "but there's a bag with another suit in it back of the seat. I usually do the town for a couple of hours whenever I bring a load in."

Suppressing an interesting little mental picture of them being grandly handed out of the truck by one of the better doormen

around town, Carrie nodded, but the nod lacked verve. She had asked for a date but she feared she was being given a lemon. And in her social moments, she did give a fig for appearances.

Carrie blinked rapidly. Was that hollow feeling in her stomach bringing on all those fruity similies hunger, or was it a distinct feeling something in this situation was getting out of hand?

Deale swung the truck into the parking space at the Union Station.

"Procedure as follows. We leave truck here. I go, and I do know where, and change clothes. You drink coke and wait. Then we take taxi and are off in blaze of glory."

"Any other orders?" Carrie asked faintly.

"E-er, yes." Deale grinned down at her. "You start looking a little happier about it all."

He leaned over and caught her head comfortably in the crook of his elbow, tilted her chin up with his hand, and kissed her. Carrie considered, up to the point when Deale's lips touched hers, whether it was wise to let him kiss her. After that, she stopped considering anything. Wise was hardly the word she would have used anyhow. Hollywood has some good six-syllable adjectives.

"Feel better about it now?" Deale asked cozily.

"I'll give the matter some thought," Carrie said, climbing a little dizzily out of the truck. "Quite a little thought." And headed in the direction of that coke.

Afterward they ate two-inch steaks at a famous place near the stockyards. They were swept out, with the rest of the left-overs from a large evening, of the best hotel dance and drink room in town. They helped close one road-house. They practically separated the town from the country.

"I know just one more place that might be open," Deale said. "Let's look."

Carrie looked and shook her head. It was not quite dime a dance. Maybe twelve cents. But everyone who could get inside was having their twelve cents' worth.

"Oh, no," Carrie said decidedly. "I hate the middle classes. They comes in such teeming masses."

"And a hey, hey, hey and a hi, hi, hi." Deale murmured thoughtfully. "What makes you like that?"

"I've spent three years alone in my basement, just me and my little seed sprouts," Carrie said gloomily. "Not only the weeds are noxious there. It's a wonder I don't do worse." And realized too late that was hardly the rosy enticing picture of her job she had meant to paint for Deale.

ALL the way home Carrie slept comfortably on Deale's shoulder. It was a very fine shoulder. Always allowing for the fact she never had slept on a man's shoulder before, Carrie still thought she could go farther and hardly do better.

They just beat the sun in. Then, because it seemed a shame not to finish the evening up right, they sat and yawned until it rose. Carrie staggered sleepily in to bed and fifteen minutes later remembered bed was just wasted effort. Thousands and thousands of seeds were calling for her. And Deale had remembered to put his sample in her coat pocket.

For the next couple of weeks, the days slipped away as if running downhill on an icy surface. Carrie stopped chanting sad little solos to herself, the birds existed on a sketchy and badly balanced diet of whatever happened to come out of the files first when Carrie put her hand in, and the gold knit dress went to the laboratory increasingly often. Because, for a farmer, Deale seemed to have an amazing amount of business in town and especially at the state-house just around quitting time.

Cunningly, a couple of times, Carrie pointed out the scientific beauties of the germinators, the perfections of the scales, the excellencies of the filing system, the necessity for it all. But mostly she just went where Deale led and, for a stranger in town, Deale led her an amazing number of places.

One evening when they were lounging over a beer apiece and getting pleasantly nostalgic to the records on the juke box, a large rough character wandered over to their table. He gave Carrie the eye as she seldom had been given the eye before and presented Deale with an elbow in that crooked nose.

Deale was quiet and efficient. He stood up, took the character by collar and seat of pants, and deposited him outside the door, still in one piece but not quite sure what had happened to him and in no mood to return to find out.

Carrie beamed mistily at Deale. She never had wanted to be the backbone of the nation, but being a bone of contention was something else again. It was pleasant. She liked it.

"You're a funny man," she murmured. "Not funny ha-ha. Funny different."

"How?"

"You take me out practically every night for two weeks and you tell me I have pretty hands or nice legs or something often enough to keep me purring, but you haven't done it once since."

"I think better with pictures, too."

"The kiss," Carrie said, unable to believe Deale had not been thinking of it too, now, and then in an odd moment. She

was having a lot of odd moments lately.

"Oh, that. I just tried that one on for size."

"Oh," Carrie echoed a little blankly, and somehow at once felt less glamorous than she had in days.

That night Carrie had one of those serious girl talks with herself that every woman has when life reaches a crisis. Did she want to get out of the seed laboratory? A thousand times yes. But was it still her for the gay life and the riveter's gun? We—ell. . . . Or did she want to turn into the sort of woman who counted from that year the corn was so poor or when Johnnie had the measles? A farmer's wife? No!

It was very depressing, and high time something was done. Because the more she looked at Deale, the oftener Carrie felt a weakening tendency to think it wouldn't be so awful to count from three years ago last harvest time. And he was a man who just tried kisses on for size.

But watta kiss.

"Yippee," said Carrie softly, in memory.

The thing to do, Carrie decided firmly, was to exit while she still had her strength. She would sneak up on the subject of the laboratory the next time she saw Deale, being subtle as all get out.

BEING subtle called for a brand new dress and brushing the beaver so most of it looked so handsome that the bare spots were hardly noticeable at all.

"Think you'll have a good cash crop this year?" Carrie asked, attacking cunningly, when they had done a movie and were settled over a soda, this being their evening to be sedate.

Deale's eyebrows wigwagged surprise "How do I know? It's not even planted yet, and I was never a man to count my ears before the corn starts tasseling. But that place always makes a living."

Plainly the commercial angle did not click. Carrie tried sneaking in from behind, hunting a blind spot.

"Won't the work be pretty heavy for you? That neck and all."

"I'm more scarred than hurt."

Subtleness was out. Carrie went straight in, guns blazing.

"Some farmers hold a job in town and work their places too."

"Oh," Deale's eyes twinkled sardonically. "I wondered how long it would take you to get around to this."

"Huh?" said Carrie feebly. She had a distinct premonition that she should have looked before she peeped.

"Look, dear," Deale said, as gently as if to an idiot child, "I saw you coming first. But I didn't know how far you'd go. I've been watching with interest."

ALL was lost. Carrie knew that by the large lump of lead which suddenly was sitting where her stomach used to be. But she might as well get the horrid details. "Pictures, please," Carrie said.

Deale began to count on long brown fingers. "You hate that lab and you want to get away. You said it. You sang it. My guess is you're frozen and can only get a release by finding a substitute. By the way, how long did it take you to register on that oats crack of mine?"

"Not long enough," Carrie said sourly. She was a girl who knew when she had been took with a come-on. "But why?"

"I thought you were sort of cute. Or at least different. I knew when you called me that you hadn't really lost that sample. I saw it on the desk when we left. Then you wanted to tag along to Omaha. And I hardly thought it was my beautiful brown eyes that had done it. So I decided two could play that game. Incidentally, it's no sale."

"Raw Deale Turner."

"You weren't playing very pretty yourself," Deale pointed out, and held her coat.

They drove home in silence, with Carrie wiggling inwardly as she realized Deale must have watched and understood her every move. Just like an insect under a microscope, Carrie thought furiously. Deale certainly was a man who had strange ideas of amusement.

Deale took her formally to the door. Then he put his hands on her shoulders and bent and kissed Carrie, kissed her long and deep and hard. "Give that one some thought too," he said softly, and left.

But Carrie was not doing much thinking. Mostly she was feeling, and though what few stray thoughts were wandering around in her mind did relate to Deale, they were hardly the sort to enhance its girlish innocence. She never had disliked anyone more actively. At times it seemed to go even farther than dislike.

For two weeks, Deale had been her fellow, her beau. But as a beau he had too many strings on him, to wit, one farm and the idea that farming was living.

"Huh!" Carrie snorted scornfully.

But watta fellow he had been while he lasted. So what? Carrie tried to look tough.

"Yah, yah, yah, Farmer in the Dell," Carrie sang, but her heart was not in it. Because she felt, for some reason, exactly like what rhymed with dell.

So maybe it had been love, Carrie admitted finally. It often was when a girl suddenly started taking an interest in her clothes, and ordinary little catch phrases were important and heart-heightening not because of what they said but how they were said.

Morning, and the laboratory and the red

wool dress again gave Carrie a distinctly jaundiced view of life. Deale had dealt her out of his life. No more gay and silly and happy evenings. No more kisses. No more nothing.

Carrie looked around the laboratory with a kindling spark in her eyes. No more nothing was right. If the Government thought it could freeze her into a lifetime of nurse-maiding little seed sprouts, the Government was due to learn something new about the independence of the American character.

So then, ho, for the gay life, and, hey, for the speeding wheels of industry. She would be a career woman. She would rivet as rivets never had been driven before. And if she ever again came across any trace of a character named Deale Turner, he had better look twice to make sure she did not have her riveting gun in her hand. Because if she did have, Carrie was in a mood to make it forcibly plain that his ideas of amusement were not hers.

Carrie sniffed desolately. Success would be hollow, but it would be her own. At least she would not be a stupid puppet going through her transparent little gestures for the cynical amusement of a certain crooked-nosed character she could have named, if all the names she was able to think of for him at the moment had not been the type which a lady never would use.

Right now the Governor was going to hear a few things that governors seldom have said right to their faces.

"Did you give that one some thought?" a voice asked softly from the door.

Carrie whirled. "I'll say I have."

Deale nodded, up and down. He narrowed his eyes at the red dress.

"All your other clothes at the cleaners? Or are you just feeling like that?"

So he hadn't even missed that little trick!

"Something's going to the cleaners, but it's not my clothes."

Deale lounged into the room and then grinned. "And what have you been thinking and what is going to the cleaners, dear?" he asked enticingly.

FOR the first time in her life, Carrie found herself shaking a clenched fist under someone's nose.

"Don't call me dear!" she shouted. "And stop looking so darn handsome."

"Thank you," Deale said modestly.

"Because I'm not jumping through any more hoops for you," Carrie raged on. "I'm not playing games any longer. I'm through being subtle."

"Was that what you were being?" Deale asked, too blandly.

Carrie fixed him with glittering eyes. "In short, I'm through. I'm still going to get out of here but I'm going out in my

own way. If I have to tear the joint apart to get out."

"The taxpayers wouldn't like that."

"I don't like taxpayers," Carrie snapped, looking fixedly at a certain one. That was a mistake. He didn't look like a taxpayer. He didn't look like a farmer. He just looked like the man she loved. "Oh, go peddle your seeds somewhere else," she sniffed.

"What are you going to do when you get away from the seeds and the taxpayers?" Deale demanded softly.

"I'll rivet," Carrie admitted.

"Do you really want to rivet?"

Now that she thought it over, Carrie was not so sure. "Well, a girl's gotta do something," she muttered defiantly.

"There are lots of things a girl can do besides rivet," Deale murmured. "If a girl's through being subtle, so a man has to be even subtler, they might both start playing pretty and then there are lots of things she can do. This, for instance."

Carrie saw the light, as a blinding flash, practically the same moment Deale's lips touched hers. Seeds gotta be tested, don't they? Few can test but many can rivet. Just like birds gotta eat. And girls gotta be kissed. And farmers have to have wives, don't they? So the heck with rivets. The heck with everything. Except Deale. And yippee for kisses.

"I could stay on here," Carrie whispered dazedly.

"You are staying on here," Deale said firmly. "Because I'm staying and I like my seeds tested right."

Something was missing. Carrie looked questioningly at Deale.

"That's all right," he said comfortingly.

"You had a strange fascination for me from the first. Then all at once, I got a little mental picture of you singing Hymns of Hate in my kitchen for the rest of your life. And as you pointed out, some people do two jobs. Though later I might entice one of my old college pals in to take this over. You must admit I entice just fine when I put my mind to it."

Deale pulled her a little closer into his arms to show what he meant in her case.

"Yes, dear," Carrie admitted docilely. But something still was missing. "Ye--es," Carrie repeated. She sounded doubtful.

"You can go right on hating anything you like," Deale murmured. "That's part of your strange fascination. Except me. You gotta love me. Because I love you. You see, when I tried that kiss on for size, I found it suited me just right."

"Well, why didn't you say so before?" Carrie asked crossly.

And kissed Deale, not at all crossly. And he kissed her. It was lovely. It seemed they both were suited just right.



Then he lifted her gently in his arms

Love Like the Mountains

By ANN SPENCE WARNER

Prospector Barney Offered Meg the Security of Love, But She Didn't Want to Build a Marriage on a Fabric of Dreams!

SOMETHING was happening in Big Creek Camp. Meg Mallard sensed the tension, but she refused to get excited. She'd heard enough wild rumors in gold camps, hush, hush, hurry-scurry—and then nothing. Under their bluff manners the men probably knew as little as she did.

It showed how Big Creek was slipping, that the whole camp could get excited over the arrival of two strangers. They plainly were not pilgrims completing the long trek across the plains from the States, for Meg heard them talking of other camps when she served them their supper.

Ma was about the only cook left in camp so they'd bid up high to get at her boarder table. Ma had cooked for so many miners. She was turning Meg out a lady, and she didn't want her getting bent and tired, but she let her help wait on table.

Pa was always on the verge of striking it rich, while Ma kept the family from going hungry. Pa talked in big sums, but when Ma needed a new washboard he lacked even one silver dollar. But just wait—he'd seen pay dirt that very day—well, maybe not exactly pay dirt, but mighty promising color.

Pa's lucky gulch was in the blue distance just beyond, and too often Meg had seen him, pick over his shoulder, start out to find it. Then she'd seen him come back, tired, discouraged. Oh, if Pa could just have spent that much energy some other way! The wasted years hadn't been fair to him, or to Ma, who'd stayed home and took in boarders and done washing for the men.

Ma didn't want that kind of a life for Meg, and Meg agreed with her. Meg hated mining. She wasn't going to marry a prospector—not even big Barney. But she couldn't resist slipping the best food to him.

Meg didn't intend to let herself go soft. Barney was a miner. She tried not to see the slow smile that lit up his face with the bewitching sorcery of the golden aspen grove in the fall. Breathtaking and gone so soon. The caress in his deep-set blue eyes reached out to her with a warm pull, but she tightened up. She'd keep in mind his silhouette against the mountains, with a pick over his back. She wasn't going to forget that the gold of the aspens paid no bills at the store.

"Hey," Long Tom rose so fast he jarred the pineboard table, "ain't that the stage already?"

Meg's quick feet took her to the door first. Yes, way down the road the creaky old four-wheeler was whirling up dust. The room emptied, to go after the weekly sack of mail and packages.

At the height of the boom, four fairly large frame buildings had gone up, their high false fronts making an impressive lineup along the main—and only—street. A board walk had even been built in front of the store and saloon. The Nugget had moved now to Tin Cup, but the store was still open. It was common knowledge that Sam, the proprietor, didn't intend to leave until he took with him pretty Meg Mallard's promise to wed.

THIS evening Sam's small dapper figure stepped out of his store as Meg approached, looking trim and ladylike for all her hurrying. Actually the stylish dress, with its draped flounces over the hips, had been made from many, many flour sacks, dyed a dark blue, sewed with tiny stitches in gore after gore, and trimmed with pieces of gray poplin, the last of Ma's dresses from the States.

Sam hustled up, carrying the one cane-bottomed chair in camp and seated Meg on the raised boardwalk in dignified aloofness. Whirling dust clouds moved in with the stage and Meg watched the men duck away, coughing and rubbing their eyes. Quickly the tired horses were unharnessed and led off.

Sam, who had remained gallantly by

Meg's side, left to bid the two strangers farewell. The coming of the strangers to Big Creek couldn't mean much if they were leaving already, Meg observed to herself.

The driver, bustling about impatiently, was obviously in a hurry to be off. Time he was getting to busy Tin Cup, he muttered as he hauled out the mail for Big Creek. It was small this week, only one package. The men milled about him, asking eager questions about Tin Cup. Three decided then and there to go on with the stage. Soon equipped with fresh horses, the driver resumed his seat, and the overloaded stage went rocking away in eruptions of dust.

"How come you didn't go along?" the man handling the mail demanded of Sam. "I see you ain't stocking up your store any."

"No. Just one package for me today."

Sam hustled forward to claim it.

Long Tom stopped his whittling.

"Ain't much use waiting for what you're waiting for," he openly advised, elaborately avoiding a glance in Meg's direction. "You might just as well sell what you got in there and git going."

His thumb jerked backward toward the counter, visible through the open door, with its dwindling supply of canned beans, flour, dried salt pork, and such goods.

Meg colored, but her shiny black head stayed high, the slick flat curls across her forehead severely set. Long Tom was a privileged character but he was going too far. She was puzzled why none of the men liked Sam, for Ma approved of him, said he was a good provider. Maybe Long Tom and his cronies didn't think clothes mattered, that it was all right for the honky-tonk girls to be the only ones who could afford silks and satins.

Sam, completely ignoring Long Tom, carried the box over to Meg.

"S not heavy. Mind keeping care of it for me? Open it if you want to."

Meg escaped from the thinning group, her curiosity growing. The box didn't jiggle, in fact made no noise at all inside. The moment she was in her cabin, she tore open the package.

Goods! Of unheard-of soft texture, with a delicate pattern in pink and blue. There was plenty for a dress. She could just see scissors snipping pieces to take artful shapes.

"It's challee," her mother told her, looking over Meg's shoulder. "It'd be beautiful on you." Straightening her tired shoulders, she gave Meg a probing look. "You're going to take it, aren't you?"

A gift like this you took only from the man you were to marry. Smart Sam, making a yes so easy, a no so hard. Meg's eyes evaded her mother's.

"He just asked me to keep care of it."

"But you will take it?" Ma persisted.

"Oh, Ma, I wish I knew!" Her thick-fringed eyelashes lifted. "You want me to, don't you?"

In the home Sam would provide there'd be a rocker for Ma. In a beribboned cap, Ma could just sit and rock with idle hands.

Oh, why couldn't she act sensible? She knew Sam was the husband for her. He wouldn't even be awfully demanding. He beamed all over at every tiny favor Meg bestowed on him.

"Maybe, Ma, maybe yes," she answered slowly.

Disconcerted, Meg fled from the pleasure lighting Ma's worn face. If she had any gumption she'd be as pleased as Ma at the idea of marrying Sam.

"Time I was getting the tubs in 'fore dark," Meg flung out over her shoulders as she hurried from the cabin.

The arrival of two strangers, especially requesting hot biscuits and other frills, and paying dear for them, had interrupted the washing, and the tubs were still down by Little Creek, which ran close to their cabin, one of the most pretentious the Mallards had ever owned. Two rooms. But Ma had tacked calico over the bare walls until the place looked quite fixy.

But Pa's wanderlust had been growing. All the gulches within burro range were fast becoming an old story to him. Now he was taking longer and longer trips, often staying away two and three days at a time, until it got so he was gone more than he was home. Meg and Ma knew he was getting eager to press on even farther—to a new camp. And that meant they must soon say goodby to present conveniences.

The suds were still in the tubs. As Meg started to dump out the dirty water, with its congealed scum, Barney came up.

"Here. Let me help."

His strong grasp flung the splashing water well away. In silence he rinsed the tubs clean in the stream and carried clear water to the outdoor fireplace, ready for morning.

When all was in order, he turned to Meg with a lack of his usual bumbling shyness. A demanding maleness made his request half an order.

"Mind taking a little walk up the hill? Moon'll be up soon."

MEG'S heart was pounding. It would never do to encourage the wild sweet delight in her, but after all she had not yet given her word to Sam. For an hour or two she could play a little game of pretending to be Barney's girl. He needn't know the joy she found in being with him. On the way back she'd tell him she was going to marry Sam.

As she walked beside Barney, she wondered if he really would care. You didn't

always know what Barney was thinking. He was like the mountains he loved, where gold lay deep. Wild flowers were gay on the hillsides; little streams burred and gurgled in the gulches. Barney had something of their light touch.

She recalled his tenderness in doctoring their crippled burro, Patch, when the wretch had tumbled over a cliff trying to buck off his detested pack. Maybe Barney's gentleness toward her was just sympathy for a lone girl in a rough camp and her mother doing washing.

"Folks sure were curious 'bout those strangers," she remarked, making conversation.

A grin quirked Barney's lips.

"Sam sure was."

"I thought mebber they'd come to dicker with him—where next to locate."

"Looks like most folks've already picked Tin Cup," Barney commented. "I hear our Nugget Saloon's running there full."

Meg grew flustered. Barney might not have intended any connection, but some claimed Sam was part owner of the Nugget, and there had been a dance hall with three honky-tonk girls a part of the establishment. It gave Meg a queer feeling.

Ma didn't believe it. She said Sam cared too much about having a perfectly respectable reputation. Yes, Meg was sure of that—the respectable reputation—but she wondered sometimes just exactly what it covered.

She was glad when Barney changed the subject.

"Look!" he exclaimed. "Moon coming up."

They stepped out on a jutting ledge to get a better view. A yellow glow in the east was raying out, making the fringe of pines against the sky black lace. Meg breathed deeply savoring the odor of pine mingled with the lingering warm earth smell the sun had pulled up.

Now the whole moon became visible, a generous yellow plate, flat against a flat sky. Because she belonged in his arms, Barney drew her close to him. His lips claimed hers, and the sweetness of their intermingling was the essence of the evening's magic. Joy such as Meg had never known before woke every part of her to tingling throbbing life, as one kiss followed another.

Then he lifted her gently, carried her over to a big boulder, and seated himself with Meg still in his arms, her long skirts trailing over his knees. A pervasive content let minutes slip by.

At length Barney, looking about with a happy sigh, broke the silence.

"Yes, Meg, the mountains are going to be good to us, aren't they?"

Meg did not move, but the magic of the

night had already died for her. Too often, from childhood onward had Meg heard that hope, that faith in the gift of the mountains about to be bestowed. Tomorrow Pa would strike it rich. Ma knew. Ma had warned her. Ma wanted her to wear a dress of pink and blue challie, not drape herself in rainbow dreams. And here she was in the arms of a miner!

But surely Ma did not know what Barney's love meant. Fiercely Meg reached up and kissed Barney full on the lips. Again the ecstasy of sheer joy coursed through her. Again her blood flowed warm, full of the meaning of life itself.

"See—it's me," Meg exclaimed tensely. "Not the mountains." She must, she would, make Barney give up his old pick and burro.

Why should Barney understand her meaning?

"But I'm trying to tell you" he insisted with a rich laugh, "it's the mountains are going to be good to us."

Her black eyes looked somberly into his face.

"Maybe—maybe not." Time on the hill-top was fleeting, but not the years in which Ma had waited. "Listen, Barney, I'm through with mining."

"Through!" He flung back his head in a full deep-throated chuckle. "Girl, you're just beginning."

Just beginning, was she? After all Pa's wasted years! She leaped to her feet and stood glaring down at Barney's big frame.

"Get this straight, Barney. From this minute you either have nothing more to do with mining—or nothing more to do with me."

"Meg, girl!"—he smiled up at her—"you don't know what you're talking about. Why tomorrow—"

Yes, tomorrow he'd be off, pick over his shoulder, for the blue ridge beyond. But not taking her with him.

"I know all I want to know." She interrupted hotly.

FURIOUSLY she spun on her heel and started running down the mountain side. To her surprise there was still a group of men near the cabin, taking advantage of the moonlight to build up Ma's wood supply. She and Barney could not have been gone so very long then, yet the light-hearted girl climbing the hillside had come down with the knowledge of a woman's birthright.

Barney caught up with her while still out of earshot of the men.

"Just a minute, Meg—" His fingers fumbled with the puffs of her sleeves. "Let me tell you what I've been trying to all evening."

That he loved her, Meg knew. But she was through—through with miners. And

he wouldn't listen to reason. When they got that way about finding gold there seemed to be nothing you could do about it. She loved him—yes. She'd known heaven on the hillside, but the moon had a way of going down, and Ma had a right to the beribboned cap and rocker—rest, security, the peace she deserved. With Sam, a good provider, her children could live in a nice house, near real schools.

"You might just as well not tell me," she cut Barney off, and hurried on.

He was left to follow Meg's darting figure, her full skirts rippling out in the moonlight like a ballet dancer's.

"You got here just in time, Barney," Long Tom greeted them. "You're the one as knows the weather. Sam here says this clear moonlight'll be gone soon."

Barney scanned the horizon—north, east, south, west—his head turning slowly as his eyes searched the far reaches. Not a cloud in the whole dome of sky. Barney breathed deep. Then he gave his verdict. "I'd say a clear night for sure. The moon'll stay with us."

Sam thrust forward belligerently.

"I say you're wrong. The moon'll be out of sight in less than three hours."

Barney made no answer, exasperating the argumentative Sam. But Barney refused to be baited, although Sam kept insisting he'd see.

"We've been trying to get Sam to tell us what them strangers was up to," Pa broke in.

Sam seized his chance to show off around Meg. "I'll tell you this much. One of 'em was W. W. Kentoff." This was the man whose Midas touch had piled up incredible millions.

An awed silence followed Sam's revelation. To Meg's excited imagination the moonlight put the hulking figures of the burly men in a queer kinship with the mountain setting. Gold. The hills held it and the men sought it. Tomorrow they too might be millionaires. Then she came back to facts. That was only what they thought. Tomorrow their picks would just be playing the same old tune, while she and Sam would be getting somewhere.

"Aw, Sam, loosen up," a newcomer begged eagerly. "Which gulch around here is he interested in? Go on. Give us a chance to stake out before the rush is on."

Sam's eyes narrowed. Instead of continuing to refuse, he stepped up on a stump not yet split into kindling so that now he dominated the group.

"You believe in Barney as a weather prophet. You're after me to tell what I know. Now you make a pool—put up half a share in all your claims—and four hours from now if the moon's been out all the time you get 'em back—and I'll tell what the visitors came for." He paused, then

clapped his hands together. "But remember. If the moon's not stayed clear, I don't tell. And I get the pool."

Meg felt as if two girls were listening to him. One was going to marry him. She ought to be glad that he could juggle the men into making pools like this. This must be the way men made money out of mining. The other girl was thinking about picks. You searched the hills and you found what? The girl who was going to marry Sam knew. They found nothing. The other girl stood silent—completely silent—her eyes glued to Barney.

He had stepped back, studying Sam's face in the moonlight. "You say you promise to tell the deal those men made today?" he questioned.

"If the moon stays out," Sam qualified.

Barney scanned the clear skies again.

"You bank on it turning cloudy." He shook his head in bewilderment.

"Come on, boys." Pa was growing excited. "Let's take Sam up. Put up our claims."

"Not mine," Barney demurred.

"Aw, back yourself up." Long Tom slapped him on the shoulders. "You're always right about weather."

"No, Barney—don't!" The plea came from Meg involuntarily.

Barney spun in her direction.

"Why not, Meg?"

Meg had no words. She just felt that Sam was too sure. He must be up to some game. The way Barney knew his mountains, his weather, Sam would not set himself against that judgment unless there were shenanigans afoot.

Like a flash, Meg had a suspicion what they were. Without the daily papers, eclipses of the moon came unheralded, but now she recalled a book Sam owned, a fat one with paper covers, an almanac it was called. It had arrived with some merchandise one day when Meg was in the store.

Books didn't often come her way, and she always felt an excited wonder about them. This book, with fine print, was hard to read, and Sam soon took it out of her hands, begging her not to puzzle her pretty head over a dull book. Still she remembered one heading—weather reports. If newspapers in the States told of coming eclipses why couldn't the book?

Sam was going to use that knowledge. All right—because he was smarter than they were. She wanted a smart husband, didn't she? A good provider.

She sprang forward, finding herself at Barney's side.

"Please, please, no," she implored him.

She couldn't let Sam slicker him out of the claim he believed in. What if it was just another hope, like all of Pa's. It belonged to him—to Barney. Pa had a right

to keep any he'd staked out too.

"It's going to be clear," Barney told her firmly.

"Maybe so—maybe not."

Meg shook her head, her eyes dark with brimming love.

"All right. Just call it off." Sam stepped down from the stump. "And I'll tell nothing of the business deals made today."

Barney's head spun away from Meg toward Sam.

"You're a queer'un," he gasped.

"He's bluffing," Pa cried. "Come on, Barney. Call him. Sure, you say the night's to be clear."

"No, Barney, no. Please, Pa, no," Meg pleaded frantically.

"Take on the rest of us, Sam." Long Tom urged. "Ain't we got claims enough?"

Meg choked up. What if most of them were no good? The men had a right to keep them. They had slaved for them—tramped the hills over—dug and dug. They believed in their dark tunnels. She was glad they did. Dreams mattered.

And no little sneak like Sam had a right to take them away. Thank the gods Barney was a dreamer like Pa. What if he never did find the gold he sought? He was big like the mountains he roamed.

SHE would never wear the pink and blue challie dress, because it couldn't make up to her for all she'd miss in big Barney's love. Her life with Barney would be big whatever came. She didn't want babies that looked up at her with little Sam souls. Hers and Barney's would be beautiful like the mountain wild flowers, dance with the rippling streams, and have the sturdy strength of granite boulders. Of far less account was the roof overhead.

And Ma—oh, she'd handle the washtubs herself hereafter. Somehow she and Barney would manage a rocker and lace cap. He'd understand the need for them and help.

"Listen," her voice rang out clearly, "ever heard of an eclipse of the moon? Isn't that a little nick coming off already?"

The men gaped from her to the moon. Their expressions were first sheepish, then their angry faces turned demanding to Sam.

"Say, how'd you know?"

"Part of a lot else I know," Sam blustered.

"Yeah?" Barney moved forward. "And if you're not just bluffing—how did you learn about those deals unless you sneaked in to listen where you didn't belong? Kent-off's after my claim. Fifty thousand he's paying me for a fourth share. Maybe not enough but I need cash to get out the rest of the gold." He crossed to Meg. "It's what I've been trying all evening to tell you."

(Concluded on page 72)



Yours Truly



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Mail us your request for letters NOW! Do not neglect to state your name, age, sex, and supply at least one reference.

Dear Mrs. Hope: I am a fun-loving girl of sixteen and one-half. I have blonde hair and blue eyes. My height is only 5' 1½" tall. I would like to hear from girls fifteen to nineteen. So, come on, girls, write to a gal who will promise to answer every letter I receive promptly! I will exchange snapshots with those that want to send theirs. So—come on gala, write a girl who is very eager to see her mail-box full—for once.

BUNNY. No. 1603.

Dear Mrs. Hope: I am a girl of fourteen, a blonde with dark eyes. I am five feet ten inches and weigh one hundred and thirty-four pounds. My favorite sports are dancing, roller skating, and ball games. My hobbies are collecting airplanes and pictures of movie stars. I would like to hear from all girls my age and older. I will be glad to exchange photos.

MAY. No. 1604.

Dear Mrs. Hope: I am a girl almost 15 years old, with brown hair, brown eyes, five feet five inches tall. My favorite sports are horseback riding, swimming, roller skating. I would like to hear from girls 14 years old to 18 years old.

LOU. No. 1605.

Dear Mrs. Hope: I am 20 years old, married for three years and have two children. I love to write. Have a few pen pals in England and I would like very much to have more. I collect movie stars' pictures and souvenirs. I will gladly exchange snaps with anyone. Please pen pals, won't you write to me.

MRS. CASCELLA. No. 1606.

Dear Mrs. Hope: I am a girl of sixteen, with natural curly auburn hair, brown eyes, fair complexion, weigh 118 pounds and am 5' 3½" tall. My friends tell me I'm nice-looking and a real sport. I go for many sports in a big way including dancing, skating, swimming, bowling, horseback riding, golfing, baseball and try at many others. Most of all I always like to make new friends, so please, girls of all ages write me and tell me all about yourselves. I promise to answer all letters faithfully and will exchange snapshots.

HELEN. No. 1607.

Dear Mrs. Hope: I like to get letters from everyone. I am eighteen years old, have dark hair and hazel eyes. I am a defense worker. Like bowling, swimming and dancing. Hope you will write.

CARRIE. No. 1608.

Dear Mrs. Hope: I am a girl of nineteen. My husband is in the service and we have a nine month old son. I have blond hair and blue eyes. Come on girls, write. I am very lonely.

MARGARET. No. 1609.

Dear Mrs. Hope: I would like very much to correspond with pen pals all over the nation. I am a young married lady. My husband is in the Navy so you see I have more time to write letters. I am nineteen years old. Have brown curly hair and brown eyes. Stand 5' 5" tall. I like all kinds of sports but dancing is my favorite pastime. Will promise to answer every letter received and also exchange snapshots. I have an 8 by 10 picture of my husband and I think I'll send it to the first person who writes me. So, come on everybody and write.

ELLEN. No. 1610.

Dear Mrs. Hope: I am a girl of 15 and would like to hear from pen pals. I am lonesome and would like to hear from girls my age. I am 5' 4" tall, have brunette hair and blue eyes. My hobbies are stamps, baseball and other sports. I am willing to exchange snapshots with anyone who wants one. I promise to answer all letters real soon.

DORIS. No. 1611.

Dear Mrs. Hope: I am a girl eleven years of age. I would be very happy to hear from girls ten to fourteen years old. I am Spanish American, have black hair and brown eyes. I love music and all kinds of sports. Please friends, write to me.

ALIDA. No. 1612.

Dear Mrs. Hope: I am a girl of sixteen years of age, moderately tall, quite slender and I have blond hair and blue eyes. I love dancing and also I love to play the piano as I have taken it nine years. I also like to write to pen pals so please, kids, write and I'll answer promptly.

ROSY. No. 1613.

Dear Mrs. Hope: I am a girl of nearly fourteen, have brown hair, brown eyes. I love swimming and dancing, especially jitterbugging. I was also voted Miss May Queen of '44. All girls between 13 and 16 please write.

DOLLY. No. 1614.

Dear Mrs. Hope: I am a young girl of sixteen. I am a junior in high school and stand about 5' 5" in stocking feet. I have a dark complexion, black hair, deep brown eyes and I believe I have a very pleasing personality. I am interested in dancing, bowling, ice skating and all types of sports.

JEAN. No. 1615.

Dear Mrs. Hope: I am a thirteen year old girl and am five feet four inches tall. My favorite sports are swimming, dancing, baseball and corresponding. I will answer any letters but would like to write mostly to persons from thirteen to sixteen.

CARITA. No. 1616.

Dear Mrs. Hope: I am a married girl of 23 and

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DENT'S EAR DROPS

have a little daughter eight months old. I have brown hair and brown eyes and am five feet three inches tall. I am interested in reading and exchanging snapshots and post cards with girls of my age in various states. I am a Texas girl, but have travelled a great deal.

AUDREY. No. 1617.

Dear Mrs. Hope: I am seventeen years old, have golden brown hair and dark brown eyes. I like to play tennis, roller skate, ice skate and go to shows. I like to waltz. In fact I could waltz all day and part of the night too. This is if I didn't work in a defense plant. I love to write letters and most of all receive letters. I answer all letters I get. I am the sister of six brothers who are all in the U. S. Navy. I collect pictures and snapshots. So come on, girls of 17 to 24. Don't be bashful.

CHRIS. No. 1618.

Dear Mrs. Hope: I am a high school sophomore, and have golden blond hair and hazel eyes. People say I am quite good-looking, but I am far from conceited. I love to make new friends through correspondence. Dancing, swimming and worshipping Sinatra are just a few of my hobbies. I would like to hear from tall girls like myself (as I am past 5' 7") but anyone who writes will receive an immediate reply.

MARCELLA. No. 1619

Dear Mrs. Hope: I am a young girl of twenty. I am married to a soldier who is now overseas. I really do get lonesome and would like to have some pen pals who are about my age. I have brown hair and blue eyes and I am five feet three inches. I like to exchange snapshots and souvenirs. I promise to answer all letters.

EVELYN. No. 1620.

Dear Mrs. Hope: I write to very few people and just love to receive mail so I am appealing to you. I am 16 years of age, female, 5' 5", 116 lbs., green eyes, blond hair. My only hobby is roller skating and I own my own skates. I've got dozens of movie stars' pictures which I want to get rid of. So come on girls drop me a line if you want pictures and are interested in skating.

JYNX. No. 1621.

Dear Mrs. Hope: I am a girl of 20, have black hair and brown eyes, weigh 110 lbs., 5' 3 1/2" tall and I like to dance, swim and would like to get snapshots. I will answer all letters.

ALBERTA. No. 1622.

Dear Mrs. Hope: I am a girl 18 years of age. I have black natural curly hair and I live on a farm. I live in Garland, Texas. I will try to answer every letter and card. I would like to have a snapshot of every one that writes to me. I want pen pals of all ages.

LAVENNE. No. 1623.

Dear Mrs. Hope: I am a lonely girl of 14. I have no brothers or sisters so I would like to have many pen pals. I am 5' 1" tall and have dark blond hair and blue eyes. I have many hobbies and pastimes, but the two I enjoy most are horseback riding and swimming. I also am a member of the Girl Scouts and I try to perform all duties of a good Scout. So come on girls and fill the mail box of a lonely girl 'way up in the mountains.

BONNIE. No. 1624.

Dear Mrs. Hope: I am a girl of sixteen years of age, five feet five, with brown hair and blue eyes. My favorite sports are horseback riding, basketball and swimming. I am deeply interested in photography. Won't someone write to me?

IRISH PAT. No. 1625.

Dear Mrs. Hope: I am a married woman of 20. My husband is in the army. I am five feet three inches tall. My hobby is collecting snapshots and writing letters. I would like to write to girls 18-20 who are married to soldiers. I'll enclose snapshots.

MARIE. No. 1626.

Dear Mrs. Hope: I am a young girl of 15. I am 5' 6" tall and weigh 120 pounds. I have light brown hair and blue eyes. I was born in Utah but I am living in California right now and I don't know many people, so I have lots of time to write and answer letters. My favorite sports are dancing, swimming and bowling. So come on friends far

(Turn to page 72)



I Have Lived Before

Says Aged Lama

CAN WE RECOLLECT OUR PAST LIVES?

IS THERE a strange familiarity about people you have met for the first time? Do scenes and places you have never visited haunt your memory? Are these proof that the personality—an immaterial substance—can survive all earthly changes and return? How many times have you seemed a *stranger to yourself*—possessed of moods and temperaments that were not your own?

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and near and especially in and around California, please write to me.

GERRY. No. 1627.

Dear Mrs. Hope: I will soon be fifteen. I have blond hair and grey eyes. I am five feet four inches tall and weigh one hundred pounds. I am a freshman in high school. I enjoy most sports and would delight in corresponding with other girls.

DELORIS. No. 1628.

Dear Mrs. Hope: I am a girl of fifteen and weigh 117 lbs. I am five feet tall. My hobbies are collecting snapshots and dancing, basketball and singing but above all I love to sell Bonds and Stamps. I would like to receive letters from girls between 14 and 17. I hope I will receive them from all over the U. S., Canada and from other countries if possible. So come on girls and let us all get acquainted and exchange snapshots and souvenirs.

SALLY. No. 1629.

Dear Mrs. Hope: I am a girl of fifteen. I am five feet four inches tall and weigh about one hundred and fifteen pounds. I have blue eyes and blond hair. I will be glad to send snapshots of myself, and would be glad to receive some in return. I like to dance to all kinds of music and like to see all the band leaders that come to Detroit.

DOLLY. No. 1630.

Dear Mrs. Hope: I am a girl fifteen years old, five feet three inches tall, blue eyes and blond hair. I am crazy about popular music, like all sports, especially roller skating, and love singing. I promise to answer all letters promptly, and enclose snapshots. So please write everyone, won't you?

BLONDIE. No. 1631.

Dear Mrs. Hope: I am a young mother 23 years of age, am 5' 5 1/2" tall, weigh 150 lbs., dusty blond hair, blue eyes. I have a girl 2 years 4 months old and a boy 4 months old. My husband is in the navy and I would like to hear from anyone at all. Especially young mothers. Will answer all letters. Have no special hobby, am just fun-loving and have a sense of humor.

DOLLY. No. 1632.

Dear Mrs. Hope: I am a girl with blond hair and blue eyes. My favorite sports are roller skating and horse-back riding and the movies. I have plenty of time to answer letters, so won't someone please write me a letter?

TWILA. No. 1633.

Dear Mrs. Hope: I am a girl 14 years of age, with brown hair and brown eyes. I am 5'2" tall. My favorite sports are dancing, swimming and going to the movies.

FRAN. No. 1634.

Dear Mrs. Hope: I am a girl of 14 with brown hair and eyes who would like pen pals. I love dancing, writing letters, pets and mostly all sports. My hobby is collecting photos and autographs from the movie stars. I have written this year to 155 of them. Will answer all letters promptly.

FLORY. No. 1635.

(More Letters Next Issue)

LOVE LIKE THE MOUNTAINS

(Concluded from page 68)

Her breath came in gasps. So it wasn't to be dreams she was to share with Barney but actual wealth. A house full of rocking chairs for Ma!

"Oh, Barney!" she murmured, her heart spilling over with happiness.

But somehow it mattered most of all that he had waited until he was sure of his ability to care for her before he had declared his love. Now it could shine down from his face in unmasked radiance. All the riches of the hills were hers. Yes, yes, the mountains were to be good to them.

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LOVE NUMEROLOGY

(Continued from page 6)

home last night slaving your head off for Tom Bradford, typing more of his articles?"

Doris looked up, surprised. "Why, yes—what of it?"

"Well—I think you are a little fool! Is he paying you for it?"

"Of course, not," said Doris. "I am only too glad to help him."

"Sure," snapped Madge, "saving him time so he can spend his evenings with Grace Seymour."

"What do you mean? Tom was home writing. He telephoned me."

"Where did he phone from?"

"From home, of course."

"Are you sure?"

But Doris wasn't sure. All day long she worried about it. She wanted to ask Tom, but was afraid he might be angry. After all, Madge might be kidding. But still, Tom did like Grace a lot. Perhaps. . . .

However, Tom was very sweet to her when he met her that evening at closing time. He thanked her for her work and said he would be around on Saturday night. He'd give her another article and then take her to a show. Maybe she could type it on Sunday.

Doris thought quickly. "Did you do another article last night?"

Tom hesitated, answering: "Just part of one. I couldn't seem to concentrate. I had to take a walk, hoping to get an idea."

Doris didn't press him further. But an imp of suspicion had entered her heart. She would wait until Saturday and see how he would act then.

The Experiment

By Saturday night, Doris had calmed down a bit, but had come to the conclusion that maybe she had been too good a pal. She was going to try an experiment.

After they came home from the show, Doris complained that her eyes hurt. When he left the article in long hand, she said: "If my eyes are hurting me tomorrow, Tom, I don't think I'll be able to type it."

Sunday, there was nothing the matter with her eyes, and she really wanted to sit down at her typewriter for a couple of hours, but she couldn't get Grace Seymour out of her mind. So for once in her life she was not helpful. She felt guilty—but she also felt she had a right to be independent.

At five o'clock Tom telephoned that he would be over after dinner. He didn't ask her about her eyes, evidently believing she had typed his article.

Tom Is Sympathetic

She was a bit nervous when he came in at eight o'clock, for she had found a pair of dark glasses and was wearing them. He noticed them of course, and his eyes opened widely.

Before she could tell him that she hadn't typed the manuscript, he took her in his arms.

"Honey," he said, "your eyes do hurt—I'm so sorry. You must have strained them. I hope you didn't type today."

"No," she said, softly.

"I'm glad. The heck with the manuscript. It's my fault, I know—expecting you to work all day and at home. No girl can stand that. From now on, you must take care of yourself."

"I hated to disappoint you," she murmured, feeling more guilty than ever, but enjoying his solicitude.

"Doris," he said. "I've been too selfish. It never dawned on me that you are just a girl, not a machine. I'd never forgive myself if you had to wear glasses just on account of me. No, your eyes are too beautiful. I realized that the other night when I took a walk and bumped into Grace Seymour. I had to buy her a soda to get rid of her. The light hit her eyes and I thought how dull they were in comparison with yours. And then I went home and got the idea for a good article—this very article I gave you last night!"

The Light of Happiness

Doris was now smiling and she took off the dark glasses.

Tom looked at her with yearning. "That's better, honey! Promise me you will take care of those beautiful eyes. No more typing at home. I want the girl I love, always to show love-light in her eyes for me . . . especially when she tells me she will marry me . . . and you will darling . . . won't you?"

But tears had dimmed her eyes, for a moment at least, and then they sparkled from the light of happiness within.

"Yes, Tom," she said, "if you care that much." And she went into his arms, and felt him kiss those eyes which had at last seen wisdom.

The Number 5 Girl

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Number 5 is the adventure number. Its possessors are sometimes reckless and

(Turn page)

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often fickle. The Number 5 girl has much of the artist, the traveller, the actress, the entertainer and the reporter in her. Until she has a good sense of values, she is often fooled by glamour. It is hard for her to learn that all that glitters is not gold.

A flame never gives the heat that comes from slow burning embers. It is all right to be curious and venturesome, but there must be more than just daring. There must be a sincere realization that happiness comes to those who appreciate what they have.

The Number 5 girl must learn to be a good bookkeeper in the business of life and love! She must not throw all she possesses overboard in the hope of something indefinite. To discard a lover just because somebody says a Prince lives over the mountain may bring neither Prince nor lover, but only a valley of regret.

Many Temptations

The Number 5 girl, it seems, has more temptations than most girls. It is because her emotions are so strong and spontaneous. She is apt to feel that she is missing something in life until she has worn out her natural energy and learns at last that contentment is a joy greater than glamour.

Such a Number 5 girl was Bonnie Duwane. It had never been hard for her to find a sweetheart, but for a long time she had failed to find true love because she was always seeking new thrills and new faces.

The Lure of Splendor

Bonnie was a hair-dresser employed in the most fashionable shop of her town. Her customers were rich and many times Bonnie envied the glamour and splendor of the women who came to her for service.

She did not really appreciate the love of her most ardent suitor, Jim Toomey, a young lawyer who had studied so hard in college that he had ruined one of his eyes and could not wear a uniform for his country although he wanted to.

Jim was a modest chap who had dreams of becoming a corporation attorney. His prospects were good, but Jim seldom talked about himself.

He took Bonnie out to nice places, but something was missing. She wanted to belong to the best circles because she had had a tough childhood, being one of nine kids in a hard-working family.

Then, one day, her most glamorous customer, Gladys Delong, was met at the hair-dresser's by her handsome brother Wilford Delong, who radiated attractive social graces. Bonnie was introduced to him and he treated Bonnie like a member of the four hundred. She was thrilled. If only Jim were like him, wouldn't she be happy!

She was sure she could fit into any type of society if she only had the chance. She was good looking and knew how to wear clothes better than many of the rich women who came to the shop.

All Bonnie could do was dream until one afternoon she got a telephone call. It was Wilford Delong! He was asking Bonnie to come over to their exclusive home for a special job. Bonnie believed that Gladys Delong was not feeling well and wanted her hair fixed at home.

When Bonnie got there however, she found Wilford alone. He said his sister had gone to Chicago for a few days and he wanted his nails manicured. He had to attend a party that night given by a neighbor in honor of the mayor of the town.

Bonnie didn't object when he praised her and told her he couldn't get her out of his mind. And then he thrilled her when he asked:

"How about going with me to the party tonight? I hate to go alone--and honestly, Bonnie, you will be the prettiest one there, I am sure. Please say yes."

This was something Bonnie had long hoped for--to mix with real people and be one of them! And the idea of associating with the mayor as the companion to a gentleman like Wilford Delong, just made her head swim with joy. She rushed home to prepare herself for the greatest night of her life. (Turn page)

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A Heavenly Time

Then at the party, when she danced with Wilford, and the mayor and other men made a fuss over her, she was in heaven! Her heart went out to Wilford with the force of jet propulsion. And when he kissed her good night, telling her he wanted to see her again, her cup of joy was full.

She felt that Jim would understand. Hadn't he said he wanted her to be happy? And she did think a lot of him—only it might be so long before he could give her what Wilford could!

Several days passed. Everytime the phone rang she hoped it was Wilford, but he had told her he had a big deal on for a few days and would call her to celebrate with him when he had closed it. Jim had called on her, but she had told him she was too tired to go to the movies.

On the following Friday afternoon, Fate stepped into the picture—luckily for Bonnie. A girl brought in an evening paper. Handing it to Bonnie, the girl said:

"This will interest you. It involves your best customer. What a false alarm she is!"

Disillusion

The headline struck Bonnie with the force of a thunderbolt: "Husband and wife, masquerading as brother and sister, arrested in confidence game."

And Bonnie read on: "Gladys Delong and her husband Wilford Delong of High Street, believed by friends to be brother and sister, were arrested today in a stock swindle, accused of trying to extort money from Councilman Briggs, brother of Mayor Briggs. . . ."

Bonnie could read no further. She almost fainted. Her dream had been shattered.

Jim called at her home later. He was worried at seeing her so upset, but she did not tell him what was the trouble..

He tried to cheer her up. "You'll be all right, sweetheart," he said. "You've been working too hard and standing on your feet all day. I want to take you out of that, and now I will be able to. I've just secured a big contract, and on my own too. Some people thought I would have to depend upon my cousin, Senator Blackston . . . but I swore I would not depend on pull to make good."

Bonnie looked at him blankly. "Senator Blackston is your cousin?" she gasped.

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"Yes, I never told you before because I promised my father before he died that I'd be a self-made man like he was. My mother, the Senator's aunt, was rich and sometimes people thought my father wouldn't have succeeded without her money. But he did—and so will I."

"Oh, Jim, I'm so happy," cried Bonnie, realizing what a little fool she had been. Why, Senator Blackston was real—the kind of person she longed to know.

True Values

Jim must have sensed her thoughts, for he added: "Yes, honey—now we can go to some of the Senator's parties. He has invited me, many times—but I hesitated until I was ready. And I want you to go with me next Tuesday. We can announce our engagement there and the papers will give us a big write-up. Will you, darling?"

It was as though heaven had opened up and she suddenly had been crowned a princess. She rushed to Jim and almost smothered him with her kisses. And in her heart there was a silent prayer of thanksgiving that she had not made a fool of herself with Wilford, who might have ruined her life.

She was lucky indeed. She had learned true values before it was too late. Fate was good and she vowed she would be a real wife to a real man!

(Turn page)

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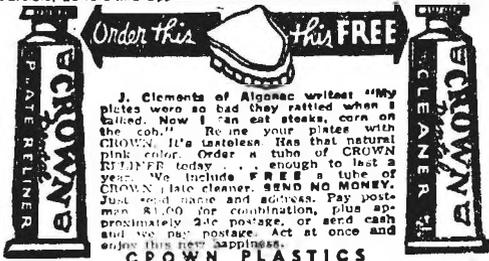
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Dear Miss Cantrell: The most favorable dates in June would be the 4th, 5th, 8th, 13th, 14th, 17th, 22nd, 23rd or 26th. Best of all would be the 22nd.

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Dear Mrs. Wilsey: Better to wait until the birthdate of your child and then base the name on the child's birthdate as shown by your Numerograph name chart.

Dear Sylvion: Is it really important to arrange your name in harmony with your birthdate?—*Winnie McClain.*

Dear Miss McClain: More than a hundred prominent actors think so, because they have done it.

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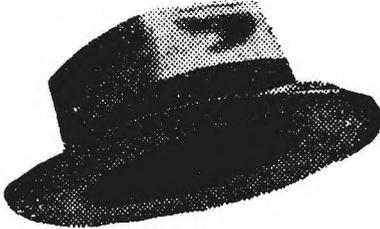
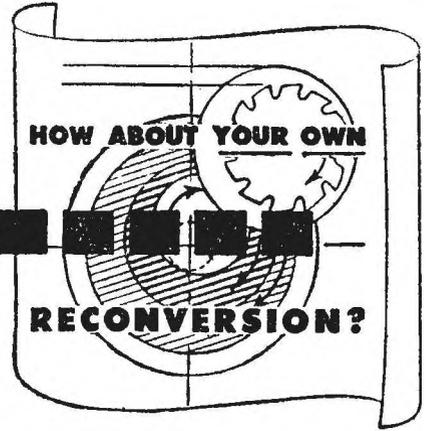
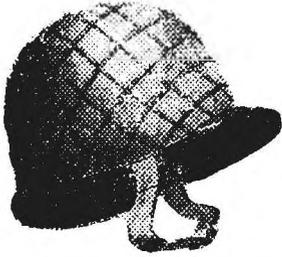
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