



LOVE

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JANUARY

NOVELS
MAGAZINE

*My Kind of
Love*
A NOVEL BY
RUTH HERBERT

*Send Him
Your Heart!*
By ADELE HALL

KATHRYN
KEELEY

DOROTHY
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CLINTON
RICHARDS

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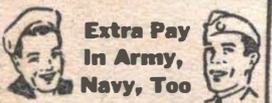
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LOVE

NOVELS
MAGAZINE



Vol. III

January, 1944

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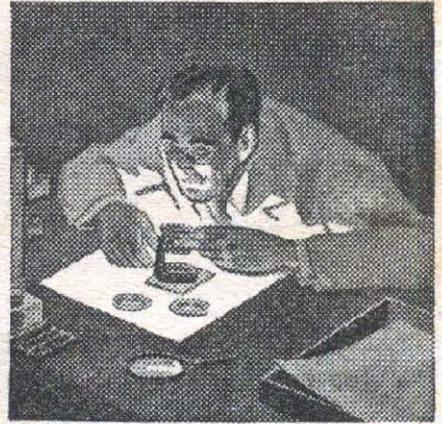
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Let's Talk About It

SHE hardly knew when it was that Joe put his arms about her. It was not Joe—or anything he did—that mattered. It was Carl, the man to whom she'd given her heart and who'd treated it as a meaningless plaything. . . .

And now Sue Jean started to free herself from Joe, because she could hear someone coming up the stairs to the little balcony where they stood.

It was Carl!

His face tightened a little when he saw them. And something inside of Sue Jean hurt so much that she could hardly stand it.

Joe shrugged and moved off.

For a long moment, Carl stood there, looking down at her without saying a thing. Then he smiled a taut, crooked smile. "You might as well get a laugh out of this, too, Sue Jean. You've earned it." His voice was harsh and bitter, his eyes

more coldly flat than steel. "I wanted to tell you something. Something about a fellow and a girl meeting just once and knowing all they needed to know about each other. I got to thinking, down there, that maybe you *were* real and what I felt when I kissed you *was* real. I told you it was funny . . . remember? . . . And here's something else. I've done a lot of traveling, in this man's Army and out of it. And everywhere I've gone I've been looking for a girl—the girl— Well, tonight I found her—and she turns out to be a little fraud like you!"

How could Sue Jean let him know that she'd kissed Joe only because she was hurt? Was there *anything* she could say that he would believe, or *anything* she could do that would not make things even worse?

"Love-By-Night," a novelette by Richard Worthington, will appear in the next issue.

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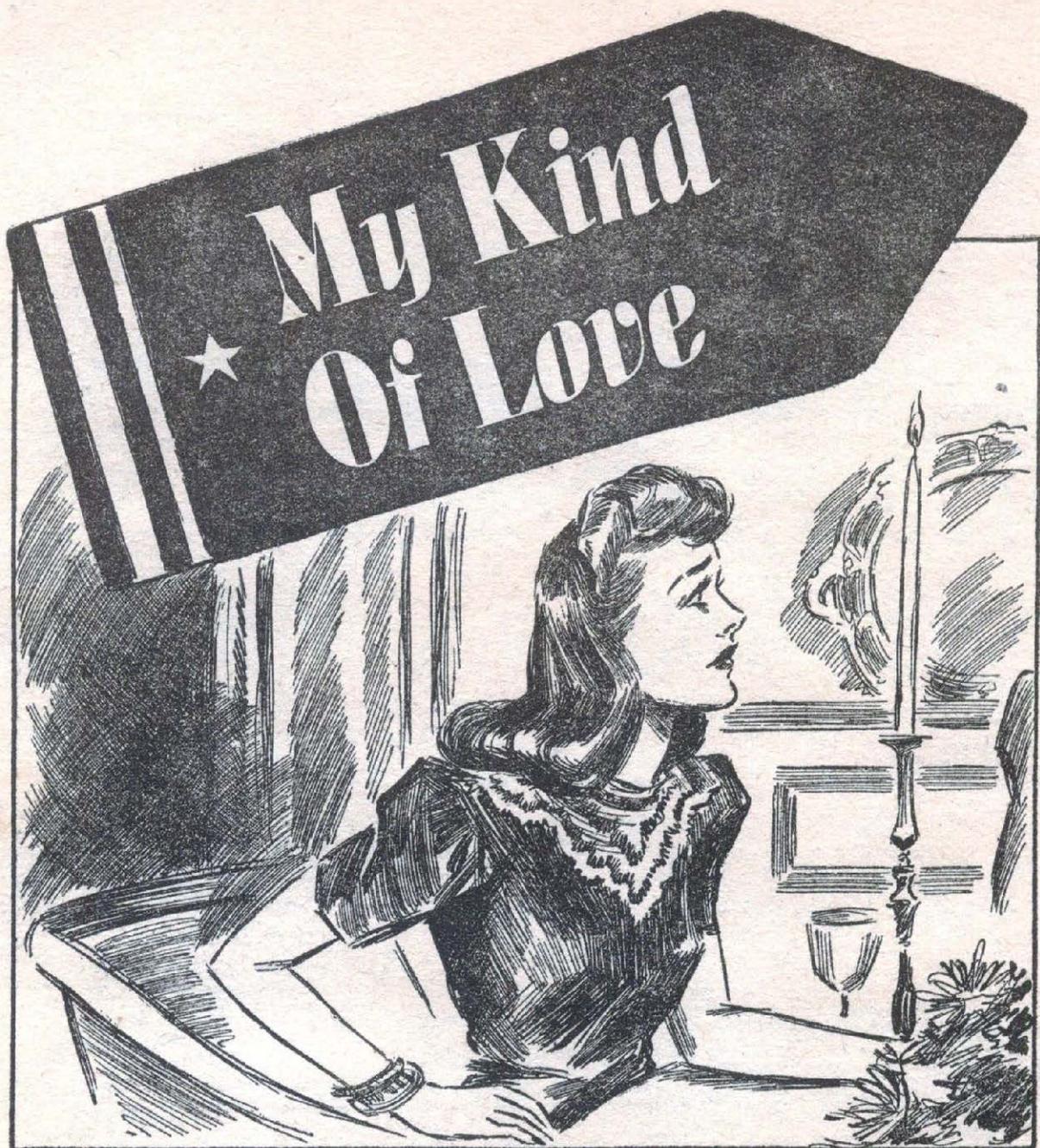
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CHAPTER ONE

The Other Girl

ARDIS smiled at her dinner partner with the unruffled gentleness that came from the feeling of calm security she had had for a whole year. Then she let her eyes travel the length of the dinner table to find Leland. He was talking to the vivid, red-headed visitor who was the occasion for this unusually festive dinner party. The girl—Connie Something-or-other—was leaning toward him, her red lips parted eagerly. Ardis waited for the feeling of amused, slightly con-

descending satisfaction she always got when a new girl made a play for Lee. It did not come.

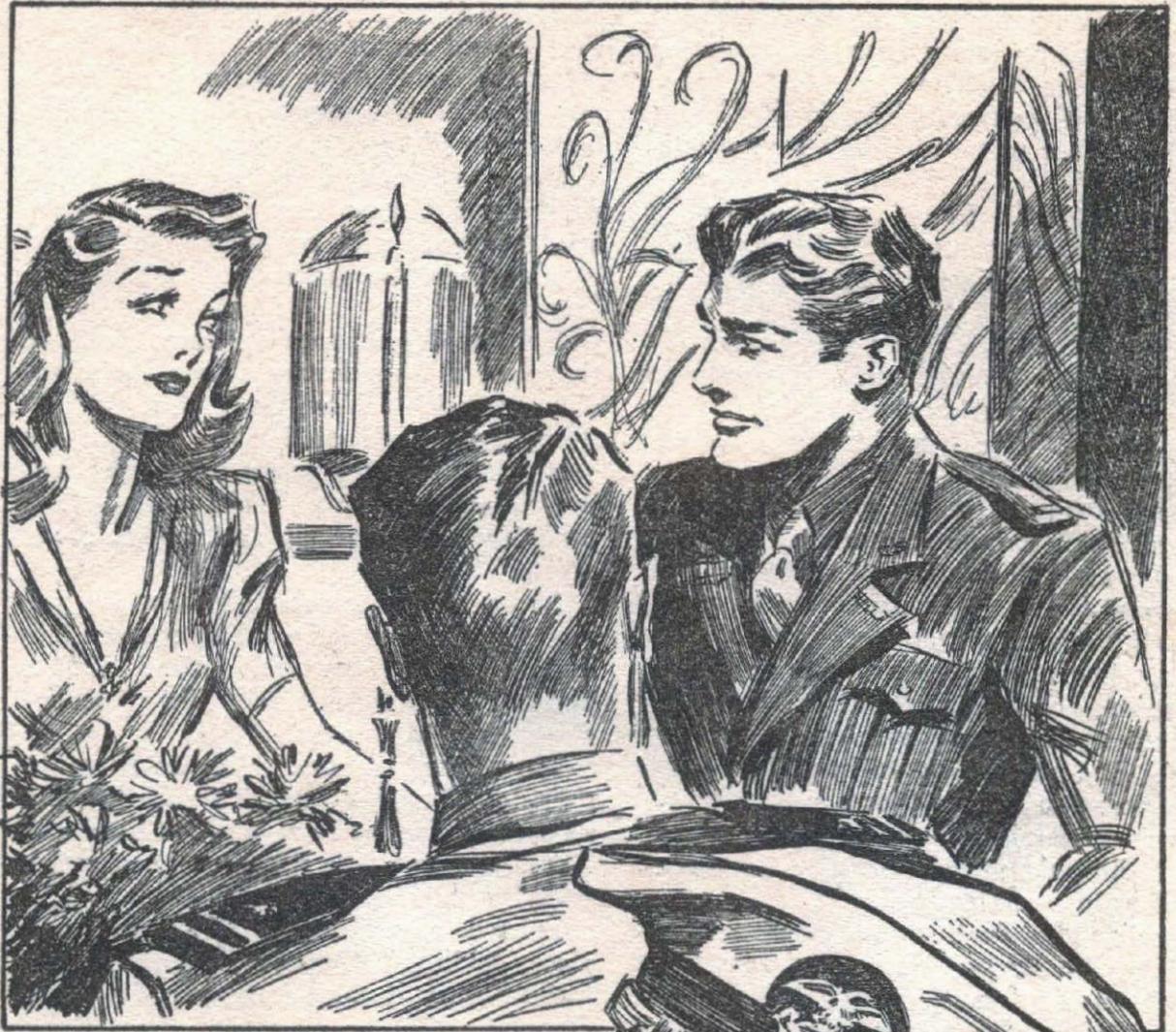
Instead she felt a violent, almost insupportable urge to go tearing down the room and scratch out Connie's green eyes. Ardis sat very still. She felt bewildered, unbelieving.

"Mrs. Deering," said her dinner partner sharply, "are you ill?"

"Certainly not," said Ardis. Again her eyes, unwilling, sought out her husband. Leland, lanky in his Navy whites, with the two broad gold stripes of a lieutenant. Leland. Odd, homely face with high cheekbones, dark-blue eyes, gentle mouth



*She kept her heart safely on ice—then found
that frozen hearts break easiest*



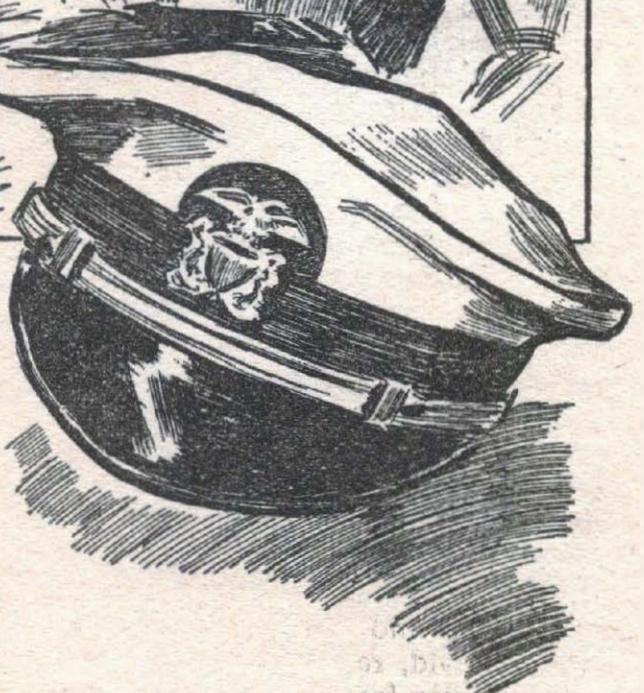
*Connie was stealing the show—treating
Ardis as a chaperon!*

and stubborn chin. So completely delightful-looking and so completely unaware of it. Leland, whom she had deliberately set out to marry, because she liked him so much, because he left her so serene.

She fought back to serenity now.

She could hardly wait, after dinner, to seek out Lee. When she came up to him, his slow, one-sided smile welcomed her. "Hello."

"How do you like the new visiting royalty?" asked Ardis. "What's her name?" She had intended to say something quite



By **RUTH HERBERT**

different, but now she couldn't remember what it was.

He looked bewildered at the suddenness of her question, but he answered obligingly, "Connie."

Ardis' black eyebrows described two lovely, ironic arches on her forehead. "You're calling her by her first name already?"

"Why, of course. Why not? Connie Williams, her name is. She's very pretty, isn't she?"

Steady, Ardis. Count to ten. Her voice was cool when she spoke. "Do you think so? Of course, the red hair is a little unconvincing."

She watched Lee's face change, saw the muscles in his jaw tighten. His eyes were two blue question marks. "I think she's very pretty." No qualifications, just the flat statement.

Ardis smiled with what she hoped looked like a serene unconcern. She said, lightly, as if dismissing Connie Williams once and for all, "Marian certainly spread herself tonight, didn't she? Wasn't that almost like a real pre-war dinner?"

Inside, she was thinking feverishly something that had nothing to do with food. She was saying to herself, "Whatever possessed me to wear a green dress?" It was green linen, simple and cool and fresh, its only adornment a wide yoke of handmade eyelet embroidery.

Ardis had been quite pleased about finding the dress. Since the war there had been few formal parties, and she had thought it really rather silly of Marian Colleston, the hostess, to use this visitor as an occasion for a big formal splash, like the old days. But she had gone to buy a dress, a little unwillingly, and then had found that there was something exciting about putting on a long skirt again.

Lee had liked the dress, too. He'd said, "You look as cool and refreshing as a lettuce-and-cucumber salad."

Ardis had laughed and parried, "Is that a subtle way of calling me a vegetable?" But she had been pleased.

She was rather tall. She had sculptured, regular features and alabaster skin, framed by shining blue-black hair and accented by groomed black eyebrows and a controlled red mouth. She had long, smooth-muscled legs and a proud way of carrying herself.

The green dress made her look just the way she had thought she wanted to look—cool, remote, untouchable.

But Connie Williams had on a green dress, too—a bright green jersey, clinging and vivid, with an intricate jeweled belt of red suède. Connie was like a flame. She looked anything but untouchable.

"Lee," said Ardis abruptly, "I've a headache. Don't you think we could go home now?"

She was ashamed, but she said it. And waited for Lee to turn to her, worried and solicitous and completely hers, forgetting a visiting girl named Connie Williams.

But Lee did not speak at once. He stood there, as if considering. Then, unbelievably, he said, "Why, no, Ardis. I don't think we should go home. Marian has been planning this party for weeks, and you're her best friend." He smiled. "She probably used up all this month's red points."

Ardis stared at him. When she was angry her eyes, that were sometimes blue and sometimes purple, looked almost black. They were black now, hot and shimmering as melted tar.

He wanted to stay. He wanted to see more of Connie—wanted it so much that he was willing to disregard her headache. Ardis felt as if she had just been rudely jolted out of a long complacency. She mustered a smile. "Of course, you're right, darling." She never called Lee darling, but if it surprised him he didn't show it. "I'll be all right—don't worry about me."

She wandered off to the powder room. Fortunately, it was empty and she sat down, clenching her hands until the knuckles began to whiten. She was breathing hard, as if she had been running. She was wracked by the most primitive, soul-shaking jealousy she had ever experienced. Only this time it was Lee. Not Bert, not Forrest, not Decker. *Lee!*

But she couldn't—she wouldn't—be jealous of Lee. She had promised herself that, almost as part of her wedding vows. She never intended to be jealous again. She never intended to be hurt again.

She drew a deep breath and stood up again. "This is nonsense," said Ardis to Ardis. The controlled red mouth was the

only color in the white pool of her face, but there was pride in the way she lifted her head, erect and alert, with just a trace of arrogance. She went back in to the party, carefully not looking for Lee. But she could see him, even with her eyes turned away. He was dancing with Connie Williams.

Ardis danced with Marian's husband, and with two or three of the other husbands, and with Peter Finch, the town's bachelor who was too old for the draft, and with Tom Carewe, the town's other bachelor, who was 4-F. She thought, "What slim pickings for a visiting girl—nothing but husbands."

But Connie was doing all right with husbands—with one special husband.

WHEN Lee came to dance with her, Ardis was, she thought, well in control of herself. So she was unprepared for the little tremor that traveled along her nerves the minute Lee's arms went around her.

"How's the headache?" he asked. "I think it would be all right to go home now, if you're still feeling rotten."

"Oh, no," Ardis said quickly. "I'm feeling much better and I'm having too good a time to leave now." She looked up at Lee through her dark fringe of lashes, and her breath caught in her throat. It was as if she were seeing for the first time the magnetism in his lean, hard face. It was as if, for the first time, she looked at her husband through a woman's eyes. "Stay off, Connie!" she thought. "This man is mine!"

Lee's blue eyes, electric in his tanned face, smiled down at her. "You look as if you'd never had a headache in your life, Ardis. Here it is, the end of a long evening, and you still look as if you were just starting out. Not a hair out of place. You look lovely."

Lovely, like a cucumber salad. But who wants to look like a salad?

But she smiled past the bitterness in her throat. "You look very nice yourself, Lieutenant." Keep it light. All her married life she'd kept it light. Deep emotion was disturbing.

Somebody cut in, then. Ardis, slim and light on her feet, was a favorite dancing partner with all the husbands, just as Ar-

dis, cool and remote, was a favorite with the wives, in a comfortable, distant way. They never rushed over to her with their troubles and their enthusiasms, but they never distrusted her, either.

As she danced away, she watched Lee go over and join the group around Connie Williams. But as she watched, the group gradually seemed to fade away, until there were only Connie and Lee, isolated in a little corner, a little world of their own. Connie's red hair looked slightly disheveled and her eyes were glowing and there was laughter on her full, sensuous mouth. She certainly did not look as if she was just starting out. She looked like the end of a large party where she had had a grand time every minute. A little cold wind seemed to blow across Ardis' heart.

She said to her partner, "Heavens, I left my hankie in Lee's pocket. Let's go over and collect it." They joined Lee and Connie and they stayed there. Ardis put her hand on Lee's arm in a studiedly possessive gesture and let it rest there, lightly. She had seen other wives do that at times, as if in warning of possession to anyone who happened to be looking. But she had never touched Lee in public, any more than she called him dear or darling. She felt the hard muscles of his arm grow tense under her hand, and she saw an oddly probing look deep back in his eyes.

"I am imagining things," she thought. It occurred to her that this was the first time she had ever tried to see what Lee's eyes might be saying. But she took her hand away and smiled brilliantly at Connie Williams. And after a while she said to her partner, as if he had been the one who was delaying, "Aren't we going to finish our dance, Fred?"

But she noticed that Lee and Connie did not dance. They kept on standing there, in their own little corner, as if they had so many things to talk about that the whole evening would not be enough time to talk. It was more frightening than if she had seen Lee put his arms around Connie, somehow, because this showed utter absorption in each other.

THE party was over at last and they went home. Ardis went upstairs, took off the green dress, and hung it far back in the closet, out of sight. She put on a

rosy housecoat and combed through her upswept hair-do, until lustrous curls framed her face in a soft dark cloud. Then she thrust her bare feet into mules and went downstairs to see what was keeping Lee.

He was in his study, staring down at his cluttered desk. He looked unutterably weary and there was a grim set to his mouth. But it seemed a very private look, too personal to be caused by overwork or even by the war. His mouth looked as if it were set against a secret pain.

Ardis said, "Lee, you're surely not going to work tonight?"

"Yes."

She went close to him. She tipped back her small proud head, haloed by its froth of blue-black curls. And suddenly she wanted him to kiss her. She thought, "He is my husband. Why shouldn't I ask him to kiss me?" But the words stuck in her throat. She said, "Well, good night, then, Lee."

"Good night."

His lips barely brushed hers. She felt that light, tantalizing kiss tingle on her mouth. It throbbed with life. But his mouth did not linger, did not cling.

She climbed the stairs, very slowly, and went to bed. She was still awake, hours later, staring wide-eyed into the darkness.

The cool dimness of the room was suddenly hostile. Nagging little doubts popped out at her, leering at her from the shadows.

"You see, Ardis, it is happening all over again. You're wondering if he is going to lie awake thinking of Connie. You're jealous, Ardis. First it was Bert, then Forrest, then Decker. Now it's Lee.

ARDIS had just finished high school, when she had been so sure that Bert was the love of her life. Her family laughed at the idea of a formal engagement, but she wore Bert's class pin. Then she found out that he had taken another girl to a picnic. Ardis put on a big scene, she and Bert had a battle royal and she was quite sure that her life was ruined and that she would never love again, ever. Shortly afterward she forgot him and would probably never have thought of him again, if it had not been for what happened afterward.

Forrest was a great catch, handsome, good family, not rich, but solid. Very solid. There had been a formal engagement this time, with all the trimmings.

Then one day, she walked into a restaurant with a group of girls and saw Forrest and Myra Thornton having lunch together. Her girl friends looked slyly at her and made a point of not saying anything. Ardis felt her pride writhe. As soon as she saw Forrest that night she quarreled with him bitterly. She almost threw her ring at him and it fell to the floor and rolled under a table. Not all Forrest's pleadings that it "hadn't meant anything," nor her mother's kindly advice to "think it over," changed her mind. She was through with Forrest, through with love.

She had got over Forrest when she met Decker. Decker Worthington Wainwright, who had everything. He looked like a blond young sun god. When he made love to a girl her very bones seemed to melt. When he finally asked her to marry him, Ardis went weak with delight.

So once more Ardis was engaged to be married. Being engaged to Decker was like having too much to drink—feeling wonderful and a little dizzy.

The first time she came upon Decker making love to another girl she felt the familiar wild stirring of jealousy. But she fought it off and crept away.

It happened again. And again. Decker was a philanderer. Being engaged hadn't changed him. But Ardis kept her jealousy throttled and only let it come alive in the dark hours of sleepless nights.

Or she thought she did. Actually, while she didn't make a scene with Decker, she watched him constantly. She often interrupted him when he was with another girl. She made excuses to call him up at the office when he said he'd be working. She got thin and brittle and a little knot of fear tightened around her heart for good.

One afternoon she walked into his office, early for her appointment with him, and found him kissing his secretary. When the girl scuttled out Ardis went to pieces and broke their engagement.

That was when Decker said, "You drove me to it, Ardis—always watching me, always waiting for me to step out of line. Our engagement was like a contest

you had to win—not just two people in love.”

She left her engagement ring on his desk.

She walked the streets blindly, numbly. She thought of the scandal—once again the town would ring with the news of Ardis Latimer's broken engagement. In such a mood she ran into "Wolf" Meredith. His nickname told all of him. He was a friend of Decker's, but older—and almost, not quite, beyond the pale. He was still invited to the best houses, but only to large parties, and when younger girls went out with him they did not tell their parents about it.

"Hello, there, Beautiful," he said to Ardis. "Where's Decker?"

"I don't know," she answered distinctly, "and I don't care."

He took one quick look at her, whistled softly, and said, "What you need is a drink."

She went into a cocktail lounge with him because she did not care where she went. It was a very public place. Many of her friends would see her—but she didn't care this night.

She had never had more than one cocktail at a time in her life, but now she lost count. Once Wolf said, "Say, haven't you had enough?" and she said, "There isn't enough." Not enough in the whole world to make her forget that her life was smashed.

She woke up the next morning with a dry, bitter taste in her mouth and ache in the back of her eyes. It took her a full minute to realize, first, that her heart was broken and, second, that she didn't remember how she had behaved.

She got up and looked out of the window, just as the phone rang. It was Decker.

Decker said, "So you drew a blank. I thought so. Maybe this will teach you not to drink. You're not the type."

She could not go on. She could not ask. She could not make herself say the simple words, "What happened?"

"Nothing—except you had us kicked out of the joint." There was a strange glint in Decker's eyes. He stood there, watching the hot blood dye her face scarlet. Then he said, "Sue Carol was there, and that Foster dame. They tried to quiet

you, but you told them to go away. You were too busy kissing me—right in the middle of the dance floor. Not that I didn't like it. But I can think of better spots for it. Uh—I'll be seeing you to-night maybe?"

But she did not see him that night—or ever again. She ran away. She managed some credible story for her mother. She caught the noon train to Boston, to visit her Aunt Millie, after making her mother promise not to let Decker know where she was.

CHAPTER TWO

"Why Did You Marry Him?"

AUNT MILLIE had been prepared to comfort a broken-hearted niece, but she was stunned by this white-faced girl whose pansy-velvet eyes, ravaged with pain, looked out at the world as if she hated everyone in it and, most of all, herself.

The visit ran into months, and Ardis did not improve. She would go nowhere, do nothing, except stare out into space with that haunted look of shock. Finally, her aunt said desperately, "You're going to live a long time, Ardis. You might as well make up your mind to it."

Ardis said, "All right, Aunt Millie. I needed that."

In that moment she locked away the thought of that hateful night. She set her teeth and blotted out the memory of it as if it had never existed.

After that she went out with her aunt, did whatever she was told. But she had a frozen bearing that dared anyone to pity her. She was always on guard. *Never to let anyone get close to her again, never to be hurt again.* Even her appearance changed subtly. Her eyes were curtained now to shut the world out. Her ardent red mouth was firm and controlled, set against shock.

The new Ardis did not attract men. At first she did not care. She wanted no more of love. But one day she discovered that she was very lonely.

Aunt Millie did war work at a club for Naval officers, and Ardis consented to help her. It was there she met Lee. He was in Boston on an assignment, attached

to a war plant which made parts for the Navy.

Lee was quiet and almost homely and a little shy—in looks and temperament the direct opposite of Decker. He did not seem to rush Ardis, but somehow, without quite knowing how it had happened, she found herself spending practically all of his free time with him.

Then one night he told her that his assignment was finished there and he was being transferred to another town, to take charge of production in another war plant. She was astounded at the sudden emptiness inside her. Involuntarily she cried out, "Oh, Lee, I am going to miss you so!"

His face lit up as if a torch had suddenly been turned on inside him. In a moment he had in his arms, tight against him, while he kissed her hair and her eyes and her mouth, with murmured words between.

"Darling, darling! I thought you didn't care a rap whether you ever saw me again. You always seemed to have a high fence around you, shutting me out, shutting everybody out. I was going away without even telling you that I loved you, because I was so sure you wouldn't give a damn."

She was so shaken by surprise that she could not move, could not speak.

"I'll make you so happy," he promised. "I'll make it up to you—whatever it was that made you freeze over. I should have known that you weren't frozen underneath."

Her thoughts were whirling. Marry Lee? It might be the answer to everything. He was the perfect solution. Lee was not the handsome, fiery type that would have girls running after him. There would be no searing pain, no wild pangs of jealousy.

"You will marry me, won't you?" whispered Lee. "I love you so."

But I don't love you! Ardis almost said the words aloud, but she bit them back. Love was a trap, a brief, hot-blooded affair that ended in disaster. She had spent years plunging in and out of love affairs and she wanted no more of it.

But she was fond of Lee, she thought defensively. And she was lonely. Marriage was a business—she could make a success of it, if she tried. She said aloud, "I'll

make you a good wife, Lee." She said it as if it were a dedication.

He laughed. "You sounded so sweet and old-fashioned and determined when you said that, darling. Of course you'll make me a good wife—all you have to do is love me."

They were married at Aunt Millie's in Boston the next night. They couldn't go back to Ardis' home for a proper wedding, because Lee had to report to his new job in three days. Ardis was relieved. If they had gone home, he might have heard about Bert and Forrest and Decker.

Life went pleasantly for Ardis for almost a year, and then Marian Colleston had given the party for a red-headed girl named Connie Williams.

Ardis lay in bed and remembered past agony. It was too easy to remember. She did not want to remember. Her mouth was dry and her throat ached and her hands were clammy. She lay in bed and rediscovered jealousy, the more intense for the year it had lain dormant within her.

When she went downstairs to breakfast the next morning Lee had already gone. Ardis felt her heart contract painfully, but she told herself that it was nothing—he often went to the plant early, before she got up. But this morning it seemed to have some special significance. When the phone rang she flew to answer it, with an unreasonable hope that it might be Lee. In the first few months of their marriage he had often called her up during the daytime, just to say hello, but he had stopped doing that a long time ago.

But it wasn't Lee on the telephone. It was Marian Colleston. Ardis prepared herself for a long, complimentary chat about last night's party, but Marian had something else on her mind.

"My dear," she wailed, "you can't imagine what has happened. Howard's Aunt Sarah is arriving tonight for her annual visit!"

Ardis spoke sympathetically. The Collestons lived in hopes of inheriting the very disagreeable Aunt Sarah's money.

"You know Aunt Sarah," said Marian. "She doesn't approve of women drinking or smoking or even using make-up—she just doesn't approve of anything or anybody. We have to hide the liquor when

she comes and I have to smoke behind locked doors. Ardis, what am I going to do about Connie? Aunt Sarah will think she's awful. I don't dare let the two of them together."

"Hadn't you better be careful?" warned Ardis. "You don't want Connie to hear you."

"Oh, that's all right. She went down town early so as to get in some shopping before the lunch date. She was meeting somebody at noon—she didn't say who it was."

Lee always went to lunch at one o'clock, but he could change, couldn't he? There was a roaring in Ardis' ears. When she came to herself, she had no idea how long Marian had been talking. ". . . So of course I simply have to get rid of Connie for a few days. I'm trying my best to think of somebody who will take her off my hands."

The words hung suspended in the air, followed by Marian's long, expectant pause. Ardis knew that Marian expected her to jump into the breach and offer to take Connie as a house guest during Aunt

Sarah's visit. Instead, Ardis said, "Well, I'll try to think of something, Marian," and hung up quickly.

Why hadn't Lee told her he was taking Connie to lunch? Of course it was a perfectly natural and polite thing to do—Connie had probably told him she was going to be down town and had practically invited herself to lunch—but why hadn't Lee mentioned it? She brought herself up short. Of course Lee wasn't taking Connie to lunch! Why should she jump at such a conclusion?

She made herself go about her morning routine calmly. She certainly was not jealous of Connie Williams—the whole thing was ridiculous.

At ten minutes to twelve she called Lee at the office. "He's already gone out, Mrs. Deering," said his secretary. "He had a luncheon appointment at twelve. Shall I tell him you called?"

"No, don't tell him. It wasn't important—there's no use bothering him."

She felt shamed and angry. She fought it out with herself all day. By afternoon she was so tired that her body felt beaten

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and her eyes were smoky with hidden pain. But she had made up her mind that she definitely would not ask Lee whom he had taken to lunch.

Her maid interrupted her thoughts. "Miss Ardis, there's a soldier here to see you."

She stifled an impulse to say she wouldn't see anyone. "Didn't he give his name?"

"No'm. He just said tell you it was a surprise."

Ardis shrugged and went into the living room. A blond young sun god in a flyer's uniform stood up.

"Decker!" gasped Ardis.

She wanted to turn and run wildly away—away from disaster. But Decker grabbed both her hands and swung them, and he kissed her soundly on both cheeks. Then he laughed and said, "That's not good enough—not for a soldier home from the wars!" He bent and kissed her lips.

Once, long ago, when she had first run away to Aunt Millie's, she had wondered how she would feel if she ever saw Decker again. She had imagined silly, childish scenes in which he would go down on his knees and beg her forgiveness. Sometimes, in her imagination, she forgave him, sometimes she spurned him and sent him away shamed and heartbroken.

Then, after she met Lee, she had told herself that she had forgotten Decker and everything connected with him. It was ironic that he should come today, the first time in her married life that she was emotionally upset.

Well, at least, she did not have to show it. She had learned one lesson well. She knew how to hide her real feelings. She made her voice light, not too cordial, but not cold, either.

"It's good to see you again! You say you're back from the wars—does that mean you've been across? But you look just the same."

"Well, you don't," said Decker, his voice faintly puzzled. "You've changed a lot. I can't put my finger on it, but—" He broke off. "This is luck for me, running into you like this. A girl I know is visiting here. I'm on leave. Mrs. Colleston happened to mention your name, and that was the first I knew you were living here, the first I knew you were even married.

I want a chance to meet the lucky guy."

"Wait a minute. You're way ahead of me. You know Marian Colleston—is that it?"

"Well, not till today. It's her visitor I know—Connie Williams. Have you met her yet?"

"Yes, I've met her."

Decker grinned. "Funny, how many women use that tone when they're speaking of Connie. You're not jealous, by any chance?"

She flushed. She said quickly, before she realized what she was saying, "Hardly. I'm going to have her as a guest for a few days, as a matter of fact. Marian ran into complications."

He was watching her closely. "You *have* changed. And how! Two years ago you'd have slapped my face if I'd made a crack like that."

She managed a light laugh. "I've grown up. People do, you know."

She rose. "Well, it was good to see you again, Decker." Dismissing him, graciously, but unmistakably.

His eyes were fixed on her curiously. "I'd like to meet your boy friend—what's his name?"

"Lee." Just saying his name held a new sweetness. "You must meet him some time." But she knew that she did not intend Decker to meet Lee, ever.

Decker asked eagerly, "Why don't you invite me to stay with you, too?"

Never, *never*. She schooled her voice to just the proper shade of polite regret. "I wish I could. But there's really not enough room."

"I'd like to stay here, Ardis." His voice was inflexible. He dropped all pretense of this being a light, casual conversation.

"Why?"

He shrugged. His eyes were faintly mocking. "Just curiosity, that's all. I want to see the guy who has made you over into a frozen travesty of yourself. Besides, there's Connie. I came to town to see her, remember? If you're jealous of Connie, you ought to be glad to have me here to take some of her attention away from your precious Lee."

"I haven't room for you, Decker. It's out of the question." *Why was she suddenly so afraid?*

"Did you ever tell Lee about that night you raised the roof?"

"No, why should I?"

"Well, I thought you might have."

She was white as paper now, her eyes stark black.

Decker went on, lightly, "Don't worry, I'm not going to tell him. There's no reason for you to be afraid."

"I'm not afraid."

"Then ask me to stay with you."

She felt trapped, helpless. She thought wildly, "Surely he's not threatening me. He wouldn't do that." But she wasn't sure.

"Very well," she said tonelessly. "Go get your bags from the hotel and come back in time for dinner."

WHEN he had gone she telephoned Marian Colleston to say she would take Connie for a few days.

"I guess that will prove I'm not jealous," she thought. But whether she meant prove it to Connie, or Decker, or Lee, or herself, she was not quite sure.

She felt panic-stricken. All of a sudden her ordered, secure world had crashed about her. But when Lee came home that night she pretended that everything was just as usual. She had on a hostess gown of bright scarlet. It highlighted the silky sheen of her black hair and gave a faint glow to her white skin. She kissed Lee lightly, as she always did. She stifled an impulse to throw herself into his arms, but she did allow herself to cling a little, to give him a chance to kiss her more closely. But he did not.

She remembered suddenly other times when he would come home and gather her in and hold her as if he would never let her go, kiss her as if he could never get enough. She thought, "What if he should never really kiss me again?" and it was like a cold wind blowing over her heart.

She drew away and told him about Marian's dilemma. "So I asked Connie to stay with us. There simply wasn't any way to get out of it. Do you mind?"

"No, of course not. I think it's fine," he said.

So you think it's fine. But you won't be able to work nights, with guests in the house. But maybe you won't want to work, when Connie's here.

She told him, then, about Decker. "An old friend, from home."

"I'll be glad to meet him. He's seen action, you say? I wish I were in his shoes!" Then, quickly, "I'd better change, to keep up with you. You look lovely, Ardis." But he might as well be saying it was nice weather, and his smile was forced.

"Yes," said Ardis, dully, "you'd better change." She watched him go up the stairs. She wanted to run after him, but she did not.

When she introduced Decker as "the old friend I told you about," Decker grinned and said, "A *very* old friend—she jilted me, you know. I haven't got over it yet."

Ardis caught her breath, but Lee smiled back easily, without comment.

Connie said, "For heaven's sake, what a wallop! She doesn't seem your type at all," and then flushed.

Decker laughed. "What's my type, Connie?"

She recovered herself. "Me," she said impudently, and both men laughed.

Decker turned to Lee. "Bring me up to date on her, feller. Does she still get mad and throw things?"

"Decker!" protested Ardis. "You're being ridiculous. Let's talk about something interesting."

"I find this very interesting," said Lee. "No, she hasn't thrown anything yet. Should I expect it?"

"Oh, boy, yes." Decker's eyes were glinting. "Does she still pick up stray characters on street cars and buses and bring them home to dinner? And does she still have men trailing after her by the yard? Only don't accuse her of flirting, because she will tell you that it's just because she likes everybody. Oh, she's cute, Ardis is. You can always tell when there's stormy weather ahead, just by looking at her eyes." He laughed. "Ardis always had the same number of ups and downs as other people, only she was always higher up or further down. She was never merely calm."

It sounded as if he were talking about another girl, thought Ardis—a girl who had been dead for a long time. Just hearing about her, she sounded like a very interesting, attractive girl—somebody you

would like to meet. But that girl had had her heart broken. She tried to think of some way to stop Decker. She looked at Lee. He was watching Decker with a curious expression in his blue eyes.

Connie broke the tension. "Why did she jilt you, Decker?"

"Wouldn't you like to know?" mocked Decker.

The maid came in with cocktails and Ardis let her breath out in a soft, relieved little sigh. She did not take a drink—she had never touched one since a certain night, long ago.

Decker said, "Where's yours, Ardis?"

"I've never seen her take one," said Lee. He smiled at Decker, and there was no mockery in his smile.

"Why, he *likes* Decker," thought Ardis. "And Decker likes him." She did not understand this, not any of it. A knot of hysteria tightened in her throat.

"Well, I'll be darned," said Decker, softly. "What made you turn over a new leaf, Ardis? Was it because of that night—you know, the time you passed out?"

Lee said, "Did you pass out once, Ardis? You never told me about it."

Ardis felt as if she were walking on a tight rope across a bottomless chasm. One misstep meant catastrophe. She had always been so cool and careful. If Lee knew she used to be gay and a little crazy. . . . She laughed, and wondered if her laughter sounded strange to Lee's ears.

"Heavens, it wasn't anything. You'd be bored by it. And it was such a long time ago. I've changed since then."

"You certainly have," said Decker fervently.

"And do you approve of the change, Decker?" asked Lee.

"I don't know. I'll have to find out first what caused it."

The two men were talking to each other, and the things they were not saying filled the air.

"Well," said Lee, "when you find out, let me in on it, will you?"

Ardis rose quickly. Her voice was unsteady. "Let's go in to dinner."

Dinner was a festive affair. Everybody seemed to be having a good time—Connie, especially. Connie had tired of having Lee and Decker concern themselves with Ardis. Connie was stealing the show,

acting as if she owned both men, and as if Ardis were a kind of chaperon. She turned from one man to the other, with her warm, impartial smile. She had seemed to be delighted to see Decker, but she was just as eager in hanging on Lee's words. If anything, thought Ardis crossly, she seemed to have a more special warmth for Lee.

And why not? No girl would ever notice Decker, for all his flamboyant good looks and arrogant charm, if Lee were there. Lee, with his quietness and his strength, his slow smile that now and then lighted up his face, his eyes that now and then, when he was stirred, turned to blue flame. "I never really saw him before," she thought. "I never really knew him."

After dinner Decker went over to a window and stood looking out into the moon-splashed night. "Looks like a nice garden you've got here. Let's go take a walk in it, Ardis."

"Oh, you can see it tomorrow," she said lightly.

But Lee said, "It's really lovely at night. Why don't you show it to him, Ardis?"

He didn't even care enough about her to be jealous of Decker. Or did he think that she was so unattractive that Decker would no longer be interested in her? *Or did he want to be alone with Connie?*

When she was outside with Decker in the scented night, he said abruptly, "Why did you marry him, Ardis?"

She gasped. Then she said lightly, "Why does anyone get married?"

"The usual reason is love."

"Exactly."

"Well, why do you question it with us, then?"

"Because he doesn't know you. And I'm quite sure that you don't know him."

She was furious. She said hotly, "The truth is you're so conceited you can't believe I've got over you!"

"That's the first flash of temper I've seen from you. I feel more at home now. I thought you had turned into an ice princess. I should have known better."

Once Lee had said, huskily, "*I should have known you weren't frozen underneath.*" It seemed a long time ago.

"Let's go in," said Ardis abruptly.

She went into the house quietly and

closed the front door very softly. Decker said, "I don't think the lock caught," and he opened the door again and slammed it, hard.

"The lock always catches," said Ardis icily, and for no apparent reason Decker laughed.

CHAPTER THREE

"I'll Tell the Truth"

WHEN they went in, Connie had her compact in her hand and was putting on lipstick. Why should she be putting on fresh lipstick now? Ardis wondered. She had made up after dinner.

Connie looked up at Lee and said, "How's that?"

Lee watched her with his slow, one-sided smile. "A little more on the right side, I think," he said judiciously.

Ardis thought, "He hasn't grinned like that in a long time." She clenched her hands at her side. But she walked in and said lightly, "What kind of lipstick is that, Connie? It's a luscious color."

"It's called 'Vibrant,'" said Connie. "But I don't think it would suit you, Ardis."

It was late when Connie and Decker went upstairs. Ardis moved around the living room aimlessly, emptying ash trays. But finally she couldn't put off the moment any longer. "Well, good night, Lee."

"Good night." He did not kiss her and she was too proud to lift her face.

After lying in bed, sleepless, for a long time, Ardis finally fell into a fitful, unhappy sleep.

The next two days were a nightmare, while she went through the motions of being a perfect hostess, while she watched Connie, radiant and vital, set about taking her husband away from her.

One day Decker said abruptly, "Why don't you do something about it?"

"I don't know what you mean. How would you like to play tennis this afternoon, Decker?"

"How would you like to come alive again, Ardis?"

She answered before she thought, "I was alive once and it didn't pay."

"When you were engaged to me—"

"When I was engaged to you, I wasn't enough for you. Apparently history does repeat itself, Decker. Apparently I'm not enough for any man."

"Ardis, listen to me—"

But she walked off, quickly, before he could finish his sentence.

That night she thought, "Maybe I've been all wrong. I've been trying to make Lee believe there is nothing between Decker and me. But there is one more thing I can try. I can try to make him jealous."

That night she began to concentrate on Decker. She did it subtly—in the way her hand would touch Decker's unnecessarily, in the way her voice would soften and deepen when she spoke to him.

Decker caught on quickly—this was a game he knew. He played his part to the hilt. Connie caught on, too. You could see it in the way her eyes narrowed when she watched Ardis and Decker. But Ardis could not tell whether Lee even noticed. His face betrayed nothing—his blue eyes were inscrutable.

At the dinner table Decker said suddenly, "Oh, by the way, Ardis, remember Wolf Meredith? He's in Africa now, probably playing havoc with all the little native girls."

Her body went rigid. She said mechanically, "Really?"

"Who is Wolf Meredith?" asked Lee. "An old friend?" She could not tell whether there was any irony in that, or not.

"Yes," said Ardis, quickly, before Decker could speak.

But Decker went on. "Forrest is in Africa, too. Funny if they should run into each other."

"Another old friend of yours, Ardis?" asked Connie, maliciously. "It sounds like old home week in Africa."

After dinner she made an excuse to get Decker alone with her in the library and said furiously, "You've got to stop this. I won't have it."

For answer he took her in his arms and kissed her. He held her motionless and kissed her for a long time—and then let her go.

"What was that for?" asked Ardis evenly.

"I'm tired of walking around on the

edge of a volcano. I'd rather have it erupt and get it over with."

"I never was very good at riddles, Decker."

"Lee was in the doorway. I wanted to see what he would do if I kissed you."

"And what did he do?"

"He turned and walked away."

Ardis reached out and gripped the back of a chair to steady herself. "If he loved me," she said, dully, "he would not have walked away."

"I don't know. Perhaps. I'm quite sure of one thing. When he married you he must have loved you terrifically. Because that is the kind of a man he is. But love can die from undernourishment, as well as from other things."

"Can't you persuade Connie to leave?" she asked abruptly.

"Don't blame it on Connie. There will always be a Connie around, when a man is ready for her."

"Get out," choked Ardis. "Get out and take Connie with you."

She went back into the living room and said to Lee and Connie, "How about some bridge? I'm sorry you're having such a dull visit, Connie. There isn't much entertaining going on nowadays."

"Oh, I'm not bored," said Connie, softly.

It seemed to Ardis that they played bridge endlessly. When it finally broke up and Connie went upstairs, and then Decker, Ardis said, "Coming, Lee?"

"Wait, Ardis. I—I want to talk to you."

She could only stand there and watch Lee's body tense, watch his mouth tighten.

She was utterly unprepared for what he said then. "Why did you marry me, Ardis? I've often wanted to ask you."

Panic hammered at her nerves. "The usual reason is love." She said it lightly. She was proud of her voice, because it did not tremble.

"Yes," said Lee, "I know." He waited, as if she had not answered his question.

She knew what she had to say. "I married you because I loved you." But when she looked up and met Lee's eyes, there was a look in them you couldn't lie to. She faltered and he saw her falter.

She thought wildly, "I must cover this up. I must not let it seem important."

She managed a little laugh. "Mercy, let's not get so serious—not tonight. We've both had a trying day." She lifted her lips. "Good night, then, dear."

His eyes looked out blue and bleak from darkened hollows. He caught her up, so that her feet left the floor and her head fell backward across his arm. She felt his mouth on hers, hard and hungry. She melted against him, her body yielding and flexible, while he kissed her again and again, one long kiss after another, as if he had forgotten how hungry he was, as if the dam of his self-control had broken.

There was bitterness and defeat, but no tenderness.

Not like that, shouted Ardis' heart. Better nothing at all, than that.

She said, "You're hurting me, Lee."

He put her down. The silence was tight and hot.

His sudden laughter was jeering, with a kind of wild mockery in it. "Ardis, you are incredible." His glance went over her, as if he could not believe what he saw. Then he turned toward the door.

"Where are you going?"

"For a walk."

"It has started to rain."

"I know. I want to feel the rain in my face, and the wind. I wish it were blowing a hundred-mile-an-hour gale, so I'd have something to fight. The wind and the rain are real. You don't understand that, do you, Ardis?" His smile was sword-edged, his voice impregnated with mockery. "Good night."

SHE went upstairs to bed, but she could not sleep. The memories came stealing in to rob her of sleep—the memory of Lee's voice and arms and lips. She had held heaven in the hollow of her hand and she had not even known enough to hold onto it. And now she missed it with an unrelenting, driving, penetrating hunger. The loneliness hurt like an actual knife turning in her heart.

She thought, "Why, I love him. Of course. I must have loved him all the time, only I would not let myself realize it."

She heard him come in and go into his room and shut the door. She could not let him shut her out of his life like this. It would be like having the sun shut out.

She got up at dawn and put on a robe and went downstairs. He was in the living room. He looked up when she came in.

She saw his eyes, blue and hot and bitter. She saw his mouth, the deliberate control in every line of it. She went over to him and said, "Lee—"

"It's no good, Ardis."

Her mouth turned unsteady, like that of a slapped child. "But Lee, you don't understand. I came because—"

"I know why you came. You think Connie has been trying to take away one of your possessions and you don't like it."

"You're just upset, Lee. You don't mean it—you can't. Everybody in town knows how happy we've been."

"Happy!" His wrath was blistering. "You don't mean you think I've been happy, Ardis? You don't really call this house a home?"

"But what do you want?" Her voice was going all high and wild.

"What every man wants. A wife whose heart can be his home."

"Lee, if it's Decker, I'll tell you all about that."

"It's too late, Ardis. I know you would tell me now—now when your precious security is threatened. You would do anything now, to keep your smug, safe little corner, wouldn't you? It's no use. Nothing is any use. I'm simply ending something that never should have happened in the first place."

"But it did happen. You can't just walk out on a marriage."

"Don't call this travesty a marriage. I'm not walking out on anything, Ardis, because there's nothing between us to walk out on—nothing at all."

The whole room seemed to be holding its breath.

"No," said Lee, "you didn't put me out of your heart, because I was never there. Every time I kissed you I had the feeling that the real you was standing on the sidelines, watching. The flame passed over you and left you untouched."

They were on opposite sides of a chasm. Across that chasm Lee's voice came, relentless, presenting his indictment.

"I asked you the other night why you married me, and you wouldn't answer. But I didn't need an answer—I knew. I've

known for a long time. You wanted an anchor to windward. You didn't want to feel, because you were afraid of feeling. All you wanted was security against reality. That's why you married me, with your prattle about being a good wife. And when you did that, when you married me, not loving me, you were the worst kind of cheat."

She put up her hands as if to fend off that bitter voice. But he had not finished.

"Even after I realized all that, I still tried. But I could not get through all that ice and warm a bit of you. Either a woman loves you, completely, irrevocably, because she cannot help herself, or she does not love you at all. There is only one kind of love. And so, Ardis, this farce will have to end."

He had not mentioned Connie. But surely Connie was to blame for this. Even now Ardis fought against believing that a year of marriage could crumple at the first onslaught of a Connie.

"Next week," she said unsteadily, "is our first anniversary. I was planning a party to celebrate."

"Celebrate what? A year of plain and fancy hell?"

Still she tried. She would not stop trying.

"I was going down tomorrow to buy you an anniversary present," she said.

"The best anniversary present you could give me would be my freedom."

"Lee, you're not yourself. You couldn't be so hard, so cruel. Lee—"

She went close to him, pressed against him. She put up her mouth, pleading. And for a moment she thought she had won. His mouth bruised hers with the force and fury of his kisses. Then he pushed her away as if the touch of her scorched him.

"Lord, how can you kiss when you're trying to get your own way!"

Her face was paper-white now. Her eyes blazed, enormous in its whiteness. "That was a beastly thing to say!"

"The truth is always beastly. You should not have humbled yourself, Ardis. You should have gone on being the ice princess, untouched by ordinary human feelings."

Ardis turned and ran blindly from the room.

THE next morning she sent word downstairs by the maid that she was ill. Let Connie and Decker make out the best way they could. She felt no compulsion now to act the perfect hostess. She felt no compulsion about anything. She only felt dead.

Late in the afternoon she got up and dressed. She could at least go through the motions of living. It was too early for Lee to be home from the office, so she went downstairs, prepared to face Connie and Decker. She could face Decker's probing and Connie's malice because she was immune now to any more pain. Nothing more could happen to her.

In the living room, Connie was in Lee's arms. Ardis felt knives stick through and through her.

Connie's voice, low and slurred and passionate, came to her ears. "Kiss me again, Lee. I'm crazy about you. I've never been so crazy about anybody."

"It's no use, Connie," Lee said. Ardis had never heard a voice so tired, so weighted with misery. "You might as well leave—it will never be any use."

Ardis turned and crept away. Upstairs in her room she threw herself in the bed, shivering. Lee's voice rang in her ears. Giving up Connie could make him sound like that, hopeless, despairing.

"Oh, my darling," thought Ardis. "I didn't know you loved her like that." She had forgotten her own pain in thinking of Lee's.

She knew that now, for the first time, she really loved Lee, because she was ready to give him up. Because his happiness was more important to her than her own.

There was a knock at the door and she said, "Come in." And Lee came in.

"How are you feeling now?" he asked formally. "Would you like to have me take Connie and Decker out for the evening, so you can rest?"

"No, never mind," she said. "I'll come down to dinner. I'm feeling better."

"Very well."

"Lee!"

He came back and she stole one moment to look at him, one moment to fill her heart with the look of him, because it had to be enough to last her all the rest of her life.

"I've decided to go away, Lee."

He said, "Thank you," and went out, quickly.

Dinner was a strain. The air was heavy with undercurrents. Connie, for the first time, was almost completely silent, her eyes dark and sultry. So Lee had not had a chance to tell her the good news. . . . Unreasonably, Ardis could not help being glad of that, glad that for a little while longer Connie would not be in possession.

Even Decker was quiet. He said practically nothing all during dinner. But immediately after dinner he said, "I'll be leaving in the morning, Ardis. It was nice of you to have me here, but I've imposed on your hospitality long enough."

She said something polite. She could imagine nothing more unimportant than whether Decker came or went.

But Lee said, "This is rather sudden, isn't it, Decker? Hadn't you planned to stay until your leave is up?"

Connie cut in, her green eyes smouldering and hot. "He's not going to stay because he wants me to go away with him."

"Connie!" said Decker sharply.

"I might as well tell them," said Connie. "Why not? Don't you think I would have a good time with Decker, Ardis? Tell me. You ought to know."

The silence was appalling, deafening. Then Lee said, "That's enough, Connie. You'd better go."

"Look at Ardis if you don't believe me. All you have to do is look at her face!"

"The maid will pack your bags and call you a taxi," said Lee.

"But—" Then she took one look at Lee's face and went out.

Decker said, "I'm sorry, Ardis. Don't pay any attention to what she said, Lee. She made all of that up out of whole cloth."

But Ardis stood up. She was through with lies.

"Oh, my Lord," groaned Decker. "This is all my fault. I should have told you the truth long ago. You didn't shock the town that night, Ardis. I made that up. You passed out, very quietly, and I took you home. And that was all, absolutely all."

Ardis began to cry. The hard lump of ice in her heart that she had carried

around with her so long, dissolved now.

"I would have told you that day except that I was so angry with you and I wanted to teach you a lesson. I went around that night to tell you, but you'd already gone and your mother wouldn't tell me where."

He turned to Lee. "Do you believe that?"

"Of course," said Lee. "You were in love with her."

"I still am. That's why I came here and hung around all this time, making trouble. I thought if she was unhappy I might get her back."

"I knew that," said Lee. "You don't have to go on explaining."

"Okay, I'll get Connie out of here now. Good-by, Ardis." He turned from the doorway, "Good luck, feller."

WHEN he had gone, Lee looked at Ardis. The tears were running down her face and she did not even try to check them.

"Don't cry," said Lee gently. "He won't go away with Connie—he was just doing that to get her away. You don't have to worry. You can get him back, because he loves you."

"I don't want him back."

"But I don't understand. I thought you must have decided that you wanted to marry Decker. Why *did* you agree to break up our marriage, Ardis?"

"Because I want you to be happy." She lifted her tear-drenched face. Her eyes were dark and luminous, the long lashes stuck together with tears. "Lee, I want you to have Connie—I want you to have everything you want. But you did love me once, didn't you? In the very beginning? Even if you stopped loving me, and I don't blame you for it, I just want to be able to remember that you loved me once."

"I never stopped loving you," he told her.

Ardis closed her eyes, swayed a little. "But you told Connie—"

"I told her it was no use. That was what you heard me say, wasn't it? I kissed her, yes. I was sick with loneliness—and despair—and she was there and very willing. I thought for a minute she would do, as a substitute."

He reached out and gathered her in, close against his hard-beating heart. "There isn't any substitute for you. There never could be, don't you see? All I ever wanted was you. Only I thought I'd never really have you."

The light in his eyes was suddenly too bright to look at. Ardis closed her eyes. Then she opened them again, wide, so that Lee could read in them all the love in her heart.

"You have me now, darling," she said, softly. "Forever and ever."

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Daytime Sweetheart



"No orchids, thank you," she said. "I'm here to work."

By DOROTHY BRODINE

MIMI started through the revolving door of the restaurant at the same moment that the tall Army lieutenant did. She bumped her head against the gleaming buttons of his coat, stumbled, and just missed falling as they both came out on the other side.

"They met in a revolving door," he said, laughing down at her, "and they started going around together."



Can a triangle ever be on the square?



Mimi didn't return his grin. She had too much on her mind to engage in a flirtation just then. She had come to the Serve-Yourself restaurant to grab a bite of lunch before she applied for a job as secretary to an Army captain who had his headquarters in a near-by office building. Landing a position that paid well meant the difference between marrying Bill Watson and waiting for him until the war ended. Bill was deferred because he was essential in his job, but he was so careful about a thing like marriage that he didn't want to leave Mimi without a position when he finally went into the Service.

And Bill was coming in on the plane from California at three o'clock. He was to be in New York for about a week on business, but Mimi knew that if she could convince him that she had the security of a really good job he'd do things as she wanted, and marry her before he went back to the coast to clean up some final business affairs.

That was why she simply had to convince Captain Callahan, of the Army Exchange, that she was the secretary he wanted. She'd have just enough time for a quick lunch, her interview—and then she'd rush to LaGuardia field to meet Bill's plane.

So it wasn't bad temper that made her give this too fresh lieutenant a frigid glance. "Ever hear of the book of etiquette?" she snapped, straightening her small hat. "I always thought it said something about ladies being first."

He looked as if he enjoyed their repartee and wanted to continue it, but she swept away before he had a chance to reply. She found a tray and silverware, ordered some spaghetti and meatballs, and then inserted a nickel in the coffee spigot.

All the tables seemed to be taken by the influx of noon-time eaters, and Mimi began to fear that she wouldn't finish in time to make her interview with the captain. Darn these crowded lunchrooms! If only she had a really good job, she'd eat in the most expensive restaurants and never consult the price list until it was time to pay the bill.

Then she saw a single empty place at the far end of the room, and hurried toward it, hoping that her cup of coffee wouldn't spill. She was just about to sit

down, when someone else slipped neatly into the seat before she could, and put his tray on the table. It was the same lieutenant she'd met with in the revolving door.

"Beat you," he said, grinning.

Her eyes snapped sparks. "I see that your manners are as bad as ever," she said.

"Of course. How could I improve in the space of only five minutes?"

If she hadn't been so annoyed with him and excited over her coming interview, she might have noticed that he had a very charming grin and that his eyes were full of laughing lights. "However," he went on, "I'll make a concession. You may sit in my lap."

Mimi decided it was time to make a sarcastic retort, but just then the man who had been sitting at the other place at the table finished his coffee and rose. There was nothing for her to do but take the seat he had vacated. She set her tray on the table, trying not to pay any attention to the lieutenant.

"My name's Chet Allen," he said, giving her an amused smile. "If you like spaghetti and meat balls, I know a really swell place to go for them. The stuff they serve here isn't fit for a dog."

"Thanks, but I'm not interested," Mimi replied stiffly.

"Tell me, what are you?" he asked. "Working girl, débutante, or do you stay at home? On second thought, you're much too attractive to really know anything."

Mimi tapped her fork impatiently on her plate. "If you really want to know, I'm going to work for Captain Callahan, of the Army Exchange," she snapped. "Now, kindly stop bothering me."

"What's the matter? Don't you like me, or something?" He asked the question in a mock serious voice that made Mimi very angry. If he thought he could dazzle her with his gold bars, he was entirely mistaken. She wondered what he'd say if he knew she was a year out of college, a capable secretary, and about to be married. That would deflate him!

"Like you?" she repeated, in a superior tone. "I think you're obnoxious. If you're in the mood for a flirtation, Lieutenant, I advise you to pick some country-bred girl

who'll be more receptive to your wolf calls. Now don't annoy me."

She thought he'd be angry when she finished that speech, but instead he only laughed. Nevertheless, he stopped trying to talk to her, and she was just a bit dismayed at finding that his silence continued for the remainder of the meal. When she stole another glance at him, she had to admit that he was attractive, if a bit on the forward side.

He had ordered only a ham sandwich and a cup of coffee, so he finished his lunch before she did, and rose to leave. For a moment, she thought he'd make an effort to speak to her again, but he only gave her an almost imperceptible wink, and was off.

MIMI tried to make herself believe that she didn't care that he had left. After all, Bill was planing in at three o'clock. She remembered how hard she'd worked to attract Bill, and a tremendous feeling of satisfaction came over her when she realized that he was hers at last—almost. Bill had been the darling of Westchester society, and it was quite a feat for Mimi to be able to claim all his attentions.

When she had finished the last sip of coffee, she inspected her face in her pocket mirror, smoothed the wrinkles from her blouse, and started for the building in which the Army Exchange was located. With the card from the employment agency in her bag and her excellent letters of recommendation, she was fairly sure that she could impress Captain Callahan. Oh, if she could only greet Bill at the airport with the news that she'd got a wonderful new job! Maybe he'd want to get the marriage license that very afternoon.

She took the elevator to the fifteenth floor, and found the offices of the Army Exchange. She walked up to the front desk, reached into her bag for the agency card, and was about to introduce herself when she saw the man who sat before her.

"Hello," said Chet Allen. "What have we here?"

Mimi wished that she could afford to sweep out of the office like a grand duchess, but the job she wanted was too good to pass up. "I've been sent to see Captain Callahan," she replied coldly. "Is he busy?"

"About the secretarial position? I'm interviewing all candidates."

Mimi's cheeks burned. She wished she could have slapped Chet Allen hard enough to make him lose that complacent expression.

"Sit down, please," he said, putting on a great act for her benefit. "Your name, please?"

"Mimi—I mean, Miriam Richards."

"Have you any letters testifying to your character and dependability?"

Mimi hoped that he couldn't tell how angry he was making her. She reached into her purse, drew out the letters, and put them down on the desk with a gentle motion, although she would have liked to toss them at him. What stupid luck! Imagine running into this impossible person at such a crucial moment!

"Your qualifications are unusually good, Miss Richards," he said, reading her letters with a very grave expression on his face. "Do you think you would enjoy working for the Army?"

Mimi was about to answer, when the door behind Chet Allen opened, and a slim, plain girl who wore shell-rimmed glasses and a severe black dress came out.

"Lieutenant Allen," she said, "Captain Callahan would like you to check over these letters before I send them out. It will take a little time for me to get used to being his secretary, I guess, so it doesn't hurt to look things over twice."

As soon as the girl returned to the inner office, Mimi jumped up, her eyes flashing.

"Of all the cheap tricks!" she said. "You knew perfectly well that the position was filled! How dare you waste my time—as well as the Army's time!"

"Wait, Miss Richards!" he said, as she went toward the door. "Captain Callahan has hired a secretary, I'll admit. He engaged Miss Williams early this morning. But I need a secretary too. Will you take the job?"

Mimi began to laugh. "Are you kidding?" she said.

She wasn't quite so angry when she reached the street. If she hadn't wanted the job so much, she might have been able to laugh over the whole thing. It would take a little ingenuity to keep Bill from finding out that she wasn't working. Then

she glanced at her watch, and discovered she had only twenty minutes to reach LaGuardia airport. That fool lieutenant had wasted almost a half hour of her time.

Of course, there were delays in traffic on the way. Then too, the connections that she made were poor, and when she arrived at the airport, she found that she was fifteen minutes late. There wasn't enough time to fix her hair or straighten her lipstick, so she rushed into the waiting room, breathless and upset.

Bill was standing at the far end of the waitingroom, and he looked as if he had about given her up. "Mimi!" he cried, when he saw her. "At last! I thought you'd ditched me, sweetheart."

"You know I never would," she replied, as he gathered her into his arms.

"Come on, Sweet," he said. "Let's go somewhere for a drink."

"How about dropping into my apartment for that drink, instead?"

"What's the matter, Mimi?" he asked, putting a hand under her chin. "You talk as if you're afraid you'll run into someone you don't want to see. Another guy?"

"Of course not," Mimi said.

So they went to the apartment that she shared with two other girls, and Mimi got out the cocktail shaker and ice cubes. One of the girls was away and the other was lying down in the bedroom because she had a headache. While Mimi was working in the kitchen, the telephone rang.

"Answer it, Bill, will you?" she called.

THE conversation in the other room lasted a few moments, and when Bill came into the kitchen, there was a strange look on his face. "Do you know anyone named Lieutenant Allen?" he asked. "He just called you on the telephone."

Mimi nearly dropped the cocktail shaker. "Why—he's—he's just somebody who was interviewing me for a job," she said.

"A job?" Bill's eyes were sad. "Are you sure, Mimi? Getting tired of me? Another guy?"

For a second, Bill almost annoyed her. "Oh, Bill, don't you ever stop wondering if there's someone else?" she asked, with a deep sigh. "You've asked me that question so many times that I've lost count. How many times must I tell you there's nobody else?"

"And what's this about your taking another job?" he asked. "Haven't you one now?"

Mimi swallowed. "Why—uh—of course I have!" she said. "I'm secretary to Lieutenant Allen. It's a new job, Bill—a good one!" She forgot about the ice cubes and cocktail shaker, and put her arms around his neck. "Oh, darling, don't you know why I've changed my job? I want a good one—a really good one—so that you'll know I have a nice income, and you'll marry me right away!"

Bill held her close. "I know how you feel, sweet. I want to marry you more than I want anything. It's your security that I'm worried about. After this war's over, I'll never let you work outside our home—the home that we are going to have together."

He couldn't stay with her for the evening, because he had an important business engagement. After they had their drink, they talked for a while, and then Mimi said good-by to him at the door. After he left, she went to talk to Beth, in the back room.

She was sorry that she'd told Bill she was going to work for Chet Allen—she hadn't really meant to. She had to be so careful of the things she said to Bill—he was always suspecting her of interest in someone else. Of course, she'd never accept a job as Chet Allen's secretary. She'd find something else, and then, when Bill was in a good mood, she'd explain the whole thing to him so that he'd be sure to understand.

But if she wanted to become Mrs. Watson before Bill left for the West Coast, she'd have to be settled in a good job before the week was out. She was trying to forget her difficulties by reading a new story, when the telephone rang.

"Good evening, Miss Richards," said the pleasant baritone on the other end of the wire. "I called you before, but a man answered the telephone, and wasn't anxious to connect me with you. Have you a husband?"

She knew at once that her caller was Chet Allen, and she stifled an impulse to laugh at his boldness. "I haven't a husband," she replied, and a second later she thought, "Now, why was I so anxious to set him right on that point?"

"Good. Before you acquire one, Miss Richards, you should get over being so absentminded. Did you know that you left your letters of recommendation at my office today?"

"Oh, did I?" Mimi cried. "Thank you for letting me know! I'd never have known where to look for them. Is it all right if I pick them up in the morning?"

"Let me bring them to you tonight. If you're going to look for another job, you'll want an early start."

Mimi didn't know what to say. Chet Allen had been causing trouble for her from the moment she first saw him. She was on the point of refusing when she remembered Bill, and her fears were renewed that he'd discover she was out of a job. There was no time to lose in hunting another, so she told Lieutenant Allen to bring the letters to her.

IT WAS a warm evening, so she changed to a simple yellow shantung dress and a pair of high-heeled, red sandals. She wound a cluster of flowers through her dark hair, and touched her lips with a bright lipstick. She wasn't sure just why she was taking so much trouble with her looks; she hadn't been nearly so fussy when she dashed into the airport earlier in the day to meet Bill. Certainly, she wasn't interested in Chet Allen's personal estimate of her.

"All I want is a job, so that I can get Bill to marry me," she told herself, and for a moment she let herself dream of the day when she would be a bride. She couldn't understand why she saw the groom in an Army uniform, instead of tails and topper.

The doorbell rang, and she went to open it, determined to endure Chet's company only long enough to get back her letters. He had been the cause of a minor rift between her and Bill, and the less she saw of him, the better.

But it wasn't Chet who stood in the doorway. It was Bill.

"Hello, sweet," he said. "Gosh, but you look beautiful. May I come in?"

"Why, uh—of course!" Mimi said.

"I've good news. I've wound things up temporarily, and have the rest of the night off. Get your hat, and let's start painting the town."

Apparently, he didn't notice the look of alarm on her face. While Bill lounged on the sofa, Mimi did some fast thinking. She'd have to get him out of the apartment before Chet appeared, and that meant that she would have to accompany him. As for Chet—well, it was just too bad. After he rang the bell for five minutes or so, and neither she nor Beth, who was still home from work, answered it, he'd know she wasn't at home.

"I'm ready," she said impatiently. "Let's go. I don't need a hat."

"Say, you're a little speed demon!" Bill laughed. "Don't you even want to sit down a minute while we decide where to go?"

"We'll decide that in the taxi," Mimi said.

"First I've got to kiss you 'hello'—"

The sharp peal of the bell sounded just as Bill's face came close to Mimi's. She heard him mutter something to himself, and then he said aloud, "Wouldn't you know! Answer the door, honey."

As soon as she turned the knob, Chet walked in, smiling and beaming as if he owned the place. He had a cellophane box under his arm, and in it was one perfect white orchid.

"Lieutenant Allen at your command, my lovely," he said, bowing low. "Allow me to—"

He had just lifted the box to present it to her when he saw Bill standing a few feet away. The two men looked at each other, neither of them quite sure what was going on.

"Lieutenant Allen?" repeated Bill slowly. "You called Mimi earlier this evening, didn't you?"

"I did."

"Mimi tells me that she's accepted a job as your secretary."

"Oh, has she?" said Chet. "I didn't know—say, that's wonderful! You'll be coming in at nine tomorrow, then, Miss Richards?"

While Mimi groped for words, Bill took out a cigarette and placed it between his lips. He eyed the orchids, and said in a puzzled voice, "There are one or two things that I don't get. Tell me, Lieutenant, is this call business or social?"

"It's business, of course," Mimi interrupted. "I promised to give Lieutenant

Allen my decision about taking the position this evening—that's the only reason he's here."

"And the orchids?" Bill prodded.

"I only wish they were for me!" Mimi said, with a dramatic sigh. "I imagine that Lieutenant Allen chose them for—"

"My mother," said Chet solemnly. "She loves orchids. Especially white ones."

When Mimi finally got the troublesome lieutenant out the door, she had promised to report for work at nine in the morning.

"Look, what is this?" Bill asked, turning to her irritably. "I'm not dumb, Mimi, and I think there are some fifth column activities afoot around here. Don't try to tell me that this Army guy's only interest in you has to do with business."

"You should be jealous!" she snapped. "You should tell me what to do! If you're not careful, Bill Watson, you're going to lose your devoted little Mimi! I've waited long enough for you to decide to marry me!"

"Now listen, Mimi—"

"Suppose you listen instead," she cut in. "I think it's time we settled a thing or two. You want me to confine my interest to you, and you're afraid that every man who crosses my path is going to steal me." Then her voice softened, and she went to him and put her arms around his neck. "You can make sure that I belong to just

you," she whispered. "Marry me right away."

Bill's arms were tight around her, and his cheek was against hers. "What about the end of the week, sweetness?" he said. "If you're getting along all right in your new job, and I'm sure that you'll be safe while I'm gone—I'm all for getting married."

Mimi sighed as Bill kissed her lips. It was going to work out.

THE next morning, she reported to work at the Army Exchange. Chet had been in the office long before she arrived, and was studying some reports as she approached him. It was then she noticed the cellophane box with the orchid inside, resting on the top of his desk.

"Good morning, Mimi," he said. "I'm glad to see you. By the way, my mother didn't care for the orchid after all. Suppose you wear it, and brighten up this place a bit."

She flung her purse and gloves on the nearest chair. She was all ready to tell Chet Allen off. "No orchids, thank you," she said. "I'm here to work. It may interest you to know that at the end of the week I'm going to marry the gentleman you met at my apartment last night."

"Interesting," Chet murmured, apparently undisturbed by the news. "Why tell me about it?"

Leftie and the Right Man

By Hope Campbell

LEFTIE'S grandfather was no amateur when it came to playing Cupid. He had picked husbands for the women in his family for almost two generations, with just one failure to his record—Leftie's mother. She had defied her wealthy father, and married for love.

Grandpa wasn't taking any chances on his granddaughter following in her mother's footsteps, so he invited Leftie to his palatial country home and set about finding her a husband.

Don't miss the exciting solution to Leftie's choice between her grandfather's candidate—and love.



Love 
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The January issue is on sale
November 19th.

Mimi's face reddened. "Because if you have any ideas—I mean—"

"Don't worry, Miss Richards," said Chet, studying the report he held. "I'm not here to fool around, and neither are you. I hired you to work, not so that I could make love to you. If you're thinking about the orchids, they're merely a good will gesture. You needn't bother to wear them."

She felt so small after Chet had finished speaking, that she lost her tongue completely. She stood there, blushing and sputtering, when he spoke again.

"Anyway, maybe I'm married," he said. "Maybe I'm not eligible to pursue you."

Mimi avoided her new boss as much as she could for the rest of the morning. At lunch time, she made the acquaintance of Elsie Williams, Captain Callahan's plain little secretary.

"Working for Chet Allen?" Elsie said, her pale eyes sparkling with interest. "Oh, Miss Richards, he's the most wonderful man!"

"Wonderful?" repeated Mimi. "What's wonderful about him? As far as I can see, he's just another officer with a desk job that keeps his neck safe."

"Oh, didn't you know? He's seen foreign service, and plenty of it. He returned from Africa, and was slated for this job in the Army Exchange, but I've heard that he asked for active duty again. He hates to sit on the sidelines."

Mimi gulped. She'd been wrong about Chet Allen again. "Elsie," she said, and hated herself for blushing, "is—is he married?"

"Indeed no. There doesn't live the girl who could trip him up."

Mimi didn't know why she wasn't particularly enthusiastic about her date with Bill that night. She got no lift when he walked in the door, and his kiss seemed sort of stodgy and routine. As she listened to him monologuing about himself, she realized suddenly that he was completely without a sense of humor. A man as attractive as he was should certainly have a spark of gayety hidden some place, but Mimi could not detect it.

"I'm glad to hear you made out well at work today," he said, holding her hand. "If things keep going nicely all week, it'll

probably be safe to get married before I leave."

"Oh, Bill!" She sighed. "Why must you say 'safe' to get married? Couldn't you say wonderful or swell or anything but safe?"

"A thing can't be wonderful if it isn't safe," he told her.

MIMI worked hard on her second day as Chet Allen's secretary. When it was time to close the office, she found that there were still a few things to be taken care of.

"I'm sorry we didn't quite finish up," he said. "You go ahead and keep your date—I'll take care of the details that are left."

Mimi was just a bit sorry that she'd blown off steam the day before, and now she wanted to make amends. "I haven't a date tonight," she said. "Bill's tied up with official business. Let me stay a half hour or so, and clean up here."

"Say, you're a sport," he said. "Suppose you come down to the Magenta Cocktail Lounge with me, and I'll dictate a couple of letters to you there. Maybe it won't seem so much like work, if we have a drink first."

So they went down to the Magenta Bar, and Chet ordered daiquiris for both of them. While they waited to be served, he dictated his two letters, and then told Mimi to put away her pad and pencil.

"No sense in working any longer than necessary," he said. "And by the way, Mimi, I want to congratulate you on your work. I'm pleased with it."

"Thank you," she said. "I guess I should make a confession to you, too. When I met you in the restaurant, I thought you were just a flirt. I didn't know that men who've seen action in Africa have to have their lighter moments too."

"Let's not talk about Africa," he said, as the waiter served their drinks. "The bars sold bad wine and no liquor. Let's enjoy our daiquiris."

The longer she sat across the table from Chet Allen, the less she wanted to leave. The more she talked with him, the less she could remember anybody named Bill Watson. After the second daiquiri, she felt that this tall, browned lieutenant was

someone whom she'd known for years.

"So you're marrying him before he goes away," said Chet, and Mimi saw little lights dancing just behind his eyes.

"Yes," she replied, and she didn't know why she said the word so listlessly. "Probably at the end of the week."

"Nice," murmured Chet, studying his empty glass. "Very nice. Well, there there isn't any point in our sitting here forever. You don't want another daiquiri, do you?"

"I wouldn't risk the third one," she said. "It might make me start walking up the ceiling."

"Look, Mimi," he said. "Just to prove that you and I are going to be friends, how about wearing that orchid? You know that I got it for you, don't you?"

"I sort of suspected that you did," she said, laughing.

"It's still upstairs in the office. Come on, we'll go back for it. I've a key."

They found the cellophane box on top of the water cooler, where Chet had left it to keep the orchid fresh. "You untie the ribbons," she said.

Chet lifted the flower out carefully. "You know, Mimi," he said, "you're sort of like an orchid yourself. Not like a purple orchid—you see them everywhere. Like a white orchid—or didn't you know?"

Mimi wasn't quite sure how it happened, but a moment later, the orchid was forgotten, and Chet Allen's arms were around her shoulders, holding her tight to him. The kiss they shared was like a sky rocket—it sent them to the stars. It wasn't the cocktail—cocktails hadn't made her feel like this when Bill kissed her. It was—well, she didn't quite know.

"Gosh, Mimi," he murmured. "That was like a third daiquiri."

Then, she remembered. Bill. She was going to marry Bill at the end of the week. And here she was, kissing another man. She freed herself from Chet's arms and stepped back from him.

"You shouldn't have," she whispered. "I'm being married—"

Chet laughed, but Mimi could feel the pain behind his laughter.

"We—we can be friends, Chet."

"Yeah," he replied. "Friends. Sure."

Then Chet reached out and took her hand, holding it so tightly that it pained her. "Listen, Mimi, if anything happens that you don't marry him—I mean, if you change your mind—"

"I'm not going to change my mind." It seemed that another person was saying the words, not Mimi Richards.

WHEN Bill called for her the next night, she almost managed to forget Chet and the orchid and the trying day she'd had in the office trying to avoid Chet's eyes. She'd be married very soon, and all decisions about men would come to a stop.

"Let's have a drink before we start out, Bill," she said gayly. "You get the ice cubes, and I'll bring out the cocktail shaker."

As soon as Bill opened the door of the refrigerator, he uttered a sound of annoyance. "Mimi!" he said. "What is this orchid doing here? This white orchid?"

She'd forgotten that she had placed Chet's orchid in the ice tray. There it was, a little wilted now, but still beautiful.

She looked foolishly at Bill, not knowing what to say.

"It's the orchid that the lieutenant brought for you, isn't it?" he said, his face dark with rage. "Don't try to get out of it, Mimi."

She made an impatient gesture with her hands. "The orchid means nothing," she said. "It's just an expression of good will, that's all."

"Mimi," he said, "you've got to leave that office."

"But Bill! It's a good job! It pays well, and I want to stay."

Your Copy May Be Late

Because of the exigencies of war-time transportation, your magazine may be late sometimes in reaching you. If it does not arrive on time, please do not write complaining of the delay. This delay occurs after it leaves our offices and is caused by conditions beyond our control.

"What do you think I've been scouting around town for?" he said. "I've been looking into possible jobs for you, and I've found one. It pays more than the one you have now, and you're to report for work tomorrow morning."

"Don't *order* me to do anything, Bill," she said, her lips tight. "I don't like it!"

"You want to get married, don't you?" he asked. "Listen, Mimi, I know more about men than you do. I won't have you working in an office with a guy who's so obviously after you! I'd never stop worrying about you!"

"You mean you'd never trust me."

"That isn't the point. Now I want you to resign your job tomorrow and go to work at the Bay Street Bank. It's an excellent position."

"I'm not going to resign," Mimi said.

"This looks like a showdown."

"Maybe it is."

Bill took out his cigarettes and made an elaborate ritual of giving himself a light. "Why not think it over tonight?" he said, in a matter-of-fact tone. "You call me at my hotel in the morning, and let me know what you decide."

Neither of them wanted to go out after their little scene in the kitchen, so Bill left early, with a very sure look on his face. He had little doubt that Mimi would give in to his wishes, and when she thought the whole thing over, she began to feel that she should.

After all, Bill Watson definitely wanted to marry her. Chet Allen hadn't done anything but kiss her a couple of times and make a few flattering speeches. What a sap she'd be to give up Bill on the chance that Chet would get around to falling in love with her. Maybe he was in love with someone else already. How could she know?

SHE walked into the office the next morning with a heart as heavy as a sack of cement. She didn't want to quit! Those few days at her job had made life seem new and glowing and exciting. But there was nothing else for her to do, if she wanted to marry Bill.

"Well, Mimi!" Chet said. "Early again. That's a good sign in a secretary."

"I have something to tell you," she said slowly. "I'm leaving this job."

"You're not. You can't!"

"I have to. I'm sorry if I messed up your routine. I suppose you can find someone else to take my place, and I'll be glad to stay until you do."

He got up from his seat, and came around to where she was standing. "Tell me why you're going," he demanded.

"I—I can't tell you."

"Then I'll tell you. Your boy friend is making you leave. He's afraid you're going to fall for me while he's away."

Mimi started to deny what he said, but her face flushed, and her throat went dry. It was funny how Chet understood things without being told.

"Yes," she said defiantly. "That's it."

"And you're definitely in love with him." Chet tilted up her chin so that she had to look at him. "You never could love me."

Mimi started to say that, yes, she loved Bill Watson, and no, she never could love Chet Allen, but she didn't have the chance. The next moment, she was in his arms, and everybody and everything else in the world vanished, but just the two of them.

"Call him up, and tell him you're not leaving," Chet whispered. "Tell him you're not going to marry him. You're marrying me."

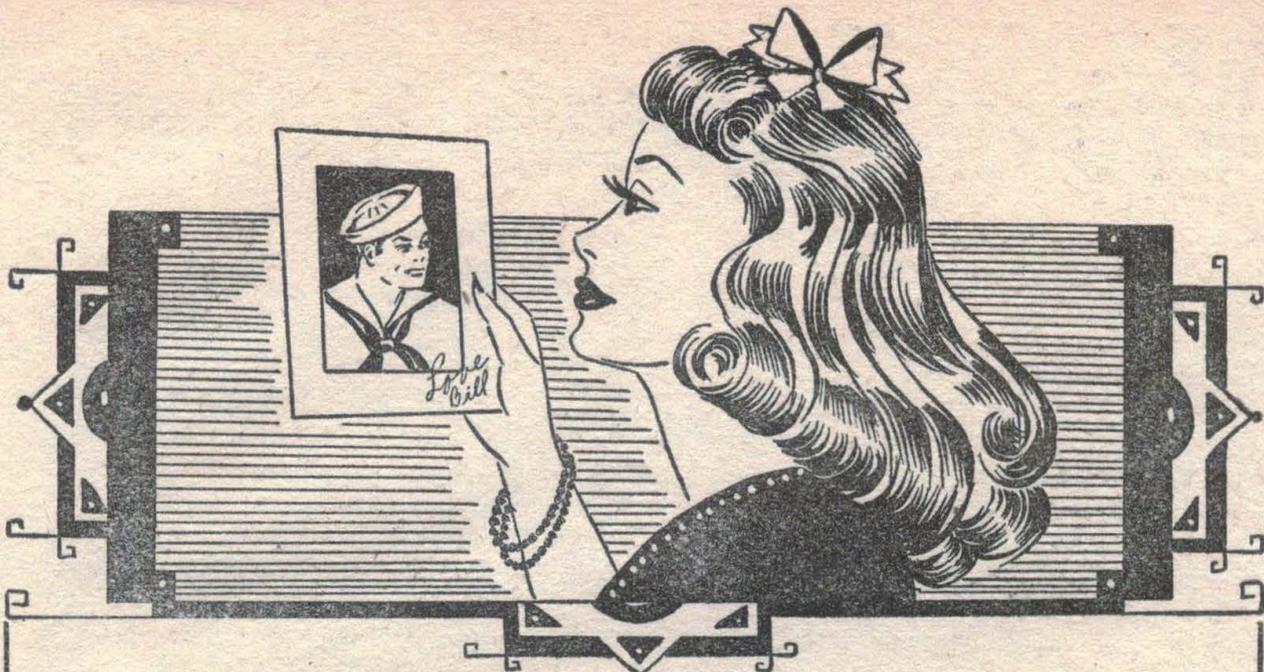
"But—but this is ridiculous! I've known you less than a week!"

"Oh, we'll wait the conventional length of time before we let people know!" He grinned, kissing her cheek and the corner of her mouth. "Still, there's no law that says a man can't fall in love with a girl the minute he sees her. I've been dizzy about you ever since I got mixed up with you in the revolving door."

As Mimi went to the telephone to dial Bill's hotel, she knew that he wasn't going to break down and weep when he heard the news. He'd never been particularly enthusiastic about marrying her, but he was selfish enough to want all her time because she was the most attractive girl he knew.

Just as she began to dial, Captain Calahan came in the door. He smiled jovially at Mimi, and said, "The perfect secretary, I see."

Chet Allen agreed that he wasn't far from wrong.



I'll Forget Him?

*WHAT did we do on your furlough?
Rush to the latest show?
Laugh at a crazy movie?
(Tucked in the dim back row!)*

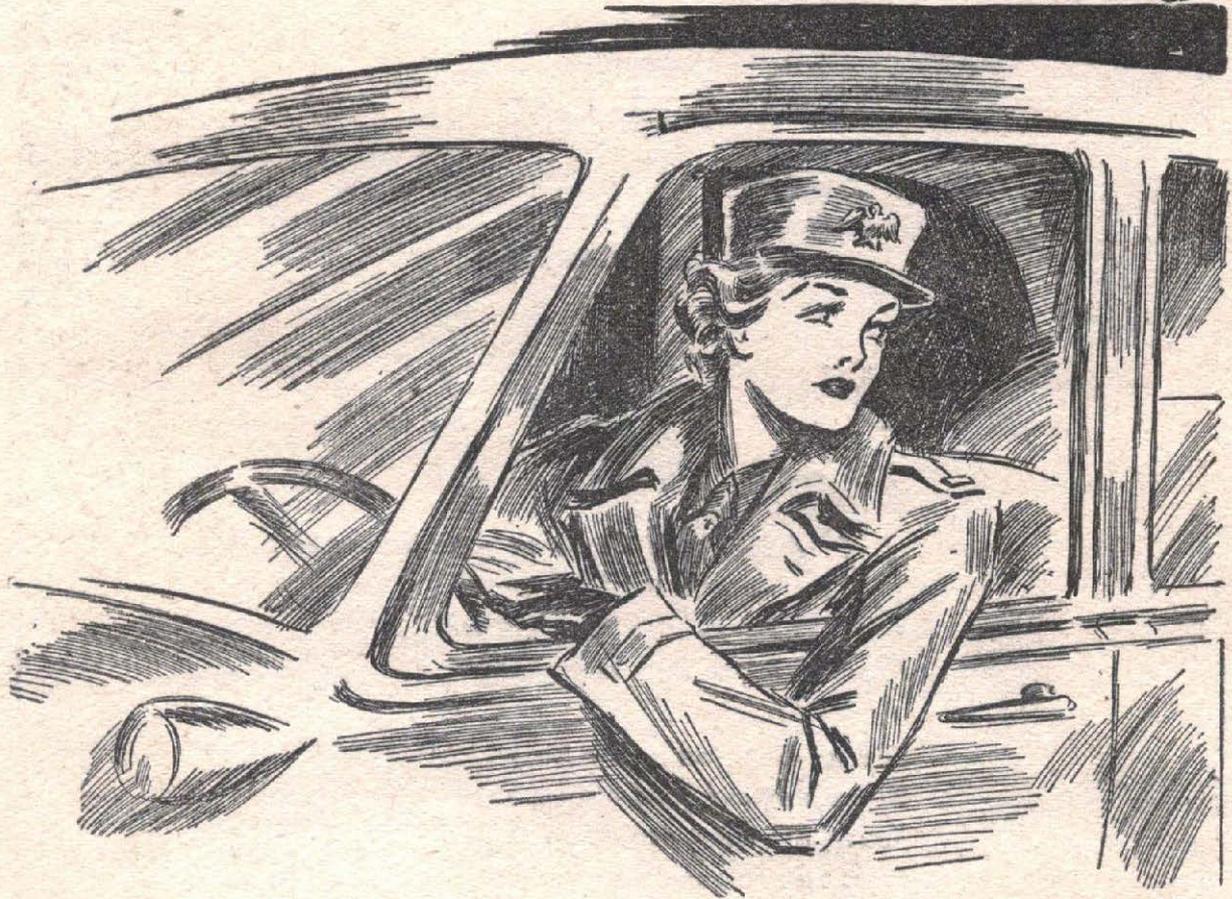
*Did we have fun at the party
Thrown by our good old gang?
Sweet, did we dance till midnight?
Sing, when Sinatra sang?*

*Did we walk home by starlight?
Was there a moon above?
What did we talk of, darling?
Only our precious love?*

*Furloughs fly by like a dream, dear,
All I recall is this . . .
The warmth of your arms, the trust in your eyes,
The promise hid deep in your kiss!*

—Nora Smaridge

When Jeannie Comes Marching



CHAPTER ONE

Lady Soldier

THERE were about a hundred too many people in Major Wellin's big house that night. They stood in groups, glasses balanced precariously in the crush, the tide of conversation punctuated occasionally by a feminine squeal of welcome for some late arriving guest.

In almost the exact center of the milling mob of uniforms, Lieutenant Jeanne Ames stood in one such group, entirely surrounded by uniforms. She stood first on one foot, then the other. She smiled politely at a colonel's jokes, laughed a little more heartily at one of Jason's, and wished

to high heaven that she was sound asleep in barracks.

Why, then, was she spending her first evening pass since her transfer to camp in Major Wellin's crowded living room?

The answer to that was Jason. Jason was a round, pudgy ball of a man in a major's uniform. He had twinkling blue eyes and ruddy cheeks. His white hair sat like a silver crown on his head, leaving a bald spot gleaming in the back. He was a major in the United States Army, retired. Moreover, he was Jeanne's only uncle.

Jason loved the Army. It had been his life. With the beginning of World War II, Jason had done everything to get a chance to go into this war, too.

By FRANCES BOOKER

Home



*"Is she hurt?" Jeanne
whispered.*

*What chance has a lady sol-
dier—to become a soldier's
lady?*

When he was refused, he did the next best thing. He took up quarters in one of the small towns as close to the big sprawling Army camp as he could get. He fought battles verbally with his more fortunate cronies still in Service. He lived for events such as tonight.

When Jeanne had received her commission in the WACs, Jason had swelled with pride. There was another Ames in the Service—and vicariously Jason was in the war again.

So Jeanne stood, as she had been standing for the last few hours. She smiled politely, she accepted the glass someone forced upon her, because it was easier than explaining that she didn't drink. Besides, she could put it down somewhere later. . . .

Someone touched her arm.

Jeanne turned her head slightly, and as easily as that she was out of Jason's group and forming one-half of a very cozy two-some.

"Look," said the other half of the two-some. "I haven't got time to find someone who knows us both. I'm Rand Spencer and I need some help."

She'd never laid eyes on him before. He was an all-over big young man with an amazingly square chin and violet-blue eyes under a shock of unruly mouse-colored hair. He was in uniform, with two bright bars on his shoulder. He was scowling fiercely, and obviously he was not interested in Jeanne—as a girl.

"Well," said the captain irritably, "are you going to help me? If you are, let's get going."

Jeanne stiffened and drew back from the hand on her arm. "Go where?" she asked cautiously.

Rand Spencer was impatient. But he looked down at her, really looked for the first time.

"I'm not going to abduct you, you know. I like my women—women. Not imitation men! I'm old-fashioned that way."

Jeanne gasped and her brown eyes began to shoot sparks. But before she could put her angry thoughts in words, Rand Spencer was going on talking.

"I don't know you," he was saying, "but maybe we'd better understand each other. Officially, I think the WACs are doing a fine job. You're all intelligent and

efficient but, to me, you all look as alike as peas in a pod. I'm not interested in you personally. I would never have bothered you, if Patty were not brewing a spot of trouble. I have to break it up," he explained, "before Patty makes an idiot of herself—and a fool of her father." He paused briefly. "Well?" he asked.

It was an unfortunate moment to pause. Jeanne had been thinking one phrase over and over again. Stuffed shirt, stuffed shirt—er stuffed uniform, rather. So that when the captain paused, she opened her mouth and said, "Stuffed. . . ." explosively and then fell silent, bright crimson flooding her clear skin.

Rand Spencer stared. "Stuffed?" he asked, puzzled.

Now she'd probably done it, Jeanne thought. There were rules of military courtesy to a superior officer. She'd broken them . . . insubordination. . . . "Stuffy," she corrected, thinking swiftly. "In here, I mean," she added waving a hand around the crowded room.

"Oh?" said the captain. He looked at her intently, and this time he really saw her. The tawny chestnut hair that was the color of October hills, the brown eyes that were shooting sparks, the deep red mouth that was so soft and sweet.

The captain stared, and his preoccupation fell away from him. He said, as though he hadn't been irritably growling at her for the last several minutes, "You're new here, aren't you?"

"Yes," Jeanne said. "Lieutenant Jeanne Ames, sir. And tell me, who is Patty?"

"Colonel Winter's daughter," he said, and he waved a hand to one side of the room. "There she is, over there."

PATTY WINTER stood facing them, and she was looking up at an officer whose back was toward them. She wore black, a daring, sophisticated black into which her too thin body seemed to have been poured. The only make-up she wore was the lipstick that made a wide, crimson splash of her mouth, and the matching crimson on her long, pointed nails. Her hair was dark, piled high on her head. She was laughing—a little shrilly, as though she might have had too much to drink.

"She looks as though she could take care of herself," Jeanne said.

"Well, she can't!" Rand Spencer informed her. "That's just part of the general set-up," he went on. "Looking like something out of a burlesque show, getting into one scrape after another—breaking all the rules, just for the hell of it. She can't take care of herself any more than a baby can. And that—that matinée idol she's playing around with isn't helping any, either."

"Well," she said, "I'm afraid I still don't see. . . ."

"I can't go barging in there by myself," the captain told her. "Patty'd have my scalp. She doesn't approve of what she calls my watch-dog tendencies. But if I came along with a girl, Patty couldn't . . . oh hell," he broke off. "Skip it." He scowled. He said in deep disgust, "Women!"

He looked so fierce that Jeanne laughed. And after a moment, he laughed, too. It did something to his face, that grin. Something boyish and pleasant. "Why, he could be nice, if he wanted to!" Jeanne thought, astonished. She said impulsively. "I'll help. What do you want me to do?"

"Just trail along," Rand said.

His hand lightly on her arm, he guided her through the mass of uniformed men straight to the other side of the room.

"Stick right behind me." He grinned over his shoulder. "I used to be pretty good at broken field running, a long time ago."

Not too long ago, Jeanne reflected. The captain seemed to be pretty young. And he had nice shoulders, she noted as she followed him.

And then she forgot about him as they halted before the dark-haired girl and the tall officer with her. Rand was murmuring introductions.

Patty Winters' eyes went over Jeanne's uniform appraisingly and the interest went out of them immediately. But the tall blond man beside her was smiling delightedly, and Jeanne's eyes opened wide as she looked at him. It couldn't be. Fate couldn't play the same dirty trick on her twice in succession. It wasn't fair. But fair or not, there was no erasing the man who stood there.

"Jeannie! Jeannie Ames," Tony Drake said. "You—a WAC! Well, what do you know!"

Patty looked from one to the other, curiously. "You know each other?" she asked.

"We've met," Jeanne said coldly. And after a moment, she added, "How are you, Tony?"

She was perfectly aware that Patty's curiosity was far from satisfied, but she had no intention of enlightening her further. Rand Spencer, after one curious glance in her direction, was paying her no further attention. He was talking earnestly to Patty in an undertone. A few words came to Jeanne's ears. Rand's temper was plainly rising and Patty's dark eyes were flashing dangerously. Then Rand said loudly, "I want to talk to you. Now! Come on!" And a moment later Jeanne was watching him propel Patty away.

And that was just ducky, was it not? They had done one swell job of rescuing Patty, and now Jeanne was the one who needed rescuing. Rand would not be her Galahad. He had said, "I like my women—women."

"Well, darn him," Jeanne thought, and her spine began to stiffen all over again as she stood staring after his retreating back.

"I wouldn't do that if I were you," Tony Drake said lazily. "Can't you read, Jeannie?"

SHE looked at Tony coolly. Two years hadn't done much to him, after all, and the uniform only enhanced his blond good looks. More than ever, he looked like a hero of the silver screen.

He was a tall young man with shining blond hair, cynical brown eyes and startling heavy brows that were very black. He was still about the best looking man she had ever met, Jeanne decided. And, somehow, that did not seem very fair, either.

She said crossly, "What in the world are you talking about?"

Tony grinned. "The signs posted all over our friend, the captain," he said. "Didn't you see them? Captain Spencer is slated to be the first of Patty Winter's husbands. Didn't you know?"

"I wouldn't have thought—I mean, he

doesn't seem like Patty's type at all."

Tony laughed outright this time. "Don't be naïve, darling," he said cynically. "Rand is any woman's type. Kind and steady, dependable and decent—guaranteed never to give any trouble. But that doesn't go for Patty, my lamb. Patty is a brat. She has no scruples and little or no conscience. She'll cut you up in little pieces and throw you to the lions cheerfully if you get in the way of anything she wants. Rand Spencer," he said significantly, "has been Patty's special property for quite some time."

Jeanne stared at him. "Are you *warning* me, Tony?" she asked in an amazed voice. "Because if you are, you needn't. That's one thing, at least, you did for me. I wouldn't trust any man as far as I can throw a house."

"My good deed for the day," Tony said ruefully. He looked down at her and after a moment, he said quietly. "Look, Jeanne, as long as we're in the same camp—well, there's no reason we can't be friends, is there?"

"There's no reason why we should be," Jeanne told him coolly. "Also there's a very good reason why we shouldn't be."

"You mean Edna, I suppose."

Jeanne nodded, not trusting her voice to mention Edna by name. Because it brought back the painful sense of shame and humiliation she had known two years ago.

She had met Tony at a cocktail party. One of Susan Peters' mad, hodgepodge sort of parties where you were likely to meet almost anyone. Someone had introduced Tony and Jeanne and then wandered away. But Tony had stayed, chatting utter nonsense, making himself as charming as possible.

He'd taken her home that evening, and after that she had dinner several times with him. They just drifted into it. Tony worked in an office not far from Jeanne's own. He took to dropping in each evening at closing time. "Dinner tonight?" he'd ask and Jeanne would smile and agree. It was nicer than eating alone.

It was perfectly innocent of course. Tony did not tell her that he was married, and Susan Peters, who might have told her, had gone to Hollywood to do some sketches.

So they had drifted on, until that night when a bitter, defeated woman had rushed up to their table and had flung one mean accusation after another at them.

There was no basis for Edna's jealous outburst. Jeanne was not in love with Tony.

Tony had called Jeanne repeatedly after that night, but she had refused to see him.

"You may not believe me," Tony said softly, "but I was very fond of you, Jeanne. Maybe I was a little bit in love with you."

Jeanne looked at him, startled. She had once thought of Tony as a charming playmate, later as an unkind husband, a down-right heel—depending on how you looked at it. But never had she pictured him as an unhappy man.

"Maybe I am still in love with you," he continued. "The way I feel right now—" He broke off as he saw her stiffen. He shrugged ruefully. "Well, you can't blame a guy for trying."

After a moment, he asked, "Friends again?"

"No," Jeanne said firmly. "I'm sorry, Tony. But that's the way it is."

If Tony was disappointed, it showed only in his narrowed eyes. "Okay. But don't forget what I told you about Spencer. I still like you too well to see you tangle with Patty."

What was the matter with Tony? She scarcely knew Rand Spencer—let alone having any designs on him. Besides, she didn't like him—the stuffed shirt.

She said violently. "I wouldn't have him if I won him in a raffle."

She would probably never see him again, she thought, turning away from Tony. And certainly she would not see Tony again, if she could help it. Nor that spoiled child, Patty. She thought Tony might well take heed of his own warning if the look in his eye as he bent down to Patty had been any indication.

She hunted around for Jason, found him and detached him a moment from his eternal battles. "I think I'll go back to the Post tonight, Jason, if you don't mind." She had planned to spend the night in Jason's big, old-fashioned house, but that meant getting up an hour earlier in order to get back before reveille. And she was tired.

"All right, Jeannie," Jason told her. "But you'll spend your first week-end with me, won't you?"

She promised obediently and asked as though it weren't very important, "By the way, Jason, who is Colonel Winters?"

"Piggy Winters?" her uncle inquired. "Oh, he's commandant of your new post. Nice fellow. Used to be a lieutenant when I was a captain. Why?"

"Oh, nothing," Jeanne said vaguely. "I just wondered."

Tony was really biting off a hunk of something, this time, she thought. But it was none of her business.

She got her Army top coat from one of the rooms set aside for a coatroom. She put fresh lipstick on her soft mouth, fished her car keys out of her bag, and started out of the house.

On the front porch there were deep shadows, but as Jeanne stepped through the lighted doorway, one of the shadows moved toward her.

"Hello," said Rand Spencer. "I saw you getting ready to leave. I've been waiting for you."

Startled, she said, "Why?"

"Patty's disappeared," he said. "Likewise your friend Drake."

So Patty needed rescuing again!

Jeanne said, "Tony is not a friend of mine, Captain Spencer. Neither is Patty. As far as I'm concerned they can both get themselves safely home or not, just as they choose. If you can't manage your girl now," she demanded, "how in the world do you expect to manage her when you get married?"

The captain looked at her sharply, and Jeanne felt disapproval rise like a fog between them. For just what reason, she didn't know, and she cared less.

She said firmly, "If you'll excuse me. . . ."

"I won't," Rand Spencer said. "You're new here. You're not part of the regular Service—I mean the regular Army. But even you should know that Patty Winters is the daughter of your commanding officer and if she needs help—" He stopped again, shrugged. He said grimly, "You have a car, have you not, Lieutenant? I saw you drive up earlier this evening. I came with the colonel. Right now I'll need a car, so I'm borrowing yours."

HE took her arm and pulled her down the steps and along the street. He said, coldly. "You can come along or not, just as you choose. This is your car, isn't it?"

"Yes." She stood beside the car, undecided. Then, having made up her mind, she unlocked the door and slid under the wheel. This man was a complete stranger to her. She certainly wasn't going to give him her car to run around in. And she didn't think it would do much good to refuse him the keys. In his present frame of mind she rather thought Rand Spencer would take them anyway.

"Where to?" she asked.

He still stood on the street beside her. "You know where the Blue Parrot is?"

"No," said Jeannie. "I've been here only two days."

He said, "Move over, then. I'll drive."

There was the habit of command in the captain's voice, and instinctively Jeanne obeyed it. She thought furiously, "The big lug!" He had consistently put her in the wrong, bent her will to his.

She sat stiff and unbending in her corner of the car as they moved swiftly through the small, sleeping town, past the square that was the business district, out onto the highway. Rand drove fast, never taking his eyes off the twin beams of light ahead of him, until he came to the small dirt road thirty miles outside of town that ran parallel to the highway for some yards, then branched sharply to the right into a deep-set grove of trees.

It was very dark there under the trees, with only the headlights cutting through the gloom. A nice place for a murder, Jeanne thought, and glanced uneasily at the stranger beside her. The car stopped before a long, low building.

There were no outside lights to indicate a roadhouse or any other building. Only the small gleam of light from inside indicated that it was even inhabited. That and the row of parked cars on one side of the building.

Rand Spencer jumped out of the car immediately.

"You stay here," he ordered.

She waited obediently. Nice people, she reflected. Very nice people, indeed! And why did she have to get herself mixed up with them?

Rand came back. "Open the door," he ordered.

She opened the front door, not thinking. Not until then did she realize that he was carrying Patty in his arms. A limp, unconscious Patty. Jeanne drew in her breath sharply.

"Is—is she hurt?" she whispered.

"No," Rand snapped. "The back door!" he added impatiently.

She did as he ordered.

"You drive," he said. "I'll tell you where."

He sat in the back seat, Patty across his knees. Jeanne drove silently, following his directions. There was no sound in the car except for Patty's heavy breathing, until they slowed before the Post.

Now what? Jeanne wondered.

But Captain Spencer was equal to that, too. Just before they reached the lights of the Post, there were sounds of movement in the back seat, and long legs slid over the front seat. When they stopped a moment later before the sentry, Rand had both Jeanne's and his own pass ready for inspection.

Jeanne scarcely breathed until they were safe inside the Post. "Officer's Row," he instructed. "The last house on the row. Take the drive on the north side."

Jeanne's knees were shaking.

"Where's Patty?" she whispered.

"On the floor," Rand said quietly.

"Here we are. Turn right."

But before she could turn the wheel, his hand had reached across her and the headlights blinked out.

Jeanne gasped. "But what. . ."

"Drive around to the back," Rand ordered. "And for Pete's sake be quiet."

Instinctively, Jeanne put her foot on the clutch, and the car glided almost silently around the house and stopped before the back door. As though at a prearranged signal the door opened, though no light showed in the kitchen, and a burly figure stood suddenly beside the car. The back door opened and Patty was lifted gently, easily.

"Everything all right, Hedge?" Rand asked, sliding out of the car.

"Yes, sir," the burly man answered. "The colonel is dead to the world. It would take an earthquake to wake him."

The figure turned, started toward the house, then hesitated and came back. "Could you wait a moment, sir? I'd like a word with you, if you've time."

"I'll wait," Rand nodded and stood watching as the kitchen door closed softly behind Patty and the burly figure.

Jeanne drew a long breath. "Well!" she thought. She wouldn't have believed it if she hadn't seen it with her own eyes. This was a military post, disciplined to the last inch, ruled over by the man outside whose home she sat. It was fantastic. Utterly, incredibly fantastic. Jeanne thought, "I'll wake up in a minute and find I've dreamed it all up."

But the man who leaned against the car door was very real.

Rand said quietly, "You've been swell, Lieutenant. I apologize for all the things I've ever thought about the WACs. Sorry I had to practically steal your car. It was—" He broke off, looking at her appealingly. "Well, anyway—thanks."

A vagrant moonbeam lighted the camellia like purity of Jeanne's skin into a satiny luster, lit the liquid brown eyes, and focused, on her soft, red lips.

Rand Spencer stared, fascinated, and then, abruptly, his head was inside the car window and his lips had come down on hers and he was kissing her, expertly and thoroughly.

"Stuffed shirt eh?" he asked at last, and his head bent forward again.

At first she was too stunned to move. She just sat there like—like a bump on a log, she thought afterward. But the second kiss was worse than that. She'd been kissed before, heaven knew, but she'd never before had the world turn upside down like this. Never before had her heart raced as though it would shake her to pieces. Never before had her lips cling as they were clinging now.

He leaved her finally and stood staring down at her. "Good Lord," he said feebly. He wore an astonished, bewildered look.

He started to say something more, evidently thought the better of it, and strode off toward the dark house.

"Idiot," Jeanne told herself. "You should have slapped him!"

She raged at herself as she went around the silent house.

CHAPTER TWO

Out of Bounds

SHE did not, after all, spend the night on the Post. It was long past "lights out," very late—or very early—when she stopped before Jason's square, old-fashioned house. But lights still shone in the living room and Jason himself, attired in a voluminous bathrobe, opened the door before she could ring.

Jeanne stared at him. Jason stared right back. She had the uncomfortable feeling that his shrewd blue eyes were looking right through her head, into her mind. She had not yet thought of any excuse to account for her presence there at such an hour. She said feebly, "I—I changed my mind."

Jason smiled, his ruddy face assuming a cherubic expression. "Come in, my dear. I've been expecting you."

"But how could you?" Jeanne demanded. "I didn't know . . . I mean . . ."

"I know what you mean." Jason grinned. He started briskly toward the kitchen. "Come on out. I've hot chocolate on the stove. Make you sleep like a baby," he promised.

Jeanne followed Jason. Not for hot chocolate, but for information. Jason stood beside the stove, pouring steaming liquid into cups. He asked casually, "Did you get Patty home all right?"

"Did I . . ." she stared at him in astonishment. She knew there was very little that went on about the post that Jason did not know about. But this! She said accusingly, "How did you know?"

Jason smiled his cherubic smile. He said slangily, "Oh, I get around," and chuckled at her bewildered expression. "I was with Rand when Ted Malone phoned him from the Blue Parrot."

So it wasn't the first time that Patty had been taken home in like fashion. Jeanne had suspected it wasn't. Everything moved with too clocklike precision. But if Jason knew it—how many others knew?

"Why do you do it?" she asked slowly. "Protect her, like that."

Jason glanced at her sharply and set the steaming cups on the table. "We don't protect her, Jeanne," he said. "We simply

close our eyes to as much as we can. Patty Winters is very spoiled. Sometimes I think it is even more than that. But her father adores her. She's an only child. Her mother died when she was born. All that sort of thing. Her father doesn't even suspect.

"Piggy Winters is a valuable man," he went on. "Particularly right now. More than that, he is one of the best loved officers in the Army." He added meaningfully, "Rand Spencer idolizes him."

She had an impulse to hide from those shrewd blue eyes. Jason had helped raise her. He knew things. She felt now as though Rand Spencer had left an indelible mark on her lips—there for anyone to read.

She said, "I thought Rand's interest was a more personal one."

"In the slang of the day . . . could be," said Jason. "Rand hangs around." He looked at her sharply. "Piggy Winters has been like a father to Rand. He helped him get his appointment to West Point. He practically raised him from a pup. Naturally, it's been Piggy's dearest hope that Rand and Patty would marry."

"His hope?" Jeanne repeated. "Then they're not. . . ."

"Not yet," Jason interrupted cheerfully. "We've been expecting it any time, though."

She understood him all right. She was being warned again. First Tony, now Jason. She thought, they needn't worry. Tomorrow she would be back at the Post. She would be assigned to her new duties, and she would probably never see the people of tonight's drama. She assured herself she didn't want to. She didn't like them. Particularly, she didn't like Rand Spencer.

Preparing for bed, she scrubbed her lips hard. She wished unhappily that she could forget the feel of his lips against hers.

Jeanne was perfectly right. There was no reason the next morning to suppose that her path would cross either Tony's or Rand's. The Post was a huge one. One of the largest in the country. It stretched for miles on either side of the highway. Across flat rolling hills, on desert sand under a merciless sun. There were hundreds, thousands of people in it. It was un-

likely that Jeanne would see either of them again.

Before the sleep-shattering notes of reveille had broken the early morning quiet, Jeanne had reported in to her commanding officer. She went to early morning mess and paused long enough to check her bed and locker for daily inspection. And shortly before eight o'clock she was on her way to the administration building.

The orders of the day had said, *Lt. Ames—L1579430 assgnd to dy Adm—Colonel Winters*. Which, translated meant that Lieutenant Jeanne Ames had been assigned to Administration Office under Colonel Winters. So much for the plans of men.

"Darn," thought Jeanne. But she was aware of a vast curiosity as to what kind of a man Patty's father might be, when at last she stood smartly at attention in the colonel's office. "Lieutenant Ames, reporting for duty, sir," she said quietly.

Even sitting down, Colonel Winters gave the impression of height and military bearing. His iron-gray hair matched his stiff mustache. His mouth was stern, but his eyes, under gray-flecked, heavy brows, were much the same as Jason's—shrewd and twinkling.

"At ease," said the colonel. He looked at her approvingly. Olive drab coat, and skirt of a lighter shade, each lapel of her jacket glittering with a round brass insignia, the bright blue star of his own division on each shoulder tab. Her tawny hair neat under her cap, brown eyes steady, small tanned hands strong and efficient.

"By jove," Colonel Winters said admiringly. "You girls are wonderful.

"How long do you suppose it will be before one of you can take over my job?" he asked, and Jeanne understood right then why his men loved him.

She went to work in the big outer office that contained typewriters, filing cabinets, four clerks and a sergeant major. In a few minutes Jeanne had met them all and was at her own desk, her pencil moving with lightning precision down a long column of figures. She was very efficient. She had been to Specialist School—Administration. She had received her commission from the ranks. Time slipped away from her and it was noon before she knew it.

It was only when she became suddenly aware that the chattering typewriters were silent that she looked up to find the office almost empty—except for a man who stood before her desk, looking intently down at her.

He was very tall, his chin very square. He had violet-blue eyes and unruly, mouse-colored hair, and two shining bars on each of his shoulders. How long he had stood looking down at her, Jeanne didn't know. "Hello," said Rand Spencer.

Jeanne's heart plummeted. "H-hello," she stammered.

Rand's mouth was smiling, his blue eyes humorous. "Well," he said, as if resigned. "I guess this is it."

Jeanne stared and blushed. "What in the world are you talking about?" she demanded.

The smile on Rand's mouth deepened to a grin. "I'll tell you tonight," he said.

SHE thought of the WACs crowded day room; of the girls darning socks, writing letters, studying the soldier's handbook. The WACs were allowed to see their boy friends three times a week, in the day room, the crowded Service Club, the Post movie or sometimes for dinner in a nearby restaurant or USO.

She said weakly, "I've some letters to write."

"Put it off," he suggested. "You and I have some things to talk over."

"But . . ."

"But what?" he asked. He smiled down at her, his eyes still intent. He said, "My intentions are strictly honorable. Wolf clothing doesn't fit me."

She could not help smiling. "You're crazy," she said.

"Do you think I don't know that? Do you think I meant to fall in love with—of all things—a lady soldier?"

"But you're not . . . you can't. . . . You don't even know me," Jeanne protested.

"Is that necessary," Rand asked.

Her cheeks felt hot, her hands moist. "Yes . . . no," she said confusedly, and Rand laughed. She thought for a minute that he meant to kiss her again, right there in the office, and her cheeks grew even hotter.

He didn't. He said, "Tonight, then?"
"No."

"Why not? Not afraid, are you?"

"Of course not," Jeanne denied. "But you're engaged to Patty—or will be. I don't. . . ."

"Whatever gave you that idea?" he demanded. "Patty and I are old friends—more like brother and sister. The old man's been swell to me. I try to pay him back by keeping an eye on Patty. Didn't I tell you she doesn't approve of my watchdog tendencies?"

So the engagement was all Patty's idea, Jeanne thought, and her heart leaped strangely. She was aware that she was behaving like a schoolgirl. She asked herself, crossly, "What's the matter with me?" suspected the answer immediately and was so disturbed that she put her pencil down carefully as though afraid that it would bite her.

Rand said, smiling, "Incidentally, I have no wives tucked around, either. Up until now, no one has had any priorities on me. Now, will you go to dinner with me tonight?"

Was there a barb beneath his words? Had Tony. . . . But Rand's eyes were very intense, very earnest.

"All right. At seven."

Love at first sight? Surely, there wasn't any such thing. She thought uneasily, "What am I getting myself into?"

More than she had bargained for. She knew that before the week was out. For, whether she believed in love at first sight or not, here it was. She had spent every free moment she had with Rand Spencer and with each moment she became more and more disturbed.

He didn't rush her. He didn't say much. But he looked a lot. She couldn't object to that. Nor could she really object to the heady excitement of every meeting with him.

Nevertheless it was something of a relief to have Rand go out on maneuvers. With him gone, perhaps she would have a chance to think, and could find out just what all this inner turmoil meant.

He stopped by her desk that morning.

"How long will you be gone?" she asked him.

"Military secret. But even one day would be too long," he said fervently.

"Don't look at any uniforms while I'm gone, will you?"

She laughed.

"By the way," he said, "Patty's coming to see you. You might just keep an eye on her while I'm gone. She's promised to be good."

Typewriters chattered all around them, chairs scraped across the wooden floor, files banged.

"A hell of a place for romance," Rand grumbled.

The colonel's door opened. Two WACs marched by Jeanne's desk. Rand sighed and stood up.

"Be good, darling," he said softly, and was gone with a wave of his hand.

PATTY was waiting for her in the deserted WAC day room after Saturday noon review. She did not get up when Jeanne entered.

"Hello!" she said from the depths of the overstuffed chair.

Jeanne had not seen Patty since the night of Major Wellin's party. But this cocky child was not the girl who'd been carried, limp and helpless, in Rand's arms. Nor was she in the least embarrassed nor penitent.

Patty now wore her dark hair curled about her shoulders. She wore bobby socks and flat-heeled shoes, skirt and sweater. There was nothing of the slinkily gowned *femme fatale* about Patty, today. This was a new pose.

She said, "Rand said I should thank you for taking me home the other night."

"It was nothing," Jeanne said, embarrassed. "I didn't do anything."

"On the contrary, I thought you did all right," Patty said. "And I don't mean about taking me home, either. That was the night you met Rand, wasn't it?" she asked pointedly.

She went on, considering, "You're pretty, and as near as I can tell with that uniform, you probably have what it takes. But then, so do I!"

Jeanne gasped.

"You're probably inhibited," said Patty. "I haven't got even one inhibition. I always say just what I mean."

"I see," Jeanne said. "Well, it must make life quite interesting at times."

"Um-m-m," Patty said. She studied

Jeanne intently. "Well, let's get down to business. I suppose you know that Rand *thinks* he's in love with you. Now—how about you?"

"What?" Jeanne asked, dazed.

"Are you in love with him?" Patty demanded.

"Why I . . . I . . ."

"Inhibitions," Patty said casually. "Oh, well, skip it. It doesn't really matter whether you are or not. I'm going to do my best to make Rand change his mind. You see, I don't like being jilted!"

"But you aren't—you weren't engaged to him," Jeanne protested. "Rand said. . . ."

Patty waved away whatever Rand had said. "We would have been," she said. "Everyone expected us to marry. Everyone knows now that you . . . that he. . . ." She broke off, grinned suddenly. "Don't say I didn't warn you."

Incredible child, Jeanne thought. Or was there perhaps something besides scorn under that flippant manner? She said impulsively, "Patty, if you really cared for Rand—I'm terribly sorry. I would never. . . ." She stopped, flushing. "We didn't want it to happen, Patty. It just did. . . . Patty, couldn't we be friends? Rand thinks the world of you, and I'd like to. Look—I've got a week-end leave. I'm going to Jason's. Why don't you come with me? You might even like me if you got to know me."

Patty's head came up proudly. "Soft," she said coolly. "This is going to be almost too easy. Thanks for the invitation, but I never hobnob with the enemy. Besides, I've got a heavy date tonight."

Rand had said to keep an eye on her, "—But it's none of my business, Jeanne thought rebelliously. She didn't like prying. She asked reluctantly, "With Tony?"

"Um-m-m," said Patty. She added, "If it weren't for Rand, I could really go for Tony Drake. I think he's fascinating, don't you?"

"Like a cobra," Jeanne said wryly. "Patty, he's married!"

"So what?" Patty said. She chuckled, seeing Jeanne's shocked eyes. "You really are naïve, aren't you? Tony said you were. I didn't really believe him."

She laughed again. "Red Riding Hood and the wolf."

She stood up and said, "I've got to be going. So long, enemy."

She went out and the door closed behind her.

Jeanne thought uneasily, "Tony won't talk."

Tony himself had warned her against Patty.

JEANNE went shopping that afternoon. It wasn't much fun. Vague uneasiness went with her. She decided that perhaps she should tell Rand about Tony and Edna. She was sure—without knowing exactly why—that Rand would understand.

When she got home, she found Jason had gone for the evening to the officer's club. He had invited Jeanne to go along, but she had refused, saying she saw plenty of officers every day. They were no treat to her.

She spent the evening quietly. She washed a few clothes, darned the pile of socks she found waiting for her on Jason's bureau, and at ten o'clock she was in bed.

She had been asleep quite some time when the telephone rang. It woke her, but she let it ring awhile before she realized that Jason had not returned home yet.

She groaned and tumbled out of bed into robe and slippers and made her way downstairs, switching on lights as she went.

It was quite a while before she realized that it was Patty on the phone. A shaken, almost hysterical Patty. She could not make out what she was trying to tell her. She said sharply, "Patty, get hold of yourself. Where are you?"

Out of the unintelligible sounds that followed, Jeanne picked up the words, "The Blue Parrot."

"You've got to help me, Jeanne," Patty sobbed. "Tony's sick. I don't know what's the matter with him. He doesn't move. I don't know what to do! Jeanne, please!"

Jeanne didn't know just what she could do, either. She hesitated, but she was ashamed of the vagrant suspicion that flitted through her mind, and in the end she promised to come.

Driving out of the almost deserted, sleeping town, Jeanne thought swiftly.

As near as she had been able to make out from Patty's scrambled story, Patty and Tony had gone to the Blue Parrot earlier in the evening. They had a few drinks—but not too many, Patty insisted. Then, suddenly, Tony had complained of a pain, and before Patty knew it, he had been stretched out unconscious on the floor.

Near the fork in the road, Jeanne's headlights picked up the big sign posted for soldiers. "OUT OF BOUNDS!" Jeanne read it and shivered. "I'm a fool!" she thought tensely. Patty was nothing to her. Nor was Tony. But Rand was.

It was because of Rand that she was going to Patty. Because he thought Patty should be protected. Because he wasn't here to do it himself.

The Blue Parrot was crowded and smoke-filled, though it was past midnight. Jeanne stood hesitantly just inside the door. There was no sign of Patty. Nor of Tony. Jeanne didn't know just what she should do.

No one was paying her much attention—except the bartender, who looked up as she entered. He studied her curiously, and a moment later, apparently satisfied, he nodded to her and walked to the end of the bar.

Jeanne, her heart beating fast, followed him. She thought in panic, "I don't know what to tell him." She hadn't thought of this. She'd expected Patty to be waiting for her.

She didn't ask the bartender anything. He said, "Back here," and led her down a long and dimly lit hall. The floor was uncarpeted, the air close. Jeanne shivered distastefully.

The bartender stopped before a closed door. "You going to take him out of here yourself?" he asked.

"Oh, no," Jeanne said hastily. "Patty—that is, my friend, will help."

"Well. . . ." He looked at her dubiously. "There's a back door," he said, nodding to the end of the long hall. "You can use that."

There was no sound from inside the room. Jeanne knocked lightly, her forehead creased in a frown. Then her hand touched the knob. It turned easily under her fingers and the door swung open. She stepped in, and the bartender stood in the doorway.

THE small room was only sparsely furnished. There were several hard chairs, a table, and several glasses. Tony sat on one of the chairs, his head cradled on one arm that was flung across the table. The other hand hung limply to the floor. There was no sign of Patty.

Jeanne moved into the room. "Patty?" she called softly.

Jeanne bit her lip in perplexity. Where was Patty? Had she become too frightened and left Jeanne to take care of Tony alone?

She went back to Tony. She bent over him and raised his head, more frightened than she would have admitted. Tony lay like a dead person. His face was waxlike, with no sign of life. Jeanne felt his head, and tried to find the pulse in his limp arm. Then she shook him.

"Tony!" she ordered sharply. "Tony, wake up!"

He didn't open his eyes, but the force of her hands on his shoulders brought his head up from the table. He slumped sideways, his head coming to rest on her shoulder. A glass moved under his inert arm, overturned and spilled its contents on Jeanne's skirt.

As though she weren't frightened enough, it was at this instant that a woman shoved past the bartender.

"Pat. . . ." Jeanne began explosively, and then stopped, staring at the woman who stood there.

"So it's you again," said Edna Drake and her blazing eyes like dagger points held Jeanne pinned where she was. "I might have known it would be. You couldn't leave him alone, could you? You even followed him right into the Army!" she said, looking at Jeanne's uniform.

Jeanne tried to speak—and couldn't. Her tongue seemed to be stuck to the roof of her mouth. Vaguely, she realized the bartender had gone, while through her mind were marching the facts she had so painfully learned about Edna Drake two years ago.

Edna was much older than Tony. She had married him shortly after the death of her first husband. There were those who said that Tony had married her for the money her first husband had left. Whether it was true or not, Edna herself apparently believed it.

From the very first she tortured herself and Tony with her jealousy. She might have been pretty once. She wasn't now. Jealousy had etched lines in her face that make-up could not remove. Her lips were thin, vindictive. You knew instinctively when you saw her that Edna Drake would give no quarter in a quarrel.

"I've had Tony followed for weeks," she said. "He knew it. Somehow he always managed to give me the slip. I'm surprised he didn't tell you."

He hadn't told her. She hadn't been with him. But Patty. . . . Jeanne found her tongue suddenly. "I haven't seen him," she said coldly. "Believe it or not, I've seen your husband only once since. . . ." She hesitated. "Well, since that time two years ago. I came here tonight because he was with a—a friend of mine."

There was hardly any hesitation before her definition of Patty. "Tony complained of a pain," she went on. "A short time later, he was unconscious. My friend lost her head. She didn't know what to do. She called me, and here I am." She looked at Edna defiantly. "Now that you're here to take care of him, I'll be going."

Edna laughed mirthlessly. "Just like that, eh?" she said, and added vehemently, "You wait!"

Jeanne watched, fascinated, as Edna bent over the unconscious form of her husband, who was still leaning against Jeanne's shoulder. She pulled at his eyelids, sniffed audibly, and straightened up. "Drunk," she said bitterly.

"You don't believe me?" Jeanne asked. "I'll get the bartender—"

"No one would believe a story like that. No one will!"

Jeanne was thinking fast. She asked, "How did you happen to come here tonight?"

Edna shrugged. "Someone phoned. Anonymous, of course," she said grimly. "It was worth looking into."

There was a knock at the door and a moment later Rand Spencer entered the room. His blue eyes were blazing. He looked at Jeanne—at Tony. He said nothing, but his eyes said a lot.

They stared at each other, a long moment. Jeanne spoke first, and she said

the wrong thing. "What are you doing here?" she asked. "You're supposed to be on maneuvers."

"I got through," Rand said. "I called your uncle's house. Patty answered. She knew you were out with Tony. It was very late, and Patty was worried."

So Patty was at Jason's. And she was worried, was she? Probably anxious to see how her little frame-up was working. From all appearances it was doing all right. First Edna—now Rand.

She had only to look at Rand's face to know that he was furious. He said, angrily, "How did you ever get yourself mixed up in this?"

Jeanne stiffened at his tone. He was jumping at conclusions, not giving her a chance. "Poor Rand," she mocked him. "You seem doomed to always rescue damsels in distress. First Patty—now me!"

Edna Drake moved restlessly. "I don't know who this Patty is," she said, "but I do know that this is one spot no one is going to rescue you from. I'm going to see your commanding officer in the morning," she said with grim relish. "Nice of you to join the WACs, Miss Ames. You've made it very easy for me."

"But you can't do that," Rand said staring. "You don't understand."

"Oh, don't I?" Edna Drake asked. "I think I understand perfectly."

"Who is she?" Rand demanded of Jeanne.

Jeanne told him. She thought furiously, "I won't cry. I won't make any bigger fool of myself than I already have," and immediately tasted salt in her mouth. She thought, "If he can believe this of me—if he can't trust me. . . ."

"Now wait a minute," Rand was saying. "Let's talk this over. Jeanne. . . ."

"You talk it over," Jeanne said coldly. "I've heard enough. I'm going home." Home where Patty was. Home where she could shame the truth out of Patty. She'd make her explain that she was the girl with Tony when he'd drunk too much.

Jeanne moved away from the table and Tony slid sideways to the floor. She went past Edna and Rand, down the narrow, dark hall. Behind her she could hear Rand's low voice and Edna's shrill one raised in argument.

CHAPTER THREE

"Choose Your Weapons, Ladies!"

THE night air felt cool on her hot cheeks. She ought to have been worrying about Edna's threat to see the commandant, and all she could think of was Rand, standing by her, but not believing her. "I won't care if I never see him again," she thought. But before she had even reached the highway, the rear-view mirror had picked up twin headlights.

Jeanne stepped hard on the gas pedal, but the mirror did not lose the oncoming headlights. He had stopped the car, was out on the sidewalk in front of Jason's house before Jeanne could set her own emergency and open the door.

He said, "Why didn't you tell me you were seeing Drake?"

Jeanne eyed him coldly. "Because I haven't been seeing him," she snapped. And she added, "Not that it's any of your business."

"I thought it was," Rand Spencer said, and Jeanne thought she had never before noticed how square his jaw was. "You know how I feel about you. I thought you . . . oh, skip it." Then he said glumly, "I'll try to see the colonel tonight, or the first thing in the morning. Not that it'll be necessary," he added hastily. "I don't think Mrs. Drake will do anything—after she cools off."

"You don't know Edna," Jeanne said.

If she couldn't shake the truth out of Patty, it would almost certainly mean court-martial, possibly a dishonorable discharge. Jeanne shivered.

"How you could have been so stupid as to walk right into this after what happened two years ago, beats me," Rand said.

"Oh! So you know about that, too?" Jeanne asked, and her voice was dangerously soft.

"Patty told me."

"Oh, of course—Patty," said Jeanne. She laughed almost hysterically. "Jeanne, the home-wrecker. I told you once that you didn't know me, Rand." Abruptly her laughter died. "I guess it works both ways," she said soberly. "I guess I didn't know you either."

He said, "I don't know what you're talking about."

"Ask Patty," she suggested. She was suddenly very tired. "That's what I intend to do," she said grimly, and went past him, up the walk.

JASON was waiting for her.

"Jeanne what is this all about?" he demanded.

His usually cherubic face was anxious.

"Is Patty here?" Jeanne asked him.

"Upstairs," Jason told her. "She said you'd invited her. I didn't know what it was all about. I put her in your room."

Jeanne nodded. She went past him, up the stairs, like a small avenging angel. Patty was a brat. She was completely outrageous. She was everything anyone had ever said about her. But if she thought for one instant that Jeanne would take this lying down, she was due to be sadly disappointed.

Jeanne opened the door of her own room and went in. The pretty room was softly lit. Patty sat cross-legged on the bed, an open magazine across her knees. She wore childish blue cotton pajamas with a round collar. A bright pink ribbon perched perkily in her dark hair and her hazel eyes were very bright and very wide-awake.

Closing the door, Jeanne stood leaning against it, her arms folded.

Patty was far from abashed. She smiled and said softly, "Hello, enemy!"

"You framed it," Jeanne said. "You called Edna. You told Rand. You must have done something to Tony. Probably slipped something in his drink."

Patty nodded. "Commonly called a mickey," she said, and laughed as though it were funny. "I'll bet he's surprised," she said.

Patty's ready admission threw Jeanne off guard. "But . . . why?" she demanded.

Patty stretched and yawned. She said, "Edna doesn't like you. Seems as though you were the only one of Tony's playmates she ever caught. The others knew their way around. So she's been hanging all her spite on you for two years. I thought—well, if she caught you again. . . ." Then she said meditatively, "You should have left Rand alone."

Jeanne said grimly, "Edna's going to your father tomorrow morning to tell him I did it!"

Patty shrugged. "I thought she would. She won't divorce Tony. She'd rather make him miserable. Either way," she said pointedly, "she'll get rid of you!"

"If you think for one instant that I'll protect you, you're crazy," Jeanne said slowly. "I'll tell them everything!"

Patty shrugged, unconcerned. "My word against yours," she said. "And he's my father," she pointed out.

There was a constriction in Jeanne's throat. Patty was not just a brat. She was utterly horrible. There wasn't a weak spot in her anywhere.

"There's Tony!" Jeanne said, but even as she spoke, she realized it was a forlorn hope.

"Tony won't talk," Patty said scornfully. "He's never faced anything unpleasant in his life. And the bartender won't talk—he'd be afraid to get mixed up in it."

For a long time Jeanne stared at her. And at last Patty's eyes faltered and dropped, and her mouth turned sulky. She said nothing, and at last Jeanne turned to go.

EDNA DRAKE was already in the colonel's office when at last the summons came for Jeanne. She sat beside the colonel's desk, dramatically gowned in black, a handkerchief pressed against her eyes. Obviously, she had already told her story, coloring it to suit herself.

Rand was there, his face white beneath its tan. And last, but not least, a young man in khaki sat beside a table, pencil and notebook before him.

Jeanne saw him and shivered. She stood stiffly at attention. "Lieutenant Ames reporting, sir."

Colonel Winters looked up. His face was stern, his blue eyes uncompromising. He did not ask her to sit down. "You know the charges, Lieutenant?"

"Yes, sir," Jeanne said.

The colonel sat back, studying her face. "They're pretty serious charges, Lieutenant. Suppose you tell me your side of them."

She told him. The same story she had told Edna the night before.

"When I reached the Blue Parrot," Jeanne finished slowly, "my friend was not there. I went into the room. Tony—Mr. Drake, was sitting at the table, his head slumped on his arms. There was no sign of—my friend. And then, Mrs. Drake came in. She—she jumped at conclusions." She stopped, drawing a long breath. Her fingers clenched until the knuckles showed white. "That's all, I guess!"

Colonel Winters was studying her face. He was a good friend of Jason's. She knew he wanted to believe her, but she also knew it would not sway his final judgment. "Your friend's name?" he asked.

And here it was. The thing she had been dreading. She, of all people, had no reason to protect Patty. To keep silent meant certain disgrace. "My word against hers," Jeanne thought hazily.

Colonel Winters was waiting. Rand was waiting. She had only to say two words.

She drew a deep breath. She opened her mouth—and closed it again, the dreadful words still unsaid. She simply couldn't do it. It wasn't Patty who held her back. It was Colonel Winters himself. What was it Jason had said? That this man was invaluable. She wasn't. She said, swallowing hard, "I—I guess. . . ." She closed her lips firmly to stop their trembling.

Rand moved, then. He came around the colonel's desk and his hand gripped her arm. "Jeanne, for heaven's sake, tell him," he ordered.

"Loyalty is a wonderful thing," Colonel Winters said. "But sometimes it can be misplaced, Lieutenant Ames."

His voice was soft and very kind. Jeanne did not dare look at him. She kept her eyes on a point just above the colonel's head. "Yes, sir," she said.

Two words unsaid, she thought despairingly. They meant Rand would never know about Patty. They meant a file in Washington—perhaps a dishonorable discharge. For as long as she lived, that file would be kept. It would follow her everywhere. You could never explain it away.

More than that, they meant that Rand was lost to her—forever. An officer's wife, like Caesar's wife, must be above

suspicion. At that moment, the future looked very, very dark to Lieutenant Jeanne Ames.

The colonel was eyeing her shrewdly. He said, "I've known your uncle a great many years, Jeanne. We went to school together, fought in the first world war. This will be very hard on him, you know."

Jeanne swallowed painfully. She said nothing. Her eyes never wavered from the point above his head.

Colonel Winters sighed. "You're leaving me no alternative except to send you before the board," he said softly. "You understand that?"

Why didn't he get it over with? She couldn't stand much more. She said, "Yes, sir."

The colonel sighed and picked up his pen. There was silence inside his office, but outside there was sudden noise. A voice was raised in protest, footsteps sounded on the bare floor and the door opened just as the colonel leaned forward to write. "One more chance, Jeanne," he said sternly. "Who was the girl with Tony Drake last night?"

"It was I," said a voice in the doorway.

In the shocked silence that followed her abrupt entry, Patty closed the door behind her. Her head was held proudly high. Her gaze swept each face defiantly. All save one. She did not look at her father. She said quietly. "I was the girl with Tony last night, dad."

IT was less than a week later that Jeanne stood on the small open platform of the Paso Robles station, her small hand trunk beside her.

She was very trim and neat in her olive

drab uniform, the tawny hair correctly clearing the collar of her uniform.

She was being transferred. Where, she didn't know. Her orders were only to report to a unit on the East Coast. There was no black mark against her record. Colonel Winters had seen to that. "You're a good soldier, Jeanne," he had said gruffly. And he had added heavily, "Jason can be proud of you."

None of it had helped much. She had not heard from Rand since that day in the colonel's office.

Just what had happened between Patty and her father, no one ever knew. But it was generally rumored that Patty was going away. No one had seen her since the day she'd walked into her father's office—unless it was Rand Spencer.

But even that thought couldn't stir much bitterness in Jeanne's heart now. Patty had been all the things she had thought her. But she had been something rather fine, too.

It had taken courage to walk into her father's office that day.

Out of the corner of her eye Jeanne looked at the tall man in officer's uniform and the small, dark-haired girl. Rand was going back into the station and Patty was coming straight toward her.

"Hello!" Patty said almost shyly. "I've been wanting to see you," she went on in a rush, not waiting for Jeanne to speak. "I—I wanted to tell you how sorry I am, about everything."

Jeanne said nothing. She couldn't say it was all right. It wasn't! She was leaving her first post because of Patty. She had had to endure the curious glances of the other officers. She had lost Rand. But Patty was waiting and Jeanne said

This Year Give
**WAR
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*He's Fighting for
You. Buy a Christmas
War Bond for Him*

quickly, "It's water under the bridge, Patty. Let's forget about it."

"I don't think I'll ever forget it," Patty said quietly. "I guess I shouldn't. That's what dad says." She flushed. She said with difficulty, "I'd like to be—friends. I wish we could start all over, Jeanne." She looked away. "I'm leaving next week, you know. I . . . I've enlisted in the WACs. I wanted you to know." She met Jeanne's astonished stare, and grinned, a flash of the old, impudent Patty's grin. "Private Winters," she said. "Next time I see you I'll have to salute."

"But that's wonderful," Jeanne said warmly. "You'll like it, Patty. And they'll like you, too," she added. She was thinking that in the WACs Patty would find her niche as nowhere else. She'd turn her brilliant mind, her Army background into something constructive, and there would be no further need for Colonel Winters to worry. Nor Rand either, she reminded herself.

"Next week, Patty?" she asked slowly. "Then you aren't leaving on this train?"

"No. Rand is," Patty said and smiled at Jeanne's blank, "Oh!"

"He's being transferred."

Patty hesitated, then said swiftly, "I don't suppose I should tell you, but I think he's going across." She looked at Jeanne defiantly as though afraid she would protest against her giving away a military secret.

"I—I think you should know . . . Rand refused me last night." Patty said it quickly.

Patty—mercurial, tempestuous Patty. Patty the magnificent.

Jeanne found her voice. "Patty!" she said, but Patty was already disappearing around the little yellow station.

Someone touched her arm and Jeanne turned blindly. He was very tall.

He said, smiling a little anxiously, "I'm Rand Spencer. Remember me?"

Jeanne looked up at him. She couldn't speak. Her heart seemed to have slipped its moorings and was pounding in her throat, getting all mixed up with her breathing.

"I came to apologize," Rand said anxiously. "To ask you if you could forgive me."

Jeanne's soft lips quivered. She couldn't seem to get any words past her paralyzed throat. "For what?" she asked at last.

"For believing—or thinking I believed that you . . . that Tony. . . ." He stopped, looking at her pleadingly. "I didn't really, you know. Not even when I saw it with my own eyes. I was jealous. Of Tony," he explained. "Sometimes when a man sees things with his heart instead of his eyes, he gets a little mixed up," he said slowly.

There was the sudden blast of a train whistle nearby, the sound of wheels rushing along steel rails. It swept everything out of Jeanne's mind but the thing that Patty had told her. She said accusingly, "You're going overseas."

Rand stared down at her, his face puzzled. "You jump around so, Jeannie," he complained. "But I think so. Isn't it swell?"

"No!" she said violently. "It isn't swell at all."

He would be in constant danger.

He stared down at her, and his eyes were very blue. "And that means. . . ." He stopped and looked around him.

There were a great many more people on the platform now.

"No privacy," he grumbled, but he didn't hesitate. His arms opened and closed, sweeping her against him.

After all, what were railroad stations for? People are forever kissing one another hello and good-by in them. There was nothing very unusual in a young man in uniform kissing a pretty girl. Not nowadays.

But there must have been something pretty special about this kiss. It went on for a very long time, and close by a soldier whistled. Jeanne and Rand didn't hear him.

Not even when a moment later, Rand raised his head briefly. Jeanne's eyes were suspiciously bright as she stared up at him.

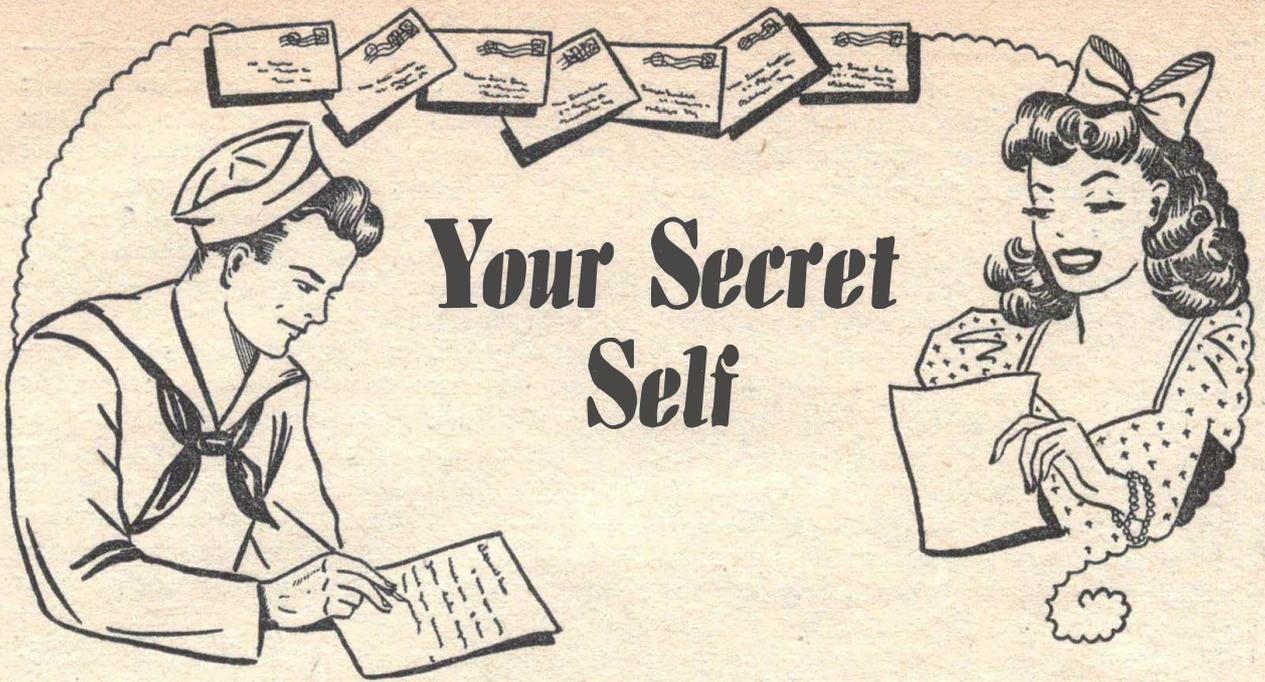
"By the way," Rand said huskily. "Will you marry me, Lieutenant?"

"Why?" Jeanne asked, smiling.

He looked surprised. "Didn't I ever mention that I loved you?" he asked.

Jeanne shook her head, wordless.

"Well I do," Rand said, and bent his head to kiss her again.



Your Secret Self

By **NAIIA ANDREYEFF**

Noted Handwriting Analyst

Would you like to know how you can be happy, popular, successful? Handwriting tells many secrets about you and your friends. It reveals hidden talents, abilities, faults and good qualities. It reflects personality, temperament, disposition and emotional make-up. It tells whether or not you can be happy with the one you love and how you can make a success of marriage.

Take advantage of this offer, especially if you have a problem. For a personal reply, send six lines of handwriting, in ink, and a self-addressed, stamped envelope to Naiia Andreyeff, All Fiction Field, 210 E. 42nd St., New York 17, N. Y. with ten cents in stamps or currency.

ONE of the important requisites for popularity and success in either business, social contacts, friendship or love is the ability to keep our emotions under control, instead of allowing them to confuse and run us ragged.

Emotionality has been described as "the inability to control the feelings that are born of the heart and respond to kindness, tenderness, idealism, as well as to fear, hate and any favorable or adverse excitement," and so on. All of which simply adds up to the fact that most of us are sensitive and responsive to the interest, friendliness and affection on the part of others, or to their indifference and dislike of us, and to conditions and situations around us.

It is easy to tell from handwriting if a person is impressionable and readily disturbed emotionally. The handwriting will contain sudden, quick strokes that appear

to be without direction. In some handwritings several different slants will be noticed in nearly every word. Some of the letters will slant forward, others to the left, and still others will be upright. T bars are likely to be uneven and the t's crossed as if the writer had been indifferent or too much in a hurry to make them at all. As for i dots, they're likely to be a mixture of dots and short dashes placed hither and yon in the vicinity of that letter. The pen pressure too, will be uneven.

When you see these signs in any handwriting, and you don't have to be an expert to notice them, you can safely bet a war stamp that the writer is no cold fish but subject to emotional changes.

Do you let every little disturbance affect and upset you? Are you an all-out softie, or do you use your common sense and cold logic when someone's working on your sympathy? Are you affectionate, or slight-

ly on the iceberg side? These traits, as well as many other indications of your personality and character that make up the real YOU, are clearly evident in your handwriting.

HOWEVER, don't be alarmed. Although handwriting analysis can scale the wall you may have painstakingly built to conceal your secret self from the eyes of others, your handwriting does not reveal this self to your friends or acquaintances, but only to the trained eye of a handwriting analyst. And you can always be sure that your confidence will not be betrayed. Handwriting analysts take professional pride in their work, like doctors and lawyers.

Getting back to the subject of emotions, if you are of the emotional type, an analysis of your handwriting can help you to exercise better control over your emotions, tell you what faults to soft pedal, what good qualities to make the most of. And

If it leans to the right, as in sample number one, you can be sure that the writer is never cold or indifferent, even if at first he does not appear to be particularly responsive. He is more sensitive to influences and conditions around him than if his handwriting were of the up-and-down kind.

People whose handwriting slants forward have no trouble in showing their affection and friendliness, once the preliminaries are over. If other signs in the handwriting show that they are sensitive and self-conscious, they may at times appear aloof, but such is not really the case and sooner or later they thaw out of their own accord.

Some of us are naturally more affectionate than others. In some people, the desire and the ability to love is more developed and the emotions are more intense when expressing affection. When such is the case, the handwriting will slant quite a bit to the right, and the pen pressure will

*I analyze the hand-
of mine and the man*

#1

an analysis of the handwriting of someone you love, or people who interest or puzzle you, will prove invaluable if you are anxious to know them better.

Does all this sound as if handwriting analysis must be attempted only by a chosen few? Don't you believe it. I must admit that it takes time and study to acquire a thorough knowledge of this fascinating subject. But nearly anyone can easily learn to recognize various characteristics almost at a glance.

If, for instance, you want to find out whether or not the person whose handwriting interests you is affectionate, notice if the writing leans to the right or to the left, or if it is up and down.

be moderate, even and firm. Sample number one shows the slant of handwriting which is used more often than other slants, and shows a normal degree of affection as well as well-balanced emotions.

Up-and-down style of handwriting shows that the head rules the heart at all times. No matter what such writers feel, they are rarely demonstrative. I don't mean they go around with chips on their shoulders and are cold to all advances of friendliness.

They may be loyal, sincere, have good judgment and remain steady in their love for those who are close to them; they are protective and also possessive, but they never make a fuss. They keep their feel-

*most of my talking on paper.
takes up most of my spare*

#2

ings to themselves, and it is hard to figure out from their attitude what their emotional reactions are. Some people who write an up-and-down hand are not always deeply affected by their emotions.

Love and joy give them more mental than emotional satisfaction and pleasure. Grief they take in their stride; disappointment is met with the philosophical observation that it will pass. They are too practical not to snap out of any unpleasantness and usually get busy finding the ways and

constant change. Usually they are very likable and good mixers, since the variety of emotions, ideas and impulses help them to understand other people.

The back-hand writer, if the handwriting leans as much to the left as most people's handwriting leans to the right, is not easy to know. He is easier to become acquainted with than those whose writing is up and down, but his whole make-up is more complicated.

Back-hand writers, however, are not

about having my hand
analysed before but I

#3

means to remedy any depressing matters.

Perhaps all this sounds as if people who use the up-and-down style have no feelings at all. This isn't true. They do feel; they are just as sensitive and easily hurt as those who use other slants, only they try harder to be practical and see no advantage in crying over the proverbial spilt-milk idea.

There are people who run hot and cold. They have a hard time concentrating on one thing at a time. Their emotions change often, and they appear hard to understand. Often they seem like three or four people rolled into one. They jump from one thing to another. They like one person

cold. They are, in most cases, ardent, emotional, affectionate, imaginative and even original. But more often than not, you'd never guess it. They are inclined to suffer from all sorts of inhibitions and live a great deal within themselves. It is difficult for them to express their thoughts, feelings, dreams, ambitions and longings, though they do feel at home with kindred souls.

Although they are likely to appear distant and even unfriendly, sometimes to the point of snobbishness, they have much charm of personality and are interesting. Their temperament is such that they crave and demand the affection of those they

kind as to tell me
my inner characteristics

#4

for his smile, another for the tone of his voice, and so on. They are not happy people. Their reactions are so varied that happiness often plays hide and seek with them. Most of us know at least one person of this type.

Generally, their handwriting will contain all sorts of slants, as shown in sample number three. They would fare much better if they made a serious effort to control their emotions and the desire for

love, and yet do not seem to return it themselves. They have the capacity to feel, but, as I said before, lack ease of expression. They are often moody. On the heights one day, in the depths the next.

Every letter that is formed by the strokes of the pen has definite meaning. It tells innumerable things about your personality, character, abilities. Do you know what your good points are? If you're in love, is the person you love the type whose

nature harmonizes with your own? Are you the proverbial square peg in a round hole and wonder to what type of work you're best suited? Your handwriting is an infallible guide. I'll be waiting to hear from you.

To Bunny J., New Jersey.

Judging from your handwritings, both you and your boy friend are well above the average in intellect, and I'm sure that personally you have no trouble in getting along well either with each other or with other people. Bill's writing shows that he has a quick mind and keen perceptions. He is sympathetic, and some people succeed in imposing upon him, but if he finds out that they have taken advantage of his good nature for selfish purposes, he is quick to express his opinion. If he likes

who are much alike in their mental and emotional make-up should not marry, and that only opposites will remain interested in and continue to be attracted to each other. But from past experience in dealing with hundreds of problems of this kind, it seems to me that the more two people have in common the better is their chance to avoid the breaks and clashes that opposites run into.

Your handwriting further shows that you are sensitive, have sound reasoning ability, are conscientious, thorough and dependable. You have a quiet self-confidence, and use your ingenuity to gain whatever objective you set your mind upon. If Bill is the number one man on your list, and you are certain that it's real love between you, the rest should cause you no worry. Here's wishing you both lots of luck and happiness!

*But wondered if he is suited to
Bunny
me tomorrow.. Tell me I'll*

Bill

someone, he doesn't believe in keeping it a secret. He is affectionate, demonstrative, and ready to do all he can for the happiness of those who are dear to him.

He has a pleasing and likable personality, a lively imagination, and now and then he can't help indulging in building air castles. But we can't hold that against him. Life without a few daydreams would be rather drab and uninteresting. We all have our secret wishes.

An equally affectionate nature is indicated by your own handwriting. In many respects, temperamentally and in your dispositions you might have been poured out of the same mould. And yet I don't think that you ever bore each other. Some people are of the opinion that those

F. W. S., Illinois.

I don't think that you are very much misplaced in your present line of business, but your handwriting shows that you possess much more individuality than the average person, man or woman, has in the drug line. However, this trait probably contributes greatly toward your making a real success of your efforts.

You have really commendable sales ability, despite the fact that this is sometimes clouded by your quick temper and argumentative temperament. If I may suggest it, it would be to your advantage to curb this. Your handwriting shows a strong and forceful personality, good business ability, and it is no doubt due to your

*which your articles I
and I would appreciate*

F. W. S.

vivacity, facility and ease of expression, that you often wonder whether or not you are in the proper line of business.

For a woman, you have very strong convictions and much determination, and also some executive ability. You are interested keenly in life and people and events around you. You enjoy material comforts, and are practical, and you also have much self-confidence.

Frances R., California.

Of your two friends, Fred's handwriting shows that he is temperamentally and emotionally much better suited to a person

you've settled down together after the war. He's not the type to willfully forget to kiss you good-by in the morning and hello in the evening.

Your own handwriting shows a livelier imagination than Fred's, and also that you're inclined to be a little quick-tempered. But considering the characteristics as they are indicated by both handwritings, you two should get along fine.

Jack's handwriting reveals a nature that is affectionate enough, but he is sometimes unreasonable, like a pampered child, and he's not much the go-getter type. After all, when a girl marries, she wants

Tell me if he is sincere

Frances

will be waiting for you.

Fred

to write to you since I got here so

Jack

of your disposition than Jack. You and Fred are about equally emotional and demonstrative, sympathetic, kind-hearted, sensible and generous.

Fred may at times seem easy going, but that is only because he is a kind and genial soul, eager to do all he can to make those he loves happy. He is equally considerate of his friends and associates. He may be depended upon to interest himself in his home and family life, when

to feel that the man of her choice has the backbone and the ambition that make a good provider. And I'm sorry to say that Jack's type of person, when not supplied with plenty of money, has a hard time making a success.

I'm casting my vote for Fred, but of course, the final decision rests with you and on the fact that you and Fred are convinced beyond doubt that it's the real thing.

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RICHARDS



"Seven years' bad luck!" Belle said, as she let fall the compact she'd borrowed from Megan.

Moon Over CAIRO

CHAPTER ONE

"Let's Begin All Over Again"

AS SOON as Megan had left her luggage in the room she had reserved by cable at Shephard's Hotel, she drove straight to the big new Allied base hospital—and Alick. Leaning back in the taxi, she lit a cigarette and reflected how little Cairo had changed since her last visit. It scarcely looked like a city at war at all. It seemed, oddly, remote and safe; sheltered and out of things.

There was less civilian bustle in the streets, and many more uniforms. There were more staff cars and jeeps and fewer limousines but there were still the fezzed magnates and Levantine millionaires at the café tables; the streets were still wide and dusty and whitely sun-smitten.

Perhaps, she thought, there *had* been raids and bombings but the shimmering buildings were scarcely pocked at all and the palm fronds still cut their dignified shadows across the carved façades. All the action here was desk action, administrative action. Megan wasn't quite sure she liked the atmosphere.

Cairo had always seemed faintly unreal to her. It was more unreal than ever now.

She paid off the driver and went up the broad hospital steps. Inside, everything

*She tried every road to the Future, and found
none open except the long road back*

was shadowy and cool; all movement was muted and formal, with that hushed expectancy that seems almost to live. Megan, remembering the bloody, heroic frenzy of hospitals on the Chinese and Russian fronts, recalling the anguish and stench and fever of Corregidor and Bataan, lifted her poised, tawny head a little scornfully.

The blue-uniformed sister at the reception desk looked at her doubtfully, even after Megan had given her name. Dr. Vernon was in Ward E-12, but he was always busy at this time in the afternoon, and the sister wasn't at all sure that he would be able to see Miss Graham now.

"He'll see me," Megan assured her. "We're going to be married, you know. We haven't seen each other in over two years and I'm sure he'd be very distressed if I didn't go to him immediately." She smiled and sailed smoothly around the desk.

You don't travel to the trouble spots of the world at war for more than twenty-five months without learning to recognize at sight which sentinels can be safely bypassed and which not. At least, if you do, you're not Megan Graham, blond, trimly assured; dubbed variously the Playgirl of Page One and Princess of the Press; with a seven minute interview with Stalin safely under your belt before you're twenty-two.

Of course, you don't get to be Megan Graham all by yourself. Your father has to be the owner of one of the four top press services in the world, and you have to have spent a good part of your childhood perched precociously on the laps of the great and the near-great. Inheriting, too, your father's news sense and your mother's beauty doesn't harm your career either.

But you can be all that, and author of the best-selling: "A Girl Reporter Looks the War in the Eye" to boot, and you can still carry around a lonely ache inside. The way Megan Graham was lonely now. For Alick.

The way she wanted to be just Alick's Meg, with his arms around her, his gentle, stubborn, sensitive face close to hers; the warmth of his mouth on her own. Somehow, Alick seemed a safe and wonderful harbor. And Megan was weary.

As she went clicketing down the hall it suddenly seemed to her that she had made

the long and difficult hop from London to Cairo only to see him. This wasn't strictly true. She was on assignment and as a matter of fact hadn't even been certain that Alick was still there until she'd reported to *Global News* on her arrival.

But he was here—tall, calm, wonderful Alick; and in minutes, seconds now, she would be seeing him.

Yet with her hand on his office door, she hesitated a moment, almost in panic. Two years was forever. Hasty notes and dashed-off cables can scarcely bridge so long a separation. Suppose her Alick had changed? Suppose, seeing him, she found that *she* had? But it couldn't be. Alick had been a part of her world ever since her Nob Hill girlhood when he had been the second gardener's red-headed, freckle-faced boy; bony and eager and coltish, burning with a driving ambition, even then, to become a doctor.

"You were my shining princess in those days," he'd told her later with his lips against her hair. "You are now, and you'll always be its princess."

He'd said that, the night he'd told her he was going into the medical corps. He'd wanted to be married as soon as he was in the Service. So had Megan. But things had happened too fast, and before these two sweethearts in a world fighting to survive, knew what had happened, they were half that world apart.

Now he was Major Alick Vernon, with a D. S. C. he seldom wore, a surgeon, and also credited with important discoveries in the advancement of therapy in shell shock.

And now there was only that door between them. . . .

Swiftly, her breath catching, she pushed the door wide, and stepped into his darkly quiet office.

THE blinds had been pulled, and overhead the electric fan turned its sluggish blades. Lying on a couch, his head turned the other way, was a young soldier in a red hospital robe. Alick was bent over him, talking to him.

The sight of Alick sent a warm little flood of joy through her.

When he looked up and saw her, his face didn't light with the happiness she'd prayed to see. He didn't get up and rush

to gather her in his arms the way, a million times, she'd planned for it to happen. The only sign he made that he'd seen her at all was a warning little frown and a finger brought sharply to his lips.

"Green," he said, turning back to the boy.

The boy's hesitation was painful. After a long time he said in a flat, toneless voice, "Field, I suppose. Is that right, sir?"

"You mustn't ask questions, Tim. Just say the first word that comes into your mind." Alick's down-bent face was tense and drawn; his eyes seemed to be trying to see into the very mind of the boy in front of him. He leaned forward suddenly as the boy started to say something else.

"Scene would have rhymed. With green, I mean, sir."

Alick's eyes flashed. He'd struck some kind of spark then. "Yes. Yes, it would have, Tim. Although rhyme isn't the point, you know." And he went on swiftly with the association test. But that one flash was all he got. The boy's tone lapsed back into dullness and finally Alick rang for a nurse to come and get him.

When they were alone, Alick stood by his desk, fingering a chart. "Did you hear that? It's the first glimmer I've been able to get out of him. Tim was a poet before—now he doesn't know who he is. But that one flash for rhyme was something. . . . We'll pull him out of it now. We'll—"

"Alick, dearest," Megan said. "It's I, darling. Megan."

A great, glad smile lighted his face. Instantly she was in his arms, clinging as if she could never bear to let him go. His hands were flat and strong across her back.

He pinioned her arms to her sides, then. "Let me look at you, Meg," he said. "I can't believe you've come to me at last." His eyes searched her face hungrily and Megan wished she'd changed into something soft and white instead of wearing her traveling suit.

"I messed it up, didn't I?" she said ruefully. "I shouldn't have come here at all. We should have met each other some other way."

"I'm a brute, Meg—but I couldn't help it. There's something about these kids that get me. Tim, and all the others like him—Americans, British, French—with only half of themselves to take back to

the world with them. Here, they must come before anything else."

"I do understand." She laid a hand on his arm. "I do, Alick, and I'm so proud of you." But even as she spoke, the sense of overwhelming loneliness returned. The loneliness she'd felt in the plane over China, in the crowded Moscow train, and on the transport off the Spanish coast.

Alick had changed. There was strain and despair and fatigue in the taut line of his mouth which not even seeing her again had lifted. The jutting outlines of his face were harsher. He stood before her now, not the romantic boy who had dreamed dreams with her on top of a San Francisco hill, but a man with power and responsibility. Did he still desire the golden princess he had worshiped? Or had that dream gone with all the other dreams?

She touched his unshaven cheek with her finger and said, "Look darling, let's begin all over again, shall we? I'll go home and turn into something radiant, and we'll pretend this afternoon never happened. We'll make it happen the way it should have—tonight."

He frowned for a moment, then his face cleared. "I shouldn't take the evening off, but I'll do it anyway. I don't suppose you could get one of your father's fabled minions to dig up some orchids for me to bring you?"

Megan tried not to hear the edge of irony in his voice. She knew he didn't like her father much. She said lightly, "Who wants orchids? I have you, Alick."

He kissed her as he led her to the door, but she knew there was something gone. Something she and Alick had glimpsed in a garden with an ocean on its sill; something that had seemed to make a silvery bridge of promises on the way to Tomorrow. This . . . this was almost dismissal. And as she went down the long corridor she murmured to herself, "No . . . no, I can find it again. I can . . . I can . . ."

CHAPTER TWO

Uncertain Lady

FOR a while, the evening went better. Megan's spirit soared determinedly, and Alick, handsome and distinguished in his dress uniform, was gallant

and charming. He took her to Muscati's for dinner, and Megan remembered how good he had always been about finding little out-of-the-way restaurants.

The crowd was colorful and cosmopolitan; the food was good, the music soft and exotic, and the pungent wine did entrancing things to your feet when you danced. Outside, the yellow moon turned the sluggish Nile to a swath of shimmering brilliance, and the Royal Palms told secrets to the softness of the night.

Alick hadn't managed the orchids, but he had sent the cluster of white native flowers that, worn on her shoulder, fragrantly spiced the air about them.

The past clung about them protectively as they sat holding hands across the table. So many times, Megan thought, have we done just this. And now it can't—it *can't*—be any different.

Alick's eyes, looking deeply into her own, were admiring and responsive, only turning guarded when she spoke of her 'round the war-map swing, and the past dissolved into the present.

She felt his hand tighten abruptly, and he said, "Let's dance again, shall we?" and he was on his feet and they began circling the floor to a sleepy little tune that was popular in the States two winters ago. Megan felt that she had somehow offended him. He was gazing fixedly over the blossoms on her shoulder when she asked, "My trip . . . you don't approve?"

"Approve? What right have I to approve or disapprove of you, Meg?"

"I gave you the right, when I told you I loved you, Alick," she said simply. "Tell me. . . ."

He was silent, and for a moment he seemed to have lost the rhythm of the music. Then he said, "It's just that I don't like the way you talk about the war. You find everything so . . . so damned amusing. As if it were some glamorous circus put on for your entertainment. Your book was like that, too. Embassy teas—cocktail parties—garden parties in Singapore—vodka in Moscow. Shells falling all around, but Megan Graham never for a second being rocked off her perfect little heels. Never for an instant losing her devastating beauty and charm and wit. Being—what was it you said this afternoon? Radiant!"

Her eyes were greenish danger signals. "I take it you didn't like my book."

"Frankly, Meg, I hated it."

"I see. And I suppose you know all about what war's really like . . . you in games with convalescent young poets!"

The minute the words were out she'd have given anything to have bitten them back.

She'd said them only to hurt. She'd wanted to hurt. They weren't true. She'd only wanted to stab and strike because she had that hurt of her own inside. Alick *had* seen action. He'd won his medal doing a tricky brain operation under the full fire of Rommel's heaviest guns.

"Darling, I didn't mean it," she said quickly. "What's happening to us, Alick? Why are we quarreling like this? Why?"

He shrugged. "We fell in love in peacetime, Meg." His voice was tired. "Maybe we just can't take it, you and I. Maybe the smell of blood and death, and the noise and the broken lives and the hopeless craziness of it all. . . ."

"I don't believe that, Alick. I won't believe it."

Quickly she pulled him out onto the tiny balcony over the water. This was something she must settle right away. She must get her hands on it and hold it tight—tight. It mustn't elude her. "Alick . . . listen. I want us to be married as soon as we can. Please, darling, we can't let it change us. No matter what happens to others, we can't let it change us. We mustn't let an insane world take from us the one thing that's real and sound and sure. Help me, Alick. Help me to hold it."

His hands gripped her elbows, squeezed them tight. The moon cut jagged shadows across his cheeks, and for an instant his face was again that of the little boy who had worshiped his princess.

"Do you really mean that, Meg?"

"You know I do, Alick."

"I've always believed I wanted love so much more than you did, Meg. You were to me like a star I never could touch. I was just . . . well, just something you could always have. . . ."

She put her fingers over his lips. "You're so important to me, Alick, that sometimes it frightens me. You must never say that—never even think it, dar-

ling. Kiss me and hold me close, close."

For that long, sweet, tender moment there were only the two of them standing on some high place, the rest of the world below them.

WHEN they got back to their table, Alick refilled their glasses.

"This needs a special toast," he said, and his eyes were no longer tired or uncertain as they lingered on her face. "One man's gain is the whole world's loss."

They drank without lowering their eyes.

"What makes you say that, darling?"

"Just that I can't get it through my groggy head that Megan Graham is going to take off her seven league boots and settle down in Cairo as a soldier-doctor's wife."

She frowned. "I didn't mean that exactly, Alick," she said hesitantly. "I'd want nothing better, but—well, I've got a job to do, too. A job that I think has its own small importance. Don't you see, Alick, we'll be working together, shoulder to shoulder, no matter how many miles apart? It'll be at least a month, maybe six weeks here before I have to go on. And then after it's all over. . . ."

He was shaking his head at her. The glass in his hand was twirling slowly in his fingers. "It's no go, Meg. Not that way. We can't love in some pale tomorrow that we may never have. It's got to be today—*now*—the way the world *is*. I'd rather not have you at all than have only half of you and that half on the other side of the world. No, Megan . . . not like that."

"Alick, you're so stubborn. . . ."

His eyes warned her suddenly, and she fell silent as he rose and greeted a man and woman who had come over to their table. The man was young. He looked dashing, and charming and gay, and Megan smiled instantly in answer to his greeting. He wore the uniform of a captain in DeGaulle's army. He bent over Meg's hand and kissed it in a way that she knew could have been learned only in Paris.

The woman with him, was tall with pale, honey-colored hair. Megan remembered seeing her on the screen almost since the first years of the talkies. She played sophisticated adventuresses, usually of the long-suffering variety who protected their innocent daughters from the ravages of

an unkind world. A Hollywood fixture for nearly twenty years, she didn't look more than a radiant twenty-five, even in her rumpled USO uniform and no powder on her famous nose.

Belle Parrish and Remy Latrobe, back from a jaunt into the Libyan desert, exhausted, but cheerful, and dying they said, of a meritorious thirst.

Megan liked the young Frenchman, but there was something about Belle Parrish that threw her off instinctively. A sort of larger-than-life quality about her, and the frankly amused way in which she swept up the two men as her own personal property.

"These are two of my old friends," Alick explained; "that is, old for Cairo. I've known Belle for six weeks, ever since she came over to entertain the boys, and Belle brought Remy back from the desert about a month ago."

Belle's lips curved into a smile. "I found Remy behind a rock making love to three women," she said. Remy flushed and looked uncomfortable. "I later learned," she continued, "that for Remy, this was an all time low."

"And this is Megan Graham, my . . ."

Alick checked himself. "I'm Alick's fiancée," Meg said coolly. "Although at the moment he doesn't seem to want to admit it."

Belle looked at Megan with a curious interest so frank that it verged on insolence. "I know your work," she said, with a slow smile. "Especially your book." And it was no compliment.

SITTING down, Belle shrugged her trenchcoat off her shoulders, fumbling vainly through the big patch pockets for her compact. "That's the fourth one I've lost since Lisbon," she said impatiently. "And my face must look like the road to Mateur."

Megan silently offered hers, a big, silver pancake with her initials picked out in tiny brilliants. She looked at Alick questioningly, while Belle repaired her face; but Alick's eyes were quite non-committal.

So, Megan thought angrily, everything was to be left dangling, and she was to be charming and bright to a pair of strangers, while her heart was writhing.

Her reunion with Alick, dreamed of a thousand times, had never been going to be like this. She'd imagined Alick's face close to hers, his voice a tender, intimate whisper; there'd be starlight on the water and the fragrance of oleander about them.

But she knew now that she'd been thinking of the oleander in a garden in San Francisco; and the words Alick whispered were still the speech of his little-boy dreams about the princess in her tower.

That was yesterday. This was . . . today.

And today their wills had clashed and jangled; and now they sat, stiffly polite, listening to Belle's glib chatter, laughing brightly, though what Belle said didn't seem funny at all to Megan, who could find nothing amusing in this broken moment in a Cairo night club.

She looked up, suddenly conscious of eyes watching her; but they were the young Frenchman's eyes, not Alick's; and they were filled with speculations that Megan found difficult to face. Quickly, she looked away again.

If she and Alick could only get away from here, if they could find a few moments alone, she knew that she could make everything come right between them. Somehow, she'd melt Alick's stiff-necked stubbornness; the hurt and disappointment would leave his eyes; and the music they made together would be sweet and true again.

But when he was summoned back to the hospital a little after eleven, Alick didn't even suggest that she leave with him. Instead, it was Belle who offered to drive him, so that he could leave his car for Megan, who, Belle could see, wasn't ready to go yet.

Megan smiled coolly. "I'm sure I'd only be intruding," she murmured. "After all, Alick, you haven't seen Miss Parrish in nearly two weeks. So if Captain Latrobe—"

"*Enchanté, mademoiselle.*" Remy was enthusiastic.

As a final touch of petty disaster, Belle managed to knock Megan's compact off the table. The mirror cracked into fragments.

"Seven years' bad luck," Belle muttered. "Everything happens to Parrish.

I'll get this fixed in the morning, Miss Graham. Come along, Alick, your patient may be bleeding to death."

Megan, finding absurd symbols in everything tonight, wondered bitterly if other things could be mended and returned as easily as a compact; and there was something suspiciously like angry tears stinging against her eyelids as she watched Belle calmly march off with Alick, his head bent low to catch what Belle was saying, then thrown back in laughter. And they were gone.

More to avoid Remy's insistent glance than for any other reason, Megan began to rummage through her evening bag, looking stupidly for the compact that Belle had carried away.

"I don't think you'll find it there, mademoiselle," Remy murmured.

"Find what, Captain Latrobe?"

"Whatever it is that you have lost tonight. Your heart, perhaps." His voice was soft; his English brushed with merely the lightest trace of Gallic liquidity. "Forgive me. I see I have offended you. You are about to say, 'No, I will not stay here and drink wine with this so impertinent young soldier who has come out of the desert and disrupted my evening.' But it is the wine of France, mademoiselle; and the young soldier is both penitent and lonely. So . . . will you stay?"

Megan thought of what it must be like out there in the desert. She felt a touch of pity, and softened. "All right," she said.

Remy, beaming, refilled their glasses. "Here's to a certain lovely lady—or shall I say, to an *uncertain* lovely lady? No, again I offend. Perhaps we should dance—my feet are not nearly so clumsy as my tongue. You will see."

And he did dance well. Nor did he trespass on forbidden territory until they were drinking the last of their wine, several dances later.

"Are you so very sure you are in love with Major Alick, Miss Graham? Or could it not be, perhaps, the familiarity of the old shoe, that fits the heart so comfortably?"

She managed a light laugh, not willing to admit that Remy had struck dangerously close to her own thoughts. "You're incorrigible," she said. "And I don't like

you calling Alick an old shoe. And for pity's sake, don't call *me* Miss Graham. It makes me feel a hundred."

"Meg, then. Alick calls you that."

She shook her head.

"But why not?"

"*Because* it's what Alick calls me. And now, if you don't mind, Captain Latrobe, I think I've had about all the Gallic charm and intuition I can assimilate for one night. Shall we go back to the hotel?"

Outside, they were accosted by an incredibly ragged little brown-faced boy with dancing eyes and an impish grin. "I get taxee, *mon capitaine?*"

"I've Alick's car," Megan said. "We won't need a cab."

"This is Barby, mademoiselle," Remy explained. "There are many more letters to his name, but I cannot pronounce them all. His people were killed in the fighting around Morocco and this so foolish young one insists that I saved his life. I have not been able to get rid of him since."

"Me batman," Barby said proudly, his great brown eyes resting worshipfully on Remy's handsome face.

"He picked that up from a British officer. It makes him feel very important." He turned to the boy. "Look well upon this lovely young lady, Barby. I hope she will become very important to us."

"The car's over here," Megan said quickly, feeling a little flustered.

With many grins and a good deal of elaborate ducking and bowing, Barby ran ahead and held the door open for them. Remy slid behind the wheel, and they started off.

AFTER they had sped through Cairo's narrow, darkened streets for a long time without passing any buildings that she even vaguely recognized, Megan protested. "This isn't the way to Shephard's, Captain Latrobe."

"Please," he begged. "Just to the end of this street—there's something I must show you."

"No, really. It must be terribly late."

"But we are already here, mademoiselle."

And as he spoke, the car emerged with breathtaking suddenness from the twisting alleys of Cairo's slums onto a road, sandy plateau. Moonlight and starlight struck

down in silvery brilliance upon the river; and beyond, the sky arched onward in an endless blue canopy, bending down to meet the desert at some point the eye could only guess at. And all about them was vast, blue, silent space.

"It's—it's lovely," Megan murmured. "It's like something out of an impossible dream. The water—all that heavenly moonlight—" Why wasn't it Alick showing her this beauty?

"Heavenly moonlight," Remy murmured. "Beautiful—and treacherous. Tonight, my friend. Last night, out on the desert, my enemy. That siren moon pointed me out to the enemy snipers, shining down like a searchlight to find me, so that every rock and cave and gully that riddles the Qattara Depression may hold Mama Death. I have seen her many times, but so far she has not come for me. I have outlived my luck many nights, already. Some night, perhaps soon—perhaps next time, it will not be so."

"Please," Megan begged. "Don't talk like that."

"A soldier dares not fear death, mademoiselle," he said, turning half around to face her. The moonlight reflected in her hair until he could not say which was brighter. "Now I know," he said softly, "what I shall call you. Until this moment, the name has meant only woman. But now it means you, too. *Maggi*. Not like the so harsh Irish, Maggie. But like this: *Maggi*," and he gave a caressing stress to the last syllable. "Megan—*Maggi*. It fits so beautifully."

"*Maggi*," Megan murmured. "I rather like it. Who was she?"

"You have never heard our great soprano—*Maggi Teyte*? So beautiful and with a voice to make the angels jealous. . . . When I was very little, my *maman* took me to hear her sing *Melisande*; and it was like a fairy tale come true. The lovely *Melisande* with the pale gold hair, like yours, *ma'mselle*, and the heart that was breaking so sadly, so exquisitely, because poor *Melisande* loved the wrong man. Nothing for me shall ever be quite so beautiful. So I shall call you, after her, *Maggi*."

Megan was too touched to speak; and Remy fell silent too. The water lapped softly against the marshy beach; there

was no other sound in the stillness. And in a little while, Remy's head sagged slowly forward, and Megan realized, with a little shock of indignation, that he had fallen asleep.

My score for the evening, she thought, grimly, is certainly not so good. One man walks out on me. And another, after calling me a fairy tale princess, falls asleep.

But she didn't have the heart to rouse him. Instead, she got out of the car quietly and ran around to the other side. Remy's long lashes, dark against his sun-bronzed cheeks, didn't even flicker when she pushed him gently over on the seat and got in behind the wheel. With a little prayer that she could find the hotel without driving around Cairo all night, she set the car into motion. Back through the twisted labyrinth of streets and past Muscati's and then out on to the broad avenue that led to Shephard's.

She parked the car and touched his shoulder gently. "Remy," she said, "wake up. We're home."

His eyes opened suddenly and he fairly leaped to tense alertness, a sudden dazzle of fear in his eyes as if an enemy bayonet were stabbing for his throat. Then he groped his way back to comforting reality, and grinned a sheepish grin.

"I have slept," he said. "I cannot even apologize."

"There's no need," Megan told him. "You must have been very tired."

He rubbed his hand wearily across his eyes. "It is so," he said. "I think that I have been tired—tired to death—ever since Dunkirk. . . ."

And a great stab of pity struck her heart. Pity for Remy and for all the gallant, stubborn, brave young men all over the world that violence and hatred had blasted loose from all the light-hearted, wonderful things that young manhood was intended to mean.

So that when, as they separated at the elevator inside, he asked her if he might see her again, soon, she did not refuse him as firmly as she had intended to.

"I—I don't know, Remy. After all, I am engaged to Alick and, well—"

"It is not much that I ask, Maggi," he begged. "A few moments of your time, when there may be so little time left.

Just a little generosity—a little touch of radiance to light up a soldier's life again?"

The elevator door opened. "Perhaps, Remy," she said. "We'll see. . . ."

CHAPTER THREE

That Treacherous Moonlight

THE next day, Megan remembered that she was, after all, Megan Graham with a job to do and a story to get—the story of Cairo in wartime. Resolutely she pushed Alick to the back of her mind and started out on a series of flying visits to the Colonial Defense Ministry, staff headquarters, the Office of Egyptian Affairs, and the American Legation.

She tried several times, when she could get to a phone, to call Alick, feeling that the situation that had arisen between them was absurd and unnecessary, needing only a few straight words, a compromise here, a little yielding there, to set it right.

After all, this was war time. Nobody could have things exactly the way he wanted them. Not even Alick. She'd make him see that. And he'd take her in his arms and kiss her until she was breathless, and all of yesterday's stupid misery would be forgotten.

Only, by the time she'd fought her last battle with the diplomatic censor and filed her last cable to the New York office of *Global News*, she hadn't been able to reach Alick. He was, she'd been told repeatedly, too busy to come to the phone.

And he was, as she discovered when she got back to the hotel, too busy to see her that evening. He hoped, the terse little note said, to find time to see her tomorrow. She crushed the scrap of paper in her hand and tossed it into the wastebasket.

Of all the small-boy tactics, she thought, her eyes smarting with helpless tears.

A cool bath restored her sense of proportion a little. Maybe Alick really was busy, and she was being unfair. When the phone rang, she wrapped a big bath towel around her and flew to answer it. But it was Remy, not Alick. An importunate Remy, urging her to dine with him.

She thought of the straight line that

was Alick's brows, and the angry tenseness of his mouth when he'd said, "It's no go, Meg. Not that way. . . ." And her head lifted decisively. If that was the way Alick wanted it, all right. She was Megan Graham, after all, independent, generally admired, very much her own woman.

"All right, Remy," she said. "At eight."

She put on her favorite dress, a white print recklessly splashed with vivid jungle flowers, and swept up her tawny hair in high, severe spirals. And when, presently, Remy's flowers arrived, she lifted them from the box to pin in her hair. Their pungent fragrance swirled around her; and, recognizing the scent, she put them down quickly.

These were the same sort that Alick had given her last night. She couldn't wear these for Remy. Weren't there any other kinds of flowers in Cairo?

Then her eyes glinted recklessly from the mirror, and she took the flowers up again and fastened them defiantly in her hair.

"There," she told the girl in the mirror. "Maybe next time you'll manage not to be so stiff and—and busy!"

The whole evening swept by on that note of heady excitement, as she and Remy traveled from one exotic cabaret to another in a reckless search for gayety—and gayety to drown out for Remy the knowledge that out there, across the desert, Mama Death might be waiting in the bright moonlight; and gayety to still for Megan her tense discontent and unhappiness over Alick.

And then, the mood changed. They were on the Nile in a queer, long native canoe, poled by a wizened little brown boatman. And, settled comfortably on the cushions, Megan gave herself up rapturously to the magic of the night.

There was only the soft gurgle of the water beneath them and the brilliance of the moon at its swollen full above. Treacherous moonlight. Ready to betray a soldier to his death—or a girl's heart to sudden, disastrous enchantment. And she was in Remy's arms, lying breathless beneath his swift kiss, her heart beating with a wild rush of wings against her ribs.

All that the moon told her was that

Remy's lips were sweet and demanding, and that his arms around her carried her to bright, high places she had never known before—and that her pulse was a drunken, fluttering thing. . . .

"Please, Remy," she breathed, drawing back out of his arms. "We—we must be crazy. This isn't possible. . . ."

"Because we have only known each other since last night?"

He shook his head, and the close-cropped dark hair glistened softly in the moonlight. His face was in shadows, a soft blur of warmth beside her own.

"I knew it the moment I saw you. And it is so, Maggi. It is so, as it is so that the moon is up there in the sky, and the water beneath us. We did not put them there, but that doesn't change their reality. They *are* there. And so is my love for you, Maggi. . . ."

He took her in his arms, and kissed her once more. And she sensed an inevitability in this moment that she no longer even wished to resist. Had it been this that she had felt when she had first refused to lift her eyes to Remy's, last night, after Alick had left them? Had that been the first faint stirring of the emotion that gripped her so wholly now?

She couldn't think. And she knew she must think. . . .

More firmly this time, she pulled away from Remy, and sat up very straight against the boat's side.

"Remy, don't," she begged. "Leave me alone. I'm all mixed up. We must at least try to make sense."

His smile was beseeching and a little sad. "I am a soldier, Maggi. I can only live for the moment that is before us."

The words rang oddly in Megan's mind, they were so like what Alick had said. The now—everything in all this insanity was just for the now. Were there no more sunrises—no tomorrows? Just always the *now*?

"You do not wear Alick's ring, Maggi," Remy said.

"I— Everything happened so fast there just before Alick joined up, he never had a chance to give me one," she told him, remembering suddenly those exciting, rushed and poignant days back in San Francisco. Wondering if, for her, they were really gone. If Remy's kiss had

sealed them forever in their coffin. "Please, Remy, take me back to the hotel. I don't know anything tonight. There's too much moonlight, too much river, too much Cairo. There's even"—and she smiled faintly—"a little too much of you. Together, you're overpowering."

Remy nodded. "I will be patient. Do not try to answer me tonight. But I want to marry you, Maggi." He pulled an agate ring from his finger and laid it in her cupped hands. "Keep this for a little while. It belonged to my mother. . . ."

Remy closed her fingers over the ring, and pressed them for a moment in his hands. Then he turned to the boatman; and directed him to turn back.

When they got back to Shepherd's, there was a message for Remy at the desk. Remy read it hastily and looked up at Meg. "I was right, Maggi. But the time was even shorter than I thought. All leaves have been canceled. I am to report to headquarters in the morning—and leave for the front by noon. No, don't speak. Keep my ring and if, when I come back, I see it on your finger, I shall be standing on the clouds. And I *will* come back, Maggi. Never forget it, never doubt it, for a moment."

He lifted her hands and kissed them. "Good night, Remy," she murmured, and stepped through the elevator doors. . . .

SHE stood outside Alick's office the next morning, her hand against the slatted half-door, feeling once more cool and self-possessed. The enchantment of last night had passed, and in the clear light of day she could think once more. Alick must be made to see and to understand her point of view. They couldn't go on like this any longer. If he wasn't in his office, she would wait.

But he was there, crisp and fresh in his khaki uniform, his russet head bent efficiently over a sheaf of case reports, a frown of concentration on his forehead.

Suddenly her heart rushed out to him, and the only thing she wanted was to smooth out this idiotic misunderstanding that stood between them.

But he looked up at her, and the moment died. "Hello, Meg," he said, almost tonelessly, and no light came into his eyes.

It was a rebuff, but she wouldn't let it stop her. "You're a very difficult person to see, Major Vernon," she said lightly. Then her tone grew earnest. "I meant from the bottom of my heart what I said the other night. Nothing's changed, Alick—not really changed. We're the same two people that stood looking down at the bay that night in 'Frisco, and promised each other that we'd be together always, no matter what. Please marry me, Alick."

"On my terms, Meg?" His eyes were searching.

"Please don't be stubborn. This is terribly important to both of us. I've my work to do. I've appointments in London that can't be canceled. Perhaps, after that, I'll come back here—I'll manage somehow. . . ."

Carefully, he chose a cigarette from the box on his desk, lit it, and blew a slow spiral of smoke up at the fan. "I was operating early this morning, Meg, on a young soldier; and all the time we were getting him ready for surgery, right up until the moment the ether took him, he was crying out for his wife, wanting her to be with him. They *had* to be apart. Am I selfish when I say that I want you *with* me? When I want you to give up this crazy globe-trotting and settle down to the job of being my wife—if you undertake it at all?"

Megan's eyes narrowed. "That's it, at last, isn't it? It's my job you hate. You say it's silly, but in your heart you resent it."

She was angry now, saying things she didn't mean, not stopping to think how they sounded, not caring. "You sit here in your smug little office, moving everybody's lives around like checkers, playing God—and all the time you're so . . . so *safe!* While—" She stopped short, aghast.

"While men like Remy Latrobe are out there dying?" he said, slowly and very quietly. "That's what you meant, isn't it? Remy's a good soldier. And he's in love with you. He'd take whatever scraps of your interest that you'd choose to throw him, and be glad for the chance. Why don't you marry him, Meg?"

"How—how did you know about Remy, Alick?"

"Belle and I were in the lounge last night at the hotel. After you'd gone upstairs, he joined us. And like the good soldier he is, he told us straight out he'd asked you to marry him."

So that, she thought numbly, was what Alick had been doing last night when he was too busy to see her. He'd been with Belle.

"I see," she said, her lips stiff with anger and hurt.

"You wouldn't have to throw your career overboard for Remy, you know."

The angry tears were burning in her eyes. "I don't think anything should ever be thrown overboard, unless it's to make room for something better. So far, I haven't found anything that is." She waited a moment for him to make the gesture, to speak the word that would blot out all this bitterness between them and draw her into his arms. But he didn't move or speak.

"There's really nothing more to say, is there, Alick?" She had to fight to keep her voice from breaking. Then, somehow, she crossed the room and, without looking back, walked out of the door, her head held proudly high.

She spent the rest of the morning at her borrowed desk in the *Global News* office, but the keys of her typewriter lurched and blurred before her eyes, and the cables that the copy boy brought to her desk seemed to be written in some language she'd never seen before.

Only one thing hammered and pounded through her mind. It was over. Finished. Whether from hurt or from pride, or simply because he'd fallen out of love, Alick no longer wanted her. Whatever they'd had was gone. It was, as Remy had said, like an old shoe; and it had been discarded. . . .

SHE left the office early, around three, and went back to the hotel. In her letterbox she found a note from Belle, scrawled in a large and splurgy backhand. Megan's compact had been repaired, and it would be returned with thanks and a cocktail if Megan would drop in. . . .

She stared at it for a moment. Then shrugged. Why not? she thought defiantly, and asked the clerk for the number of Belle Parrish's room.

As she walked down the corridor in the direction of Belle's suite, she heard a murmur of voices in a drawing room on her right. One of the voices was Belle's, and the other—it was absurd, of course, because Remy had left for duty at noon—the other voice sounded like Remy's.

She looked in, and it took her a moment to take in what she saw. Cocktail glasses and full ash trays were scattered on the casual table. Belle was seated on a divan, her head thrown back beneath the dark one of the man bending down toward her. And the man was, incredibly, Remy Latrobe!

For a moment, Megan couldn't move or speak. It was as if the blood stood perfectly still in her veins and her flesh had turned to stone.

Then Remy saw her. Dull red spread over his face. He came toward her. Words struggled to his lips and died there—his hand groped out toward her, then fell back to his side. And then, since there was really nothing he could say that would be in the least adequate, he snatched up his képi, jammed it down on his rumpled head, and strode past her without a word.

From the divan, Belle smiled lazily. "I have your compact with me, if you'd like to have it."

Megan just looked at her. "You're really rather wonderful, you know," she said in a cold, even voice. "But it seems to me that Remy just showed himself to be more than a little interested in you. Last night he asked me to marry him. He told me he wouldn't be here today, and he's supposed to be on the way to the front with his outfit."

Belle said coolly, "He was—a little delayed." Her effrontery was superb.

"Which one," Megan demanded raggedly, "do you want, anyway—Remy or Alick?" Megan's hands were tight fists, the nails digging into her palms.

Belle's eyes glinted a little. "I might ask *you* that."

Megan opened her purse and took out Remy's ring. Slowly and deliberately she slipped it over the third finger of her left hand.

"That's Remy's ring," she said. "And your answer, Miss Parrish. And please

don't think that I blame Remy for what I saw just now. I've seen you on the screen, Miss Parrish, and I realize how devastating"—her lips curled scornfully—"you can be when you choose.

"Remy's young and impressionable and perhaps a little foolish. But he loves me. You've had your little moment, and now it's over. I think you know that. So good night, Miss Parrish—and if you like the compact, please keep it. Because it's the only thing that belongs to me that you're likely to get. . . ."

CHAPTER FOUR

Three on a Heart

MEGAN stirred from the depths of her slumber, dragged back to consciousness by the insistent sound of knocking on her door. She glanced, half-roused, at her bedside clock. It was nearly two o'clock.

The knocking sounded again, urgent and somehow alarming.

She went to answer it; and there, his eyes round and wide with worry, stood Remy's Barby. He came tumbling breathlessly into the room, and from his excited, panicky flow of broken English and pidgin French, Megan gathered enough of what he was trying to tell her for his alarm and fright to spread to her.

Remy was hurt. Badly hurt. Lying somewhere out on the desert road. And because Remy was not with his own men—thanks to Belle Parrish, Megan thought angrily—Barby had been afraid to go to the proper authorities. If Remy's defection were discovered he would get into trouble, serious trouble.

Her thoughts flew to Alick. Maybe he would be able to get Remy into the hospital without anyone finding out; maybe it would never have to be known that Remy'd been wounded away from his men.

"You can take me to where he is?" she demanded of Barby, while she waited for Alick to answer his phone.

Barby's nod was emphatic. Remy was in the jeep that Barby hadn't known how to drive, on a back road, a little-used shortcut he'd taken to get back to patrol before they reached the line of battle.

"Me run all way back," Barby said, fiercely proud of his achievement. "It pretty far."

Then at last, Alick's voice answered the phone, and she poured out Barby's story.

"Can you get him into the hospital, Alick? Can you?"

"I can try," he said. "You get dressed. I'll be right over with a car."

And by the time she had fumbled into her clothes while Barby waited outside the door, and raced with him down to the lobby, Alick was waiting. His face was frowning and earnest as he took her hands.

"This sounds pretty bad for Remy," he said. "But we'll do what we can. . . ."

Alick's staff car tore the night to nightmare shreds as it ripped its way out of the city and swung on to the short cut route that Remy and Barby had taken. Beyond, stretched the endless sand in low rolling dunes. The moonlight was thinning out before the dawn.

While they sped along, Barby answered Alick's clipped questions, and gradually they pieced together what had happened. Barby had fallen asleep, and when he woke up at some place he did not recognize, the jeep was empty. Then he'd heard shots and seen Remy come running toward the car out of a rocky gully that branched off from the road. He was limping, his leg hit by a sentry's bullet; and he'd been white-faced and very excited.

"Eytee tanks!" he shouted, piling into the jeep. "I've got to get back to headquarters and tell them—"

"Do you think you could find that place again?" Alick demanded. Barby didn't think so; he'd been too frightened and too confused by the suddenness with which everything had happened.

Remy had driven until he'd fainted from loss of blood. Barby, unable to bring him around, not knowing the first thing about driving the jeep, had left Remy and started for Cairo on foot. "Six, maybe seven hours go by," he told them.

Megan's fearful eyes met Alick's grim ones. Unless Remy had been able to stanch that bleeding. . . . Megan shivered.

They drove on. And on. And the fear grew in Megan's heart.

Then at last they spotted Remy's jeep, and Alick brought their car to a screaming halt. The moon was now a huge white ball tipping the rim of the desert; the Eastern sky was paling to the pinks and grays of coming dawn.

The jeep was empty. . . .

Megan's heart lurched, and then her ears caught Remy's feeble voice coming from a clump of scraggly desert brush at the side of the road. She ran to him, with Alick close behind her.

"Crawled over here," Remy whispered. "Not safe on road—in daylight." His eyes seemed to drink her in; and when they found her hand that wore his ring, a triumphant smile clutched at his almost bloodless lips. "Maggi!" His hand groped out to her, and she took it, kneeling beside him while Alick unwrapped the handkerchief that Remy had twisted around his wound.

"Not too bad," he muttered. "Let's get him into the car and back to the hospital."

"No, wait," Remy begged, and his clutch on her fingers tightened convulsively: "Eytce tanks—must tell—" His head slumped forward, and he lay still.

Alick and Barby got Remy stowed away in the back of the car and they were off again, roaring back toward Cairo, into the very heart of the flaming dawn. It was blinding fire in their eyes.

Megan heard it first—that low, menacing hum getting louder and louder. Her frightened eyes sought Alick's. He nodded. "One of theirs." He pulled over to the side of the road and leaned across her to open the door. "Make for cover, Meg—hurry! I'll bring Remy."

She dived out of the car and made for a pile of outcropping rocks, her eyes scanning the sky. Then she saw it. It was a Stuka, flying fairly high. But it had spotted them, and now it zoomed down for them with incredible rapidity.

Alick was still by the car, hoisting Remy to his shoulders. Hurry, Alick. Hurry! Barby dived in behind the rock and crouched beside her, his black eyes big and round.

And then it came—the deafening, crashing thud of the falling bombs, spitting fire and molten steel. One explosion following on the heels of the other, splitting Megan's head, seemingly, and hiding the

car and the two men in a vivid sheet of fire.

Megan's heart seemed to shrivel in her chest—and then, suddenly, it sprang to life again as Alick staggered toward her out of that core of flame, carrying Remy in his arms.

He dropped down beside her, his own body arched over the Frenchman's. Machine-gun bullets ploughed up the road and splattered across the rocks. The Stuka rose and dived again, and another burst of machine-gun fire sought them out.

An eternity later, the plane climbed, circled twice, and winged back toward its own lines. Megan could breathe again, and begin to throw off the paralyzing sickness of fear that had held her fast. Alick lifted his head. "All right, Meg?"

She nodded.

"I'm afraid some of that shrapnel got Remy—back there on the road." He lifted Remy's head and passed his hands swiftly over the back of it. When he brought them away, they were bright and sticky with scarlet. . . .

Without a word, Alick scooped Remy up in his arms again and ran for the car. The tonneau was raked with bullet holes, and the paint was heat-blistered, but by a miracle the car had escaped a direct hit. The motor purred as Alick's foot found the accelerator. Megan threw herself into the front seat, taking Remy's head into her lap.

THEY found Belle waiting in Alick's office, tense, nervous, and angry. "Alick! Where've you been? You were on duty last night. I've been here since a little after two, trying to cover up for you. I had to see you—" Seeing their faces, she broke off abruptly. "What's happened?"

In a weary, leaden voice, Alick told her about Remy.

Belle's face went ashy. "You mean," she faltered, "if he'd been with his men, he wouldn't have been hurt?" She looked at Megan quickly.

She's frightened, Megan thought. She's afraid I've told Alick about her—and Remy. And why Remy was a.w.o.l.

Alick shook his head. "Remy may have been lucky at that. They told me downstairs that his whole outfit had either been

taken prisoners—or killed. I covered up for him as well as I could. He's in the books as wounded in action."

"Pull him through, Alick," Megan begged. "Don't let him die. . . ."

He faced her squarely. "I'll do everything I can," he said. "I know how you feel about him. . . ."

It was dark again when Alick finally returned. The overhead light threw deep black shadows down from his cheekbones; his eyes were underlined with circles of exhaustion.

He stood looking at them for a moment before he spoke. "We got the bomb fragment out," he said at last, "by surgery. But—his mind. . . . He's conscious, but he doesn't remember anything. Remy doesn't even know who he is."

"But, Alick—that information he had?"

Alick shook his head. "Locked up with the rest of it. And I've been trying for the past three hours to find the key. I'm afraid it's amnesia."

Very carefully, Belle ground her cigarette out in the ash tray. "I don't know much about this kind of thing," she began slowly, "but couldn't the block in Remy's mind be caused—well, by a feeling of guilt?"

Alick looked at her sharply. "What is it, Belle? Tell me."

"It's so—trivial. But Remy's in love with Megan, and if subconsciously he felt that he'd injured her, mightn't that be enough?"

"It might," Alick said. "The only thing I've learned in psychiatric practice is that with the human mind, anything is possible. So let's have it, Belle."

And so Belle told him about how Megan had found Remy with her—told him straight out, without explanation or apology, although even Megan could see the angry disapproval forming in Alick's eyes. It must have cost her a lot, Megan thought.

"It's worth trying." He looked at Megan sympathetically. "Don't worry. I'll pull him through for you, Megan," he said, and left.

Megan. No longer Meg. She felt as if a door had closed in her face.

She looked up at Belle's worried face, and impulsively stretched out her hand.

"Belle, listen," she said. "What happened yesterday afternoon wasn't entirely your fault. If Remy hadn't been the sort of person he is—impulsive and sweet and childishly likely to get into mischief—he wouldn't have done what he did. I don't blame Remy for being what he is. But other people shouldn't feel guilty about him, either."

Belle's wan smile was grateful. "I guess—I didn't have you figured out very well, Miss Graham," she said.

"I've made mistakes, too," Megan replied, offering her cigarette case.

In a minute, Alick appeared and beckoned to Megan. She followed him wordlessly down the hospital corridor to Remy's room.

"Before you go in," he said, stopping in front of the door, "there's one thing I'll have to know before I can be sure you'll be any use in there. Do you love Remy, Megan? Really love him?"

Megan sensed that her answer to his question was vital. And that everything—Remy's recovery and perhaps a whole lot more, if his information was of real military significance—somehow depended on her answering it in the affirmative. Her own doubts and confusions no longer counted.

So she met Alick's eyes and said without flinching, "Yes, Alick, I do." And she knew as she said it, that it was a lie.

They went into the room. Remy, his head bandaged, was propped up in bed, and his eyes met hers without recognition. Alick motioned her to stand at one side of the bed, and he went around to the other. For a moment the room was absolutely still, then Alick, explaining carefully to Remy what he wanted him to do, began the association test, his voice rapid and low.

Remy's answers came slowly, fumblingly, at first, and then with greater assurance.

"Hate?" said Alick swiftly.

Remy's reply came without hesitation. "Boches."

"Fear?"

"France."

Alick paused a second, and then whipped out: "Woman?"

"Love."

"Love?" Alick threw back.

And without any pause at all, Remy said, quite simply, "Maggi."

And Alick beckoned Megan into Remy's arms. She hesitated for a moment, her eyes miserable, as if they were trying to say, "Not here, Alick. Not like this, before you." But he only repeated his gesture, more imperiously. So Megan leaned forward and kissed Remy gently on the lips. His eyes lifted to her face, and lit up.

Instantly, his arms went around her and held her strained against him, while he whispered his name for her over and over again, "Maggi, Maggi. My Maggi. . . ."

Alick slumped wearily back against the wall. His job was done. Megan's had only begun. . . .

CHAPTER FIVE

"I'll Forget Him!"

MEGAN was sitting at the bar in Shephard's Hotel, sipping an iced white crème de menthe, waiting until it was time to go to the plane.

She hadn't really seen Alick in weeks, except briefly at the hospital, when she ran into him on her way to Remy. And she hadn't called him to tell him she was leaving.

"Hi," said a voice at her shoulder, and she turned to see Belle Parrish standing there, tall and trim in her familiar trench-coat. Without waiting for an invitation, she climbed up on the stool beside Megan. "Running out, eh?"

Frowning, Megan sipped at her drink. "Running out? I wouldn't call it that exactly. I have to go to London for a few weeks, that's all."

"Career calling again, I see. How about the lad you're leaving behind?"

"If you mean about Remy and me, we're going to be married as soon as I get back."

"And I wasn't talking about Remy, either. I meant Alick," Belle said.

Megan made an airy gesture. "Oh, that's all finished. It was just one of those first-love things, you know. I don't think long engagements ever work out, do you?"

Belle's eyes narrowed. "You're good,"

she said. "You're very good. You almost had me believing you. . . . Pride's such a funny thing. Take me for instance. I don't have a nickel's worth. That's why I can come here and tell you not to make a fool of yourself. Brandy, bartender, please. A double brandy and lots of ice."

"Really," said Megan, her tone as frosty as the ice tinkling in her glass, "I don't see—"

"You don't see a lot of things. But there's one thing you did see: that I'm in love with Alick. Have been ever since I first laid eyes on the boy. But all I ever got out of him was a lot of propaganda about how wonderful you are.

"I'd read your book, and I didn't think you were so hot. Then you got here, and I didn't change my mind. But I did care enough for Alick so that when I found out you were getting all mixed with that handsome little charmer, Remy, I tried to show you what he was really like."

Megan's breath caught. "So that's why—that day—"

Belle nodded. "That's why."

She put her glass down loudly. "Listen: Alick is in love with you. He always will be. Doesn't that mean anything to you?"

Megan's heart beat crazily, but she protested, "But Remy needs me. Alick is strong. He'll get over me. I can't just blithely tell Remy that it was a stupid mistake, and that I never really loved him at all."

"Can't you? Why not? If you're worried about Remy, forget it. They'll never find out he was a.w.o.l. that night. And the information he brought back about that hidden concentration of Italian tanks in a position to cut Montgomery's line of supply, will earn him a medal or I miss my guess.

"You did everything for him that had to be done when he needed you.

"Don't tell me I was right the first time," Belle begged. "That you're the kind of nitwit who thinks Remy is a little tin hero, and Alick is just a hard-working plug. I don't know much about heroes, but if you don't think it took courage for Alick to bring Remy back, to fight to save the mind of the man who was cutting him out with you—and practically to drive you into Remy's arms to do it—if you

don't think that was heroism, you're crazy!"

"But don't you see, it only proved he didn't really love me. Or else he never could have done it."

"You don't believe that. That's your silly pride talking. It was Alick's job, so he did it. . . . And speaking of pride, Alick has it—lots of it. He won't come crawling to you when he thinks you're in love with another man. It's up to you to show him you're not. And by the Lord, if I can love him enough to come here and beg you to take him away from me, then you can certainly love him enough to go to him and tell him so."

She gripped Megan's arm fiercely, and Megan saw the tears shimmering in Belle's eyes.

"Thanks," Megan whispered, very humbly. "I know I've been a fool, but I didn't see just how big a one. . . . You've given me heaven and earth, Belle. Can I ever repay you?"

"There's one way," Belle said bluntly. "Give me your plane reservation. I think it's about time mama got the devil out of here, don't you? And I don't think you'll be needing it."

"No," said Megan, with singing heart. "I don't think I will." And she took it from her purse and gave it to Belle. It seemed like such a very little to give. . . .

MEGAN swept by the protesting receptionist at the hospital with an airy, "I'm sure Major Vernon will see me. We're going to be married, you see, and I wanted him to be the first to know."

Upstairs, she stopped just for a moment by Remy's door. She really ought to set things straight with him.

"So please, if you do not mind," Remy's voice came floating out, "I will call you after her. Maggi. Like this: Maggi. To me, it is the most beautiful name in the world. . . ."

The red-headed nurse whom Megan could glimpse over the half door giggled happily, and said, yes, indeed it was. Megan thought so, too, but she was glad to pass it on to the next in line.

Her last, lingering scruple removed, she went on down to Alick's office on winged feet.

He glared up at her when she came in.

"I thought you were flying to London."

She came and perched on his desk. "Not me. That was some other girl. I don't think you'd like her very much." She stretched out her fingers and twisted a strand of his hair. Irritably, he pushed her hand away. "I love you, darling," she said softly.

"What are you trying to do?" he demanded. "Mix me up all over again? Can't you—just go away somewhere and let me alone?"

"I'm not going to marry Remy, and I love you. Don't you love me, darling?" she said, in a serene little croon.

"No!" he snapped. "I'm not that crazy."

"Aren't you, darling? You used to be. I used to be crazy, too. But I'm not any more. I thought love was all glamour and excitement and starlight, and that there were other things that were just as important. But I've found out that love is a full-time job, something you share every minute, and something that's made up of all things you have shared. We've shared a lot these last weeks, Alick. Don't let's just waste them. . . ."

He stood up beside her, his hands on her shoulders. "If I could believe for one small second that you had any idea what you were talking about—"

"I gave Belle my plane ticket. I cabled my publishers that I couldn't do a sequel to my book. And I've brought you my lecture-tour contract to tear up. What more do you need?"

"I don't know—but, Megan—"

She put her fingers against his lips. "Not those words, Alick. Not the buts. . . . You just say the first thing that comes into your heart in answer to the word I give you. Now let's begin. Future?"

"Today."

"Happiness?"

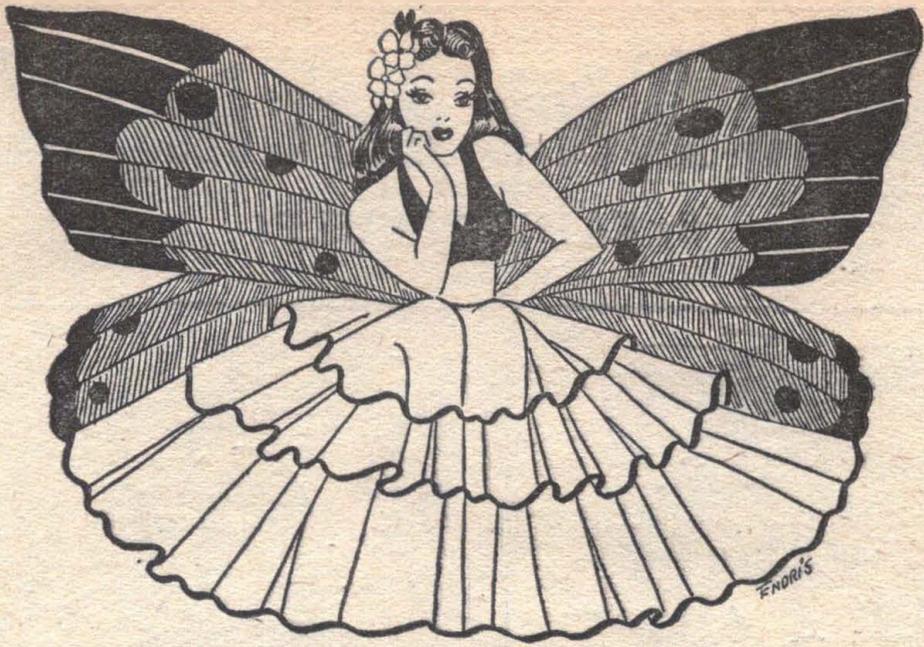
"Peace."

"Love?"

His voice had a lift to it. "Meg, Meg, Meg," he said, and gathered her gladly into his arms.

"Kiss?" she said, almost in a whisper.

And Alick said, "There's no word-response to that. Only this." And her head tilted eagerly to meet his lips. The golden princess had come out of her castle at last. . . .



Furlough Dance

*S*HE wore a sequin-spangled frock,
Camellias in her hair,
In twinkling sandals, slim and gay,
She seemed to float on air!

*Ah, did he see a pin-up girl
In that enchanting blue?
Aristocrat? Or glamour-puss?
She mused . . . and never knew.*

*He saw her in a kitchen-smock
Rush busily about
Turning his waffles, wifely-wise,
And pouring coffee out!*

—Enid Ros Graham

It Was Nice Loving You

By KATHRYN KEELEY



"Not thinking back, are you?" Johnny asked anxiously.

He showed her the way to happiness, step by step—but then took the ladder away!

HOLLY DuBOIS wandered along the main street of Oran in Algiers, adventure dancing in her Mediterranean blue eyes. Yesterday she had looked into the shop windows, much the same as any Main Street in a bustling American city. Then she had been besieged by peddlers, pawed at by beggars until Niles Lawton made her turn back,

exclaiming, "Why do you want any more junk jewelry? That's what these store-keepers will palm off on you. Dime store stuff at U. S. Treasury figures."

Because she was engaged to Niles, Holly had returned to the hotel. The smile on her bright red mouth had hidden her disappointment and her thick dark lashes had concealed the speculative gleam in her eyes. She would do her shopping alone, that was the only way.

Niles, a well-known comedian, had brought the troop of singers and dancers to Africa to entertain the Service men. What had started to be a lark turned into grim boredom. No sight-seeing, no fun, no exotic little encounters with the sheiks of the desert. They might as well have been playing Podunk or Five Forks as far as excitement was concerned.

Now Holly had given Niles the slip. It was her last chance to procure a necklace of moonstones. And she was in costume, the one she wore in her number, *I Might Be French, But I'm Awfully Nice*. Short black skirt, a multicolored shawl with deep black fringe, red sandals on her bare feet. She experimented with the accent she used in her impersonation of famous foreign-born movie stars. That combination was something rare. She giggled like a schoolgirl. She would show Niles she could haggle like a native and whatever she bought would not be junk.

Before the window of the leading jewelers, Holly paused. She wore a dark make-up to give her the amber skin of a native. She touched the flower in her blue hair for courage. There was a tray of bracelets displayed that made her wrists tingle, yet her stomach had the all-gone feeling of an opening performance. She ran over the French that constituted her scant vocabulary. She'd never get by.

A blue shadow a mile high dimmed the glittering exhibit. An American voice with a Mid-western twang said, "*Bon jour, Ma'amselle.*"

What did that mean? Was it good? Holly swung around to face an ensign of the U. S. Navy. He had bristling red hair, the friendliest brown eyes and a winsome, sparkling smile that made anything he said good.

Holly kept staring. She had seen lots of gobs and ensigns. She had faced lieu-

tenant-commanders across makeshift foot-lights. Never before did she have this feeling of being dazzled and charmed. It was as if he were one of those skinny old men in a turban and loin cloth piping eerie sounds to a docile snake which ultimately wrapped its green body around his wrist. Only this sailor wasn't skinny or old, but his voice was deep, fascinating music. Holly had to hold herself rigid to keep her arm from locking with his.

Shakily she repeated, "*Bon jour,*" and couldn't tear her gaze away from his mouth. It held strictly pre-war laughter with no rationing problems.

"You're Frenchy," he beamed. "I caught your show at the canteen. I've seen you three times a day for five days."

She looked up at his blunt-featured, bronzed face with admiration. Anyone who could endure that show fifteen consecutive times deserved a medal.

He frowned anxiously, "I don't suppose you know a word I am saying, and I don't know much French. But we'll get along by the sign language."

"I know some Eng-leesh," Holly jerked the words out in a wild confusion. She slanted a glance at him through thick lashes. His delighted smile warmed her. He wasn't branding her as a phoney.

"Your manager, Niles Lawton, said you didn't. I asked if I could meet you. He said it wouldn't do a bit of good. You were from Paris, and terribly upset about the Nazi occupation. That you had suffered enough before you escaped to Algiers, and he had promised no one would annoy you."

"Oh!" It was a faint gasp.

"That only made me all the more eager. I feel akin to French girls. My father married one in the last war. She died when I was seven. All week I have been trying to recall some of her language, but I can't. My father called her Petite. I am going to call you Petite."

Holly smiled happily.

"And my name is John Ellis Manning."

"'Allo, Johnny."

He took her outstretched hand and forgot to return it.

"Hello, Petite. I knew you'd be like this. Sweet and intriguing; brave, hiding the things you have seen under a gallant smile."

Holly veiled her eyes. The only suffering to date had been an agony of air sickness over the Atlantic. She might add to that the lukewarm beer Niles always ordered for her this past week rather than cocktails. Or the thought that these shops were crammed with gorgeous trifles that Niles wouldn't let her buy. She was quite sure John Ellis Manning meant something quite different.

She ought to set him straight, and yet he so wanted her French and courageous, clothed in refugee glamour. He probably wished for it just as hard as she dreamed of an encounter with a strong, sun-bronzed sheik. Not as a steady diet, but something to boast about. To take out of her storehouse of memories when she was old and gray to embroider fancifully for her grandchildren. Why not give Johnny romance for an hour?

She looked up at him, her smile appealing.

"I don't want to—how you say?"

"Talk about it? We won't, then. You won't need to talk at all. First I'm going to buy you a drink and just look at you."

Now he tucked her arm in his as if he had been wanting to do just that from the first minute.

He grinned. "If you knew the high stone wall that Niles Lawton has built around you. You are sort of a princess in a tower. A lot of guys tried to crash through. I'm the only one who made it—by sheer luck, too. That calls for a big celebration."

His brown eyes held hers, and she thought of burning autumn leaves with a strange nostalgia. She wondered if she should tell him about Holly DuBois, born in Chicago, lately of New York. There were so many good old U. S. skeins that they might have unwound together.

But his warm gaze made her a fragile princess in an ivory tower, and it was too satisfying an illusion to destroy.

His lips moved, "*Ma Petite!*" Just a breath. Holly was trembling.

She said softly, "I like celebrations. I like you, beeg Johnny."

CROSSING the street to the sidewalk café, she clung to his arm, smiling up at him with eyes she hoped were beautifully tragic. When she returned to the

hotel for tonight's show, Niles was going to feel tragic, in fact persecuted. Frenchy, the little refugee from Paris whom Niles had picked up somewhere in Algiers. She resented such a build-up. She was doing quite all right on her own in the States. Oh, she could live up to that French rôle, if there had been any real reason for it. It wasn't even good theater. It was simply Niles' subtle way of keeping her for himself.

He didn't trust her among the gold braid and D.S.C.'s of the Navy. He made her the top girl on a totem pole so he wouldn't have to spend too much time fighting off the Service men who might want to talk to a girl from home. Maybe it was admirable of Niles. Somehow she could have understood Niles better if he had fought off swains with his fists, rather than a fantastic story. Or better yet, Niles could have killed all competition by a simple gold band on the third finger, left hand, rather than the gorgeous square cut diamond on the chain around her throat. A secret engagement, for Niles preferred no one in the troupe to know so he wouldn't be accused of showing her special favors.

Johnny found a secluded table where she could see the street and the olive gray, khaki and blue of the many uniforms. Here and there the pattern was broken by the civilian clothes of the business men of Oran. This was the first time she had been in the audience, back in the shadows while the peddlers and beggars annoyed the brightly garbed wives and sweethearts. Holly sighed.

Johnny's eyes were anxious. "Not thinking back, are you? From now on, your thoughts are going to be happy ones. I'll see to that. I'll have you laughing in an hour. I'll have those shadows gone from your eyes by nightfall. By tomorrow, you might—"

Suddenly she was breathless. "I might?" she whispered.

His hand closed over hers, like a firm, hard brown knot.

"You might marry me."

The silence was tense. There were street noises, but far away in a different world; a waiter's shuffling feet, a gust of laughter. Holly and Johnny at a sidewalk café, with the wind blowing in from

the sea, and the bright, burning sun beating down from a sky that droned with airplanes.

For an instant she had the feeling she was in the midst of an enchanted oasis, and Johnny was a sheik. Impossible, with the sun glinting on his red hair and his irresistible chuckle, yet his dark eyes held all the ardor of a man who knew what he wanted and took it.

"Johnny!" The throb in her voice was as real as life itself.

His swift grin was dazzling. "I've been loving you for five days. How long will it take you to catch up with that?"

She looked so utterly bewildered, his blunt features sobered.

"You don't know what I am talking about, do you? Love doesn't need a language. Look, honey, *je t'aime*. That means I love you."

Maybe it was funny. Probably that was why her mouth smiled and her eyes were tear-drenched, and her breast had a deep ache in it when she caught her breath.

Niles, why did you build up a ridiculous story of persecuted glamour for me? Big generous Johnny has fallen in love with a myth. She thought, stop blaming it on Niles, Holly! It needs only a word to set Johnny right. A word, casually blunt, dream-destroying.

She couldn't hurt him. She remembered the little French girl who was his mother and who had died when he was seven. She wondered if he had been a lonely little boy, hiding his fears and childish tragedies beneath that glad smile, so ready, so understanding.

Holly smiled at him. Slowly she said, "*Je t'aime*." Then as if to make it more binding she said with a little catch in her husky voice, "I love you, Johnny."

She went taut thinking, "This is the first time I have ever said it to anyone." To Niles it had been "I'm crazy about you." To Dean Fuller before him, it had been "I could go for you."

Love was a word she had skirted like the plague. It was an emotion, she knew, that drained the heart dry, like a squeezed lemon.

Holly was wise. She kept her feelings flippant and casual, her heart coated with a bright enamel, that could take the most expert love-making with ease. Even Niles'

superior brand, so sophisticated and charming. Niles had the knack of playing each emotion to the final curtain.

She had the odd feeling that she wasn't Holly now. To Johnny she was Frenchy, and he was looking at her with his autumn-brown eyes as if he adored her.

He said, "I like it better in English. Say it again."

"I love you, Johnny." She closed her eyes. A girl like Frenchy would love Johnny. Any girl would love Johnny, she supposed. Her heart gave a convulsive gasp thinking of the girls in Johnny's past. She wished she were really a harassed little refugee. She wished she had all the lovely qualities Johnny's eyes were showing on Frenchy, rather than on Holly DuBois, the girl from home, whose throbbing voice was singing entertainment across Africa.

Then there was a pair of lips pressed tightly against her own, demandingly possessive, protectingly sweet. A thrill swept through her. The hard, bright shell about her heart cracked alarmingly. The pounding in her eardrums was out of reason. The turbulence of her own emotions frightened her. She withdrew a little.

Instantly Johnny released her. "I didn't mean to scare you, but there is so little time."

"I must be getting back," Holly said in panic.

"Finish your drink," he said imperturbably. "There is plenty of time to get back. We are going shopping. Not in the plate glass parlors where I found you, but in the native quarter. I'm going to buy you a ring with a stone as red as your lips."

As if suddenly afraid she did not understand, he took her engagement finger and circled it with his thumb and index finger. "How the devil do you say ring?"

Holly smiled. "You forget I know some Engleesh, Johnnee."

His answering grin was something out of heaven. "You learn fast."

HAND in hand, they wandered through the native quarter. The streets were narrow and the shops open-faced. Holly clung to Johnny, fascinated. He pointed out the men in turbans and burnouses and bright flapping sandals as if this were a world he had discovered. Once a veiled

woman passed, and Johnny paused and touched Holly's cheek and murmured, "I like to see your face."

She was pleased that her skin was smooth and fine beneath the dusting of sun-brown powder. Someone had once called her Hedy LaMarr DuBois. She wondered if Johnny had noticed the resemblance. Johnny should have beauty in his fling at romance.

Romance? This world was a fairyland, something Hollywood had dreamed up. The shops with their bolts of cotton goods, vivid pinks, yellow, blue. The dazzling sun, the salt wind from the sea. She looked up at Johnny. Did its exotic charm grip him?

There was nothing make-believe in John Manning's eyes. He held tight to her arm as if he would never let her go. In an off-hand manner he talked. He was stationed at Arzew in Algeria with a construction battalion, and was in Oran for a furlough. He intended to marry Holly on that furlough, the quicker she would agree, the better. The ring was the next step.

Holly caught her breath in excitement. In dismay she followed Johnny into one of the open-front shops. The wizened owner wore a fez on his thick gray hair, and his nostrils quivered with a sort of ecstasy as he produced trays of rings. He greeted Johnny as an old customer, and Johnny explained he had purchased a bangle bracelet for his kid sister.

The ring which was brought from the privacy of the rear quarters was a beautiful beaten gold. In part Arabic, part English the proprietor told them it was fashioned by the natives of Bambarra. Its large center stone, red as a drop of blood was from the tomb of an ancient king, and guaranteed to bring the wearer luck.

Holly smiled, yet her heart contracted. She couldn't accept anything so valuable, yet she couldn't hurt Johnny by refusing. On impulse she turned to him.

"Johnny, will you let me give you a ring for luck?"

His eyes glinted. For a moment she thought they looked suspiciously moist, which was ridiculous. It was the dimness of the little shop after the glaring blaze of the sun. Johnny fanned himself with his cap, then put it on slowly.

"I never wore a ring before, but I'll wear yours."

They made a great ado over selecting Johnny's ring. It was a heavy gold band with raised Arabic letters.

"Forever," the shopkeeper explained the inscription, and he hobbled back of the rear curtain with his tray of rings.

Johnny held out his hand and laughingly Holly slipped the heavy ring over the third finger of his left hand. Johnny smiled, and fitted his ring with its center stone like a drop of heart's blood on the same finger of her hand. Suddenly they weren't smiling. It was as solemn as a ceremony in some grand cathedral. Holly looked at him with wet eyes, her breath hushed, her heart pounding.

Then Johnny bent and kissed her. A vow and a promise.

"Forever," he murmured.

She nodded, choked with emotion. In a startling moment she knew she was in love with Johnny. Like a bolt from the blue, it came, tearing apart in its terrific momentum the weak affection she had felt for Niles, the mild flirtations stretching back to grammar school when love was too binding a word to even utter. She wanted to belong to Johnny. She clung to him in a reckless abandon. But for chance, she might never have found Johnny. She might have married Niles without ever having lived.

Johnny was holding her so tightly she could feel the square-cut diamond on the chain about her throat digging into her soft flesh. It had no right to be there when she belonged to Johnny.

Abruptly she moved in his arms. She hadn't told him she was Holly DuBois of the U. S. A., with two brothers in the Pacific and a kid brother in grammar school. She hadn't breathed a word about growing up in the shadow of Chicago's loop and her ambitions toward Lake Shore Drive. She wondered if Johnny would understand her having sung in a second-rate night club, and the slow painful steps through radio to a featured spot on Niles Lawton's show touring the camps. Her success was so new, she hardly realized it herself.

When she had broken her engagement to Niles, she would tell Johnny the truth.

She said swiftly, "I must go. There is

a show this evening. We go to Cairo as soon as we can get a plane."

His face fell. There was a look of pain in his suddenly stern mouth. "But you'll come back from Cairo? Remember our love is forever."

"Yes, yes," she said it restlessly, thinking in a terrifying panic, would Johnny love her when she told him the truth? If there were only more time! If she could gently get Johnny used to the idea she wasn't French, he might be so in love with her that the disillusionment wouldn't matter.

Probably the show wouldn't go to Cairo just yet. It had been marooned at more than one location because airplanes were needed for the armed forces.

ON the way to the hotel, Johnny said soberly, "I wouldn't want you to desert the show, any more than you would wish me to be A.W.O.L. Yet I want you somewhere close. Maybe we can set up a home in this sizzling spot. We'll have to make the most of minutes. How would you like a cottage with Mrs. John Manning on your mail box?"

Dreams, impossible dreams, only Johnny didn't realize it.

The hotel clerk greeted Holly in consternation. He was a little man with rolling eyes and elaborate gestures. In a near frenzy he cried, "The troupe has gone to Cairo. They secured unexpected accommodations on an earlier plane, and the show tonight at the canteen is canceled. Mr. Lawton was much agitated at your disappearance. Mr. Lawton has made arrangements for you to take the plane that leaves at dawn."

Standing there in the lobby, Holly didn't know if this reprieve was good or not. Niles would be furious. It wasn't fair to even think of marrying Johnny until she had broken her engagement to Niles, and she couldn't tell Johnny the truth about Frenchy until Niles was completely washed out of her life. For if Johnny in his bitterness and disillusion despised her, she wanted no opportunity to turn to Niles.

Johnny's deep, tender laugh interrupted her thoughts. "That ring is supposed to bring luck. What more can we ask? We have until dawn."

"Come back for me in an hour, Johnny. I shall have to dress."

"Why so long? American girls can dress in ten minutes flat."

"Do you wish I were an American girl?"

His eyes were thoughtful. "No. When I am with you, I feel as if I wanted to protect you, give my life if necessary. The American girls I know would think that silly. They are quite capable of taking care of themselves. Look at the Niles Lawton troupe traipsing all over the Dark Continent. They laugh at danger."

Holly said stiffly, "I'll be ready in ten minutes."

She dressed swiftly. After her bath some of her natural gayety returned. She wouldn't worry about anything until the dawn plane. She would take her cue from the way Johnny acted tonight. It might be just before she said good-by to Johnny, she could tell him Frenchy was one of Niles Lawton's brain storms. He would have the time she was away to become accustomed to the idea. As it was, she had this night to make Johnny fall deeply in love with her, and with luck— The stone in Johnny's ring winked. With luck!

She donned a strictly New York white silk frock with short sleeves and carved blue buttons marching down the front. High heeled white slippers and sheer hose, a huge flat white purse and a cartwheel hat as American as ham and eggs. But when she gazed at her reflection she was afraid the peach and cream skin and the candid blue eyes would be too startling to Johnny. She returned to Frenchy's golden make-up with the dark mascara and the vivid mouth.

She discarded the hat in favor of fresh flowers in her dark hair.

Johnny rose when she quickly crossed the foyer. She stopped before him, pirouetted, said bluntly, "How do I look?" with no accent, no mannerisms.

A long second passed before Johnny answered, "Beautiful. You take my breath away. You look like a fashion drawing. Now I know you came from Paris. And it took you half an hour, *Ma Petite*."

Figuratively, Holly threw up her hands. Johnny needed an avalanche to awaken

him. She shot him a seductive glance.

"Still want to take me to dinner, Johnny? Here in the hotel dining room?"

"I'm going to show you the harbor by starlight. I've hired a carriage, drawn by a rather sorry-looking horse, but it moves. I have found a place for dinner, not exactly an inn, but the people are clean and nice. All these things I want to share with you, to take the place of all those years we did not know each other." He spoke eagerly, yet with a shy earnestness.

Her heart was swelling until she thought it would burst.

"We will have each other when all memories are forgotten." She could not help the wistfulness of her voice. Johnny would be in her heart when the whole world was forgotten. She was not so sure about his reaction when he discovered he was duped.

"Will you marry me now, dear? Tonight?"

She was silent so long, he shook her arm a little. "Answer me, darling."

She said slowly, "I'm thinking and the answer is no."

He winced as if she had struck him. "Why not?"

"It cannot be done so simply. You are not in your own country where you can do as you wish. There are stricter regulations here. As for me, I don't know what restrictions are placed on me. Why waste the few hours we have left complying with the customs of the country? It would leave us no time for each other."

His face was bleak. "I want to be sure of you."

Holly placed her hands on his wide shoulders. "Look at me, Johnny! What do you see in my eyes? It is love for you. I make no effort to disguise it."

"Petite!"

"Don't you trust me? We shall marry. Next week! Next year! I shall always be waiting for you." She touched his ring. "Marriage wouldn't make me love you more than I do."

With that he was content. He led her to the carriage manned by an oily-faced driver.

They followed the road parallel to the sea. There were many American ships in the harbor.

With pride, Johnny pointed out the low, rambling house where they would have dinner. It was a faded pink with many arches, set deep among a cluster of palm trees. There were little tables set out-of-doors. A faint haze obscured the sea, making it unreal. The woman who served them beamed and bobbed, her ear hoops dancing. She brought them wine in an earthen jug.

WHEN the woman had gone, Johnny said soberly, "I have a feeling any minute I shall awaken and find myself on one of those transport ships with my life belt strapped on, watching for an enemy submarine. Pinch me, Petite."

She didn't obey. She reached for Johnny and let her mouth cling to his for a long, long moment. When she drew away, she was strangely silent and Johnny was lost in a fit of moodiness.

She didn't remember what they ate. Bread and cheese and the wine. She forced herself to nibble at the dark, thick slices. There were native dishes, and the serving woman was disappointed that Holly would not touch them. She couldn't eat. All her natural gaiety was gone.

Johnny was as disturbed as she was. She kept telling herself it was the unusual beauty of the scene, the way the sea turned to purple beneath the dying sun. It wasn't the fact that their dreams had tangled so oddly.

Johnny's wish for a French fiancé and her vaunting desire to just once come face to face with a fascinating sheik. Those dreams would die with the night, and the morning would bring the cold light of reality.

Somehow Johnny instinctively understood the turbulence within her. He rose abruptly, tossed some bills on the table.

"Come on, let's walk up to that bluff. You can't eat goat's cheese and chatter like monkeys during a miracle." His voice was harsh.

The climb to the bluff overlooking the sea was hard. Holly reached the top. She didn't know if the breathlessness was from exertion or the nearness of Johnny. Desperately she wanted him to take her in his arms.

After a seeming eternity, he gathered her tight against him. For the first time

in her life, Holly knew utter contentment. No matter what the future might bring she had this moment. She lifted her face to the wind, let it toss her hair in a dark cascade to her shoulders.

What did it matter if she were Frenchy or Holly? What did it matter that they parted at dawn with hungry, aching hearts? They had each other now and if they believed with all their hearts, some day they would be together again.

They stayed there, high on a wind-swept bluff, until the sky was black velvet and the stars were so close and bright you could almost reach up and pick one.

It was when the searchlights fanned the sky that Johnny put her from him abruptly, almost angrily.

"What am I thinking—that we could escape all that?" His wide gesture included the dark ships, the shafts of white obscuring the stars.

With swift steps he was stumbling down the hill, Holly holding tight to his arm, her heart faltering within her.

His voice, self-accusing, cried, "I'm a fine one. Talking big and protective. Urging you to marry me so I can cherish you. Thinking of you in a cottage close to me. You must be laughing after the horrors you have been through. Do you know where I'll be in a few short weeks? Pushing across that sea into Europe! And where will you be?"

He didn't pause for an answer, but Holly interrupted clearly, "I'll be waiting."

He scoffed, "I may not be back for months."

"I'll still be waiting."

"What you should do is marry some well-to-do Frenchman, a merchant or a banker. One familiar with your ways and customs, your language. You wouldn't know fear, then, or anxiety."

"Stop it, Johnny," she stormed. "This was to be our night, out of eternity, something to remember, and you are quarreling with me."

"I feel like quarreling with everyone."

"Why can't you accept what the gods offer?" Her voice was crisp, a little cruel. Well, he had hurt her, hadn't he? He didn't give her credit for much stamina. He thought little Frenchy had used up all her endurance fleeing from France and she wanted a safe comfortable marriage.

She fumed for Frenchy and she raged for herself. Until she was so confused she didn't know if she were Holly DuBois or Frenchy or all women incarnate.

"And what do the gods offer? Death?" he asked bitterly.

"The trouble with you, John Manning, is that you've got the jitters."

Pebbles were rolling under her high heels. She almost fell. Johnny paused, held her upright. His hands bit into her flesh.

"Jitters?" He picked up the word like a hand grenade and hurled it back at her. "A strictly American word." His face so close to hers was hard, his eyes demanded an explanation. Weak with fear, she could not give it to him.

Trembling, she said at last, "I picked it up from Niles Lawton."

"You learn very fast." His face was a dark, marble-carved image.

"What would you say if I told you I am American?" Her heart crumpled. She had the feeling she was gambling with life itself.

For an instant he did not speak. He led her to their drooping horse that was tethered to a tree.

"I'd say you were lying," he told her.

It was as if he turned a long, thin blade in her heart with deliberate ruthlessness.

She pressed her shaking fingers hard against her temples.

Johnny's voice, when he spoke again, was dull. "I don't know why you are putting on this act. I think to make it easier for me, so I will think you are capable of carrying on alone. You are being very brave and fine, so I won't worry. I know one thing—I am glad we did not marry tonight. I don't intend to let you in for any more suffering. If I ever come back to Oran, I hope I'll find you in that cottage with a husband to look after you."

She stared at him, her eyes wide and tormented, her face white under the dusting of amber powder. "I wish you would take me back to the hotel as fast as possible. I have to pack if I am going to make that dawn plane," she said.

His voice sounded empty. "Of course."

Johnny untied the horse. The driver was asleep on the rear seat of the carriage. He had evidently finished the jug of wine

they had barely touched. He couldn't be aroused.

Without a word, Johnny lifted her into the front seat, and they jogged along to the tune of the *clop, clop* of the horse's hoofs and the wheezing snores of their passenger. What an end to something incredibly beautiful!

HOLLY sat beside Johnny, feeling as if she were being torn apart inside. What could she do?

She looked down at the beautiful ring on her finger. Just as she had so willingly accepted the grotesque fact that it had come from the tomb of an ancient king, and that it would bring its wearer luck.

She touched his hand. Her fingers came in contact with the odd Arabic ring with its inscription "Forever."

She said bitterly, "I think we are fools, Johnny."

He gave her a hard, penetrating glance and said nothing. The rest of the drive was made in silence.

Outside the hotel, Holly said wearily, "Thank you, Johnny and good-by."

His chin set stubbornly, "It isn't good-by yet. I'll take you to the airfield. I'll return as soon as I find where this horse should be stabled."

Her eyes were blind with tears as she made her way to the stairway.

It was midnight when the phone rang. It would be Johnny saying good-by. Johnny repenting of his promise to escort her repenting of his promise to escort her to the airport.

"Hello," she snapped.

"Where have you been?" Not Johnny's deep, masculine tone, but Niles' crisp voice, sharp and edgy. Niles was en route to Cairo. They had missed the plane.

"Holly," he barked, "come down to the lobby at once."

The connection was broken with an angry click. There was no disobeying that summons. She put on a dark blue silk suit, crammed her robe into the traveling case.

Niles was waiting at the elevator when she stepped out of the cage, his handsome, clever face distorted with rage.

He said with ominous quiet, "Do you know I have been searching this town from end to end? I have had the secret police investigating the native quarter. I

have reported your disappearance to the American embassy."

"I'm sorry, but I can explain, Niles."

"Suppose you do just that."

But she didn't utter a sound, for stalking across the lobby was John Ellis Manning.

She gasped, "Pardon me, Niles. I see someone I know. I want to say good-by to him, and then I'll tell you everything."

She attempted to brush by Niles, but he was too quick. He imprisoned her wrists in a cruel, relentless grip.

"If you mean that Ensign Manning, you can save your breath. I have just given him the facts and figures."

"All the while she was giving me the run-around." Johnny's voice was biting acid. His attractive face was devoid of all pity, beyond appeal. He said with scathing mockery, "Frenchy, the little refugee that I wanted to give my life to protect! How you must have laughed, Holly Du-Bois of the U. S. A."

She searched his face through a burning flood of tears.

"I didn't laugh. Frenchy was a beautiful dream. You were reliving your father's experiences, hoping they would come to you. I tried to make them true."

Niles burst in, "What are you talking about? Holly, I never knew you to be a fool for sentiment. You must have had some other object."

Holly squared her shoulders.

"I met you, Johnny, with your eyes filled with dreams, your heart bursting with chivalry. You were afraid a girl from your home town would laugh at galantry. No girl ever would, but you didn't know that. I fell in love with you, Johnny. I don't know when it happened, but suddenly I knew. Do you believe me?"

Johnny's mouth twisted. "I don't believe you."

Holly's head lifted. Her eyes were twin fires. Slowly she unclasped the chain about her neck. The brilliant diamond ring slid into her hand. She gave it to Niles.

"I intended to tell Johnny the truth as soon as I returned this to you. That seemed the decent thing to do." She paused, looked squarely at Johnny. "Then I didn't think much about anything except being in love with you. I thought the love we shared was above who I am, or the

lies I told. I thought that nothing mattered except you were you and I was I and somehow, sometime we'd be together again. I suppose I was wrong."

JOHNNY'S eyes were tortured. "I keep remembering the plausible excuses you gave for not marrying me. So little time, the red tape of regulations. You said it was better to have those hours together. That marriage wouldn't be any more binding than the promises we made. All the time you were engaged to Lawton."

"Of course, Holly had no thought of marrying you," Niles roared. "And I have no intention of taking this ring." He reached for her hand, attempted to slip the gorgeous square diamond on her finger. It was blocked by the ring of beaten gold with the blood-red stone.

"Take that junk off," Niles cried furiously.

Johnny's fist shot out. The thud as it struck Niles' lean jaw made Holly suddenly sick. Looking surprised, almost ludicrous, Niles collapsed on the imitation oriental rug.

Holly said wearily, "If you wish your ring, Johnny, I'll give it to you. I'd rather keep it in memory of a love that didn't last."

"Holly, how could you!" Johnny's shoulders moved in a stiff, painful shrug.

She turned away. It didn't seem as if her heart would ever beat again, that her chest would ever be without this piercing agony. She said quietly, "I love you." She swallowed the sobs in her throat, but her voice broke. "*Je t'aime.*"

"Holly!"

An eerie warning howled, the sirens of an alert.

Niles was on his feet, and Johnny scooped her up in his arms and brought her to Niles. Johnny's voice was grim, "That's Jerry, dropping a calling card. Take Holly to a shelter. This hotel must have one. I'll go out to see what I can do to help."

Before she could twist free of Niles' hold, Johnny was gone. She caught a glimpse of his blue uniform going through the door before the hotel was plunged in darkness.

Niles' exasperated voice rang out, "Holly, where are you?"

"I'm right here beside you."

"Stay there. I'm tempted to cancel your contract and ship you home. If those boys didn't clamor for Frenchy, I would." He paused. She could hear his labored breathing. "I'm crazy about you, Holly. I went through hell searching for you."

"I'm sorry, Niles. You've found me and I've lost Johnny."

They were making their way to a blue light that guided the way to the shelter. Holly gave a long sigh.

Then before she quite realized it, Holly was on the street, deserted and black. Searchlights slashed the sky. Ack-ack guns pounded. Nowhere was there a trace of Johnny.

The power house, he had said. It was one of the sights Niles had let her view, and she plunged on through the darkness.

When she could run no longer, she fell in a heap, exhausted, half unconscious.

A slim beam from a flashlight played on her face.

"Holly!" Johnny's voice, Johnny's arms gathering her close. "It was a lone raider, and the anti-aircraft guns got him before he reached the shore. What are you doing here? Why didn't Niles keep you safe in the shelter?"

She lay very still in his arms. "No one can keep me safe but you, Johnny. I know all the things you are thinking. I've hurt you. I've cheated you, but darling—"

"I'm only thinking one thing. I love you. I'm a prize fool. I wanted the cards to fall my way, and then I was angry because you tried to give me what I asked. Suddenly I can see clearly, all the little signs that I should have recognized. You weren't the girl my dreams had cooked up, but you were doing your best to fill her place. She seems awfully vague now, because my whole heart belongs to you. Darling, will you wait for me? Will you wear my ring for luck?"

"For luck?" her lips whispered, but a deep, incoherent prayer in her heart kept saying, "Dear God, keep Johnny safe, for I'll be waiting forever."

The all-clear sounded, and Holly reached up and kissed Johnny. Somehow that all-clear seemed meant for more than the skies.



Have you a question to ask Ann concerning latest fashions, new kitchen gadgets, recipes, beauty hints, or any of the dozens of things girls want to know about? Just drop a note with your question, and enclose a stamped self-addressed envelope. Address your letter to Sincerely Ann, All Fiction Field, 210 E. 43rd St., N. Y. 17, N. Y.

HI, THERE! Another month has gone by, and here it is time to chat with you all again. I look forward to these talks we have, and I hope you do too. This time, we've got lots and lots of ground to cover—all the way from clothes to war jobs.

I saw some swell soap the other day—soap is on the Army's okayed list, by the way, and the Servicemen love to get it. Seems it's hard to come by—that would make an elegant present. It has the name of the person moulded right into the cake so there won't be any arguments as to whose it is! The printing runs all the way through, too, so it won't wash off.

Photographs are always welcome. Men away from home long for a sight of the familiar. They love pictures of places they know—the front porch where they sat on summer evenings, the drugstore where they always stopped for sodas, the baseball diamond. And pictures of people, too. Not necessarily fancied-up cabinet photographs, looking more like a movie star than the girl back home. They like snapshots of people doing things they remember them doing—Sister on the swing under the old apple tree, Mother picking flowers in the back garden, Dad cutting the grass. All the things that mean home.

I saw a grand wallet-like case, wafer thin, that holds about twenty pictures of snap-shot size. You could make one yourself, either of suede (old pocketbooks are wonderful for this) or fabric. Embroider your soldier's initials on the outside in simple, square letters, and fill it with all sorts of snapshots. He'll love it and carry it with him everywhere.

If your soldier likes reading, books are good. Pick out things he would normally read at home, and steer a little clear of war stuff and stories written from the point of view of a soldier. They can probably be found in a camp library, anyhow.

I know one smart gal who sent a book every month or so to her young husband. And they were well selected, too. They were all books he had read and re-read in civilian life, not his own treasured old copies which might so easily get lost, but new, cheap editions he could toss aside when he was through. One time she would send poetry, the next a copy of some old childhood favorite like "The Rover Boys" and the next a novel he had always loved. I talked to the young husband when he came back on leave and he said that those books, old friends all of them, gave him a feeling of "home" and loved ones that nothing else could have done.

Check with your postoffice about sending anything in bottles, such as shaving

lotion, talcum or the like. There are strict rules about the type of containers you must use. Food is not recommended, though you may send cookies and candy if you like. Liquor is banned. Cigarettes are okay, though, as are stationery and fountain pens. Clothing is not recommended, due to the trouble in the soldier's storing it.

These things I have suggested will do just as well for the soldier who is still in the United States, you know, the only difference being that regulations are less strict and you can send more and larger bundles.



FUR coats have taken a new turn this season. We have been used to seeing full length ones and short, chubby jackets, but the three-quarter length ones have been fewer and farther between. Though of course there have always been one or two floating around.

There are loads of them, this year.

Fashion experts do not quite agree on what started this fad. One of the stories is that they are based on the short coats officers in the Army wear. Could be, of course. The other is that they were founded on the short pea-jacket that cigar-smoking Winston Churchill has made so famous. But, whatever the tale is, the short coats are among our very smartest.

One of the main joys in these new briefs is that they can be worn with anything at all hours of the day or night. They look grand with the new pencil-slim silhouette of our day clothes, and equally well over long and swishy glamour-date dresses. They even look smart with slacks if you're so minded.

Almost unanimously, they are cut with a full swagger back, falling from the shoulder or from a set-in yoke. The sleeves are long and wide, usually with turn-backable cuffs. The tuxedo front is the most popular—and the most attractive, to my way of thinking—but you do see an occasional turned-down collar.

All types of fur are used, but I like the short-haired ones best. They look newer, somehow, and more "this season." There was a honey in ocelot, if you like the leopard family, and another dream in sable-dyed squirrel.

Mink is around, too, as always. But I feel that if you are planning to sink that much money into a coat you might just as well go the whole hog and buy a long mink. These shorties are nice, but they are a fad and a full-length mink will last you for ever and ever. You can have it made over decade after decade, and it will probably still be in fine shape for you to wear to your great-granddaughter's christening!

Persian lamb, the new gray Persian and beaver, are all wonderful in this short length. I'm inclined to think Persian is better for older women, unless it is cut on extremely youthful lines, but that is purely a personal reaction. If you want a good, practical coat that will always be smart and will wear like pre-priority iron—Persian is your answer. Just because I don't like it, doesn't mean that *you* don't.

If you want to get something that looks very mink-like and always will make you feel rich and opulent, why not look at sable—or mink-dyed let-out muskrat. It hasn't even the faintest relationship to the college girl's favorite rat. It is rich and silky and lovely. Wears well, too. If mink is out of your financial picture, look at the muskrats. I think you'll love them. The really good ones come fairly high in price—not in mink's range, however—but not as high as good beaver or Persian lamb.

So much for furs. My one parting bit of advice to you, though, is to put your money into the very best of any given fur. If your cash is just enough to buy a

very good lapin, buy the lapin. Don't buy inferior Persian. It will always look inferior and shoddy, while a good bunny will look as if you had bought bunny because you liked it. Cheap furs look cheap. They don't wear well. And they look ostentatious, too, as if you were trying to "keep up with the Joneses."

If you can't afford fur at all, really, don't feel you have to have it. I'd infinitely rather have a well-cut cloth coat of good material untrimmed by so much as an inch of fur than a fancy fur job made out of the cat that yowled in an alley two weeks ago. When you have more money you can always get a fur scarf to dress up your untrimmed little number.



HOW are you and your war job doing these days?

I just finished reading a perfectly appalling list of statistics that scared me but good! They were on women in industry and they were pretty awful.

Seems that right after Pearl Harbor hundreds and hundreds of women rushed out and got themselves jobs in defense plants. In a wild burst of patriotism they felt that they had to do something for their country. Now, that patriotism was a wonderful thing, and something we should all be proud of.

But—and a very large BUT that is, too—a whole lot of the gals discovered that working long hours, riveting and lathing and such, was hard work. In spite of all the promotion and advertising that was given to Rosie the Riveter, it turned out that there was little, if any, glamour attached to getting yourself all begrimed and filthy day after day.

So, in wholesale batches, women have been quitting. Oh, they've thought up good excuses for themselves. Their doctors said the work was too confining. Or it was taking so much time that they couldn't devote any time to their homes. Or the maid left and they were too tired when they got home to do their housework. Oh, there were lots of excuses, good ones, too.

But the fact remains that no matter how good an excuse is, it is just an alibi. And alibis never won the war. Where would we be if our soldiers said they were sorry, but they'd rather be at home with the wife and kiddies? Where would we be if MacArthur said he was willing to work of course, but he'd rather work in New York where he could see a few theaters?

We've got to do something—and fast—about women at war here at home. We've got to pitch in, every single one of us, and work and work and work.

Ask yourself this one question, "What have I done today to help my country?" And then ask yourself, "Is that all I could do, or am I hiding behind peace-time excuses?"

If you're not happy with your answers, do something about it. Go down to your nearest Uses (United States Employment Service, in case you didn't know) and find out just what *you can do*.



HERE'S just a bit of foolish feminine chatter, things that I've picked up in the shops here and about that I thought you'd be amused in hearing.

A necklace of tiny glass prisms made to look like rarest crystal. You twine it

around your neck into a thick, chunky rope. Guaranteed to dress up your simplest frock.

A set of rhinestone stars on pins to stick where you will, on your bonnet, in your coiffure, around the neck of a plain black dress. In fact, anywhere.

The rebirth of hand-crochet in the fashion world in bags and hats and scarfs. Do it yourself, or buy crocheted pieces. You'll love 'em.

Also the rebirth of knitted suits. It has something to do, no doubt, with the shortage of really good tweeds, but when well done the knitted suit is just as attractive.

Remember, if you're knitting your own suit, to keep it very simple and tailored. There is nothing on earth that looks as tacky as a too fancy knit garment. Steer clear of ruffles and lacy businesses.

And have your garments well-blocked by someone who really knows how. That's half the secret of real chic.

The new powder bases that are springing up every time you turn around. Some of them are excellent. Some just good for special types of skin. Hunt around for one that seems made for *you*. I've got one that is sheer unadulterated heaven—for my particular skin. It might be awful for yours. Pick your shade carefully and apply it according to the directions on the jar. The manufacturer has worked out the very best method of using it.

The new classic opera pumps that have various different buckles that can be switched to change the look of your shoes. Marvelous, now that shoe rationing is here to stay—for a while anyway. The pumps can double in brass for evening shoes, or street wear or almost anything by the simple expedient of changing the bow.

The great, big square glass earrings that look like an only slightly smaller than usual ice cube. Swell with black, if you wear your hair up. Terrible if you wear it down, as they get all messed up in stray ends. But that goes for all earrings, not just these.

Well, until next time, gals. I'm going to get busy right away on what to tell you about.

Until then, I am

Sincerely,
ANN

DANGER—GIRL AT WORK!

Gale Taylor owed the success of her restaurant to rancher Bill Wheaton, and she owed the lightness of her heart to his brother Larry's gay smile. But Gale owed herself a clear-minded decision between them—a decision she couldn't make . . . for she was desperately in love with both!

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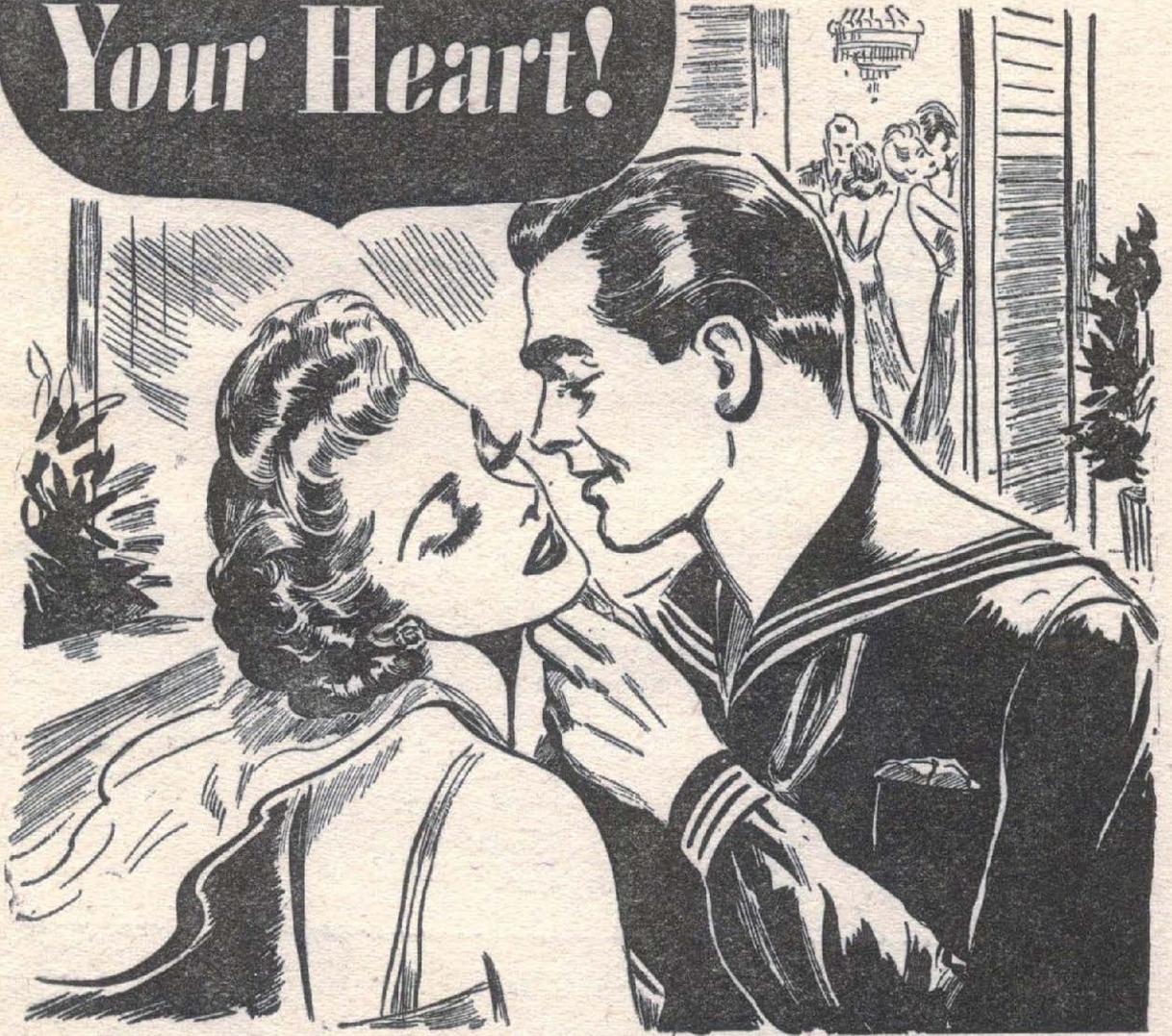


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Send Him Your Heart!

By
ADELE HALL



*There had been
stars mixed up in
that kiss.*

*She had too much love to be his friend.
—but too much money to be his bride.*

THIS party was going to be fun. Gay, standing in the doorway, swayed slightly to the music and smiled at anybody who happened to glance her way. She was so glad she had come home to spend her college holidays instead of visiting with her roommate. And it was super of Thea to ask Hal to bring a bunch of his shipmates to the house for a dance on her first night home.

Gay was feeling all bright and bubbly

inside just from watching the other couples. Hal caught her eye at that moment and she wiggled her fingers at him in an ecstatic little wave. What a grand brother-in-law he was going to make!

"Don't get chummy with that wolf," a voice said right in her ear.

She jumped. "He's a very good friend of mine. Why not?"

"He's a good friend of mine, too, but I want you to get chummy with me.

Dance?" He pulled her toward him and led her onto the floor without waiting for her consent.

"Don't you ever wait for an answer, Mr.—"

"No. Second Class Petty Officer Horace Richfield. Luckily my friends drop the Horace and call me Rich. Friend or foe, Gay?"

"Friend, Rich. How did you know my name?"

"I've been eavesdropping. It suits you very well, but I prefer 'darling.' Any objections?"

She shook her head. It was crazy, but even after so few short minutes, she knew it was going to be wonderful to have him call her darling.

"In that case," he said, "back me up in saying I have a priority when these other guys try to cut in. We have to work fast to make up for years of not knowing each other."

That was wonderful, too—dancing every dance with Rich, having him supply her with drinks and snacks, sitting next to him and holding hands during supper, knowing what he really meant when he asked, "Do you go for dancing on the balcony?"

"Not with the temperature at its present level," she said, not really meaning it.

"Pouf!" He unlatched the door and guided her out under the frosty sky.

Gay shivered slightly. "You might at least have given me time to get something to put around me."

"I have something," he said, and used his arms. "We could look at the stars, but—" He kissed her.

She didn't have to keep her eyes open then to see the stars. There were stars mixed up in that kiss, stars and little golden bells tinkling a love song.

"This must be why they give sailors shore leave," he said when it ended. Then he leaned toward her again, but before their lips met, Hal stuck his head outside and called, "Break it up, you two. Time to shove off, Rich."

Gay's happiness melted away. The evening surely hadn't gone in such a short time! Only a moment ago there had been hours and hours left. "Some little gremlin has pushed the clocks ahead," she said.

"I was thinking the same thing, dar-

ling." Rich kissed her, quickly. "A vote of thanks to the guy who invented tomorrows. We'll have lots of them, darling. Get your wraps and I'll see you home."

"Home? I live here. Didn't you know? Hal's fiancée, Thea, is my sister."

"You live here? In this big place with a two-story living room and a butler and twenty-nine kinds of sandwiches on the snack bar and somebody hired just to mix drinks?"

Gay nodded, grinning at his jumbled description.

But Rich wasn't grinning. "I had no idea," he said. "I thought you were one of the girls who came to dance."

"The better to find me tomorrow, my dear."

"That might not be so easy. Empty, that living room must look like Grand Central Station."

"Then try the dining room at seven. Hal's coming to dinner, too. If necessary, he'll lead you by the hand."

SHE didn't actually know whether or not he said he'd come because several of the guests chose that moment to say good night, but when Hal arrived the next night, he was alone.

"Where's Rich?" Gay demanded. "Didn't you wait for him?"

"He's not coming."

"Not coming!" She hadn't known what two simple, ordinary words could do to her. "Why, Hal? Why?"

"He claims he was out of his league last night. You scared him off by turning out to be one of the idle rich. He doesn't play with heiresses."

"Stop joking."

"I'm not joking, Gay. He's a serious-minded young man."

Gay was close to tears. "He can't do that to me! I can't help where I was born, can I? I—"

"Why, I believe the baby is carrying the torch for old Horace," Hal teased.

"If you'd seen her trying on every dress in her closet and ending by borrowing my newest, you'd know," Thea said. "Hal will find you another sailor, honey."

"I don't want another! I want Rich!" She grabbed Hal's arm and shook it. "Where can I find him? Tell me!"

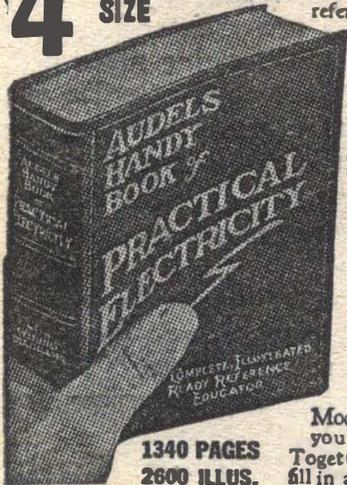
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LOVE NOVELS MAGAZINE

"Wait, now," Thea said. "Try to act slightly adult. There are other guests for dinner, you know."

"I don't want any dinner. I couldn't eat a crumb."

"Not if I promise to help you find Rich afterwards?" Hal asked.

Gay eyed him narrowly. "Are you just saying that? Are you treating me like a baby? That's what everybody else does around here."

"I mean it. I'll find him if we have to do every dive along the waterfront."

Fortunately they didn't have to. They found Rich in the first place they visited. Hal evidently knew his habits.

"Thanks," Gay said. "Now you two run along. I want to see him alone."

"There's a girl with him," Thea protested.

"Only a hostess," Gay said. "He can tell her to go."

"Say, how do you know these things?"

Gay looked at her sister scornfully. "I listen to the radio. Now scram."

Hal roared. "You've been underestimating the baby, Thea." But they turned and left, as Gay wished.

She walked straight to Rich's table and seating herself in one of the empty chairs, slipped her sable jacket off and said, "We had a dinner engagement. Remember?"

"See you later, Rita," Rich said to the girl sitting across from him. The girl rose sullenly and swaggered past the table. Gay couldn't help but feel glad that her hair was smooth and dark rather than fuzzy and harsh blond like Rita's, that her figure was trim instead of full blown.

"Nice brushing off," Gay said. "How do you do it?"

"It's easy. Watch." He stood up and placed her coat around her shoulders. "Now I'll put you in a taxi and send you home."

She reached her hand out timidly. "Please sit down, Rich," she begged. "I didn't come here to be nasty. I want to talk seriously."

HE SEATED himself grudgingly. "We don't have anything to talk about. I'm sure Hal must have told you why I didn't come to dinner, Gay."

SEND HIM YOUR HEART!

"I didn't think much of the reason. And I thought you preferred to call me darling?"

"I'm skipping that, along with your invitations."

"You do the inviting, then, and I'll call you darling."

"Don't try to act bright, Gay. We're through, before we really get started."

"But why?" You can't offer one good reason."

"It wouldn't work. We'd get involved and the first thing you know we'd end with nothing but a pair of broken hearts." He smiled grimly. "That girl you chased away from this table is more my type."

"You can't make me believe that."

"Well, anyway, she's a girl who works for her living, even if it isn't the approved kind of work." He pulled a snapshot from his wallet and shoved it toward Gay. "That's where I live."

The picture showed a pleasant white cottage set in an old-fashioned garden. A middle-aged couple stood arm in arm on the steps. To the right showed a shingle saying: *H. G. Richfield, M. D.*

"I think it's sweet," Gay said. "And if those people are your dad and mother, I think they look sweet, too."

Rich snorted. "You'd think it sweet if you had to live in a place like it, wouldn't you? You could put the whole thing, garden included, inside your living room."

"Sounds cozy."

"And my dad," he said, ignoring her remark, "probably makes enough in a year to buy an outfit like the one you're wearing."

"And what would he do with it, anyway?"

"You're acting bright again."

"Only because you're so funny and silly, Rich—I mean, darling." She leaned across the table. "Can't you see that it doesn't matter a bit to me? If two people love each other it doesn't matter where they live or what they wear. I'll bet your mother never objected to that house. I'll bet she thinks it's sweet, too."

"My mother isn't you. I tell you, we don't belong together, Gay. I want to stop anything between us before it gets to the hurting stage."

"It's at the hurting stage already with



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me, Rich. My heart got all tangled up in that kiss last night."

"You'll get over it. What are a couple of kisses?"

Suddenly she was angry. She'd pleaded long enough. A person can go only so far. "So that's the way you feel! Just a couple of kisses and nothing to it!"

"Gay, stop shouting. People are looking at you."

"I don't care if they are. Maybe they'd like to see somebody who doesn't make a habit of kissing and thinking it's nothing. But believe me, I'm through with throwing myself at somebody who does think that way. Or maybe I should reform and start taking my kisses more lightly."

"Gay, please. You know I didn't mean it that way."

"Oh, didn't you! Well, I do." She dragged her coat from the back of the chair and stood up. "I'll show you I can give kisses lightly, too."

She started toward the door, and when one of the sailors standing at the bar said, "Hi, sweet stuff," and took hold of her arm, she didn't shake him off. But Rich was there instantly, removing the sailor's hand.

"Apologize to the young lady for bumping into her, sailor," he said meaningfully. The other man seeing Rich's menacing look, and his towering six-feet-two of muscle, hastily mumbled an apology and returned to his drink.

"YOU were asking for real trouble in there," Rich said when they were outside. "Somebody ought to spank you."

"Who? You?"

"I might if I had to watch any more hare-brained tricks like that."

"Stick around, sailor."

"No, thanks. I'm going to put you in that taxi and send you home."

"Share-the-ride, buddy," the taxi driver said. "I'm waiting for a couple of other passengers."

Gay got in and sat down. Rich started to give her address to the driver. Just then, two sailors walked over to the cab. One of them looked inside and said, "Great idea, this share-the-ride plan. Move over, sugar."

Gay smiled at them brightly.

SEND HIM YOUR HEART!

But Rich got in, too. "Guess I'll have to stick around, after all," he whispered angrily. "Trouble just throws itself your way, doesn't it?"

They rode in silence after that until the other two fares had been dropped.

Immediately Gay turned upon him, "Why don't you go for a nice boat ride or something? You're not interested in my type. Go away and let me alone."

"It's my protective instinct," he said. "I'd do as much for a stray puppy."

Gay went white with rage. "I don't want your protection."

"Well, if it's kisses you still want, I can take care of that, too." He yanked her toward him roughly and crushed his lips against hers.

For a rapturous minute she was back in that beautiful moment on the balcony last night, and all the stars of ecstasy were there again.

But when he lifted his head again, she slapped him. But it wasn't because she really wanted to slap him. It seemed the only thing to do under the circumstances.

Rich laughed shortly. "If you always remember to do that," he said, "everything will be all right. You don't need to be protected." He signaled the driver to stop, jumped out of the cab, and left her to go home alone after all.

She was furious.

She was still furious when Thea got home and asked, "How did you make out with Rich? Everything shipshape?"

"Don't ever mention his name to me! I hope I never see him again." Then contradicting herself, "Oh, how I wish I could show him!"

"That's out, baby. He said he was going somewhere else, on duty." He hadn't said a word to Gay about leaving. Now she wouldn't have a chance to make him change his mind. Hastily she amended her thoughts. What she really meant was that she wouldn't have a chance to show him she didn't care.

"I'll forget him, then," she thought loftily. She lay back on the bed and watched Thea undressing, creaming her face, brushing her hair. And after a time she said, "You know what?"

"Tell."

"I'm not going back to college."

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LOVE NOVELS MAGAZINE

Thea put her hairbrush down and stared in surprise. "You'll have some trouble with dad over that."

"No, I won't. He didn't want me to go to that silly, fashionable school anyway. It was mother. He'll help me with her." She looked at the ceiling thoughtfully and a little smile began to turn up the corners of her mouth. "Then I'm going to get a job. And I'm not going to take an allowance any longer. I'm going to support myself. In my spare time, I'll learn to cook and take a nurses' aide course. And—"

"Say, is that for forgetting Rich? It sounds more like showing him, to me."

"I told you never to mention him again. I'll forget him. This is just in case another person should come along and accuse me of being a butterfly."

She worked hard at forgetting, and did pretty well. The job she got in the shipyard was a hard one, and her nurses' aide course kept her well occupied. She didn't have many waking hours to spend thinking about anybody, and when she finally tumbled into bed at night, she was too tired even to dream.

The months went by fast, and then there came the day when Thea danced into Gay's room, shouting, "Hal's back! Hal's back! He may get over to see me later this evening."

Gay paused with one arm in the blue pinafore of her nurses' aide uniform. That meant Rich was back too—if he'd come through the last trip all right. Suppose he hadn't! No use telling herself she didn't care. Now that he might be within a couple of miles, she couldn't fool herself any longer. Yet she didn't dare to ask Thea, not after studiously avoiding the mention of his name for so long. She forced herself to go on dressing, but Thea had apparently seen her face.

"Rich is here, too," she said.

Gay barely gave herself time to sigh with relief. "Who cares?" she said, and went to the closet to get a coat. She didn't choose the beautiful gray Persian lamb that dad had given her for her birthday, but the blue wool she had bought with her very own money. Not that thoughts of Rich had anything to do with her choice. Oh, no. It was simply that she was a girl who wore clothes she bought for herself.

SEND HIM YOUR HEART!

SHE wasn't even thinking about Rich. She did catch herself calling old Mr. Baxter in Ward C, "Rich," but when he smiled and said, "Got a beau on your mind?" she very curtly replied, "I haven't got a beau."

Then she had to be doubly nice to make up for being so rude, and she had to watch herself for the next two hours. She was very well liked in the hospital, and she didn't want to be cross to well-meaning patients.

She tried so hard not to think about Rich that she thought her eyes were playing tricks when she saw him standing outside the building as she left. She blinked once or twice, but he was still there. He was still there! Rich had come to find her!

"Watch out," she warned herself. "Remember, you parted on slapping terms. Don't throw yourself at him again. If he wants to make up, let him work at it."

"Going into the hospital?" she asked by way of greeting. "Nothing less serious than a broken neck, I hope."

He seemed startled, as if he couldn't believe what he had heard. She smiled to herself and thought, "You didn't expect that, did you?"

"Sorry to disappoint you," he said stiffly. "Thea and Hal asked me to come for you. They wanted to be sure you went straight home."

So that was the only reason he had come. Her heart sank and she was thankful she hadn't thrown herself into his arms.

"How thoughtful," she said. "What makes them so solicitous?"

"They're getting married tomorrow. Hal has a long leave and can get plane reservations to go home. They want to make plans tonight."

That would be something to think about anyway. Maybe her heart wouldn't break after all.

"That's wonderful," she said. "Let's hurry."

They walked toward the bus line.

"You haven't even asked me how I am or where I've been," he said.

"So how are you and where have you been?" she asked tonelessly.

"You're still angry at me."



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"Don't flatter yourself. I'm ignoring you."

"Oh."

They ignored each other the rest of the way home, and even after they got there, up to the point where Thea said, "I got the Deb Shoppe on the phone after hours and they sent over the winter white wool I wanted. I think it'll look very bridelike for a hurry-up, practical wedding. And there was another one something like it that Sandra Blake ordered and didn't take, so I had them send that over for you."

That was when Gay had to notice Rich. He, thinking she wasn't noticing, began making wild signs at Thea. Gay puzzled over his actions briefly then returned to the business at hand. There was no time for guessing games.

"I can't afford Deb Shoppe clothes," she said. "Send it back in the morning. My blue velvet will do very nicely, I'm sure."

"Not for a wedding," Thea wailed. "You can splurge just for once, can't you?"

"You do the splurging at your wedding, dear. I'll splurge at my own. When it happens."

"Your own! When it happens!" Thea jumped to her feet wildly. "Gay Le-Grande! Do you mean to stand there and tell me you refused him? After we've sent the announcement to the papers and dad has gone to the mayor for special licenses. Gay, how could you!"

"I don't know what you're talking about," Gay faltered, now completely bewildered.

RICH, who had given up gesturing, and had sunk onto the sofa with his hand over his eyes, looked up. "Thea," he said, "I didn't ask Gay to marry me. She hates me. She's ignoring me. You can't have a wife who ignores you."

"Hates you! Ignores you! After working for months at the worst job in the shipyards and putting almost every cent into War Bonds and dressing worse than the upstairs maid!"

She wheeled around toward Gay again. "What's the matter with you?"

SEND HIM YOUR HEART!

Gay smiled with mock sweetness. "You heard Rich say that he hadn't asked me."

Thea turned to Rich. "For goodness sake, ask her!"

There was an uncomfortable silence, then Rich, like a schoolboy reciting, said, "Will you marry me, Gay?"

"No, I won't. I only wanted you to ask me so I could say no. The man I marry won't ask me only after a remodeling job. He'll take me rich or poor, good or bad, whatever way—"

Rich interrupted by grasping her arm and dragging her across the room. "Excuse us a minute," he said. Then he unfastened the French doors and they were on the balcony again, exactly as they had been that other time.

His arms were around her, just the same way.

"Stop struggling," he said. "It's colder than it was that other time. You still need my arms around you." Before she could say a word, he went on, "You scared me off at the hospital, Gay. I really went there to ask you if you liked double weddings. I didn't need Thea to prod me into asking you."

"But you needed her to build me up, to tell you that I'd stopped being a butterfly, to talk you into asking me."

"I swear I didn't know a thing about that until a couple of minutes ago. While I was away I decided I needed you so much I'd have to see things your way. We'd just let love work out our problems."

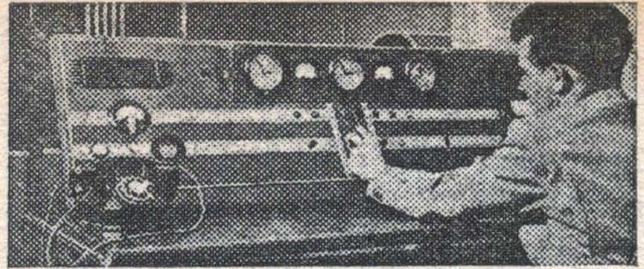
His arm tightened around her. "Now that you've already done something about it—well, I had come to the conclusion that you are the most wonderful girl in the world, while I was still at sea. You must have sent me your heart! Now the English language has no words for what I feel." He bent his head and whispered it very low, "Please marry me—darling."

It was the "darling" was that thing that did it.

"If you'd remembered to call me that back at the hospital," she said, "we could have saved a lot of time."

"I'll never forget again, darling."

She sighed, then snuggled closer and lifted her lips to his.



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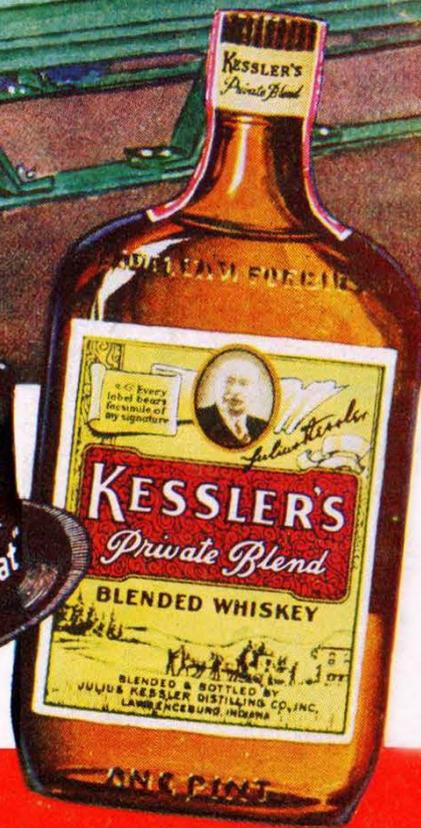
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