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SPRING

ARMY

Romances

Lloyd Shearer's
SICILY GIRL



LOOK OF LOVE.
MO-MOU, BE GOOD!
HERO BEWARE

Kemp

ARMY Romances

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**WATCH FOR THE
NEXT ISSUE—On
sale in March!**

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SPRING, 1946

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MO-MOU, BE GOOD!

Being the hysterical adventures of a girl who could handle the whole Army — though Arly and Johnny figured that two corporals were enough, not to mention the civilian population!

CORPORAL J. Arlington Wooster, U.S.A., experienced a distinct shock when his searching eye finally located Mo-mou. She was seated on a bench on the lawn engaged in an animated conversation with another corporal. But shock gave way to relief as he recognized in the other corporal his buddy, Johnny Adams.

"Good old Johnny," Arly thought, approaching them. No danger of Mo-mou running out on him with Johnny. It didn't occur to him to wonder how she and Johnny had met in the first place.

"Hi yah, soldier," he greeted him and then turned his attention to the dark-haired, black-eyed beauty on the bench.

"Where did you find the corporal, chick?" he asked banteringly, indi-

cating Johnny with a casual thumb.

"Arlee, this is Johnce," she replied throatily, by way of introduction.

"Yeah, I know. We spent the last nineteen months sharing a duplex foxhole," he answered. "You want to watch him, honey, he's a wolf. What d'ya say to getting some chow, hey? I'm starved."

"You know him?" she asked, surprised. And then without waiting for an answer she continued, "Let's go altogether, huh?"

"Together! Hey, wait a minute, I got a date with you, not him. He's not that much of a buddy," Arly replied heatedly.

"You go away and leave Mo-mou

●
by W. C. MacAllister

**But Arly caught sight
of the diamond on her
finger.**

all alone," she replied, pouting. "and Johnee, he's been very nice. We all go," she finished flatly.

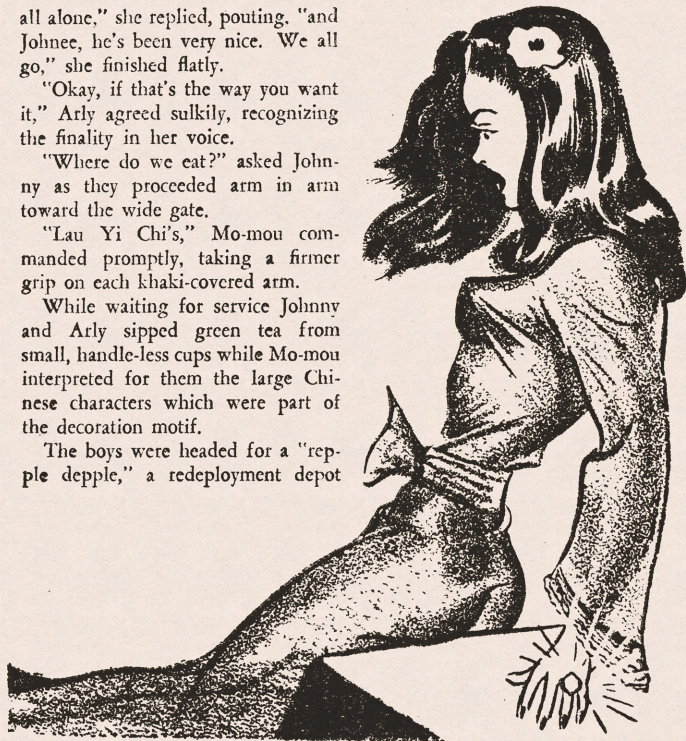
"Okay, if that's the way you want it," Arly agreed sulkily, recognizing the finality in her voice.

"Where do we eat?" asked Johnny as they proceeded arm in arm toward the wide gate.

"Lau Yi Chi's," Mo-mou commanded promptly, taking a firmer grip on each khaki-covered arm.

While waiting for service Johnny and Arly sipped green tea from small, handle-less cups while Mo-mou interpreted for them the large Chinese characters which were part of the decoration motif.

The boys were headed for a "repple depple," a redeployment depot



in the States, but the Army had decided to temporarily sidetrack them on the Islands. After obtaining three-day passes and securing a hotel room in downtown Honolulu they had immediately headed for Waikiki Beach.

They found Kalakaua Boulevard, which paralleled the beach, out of this world, even if it was strictly from Coney Island. The boulevard was lined with curio shops—"Genuine Hawaiian Curios"—hot-dog stands and palm trees. Except for the Royal Hawaiian Hotel and the profuse, semi-tropical foliage on every hand it didn't look a great deal different than Venice or Ocean Park in California. And they were amazed when they finally got to Waikiki Beach.

"Now I know the movies are propaganda," Arly commented. "Why, you could put this whole beach on one lot at Warner Brothers!"

They had wandered several blocks back along the boulevard toward Honolulu when faint strains of solid American jive were borne to their ears on the gentle breeze. Following this lead they soon found themselves at the wide gates of a beautifully-landscaped recreation center, almost hidden from the boulevard by a high fence and rows of palm trees. *MALUHIA*, which translated broadly means "peace and rest," was lettered on one gate-post. Across a wide expanse of cropped lawn was a large, open beer garden. Brilliantly spotted against the white of Navy and the

tan of Army uniforms were many brightly colored frocks.

"Johnny," Arly exclaimed, "look, women!"

"And beer," added Johnny reverently, feeling the long hike.

After a couple of quick beers apiece they visited the spacious dance floor which was crowded with dancers. The color of the frocks, the air of gayety and the pulse-pounding rhythm of a sixteen piece Army swing band lent a gala, Fourth of July atmosphere to the place.

From the sidelines the ever alert Arly spotted a lithe, lushly figured girl on the dance floor. A large expanse of nut-brown midriff was exposed between the bright red of her bra type sweater and matching skirt.

Arly lost no time cutting in on her and with his characteristic smoothness had soon obtained her promise to go to dinner with him. Johnny, meantime, had disappeared.

After several dances with Mo-mou, Arly had run into a crap game on the balcony above the dance floor. Before the MP's broke it up he had added several of the long green to an already well-filled wallet. It was just after this episode that he had located Johnny and Mo-mou together on the lawn.

AS THE THREE of them enjoyed the numerous and unfamiliar concoctions of a real Chinese dinner, which Mo-mou had ordered with a

lavish disregard for the right hand column of the menu, Arly schemed to get rid of Johnny, who gave every evidence of sticking like a mustard plaster. He was unsuccessful.

At Mo-mou's apartment, whither they had cabbled her after dinner, both boys were treated, at their urgent behest, to the real McCoy in Hawaiian dancing, complete with authentic grass skirt.

Mo-mou performed the hula admirably, sinuously and provocatively. She took a childish delight in being able to entertain them.

Neither of the two corporals would make the first move to leave. Consequently, it was approaching curfew time, ten o'clock, before they found themselves on Kalakaua Boulevard vainly trying to find some means of transportation uptown to Honolulu.

"Maybe we better go back to Mo-mou's," Johnny suggested after several packed buses had passed them. There were no cabs in evidence and the rest of the traffic was as jam-packed as the buses.

A jeep, brilliant in chrome yellow and green and bearing the legend "Military Police," rolled slowly by.

"Maybe we'd better," Arly decided quickly. "It's almost ten now."

Mo-mou, when she finally opened her door to their knock, robbed them of their respective breaths. She had donned a rose satin housecoat which

gorgeously sheathed her liliesome curves.

"You miss bus, huh?" she laughed merrily. "I not surprised. You sleep on *punii* hokay. Mo-mou don't mind." She spoke the demi-English peculiar to many of the Island natives and particularly the Portuguese, of whom she was an entrancing example.

She produced sheets and a blanket and retired to the adjoining bedroom. When they were bedded down on the *punii*—a low, double-sized couch—she reappeared. Brightly, and with scant regard for the extremely low neckline of her housecoat, she bent over the *punii* and naively kissed each of the boys good-night.

NEXT MORNING, in high spirits, they all took breakfast early and went to the beach. In hired swimsuits they spent several hours in the water, even tried surf-boards.

While Johnny swam out to try the deep water, Arly stole a march on him by talking Mo-mou into a date for dinner and the evening. At the hotel that evening, Johnny waited for his pal in vain. Arly did not put in an appearance until the next morning. He was non-committal about the night before, but did say that he was looking for a game somewhere. "I'm almost broke." Knowing that Arly had had at least a couple of hundred on the previous

day, Johnny asked how come. He learned exactly nothing. Arly was interested in one thing—action for his dice.

"I don't see how you do it, Arly," his buddy said enviously. "I only won once in my life and that was a freak. Six hundred bucks, and I put it all into this rock," he said flashing the large diamond he wore on his left hand.

"Nothing to it, son," Arly replied airily. "You just gotta know how to handle them, that's all. You gotta give them a good play, back yourself with plenty of dough and it's in the bag. Same way with women. No difference."

Johnny laughed. "Okay, general. I'll watch you and learn how it's done."

It was some time before Arly located a good game and he had only just begun to cash in when he realized that it was time to meet Mo-mou.

"Johnny, do an old pal a favor, will you," he asked. "How about you meeting Mo-mou at the Moana Hotel and keeping her out of mischief until I get there? I won't be too long."

Mo-mou greeted Johnny lavishly, just as though she had made a date with him instead of Arly. She looked lush and completely ravishing in a black frock with a sheer net top.

"Arly's in a crap game," he announced. "Let's go somewhere and have a drink or two. We'll meet him later."

"Hokay, Johnnee, I like that," she acquiesced, taking his arm cozily. Her eyes were dancing and her red lips merry.

SEVERAL drinks later they had both forgotten Arly. When Johnny suggested that they go somewhere for dinner Mo-mou thought a moment and then proposed a plan.

"Johnnee, why we don't get dinner stuffs and take to my house, huh? Is better." Her English was a bit twisted but he understood her perfectly.

"Swell, let's get going," he exclaimed.

Once in her place, Mo-mou disappeared into the bedroom to change her frock. She asked him to get out the dinner-plates meanwhile.

She reappeared clad in an old gingham house dress, faded, and shrunk to about one size too small for her figure.

"You don't mind, Johnnee?" she asked. "Mo-mou always spills some-things. It won't hurt this old thing, I don't care. Besides I don't like to wear clothes anyway but they arrest me if I don't," she said simply.

Johnny assured her feelingly that she looked perfectly all right to him.

"We should have just one more drink, you think, Johnnee?"

While he mixed the drinks she set the food on a table standing in a small breakfast nook. It was quite cozy and intimate in the small corner and they made a clean sweep of everything in sight until only one piece of pineapple remained. Mo-mou plucked it from the plate and placing it between her lips, indicated that Johnny should claim his half. "Old island custom," she laughed.

He did so with alacrity and would have proceeded from there but she demurred. She insisted that they clean the place up and put things in order.

They danced, afterward, to the rhythmic Hawaiian pieces Mo-mou played on a small portable victrola. Then she pleaded weariness, and with quite innocent provocativeness, stretched herself full length on the *punii*.

Johnny sat looking down into her eyes which, in the dim light, were twin slits pencilled in a delightfully exotic face. He sighed. He hadn't known her long enough, he reflected, to have fallen in love with her; not very much in love. Still—

She sure was a sweet kid. He bent to kiss her.

She twisted from his arms and rolled to the floor. But she was not angry. Giggling, she got up and burrowed into the cushions on the *punii*.

"Johnnee," she murmured softly, cajolingly.

"Yes, honey," he answered, dreamily, putting an arm around her.

"You and Mo-mou get married soon, huh?"

He started involuntarily and was instantly wide awake.

"Marry you? Because I want a kiss? Look, Mo-mou—I—I mean—"

"Well, we be engaged then, huh?" she said quite amiably, nestling warmly against him.

"Sure, sure," he exclaimed, immensely relieved. "We should be engaged for a while, I guess."

"You get Mo-mou a ring?"

"First thing tomorrow."

"Johnny, you let Mo-mou wear *your* ring till then, huh?"

He might or might not love Mo-mou, but he definitely loved the ring. He hated to relinquish it even for a short time. However, she coaxed with her soft lips, promising him the kiss he wanted, so reluctantly he slipped it on her waiting finger. She raised her face—

Whatever ideas Johnny might have been entertaining about kissing were rudely driven from his mind by an abrupt knock at the door.

MO-MOU fled into the bedroom. Johnny opened the door.

"I thought I'd find you here, you rat," Arly said, walking into the room. "Where's Mo-mou?"

Silently Johnny indicated the bedroom.

"What's the idea of running off with my girl?" Arly questioned peevishly.

"Your girl? Come off it, chum," Johnny answered easily. "You got her branded or something?"

"No, but I had a date with her."

"Sure you did, but you'd rather shoot craps. After all, what did you want me to do? Have a drink, pal, and forget it," he offered placatingly.

"Well," Arly replied, mollified, "probably do the same thing myself. Where's the drink? I'm dry."

While the two corporals were in the tiny kitchen Mo-mou returned. She had repaired her make-up and donned a bright green housecoat decorated with open gold filigree and which, as usual, left little to the imagination as to just what it was supposed to cover.

She ran to Arly and kissed him warmly, telling him the while that she was very glad to see him.

But Arly caught sight of the diamond on her finger. Very gently and ominously he set his half-finished drink on the drainboard of the sink.

A thunderous knocking at the door sidetracked his lethal intentions. Mo-

mou danced lightly across the living room and swung the door wide to reveal the scowling, dark countenance of a huge, hulking Portugee. Without a word this apparition entered the room, shoved the girl aside, and closed and locked the door.

"What you guys do wit' my girl, huh?" he demanded unequivocally.

Silence hung over the room like thunderheads over the Pali.

"I tink I clean da house," the Portugee said slowly, advancing toward the kitchen. A long knife seemed to spring out of the air into his right hand.

Uttering a small, frightened scream Mo-mou flung herself on his hairy arm. Without batting an eyelash the man-mountain heaved her across the room onto the *punji* and took a stand in the kitchen doorway.

Neither Johnny nor Arly dared attempt to get into the larger room. There was only space for one to try at a time and the Portugee had all the advantage. He knew it, too. The boys weren't afraid of him physically but both had a most healthy respect for the gleaming length of quivering steel he handled so casually.

Mo-mou saved the day, and their hash.

"Pacheco," she ordered sharply, "you stop. Hear me?" She said a few other things to him in the Portuguese language that didn't sound



*The thunder as they hit
the floor could be heard
on the boulevard.*

too good and he turned toward her, stung.

That move did for him.

Arly, in a super, Superman dive from a standing start nailed him neatly around the shoe-tops. The resulting thunder as they hit the floor amid furniture and bric-a-brac could be heard on the boulevard.

THE PORTUGEE kicked himself free with surprising agility, regained his feet and lunged at Arly who stood facing him. "Watch the shiv," cried Johnny as the knife flashed in the air. But Arly, thoroughly experienced against Japs in this very type of infighting, eluded his opponent and planted a solid left in his flabby midriff. The blow was calculated to slow him down temporarily and it did just that. Johnny, by now behind the Portugee, searched the room for a suitable weapon.

They had to finish this business in a hurry and get out. Johnny knew from experience that the MP's would hear the racket and reach the scene in nothing flat—they never failed.

His eye fell on a small straight-backed chair in one corner of the room and he made for it. The Portugee saw him and lashed with the knife. The gleaming weapon ripped through the sleeve of Johnny's shirt, barely scratching him.

Overbalanced by his effort to get Johnny, Pacheco was fresh meat for

the haymaker that Arly started from floor level. It caught him just below the ear and he went to sleep amid the ruins of the armchair on which he fell.

"Johnee," Mo-mou wailed, "you keel him."

"No, we don't keel him—I mean he's not hurt, much," he amended hastily, retrieving his overseas cap, and the knife, from the floor.

"What's the idea, anyway, Mo-mou? What's this bone-crusher to you?"

"He's my boy friend. But Mo-mou not like him any more. Mo-mou love you, Johnee," she said softly, her eyes full.

"Hey, remember me?" Arly broke in.

"Sure we do," Johnny answered. "You're another ex-boy friend of Mo-mou's. You heard her."

"Why, Johnny, how you talk to an old pal," said Arly. Without moving he reached out and pulled Mo-mou into his arms.

"Mo-mou, it's me you love, isn't it," he asked tenderly.

"Oh, Arly, I love you, too," she answered, melting in his embrace. "I love all the brave soldiers," she cooed happily. "They are so handsome and brave. And the beautiful uniforms!" She sighed.

Johnny, bug-eyed and bewildered at this facet of Mo-mou's character, was completely speechless.

At this point came another hammering at the door.

"More boy friends, I don't hope," Johnny exclaimed.

"One gets you five it's MP's," Arly answered. "Open the door, Mo-mou. At least these guys don't pack knives!"

A large young man, wearing sergeant's stripes and a ferocious scowl entered the room, followed by two colleagues.

"Mo-mou, who are these lugs—?" he stopped dead at sight of the recumbent Pacheco.

"Brawling, common brawling. I'll have to tell the general," he said with heavy sarcasm, eyeing Johnny and Arly.

"You all right, sweets?" he inquired solicitously of Mo-mou.

"Yes, Billee," she replied, a big, beautiful smile on her face. "But, Billee—Johnny and Arly, they don't hurt Pacheco. His heart, no good, you know? He faint."

"He faints in a big way. This room looks like the Tokyo marketplace," the sergeant answered, shaking his big head.

"You don't hurt Johnny and Arly, huh?" she asked fondly.

"Nah. Scram you guys. It's okay

this time but don't let me catch you monkeying around this sweet little girl again—see?"

"We were just leaving, Sarge," Arly answered meekly.

Taking Mo-mou's left hand in his own at the door, Johnny thanked her for a fine evening and gently slipped his beloved diamond from her unresisting finger.

"We were pretty lucky at that," Johnny said some time later in a crowded amusement arcade.

"Yeah," Arly was non-committal. Gently he nudged the pinball machine he was playing, trying to sink one of the little balls.

"I got my ring back, anyway," Johnny continued. "I've always been a sucker when it comes to women. The diamond proves it."

"Do tell!" Arly said disgustedly. "That diamond was no brotherly present to her. I'm no dope, pal."

"Well, so what? Where'd you spend the other night, huh?"

"On the *punii*, alone, wise guy. Believe it or not. And I got her fur coat out of hock for her just before I came back to the hotel, two hundred bucks worth. Barnum was right," he finished gloomily, as he watched the "TILT" light up the backboard of the pinball machine.

NOVELETTE OF A SOLDIER'S LOVE

When her father caught them together, he slapped the boy silly. That was before Eno had returned from the wars . . . to find Martha gone.



HERO Beware!

THERE WERE a lot of people at the station to welcome Corporal Eno O'Leary when he came back to Jack Pine.

He saw them as he swung from the train, farmers from the Scarlet River Portage, lumber jacks from the pulp camps, citizens of Jack Pine.

He knew why they were there. Not because of the medals on his coat. Not because the city papers called him a hero. They came because it was a good bet that Chris Gruska wouldn't let Corporal Eno O'Leary go back to Scarlet River Portage without a fight.

A short, powerfully built man with a red face and sandy hair elbowed his way through the crowd—Sven Narminen, foreman of the pulp camp on Cloud Lake. "The boys wanted I should be the first to say hello," he shouted. "We're proud of you."

Eno O'Leary's eyes searched the crowd. "Ma?" he asked softly.

"She's fine," Sven pronounced in a robust voice, "just fine."

A lumber jack behind Sven grabbed Eno's hand. Then the Portage people closed about Eno O'Leary.

She's fine, the words raced through



by
Andy
Lang

his head, ma's fine. But she didn't come to meet me. His eyes swept the crowd. And Martha, she didn't come either.

An empty pulp truck drew up before the station. In dead silence Chris Gruska, big and black-bearded, the fightingest man on Scarlet Portage, got out of the truck.

For a moment Eno O'Leary hesitated. Then slowly he went to meet Chris.

"So you come back!" Chris sent a stream of snuff juice spraying the planks of the station platform. "I don't care how many damn times you a hero," said Chris, his voice slurring soft, "keep away from Martha. Me, her pa, tell you, keep away." His voice slurred on. "Or I break your damn neck like I should of done afore."

"I don't want to fight you, Chris." Eno tried to keep his voice quiet, steady. "I had enough fighting. But I'll fight if I got to and this time I'm ready for you."

Chris' black beard spread in a moist red slit. "Ja, like always." His hand came out open and swung at Eno's face.

And swiftly Eno O'Leary pulled back.

He didn't want to pull back. His body, his will, were set against backing before Chris. And he pulled back. It was that hand—that open hand.

Again the hand came up. Sven

Narminen shoved between Chris and Eno. "Me and the boys," Sven glanced at the lumber jacks standing by, their eyes on Chris, "we're here to see there's no trouble." To Eno he said, "I'm drivin' to camp. I'll drop you at the farm."

THE ROAD to Scarlet River Portage turns from the International Highway at Jack Pine and twists and climbs through a hilly country heavy with second growth. Corporal Eno O'Leary sat beside Sven Narminen, not speaking, his eyes on the trail.

His eyes were blue, Irish blue. His hair was red. But the high bones of his cheeks, his strong, full neck, marked him as a Finn. He was not tall but his shoulders were broad, his chest deep. High on his forehead, partly covered by his GI cap, was a deep, furrowing scar.

Sven broke the silence. "You got bigger since you was gone."

"Looks like I'm going to need my size."

Sven cleared his throat nervously, "Eno, maybe if you'd give her up—Martha, Chris'd let you alone."

The corporal shook his head. "This trouble with Chris—it ain't just a matter of Martha. It goes deeper'n that. Chris don't want me on the Portage just like he didn't want pa. Well—he got rid of pa—"

"I always figured it was your pa sendin' Chris to jail what started

Chris hellin'." Sven's voice was reflective. "Chris just never got over goin' to jail."

The Portage had never got over it either, thought Eno. When he was a little kid his pa used to tell how he, Michael O'Leary, had come to the north country for his health and got a job on Grandpa Eno Lorella's farm. And married the farmer's beautiful daughter. He never told about Chris Gruska. Eno got that from the kids at school.

Elena Lorella had kept company with Chris Gruska. When Chris heard Elena had married Michael O'Leary he went up to O'Leary on Main Street in Jack Pine and slapped him down.

The way the Portage figured it, after the slapping Chris and Michael O'Leary were even. Michael had got Chris's girl and Chris had licked Michael. Nobody expected a little guy like Michael O'Leary to fight back at Chris.

But Michael O'Leary fought back. In the only way he could. He took Chris to court and the judge sent Chris to jail for ninety days.

Portage people settle troubles with fists and sometimes with knives, but they settle them on the Portage. To take a fight to court was the way of a coward.

The Portage understood how it was that Chris never forgot about going to jail. Even after he had married and settled down on his pa's farm

across from the O'Leary's, Chris never forgot.

Eno used to pray God to make his pa strong so he could fight Chris. Just fight him once. He never asked God to make pa so strong he could lick Chris. He knew that was asking too much. Just strong enough to stand up to Chris. So that Chris and the Portage could forget about jail.

Michael O'Leary never got strong. But someday I'll be strong, Eno had dreamed. When I'm big enough and strong enough I'll fight Chris.

And then, one day, in a pasture—

SVEN WAS speaking. "It was bad —Chris livin' right across the road."

"It wasn't all bad. There was Martha. We always was crazy for each other but Chris never let us be together. If he knew she'd been at our house he'd lick her. After he killed pa—" his voice was harsh.

"I never believed that, about your pa pulling a gun on Chris."

Eno stared hard at the trail. "Ma—she never wanted it told. She figured it wouldn't bring pa back anyways. Pa—he pulled his revolver on Chris right enough. In the pasture, Chris got it away from pa and it—went off—" He took a deep breath. "Chris was slappin' me. He had caught me and Martha together."

"So. When Chris got the revolver it went off—"

"After pa was killed we tried to keep away from each other, me and Martha." A slow red flushed his face, "It wasn't no use."

"You kids might of knowed if you got married in Jack Pine, Chris'd catch you."

"You wouldn't think," Eno burst out passionately, "he'd slap down his—son-in-law—on the street—in front of everybody—"

"Hell, that's just where Chris would do it!"

"He meant to make Martha ashamed of me. So she done—what she done."

"A girl's got a right to expect her man to fight for her," reproach was in Sven's voice. "You never even *tried* to fight Chris. How come you could fight Japs so good and you couldn't fight Chris?"

"I ain't scared of Japs like I am of Chris's hands. It's his damned slappin'—"

Sven shot Eno a swift glance. "You mean his slappin' gets you? You shouldn't let it. Chris always starts a fight slappin'. That's to make the other guy think he don't amount to much. You got to call his bluff, make him fight! He'll use fists fast enough when he's got to."

"I told myself that," Eno burst out. "It don't do no good. Once—when I was a kid—Chris was poundin' my dog and I—I went for him. It was in a cow pasture. He slapped me down—hurt me bad—"

"Slapped a kid. The son of a—!"

"I never told ma and pa. I figured it would just make trouble. I—I can't get over it. Chris knows it. He knows I'm scared of him."

The car reached the top of Iso Hill and Sven shifted to second because Iso Hill goes up a long ways and then goes right down.

Iso Hill is the big hill, the mountain hill. The wilderness is all about the hill, a vast, billowing sea of green cut by flashing rivers, lighted by wide lakes.

North from the hill the land slopes in a great bowl and rises to black Canadian hills. Along the hills are the interlocking lakes of the Border chain.

Eno leaned forward in his seat looking, looking. "The wanting for home," he said, his voice low to a whisper, "it's the terriblest hurt. Worse than thirst or pain. The jungle—it was like fightin' always in a deep hole. I couldn't get me a good breath. I couldn't—" He pushed his elbows as if to hold off crowding walls. "I figured the harder I'd fight the sooner it would be over with and I could come home."

"You're a Finn," said Sven, "You wasn't meant for close places."

THE ROAD turns at the hill and below is the Scarlet River. From Iso Hill to Cloud Lake, an entrance to the Border chain, the road is called

the Portage Road. Along the river, in cup-like valleys, between sharp hills, are the Portage farms.

The Portage Road is even narrower, more twisting than the road from Jack Pine, a razzle-dazzle trail that lopes over hills, pitches and soars again. No grading breaks the backs of the hills. If a boulder is in its path the road goes around it. The Indians and the voyageurs packed their canoes along this trail over the rapids and cascades of the Scarlet River. To the old Ojibways it is still Kitchi-kana, the big trail. It is Border legend that the first Indian to pack the Scarlet broke the trail and to this day everyone has followed in his steps.

Mostly the farmers of the Portage are Finns. They came to America to work the mines of the iron range. But Finns do not like the enclosing walls of mines. A few pushed north and found the Border country, a vast, wild land like their native Finland. They took land along the Scarlet, built homes from the forest, grubbed out small farms. Others followed. Until a community of Finns grew on the Portage.

The O'Leary farm was a few miles along the Portage Road. The car topped a hill and below Eno saw the pitched roof of the log house, the new barn and silo built by Michael O'Leary. Beside the river was the stone sauna, the Finn bath house.

He saw that only the acres that

met the river had been sown to crops. He looked swiftly at Sven. "She got a hired man?"

"Ain't been a man for hire on the Portage for two summers. Every Finn they'd take went to war. Ain't been enough trappin' to keep the wolves in their places."

"But ma?"

"She made out," Sven's voice swelled with pride. "She grew the best land to fodder and brought the cattle through fine. Now and again on Sunday I come over and helped. She's a fine woman."

"You said it." Eno looked to the farm across the road, the Gruska farm. There were no turned acres on the Gruska farm. There were no cattle in the yard, no signs of life.

Sven stopped the car at the O'Leary gate. Eno got down, his eyes still on the house across the road. "Thanks for the lift," he said.

"Tell Elena if there's anything—" Sven's eyes followed Eno's. He half shook his head. "Anything—"

"Thanks," said Eno again. He went to the kitchen door, took a deep breath and went inside.

Elena O'Leary stood by the stove. She turned at the sound of the opening door.

HER FACE was burned by sun and wind to a leathery brown, Beneath the high bones her cheeks sank in deep hollows. About her eyes were

wear, sun-dug lines. Her hair, glossy black when he went away, was beginning to gray. "Aiti, aiti," he called, speaking the Finnish word for mother. Swiftly he went to her and kissed her.

Her body was hard and controlled against him. Her eyes rested an instant on the scar on his head, then turned away. "So you come back."

It was like a blow, her hard, unwelcoming words. He drew away and he would have spoken in anger. Then he remembered the unturned acres of the farm, saw her tired, sun-parched face. "Yes, I come back."

He saw that the table was set for two. He saw his favorite jelly, a pan of *huituvelli* pudding. She wouldn't come to meet me but she was waiting, he thought and his heart sang. In spite of her hard words she was waiting. "You know, ma, what's the worst part of war? The cooking."

"I thought you wasn't never comin' back."

The smile went from his face and it was dark and cold like stormy weather when a wind-cloud shadows the sun. "I thought I wasn't neither." He went to the window, and looked to the Gruska farm. "Ma—where is she—where is my wife?"

"There's work enough on the farm for two men and I can't get men. It's been hard havin' you gone when I needed you so bad."

"Ma—"

She brought a platter heaped with brown slices of lake trout to the table. "Eat," she said, "before it gets cold."

"Ma," Eno's voice was sharp, "where is my wife?"

Elena O'Leary got to her feet, gathered up a stack of dishes and carried them to the dish pan. Across the room from him she spoke. "Son, give up Martha. She won't never bring you nothin' but trouble."

"Ma, she's my wife."

For a time Elena worked in silence, her back to him. When she spoke again her voice shook with anger. "You think I will take you in my house—you and Chris Gruska's daughter?"

Her anger was answered in the burning color of his face. He got to his feet. "I guess I shouldn't of come home."

He went up the narrow stairs to his room under the roof. It was exactly as he had left it that night he went away. His bag was still against the wall. He opened it. It was still filled with the clothes he had packed to take when he married Martha, enough clothes for a few weeks. He had been so sure that, after a few weeks, Elena O'Leary would forgive them and they could come home.

He had taken the bag to town that day they were married, and he had brought it back that night and drop-

ped it against the wall. And there it stood. Two years unpacked Elena O'Leary had allowed it to stand. A reminder of his marriage to Chris Gruska's daughter.

They had planned so carefully, him and Martha. They had waited until Chris went up the lakes hunting. They met in Jack Pine and were married. But the weather turned bad and Chris had gone to Jack Pine. Someone told him of the marriage. And in front of the Pool Hall, in front of a Saturday crowd, Chris stopped them.

He had known that someday he would have to fight Chris if he was going to live on the Portage with Martha. He had been sure that with Martha to fight for he could fight.

He had tried to fight, dear God, he had tried.

Then Chris opened his hand and slapped him full in the face and slapped him again and suddenly he was a little boy in a cow pasture and this giant of a man was slapping him, slapping him until he fell in the deep grass beside a clubbed and bleeding dog.

He saw Martha's face, set and white. Step by step he backed before Chris taking the slaps on his face. Only when his back struck the wall did rage stronger than his fear, the rage of a Finn trapped, goad him to action. Not against a wall.

Not against a wall!

Blindly he threw himself at Chris.

And Chris threw him back and slapped him to the sidewalk. From the sidewalk he saw Martha go away with her father.

That day the Portage people passed judgment on Eno O'Leary. Yellow. Coward. Wouldn't even fight for his wife.

He had come home and gone to his room, not telling his mother what had happened. At night he went to the place beside the river where they always met and waited for Martha. But she did not come. So he went down the Portage Road and to war.

That same night he had sworn never to return to the Portage. That night he had hated the Portage with a bitter hate. Only the memory of his mother tore at his heart. "I'm never coming back," he wrote to her. "But some way, *Aiii*, I'll make it up to you—all the trouble I have been."

But in the deep jungle he dreamed of the north country—clean, cold wind—the singing pines—wide lakes—Of Martha—his mother—the farm—of home. Dreamed until it was a break in his heart. And one day he said, "If I come through I'll try once more."

He had learned to use his fists as a boxer uses them. He had learned to fight as men are taught to fight who must face the Japs.

The bullet searing his head had brought an end to his fighting but as his body grew strong he began to

train again. He had taken his time.

He had thought he was ready for Chris. And then today at the station, just the sight of Chris—just the sight of his open hand—

He buried his face in his hands. "It's got to be settled," his voice was an agonized whisper, "the sooner the better."

CORPORAL ENO O'LEARY slept a tossing, dream-disturbed sleep. He awoke at daybreak, dressed quietly and tiptoed down the stairs. He was at the door when his mother's voice, a strained, wide-awake voice called, "Eno. Where you goin'? You didn't sleep?"

"Sure. I slept fine. We get up early in the Army."

She pulled a bathrobe over her shoulders. "You go look at the car. I'll make breakfast." Her hand on his arm stayed him. Gently she touched the rough scar on his forehead. "Son, I don't want you hurt no more."

He kissed her hand, the hard inside of it. "*Aiti*," he said, "I want you to know, I didn't come back just for Martha. I come because this is my home and I want to live here. If I can't stand up to Chris I can't stay on the Portage. If I got to go it's best I go right away." He gripped her hand, "Help me, ma, help me to fight."

His car was on jacks, the battery

removed. He set about getting it in running order.

When he returned to the house Elena O'Leary had sourdough pancakes on the griddle. She brought him a plate of cakes, hesitated beside him. "What I said last night—about givin' up Martha—I'm sorry I said it."

"Thanks, ma," he gave her hand a squeeze.

"I tried to tell myself that if you'd give her up Chris would let you—let us live here in peace. But I shouldn't of tried to make you give her up. Martha is your wife. It is right you should be with your wife."

"*Aiti*—"

She hurried on, "Her and her pa—they're workin' at Sven's camp. She helps Charlie Sovarri cook. Last week she come to see me. She said she was sorry she walked out on you. She said if you want her back she'd meet you and you could get away—to the city—" She started back to the stove.

He caught her hand, stood up and forced her eyes to his. "And you—*Aiti*?"

"I'll be all right," she said swiftly. "I'll be fine."

He shook his head. "This time I ain't sneakin' away."

She stood looking after him as he went up stairs. Then she snapped shut the dampers on the stove and pulled off her apron.

When he came down she was wait-

ing for him, a coat over her house dress, shopping bag in her hand.

"I'm goin' with you."

"Please, ma. I'd rather go alone."

"I'm goin'."

AT THE PULP camp he drove directly to the cook shack. The jacks were just coming to the shack for their Sunday breakfast.

Martha and Charlie Sovarri were carrying dishes of food to the long tables. Eno stood in the doorway, looking at Martha—at her hair, the way it curled about her face, at her eyes, wide and dark—"Martha," he called. She turned, then she was running to him. He caught her in his arms. "Go pack your things," he said.

She shook her head. "No time. We'll go right away—before he comes."

"No," said Eno. "I'm waitin' for him."

"Me, I get him," piped Charlie Sovarri. He went outside and yelled. He popped in and behind him was Chris.

Carefully Chris closed the door. There was no way to tell what was going on behind that black, masking beard but his little eyes flashed fire. He's old, thought Eno, he must be forty. My God, I'm scared of an old man of forty. He said, "We better go outside. We don't want to mess things."

"Me, I don't mess things."

Swiftly, apprehensively Eno looked about the close walls of the room. Outside—he could fight better outside—. Chris came slowly towards him. Eno pulled off his coat. He held his hands doubled in fists as if by seeing them Chris could be made to also close his hands in fists. Chris raised his hand and it was open.

I'm not afraid, before God, I'm not afraid, Eno told himself. He's old—forty—forty—! He tried to keep his eyes from that open hand, tried to look into Chris's eyes—but the hand blotted out everything. Hot blood pounded his head.

Now the jacks were crowding the cook shack. Desperately Eno tried to control his frantic breathing. "I'll fight," he gasped, "to throw you out of the Portage."

Chris drove at him. "Sure," the word was a hoot.

Sven Narminen stood in the doorway. The jacks were yanking tables out of the way. Sven crossed to Elena O'Leary, standing beside a table, and put an arm around her, as if to brace her. She opened her bag and put her hand inside it.

Chris was grinning now, a wide, snag-toothed grin. He knows what he does to me, Eno told himself. I'm playing his game. God, dear God, help me not to be a coward.

Again Chris opened his hand. Hit first, hit hard, call his bluff, make

him fight with fists—the words raced, a frantic cry, through Eno's head. He struck. The blow landed hard. Chris rocked back. Then he lurched forward and his hand smashed against Eno's face.

And Eno's stomach turned over and water flowed through his veins.

He hit again and landed the blow but there wasn't much punch behind it. And then Chris was slapping him first with one hand, then with the other, and Eno was hitting out wildly and missing. He cursed himself and despised himself and he was backing before Chris, backing—backing—

He was nearing the wall.

The jacks were yelling for him to fight as they had yelled that day, two years ago in Jack Pine. He knew what they were thinking. He didn't look a soldier. He didn't look like a hero!

Another step and he'd be against the wall. Against the wall Chris would finish him.

No. *Not against a wall!*

He hurled himself at Chris—but not blindly. His legs shot out and came together like slicing scissors, one foot smashing at Chris's knee, the other clamping the knee from behind. He felt Chris lose balance. Then Chris sprawled on the floor.

He jumped free, backed from the wall. For a moment everything stopped dead. Then he heard Martha laugh, a shrill, hysterical laugh, and the jacks were all yelling at once.

Chris was getting to his feet. The smile was gone from his face. Get him before he opens his hand . . . before he opens his hands . . . Square on the jaw Eno hit him. Chris's head flew back and his massive body spun to the wall. Frantically he struck out—but now he was striking with his fists.

Fighting my way—my way. Now I call the play—the words rang through Eno's head a fierce and exultant cry. And suddenly his fear of Chris was a strange, incomprehensible thing.

Suddenly he was cool and sure as he had been facing Japs in the jungle. Take your time—

He saw the opening. He hit and hit solid and Chris slid down the wall.

He sat on the floor looking like a man who had been agreeably asleep and did not want to wake. Slowly he got to his feet. Swiftly his hand struck out. The flash of a knife and the sound of a gun were of the same instant.

The knife spun along the floor. Chris grabbed his shoulder and looked viciously at the jacks. Then, reluctantly, his eyes went from the jacks to Elena O'Leary. Her hand was out of her bag now and a revolver was in it.

Sven went to Chris and pulled back his shirt. "Scratch." He looked at the hole in the wall behind Chris.

He turned to Elena O'Leary. "You aimed too high," his voice was reproachful.

"I didn't mean to," said Elena O'Leary.

Sven motioned to Charlie Sovarri. "Take him to the Wanigan and fix him up." To Chris he said, "You can have a job in the company's camp in Oregon. I'll buy your farm—cash. The boys'll put you on the train."

And Elena O'Leary said, the revolver still in her hand, "Don't ever come back."

Martha was beside Eno holding tight to his arm. Chris looked at her out of his bloody face. "I'm staying with my husband," she said in a loud, proud voice.

"To hell with you," said Chris. He stooped for his knife but Sven got it first. He handed it to Eno.

Chris spit on the floor and ground

his boot in it. "To hell with all of you," he said and he went out of the cook shack.

Sven Narminen was grinning clear across his face. "We'd consider it an honor," he said, his eyes affectionately on Elena O'Leary, "if the fight-in' O'Learys would take breakfast with us."

Eno looked at his mother, at the revolver in her hand. His father's revolver. The revolver that in Chris Gruska's hand had killed Michael O'Leary. His eyes met hers.

"You done swell, son," said Elena O'Leary.

He lifted his head. The prints of Chris's hands were on his face. His lips were swollen and bloody but he grinned at her and his voice was deep and tender like his pa's voice used to be, "Thank you, *Aiti*. Come on, Martha."

American servicemen make good husbands—or New Zealand girls good wives. So far, of the more than 700 marriages between girls in the Wellington region and American sailors or soldiers, a mere twenty have ended in divorce. In Auckland, the figures show only thirty-five divorces out of 1,000 marriages.

This is well below both the United States and New Zealand peacetime divorce rates!

Much of the credit is said to belong to the pre-wedding check-up system maintained by Navy and Army authorities.

"You don't want me, Rich,"
she said evenly.

In occupied territory, there
are more kinds of love than
meet the eye . . .

SICILY GIRL

KEYES WITH the hard, bronzed face, came first to accept the surrender, and after that came Patton with the silk gabardine jodhpurs and the pearl-handled revolvers, to talk to the correspondents, and after that came the men of the Allied Military Government to run Sicily. These men substituted for God in the fascist-vacated City Hall of Licata, and in two days their business mushroomed in such geometric progression they were compelled to place among

by
Lloyd
Shearer

the troops an urgent call for Italian-speaking soldier clerks.

Lieutenant Blakely chose me for one of the jobs, and I walked the five miles into Licata and reported to the AMG major in charge with a snappy salute. His name was Anthony Vanda, and I found out later that he once ran the A & P Supermarket in Wallingford, Conn.

His office was hot and jammed with long, broken lines of jabbering Italians, and as soon as I finished reporting, he drew a handkerchief across his dark, sweaty face and said, "For God's sake, Hall, take one of these desks and help us get rid of some of these people."



I could speak Italian reasonably well. I had grown up in an Italian neighborhood, but social work and public administration were experiences foreign to me. Anyway I took a good, deep breath and waded in.

One wizened old peasant wanted permission to go to his daughter's house in Rome.

"Sorry," I told him. "The railroad's broken down and there's fighting on the way to Rome. You'll get killed."

A middle-aged woman in black, with a baby at the breast, pushed forward and complained that she had not received her weekly ration of olive oil. I switched her to the Major's line.

Another woman, tall and strongly-scented, wanted to know if she could open a brothel for American soldiers. She claimed to have had lots of experience, and she looked it. I asked her if she had the girls. She said no, but she knew where she could get some. Quite arbitrarily I decided it was against American military policy, and she left, muttering to herself dejectedly.

All the Italians I interviewed, and I spoke with hundreds on that first day, claimed to be avowed enemies of fascism. At the mere mention of the word "fascismo," they would knife their index fingers across their throats and emit snake-like hisses.

Unfailingly, as if it were a local

ritual, they all executed this motion—all except one girl, better dressed than the rest, with blue eyes and a tanned, smooth skin and blonde hair pulled closely over her ears. She wore a white linen suit, spike heels, no hose; half-walking, half-shuffling up to my desk, she spoke softly yet with determination.

"I have a perfectly good draft note on the Bank of Sicily," she said in unmistakable American, "but I can't get anyone to advance any money on it."

I STARED at her, surprised—then fascinated. This girl was lithe and slender and lovely.

"You Italian?" I asked.

"Yes," she answered proudly, as if I had intended to slur the people.

"*Come si chiama?*"

"Elena Roberti."

"You're the first blonde Italian I've seen."

"I came here, Sergeant, because I wanted to know what I can do with this draft. It seems impossible . . ."

"I said, *Signorina*, you're the first blonde Italian I've seen," I repeated.

"My parents come from northern Italy; Florence," the girl said defiantly.

"Are they here now?" I asked.

"Must I give an autobiography to get a bank note cashed?"

"Yes, I'm afraid so."

"All right then. My mother's dead, and my father was the mayor of this city, and that's his desk you're sitting at!"

Her words hit me with the force of a .37 millimeter anti-tank gun. "Oh," was all I could mutter.

With a jerk of her head, Elena Roberti tossed backward the stray curls which had fallen across her eyes.

"Well, say it!" she demanded. "Go ahead! Why don't you say it? Why don't you call me a fascist like the rest of them do? Go ahead! Why don't you?" She clenched her small fists tightly, so tightly that her hands were white as they beat the top of the desk.

"Sit down," I said. "You're upset." I got up and shoved a chair against the back of her legs. Getting so close to a girl again felt good.

"We've had to close the banks a few days," I explained. "You can understand that. I'll see what I can do."

While she calmed herself, I walked over to Major Vanda and explained the case to him quickly. He looked at Elena's legs. Majors are also human.

"Well," he said weakly. He took a one-hundred lira note from the top drawer of his desk. "We know about her. She's all right. Give this to her and keep the draft. Tell her to come back for the rest in a few days."

I gave Elena the money and asked her where she lived, as if I needed the information for the record.

"Eighteen *Via Progreso*," she said.

"Perhaps I can see you tonight?" I suggested.

She raised her eyebrows in quizical disapproval. "See *me*?" she repeated.

"I mean about the rest of the money that's due you." I quickly added.

"Oh," she said. "If that's really the case, perhaps you can."

For the first time since I'd landed, Sicily looked good to me.

UNLIKE MOST of the other streets in Licata, the *Via Progreso* had remained comparatively untorn, unshelled by our heavy stuff. It was a narrow, winding, cobble-stoned street, working its way unplanned to the northern end of the town where atop a small rise stood Elena Roberti's house, its once white stucco now discolored a battle gray.

It was hot and eight o'clock when I knocked expectantly at the door. An old, shawl-clad woman, white-haired and sixtyish, carefully drew it back a few inches.

"*Si*?" she asked, peeking out. "*Si*?"

"Elena," I answered. "*Desidero* *ver Signorina Roberti*. Tell her the American soldier is here about the bank draft."

The old lady remained suspicious.
"*Aspettate un minuto.*"

In a few minutes Elena came down and let me in herself. She was wearing a black skirt and a Paisley blouse, and she was the closest thing to an American girl I had seen in a year. God, how I wanted to slip my hand around her waist and hold her. She showed me to the living-room, and we sat down on a sofa facing each other.

"Tita said you had something to tell me about the bank draft," she began. Her voice was soft and gracious.

"Yes. Major Vanda tells me we can't advance you any more money on your draft until we reopen the Bank of Sicily."

"And when will that be?"

"I don't know," I said.

The last thing I wanted then was to discuss the Bank of Sicily. I'd been doing that all day. Now I was tired and worn. Those five miles into town, the heat, the dust, those incredible stories of trouble and poverty, they added up to fatigue; I wanted to relax. Yet here I was on a comfortable sofa with an attractive, desirable girl and all I had to tell her was that we couldn't give her money.

"How do you expect us to eat?" she objected rightfully.

"Well, frankly I don't know," I said. "I understand we're going to start distributing food as soon as

we can. Here, I brought some stuff for you myself." I was carrying my musette bag, and I reached inside for two cans of K-rations. I put them on the couch between us.

Elena Roberti looked at them.

"You're very kind, Sergeant," she said.

"Also very tired," I added.

She caught on quickly. "Where are you staying?"

"Nowhere," I said hopefully. "The Major told me to go out and find a place where I could billet myself."

"We have a room here," she offered, "if you like."

If I like? Hell, I'd been sleeping in ditches and mud and gullies and foxholes. I hadn't been sleeping at all.

"Yes," I said. "I would like to stay here very much. I would be very grateful."

She smiled. "It isn't much of a room, Sergeant. But it does have a bed."

"A bed," I repeated. "A real bed? That sounds like heaven!"

"You look as if you could use a little heaven right now," she said.

Self-consciously, I ran a hand up and down my stubbled beard.

She laughed, and stood up. "I'll call Tita. She'll show you upstairs."

"That's very good of you," I said. Then I added impulsively. "Wonder if I might impose upon you for another favor, Miss Roberti?"

"If I possibly can—" she hedged.

"My name is Hall," I said, smiling at her, "Richard Hall. Would you call me Rich?"

Elena smiled back. "I'd be happy to . . . Rich."

That night I slept in a bed under linen, too weary to be tormented by the fact that Elena Roberti, warm and lovely and radiant, slept in the room across the hall from me.

IT TOOK ME a month to fall in love with Elena, a relatively long time, I guess, during a war. Considering that she was beautiful and young, and I was billeted at her house—eating, talking, playing, singing, walking, and dancing with her practically every evening—I guess it was inevitable.

The realization that I loved her was a pleasant enough one, disturbed only by the thought that I didn't know very much about her background. The Major had told me she was all right politically, and she herself had told me she'd been sent to the United States when she was ten. But that was really all I knew. And after all when a fellow is going overboard for a girl, he likes to feel they agree on a few basic rights and wrongs.

One evening with dinner finished, I decided the time was ripe for me to find out about Elena. At the time

I was sitting in the easy chair watching her light the candles over the fireplace in the living room. Presently she came over and sat down on the hassock at my feet.

"You look so serious, Rich," she observed. "What's on your mind?"

"Elena," I said, "how long have I been staying here, in your house?"

She paused to think. "Four or five weeks. Why?"

I couldn't bring myself to the point. "Well, so much talking and dancing and being with you . . . We *have* had a lot of fun, Elena, haven't we?"

"Yes, Rich. But why so serious about it?"

"It's just that . . . Well, I've never bothered you with any personal questions, have I?"

"No, Rich, you haven't."

"I mean, I do know a lot about you. You've traveled. You've gone to school in America, but . . ."

"But what?"

"Well, on this whole fascist business," I began. "I know how *you* stand, but your father and the party and . . ."

Elena took my hand. "You were never meant for the diplomatic service, Rich. Why don't you speak your mind?"

"All right, Elena," I blurted out. "How come you didn't go with your father when he left the city?"

Elena's eyes narrowed and her forehead wrinkled. She got up from the hassock, went over and rested her head against the stone of the mantle-piece.

"I've never been a fascist, Rich," she said. "You know that. I've always hated Mussolini and everything he stood for. Father made a mistake when he sent me to America for an education. When Mother died and I came back to take care of him and the house, I tried to get him to leave the party, to resign, but he was in it too deeply.

"When the Americans landed at Gela, he begged me to go to Switzerland with him, but I told him I'd been born Italian and that here I'd stay. He pleaded and threatened and coaxed and cajoled, but I wouldn't go. I don't even know where he is now."

When she finished, I said, "Thank you, Elena."

"I'm glad you know, Rich," she said. "I really am." Then laughingly she added, "You're a good listener. Is your autobiography as good as mine?"

I didn't feel like talking, but once I had launched into how I was raised in Salem, Mass., and how I was just getting started on the Herald when war broke out, I guess there wasn't much I left out. I told her about Salem High and winter carnival at Dartmouth, about Mother and my

two sisters and sailing off Marblehead.

By the time I ran out of memories we were both sitting on the couch, laughing at my stories, and Elena was asking questions about the family. Then it hit me. I looked at her—Elena Roberti curled up beside me, with warm, smooth skin and beautiful, rounded body, and full, inviting lips—and I knew the time had come to tell her. I had to tell her.

I put my arm around her and drew her close so that her head nestled against my shoulder. It fitted well, like the stock of my rifle. Her hair was soft and fragrant and my heart started to pump blood double time.

"Elena," I said, "you may not believe this, but I swear by everything that's holy I've never told another girl I loved her. I love you, Elena. I love you and I want you. You can understand that, can't you?"

"You don't want me, Rich," she said evenly, "all you want is a woman."

"That's not true," I answered. "You know it. I've known lots of girls but you're Elena and your hair is gold and you're fire and snow at the same time and my heart is beating like hell." I cupped my hand under her chin. Then I must have kissed her because there was a helluva pounding in my ears and I felt as though I were falling through a whole sky full of clouds. I only stopped when I heard her whisper.

"No, Rich . . . please . . . no." And she managed to turn her face away.

"Elena," I moaned. "Are you all ice inside?" I knew she wasn't because I could see the pulse beating in her neck—but she didn't answer the question.

"Please stop, Rich," she said instead. "You haven't been with a woman in a long time. I know that's all it is! Believe me, I do. I do . . ."

I bent her back and pressed my lips against her soft tanned neck.

"Don't hurt me, darling," she mumbled. "Please let me go."

"I won't," I said "I can't!" And then I heard the front door screech open and a heavy masculine voice shout, "Elena! Elena! Where are you?"

We both jumped to our feet.

"The no good b——," I cursed.

THE VOICE BELONGED to a tall, unshaven Italian, about thirty, who strode into the room as if he owned it. Elena ran towards him, her arms outstretched, crying, "Mario!"

I stood there, ill at ease, watching them, letting my fingers play with one another, trying to tell myself the guy was her brother. The way he held her I knew he wasn't.

I'm pretty good at Italian, particularly on the receiving end, but I could only catch occasional snatches

of Mario's high speed sentences. I gathered he wanted to know about her father, how the Americans were treating the people, and of course all about me. Elena turned and introduced him.

"This is my fiancé, Captain Mario Menicci," she said easily. "Sergeant Richard Hall of the Allied Military Government. Sergeant Hall has been very kind to me, Mario."

Mario put out his hand, I shook it. He was wearing a strange get-up consisting of a dirty sweat shirt, a pair of fatigue trousers and the boots of an Italian officer.

I didn't know what to do. Sick at heart, completely puzzled, I excused myself and went up to my room. Clothes and all, I dropped on the bed. What a helluva mess! I was in love with a girl who was engaged to an Italian captain, and here I was living in the same house with both of them. . . .

I didn't sleep that night. I could hear their voices downstairs. I kept cursing Elena, denouncing her falseness, her cheating, her treachery, torturing myself with mental pictures of her lying in Mario's arms just as she had in mine. As for him, I thought, hell, he's a guy who was trying to kill me a few months ago.

In the morning, I moved out of the house, barracks-bags and all. Before I left, I propped up a note in the hallway. "Thanks for your hospi-

tality and the buggy ride." I wrote. I knew it sounded adolescent but I felt pretty sour.

THAT EVENING as I left the AMG office, Elena fell into step beside me.

"Aren't you mistaking me for someone else?" I said.

"Please, Ricky." She tugged at my blouse. "Please don't feel like that."

"What am I supposed to feel like?" I said, quickening step. "A noble martyr?"

"I know what you're thinking," she insisted, "but please let me explain to you."

"Explain, hell," I said. "what good are explanations? Everything is self-explanatory. You just led me on, let me make a damn fool of myself while all the time you were waiting for Mario to come home."

"No, Rich," she said tugging the blouse harder. "It's not that at all."

"Look, Elena," I said meanly. "If you don't mind I'm tired and I'm looking for a room."

"Just let me walk along with you," she pleaded. "I'm not trying to excuse myself. Honestly I'm not. There are just a few things you ought to know." Her voice was choked with urgency and her eyes were growing wet. I decided not to argue.

We started down the dusty, uneven street without any direction in

mind. But before many minutes she began leading me towards the outlying farms, where often we had walked together.

"Where the hell are we going?"

"Don't be cross with me, Rich," she answered. "Tita's people live near here. They'll be glad to put you up."

"Little guardian angel," I said.

She ignored the wisecrack and sat down on a grass mound facing the Mediterranean. We had sat there looking out to sea many times before.

"Please sit down, Ricky," she said.

I did, close beside her, and I could smell the sweet, intoxicating fragrance of her hair. She took my hand and held it in both of hers and began to speak, hesitantly at first.

"Maybe you won't believe it," she said. "But it's still the custom among my people for parents to arrange their children's marriages. I was promised to Mario when I was nine."

"That's great," I said. "I was promised a set of Lionel electric trains for Christmas but I never got it."

"But you don't understand, Rich. It's not like in America."

"What do you mean, 'It's not like in America?'" I demanded. "Are you auctioned off to the highest bidder at birth?"

"No, Rich," she continued. "You just don't want to understand. While I was going to school in the States, I never even thought of Mario. I

never thought of him until I came back here. Then he seemed the only one I had anything in common with. He didn't like fascists, either."

"I can't make heads or tails of it," I said. "All I want to know is do you love him? That's what counts and that's what I want to know."

Her answer came slowly and deliberately. "Not the way I love you, Rich."

I grasped her by the shoulders. My mouth found hers. I was rough. I could feel her wince, yet respond. This time no Mario Menicci barged in.

AFTER THAT wild instant of passion had tempered itself, we lay listening to the night sounds, watching the searchlights stab the sky with white shafts of light.

I raised myself on my right elbow. "Elena, it's perfectly obvious. We've just got to marry; don't you see? We're *meant* for each other."

"Don't joke," she said.

"I've never been more serious—"

"Even if we wanted to, we couldn't," she said. "You're an American soldier. I'm an Italian civilian."

"Look, Elena," I said. "There are ways of doing things in the Army. All I need is permission from the CO. I can get it if you say the word. I was going to ask you yesterday, before Mario horned in."

"I—I don't know what to say," she stammered. "I'd like to think it over."

"Do you love me, Elena?"

"Yes, Ricky. I do."

"Will you let me know by tomorrow? Is that asking too much?"

"No. No," she said, "tomorrow night's all right. I'll meet you here, Rich."

Things were moving awfully fast. One minute I was through with the girl, through with her for good. Next minute I was asking her to be my wife.

Major Vanda was discouraging when I spoke to him next day.

"Don't you think you're being hasty, Hall?" he asked.

"No, sir," I answered. "I've known this girl six weeks. That's long enough for me. Besides I've been around sir, and I know my own mind."

"Are you pretty sure about this girl?"

"Yes, sir."

"No one can be sure about a woman, Hall, except a fool. I don't want to stand in your way," he added, "but I want you to know I'm granting my permission with plenty of misgivings. You realize the complications involved, do you?"

"Yes, sir."

"About taking her home with your folks not knowing her, and all that?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you still want to go through with it?"

"Yes, sir."

"Good luck to you, then, my boy."

"Thank you, sir."

I WAS WAITING for Elena on the hill that next night. Watching her come across the field I thought of the sensation she would cause back in Salem. People would whisper as she walked by: "That's Rich Hall's wife. You know, the girl he married overseas."

I ran down to meet her and slipped my hand around her waist as we started up the incline.

"What's the verdict?" I asked her quickly. "To be or not to be?"

I expected her answer in the same half-joking vein, but instead she stopped and looked at me. "I can't marry you, Rich," she said.

"Can't marry me!" I repeated, stunned and hurt. "Elena, why can't you? Why in the world not?"

Her answer was a knife cutting deep. "Because I'm going to marry Mario."

"But you don't love Mario," I insisted. "You told me so yourself last night."

Anguish invaded her eyes as she tried to explain. "You don't understand, Rich. Oh, I do love you—you're excitement, like a storm, a thunder storm with lightning that

strikes. But Mario, well, he's respect and fondness and maturity."

"I still don't get it," I said.

"Can't you see, Rich?" she went on. "My heritage is here in Sicily. If I were to marry you you'd want me to go back to America, wouldn't you? Of course, you would. . . . And I would want to go back, too! But I can't leave this country for anything or anyone. My father wanted me to go with him. I wouldn't. This country needs me. It needs people like Mario and me, people who can raise a family of healthy Italians. Together we must help Italy. Our democracy may not be the same as yours, but Mario and I believe in the same freedom—and a better future for Italians. We must be a part of it. We have to work for it. It will take the rest of our lives."

I stood there listening to her hot words, startled, amazed, doubting each sentence as it poured from her lips.

"Let me get this straight," I said. "Do you mean you won't marry me, because you feel your place is here beside your own people?"

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

"But how about my loving you and your loving me?" I pleaded.

"Please—"

"Doesn't that mean anything to you? Do you think you can reform this war-torn country, just you and Mario? What are you going to do—travel up and down the countryside

preaching the benefits of democracy to illiterate peasants who can't understand them? For Pete's sake, Elena, I know you're an idealist, but don't throw away our lives for this. Italy will be hell for years. You know it. I'm not asking you to run away from a responsibility. This war wasn't of your making. You had nothing to do with it. Why clean up the rubble?"

Her eyes flashed. "You're wrong, Ricky. I owe it to the people to stay here and right the wrongs my father committed. I love you. You know I love you. But there's nothing, Ricky, nothing you could say that would make me leave this land—ever."

She was definite and final, and I knew in my heart she was right. I had seen and talked with enough Sicilians day after day to see that more than anything else they needed guidance. They were a lost, bewil-

dered, betrayed people — with no talent for governing themselves. Maybe Elena and Mario could give it to them.

I didn't know what to do, what to say. I put both hands on Elena's shoulders. "I guess this is goodbye then." I was trying to play the good sport.

She reached up and kissed me. Tears started to slide down her cheeks, but she spoke firmly enough, "Go, Rich, darling," she said, "go before I lose courage and change my mind—"

I turned and half ran, half stumbled down the hill. Leaving her there alone, I felt somehow in a queer, inexplicable way that I wasn't losing Elena Roberti to another man. Rather, I had lost her to another Italy.

THOSE GEISHA GIRLS

Most "geisha girls" entertaining GI's in Tokyo are fakes! Says who? Says the Tokyo metropolitan police.

Of the 10,500 geishes formerly in the city, only 1,500 remained after a ban on pleasure was announced by the government in 1943. The rest returned to their native villages or found other jobs. Of the 1,500 still in Tokyo, thirty per cent are married, and the rest are mostly "old and unfit," states the police department.

A real geisha goes through long training in dancing, singing and playing the *samisen*. She wears an elaborate, lacquered hair-do, partly a wig, a kimono that reaches to the ankles; a coating of white face-powder and lip-stick on the lower lip only. She is wound about the waist with a sash many yards long, called an "obi."

Most girls representing themselves as geishas to unsuspecting GI's are bobby-sockers or other kids.

DON'T SAY IT UNLESS . . .

YOU'RE sitting in the middle of the floor, Tim's picture grinning at you from all the newspapers strewn around. The tears are running down your cheeks, but you don't care because Tim, who has been missing in action for seven months, is safe. Then the door bell rings.

First you think: *Tim!* For the papers have today released the story that Tim has been in Washington the last two weeks and has just been flown into town on this Bond Drive.

And then, just before you open the door, you have the feeling that it will not be Tim, it will be this girl, this tycoon's daughter, whose picture is in all the papers with Tim.

So you're not surprised to see her standing there, smooth and polished, a girl who has everything and what she doesn't have you feel she will take.

She says lightly, "May I come in?"

You just step back and she brushes on past you, easily, assured. Then she turns and looks at you. "Tim has told me everything about you," she says.

You don't say anything, because how can anyone tell what can't be

put into words? The miracle which happened that first time, that time you walked in the park with Tim. Before you quite knew how it happened you were holding hands. Not saying anything, just happier than you'd ever been in your whole life. It is raining, one of those slow, high, drizzly rains which can't make up its mind, and you love it! Pretty soon you stop and you look at each other and both are smiling in a new way.

Tim's arm reaches out to draw you to him. And in that moment you're scared stiff this isn't going to mean as much to him as it does to you.

Instinctively you feel his easy assurance and that scares you, too. You see his lips coming down toward yours and you know what he is going to say and do. And then, suddenly, without warning, you put your hand over his mouth and stop him.

"Please don't say it, Tim," you beg, and the words hurt in your throat. "Please don't say it, unless

by
*Marian
Bruce*

you mean it. I . . . I have a funny little way of believing what people tell me."

You stare shyly at the ground. He looks at you a long moment, then he lays his cheek against yours and you can feel the warm chuckle bubble up in his throat.

"Listen, Ginny," he says, "there was a girl back home. I've known her all my life. We sorta took things for granted that someday we might get married. It was nothing like this. I didn't know there could be anything like this. I love you, Ginny. I love you. You can *believe* that."

Then you feel the curve of cheek and the hard pressure of his lips. And you know that this is it with Tim too.

And right away you both plan not to wait. You will be married on Tim's next twenty-four hour pass. That will be Saturday—a whole month. And you think: *What if Tim gets sent out meanwhile? What if . . .*

And this time, Tim senses what you're thinking. He cups your chin in his hand and makes you look at him straight.

"Ginny, I'll come back," he says. "You can believe that, too!"

When the Saturday comes you're there at the park bench, because you promised to wait for him there, and you're in your brand new outfit. After a long while you're afraid to



look at the Tower clock. Finally you go home. You won't let the doubts come up in your mind. You sit down and write Tim a letter. And every day you write Tim a letter. Then one day you get a funny little scrawled note which says: *Ginny, I'll come back.*

Even when you find his name among the "missing in action," you keep on writing Tim a letter each day until they start returning to you. Then each day you write them and put them in the dresser drawer. . . .

The girl is taking a long time lighting her cigaret. She says without looking at you:

"You know Tim has been through a lot."

You could say: Yes, you know, you've been reading the papers. You're very proud of Tim. Wounded, lost twenty days in jungle swamps, captured, escaped. . . . Tim had had that extra something which would not let him quit. Tim had come back.

"I've known Tim all my life," the girl says. "We've been practically engaged since high school days . . ."

And you know that too. First, from Tim. Now the papers have done a job of embroidery on it.

"Dad has a job for Tim, that is, until his leg is well. Then later Tim can take complete charge."

You know without anyone telling

you that this is a real break for Tim. Tim deserves everything the world can lay in his lap. You don't blame Tim. You don't blame him one bit.

But you can't say anything. You see that this irritates the girl.

She says, suddenly, "Surely, you can't be serious about Tim! You can't believe what a lonesome soldier tells you in a few off-guarded moments!"

Can't you, you think! And you wonder if she knows it is two hundred and ten days of holding yourself to believing . . .

"Why don't you look at the thing squarely?" the girl says. "Tim has been back in the States over two weeks. If he had been really in love with you, don't you think he would have called you the minute he landed . . . instead of me?"

That was something you hadn't let yourself think about. Now you *had* to look at it. And suddenly you felt crumpled up inside, like a dropped handkerchief.

The girl picked up her gloves. "Tim is no heel. He planned on seeing you at the rally tonight and telling you himself. But I thought we'd better save him all the emotional strain we could."

You had planned on buying that first bond from Tim. Now you say, very slowly, so the words won't trip you up. "I won't go. I won't be there." And you hold the door open.

"Thanks, Ginny. I thought you'd see it my way."

You shut the door, and lean against it, until the room is visible again.

Then you can't help the next thing you do. You go into your closet and you take down the outfit, the one you bought for Tim. Your hands shake as you put it on and see how pretty it still is. Then you take the subway downtown and you walk over to the park and sit on your bench and you remember just how it was that other night.

You will not let yourself cry. You just sit there shivering because it is cold for this light spring outfit.

There is fog and a high drizzly rain, much like that other time, so at first you do not see the pair of familiar rangy legs, swinging along with the aid of a cane. Swinging with pride and dignity. Then you stand up quickly and smile, because you want Tim to know that whatever he does, in this world, is all right with you.

"Ginny!" he cries. "Ginny! I came back!" There is triumph in his voice and in his eyes—triumph and pride, reserved for those who conquer. You can feel your pride in him. Then he grins.

"This is the way I dreamed it! I'd come walking down the path and

you'd be here waiting . . . just like you promised!"

His cane drops, and you're in his arms, his cheek against yours. You can feel the low chuckle in his throat.

"Oh, Ginny, those two weeks of incommunicado in the hospital were longer than the whole seven months! I didn't want to call you, though I could have—the first day. I wanted to wait until I could see you . . . Here!" And the next moment he is kissing you and you know. You see the other girl fading back into her proper place—just a girl who wanted a hero. A girl who happened to be there on the outside, while you were there all the time on the inside, next to Tim's heart.

And suddenly, very badly, you want to hear Tim say this.

"Tim, it was because you loved me. . . . It was that brought you back?"

You feel his hands grip into your arms and you wish you had not asked that question.

"No, Ginny. It wasn't that. It was something more."

"More, Tim?" and you're scared. You see his eyes look off into the distance, leaving you behind.

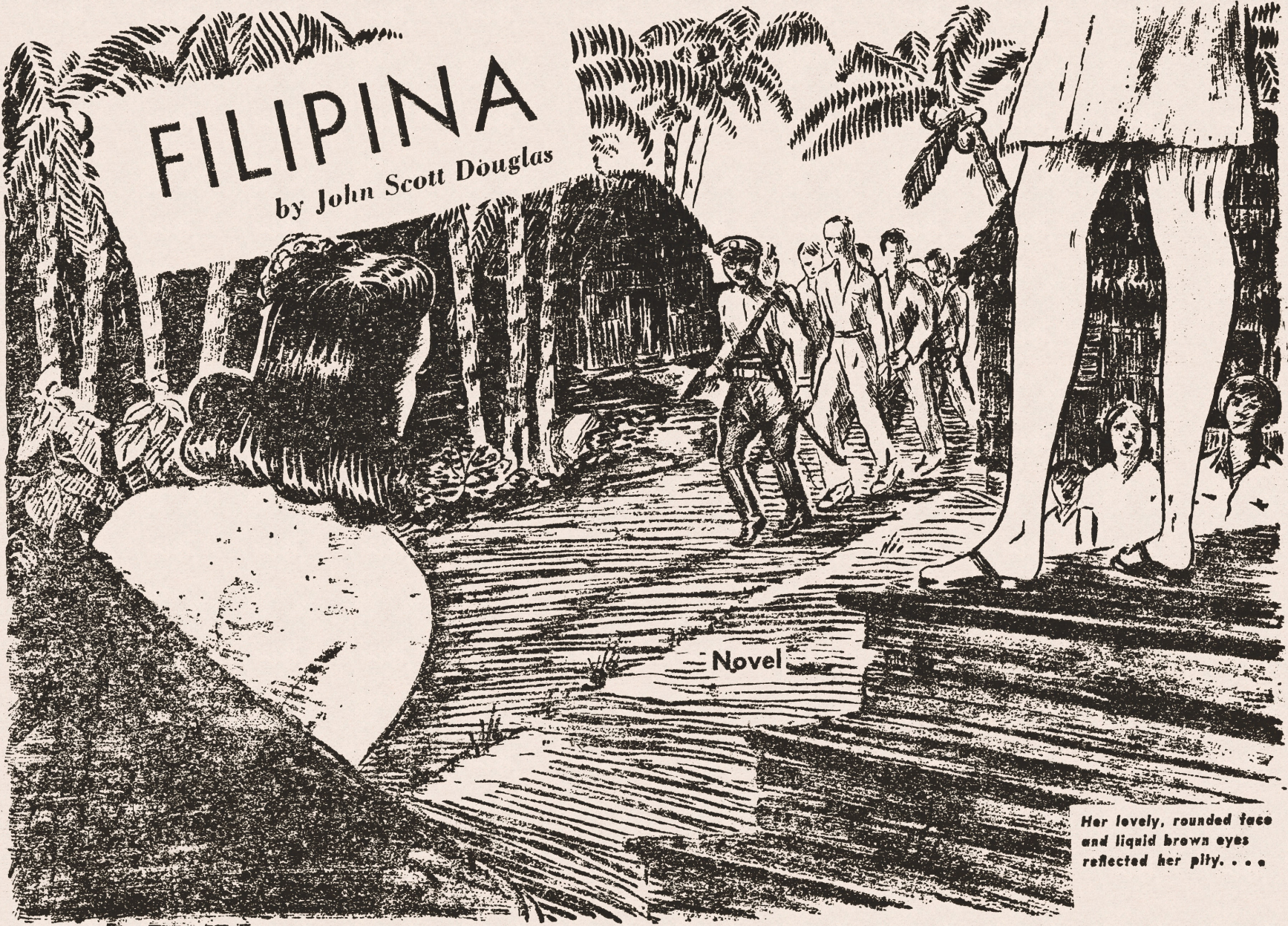
"I promised you I'd be back, Ginny. And I kept hearing your voice, over and over: '*Don't say it, unless you mean it. I have a sunny little way of believing . . .*'"

FILIPINA

by John Scott Douglas

Novel

Her lovely, rounded face
and liquid brown eyes
reflected her pity. . . .



< 1 >

SERGEANT Rob Baldwin felt the traces cut into his emaciated flesh as he and the other American prisoners tried to move the great log. Sweat streamed down his thin, bare body, his knees shook from weariness and hunger. A Jap guard shouted, and the prisoners struggled harder, but the log would not budge.

It was their misfortune that Lieutenant Toyama was visiting the lumber camp that day. Toyama, in charge of the garrison in the nearby *barrio* of Santa Isabel, had overworked and underfed the *carabaos* until the animals had one by one died. Responsible for getting out lumber from the Leyte jungle, he had replaced the bulls he'd killed with survivors of the Bataan death march.

Now, screaming like a hysterical woman, he hustled over—a shrunken, hen-shaped man with a small bristling mustache above a small, thick mouth, and tiny, piglike eyes.

"Use whip!" Toyama shouted in English, so the prisoners would understand. "Let lazy dogs know who is masta!"

The human draft animals heaved again as the guard came toward them, unlimbering his bull whip. That effort was too much for Jim Wilkes, standing behind Sergeant Rob. Jim suffered from dysentery

and malaria, as well as malnutrition. With a moan, he fell. The guard's whip cracked, flicking flesh from the raw welts left by other beatings. Jim tried to rise but was so weak and sick that the blow knocked him flat. The whip fell a third time—a fourth—

Rob Baldwin had seen sick comrades bayoneted on the Death March. Seen them beaten to death at the order of Jap officers like Toyama. Seen them tortured, humiliated and starved. The red-headed sergeant knew well what happened to the American who antagonized these inhuman brutes! But he was the man nearest Jim—and suddenly Rob couldn't take it, something snapped in him.

If he hadn't been lashed into the traces, he would have flung himself at the Jap officer. Unable to do that, he seized the end of the bloody whip and wrenched violently. The guard, pulled off-balance, fell within reach of Rob's hands.

Like a vise they closed on the Jap's throat! Two guards rushed up and flayed Bob's bare back but in his blind fury he scarcely felt the pain. He thought only of killing that Jap guard. The Jap's tongue was sticking out, his eyes popping, his yellow face turning blue.

Casting aside their whips, each guard seized an arm and dragged Rob off. The Jap on the ground lay choking and gagging.

Toyama was flushed with rage. "Beat him, fools! Beat him!"

They swung their whips with such force that Rob felt the hot, damp blood trickling down his back. He fell and tried to rise, but the whips beat him to earth. A comrade whispered. "Lie still, Sarge. They'll kill you!" But he was past reason and kept trying to rise until he lost consciousness.

A creaking door was the next thing he heard. Opening aching eyes, he found himself on a wooden bench in a damp cell. A flashlight played through the bars, and as the door opened wider, he saw Toyama's pig-like eyes staring glassily down. The Jap had a cigar in his small fat mouth. Rob tried to move, but pain made him so giddy that he sank back.

"When offica Mikado approach," Toyama hissed, "you lise."

Blowing the ash from his cigar, the lieutenant placed the glowing end hard against Rob's instep. A paralyzing shock darted up his leg. Sick with pain, Rob managed to swing his legs down from the bench. Swaying, scarcely able to stand, he'd have tried to kill Toyama if two guards hadn't kept rifles pointed at him.

"I teach you lrespect supeliors," Toyama hissed.

His foot swung swiftly, striking Rob in the groin. The sergeant went down, writhing, his teeth clenched to

avoid giving the Japs the pleasure of hearing him groan. Toyama now kicked him in the legs, the thigh, the ribs and in the head. Rob slipped away into a black abyss.

« 2 »

ONLY a burning desire for revenge kept Rob Baldwin alive that night tortured by hunger, thirst, pain and fatigue.

It was still dark when he stumbled up from the basement cell in the schoolhouse serving as a Jap barracks to join the squad of captives already lined up. It appeared that they were all being punished by being deprived of the thin gruel that was their usual breakfast ration. As they marched toward the jungle, another prisoner whispered that Jim Wilkes was gone. He had died during the night.

Rob himself almost died that day. Flies attracted by his raw back were a constant torment, and when the shriveling sun rose, his thirst became torture. The guards' whips opened new wounds on his back, but he

TALE
OF A
FIGHTING
LADY

spoiled with burning hatred, knowing that if he fell he would be beaten to death.

To impress the Filipinos with the uselessness of resistance, the Japs made a habit of marching the Americans through Santa Isabel each morning and evening. At first the inhabitants of the *barrio* had tried to slip food to the prisoners, but brutal beatings had stopped this, and now they dared show their feelings only with sympathetic glances.

As the work gang approached the village at dusk, led by the swaggering and pompous little Toyama, Rob realized that Santa Isabel was having a market fiesta. The streets were crowded, streamers of pre-war days stretched across the street, and numerous visitors examined goods at little stands along both sides of the main street. The visitors looked pityingly at the prisoners, particularly at Rob.

Nearing the center of town, Rob saw a small platform on which stood a line of beautiful young Filipinas. He knew that a beauty contest, the featured event of most Filipino fiestas, was being held.

Pretty though most of the contestants were, it was a girl standing in the crowd near the stand who caught Rob's eye. Her lovely, rounded face and liquid brown eyes reflected her pity as she watched the approaching prisoners. Suddenly this girl slipped off her jacket, undraping

herself to the waist, and hounded up the platform steps. With the lovely young curves of a Venus, the girl swayed shapely hips and her white teeth and dark eyes flashed as she smiled directly at Toyama!

Hill girls frequently appeared in the *barrio* wearing only sarongs, and even the village women sometimes wore only sprigs of leaves draped from girdles when working in the fields. But this girl's action was so brazen that the crowd gasped.

A fatuous, buck-toothed grin lighted Toyama's pudgy face as he leered at the girl.

Coming abreast of the platform, he ordered the column to halt. The girl was undeniably beautiful, with dark hair falling softly about her slim, bare shoulders. But Rob felt a surge of revulsion that any girl could thus display her charms to attract the swinish Toyama.

"You come see me tonight," Toyama hissed. "Give you nice present."

"How nice?" asked the girl teasingly, with a flick of her hips.

"Ha! ha! Velly nice. . . . You maybe get beauty plize here, yesss?"

Rob's eyes, like those of all the prisoners, were on the girl. So he wasn't aware of the movement of the bunting covering the lower part of the stand. Unprepared, when hands gripped his ankles and wrenched, he fell hard. At the last moment he put out his hands to break the fall,

thus making so little sound that he could still hear Toyama and the girl talking as he was pulled under the stand.

"Sir, no noise please," said a voice close to his ear.

Rescue! He felt another man's hands now; the pair were pushing him toward the open back of the stand. There was just enough light to see, beyond the stand, a passage between two stilt-supported nipa shacks.

"Sir, hurry please. Between those houses, sir. You need help?"

"I'll make it!" Rob said grimly. Surging hope gave him new strength.

He followed the two Filipinos at a crouching run along the passage between the houses, then turned right as they darted down a rough street. A few minutes later, they left this street, cutting between houses, and across a terraced rice-paddy.

Utterly exhausted, Rob's legs gave out as they entered the jungle. Silently the two men ran back, grasped his hands, and half-pulled, half-dragged him up a precipitous trail. That climb was a nightmare to Rob. At times he could scarcely hear the shriek of nearby cockatoos above his own labored breathing.

At last the men paused beside a foaming cataract. Through the interlacing network of liana vines above the river, a thin moon shone down on the black jungle. Rob saw that one of his companions was a young

man, handsome and earnest-looking, but his skin was pale-tan as if he'd been living too long in the sunless jungle. The older man had a grizzled white stubble, suggesting some Spanish blood, covering a face as brown and wrinkled as old parchment.

"She should have overtaken us by now, Manuel," said the young man.

"Nothing happens to Luisa," said Manuel. "She is clever, Carlos, though over-daring."

Rob lay down beside the stream and drank his fill of the cold, clear water. This action reminded Carlos of Rob's condition. The young Filipino slipped into the bush and reappeared with a native jar containing a hash of rice and meat and vegetables. Rob took a handful and tasted it eagerly, reached for another.

"Sir, it is poor food, but we do not live well. Eat what you can."

"After the slop the Japs gave us," Rob said, "it's a banquet!"

He had devoured the contents of the jar ravenously and was trying to decide how to lie down with the least pain when the old man suddenly reached for a conch shell with a hole in it which hung from a cord around his neck.

"Be careful, *Viejo!* It may be a real *bojong* calling!"

Carlos disappeared again into the bush and came out with what looked to Rob like a .25-caliber Jap carbine.

From far below them came a *bo-*

jong's call again, repeated twice. Manuel blew on the conch shell in close imitation of the call. Then they waited, Carlos gripping the carbine in tense hands as he watched the trail.

Minutes later Luisa appeared, accompanied by two young Filipinos. She still wore only her flowered skirt, but now there was a businesslike Colt automatic swinging from a holster around her slim waist. Her bosom rose and fell swiftly from the climb. Blowing a strand of hair from her eyes, she dropped a heavy pack on the ground. The two men, with similar packs, did likewise.

"You worry me, Luisa. You take great risks. Where did you get these?"

She glanced at the packs, and then at Carlos' troubled face.

"Ah!" she cried, and laughed. "I bought these things, Carlito. For five bullets. In exchange, three Japs gave their lives and all the supplies on two pack-horses. I burned all we could not carry, and turned the horses loose to leave a false trail."

"We're taking enough risks tonight, without—"

Breaking off short, Carlos removed his shirt and Rob knew from the gentle way he slipped it on her that he loved the girl. She buttoned it, leaving the tails hanging out like a Filipino boy. She patted Carlos' cheek lightly, then freed the cords from her bundle.

"I was hoping I might find medical supplies for the *Americano*, and so it happened," she said.

Rob was grateful, realizing that she'd risked her life to get these supplies. But he couldn't quite forgive the performance she'd put on for Toyama.

She took a tube from her pack. "Face down, *Americano*."

Despite her gentle touch, it was all he could bear to lie still while she applied antiseptic. Rob clenched his teeth, silently enduring the pain. Several times she uttered choked sounds.

"That Toyama!" she at last cried furiously. "That beast! Look what he has done! I kill him, Carlos—with my own hands I kill him!"

"Not if I see him first," Rob muttered.

"I was spying yesterday, trying to think of some way of freeing you prisoners," the girl said. "There were too many guards with machine-guns. But I saw you fight when they beat your friend. 'That man,' I said, 'has the good heart and will make a great guerrilla fighter.' Are those not my words, *Viejo*?"

"It is true," said Manuel.

"Sit up, *Americano*. By what name do they call you?"

He told her.

"Roberto, I shall call you." Impersonally she squeezed ointment from the tube, started to apply it to his face and then her hand dropped,

her mouth parted, and her dark eyes brightened. "But you are handsome!"

"Like a skeleton?" Rob suggested.

"Ah, but you have the fine body and one day it will be strong again! Your jaw is most firm and wide, and I like blue eyes. And red hair, it is always, for me, a secret weakness."

If she was trying to add to her admirers, she failed.

"Let's get on with the treatment," he said brusquely.

She slapped him lightly, laughing. "You don't like me, no?"

"I'm most grateful to you—to all of you. Isn't that enough?"

In silence she finished applying the ointment. Then she eyed him with such a sweetly serious expression that he wished she were as lovely as she looked. "No, Roberto," she said slowly. "That is not enough. You must get well and fight!"

She walked to the river's edge and selected what seemed like a vine. Freeing it, she stepped back, and Rob saw that it was a manila line, apparently secured to an overhead branch somewhere up in the tangle of liana vines. She ran quickly, raised her small bare feet, and the line swung her like a pendulum to the opposite bank.

She swung the line back. Packs were tied to it; then one by one they were swung across the foaming cataracts. Rob followed, and he was vaguely disturbed at the feel of her

slim, strong little arms as she caught and supported him—several moments longer than seemed necessary. When the others joined them, Luisa concealed the rope in the vines, then led the single file of men through the jungle.

< 3 >

TWO hours of hard marching brought them to the jungle guerrilla camp.

Even though they'd passed sentries, the forty-odd guerrillas around a crackling fire held their motley assortment of weapons ready for instant action, only putting aside carbines, light machine-guns, bolos, krises, and pistols when they recognized Luisa. They cheered then in Spanish, English and native dialects, many of the men coming forward to embrace her.

Rob saw that she was the only woman in the camp, and it came to him with a shock that she was the leader of this desperate band. He realized then that his first impression might be unfair. Men couldn't live as hunted animals, without sufficient clothing, food or shelter, and not show the effects of their privation. Some guerrillas who wore only a G-string or a ragged pair of pants or a tattered shirt might in better days have been students, school teachers, the mayors of *barrios* who had

refused to submit to Jap tyranny. Others looked like, and undoubtedly were, the sons of savage Philippine head-hunters.

What united these diverse men was their love of freedom, and a swash-buckling slip of a girl. A girl who, he suspected, had more courage than maidenly purity. Mingling with desperadoes! And all right, she had helped him escape, but she could have distracted Toyama by going up to him, talking to him, making herself enticing some other way, couldn't she?

Luisa insisted that he sleep that night in her bed in a small thatched lean-to. The men made her a couch of boughs nearby. Awakened by nightmares in which he relived the hell of his slave existence under the Japs, he would find Luisa hovering over him, placing cooling compresses on his face, holding his hands because he was fighting his oppressors in his dreams, talking soothingly to quiet him.

After two years of undernourishment and brutal treatment, the hard trip to the camp had been too much for Rob. In the morning he awoke with a raging fever. Luisa dipped generously into her meager hoard of medical supplies to give him quinine and other drugs. Except when away on guerrilla raids, she devoted much of her time for days to nursing him. In spite of his reservations about her, Rob would find himself feeling deso-

late until her return.

She fed him the best of the strange foods upon which they lived—*camotes*, upland rice, sugar cane, bird eggs, wild honey, monkey meat, the white meat of lizard-like iguanas, wild chicken, and the fruit bats known as flying foxes. He even learned to relish the locusts which the guerrillas caught in nets, finding that they tasted like whitebait. All these and other foods she urged upon him so that he would regain his strength.

She was a devoted nurse, yet her gentleness sometimes vanished in a flash and he would see the vein of steel which made these men accept her as a leader. Many of the guerrillas had pet fighting cocks, and once two who had placed bets on a contest argued hotly about which cock had died first. They seized bolos, but before either man could strike, Luisa was on them like a small lightning-bolt, hammering one man's hand with her pistol to make him drop his weapon, then turning her gun on his antagonist. His defiance withered under her blazing glance; Rob was sure she'd have shot him, otherwise. Then, snapping her pistol back in its holster and laughing, she embraced both men affectionately.

Once, too, after losing a man on a raid, she discovered the traitor who had informed the Japs of their plans; and after a brief though fair enough trial, she coldly ordered the traitor

hung. True, their lives depended on loyalty, but this kind of hardness in her sometimes made Rob uneasy about Luisa.

With him, however, she was always devoted and gentle—until one day when he overstepped the mark.

As he grew better, he realized that some of the guerrillas were a little jealous of her attentions to him. And this feeling was plainly evident with Carlos Ramirez. His dark, intelligent eyes shadowed when she nursed him, and once when Rob braced himself against Luisa's arm, Carlos apparently thought he was taking liberties and his hand flashed to his knife.

Though still not strong, Rob moved fast. Flinging Luisa aside, he grasped Carlos' wrist and wrenched it so hard that the young Filipino dropped the knife. Rob sent him reeling with a swift blow. A hand caught Rob's arm then and spun him around; he stared into the barrel of Luisa's automatic. Her small hand was white with its pressure on the gun; her rounded, beautiful face was cold and stern.

"I'll have no fighting among my men!" Her voice seemed to curl and crack. "Not even the man I love can break this rule, Roberto." Love! Did she mean him? Carlos? Rob felt distinctly uncomfortable. "Shake hands, *muy pronto!*"

Rob pulled Carlos to his feet, and their hands locked as they looked

into one another's eyes. "Damn sorry, Carlos," Rob said; and he meant it, for he owed his life to the other.

"Sir," said Carlos gravely, "I regret this too. But you must understand, sir, that I love Luisa."

"I have no time for girls! When I'm stronger, my business will be killing Japs."

"When you're stronger," said Luisa softly, "perhaps you'll find time for both."

Realizing now how her poorly concealed feelings for Rob might affect the encampment, she thereafter nursed him only at night when she believed the others were asleep. It was then that she would come to give him medicine and dress his healing lacerations. And, having revealed her feelings, she kissed him each night before leaving. Rob gave no sign of how disturbing he found her lips, for he didn't wish to give his heart to a girl who might, he thought, fall in love with another guerrilla when her fancy changed.

One night her soft rounded arms circled his neck and her lips lingered so long that he thought his pounding heart would burst. He could hardly resist crushing her small, supple body in his arms. She raised her face at last and a shaft of moonlight, lancing down through the jungle roof, made it bewitchingly beautiful.

"I love you, Roberto," she whispered.

He chose to ignore her feelings. "I was a sergeant in ordnance before Bataan fell. I'd like to wipe out Toyama's garrison and free his prisoners, but we're woefully short of ammunition. If you could dig up a hand forge, a few tools, metal and shell cases, I believe I could make some shells. Might even turn out a crude cannon."

"You're a hard man, Roberto. Don't you ever think of anything but revenge?"

"The Japs gave me plenty of time to think of that," he said.

She looked wistful. "I think I can find those things. And perhaps Carlos can help you. He went to a trade school and knows many things."

In the next few days the guerrillas assembled an old hand forge from an abandoned gold mine, a file and a hack saw, various pieces of pipe and other metal, and some empty shell cases. Two of the men went to the coast, found a Jap mine which had washed ashore, dismantled it and returned with the powder. Too violent for Rob's purpose, he knew he could slow its action by mixing it with pulverized wood. In camp were several sacks of sulphur and some antimony which he could mix with coconut-shell carbon for a primer.

Rob immediately set up a small armory. Carlos, who was quick and

intelligent, proved his most able assistant, and they found other men to help with routine work. Curtain rods stolen from closed schoolhouses were cut into short lengths for bullets and, after being filed down, were passed through the barrel of an old Springfield rifle as a test for size. By further filing, they made bullets small enough for captured Jap carbines. Old shell cases were filled with powder and the curtain-rod bullets were carefully inserted in the cases.

When the production of ammunition was proceeding smoothly, Rob started making a small cannon. After many failures, he wrought a barrel from a piece of three-inch gas pipe, reinforcing it with metal sleeves and rings made tight with wedges. A filed-down spike, given tension by an inner-tube from a Jap car, served as a firing-pin. Shells were made from three-inch brass pipe and filled with lead and other metal. He cautiously tamped the diluted mine powder into a four-inch case.

With the crude little gun mounted on a pair of *carabao*-cart wheels, and fitted with a lanyard, Rob's hopes soared. At last he had a weapon which gave his band a chance of fighting Japs on more equal terms. Within five days it would be the dark of the moon, and then his little cannon would have a chance to prove itself!

But time was running shorter than he knew.

« 4 »

WHILE they ate that night, a sympathizer from Santa Isabel was brought in by a sentry. Luisa left the fireside to speak with him in whispers; then he slipped away. Her lovely face was troubled when she returned.

"Attention, all of you!" She clapped her hands. "Toyama has discovered we've been raiding school-houses for curtain rods. The Japs know what use we make of metal—they suspect we are planning something! A patrol has already left Santa Isabel, and is on the trail leading here." Her eye flashed. "*Hombres*, we hung that traitor too late. . . . He must have given them the location of our camp!"

"*Socorro!*" cried Manuel. "We must leave at once!"

"Abandon the cannon we've worked so hard to make?" wailed Carlos.

"No!" Luisa cried emphatically. "I'll take six men . . . try to stop that patrol! That will give the rest of you time to drag the cannon down to Santa Isabel by the cliff trail."

"*Por Dios!*" moaned Manuel. "The cliff trail! Even a burro—"

Her eyes flashed. "I know you'll have to lower it in places with ropes, *Viejo*, but if anything happens to that cannon—!" Her hand dropped meaningfully to her automatic.

"We understand, *Señorita*," Manuel said hastily.

"We will overtake you, if we can. If not—" she shrugged. "Should we be killed, you will shell the school-house in Santa Isabel where Toyama and the other Japs are quartered. If you are successful, Old One, and it seems possible, you'll free the prisoners in the stockade."

"We shall do our best," Manuel promised.

Luisa started choosing men to accompany her. "You, Carlos . . . and Francisco . . . and Pablo . . ." Grimly Rob stepped toward her; she hesitated as their glances met. "And you, my Roberto . . ."

When she'd chosen six men, Carlos led the way to a pile of *bangka-kay* stakes which lay heaped under a tree. He tied these bamboo stakes into six bundles. Each man packed one of these and a bolo as they started down the trail behind Luisa Lorenzo, who had shouldered a light machine-gun.

They'd jogged along briskly for perhaps two miles when Rob, at the rear of the column, saw something shadowy disengage itself from a bough over Luisa's head, swinging down like a hawser toward the unsuspecting girl.

Terror froze Rob's blood. "Luisa!" Dropping his bundle of stakes, he reached the girl just as the writhing monster coiled its body to circle her waist. He saw the darting, forked

tongue of the python as he slashed with his bolo; then its severed head dropped in the trail.

Trembling, Luisa clung to him. It came as a shock to Rob to realize that she was a girl after all; young, tender . . . yes, and precious. He clutched her to him and felt the fast beating of her heart, her quick, convulsive breathing as she struggled for control. Suddenly he kissed the girl with a hard, fierce possessiveness. Her nails dug into his back, then her hands were softly pressing and finally she lay limp in his arms.

But the vision of her standing brazenly before Toyama rose to haunt him, and he tore himself away.

Breathing quickly, cheeks charmingly flushed, she averted her gaze with unexpected modesty.

Turning back, Rob dimly saw Carlos. The Filipino's nostrils flared slightly, and his bolo almost quivered in his hand.

"Watch yourself, Carlos," Rob said sharply.

"Sir, may I advise you to do the same, sir."

Farther on, they reached a long, dark stretch of jungle trail. Luisa picked up a pitchy pine cone and set fire to it. By its light they drove in the *bangalay* stakes for several hundred yards along both sides of the trail. They covered the vicious barbed ends with leaf mold and loamy debris. Then, moving back along the trail, they lay down to wait.

As Luisa dropped beside Rob, he smiled bleakly. "Hard little witch you are, Luisa, but it takes that . . . fighting Japs!"

She slipped an arm about his neck. He'd borrowed Manuel's razor that morning; his face tingled as her soft, smooth cheek rubbed his.

"I'm not really hard," she said, after a moment. "Before the war my people lived in good house, not nipa shack. One day, after the Japs came, my little sister was playing with another little girl when Jap soldiers appeared and seized both of them and dragged them toward the bushes. My mother and father heard their screams and rushed out of our house, only to be driven back by Jap bayonets. They set the house ablaze, and fired their guns into doors and windows to prevent my parents from leaving. When I came home that night and saw their charred bodies—and my little dead sister—" Her hand clutched his fiercely, and she buried her eyes against his shoulder. "That night," she went on tremulously, "I became a guerrilla!"

Touched more than he could tell her, he drew her close for a minute, comforted her. Then, stiffening, he drew away, seized the machine-gun.

"Listen! Hear that?"

From not far off came the cry of a cockatoo. Presently a beam of light flickered on the trail. Behind the flashlight beam, and barely visible,

came a column of squat, fast-moving figures.

The beam of light crossed and recrossed the jungle path, but the leader detected nothing of the trap, the primitive "mine field." The Japs came trotting on.

Rob's finger closed down hard. The gun came alive in his hands . . . jerking, clattering, spitting out death that was marked by the flashing streaks of tracers through the darkness. . . . Finger up; down again for another burst. The gun yammered its staccato beat. . . .

Suddenly the night was made hideous with screams. Japs trying to escape the machine-gun fire had flung themselves headlong at the sides of the path—crashing into the barbed bamboo stakes and impaling themselves bloodily. Bob's lips tightened; he ceased firing. He pushed Luisa down as she started to rise. Picking up his bolo, he followed Carlos and the other men to finish off their enemies with war knives. Within two minutes, the grisly business was finished.

"Dead Japs are good Japs," Luisa said with a tremor in her voice. "Come, we must hurry! It feels like rain."

« 5 »

BEFORE long, she turned into an almost indistinguishable trail which crossed the main path. It began raining—a cold, bucketing rain that

turned the trail to slush. But they made fair progress until they reached the cliff trail to Santa Isabel. Rob could imagine the difficulty the guerrillas must have had getting the cannon down such a trail—if they had got it down at all!

Lightning began crackling overhead. By its sputtering glare, Rob saw Luisa's sodden clothing molded to her shapely, slender figure. He slipped his arm about her to keep her from stumbling.

After hours of miserable travel, they reached the gently sloping valley. Suddenly a man with a rifle stepped into the trail.

"*La libertad!*" the girl said quickly.

Hearing the right password, the man lowered his gun. "It is Luisa?"

"Yes, yes—the cannon is safe?"

"A thousand devils possessed it," said the sentry, "but it reached here with less damage than ourselves. The men wait a little farther up the path. There's an empty shack where you may wring out your clothes."

They hurried on, soon coming upon the guerrilla party. The cannon was drawn into the woods a short distance from them. Half hidden in the trees stood a nipa shack supported on stilts. The girl started toward the shack, Rob toward his crude but beloved gun.

Rob found Carlos regarding the weapon thoughtfully. The bluish glare of a lightning flash revealed his faintly melancholy smile.

"If this attack fails, sir, one or both of us may die."

"It's the luck of war, Carlos."

"Should the worst happen, sir, I do not wish to die your enemy. It is no fault of yours that Luisa loves you and regards the rest of us only as comrades. I have loved her since I went to trade school in Manila and she went to the university—"

"University! I—I never dreamed! Why, half the time she acts like a—
a—"

"A camp follower?" Carlos laughed. "Sir, you do not understand. War has forced her to adapt to the hills, the jungle and to us rough guerrillas. But even I do not dare lay a hand on her, for she draws a pistol swiftly if any man tries it. She has told me that if ever she loves a man, she will make no secret of it. She has made no secret with you, sir."

Rob was stunned. "But if she's the kind of a girl you say—I don't understand—that beauty contest in the *barrio*—?"

"Ah," said Carlos sadly, "Luisa is too daring. She went to the fiesta wearing a jacket on which was emblazoned 'MacArthur will return.' While she tried to think how to stop that column so we could rescue you, Toyama appeared with the prisoners—a little early, sir. She had to remove the jacket quickly, sir, to avoid having the message on it read by the

Japs. And when she'd done that—well, she saw how to stop Toyama."

Relief flowed over Rob, and he felt happier than he had in ages. He shook hands with Carlos, thanked him; then he strode exuberantly toward the nipa shack.

Luisa's dripping clothes hung on a beam. She had slipped into a dry sarong and lay resting on a grass mat. She said nothing as he leaned over her, but her soft, rounded arms went up to him. Hungrily he drew her close.

"Forgive me," he said hoarsely, "I never understood. You see . . . that day in Santa Isabel. . . ."

Her voice shook with emotion: "It does not matter now, Roberto. Oh, darling, kiss me—I've waited so long!"

With a strange sense of fulfillment, he drew her close again. He heard her long, shaken sigh, then tasted her lips. . . .

"Darling," she said at last, "it has stopped raining. Dawn will come soon. We must have the cannon ready."

"Luisa, if we live through this attack, will you marry me?"

She clung to him, and sighed. "It is hateful to think that so much happiness might end. I would die if you died, Roberto."

"Let's not think of dying. We have too much to live for."

His lips sought hers for one long,

ardent kiss that might be the last they would know.

< 6 >

OUTSIDE, Luisa reconnoitered swiftly and made her plans. She found a small clearing separated by just a fringe of trees from the road and the schoolhouse where the Japs were quartered. The cannon was wheeled into position to fire at the Jap barracks. To the left of the schoolhouse looped a high barbed wire stockade, protected by several drowsy Nip sentries.

"You can creep through the grass almost to those sentries," Luisa told Carlos. "Take ten men and when we fire the cannon, rush them. They should be too stunned to offer great resistance."

Carlos selected men armed with light machine-guns and slipped away through the trees. His squad was given but a few minutes to take positions, for the sky was already growing lighter. Luisa ordered her remaining men to storm the barracks after the cannon was fired; then she nodded at Rob.

He rammed in one of his crude shells, then stepped as far away as the lanyard allowed before giving it a sharp pull. There was a thunderous roar. Rob thought for a moment that the cannon itself had exploded. It recoiled, struck a tree, bounced

and the next instant was hanging by one wheel from the branches of the tree.

Then he saw the walls of the schoolhouse swell out and collapse in a cloud of black smoke and roaring flames. The guerrillas broke from hiding, drawing a few wild shots from a sentry near the stockade which failed to stop them. Luisa was running too. As he dashed past her, Rob shouted, "Stay back, honey!" But he knew she wouldn't.

A bloody Jap staggered from the building and was immediately riddled by a dozen bullets. Then the guerrillas' charge reached the schoolhouse steps. The leading man, screaming an Igorot war whoop, slashed off the head of the second Jap to emerge. Then, still screaming, he rushed into the burning building, followed by most of the guerrillas.

Rob rounded the side of the building, but finding no one there, continued on to the back. There he saw Toyama, with a deep gash in his head, squeezing his fat body through a window. The Jap dropped to the ground, drawing his *samurai* sword as Rob rushed him.

Rob saw the swiftly rising sword but in his fury felt neither fear nor danger. He had only a bolo. Bringing it swishing down with terrible violence, the blade knocked Toyama's sword from his hand and buried itself in the Jap's skull.

As Toyama fell, another man ap-

peared at the window. It was Manuel, his face begrimed with smoke, his arms filled with light machine-guns.

"*Qué lástima!*" he cried regretfully. "I told you you used too much powder in those cannon shells. There were but three Japs left to kill!"

Rob took one of the machine-guns.

"Hurry, Manuel! The stockade!"

They were only part way across the school grounds when emaciated prisoners began emerging from the barbed wire enclosure. Carlos needed no help! He came running toward Rob, his face shining with a broad smile.

"Took the sentries completely by surprise, sir! With all these Ameri-

cans to join our band, we will give the Japs much trouble. And, sir, I hope you both much happiness."

"She's all right?" cried Rob.

Then he saw the radiant Luisa running toward him. She flung her arms around his neck and raised her lovely face for his kiss. So great was their relief at finding each other safe that their impassioned embrace lasted many minutes.

"*Qué cosa!*" cried Manuel. "Two fires—and but one shell fired!"

Laughing and flushed, Luisa reluctantly drew away.

"Tell the Old One to go away, Roberto," she begged, smiling into his eyes. "You're giving the orders from now on, darling!"

GUERRILLA GIRLS OF THE PHILIPPINES . . .

Girl guerillas played a big part in the Philippine liberation. Among the guerillas who met the first Americans at the Leyte beachhead were six Filipino girls. One of the most famous guerilla leaders was a woman—Yay Panlilio.

The ladies fought at the side of their men, but were especially good at hiding for days near Jap garrisons, waiting patiently for an enemy to come within range. One slim miss, Amparo Bonecilla, bagged 22 Japs with a carbine.

The Filipino girls were inspired in part by news on the secret radio of the American WAC. They called themselves WAS—for Women's Auxiliary Service.

ARMY LOVE

Dutch girls were discouraged by their authorities from fraternizing too warmly with American boys. "This might break up the married life or engagements of their liberators," the gals were told.

According to WIVES, organization of servicemen's brides, not more than two per cent of American fighters who were abroad have married foreign girls.

After World War I, some 8,000 foreign brides were brought home by servicemen.

Married GI's returning to their studies after discharge will be provided with special quarters for wedded couples at Yale, Michigan, Idaho and other universities.

Fifteen weddings took place among the 300 Wacs and 2,000 soldiers stationed at a jute mill encampment near Calcutta, India. The entire Wac force slept in one room—claiming it to be the largest dormitory in the world.

Elsewhere deep in India, at the opening of a Red Cross servicemen's club, fifteen girls were on hand to dance with 350 GI's. Eight of the girls had flown 300 miles to attend the party, and each girl danced with as many as ten men during one number!

Of the 4,700 American soldiers stationed in Norway, 70 officers and men married Norwegian girls.

45,000 English brides of GI's recently mobbed the U. S. Embassy in London, demanding transportation to America and their hubbies.

In Italy, on the other hand, soldiers and nurses complain that Italian brides get passage on troopships before the Army does. "I guess the only way to get home is to marry a GI," one Wac complained, according to American Radio Rome. Well, is that bad?

British paratroopers are impervious to beautiful women—at least when information is concerned. The British high command purposely turned loose a pack of beauties just before D-day, to test the security of military secrets.

You can't go just any old place to have a honeymoon — not if you expect to do research in juvenile delinquency!

**HTD. WITH
ST. 3RM. APT. BTH.**

KITTY SHAW ROUSED herself from the back seat of the dilapidated roadster and shook herself experimentally. Her hands and feet had long ago signed off connections with the rest of her nervous system. Her back seemed to be broken along about the mathematical middle. And her breath made icy puffs against the window panes.

Kitty sighed gustily. Could this possibly be happening to her in such a theoretically quiet little country town as Fairview—this competition with hordes of people coming in to work in the new washing-machine factory, so that she had had to wheedle an old hack out of a Rent-a-Ford joint in which to spend the night? Why, this was something that happened only in those movies and stories laid back in wartime Washington! But the crick in Kitty's neck distinctly told her that it *was* happening. Now!

Kitty slithered a bar of soap and

a comb into a little silk bag. If the Fairview Hotel wouldn't let her stay all night, at least they would have to like it or lump it when she washed her face and tidied her hair in the women's lounge!

Brown curls tousled, piquant face streaked with dirt, Kitty tried to emerge from the car. Ouch! Something had gone permanently wrong with her right leg. She diagnosed her case with deadly accuracy. She would have fitted in that back seat exactly—if both her legs had been off at the knees.

Finally she managed to restore enough of her circulation to limp from the back alley where she had

by

Marion A.

Taylor

parked the car to the side entrance of the hotel. Her anger continued to rise against John Howard Sullivan, who had let her in for all this.

A telegram crackled in the inside pocket of her rumpled coat. She knew every word of it by heart. "KATHERINE, HELD UP IN CHICAGO. CONTINUE TO LOOK FOR LIGHT AIRY LARGE APARTMENT IN FAIRVIEW. WE CAN'T GET MARRIED UNTIL YOU LOCATE IT. WILL GET DOWN SOON AS I CAN. BRINGING MENDENHALL. LOVE. JOHN HOWARD SULLIVAN."

Imagine! A light, airy, large, noiseless apartment in Fairview! When Kitty couldn't even get a bed at the hotel. Well, that's what you got for being such a doting secretary that your boss, who was also your future husband, couldn't do a thing without you.

As she viewed the utter desolation wrought to her clothes and make-up in the wavy mirror of the women's lounge, her heart hardened further against John Howard Sullivan. Of course, it was all very nice to be engaged to a promising sociologist, who was making such a name for himself correcting wartime juvenile delinquency. But there were limits.

His postponing their wedding again so that he could finish his book on reform schools, for example. His demand that they spend their honeymoon in Fairview so that he could study problems arising in and around new factory towns for his next book.

His insistence that she come ahead and get an apartment all ready for him to move into so that his writing wouldn't be disturbed. And worst of all, his cluttering up their honeymoon by bringing George Mendenhall, who had tons of money but such a Sunday School complex that before he would finance the Sullivan Laboratory for Special Study of Juvenile Delinquents, he wanted to assure himself by personal inspection that the private life of John Howard Sullivan was spotlessly white.

Kitty sighed as she wondered for the thousand and eighty-ninth time what things would have been like if she'd married Pfc. Larry Comstock. This was Larry's home town. She couldn't be blamed if Fairview brought him back to her thoughts, could she?

IT HAD ALL added up to something pretty important, that weekend at Lillian's house party many months before. The helpless, I'm-all-tangled-up-in-flypaper feeling she'd had when she'd first felt Larry's dark eyes studying her across a roomful of people. The way he'd persuaded her to slip away and go swimming in the moonlight. The wild kiss. Followed by a three-hour debate as to whether greased-lightning love could last a lifetime.

"Darling, this is it. The real

McCoy, the genuine sterling silver, the twenty-four-carat gold. I've never felt like this about anyone before!" This from Larry, his dark eyes reaching down into hers in the moonlight.

I never did either, darling. This from Kitty's heart. But Kitty's lips had said something different. "Larry, don't be crazy. I never saw you before tonight. How do I know you didn't murder ten people and rob a bank? Besides, my sister eloped with a man after a two-day romance and was sorry ever after."

"So what! Oh, I know I haven't much to offer, darling, but after I get through knocking over Japs, there'll be lots of fun and laughter—and always all my love."

Liquid silver waves were plashing against the platinum lakeshore. The solid feeling with which Kitty always contemplated her future with John Howard Sullivan had almost blown away on the caressing summer breeze—almost, though not quite. "You're forgetting, Larry, that I'm engaged to someone else. We've been engaged three years!"

To Kitty's surprise he had thrown back his head and laughed. "Anyone who has been engaged to a girl like you three years and hasn't married her yet is a dope! And where there's a dope, there's hope."

Kitty had somehow managed to maintain a con against Larry's pro. Yet Larry might have clinched things with another dose of moonlight, if

the next day had not brought one of those telegrams from John Howard Sullivan. "KITTY, WHAT THE DEUCE DID I DO WITH CASE HISTORIES FOR MY NEXT BOOK?"

So Kitty had hurried back to Chicago—and the old habit of smoothing out life for John Howard Sullivan.

The heat thump-thumping through the Fairview Hotel radiator thawed out Kitty's icy body, and combing out her hair and putting on new make-up warmed her soul. Out in the lobby, she bought a copy of the *Fairview Gazette*. Absorbed in the back pages, she walked along toward the door with the paper held up before her. The want-ad columns deviated little from those of the day before. Mostly "Rooms Wanted" instead of "Rooms to Rent."

Suddenly a head crashed through the last section of the want-ads. A dark head, with nice, friendly brown eyes, followed by broad, khaki-clad shoulders.

Kitty gasped. "Larry Comstock!" Well, wasn't this his home town? Why should she be so amazed?

"Kits," he shouted ecstatically, just as though John Howard Sullivan had never existed. He clutched her by the arm.

Over a nice cozy breakfast in the dining room of the Fairview Hotel, she learned that Larry was just back from the Pacific. With a thirty-day

furlough—and prospects of discharge before the year was out. She returned the information that she was hunting apartments—for John Howard Sullivan. “Quiet ones,” she explained.

“W-w-whew! That’s bad, beautiful.” Larry’s voice was a shade too sympathetic. “You’ll have a tough time finding *any* kind of apartment here in Fairview—much less a large, light, airy, noiseless number! But, tell you what, I’ll be good to you, Kits, and escort you around town personally—”

Candles lighted up in Kitty’s green eyes. “Oh, Larry, would you?”

“Why not? Just tell me this, what does John Howard Sullivan do up in Chicago? I mean, is that burg so darn quiet?”

Kitty giggled a little. “He lives in a padded penthouse.”

WITH GREAT GUSTO, Larry started pushing the rented Ford down snow-blanketed Main Street as if it were a jeep. “Read off the first on the list, Kits. Might as well take them in order.”

“Okay. ‘Three rm. apt., club atmosphere; reas.; free use of kt., din. rm., ldry. 505 Willow.’ I don’t believe there’s much use going out there. John Howard Sullivan wouldn’t like club atmosphere. Besides, he wants a kitchen of his own.”

“John Howard Sullivan can’t be

choosey in a hot boom town like Fairview. First we’ll send him a telegram giving him my home address so he can get in touch with you if he has to. And then we’ll take a powder out there, beautiful.”

The “three rm. apt.” turned out to be located in a dilapidated frame house inhabited by multitudes of wives with crying babies. But at least it was on the top floor, more isolated than the rest, and it might have done in a pinch.

“You’d be welcome to the house kitchen any time after eleven at night,” rasped the blowsy landlady, “because I’m through servin’ boarders, then. But you hafta sign up for the laundry. And the way the list is now, I couldn’t let you in there till one a.m.”

Kitty found herself yelling to get in a word edgewise. “We’d send our laundry out. But couldn’t you rearrange that cooking schedule? My—er—husband, John Howard Sullivan, always wants his meals at six o’clock.”

“She means the man she’s engaged to,” put in Larry, with an innocent air.

The landlady peered at Kitty sharply. “Oh, so you ain’t even married yet. I’ll have you know I don’t have them kind of goings-on in my house! It’s respectable!”

“You stay out of this, Larry,” Kitty said hotly. Then she turned on the landlady. “And I’ll have you

know that before I ever took those rooms, I'd be married to the man I—I'm engaged to."

"I've heard that before, dearie." The landlady leered.

Before Kitty could frame a completely annihilating answer, Larry took her firmly by the arm. "Kitty, my pet, let us hither and away. There must be other items on the list."

THERE WERE. But research revealed that a "Nicely furn. dbl. frnt. rm. apt." was really a "poorly furn. sgl. bk. rm." and that "rms. with priv. bath. adj." automatically meant a mile down the hall. One "quiet suburban apt." consisted of two rooms right next to busy railroad tracks.

Then finally they found it. The large, light, airy, noiseless apartment of John Howard Sullivan's dreams. Four big sunshine-flooded rooms that looked out on the trees of a snowy park. Neat glass curtains at the window, and a gay, chintz-covered davenport with matching barrel-back chairs, not to mention real honest-to-goodness pile rugs.

Mrs. Amelia Jones, the landlady, proved a timid, wispy soul who scarcely spoke above a whisper. "My husband died last year. It would be nice to have a good, quiet, reliable man around the house again," she said, as Kitty described John Howard Sullivan. "My last tenants were

women. And I used to get so afraid at night."

Kitty was ready to sign the lease, when Larry opened a closet door. "This would be a wonderful place for her husband's—uh—vice."

"Vice? What do you mean, vice?" shuddered Mrs. Jones.

"The corruption her—uh—husband is always in the middle of," replied Larry. "He's a specialist in delinquency and crime, you know."

"Crime!" echoed Mrs. Jones.

If looks were guns, Kitty would have shot Larry dead. Instead she turned sweetly to Mrs. Jones. "My husband simply writes about juvenile delinquency. John Howard Sullivan. Maybe you've read his books."

The landlady's face blanched. "Certainly not! I wouldn't want to read anything so low. Besides," she confided with horror, "I always did think writers were a queer lot, anyway."

"They are," sighed Larry. "Take John Howard Sullivan. He always likes to get into the spirit of his crimes before he writes about them. Getting local color, he calls it. He's liable to do anything . . ."

"Lar-ree!" Kitty was choking.

"Well, isn't he?" Larry's face was the picture of guilelessness. "You said yourself he lived what he wrote, didn't you? Most good writers do."

Mrs. Jones cut off their conversation abruptly. "I don't think you'd

better sign the lease after all, Mrs.—er—Sullivan. I've been getting forty or fifty calls for these rooms every day. I think I'll just rent them to somebody else."

BACK DOWN on the street, Kitty, white to the lips, turned her back on Larry and strode away over the snow. "Don't ever speak to me again." Her little beaver hat was jiggling up and down on her brown curls. "You're just deliberately trying to get me thrown out of every single place, so I can't marry John Howard Sullivan."

Larry's face took on an expression of hurt surprise. "Why, beautiful, how you talk, when I'm only trying to help you. Besides, you know I'm sensitive."

She nearly got away from him, slim hips swaying jerkily under the tweed coat, small brown slippers twinkling rapidly down the sidewalk.

"Kits," he called after her. "Just one question, and then I'll go away—forever. I promise."

She turned ever so slightly. "The last question you'd ever ask me would be a pleasure to listen to. Go ahead. Shoot."

"It's this, Kits. Just where do you think you're going to spend the night?"

Where indeed? Again she felt,

even sharper than reality, the icy chill of the car in which she had slept, the way her knees buckled under her when she had got up that morning, the devastating crick in her neck. And furthermore, the car was due back in the garage by night-fall. They had told her that under no consideration would they let her keep it more than twenty-four hours.

"Oh, Larry, what am I going to do?" Tears shimmered in the green eyes. "John Howard Sullivan won't marry me unless I find an apartment. And as it is, I haven't even any place to go for the night! The hotel won't have a vacancy for a week."

"You can always come home with me and sleep in the spare room. Dad'd be tickled to death to have you. No strings attached, Kits," he added quickly.

Her lips began to quiver. "Oh, Larry, I'd love to, but—"

"But what?"

"John Howard Sullivan wouldn't like it. He—he's fussy about things like that."

Larry looked as though he had just swallowed a sour pickle. "I suppose John Howard Sullivan would rather have you sleep in the street when it's eighty below!"

"No-o-o," she quavered. "But I just *can't* go home with you, don't you see? I'll get a bite to eat and keep on hunting. No matter how

bad it is, I'm going to shut my eyes and take the very next vacant apartment."

FIVE HOURS and four gallons of gas later, Kitty and Larry were walking up the rickety stairs to what was probably the worst "St. htd. 3 rm. apt., with bth., prch., r. wat., piano, rates reas." in the U. S. A. The landlady was fat, slatternly, and romantically inclined. And very deaf.

"You two young folks just been married?" An ecstatic smile creased her upholstered face.

"No, no! I said I was just terribly worried," Kitty shouted. "I've been looking for apartments all day."

"You say you want to sign up right away?" she nodded, giving Kitty and Larry a meaning smile. "Ah, young married love. So sweet. And so impatient."

Larry came over and put his arms tenderly about Kitty's waist. "Darling!" Then he added *sotto voce*, "Just act as though we're on our honeymoon. She expects it. You've got to sleep somewhere for the night."

Kitty gritted her teeth. "But what'll I do about you, Larry?" she whispered.

"Just sign up for the place, beautiful. And I'll leave right away. By the fire-escape."

"Okay, Larry. But just see that you do."

Kitty turned away from Larry to find the landlady grinning like a Cheshire cat. "Secrets," she tittered. "Oswald and I used to carry on like that when we were young."

Trying to avoid the triumphant gleam in Larry's eyes, Kitty began examining the apartment. There was "r. wat." only if you ran and got it, because the lavatory in the corner of the bedroom had long since given up the ghost. And the "rates reas." were a hundred dollars a month. But the piano was real enough, standing just outside in the hall, being drummed on by the landlady's imp-faced, pig-tailed daughter. Kitty shuddered as she visualized John Howard Sullivan listening to "Old Black Joe" being picked out with one hand. But then, she shuddered visualizing John Howard Sullivan putting up with anything in this place. Still, a girl had to sleep somewhere. She didn't know what else she could do but take it.

Larry, in the meantime, was being jubilantly horrid. "Look, beautiful," he exulted, opening a window that looked out on the "prch."—a mouldy cupola, from which dozens of pigeons were hoo-hooing out in the cold. He came over and grasped her hand. "Doves, darling. So romantic. Symbol of love."

"Skip it," snarled Kitty under her

breath, going over to test out the sagging, moth-eaten davenport.

"Then, here's another angle," continued Larry. "It will be so interesting to find out if pigeons go in for juvenile delinquency. Or other vices. For example, you never can tell when an enemy alien might get in their midst with an important secret message tied to his leg. It'd make a wonderful crime!"

"Larry, do you have to—"

"Doves are so lovey-dovey," cooed the landlady, snuggling alongside Larry to peer out into the frosty night.

"Exactly, Mrs. Guggengruber," purred Larry. "And what's more, with the meat shortage still on, this porch is worth its weight in gold. They do say pigeon pie and creamed squab are so nourishing. . . . Can you cook, Kits?"

Completely unaware of what had just been said, Mrs. Guggengruber gave Kitty a melting, tallowy smile. "Ah, young love. You can move in right away."

Wearily Kitty handed over a month's rent. Then she extracted Larry from the clutches of the smirking Mrs. Guggengruber, and they drove down to send a second telegram to John Howard Sullivan, giving him the address of his future home. After that she succumbed to Larry's suggestion that they dine at the hotel and go to a movie.

When they got back to the Guggengruber's, Kitty tried to leave Larry on the front porch. But they could see Mrs. Guggengruber beaming at them like a full moon through a slit in the window shade.

"You've got to take me on up. She expects it. Besides," philosophized Larry, "I might as well get used to your fire-escape sooner or later."

KITTY MARCHED up the rickety stairs, Larry behind her. When she unlocked the door, she could see the landlady's little girl, streaking across the living-room into the bedroom.

"Quick, beautiful," whispered Larry, drawing Kitty to him. "Give us a big, juicy smack. We can't disappoint little Esmeralda."

Jaded, Kitty threw herself into Larry's arms. Then it happened again—the sensation she hadn't experienced since Lillian's house party. The feeling of being suddenly connected up with an electric vibrator.

When she came up for air, something had snarled up her sense of values. She found herself asking why a man who wrote books on juvenile delinquency couldn't have broad shoulders and melting brown eyes. And why a man who made ten thousand a year couldn't kiss like Larry Comstock.

Meanwhile Larry had made a dive for the bedroom. "Come on out,

Esmeralda. We see you." He dragged her from under the bed by her pig-tails.

"Gee, that was a wonderful kiss," breathed Esmeralda. "Just like in the movies. Please do it again. . . . Please?"

Suddenly Larry struck a pose of tragic melancholy; like Ronald Colman leaving for the Foreign Legion. "Good night, Kitty darling." He folded her into his arms. "It just breaks my heart that I have to report back to camp on my wedding night."

Kitty saw his game at once. "O-o-oh, my beloved." She tried to make like Loretta Young. "I—I just don't know how I'm ever going to stand it. But business is business. We must be brave, my darling."

Then right in front of Esmeralda, Larry gave Kitty another Hollywood kiss. Once more Kitty had the sensation of electric batteries discharging under her skin.

But this time when Kitty came up for air she saw a sight in the doorway that short-circuited her whole body. John Howard Sullivan, brief case in hand—accompanied by George Jasper Mendenhall, suitcase in hand—plus Mrs. Guggengruber, with an ear trumpet!

BUT I TELL YOU, she's married to him!" Mrs. Guggengruber was pointing a well-padded finger at Larry. "At least, that's what they

told me when they rented these rooms."

"Kitty," thundered John Howard Sullivan, blue eyes blazing behind tortoise-shell glasses, "is this true? Yes or no?"

"No-o-o," quavered Kitty.

"Then what's the meaning of your—er—kissing him like some—er—wench from the state reformatory?"

"It was like this—" began Larry.

"You keep out of this, Larry," snapped Kitty. "Well, you see, John Howard, we were doing it solely for the benefit of this child here. She—she expected it!"

George Jasper Mendenhall, millionaire fanatic, sniffed the stale air as though someone had just crushed an ancient egg. "Ah, contributing to the delinquency of a minor, I see! And you dare to tell me this is the woman you intend making your wife, Sullivan?"

John Howard Sullivan winced. "Katherine, you ought to be ashamed of yourself. What are you doing in this filthy hole? Come along with me at once."

"Come along where?" Kitty's voice shook. "To the Rent-a-Ford joint or the gutter? Whether you know it or not, John Howard, these are the only rooms in Fairview I could find for us to have a honeymoon in. That's why I was kissing Larry—so that I could be sure of holding this place for you and me."

John Howard Sullivan eyed Kitty

as though she were one of his least-appetizing delinquents. "My dear girl, I fail to see how kissing a soldier could hold a set of rooms! And furthermore, Katherine, I don't like to have you lie! I know perfectly well there are plenty of rooms to be had. Why, I wasn't in town more than fifteen minutes before a kindly old gentleman offered me a whole suite—in an elegant, big white house on the other side of town."

"What elegant, big white house on what side of town?" snarled Kitty.

John Howard fumbled briefly in his pockets. "Why, at that first address you wired me. The one you sent me before you did this one. I got them mixed and went out there first."

A GREAT LIGHT began to dawn on Kitty. "He must mean your house, Larry."

Larry nodded. "And after he got out there, and told Dad he was to stay at this run-down address, Dad must have felt so sorry for him he offered him some of our rooms."

Mrs. Guggengruber began scowling at what her probing ear trumpet relayed. "What's wrong with my address? I'll have you know I could have rented these rooms ten times over if you two hadn't come along and snapped them up."

John Howard Sullivan took Kitty by the arm. "Come along, Katherine.

I'll take you to the place I've just rented. You can't spend the night in a hole like this."

George Jasper Mendenhall snorted. "Just a minute, Sullivan. Do you mean to tell me you'd take this lewd young woman home with you when she was—*kissing* this man with low passion, and you yourself aren't yet married to her?"

Crimson stained the cheeks of John Howard Sullivan. "But, Mendenhall, you don't understand—"

George Jasper Mendenhall's great stone face looked positively craggy. "Oh, yes, I think I do understand, Sullivan. All too well. You're the type of man who thunders at delinquency in public and practices it in private. Well, so far as the Sullivan Laboratory for the Special Study of Juvenile Delinquents is concerned, I'm through. Good day." He picked up his brief case and strode out the door.

"But, Mr. Mendenhall, I can explain everything—" wailed John Howard Sullivan. He picked up his brief case and trotted out after him.

Larry oozed Mrs. Guggengruber and the staring Esmeralda out the door also. Then he locked it and handed the key to Kitty. "Darling, remind me tomorrow to inform John Howard Sullivan and his boy friend they were slightly in error. You may be delinquent—but you aren't juvenile."

Kitty bridled. "I'll have you know

I'm not a day over twenty-one."

"Twenty-two," he corrected.

Kitty tried to glare at him. "Okay. Have it your own way. Now how about shinnying down the drain pipe?"

"Okay, darling," sighed Larry. "If you insist. But before I go, there's something else I wish you'd remind me to do tomorrow."

"What's that?"

"Marry you, as soon as I can get a license. You can spend the morning finding out all about me from Dad, and in the afternoon we can stage a little wedding. How's about it, sweet?"

"My sister," began Kitty, "eloped with a man she'd fallen in love with, and he—"

"Who's in love with your sister?" He held out his arms.

It was snug and warm in Larry's embrace, and Kitty had had a hard day. Mrs. Guggentuber's dilapidated st. htd. 3 rm. apt. began to take on an air of downright coziness. Outside on the prch. a pigeon hoo-hooed sleepily. "Doves," remarked Kitty, "always make a place so romantic." She reached up her lips for his kiss. "Maybe this wouldn't be such a bad place for a honeymoon after all."

LOVE AND WAR

Married to a major assigned to the U. S. supply mission in Moscow, one loving wife tried to wangle a passport to Russia by getting a job first with the British in Washington, then with our State Department. Assigned finally to the legation in Teheran, she crossed the Atlantic, Africa and the middle east; at Teheran she worked extra hard and earned a vacation. During the vacation she talked herself into a Soviet visa and flew to Moscow—at last seeing her husband.

She was promptly informed by our War Department that she was in a war zone and would have to leave. But her husband fooled fate. He wangled a transfer, and managed to leave with her.

British authorities say Anglo-American marriages are more welcome in Britain than Anglo-European marriages. It is claimed that the British and Americans see eye to eye on fundamentals, however much they may differ superficially.

When Lieut. William Arnold, son of AAF General "Hap" Arnold, failed to attend his engagement party because of military duties, here is what he wired his sweetheart: "Terribly sorry I couldn't make it. May I come to the wedding?"

—GENEVIA I. COLE

PEACHES AND CREAM

THEIR IMMEDIATE TARGET was the greenish stone building which was set like a chipped, dirty gem in the too-heavy ring of rocky ridge. The battle-conditioned, 26-year-old corporal of tank-destroyers, Robert Wilson, traversed his gun until the Japanese hideout was centered on the cross of the sighting reticule. He could see a puffy cloud of dust arising from one end of the building where his piercing projectile had just hit. Wilson turned to his radio operator.

"Find out if the CO wants us to fire any more. I can't see anything moving up there now," he said.

The radio operator switched on his transceiver, waited a few seconds for the telltale hum of radio activity,

Look of Love

and then depressed his microphone button to talk.

"Hullo, Apple, this is Quince. Is the menu today Peaches and Cream? Over," he messaged in accordance with the prearranged system. Then he released the mike button and waited for the command car back at base area to relay instructions from the commanding officer. Both the radio operator and the gunner corporal,

If one woman—and a detonation—could shock a soldier into darkness, perhaps another woman could bring him light.

Helen gambled . . . and won.

A NOVELETTE
BY
JAMES E. WEST



Wilson, listened closely to the frying-egg sound of the radio, straining to catch every intonation of the incoming order.

"Hullo, Quince? This is Apple. The menu today is Radishes and Strawberries. Over," the command-post operator said.

"This is Quince. Roger. Out." Wilson's operator said.

"That means a couple of guys will be right up to relieve us. We leave the tank-destroyer dug in right here. Man, will I be glad to get some sleep!" the operator said.

Wilson reflected that he, too, would be glad to return to the rest area. He'd been dug in with this gun for three weeks. There were times when he had patted the gun affectionately, but not now. The sulphur smell of muzzle blast stuck to his fatigues and the stench of drying bore cleaner got on his nerves. What a life, he mused, and then reminded himself grimly of the old Army gag: "Somebody's got to do it."

The Japanese had been falling back on the island for two months now—with the worrisome clean-up job assigned to his tank-destroyer battalion. And those Nips could hole up in the worst places! They pulled bamboo and vines over the fronts of their caves; they died in the rubble pockets of old pill boxes; they hid behind jutting scraps of demolished buildings, and they tied themselves

to death as tree-snipers. They had to be gouged out by ones, twos and threes—by tank-destroyers, by bazookas, by grenades, by flame throwers, by rifle and machete.

Wilson and the radio operator crawled down the heavy side of the vehicle. Realizing the other wanted to talk, Wilson tried to pick up the thread of conversation:

"Sure, sleep is what I want too. But mostly I want my mail. I haven't heard from Margaret in almost a month. Bad enough when the boats are slow—but to get stuck at this firing point, away from mail—"

The radio operator grinned and nodded.

Whenever Wilson thought of mail-call he got warm inside. That was because mail always meant letters from Margaret, and Margaret meant Des Moines, and Des Moines meant home. In his mind's eye he could see Margaret now, trying not to embarrass him by weeping at the railway station.

"Remember, darling," he had told her. "You're what I'm fighting for. Nothing will happen to me. I'll be back and we'll get that little apartment. Don't ever forget, darling!"

"I won't forget," Margaret had said, crying softly.

Wilson stirred from his day-dream when a dusty jeep bounced up the small rise and came to a fluttered halt. The two relief men climbed out.

"Hi, fellas," Wilson said. "If there are any more slant-eyes up there, they're hiding. Got to be careful nights they don't sneak down and cut your throats—"

He and the radio operator climbed into the jeep. Wilson whirled the steering-wheel, shoved the gear into reverse. He swerved around and started for camp, now and then flexing his legs which were inclined to shake with a tremor. It was that old familiar feeling of tank fatigue.

MAIL FROM DES MOINES

The sentry who had been posted on the road signaled them into camp.

Camp seemed quiet. Most of the men were out on patrols, creeping and crawling through the brush and grass.

The company clerk had seen the jeep returning. He had the mail ready, tied up with string into packets for each man.

"Here's what you've been waiting for, boys," he shouted, running out to shove the letters into their hands.

Wilson thumbed the postmarks quickly. St. Joseph, Mo., that would be Aunt Nettie; Lincoln, Nebr., that would be Cousin Jim; and then—five! From Des Moines! He'd read the last of the Des Moines letters first—to get the latest news. Then he would read the others backward progressively by postmarks until he had

read everything in every line, drawn every inference from between the lines. He noted the latest date: September 16. He ripped the end from the envelope, opened the light gray note paper and read:

DEAREST BOB:

I don't know how to begin. I never dreamed I would have to write a letter like this. But the heart does strange things and I think it's only honest to tell you what mine has done.

I know you'll understand, Bob dear. It's just this: I've met someone I care for more than you. When you were here it seemed I loved you past reason. But things happen and people change.

After you left everything was different. The streets didn't look the same. The places where we used to go were different. The days dragged on. And the nights—well, out there you must know what it's like to lie awake hour on hour just wondering and being lonely. Sometimes I would think the telephone had rung when it hadn't. One night it did ring. It was Raymond Davis. He asked me to a bridge game. Then came one date after another—and suddenly, Bob, we found ourselves in love. We're to be married October 1st.

Please forgive me, Bob. Ray-

*mond didn't anticipate this—
neither did I. It's just one of
those things.*

Sincerely,

MARGARET

Wilson stood stunned. He'd seen death; he'd seen more than one man gasp out life like a beached fish on alien soil. Death was bad, but this death was different. He'd seen death but he had never felt it. This living death had grabbed him by the throat. He was choking. He moved towards the shade of a thorny tree. The rest of his letters slid unopened to the ground.

Harry Bright, the mail clerk, was the first to notice the shock victim. He walked over and took Wilson by the arm. The gunner corporal jerked away violently, almost convulsively. His lips moved but he said nothing.

Bright knocked off the stricken man's helmet. Wilson slid sideways to the ground. The mail clerk ran to the Lister bag and drew a canteen cup of water. He wet a handkerchief and put the wet compress on Wilson's forehead. Then he drew a shelter-half over the body. After some rest, Wilson was able to rise. The mail clerk led him to a bunk.

Finally, lying down, Wilson spoke: "What's today, Harry?"

"Monday, October 2," the clerk replied.

"Can you wangle me some sleeping pills?" Wilson pleaded.

Bright left the barracks and returned with a chunky, brown bottle. He removed two tablets and placed them in Wilson's still unwashed hand.

"Leave the bottle, the whole bottle."

"I'll leave you just two more. Don't take the second two, though, until you wake up."

THE DEMOLITION KIND

Wilson washed down the tablets with salty water from the Lister bag and turned wearily to the guardian angel of all soldiers—sleep.

Fourteen hours later he awoke. A vise clamped his forehead. At first he thought he'd been hit by a mortar. He ran his fingertips along his forehead slowly. Then he remembered—and reached for the remaining pills.

But the radio operator, closely watching from a nearby bunk, jumped across and slapped the pills to the floor.

"You need better chow than that, bud."

Wilson shrugged. The radio operator put an arm across his shoulder and steered him to the mess hall where he ate slowly, thinking, thinking, thinking. He had to get away.

He had to get out of camp, where he could be alone—

After he'd eaten he walked to headquarters building:

"Sir," he reported to the officer of the day, "I'd like to go back to my gun."

"Wilson, you sure you're all right? Might be best if you stayed here, dammit. You don't look rested to me—"

"I'm all right, sir. But if I stay around here, I don't think I will be. I'll go nuts. I've got to be doing something. I'll be all right if I go back, sir," Wilson forced a smile as if to convince the officer.

The captain looked at him closely. He could sense something strange and proud happening within the man.

"Well, if you really want a job, we've got a tough one up there, in that valley ahead of your gun. It's mean. Strictly volunteer. The Japs mined that level between where your Hellcat is dug in and the stone building up ahead. Before we move up, we've got to clear that strip of mines—"

"That's for me, sir."

"It's a hand job because no detectors have come up. You'll just have to prod and find them. Had much experience with the demolition kind?"

"Plenty," Wilson responded, thinking back how he had dug out live mines in training, same as those up ahead.

He was also thinking of the repeated advice of old soldiers: *Never volunteer for anything!* He pushed the thought aside, set his teeth like a boy about to dive into a strange pond, and said decisively: "Yes, sir, that's my job."

At the supply tent he drew the necessary equipment. First, two steel prods about two feet long. He could poke and punch the earth for hidden death with these. Then he found some engineer's tape to mark off the boundaries of the strip after it had been cleared. It would be hot out there; so at the Lister bag he filled a couple of canteens with warm, briny water.

He got into the jeep and drove toward the valley. Skirting the rise where the tank-destroyer was dug in, he emerged a little forward of it and waved to the crewmen.

Quickly he went to work. The end of one roll of engineer's tape he tied to a small bush. With a rock he anchored the end of another roll about thirty feet to one side. He'd use the two tapes to mark a path for the tank-destroyers the same way shoulders mark the boundaries of a road. He planned his approach methodically. He would work slowly back and forth, three feet at a time, prodding the earth. Long hours of labor lay ahead.

He began, saying slowly to himself: "Reach, grope, prod. Reach,

grope, prod." It was slow tedious work. The first hour passed. He looked behind. He hadn't gone very far. His leg muscles were sore and his back ached. He rested five minutes and started again.

"Reach, grope, prod. Reach, grope, prod" . . . *Scraaatch!* His steel prod had struck something. A mine? He stuck the prod in the ground two feet away. The earth was soft there. It had been dug out and replaced. There was also the telltale yellow line where grass had withered.

He must be careful now. Very careful. Was it a push or pull variety? Was it a combination? The slightest mistake would blast him from the war forever. He knew—he'd seen the things go off.

He started removing the earth with his fingers. A pinch at a time, not much more than a thimbleful. He heard a *spang*, saw the dust spurt. A sniper had located him. Wilson snuggled behind his helmet, emptied a carbine clip at the trees beyond the stone house.

The commotion roused a Jap light machine-gun, which began spraying the level strip. The tank-destroyer instantly started throwing back big stuff, but the Jap weapon kept on. . . . Wilson watched the lead spray approaching in a line of dust spurts. He rolled over, keeping close to the ground, trying to get away from the mine. The spurts came closer. If one struck the mine. . . .

This was it. He saw it coming. Flash and smoke. Mostly flash. All in his face. The world went off in an explosion of everything.

Back at camp they heard the blast. The captain muttered under his breath: "I should have known better; I shouldn't have let him try—"

They took Wilson to the island "hospital" in a Red Cross jeep. He was hysterical by spells until they gave him hypodermic shots to make him sleep.

It took three days before any measure of genuine consciousness returned; he woke up, put out his hand and felt the hospital sheets. He reached up and felt the bandages on his head. "Must be over my eyes," he reasoned, for he could not see. He reached up again. The bandages came no lower than his forehead. "I'm blind," he choked. "I'm blind as a bat."

UNKNOWN DESTINATION

At the other end of the row of beds stood the major who had made the examinations. He was discussing the wounded corporal's case history with a nurse.

"I can find nothing organically wrong with Wilson. Shock blinded him—should be temporary—but if that hysteria of his lingers, the return of sight may take some time.

Nurse, try and find out if he has anything on his mind. He'll be regaining consciousness any minute, I expect. Talk to him. And give him sedatives—I want him thoroughly rested before we try other therapy."

"Yes, sir, I'll do what I can," said Lieut. Helen Minton, brushing stray strands of curly, corn-silk hair back into place under her cap.

She walked down the ward to the corporal's bed.

"So you're awake, soldier! What about the pulse?" she said cheerfully, taking Wilson's wrist.

His heart was racing like a multi-cylindered engine. This was not new to her. She had treated such cases.

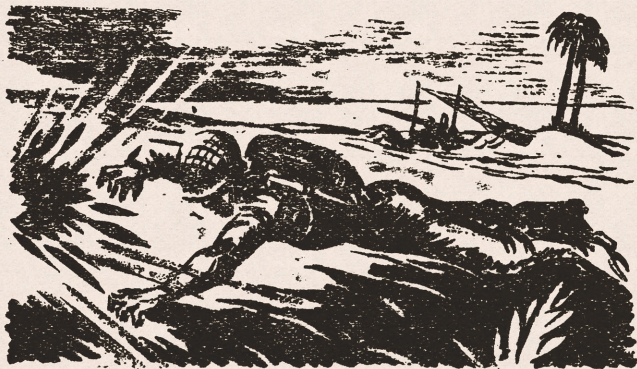
She knew how he would be feeling his heart pounding in the arter-

ies of his throat. How his heart would gather speed like a locomotive, then ease down as if entering a station, and then without warning go off again, racing, racing—on a stepped-up timetable to an unknown destination.

"You're going to be fine," she reassured him, wishing she knew something better to say. "Take this pill, now. Come on. Open your mouth. That's right. Now just rest quietly. I'll be nearby if you need me."

She stepped back from the bed. His face was badly flushed as a result of the frantic heart-pumping. Beads of terror were on his forehead. Drawn and tired, he stared ahead anxiously—seeing nothing!

Drugged, he slept heavily.



OVERSEAS BRIDES

Up to Spring, 1945, American ground and air personnel at eight flying fields around Northampton, England, had acquired 1,250 English brides. If the same ratio applies at other American fields in England, British-American altar trips will surpass Cupid's fondest expectations.

The majority of marriages contracted by our soldiers and sailors in this war have been with English, Scottish and Irish brides. In the last war they were predominantly French, with a smattering of German marriages thrown in from the days of the Army of Occupation.

—JASPER B. SINCLAIR

Awaking the next day, it was warmer. Wilson could feel the change in the air.

Quickly, then, it hit him.

"So I'm blind. Blind. I'll never see again." His heartbeat stepped up. He was frightened. He saw the flash, caught the stench of smoke. His head whirled. . . .

"Nurse, *nurse!*" he called frantically, tears streaming from his brown, unseeing eyes.

He heard her quick steps.

"What's happening to me? My God, do something. . . . I'm on a damned merry-go-round!"

"Turn over on your stomach," she snapped. She helped him roll over. "You'll be all right in a minute. Take it easy, Bob. Try to relax." Helen reached for his tense hand, which was clutching the sheet convulsively. She stroked it gently, and gradually the grip relaxed. "You'll be all right," she repeated.

She massaged his hand. She could

see the arteries pulsing in his throat again. She knew the blood was booming in his ears like a river pounding through a broken levee-wall.

After a while the throbbing in his throat seemed to slow. He was calmer now.

"Feeling better?"

He nodded. For the first time, he was conscious of the cool, soothing odor of lavender.

"Would you like me to read to you?"

He nodded again.

She took a newspaper from a nearby table. "Here's something might interest you—about how to make wine from potatoes—"

"Anything," he said. "Read anything. Makes me feel right at home." He blushed, and explained reluctantly, "I used to work on a paper."

She started to read, stopped abruptly. "A paper? What did you do?"

"Leg work, mostly. Got in a fea-

ture, once in a while. Even wrote poetry—" He smiled, embarrassed. "Before the war. I was a kid."

"Can you remember any? I like poetry," she said, pumping him.

"Yes, one especially. It was called *Litter* and was published in Chicago. Went like this:

*Now all along my reedy shore
The litter of sea life is flung,
A spar, a rope, a melon peel,
A bottle that the wet grass hung.
A purple line marks sea and sky
With bluer blue than any plum
As my eye seeks the puff of white
In rounded sail that does not come.
I think I lost love like a shell
Now cupped forever in the sand,
Like whited boat ripped on a reef
Or silver fish gone from the hand.*

Helen was looking at him in an entirely different way. He waited for her to say something, but she was too moved to speak.

"You didn't like it?"

"Oh, yes. I did!" she said. "You spoke that so vividly it sounded as if you'd lived it——"

"Well, no . . . not when I wrote it . . . maybe later. I've written lots of stuff like that. Some war poems, too. Couple of months ago I sent some to a New York publisher. I'm hoping that some day they'll be published, but I haven't heard."

"Oh, I'm sure they will be!"

He was entirely calm now. "Read

to me, if you want to," he said.

She started the article, holding the newspaper with her left hand. Her right hand was resting lightly on his wrist. He closed his hand on hers, and it felt small and soft, yet strong. He slept.

THERE MUST BE A WAY

A few nights later, tossing restlessly on her cot, Helen as usual was trying to think of some way to help him.

Hysterical blindness. Would it last? Would it take permanent hold? The major was right . . . the shock of the blast alone was not responsible for Bob Wilson's condition. But try as she might, Helen could not penetrate the secret, whatever it was.

There must be a way. Helen thought hard. She had to admit that helping the lean, hard corporal was becoming terribly important to her, more important than anything in her life. . . .

She sat upright in the darkness. She had it! It was so simple, why hadn't she thought of it before?

The next morning she walked briskly to his bed.

"I have a letter for you, Bob. Do you want me to read it?"

He nodded.

"Say, what was the name of that publishing house where you sent your poetry?"

"Linder and Mappin," he replied. "Why?"

"Because this letter is from them!" she lied. She did not dare place her hand on his wrist this time. He might feel her excited heart pounding harder than his. She prayed inwardly: "Dear God, help me make him see. Help me make him want to see."

She began: "Here's what it says. 'Dear Corporal Wilson: We wish to congratulate you on what are probably the finest poems of this war we have seen. With your permission, we intend to publish them in book form for our fall and winter list. Royalty payments are to be made under our regular poetry-publishing plan; an advance check of \$100.00 will be sent you on the date of publication'."

She halted breathlessly. "Isn't that wonderful, Bob?"

"You're kidding, Helen. They weren't that good—"

"It's true, Bob. Here's the letter!" She put a piece of note paper into his hand.

He felt the paper. "It would be wonderful, all right!" With a pang, she saw that he wanted to believe her. He *did* believe her.

*

The days which followed were filled with ups and downs. Sometimes his heart would race with fright. The arteries stood out from his throat like the tendons of a straining horse. When it became too much

for him, he called for Helen. She knew how to calm him.

During those weeks, whenever he thought of Margaret, his heart would start on one of those races.

At such times he would reason: It's better this way. What if Margaret had waited. A blind man would just be a burden to her. A blind husband . . . It wouldn't be fair!

Once again he was telling himself this. His heart pounded and raced. Passing by, Helen noticed the throbbing at his neck.

"God, help me to help him," she prayed, looking down at his tortured face, strong even in blindness and bewilderment.

Then Wilson sensed her. "Helen? I know you're there! I can hear you breathing—"

"Yes, Bob."

"Helen, I want to talk. I want to tell you about Margaret." It burst from him like an explosion. "Did I ever tell you about Margaret? Please don't say anything until I've talked it out. I've got to tell you," he rattled on, his face erect, his eyes straight ahead, fixed on nothingness.

He recalled his boyhood, his work, his love, the war. He told about the letter from Margaret.

She sat through it all quietly. But he knew she understood, he could tell by the feel of her hand resting against his wrist. Then he felt her take both his hands in hers.

"You're sweet, Bob. And you do have talent! That's more than most of us have. What does the rest matter?" She gave him a pill.

He was glad he had got it all off his chest. He took the pill and slept.

She sat for a long time at his bedside. So his secret was out. She shrugged, and suddenly decided the time had come for the final step in her experiment. She wanted him to see. He *had* to see.

VIOLETS WERE DRENCHED

Next morning she was at his bed early. "How goes it, Bob?"

"You know I always feel better when you're around."

"If you can kid the nurses, you're practically off the sick list." She laughed. "And this morning—soldier—I've got a surprise for you!"

He took the cigarette out of his mouth. "You sound happy."

"I'll say I am." She leaned forward tensely. "They've mailed it. Look, Bob. Your book of poems! Look at it, Bob. *Look!*"

Wilson turned instinctively. Irresistible desire rolled back the curtain his morbid mind had clamped on his optic nerves.

He *saw* the outline of a book. He *saw* the corners. He *saw* the hand holding it.

And he saw the title: SOLDIER'S FIELD MANUAL.

The arteries in his neck jumped, his hands and lips trembled. He was angry. He turned bitterly to the nurse who had tricked him. There, outlined against the window, he saw the clean-cut cameo of her face. It was a white, anxious face, with eyes soft as violets. But the violets were drenched with tears now.

"Forgive me, but I wanted you to see. I wanted you to—very much." She walked away stiffly.

Wilson rolled over, burying his face in the pillow. A little later, another nurse brought him a sleeping tablet.

Darkness had come by the time he stirred again. Through the window he noticed the moon. He could see all right.

For an hour he stared out of the window, just enjoying it. Seeing.

Then he started to think to himself. "It doesn't make sense. She built me up, and threw me down. Are all women liars? I don't hate her . . . She was only trying to help me." For once he didn't think of Margaret. He thought only of Helen. He recalled her soft, gentle hand stroking his wrist . . . the cool smell of lavender. . . . "Why did she try so hard to help me?" Suddenly it seemed very important. "Just pity? Pity of a nurse for any wounded soldier? I must think this thing through—I must think—"

Awaking again an hour later, he

drank in the moonlight. He was agitated, he realized, but his heart was not racing. It only raced a little bit when he heard the quick footsteps.

He felt the light warmth of her hand on his wrist. Was he dreaming?

He looked up. She was standing beside him, the delicate cameo of her face framed by corn-silk hair and moonlight. He knew now. This, most

of all, was what he wanted to see.

"Helen," he said tenderly.

"Yes, Bob." Her voice assured him. He was not mistaken.

"Stay with me. Help me. Stay with me forever, will you?"

She bent over him, and he cupped her face in his hands. As she kissed him she saw in his eyes the cure complete, a look of love.



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