

Street & Smith's

LOVE STORY

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MAY 30, '44

REG. U.S. PAT. OFF.

Magazine

MAY 30, 1944

15c

Novelette and
Complete Stories By
NICK BODDIE WILLIAMS
ZILLAH PATRICK
JOHN PAUL MITCHELL



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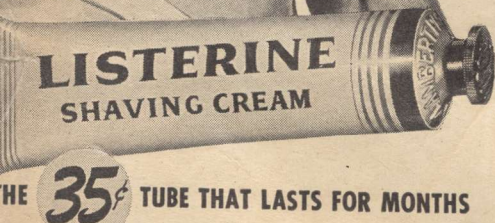
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STREET & SMITH'S

LOVE STORY

REG. U. S. PAT. OFF. MAGAZINE

MAY 30, 1944 VOL. CLXXXVIII, NO. 5
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Editor
DAISY BACON

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LOVE STORY NOTES

AND here, ladies and gents, you see the latest acquisition to the Love Story art gallery—the portrait of Camilla Jordan. Camilla herself is no stranger in our midst—no, no, far from it!—her stories have enriched our mag ever since way-back-when. Her newest, “Almost Too Late,” in our next issue, is a dramatic representation of her views on the eternal man-loves-woman situation. Camilla’s pet conviction is that men and women were made to be balancing opposites, each to the other, never opposing competitors. Says Camilla, “Universal peace cannot come until there is universal balance and harmony between the sexes, each doing their jobs according to the talents nature gave them. And what is a love story but the portrayal of that principle? A boy and a girl join forces, different from each other, each a

half that is incomplete without the other. When two people discover that secret between them, then that’s a love story!” More about Camilla? Well, she’s a born and bred New Yorker with the oddest collection of interests—history, a home in the country, Chinese art, English furniture, and a deep love of the mystic and the ancient, which comes of being brought up among romantic, hard-bitten archaeologists. That love, by the way, is her “life insurance,” for Camilla believes that no matter what may happen or how old she may grow, dreams and lovely imaginings can never be taken from her. There’s no such word as “lonely” in Camilla’s vocabulary. She lives alone and adores it. And the greatest satisfaction Camilla gets out of living is a writing job well done. Well, gosh, we sure get a kick out of it, too!



Camilla Jordan

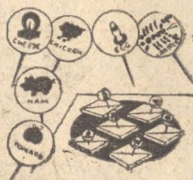


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Conducted by Esther J. Ford



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DETOUR TO PARADISE

BY NICK BODDIE WILLIAMS

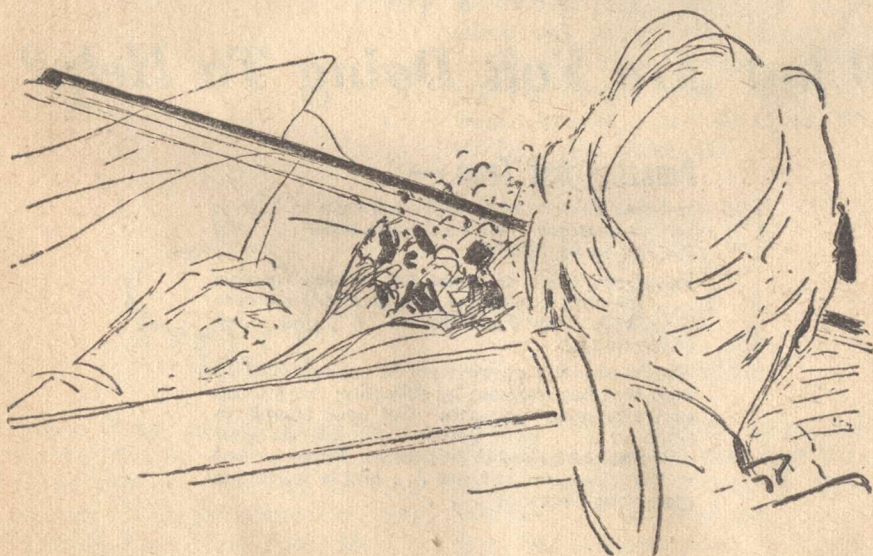
I.

AS ALWAYS, his telephone call came just before her broadcast. It was a sentimental thing to do, not at all like Speed Stanton as he seemed to other people, but this was for Terry Kane, this was different.

"Terry, sweet, sing our song tonight, will you? For me."

She laughed softly into the telephone. "For you, Speed. With a special message."

She could visualize him answer-



It was a sentimental love song, and the vast radio audience who listened to Terry Kane's rich contralto, could not detect its faintly ominous undertones.

A Novelette



ing. Speed Stanton, tall, gray-eyed, with the cool smile of that easy self-assurance which had helped him climb from trumpeter to orchestra leader, to owner of the Drumbeat Club. There was a trace of it in his voice now.

"If it's the message I hope it'll be, drop into the club afterward and we'll plan things. Come by, anyway. I haven't seen you since—seems incredible—since noon!"

At noon, Speed Stanton had asked Terry Kane to marry him. That, of course, was a long story that began two years back, when she was a scared kid of seventeen, auditioning for his orchestra in her most sophisticated evening gown, her honey-colored hair brushed into a shining page-boy bob. The song had been "Our Love" and since then it had been "our song," even after Terry left the Drumbeat Club for radio. She never sang it unless he telephoned, requesting it. And tonight the song was more than just a melody they'd known together, for Speed would understand that it meant "yes."

The studio call boy thrust his head into the phone booth. "Miss Kane, three minutes now."

She nodded absently. Three minutes more before she said "good-by" to Terry Kane. That thought made her feel breathless with the pace of things. Like a deep plunge into a pool, mysterious and dark, but thrilling, too.

She was going into the broadcasting booth when she observed the dark young man. This was the third time she had seen him at her

broadcasts, one of those anonymous thousands who admired the husky, rich contralto of her voice. He was near the front, his arms folded across the chest of his French flannel pin-striped suit, as he sat listening, crisp-haired, powerfully built, rather grim-looking for a radio fan. And disturbing, too. Perhaps it was the determined cut of his chin or the smooth rightness of his clothes that made him stand out from the crowd. Or perhaps—

But he didn't matter. This song was for Speed Stanton beside an amplifier in the Drumbeat Club, and Terry Kane was admitting that her gratitude, her admiration—yes, and her affection, too—was more important than the unaccountable flicker of doubt she felt when she thought of marrying Speed. For she'd thought a lot about it before today. There'd always been an implication in Speed's manner that, eventually, when things were right—

That dark young man again! He was getting up, deliberately leaving in the middle of her song. The rudeness of it shattered Terry's poise. For an instant, jarringly, she stopped. Her mind went blank, the words and melody completely gone. A surge of anger filled her, swept a scarlet wave across her lovely face. She saw his tight-lipped smile as he walked on, and then, as if his passing freed her from a spell, she caught the music and resumed, shaken and cold.

Afterward, the call boy met her with a grin. "Gosh, Miss Kane, I thought you knew that song. You

sing it about twice a week."

Terry bit back a sharp retort. "Who was the man who walked out on me?"

"Dark? Well-dressed? Good-looking?"

"Don't sell him, junior. Just tell me who he is."

The call boy's grin widened. "That's Bruce Tobin. All the ladies go for him."

"And so could I," Terry said, slipping a fur jacket over char- treuse bodice topping bouffant black net. "With a hatchet, preferably."

While her taxi was threading through the traffic skein of Sunset Boulevard toward the Drumbeat Club, that name kept hammering at her—Bruce Tobin. It sounded vaguely familiar, something about — But Speed would know. Speed knew exactly who was who in Hollywood. He had to know what people to keep out of a club like the Drumbeat. If your name didn't rate a line in newspaper columns, there never seemed to be a table for you in the Drumbeat. "Keep the hack drivers out," was Speed's slogan. A little hard, but Speed remembered what poverty could be, and he wanted no more of it.

The cab was stopping. Terry looked up at the blazing neons of the Drumbeat, remembering. Those lights spelled the difference between herself and that desperately anxious child she had been just two short years ago. For that, she could thank Speed.

She nodded to the hat-check girl,

then went toward the dance floor, peering around the dimly lighted room for Speed. He was dancing with a willowy blonde. Terry took in the sequins-sprinkled white taffeta shimmering in the spotlight, the close-piled head of golden curls, the slender throat with chin upturned, the smile inviting, challenging. It added up to something, but Speed's bland manner reassured her.

"Hello, Miss Kane." Raoul, Speed's maître d'hôtel, was at her elbow, smiling. "This way. The boss asked me to watch for you."

She followed him to a table near the side. As the music stopped, she saw Speed take the blonde across the room, then bow, not stiffly, the way he bowed to casual patrons, but easily, intimately. There was something there— The blonde's smile told that much. But that sounded like jealousy, and certainly tonight no woman's smile could make Terry jealous. For, after this night, Speed was hers for keeps. He was coming at last toward her table, all his easy charm flashing across the room.

"Terry, angel!" He caught her hand, held it close within his own, then sat down facing her. "You're lovely in that gown. You're lovely in any gown. You're lovely, period. What shall we drink?"

Terry smiled. "What would I drink if I were that sea-foam blonde?"

Speed laughed at her. "That blonde? She'd have a zombie, I suppose. You know the type—a little weary of the social grind,



"You have no right to question me about Speed Stanton," Terry flared. "I shall tell you nothing!"

bored with the bales of cash that smother her. Gets a bang out of hot trumpeters, torch singers, night club operators. She's Leslie Anders, out for an evening's slumming. Satisfied?"

"Why not?" Terry dismissed the subject. "Did you hear me sing."

He struck a light to a cigarette, his eyes narrowing above the glowing match. "I never miss you, Terry. You know that."

Something, she sensed, was wrong. His answer wasn't what it should have been. "You didn't really mind my messing it? You see, when I went into the broadcast room—"

Startled, she saw his face go taut. "What do you mean, you messed it? Didn't you sing 'Our Love'?"

For a moment she could not believe the anger in his eyes. Surely, he'd listened in tonight, knowing

what it meant? "Darling, of course! If I sounded unlike myself it's because it's the last time I'll sing as Terry Kane, because I was trying so hard to let you know how happy—"

His fingers stopped her with a sudden tattoo. He leaned back, frowning a little. "Listen, Terry, something's come up that changes things. We can't get married now."

"I . . . I don't get it, Speed." She shook her head, bewildered by the change in him. "If you mean it's something you've got to do tonight, we can wait another day. The license will keep."

Speed's teeth bit into his lower lip. "Terry, you're sweet. You'll understand, won't you, if I can't set a date? Let's say it's indefinite."

So here it was! She'd felt something was wrong when she saw him dancing with Leslie Anders. Not just the fact of it, but something

she instinctively feared. It was in Speed's eyes now. "Just how indefinite, Speed?"

"I wish I knew!" He snapped the cigarette into a tray, then lighted another one. "Remember Danny Reddick, the kid who played the clarinet for me before the army called him?"

She nodded.

"Last night he came back on leave. He borrowed my car, drove to his girl's apartment, and when he came out, someone had moved my car a block away. At least, left it a block away."

He was talking too fast, too glibly. But what mattered was that he had to talk at all, Terry thought bitterly.

"The car was parked beside a fire plug. As Danny got there, a cop pulled up. He was writing a ticket when he saw a box of marijuana on the seat. It wasn't Danny's stuff, but he knew if he claimed the car he'd be arrested. He might prove his innocence, but he's trying for an army commission, and even a suspicion would kill that. So Danny came straight to me. Could I report the car as stolen and put him in the clear? I thought I could. But the new regime on the police commission, led by this Bruce Tobin—"

That name shattered Terry's bitterness. "Bruce Tobin!"

"That's right, Galahad Tobin, fresh out of law school and dying to reform the world." Speed laughed tolerantly. "I don't mind reformers, but they make policemen nervous. And I can't let

Danny down. I've got to stand pat while they take me over the jumps, but I don't want that kind of thing going on after we're married."

It took a moment for her to get the full meaning of his words, and then she felt a twinge of shame for doubting him. This was like Speed to stand up for his friends, no matter what the cost. He might seem hard at times, but this was the real Speed. And when she thought of Bruce Tobin, barging into her life the second time within a night, she stood up angrily, holding out her arms.

"Dance with me, Speed! Just hold me tight."

The world seemed right again. She let her face rest close against him, then looked up.

"Speed, he was in the studio tonight when I was broadcasting—Bruce Tobin."

"What?"

"It was the third time he's been there. He walked out while I was singing our song. So now I've got a double reason for detesting him."

Speed jerked away from her. His eyes were blazing, frightening. "Why didn't you tell me this before? Why, you dumb little—"

"Speed!"

His color drained. She saw him make an effort to control himself. "Sorry, Terry, guess I blew my top. But this is over your head. You're going home. Wait for me at the door."

A few minutes later, when he came out, she saw that Leslie Anders also was leaving, and while

they got into his car, Leslie remained alone beneath the marquee, looking the other way. Speed didn't seem to notice anything.

Throughout the drive down Sunset Boulevard to Vine Street, he stared moodily ahead, silent until the door of her apartment. He caught her briefly in his arms.

"It's a rotten break for us, Terry. But when this blows over we'll have orange blossoms and Niagara. Check?"

"Check, Speed. But why is it so important that Bruce Tobin came to listen to me?"

"This marijuana thing," he explained. "It's a frame-up of some kind. But let me worry over it. And sweet dreams."

Then he was going away, walking fast, a man with something on his mind. And that something, she knew, wasn't Terry Kane.

"My wedding night," she thought ironically, alone and depressed. She turned the key in the door of her apartment, then moved into the dark and fumbled for the switch. When the lights came on, she gasped. Bruce Tobin was sitting on the davenport, legs crossed, casually tapping the cushions with a folded tabloid.

"Surprise, Miss Kane. I came to hear the finish of that song."

Terry was trembling. She stood rigid, staring at him.

"You like that song, Miss Kane?" he asked, tapping the cushion ceaselessly. "Twice a week—not much variety. Any idea why you sing it? Sentimental? On request?"

His insolence was almost unbearable, yet she kept a tight grip upon herself. "Are you a music critic, Mr. Tobin?"

"Sorry"—he grinned—"a police commissioner. But you're a lovely girl to get mixed up—"

"If you came here to tell me I'm a lovely girl, thanks terribly," she burst out, no longer able to restrain her fury. "And good-by! You may leave by the fire escape, the way I see you came. Incidentally, that's burglary, isn't it? Or by the door, like a gentleman for a change."

He got up from the davenport. "That's right—legally I suppose I'm a burglar. You may scream and end my glorious career. Or you may sit beside me and answer a few questions, like a lady for a change."

She could feel her nerves bunching. She could stand just so much of this. Her hatred for him made her blue eyes dark. "Mr. Tobin, just get out of here. I mean it."

"On one consideration," he mocked. "Tell me why you sang 'Our Love' tonight."

"I shall tell you nothing."

"But I think I know. Was it because Speed Stanton—"

Her open hand flicked out. Red imprints from her fingers flamed upon the sudden whiteness of his cheek. In that instant the mockery vanished from his eyes. Terry was suddenly dismayed by what she'd done, sensing an ominous change in him. And then, the next moment, he had seized her in his arms and forced her head far back,

searching until he found her lips. This, she knew, was what she'd feared. Yet, though her hands were beating at him, she was returning that kiss, caught by the wild, amazing rapture of it.

Abruptly, he released her and stepped back. "You're too beautiful, Terry Kane. I thought I could cross-examine you like any other woman, but I can't. I'd better go."

She pulled herself together. "Yes, you'd better go. When Galahads decide to change to Casanovas—"

"I'm sorry, Terry. You don't know how sorry."

"And I don't care!" she cried.

His voice was pleading. "That kiss was accidental, Terry. It wasn't part of anything I'd planned. Sometimes we blunder onto heights we never reach again, no matter how we try, and we were there, Terry. For just a moment! Oh, I'm not making love to you—"

"I should think not!" she flared. "You're making a speech, the way you make speeches when you run for office, to sell yourself. Well, please don't. Just get out!"

Her angry voice died suddenly. For, behind the flowered cretonne of the window drapes, someone was moving, bulging into the room. Then she saw something sliding through, cylindrical and black. She tried to scream, but Bruce Tobin's swinging arm brushed her to the floor. He leaped away from her, his right hand smashing the light bulb overhead just as a sheet of flame, smoke and blasting sound swirled crazily upon her senses. In the dark, she heard Bruce's body hit the floor.

A moment later, the pistol clattered beside him, and rapid footsteps beat upon the metal rungs of the fire escape.

The darkness quickly became intolerable. Straining, she heard Bruce's jerky breathing somewhere in the room, but she dared not move until she saw him looming at the window, peering cautiously beyond the drapes.

"Coast's clear," he whispered. "Can you find a light?"

She switched on the table lamp. Bruce came toward her, stooped and picked up the pistol.

"Get it?" he snapped. "This was to pin the job on you if they had got me. Nice people, Terry—frame a woman any day they can. I wonder if you realize— Never mind, you don't!"

Her voice came shakily. "Who was it, Bruce?"

"They rarely leave their names." He shrugged. "Informal that way. Lend me a handkerchief." He displayed his fist, slashed to ribbons where he'd smashed the bulb.

Terry bound his hand. She said, "Thoughtful of you to shove me to the floor."

"Skip it." He scowled. "I let you in for this, being stupid enough to think— Skip what I thought! More important, do you still think that that was just a speech?"

His arms were holding her. She did not resist. "Let's skip that, too. It doesn't matter now."

His lips touched her face, then he turned toward the open window. "Give me three minutes' start before you open that door to anyone."

And if you forget to say that I was here, you'll help a lot."

"Wait, Bruce!" Fear wrenched at her. "Don't go that way. If they're still waiting—"

"Not a chance," he laughed. "I'm supposed to be dead. And this time I'm going to be a real surprise."

"Bruce, please—"

He stepped across the sill into the night. She heard him climbing down. When she went to the window, he was gone and a car was starting somewhere.

Weariness dragged at Terry Kane. Too many things were happening to her, making a crazy quilt of her well-ordered life. One moment she had hated Bruce Tobin for what he was trying to do to Speed. And then he'd kissed her. Now she remembered only that. She tried to tell herself that she should hate Bruce, yet all she felt was a sensation of escape that she was not married to Speed.

Escape? What was she getting at? Speed had done everything for her, helped her to climb from obscurity to fame. Devotion, loyalty—were these to be brushed aside because of a moment's wild impulse?

Her glance caught a picture in the tabloid Bruce had left upon the davenport. A slender throat, a thin patrician face, a mass of close-piled golden curls.

HEIRESS TO WED CRIME CRUSADER

Mrs. Morris Anders, Brentwood Heights, yesterday announced the en-

gagement of her daughter Leslie to Bruce Tobin, police commissioner—

Terry balled the paper tightly in her hands.

II.

AFTERWARD, Terry thought her mind was numb that night. Yet out of it came decision, excruciatingly clear. Whatever Bruce Tobin's kiss had seemed at the moment, whatever restlessness and discontent it had aroused in her, her life was bound inextricably with Speed's. She must force him to give up his chivalrous notions of shielding her. After all, if he could risk his freedom to protect a friend, she could share that risk. Together, as man and wife, they would meet Bruce Tobin's recklessly mistaken crusade. And if there were fresh pain in this, defiance and wounded pride, she shut it blindly from her thoughts.

The Drumbeat Club, without benefit of its neons, seemed drab and deserted in the glaring sun of that next morning. Terry passed through the employees' entrance, along the empty corridor, feeling none of the exaltation that she'd anticipated when she made her decision. Her heels tapped sharply on the composition floor, echoing back a dismal, lonely sound that left her spirits drooping. She caught a glimpse of herself in the mirrored wall—a slender girl with honey-colored hair, wearing a green-and-white sheer wool sports dress, a bright-red feather in her apple-green Robin Hood hat. Some-



The girl understood at last. It was in his impassive face, in his irresistible pressure, closer, closer to the bluff's edge!

how, the picture's jauntiness depressed her even more. There was still time. She could turn back!

It was the sound of voices from Speed's office that kept her from fleeing, but just outside the door she stopped, for then she recognized the voices, Speed's, cold and clipped, and Bruce's, angry.

"You're wrong, Stanton. I'm getting close to you now. Last night I found one thread, and I can check it back."

"When you do, it's going to be a jolt to you," Speed warned. "Better lay off."

"I'll take a chance on that. But leave the girl alone."

Speed laughed. "So you're back to that. You'd better stop playing detective, Tobin—you're sentimental. And you're imagining things. I'm not even sure somebody took a shot at you."

"You're sure, all right. It had the Stanton touch, particularly that gun into the room. That would have made it beautiful—a secret love affair, that announcement in the papers, a quarrel over it. You could have turned up evidence against Terry—my visits to the radio station, my car parked on the side street. She wouldn't have had a chance."

"All possible," Speed answered. "But why? Terry's my girl."

Terry, her lips tight, entered the room. Speed was sitting behind his desk. Bruce, facing him, twisted around, but she went past him without meeting his eyes, going to Speed's side.

"I see young Galahad's back on

the job," she said. "Still dreaming up adventure stories. Send him away, darling. Why waste time on our wedding day?"

Speed's eyes narrowed and then he smiled. She saw Bruce stiffen. "Your wedding day?" he echoed. "Are you crazy, Terry?"

She whirled on him. "Perhaps you think only the idle rich, the playgirls and the amateur crusaders, ever marry. Well, it also happens on this side of the tracks. You'd better stay on your side, Bruce."

He shook his head. "Terry, we tore those tracks up years ago."

"I suspected that last night. But on this side we don't agree. We still believe in simple things like fighting for your friends, like making love to one woman at a time. We're quaint that way."

Bruce went to the door, then turned. "Terry, I understand what you think you're doing, and I respect it, but you're mistaken."

"Then it's her mistake," Speed answered quietly. "Close the door behind you, Tobin."

When Bruce went out, Terry flung her arms around Speed, sobbing, "Speed! Oh, Speed!"

"Easy there, kid." He pushed her gently back from him. "You're not in love with him, are you?"

"Certainly not! It's just—" She groped for words. She might fool Speed, but never herself. "I hate him, Speed! Let's get married today, now. We'll be so much stronger together. Then we can fight—we can beat Bruce Tobin."

The corner of Speed's mouth

pulled down. "Terry, you're wonderful, but we can't do it."

"Why not?" She was insistent. "Even if . . . if things go wrong and Bruce makes you suffer for shielding Danny Reddick—"

"Did you tell him I was shielding Danny?"

"I didn't tell him anything. He kissed me, that's all. But I'm afraid of what he's trying to do."

"That's just it," Speed broke in. "He's trying to get at me through you. If we were married, it would be that much easier. We've got to wait, Terry. Take my word for that. And don't question anything I do. I think I know a way to hamstring Mr. Tobin. There, now, dry those gorgeous eyes."

She had to let it go at that. She was too sure of Speed's intelligence to challenge what he said. Yet, when he kissed her just before she left, she knew that it was sanctuary for herself she sought, to erase the pain she'd felt when she had read of Bruce Tobin's engagement to Leslie Anders. That memory had driven her to refuge in Speed's arms. And now even that refuge was denied to her.

She was a block away before she missed her gloves. She started walking back, but as she turned the corner toward the employees' entrance to the Drumbeat Club, she stopped, confused by what she saw. Speed's sports sedan was waiting at the door, and Speed was assisting Leslie Anders into it. He closed the door behind her, then slid under the wheel.

Before she stopped to think what it could mean, Terry ran to a cab at the curb. "Follow that sedan," she ordered the driver, then jumped into the back seat, watching Speed's car move into the traffic of Sunset Boulevard.

She recalled Speed's words, "Don't question anything I do." This was part of it, then. Speed was playing Leslie Anders as a move to checkmate Bruce. When she remembered Leslie's face, dancing with Speed in the Drumbeat, she could believe that Speed knew what he was doing. The suffocating boredom of Leslie's world, Bruce's world, made men like Speed seem fascinating, dangerous. And yet it was a shoddy way to strike at Bruce. Perhaps it was the other way around—perhaps Leslie was setting a trap for Speed! But she could not imagine Bruce having a part in it. Maybe it was a game that Leslie played alone, but what kind of game? What could she want? She had wealth, position, Bruce—

They were cruising far out Sunset, through Beverly Hills and its outlying polo fields, toward the estates that dotted the arroyos running back from the Pacific Ocean. Into one of these arroyos Speed swerved his sedan, then turned through towering wrought-iron gates and pulled up in a courtyard, before a huge stone version of a French chateau. As Terry's cab crept past, she saw Speed helping Leslie out, saw Leslie's arms go around him as their lips met lingeringly.

The cab passed by the arroyo. Presently, Speed's sedan came from the courtyard and swung back toward town.

"Turn back," Terry told the taxi driver. "I'm going into that museum. And wait."

She had to know. Whatever that kiss meant, it was a crisis in her life. There was one way to learn, and that was by facing Leslie Anders. Either Speed was not in love with Terry Kane, or he was taking a long chance. She'd learn when she confronted Leslie.

Leslie herself, serene and glittering, opened the door. She stared blankly at Terry for a moment, then recognition flickered in her eyes.

"Oh, hello! You're Miss Kane, aren't you? Won't you come in?"

Terry said, "Thanks," and followed her into the ornate drawing room beyond the foyer. Leslie sat down, pointing languidly toward a gilded chair.

"Something on your mind, Miss Kane? Surely, you didn't come this far to sing a song for me?"

The cool, insulting tone of it made Terry flush. "Not a song, Miss Anders. A little straight talk, just between us girls. I read of your engagement to Bruce Tobin and—"

"Bruce? Nice boy."

"And Speed—I suppose he's a nice boy, too? But just a little different, Miss Anders."

"I've noticed that."

Terry's lips were grim. "I shan't appeal to your sense of decency, but isn't it a little reckless to let

Speed make love to you? Speed and Bruce aren't friends. And, after all, if you're engaged to Bruce, aren't you risking his happiness, possibly even his future, to try mixing their worlds?"

Leslie stood up. "My dear, you'll have to let me be the judge of what I risk. So sorry you have to run along."

"Oh, but I don't!" Terry drawled, for Leslie's silken insolence infuriated her. "You're going to tell me what you're trying to do to Speed, or I shall tell Bruce—"

"You'll tell Bruce what?"

The question, coming from the foyer, was a greater shock to Leslie Anders than to Terry, for Bruce Tobin was entering, his eyes watching them intently as he smiled. "What is it, Terry, that you'll tell me?"

"She's got nothing to tell!" Leslie burst out excitedly. "Oh, Bruce, this . . . this would-be singer broke in here, daring to insinuate—"

Bruce's eyes narrowed. "Crossing the tracks, Miss Kane?"

It was too much for Terry. Just seeing him again brought that ache back to her heart. And now, his taunting tone. She fought back tears as she rushed to the door.

"That's right, crossing the tracks, and it's as wretched over here as I'd anticipated. I'll leave you two to your conspiracies. Only watch out—you're sure to double-cross yourselves."

Returning to Hollywood, Terry felt the dismal futility of her trip

to Leslie Anders' home. She'd only made herself miserable by seeing Bruce again, and if Leslie were playing with both Speed and Bruce, there was nothing she could do about it. Nothing at all!

The telephone was ringing when she entered her apartment. It was Speed calling, with unconcealed triumph in his voice.

"Dust off those orange blossoms, Terry. I've got Bruce Tobin where I want him. No details now. But we'll drive to San Diego and be married tonight."

"Darling, I'm glad!" It was hypocrisy to tell Speed that. She wasn't glad at all. But she couldn't back out now. Not after Speed had dared so much, shielding a friend—Speed who had done so much for her.

"See you at eight," Speed's jubilant voice went on. "I'll be busy till then."

"Yes, Speed, at eight."

When she hung up, she sat a long time by the telephone. Almost irresistibly, the impulse grew to call Bruce. But it was too late for that. Their last chance passed in bitterness at Leslie's home. And to shut out memories, she began packing.

At six o'clock she went to a nearby café for supper. All the way there, she had a curious sensation that she was being followed. Once, turning quickly, she thought she saw a dark-clad man vanish in a doorway. Nerves, she decided, and went on. Yet that feeling persisted while she was returning

home. She forgot it in the final rush.

Speed arrived at eight. He stepped across the bags she'd packed and gathered her in his arms.

"Terry, gorgeous, this time I won't stand you up."

She felt a sense of irritation running through her. "You're sure? About Bruce, I mean."

"About Bruce?" He smiled down at her. "Must we talk about him on our wedding night? Tomorrow, if you're still interested, I'll tell you how I settled that."

He gathered up her bags and they went out to his car. Just as she was getting in, Terry saw a black coupé cruise slowly to the corner. It stopped, then a dark-clad man climbed in.

"Speed!" she called, but by the time he looked up, the car was gone.

"What's wrong, sweet?"

"A car at the corner—a man got into it."

He laughed tolerantly. "Now you sound like Galahad, imagining things. Expecting a rescue?"

His tone set her teeth on edge. "All right, let's go. Sorry if I seem excited, but it's my first marriage."

"And your last," Speed laughed. "Take my word for that."

It sounded faintly ominous. She wondered whether Speed was actually jealous of Bruce. If that kept up, she just might mention Leslie Anders and that kiss. Her wedding night, and she had thoughts like these!

Speed drove across Rossmore to Wilshire Boulevard, then turned to-

ward the sea, to Santa Monica. He pulled the car beside the strip of eucalyptus grove along the bluffs that overhung the Pacific. Both north and south, hugging the arc of shore, lights twinkled like a string of jewels tossed upon the sand. The sun was gone, the moon not yet out. The night was dark, exciting.

"It's our last stop," Speed said, smiling. "Let's get out, Terry. Let's listen to the surf and watch the moon come up."

"Why, Speed! I never dreamed that you were so romantic."

"I never was," he told her huskily, "until tonight."

There was a strange, electric quality in his mood, something that tantalized her memory, eluded her. Fascination, that was it—the fascination that had charmed Leslie Anders that night at the Drumbeat. It was almost tangible, almost wonderful, and new. Arm in arm, they strolled across the park, to the bluff's edge, peering far down toward the sea. A hundred feet below, the coast highway hugged close against the cliff, its outer rim lashed by the pounding waves.

"Happy, sweetheart?"

"Yes, Speed." And then, "I guess I am. I've so much to be grateful to you for. Oh, I'm sure I'll be happy!"

"Thinking, perhaps, of Galahad?"

She turned into his arms. Just as well to end these differences now. "Of Leslie Anders. I saw you kissing her today."

Speed laughed softly. "Terry,

you shouldn't have followed me. Some things a girl should never know. One of them was Leslie. Another one, that Danny Reddick never came back from the army."

She didn't think she'd heard him right. "You mean that . . . that it was a lie about Danny? It was your car and your marijuana, and you weren't shielding—"

"I'm explaining only because it's necessary," he said. "You understand?"

Suddenly, she was shivering. "I don't understand. Maybe I'd better not."

"My marijuana, that carload the police got," he told her, "and many more. When you sang 'Our Love' over the radio, the cars would move to the Drumbeat Club. I'd clear the stuff and send it to my retail agent, by Leslie Anders. Leslie was out for thrills at first, but even before her engagement to Tobin was announced, she fell for me. Tobin figured that out, also about 'Our Love,' but it was only today, when he confronted Leslie with his facts, that he was sure."

Terry felt his arms tighten around her waist. She dared not move.

"Today," Speed went on, his voice almost caressing in its charm, "when Tobin left, Leslie telephoned me, demanding that I marry her. If I did that, she couldn't testify against me. That would leave Tobin without a shred of evidence, except you. You see, you could swear I always gave the signal for you to sing 'Our Love,' and Tobin had tied that definitely into the

movement of the marijuana. So I've got no choice. When I'm married to Leslie and you're gone—"

She understood at last. It was in his impassive face, in his gentle, irresistible pressure, closer to the bluff's edge. She strained, lost hope, struggled for breath. Then, suddenly, she screamed:

"Speed! Speed!"

Somewhere, she heard the shriek of wheels. But, in that moment, terror-numbed, she felt herself toppling, then falling down through space.

Even the wrenching jerk that halted her descent could not clear her mind. She was dimly conscious that her dress was snarled in a protruding manzanita bush and, somehow, she knew that careful hands were pulling her back to the top of the bluff. But the shock of it, of Speed's confession, of his terrible solution, of her fall, clouded all things. It was only the frantic

pleading of Bruce Tobin's voice that finally roused her to reality.

"Terry, Terry!" And once again, the rapture of his kiss. Her eyes opened, shining through unshed tears.

"It's all right, Bruce."

"Darling, I know! It's going to be all right forever and ever. We've both been hurt by love, but not this time, for now—"

She whispered, "Speed?"

"They're taking him where he belongs," Bruce said. "And don't interrupt! This is my greatest campaign speech. I'm running for the only office that matters now. I'm selling myself."

She closed her eyes. "No sale."

"But, Terry darling, angel—"

"Because I much prefer to do the selling," she murmured, her face upturned. And if he meant to say another word, somehow, and for good reason, it slipped his mind.

THE END.

LEAP YEAR TACTICS

I knew in a second
That he was for me,
And he'll know it too—
Eventually!

For I shall be very
Attentive and kind
And help the dear gentleman
Make up his mind!

GAIL BROOK BURKET.

REUNION AT RENO

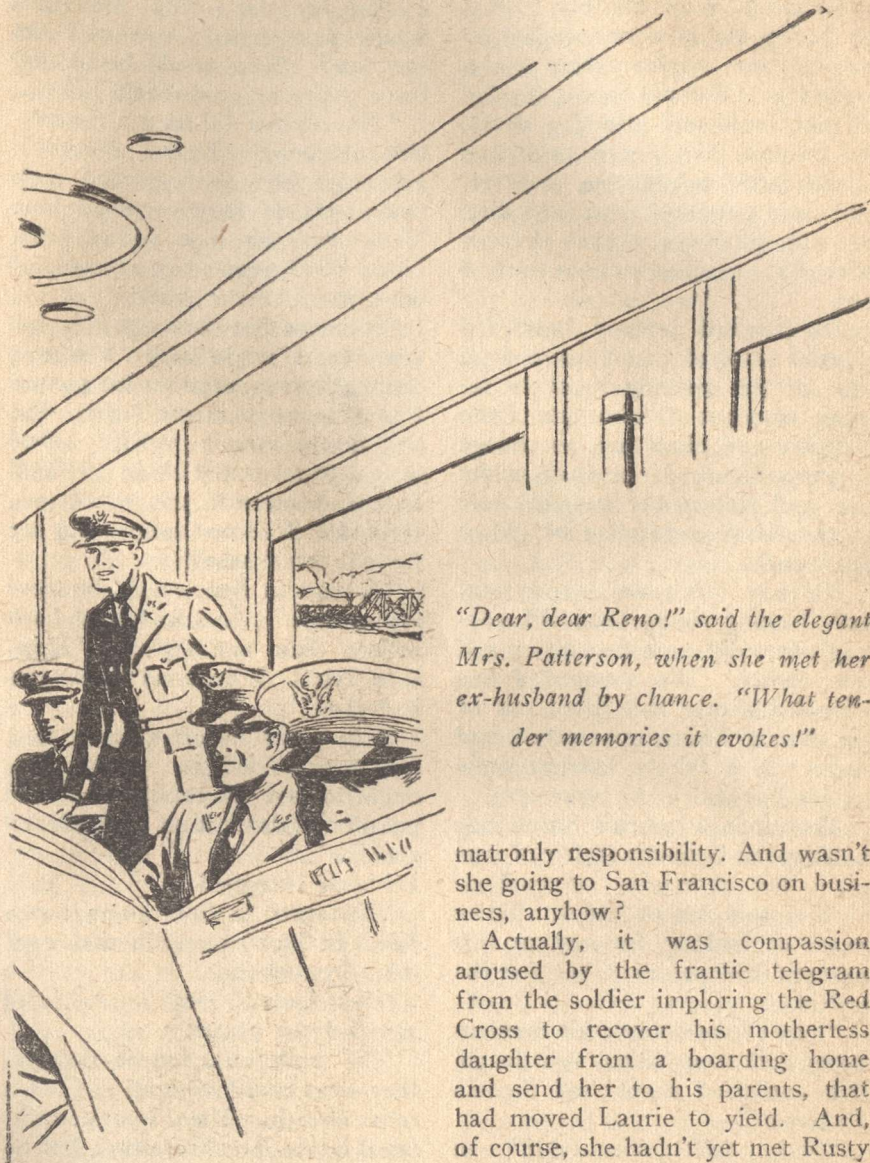
BY MARGUERITE JACOBS

LAURIE paused a moment in the doorway of the club car, her frayed nerves and weary body reveling in the restful atmosphere of shaded lamps, low voices and chairs designed for repose. Back in the crowded day coach Rusty was sound asleep at last, her chubby limbs relaxed for the first time in the eight hours since the train had left Denver, with a platoon of obliging soldiers standing guard out of sympathy for the distracted chaperon.

"Never again!" Laurie vowed, as she stood there enjoying that blessed peace and spirit-soothing dusk. Meaning, of course, that if anyone ever again asked Laurie to personally deliver a two-year-old infant to its grandparents in San Francisco, an emphatic refusal would end the matter.

She hadn't wanted to accept the commission in the first place, but down at Red Cross headquarters her colleagues had proved adept at brushing aside her protests. Mrs. Patterson was exactly the right person to take charge of Rusty. That "Mrs." was Laurie's sole relic of a stormy ten-month marriage which had ended almost three years ago, but it still lent a false air of





"Dear, dear Reno!" said the elegant Mrs. Patterson, when she met her ex-husband by chance. "What tender memories it evokes!"

matronly responsibility. And wasn't she going to San Francisco on business, anyhow?

Actually, it was compassion aroused by the frantic telegram from the soldier imploring the Red Cross to recover his motherless daughter from a boarding home and send her to his parents, that had moved Laurie to yield. And, of course, she hadn't yet met Rusty at the time.

With a little shiver of pure delight, Laurie shook off the harrowing effects of the last eight hours

and started toward the bar. Most of the big chairs were occupied by service men, but here there was a noticeable difference in the display of gold braid and gleaming shoulder insignia. They were beginning to sit up and take notice, however, as Laurie sauntered past, indicating that the difference in rank did not affect their reaction to an attractive girl.

The stir of interest heartened Laurie. It had taken her a long time in the dressing room to remove smudges of chocolate from her face and black suit, to change a grimy blouse for a fresh white one, and restore her rumpled hair to the classic perfection of glossy black curls.

Halfway down the car, a lean, good-looking young man with captain's bars did more than sit up and take notice. His slumped frame unfolded slowly and lifted out of the chair as Laurie approached, and there was a faintly satirical smile on his lips and in his gray eyes.

The catch in Laurie's breath was audible, but beyond a flicker of surprise, her expression betrayed no further evidence of shock. Three years of looking forward to this moment had prepared her for the ordeal.

"Neal!" she murmured involuntarily, and then with a light laugh. "Or perhaps I should say Captain Patterson."

"Now, isn't this odd?" he drawled. "Only a few moments ago I was thinking of you. Someone mentioned that we would arrive in Reno around midnight and

I thought, 'Isn't that the place Laurie was headed for when I last saw her?' That would be around three years ago, wouldn't it?"

"You always did have a remarkable memory," Laurie observed. Her cool blue eyes glinted with amusement as they surveyed him. "I needn't ask how you've been. Uncle Sam's renovating process has done wonders for you."

"Someone has done wonders for you, too, I might add. You're a distinct improvement on the picture I used to carry in my heart. But sit down, won't you?" Neal turned to an empty chair. "You'll have a drink with me, won't you, for—shall I be sentimental and say for old times' sake?"

"A toast to Reno would be more appropriate." Laurie leaned back in her chair and sighed. "Dear, dear Reno! What tender memories it evokes!"

"The train makes quite a long stop there, I believe. Perhaps we ought to save the toast. We could get off and drink it on the hallowed spot."

Laurie shrugged.

"Midnight is four hours away. We'll be bored to death with each other by that time."

"No doubt," Neal agreed, and signaled the porter.

The truth was, Laurie thought, they were bored to death with each other already. There were no awkward lapses in conversation, but no interest other than a polite pretense, either, in the desultory talk. They were like bare acquaintances forced into intimacy through an accidental

encounter. Once the faint pleasure of those barbed comments about the past had worn off, they had nothing in common.

Neal had slumped down in his chair again and was staring at the swinging toe of one polished shoe. He asked a few questions about Laurie's business—apparently someone had told him that she was the keen young executive who had reorganized Chérie Frocks into a flourishing concern—and gave a few unimportant bits of news about people Laurie hardly remembered. Laurie inquired about his enlistment and commission, but it was useless to try to work up interest in the vague details he volunteered.

She sat chatting with a false brightness, occasionally sipping her drink, and wishing with all her heart that the event she had looked forward to for so long never had happened. Was this, she wondered bitterly, the big moment whose dream of anticipation had lulled her to sleep so many lonely nights? Where was the thrill of showing Neal Patterson that she could not only survive the blow of losing him, but recover magnificently? It didn't happen, she told herself wryly, because she forgot to consider that Neal might not only survive, too, but recover magnificently.

Finally, a decent interval of fifteen minutes had elapsed.

"This has all been pleasant, Neal," she observed, setting down her empty glass, "but I'm afraid I'll have to be getting back now."

Neal rose, too.

"I'll stroll along with you," he offered, suppressing a yawn. "I need a bit of exercise."

In the vestibule, he recognized a fellow officer's greeting with no more than a curt nod.

"That was Major Washburn," he told Laurie, grinning, as they went on. "I'm glad I escaped before he could corner me. The old boy is a deadly bore."

"There's nothing worse than being cornered by a bore, is there?" Laurie inquired, but if Neal detected any significance in the query he was too indifferent to respond.

"Look here," he said suddenly, in an amused tone when they had walked the length of three cars, "you don't have accommodations in the engine, do you?"

Laurie's arrogant features crinkled with annoyance at the reminder.

"A new girl in my office mixed up my reservations, so we're riding day coach—"

The crisp voice broke off with a gasp, and for the first time since meeting Neal, her suave composure cracked.

"We?" Neal said quickly. "I thought you were alone."

His tone was only mildly curious. There was still time for Laurie to recover and gloss over the slip, but it was too late after the surge of horror that swept over her when she realized what it would mean if Neal discovered that she was traveling with an infant. The thought of his jeering smile at seeing the smart, worldly Mrs. Patterson with a grimy child in her arms was un-

bearable. There was real panic in the way she turned toward him abruptly, with a belated effort to look unconcerned.

"This is my car, Neal. You needn't come any farther."

The suddenly alert, keen gaze fixed on her face told her that she had only succeeded in arousing his curiosity.

"I might as well see you all the way," he said, and reached past her to open the door.

She stumbled across the threshold, frantic eyes turning instinctively toward that seat only a few paces away, where Rusty was sprawled out. Laurie gave a choked cry, all concern about Neal Patterson forgotten as her glance fell on two wildly waving feet and a diminutive body hanging head down over the back of the seat.

"Rusty!" she screamed, arousing the dozing occupants of the coach. In what seemed a single bound, she reached the dangling body and hugged it fiercely to her. "Darling! You aren't hurt, are you, sweet?" she went on in frenzied but quieting accents, as she collapsed into the seat and made a hasty inspection of Rusty's squirming limbs.

The coach settled down to repose once more. The soldiers mumbled apologies for failing to look after Rusty as they had promised, and withdrew with surprising haste, considering the affection they had shown earlier for the child. Then, suddenly, Laurie remembered Neal and understood their reluctance to linger in the presence of an officer. She wished that she could slink

away somewhere and hide, too.

Unwillingly, she turned to look up at him, her eyes steeled to endure the derisive grin she expected to see on his face. She wasn't prepared at all for its livid blaze of fury, the savage hatred glittering in his hard gray eyes. She paled a little at the actual menace in his glare, even while it astonished her, and unconsciously drew Rusty closer to her as Neal sat down.

"No wonder you were so upset when I insisted on coming back here with you!" he whipped out. "It didn't suit your plans to have me discover how I'd been cheated and deceived. Of all the foul tricks! You must have planned it deliberately, out of sheer malice—"

"Neal!" she broke in distractedly. "What are you talking about?"

"Even though we couldn't get along together, I always respected you," he went on, as if she hadn't spoken. "I never dreamed that you could be so cruel and vindictive as to pull a stunt like this. Well, you're not getting away with it. I'll have my lawyers start suit immediately, and since I feel under no obligation to play fair, I'm going to demand complete custody of my child!"

That fierce note of triumph on which he ended had no effect on Laurie. It was the sudden realization of what Neal was talking about that struck her limp and gasping for breath. For a moment, she could only shake her dazed head mutely.

"You've got it all wrong!" she

managed to whisper at last. "Rusty isn't your child, or mine. I'm just in charge of her."

"Naturally, you'll deny it!" he said roughly. "I expect you to invent any number of fantastic lies trying to disprove my claim, so suppose we just leave it to the lawyers to ferret out the facts." He gave a short, harsh laugh as he watched her face. "That frightens you, doesn't it, Laurie? No doubt you realize that the courts show very little sympathy for mothers who scheme to cheat fathers of their rights."

"Perhaps I do look frightened," Laurie thought. She was still too bewildered and stunned to compose her expression. She made a valiant effort to clear her muddled mind and, in that moment of preoccupation, Rusty took advantage of her relaxed grasp to lunge at Neal.

"Daddy!" she gurgled, and before Laurie could move, Neal had snatched the infant out of her arms and was cuddling her against his shoulder.

"Hi, Rusty!" he said gayly, and once again Laurie was overcome, not with astonishment this time, but with an inane desire to laugh outright at the fatuous glow of pride that swept his grim features.

"She calls every soldier she sees 'daddy,'" she told him in a muffled voice, trying to choke back her mirth. "It's because her father is a soldier—and I don't mean Captain Patterson."

"What about the red hair?" Neal countered. "I suppose every little girl has hair like mine."

There was, Laurie had to admit, a faint resemblance between Rusty's reddish-gold ringlets and Neal's unruly sandy shock. She gave a sigh of exasperation.

"Neal, I must insist that you listen to me. I'm taking Rusty to her grandparents in San Francisco at the request of the Red Cross." Her brisk voice trailed off. Neal wasn't listening. He was beaming complacently upon Rusty, who had yanked off his hat and was trying it on. Anger flared up in her dusky eyes as she went on, a little bitterly, "You always said you didn't want children! Only you didn't say it quite so politely. As I remember, your way of putting it was that you weren't ever going to be tied down with any crying brats."

"Men always talk like that at first." Neal dismissed the charge carelessly. "But after the first one comes along— Ouch!" He grimaced suddenly as Rusty pulled herself erect, using his ear for leverage and his ribs as ladder rungs. He shook his head admiringly. "Strong little monkey, isn't she?"

With a look of resolution, Laurie took Rusty from him and set her down on the seat beside her, next to the window. She gave the protesting child her red purse to play with and turned back to Neal.

"Neal, you simply must believe me. You're building up for a big disappointment unless you do. Rusty's father is an enlisted man. He was planning to take her to her grandparents on his next furlough. It was canceled and he wired the Red Cross—"

"So that's why you did it!" Neal burst out, not even aware that he was interrupting. He had been sitting there musing, not hearing her at all. With an air of complete enlightenment, he went on, "It wasn't spite or malice that made you keep it a secret. You were afraid to tell me. You thought I meant all that bluster about brats. After all, you were just a baby yourself, only nineteen. Why, you must have known what was ahead the day you left for Reno, after our last grand battle—" He turned to look at her suddenly, and a husky note lowered his voice to a whisper, "You poor kid!"

The look in his eyes was like a flame. Laurie had never seen it before, but she recognized it instantly—the tender light of pride and adoration that men feel for the mothers of their children. The suave, poised Mrs. Patterson was completely caught off guard. Nothing in her experience with weighty affairs had prepared her to deal with a situation like this. She tried to speak and managed no more than a gasp. A tide of rich scarlet mounted from her cool white throat to the silky black curls that haloed her brow, and her dark lashes fluttered down to shut out the blinding radiance.

"That's what it was, of course," Neal nodded, interpreting her confusion as a confession. "You just didn't realize how cruel and unfair it was to deceive me. I knew it wasn't like you to let hatred warp your sense of decency and honor."

Laurie tried desperately to quell



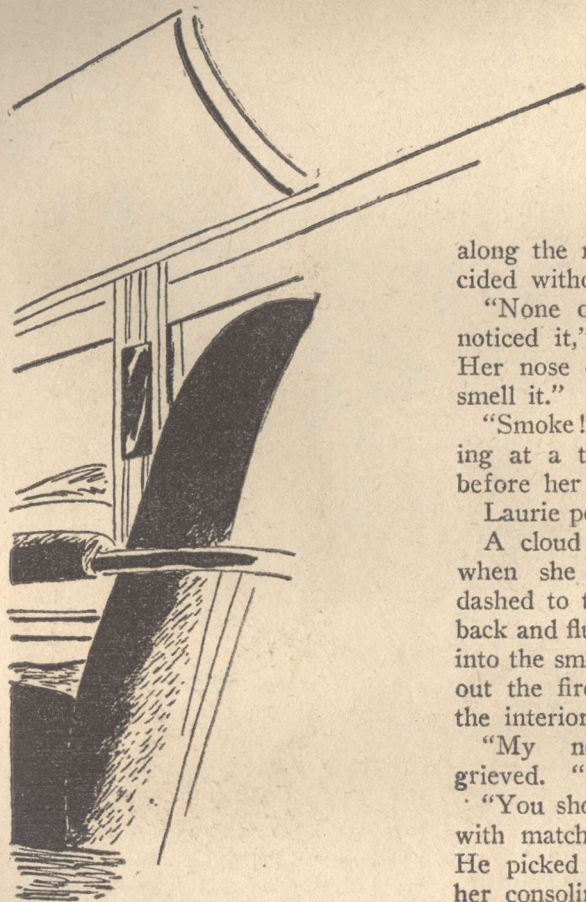
"What is it, Laurie? What have I said? Don't cry, sweet!"

her heart's tingling flurry.

"This nonsense has gone far enough, Neal. Too far. I have papers proving that Rusty isn't my child—"

"Do I smell something burning?" Neal sniffed, suddenly sitting erect.

Laurie darted an irate glance at him, but almost at once she was sniffing, too, keenly aware of the



pungent odor of smoke. Together, they leaped up and began a frantic search under the seat and into the corners of the upholstery, shaking out Laurie's sleek beaver coat and Rusty's blue wool reefer. Rusty sat fascinated by these adult antics, the red purse lying neglected beside her.

"It must have been a bonfire

along the right of way," Neal decided without too much assurance.

"None of the other passengers noticed it," Laurie reminded him. Her nose crinkled again. "I still smell it."

"Smoke!" Rusty squealed, clutching at a thin blue wisp spiraling before her enthralled eyes.

Laurie pounced on the red purse.

A cloud of smoke billowed out when she lifted the flap. Neal dashed to the water cooler, dashed back and flung a paper cup of water into the smoldering inferno. It put out the fire but completely gutted the interior.

"My new lipstick!" Laurie grieved. "My ticket!"

"You shouldn't let the baby play with matches," Neal said sharply. He picked up Rusty and cuddled her consolingly.

"I shouldn't let her!" Laurie choked. "Do you think I give her matches and tell her to go ahead and have fun?"

"You're too easy with her," he went on, maddeningly smug. "She's got you over a rail and knows it. What she needs right now in the formative years is discipline"—he paused to rescue his pipe from Rusty's cherub lips and restore it to an inner pocket—"and a father's firm hand."

Apparently, Rusty resented his tone. Abruptly, her small features contorted and she burst into loud tears, her arms reaching for Laurie.

"Now, see what you've done!" Laurie said; her ruffled feelings appeased as Rusty's wails subsided against her shoulder. "You've frightened her."

"And whose fault is it that my child is afraid of me?" Neal demanded grimly.

Laurie shook her head wearily.

"For the last hour I've done my best to convince you that you're making a ghastly mistake, Neal. You won't believe me, but fortunately I have proof that you're wrong." She groped with her free hand for her purse, a faint smile on her lips. "You will admit that you're wrong, won't you, if I show you the Red Cross instructions for turning Rusty over to her grandparents?"

The smile faded as her fingers touched a sodden mass of pulp. She glanced down swiftly, and a blank, stricken look swept her features as she stared at the charred ruins.

"Well, what do you know? No papers!" Neal mocked.

Laurie sat lost in sober reflection. Rusty was falling asleep and she shifted the warm little body into a more comfortable position in her arms. The loss of the papers was not too serious, since she could wire the Red Cross for duplicates as soon as she reached San Francisco. What troubled her was the delay

before she could show Neal proof of his error.

It was only too clear that with every passing moment, he was becoming more and more charmed with the rôle of father, more deeply attached to the child he thought was his. There was no reason why Laurie should care particularly how he would feel when he learned the truth, but she did. Her heart ached with sympathy. His attitude was amusing, but it was touching, too. Laurie could understand what was behind it probably better than Neal did himself. Here he was going off to war to fight for a home and family, and he had neither.

"As a matter of fact," Neal remarked abruptly, "the only proof I need is the way you look now with the baby in your arms. Don't tell me the elegant Mrs. Patterson acquired that madonna touch at a moment's notice."

Laurie flushed and straightened her lips grimly. Getting soft-hearted and sorry for an ex-husband was a dangerous business. Neal Patterson wasn't the only one who was being ridiculous tonight.

"Knowing how to hold a child is purely instinctive," she said stiffly.

"It's a lovely pose, but I'm afraid it would become a bit tiring by morning." Neal got up suddenly, disappeared for a while, then came back with the porter. "Here, I'll carry the kid," he told Laurie.

"Where?" Laurie demanded in bewilderment.

"To my compartment, of course." Neal settled Rusty comfortably on

his arm, the drowsy head on his shoulder. "You don't think I'm going to bed in state while my family sits up in the day coach, do you? I can park in the club car and still be more comfortable than you would be here."

Laurie protested, but not too vigorously. Neal's proposition appealed to her. It would be foolish to insist on enduring the rigors of the day coach when a compartment was available. Besides, she was beginning to see that it was useless to argue with Neal. The only thing to do for the present was humor him in his mad delusion.

They made quite an impressive cavalcade on their way through the swaying Pullmans, Neal in the lead with Rusty and strutting a little, perhaps unconsciously, as spectators along the route commented audibly on "that darling little girl," Laurie next, with an armful of wraps, and the porter bringing up in the rear with the bags. It was inevitable that she should feel the contrast between this trek and the one that had preceded it earlier that evening, composed of two bored, indifferent strangers who had no common interest as a basis even for polite small talk.

It was remarkable, she reflected ruefully, how swiftly the situation had changed with Rusty supplying the common interest.

They were at the door of Neal's compartment when the officer he had told her was Major Washburn came along the aisle from the club car. Neal paused and waited, nothing in his attitude now indicating

that he was anxious to avoid the deadly bore.

"Well, well, what's all this?" the major puffed, eying Neal's shoulder adornment with jovial surprise.

"My daughter, sir," Neal proclaimed, a tremor of pride in his complacent tone.

"A beautiful child!" Major Washburn boomed, poking a finger into the tangle of red-gold curls and pinching a rosy cheek. "Looks just like her father—ha, ha!"

Laurie tensed for an explosion, but the angels must have taken abode in Rusty for the moment, for she merely opened one blue eye and bestowed a dazzling smile on the major. Neal's chest swelled with triumph and elation. He beamed fondly on the major, but the major was edging on his way, staring with interest at Laurie.

"And this is Mrs. Patterson," Neal added casually.

"How do you do, Mrs. Patterson?" the major said with a bow.

Laurie murmured a bare acknowledgment, her lips shaping a stiff smile. She did not linger to exchange pleasantries, but followed Neal into the compartment, standing in a cold, simmering silence until the porter had left.

"How dare you introduce me as . . . as Mrs. Patterson?" she burst out hotly as the door closed.

Neal didn't even look up. He had laid Rusty on the bed and was unlacing the scuffed white shoes.

"Your name is Mrs. Patterson, isn't it?" he asked laconically.

"That isn't what I mean!" Laurie sputtered. "You— It was the

way you said it, implying that I was your wife."

"All I said was that you were Mrs. Patterson."

"But Major Washburn assumed that you meant I was your wife!"

Neal was silent a moment.

"Suppose we postpone our discussion until Rusty's settled for the night?" he suggested finally.

His tone was flat and dispassionate, but there was an inflection that arrested Laurie and quelled her anger. Postpone what discussion? Not this fruitless, trivial argument about Major Washburn's impressions. But what more was there to say except "good night"?

The question seethed in her mind. The silence that fell crackled with their soundless nagging, and the atmosphere of the compartment was hot and stifling with suspense. Without looking at Neal, she could feel his tension and grim preoccupation.

Her hands shook as they fumbled with Rusty's tiny garments, the relaxed warm flesh hot against her clammy fingers. Her temples throbbed and her throat felt dry and sandy. She had a hard time locating the tiny one-piece pajama suit of flannel gayly printed with nursery characters, a more difficult time solving its unfamiliar complexities and getting Rusty's arms and legs into the proper sections.

Neal finished the job, tucking the covers under the dimpled chin.

"Funny how innocent and segraphic they look when they're asleep, isn't it?" he chuckled. He went to the basin, poured some

whiskey into a tumbler and handed it to Laurie. "Here, you look as though you need this. You've had a hard day."

"Yes," Laurie agreed quickly, gratefully. "I've had a very hard day." She barely tasted the drink, however.

"For which I'm partly to blame, I suppose," Neal conceded. He frowned and pushed his fingers through his rough red hair. "I may as well admit right now, Laurie, that I haven't any intention of carrying out my threat to take the child away from you. I couldn't be quite that ruthless, so that's one worry you can put out of your mind." He paused for a moment, waiting for her to answer.

"On the other hand," he went on more resolutely, as Laurie remained silent, "I can't let the situation stand as it was before I knew about Rusty. Perhaps you didn't realize how I would feel about her, Laurie, but you must know now that she means as much to me as she does to you. Perhaps you didn't realize, either, that in cheating me you were cheating Rusty, depriving her of a father. But I think you're fair enough to admit you were wrong and agree to share her with me. Which brings us"—he grimaced—"to the biggest headache and injustice of divorce. Somehow, I'm sure you feel as I do, that dividing a child's time equally between parents can be just as cruel as giving either of them entire custody."

Laurie felt his questioning gaze on her face and stirred a little, almost as if it pained her to move.

"It's late," she said huskily. "Perhaps we should wait until tomorrow—"

"No!" he interrupted harshly. "Tomorrow may be too late. I may find orders to ship out when I reach San Francisco. I want this thing settled and off my mind before I go. There's only one way to settle it satisfactorily, of course," he went on in a calmer tone, "with a minimum of hurt to everyone concerned. Would you be willing to give it a try, Laurie? To marry me again?"

She stood there motionless, no sign of feeling in her still, white face. "I must have known it was coming," she thought. "It's what I've been waiting for—not just tonight, but all these years." She felt laughter within her, bitter, mocking laughter. All these years she had been forgetting the past, struggling to build a brilliant future and a full, absorbing life, she had been waiting for the moment when Neal would suggest that they have another try at marriage.

"I know it isn't what you want," Neal spoke out abruptly, trying to guess what was in her mind. "You're engrossed in your career now, and from what I've heard, you've been playing the field too impartially to be interested in another shot at matrimony. Well, it's been that way with me, too, but still I'm urging you to think carefully before you decide to refuse. For Rusty's sake," he added impressively.

Laurie's held breath expelled and the inner laughter died away on a note that was almost a sob. She

knew now that she had been overplaying her part, like an actress dramatizing a rôle intended for straight farce, taking Neal's proposal seriously, although he had made it clear that he wanted her back only for Rusty's sake. There was nothing to think over, nothing to stir up her emotions. There was no problem except the one that existed in Neal's imagination, and that would solve itself by tomorrow.

Neal was still standing there, his grave eyes intent on her face, waiting for her answer. The steady gaze hurt her unbearably. It was so untroubled, so confident that Laurie would be willing to marry him, for Rusty's sake. Her throat tightened. She couldn't speak at all.

There was a knock at the door and Neal scowled as he turned to answer.

"Telegram for Mrs. Patterson, sir," the porter announced.

Neal signed and handed the envelope to Laurie. She tore it open and stared at the message a long time. Like most telegrams, it was just a jumble of words at first. She had to push everything else out of her mind and concentrate grimly before she understood that the Red Cross was advising her that the grandparents of Barbara Jane Carter had wired that they would refuse to receive their son's child. Mrs. Patterson was to turn the child over to the San Francisco Red Cross until other arrangements could be made.

Laurie drew a deep breath of re-

lief when it was all clear in her mind, because now she wouldn't have to tell Neal that she was unwilling to marry him for Rusty's sake. All she had to do was hand him the telegram and he would understand.

Neal read it slowly, as she had, taking a little longer to digest its meaning because, of course, he had to read between the lines as he went along. Laurie watched his face with a fierce intensity, hardly conscious that she was praying that the news wouldn't be too much of a blow. But she couldn't tell how he felt. His lips twisted a little as he finished reading, but that was all.

"Well, I can't say you didn't try to tell me," he remarked in a musing tone. But then he read the telegram again, and this time there was a decided change in his expression, not at all what Laurie had expected. His mouth hardened and a dull flush spread over his bronzed face.

"What kind of grandparents are they, refusing to take care of a child whose father has gone to war?" he exploded, and Laurie fell back a step at the blaze of violent rage in his eyes. "People like that ought to be horsewhipped and shot as traitors!" he stormed on, but when he swung around to look at Rusty, his savage voice instinctively softened.

"Just look at her, Laurie. Can you believe that no one wants that sweet little doll, that there could be people selfish enough to kick her around?" He bent down and touched Rusty's curls, then sud-

denly straightened. When he turned, Laurie saw that his anger was gone and that excitement and boyish enthusiasm illumined his face, reminding her of the happy-go-lucky Neal she had married four years ago.

"Look here, this is a break for us, Laurie!" he rushed on elatedly. "Why can't we take her? It could be arranged with the Red Cross easily enough. Of course, the burden would all be yours for the present, but she'd be company for you while I'm gone. After the war, her father might be willing to let us adopt her. She'd be as dear to us as our own— Darling, what's wrong?" He broke off sharply.

Laurie was crying uncontrollably, reeling from the impact of the emotional cloudburst. Instantly, Neal had his arms around her and was holding her close, her grief-stricken face pressed into his shoulder, his hand patting her dark head distractedly.

"What is it, Laurie? What have I said? Don't cry, sweet."

"I can't h-h-help it!" Laurie sobbed. "I thought you wanted me back only because I was Rusty's mother. But now you know I'm not and it hasn't made any difference. You went right on making plans for us."

Neal's soothing hand slowed to a stop in her hair. He stood motionless, hardly breathing.

"That's what I thought, too," he said at last, and shook his head as if to clear it. "Well, it only goes to show that it isn't always smart to use your brains instead of your

heart. Here I've been kidding myself for three years that I was well rid of the matrimonial mess and that Patterson was a lucky guy to be free and unencumbered."

"That sounds familiar," Laurie sighed. "Mrs. Patterson was kidding herself, too."

Neal's arms tightened around her.

"That name sounds familiar. It gives me ideas." His lips found hers and pressed down with a fierce, stormy sweetness that burned out

the loneliness and hunger of the last three years.

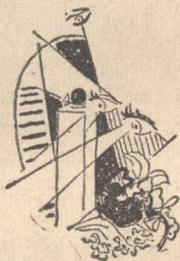
The train whistled twice, two long, eerie blasts, and Neal glanced at his watch.

"That would be Reno," he said, his eyes twinkling. "Do you still feel like stopping off to drink that toast?"

Laurie nodded, her eyes twinkling right back at him.

"But not that particular toast, darling. A better one. To our reunion at Reno."

THE END.



GOOD-BY

We said good-by today,
And though we could suggest
More sentimental words,
The old phrase sounded best.

We knew it meant in brief,
"God be with you, my dear."
And so we smiled a bit
To hide an unshed tear.

For though we said good-by,
It is not really so;
Your heart stays here with me,
Mine goes where you may go.

HARRIET A. BRADFIELD.

Girls, girls, girls—lovely, talented creatures, gazing at Broadway with rapt fascination. Megan Tyler was one of them, with hope in her heart but no illusions.

STREET OF DREAMS

BY GRACE POE PORTER

I.

THE knocking, rhythmical and insistent, finally broke in to end Megan Tyler's dreams and open her sleep-heavy eyes.

Drowsily, she looked at the morning sun, spreading yellow fingers on the faded wallpaper of the furnished room. She turned her curly head and glanced over at the adjoining bed. Gay Rafford, her bare pink shoulders made golden by the sun, slept placidly. Gay's long lashes made shadows on her cheeks, her breathing was deep and regular.

A clock on the stand between the beds said it was ten exactly. Megan ran slender fingers through the

glimmering tide of her taffy-colored hair while, with staccato suddenness, the panels of the door reverberated again to the knuckles laid imperatively upon them.

Slipping out from between the sheets, Megan pattered to the door. She turned the key, opened it a crack. It was immediately pushed wide. Mrs. Crawford, the woman who ran the rooming house, stepped in.

"I want to talk to you a minute, Tyler."

Mrs. Crawford never bothered with the formality of a "Miss" or even a "Mrs." She was a raw-boned, square-jawed woman, for-





A Three-part Novel

Part I

merly on the burlesque circuit. Age and arthritis had combined to put her, and her savings, into a Forty-fifth Street rooming house.

Megan yawned, sat down on the edge of the bed and wriggled her pink toes. She always did that to wake herself up. Mrs. Crawford looked at Gay, sniffed, and rested against the bureau.

"I'm not running a charity institution. Some of the boarders here seem to have that idea. I've got to pay my bills and I expect rent on the dot. I've got enough troubles what with ration books, fuel shortages and the like. You and your girl friend are a week in arrears.

When do I get my money?"

"As soon as possible." Megan looked up at the stern, forbidding face.

She felt there was no use going into details. Mrs. Crawford was not the type to be interested in hard luck stories. No use at all, Megan decided, trying to explain about the two musical shows she and Gay had been briefly connected with. The two flops that never had got within local telephone distance of Times Square.

"Give us until Saturday." Megan made her tone wheedling. "After all, we're not new customers. We've been around for a long time, Saturday—"

Mrs. Crawford rubbed her chin. "Got prospects?"

"You have no idea." Megan smiled, her softly curved lips turning up at the corners.

"Saturday and not a day later." There was finality in the woman's words. She turned to the door, stopping for another glance at the girl in the other bed. "You can tell her she'll never get anywhere pounding her ear all day."

"I'll mention it," Megan promised.

She locked the door after her landlady and hunted for a cigarette. The package was nearly half-gone. Low tide in everything, Megan thought. They had to do something quickly and drastically. They had to do it that day if they were to go on eating and continue with a roof over their heads.

"Old buzzard!" Gay said, without opening her eyes.

Megan laughed. "I hope you got her opinion of people who sleep late. Saturday!" She held a light to the cigarette, drawing in its aromatic smoke. "Come on, get up. We've got to find money today and no fooling. Six bucks, fifty. How long do you think that'll last?"

Gay yawned prodigiously. "Why worry? Ray will have an angle. Didn't he promise?"

Ray was Raymond Allen, Gay's heart throb at the moment. Gay had much more faith in Ray's ability to find them something than Megan. To Megan, Gay's boy friend was a noisy, chiseling, small-time drifter whose boasts were as loud as his Broadway clothes.

He was waiting for them at the Ten-Up, the Sixth Avenue cafeteria Megan and Gay had patronized for some time. Ray was at a table near the door, a racing form spread out in front of him, a pencil poised to make notes on the paper's margin.

"Hello, lovelies. Draw up a toasted muffin and sit down."

Gay leaned to kiss him swiftly. Megan picked up a slightly damp tray, gathered knife and spoons and drifted along the railed-in aisle beside the counter.

"He's come through!" Gay's dark eyes were excited, as Megan came back. She helped Megan unload the tray, then locked her fingers with Ray's. "Guess what?"

"Tell her," Ray urged. "Never mind the guessing games."

"We're to go to Harmony Hall

at noon. A friend of Ray's has an in with Edwina Drake. You know, the Drake dancers."

Megan's arched brows drew slightly together. Of course, she knew of the Edwina Drake dancers. A sort of classical outfit, chifon and bare feet, colored lights and the pipes of Pan. Stories told to posturing and undulations. High-brow stuff. She made a grimace of distaste.

"We don't fit. We never studied ballet."

"That's right, argue." Ray's smile was cynical. "I dig this up for you and right away there's complaints. If you want a job you can go down there and get it. If you don't, don't!"

Megan shrugged and sampled her applesauce. Gay finally tore herself away from the man beside her and went to collect her breakfast. Ray made a private notation on the racing paper, folded it and dropped his pencil back in his pocket.

"The trouble with women," he announced, "is they have too much to lip about. They know all the answers. They're wise to all the angles. You can't tell 'em anything, they've read the complete book."

Megan said, "I'm sorry. It's just that we're looking for a show job. I always thought Edwina—"

"See what I mean?" Ray laughed shortly. "You always thought. Listen, babe. Cash is cash whether it comes out of the Winter Garden or Carnegie Hall. Don't forget that."

He left them some minutes later,

bound, as he said, for a poolroom up Longacre. Gay stared after his jaunty, retreating figure, the chalk-striped, form-fitting blue flannel suit and the flamboyantly banded straw hat.

"Isn't he wonderful?" she said, enthusiasm mingling with her awe.

"So's a P-38. To us, not the Japs," Megan murmured enigmatically.

"I don't get it." Gay looked blank.

"Let it go." Megan opened her bag and went through their six-and-a-half-dollar hoard. "Let me have your check and let's get out of here."

They sat in Bryant Park, looking at the rear of the Public Library, killing time. There was still more than three quarters of an hour before their appointment. Megan didn't like any part of it. She didn't think they had a chance to tie up with the Edwina Drake dancers, almost hoped they didn't. The Drake outfit seemed amateurish, nothing at all what she and Gay had planned.

That was a smash Broadway hit. A big, glittering musical that would run for weeks and weeks. A show that played to crowded houses. Sometimes, Megan told herself, it would happen. Two flops, that never had got beyond Trenton, New Jersey, and New Haven, Connecticut. The third time they had to click!

Sitting there in the warm, late-spring sunshine, while Gay idly turned the pages of a discarded newspaper she had picked up, Me-

gan remembered how eagerly she had set out on a stage career. The theater had always intrigued her. She supposed she had been born stage-struck. After school, the closest she ever had got to her goal was a job as hat-check girl at the Macarimbo, that exclusive night-erie in Fifty-second Street.

Even the floor show, with its Cuban and South American beauties, made Megan wish she could darken her skin and get into it. She had stayed until she had heard a producing firm had put out a chorus call. She rehearsed for five weeks, played one on the road, and was footloose and fancy-free again. Fortunately she had saved some money, enough to keep her going until she had signed with still another song-and-dance revue.

This had names, money had been poured into it, and a top radio orchestra was featured. It had everything but the necessary spark. It survived for two weeks, giving up its ghost in the New England college town on a night when snow fell dismally and Megan, turning down two collegiate dates, went sadly and thoughtfully from the playhouse to her cheap hotel.

War money had flooded Broadway. The street of dreams, as Megan had seen it referred to by a famous columnist, had never been more prosperous. People crowded the theaters to snatch momentary recreation from harried days. Hit plays were breaking records with ticket sales. Scalpers had moved in and were cleaning up. And second-rate shows, catching the over-

flow, were chalking up profitable runs.

Most musicals were already playing or scheduled for the fall. Though, Megan remembered, someone had told her Shan Santry and his partner, Julius Kranz, were thinking of doing a summer piece. It all depended on whether or not they could find a theater to put it in. She had watched *Variety* with hawklike interest, hoping to read something about the Santry-Kranz opus. So far there hadn't been a line.

"Look, hon"—Gay's voice broke in on Megan's reflections—"guess we'd better put it in gear. Ten to twelve."

Harmony Hall was a huge brick bulk farther uptown. Above its auditorium and recital hall were floors of offices. Mostly agents, music teachers, piano instructors and all the cogs that turned the wheels of artistic Manhattan.

In the marble-lined foyer, a black board with white lettering, said, "Edwina Drake, Room 1513." The starter winked at Megan when he directed them to an express elevator and, a few minutes later, they were in an anteroom where a girl who wore a green smock and had her hair wound in a huge knot at the back of her head, sat at a desk.

Still half hoping they'd get the usual, "Sorry, nothing today. If you'll leave your name and address—" Megan was surprised when the girl told them to wait. She disappeared into another room.

Gay made a grimace.

"What do you know?"

"Miss Drake will see you." The girl came back and gestured toward the door she had left open for them. "Go right in."

Edwina Drake was different from her photographs. Older, more like a secretary with her horn-rimmed spectacles and severely plain skirt and blouse. She had russet-colored hair. It had been dyed frequently, Megan saw, so that now its texture was strawlike. There was a pile of papers on her mahogany desk. The walls were almost a solid bank of framed photographs—pictures of past and present Drake dancers, scenes from the company's repertoires.

The interview didn't last long. The woman was crisply direct. The fact that they had dancing experience seemed to suffice. Megan knew there was a serious shortage of girls. The armed services had drawn heavily on youth and talent. Humming war plants, with time and a half overtime and bonuses, had made inroads on available stage material.

"Report at the hall downstairs at three o'clock," Edwina Drake told them. "I'll see what you can do."

She polished her spectacles, smiled for the first time, and nodded dismissal.

"Not bad." Gay's dark eyes sparkled. "I knew Ray wouldn't let us down."

"She didn't talk money and it's money that's important. You heard what I told Mrs. Crawford. Saturday, I said. I'm not rehearsing

weeks without cash on the line. I want an advance," Megan said.

It appeared, later, they would be satisfactory. They didn't need ballet training. They formed a back-ground for Edwina Drake and her male partner, Jacques Jouvaud. Costumes were furnished, the salary was forty dollars a week and that Friday night they were booked to participate in a war bond rally at some Westchester estate.

Megan listened to what Edwina Drake told them, waiting for an opportunity to make herself heard. Again there was a nod of dismissal, but this time Megan didn't leave.

"Can we get an advance, Miss Drake?"

"I never do that."

"Because," Megan went on, "if we don't, we won't be able to work with you." She explained briefly.

They were in the hall, a dark, bleak expanse of empty seats and echoing voices. Edwina Drake went across to where Jouvaud was sorting through a pile of music scores. She consulted with him in whispers. Gay nudged Megan.

"Here's where we get the quick turn-down. You shouldn't have said anything. If Ray gets a winner today, he'll stake us and—"

"Ray never gets winners and she's not throwing us out." Megan laughed under her breath. "A couple of honeys like us don't walk in every day. She knows it. See if I'm not right."

"We'll take care of the matter"—Edwina Drake came back to them—"tomorrow."

They had only rehearsed twice, but twice, Megan knew, was enough. They had gone up early that Friday afternoon by train to Westchester. There were thirty-six of them, including the musicians. They had to wait their turn at the depot while a swanky station wagon took eight at a time to the estate.

Megan sat beside Gay on a dusty bench. She watched the steel rails and the roadbed give off a glimmer of heat. From what she knew of the engagement, they were to be an act in a program arranged principally for the sale of war bonds.

A Mrs. Frazier Lennox had donated the facilities of her sprawling estate. It included, Megan had learned, an outdoor theater. She sat thinking about it while the station wagon, with its liveried Filipino chauffeur, came back for another detachment of Edwina Drake's disciples.

"We play a week at Harmony Hall," she said to Gay, "and then jump to Syracuse. How do you feel about it?"

"I'm going to miss Ray terribly. By the time we get back, I suppose he will have forgotten all about me." Gay sighed. "That's life—a brunette today and a blonde tomorrow."

Megan pursed her vivid lips. There was a dreamy look in her deep-brown eyes. Distantly, a freight train whistled. She didn't like any part of the Drake business. The other girls, a strange type. Serious, studious, unprepossessing

girls. She didn't like the idea of getting away from her street of dreams, of losing some real chance to sign with the kind of show she wanted to be in. She didn't want to be a classical dancer.

"Nuts!" she thought. "I suppose I'll have to stick. It won't flop and it pays off in real coin. Besides, Syracuse and those other towns aren't too bad. Then, in the fall, I'll be all set for what I'm after."

The grassy lawns of the Lennox estate, with the performers' tents mushrooming up in the rear of the shell-like arch of the outdoor theater, reminded Megan of circus grounds. A trucking concern had brought up the Drake dancers' trunks and was unloading. Electricians were still busy stringing wires.

In the middle distance, back of some stately gardens, the house sprawled. It was brick and timber, English style, with tall chimneys. To Megan it represented wealth with a capital W. She stared at it thoughtfully, nodded to herself and wandered over to the stage of the theater.

Men were working there, moving scenery, testing the footlights. Megan tucked a cigarette in the corner of her mouth and watched them.

After a while, her idle gaze focused on a tall young man with dark, wavy hair and a profile that was intriguing. He wore gray slacks and a sleeveless sweater. His skin was darkly tanned and he seemed the most energetic of the

scene-shifting crew. Secretly, she admired his slender, virile figure, his good looks, the way he moved.

She sat down in one of the second-row aisle seats. The tall young man dried his forehead with the back of his arm, fished a package of cigarettes from his pocket and came down the proscenium steps.

"Match?"

He was beside Megan before she realized it. She opened her imitation pigskin bag and handed over a packet of matches. He used one, inhaled and passed them back.

"Keep 'em," Megan told him.

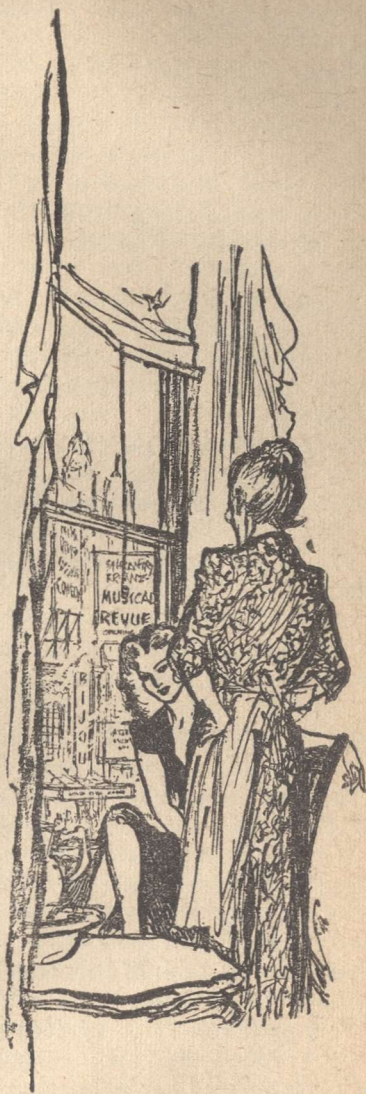
"Much obliged." His eyes were hazel, a deep, dark gray with amber flecks. Friendly eyes, full of youth and laughter. They roamed over her casually. "You on the program?"

"I'm Megan Tyler. I twist and bend with the Edwina Drake dancers. You have no idea."

He looked interested. "One of the tulle-and-torso tossers. Like it?"

"I hate it." Megan laughed. "Principally because it isn't my racket. I'm strictly Times Square, not the arty species. I'm musical comedy."

His gaze wandered over her again. "Yes," he agreed, "I think you are. Very nice, too. I can see you in the spotlight, singing a Cole Porter number and tearing the house apart." He turned the cigarette over in his fingers. Megan noticed that his hands were slender and well cared for, tanned like his attractive face. Hardly the hands of a scene shifter. "My name's



Megan's eyes lighted up, her heart leaped when Mrs. Crawford came up to tell her Eddie was waiting for her in the parlor.

Eddie," he added.

"Glad to know you. Eddie what?"

"Smith. How about an ice-cold coke?" When she said, "Swell, where do you get it?" he explained, "There's a refreshment tent somewhere around. Let's look it up."

Megan walked along beside him. "You off the job? Finished?"

"For a while."

He got a couple of bottles of the soft drink and paper cups with ice. They stood in the shade of a majestic linden tree. Eddie held his cup up.

"To you, Megan. Let's hope you get to Longacre soon. How are you going back to New York, after the show?"

"The same way I came up. Train."

"I have to go in later." His tone was still casual. "How about me meeting you and giving you a lift? I'm driving."

Megan looked up at him. There was something in his gaze—it might have been admiration, she couldn't decide—but, oddly it made her heart quicken its beat. He was smiling and she saw the even white line of his teeth, the laugh crinkles at the corners of his mouth.

She knew the book of her Broadway, the dream street setup with its wolf pack call at every corner. But she didn't hesitate. Impulsively, she nodded her taffy-colored head.

"That sounds good to me. Where'll I meet you?"

"How about right here under this tree? What time?"

"Soon as I finish and change."

"I'll be on deck."

Later, when the twilight made lengthening shadows across the emerald-green lawns and lights began to swim in the dusk, Megan was still thinking about Eddie.

She and Gay sat on a bench and dined on hot dogs, coffee and pie. There was no sign of the man with the hazel eyes. Megan hadn't seen him again. She wondered where he had gone.

"I met a guy," she told Gay. "Seems awfully nice. Big lug, stage hand. I made a date to drive back to town with him."

Gay frowned. "That's unusual. He must be something if you made a date with him."

"He is!" Megan laughed under her breath. "And he says I belong in a musical, singing a Cole Porter song and tearing the house apart. Discerning, eh?"

"You'd better watch your step," Gay cautioned. "Remember the babe who played around with the scene shifter and ended up shifting for herself?"

Megan laughed. "You and your imagination!"

Toward eight the seats began to fill. Officials of the treasury department arrived. Pretty girls of the army, navy and marines, who were to assist in the bond selling, added their trim uniforms to those of the soldiers and sailors.

Broadway celebrities rolled up in cars. A well-known comedian, a dramatic stage favorite, dozens of chorus girls to decorate the musical

numbers. Then, a half-hour later, the Westchester contingent began filing in.

Megan, sitting cross-legged in the dusk outside the cluster of lights over the stage, listened to a fanfare of the orchestra and the start of the proceedings.

A girl, with one of the officials beside her, came out on the stage. She was all in white. It accented the inky blackness of her glistening hair and the creamy texture of her perfect skin. Her eyes were twin pools of liquid darkness, her mouth a scarlet bow and her figure *sauve* and lithe.

There was something exotic about her, something that set her apart from other girls. It wasn't only her vivid beauty or the miracle of the white gown. Megan traced from effect to cause and decided it was her personality, a suppressed animation that was vibrant and tense.

The girl was introduced as Rosalie Garth. Megan remembered the name. She had often seen it in the papers, in the society columns. She watched while Rosalie began to talk about war bonds and what they meant. Megan was still listening when a hand touched her shoulder.

"I've been looking all over for you, Miss Tyler," Edwina Drake said. "What are you doing out here? You should be in costume."

"Coming right up!" Megan climbed to her feet.

The Drake dancers followed a knock-about comedy team from one of the hit Broadway shows. It was a bad spot for an art act, with the

audience still laughing. Edwina Drake's own conductor raised his baton. The Tschaikowsky number that opened the first dance began, the woodwinds and violins whispering the minor theme.

Two numbers had been selected from the repertoire. The "Storm," which Edwina Drake danced with Jouvaud, and "Dryads' Dawn," which used the full company.

In a swoon of amber light, Megan danced out, swinging her draperies, bowing and bending with the sweep of the music. There was nothing difficult, no set pattern of steps to follow, no intricate routine memorized after the grind of rehearsal. It was more a eurythmic swaying to the tempo of the orchestra.

Megan wondered if Eddie Smith were watching. She wondered why he had lingered so pleasantly in her memory, why the date under the linden tree made her anticipative. She hadn't known many men. She hadn't wanted to. Those she had encountered had been mostly Ray Allen's type, smart-cracking, Times Square guys.

As the dance drew to its conclusion, Megan was conscious she was being watched. A swarthy little man with glasses, a cigar in the corner of his mouth and untidy, oily-looking hair, lounged in the wings, his gaze fully on her. Every time she turned in his direction she saw his stare. Even after she had danced off, she could feel the tug of his eyes.

He met her halfway back to the dressing room tent.

He came up behind Megan and

touched her arm. "Just a minute, friend."

When she stopped and raised her eyes, he threw the cigar away and introduced himself.

"The name's Kranz, Julius. You know me?"

Megan's eyes widened. Julius Kranz. Shan Santry's partner! The firm that had given Sunburst Alley three consecutive musical hits!

"Yes, of course."

"I like your looks, the way you stood out in that crowd. Stop around and see us when you get a chance. Any time. I'd like Shan to give you a gander. Right?"

He turned away before Megan answered and headed back toward the stage. She stood perfectly still, her breath in her throat, watching him go. Then, abruptly, the significance of what Kranz had said came to her and made her pulses beat excitedly.

"Well!" Megan expelled her pent-up breath. "What a night this has turned out to be!"

II.

The car, a small sedan, went down the Hutchinson River Parkway. The moon made it a silver stretch. There wasn't much traffic. When they turned into the Henry Hudson Parkway, below Yonkers, Megan saw the river, broad and shiny.

She had told Eddie Smith about Kranz. She had talked all the way down. Now, Megan suddenly realized, she hadn't been very polite.

She hadn't given Eddie a chance to say anything.

"What about you? Maybe, if I land something with S and K, you'll be in my stage hand crew. Wouldn't that be a coincidence?"

"I'm afraid I won't. You see, I was only helping out up there this afternoon." While Megan peered up at him under her thick screen of lashes, he went on, "I'm with the Lennox Ammunition Works, in the New York office."

"Oh!" Megan glanced at his hands on the wheel. Well-cared-for hands. That explained it.

He stopped in front of Mrs. Crawford's. Megan realized it was over. Yet, for some odd reason, she hated to say "good night" to him and go up to her room. Something held her in a queer spell.

"Let's make another date soon," he suggested. "How about tomorrow night? Like to dance?" She nodded. "We'll do it then. I'll stop by for you around eight. You're not working?"

"Not until Monday night. We play a full week at Harmony Hall. Tomorrow will be all right."

He leaned toward her. There was a glow in his hazel eyes, something expressive, more than the admiring light Megan had seen that afternoon. She began to breathe faster, her softly curved lips parted. A tremulous feeling ran swiftly through her.

"Good night. Thanks for the lift down." Her voice was unsteady.

"Wait just a minute. I almost forgot—"

"What?"

His arms went around her. Megan's nerves felt a tiny shock when his lips closed over hers. She half shut her eyes, lying limp and unresisting against him, while the kiss, burning on her lips, brought a strange, indefinable elation to her.

Then, as quickly as it came, it vanished and Megan moved away.

"Please, you shouldn't have done that!"

"You're sweet! I couldn't help it. Really, I couldn't. I apologize."

His eyes and voice were serious. Megan opened the door beside her and stepped down to the sidewalk. She wanted to be severe with him. He mustn't get the idea that she was the ordinary kind of Broadway girl. But the expression in his attractive face, the anxious look in his gaze told her he was really sorry he had transgressed.

"Tomorrow, at eight," Megan said.

His face cleared as if by magic. "Be seeing you!"

Gay had returned and was already in bed, asleep. Megan undressed in the dark. Every now and then she touched her lips with a wondering finger, the lips Eddie Smith had kissed!

While she combed her hair, she tried to analyze the elation the kiss had brought her, the strange feeling that had set her pulses throbbing. She had always supposed that only when you were in love kisses did things like that to you. A kiss from a stranger and she was thrilled! It didn't make sense.

"But I do like him," she told herself. "I like him because he's different from anyone I've met so far. He isn't rough and noisy like Ray. He's considerate and sweet. I . . . I wonder—"

The offices of Santry and Kranz were in the Monopole Building, almost diagonally across from the old Palace Theater. At eleven the following morning, Megan gave her name to the switchboard operator who looked indifferently out at her from her cubicle in a small foyer.

She wasn't letting any grass grow under her feet. She was striking while the iron was hot. On Broadway you didn't get a nod from a producer and mull it over in your mind while he forgot you. You acted quickly, without hesitation.

"Mr. Kranz says you're to go in. Second door to the right."

From somewhere down the hall came the tinkle of a piano, then a girl's voice singing. It was a catchy tune. When the girl reached the melody break and stopped, the piano continued on elaborating on the tune, building it into near-symphonic proportions. Megan opened the second door and looked in.

Kranz was at a littered desk, a desk so long and large, it made him seem even smaller than he was. His shirt sleeves were rolled up, revealing hairy arms. His glasses glimmered when he trained them on the door. The usual cigar was balanced on the edge of the desk.

"Come on in. Don't stand there looking." When Megan shut the door, he chuckled. "No time lost.

That's what I like in a gal. Sit down."

Megan dropped into a red leather chair. She was wearing her best dress, a cool, summery sharkskin that fit perfectly. It hadn't been expensive, but it was a copy of an exclusive model. Like all her clothes, she wore it with an air, with a charm entirely her own.

Kranz continued, "Shan's busy listening to a dame warble. He'll be in in a minute. Suppose you tell me what you've been doing?"

Megan explained about the two flops. She gave him the particulars concerning her job with the Edwina Drake dancers. Kranz made a grimace as he listened.

"What kind of contract did you sign? Equity?"

"No contract. It wasn't ready. I'm to sign tomorrow," Megan told him. "I did get an advance against salary. Half of my first week."

Kranz pulled the morning newspaper over to him. It was open to the amusement advertising section. He pushed his glasses up and nodded. "The troupe's playing a week return at Harmony Hall. Then where?"

"Syracuse."

Before he could say anything more, the office door opened. A man entered briskly. He was tall, well over six feet, with wide shoulders and bright-blond hair. He had the bluest eyes Megan had ever seen, a crooked nose that looked as if it might have been broken at some time and a small, thin-lipped mouth.

She recognized him the minute

she saw him. He was Shanley Santry, though Broadway never called him anything but Shan. He was supposed to be a smart operator. He never picked failures. He discovered talent and seldom missed on those he selected to go on to high places in the amusement world. Two motion picture stars, a top radio tenor and a dramatic ingenue starred in a play of her own had been among Santry's finds.

His blue gaze fastened on Megan. She felt it probing her. She had the idea he was mentally cataloguing her, adding up her assets. She stood up so that he could see better. In show business you didn't miss tricks—you had to sell yourself.

Kranz introduced her. Santry put out a big hand and pressed her fingers. "Sit down, Megan. Relax. You're all tightened up and that's no good."

Kranz went on to explain about the Drake dancers. "She hasn't signed any contract yet. She's to ink it in tomorrow."

"How's her voice?" Santry leaned against the desk. "Johnny's in the other room. Suppose you do a number with him, Megan? We're thinking about a show and we might be able to use you."

Johnny was John Mark Stanard, one of the town's sure-fire song writers. A dissipated, young-old man, it was he who had been playing the song Megan had heard in the corridor.

"Anything particular? Know 'Stardust'? Just a sample."

So she sang while Kranz and Santry chewed fresh cigars and lis-

tened. Her voice wasn't trained, wasn't remarkable. But it did have a limpid clearness and sweetness. She was tone-true and knew how to handle a lyric. Stannard made her do the chorus again.

"Too bad she didn't take lessons ten years ago," he remarked, fumbling for a cigarette.

"Come on back in my office," Santry said to Megan.

It was an hour later when she left.

Megan's cheeks were warm with excitement. A job at last! A real job, the kind she always had wanted! She could hardly believe it!

As she walked up Broadway, her heart singing, Megan checked over what Shan Santry had told her to do. She wasn't to sign anything with Edwina Drake. She was to give the woman notice that she was through with the dancers at the end of the following week.

"If there's any argument," Shan said, "buzz me and I'll talk to her."

But there wasn't any.

Edwina Drake, when Megan explained, nodded without interest. "Just as you wish, Miss Tyler. I'm relying on your word that you will work a full week."

Then, back at Mrs. Crawford's, Megan told Gay about it. Her friend had just got up. Gay listened, while Megan related her adventures, and pursed her lips.

"Then I'm giving Miss Drake my notice, too. I'm not leaving town with that crew without you." She sat up straighter, one shoe sus-

pended in midair. "What a pal! Why didn't you get me into Santry's frolic?"

"Why didn't I?" Megan said slowly. "Why don't I? I'll speak to him when I go in next week. Oh, Gay, imagine! A hit at last! Weeks on the stem! Regular money and no foldup. We can save, have decent clothes and meals again. We'll get out of this lair!"

The excitement increased as the day waned and the time drew closer to eight o'clock. Megan was ready when Mrs. Crawford wheezed up the stairs to tell her someone was waiting for her in the parlor. Eddie heard Megan's descending steps and was in the doorway when she came down the stairs.

Their gazes met. Megan felt her heart leap. She was glad to see him. She had so much to tell him. She slipped her fingers into his, tingling at the magnetic feel of his hand over hers.

"All set?"

"All ready."

He reached to open the door. As he pulled it wide, Ray Allen came in, a cigarette dangling from the corner of his mouth. Ray stopped, looking from Megan to Eddie Smith. She saw him frown as she said:

"Ray, I want you to meet Mr. Smith. Ed, this is Ray Allen, my roommate's friend."

"Glad to know you."

"Same."

The two shook hands and Ray went on upstairs. It was against the Crawford code of ethics, but codes meant little to him. Megan,

with Eddie following, went down the brownstone steps.

It was a perfect night. High over the city the same silver moon that had lighted their way the night before, was a bright admiral ship of illusion in a blue sea hung with crystal jewels. The breeze in Megan's face was blandly mild. She couldn't remember when she had been happier.

"Where are we going, Eddie?"

"I'll leave that to you. How about a show and then a night spot?"

"But isn't that expensive?"

He laughed. "I'm feeling flush. Got paid today. Besides, it's our first date and that really calls for a celebration." His voice lowered. "I mean that. This is the beginning of something. We'll do it the right way."

He got tickets, in some miraculous manner, for a fabulous comedy with a two-year metropolitan run behind it. It was an enchanting thing and Megan loved every minute of it. After the final curtain, she waited in the lobby crowd until Eddie got a taxi.

Then, when it stopped and she saw the night place he had selected, her eyes grew round.

"Macarimbo!"

"Anything wrong with it?" He sounded anxious.

"Not a thing in the world. I worked here once."

But there were all new faces. Most of the waiters had been drafted. There was a new man at the door, an unfamiliar head waiter. With mingled feelings Megan

looked at the coatroom wicket. So many times she had stood there, the little metal tip dish in plain view, listening to Cuban serenades, rattle of gourds and pound of drums.

It appeared that Eddie had reserved a table. Megan wondered at the attention her escort commanded. Usually, customers didn't get that much service.

"You must have been here before," she observed. "You must have spread it plenty to have them remember you."

"Believe it or not, I rather like it. Different atmosphere."

"You like different things?"

"One reason," he said, "why I like you. Maybe you don't know it, but you're different. Different from any girl I've ever met. Shall we order first and then dance?"

Out on the floor, the alternate orchestra playing the jerky cadence of a rumba, Megan quivered when she felt the touch of Eddie's arm around her. Her cheek brushed the lapel of his coat.

He danced well. The lids went down over Megan's eyes. "What's the matter with me?" she thought. "Am I falling in love with him? That's ridiculous. I met him yesterday and now it seems as if I'd known him forever and ever! What's happening to my heart?"

She couldn't answer the question then, or two hours later when, in the dark vestibule of Mrs. Crawford's, his arms went around her. Again that strange elation made her heart beat wildly. This time he held her close to him. She heard

her bag drop, the tiny thud of mirror and lipstick clinking in it. She paid no attention. A magic spell gripped her completely.

"I've fallen in love with you!" She heard him as if from a distance. "It does happen sometimes, like this! Megan, I love you!"

"You . . . you're nice, too!" she said, hardly recognizing her own voice.

Ray had gone, and Gay was in the room's only chair. The bridge lamp turned on beside her, Gay was munching a sandwich and looking at the comics in the evening paper Ray had left.

She threw it aside when Megan, inwardly aglow, came in. Gay put the remains of the sandwich on the bureau.

"Have fun?" Gay laughed. "From the looks of your lipstick, the answer is 'yes'."

Megan turned to the mirror. She flushed when she saw what the other girl meant. She reached quickly for a tissue, scrubbing at her face, her eyes starry with remembrance.

"I've gone," Megan said, spacing each word carefully, "and got myself in love, after all this long time!"

"With the party you introduced to Ray?" Gay put her heels on the edge of the bureau. "With Eddie Smith?"

Megan nodded. "Nobody else but!"

For a long minute Gay studied her. Then she stirred in the chair and laughed shortly.

"What do you mean, Eddie Smith? Where do you get that monicker? Ray gave him a gander and knew him right away. What goes on?"

Megan dropped the cleansing tissue. Her breath caught in her throat. She peered uncertainly at Gay, her heart beginning to sink.

"Then who . . . who does Ray think he is?"

"Ray doesn't think, Ray knows." Gay made a gesture. "For your information, hon, he happens to be Gig Lennox and that was his place where they sold the war bonds last night!"

TO BE CONTINUED IN OUR NEXT ISSUE

SEEING-BELIEVING

THIRST-RELIEVING

What happens when you look at the circles
and move your head from side to side?



ANSWER. The circles spin like a wheel.



YOU CAN'T BEAT LUCK

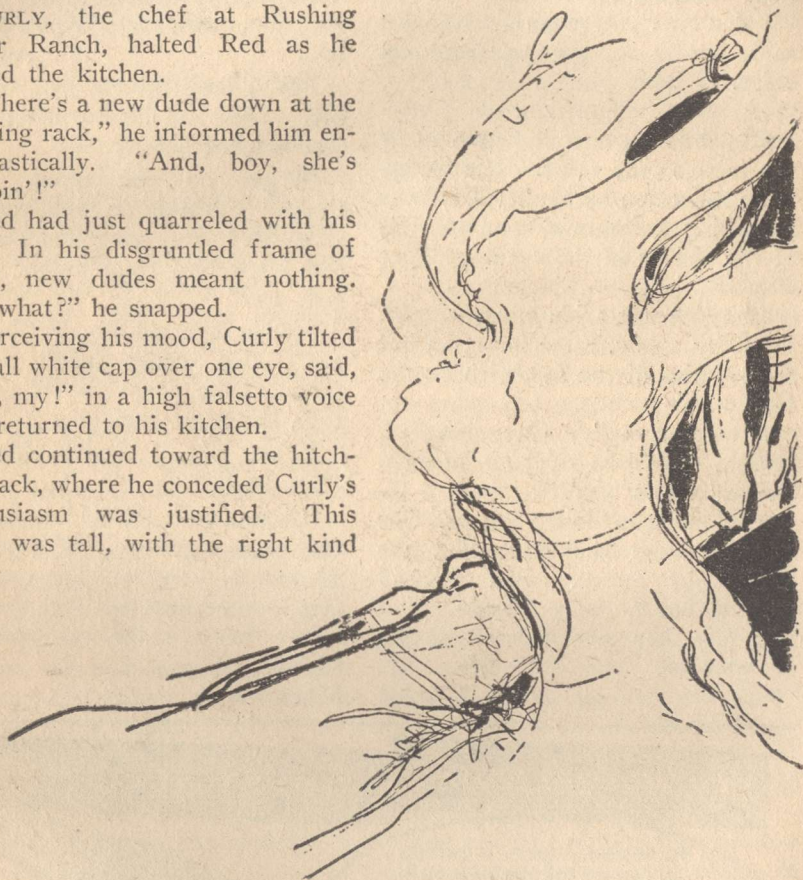
CURLY, the chef at Rushing River Ranch, halted Red as he passed the kitchen.

"There's a new dude down at the hitching rack," he informed him enthusiastically. "And, boy, she's sumpin'!"

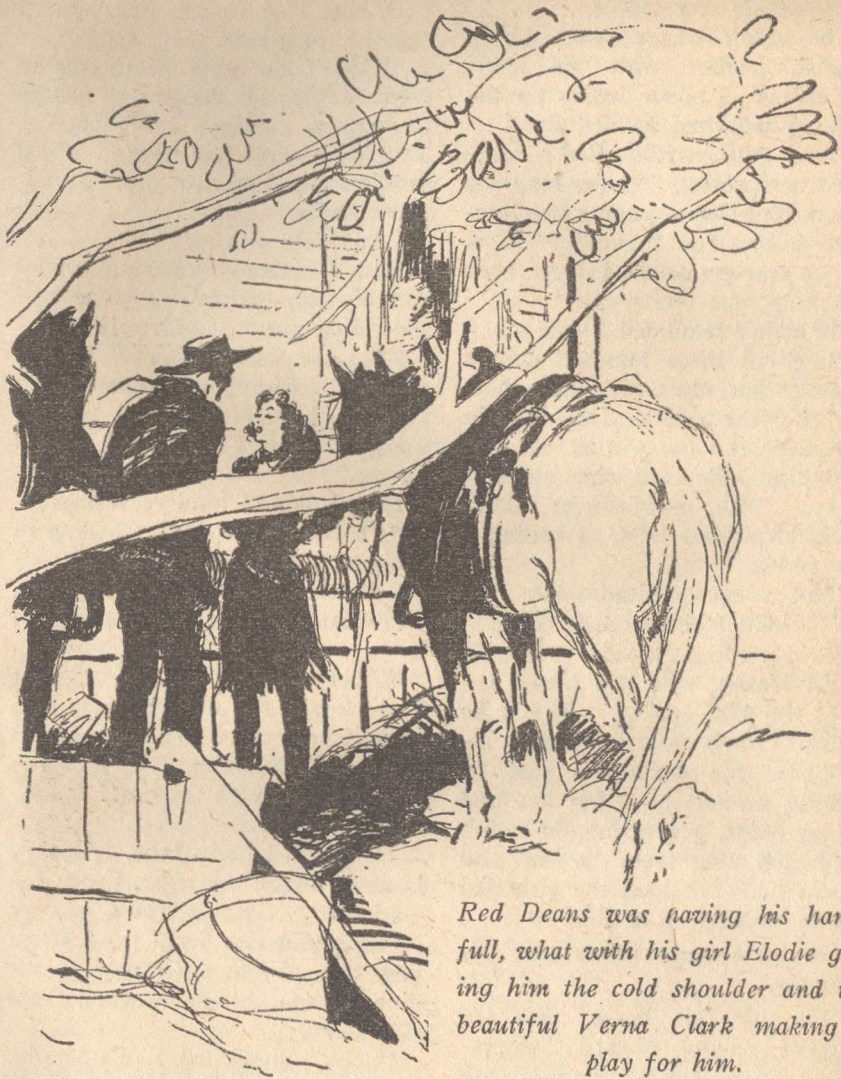
Red had just quarreled with his girl. In his disgruntled frame of mind, new dudes meant nothing. "So what?" he snapped.

Perceiving his mood, Curly tilted his tall white cap over one eye, said, "My, my!" in a high falsetto voice and returned to his kitchen.

Red continued toward the hitching rack, where he conceded Curly's enthusiasm was justified. This dude was tall, with the right kind



BY JOHN PAUL MITCHELL



Red Deans was having his hands full, what with his girl Elodie giving him the cold shoulder and the beautiful Verna Clark making a play for him.

of curves, black satin hair and wide blue eyes. What Red didn't like was her gaudy outfit and the way she looked him over, completely and without haste.

"Howdy!" he greeted her with

the courtesy required toward guests.

He was riding down to the truck garden to see if the hands were working or merely going through the motions. Before mounting, he

inspected his new saddle.

The saddle was a swell job in Spanish leather with his name spelled out in silver letters on the back. Elodie had scolded about its purchase and, ruefully, Red remembered her protest, "You're crazy as a loon, Red Deans, paying two hundred dollars for a saddle! How can we ever get married if you keep throwing your money away?"

He hadn't reminded Elodie about shelling out three hundred dollars to cover her old man in the hospital the year before. Instead, he'd wheedled the way that usually brought a smile even when she was angry. "Aw, now, sugar, don't crack down on a fella. I needed a new saddle!"

"Not a two-hundred-dollar saddle!" Elodie had returned crisply.

She'd left him then and gone over to Ed Harris, who had joined the outfit in the spring. The boss claimed Harris created romantic atmosphere for the dudes just by walking around in a big hat and shaggy pants, but he and Ed hadn't liked each other from the start and Elodie hadn't helped the situation any by making up to Ed.

The new dude interrupted his thoughts.

"I'll ride this horse," she announced, moving toward Chappo.

Red stopped her. "Sorry, but this one's mine," he informed her, pointing to his name on the saddle.

His voice was so grim, she stared in surprise.

"You don't like girls much, do you, cowboy?" she challenged.

Briefly, Red forgot the required courtesy to guests.

"I don't like girls who come to New Mexico all dressed up pretty to impress cowboys!" He paused, struggling with his temper. "I'll saddle Lady Jane for you," he offered stiffly.

"And ride with me?"

Red hesitated, knowing dudes weren't supposed to ride alone, and the riding party had already left.

"I'm the fishing guide," he explained. "Riding with guests isn't my job, but if you want to ride along to the truck garden it's O.K. by me."

She smiled at him, reflecting.

"I'll have to go in for fishing in a big way," she decided.

"At twelve dollars a day?"

She laughed. "It might be worth it!"

Either she was bluffing, thought Red skeptically, or here was one more rich female who never counted the cost of anything. Fun was fun and the heck with the cost!

He saddled Lady Jane. As they headed toward the river, Curly extended hands clasped in a gesture of congratulation from the kitchen doorway. From a window in the dining room, Elodie watched them ride away.

"Look," suggested Red uneasily, "let's skip the fishing. It's hot, it's dirty—"

"And you never catch any fish. Still, I think I'll try the fishing!" She smiled again. "My name's Verna Clark. Just call me Verna."

She could ride, he conceded. She

wasn't grabbing leather or riding a cool saddle. Though the pace he had set wasn't slow, she kept up without difficulty.

When they passed the rodeo field, he turned in. Briefly, they watched cowboys practice at roping calves.

"Riding in the rodeo Sunday?" inquired Verna Clark, as they rode on toward the truck garden.

It was such a silly question, Red didn't answer. This was the biggest rodeo of the season. If he got his share of prize money, the new saddle would be paid for with enough left to buy Elodie something pretty, though Elodie had protested his taking part. "Suppose you get smashed up, where does that leave us?" Elodie had said impatiently.

They were fording a shallow stream. His thoughts returned to his immediate surroundings as Lady Jane jerked her head down for a drink, yanking the reins loose. With a swift grab Red captured then.

"It's dangerous not to watch your horse!" he reproved.

In silence they rode on. It was a long time before she spoke again.

"Have you ever seen something your simply had to have?" she asked in a small voice.

Red thought of the saddle hanging in the Mexican harness worker's shop and knew he had felt like that about the saddle. Then the way she was looking at him made him uncomfortable.

"Maybe this is the right time to mention I'm getting married soon,"

he said, embarrassed because any girl ought to know better than to crowd a man.

The eyes that were so blue beneath the smooth blackness of her hair looked deeply into his.

"Is she pretty, Red?"

"She's pretty!" Red answered, feeling like a fool.

He thought the funny business was over. But when the horses stopped at the truck garden, her cheek touched his as he helped her down. He had no way of knowing whether it was by accident or intention, but there was nothing he could do about it.

Cowboys on a dude ranch took a lot of punishment from sentimental women during the dude season. The boss had warned his outfit about that.

"You guys remember you're not real to the dudes who come here," Len had said sternly. "You're scenery, frosting on the cake, something to satisfy a harmless yen for romance. I'll fire anybody who takes this sentimental stuff seriously!"

Len had been as good as his word a couple of times. Now Red wondered if he were due to get fired because of Verna Clark.

Elodie was bossing the job of getting the tables ready for lunch when he arrived back. She wore the Spanish rig all the girls wore in the dining room and Red thought proudly that she was as pretty as a pink.

"Have yourself a nice ride?" she inquired too lightly.

Red squirmed. "Aw, now, sugar, lay off," he protested. "I came to arrange about tonight—"

Elodie interrupted, "Ed and I are driving to town for dinner."

That burned Red up. Saturday had been their steady date for a long time and he'd already borrowed Curly's car for the evening. Resentfully, he decided he'd take Verna Clark to town for dinner. If they ran into Elodie and Harris, that would be swell!

"Have it your way," he said with deceptive mildness.

Leaving the dining room he met Verna Clark, headed toward the swimming pool with a towel over her arm.

"How's for dinner in town tonight?" he inquired.

"Why, cowboy, I'm overwhelmed! When do we start this giddy whirl?"

She was laughing at him, but Red didn't care. Tonight she would be what cowboys were to romance-hungry dudes—somebody to dress the stage. From the way she looked in a bathing suit, it seemed likely she'd make a good job of it.

"Around five," he informed her. "I'm taking a guy fishing, but he never stays late."

She started away, then returned to ask a question.

"Are you wearing a gaudy shirt and spurs for this festive occasion?"

Red flushed.

He'd intended wearing a satin shirt and the pants he wore at rodeos. But since she was rubbing

it in that cowboys did as fantastic a job of dressing as the dudes who rushed into overalls and Stetson hats, he decided to be conservative.

"Not tonight," he grumbled, wondering if his dark suit needed pressing.

An uproar broke out at the stables and Red hurried down to discover a small white dog nipping at the horses.

"Stop that, you!" he yelled, yanking the dog into the air by the scruff of the neck.

Ranch dogs knew better than to rush a horse, so some dude must have brought this little pest along. He cuffed the animal lightly to teach it a lesson. It yelped and Elodie appeared.

"Put down my dog, Red Deans!" she commanded.

"Your dog?" he repeated incredulously.

"Mr. Andrews gave it to me."

Andrews was the dude he was taking fishing after lunch, a fat, bald man in his fifties Red had pitied because he knew so little about anything belonging to the West. Red put the dog down. He reached for Elodie and pulled her close.

"What's all this?" he inquired. "You and I have been for each other too long, sugar, to be fighting about a dog."

For a moment Elodie was soft in his arms, then she jerked free.

"We've been for each other a long time," she agreed bitterly. "Maybe too long, Red. Time's passing and we aren't getting anywhere."

The little white dog bit his ankle, but Red was too surprised to do anything about that as he watched it follow Elodie up the path.

Elodie was angry at him most of the time nowadays because he was stubborn about seeing things her way. Elodie said the day of the cowboy was over and since the army wasn't going to take him because of that punctured lung, now was his big chance. She wanted him to stop buying two-hundred-dollar saddles and save his money toward buying a gasoline station and hamburger stand in town, only he couldn't see it that way.

Moodily, Red wondered if Elodie were right about the day of the cowboy being over and knew a deeper grievance because he wasn't wearing a uniform. Curly was deferred until after the dude season, then he'd be off. And even Len was talking of finding himself a spot somewhere, leaving his wife, Kitty, to run the ranch. It made a fella feel out of things to have everybody going and leaving him behind.

He took Mr. Andrews fishing after lunch, but Andrews wasn't a real fisherman and by four o'clock he'd had enough.

After Red had changed his clothes, he found Verna Clark waiting on the front porch of the main building.

"You look like somebody from back East," she commented, settling into the seat beside him with a glance at his dark suit.

"And you look—" began Red.

His anger departed as he stared at her. She was all in white, with a white coat and perky white hat. "Swell!" he finished, meaning it.

Until they encountered her with Ed Harris in a restaurant after the movie, he forgot about Elodie. Up to then he'd been enjoying himself but, abruptly, his pleasure in the evening vanished.

Verna Clark followed his moody gaze.

"That your girl, Red?" At his nod, she shook her head. "She's pretty, but her mouth's too small."

"She's my girl," Red said stubbornly.

Verna Clark stood up. "Let's dance," she suggested, pointing to the juke box.

People stared as they danced and Red saw Elodie's eyes grow sultry. Evidently her being with Harris was O.K., but his stepping out with another girl was different.

The dance ended, they joined the other two.

Harris made them welcome, his glance appraising Verna Clark thoughtfully. Elodie was falsely polite, though Red took her hand beneath the table and pressed it to show his companion meant nothing in his life. Conversation dealt mainly with Sunday's rodeo.

Because he had a date to take a man fishing at Little Creek Lake at dawn, Red left early. On the way back to the ranch he was so silent that Verna Clark challenged his silence.

"Cat got your tongue, Red, or are you afraid somebody's got your girl?"

"I'm worrying about the rodeo," Red informed her stiffly. "I've got a saddle to pay for."

Verna slid closer. "Relax, Red. I'll buy you the saddle."

"Thanks, I'll buy my own saddle!" refused Red.

As he said "good night" at the door of her cabin, something rustled in the grass nearby. Verna Clark moved toward him. To his own surprise, Red kissed her.

That was a mistake.

When it was time to take his dude fishing, he was still awake. Elodie had been tops with him for three years, but he hadn't slept for thinking about Verna Clark.

He had a real fisherman in tow this time and real fishermen know fish bite best at dawn and at dusk. It was long after dark when they returned to the ranch. No lights burned in the dining room, and until Red found a note in his cabin instructing him to get down to the river as soon as he could, he thought they had missed dinner. Then he remembered this was the night of the moonlight picnic. A party of riders would be coming back over the mountains. He was needed to ride along and help keep an eye on the dudes.

The prospect of a ride on top of his heavy day wasn't appealing, but after a moment Red brightened. Elodie would be taking the ride. Maybe he'd get a chance to patch things up between them. Anyhow, picnics were fun. The food was always good and Kitty, the boss' wife, brought her guitar along to

accompany the singing around the campfire that followed supper.

He whistled as he changed his clothes. He looked in on his fisherman and found him asleep with an empty highball glass and a plate of half-eaten sandwiches beside him. Chappo was waiting beside the rack, already saddled.

The moon was coming up over Frog Mountain as he rode toward the river. It was so bright it made Red feel funny. His heart was beating too fast. His hands were unsteady and it wasn't from rowing a boat all day.

Things moved in the underbrush. Leaves rustled in the wind blowing through the valley every night. Presently, the bonfire by the river came into view and Chappo neighed, picking up speed the way a horse does when he wants to join other horses.

Everybody except Curly and his helper sat in a circle around the fire. Kitty was singing a song that always got the dudes—something about empty saddles in an old corral. Red had heard it hundreds of times, but he stopped to listen.

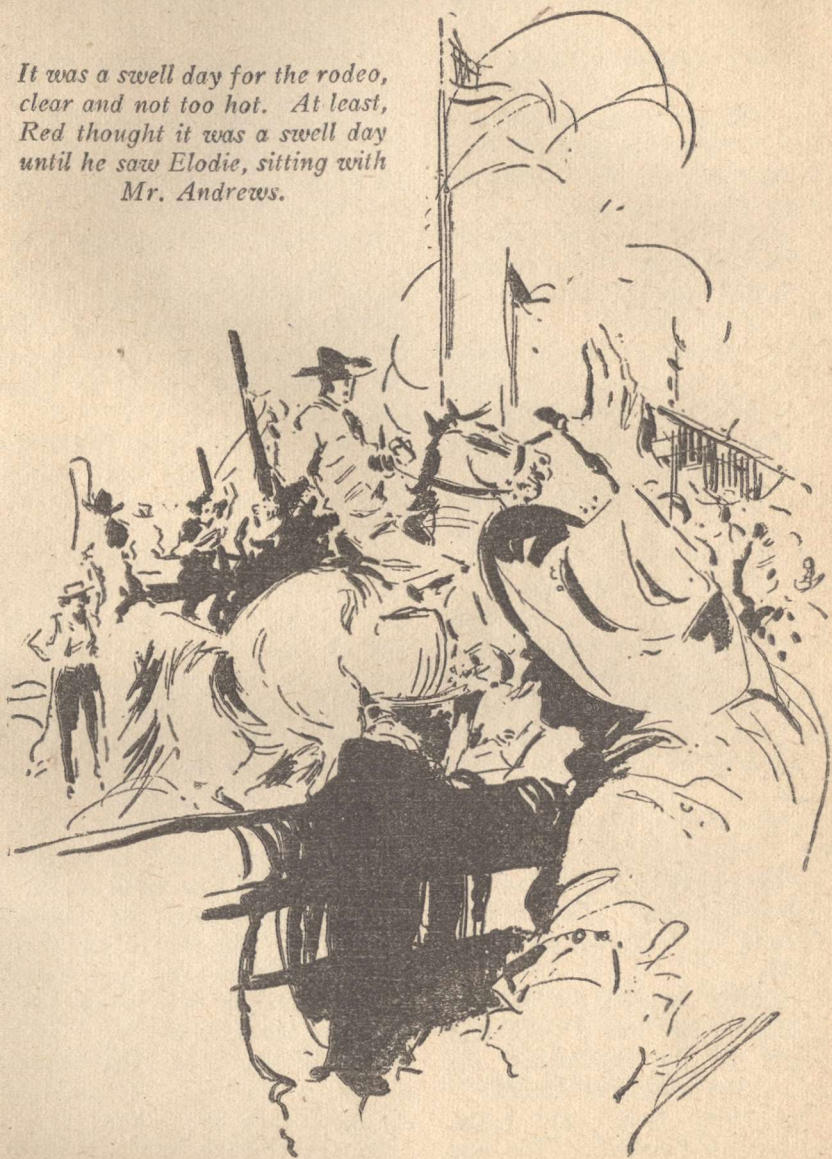
Unexpectedly, another voice tuned in and Kitty looked surprised because she always did her stuff solo until she invited the dudes to join in. When she smiled, motioning the other singer to come closer, Red saw it was Verna Clark.

The song ended.

"Is Red here?" called Kitty. "We need him for the next."

Red dodged out of sight and went to the cookstove, where Curly dished up his dinner.

*It was a swell day for the rodeo,
clear and not too hot. At least,
Red thought it was a swell day
until he saw Elodie, sitting with
Mr. Andrews.*



"Ever hear of the Lorelei?" inquired Curly whimsically. "A female who drove sailors loco with her singing? The Clark fireball didn't start yodeling until she saw you."

Red took the plate, which was piled high with the kind of chow that gave Curly the No. 1 salary on Rushing River's pay roll.

"I don't need cotton for my ears," he drawled. "If that singing's bait, it was plumb wasted on me."

Curly grinned. "Never knew anything to hold you back from your food before," he pointed out. "Not that I blame you—that girl's got everything."

Hearing Curly praise Verna Clark brought back the funny feeling he'd had riding toward the river. When Kitty called again, he put down his plate and, together, they sang their trick song. Then everybody sang, only instead of singing, Red watched Verna Clark.

He learned how she smiled and the cute way her hair grew around her temples. That one of her eyebrows was slightly higher than the other, as though she'd been surprised by something and found that something pleasant. That her chin was round but firm and her mouth generous.

At Kitty's request, he sang a song alone. His was a voice that belonged to the mountains, the stars and the wide open spaces.

"One more, Red," said Kitty, when he had finished. "You and Verna sing it together."

It was his favorite song, the one

about a cowboy finding the girl he loved.

"Oh, she wasn't so small," sang Red.

"And she wasn't so big," sang Verna beside him.

He was sorry when it ended and Kitty stood up, telling the riders to get started and asking him to look after Miss Clark.

Kitty might have requested it because the Clark girl was new at the ranch. On the other hand, maybe she'd seen Elodie glowering while he stared at Verna Clark during the singing and wanted to spare him a scene.

Three could ride at the end of the column, which was his regular place on moonlight rides. Eagerly, Red turned to Elodie, but Elodie was already walking away with Ed Harris. Harris was holding her arm, looking back at Red with the sort of smug look that meant he thought he had the inside track and, for a moment, Red was furious because in the West when you'd staked a claim your rights were supposed to be respected.

He turned to Verna Clark. "Where's your horse?" he asked in the brittle tone that spells anger.

When she pointed, he whistled in surprise. She was riding North Star, a horse nobody rode except Kitty. Tonight she wore black corduroy pants topped by a white leather jacket. The shirt beneath the jacket was of scarlet wool and she didn't look like a dude.

As she climbed into her saddle she smiled at him and, instantly, Red's anger increased because he

thought the smile hinted they shared a secret.

"Kissing you last night didn't mean anything!" he snapped.

Verna Clark gathered up her reins.

"Only that you felt like kissing someone and the right girl wasn't handy," she agreed. "Put a check-rein on that temper, Red. What's a kiss between friends, or aren't we friends?"

Only it wasn't like that, brooded Red, as they rode side by side at the end of the column. He'd kissed Elodie plenty of times without its shaking him to pieces. But kissing this girl had made him feel unsure of himself and Elodie's making such a play for Ed Harris, plus the army's turning him down, wasn't restoring his confidence any.

Abruptly, Verna Clark halted her horse. "Nice!" she said, looking at the moon shining on distant mountains.

"Yeah," agreed Red. "A horse to ride and a trail to follow—reckon a fella like me would feel lost if he gave it up."

"The army?" guessed Verna Clark.

Red shrugged. "Not the army," he said bitterly.

To his surprise, he heard himself explaining about Elodie and the filling station and why he wasn't eligible for military service. When he had finished, unexpectedly he felt sure of himself again.

"I'm sorry Elodie can't see things my way," he decided. "Because I plan to keep on riding the range."

Verna Clark moved her horse closer. "I wish my dad could have heard you say that."

"Why?"

"He liked people who like horses the way you do." Leaning over, she rested her hand on his. "You were angry when I offered to buy the saddle for you, weren't you, Red?"

Red yanked his hand away.

"Right kind of a guy doesn't take presents from women," he muttered. "Come along, lady, we've got to catch up with the others."

He saw Elodie briefly at the stables.

"Nice ride?" He glowered.

Elodie dimpled. "Lovely!" she assured him.

He caught her arm. "Aw, now, sugar," he pleaded. "Don't use the whip so heavy."

Elodie shook his grasp loose. "Save your eloquence for somebody who appreciates it!" she said pertly.

Red went along to the cabin he shared with Curly.

Again he lay awake, but this time his thoughts were upon Elodie. When you'd planned spending a lifetime with a certain girl, it was upsetting to have those plans threatened, and Ed Harris was unmistakably a threat. Whoever had said competition was the spice of life didn't know all the answers, thought Red dismally.

He dressed in his best early on the day of the rodeo. After he had finished dressing, he stared at

himself in the mirror, knowing he wasn't in Ed Harris' class when it came to looks. He had steady gray eyes, a lean tanned face, thick red hair. Something about him was intensely masculine, but when you'd said that, you'd said it all. The shaggy white pants, gold shirt and tall black Stetson helped a little, but not much.

Tilting on his high heels, he went down to the stables with his nerves tight as wires. Ramirez, the head wrangler, kept watching him as he fussed around aimlessly.

"Amigo, it is better you do not ride," suggested Ramirez.

"I'm riding!" Red declared curtly.

Ramirez looked unhappy.

"If it is because of the saddle, I will lend you the money," he offered.

Red lost his temper.

"I want to know why everybody's trying to buy me a saddle!" he yelled. Then he was ashamed of himself. "Skip it," he apologized gruffly. "I'm edgy today."

Silently, Ramirez began giving Red's gear a close inspection.

"Expecting to find wormholes?" jeered Red. "That's a new outfit you're looking at."

When it was time for the rodeo, he rode down to the field alone.

It was a swell day, clear and not too hot. People perched on the rail fence inclosing the field, or sat in ranch cars and trucks. Red yelled joyously at guys he knew, spoke to the boss and Kitty.

Verna Clark was leaning against

the rail fence in her black pants and white jacket. He saw Elodie in a new silk dress sitting beside Mr. Andrews in the ranch station wagon, and knew the brief pity of a man in the full vigor of youth for a man whose strength was waning.

The governor of the State made a speech. At its end the starter bawled the name of the cowboy opening the calf-roping contest and Red's hands grew damp on his reins.

He himself was good at roping, but a fellow needed a little luck. Sometimes a calf ran in circles and that made things tougher. Or a horse could stumble. Even if you were first-class at roping, a lot of things could happen.

The first cowboy returned. Ed Harris went out then and did a swell job on his calf. Passing Red as he returned, he spoke in a jeering tone, "Looks like I'm beating your time all along the line, Red!"

The starter bawled again. Red picked up his reins and spoke softly to Chappo, "Here we go, sweetheart. Remember, I'm counting on you!"

His calf ran straight. Time was an interval written in dust and flailing feet until the starter waved his hat in a signal of release. Red loosened his rope, slapping the calf gently. "Go home to your ma," he said, and the calf ran bawling.

People applauded. Presently, the megaphone announced first prize for calf-roping had gone to Red Deans of Rushing River. Red rode toward Elodie, feeling swell.

Passing Harris, he grinned.

"There's a saying about counting chickens before they're hatched," he reminded without malice.

Harris had a nasty temper. It flared now, and the picture of the other man's controlled fury lingered with Red. Funny sort of guy, he thought disapprovingly. A fellow had to know how to take it when he lost!

He reached Elodie, still sitting in the station wagon beside Mr. Andrews.

"The saddle's part paid for, sugar," he informed her, smiling.

Elodie's face closed against him.

"Congratulations," she said so thinly he knew his winning meant nothing.

Andrews stirred uncomfortably. "Nice going, Red," he muttered.

Red waited a moment. When Elodie remained obstinately silent, he turned and rode away. As he did so, something flashed across the field. People shouted and, high above the shouting, he heard Kitty scream as she had screamed the day Len broke his arm. Unexpectedly, then, he was looking up at his saddle instead of down, knowing he wouldn't be able to get back.

He was on the ground when he opened his eyes and Len was talking:

"Steady, Red. We'll get you patched up pronto!"

"Sure," agreed Red. "What happened?"

"Elodie's dog ran out on the field, nipping at Chappo."

Red thought with respect of the dudes who got up and walked away

from their spills. The haze cleared a little then. He saw Ramirez, Kitty and the starter for the rodeo. They were all sorry for him. Experimentally, he tried to get up.

"Get me out of here!" he said.

He was wrapped in plaster from his neck to his waist when he woke up in the hospital after the doctors had finished with him.

Kitty was sitting beside him. "You'll be O. K.," she assured him.

"How long?" inquired Red.

Kitty delayed her answer.

"Three months in a cast. Another three months in a brace. That isn't forever, Red."

Red closed his eyes, knowing he'd go nuts before this was over. Lying on his back with nothing to do but tap a tune on his cast would drive any man crazy!

"Elodie's outside," informed Kitty.

Red brightened.

"Send her in. And, Kitty—"

Kitty winked. "I know," she said. "You want to be alone!"

Devils worked on his spine with pincers as Elodie stood at the foot of the bed.

"You certainly fixed things this time, Red," she began stormily. "But I've waited long enough."

Her face was still closed against him. Knowing her so well, Red knew she was angry because she intended doing something she wasn't proud of.

"Meaning you're marrying Ed Harris?" he hazarded.

Briefly, she hesitated. "I'm marrying Mr. Andrews."

Andrews! The fat little guy who didn't know how to have a good time and was so out of place in the West! Red stared at her, suddenly understanding how futile had been the dreams fashioned about Elodie's loyalty. From the start she had fooled him. All that pretty concern regarding his future hadn't been for him. Elodie had been merely looking out for herself, as Elodie would always look out for herself!

Understanding, he absolved her.

"O. K., sugar," he said gently. "Leave the ring on the dresser as you go out."

Elodie's cheeks flamed.

"I'm keeping the ring," she informed him. "A girl's entitled to something in return for her time."

Red closed his eyes again.

"The ring's yours," he agreed. "Smooth riding, honey."

It was what he always said when Elodie went anywhere without him, and by the way she caught her breath, he knew it got her. For a moment she lingered unhappily.

"I'm sorry about the dog, Red. I left him shut up in my cabin."

"Sure," said Red. "He just got loose."

He didn't believe that. He remembered the look in Ed's eyes. Ed had turned the dog into the field. When he heard about Elodie's marrying Andrews, Ed would be ashamed.

"Beat it, sugar," he ordered. "Spilled milk's spilled milk. Nobody's ever found a way of picking it up!"

Elodie left. Someone else came in.

"Elodie and I are washed up," Red informed Kitty without opening his eyes. "You'll be glad of that. You never liked her."

Curly would be glad also, and Ramirez, and Len. It was surprising how many people would be glad he and Elodie were finished!

"She wasn't right for you, cowboy," said Verna Clark quietly. "I told you her mouth was too small. People with mouths like that take everything and give nothing."

Red opened his eyes. "Fancy meeting you here!" he greeted her politely.

Verna Clark put out a hand as though fending something away.

"Don't be so casual, Red," she pleaded. "I can't bear it!"

He stared at her a long moment and she stared back.

"You could bear anything!" scoffed Red, then abruptly his voice softened. "You like me, don't you, plaster shirt and all?"

"From the moment I saw you!" said Verna Clark with fervor in her voice.

Love was like that sometimes, conceded Red, beginning to understand why kissing this girl had been different from kissing Elodie. Elodie had been a pretty picture he'd carried around a long time. Naturally, he'd put up a fight to keep the picture. But he hadn't loved Elodie and Elodie hadn't loved him.

He smiled, his world adjusting itself.

"Don't take this so hard, baby,"

he consoled her. "In six months' time I'll be right as rain."

Verna Clark asked a question in a manner that made it plain the answer was important. "Are you through with horses, Red?"

There was no use lying, decided Red, after debating at length. He might as well tell her the truth. "Six months and one day from now I'll be riding Chappo!" he said stubbornly.

Verna Clark heaved a sigh rich with content.

"I wish my dad could hear you! He made me promise to find a man who loved horses and wouldn't take presents from women. He said a man like that would be good enough for Flying K—"

Flying K was the biggest ranch in the State and a man named Clark had owned it.

"What's all this?" yelled Red.

Verna Clark leaned down swiftly and stopped his protesting lips with hers. When she straightened, she was giving orders.

"Let's have no nonsense from you, Red Deans. You'll take Flying K along with me and like it,

and help me run it!" Seeing the stubborn set of his jaw, she faltered, "Oh, Red, you're not going to be difficult?"

Again they exchanged a long look. Red saw she was terrified that his pride would come between them, also that the way they felt about each other made everything else unimportant.

"Lady, you got yourself a husband!" he informed her.

Curly came in with Kitty. Both were grinning, but Red didn't mind.

Everything was swell—even the tedious six months ahead of him was something he could take in his stride. When you married a woman you married a way of living, thought Red profoundly. Contrasting Elodie and the filling station with Verna, the Flying K, the herds of cattle, a prickling of awe ran along his aching spine.

"You can't beat luck!" he told himself, beginning to filter the future through his mind in a series of highly satisfactory pictures which helped wipe out the sting of not being with Curly and Len when they left to fight in the war.

THE END.

TEST SIGHT

TASTE RIGHT

If the ladder is placed against building,
how far up will it reach?

ANSWER.

It will reach exactly to the top of the building.





Many a man has been tricked by a woman, but—oh, when he finds out!

BY JERROLD BEIM

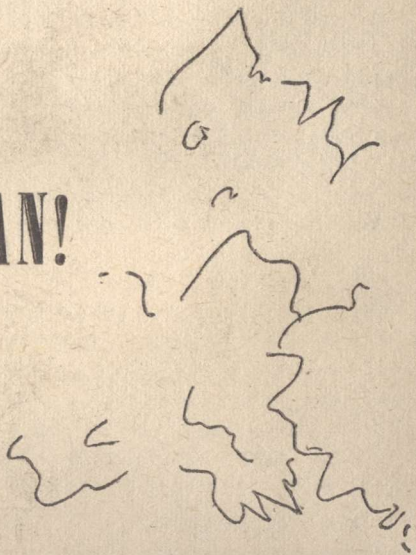
I'LL MEET THAT MAN!

SHELDON and she had a habit of skipping out of the office mornings to get a cup of coffee across the street. He sat opposite her at the table, handsome, mature, one of the nicest men she knew.

"Marry me, Karen, and you won't regret it," he was saying. "We'll be happy together. I promise you that."

Karen stared at Sheldon, wondering if she weren't being foolish not to accept his proposal. What more could she want in life than all he could give her?

Sheldon went on, "Your dad would have liked it, Karen. He and I were great pals, you know that.



I guess that's why you've always seemed so wonderful to me, because I idolized your father."

Perhaps Sheldon would have been wiser not to have mentioned her father. It only made her conscious of the fact that dad and he had been contemporaries. Both of them had been newspapermen together, Hugh Chandler becoming a



I'LL MEET THAT MAN!

famous foreign correspondent, Sheldon Walker the editor of the *Daily Gazette*. She remembered Sheldon's coming to the house when she was a child, dangling her on his knee. She recalled rumors that Sheldon had been in love with her mother, but that dad had won out. Perhaps it was because she resembled her mother so much, with her great dark eyes, her warm curving lips and lustrous ebony hair that Sheldon had fallen in love with her.

But marry him! It would be unkind to say, "No, Sheldon, I can't do it. You're old enough to be my father. Besides, I have other dreams. Some day I'll really fall in love."

No, she wanted to be kind to Sheldon. She was grateful to him for all he had done to help her since the day that telegram had arrived, "Hugh Chandler Killed In London Bombing." Dad, who had been all she had left in the world, her mother having died years before. She couldn't have borne it if Sheldon hadn't been so kind to her, given her the solution that helped ease some of the anguish in her heart.

"You've got printer's ink in your veins, Karen," he had said to her. "Why don't you take a job, work for the newspaper?"

Her eyes had glowed at his suggestion. "You mean, I could take dad's place, carry on for him as foreign correspondent?"

"Now, kid, take it easy!" Sheldon had laughed. "You're not even a cub reporter yet. No, I have another idea. You're a smart young

deb around town. I thought you might write us a regular gossip column. You know all the doings, the inside dirt of café society."

Her lips had curved in scorn. "I, the daughter of Hugh Chandler, dish out that dirt, pry into people's private lives? No, thanks, I wouldn't think of such a thing."

"Oh, come now," Sheldon had coaxed her. "Those columnists do a good job. Their stuff's relaxing for people to read in these war times. You can have fun with a column like that. Why, I remember one of your dad's first jobs was just writing up society stuff. He hated it, too, but always said it had been good practice."

If it had been good enough for dad it was good enough for her. Besides, she needed something to keep her from brooding.

"Café Chit-Chat," by Karen Chandler, began to appear regularly. In a way it was fun, making the rounds of the night clubs evenings. Picking up bright bits of harmless gossip, then a last-minute stop at the office to turn in her copy. The column caught on. Sheldon even admitted it was a circulation booster.

That had been over a year ago. And then, as more young men went to war, as girls shed their smart clothes for uniforms, she began to get restless. She couldn't go on writing this drivel! She pleaded with Sheldon to give her another job, real assignments, and all he did was propose to her.

"I don't want to marry yet," she

said to him now. "I want a chance to do something worth while for this war. You don't even let me do much beyond boosting war bonds in my column. You censor every bit of the war news I put in."

"I told you people read it for relaxation," Sheldon answered. His eyes suddenly narrowed. "I'll tell you what I'll do, Karen. I'll make a bargain with you. Tom Barclay is in town, staying at the Hotel Nesoron. You go interview him. Get an exclusive story and run it in your column. Wouldn't you like an assignment like that?"

Her eyes sparkled and her heart quickened with excitement. "Sheldon, do you mean Captain Tom Barclay? The fellow who made all those bombings over Berlin? I'd love to meet him. Sheldon, you're a darling! That's a glorious assignment. I don't know how to thank you."

"Don't thank me. I said it was a bargain, you remember. The bargain is that if you don't do a good job of it, you marry me. Forget your career as a newspaperwoman, except to be an editor's wife."

"O. K., it's a bargain, Sheldon." She said it impetuously without a second thought. But why wouldn't she do a good job of it? She was very keen at character analysis. An interview or two with Tom Barclay and she would write up a wonderful story.

"I'll get right at it, Sheldon." She rose from the table, picking up her purse. "It'll be too good for my column. You'll want to run it as a Sunday feature."

It wasn't until later that she recalled the expression that had come over Sheldon's face. A wry smile, a satisfied look in his eyes, like a cat that had swallowed the canary.

She took a taxi to the Hotel Nesoron, marched confidently through the lobby to the clerk at the desk. She held her head high, speaking with the authority and assuredness that always commanded respect.

"I'm Miss Karen Chandler of the *Gazette*. I understand Captain Tom Barclay is staying here. I'd like to speak to him, please."

The clerk was a haughty-looking girl who didn't seem at all impressed. In fact, she stared at Karen as if she were mad. Karen decided to change her technique. She smiled warmly and said, "I want to interview the captain, you see. All America is dying to know more about his wonderful exploits. So would you connect me with his room, please?"

"I'll let you speak to Mr. Osborn. He's his secretary. That phone over there."

Karen sighed, went to the phone. Well, the secretary would arrange an appointment, except that she wasn't aware of the fact that captains carried secretaries around on leave! She got her connection and explained what she wanted to the gruff male voice that answered the phone.

"News stuff? I'll send you some material right down," the voice, evidently Mr. Osborn's, said.

"But I want to see Captain Bar-

clay himself. I want to get the personal angle."

"The captain isn't seeing anyone. I'll send the material down." The click that followed closed the matter definitely.

The clerk at the desk was smiling. "No luck, eh? You won't have any. No reporters allowed. No one's met the captain. Seems he's in town to enjoy himself in exclusive privacy. And you might as well give up, too. Every reporter has been here at least half a dozen times, including one from your paper. They tried to bribe, buy out Mr. Osborn, hung around all day and none of them's got to see the captain. So better give up. Oh, here's the material for your story."

An envelope had arrived, and Karen took it from the clerk, angry fire soaring through her as she opened it, reading the mimeographed sheets. Facts and dates about Captain Tom Barclay. Born, September 10, 1912. Hair, brown. Eyes, brown. Height, six-feet-two. Weight, one hundred and eighty pounds. Son of Middle West farmers. Went to agricultural college but gave that up to take up aviation. Single. Likes chicken pie. On and on, the most trivial ordinary things about him. How could she write a good story from this, one with a personal angle?

And then she thought of Sheldon. She didn't know whether she was more angry at him or at Captain Tom Barclay. Because Sheldon had tricked her into this, knowing she couldn't get a story, forcing

her to agree to an unfair bargain, to get her to marry him.

She started to stride out of the hotel, her eyes blazing furiously. But how could she give up so easily? There must be some way of meeting Captain Barclay. Maybe she'd run into him at one of the night clubs. But he probably didn't go to them if he were so dead set on privacy. She started to push her way through the revolving door. And then, her hand on the chrome bar, she saw the letters of a sign pasted on the glass:

HELP WANTED

MEN OR WOMEN

FULL OR PART TIME

COOKS, CHAMBERMAIDS, BELLBOYS

APPLY EMPLOYMENT MANAGER

The door swung around, and she with it. She was back in the lobby, her heart pounding madly, a wild idea pulsating through her. She could do it! Certainly, she had nothing to lose.

She stopped at the ladies' room first, removing the few simple jewels she wore, mussing the bow of her blouse a bit. She still looked too smart, too well dressed. She removed all her make-up, combed her hair back severely. Then she stepped back, glancing at the mirror. The girl reflected before her certainly wasn't Karen Chandler, capable of writing "Café Chit-Chat."

"I'm Cora Moore," she was saying to the employment manager a little while later. "Sure, I can make beds—I do it at home for

my folks and my six brothers and sisters, so I don't see why I can't do it in a hotel since I need a job."

"You're hired," the manager told her. "We need all the help we can get."

An hour later Karen was standing before Room 1207, fresh linen over her arm, trying to steady her trembling. But it had been quite an ordeal, persuading the girl who usually cleaned this room to swap with her.

"But you say you've seen the captain," she pleaded with her. "And I never have. And I hear he's so handsome. Please let me do his room, just this once."

"Well, all right," the girl finally yielded. "Don't know why you're so anxious though. He seems like kind of a frozen puss to me."

She lifted her hand timidly to the door now. A voice boomed, "Who is it?" She recognized the gruff timbre at once—Mr. Osborn.

"Maid, to clean up," she managed to answer.

"Oh, well, all right. Come in and get it over with."

She entered the room, obviously the sitting room of a suite, and saw a young man stretched out in a chair, reading a magazine. He didn't pay any attention to her, but she looked at him closely as she swept the room and dusted.

He was fairly good-looking, lean and lithe, with brows that furrowed over dark eyes as he read on. He suddenly looked up, aware of her gaze. Her cheeks flushed with color and she said:

"I . . . I wondered if I could get into the bedroom now."

"The captain's been taking a shower, but I guess he'll be out any minute. Hey, Tom," he called, "are you finished in there?"

"Yep, I'm coming!" The door swung open and Karen drew a sharp intake of breath. A young man in khaki stood on the threshold, knotting his tie. She had never seen such shoulders, narrow hips, a handsome face tanned a golden hue. He saw Karen, but didn't give her a second glance. "You can clean in there," he said. "'Fraid I left a lot of wet towels in the bathroom."

She was able to see him closely as she walked past him, almost to stare in those deep-set brown eyes. As she cleaned in the bedroom, she could hear the men's voices:

"Listen, Osborn, I can't go on this way," Tom Barclay was practically pleading. "I know I've been sick and I needed a rest. But I've had one—I'm almost in shape to go back. And here I am in a big town at last, and you won't let me go out and have any fun."

"Listen, captain, I don't like this job any more than you like me with you," the gruff voice retorted. "But you yelped so that you were given this visit on condition that you do only one thing a day. Well, we have tickets for a show tonight. That's your activity. Until then you can play cards with me or do cross-word puzzles or whatever you like. But those are the orders I got and as long as I'm your bodyguard, we stick to 'em."

"Yeah, and look what I'm doing to you," Tom Barclay went on. "I know you have a girl in this town and want to see her. But, instead, you practically have to hold my hand. I don't see why you, at least, can't have some fun. Go on and have lunch with her. Just send me up some detective magazines from the newsstand—"

"Well, Janice is pretty sore that she doesn't see me." Osborn was reluctant though. "But if you'll give me your word you won't leave the room—"

"I give you my word. As soon as the bedroom's clean I'll flop down and take another nap. Go on, beat it." Karen stood there, clutching the post of the bed, wondering if Osborn really were going.

"Well, I guess it won't do any harm if I leave you alone for an hour or so. O. K., cap, so long." And then she heard the door shut.

She stood there, motionless, almost afraid to move. They were alone in the suite now. Her heart quickened as she started for the other room. She saw that he was sitting on the window sill, staring wistfully across the street. There was a sign on the building across the way:

PALACE SKATING RINK

"I was there last night. Was it fun!" It was hard to utter the words, but she managed to attract his attention. He turned around, startled, staring at her.

"You mean you were there, roller skating?"

"That's right." She nodded. "My girl friend and me. It was fun. Do you like to roller skate?"

"Well, I haven't done it since I was a kid"—his lips formed a wide grin—"but I was quite a flash on wheels. Once did it with a sail, thinking I'd soar up in the air."

"And now you're a flier!" she exclaimed. "I think you're pretty wonderful, Captain Barclay."

His cheeks flushed with color. But then he caught himself, stiffened and said, "When you go down, will you have some lunch sent up to me? Just tell the waiter that the same as yesterday will do."

It was obviously a dismissal. "Yes, of course." She took the hint and hurried out. She stood by the door a moment, realizing that so far she hadn't done well at all. That bit about him with the sail would make a cute tidbit for the column. Or better still, she'd wait until she got more material, and use it all in the article.

She hurried down the hall, got into the service elevator, to the back entrance of the hotel kitchen. "I've a message from Captain Tom Barclay," she said. "He wants the same lunch as yesterday and," she added with inspiration, "he said I should bring it up."

"O. K., miss. He gets two chops, a baked potato, salad and milk. Be ready in a jiffy."

She was ready in a jiffy, too, deciding that the time had come to improve her appearance a bit. She combed out her hair and put on some lipstick. It made her look



Arm in arm they circled the rink then, suddenly, Tom maneuvered so that they were facing each other. "Cora, this has been the most wonderful day I've ever had," he said.

quite attractive again. She was soon carrying the tray up in the elevator, knocking at the door of the room.

"We're so short of help that they asked me to serve you," she told him.

"Oh, that's all right." He had obviously received his magazines and was reading one now. She started to move a table before him and he got up quickly. "That's heavy. Better let me help you."

"I can manage it. You're supposed to take things easy, aren't you?"

"Nonsense!" he said, laughing. "They coddle me too much—think I need it. They don't know I'm used to rough treatment, living on a farm all my life. Why, I used to get up at four thirty every morning and milk twenty-six cows!" But then he leaned forward, staring more intently at her. "Say, are you the same girl who was here before? You look different."

"Oh, I just fixed myself up a little, after cleaning the rooms, you know."

"You're pretty, if you don't mind my saying so," he told her.

"I don't mind"—she smiled at him—"especially coming from a captain! I . . . I only meet privates and sailors at the skating rink."

"Oh, come now!" He laughed. "I'm really only a farmer. Besides, in this war, we're all alike. It's part of what we're fighting for, don't you think?"

Her heart glowed at the expression on his face as he said that. No

wonder he was such a good aviator, fighting for the things he believed in. They were both caught in a moment's silence that seemed to bring them closer together. He said, "Say, I'm awfully lonesome. There's plenty to eat for two. Would you have lunch with me?"

She hesitated. "I might get fired if they find out. But then, they're so short of help they mightn't care. And it's time for my lunch now, anyway. Sure, as you say, it's what we're fighting for!"

They sat opposite each other, talked and laughed as they ate, and she almost forgot why she was here.

"You don't know what this means to me, Cora," he told her. "I wanted a vacation so badly that they finally let me have one. But with all these restrictions I didn't think it had been worth while coming to town until now. I feel as I did when I was a little boy and had the measles, and my mother had an awful time keeping me home."

She was glad, though, when lunch was over. Because she became frightened at having stayed with him, afraid that Osborn might walk in any minute. "It . . . it was awfully nice, captain. But I've got to get back to work now."

"It was swell knowing you, Cora." He took her hand for a moment, and its contact sent her heart beating wildly again, not with fear this time, but with a sensation such as she never had experienced before. "Maybe I can work on Osborn to let me have just one date before I go!"

Back to work! She had been hired on a part-time arrangement, so she was free to go to her real job now. She hurried to the *Gazette* office, her first impulse to see Sheldon, tell him that she had met Tom Barclay. But then her lips curved in a wry smile. It would be better to surprise him, present him with the full interview when she had more material from Tom to write about. But she couldn't resist stopping into Sheldon's office.

"That was some assignment you sent me on." She stood in the doorway accusingly. "No one's met Tom Barclay and you knew it."

Sheldon looked up, trying not to appear shamefaced. "A man gets desperate loving a gal and having her refuse him. I was afraid that you'd never meet him."

"Only, you forgot that I was a Chandler," she reminded him. "And Chandlers don't give up easy. I'll meet that man if it's the last thing I do!" It was hard to control her amusement as she turned and hurried to her own office.

She spent most of the afternoon starting the article, describing Tom as he looked, handsome, boyish, so genuine and sincere. Telling the story about skating with a sail, the other little stories he had told her. Another meeting or more with him and she'd have the makings of a swell newspaper story. She thrust what she had written into her desk drawer, then hurried on to her other assignments for the day. Going to a cocktail party, dressing for dinner at a smart club. How

silly her job to collect chit-chat seemed now. She was glad when she visited the last night club, wrote up her column and went home to bed.

But bright the next day she was Cora Moore again, reporting for duty at Room 1207. She knocked at the door and the same gruff voice asked, "Who's there?"

"The maid," and she went in. She heard Tom saying, "Oh, go on, Osborn, take Janice to the movies. I don't mind. In fact, I've got to write some letters this afternoon, to the folks at home. I want to tell them about the swell show we saw last night."

"Well,"—Osborn was reluctant to go—"Janice has the day off and wants me to go out with her. But I hate leaving you alone."

Karen dusted the furniture furiously, seeing Tom's face in a mirror. She had the feeling that he wanted Osborn to go so that he could be alone with her. She almost sang out in sheer ecstasy when Osborn finally said, "Well, all right. I'll be back about four thirty, so don't worry about me."

The door slammed shut and she was conscious of Tom's eyes on her. She looked up and they both smiled widely. "I thought he'd never go," Tom said. "I wanted to talk to you."

"I . . . I have to get the place cleaned." She was embarrassed. There was such sincerity in his voice, such honest admiration in his eyes, that her cheeks flamed.

"Cora, I've been thinking about

you ever since you were here yesterday, about that luncheon we had together. I've never been able to talk to a girl so easily, the way I have to you. I think we're just two people who hit it off and ought to see more of each other. Cora, I have an idea. Do you have to work all afternoon? I wondered if we couldn't go across the street to the Palace Skating Rink together?"

She had to restrain an impulse to laugh—gay, glorious laughter. Because it seemed like such grand fun, something she wanted to do, too. She told him, "I'm off for the day, just after I do this room. It would be fun—I'd love to go!"

They arranged to meet in front of the rink and she finished up his room, then went to fix herself up. Her eyes were shining, and she had never looked lovelier. And his eyes were sparkling too, his lips curved into a happy smile as he held the tickets in his hand.

"Are you sure it's all right for you to have such strenuous exercise?" she asked, as they entered the place.

"Oh, of course!" he assured her. "Skating's second nature with me. I do it as natural as breathing."

He didn't exaggerate. The rink was practically empty so early in the day and it was wonderful, putting on skates, skimming over the polished floor to the gay music that came through microphones. She hadn't skated in years, however, and worried how she would get along, but after a few rounds, with Tom holding her hand, she managed beautifully. Tom looked so

handsome, she thought, skimming across the floor, doing tricks for her like a little boy showing off for his best girl. There was a refreshment counter on the side and they had cokes together, sipping straws out of the bottle.

"Hold hands and around again?" Tom laughed and led her to the lilting music. And, suddenly, as they turned a corner, he maneuvered so that they faced each other.

"Cora, this has been the most wonderful day I've ever had. Cora, I know we hardly know each other, but I can't help it—I love you. I feel we should go on this way together, for always."

His arms were about her waist, and he was drawing her close to him. For a moment she wanted to push him away, to cry out, "I'm not Cora Moore. I'm Karen Chandler, out to get a story about you. You wouldn't like the real me—you'd hate the trick I played on you!" But then his lips were on hers and the words would not come. There was only music in her heart, louder, stronger, than the music that filled the place. She clung to him, knowing that she loved him, too.

It was he who finally broke away. "Cora darling, I ought to go back to the hotel. I'm going to tell Osborn about you, that I'm in love! And, tomorrow, when you come we'll talk about our future together. So this is good-by, just until then, darling. Let me put you into a taxi!"

"No, I think I'd rather walk home. I . . . I'll see you tomorrow."

row, Tom." She watched him disappear through the revolving doors of the hotel.

But she didn't go home. She walked to the newspaper building, then sat in her office. She had her story complete. Certainly, she could write a splendid story about Tom Barclay now. She began to pound out the words on the typewriter. Telling about Tom, his vibrant personality, his special charms. Those stories about his boyhood, his modesty that kept him from saying much about his bombing exploits.

She wouldn't have to marry Sheldon. She could marry Tom. Marry Tom? She stared at the keys for a long moment. She should have told him who she really was this afternoon, how she had set out to meet him, tricked her way into his life. But she hadn't been able to spoil the wonder of this afternoon. She stared at the paper in the typewriter again.

"Tom Barclay is the type of man to endear himself to every American," were the last words she had written. "I love Tom Barclay—I love Tom Barclay!" her fingers instinctively typed on. It was the end to the story, this interview she would never finish. She loved Tom Barclay, and though the whole world might know it some day, it wouldn't be told this way.

She pulled the sheet of paper from the typewriter, crumpling it, flinging it away. And then she strode out of the office, knowing she was leaving it forever. Her

place wasn't here, with Sheldon—it was with Tom Barclay. Tomorrow she would see him—tomorrow she would tell him. As for her bargain with Sheldon—some day she would pay that. He could get first release on their marriage.

It was hard not to phone Tom that night, ask to see him, but she decided to wait until the next day. To go to the suite in her disguise, have him hold her in his arms, say he loved her again. And then, when he saw the love in her eyes, too, he would understand how she might have played such a ruse and forgive her for it.

She could hardly wait until she got to the hotel the next day. Her heart beat like a bird about to be released from its cage. She rapped at the door and was disappointed to hear that gruff voice say, "Come in!" But Tom would get rid of Mr. Osborn. She felt sure of that.

"Good day. I . . . I've come to clean the rooms." It was hard to talk, to look into Tom's eyes. She waited to hear him say something to Osborn, make some effort to get rid of him. But, instead, he merely stared at the skating place across the way. She tried to clean, but her hands trembled, and suddenly, an ash tray fell to the floor, shattering to bits. Tom turned around to help her pick up the bits, when the gruff voice rang out:

"Well, what are you waiting for? Ask her if she didn't write this."

She glanced up, her cheeks flushed with color. Osborn was standing before her, his eyes blaz-

ing with indignation, waving a newspaper in his hand. "Captain Barclay doesn't believe it. But it says here, in an exclusive interview by someone called Karen Chandler, that he sailed a kite when he was a little boy, milked twenty-six cows one morning, that roller skating is second nature to him. And then he admits that he told that stuff to you, went skating with you. Plain as the nose on his face that you're Karen Chandler, that it was a trick to get an interview with him, but he refuses to believe it. Are you Karen Chandler? Answer truthfully—did you write this story?"

Karen's eyes were flooded with tears. That story—it was in the paper—but she didn't know how it had got there. "I didn't put it there—" she began. But Osborn cut her short. "Are you Karen Chandler?"

"Yes . . . yes, I am Karen Chandler!" she cried in anguish. "But that doesn't mean—"

"It only means one thing—that you were making a fool of him. All right, captain, I hope you're convinced now."

"I'm convinced, now." Tom's voice was hollow, lifeless, and he was walking across the room, shutting the door of the bedroom behind him.

"Tom . . . Tom, no, you've got to listen!" she cried. But it was no use. He couldn't hear her, wouldn't listen to her. And Osborn was saying, "You'd better go, young lady, if you know what's good for you. It's only because he asked me not to, that I'm not press-

ing charges against you. You'd better go now."

Karen was laughing wildly, almost hysterically, as she left the room. She had lost Tom Barclay forever, and her heart would never know love again.

"Yes, I printed it," Sheldon was saying. "I went to your office and found it crumpled on the floor. It was too good a story for me to see wasted. And it was a debt you owed me."

Yes, it was a debt she owed him—that was clear enough. Now she didn't have to marry Sheldon, never had to see him again. But she went on working for him. What else was there to do in life but go from night spot to night spot, writing up her items for "Café Chit-Chat?" Her ambitions, her aspirations were gone, just as Tom was gone.

Sheldon was worried about her. "There's a new quality in your column that I don't like, Karen. It's too frivolous, brittle, almost callous these days. Our readers are complaining."

"Poor readers! I'm portraying high society, aren't I? What would you like me to do, write up life at the Palace Skating Rink? Now, Captain Barclay would like that story better. We had such fun at the place—"

She was trying to sound mocking, but her voice caught with anguish. She had to lean against Sheldon's desk for support.

"Karen, once I wanted to marry you"—he was beside her, trying to comfort her—"but now I see how

foolish I was. I'm worried about you, as your father would be. Karen, you're torturing yourself. You've got to pull yourself together, find happiness somehow."

Such an easy prescription to give, but one so hard to fill. And then, a few weeks later, Sheldon called her into his office again. "You know, many a good idea comes out in jest, Karen. Why don't you do an article about the Palace Skating Rink? All about soldiers and sailors on leave, a real colorful picture of that kind of place. Run over there now for some material."

She wanted to cry out, "I don't have to go there. I know every detail of it by heart." But she wanted to go, as if just hearing the music they had skated to would help her a bit, ease the pain within her. She bought a ticket to the place, and entered it. It was more crowded than when she had been here with Tom, soldiers and sailors going around and around with their girls to music. A nice-looking soldier asked her to skate with him, but she couldn't accept. She couldn't skate here again with anyone but Tom.

"Let's skate the next one together, Karen. You sit here and I'll put the skates on you. I remembered your size."

It was fantasy, a dream that the music brought on. But the face before her, the strong hands gently pushing her down to the bench—Tom! Could it be Tom?

He was bending before her, his hand gripping her slim ankle, tight-

ening the strap of the skate. "Yes, it's I, Karen. Don't look so surprised. I got here just as soon as I could, after I received the message."

"The message?" Her heart was racing, faster, faster, in time with the music. "What message?"

"From Sheldon Walker, your boss. Telling me that he was responsible for putting that story into the paper, that you didn't want to do it. Darling, I should have listened to you. But we were both so blinded by hate and misunderstanding. Then Sheldon and I arranged that as soon as I could get here, I'd phone him and he'd send you to me. He's not such a bad guy really, is he, Karen?"

"No, he's not such a bad guy," she managed to reply.

"Neither is Osborn. He sends his apologies. And we're to let him know as soon as we're married, so he can send us a wedding present. Oh, you didn't know we're going to be married!" He laughed happily. "That is, we are if you want to. I'm fully recovered now. I have a final leave and then off in the sky I go again. But we can have our own bit of heaven first." He started to get up now that both her skates were fastened, then stopped. "While I'm still on my knee this way, Karen, will you marry me?"

Would she marry him? She laughed, holding both hands out to him, her answer shining in her eyes, singing in her heart as they skated off in rhythmic unison together.

THE END.

WOMEN and



Lovely Jay Meredith who plays the part of Janie in CBS's dramatic serial, "This Life Is Mine," is guest editor of "Women and War-time Living" this issue.

At first it amused me—the scrap of conversation I overheard in the subway—and then it made me thoughtful. A sweet young thing, wide-eyed and reverent, was saying breathlessly to a young man in navy uniform, "Why, Fred, that's wonderful! I didn't know you knew anything about electricity before you joined the navy. You were always so wrapped up in art and things like that."

The young man looked slightly embarrassed—I wasn't the only one who'd overheard. "Wh-why," he stammered, "I d-didn't know I knew anything about it myself!"

Strange, I thought, how great a diversity of hidden talents the war has brought out in our boys. Men who have never suspected in themselves a mechanical aptitude have learned that, with training, they've got what it takes. And that ties in

WAR-TIME LIVING

with my message. One of the most critical problems confronting naval aviation is a shortage of aerial radio-gunners. Thousands of men are urgently needed—they are vital members of the air combat crew, in dive bombers, torpedo bombers, patrol and reconnaissance planes. To become a radio-gunner, a man is inducted into the navy and at "boot" camp he may volunteer for this job. If qualified, he starts specialized training for about a year which, with its instruction in radio and radar, paves the way for a splendid postwar career. Now, how many men know of this need for radio-gunners? How many would say, startled, "Who, me?" if you, their wives, mothers, sweethearts, suggested that branch of service? Yet how many might think the idea over, apply, and find themselves the right men for the job? Why not suggest it? It would be one more contribution of the women of America to the peace of the world.

Mothers can help their sons decide what their place is in the war effort by simply knowing the facts. The United States navy is prepared to give young men of seventeen the

most expensive technical education in the world, to train qualified youths as naval aviators. These seventeen-year-olds are enlisted as apprentice seamen and are sent to college for training for eight months. After this, they go through



Jay Meredith

six stages in flight training, and if they successfully complete this course, they are commissioned as ensigns or second lieutenants and are awarded the navy wings of gold. Why not talk it over with your sons, mothers?

WEDDINGS

SHOULD BE PRIVATE

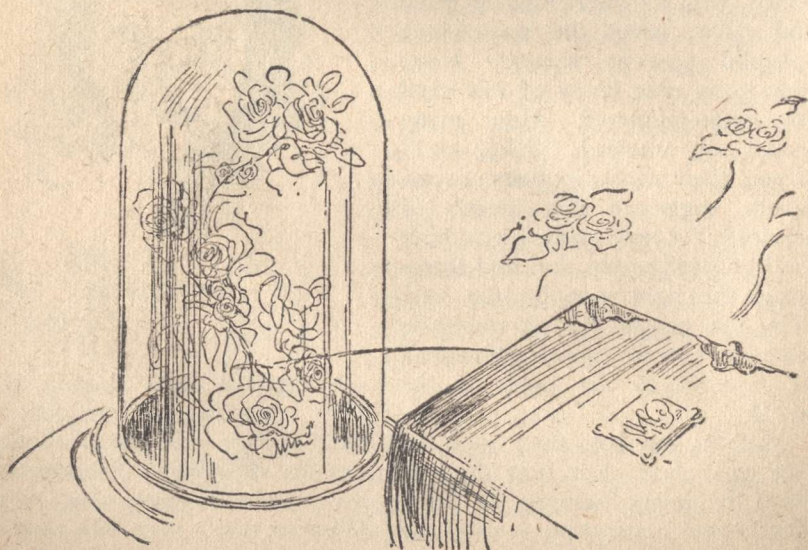
BY ZILLAH PATRICK

THERE was no use wishing. She couldn't see Jeff for twelve more hours, and that was that. But after today—

Breathless, Laura Lou moved away from the marble-topped washstand, raised a shade to pale October sunshine. Autumn had come South early that year of 1898,

and most of the leaves were gone so that she could see the tall white church spire uplifted like a reminding finger. Her throat got tight.

All those people staring— Oh, it was wrong, barbarous. Weddings ought to be private, like saying your prayers. Anyway, they wouldn't have to take that honey-



*It just wasn't done in those days of
petticoats and ruffles, that a girl
should say "I do" without all the
fuss and feathers.*



moon trip mama had been so set on. But only because Jefferson Kennard was the cleverest man in the whole wide world, and a lawyer besides.

Laura Lou smiled, progressing in her dressing to the first layer of starched tucks and ruffles. Mama simply couldn't understand why they wanted to start housekeeping the first possible minute. And she, Laura Lou, couldn't understand why Jeff kept twinkling at her. Actually twinkling, when all the time mama was insisting on that awful trip to Niagara Falls. And how casually he'd dropped in one evening and told them that an important case he was to defend had been set for trial on the very day after the wedding!

Mama had sat up straight. "The very idea!" she said. "Tell the judge it's out of the question."

"I'm afraid I couldn't." Jeff was all polite regret. "Judge Barefield is a stickler for legal procedure."

"Procedure, fiddlesticks! Oscar"—mama turned to papa—"you go right down there the first thing in the morning and tell him how ridiculous, how impossible this is."

"My dear," said papa mildly, "such a course would jeopardize Jeff's entire future. You know, the judge isn't exactly famed for his patience. He has honored the boy with this appointment and I haven't the colossal impudence to interfere."

Mama sniffed, but Laura Lou caught an odd flash from Jeff's black eyes and her heart swelled.

He had planned it all, for her.

Just because he liked this blue cashmere dress—Laura Lou tilted the bureau mirror and stepped back to make certain no petticoats were showing—she'd wear it tomorrow, the first day in their own home. The high collar choked her, but you weren't supposed to be comfortable. She fluffed its ribbon bow, tucked in side combs and rustled down to breakfast.

Papa was waving the *Gazette* agitatedly, saying the country'd be ruined, and mama, very dignified in freshly crimped hair and her second-best taffeta, was trying to look patient.

"Well, well," papa said in a different tone, and patted Laura Lou's shoulder as she paused by his chair. "Sit down and eat your breakfast, child."

"I hope you got a good night's rest," mama began, when he had mumbled a hasty grace and again disappeared behind the headlines. "There's so much to do. Mr. Perkins called—poor man, he's nearly down with the grippe—asking whether you want the pews tied off with ribbon, alone, or with a bit of smilax mixed in. Just the ribbon would be better, I believe."

"Whatever you prefer, mama." Laura Lou heaped muscadine preserves beside her biscuit.

"And you've never decided whether you want Miss Peavey or the organist to provide an extra solo. There may be some delay in seating everyone."

"Whichever you prefer, mama."

"I declare, Laura Lou," said

mama, a bit sharply, "I wish you'd take more interest. It's your wedding, not mine."

"Well, I think so much fuss is silly. Gypsies," muttered Laura Lou, "just jump over broomsticks."

Mama set the coffeepot down with a thump. "Laura Lou! If you can't be serious— What would Jefferson think?"

"I am serious," said Laura Lou tremulously. "It's so . . . so sacred to me, I don't want anybody but the family there."

"But, dear, Lillian had six bridesmaids, a page boy and a flower girl and, naturally, your father and I want—"

Papa rattled his newspaper. "Don't go bringing me into this. All foolishness. Not a bit of sense to it."

"You and I had a big wedding." Mama passed his cup with the gilt letters, "FATHER," that ten-year-old Laura Lou had given him for his birthday. "And the church was so crowded three ladies fainted. It was the happiest day of my life!"

Papa flung down his paper, attacked a slice of ham. "Yes, and before I'd go through that parade again, I'd—" He stopped and mama asked in an awful voice:

"You'd what?"

"Why"—papa beckoned Sapphire, the housekeeper, to hurry with the hot biscuits—"I'd simply call in a preacher and have it over in ten minutes. It's what Kennard ought to do."

Passing the window, Sapphire abruptly stopped, peered out. "Oh!"

she moaned. "Bad luck comin' to de bride! Yondah Mistah Kennahd right now."

"Today?" gasped mama. "But let him in, of course."

It occurred to Laura Lou that he wouldn't have to be let in tomorrow morning, and her hands began to tremble. She laid down her fork, fastened eyes on the doorway. She heard a man's deep voice, Sapphire's high-pitched laughter, quick footsteps. The atmosphere took on a tingling tenseness.

Then, slim, dark and casual, Jeff was there. His eyes were on hers as if they never wanted to be anywhere else, and in them was a look that set the blood to pounding at her temples.

"You're out early, Jeff." Papa stood up, grabbed at his falling napkin and sat down hard. "Come, have some breakfast."

"Good morning, Mrs. Beauchamp." Jeff was already bowing, shaking hands. "Thank you, sir, I've eaten."

He held Laura Lou's hand for a heart-stopping instant, took a chair beside her and began sipping the coffee mama thrust upon him. Laura Lou felt his awareness of her like an irresistible magnet. She looked down, breathing fast.

"Another building was set on fire last night," he said, addressing papa. "One of those sheds back of the post office. Somebody saw old Ike running from the scene and they found oil-soaked rags such as he uses at the church. So the sheriff's locked him in jail."

"The very idea!" declared mama

indignantly. "That poor old man— Why, he's the best help I ever had with my roses. And we'll need him at the church all day. Oscar, you go right down there and tell the sheriff to turn him loose."

"You know I can't do that," said papa testily. He banged the table. "But it's preposterous, sir. Preposterous. Man has no business in office."

"Feeling's running pretty high, but Ike's innocent beyond a doubt, and I'm going to do all—" Clamorous barkings from the front porch interrupted. Jeff looked around, one black eyebrow up. "I thought I left that dog in the buggy."

"Oh, is it your dog?" cried Laura Lou. "What kind?"

"That's hard to tell," he answered, grinning, "but I imagine Dude's mostly bird dog."

"Oh!" said Laura Lou faintly. Lillian's husband had a bird dog which was forever tracking up the house.

"Well, well." Papa squared around in his chair, beaming. "Go bring him in, Sapphire, and let's have a look at him. Maybe he can catch this possum or whatever it is that's been killing my chickens. I've had Ike setting traps a week."

A chair crashed in the parlor. Something vaguely resembling a white calf pushed through the portieres and halted, stricken. Mama sniffed. But the poor thing looked so unhappy. Even dogs didn't want to be stared at, thought Laura Lou, and held out her hand.

Saucer-sized paws pattered across

the matting. A knobby head was laid on her knee. Gusty pantings stirred the air.

"Why, you're nice," said Laura Lou.

"Right nice dog." Papa snapped a finger. "Come here, sir."

Promptly, Dude leaped on papa's chest, swiped a dripping tongue along his cheek. "Down, sir!" roared papa. "Down!"

Dude collapsed. He backed off, overturning a chair, yelped and loped out.

"Mercy!" ejaculated mama. "I'm afraid he isn't very bright."

Papa was brushing paw marks off his vest. "Just scared. Bet he catches that possum."

A shoulder brushed Laura Lou's and Jeff got to his feet. He was making apologies, he was going, leaving her.

"Jeff," she cried desperately, "won't I see you again?"

"Certainly not," mama cut in. "Not until he meets you at the altar. We're glad you came, though, Jefferson. Tell Ike we'll send him a good dinner," she called to his retreating back, then sighed, "Oh-h-h, I ought to be busy this minute. Sapphire's so slow, and the house has to be tidied and I do want a nice dinner ready when Jefferson's mother arrives on the noon train."

"I'll do the tidying, mama," said Laura Lou. "You mustn't get tired and start your neuralgia."

The parlor was sweet with chrysanthemums and mama's late roses. Laura Lou couldn't bear to look at

the bay window. It was too much like a little altar.

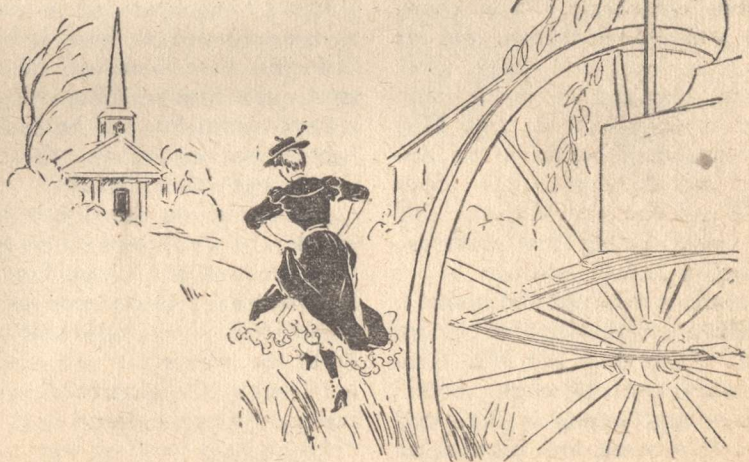
Almost fiercely, she changed water in vases, feather-dusted her way upstairs, made beds, put out fresh, fringed towels. If only she could keep from looking out at that church spire!

Going down the stairs, she caught her breath as mama started up them, pale, holding her head. "Now, I'll be all right," said mama reassuringly, "soon as I loosen my corset."

"Mis' Beauchamp," shouted Sapphire, "Ike's hyah!"

"Ike!" Magically restored, mama rushed out to the kitchen so fast, Laura Lou couldn't get there first. Ike was standing by the hot stove, bowing and grinning all over his wrinkled black face.

"Well, Ike," cried mama, looking extraordinarily pleased, "we didn't know how we were going to



Laura Lou cut across the vacant lot, recklessly holding up skirts so that anybody around could have seen clear to her shootops.

get along without you. Did the sheriff decide he'd made a mistake?"

"No, ma'am. But Mistah Kennahd, he bail me out."

"He did!" cried Laura Lou. She had never loved Jeff so much.

"Yas, ma'am. He sho' one fine man." Ike, always redolent of sulphur spray and of asafetida, was emitting some new pungency that made Laura Lou back away. "Yo' papa," he said, "good 'n' mad 'bout de way de jedge gone treat him. 'Twan't much of a bite, nohow. Jes' a little nip in de leg."

Laura Lou stopped breathing.

"What are you talking about?" demanded mama.

"Mis' Beauchamp," he said solemnly, "hit's a sin, de way dat man do hate a dawg. Whilst him and Mistah Kennahd and de she'iff 'scussin' my bail, he jump up and happen tromple de po' crittah—" Ike shook his head. "You know, he be a heavy gentleman, and hit grab right holt. De jedge riled, anyhow—him and de she'iff cain't nevah git along—and he 'cuse Mistah Kennahd of not havin' no disrespect' fo' de dignity he's office. Den he tell him somebody else sho' goin' han'le dis big case tomorrow, and dat's a fack."

Laura Lou felt cold and numb.

"That miserable dog!" exclaimed mama. "But why did Mr. Kennard take it in there, of all places?"

White rims sprang to Ike's eyeballs. "He nevah done no trick lak dat—no, ma'am! Othah folks lef' de do' open, and hit crope in unbeknownst."

"Well"—mama rubbed her forehead wearily—"let Sapphire give you some breakfast, then you better go on to the church."

She followed Laura Lou out of the room. "I declare, I know Judge Barefield is the most unreasonable man—here, help me lay this tablecloth, will you, dear?—but Jefferson wasn't going to make a cent from the case, anyway."

"He'd probably have been famous," said Laura Lou in a choked voice. "He says this man, this pauper, has been done a dreadful injustice because the laws are all mixed up. If Jeff had won, nobody would ever be so . . . so persecuted again."

Centering the cloth's long fold, mama pursed her lips, suddenly brightened. "Laura Lou! Since he doesn't have to be here tomorrow, there's no reason why you can't have your trip!"

Laura Lou's heart fell so far, she almost expected to hear it bump. "Oh, yes, there is, mama," she managed quite firmly. "Repairing the cottage cost a lot, and he had that furnace put in, and there's simply not enough money left."

Mama took on the absorbed look of one who yet hopes to solve a baffling problem, and Laura Lou eyed her uneasily. Mama was so very resourceful. An asthmatic whir broke the silence.

"There's the doorbell," sighed mama. "You go, dear."

Laura Lou went by way of the hall, so as not to see the bay window again. She smiled at a freckled messenger boy, signed for a

telegram, took it back to the dining room.

"Maybe this is about the flowers Mr. Perkins ordered," she said, matter-of-fact as possible. "It's for you, mama."

"Oh, mercy!" Mama always expected the worst. "Lillian's baby must have had a relapse. See what it says."

What it said was something so awful, Laura Lou couldn't believe her eyes. She read it twice and just stood there, looking at mama.

"Laura Lou! What is the matter?"

Laura Lou swallowed hard. "I didn't mean to scare you, mama. It's just from Jeff's mother. She . . . she can't come."

"Well, for goodness sake! That's bad enough, but you're so pale. Let me see that."

Mama read aloud, "'Exceedingly regret cannot be with you, owing sister's sudden illness. Wishing share in today's happiness, am wiring Jefferson'"—mama's voice was rising—"amount sufficient cover all expenses tour such as his father and I had thirty years ago. Isabel Kennard.' Really," mama wound up, quite pink, "isn't that lovely! I declare, I'm glad that dog bit the judge. Jefferson needs a vacation, and your fawn-colored broadcloth will be the very thing for traveling."

Traveling! Getting farther from their dear little cottage every minute.

"You don't seem very excited," mama observed reprovingly. "You and Jefferson will have to make

arrangements quickly."

"He . . . he was going to lay the kitchen linoleum tomorrow night after s-supper," Laura Lou answered unsteadily.

Mama came over, put her arms around her. "Daughter," she said gently, "I know you're nervous—I remember how I felt—but you'll look back on this as the happiest day of your life. Papa and I want it so—you've always been such a . . . a joy."

"Oh"—Laura Lou laid her head on her mother's plump shoulder—"if I could only be married at home! I don't want a crowd around."

Mama patted her. "There, now. I ought to have understood sooner. But don't think of people, dear, think of your vows."

As if vows could help matters! And why, wondered Laura Lou during the next half-hour, didn't she hear from Jeff? For once, he must be upset. Then the doorbell rang again and there was the same messenger with a letter.

"My darling," ran Jeff's black scrawl, "I'm afraid the linoleum will have to wait, but—

'Come tour with me and be my love,
And we will all the pleasures prove
That Paderewski, Weber, Fields,
And daily rubber-necking yields.'"

The dear, silly goose! Laura Lou's eyes misted so that she could hardly see the rest of it. The scrawl ran on, "If you should happen to pass the cottage about five thirty, Laura Lou, you could tell

me where you'd rather go with your husband-to-be."

He wasn't thinking about himself at all, just her. And, oh, she'd pretend, too! Pretend she'd love a trip. Pretend she didn't even mind a church wedding any more.

Why, that, thought Laura Lou, a little awed, was what mama meant about vows.

From then on, callers came and went. Mama's neuralgia started up, necessitating hot salt packs. Papa brought home a new kind of trap for the possum, caught his finger in it and had to be soothed. Miss Peavey sent word that she and the organist would each render three solos. Gifts crowded every table—Laura Lou never had seen so many pickle forks—and the telephone rang and rang.

It even rang as, pinning on her wing-trimmed blue sailor, Laura Lou ran downstairs a few minutes before five thirty. Impatiently, she took down the receiver, said "hello."

Mr. Perkins, a boy's unfamiliar voice told her, had gone home with the grippe, and wouldn't she meet him at the church and advise about decorations. He was, he said, new on the job. He was obviously worried. He sounded very young and anxious to please. Laura Lou fought back a sickening vision of Jeff waiting, waiting, at last going away.

"I'll be there in three minutes," she said, and flew out.

She ran along the street, recklessly holding up skirts so that anybody around could have seen clear

to her shoetops. She cut across the vacant lot adjoining the church grounds, totally disregarding rocks and tall dead weeds.

The church, huddling in shrubbery, its windows fired by the setting sun, looked bigger than ever before. And who was that? Laura Lou had only a glimpse of the dark figure which sprang up from nowhere and vanished inside the doorway. Ike, of course. But he, too, looked somehow different, and she walked on slowly, watching for the florist's boy.

Then—oh, there came Jeff and Dude! Dude, capering, straining at his rope. Jeff, so dear!

It wouldn't do to run and meet him, thought Laura Lou, lowering her skirts modestly. She fixed a prim gaze on the church—stared, bewildered.

Out of the arborvitaes by the doorway rose Ike. Unmistakably Ike. He darted up the steps, carrying by the tail—why, it was a cat. The judge's black-and-white Angora that caught the church mice. And he was actually hurling the poor thing into the vestibule, shutting the door, diving back into the shrubbery.

Thank goodness, Jeff had started up the walk, for Ike must be drunk. Imagine meowings during Miss Peavey's—

Laura Lou froze in her tracks. Worse than any imagined calamity, Judge Barefield was coming around that motionless clump of arborvitaes— Oh, dear Heaven, don't let Dude bark! Her panicky glance found Dude digging and sniffing

among leaves and Jeff, unaware of peril, yanking at the rope.

The judge stepped forward, peering about nearsightedly. "Kit-tee," he called in a coaxing falsetto. "Come, kitty."

Laura Lou's heart was pounding, drumming in her ears. She had never seen anybody so agonizingly slow as the judge mounting the steps, opening the door, finally closing it behind him. But here came Jeff and that wretched dog!

"Jeff," she cried, heading him off. "Go away! The judge is in there, and Ike's drunk."

"Drunk?" Jeff repeated.

"Yes, he is. He threw the church cat into the vestibule, hard as he could.

"Cat?" asked Jeff. He stood there, twinkling.

Laura Lou tugged at his arm. "Oh, do go—" Her voice trailed off as scalp-prickling shouts and bumpings issued from the church. She thought, "That dark figure that went inside a few moments ago is murdering—"

The judge burst out, flailing his arms. Beside him, now getting a little in front, sped—not an Angora, Laura Lou saw with horror, but another and much more dreadful kind of cat. Incredibly, Jeff whipped the rope from Dude's neck. Even more incredibly, he said, "Sic 'em!"

The polecat whirled and dashed between the judge's feet, nearly upsetting him. One jump ahead of the dog, it shot back into the church. Something awful must have happened then, for before the judge

had recovered his balance, the dark figure—a Negro—catapulted blindly through the doorway. There was a violent, grunting impact, and the two men toppled off the steps, wildly clutching at each other.

Laura Lou shut her eyes, turned away. When she and Jeff started on their trip, they might as well keep on traveling. She leaped back, all but overcome, as Dude tore past. Circling, he plunged into the arborvitae, precipitating Ike.

"I trust you're not injured, sir." Jeff's polite tones spun Laura Lou around.

He was calmly assisting the judge to his feet, at the same time keeping a grip on the Negro's collar. Only this wasn't a Negro, after all. His hat had fallen off, revealing straight blond hair and a splotch where blacking had rubbed off his face. The judge's face was a terrifying purple.

"You've captured the arsonist, sir!" Jeff extended a handful of matches and oil-soaked rags scooped from the man's pockets. "See?"

"Hm-m-m, so it seems." The judge's face faded to crimson. Then he quivered. "But let me tell you, young man, that dog—"

Jeff cut in suavely, "My dog appeared very much excited as we came along—I'd had him at the scene of the fire earlier—and you've observed now he went straight to the criminal. Most courageous of you, sir, pinning the man down." As if, thought Laura Lou, the judge could have done otherwise, falling on top of the man. Jeff was making a neat finish. "The

sheriff will be rather chagrined when he hears of it, don't you think so, sir?"

Mumbling to himself, Ike picked up the battered hat, brushed it, held it out. "No wondah folks thinks hit's me doin' dem burnin's. Dis hyah's my hat I los' a few weeks back."

"Why, that's one of papa's old hats!" cried Laura Lou. "Mama gave it to Ike last month."

"The facts," said Jeff, "pointed to someone disguised as Ike. Since the real arsonist could do nothing while his double was locked up, I suggested Ike's release this morning."

"Perfectly logical deduction. Now, let's get away from this—" The judge broke off, choking a little, and suddenly surveyed Laura Lou as if he had not seen her until then. His expression changed. "My dear child, it hadn't occurred to me—I'm deeply grieved for you. The altar is in ruins."

Laura Lou bit back a cry of joy so that it sounded almost like a moan. There couldn't be a church wedding!

"Perhaps," the judge went on kindly, "you will find some consolation in that this has served to clear an innocent man."

"Y-yes, sir, I . . . I do," stammered Laura Lou. Oh, the bay window would make a lovely altar!

"Do you require any assistance with your prisoner, sir?" asked Jeff, still collaring the man.

"Eh?" The judge started, blinked. "Oh, no. Just a few

steps. You'll want to escort Miss Laura Lou home." He took a good grip on his prisoner's arm and made off, stiffly erect. "See you in the morning, Kennard. You'll be in the courtroom, of course?"

Not in the least discomposed, Jeff bowed, raised his hat again. "Certainly. Thank you, sir."

Ike was grinning widely beneath his recovered headgear. "Yo' papa sho goin' be tickled, Miss La' Lo, yes, suh! Kin th'ow 'way all dem traps now."

What did traps matter when she wanted to be alone with Jeff?

"How do you know this is what's been after his chickens?" asked Laura Lou.

The men's eyes met and Ike's face went blank as a new slate. Mystified, staring at the old man, Laura Lou backed away, just as she had in the kitchen this morning. He'd been at papa's traps. And Jeff knew all about it.

"Oh, Jeff!" Her tears spilled out. "Did . . . did you—"

She began to tremble, for his black eyes were on her and he wasn't looking at all cool or composed now. "Things couldn't have worked out better if they'd been planned," he said easily. Then, in the tones he used for her and no one else, "This time tomorrow, Laura Lou, we'll be home."

Laura Lou took his arm and walked away beside him, smiling, aching with loving him. At that moment she loved everything in the whole wide world, particularly polecats.

THE END.

LIEUTENANT JOHNNY

TAKES OVER



Randy Allen, with her candid brown eyes and fresh, outdoors look, made every man think of his girl back home.

BY EDNA GORMAN

RANDY lay flat on her back under the pepper trees, her bare heels digging into the California earth and her deep-brown eyes gazing dreamily up at the powder-puff clouds that drifted across a sky of incredible blue.

In her yellow overalls, she looked even younger than her sixteen years.

"Lana, Gloria, Arabella, Ginger, Tonie—all the glamorous, interest-

ing names there are in the world, and they had to call me Miranda!" she was saying to Ko-Ko, the fat little cocker spaniel cuddled up against her.

Ko-Ko licked her hand, and pretended to be very sympathetic about it.

Randy's round shoulders lifted in a resigned shrug. "Oh, well," she went on, "I guess they thought it was a good enough name for a girl with a mouth that's too big, and a funny nose with freckles on it, and just plain brown hair. Satin black

hair, now, black as a raven's wing, or shimmering gold, like a field of wheat with the sun shining on it—that's something. Or Titian-red, maybe. Or burnished chestnut. But brown! Nobody likes brown hair!"

"Oh, but that's where you're wrong," said a nice voice above her.

Randy rolled over to look briefly up at a pair of blue trouser legs, and a blue sleeve with gold stripes on it. She didn't bother to go any higher. Sailors, soldiers and marines—they came and they went. In the big house beyond the pepper trees, looking out over the Pacific, there was an endless stream of them. Her mother, her older sister and their friends were forever serving drinks, making sandwiches, writing letters and talking softly in the moonlight with men in blue and khaki. Military men were no novelty to Randy.

"Just follow the path and turn to the left. The house is right there," she told the blue legs and the gold stripes.

"Fine," said the nice voice, "but first, I want to know what's wrong with brown hair. I like it. And another thing I like is to lie in the sun and watch cottony little clouds that look like all sorts of things."

"You do?" Surprise jerked Randy erect. Most grown-ups never had time for anything like this, and if they did have time, they thought it wasn't very bright to spend it just gazing up at the sky.

She sat up then, and she found

herself looking into the friendliest eyes she ever had seen, set in a stern young face, browned deep by the sun and the wind. He was a tall young man, slim-waisted and straight, with his officer's cap set jauntily on his dark head. Altogether, he was a figure to stir the pulses of one far more sophisticated than Randy.

But it was his eyes that held her. In spite of their warm smile, there was something haunted in them. Something so hurt and so heart-sick that Randy wanted to cry, or to comfort him. Her heart gave a queer twist, and she looked at him and waited for him to speak again.

"Clouds are great," he said, in an intimate kind of way, as if this were something just between them. "I've stood on deck with nothing within a thousand miles except the sea and the clouds above me," he told her, "and I've played all sorts of goofy games with them."

Randy was all interest now. This was something new, and she was all for it.

"Look at that one sailing over there above the fig tree"—he pointed it out. "That's the admiral's flagship. See the flag out there in front? You can even see the Old Man, and the fellows coming into battle station. That lad there with the long whiskers—he's just back from the Solomons and he hasn't had time to shave yet. And look—"

He caught her arm eagerly, and she squinted upward, all excitement. "There's a spy!" he cried. "What'll

we do? Gosh, what'll we do?"

Randy bit a quick giggle in half. This was fun. He was fun. But she was afraid he was laughing at her, afraid he thought she was just a silly child, out here playing games. Next he would be asking her where her dollies were. She pulled her arm free.

"I think you're being goofy now," she told him severely. "The crowd up at the house will be waiting for you, and you'll be late for coffee if you don't hurry."

He looked down at her, from his six feet of tailored blue-and-gold perfection. And his smile was like no smile she had ever known. But she held her own face remote and still. She refused to let him treat her like an infant.

The tall lieutenant waited, and when he saw that she had completely withdrawn from him, his eyebrows lifted quizzically. He stiffened to attention, and his hand went up in a smart salute.

"Aye, aye, captain," he said. "Your orders shall be carried out."

He turned away then, and swung up the path toward the house, where gay laughter and music came out to meet him. Randy flung herself down on the ground, and a long, dry sob went through her. She wondered why she had been like that, why she hadn't met friendliness with friendliness. Why she couldn't be charming, poised and lovely, like the older girls he would meet up there? It was heartbreaking to be left out of everything.

And then, lying there on the grass, she began to dream. She

was suddenly grown up. She was eighteen, maybe twenty, wearing a long black taffeta dress all swishy around her ankles, with jewels glittering in her ears, and a jeweled butterfly in her hair. She was dancing with an admiral, after having had dinner and cocktails at the Coronada, when a tall young lieutenant entered the room and tried to gain her attention. But she turned away and smiled alluringly up into the admiral's eyes.

It was right here, with those same powder-puff clouds up there in the blue, blue sky and Ko-Ko cocking one eye at her inquiringly, that her dreams began to grow real. In that amazing way in which truth sometimes turns out to be stranger than fiction, things began to whirl into shape quite as she had dreamed them. It was almost like magic.

"Randy!" her sister Iona started the whole thing by calling urgently, as she came running down along the path from the house. "Randy, for goodness sake, where are you?"

"Well, for goodness sake, I'm right here," Randy said a little crossly, not liking very much to be snatched away from such a glamorous dream.

"You've got to get yourself into some decent clothes and come and help us out," Iona told her breathlessly, beginning at the wrong end, as usual. Only no one ever cared where Iona began, she was so beautiful.

"Jean Brent, Doris and Marie have gone up to Los Angeles and Peg just phoned she has such a bad cold she can't stir," she went on.

"It's blood bank day and a lot of the girls are over there, and there's a houseful of the army and navy. Come on, Randy, get going."

"Me!" Randy said, without interest. She shook her overalled leg in the air, and hooted. "What good would I be?"

"Well, you're better than nobody," Iona told her.

"Yes, but not much," Randy pointed out. "They wouldn't even know I was there."

Iona's bright head was on one side, studying the younger girl. "You know, you wouldn't be half bad with make-up," she observed. "You'll be fine when I get through with you. I'll fix your hair and your nails, and you can wear my new gold crêpe. Thank goodness, you can play gin rummy."

Taking it for granted that everything was settled, Iona grabbed her sister's hand and dragged her along.

"We'll slip in the side door," Iona told Randy. "And they'll all think you're someone new. Hurry, darling, it's going to be fun."

A half-hour later, with jewels glittering in her pretty ears and a jeweled butterfly in the brown curls piled high on her queenly head, a slim girl entered the room where four girls were doing their valiant best to show a pleasant time to fifteen service men.

Randy saw them turn and look at her. She saw a stoutish man with a red face detach himself from a group and come toward her. He was Captain Cornwell, a classmate of her father's.

"Darn," she thought, "he'll tell all the others I'm nobody but sixteen-year-old Miranda Allen."

But although the captain had been to dinner here in this very house less than a month ago, although he had sat at the same table with her, he didn't know her! He didn't have the foggiest idea she was that same long-legged girl with the wide, thoughtful eyes, who never had a chance to say anything, because all the grown-ups were saying it so much better.

"How do you do?" he said, holding out his hand. And for a long moment, he stood there looking at her, as if he couldn't take his eyes away. "You know, you gave me quite a shock when you came in just now," he told her. "You were so exactly like my wife, the year we were married. You have that same fresh young glow about you, that same gallant lift, as if with all life ahead of you, you are going out to meet it with bright, gay courage. Will you come and have a drink with an old man, my dear, and let me talk to you about her?"

Randy's spirits soared. If he didn't recognize her and was willing to escort her around, it would be easy with the others, mostly newcomers, she saw. She slipped her arm through the captain's, with just the right mixture of warmth and sophistication, and gave him a smile.

"It's a grand afternoon for a limeade," she said, and glared at their Filipino houseman, daring him to give her away.

She sipped the cool drink daintily,

while her eyes searched the room for the one face she wanted to find. She saw him at last, standing beside Dolly Walters, listening to her with that air of intimate interest that had so captivated Randy.

And, suddenly, the limeade might as well have been water, or nothing at all. There was no taste in her mouth, only something thick and sweet which was creeping all through her, and which wasn't like anything she had ever known before.

She wondered if he recognized her, if he thought she looked foolish, masquerading here like this. Her sensitive face flushed. It was suddenly very important to her to have him think the right things.

Iona introduced them, "Lieutenant Johnny Delavan."

She liked his name. It had a swing that belonged to him. But before they had a chance to talk, others interrupted.

A couple of ensigns and another navy man were planning a poker game with some army lieutenants. They wanted her to sit in. They said they had read in some book how the government could save money by only paying the army, and then giving the navy a chance to play poker with them.

"We'd like to show you what a screwy idea that is," Lieutenant Saunders, a good-looking West Pointer, told her. "We're going to win their last cent."

"Says you!" drawled Ensign Phillips, a lanky, red-headed boy from Texas. "Any old time the army wins a plugged nickel from

the navy playing poker, you let me know! Do you play poker, ma'am?"

"Sorry"—Randy smiled—"no can do. But I'm pretty good at rummy."

"O. K., then it's rummy," they agreed eagerly, and made room for her.

She thought they were just being nice to her. What she didn't know was that she had something none of these other girls had, something that made her stand out, and made every man in the room want to talk to her. She was the ideal of the American girl that every man carried in his heart.

Dolly, twice divorced and on the make for a third husband, Eve, who had been drinking far too much since her husband went down on Attu, even Iona, who went dashing from party to party and who looked tired and somehow faded at twenty-five. Beside them, Randy's skin had a clean, outdoors look. Her eyes were clear and fine, and her lips were warm and young. She was a glimpse of home to these homesick boys. Boys from Georgia, Dakota and Vermont, from Ohio, Nebraska and Maine, shoving off the next day to do the grim job they had to do. Here, in their last port, she was the memory of every man's sweetheart, every man's sister.

The talk around her touched on the war, and Randy shivered. It wasn't fair to send men like these out to be killed. Lieutenant Johnny Delavan, with his crisp dark hair and his eyes that seemed to be always looking at something he

wanted to forget, and his heart-warming smile. He was sweet. It was awful to think she might never see him again.

Almost without volition of her own, she moved toward him. The captain walked beside her, and Dolly Walters said to him, "Darling! I've been waiting for you to get me a drink. There's a lovely sunset on the terrace. Let's go out there."

They went away together, and Randy looked at Johnny Delavan with her candid brown eyes. She wanted to tell him how brave and wonderful she thought he was, and how she meant to make a little prayer that he would come back safe. But, standing there beside him, she was shy, and no words came.

"Which is the real you, I wonder?" he asked her. "The little girl out there watching the clouds, or this lovely young lady in here?"

"How did you know me so quickly?" Randy demanded. "Even the men who have been here quite a lot didn't recognize me."

"Even with all your war paint on, your sweetness showed through," he teased. "Wouldn't you like to dance, Randy? Wait, I've got an idea. How about going to the Sky Room? Wouldn't you like that? Red Hall and his orchestra are there."

Randy was quite sure she was back under the pepper trees, dreaming. Nothing so super could possibly be happening. The Sky Room! There wasn't a girl in school who wouldn't envy her. And

the Sky Room with handsome, wonderful Johnny Delavan—it was too much!

"I'd love it," she told him, a little shakily. "But are you sure you want to? I'm just a kid, you know. I've never been there."

"You didn't have to tell me that, you know." He smiled at her. "Randy, I think you're the most honest girl I've ever met. I do want to take you." He looked at her. "Do you have to fix your hair or anything? It looks all right to me. Where will I find your mother? I'll go ask her. I hope she won't object."

"That's nice of you," Randy told him, and she thought no one was ever quite so thoughtful. "Mother's in Washington—she's in the OPA. Aunt Rachel's taking care of us, but she's at the blood bank. We'll tell Iona, but she won't care, I guess. She said I had to help entertain you men."

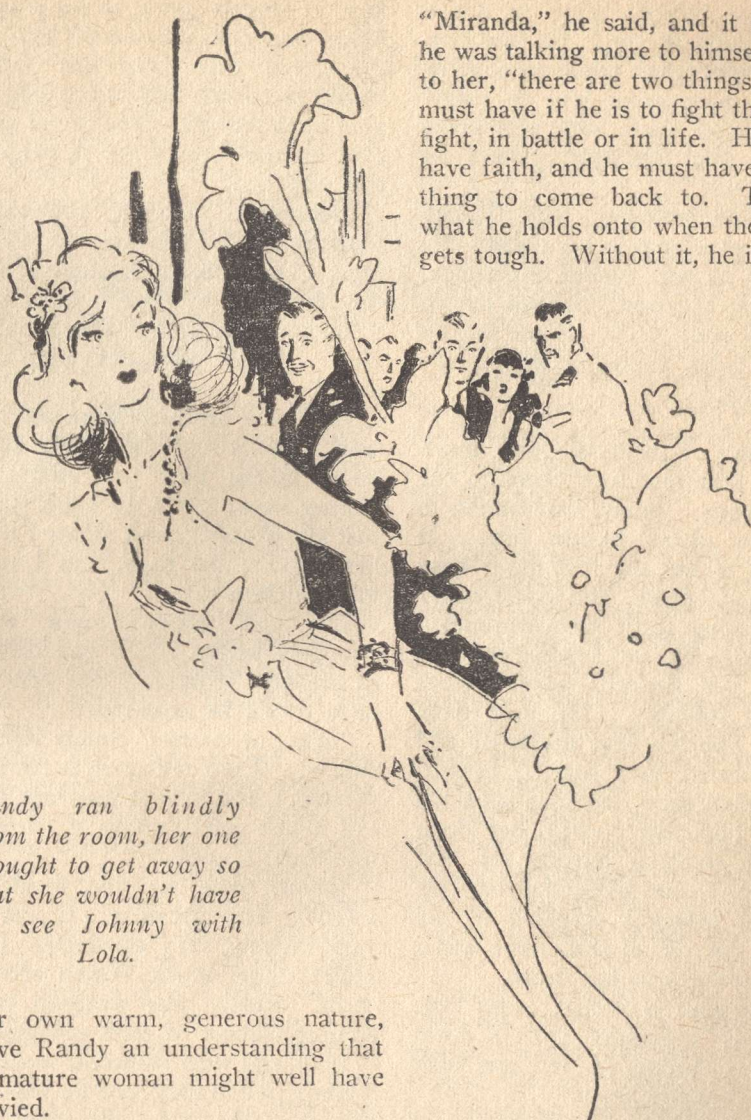
"Well, then, it's settled," he declared. He seemed to be considering something. She waited. "Listen," he said, "would you do something for me—would you wash off that stuff on your face and look the way you did before? And would you let me call you Miranda?"

- She looked at him wonderingly.

"Maybe I'm a little tired of glamour," he went on, and she was shaken at the harshness in his voice. "Maybe I want to get back to something loyal and true once more. Something as staunch as 'Miranda.'"

The nearness she felt to him, and

"Miranda," he said, and it seemed he was talking more to himself than to her, "there are two things a man must have if he is to fight the good fight, in battle or in life. He must have faith, and he must have something to come back to. That is what he holds onto when the going gets tough. Without it, he is lost."



Randy ran blindly from the room, her one thought to get away so that she wouldn't have to see Johnny with Lola.

her own warm, generous nature, gave Randy an understanding that a mature woman might well have envied.

"You've been hurt pretty badly, haven't you?" she asked gently. "And it wasn't the war, was it? It was someone you loved? I'm sorry."

His young face became hard.

Some of the seriousness went out of him then. He took her heart-shaped chin between his thumb and forefinger, and tipped her face up to him.

"It's a terrible thing to kill a man's faith in you," he told her. "Remember that when you grow up and men make love to you—and a good many men will make love to you, Miranda. Don't let them down."

Without knowing why, Randy could feel a lump in her throat. He grinned at her solemn expression.

"What a talker I turned out to be," he said. "This is no way to treat a lady. Come on, kitten, let's get going."

Neither of them said very much in the taxi that took them to the Sky Room. Randy was content to just sit there beside him. It seemed to her she had never been so happy before, and could never be so happy again, nor so proud.

Impulsively, she reached out and curled her slender, warm fingers around Johnny's. He held them tight. She felt very grown-up and sophisticated, very sure of herself. And when they went out upon the dance floor, she decided her dress was as stunning as any she saw there, and she loved the way the jeweled butterfly sparkled in her hair. But for all that, there was a queer sadness in her heart.

"You look so serious, funny little Miranda," Johnny smiled down at her. "Come on, tell me what you're thinking about."

"I don't know," Randy said slowly. "I'm trying to get things straight in my mind, I guess. Because if there are going to be places like this to come to, where people can be happy, gay and care-

free, if there's going to be music, lights and companionship, and all the things that make life worth while, it means that we've got to give up a lot, and some of us may give up our lives even, to keep it this way."

Lieutenant Johnny Delavan's head went up. His face was shining. "Good times, happiness and the freedom to live!" he cried. "You bet we're going to keep it that way. We're the ones who can do it."

"My two brothers were on Bataan," Randy told him. "We don't know where they are now, but mother never gives up hope. She just keeps busy. And nights I hear her walking the floor, and I pray to keep them safe."

The tall officer's eyes were strangely bright. "Do you believe in prayers, Miranda? Do you believe they'll be answered?"

"Why, of course," Randy replied simply. "Look out there at the sea, Johnny. And look at the stars, and — I just can't explain it. It's in my heart, I guess."

Johnny gave her slim shoulders a tender little pressure. It was all very exciting, very wonderful. Red Hall's magic music flowed around them. Randy was wrapped in a shining blanket of pure enjoyment.

Now and then someone spoke to Johnny, but Randy saw no one she knew. This was disappointing. She would have liked the whole school to come flocking in to see her there. She twisted slightly as she danced past a long mirror, to admire herself.

"Goodness!" she cried. "Look how shiny my nose is. I'll have to go to the powder room. But I won't put on any rouge or lipstick."

There was a blond girl seated at the dressing table when Randy entered the beige-and-turquoise powder room. Their eyes met in the mirror.

"Hello," the other girl said. "I saw you come in with Lieutenant Delavan. Are you his sister or a relative?"

Randy looked at her levelly. "You mean because I'm so young?" she asked. "No, I'm no relation. I'm just a good friend."

"Oh," the girl said, as if she didn't believe it. "I just wondered. It looks kind of funny to see him with a girl like you, after the way he went all out for Lola Pierce."

"Lola Pierce!" Randy echoed, in spite of herself. "You mean the dancer?"

"Yes, didn't you know? They were going to be married when he came home this week. They say he long-distanced her every night. But he got here unexpectedly, and found her in the arms of another man. There was quite a scandal."

"Oh," Randy thought unhappily, "how could any girl treat such a wonderful man as Johnny like that?" She wished achingly that she was more experienced so that she could help him, so that she could make him forget. It was terrible to be so helpless. She saw now why he was paying this attention to her. He had lost faith in girls, and he just wanted someone to talk to.

"Do you think he still loves her?" she asked the blond girl hesitatingly.

"That's what everyone says," the girl replied, as she gave her scarlet lips a final touch, and turned toward the door. "Well, so long, kid, have fun."

Randy sat there a long time, troubled and uncertain. There must be some way she could help Johnny. Perhaps—she sat up very straight, and her heart began to race—perhaps, if she talked to Lola and told her Johnny was shoving off in one more day, and that he still loved her and was unhappy—

When an idea came into Randy's head, it never remained there long without action, especially when any friend of hers was concerned. She knew where Lola Pierce lived; it was only a short distance away. It was easy to find her number in the phone book. She dialed it with tense, cold fingers.

"Yes," Lola's low, throaty voice told her, "of course I remember Lieutenant Delavan. I've been expecting him to call all evening. Where is he? What has happened?"

Randy wondered dizzily if this were the truth. Was Johnny intending to call this girl who had treated him so terribly? Or was the blonde in the powder room all wrong, or malicious, and there really hadn't been any trouble between him and Lola? Maybe Johnny was only being nice to her, Randy, to fill in time until Lola could be with him. She was a

popular dancer, she must have a great many things to do, business engagements, perhaps. And even Johnny would have to wait.

"He's at the Sky Room," she said slowly. "I don't know what you will think of me, Miss Pierce, and I'm sorry if I'm wrong, but I thought you might like to know. Johnny's such a swell guy."

"Who is this?" Lola Pierce asked sharply. "What goes on? Is he alone?"

"Yes," Randy answered, with misery flooding through her. "He's alone"—because he would be now—"and I thought you wouldn't want him to be, when he has such a short time ashore. Well, that's all, I guess. Good-by."

She hung up. Her throat felt dry and achy. She had made a mess of things, she told herself unhappily. She was afraid to go back to Johnny, even to tell him she had to go home, and she wondered what excuse she could make. She loitered at the dressing table until she began to feel conspicuous. Her feet were leaden as she made her way back to the dance floor.

"Well, hello, little lost girl," Johnny greeted her. "Another five minutes and I'd have called out the marines."

Randy wanted to cry. He was such fun to be with. She had hoped this evening might never end, and now she had given it away to Lola Pierce. But she mustn't mind, if it would make Johnny happy. She wasn't much good at telling lies, even little white ones. But she managed to think up

a pretty good reason for getting away.

"I met a friend just now," she told him nervously. "He's a boy in school. He wants to take me to a radio broadcast. You don't mind, do you? After our next dance, I mean."

That much she would have—one last dance to remember always.

"Why, no, kitten," Johnny said slowly, "if you want to."

Randy's eyes were on the door. Would Lola come? If she didn't, it would mean she wasn't interested in Johnny any more, although this didn't for a moment seem possible, and then Randy could explain that meeting the boy from school was a joke. Nobody could have lured her away from Johnny, if she hadn't felt she was helping him.

They circled the floor once more, and still Lola didn't come. Randy was torn between surging relief for her own sake, and an ache for Johnny.

And then, suddenly, she could feel him stiffen against her. His breath caught sharply. She saw he was looking at the beautiful girl who stood in the doorway. A girl whose exquisite loveliness made Randy gasp. She was slender, golden and vibrant. She was exciting, vivid and graceful. Randy was sure no man could look at her and not adore her.

She heard Johnny's half whispered, "Lola!" She saw the white line around his lips.

And then they were beside her. The dancer gave a quick, breathless cry, "Johnny!" She swayed toward

him, and held out both her lovely hands.

Randy was out of his arms then, and Johnny took the hands held out to him so appealingly.

"I heard you were here," Lola told him, and her eyes were ardent and eager behind incredibly long lashes. "Oh, Johnny, you don't know how wonderful it is to see you again."

"I can guess," he said stiffly.

"Can't we go some place and talk, darling?" Lola pleaded. "You never gave me a chance to explain—"

For the first time, she seemed to be aware of Randy. She looked toward her, and Randy felt awkward, alone and terribly young. She didn't know how to break away. Lola was glad enough to help her.

"And you, my dear," she said smoothly, "you wouldn't mind waiting out in the lounge a bit, would you? Johnny and I have something vitally important to say to each other."

Lieutenant Johnny Delavan's good-looking face tightened. "Aren't you being a little high-handed, even for you?" he grated.

Randy's heart was beating painfully. Her only thought was to disappear. She was sure that Lola was crazy about Johnny, and she was equally sure that no man could resist such exquisite beauty. He could go back to sea happy, and that heartbreaking look would be gone from his eyes.

"Good-by, now, and thanks a lot for a wonderful evening," she managed, and she was really poised and

smooth about it. "I mustn't keep the gentleman waiting, you know."

"Miranda!" Johnny said quickly.

But she was gone. Once outside the room, she looked back. Lola stood close against Johnny, looking up at him with half-closed eyes. And as Randy paused there, they moved away together.

Randy went blindly along the hall, and caught a waiting elevator. There was a numb feeling creeping over her. She was sick—sick all over with a strange, lonesome, left-out feeling. She had liked Johnny so much. She had built up a gorgeous dream about his always being there, where she could reach out and find him. But now this dull hurt was worse than anything she had ever known.

Achingly, she longed for her mother. She had no money for a taxi, and she ran along the street, wanting nothing so much as the friendly darkness of her own room. And when, after what seemed miles of walking, she reached it, she was glad to find no one at home. She threw herself across the bed, and slept until morning.

The next day dragged along, somehow. She took a long walk along the shore, and tried not to think. Above all, she tried not to meet anyone she knew.

Afternoon came, and when sailors and soldiers began to fill up the house once more, she slipped out to her favorite spot under the pepper trees. She stretched out on the grass, and covered her eyes with her folded arms. The clouds didn't

seem very interesting today, somehow.

"Hi!" said Johnny's voice, all at once. "Where the heck did you disappear to last night? I hunted for you all over, after I had deposited Lola in a taxi and waved her on her way. She told me, by the way, what you had done, that you had called her. I figured that the boy from school was an invention of your imagination, so I came to your house, but it was dark."

Randy rolled over and looked at him. "Are you all right?" she asked anxiously. "Did you get everything fixed up with Lola?"

"Oh, for Pete's sake, forget Lola, can't you?" he grumbled. "That ended when I came back and found out—well, a lot of things. It died like that!" He snapped his fingers.

"But I thought you were breaking your heart over her," Randy said. "And it seemed so wrong for you to be hurt, when you're doing so much out there for her and for all of us."

Lieutenant Johnny Delavan's face was thoughtful. "I'm sorry about it all," he told her. "I confess it did knock me for a loop when I first discovered how worthless she is. But not all the king's horses and all the king's men could put that affair together again."

"And you aren't going to feel sad any more?" she asked happily.

"I promise." He smiled. "You see, Miranda, the girls men think about out there, are the true blue ones. The ones sweet and gener-

ous, who would give up an evening they loved to help a pal, as you did last night. When a man is face to face with grim reality, he has to have something real to cling to. Something fine, loyal and shining. Which reminds me. I'm shoving off tonight, and I'd like to have your picture to take along, kitten."

"My picture!" Randy said in a tight voice. "Why, I look awful!"

"Oh, no, you don't," he told her, grinning. "You look like the girl every man believes American girls are. Girls with friendship in their eyes, with ideals in their hearts."

"Men in uniform need someone like you to remind them there are girls back home worth fighting for. I'll carry your picture with me, and sometimes you'll be my pal, sometimes you'll be my sister, and sometimes you'll be the girl I dream of marrying. You'll be the one who is standing by. Thank Heaven for you, Miranda, and for all girls like you, who give a man new courage and faith."

Tears were streaming down Randy's face now, and he took out his handkerchief and wiped them away gently.

"Who knows when it will be over?" he said. "But wherever you are, and whatever you do, don't forget me, kitten. And I'll never forget you. I'll always remember the sweetness of you, the warmth of you against my heart and the freshness of your lips. I'm going to kiss you, Miranda—a good-by kiss."

THE END.

There's always divorce. With this thought in mind, Alixe and Wade Townsend give their fantastic marriage a six-month trial.

A Four-Part Novel—

Conclusion



A MARRIAGE IS ANNOUNCED

BY INEZ SABASTIAN

VII.

ALIXE had never gone apartment hunting in New York before, and, consequently, had only a vague notion of what rents might be. She knew that Merilee Bishop paid an enormous amount of money for six rooms and three baths, and that

Lisa Chalmers' penthouse cost even more. Wade made it clear from the start that he was prepared to pay only a moderate rental.

"We'll look at every house that has a sign out," he said. "If we can't find an apartment at our price,

we'll take furnished rooms."

Eventually, when Alixe was almost exhausted, they found something that suited him. By that time she would have settled for a bench in the Grand Central Station. She had wearily dragged herself upstairs and down, had seen bedrooms the size of clothes closets, furniture that made her wince. Once, as they reached the street, Wade had turned to her with a grim smile.

"I told you it would be like this," he told her. "Want to go back on your suggestion that we take an apartment? It's not too late to change your mind, you know."

She shook her head. If this was the only way that she could win his love, it was the way that she had to take.

They found an apartment at last that would do. It was on a side street near First Avenue, up five flights of stairs. A woman whose husband had changed jobs, and was going to travel most of the time, was willing to sublet her home.

"You look as if you'd be careful of my things," she said, her anxious gray eyes surveying Alixe. "I'll let you have it for sixty a month."

There was a short hall, with a bathroom opening from it on one side and a bedroom on the other. At the end of the hall was the living room, with a kitchenette at one end, hidden behind a screen. Alixe thought the furniture almost the most hideous that she ever had seen. But she knew that Wade was watching her skeptically, so

she looked about her, trying to seem pleased.

"I'll be very careful of your things, Mrs. Parker," she promised earnestly.

"Well, just so's you don't give a lot of parties, with people putting wet glasses down everywhere and marking things up," Mrs. Parker said. "Do you want to move in right now? I can stay with my sister tonight, and I'll join my husband in Chicago right away, now that this is off my hands."

"How about it, Alixe?" asked Wade. "Would you like to move in today, or do you want to go back to Merilee's till tomorrow?"

"Oh, no," she said quickly. She was afraid, if she did that, he would think that she was dismayed, hesitating about joining him. "I'll go there, pack a bag and come right back. Will you be here? Where are your things?"

"My bag's checked. I can get it in two shakes," he replied.

"I've upset your plans," she told him, as they walked down the stairs. "You must have had things to do today, and I don't want to interfere. Honestly, I don't, Wade."

He smiled at her. "You're not interfering," he answered. "But, Alixe, be honest about this, too. You've seen where you'll be living. You'll have to get along on very little money. So far you've been a good sport about this whole business. Don't you want to call it off?"

"You're the most obstinate man I ever saw," she told him flatly.

"And I'm getting very tired of telling you that I do want to share an apartment with you. If you ask me again, I'll throw things!"

Merilee was at home when Alixe got there, having tea by the fire. "Well?" she asked, as Alixe hurried in. "Where's Wade?"

"Getting his things," Alixe replied over her shoulder, as she rushed toward her room. "We've found an apartment, and we're moving right in right away."

"I don't blame you." Merilee picked up her teacup and strolled into the bedroom after her. "Where are you going to live? I wish you'd taken the apartment on the floor below this. It's vacant, you know."

Alixé was dragging out a suitcase. "We couldn't afford it," she said, dumping the suitcase on the bed and beginning to collect clothes. "We're going to be poor. Wade's just a clerk in a law office, you know."

Merilee looked startled. "No, I didn't know," she replied. "But, of course, you'll have an allowance from home."

Alixé shook her head. "Wade doesn't want me to. We're going to live on his salary."

"But, Alixe, you simply can't!" protested Merilee, her eyes widening. "Law clerks absolutely don't earn anything at all. You'll practically starve. You really will."

"All right, I'll starve," Alixe told her, laughing. "I'll come over and pick up the rest of my things some day soon, Merilee. I must run now."

Merilee sighed. "I wish I didn't envy you so, whether you go hungry or not," she said. "When Clip and I were married I felt just the way you do. I'd have married him if he hadn't had a penny. I hope you'll be able to get a good maid. Remember what happened to you when you tried to do war work."

"This'll be different," Alixe replied. She was determined that nothing was going to be too difficult, if she could be with Wade.

But carrying her suitcase up those long flights of stairs was almost too much for her. She paused on a landing and, suddenly, Wade was running down the stairs to her, to pick up the bag.

"I thought I heard you coming," he said. "These stairs will be tough till we get used to them."

He put the suitcase in the bedroom, that opened on an air shaft. Alixe glanced out the window and drew the shade. It seemed to her that the opposite window was almost against her own. The room seemed to have shrunk since she had first looked at it, and to be much more airless.

"I'll sleep on the couch in the living room," Wade went on. "I can keep my clothes in that coat closet off the hall. That'll leave this room for you."

She sat down on the wide, lumpy bed. Unwillingly, she contrasted her surroundings with her room at Merilee's, with its view of the river, its charming color scheme, its many conveniences. There were clean newspapers in these dresser drawers, instead of the quilted satin pads

to which she was accustomed. She got up and took out her sheer, lacy underwear and laid it in them. She hung her dresses and a suit in the high, narrow closet, put her toilet articles on the dresser, realizing dimly that there was no dressing table. Then she went into the living room.

"Ready for dinner?" asked Wade. "I brought some food in. I'll be cook tonight, unless you want to."

"I can't do anything but make tea," she said. Then, as he smiled, "But I'm going to learn," she added determinedly.

She bought a cookbook the next morning, but found it rather complicated. So she evolved a method of her own. She went to the big supermarket on First Avenue and watched other women shop. When one woman bought something that appealed to Alixe, she asked the woman how to cook it. She saved the dishes that turned out badly and ate them herself for luncheon.

But, on the whole, she was successful. She brought all her intelligence to learning to shop so that the money Wade gave her the first of each week would go as far as possible, and then to learning to cook the food properly. A Frenchwoman who lived in the other apartment on that floor taught her things that she could never have learned from books. A neighbor with whom she made friends in the market, puffed up the stairs and spent an afternoon giving her a cooking lesson that delighted Alixe. She

began to feel that all her life she had been missing something.

To her delight, Wade began to look less haggard, less tired. Once again, his eyes had the old fearless, confident look. And best of all, he seemed glad to get home at night. He had spoken truly when he said that he might be nervous and cross. More than once, in those first weeks, he strode out of the house immediately after dinner, tense and irritable, and did not come home until dawn. Alixe lay in bed, listening for his step, relaxing at last when she heard him open the front door and go quietly down the passage.

She had got the couch ready for him, had laid his pajamas across the foot of it. With all her heart she longed to go to him, to ask what was the matter and offer to help if she could, but she did not dare. It hurt that he did not confide in her, could only hope that some day he would.

Each time, he apologized the following morning, saying that he had been in a vile mood and had to walk it off. But after a little while, he no longer went tramping off by himself, as he often had at first, to stay an hour or two and come back exhausted. Instead, he and Alixe sometimes walked down to the East River and sat there, with the cool wind blowing across their faces. And she began to know a quiet, deep content that conquered the impatience that had made this new life doubly difficult for her. Surely, after a while, Wade would realize

that she did love him, that their living together was not merely a sop to her pride, a preliminary to a divorce that her friends would accept without curiosity?

"Guess I'm finally learning to be a civilian again," he told her one evening. "I passed two colonels on the street today without having my right arm start to jerk up in a salute. Bixby, at the office, says he still finds himself saluting, and he's been out longer than I have."

"Was Bixby in the office when you left to go into the army?" she asked. She longed to have him tell her about the office, discuss his business affairs with her, but he had never before mentioned it.

"No, he's new since I came back," he said, and changed the subject.

But Alixe smiled to herself. This was an opening wedge. He was accustomed to having her there at home now. Perhaps it wouldn't be long before he'd accept her more fully. She'd just have to wait.

Merilee had asked them to dinner soon after they moved into the apartment, but Alixe had declined the invitation. "We just don't want to go anywhere or see anyone, for a while," she wrote. "After all, we have a good deal of lost time to make up for, you know. We really have to get acquainted, as you said we would. I don't want to be ungracious, Merilee, but I'd rather not see even you just now."

"All right, I won't intrude," Merilee wrote back. "But Clip's back at last, and he's never met Wade. They'd get along fine together, I'm sure. Let me know

when you get your phone in, so that we can at least talk to each other once in a while."

But no telephone was put in. Alixe had not even applied for one. That would be an extra expense, and she was being careful about extra expenses these days. She might as well have been living on the other side of the earth, as far as seeing her friends was concerned. Sometimes she read about them in the society pages of the newspapers. Mary Searles had a daughter. Lisa Chalmers was marrying a Canadian, and going to Quebec to live. Alixe cashed her birthday check from her father and bought a gift for the baby and one for Lisa. Patty Seward's husband returned from Europe, and died a few weeks later. Alixe went to see Patty, and the controlled grief in the other woman's eyes sent her hurrying home, to stand in a window of the living room, waiting breathlessly for the first glimpse of Wade coming down the street.

The summer heat descended suddenly on the city, beating up from the pavements, pouring down from the brassy sky. It seemed to Alixe that she could hardly breathe. Her bedroom was so airless that Wade urged her to change rooms with him, but she refused. Her mother wrote from Massachusetts, saying that Wade and Alixe must come up for a week end, at least, if they could not stay longer. Alixe smiled as she replied that it was out of the question, thinking of how shocked Janet Chanler would be if she knew that they could not

afford the fare. She was glad that none of her friends but Merilee knew where she lived. It would have been difficult to refuse invitations to Long Island or Connecticut.

"Well, you won't have to stick this out much longer," Wade remarked one night at dinner, when Alixe could swallow nothing but iced tea. Then, as she looked at him blankly, "The six months is nearly up, you know. And realizing that you won't ever have to live like this again, ought to make it a little easier for you."

She understood what he meant after that first, sickening moment. This was the first time that he had referred to the plan for her to divorce him after six months, and she had happily forgotten about it during these last weeks. She had been counting on time to prove to him that she did care for him. Now his words seemed to mean that it was useless to go on hoping.

"Oh, I don't mind the hot weather," she said casually. "I'm not eating tonight because I kept sampling things while I was getting dinner. Just think of all the training I'm getting as a cook. I'll be able to get a job now, if I ever have to."

Wade laughed. "I'll give you a reference," he told her. "But maybe you need a vacation from being chef. I got a raise today. We can go out to dinner after this."

Alixé shook her head. "We get better meals right here than we'd have in any restaurant but an expensive one," she said. "And it

would break my heart to pay money for something that wasn't as good as my own meals. You take the raise and buy yourself a new suit."

"I've got a couple of old ones that will do," he told her. "The money's for you."

Alixé accepted it, bought deck chairs and took them up to the roof—long, comfortable chairs with thickly padded mattresses, the kind that she had lounged around in at home. Sitting up there at night was fairly quiet and cool, and they could see the stars. She was delighted to see that the summer suits that Wade produced were very good ones, as well tailored as the clothes Henry Stanton wore. She was especially glad of that when, a few days later, her sister Kate appeared one afternoon just after Wade got home.

"I got your address from Merilee Bishop," she announced. "I'm here just for a day or two, and I had to come and see what sort of man my sister married." She tipped her red head on one side and surveyed Wade thoughtfully, then stood on tiptoe and kissed him. "You're certainly a great improvement on Henry Stanton," she observed. "Also on practically all the other men I've met recently. I'm sorry it's my sister you married, so that there's no chance for me."

"I'll telegraph you if she ever walks out on me," he told her coolly. "That could happen, you know."

"I doubt it. Alixe isn't a walker-outer," she replied.

Kate's appearance shocked Alixe. She looked much older and harder than she had when Alixe last saw her. Her beauty seemed to have dimmed and her violet eyes were haunted, unhappy. Her fingers, on which the sparkling, blue-white diamonds slipped and turned, were far too thin, and she moved them restlessly as she talked.

"This deserves a celebration," declared Wade. "Our budget doesn't include liquor as a rule, Kate, but it certainly does for this. I'm going out to get some."

When the door had closed behind him, Kate strolled around the living room. "Rather frightful place, isn't it?" she observed. "But I take it that you decided that it was all for love and nothing else mattered, when you married him. You're right, of course. I suppose Wade's the kind who'd have fits if I gave you some money?"

"He most certainly would. I don't even take an allowance from father," Alixe replied quickly.

"Well, it's better not to. Do you know, I wish I'd stuck to my first husband? I really do. If he'd made me live on what he earned, I'd have been happier. He was a lot like Wade, had loads of charm, heaps of magnetism. He was working as a chauffeur to get money enough to go through medical school, you know. He's a doctor now, and I'll bet a good one."

"Why did you leave him?" asked Alixe. "Didn't you love him?"

"Yes, I did, but— Oh, I don't know. I never know why I do

anything, do I? Perhaps I was too sure of him."

"What's your score on husbands now?" asked Alixe, as Kate laughed, an empty, musical laugh.

"I've had five, so far. I'm on my way back from Reno now. I don't know what I'm going to do next. Seeing you and Wade together—I wonder—" She stood there looking at Alixe thoughtfully. The faint breeze that came through the windows ruffled her red hair, blew the thin folds of her black dress against her figure. "Do you know what I'm going to do?" she demanded. "I'm going to see Neal Baxton. I'm going to marry him again!"

Alixe was aghast. "But . . . but how do you know—" she began.

"I know that he's always loved me," Kate interrupted. "I've had a note from him every New Year's Day. I don't know how he found out where I was, but he always did. Just a line, wishing me happiness during the new year, and giving me his address. This time," said Kate confidently, laughing a little, "this time I'm going to be happy!"

Wade came in just then, and she held out her hands. "Want me to be bartender?" she asked. "I'm awfully good at it. It's almost the best thing I do, mixing drinks."

He shook his head, and kept a firm hold on the bottles. "I don't care how good you are at it, it's my job," he told her.

She turned to Alixe. "See?" she said. "That's the kind of man I should have married. One who'd

put me in my place and keep me there. I think I'll send Neal up here to take lessons from Wade."

When she had gone, Alixe turned to Wade. "Do you see what I was afraid of?" she asked. "Do you see that Kate and I are enough alike so that I'd have been like her, wretched and unhappy, daring people to be sorry for me? It frightens me to see how changed she is. I'd have been like that, if you hadn't married me."

He shook his head. "You'd never have been like that," he told her. "You have more backbone than she has. You'd never have given up and taken the easiest way of proving that you're desirable, as Kate has. I know you well enough for that."

"Knowing how you could love the right man and trying to find him—that's not the easiest thing to do," she said.

"I hope you'll find him some day," he replied. "And I still don't believe that I gave you any cause for being grateful to me. When you say that you are, or imply it, I'm as much annoyed as you were when I tried to talk you out of coming here to live, because I thought you couldn't stand being poor. I was wrong. Give me a break and grant that you are, Alixe. Better go to bed now. You look tired."

"All right," she said, and went down the hall to the tiny bedroom, to the bed that was so very near the couch in the living room where he slept, yet was separated from it by such a gulf.

She felt so dismal, so forlorn, that sleep was out of the question. He'd been so casual when he said he hoped that some day she would find the right man, so very ready to let her go if she did. And, until today, she had felt sure that she was really making progress with him at last. Alixe told herself that now she would give up. It was useless to go on like this. Wade liked her, but he didn't love her, and never would.

There was consolation in the fact that he looked and felt so much better than he had a few months ago, when they took the apartment. At least, she had done something for him. Perhaps he'd miss her after she left. She'd go the next evening, she decided. She'd pack up during the day, and when he came home, after he'd had dinner, she'd tell him that she was leaving.

"And he'll probably say, 'Fine!' and offer to carry my bags downstairs and get me a taxi," she reflected bitterly. "That's how much I mean to him! That's—"

Suddenly, she sat bolt upright, jarred out of the depths of her wretchedness by the strong odor of smoke. It was unmistakable. She strained her eyes, trying to see through the darkness, to find the lighter square that was the window. Then she realized that thick, black billows of smoke were rolling up from below.

Alixe leaped out of bed and ran into the hall. "Wade! Wade!" she shouted, as she pelted along the hall in her bare feet, her nightgown



"I know we're trapped," Alixe gasped. "We're going to die. Oh, Wade, I love you so!"

fluttering about her. "The house is on fire!"

He answered, "What?" sleepily. The next instant he was wide awake. The sharp, dreadful light of fire flared beyond the living room windows, a tongue of flame licked through the space between the edge of the fire escape and the window frame. Wade's tall figure was silhouetted against the brilliant light as he jumped up and hurried toward her. Then smoke darkened the room.

Wade put his arm around Alixe and reached over her shoulder with the other hand for the light switch. It clicked, but the room was still dark. Suddenly, the fire blazed up again.

Alixé gasped, clinging to him, "The smoke came into my room, and— Oh, don't leave me!"

He had darted away and was snatching up the couch cover that had been thrown across a chair. "Don't be frightened. I'll take care of you. I'm going to roll you up in this and carry you down the fire escape." He threw it around her, picked her up and carried her to the window. But as he looked out, a burst of flame shot toward the sky. "O. K., we'll take the stairs," he said.

But the hall was filled with black, heavy smoke. It rolled up the stairs like something alive, menacing, reaching out for them. Wade stepped back into the room and slammed the door.

"Looks as if we'll have to stay here," he remarked, but the tension in his voice told Alixe that he was

trying to quiet her fears by merely pretending to speak lightly. "There's nothing to be afraid of, honey. The fire department'll be here in two minutes." He pushed her down on the floor, lay down himself, and drew the couch cover over their heads. "Just be quiet. Don't breathe deeply, because of the smoke," he said.

Alixé shuddered, and buried her face in his shoulder. He knew as well as she did how fast old houses like this one burned. Floors fell in, walls collapsed; the whole thing would go like dry kindling. She had seen a fire like that once, late at night when she was coming home from a party. People had stood at the windows and screamed for help.

She lifted her face a little. Her arms were around his neck, drawing his head toward hers, so that he could hear her above the clamor in the street below. "I know we're trapped," she cried. "We're going to die. Oh, Wade, I love you so. I never could make you understand how much I loved you. I'd rather die like this than go on living without you, truly I would."

His face was pressed to hers. When he spoke, she felt the movement of his lips against her cheek. "I love you, too, honey," he said, his voice trembling with emotion. "I didn't dare believe you. I thought you were sorry for me, just pretending—"

"Hey, anybody in here?" It was a man's voice, shouting from the fire escape, outside a front window. Wade threw back the enveloping

cover and jumped up, dragging Alixe with him. A fireman stood there, peering in, turning the clear brilliance of his flashlight from side to side of the room.

"Yes, two of us," called Wade. "Right here."

"Are you O. K.? Everything's all right. Hope you didn't get scared," the fireman said briskly. "Kid downstairs swiped some chemical stuff and got to experimenting with it, got scared when it got out of control and opened all the doors. That's why the smoke came up here so fast. The draft blew it. They're checking everything over, so you don't need to worry. You'll have lights again soon."

As he disappeared, Alixe drew a long, unsteady breath. "It . . . it looked so dreadful," she said shakily. "Well, I'll go back to bed now," and she turned toward the door. "I guess I—"

Wade strode across the floor and took her in his arms again. "Want me to tell you what you were going to say?" he asked, and laughter ran through his voice. "You were going to be very proud and aloof, and say that you guessed you'd made a fool of yourself because you were frightened. Weren't you?"

"Why, yes, I was," Alixe whispered.

"And then you were going to go back to your room, and maybe you'd wished you hadn't. Weren't you?"

"I— How do you know?"

"I can guess. Alixe, I've loved you so much! But I didn't dare

believe that you could care for me. I was so sure that you were just being a good sport, that you were too stubborn to admit that you'd made a mistake, and I had to be sure. I had to! Those two times I kissed you, the world stopped moving. There was nothing, nobody but you! Say that you love me, Alixe. Say it now, when I can let myself believe you!"

She laid her hands against his cheeks, as she had so longed to do. "I love you—I love you," she murmured, kissing his lips lightly each time she paused. "I wish I knew a thousand different ways of saying it, and I know only that one."

He held her to him so closely that she was breathless. "I love you, too, my darling," he said, his voice deep, caressing. "You're mine!" he exclaimed suddenly, exultantly, and bent his head to kiss her. "I can hardly believe it, but you're mine."

VIII.

Alixé was sure that she was dreaming the next morning, when she drowsily opened her eyes as Wade gently eased her head from its resting place on his shoulder. So often she had had this dream—could it be real now?

"Don't leave me," she murmured, and he kissed her, his lips lingering on hers, moving to rest for an instant on her eyelids, her throat, before they touched her lips again. She drifted back into sleep, happy as she had never been before in her life.

When she woke again she told herself, as she dressed, that this would be a day she would remember all her life, because it was so filled with joy. It was a gray day, rather chilly, with rain clouds hanging low, but for her the sun shone. She cleaned the small apartment, although she had cleaned it thoroughly the day before. It could not be bright and gay enough for Wade's return. She bought flowers at the little open stall on the corner. The man looked at her radiant face and brought fresh ones from his refrigerator, instead of selling her the slightly wilted blossoms that stood in pails on the sidewalk.

Marketing was fun. She could say, as other women did, "My husband likes steak. I have enough points for one, but it must be very good," or "My husband simply loathes beets—haven't you some fresh lima beans?" She had never referred to Wade that way before, because she would have felt that it was so false, that she had no right to call him by that precious name. Now the words were glorious, thrilling her every time she said them.

At home again, she tried not to look at the clock, because the hands seemed to stand still.

"It must be five now, at least, maybe a quarter past," she decided finally. But it wasn't—it was only half past four. Then the bell rang, and she tore down the hall to the door, thinking that Wade had come home early, and for some reason didn't want to use his key. But it was Merilee Bishop who stood

there, with her husband and Henry Stanton, who grinned down at Alixe over the others' heads.

"Darling!" Merilee exclaimed, embracing her. "We simply had to see you, because it's been such ages. I'd have telephoned if you'd had a phone, but since you didn't we just came along. Henry just got back from San Francisco, you see, and he began pestering me, and here we are. You know how Henry is when he wants anything!"

"Hey, Merilee, let her go and give Clip and me a chance," urged Henry.

Alixé turned and walked swiftly ahead of them to the living room, biting her lips, trying to conquer her bitter disappointment. She wanted to be alone today, of all days, when Wade came. Well, perhaps she could get rid of them before he arrived.

"You've got to go out and celebrate with us, because I'm home at last," Henry told her. "And I'm a free man. Yep, Lucille threw me over. History repeats itself, you see, Alixe, only this time it's reversed." He sat down on the arm of her chair and patted her shoulder, leaning forward a little to look at her.

"Even though you're free you can't sit there," she protested. "This furniture belongs to a fussy woman who'd never permit it."

She regretted saying that, a moment later, when he grasped her hand as he rose, and pulled her over to the couch. "I like this better anyway," he said. "Pretty beautiful these days, aren't you?"

"I'm pretty busy. I can't even be hospitable, because this evening Wade and I are—"

"I don't care what you've planned. You've simply got to go out with us," Merilee declared. "You're my best friend, and I haven't seen you for months. I won't be brushed off, Alixe—I absolutely won't."

"Surely, you'll go with us for a cocktail and dinner?" urged Clip Bishop. "Please, Alixe, come along."

"But, you see—" Alixe fumbled for an excuse, wanting a good one, because she was so fond of Merilee and Clip. "Wade and I—" She stopped as she heard Wade's key in the lock. She jerked away from Henry, and reached the front door as he opened it.

"Sweetheart!" he said, and caught her up in his arms. "I could hardly wait to get home to you." He set her down and put one hand into his pocket. "Here's something for you, darling."

He opened the small white box and took out a ring. "We're through with the old one," and he drew the thin gold wedding ring off her finger and threw it on the floor. "This is the ring you should have had all along."

It was a circlet of sparkling stones. They looked almost like diamonds, thought Alixe. "But of course they're not," she told herself. "He couldn't possibly afford real ones. Oh, dear, Merilee will spot them as an imitation at once, and so will Henry. They'll feel sorry for Wade. They'll remem-

ber that I've always hated things that aren't real. I can't tell them how I'd love anything that he got for me."

Somehow, she must protect him from that. He'd been a darling, buying her the ring. They mustn't have a chance to talk about him, look down on him.

"Merilee's here, with her husband," she told Wade, as she walked ahead of him to the living room. "And Henry Stanton," she added reluctantly. Standing aside as he spoke to them, she slipped the ring off her finger. Her handbag lay on a table near the door, and she put the ring into it, wishing that she could look at it again.

"Come back here and sit on the couch with me again, baby," Henry said to her. "Don't be shy just because your husband's home." He turned to Wade. "You blighted my life when you married Alixe," he told him. "I can't find anyone who can take her place."

"How about Lucille?" asked Wade.

"She wouldn't have me. Broke our engagement and married somebody else." He went across the room to Alixe and took her hand. "Come on over here and let me pretend that I never lost you," he insisted. "Well, well—" He held up her left hand and looked at it. "No wedding ring! It's the beginning of the end when a wife stops wearing her occupational badge, isn't it, Merilee?"

"So I've heard," said Merilee. "Mine's always been so tight that I couldn't budge it. Well, Alixe,

coming with us? How about it, Wade? We want you two to have dinner with us."

"I don't want to go," Alixe protested, pulling her hand from Henry's grasp, her cheeks blazing. She did not dare look at Wade. She felt sick, ashamed. If only Henry wouldn't stand so close to her! Surely, Wade could see that she really did want to get away from Henry?

"Of course you'll go," Wade was saying, and his voice was the one that she had thought she would never hear again, impersonal, casual, shutting her out, holding no love for her. "I've got to get back to the office right away—just came home for a few moments, to get some papers I forgot this morning. Run along and have some fun, Alixe."

She protested again that she didn't want to go, but the others were maddeningly insistent. Wade went to the desk and took a folder from it, then picked up his hat.

"Better go," he told her. His eyes were cynical, amused. "I won't be home till very late. Why stay here alone?"

"There, that settles the argument," said Merilee gayly, as Wade closed the outer door behind him. "Come along and put on some make-up, Alixe. You look like a ghost. Where's your bedroom?"

Alixé went into it, with Merilee at her heels, and changed from her blue cotton dress to a bright, flowered blouse and gray suit. Merilee wandered about the room, curious, talkative.

"You must be crazy about Wade to live in a dump like this," she said frankly. "I simply don't get it at all. I should think your mother would be having a fit."

"My mother has never seen this apartment," Alixe replied curtly. "When she and father left Florida they went straight to the house in Massachusetts. I don't think this is a dump. I like it."

"Well, your mother will get you out of here in a hurry, if she ever does come to see you," predicted Merilee. "Ready? All right, let's get started."

"Promise me that you'll make Henry behave or I'll come straight home," Alixe threatened.

"All right. He is sort of overpowering, isn't he?"

Merilee sat between Alixe and Henry in the cab, and at the restaurant where they dined. Alixe began to relax. She'd go home early and wait up for Wade. When he came in she'd make him listen while she explained. He'd have to see that his own quick temper had been partly responsible for this misunderstanding. After last night, he must realize that she loved him so much that there could be no place in her heart for Henry.

But Merilee forgot her promise when they went on to a night club after dinner, refusing to let Alixe leave them. Alixe found herself sitting beside Henry, and when Merilee caught sight of some old friends and dragged Clip over to their table to speak to them, Alixe and Henry were alone.

"See here, my pet," he began at once, "I'm crazier than ever about you, and from where I sit, it doesn't look to me as if you and Wade were making much of a go of your marriage. Why be stubborn? I know that it takes courage to admit that you've made a mistake, but you've always had courage enough for anything. Go to Reno and get a divorce, and then marry me. Why not?"

"Because I love Wade," Alixe replied instantly. "That's why. And he loves me. I wish you'd get that through your head."

"Does he, really?" Henry's voice was skeptical. "He doesn't seem to know it. Alixe, don't try to fool me. You know as well as I do that he married you because he was sorry for you, when I turned out to be such a heel. I don't know why I did that—I'll never know. Lay it to the war, though I'm not trying to excuse myself. I'll make up for it, Alixe. Marry me, and let me make you happy."

"I'm happy now," she told him. "If you don't want to go on being a heel, stop talking that way. I know that Wade loves me—that's enough for me, and what you think doesn't matter."

Henry straightened up angrily. "Like the devil he does!" he exclaimed. "If he loves you, why does he keep you living in that hole of an apartment, when he could afford to buy the duplex you and I were going to live in, and have enough left over to buy the whole building, if he wanted to?"

"He . . . he—" She hesitated.

If Wade had lied to her when he said that he was just a law clerk; it was none of Henry's business. Wade must have a good reason for what he'd done. "I like it there," she said limply.

"I'll bet you do! Of course, it's like the nutty things Wade does. Leaving home when he was fifteen, because he hated the oil fields and the ranches his father owned and wouldn't learn to take over. Imagine walking out on a fortune like that!" He laughed abruptly. "He inherited a flock of millions just before he and I came home last winter. And he takes you to live in that hole!"

Alixé stared down at her hands, too stunned to speak. Wade must have some reason for what he'd done, she told herself, over and over. He'd known what he was doing. And whatever he did was right.

"Looks to me as if he wanted to get rid of you," Henry remarked. "Just trying to make things so tough that you'd duck out. Is that it? You're so stubborn that you'd hang on, just to show him that you could, but it looks like a screwy setup to me."

Alixé looked at him squarely then. "I'm hanging on because I love Wade Townsend so much that I'd rather live with him, anywhere, than with anyone else," she said emphatically. "I wish I were in our home right now, waiting for him. If he and I want to live the way we do, that's certainly our affair, Henry Stanton."

Merilee drifted back to the table

just then. "What are you two quarreling about?" she inquired, as she sat down. "The same old thing? Where are you going, Henry?"

"Just any place where I won't ever have to see Alixe again," he said, as he rose and walked away.

Alixé was fumbling in her bag. She took out the ring that Wade had given her and slipped it on her finger. No matter what Merilee said about it, she didn't care. Wade had given it to her because he loved her. If he wanted to give her imitation diamonds, pretending that he didn't have much money, no one had a right to question his judgment. She'd stay here with Merilee and Clip a little longer, because suddenly she was very tired, too tired to move. Soon she'd be all right, when this first amazement over what Henry had told her was over, and then she'd go home and wait for Wade.

Merilee was gossiping idly. People were all settling down again now, since quite a few of the men were home to stay. Clip and Merilee had spent a week end at Southampton with Mary and Stan Searles. "And their new daughter is the loveliest thing you ever saw. They still can't decide on a name for her, so they call her Mrs. Smith." Lisa Chalmers and her husband had been down from Quebec for a week—Lisa had begged everybody to visit her. "And she was furious because I wouldn't give her your address, Alixe. It really was very embarrassing to me."

Alixé bit her lips. This after-

noon she'd been thinking that she'd telephone Mary, and persuade Wade to go to the Searles' with her. She was so proud of him that she wanted Mary to meet him, because she liked Mary better than any other woman she knew. Now, when she and Wade were at odds again, that would be out of the question.

Then she looked up and saw Wade coming toward her. Her thoughts flashed back to the winter day when she had sat at a table and watched as he came down the room to her. Even then, when she was so disturbed over what Henry had just told her, there had been a moment when she was free enough of her unhappiness to realize that she liked the way he looked. He was hurrying now, his face drawn with anxiety. He sat down beside her and grasped her hands.

"What's the matter?" he asked. "Are you all right now?"

She turned to him, as Merilee slipped away. "Am I?" she asked. "I don't know. You'll have to tell me."

"Henry telephoned me that you were sick," he said, puzzled. "He told me to come here immediately, that you needed me."

"I do need you, I always have," she answered. "And I was sick—sick at heart, because when you walked out of the apartment, I thought I'd lost you."

"But I thought Henry was the man you wanted, in spite of last night," he told her. "I'd been so crazy to get home to you, and then when I did, there was Henry. And

when you took off your ring, I thought you were showing me that you didn't want to be married to me. I was mad clear through. I'd picked it out so carefully, and then you didn't wear it."

"Oh, Wade! I thought it was just imitation stones, and I was afraid Henry and Merilee would think—"

"Imitation stones? What on earth do you mean?"

"A poor law clerk doesn't buy diamonds like that for his wife. Hadn't you thought about that?"

He put his arm around her and drew her close to him. "I owe you an apology," he said sheepishly. "I was sure you didn't love me, you see. I remembered what you'd told me about your sister Kate, and decided that what you needed was a little hard treatment. If you did love me you'd stick it out for six months; if you didn't, you'd walk out on me. I hadn't any right to do that, I guess, but I

had to be sure. I couldn't quite get over the idea that you were sticking to our marriage because you felt sorry for me, that day you met me when I was just out of the army. That old suit I had on was the only one I hadn't given away when I got into uniform, and I certainly looked as if the cat had just dragged me in."

Alixé smiled up at him, her eyes shining. "Next time you get a bright idea like that, I wish you'd ask me what I think of it before you try it out," she said. "But I'm grateful to you for it, anyway. I certainly did learn how to cook! So you're rich, are you?"

"I am. But I'm really a law clerk—that was true."

"You may be a good law clerk," Alixé told him gravely, though her eyes were dancing, "but you're not being very clever at this moment. If you were, you'd know how much I want you to take me home, right now!"

THE END.

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The next issue of

LOVE STORY

MAGAZINE

*will be on sale May 26th and the fourth
Friday of each month, thereafter.*

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YOUR STARS

BY KAI

Your Fortnight

May 2nd to 15th inclusive.

EXECUTIVES who plan well will be least troubled with financial headaches. Avoid expansion unless way is clear financially without outside money or dependency upon the whims of others. Keep practical, not venturesome; watch out for entangling red tape. Income satisfactory; substantial savings if you think ably before making disbursements. Business good in spots; buying public knows what it wants but must make adjustments to necessitous circumstances not adequately prepared for. Requests for exchange of goods or refund of money more numerous than usual. Home benefits but unexpected annoyances. Advance love and marriage but control imagination and impulses; may be obstacles, probably of a financial, possibly of a legal nature. Avoid lawsuits and extravagance. Keep social activities within reasonable bounds. More money needed for governmental purposes.



DAY BY DAY

Hours mentioned are Eastern standard time. Add one hour for Eastern war time. If not using that time, make correction to the time you are using.

Tuesday May 2nd



During morning, control temper; mark time in employment and home affairs; avoid impulsive actions, travel and misunderstandings; be careful what papers you sign. Between noon and 2:00 p. m., there may be financial benefits; advance love and marriage plans; expect benefits through a legal paper. Between 2:00 p. m. and 7:00 p. m., there may be employment benefits; also benefits through a writing. Between 7:00 p. m. and 9:00 p. m., there may be financial benefits; advance love and marriage plans. Between 9:00 p. m. and midnight, there may be employment and financial benefits.

Wednesday May 3rd



During the morning, there may be business, financial and home benefits; advance love and marriage plans; you may benefit through a legal document or other writing. Between noon and 2:30 p. m., avoid jealousy and misunderstandings. Between 2:30 p. m. and 8:30 p. m., be conservative; avoid falls, falling objects and misunderstandings; curtail social activities. Between 8:30 p. m. and midnight, be careful what you say, write and sign.

Thursday May 4th



During morning, be conservative; control imagination; mark time in love and marriage; there may be home benefits. Between noon and 2:00 p. m., be conservative; avoid lawsuits; curtail social activities. Between 2:00 p. m. and 6:00 p. m., curtail social activities. Between 6:00 p. m. and 8:30 p. m., advance love and marriage plans. Between 8:30 p. m. and midnight, expect pleasant surprises; also unexpected benefits and favors from relatives; marriage plans may be advanced in an unusual manner.

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This advertisement, contributed to the war effort by this magazine, was prepared by the War Advertising Council in cooperation with the War Production Board and the Office of War Information

During morning, control imagination; mark time in love and marriage; there may be benefits through a writing; also financial benefits through planning. Between noon and 1:30 p. m., expect financial benefits; advance love and marriage plans. Between 1:30 p. m. and 9:00 p. m., there may be business and financial benefits; advance love and marriage plans; there may be benefits through a journey. Between 9:00 p. m. and 10:30 p. m., there may be financial benefits; also pleasant surprises and favors from relatives. Between 10:30 p. m. and midnight, control temper; mark time in love, marriage and home affairs.


Saturday May 6th



h During morning, there may be business benefits; also favors for elderly persons; avoid "get-rich-quick" schemes and sob stories designed to separate you from your money; mark time in love and marriage plans; control impulses. Between noon and 6:00 p. m., there may be business benefits through conservative planning. Between 6:00 p. m. and 8:00 p. m., mark time in business and finance; be careful what papers you sign; avoid misunderstandings. Between 8:30 p. m. and 9:30 p. m., advance love and marriage plans. Between 9:30 p. m. and midnight, mark time in money matters; curtail social activities.

Sunday May 7th



 During the morning, be conservative; mark time in love, marriage, business and finance; be careful what papers you sign; do not write love letters; control imagination and impulses; avoid falls, falling objects and misunderstandings; there may be home benefits. Between noon and 5:00 p. m., be conservative. Between 6:00 p. m. and midnight, there may be financial benefits; advance love and marriage plans but be careful.

Monday May 8th



During the morning, be conservative; control imagination; do not become romantic; avoid lawsuits and extravagance; there may be benefits through able planning; also home benefits. Between noon and 3:00 p. m., mark time in love, marriage, business and finance; avoid lawsuits; do not write love letters. Between 3:00 p. m. and 5:00 p. m., be conservative; avoid falls, falling objects and misunderstandings. Between 5:00 p. m. and midnight, curtail social activities.

Tuesday May 9th



♂ During the morning, there may be business and financial benefits; also favors from elderly persons and relatives, and a pleasant journey; advance love and marriage plans; you may benefit through a legal document or through legal proceedings. Between noon and 2:00 p. m., expect business and financial benefits; advance love and marriage plans. Between 2:00 p. m. and 4:00 p. m., control temper and impulses; be conservative; mark time in home affairs; avoid travel and misunderstandings; be careful what papers you sign. Between 4:00 p. m. and 5:00 p. m., there may be financial benefits throughable planning. Between 5:00 p. m. and 11:00 p. m., advance social interests. Between 11:00 p. m. and past midnight, avoid extravagance and jealousy.

Wednesday May 10th



During the morning, expect business and financial benefits; also pleasant surprises; advance love and marriage plans; you may benefit through your journey; also through a legal paper or through legal proceedings. Between noon and 2:30 p. m., there may be business and financial benefits; advance love and marriage plans. Between 3:30 p. m. and 7:30 p. m., mark time in love, marriage, business and finance; be careful what papers you sign. Between 7:30 p. m. and 9:00 p. m., there may be home benefits. Between 9:00 p. m. and 10:00 p. m., there may be financial benefits; also benefits through correspondence or other writing or message. Between 10:00 p. m. and 11:00 p. m., be conservative; avoid falls, falling objects, travel and misunderstandings. Between 11:00 p. m. and past midnight, there may be financial benefits; advance social interests.


Thursday May 11th



27 During the morning, there may be financial benefits; also pleasant surprises and favors from relatives; mark time in love and marriage; control imagination. Between noon and 8:00 p. m., be conservative; curtail social activities; avoid travel, extravagance, jealousy and misunderstandings. Between 8:00 p. m. and 9:00 p. m., there may be financial benefits. Between 9:00 p. m. and 10:30 p. m., be conservative; avoid impulsive actions, sudden changes, travel and misunderstandings. Between 10:30 p. m. and past midnight, there may be financial benefits; also favors from women; advance love and marriage plans.

Friday May 12th



 The morning may be quiet; advance social interests. Between noon and 5:00 p. m., there may be business benefits; advance love and marriage plans; you may benefit through legal proceedings. Between 5:00 p. m. and 9:00 p. m., advance social interests. Between 9:00 p. m. and 11:00 p. m., advance love and marriage plans; there may be financial benefits. Between 11:00 p. m. and past midnight, control impulses; avoid travel, sudden changes and misunderstandings.


Saturday **May 13th**



h During the morning, be conservative; control temper; mark time in love, marriage and home affairs; avoid cuts, burns, falls, falling objects and misunderstandings. Between noon and 5:00 p. m., advance love and marriage plans; expect favors from women. Between 5:00 p. m. and 10:00 p. m., advance social interests. Between 10:00 p. m. and past midnight, be careful what papers you sign; do not write love letters; avoid jealousy and misunderstandings.

Sunday May 14th



 During the morning, be conservative; be careful what papers you sign; advance love and marriage plans, though there may be obstacles; expect home benefits; also pleasant surprises. Between noon and 4:00 p. m., curtail social activities. Between 4:00 p. m. and 6:00 p. m., mark time in love and marriage plans; control imagination. Between 6:00 p. m. and 1:00 p. m., be conservative; do not write love letters. Between 11:00 p. m. and past midnight, advance love and marriage plans.

benefits; also pleasant surprises and favors from relatives; you may benefit through correspondence or other writing. If born between April 1st and 5th, excellent for love at marriage; there may be financial benefits. If born between April 6th and 10th, there may be business and financial benefits; advance love and marriage plans; avoid jealousy and extravagance; mark time in home affairs. If born between April 11th and 15th, there may be business and financial benefits; also favors from elderly persons and relatives; advance love and marriage plans; avoid jealousy, extravagance and misunderstandings; mark time in home affairs. If born between April 16th and 20th, there may be business benefits; also favors from elderly persons and relatives; advance love and marriage plans; avoid jealousy and misunderstandings; mark time in home affairs.

The influences affecting the particular zodiacal group to which you belong are given in the "Born Between—" section of this article, which you should also consult.

Aries

—If born between March 21st and 26th, there may be financial benefits; advance love and marriage plans but do not become romantic; control imagination. If born between March 27th and 31st, excellent for love and marriage: there may be financial

Taurus

—If born between April 20th and 26th, advance love and marriage plans but do not become romantic; there may be financial benefits. If born between April 27th and May 1st, advance love and marriage plans; there may be financial benefits; also pleasant surprises; you may benefit through correspondence or other writing or message; avoid jealousy. If born between May 2nd and 6th, excellent for love and marriage; there may be financial benefits; you may benefit through a writing. If born between May 7th and 11th, there may be financial and home benefits; be conservative; avoid extravagance; advance love and marriage plans, though there may be obstacles. If born between May 12th and 16th, excellent for love, marriage, business, financial and home affairs; expect favors from elderly persons and relatives.



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understandings; watch expenses; be careful what you say, write or sign. If born between November 3rd and 7th, watch expenses; be careful what you sign; mark time in love and marriage matters. If born between November 8th and 12th, be conservative; avoid lawsuits; mark time in love and marriage; home benefits. If born between November 13th and 17th, be conservative; avoid falls, falling objects and misunderstandings; mark time in love and marriage matters; there may be home benefits. If born between November 18th and 22nd, be conservative; advance love and marriage plans, though there may be obstacles; expect home benefits.

November 22nd and December 22nd

Sagittarius



—If born between November 22nd and 27th, there may be financial benefits; advance love and marriage plans; expect favors from women. If born between November 28th and December 2nd, advance love and marriage plans, though the unexpected may modify your plans; avoid impulsive actions, sudden changes, travel, lawsuits and misunderstandings; you may benefit through correspondence or other writing but be careful what you write or sign. If born between December 3rd and 7th, expect financial benefits; also benefits through a legal document or other writing; advance love and marriage plans. If born between December 8th and 12th, there may be business and financial benefits; also benefits through legal proceedings; advance love and marriage plans, though there may be obstacles; control temper; avoid jealousy and misunderstandings. If born between December 13th and 17th, be conservative; postpone important decisions; avoid cuts, burns, falls, falling objects, lawsuits, travel and misunderstandings; be careful what papers you sign; there may be financial benefits. If born between December 18th and 22nd, be conservative; postpone important decisions; avoid cuts, burns, falls, falling objects, lawsuits, travel and misunderstandings; be careful what papers you sign; expect financial benefits; also favors from women.

December 22nd and January 20th

Capricorn



—If born between December 22nd and 26th, advance love and marriage plans but do not become romantic; control imagination; expect financial benefits. If born between December 27th and 31st, expect financial benefits; you may benefit through correspondence or other writing but be careful what you say, write or sign; there may be favors from women; advance love and marriage plans, though the unexpected may modify your plans; avoid impulsive actions, sudden changes, travel, jealousy, lawsuits and misunderstandings. If born between January 1st and 5th, there may be financial benefits; you may benefit through a legal document or other writing; advance love and marriage plans. If born between January 6th and 10th, there may be business and financial benefits; also benefits through legal proceedings; control temper; mark time in home affairs. If born between January 11th and 15th, be conservative; postpone important decisions; control temper; avoid cuts, burns, falls, falling objects, jealousy, travel and misunderstandings; there may be financial benefits but watch expenses. If born between January 16th and 20th, control temper; mark time in love, marriage and home affairs; avoid cuts, burns, falls, falling objects, jealousy, extravagance, travel and misunderstandings.

January 20th and February 19th

Aquarius



—If born between January 20th and 25th, advance love and marriage plans but watch expenses. If born between January 26th and 30th, watch expenses; be careful what papers you sign; do not write love letters; there may be pleasant surprises and unexpected benefits; also favors from relatives. If born between January 31st and February 4th, be careful what papers you sign; watch expenses; curtail social activities. If born between February 5th and 9th, be conservative; control temper; avoid jealousy, extravagance, travel, lawsuits and misunderstandings; mark time in love, marriage and home affairs. If born between February 10th and 14th, be conservative; avoid cuts, burns, falls, falling objects, travel, lawsuits and misunderstandings; mark time in love, marriage and home affairs; postpone important decisions; watch expenses. If born between February 15th and 19th, be conservative; control temper; avoid cuts, burns, falls, falling objects, travel, extravagance, lawsuits and misunderstandings; mark time in home affairs; expect financial benefits and favors from women.

February 19th and March 21st

Pisces



—If born between February 19th and 24th, advance love and marriage plans but do not become romantic; control imagination; there may be financial benefits. If born between February 25th and March 1st, there may be financial benefits; also favors from women; you may benefit through correspondence or other writing but be careful what papers you sign; avoid impulsive actions, sudden changes, travel, jealousy and misunderstandings. If born between March 2nd and 6th, there may be financial benefits; you may benefit through a legal document or other writing; advance love and marriage plans. If born between March 7th and 11th, excellent for love and marriage; there may be business, financial and home benefits; you may benefit through legal proceedings. If born between March 12th and 16th, there may be financial and home benefits; be conservative; advance love and marriage plans, though there may be obstacles. If born between March 17th and 21st, there may be financial and home benefits; also favors from women; advance love and marriage plans, though there may be obstacles; be conservative.

Note for "Born Between—" readers: The period referred to begins with Tuesday, May 2nd, and ends with Monday, May 15th. Compare with information given in "Your Fortnight" and "Day by Day" to see what the general influences are. Best results will come from acting in any matter when both group influences and general influences are in beneficial agreement.

MORE ABOUT GEMINI PEOPLE

To ascertain in detail the harmonies and discords between persons, their horoscopes must be cast and compared. The respective groups to which they belong, however, harmonize or discord in a general way. For fun-

amental harmony select the group that corresponds to your own in a sign that harmonizes with your own. The groups corresponding to each other may be ascertained from the "Born Between—" section, wherein each sign is divided into six groups, the groups of any sign corresponding to the groups of any other sign in the order of their mentioning. The signs harmonizing best with Gemini are Aries, Leo, Libra and Aquarius. Of these, it will be to your interest to marry the one who will be most likely to fit into your aims in life. An Aries marriage partner will keep your mind extremely active, spur you to more energetic effort and intensify your ambitious desires. The effect is apt to be more general than particular, with a tendency for you to have too many irons in the fire. A Leo marriage partner will affect your emotions rather than your mental processes, except that as you become more emotional, you will be satisfied to be less active mentally. Your understanding of the human heart will become greater. Marriage to a Libra native will make your life more serene and your development more symmetrical. Marriage to an Aquarius native will tend to develop your exceptional talents, particularly along scientific lines, with the possibility of your achieving fame through some outstanding accomplishment. You should avoid marriage to a native of Virgo, Sagittarius or Pisces, as fundamental differences between you may be hard to reconcile.

(Cancer article begins in our next issue.)

The same wind blows again,
The same stars shine at night,
But different petals fall
In a different light.

The same waves beat forever
The acres of the sea,
But a new prayer I breathe
To bring you back to me.

QUESTION BOX

D. J. S., female, born July 19, 1912, 9:00 p. m., Pennsylvania: You will come under excellent influences affecting marriage and business about the last half of October, 1945; probability of a long journey.

G. Q., female, born August 21, 1918, 6:00 p. m., California: You will come under excellent employment and marriage influences about the first half of April, 1947.

V. J., female, born April 9, 1916, 11:30 a. m., Georgia; You will come under excellent influences affecting marriage and financial matters about the first half of February, 1946.

T. M. V., female, born August 12, 1919, between 5:00 a. m. and 7:00 a. m., North Carolina: You will come under beneficial influences affecting marriage about June or July, 1945. Obstacles, probably of an employment nature, may have to be overcome.

S. V. C., female, born December 3, 1919, between 6:30 p. m. and 7:00 p. m., Connecticut: You will come under beneficial influences affecting marriage about the last three weeks of January, 1945.

E. P., female, born April 2, 1915, 12:00 noon, Massachusetts; You will come under excellent influences affecting marriage and financial matters about the first half of September, 1944.

We're just little people

We're just plain folks . . . but
We're the folks who made this country!
And we're the folks who will save it!

Save it—not only from the Enemy—but from the
danger of Prices Getting Out of Hand.

Here we are this year—after we've paid our taxes
—with 131 billion bucks in our pockets.
But only 93 billion dollars' worth of goods to buy.
That leaves 38 *extra* billion dollars.

Sure, the easy thing to do is to take that 38 billion
and start running around buying things we don't
need, bidding against each other . . . forcing
prices up and up!

Then people want higher wages. Then prices go up
some more—and again wages go up.

And then where are we!

But us little guys—us workers, us farmers, us busi-
nessmen—are not going to take the easy way out.

We're not going to buy a single thing we don't need.

We're not going to ask higher wages for our work,
or higher prices for the things we sell.

We'll pay our taxes willingly, without griping.

We'll pay off all our debts now, and make
no new ones.

We'll *never* pay a cent above ceiling prices.
And we'll buy rationed goods only by
exchanging stamps.

We'll build up a savings account,
and take out adequate life insurance.

We'll buy War Bonds until it really pinches.

Heaven knows, these sacrifices are chicken feed,
compared to the ones our sons are making.



Use it up...Wear it out.

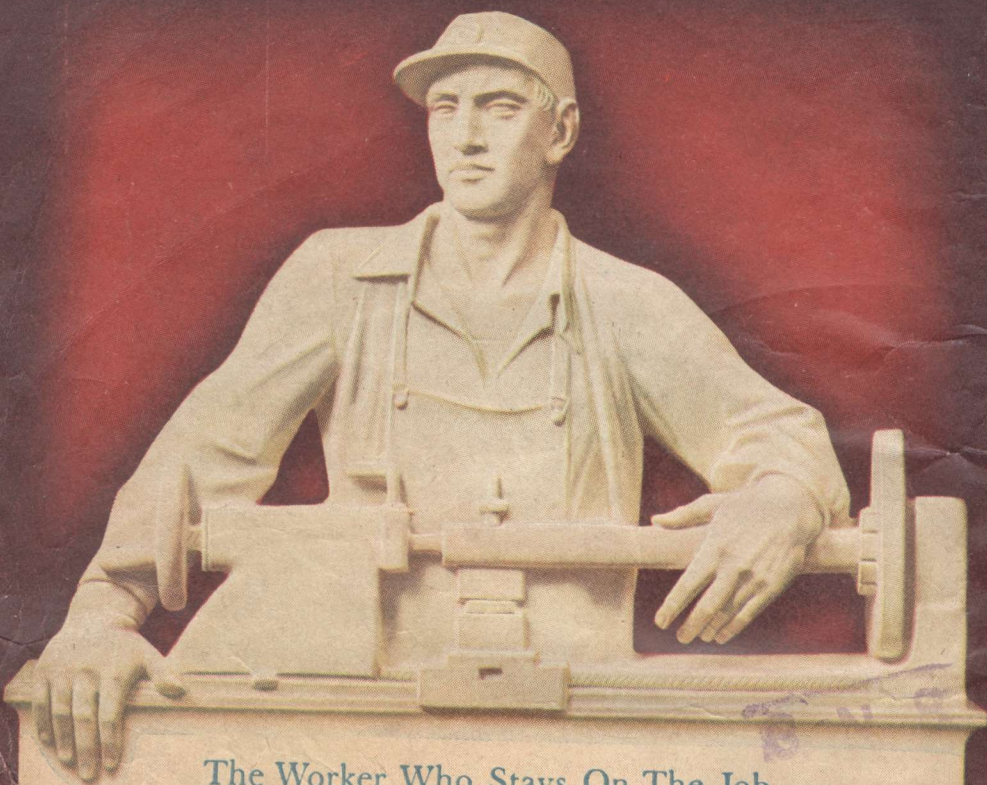
Make it do...Or do without.



SALUTE TO A CLEAR-HEADED AMERICAN

LOVE STORY

MAY 30, 1944



The Worker Who Stays On The Job

He knows that minutes count.
Each one is precious to himself —
But precious more
To those who fight, and bleed, and die.

Minutes in which another turning
of the wheel...

Another weapon fashioned...

Another shell made ready for its task...

Can tip the balance of some far-off battle
Not yet fought...

And make the Victory certain —

Where it is only hoped for now.

He stays. Day upon day, he stays
and meets the test...

With purpose clear... and with sense
of honored duty well performed.

He is a Clear-Headed American.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Published in the interest of the home front war effort... by the makers of Calvert

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