

MARCH

NEW

TEN
STORIES

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LOVE



MAGAZINE



THANKS FOR
THE
Memory
by
RUTH HERBERT
MARY VINCENT
VIRGINIA NIELSEN

Drink a Toast to Our Armed Forces

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for Readers of

THIS MAGAZINE

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ALL STORIES NEW

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LOVE

MAGAZINE

NOW EVERY MONTH

VOL. 5

MARCH, 1943

NO. 4

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April Issue On Sale February 26th

Published monthly by Fictioneers, Inc., a division of Popular Publications, Inc., 2256 Grove Street, Chicago, Illinois. Editorial and Executive offices, 205 East 42nd Street, New York, N. Y. Copyright 1943 by Fictioneers, Inc., a division of Popular Publications, Inc. Entered as second class matter July 30, 1941, at the post office at Chicago, Illinois, under the Act of March 3, 1879. The publishers cannot accept responsibility for return of unsolicited manuscripts, although care will be exercised in handling them. All rights reserved under Pan American Copyright Convention. Single copy price 10c. Yearly subscription in the U.S.A. \$1.20. Foreign postage 75c additional. Printed in U.S.A.



Dear Reader:

Suppose you were a small-town girl, engaged to a man whom the community held in the highest regard. And suppose, out of a clear sky, your one rich relative sent you an utterly mad, frilly bit of bright pink silk that only a New Yorker would dare to call a hat. Would you wear it in the local Easter Parade, even if you knew the whole town would not only be completely shocked, but would probably laugh at you? Charity Lane decided, after many misgivings, that she would take a chance, because all of a sudden she knew something had to be done to add a bright spot to her dull, everyday existence. And something definitely bright WAS added. If she hadn't worn the shocking-pink hat she never would have met the man who wanted her to help him chase rainbows. She discovered that chasing rainbows was lots more fun than working in a tearoom and being engaged to a stuffed shirt. And Dr. Tony Nickels, who was on his way into the Marines, was the first man who ever made her feel she was beautiful. This is one of the gayest stories Vina Lawrence has ever written, and if you feel the need of a bright spot in your own life, don't miss **THE SHOCKING-PINK BONNET**.

But we're not for a single moment forgetting our lead novelette, **THE LOVES OF LAURINDA**, Mary Vincent's highly dramatic and deeply moving story about a girl from the New York slums who became a famous dancer. We know you will also be thrilled to death by Virginia Nielsen's **GIRL ON ICE**, because the heroine faces the same problems as millions of American girls who are "promised" for the duration.

The April issue is just bursting with exciting, up-to-the-minute stories by your favorite writers, Kathryn Keeley, Tugar De Pass, Blake Reed, Hope Campbell and others, who, month after month, bring us the newest in love stories.

The April issue is on sale February 26th. Until then,

Sincerely yours,

THE EDITORS.

How to Make YOUR Body Bring You **FAME**

... Instead of **SHAME!**

**ARE YOU
Skinny?
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Flabby?**

**Will You Let Me
Prove I Can Make You
a New Man?**

I KNOW what it means to have the kind of body that people pity! Of course, you wouldn't know it to look at me now, but I was once a skinny weakling who weighed only 97 lbs. I was ashamed to strip for sports or undress for a swim. I was such a poor specimen of physical development that I was constantly self-conscious and embarrassed. And I felt only HALF-ALIVE.

But later I discovered the secret that turned me into "the World's Most Perfectly Developed Man." And now I'd like to prove to you that the same system can make a NEW MAN OF YOU!

What Dynamic Tension Will Do For You

I don't care how old or young you are or how ashamed of your present physical condition you may be. If you can simply raise your arm and flex it I can add SOLID MUSCLE to your biceps—yes, on each arm—in double-quick time! Only 15 minutes a day—right in your own home—is all the time I ask of you! And there's no cost if I fail.

I can broaden your shoulders, strengthen your back, develop your whole muscular system INSIDE and OUTSIDE! I can add inches to your chest, give you a vise-like grip, make those legs of yours lithe and powerful. I can shoot new strength into your old backbone, exercise those inner organs, help you cram your body so full of pep, vigor and red-blooded vitality that you won't feel there's even "standing room" left for weakness and that lazy feeling! Before I get through with you I'll have your whole frame "measured" to a nice new, beautiful suit of muscle!

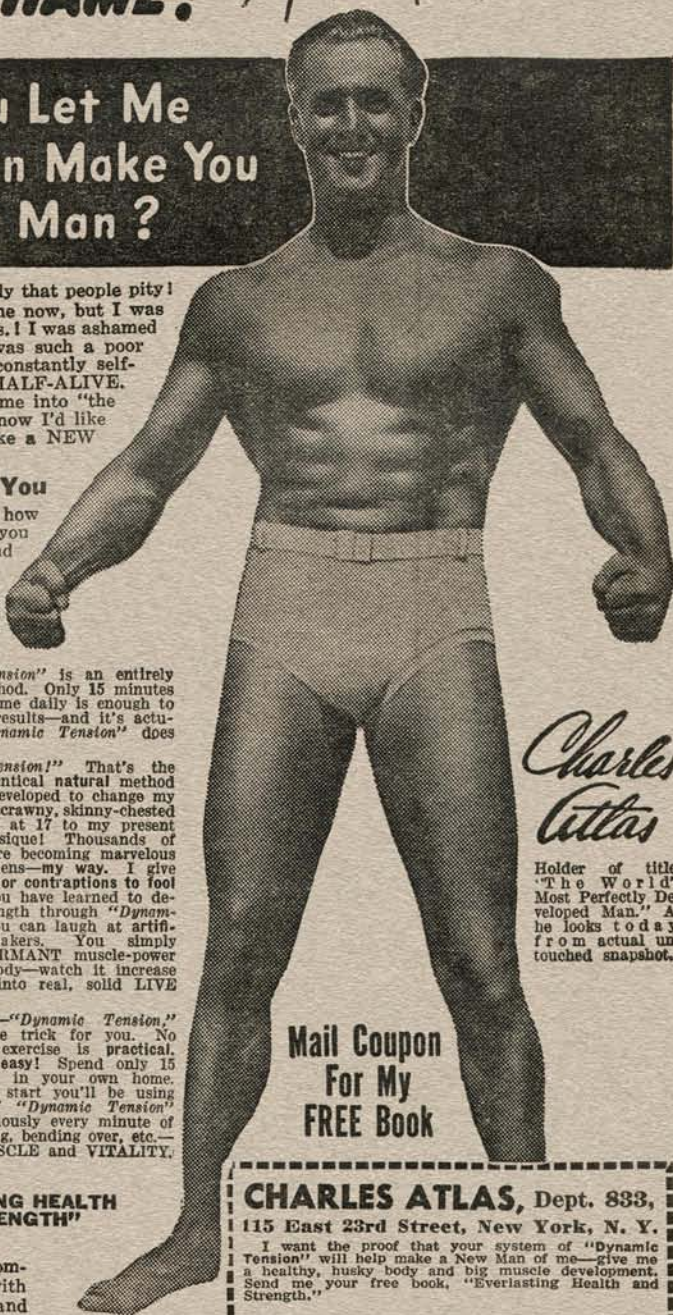
Only 15 Minutes A Day

No "ifs," "ands" or "maybes." Just tell me where you want handsome, powerful muscles. Are you fat and flabby? Or skinny and gawky? Are you short-winded, peppy? Do you hold back and let others walk off with the prettiest girls, best jobs, etc.? Then write for details about "Dynamic Tension" and learn how I can make you a healthy, confident, powerful HE-MAN.

"Dynamic Tension" is an entirely NATURAL method. Only 15 minutes of your spare time daily is enough to show amazing results—and it's actually fun. "Dynamic Tension" does the work.

"Dynamic Tension!" That's the ticket! The identical natural method that I myself developed to change my body from the scrawny, skinny-chested weakling I was at 17 to my present super-man physique! Thousands of other fellows are becoming marvelous physical specimens—my way. I give you no gadgets or contraptions to fool with. When you have learned to develop your strength through "Dynamic Tension," you can laugh at artificial muscle-makers. You simply utilize the DORMANT muscle-power in your own body—watch it increase and multiply into real, solid LIVE MUSCLE.

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*Charles
Atlas*

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*There's a substitute for rubber
We all may use some day,
Our tin cans change to glassware
In a magic sort of way.*

*Silk alters into rayon
In dresses smart and bright.
But one thing must be steady
If life is to seem right.*

*In order to be happy
In this all-changing year,
I must be very certain
Of your true love, my dear!*

—Alan Harte

Transportation

*I have seen Love riding
In stream-lined renown.
I have seen him thumbing
Rides from town to town.*

*I have seen him driving
Swanky motor cars.
I have seen him gliding
Planes among the stars.*

*I have seen him sailing
Boats upon the deep.
But today I saw him
Bouncing in a jeep.*

—Clarence Edwin Flynn



Today IM the foreman!

-last week I was only a bench worker

FOREMEN WANTED!

TO GET WAR WORK OUT

More Foremen than ever are needed to keep war production schedules at their peak.

FOREMEN WANTED!

TO TRAIN NEW WORKERS

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FOREMEN WANTED!

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Important to Your Country—VITAL TO YOU

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And So Can You!**

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"When I enrolled, I was making approximately \$40 a week. For the past three months, I have made \$85 a week, so am entitled to your 100% Club button." C. N., Ind.

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A Kiss to Make You Well

By PEGGY MONTGOMERY

One of two men had saved Nan from utter oblivion by a kiss. And she would have willingly given her life again for the one she hoped it was.

THE landlady was voluble and indignant. "If I'd known she'd act that way I wouldn't have let her have the room."

The ambulance driver was curious. "Who do you suppose she is?"

The interne was curt, businesslike. "Oh, no you don't. You're going to stay awake if I have to—"

Their voices came to Nan through screens of sickening fog. Why couldn't they let her alone. If she didn't want any more of life that was her business.

"I'd sure like to know who she is." The ambulance driver was not adverse to curly brown heads and long eyelashes.

"Don't ask me." The landlady disclaimed all responsibility. "I never set eyes on her before today." She opened a traveling bag, exposing its naked emptiness. "Did you ever! I had a notion to make her pay in advance, but she looked at me with them big sad eyes. I sorta thought she was some girl whose boy friend had gone out on a convoy."

"And left her stony." The ambulance driver matched the landlady's ire and raised it. "If she makes it I'll take her home to mom. She'll—"

"The good Samaritan act won't be necessary," the interne cut in. "She's some wealthy brat who couldn't take it because she wasn't asked to the right luncheon."



"I'll bet she ain't. I'll bet she's some sailor's sweetheart."

"With this underwear! Feather haircuts like this don't come out of Five and Dimes, either. Come on let's get her into the ambulance."

The fog was thicker. Nan felt herself lifted by hands which were skilled and gentle, but she was too sleepy to care.



And then Nan was dancing with Jere. At least Jere was dancing—Nan was more like a sleep-walker.

She would sleep in spite of the one who was determined to keep her awake. Did he think he was God? What right had he to make her live, to face a life of heart-break and humiliation, jilted the day before her wedding?

Oh Duke, Duke . . .

But the hands wouldn't let her alone. There was a blessed lapse and then that horrible sickness again. Nan had no consciousness of the passage of time, she had no idea where she was. She would not

live. She pitted all her strength against those persistent hands, that coaxing voice. And then there were lips against hers. Against her will Nan felt a tremor in her veins; the flickering flame of her heart steadied. The will to die was slipping from her. Under those lips it had lost its strength. Again there was a lapse, a void.

NOW the nausea was gone. With a sickening surety Nan knew she would live, would have to face the world a jilted bride. Wearily she opened her eyes, great blue disks which looked up dully into the haggard face of a blond young giant who was bending over her bed. With difficulty they focussed on that face which was whiter than her own.

"Oh Nan, darling," the man said. His voice was breaking. It sounded like Duke. But it couldn't be. Duke didn't cry—he rode to hounds and won golf tournaments. Besides, he had left last night with Frieda Glenn. But it *was*. *Dear God in Heaven—it was Duke.*

Nan whispered, "How did you get here?"

"You thought I'd gone away with Frieda, didn't you, silly child? Oh, Nan, how could you do such a horrible thing. If you'd died I would have been a murderer."

"Are you going to marry Frieda?"

"Of course not. I'm going to marry Nan Sheridan if she'll only get well. "You will, won't you, darling?"

"Yes, I will, if you'll kiss me again."

Duke's lips were gentle, frightened.

"Sorry, Mr. Carlton, you'll have to leave. Miss Sheridan mustn't be tired. She needs her strength."

Duke left obediently, quickly, as if his life held only one purpose—Nan's recovery.

The morning papers carried the announcement that the wedding of Miss Nan Sheridan to Mr. Rodman Carlton, prominent socialite and sportsman, better known as "Duke," had been postponed indefinitely while the bride elect was in a hospital recuperating from an emergency appendectomy.

Nan slept most of the day, her bride's bouquet of orchids and lilies-of-the-valley crushed in her arms, and as she slept she dreamed of Duke whose love had reached

her in the Valley of the Shadow of Death and led her back to life again. And she waked to wonder how she could have doubted him.

The following day she felt quite herself aside from weakness and a dizzy head, but when she suggested that she was well enough to leave the hospital Duke protested with surprising violence.

"No, Nan, you mustn't!" And then, seeing the worried crease of her forehead, he hastened to add, "If you're worrying about the expense, forget it. It was partly my fault. I'll take care of everything."

When that did not dissolve the stubborn set of her cherry mouth, his voice became more pleading. "Please, darling. If you'd had your appendix out you wouldn't be back in circulation the second day. We don't want a messy scandal, do we?"

Reluctantly Nan allowed herself be persuaded, although she would have preferred a little gossip to this new postponement of their wedding. But then she didn't have Duke's horror of a little talk, probably because her family were neither wealthy nor prominent.

In the days which followed Nan's restlessness gradually diminished. It was fun to live in a bower of flowers, to receive great sheafs of roses from Duke each morning, little cards which she read and reread a hundred times.

Duke was not lying when he said—she had never been so beautiful. For the first time in months she was getting enough sleep, eating regular nourishing meals. It had taken a lot of doing without lunches to be a glamor girl on a shoestring income from part-time modeling jobs.

The last hectic months were fading in her memory, those months since Frieda Glenn's husband had been killed on Bataan, and Frieda had come back to New York a romantic young widow. It was only natural that Duke should be nice to Frieda. They had been engaged, before Frieda met her aviator husband, before Duke and Nan had sat together that historic night on a Fifth Avenue bus.

The miracle of that chance meeting still brought the pounding blood to Nan's cheeks—the idea of Duke Carlton falling for a strange, penniless model was still hard to believe. None of the glamorous new friends whom she had met through

Duke knew quite how penniless she was.

When Duke suggested that she stay in the hospital a third week Nan didn't argue. Secretly she was beginning to dread seeing people again. There might be some skeptical raised eyebrows, and requests to see her scar.

Dr. Powers, the expensive specialist whom Duke had called in, consented with reservations. Nan must see more people, get out of her room.

And so they put her in a wheeled chair and rolled her out onto the sun porch. It was as exciting as a trip to Europe, with Duke hovering over her, and nurses with blankets and pillows. They almost ran over a lanky redhead who stepped aside, to let the cavalcade pass. He did it with such exaggerated, disrespectful courtesy that Nan turned and stared after him. Their eyes met for a single second, but Nan's came away, feeling bruised, and that night, when she was being prepared for bed, she questioned her nurse, "Who's the tall red-haired doctor?"

"Tall? Red-haired? You must mean Jere Willis. When he finishes his internship he's going into the Army Medical Corps. Isn't he divine?"

Nan's voice was coolly disinterested. "I wouldn't know."

UNFORTUNATELY her heart didn't follow its example the next morning when he came into her room, carrying a sheaf of records. She thought he looked the way Gary Cooper would look if he were ten years younger and had red hair.

"Sorry to trouble you," he said, pulling up a straight chair, "but the hospital lacks your vital statistics." His long body hung off the chair.

"Why don't you sit over there?" Nan pointed to an overstuffed chair.

"I wouldn't dare. I might go to sleep."

She noticed the dark hollows under his eyes.

"You should try getting some sleep at night," Nan suggested.

"Thanks for the suggestion. I'll mention it to the next person who calls for the ambulance in the middle of the night." And then, ignoring Nan's quick flush, he uncapped his pen. "And now to work. Usually this data is compiled when a patient is admitted. But when a patient

has a ruptured appendix, it isn't always possible."

"Is it necessary to be so nasty?"

"Am I nasty?" Jere's eyes were not as innocent as his words. "I only know what I read in the papers. Cats may look at queens, but internes don't get that close to glamor girls. Let's see," he went on, "Age—nineteen."

"How do you know?"

"Glamor girls are all nineteen."

Even his eyebrows are impudent, Nan thought.

"Occupation—being glamorous."

"I suppose you're partly right. I am a professional model," Nan said.

"And I suppose you call that *work*. Don't you know we're at war."

His violence made her jump. "You don't like me," she challenged.

"Not particularly." Jere's voice was changed, the fury gone. It had been better the other way, uncomplimentary but alive.

"Why?"

Jere shrugged. "You're a waste of time. Hospitals are meant for the sick."

"And I wasn't sick!"

"Was but aren't. Listen, I haven't time to argue with you, let's get going."

Nan had never been so annoyed in her life. "Let's. I know how valuable your time must be to the hospital. I weigh one hundred seven pounds, my eyes are blue, I come of native born parents. Is there anything else you need to know?"

Nan's special nurse was startled at her sudden decision to leave the hospital. "But Mr. Carlton said . . ."

"Mr. Carlton is not a medical authority," Nan snapped. "If I must have someone's permission, please send for Dr. Powers."

Dr. Powers came quickly and his agreeable manner made Nan ashamed of her ill temper. "I do appreciate how much you've done for me, Dr. Powers, and I want to thank you for saving my life."

"Don't thank me, my dear. Your life had been saved before I even saw you." Seeing her surprise he explained in more detail. "I'm past the age for charity work. By the time they located Carlton and sent for me, Jere Willis, the interne on emergency, had pulled you through. He's a brilliant fellow. If he comes out of the war in one piece he'll have quite a career."

Nan was a full minute digesting that distasteful statement. She wouldn't owe her life to that red-headed bigot. She wouldn't.

"I suppose Dr. Willis is clever, but he didn't save my life. Duke did that. If he hadn't made me want to live . . ." she stopped shyly. "I suppose you think I'm silly."

Dr. Powers polished his glasses thoughtfully. "I've never known how much weight to put on this will-to-live business, but granted it was Duke's presence which saved you, and not Jere's skill, you're still in Jere's debt. If he hadn't done some clever detective work Duke would not have been here."

Nan was listening to Dr. Powers but she was hearing another voice, too: "*With this underwear. Feather haircuts like this don't come out of . . .*" Jere Willis, of course. A painful dye stained her cheeks as she remembered their recent interview. How ungrateful he must think her. She must see him again, before she left the hospital.

BUT she didn't see him again until she was dressed in a blue faille with a crisp white blouse, and had every one of her brown hairs set in careless perfection. By then she had the interview carefully planned.

"Dr. Powers has told me that I'm very much in your debt," she began glibly enough, but stalled annoyingly before something in Jere's tawny eyes. "I didn't know when I talked to you last that it was you, or I shouldn't have—"

"Skip it," Jere said brusquely, and for a minute Nan thought he was going to be nice, but he quickly dispelled that illusion. "It was only routine. I did nothing for you that wasn't my duty."

If you'd had a choice, I suppose you'd have let me die," she flared.

He could at least have denied it quickly, in place of stopping to ponder. "No. No, I wouldn't have. It was damned good practice pulling you through. I might not get another chance at a poison case like it."

Nan had never known how overpowering physical anger could be. Her heart was outpounding the Nazi guns at Stalingrad, her blood racing along at a rate

which would have left Whirlaway at the post. She drew herself up haughtily. "I'd be only too glad to pinch-hit as a guinea pig for the sake of your great future, but unfortunately your medical ability had nothing to do with saving my life. It was saved by a kiss."

That got under his skin. His facial muscles were under control in an instant, but the startled look remained in his eyes. Relentlessly Nan pressed in for the kill.

"Duke's kiss," she added.

It was her valedictory of venom. Jere was supposed to wither before its fury, but instead he looked definitely relieved. In another minute he would be laughing, but Nan didn't have to stay to listen. As she swept out of the room she paused, "And for the sake of the records, I didn't take poison because I wasn't invited to the right luncheon. It wouldn't be the right luncheon if I weren't there."

The afternoon was endless. A thousand times Nan wished she hadn't dashed out of the hospital in such a hurry, had at least waited to eat her lunch. Her apartment boasted a fashionable Sultan Place address and a completely empty refrigerator. Its single room was oppressively small. Try as she would to forget him, her interview with Jere had left a tenacious, cloying reaction which she couldn't shake off. She was still thinking about him when evening came and she was dressing for Duke in the loveliest thing she owned, a green hostess gown which made her look very much like a lime sherbet dryad.

Duke was late and he was annoyed with Nan because she had left the hospital so suddenly.

The Carlton factories were busy on war orders, and Duke was actually working hard for the first time in his life. Nan knew he was tired. He kissed her, a gentle kiss which left her irritated and unsatisfied. Once in Duke's arms she had thought all her problems would vanish. She hadn't expected the same feeling of restraint which she had experienced in the hospital with its lack of privacy.

"I suppose we might as well set a new wedding date," she suggested.

Duke answered, "Why, yes. Sometime in the fall, don't you think?"

Seeing her quick hurt, he crossed the

room, lifted one of her hands and pressed it against his cheek. "I'm eager as can be, darling, but first I want you well and strong. I want you to go to our country place for a month or so. Mother would love to have you. And I'd run out weekends, and whenever I could. Think of the fun we'd have, just the two of us together!"

His eager voice was painting a rosy picture, a tempting one, but every time he paused for breath Nan heard a hateful refrain: *Occupation—being glamorous . . . Don't you know we're at war?—Occupation—being glamorous.*

"Sounds all right, doesn't it?" Duke waited expectantly.

"It sounds marvelous. But, Duke, I'm wondering if I shouldn't try to do some kind of war work. I haven't done a thing. If I stayed here in New York. . . ."

"But you can't stay here." Duke's vehemence was unfortunate, for it hardened Nan's uncertainty into stubborn determination.

"Why can't I? Are you trying to get rid of me?"

"Nan."

"I'm sorry. I shouldn't have said that, only— Oh, let's skip it. Kiss me, Duke— No, no, not that way. I'm tired of being a china doll."

"So you want cave man stuff. Okay." Duke's arms were strong; they crushed the breath out of her. His lips were hard and purposeful, but they were not delivering the kisses for which she had hungered. Something was missing. She felt small and lost. Possibly Duke had been right. Possibly she wasn't up to standard physically, in spite of the five pounds she had gained. His cheek against her hair was an oppressive weight.

"I think it would be nice to be married next fall."

BUT Nan stuck to her determination to stay in New York and do some kind of war work, even in the face of Duke's violent opposition. However, she did let him talk her out of a job in the defense industries, and into becoming a volunteer nurse's aide. That would permit her to go on with her modeling. Nan was too

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proud to explain to Duke that a defense job might have paid her more money.

The nurse's aide work had its compensations though, for the group were to be trained at Memorial Hospital and Jere Willis was at Memorial. Watching him eat a few words would be a refreshing sight.

The course was divided into two parts, two weeks of lectures and instruction followed by three weeks of actual hospital work. Nan worked faithfully on the preliminary training. She simply had to be good.

The day the class entered the hospital was the hottest spring day she had ever known. The blue pinafore which had looked so pretty in pictures felt like ticking to her sensitive skin. At the door of Memorial she sternly stifled an impulse to turn and run. With knees which felt like undercooked taffy she slowly climbed the steps to her first day of duty.

She was delighted to find that they were assigning her to pediatrics. A sick baby wasn't as formidable as a sick adult. But Nan's delight was premature. Miss Hickey, the supervisor was a dragon. She shoved a carton of gauze under Nan's nose, instructing her to make "B.S.G.'s," and disappeared with a swish of starched skirt.

Helplessly Nan stared at the gauze until a student nurse came along and condescendingly helped her out. "Heavens, don't you even know about 'big square gauzes.'" Nan didn't but she learned rapidly.

The morning dragged on. At ten o'clock Nan was folding gauzes, and found herself doing the same thing when eleven rolled around. Her back ached unmercifully from standing so long in one spot, but she was afraid to stop even for a drink. It was almost twelve when Miss Hickey rushed in to her.

"Bring a clean sheet into emergency. You'll find one in the linen closet," and then disappeared.

Nan sped away, but there was no sheet in the linen room. A friendly nurse directed her to the laundry on another floor. When she came back five minutes later, flushed and triumphant, the door to the emergency room was closed. Nan knocked timidly and was told to come in. The

room was filled with nurses and doctors. One of them was a redhead.

"I—I brought the sheet," she began uncertainly.

"We couldn't wait all day," Miss Hickey snapped, "We used a clean bedspread. Get an antiseptic basin and be quick about it. And shut the door."

Nan had noticed an open bathroom door and sped to it quickly, but there was no antiseptic basin. There were any number of wash basins. Realizing that Miss Hickey didn't like to be kept waiting, Nan grabbed one of them.

But again she was wrong. Miss Hickey was horrified. "Don't you even know an antiseptic basin?" She sent a student nurse on the errand and Nan crept away, down the hall, her cheeks burning, her eyes glazed with angry tears. It was twelve-thirty and she had been supposed to leave at twelve.

As she washed her hands, so conscientiously stripped of nail polish and jewelry, she resolved that she would never, never set foot in the hospital again. Why hadn't Miss Hickey told her where things were kept. Was a brand new nurse's aid supposed to have been born knowing all about Memorial's store-rooms?

JERE WILLIS was at the door when Nan left the hospital, waiting to gloat, she thought viciously. Although she was walking quickly, his long legs had no difficulty keeping pace with her.

"Just wanted to say good-bye, and it's been nice having you here today."

"What do you mean good-bye?" Nan snapped.

"You won't be back, not after what happened. It's one thing to work but quite another to be yelled at unjustly."

The uncanny accuracy of his analysis took her breath. It also stiffened her backbone. "I haven't the faintest notion of quitting," she answered loftily. "Don't let me take you from your important work."

She hoped she was epitome of dignity but she hadn't much faith in wilted blue denim.

"You're not taking me from my work. I'm on vacation for twenty-four long glorious hours."

"Heavens! Are you leaving town?"

"Nope. I'm treating myself to eight hours of good old shuteye, and then I'm going dancing with a good looking gal, for the relief of the Navy. This is my corner. So long."

He moved away with lazy, long-legged grace.

Nan used a whole bottle of bath salts to soak the smell of the hospital out of her. As she lay in the tub, relaxing, she thought how long it had been since she had been dancing—weeks, literally. She and Duke had become very dull children since the initiation of their "all work" policy. Surely a little play wouldn't be unpatriotic!

Duke called her promptly at seven. "You're all right, darling?"

There was a newly-acquired concern in his voice.

"Horribly so," Nan answered, suddenly impatient with this solicitude about her health. "So right that I feel like going places and doing things. Don't you have some tickets for the Navy Relief party tonight?"

"Why, yes, of course. But it's going to be mob scene."

"I know. The entire human race."

"I don't think it would be the smart thing for you. Let's drive up along the Hudson. I know a quiet little place where you've never been."

"But I don't want a quiet little place. I feel like swing music and excitement. Oh, by the way, do you know my age?"

"Why you're nineteen."

"Right. I thought possibly you'd got mixed up and thought it was ninety-one."

"I was only thinking of you." Duke's voice was stiff and hurt. "I didn't think you'd feel up to facing a crowd."

"Why not. What do I have to hide?"

Nan replaced the telephone slowly, the sparkle gone from her face. She did have something to hide, a cowardly, shameful something—her suicide attempt. How could she have been such a quitter? If she hadn't been so physically exhausted, so desperate financially, not daring to take an ordinary job least everyone know her true financial state. But there were no excuses which could explain away her sinful act.

Possibly she was sticking her neck out, insisting on this party tonight. Maybe

she should call Duke and tell him she'd reconsidered. For a second time her backbone stiffened. Because she had been a coward in the past was no excuse for continuing to be one.

To bolster her courage she wore the loveliest thing she owned. It was a dress she had earned modelling, which she had intended for her trousseau—a lovely blue marquise, unexpectedly kindled with an American beauty sash, and a skirt miles' wide. The mirror assured her that she was a knockout in it, but still she had some misgivings. Defiantly she elevated her chin. She was going to that dance if the whole world were there to shame her with their whisperings.

THE whole world was Duke's world, which had become Nan's. Possibly it was only her guilty conscience that made her feel she was being scrutinized as closely as a *saboteur's* cache. Everyone was terribly cordial. "How nice to see you again, Nan," "Heavens, where have you been keeping yourself?" and "Have you recovered from your operation?"

But what about the things they were thinking: *Appendicitis, my eye. Do you suppose she'll be able to hang onto him this time?*

But this was crazy, she was only imagining. Nan looked up at Duke, seeking reassurance. But his forehead was creased in a black frown and he was glaring out over Nan's brown head. Then it must be true that people were gossiping. Unconsciously Nan followed the direction of Duke's glaring eyes.

She recognized Frieda instantly. Frieda would be wearing black in a crowd of pastels, looking cool and sophisticated. And then she recognized the man with her. Even in a dinner jacket, red hair was still red hair.

Duke was moving toward them, cutting through the dense crowd like a sabre through a wedding cake. Nan's heart twisted. So it wasn't over. Duke was still interested in Frieda.

They were very close now. Nan saw Jere say, "Don't look, but I think we're being shadowed;" saw the lazy raising of Frieda's eyes, her cool appraisal.

"Hi" Nan said. Someone had to say something.

"Shall we exchange partners?" That was Duke.

And then Nan was dancing with Jere. At least Jere was dancing—Nan was more like a sleep-walker.

"That's not a very funny smile," Jere said softly in her ear.

Nan started. "Oh . . . No. I don't suppose it is. Something was worrying me, and now it isn't, but there's something else."

"I catch. Out of the frying pan into the foxhole."

"Yes, that's it." Nan was grateful for his understanding. "How did you happen to know Frieda?"

"Professionally. She was in the hospital once," Jere said, studying Nan.

"Frieda in the hospital! What was she doing there? She's strong as a horse."

"I can't answer that one. Professional ethics. But it wasn't appendicitis."

Normally Nan would have skipped it, but tonight she was too raw, too hurt. "If you knew how ashamed I am, you'd never say that word again."

"Okay, I won't if you'll wake up and really dance. It's tough on my one night off, to get stuck with two girls with but a single thought."

"I don't know what you mean," Nan said stiffly.

"Oh, yes, you do." Jere snapped his fingers in front of her eyes. "Come out of the Never-Never Land, my darling. We're at war. Eligible young men with bank accounts and proper draft numbers don't hang on every bush."

Cold fingers of ice clutched Nan's heart. "You think Frieda wants to marry Duke?"

"Think it. My God, I know it. And so do you, but you won't admit it."

Jere's blunt statement was a dash of cold water and Nan didn't like cold water to be thrown in her face, she preferred to have it served in goblets disguised as wine. But possibly Jere didn't know what he was talking about. After all she had no reason to trust him that much. "Since you're so well informed, what's Duke's reaction?"

"Duke? That's easy. His bank account and torso are above average, but otherwise he's simply a normal human being, and being human he's attracted by

Frieda. Now don't stiffen up. I'll probably cut him out with her, but even if I don't you can easily make him marry you. It's silly to get all steamed up. Duke can't help what he feels toward Frieda any more than I can help the fact that being close to you changes the chemistry of my bloodstream."

Nan's heart started to cut up capers, heel-kicking, hat-throwing capers, and in spite of her anger there was nothing she could do about it, for the heart is an involuntary muscle.

"Your modesty surprises me. You don't really doubt your ability to make Frieda forget Duke, do you?" Nan said, hoping to hide her inner tumult with a veneer of cool sarcasm.

"Oh, that! Jere lowered his voice confidentially. "Frieda wants a husband—you all do, and I definitely am not in the market for a wife. It's a tremendous handicap, but I don't mind. Otherwise it would be too easy."

Of all the colossally conceited asses! But at the instant Nan was sure she had made up her mind about Jere, she looked up and found in the amber depths of his eyes a wicked sparkle, an upsetting, contagious sparkle. Her smile began staidly in her eyes, but by the time it had reached her mouth it was a rascal of a smile.

Jere gathered her into a rib-crushing hug. "Come on," he begged, "let's leave the sex angle to Freud and have some fun."

"Okay, let's," Nan answered recklessly.

But she didn't expect it to be quite so much fun. Jere went all out in his dancing and his manhandling was a refreshing change from Duke's gentle clasp. At the end of the first dance her face was flushed, her hair a ball of topsy turvy brown gold. In the middle of the second dance the Navy discovered her. It was fun watching a blue uniform coming to cut in, it was more fun seeing Jere work his way through the crowd to reclaim her.

MUCH later Nan and Jere went out on the balcony in search of cold beers, a glimpse of the moon and their breath. Nan was happier than she had been since Frieda's return to New York. Because there were no vacant tables they wandered off to a secluded corner to drink

their beer, leaning on the wide railing.

Nan didn't know when she became conscious of the other couple in the shadows. "I think we're not alone," she said softly.

"Very observing, my darling. When your eyes grow more accustomed to the dimout you'll recognize our fellow countrymen." Jere lit a cigarette and handed it to Nan.

"Duke and Frieda! Should I go over and take her by the hair?"

"Good Lord, no. We're having fun, too." Jere's fingers caressed the place on Nan's neck where the curls clustered thickest. It didn't make sense that she should enjoy their touch so much, but she did. "Besides you've nothing to worry about. You'll get the guy."

It was the second time Jere had made that statement. "I don't know what makes you so sure," Nan said sharply.

"Don't you." A new ironic note in his voice brought Nan's head up quickly. Again she was on the defensive.

"On second thought I guess I do. If Duke didn't love me, he couldn't have made me want to live by kissing me. Was that what you meant?"

It was a long minute before Jere spoke, and when he did his voice was harsh. "Not exactly, but let's skip it. Gorgeous moon, isn't it?"

But he was not looking at the moon. Nan squirmed around in his arms until she, too, could see the couple at the end of the balcony. They had come to their feet and were merged in a long, close kiss. As Nan looked she felt twin stabs of jealousy. Duke had no business kissing Frieda that way and Jere had no right to be so angry about it.

Because she was hurt and angry Nan acted impulsively. "I believe you fight fire with fire." With a defiant toss of her head she raised her face to Jere's. For a long poignant minute, while his lips hovered over hers, she was swept with a medley of emotions. What was it going to be like, having Jere kiss her?

She did not find the answer, for Jere suddenly raised his head. "And I believe prevention is the best cure." He picked her off the railing and set her on bewildered feet. "Come on. Let's go in and dance."

Back in the ball room Nan didn't know whether to be furious or flattered. Why had Jere refused to kiss her?

The crowd had thinned and Duke had no trouble making his way toward them, although his wide shoulders took space. He was very close before they noticed him.

"Remember you've got him roped and tied if you don't spoil it," Jere had just time enough to whisper a warning.

"I've been looking all over for you," Duke said.

Where? In Frieda's hair? It was the perfect reply but Jere's eyes kept Nan from using it. Instead she went docilely into Duke's arms.

"I've had such a wonderful evening," she said as she danced away with Duke. Jere's raised eyebrow was a salute, and the silly little gesture made Nan happy all the way to her toes.

When Duke suggested that they drive the long way to her apartment she laughingly refused. "And wear out tires! Besides I have to be at the hospital at seven tomorrow."

He lingered at the door uneasily. "I tried to dance with you some more, but you were having such a rush I couldn't get near."

"Think nothing of it, darling," Nan was surprised how easy it was to be magnanimous. "It was sweet of you to rescue Frieda. Jere should have been spanked for brushing her off so completely." She yawned. "Sorry not to ask you up, but seven comes mighty fast."

Brushing his cheek with a light kiss she slipped away from him. Although she was not by nature a gloater, Nan hugged herself all the way up to the sixth floor. And she wasn't at all surprised when her telephone rang fifteen minutes later.

"Just wanted to tell you good night again, darling," Duke's voice came to her in a caress.

So she had him worried. The shoes didn't feel so good on his own feet. Nan giggled as she jumped into bed and pulled off her table light. Jere Willis certainly knew his psychology. And then her mood became serious. Again she was indebted to Jere. He had turned what could have been—what had started out to be—a bad evening, into a lot of fun.

Was he being facetious when he said she upset the chemistry of his bloodstream? Probably. Otherwise he would have kissed her. And yet, on the other hand, her logic might be all wrong. He had said he didn't want a wife. Possibly he had been afraid to kiss her. It was a nice thought.

"Don't be a fool," Nan admonished herself angrily. "You love Duke. Stop thinking about Jere. Stop it, I say. Do you hear me. *Stop!*"

IT WAS a thick, hot summer, New York at its worst. People with one job felt wilted and depressed, but Nan struggled gamely along with her two. She had never dreamed one could walk so many miles in a hospital corridor, never known how many supplies one needed. She folded millions of dressings. But each day brought more interesting assignments, as she was allowed more responsibility.

In the hospital people took on new personalities. A doctor became an exalted personage; even an interne had to be treated with reverence. It seemed almost a dream that once she had danced in Jere's arms.

But there were days when she wished she need never see a hospital again, but on the whole they were happy weeks. Duke was out of town a lot, but on the nights they were together he was sweeter than ever.

It was the last day of her training, a hot one early in June. At noon she was feeding an elderly man, one of her favorite patients. He had a little trouble with his soup, and she noticed that his breathing was jerky, gasping. While Nan was cutting his meat into small pieces he closed his eyes, and when she spoke to him he did not respond. She waited patiently, hating to disturb him too much. Beads of moisture stood on his forehead and a white line circled his lips. Worried Nan picked up his wrist, but she could find no pulse.

Quickly she snapped on the light, but several minutes passed and no one came. Suddenly Nan's worry became panic. She ran out of the room.

The head nurse came in a hurry, took one look and sent for a doctor. Jere and

one of the house doctors arrived at the same time. They tried artificial respiration, but it was useless.

"Well, he certainly went in a hurry," one of the doctors remarked.

Nan couldn't believe her ears. The nice old man wasn't dead, not really. It hadn't been ten minutes since she had given him his soup. If she'd only sent for help when she noticed his breathing, he might have been saved. What right did she have to play nurse? She must quit immediately, before she killed anyone else.

She was a block away from the hospital and going fast when Jere overtook her.

"Hey. Wait a minute. Where are you going?" He took her arm.

"Home," Nan said, "where I belong—where I can't do any harm." Her eyes heavy with unshed tears, begged him to leave her alone.

"You're stopping at my place first for a drink," he told her.

"No, Jere. . . . Please."

But Jere was adamant. "I'll kick you out in half an hour—don't worry. I'm on emergency tonight and I need sleep." When she still objected, he said, with a grin, "Don't be coy. My etchings are put away for the duration."

It seemed incredible to Nan that she had once thought him nice. She'd show him how immune she was to his fatal charm. "I could stand a drink."

Jere's one room apartment was a nest of pipes and books and unsorted laundry. There was lint on the floor and the day-bed was unmade. As Nan waited for him to appear with the drinks, she moved about automatically picking up and straightening.

When he came in, she said severely: "I should think you might keep the place clean."

Jere's eyes were malicious as he handed her the tall glass. "It's a bad sign when a gal starts looking after a man."

That was the straw too many for Nan's strained emotions. Snatching a glass from the tray she pitched its contents squarely in his startled face.

The tears she had been hanging onto so grimly slipped their leash. Her chin quivered, and the sobs which followed must have come from her toes to hurt so badly.

Flicking the liquor out of his eyes, Jere

placed his tray on the table. He picked Nan up and sat down with her on the chair that was the least cluttered. Although she could hear his voice it was several minutes before the meaning of his words came through to her.

"I know how you feel. The first time it happened to me I went out and got gloriously plastered. But it's one of the things you've got to learn to take."

"He was so sweet and patient," Nan sobbed. "If I'd called someone sooner he might be alive." The sobs rose again, choking her words.

Jere waited until she had quieted. "Nonsense." His voice was brusque. "He had a heart condition which was bound to flick him off. Nothing could stop it."

"That's awfully nice of you, but—"

"Look at me!" Jere pried her face out of the shelter of his shoulder. "There are a lot of things people might call me, but by God *nice* isn't one of them. Have I ever bothered to lie to spare your feelings?"

Why of course he hadn't. And yet, Nan didn't dare let herself be comforted.

"Have I?" Jere repeated.

"No—no, you haven't." In the moist blueness of Nan's eyes appeared a rainbow of renewed hope and courage.

"Good girl," Jere patted her approvingly. "Come out into the kitchen and wash your face and I'll fix a new drink."

THE kitchenette was as immaculate as the other room was untidy. "It wouldn't be sanitary to have it dirty," Jere explained. "I cook here."

They had their drinks sitting on the white enamel table. "It's so much nicer out here," Jere said.

It must have been good liquor for it made Nan feel warm and cozy, and it made Jere, sitting beside her explaining angina cases, seem the nicest, kindest person she had ever known. Nan was horrified when she looked at her watch to see how long she had overstayed her time limit. Guiltily she slid off the table.

True to form, Jere did not urge her to stay, but he did follow her to the door. When she tried to put her appreciation into words he interrupted impatiently. "Skip it. If you feel so heavily in my debt, you might come back tomorrow night and I'll broil lobsters."

Nan's heart gave a lurch wholly out of proportion to her fondness for broiled lobsters a lurch which put her on her guard. "That'll be grand. Duke and I are both crazy about lobster. You don't mind if I bring him?"

"No, of course not. *Do* bring Duke," Jere answered. There was a gleam in his eyes Nan couldn't interpret. She wasn't at all sure she liked it, but she was sure of one thing—Jere was going to kiss her, and if she had any sense at all she would stop him! But she wasn't going to stop him. After all, why be prudish about a silly little kiss.

And then Nan knew, too late, as Jere's lips pinned down her fluttering nervous ones, that this was to be no casual kiss, no surface, nice-to-have-met-you affair. It was genuine as rain and sun, and fundamental as life. His lips were cruel in their intensity, cruel and—wonderful.

Nan had reached the end of a long quest. These were the kisses for which she had been waiting. They were the kisses which had led her back to life, the kisses for



which she had been asking so fervently.

With an almost superhuman effort, she broke away from Jere's arms. White and startled she stared up at him. Jere recovered first. "That was a mistake. I apologize."

There was Nan's answer. She turned and fled. As she walked rapidly along the street she was unaware of the hot sun streaming on her uncovered head. Inside her mind was reeling, her heart staggering. So it had been Jere—not Duke—who had kissed her in the hospital that night. How Jere must have laughed when he found the significance she had attached to those kisses. She blushed, remembering how she had thrown up to him that it was Duke who had saved her life.

Fool she had been. Now she understood why he had refused to kiss her at the dance, afraid lest she discover the identity of the man who had touched her heart, afraid lest she offer him an unwanted love.

Nan didn't know how far she had walked, she only knew that she was suddenly very tired. As a person awaking from a heavy sleep she looked about and found she was in Central Park. She sat down gratefully on an empty bench.

As her head cleared she tried to think. There was no undoing what had happened. She would have to face Jere with the knowledge that he knew she was in love with him. She hadn't fallen in love with him, she had slipped into it without knowing it.

But what about Duke? Two months ago she couldn't face life without him. Nan rubbed her eyes with the back of her hand because the blur had returned. Duke had dazzled her, swept her off her feet and she had thought it was love. What should she do about him now? Would she have to hurt him as Jere had hurt her? In her new awareness of pain, Nan's heart shied away from inflicting so much pain on another. Duke loved her surely—even though he had not kissed her back to life, he had demonstrated it in a thousand ways this past summer. Could she squeeze Jere out of her heart and dedicate her life to Duke? She must.

Nan dragged herself up from the bench. It was late and a long hot walk to her apartment. When she reached it she was tempted to crawl into bed and refuse to

even answer the telephone, but she wouldn't let herself be that weak. Grimly she bathed and dressed in a gown of Duke's favorite blue. As she tied the damp ringlets away from her face with a matching ribbon she was surprised to find that, aside from violet smudges under her eyes, she looked no different than usual.

"A broken heart becomes you, my girl." A sob caught at her throat. "But don't you dare start crying."

WHEN Duke hadn't called by seventy-three Nan dialed his number and was greeted by the busy signal. He was in town. Probably he would call her in a few minutes. When a half hour had passed and no call came, she tried again. The wire was still busy. She decided he must be tied up with long distance calls, as he frequently was.

Because she could no longer stand her own company Nan decided to walk the few blocks to his apartment and surprise him. Lights glowed from his living room windows, which proved he was in, because no one left lights on in these nights of unexpected blackouts. The friendly doorman let her in. Without bothering to buzz Duke, Nan took the elevator to his floor.

For a few seconds she stood outside his apartment, composing herself, listening to the vague indistinct sounds which speak of human presence. The she knocked, her usual brisk tattoo and waited for Duke's familiar footsteps.

When he didn't come, she rapped a second time louder and more briskly. There was a sudden hush behind the locked door. It was the hush which comes over the forest when the hunter approaches with his gun. Nan gave herself a mental shake, she must stop imagining such foolishness. She was no hunter, and Duke wouldn't hide from her.

She would pound louder, make him hear her. But in the act of doing so she stopped motionless, and stood with her arm raised, frozen. Duke wasn't in there alone. There was someone with him whom he didn't want her to see. It could be but one person—Frieda.

Half way to the elevator Nan was surprised to find she was tiptoeing. As she walked slowly home she wondered why this new blow didn't hurt. Was she

numbed to suffering? She was sure it was only temporarily, that the pain would come and it would be overwhelming. But she would face it this time, take it standing on her feet. Because she dared not risk the long sleepless hours of the night with their undermining loneliness, Nan called Memorial and asked if they could use an extra nurse's aide. She buttoned herself hastily into a fresh uniform, and called a taxi.

"I am certainly glad to see you," the head nurse's greeting was cordial. "If you'll answer lights, you'll do a lot toward preserving my sanity."

The corridor looked like Broadway before the blackout. It was hot and the patients couldn't sleep. They wanted fresh water, or their pillows smoothed, and Nan went from one to another.

In the hallway of open doors there was one that was closed. It belonged to Mr. Williams who had hallucinations of people trying to harm him. Thinking how hot his room must be, Nan opened the door and stood quietly listening. Satisfying herself that he must be sleeping she moved away, leaving the door ajar.

When she came by it again, a few minutes later, it was tightly shut. So he wasn't asleep. Nan went in to see if she couldn't do something to help him get some rest. In the dim light she could see that his bed was empty, and even as she noted it the door crept shut behind her.

"So you're the one."

"I thought you'd be more comfortable with the door open," Nan said, in the calmest voice she could muster. As she spoke she backed toward the head of the bed, hoping to be able to find his light cord.

Her fingers were on the cord, groping toward the switch, when the hands came out of the darkness, and a viselike grip caught her right arm. There was a sickening snap, a wave of pain and Nan learned how easily an arm could be broken.

The hands reached her throat. "Jere . . . Jer . . ." The scream died off into a gurgle. The fingers banding her throat were wires, barbed wires, digging, cutting, pressing. Her breath was going. With her last strength Nan kicked the bedside table.

The door must have been opened be-

cause it was lighter. There was a smack. It was a fist hitting a chin, but Nan didn't know about that until later—much later.

THE smell of sprints of ammonia was strong, and the light blinding when Nan came back to consciousness. She wondered who the people were and why they kept hurting her arm.

Gradually, as things stopped whirling, she recognized one of the house doctors and two of the nurses. But there should be someone else. Her eyes groped on until they found Jere, Jere with a very black eye and a scratched cheek.

"You seem to make a habit of saving my life," Nan said, ignoring the others.

His cocky grin was unsteady. "I can't take the bows this time. They go to Duke for being psychic."

So he wanted none of her, not even her gratitude.

"We're going to set your arm. I'll be as gentle as possible, but it may hurt quite a bit," the doctor told her.

It did hurt, excruciatingly, but Nan set her teeth against the pain and clung to the hand of one of the nurses. Once Jere came to her and stuck a hypodermic needle into her arm. Because his hand trembled slightly, because there were huge drops of moisture on his forehead, Nan managed a reassuring smile for him.

At last it was over and her arm a neat white bundle and they wheeled her off into a bed, wrapping her up in spite of the heat.

She fell into a half sleep and was conscious of someone calling. "Nan, Nan, darling." She was fighting against the sound of that voice.

For a second she opened her eyes but closed them quickly. It was only Duke as she should have known it would be, for Jere didn't call her "darling." He called her "my darling."

"You thought Frieda and I were—Oh, you silly child."

Why should she bother to stay awake to hear something she had heard before. Duke leaning over her bed, assuring her of his love, was a movie she'd seen before, and not a very good movie.

But his voice was persistent for being in a dream. "I can explain everything.

Frieda came to see me about some insurance she's having trouble collecting. I didn't know it was you at the door.

Suddenly Nan was fully awake. She wasn't reliving a scene from the past. This was the present and again Duke had come running to her, declaring his love. Only this time she wasn't the glib, trusting girl she'd been before.

With an effort she said, "How did you happen to find me here?"

"After you were gone I was worried. I was so afraid you'd—" his voice broke.

Nan's mind supplied the end of the sentence. He'd thought she'd try again, to take her life. And she'd thought Jere a conceited ass!

"And then what did you do?"

"I called your apartment, but you didn't answer and then I started calling hospitals. Frieda said I'd never find you and so she called Willis and told him I was worried about you, that you'd seemed depressed." His voice trailed off. He slid to his knees beside the bed. "Oh, Nan, darling, we'll be married tomorrow."

And so Duke didn't love her, either—He was only afraid to tell her so, lest she commit suicide. Nan closed her eyes.

"Get up and go back to Frieda," her voice was low but steady. "We won't be married tomorrow—or any other day. We don't love each other." She managed a twisted smile. "Tell Frieda there'll be no hard feelings. I'm really grateful to her for coming back."

Duke's expression changed slowly from disbelief to a mixture of relief and hurt ego, which made Nan uncertain whether she wanted to laugh or cry. He said, "You're absolutely sure?"

"Positive. I thought my heart was hurt that other time, but now I know it was only my pride. I guess I've grown up at last, Duke, learned to take things." There was a trace of bitterness in her voice because she was thinking—*I can even take knowing I love a man who doesn't love me.*

The door swung open, admitting a red-haired tornado. "Your time's up!"

It is hard to make a dignified exit when another man finds you on your knees beside a girl's bed, but Duke managed.

"Is that any way to speak to a visitor?" Nan asked when she and Jere were alone, afraid to let a silence grow between them.

"No, it's not. But it's the way to speak to a two-timing stuffed shirt!"

"Aren't you forgetting that he's my fiancé?"

"He is not. Oh, I know it's not nice to eavesdrop, but I gave the guy five minutes before I started listening."

Jere was across the room and down beside the bed where Duke had been only a minute ago. Only this time, it didn't seem silly—it seemed wonderful, too good to be true.

"Nan, dearest, if you hadn't got hep to him I'd have broken your neck."

"But, Jere, what's it to you, you don't—"

"Love me. You don't want a wife," Jere finished the sentence for her. "You're mixed in your tenses, darling. I didn't want to love you, and I didn't want a wife—" He stopped, his voice becoming sober. "Did you ever want to murder, Nan?"

She shook her head.

"Well I have. Twice tonight. First when I found Williams choking you, and again when Duke came running back—We won't go into that, but at least it knocked all the silly notions out of my head. Nan, dearest, will you forget how—"

Nan had only one arm but she used it to advantage. As she pulled the rumpled red head close against her breast she knew it was the thing she had been wanting to do since the first day she saw him.

"Jere," she said, much later, "why did you kiss me that night?"

"Because you made me so damned mad. I'd done everything and you wouldn't react. So I thought, 'To hell with her, she's nothing but a sleeping beauty.' And then I remembered how the prince wakened the sleeping beauty—"

"And so you kissed me and it saved my life." Nan's voice was dreamy.

"The hell it did," Jere contradicted. "The stomach pump did that."

"I'll never believe that. You made me well by kissing me." Nan snuggled more deeply into his arms. "You know, Jere, I think I'm going to be sick a lot."

Tall, Dark & 4-F

By VINA
LAWRENCE

That was all Sally knew about Nick, and yet she offered her heart before he asked for her hand.

Sally poured hot coffee from the thermos and gave Nick a corned beef sandwich. It was as if he was someone she had always known.



THE new welder had his back to Sally. He was already at work when she arrived that morning at her bench in the munitions factory. He wore a blue coverall and his head was completely covered by the enormous weld-

er's helmet. She saw that he was tall and lean and was apparently having a wonderful time.

"Take that, Hitler!" he cried triumphantly as he placed his welding torch against the glowing metal and made the

sparks fly. "That'll burn off your mustache, you so and so!"

Sally also wore a blue coverall and her face and head were covered with a big welder's helmet. She took up her torch and went to work but the whir and noise of the torches didn't drown out the new man's enthusiasm.

"Take *that*, Tokio!" he cried, blazing away with his torch. "That'll put a spot on your rising sun! Take that and *that*!"

This went on for more than an hour, while everyone in the big welding room worked away furiously. Only Sally, just back of the new man, could hear his delighted war cries as he worked.

Then there was a pause and he turned and said, "It's great to be winning the war, isn't it, Shorty?" He slapped Sally a resounding bang on her shoulders.

She recovered her balance and turned on him. "Take your hands off me, you big stiff!" she said.

The two helmets glared at each other, although neither of them could see the other's face.

"Great guns, you're a *girl*!" the new man cried.

Sally's voice was heavy with sarcasm. "Could be!" she said grimly.

"But I didn't take a good look at you and I just thought you were a short little guy behind me. I'm sorry if I nearly knocked you down. Now that I take a look at you, I can see that—"

He was looking at the swell and curve of her breasts. Size thirty-four bust curving down to a size twenty-four waist made something to look at.

He looked thoughtfully. "I can see that—that—"

"I *see* that you can see!" Sally said, and she gave him a sharp kick in the shin.

"Oh, hey now!" he cried. "I didn't mean anything! Isn't there enough going on in the world without us starting a private war?"

For answer Sally simply turned her back and picked up her blow torch and went back to work, sending sparks flying in all directions. Another hour went by while the new man worked away, letting out an occasional burst of triumphant hate against the enemy. Then another pause. . . .

He turned and asked, "Say what do you look like under that helmet? I mean do you have a face to match that—that—"

He was looking at the curves again and Sally stiffened.

"Never mind!" he said hastily, "Don't kick again. I just wondered if your face *matched* or if you were a ghoul."

"I'm a ghoul," Sally said. "I have green eyes, an eagle beak." Then she turned furiously back to her work.

A half hour later he said, "Well, I could always take you out with the helmet *on* and introduce you as my woman from Mars."

Sally didn't answer, but after a time the noon whistle blew, and then she jerked off her helmet. And there she was, red-gold hair spilling suddenly from her loosened snood and falling about her shoulders in soft, loose waves. Her face was young and waxy-fresh without make-up and she had great brown eyes and a few little freckles on her button nose. Her lips were wide and bright pink and she had a stubborn chin.

She blinked at the new man's helmeted face and he stared.

"Great day in the morning," he said simply. Then he took his helmet off and it was her turn to stare.

HE had crisp brown curls and deep-set gray eyes and a hard-as-rock brown face. He was rather frighteningly handsome. Tall and dark and lean, and there was a long cleft in his big chin. Sally smiled.

"Hello," she said and her voice was suddenly very sweet and very, very feminine. After all, with men getting scarcer and scarcer, a girl didn't see anything like *this* every day in the week.

"Hello," he said and he grinned, showing glinting white teeth. It crinkled his brown face and made his gray eyes dance. "I'm Nick Thomas."

"I'm Sally Blaine," she said and then they shook hands solemnly.

"You are a darn gorgeous ghoul," he said.

"I'm sorry I kicked you," she said.

And then they just looked at each other some more.

"It's great to have a job," he said then. "I've been without work for three months,

nearly. I tried my darndest to enlist, even tried the Merchant Marine, but no go. I'm stuck in 4-F and that's that. I busted my knee cap once in a sort of shipwreck and I've got a silver plate in my knee. So they won't take me. My knee's as good as anything, though. I can hike ten miles and everything, but try to convince them! No, they say I'm 4-F and so I'm 4-F. So finally I gave up and got this job and its swell, after all. Say, I bet I killed about a thousand Japs this morning. After all, they've got to have munitions, huh?"

"Sure," Sally said. "This is winning the war, too, you know. I'm sorry, though, about your knee. Were you a sailor when you were hurt?"

"Not exactly. I had a job on a private boat, sort of. Say, I'm hungry enough to eat a horse. Where's the cafeteria around here, anyhow?"

"A cafeteria in a *Grant* factory?" Sally scoffed. "Don't make me laugh! We bring along a lunch pail here!"

She picked up her red lunch box and thermos from under her bench and waved them at him. He looked dismayed.

"Then I haven't any lunch!" he cried.

"Mom always puts in more than I can eat," Sally said. "Come on."

"No kidding? You've got enough?"

"Sure," Sally said leading the way into a stock room.

They found a packing case near a large window and Sally spread her lunch out. Outside of that window was the little town of Grantville, Vermont, where she had always lived. It was a grubby little factory town, built around the ancient red brick Grant Sewing Machine Factory. Only recently the factory had been turned into a munitions plant and the town was full of new workers.

Sally poured hot coffee from the thermos and gave Nick a corned beef sandwich. It was as if he was someone she had always known.

"What do you mean no cafeteria?" he cried. "There *ought* to be a cafeteria for this crowd working here!"

Sally laughed. "Maybe you ought to just dash into New York and tell the Grant Factory board of directors about it!" she said. "Listen, the Grant Sewing Machine Factory was founded a hundred

years ago by old N. T. Grant, and they haven't changed a thing about it since then! The factory has just gone on working people in the same old red brick sweatshop, making money for the Grant family! The Grant family moved away from Grantville years ago. They are rich New York society people today. So what? So when they had to start making munitions they only made just such changes as they absolutely *had* to. *They* don't care if we eat out of a lunch pail!"

"Say!" Nick cried. "That's too darn bad! Why don't the workers complain? Why don't they protest or something?"

Sally shrugged. "Oh, they do," she said. "They asked to have that south brick wall torn out and glass brick put in for light, and they asked for a cafeteria and the girls asked for a decent powder room and even the town people have been after them to put in a decent first aid room. But so what? So the Grants keep going to cocktaily parties and the board of directors keeps postponing things, and we keep bringing lunch pails! Here, have another sandwich?"

Nick took the other sandwich. "I didn't know much about things here," he said. "I just got in yesterday and the town's so crowded that I couldn't even find a room. I'm staying in the cook's room at the local hotel. You don't know where I could get a room, do you?"

Sally knew that he couldn't get a room. The town was that crowded, but she had an idea. If she moved in with her sister and her two kid brothers took her room, it would leave the attic room vacant. The attic room was private and had its own washroom and a separate entrance from the back stairs. He would like that.

"We might have a room at my house," she said. "You can come home with me for dinner and talk to Mom. We've never had a boarder but everyone in town has to help out now."

"That would be swell!" he said. They stood up then and grinned at each other. "Thanks for the lunch, ghou!" he said.

Sally smiled at him, her heart pounding. Even though a lot of new workers had come to Grantville, there were still very few handsome young men in town. Very, very few. And here was Nick Thomas—tall, dark, and 4-F! And he

had dropped right out of the skies into her very lap.

It must be fate. Sally went back to her welding with her eyes shining. Life was about to arrive in Grantville, she decided. After eighteen years of nothing happening, Nick Thomas had arrived!

He stopped his welding in the middle of the afternoon to ask, "Got a boy friend?"

"Well—not really," Sally said and went red under her helmet.

She knew that Eddie Phillips, the foreman's son, considered her his "girl." He was slight, sandy headed and drank too much. He was 4-F, too, from an alcoholic heart. But he was one of the few boys left in town, now, so Sally had been going places with him. She knew that Eddie really meant to marry her. His father, John Phillips, the foreman of the factory, even called Sally, "daughter" in a joking way.

In fact everyone in the little town probably thought there was a sort of understanding between Eddie and Sally. But there wasn't, really. Sally didn't even like Eddie. She was convinced of that now.

"I don't have a real boy friend," she said firmly. Because already she knew that Nick was going to be her new boy friend.

"Good!" Nick said. "Then you'll show me the town tonight?"

Sally laughed. "There's one picture show and two drug stores. There is quite a hot competition between the two drug stores. One of them puts *both* whipped cream and a cherry on ice cream sodas, and the other retaliates by giving the customers two olives with each sandwich. It's a very wild town! Even a juke box in the drug store on the corner. You can dance if it isn't too crowded."

"We'll paint the town red," Nick promised. "We'll take in both soda fountains and play all the records in the juke box!"

It was wonderful, really. Because when she took Nick home for dinner, all the family liked him. Her mother made him at home in the attic room and he was all moved in before dark.

In fact the late winter dusk was hanging like a pale lavender wrap about the shoulders of the little town when Sally and

Nick started out to paint things red. A bit of silver moon hung above the hills and the stars were out like jewels.

Sally had put on her beige coat with the fur collar and Nick was more handsome than she could have believed in his gray tweeds. They walked down the two blocks of Main Street and Sally knew that everyone in town would know about her new man in an hour!

At the end of the Main Street they halted, for the sidewalk ended. Sally pointed up the hillside to the pointed turrets of a dark old mansion at the top of the hill.

"That's our local castle," she said, "the old Grant mansion. It's been boarded up for ten years now. Ever since the old man's death. None of the younger Grants have even been back for a visit since the funeral. Once in a while a servant comes up to check things or something, but otherwise it's vacant. An awful waste, isn't it? It would make a swell community center with dances in the big old ballroom."

Nick stuffed his hands in his pockets and looked up at the dark mansion. "You're darned right," he said.

AND so then they went to the picture show and first to one drug store and then to the other. At the second drug store they played the juke box and danced in a vacant room in back. Other couples were there and Sally introduced Nick to everyone. Presently Eddie Phillips came in.

He was flushed and angry looking, and Sally knew that he had been drinking. Sally was dancing close in Nick's arms when Eddie came over and tapped Nick's shoulder.

"Break!" he said.

"You've been drinking too much, Eddie!" Sally said quietly.

"Come on and dance with me! You're my girl, you know!" Eddie said loudly.

"She doesn't want to dance with you," Nick said. "So that's that. Go drink some black coffee!"

Eddie glared at Nick. "I've heard all about you!" he said. "News travels fast in this town, you know. You're a new fellow at the factory, but it sure looks funny to me that you have moved right into Sally's house!"

"Do you mean anything by that?" Nick asked coldly.

"I mean just what you think I mean!" he said. "And Sally's going to get herself talked about!"

"I'd hate to hit a drunk man!" Nick said.

"Oh, *would* you! Well, *you* aren't drunk, so I guess it'll be all right if I hit you!" Eddie hit Nick a hard, unexpected blow on his chin that sent him against a door that opened on a porch.

Nick caught his balance and rushed at Eddie. He pushed him outside and yanked him down the steps to an old rain barrel full of last night's rain water. He ducked Eddie's head in the cold water, and everyone laughed. But Sally went white, for she knew how much influence Eddie's father had at the factory. She knew this would make Eddie and his whole family furious.

They would be furious with Sally, as well as Nick, for allowing a strange boy to humiliate their son. The whole town would probably feel that Sally had gone too far. Eddie drank but he was a home town boy.

Sally was silent as they walked home but Nick laughed about it.

"If you had liked him, I wouldn't have done it," he said. "He was just jealous but I could tell you didn't like him."

"No, I didn't like him," Sally said. "But small towns are funny, Nick. They don't like outsiders to come in and take their girls and stick their heads down rain barrels!"

"You aren't his girl!" Nick cried.

"Not any more, you may be sure of that!" Sally said and laughed now, and then she looked at Nick and knew that no matter if people talked about her, he was worth it!

DURING the next few weeks Sally's life became just so much a part of Nick's that it was hard to look back to a time when she didn't know him. They ate their lunch together every day and sometimes talked until they forgot to eat. In the evenings after they had finished work they went to the show or sat around talking to other factory workers Nick had met and liked. Jerry and Lane, two men at the factory who were intensely in favor

of improvements at the factory, often came to talk to Nick because he was so sympathetic and interested.

It was as if all her life had been waiting for him.

Then one night she awoke from a sound sleep and saw the moonlight flooding her bedroom. A soft whistling sound came from the orchard and she rushed to the window. Nick's tall, striding form was coming up the lane. Apparently he had gone out for a moonlight walk. How wonderful! Sally had always wanted to go out into the moonlight in the dead of the night and had never had the courage.

Somehow, now, she just had to go out and meet Nick.

She slipped quickly into slacks and a polo coat and ran softly down the back stairs. The moonlight poured down, white hot and magic, glistening on the dew. Sally had no idea of the time. She only knew that this was a wonderful night and she had to be out in it with Nick!

"Hey!" she whispered. "Night owl! I saw you and came down! It must be after midnight!"

He laughed softly and put his arm through hers. "It is nearly five o'clock in the morning," he said. "I've been out looking at—at the country side. You'd better get back to bed!"

"And leave this beautiful moon! I'm wide awake and you'll have to take *me* walking in the moonlight now!" Sally said, laughing.

Nick laughed. "In New York five in the morning is quite a conventional hour to be coming home but I'm afraid that *here*—well, do you dare?"

"I do dare!" Sally laughed. "Come and I'll show you the top of the hill where I used to go when I was a little girl."

And so they climbed a hill back of the house and watched the sleeping town below them, wrapped in a veil of moonlight.

She shivered and he put his arm about her. It was then he kissed her for the first time. He just held her to him and put his lips on hers, very tenderly, very sweetly, and Sally knew that the fire he set then would never go out.

He let her go and said, huskily, "Sally, that—that wasn't the way I meant to do it. I meant to say a lot of things but—"

let's go back now!" He took her arm.

And so they went back in silence and Sally clung to his arm.

The dawn was silver pink and gleaming as they ran, a little guiltily, back along the path. An automobile passed them in the misty road and Sally gave a little cry.

"What will happen to my reputation, Nick Thomas?" she laughed. "You are giving me big city ways, coming in at dawn!"

But there was nothing to feel guilty about, really, she told herself when she was back in her room. A moonlight stroll and a kiss, that was all. Yet she felt as if she had done something wrong, and all day the feeling haunted her. It was at five o'clock when John Phillips, the big, red-faced foreman, sent for her to come to his office.

He didn't ask her to sit down and he spoke bluntly.

"Sally, I'm disappointed in you. I thought you were the sort of girl who could work along side of men without losing your head and turning theirs. But I think you'll have to leave the factory. I don't like to fire you, but after all the town is getting full of more mature and more experienced workers and— Maybe we can use you in the office later."

She was fired like that!

"But what in the world brought this about?" she cried. "Of course, Eddie is angry with me but you aren't so little that—"

He looked her in the eyes. "I passed you in a car at dawn this morning, Sally. You were walking along the road with that new fellow at dawn! In this town we don't want a girl who will do that sort of thing working in this factory. I guess that's about all, Sally."

She turned wordlessly and left. She didn't know whether to laugh or cry. She wondered if John Phillips would tell his wife, and she knew he would. His wife would spread it and enlarge it. It would scandalize the town.

She had lost her job because she had gone out into the moonlight with Nick and had come in at dawn! But she kept a stiff upper lip about it and passed it off casually enough at home.

"Too many experienced men are com-

ing to town for welding jobs," she explained at supper. "They are transferring me to the office, but for a while I'll be doing nothing."

She told it so lightly that the family took it casually. Her mother was glad to have her back home to help, especially since Nick made extra cooking. And Sally found that she loved being home, knowing that she was cooking for Nick, having him come home from work and find her fresh and lovely, having him praise her cooking.

She was quite aware that the town was gossiping but she didn't care. When she and Nick were married, all that talk would stop soon enough! Anyhow nothing mattered now only Nick.

AND so the day came when Nick said, "Say, tomorrow is my birthday. Are you going to make me a birthday cake, Sally?"

And immediately Sally began to plan a little dinner for him, a cake with candles. She would ask some of the friends he had made at the plant and they would have a special little dinner.

It was an unusually warm day in March when they sat on the front veranda, planning the birthday. Sally was holding Nick's hand and laughing up at him when a car stopped in front of the house.

Both Sally and Nick stood up as a group of lovely girls and two men stepped out of the expensive car.

"Who on earth. . . ." Sally cried.

Nick had gone scarlet and he jammed his fists into his pockets.

"Friends of mine from New York," he said. "Sally, I—"

But he had no time to say more. The three girls and two men had reached the veranda and were screaming at him as he went out to greet them.

"Nickey Grant!" one of the girls yelled in a shrill voice. "You old meanie, we've come to take you back to town for your birthday! We've planned the most marvelous party at my penthouse. Caviar and everything and everyone will be there. And I've got the best orchestra on Broadway to play for you! You can certainly get away from the old factory for a few days. After all, it's *your* factory."

Sally stood in the doorway, hearing

what was said, and her heart just leaped to her throat. Grant . . . Nickey Grant!

He turned and caught her arm and introduced her to the group. There was a lean, mustached youth named Bill and a short middle-aged man called Freddie. There was a girl called Candy who had blonde hair and another girl with even blonder hair called Alice. And there was the tall, very dark, olive-skinned girl with green eyes named Diane who had put her arms about Nick and kissed him possessively.

"Sally," Nick said, "I'm sorry for you to find out who I am this way. You see, the directors made me promise not to tell my name here. They didn't object to me getting a job at the factory, but they thought it would sound like phony publicity if it made the papers. Anyhow, I didn't want any favors. I just wanted to work here and find out what it was all about for myself. . . ."

"Then your name is—"

"My name is Nicholas Thomas Grant, III," he said simply. "My uncles and the directors have charge of the factory now, but some day it will belong to me."

"I see . . ." Sally said.

"Well," Diane said, "Uncle certainly hasn't liked the reports you wrote him. He read about these people here who want all sorts of improvements made. He said they were radicals and that he was coming down to fire the ringleaders! He's planning to come back with you, I think—"

"Nick!" Sally cried. Her face was paper white. "You didn't write and tell them what Jerry and Lane said, did you? That was in confidence! And now they'll be fired! Nick, how could you—"

She clung to his arm, looking up into his face.

"Well!" Diane said. "Fancy! She seems rather emotional over you. Maybe you also forgot to tell her that we are engaged!"

"Engaged. . . ." Sally whispered.

Nick was crimson. But he looked into Sally's eyes and said, "That's right. My engagement to Diane was announced last summer. She didn't want me to come up and work in the factory but— But we didn't break our engagement, did we, Diane?"

"We certainly did *not*!" Diane said. "And I can see that it was about time for me to come and get you! You wrote that you had found a cozy place to stay but I had no idea how *very* cozy!"

But Sally was still staring into Nick's face. A *Grant* . . .

"And I told you all about the Grant family and showed you the house!" she said. "You must have been laughing at me!"

"Sally, I wasn't laughing!" Nick cried. "I wanted like the devil to tell you, but girls will talk and I'd promised the directors. But I meant to go down to New York in a few more weeks and get back that promise and—Sally, there was so much I wanted to tell you: That I got my knee hurt on my own yacht and that the night I came in at five o'clock, I had spent the night roving over the old Grant mansion with my flashlight."

"Nickey!" Diane said sharply. "Are you going to get your things and come with us or not? Don't tell me that the *charms* of this place have got you down!"

He hesitated, still looking at Sally. But Sally had grown suddenly cold and hard with rising anger.

"Yes, he's going!" she said bluntly. "He wouldn't want to stay here now. I don't think he would find it very pleasant here now."

THEN she turned and ran to her room and wept. He went, all right, for she heard him calling good-bye, heard the car driving away.

In the two weeks that followed, Sally was tense and white and silent. He wrote her letters from New York, but she sent them back unopened. His was another life and another girl, and Sally didn't intend to try to eat any crumbs he might throw her. The townspeople were saying that he had jilted Sally and she let them talk. Nothing mattered. Nothing would ever matter again. . . .

And then one day she was on Main Street at the market across from the factory when Molly Jones, who worked in the factory, saw Sally.

"Look, Sally," Molly said. "They're putting in all the improvements in the factory, the glass wall and the powder room and the cafeteria. . . ."

Sally looked and saw the workmen. "Yes, they are!" she cried.

"They have fifty workmen here, so it can all be done in a couple of days and won't interfere with the factory production," Molly cried. "And young Nick Grant is taking the money right out of his own pocket because he couldn't get any action out of the board of directors. Isn't it wonderful?"

Sally only stood there looking at the bricks being torn down from the south wall of the factory. So Nick was back in town! For a moment that was all she could think of, all she could feel. Then she heard his voice at her elbow.

"Sure, it's wonderful," he said.

Then Sally turned about and faced him. His gray eyes were laughing, just as if he hadn't ruined her life and left her picking up the bits. She looked at him and an unreasoning fury rose in her breast.

"Oh, I don't know!" she said tensely. "We wanted all these improvements at the factory, all right, but we wanted them because we deserved them and not because—not because a playboy took pity on the poor underprivileged workers! We don't like charity, Nick Grant!"

Then she felt the tears stinging her eyes and she turned and rushed away. But he followed her up Main Street and right in front of the corner drug store he caught up with her. He caught both her arms and turned her to him so that he could look down into her flushed face.

"Listen to me—"

"Let me go, Nick Grant!" she cried. "Haven't you done enough to me? You made me lose my job and my—my boy friend and my reputation. You made me get—fired. And my whole family is scandalized. I'll never live down what you did to me. Now don't start pawing at me on Main Street. Go away and leave me alone. Go away and leave Grantville alone! We've got along without any Grants for a long time and we can do without you! Go on back to Diane before—before your caviar gets cold!"

SHE would have broken away from him, but he caught her closer and suddenly he held her to him and kissed her. He

kissed her right there on the Main Street in broad daylight! He kissed her hard and long and long. And then he held her sobbing, angry body to his.

"That'll give the old town something to talk about for awhile, honey!" he said. "And you *are* going to listen to me. I came back here to live. I'm going to keep on working in the factory, and I'm going to open the old mansion and live there and turn the downstairs over for recreation rooms. The factory is going to be enlarged and a lot more workers will be in town. I'm going to do a lot of things and I'll need you, Sally. I came back to stay and to ask you to marry me!"

"Marry you!" she gasped. "But Diane—"

"Oh, we broke it off. Diane had her own ideas of what she wanted me to do. She had a nice desk job lined up and she thought I'd take it when I got over my craze for working in the factory. When she found that I wasn't going to get over that craze, she was through plenty quick. And it was all right with me. We'd never really hit it off. It was all sort of an arrangement that our families had brought about. I knew before she came here that I had to break it off with her because I'd fallen for you. I didn't know what it was like loving someone until I knew you, Sally."

Sally held her breath for a moment, trying to realize what was happening to her. She was going to be Mrs. Nicholas Thomas Grant, III, and she was going to live in the Grant mansion! How the town would talk. And how proud she would be for them to talk about that.

Nick still had her in his arms and she looked over his shoulder and saw that people were staring at them from every store window and every street corner and from every passing car. She began to laugh shakily.

"You'll have to marry me now, Nick!" she said. "Because I think you've just shattered the last shred of my reputation!"

"In that case," he said, "one more kiss can't hurt!"

And so he held her closer and kissed her again.

Teach Me To Live

By LUCINDA BAKER

Her job was to teach math to soldiers. But one of her own students proved to Sue that a two-some is more fun than a lonesome.



THERE was a new class that morning. Sue Bower took her place behind the huge desk with her usual poise and assurance. Her dark blue suit might have passed for a uniform except for the crisp, white blouse that

"Is love always like this, Peter?" Sue asked.
"Does it make you happy—and yet afraid of the end?"

accentuated the gardenia whiteness of her skin. Her rich brown hair was parted in the middle and rolled neatly in a little frame around her face. On other girls, the hair style might have been sophisticated but it detracted from Sue's beauty and made her blue eyes seem too big for her face.

But she was the perfect type for a civilian instructor at the Air Force Technical school in Chicago. Although she was only twenty-two she had taught school for three years in a small Ohio town. When the Army sent out a call for instructors in mathematics, she was happy to serve her country in the way she knew best. She had majored in math and had never had an opportunity to use it.

The Army approved her appearance as well as her brain power. She wasn't the distracting type. Her work was important. The men who navigated planes and bombed difficult targets had to know complicated arithmetic, and Sue never forgot her duty by trying to act as if she were Lana Turner.

Sometimes, she sort of wished someone would ask her to forget her duty, say, for a date or two every week. Her model roommate, Joan, was always telling her, "It's just that you don't know how to express your beauty. What you need is a lot of lipstick and clothes to show off that figure of yours. Why, if I had your chance, I'd be rationing dates!"

Now Sue put on her spectacles with tortoise-shell rims, which were awe-inspiring to her students. "Good morning," she said, with dignity. Sue never had to cope with flirtation. "I am Miss Bower. Shall we begin?"

It was at that precise moment she suddenly felt as if someone were staring at her. Maybe her slip was showing. It wasn't. But a young man in the last seat of the front row was looking at her intently. Sue blushed, and then she realized that his eyes were mostly amused, rather than flirtatious, and just a tiny bit disbelieving.

Looking at him in return was quite a shock. In all her twenty-two years, no man had had the same effect on her. It was as if she couldn't live another minute without knowing him better. And it certainly had nothing to do with mathe-

matics. She could have coped with that.

He was about twenty-seven and his eyes were as brown as her own hair, full of gold sparkles that meant danger. He had unruly, close-cropped brown curls, which he probably hated. He was tall, even sitting down, and he looked the way a man in uniform ought to look, flat and hard and broad shouldered. He gave her a small salute, and a grin.

She thought, "You're laughing *at* me, not with me," and she looked away, carefully, pretending she hadn't noticed. "We will proceed with the problems for today."

EVERY day for a week, she was terribly conscious of him there in the front row. And this class was different from the ones that had gone before. It had an air of gayety about it. And somehow Sue knew that Private Peter Murray was to blame.

Then one night just as she was leaving the building he was waiting outside. "Hello, Miss Bower," he began. "May I talk to you about something?"

"Of course," Sue said. Her heart was beating a tattoo against her ribs.

"It's about that newest theory you explained to us. I can't quite get it."

Her heart stopped pounding and went back to normal. "I'll help if I can."

"I certainly would appreciate it," Peter continued, taking her brief case.

He wondered desperately what to say next. He was evidently seeing her home. "Actually, arithmetic is fascinating," she began. "It isn't difficult if you get started right."

"You're a girl, and yet you think in terms of algebra and geometry!" There was awe in his voice.

She said defensively, "People don't know how interesting those subjects are." But she knew she really didn't care.

Peter helped her aboard a double-decker bus. "Miss Bower, did you ever stop to think that maybe you're missing a lot? I mean, you've been teaching this new class a week, and nobody knows anything about you. You discourage all attempts at getting acquainted. You act—sort of frozen."

Sue said crisply, "My job is to teach arithmetic to soldiers, not to provide a central heating system!"

"Don't be angry, please!" Peter argued anxiously. "I know I'm barging in. But I like to see everybody happy, and from the first day, I've noticed your eyes are sad. You look afraid, as if life were passing you by. What you need is to thaw out. It's easy if you know how."

Sue's heart had started going too fast again. But she wasn't angry any more. Peter Murray's voice somehow prevented that. It was so quiet and friendly. And there was something about it she couldn't have explained, something that made her go on listening.

"What I wanted to suggest," Peter went on politely, "is that if you would help me with the toughest mathematical problems, off duty, that is, I'd show you how to let go and have fun. Oh, I know that sounds presumptuous, but I know all about you. You look as if life were just a problem in geometry. But it isn't, Sue. Every day ought to be exciting!"

"And you . . . really think I could learn?" she asked, hesitantly, reminding herself that there was nothing personal in the suggestion. It was just a bargain, a business transaction.

"You ought to be dating a different soldier every night!" Peter asserted. "And you could." He sketched a vivid future. "You're cute, under that icy exterior. All you need is to be taught how to have fun."

Sue couldn't be angry. She knew he was right. Peter's brown eyes had penetrated the icy wall between her and happiness. Joan would have told him to run along, that she could run her own life.

But she didn't say that. She knew she would grasp at any chance which let her be near Peter Murray. "All right," she said. "I'll help you with mathematics and you . . . can teach me how to live."

"How about beginning tonight?" he suggested. "I'm at liberty for several hours. We could get off this bus and go to a place I know where we could have dinner and dance. And then we'll fix a time to study."

She knew in her heart that for a chance to go with Peter, she would have agreed to almost any idea. So she said, "All right, Peter, if you really think it'll be worth my help tutoring you."

"I really do." He grinned. "When

we're finished, I'll be a mathematical shark, and you'll be the siren of the Army Air Force Technical School."

They went to a little café on Rush Street, where the specialty of the house was spaghetti, and you chose your music from hundreds of records. They danced and Sue had the sensation of floating in a dream.

Peter kept speaking to people he knew, and his grin was a bright magnet warm as sunshine. Sue felt suddenly alone in the midst of the music, thinking of how terrible it would be to go back to a life that didn't include his smile. And yet, she would have to, unless she somehow miraculously became the kind of girl he went for.

After they danced some more, and had dinner, it was time to go. Outside, they walked a little while down Michigan Avenue. "Thanks for tonight," she told him, almost wistfully. "I guess you were right. What I need is to thaw out. I didn't know how to start."

"You've started now," Peter grinned. She was crazily thankful that he needed help in mathematics.

THE next day she went to class in a dress she had considered too festive before. It was beige, with a red belt and a bright red patch pocket. She didn't just imagine it. The class was different that morning. Several of the men smiled at her when she was explaining problems. The smiles were almost flirtatious, amused, but Sue ignored the amusement.

Peter came that evening for his first lesson. He had to leave early, but they had time for some intensive work. Before they began, Sue asked, "I'm doing better already, don't you think?"

Peter pretended to examine her. "You certainly are. Several of the fellows in class noticed, too. Before the term is over, you'll be dating all of them."

"But I want just to date you!" She almost said it aloud. To cover embarrassment she hurriedly began explaining a difficult problem. Peter listened all evening. He wasn't nearly as ignorant about figures as she had thought. He learned very easily. If he had any difficulties it was probably because he was occasionally lazy.

He was just preparing to go when Joan came home to dress for a late date. She was adorable, all gold and cream loveliness. Sue couldn't miss the look that passed between Joan and Peter. It was a look of genuine interest, of challenge, the kind of look Peter had never given Sue.

Suddenly she knew she was dreaming a desperate dream to think Peter would ever think of her as anything but a good deed.

Joan was saying, "I believe I know Peter. We met at a party."

"Tom Grayson's, wasn't it?" Peter remembered, or else he was just inventing on the spur of the moment. "This is the first chance I've had to really see you. At the party, the stag line was three deep around you."

A few minutes later, he had gone, and there was panic in Sue's heart. Peter didn't belong to her and she knew it. He was just doing a good deed.

Joan took off her make-up. "So Peter is the one responsible for the change in you, Sue. I was sure you looked different."

Sue protested, "I'm afraid that was an optical illusion. I'm just helping Peter with his studies."

"That's a relief. Peter Murray is strictly for smarties. He lost his amateur rating as Prince Charming long ago. You can't be an amateur and date him without getting hurt."

Sue felt incredibly that something inside her was slowly freezing. The first time she saw him she had known he was smooth and popular.

The next morning she used a new shade of lipstick, painting her lips just the way Joan did, into a shining red curve which dominated her pale, small face. The pallor didn't just come from not wearing rouge, but from a strained feeling about her heart.

One of the students asked her, eyes mockingly humorous, "Miss Bower, you're slipping. If you wear that much lipstick, we aren't going to keep our minds on our work. It's sabotage, in a way."

In fact, the whole attitude of the class seemed changed. Even though it wasn't expressed in words, Sue could sense it.

It was as if every one of the soldiers were watching, seeing the ice melt away from her. But she didn't care. In fact, she was glad.

IT WAS Friday night, and Peter made a date for Saturday. "It's your turn, Sue. Tomorrow night we'll polish up on the fine points of a siren's technique." He grinned, "Of course there are some things you have to pick up for yourself. Forget about mathematics and let yourself go."

Sue thought, I don't want to be a siren except to you. I like the way you laugh, the way you know life will always be thrilling. But aloud, she said, "I've made up my mind to make a success of this problem."

"It isn't a problem. That's been your trouble. Life has been all problems in mathematics, and no fun!"

She knew it would make her late, but she went shopping after class. She was reckless, extravagant, and told the salesgirl, "I want something dangerous. Something for a siren!"

"For you, Miss?" she was asked, dubiously.

But in the end, she found just what she wanted, a black chiffon formal, appliqued with black chantilly lace.

As she selected new makeup, she studied her own image and was astonished. Her eyes were lustrous, her lips parted in expectation, her chin reckless with determination. If Peter Murray liked sirens, she would be one! Time was getting short, she knew that. He would be finding someone who didn't have to be taught about life.

She even had time for a quick hairdo, that Saturday afternoon, in a down-town salon. Her dark brown curls were cut short, feathery and sweet about her face, turning it into an ivory heart.

Peter was already waiting for her when she reached the apartment. He and Joan were carrying on an intimate conversation. Joan said brightly, "I've entertained him, Sue, darling. He told me all about your agreement. I think it's the best thing that ever happened to you, honestly I do."

It was as if someone had thrown cold water in Sue's face. She hated having Joan know the truth.

Peter said, dark brows amused, "Joan could give you some hints. Her code matches mine. She's always ready for a thrill, so thrills never pass her by."

Joan purred, "Yes, darling. I've tried to explain it before, but you never seemed interested. But now that you're out of your cocoon, here's the lowdown: Be carefree. Expect life to hold something romantic every day. And remember that a two-some is more fun than a lone-some."

Sue said defiantly, "I'd rather find out by myself, Joan!"

She went to her room and while she was dressing Joan's date called for her. So when Sue came into the sitting room Peter was alone. He was playing the spinet piano and his back was turned to Sue.

"That Joan is bad for a man's peace of mind," he said with a laugh.

Sue said, "I'm ready."

When he turned his face mirrored his surprise, but only for a moment. Then he

grinned, the old, easy-going, let's-have-fun, Peter Murray grin. "Hi, here, siren. Shall we go?"

THEY went to Camellia House, and the Buttery, and the *Chez Paris*. Sue's feet moved magically to the music, though perhaps it was because Peter knew how to guide them. Anyway, the evening was a success. Before it was an hour old, Sue forgot to think.

As they were leaving Camellia House it started to snow. When they went from one place to the next, just down the street, the white flakes clung to Sue's hair, to her eyelashes, and her laughter was muted in the white softness.

They turned in at a door, and in the soft glow of the light, Peter looked down at her. "Sue, it's nothing short of a miracle, the way you've changed!"

Her voice was shaken, "I guess I'm your star pupil. Everything is different. I'll never be afraid to live again! I've missed so much."



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LOVE 
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She wanted to tell him that the miracle was love.

"Sue," Peter said, and his eyes did not leave hers. He lifted her off her feet, and kissed her lips. "Sue, you're . . . very sweet, very lovely."

Somehow she had always known that kissing Peter was sure to be like this, a sweet tide of feeling sweeping everything else aside. And she had known that after she kissed him, life would never be the same again.

It was very simple, really, the simplest mathematical equation in the world, this was love. It was a word you read about, and then it happened to you.

Peter was looking at her almost as if he were seeing a stranger, and she said, not really knowing how it sounded, "Is love always like this Peter? Does it make you happy and yet afraid it may end?" She laughed, uncertainly, "I guess you've really—thawed me out."

A crowd came out of the door, ruining the moment, and Sue went on inside, with Peter following. It was noisy and crowded, and they didn't have time to talk, but it was enough to dance with Peter and to realize, over and over again, that she had known his kiss.

A little later he discovered there was just time to put her in a taxi and get back to his quarters. The night had vanished almost weirdly. It might almost have been a dream.

When Sue came in, Joan was already removing her makeup. "Hello, darling," she said. "You look as if a star had exploded in your hands and covered you with glitter dust. Or am I wrong?"

"I've missed so much, Joan!" Sue said. "I've been locked in a cage of ice."

"Or a cage of mathematics," Joan said.

Sue didn't tell her about Peter. She wanted to keep the knowledge of her love secret for a while.

All the next day there were no messages on the telephone stand, and all afternoon the telephone stayed maddeningly still. Sue spent Sunday afternoon washing her hose and doing various odds and ends. And still nothing happened. Nothing, that is, until after she had gone to bed.

There was the sound of a key rattling in the lock, and Joan's voice, breathless,

saying, "Thanks, Peter! I'll never forget today. Nobody ever took me on a winter picnic, before. You have wonderful ideas. Life will never be dull for you."

Before the door closed, plainly as anything, Sue heard Peter's voice. "Thanks, Joan. You're pretty exciting yourself. You're the kind of girl a soldier dreams of being stranded with some place."

Then there was a short silence, long enough for a kiss, before the door closed.

Sue was trembling with anger and heartbreak when Joan turned on the light. "You dated Peter!" she gasped. "When you knew. . . ." Her face flamed as she realized she was a fool to show her feelings.

Joan took off her sweater and skirt. She said, "Listen, Sue, all I knew was that you had some sort of business arrangement with Peter. You were going to teach him mathematics in return for a few helpful hints on being a success with men. He may have been romantic with you last night, but don't you know you should never take a man of Peter's type too seriously? Just because you dated him once doesn't mean it's permanent. Men like Peter don't play for keeps."

Sue turned off the light. "Would you mind undressing in the bathroom?" she asked Joan. "I want to go to sleep." What she meant was that she wanted to hide, there in the dark, in case she cried.

All her life, she had been facing facts, so that was what she did now. Joan was right. Peter hadn't said, "I love you." He had just kissed her, and she'd jumped to conclusions without waiting. She had certainly arrived at the wrong answer. She'd flunked at love, even if she was a whiz at geometry. Both she and Peter were successful teachers. He knew about life, and she could do complicated arithmetic.

IN THE morning, she had to go to school as usual. She didn't want to, but she knew her duty. She was a little late, after trying to do something about her tear-ravaged eyes.

But now, she was her new self. Short bob, perky and cute, lipstick shiny and bright as a model's, she wore one of Joan's bright sweaters. It was very effective. She could tell that when she went up to her class-room.

It was in perfect order, of course, for this was the Army. But she could almost feel the little gasp of attention that went over the men as she took her place. Sternly, she began the lesson, not looking at Peter Murray, but she could sense his presence. It was a savage torture she was going to have to endure, learn to ignore.

But how can you ignore heartbreak? Instead of standing there in her new hair-do and makeup and scarlet sweater, she wanted to run away and hide.

The class was finally dismissed. As the men filed past her desk, she heard one of them say, very low, "My money was on Peter Murray. He knows his girls as he does his arithmetic. He was an accountant in civilian life, and he certainly transformed teacher."

Peter was one of the last to go out, but he didn't march with the rest. He said, "Sue, what's wrong with you?"

Somehow she managed to speak through stiff, cold lips. "You'd better go, Peter. I learned about your little joke by accident just a second ago. I guess I should have known it all the time. I should have guessed! I should have known last night when you dated Joan."

As long as she lived she would remember his eyes, intent on her, as she went on recklessly, "It was sweet of you to help me, especially since you knew all about mahematics any way. You don't need asistance with anything, do you?"

She turned to go, but he held her, his fingers tight about her shoulders, "Listen, Sue, I'm risking plenty by talking to you when I ought to be on my way to another class. So you've got to let me talk!"

She struggled. "Let me go. I was silly to take for granted that your kissing me was more than a part of my education. You taught me how to live, and I'll never forget the lesson. I guess learning it was a little hard, but after today it will never hurt me again."

"That's a lie," he accused; his mouth was hard, determined. "If you don't let me finish, there will never be a moment

when the memory of this doesn't hurt you. The truth is, Sue, I made the date with Joan before you and I went out. You were late getting home, and . . . I guess I still thought of myself as footloose. Sue, try to understand this . . . every man is an adventurer until he finds the right girl. Conquest is fun. When I saw Joan, I guess I acted according to habit." He stopped, then began again, "I didn't know I loved you, Sue, until later, when I kissed you. You can't hate me for that. I doubt if you knew it, either. It took me all day to realize that I didn't want to date Joan or anyone else, and that though I was supposedly trying to teach you how to live, I was getting an education myself. I was learning how to love. I didn't ever want you to know about the joke part. It was just that soldiers have fun, they have to make a joke out of everything else. I made a bet that you could be a siren, underneath that icy exterior, and I was right. But—I'm sorry, Sue. I'm sorry, and I want to forget it. All I want to do is to love you."

"You're sorry for me," she retorted, anguished. "Please, Peter, don't make it any worse by being sorry!"

"It would take more than sympathy to make me go A.W.O.L. from my next class!" he told her. "I'll meet you outside the hotel when you're finished." He kissed the tip of her nose. "I can't go through the day with lipstick on my face, so that will have to do," he said, "and remember, darling, when I transform a girl into a siren, I want her for myself. Just ignore any soldiers you see, except me."

It was a small kiss, not like the one of two nights before. But she knew suddenly that he wasn't sorry for her. He shared her thankfulness for love. He disappeared around the corner in the hall, and she wished intently that it were evening, and he was waiting for her, outside.

She stood there, not sensing the passage of time. A star had really exploded in her hands, flooding her life with a spray of what Joan had called "glitter dust."

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Paul Vickers took models in his stride until Julia's lovely face came before his camera, and her beauty was such a sacred thing to him that to save her from heart-break he hoped to keep her from success.



He tried to concentrate on the music, on the fragrance of Babs' black hair, but his eyes were drawn to those two at the table.

Star in My Heaven

By VIRGINIA NIELSEN

PAUL VICKERS puffed reflectively on his pipe as he looked at the slight, rather pale girl before him. Behind his glasses his nice-looking young eyes were sizing her up shrewdly.

Her prettiness was of the elfin variety. There was a touch of wistfulness, a hint that once her shyness evaporated, she could be merry. Her clothes did not fit well and she wore practically no makeup. But that wasn't his job.

He thought he saw what Kip Saunders saw in her—an elusive, sprite-like charm that was quite new and refreshing. Kip's enthusiasms seldom went wrong, and over the telephone he had been nearly incoherent, rhapsodizing about his latest discovery.

Paul put down his pipe. "So you want to be a model," he growled, unencouragingly.

"Yes," she said, and smiled at him.

He felt a curious contraction somewhere inside him. The girl was an idiot.



She shouldn't look at anyone as trustingly as that.

He said crossly, "Why don't you go back to the farm? This is a racket and a tough one."

There was a shy teasing in her laughter that surprised him. "They told me you would be like this."

"Yeah? Who told you?"

She blushed but stood her ground. "The girls over at Mr. Saunders.' They said you were a barking dog, the kind that doesn't bite."

He made a noise in his throat and, turning away from her, fired some instructions at his assistant.

"All right," he said to her. "So your mind is made up. Let's get going."

Obediently she pulled off her hat. Her hair was fine, like corn-silk, and it had the same soft gold in it. She combed it in the dressing room he indicated, while he fussed with his lights and the big camera the assistant had wheeled in place.

She came back, looking at him with a shy, expectant smile, and her eyes plainly said, "Go ahead and scold me. It doesn't matter. I can tell by the twinkle in your eye that you don't really mean it. I think you're really very nice."

What could you do but be nice to a girl like that? Grudgingly Paul explained. "Don't expect these pictures to flatter you. These I make just to help Saunders."

She sat docilely while he arranged her under the big flat lights, but her gaze was quick with interest. "How can unflattering pictures help him?"

"Shows him how much room there is for improvement," Paul said, dryly.

Color washed over her pale face and he thought. Thin-skinned little thing.

After she had gone he took out the plates and went into the dark room to develop them. He was conscious of an impatience he had not felt for a long time. As soon as he could, he ran off prints and held them up to scrutinize them carefully.

Unflattering though they were, the pictures definitely heightened her personality. There was mystery and invitation and teasing laughter in her eyes and her smile was captivating. It was that way some-

times, the camera gave a girl a personality she scarcely knew she had.

Paul Vickers stood a long time studying the prints, his pipe between his lips. She would be a success, all right, he thought, and felt a troubling foreboding. Because she wasn't the type who could get along in this game.

THE next time she came to his studio she carried a swank hatbox, the badge of the working model. She walked a little straighter. Her makeup was perfect and a new hairdo gave a lovelier oval to her face.

"Hello," she said, and he was immeasurably pleased to see that she was still a little shy.

"Hello, Miss Forrester," he said, and added quizzically, "Or is that still your name?"

She laughed and he thought it was a pity the camera couldn't capture the sound of it. "Yes. Kip is going to let me keep my own name. He thinks Julia is quaint. He says there are enough girls named Candy and Babs and Gloria already." She laughed again. The studio seemed a warmer, brighter place with her in it.

"So it's 'Kip' already," he said dryly.

She looked a little startled, then blushed and was silent as he arranged for her picture.

Paul was silent, too. He knew Saunders's way of playing his latest discovery for a favorite. Someday there would be a bounce for Julia Forrester. For there was always a new favorite. There had to be in this business.

It was a good thing, Paul thought grimly, that he had long ago steeled his heart to the lovely young models he photographed day after day. Not only to their beauty but to the young helpless appeal of the new ones, like this Forrester girl. It was the only thing to do.

"You could break your heart over them," he told Sarah Bickers, the elderly but not at all unlively aunt who kept house for him in his apartment around the corner from his studios.

"I'm surprised you don't," she teased him.

He made an exclamation of disgust. "They're in a tough racket," he said, as he had said so often. "And what brings

them in? Vanity. Vanity and a thirst for cheap fame. If they are too soft to take it, they can blame no one but themselves, can they?"

"Well," his Aunt Sarah said, a bit acidly, "I suppose you have paid for the right to speak your mind. The softest touch in town, that's what you are to models! They can always count on a loan from you when they start going downhill."

With a grunt Paul retired behind his evening paper, ignoring his aunt's chuckle. He read the gossip columns regularly now, for Julia was starting to appear in them. That was part of Saunders' technique. He squired his latest favorite to all the places where café society gathered. He dressed her and let her be seen. He enjoyed hearing people say, "*Her face is so familiar, but where have I seen her before?*"

Julia frankly gloried in her success. She came very often to Paul's studio, sent by one or another of Saunders' customers. Her loveliness was more polished now. But in spite of the poise she was acquiring, she recounted each triumph to Paul with a naivete like that of a little girl just home from school and full of what had happened. She seemed bubbling with happiness.

As the months wore on, however, there was another difference in her. She began looking a little tired. Paul began greeting her with, "What time did you go to bed last night?" It was seldom early.

One day he said grimly, when they happened to be alone in the studio, "Saunders isn't going to like these pictures."

Her eyes widened. "Why?"

"Your late hours are going to show up in them," he said. "To say nothing of those last three drinks."

She wrinkled her nose and laughed at him. "But he bought the drinks."

"Laugh while you can, beautiful," Paul said. "If you're tired of being a model, it's no concern of mine. There are plenty of models. And you can always find another job."

Her elfin face was suddenly breathtakingly radiant. "Paul," she said, "I'll tell you a secret. It isn't the job that matters any more."

His heart sank. "No?"

She shook her head. "No," she said. "It isn't the job now. It's the boss."

Paul groaned out loud. "You little idiot!"

She stared at him, looking a little hurt, for once unable to laugh off his gruffness.

He straightened and put down his pipe. "I figured you were one girl who might be able to keep her head in this crazy business," he told her bitterly. "Can't you see that Kip has only been building you up? It's always this way with each new one he discovers. She's the only star in his heaven as long as she is new. Then—*plop!* That's the goods, beautiful. And everyone in the business knows it. One every year for Saunders. Each year a new favorite."

She laughed, a little uncertainly. "Paul, you old grumbler! You *are* a bad-weather prophet. But you don't fool me! You're just trying to scare me into getting some sleep, aren't you?"

"I'm not trying to scare you. I'm only trying to pound a little sense into your pretty head."

He came closer to her. Surprisingly, he was really angry. His heart was beating hard with anger. He took off his glasses and looked at her with a sober intensity in his dark eyes that she could not laugh away.

"I'm not teasing you," he said quietly. "Why else do you suppose Kip is so successful, unless it's because he can always work up enthusiasm for a new type? Last year it was the 'Wheat Girl,' the clean earthy country beauty—Linda Adams. You've heard of her. You know what kind of jobs she gets now. Buff pushed her until the advertisers were sick of her face. Now you're it. The elfin type. Next year it will be someone different. And where will you be?"

He stopped, a little surprised at his own intensity. She was sitting in the prop chair, staring up at him, her eyes wide and her face a little pale. He had got under that thin skin of hers, all right.

"I can tell you where you will be," he said brutally, "and it isn't going around with stars in your eyes!"

She winced and he turned away, trying not to be sorry for her. It was something she should be told.

They finished the pictures in silence and she was either thoughtful or offended. She left with a brief "Bye," and he began swearing to himself as he got ready for the next job.

The look in her eyes stayed with him. He thought, "Maybe, I'm wrong, I hope. Maybe Saunders is going to marry her." But the thought gave him no comfort, and anyway he knew better.

He growled at his next appointment, a newcomer, "Why didn't *you* stay on the farm?"

"And milk cows, with these hands?" the girl said, pertly.

He grunted. They were good hands. But there was nothing in her face to help her make the grade. It was too bad, because *she* wasn't soft.

IN SPITE of his predictions, Julia's star continued to rise. Not for several years had Saunders had a model so successful. Paul thought he knew why. Her beauty was not the kind one tired of. A man might always find new things to admire in her clear, laughing eyes, in the shine of her hair, and the haunting elfin expression of her face.

But the advertising public was fickle, he reminded himself cynically. The end would come. And there was that old saw about the higher the limb—or something like that.

When the fall came it was in a way Paul could not have anticipated.

He picked up the evening papers, after one of Aunt Sarah's satisfying dinners, and saw a headline:

PHOTOGRAPHER'S MODEL IN ACCIDENT

Julia's name leaped up at him. He felt a cold chill, and at the same time a quick revulsion because the story was disgustingly splashy.

Paul grabbed the telephone and shouted at the inoffensive operator. When he had Kip Saunders on the line he said, "What about Julia?"

"Oh, hello, Paul! I've just come from the hospital. I'm afraid she's a total loss. Her face, you see—"

"My God, I'm not calling professionally!" Paul cried. "How badly is she hurt? Will she pull through it?"

"Oh, yes! I'm sorry if I sounded unfeeling, old man," Kip apologized easily. "I thought you knew. There was little damage except to her head and face, and they soon were satisfied there is no concussion. Of course, she is suffering from severe shock."

"Where is she?"

Kip named the hospital and Paul thanked him shortly and hung up.

Aunt Sarah was clucking sympathetically. "What a terrible thing! How did it happen?"

"It's all in the paper, I suppose." He was not interested in *how* just now. He was rushing back and forth across the room, looking very young and distraught. "I'm going to the hospital. They probably won't let me see her, but I've got to try, anyway."

"A taxi accident!" Aunt Sarah exclaimed, bending her head over the paper. As he was on his way out of the apartment, she said, "Paul, they've used one of your pictures—"

He swore at her and never realized he was doing it.

They wouldn't let him see her that first night. He realized finally that he could not talk his way past the starched white dragons at her door. And so he went down the street to a bar where he sat for a long, gloomy time over a drink.

The next evening they let him see her for a few minutes. She looked unbelievably slight under the white hospital coverlet, and the bandages that almost completely covered her head and face gave a twist to his heart.

But her eyes laughed up at him as clear and as happy as ever. "Paul! How nice of you to come!"

"Don't you know enough to stay out of taxis?" he growled. "What are you trying to do, put yourself out of the business?"

"Not at all, Grumpy! I'll be back under those horrid lights of yours in no time."

"Don't hurry!" he pleaded. "I'm enjoying a rest. It was 'Give me Miss Forrester in a bathing suit, Miss Forrester on skis, Miss Forrester in this or that uniform, or Miss Forrester enjoying a cigarette,' until I was sick of the girl."

She sighed contentedly. "I have been

busy, haven't I? Maybe I needed a rest. Buff told me not to worry about a thing. Isn't that sweet of him? He is taking care of everything!"

"He ought to!"

Julia sighed again. "Hardboiled as ever, aren't you?" But her eyes laughed up at him.

Paul did not smile.

The nurse said, "That's all for this time," and he went soberly away, worried for her.

A FEW days later Kip Saunders called him at the studio.

"Paul?" he said, his deep voice vibrant with excitement. Paul could see him at his desk, big and broad shouldered and confident. "Paul, I'm sending over a new girl. She's on her way now. Hartwell, her name is. Babs Hartwell."

Another Babs?" Paul said dryly.

Saunders ignored his interruption. "She's terrific. She's the type I've been looking for, Vickers. Dark and sophisticated, yet sweet, if you get it. And plenty of come-hither in her eyes. If her pictures turn out as I expect them to, she's going up like a rocket. In fact, she won't have to go up. She can practically start at the top. I can have the big fellows begging for her in a couple of weeks."

"Sounds good," Paul said, still in that dry flat tone. Kip Saunders' optimism reacted on him like a mouthful of vinegar. "How is Julia?"

"Who? Oh! Julia Forrester." The vibrant excitement noticeably faded from Kip's voice. "Well, I'll tell you frankly, Vickers, there isn't much chance she'll be able to come back. The doctors are doing a wonderful job on her face, I'm sure, and of course it's too soon to tell, but there is apt to be a certain stiffness in those made-over faces. Ever photograph one of them?"

Paul wet his lips. "No," he said.

"Can't fool a camera, you know." He laughed, his hearty, confident laugh. "I should be telling you!"

"Yeah," Paul said. He put down the phone. His teeth clenched tight over his pipe and his knuckles were white as he walked up and down the studio.

Before his anger had worn off, Babs Hartwell arrived. His first look at her

told him she was a natural for success. She had that kind of flawless beauty that artists paint, yet there was enough individuality in her features so one would not forget them.

He knew just by looking at her that she would be photogenic from almost any angle. Besides that, she had sparkle and life. The wiseness in her inviting eyes tantalized, and she was not in the least shy.

Paul put on his gruff act. "So you want to be a model, do you! What percentage do you think there is in it, anyway?"

She smiled a little. "Suppose you let me worry about that," she said.

She would get ahead, all right. No need to worry about her. Paul posed her and shot rapid fire pictures—full face, three quarters, full length, right and left profile, and sent her back to Saunders.

He ducked out of the studio then and ordered a big basket of fruit and an armload of flowers and all the latest magazines sent to the hospital.

In the weeks that followed, he watched Babs Hartwell's star rise with a pain he found it hard to reason away.

"I should quit this business," he told himself. "I'm getting soft."

It was clear from the start that Kip Saunders was behind the Hartwell girl with all his dynamic energy. When she came to Paul's studio, she didn't chatter about her appointments the way Julia had done. But he knew that she was already very busy.

She had a quiet, business-like way of getting things done which she hid behind a deceptively languorous air. It was a funny thing, but Bab's hardness didn't show in the pictures. It almost didn't show up at all. She was so lovely to look at, you forgot about the little gleam in her eyes that was nothing but calculation.

If Paul had not been so familiar with beauty as to be unimpressed by it he might have missed that look of hers that catalogued him Attractive, useful—but not importantly so. He knew it; he had seen it in girls' eyes before.

One night he ran into her at a popular nightclub. She was with Kip, who was almost swaggering as he showed her off. Feeling a little sickened, Paul left quietly to avoid meeting them.

The next evening he loaded himself down with flowers and candy and went to the hospital.

He found Julia thinner and quieter. She was pleased to see him, and touchingly appreciative of his gifts. But she plucked nervously at the coverlet as they talked.

At last she said, "They're going to remove the bandages at ten tomorrow, Paul. Kip is coming." She hesitated. "I—I've almost forgotten what I look like. I'm so used to being a mummy." There was apprehension in her voice.

He picked up her pale hand and held it warmly between his. "Now I know you're well," he said. "Vanity rears its ugly head. 'Will I still be beautiful?' she wonders." His tone was lightly jeering.

She moved impatiently. "Vanity, nothing!" she said, a little edge in her voice. "My looks are my bread and butter, remember!"

"The camera never did justice to your most beautiful feature," Paul said. "Your beauty is in your eyes, Julia. And they still have that clear, golden look that no photograph has ever captured. Your eyes are all I can see now, but they haven't changed."

They were moist, all of a sudden, and her lashes swept down to hide them from him. But her hand, which had been lying passive in his, returned his grasp.

She said, with her old shyly teasing laughter, "Paul! I've never heard you so un-grumpy! Have you fallen in love while I've been here?"

He flushed and stood up to go. "There's nothing wrong with you," he told her dryly. "I think that doctor is keeping you here just to keep you out of mischief."

Her laughter floated to the door with him.

HE COULD not keep his mind on his work the next morning. The time moved in slow, deliberate minutes. Ten o'clock came at last and after that the clock on his studio wall seemed to stand still. At nearly noon his assistant told him Kip was on the telephone.

Paul was conscious only of the beating of his own heart.

"Yes, Saunders?"

"Hello, Paul. I'm sending Babs over this afternoon. Here's what I want you to do." He went on with enthusiasm, outlining an idea he wanted to present to a customer.

Paul listened, emotion swelling unpleasantly within him. When Kip had finished, he said, surprised to find his voice slightly thick, "You've seen Julia?"

"What?" Kip seemed to come back from a long way off. "Oh, of course! Julia Forrester. Coincidence, your mentioning her. I just came from the hospital. They removed the bandages this morning."

"Yes?" Paul said impatiently.

"Successful operation. Very. But the photogenic angles are ruined, naturally. Too bad."

There was a subtle change in his voice. He sounded detached, a little vague. *Too bad!* Paul thought, that swelling feeling hurting his chest.

"Of course she was about through, anyway," Kip said casually. "They don't last long in this game; do they, Vickers? We know that. The public wants novelty. And Babs Hartwell has it. They're crazy about her."

Paul controlled himself with an effort. It was all true. He had said the same things over and over again. He had told Julia this would happen. But he still had an overwhelming desire to lay his hands on Kip Saunders, and violently. For the man must know that Julia was in love with him.

He said, "About Hartwell. I'm sorry but I can't take her this afternoon. I'm pretty busy."

Kip sounded annoyed. "Can't you squeeze her in?"

"Can't be done today. I'll try tomorrow."

"Look, Vickers, this is important—"

"Tomorrow!" Paul said, and slammed down the phone.

He said to his assistant, "I'll be out all afternoon," and turned his back on the fellow's wide stare.

He didn't stop to buy flowers or magazines this time. He went straight to the hospital and was admitted at once to Julia's room. It was sunny and filled with flowers. She was sitting up in bed, wearing a pretty bed jacket and her hair was

like a golden cloud around her face. "Hello, beautiful!" he said.

She didn't smile. There was a frightened, cringing look in her eyes as she sought his first reaction. He sat down by the bed and reaching over took her chin in his hand. Turning her face from side to side he looked it over quizzically. At last he said, "Mind if I kiss it?"

She drew her breath in a quick little gasp. He bent over and kissed her squarely on the lips. "Got to christen it, you know," he observed dryly.

She began to laugh, but her laughter got all tangled up in tears. "Oh, Paul, you clown! Is—is it so terrible?"

Feeling unbearably awkward, Paul retreated into his familiar, comfortable gruffness.

"So now she wants me to tell her how beautiful she is! What's the matter? Won't they let you have a mirror?"

She didn't snap back at him as he hoped she would. She just looked at him sadly and said, "I know I'm lucky, Paul. There won't be a scar. I look a little strange to myself, a little *stiff*, but I'll get used to that. It's just that—Well, I know I am through modeling. Kip didn't say much, but—"

Paul's heart ached with a dull, hurting anger. He could imagine so well the scene that occurred this morning. He knew exactly how Saunders must have done it—going all vague and impersonal all of a sudden. He was a master at backing out of a situation.

Paul said unhappily, "The camera sees things we don't. But is that so important?"

"No," Julia said, after a long pause.

They were talking around the bush and they both knew it. Paul could sense so clearly that what hurt her most was the realization that Kip's interest was ending along with her career.

He felt an impotent anger. There was no way for him to relieve it without cursing Saunders. He sat beside her bed and felt the blood pound in his temples.

"When can you leave this place?"

She hesitated. "Most any time," she said.

He waited.

"Kip has been grand. He—he has taken care of all the bills."

Paul said, "But you haven't any money, I suppose? Models never do."

She colored.

So that was it. Kip had paid her hospital bills and washed his hands of her. Abruptly Paul stood up and walked out of the room.

He didn't wait for the elevator but walked quickly down the steps to the office on the first floor. "Can Miss Forrester leave today?" he inquired.

"You'll have to get permission from her doctor," the woman told him.

"Then get him on the phone."

When Paul was determined he usually got his own way. By five o'clock he had Julia looking pale but starry eyed with excitement, bundled into a taxi and on her way to his apartment where Aunt Sarah, warned by telephone, was already fussing with preparations for the convalescent.

PAUL whistled a little tune as he selected a tie, spending considerably more time at it than he usually did. He



settled finally on a rather gay one, gave an extra combing to his crispish dark hair and went into breakfast, still whistling.

His aunt was already sitting at the head of the small table. "Good morning," she said with a little smile, and poured his cup of coffee.

"Where is she?" Paul asked.

"Still asleep, of course. Did you expect her to get up to have breakfast with you?"

"Of course not," he said indignantly. "I merely—"

"Then why are you wearing that tie?" She chuckled. "What a change Julia has brought to our little household."

"Nonsense!" Paul said, annoyed.

"Decidedly a change for the better," his aunt teased him. "I like having you come to breakfast with your hair all nice and smooth. And whistling, at this hour of the morning!"

"You're a romantic old spinster," Paul growled.

But the truth was that the apartment had become a different place for him since he had brought Julia to it. He found himself hurrying home after his last appointment at the studio. Instead of stopping for a glass of beer or a highball with some of his friends, if he stopped at all it was to pick up some flowers to take home, or a book he thought Julia might like.

Her appreciation of even the smallest gift gave him the keenest pleasure he had ever known. He delighted in thinking up little surprises to relieve the monotony of her convalescence. His aunt teased him slyly and even that pleased him in some obscure way.

Julia was growing stronger but she was still very thin. He scolded her about her eating, bringing home certain delicacies to tempt her appetite.

He could tell when she started to grow restless, to worry about crowding them. After the first night when he slept on the livingroom couch and let her use his room, Aunt Sarah put a studio couch in her room for Julia.

For several days it was apparent that she wanted to talk to him, but he anticipated what was coming and retreated into his gruffness to put her off.

Aunt Sarah loved to play chess and in the evenings after dinner she and Julia would set up a card table in front of the fireplace while he read the paper.

More often than not, his eyes would stray over the top of the printed sheet to Julia. He was fascinated by the way the firelight brought out the warm tones in her hair and skin, the way she had of half-closing her eyes while she studied her next move.

He loved to watch her hands. They were not only beautiful, but she handled them gracefully. And that gave him his idea.

He spoke abruptly, interrupting the game. "Julia, I don't like to rush you, but I wonder if you are feeling well enough to help me out at the studio? I'm in a spot."

Her quick glance was startled, suspicious. Color tinged her cheeks. She said, "What kind of a spot, Paul?"

"I was wondering if you would let me photograph your hands for a job I have?" he asked.

Radiance spread over her face, incredulous at first, then frank and unashamed. "Oh, Paul!" she cried. "I'd—I'd *love* to!"

She was nervous the first day she returned to the camera, but she was touchingly glad to be working again. He gave her a diamond ring to put on and she laughed and said, "It's bad luck to put an engagement ring on yourself!" and made him slip it on her finger.

He could feel the color burning his cheeks. "She's guessed," he thought, and reflected how like a woman it was to tease him with her knowledge.

She posed her hands for him several times and she posed her legs for a stocking ad. When he tried to pay her she was indignant.

"Apply it on what I owe you," she insisted. And added warmly, "Not that I can ever repay you, Paul."

He gave in finally, understanding and loving her independence.

She was in the studio when a lingerie customer came in. She begged for the job anxiously.

"No!" Paul snapped.

But the customer looked her over and he had to give it to her.

Paul stormed up and down the studio for a while while Julia patiently argued that she couldn't afford to be fussy about the jobs she took. He finally gave in, but when she appeared before the camera in frothy underthings he was filled with such a chaos of tangled feelings—a burning, important anger, humiliation for her, and shame at his own desire—that he turned the camera over to his surprised assistant and walked out of the studio until the job was done.

That night at the apartment Julia told Aunt Sarah how she had outraged his modesty, slyly teasing him with every word. His aunt looked at him shrewdly and he felt the rage rising in him again, unreasonable and inexpressible.

Julia must know why he could not photograph her in such intimate apparel. She could only be tormenting him.

After dinner he left without an explanation and spent most of the evening in the bar he used to frequent before she came to the apartment. As he brooded, drinking little, he decided that he could stand it no longer. It was torment no man could stand, to have her so near day after day, loving her as he did. He had to find out if there was any chance for him, any chance at all, even if it drove her away.

When he returned to the apartment late, Julia was curled up in a corner of the sofa with his discarded paper. He liked the way her blonde hair contrasted with the deep sapphire of her velvet house coat.

She looked up and smiled at him and he thought she looked unbearably beautiful. He advanced toward her, his heart beating thickly. For a silent moment they looked at each other, while he struggled for words to say what he had to say.

She had dropped the paper to her lap, still open to an inside page. He saw suddenly what she had been looking at. It was a picture of Babs Hartwell snapped with Kip Saunders at the Circle Club.

She made a small gesture toward it. He thought her lips trembled slightly. "I like you for many things, Paul," she said, "but I like you most of all for not saying 'I told you so.'"

He was powerless to speak. The words he had been forming died unspoken. He stood like a dummy while she rose quick-

ly to her feet and went out of the room. Her soft "Good night" was muffled, and he wondered painfully if she were crying.

BABS HARTWELL WAS GIVING him the come-hither. She was going around with Kip a lot, he knew. But she was the kind of girl who wouldn't put all her eggs in one basket.

"She wants a cushion in case Kip forgets to let her down easy," he told himself cynically.

But a man couldn't help responding to the treatment from a girl as lovely as Babs, even when he saw through her. He was photographing her more than any other model, and he didn't exactly look forward to her appointments.

"I never see you at any of the night spots," she told him. Her dark eyes were warm and teasing. "Don't you ever go to the Circle, or are you the type who plays poker with the boys?"

He puffed thoughtfully on his pipe. "How often do you go to the Circle Club?" he asked.

Babs laughed, just a shade complacently. "You can count on me any Saturday night."

Paul said, "I'll be seeing you."

He left the studio early that afternoon and went shopping. He knew what he wanted, exactly. But he had a hard time convincing the sales girls that he did. He could see Julia in the dress he wanted, something as blue as her eyes, cut low enough to show off her lovely throat, a dress that hugged her tiny waist and had lots of skirt.

The sales women shook their heads over him, but he clung stubbornly to his mental picture of Julia in blue, and finally came near to getting what he wanted.

He took the box under his arm and started home, with an exhilaration that he remembered feeling at Christmas. He was late getting home and the two women were waiting dinner. Julia was sitting under a lamp, and her hair shone like washed gold.

She looked up. Surprise widened her eyes and anticipation colored her cheeks as he put the box in her lap. Her fingers trembled a little with excitement as she pulled at the cord. When the lid came off and the tissue parted to reveal the blue,

silky folds she gasped. "Paul! What—" "Put it on," he said. "I want to see if it fits you."

She said, flustered and confused, "But dinner is ready—"

"Dinner can wait," Aunt Sarah said.

She stood up, holding the dress up to her in a purely feminine gesture. "Paul, you shouldn't have—I can't let you—" She looked a little scared.

"Go put it on," he urged. "I want to see how good I am."

She went into the bedroom and Aunt Sarah followed her, almost as excited as Julia. When they came out again, a little later, Julia's hair was piled on top of her head. She had put on some twinkly shoes—and the blue dress. Paul nodded with satisfaction. It fitted perfectly.

Julia was both disturbed and happy. "But, Paul, *why*—"

"You're getting to be too much of a homebody," he said. "I'm going to take you to the Circle Club."

She looked incredulous. Then she said, "When, Paul?"

He lit his pipe before replying, "Saturday," he said.

HER excitement was touching and a little frightening. Before her accident, an evening at the Circle would not have meant so much to her. Paul made himself edgy and miserable wondering if it was the possibility of seeing Kip Saunders that stirred her so. He knew she had gone there often with him in the old days, when the "boss—not the job," mattered.

Just in time he remembered to send her flowers. "You're lucky," he told her when she thanked him for them. "I'm not the thoughtful type."

She laughed. "I've noticed that," she said, with a tender note in her voice that made prickles run along his spine. But it wasn't gratitude he wanted. His edginess increased.

Aunt Sarah beamed on them both when they were ready to leave. Paul called a taxi and they went down to the foyer to wait for it.

Julia said, "You—you haven't told me how I look?"

"A little pale," he said. "Otherwise quite lovely."

The taxi came and he put her into it

and gave the driver instructions. Julia sat close to him and reached for his hand.

"There's a special kind of beauty treatment a girl needs sometimes," she whispered. "It—puts color in her cheeks and gives her confidence—"

Paul's pulses drummed. He knew what she meant. He wondered again if she took a pleasure in tormenting him. Almost angrily he took her in his arms.

The hunger to hold her that he had suppressed for so long surged over him. He held her close and kissed her as he had always wanted to. With a sigh she relaxed in his arms and her lips clung, sweet and soft beneath his.

Was she thinking of Kip?

With an effort he put her away from him. "How's that for treatment?" he said, his voice sounding rough in his ears.

She straightened. "That helps, thank you," she said. She sounded queerly remote through the pounding that still filled his ears.

For the rest of the ride they sat apart, in a rather stiff silence. As soon as they arrived at the club and were seated at the table Paul had had reserved, he ordered champagne.

"Another beauty treatment," he told Julia. For she was still pale and her face looked a little strained. He realized that she must be dreading meeting all the café society acquaintances who had not seen her since her accident.

He lifted his glass and said, "to the loveliest girl here!" That brought a faint smile to her lips.

Almost at once people began crawling around their table to greet Julia. The supper he ordered was scarcely touched, for the dishes cooled and lost their interest while they talked with friends and acquaintances who stopped by. Julia was looking happier and more like her old self, as they told her how lovely she looked.

Looking at her critically and as impersonally as he could, Paul thought her beauty was as arresting as ever, with only a haunting difference, so slight you were not sure what it was. Certainly only the camera could single it out.

But he realized what a poor judge he was. His love for her had grown and deepened so much since her accident that

it seemed to him her beauty had grown and deepened, too.

The floor show was over and the lights had just gone up again when Babs Hartwell came in, followed by Kip Saunders. Babs saw him and waved. He beckoned to her and with a little smile she led Kip toward his table.

All eyes followed her. She was wearing white and her dark eyes and shining dark hair made a striking contrast. Kip towered behind her, big and confident and successful looking. They were a strikingly handsome couple.

Paul stood up. He spoke to Kip, then greeted Babs warmly, devoting himself to her so that he would not have to watch Julia greet Kip. But even though he would not look at them, his ears picked up the sharp silence that fell between them after they greeted each other.

"You're a gorgeous creature tonight," Paul said quickly to Babs.

"Tonight?" she pouted.

He grinned. "Don't quibble. It isn't often I make pretty speeches." He gestured to a chair. "Sit here. You'll have a drink with us, won't you?"

Her dark intimate eyes seemed to speak of secrets between them. "Of course," she said, smiling.

"Oh, I'm sorry!" he said, suddenly flushing, and introduced her to Julia.

Babs barely acknowledged Julia's greet-

ing and turned back to him. "Paul!" she said, laying her hand on his arm. "Those bathing suit pictures you took of me, remember—" She was off on a story. But he was conscious only of the conversation that went on between Kip and Julia.

He heard Kip say, "It's good to see you, Julia. I've missed you." But though he strained to hear her reply, it was so low he couldn't catch it.

Kip said, in an altered voice, "Julia! You can't mean that!" Feeling like an eavesdropper, Paul suddenly stood up and pulled Babs to her feet.

"Let's dance," he said. "Excuse us, you two?"

Julia looked up at him with eyes that were strangely dark. Her face was blank. Kip nodded casually, and his eyes never left Julia's face.

Feeling the blood rush to his head, Paul led Babs to the small polished square where other couples were dancing.

She went into his arms with a snuggling movement. "You didn't hear a word I said, did you?" she said accusingly.

Paul said, "I wanted to dance with you."

She laughed softly and let herself move closer to him. He concentrated on his steps, on the music, and on the fragrance of her dark hair, anything to keep from watching those two at the table and won-



Debt of Fury

By Phyllis Gordon Demarest

Can a man plan for a lifetime of happiness when he has only four days to do it? That was Tag's problem when he fell in love with a girl whose tragic past threatened her entire future. For Pat was married to a man who hated her so terribly that he was willing to sacrifice his life to ruin hers. But Tag found a way, a desperate daring chance, to rescue Pat from the debt of fury which her husband so unrelentingly paid to her.

This exciting love story appears in the March issue of Love Short Stories. On sale February 5th.

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LOVE

SHORT STORIES

dering about the things they were saying to each other.

The music ended. Julia and Kip were still talking, so Paul kept Babs on the floor, paying her foolish compliments to keep her from getting restless. She was playing up to him beautifully and he decided it was to arouse Kip's jealousy.

"It's been tried before, my girl," he thought cynically, but he couldn't see any point in warning her. Might as well warn Kip about her. She wasn't like Julia. She could take care of herself.

The third time they danced together Babs said happily, "Kip is going to be furious!"

Paul looked toward the table they had deserted. Julia was sitting very straight in her chair. She looked angry, and she and Kip were no longer talking.

"Perhaps we'd better go back," he said. He felt a pounding anger rise in him again, wondering what Kip had said to make Julia look like that. He thought, "If I could just hit him once—!"

Babs walked ahead of him back to the table. Julia jumped up as they came near. Her eyes were dark and bright and her face was pale.

"If you are through dancing with Miss Hartwell," she said icily, "I'd like to go!"

Kip's face was expressionless. He stood up so she could pass him. With the grace of an angry queen she walked away from them. Paul muttered an excuse and followed her, feeling utterly wretched because he was powerless to help her.

He caught up with her near the door. He said, "Julia, I'm sorry—"

She turned on him, white and furious. "Don't apologize!" she said. "I couldn't bear that! But the next time you want a—*a blind* so you can work on Kip's girl friend—!"

His jaw dropped. "Julia! Are you mad at me?"

"Who else?" she demanded.

"Why, Kip, of course. I thought—"

"Kip?" she cried. "What does he matter? I thought you wanted to show me a good time tonight, and instead you leave me sitting there for *three* dances!"

"Julia!" The anger boiling up inside him was changing to bubbles of laughter. He felt a great surging happy release.

"Did you mean it when you said Kip doesn't matter?"

"Of course I meant it!"

"Pardon me," he said, and turned on his heel. He hurried back to the table they had left. Babs looked up with bright interest on her face. Kip got slowly to his feet.

"There's something I've been wanting to do for a long time," Paul said. He felt light-headed, almost tight, except that he hadn't had that much champagne. He took off his glasses and laid them carefully on the white tablecloth beside Babs' evening bag. Then he doubled up his fist and swung on Kip.

It was a good, clean blow and it stretched Kip Saunders out. Babs screamed. Men at nearby tables jumped to their feet. Waiters hurried forward.

The next few seconds were confused and blurred. He found himself being hurried outside. Julia appeared beside him and he heard her ask the doorman to get them a taxi. He couldn't see her very well. She was a movement of blue above which her face was a blurred, white patch. He realized then he had left his glasses inside.

But Julia wouldn't let him go back for them. The doorman was at his other elbow.

"Darling," she said, her voice sounding choky, "you were wonderful!"

He took her in his arms and with his face very close to hers, looked down at her. "I can see you better this way," he murmured. "Why haven't you called me darling before?"

She said, "I—I hinted about rings—I even made you kiss me tonight! I couldn't do any more. I was afraid you didn't want me because I'm not beautiful any more—"

"Not photogenic," he corrected her. "I've never wanted to marry a model."

"Marry!" she sighed happily. "What a lovely word!"

"Can't you think of some nicer ones?"

She shook her head, suddenly shy.

"I can," he said. He drew her closer and just before his lips found hers he murmured, "Julia, my wife—" And he knew that more than anything else in the world he wanted to make them come true.



Remembering

*The chilly fingers of the snow
Are cradling the arid grass,
And leafless branches whip across
The face of icy winds that pass.
Yet here we knew the honeyed air
Of roses spilling into bloom.
I close my eyes, remembering,
And breathe again the sweet perfume.*

*The days drag on more slowly now
While you are held so far away,
Yet hours with you are no more lost
Than are the flowers of yesterday.
I close my eyes, remembering,
And wonder that we are apart,
For though you are not here, my dear,
I see you clearly with my heart.*

—By Harriet A. Bradfield

The Thought of You

*I miss you more than words can tell,
And yet I find it true
My days are made so very sweet
By just the thought of you!
The tender words you used to speak;
The way you smiled at me;
Your touch, your glance, your manly step—
So dear each memory!
Oh, these and all the little things
That you were wont to do
Remain to bless and comfort me—
In just the thought of you!*

—By Mary Lavelle Kelley

Please Dial L-O-V-E

By MARY VINCENT

PICTURE to yourself a girl of twenty-two, who lived alone in a tiny, impeccably-kept apartment with a pair of love birds and a bowl of goldfish; a girl who wore medium heels and neat print dresses with white collars, whose name was Peggy Jones, who worked in the Literature and Philosophy Room of the Los Angeles Public Library. Well, you're wrong. Peggy Jones didn't look anything like that. Even though her job sounded very prosaic, she was gay, modern and almost lovely looking.

She wore her warm brown hair in a softly curled Victory bob and Bill Calvert said her lips reminded him of a ripe red persimmon just before you bit into it. She said she hoped he'd remember that her lips weren't a persimmon—besides, persimmons were orange not red—because she was pretty crazy about the way he kissed her, but she certainly had no intentions of being maimed in the process. He said when he kissed her, he couldn't be held responsible for sudden developments.

Anyway, Peggy Jones was entirely too happy this dull, rainy February afternoon on her way back to her department after a Biltmore luncheon date with Bill. She knew she was too happy. There was something dangerous about this kind of happiness.

Everything became too clear and sweet and sharp. Her heart seemed to put out shining feelers that attached to the whole world, and when they vibrated part of the sensation was bliss, but part was also pain. Mildly funny things became hilarious and sad things were almost too sad

to be endured. Tears started easily to her eyes and a humming to her lips.

Perhaps that was why she paused when she saw the soldier. There was something sort of pathetic about a lone private anyway. But let him be tall and loosely knit, with sun-burned hair and shy eyes—the kind of a soldier who wouldn't even be able to wear a major's uniform without looking like he'd gotten dressed in a wind tunnel—and then let him stand in the center of a huge, quiet place like the high-domed rotunda of the library, staring upward with an expression of rapt wonder on his lean, serious young face. The sight of him drew Peggy to a sudden halt because of a sudden twitch at those overly-sensitive heartstrings.

Talk about green, she thought. It was a wonder the cows hadn't eaten him for grass long ago!

She went up to him. "Heh," she said softly. "I think you ought to know that the city owns this building. Just in case somebody tries to sell it to you."

His eyes dropped, but for a moment they were still so clouded with wonder she doubted if he even saw her. Then suddenly his lean face flushed a painful, beet-red and she was afraid he was going to bolt like an overgrown colt confronted by a wild tumbleweed.

Good heavens she thought again, the original corn right off the cob! She was amused but it was the kindly variety, and it must have registered in her expression because he didn't bolt after all.

He jerked his big thumb upward and said hesitantly, "Aren't those what you call murals?"

If Peggy was willing to accept Bill's idea that love was a gay bit of ribbon to wear in your hair, why was she disturbed by Private Daniel Webster Whitney's ideal of love being a precious thing men fought to preserve?



She looked up at the bewildered young soldier. Part of her wanted to laugh at his expression and part of her wanted to start a wild storm of sobbing.

Peggy nodded, a warm smile curving her persimmon lips. "Do you like them?"

"Gosh!" he breathed.

"You've never seen any before?"

"No, ma'am. And I never knew there were so many books in the world before, either. They've got a different room here for each kind, too—like history and religion and science. Big rooms." Again that look of rapt astonishment crossed his face. "I just never did realize there were so many books for people to read. And free too."

"Do you like to read?"

"Oh yes, ma'am. I sure do! Only I never had much chance to read anything outside of school books. Just a little Shakespeare and Dickens and then the Bible, of course."

"Of course," agreed Peggy softly, and quite ridiculously her eyes were full of tears. But that's what happened when you were so happy. A hayseed of a young soldier could make you cry by telling you he read Shakespeare and Dickens and the Bible.

She said, "Where are you from, Soldier?"

"North Dakota."

"A farm?"

The beet-red stained his lean cheeks again. But put his big hands behind him as if he suddenly realized just how big they really were. "I guess you can tell that all right," he said with embarrassment.

"I was born on a farm myself," Peggy announced staunchly. "Only we called it a ranch. Anything bigger than a pansy bed is a ranch in California. What's your name?"

"Dan Whitney. Daniel Webster Whitney."

She managed to keep the smile off her lips this time but it really wouldn't have hurt him because it was a very tender smile. She said, "Mine is Peggy Jones. I work here, in the Literature and Philosophy room downstairs. That's where we keep all the Shakespeare and Dickens. If you'd like to, you can come along and browse around. I'll help you find anything you want."

"Well, thanks, ma'am—" he said. "I mean, Miss Jones. I'd sure like to do that."

"Let's go then."

"But I can't now, I'm supposed to meet my buddy. He's from Brooklyn. We're going out to Hollywood and look for some movie stars."

Peggy laughed. "I'm afraid they're a lot harder to find than that. Besides, it's pouring outside."

His expression said he couldn't possibly understand what difference that would make. "Rain never hurt anyone," he said. "I always used to go tramping in the rain back home." He added with clear-cut homesickness, "Only the rain in California is different somehow. It doesn't sting your face like a good, hard Northern storm and there's no thunder or lightning with it. And everything is green already, so Spring doesn't show much." He paused. "I always liked Spring better than any other season."

Unaccountably, Peggy heard herself protest earnestly, "But you can still *feel* Spring here in California. Inside you, I mean. Just like anywhere."

For a moment his eyes went straight into hers and she discovered they weren't quite as shy as she had thought. "Yes, Miss Jones. You sure can." There was something different about his voice, too. And then he said hurriedly, "But I've got to go now. And I sure thank you for talking to me."

"It was a pleasure, Dan. A real pleasure." She smiled up at him. "Good-bye now."

"'Bye," he mumbled.

She stood and watched him until he was out of sight. She was so wonderfully, terribly in love with Bill—she had so much love inside of her that she could even let some of it overflow toward this shy young soldier from North Dakota.

She wondered if he would come back. It would be fun helping him find something else to read besides Dickens and Shakespeare. She bet he'd like Jack London and Conrad and maybe even Hemingway. He was naïve but he was no fool. She could tell that by his eyes. And the structure of his face was good. Daniel Webster Whitney . . . She smiled musingly. Somehow it made a person feel a lot better about the war just knowing Dan's kind was in there pitching. And then abruptly her thoughts shifted to Bill

again and there was no room for any others.

THE next time she saw Dan Whitney, over a month had passed. It was on a Monday evening, less than an hour before closing time. She looked up from her check desk at the door of the Literature and Philosophy Room, but for a moment nothing registered. Not that Dan had changed, but lately, Peggy was apt to stare at her best friends and then pass them right by.

"Gosh!" he exclaimed happily. "Hello, Miss Jones. I was scared maybe you might not be here."

"Hello," she said briefly.

Some high school girls came through with their arms loaded and Peggy stamped out their books. She could feel Dan's eyes on her pale, set face. She hadn't bothered about much lipstick and there were bad circles under her eyes.

When they were alone again, he leaned against the desk and asked in a low, worried voice, "Have you been sick since I saw you?"

"No."

"Well, you don't look so good, Miss Jones."

"Don't I?"

He stepped aside and let her stamp out some more books and then he said, "Is anything wrong?"

"Nothing much."

Oh God! Nothing much! Just that if Bill doesn't call me and tell me he didn't mean what he said, I can't stand it any longer. Can't . . . can't . . . can't . . .

She realized she was digging more deep, meaningless doodles on a pad of paper with a sharply pointed pencil held in fingers that were cold and trembling. She threw down the pencil and looked up at the bewildered young soldier.

Part of her wanted to laugh at his expression and part of her wanted to start a wild storm of sobbing. She hadn't cried once since that night a week ago with Bill, not once. She had just waited. But now unless this galoot took his lean, North Dakota face away from her desk she was liable to do anything.

She said, "I'm sorry, but you can't stand here. You'll find the Shakespeare over there and the Dickens there. If you

want anything else, you'll have to look in the files. You know—A B C for the author's name.

She wanted to hurt him and she succeeded. She wanted to hurt anything that came near her, that kept her mind off Bill and that phone call that must come—that had to come! There was a limit to how much anyone could stand. Pride had kept her from phoning him, but even pride can crumple under sustained pressure.

Dan didn't move away, however. He said, "When the library closes does that mean you're through work, too?"

"Yes. But I'm going straight home if you're thinking of asking me for a date."

"Will you let me see you home then?"

"No."

"Well can I walk you to the car or the bus or whatever takes you home?"

She began to rub her fingers across her forehead, back and forth, slowly. She had a dreadful headache and her eyes felt dry and hot. She glanced up at the clock and shrugged wearily. "If you want to," she said in a toneless voice. "I'll be at the Fifth Street entrance about nine fifteen. But if you're not there I won't wait."

"I'll be there," Dan said quietly.

Now and then Peggy glanced in his direction as he wandered slowly around the shelves, taking down an occasional book, handling them all with an almost reverent gentleness. He finally carried a big, hefty volume to one of the rear tables and began to read.

When the closing bell rang, he filed out with all the rest of the late customers, catching her eyes for just a second, very plainly begging for a look of added confirmation that she would meet him outside.

Peggy nodded curtly and continued to stamp out books. When she finally stepped out into the damp, foggy night, he came up to her and took her arm.

They walked downhill on Fifth Street toward Broadway. The neon-brightness of the downtown streets had disappeared in the strict dimout. There were no more window shoppers. People walked quickly and apparently with purpose, or stayed indoors. The old traffic jams were a memory. Now it was mostly busses and street cars and taxis. But the darkened theater marquees still drew in plenty of

late movie-goers and the bars were overflowing. And Peggy noticed there were still plenty of couples going places, arm in arm as she and Dan walked—only it should have been Bill.

She stiffened and Dan stepped a little away from her. He hadn't spoken since they left the library, and neither had she. They were passing the darkness of Pershing Square when she heard him say, "My pa used to say that a person's vic-tuals and troubles always set better for being well chewed. He meant it was good to talk about things sometimes—out loud."

Your pa sounds like a very helpful man."

"Don't you want to tell me about it, Miss Jones?"

"I don't—think so."

"I wish you would."

Peggy bit her tongue to keep from giving him another sharp reply. It was only that if she had to hurt inside like this, someone else ought to share it with her. She answered him in a stiff, constrained little voice. "It's a very trite story. Very uninteresting. It happens all the time."

Only not to me, she thought wildly. And I don't know how to handle it. I don't know what to do to make it stop tearing me apart like this.

"A fellow?" Dan suggested.

Her lips twisted sharply in the darkness, like a spasm of pain. "A very attractive fellow," she said. "The kind who does everything better and smoother than any other fellow you ever met. She could have added, *The kind you think you'll die if you can't get, and then if you do get him, you know you'll die if you ever lose him.*

She dug her hands deep into the pockets of her trench-coat and threw back her head, trying to draw the damp, foggy air into a breast that felt bruised. There was an almost physical taste of bitterness on her lips.

"Go on," Dan said gently. "Go on and talk about him, Miss Jones. It'll do you good. Don't mind about me. Just pretend I'm not here—or pretend you won't ever see me again. Anyway, I'm only a stranger."

"He's an assistant cameraman at one of the movie studios," she said. And

then suddenly the words began to come, easily. She talked fast and tonelessly, more to herself than Dan. She wanted to hear how it sounded aloud. For so many endless hours, she had gone over it silently, a treadmill of thoughts, around and around. . . .

"We were to be married next month. That is, I thought we were. I guess it was never much more than an idea with him. He tried to explain last week how he felt. He was perfectly frank about it. He said all of a sudden there was something about me that sort of suffocated him. He said no man wants to be smothered to death in a woman's love. He said I should relax. When he kisses me, I should act like Veronica Lake—dead pan. He said he wasn't breaking anything off, he was just taking himself a little breather. He said he'd phone me. Any night soon I'd hear from him again."

She put her hand to her throat and swallowed. The cords felt stiff. They began to ache intollerably. She swallowed again, but she didn't make a sound.

They had reached the bus stop and her bus was just pulling around the corner of the Square. She said, "And so you see why I've got to stay around home at night. I couldn't possibly go anywhere." She glanced up at Dan and something in his eyes made her suddenly reach out and clutch his sleeve. "Dan," she whispered pleadingly, "Oh Dan, he will phone me, won't he? He promised. He said he wasn't breaking us up. If he'll only give me another chance, I won't smother him any more. I can pretend I don't love him so much. I can—" She broke off and began to bite at her lower lip, conscious of what a spectacle she was making of herself. Talking this way to an utter stranger! Pleading with him for a crumb of hope!

She turned away, stiff and hot with shame, and stared blindly across the street. The bus pulled up before them.

"I-I'm sorry," she mumbled. "But you asked me to talk about it."

He pressed her cold fingers. "Good night, Miss Jones. And don't you worry—he'll phone you all right. But I think I'll just stop around tomorrow night about the same time." He added quickly, "Oh, not to take you anywhere. Just to

walk you over to the bus again."

She started to protest but there wasn't time. With another weary shrug, she climbed aboard. "Good night, Dan."

Daniel Webster Whitney smiled up at her. His eyes were warm and understanding and the shyness was gone out of them.

DAN was true to his word. He showed up at the library about the same time the next evening, read until closing time, and then took her to the bus stop. Only this time the whole atmosphere was different. It was almost friendly again, quieter, easier. There was no mention of Bill, and Peggy realized it had helped a little to talk about him to someone. The fear and the pain were still there but she could camouflage them well enough to discuss books with Dan and make a show of interest in what he said.

When it became really bad was after the door of her tiny apartment closed behind her and she was alone with that telephone—when the waiting lay ahead of her . . . second after minute after hour of it, *knowing* that Bill must call because he had promised.

Standing with her back against the door, she suddenly remembered that afternoon when she had first seen Dan standing in the library rotunda. But was it possible anyone could really have been as happy as that? She tried to recapture the feel of that happiness, but it would have been easier to recall the feel of a blazing summer sun on a winter midnight.

Her emptiness and fear and loneliness were like evil forces that swept through the bright, neat little rooms, chilling them, making the colors cold and the sound of her own movements hollow in her ears. A black depression seemed to creep out of the walls and pile up around her. She stood looking at the telephone. She had waited so long and hard for its ring, she wondered if she might not scream when its shrill sound finally broke the echoing silence.

I'm a fool, she thought desperately. Worse than a fool. Girls don't act like this nowadays. They don't let anything—not even love—throw them off strides. Relax, Bill had suggested. Take it all

with a shrug. Pretend love is a gay bit of ribbon to be worn in your hair, not a chain to bind and crush the heart right out of you.

Well, they were just words, too—thoughts without any emotional reaction . . . like happiness. Maybe every girl in the world wasn't the same. Maybe some of them just couldn't relax. Maybe to some of them love was still a frighteningly intense and magical thing, a thing of flame-red witchery and torment and passion, with all the ancient powers it had possessed in the days of Juliet and Heloise and Isolde.

It was the fear of that black, icy depression crushing down on her the minute she was alone, which kept her from protesting when Dan got on the bus with her Wednesday night. It kept her from protesting when he got off with her and walked as far as her apartment house entrance.

He said hesitantly, "I don't suppose you'd feel like asking me in."

"Well, I—"

"It's all right," he interrupted quickly. "I know how you feel. But it doesn't ever hurt a fellow to ask."

"Dan, you're very kind. And wonderfully understanding."

He made a deprecatory gesture.

"But you are," she insisted. "And I just thought of something else, too. How is it that you can meet me every night? How do you manage to get back to camp?" She shook her head apologetically. "Isn't it awful to be so full of your own importance? I've never even asked you where you were stationed."

"At Camp Roberts. But I'm on furlough now. I had a week coming to me and I thought I'd better try and get it because I don't think I'll be around much longer. My buddy's gone already."

"But. . ." she frowned, "why didn't you go back home and visit your folks?"

"I only had a week. I couldn't have afforded to go by plane and the trains aren't so sure anymore. I'd only have had maybe a day or so with them and—" he broke off and slowly scratched his lean cheek. His eyes dropped away from hers. "I guess I just wanted to stay here worse."

"But you—you haven't any friends here, have you?"

He shook his head.

"Where are you staying, Dan?"

"At a little hotel downtown."

He told her the name of it and she said, "Why, that's only a block from the library!"

"I know," he admitted awkwardly.

"What do you usually do after you leave me in the evenings?"

The entrance way wasn't so dark that she couldn't see the beet-red stain mounting out of his collar. "Read," he said.

A tender, aching little smile curved her lips. "Dickens?"

"Shakespeare." He grinned. "I've got a pocket volume."

"No movies? No bars or nightclubs at all? Hollywood and L.A. have some very famous places, Dan. Wouldn't you like to see them?"

"I'll say I would! Gosh! But it's not much fun going places like that alone."

She said gently, "I'm sure you could find some nice girl at the U.S.O., or one of the service clubs who'd be glad to go with you."

"I guess I'd rather read," he said briefly.

"Dan Whitney! You're not using a subtle form of strategy on me, by any chance?"

"No," he answered earnestly, "I'm not. But you asked me."

"So I did." Pain contracted her heart and she added unsteadily, "But I haven't had that phone call yet, Dan. And I—I've got to get it when it comes. I can't go out with you. I just can't, Dan."

He replied firmly, "I didn't ask you to, Miss Jones. I only asked if I could come in awhile. That way, I wouldn't have to read Shakespeare every night all by myself and you wouldn't lose out on your phone call." He paused. "I've only got tonight and three more. I've got to be back at Camp Sunday."

She searched his lonely, serious young face. "You really would be content just to—to sit around and talk? While I wait for a call from another man?"

"I sure would," he breathed fervently.

She took her eyes out of his and looked quickly away. She was silent. She felt somehow humble and ashamed before him. He didn't have to say anything more. It was just there. He wasn't even

offering it to her. He was just telling her that he wanted to wait around with her while the man she loved got ready to take her back.

It was strange what different forms love could take. With her, it assumed such intensity and eloquence that Bill said she suffocated him with it. And with Dan, it assumed an ask-for-nothing, hope-for-nothing silence. She wondered if a girl could suffocate Dan by loving him too much. At least, he'd be a lot kinder about it than Bill.

She said, "I'd like to have you come in awhile, Dan. And you might as well call me Peggy." Digging around for her key, she added, "I hope you like apple pie. It's about all I have to offer you. That and some cold ham."

"Gosh!" he exclaimed and followed her down a long, carpeted hallway and into the tiny apartment with the two love birds and the bowl of goldfish. He stood at the door while she went around lighting lamps. The colors in the green-and-amber chintz and the taupe rug and the apricot walls came out all bright and warm again, and somehow Dan's voice and his occasional laugh completely destroyed that echoing hollowness.

THAT night and the two that followed were unlike any Peggy had ever known. During the entire year that she had gone around with Bill, she couldn't remember one evening passed quietly in her apartment.

Bill wanted his entertainment in a state of perpetual motion, in bars and nightclubs or parties at his Hollywood apartment. He made pretty big money at the studio and he liked to spend it with appropriate sound effects and plenty of technicolor.

A night like one of these with Dan would have driven him crazy—just listening to the radio, talking or remaining comfortably silent, a game of gin rummy, an argument over Hamlet, a short story read aloud, and then when it began to grow late, a stand-up snack around the refrigerator.

Dan talked about his folks and the big North Dakota farm where he was born and raised. He told her about the iron-cold winters when the wind came roaring

down from Canada, when forty below zero was nothing. He described the hot summers and the wide fields of grain waving along the four horizons and the funny little school house and the games he and his four sisters used to play in the big barn.

Once when he finished telling her about his mother, she thought stunned, "Why I don't even know if Bill has a mother!"

And once when she asked him to fix a broken lamp connection, after seating himself on the floor, he glanced up and must have caught a startled expression on her face because he said quickly, "What's wrong, Peg?"

"N-Nothing," she replied unsteadily, "Only—only don't get a shock."

But it was she who had gotten the shock. Because all at once she realized that these nights were exactly as she had pictured her married life. But that was before she met Bill and knew their life together would be something entirely different. Not that married life, even with someone like Dan, would be so placid. With the war and everything, but it was strangely disturbing to find her old dreams suddenly alive, even for a few short hours.

And once she said abruptly, "Dan—do you think a girl can offer a man too much love? So that he—he suffocates?"

He scratched the side of his lean cheek in that gesture she had come to know so well. "Well," he replied slowly, "My pa used to say the finest wheat in the world won't grow in loose sand and only a fool would sow it there."

After a strained silence, she said in a tight little voice, "But suppose there's no where else to sow it but in the sand?"

"There's always another place," he said. "If you're not in too big a hurry."

Just as Dan was leaving Friday night, it was Peggy who suggested that they spend his last night "going places."

He stared at her.

She said bravely, before she could change her mind, "If Bill phones me, he'll just have to phone again."

A look of joyful eagerness crossed Dan's face and she watched him valiantly try to deny it with a protest.

"As long as I won't know whether Bill called me or not, I'll pretend he didn't. That way I won't feel any worse than I've felt for the past two weeks."

He crushed her two hands in his. "Peg. . . !" he exclaimed. "Oh Peg. . . Gosh. . . !" He was like an overjoyed kid with the promise of a circus.

She smiled up at him. "We'll go anywhere you say, Dan. Anywhere."

"The Brown Derby!" he said quickly. "And the Cocomat Grove! And that Chinese theater with the stars' footprints in the cement. I even read about those places up in North Dakota."

Searching his happy face, she said, "I've been awfully selfish, Dan. I've let you spend your whole furlough just waiting around with me—for a phone call. I should have made you go out and have a good time."

"I wouldn't have gone unless you'd come too."

"But you've wanted to go. You've wanted to go very badly. Haven't you, Dan?"

His expression grew deeply sober. "No I haven't," he said. "Not without you."

"Oh Dan. . ." she whispered, "Dan, my dear. . ." and before she realized, she had put both hands on his shoulders and reached up and kissed him on the lips, gratefully, tenderly, lightly.

It was only when she saw his cheeks turn pale and hard, his eyes narrow with pain that she stopped to think what a cruel thing she had done.

She spoke quickly, to cover their confusion. "I'll have to come home first tomorrow night and dress so you'd better pick me up here. I think I can get off early so let's say about nine."

"You really want to go?" he asked. "You're not just doing this out of—?"

"I really want to go," she interrupted firmly, and was a little astonished that she had spoken with complete honesty. "With you, Dan."

His face was all bright again. "Nine o'clock then."

"Nine o'clock," she promised. "Good-night, Dan."

"'Night, Peg."

Be sure to read Mary Vincent's newest story—"The Loves of Laurinda"—
in the April issue of *New Love* on Sale February 26th!

WHEN she opened her door on Saturday night, the telephone was ringing.

She stared at it in unbelief, and then gave a tiny sob. She ran and put both hands around it and brought it up to her trembling lips and hungry ears.

"Hello, baby. Remember me?" That warm, husky voice of his went through her in a twisting thrill of sweetness and agony.

"Bill. . ." she breathed, "Oh Bill. . ."

"Doing anything?"

"No." Her fingers tightened convulsively around the handle. "No."

"I'm at the Seven Seas in Hollywood—with the gang. Count and Amy and Barry and Sybil and Nancy. How about joining us?"

"Do you—want me, Bill?"

"Do you think I'd have phoned you if I hadn't?" He laughed and it was so much more wonderful than all her memories of his laugh, that she caught her breath. "But if you want to be coaxed, I'll coax. Or better still, I'll save it till you get here and prove it another way. How about it, Miss Books?"

That was his old extra-affectionate pet name for her. She swallowed hard at the lump of breathlessness in her throat. She felt tingling, glowing. Stars were in front of her eyes and bliss in her heart. "I-I'll be there in about forty minutes, darling!"

"Swell. And by the way—the girls are all in spangles."

She managed to get the phone back in its cradle and then she remembered Dan. But it was too late to remember Dan. It would have been too late anyway. Dan would have to understand.

If Bill had phoned while they were gone, she would not have known. What a person doesn't know can't hurt her. But what a person does know can be sheer heaven or hell. And she knew. The sound of Bill's voice was all warm and alive for her again and she knew he wanted her with him. Dan wouldn't even suggest she give up that heaven. After all, it was only a last night of furlough, a good-bye between friends against—against Bill and the coming to life again of her very existence. Dan wouldn't ask such a sacrifice. Dan wouldn't even accept it if she had the strength of will to

give it to him—which she hadn't. She wrote him a note:

Dear Dan,

Bill just phoned. I'm meeting him. Dan, I'm terribly sorry about tonight for us but I'm terribly glad he phoned. That sounds crazy, doesn't it. But it's true and I think you'll understand. You've been so fine and kind to me it doesn't seem right to treat you like this. But Dan—oh Dan, maybe the less I write, the better it'll be.

Good-bye, and the best of luck. If you ever feel like writing to me, I'll be very proud and happy, and I promise to answer.

Peg.

Just the way I promised to go out with him tonight, she thought. But then that hot eagerness trembled through her again and even shame was forgotten. She fastened the note just above the doorbell with a thumbtack.

At exactly nine fifteen, she stepped into the dim, perfumed, exotic South Sea atmosphere of the Seven Seas. She was wearing the red and gold evening dress that Bill preferred. No one would have suspected she was a librarian. Her brown hair was brushed about her erectly held head in a warm, shining halo. Except for being much too pale, she looked poised and utterly lovely.

And there was Bill! He had her hands in his, and the thrill of his touch leaped through her, flame-like. She had never known another man quite so attractive, quite so casually smooth. In all the world, there was only one Bill.

"Well, well," he smiled. "Hello, Miss Books."

He drew her toward the bar. "We'll have a couple alone first before we join the others."

The imitation rain began pounding on the roof. Or was that the sound of her own heartbeats? And then strangely, abruptly, shockingly, there was neither the sound of rain nor any turmoil within her. She was staring at Bill, her brows pinched into a tiny frown. Very attractive and very smooth, very superficial.

He said, "I've missed you, sweet."

"Have you?"

"I began to get jumpy."

"You did?"

"Say what's the matter with you anyway? Why the dead pan?"

"That's the way you wanted it played."

"Well a little of a good thing goes a long way." He drew her arm against him. "I said I missed you, sweetheart," he whispered. "Now you say something."

"And I missed you," she said quietly. "I missed you so hideously I thought I was going to lose my mind for awhile."

"Attababy! And I'll tell you something else. From now on, I'll take all the smothering you want to give—"

"But I won't ever miss you again," she said. "Isn't that funny, Bill? I had to see you to realize that."

His face hardened. Anger touched his eyes. "Are you a little drunk already?"

"No. Cold sober. More sober than I've ever been around you in my life. What Dan said was true—only a fool would try to sow good wheat in loose sand."

"Now I know you're drunk. And who the hell is Dan?"

"A farmer from North Dakota who reads Dickens and Shakespeare and—"

"What's he to you?"

"I don't know yet. Everything I hope!"

"Peggy— Come back here!"

But she was gone.

At exactly ten-thirty, she flew into the lobby of the little hotel near the library.

"Mr. Daniel Webster Whitney!" she told the clerk. Her face was radiant. "And please . . . please may I go up to his room? Just for a few minutes. I want it to be a surprise, so please don't ring him. It's quite all right. You see, I'm going to marry him—I think!"

She knocked on the door of Room 201. It opened and she looked up into a lean, startled young face.

The face blurred and she blinked away her tears. "Hello," she said in a choked-up little voice. "Busy?"

"Nope. Just reading."

"Shakespeare?"

"The Bible."

"We've got a date, haven't we?"

"Have we?"

"Oh Dan. . ." she sobbed. "Oh Danny, Danny. . . !"

For a North Dakota farmer, he kissed astonishingly well.

THE END



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Marriage On Demand

By KATHRYN
KEELEY

CRYSTAL waited in the office of the Jansen Munitions Plant, Pips's small hand tightly clutched in hers. Her small son was just three. He had her topaz eyes, the same tawny curls, but his ingratiating smile belonged to his father. Crystal shut her eyes tight against the tears that stung at her lids every time she looked at him, for Pips's father had been killed in a tragic automobile accident six months ago.

Through the plate glass partitions she could feel the curious stares of the clerks and stenographers, speculating on her visit to Mark Jansen, the man she had so bitterly blamed for Phillip's death.

The ordeal confronting her was terrifying. She kept swallowing the rising lump in her throat, so her voice would be cool when she made her demands. She didn't look like a desperate young mother, rather she was small and gentle, but despair widened her eyes until they were too big for the delicate oval of her face. The translucence of her skin was accented by the severe black suit, but the usual soft red of her mouth was a thin line.

"Hi, young fellow!" Mark's deep voice shattered the quiet. He swung Pips to his shoulder and the little boy let out a delighted squeal. It annoyed Crystal because she wanted to keep the meeting as formal as possible. Her hands were cold and moist with panic as she nervously twisted



Because she held Mark responsible for Phil's death, a marriage to the man she hated seemed Crystal's only compensation for the love she thought she'd lost.



the narrow, delicately styled gold wedding band.

Mark said, "It's nice of you to drop in, Crystal. You're looking well."

The sense of his words rose to overwhelm her. It was obvious he thought she had come in friendship at last, after repelling his overtures for so many weeks.

She said unsteadily, "I have something to discuss with you."

Mark carried Pips to his desk and put a fascinating paper weight in his chubby hands, a glass ball which sent a shower of snow over a miniature snowman.

With the broad expanse of mahogany between, Crystal had the sudden forlorn feeling of being left out in an alien world. If it were not for this insurmountable barrier between them, she might have liked Mark Jansen. He had a big, brown hulk of a body, topped with bronze hair. Bronze lashes shaded his hilarious blue eyes. Laughter had a way of coming down over his face, crinkling his eyes before it reached his mouth. It was a grave mouth, almost stern, denying the boyishness of his features. She realized now he had become a bit grim since the accident. So he should.

Mark was saying, "Pips has grown unbelievably in six months."

It brought her back to her problem. "That's what I wanted to see you about. Perhaps you didn't know that Philip carried no insurance."

He gave a startled gasp of protest.

She hastened to defend her dead husband. "He was improvident, I realized



There was assurance in the other girl's laughter. Her gay, bantering voice called up, "Mark, people in this town go to City Hall for two things—to get married, or to go to jail. Which is it?"

that. But Philip was so busy living in the present he didn't think of the future. There were many bills, and it has eaten up my small reserve."

The deep blue of his eyes caught and held hers. "I didn't know," he said slowly, "I had supposed Phil was well fixed."

Her half smile was bitter. "He had been draining the principal, his mother had been using it before him, to give him the things he should never have had. The right fraternity at college, a car, an extravagant allowance. His mother spoiled him. I'm not blaming her exactly, but I don't want to make the same mistake with Pips. Philip was all she had after his father died. They travelled constantly. Philip never learned to settle down, even after we were married."

HER voice shook, remembering that whirlwind courtship—her bewildered acceptance of the lavish gifts Philip bestowed on her. She was seventeen, and his car had broken down in the little New England town where she lived. It was a custom-built model, and considerable time was required for the parts to reach her father's garage where it was being repaired.

She had dashed in one day when Philip was impatiently fretting at the delay. His exasperation ebbed at the very sight of her laughing, delicate face, her bright, wind-tossed hair. Crystal was fascinated by Philip's jovial high spirits. She had never known anyone quite like him. He talked of far places with charming intimacy. Compared to the sober-faced, struggling high school boys whom she occasionally dated, he was a cyclone of gaiety. Crystal was the luckiest girl that he was even interested.

To her parents' dismay, they were married a week later in the white-spired church.

Days after she discovered Philip's high spirits came from a bottle, that he was incapable of determining when he had enough. The bright sheen of their love had been obscured by her constant watchfulness and his resulting irritation. She had banked heavily on the arrival of her baby. Philip would settle down then, but approaching fatherhood failed to awaken his responsibilities.

Crystal had gone alone to the hospital. Pips was born and nearly died. She didn't know where to find Philip. The desperation of fighting such an intangible foe nearly unseated her reason. She grew thin and haggard, a despairing replica of the seventeen-year old bride. That's when her father had taken matters into his hands and insisted that she leave her husband. The shock of losing her jolted Philip to earth.

She sundered remembering his hysterical pleading. Her heart flooded with warmth and forgiveness. Philip did love her. She would help him fight this disease.

Again her father took matters out of her hands. She could remain with Philip only if he entered an institution, and received medical care. To her utter amazement Philip agreed. He was willing to go to any extremes to keep his wife and child. Her father even accompanied him to a reliable hospital, but his shaggy knit brows testified his doubt that Philip would be strong enough to rehabilitate himself. Her father did not live long enough to learn the result of his ultimatum. The excitement and worry brought on a heart attack which proved fatal.

No one ever knew of that year in the hospital, the exultation Crystal felt when Philip progressed. No one ever suspected that he bribed an orderly or a truck driver to bring him liquor, no one even guessed, certainly not Mark Jansen.

The one redeeming feature was that Philip was cured in time. He returned home when the Jansen Munitions Plant were erecting one-story galvanized buildings on the outskirts of the town. He was his lovable self, proud of his young son, deeply in love with his devoted wife.

Mark Jansen was a college classmate. He was their house-guest until the plant was organized. Crystal liked and admired the tall, rugged executive—until the night Mark drove his car over the steep embankment killing her husband who was riding with him.

It was an unavoidable accident. The sheriff assured her of that. But she never believed him. If Mark had been anyone less important than the president of the Jansen Munitions Plant, he would have gone to prison for manslaughter.

MARK was saying, his eyes gentle, "If there is anything I can do—"

She choked, "There is plenty you can do."

"Would you be interested in a position in the office?"

The smile she gave him wasn't pretty, coming from Crystal. She asked sweetly, "What would I do with Pips?"

Mark tousled Pips's curly gold hair. "Isn't there someone, a friend to look after him?"

"No, there isn't," she retorted crisply.

Out of a short silence, he suggested tentatively, "I don't want to embarrass you, but if it is a question of money, I could lend you sufficient to tide you over."

"It is more than money."

He was fast losing patience with her, and she was glad. Every righteous impulse rebelled against bandying polite words with someone who had carelessly rocked her world from its base. The hot surging emotion that was pulsing through her veins was hate. How could he sit there so suave and assured while she and Pips suffered? Why should he escape punishment for his crime?

Mark hunched his swivel chair forward, a perplexed frown on his forehead. He said with a touch of grimness, "If you will be frank, Crystal, I'll do my best to help you. What do you have in mind?"

She drew a long steadying breath. "Marriage."

He gasped, or maybe she just imagined it. "To whom, may I ask?"

"You."

It hit him right between the eyes, and she had the satisfaction of knowing she had staggered him. It held no triumph. The problem she was facing was too titanic to be lessened by anything Mark Jansen might think.

He couldn't speak for a minute.

She said coldly, "I'm not crazy. I have given it days of serious thought. Pips needs a father. Someone with a firm guiding hand. I couldn't possibly take a position and leave Pips to a careless servant, or an indifferent friend. He is too precious to me, too little to be left alone."

Crystal choked back the hoarseness of her throat.

Mark found his voice. "I can understand that, of course. I can make a gen-

erous settlement on you to enable you to raise him comfortably. But marriage! Crystal, you are bound to meet someone in a year or two with whom you will fall in love."

Her lip curled in faint scorn. "I loved Philip and I could not love again."

He ran a bewildered hand through his crisp, bronze hair. "Marriage! It isn't fair—"

Hot resentment flayed her. She could feel the blood in her cheeks, her eyelids felt as if they were pinned back. "Not fair to you? How can you say that? You were responsible for Philip's death, just as surely as if you had pulled the trigger of a gun. The accident was hushed up because of your name, but you know and I know you are no better than a murderer."

"You are hysterical."

She covered her trembling with defiance. "I was never more sane in my life. It isn't that I want anything for myself. Pips is the only one who matters. You are responsible for the loss of his father and I demand a new father for him."

"Suppose I refuse?" Mark asked softly.

"You won't if you have an ounce of honor. I believe the Jansens pride themselves on their honor."

For an instance his blue eyes blazed at her. It was as if she were looking into a stormy sea for an incredible heartbeat. Crystal was afraid of this stranger to whom she was making such a strange proposal. But she quickly brushed her apprehension aside. By every code she was justified. The law said a life for a life. She was demanding a father for Pips by the same right.

Mark chucked the little boy under his dimpled chin. "Maybe you are worth wrecking two lives for."

Crystal rose. "Don't forget you wrecked Philip's," she reminded him. Her legs were weak. She felt like a silken thread worn to the breaking point. She knew she couldn't stand much more. Her purse contained two dimes and some pennies. If Mark refused, in her present mental state, she might do something ghastly.

She looked at Pips swinging his fat legs against the desk. Love and despair were there in her eyes for Mark to read. Her trembling hands spoke of endurance dangerously near the cracking point. The

color had faded from her cheeks. She was so white Mark walked around the desk.

"I'll make the necessary arrangements for the wedding," he said quietly.

Crystal swayed a little. She knew his firm arm was supporting her and his anxious gaze was on her face. "When did you eat last?" There was deep concern in his voice.

"Not so long ago," she lied faintly.

Pips injected honestly, "Mummy didn't eat."

"Well, Pips, we'll eat now. By the way, I'm going to be your new daddy."

Pips thought that over. He said "Are you going to kiss Mummy?"

Crystal straightened. She stammered very low, "Please, Mark."

Mark paid no attention to her protest. "Of course, I'm going to kiss Mummy."

Matter-of-factly, his lips brushed her cold cheek.

Unexpectedly her resentment flared against him. It was like him to take advantage of her. As if reading her thoughts, his eyebrows arched mockingly. "Don't worry. This is simply a business deal, staged for Pip's sake. I haven't the slightest intention of touching you any more than necessary. I imagine I can recognize hate when I see it staring at me. And believe me, the emotion I feel at this hold-up isn't exactly love, or anything near it."

THAT sardonic promise alone sustained her through the nourishing luncheon at a quiet restaurant. She and Mark spoke hardly at all, although Pips chattered incessantly, filling the breach between them.

Once Mark left them with the transparent excuse of a telephone call, and Crystal had the anxious thought that he had reconsidered and was walking out. It didn't matter now. Nothing mattered. She had the detached feeling as if she were viewing a rather poor play from a gallery seat. The words were muffled, and she couldn't keep her mind on the action. Somehow it would come out right in the end.

When Mark returned he carried a corsage of tiny pink rosebuds. Crystal's hands were so cold she could hardly hold them.

He said mockingly, "I'd like Pips to remember something pretty about this wedding."

In the same dispassionate vein, she retorted, "Thanks, they are lovely." She would not wear them to her marriage, she determined with disdain. There was nothing pretty about this wedding, nothing sacred. The sweetness of the flowers was simply a taunt.

But when the three of them reached City Hall, the flowers were still on her shoulder, their fragrance making her a little giddy.

Mark secured the license with a minimum of delay, although a long queue shuffled by the window. The waiting period was also mysteriously waived. Again Crystal was reminded of the influence of the Jansen name. The same sheriff who so conveniently listed Philip's tragedy as an unavoidable accident, performed the ceremony.

Mark produced a diamond band. He must have secured it when he bought the flowers. In a panic she wondered what she should do with Philip's ring. It had never been off her finger. At the proper time, however, Mark simply slipped his glittering band on her third finger. It was so large it covered Philip's ring, and that wasn't right, either.

It was when they were coming down the wide stone steps of the Municipal Building that someone hailed Mark. And then Crystal saw the tall girl, with black hair and slanting dark eyes, exquisitely dressed in a mink coat. Her laughter held all the assurance of security.

Her gay, bantering voice called up, "Mark, people in this town go to City Hall for two things—to get married, or go to jail. Which is it?"

A dull guilty red spread over his cheeks. His eyes were blades of cold steel. Crystal knew in a brief, vivid flash, this girl meant something to him. There was a possessive audacity in the way she laughed up at him.

Crystal's hands were ice, and her heart stopped beating, waiting for his answer.

It came at last, hopelessly slow. "Crystal and I have just been married, Toni." He made the introductions in an expressionless tone. Toni was too stunned to say a word.

It was not until Crystal and Pips were installed in Mark's suite at the town's leading apartment hotel that she was overcome by the enormity of the step she had

just taken with such great haste.

Mark made sure that they were both comfortably settled. Then said, "I must go out for a while."

To Toni. Crystal supplied the words silently. Her lips twisted in scorn. He would have to give Toni some explanation of this sudden marriage. So far as Crystal was concerned, he could devote the rest of his life to Toni, provided he was a father to Pips.

On his way out, Mark had dinner sent up. Crystal and Pips ate in quiet absorption. The food tasted like ashes. Pips was fascinated by his new surroundings, by the stuffed dog that had arrived with the dinner. Crystal had difficulty getting him settled in the big bed in the guest room. Mark had pushed it up against the wall so Pips wouldn't roll out.

When he was asleep at last, the reaction set in. She crawled in beside him, and cried noiselessly, hard racking sobs that tore at her heart. She wished this reckless day undone. The urgency that prompted her to take the lives of four people into her hands seemed unimportant. She and Pips could have managed somehow.

It was daybreak when she dropped off to sleep. Mark hadn't returned. In the morning, she found his bed hadn't been disturbed.

THE next few weeks dragged by in numbed monotony. Whatever Mark's social obligations were, he was always there for dinner. His conversation with Crystal was brief and remote. He was real only when he played with Pips. Then his eyes would go so blue, the tears would sting at Crystal's eyelids. His laughter would hold a deep heart-breaking note. With a frightened dismay, Crystal realized Pips was his vulnerable spot. It was a two-edged sword, that Pips returned his love. He would leave her at the drop of a hat at the sound of Mark's footsteps.

At noon one day Mark brought home a sad-eyed black spaniel for Pips. The playful little puppy frisked about Pip's short legs, tumbling him to the floor and licking his face. Mark went into gales of laughter with him. For an unbelievable half hour, the polite barrier between them crumpled.

"I always wanted a mut when I was a

kid," he explained to Crystal. "And my mother wouldn't have one, because of hairs on the furniture and the fleas in the rugs. Every puppy I coaxed home, the S.P.C.A. got eventually."

Hope stirred in her heart. Mark was talking to her as if she were a human being rather than some horrible creature who had forced herself into his life. "Every boy should have a dog," she said softly.

"We never had a house, either. My father travelled, and we lived at a hotel. All hotel rooms look alike. I have no memories of a place that was our own."

"Poor Mark!" she breathed trying to picture a small boy with crisp bronze hair and troubled blue eyes. He must have been a very lonely little boy.

"When I grew up I managed to get some of the things I wanted."

With a sickening flash she knew it didn't include a wife, another man's son. She went rigid with shame.

Mark rose at last. "I must be getting back to the plant, but I am going to knock off at four o'clock. I'd like to take Pips to the zoo."

Crystal wanted to ask if she could go, too, but the words stuck in her throat. She couldn't risk a curt refusal. She couldn't endure seeing the bleak hardness curtaining Mark's eyes. There was no understanding this feeling within her that soared at his pleasant nod, or sank at indifference in his gaze. But she determined to be ready when he came at four, and if he indicated by the slightest word that she was included in the invitation, she would lose no time in accepting.

Her plans went awry, for after Mark left, the puppy howled. Pips couldn't nap for the disturbance. Over the phone the manager informed her in an ominous tone, "Madam, no dogs are allowed in this apartment house. Your lease will be cancelled unless you get rid of the animal." He added as an afterthought, "Mr. Jansen's lease also specifies no children."

Pips cried when she broke the news to him about Blackie. He hung on the dog's neck, and the puppy whined louder. The people in the adjoining apartment knocked threateningly on the wall. There was nothing to do but to get Pips dressed and go out.

Crystal thought they must have walked around the block a dozen times when Mark brushed into them.

She couldn't help laughing, "We were put out, the three of us. Your lease says no dogs and no children."

He glowered at her for a minute, then turned to signal a taxi. "Okay, we'll rent a house. Pips should have a place to run."

Before she knew it, the four of them were in the back seat, Crystal was wedged between Mark and Pips, while Blackie scrambled over them.

Mark gave the driver directions to a real estate office.

Crystal laid her hand on his arm. "No, Mark, I don't think you'd better rent a house." No one knew what an effort it cost her, because suddenly a house with a garden for Pips to play in, seemed the most wonderful place in the world, the house Mark had always dreamed of.

Apparently he didn't notice her hand on his sleeve. "Why not? We'll probably find one not too far from the plant."

She was trembling so hard she had to take a firm grip on herself.

"Because I realize how wrong I have been, to force you into this marriage. I still hold you responsible for Philip's death. In theory marriage was the only solution. I can't get that girl Toni out of my mind."

His face was a mask. "Isn't it rather late to let your conscience bother you?"

Miserably, she nodded. "I did behave disgracefully, but I was desperate. I couldn't bear to put Pips in a home, and I couldn't take care of him any longer. I think I was on the verge of a breakdown. I see things differently now. I can get a quiet divorce. You will be free to marry Toni. Pips and I won't bother you again."

She looked up to meet the thunder in his eyes. "Fine." The word seemed torn from him. "Now that you are fed and coddled, you've recovered from your brain storm. Now that I love Pips more than anything on this earth, you are going to take him away from me. Just like that."

"Mark, I didn't mean—"

"I know exactly what you mean. It's a rather tame existence being the wife of Mark Jansen. There isn't the excitement of travelling around the country the way you did with Phil. It's dull being stuck in

an apartment hotel. It will be even duller in a house in the suburbs."

Through clenched teeth Crystal said, "I suppose this is your way of punishing me."

He looked at her so long she felt paralyzed. "I can think of more unpleasant ways of punishing you."

He pulled her to him roughly and bent to kiss her. She was too astonished to resist. His mouth on hers aroused all the starved loneliness and heartbreak that had been concealed too long. Her lips responded, giving him a glimpse of the aching sweetness of her heart.

When he released her he made no attempt to hide his own amazement. "That was a crazy impulse," he said unsteadily. "It won't happen again."

"Crazy," she repeated like a parrot.

Was it crazy, or was it beautiful? What was happening to her that she could still feel the warmth of his mouth? She would not meet his gaze, fearful he would read in her eyes the knowledge she refused to admit to her heart.

Staring straight ahead she stammered, "We can't go on like this. Let me get a divorce."

His chin was a rock. "No. I won't give up Pips."

IT WAS a lovely house that Mark finally selected.

"Like it, Crystal? How about you, Pips?" Mark asked.

Crystal nodded, her throat too full for words. That kiss was still vivid. Each step was a new link pulling her into a dangerous abyss. She had demanded marriage, but she had the feeling she would be ultimately consumed in her own fire.

Pips made no answer. He was thumping hard on a high key on the piano. Crystal crossed to him, sat beside him on the upholstered bench. "I haven't touched a piano for years. Come, sing this little jingle with me, Pips."

That piano saved her pride. In the following weeks it occupied her hands that wanted to reach out and touch Mark. It filled the thoughts that flew after him as he strode down the hill to the plant. She knew intuitively he was seeing Toni. The girl's exotic fragrance clung to him. Once upon emptying the pockets of an overcoat to be sent to the cleaners she found a

jewelled compact. Crystal slammed the dresser drawer hard on the shining ornament. There wasn't the slightest reason in the world for her to feel a twinge of jealousy. She knew Mark loved Toni, and if it weren't for the demand she had made on him, they would have probably been married. She was caught in a trap of her own making, but she lived for those brief glimpses she had of him.

The jingle book grew thick with songs. She sketched Pips' chubby figure and Blackie, and the gray squirrel that scampered across their frozen garden.

Mark happened upon the book one day. Crystal came into the living room to find him playing the piano with one finger.

He looked across at her, and the clear blue of his eyes turned her heart completely over. "Say, this is clever, Crystal. Why don't you publish it?"

Crystal had been pulling Pips about the garden on his sled. There was snow on her fur hood, her cheeks were cold and bright. She had never seemed lovelier.

She shrugged, tossed off her jacket and hood. "I made them up for Pips. I doubt if a publisher would even look at those songs."

"You wouldn't like to bet on it, would you?" His eyes beamed at her but it dawned on her his smile was haggard.

She could see he was under some terrific strain. "What is the matter?" she asked frankly. "Something at the plant?"

"The plant is all right. It's—it's Toni. She is getting difficult. Making wild threats. I wish you would avoid her if she does come out to the house."

"I'm sorry, Mark. I can appreciate how she feels."

"I never thought Toni would make herself ridiculous. After all this is something that can't be changed."

The pause lasted endless minutes. "Are you sure it can't be changed?" She couldn't keep the tremor out of her voice.

"Quite sure. So don't let her upset you. I have tried to end things decently with Toni, but I haven't done a good job."

Her hands stretched out to him. "You haven't made a good job of it? What have I done?" Then she was sobbing against the broad expanse of his shoulder. . . .

Mark patted her shoulder. He let her

cry it out. "It's all right, darling," he whispered.

She wasn't sure about that "darling." It might have been a trick of her imagination. Or it could have been because she wanted so desperately to hear tenderness in his deep voice.

His eyes were shielded from her probing gaze as he put on his overcoat. Through the French doors, Pips called for another ride. Her heart fluttering like an uncaged bird, Crystal went out to him. They waved to Mark slithering down the steep incline. They built a snow man with a paper hat and Blackie dug at its feet, sending snow flurries in all directions. Crystal laughed and Pips squealed, and it was as if everything was right in the world.

When it was dusk and Pips' nose glowed from the cold, they went in.

AND there was the girl, Toni, beautifully at home in Mark's favorite chair. The ash tray heaped with stubs indicated she had been there a long time. The slanting dark eyes were hard, and there was a reckless defiance in the way she slid out of her mink coat.

Crystal said, "Hello, you don't mind if I get Pips out of all these clothes?"

Toni replied, "I have plenty of time."

Crystal urged him out of the room, saying, "Give Blackie a good rub-down."

Toni said nothing, even after Pips had made a flying leap at Blackie. A spasm of fear rocked Crystal's heart. Mark told her not to worry, but she couldn't still the apprehension which was spreading through her. Yet a flicker of sympathy mingled with her emotion. Toni loved Mark, too.

Toni smiled, a thin stretch of her lips. "Aren't you curious why I am here?"

"Should I be?"

She shrugged. "Mark warned me against coming."

Crystal said, "There isn't anything you can say that I haven't told myself. It seemed right at the time to force Mark to marry me. He was responsible for Philip's death. Pips needed a father. I didn't know about you. Frankly, I don't think it would have stopped me if I had."

There was an odd glint in Toni's eyes. Her smoldering hostility was a white-hot flame. Her voice was throaty with anger

as she cried, "Mark didn't marry you because you forced him. He says it was because of Pips. I don't believe it. It was because he loves you."

Crystal's shrill doubting laughter was startling in the stillness. "If ever a man hated a woman who blackmailed him into marriage, Mark hates me."

Toni's gesture discounted that thrust. She cried harshly, "Why else would he conceal from you the real facts about Philip?"

CRYSTAL could feel the blood draining from her face. She had the sickening feeling she was going to faint. "What do you know about Philip?" she demanded.

Toni blazed, "I was with him that night in Mark's car. Don't look so alarmed. Phil didn't mean anything to me. Nor I to him. Mark and I met him in a cocktail bar. He was celebrating something, a return from a long trip somewhere. I was provoked at Mark, I tried to make him jealous by flirting with Phil. Phil and I drank too much, and Mark just sat there looking like a thundercloud. We thought it would be fun to go for a ride in his car."

"*Philip was driving?*" Those hoarse words were coming from Crystal's throat.

Toni shook from sheer hysteria, the horror of that awful ride was in her eyes.

Her voice said thickly, "I didn't know Phil was so far gone. The car kept weaving. I didn't have the strength to twist it back on the road. I think I fainted. I couldn't remember the crash. Mark got there first. He had followed us in Phil's car. I was uninjured. He got me out. I phoned for the ambulance and called my father. He is the sheriff, you know."

Crystal didn't know. She was too stunned to feel anything.

Toni's brittle voice was saying, "My father agreed to Mark's story that he was driving and it was an unavoidable accident. Dad didn't want me mixed up in it."

Crystal pressed her cold fingers against her temples. It seemed as if her head was swelling until it would burst.

"Why did they let me go on in such a fool's paradise?" she thought she screamed

the question, but her moving lips sent forth only a harsh whisper.

"I wanted to tell you, but Mark wouldn't let me. He wanted you to keep your ideal of Phil intact. And I wanted Mark so much I traded on that queer quirk in his brain. I knew he would even marry me to keep the knowledge from you. I never supposed you would make this marriage demand on him. Mark never loved me. I know it now. I tried to take it like a good sport and I couldn't. Maybe he doesn't realize he loves you, but a man who goes to such lengths to protect a girl is giving a pretty fair imitation of it."

"Toni, I offered him his freedom. He wouldn't give up Pips."

Toni rose wearily. "I came here intending to shoot the works. I watched Pips playing in the snow, and it all sizzled out of me. He is a miracle boy."

"He has a miracle mother." From the doorway came Mark's quiet voice. How long he had been there, Crystal didn't know. She felt numb and confused. Her world had split wide open. Her accusations against Mark were horrible now that she knew the truth. She felt stripped. There was not one bit of pride left. Through a haze she knew Toni had gone.

Mark crossed the room to her.

He drew her to her feet, "Crystal!"

"What can I say?" her eyes were humble and pleading.

"Do you need to say anything? Toni is wiser than I thought. Yes, I listened, shamelessly. I do love you. I didn't realize it until now. I think I fell in love with you when I stayed with you and Phil. Pips was a toddler and you were the most beautiful sight in the world. I think I would have given my life to protect you both. It was a most idealistic love. Lately it has been unsatisfied—since that kiss in the taxi."

"Then you felt it too? I demanded marriage—"

"I'm demanding love. For now and always."

It was a new beginning of a marriage that had begun in misunderstanding. The deep look that passed between them held a glorious promise for the future.

THE END

No Romance for Genie

By JUNE RUTHERFORD

Genie had made up her mind she was love-proof—until she kissed a man who gave her the brushoff.

They streaked down the parkway and Suzy Q held her black head high.



AT FOUR-THIRTY on a cloudy April afternoon, Genie Craig parked her sister's travel-stained car in front of the one skyscraper of a small city somewhere in the U.S.A. "You

wait here, Sarah," she said briskly, "and move the car if I'm gone over an hour. We don't want to add a parking ticket to our problems."

Sarah Garden made a gallant effort to smile, but her lips were dry, her cheeks swollen, and her eyes tired. "I'll keep my fingers crossed," she said.

"And Tommy," Genie spoke to the five-year-old who was zooming an airplane on the back seat, using a suitcase for a landing base, "suppose you sit up front and tell your Mummy the story I read you this morning about the deer that walked into a hotel lobby—remember?"

"Aw wight," Tommy said, flinging a chubby leg over the seat and tumbling after.

"I'm not coming back," Genie promised them, "until Mr. Peter Henderson agrees to let you have that apartment. We're not going to spend another night in that dismal tourist cabin." She dropped a nickel in the parking meter and marched into a street floor office marked in tall gold letters:

PETER HENDERSON,
REAL ESTATE.

"I want to see Mr. Peter Henderson, please," she said to the elderly secretary ensconced behind a vast mahogany desk, "on a very important matter."

The woman appraised Genie with a trained eye. "Did you wish to look at houses or apartments? At the moment we have only—"

"Neither," Genie said bluntly. "I said I wish to speak to Mr. Henderson."

"About a—a personal matter?"

"Perhaps yes, perhaps no."

The secretary hesitated, unable to catalogue Genie properly. "Very well," she said uncertainly. "The third door to your left."

"Thank you." With a brief smile, Genie crossed the room, opened the third door on the left, and entered without knocking.

For twenty-four hours she had visualized Peter Henderson as a deaf old gentleman, bald as an egg, and rather dapper. Therefore, she was momentarily stunned to discover a very young Peter Henderson, in wrinkled tweeds, slouched behind another vast mahogany desk, with

his big feet propped up on a window ledge. He was pipe-smoking and obviously day-dreaming.

At the sudden unexpected swish of a woman's skirt, he unwound himself and sat up. There was a hint of reproach in the wide-apart gray eyes, as if she had derailed an important train of thought.

Genie's amber eyes met his gray gaze levelly. Her mouth was set in stern young lines. Her slender body, in a blue gaberdine suit, was tense. She looked as if she might coil up and spring at him at the slightest provocation. But instead she blew a light brown curl off her forehead and began crisply: "Mr. Henderson?"

"In the flesh," he said irrelevantly. "The spirit is taking the day off." He unwound his long legs still further and stood up. "If you wish to confer with me, why don't we sit down?"

"Look," Genie seated herself on the edge of a chair, "my sister and I have scoured this city of yours for three days searching for a small, furnished apartment. The only one available is in the Bellepoint Apartments, which, I understand, belongs to you."

He busied himself digging ashes out of his pipe, pausing occasionally to look at her, and finally to make a statement. "I have a resident manager there, a Mrs. Harold Stone, who has charge of leasing the apartments. You should talk to her . . ."

"We have talked to her!" Genie exclaimed. "And that old hatchet faced zinnia told my sister that she couldn't have the apartment on account of Tommy."

"That old hatchet faced zinnia," Peter remarked dryly, "is a friend of mine. Who is Tommy?"

"My nephew. The smartest youngster this side of the Quiz Kids."

"How old is he?"

"He'll be five tomorrow."

The young realtor frowned darkly and shook his head. "We do not allow children or dogs in the Bellepoint. That particular apartment building happens to be the quietest, smartest and most exclusive—"

"I've seen it," Genie broke in, "so you needn't spread it on quite so thickly. The Bellepoint is no more and no less attractive than dozens of other apartments in

dozens of other cities. The only reason my sister wants that particular apartment is because it is absolutely the only furnished one vacant in this city, and because it is near the new Air Depot. You see, she wants to be with her husband, Lieutenant Thomas Garden—as much as possible until he is sent to Africa, or Australia, or Russia, or one of those places on the other side of the globe—especially with the baby coming.”

His eyebrows soared. “Oh, there’s going to be another child?”

She nodded. “In a couple of months, more or less, and they’re terribly thrilled about it. But if you ask me, a girl is courting trouble, camp-following a husband all over. However, Tom wants her, and Sarah wants Tom and who am I to judge? So I’ve brought her to him again, and I’m going to stick around until she is settled comfortably. Then I’m coming back to look after her two Toms while little Phyllis is being born.”

“Phyllis, eh?” He laid his pipe aside, and Genie observed an encouraging eye flicker.

“Yes, Phyllis. Naturally Sarah and Tom can’t afford hotel rates on a lieutenant’s commutation, and every boarding house already is bursting at the seams. For the past three nights they have bunked in a tourist cabin that smells and leaks, leaving most of their belongings in the car. So you see how important it is for them to have that apartment.”

PETER stood up again and shoved his hands deep into his pockets. His frown widened. “But I’ve already told you—we do not allow children in the Bellepoint.”

“Or dogs,” Genie added. “But Tommy doesn’t have a dog—yet. I promised to give him one of Lady’s puppies when they’re born. I’m going to bring it with me when I return. Lady is a blonde cocker—”

“Now wait a minute, Miss—What is your name?”

“Eugenia Craig.”

“Miss Craig. This is all very interesting and romantic and gallant and patriotic and all that. And I’d like to be of service to you, especially since your brother-in-law is a low ranking Army officer with a

wife and kid on his neck. But that is his misfortune, not mine. For the third and last time, I repeat, we do not allow children or dogs in the Bellepoint.”

Genie drew a sharp breath. “What kind of country would we have fifty years from now, Mr. Peter Henderson,” she flashed out, “if every property owner made a rule against children?”

“Never thought much about it,” he retorted. “My old man built the apartment and made the rule. I’m just carrying on where he left off.”

“And what kind of tenants do you have in your precious apartment?” she continued scornfully. “I’d like to line them up and look them over. A fine collection of—of ostriches they must be.”

He made a noise in his throat that sounded to Genie like a cross between a chuckle and a growl. “I think I’d better get you a glass of water before you blow a fuse.”

“I’d be willing to blow a fuse,” she said tensely, “if that would make you lift your head out of the sand. These are not normal times, Mr. Henderson. That rule of yours should be scrapped, at least for the duration. There’s enough of a housing problem everywhere without your adding to it. What kind of a citizen are you, anyway? Why aren’t you in uniform? You look able-bodied to me, and my guess is you’re not a day over twenty-four!”

“Twenty-five,” he grinned. “And I expect to be in uniform by the end of this week.”

“Oh!” Genie’s hand flew to her mouth. “Sorry I took that poke at you. It was unfair and impertinent.”

“On the contrary,” he assured her. “I regard it as a very fair and pertinent question to ask any able-bodied young man in civilian clothes.” He walked over to a cooler and filled a glass. “Drink this slowly and quietly,” he commanded her, “and permit me to say a few words without interruption.”

She obeyed, her eyes focussed upon him with obvious distrust.

“If I should agree to break the rules for the duration, set the other tenants howling, let your sister and her lieutenant and Tommy and Phyllis have that apartment, would you—” He regarded her

thoughtfully. "No, I don't expect you would."

"Would I what?" she asked curiously.

"Would you agree to—to let me take you out to dinner—say, every night this week? You see, I'm leaving Saturday for camp, and I want somebody to—well, help me celebrate my induction into the Army as a buck private."

She almost choked on a swallow of water. "What's the matter with your home town girls?" she asked warily. "Aren't they all pining over you?"

"Oh sure," he said easily. "That's why I prefer to spend my last evenings with you. I—I don't want to be pinned over."

"I" Genie stated complacently, "wouldn't pine over any man." Her eyes suddenly narrowed. "It's a deal," she bargained, "provided you let my sister have the apartment for fifty dollars a month. She can't afford to pay a cent more."

"But it's listed at seventy-five!"

"You probably upped it to seventy-five," she said dryly, "about the time the Government started building an Air Depot nearby."

He acknowledged defeat with a broad grin. "All right. You win. Fifty dollars and five dinners. I'll draw up a lease."

"Fifty dollars and four dinners," she corrected him, "beginning tomorrow night. And don't put the—the dinners in the lease. Tom and Sarah needn't know about that. I'm a girl of my word, and furthermore, I can take care of myself."

"I believe you." The deal was closed with a firm handshake.

PPROMPTLY at six-thirty the following evening, Peter knocked on B-1 of the Bellepoint Apartments and was admitted by tow-headed Tommy. "Come in, Sir," he said brightly. "We're bof ready."

"Did he say bof?" Peter inquired of Genie, who was standing in the middle of the living room wearing a rare costume jewel of a smile and a compelling outfit of grey flannel with a red dotted blouse and a grey beret.

"I'm afraid he did," she retorted gaily. "You see, it's his birthday and I promised him a party. He worked like a steam shovel today helping us unpack. Besides,

his Mummy and Dad are dining with the C. O. tonight. Tommy wasn't invited. Do you mind?"

"Oh no," Peter assured her. "I'm delighted!"

"I was sure you would be." She placed Tommy between them in Peter's blue roadster and he chattered away about airpanes and jeeps and sheen guns as they streaked down the parkway.

They dined in state at the Lakeside Inn with Tommy sitting in a highchair between them. At any moment Genie expected Peter to start sulking because she had dragged him along, so she was emotionally unprepared for his big brother act. He made a tremendous fuss over Tommy's birthday, ordering a cake with five candles, singing "Happy Birthday Dear Tommy," in an elastic accordian-tenor voice, and insisting that they must treat him to a Wild West movie.

It was a double feature, and long before the last villain was slain, Tommy was sleeping noisily, his head on Genie's lap, his feet stretched across Peter's knees.

When they reached the apartment, Peter shoveled him into bed and stood by while Genie took off his coat, cap, shoes and socks. They tiptoed out together.

At the door Genie held out her hand. "Thank you," she said sweetly, "for being so nice to Tommy and me."

"Bring him along tomorrow night," Peter suggested with an odd grimace, "if you're still afraid of me."

Her eyes opened wide. "Oh, but I'm not."

"Liar," he said softly. "But sweet. Good night."

On the next night, after giving the matter constant thought, Genie decided to risk dining alone with Peter Henderson, just to prove to him that she was not afraid. But when he ushered her into his car, she found the front seat partially occupied by an enormous Kerry Blue Terrier, who stared at her out of doleful brown eyes.

"This is Susy Q," Peter announced lightly. "She has a standing engagement with me on Wednesday nights, and since this is my last Wednesday night at home, I couldn't conscientiously leave her behind. Hope you don't mind."

"Not at all," Genie assured him. "I'm delighted."

"I was quite sure you would be," he grinned.

Once more they streaked down the parkway, this time with Susy Q sitting between them holding her black head high. Peter turned into the parking area of a Hot Shoppe and ordered hamburgers, French fries, pie and coffee for three. They discovered that they both liked coffee with cream and no sugar, hamburgers with plenty of everything, and sweet potato pie. Susy Q drank her coffee straight.

With their hunger appeased, Peter turned a disarming smile Genie's way. "What shall we do now?"

"What do you and Susy Q usually do on Wednesday nights," she inquired.

"We usually take a long walk through the park."

"That's my dish," Genie said.

It was a lovely night for a long walk through the park, until an angry thunder storm caught up with them and chased them into the band pavilion. There, wet and chilled, they waited in a huddle while the rain fell in silver ropes.

"You're cold," Peter said finally, wrapping his arms about her.

She moved away. "I am not."

There was a long uneasy silence broken only by the sound of rain on the roof. Peter decided to try a more direct approach.

"I'd like to kiss you, Genie."

"It isn't in the deal." Her voice was taut.

"Then," Peter challenged her, "why not put it in at once?"

He stooped to kiss her, but she quickly turned her face away. There was just a fragment of a kiss between them, but even so, it was somehow different. Often in the past disturbing months Genie had stated to Sarah, and to many of her girl friends who were marrying and snatching a few weeks of so-called happiness while they could, that no man's kiss could disturb her, clutter up her life with camp-following and heartbreak. She was invulnerable, thank goodness. Yet here she was feeling suddenly tender and startled and angry and frightened over practically no kiss at all!

Susy Q growled at her and Peter laughed. "She's jealous," he said. "Tomorrow night I'll leave her at home."

"There isn't going to be any tomorrow night," Genie said darkly.

"Still afraid of me?" Peter challenged her, and Genie shook her head vigorously.

DEEP in the night Genie told herself that the smart thing for her to do was to exit with a whole heart. She promised herself to leave the next day. Sarah was comfortably settled in the apartment and Tom could come home for lunch often. There was no reason at all why she should stay on any longer.

But Sarah wakened the following morning feeling so ill that Genie ordered her to stay in bed. She prepared breakfast, lunch and dinner and washed all of Tommy's clothes. There was no time for her to pack her bag or see about a ticket.

Toward late afternoon another reason for staying over materialized. The Bellepoint tenants had greeted the newcomers with annoyed stares, especially Mrs. Stone, the hatchet faced zinnia. She lived down the hall with an astonishingly beautiful daughter who had gray-green eyes and taffy-colored hair. Genie decided it would be a fine idea for her to make at least one friend in the building for Sarah to turn to.

But when she met Mrs. Stone's daughter in the hall and threw out her friendliest smile as a trial balloon, the other girl glared at her coldly and disappeared in her own apartment.

"Oh well," Genie muttered. "Sarah has Tom and Tommy and Phyllis, and I'll be back in a few weeks when there won't be any Peter Henderson around to complicate my life. Meantime, I'll just take a shower and put on my yellow silk with the red jacket."

At six-thirty her bright head was pressed against the window. She told Sarah that she was watching the sunset. Actually she was keeping an eye out for a chap in a blue roadster.

Seven o'clock came, and then seven-thirty. At eight she began to feel queer around the edges of her stomach. At eight-thirty she left the window forever. At nine o'clock, Sarah persuaded her to sit down and eat some dinner. The food

was cold and soggy and tasteless. At ten o'clock Tom said, "Genie, since you're all dressed up with no place to go, how about riding out to the Depot with me? I've got to check over some matters with the O. D."

She went because she wanted to prove to herself that she wasn't the kind of girl who sat around waiting all evening for any man. But the moment Tom drove away from the apartment, she regretted having accepted his invitation. She wanted desperately to turn back.

It was on the drive back from the Depot that Genie saw Peter's blue roadster parked in a lover's nook on the side of the road. Etched in the bright moonlight were two heads bent close. Peter and some other girl! Some strange new emotion needled Genie's heart in so many places that it was practically raw.

"This must be lover's lane," Tom laughed.

Genie tried to manufacture a bit of bright repartee, but somehow the words wouldn't jell.

"What's the matter, honey?" Tom inquired. "You're awfully quiet tonight."

"I'm fine," Genie said. "Never felt better in my life."

SHE went to bed at once and turned out the light. What she needed, she told herself sternly, was a good night's sleep. Tommy snuggled against her taut body and kicked her occasionally. She spanked his legs and turned him over. Her eyes stung in the darkness. Peter Henderson was the most contradictory man she'd ever met. He didn't want children or dogs in his apartment building, yet he was grand with Tommy and Susy Q adored him. He made a deal with her for fifty dollars and four dinners and then calmly ignored it. He kissed a girl and then brushed her off. He . . .

The telephone rang at twelve o'clock. Genie was out of the bed before the last tinkle had died away. "Hello," she said, very sleepily.

"Genie?"

"Oh—it's you." She flattened her voice out like a plank.

"Listen, Genie. I've got to see you. Will you meet me in the drive? We could swing around the block a time or two.

I can be there in two minutes flat."

"I've retired," Genie said firmly. "I was asleep. You shouldn't call people in the middle of the night."

"But I've got to tell you why I—why I'm so late . . ."

"It doesn't matter in the least," Genie said. "You don't have to explain your actions to me. And vice-versa."

"Please, Genie."

She pressed her lips tightly together.

"So you won't talk, eh? All right. Neither will I—until six-thirty tomorrow night. See you then."

"I won't be here. I'm going home tomorrow."

With that announcement, she dropped the receiver in its cradle. She did not go back to bed until her clothes were flung into a bag and she had called the station about a train. There was one at ten the next morning.

There was gloom for breakfast because Genie was leaving. Tommy cried when he was told and after breakfast Genie took him on her lap and read him a story, and then another, and then another.

When it was time for her to dress, Sarah came in and sat on the edge of the bed. "I shouldn't beg you to stay," she said. "But oh, Genie, please don't go."

"I must," Genie said. "I'll be back next month. Or sooner, if you need me."

"I suppose we'll be moving back to the tourist cabin soon," Sarah said slowly, her eyes clouded with hurt. "I'm afraid they're going to run us out of here."

Genie turned sharply. "What do you mean?"

"The janitor told me this morning that Mrs. Stone has called a meeting of all the tenants in the building for seven-thirty tonight in her apartment. A—a sort of indignation meeting."

"Why, why," Genie sputtered, "She can't do that to us!"

"It seems," Sarah went on unhappily, "that all the tenants are raging because Mr. Henderson leased B-1 to a couple with a small child and a stork hovering."

"I can't believe," Genie ejaculated, "that every tenant in this building would go into a rage over a thing like that. I just can't believe it." She dropped her

hat on the bed, stripped off her suit and hung it away in the closet. "I'm staying," she announced grimly, "I wouldn't miss that indignation meeting for anything."

"But we're—you're not invited."

"Then I'll crash it. Have you told Tom?"

"No. He's got enough on his mind as is. Besides, I'm afraid he'll send me home, and I don't want to leave him. I want to be with him, no matter where we have to live."

"You love that guy an awful lot."

"Yes," Sarah said softly, lifting shining eyes. "Enough to live in that tourist cabin and like it, if I have to."

"Don't you worry," Genie said. "Tom won't send you home, and the Belle-point tenants won't throw you out either. Just leave it to me."

THE telephone did not ring at all that day, but Peter rapped on the door promptly at six-thirty. Genie received him coolly.

"Oh," he greeted her lightly, "I thought you were going home today."

"Changed my mind," she replied shortly.

"I knew you were a girl of your word." His eyes approved of her in the blue gaberdine. "Where would you like to go for dinner?"

"I'm not eating dinner tonight."

"Oh, yes you are. You owe me two dinners, Genie. I thought we could eat one of them now and the other at midnight. I'm going away myself tomorrow—remember?"

"I don't owe you anything," Genie said. "If you can break one dinner engagement, so can I."

"The deal was simply that you were to eat four dinners with me. The score is now, two down and two to go. I saved two of them for tonight because—well, because this is my last . . ."

"That's a very pallid excuse," Genie exclaimed. "Not," she added hastily, "that I care what you did last night."

"I'm going to tell you about last night after dinner." He took hold of her arm. "Come on, Genie-with-the-light-brown-hair, give me a smile. I have a wonderful restaurant where they serve marvelous steaks."

She shook him off. "I'm not interested. I've got to go to an indignation meeting at seven-thirty."

"An indignation meeting?"

"Yes. Your tenants are meeting in Mrs. Stone's apartment at seven-thirty to discuss ways and means of ousting Lieutenant and Mrs. Garden, Tommy and stork. They're probably planning to work up a petition to present to you before you leave town, a petition or an ultimatum, or something."

"In that case," Peter frowned, "I've got to go to an indignation myself. You let me handle this, Genie. It isn't necessary for you to fight my battles. Besides, there's more to this than meets the eye."

"It's my battle," Genie persisted, "because I persuaded you to break your apartment rules. You let me handle it. You and Tom have far bigger battles to fight. I can take care of this little one myself."

"I don't doubt it. Nevertheless, I want to handle it. I—I have a reason, Genie. You see, it isn't really the tenants who are angry. They're just following the leader, Mrs. Stone, and—Edna."

"Edna?"

"Mrs. Stone's daughter."

"Why are *they* so angry?"

"They're out for revenge," Peter admitted, "because you—because we—because I said goody-by to Edna last night without asking her to marry me, or wait for me, or anything. Apparently they think I'm—Don't laugh!—an excellent catch. Or *did*."

She lifted puzzled eyes. "But what has that got to do . . ."

"I'm coming to that. It's because of—Edna," he confessed reluctantly, "that I asked you to dine with me every night this week. As a safety measure. To keep me from tumbling. You see, Edna's rather persistent, and she had me going. When you marched into my office Monday afternoon I was trying to figure a way out. I didn't want to go off to war with a bride slung over my shoulder instead of a gun. Nor did I want to leave a bride weeping at home. I wanted to be free and unencumbered, with no housing problem, no emotional responsibilities, no desperate partings."

Genie drew a sharp breath. "So Mrs.

Stone and Edna are really striking at me—not at the Gardens.”

“They’re striking at you and me,” Peter admitted.

“Then of course I’ve got to be there,” Genie said, “to strike back. Not for myself, you understand, but for Sarah.”

“You’re sweet and I love you,” Peter said.

Genie’s eyes sparkled angrily. “Don’t say things like that to me,” she said. “We understand each other perfectly now. You used me—”

Peter glanced at his watch. “It’s time for the indignation meeting,” he said. “We can have one of our own later. I’ll be back.” The door closed behind him.

Genie waited fifteen minutes, then marched down the hall and rapped sharply on the door of the Stone apartment.

It opened quickly, and Edna stared at her through narrowed gray-green eyes. “What do you want, Miss Craig?”

“I understand there’s a meeting going on here that concerns Apartment B-1,” Genie said. “I’m the official family representative. Do you mind?” She brushed past Edna and stood inside the room looking around.

There were a half dozen men and about a dozen women in the room. Peter was leaning against the window, his arms folded, a pipe between his teeth. Mrs. Stone was making a speech.

“We have leases which state clearly,” she was saying, “that no apartment in this building shall be rented to a couple with minor children. Mr. Henderson has deliberately gone over my head in this matter. He has broken his pledge to all of us. I feel that we owe it to ourselves to protect our rights.” She faced Peter dramatically. “Mr. Henderson, unless you remove this family from our midst, we will institute suit for breach of contract.”

An elderly, sweet-faced lady arose. “I’d like to suggest, Mrs. Stone, that Peter simply make an adjustment in the rents. We were paying extra for peace and quiet. Undoubtedly we will now have a daily ration of shouts and cries and such. With our income taxes running so high, it might be wise for us to endure a child or two for the economy of reduced rent.”

Genie moved forward and said em-

phatically, “I’d like to point out . . .”

But before she could point out anything, Mrs. Stone broke in sharply. “I don’t think there is anything you could say that would be of interest to us, Miss Craig.”

“But I insist,” Genie said. “You see—”

“Yes, we see,” Edna heckled. “We see that you’re intruding into our affairs. Please go before I—”

“This is ridiculous,” Genie began, but Peter calmly stepped forward and took over.

“Sit down, Genie. It’s my turn to make a speech.” He cleared his throat. “Ladies and gentlemen. I want to inform you that Mrs. Stone is no longer the resident manager of the Bellepoint. She is dismissed, as of this moment. Her lease is up on May 1, and after that she will no longer live here.”

Mrs. Stone clicked her teeth sharply and Edna muttered something under her breath.

“Now that that’s settled,” Peter continued, “I want to discuss Mrs. Deering’s suggestion. It is disillusioning and disturbing to discover that a kindly person such as Mrs. Deering is reacting from one viewpoint only—her own. These are not normal times, Mrs. Deering. We are in a war. An Air Depot is being built near us, and officers have been sent here to supervise its construction and organization. They have families who want to be with them. It is up to us to help them find places to live, make them comfortable. Rather than fight to oust them, or merely endure them, we should welcome them with open arms, children, dogs, stork and all. Our rule against children must be scrapped for the duration.

“That was the way I reasoned when I rented Apartment B-1 to Lieutenant and Mrs. Garden. ‘What would this country be like fifty years from now?’ I asked myself, ‘if every property owner made a similar rule against children?’ Think that over calmly. What kind of people are we, anyway, that we set ourselves off in a lovely, quiet spot, and howl just because we are going to hear a little boy shouting, or perhaps a baby’s cries? Aren’t we behaving like—like ostriches? I tell you, we’ve got to take our heads out of the

sand and start behaving the way human beings should.

"Sue me for breach of contract, if you will. But I don't think you will." He sat down abruptly and everybody cheered except Mrs. Stone and Edna.

THE applause covered Genie's departure. She sped down the hall and out the side entrance into the cool of the night. Her throat hurt and for the first time in her life she wanted to cry. She suddenly felt sorry for Edna, and sorry for herself.

She felt a sudden overwhelming sorrow for any girl who was enough of a marshmallow to fall in love in nineteen hundred forty-three.

"I ought to hate him," she told herself. "He used me to get rid of her, and now he is going away. I might never see him again. I ought to hate him, and I'm going to!"

"Hey Genie," a voice called behind her, "wait for me!"

She began running. But he caught up with her quickly, and his hands closed over her arm. "What's the big idea—running from me? How did you like my speech? I took the words right out of your mouth, didn't I? It worked, Genie.

I left them arguing about who was to call on your sister first. Now, we can go eat those two dinners you owe me now that everything is okay."

She was breathing hard. "I'm still not hungry."

"Neither am I." With rough fingers he drew her closer. "I've got too much on my mind. Such as—whether or not you're going to face it squarely, the way I'm doing," he said with a determined look on his face.

"Face what?"

"Us. Love. Marriage. Kids. Dogs. The whole works, Genie, in spite of the war, in spite of the harsh, undeniable fact that I'm leaving for camp tomorrow."

She looked up then, startled, and he kissed her. "But—but, you said you didn't want . . ."

"Makes no difference what I said I didn't want." He kissed her again. "Makes no difference what you said you didn't want either. I'm sunk, Genie. I've got to have you near me, as long as I'm training. It won't be easy. But you know that. Do you mind?"

Genie drew a long breath. Her eyes began to shine in the darkness. "I'm sunk, too," she said softly. "And I—I actually felt sorry for Sarah!"

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Lovely Little Liar

By TUGAR De PASS

Deception is the one thing a man hates in the woman he loves. But in order to live up to the role Bing had created for her, Ann had to keep her identity a secret.

ANN CREIGHTON slipped her old camel hair coat on over the simple leaf-brown jersey, picked up her purse, and ran down the three flights from her one-room walk-up. It was two o'clock in the morning, but she was simply too excited to sleep.

"And what girl wouldn't be," she said to herself, as she reached the street, "with a crisp pink check for fifty-thousand dollars in her purse!"

The check was for movie rights to *Fair Tomorrow*, her very first book! She had been excited enough when the manuscript was accepted for publication, and more so as it climbed steadily to the top of the best seller lists, but a sale to the movies was something she had to pinch herself to believe. She had been in a daze ever since her publisher handed her the check that afternoon.

Now, she felt a little as though she were floating, instead of walking down the deserted street. The bitter February wind whipped the short brown curls back from her face, but she scarcely felt it. Opposite a book store window, she paused a moment to glance at the display in the eerie reflection cast by the dimmed-out street lamp. Yes, *Fair Tomorrow* was featured prominently.

"*Fair Tomorrow*, by Lucinda Lowry," Ann read aloud, pressing her small, pert nose to the cold glass. "Lucinda Lowry," she repeated and giggled. Such a silly name! Why on earth hadn't she used Ann Creighton?

She turned from the window and strolled on, knowing quite well why she had chosen a pen name. She had been so sure the book was no good—

The girls she had known at boarding

school would be amazed to know that Lucinda Lowry was quiet, shy little Ann Creighton. The four years at fashionable Beverly Hall were a nightmare in Ann's mind. She had gone there on a scholarship made possible by an influential friend of her dead parents. Ann had been an orphan for longer than she cared to remember. Her father had been a country doctor whose legacy was a collection of unpaid bills.

Some of the girls had been sweet and kind to Ann, but there had been a few who were cruel as only girls of that age can be to one another. There was Marcella Drayton, for instance, who had roomed with Ann for one year and constantly flaunted her lovely clothes in Ann's face. The thoughts of Marcella always rankled.

Ann reached the corner, and without pausing, turned and stepped off the curb.

She stepped straight in front of a car that was almost on her before she saw it. Desperately, she flung herself back as, brakes screeching, the car swerved. But she knew even before the fender hit her that she could not possibly escape. She had the sensation of being lifted bodily and flung through the air before landing in a crumpled heap in the gutter. Her head struck the curb and neon-lights exploded in her brain.

WHEN she opened her eyes, a red-headed young man was kneeling beside her, vigorously chafing her wrists. As though I'd simply fainted! Ann thought indignantly. Abruptly, he leaned forward and saw that her eyes were open.

He let out a long ragged breath, then practically shouted, "if you wanted to

Her eyes wandered over the crowd,
and suddenly she gave a strangled
gasp. What was Bing doing at a
literary cocktail party!



commit suicide, why didn't you go jump off the bridge instead of stepping in front of my car!"

"Suicide!" Ann sat up with a jerk, completely forgetting that a moment before she had strongly suspected that every bone in her body was broken. "I wasn't trying to kill myself, you fool!"

He shrugged impatiently. "Oh, of course not! You just get your setting-up exercise by stepping out in front of speeding cars. Here—" he put his hands beneath her elbows—"let's see if you can stand up."

Ann practically bounced to her feet, jerking herself away from him. She tilted her chin, and glared at him. "I'm quite all right," she said coldly. "Please don't let me delay you any longer." He had the broadest shoulders and the reddest hair she had ever seen—and the most stubborn chin. What was the use of trying to explain to that sort of a chin that the whole thing had been an accident? Unaccountably, her lips suddenly began to tremble, and two large tears coursed down her cheeks.

The young man's blue eyes drifted from her bare head down the length of her shabby, last year's coat, and came back to rest on the worn leather purse she still clutched. "You poor kid," he said softly, taking her arm. "You don't think I'd go off and leave you feeling like this, do you? No, siree, but Bing Layton! Rescuing damsels in distress is one of the things I do best. Now, just come along with me and we'll go over to that all night restaurant there and get some food into that empty little tummy of yours. You have no idea what a difference *that* will make." As he talked he was propelling her rapidly across the street.

"But I'm not hungry!" Ann exclaimed. "I mean, that is—I'm not *starving*." For abruptly she realized that she *was* hungry. She had been far too excited to eat any dinner, and lunch had been one sandwich and a glass of milk. With a smothered little laugh she relaxed and let him lead her on into the restaurant. After all, he owed her a meal for being so rude to her.

Without consulting her, he ordered soup, French fried potatoes and steak. "And coffee right away," he finished.

The bossy type, Ann decided.

"And now," he leaned back in his chair and smiled at her, a slow, lazy smile that lifted one corner of his mouth higher than the other, "before we go any farther, I think you'd better tell me the one thing I don't know about you—your name."

"I'm Ann Creighton," Ann lifted her winged, dark brows, "but it's most certainly not the one thing you don't know about me!"

He chuckled. "I'm a reporter, and it's my business to know things. You're—" he paused and studied her for a moment. "You're about twenty-two or three, and you're out of a job—or more likely never had one. You came to the big city with high hopes of making a name for yourself, and when you failed you couldn't bear to go back to the home town and admit defeat. When you'd spent your last two-bits—for coffee and doughnuts yesterday morning, probably—you decided there was only one thing to do."

Ann's eyes rested on her purse, and she had to fight back a desire to burst into hysterical laughter. What would Mr. Bing Layton do, she wondered, if she suddenly opened that purse and flashed a fifty-thousand dollar check in his face! It was almost too much of a temptation to resist, but she was beginning to enjoy this absurd situation, so she merely smiled at him and murmured, "That's awfully clever of you, Mr. Layton."

"Bing," he said absently. "Nobody ever calls me Mr. Layton." The waiter set down two cups of coffee, and Bing pushed the sugar bowl toward her. "We've got to find a job for you," he said thoughtfully. "Now, just what can you do?"

"Well—" Ann's thick lashes fluttered down over her gold-flecked brown eyes, "I always *thought* I'd like to write."

To her surprise Bing Layton snapped his fingers. "Of course, why didn't I think of it before! One of our copy-girls left last week to join the WAAC's. Your saying 'write' reminded me of it. I'm sure I can get that job for you. Of course," he added, grinning, "you won't do much writing, but at least you'll eat regularly."

SO that's how Ann Creighton, with fifty thousand dollars in the bank, and royalties from *Fair Tomorrow* piling up

daily, came to go to work as a copy girl on the *Morning Clarion*. She hadn't had the least intention of doing any such thing; in fact, she had fully intended to tell Bing Layton all about herself before they parted that night. But he had been so boyishly pleased over what he termed "his good deed for the day," that she hadn't had the heart to disillusion him. Not just then, anyway.

He left her at her apartment, with a blithe, "Don't worry about your back rent, now; I'll see that you get an advance first thing in the morning so you can take care of it."

But she had every intention of writing him a note in the morning, explaining the situation.

She awoke at sunrise, feeling oddly excited, and decided abruptly that she would take the job after all. It might be an interesting experience, and, as an author, she needed all the experience she could get, didn't she? Besides, she had been trying for weeks to get started on a new book, and so far hadn't written a word. Working in a big newspaper office might suggest some idea for a plot.

But when she had put on a trim little beige suit, with a lettuce green blouse and a perky green hat pulled down on her curls, she looked in the mirror and made a little face at her reflection. "Shame on you, Ann Creighton," she said aloud, "you know perfectly well why you're doing this. You want to see Bing Layton again, and you're afraid if you tell him the truth he'll feel so ridiculous over the mistake he made last night that he'll never want to see you again."

Of course, she would have to tell him sometime, but, perhaps, when he got to know her—and like her—maybe he wouldn't mind.

But two weeks passed and still she hadn't told Bing, and certainly it wasn't because he didn't like her. As for Ann, from almost the moment she saw him again that first morning, she had known she was in love with him. And she had always believed so fervently that love should be based on long friendship and mutual likes and dislikes! How could she have fallen in love with a man about whom she knew next to nothing? That was what she thought that first day—

But after two weeks of lunching with Bing every day and going out with him every evening, the trouble was that she knew *too* much about him. He didn't like career girls, so how could she tell him that she was one? He definitely disapproved of a poor man marrying a rich girl, so how could she tell him she was getting richer every day, when his own salary was a mere forty-five a week? And, worst of all, one day when she mentioned *Fair Tomorrow*, just to see what he would say, he exploded. "That cloying, adolescent melo-drama!" So how could she possibly tell him she had written it?

If he falls in love with me—and, please, God, let him!—I'll tell him then, she finally decided.

And, almost as though God had heard that little prayer and answered it promptly, it was that very night Bing told her he loved her!

Driving home from a late movie Bing stopped the car abruptly at the corner where he had run into her that night.

"What gives?" Ann asked, with a puzzled glance.

He slipped an arm about her shoulders, and drew her close, tilting her chin with one hand. "I've a sentimental attachment for this spot," he said softly. "Shall I tell you why?"

She nodded, her heart suddenly pounding.

"Because right here is where I first saw the girl I love, the girl I hope to make my wife." His eyes held hers for a moment, then he added, "Will you, Ann?"

"Of course," Ann told him simply.

And then she was crushed in his arms, his lips hard against hers, their hearts pounding in unison, and there was no reality except this miracle that had happened. Bing loved her and was asking her to marry him!

Slowly, reluctantly, their lips parted finally, as though neither of them wanted that kiss to end. Rubbing his cheek against her tumbled curls, he said huskily, "For years I've dreamed of finding a girl like you, my Ann. Sweet and little and cuddly, the kind of girl who needs a man to take care of her. Smart, yes, but not too smart—an old-fashioned girl, who wants nothing more from life than to

make a home for the man she loves."

Oh, dear, Ann thought miserably, I'm really not at all like that! "Do—do you think it's really so important, what two people are like, as long as they truly love each other?" she asked in a muffled little voice.

"Of course it's important," Bing chuckled. "Oh, I'll grant you that a man might fall in love with a girl who didn't fit his ideas of what he wanted in a wife, but he'd be a fool to marry her. A marriage like that is jinxed before it starts. Take me for instance. There was a time—before I met you, of course—when I might have fallen in love with a girl named Marcella Drayton. She's a darn attractive girl, but I just wouldn't let myself, because I knew we'd never make a success of marriage. Her dad owns the *Morning Clarion*, you know, and, of course, he's a millionaire a couple of times over—"

"Marcella Drayton!" Ann sat up. "Why, I—" She stopped abruptly. She had almost said, "Why I went to Beverly Hall with Marcella," and that would never have done, since it certainly wouldn't fit into the background Bing had manufactured for her. Instead she finished hastily, "I've often seen her picture in the papers. She is lovely, Bing."

Coward, she told herself scathingly, why didn't you admit you went to school with Marcella, and use that as an opening to tell him the whole thing? She simply had to tell him, but when and how she was ever going to do it, she couldn't imagine.

THE next morning, before she left for the office, her publisher called and told her he was giving a cocktail party for some of their authors.

"In the Green Room of the Hotel Rothmoor," he told her, "and as it will be given quite a bit of publicity, Superb Pictures Eastern representative insists that you attend. They'll have photographers there for some still shots to be used in the advance publicity of the picture."

So it's come, Ann thought, replacing the phone with a none too steady hand. I'll *have* to tell him today, before that story breaks in the papers—

But Bing had already gone out on an

assignment when she arrived at the office, and by lunch time he hadn't returned. Ann could scarcely get her work done for watching the door, praying for him to come so that she could get the ordeal over. When, a little after four, she heard the clang of the elevator door and rapid footsteps in the hall, she was half way across the big room before the door opened.

And then, with a little gasp, she stopped quite still. For, instead of Bing, it was Marcella Drayton walking straight toward her, in a trim, black tailored suit, blue fox furs swinging from her shoulders, a black turban, with a wisp of veil, on her sculptured blonde curls. Ann saw that much before she turned and fled for the tiny cubbyhole of a rest room.

But she had scarcely closed the door of the little room before it opened again, and Marcella stood there staring at her. "Why, Ann Creighton!" she exclaimed. "What on earth are you doing here in the *Clarion* office? And why were you trying to avoid me?"

"Hello, Marcella," Ann said weakly. "I—I was hoping you hadn't recognized me."

"For heaven's sake, why not?" Marcella's thin brows rose.

Ann's mind whirled, but she could think of only one thing to do: Take Marcella into her confidence and ask her to keep her secret until she had had a chance to explain to Bing.

"Well, you see, it's like this," she began. "I work here as a copy girl, but it's just a sort of gag—I mean I don't really need the job. I—I just took it to collect material for my next book. It's going to be a romance with a newspaper background. Handsome young reporter hero—you know the sort of thing?"

"Your *next* book?" Marcella broke in in a puzzled voice.

"Yes, you see, I—I'm Lucinda Lowry," Ann stammered.

"Well, I'll be damned," Marcella said. Then her china-blue eyes narrowed. "But I still don't see why you have to be so mysterious about it. Even if you are a successful novelist, there's no reason why you shouldn't work as a copy girl if you want to. Come on, Ann, give! There must be more than that to it."

Oh, dear, Ann thought, I didn't want to have to tell her about Bing, but I suppose there's nothing else for it. "Well, there is a little more to it," she admitted, somehow managing to keep her voice light. "I—I'm in love with a man who works on the paper, and I haven't told him about myself yet. Of course, I've always intended to—in fact, I'd already decided to tell him this very afternoon, as soon as he gets back to the office." She laughed lightly. "So you'll keep my little secret, won't you, darling? It would be too awful if he learned the truth from someone else, you can see that."

Marcella nodded. She took a cigarette from her bag, and tapped it thoughtfully on a lacquered red nail. "Handsome young reporter," she murmured. "It wouldn't be Bing Layton, this man of yours, would it, Ann?"

"Yes, it's Bing," Ann admitted reluctantly, remembering abruptly what Bill had told her last night, that there had been a time when he might have fallen in love with Marcella. That, of course, meant that Marcella must know Bing rather well, might even—oh awful thought!—be in love with him herself. "Of course, I know it won't make the slightest difference to Bing that I happen to be a successful novelist," she added firmly, and wished she felt as sure as she sounded.

"Oh, of course not," Marcella said sweetly. "Well, be sure to let me know when the new book comes out, Ann. I loved *Fair Tomorrow*." And with a gay little wave of her hand, she was gone.

With a sigh of relief, Ann went back to work, and it wasn't until half an hour later she suddenly remembered that Marcella had never actually promised to keep her secret. But she shrugged the thought impatiently away. Even Marcella wouldn't be cruel enough to deliberately give her away to Bing before she had a chance to talk to him. And surely, he would be here any moment now.

BUT five o'clock came, and then six, and no Bing.

Darn that cocktail party anyway, Ann thought, as she jerked on her hat and hurried out to the elevator. But she had promised, so she supposed she'd have to

go. Thank heaven, the account of the party couldn't possibly make the evening papers, and she still could tell Bing to-night.

An hour later, wearing a new blue velvet cocktail suit, and a foolish little hat fashioned entirely of violets, she was in the Green Room of the Hotel Rothmoor. Impatient for the party to be over, so that she could leave and phone Bing to meet her some place, she was scarcely listening to the chatter of another lady novelist who had cornered her. Idly, her eyes wandered over the crowd, and suddenly she gave a strangled gasp. Leaving her companion stranded in the middle of a long description of her current heroine, she turned on her heels and began shoving her way through the crowd.

What was *Bing* doing here at a literary cocktail party! Of course, all the papers were represented, but by their society editors, not reporters. She was almost gasping for breath, and her hat had been knocked down over one eye, by the time she reached the first exit. She had no idea where that door led, but without a moment's hesitation, she turned the knob. She simply had to get away before Bing saw her!

The door opened on a small writing room, and she paused for a moment to catch her breath before trying to find her way out. And then, to her dismay, the door flung open and slammed shut all in one motion, and there was Bing with his back against it. His blue eyes were practically shooting sparks, and, to Ann, it seemed that his crisp red hair flamed brighter than usual with his anger.

"What's the hurry, Miss Lucinda Lowry?" he asked, with a tight-lipped smile. "You wouldn't want to leave before I had a chance to say thanks for the ride, would you?"

"Bing, please—" Ann's voice broke.

"Oh, you needn't feel so badly about it! After all, it was quite a unique experience for me. I don't believe I've ever before played the part of a guinea pig. I suppose I really should feel rather flattered, being chosen as the hero of Lucinda Lowry's next best seller. Handsome young reporter, I believe was the way Marcella says you described me." He laughed mirthlessly. "Please don't forget

that I have thick, curly eyelashes, and—" he paused and let his eyes rest insolently on her lips for a moment, "and that my kisses pack a special brand of dynamite that leaves even a cold-blooded lady novelist a trifle breathless."

Fury swept Ann from head to foot. She didn't know whether that fury was directed against Marcella for twisting her report of the conversation so cruelly, or against Bing for believing Marcella without giving *her* a chance to explain.

She jerked her chin up defiantly, and the little violet hat slipped down completely over one eye. She put her hands on her hips and glared at Bing from the other eye. "I shall devote an entire paragraph to your entrancing eyelashes, and possibly two to the quality of your kisses," she told him, "but it will undoubtedly take me several pages to do justice to that stubborn chin of yours, and to make it quite clear that you haven't the slightest sense of humor!"

"Humor!" Bing snapped. "I don't happen to find this even remotely amusing, do you?"

Ann wilted. With a tired gesture, she brushed the little hat to the back of her head. "No," she said simply, "as it happens, I don't. Bing, please, listen—"

But Bing was no longer there to listen; he had jerked the door open, and slammed it good and hard behind him as he went out.

ANN never knew how she managed to live through those next weeks. Only one idea consumed her—to see Bing and make him understand that she really loved him, that Marcella had deliberately twisted her words to give him the impression she had been using him only as story material. Over and over she called the office and his apartment, only to be told each time that "Mr. Layton is not in just now." Finally, with no pride left, she decided that she would go to the *Clarion* office and *force* Bing to talk to her. She didn't know just how she was going to manage it, but manage it she would. Once face to face with him, she would talk so fast that he wouldn't have a chance to get away before she had had her say.

She dressed carefully for that interview, feeling that it was important to look

her prettiest. No use now keeping up the pretense that she had practically no clothes. She put on a soft, gold wool frock that accented the yellow flecks in her brown eyes, and a matching gold wool turban with a six inch swirl on top. Over the yellow dress she slung a leopard coat. There! She nodded admiringly at her reflection. Even Marcella, with that half a million dollars her grandmother had left her, couldn't look any smarter!

All the way down town in the taxi, she kept wishing she hadn't thought of Marcella today. Ever since that horrible scene with Bing, she had been trying to forget what he had told her the night he asked her to marry him—that once he might have fallen in love with Marcella. Desperately, she wanted to believe it was only injured pride that was keeping Bing from her, that Marcella herself had nothing to do with it. Of course, there had been that picture in last night's paper, of a gay party at the Glass Slipper; the man on Marcella's right, even though his head was partly turned, had certainly looked a little like Bing. And a day or two before, there had been an item in one of the gossip columns.

Maybe gentlemen prefer blondes, but we know a certain luscious blonde who definitely prefers redheads these days!

You're being perfectly silly, Ann told herself firmly, as she walked briskly across the lobby of the office building and punched the elevator button. New York is full of blondes and redheads!

But a few minutes later, as she stepped from the elevator to the corridor of the fifth floor, she knew with a sick certainty that that item *had* referred to Bing and Marcella. For there they were, Marcella clinging with unmistakable possessiveness to Bing's arm, and Bing smiling down at her.

"Ann!" Marcella squealed delightedly. "I'm so glad we bumped into *you*—There's no one I'd rather be the first to hear our news. Bing and I are engaged—we've just come from telling Dad!"

I'll bet there's no one you'd rather tell than me, Ann thought bitterly, while from somewhere she conjured up a bright smile. "How perfectly lovely," she murmured, and couldn't resist adding, "Now I won't

have to bother to think up an ending for my book. Quote. Love conquers all, even the scruples of our idealistic hero. In spite of the fact that he has always believed the marriage of a wealthy girl and a comparatively poor man would be doomed to failure, he—"

"You'll have to change that ending a little, I'm afraid," Bing cut in stiffly. "I still have my scruples, as you so charmingly describe them, but it just happens that Marcella agrees with them—a fact I neglected to find out until just recently. So, naturally, her allowance will stop when we are married, and she has promised never to accept another penny from her father."

"How sweet and generous of you, darling!" Ann glanced swiftly at Marcella. No wonder she was biting her lip nervously! Evidently, she hadn't bothered to tell Bing about that half million her grandmother had left her in her own name. Well, this was certainly no time to pull any punches.

"I suppose," she said thoughtfully, "that you'll donate your *own* fortune to some charity or other, Marcella?"

"My fortune?" Marcella actually managed to sound utterly bewildered. "Oh, I suppose you mean those few thousands grandmother left me, that I used to brag about to you girls at Beverly." She laughed and pouted up at Bing. "Darling, I completely forgot *that!* But it isn't important; we can decide after we're married what to do about the silly thing."

"I don't suppose it seems much to you," Ann sighed, "but half a million would sound like a fortune to most people."

"*Half a million!*" Bing exploded.

BING looked uncertainly from one to the other of them, but it was on Ann's face that his eyes finally rested. "I think you've said quite enough," he told her, in a queer, tight voice. And he swung Marcella around and marched stiffly beside her down the corridor toward the *Clarion* offices.

So it hadn't done any good, Ann thought listlessly.

Out on the sidewalk, she signaled impatiently to taxi after taxi, and when one

finally drew up at the curb, she stepped swiftly in, and sank back against the seat, closing her eyes as she gave her address.

The taxi jerked forward, and, at the same moment, someone sat down hard on the seat beside her.

Ann's eyes flew open. Of all the nerve!

Then she gasped, for there sat Bing, grinning that lop-sided grin at her, his red hair in wild disorder, as though he had run his hands many times through it as he always did when excited or upset.

"What—what are you doing here?" In spite of her determination not to let it, Ann's voice shook a little.

Bing shrugged his broad shoulders. "Oh, I just decided that if I had to choose between two lovely little liars—"

Ann slapped him so hard her hand stung. "I *never* lied to you—not really!" she flared. "I—I tried to tell you the truth that very first night—"

"Shut up, you talk too much," Bing interrupted, gathering her into his arms. "Look up here and let me give you one of those special kisses of mine."

But when it was over, Ann said hesitantly, "You know, nothing is really changed, Bing. I'm still a successful novelist with an awful lot of money in the bank. Only—" she went on with a rush, "I don't care about the money. We'll just give it away, or throw it in the river, or burn it up—anything you say."

"I've a much better idea than any of those." Bing pulled her head down on his shoulder. "We'll just put it in War Bonds for our grandchildren, and you and I will live on my salary. I understand Uncle Sam does pretty well by his captains."

"Captains—" Ann's eyes flew to his face.

"I was sort of saving that for a surprise for you," he said. "My commission just came through."

"Bother!" Ann wrinkled her nose at him. "Now I'll have to change that story of mine again: The hero will have to be a captain in the Army instead of a reporter. But I'll still let him have thick, curly eyelashes—" a quick, hard kiss from Bing interrupted her, then she added mischievously, "*and kisses that pack a special brand of dynamite!*"

Thanks For The Memory

By RUTH HERBERT

Chris stood there long enough to have her heart cut to ribbons.

RUSTY was late and Chris made up her mouth again and saw that her hand was shaking. She was shaking all over. She walked up and down the living room, the skirt of her hostess gown swirling around her slim ankles, as she looked around to be sure that everything was absolutely perfect. Lamps cast soft golden pools of light, roses gleamed in silver bowls. The stage was set and it was past the hour for the play to begin, but the red-headed leading man was late.

"Why did I have to fall in love with him?" she thought. "I was happy, until I fell in love."

Happy, but not alive. She had never felt the lump in her throat that she couldn't swallow or the almost unbearable tenseness of body and mind, with every nerve quiveringly alive.

She hadn't seen him for seven days. And in the end she had had to call him up and ask him to come tonight.

Face it, Christy. You called him the last time, too.

If she had to fall in love, why couldn't it have been with some one who loved her? With one of the nice, eligible, adoring young men who thought she was perfect, just as she was? Why pick on a red-headed production engineer who was always too tired to play and who looked at her sometimes with a puzzled, waiting sort of look in his blue eyes, a man who had never even kissed her!

Sometimes she thought she would die if he didn't kiss her. Sometimes she wondered what he would do if she were to beg him to kiss her, just once. It would have been a strange sensation for Christy Carrington to beg for love—she who had always been so popular and so proud.

Her father came in. He looked tired;



♥ *Life to Chris was a stage setting for her beauty. But the leading man was missing—because Rusty wanted a girl who* ♥
could fit herself into the life of a country at war.



he always looked very tired nowadays.

"Hello, Kitten. You're as pretty as all get-out. Expecting somebody?"

"Rusty."

He seemed about to say something, and then he hesitated. "Well, have a good time." She noticed then that he had his hat in his hand.

"Dad! You're not going back to the office? I wanted to talk with you."

I wanted to ask you how to go about making a man fall in love with me. I wanted to ask you what's the matter with me, where I've failed, that I can't get the only man who matters to me. You ought to know—you're a man.

"Some other time, baby. I'm late now."

"But, Daddy—"

He didn't hear her. He didn't see the lost, forlorn look in her dark eyes, or the way her red mouth drooped at the corners. For the first time in her life, he was too busy to bother with her.

She went back to pacing up and down the room. "Pretty as all get-out," he had said. But that was her father—he was prejudiced. Would Rusty think she was pretty?

Her hair was a shower of gold to slim, straight shoulders. Her honey-tanned skin and coral mouth were something to dream about. But her most spectacular feature were the velvet dark eyes which were such a marked contrast to her blonde coloring.

Would Rusty think she was pretty? Her cheeks felt on fire, but the palms of her hands were cold and wet with anxiety, in spite of the fact she looked like a medieval princess in her green brocade hostess gown.

She heard the front door open and close, and he was speaking to the maid.

Then he was in the living room. "Hello, Christy. Sorry to be so late."

He looked so tired, so harassed. He had been running his fingers through his red hair until it stood up in flaming spikes. His face was haggard, slashed by deep lines at the corners of his wide, mobile mouth. But his blue eyes blazed out from his weary face.

"That's all right," she said lightly. "It's a new experience to me to do the waiting."

She had been trained to talk that way—men ate it up.

HE DROPPED down on the sofa. "We finally got going on the new gadget I was telling you about. It ought to step up production about twenty per cent after the girls on the assembly line get used to us. But it's not enough—it's not enough!" His eyes were wild. Automatically his fingers began to harry his hair again. "The bottleneck is on the wiring line. If I could figure out something—"

She heard the eagerness in his deep voice, eagerness that was not for her. She saw the blue fires in his eyes, fires that did not burn for her. He had not even noticed the new hostess gown. She watched the shape of his mouth, a mouth that had never lain against her own.

She had been brought up to believe that a woman's place was to soothe, to placate, to entice. She must take Rusty's mind off his grueling day.

"Rusty, darling, why don't you forget about the shop? Your work is over now, until tomorrow, isn't it?"

He broke off in the middle of a sentence about wiring.

"Sorry, Chris. What a boor you must think me. Let's talk about something pleasant." But his eyes were no longer on fire.

"Good," Christy said. Her voice was very gay, but she was watching his eyes where the fires no longer burned, and her heart was suddenly frightened. She had never been afraid of boring a man before. It had always been the other way round. "What shall we talk about?"

"You. That's the most pleasant topic I know. What did you do all day?"

There seemed to be something more than a casual interest as he asked that question, and her heart began to beat again.

She had slept until noon and had gone to a benefit luncheon for the Red Cross. Then she had served for an hour at one of the USO centers, after which she had served for another hour at an officers' service club. She made a very amusing story out of the lieutenant who didn't want to see any of the shows, but wanted to get into the Museum of Natural History.

So she told Rusty about her day, in a light vein, with the husky little chuckle in her golden voice that was so enchanting. Christy was noted in her crowd for the

way she told funny stories. She knew it and was accustomed to hearing her friends say, "There's no one who can tell a story like Chris." Her dark eyes were bright with amusement and her lovely mouth tilted up at the corners. She made the war sound like a tea party, and Rusty laughed obligingly in all the right places.

While she was talking a plane flew low over the house, so low that the sound of its motor filled the room. Rusty stopped laughing and listened, his face suddenly still, his eyes naked and revealing.

"That was low, wasn't it?" Chris said, casually.

Although Rusty never discussed it, she knew how he felt about not being in uniform. She realized it the day she had taken Robert Graves, with his brand-new wings down to see Rusty at his office. Rusty had stopped work to say hello to Bob, and Christy had said brightly, "Doesn't Bob look wonderful in that uniform? It makes me proud just to walk down the street with him!"

Rusty had said, quietly, "It should make you proud."

Bob had cut in then, rather quickly, Christy thought, "When I tangle with the Japs, I hope I've got one of Rusty's planes underneath me. Any chance for me to take a look around the plant, Rusty?"

While they were out Christy said to Florence Miller, Rusty's secretary, "What's the matter with Rusty? Doesn't he feel well?"

The other girl looked almost angry. "Don't you know how wild he is to get into uniform—any uniform? But he's got courage enough to stick it out where he's needed. But it's breaking his heart. Surely you know that."

Christy's throat seemed to close up and her heart had cried out, "No, of course I didn't know. How could I? He never talks to me."

But he had talked to Florence Miller!

Ever since that day Chris had wished for an opportunity to tell him she didn't mind his not being in uniform; that she loved him anyway. But Rusty had never mentioned it. Only whenever he heard a plane the muscles in his face tightened and he seemed a thousand miles away.

The plane passed over and she searched for conversation. "Some flyers were in the

canteen today—they looked like babies, simply like infants!" And that was the wrong thing to say, too.

Rusty said, "Yes, they like 'em young," and his face was too completely expressionless to be real.

SHE remembered a new joke that was going the rounds and as she told it Rusty smiled and the far-away look went out of his face.

Then the maid came in and said there was a Miss Miller to see Mr. Heath. Instantly Rusty was on his feet.

Florence came in. She apologized briefly to Chris and immediately plunged into conversation with Rusty. She looked tired and disheveled and her lipstick was almost off. But when Rusty was talking to her, his whole face was live and intent.

Christy pushed down the sick surge of jealousy. "It's business," she told herself firmly, but there was an intimacy that was far from businesslike. She heard the concern in Rusty's voice when he said, "You did exactly right, Florence. Now you go straight home and get a good night's sleep." She noticed that Rusty put his arm around the other girl's shoulders when he took her to the door. She noticed all these things and her heart was sick within her.

When Rusty came back she was rearranging the red roses.

"They're beautiful," Rusty said. "But no more beautiful than you are, Chris—no more fragrant, no more luxurious, no more fragile."

The lamplight made a halo of her shining hair and her mouth was soft and promising as she looked up at him. He put his arms around her and the floor rocked beneath her. He bent his high red head and put his mouth against hers and warmth poured through her body, drugging her senses. His kiss was long and deep and unhurried, as if he wanted to drain every drop of sweetness, as if this were not only the first kiss, but the last. When that kiss was finished, Christy felt as if the whole world were holding its breath with wonder because something she had only dreamed about had come true.

"I shall always remember tonight," Rusty said softly. "I shall remember it perfectly and completely."

Christy's throat was suddenly tight with fright. "That sounds as if you were saying, 'Thanks for the memory—as if you never expect to see me again.'"

"Oh, I expect I shall see you now and again," Rusty said. His voice sounded stirred and a little unsteady, but very definite. "But not like tonight. You're like a dream girl, Christy, lovely and quite unreal. You stay in your beautiful sheltered shell and nothing gets through to you—not even a war."

He had started talking very quietly but his voice kept getting more fervent.

"I buy war bonds," she said a little angrily. "I bought bonds instead of a new coat. I serve on committees."

"I know," Rusty said. "It's being done. That's what I mean."

"I don't know what you're talking about." Christy felt helpless, frustrated. Only a moment ago their lips had melted together and now he was talking to her as if she were a complete stranger of whom he disapproved. "What are you trying to tell me, Rusty—that I'm spoiled?"

"Not just spoiled, because spoiled people are arrogant. You're not even arrogant, Chris—there's not that much to you. You're sweet. But a man needs more than sweetness. He needs understanding."

The memory of his kiss still burned on her mouth. It couldn't have been a good-bye kiss, it was too throbbingly alive. Chris tilted her head way back and looked up at Rusty, her eyes shining, her red lips softly, eagerly parted.

"Oh, Rusty, let's stop arguing."

He said sharply, "Don't try that, Chris—it won't work," and she felt the blood suddenly hot in her face.

"That's what I meant," Rusty's voice snapped now. "You've been brought up to get your own way by being charming. You've been brought up to be beautiful and useless and you want to go on being just the way you are. You don't want to change, and I doubt if you could change, even if you wanted to. It's not your fault, I suppose—it's just the way you are."

It had started out like an indictment, but the anger suddenly left his voice and he sounded just tired—terribly tired and bewildered. He straightened his shoulders suddenly, as if throwing off a bur-

den. "Find yourself another playmate, my dear, somebody who still has a taste for milk and honey and low lights and soft music."

Inside Christy felt a strange fury, full of heartbreak. "Why did you kiss me, then?"

He smiled, then as if she were a slightly foolish child. But there was something the matter with his smile because it did not reach his eyes.

"You were so obviously waiting to be kissed. Shall I tell you a secret? I kissed you with my fingers crossed. But it was a very heady kiss. That's why once was enough. I know where to stop and when. So, good-bye, Christy, my dear—and thanks for the memory."

THE front door closed softly and definitely, and Christy felt her heart slide down into a bottomless pit. The stars no longer shone and the earth stood still. Rusty was gone. She was idle and useless and he didn't have time for her. But he had kissed her as if he meant it.

She wondered suddenly how he would have felt about her if she were no longer useless. What if she worked, like Florence Miller? What if she proved to Rusty that she could hold down a job?

She was waiting up for her father when he came in. "Dad, could you get me a job?"

He sat down heavily, as if he were tired. "I don't know, Kitten. What kind of a job? What can you do?"

"Why, I—" For a moment she was lost, and a little angry at her father, because he seemed to be failing her. Then, like an inspiration, she remembered a phrase of Rusty's—the girls on the assembly line. "I want a job on an assembly line."

His face brightened. To her surprise, his tired eyes looked suddenly proud. "That's very fine of you, Christy, to want to do something toward the war effort." It was the first time in years her father had called her Christy, usually it was "Kitten" or "Baby." "I'll see what I can do."

"I'd like a job in Rusty's plant."

Did she imagine the shadow that seemed to cross his face? She must have imagined it, because a moment later he was

his usual self, kindly and wanting to give her what she wanted.

"In Rusty's plant. I see. Are you in love with him, Baby?"

She was completely, devastatingly honest. "I think I shall die if I can't make him want me."

"Doesn't he want you?"

"Not enough." Her voice was painfully even, but her eyes were pleading for reassurance, for hope. "He kissed me once. He—he seemed to like kissing me. That's important, isn't it? But then he went away. If he were in love with me, one kiss wouldn't be enough, would it?"

It seemed as if he were searching for words. "When times change, Baby, people have to change with them. Old standards don't count any more." He stopped, hesitated. "I'll see what I can do about the job, Kitten."

He got the job for her and Christy went to work on an assembly line. She had had some vague idea of going to work in trim, fitted slacks. But she wore a shapeless, blue denim coverall and hid her bright hair under an atrocity they called a turban. She sat in one back-breaking position all day, until all her muscles screamed with pain, and put two parts of a screw together.

But she stuck to it. She went home every night and crawled into bed and it seemed to her that she had hardly closed her eyes before the morning alarm sounded hideously in her ears. But she kept at it, because sometime Rusty was sure to walk through the plant and recognize her. She dreamed of seeing his blue eyes light up with surprise and pride and love.

And then it happened. He passed by with the foreman and Christy's fingers, putting screws together, turned cold and stiff. Her heart hammered against her ribs until it seemed to her Rusty must hear its beating clear above the hum and whirr of machinery. Then he saw her and the fire that blazed up in his blue eyes was all that she had dreamed about.

She got a message just before lunch period that Mr. Heath would like to see her in his office when she was through work. But she didn't wait until after work. She had a half-hour off for lunch and she wasn't hungry, anyway. She went to Rusty's office just as she was, in the

voluminous, ugly coverall. But she snatched off her turban and let her hair tumble down in a cascade of shimmering gold.

RUSTY said, humbly, "I couldn't wait until tonight." He took both her hands and gripped them hard. He said, "Can you ever forgive me for the things I said? Can you ever—"

He choked up. He just stood looking down at her as if he were drinking her in.

Triumph surged through her, a high-hearted happiness that went singing its way through her blood. "I didn't put on any lipstick," she babbled, "because we're not allowed to wear it, but then if there isn't any lipstick on then you can't kiss it off, can you? I mean, you have to be careful about things like that in an office, don't you?"

He laughed, a little shakily. And then he was kissing her, hard, fast, turbulent kisses, and he hugged her so close she could feel the hard strength of his arms through the heavy coverall.

"Why didn't you tell me?" he whispered.

She snuggled up against him. "I knew you'd pass by some day and see me. Were you surprised? What did you think when you saw me?"

His voice was muffled in her shining hair. "I thought, thank God, we are the same kind of people, after all!"

"Wait till I tell Daddy," Chris said contentedly. "I don't think he really believed it would work, even when he got me the job." She sighed. "I was getting sort of doubtful myself. I began to think I would have to stay there for months before you'd ever find out."

She felt the hard muscles of his arm go tense.

"Wait a minute, Chris. I'm not sure I understand. Do you mean you asked your father to get you a job here just to make me notice you?"

She should have been warned, then, by the incredulous note in his voice, but she was wishing he would kiss her again.

"Mmm. . . Rusty, what's the matter?"

"It would have been nice," Rusty said, and she couldn't mistake the bitterness in his voice, "if you had cared about helping to win the war."

She tore herself out of his arms, and

she saw that his face had gone quite gray and his eyes were barren and defeated.

"I was a fool to think you had changed," he said. "People don't change, unless they want to."

"But, Rusty—"

"Just a trick to get me to notice you, like putting on a different kind of lipstick or buying a new hat. You weren't used to having a man *not* notice you, were you, Christy?" His voice was searing. "So you were afraid you would have to stay on the job for months! And I thought we were the same kind of people! Why, we don't even speak the same language."

She felt hot anger surging up inside of her, tying her throat in knots, and with the anger was a fierce, hot pride. He didn't have to look at her with that sizzling contempt in his eyes. He didn't have to let his voice drip scorn when he spoke to her. If he didn't appreciate the fact that she had half killed herself doing manual labor just to impress him, she certainly wasn't going to call it to his attention again. What did he expect her to do, go down on her knees?

Her brown eyes were on fire as she swept her long, yellow hair back from her shoulders.

"Well, thanks for the brush-off," she said.

SHE found the foreman and told him she was quitting.

"All right," he said brusquely. "Pick up your check tomorrow night."

"Tomorrow night? I'm quitting now."

The look in his eyes made her shiver. "Oh, no, you're not, Sister. You'll finish your week out, to give us time to put in somebody else. There's a war on—or hadn't you heard?"

"How dare you use that tone to me!"

"Pardon me, Duchess." He shrugged. "Well, you lasted longer than most of them thought you would, at that. I was the sucker—I told them I thought you'd stick."

Chris clenched her hands together at her sides.

He turned away, dismissing her. "All right—that's all. Good-bye, Carrington. I'm sorry to lose you—you were a good worker."

All afternoon she put screws together.

All afternoon she told herself, "After tomorrow I can sleep as late as I want to. I can get my hands back into condition and get a manicure again. I wonder how long it will take to get rid of these calouses?"

Changing her clothes in the locker room that night she ran into Mrs. Roberts. For weeks she had worked next to the little gray-haired woman on the assembly line. But this was the first time she really noticed her.

"Why aren't you changing? Here, I'll get down your things for you."

"I'm not leaving yet," Mrs. Roberts said smiling, "I'm working overtime tonight."

"Overtime! But you can't—you look tired already." Christy stopped short, hesitated. "I'm sorry—maybe you need the money."

The other woman shook her head. "No, I don't need the money. But we ought to get out more planes. My son writes me that our planes are better than the Japs', but they still have more of them. After all, they got a head start on us."

"I didn't know you had a son," Christy said gently. "Where is he?"

"The last I heard he was in the Solomons," Mrs. Roberts told her. "Well, good night, Miss Carrington. See you tomorrow."

"See you tomorrow," Christy echoed. *But not after tomorrow.*

The next day a subdued feeling of excitement ran through the plant. The pace of everything seemed heightened. Christy looked down the line and it seemed the many fingers were flying faster than ever.

"What's going on?" she asked curiously.

It was Mrs. Roberts who answered. Her faded blue eyes were bright and her thin shoulders looked unusually straight and proud. "Haven't you heard? We're getting the Army-Navy 'E' flag this afternoon!"

Christy smiled politely. "That's fine." But it has nothing to do with me, she thought. This is my last day here.

But for no reason at all her own fingers seemed to move faster.

All the workers went to the ceremony that afternoon. They stood massed together while an official from the War

Department made a five-minute speech. Christy didn't hear much of it because her eyes were riveted on a disheveled red head. She thought: Rusty might at least have combed his hair.

Eyes on Rusty, heart crying out to Rusty, she thought she was not hearing any of the speech, but little snatches of it seeped through. "Every minute lost on the assembly line prolongs the war one more frightful minute . . . Every screw from this factory is an integral part of a bomber."

Rusty's wide shoulders were as straight as if they were in uniform. Rusty's blue eyes were fixed unswervingly on the speaker, the same eyes that had blazed with scorn as they looked down at a yellow-haired, brown-eyed girl. Christy locked her hands together to still their shaking.

"We're all in it together," said the deep voice of the speaker.

On the platform the band played *The Star-Spangled Banner*. Unconsciously Christy felt her aching shoulders straighten. There was a lump in her throat that she couldn't swallow, a lump that had nothing to do with heartache or pain.

*Oh, say does that star-spangled banner yet
wave . . .*

Pride could bring a lump in your throat, too.

The band stopped and the assembled workers turned and filed out of the assembly room.

"Is that all?" asked Christy, startled. "Isn't there going to be a celebration, or something?"

One of the men standing near grinned down at her, a comradely grin. "Come on, Sister—we've got to get back to work."

AT THE end of the shift she changed her clothes in the locker room. She put on lipstick with a lavish hand. She slipped into her beaver coat and set her tiny beaver hat carelessly on her yellow head. Tomorrow, she thought eagerly, I'll be able to go to the hairdresser.

She turned in her locker key and got her check. She hadn't said good-bye to Mrs. Roberts—somehow she couldn't. But now she felt an overwhelming desire to

say good-bye to someone. After all, she had worked here for seven weeks. That should entitle her to at least a good-bye.

She smiled ravishingly at the paymaster. "Well, good-bye."

He looked up, startled. He did not smile. "Oh, goodbye, Miss—er—"

"Carrington," she said defiantly.

But he had already gone back to his work.

She started out, every step taking her away from Rusty. Suddenly she couldn't stand it. Suddenly she thought she would suffocate if she couldn't get one more glimpse of him. She could at least say good-bye to him. She could be gay and bright about it. She could shake hands and say, "Well, no hard feelings." May-be—

She went quickly down to Rusty's office.

The door was ajar and she pushed it open quietly. Florence Miller was there. Florence Miller was in Rusty's arms and tears were running down her face and she was saying, in a choked, little voice, "Oh, Rusty, Rusty! I thought I could never be so happy!"

Chris stood long enough to have her heart cut to ribbons. Then she turned and ran.

"A man needs more than sweetness, he needs understanding." Rusty had said that. Had he been thinking of Florence Miller?

SHE slept till noon the next day. She went to the hairdresser and the manicurist worked for an hour on her hands.

She slept till noon every day. She went to luncheons and cocktail parties and dances. Men were getting scarce all the time, but there were still a few left, even if you didn't count the ones coming back all the time on leave.

She called up Don Parsons, who had been crazy about her for years. Don worked in a bank. His draft number hadn't come up yet. "When it does," he shrugged, "I'll go, of course. Meantime, here's to fun."

"Here's to fun," Christy echoed.

They were still having dances at the country club, once a month, now, instead of every Saturday night. But there was a dance the Saturday night after Christy

had quit her job and she went with Don Parsons.

She wore a slinky new dress with a narrow skirt slit halfway up to her knees. It made her feel like a siren. With her long shining hair, just barely curled under at the ends, it made her look like a little girl trying to be sophisticated.

Don thought she looked beautiful. He kept telling her so at five-minute intervals. Maybe she would marry Don some day. Why not?

Why not, Christy? You can't go through the rest of your life carrying a very bright and burning torch.

Coming upon Rusty suddenly on the dance floor at the club made her stop stock still and catch her breath sharply.

"Why, hello, Rusty. Hello, Florence." She stopped and introduced Don and then rattled on. "Imagine my surprise! I didn't know you two ever prowled after sundown. I thought you were much too grim and earnest."

She was proud of the way her voice sounded. Hearing it, you would never guess that she was slowly bleeding to death inside.

"We're celebrating," Florence said happily.

Christy rushed in. "Let's not miss a minute of this perfectly divine music. Dance with me, Rusty? Or am I too frivolous for you even to dance with?"

She slipped into his arms and danced away.

That was rude, but I don't care. I couldn't stand there and let her tell me about it—I couldn't congratulate her, not yet. I have to have a little time.

She knew now that she had been hoping against hope, right up to that last dreadful moment when Florence had said. "We're celebrating."

She struck out blindly, wanting to hurt Rusty in some way, because she was hurting so terribly herself. "Well, what's the subject of tonight's lecture going to be, Professor?"

He winced. "I deserved that, I expect. I'm sorry I was so rude the last time I saw you, Chris."

"Think nothing of it," she said blithely. When you had nothing to lose, you lost it with a bang. You snatched back your discarded pride and wrapped it around you

like a cloak. "It makes a very funny story—little Chris getting her come-uppance. You should have heard the gang roar about it."

"I see." She could almost feel the sparks shooting from his storm-blue eyes. "Shall I take you back to the gang now? I don't want to deprive them of a minute of your funny stories."

When he left her with the girl, she said, "Well, good-bye, Rusty, darling. Give my love to the little screws."

But a cloak of pride could not warm you. Nothing could warm you when your heart was like a lump of ice in your breast.

Everybody gathered around to make much of her. Her friends were so glad to see her back in circulation again. "Tell us about it, Chris. Was it fun?"

"It was wonderful," she said.

She had practiced how she would tell it. "I wore a size 40 coverall and I—" It would make such a funny story that everybody would roar with laughter and say, "Chris, you're priceless. Nobody can tell a story like you."

"Tell us about it, Chris!"

"Skip it," she said briefly.

THE next Saturday there wasn't a dance, but Don got up a party to go into town. Don knew how to push an advantage when he saw it. Christy wore a long black skirt and a snug yellow sweater that matched her hair. Don Parsons kept looking at her as if he could eat her up, until everybody began to laugh and tease them about it.

"Why shouldn't I look at her?" Don said, unabashed. "She's like something out of this world."

You're like a dream-girl, Christy—love-ly and quite unreal.

Suddenly Christy was trembling. "I'm tired of this place. Let's do something different. Let's go to a newsreel."

The others let up a howl of protest, but Don said fatuously, "I'll take you to a newsreel, Christy."

He held her hand in the movie. "Chris, you've got a callous. On those lovely, soft hands!"

Of course, I've got callouses. You can't have bombers without callouses.

Aloud she said lightly, "Callouses are

nothing. You should have seen them when they were blisters!"

One of the pictures showed a flight of American four-motored bombers.

"Don," she said suddenly, "maybe some of my screws are in those bombers."

He laughed. "Christy, you're cute."

He's silly, Christy thought. He just doesn't know what it's all about. He's all right to play around with in peacetime, but he doesn't know there's a war going on.

And then something flashed on the screen that caught her attention—the presentation of the Army-Navy 'E' Award to Rusty's plant. They didn't show much of the ceremony, just a brief glimpse of the speakers' platform, a briefer glimpse of the massed workers. Then the band played *The Star-Spangled Banner* and the audience rose.

Christy stood so still she seemed hardly to breathe. Her throat was tight.

"We're all in it together . . ." "My son says we haven't enough planes." "Where is your son, Mrs. Roberts?" "The last I heard he was in the Solomons." . . . Not enough planes . . . "Sorry to lose you, Carrington. You were a good worker . . . Oh, say does that Star Spangled Banner yet wave. . . . "We're all in it together . . ." "It would have been nice, Christy, if you had wanted to help win the war. . ."

"Don," Christy said, "let's go home, I have to get up early in the morning."

THE next morning she went out to the bomber plant and asked the foreman if she could have her job back.

He said briefly, "Sorry, Carrington. We have to have people we can depend on."

"All right," Christy said humbly. "I don't blame you."

It took a long time for her to find a job in another plant. It was hard, walking in cold and applying for a job, different from having her father make all the arrangements beforehand. And she was afraid to give her last place as reference, but more ashamed not to. Maybe the foreman wouldn't recommend her.

The day she was finally hired she went home with her brown eyes shining like stars.

She had never seen such pride in anybody's face as her father's when she told

him. He cleared his throat several times before he spoke. "So you've grown up, have you, Kitten?"

She said, "I'm going to take a course at night in reading blueprints. The foreman says they can't get enough women who can read blueprints."

It was rather an oblique reply to his question, but her father seemed satisfied.

The assembly lines at the new plant didn't work as fast as those at Rusty's. It worried Christy. It wasn't anything you could put your finger on, but there just wasn't the same urgency about getting the work out. The harassed foremen worried and prodded. Once Christy heard Brodie, the big foreman of her own shift, swearing under his breath that you couldn't expect to get any work out of women, anyway.

Christy hardly knew when she began to talk. Maybe it started in the locker room or at lunch period. But somehow or other, a little shyly at first, she began telling about Mrs. Roberts. Pretty soon everybody on the line knew about Mrs. Roberts, who was middle-aged and tired, but who worked overtime because her son was in the Solomons. Then Christy began telling about the Army-Navy 'E' flag. She said casually, "We ought to get it here, too."

As the weeks went by she learned the names of all the girls in her department. She knew Violet, whose feet hurt, and Katherine, whose boy-friend was in the Marines, and Penny, who had a Phi Beta Kappa key from Wellesley. After a while, no matter where she went in the plant somebody was apt to say, "Hi, Chris. We moved up seven per cent this week. Maybe we will get that flag."

One day Brodie passed her and said, "Keep going, Sister. You've got what it takes."

Chris felt as if she had been knighted.

She tried not to think of Rusty. Sometimes she would go for almost five minutes at a time without thinking of him once. Then she would tell herself, with a wry smile, "Keep going, Sister. At this rate you'll get over him by the time you're ninety."

Sometimes she would pass a workman with red hair or a foreman who carried his wide shoulders with a slight swagger,

and her knees would turn to water and the ache of loneliness inside her would be almost more than she could stand. Then she would go and tell one of the new girls about the "E" flag.

And then, miraculously, the news came. The company was to receive the Army-Navy Award. Christy thought she had never in her life been so proud as she was on that Friday afternoon at four o'clock.

She was way back in the middle of the crowd and she couldn't see very much of the platform, but she heard the president of the company say that today they had as honored guest the production engineer of the bomber plant for whom they were sub-contractors—Mr. Russell Heath.

Christy caught her breath wildly and lost track of what followed. When she finally fought back to where she could breathe again the principal speaker was already nearly finished. But she heard him say that in the last three months production had gone up twenty-seven per cent, and she almost burst with pride.

And then he said, "We thought it would be a good idea to have one of the workers come up here today to receive the flag. So we asked the foremen to designate some one to represent the men. And then we got a little bit of a surprise. It seems that the unanimous choice was a girl. And what we heard from those twenty-four hard-boiled foremen makes us proud to accept their recommendation. Will Miss Christine Carrington please come up to the platform?"

"Oh, no," Chris whispered frantically. She turned to flee.

It was Brodie, big, gruff Brodie, who took her arm and led her through the grinning, applauding crowd.

Christy accepted the flag with shaking fingers. She managed a frightened little half-smile for the smiling officials. She opened her mouth and not a sound emerged. Finally she managed a squeaky "Thank you." But it seemed to be enough. The crowd roared their approval and the band played *The Star Spangled Banner*. Then the officials on the platform gathered round to shake hands with Christy. She thought, "Now it's coming. If I can get through the next five minutes I'll be all right."

She said, "How do you do, Mr. Collins . . . How do you do, Colonel Forrest . . . *How do you do, Mr. Heath?*"

"Hello, Chris," Rusty said.

Don't look at him, Christy, and maybe you won't give yourself away.

The president of the company was patting her shoulder paternally. "Mr. Heath tells me you two are old friends. Suppose you run along with him now and renew old acquaintance."

"I can't," Christy said. "I've got to get back to work."

I can't. I've stood enough for one day. He wants to apologize, so he'll feel better and can go back to Florence with me off his conscience.

"Nonsense," laughed the president. "I'll tell Brodie you had special dispensation. Take her down to my office, Heath—you know the way."

AND then she was walking down the hall with Rusty.

They went into the big private office and Chris sat down, not saying anything. Rusty didn't seem to know how to begin, either. The silence became thick and embarrassing. Finally, for something to do, she took off her turban and ran her fingers through her hair.

Then she heard Rusty's quick, indrawn breath.

"You've cut your hair," he said stupidly. His voice shook a little.

"It got in my way," Chris said briefly. Then she flung back her head and looked straight at him. She was thinner than when he had last seen her, prouder. There were smudges of pallor under her cheekbones. Her wide-set dusky eyes were dangerously bright, her voice dangerously soft. "After the war," she said clearly, "I shall let it grow again, clear down to my shoulders. After the war."

"Of course," his voice was still uneven. "But it's lovely that way, too, like little soft baby curls, close to your head."

To her horror she felt her eyes sting, and two scalding tears crawled down her cheeks.

Rusty spoke again, helplessly. "I know you didn't want to come down here with me. I hadn't any right to force it on you. But I had so many things to say and now I can't even think how to begin."

She stood there, willing the tears to stop, but they kept coming.

Then Rusty said, "Maybe this is a better way than talking." He leaned over and put his mouth against hers. He left it there for a long moment and Christy felt the same old response to his touch, but the mouth he kissed remained cold.

She drew away from him. She could have stood almost anything, except having him kiss her in pity because she cried.

Out of her pain and her humiliation she found words to say. "Maybe I can help you."

Get it over with, before he sees it in your eyes and hears it in your voice!

"You want to say you're sorry, don't you, Rusty? You want to apologize for the things you said the last time I was in an office with you. But you don't have to apologize, because all you said was true, except one thing. People can change, people can grow up. Only I was just a little late getting around to it. Now, let's skip it, shall we? How is Florence?"

He sounded startled and utterly bewildered by her abrupt change of subject. "Florence? She's fine now. Her husband got back a week ago. He's in the hospital, but he's going to be all right."

"Her husband?"

"Why, yes. Didn't you know she was married? Well, her husband was in the Pacific and was reported missing for a long time. Florence kept up, kept on working. But when she got word he had been found she went all to pieces. I re-

member the exact day she heard, because it was the day we got the 'E' flag at the plant. I thought she told you, that night we saw you at the country club. She said we were celebrating."

"I remember," Christy whispered. "Oh, Rusty—I thought you were in love with her!"

He went white, under his tan. "How could I be in love with her?"

She saw it in his eyes, she heard it in his voice. Light spilled over Christy's face. "Oh," she said. "I don't know, darling—"

"Because I'm in love with you."

She hugged the words to her heart. Happiness brimmed up in her eyes and spilled over. "Are your fingers still crossed, darling?"

He reached out and gathered her in. She could feel the starved pounding of his heart against hers, she could feel the tenderness of his hands and the hard possessiveness of his mouth on hers.

He was still kissing her when a flight of planes passed overhead. Rusty lifted his head to listen. But this time he wasn't far away—he had let her in. He said, "I wish I were flying one of those." He said it with longing, but almost casually, as if he knew she'd understand.

She didn't have to say all the things she'd practiced, after all. You didn't need a lot of words, when two people spoke the same language.

"I know, darling," Christy said. "I know how you feel."

THE END



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Troubles, Inc.

By HELEN HIBBARD DAU



She knew he was going to kiss her and that she ought to stop him, but somehow she was powerless.

She had the right answer for everyone's love troubles, but her best client's boy friend knew the only answer to Gerry's.

GERRY was sitting at the big mahogany desk in the inner sanctum, Ella Eaton's private office. The door stood open so that she could see into the small outer office.

Ella Eaton
Troubles, Inc.

Those were the puzzling words on the outside door.

"What have people got more of than anything else in the world?" Ella would say. "Troubles. And this city is full of them. Hundreds of girls on their own, getting into jams, and nobody to talk things over with."

She had been right. In three months the business had grown astonishingly. They were already looking for another girl to help with the mail, and the schedule was full of private consultations every day.

Ella was a modish, comfortably stout woman, with handsome gray hair, kindly humorous eyes and a firm mouth and chin. She was no quack. She had the proper doctors and psychiatrists behind her. But all most people needed was common, ordinary horse-sense advice.

Two hours ago Ella had sat at this desk and received a telephone call. She had hung up and barked, "Gerry!"

She was thrusting letters into a briefcase even before Gerry could get into the room. "My aunt's very ill and I've got to go to New England. I don't know how long I'll be gone. You'll have to take over."

"But I'm just your secretary," Gerry wailed.

"I've got a train to catch. I haven't time to argue," Ella said, jamming on her hat. "I'll keep in touch with you. Good-bye." And she was gone.

Well, nobody had come in for two hours. The people who had called on the phone had been quite willing to wait for Miss Eaton's return.

Gerry had done all sorts of things on this job from simply answering mail to shopping for new clothes and hairdos for the girls. She adored it. But she didn't feel qualified to juggle another person's life around.

Five to five. She breathed a sigh of relief and uncrossed her fingers. That was the wrong thing to do. Because at that very moment the outer door was flung open by a distracted-looking girl, a very pretty girl with curly blond hair and wide blue eyes.

Gerry straightened up. Fortunately

she had kept her spectacles on. She felt they made her more impressive.

"Miss Eaton?" the girl asked, her high heels clipping sharply across the floor.

"Miss Eaton is out of town," Gerry said. "I'm Miss Palmer, her assistant."

"Oh, how awful!" the girl said. She lit a cigarette and began to pace up and down in front of the desk. "I've got to decide tonight." She turned quickly. "Can you help me?"

"I can try," was the quiet answer.

Gerry took out a card and filled it in. The girl's name was Sylvia Mead. She was nineteen. She lived on East Thirty-fifth street. She was a photographer's model.

"I can't stand it any more," she said. "I can't sleep."

"Two men are in love with me. And I can't make up my mind. One's rich and one's poor. I don't know as I could stand being poor. I've always wanted to be *rich*. Poverty kills love anyway, doesn't it?"

"Is the rich one older?" Gerry asked.

"Oh, a lot older," the girl said.

Gerry felt a flood of relief. This one was easy. Just routine stuff. She knew Ella's answer. Always tell them to marry the one they love. That was the young poor one. If they weren't really in love with the young poor one, there wouldn't be any problem.

Gerry talked quietly for a few minutes. The girl said, "But are you sure I'm not in love with Bruce, the rich one?"

Gerry talked again about the glamor of money which had nothing to do with love. "Besides," she said, "what if this other man is poor? He's young. He'll probably make money. Especially with your love and help."

When Sylvia Mead left she seemed satisfied. And Gerry felt quite proud of herself.

She fluffed out her brown hair, put on her small leopard pillbox which matched the collar of her black suit. It was a very good suit, an extravagance considering her small salary. But it was important to look well, and some day Ella would be able to give her a substantial raise.

AFTER a merciless ride on the subway, she stopped in at the corner grocery store. She wanted a nice juicy steak for

two. Jimmy loved steak. But steak was much too high and really very scarce these days. So she compromised on some ground beef for hamburgers.

She carried her bundles from the store and climbed up the three steep flights to her tiny apartment. She was quite out of breath when she let herself in and dumped her packages on the table.

There was no time to freshen her face or start the dinner before Jimmy was ringing the door bell.

He was a tall, dark, nice-looking young man in a cheap but neatly-pressed blue serge suit. He was just her own age—twenty-five. He kissed her but he looked cross.. He had been deferred by his draft board because he had to support his mother. Sometimes she wondered if the fact that he wasn't in uniform was the reason for his occasional bad disposition. But lately she was beginning to wonder. He was always cross before dinner and tonight it irritated her more than usual. She was just as tired and hungry as he was. What's more, she had to hustle around and get the meal. *She* couldn't sit back in a comfortable chair and read the evening paper.

What's the matter with me anyway? she thought. Don't I love Jimmy, after all?

"Let's go to the movies," she said, as she peeled the potatoes.

"Okay," Jimmy mumbled over the top of his paper.

"Did you get to talk to the boss today?" she asked.

"What?" Jimmy said crossly.

"Did you talk to Mr. Hemstreet about giving you Holton's job when he leaves?"

Jimmy put the paper aside and got up. He thrust his hands into his pockets and began to pace up and down. "They've sent for the Chicago man to take Holton's place," he said at last.

She couldn't say anything. She felt sick with disappointment. They'd *never* be able to get married. He might just as well be in the Army, as far as matrimony was concerned.

"Darn it," Jimmy said, "here I am, earning twenty-five measly bucks a week. How's a man *ever* to get ahead in this lousy world?"

"If you'd only asked him right away,

two weeks ago as I wanted you to," she said, and knew instantly that it was the wrong thing to say.

He said furiously, "I guess I know my own business better than you do!"

"Let's not talk about it now," she suggested.

"Let's not talk about it ever," he growled.

They climbed the long stairs up to the balcony, because the seats were so much cheaper, and sat through two dull movies. They climbed down again and walked home and up the three flights to her apartment. It was late, so Jimmy just kissed her good night in the hall. It used not to be like this when we were first engaged, she thought.

"I don't know," she said to herself later, just as she was about to drop off to sleep. "The rich one might have been awfully nice to have."

THERE were quite a few letters to answer in the morning and many telephone calls. But no one came in until almost noon. Then a blond young man stormed in like a cyclone. Her first impression was a tall, well built form in a smooth-fitting uniform. Then she noticed the silver bar on each shoulder and the wings over his heart.

"I want to see Miss Eaton!" he demanded, leaning across Gerry's desk threateningly.

"Miss Eaton is out of town," she said.

"Who are you?"

"I am Miss Palmer, Miss Eaton's assistant," she said stiffly. "Is there anything I can do for you?"

"Then it was *you!*" he exploded.

Gerry drew back, startled. He looked ready to throttle her. Obviously he was crazy. She wondered if screaming would bring help in time.

"You've ruined my life, that's what you've done!" he cried.

"What do you mean by butting in and telling her to marry that bloke? What business is it of yours? I love her. Do you understand? You've ruined my life. And I'm going to sue for damages and you needn't think I won't."

Gerry's head was whirling. "I'm—afraid I don't understand," she murmured.

"I'm afraid you don't!" he snapped. "You couldn't understand the simplest human problem, except how to mess up other people's lives for some miserable little fee. Now what I want to know is, what you are going to do about it?"

She just stared at him helplessly.

"In another week I could have persuaded her," he stormed. "I'm going to marry Sylvia Mead, whether you like it or not. What's more you're going to help me. You're going to see her again and take back that lousy advice."

Sylvia Mead! Things were beginning to be a little clearer. Then this was the rich, "older" man. He couldn't have been more than thirty. Perhaps that looked old to the nineteen-year-old Sylvia, in love with someone else. But any girl in her right mind could see that this man was young, strong, handsome—and definitely virile. Very definitely.

She frowned and picked up a pencil and tapped it on the desk. "Let's talk this over calmly," she said. "It seemed obvious to me that you weren't the one Miss Mead was in love with."

"Oh, it seemed obvious to you, did it? Well, it never seemed very obvious to me. She didn't seem to hate my kisses."

Gerry was startled to find herself not liking at all the idea of his kissing Sylvia Mead. She said angrily, "It was just your money."

"Are you trying to tell me that I am so repulsive that a girl would only put up with my kisses on account of my money?"

Gerry felt her cheeks growing hot. "I didn't mean that, at all! But I can't talk to you unless you calm down."

"Calm down!" he exploded. "When you've ruined my life! All right. You're not going to talk to me. You're going to talk to Sylvia. I'll be back here at five o'clock and pick you up. You're going to march straight to Sylvia's with me and tell her everything you said was a mistake. And you'd better not try to get out of it. Because I'll find you—anywhere!"

He slammed out of the door and Gerry slumped back in her chair. This *would* happen to her, with Ella away.

Would he sue? *Could* he sue? Could he swamp Troubles, Inc. in a lot of unfavorable publicity and wreck Ella's beloved business?

But that was sheer nonsense. He was in the Army. Just the same she had better do her best to straighten things out.

At four-thirty, she got up from her desk and did a thorough repair job on her face. She peered at herself critically and wondered if a man would find her as pretty as Sylvia Mead. Sylvia was the doll-baby type. Gerry's smoky gray eyes were level and candid. Her coral lips had a humorous quirk at the corners. And her hair was just light brown.

No, she decided with a sigh, a man wouldn't look at her with Sylvia around.

SHE began to feel very jittery as the hands of the clock moved toward five. He won't come, she kept assuring herself. And she felt just as scared that he wouldn't come as that he would.

Then the door was thrust open and there he was.

"I'm here!" he announced, scowling. "So you didn't try to run away?"

"I am not a fugitive from justice," she said haughtily. "Lieutenant—"

"Cowell. Bruce Cowell."

"Lieutenant Cowell, you feel that an injustice has been done and I am more than willing to investigate."

To her surprise he grinned, his blue eyes crinkling at the corners. "Okay," he said. "We'll declare an armistice. We've got three hours to waste. Sylvia won't be home until after eight. And I'm *not* going to let you out of my sight. You've got to get my girl back for me—tonight. After all I'm in the Army, and orders for foreign service will be coming up anyday now!"

"Three hours?"

"We'll have cocktails and dinner."

"But—"

There were no buts with this young man. He had her by the arm and was leading her out of the door. He put her into a taxi and Gerry, peering out at the crowds shoving into the subway entrance, felt very superior.

The restaurant he chose was one of the very smartest, soft lights glowing and soft music playing. They took a booth at the side of the room and Bruce ordered champagne cocktails. She had never had a champagne cocktail. Jimmy always bought beer.

He lifted his glass. "Well, here's to your success—in persuading Sylvia in my favor," he said.

Gerry looked at him. "You love her very much, don't you?"

"One look at Sylvia and any man's a goner," he said.

Gerry felt irritated to think that even a strong, sure man like Bruce Cowell would fall for that baby-face. Men were saps about women.

"Sylvia's like a soft purry kitten," he said. "When she curls up in your arms—"

The picture of Sylvia in his arms made her furious. She wanted to throw something at him. It was such an unreasonable emotion that she wondered what was the matter with her. And there was something else that bothered her, too. He said he might be ordered into foreign service. That might mean Africa, Australia, or someplace far away. Someplace where he would be in constant danger!

"How come," he said suddenly, "that you got this job, messing into other people's lives? Let 'em make their own mistakes. I'd like to see anyone tell *me* what to do!"

"I don't suppose anybody could tell you anything," she murmured. "But modern life can be very confusing, especially to girls who live alone. Why shouldn't they profit by Miss Eaton's wisdom and experience?"

"And you think your precious Miss Eaton has all the answers to happiness?"

"She has all the answers for good sense, which goes a long way toward happiness."

He smiled with amusement. "I suppose you've got your life all down pat?" He reached across the table and caught her left hand, looked down at Jimmy's signet ring. "Is that an engagement ring?"

"It is," she said coolly, "until we can afford a real one."

"So you're engaged! He must be a paragon among men," he said mockingly.

"Why do you say that?"

"Well, you don't think I'm attractive enough for a girl to want to marry and actually, I'm way above average."

"Certainly in conceit anyway," she said.

He just grinned at her. "I've got an idea," he said. "Let's go some place where we can dance."

THEY danced while they were waiting for their dinner. Bruce was a wonderful dancer. It seemed to Gerry that they were simply marvelous together. She just fitted into his arms. She bet that Sylvia Mead was too short for him. She was three inches taller than Sylvia.

He was very polite and agreeable, a perfect host, but he didn't seem to be aware of her as a woman.

This annoyed her. She didn't want him to be so detached. She was falling for the glamor of his money, of course. She could sympathize with Sylvia Mead. No wonder she was in a state of confusion, deciding between this man and one who didn't have as much as he had.

A few minutes past eight he glanced at his watch. They were just finishing their coffee. "We'd better get going," he said, and she realized he hadn't forgotten Sylvia for one moment.

They took a taxi to East Thirty-fifth Street and Sylvia opened the door, looking like Dresden china in a blue taffeta house coat.

"Why, Miss Palmer!" she said, her eyes widening in astonishment when she saw Gerry. "I didn't know he was bringing you."

"Miss Palmer feels that she was a little hasty in her advice," Bruce said. "She has decided to have another talk with you."

He took Gerry's arm and led her firmly into the room.

A dark and handsome young ensign, a *very* young man, not more than twenty-two, rose out of a chair and glared at Bruce.

"Sylvia's said she was going to marry *me*," he began furiously. "Will you get that through your head, Cowell, and get out of here before I have to throw you out?"

Goodness, Gerry thought, another young man with a violent temper.

Sylvia said, "Now, Dick, darling, *please*." She gave a deep sigh and turned to Gerry. "We could be alone in the bedroom," she said.

Gerry followed her into the bedroom, wondering if it was safe to leave those two young men together. She couldn't think of anything to say to Sylvia. She suddenly felt very foolish.

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"What am I going to do, Miss Palmer?" the girl wailed. "When you told me yesterday that I was really in love with Dick I was so relieved. I thought I wouldn't really mind being poor at all—after the war. We'd be so happy because we loved each other. Then when I told Bruce he was so *violent* about it. It was positively *thrilling*. I can't bear to give either of them up. And both of them might be ordered into foreign service any day."

Gerry said, "I think we'd better wait until Miss Eaton comes back. This just might be one of those cases where she'd say not to marry either of them."

"What?" cried Sylvia, looking startled. "You mean she might tell me not to marry Dick?"

"I don't know," Gerry said. "But she'll be back in a couple of days. And she'll know so much better than I would."

THAT wasn't exactly true. Gerry knew what Ella's answer would be. She knew it with an awful cold certainty. Sylvia found Bruce Cowell thrilling. She was in love with him. Ella would tell her to

marry him. Gerry herself could have told Sylvia right that moment. But somehow she couldn't get the words out. She couldn't tell Sylvia to marry Bruce. The thought of their being married—

She pulled herself up sharply. She repeated, "That's the best thing to do—wait for Miss Eaton."

Sylvia opened the door to the living room. She announced to the two men who stood waiting, "I've decided to wait for Miss Eaton's return, before making my decision."

Dick exploded. "You're going to give me an answer yes or no tomorrow, or you'll never see me again!" He grabbed up his hat and slammed out of the door.

Sylvia stared at the closed door and suddenly burst into tears. "Oh, Bruce," she sobbed and went into his arms for comfort. Bruce held her and patted her shoulder.

Gerry stood on one foot and then the other, feeling embarrassed and miserably alone. She finally said weakly, "Well, I'll be going." And she rushed out.

As she ran down the stairs she asked

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herself furiously, "Now what have I got to cry about?"

She was just at the corner when Bruce caught up with her. "You got away awfully quick," he said. "The least I can do is take you home."

She said, "You stay with Sylvia."

"Sylvia's all wrought-up. She's better off alone." He took her arm and put her in a taxi, asking her address.

Sinking down on the seat beside her, he said, "Well, you didn't do so well for me either. We're back where we started."

"Miss Eaton will tell her to marry you. I'm sure of that. I can see I made a mistake." She stared out of the window.

"Did you?" he said. "Look," he said suddenly, "would you do me a favor?"

"Yes."

"You won't get mad?"

"Why should I?"

She turned to look at him. He had moved close to her, his face was very close and very intent. She knew he was going to kiss her and that she ought to stop him, but somehow she was powerless. She could not take her eyes away from his.

Then his arms pulled her close and he kissed her hard. For one sweet terrifying moment she pressed closer to him while everything inside of her seemed to be melting away in a giddy hungry ecstasy. Then he let her go. Her heart was pounding wildly. She was trembling and her cheeks were on fire.

She said feebly, inanely, How—how dare you?"

"You said you wouldn't be mad." He turned her face so that she had to look into his eyes. "Will you please tell me is the thrill you got from that kiss because of my bank account—or because I am a man?"

She pushed away from him hard. "Who said it was a thrill?"

"Oh, a man can always tell," he said carelessly.

"Well, you're not so smart as you think! It didn't mean anything—anything at all to me, but I suppose it would to a girl who loved you. This is my house!"

The taxi had stopped and she was out of the door before he could even move to open it for her. He ran up the steps after

her and firmly took her key from her and opened the door.

"Lieutenant Cowell," she said haughtily. "Our business is over now. I'm sure Miss Eaton will tell Sylvia to marry you."

"But I don't want a girl who has to be told to marry me. I want a girl who loves me so much she can't help herself."

"Then keep kissing her, the way you just kissed me," Gerry snapped, "and maybe she'll marry you before Miss Eaton gets back."

"Oh," he said brightly, "is that the way you felt about the kiss?"

"I didn't say I felt any way about it. I said she might."

She slammed the door in his face. She was out of breath and shaking as she reached her own apartment. And there stood Jimmy.

Heavens! She had forgotten all about him and the dinner she cooked for him every night. He was looking very injured.

"You might have called me," he said.

"Don't tell me you haven't eaten!"

"Of course I haven't."

"Honestly, Jimmy, you might have the sense to eat when I'm delayed on business." She flung her hat down on a chair.

"Business?" he said, lifting his brows a bit. "I know you drove up with a man—an Army officer. I suppose the uniform got you."

She said coldly, "Well, it still happens to have been business, uniform or no uniform. Oh, Jimmy," she said, suddenly flinging herself into his arms, "let's be like we used to be. Let's not have everything dead and dull between us like this."

"I guess I do seem pretty dull," he said bitterly, "beside a man who can ride you around in taxis."

His words struck home. There it was again, the glamor of money versus the glamor of love.

THE next morning she couldn't seem to put her mind on her work. There were a lot of letters to answer but she didn't seem to know the answers to anything. Ella phoned long distance and said that she would be back in the morning.

Gerry hung up the phone and gazed across the room. Tomorrow Ella would be back to tell Sylvia to marry Lieutenant Bruce Cowell. She wondered if Bruce had

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gone back to the baby doll last night. She wondered if he had taken her advice and kissed her.

The telephone rang.

"Hello!" said Bruce's voice, very cheerfully. He had kissed Sylvia then; he had persuaded her. Gerry closed her eyes against the aching pain she felt.

"I'm taking you out to dinner tonight," he announced.

"But," she said, "I told you I wasn't going to have anything more to do with this business."

"Who said I was taking you out for business? I'm taking you out because I want to." He hung up.

She stared at the phone and then she put it down slowly. She was feeling so giddy that she had to catch hold of the desk. He was taking her out because he wanted to! She didn't understand it.

She understood it perfectly half an hour later when Sylvia Mead called her.

"I thought you'd want to know," Sylvia said excitedly, "Dick and I are leaving for Maryland to be married tonight. He has his orders, and there are only two days left. I couldn't bear losing Dick. You were right all the time. He's the one I really love."

So that was the reason Bruce wanted to see her. He had lost Sylvia. He wanted to bawl her out again.

She was ready when he came at five.

"Hello, beautiful!" he said, grinning. He took her hands.

She snatched them away from him. "You must think I'm awfully dumb," she said. "Or else you don't think I know about your losing Sylvia."

"Losing Sylvia?" He sat down on the edge of the desk and looked at her.

"She called me about driving to Maryland with Dick tonight to marry him."

"To marry him!"

"She may have left a message for me at the office but I wasn't in all afternoon."

He didn't seem in the least disturbed. "Don't you—mind, Bruce?"

He caught her hands and pulled her over in front of him.

"All I ever cared about Sylvia," he said, "was the competition. It's always a challenge to me. Last night, the minute she opened that door and I saw her beside you—why, she was suddenly nothing

but a cute little kid to me. There are dozens of them around. But you, Gerry—there is only one you!”

Her heart was beating hard. “You—seemed to like kissing her.”

“She was fun to kiss. What pretty girl isn’t?” he demanded, grinning. “I’m only human. But kissing her was like kissing a kitten. And kissing you, Gerry, is like kissing a woman. A warm, alive, thrilling woman.” He drew her closer to him. “I couldn’t ever get enough of kissing you, Gerry,” he said huskily. “If you want to know the truth, I never kissed Sylvia the way I kissed you last night.”

He suddenly lifted her left hand. He drew off Jimmy’s ring and he reached back for her bag which was lying on the desk, opened it and dropped the ring inside. “You can give that back to him later,” he said calmly.

She snatched the bag from him. “Give me that ring!” she said. “I’m engaged to Jimmy. I love him.”

“Do you?” he said. His eyes searched hers. “We’re going to change your mind about that.”

She thought he was going to kiss her, but he didn’t. It was a sharp disappointment.

“Come on,” he said. “We’re going to have an evening.”

They certainly had an evening. Gerry had never been in so many famous places. She had never had such an exciting time with any man. But she held steadily to the thought that she had never had so much money spent on her before. Could she trust the thrill she felt when Bruce looked at her and smiled into her eyes? She wasn’t going to let herself be carried away by a man’s money.

He didn’t kiss her good night, either, although she held her face up to him expectantly. His fingers suddenly gripped her shoulder hard. “Gerry, if you don’t love me I don’t want to kiss you again. The less I have to remember, the better.”

He turned away abruptly and went down the stairs.

GERRY went into her apartment, dropped her coat and hat on a chair. She thought, I love Jimmy. I must love Jimmy. We’ve been engaged a year. I can’t have changed so suddenly. It’s just

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the glamor of the money. It was true about Sylvia and it must be true about me.

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She wrote steadily for ten minutes, signed a fictitious name and address.

In the morning she took the letter along with several others into Ella. "It's certainly nice to have you back," she said. "That one on the top seems sort of—urgent. I wish you'd look at it."

"All right, I'll look at it," Ella said.

She knew what Ella's answer would be. She knew she was going to have to tell Bruce no. Ella's advice was always right.

It was almost noon when Ella called her in. "I made some notes on that letter," she said. "You can put them into the answer.

Gerry's mouth felt very dry. "All—right," she said. She took the notes and folded them and went back to her desk.

She couldn't bring herself to read them. She couldn't. They'd be so—final. She suddenly thrust them into her bag. Her knees were shaking when she

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walked into the restaurant at one to meet Bruce. Her heart was beating very hard.

Then she saw his face coming toward her and she knew she couldn't say no. She knew that all the good sensible advice in the world wasn't going to keep her from marrying him. It might be just the money, but she simply couldn't give him up.

He seemed to know it the minute he looked into her eyes. He said, "Gerry!" huskily, and right there in front of everybody he took her into his arms and kissed her.

A little while later they sat at a small table against the wall. They were holding hands across the table and not paying much attention to their food.

Gerry laughed suddenly. "You'll be glad to know," she said, "that you're getting a girl who loves you so much she's going against everybody's advice."

"Did Miss Eaton advise you against me?" he said.

She opened her bag and handed him the notes. He scanned them quickly and then he chuckled. "I'm afraid I've been all wrong about your Miss Eaton," he said. "Didn't you read these?"

She shook her head. "It didn't matter what anybody told me to do, Bruce."

He handed her the notes. "Read them."

"Why this girl is so muddled up I don't understand," Ella had written. "She's suffering from a guilty conscience about this man she's been engaged to for so long. Everything she writes about him shows him up to be one horrible weakling. The other man appears to be strong and confident. What's his money got to do with it? Tell her to marry him and count her blessings."

Gerry lifted her eyes and looked at Bruce. "But Bruce, she always tells them to marry the poor man. That's just routine stuff."

"Not unless they're in love with him, it seems. Why were you so sure she'd tell Sylvia to marry me?"

Gerry hesitated. "Well, I guess even then I was sure that you were the right man for anybody to marry."

"Oh, no," he said. "Not anybody. Just you, darling."

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