Reunion
in Carolina
by Frances Lake McKenna
WHY THOUSANDS SAY...

"It's Lee 6 to 1"

Lee Leadership is built on many sound, proven facts.
The Lee Guarantee... Your Lee garment must look better, fit better, and wear longer than any other you have ever worn, or you can have a new pair free or your money back.

Lee Tailored Sizes... A perfect fit for every build... tall, short, slim, or stout.

Famous Lee Jelt Denim... Made of selected long-fiber cotton and woven into tough, long wearing denim.

Exclusive Lee Fabrics... Smart colors in really tough, handsome materials.

Fadeproof Fabrics... Many of the exclusive Lee fabrics are vat dyed and fadeproof.

Sanforized... Shrinkage guaranteed less than one per cent.

That's why Lee won first place in a nation-wide survey* among working men on the question: "What brand of overalls do you prefer?" Lee Jelt Denim Overalls led the next brand by a margin of 6 to 1!

Buy Lee work clothes... at leading stores coast-to-coast.

*Survey made by a prominent publishing company.

THE H. D. LEE COMPANY, Inc.
Kansas City, Mo. • Minneapolis, Minn.
Trenton, N. J. • San Francisco, Calif.
South Bend, Ind. • Salina, Kansas

WORLD'S LARGEST MANUFACTURER OF UNION-MADE WORK CLOTHES
HERB'S ARROW
HIT THE MARK
AND THEN...

AN ARROW! AND
RIGHT THROUGH
THE CHEST!

REMARKABLE!
LOOK, HERE COMES
OUR ROBIN HOOD

HERB HALL!
WHY, DAD,
HE'S THE
MOVIE
ARCHER

DISCOVERED BENEATH
MY BACKWOOD'S BEARD.
AND AREN'T YOU PAUL
LAURIE, THE FAMOUS
HUNTER?

THANKS FOR THE
LIFT WITH THAT
BUCK MAY I DRIVE
YOU TO YOUR CAMP?

FINE! AND SAY...
IT'S NEAR DINNER
TIME. WHY NOT
JOIN US?

I'D LIKE TO SHAVE
BEFORE WE EAT
BUT HAVEN'T A
RAZOR IN MY CAR

COME ALONG AND USE
MINE.

THIS IS THE BLADE
FOR ME! SLICKEST
SHAVE I'VE
EVER HAD.

LOTS OF MY
FRIENDS USE
THIN GILLETES.

SO NEXT WEEK WE
HOP TO ALASKA
FOR GIANT MOOSE.
LIKE TO COME
ALONG?

WOULD I! AND HOW!

WONDERFUL... HE'S KEEN.

TAKE ALONG SOME THIN
GILLETES, PAL

YOU LOOK AND FEEL RIGHT ON THE BEAM
WHEN YOU SHAVE WITH THIN GILLETES.
THEY'RE THE SHARPEST, LONGEST-LASTING
BLADES IN THE LOW-PRICE FIELD. WHAT'S MORE
... AND THIS IS IMPORTANT... THEY EAT YOUR
GILLETTE RAZOR PERFECTLY, PROTECTING YOU
FROM THE IRRITATION CAUSED BY MISFIT
BLADES AND FAULTY SHAVING
METHODS. ASK FOR THIN
GILLETES
Novelettes

REUNION IN CAROLINA
Frances Lake McKenna
Alison was to play out a strange masquerade of love, until Brian removed the veil of heartbreak which disguised her dreams.

THE WRONG ROMEO
Julie Paine
Ann played championship tennis, but she wanted to lose her heart in a love set.

YOU'LL LIKE IT JUST FINE!
Tugar DePass
Smokey had to remodel her romance—to fit a pattern for Paradise.

TO EVERY LONELY HEART
Grace Mack
...there comes the love of a lifetime. Could Lynn hold it in her heart, or would it slip through her dreams?

LADY COME LATESTLY
Frances Youlins McHugh
Romance was on the program, when Sherry tuned in on the right love-length.

THE LOVE PIRATE
Virginia Nielsen
Nancy was a lovely lady pirate, and Pete was the daring desperado who stole the treasure in her heart.

WISH ON A WEEK END
Dorothy Brodine
Marjorie knew that Ted was a lost cause, but you can't blame a dream for trying.

Short Stories

PRESCRIPTION FOR ROMANCE
Alice Warner
There was nothing the matter with Merry that a certain doctor couldn't cure.

LETTER FROM BARRY
Millie Breeze
Two hearts can't be kept apart, when a dream can cover the distance between them.

Verse and Features

TIP TO A BEAU
Harriet A. Bradfield

MARCH PREVIEW
The Editor

PURPLE HEART
Ursula Malchow

ELEGY FOR A DEAD DREAM
Cecile Bonham

ONE BROWN LEAF
Alma Robison Highbee

"SEW"-EASY

SPRING NEEDLEWORK

MARCH ISSUE OUT JANUARY 24TH!
Tip to a Beau

by Harriet A. Bradfield

If you would take a little tip
On bow to hold romance,
You'll find your future happiness
Is more than lucky chance.

When you just have to break a date,
Please do not telephone;
Instead, surprise me with some flowers,
And sweetly thus atone.

For fragrance has a subtle way
Of curing ache and smart;
Though telephones leave me annoyed,
Your flowers would soothe my heart.
It was Dean Vernon who interrupted them. "You've a guest, Brian — from Cleveland."
CHAPTER ONE

Heart on a Limb

FEELING an almost desperate weariness, Alison unlocked the door of her apartment and entered the smart, tiny foyer. As she started toward the living room, her reflection in the wall mirror over the slim plastic table caught her attention. Except for its present gardenia pallor, it was a quite lovely reflection and should have satisfied the owner. But no satisfaction registered as she regarded the small, heart-shaped face that seemed smaller than it was because of its frame of copper hair. Brian always said it
was the color of tea in a crimson cup. Stop thinking about Brian! Gray-green eyes, slightly slanted, with a fringe of long, dark lashes. Shoulders that didn’t need the tailored padding in the pale green polo coat. Full, curved mouth that Brian...

“Well,” she said aloud, belligerently, “do you think you’ll be able to sleep tonight? You’ve certainly walked far enough to collapse. Or are you going to lie awake again tonight, groveling in your pillow to keep from crying your heart out? Go ahead, cry, then maybe it won’t hurt so bad. Girls have been jilted before, you know. Plenty...”

Lips tight, she walked into the living room, her footsteps making no sound as they crossed the deep-piled, beige carpet. Pausing beside the long, low, apricot velvet divan, she sorted over the letters she had taken from her mailbox in the lobby. Most of them were bills, which she tossed aside without interest. There was one, though, with a South Carolina postmark, which caught her eye. Turning over, she saw the not unfamiliar crest of Vernon Hall. From Brian’s grandfather, she thought, and her delighted surprise helped to ease the pain around her heart.

She sank into a corner of the sofa and unfolded the page written in Dean Vernon’s large, compelling hand:

My dear Alison:

It has been too long since I’ve heard from any of you in Cleveland—nothing at all from Brian since his brief note two months ago that he was home for good. From his mother’s last letter, I take it that you have now resigned your position, preparatory to your marriage next month—which, of course, I shall attend.

However, here is my desire. You’ll recall that our fox hunting season opens a week next Monday—with the traditional Hunt Club Ball on that night and—more importantly, the breakfast here at Vernon Hall the following morning. You were here with Brian’s mother for last year’s occasion, you know. And, since this may well be my last year to give the breakfast—it is my dearest wish that you and Brian be here with me, in preparation for the time when you will both take over officially.

I need not remind you, my dear, that after Nora’s divorce years ago and her subsequent remarriage to Paul Geddes, it was understood that she would not inherit Vernon Hall. For a time, I considered leaving the estate to the county—a consideration that I would still put into effect, I’m afraid, should anything happen to dissolve this most desirable marriage between you and Brian during my lifetime, for I cannot imagine a more suitable future mistress for the Hall than our lovely, gracious Alison King.

Frankly, I have worried about you and Brian recently. Put it down to the vagaries of an old man—but I desire to see you and Brian here together before your marriage. I hope you will come soon enough that we may have a few days before the hunting festivities. Devotedly,

Dean Vernon

P.S. Joel Lynne just dropped by, and he asked me to add his hope that you will come.

For a long moment, Alison sat staring at the crested note paper. Then she began laughing, short, ironic little jerks of laughter because her whole beautiful world had crashed like a house of cards, all because Brian was jealous of her career and her boss, Ned Bradley. He and Alison had gone to New York to an advertising convention. Brian had stayed in Cleveland and sulked. That was how he happened to meet Daphne Maris.

Alison decided to call Nora, Brian’s mother. Brian wouldn’t be home—she was sure of that. He would be out with his new love, celebrating his release.

SHE WENT over to the little alcove that housed the telephone, settled herself on the chair and dialed the familiar number.

“Darling,” came Nora’s rebuking trill, “you can’t mean what you did last night! You and Brian had better stop acting like a couple of ninpies. Don’t you think you were too hasty?”

Alison sighed. She might have known! “Nora, I didn’t phone you to discuss Brian. That’s over—definitely. But I’ve a letter—”

“Darling, it can’t be! You and Brian are too perfect for each other! Daphne Maris is only a phase. The chorus-girl stage, you know? Brian never had time for that in college, because his nose was always buried in a book or hanging over his typewriter. Then his war-correspondent job, and writing that bestseller... That’s what appeals to Daphne.”

“Look, Nora,” Alison said, with tired patience. “Brian is twenty-six, old enough to know his own mind. He admitted that he was in love with Daphne Maris last night. If you were engaged to a man and he admitted he was in love with another girl—would you try to hold him?”

“Well—” Nora paused dubiously. “But he can’t be, he’s just too miserable! I couldn’t pry any details from him, but—oh, darling, youngsters like you are so independent these days. Twenty-one years old, on your own, holding down such a grand job, supporting yourself so beautifully. Why, Ned Bradley told me that you were the best little advertising executive he ever hoped to have, and that the girl you were breaking in would never come up to your standards in—”

“He doesn’t have to worry about that any longer,” Alison cut in bitterly. “But look, Nora, what I called you about is a letter I
just this minute received from your father.”

“Oh, that old dictator!” Then, with a little shriek, “Alison, he hasn’t heard? He’s always simply adored you!”

Wearily Alison pushed back the heavy red-gold hair from her forehead. She had intended to tell Nora the details of the letter, but she could no longer endure further maternal reproaches. So she said, “If you mean, has he heard about Brian and me—no, apparently not. But the letter requires an immediate answer, and, under the circumstances, Brian should do it. I’ll mail it tonight and he’ll have it in the morning. Good night, Nora.”

She hung up.

She was in the midst of a sketchy breakfast the next morning when the insistent pealing of the doorbell jerked her out of her morbid thoughts. “Well, wait, whoever you are,” she muttered, turning the switch on the toaster.

She walked into the carpeted foyer and opened the door a mere crack. But someone pushed it wide and strode past her into the sitting room.

“Brian!” she gasped, still standing in the foyer.

He stood tall and tapering, blue-black hair shining, dark eyes slightly scared but brazening it out, his unbearably beautiful mouth set.

“Get yourself comfortably settled,” he ordered, “for this will probably take a little time.”

Alison froze. “Nothing,” she uttered, “will ever take time between us again. I thought I made that clear!”

“You did. It still is. I mean—” Suddenly his bravado crumbled, and he sank into the nearest chair, elbows on knees, his long beautiful hands threading through his hair distraughtly. “Alison, please . . . you have to help me. It’s Grandfather’s letter.”

Deliberately, she arranged herself in a corner of the sofa, crossing her slim lovely legs, and gave Brian a sweetly polite smile.

“So . . .”

Eyeing her morosely, he sat practically on the end of his spine, long legs stretched before him, cigarette smoke spiraling upward from one dangling hand. “Okay,” he muttered, “it’s your inning. You don’t have to rub it in. You knew when you got that letter that we’d have to go down there.”

“Why,” she said brightly, “I knew nothing of the kind. All you need do is write him that we’re no longer engaged—that you broke it off because you’re in love with Cleveland’s most captivating night club singer, and then everything will be fine.”

“Like fun it will, and you know it,” he accused. Then again, the fingers through the hair, the head falling back against the bottle-green velvet chair, dark eyes roaming the ceiling. “Mother’s practically nuts, and I’m more so. You know how I love Vernon Hall. Why, I was raised there—I was born there, remember?”

“No, I wasn’t there at the time,” Alison murmured. “You being five years older than I—”

“I mean, you know how I feel about it!” he snapped. Then, in a gentler tone, “Naturally, I hope Grandfather lives to be a hundred. And he can leave all his money to his faithful old servants, but I want Vernon Hall. I’ve dreamed of ending my days there, perhaps writing my best stuff.”

“Why, darl—I mean, Brian,” she writhed inwardly at the slip, “you can’t have dreamed much about it. Recently, that is. Or probably your beautiful Daphne bewitched you into forgetting. But after all, we’re not married, so there’s no question of divorce. That’s what Mr. Vernon is so set against, of course. You only broke our engagement, remember? Surely you can explain that it’s much better to find you’re in love with another woman before we married than afterward. So, instead of me, you take Daphne to South Carolina.”

“Oh—fine!” he flung at her bitterly. “You know as well as I do that Grandfather will consider our broken engagement worse than divorce in anybody else’s case—because he’s so crazy about you! And the minute he learns that Daphne is a night club entertainer—that’ll finish me, and you know it.”

“Why, I don’t really think he’ll—”

“And stop saying why in that smug, supercilious way! You gave me enough of that the other night. And incidentally, you certainly were quick enough handing me back my ring when I told you about Daphne. So maybe you are in love with Ned Bradley, after—”

She was on her feet, a slim red-haired girl, quivering with rage. “Look—you! I didn’t ask you to come here. When you walked out that door two nights ago, I hoped never to see you again. Do you think I’m so hard up for a husband that I’d hold you after you admitted you were in love with someone else? Or—pardon me, you said you ‘guessed’ I’d call it that. Well, you’re free now to make your guess sure. And as for Ned—that’s too utterly nonsensical to answer! But if you think, Brian Delaney, that I’d deceive your grandfather, that fine old gentleman, you don’t know me as well as I thought you did!”

“I’m not asking you to deceive him!” He was on his feet too, looming over her. “If you’d let me explain once—just once! I thought we’d go down together and—well, he’d see soon enough, from our actions, that we’re no longer suited to each other, and be reconciled to our breaking up. We needn’t tell him that we already are—and certainly he
won’t ask. So where’s the deceit? And I told you the other night, under that crucifying cross-examination of yours, that I hadn’t even begun to think about marrying Daphne.”

“Why, gracious no. How could you; honorably, while you were still engaged to me?” She sighed dramatically. “Ah, chivalry. It is not yet dead.”

HE LOOKED, momentarily, quite capable of strangling her. Then he whirled and walked to the other side of the room. She watched him as he stood at the wide front windows, glaring out over Cleveland’s Rocky River.

She inquired sweetly of his back, “And what does Daphne say to our cozy twosome in South Carolina? You told her, of course.”

“How could I?” he snapped over his shoulder. “I just got the letter. She sleeps till noon. I’ll see her later today. Anyhow, we’d scarcely be gone two weeks—one week with Grandfather, till after he gives his Hunt breakfast, and figuring three days down, three back. This is Tuesday. If we left tomorrow, drove down—”

“Drive? Three days alone with you?” Alison laughed. “No, dar—I mean, please. Thanks a million, but we’ll fly or I won’t go. That way, it would only be a few insufferable hours.”

“Then you’ll go?” He started back to her—in relief, delight, and such unwarranted speed that Alison’s heart turned a disgusting flip-flop.

She retreated quickly behind a chair. “For you, I would not go even if it meant saving you all the historic old plantations in the deep South. But for your adorable old grandfather, if it will mean his peace of mind against our eventual blowup, I’ll gladly go. But understand this, Mr. Delaney, I shan’t deceive him the slightest. As you say, he’ll think we’re still engaged or we wouldn’t be there, so that question probably won’t arise. But I intend to act exactly the way I feel like acting—and you can gather the chips as they fall. Take it or leave it.”

She added hastily, “And stop where you are. If you so much as touch me once, from this moment until the time we get back, I’ll not be responsible.”

He stopped where he was, precisely in front of her chair. His grin was dry, twisted.

“What makes you think I was going to touch you? I merely thought we could discuss the details in a more civilized manner than shouting at each other across the room. And as for acting the way you feel—if you play it straight, as you’re playing it now, Grandfather won’t be long catching on.”

“That’s the object, isn’t it?” she reminded coldly. “So there’s nothing further to discuss. When you get plane reservations, phone me. I’ll meet you at the airport. Or, if your little daffy-down-dilly persuades you not to go, phone me also. Now close the door as you go out.”

Their eyes held each other’s; hers coldly impersonal, his mocking, ironical. “Your decision to go,” he suggested, “wouldn’t be prompted by the thought that you’ll be seeing a lot of Joel Lynne, would it?”

Alison pinned an enigmatic smile on her face. “Could be,” she said, shrugging her shoulders.

But she knew one terrible moment when the door closed behind him; a knife-twisting moment that bent her forward over the back of the chair. How could she endure their visit together! If she wanted to get over him—and she did, desperately—going to Carolina was not the way to do it. Or was it? Living with him under the same roof, remembering that he preferred another woman to her; wouldn’t that help her to hate him blindly? And so irrevocably, she might be able to see Joel Lynne—his charm and sweetness—without her memory of Brian clouding her vision?

Then again she hugged herself the thought, the wonderful little human triumph, that Brian had to appeal to her to help save Vernon Hall. She should have made him beg a little harder. Well—there would be a week or longer.

IT WAS the next morning—a bright and early eight o’clock, Wednesday morning, to be exact—that Alison sat in the waiting room of the Cleveland Airport, awaiting Brian’s arrival. Under her beaver coat she wore—with sweetly malicious intent—the ensemble she’d bought for another flight with Brian, their wedding trip to Nassau. A copper-penny wool suit and sable-brown hat.

Then Brian walked into the waiting room, with Daphne Maris. Alison recognized the singer from her pictures; the golden bell of hair, great brown eyes with incredibly long sweeping lashes, the model-slimness—encased now in a mink coat.

There were murmured introductions, and then, practically in Alison’s face, Daphne yawned widely, frankly as a child might, and said engagingly, “What an unearthly hour! But I had to see my darling off! Alison, my dear, I simply won’t have you hating me, especially when there wasn’t a question after Brian and I met. It was one of those instant—”

“Oh—Daphne,” Brian broke in hurriedly, “I must pick up the reservations. Is that your luggage, Alison? I’ll take it with mine.” He was gone.

Still smiling, Daphne confided, “Of course he’s afraid we’ll claw each other to pieces.
REUNION IN CAROLINA

But we’re too clever for that, aren’t we, darling?”

“Much,” Alison agreed, smiling as sweetly. “Of course, it was all so startlingly unexpected. Brian never having played around before—”

“He isn’t playing now, either.” The brown eyes glinted granite-hard. “Make no mistake about that. Or should I say we’re both playing—for keeps?”

“No doubt you should. At least, you must be terribly sure of him, to turn him back to me like this. Thrown together as we shall be, not to mention his grandfather approving so strongly of our marriage. Why, anything might happen—darling.”

Daphne’s smile broke into laughter, gently. “But not what you’re thinking. Brian is phoning me every night at midnight—his own suggestion. And I think I know him well enough to detect the slightest—shall we say, kicking over the traces? At the first kick, I’d catch the next plane down—and darling,

Brian’s face went brick-red. Alison giggled, certain that he wouldn’t, he couldn’t kiss Daphne in front of her like that. But he did, and it clung, for so long that it wiped the grin from Alison’s face and picked her heart right out of her body and dropped it to her feet with a sickening thud.

She was standing out beside the plane steps when Brian came running.

“You mustn’t mind her Alison,” he said, with some embarrassment. “She’s such an affectionate child.”

“Oh brother—” Alison said softly, preceding him into the plane.

“Oh, I suppose she got under your skin with a dig or two,” he muttered over her shoulder. “She doesn’t like this situation any better than you or I do.”

The stewardess showed them to their seats and took their coats. Alison curled up near the window, saying casually, “I’ll have me a long nap—while you dream about your future child-bride.”

Alison looked on as Daphne went into Brian’s arms.

I’d hate to have to be the one to tell the old grandfather about your breakup. That it was because you and your handsome boss, Ned Bradley, attended one too many conventions together.”

Alison thrust the mayhem from her heart and chided, “Too bad you haven’t something really against me, Miss Maris; that you must drag in that oldie about the boss and his assistant. Don’t you draw the line anywhere?”

“No, Miss King. Not when I’m playing for stakes like Brian—” She broke off as Brian came striding toward them.

He said, not looking at either girl, “The plane’s warming up. We should take our seats.”

Daphne went into his arms. Or rather, she went to him and his arms automatically went around her. Or is that just my impression? Alison wondered. Then the golden head lifted, adoringly, for his kiss, and the throaty voice purred reprovingly, “So soon? I shall die while you’re gone. If you miss phoning me a single night—Now kiss me, lover-mine.”

“Do you believe her?”

“Shut up.”

CHAPTER TWO

Lost Enchantment

IT WAS their last spoken word throughout the flight. Alison pretended to sleep, and occasionally glimpsed through her veiled lashes that Brian was pretending to read his magazine. He fidgeted. He would look at her covertly to see if she was really asleep, then obviously thinking she was, he would watch her quite frankly, his lips grim, frown lines arrowing upward from his nice straight nose. Was he thinking, she wondered, how he’d like to choke her in her sleep?

Then she realized that she must have slept, for the next she knew they had arrived at the municipal airport fifteen miles from Vernon Hall.

“Nice flight, good time,” Brian remarked, as they crossed the sun-drenched field together.
“You wired your grandfather?” she inquired politely.

“Phoned. Yesterday afternoon, after I snagged the reservations, and after I phoned you. And there’s young Hawkins with the car!”

They drove the fifteen miles through the quiet countryside. Then the big sedan turned into the winding, tree-lined drive, and presently drew up before the Hall, a big, two-story Georgian house with pillars that were dazzling white in the sunshine.

As Brian and Alison ascended the wide, shallow, semi-circular stone steps, the doors were swung open by Hawkins’ father, and then Dean Vernon stepped out on the porch. He stood tall and erect for his seventy-four years, his skin like fine parchment, hair snow-white and quite thick. The restrained eagerness in his dark keen eyes pierced Alison’s heart like a sword-thrust as she gave him both her hands.

“Welcome, my dear,” he smiled, his lips touching her cheek. “Thank you for acceding to an old man’s whim.” Then, extending his hand to Brian, “It’s been a long time for you, son.”

Brian gripped his hand firmly, his other arm across the older man’s shoulders. “Hello, Grandfather. Can’t say you’ve changed the slightest.”

THAT NIGHT Alison had just finished dressing for dinner when a knock sounded at her door.

“Yes?” she called.

“Brian. May I see you a minute?”

“Come in.”

He came in, so tall and dark and outrageously handsome in his dinner clothes that Alison looked once then quickly looked back into her mirror, where she could watch him without seeming to. He stopped abruptly, hand on the doorknob, and looked at her as she stood before her dressing table.

She wore a cream-white moiré formal, exquisitely and expensively simple, the skirt hanging in deep heavy folds, a plain, fitted bodice that left her lovely shoulders bare. The vividness came from her glowing hair, her bright scarlet mouth, the gray-greenness of her long, slanted eyes.

As he paused, she picked up a squat, crystal bottle of Odeur de Jasmine, took out the stopper and slowly, deliberately, brushed it across the lobe of each ear.

Brian said evenly, “You wouldn’t be deliberately making it hard for a guy, would you?”

Her eyes widened in the mirror. “Gracious, shouldn’t I have dressed for dinner? You are. Mr. Vernon is having a few guests, isn’t he? Joel Lynne, for one.”

He came on until he stood directly behind her, his hands closing around her shoulders, his eyes holding hers in the mirror. “Maybe he’s who I meant,” he said. “You shouldn’t take your spite out on him, you know.”

“And you know what I told you,” she flashed warningly. “If you dared touch me—”

“I’d kiss that mouth, if it weren’t for ruining a beautiful paint job,” he muttered.

Knowing better than to dare him, she said icily, “You wanted to see me about something?”

“Just—go easy on Lynne. We’ve a week to let Grandfather see our changed status. There’s no use upsetting him right off.”

“Well, thanks—chum. I mean, for intimating I’m irresistible to Joel. You’re a real up-lift to a gal’s morale.”

“Skip it!” he snapped. “And another thing. I suspect Grandfather intends making some sort of announcement tonight. About us. Try not to laugh.”

She really hated him then. “You—utter heel,” she cried low, tensely, whirling to face him. “The only thing laughable about this whole situation is you—a man, by whose very profession, should have learned at least a little about people, but you’ve let a piece of blond fluff blind you to the point of imbecility.”

“Watch your grammar, darling. I doubt if that sentence could be diagrammed properly,” he reproved as, ignoring her wrathful eyes, he calmly extricated the perfume bottle from her left hand and set it on the dresser.

Then, still holding her hand, he reached into his breast pocket, drew out the lovely square-cut diamond that she’d returned to him three nights before, and slipped it back on her engagement finger.

“And no cracks,” he mocked dryly. “It’s just that Grandfather might question its absence.”

She stood dazed, but refused to let it get her down. “Why, of course,” she said brightly, turning her hand this way and that, as the ring gave off flashes of rainbow lights. “How thoughtful of you, Mr. Delaney. And how—masterful, because naturally it was hard for Daphne to part with it even for this short time. Or had you given it to her yet?”

He walked back to the door. He turned, wagged a warning finger. “Better watch that jealousy, too. It’s bad for the blood pressure, you know.”

She flung the heavy crystal perfume stopper at him, but it cracked against the closing door.

THERE WAS no announcement at dinner, only a toast, offered by Dean Vernon, honoring Alison and Brian. “Our prospective bride and groom,” he added, “who are to be married next month, as you all know. And so I have asked them to be here at this time that they may preside with me jointly at our annual
Hunt breakfast to be held here at the Hall next Tuesday, in preparation for the time when they will take over the traditional festivities permanently.”

Alison accepted with a gracious smile, while her tall heel searched for Brian’s ankle and dug him into answering.

His head jerked up, and he mumbled, “I—uh—you shouldn’t be so hasty, Grandfather. There’s plenty of time.”

There was a ripple of laughter from the half dozen guests, the usual fatuous laughter reserved for inane remarks from a prospective bridgroom.

Above it, Dean Vernon said, smiling, “When one reaches my age, there is need for haste in such matters.”

Later, in the spacious drawing room, with its mellowed, polished mahogany, Alison was wrathfully reminding Brian that he could have done better than his idiotic remark, when Joel Lynne appeared suddenly beside them.

“What’s this?” he inquired, with his slow, charming smile. “A quarrel, I hope?”

He was as tall as Brian, and as blonde as Brian was dark. He was thirty years old, a bachelor, the typical Southern gentleman who had inherited a fine ancestral estate and considerable wealth. His life was devoted to breeding thoroughbred jumpers and saddle horses.

“Oh, hello,” Alison said with a soft breathlessness, as if she were only awaiting his rescue. “I was just reminding Brian of his promise to his—uh—publishers that he would phone them every night. Imagine, every midnight! He has to report on the progress of his book. He must work on it while he’s here, because he’s been dallying away so much time recently.”

She gave Brian a playful push. “Meanwhile, darling, why don’t you go over and make nice love to that pretty Mary Jane Martin? She was moon-eying you all through dinner.”

When he left, Joel’s blue eyes regarded her intently.

He said, “I’m attending a horse sale tomorrow, about a hundred miles down in the hills. Will you drive along with me?”

“Why, I’d love it!” she cried eagerly, and really meant it. “I adore you for asking me, Joel. I’ve been wondering what to do with myself.”

He laughed softly. “Now I know you’ve been quarreling with Brian.”

“Why?” Sharply.

“Because every other time I’ve practically had to beg you to date me. Now you adore me for asking.” His eyes added, “And I adore you.”

It was dynamite, she knew. But it was also balm to her outraged heart.

The next morning when she came down to breakfast she wore tailored green jodhpurs, and a pale green cashmere sweater. As she entered the dining room, Brian and his grandfather turned from the wide windows which overlooked the rolling acres of Vernon Hall. Dean Vernon regarded her, with fond admiration, Brian morosely.

“Going riding, my dear?” the older man inquired. “I’ll have young Hawkins bring round a little mare that he’s been training for you—for the meets next week.”

Alison explained, a little nervously, “I’m sorry, no. Joel asked me to go with him to a sale somewhere down in the country. I know that Brian wants to work on his book, so I accepted. He’ll be here any minute, I’m afraid.”

“Then we must hurry with breakfast,” was all that her host said.

During the meal, Alison silently called herself names ranging from a heel to a jerk, and hoped that Brian was calling himself likewise. He looked as if he were the way he was glowing on his plate.

Then old Hawkins was announcing Joel, who joined them in a cup of coffee.

And then they were off, Alison beside him in his long black convertible, breezing through the countryside. He was charming, attentive and interesting. She knew he was already half in love with her, and with a little push... But she turned her thoughts in another direction.

At the sale, they parked in a semi-circle of other cars beside a privately-owned training track, and watched the proceedings from there. Joel left her only when he wished to bid on a horse that was being auctioned off. He seemed to know what others he wanted to bid on, for he consulted his program only when those horses were paraded past.

On the leisurely return trip, at dusk they stopped and had dinner at a lovely colonial inn set back from the highway in a deep grove of trees. They dined by candlelight, and the glow in Joel’s eyes as he looked at her matched the candle flames.

“I hope I never wake up,” he said softly across the table.

Alison blushed. “I thought you seemed very much awake.”

“You know what I mean. For the first time in the two years I’ve known you, you’re permitting me to hope. Or is it just my wishful thinking?”

She lowered her eyes. Well—why not? There was no one else. Probably she might never love him as she had once loved Brian, but again... why not? She would be cherished as few wives were. And Joel Lynne would never one day come to her and ask her
to release him so that he could be free to love a blonde night-club singer!

But he wouldn’t ask her to marry him as long as he thought she was engaged to Brian! He had never hidden his affection for her, but his integrity would never permit him to propose to an already-engaged girl. Well, that hurdle would presently be removed, when...

Joel said, with his charming smile, and obviously mistaking her silence, “Forgive me. I’m a heel to have said that much. If I don’t watch myself, you’ll never go with me again.”

She hesitated. Then, a little breathlessly, “I—I want to go with you again, Joel.”

Silence. Finally he said, very low, very carefully, “I’m driving down to Augusta on business tomorrow. It’s only seventy miles, you know. We could make a day of it—dinner, a show, perhaps dance at some night club. If you’re again at loose ends.”

She nodded, and watched him down the steps.

Brian muttered, his voice seeming far away, “It’s a good thing that kiss didn’t happen five minutes ago. Grandfather and I were standing out on the porch, wondering why you were so late. He just went to bed. What’s this about tomorrow?”

She moved past him, crossing the hall to the wide curving stairway.

“What’s the matter with you?” he called sharply after her. “You act as if you’re in a trance or something.”

Slowly she turned to face him, her hand on the mahogany balustrade. “I—hope I never wake up again,” she said, in a softly solemn truthfulness. Then she went upstairs to her room.

The next day she went to Augusta with Joel, and returned after midnight. Brian let her in. “I’d better have Grandfather give you a key,” he snapped, “if you intend to keep this up.”

She met his blazing black eyes steadily. “Perhaps you’d better,” she agreed. “Because I have a date with Joel tomorrow, too.”

“I shall be. I’d—like to go.”

It was midnight when his car drew up before Vernon Hall, the tall white pillars gleaming in the moonlight.

Alison said impulsively, “Joel, it’s been a beautiful day. Thank you...”

With a soft little sound deep in his throat, his arms caught her to him and then his mouth was set against hers. She responded with all her being, aching with every nerve to be thrilled, to feel something! And she did feel a warmly alive glow threading through her. Almost, she thanked him again.

When they were crossing the stone porch, the white double doors opened as if by magic. But it was by Brian, the tall triangle of him silhouetted against the dim light from the great hall, his cold black eyes staring from Joel to Alison.

Joel said pleasantly, “Am I bringing her back too late? We stopped for dinner on the way.”

“We supposed you did,” was all Brian said.

Joel smiled down at Alison. “Tomorrow, then? Around ten o’clock?”

On Saturday, before Joel called for Alison, Brian asked her if Joel knew about their broken engagement.

“He knows something’s wrong,” Alison replied. “Naturally, I’ve encouraged him to think it. He hasn’t asked me outright what it is, but when he does, I’m going to tell him.”

Brian said, lips white, “No wonder you were so damned agreeable to coming here. This straight-ahead drive you’re making for him. Why didn’t you come down long ago if you’re so crazy about him?”

She countered tautly, “But I didn’t realize it before. And I’m not making any drive for him, I didn’t have to. He was there waiting. Besides, I told you that I was going to act exactly as I felt like acting, didn’t I? And besides that, isn’t this the solution to our problem? Surely your grandfather has guessed.
by now that things are not quite rosy.”
“‘He’s not blind,’” Brian reminded coldly.
“He’s asked me twice what’s wrong. I’ve let him think it’s only my book, and that I approve of your going around with Lynne. To keep up the pretense, I even have a type-writer in my room. I lock myself in, pound at the thing while you’re gone—”
“Writing love letters to Daphne, no doubt. Why don’t you tell your grandfather and have done with it?”
Abruptly he turned and stared out of the window. “I thought it best to wait till after the Hunt Ball. He always gets such a kick out of all the ceremony. Naturally, we’ll participate in the first fox hunt, Tuesday. We could tell him when we return, then leave Wednesday for Cleveland.”
He whirled to face her, his voice savage. “But if you continue being out with Lynne every night you’ll climax the thing ahead of time. Or maybe it’s the way you’ve liked to act all along, and I haven’t known. Maybe there was something to Daphne’s hint about you and Ned Bradley.”
She couldn’t have turned whiter if he had struck her. Swiftly he strode to her, grasped her arms, hard, his eyes terrified. “I’m sorry, dear. Forgive me. I know there’s no truth in it. I know—”
He broke off, staring frozenly beyond her. Alison turned her head, following his gaze. Dean Vernon stood at the wide archway, looking at them.
There was a note of distress in his voice. “What is the matter between you two? I couldn’t help knowing there’s something, even if I didn’t love you both so dearly.”
“Nothing, Grandfather,” Brian said automatically. “Just—a little quarrel.”
Alison continued to look out the window. She said deliberately, “No. It’s another of our usual quarrels, Mr. Vernon. We—seem to have them more and more frequently. You see, we—we’ve been rather straining at our bonds for quite some time.”
“Because of any particular reason?” Mr. Vernon inquired gently.
Alison didn’t answer. Nor did Brian. His grandfather persisted softly, “Look at me, Alison, my dear.”
After a moment she turned and looked at him. He smiled slowly. “And you don’t want to strain at your bonds, do you? Your eyes say so desperately that you do not.”
Then to Brian, “Is your book—or anything—worth what you’re doing?”
With that, he walked quietly out of the room.
Blindly, Alison groped for the nearest chair and sank into it. She buried her face in her arms and began crying—hard, gasping little sobs that shook through her whole body.

When the sobs quieted a little, Brian caught her up in his arms, holding her close, as if he couldn’t stand it any longer. “If I knew why you’re crying!” he whispered fiercely, helplessly, in her ear. “Do you even know yourself why you are? Answer me, Alison. Tell me!”
She shook her head against his hard chest, impatiently, angrily. “Oh, it’s—just that I can’t bear hurting him like this. His pitifully transparent little efforts to hold us together. I think you must despise yourself as I despise myself. Why else would I be crying? Why didn’t you tell him just now—or let me?”
“Why didn’t you?” he countered softly.
“You had the chance.”
She flung back her head, half-demanding, half pleading. “You are going to, aren’t you? Tuesday, after the fox hunt. You—you do love—her—enough to go through with it?”
He looked down into her eyes for a long moment, breathing hard, deeply, his lips twisted in bitterness. “That’s what you desperately want me to say, isn’t it?” he mocked, savagely low. “Because of Lynne?”
It couldn’t be, she thought desperately. He wasn’t about to say something else, it was just my imagination. The way he kissed Daphne. Phoning her every night, because, of course, he does. No, Miss King, don’t offer him your heart again so he can kick it right back in your teeth!
Thus memory-goaded, she taunted, “Why are you stalling? You said it before. Why can’t you again? Because you’re jealous of Joel—because you don’t want me, but you don’t want any other man to have me? Because I’m now over you sufficiently that I find another man attractive? You can’t stand that, can you?”
“Consider it said. Since you insist.” His arms fell away from her and wary he turned toward the windows.
“No.” She grasped his coat sleeve, pulling him back to her. She smiled, a small terrible smile. “I want to hear you say it—to my face. Once again. I’d like to be free, too, you know—to love somebody else. Free of any misunderstanding, I mean.”
So he said it to her face, softly, very slowly. “I love her. Enough to go through with it.”

CHAPTER THREE

Till the End of Time

And of course it happened, that night, at the swank supper club where Joel took Alison. She was wearing the lovely cream moiré formal with the off-shoulder bodice that she had worn on her first night at Vernon Hall.
Joel was a tall blond knight in dinner clothes. They were sitting at their table, when he leaned toward her and said, "Alison, tell me. This—something between you and Brian, is it quite impossible? I mean, there's no hope of patching it up?"

"Not any," she said low, decisively.

He hesitated. "Of course, it's none of my business, but—" He left it like that, appealingly.

So she told him, not only because she wanted to, but because there was no earthly reason why she should withhold the fact that she and Brian were no longer engaged. Then she told him everything.

When she finished, Joel said none of the obvious things. He said, simply and sincerely, "Alison, will you marry me?"

So there it was, the thing she'd been waiting for. Well? Why couldn't she answer him? Was she going to wait until Brian married Daphne, and let everybody think she was taking Joel on the rebound? He deserved better than that!

Joel was laughing softly, his hand creeping across the table, covering hers. "Perhaps that was a little sudden? You—say that you and Brian intend to explain the situation to Mr. Vernon after the hunt, Tuesday. Are you returning to Cleveland directly afterward?"

"The next day."

"Think it over," he suggested gently. "Give me your answer before you leave. I won't see you alone again until the Hunt Club Ball."

She looked up curiously. "Whom are you taking to the ball?"

He smiled. "No one. Remember, I always call for Mr. Vernon, and we stag it together? In that way, we get to dance with all the ladies."

"I—may give you my answer Monday night, Joel."

"Then let's leave it that way."

On Monday morning, Alison awoke feeling a strange, inexplicable foreboding. After breakfast she had young Hawkins saddle a horse for her. She rode until lunch time, and wondered desperately how she was going to spend the rest of the day.

Finally she sought Brian in his study and asked him to drive her to Aiken and help her select a new formal for tonight's affair.

"We'd be back by five," she said, a little frantically when he hesitated. "Surely you can endure those few hours alone with me?"

"But you brought a formal with you," he reminded her across his typewriter desk. "That white moiré."

"Cream. But you don't like it," she said, holding her head sidewise, unconsciously coquettish. "Besides, I've worn it twice here."

"You mean Lynne has seen it twice!"

But of course he went with her. And because she was so burningly aware that it might very possibly be the last time she would ever be alone with him again, she forced herself to be gay and chatty.

In Aiken's smartest dress shop, it was Brian's decision that bought the new formal, when Alison favored a daring black lace, and he a lovely, gossamer affair of silver-threaded white net over pale green taffeta.

"It's not so sophisticated," he said, defending his favorite. "It's—more like the you that you used to be."

Did she detect a note of longing in his voice? She quickly changed the subject and started to tell him of an amusing incident that happened when she was in New York.

It was after six when they returned to Vernon Hall. The great entrance hall was quiet and twilight-shadowed, the servants obviously in the rear of the house.

"Now tell me," Brian demanded, terrifyingly soft, after closing the white doors. "Why have you been so sweet to me all afternoon—the way you used to be, until I could scarcely keep from kissing you, and more often than not I didn't keep from it."

In a blinding breathlessness, Alison reached for the dress box dangling from his hand.

"We'd better hurry—"

His free hand gripped her shoulder. "Answer me! It's because you're going to tell Lynne tonight that you'll marry him, isn't it?"

"What makes you—"

"Isn't it! I want to hear you say it. The way you wanted to hear me say—what you made me say yesterday in the library, remember?"

She stood before him and held her head down to avoid his dark accusing eyes. And suddenly she felt his lips, hard, burning, against the top of her head. Then, as if that contact swept away the last shred of his control, his arms caught her to him, the dress box dropping to the carpet with a soft thud, and his mouth buried against hers in a terrible desperation.

She never realized that her arms were locking him to her as his were locking her, nor that her lips gave back the ever-increasing pressure of his, until finally he whispered triumphantly against her lips, "You can't say it, can you? You can't tell him tonight either, can you? Because you still love me, and will until your last day on earth. The way I love . . ."

IRONICALLY IT was Dean Vernon who interrupted them. He stood at the living room archway across the hall, looking ineffably weary, and he said, his voice toneless, "Oh you've returned. I thought I heard someone out here. You've a guest, Brian. From Cleveland."
He had scarcely spoken, when from behind him, Daphne appeared, all golden hair and girlish shyness.

"Brian, darling." She drifted across the hall to him and went into his arms like a homing pigeon. "Darling, don't look so surprised. It was your mother's idea that I come down for the ball tonight. Haven't you a kiss for me—after all these endless days?"

Brian kissed her. Obviously she would have held her face up to his until he did. Then he said, utterly bewildered, "My mother! But—Daphne. My mother?"

"Why not?" She laughed throatily. "Nora knows about us, you know. She and her handsome husband were at the club Saturday night, and we had a little chat." She pursed her lips in a gentle reprimand. "That's because you refused to phone me after your first night here. So I told Nora you'd better be back Wednesday, or I'd come after you. And she said, 'I hope you do, and I'm not sure that it mightn't have brought things to a head quicker if Brian had taken you down in the first place.' So I caught the first plane I could get."

She added prettily, "And your darling grandfather knows all about us. I told him everything—but everything. And it's all fine, as I knew it would be."

Firmly, Brian removed her arms from around his neck and returned them to her. He started toward the tall, white-haired figure still standing at the archway. "Grandfather—"

Alison was never sure whether he heard Brian or not, because he walked straight past his grandson to her.

"You will go with us, Alison," he said, as if he knew that she had silently determined not to. "Joel is stopping for us, and we'll all go together, as planned—except that we shall have our new guest. We must dress now."

He hadn't yet, she saw achingly. How terribly shocked he must have been at Daphne's arrival, the story she'd told him. He had spoken just now in his usual quiet, well-bred voice, but in it she read more condemnation than any other person could have managed in an hour's uttered accusations.

Mute, she nodded assent and went upstairs. In the upper hall, because she could endure it no longer, she whirled to face him. On a helpless little sob, cried, "Oh, please, I've wanted—you must understand, I've so terribly wanted—"

It was his expression that stopped her; that bland, utterly blank expression—like a plaster mask.

Alison remained in her room until the last possible moment, roaming from window to window, pulling on her long white gloves, peeling them off.

Then the silence was shattered by a knock at her door. She stopped dead still beside her dressing table. Brian? She could not see him!

"It's me," came Daphne's little-girl voice. She came in, without invitation, and sank gracefully upon the chaise lounge. Alison noted, without interest, that she was wearing a gold lamé dress, so daringly designed that it molded every curve, as if gold paint had been poured over her.

"That's a cute dress," she remarked idly, with the look of a cream-gorged kitten.

"Yes—" Alison regarded the reflected loveliness in the mirror. "I didn't like it at first, when Brian chose it this afternoon—that's where we were, in Aiken—but I love it now."

"You must be slipping. Haven't you found any local swains to save your face, and help choose your clothes?"

"I happened to want Brian."

Daphne laughed delightedly. "Darling, that's not news." She leaned back against the piled satin pillows. "Ho-hum. It's wonderful, making a man admit he's wrong, isn't it? I mean, Brian just admitted downstairs that he wishes he had brought me down last week, instead of you, and explained the situation to his grandfather. Why, the old fellow isn't at all the bear that Nora Geddes would have liked me to think he is. She's just a jealous cat."

"Goodness, aren't you speaking disrespect-
fully of your future mother-in-law?” Alison mocked. “I thought you were so chummy.”

“Stop clowning, Miss King. By the way, who’s the tall handsome blond who just arrived? Lynne something, Brian introduced him.”

“Oh—he’s a knight in shining armor,” Alison said, softly wistful.

“Probably worth his weight in gold bricks, too. Oh, well,” Daphne waved her hand airily, “some day Brian will possess all this, besides what his mother will probably leave him. His father’s dead, isn’t he?”

“Years ago. So I’m afraid you can expect nothing from there.” Alison smiled steadily into the mirror. “Apparently you haven’t much confidence in Brian’s writing ability, Miss Maris. And that’s too bad. Because frankly, I wouldn’t be too sure that he’ll inherit anything—from anybody.”

It jerked Daphne erect like a puppet on a string. “Oh, I know they’re crazy about you!” she flashed. “And Nora Geddes hates the air I breathe, because I stole Brian from you. She never dreamed I’d come here, she’s probably tearing her hair now for mentioning it.”

“I doubt that,” Alison ventured. “I think Nora knew exactly what she was doing,”

“And what do you mean by that?” Daphne demanded, her voice chipped ice. “If I thought—”

Abruptly Alison turned and walked to the door. “Come along, it’s time for the ball.”

And to herself, Keep smiling, fool! Unless you want to crack up before everybody.

THERE WAS first the dinner, in the club dining room with the pine-paneled walls lined with trophies of former fox-hunting seasons. Then dancing in the ballroom, ushered in by the grand march led by Dean Vernon and a sprightly dowager. Some distance behind them came Brian and Daphne, and behind them—Joel and Alison.

But it wasn’t until her second dance with Joel that Alison heard him say, “She’s quite stunning, isn’t she?”

“Very,” Alison agreed instantly. “She has a most intriguing voice, too. Technically, I believe it’s described as a combination of husky-torch and little-girl wistfulness. She’s Cleveland’s most popular night club singer, you know.”

“And she’s also the something between you and Brian.”

“Yes.”

“And now,” his voice changed to soft teasing, “who’s this we’re discussing? We haven’t mentioned a name.”

Alison looked up to laugh with him. But the laugh died before it was born, and the tension that had been coiling up inside her broke, and she crumpled in Joel’s arms, her body shaking and torn with hard, soundless, sobs.

At once, Joel danced her out through the nearest French door onto the wide cement promenade that encircled the building. In the shadow of some potted shrubbery, he held her in his arms for long moments, until she cried herself out, and she could speak, could say, “I’m—terribly sorry. It’s just that I—suddenly couldn’t stand it any longer, it’s all been so—impossible. I was sure I could get through this last night—”

“Yes. I know. I’ve guessed so much more than you think I have, Alison. Would you like me to take you home?”

She looked up at him pleadingly. “Oh, would you, please? I want to pack and leave before they return. I’ll stay at some hotel tonight—”

And in his car, as he drew up before the moon-silvered pillars of Vernon Hall, she said, “Joel, would you go back to the club instead of waiting for me here—and return in an hour? I don’t want to be missed, you see. If anyone inquires, just say that I’m in the powder room or somewhere. Meanwhile, I’ll phone for a reservation.”

His smile was twisted, rueful. “Dear, would you stay at my house tonight? It’s quite all right, my aunt lives with me.”

“Oh, I know that,” she cried, her voice raw and quivering. “You’re so wonderfully kind, and I’m grateful, but—no. I’ll never again stay anywhere under false pretenses.”

He lifted her chin upward to him. “What do you mean, false pretenses?”

She took a hard, tearing breath. “Because I—I can’t marry you, Joel. I—I love you as I might love a dearest friend, but—”

He laughed gently. “My sweet, I’ve known that for some time. I know that you could never marry me, nor any man, as long as Brian Delaney walks the earth.”

SHE HAD almost completed her packing when she heard a car arrive outside. There were footsteps on the stone steps, and then the front doors opened.

She flew out to the upper balustrade, calling, “Joel? Would you come up for my bag—?”

But it was Brian who swept up the stairway like a dark wind.

“Are you eloping with him?” he demanded, when he stood before her. “He wouldn’t tell me a damn thing when I finally snagged him at the club. I’d been looking everywhere for you! Then he walked in alone and said you were just around somewhere. I knew he was lying. Why have you packed your bag?”

“Because I’m leaving.” She turned, started back to her room.

He caught her wrist, whirling her around to him. “For where?”
"That's none of your business!"
"Isn't it?" he whispered furiously. "After that kiss this afternoon, after our hundreds of kisses throughout our three years of love—isn't everything you do my business?"

In utter bewilderment, she stared up into his dark tortured eyes. "But Brian, you're in love with Daphne Maris."

He was breathing like an athlete who'd just rushed up a long hill—deep, hard, desperate breaths.

Then he said, "I have to make you understand. But, I'm afraid I never can. You wouldn't give me a chance—that night back home when you gave back the ring. And I didn't dare try again when Grandfather's letter came, for fear you'd think I was only getting around you because of the blasted estate—which was farthest from my thoughts, really."

His hand tore through his black hair, agonized. "Look. You were gone to New York. Before that, you were too busy with your job to see me much. And one night Jed Harmon introduced me to Daphne and I remarked what a sweet kid she looked. Jed laughed and said she was a good character for me to study, professionally. I asked him why. He said because she had the face, the voice of an angel, but the soul of a shrew, and the best he ever heard about her was that she was out for the highest bidder. The best—get it? I said he was nuts, a snob, and that if it weren't for you I'd like to prove it. He said if that's all I wanted to do, I wouldn't be hurting you, and why didn't I try? He introduced us. You can ask him."

He continued, "Oh, I'm not passing the buck. I'm to blame absolutely—though I was piqued over your neglect, I admit. But before I knew what was happening I was stepping into quicksand. Or mud, maybe. Anyway, it wasn't love. Nor anything else important. Can you understand that?"

"Not—yet," she said, breathlessly, in her effort to keep up with his striding.

"It never was. You have to get that straight. It was just that deadly, dual personality of hers. You saw her at her worst because she was so jealous of you. But with a man she puts the finger on, she works that child-like innocence until he wonders if he knows his way around. I was intrigued. The way she sang made you think she'd been put out to work too soon, was scared and lost, and trying hard not to show it. I wanted to sock Jed for making that crack about her."

He heaved a deep sigh. "So that's how it started. She asked me to take her home that first night. Said she didn't play around, didn't know many people, and was tired fighting off passes from fellows like Jed, that she felt safe with me. It all fitted her looks, you see. I told her about us—when we were being married, that you were tied up with your work or I wouldn't be on the loose. It didn't seem to matter—then. She just asked if I'd mind taking her home. But I didn't see her again—until she phoned me two nights later, she was crying. Said a fellow from Chicago had followed her to Cleveland and she was afraid of him. Daphne seemed to count on me so—until I felt like a heel to let her down."

He drew a hard breath. "So that's how it was. Then—wham! The night I told her that you'd be coming home from New York next day, and I wouldn't be seeing her again. What a scene! Sobbing—hysterics—reproaches—I'd made her love me and now I was leaving her—the whole works, from A to Z. I took her home, and got a second dose of it from an aunt, who lived with her. I was sunk—though I couldn't see I was to blame. I'd told her about us, hadn't given her the slightest encouragement to think there could be anything serious between us.

"The next day the aunt phoned and said Daphne had taken an overdose of sleeping tablets. She didn't go to the club that night, just lay on the sofa, looking only half alive, wanting me near. And that's the first I knew that she knew all about me—when she cracked something about she might have known that a wealthy socialite like me, son of the terribly rich Paul Geddes, would only be playing with a girl like her. I told her I was only Paul's step-son, and my sole source of income was my profession—but it wasn't any use. Mother was of the old Southern aristocracy, now married to the Geddes fortune. I'd never mentioned my family history, but she had it all pat. Then I suspected I was in for something."

"BLACKMAIL," ALISON murmured.

She and Brian were sitting on the stairs, and she suddenly realized that his arm was around her. Her head was back against his shoulders but there was no forgiveness in her heart.

"So that's when you learned," she prompted, "about her dual personality."

"No, she was too clever to threaten—yet," Brian said bitterly. "It was the day after you kicked me out, when I went to Jed and I told him the whole story. I asked him how the hell I could get rid of her."

"But you said you were in love with her," Alison reminded him dryly, "or guessed you were, when you told me about her that night after I returned from New York."

"Do you remember my exact words?" he snapped. "I do. You've given me plenty occasions to remember. I wanted to tell you when I took you home from the airport that day—but I didn't know how! So damnably afraid you'd misunderstand. And you didn't
“And Daphne interrupted,” Alison stopped him, blushing. “By the way, where is she? At the ball?”

“For her, the ball is over. I took her for a drive after the grand march and told her that grandfather was seeing his lawyer tomorrow, willing everything to you. Also, that Mother warned me before I left Cleveland that unless I married you I could expect nothing from her. And as for my own financial status, my sole income was from my profession, and, I guess she doesn’t think much of that.”

“And she believed you,” Alison supplied. “Not quite enough—though she reluctantly admitted my family was just crazy enough about you to do as I said. Then I delivered the knockout blow—assured her that despite any problematical inheritance, you were the girl I loved and wanted to marry, and I’d brought you here solely to win you back. And that if she wanted to make something of it, as seemed indicated by her bold trip here, that I’d be forced to call on a certain banker’s son in Chicago to testify, in my defense, how she had victimized him.”

For a long moment, Alison sat silently, thoughtfully, beside him. Then, stubbornly, “But you did say you loved her. In the library, Saturday afternoon, remember?”

“That was for you. Oh, my darling, couldn’t you see I was dying inside because I love you so much and thought I’d lost you to Lynne? And then when I came through the front door I heard you calling Lynne to come up for your bag.”

He pulled her up beside him and his arm curved around her and drew her against him close.

“I know that he asked you to marry him. I think you said no tonight. And I hope I know why. You wouldn’t have gone with him, would you?”

“Ummmm—maybe,” she murmured, trailing her finger over the black satin lapel of his dinner jacket and feeling his heart pounding. “Look at me, dearest—and say that.”

When, finally and slowly she looked, her heart melted at the naked longing and adoration in his eyes, and she shook her head slowly.

Then she was locked in his arms, they were laughing softly, a little shakily against each other’s lips, Brian saying, “Let’s phone Mother and tell her how her bright little idea precipitated the Maris exit.”

“Let’s wait till your grandfather comes home and we’ll have a real long distance celebration,” Alison suggested.

Then she saw his eyes close, felt his mouth cover hers, and that was her last clear impression for a long, long time.
Julie laughed up at herself in the gold-framed mirror over the mantel. If she'd known there was an Andy Kent in the world, she would have— She stopped and watched the happy smile fade. What then? Andy was in love with Coralia. He loved her so much, in fact, that just sharing a dinner with the cousin Coralia had been raised with, was enough to set him whistling with joy. You, Julie Carter, had better look where you're going. No smart girl walks into heartbreak with her eyes open!

But there was nothing for Julie to do but face the truth. It had finally happened. She was in love. And of all the men who had danced to Coralia's tune through the last years, it would have to be the one man who was real, and the only one who deeply, sincerely loved that beautiful enchantress!

From that time forward, Julie became a pawn in a dangerous game of heartbreak, playing at intrigue and imitation glamor, in order to sacrifice her dreams for a love that could only be madness. And in the end, she was caught in a trap of her own making. Andy was saved for Coralia—and lost to Julie forever. Exactly as it must be...

Here is the captivating portrait of Julie Carter, whose fate it was to understudy a temptress, before she could win her own role in romance. Eleanor Atterbury's Heartbreak Cinderella is an adventure in fascination, the exciting novelette of a whirlpool deception that threatened to sweep three people into its bottomless depths—unless their hearts could survive its swirling upheaval.

*   *   *

When I fall in love... “When I fall in love,” Mickey North said, “there’ll be fireworks.” Fireworks? She had said it so lightly, but suddenly she was remembering the sparks that had seemed to leap between her and Tom Asheford. It had been anger, of course. But what had moved him to kiss her—and why had she let him? It would be beating her head against a stone wall to fall in love with a man like that, especially when she knew he was engaged to another girl. Against a fabulous, colorful Louisiana background, Virginia Nielsen tells the enthralling story of a reporter who set out to make headlines, and came back with a new lead on love.

Also featured in next month’s sparkling lineup are delightfully entertaining stories by Elaine Heyward, Bill Severn, Betty Webb Lucas and other favorites. It’s a winter-wonderful issue for romantic reading... on sale January 24th.
The moment was too sober and serious for words.
Ann said, "Oh, good grief!" when she heard that Kip Donaldson had entered the Championship Matches. "That disgusting sissy," she said contemptuously. "If he's a tennis player I'm a Zulu warrior."

"At least he tries," Mary Paley said from across the girls' dorm. "We can't all be as good as you, you know."

Ann threw up her shoulders and chin and made no rebuttal. Mary never missed a chance to be sarcastic. Mary still seethed over the withering defeat Ann had given her last winter in the singles finals for the women's championship of Dalton State.

Ann left the dorm, her tennis racquet under a round brown arm, her white cardigan thrown over straight young shoulders. Halfway across campus, going toward the courts, she came face to face with Chuck Manners, the most spectacular player and the best-dressed senior at Dalton.

"Hiyah," Ann said, lifting her long, brilliant green eyes to his good-looking face so bronzed by the Florida sun. "Been practicing?"

"I just won a love set from Slow Motion Donaldson. There ought to be a law against a guy like that cluttering up the courts. Somebody ought to tell him to stick to academics and leave tennis to those who can drive a ball over the net. The guy's so consistently poor he gives me the heebies."

"He'll lose his first match," Ann said.

She was wondering why Chuck had never asked her for a date. She was a lot more attractive than any of the girls he squired around campus.

"That's a sure bet," he grinned. He asked how her game was going and she said fine, and he said he had to bone for mid-terms and
he'd be seeing her around. But that was all.

She walked on. Why didn't Chuck admire her as a girl instead of just as last year's woman champion? She could have any other man in school on whom she chose to cast an eye.

Like Kip, she thought ... J. Kipperton Donaldson. Ever since freshman year when he was a 4F-er, and one of about a dozen men in the whole registration at Dalton, he'd followed at her heels like a thin-ribbed, sad-eyed dog waiting for a kind word. At first she had been polite and friendly, but then his over-attentiveness had gotten on her nerves. One night at a gym hop when he'd stepped all over her new silver sandals and almost pumped her arm out of its socket she had blown up. She had been rude, but she'd never regretted it because since then he had not bothered her, although often she had caught him looking at her with that idiotic hang-dog expression.

She got to the courts and stood for a moment on the sidelines talking with Mike Flynn, Dalton's tennis coach.

"You can hit a few on a court with Kip," Mike said. "Warm up and then I'll make up a doubles match with the Miller twins and Helen Moberly as soon as they get here."

"Please," Ann said, "not with Kip, Mike."

"Why not?" The man's blue eyes under bushy gray brows were sharp and penetrating. "If you want a court this afternoon, you warm up with Kip."

She frowned. Once Mike had been wonderful to her, but lately he had become awfully crotchety. He never complimented her game any more; in fact, he seemed intent on criticizing her every move on the court.

Long, slender, sun-browned legs under white shorts moved slowly and stubbornly toward the far court. Mike wouldn't have much longer to order her around like this! Next summer when she would smash through to amateur laurels at Forest Hills Mike would be the first to say, "That's my pupil. The first day I saw her grip a racquet I knew I had a great tennis star on my hands."

**HELLO,** ANN said to the tall, thin young man who was practicing placement shots from the far side of the net. "Mike says I should warm up with you. The only way I can warm up is with a fast volley."

Kip merely nodded. For just a second Ann's very excellent eyes observed his grip on the racquet. Funny, she thought, he's got a pretty good grip there for a rank player.

Ann didn't ask a courteous, "Ready?" She served a fast cut ball into his right near court. It was impossible for him to return it from his position behind the base line and she knew it. It hadn't been a fair volley shot and she knew that, too, but she didn't give a darn. If he was so stupid as to continue to annoy the good players with his persistent presence and attempts on the courts, he deserved unfair treatment.

This time she sent him a high, curving ball which his long arm returned easily. She slammed back hard, giving the ball another terrific cut which he missed.

He tossed the balls back to her over the net. "Are we volleying or are you trying to prove to me how good you are?" he asked.

The question threw her off balance because she'd never expected anything like it from him. He'd always been so timid, close-mouthed and reserved.

"You don't need to prove it to me, Ann," he said right away. "This is the fourth year, but now I'm convinced. Of everything but your good sportsmanship."

She glared across the net. "You—"

"I know," he interrupted. "You don't have to say it. You've said it all to my face and behind my back. Here come your friends. You can play tennis now. There's more than one way you can warm up it appears to me."

He walked off the court and she glared after him, her face pinched with anger. A moment later she said to Helen Moberly, "Do you know what that big, skinny sissy said to me?"

"No," Helen said, looking odd. "And if you mean Kip Donaldson, Ann, if I were you I'd quit being so nasty. Just because he isn't your idea of a he-man is no reason to constantly tag him a sis. That seems to be your pet complaint about every fellow except Chuck Manners. Manliness doesn't necessarily go with over-padded shoulders."

"You're in a swell mood, too," Ann said. "Let's play tennis."

What was the matter with everybody lately? Helen had just acted as though her own toes had been stepped on.

Sharp anger and resentment flowed through Ann and when she was smouldering like this her game always suffered. Helen, who was her partner, saved the game by winning the point after deuce. As Ann played she was conscious of Mike Flynn and Kip watching her from the far side of the alley. Her irritation grew and she missed an easy shot and lost the set.

"Your backhand's lousy today," Mike shouted. "What's the matter with you?"

"Nothing at all," Ann answered stiffly.

She fought desperately to regain control and smashed through the next set in top form. Several of her shots were beauties and she heard Kip say softly, "Bravo!"

Oh quiet, she thought. You don't know a good shot when you see one. At least Chuck saw eye to eye with her on the subject of the
Law School’s prize academic wonder, J. Kipperton Donaldson.

After the set Mike called the girls off the court. Kip was still hanging around but Ann only looked at the coach.

“Tomorrow,” Mike said, “we’ll post the names of the contesting teams in the elimination mixed-doubles matches. As you know the singles will be played off the first week in February, then the women’s and men’s doubles and finally, mixed doubles. And this should interest you gals. The Athletic Board and the student council decided at the meeting last night to give a dinner dance in honor of the tennis teams. A really gala affair,” he grinned.

“Oh, how simply swell!” The Miller twins breathed excitedly.

Ann said nothing. She was too busy wondering if Chuck might ask her to go with him. The two victorious finalists—together. She would wear the new mint green organdy her mother had bought in the exclusive Southern Wear Shop and sent down from New York. No one else would have a formal to touch it—

“Going my way?” Ann asked the girls when Mike was finished talking. “Me for the gym and a dip.”

Neither the twins nor Helen seemed enthusiastic, so Ann said she’d be seeing them and left. Once, she remembered, those gals fell in with anything she suggested. What had gone wrong this past semester? Was it her fault or was it jealousy? She was inclined to believe it was the latter. Ever since she’d defeated Mary Paley a year ago she’d begun to notice a different attitude among her friends. Mary, even though she was a sarcastic, unforgiving wretch, was the most popular girl on the campus.

But they could all go to blazing. She had won fairly and had fought hard for the victory. She was a better player than Mary and she was going to stay a better player whether anyone liked it or not.

A STEP came behind her and she knew from the automatic bristling of her spine to whom it belonged. She looked up at Kip. 

“What do you want?”

“To walk to the gym with you. And to tell you I’m always sorry after I’ve been rude. There’s really no excuse for it,” he said earnestly.

Ann was stubborn and quick-tempered but she wasn’t unkind. She swallowed her dislike for him and said swiftly, “We’re all rude at times. Just let’s say our horoscopes aren’t sympathetic and let it go at that.”

“I can’t agree, knowing nothing about horoscopes,” he said, “but I won’t argue, either.”

“You’re in Law, aren’t you?” she asked trying to keep the edge out of her voice. “I’ve never heard of a lawyer who wouldn’t argue at the drop of a hat.”

“Then I’ll be a different kind of lawyer. I only argue on subjects I know and I don’t know much.”

“You’re telling me?” Ann thought to herself. You may be a whiz at academics, but brother, that’s as far as you go. You dance like a Mexican jumping bean and you dress like a poor Alger boy. That last wasn’t being snobbish, either. Kip’s father was one of the most successful lawyers in the state of Florida.

They came to the gym in silence. He said, “I’d be putting you in a bad position if I were to ask right now to take you to that dance Mike mentioned, wouldn’t I?”

Ann was honest. She looked right at him and said, “Yes, you would.”

“I’ll put it this way then,” he said soberly. “If Chuck doesn’t ask you within the next two weeks, will you go with me?”

Again he seemed to have thrown her entirely off balance. She looked at him a long time. “You’re different this afternoon.”

“That isn’t answering my question. If you don’t go with Chuck will you go with me?”

“Yes.” She said the word in quick embarrassment. Before she whirled on her flat rubber heels she told him, “You’ve certainly just succeeded in making me feel like an awful pill!”

“I don’t want you to feel that way, Ann. I’m one of the few on campus these days, who doesn’t.”

She turned again, her cheeks flaming.

“What do you mean by that crack?”

“Do you really want to know?”

Her bright gilt head flaunted up. “You can tell me at the dance . . . if I go with you.”

“Okay.”

She went into the gym in a steaming rage. If she went with him! She’d die before she’d go to that dance with Kip Donaldson. What had come over him to suddenly put on such a superior, sardonic act? He’d almost sounded as if he were sorry for her and wanted to help her. That was the prize—Kip Donaldson who couldn’t keep a ball out of the net, feeling sorry for the girl who’d taken all the tennis honors at Dalton!

Chuck will ask me, she vowed fiercely to herself as she came out of the locker room and plunged headlong into the water. She was going to see to it that he did.

**KIP WASN’T** on the courts the following afternoon, but Chuck was. Ann played three fast sets with him and afterward, he walked back toward the dorm with her.

“Can you imagine Mary Paley being teamed with Kip in the mixed doubles?” she asked.

“Against us, too,” Chuck grinned. “I bet Mary’s gnashing her gums over that.”
"No, that's the funny part," Ann said. "I was talking with Mary after Psych class and she seemed quite pleased about it."

"Well, I'm pleased I got you. We'll make monkeys out of them." There was an intimacy in his tone and she hoped fiercely that he'd mention the dance.

But he didn't.

In front of the dorm Ann said, "I'm not afraid of anything but defending my singles title. When Mary's in top form she's plenty good and her schedule gives her an extra practice hour every morning. Besides, this morning I promised Dr. Everett I'd work on the decoration committee. For the dance I mean..." she added hopefully.

"I understand we're having Tom Scully's band," Chuck said, not biting at all. "It's going to be quite a shindig. So long now, beautiful. I'll see you in my dreams."

He was gone.

Ann slid into the building and stood behind the door frame and watched him lope away. Maybe he was on the conceited side but she liked him and his tennis. But darn it—what was a girl supposed to do with a guy like him? The system was all wrong. Girls should be entitled to ask fellows to dances part of the time.

She turned and saw Mary Paley standing at the head of the short flight of steps and she knew Mary had been there long enough to have seen her looking longingly after Chuck.

"If you'll pardon my bluntness, since you're often very blunt," Mary said quietly, her blue eyes intense, "I'm going to say what I'm thinking. You're one swell tennis player, but you sure are dumb about men. If that handsome, racquet hero you're drooling over were a movie star all you'd see of the supporting cast would be the backs of their heads. In other words haven't you noticed he only dates unspectacular women?"

"I'll thank you to mind your own affairs," Ann said in a hoarse whisper.

Mary caught her arm as she dashed past.

"I surely would do just that—if it weren't for Kip Donaldson. The guy's in love with you and—"

"Let go of me," Ann said between white, thinned lips. "Or do you finally have to get revenge out of your system?"

"Revenge," Mary said, letting her go, "is something I'm not guilty of. I like Kip a lot and I don't like to watch you deliberately committing suicide. You're doing just that, Ann. Championship isn't in winning one or a hundred titles, it's in the way you wear it."

"I suppose you wore it well?" Ann wasn't in any mood to try to find the merit in what Mary was saying.

"I hope," Mary said thoughtfully, "I wore defeat better." She looked into narrowed, blazing green eyes and added, "Okay, I'm sorry, but honestly I was trying to give you a good steer."

Ann went upstairs. She wanted to blow off steam and tell everybody what she thought of Mary, but for some reason she didn't. She just flopped down on her bed and pretended she was asleep and nobody saw the angry tears under her cheek on the pillow.

She went over every word Mary had spoken. Kip was in love with her? It was too absurd to think of and yet Kip had been so different yesterday. As if he'd emerged from a shell. Not that she liked him any better—he was still a drip in her estimation—but he had been different. Even sort of attractive...

She could hear her roommates coming in to dress for dinner, being quiet and whispering to one another because they thought she was asleep. They were really a swell bunch. Maybe she had blown her mouth off a bit too much of late regarding Kip and others she didn't like. She had to hand one thing to Mary. Mary never ran down anybody. When others did, Mary always came to the defense of the one being maligned. Mary could be sharp and sarcastic but you could always depend on her being that way to your face only.

"I've got a heck of a disposition," she admitted silently. "Maybe it would behoove the woman champion of Dalton to study up on championship a little."

**ANN ELIMINATED Mary in the semifinals that week. Mary played an expert game but she didn't seem to put her heart and soul in winning and Ann sensed the slack in her opponent.**

"Your game was downright brilliant," Mary grinned as the two girls shook hands over the net. "Congratulations."

Ann only said thanks then, but later she cornered Mary going across campus. She asked, "Why didn't you try harder, Mary?"

The girl's bland face was completely honest. "I did try. You're inferring that I threw the game to you?"

"No, but..." She shrugged. "Maybe I was wrong. It just seemed to me that tennis doesn't mean as much to you as it used to."

"It doesn't," Mary said. "I had the title for two years, now you've got it the second year. I like to see the best man win, and you're the best man."

"In tennis—only?"

"I didn't say that." Mary's blue eyes were probing. "Have you seen Kip lately?"

"No. Why?"

"It might be well for both you and Chuck to get over to the courts around nine A.M. and see what that boy can do with a racquet. He's good now that he can open up and hit on all cylinders."
"You’re prejudiced," Ann said. "Chuck saw him and so did I a couple of weeks ago."
"Well," Mary smiled, "don’t say I didn’t warn you."
Ann repeated this to Chuck when she saw him at the Campus Soda Shoppe later that afternoon.
Chuck threw back his handsome dark head and guffawed. "Mary’s trying to worry you. I’ve been hearing rumors about the dark horse, too, but they go off me like water off a duck’s back. The story goes that Kip’s had a heart murmur since he was a kid but now his ticker’s normal. It’s all bunk. He’ll be knocked out of singles tomorrow just like that." Chuck demonstrated with a snap of his fingers. "I’d bet anybody fifty bucks he won’t get past Hardin."
Kip didn’t. Ann heard it the next afternoon as soon as she returned to the dorm from class. She looked at Mary, a smooth eyebrow arched.
"Didn’t you say to watch out for Kip’s new game?"
"I did," Mary reiterated. "I most definitely did—and do. His defeat today was purely psychological. He’s been forced out of things so long he still needs to be pushed by a friendly hand and in singles match-play you’re strictly on your own."

The girls switched the conversation around to the coming big dinner dance and Ann slipped unobtrusively out of the room before anyone could ask her with whom she was going. Why didn’t Chuck speak up? She’d given him every opportunity. Kip would be seeking her out in a few days to get his answer and if she had to go with him after all she’d said about him, she’d lose face.

Wherever Chuck was after classes the next few days there was Ann. She threw herself into high gear around him. She flirted outrageously and desperately, hung on his every word, gave him the full, coaxing brilliancy of her green eyes, flung pride and decorum to the winds and didn’t give a hoot who looked on. Chuck simply had to take her to the dance and that was all that mattered.

The fourth afternoon in front of the library he did ask her to go to the campus movies with him that evening. "I’ll pick you up in front of the dorm at seven-thirty," he said.

Ann sailed away on air. Her heart pounded against her ribs because victory was in the offing. He’d broken down to ask her to the movies and there’d been an expression in his eyes which intimated this wouldn’t be the only date they’d have together.

After a rousing set of tennis with Lucy Miller, Ann sought out the coach on the sidelines. She felt magnanimous this afternoon. She could visualize herself in the lovely mint green frock walking into the beautifully-decorated gym on Chuck’s arm...
"Where?" Lucy demanded. "Tell me quick!"

"On Main Street in town in front of the Sports Store. I was sitting in Greg Powell's car waiting for him when Kip came along the street and Chuck came out of the store with his racquet under his arm. They didn't notice me and when the words started to fly I ducked down so they wouldn't see me. Golly! will this make tongue fodder!"

"Go on, go on!" Lucy urged.

The girl at the rear of the room under the stairs pressed her spine up hard against the wall.

She had to hear this through. She couldn't go out now... It was Hazel McCord talking to Lucy. Hazel was one gal who loved to dramatize a story.

"So... Kip went right up to him and said, 'Look, Manners, are you taking Ann to the dance, or aren't you?' You may be a helluva flash on the court but while I'm around you're not going to play hard to get with Ann.' Chuck looked kind of saffron around the gills,' Hazel continued, "and gave with a couple of derisive sneers and then Kip had him by the shoulder, and did that boy look big and powerful with his chin stuck down in Chuck's pretty face! He's thin but looked every inch a steel cable. He said, 'Manners, Ann's making a fool of herself over you and I'm not going to stand by and hear her talked about. She's crazy about you and you give her a break or I'll knock the teeth out of your head.'"

"I couldn't help thinking," Hazel continued, "that here was a 4F-er who would have made a soldier, and here was a veteran second looey who must have been a disgrace to the uniform. I mean, it was so obvious in his expression he was afraid Kip was going to mess up his beautiful dark curls."

"Come on," Lucy said, "my sister Jeanne's got to hear this! Did Chuck say anything...?" Her voice died away in the direction of the pool.

Ann slipped out from under the stairs and ran noiselessly through the swinging door and out the rear exit. Her face in the last rays of sunshine was without color. Everyone would be talking about this. She and Chuck would be the laughing stock of the campus. Oh why, why didn't Chuck smash Kip's face in? How dared Chuck allow Kip to make a scene like that over her? How dared Hazel malign Chuck's war record? Hadn't Chuck worn all those campaign ribbons he'd earned—when he'd first come to Dalton to register and get his course lined up while he was awaiting his final discharge from the field in Tampa?

Ann went slowly, miserably, toward the dorm. She avoided everyone's eyes and entered into no conversation. She put on a brave red dress and tied a wide red ribbon around her hair and colored her mouth red, red, and glued a defiant smile on it.

During supper she heard Jeanne Miller ask across the table, "Mary, who're you going to the dance with?" And she heard Mary's quiet answer, "With Kip."

Ann left the table at five minutes after seven.

"Got a date?" Lucy Miller asked.

Ann whirled and scanned every face with frosted green eyes. "Yes," she said, "with Chuck Manners."

Chuck had had very little to say all evening, but walking home he asked, "How about going to the dance with me, or have you made a date already?"

"No." Her voice was very low. "I haven't made a date. I'd love to go with you."

"Okay then." He said it curtly as if the whole subject were distasteful to him. As if asking her were something that had been forced upon him.

He didn't hold her hand. In front of the dorm he stood first on one leg, then the other. His eyes rested on everything except her. Ann kept up idle chatter until he covered a yawn.

Then she said stiffly, "I'm keeping you up, Chuck. Thanks for the movie and good night."

Upstairs, in the darkness of the dorm she lay a long time staring at the ceiling out of dry, burning eyes. Then when the sobs finally came, she stuffed the end of the pillow in her mouth so she wouldn't awaken anybody.

**THE MORNING** of the mixed doubles play-off, Ann awakened with a pounding head and a raw, aching throat. It hurt in every nerve and muscle to crawl out of bed and she felt feverish and nauseated. But she got up and dressed and went to the courts to watch the play. The mid-winter Florida sun beat down unmercifully on her aching head but she said nothing to anyone about not feeling well.

Mary and Kip sailed through their match and then Ann and Chuck went on the court with their contenders. Ann played mechanically but well and they took a love set. She didn't keep score or look at the board after that. She just played tennis until three out of five sets had been won.

Somehow the day wore on. At four o'clock Mary and Kip, Ann and Chuck went on to play off the finals. Ann was feeling ice cold and burning hot in waves that attacked her whole body. But she played like a demon, throwing every ounce of strength she had behind her racquet. Through the dizzy, pounding space that was her head, kept running the thought, _Mary's wrong. Kip wasn't so good in their first match. Kip's not so good._

She served Kip a hard ball and he reached for it and gave it a neat return. Chuck smashed it back and Mary took the point with a beauty of a backhand slam. On the next
serve and the subsequent play, Ann found her self watching Kip's attitudes and movements rather than the ball. Her eyes, like balls of fire in her pulsing head, seemed to be registering in slow motion. His leaps, his long stride, his quick pivots were things of wonderful agility and lean muscular grace. The more she watched, the better he was. Then when he sprang off the court and made a beautiful lob she didn't watch the ball at all and missed it.

"For God's sake!" Chuck growled unpleasantly as they changed courts. "What are you doing—throwing the game?"

She didn't answer. She had to save her breath for the game. And she didn't care at all that Chuck hadn't looked handsome or sounded well-bred just then. Chuck didn't really matter. Kip was—good! He was wonderful. He looked like Tilden must have looked when he first began to play serious tennis.

"Get that!" Chuck yelled sharply in her ear, his voice twisted and ugly with anger.

Ann threw her last ounce of strength after the ball and drove it into the net and then things began to go dark and all around she heard voices yelling congratulations at Mary and Kip and she knew she must not give in to the sickness or Chuck would contest the match.

"I'm sorry," Ann managed to say to Chuck. "The way the world is, Chuck, you can give all you have to live but you can't always win."

"Not when your partner dubs every shot," he said as though she hadn't played her heart out.

A long, long time later Ann was running toward the dorm, her feet so heavy they seemed to stumble over every blade of grass. But the tears were cooling to her burning eyes and cheeks. She'd told Kip and Mary they were swell. She'd smiled at Mike. She'd kept her head up.

She got as far as the nurse's office in the dorm building. She tried to smile. "I'm afraid," she said. "I'm afraid I'm—ill."

And then the darkness closed down on her.

ANN WAS in the hospital in an oxygen tent for six days. She didn't know what was being said about her around the campus.

"Imagine her playing in the hot sun with a hundred three temperature! What a gal!" passed from one sober mouth to another in the Soda Shoppe. "If we could have postponed the dance for her, everybody would have voted for it," they said. And, "Ann's a real champion. Boy, it took grit to do what she did as sick as she must have been. The doctors say she had pneumonia that morning."

Things were said that any girl would give her eye-teeth to hear. But Ann was too sick to care much about anything except Kip. She could close her eyes and lie quietly when she thought about Kip and what a fine player he was going to be and what a fine person he was and always had been.

Kip loves you. Ann kept remembering what Mary had said. If Kip had learned love from the sidelines as he'd learned tennis, he'd be wonderful at it. Kip . . . Kip . . . her mind ticked off like a metronome. I love you, too, Kip. I always have. I've just been fighting it. I've been trying to win back the love set you gave me the first time I saw your eyes looking at me . . .

(Continued on page 96)
You'll Like It
Just Fine!

by
Tugar
DePass

Smokey didn't want to be roped into romance, until the cowboy tried a new lasso with love.

Smokey's hands clenched into small tight fists as she saw Marty with the strange girl.
SMOKEY COULD have posed for a fashion photo of what the well-dressed horsewoman should wear on a dude ranch. Her flared top boots gleamed. Her flared bottom, short split skirt fitted her slim hips as though it had been tailored for her—which, indeed, it had been. Her smoke-blue flannel shirt was unbuttoned at the neck, giving the exactly right careless touch. And a sombrero on the back of her cloud of dark hair completed the picture.

Oh, yes, Smokey looked like a horsewoman, all right. And why not? Smokey Smith was one of the most famous models in America; naturally, she knew how to dress a part. The only trouble was, she didn’t feel a bit like a horsewoman.

While Ralph did mysterious things to something she vaguely assumed was a girth, Smokey stared the horse in the eyes. The horse stared right back at her.

Darn, Smokey thought, disgustedly. He’s not a bit afraid of me. Why should I be afraid of him?
It didn’t do a bit of good. She was just plain scared silly. All the same, she’d have to get up on the animal and learn to ride if it killed her—which she wouldn’t be a bit surprised if it did.

Ralph had told her that all the Van Alston women were famous horsewomen. Just as he’d told her all the Van Alston women sailed racing yachts, skied expertly, played tennis and golf like professionals, and could whip up a seven-course dinner on the spur of the moment—with the help of a dozen or so servants, of course.

So, naturally, Smokey, who knew she was the luckiest girl in the world to be marrying Ralph Van Alston and thus becoming one of the Van Alston women, had to learn to do all those things, too.

Still staring the horse in the eye, she couldn’t help wishing Ralph had started her training with something simple like learning to sail a racing yacht. She almost wished she were back in snow-bound New York, instead of here at sunny El Rancho del Rio. How glamorous and exciting it had sounded when Ralph suggested they spend a winter vacation here! And it would be, too, if only there weren’t any horses.

But there were horses, and she was going to have to climb up on one right now. For Ralph had straightened, and was smiling at her, the sun glinting on his smooth blond hair.

“Okay, darling. Let’s get started, shall we? And don’t worry—you’ll like it just fine, I’m sure.”

“Of course. I’m going to love it,” Smokey said quickly and very, very confidently. But she thought it best to lower her thick lashes a little, just in case Ralph might see the terror in her eyes. It was those expressive, gray-blue eyes which had caused Larry Converse, the most renowned model maker of them all, to change her plain Jane Smith to Smokey Smith.

TO HER enormous relief, when Ralph had boosted her into the saddle, and, with one swift, lithe movement, had mounted himself, he told her, “We’ll just walk them for a little until you get the feel of it, Jane.”

Ralph always called her Jane; he thought Smokey undignified. Smokey gathered that a Van Alston woman would have preferred being dead to undignified.

They walked the horses out of the corral and along a narrow dirt road leading through the woods. Ralph talked, using a lot of bewildering words like Canter and Trot and Post.

Smokey couldn’t make the least sense of what he was saying; she was too busy fighting back an impulse to drop the reins and cling with both hands to the pommel.

She thought they must have traveled miles when Ralph announced casually, “Well, a half-mile walk ought to be long enough for you to get the feel of the saddle. Suppose we take a nice, easy canter to the top of the ridge now.”

Smokey clamped her teeth hard together to keep them from chattering. A nice, easy canter—whatever that was—was something she simply could not face.

“Look,” she said desperately. “Do you think that’s wise, Ralph? I mean, I don’t think I should—well, rush things, you know. I’ve heard people sometimes get awfully sore when they first start riding. Why, I might not be able to ride for days if I overdo it today.”

“Well,” Ralph frowned, “there’s something to that, of course.” And then he sighed, “I suppose we’d better stick to a walk a little while longer.”

A little while longer—that didn’t sound too good to Smokey. And, suddenly, she had an idea.

“Darling, I know!” she exclaimed gaily. “You go right ahead and enjoy a nice canter to the top of the ridge, and I’ll turn around and go back to the ranch. Going back all by myself might give me more confidence, don’t you think?”

She almost held her breath waiting for Ralph’s answer. But he agreed that it would be a good idea.

And what he doesn’t know won’t hurt him, Smokey thought, almost giddy with relief. For, of course, the moment he was out of sight she intended getting off this animal and walking back to the ranch—

She got off, all right, only not the way she’d intended. Ralph had long since disappeared around the curve in the road and she was still just sitting, trying to screw up her nerve to dismount, when, around the curve, with a terrific clatter, came a dilapidated surrey complete with fringe on top.

With one wild glance, Smokey took in the briskly trotting horse, the swaying vehicle and the lanky-looking driver with his feet propped up on the dashboard. Good grief, he was going to run right into her if she didn’t do something!

She did several things all at once, all of them wrong. She kicked her horse in the sides, jerked with all her might on the reins, and yelled at the top of her lungs. The horse didn’t like any of it, especially not the yell. At the sound of it, he simply put back his ears and bolted—

And Smokey found herself sailing through the air to land with a thud flat on her back in a thick clump of grass by the roadside. The grass cushioned her fall so that the breath wasn’t even knocked out of her. Smokey didn’t
think of that. She was quite sure she'd broken every bone in her body.

Frantically, she scrambled to her feet and began patting herself all over to find out.

"Too bad I left my X-ray equipment in my other suit," a lazy voice drawled. "But I think you can take my word that nothing's broken."

Smokey jerked erect from a thorough investigation of her right ankle. The lanky-looking driver of the surrey grinned at her. He had rust-red hair, a squarish, very tanned face, and dark-brown eyes.

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself," he remarked. "Searing a poor dumb animal to death like that."

Smokey gave an indignant gasp. And then, suddenly, she found herself giggling. "Well, he scared me first," she said. "I've been terrified since the moment Ralph put me on him."

"Then why didn't you just tell this Ralph person so and get off again?" The brown eyes regarded her with curiosity.

Smokey laughed. "It's not as simple as that. Besides, it's a long story, and I doubt that you'd be interested."

"Oh, I don't know." He paused, and seemed to be considering what she'd said quite seriously. "I might be," he finally conceded. "Suppose you hop in and I'll drive you back to the ranch. You are one of El Rancho del Río's dudes, I take it?"

"Need you ask?" Smokey grinned, taking the hand he extended and climbing up beside him.

When she was seated, he gave her hand a formal little shake. "I'm Marty Wayne."

"Smokey Smith." With a happy sigh, Smokey added, "And I'm very glad to meet you, Marty. I wasn't exactly looking forward to hiking back to the ranch in these new boots. Oh, gosh..." she suddenly remembered, "what about my horse? Shouldn't we look for him or something?"

Marty Wayne chuckled. "Uh-uh. He's probably parted company with dudes before. He'll find his way home all right."

He slapped the reins, said, "Giddap," and they started forward.

Smokey groaned. "Oh, dear, I never thought of that. Now Ralph will find out I fell off."

"That's bad?" Marty cocked an eyebrow down at her.

"Very bad." Smokey groaned again. "You see—and without it even occurring to her how odd it was for her to be discussing her personal affairs with a perfect stranger, she launched into the saga of Ralph.

"He's Ralph Van Alston, of the Van Alstons," she said dreamily. "I met him after a private fashion show his mother sponsored for charity—I was one of the models. Honestly, Marty, I felt just like Cinderella when he asked me to stay on for the dinner and ball Mrs. Van Alston was giving that evening."

"A model, eh?" Marty commented, as she paused. "That explains the Smokey, I suppose?"

Smokey nodded. "My real name is Jane. Ralph always calls me that; he says Smokey is undignified."

"Which do you like best?" Marty asked.

"Jane or Smokey?"

Smokey looked surprised. "Why, Smokey, of course—I've always hated Jane." And then, as she caught the point of his question, she blushed. "But that's not important. Since I love Ralph and am going to marry him, naturally I don't mind his calling me Jane. Don't you see? When you love someone, you want to be the sort of person that someone wants you to be. Which, Mr. Wayne—" she giggled suddenly, "brings us to the real point under discussion—why I'd hate for Ralph to find out I was thrown. Among a good many other things Ralph wants me to be is an expert horsewoman. She shook her head sadly, "I'm afraid it's going to be an awful blow to him to learn I couldn't even stay put in the saddle."

There was a moment of silence, then Marty said thoughtfully, "No reason why he should find out if you don't want him to. The corral boss at your place is a pal of mine; I'm sure I could persuade him not to mention the fact that your horse came in riderless."

"Really?" Smokey beamed at him. "Oh, Marty, that would be wonderful." Then she sobered. "But it's just a temporary reprieve, I guess. I'll have to ride again tomorrow, and I wouldn't be a bit surprised if I fell off again."

The surrey rattled around a curve, and the low, log buildings of the ranch came into view.

"Tell you what," Marty said casually. "Why don't you let me teach you to ride, Smokey? You're probably overly nervous with Ralph, wanting to please him so much, the way you do. With a disinterested party, now, like me, you wouldn't be under a strain."

Smokey looked at him, her eyes taking in the faded levis the well-worn plaid shirt, and, most of all, the strong, tanned hands holding the reins. And, suddenly, she knew he was right; she wouldn't be the least bit nervous with Marty teaching her.

"That's a grand idea, Marty," she said slowly. "Only, what would I tell Ralph?"

"That's simple," Marty chuckled. "Just tell him you feel guilty about making him tag along with you when he could be enjoying some real riding. And you hear there's a cowhand on a neighboring ranch who picks up a little money on the side teaching dudes to ride. Stevens, the boss of your outfit, will vouch for me. I've taken on a few of his
dudes before, at the height of the season like this, when he's short-handed."

Smokey had a queer, let-down feeling. So that was all it was to Marty, just a business proposition. Then she had to laugh at herself. Marty had known her not quite twenty minutes; it had been absurd of her to assume his offer stemmed from liking . . .

SHE TOLD Ralph about it that evening after dinner while they sat out under the stars, watching the moon rise over the mountains. When she finished, she was a little afraid she had overdone the part about not wanting to spoil his vacation.

But, evidently not. "That's very sweet and thoughtful of you, Jane dear," Ralph said. "I don't often have the opportunity for real riding such as I have here. If Stevens vouches for this cowboy, as you say he will, I don't see any reason why we shouldn't engage the lad. I think I'll run in and speak to Stevens right now."

Watching him stride toward the lighted doorway of the main ranch house, Smokey realized she was going to be awfully disappointed if the plan didn't go through. Just because she wanted so desperately to learn to ride well, for Ralph's sake, and she was sure Marty could teach her to do that, she told herself quickly.

And it was all right! When Ralph returned he told her Mr. Stevens had highly recommended Marty Wayne as a riding instructor.

"It's all settled, darling," Ralph added, settling contentedly back into his deck chair. "I had Stevens call Wayne and he'll drive over and pick you up about nine in the morning. I gathered the young man has an arrangement with his boss to use the horses on the Bar K for his sideline." He chuckled. "A most lenient boss, I must say. Stevens tells me Wayne's pupils always spend the day at the Bar K. They're furnished lunch there, and have a lesson both morning and afternoon, it seems."

"That's wonderful!" Smokey exclaimed enthusiastically. At Ralph's slightly surprised glance, she added hastily, "I mean, I'll hate being away from you so long, of course, darling. But, having two lessons a day will mean I'll learn to ride that much sooner, won't it?"

She was more than a little amazed at how quickly she did learn. In three days she felt as though she'd been riding all her life. Somehow, the same things Ralph had tried to explain to her that first day sounded perfectly simple when she heard them in Marty's slow, lazy voice. Marty's grin had something to do with it, too, she was pretty sure. It was such a warm, friendly, encouraging grin.

The afternoon of the third day, riding back toward the Bar K, Smokey was thinking contentedly that she'd never spent three more enjoyable days. Not only was Marty an excellent teacher, but he was a lot of fun, as well. Surprisingly intelligent for a cowhand, too, Smokey thought suddenly. They'd talked about practically everything under the sun on these rides—books, music, plays, politics, people, religion and even cooking. And, no matter what the subject, Marty had more than held up his end of the conversation.

As they galloped up to the white adobe ranch house, and drew rein beneath one of the huge old cottonwoods which surrounded it, Smokey looked at him and said gaily, "You know something, Marty? I'm going to miss you when I graduate from the Wayne Riding Academy."

Marty didn't say anything until after they'd dismounted and a ranch hand had led the two horses away toward the corral. Then he looked down at her, one eyebrow quirked a little in the way he had when he was thinking very hard about something.

"You mean that, Smokey," he asked softly.

"Of course I mean it," Smokey laughed, but it was a rather strained laugh. Because something in his brown eyes made her feel uneasy. She decided she'd better change the subject.

With a glance at the ranch house, she said the first thing that came into her head. "Where's your boss today, Marty? He never seems to be around when I'm here."

Her uneasiness increased when Marty didn't even answer the question. Without looking at him, she knew he was still staring at her with that intent, searching look in his eyes. And then, to her relief, he suddenly laughed.

"How about a drink before I drive you back to El Rancho?"

she suggested cheerfully, and took her arm and led her toward the house.

BACK TO normal, thank heavens! Smokey thought, a little hysterically. For he'd made the same suggestion each afternoon, and they'd sat for half hour or so before the big open fire in the ranch house living room.

When they entered the living room now, a big tray with the makings for drinks was already on the low, rustic table before the couch. It had been placed there, Smokey knew, by Juanita, the little Mexican maid, who also served lunch each day.

At first, Smokey had been a little puzzled that a hired hand should have the run of the house the way Marty seemed to have. But then she'd remembered that he undoubtedly charged his dudes a good stiff fee for his services and probably the owner of the Bar K received a percentage for the use of his horses and the house.

Another explanation occurred to her now,
as Marty handed her a tall, frosted glass. "Marty, are you related to your boss?" she asked.

Marty, who had started to take a sip of his drink, made a strangled noise. He set down the glass hastily, and snatched out his handkerchief. As he coughed violently into it, Smokey pounded him helpfully on the back. And, by the time he'd finally caught his breath, she'd completely forgotten her question.

"Okay?" she asked anxiously, because that coughing spell had lasted an alarming length of time.

"Okay." Marty gave her a relieved grin. "Guess I must have swallowed down my wrong throat." Then he settled back on the couch beside her, and, glancing around the big room, with its gay Indian rugs and hand-woven beams, he asked casually, "What do you think of this place, Smokey?"

Smokey followed his glance. "Why—it's most attractive, Marty," she said slowly. "Perfect for its type, I'd say. Only—" she grinned at him, "it doesn't happen to be my type, I guess. Me, I'm the original big city gal. Or maybe I should say the original luxury gal. I like deep, thick rugs, and soft-shaded lamps and crowds and plenty of excitement. I'd die of boredom living on a ranch like this."

"So you think nothing exciting could happen on a ranch?" Marty drawled. And then, abruptly, he was on his feet, catching both her hands, and pulling her up beside him. And, before Smokey had the least idea what he intended, he was kissing her!

Quite a kiss it was, too. She couldn't have avoided it if she had wanted to. And, for the long, breathless, utterly mad moment it lasted, it never occurred to Smokey to want to. She just stood there within the hard circle of Marty's arms, her heart thudding in wild accord with his, her blood racing through her veins, and kissed him back.

When it finally ended, Marty put his hands on her shoulders and held her a little away from him, his eyes narrow. "How do you like that for excitement, Smokey?" he asked tautly. "When two people love each other, as you and I do, a kiss can be pretty darn—"

"You're crazy!" Smokey jerked away from his hands, her eyes blazing. "We don't love each other—at least, I certainly don't love you. The—the way I acted just now, kissing you back like that, I mean, doesn't mean a thing. You just took me by surprise, that's all! I'm in love with Ralph, you know that, Marty Wayne!"

"Uh-uh." He shook his rust-red head sadly. "You aren't in love with Ralph, honey. You're just in love with the sort of life his money can give you—although, undoubtedly, you've never admitted that, even to yourself. But I know it's true, Smokey. You see, you have to try too hard to like the things Ralph wants you to like, such as riding, for instance." He shook his head again, grinning a little ruefully this time. "When you really love someone, darling, you don't have to force yourself to fit the pattern of his life; when real love cuts the pattern, yo; fit it without even trying—and you'll like it just fine, too."

You'll like it just fine... The words rang a little bell in Smokey's mind. And, suddenly, she remembered they were the same words Ralph had used that first day. Ralph, of course, hadn't used those words in reference to a lot of vague nonsense about life patterns; he'd been talking about just one thing—riding. But that was all right; she knew now what to say to Marty.

With an amused little laugh, she told him quickly, "You've refuted your own argument, Marty. You said I had to try too hard to like the things Ralph wants me to like. But, in just three days, I've learned to love horseback riding. I certainly wouldn't call that having to try very hard, would you?"

Marty ignored the question. "You might—" he drawled, "take time out to remember with whom you learned to love to ride."

"Oh, don't be silly," she said impatiently. "Just because you're a good teacher, doesn't
mean you, personally, had anything to do with it.” Abruptly, she felt a little guilty for having spoken so sharply. “I’m awfully sorry this happened, Marty,” she said gently. “I wish you hadn’t fallen in love with me, but since you say you have, I think I ought to make it perfectly clear how I feel. Even if I didn’t love Ralph, I could never marry just a— a cowboy. Any more than I could marry a shoe clerk or a taxi driver, say. You see, Marty . . .” With a weary gesture, she brushed the cloud of dark wavy hair back from her forehead, “I was one of eight children. Sometimes we had just barely enough to eat, and, always, I wore my older sisters’ hand-me-downs. I hated being poor! And I’d hate it more than ever now, after being a successful model.”

Marty had listened quietly, his rust-red head cocked to one side, his mouth a grim, tight line. As she finished, he gave a short, harsh laugh.

“I’d say that was clear enough, Smokey. So this, I guess, is good-bye . . . I won’t be seeing you again. You don’t need any more riding lessons, anyway. One of the other boys will drive you back to El Rancho whenever you’re ready.” And turned and strode swiftly from the room, his shoulders very square beneath the moss green flannel shirt.

For a long moment Smokey stared at the door through which he had disappeared. She ought to be glad it was over, completely finished—and, of course, she was, really. This queer, lost, empty feeling was just nervous reaction . . .

It was rather odd, though, how often she had that some feeling all the next week. She’d be riding beside Ralph, proud and happy because of his pride in her, and, all of a sudden, Ralph’s handsome face would blur before her eyes, and a squarish, tanned face, topped with thick short-cropped red hair, would be looking at her.

The illusion never lasted more than a moment, but, always, following it, she had that queer feeling of emptiness. As though the world had suddenly become a vacuum, with herself suspended helplessly in the center of it.

And the evenings were even worse, which was rather surprising since she had never spent an evening with Marty. Just the same, strolling with Ralph in the moonlight, sitting beside him in the deck chairs beneath the stars, she would find herself thinking of Marty, wondering what he was doing.

Over and over, Smokey told herself she was simply suffering from a mild guilt complex, for having hurt Marty, even though she had done so unintentionally. She ought to put the whole thing out of her mind, forget she’d ever, for three brief days, known a cowboy named Marty Wayne. After all, knowing Marty had changed nothing between her and Ralph. Certainly, Ralph did not suffer in the least by comparison with Marty. He was still the handsome attractive, thoughtful, considerate man with whom she’d fallen in love. And it was those qualities, not his money, which made her love him—no matter what Marty Wayne thought.

It didn’t do a bit of good; she went right on remembering Marty, remembering, too, every smallest detail of those three days . . .

And then, Saturday evening, the last day of her stay at the ranch, something happened which shocked her awake to the truth.

Each Saturday El Rancho del Rio put on a square dance for the benefit of the dudes. And—for local color, Smokey supposed—the cowhands from all the neighboring ranches were free to attend. Usually a dozen or so were present, most of them with their girls.

A laughing, vigorous set had just ended, and Ralph had gone to fetch them drinks from the bar, when Smokey saw Marty come into the big barn where the square dances were always held. At first she saw only Marty, and felt her heart strings jerk—just because it was bound to be a painful meeting for them both, she told herself quickly.

And then she saw the girl. The slim, tanned lovely girl, with her wheat blond hair wound in a smooth coronet of braids about her small, well-shaped head. She couldn’t have been more than eighteen and she was clinging to Marty’s arm, looking up at him with obvious adoration.

And Marty was looking down at her in the same way, one of his hands covering hers on his arm!

Smokey’s own hands clenched into small tight fists. Wildly, she thought: I’d like to scratch her eyes out! I’d like to tear that blond hair out by the roots!

And that was when she knew of course. She loved Marty Wayne, loved him as she had never loved Ralph, as she had never known the meaning of the word until now. Maybe it was no use, maybe she was too late learning the truth, but she had to tell Marty.

She drew a deep shaken breath, lifted her chin, and walked straight across the room to where he stood in the doorway beside the blonde.

“Marty,” she said calmly, “could I speak to you a moment . . . outside?”

“Of course, Smokey.” Something flared for a moment in his brown eyes.

He smiled at the girl. “Excuse me for a little while, Liza?”

“I suppose so.” The blond girl pouted prettily up at him. “Only, don’t be too long, darling—I’ll miss you.”

Darling, Smokey thought sickly, and was scarcely aware of walking with Marty from
the brightly-lighted barn out into the night.

Marty's hand on her arm stopped her just as they stepped from the swath of light from the open doorway into the deep shadow of a cottonwood tree. "Yes, Smokey? What is it you wanted to tell me?"

Smokey turned slowly so that she faced him. His face was just a dim blur, which was probably just as well. There had been no encouragement in his voice—why should there be any in his expression?

She said quickly, the words almost running into each other, "I wanted to tell you you were right and I was wrong. I wanted to tell you I love you. It doesn't matter at all that you're just a cowboy—you were right about that, too. I love you and so, whatever your life is, I want it to be my life, too. I'd scrub and cook and wash and—"

"Marty! Oh, Marty, darling!" Lisa's voice, calling from the doorway of the barn, cut her off short.

And Marty said, "Oh, there's Lisa. I've got to see her...

He was gone, striding swiftly toward the slim blond girl. Her heart aching, Smokey watched him take the girl's arm, and lead her into the barn.

So she had learned the truth too late, she thought dully. Maybe Marty had never loved her. Maybe what he had felt for her was only a brief infatuation.

SMOKEY TURNED blindly, and walked swiftly away into the darkness of the grove of cottonwoods. She had no idea where she was going. She didn't care. She only knew she had to be alone for a little, had to regain some semblance of self-control before she went to find Ralph and tell him she couldn't marry him.

The grove was behind her now, and she was running down a steep slope toward the river.

It was at the foot of the slope that it happened. The toe of her sandal caught on a projection, and she pitched violently forward on her face. Afterward, she knew her forehead must have struck a rock—at the time she knew nothing at all, for blackness engulfed her...

A long time, or just minutes later—she had no way of knowing—she floated up from the blackness to hear a taut voice saying, "Smokey! Sweetheart—darling! Are you all right?"

It wasn't Marty's voice, of course—Marty had left her to go with Lisa. What a vivid imagination she must have! She could actually feel arms around her, holding her close. She could even feel the soft warmth of flannel against her cheek.

And then the voice said again, "Sweetheart, darling, open your eyes! You're all right—it's nothing but a bump on your head."

So Smokey opened her eyes—and it was Marty! Hazily, she thought she'd better make sure, though. She reached up one hand and ran it over his hair, and it felt crisp and vibrant beneath her fingers, just the way she had known Marty's hair would feel.

She sat up with a jerk, her eyes wide and incredulous as full consciousness came to her. "You called me sweetheart and—and darling," she stammered.

"Sure. Why not?" Marty grinned. "I love you—remember?"

"But—but Lisa! You left me and went to her. And the way you looked at her and the way she looked at you—"

"Whoa, there. Marty stopped her, his hands on her shoulders, his eyes dancing. "We'll take one thing at a time. I shouldn't have dashed off like that with no explanation—guess I was just so excited I didn't stop to think. Like a fool I just assumed you'd understand I'd be back in a moment. You see, I wanted to tell Lisa she could drop the act because I didn't need it any longer. That's all it was, darling, just an act. Lisa's one of my best pals, and also a darn good amateur actress, so I asked her to come over here with me tonight and stage that act for your benefit."

He paused a moment, his face suddenly sober. "I had to do something, Smokey. At first I thought I could just let you walk out of my life and forget all about you. I told myself a girl who was afraid of poverty wasn't worthy of my love. But it didn't do any good—I went right on loving you just the same. So I knew I couldn't let you go without fighting to hold you. And the only thing I could think of was this act business."

"Thank goodness you did think of it," Smokey sighed. "Maybe I'd have waked up to the truth some time—I'm sure I would have, in fact. Only, it might have been too late, I might have already married Ralph."

She looked at Marty, and suddenly laughed. "Now I'm going to marry you and live in a cabin or wherever it is you do live, and, darling, I'm going to like it just fine!"

In the pale moonlight, to her surprise, she saw that Marty looked faintly embarrassed. He cleared his throat, then cleared it again.

After a moment, with a shame-faced grin, he said, "I hope you won't mind too much exchanging that cabin for the Bar K ranch house. I... well, you see, Smokey, I happen to own the Bar K."

"Huh?" Smokey blinked.

"That's right," Marty nodded. "As a matter of fact, I own some other things, too. Some oil wells and a penthouse in New York, for instance—I live there most of the time. I just (Continued on page 97)
She asked evenly, "Is there any reason why we can't be friends?"
... someone comes along some day. But had Lynn met Dirk early enough for enchantment — or too late for love?

CHAPTER ONE

The Sapphire

LYNN MILLARD was not her real name and her shining blond hair was not real, either. It had been blond for less than forty-eight hours but she was trying hard to act as if she had been born with it. As she stepped off the Chicago plane at the Denver airport and hurried through the gate to the reservation desk, she held her chin defiantly high. The dark glasses hid the fear that came into her eyes when she glanced over her shoulder and saw that the big man in the gray, double-breasted suit was standing directly behind her.

For the millionth time her mind sternly counseled: You've got to stop imagining that every person who gives you a second look recognizes you. But this man had given her more than a casual second look, and she sensed that it was not mere coincidence that he was near her now. She had been aware of his stares when she boarded the plane at Chicago, and she had been grateful that their seats were far enough apart that he had no chance to strike up a conversation. She did not want to talk to anybody. All she wanted was to be whisked as fast and as far away from Chicago as possible to a place where no one would recognize her as Linda Miller, the girl who

by

Grace Mack
was with Dan Bogard the night he was killed. She had been unable to secure a seat farther than Denver but she was counting on getting another flight from there to the Coast.

"Sorry, miss," the clerk at the reservation desk informed her, "no space available now, but I'll put your name on the wait-list for a possible cancellation."

As she turned away from the desk, her full, sweet mouth, so richly curved, trembled with disappointment.

A voice cut through her worried thoughts. It was the man in gray.

"Tough luck," he said sympathetically.

She acknowledged his remark with the faintest of shrugs, but her heart started pounding with growing nervousness. She moved away, hoping to lose herself in the crowd, but she knew instinctively that he was following her. In her anxiety to avoid further conversation, she stepped off the curb, directly in the path of an approaching taxi.

There was the screech of hastily applied brakes, and the next thing she knew, the man she had been trying to evade was lifting her to her feet. The taxi bumper had only grazed her, but she was trembling so from fright that she could scarcely stand. She saw the driver leap out and start toward her. Like the warning sound of a gong, the thought flashed across her mind that he would ask her name and address. She swayed dizzily and the stranger's arm caught hold of her.

She said to him in a low, shaken voice, "Tell the taxi driver I'm not hurt. If he wants to know my name—please, would you mind telling him I'm your wife?"

The words had sprung unbidden from her lips, and her ears were as astonished at her impulsively-voiced request as they were to hear the man carrying it out.

"No harm done, driver," his voice boomed out. "My wife's just stunned a little. She'll be perfectly okay in a few minutes. The name? Why, sure. Mrs. Wolf Lamont. We're from Las Vegas, Nevada."

When the taxi drove off, the man named Wolf Lamont said, "What you need now is a good stiff drink—something to take the cotton out of your ankles."

She was too faint, too shaken to argue. After all, he had saved her life, and he was obviously trying to be kind. He took her to a nearby cocktail lounge and ordered a straight shot of brandy for her and a glass of water for himself.

"That request of yours might have gotten me into trouble, young lady," he said pointedly. "I mean, if I had happened to have a wife."

"I'm sorry," she apologized. "I was so groggy that I hardly knew what I was saying."

For the first time she dared to look at him. She guessed him to be in his middle thirties and he had the air of being somebody of importance. He had a ruddy face and keen gray eyes. With one swift, panoramic glance he had taken in the bar, and Lynn had the feeling that he knew just how many people were seated in the booths and what each one was drinking. She had the feeling, too, that he knew that her plain dark suit was being worn for the first time and that her black leather handbag did not contain very much money.

He asked bluntly, "Why didn't you want the taxi driver to know your name?"

"The reason isn't important to anybody but myself," she said warily.

"Lynn Millard," he repeated her name aloud, as if he expected her to show surprise that he knew it.

Inwardly, she stiffened, though she realized that the only way he could have known it was through overhearing her give it to the man at the reservation desk.

"Now that I have saved your life," he continued blandly, "I think I have earned the right to choose the place for you to spend it. How about coming to Las Vegas with me? I've got a nice little spot on the desert, a sort of dude ranch. I'll give you a job—a good one."

LYNN LOOKED at him in amazement. Was he merely taking pity on her because he sensed that she was in some kind of a jam? He seemed like just the type of diamond-in-the-rough Westerner who would do such a thing.

She started to say, "You're very kind, Mr. Lamont..." but he wasn't listening. He was signaling to someone who had just entered the bar. Lynn turned to see who it was as a tall, good-looking young man walked toward their booth.

"Hi, Dirk," Wolf greeted him. "Sit down and order yourself a drink." As the man jack-knifed his six-foot-two into the seat opposite, Wolf said to Lynn, "Miss Millard, I want you to meet Dirk Andrews."

Lynn looked into eyes that were such a clear, vivid blue they made her heart quiver, and as Dirk acknowledged the introduction, she had the disturbing sensation that a queer electric impulse passed between them.

"I'm trying to persuade Lynn to fly back to Las Vegas with us," Wolf said. "I think she would be just right for the Sapphire. What do you think?"

The overhead light made blue glints on Dirk's crisp dark hair. He eyed Lynn speculatively. "I could tell better if she'd take off those dark glasses," he said in a quiet, low-toned voice.

Maybe it was the challenging directness of his gaze, or maybe it was the drink giving her
false courage. For the bare fraction of a second she hesitated, and then as if drawn by some irresistible force, she jerked the glasses off and let her amber eyes look directly into his.

There was no recognition in his gaze, but there was a masculine strength and vitality about him that seemed to reach across the table and grab her. Crazily, the thought flashed across her mind: Here is a man I could trust—a man I could love.

She waited breathlessly for him to reply to Wolf's question. When it finally came it told her nothing.

"You're the boss, Wolf," he shrugged, as if it made no difference to him whether or not she accepted Lamont's offer.

But instinctively Lynn knew better. For the space of a few jarring heartbeats his eyes had not been quite as guarded as they were when he spoke to Wolf, and what she saw in their depths told Lynn that he, too, was aware of the exciting something that had flashed between them. Whom was he trying to fool? Wolf?

Wolf explained Dirk's presence to Lynn. "Dirk pilots my plane. I hired him to meet me here."

"Oh, do you have your own plane?" she asked.

He must really be somebody if he could afford a private plane.

"Yes, sometimes I need transportation in a hurry," he said.

Lynn wondered why he had been using a commercial line from Chicago. As if he read her thought, he explained, "I had to leave Dirk for reasons of different things while I was away. If anything unforeseen pops up, he can handle it, and good."

Afterward, Lynn was to ask herself incredulously: How could I have taken such a chance? But at the time she impulsively accepted Wolf Lamont's offer it seemed, in a way, like the answer to a prayer; a made-to-order escape from the painful memory that had caused her to leave Chicago.

Her plane ticket had used up most of her small savings. Suppose she could not immediately find a job when she reached the Coast? Here was Wolf Lamont offering her a good job at his dude ranch. Desperation rendered her decision; desperation—and something else: The sudden compelling urge to be near Dirk Andrews.

For she had not just met Dirk. She had met him in a hundred dreams. She had met him in the pages of books she had loved, in the lyrics of a song. In imagination, she had heard his voice many times, and felt the touch of his hand, the thrill of his lips touching hers, and always she had known that some day she would find him. As the song said: Some day,

TO EVERY LONELY HEART

WHEN DIRK helped her into the green-and-yellow plane that resembled a giant grasshopper squatting on the airstrip, Lynn had the heady sensation that he was flying her to a heavenly, dreamed-of spot where she could forget that fantastic night, with the blinding flashlights of news photographers exploding in her face; forget the barrage of questions shot at her by the police, and the sick despair that had engulfed her when she lost her secretarial job because of the newspaper notoriety.

She slanted a glance at Dirk's profile, cut as the profile on a coin. She wanted to believe that he was pleased that she had accepted Wolf's offer but his expression was as unreadable as Sanskrit.

As they flew over Las Vegas, Wolf pointed out the road which led to the Sapphire. It looked from the air like a dark pencil mark drawn diagonally across a flat, fawn-colored valley, flanked by bare, saw-toothed mountains which the setting sun was tinting with pastel shades of purple and rose.

Lynn's knowledge of dude ranches was extremely limited. She had visualized a rambling ranch house, and perhaps some adjoining cabins.

When the plane glided to earth in the midst of what seemed an incredible oasis in the heart of the desert, she stared in amazement at the red-roofed buildings of dazzling white surrounded by spacious green lawns and flowerbeds, an oblong swimming pool of sapphire blue, and gay-colored umbrellas which dotted the lawns.

"What do you think of our place?" Wolf asked.

"It's beautiful," she gasped. "I never dreamed it would be anything like this."

Neither had she dreamed that gambling provided the real reason for the existence of the Sapphire.

"We really money on the cottages," Wolf informed her as he escorted her into the main building and showed her the beautiful gaming room which adjoined the bar. "It's the dice tables and the roulette and the slot machines that make the money."

Lynn knew that gambling was legal in the state of Nevada, and yet a queer uneasiness began to grip her when Wolf took her to his office on the upper floor and explained about her job.

"My plan is to use you as a sort of hostess in the casino," he told her.

Her breath caught in her throat and she felt the color leave her cheeks. "Oh, no, please—I don't think I—" Something in his probing gaze caused her to pinch off the sentence without finishing it.

"You're not afraid of people, are you,
Lynn?” he asked her much too pointedly.

She steeled herself to say, “No—it’s merely that I’ve never done anything like that. I’m afraid I don’t have the poise or the self-confidence a hostess needs.”

“Just be yourself—that’s all you need to do. Be friendly with the guests. Have a drink with them, and encourage them to play at the tables. But no gambling for you,” he added quickly, “and no dates. If any of the men get—er fresh—or try to start something, Dirk will be Johnny-on-the-spot to handle it. See what I mean?”

Lynn nodded, hoping that her thundering heart was not audible to him. So Dirk was to play watchdog to her. Well, that was a new angle.

Wolf continued his instructions. “We get quite a variety of guests here—a lot of divorcées who are killing time while they wait for their day in court, a number of wealthy vacationers looking for relaxation, and some of the movie people from Hollywood frequently fly over here. So you’ll need the right clothes…”

Dazedly Lynn listened to all the things he told her. She was to have a cottage of her own, he said, and he summoned a boy to escort her to it. Astonishment almost rendered her speechless when she went inside the attractive white building. The living room was done in sage green and coral, and the bedroom was yellow and gray. There was a spacious bathroom with a glass-enclosed shower. An outside stairway led to a sundeck, with a bright blue awning and deck chairs with tangerine covers.

It must be a dream, Lynn told herself. I feel as if somebody had waved a wand and turned me into some sort of a princess.

CHAPTER TWO

Heartbreak in Heaven

She felt even more like a princess when she slid into the evening gown which Wolf had selected for her—a long, clinging sheaf of a skirt of shimmering black slipper satin, split almost to the knee, with a plain, long-sleeved, square-necked top which was fashionably cut to leave her slim midriff bare. No ornaments, except an unusual sapphire ring which Wolf took from a wall safe in his office. At his command, she wore her hair in a shiny golden cloud. It seemed unbelievable that clothes could change a person so much. As she took one last look at her reflection, before presenting herself to Wolf for his inspection, she felt her confidence mounting.

“Temperatures will certainly go up tonight when the crowd sees you in this,” he said with approval. He made her revolve before him then like a mannequin while he surveyed her.

Her pulses were throbbing. She lifted her gaze to Dirk to see whether he, too, approved. But his lips made no comment. Only his eyes said things which sent little thrills racing through her.

Wolf said to him, “Nicer than anything we’ve had to date, eh, Dirk?”

Dirk said tonelessly, “Quite a transformation. Congratulations, Wolf.” He turned abruptly and went down the stairs to the main floor.

Lynn had the queer feeling that he had physically slapped her. But why? She determined to ask him.

It was more than an hour later when he came into the bar where she was seated. She smiled at him and with a slight lift of her chin indicated that she wanted to speak to him. He came over beside her. He looked even more handsome in his dinner jacket. He was as straight as a steel rod and he moved with the smooth gliding step of a boxer. She put a cigarette between her lips and waited for him to light it.

“How do you like my new gown, Dirk?” she smiled up at him provocatively.

His eyes raked over her in a way that brought a wave of color rushing into her cheeks. “It’s very intriguing,” he said, but his voice was as cool as tinkling ice.

“But you don’t like the girl who’s wearing it… Is that it?”

His shoulders lifted. “What gave you that idea?” The line of his jaw was taut but some of the ice had gone out of his voice.

“Well, the way you look at me, as if you didn’t quite approve of me, for one thing, and the way you try to avoid talking to me, for another.” She paused and then asked evenly, “Is there any reason why we can’t be friends, Dirk?”

“A very good reason,” he said bluntly. She looked up at him, puzzled. “Do you mind telling me what it is?”

“You’re a smart girl, Lynn. You ought to be able to figure it out.”

She told herself that she must be crazy to feel about him as she did when he was apparently trying to tell her that he did not even like her.

“Forgive me if I seem to be a little dense,” she persisted, “but I don’t get it.”

“Then I’ll give it to you straight.” He looked quickly, this way and that, as if to make sure he would not be overheard, then he said in a low, tense voice, “For your information, I’m not fool enough to make passes at any girl of Wolf’s. Does that make things clear?”

Her eyes darkened with anger at his insinuation. “And for your information,” she retorted, “I am not Wolf’s girl. I just work for him—the same as you do.”
“Okay, have it your way,” he conceded with an edge in his voice. “But I wasn’t born yesterday, Lynn.” Before she could reply, he walked swiftly away.

The shock of what he said sent alarm rocketing through her. Had he merely formed his own conclusion or had Wolf warned him that he had earmarked her for himself? If the latter were true, Wolf was certainly playing a peculiar waiting game for so far his attitude toward her had been strictly business-like. True, there were the clothes he had bought for her, but when she had remonstrated about accepting them he had told her laughingly that her new wardrobe was “on the house.”

“Our hostess has to be dressed to match the surroundings, doesn’t she?” he said.

She had feared that he might suggest that the proper “gratitude” was all he would expect in return, but he had made no such suggestion. She wished that she had given Dirk a piece of her mind.

As she sat at the bar sipping her drink she found herself wondering where Wolf had found Dirk. He wore a small gold service button and she supposed that he must have been in the Air Corps during the war. She had a sudden impulse to ask Charlie, the bartender, about him. She leaned across the bar to speak to Charlie, and at that instant she heard Wolf’s voice.

“How are things going?” he asked.

She forced her lips into the semblance of a smile. “I’m having a very interesting time,” she answered. “I’ve never seen anything like this crowd.”

It was really a colorful scene. Women in Adrian gowns rubbing shoulders at the dice table with cowboys and ranchers; women in frontier pants and brilliant handkerchiefs knotted about their throats; business men in levis and Stetsons, trying to look like buckaroos. Wolf called her attention to a woman at the roulette table, playing with hundred dollar bills instead of chips. She was a wealthy divorcée, he said. He pointed out a millionaire from Mexico City, a banker from the East, a Hollywood executive.

“Better get acquainted with them,” he suggested.

As he moved out of the bar, through the archway to the casino, Lynn tried to tell herself that it was only because Dirk had planted the idea in her mind, but she had the uneasy feeling that Wolf would somehow know where she was at any given moment, and with whom, and how long she talked. She changed her mind about questioning Charlie. Charlie might report her interest in Dirk to Wolf.

THE GEM-LIKE days flowed by like jewels melted by the sun. Because she was up late at night, she usually slept until noon, and then she spent an hour or so on the sundeck or at the pool. She tanned quickly and well and her skin was flawless under the apricot patina. She sensed that the women guests were curious about her. The men made no attempt to disguise their interest in her and several of them had offered to stake her if she wanted to play at the tables. In each instance she told them graciously that she did not gamble.

Wolf saw to it that her cottage was filled with fresh flowers each day, and there was a Negro maid, Verna, who looked after her clothes and brought her breakfast each morning. Verna had little to say, at first, but as they became better acquainted she was more talkative.

“You’ve much nicer than Mr. Lamont’s last girl,” she said one evening when she was helping Lynn dress. “She didn’t have nice manners like you, Miss Lynn.”

Embarrassment spread its hot color across Lynn’s face. So Dirk was not the only one who thought she was Wolf’s girl. A small voice within told her not to do it, but she could not resist asking, “What became of the other girl?”

“I don’t rightly know,” Verna replied. “She left kinda sudden like. I heard say that Mr. Lamont was awful mad.”

The sudden thought came to Lynn: Maybe the girl fell in love with Dirk. But if that were true wouldn’t Wolf have fired Dirk? More and more, she had the uncomfortable feeling that she was living on the brinky edge of a volcano that might erupt at any minute without warning.

If it were going to erupt, she decided perversely, it might be better to have it over with at once. At least she would know then just what the true situation was. And so late that night when Wolf asked her to join him in a drink she impulsively tossed a bombshell into their midst.

Dirk had paused at the table to say something to Wolf. The orchestra was playing a torchy number and Lynn smiled up at Dirk and suggested, “Why don’t you ask me to dance, Dirk? I’m dying for a dance and I’m sure Wolf will excuse us for a while—won’t you, Wolf?”

Wolf’s face was a mask. “Go ahead and dance if you wish,” he said stiffly.

It was the first time Dirk had actually touched her and as his arm encircled her Lynn knew instantly that he had not been as indifferent to her as he had tried to pretend. There was sheer witchcraft in the contact of their bodies. Neither of them spoke as they gave themselves completely to the golden flame of the music.

Finally Lynn said, half teasingly, “Do you still think we can’t be friends, Dirk?”

His arm tightened about her and his lips
were very close to her hair. He said in a low, tense voice, "Just being friends wouldn't work with us, Lynn. It would have to be all—or nothing. Anything less would be torture for both of us."

There was an intensity about him that she had never seen, never felt before. Its unexpectedness made her feel more confused than ever.

She wanted to cry out to him, Oh, Dirk, darling, you do love me then—you must—

But before her lips could form any words at all, he commanded, "Don't ever ask me to dance with you again! It could only spell heartbreak for both of us." She looked at him incredulously, and he added, "Get that look out of your eyes before I take you back to Wolf."

"What look?" she asked breathlessly.

"You heard me," he said.

Lynn's feet seemed scarcely to touch the floor as they went back to Wolf's table. If he noticed anything different in her eyes, he made no mention of it.

But a little later, after Dirk had excused himself and left the table, Wolf said casually, "Do you like it here at the Sapphire?"

The question sounded innocent enough but Lynn answered warily, "Yes, Wolf, I like it fine—so far."

"Then take my advice," he said cryptically, "and remember which side your bread is buttered on. Don't make any foolish mistakes which might prove costly."

"I'll try not to," she assured him.

Throughout the remainder of the evening, and later when she was trying unsuccessfully to go to sleep, Wolf's words stayed with her like a bad taste in the mouth. What, exactly, did he mean? She wished that she had summoned courage to ask him to explain.

THE FOLLOWING morning there was a note from Wolf on her breakfast tray. It said merely that he was leaving on a brief business trip. Remember my advice, the note concluded.

Throughout the day Lynn puzzled over that note, and try as she would she could not dismiss the feeling that Wolf had probably left someone to spy on her during his absence. She stayed in her cottage until late afternoon, and then finally convincing herself that she was being overly imaginative, she put on her bathing suit and went over to the swimming pool. The sun was about to disappear behind the mountains and the pool was usually deserted at this hour. It was deserted now—except for one person.

"Hi, there!" Dirk called to her from the water. For the first time since she had known him, there was a warmth in his greeting. It was almost as if, with Wolf away, he dared to be himself. "Come on in," he urged, "I'll race you across the pool."

She dived into the water. It was wonderful, swimming along beside him, feeling anew his strength and vitality. All the tautness and the worry seemed to leave her. They swam the length of the pool, and then they floated lazily on their backs and watched a plane flying above them. Finally they pulled themselves out of the water and sat on the edge of the pool. It was the first time they had actually been alone together.

"You swim well," Dirk complimented her.

"Where did you learn?"

Her breath caught in her throat. Was she always to feel this quick fear when anyone asked about her past, even someone she trusted?

"I learned to swim in the Mississippi," she said. "I grew up in a river town." She hoped that her breathlessness from swimming would explain the unsteadiness of her voice.

For a minute or so he was silent, and then abruptly he asked, "What's a nice kid like you doing in a clip joint like the Sapphire?"

Her shoulders lifted. "I happened to need a job," she said with pretended nonchalance. "Girls do sometimes, you know. What are you doing here?" she countered.

A muscle tightened along his jaw. "That's a long story. Didn't Wolf tell you?"

She shook her head.

"I got myself involved in a little jam," he confessed.

"And Wolf got you out of it?" she asked.

"I guess that's as good a way to put it as any," he said with a trace of irony in his voice.

"I'm glad you told me," she said softly. "I've sort of wondered about you." For a second she was tempted to tell him about herself, but his next words stopped her.

"Listen, Lynn," he said suddenly, and there was an earnestness in his voice which startled her. "This is no place for you. Promise me that you'll clear out before it's too late." His eyes were pinioning hers.

She asked in a voice that was anything but steady, "Why, Dirk? Why do you want me to promise that?"

He caught her hand and squeezed it hard.

"Can't you guess?"

She searched his eyes. They seemed to be saying as clearly as if he had spoken the words aloud, Because I love you, and I don't want the girl I love working for Wolf Lamont.

She asked shakily, wanting to be sure, "Do you mean—what I think you mean?"

He bent closer but no words came in answer to her question. Instead, caution forgotten, his lips sought hers with swift urgency, telling her more eloquently than any words could have done just what he meant.

Recklessly, Lynn responded to his kiss with
all the love and longing that had been vibrating through her like torment. When she had regained her breath, she whispered, “As soon as Wolf returns, I’ll tell him I’m leaving.”

He was suddenly controlled again. “Handle it with care, baby,” he said, “and keep this little talk strictly off the record.”

AFTERWARD, LYNN was to wonder how she could have been naïve enough to imagine that it would be a simple matter of telling Wolf that she had decided to leave the Sapphire. Even when she faced him across his desk the following day, she had no sense of foreboding. He seemed to be in a good mood as he waited for her to tell him what was on her mind.

“I’m giving up my job here, Wolf,” she blurted it out.

He did not comment for a second, just looked at her in a strange accusing way. “So you did not take me seriously when I advised you not to make foolish mistakes,” he said.

Uneasiness began to spread over her, but she braved his sardonic gaze and said, “It isn’t a mistake for me to go, Wolf.”

“But it sure was a big mistake for you to fall in love with Dirk.” His voice was like the snap of a whip. “I gave you credit for being a lot smarter than that.”

Was he making this accusation to test her, to see what she would say? Her face had paled, but she forced herself to ask, almost coolly, “Who says I’m in love with Dirk?”

“I have a good pair of eyes,” he said pointedly, “and the people in my employ see very well, too.”

She knew that it would be useless to deny it, and though her throat felt tight, she managed to say with amazing candor, “Suppose I have fallen in love with him! Wouldn’t it be perfectly natural?”

Wolf’s massive shoulders lifted slightly. “Natural, maybe,” he conceded, “but not very smart.” He leaned forward, his keen eyes probing hers. “The smart thing, my dear, would be to fall in love with me. Shall I tell you why?”

She could not answer. She could not even nod her head. Her heart had crowded up into her throat and a strange sense of disaster began to close in on her. There was suddenly something lecherous and frightening about Wolf.

“The Sapphire,” he went on in a voice that was almost suave, “makes a very cosy hideaway for a girl who doesn’t want to be recognized. Don’t you think so, Linda Miller?”

The shock of hearing her real name went through her like an icy dagger, causing an ache to spread over her body, stiffening her lips so that she could not speak. So he had known her true identity all the time! As if to prove it to her, he took a folded newspaper clipping from his billfold and passed it across the desk to her. She had no need to look at it. Every word of the fantastic story was burned into her memory . . .

POLICE CATCH UP WITH NOTORIOUS DAN BOGARD

Linda Miller, Mysterious Redhead, Who Was His Date When Bogard Shot It Out With Cops.

Finally she managed to ask in a ragged voice, “Why have you waited so long to tell me this? Why didn’t you tell me that day in Denver?”

The faintest of smiles curved his lips. “Maybe I wanted to give you a chance to appreciate how safe you could be here with me—so long as you played it smart.”

He paused to let his words sink in, and then he added speculatively, “I wonder what our friend Dirk would say if he happened to find out that you were one of Dan Bogard’s accomplices?”

“That is not true,” she cried out in quick denial. “I never saw Dan Bogard until the night the police caught up with him. I didn’t even know that was his name. I met him on a blind date and he was introduced to me as Monty Smith, a business man from St. Paul. I never even dreamed that he was wanted by the police.”

“And they let you get away with that story?” Wolf sneered.

“It was the truth!” she almost shouted the words at him.

“Do you think Dirk would swallow it?”

For the space of a few painful heartbeats Lynn stared at the wedge of afternoon sunlight slanting across Wolf’s desk. Maybe, she tried to persuade herself, if she told Dirk everything, from the beginning . . . about the dull little river town she grew up in where nothing ever happened; about going to Chicago and finding a job as a stenographer because her foolish heart yearned for a more glamorous life. Maybe if she told him how lonely she was during those first months in the city when she knew no one, he would understand how she had clutched at the chance to go on a date which included dinner and dancing, even though it was a blind date, and even though she barely knew the girl who had invited her. Yes, Dirk would understand, her heart whispered assurance.

“Dirk would believe my story,” she said with pretended confidence. “I know he would.”

“Don’t be stupid,” Wolf scoffed. “A gambler’s girl taught Dirk a lesson he’s still paying for. A girl named Muriel. She used to work here as a hostess and Dirk fell for her. She was a redhead and as intoxicating as tequila.
She found out that he was just out of the Air Corps and had a wad of mustering-out pay burning his pockets. She introduced him to a guy named Nick Seville, and between the two of them they stripped Dirk cleaner than a hound's tooth. Muriel even talked him into signing a flock of IOU's here at the casino, to try to win back his losses. That's why he's working for me—to pay them off."

"Oh!" A faint choking sound escaped Lynn's lips.

"So you can see how Dirk feels about girls who are mixed up with gamblers. They're just plain poison as far as he is concerned."

Her hands were clasped so tightly they ached. "Are you going to tell him?" Her voice betrayed her fear.

"That depends on you, my dear." He rose from his desk and moved over beside her. "When I find something that appeals to me I don't relish losing it. You appeal to me plenty, Lynn. In fact, I fell in love with you that day in Denver, when you asked me to tell the taxi driver you were my wife. I knew who you were then. I had the clippings from the Chicago papers in my pocket. But your past didn't make any difference to me. I made up my mind that day, when we were sitting in the bar, that I'd make you my wife. You could have a pretty sweet life here, Lynn. If you can't see it, then..." His shoulders lifted, and there was not the slightest doubt about his meaning.

NEVER BEFORE had Lynn realized what a cruel mouth Wolf had and how steel-like his eyes could be. She wanted to cry out, "I wouldn't marry you, Wolf Lamont, if you were the last man on earth." But she knew that she must not let herself go to pieces. She must try to play it smart, as Wolf would say, at least until she could gain time to think coherently. She drew a constricted breath and moistened her dry lips, intending to ask him if she could give him her answer later. At that instant there was a staccato knock on the door—and Dirk walked in. The blood in Lynn's veins seemed to turn to ice and the room swam before her.

Dirk asked, "Am I interrupting something?"

Wolf said nonchalantly, "No, I was just going to call you. Lynn and I have been discussing our marriage plans. I'll be wanting you to fly us to Santa Barbara—or maybe Lake Tahoe—right after the wedding ceremony. We want to go to some beautiful spot for our honeymoon where we can be strictly alone."

He spoke with the confident air of one who is betting four aces against a possible pair of deuces.

Dirk stood rooted in silence and his face went as white as if he had been struck across the mouth. The very sight of him twisted Lynn's heart and she lived the next few moments in a weeping wave of nausea and heartbreak.

"When is the happy event to take place?" Dirk asked in a well-controlled voice which contradicted the shock in his eyes.

Wolf said, "I think we'll have the knot tied tomorrow." He turned his gaze to Lynn and asked ruthlessly, "Is that okay with you, my dear?"

Those were the words his lips uttered but his eyes held the ultimatum: If you are foolish enough to say no, I'll hand these newspaper clippings over to Dirk.

She said in sheer helplessness on a choking breath, "I—I guess tomorrow will be as good a day as any." She thought imploringly, Oh, Dirk, darling, can't you see that I'm being forced into this marriage as surely as if Wolf had a gun against my ribs?

Somehow, she managed to walk blindly out of Wolf's office. In the quiet of her cottage, she threw herself on the bed, hands clenched until the nails grooved the pink flesh of her palms. For a while she gritted her teeth and tried to keep the tears back. And then, like a dam bursting, they flooded her eyes as the sick realization swept over her that she was right back in the horrible nightmare she had known in Chicago—only now it was worse because she had a broken heart to add to her misery. Of course, her mind tried feebly to reason, she still had a choice of action. But what a choice! She could stay at the Sapphire and marry Wolf and endure the agony of seeing Dirk every night. Or she could try to run away and never see Dirk again, ever!

Her heart tried to whisper, If you run away, Dirk would find you. But her head knew better. Dirk would not want to find her when he learned who she was, and the minute she ran away, Wolf would certainly tell him.

You would be just plain poison to Dirk... Wolf's words echoed painfully in her ears. If it had not been for that other girl, Muriel, he might have believed her story. But not now. Bitterly she knew that Dirk would think, as Wolf had, that it was too pat to be true.

She tried to think, but her wits seemed to have dissolved, and she felt strangely without volition, as if she had lost the power to think or move. At last, she dragged herself up from the bed, peeled off her clothes. Then, like an automaton, she went into the bathroom, turned on the shower, and let the cool water cascade over her trembling body. In a state of foggy desperation, she dressed and went over to the casino, steeled for the familiar pattern of her evening. But it was almost as if some outside force were hurrying her relentlessly along, a dynamic force which she was not strong enough to stop.
CHAPTER THREE

From the Very First Moment

BLINDLY SHE entered the private corridor which led to the gaming room. Suddenly she was aware that someone was coming toward her. She lifted her gaze and saw Dirk's eyes, dark with anger and bafflement, burning into hers. He stopped directly in front of her and stood there motionless. She tried to speak but no words would come. What could she say? His fingers clamped on her shoulders. His kiss was quick and hard.

"That's a kiss of congratulation for the bride," he said scornfully.

Lynn tried to move but she seemed rooted, and suddenly his arms closed about her compellingly tight, and this time his kiss was slow and tantalizing and completely brutal.

"And that," he said grimly, "is to congratulate you on your success at fooling me—making me think you were a sweet kid who had got yourself in a wrong spot."

Fury and hurt glowed in his eyes.

Lynn made a weak, futile attempt to tell him how wrong he was. "It isn't the way it looks, Dirk. Please—try to believe me," she begged.

He flung her from him and said derisively, "I hope Wolf finds your lips as eager and yielding as I did yesterday."

Her hands clenched, and she started to cry out, "You fool—you blind, stupid fool!"

But Dirk had stalked away, leaving her in the empty corridor, a small huddle of misery.

By making a supreme effort she forced her rigid legs to carry her into the bar. Guilt and shame and anguish went through her in sickening waves. Weakly, she climbed on one of the bar stools and asked Charlie for a sherry. Maybe it would help her to get hold of herself.

Charlie gave her a curious look, for she seldom asked for anything stronger than a liqueur. "Aren't you feeling well tonight?" he asked.

"I have a headache," she smiled faintly at him. Had Wolf told Charlie or any of the others about his marriage plans? Charlie seemed to have something on his mind.

After a while he leaned across the bar and said in a low, confidential voice, "I ran into your predecessor this afternoon in Las Vegas. She's calling out the bingo numbers at the Bijou."

"Muriel?" Lynn gasped, and was astonished that the name should have come so quickly to her lips.

Charlie nodded. "Just between you and me I don't think her luck has been so hot since she left the Sapphire."

Questions about Muriel swirled in Lynn's mind. Did Wolf know she was in Las Vegas?

Did Dirk know? Was Dirk really in love with her in the days when she was at the Sapphire? Why had she come back? Did Charlie know? But she held her tongue.

Charlie, she had reason to believe, was her friend, but after all, it was Wolf who paid his salary so it only stood to reason that he would be careful about answering. A group of guests came into the casino and Lynn finished her drink and went nervously to greet them.

There was the same familiar gaiety, the same familiar sounds... the whir of the roulette wheel, the clicking of the slot machines, the shaking of dice, the murmur of voices... and somehow the hours dragged by. Lynn did not know exactly when it happened, but all at once her thoughts became coherent and she knew beyond any doubt that she had to leave the Sapphire at once, and she had to do it without letting anyone know. Where she would go, what she would do, were questions that would have to be answered later. The urgent thing was to get away.

Though she was quaking inside, she managed to be charming to the guests and keep herself so constantly busy that neither Wolf nor Dirk would have a chance to speak to her. As the clock edged up toward midnight, it suddenly occurred to her that she had not seen Dirk threading his way through the gaming room, as was his custom. As a matter of fact, she had not seen Wolf; either, although he must be somewhere about. If only she could get through the next fifteen minutes without his appearing! The pulse at her temples was pounding and her nerves were keyed to a high pitch.

AND THEN, as if some psychic sense had warned him of her intention, she heard Wolf's voice beside her. "I've made our reservations for Lake Tahoe," he said.

Swift panic gripped her. Should she tell him point-blank that she had no intention of marrying him, or should she pretend that she was going through with it? Intuition told her that it would be wiser to pretend. She forced her lips to say, "Lake Tahoe—I've heard it's beautiful there."

"It's a regular jewel of a place," he said. Then he added with a cocky wink, "Speaking of jewels—come on up to my office. I have something special to show you."

Lynn felt her face grow taut, and the panic which she was trying so hard to control rocketed through her. "Please, Wolf—can't it wait until tomorrow? I have such a frightful headache." She should have known, of course, that he would not accept such a feeble alibi.

"A glass of champagne from my private stock will help that," he assured her. Turning toward the bar, he asked Charlie if he had seen Dirk.
“Not since early this evening,” Charlie said. Wolf shot a suspicious look at Lynn. “Have you seen him?” she asked. She shook her head and he said to Charlie, “Have one of the boys try to locate him and send him up to my office. I want to give him some instructions about tomorrow.”

As he spoke, he linked Lynn’s hand through his, and started moving toward the circular stairs which led from the gaming room to his office.

Wolf’s office opened on a mezzanine floor, but there was another stairway which led up from the patio, to provide an easy exit. He flung open the ivory-paneled door and snapped on the light—and there was Dirk, sitting there waiting for him.

But it was certainly not Dirk who cried out, “Wolf, darling!”

UNBELIEVINGLY, LYNN saw a slender girl rush forward and throw her arms about Wolf’s neck. Even before he said in a harsh, stunned voice, “What are you doing here?” she knew that it must be Muriel.

Wolf jerked the girl’s arms from about his neck and glared at her. His usually ruddy face had paled and it was plain that her presence was a shock.

“Just a little surprise, Wolf,” Muriel smiled up at him provocatively. “I heard that you were about to enter the holy bonds of matrimony and I thought I’d remind you that it’s customary to take legal steps to get rid of wife Number One before you take on Number Two. See what I mean?” Her words sounded as if they had been dipped in acid.

Lynn heard them incomprehendingly. Even Wolf seemed for once to have been knocked speechless. When he finally found his voice, it was rough with anger.

“That ceremony we went through in Mexico was a phony and you know it!”

“I know that’s what you told me afterward,” she agreed. “But—just for fun—and because my luck has been a little sour lately—I took the trouble to step across the border at Nogales and do a little checking up.”

She faced Wolf defiantly. “The little guy who married us had every right to do so, and even though we were both pretty high at the time it happened, our marriage is recorded in the right place, Wolf. You can bet I made sure of that.”

“You devil!” he said hoarsely, and made an angry gesture toward her. But something stopped him. Maybe it was the look on Dirk’s face. “I suppose this is your doing,” he said accusingly to Dirk.

“But strictly coincidental, I assure you,” Dirk answered coolly. “I heard tonight that Muriel was in town, so I took time off to look her up. I figured I might settle that little score with her that you are so familiar with.” A grim smile twisted his lips. “When the cards were all on the table, several little mysteries were cleared up, and among other things Muriel let the cat out of the bag that she was your wife.”

Utterly incredulous, Lynn listened to what Dirk was saying, and vaguely she knew that it meant she would not be forced to marry Wolf, but her sense of relief was only momentary. She saw Wolf’s eyes glitter.

“And I suppose you thought,” he sneered at Dirk, “that if you confronted me with Muriel and her little story that you would be able to step in and take Lynn away from me. Well, the joke’s on you, boy. Lynn is a smoother article than Muriel ever dreamed of being. Wait till I tell you who she really is, and whose girl she was—”

But he got no further. Lightning-fast, Dirk leaped to his feet, his clenched fist cracking against Wolf’s jaw with a blow that rocked him on his heels, but only for a second.

Viciously, Wolf lashed back, and blood spurted from Dirk’s cheek. Sickened, her heart pounding in her throat, Lynn saw Wolf’s powerful fist smash again. She felt as though a thick fog were rising about her, filling the room, filling the world, choking her, making everything sway crazily.

And then she was running down the stairs, through the gaming room, across the lawn to her cottage, only one desperate thought swirling frantically through her mind—to get away.

She had very little to pack, for of course she would not take any of the clothes Wolf had provided. Helter-skelter, she crammed her personal belongings into the suitcase; pulled off her evening gown, the beautiful sandals and sheer hose, and put on the plain black suit—the bargain-sale suit in which Linda Miller had left Chicago.

It was odd how her fingers could unfasten and fasten zippers, pull on a blouse and button it, as of their own volition. It was odd how she could go on breathing, living, when her heart was like a dead leaden thing in her breast. Dirk would never know now that she never intended to marry Wolf, even if Muriel had not appeared. He would never know her true story, never know how much she loved him. In his eyes and memory she would forever be a “smooth article,” as Wolf put it, smoother than the unscrupulous Muriel, from whom he would doubtless consider himself lucky to have escaped. And then, in stunned disbelief, she heard Dirk’s voice.

SHE TURNED quickly, certain that it must have been her imagination, and looked straight into his eyes, and saw blazing there—or was she dreaming it—that electric something she had glimpsed that day in Denver.
“Lynn . . .” he said. Just her name, low and tense, as his hands reached out and gripped both her wrists to pull her toward him. Then, “Lynn, darling!” His strangled exclamation was almost a sob as his arms closed urgently about her.

Unbelievingly, she felt the burning imprint of his kiss on her lips. It was too impossible, too like heaven to be true. She looked searchingly into his eyes.

“Why did you follow me—why did you kiss me like that?” she asked shakily.

“Because I love you.” His voice was husky, earnestly so. “I’ve got a taxi outside and we’re getting out of here fast.”

She thought wildly, Then he doesn’t know. Wolf hasn’t told him. So she would have to. She took a deep, despairing breath. “Maybe—when you know who I am—how I happened to—”

He put his hand gently over her mouth. “But I do know, Lynn, and I know your story—the part the newspapers printed, the part Wolf was using to blackmail you into marrying him.”

Her eyes were misty pools of disbelief. “And you love me—in spite of that?”

“T’ve loved you since the very first day I saw you, and I nearly went nuts trying to figure out how you ever got linked up with Wolf. Then when I started to believe you were in love with me, to be hit in the face with the news that you were going to marry Wolf . . . Oh, darling, something exploded inside me. I couldn’t think or reason it out. All I wanted to do was to hurt you.”

“I tried to tell you tonight, when I met you in the hall,” she said chokedly.

“I know you did—and I wouldn’t listen.” He kissed her again with deep, hungry longing. “Oh, baby,” he groaned, “suppose Charlie hadn’t tipped me off that Muriel was in town. Suppose I hadn’t found her!”

He told her then how he had gone to the Bijou in Las Vegas to see Muriel, never dreaming that she had ever been married to Wolf; how he had told her that Wolf was marrying her successor and she had exploded with, “Over my dead body!”

“But I would never have gone through with the marriage,” Lynn said honestly, “even if Muriel hadn’t appeared. I couldn’t have married him! I had already determined to run away tonight—as soon as I could get away from him.”

Suddenly he grinned down at her. “Well, what are we waiting for!” He grabbed her bag with one arm, Lynn with the other.

The next thing she knew she was beside him in a taxi, speeding toward Las Vegas, and his arm was holding her tight. She still could not believe it.

“There’s one thing you haven’t told me yet,” he said. “You haven’t said, ‘I love you, Dirk.’”

She clung to him, her eyes lifted to his. “Oh, I do, darling,” she cried out, “I do! It started, I guess, the minute I saw you. It was why I accepted the job Wolf offered me—because I wanted to be near you.”

Her eyes filled with foolish tears and he kissed them away.

---

**Purple Heart**

*by Ursula Malchow*

*The veterans of foreign wars*

*Wear ribbons on their chests*

*To show the world that courage once*

*Beat in their manly breasts.*

*A woman shows her courage, too,*

*In a different way.*

*On days when she is very sad*

*Her lipstick is quite gay!*
Prescription
For Romance

by
Alice Warner

In the lottery of love, Merry could draw a second chance
at heartbreak—or a first prize in romance.

IT WASN'T Spence. It couldn't be!
Merry Holmes stared unbelievingly at
the tall figure clad in white, striding along
the corridor toward her. She told herself frantically, So what? So it's Spence. He's just an-
other addition to the staff. Behave, heart!

But with the appearance of Dr. Spencer
Cartwright, six years were erased, swiftly and
violently.

Merry had known Spence was coming ever
since the Chief, as gray-haired Dr. Morgan
was called, had told her Dr. Cartwright would
be the new interne. That had given her a
month to get used to the idea of typing
Spence's medical notes, writing up case his-
tories, taking messages. One month of warn-
ing herself to be strictly impersonal.

After walking out of her life and never so
much as writing, except for Christmas cards
and a note when her father died, Spence didn't
deserve a royal welcome or any welcome. But
here he was, standing before her, his dark eyes
serious, his lips smiling, and saying calmly,
"Hello, darling."

Six years might have been six days.
His studied glance took in her slim figure in
its tailored blue dress, her fair skin, her halo
of gold-specked auburn hair. Dresden doll, he
had nicknamed her, but there was nothing in-
animate about Merry. When she smiled it was
like a flood of sunshine.

She wasn't smiling now. When Spence had
the effrontery to add, "Miss me?" her heart
flashed a storm warning.

"I've been too busy. Now if you'll excuse me—"

But he blocked the door to her office. "So

that's how it is," he said dryly. "I thought
you understood I had to go away to med school
without any attachments. I thought you knew
how I felt about you."

He grasped her arm, but she wrenched her-
self free. "If I were that good a mind reader,
I'd be working the carnivals this year!"

Why did she have to pick this moment to
remember the wonderful week ends when she
was a student at Temple and Spence was at
Dickinson. Those glorious college dances with
Merry so young, so gloriously happy as he
whirled her about the ballroom. How she had
loved the tall, debonair Spence! But she
mustn't think of that happiness now, she re-
mined herself.

"I only knew you walked out of my life,"
she told him bitterly. "You couldn't expect me
to sit here and mark time."

He shrugged impatiently. "No, I suppose
not." Then he grinned infectiously. "Well,
now that I'm back, we'll make up for lost
time."

Of all the nerve! "Sorry, Spence," she said
coolly, holding up her left hand so he could
see the sparkling star sapphire with its encir-
cling diamonds.

His face darkened, and Merry told herself
she should be glad to see the hurt, defeated
expression in his eyes. It served him right.
But she didn't feel the least bit triumphant.
Her mind flashed back to the terrible days she
had spent when she returned to Baltimore to
be with her father, who was then chief pedia-
trician here at the hospital, and Spence had
stayed on at medical school in Pennsylvania.
During those lonely, empty days came the real-
ization that Spence was determined to give all
his time and energy to his work.
If only he had asked her to wait! But he didn’t exact any promises, and four years of loneliness had stretched ahead for Merry. Then two more years when Spence entered the Army. Lonely years until Reid came along.

“I heard you were engaged,” Spence was saying bitterly, “but I didn’t believe it. I couldn’t imagine you being in love with anyone else. Conceited, wasn’t I?”

Merry laughed uncertainly. “Terribly.”

“Who is he?”

“Reid Belmont. You’ve probably read about him. He’s a well-known lawyer . . . expects to run for state senator.”

Merry spoke proudly as she thought of Reid’s brilliant record and of the newspapers’ predictions that he would go far in political circles. His serious gray eyes, his firm chin, his determined walk, his earnestness were all factors the papers played up. He was a good man, they insisted, steady, reliable, level-headed.

“You should be quite a help,” Spence said, a note of irony in his voice. “You know all the right people.”

Merry chose to ignore the remark. “I’m very proud of him,” she said decidedly.

It was then that Spence laughed, a short, triumphant laugh. “So you’re trying to convince yourself? Maybe I’m not too late after all.”

“The psychopathic ward’s over there,” she told him firmly.

He caught her by the arm. “I’m dead right and you know it,” he said huskily. “You’d be miserable with a lawyer. Why, medicine’s your second love as much as it is mine. We’d make a great team.”

“Thanks for the advice, doctor, but you’re slipping. Now if you’ll pardon me, I have work to do.”

“I can see this case will require a little thought,” he said in a gravely professional tone, and turning quickly, started down the corridor.

“But I’m sure my diagnosis is correct,” he called back.

When he was out of sight Merry sank down at her desk feeling shaken and miserable, his words still ringing in her ears. She glanced at the picture on her desk, the picture of a white-haired man with kind eyes and a smile playing about his lips. Oh, Dad, she thought desperately, I wish you were here to help me.

She and her father had been pals, for Merry was only ten when she lost her mother. He hadn’t left her too well fixed, for he was always using his own money in research work, and Merry had taken this job in the hospital he had loved so much. Her work and Reid were her only interests.

But now Spence had bolted back into her life. What right had he to try to change her mind? Working with him she couldn’t ignore him, but she could adopt an impersonal attitude. She would convince him she was a coolly efficient secretary, nothing more. And she and Reid would go ahead with their plans—right away.

That night, returning from the Lovelaces’ dinner party, Merry slipped her hand through Reid’s arm and said, “Honey, let’s get married next week.”

She could tell by the way his thick eyebrows jerked upward that she had surprised him. He took his eyes off the road a minute to look at her carefully. Merry knew he was planning what to say. He never spoke impulsively as she did. Perhaps it was the working of a legal mind, but tonight she wished he would hurry.

“Merry,” he said patiently, “you know how busy I am at present. I thought we had planned to wait until after the campaign and we could move to Annapolis.” He added a short laugh to take the over-confidence out of the last sentence.

Merry let a sigh of disappointment escape. “You don’t seem to understand, Reid,” she said, trying to match his patient tone. “I don’t care whether we live in a mansion in Annapolis or in one room here. Just so we’re happy. Just so it’s all settled.”

“You seem afraid that if we aren’t married this minute, we won’t be. That’s foolish,” he told her.

“It was just an idea,” she said quickly. “Perhaps I am being foolish.”

But silently she was warning herself that her heart had always been a foolish thing where Spence Cartwright was concerned.

The next morning she became desperately certain that Spence was going to be concerned—with everything she did. She found a dictaphone cylinder on her desk to be transcribed. The minute she switched on the machine and heard Spence’s deep, vibrant voice in the earphones, she got panicky, and her fingers persisted in striking the wrong typewriter keys. She was thankful her assistant, Peg Roberts, was out to lunch. Peg had an uncanny way of guessing the score.

Merry was frantically making an erasure when a voice said, “You look like a thundercloud waiting to burst.”

She spun around to face Dr. Morgan smiling at her from the doorway. The Chief’s gray hair and kindly blue eyes always reminded her of her father, and Merry was genuinely fond of him.

“I—I didn’t see you come in,” she stammered, realizing her expression must have been one of anger and frustration. “I’m having a little trouble.”

The Chief crossed the room and glanced at the paper in the typewriter. “Oh, Dr. Cart-
wright's notes. He seems to be a splendid young fellow, eager and hardworking. I suppose it is difficult to get used to new dictation, but it'll come easier with time."

Merry started to tell him she was quite familiar with Spence's manner of speaking, but she decided against it. Let him think they had been casual friends before Spence came to the hospital, or, better still, let him believe they had never met.

When the Chief was gone Merry switched on the dictaphone again. This time she concentrated on the words, not the voice. She had a lot of fighting spirit in her, and in that way took after her father, who had died experimenting with a new serum. Merry had often wished he weren't such a fighter, but she knew he was making a better world for future generations.

Now she would have to fight for happiness for herself with Reid. She would defeat this panic, or she wasn't Dr. Holmes' daughter.

With relief she typed what she was sure must be the end of the notes. But Spence's next words set her pulses racing again.

"You're still my Dresden doll and I love you," he was saying confidently. "You can't marry this ambition-ridden fiancé of yours. I'll do something drastic if you insist on going through with it."

Merry pulled the earphones from her head as though they were threatening to electrocute her. She stared at them, thinking the metal discs should have melted after that speech of Dr. Cartwright's.

Turbulent anger surged up inside of her. And yet there was a discordant note of admiration. Spence had indeed chosen a clever way to get to her. He was smart all right. Well, she would show him she was smarter by not mentioning the speech.

She was taking dictation from the Chief the following day when Spence strode in. Dr. Morgan rose, shook hands, and said, "I wanted to talk to you about the Randall boy, Cartwright."

Merry felt Spence's eyes on her face, so she said quickly, "Will that be all for now, sir?"

The Chief said, "Yes, I'll ring for you. Oh Merry, you've met Dr. Cartwright, haven't you?" and to Spence, "Miss Holmes seems to be having trouble with your dictation. Maybe you could speak a little plainer."

Spence's eyes twinkled, but he said seriously, "I'm sorry, Miss Holmes, if I didn't make myself clear. From now on I'll make a more concentrated effort."

Merry's cheeks burned and she swallowed hard to keep back a flood of stormy words. "If you'll just stop rambling, it would help ever so much," she said sweetly.

A smile threatened to break through on Spence's face. "Oh, I see what you mean,"

he replied gravely. "But there's one case I feel so strongly about, it's hard to restrain myself."

The Chief's head was swinging back and forth like a metronome. He cleared his throat vehemently and pointed to a chair, his eyes hopefully on Spence. Merry was thankful for the exit cue.

Her hand was on the door knob when Spence said, "Oh, Miss Holmes, I just left another cylinder on your desk. I do hope it's easier to transcribe than the last."

Merry's eyes flashed but she merely smiled coolly. She tried not to rush to her office, even though her heart was pounding madly. Suppose there were a message at the end of these notes? Didn't Spence know how dangerous it was to leave his crazy, reckless words lying about where Peg Roberts could get hold of them.

The sight of Peg industriously typing started Merry's brain sending frantic messages to her lips.

"Are those Dr. Cartwright's notes?" she asked, trying to be casual.

Peg's blue eyes glittered as she nodded her blond head. "Hasn't he the most wonderful voice?"

Merry yanked the earphones away. "Run along to lunch. I'll finish."

The blonde looked stunned. "But I—"

"Did you hear me?" Merry blurted out. "I said I'd finish." Then she took a deep breath. "Sorry, Peg. I didn't mean to be cross."

When she was alone, Merry stared numbly at the dictaphone machine. Drat Spence, she thought furiously. In the short time he's been back he's succeeded in letting the Chief think I'm becoming temperamental and in making me argue first with Reid, now with Peg. He's made me restless and impatient.

Then, too, the words "ambition-ridden," as Spence had applied them to Reid, kept coming into her head, making her resentful and defiant. Especially today. She and Reid were to be dinner guests at the home of Mrs. Drew Williams, and it was an important occasion for Reid. Mrs. Williams had been a friend of Merry's parents, and Reid considered her quite a conquest for she was a member of the school board and very influential in politics.

Impulsively Merry locked the cylinder away in the desk, determined not to type Spence's notes until tomorrow. It wasn't that she was afraid, she told herself. She just wanted to be as charming and pleasant as possible tonight, and she was sure if she listened to Spence's ridiculous ideas she would become thoroughly confused.

BUT SHE might as well have listened to Spence, she thought later, for Reid probably wouldn't have noticed a change of dispost-
tion. He was in a restless mood, slapping too many people on the back and handing out all sorts of sugary compliments. Mrs. Williams seemed pleased with him though, and Merry supposed that was all that mattered.

She did wish, however, he would notice her a little more. Her new claret velvet dinner gown brought glowing comments from the commissioner seated beside her at the table.

But Reid seemed oblivious until Mrs. Williams said, “You look like a fashion plate, Merry. That dress is so striking, dear.”

Then Reid beamed possessively and said, “See what a lucky man I am.”

Lucky! Merry thought savagely. He was lucky because she had brought him here tonight. Lucky because he was making a good impression on Madge Williams. I’m a social asset, that all, she thought despondently. He’s using me to further his own career and I’m fed up with it.

Desperately she tried to brush such dangerous thoughts from her mind. It was Spence’s private campaign that was undermining her morale, making her doubt Reid’s love. Spence was ruthless and stubborn, and she would have to steel her mind and heart against him.

Nevertheless, when she arrived at the hospital the next day she was as limp and lifeless as a half-filled hot water bag. Morbidly she sorted the mail and made up Dr. Morgan’s schedule for the day. When the Chief rang, she sent in Peg, for she didn’t feel equal to his robust sense of humor and painstaking dictation.

She was absentmindedly peeling off nail polish when a masculine voice inquired, “May I come in?”

Spence stood in the doorway, hair tousled, face drawn and pale. Merry felt a strange tug at her heart as she noticed the sag of his shoulders, the tired lines around his mouth.

“Please do,” she said recklessly.

Reid had used her for moral support, so now she would use Spence. He was just what she needed to bolster her sadly deflated ego.

At her words he brightened visibly. He smiled, and the circles under his eyes almost disappeared. “I feel better already,” he said, perching on the edge of her desk. “It was a bad night.”

Merry’s plans evaporated. She couldn’t play around with Spence. “Did everything turn out all right?” she asked softly.

Spence grinned sheepishly. “Yes, the Randall kid’ll pull through.”

Merry tried to quell the look of pride she knew came into her eyes. “You’re too modest, Dr. Cartwright. Why not say you pulled him through?” Without pausing to think of the possible consequences, she leaned over and put a hand on his arm. “You’re making a good doctor. Spence.”

At her touch he was on his feet, moving around the desk. “I’m trying to be,” he said hoarsely. “But I need you, Merry.” His eyes were serious, his jaw stubbornly set. “I need you so much.”

Roughly he pulled her to her feet.

She felt suddenly stifled, hemmed in, caught in a current that was carrying her relentlessly to certain destruction.

“No, Spence,” she pleaded. “Let me go. You don’t know what you’re saying.”

His fingers dug into her soft arms. “Yes, I do, Merry. You’re mine. Stop trying to run away.”

His lips came down on hers, crushing the breath out of her, setting her blood on fire. She remembered vividly the times at college Spence had driven his battered jaloppy into a lonely lane to steal a few kisses before taking her back to the dormitory. But this was different, more tempestuous, more frightening. Merry could feel the muscles in his arms become taut, and the urgency of his lips brought swift ecstatic response from her own. For a moment she found herself returning his kiss, clinging to him desperately.

Then she thought of Reid, of their plans for the future. Spence had no part in those. He had had his chance and forfeited it. He would only make her miserable again.

Frantically she beat against his chest. “Let me go!” she cried, tears springing to her eyes. “Cartwright!”

Merry let out a horrified gasp as she wheeled around to face the Chief. The older man’s face was dark with fury.

“I’ve never seen such ungentlemanly conduct in this hospital,” he barked. “If I ever catch you annoying Miss Holmes again, I’ll see that definite action is taken to force your resignation.”

MERRY STOOD motionless, white faced and shaken. To defend Spence would be exposing herself to criticism, and would make Spence think she had wanted him to kiss her. Yet the Chief’s words were like a knife in her heart. She couldn’t let him believe Spence was a cad.

But Spence was saying quietly, “I’m sorry this had to happen, sir. I assure you it won’t happen again. Ever.” Tossing Merry a look filled with hurt and disillusion, he walked quickly out.

Merry sank weakly to a chair. Dr. Morgan said gently, “We’ll forget the incident. You may go on with your work.”

Dazedly Merry watched him walk to his own office and close the door. Go on with her work! How could she possibly work after Spence’s fiery, stirring kiss? Spence, why won’t you leave me alone? her heart cried. I’m so confused, so miserably mixed up.
Without fully realizing it she opened the desk drawer and took out the dictaphone cylinder Spence had left for her yesterday. She plugged in the machine and started to type, but curiosity got the best of her. She ran through the medical notes so rapidly Spence’s voice sounded like a tobacco auctioneer’s. Then she slowed down, listening breathlessly.

“Darling,” Spence was saying, “I know I’ve been acting like a conceited fool. Believe me, where you’re concerned, I’m anything but sure of myself. I love you as much as ever, but I’m still not worthy of your love. I only know I can’t go on this way any longer. Please, darling, either accept my love or ignore me completely. This impersonal treatment is driving me crazy. The future’s in your hands, dearest. Please give me some ray of hope.”

Merry took off the earphones slowly. She put her head down on the desk and pillowed her face in her arms. What a dreadful person Spence must think she was. He had come to her thinking she had transcribed those notes and heard his plea. And she had welcomed him, not to encourage him, but because she was depressed and lonely. Then she had let the Chief think it was all Spence’s fault.

The tears Merry had held back since Spence’s return came in a torrent, and with them a violent self-condemnation.

“What a mess you’ve made of everything,” Merry accused herself fiercely. “If only you had had faith enough to wait for Spence.

Slowly, as the sobs subsided, Merry made up her mind to explain to the Chief, so he wouldn’t think harshly of Spence. She would have to wait though until she could talk without the risk of tears. Then there was Reid to consider next. Merry stared dispassionately at the star sapphire. She had no right to wear it, yet she dreaded telling Reid about Spence. But she would have to face it.

And what about Spence? He was completely disappointed in her. Probably he had decided by now he didn’t want her anyway. Frantically she tried to force back such thoughts and finish her work for the day. Luckily it was Saturday and she was through at noon. Reid was stopping by for her and they were going to the football game.

Gloomily Merry slipped on the jacket of her hunter’s green suit and ran a comb through her soft lustrous hair. She was certainly in no mood to be on display. She just wanted to crawl into a corner and be left alone.

“Whew, you look nice,” the Chief said pleasantly as she passed him in the corridor. “With you there, it should be hard for a man to keep his eyes on the ball.”

Merry glanced at him quickly. Did he mean that as a compliment or was he implying that Reid didn’t pay enough attention to her? She told herself she was imagining things. It would do her good to get away from the hospital and everybody in it.

She had just reached the sidewalk when Reid’s maroon convertible slid up to the curb. Merry knew at once she wouldn’t have a chance to talk to him alone, for there was a middle-aged couple in the back seat. She remembered meeting them before. State Senator Parker and his wife. Merry wondered how Reid put up with the stuffy politician.

Intently she scanned Reid’s face. There was an amused gleam in his eyes, so the preceding conversation must have been profitable for him. Merry noticed, too, that he had on a new expensive-looking tweed suit and a jaunty hat that gave him a casually wealthy look.

This was going to be one of those days when appearances meant so much, Merry thought disgustedly. She felt a desperate desire to say all the wrong things. But instead she smiled and managed to take her part in a politely boring conversation.

By the time they were seated in their reserved seats on the fifty-yard line, Merry was fit to be tied. This was a special game to be played for charity, and the surging mob, the excitement and the color which filled the stadium should have helped her spirits. But instead, the heartbreaking ache inside her be-
came unbearable. Her memory persisted in taking her back to her office, and Spence's arms were about her, his mouth on hers.

"Honey, there's Mrs. Forrest," Reid was saying. "Remember, we met her at the Williams' party?" As he waved enthusiastically Merry felt the same stubborn desire to say something shocking.

"She's a big windbag," she retorted impatiently, her eyes never leaving the players practicing out on the field.

"Honey!" Reid's voice, irritable now, rang a warning bell in Merry's mind. Wave to Mrs. Forrest or else! it seemed to say. Wave because she's some big shot's wife. She's important.

Stubbornly Merry turned her eyes in the opposite direction. Then her throat contracted, her head spun like a windmill. For she was gazing directly at the Chief, and beside him—Spence!

She half rose and without thinking, clutched Reid's sleeve.

"What's wrong?" he asked harshly. "Mrs. Forrest is watching and you're acting like a two-year-old."

But Merry was staring as though hypnotized. Spence had spotted her and was making his way toward them, his stride purposeful, determined. As he came into their section and started up the steps, a stab of fear ran through Merry. If there was anything Reid hated, it was a scene.

"So this is the great Belmont," Spence was already saying dryly. His hand moved possessively to Merry's arm. The Parkers and Reid stared at him incredulously.

"I—oh, Mrs. Parker, Mr. Parker, Mr. Belmont—Dr. Cartwright," Merry blurted out, her face getting warmer by the minute.

Spence acknowledged the introductions with a wry smile and said, "Mind if I borrow Miss Holmes?"

"Now look here—" Reid began.

But Spence was trying to drag Merry to the steps. She glanced desperately from one man to the other. Spence's jaw was set in a firm line, his grasp like a vise.

"I'll—I'll be back in a minute, Reid," she gasped.

His face was florid. "How dare you cause a scene?" he demanded. "Everyone's watching you making a fool of me."

Something within Merry snapped. "You selfish beast!" she said fiercely. "All you're worried about is what people think. You don't care whether this man loves me or whether I love him. Well, I do love him! All you care about is your blasted career. You'll have to manage it alone from now on."

Recklessly she pulled off the sapphire ring and slammed it down on the seat. Then she turned to the steps. If Spence hadn't caught her, she would have hooked one of her high heels and flung herself into space, but his arms were around her and he was leading her into an alcove, away from the crowd.

When she stopped trembling, he said, "Well, you saved your pride anyway."

Merry put her hands on his shoulders. "I didn't tell Reid I loved you just to save my pride. I meant it. Oh, Spence, what's been wrong between us?"

"Everything's been my fault," he said huskily. "I'm afraid the reason dates back to the time I met you—all the way back to the time we were eighteen and you were the daughter of a famous doctor, and I had vague dreams of studying medicine. I was always so in awe of your father, that I felt I wasn't worthy of his daughter."

"But what about those years at college, Spence?"

"We seemed like two other people then, Merry, so young and free. When you returned to Baltimore, I told myself I had been foolish to think you'd consider marrying me. I could never live up to your expectations, or your father's. And so I wasn't really surprised to hear about Reid."

The old emptiness crept over Merry. "I was so lonely, Spence. That's why I turned to Reid. I know that now."

"Oh, my darling, loneliness and I aren't exactly strangers," Spence said softly. And then his lips were warm and gentle on hers, his arms a haven.

A loud "Ahem" brought them out of their seventh heaven. The Chief was beaming like a benevolent Santa Claus. "Who do you think dragged Dr. Cartwright here today, young lady?" he asked, pretending injured pride.

Merry glanced questioningly at Spence. "I haven't had time to figure it out," she admitted with a smile.

Spence looked gratefully at the Chief. "Dr. Morgan bounded into my room as though he'd figured out the greatest mystery of all time."

Merry laughed happily. "But I thought you were disgusted with Spence?"

"I was," the Chief admitted. "Until I peeped in and saw you crying. I'm not so old and dense as you might think. I called in Miss Roberts and together we solved the case." He chuckled softly. "And to prove again I'm not so dumb, I'll leave you two alone."

Spence slipped an arm about Merry's waist. "Alone in the midst of forty thousand people," he said smiling. "I don't think you'll notice them," the Chief insisted.

He was right.
Elegy for a Dead Dream
by Cecile Bonham

I have been burying dreams today;
I covered ours gently and laid it away,
I mourned it so softly that nobody knew
And gave it two kisses, dear, one was for you.

It looked very nice (it had hardly been used),
My heart begged to hold it, my reason refused,
But I shed bitter tears, which were purely my own,
For the way it would look if it only had grown.

Still, dreams are so fragile it never would last,
I've seen them fade quickly and die in the past;
Now, no one will find it, for no one will look
For a little, dead dream in the leaves of this book.

One Brown Leaf
by Alma Robison Higbee

Your letter came and in the folds were pressed
This leaf that you had plucked from our own tree,
With this bright token that your hand caressed,
You brought a sweet, lost summer back to me.
She looked up at Hank appealingly, but he just grinned and didn't show any sign of having seen her before.
Lately

by

Frances Youlin McHugh

Sherry was only rehearsing for romance, until she put the right dream on a heart-to-heart hookup.

HANK SLAIGHT was watching them from behind the plate glass window of the control room. Sherry smiled at him as she and Eddie finished their song and a burst of applause rose from the studio audience.

Eddie reached for her hand and they bowed their thanks and the orchestra swung into the theme song.

Sherry tossed Hank another smile. She guessed that applause would show him she wasn’t slipping. Maybe now he’d stop nagging at her about practising and taking more lessons. Why, the other day he’d even had the nerve to tell her she was getting lazy and keeping too-late hours.

He motioned to her, indicating he wanted her to go to his office and she nodded slightly to tell him she understood.

As soon as she and Eddie were in the corridor she said, “Hank wants to see us.”

Eddie said, “Okay.”

He was wearing a gray suit this evening and the light color made his large black eyes
seem even darker. His curly black hair was neatly parted and brushed down into soft waves and she was going to enjoy mussing it up later on. His perfect features were like smooth coffee-colored marble.

She and Eddie Fields had been sweethearts ever since, over a year ago, they had met right here in WXBA studios. They had both been auditioned the same day and it had been discovered their voices blended perfectly; his mellow tenor, with her lyric soprano.

Later they also discovered that their hearts blended as well as their voices. They had become engaged the day they signed the Wheat Crispette contract. That was nearly a year ago.

Sherry liked to make believe her life began the day she met Eddie. Before that, it had been too terribly difficult. Her parents had died when she was fifteen, leaving her very little money. She had worked in a department store in the daytime and studied singing at night. It had been a long, hard struggle.

But the day she met Eddie, everything suddenly changed.

As they hurried down the long, thickly-carpeted corridor she hummed a snatch of their theme song. She was so happy she just had to sing. She and Eddie were going to be married next month, and now Hank Slaitght probably wanted to see them about renewing their contract. They still had a few more weeks on the old one, but contracts always came up for renewal before expiration.

She liked Hank. He was a good guy—when he didn’t lecture her as if she were a child. She waved him a greeting. “Our public seemed to like us tonight, didn’t they?” she said, smiling.

But there was no answering smile in Hank Slaitght’s gold-flecked brown eyes. “Your contract came up for renewal today, Sherry,” he told her.

Her own eyes, large and blue and fringed with carefully shadowed lashes, instantly became as serious as his. That renewal was important to her. It meant either she was a success or a failure. But of course she’d been a success this year.

“Yes, I know,” she said, waiting for him to tell her how much of a salary increase she was going to get.

They were facing each other across the top of his massive mahogany desk and behind him on the wall was an oval mirror in which she could see herself. Her delicately featured face was pale and she looked a bit haggard in spite of skilfully-applied makeup.

Suddenly she felt frightened. Was Hank right; was she keeping too late hours chasing around to parties and night clubs with Eddie? But she had to. That was what Eddie liked. He said it was good business for them to be seen around.

Hank was speaking again. “The Wheat Crispette Cereal Company have been very well satisfied with you, Sherry,” he said. “And as far as I am concerned you could have gone on with them. But for one of those unexplainable reasons that crop up in this business, they’re keeping Eddie and letting you go. I’m sorry, Sherry.”

She stared at him. She felt as if the thick oriental rug were quicksand sucking her down, down, until she would be suffocated.

Then suddenly she felt uncontrollable anger. “This is all your fault, Hank Slaitght!” she cried. “You’ve been tearing me to pieces for weeks!”

He smiled faintly. “Not to Mr. William Gahagen, our client,” he said. “But I have been trying to make you see that you’re being rather a fool; that you haven’t been taking your work seriously enough. You’ve become too smug, too sure of yourself.”

To have something to do with her nervous hands she pretended to pick an imaginary speck from the sleeve of her gold-trimmed white wool dress. She pushed back a wisp of pale blond hair from her burning cheeks. As she did, the diamond on the third finger of her left hand caught the light and sparkled prettily.

“Are they putting anyone else in my place—or is Eddie doing a single?” she asked with what little breath she had left.

“They’re putting on a girl named Betty Lattimer.” Hank’s voice was scarcely audible, as if he, too, were short of breath.

She felt as if she’d been hit in the stomach and on top of the head at the same time. “But they can’t do that!” she cried. “Eddie and I are engaged. Our voices are perfect together. We—why we’d planned on singing together forever!” It was a silly argument but she was too upset to realize how silly.

Hank shrugged. “Well, that’s none of my business,” he said brusquely, bringing his heavy brows together and making two vertical lines up the middle of his broad forehead. “You’ll probably be able to get something at one of the other broadcasting companies,” he added more kindly.

She stared at him, scarcely able to believe her ears. “You mean I’m through here?”

“I’m afraid that’s the story, Sherry,” he said. “I take my orders from higher up, you know. And to be perfectly truthful, I’m overstocked with lyric sopranos. They’re a dime a dozen. What I need is more torch singers, like this Betty Lattimer.”

She had always liked Hank. He had the rugged good looks that appealed to women, and even though his job as program director kept him inside most of the time, he had a
ruddy outdoor kind of complexion that comes from perfect health.

His features were large but good, with high cheek bones and a square jaw centered by a firm cleft chin. His hair was a light brown, always more or less mussed up, and he was tall and slender, with broad shoulders and lean narrow hips.

She couldn't believe this nice and usually kind man was saying such ruthless, devastating words—and to her.

She kept staring into his eyes, as if somewhere within their depths, she would find help—or at least an explanation more satisfying than the one he had just given.

But there was no answer in his eyes. They were serious, almost sad, the usual twinkling good humor completely erased.

She turned to Eddie. He was standing beside her, hands in his trouser pockets, rocking back and forth slowly on his toes and heels.

"Eddie!" she cried. "Can't you do something about this? Don't just stand there!"

Eddie took his hands out of his pockets and advanced on Hank.

"Look Hank," he said, "you can't treat Sherry like this. I won't stand for it. I won't stay on the program without her. Tell that to our precious client!"

Hank gave him a peculiar look and picked up a letter opener and threw it to the far side of the desk as if he just had to throw something.

"You tell them," he said. "At least it would be an interesting experiment."

Sherry pushed Eddie to one side in her eagerness to get closer to Hank. "If I'm so terrible," she demanded, "why did that audience applaud so enthusiastically just now?"

He looked up at her from beneath his brows without raising his head. "That's just one of those things," he said vaguely.

A gasped, "Oh!" was the best she could do. Eddie took hold of her elbow. "Come on," he said, "let's get out of here, where the air is cleaner."

He led her from the office. As they went for their coats he asked, "Want a drink and a bite to eat?"

"No—" she said wearily, "that is, let's get something at my apartment. I'd kind of like to have seclusion for a while."

SHERRY'S APARTMENT was her pride and joy. It was on the twentieth floor of a building which overlooked the East River. A well-known decorator had done it in a combination of modern and traditional, which he insisted, matched her personality.

She tossed her coat on the railing which separated the foyer from the dropped living room. The close proximity of her personal possessions made her feel better.

"You know," she said, "I think maybe Hank is just trying to scare me. You know he's been lecturing me lately."

Eddie mixed them a drink. "I'm not so sure," he said. "Hank doesn't do things like that."

She tried not to notice the sinking feeling in the pit of her stomach. "But he can't really be serious!" she argued. "Why, the client has spent too much money building us up as a team. They wouldn't just throw me out—"

she snapped her fingers expressively, "like that!"

He handed her a drink. "Listen, baby, you ought to know this business well enough by this time to know that a client can do anything he pleases, especially Bill Galahgan. He's not only the studio's best client but he's a friend of the big boss."

She collapsed in a chair and sipped her drink. "Maybe this would be a good time to ring the wedding bells," she said, "instead of waiting until next month. Maybe if I scare them a little they won't want to play games any more."

He sat down at the piano and began to play softly, leaving his drink on a table. "I know how you feel, honey," he said, "but I couldn't get away for a honeymoon right now, and as long as we have all our plans made for next month we might as well wait. As a matter of fact, I think maybe we'd better wait a couple of months. They'll be lining up the new programs and I ought to stick around."

His fingers ran idly over the keyboard. "Besides," he said, "everyone knows you haven't any idea of giving up your career and being a housewife after you're married."

She could see his profile as he sat playing, and for a panicky moment she thought he was giving her the brushoff. Then he swung into their theme song and began singing it to her and the panic slid into the background. He was probably as much upset as she was over this deal.

When he finished singing he said, "I know some people around at the other studios. I'll call them in the morning and tell them I want them to do something for you. You won't have any trouble getting another job; probably a better one. And then you can laugh at Hank and our revered client. Heck, there are more clients and broadcasting studios than just our bunch."

He came over to her and pulled her up into his arms. "A beautiful girl like you with a voice like yours won't have any trouble. Not with Eddie Fields putting in a good word for her."

His lips came in contact with hers and his arms held her close. She slipped her hands up behind his neck and closed her eyes. When Eddie kissed her, liquid fire trickled through
her veins and sparks crackled around her ears.

After he went home and as she prepared for bed, she kept thinking about Hank. He had always been her friend. How could he have changed so quickly? If tonight's little episode was serious, what did it mean? Was her voice really slipping? Did she need more lessons? It was strange her teacher hadn't suggested it.

Was Hank really disgusted with her because she had been having too good a time with Eddie? But she didn't go out with Eddie every night. Some nights he had engagements to sing at clubs and private affairs. Those nights she went to bed early. And she never minded being alone because she knew Eddie would make it up to her the next night by being extra nice.

Only the next night when he didn't show up for a date and didn't even phone her, she cried all night.

**THEN IN** the morning she began to worry. Maybe Eddie was sick? She didn't like to phone him early because if he'd had a late night, he'd need rest and extra sleep.

So she decided not to bother him until late in the morning and then go over to his apartment and fix up his breakfast for him.

She put on a beige wool dress and her beaver coat. She seldom wore a hat. It was more comfortable just to pin a band of velvet around her head to keep her hair from blowing about too much.

Eddie's apartment was in the Sixties, between Madison and Fifth. She walked all the way, enjoying the cold clear air, and stopping to look in the shops to take up time.

When she turned into Eddie's street her heart quickened with her footsteps. In just a few minutes she'd be in his arms and he'd be kissing away her fears.

His apartment was on the second floor. She walked up and rang the bell. As she waited she thought she heard voices, but decided she must have been mistaken.

She rang again. Then she heard Eddie's footsteps. The door was thrown open. "Oh, Sherry," he said. "What are you doing here so early?" He had on gray slacks and a yellow pullover sweater. His hair was tousled but he was cleanly shaven.

"Aren't you going to ask me in? I could use a cup of coffee."

He hesitated, then shrugged and stepped aside for her to enter. "Sure, come in, if you want to," he said.

She walked past him, through the entrance hall and into the living room. On the couch, a cigarette in one hand, a cup of coffee in the other, was a gorgeous redhead.

Sherry stopped at the doorway. "Oh," she gasped. "I didn't know you had company."

The girl wore an expensive black suit, and a Persian lamb coat was slung over a chair. Eddie said, "This is Betty Lattimer, Sherry Stuart."


Sherry returned her polite greeting. "How do you do."

Eddie said, "Sit down, Sherry, and I'll get you some coffee."

Sherry sat down because her legs refused to hold her up. But before Eddie could get to the kitchen, Betty jumped up.

"I'll get her some coffee, dear," she said.

"I know where everything is—or shouldn't I say that?"

Eddie looked embarrassed. That was unusual—for Eddie. He was always equal to any situation.

Sherry took a cigarette he offered her and waited while he snapped his lighter. She decided to feel her way in this threesome.

She said, "I suppose you and Miss Lattimer have been—rehearsing?"

He sighed, as if with relief. "Yes—yes," he said quickly. "We've been rehearsing."

She watched him through the smoke from her cigarette. "But I thought you wouldn't go on—without me?" she reminded him.

He went to the piano and fumbled through some music. "There isn't any use in our both being out of a job," he said.

She took the blow without outwardly flinching. This was her Eddie—the man she loved—the man she was going to marry next month. Or was she? Hadn't he suggested postponing the wedding?

Betty came in and handed her a cup of coffee. "I'm sorry I took your job away from you, Miss Stuart," she said with a smile that could only be false.

Sherry gulped the coffee. The girl was very pretty. "Oh, that's all right," she said. "Perhaps a change will be good for me."

Betty went over and stood beside Eddie. Then she smiled up at him. "And I'm giving you fair warning," she said, still talking to Sherry but looking at Eddie. "I'm going to get your man away from you, too!"

Sherry banged the coffee cup down on the fragile saucer and set it on a nearby table. Her eyes flashed to Eddie's face. It was a dull red. "If you can get him as easily as you got my job," she said defiantly, "you can have him!"

Eddie let his eyes meet hers for a split second, then he looked away as he ran a shaking hand through his already tousled hair. "Betty, run along, will you," he said. "I—I want to talk to Sherry."

Betty shrugged and picked up her coat. "Okay," she said. "See you for lunch. Uncle Bill wants to go over our contracts with us."
Eddie gave her a warning look but Sherry intercepted it. "You don’t mean Mr. Gaahagen is your really truly uncle, do you?" she asked Betty sweetly.

Betsy’s answer was just as sweet. "Yes," she said, "didn’t you know? He’s my mother’s brother." She started for the door. "Be a good boy, Eddie," she said. "Technically you still belong to her, but I’m warning you both. I’m going to establish squatter’s rights."

When they were alone Sherry waited for Eddie to speak. There was an expressive silence for quite a while. At last he said, "I suppose I should have told you, but— Well, I wasn’t sure Betty would make the grade. And then it all happened so quickly."

"You mean the whole thing has been planned from way back?" Sherry managed to ask.

He leaned against the piano and folded his arms. "Well, you see, I met Betty at the studio last summer, while you were away on your vacation. We got acquainted and I found out she was a singer; that is she’d been studying for several years but had never sung professionally."

With a great effort Sherry pulled herself to her feet. "I see," she told him. "And ever since you met her you’ve been getting better and better acquainted. Every night I thought you had an engagement singing at a club or a private party, you’ve been with her. Like last evening, for instance. It was a shot in the dark but it made a bull’s eye."

He nodded guiltily. "That’s about it," he admitted. "I hate the deuce to see you leave the program, but you’re so popular you’re a cinch to land a good job."

She went over to him. She should be feeling heartbroken, devastated—but strangely enough she felt nothing. Just emptiness. She slipped off the diamond ring and held it out to him.

"And it will be a cinch to have this ring made to fit Betty," she told him.

He took it and held it in the palm of his hand, staring at it. "I didn’t think it would turn out like this," he said. "I thought you’d understand. There isn’t anything personal between Betty and me but I think it’s a good idea for people like us to get in with rich people like the Lattimers and the Gaahagens."

She looked him squarely in the eyes. He was very handsome but she had never noticed before how empty his face was. Almost as if he wore a mask. "I think it’s an excellent idea," she told him. "But you really should marry the girl, to be really in their good graces."

She turned to leave and Eddie put the ring in his pocket. "Oh, well," he said disgustedly, "if you want to be snooty about it."

She turned and smiled at him. "Oh I most definitely do want to be snooty about it," she said. "And now if you’ll excuse me?"

As she walked down Fifth Avenue she tried to figure things out. Hank must have known what was going on. Then why hadn’t he told her? Why had he let her go on blindly making a fool of herself by showing everybody how much she loved Eddie, when for weeks, months even, he’d been double-crossing her with Betty Lattimer?

Her feet seemed to take her to the studio of their own volition. She had to have this out with Hank.

HE WAS sitting at his desk when she went in. He looked tired.

"May I talk to you a minute?" she asked him, and he nodded.

She sat down in a chair near his. "Done anything about looking for another job?" he asked.

She shook her head. "I’ve been thinking," he told her. "I said I was overstocked with lyric sopranos, but then ... ." The old twinkle was in his eyes. "I’m not overstocked with wives. In fact I’ve never had one. How would you like the job?"

Her eyes flashed to his. Was she hearing right? Did Hank Slaight, program director of WXBA just propose marriage to her? He had never been the least bit personal with her before and this sudden change, on top of everything else was a shock.

She said, "Have you forgotten about Eddie?"

He shook his head. "No," he said, "but I noticed you weren’t wearing his ring this morning. Does that mean anything?"

She held up her gloveless hand and looked at her empty finger, then let the hand fall limp in her lap. "Yes, it does," she admitted. "I gave the ring back just a few minutes ago."

He watched her. "Then ... you found out?"

She nodded. "I found out ... the hard way." She searched his eyes. "Don’t you think it would have been kinder to tell me?"

He was looking very handsome this morning in a dark blue pin-stripe suit. "I couldn’t tell you, Sherry," he said. "You would have hated me if I had, and probably wouldn’t have believed me. As for Betty—I hoped she wouldn’t be any good when she was auditioned. But she was. She’s a second Dinah Shore, much as I hate to admit it. I tried to talk Gaahagen into letting me put her on another program, but she’d made up her mind she wanted to sing with Eddie—and Bill’s very fond of his niece."

Sherry managed a faint smile. "I understand," she said, "and Bill Gaahagen is a personal friend of the big boss."

He answered her smile. "How about that other job I offered you?" he asked.

He clasped and unclasped his big hands nervously. She had never seen Hank Slaight
nervous. She felt her heart warm toward him. He looked and acted at this minute like a scared kid asking the teacher to do him a favor.

"I'm sorry, Hank," she said. "But an hour ago I was still engaged to Eddie. I can't just ..." She spread her hands in a helpless gesture.

"I understand," he said gently. "Maybe later, when you've had a chance to get used to the idea?"

She shook her head. "I'm afraid not, Hank. I guess now's my chance to take your advice about buckling down and doing more studying, because you see I really want to keep singing, even if I've lost my job here, and lost Eddie with it."

He looked at her thoughtfully, then he jumped up. "Excuse me a moment," he said. "I just remembered something I want to tell Joe Alden before he gets away. He's doing our street broadcasts now."

He rushed out of the office and she stood up and wandered over to a window.

The cars on the street far below looked like tiny bugs, scooting along. She thought: And in each car is a person, with a life to live—like me. And the fact that I've lost my man and my job doesn't mean a thing to any of them. It was a desolate thought.

Hank returned. "Well, it was nice of you to stop in, Sherry," he said brusquely. "If I can do anything for you—a word of commendation, if you need a reference, other than your reputation which you've already established over the air . . ."

She took her dismissal. "Thanks, Hank," she said, walking toward the door. "And thanks for the other—offer."

He picked up his phone even before she was out of the office and as she closed the door quietly behind her she had the feeling that his proposal of marriage had been prompted from impulsive pity rather than from a deeper emotion.

She hurried down the corridor to the elevators. Joe Alden was waiting for a car, his portable sending set slung over his shoulder.

"Hiya?" he said. "Haven't seen you around any of my Man On The Street broadcasts, Why don't you give me a break some time?"

She laughed. "But I thought you really wanted the casual passersby," she said.

A car stopped for them and he shoved her in ahead of him. "Don't you think it would be a sporting gesture to just casually be a 'casual passersby' some time? Say tonight?" he asked. "Just think how ga-ga all the real casual passersby would be if I could introduce the famous Sherry Stuart."

She stared at the elevator operator's back as she said, "I guess my broadcasting days are practically over—for a while."

She had always liked Joe. He was big and blond and homely but he had one of those kind, likable faces.

"What's up?" he asked.
"My contract wasn't renewed."
"No kiddin'?"
"Just one of those things."
"Gee, that's tough."

When they reached the lobby Joe said, "Well, I hope I'll be seeing you. I broadcast from the lounge of the Parkview Hotel at eight tonight. If you're around, drop in. You know, all you have to do is answer a question and get your name mentioned over the air and a present of a large size package of Sure-Pep Corn Flakes. The corn flakes that build you up and—"

Sherry laughed. "Spare me the details, mister," she begged. "But maybe I'll be seeing you—some time. 'Bye."

Joe grinned and said, "So long, Sherry. Good hunting."

SHE SPENT the rest of the day trying to get in to see someone in the other broadcasting companies. But the man to see was always either out or in conference, or this was not audition day. And besides, no one wanted lyric sopranos anyway. They were a dime a dozen. Hank had been right. Even the name of Sherry Stuart made no impression, nor did it open any closed doors.

But she mustn't become discouraged the first day. There would be other days, other chances. But there wouldn't be other Eddies. There was only one Eddie, and she'd lost him, along with the job she valued so highly.

She had a late and lonely dinner and it was a few minutes after eight when she found herself passing the Parkview Hotel. Joe was probably there broadcasting. Perhaps it would be fun to go in and watch him. Anyway, it would pass a little time and she didn't want to go home to her lonely apartment and just sit and think.

She pushed through the revolving door and walked into the lounge. Over to one side was a crowd of people, and coming from the center of it was a man's voice.

She decided to stay on the edge of the crowd and not let Joe see her, but just then someone moved, and their eyes met. Only the eyes she looked into weren't Joe's. They were gold-flecked brown eyes and they belonged to Hank Slaight!

Her heart seemed to jump up into her throat. He was the last person she expected to see here. She began to back away but she was caught in the crowd and he began motioning to her.

"Now here's an intelligent looking young lady," he said. "I'll bet she knows all the answers, too. You—with the pretty gold hair,"
he called. "Step over here, will you please?"

She tried again to back away, but the crowd laughed and pushed her toward the microphone. She looked up at Hank appealingly but he just grinned and didn't show any sign of ever having seen her before.

"Now what is your name?" he asked.

She looked at him in surprise but he just smiled. "Don't be bashful," he said.

She had never experienced mike fright but suddenly she knew what it was. But she couldn't just stand there—dumb. At last she said, "Sherry Stuart." She was terrified when she heard her voice quaver.

He kept smiling. "Sherry Stuart," he repeated. "And folks, she's beautiful. Blond; big blue eyes; million dollar smile—and you ought to see those dimples."

The smile was his own idea, because Sherry knew her face must look like a thunder cloud.

"And where do you come from, Miss Stuart?" he asked.

"I live right here in the city," she said.

"Oh—she's a native, folks," he said. "And have you any business, Miss Stuart?" he asked.

She thought she must be hearing things but when she searched his eyes he just smiled. What was this—a joke? On her? Was he laughing at her? But Hank was no practical joker. "Come on, speak up," he laughed. "You're among friends."

"I used to be a radio singer," she said, telling the truth before she realized what she'd said.

"Used to be?" he questioned.

"Yes." Her knees were beginning to feel more and more shaky. She knew now what it was like to feel a blinding hate for someone. How could she ever have thought this man was nice?

"You mean you don't sing any more?" he was asking.

She was trembling with rage. Desperately she tried to think of something to say; something funny and inconsequential. But somehow her heart was so full, her mind so befuddled, the only words that would come were words of truth.

"I was fired yesterday," she said, finally.

She turned and tried to push through the crowd but Hank's hand grabbed her arm and held her. "Oh now, that's too bad!" he said. "But you probably have lots of jobs waiting?"

She glared up at him angrily now with a calm, cold rage. "I'm afraid not," she said, her words sharp as icicles. "I've been told by quite an authority on the subject that lyric sopranos are a dime a dozen. They want torchy voices these days and—I am definitely not torchy!"

Hank laughed. "Oh come now. I can't believe the public only wants to hear torch sing-
ers." He appealed to the crowd surrounding them. "Do you, folks?" he asked.

There was a general and a loud, "No."

"You see?" Hank said, smiling down at her. "And I think it's only fair to give our audience here, as well as our unseen audience, a chance to judge if your voice is the kind that is worth only a dime a dozen. Now one of our questions is a musical one and it seems to me you're just the one to answer it. It's about exotic and expensive flowers. What exotic and expensive flowers grew in a very peculiar place?"

Sherry thought quickly. Exotic flowers? Expensive flowers? Grow in a peculiar place? What songs did she and Eddie sing about flowers? Oh, if she could only think and get away from here!

Then it flashed into her mind. Blue orchids! That was it. "Blue orchids only bloom in your eyes." Eddie used to sing it to her when they were alone. It was an old song but one of those perennials.

With tears in her eyes she said, "Blue Orchids."

If Hank saw the tears he ignored them. He smiled blandly. "Blue Orchids!" he said. "That is correct. And now can you sing a few lines of it for us? I have a release on the song so it's all right."

She hesitated, wondering if she could sing when she was so choked up with tears. But she had to. Everyone was waiting for her. She knew the value of time on the air. So, smothering a sigh, she stepped the correct distance from the mike, and in a voice clear and golden and throbbing with emotion, she sang the last half of the chorus. As she sang her mike fright vanished. She was once again the trained artist.

When she finished, there was a burst of applause and Harry presented her with the large size box of Sure-Pep Corn Flakes and then he was encouraging a fat man to take her place at the mike.

It had all happened so quickly she felt bewildered. She pushed her way out of the crowd, trying not to hear the voices that called to her.

One said, "Miss Stuart, I'm going to write in to the Crispettes and tell them they have a nerve firing you! I won't ever listen to them again!"

Another woman called, "I'll never buy another box of Crispettes again. You're my favorite radio singer!"

She smiled at them all and put a warning finger to her lips. She knew their words must be going out over the air.

WHEN SHE reached her apartment she threw the box of corn flakes into a chair and dropped down in another. Suddenly the
events of the day seemed to be swooping down on her like a large black mantle, blotting out everything that made life worth living. First the job the other day, then losing Eddie, and now she had made a fool of herself over the air and before Hank Slaight.

Somehow she'd always wanted Hank to admire and respect her. She hadn't realized it until just now because she'd been so wrapped up in her love for Eddie that she hadn't thought about other men. But now—mixed up in all of her thoughts—was Hank.

But it was Hank who had fired her. Of course he had to take his orders from the sponsor, but he needn't have forced her to make such a big fool of herself on the Sure-Pep broadcast.

She spent another sleepless night and when she heard the newsboy throw the morning paper against the door she hurried to get it, glad to have something to do besides think about her troubles.

She glanced through the first part, then came to the radio column. The first thing she saw was her own name:

Sherry Stuart, fired from the Crispette program a couple of days ago, appeared on a quiz program last evening. Of course it's none of our business but wasn't that kind of queer? We wonder what Hank Slaight, program director of WXBA, has against Sherry? Kind of a dirty trick to put her on the spot the way he did last night. Or was it all staged in advance?

She folded the paper and tossed it aside, tears of anger and shame burning in her eyes. Well, it served Hank right. The big goof! He'd tried to make a fool of her and he'd made just as big a fool of himself.

All day she tried to get him on the phone but he was inaccessible. Just giving her the runaround. How had she ever thought he was nice?

She tried to get Joe on the phone and was told he was out of town. She didn't like to call anyone else at the studio and ask why Hank was on Joe's program last night, but she'd certainly like to know.

She dressed and put the Sure-Pep Corn Flakes box on the mantel in the living room and stood and made faces at it. Then she laughed sadly at herself. Maybe she'd be glad to have the corn flakes before long, if she couldn't get a job.

She decided there was no use in making the rounds of the studios until this thing had blown over, so she sat down and tried to read.

But soon the radio columnists began calling up. To them all she said, "I have nothing to say."

She dreaded the thought of rehearsal of the Crispette program the day after tomorrow, but there were three more programs with Eddie. She wondered if he'd heard the broadcast last evening? Probably not, but by now he'd read about it in the paper or been told about it by at least twenty people.

She waited to hear from Hank. After all the least he could do was to get in touch with her and explain his actions.

She spent a third sleepless night, and avoided reading the papers the following morning.

Then at ten o'clock Hank called her. "Get over here right away!"

"I won't!" she snapped back. "I'm fired, and as soon as the next three programs are over I'm through. You can't boss me around any more and I think that was a dirty trick the other night!" She slammed up the receiver. She was exhausted from lack of sleep, heartache and worry.

He called back. "Stop arguing and come over here!" he yelled.

"Go to the—" She slammed up again.

Then she waited for him to call back. But this time she had to wait an hour. Then he said, "Stop being temperamental. Come over here or I'll send the police after you!"

She was furious at her heart for fluttering around at the sound of this man's voice. It was traitorous. She had always believed in undying love, even though the loved one was faithless. And now here she was getting excited over Hank just a few short days after she'd thought Eddie had broken her heart.

"Oh, all right!" she said. "I'll come, but just so I can tell you to your face what I think of you!"

"Make it snappy!" he yelled, and they both slammed up their receivers at once.

She dressed in a purple tweed suit with a yellow scarf folded in at the neck. Then she threw a matching tweed coat around her shoulders.

Her naturally soft pretty mouth she enhanced by a new lipstick. Somehow she wanted to look her best at this interview, even though it was going to be unpleasant.

Finally she picked up her purse and gloves, and lastly the box of Sure-Pep Corn Flakes. Then with her chin held high she started for the WXBA studios.

Her hand was shaking as she knocked upon the door marked, HENRY SLAIGHT, Program Director. Quickly she ripped open the top of the corn flakes box and turning the knob walked into the office.

Hank was sitting behind his desk as he had been a couple of days ago, but today he was surrounded by baskets of mail; baskets piled high with opened letters. White ones, pink ones, lavender ones.
HE STOOD up and came around the desk and put his hands on her shoulders and squeezed hard.

"But I'm terribly glad for you, Sherry," he said. "And I sure am glad you showed up at the Parkview. I worried all day after I'd tipped Joe off to wait for you and put the idea into your head."

She smiled up at him. "You're a darling, Hank."

"You're the darling," he told her. "And the sponsor thinks so too—now. He's going to have another weekly program—just for you. Half an hour, featuring you with your own band."

She let her wet cheek rest against one of his hands.

"Oh, Hank, dearest," she said tremulously. "It's like a fairy story."

Then she was in his arms. His cheek was against hers and he was saying, "But you still have enough time to take on that job I offered you the other day. And Sherry, I loved you from the first time I saw you. And now that you aren't engaged to Eddie, isn't there a chance for me?"

He pulled her to her feet and his arms were drawing her closer and somehow she was happy for the first time in her life. She hadn't really loved Eddie or she couldn't feel like this in Hank's arms. As if she had found heaven at last.

"I guess there's a lot of chance for you, Hank," she murmured. "I guess I've always thought you were pretty swell."

"You actually mean that?" he asked eagerly.

She nodded decisively, moving her lips closer to his.

"I suppose I'll have to accept the new contract, after all this fuss," she said. "But when it runs out I don't think I'll want to sing for anyone but you. I guess loving is more important than singing anyway."

His smile was tender. "In that case," he said happily, "you're practically Mrs. Henry Slaight."

With trembling hands she shuffled through more of the letters. They were all in the same vein. Then the women in the crowd at the Parkview had been sincere. She had thought they would forget as soon as they got home. But they hadn't. And others felt the same way they did. It was comforting to know people liked her and wanted her back on the air. She looked over at Hank through a mist of tears.

"You did it on purpose," she said shakily. How could she ever have doubted him? she asked herself now.

He nodded. "When people doublecross me I like to pay them back in their own coin," he said. "It's not exactly ethical but it's very satisfactory."

"But I wouldn't want to hurt Eddie and—Betty," she said.

"They won't be hurt. Their contracts are already signed."
"Sew"-

PRICE OF EACH PATTERN
20 CENTS (IN COINS)

9270 This pattern can be made five different ways! Make it as shown or edge the drapery with lace; omit draping for plain basic dress; or have plain top, skirt trimmed; or plain skirt, top trimmed. Pattern comes in sizes 14-20, 32-46. Size 36 takes 3¾ yards 39 inch fabric.

FIFTEEN CENTS for the new Spring Pattern Book with a free pattern printed within.

4507 Her new school dress has buttons marching from neck to waist, deep skirt pleat, and catch-all pockets. In girls' sizes 6, 8, 10, 12, 14. Size 10 takes 2¾ yards 35 inch fabric.

4508 A comfortable dress that slenderizes you too! Neat frock has easy front buttoning, set-in belt. Sizes 12, 14, 16, 18, 20; 30, 32, 34, 36, 38, 40, 42, 44, 46, 48. Size 36, 3¾ yds. 39 inch.
Easy

9323 Make yourself a new suit-dress for Spring. This one is easy and will excite ever-so-many compliments! It's designed to slim with nipped waist, soft scallops. Sizes 34, 36, 38, 40, 42, 44, 46, 48, 50. Size 36 takes 3½ yds. 39 inch.

4763 It's fun to sew "little" things and there are so many pieces to this easy layette. Save by making your baby gifts! Infants' layette in one size. Yardages on pattern.

4668 For school and extra-curricular activities—a suit with a good line! Has snappy front banding, nipped waist. Jr. Miss sizes 11-17. Size 13, 2¾ yds. 54 in.; ¼ yd. contrast.

Romance
Pattern Dept.
243 W. 17th St.
New York 11, N. Y.
Enclosed is 20 CENTS (in coins) for each pattern. 15 CENTS more for the pattern Book. Print name and address clearly.
Name .............................................
Street Address ....................................
City ................................................. State
Numbers ........................................... Book
667 A perfect combination of embroidery and crochet worked in an old-fashioned girl design. Now you can add luxury to all your linens with easy stitching. Pattern has transfer of a 6 x 20, two 5 x 14½ inch motifs; crochet directions.

7323 Clever way to use bright bits of wool in a colorful, crocheted afghan! You can even combine woofs of different weights in this warm throw. Six crocheted triangles join to form a hexagon. Pattern has directions for afghan.

7131 A dash of French in this chic beret and bag set. Hat can also show off your pet clip to advantage. It's made with easy, all-over pattern stitch. Pattern has directions; stitches.

FIFTEEN CENTS for the expanded Needlework Catalog with free pattern printed right in the book.
890 You can enhance your linens easily with this simple cross-stitch and crochet. Pattern has transfer of a 6½ x 21, two 6½ x 13½, eight 2¼ inch motifs; crochet directions.

813 Flower-basket design makes an outstanding chair-set in filet crochet combined with a pineapple edging. Pattern has charts and directions; stitches.

664 Embroider these pompous peacocks in all their colorful glory on your favorite linens. Elegant for gift linens too! Pattern has transfer of 14 motifs 1½ x 4 to 6½ x 11 inches.
She came through the door toward their table, and there was laughter on her beautiful young face.

The Love Pirate

by

Virginia Nielsen

Pete wished he had seen Nancy first, until he learned that he who loved last—loved forever.
ALL AFTERNOON, ever since his arrival in Glencourt, Pete had been hearing about Rich Fairlee's girl.

He had come up from San Francisco this morning to accept Rich's offer to go into his law office with him, and they had spent a busy afternoon going over books and accounts and completing their partnership arrangements. Yet, busy as they were, Nancy Ellerton's name had been constantly between them.

It was partly because her account was the largest their firm handled. Nancy, Rich explained, was the sole heiress of old Andrew Ellerton who had died a few months ago, leaving Rich the executor of his estate, which was in trust for his granddaughter.

"He knew of course that we would be married," Rich said, a bit smugly. "You'll meet her at dinner tonight," he promised.

As they walked from the office to the Glencourt Hotel, Pete tried to imagine what sort of girl Rich would choose for his wife.
He and Rich, were as different as the poles in everything but their devotion to law. Perhaps that was why they had been so drawn to each other when they had met in the Army.

"Nancy is late," Rich commented as soon as they reached the hotel dining room. "We'll just go ahead and get a table."

Pete smiled a little, remembering that Rich was a crank on punctuality.

"What's she like, Rich?" he asked his friend impulsively.

Rich stared at him. "I've been telling you all afternoon."

"Sure—that she was old Andrew Ellerton's granddaughter, and what stocks and bonds she holds. I mean, what is she like—"

"Here she comes!" Rich broke in, and Pete turned to look at the entrance. As soon as he saw her, he knew with a sinking of his heart that she was the girl he himself would have chosen—if he had found her first.

She came through the room toward their table with a quick free walk, and there was laughter in her beautiful young face. She wore gloves but no hat, and her hair was dazzlingly clean, though rather carelessly arranged.

"Hi, darling!" she said to Rich. And with a smile, "You're Pete, aren't you? I'm late again, I know, but darling, the most fantastic thing happened—"

"Nancy, I want you to meet Peter Baird," Rich said formally. "You've heard me speak of him. We were in the same air group in Sicily: Pete, my fiancée, Nancy Ellerton."

He added dryly, "Fantastic things are always happening to Nancy. What is it this time?"

A shadow crossed her young face. Pete, watching her, felt oddly touched.

But she said lightly, "I had another flat tire. Isn't that just my luck? And with my spare still at Neddie's service station."

Rich groaned. "You took the car out without a spare? Nancy, when will you ever grow up?"

"I hadn't had a flat tire in eight months, 'til yesterday," she said reasonably. "How could I know that twice in two days—"

Pete laughed. "That's the way bad luck comes."

"It's the principle of the thing," Rich said, still scowling. "You should be able to foresee and prevent such things."

A shade of defiance came into Nancy's lovely face. She tossed her head. "Besides," she said, "if I hadn't had to wait for the service station boy to come out with my tire, I wouldn't have found the wild gooseberries."

"Wild gooseberries?" Rich echoed, looking bewildered.

"I picked a hateful and Martha is going to make a pie."

Pete put his head back and enjoyed a good laugh. Even Rich had to smile. But he shook his head reprovingly as he did so.

"Neddie should never have let you go without that spare. He's too careless. Nancy, I think you should take your service station business some place else."

"Oh, but I can't!" she protested. "I have an interest in that station now. I loaned Neddie some money."

"You what?" Rich barked.

"He used to work for granddaddy before he went to war, and now that he's back, trying to get started in his own business—of course I said I'd help him!"

Pete knew that Rich was really angry now. "You should have consulted me," he said stiffly.

"But it was such a small loan, darling. I took it out of my allowance."

Rich groaned again. "I wonder if you have any idea how soon your allowance will be gone? And I can only pay it quarterly, you know. According to your grandfather's will—"

"Please forgive us," Nancy broke in, turning to Pete. "I'm sure you aren't interested in our little squabbles."

"I'm not squabbling!" Rich said, annoyed.

"I know, darling. It only sounds that way to Pete."

"Tell me more about this gooseberry pie," Pete broke in, and Nancy threw him a grateful glance.

"I'll save you a piece," she promised, and immediately distracted Rich by asking him about their new partnership.

"We completed the agreement this afternoon," he said, forgetting his annoyance.

"Pete is going to take over the office immediately so I can go to Los Angeles on that corporation deal. By the way, I must telephone about my reservation. I'm hoping to leave on the night plane."

He excused himself and left the table. Pete looked across at Nancy and their eyes caught and held. Hers were frankly curious, frankly interested. They were topaz, he noticed, with little dark flecks in them. Something like pain caught at his heart. How lucky Rich was! "I envy Rich," he said. "I wish I'd seen you first."

He had meant to say it lightly, as a compliment to a charming engaged girl. But the moment the words were out he knew he had spoken the candid truth—and that Nancy recognized it for the truth.

She colored slightly. "Thank you, Pete," she said, and then looked quickly away from his gaze.

He felt as if a shadow had moved across the sun and realized belatedly how strangely their eyes had clung.
Rich walked up and pulled out his chair with an expression that was almost like rubbing his hands together. "All set," he said.

He beckoned the waiter and began ordering for them, and after that the conversation was general.

They drove Nancy to her house immediately after dinner. Rich had some things to clean up at the office before his plane left.

The big house was dark as they drove up. Nancy, sitting between them, dug in her pocketbook.

"It's Martha's night off," she remarked. "I hope I have my key." After a few seconds of futile digging she wailed, "Oh, Rich, I haven't! I remember now—I left it in another pocketbook."

"Your yardman is here, isn't he?"

"But he sleeps over the garage. He doesn't have a key to the house."

"Nancy, for heaven's sake—" Rich began, looking at his watch in annoyance.

Pete said quickly, "Now's our chance to see just what kind of second-story men we are, Rich."

He helped Nancy out and they went across the lawn together, Rich following a little behind them, his silence betraying his mood. Pete was experiencing an odd clation.

"I used to have a secret yen to be a Gentleman Jim," he confided.

"And I used to dream of being a beautiful lady pirate like Anne Boley." Nancy laughed but her eyes shone through the dusk. "My grandfather gave me a sailboat, but to me it was a fast pirate sloop that was the terror of the seas. And my lover was the bravest and strongest pirate of all."

Rich caught up with them, muttering, "You simply must get over being so careless, Nancy. If you would just think ahead!"

"Oh, the trophys of war I gathered!" Nancy breathed, as if she had not heard him. "Silks and satins and doublousof gold!"

"Pete laughed. "Anne Boley could have climbed up that wisteria," he pointed out."

Nancy tipped him a slanting glance. "So would Gentleman Jim."

"Pete eyed it. "I'm afraid Gentleman Jim weighed less than I do," he remarked, and with a glance at his broad shoulders Nancy agreed.

"Is the window unlocked after you get up there?" asked the practical Rich.

"I'm afraid the screen's locked fast. Martha is more careful about such things than I am."

"Thank heaven for that," Rich said fervently.

"If the window's open, we can cut the screen. " Pete got out his pocket knife and handed it to Nancy. "Here you are, Anne Boley. Now, Rich, you boost her to my shoulders."

"What on earth?" Rich began to grumble. "At least let's see if the yardman is here and let him get us a ladder."

"This is the quickest way," Pete said. "You don't want to miss your plane. Pick her up and stand her on my shoulders. I think she can reach the screen."

He stood close to the wall, stiffening himself against her weight. She had kicked off her shoes, he noticed with approval, and was balancing herself like a true sailor.

"Can you reach it?"

The grating sound as she cut the screen was his answer.

"I've got it unlocked and the window's open," her voice floated down. "But I'm not high enough to pull myself over the sill."

Pete reached up and put his hands around her ankles. "Hold yourself stiff," he commanded. "Stiff as a board now!"

Slowly he lifted her. She was really as light as a feather! He felt her weight spring upward, and he let go and heard her scrambling over the sill.

"That was a fool thing to do," Rich said disgustedly. "You might have been hurt."

"But I wasn't," Nancy said. She was inside now, poking her head out of the window. Her eyes were shining. "Thanks, Gentleman Jim!"

"Be sure to have your screen repaired first thing in the morning," Rich told her. "And for heaven's sake, try to keep out of trouble while I'm away! Pete, you'll have to be her guardian for a few days. Goodness knows, she needs one."

"Good night," Pete called up to her, laughing. "You'd make a first-rate pirate, Nancy."

While they sped back to the office Rich voiced his annoyance.

"Tonight was typical," he complained. "So undignified! Nancy is always putting herself in a position like that, usually just through carelessness."

"I didn't think it was so undignified," Pete protested, still laughing. "She's charming, Rich. I wonder if you realize how lucky you are?"

"Of course I do," he said, mollified. "And I'm hoping Nancy will realize that she must settle down and mend her ways. After all, she is heiress to a sizable fortune. And of course, as my wife—"

"Oh, don't be such a stuffed shirt!" Pete exclaimed. "One thing, with Nancy you'll never be bored."

"I'm never bored," Rich said stiffly.

"Bless your soul," Pete murmured ironically, and for the first time felt genuinely irritated with his friend.

He saw Rich to his plane, all the while
seeing faults in him that he could not remember noticing in those days in the Army when they had been very close. Uncomfortably, he realized it was knowing Nancy that made him so critical of his friend.

His guilty feeling persisted after he returned to his room at the hotel, and he walked about in his shirt sleeves, smoking, trying to argue himself out of the way he felt about Nancy and Rich. Finally, although it was nearly midnight, he sat down and put in a call to San Francisco for June Carson.

Her voice carried a lilt of surprise when she heard him. "Pete, darling, how nice!" she said. "I just came in."

That was like June, he could not help thinking. She would say that even if she had been sitting by the telephone all evening.

He felt an apology was necessary for so late a call. He said, "I've missed you, June."

"That's wonderful," she murmured. "I hope you miss me lots more."

There didn't seem to be much he could answer to that. He sat silent, feeling like a fool, realizing that it had been a mistake to call her. For June would read more feeling into his late call than he had meant. To her it would mean an ardor he did not feel.

He pulled himself together at last, kidded her a little, then told her good night and hung up. He went to bed to dream crazy boyish dreams about pirates and an Anne Boley with Nancy's flecked eyes and gay carefree laugh.

TWO DAYS later at the office Rich's secretary said, "Miss Ellerton's on the phone, Mr. Baird," and Pete's heart stood oddly still.

"The gooseberry pie," he remembered, and his pulse became more normal. It was only a natural gracious gesture toward her fiancé's new partner, of course.

But when he spoke into the instrument Nancy's voice came back strained and high.

"Gentlemen Jim's been here," she said. "I've just discovered it. No, I mean real burglars, and oh, Pete, Rich is going to be furious because it's all my fault!"

"I'll be right out," he said.

He put down the phone, muttered some kind of an explanation to the startled secretary, and rushed out of the office.

He found both Nancy and her housekeeper, the motherly Martha, genuinely distracted. Nancy was pacing her living room floor in a slim-fitting, wide-belted dress of a tawny color not unlike her eyes. She looked rather pale.

Pete suppressed an impulse to go to her and take her in his arms. Instead, he took both her hands, holding her still before him.

"Now tell me what happened."

"It's the jewelry," she said miserably. "Grandmother's pearls and some other things we had here for the reading of the will. Rich thinks I've already returned them to the safety deposit box. I—I'm afraid I told him I did, to avoid another scolding about it. I really meant to do it right away but—"

"I understand," Pete said gently.

She looked up at him gratefully. "I really don't mean to be so careless about these things. It's just that other things are more important to me, things like—"

"Gooseberry pies?" Pete suggested.

"And pirates." She laughed and for the first time Pete noticed the tears in her eyes. He wanted to crush her in his arms. With an effort he managed only to squeeze her hands.

"We'll get the jewels back," he said, with more confidence than he felt.

"And Rich won't have to know?" she said.

"It's just that—well, he's always so right, and I'm always wrong."

Pete hesitated. "I suppose your jewelry was insured?"

She nodded.

"The police will have to be notified, then. And that probably means the newspapers will report it. I'm afraid Rich will have to know."

She said steadily, "It's all right. I would have had to tell him anyway. But I'll hate hearing him say, 'I told you so.' You see, it was on account of that cut screen."

Pete's eyebrows raised. "You mean that's how the thief got in? Then Rich will have to scold me, too. It was my idea to cut the screen." He smiled down at her anxious face. "We wanted to be culprits together," he reminded her.

She smiled then and returned the pressure of his hands. "Pete, you're nice," she said. "I'll ask Martha to call the police. And while we're waiting for them, we may as well have that gooseberry pie."

Pete stayed at the house all afternoon while the police questioned Nancy and Martha and Nancy's yardman, Arthur. It seemed only natural when Nancy suggested that he stay for dinner, and it seemed only natural, after explaining that he had to go back to the office and sign some letters before the secretary left, to promise to return.

Passing a florist shop he saw some bronze chrysanthemums that reminded him of Nancy and he thought, "Why not? It's merely a gesture to my hostess."

But once inside, writing out her name, he felt obscurely guilty, and he ordered some red roses to be wired to June Carson in San Francisco.

The late afternoon paper carried a story on the theft of the Ellerton jewelry. It was on the newsstands before Pete returned to Nancy's house.

The chrysanthemums had arrived just be-
fore him, and Nancy was arranging them as Martha let him in. She turned to greet him with a glow on her face.

"How did you know they're my favorite flower?" she cried.

"They're your flower," Pete said simply. He knew it more surely now, seeing her tawny head bent over the blossoms.

He had a moment's curiosity. What kind of flowers did Rich send her?

Even as he suppressed the question she said, "Rich always sends orchids for me, and roses for the table." She stopped, as though conscious she was implying a criticism. In some confusion she asked Pete what he would like to drink.

"Better still, come along and mix it yourself," she added, and took him to a small corner bar.

While he mixed highballs she stood leaning her elbows on the bar, regarding him with her candid gaze. She was wearing green tonight and it made her eyes sparkle.

I'd give my future for a kiss—just one kiss, Pete thought. And immediately told himself he was an utter heel.

If she read his thoughts she gave no sign. She was talking with the candor and enthusiasm of a child. Her words came in a little rush, as if she were afraid she would not be able to finish all she wanted to say.

They were still standing there when Martha announced dinner.

The dinner hour flew by on wings. It was while Martha was bringing the coffee into the living room that the telephone rang and Nancy, answering it, said over her shoulder, "Los Angeles. It's Rich."

Pete crushed his cigarette between suddenly tensed fingers and had to put it out.

It was obvious from Nancy's end of the conversation that Rich had read of the robbery in the papers. She said in a low hulking voice, "I didn't mean to deceive you, Rich. I really meant 'to take them the very next day, but I—"

There was a long pause while she listened. She was pale again, Pete noticed.

"They entered through that screen we cut—" She broke off, listening again, then protested, "But I did order it fixed! The very next day! Only no one came."

She said little more after that. Just, "Yes, Rich." And, "No, Rich, they left the silver." And then, "Of course, Rich."

Pete wondered if he should have offered to speak to Rich, but at the moment he could think of nothing he wanted to say to his friend. Nancy made a phone call and returned to him.

"He's flying back tomorrow evening," she said. "He wants us to meet him at the airport at eight."

Pete nodded, and Nancy continued to look quite miserable.

Pete took her hand. "Anne Boley wouldn't have mourned a few baubles," he said lightly.

Nancy flashed a smile, shaking her head. "It isn't the baubles." Tears glittered in her eyes again.

He couldn't bear it. He tried to suppress what he knew was coming but he could not.

"Neither would a pirate think twice before he kissed away a pretty girl's tears. Tonight I feel just like a pirate, Nancy."

Her eyes were round with wonder, but there was something else in them, too. Something that drove away his last remaining scruples. He took her in his arms and she melted into them. With a little sigh she raised her lips, and he kissed her.

"Nancy!" he breathed. He knew he was lost. And with that realization came another one—the enormity of what he was doing.

He put her away from him. "But there's one kind of pirate I don't admire," he said grimly. "That's a—love pirate." He stood up. "I think I'd better say good night, Nancy."

He walked back to his hotel, the better to clear the cobwebs from his muddled head. Cobwebs? If so, they were spun of silken lashes, and heartstrings, and hung with the silvery tinsel of her laughter.

But it was still a muddle. He was at the same time happier and yet more miserable than he had ever been in his lifetime. How could he go on in the capacity of Rich's partner, when he wanted the girl who had promised to be Rich's wife, for his very own?

There was no use telling himself he would get over it. He had known a lot of girls, and loved more than one of them, but he had never felt like this before. This he knew instinctively would get worse instead of better.

What he should do was clear out—but he couldn't quite bring himself to that. What could he tell Rich? Look, old man, I'm upsetting the applecart because if I don't, I'm going to try to take your girl away from you.

HE WAS in a mood when he went to the office the next morning, and it was only partly because he hadn't slept much. Everything seemed to go wrong and he was impatient with Rich's secretary and hated himself for it.

In the middle of the afternoon Rich called him. "Anything new on the robbery, Pete?"

"They think it might be an inside job," Pete told him. "They're investigating this man Arthur."

"I've never liked him," Rich said. "Have they anything on him?"

"No, I don't think so. He might be just an accomplice. He knew about the broken
screen because Nancy asked him to see to getting it fixed. And presumably he knew the jewels were in the house, although he denies that."

"Well, carry on, Pete. I've got a seat on the evening plane. I'll see you about eight."

"Roger," Pete said, and hung up. He was shaking and he felt like a criminal himself.

Nancy called a little later and asked him for news. Her voice was clear and impersonal, just as if last night had never happened. After he had told her all that the police had told him she said, "You're going with me to the airport, aren't you?"

An overtone to her voice betrayed how much she dreaded what Rich was going to say about the robbery. Pete swore under his breath. It shouldn't be that way between a man and his girl.

"Of course, Nancy," he told her. "I'll take a taxi out about seven-thirty."

When he went from the office to his hotel the first person he saw was June Carson. She sat in the lobby, in close-fitting black, with a flattering little hat on her satin-smooth hair. "Darling!" she said throatily, rising to meet him.

Pete looked at her in a stunned way that he realized was not altogether flattering.

She tucked her arm through his. "I missed you so much," she murmured. "I couldn't stand it any longer so I just took a train up here. For the week end," she added hastily, as she saw the storm clouds gathering in his face.

She pouted a little and said, "You are glad to see me, aren't you?"

"Of course," Pete said. "It's just that I'm so darned busy. I really don't have time for a holiday."

"Oh, I won't be in your way," June promised. "You've time to take me to dinner, surely."

"Oh, yes, of course. If you'll just wait until I've cleaned up—"

"Darling, I'm so tired of this lobby I could scream. I'm going upstairs with you—now, don't make a fuss—and you're going to order me a nice cool drink I can sip while you dress."

Pete groaned inwardly. He should have known better. A midnight call, a dozen roses, and June was all ready to take him over. Nice and chummy of her to want to look over his suite.

He could have choked her, but there wasn't time to argue about it. If he was going to feed her and get rid of her by seven-thirty when he had to pick up Nancy, he would have to work fast.

It was June who called room service and ordered the drinks and who, when he settled down in a chair to relax for a moment, gently prodded him into getting ready. He had forgotten how her efficiency annoyed him.

He heard the telephone ring while he was under the shower and heard June answer it. When he emerged into the living room, dressed and ready, she looked angry.

"Who was it?" he asked, but somehow he knew.

"You might have told me you have a date for tonight!"

He couldn't resist saying, "Did you ever know me not to have a date on a Saturday night?"

June was taken aback. "But, Pete, I took it for granted—"

"Never take anything for granted," he told her. It was on the brutal side, but it was best to have no misunderstanding, he thought. "Now tell me what she said."

June recovered from the jar with an effort. "She said there was no use for you to take a taxi out to her house, since you'll be driving her car. She'll pick you up here at seven-thirty."

"Okay," Pete said. He smiled at her and offered her his arm. "Shall we go down to dinner?"

BEFORE THE meal was over he had relented enough to ask June to drive to the airport with them. They were waiting in the lobby when Nancy drove up. Pete took June out to the car and introduced the two girls.

The relief in her face when she learned that Nancy was his partner's fiancée was short-lived. Girls sensed things somehow, Pete thought. June seemed to know at once he was more interested in Nancy than he would care to admit.

As for Nancy, she was oddly quiet on the drive to the airport. Pete wanted to reach out and touch her hand, but June sat between them. He cursed the girl's untimely arrival, and at the same time acknowledged that she would probably help to keep from making an utter fool of himself.

She chattered on while Nancy sat still and quiet beside her, and Pete cringed at the possessive way she sometimes addressed him. What was Nancy thinking? But what did it matter, he asked himself savagely, if she did think he belonged to June? So much the better, wasn't it?

The plane was on time and Rich was the first man to step out. He wore the harried busy look of an important man, and Pete noticed now that he had gained weight since leaving the Army.

His first glance did not include June, and he gave Pete no time to present her. He pecked Nancy's cheek, then turned to give his baggage check to an attendant.
When he turned back he said, "Nancy, I've decided that we should be married immediately."

"You have?" she said faintly. Pete felt a cramp in his heart.

June was pressing his arm meaningly, and Pete broke in, "Rich, I want you to meet a friend of mine who is up from San Francisco. June Carson—"

Rich stopped then and a pleased expression came to his face, "Pete, old man, you've been holding out on me!" he said. "How do you do, Miss Carson?"

June murmured something, smiling at him. He turned to Nancy. "Imagine old Pete having a girl, and all this time saying nothing about her! This calls for a celebration!"

"Of course," Nancy said. Like a dutiful wife, Pete thought savagely. "Won't you all come out to the house?"

They pilled into Nancy's car and somehow—Pete did not know quite how it happened—Rich was putting June in the back and climbing in beside her. Pete sat beside Nancy in front and watched the lovely clear lines of her profile as she drove.

Behind them he could hear Rich asking June how long they had known each other, and where Pete had been hiding her. He was putting himself out to be pleasant to her.

June cried, "Pete, I like your new partner!"

And Rich said gallantly, "His new partner like you, Miss Carson—June."

"Just don't ever forget your key," Nancy put in lightly over her shoulder. "It makes him furious."

There was a startled silence. "Forget my key?" June said uncertainly. "Why, I don't believe I ever have."

"I did it only the other night," Nancy went on, in that same light tone, "and Rich and Pete had to boost me through a second-story window."

Pete looked at her curiously. Why was she reminding Rich of that episode now? His silence betrayed his irritation. Rich's silences always seemed to speak louder than words.

"I live in an apartment," June babbled, all unaware, "and if I ever did forget my key I would only have to ring for the manager. But I don't believe I ever had to."

Nancy pulled up before her house and reached for her purse. "I hope I haven't forgotten again," she murmured.

The house was dark. Rich said sharply from the back seat, "Where's Martha?"

"I gave her the night off."

"Again?"

"Her sister isn't feeling well."

"And Arthur?"

"I forgot to tell you. They arrested him this afternoon for the theft of the jewelry."

"Thank heaven they've found—"

Nancy's little cry of dismay stopped him. "I have! I've locked myself out again!"

Pete started. He could have sworn he had seen the gleam of metal in her hand a moment ago. He started to say something, then closed his lips tight.

Rich lost his temper. "For heaven's sake, Nancy, can't you hang on to a simple thing like the key to your front door? How many times do we have to go through this farce? It's childish, that's all! It's a matter of self-discipline. If you can't discipline yourself I'll have to do it for you. We'll be married at once and I'll break you of such careless habits!"

Nancy turned around in the seat. She was twisting his ring off her finger. "I'm sorry, Rich, but you talk of marriage as if it were the—the Army or something. I don't think I want to marry just to be disciplined."

Rich was taken aback. "I didn't mean—Nancy, darling, it's for your own good."

"I don't agree with you, Rich. I know I have faults and I might be able to change just a little bit—but not enough. And as long as my faults annoy you so much, we'll call the whole thing off."

"She's right, Rich," Pete said, waking from his stupor in time to follow Nancy who had slipped out of the car. His heart was thudding. If he could believe his eyes... if he had seen the key in her hand—

"Pete!" June said sharply. "If you leave me now it's all over, do you hear?"

"Sorry, June, but there was nothing to be over."

He turned back to say, "Rich, be a good fellow and see June to her hotel, will you?"

That that had been sheer inspiration, he thought to himself. June was exactly what Rich wanted—except that she didn't have Andrew Ellerton's money!

He hurried across the lawn after Nancy, who was running around the dark house. "Anne!" he called softly. "Anne Boley!"

Nancy came out of the shadows then. Pete took her hands in his and twisted her fingers apart until he had the key.

"Nancy!" he whispered. "Oh, Nancy, girl, you did do it purposely!"

"Was it so wrong?" she asked. "It was a kind of test. I—I had to know. I told myself that if he wasn't understanding about it, at least before other people, I just couldn't marry him. And now I'm not going to, and I don't seem to care."

"Does it mean you care a little for me?" Pete said. "Oh, Nancy—"

She crept into his arms. "And my lover," she recited, "was the bravest and strongest pirate of all..."
WILLOW MARVIN was down on her knees on a lonely Florida road, forcing a jack under the flattened rear wheel of her car, when the red truck roared past her and skidded to a stop. It came grinding back, too fast, and then stopped beside her. A young man jumped from the driver's seat.

It was Barry Dane!

Willow had known all along she'd have to come face to face with him sooner or later. She had planned to tell him his jilting her had been a blessing in disguise, that she was over him for good. But now that he was standing beside her she hardly had the strength to rise to her feet.

"Having trouble?" he asked, in the deep vibrant voice she remembered so well.

She managed to rise. "Hello, Barry," she said evenly.

Dazedly, she noted that he was handsomer than ever, with his fair, sun-bleached hair, his blue eyes that could be so falsely tender, his rugged forceful features, and flash of gay smile.

Barry said, just as evenly, "Hello, Willow," and his eyes flicked over her.

Suddenly she was conscious of her mud-stained white linen playsuit, her wind-blown dark curls. She'd been struggling with the tire for nearly half an hour.

"I'll change this for you in a jiffy," Barry said, and got to work swiftly.

Against her will, Willow watched him, noting the muscles of his broad back playing beneath his blue, half-drenched shirt. His hands were brown and strong and quick moving. She knew suddenly that she had to steel herself against remembering she'd ever felt anything for Barry Dane.

He glanced up and caught her gaze. His mouth tightened slightly, and for a moment she thought she saw stark bitterness in his blue eyes. He rose and put the spare tire back on its rack, then came around and stood before her.

"Glad to be of service," he said, and smiled a little, casually.

She should have gotten into her car, but her knees felt weak. She stood there wretchedly, uncertain for a moment.

"Do I get any pay, lady?" He was deliberately laughing at her, his teeth a flash of pure white.

"Pay?" she repeated. "What do you mean?"

"I mean this!" Barry said.

Without warning, he took her in his arms and kissed her.

Her lips and heart were ice. She'd always known Barry acted impulsively, but she hadn't dreamed he'd ever kiss her again. And then the ice melted. For a crazy, inexcusable moment, she kissed him back, even as she hated herself for her weakness.

When he let her go, she stood staring at him whitely. He was stronger than she was. He was iron and stone against her weakness, for he could smile now. Somehow the smile infuriated her.

"I'm engaged to Todd Emery," she heard herself saying. "I'm going to marry him in three days."

"So I've heard," Barry told her coolly. The smile in his eyes was gone.

"Yet you dared to kiss me!"

He said swiftly, low, "I often do things on impulse, but thank heaven I do them of my own accord. I don't let people like your Aunt Eunice and Todd Emery regulate my life—or my love!"

"I don't, either!" Willow flamed.

Barry looked at her with cold eyes a long, still moment.

"That's what you think," he said, a bitter smile hardening his lips, and left her.

She stood perfectly motionless. The sun

He was iron and stone against her weakness, for he could smile now.

Letter from Barry

by Millie Breece

Barry sent a letter to his love, but it took a special delivery dream to reach her heart.
seemed to have robbed her of energy. The pink Indian grass waved slowly, the white clouds in the blue sky seemed too lazy to drift. Only one thing seemed to have speed, and that was Barry Dane's big truck disappearing down the long stretch of clay road.

She got into her car and started driving swiftly toward home. She'd outrace her thoughts of Barry Dane, and the memories of the past. For he'd made her remember, and she didn't want to! He'd made her kiss him back. He'd sowed seeds of doubt, and made her feel, for a brief moment, that she wasn't managing her own life.

Her hands clenched the steering wheel. "I'm going to marry Todd Emery!" she cried aloud, and the words were like a vow. "I'll never let Barry Dane bewitch me again!"

WHEN SHE'D first met him, four years ago, Barry's good looks and gay laughter and physical strength had appealed to her a little frighteningly, shaking her out of the cocoon of prejudice and narrowness her sheltered life had spun around her.

That sultry afternoon, so long ago, Willow had gone with her uncle to look over some orange groves he owned. Barry had been managing a crew of pickers, and her uncle had called him over to his station wagon and introduced him to Willow. She had been seventeen then, and one close look at the blond giant was all it took to make her fall head over heels in love with him.

After that, she visited the groves every day, and on each occasion had managed to talk with Barry. Finally, she invited him to visit her at her uncle's home, where she lived. That had been the beginning of a breath-taking dream of love. For, on their first date, they both realized they were meant for each other.

"I'll have to work to be worthy of you," Barry had told her a little gruffly. "My people were poor, and now I'm just starting a little trucking business with one truck to my name. But some day I'll own a whole fleet of them. Then—maybe I can ask you something."

"Money doesn't count," Willow had breathed. "Other things count. Things like—" "Like love?" Barry whispered. And he'd kissed her.

After that, there couldn't be any barrier between them. Even Aunt Eunice's protests hadn't mattered.

"I stayed in my class when I married your uncle," the older woman had stormed, her face like marble. "But your mother married beneath her, and came to a miserable end, leaving you for me to care for. I've raised you as my own, gladly, of course, and I've given you every advantage a girl of wealth and culture could desire. Yet you want to bring more disgrace into our family!"

"I won't bring disgrace into it," Willow had sobbed. "Barry isn't a rover like my father was. Barry will amount to something. And even if he doesn't, I'll love him till I die!"

Aunt Eunice had gazed at her searchingly, her green eyes speculative. "You're young. Have your little fling, dear!" Her tone softened. "There's a war on, and so far, this Barry person has been deferred because of his work in the citrus industry. But one of these days he'll be called all right."

Willow had sensed a threat in her aunt's words. She'd been afraid of losing Barry, and that night had suggested to him that they become engaged. Reluctantly, she remembered icily now, he'd consented. But she'd had no doubt, then, of his loving her. When, shortly afterward Barry had been inducted, Willow had felt sure that her aunt had used her influence with the local board. But she'd been proud of him. Her heart had marched away with him.

Immediately after Barry left, Aunt Eunice started entertaining lavishly for Todd Emery, the son of her best friend. Todd was a first lieutenant in the Army, home on leave. He was darkly handsome, wealthy and sophisticated, and he'd teased Willow about her engagement, asking her why she hadn't waited for him. Though he'd known her all her life, Todd seemed to notice her for the first time.

"That's because you've grown into a very beautiful girl this year," Aunt Eunice explained. "He doesn't take your engagement too seriously, and neither do I. Why don't you forget this Barry person and be really nice to Todd? He's definitely in your class, and you could have him if you halfway tried."

"I don't want anyone but Barry," Willow had cried, and to herself had vowed, I'll be strong. I'll not let Aunt Eunice or Todd weaken my love. She hadn't known then that Barry himself would shatter it.

It happened after V-E Day. Todd, who was in the Army of Occupation, had written one of his many letters to Aunt Eunice. The older woman had thrust the sheet of paper at Willow. "Read that!" she cried triumphantly.

The words, had jumped out at Willow, as if in bold relief:

Barry Dane is in trouble over here. He's still trying to rise above his station, I presume. Recently, for striking an officer, he was court-martialed and broken in rank, and is now in military prison. Tell Willow she still has me.

"There must have been a reason," Willow had cried, agonized. "Barry will write to
me and explain. I know it didn’t happen the way Todd claims.”

Aunt Eunice’s laughter had been scornful. “I think you’re a greater fool than your mother was, Willow,” she said. “At least she didn’t love a jailbird!”

Willow had flung herself out of the house, had gotten her car and driven like mad along the narrow, shoulderless Florida roads.

“Barry’s temper got him into trouble,” she sobbed to herself. “But he was in the right, and I love him. He’ll write and explain!”

Her tears had blinded her just as she tried to make a dangerous curve. She had skidded on the gravel, crashed into a telegraph pole and into oblivion.

For a month, in the dim, cheerless hospital room, she’d seen only the nurses, the doctor and Aunt Eunice, who’d been kindness itself. Willow’s tortured lips asked but one question, “Why doesn’t Barry write?”

At the end of the month, a letter came, and Aunt Eunice read it to her. Barry had written:

Our engagement was a mistake. Forget me.

He hadn’t tried to explain what had happened, or to plead for her understanding. He’d just jilted her abruptly, mercilessly. His hot impulsiveness seemed to burn through the cold, penciled words. They had burned through her love. She’d known then that Aunt Eunice and Todd had been right about Barry, that she herself had been wrong. And she knew she had to forget Barry Dane.

She recovered soon after that, and learned how to be gay again. When Todd Emery came home to stay, she looked for the good points in him, and found that she liked him. He was vital, attractive, and very much in love with her. She felt she could learn to love him, and when finally he asked her to marry him, she’d consented.

And now, in three days, she’d be Todd’s wife. She was glad she’d be seeing him tonight, for Todd always erased any memory of Barry. Todd was so intense, she could never think of anyone else when she was with him.

SHE WAS ready when Todd called for her, a slender girl in a white, gold-belted dinner dress. Todd’s tanned, eager face glowed darkly as he took her in his arms and kissed her. “Beautiful,” he said, “you don’t know how long I’ve dreamed of you as my wife.”

She gave him a bright smile and they left the house. Outside they were suddenly immersed in a night that spelled romance. Queerly, Willow felt rebellious against it, but she made herself relax beside Todd as they drove to the Chalet for dinner.

Love means peace, she thought. Love means being with someone who adores you, who will never tear your heart out and disillusion you. Love means someone you can trust, someone who trusts you.

She raised her dark head high as they entered the Chalet, a fairyland of tropical flowers and glass-topped tables set under a screened-off moon. Subdued music whispered from behind banked palms.

Todd’s hold on her arm tightened. “There’s Arline Laird and Barry Dane,” he said, low. “That girl’s riding for a fall, going around with white trash.” His voice had an edge.

“Barry isn’t white trash!” The words were suddenly a sharp ache in her throat. “He’s all right,” she added, making her voice indifferent.

Arlene Laird was one of her good friends, and she’d told Willow she was seeing Barry. It didn’t matter . . .

Todd started to guide Willow to a corner of the room when Arline, all blond hair and big, blue eyes, rushed to them. “How wonderful!” she cried, gushingly. “You two must join us, of course.” She nudged Willow, and whispered dramatically, “Now’s your chance to show Barry you’re over him.”

Had Todd heard? Willow wasn’t sure. His face had paled, but that was because Arline always annoyed him. She was good-hearted but tactless.

“You know Barry, don’t you, Todd?” Arline asked him too sweetly now. “Please join us.”

Everyone in the room had heard her. There seemed nothing to do but go with her to their table.

Barry rose, and held her chair for her. Accidentally, his hand touched her shoulder, and again she felt something like stark shock. She looked up at him deliberately, made herself smile into his eyes.

“Thank you,” she murmured. “It’s nice to see you again.”

He bowed his head slightly, his eyes expressionless as he met hers. It was as though he had never seen her or kissed her again that afternoon.

“How’s the trucking business, Dane?” she heard Todd asking.

“It has its moments,” Barry came back quickly. “Today, for instance, I helped a lady in distress.”

“Once a champion, always a champion!” Todd’s laughter was forced. “Only—” he blew cigarette smoke straight before him, “a champion doesn’t meddle in somebody else’s business.”

Instinctively, Willow’s dark eyes flew to Barry’s. He was impulsive, lightning-fast of temper. Was he going to sit and take Todd’s evident scorn? And what did Todd mean by
calling Barry a champion? He hadn’t stood up for her, or for himself, either!

Barry shrugged and turned to Willow. “When are you being married?” he asked casually.

“Saturday,” she told him, just as casually, knowing that he was well aware of it.

“And your party’s on Friday evening, isn’t it?” Arline put in, winking at Willow. Almost imperceptibly, she nodded toward Barry.

Willow was sure Barry had noticed. She wondered what his reply would be, if she were to invite him.

“I’m having a little farewell party,” she heard herself saying lightly. “Will you come, Barry? We’d be glad to have you.”

“But, darling—” Todd began sharply, then stopped short.

Barry’s eyes met Willow’s unflinchingly. “I’ll be glad to come,” he said.

Willow chilled. Barry accepted her invitation as though it were a matter of course that he be invited to the home of the girl he’d jilted. He was strong as the trucks he owned. But she was strong, too, Willow told herself fiercely. Inviting Barry showed him—and herself, too—that he was out of her life. Memories meant nothing, the past meant nothing—his kiss today had meant nothing.

She was glad when Todd took her home shortly. It was only at her door that he mentioned Barry.

“You don’t know the whole story of Barry Dane’s trouble overseas, do you?” he asked her easily.

“I don’t know anything about it,” she told him. Nor did she want to know.

“ Forget him! I love you, sweet!” Todd took her in his arms then and kissed her.

AUNT EUNICE was aghast the next day when Willow told her she’d invited Barry Dane to the party.

“That truck driver!” she cried. “Don’t you know Todd despises the very ground Barry walks on? It’s only natural, of course, because you once liked Barry, and Todd is terribly in love with you. But if you don’t watch out, you’ll lose him, just as you lost Barry. Todd Emery’s nobody’s fool!”

“If you only stop mentioning my jilting, I’d forget it ever happened,” Willow flamed wretchedly. “I’m strong enough to have Barry here, to ignore the past, but I can’t do it when it’s thrown right at my head!” Suddenly she was crying. “I’m sorry,” she choked, dabbing at her eyes furiously.

Aunt Eunice’s face crumpled. “So you still love Barry Dane! After everything that’s happened.” She looked old.

“I don’t love him!” Willow cried. “I love Todd and you, Aunt Eunice,” she added very softly. “You’ve been wonderful to me.”

“Run along to town and get your favors for the party,” Aunt Eunice said briskly. “Sometimes I think I’m a meddling fool.”

“You’re grand.” Willow kissed her lightly, then fled. Aunt Eunice had a heart of gold, even if she did want her own way. And her way was right!

Willow kept her mind strictly on her driving, going downtown. She hurried from one store to another, buying gay little novelties. Finally she stopped at the corner drugstore and slipped into a booth for a bite to eat and a few moments’ rest.

She felt spent, suddenly. Wearily she rested her dark head against the high wooden partition. As in a daze she heard a girl’s voice rising from the booth back of her.

“Why so sunk, Barry? Are you still carrying a torch for Willow?” Willow’s weariness suddenly turned to live awareness as she recognized Arline’s voice.

“I’m not at all sunk!” Barry’s laughing voice came.

“I’m your friend and Willow’s friend,” Arline went on firmly. “And I like Todd Emery, too. Why can’t we all be chummy, instead of the way we were at the Chalet? Why on earth does Todd want to get your goat?”

For a long moment, Barry didn’t answer. Then, “Let’s forget him, shall we?” His voice was perfectly controlled.

Arlene sighed audibly. “You and Willow were made for each other,” she said dreamily. “Why did you jilt her, Barry?”

Willow’s heart seemed to stop beating. Would Barry disclose anything she herself didn’t already know?

“She heard Barry’s voice, low, steady, very even. “Willow was the one who made the break.”

She froze to her heart. Barry was as much as saying she had jilted him! And that wasn’t fair. She would never have let him down when he was in trouble!

She rose swiftly and faced the occupants of the other booth. “You jilted me, Barry Dane?” she exclaimed.

Barry rose, too, and stood towering over her. His eyes were blue fires consuming hers.

“I wrote to you,” he said hoarsely. “And I received your letter. Just don’t lie about its contents!”

The fire in his eyes turned to gray ash. “Okay, lady, forget it,” he said, shrugging. “My mistake was in falling in love with a girl who hasn’t the strength to take anything but kisses!”

She whirled and left them. Wide-eyed, Arline had been speechless. But Willow knew she’d say plenty later on.

Well, let her! Let her tell the whole town that Willow Marvin and Barry Dane had
quarreled openly. Let Barry act the martyr, and add up his war citations and his pretended jilting and make the whole town like him better. She could take being considered a snob. She could take anything. She could even discount what Barry had said, because of his wretched temper.

Of one thing she was certain. Barry had warranted his disgrace in Germany. And Todd was right in despising him, just as she despised him, utterly. She was glad she'd never have to speak to him again. For now he wouldn't have the nerve to come to her party. He couldn't be that strong.

But he did come.

Willow was standing beside Todd, smilingly receiving guests when Arline and Barry entered the patio. Arline looked like an exotic angel with her fair hair loose and a clinging black gown.

For a moment, seeing them, Willow felt sick. Then she drew a sharp little breath and went directly to them, holding out a slim hand.

“So glad you could come,” she murmured, and felt the firm pressure of Arline's fingers, then the hard, brief clasp of Barry's. He released her hand quickly.

“It’s a pleasure,” he said, and looked right through her.

She made herself smile. “I must rejoin Todd,” she said, and left them.

But when she returned to the other side of the room, Todd had disappeared. Where had he gone? she wondered icily. She felt like a fool, receiving congratulation alone. What if Todd had become coldly furious at her greeting Barry? What if he should jilt her, just as Aunt Eunice had predicted he might? She'd only gone to Barry because she was the hostess, and she'd wanted to show him she could ignore their quarrel, as he had.

Aunt Eunice, stately in gray lace and pearls, hovered worriedly nearby, her brows arched in a question mark. Willow turned on the palm-concealed radio, and still Todd didn't return.

Her face was stiff from smiling when she looked up and saw Barry at her side. He looked calm and big and dependable, as though he were the bridegroom-to-be.

SHE FELT everyone watching them, and knew she had to say something. Her resentment of his blaming her for the jilting suddenly almost choked her. It took all her will power to manage to smile.

“I’m surprised that you came,” she said low. “Though nothing you could say or do now would surprise me!”

He bent his fair head slightly. “I told you I’d come,” he said.

There were sun-lines about his eyes, laugh-
"Don't know," he repeated. "What do you know?" She set her lips. "I believe I know how to be polite."
Wish On A Week End

by

Dorothy Brodine

Marjorie had only a week end to fall in love—but she made good time in romance.

The girl behind the pine-panelled registration desk was slim and dark and dramatically good-looking. She wore a tailored black dress, a giant gold slave bracelet and matching earrings, and her sleek hair was piled on top of her head. When she saw Marjorie, she postured a bit, smiled professionally, and said, “Good morning. May I help you?”

Marjorie pointed to the neatly lettered placard on the wall just back of the girl’s head. “It says to sign up here for the ski school. I’d like to put my name down.”

“You mean for tomorrow’s classes?”

“Oh, no.” Marjorie was definite about that. “This morning. I’m only here for the week end, and I want as much instruction as I can get. You see, I’ve never been on skis before.”

Very politely, the dark girl suggested that Marjorie finish reading the placard. With some trepidation, Marjorie did so. She found the injunction, in small but quite legible type:

Those wishing to attend morning ski classes, are requested to have skis fitted the evening before.

The girl added, “Ted—Mr. Roberts—may not have time to fit you.” Her slim shoulders moved. “Still, you might ask him.”

Ted Roberts. So that was his name. Since arriving at Lakeside Lodge the evening before, Marjorie had heard innumerable snatches of talk about the ski instructor. She had heard that he was handsome as all get-out. That he was built like a Greek god—or practically. That he wouldn’t give a girl the time of day. And she had thought, I want to meet him.

Marjorie was little and curly-headed and
pretty as a Dresden China doll. In New York, where she lived and worked, she went out enough, but her beaux were all so-so. There was Jimmy Davis, who worked for the telephone company, and had his own motorcycle. There was Pat Shanley, who, since getting out of the Navy, hadn't worked at all. There was Bill Hammond, who was terribly serious, and wore glasses, and wrote poems she couldn't understand.

She liked these boys. She enjoyed going out with them. But she was twenty-one now, and she wanted to fall in love. Head-over-heels, wonderfully, crazily in love. So, when last night she had heard the chatter about the ski instructor, she had said to herself, Marjorie baby, maybe this is it...

Of the slim brunette at the desk, she inquired, "Could you tell me where the class is meeting? I'm new here."

"The class," replied the slim one, pointing a carefully tended finger, "is meeting outside the ski shed. Follow your nose until you bump into a crowd of people."

Marjorie followed her nose, and shortly thereafter found the crowd. An all-female crowd. She tried to count—there must have been ten or fifteen babbling, simpering, snickering girls. Some were waxing their skis. Some were smoking cigarettes, sizing up their associates. The rest of them were hovering around the tall, broadly built young man in the yellow sweater, dark blue gabardine trousers, and visor cap.

"Ted," crooned a small, shrewd-looking blonde, "how long will it take me to learn to ski? I mean, really ski. Christy, and all that?"

Ted pushed up his visor cap. A dark curl tumbled over his broad brown forehead, and he pushed that up, too.

"Ever been on skis before?"

"The blonde dimpled effectively. "Just in a sporting goods store."

"Well," Ted said, "if you do as I tell you, you'll be going down the easy slopes in a couple of days."

"Oh, will I?" The little blonde performed an ecstatic dance step. "Honestly, Ted?"

"Sure. With no more than half a dozen spills on the way!"

The blonde groaned; the rest of the crowd guffawed. A plump girl, who had short straight hair and bangs, said philosophically, "That's Ted, kids."

Ted turned from his audience then, making for the entrance of the shed. Marjorie had a glimpse of brilliantly blue eyes, thick, dark brows, and a handsomely moulded mouth. Mentally, she whistled. Why, the guy was—gorgeous. Dream stuff. The kind you think of when Sinatra sings, You Go to My Head..."

The other girls had stepped back respectfully. But Marjorie patted her white ski helmet into place, and followed him through the doorway, into the shed.

The shed was small and damp and cluttered. Skis, poles, snow shoes, and two or three bobsleds reposed against the walls. There was another placard, also clearly lettered, tacked over the door. Marjorie dropped her eyes. She knew what it said.

As boldly as she could, she tapped Ted's shoulder. "I beg your pardon. I'd like to join your ski class. I wonder if you have a moment to fit me."

He whirled. His brilliantly blue eyes shot directly to hers. He jerked an articulate thumb toward the placard over the door. He asked, not at all gently. "Have you by any chance read that?"

She straightened. "Should I have?"

Ted Roberts was clearly not amused. He put his hands on her shoulders, spun her around, stopped her short, and said, "All right. Read it. Read it out loud."

"Those wishing to attend morning ski classes, are requested to have skis fitted the evening before." She turned back to him.

"Oh," she murmured, "it's just like the sign in the office."

"Why didn't you come to me last night?"

Ted Roberts demanded. "Last night, when I had plenty of time?"

Last night, after dinner, the ten or fifteen girls who composed this morning's class had gone to Ted to be fitted. Marjorie had seen them. And she had thought: Not me. I'm not going to get myself lost in that mob. If I do, he'll never notice me.

She said, "Last night I was tired. I'd had a long trip. It's quite a journey from New York," she added.

"All right, baby, never mind giving me your address." He nodded to her. "Come over here. Hold up your arm. Bend it a little—"

She was on the point of snapping that she hadn't given him her address, that he flattered himself if he thought she meant to. But she saw that he had selected a shining, almost new pair of skis for her, so she relaxed. Hmmm. He wasn't such a bear, at that. Perhaps he even sort of...

"Give me your foot. Come on. Don't waste my time!"

He took her left boot, pulled it, shoved it, moved it between steel clamps. He was puffing a bit, and seemed to be muttering under his breath—something about dames who bothered him at the last minute. Marjorie, resolutely, pretended not to hear him. That was the way to take his jibes. Ignore them.

He was working with her right boot now. She glanced downward, noting his veined and muscled hands, the sweep of his shoulders un-
der his sweater. He was a pretty big boy, she reflected. Big and hard and good-looking. And mean. She mustn't forget that. Mean, she repeated to herself.

He slapped her boot conclusively. “There,” he said. “You're fitted. Now, take 'em off, and let's go. We're late.”

“But—” She didn't mean to flutter, but when she saw her bound feet, she became a bit upset. “But I don't know how to take 'em off.”

He was standing, towering over her. The look in his eyes was enough to shrink an elephant to the size of a mouse. A baby mouse.

“Don't know?” he repeated. “Say what do you know?”

She set her lips. “I believe I know how to be polite.”

At that, he grinned sheepishly. He said, “Okay, okay, I'll take 'em off for you. But watch now, so you'll know next time.”

Outside, Ted was immediately engulfed by his adoring coterie. The entire crowd, laughing, bantering, joking, proceeded to move down the road, leaving Marjorie to bring up the rear. She was having trouble carrying her skis. Unsuccessfully she tried to get them under her arm, over her shoulder, in any portable position. But she kept losing them. They kept sliding from her grasp, slipping into the snow.

“Te-ed,” she wailed, in a small voice. It was dreadful to need assistance from this impecunious god, but that was the way it was. “Ted!” she called, and he didn't hear. He was crossing the bridge that led to the foot of the slope, his followers dogging his heels.

“Hold on. I'm coming.”

It was the short, plump girl, with the Dutch-cut bangs. She had paused at the bridge, and was plodding back down the road, her own skis balanced effortlessly on her shoulders. Marjorie felt an enormous sense of relief. She hadn't been deserted, after all.

She said, apologetically, “This is my first time out. I feel like the world's biggest nuisance.”

The plump girl chuckled merrily. “Don't be silly. You've got to learn, just like anybody else.” She put down her own skis, and reached for Marjorie's. “Let's have those things, now. One over each shoulder—cross 'em in back—grip 'em near the front end.” Carefully, she adjusted Marjorie's hands. “There. That's it.”

Marjorie beamed. “There's no trick to it at all! It's easy!”

“It is when you know how.”

The SUN was coming out, glinting on the crusted snow, on the sheets of ice in the gutters. In the middle distance, the Berkshires stood cold and misty blue. Ski trails criss-crossed all the nearby slopes and roads, made gray troughs in the drifts outside the cottages. The trees dripped and glittered in the sunlight.

The plump girl, trotting beside Marjorie, said, “By the way, I'm Jean Skinner, from Forest Hills. You?”

“I'm Marjorie Williams. New York City.”

“Gosh,” Jean said, chuckling, “no wonder you don't know how to ski. In New York, they shovel away the snow almost before it falls.”

Marjorie agreed that they did. She said, “You seem to know something about skiing. Have you been up here before?”

“Several times. I was here two weeks ago, in fact. And the week before that.”

“Oh,” Marjorie said, and did some rapid thinking. If Jean had spent previous week ends at the lodge, she no doubt knew a little about Ted. Marjorie faced her. “Jean—” she began.

“Yeah?”

“This Ted Roberts. What's he like? Is he always so aloof, or is that just an act?”

Jean threw back her dark, shining head, and laughed. “Gee, kid,” she said. “Gee, not you, too?”

Marjorie colored. She was sorry now that she'd opened her mouth. She mumbled, “I'm not particularly interested, of course. I just—”

“You think he's cute. Sure. We all do.” Jean's eyes twinkled. “Well he is cute. But unfortunately, he's also an iceberg.”

“Why is he an iceberg? He's not married, is he?”

“He might as well be.”

“But why?”

“Kid, it's like this.” Jean fortified herself with a long breath. “You know the tall, smooth job who works at the front desk? The one who looks a little like Hedy Lamar? Well, Ted's crazy about her—just absolutely crazy—and she's running around with a fellow from town. A fellow named Hank Morgan.”

Marjorie felt that she must protest. “But gosh, Ted's so good-looking—such an absolute dream. How can she prefer this Hank whatever-his-name-is?”

“Simple, kid, simple.” Jean grimaced. “Hank's got a big car, money to spend. Ted's got his looks and his skis. And Penny was always a business woman.”

They had crossed the bridge and come to the foot of the slope. Ted and his pupils were already at the top, putting down their skis and trying their poles. Marjorie heard plaintive cries of, “Ted, am I doing this right?”

“Ted, I can't move this binder!”

“Ted, how do you hold a ski pole, anyway?”

Ted, Ted, Ted.

 Somehow, in spite of her inexperience, Marjorie made it to the top of the hill. But by this time, she had forgotten everything Jean had told her about carrying her skis and poles. She was dragging them, losing them, picking
them up, dragging again. Ted, fastening his own skis, took a moment to observe her painful progress. He did not reprove her, but continued adjusting his bindings. His face was unreadable.

But at least, Marjorie tried to console herself, he did notice me...

Then, without warning, Ted’s voice roared forth. “On with those skis, you girls! I said on with them. You're not helpless, not one of you. I've showed you how. On the double!”

Jean, stamping her boot between the clamps, whispered, “He was a sergeant in the Army, you know.”

“Was he? Well, I'm not surprised.”

THE SKI lesson began. Ted showed his charges how to walk, how to fall down without injuring themselves, how to do the kick turn, how to herringbone. Marjorie hung on to every word, her ears and eyes wide open. She truly wanted to learn how to ski. She wanted to be able to tell her boss and the boys and her family that she'd made real progress.

For the better part of the morning, she got along very well. She followed Ted’s instructions exactly: she practiced over and over. But toward noon, when she was stomping up the hill behind Ted, herringbone fashion, she became aware of how warm she was. Inside her heavy clothes, she could feel her skin beginning to tickle. Her forehead and her upper lip were dewy. The back of her neck fairly crawled.

She stopped to strip off her mittens and loosen her helmet. Then she unzipped her navy-and-white jacket.

Ted, seeing her, asked warily, “What’s wrong now? Are you coming, or aren't you?”

“I’m coming,” she said. “Only—”

“Only what?”

She made a despairing gesture. “I’m dying with the heat.”

Ted turned, slid neatly down the slope, snow-ploughed to a stop beside her. He saw the heavy knitted sweater under her gabardine jacket, and with thumb and forefinger, he pinched up the neck band.

“No wonder you’re warm,” he muttered. “This is the sort of thing you might need in the South Pole. On a cold day.”

Marjorie couldn’t face the mockery in his blue eyes. “But I thought I'd better wear it. I didn’t want to freeze, and have to go back to the lodge—”

“My dear young lady,” Ted put his fingers under her chin, lifted her face. “When you go skiing, you skip the heavy clothes. The exercise warms you up. Didn’t anybody ever tell you that? Or couldn’t you guess it yourself?”

“Nobody told me. I couldn’t guess.”

She didn’t tell him that under the heavy sweater, she had a red flannel shirt and a set of long woolen underwear.

That afternoon, there was another crowded ski class. Marjorie, becoming accustomed to the sport, found that she was developing some skill in walking, turning, springing, climbing hills. She would have liked to practice coming down one of the gentler slopes, but Ted, after scowling and deliberating, decided not to let her do it. She was coming along nicely, he agreed, but he didn’t want her falling and breaking her neck. Tomorrow would be time enough for her to make her first descent.

“You’re making progress, kid,” Jean whispered. “You’ve got the guy worrying about you.”

Marjorie scoffed at that. “Worrying about me? Don’t be naive. It’s just that if there were an accident, he'd be held responsible.”

But she wondered, as she did a kick turn, for possibly the hundredth time if Ted was truly concerned for her neck. It would be awfully nice, knowing that he was.

Tomorrow, she thought. Tomorrow, I’ll find out.

Coming back to the lodge with Jean late that afternoon, Marjorie stopped at the bulletin board to read the notices. She observed with mixed feelings that there was a barn dance scheduled for the evening. Everyone was invited, guests and lodge employees alike, and there was a promise of cider, doughnuts, cake, and fruit. The recreation hall was to be especially decorated for the occasion.

“Going?” Jean asked eagerly.

Marjorie couldn’t quite make up her mind. “I’d sort of like to,” she admitted. “It says the employees are invited. I was thinking that maybe Ted—”

“Ted? Sorry to disappoint you, kid. Ted never goes to those things. In the evening, he usually disappears some place. Probably goes to his room to read, or hitchs a ride to town.”

“Oh, I see. Well, are you going?”

“I think so.” Jean’s round, good-natured face took on a pleased expression. “You know that tall, homely red-headed boy I sat next to at lunch? The one who asked me to pass the salt? I have an idea he’ll go, so—”

But Marjorie by this time had lost all enthusiasm for the dance. In her mind’s eye, she could visualize it clearly: Twenty or thirty girls standing or sitting around hopefully, possibly a dozen men giving them critical inspection. She would have braved the ordeal, had she thought Ted might be there. But as long as Ted wasn’t coming—well, she just wouldn’t bother.

Now, she patted away a yawn. “Come to think of it,” she murmured, “I’m rather tired. I believe I’ll just sit down and read tonight.”
She kept her word. After dinner, she went alone into the big, dark living room, dropped on the sofa, and reached for a magazine. There was a fire burning in one of the largest hearths she had ever seen. It very nearly covered the width of the room. On either side of the hearth, there was a pyramid of fresh logs.

Barn dance, she thought scornfully. How silly. I'm glad I didn't go. I wouldn't waste my time.

It was then that she became aware of Ted Roberts. But very definitely aware. He had come into the room, tall and quiet and immaculately turned out in tailored slacks and a yellow sports shirt, and he was going through the magazines in the rack. The firelight struck his dark hair, brightening and accenting it. She wished, unreasonably, that she could walk over to him and touch that dark hair.

Of course, she didn't walk over to him. She was too shy to do that. She sat primly on the sofa, turning the pages of her magazine, pretending to be completely unaware of him. She kept her eyes fixed on the page. Although the type leaped and danced and wiggled, she didn't stir an inch.

It was just as well. A moment later, he came and sat down beside her.

"I wonder," he said, "if you're going to be long with that magazine?"

She jumped. "This magazine?" she managed to whisper. "Why? Do you want it?"

"I'm reading a serial which is concluded in that issue. I was hunting all over the place for it, when I noticed you had it." He sat back, placidly folding his arms. "Take your time, though. I can wait."

She might have known. He hadn't seated himself beside her because he liked her or wanted to talk to her. He was waiting for a magazine. He had time; he didn't want her to hurry.

She was disgusted. "Bah!" she muttered. "What's that? Were you speaking to me? Did you say something?"

She riffled more pages. "No, I didn't say anything. If I can help it, I never say anything."

"Oh." He relaxed again. "I thought for a minute that you might be sore at me."

"Sore? Should I be?"

"Maybe." One of his dark eyebrows went up. "I did give you a work-out in class today. I picked on you."

She spoke with classical serenity. "I suppose you did. But I never let little things like that bother me."

She had rather hoped to annoy him, but she saw instead that she had amused him. He was laughing. He had a deep, honest, altogether engaging laugh, which seemed to come right from his heart. It made a warm human being of him, crumbling most of the barriers she had imagined stood between them. He moved closer to her.

"Listen to me, pug nose," he said. He had managed to stop laughing, but there was a lightness in his voice. "There's a reason for my grouchin'ness, if you care to hear it. It's a defense mechanism."

"A—what?"

"You heard me. It's just a cover-up. The reason I push you girls around, is because underneath I'm really afraid of you."

She turned. She had a fleeting impression of heavy shoulders, a hard chest, a strong jaw, admirable biceps. "You?" she said. "You afraid of women? I'm laughing."

"It's true, pug nose. You see—I was burned once."

Burned. She'd almost forgotten. Penny, the smooth-as-silk brunette at the front desk, had burned him. Penny had spoiled him for any other girl. For the time being, anyway.

Some day, of course, he would get over her. He was young and sound and very much alive, and his recovery was inevitable. But Marjorie was afraid it wouldn't be for some time, and she would have preferred it to be this week end.

HE STOOD up then, went to the radio, and began twisting the dials. The music came faintly at first, but presently it picked up, increased, flooded the room. A saxophone was wailing the chorus of Don't Blame Me. It was like the voice of a forsaken woman, crying into the wind for her lost lover.

"Come on, pug nose," he said gently. "Let's dance."

Innocently, she held up the magazine. "Sure you wouldn't rather read your serial?"

He grinned, taking her into his arms. "I think the serial can wait," he murmured.

Ordinarily, Marjorie was a very prudent girl. She was the kind who looks both ways when crossing a street, and banks part of her salary every week. The kind with sense. But as she moved across the bare floor with Ted Roberts, her face touching his, and her hand on his shoulder, she did a not so sensible thing. She fell in love with him.

She couldn't really help it. In the first place, he was smiling at her. He had even teeth, very white and strong, and a good, tanned skin. The look of hair was falling over his forehead again, and impatiently, he pushed it back.

Looking at him, she thought wistfully, Gee, he's smooth. And before she could stop herself, she fell in love with him.

In a way, her falling in love was all right. She was careful—very careful—not to let him know about it. She danced with him, she chatted, she laughed at his jokes. She told him about the insurance office where she worked,
FOOT RELIEF
in 2 minutes!

DO THIS DAILY: Get wonderful quick relief and health for feet with this easy exercise recommended by most Chiropodists (foot specialists). Bend feet under, flex from side to side, curl toes down, spread toes apart; repeat 10 times. Then massage feet, and between toes, with soothing Mennenn QUINSANA nourishing foot powder. Comforts, peps up feet. Amazingly effective against Athletic's Foot, excessive perspiration, foot odor. Shake QUINSANA in shoes daily. Get QUINSANA now for greater foot comfort.

MENENN QUINSANA

High School Course at Home

Go as rapidly as your time and abilities permit. Course equivalent to resident school work. Preparations for college entrance exams. Standard H.S. texts supplied. Diploma. Order from H. L. Webber, 100 W. Wabash Ave., Chicago 2, Ill. (Write for free literature.) Write TODAY for FREE samples. High school education is very important for advancement in industry and salaried work. A high school diploma is a passport to higher position.

American School, Dept. H-249, Drexel at 59th, Chicago 37

TOOTHACHE?
DUE TO CAVITY


DENT'S TOOTH GUM

NEW CHEAP OIL BURNER

FOR COOKING & HEATING STOVES-FURNACES

HEAT YOUR HOME, COOK YOUR MEALS

WITH CHEAP FURNACE OIL

NO MORE SHOVELING COAL OR ASHES. A New Fuelizer Starter Vaporizing System turns Cheap 130 Flash Furnace Oil, Distillate, Kerosene, etc., into Oil Gas without clogging up. LIFETIME GUARANTEE against defects. $2.60 50c extra. Write for testing.
and she looked lovely as a snow nymph. Hank, following a step or two behind her, was bundled into a heavy overcoat, big boots and a knitted cap. He was not good-looking—his features were too big and irregular to be attractive.

But he does have that big car, Marjorie thought grimly. And lots of money to spend.

Penny, reaching the walk, caroled, "Hello there, Ted! What are you doing out here?"

"Oh—we were winding up a stroll."

"We went to the movies. We saw something with Bob Hope in it." Penny hooked her arm gaily through Hank's.

The introductions were next. Penny made them, with Ted's help, and Marjorie responded to them mechanically.

Then, as the quartette moved to the back door, Penny said, "Hank and I were about to raid the ice box. You folks care to join us?"

Nobody answered right away. Hank shifted uncomfortably—it was clear that he didn't want another couple horning in on the most important moments of his date. Ted reached rather obviously for a cigarette, and took his time lighting it. Apparently, he had no desire to be stuck with this decision, either.

It was Marjorie who spoke. She felt the others expected her to.

She said, as equably as she could, "Thanks for the invitation, Penny—it was sweet of you. But right now, if you'll excuse me, I'm afraid I'm too tired even to eat."

She bade Penny and Hank a polite good night, and, with Ted, went through the kitchen and hall to the foot of the main staircase.

About to mount the first step, she paused. "You were probably hungry," she said. "Maybe you should have gone without me."

His grin was wry. "Two's company!"

It would be pointless to prolong the evening now, Marjorie felt. Since she couldn't immediately hope to restore the mood which had been built up between her and Ted, she would do better to hold her fire until the next day, when the ski class convened.

So she said merely, "Be seeing you," and ran up the stairs.

His voice followed her. "See you, pug nose . . ."

But IN the morning, she woke to rain. Torrential rain. The sky was completely overcast, the brook was swelling, and the snow that remained lay in gray soggy patches.

"Oh!" she said miserably. "Oh, darn!"

Jean, padding up in slippers and house coat, sighed. "Rain. You might know. And we came up here for the snow."

"It isn't so much the snow." Disconsolately, Marjorie folded her arms. "It's—" She hesi-
Beware Coughs from common colds That Hang On

Creomulsion relieves promptly because it goes right to the seat of the trouble to help loosen and expel germ laden phlegm, and aid nature to soothe and heal raw, tender inflamed bronchial mucous membranes. Tell your druggist to sell you a bottle of Creomulsion with the understanding you must like the way it quickly allays the cough or you are to have your money back.

CREOMULSION
For Coughs, Chest Colds, Bronchitis

Opportunity of Lifetime
Supplying DDT and other profitable products to farmers. No experience or capital required. Must have auto and good references. Permanent. Write or wire.
McNESS COMPANY
Dept. 716-47 Freeport, Illinois

INVENTORS
Patent laws encourage the development of inventions. Our firm is registered to practice before the U.S. Patent Office. Write for further particulars as to patent protection and procedure and "Invention Record" form at once. No obligation.

McMORROW, BERMAN & DAVIDSON
Registered Patent Attorneys
1906 Victor Building Washington, D.C.

STAMMER?

Train Your Own HORSES!
Colts - Stock Horses - Circus Horses
Gait Show Horses - Write for FREE BOOK
ANIMAL LOVERS' ASSOCIATION
Box G-111, Tarzana, Calif.

Backache Whipped By Man and Wife
If you suffer from Backache, Leg or Rheumatic pains, Nervousness, Swollen Ankles, Burning Passages, Bladder Weakness or Getting Up Nightly, due to nonorganic and non-systemic Kidney and Bladder troubles, you may easily enjoy the delightful benefits experienced by thousands who have depended on Cystex for such troubles. The following letter from a well-known Massachusetts housewife is typical of those received from Cystex users all over the world: "I was so laid up with pains in my back, legs and arms that I was miserable. Finally I decided to try your Cystex. In a couple of weeks I was like a new person, the pains had left and I could walk anywhere. My husband had pains in his arms, took Cystex and the pains left." To prove what Cystex can do to bring relief, help from the distress due to above mentioned kidney and bladder troubles, get Cystex from your druggist. Give it a fair trial exactly according to the simple directions. Unless completely satisfied and delighted with your rapid improvement, your money back is guaranteed. So don't suffer another day without trying Cystex.

ROMANCE

tated, then plunged. "It's Ted. Skiing gives me an excuse to be with him."
"Kid, I told you he was a lost cause."
"I know you did. But just the same, I keep thinking that maybe—"
Jean put a sympathetic hand over Marjorie's. "Poor you. I guess you haven't heard the latest, have you?"
"The latest? Why, what is it?"
"Penny had a fight with Hank last night. In the kitchen. And now she and Ted are like a couple of turtle doves."
Marjorie swallowed hard. A fight? That was queer. Why should they have had a fight? She faced Jean deliberately. "Who told you? How do you happen to know?"
"I heard it myself. Red and I heard it. It was when we came back from the barn dance, about midnight or so."
"Tell me about it," Marjorie whispered.
"Sure. Glad to." Jean propped an elbow on the window sill, settling herself. "It seems that Mr. Flynn—he's the manager of the lodge, in case you didn't know—stopped in the kitchen last night, and found Hank gobbled up a hunk of cake. Mr. Flynn told Penny she brought her dates in for snacks too often, and Hank got sore. He insulted Mr. Flynn, and I think maybe he tried to sock him. Then Penny got her dander up, and told Hank to beat it, and not to bother coming back—"

Marjorie exclaimed, "Golly!"
"Some of the guests looked in to see what the noise was about. Ted came with them, and the next minute, Penny was crying, and telling Mr. Flynn she was sorry, and asking to borrow a handkerchief. If I say so myself, it was her big scene, and boy, did she play it. Ted put his arm around her, and Mr. Flynn told her not to worry, it wasn't her fault. The last I saw of her, she was walking off with Ted, as lovey-dovey as you please."
"And—that's all?"
Jean made a face. "I'd say it was enough, wouldn't you?"

Marjorie decided that it was. She decided also, that in view of this reconciliation, to say nothing of the bad weather, she would take the eleven o'clock train for New York, instead of the seven-thirty, as she had originally intended. She couldn't bear to wander all day through the lodge, and watch Ted Roberts pay attention to another girl. She knew when it was time to throw in the towel.

Accordingly, she ate a light breakfast, informed the front desk of the hour of her departure, and went upstairs to get her things in order. She packed her ski pants, her jacket, her helmet—all the nice things for which she'd saved and shopped so carefully.
Jean, apprised of her decision to leave, was genuinely sorry. Jean was driving back to the city with Red.

"Isn’t it wonderful?" she asked, ecstatically. "He’s lonely, of course—you probably would turn up your nose at him. But he lives in Westchester, which isn’t really so far from Forest Hills, and—"

Marjorie smiled. "I think it’s lovely, Jean. And I know you’ll have a good time on the way home."

The taxi was due to pick her up at ten-thirty. Waiting for it, Marjorie glanced into the recreation hall and the living room, hoping for a last sight of Ted. She would have liked the chance to say good-bye to him, even though she knew it wouldn’t do any good. But he was nowhere to be found.

It was just as well. If he took her hand, if he was gentle with her, she might cry and make a fool of herself.

Suddenly, a horn honked. Marjorie consulted her watch; it was exactly ten-thirty. She picked up her suitcase, adjusted her hat, clambered down the hall and out the door, and sped to the driveway. There was the taxi, its back door open, its motor idling. Somewhat breathlessly, she got in.

Ted Roberts, sitting there, smiling, said, "Going my way?"

She fairly collapsed into the seat. When she had recovered herself, she gasped, "What in the world are you doing here?"

He answered her pleasantly. "I’m riding to the station, pug nose. With you, I hope."

The taxi started, amidst a shower of mud and slush. A bump in the road threw her toward him, and he put his arm around her.

"After all," he said, "I couldn’t let you rush off without giving me your telephone number. I’m going to need it, when I start work in New York."

Now she was really bewildered. "Start work?" she repeated. "New York?"

"I’ve been thinking about it for some time," he went on. "As you’ve probably surmised, ski instructors don’t get rich. And one of these days I’m going to want to get married, and—"

"Married?" She was beginning to catch on, but there was one point about which she had to make sure. "You mean to Penny?"

"No, you little dope. It might have been Penny once, but—" he flipped up her chin, "I think you know who it is now."

That was when she stopped asking questions. No smart girl asks questions when she can just as easily be kissed. Besides, the right kiss can tell as much as a thousand words.

Maybe more, Marjorie decided blissfully.
Ann saw her mother first and then Mary Paley. She grinned a wan grin at Mary and asked, “How’s Kip?”

“He’ll live now that you’re going to,” Mary said. “He’s downstairs waiting for me.”

“When can I see him?” Ann said.

“Tomorrow,” Mary said.

“I love him,” Ann said softly. “Tell him. He’s such a dear. I love him so awfully much I can hardly stand it, Mary.”

“Well just try to stand it until tommorrow,” Mary said.

Ann caught her arm. “One thing. Do you love him?”

“Since they said you were going to make it, I love everybody,” Mary said. She bent down toward the pillow. “I like Kip an awful lot . . . I could have loved him if he could have loved me, but I’m a funny person that way.”

She smiled softly into the white young face. “You can have him and still retain your title of the best all around gal at Dalton, honey.”

Ann counted the minutes until the next afternoon and then there was Kip, big and tall and every inch steel cable, coming hesitantly through the door. He had on a gray suit and his tie was neat and his brown oxfords were polished. She realized that he really didn’t have the flair to wear Norwegian moccasins and loud checked sport shirts and slacks like Chuck. Kip wasn’t any campus cutie but he was a man. Her man . . .

She didn’t smile and he didn’t smile. The moment was too sober and serious and grave because of the words they were going to say to each other. But the light in her eyes dispelled his hesitation and he strode toward her and leaned down and kissed her.

He said, “I love you so damned much, Ann.”

She said, “I love you, Kip.”

“Since when? I thought it was Chuck.”

“Never. I sort of thought it was, too, but I couldn’t ever forget the way you stepped on my feet when we were dancing or how you followed me with your eyes or how you dubbed a ball—”

“I’ve practiced dancing, too,” he said. “You’re going to a dance with me as soon as you’re well enough.”

“Sure I am,” she said softly, her hand against his cheek. “You said since when, Kip. Since always. Love’s kind of like being sick, I mean, it’s like fever and you don’t really know what’s wrong. You’re all mixed up and confused and then all of a sudden the trouble is diagnosed and you know what will cure you. Darling, come closer . . .”
spend a few months a year at the ranch.”
“But—I don’t understand.” Smokey shook
her head dazedly. “Why did you let me think
you were just a cowhand?”
“Well, it seemed a good idea that first day,
when I offered to teach you to ride. I mean,
I thought Ralph would be more apt to consent
to the arrangement if he thought that. And,
frankly, I was awfully anxious for Ralph to
consent to it. I didn’t fall in love with you
at first sight or anything like that—at least,
I didn’t suppose I did. But I definitely wanted
to know you better.”
“Yes, but later—why didn’t you tell me?”
“Can’t you guess?” Marty chuckled. “I was
darn sure you were marrying Ralph for his
money, even if you didn’t know it yourself.
So, if you knew I was rich, too you could
have just as easily fooled yourself into thinking
you loved me.”
“But I didn’t know,” Smokey said dreamily.
“I fell in love with plain Marty Wayne, cowboy. And, darling, I’d have liked being plain
Marty Wayne’s wife just fine, too!”
“Sure you would have,” Marty said huskily.
But his lips, claiming hers, told Smokey much more emphatically than the
words that he would never question nor doubt
her love. Just as she would never question nor
doubt his.

Tired Kidneys Often
Bring Sleepless Nights

Doctors say your kidneys contain 15 miles of
tiny tubes or filters which help to purify the
blood and keep you healthy. When they get
tired and don’t work right in the daytime,
many people have to get up nights. Frequent
or scanty passages withsmarting and burning
sometimes shows there is something wrong
with your kidneys or bladder. Don’t neglect
this condition and lose valuable, restful sleep.

When disorder of kidney function permits
poisonous matter to remain in your blood, it may
also cause nagging backache, rheumatic pains,
leg pains, loss of pep and energy, swelling, puff-
iness under the eyes, headaches and dizziness.

Don’t wait! Ask your druggist for Doan’s Pills,
a stimulant diuretic, used successfully by mil-
ions for over 50 years. Doan’s give happy relief
and will help the 15 miles of kidney tubes flush
out poisonous waste from your blood. Get
Doan’s Pills,
ROMANCE

(Continued from page 85)
crumpled to the floor. Someone screamed.
“Now get up!” Barry roared. “Get up and get out!”
Without a word, Todd lifted himself up, and staggered out.
Barry turned to Willow, his face as white as paper. “I’m sorry,” he said. “I’d better go.”
She grasped his hand, clung to it. “You must stay—” she began. “Oh, Barry, darling, won’t you have me back?”
“Have you back?” he cried raggedly. “Willow, my darling!”
Aunt Eunice pushed her way to them then, her face proud and deathly pale. “Come with me, you two,” she commanded.
She went directly to her desk in the library, and took out a slim envelope. Her hand shook slightly as she gave it to Willow.
“This is a letter from Barry,” she said, her chin high. “It came right after your accident, Willow. I read it, but didn’t tell you it had come, because I wanted Todd for you. Now I know I was wrong, and I shouldn’t have tried to meddle with real love. You two were meant for each other. And—God bless you!” She went out and closed the door after her.
Willow drew a scrap of paper from the envelope. On it, she saw Barry’s penciled scribbling:

Darling, I’m in prison but can explain all.
Cable me you’ll stand by, or write in care of the Red Cross. I love you with all my heart.

Willow raised starry eyes to Barry’s. “I didn’t know,” she whispered. “I thought you didn’t love me enough to explain. I let myself believe that Aunt Eunice had been right about you. I—I wasn’t strong, Barry darling.”
His arms held her tight. “You’re plenty strong!” he told her gruffly. “If I hadn’t been so quick-tempered I’d have reasoned out that you never received that letter. Sweet, forgive me for doubting! I love you so.”
“I love you, too, Barry.” Suddenly she was crying.

He kissed her then, and it was as if it had been long ago, as it would be forever.

INVEST IN PEACE - BUY BONDS!
"Hm—more smart people making tracks for Calvert!"

The sensible trend’s to Calvert! Sensible...
because it’s the “whiskey of moderation”...blessed with
friendly lightness...congenial taste...all-around
whiskey agreeableness. We suggest you try it. Then you,
too, will understand why...

Clear Heads Choose Calvert

Calvert
BLENDED WHISKIES
Reserve or Special

Calvert Distillers Corp., N. Y. C. BLENDED WHISKEY 86.8 Proof.
Calvert “Reserve”—65% Grain Neutral Spirits...Calvert “Special”—72½% Grain Neutral Spirits