

DELL  
MAGAZINE

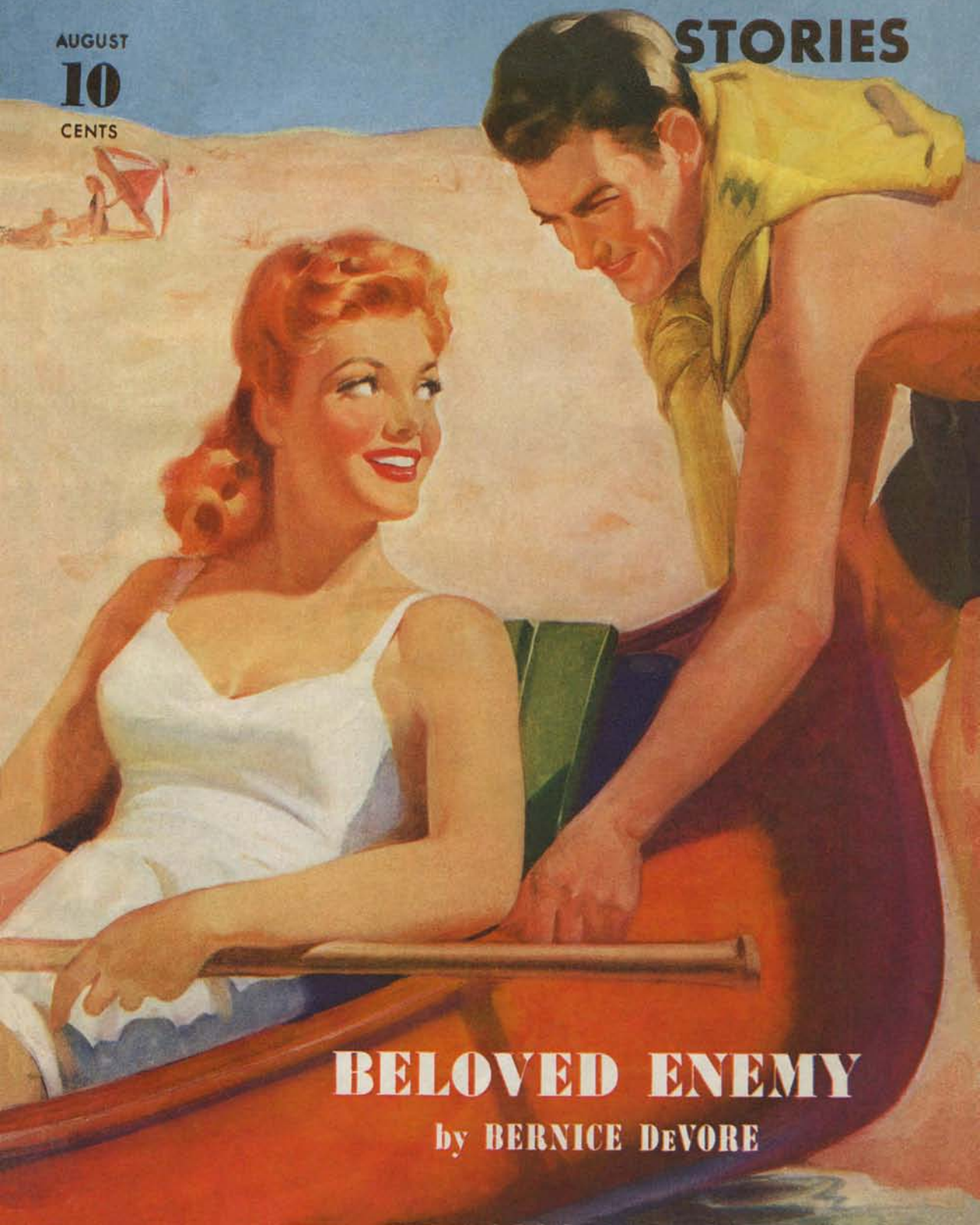
# SWEETHEART

AUGUST

10

CENTS

STORIES



**BELOVED ENEMY**

by BERNICE DEVORE



# Revealed at Last!

We Ferreted Out  
**The SECRETS of ANCIENT FORBIDDEN MYSTERIES**  
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# Prayer

## That God Will Guide Us To Happiness and Success



**Dear God,** Thou alone art the source of all possible happiness for me. Thou alone art my protection from trouble and harm. Thou alone art the Fountain of my youth, the Giver of my health, the Donor of all the good things and comforts which life can ever hold for me!

**Dear Heavenly Father,** look down upon me, Thy humble child, with Thy great tenderness and love. Vouchsafe unto me great happiness, success, peace and relief from the heavy cares and worries of this life. I know that whatever Thou hast planned for me is in the light of Thine Infinite Wisdom. I shall not complain. I shall do my part. I shall have Faith. All I ask is that Thou shalt hear my voice and take me in the shelter of Thy all-embracing Love!

**Dear Father,** if it is Thy Will, if I am worthy, I know that Thou canst open up an everlasting future of divine happiness for me. I pray that Thou wilt share with me of Thy mighty strength and courage so that I may fight on for Thy righteousness in this world!

**Dear God,** make me kind and friendly to my fellow men; strike all anger and hatred from my heart. Help me to follow the teachings of Thy Son, Jesus Christ, in Whose Blessed Name I ask Thy Loving Guidance to all the happiness and success that Life may hold for me!

—Amen

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(Clip along this line to save)



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Noroton, Conn.

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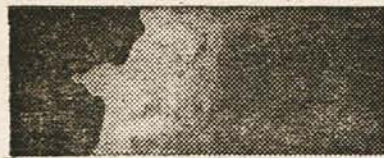
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F. McChesney, Editor

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# Have You Had These

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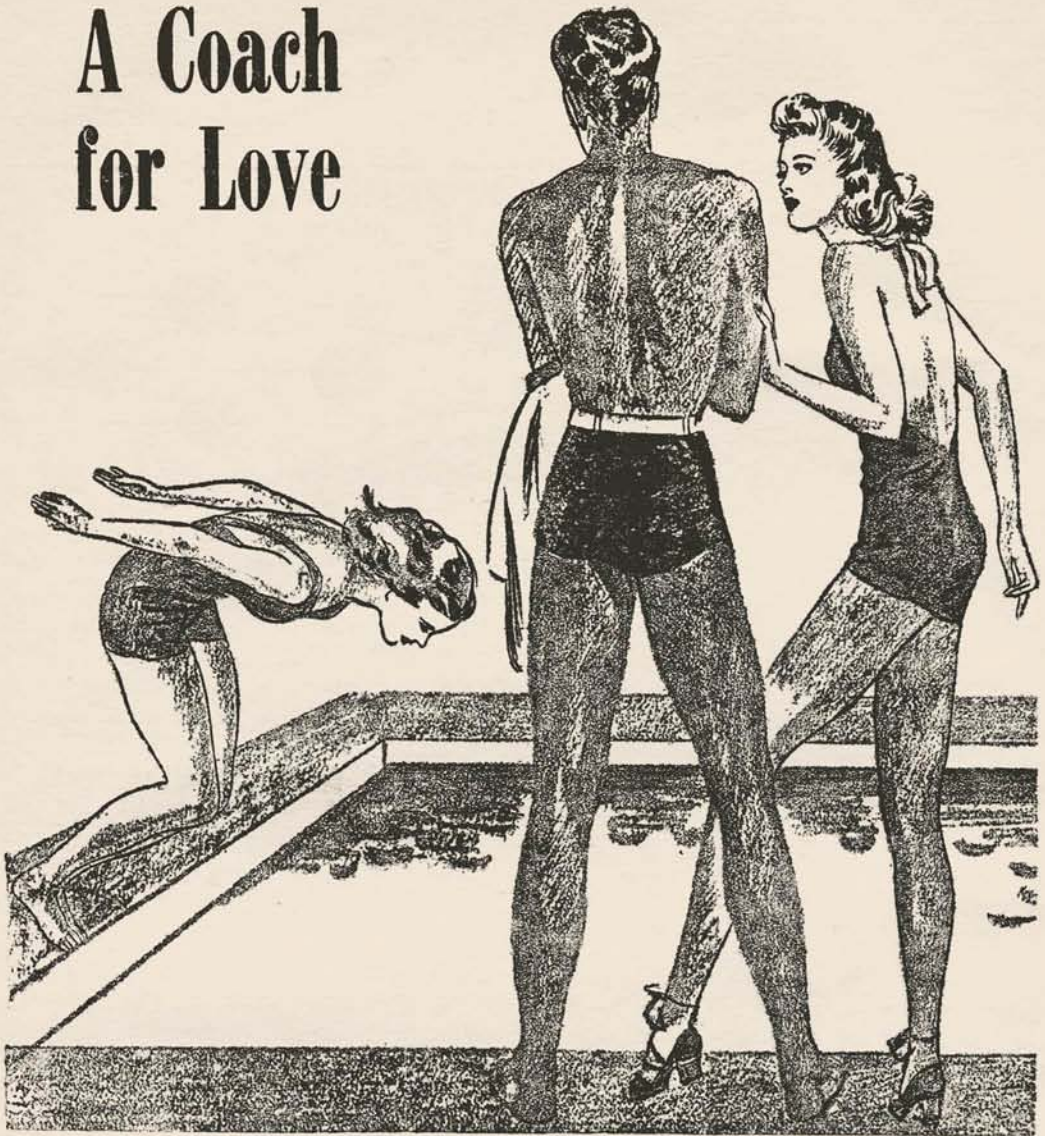
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# A Coach for Love



**A silver trophy and Brent's heart were large stakes for Linda, but she had an expert for a teacher**

**F**ROM behind the small round window of the Ocean Heights village post office, Linda Brooks gazed wistfully after the handsome curly head and broad shoulders of Brent Leeds as he strode out of the door and into the long, low roadster. Almost enviously she noted how strikingly beautiful the girl was who waited for him.

Her back was to the door that connected the post office with Sunset Inn, the hotel which her uncle, the postmaster, also owned

and operated. She had not seen Don Muirhead enter and jumped when he spoke.

"Tut, tut, Lindy!" Don said mockingly. "You should wear dark glasses when you look at a guy like that. Not quite decent, it isn't."

Linda wrinkled her nose at him. She was used to Don's teasing banter. "Isn't he the handsomest thing?" she sighed.

"Half a million bucks adds a hunk of glamour to any guy," Don replied drily.

"But those shoulders! And his eyes so

## By Elizabeth Lefevre



An icy trickle coursed down Linda's spine as she came out of the pool and heard Rosita say, "So this is my competition!"

blue, his tan so attractive!" Linda breathed.

"Say, woman, what's wrong with my shoulders and *my* tan?" Don demanded. He threw back his shoulders, preened like a giant peacock.

"Not a thing, goof—you're marvelous!" Linda laughed indulgently.

Don wouldn't be bad looking, she thought with a start of surprise, if he had clothes like Brent Leeds. She had never paid any particular attention to Don.

A big, good-natured chap, with an unruly shock of wavy blond hair, Don usually wore shabby grey slacks and a nondescript sweater when he came in for his mail. He frequently stopped to tease her, his brown eyes lit with mischief, his wide, generous mouth curved in an engaging smile.

Sometimes in the evenings he came down to the inn to argue politics with her Uncle Nat, and loneliness often drove Linda down to the lobby to listen.

"Can't understand a fine young chap

## SWEETHEART STORIES

like Don living the way he does," her uncle often remarked with a puzzled shake of his head.

**H**ER UNCLE wasn't the only one who wondered why Don Muirhead lived alone in the lovely old white Colonial house, Hillcrest, its broad acres and rolling green lawns skirting the winding river.

Its doors had always been wide open, its windows ablaze with light, when his father, the famous Senator Muirhead, and his beautiful mother were living. Now the front windows were boarded up, its wide door bolted, and Don camped at the back, with only an old Irish woman to come in by the day.

The gossips couldn't decide whether the old Senator had given most of his money to charity or whether he had invested unwisely. They did, however, wonder why Don didn't sell his valuable property, surrounded as it was by the showy extensive estates of the exclusive summer colony, and get out into the world and do something worthwhile.

Linda herself considered it a wicked waste of time—a big husky six-footer puttering around a garden!

"I'm a chemist, curious child," Don had teasingly replied when she questioned him. "I'm experimenting with a new plant food. Wander up some day and get an eyeful of my super-special sweet peas."

Call it what he would, to Linda it was still puttering. No, Don definitely wasn't one to whom she would give a second glance or thought.

"What does Brent Leeds do besides make a name at polo?" she now asked.

"Still mooning over that guy?" Don lifted an amused eyebrow. "Why should he do anything when papa makes Leeds' tires?"

"Who was the stunning blond with him?" she continued.

"Rae Johnson."

"From that red stone mansion on the bluff?"

"That's the old homestead. Rosita spends most of her summers at Bar Harbor. It's much, much too slow around here

for that young lady. She's just floated in for the weekend, she said"

"Are they engaged?" Linda asked, her heart racing over that question.

"If she is, it probably won't be for long. She changes her fiance every season."

"Oh!" Linda didn't realize what relief lay in that syllable.

"So!" Don folded his arms, stood gazing down at her. "So that's who it is! That's the goon you've been mooning over!"

Linda flushed, but managed a scornful laugh. "Don't be silly, Don! I haven't time to laugh. This is my busy day."

**Q**UICKLY she turned her back to him. She'd hate to have Don or anyone else guess how completely she had fallen in love with Brent Leeds the first time he had strolled into the post office. His deep, thrilling voice, asking lazily for his mail, had stirred something deep within her.

She had tried to laugh at herself, but it was useless. Each time she saw him, it was worse.

Not that he had spoken two words to her. None of the young people from up on the Hill glanced twice at her. That was what hurt.

Although she had been voted the most popular girl at school, the past two years had been lonely, unhappy ones, first the long, heartbreaking care of her father, then, after his sudden death, the long, hopeless search for work.

It was with new hope in her young heart that she had accepted her Uncle Nat's invitation to come live at his inn and help him in the post office. Now she would really begin to live! Ocean Heights, she knew, was brimming over with eligible young men, young men whom it would be easy—and smart—to fall in love with.

For Linda was determined not to allow herself to fall in love with a man without money. She had had her fill of poverty.

And there *were* countless young men around in expensive sports clothes. They drove up in gleaming cars, ran into the post office on their way from the country club. But—they had eyes only for the sleek, smartly groomed girls at their sides.



## A COACH FOR LOVE

No one stopped to chat with Linda. No one but Don, and of course he didn't count.

He broke through her bitterness now. "You don't mean to tell me Brent Leeds hasn't had an eyeful of you! A cute little trick with copper curls and luscious curves?"

He closed one eye, his head on one side. "Of course, one doesn't get a very satisfying view through that small wicket. Now, if he once got a glimpse of you in your bathing suit—"

Linda gave him a withering glance and turned back to sort her mail.

Don must have seen her swimming in the river at the foot of his orchard. That was her only recreation, the only sport available to a girl who "didn't belong."

Don came closer to her window. "Hi, Linda, I've just had an idea! How'd you like to make Brent Leeds sit up and take notice?"

"How'd I like a couple of yachts?" Linda retorted scathingly.

"Listen, Funnyface, I'm serious! You're pretty smooth in the water, as I suppose you know."

"I learned to swim before I could walk," Linda said drily.

"How are you on diving?"

"If I could once get on that slick diving board and tower at the country club pool, I'd show you!" she replied vehemently.

It made her boil every time she went by that ornately walled pool and read *For Members Only*.

"All right, you *shall* show me!" Don said. "I still have my Life Membership card kicking around somewhere. Dad donated that land to the club. He was a charter member. It joins our place, you know."

Linda's large grey eyes opened wider. Her heart skipped a beat at his next words.

"That's what attracted Brent to Rosita—her swimming. He had never noticed her until she won the club championship." He eyed Linda speculatively. "You know, Funnyface, you have everything Rosita has."

"A lot of good it does me," Linda replied sadly.

"That's why I think it would be great

sport to put one over on some of those small-time snobs that hang around the club."

It must be hard, Linda thought with a stab of pity. Hard to have once belonged on the top, and then to have had to step down. Don couldn't help but be a little bitter and envious, although this was the first time he had showed it.

"Brent doesn't look like a snob, Don," she said defensively.

"Oh, I didn't mean Leeds. He's a good sport. Tops in his class. Otherwise I wouldn't be offering to pinch-hit for Cupid.

"Why this sudden interest in my heart affairs, Don Muirhead?" Linda demanded skeptically.

"Maybe it's the Boy Scout in me," he grinned, then sobered. "My main idea is to make Rosita Johnson work for the Silver Cup this year. Dad donated it and it's a honey. Several of the town girls have tried for it every year. But they've never won it."

"Rosita, with her nose in the air, sails in here just before the Championship Meet each summer, and without the least effort walks off with the trophy again. She's done it for four years. This year, if she wins, she keeps the cup—and takes it away from Ocean Heights."

"She must be good," Linda said wistfully.

"She is." Don's voice was grim. "Darned good—and she knows it! But I think you could beat her—with a little coaching."

"Swell chance!" Linda scoffed. "Who'd coach me?"

"I might," Don said shortly. "I used to be pretty fair myself."

LINDA gave a start. "Muirhead—Muirhead!" she said reflectively. Then her eyes widened. "Don, you weren't Speed Muirhead, of Yale, who broke all long-distance records four years ago?" she demanded excitedly.

"That's what they called me," he replied carelessly. "My dad was a famous swimmer in his day. I never did come up to him."

Speed Muirhead, puttering among the

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flowers! It just didn't make sense, with the whole world crashing all around him! Linda gazed with renewed exasperation at the lean, tall young man lounging on the window ledge.

"Are you game, Lindy? Would you enter the contest?" Don asked.

"Will I? Oh, Don!" Linda sighed rapturously. "To swim in that marvelous pool, to dive from the tower—why, I'd risk an arm and leg!"

"To win the prize you want—the pretty Leeds boy—you'll need both of your lovely limbs," Don said sardonically.

Linda loftily ignored that. "Don, do you truly believe I could do it—beat Rosita?" Linda's voice was uncertain.

"You'd better—if you want Leeds," Don replied grimly. "Leeds likes winners—the belle of the ball, the leading lady, the star attraction. In other words, he goes for the one all the other boys are buzzing around."

He arched one eyebrow quizzically. "The big chance comes afterwards. It's a quaint old local custom, you see—the Swimming Champion and the president of the club leads the grand march at the Rose Ball that follows."

"And the president is—" Linda held her breath.

"Brent Leeds," Don answered.

**A**N ICY trickle crept down Linda's spine. "Oh, Don, I couldn't! I'd be scared silly! Besides, I haven't the clothes. I—"

Don interrupted with a snort. "Don't tell me a smart gal with red hair and fire in her eyes would let a little thing like that stop her! As for clothes—" He paused, wrinkled his forehead. "How are you with a needle?" he asked abruptly.

"Not bad—not bad at all with a darning needle," she said cryptically. "But it would be a bit difficult to whip up a dress out of flour sacks, and I've used up all our drapes."

Don chuckled. "I was just thinking about the couple of trunks filled with dresses up in our storeroom. You should find something you could use."

"Don! You're not really serious!"

He soon convinced her that he meant every word he had said. He wanted the Muirhead Silver Cup to stay in Ocean Heights. He would coach her every day. He would arrange with her uncle to relieve her of her duties. And he'd let it be understood she was a summer guest at the inn.

And he considered Brent Leeds just the man for her. He made that very clear.

The first week he gave her workouts in the river at the foot of his private pier. Then he announced they'd try the pool.

He inspected her faded swim suit with a dubious eye.

Linda laughed. "Don't fret, darling. I've bought a new suit—one that will knock your eyes out."

"Brent's, you mean, Funnyface. Don't waste any of your hard-earned dough on me."

"You put girls in the same class as your garden pests, don't you?" Linda asked curiously.

Don shrugged. "Haven't time to bother with them," he said carelessly.

She was simply a means of keeping his precious cup at home. Don had made that very clear.

Not that she cared, she assured herself. Don had none of the attributes she wanted in a husband. He could continue to putter around with his secret formulas in his top-floor laboratory, for all she cared.

Her face was flushed with excitement as she prepared for the club pool the next day. She had blown her entire Christmas check from her uncle that she had been carefully hoarding. She had bought a stunning green swim suit, with helmet, sandals and cape to match. Green, she knew, brought out the copper lights in her curls and set off the creamy tint of her skin.

Don helped Linda through the gap in the dividing hedge into the club house grounds. The doorman who guarded the sacred portals of the swimming pool greeted Don like an old friend.

Linda stepped inside, gave a little gasp, stood quite still. It was so beautiful! Multi-colored tiles gleaming beneath the crystal water, pink marble steps leading up to the white iron tables that nestled

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beneath gay umbrellas. Miniature palm trees grew in giant tubs, hanging baskets spilled gay flowers and graceful vines, tropical birds swung in gilded cages.

Her quick glance searched the tables. Brent Leeds was nowhere in sight. Her heart took a nosedive.

Later she decided his absence was cause for gratitude, because she nervously fumbled several of her dives.

"None of that, young lady!" Don said. "You'll have to wear confidence like a pull-over sweater to impress a top-notch like Brent. He likes smoothies. I've heard him whistle softly over a sweet double jack-knife of Rosita's. You'll have to work on yours."

Linda swallowed a sharp retort. She was getting slightly fed up with his constant harping on what Brent Leeds liked. Perhaps he didn't really think she could attract anyone as marvelous as Brent Leeds. She'd show him!

With flaming cheeks she ran out on the springboard, flung her head high, then dived off in her favorite swan dive.

**A** ROAR of applause came from the spectators. She felt all eyes upon her as she sprang up the ladder.

Several young men clamored for introductions after she emerged.

Don presented her as an old friend. She smiled provocatively at each in turn. Hadn't Don said Brent always went for the popular girl? She'd need every bit of build-up she could get.

"Going to be around all summer, I hope," one lanky youth said hopefully.

"Oh, yes." She paused, then laughed audaciously and said, "I've come to capture the swimming trophy!"

She left them all staring and tripped off to the dressing room.

"Well done, Lindy," Don approved. "That will set the tongues wagging. You'll attract plenty of interest from now on."

"Until I fail," Linda said in a small voice. She clutched at his arm. "Oh, Don, what if I shouldn't win it after that wild boast? I must have been mad to say that!"

"You'd better win it, you little redhead,"



"Your formula didn't work—not the way you intended," Linda said.

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Don said grimly, "after all the time I'm spending on you!"

"I'll be too busy to get over to the pool tomorrow. Brent Leeds will probably appear. Do your stuff and watch him sit up and beg. Keep your head. If he suggests lunch, tell him you have an appointment. I'll tell Mrs. Riley to lay an extra plate for you."

"You don't think I'd accept his first invitation, do you?" Linda cried, her eyes flashing.

Don ignored her indignation. His eyes narrowed thoughtfully. "Let's see, I think the proper formula with Brent is one part come-hither to two parts hard-to-get."

He pulled his shabby car up to the inn. Linda jumped out before he completely stopped. She turned and faced him with flushed cheeks.

"Don Muirhead, you make me sick—you and your silly formulae! You might give me credit for a *little* intelligence!"

She flounced into the inn, his laughter following her.

LINDA felt the curious glances and heard the buzz of whispers that followed her entrance into the club the next day.

She was poised on the springboard, ready to dive, when something made her pause and look up. At the side of the pool, not ten feet away, stood Brent Leeds. Brent, tall and breathtakingly attractive in plaid jacket and white flannels, his handsome blond head tilted back, his eyes upon her.

Their glances met and locked. She felt the blood mounting her cheeks, but couldn't tear her glance from his.

This was the moment she had dreamed of, planned for, worked toward. Brent Leeds was seeing her, really seeing her, for the first time.

A slight tremor shook her, then she drew a deep breath and sent up a little prayer. She had to be good, so much depended upon it.

"Bravo! Bravo!" Brent cried, as she came up from a perfect swan dive.

He was waiting for her at the end of the pool, reached down and helped her up.

"Beautifully done! Beautiful!" he said softly. "Why haven't I met the Diving Goddess before?"

"Sure you haven't?" she asked, slowly lifting long lashes, smiling mysteriously. "I've often seen you."

"It must have been from a distance," he replied with conviction. Seeing three purposeful young men approaching, he said, "Let's get away from the mob. We're lurching together."

Linda smiled demurely. "Kind of you, Mr. Leeds, but I have an appointment. I must hurry."

Smiling at him over her shoulder, she hurried into the dressing room.

Don hailed her from his back door. "Hurry up, slow-poke, I'm hungry."

So was Linda, but she had difficulty in eating the leathery steak and the greasy potatoes that Mrs. Riley served them on one end of the kitchen table.

"I'll have to speak to the butcher about his steaks," Don said, frowning at his.

I'd like to speak to the cook, Linda thought grimly. If this was the way she looked after Don, it was a wonder he didn't die of dyspepsia! Don certainly needed someone to look after him properly.

"Leeds turned up, didn't he?" Don asked.

"He did. Made quite a fuss. Asked me to lunch," she replied absently, noting that he had pushed back his plate, half finished. Poor Don, who had been used to the best, having to put up with this!

"Don," she burst out, "I'd like to do something in return for all you're doing for me. I can toss a mean waffle and make coffee that will start your nostrils quivering. How about letting me come over and get lunch for you after my daily workout?"

Don looked up sharply.

She added quickly, "I'm sure Mrs. Riley has too much to do. She could do with a bit of help."

One eyebrow shot up. "Isn't that just like a girl! Let her get one foot in your house and she wants to take possession! Nothing doing, Lindy!" He grinned, holding up both hands. "Can't have any girls messing around my bachelor diggings!"

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Linda sprang up, grey eyes flashing fire. "If that's the way you feel, I shan't bother you any longer!"

"Sit down, Redhead!" Don laughed. "Kind of cute when she's all het up, isn't she, Mrs. Riley?" Don appealed to his housekeeper, who had just entered with a discouraged-looking pie.

LINDA obediently sat down again, wondering why it was impossible to stay angry with Don. He was certainly the most irritating man she had ever known.

"Want to see the old house while you're here?" he inquired casually when they arose.

He opened the door of the dining room, crossed over and pulled aside heavy drapes, letting the sunlight play on the gleaming mahogany and heirloom silver.

He guided her into the library with its intricately carved mantel, its deep, comfortable chairs, and on to the drawing room. She caught her breath in wonder at the exquisite taste and quiet elegance of its furnishings. Antiques of great value, she was sure.

"You've never considered selling any of these?" she asked hesitantly.

"No," he replied quickly. "Quaint of me, no doubt, but I'm rather attached to this old stuff." He ran a gentle hand over the satin of the Queen Anne sofa.

"Of course, this doesn't compare with Leeds' new white leather and chromium," he said, avoiding her eyes.

"What makes you think I'd prefer the latest and most extreme modes?" she asked sharply.

"Don't all the girls?" he asked with a shrug. "But I must get up to my lab. I'll show you where the storeroom is. You can help yourself to anything you like in the trunks."

He left her at the storeroom door and went on up the stairs, whistling gaily.

"BAD NEWS travels fast, Lindy Lou," Don greeted her at his gate the next day. "Rosita is back."

"Meaning I'm the bad news?" Linda laughed.

"The competition you're going to dish out is definitely tough," he declared. "Someone has put her wise."

It wasn't difficult to locate Rosita. She was the center of a group of young men, chatting vivaciously with them all, but clinging possessively to Brent Leeds' arm.

Her swim suit, of Roman striped lastex, hid little of her golden-tanned skin. She carried her cap, exposing her gorgeous golden hair to the morning sun.

An icy trickle coursed down Linda's spine. Rosita was a stunning creature. She must be mad to think she could compete with a girl like that!

"There, my dear, is our richest young man and our most popular deb. Go in and do your stuff. Break it up!" Don laughed down at her.

"Oh, Don, you're perfectly horrid!" she flashed. "You make me sound sordid and common—nothing but a cheap little gold-digger!"

"Come, come, calm down, Lindy!" he soothed. "Everyone has to fight for what they want in this world. Surely you consider Leeds worth fighting for!"

Linda cast him a glance of scorn as she hurried into the dressing room.

Of course Brent was worth fighting for; he was everything she desired in a man, but she didn't want him crammed down her throat every moment!

When she emerged, Don was standing at the side of the pool, chatting with Rosita. "Don darling, you don't really think I'm going to let anyone run off with my beautiful cup!" she pouted.

"I wanted to see you work for it this year, Beautiful." Don laughed down at her.

He admires Rosita just as much as all the others do, Linda thought resentfully. He's merely been doing a lot of talking.

Don saw her hesitating, beckoned, and introduced her to Rosita.

"So this is my competition!" Rosita said with a tinkling laugh, but Linda felt herself flushing at the insolent glance that raked over her.

"Well, here starts the fun!" With an arrogant toss of her head, Rosita ran grace-

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fully out the diving board, poised confidently, then dived off into a perfect jack-knife.

"Whee!" A chorus of admiring whistles came from the sides. Linda saw Brent gaily salute Rosita, all eyes for her this morning.

Linda struggled with the cold fear that gripped her as she walked slowly on to the diving board. Rosita was watching her. Linda saw the amused smile on her face as she spoke to Brent. That was all Linda needed to stiffen her spine. She gave everything she had to that dive, cut a perfect arc through the air and sliced through the water with scarcely a ripple.

As she came up smoothly, she found the group that had first surrounded Rosita waiting to help her out, pat her on the back, and lavish her with praise.

She saw Brent Leeds start toward her, saw Rosita, with an angry gesture, pull him back, keep him at her side.

But Brent made his escape a few moments later and caught up to Linda at the dressing room door. "Miss Linda Brooks," he said firmly, "I'm listening to no excuses today. You're being forcibly dragged off to lunch today."

A warm tingling ran through Linda's veins. This was what she had dreamed of so long. Brent Leeds taking masterful possession, his eyes for her alone.

"I am sorry," she said regretfully, "but I really can't."

"Dinner tonight then!" he said quickly. "I'll call for you at the inn, and it won't do you a bit of good thinking up excuses. I'll camp there all night." He went off before she had a chance to reply.

**T**HAT evening she dressed with extra care. Put on a new, reckless shade of lipstick. Brent liked his girls smooth.

They drove out into the country, slowed down on a quiet road up in the hills. He took her hand and smiled down at her. "You know what you have? It's as rare as a horse and buggy—that old-fashioned clinging look. I find it kind of exciting, discovering a girl who's different."

Linda was finding it exciting too, hearing things like that from Brent. Dreamily

she watched little fleecy white clouds sweep across the sky. When they crossed over a small wooden bridge, he stopped the car.

"There!" he said. "That's better!" Which meant that Brent's arm was now about her shoulders, drawing her close.

She'd decided what to do about this, so she said, "I think I'll have a cigarette, Brent."

He laughed. "The good old smoke screen!" But he gave her one, and as he lit it with a silver lighter, she felt very daring and sophisticated.

"So you're going to capture the silver cup," he said over his cigarette. "Shouldn't be a bit surprised. The gallery is all for you. Did you know that?"

Linda's mind was on the Rose Ball. She was picturing herself in the dress she had found in the trunk. A cobwebby affair with cascading tiers of creamy lace. She was picturing Brent's face when he saw her, ready to lead the grand march with him.

She let him kiss her. It seemed inevitable, there under the whispering trees. But she didn't want him to hold her close long. That made him laugh.

"Linda Brooks, you're the sweetest thing I've met in a dozen of moons! I'm crazy about you. Do you like me, Linda? Do you?"

"Ummm—I guess so," she said breathlessly, pulling away.

"Not good enough, a guess isn't," he asserted, pulling her to him again.

There were more stars now and dimly Linda could see Brent's smooth blond hair and his ardent eyes. She said in a laughing, husky voice, "Make it quite a lot then, Brent." Her heart was pounding crazily.

"A whole lot?" he insisted.

"Well, that would be telling!" Nervously she reached into her cape pocket for her compact, but it wasn't there. "I guess I'll have to let the famous Brooks nose shine!" she said quickly.

"Oh, no, you won't. Take this!"

**H**E PULLED one from his pocket, a very splendid compact, red enamel, with Rosita Johnson's initials in gold. "Culled from last night's date when you

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wouldn't go. You see what happens when you're obstinate?"

Linda suddenly felt the queerest hollow ache some place close to her chest.

"I have a lipstick here some place, too. Siren red, if I recall correctly. Suit?"

"It will have to," she said with a defiant laugh.

She powdered her nose, outlined her trembling lips in brilliant red. But she didn't feel daring, nor very happy either. Don wouldn't do that, she was very sure—kiss one girl and talk about another.

But then, Don wasn't interested in girls. He had made that very clear.

"Come on, honey. One more kiss and then we'll get going."

Quietly she submitted. She'd have to play the game according to Brent's rules if she were going to hold her own against Rosita. She felt her first sharp twinge of distaste for this love game she was waging.

She gave a mental shrug. She wasn't going to back down, now that she was well started. She wasn't a quitter.

**D**ON SAW Brent drive off with Rosita the next morning and said, "What's the matter, Linda? Didn't fumble any of your plays last night, did you? Remember my formula!" Don's glance was penetrating.

She flushed hotly.

"You want to watch your step, now that you've got him interested," he admonished severely.

Something seemed to snap inside Linda. "I'll tell you what I don't want," she flared. "I don't want to be pushed around every moment!"

"Why, Lindy child, you're developing nerves! That will never do." Don shook his head. "What I started out to warn you was that Rosita is working under a coach at a neighboring pool. She's concentrating on speed—she knows you have her there. So don't let up on your practice."

"Don't worry. I won't let you down," she snapped. "I'll keep your precious cup in the village for you."

And she did work, worked until Don

called a halt. She returned without his knowledge and continued her practice. When night came she longed to creep into bed and stay there, but when Brent telephoned and demanded that she go dancing with him, she didn't dare refuse. He'd take Rosita if she did.

And she knew now that she could win Brent—if she could keep him away from Rosita.

She was too exhausted to feel the same thrill that had swept over her at his first embrace. It won't be long now, she reminded herself when she had to force herself to go out with him. The contest would soon be over.

**T**HE MORNING of the contest Don brought her a huge feather fan. "This went with the dress. One demure smile over that and the man is yours."

Linda swallowed a sharp retort. Don needn't be in such a darn hurry to shove her into Brent's arms!

"Thanks, Don," she finally said. "You'll be at the ball, won't you?"

"Wouldn't I cut a pretty figure in these clothes?" He struck a humorous pose in his grey slacks and sweater.

"You might take your dress suit out of moth balls," she suggested in annoyance.

"Or out of hock," he added with a grin and left her.

She stood gazing after him. Don would be a stunning figure in evening clothes, she reflected. So tall and broad and straight.

She shrugged impatiently. Why waste time thinking about him? She would keep her mind on how stunning Brent would look tomorrow night, and how proud he'd be when she captured that cup.

She didn't dare let herself contemplate a possible failure.

The big day dawned clear and sparkling. She started out armed with quiet confidence.

In the dressing room excited girls clustered around her.

"Rosita is out for your blood. She's been working as she never worked in all her lift, working up her speed at the Sundale

## SWEETHEART STORIES

Pool," a little blond shrilly announced.

"Go in there and take it away from her, Linda. She's always had things too much her own way," a former schoolmate of Rosita's added. "We used to say at school that she wouldn't attend even a funeral if she couldn't be the corpse."

One of Rosita's friends had entered unnoticed. "Even if you win, I wouldn't count too heavily on winning Brent with the cup. Ros Johnson has too big a hold on him," she said maliciously.

A wave of revulsion swept over Linda, but the warning whistle made her forget everything but the impending contest.

Don, surprisingly smart in white flannels, put an encouraging hand on her shoulder. "You're going to win, you know. I'm expecting it of you!" he said confidently.

Before she could reply, the starting signal sounded for the first dive. Rosita fumbled that one, but Linda felt Don's expectant eyes upon her and put all she had into it.

The applause reached the sky. Her second wasn't quite so good, and the third they tied on. The two scores were even at the end of the diving section of the programme.

Next came the long distance races. When the contestants lined up, Linda found herself beside Rosita. Brent came up behind them, put a hand on a shoulder of each of them.

"Go to it, girls! I've placed my money evenly," he said.

Linda's anger spurred her to a furious effort. She ended nearly three feet ahead, amid the deafening roar of applause.

On the next lap they tied, for Rosita, her color high, her eyes black pinpoints, was putting everything she had into the effort.

When the final and deciding race came Linda knew it was hers. Rosita was tiring, getting short of breath. As Linda stood poised, she looked for Don's encouraging smile, but he wasn't there. She searched through the crowd in vain.

While she was wondering at the hollow feeling that gripped her, Rosita approached, spoke her name.

"I've a bargain to make with you," she

said, very low and intense. "I know it's Brent you're after. The cup means nothing to you. I want that cup! Let me win this race and I'll go away. I'll leave Brent to you."

Linda caught her breath. It would be that easy! Slacken her effort and have a clear field with Brent. After all, what did she care for a silver cup?

She opened her mouth to agree to the pact, but no words came. Instead a shiver of revulsion shook her. She was sick of the whole business, fighting and scheming and bargaining for a man. Why, she'd have to go on fighting the rest of her life to hold him after she had won him!

She was sick of the very name of Leeds. Don had dinned that name into her ears until she had wanted to scream.

And Don expected her to win. He had given generously of his time and efforts to that end. She couldn't let him down.

That one thought stood out startlingly clear above the confused whirl of her emotions. She had to win. For Don.

"Sorry, Miss Johnson, but I'll have to do my best, win or lose. My coach expects it of me."

The whistle blew. Rosita gave her one brief glance of fury and dived in. Tensely the gallery watched. They seemed to feel there was something at stake beyond a silver trophy.

**R**OSITA was fighting madly to get ahead. Linda used every ounce of strength she could summon to keep abreast of her. Steadily, desperately, she fought on. She had to win! She couldn't let Don down.

There were only six feet to go and Rosita was a few inches ahead when the truth struck Linda with a bang. She was in love with Don!

New strength flowed into her veins. As joy surged through her, one arm flashed up, dug deep into the water, and she was in! One split-second before Rosita.

She was being pulled up amid the wildest of cheers. Brent had his arm around her, smiling broadly as he saw the photographers with cameras focused their way.

Then he was helping her through the



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crowd that pressed close, urging her to hurry and dress.

Linda, however, was looking for Don. He was nowhere in sight. He hadn't come to congratulate her. . . .

**N**UMBLY she dressed, slipped out of a side entrance, jumped into a taxi to avoid Brent, and hurried home.

"You didn't win!" her uncle said glumly, after one look at her face.

"Oh, yes, I won," she replied listlessly. "I—I guess I'm just played out." Her lips trembled, and she fled to her room, flung herself on the bed, sobbing.

Don hadn't cared enough to stay. He had probably hurried home to his precious laboratory the moment he knew his cup was safe. His coaching job was done and he was through with her. The man she loved was content to turn her over to another man.

She jumped up, angrily washed away her tears and recklessly applied her brightest rouge and lipstick. At least he shouldn't guess she cared!

With her color high and her eyes feverishly bright, she dressed for the Rose Ball. The creamy lace whirled about her feet. Her mother's pearls, her one precious possession, encircled her white throat. With hands that shook only a little, she fastened the cluster of waxen gardenias in her copper curls.

She stood very still, clasping her hands tightly together as she studied the result. She was lovely! She hadn't dreamed she could look like this. She need not fear Rosita tonight.

This is what you have always wanted, she reminded herself as Brent assisted her into his shining new car.

"Why did you run away from me today?" he reproached her, and drew her close, pressing his ardently demanding lips on hers.

She forced herself to respond. This was all that was left. A girl couldn't go through the rest of her life alone because the man she loved didn't love her.

"You know I'm not going to let you escape again," Brent whispered. "We're go-

ing to run away together right after the dance. I'm mad about you, Linda darling!"

She tried to lift her lips to his, but something stronger than her will pulled her away from Brent's imprisoning arms.

"Oh, no you aren't, Brent. You think so now, but you'd soon find out how wrong you are. Brent, believe me, I'd only make you terribly unhappy."

"Are you crazy or just playing coy?" Brent asked harshly. "You don't think I'll stand for any funny business after the way you've led me on!"

"I'm sorry, Brent," she said miserably. "I thought I did love you. You did dazzle me, you're so handsome, so dashing, so awfully attractive—"

"What made you change your mind?" he asked, somewhat mollified.

"I found I loved another man," she said simply.

"Ump!" was all he murmured and jammed his foot down on the gas.

In silence they drove to the Country club.

"Wait until you see Rosita in her new golden gown," one of the girls greeted her in the powder room. "She's out to steal your man."

Quietly Linda entered the ballroom, stopped inside the door until she caught Rosita's eye. Then she beckoned to her.

"Rosita, will you lead the grand march with Brent? I don't feel well. Besides, that's your place. I don't belong there," she said simply.

Without another word she quickly slipped out on to the moonlit balcony. She stepped back into a shadowy corner, stood there numb and cold as the strains of the stirring march began, her back turned to the colorful scene inside.

**S**HE had done it! Thrown away her chance, cast aside all the gay, carefree times, the life of ease and luxury, the fun she might have had with Brent.

But it wouldn't have been fun. That was the trouble. Nothing would be fun without Don, and she'd have no further excuse now to see him. She clenched her

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icy hands together, closed her eyes as if to shut out the desolate glimpse of the future.

Someone stepped out on the balcony. She moved further back into the shadows.

"Linda—Linda, where are you?"

"Don!" It was a whisper, all she could manage. She could only stare at the tall, striking figure in faultless evening clothes, a white gardenia in his lapel.

He stepped close, captured both her hands. "Linda, I was sorry I had to run away this afternoon. I had a message. A government official was waiting at the house. I've been tied up with him ever since." Excitement underlay his words.

"Linda, why aren't you out there with Brent?" he asked softly, placing a gentle hand beneath her chin, forcing her to face him.

She shut her eyes. She couldn't stand it. Don so near, so dear, so infinitely dear.

She opened her eyes and faced him.

"Your formula didn't work—not the way you intended, Don."

"Are you sure? Brent proposed, didn't he?" he asked urgently.

Linda shrugged wearily. "Oh, he proposed, but I didn't want him." A sob caught in her throat. "Let me go, Don. Let me go!"

"Oh, no—not yet, little one," he said softly, then laughed triumphantly. "Not until I make *sure* my formula didn't work exactly as I hoped it would.

"Didn't an overdose of Brent Leeds wear you out—prove, as I hoped it would, that he wasn't the one for you?"

Linda gasped. "Don Muirhead! Was that what you were trying to do?" she cried furiously.

"Definitely!" he answered cheerfully.

"But, Linda—" His voice softened, he cupped her chin in both of his lean, clever

hands. "Linda, the important question is—did it show you who the right one is?"

"Yes," Linda whispered, her heart pounding. Afraid to believe the light in his eyes, she said, "Don, you don't mean—"

"That I love you? Of course, darling. It seems I've always loved you."

LINDA stepped back, her eyes flashing fire. Joy, relief, exasperation struggled for expression. "Then why didn't you say so *long* ago?" she demanded.

"And get turned down?" he said with a wry grimace. "I had to get that glamour boy Leeds out of your system first."

So his elaborate indifference had been only part of his scheme! He'd probably even put Mrs. Riley up to serving that awful meal to enlist her sympathy! She didn't care—she didn't mind anything, being poor, having Don putter around with chemicals—as long as Don loved her.

"There's no room in my heart for anyone but you," Linda whispered happily, her arms going around his neck.

It was sometime later, when the earth stopped reeling dizzily and the stars and moon settled back in their places, that Don asked, "How would you like a honeymoon in Washington, Angelface? I have business down there."

"Business?" she asked, wondering.

"Yes, and here's a secret for my bride alone. My real secret formulae are for the Department of Munitions. The flower garden, the playing poor and shutting up the house were to ensure privacy—secrecy. That won't be necessary any longer. My experiments will be conducted in the Government Laboratories."

"Oh, Don, aren't you wonderful," Linda said breathlessly. She had already forgotten she had ever considered him otherwise.

Don only chuckled and drew her closer.

## Perennial

No fragile love  
Is this of ours  
To wither like  
Frost-bitten flowers.

It too can stand  
The wintry blast  
And bloom anew  
When war is past.  
*Eloise Wade Hackett.*

# Hearts For Sale

By Margaret Larson



"No thanks, Monkey. But I like to watch you, it's as good as a trip to the zoo," Chris said infuriatingly.

**K**AY WENT on eating peanuts as if she didn't know Chris had walked out of the little, knotty-pine real estate office across the street and now sat holding down the other end of the park bench with his big, sprawly frame. Well she was through, finished, washed up! She'd take no more dictation from that goon! The idea of him expecting her to take down all that slush to Sheila Wayne along with his business letters! Business, my eye! He'd never be a business man if he lived to be a hundred, and she'd never get anywhere

working for him either. Oh, well, nothing like a big fat bag of roasted peanuts to make the world look different.

"No crack, no smack, no crunch! Lady, you're to be congratulated!"

Kay turned her red-bronze head and looked at him—at him—and through him. Chris sat with his elbow resting on the back of the bench, his palm flat against his dark tan cheek. He wore no hat and the breeze ruffled his blond hair. His blue eyes called her any number of little so-and-sos, but his smile denied each in turn.

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He looked so exasperatingly naive that she wanted to push his face in.

On second thought, she held out the bag of peanuts. Chris was allergic to peanuts. And he was fond of them, too. It was a dirty trick.

He declined. "No thanks, Monkey. But go ahead, I like to watch you eat them. It's as good as a trip to the zoo. Your hat—that nail polish—the way you pop those peanuts into your mouth."

Kay bent her head and searched intently among the hulls—which she had put tidily in the bag—for more peanuts. So he didn't like her hat and her nail polish! Her eyes smarted, and for a second she couldn't distinguish between the peanuts and the hulls. What was wrong with her hat and her nail polish?

Very carefully Kay closed the bag. She folded down the dog-eared flaps neatly. Desperately she began to wonder if leaving Chris alone in that office was the thing to do. He'd get another girl of course. He'd pick his own, and heaven only knew what he'd pick! And she had promised his father—

It wasn't Chris she was thinking about, she told herself stubbornly glaring at the peanut sack, but his father. His father had known her when she worked for McClellan. He'd come to her with a good proposition. "Kay, I'm opening a real estate office for Chris. I want a girl in that office who has initiative, a good business head, and spunk! There won't be much business at first because I've got to go East, but I'll set you two up, and I expect some results by the time I get back. Now you've known Chris a long time, and you know he needs an example. First his mother spoiled him, since then women have always hung on his neck. And there's one named Sheila Wayne who writes him letters that— Keep her off his mind, will you!"

**K**AY HAD taken the job, been glad to get it. But a fine chance she had had to keep Sheila Wayne off his mind when Chris spent half his time dictating love letters to her that he wouldn't even trust her to mail.

An hour ago Kay had come to the end. "This isn't my job—taking down all this tripe!" she had flashed. Blindly she had stumbled to her feet, slammed her notebook down on his desk, caught up her hat and purse. And here she was.

Now that her anger had cooled—peanuts always helped to put her in the right mood—she remembered his father and her job. She couldn't walk out no matter how much she wanted to. She'd given her word and she'd have to stick until his father got back. Then she'd let him take over and straighten things out.

Chris was no realtor. Look at him! She'd quit and walked out and he had followed her. As if he had nothing to do but sit on a bench and watch her eat peanuts! What would he do tomorrow and the day after? Oh, Lord!

Kay got up from the bench. Chris rose lazily. She swung around and faced him.

"All right, you win!" She looked him square in the eye. "Come on. Back to work! Work, I said, not crooning to honey-colored hair and honey lips!" She turned on her heel and walked rapidly away from him, shoulders stiff and straight, head high, her heart thudding crazily. She flung the bag of peanuts into an ashcan as she passed. She felt a little sick.

Chris was right behind her. She heard him chuckle once. It took every bit of self-control she had to keep from turning around and slapping his face.

Inside the office, as she started to take off her hat, Chris reached out and grabbed her shoulders, perked her to him, and held her tight. Her hat slid over one ear. She didn't have the strength to shove it off. His gaze rested on her lips. Then he pulled her closer, bent his head and kissed her. His kiss was long and deep and hard, and real.

She relaxed and returned his kiss fervently.

And then she hauled off and hit him. "You beast! You beast!" she cried. He let go of her and, she fell back against her desk.

There a gentle tap came on the door. "I say," a tenor voice sang out, "are you

## HEARTS FOR SALE

back yet? Is anybody home?" and a man, a little man with not much hair, wearing glasses, his hat in his hand, stepped inside the office and stood beaming at both of them.

"I have a piece of property," he announced, with a slight bow, "that I should like to sell. It's that two acre piece known as the Wilmington Knoll. I'm prepared to pay a five hundred dollar bonus if you can sell it for me for cash in ten days."

Kay was in her chair, had her hat off, a filing card before her, her pencil poised before he stopped talking. And Chris—Chris had turned his back on the gentleman and was deliberately walking out the door!

THE little man gazed after him and then looked back at her, surprised. "Indigestion," Kay said, pointing her pencil after him.

"Really?" The little man stared, fascinated.

"He gets these attacks every day right after lunch," Kay reeled on, trying to look concerned as the sweet purring sound of Chris' new motor started up in the street.

"He does?" The little man began to look alarmed. "Now, say, I know a doctor—"

"The Wilmington Knoll?" Kay asked sweetly. "Just a minute, let's look at the map."

But she stumbled a little as she got up. Her blood was still singing so loud, her heart thudding so hard against her ribs that she couldn't see the map even when she stood before it.

When Kay got home that night she passed tow-headed Carrie Evans coming out of the house as she went in. She pulled off her hat and stuck it on the surprised Carrie's head. "Don't say I never gave you anything," she said to the startled Carrie and went on into the house. The bottle of nail polish she handed over to her younger sister Julie. "What struck you?" Julie looked flabbergasted. "Don't I have to swipe this color any more?"

Kay went to bed with a wet towel on her head.

"I'll never take a job like this again," she told herself furiously. "Let the office go to blazes! Let him marry Sheila Wayne! Let him rot! If I wasn't born so darn conscientious I'd quit now!" Then she lost herself in the remembered ecstasy of his kiss.

It was the sound of her mother's tired footsteps in the hall that brought her back to reality. That five hundred dollar bonus. Mr. Merrick would reward her if Chris closed that deal. She must see that they did it somehow.

Next morning Kay sat at her desk, checking over a list of prospective buyers Chris' father had left them. After a while she lifted her eyes and stared through the window at the cars as they flashed by on the boulevard. She gazed dreamily for a moment at the tall palm trees behind them, at the roll of green hills behind the palms. Marvelous spots for the rambling ranch house type of home; oak-dotted land for the stately colonial; tucked away alcoves for the artistic cottage type. Here was opportunity. Here was business. Beautiful opportunity. Wonderful business. And there was Chris—

Where *was* Chris? She glanced at her wristwatch. Now why hadn't he shown up? Didn't he know she had been hired as a decoy to attract him to work?

She reached for the 'phone and dialed his number. The 'phone rang and rang and rang. She let it ring. She even laid it on the desk and let it go on ringing.

AN HOUR after she finally hung up, Chris telephoned. He was in the city, he informed her.

By that time she had her little piece ready. Things had been happening—or were about to.

"Chris," she told him, "Mr. Jessup and his wife and his wife's mother will be here at one-thirty to see the Wilmington Knoll. You know them, and they know you, so they say. I told them you would be here to show it to them. Will you *sell* it to them, Chris?"

"Sweetheart," said Chris. "*You* sell it to them. You get cockleburs in your socks

## SWEETHEART STORIES

and be a go-cart to a couple of fat old women up a hill. *You* wax eloquent and expound the beauties of nature to three dead pans, and explain all about cesspools to the old sourpuss."

"Chris—"

"Lock up the office, sweetheart, and run along. You'll enjoy it."

"But what are you doing, Chris?"

"Who me?" he chuckled. "I'm down here writing a letter to Sheila!"

A horn tooted in front of the Merrick Real Estate office. Kay looked out and there sat Mr. Jessup at the wheel of a big black sedan. In the back seat sat two large, imposing looking women.

"Oh-oh," said Kay aloud, gathering up her things.

She picked up the paper with the directions written on it, locked up the office, and went out to the car.

"I'm going to show you the property," she announced brightly, beaming at all of them.

Then she met the hostile gaze of the two women in the back seat. Retreating, she glanced uneasily at Mr. Jessup. He was leaning over to open the door for her. He looked uncomfortable. "I thought Mr. Merrick was coming," he said.

Kay braced herself. "A very important business matter came up. Mr. Merrick was detained in the city. He was very sorry." She tried to look as sorry as Chris was supposed to have felt.

"I like Mr. Merrick *very* much," Mrs. Jessup leaned forward to remark pointedly, as Kay got in the front seat with Mr. Jessup who was looking admiringly at her ankle. "I think Mr. Merrick is such a *fine* young man."

"Yes," said Kay. She closed the door as if she were hauling Chris in beside her by the neck. "Oh, excuse me! I didn't mean to slam it!" she said to the startled Mr. Jessup whose eyes had jumped to her face. She drew a deep breath. "Just take the next street, and turn to the right."

The four of them stood on Wilmington Knoll and looked down on the valley. Kay happened to look down just then at the Merrick Real Estate office on the boule-



vard. There were several cars parked in front of it. The door was still closed, but in the rear stood a group of men by the hitching post. A tall figure in riding clothes stood beside a sorrel horse. Kay's heart side-slipped. Chris. Chris and his horse—and he was supposed to be in the city on important business! Kay glanced quickly away.

Mr. Jessup mopped his brow. The women puffed heavily. Now Mrs. Jessup said, wheezing a little, "Isn't that Mr. Merrick down there by that horse?"

**K**AY pretended not to hear. "It's such a magnificent view," she said, waving her arm. "And there's always a breeze." She turned her head avoiding the view of the office and smiled brightly.

"Too much of a breeze, I fear," grunted Mr. Jessup's wife's mother, groping for her fluttering silk scarf.

"What do you think of it, dear?" Mr. Jessup asked his wife, pretending not to see the wind whipping Kay's skirt above her knees.

"Let's go down," said Mrs. Jessup. "There's a cocklebur in my stocking. It's driving me crazy."

The automobiles were gone from in front of the office when Kay got out of the Jessup car.

"You might as well go around and at least say hello to Mr. Merrick, Roscoe,"

## HEARTS FOR SALE

advised Mrs. Jessup. "Mother and I will wait here." She gave Kay a curt nod and looked away.

Kay, dismissed, walked up the path and let herself in the office. Mr. Jessup went around to the rear looking for Chris. Inside, Kay walked over and dropped into the chair behind her desk. Then she looked down and saw the package.

It was a nice fat, blue-checked bag of roasted peanuts.

She resisted the impulse to hurl it through the window, pulled open a drawer, dropped them in, and shut it.

After a while the Jessup car drove away and, Chris stood in the doorway.

"Well!" she said, when she could speak. "Your father gets home next week, Chum." Her voice was gay but tears of anger, hurt, humiliation and disappointment spangled her lashes.

Chris stood there, much too tall for the door frame, his head bent forward a little. In his brown riding breeches, his beige shirt open at the throat, his blond hair ruffled by the breeze, he looked like something to pray for instead of swear at.

"Don't take it so hard, sweetheart," he grinned. "Eat the peanuts."

"Chris," she said evenly, "they liked you. If you had gone up there with them, you could have sold those two old women that whole range of hills. They didn't like me. I couldn't have sold them a gold brick for fifty cents."

"So you admit it," he said. "I'm surprised."

She stiffened. "Just what do you mean? Admit what?"

Chris grinned at her. Behind his eyes she saw something he wasn't going to say.

"That you couldn't have sold them a gold brick for fifty cents," he told her. Then laughing, he turned and went out.

She didn't know when he rode off on the horse. Well, anyway, that was the kind of a business person he thought she was. She was there trying to make a business man out of him. And she couldn't sell a gold brick for fifty cents.

She got out the bag of peanuts. She munched them slowly.

KAY spent the rest of the afternoon telephoning other prospects for the Wilmington Knoll. But there was something wrong with it for everybody. Too much cash, too much wind on a knoll, too much driveway to put in up to the house, views get tiresome when you look at them for three hundred and sixty-five days, there weren't enough trees. Exhausting that list she began calling up persons interested in other properties. Some were out, others not ready to make up their mind, some said definitely no. Others had bought.

Chris didn't come back to the office. Ready to go home, Kay dragged herself wearily out to her old jalopy. She felt beaten, depressed. She had not done any of the things she had promised Chris' father. She had failed. The only really vital thing that had happened was that Chris had kissed her. And even that didn't mean anything. He was in love with Sheila Wayne.

Next morning when Kay reached the office, she found a note stuck in the door. It was signed, C. Smythe. "I saw that property last night you telephoned me about yesterday—that chicken farm down by the river. I'm deciding this morning. Will give you a ring."

Kay's spirits lifted. Ah, today was going to be different!

It was.

At ten o'clock Mr. Smythe telephoned. He had decided not to buy the property. He had bought some stock in a horse ranch instead.

A gentle, timid voice called next. Did they have any prospects yet for his property, the Wilmington Knoll?

Oh yes, indeed! Kay braced herself. Several parties were very much interested! In fact, Mr. Merrick practically—well—considered it sold.

A half hour later Chris called to say he was in the city at the bank.

"Bank?" Kay asked vaguely. "What's that?"

Chris chuckled.

"Chris," she said, "will you please come out here and get to work? I mean it, Chris!"

## SWEETHEART STORIES

"How'll it be if I drop around later for a pep talk, sweetheart?" he asked. "Then we'll see."

"What we need, Chris," she said bitterly, "is a couple of salesmen."

"You mean somebody who can sell a gold brick for fifty cents?"

She hung up.

Kay, alone at her desk, lifted her eyes from her work. She saw a coupé parked at the curb. It was light orchid color. Footsteps tripped along the walk. Then the door was pushed open. A bit of pink fluff with wide blue eyes that fairly batted masara fringe at her, hovered on the threshold like a cherub.

"Could y'all tell me where I could find Mistah Christopher Merrick? I'm"—she dimpled—"Sheila Wayne."

Kay grabbed her desk and hung on. Some one who looked like Veronica Lake, maybe, but surely not this powder puff that some ill wind had wafted off a dresser and blown in the door!

"He's not in," Kay said. "In fact he's out of town."

Kay stiffened. Out of the corner of her eye she saw Chris' long maroon convertible drawing up in front of the office directly behind the orchid coupé. She felt, rather than saw, Chris heave his big frame over the door and come swinging up the walk.

She heard a little squeal from Sheila and she dropped back limply against her chair.

"SHEILA!" Chris exclaimed exultantly.

He made a veritable dive for her. It was shameless the way he seized her. "Why, Sheila, my pet!" he yelled. "When did you get in?" He half dragged, half carried her over to his desk, sat down and pulled her down on his knee. "Well, Sheila, Sheila!"

Kay turned her back on them, a stiff, rigid, formidable back.

"Honey, why didn't you let me know?" Chris coaxed. This was followed by a long silence. Then,

"Kay, can't you go somewhere else?"

"Don't mind me," Kay said, choking. "I only work here."

"Goodness, gracious!" Sheila cried.

"Does she really *work* here, Chris? In this cute little old place? Oh, I love it, Chris, honey, it's just like you. I'm so proud of you, Angel!"

"Are you?" Chris asked, laughing.

"Yes, I am." Then a whisper.

"Oh, Kay's all right," Chris said out loud. "She just takes her job seriously, that's all. You know when Kay was a baby, Sheila, they never let her play."

"Never let her *play*?" Sheila's voice was a wail.

"No. They didn't even give her a rattle. They just taught her to shake her head and listen to her brains. It was a great sound. It fascinated her. She's been listening to them ever since."

"Is that what she's doing now?" Sheila asked.

The telephone on Kay's desk rang. Kay reached for it. Her fingers got it by the throat. She strangled it.

"Chris Merrick," she said. "Real Estate."

The voice that came over the wire made her heart leap. She pressed the receiver tighter against her ear.

"Kay? Where's that son of mine? I just got in by plane, called the house. He's left. He couldn't be working, could he?"

"No," said Kay firmly. "Nothing like that." She paused, trying to find the right words. "Remember what you warned me against—that southern exposure? Well—that occupies attention at present."

"What? What are you talking about?"

"There's nothing I can do about it," she went on sweetly.

"You mean—you mean," he fumed, "that that little nincompoop Sheila Wayne is there? That he's with her?"

"Yes," she said, even more sweetly. "I can't get him to sell, or give it away at any price."

"I'll be right out there!" he stormed. "You just wait until I get there!"

"Thank you," Kay purred. "We'll be glad to see you whenever you call at the office. I am sure Mr. Merrick will, too."

She put down the 'phone. She patted it.

Then she reached in the drawer for the last of the peanuts.



## HEARTS FOR SALE

MR. MERRICK made it out in less time than Kay believed possible. He paid the cab driver, waved him on to the house with his bags, then he burst up the path and exploded in the door. A man of action, drive, and apoplexy.

"Chris!" he thundered.

Kay smiled. She turned around in her chair to enjoy the scene. Chris was standing. The bit of fluff hovered beside him. They both looked flustered and extremely uncomfortable.

"Well!" barked the older man, "Where is she?" He seemed to catch himself. "Hello, Blossom, didn't expect to see you here, where's your mother, when did you get in?" He looked around as if he expected to see somebody emerge from some corner. "Where is that Sheila Wayne who has been writing you those asinine letters always always laying around on the high-boy?"

"Why, Uncle Christopher Merrick!" Sheila cried. "That's *me!* You ought to be ashamed to talk that way to your own niece! I don't like Blossom and who wants to go by the name of Mudd?"

"Hush!" Chris commanded. He turned to his father.

"But Chris—" Sheila tugged at his arm. "Chris—"

Chris waved her aside. "Run along now, Blossom, the game's over, pick up the pretty marbles and run along like a good girl. The old boy's home now, and I want to talk business." He began shoving the dimpled Blossom toward the door. When he finally had her through it, he pulled it shut and locked it, then strolled over to his own desk and began pulling papers out of his pockets and tossing them down. "Exit Blossom Mudd alias Sheila Wayne," he grinned.

"Sold the horse ranch to Nolan, the banker, this morning, Dad." Chris said, smiling, pawing through some papers. "Sold him ten more acres than he wanted, the ten you called a chicken farm, so had to even off by selling Clifford Smythe stock in the horse ranch. Sold old Roscoe Jessup the Wilmington Knoll out in back of the office the other day by showing him how a

gentleman of leisure can have a horse to ride out here and get something out of life. By the way, there's a bonus Kay gets on the deal, she was a great help. Then there was—"

Chris' father could only nod. His hat was still on his head, shoved back. The shock of grey hair that stood up in front had a surprised, dazed look. As he looked at Chris age seemed to slip out of his eyes and off his shoulders and to melt away like a shadow. "My boy," was all he could say. "My boy!"

CHRIS got Kay's hat for her, put it on her head, put her purse in her hand. "Come on, zombie," he said.

He led her across to the bench in the little park. He sat down. He pulled her down beside him.

"You know, sweetheart," he said, "you work too hard. You work so darn hard you scare business away."

Kay sat there wishing she had her hat back and the nail polish back that she had given to Julie.

"Look at the fun Cousin Blossom and I've had. You know all those letters you wrote her for me? She used them to wrangle a diamond out of her boy friend. We grew up writing wacky letters to each other. Great habit. Always good for a laugh. She's nuts." He grinned. "First the Blossom, then the nut." He moved closer and put out his fingers and began to fool with the gold chain about Kay's throat. "There's always time for a laugh, isn't there, sweetheart?"

"Isn't there?" he demanded two seconds later.

Kay stared straight ahead.

He waited.

"Zombie," he said, "*Isn't* there?"

She didn't move. "Yes," she said. "Ha!"

She got up. Chris pulled her back down. She said, "Ha" again, but very differently.

Halfway through the kiss her eyes flew wide open, then they closed again.

"Fresh peanuts!" sang the man coming along the walk in front of them. "Fresh peanuts! Fresh roasted peanuts!"

But his best customer didn't hear him.

# Unexpected Bridegroom

By Adelaide  
Humphries



"Sweet, you'll never understand—all of a sudden I was afraid of you!" Ellen said shakily.

**I**T WAS silly of her, of course. But all evening she had avoided dancing with Carson—and he was aware of it. When her eyes met his now and then, she saw that he was angry; his jaw set, that glint in his eyes that warned her he could not be stalled off much longer. Her heart

stirred under a soft, sweet excitement and the color deepened in her face.

She was dancing with Dick Gordon when suddenly Carson spoke at her elbow. "I'm cutting in, Gordon," he said, his tone daring Dick or anyone else to argue that point.

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Dick laughed and stepped back. "Okay, fella—put down that gun! The gal's all yours!" He registered mock terror, yet there was respect in his attitude, too. Men always respected Carson.

"You're darn right the girl's mine," said Carson, as Dick moved away. Then for Ellen's ear alone, "And the sooner she realizes that, the better for all concerned! It's mid October and the garden is not at its best, and it's just my luck that there isn't even a skeleton of a moon. But how'd you like to go with me—look *at* me, will you please, and answer!—to look at it just the same?"

Ellen's heart was hammering queerly and her smoke-grey eyes were starry. But she managed a little laugh and answered shakily, "The sun parlor would be cozier for a late October night, don't you think?"

"The question is, is it as secluded as the garden? What I have to say to you requires the utmost quiet and privacy," Carson warned her, his tone still grim.

"Then the sun parlor is the solution," Ellen laughed, and led the way.

The sun parlor had been carefully glassed in and was pleasantly warm, gay with chintz and wicker, bright with growing plants in ivory-painted containers.

Ellen turned to face Carson, laughing, flushed, trying to deny the mad, sweet clamor of her pulses as she gave him a gay little bow, the creamy lace of her gown sweeping about ruby-tinted slippers, her shining dark head bowed so that the fragrance of the gardenias tucked into the black curls above her ear swept up to him breathlessly.

"Does this please milord?" she asked with mocking gaiety.

"It's a beginning," Carson admitted cautiously. "And now see here: what's all this nonsense about your avoiding me as though I had the measles, or were a tax collector? You've been dodging me very effectively all evening, and I've had just about as much of it as I'm going to take."

Ellen laughed, but her smoky eyes could not quite meet his.

"What nonsense!" she protested a trifle breathlessly. "I'm the hostess and I've got

to see that my guests are being amused."

"Then you're slipping badly, because *this* guest isn't amused at all," Carson told her grimly and put both hands on her shoulders. Turning her about so that the light fell full on her charming, piquant face, he asked quietly, "Is it because I'm going into politics? Because if it is, then I'll step out of the mayoralty race before the campaign gets any hotter."

**E**LLEN said breathlessly, "You'd give that up, when it means so much to you, just because I might not like it?" And her hand went up to his, where it gripped her shoulder.

"There's nothing in the world I wouldn't give up if *you* asked me to," he said with convincing simplicity. "I admit that the thought of being mayor and having a hand in cleaning up the politics of a city that my grandfather and yours, and a lot of swell old pioneers fought to build, means a great deal to me. But not one millionth part as much as you do. You're my heart, darling. You're the reason I was born and grew up. You're the girl I've loved since I was a kid and that I've always wanted for my wife. So whatever you say goes—always!"

There were tears in Ellen's eyes and she swayed a little toward him as she whispered, "Oh, my dearest dear! Carson, it's like that with me, too."

His arms closed about her and drew her hard against him. He kissed her as though the touch of her mouth were cool, crystal clear water and he were dying of thirst. But after the first long, enchanted moment, he held her a little away from him and looked down at her, frowning.

"Ellen, if it's like that, why the blazes have you been giving me the bum's rush all evening?" he demanded.

Ellen's laugh was soft, shaky, and she stammered, "Sweet—you'll never understand the weird and crazy things a girl in love feels. You see, all of a sudden I was afraid of you!"

Outraged, indignant, bewildered, he repeated that. "Afraid of me? Well, of all the—good heavens, Ellen, I'm Carson—re-

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member? The guy who used to carry your books to school for you and fight your battles when you were a long-legged brat with hair ribbons and a temper that sizzled. And you're *afraid*—"

"I know it sounds idiotic," she admitted. "But all of a sudden tonight while I was dressing—just in between two strokes of the hair brush—something in my heart said 'Why, you zany—you're in love with the man!' And darned if it wasn't true, when I stopped and thought about it. And then you came in with your usual air of the conquering hero—stop squirming, darling, of course you do!—well, anyway, believe it or not, there I stood and said to myself, all wide-eyed and everything, 'Why—Carson's a stranger. I don't even know him.' And I was suddenly shy of you, because I knew I loved you so much I was completely at your mercy. I wasn't *me* any more, I was *yours*. Oh, darling, don't laugh at me! I know I'm a fool, but I do love you so terribly!"

"Who's laughing?" demanded Carson huskily, his arms tightening about her. "For two cents I'd burst into tears right along with you, because, angel, darling, I love you, too—so terribly much."

**A**FTER that, of course, they lost track of time. Then after a little he asked her anxiously, "Sure you don't mind my getting mixed up in politics? It's sometimes a rather messy business, and more than a little on the scandalous side, you know."

"Oh, but it shouldn't be, darling. And it wouldn't be if more men like you—young and able and courageous, and with enough money of your own not to be tempted by the opportunities for graft—would get into it," she protested eagerly. "If people who are willing to vote for just anybody would stop and think, and vote only for people they could trust to handle their own personal business affairs; and if more responsible, worthwhile citizens would run for office as a public and civic duty, politics could be cleaned up in no time. It would have broken your grandfather's heart—mine, too—to see a racketeer practically

running this city. Everybody knows Mike Morelli is really the power behind all the political rottenness in this town, yet nobody does anything about it!"

Carson kissed her, moved by her eagerness and her sincerity. She was still in the circle of his arms for a long, lovely moment; and then she stirred and said uneasily, "but it's going to be dangerous, darling. We both know Mike Morelli and his gang aren't going to give up easily. They'll fight with every crooked, dirty weapon they can lay their hands on."

"Don't you worry about that, dear," Carson answered confidently. "That's why I've insisted that our party give me a ticket fairly bristling with young men who don't scare easily. We're all looking forward to a swell time cleaning up this town, making it the sort of place we'll be proud to have our children live in."

Deeply touched, Ellen clung to him a little more fiercely and hid her face against his shoulder. Because it would be too utterly silly to burst into tears just because she had suddenly realized a little how beautiful it would be to have a child that was hers and Carson's.

Later, when the party was over and she was alone in her big, comfortable room, she sat for a long time, making no move to go to bed. She was fiercely glad now that she had kept her secret; that cheap, pitiful little secret that she had so nearly revealed to Carson several times. It would be easier to tell him, to share the shame with him. But it was a part of her punishment for the thing she had done that she must bear the ugly memory of that episode in secret. Only three people had known. Her father, Don Hartly, and herself. Her father and Don were both dead, and so the secret must forever remain locked in her heart. It would hurt Carson to know it, and telling him would serve no purpose whatever except to steal a bit of comfort for herself. But that would be at the price of pain and shock to Carson, a price she was unwilling to exact.

**T**HE "best people" in Crescent City flung themselves headlong into the city cam-

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paign for civic cleanliness and decency. Once thoroughly aroused, men and women who had turned up their socialite noses at the mere thought of politics were working industriously to defeat the notorious Morrelli "machine" and to put into office Carson Shane and a hand-picked group of courageous young men who had suddenly discovered politics was amazingly good sport.

Ellen's engagement to Carson, a surprise to nobody because they had been going about together since Ellen's return from a Northern school two years ago, had been announced shortly after Carson had announced himself as a candidate for mayor. They were going to be married the day after election, and as the honeymoon was to be spent at Carson's hunting lodge on the Carolina coast, the problems of her trousseau more or less adjusted themselves for Ellen and she was free to put all her waking moments into the business of helping Carson get himself elected to clean up Crescent City's disgraceful political conditions.

A week before the election there was a banquet, a crowded, noisy affair held at Crescent City's best hotel, attended by two hundred or more of Carson's supporters and campaign workers. Ellen, as Carson's fiancée, was in the very thick of things, at the speaker's table beside Carson. She sat listening to the after-dinner speeches, tired but keyed up by her excitement. Her eyes roamed the huge room, passing from face to face of friends and acquaintances. And then suddenly it seemed as though she had received a stunning blow between her wide, incredulous eyes. For across that crowded room she looked into a lean, narrow, weakly handsome face and blue eyes that met hers as though in cynical amusement. Her hands clenched beneath the table edge and every drop of color drained from her face, leaving it paper-white beneath her light makeup. She set her teeth against a deadly faintness that threatened her and for a moment closed her eyes.

It couldn't be possible. It just *couldn't* be, she told herself frantically. Fate couldn't play her so shabby a trick! Don Hartley was dead! He *couldn't* be here,

across the room, grinning at her cynically. She wet her lips with her tongue and forced herself to look again. But now the seat where the man had been sitting was empty. Slowly, painfully, life came back to her sick, stunned heart and the paralysis left her limbs. What a fool she was, she told herself shakily, getting all wrought up because of a fancied resemblance!

Carson was saying swiftly, "What's wrong, darling? You're ill—"

She pulled herself together and smiled up at him with stiff lips. "I'm only tired," she insisted, "and overcome by all the excitement."

Carson did not fall for that excuse. He said, "I'm going to have old Bill drive you straight home. You've been working too hard. You won't mind if I don't take you home—I've a conference."

"Certainly I mind," she said. "I mind like the dickens, but since I *would* marry the mayor, knowing how important he is, what can I do?"

Her attempted lightness was not entirely convincing, and Carson tucked his hand beneath her arm, drew her with him out to the sidewalk and put her into his car. "You're to drive Miss Mowbray home, Bill," he told the smiling, middle-aged Negro who swung the door open. "And if you don't drive carefully, I'll have your life!"

Carson bent to kiss Ellen, not caring in the least that the sidewalk was thronged with amused but friendly spectators. But as she lifted her head for his kiss, Ellen's eyes saw beyond his shoulder the face of a man who stood a little to the left of the hotel entrance. Beyond all shadow of doubt, the man was Don Hartley. An evil shadow out of the past that brought her cheap, tawdry little secret to ugly, clamorous life once more. The man smiled at her sardonically, and lifted a finger to the brim of his hat in mocking recognition.

**B**ILL, as he swung the car away from the curb, glimpsed her pallid face in the rear-view mirror and asked anxiously, "Is anything wrong, Miss Ellen?"

Wrong! Everything was going to pieces!

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"No, no, Bill—I'm just tired, that's all," she stammered.

"Yessum—you been working mighty hard, Miss Ellen," said Bill, with the freedom of an old and privileged servant whose family's affairs are his closest concern. "Dis is de finest thing that ever happened to this town, Mr. Carson and them other gentlemen going into politics. This town got so bad, honest folks wasn't safe to make a living or walk the streets after dark."

"Nothing must stop Mr. Carson's being elected, Bill—nothing!" Ellen burst out.

"Ain't nothing going to, Miss Ellen—don' you worry about that," Bill answered comfortingly.

She said goodnight to him at the gate and hurried up the walk to the big, comfortable old white house where she had been born and had grown up, and where she and Aunt Martha now lived. As she let herself into the house, she heard the clamor of the telephone in its closet beneath the stairs. A cold hand clutched her heart as she lifted the receiver and said, "Hello?"

Somehow she had felt it would be Don. A voice she had hoped never to hear again said lightly, "Well, darling—nice to hear your voice again. No need to ask how you are. I saw you at the banquet and you're more beautiful than ever."

She writhed beneath the memories that voice brought up and she couldn't have spoken if her life had depended on it. After a moment that hated, dreaded voice said sharply, "Are you there, Ellen?"

"I—yes. What—what do you want?"

"Well, that's more like it." She heard his faint chuckle and her heart shook at the thought that once she had loved that easy chuckle. Don said, "I have to see you, and at once. It's very important."

"Oh, no! No!" She couldn't have controlled the sick revulsion in her voice if her life had depended on it.

"Oh, like that, eh?" and now his voice was sharp, threatening. "Well, that's just too bad, because I'm going to see you whether you like it or not. I'll let you name the place, but the time must be no later than ten o'clock tomorrow morning."

She was silent a long moment, sick and

shaken. Then she said coldly, "But surely *we* have nothing to discuss!"

"That's your mistake, darling," Don said, and she shivered at the sound of that endearment in his hated voice. "We'll make it ten o'clock tomorrow morning at the Owl's Nest, on the River Road. You're unknown there, I'm sure, and our interview can be entirely private. But don't fail to be there, darling, or you'll be mighty sorry!"

ELLEN sat very still for a long moment with the dead telephone in her hand before she put it down and went slowly to her own room. There she huddled face-down across the bed in the darkness and, for one of the few times in five long years, let herself go back in memory and the past came back, whipping her with stinging lashes of shame and futile remorse.

She had been away at school and she had been barely seventeen. It was a very strict, old-fashioned school to which her mother and grandmother had gone, so it had been taken as a matter of course that she should go there too. She had met Don Hartley one afternoon when she and two other venturesome girls had "broken bounds" and sneaked off to the nearby town to see a show given by a cheap stock company. Don had been the leading man and his cheap, rather florid good looks had made an enormous appeal to the excited girls.

She had believed herself madly in love with Don. He had seen the three girls and managed to meet them afterwards. It had been, the excited, impressionable girl had believed, a great romance. There had been letters; she had developed an amazing ingenuity at slipping away from school to be with him and her letters had been the silly, innocently adoring letters that romantic school-girls write to good-looking actors.

When he had told her that the stock company was disbanding and he was returning to New York, she had been appalled and heartbroken. They might never meet again, he had told her sadly. That was a thought she couldn't endure, so when he very carefully led up to the suggestion that she elope with him, she didn't hesitate a moment.

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"That's crazy talk! I'm not your wife! I never was!" Ellen said desperately.

They had been married by a fat, tobacco-chewing justice of the peace in a little upstate village. His thin, sour-faced wife and a grinning hired man were the witnesses. And even by then some of the rosy glamour of the elopement was vanishing. Ellen

was beginning to be a little frightened, uneasy. That feeling grew when she and Don parked the roadster—which was hers—before the shabby old hotel and were shown upstairs by a grinning bellhop to "the bridal chamber." It had hideous red

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carpet, a rickety brass bed, a maple dresser sagging at an incredible angle because one of its casters was gone. Something about her smart, striped luggage sitting chummily beside Don's shabby, battered pig-skin bag had sent terror to her heart.

She was tired and uneasy. The excitement had waned and the "romance" was wearing a bit thin. But she tried frantically to tell herself that she was madly in love with Don. Of course she was! And she was thrilled to bits at the thought of being his wife! She *had* to be! It was too late to be anything else, she told herself, as Don caught her close in his arms and kissed her as he had never dared kiss her before. His caressing, too-eager hands frightened her, yet she dared not protest. After all, he was her husband. And this—this was her marriage!

She all but cried out in sharp relief when there came a peremptory knock at the door and Don, swearing, let her go and opened the door.

A plump blond, flashily made up, wearing a sleazy satin dress—a woman whom Ellen recognized with difficulty as the very amusing "character woman" in the stock company plays—thrust her way into the room. The scene that followed sickened Ellen, because the frowsy blond was Don's wife and she screamed shameful, unprintable epithets that made Ellen's flesh creep.

Ellen remembered hearing Don say sharply, "Shut up, you fool! Haven't you brains enough to see what I'm after? The kid's old man is rich. He's a millionaire! He'll pay plenty to hush this up and get her out of it without a scandal. Why the devil didn't you hold off until morning?"

The blond looked startled, her anger fading as she turned to Ellen. "Is that on the level?" she demanded sharply. "Is your old man a millionaire?"

"No," Ellen said faintly from an abyss of shame and humiliation. "Not anywhere near it. There's only the income from a trust fund. About five thousand a year."

Even now, five years afterward, she burned at the memory of Don's fury. They hadn't tried to stop her when she had fled from the room and down to her roadster.

She telephoned her father from the next town and he came for her. As he listened to her stammered, tear-choked story, he looked older, tired and a little sick. But he didn't reproach her. He sent her North to a school where no one knew her. And he made her promise that she would keep the secret of the elopement. Later, he told her that Don was dead. He had found a newspaper story about the death of Don Hartley in a train wreck. So far as she and her father were concerned, the matter had been buried with the past. And then her father died, leaving her alone but for Aunt Martha.

She hadn't told Carson. It had seemed an insult to their love. And that she could ever have imagined herself in love with Don Hartley now seemed incredible. And that she had actually married him was intolerable.

She fell at last into a brief sleep of utter emotional exhaustion.

ELLEN awoke in the morning to face the ordeal of her life. She was thankful that she could drive her own car, and that it was a roadster of an inexpensive make so that there were hundreds just like it in Crescent City. There wasn't much likelihood that anyone she knew would see her going to the notorious Owl's Nest, nor would her parked car outside that unsavory spot be recognized.

A stout, bald-headed man wearing a soiled shirt and an even dirtier white apron was behind the bar when she went in. Without waiting for her to speak, he jerked a thick thumb toward the stairs and said, "He's expectin' you. First door to the right."

Her cheeks burned beneath the look in the stout man's eyes, but she hurried past him and up the dingy stairs. Don was standing at the open door of the dingy private dining room and he did not speak as she came up the stairs. He merely stood back, grinning a little as she followed him into the room.

"Well," he said then, his eyes taking her in from the top of her smart little hat to the tips of her shining patent leather slip-



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pers, "you *have* grown up, haven't you? You were cute at seventeen—but you're beautiful now."

Ellen said through her teeth. "Why are you here? What do you want of me?"

His eyebrows went up and he said dryly, "Just won't be friendly, eh? You want it the hard way! O.K., then we'll get right down to business. You're to have Carson Shane withdraw from the mayoralty race—at once."

She stared at him, startled. "But that's out of the question—I won't do it!"

"Oh, yes you will, or I'll have to enter suit for divorce and name him as co-respondent," said Don quietly, his eyes never leaving hers. "Perhaps a little suit for alienation of affections, too, might net me a few pennies."

Ellen laid a shaking hand on the edge of the table, supporting her trembling body against it. Her eyes met his with a wide, stunned gaze. There was a terrible conviction about his words. A conviction she fought wildly with stammered words. "That's crazy talk! I'm not your wife—I never was! You were already married!"

He grinned at her. "That was your little mistake, darling," he explained. "Very foolish of you to accept her statement without proof. The blond was not my wife—we'd never been married—so your marriage to me was legal and quite binding. Incidentally, it still is, of course."

**T**HE room spun about her and Ellen thought she was going to faint. Only she mustn't faint, she warned herself. She set her teeth hard in her lower lip, and after a moment she could stammer faintly, "I don't believe you! You're lying!"

"I have all the proof required," he said. "At the proper time I shall present that proof, with your letters, and all the rest of it. That is, if you're going to be stubborn and make that necessary."

She could no longer doubt what he was saying. There was an inescapable air of conviction about him. She was still this man's wife! His wife! She shivered.

Studying her, Don sensed the exact moment when she reluctantly began to believe

that he was speaking the truth and he went on briskly. "There are certain people here in town who do not want to see your boy friend elected mayor. If he withdraws now, the entire ticket of 'Young Crusaders' will collapse and the opposition candidate will be elected by a landslide. Which is exactly the way certain—er—friends of mine want it to be. Now, there are two ways for Shane to pull out. He can do it willingly, because you ask it of him. He's pretty crazy about you, and he'd do it if he knew that, by pulling out, he could save you from a rather messy scandal and himself from a suit. The second way is for you to be stubborn. Then I'll go to the opposition's newspapers with my story and file my suit immediately. You know as well as I do that the 'better element' of the town—the church crowd, the women's clubs, the civic organizations who are backing Shane—will be horrified to learn that he has been running around with a married woman whose husband has at last caught up with him. Well—what's it going to be?"

Ellen's throat ached. Speech was beyond her. Everything Don had said was so hideously true. Carson would withdraw if she asked him. And scandal and gossip would inevitably bring a wave of reaction against him that would defeat him.

Desolation swept over her as she faced the ugly, inescapable truth. To ask Carson to sacrifice his political career for which they both had held such high hopes—to ask him to forego the chance to rid the town of Mike Morelli and his infamous gang—to make it easy for that gang to go on bleeding the city, terrifying the people—! Yet if she didn't ask Carson to withdraw, both he and she would go down in the scandal Don threatened.

She straightened after a long moment and said huskily, "You'll have to give me a little time to decide. To think."

Don's face twisted unpleasantly. "There's not a heck of a lot of time left," he reminded her grimly. "The election is next Tuesday. But I'll give you twenty-four hours. Be here tomorrow morning at ten. And remember, I hold all the winning cards, so don't try any funny business!"

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She turned from him without a word and went down the stairs and out to her car. She remembered nothing of the drive back to town. Morelli's plot—for undoubtedly it *was* his plot—hinged on her closeness to Carson. The whole thing was aimed at her; the whole force of its attack was that Carson loved her. So Carson was to be defeated by the girl he loved. By her, Ellen Mowbray!

She wasn't conscious of the thought processes by which she reached her decision. Dimly, in the back of her mind and in the aching depths of her heart, she had known that deviation was inevitable. There was nothing else she *could* do.

She stopped her car in front of a drug store that bore the familiar blue and white telephone sign. First she telephoned Carson, grateful for the shelter of the booth that concealed her tears.

"Darling," she said when she heard Carson's voice, "you've got to trust me. I'm going to do something that will hurt you terribly for a little while—maybe for a long time. But you must believe that I love you and that there isn't anything else I can do. It's the only way—" Oh, darling, darling! She put down the receiver against Carson's frantic questions.

She stood for a moment, clinging to the telephone, trying to master her emotions. And then she lifted the receiver again and called Crescent City's foremost newspaper, the one that was backing Carson's campaign to the hilt.

"Is this the City Editor?" she asked, surprised that her voice could sound so steady, so calm. "This is Ellen Mowbray. If you will send a reporter out to my house, I have a story for him. If you'll tell him to hurry, it will still be a 'scoop.' The other papers won't know about it until—ten o'clock tomorrow morning."

THE afternoon paper came out with an extra shortly after noon. An extra that screamed aloud the fact that Ellen Mowbray, daughter of one of the city's pioneer families and engaged to Carson Shane, was announcing that she had been married for almost five years.

The news hit the town with a stunning force. Ellen had given the story whatever glamor she could. A runaway marriage; a lover's quarrel; two people in love but both too stubborn to admit it; the marriage a secret; her own return to school; supposedly authentic information of the bridegroom's death; the secret bride locking the whole story deep in her heart—and now their unexpected meeting, the discovery that their love burned as brightly as ever, and this belated announcement of their marriage.

Less than an hour after that extra hit the streets, Ellen was locked in her own room, refusing to answer the telephone, to talk to anybody, denying herself even to Carson who, of course, was at the house within a few minutes of that incredible extra. Ellen let Aunt Martha come in, an Aunt Martha who was pale and stern.

"Well, you can come out of hiding," she said grimly. "Though I must say I don't blame you. A more shameful affair I've never known. But *he's* here. Downstairs. And it looks as though he'd come to stay."

Ellen turned a white, ravaged face and tortured smoky eyes to Aunt Martha. "He?" she repeated, but even as she spoke, she knew, and her heart seemed to die a little more.

"Your—devoted bridegroom," said Aunt Martha, and there were anger and contempt and a deep, burning hurt in her voice. "He's brought his baggage with him—if you can call a battered old valise baggage."

Ellen had a moment of panic. "Oh, Aunt Martha—send him away! Get rid of him!"

Aunt Martha, with no hint of softening, detached Ellen's clutching hands and stood back, with the gesture of one who washes her hands of an unpleasant situation.

"I'll have nothing to do with the affair, or with him," she said sternly. "You've disgraced your whole family—treating a fine man like Carson Shane the way you have! You ought to be ashamed of yourself—but unless I miss my guess, you'll pay for it many times over before you're through. Playing fast and loose with Carson! I think you'll find everybody feels just as I do about it."

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She went out and closed the door firmly behind her.

ELLEN sat still for a long, stunned moment. She had not thought of that—that people would think she had been making a fool of Carson; getting herself engaged to him, while she was still uncertain whether or not she was free. People would argue that there *must* have been something shameful about her marriage, or there would have been no reason for keeping it so secret.

She heard footsteps on the stairs, then a knock at her door. She stared at the closed door, bereft of speech. After a moment of waiting the door opened and Don stepped into the room.

Ellen cringed a little from the look in his eyes as they swept over her, and Don laughed.

"I got tired of waiting for you to come down, and the old battle-axe told me this was your room," he announced casually. "I have to admit, darling, that you just about threw me for a loop when you announced our marriage. It was, frankly, about the last thing I expected you to do—and of course Morelli is raving like a madman!"

Ellen pulled herself together with an effort and said shortly, "Why did you come here? I mean—you can't *stay* here!"

"No? And where else would a devoted husband stay except with the wife whom he's found after all these desolate years?" he demanded, a triumph and insolence in his voice. "Frankly, darling, I was tickled to death to find that you still loved me—"

"I don't—I *don't!*" she cried wildly.

A cruel gleam dawned in his eyes for a moment and he said smoothly, "Oh, then it *was* just what Morelli thought—an attempted doublecross!"

Ellen caught her breath and stared at him fearfully.

Don went on after a moment: "Of course, with the story you have already given the newspapers, my suit for a divorce and alienation of affections would be just twice as effective against Shane. Morelli thought of that right away."

Ellen's heart turned to ice. She was as much in their power as ever! She had given them still another weapon with which to strike at Carson. And once again there was only one way out.

She drew a long, hard breath, pulled her slender body erect and said thinly, "I see. You expect to stay here, to be taken care of—or else Carson will be wrecked."

"That's putting it bluntly," Don admitted, entirely without shame. "But frankly, darling, the world's been pretty tough sledding of recent years. You have a very comfortable home here—what's more natural than that your husband should share it with you? And why can't we make a go of things? After all, you were in love with me—"

Ellen said swiftly, "I loved you five years ago, or thought I did. But this is today."

"I see," said Don, with the air of one who wishes to be fair. "Well, darling, we'll dispense with love and all that for the present. And now, suppose you have my luggage sent up to whatever cubbyhole a not-too-welcome husband is to be assigned."

Ellen stood still for a long moment. But there was no fight left in her. She was beaten. There was only one faint and lonely shred of comfort. Through her present misery and pain, she had saved Carson from defeat.

DON was established in a comfortable room across the hall. The mad, incredible afternoon finally waned. The storm of telephone calls died down. Aunt Martha, tight-lipped, stern with disapproval, had been persuaded not to carry out her bitterly expressed intention of leaving instantly for a spot in the Old Ladies' Home. The two elderly servants who had known and served Ellen since childhood had looked with lowering, sullen faces upon Don and dismissed him, openly despising him.

Dinner was a very strained and unhappy meal. Don came down to it, freshly shaven, neatly brushed, but the moment he stepped into the living room he set the pattern of the days that were to come.

"I'll have to apologize for my shabbiness," he said, airily, heedless of Aunt Mar-

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tha's stern and outraged disapproval. "I'm afraid I've grown careless about clothes—but now that I have found my bride again, things will be different. I daresay you have accounts in town, darling. I'll run down and do a bit of shopping tomorrow."

Aunt Martha bit back stinging words; Ellen dropped shamed eyes and set her teeth. Old Dennis came to the door to announce dinner, but before he could do so, the front door, never locked, swung open and Carson came in, his face white and grim and set, his eyes angry and bewildered.

Ellen caught her breath on a gasp of shock and dismay; Aunt Martha folded her hands and looked self-righteous; and Don surveyed Carson with a smile in which there was obvious malice.

"Ah, Shane, glad to meet you!" said Don, holding out his hand. "I've seen you about, of course, and heard some fine things about you. Awfully decent of you to call and congratulate us."

Carson looked him carefully over from head to foot, ignoring the outstretched hand. Turning away from him without a word, he said to Ellen, "What the devil is this all about? There's something suspicious and smelly about the whole affair. I don't believe you were ever married to this man—"

"Would you care to see complete proof?" Don cut in savagely, furious at Carson's manner.

Still ignoring him, Carson said to Ellen, "You can tell me you are married to him, and you can tell me that you've finished with me. But you can't tell me that you don't love me, for I *know* better—"

"See here, Shane, you can't talk to my wife like that!" Don snapped, shouldering his way between them.

And Carson, as though the thin edge of his self-control had required only that to snap them, drew back and planted his clenched fist beneath the point of Don's jaw. Don sprawled heavily backward, among the wreckage of a small table laden with some of Aunt Martha's most cherished bric-a-brac.

"Good boy, Carson!" Aunt Martha cried

joyously. "I've been dying to do that all afternoon!"

Carson looked down at Ellen and she had to set her teeth hard in her lower lip to control its trembling. She could not tear her eyes from his stern, bewildered gaze, though her own eyes filled with tears.

Carson said suddenly, huskily, "Sorry, darling," turned on his heel and strode out of the house.

Sure that he was gone, Don got to his feet, cursing viciously. In the doorway old Dennis, his eyes dancing with glee, managed to keep his face straight and said happily, "Dinner am served."

Don glared at the old man, but Dennis looked blandly back at him and Don knew, with a helpless fury, that the servant was rejoicing over Carson's blow, and the swelling bruise on Don's jaw.

Ellen dared not meet Aunt Martha's eyes. Instead, she turned and led the way, without a word, to the dining room.

**I**N THE morning it was a vast relief to both Ellen and Aunt Martha when Don elected to have his breakfast in bed. Across the breakfast table, sunshiny with a bright cloth and yellow pottery, they looked at each other, in Ellen's eyes a dumb, stricken plea, in Aunt Martha's an angry, helpless bewilderment and stern disapproval.

"I've been making a list, Ellen. Will you do the telephoning, or shall I?" asked Aunt Martha when Dennis had served breakfast and the swinging pantry door had closed behind him.

Ellen looked up, startled. "A list? Telephoning about what?"

Aunt Martha snorted. "Hasn't it occurred to you yet that you've got to introduce your friends to this—this prize-package of a husband you've suddenly dug up? That is, if you've got any friends left after the scandalous way you behaved about the whole business!"

Ellen stared at her, stricken.

"I thought a reception would solve the problem nicely," Aunt Martha went on grimly. "Though how I'll manage to stand beside that—that creature and not kick him soundly is more than *I* can see."

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Ellen cried sharply, "A reception? Oh, no, Aunt Martha! I couldn't! I just couldn't!"

"Don't be an idiot!" snapped Aunt Martha, her nerves on edge. "See here, Ellen, can't you realize what a hornet's nest you've pulled down about your ears by suddenly producing this gigolo and announcing blandly that you've been married to him five years? Meanwhile, you've been going around with Carson, your engagement to him announced, your trousseau bought—even the church and the minister and the honeymoon arranged! Had you stopped to realize that the spare room is already filling with wedding presents meant for you and Carson? That the decorators have almost finished with the bungalow Carson bought and is preparing for you? And then all of a sudden, without a moment's warning, like—like a third-rate vaudeville magician reaching for a white rabbit, you drag a sleazy thing like Don Hartley out of nowhere and say blandly, 'Oh, I forgot—I've already got a husband. I just mislaid him a few years ago!'"

Ellen listened, panic in her eyes. She could not deny the truth of her Aunt's vigorous words. Whereupon Aunt Martha went on just as vigorously, "You're a beautiful girl, and popular. It stands to reason you've got enemies—people who have been jealous and resentful of your beauty and your popularity—jealous perhaps most of all of Carson's love for you. Don't you realize they are going to pounce on this story with great glee and tear you to pieces? They'll ask questions and find their own answers—and you can rest assured that the answers will be to your discredit. The only thing left for you to do is carry your head high, behave as though you were madly in love with the silly, vicious man and give the lie, by your boldness and frankness, to all the scandalous stories. Therefore, you've got to have a reception to introduce your once-upon-a-time friends to your husband. Now let's hear no more nonsense on the subject!"

**E**LLEN was on her feet, trembling, her face as white as the crisp collar of her

print morning frock, her eyes wide and tragic.

"I can't do it, Aunt Martha! It doesn't matter what people are saying, I just can't go through with that!" she cried wildly.

Aunt Martha eyed her without a hint of relenting. "Of course," she said grimly, "I'm only a crazy old woman without much sense, but after all, I brought you up from childhood and I'm damn fond of you. A blind, deaf and dumb man could see there was something terribly wrong with this all-of-a-sudden marriage business. Maybe if you cared to tell me about it, we could find a way out."

For a moment Ellen was tense, terribly tempted to confide in Aunt Martha; to tell her of Don's threat, inspired by Morelli, and of her desperate attempt to keep Carson from being hurt by her own youthful folly. But she set her teeth hard in her lower lip, knowing that she dared not trust Aunt Martha who adored Carson and despised Don, and might, impulsively and under the spur of her emotions, betray the truth to Carson. He, of course, would instantly withdraw from the race—and that wouldn't help. No, it was her own trouble and she had to fight it out alone.

She drew a long breath and said with a forced quiet, "I'm sorry, darling, but I can't tell you. Not now. Later, perhaps. But I can tell you that immediately after the election Don will be going away, and then I can get a divorce."

Aunt Martha said something, but Ellen didn't wait to hear what it was. Instead, she sped out of the dining room and toward her own room. But at the foot of the stairs she came face to face with Don, wearing a shabby bathrobe and grinning at her with an expression that told her he had heard at least a part of her talk with Aunt Martha.

He jerked his head toward the closed dining room door and said, so low that it reached only her ears, "I heard that little crack about my going away immediately after election. Sorry, my dear, but you're quite wrong about that. I like it here. A trifle dull, of course, but the old place is quite comfortable and the food is wonder-

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ful. I think you'll find it hard to divorce the model husband I shall become, for I'll see to it that you have no grounds whatever for a divorce."

Ellen felt that she could stand no more. Tears were near the surface and it went distinctly against the grain to burst into tears before an enemy. So she thrust her way past him and achieved the quiet and seclusion of her own room.

She had had a little fear that it might not be easy to rid herself of Don once the election was over and Carson safe from anything Morelli and his gang could do to block his campaign to clean up the city. But she had not dared face that fear. She had tried to put the thought behind her—to deny it. But Don had brought it to the front and crystallized it from an uneasy fear to a definite threat. She had put herself completely in his power in her impulsive, frantic effort to save Carson.

Ellen steadfastly refused to permit the reception Aunt Martha insisted was strictly necessary if she was ever to hold up her head again against the storm of whispers and dark, ugly gossip and questions that swept the town on the heels of her sudden wedding announcement. She knew that Aunt Martha was right; that she was being talked about, always to her discredit. Friends and acquaintances either avoided meeting her the few times she went out, or else, cornered, were distinctly cool and frankly hostile. Yet she could take what scant comfort was possible from the thought that their hostility toward her had caused a further reaction of sympathy for Carson and insured his election.

On election night she settled herself at the radio in the living room immediately after dinner and was oblivious to everything save the election bulletins coming in every little while. When Aunt Martha, who clashed with Don almost every time they were in the room together, went to bed in helpless fury about ten, Don settled himself across the room from Ellen with a New York newspaper.

From the first bulletins that came in, Carson's victory seemed assured. Shortly after midnight the Morelli-backed opposi-

tion conceded the victory and the radio fairly rocked with the noise of Carson's enthusiastic supporters. There was a momentary confusion and then the announcer said briskly, "Ladies and gentlemen, we will now hear a few words from Carson Shane, the Mayor-elect. Mr. Shane."

ELLEN sat tense and still, listening, her heart going out wordlessly to the man she loved but had deliberately hurt.

"Ladies and gentlemen," said Carson, and Ellen, who knew him and loved him so well, knew that he was tired, nervous, keyed up to an unusual pitch, "I want to thank you for what you have done for me. For the hard work you've done, but most of all, for your confidence in me. I am deeply grateful to you all—but if you don't mind, I am going to confess that I feel my thanks—and yours, too, if you will—are due most of all to the self-sacrifice of someone who is not here. Someone who, had she not made that great sacrifice, could have cost me the election—though she should know that no election, no honor or privilege, could ever mean enough to me to justify the thing she has done. I am, as you must all of you know, referring to Miss Ellen Mowbray."

Ellen sat perfectly still, rigid and white, unable to think. She heard the little confusion of voices that greeted her name, there in the down-town hotel.

"A great many of you have known Miss Mowbray almost all her life," Carson went on, a little grimly. "You have been, supposedly, her friends—some of you her admirers. Yet when, a few days ago, she admitted to the newspapers that she had been married for five years, to a man whom none of us had ever seen before, and that for reasons which seemed good to her, she had kept the marriage secret—then, I say, you one and all swung around and decided that there must be something outrageous, something scandalous, back of her behavior all these years. Even I, who love her more than anything in the world and should have trusted her implicitly, refusing to believe there could be a shameful thought in her heart or her lovely head—even I be-

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lieved for a little that she had betrayed me, as well as herself."

"Say! What the blazes ails that guy? What's he after?"

Ellen was startled out of her rigid absorption by Don's angry snarl.

"—learned less than an hour ago," Carson was saying when Ellen once more caught his voice, "that Miss Mowbray's alleged marriage was not legal, because at the time it was performed Hartley was already married to another woman. He had believed the Mowbrays a wealthy family and counted on a huge slice of money to keep the 'scandal' of the elopement a secret. When he discovered that the Mowbrays were unable to pay the amount he demanded, and with the authorities closing in on him for some of his more minor crimes, he managed to disappear in such a manner as to convince the Mowbrays that he had been killed in a train wreck, along with other members of a road show."

The crowd in the hotel banquet room were so still that Carson's voice seemed to reverberate in that stillness.

Carson went on after a moment. "Somehow, Hartley discovered the Mowbray residence. Undoubtedly, he has kept track of the girl whose life he might have ruined but for the arrival, after the elopement, of his wife. He came here intending to blackmail the girl. But he fell in with some of the Morelli crowd and became their tool. His threat was that, unless I withdrew from this campaign, her reputation and my own would be destroyed—a threat that could only be effective to a girl like Ellen, deeply and sincerely in love, and willing to make any sacrifice for the man she had intended to marry. And so she revealed herself to you, whom she believed her friends, as the wife of a man who is wanted by the law in various states for various crimes, chief among them forgery, bigamy and fraud. So I think that to Ellen Mowbray goes most of the credit for the defeat of the notorious Morelli 'machine'—"

**D**ON snapped off the radio and turned on Ellen, raging. "I ought to break your neck for this, you doublecrossing—"

He was badly frightened, she saw. He turned for the door, intent only on flight. But as he jerked open the door, two men stepped into the room, both armed, and both with the unmistakable look of officers, despite the fact that they were not uniformed. It was then that Ellen fainted.

When she became conscious of what was going on about her, Carson knelt beside her, his arms around her, and Aunt Martha was anxiously chafing her wrists.

"She's coming around, Aunt Martha," said Carson in keen relief. "She's all right, though she ought to be spanked within an inch of her life for not trusting us enough to confide in us!"

"She certainly should!" said Aunt Martha warmly.

Carson looked into Ellen's eyes and said curiously, "Angel face, didn't you know that was what a fiancé was for—to give a girl a helping hand when things began to cloud up?"

Ellen drew a shivery breath and for a moment hid her face behind her hands. "How—how did you know?" she asked.

"One of Morelli's mob came to me when he saw how the election was going, and wanted to be 'taken care of' after I got in office. And to prove his good intentions of serving me, he spilled the whole story. And it was easy enough for me to accept the proofs he offered because I've known almost since the first that there was something wrong in back of the whole incredible business, and that none of it was your fault."

"Then—I'm *not* really his wife?"

"Of course not, darling—and you never were," Carson said tenderly. "You're to forget every bit of it. It never happened. It was just a bad dream. And the first thing tomorrow morning, you and I are going to be married—"

Ellen said uncertainly, "I'm—I'm a notorious woman now. Can our mayor afford a notorious wife?"

Carson's arms tightened about her. "If you're notorious, then that's the only kind of wife this mayor wants," he said, and the ardor and tenderness of his kiss gave her the deep thrill of the happiness she had never expected to know again.

# The Gallant Adventure

By  
Kathryn Keeley

MARCIA curled her feet under her in the huge tapestry chair, and watched her older sister, Isabel, dip her long fingers into the jar of mud pack. This date must be important, if the hours of preparation were any gauge. Isabel's face wore a greenish grey mask under a Turkish towel when the 'phone rang.

Without moving her lips, Isabel breathed, "You answer it. Pretend you're me. This stuff is beginning to sting."

Marcia swung down her slim legs. This was an old ritual to her. No one could distinguish between their voices. She wished, with a regretful sigh, their physical differences were less apparent. They were the same height, but Isabel had an arresting walk that turned heads, her clothes were ultra sophisticated. And her hair was a halo of golden curls which earned her the nickname of "Honey." Beside her, Marcia was a colorless shadow, her light-haired prettiness obscured, her wide dark eyes too big for her white oval face. She disdained lipstick and eye shadow, all the little deft artifices Isabel revelled in. Because Isabel invariably kissed her and said softly, "You are sweet just as you are, kid. One glamor girl is enough in this family."

The telephone in the hall jangled insistently, and Marcia picked up the receiver.

A voice out of the past said, "Honey, this is Steve Carradine. Remember? This is a ship-to-shore call, so I'll have to be snappy."



"Honey, darling, it was good of you to come,"  
Steve whispered brokenly.



## THE GALLANT ADVENTURE

"Steve!" Her voice broke over his name, just as her heart had broken a year ago.

"Honey, are you there?"

The urgency of his tone leaped at her. She steadied her heart and said slowly, "Yes, this is Honey. Oh, Steve, how are you?"

"Not so hot. I've been wounded in Hawaii and the hospital ship is steaming into Los Angeles harbor. You told me once if I ever came back, you'd meet me. Remember?"

She spoke for Isabel. "Yes, I remember."

His voice wobbled, but maybe it was the connection. "Will you, Honey? It's frightfully important. I just want to touch you."

Marcia could hear Isabel's slippers padding over the polished floor. She cupped her hand over the mouthpiece and whispered,

"It's Steve Carradine. His ship is coming into Los Angeles. He wants you to meet him."

"NO. No!" Isabel forgot her clay pack. Little cracks spread from her mouth. "Tell him I can't. Tell him I died. Tell him anything, but I can't be there." Isabel waved her hands in a frantic denial.

In Marcia's other ear, Steve's hesitant tones said, "It's all right, Honey, if you can't."

For some reason tears blurred her eyes, and she dashed them away impatiently. She sang, "I'd like to see anybody keep me away."

After the connection was broken, she thought how cruel she had been. Steve would build up his dreams of Isabel at the gangplank, the wind tumbling her fair hair, her eyes full of promises, and what would he find? Marcia, almost lost in the crowd, fibbing that Isabel was out of town; that she was going to be terribly unhappy because she had missed his call. Although the lies would be glib enough, they would not be convincing, because Marcia had repeated them too frequently to any suitor that Isabel was evading at the moment.

Marcia followed Isabel into the bathroom, and sat on the edge of the tub, while she impatiently splashed water on her face.

Isabel snapped, "Now don't start working out on me."

"He's been injured."

"Well, I'm sorry, of course. But I can't meet him. I've a weekend party. You knew that. You had no right to promise. So just get out of it the best you can."

Without speaking, Marcia rose and slammed the bathroom door. You didn't argue with Isabel. You just did what she said, but the defiant noise of that banging door relieved her mounting tension. In her room, Marcia poked about her closet. She wore her new tan gabardine suit, not that Steve would notice. And a wide cartwheel hat with a streamer that made her sixteen instead of eighteen.

She thought back over her last glimpse of Steve. The big hulk of his body, his smooth black hair, and the incredibly long lashes which shaded his blue eyes. She remembered his mouth best. It was grave, contradicting all the happy-go-lucky charm of his face. He had been rushing Isabel to death, and Marcia then sixteen, adored him. Steve treated her like a playful puppy. He brought Isabel orchids and Marcia candy. He gave Isabel his mother's old-fashioned diamond ring, and to Marcia, a ridiculously big rag-doll to sit on her bed. When Isabel hedged at setting a date for the wedding, he flung out of the house in a rage, hard jawed, grim-lipped, and enlisted in the Army. He avoided them like the plague. They heard he was transferred to Hawaii. After a time thick, fat letters came for Isabel, picture post cards for Marcia, and then nothing for either of them.

NOW STEVE was coming home. The dock was jammed, and the boat was in. The gangplank had been lowered, but no one had yet descended. The waiting lines of ambulances sent a wave of panic through Marcia. Steve said he was wounded. His voice on the phone had sounded anything but weak.

## SWEETHEART STORIES

And then the soldiers came down in an eager rush, their bandages white medals. Serious faces, laughing faces. All but Steve. Marcia's heart rocked. That meant he would come down on a stretcher.

She saw him then. Apart from the rest. At the top of the gangplank. He turned his head from side to side, searching for Isabel. Marcia's eyes stung. What could she say to him?

He gripped the rope railing at both sides. Each cautious downward step echoed in her slowly throbbing heart. Marcia didn't realize she was pushing her way through the crowd. She didn't know the tears were running down her cheeks. She refused to face the dreadful certainty of it. Then she heard a blue-caped nurse say calmly, "One more step, sir, then you'll be all right." She had to face it.

Steve was blind! Those laughing blue eyes gazing into the crowd were sightless. The horror of it made her dig her clenched fists against her mouth to stifle the bitter moan.

Marcia forgot that she was going to explain about Isabel. She flung herself into his arms, crying, "Steve! Steve!"

The most beautiful smile in the world touched his lips. He gathered her close against the rough khaki of his jacket. She could sense the frantic, shaken beating of his heart. Or was it her own?

He whispered brokenly, "Honey, Honey, it was good of you to come."

Some of Marcia died then. To him she was Isabel, Honey. Words trembled on her lips to correct him, and then she couldn't utter them.

Others were coming down the gangplank, and she withdrew from Steve's arms, guiding him out of the way. But she held tight to his hand, its warm pressure giving her courage to say, "Steve, is there somewhere you must report?"

He smiled, "Not today."

With quiet decisiveness she said, "I'm taking you home."

The crowd parted to let the slender, wide-eyed girl and her soldier through. No one thought he was blind. His eyes were clear blue. And if she led him very care-

fully, there might be moments when Steve would forget too.

In the taxi, Steve referred to his injury with a rueful smile.

"The doctors say this blindness won't be permanent. The optic nerve isn't shattered, but the blow my skull took, I wonder that it wasn't. I have to go to the hospital every day for examination. In fact, I am supposed to live there." The words came out slowly, painfully, and for a fleeting instant, he looked desolate.

Marcia caught his hand and rubbed it against her cheek. "You wouldn't like that."

"No. If I were ill, or if there was some physical disability, I could stand it. But to go groping around in the dark—" His face grew tortured. "I tell you it's been hell, Honey."

MARCIA thought desperately, If Isabel could see Steve, she'd forget her week-end party. Isabel has a heart under that smooth surface. Steve reached it once.

Aloud she said, "Then we'll only go to the hospital on the appointed hours. You'll live home with us. I'll be your eyes until you get back your own."

"Darling!" Steve's outstretched arms sought her, and she slipped into their circle as if she belonged there. His head bent, seeking her lips. It was she who kissed him, giving him all the warm love that had been stored in her heart. He dragged her to him in a hard, hurting grasp, and she clung to him, kissing him terribly over and over, because she knew she dared not do this ever again.

When Steve lifted his head, his mouth was stern, his straight brows were frowning. "Is it pity, Honey? I couldn't stand that."

"I love you, Steve. No matter what you do, no matter what you are." There was no doubting her sincerity.

His face cleared. "If I weren't sure this blindness will pass, I wouldn't take your love. I wouldn't take it for one minute."

Her faintly husky voice said, "I know you wouldn't. That's why I am going to get you settled at home where there are

## THE GALLANT ADVENTURE

things you remember. That old antlered hat-rack. The hall has been done over, but we couldn't part with that."

He threw back his head and laughed. Some of the tension in Marcia eased. She *was* doing the right thing. Even if Isabel was dubious and refused at first to fall in with her plans, she would have to recognize the logic of surrounding Steve with love and tenderness and understanding.

Steve was saying, "I remember that fireplace where the flue wouldn't work for anyone but Marcia."

Her heart stood still. She moistened her lips with her tongue to say something reassuring like "good old Marcia" or "sweet kid" Isabel's pet expressions, but they wouldn't come out.

Steve turned his head toward her. "Is she still a gangling kid, long legs and big eyes? Does she still mother stray kittens? And cry in the movies?"

So that's what he thought of her! Just a silly kid!

With an effort she said coldly, "Marcia hasn't changed."

"Good. I'm anxious to buy her one of our double sodas."

He didn't notice her wince, though his arm rested across her shoulder. He traced her nose with a brown finger. "They tell me you get a sixth sense in your fingertips. I haven't so far. I know you are Honey by your voice and your straight little nose. Your kiss is different, but then you were always ducking my kisses and keeping me at arm's length, so I didn't get to know them very well."

Her breath was a sob, "Oh Steve, I—"

**H**E GAVE her a swift smile. "I know your kisses now. I've thought about them, dreamed about them. I've even fought a fresh non-comm in Hawaii over them. The war does funny things. That's the first time you ever kissed me."

She longed to cry, That's the first time I ever dared. She drew a deep shuddering breath. If they would only get to the house. Isabel would take over this situation that was getting out of bounds. Isabel was expert on kisses. She didn't reveal

the agony of her heart with her lips. And that would be the only way Steve would be able to detect the difference between them in his present darkness.

Steve was leaning forward eagerly, a challenging smile lighting his face, waiting for her mouth to come down on his again. It was the hardest task in the world to deny him. To deny herself. The very touch of his hands sent her pulses leaping.

She forced a gay laugh. "Greedy! This is a public conveyance." But there was no laughter in her wide, dark eyes. There was fear and panic. These were Isabel's kisses she was taking so high-handedly. This was Isabel's Steve. If he ever learned that gangling kid of a Marcia had imposed upon his sightlessness. If he ever thought he had revealed to her the hidden desperation of the black trip home on a hospital ship, he would be furious. He would hate her. He would consider her beneath contempt.

The taxi drew up at the old white frame house. She was glad Steve couldn't see the peeling paint. Mounting expenses, Isabel's clothes, her own schooling, had tightened their income to the snapping point.

Steve's steps were firm on the flagstone path. He climbed the three steps as if he remembered them. His curved, clean-cut mouth lifted in a grin. "I'll bet Marcia's hockey stick is parked in this corner."

She said coolly, "Marcia is going in for tennis this year."

Marcia put Steve into the big tapestry chair, with a cigarette in one hand and an ash tray in the other, and started toward the kitchen. Isabel had stopped wearing Steve's ring months back, but she had never returned it. It was in a box in her top drawer.

At the doorway Marcia paused, her heart cold and shriveled.

"I'm going to prepare dinner; a steak, some of the things you like best. Do you remember the first dinner you had here?"

He thought a minute. "I can't recall what it was exactly, but I remember Marcia cooked it. She was majoring in domestic science. She cried because the steak was burnt and the potatoes hard as bul-

## SWEETHEART STORIES

lets, but I ate every last scrap of it and dried her tears on my napkin."

She stood mute, her pulses quickening that he remembered.

There would be no burnt offerings this time. It would be perfect. Isabel was probably lying down, but the savory odor of coffee would awaken her. Marcia's throat thickened with fright. Isabel would be furious when she found Steve in their library. She would lash out in resentment at a spoiled weekend party with Tip Mallory's crowd, but when she saw Steve, her anger would curl up around the edges and she would play her part like a thoroughbred. And Steve was too new to blindness to sense the pity. Perhaps Marcia was wrong in believing Isabel no longer loved him. Reckless, careless, her constant dates might only be covering the fact she still carried the torch for Steve Carradine.

**M**ARCIA built up a beautiful picture of Isabel flinging herself into Steve's arms, his tanned face aglow with love. Only to have it shattered by one small white note on the chipped porcelain table in the kitchen, a note that said in Isabel's perfectly formed letters:

"Tip has picked me up. May be gone all week. Tell Steve hello for me and better shooting next time. Iss."

Marcia covered her face with her hands, and her shoulders shook uncontrollably. She had depended on Isabel. She couldn't go out to Steve, lax in that big chair, with the smoke curling about his black hair and say, "I'm Marcia, the gangling kid. I've pretended to be Isabel, hoping everything would be fixed up between you. But Isabel is off on a date with Tip Mallory of the shipyard Mallorys."

She couldn't say that. She couldn't say, "My heart is dripping tears, because now is the time you want the one you love."

She could only stand there, dry-eyed, staring bleakly at the green grass, the first early spring flowers budding and sweet and know Steve could see nothing at all.

And then she heard his stumbling step, saw his hand groping for the doorway, and her heart turned over within her. His palms grasping her shoulders sent an overwhelming emotion tumbling through her.

There was a forced sternness on his brow. "I found you by instinct, for Lord knows I don't smell any steak. What kind of a mess hall is this?"

In a lightning flash she knew she would keep up this pretense until he saw with his own eyes she was Marcia. And when he put her from him in repulsion, she would have this memory to cling to; his arms, his lips, the thought of helping him through this darkest hour. And this was the time to make him depend on himself.

Her voice held a lilt. "You'll eat when you've earned your keep. In the right hand drawer is a cloth. In the left, is silver."

She led him ever so gently to the cabinet. He was amazed when he found forks and knives. He said, astounded, "You're not a seeing-eye dog, by chance?" His hand tousled her hair.

She said softly, "I'm a seeing heart, Steve."

Swiftly he swung around. His arms went out to her, and with shameless impetuosity, her young, eager mouth was close to his. At the moment, she felt no dishonor in accepting kisses meant for Isabel. She felt only the desire tingling their pulses, leaping through their blood. She gave him the sweetness of her lips, gave it gladly, freely.

**T**HEY ATE before the fire, the fire that only Marcia could coax into flame. The steak was rare and the little potatoes dotted with parsley and butter. There were beaten biscuits and a tart salad.

Across the table, Steve beamed, "Marcia has been teaching you to cook."

Again all the warmth inside her chilled. Her position was so precarious. A slip of the tongue and Steve would suspect. As his fingers acquired that sixth sense, his mind would become keener. He would puzzle over little things, inconsequential phrases and string them together.

## THE GALLANT ADVENTURE

Later she sat at his feet, with her head against his knee, watching the ribbons of flames only half conscious of his voice. Crazy she built castles. Steve and she married. Their house, their own particular heaven. This shining moment she would always have so long as she lived. Steve talked of his school days, his college career, the time as a boy of seven he was ill for months with typhoid in a hospital. It had made a tremendous impression on that small lad. He was wound up as if deep within him was a coil of words that ached to be said. Far into the night, when the fire had died down to a dark red ember, Marcia decided then on no half way measures. She would be Isabel. She would wear Steve's ring. She would be everything that he desired. And when Steve could see again—she gave a long shuddering sob.

Steve's head jerked up. "Are you crying, Honey?" The pain about his mouth terrified her.

The little pulse in her throat was hammering frantically. It took all her self control to say quietly, "I wasn't crying, Steve. I cried when you went away. I cried when we heard of Pearl Harbor and I didn't know about you. I'm not crying now. Maybe I was yawning. Darling, we ought to go to bed."

Marcia put Steve in the guest room. She turned down his bed, chattering nervously, while he smoked a final cigarette in the chintz chair by the window. She clicked off the light and crossed the hall to her own room, her heart ravaged with pain. Her ears strained to Steve's movements. He stumbled once, and swore softly, then he chuckled as he got into bed and called, "Goodnight, Honey."

She couldn't sleep. She could only go over in her mind each hurting memory, knowing she would not have changed one step. In the morning, she put the haunting ghosts of worry and fear from her.

She knocked on Steve's door, carrying his breakfast tray. He was fully dressed. He smiled delightedly.

"This is the first time I've gotten my clothes on without anyone's help."

When she set the tray before him, he

refused it. "I'm not going to get used to such service. I'd rather sit opposite you at a table."

So Marcia took the tray back, her high heels clicking, and Steve followed her to set the table.

He said, "I'm beginning to know your step. There's a little skip in it."

MARCIA froze, recalling Isabel's smooth glide and tried to put it into practice. But it escaped her, and was too slow for the hundred and one things she had to do this morning.

She said brightly, "What time do you report to the hospital?"

"At two."

"Then we'll go to the barber's first."

He ran an exploratory hand up his neck. "Do I look that bad?"

"No, but I do. It will give you a lift while you are waiting for me. And I'll drive you to the hospital in plenty of time."

Fortunately Isabel had not taken the old roadster. Tip Mallory's crowd would have had hysterics over it. But it would take Steve and Marcia any place they wanted to go. They would eat outdoors tonight, Marcia decided, while the hairdresser cut her hair into feathery upswept curls. And when she finally surveyed her finished self in the long mirror, she was amazed and delighted. She hadn't Isabel's smooth perfection, but she had her own individual loveliness. Steve would be pleased, even if his eyes could not gaze on her. He would sense this new beauty.

Hours later, after the doctors at the hospital had peered into Steve's blank eyes through strange instruments, Marcia was glad she had chosen the cathedral stillness of this secluded spot. The earth was a carpet of green velvet. Against the silence was the sleepy chirping of birds high in the trees. Steve, at her side, carried the small branches that Marcia gathered, his mouth sober.

He said, "That was quite an ordeal they put me through at the hospital, but I didn't mind it. One old fellow fussed over me so long, I'm beginning to be doubtful." For a fleeting instant his face went grey.

## SWEETHEART STORIES

Her heart went out to him, but she wouldn't soften him.

She said calmly, "This is only the first day, Steve. There must be plenty of examinations before they decide on the procedure."

"I know. They mentioned a Doctor Gardner, the best eye specialist in the country. When he returns, he's to go over me."

She thought dismayed, "Suppose Steve's sight never returns!" And put the jarring idea from her as swiftly as it arose, fearing her uncertainty might creep into her voice and wing its way to Steve. He needed all her strength, her courage, her belief.

"You'll see again," she said firmly.

He moved his hands in a positive gesture. In a different voice he said, "Of course I will. I'll get back into active service again too."

"Would it help to talk about it?"

"No. I just want to get back where I belong."

**THEY DIDN'T** touch upon his misgivings again. Soon the sticks were laid for a fire, and the crackling branches sent up a blue smoke. Hamburgers sizzled upon the skillet in Steve's steady sunburned hands. Marcia spread rolls with thick pats of butter, knowing she would never sniff the pungent fragrance of wood smoke without remembering vividly this moment.

There was a hurting in her throat. She forced words through it. "Are you happy, Steve?"

The glow that spread over his face was her answer. She added hastily, "That was a silly question, so skip it."

He said unexpectedly, "I had to lose my sight to really know you. You weren't like this last year."

Her face shimmered with tears. She was glad he couldn't see them. "Last year was last year," her voice was blurred.

He grinned, shrugged. "Last year you were a little flirt. You led me on and put me off. You laughed when I was serious. You said you didn't care one scrap about me. But I loved you."

Her cheeks felt hot. It was Isabel last

year. It was Isabel this year that he loved. She felt racked with agony. She had no right to warm herself in the flame of his love for another. She had no right to feed that flame with hope and desire. For when he saw again, it would die to ashes. And she would have to watch it die.

Her eyes grew big and honest gazing into the future. She said softly, "I loved you last year. I love you now. Always remember that, Steve."

They went home in the crisp cool starlight. Marcia drove and Steve stretched beside her in a contented silence. How long it would be, she did not know. In her indomitable hope, she determined to lock each day into her heart until the next.

But you can't chart your days into narrow little channels and expect them to stay there, she discovered two days later.

It was about ten o'clock. She and Steve had dawdled over breakfast, Marcia in a yellow housecoat that brought tarnished gilt to her hair and golden lights in her brown eyes. Its full skirt whispered at her heels as she cleaned up the breakfast nook. Steve had gone back to his room to make his bed, when the door bell rang.

The queerest feeling of doom gripped her; drained the color from her cheeks, shadowed her eyes. Isabel returning! Isabel who would never countenance this fantastic interchange of personalities. For a full moment, she leaned with her forehead against the door, wondering if she dared run up those steps and confess to Steve. To plead for his understanding, to face his heartsickening contempt.

The bell pierced her anguish. It was too late for explanations. She flung open the door. It wasn't Isabel. The little gasp that escaped her was for the reprieve. It was Mrs. Scott, who lived across the street in a house very much like this. Mrs. Scott had been helpful and kind during the lingering illness of Marcia's mother. She had kept a watchful eye on the girls while they were becoming adjusted to a motherless, grief-stricken household. At this moment, Marcia did not care to see her morning caller, but she remembered those things and smiled.

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"Last year you were a little flirt. You said you didn't care a scrap about me," Steve grinned.

The panic within her still held her so that she barely followed her visitor's voice, commenting on the early spring rain. Marcia grasped the arms of her ladder back chair and prayed that Steve would not come sprinting down the stairs. For Mrs. Scott was sure to say, "Marcia, dear," and Steve would know.

MRS. SCOTT'S little round face was wrinkled with distress. She clasped and unclasped the catch on her purse and it made a clicking sound in the stillness.

"My dear," she said and paused. Marcia jerked to attention. She saw her old friend fumbling for words and rejecting them. Finally she began again, "My dear, I have no right to say this, so you must forgive me. You must not keep this soldier here. I know there is nothing wrong. I know you are doing a fine, brave

thing to help him, but people talk. They're buzzing now. You can't defy gossip."

In a daze she recalled Mrs. Scott's departure. The doorknob was cold to her touch and as hard as the lump that was her heart. Her throat was dry as she bid her goodbye. For a long time, Marcia stood inside the door. There was a pall in the room. If she let it, it would settle over her heart. She would not permit scandal to frighten her into sending Steve away. He needed her now. She needed him. If he returned to a hospital, he would lose that new self reliance that was giving bouyancy to his step. If she let him go now, her brief, bright glimpse of heaven would be gone. Just a few more days. Until this great eye specialist gave his verdict.

How the people would talk if they knew the game she was really playing!

## SWEETHEART STORIES

UPSTAIRS she could hear Steve's swift movements. She sat, small and serene in a chair, the skirt a splash of gold at her feet. There was a fixed defiant gaiety in her smile, for no one was going to disrupt the pattern of their existence. If there were unpleasant rumors, she would close her ears to them. If she experienced snubs, she would hold her head high and proud and ignore them.

Steve came down the stairs. His steps made no sound on the blue velvet carpet as they carefully picked their way. For an instant he paused on the landing against the brightness of the oval window. His dark brows were met in a troubled frown and he ran his tense fingers through his smooth black hair.

His tortured voice came to her. "I was a fool, a thoughtless fool." He descended the remaining steps like an old man.

She rose, went to him swiftly, her hands outstretched. "You heard, Steve! Oh, I'm sorry—"

The grim, set lines about his mouth did not relax. "I never gave a thought to anyone but myself. It seemed so right to come home to you."

"It was right."

"It was selfish. It seemed right to share my anxiety with you and our laughter and our silences. It seemed almost as if we were married. All I have given you is censure. Lifted eyebrows and whispering. I wanted to give you the world wrapped up in a ribbon."

His mouth twisted with bitterness, and her heart went out to him.

"Will you marry me, Steve?" It was queer the way the words came out because she didn't mean to say them. Yet they were quiet and determined. She added hastily, "Not to protect me from wagging tongues. They don't matter. But because you love me. Because you want me."

The uncertainty on his face made her half faint. He drew back from her, and for an unforgettable moment his mouth worked. "I wanted to wait until I had the right to ask you that, Honey. Until I could see my bride."

She flung back her head, and a sob caught her, shook her.

"Why, Steve? When we have so much to share now, why must we wait? Why must we ask for more when we have everything? Why must we wait for tomorrow when we have today? Oh, Steve, if you should ever regret, if you should stop loving me, I'd give you your freedom."

HER MOUTH quivered with the unspeakable words of her deception. Now was the time to tell him. His hands pressing her shoulders made her go limp. He was saying, "If I should stop loving you! Darling, do you know what it is to be falling into a bottomless pit and have someone jerk you to safety? Do you know what it is to be in a thick blackness and suddenly there is a glimmer of light. You can't see it, but you know it is there. That's what your love has done." His voice shook. He swallowed. "I was on the crumpling edge of self control when your voice came to me on the phone."

She drew a deep chaotic breath. Her voice! Isabel's voice! Did it make any difference?

So they were married. In a little church Marcia had attended all her life. Marcia in her graduation gown of white shirred net, with a tight little-girl bodice, and a wide flowing skirt. Wearing the finger tip veil that had been her mother's.

Marcia had said to Steve, "Is there some friend you'd like to ask?"

He had thought a long moment and then shook his head. He was so tall, so distant above her. Handsome in his uniform, firm-jawed and incredibly happy. He said, "I would have liked Marcia to be here. Too bad she's had to stay so long with your aunt."

She was grateful Steve could not see the confused red in her cheeks as she heard the lie she had told him two days before repeated. He had asked why Marcia was away from home and she had told him that she was visiting a sick aunt in Seattle.

He had been content with that, and it



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turned her sick with shame that she must lie. Yet that too passed, and she forced all the little nagging doubts of fear into the background for she was determined to make Steve happy. So only Mrs. Scott was at the wedding.

She had an awful quaking moment when the minister said, "Do you, Marcia, take this man—"

Outside the riveting from across the street shook the tiny church. Steve's hand in hers jerked involuntarily. The low voice of the minister was lost in the noise, and Marcia's breath came out in a revived exhausted gasp.

Steve belonged to her now. They celebrated by cooking their dinner over a fire as they had done that first night in the grove of trees. When it was dark, they came back to the house. Marcia pushed back the chairs in the library and turned on the radio and they danced. There was a great deal of bumping and laughing. Suddenly they were laughing no more. Steve's arms were tight bands, and she was dizzy with his nearness.

Without a faltering step he carried her up the wide stairs. She was helpless in his embrace. She could not think. She was glad to surrender because she loved Steve so terribly, and he loved the girl he thought she was.

**H**ER HEART was singing through the days that followed. Long hours spent in the hospital, Steve undergoing endless examinations. Picnics in out-of-the-way places the old roadster nosed out of the blue. Dancing in the library to the radio. Or just sitting before the fire, her head against his knee, while he tumbled her fair hair. Inside she was fiercely glad that she had married Steve, fiercely glad for the love that had fallen to her.

Not so with Steve. He was restless, dissatisfied with the slowness of his recovery, doubtful of the doctors' findings. His face was serious, pained.

Then Isabel returned, more beautiful than ever, and triumphant. It was a day Steve was at the hospital. Marcia had driven him in. She was to pick him up

at four. Now her eyes went black and wide with shock when Isabel dropped her coat on the chair and hugged her.

Isabel sang, "Pack your things, kid. I am going to marry Mr. Tip Mallory, if you please, and we are saying goodbye to poverty forever!"

Marcia dug her nails into her palms for control. Her voice when it came was a small shaken whisper. "I married Steve. Oh, Isabel, he thinks I am you!"

Abruptly, Isabel sat down, and Marcia poured out the whole story in a quick ruthless tide. She spared herself nothing. The raw ache within her eased with the words. To confide in someone! To find some justification for what she had done.

Isabel gave her none. She said all too logically, "Marcia, darling, you can't get away with it! You've just got to tell the truth. You can't go on forever lying to Steve. Not as I remember him. He's a stickler for honesty. He won't tolerate double-crossing. That's why we quarrelled and he joined the Army. And you love him."

The tumult of Marcia's anguish was in her face. "I can't tell him now."

"Then I will. It isn't fair to him nor to you to go this way."

"No. I don't care for myself. Let me have a little more time—until this eye specialist sees him. Oh, Isabel, he'll never forgive me!"

"I don't believe he will," Isabel said slowly. She hugged Marcia with fierce loyalty, "If Steve Carradine breaks your heart, I'll—I'll tell him something!"

For a long instant Marcia buried her face in Isabel's shoulder. The desire for truth battled with her engulfing hope that Steve might fall in love with her; until she was so deeply a part of him the deception would not rock his whole existence. She knew at last the futility of her wishful longing.

Marcia lifted her chin. "I'll tell him when he sees this specialist. If his case is hopeless, I'll never tell him. I'll go on living a lie and making him happy." Her words were clear and unwavering.

## SWEETHEART STORIES

Isabel shrugged. "Marcia, you'll be the one to suffer, not Steve. But if you wish, I promise not to say a word. I'll get out of the way, and when the final blow-up comes, you come to me. Because you won't be able to fool him forever simply because he is blind."

The shaft drove home, drove deep into the torment that was sleeping in her breast, that she had tried to lull into a false security.

"I'll chance it," she said stubbornly.

**I**SABEL was gone for good. Only a few limp gowns hung in her closet and her room held a faint exotic perfume. The devastating thought struck Marcia that she would slip out of Steve's life just as surely, and as completely. She would be just a bitter memory.

Somehow she got through two awful days of mental anguish and grim recrimination. Steve sensed her inner turmoil. It was at breakfast. He pushed back his chair with a harsh scrape. His mouth was set and miserable.

He said, "I can appreciate how terrible it is to be married to a blind man."

He couldn't see the wretchedness of her eyes. Or her fingers plucking nervously at the bright flowered tablecloth.

"It isn't that, Steve." She steadied her trembling voice. "What would you think if I told you I hadn't been entirely truthful?" She chose her words carefully. She was holding her breath, awaiting his answer.

There was a bitter twist to his mouth. "I would say I am not surprised. You lied before. You were engaged to me and dating a man named Barney Shore."

Marcia vaguely remembered Barney. He was one of the boys Isabel had danced with and kissed goodby and never given another thought to. With swift insight, Marcia realized now that Isabel had never been in love with Steve even when she was wearing his ring, or she couldn't have given her kisses so casually.

Steve's accusing voice went on, "Barney carried your picture and received your letters."

And yet a passionate loyalty to Isabel swelled within her. She cried jerkily, "Goodby kisses to soldiers! What a little thing to resent!"

"My Lord! Little!"

Her head lifted proudly. "I've never asked a man to marry me but you."

His mouth grimaced. "What kind of marriage is this? Built on pity!" And his self-loathing turned itself on her. He wanted her to suffer as he was suffering, illogically, unreasonably. "Don't you suppose I can feel you are restless and unhappy? That you lie awake half the night tense. You talk of truth. Don't you think I know our marriage was a gallant gesture you now repent?"

In his present frame of mind, it was useless to explain.

The telephone rang, and Marcia leaped to answer it, welcoming the interruption. The message was brief. She had just replaced the receiver on its cradle when Steve entered.

"It was the hospital," she told him excitedly. "Dr. Gardner is there for a few hours. If you go immediately—"

**D**RIVING Steve to the hospital, she realized hopelessly the whole situation had been taken out of her hands. If the operation was not successful, and she should reveal her true identity to Steve, he would not believe her. He would think it another fantastic lie concocted by Isabel to extract herself from a distasteful marriage.

When they were in the hospital waiting for Dr. Gardner, Steve's mouth was a jagged line of expectancy. He kept lighting cigarettes that he did not want. His trembling hands revealed his nervousness. Marcia, slim and straight, stood at the desk, giving his case history to the white-capped nurse. She could only pray that this surgeon was more expert than the others; that God-given genius was in his fingers.

Steve was at her elbow, looking like a lost child, now that his great moment was at hand. She laid her warm hand on his arm in sympathy and understanding.

## THE GALLANT ADVENTURE

The nurse said to Marcia, "Your name, please."

Unthinkingly she replied, "Marcia Carradine."

"Your relation to the patient?"

"His wife."

Steve's sudden grip on her arm was hurting. The oddest expression flitted across his face. It was as if she had turned a knife in the most vulnerable part of his body. A brick red suffused his face. Unwittingly she had told him. Bluntly and without a softening word of explanation!

An interne was beckoning. Without speaking, Steve turned to follow him. Marcia caught at Steve's arm. Her bright mouth trembled.

"Steve—"

With a kind smile, the interne said, "You may have a few minutes with your wife."

Steve never paused. He said brutally, "We have nothing to discuss."

With stricken eyes, Marcia watched the elevator climb. Steve's black hair, his blue eyes staring straight ahead, the long khaki clad length of him, his feet set far apart, bracing himself for the next blow. She had the queerest feeling she would never see him again, never hear his voice, never see his mouth curve into a smile. If he died, he had denied her the right to weep. If he came out into darkness again, he would renounce her just as cruelly as he had a moment before.

**Y**ET SHE couldn't go home. Unseen, she slipped into the solarium and waited. Somewhere in this same building Steve lay under the white hot glare of the operating theater.

The lights came on automatically and she stared unseeingly into blackness outside for hours, or was it years?

A nurse came in and broke the spell of waiting horror.

"You must go home, Mrs. Carradine. You can do no good here."

Spent and lifeless, Marcia shook her head. "I'm waiting to see Dr. Gardner, when he's free."

"He's gone. Flew east an hour ago."

It was over then, that hopeful operation. No one had told her. No one even knew she was here. Her heart beat painfully.

"Can you tell me how Lieutenant Carradine is?"

"I'll see." The nurse never came back. Each time, Marcia inquired at the desk, the answers were vague. She went home at last.

For three days, she endured it. Waiting in the solarium for the call that never came. There were dark shadows under her eyes. She couldn't remember when she had eaten, or when she had slept. She saw pity in the eyes of the nurses, sharp scrutiny in the glances of the doctors. For the first time she faced the dreadful truth. Steve did not want her. Blind or seeing, it didn't matter. He did not want her.

She never returned to the hospital. She remembered Isabel's insistent demand that she come to her. Marcia couldn't. This was something she had to suffer alone, in silence, because she alone was responsible. She drew some scant comfort in walking the paths that she and Steve had so joyfully explored, memory stabbing at her heart. A week with Steve. She had tried to cram it with a lifetime of living.

**S**HE WAS digging in the side garden when he came to her two weeks later. She didn't hear his firm step, although the thought of him was so vivid, it was not startling to feel his hands on her elbows, drawing her to her feet, whirling her around to face him. His eyes were bluer than she ever remembered them, and clear, and sinking deep into hers as if they were going straight down to her heart.

"Marcia—" His voice was ragged.

"You are all right, Steve!"

"They took the bandages off this morning."

"Why didn't you send for me?" she whispered. "Why did you deny me the privilege of knowing how you were?"

"I wanted to be able to come myself. I wanted to be able to see you, to stand

## SWEETHEART STORIES

on my two feet and tell you I love you, Marcia."

"I love you, Steve. I've always loved you."

He said slowly, "I know that. You loved me 'way back when you were just a youngster. You used to look at me with your heart in your eyes as if I were a god. I discouraged you, laughed at you, tried to think of you as a baby. I thought I was in love with Isabel, but it was you I wanted to take care of. I asked Isabel to marry me, but it was your love and laughter I carried in my heart."

"Oh, my dear!"

"When I came back I was so busy feeling sorry for myself I didn't think clearly. I should have known it was you, but I didn't. I should have known Isabel would never have made such a sacrifice, for she never loved me.

"A man sees his whole life when they clamp that ether cup over his nose. I saw you in my heart—a brave, gallant

girl who would marry a blind man to give him courage and confidence."

His voice was torn. "You've given me that. You've given me something else. The knowledge that I love you as you love me. I clung to your love those dark days when I wouldn't let them send for you. I wanted to come back, well and strong, seeing you as you are." His voice broke. "If the operation hadn't been successful, I would have come back somehow just to hear the sound of your voice, to touch you. My darling, I can't live without you."

She lifted her face to the warmth and tenderness in his. "It was no sacrifice, our marriage," she said, her voice husky. "Love isn't sacrifice. It's knowing all the little things. It's giving with your heart, seeing with your heart."

There was vision in his blue eyes at last and love in his heart. There was enchantment in his lips against her mouth, enchantment that she dared to take because now it was meant for her.

## Tides of Memory

I love the oceans mighty roar,  
The white gulls' eerie notes,  
The curving sweep of foamy shore,  
The rocking, dipping boats.

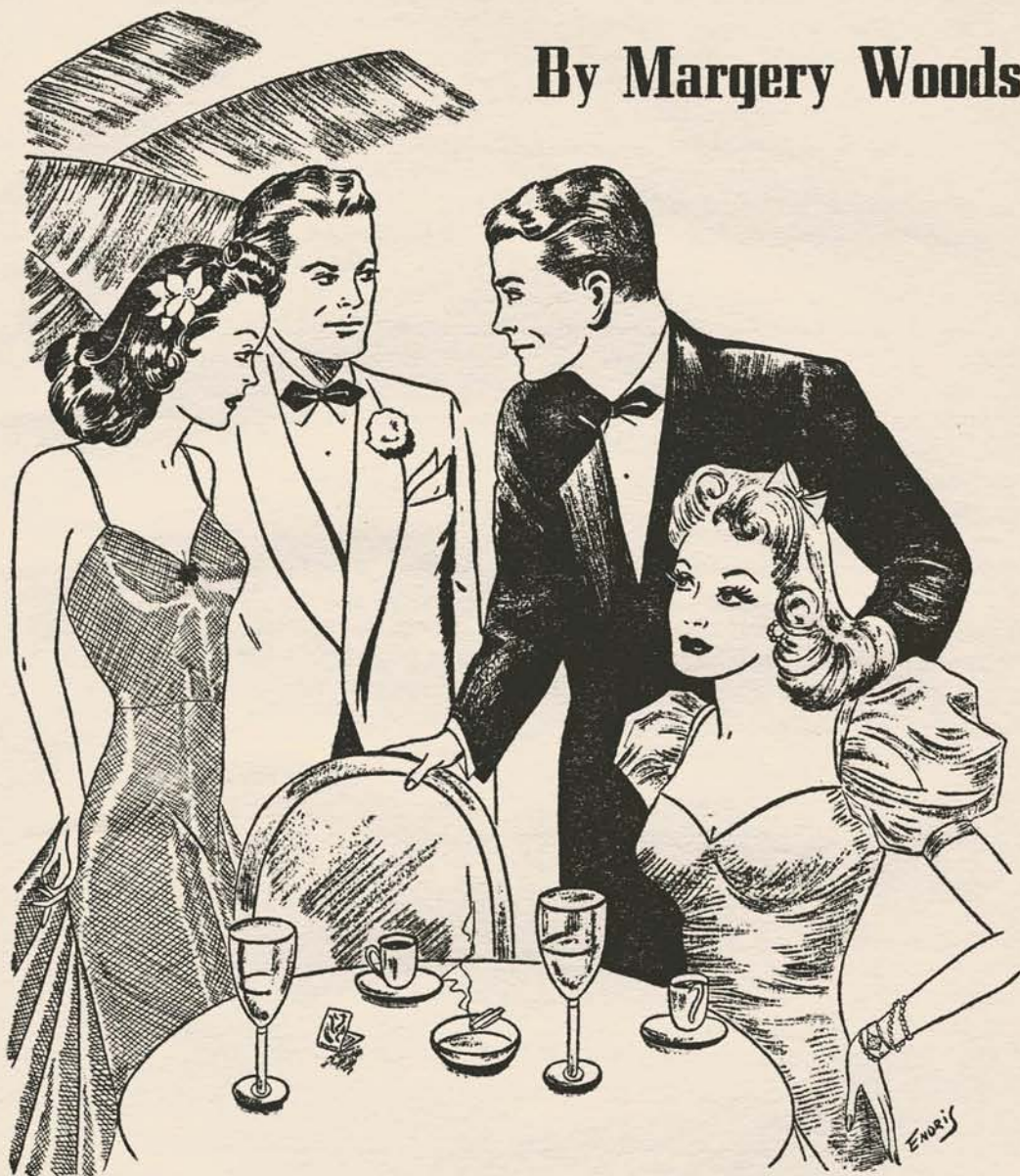
And dear to me are leaning spars  
Above the blowing sail,  
The silver sheen of frosty stars,  
The challenge of the gale.

Why must I haunt the lonely sea  
Where once we walked apart?  
Oh, restless tides, eternally  
You break against my heart!

*Nancy Buckley.*

# Furlough Kisses

By Margery Woods



"You do have a habit of popping up where you're not needed, don't you?" Michele's eyes said.

**F**ROM the observation platform Lynn Barry watched the Clipper being towed in to the dock. Jeff was aboard. After almost a year with the Eagle squadron, Jeff was coming home—to fight, he had written, with his own gang.

A stiff breeze tried to snatch Lynn's cocky felt hat from her golden curls. The hat, like her eyes, was gentian blue. She

had bought it for Jeff's homecoming, though she wasn't in love with him, nor would it do her any good to be. "I like you," Jeff used to say, "as a person. But heaven save me, Lynn, from ever getting That Way over a career gal!"

Heaven *had* saved him. For three years he and Lynn had been joint owners of Beauvais, Inc., with never anything more

## SWEETHEART STORIES

romantic between them than, "I like that hat, beautiful." They had bought Beauvais, perfumes and cosmetics, at a time when business was bad and Monsieur Beauvais himself eloped with another man's wife.

Jeff had been doing publicity for Beauvais then, and Lynn was office manager. Almost at once the business began to click. They did it with the Blue Lady. Lynn said they needed an arresting new package, so they worked out the Blue Lady and Jeff did her in clay, using Lynn for his model. Modeling with clay was Jeff's hobby.

The Blue Lady was all rhythmic, flowing lines, her lovely figure scantily draped, her head tilted joyously. The original now stood on Lynn's desk. She and Jeff were superstitious about the Blue Lady. They thought she brought them luck.

The Clipper, wallowing like a tremendous bird, was being tied at the dock. Lynn ran downstairs and waited by the gate. People turn to look at her. She was not so much beautiful as vivid and arresting. Honey-blond hair contrasted with dark brows and lashes. Her skin was the color of rich cream, her mouth wide and expressive.

Passengers began trickling through the gate. Stretched on tiptoe, Lynn saw Jeff's rusty brown head, his hazel eyes searching for her. He looked thin and tired. Lynn's heart turned over with unexpected tenderness.

"Lynn!" He was kissing her.

"Jeff! Oh, it is good to see you!" A little shakily, she drew back and gazed at him.

"And *you!*" His eyes were warm. "Oh, Lynn, you look so cared-for, lovely—and so normal!"

She knew what he meant—after Europe's nightly blackouts, rubble where tall buildings should be, danger and sudden death. But Jeff was turning to a thin, dark girl beside him.

"Michele, this is Lynn. Didn't I tell you she was beautiful?"

"But she is!" The girl had a faint accent. Her lips were smiling, though her dark eyes seemed to measure Lynn with faint hostility.

Who on earth was this Michele girl? Lynn was suddenly jittery in her very bones, but Jeff had begun to explain.

"Michele and I met in Lisbon. She had been there nine months. Imagine! I was able to help a little in getting her on the Clipper."

How like Jeff, Lynn thought, warm-hearted Jeff, always lending a hand to someone in distress! You might say that lame ducks were his hobby.

JEFF and Michele cleared the Customs, and all three took a taxi for New York. "There's the skyline." Jeff's voice had a warm tone. "Look your fill, Michele, there's nothing else like it in the whole world."

"Oh!" the girl exclaimed. "It is marvelous!"

"Oddly enough," Jeff turned to Lynn, "Michele was born in New York. Her father was American and her mother French. Michele's last name, you see, is Bradley. Her father died when she was quite young and Michele's mother took her back to France. After Hitler took over, the poor kid had a heck of a time proving her American citizenship, but she finally did and got as far as Lisbon."

"Too bad." Lynn felt shame for her first distrust of the girl.

"It was so dreadful!" Michele's voice broke. "I cannot talk of it. I am alone, you see—quite alone."

Jeff patted her hand. "Don't you worry, Michele, we'll look after you. See here, Lynn, have you still the same apartment?"

"Why, yes."

"Then you'll take Michele, won't you? The poor kid is broke. A French woman befriended her and gave her money for passage home, but staying so long in Lisbon—"

"Of course," Lynn told him. "I've plenty of room."

"Thank you!" Michele said with her charming accent. "It will be only until I go to Hollywood."

"Michele," Jeff explained, "has done some theater work and a lot of dancing, so a good agent should be able to help her."

## FURLOUGH KISSES

"Of course," Lynn agreed, though she felt rather skeptical.

As they turned into Park Avenue Jeff took a deep breath. "Look, Michele, isn't it wonderful? People going about their business as usual, no boarded-up windows or piles of rubble. But we're going to forget all that. Know what I want, Lynn? A three-inch steak—and darn soon!" He glanced from one girl to the other. "You two must be about the same size. Will you lend Michele something to wear? The poor kid hasn't a rag."

"Of course." Lynn felt terribly let-down. She had dreamed of an intimate dinner with Jeff, of catching up on what had happened this last year. Now Michele would be there.

In Lynn's apartment Michele looked at the great bowl of irises and yellow snapdragon, at the deep, comfortable chairs and the view from a wide window. "Marvelous!" she exclaimed.

Lynn ran bath water for the girl. When she did not even open her one shabby bag, Lynn laid out silken underwear, then flung open the door of her wardrobe.

"Let's wear dinner clothes, Michele—something simple." She took down a yellow organdie. "Do you like this? It's a bit tight for me and should fit you perfectly."

Michele held the organdie to her shoulders. "It is nice, but—" Turning back to the wardrobe, she selected an apple-green taffeta. "If you do not mind, I will choose thees one."

Lynn *did* mind, for the apple-green was new. Helplessly she watched Michele place it upon the twin bed which had been assigned to her.

Lynn and Jeff were lunching at the Marguery. He had been home now for five days, and that morning they'd had a long business conference, with much talk of priorities and what-not, although Jeff was impatient of business and anxious to fly again. He expected his commission in the Air Corps to come through almost any time.

The Marguery's arbored summer dining

room was cool and charming. Jeff looked at his watch. "I'm taking Michele to an agent at three, Lynn. You know, she's looking better already."

"She should. I buy my clothes at the best shops," Lynn retorted.

"Lynn! Surely you don't mind Michele's borrowing a dress here and there!"

"Oh, not at all." Lynn was sorry she had brought up the subject, yet some perverse demon made her pursue it. "A dress here and there would be swell. But Michele takes practically your whole wardrobe without so much as a by-your-leave."

"That's terrible!" Jeff was shocked. "Though you musn't be too hard on her. Michele is as eager as a child."

A very shrewd child, Lynn thought. Michele was determined to have her own way—or else. This time, however, Lynn *did* hold her tongue and Jeff began talking about his commission. He wanted to get on a bomber, but had never flown one, so there would be a training period of some weeks.

Lynn felt both excited and frightened about it. She had a sudden need to know his thoughts—know what went on inside him.

"How does it feel, Jeff—up *there*?" she asked.

"Wonderful!" His eyes were dreamy. "It's beautifully free, and sometimes, of course, frightening. I can't quite describe it, Lynn. "Then," his face grew grave, "there is the other side—your friends being shot down, an empty place at mess—but after a while you get a furlough and sort of forget."

Her skin was all icy prickles. Friends shot down—and it could have been Jeff himself.

"Spend your furloughs in London?"

"In London," he agreed. "There would be a girl, perhaps—a kiss—" His tone was lightly cynical. A kiss! She didn't like to think of those furlough kisses from girls in London. . . .

Jeff walked back to the office with Lynn. Leaving her at the elevator, he said, "I'll be around and take you gals out to dinner."

## SWEETHEART STORIES

Suddenly she rebelled. A threesome, always a threesome—! "Thanks," she said, "but I have a date."

"A date?"

"Why not? Haven't I always had dates?"

Lynn left him looking startled and displeased. She would phone Paul Morton. Paul was something-or-other in his father's ship building plant and wouldn't be drafted. He had a passion for building a house and had asked Lynn to marry him; but whether for herself or to pore over blueprints with him she didn't quite know.

**O**N THE way home that evening Lynn stopped and bought a dress. It was white satin, beautifully molded to her curves, with no shoulders and puff sleeves. It made Lynn seem very sweet and clinging, as if she had just stepped from an old-fashioned picture frame.

Sprawled on her own twin bed, Michele watched Lynn dress. "Going dancing?" she asked enviously. So far they had dined only at small, no-dance places.

"Oh, yes," Lynn answered, hoping Jeff would come in time to see her. Even her eyes, tonight, had taken on a sort of dreamy softness.

Suddenly Michele exclaimed, "He shall take *me* dancing!" and sprang up to fling wide the wardrobe doors. "The black," she muttered. "No, the pink net with only straps." As usual, she did not even ask her hostess's permission, but just took what she wanted.

Lynn was boiling mad, but she only tucked a honey-gold curl into place and adjusted a bow with long streamers. She had just picked up a silly blue taffeta cape designed for show rather than warmth when the doorbell rang. Thank heaven, it was Jeff.

"Lynn!" He looked surprised. "I—I've never seen you like this. I mean, tonight you're really super-duper!"

"Thanks. Don't look now, Jeff, but I think you and Michele are going dancing. I seem to have given the gal ideas."

Still gazing at her, Jeff didn't seem to hear. Again the doorbell rang, this time

bringing Paul Morton. Paul was a dark chap, taller than Jeff, but less rugged. When they were introduced, the two men eyed each other warily.

As she and Paul left the apartment, Lynn remarked very clearly, "Let's go to El Morocco, Paul. We haven't been there for ages."

There! Jeff couldn't help hearing!

At El Morocco, Paul got a table near the dance floor. They had cocktails, ordered dinner and danced, but all the time Lynn was waiting. If Jeff wanted Michele to himself, he wouldn't come. Otherwise—

Lynn watched the door. Forty-five minutes passed—an hour. She had almost given up when they came. Jeff had changed to a white dinner jacket and looked wonderful. Michele looked pretty in an elfin, helpless sort of way.

"May we join you?" Jeff asked, and suddenly Lynn's spirits lifted.

So Michele was ordering a Martini and roast duck. Michele was dancing with Jeff and doing it, Lynn had to admit, beautifully.

Ever since Jeff's return, Lynn had been alternately happy and depressed, and she had blamed it all on Michele. But presently, when she and Jeff were on the dance floor, Jeff holding her close, every nerve and fiber of her being seemed to come alive. Confused and disturbed she was silent. She'd never felt this way before with Jeff.

Back at the table, Lynn concentrated on Paul. But she was still disturbingly aware of Jeff. Even when she and Paul were doing a smooth rhumba, she could scarcely keep her eyes from Jeff and Michele. When the dark girl deliberately let her hair brush his cheek, Lynn felt a sharp thrust of pure jealousy.

**T**HE WHOLE evening was like that.

Dancing with Jeff, Lynn would feel once more that heady excitement, and between times was only a period of waiting. Finally, it was past midnight and Lynn said, "Come on, Jeff, let's have a brandy at the bar." It was brazen, she thought, but she must have him all to herself a few minutes.



## FURLOUGH KISSES

So they were at the bar, cradling brandy glasses in their hands, and looking at each other a little oddly, as if all at once they had become different people.

"Silver palms," Jeff glanced about, "and cockeyed, zebra-striped furniture. It's crazy, but nice. I used to long desperately for something like this and for the sort of gal you seem to be right now, soft and sweet. It—it's hot in here. Want a breath of air?"

They went outside and down the almost deserted street. They walked slowly, Lynn's arm through Jeff's, their fingers intertwinced.

"It's like a dream," he said; "an interlude between—"

Though he didn't finish, Lynn knew what he meant; between the war in England and the war somewhere else. They walked on, not talking very much. Lynn felt breathless and waiting. Waiting for what? Finally, at a darkened doorway, Jeff drew her close.

The shadows closed about them. As Jeff held her close, Lynn could feel the wild thud of his heart answering her own.

"You're so sweet!" he whispered. "Like something a man dreamed up."

Lynn could no more keep her arm from creeping about his neck than the moon could keep from rising. Later, in shame, she wondered if she had been too bold, inviting his kiss. Anyway, they clung together blindly there in that strange doorway, their lips seeking and hungry, as if this sudden, urgent need for each other could never be satisfied.

It was reckless, unbelievable—and heavenly. It left Lynn stirred to her very bones. Finally Jeff was holding her like a precious thing, whispering against her hair, "You've a fire I never dreamed of, Lynn! In that war-torn world over there, a man goes nearly crazy with wanting something like this!"

A QUEER iciness slid through her veins. What had he called this? Oh, yes, an interlude. And how lightly he had spoken the other day of furloughs, a girl, perhaps—a kiss.

Moving away from him, she steadied her voice carefully. "We'd better go back, Michele will be annoyed."

"And Paul?"

"And Paul."

As they started up the street she thought, kissing in doorways, my girl—and furlough kisses, at that! You should be ashamed!

The next day Jeff didn't appear at the office until after noon. All day Lynn, in a honey-beige dress with brown leather flower and belt, had waited for him. All day she had tingled to the remembered magic of his kiss. Suppose he *had* meant that kiss, after all. Suppose, like herself, he was suddenly in love.

Finally he came. He sat on a corner of her desk looking at her, a faint smile on his mouth.

"We had fun last night," he said.

"Didn't we?"

He picked up the statuette of the Blue Lady. "Here she is, our Lady Luck. Remember the day I modeled her—how I said you had nice bones but no fire? Guess I was wrong."

"About career gals?"

"Well, I wouldn't say that. I can still take my career women or leave them."

So that was it! Angry tears stung her eyelids. It *had* been only a furlough kiss!

Jeff got up and walked about the office. "I left Michele at the hairdresser's and am to pick her up again in half an hour. New York has the poor kid so bewildered that she simply can't find her way about."

Lynn had planned to be soft and very feminine. But here she was all criss-cross again, and here was her unruly tongue exclaiming, "Wouldn't it be a good idea if Michele learned to *find* her way about? She can't expect you to play nursemaid indefinitely."

"Lynn, you *do* hate her, don't you?"

"I don't hate her. But the girl has to earn her own living, so why not face facts? To begin with, she hasn't a thousand-to-one chance of making good in Hollywood—the country is full of girls who can dance pretty well and act a little. I could get her a job in a shop somewhere, or perhaps doing some kind of war work."

## SWEETHEART STORIES

"The kid isn't very strong." Jeff took a turn up and down the room. "I don't think anything like that would work out. I worry about her, Lynn. She's been through so much, and now what will happen to her? I—I have a sort of idea—" Almost defiantly he stopped at the desk, looking down at her. "I thought I might make my insurance over to Michele. Then if I did check out she would have, at least, a few thousands to get started in Hollywood."

If I *did* check out! For all her incredulous anger, those words turned Lynn's blood to ice.

"Jeff Sturgis!" she cried. "Have you lost your mind?"

"Oh, of course I wouldn't expect *you* to understand."

"But I *do* understand!" Lynn sprang up, facing him furiously. "I understand only too well. Can't you see, Jeff, that you don't have to worry about Michele? In France some kind woman cared for her and gave her passage money home. In Lisbon *you* took over. It will be like that always. Michele has only to let a few tears drip and some dope will come to her rescue!"

"*Dope!*" Jeff's face hardened. "Well, I'm glad to find out, at last, what you really think of me!"

"Jeff! I didn't mean—"

"Skip it." He was looking at his watch. "I have to go now and I—I'll make other arrangements for Michele."

"Jeff!" Her hand was on his arm. "Please don't. I'm sorry for being so bad-tempered. Perhaps—perhaps I was only jealous."

"*You* jealous?" He gazed down at her scornfully. "That's a hot one!"

When he had gone Lynn buried her face in her hands. A long, dry sob shook her. "You idiot!" she whispered. "Oh, you precious, big-hearted idiot!"

**I**N THE end Michele remained with Lynn. On the following day there came a strangely addressed letter. Ordinarily the mail came after Lynn had left for the office, but she had overslept, so when she finally came downstairs the mailman was just

leaving. And there was a letter, addressed not to Michele, but to Miss Vinnie Bradley, with a return on the back to some Park Avenue address.

The wrong Bradley, Lynn thought. Then, faintly suspicious, she jotted down the address in her notebook. By computing numbers, she figured that address would be not the fashionable section of Park Avenue, but the cheap one further north.

That evening, Lynn mentioned the letter.

"Oh, *that* one," Michele answered, "it was not for me."

Lynn was dining with Paul that night. He brought some blueprints and had them spread all over the floor when Jeff arrived. Jeff grinned at them skeptically. Lynn thought, Darn it! He feels certain I won't marry Paul—and he wouldn't even care!

She had a dull sort of evening and made Paul bring her home early. She went to bed, but again she couldn't sleep, for Michele and Jeff were still out. Lynn imagined the girl in Jeff's arms, being very thoroughly kissed. Furlough kisses? Or would it be different with Michele? Tormented by jealousy, Lynn turned over for the tenth time and pounded up her pillow.

Finally Michele came. Lynn heard her say, "Goodnight, dar-r-ling," at the door.

"Hello!" Michele turned on one of the dressing-table lights. "You are still awake?"

"I just got in," Lynn fibbed with an elaborate yawn.

"We had champagne." Michele stretched her arms luxuriously. "That Jeff, he is wonderful! I think I shall marry him, Lynn."

"Has he asked you?" Lynn kept the awful panic from her voice.

"No." Michele flashed her a mysterious glance. "But soon he will. He has the most crazy notion of giving me his insurance if he is killed. But what would people think? No, that I would not like."

How lightly she spoke of Jeff being killed!

A look of avarice crossed Michele's dark face. "While he is gone," she said, "I will help you run the business. Maybe I could be—what you call the receptionist."

## FURLOUGH KISSES

Over my dead body! Lynn thought. And her body *felt* dead, at this minute—numb with fear. Whether Jeff loved Michele or not, he was putty in her hands. Hadn't he always been a pushover for lame ducks?

That night Lynn didn't sleep and next morning the shadows under her eyes made her look very fragile and appealing. Jeff came in at the office for a little while.

"Going to get married?" he asked rather stiffly.

Lynn shrugged. "Perhaps."

"So the boy friend could go for a career wife?"

"So it seems," Lynn answered lightly.

"Well, I'm scarcely worried. You just aren't the type to settle on a Connecticut hilltop and raise a flock of children."

This time Lynn managed to hold her temper. "That's what *you* think" she said airily, and Jeff gave her a startled glance.

After walking to the window and back he remarked, "I offered to make Michele my beneficiary and she refused. That shows how wrong you were about her!"

"Perhaps she—" She broke off, flushing.

"What were you going to say?"

Again Lynn's reckless tongue betrayed her. "Perhaps Michele wants you to marry her."

"Marry!" he repeated. "Oh, no. I wouldn't be a bargain for any gal. If I didn't come back, okay. But if I *did* come—all shot up or something—"

"Jeff! *Don't!*" Lynn's eyes looked almost black in her white face.

He perched on the corner of her desk. "Heaven save us, Beautiful, I didn't mean to scare the daylights out of you! That's just a chance we all take. *I'm* not worrying."

"But you—but we—" Impulsively she drew his hand against her cheek.

As he bent and brushed her hair with his lips, she longed with every fiber of her being to be held close in his arms. Then he was saying, "I like that collar, Lynn. It makes you look like a little girl."

"Thanks!" Her throat ached and her eyes smarted with tears. Darn it, now she had given him the idea of marrying Michele!

Then Jeff was leaving. He had to see if his commission had come through.

Lynn had no time for tears. She was too busy being the efficient Miss Barry who managed Beauvais, Inc., so competently. Jeepers! she thought. Career gals can't even have a broken heart decently!

Around four o'clock, however, there was a lull, and then fear caught up with her. She remembered Michele's purposeful look as she said, "I think I shall marry him."

Lynn opened her notebook and found that address on Park Avenue. She set a straw cartwheel on the back of her head, went out and hailed a taxi.

The Bradley address proved to be a shabby apartment house only one step removed from a tenement. She questioned a thin boy who had just come through the door and stopped to light his cigarette. Sure, he said, there were Bradleys on the third floor, but he didn't know one called Vinnie. Lynn had started to go past him when he stopped her.

"Hey!" he said. "Perhaps you mean the one that went to Hollywood."

Lynn turned. "I don't think . . . Wait! How long ago was that?"

The boy screwed up his face, remembering. "Oh—perhaps three or four years. I didn't live here then."

"Would she be a thin, dark girl? But then you'd hardly know."

"She *could* be," the boy admitted. "Both of her sisters are dark and kind of pretty—such great big eyes, you know."

Big eyes—yes, Michele had those, all right! Lynn's heart had begun to thump harder. She thanked the boy, who walked off down the street. Lynn's finger hovered at the Bradleys' bell but did not ring it. If Vinnie and Michele *were* the same person, Mrs. Bradley would scarcely admit it—and she'd be sure to tip off her daughter. Taking Michele by surprise was important, so Lynn went away without inquiring further.

This time she took a bus. As she rode downtown, the situation seemed reasonable one moment and fantastic the next. Obviously the girl known as Vinnie had had no

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luck in Hollywood. Suppose, then, she had somehow wangled her way to Paris with the idea of coming back with a French accent and a phony background. That stunt had been used before—and successfully. In her more hopeful moments, it seemed to Lynn that Michele's "French" accent *did* slip occasionally.

When she opened the door, Lynn heard Jeff's voice. "Hi!" he called, hurrying to meet her. "My commission came through and I'm leaving on Monday for Texas."

"Oh, Jeff!" Lynn's throat closed with tears. Blindly she crossed the living room, flinging the cartwheel hat on a table and pretending to look in the mirror as she ran her fingers through her curls.

"I cannot bear it!" Michele was curled in a big chair. "I cannot have him go and leave me all alone!" Her voice broke.

Lynn swallowed her tears. Turning around, she drew a long breath.

"Alone!" she repeated. "But look, Michele. Haven't you sort of misplaced a relative here and there? You've a whole flock, you know, over on upper Park Avenue—including a mother and father."

Michele's eyes were wide and startled. "What—what are you talking about?"

"Oh, don't stall!" Lynn cried hotly. "I've just been over there!"

Michele turned to Jeff and tears rolled down her cheeks. "Jeff!" she cried. "I didn't mean to lie, but I—I couldn't be a burden on my f-family. They have so much to bear! And I have tried so hard. Since I was thirteen I have slaved to make something of myself!" Burying her face in her hands, she wept as if heartbroken.

Jeff went and patted her shoulder. "That's okay," he comforted. "I knew it all the time, Michele."

**L**YNN simply could not believe this horrible nightmare. She saw Michele gaze at Jeff, a smile breaking through her tears. "Darling!" Michele cried. "Jeff, darling!" And springing up she flung herself into his arms. "How did you know?"

Looking embarrassed, Jeff held her lightly. "On the Clipper I asked to see your passport and you made some excuse, so

I grew somewhat suspicious. These days a guy has to *know* the people he's sponsoring. Later, here in the apartment, I managed to get the passport and take a peek. From that, I pretty well reconstructed your whole sorry. It proved, anyway, that you were okay, and if you didn't want to tell me the whole story that was *your* business."

"Oh, Jeff!" Michele gazed at him adoringly. "Your faith means everything. All my life, Jeff, people have thought the worst of me."

"Even so," Lynn told her bitterly, "you *do* seem to get on, my pet!"

She went into the kitchen and got herself a glass of orange juice. She was standing in the window, staring blindly across the street, when Jeff came out.

"Michele's packing," he said.

"Not a bad idea." Lynn turned to face him. "And *she* didn't know her way around New York!" she said scornfully.

Jeff sighed. "Lynn, you're perfect, and you just can't understand other people's weaknesses. Michele is a born actress. She had played her part so long, she really believed it."

Lynn choked on tears of mingled rage and defeat.

Michele finished packing, and she and Jeff left, taking her one bag. A bit reproachfully she thanked Lynn for her hospitality. From the door Lynn watched them go, her heart in her eyes as she noted the familiar breadth of Jeff's shoulders. When she saw him again he would be in uniform.

Her eyes blurred with tears. She understood so much now—why, after he went to England, she had been afraid to open a newspaper—why she had been restless and depressed and the men who took her out hadn't mattered at all. And now she had only memories.

She walked about, twisting her hands together in agony, the tears slipping down her face. She thought, I could have had him, perhaps. I could have pretended to be just another lame duck. No, I couldn't either. I'm not the type to pull an act. He'd have to take me as I am, and he doesn't really like me at all. . . .

## FURLOUGH KISSES

THE next day, Lynn went through the motions of being manager for Beauvais, Inc., and waited for Jeff. He didn't come. On the following day the same thing happened. Probably he and Michele were married and honeymooning somewhere. Lynn ached with loneliness. If she only could touch Jeff, feel his cheek against hers, the warm strength of his arms — But no, Michele would have all that. Michele!

Remembering how Michele had planned to help here in the office, Lynn's mouth set. She thought, I'll sell out—I'll marry Paul. But she wouldn't, of course. Paul with his blueprints seemed pretty wooden and dull.

Lynn glanced through the paper. Planes shot down—not Jeff's, thank heaven!—a practice blackout. Maybe she could be an air raid warden.

She was called out front to satisfy an exacting customer. "Yes, Madame, this is very good for dry skin. . . . No, Madame, we use astringent. . . ." She felt like saying, "The heck with you, Madame! What could anyone do with a face like yours!"

That night, Lynn took the Blue Lady home with her. It stood upon the coffee table, a symbol of the years when she had been so close to Jeff, never realizing that she was in love with him. Forgetting dinner, she wandered about the apartment, tried to read, wandered again.

It was almost dark when the doorbell rang.

Jeff! Lynn told herself, her heart beating wildly. But it couldn't be Jeff. But it *was* and he was in uniform. Dizzily she saw his wings and the two silver bars on his shoulder.

"A *Captain!*" she said. "Hi, Captain!"

"Hi!" Though he saluted proudly, Jeff had the sheepish air of a small boy caught in some devilment.

"Where have you been?" she asked, trying to sound casual. "Getting married or something?"

"No, thank heaven!" He walked over to the coffee table and picked up the little statuette. "Lady Luck! Lynn, she almost failed me this time. You were right, Oh, Lynn! How right you were!"

"About what?" Lynn tucked her feet under her on the sofa.

"About Michele. Lynn, I did consider marrying her. She seemed to—sort of expect it. But I put it off, and this afternoon we were having cocktails in Twenty-one when along came a repulsive-looking, flashy sort of man. He knew Michele. She tried to shush him, but he was tight and wouldn't be shushed. So the whole thing came out. A third-rate ham actor, he took her to Paris. That was how she got there."

"Oh, Jeff!"

"When they got there, she apparently pulled a fast one and he's still mad about it. He told her off right there in Twenty-one, and I saw her at last, Lynn, for the cheap little adventuress she is."

Lynn said, "You're swell, Jeff, but too big-hearted for your own good. It's a nice fault, though." Her voice was suddenly husky, for he was looking down at her in a new, disturbing fashion.

"Lynn," he said, "why did you bring the Blue Lady home?"

"I—" Though she couldn't tell him, the answer was in her eyes.

THEN he, too, was on the sofa, drawing her into his arms. "Lynn!" he cried. "Ever since that kiss I've been tormented by you day and night. Be a career girl if you like, sweet. Be anything—only marry me before I go."

"Oh, Jeff, as if I wouldn't!"

As they clung to each other in a sudden feeling of oneness, their kisses had a new tenderness and a deeper passion. Finally, Lynn drew back to look at him.

"Jeff—oh, darling, I thought that first was only a furlough kiss!"

"It was." He drew her close again. "But all my furlough kisses will be yours from now on, Lynn. And speaking of furloughs, we're getting married on this one. Married right away."

"That's an order?" Lynn asked softly.

"Straight from the captain to the captain's lady," Jeff said, and Lynn answered him with the flame of response to his kiss. She liked orders from *this* man's army.



"You're just being a cat!" Tod exploded. "Suppose you leave Polly out of it!"

# Beloved Enemy

By Bernice de Vore

IF THE big frame house on Vine Street could have had any human reactions, it would have hidden its face and trembled with foreboding!

Ann Tennis and Tod Morgan were both rushing home from college on the heels of two letters. And to make it worse, they were heading toward the same home.

Ann re-read her letter on the train and at every reading became more angry, if possible. She and Tod had kept up a continual battle since they were children.

"Dear Ann," her mother had written. "I've put off telling you for three months, knowing how you felt about Tod Morgan. His father and I were married very quietly. Danny and Sam seem to get along marvelously—"

Sure, Ann thought bitterly. Her brother Danny was seventeen and just a kid in high school. Nothing ever worried him very much. But, I'm different!

She stuffed the letter in her purse and grasped her overnight case, stalking towards home like a warrior advancing towards the scene of battle. It was only a short distance, and she hadn't wired her mother she was coming.

Danny sighted her from where he slouched on the porch and shouted a greeting. He descended upon her with a bear-hug that almost tripped her.

"Hey, Nancy, the enemy is upon us!" he called to his mother.

The new Mrs. Morgan came hurrying out and cried nervously, "You should have wired us, dear, and we'd have come to meet you.

"Never mind, it wasn't far. Let's go in, I want to wash up. I feel wrinkled and grimy."

Looking unhappy, her mother hurried along behind her.

Nancy Morgan was a small, attractive woman in her late thirties. She had light

brown hair and large, expressive grey eyes. Her son, Danny looked like her.

But Ann was quite different. Ann was dark with silky black hair and dark eyes. Nancy had always been just a little in awe of her lovely young daughter. For Ann was serious, forceful, and very dynamic.

"Is *he* here?" Ann demanded abruptly.

"Who, darling?" her mother asked timidly. She was smoothing out the wrinkles in her daughter's jacket.

"You know who. I mean Tod Morgan!"

"Now, Ann dear, I hope you aren't going to be difficult."

"YOU know that Tod and I have hated each other as far back as I can remember. You don't expect me to whoop with joy because you've married his father!"

"Sam and I considered all that," her mother said, "He didn't think it was important. We wouldn't have sent for you, but he was ordered to stay away from the office—"

"Poor Sam," Ann exclaimed more kindly. "He's really a dear. Too bad Tod couldn't be more like his father!"

"Sam has been ordered to rest, so we had to curtail our spending."

Ann had the grace to feel a little guilty. She had rather over-done her spring buying. Her trunks were filled with smart new clothes.

"Sam and I pooled our money and bought the mill, since he had that tract of North Hill timber."

"Oh Nancy!" Ann wailed miserably. "If you'd married into any other family but the Morgans!"

"And what," asked a cold voice from the door, "is the matter with the Morgans?"

"Tod!" her mother gasped uneasily. "I thought you were with your father."

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"I was." He leaned a crooked elbow against the door and rested a surprisingly flaming red head against his palm. His grey eyes were like cold steel as he glared back at defiant Ann.

Ann flashed, "You might have knocked before entering." Her eyes were so dark that they looked like pieces of black velvet.

"Why enter? Your voice can be heard all over the house, in case anyone were interested enough to listen." To Nancy he said, "The trusty Julia says dinner is ready."

"Let's go down," Nancy urged, her worried eyes on her daughter.

Ann turned her back and went to the window. "Go on. I don't want any dinner. I'm not hungry."

"No wonder!" Tod snapped. "With a disposition like yours, it probably turns your stomach."

Ann started to retort but Danny interrupted her by calling, "Grab the extension in the hall. Charlie Walters is calling."

"All right, but lower your voice. There's no use telling the neighbors!" She waited until Tod and her mother went downstairs before lifting the receiver.

"Hello, Charlie," she said and was really glad that he had called.

"Danny said you were coming!" his voice boomed happily over the wire to her. "So suppose we do dancing? I'm still pretty crazy to see you."

Ann bit her lip and sat thinking for a minute. Charlie was good company. An evening at home promised to be trying. There would be Danny's playful remarks, Sam goodnatured and grinning in amusement, Nancy fluttering about like a disturbed mother hen, and Tod superciliously superior. In her present frame of mind she knew she couldn't endure it.

He said, "Don't you want to see me, darling?"

"Of course," she said without enthusiasm. But she wasn't so sure of that. Charlie had developed into something of a problem before she left.

She had certainly come home to a nice mess!

SHE hung up the receiver with a sigh. She was tired and hated to take the trouble to dress. But she at least had a new dress for the occasion, royal blue velvet with silver clips for trim at the shoulders. It made her dark eyes look deep purple.

A warm shower and a quick rub helped to lift her spirits. She brushed her black curls until they looked like silk and then slipped the gorgeous new dress over her slim young shoulders. Her arms were bare and her hands were small and soft. She knew that she looked quite lovely. She knew, oddly enough, that it wasn't exactly all for Charlie—

She caught up her white fur jacket and switched off the light as she closed the door of her room softly behind her.

She found the family in the library. She said gaily, "Hello Sam, welcome into the family." She patted his big shoulder under the brocaded smoking jacket.

"Going out, dear?" Nancy asked regretfully. "I had hoped we'd all be together this first evening."

"You'd better be glad she's not staying," Danny contributed with an annoying grin. "It would only lead to bloodshed."

Ann didn't say anything. She just stood at the door and looked at them. Sam's big frame in the big comfortable chair with little brown haired Nancy close beside him. Tod with his long legs stretched towards the fire, and Danny slouched on a stool beside him. Cozy and comfortable! But she had no place there. She was too much of a disturbing element, and it made her feel sad and irritated. Without Tod she would have belonged, too!

She drew down her crimson mouth and lowered her long, silky lashes. With a face as pretty as Ann's, it was hard to look disagreeable. She dropped a light kiss on Nancy's soft cheek and said, "Goodnight Sam," and left them.

Charlie had a new car. It was waiting at the curb in all its grandeur. Charlie was a tall young man with blond hair brushed smooth and a broad face with a big mouth and even white teeth.



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"This is a surprise, Charlie," Ann said sweeping her hand toward the car. "It looks as if you're coming up in the world!"

He grinned. "To manage a contracting business, you don't have to go to college."

That had been rather a sore spot with him. Charlie had wanted her to stay at home so they could get married. Ann had hated saying no, but she hadn't been at all sure she loved him.

**C**HARLIE suggested, "We'll drive down into the valley. There isn't anything to do here in Pottsville. I've spent most of my time out of it since I've been made manager of Darwin Construction. If we have time, I'll drive by and show you the apartments we're building."

Ann smiled and let him brag a little. She thought of that conversation the next day.

They did have a good time. The music was low, and Charlie was a good dancer. The swing band was one of Ann's favorites. Charlie looked nice in his neat blue suit and shiny patent slippers.

But Ann suddenly found that she was too tired to enjoy herself. Charlie took her home very reluctantly, and he was a little sulky when she didn't want him to kiss her. She'd never objected before, but when his face came close to hers she just didn't want him to touch her. She couldn't explain it.

She was relieved when he drove away and she headed for the library. A light was still going, and she wondered who was waiting up for her.

Through the open door she spied Danny sitting with his back against one arm of the easy chair with one long leg swinging over the other side.

He was wheezing a low, tuneless little whistle. His hair was surprisingly brushed flat, and his ears looked freshly washed and shining. She noticed that he had on a clean blue pull-over sweater.

"Insomnia, Danny?" she asked idly.

"Nope. Just waiting for company."

"At this time of night?" she asked dubiously.

"Sure. Tod's girl friend's coming down.

He just got the wire and he's gone down to meet her. Nancy's up getting her room ready."

"Huh!" Ann grunted. "I didn't know Tod had a girl friend."

Danny clucked. "I'll say he has and she's some babe. He has her picture. Her name's Polly Norton, and she dances in a chorus. I guess they plan to get married. Old Sam nearly fainted, but our gallant Nancy came to the rescue and smoothed over the troubled waters."

Ann almost dropped her white fur jacket. She had never thought of the high spirited Tod marrying. It hit her with such force she almost staggered.

Danny watched her and remarked grinning, "Which goes to show you can't trust your own grandma. Who'd have thought of Tod falling for a blond babe in the chorus?"

Ann went up the stairs without answering. This was certainly one for the book, and she couldn't understand why she didn't like it. She wanted to think it over and find out. That is, if she could come to any conclusion, which she doubted.

Things happened fast. There was a crunch of wheels on the drive, a car door slammed. Ann sat still and listened.

A few minutes later there she heard a high, excited voice in the hall, saying, "Oh, Mrs. Morgan! You're just like I thought you would be! Tod has told me all about you."

Ann closed the door hurriedly and sat down on the edge of her bed. She felt tired and miserable. She hated the world in general and herself in particular. It almost sounded as if she were jealous but that, of course, was certainly out of the question! Perhaps things would look different in the morning.

**B**UT they didn't. She awoke to a damp and chilly morning. The house was cold and unearthly quiet.

Ann jumped out of bed and slipped into a green wool dress with gold metal buttons. She blushed her hair vigorously and tied it back hastily with a narrow velvet ribbon of the same color.

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She found Tod below in the dining room just finishing his breakfast.

"Where's Nancy?" she asked of the smiling Julia.

Julia was the maid of all work and her teeth shone sparkling and white in her fat, goodnatured black face.

She said, "Laws honey, you know how your mamma hates to get up in the morning!"

It was true. Nancy had only complied as a concession to her daughter.

"Have some bacon," Tod offered, shoving a platter absent-mindedly across the white cloth towards her. He was half buried behind the morning paper. Ann could just see the tip of his red head.

"Orange juice and toast, Julia," she ordered, ignoring him.

The paper came down and he observed her with more interest. "Cutting down on your figure?"

"That wouldn't be necessary!" she snapped, glad that the sheer wool dress fitted her so becomingly. "I'm not trying to get in the chorus!"

"Now, look here!" Tod exploded. His eyes were as sharp as cold steel. "You're slapping at Polly, and you don't know a thing about her. You're just being a cat, so suppose you just leave her out of it!"

He slammed down the paper, shoved back his chair angrily, and stalked out of the dining room.

Ann had the grace to admit to herself that the remark was really uncalled for. But this morning she felt like fighting. Tod needn't make remarks like that to her. *He* certainly wasn't what you could call agreeable! She didn't have to meet Polly—"Oh, Mrs. Morgan, you're just—" Just a dripping line!

She shrugged. Drank her orange juice and then tossed down the white napkin. She'd just decided she would go down to the mill and see how things were going.

An hour later she found Danny and Tod talking in Sam's private office. They looked surprised to see her.

"Well, Sherlock," she said crisply, "what have you found upon your tour of inspection?"

"What are you doing down here?" Tod asked rudely as he got up grudgingly and offered her a chair.

"I'm going to help run this business, just in case you haven't figured that out for yourself in the meantime."

"And what," Tod said, emphasizing each word vehemently, "do you know about the lumber business?"

"Just as much as you. And it's as much my business as yours considering my mother sunk all her money into it!"

Danny said, "Oh, for Pete's sake stop snapping at one another and let's see if we can figure what can be done about this situation!"

Tod picked up a pencil and reached for the papers before him. "As I see it, we have a yard full of lumber and canceled contracts."

ANN said, "Well, people are still building." She was remembering her conversation with Charlie, and the new apartments.

"Little orders won't help. To get us out of the red we've got to have a big one."

Danny said, "That's right." He got up and went to the door. "I'm going out to talk to old Stan. He's been worried for the last few days. The big saws have been acting up, and you can't depend on them. He's been showing me things. Says I have a natural flare for mechanics," he added with studied carelessness.

"Stan—" Ann repeated thoughtfully. "You mean the big fellow with the large family?"

"Sure," Danny nodded. "He's got ten kids and he's plenty proud of them. His wife ain't feeling so good now, so he tells me—"

"Well, for goodness sakes!" Ann exclaimed disgustedly.

"What's the matter?" Tod snapped. "I suppose you don't *like* a big family!"

"Well, it looks to me—" Ann began heatedly.

"Oh, for Pete's sake—" Danny interrupted her. "Why are you two fighting? *You* aren't having a family."

"That's right," Tod agreed. He was

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silent while Danny went whistling out of the office.

Ann stared at Tod's back and felt a moment of panic. He'd marry Polly and have lots of children. They'd be freckled faced and red-headed. The boys would have that crazily quirked brow just like their father. They'd all have quick tempers and eyes like grey mist when they were in a good humor, but be cold as steel when they were angry about something.

"I'm going out!" Tod said sharply and went out slamming the door of the office.

I wonder where he's going, she thought? Probably back to the house on a pretext of consulting Sam, but really to see Polly. He'd better tend to this business! she added grimly, forgetting that that was what she had come down for herself.

She got out of the swivel chair and went out into the outer office to see Sam's secretary, fussy little Miss Simpson. If you were going to run a business you had to know something about it. She'd show this smart Tod Morgan!

Miss Simpson was a small woman with a tired, homely face. She wore a crisp, white shirtwaist and a black skirt just a little longer than the current fashion.

"Is there anything I can help you with, Miss Ann?" she asked and smiled through the thick lenses of her rimless glasses.

Ann sat down and listened while she explained a lot of figures that she was sure were quite important. It sounded dull and Ann's head ached a little.

**M**ISS SIMPSON said, "We had two contracts pending. Either one would have cleared enough to take care of the stock on hand. Mr. Morgan was rather doubtful of this one on Darwin!"

Ann jumped and sat up quickly.

Miss Simpson went on explaining. "These bids were too low, but if completed on a certain date there was to be a cash bonus. Now, this other one on Shipley was for Federal Housing. Tod took that—"

"I'm just interested in this," Ann interrupted.

"But, Miss Ann—" Miss Simpson began, but Ann didn't hear her. She took

the contract and rushed back into Sam's office, jammed on her smart green felt hat and tore into her jacket.

She dashed past Miss Simpson before that surprised little mouse could utter a word and was out of the office leaving her staring helplessly.

Ann look around quickly and spied Danny's battered looking roadster. He called it "The Mayflower" and it certainly looked it. She felt a little silly riding in a car with, "Don't Park Here" and "Not A Dope In A Car Load" painted in glaring white letters across the sides. But she was in a hurry and couldn't afford to be choosy.

She drove across town to the Darwin Office. She parked on a side street and hoped no one would see her getting out of that monstrosity.

She was lucky enough to find Charlie Walters in his very impressive office. He looked very handsome and quite at home behind the polished brown desk.

"Why Ann. I'm delighted to see you," he exclaimed.

She took the contract from her pocket and spread it out before him. "This isn't a friendly call, Charlie," she advised him. "I mean business."

He looked down at the paper and then seemed a little at a loss for a moment. "Oh that—" he said doubtfully. "We're still thinking it over."

She saw it wasn't going to be easy. She changed the subject quickly, and soon they were laughing and talking about personal things and enjoying themselves.

An hour later she looked at her watch and cried, "Look, I've got to be running. If you knew how important this was you'd settle it now and be done with it."

He said, "Marry me, Ann, and let's forget this business."

"No." She said stubbornly. "Don't you have the authority to sign these contracts, Charlie?"

That was hitting below the belt because she knew his pride. "Of course, Ann. I will, but I think you're taking an unfair advantage—mixing sentiment with business." He took up the pen and scrawled his name at the bottom hurriedly.

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"Would it do any good to say that you're the loveliest thing that ever happened?"

She let that pass, but she didn't feel that sentiment really had anything to do with his hesitancy. And she didn't like it when he tried to kiss her as she was leaving.

Her feet fairly flew down the walk and she climbed into the Mayflower in relief, glad to get through that interview! It left a bad taste in her mouth, and she couldn't explain it. She and Charlie had been good enough friends before, but this seemed a little different. Maybe she had been unfair—but he seemed so odd, so evasive about it!

**T**HE MOOD passed and Ann felt a lift as she neared the office. She put her hand into the pocket of her tan sports coat

and felt the paper crackle. It gave her a renewed feeling of satisfaction. She guessed that this would show Tod Morgan who was capable of running the Morgan Mill Company office! She didn't stop to analyze why showing him had taken on such grave importance.

She parked the Mayflower at the main entrance and jumped out, slamming the door in her hurry. She felt like the conquering hero as she bustled into Miss Simpson's office and waved a gay hand at her.

She burst into the inner office without knocking.

Again she found Tod and Danny in deep consultation. There were several papers spread out in front of them.

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"There you are!" she said triumphantly and tossed the paper on the desk before them.

Danny picked it up and unfolded it. His change of expression was swift and disturbing. "Well, holy cow!" he ejaculated.

"What is it?" Tod demanded, leaning forward.

"The Darwin contract!" Ann snapped. "Or shall I read it for you?"

Danny clapped his hand to his head and almost howled. "For Pete's sake Ann, why didn't you tell us what you were doing?"

"Why should I?" Her tone was frosty. They certainly weren't reacting as she had expected. "You wanted a contract, didn't you?"

"Yes, but not this one!" Tod barked. "Their credit's too shaky!"

"You're saying that to be hateful!"

"No, he's not," Danny informed her quietly. "We're in a mess now for sure. Tod got the contract from Shipley."

"Then, it looks like we're all set," she ventured. Inside she was raging. They were certainly lacking in consideration! A fine thing when you're sided against by your own brother!

"We can't fill both these orders," Tod remarked, "And Darwin won't let you wiggle out of this one."

"We'll have to try," Danny suggested. "Put on a double shift and throw a crew up on the North Hill timber Sam was saving."

"Let's go home and eat something," Tod insisted. "I'm hungry and tired, and I had one hell of a time with old Shipley!" He turned a cold stare on Ann speculatively. "I don't imagine you used the same tactics on Charlie," he said with a half grin.

"TOD MORGAN," she flashed, "I think you're the most hateful, spiteful and conceited person it has been my misfortune to meet!" His remark had been too near the truth for comfort.

"Oh, save it until after you're married!" Danny said rudely and slammed out.

Tod made it worse by throwing back his head and shouting with laughter. She gave him a withering look and stalked out.

The house on Vine Street seemed charged with excitement. Sam was sitting out on the lawn, and Ann could see his regal white head above the back of the wicker rocker. There was a wool robe over his knees, and he looked dignified and pleasant in his blue smoking jacket.

Polly was with him. She looked like a ray of sunshine as she danced around on the grass for him. She had on a bright pink dress with a tight waist and full, short skirt, and her yellow curls bobbed gayly about her slender young shoulders. They could hear her laughing and it sounded like the tinkle of little silver bells.

Tod smiled indulgently. Looking at him, Ann felt her heart suddenly turn over.

Nancy was in the hall to meet her. "Ann," she smiled happily, "Polly is out with Sam and she's the sweetest little thing imaginable! She's as pretty as a picture and not a day over seventeen. She's never had a home, her parents died young and I'm so glad she's enjoying this!"

Ann smiled at her mother, but it looked a little sick. She felt tired and grumpy and ill tempered. The boys hadn't appreciated her help, and now it seemed that her mother was getting along nicely without her, too.

Nancy didn't notice her mood in her own excitement. "Wash up, dear," she begged. "Julia has lunch almost ready."

Ann went up to her room and hated herself thoroughly. She got up and determinedly looked at her own reflection in the mirror. The black hair was just as silky and shiny. The red lips just as full and crimson, but her mouth drooped at the corners. She felt ashamed for she looked quite disagreeable. And to make it worse she had an odd, let-down feeling.

She slipped off the green wool and got into a pale blue dimity with pink ribbons. It didn't exactly fit her mood, but she wanted to look pretty. As soon as she got it on she felt better. She was a pretty, even if she was older. Good Heavens, she'd never compared herself with another girl before!

MEETING Polly wasn't the ordeal she had imagined it. They came face to

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face in the lower hall, and Polly let out an exclamation of delight at sight of her.

"Oh, you're Ann, Danny's sister! What gorgeous black hair. It looks just like the silk my grandmother used to use to embroider."

Ann smiled back into her excited blue eyes and warmed to the girl unconsciously. Polly was genuine and not the least effected. She really meant it!

Dinner turned out to be quite fun. Polly had a quaint gift of imitation, and she kept up a running fire of chatter with a sprinkling of wit. She mimiced her manager with his broken English and finished up by imitating Tod and Danny.

She kept Sam chuckling from his chair at the head of the table, and Nancy smiling happily beside him.

Danny watched with bewitched eyes and, Tod laughed indulgently and saw that Julia kept Polly's plate filled although she ate scarcely anything.

After lunch the family moved towards the library, but Tod took his hat, followed by the adoring Polly.

Ann looked after them and felt her knees weak and her heart pounding painfully. She stared at the back of Tod's shining red head as if she'd never seen him before. She was in love with the brute and she was helpless to do anything about it! In love with him! Why I always have been! she thought.

The next few weeks were a maze of work and worry. The Morgan Mill fairly teemed with activity. The yards were full of trucks hauling in freshly cut logs and loading out with the finished lumber. Ann, under the guidance of Miss Simpson found that there was more work than they both could accomplish. Danny was busy with Stan inside the mill, and Tod had little time to spend inside the office.

Once when she was so tired she could drop and her eyes ached from checking the rows of long figures, Tod strode in like a breath of fresh air. Ann's spirits lifted.

Her nose was shiny, her white collar crumpled, and her hands were smeared with ink. He stopped beside the desk without a word and looked whimsically down at her.

Ann felt her heart begin to swell and her eyes became misty.

He gave her shoulder a friendly pat and then passed on through into the office, and that was the last she saw of him before evening. Why did she have to find she loved him just when he'd found Polly? And Polly was so sweet.

That night in desperation she went out with Charlie. But she was sorry she had because she was so tired she begged off and came home early. She just couldn't dance a step when her heart was aching. No one was even fun without Tod.

Sam had retired but Nancy was sitting in his rocker and beside her was Tod and Polly. Tod's head was in Polly's lap, and she was sitting on a heap of pillows.

Polly put one finger to her lips and said, "Shh! Poor darling, he's simply worn out. He needs a wife to take care of him."

The words burned across Ann's heart with fresh pain and she suddenly wanted to be close to her mother. Not that Nancy would know what was wrong with her or even if she did, could do anything about it. But they couldn't talk now.

ANN FELT frightened and lonely. She said, "I think I'll go up to bed," and fled from the sight of Tod's head against Polly.

She met Danny in the upper hall, and he looked cross and sleepy in his terry robe and leather slippers. He was just hanging up the telephone receiver.

"Tod up?" he asked, yawning. "Stan's home and there's trouble with the machinery—"

Ann nodded. "He's down stairs with Polly."

A pained expression flashed across Danny's face and was gone in a minute. "I'll dress while you tell him," he suggested.

Tod must have been awakened by the phone for he was standing beside the door with an arm about Polly. The little honey blond head came to his shoulder, and she was rubbing her face against his arm.

"I heard the phone," he said as soon as he saw Ann. "What's the bad news? I've been expecting it."

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He listened to her explanation and then objected when she insisted upon going with them. She wasn't exactly dressed for the occasion.

She wasn't, she had to admit. She had on a crisp yellow organdy with a skirt full of tiny ruffles. It had open butterfly sleeves and was tied with tiny blue ribbons. With her dark hair in a long wave against her shoulder she looked very lovely. And for the first time she thought by Tod's expression that he realized it.

When Danny came down Ann threw a long blue cloth coat around her shoulders. She caught up the full skirt and slipped into the car between Tod and Danny. Being so close to Tod made her feel a little light-headed and crazy. The seat was narrow, and she could feel his hard, young body against her side.

He had put an arm across the back of the seat. She thought shakily, I'd like to lean my head back against his shoulder just like any love-sick school girl. But, wouldn't Tod be astounded? The very self-sufficient and quarrelsome Ann, going suddenly weak! All he would do would be to make some crack probably.

She sat very stiff and straight beside him and he didn't seem to notice her at all. His mind was on the business ahead.

At the mill they filed into the quiet building. The workmen were standing about smoking and talking. Something had gone wrong with the power system.

Danny threw off his coat and went to work. "I wish Stan were here," he said regretfully.

"Where is he?" Tod wanted to know.

"Wife sick again," Ann deduced sagely.

Tod gave her an impatient look as much as to say, he supposed she didn't approve, so she shrank back in the shadows.

Why do I always have to say the wrong thing, she wailed to herself unhappily? I suppose quarreling is such a habit with us that even if we could get married we'd forget that there was such a thing as love and quarrel right on out to the end of it!

Well, Tod didn't want her. Probably that was why she had felt so quarrelsome toward him all these years!

SHE STOOD around for awhile and felt miserable and unwanted. Going back into the office, she put her head down on Tod's desk and let the tears slip through her long black, silky lashes. I love him, she unwillingly admitted. I love him so much that's all I can think of. And even if Tod wanted me, I couldn't bear to hurt Polly, she's such a baby.

She must have finally dropped off to sleep for it was some time later that she felt a hand on her shoulder and an amused voice saying, "Wake up, sleepyhead. I'm going for a cup of hot coffee and I'll take you home with me."

She jumped up in fright and swayed a little. She had been dreaming that she was falling. She caught frantically at Tod's sleeve to steady herself.

His arms went around her and he pressed her against his shoulder. "Poor baby!" he said gently. "I guess I startled you. Be still for a moment until you get your eyes open."

His face was against her hair, and her crazy heart tripped and then flung itself against her ribs and began pounding. Trembling, she held on to him, afraid to let go. The excited blood rushed over her like spreading fire. Tod wasn't someone you could touch casually. He was lightning, fire and danger packed in one.

Her yellow organdy was crushed, and the black hair was tumbled about her flushed face. The blue cloak lay in a little heap at her feet. She shivered and Tod put his hand on her bare arm.

"Here, let me get your coat. You're shivering." He stooped, still holding her with one hand and lifted the garment. He slipped it around her and pulled it under her chin.

Then he put a hand on the silky black head and then pulled her close and kissed her. The pressure was light at first—she knew he had intended it to be merely a friendly gesture—but at the close contact he seemed to lose his self-control and crushed her against him.

Ann's lips were warm and sweet under his, and she returned fire with an equal warmth until her head rang.

## SWEETHEART STORIES

Tod drew back and looked down at her. His face looked puzzled. "You're sweet to kiss, Ann," he said wonderingly. Then ruined it by adding, "Sweet to kiss when you're not busy quarreling."

ANN brushed his hands aside and rushed from him, down the hall and into the car before he could follow her. He had looked surprised and a little embarrassed. She felt she just couldn't stand it if he started apologizing. She felt like laying her head down and howling at the futility of it.

The next morning Nancy didn't wake her. Around noon Polly came peeking in her door and said, "Darling, are you awake? May I come in and talk to you?"

Polly looked like an escaped sunbeam. Her orchid print was of soft material and clung to her perfectly rounded young figure. Her honey gold hair was loose and swung in a cloud around her slim shoulders.

She came in and perched on the edge of Ann's bed and said, "Honey, it's a crime to look as pretty as you do in the morning. And I simply adore that darling rose bed jacket. You look just like a picture done in technicolor."

Ann smiled at the extravagant praise and stretched like a lazy kitten.

"Have you ever been in love?" Polly asked her unexpectedly.

Ann sat up in surprise and looked at her. "Of course," she answered simply.

Polly swung one slender foot childishly and her blue eyes were thoughtful. "Does it leave you mixed up with all kinds of uncertain feelings?"

Ann nodded. Love hadn't brought her any joy or pleasure, but it had left her uncertain and confused all right!

Polly sighed. "I was afraid you'd say it was just because I'm so young that I don't know my own mind."

Ann said, "No. I don't think that has anything to do with it. If you love someone you just do, and it changes the world for you. And not always as you imagine or want it."

Ann thought of Tod's kiss and a longing

to be loved nearly set her wild. Still, you couldn't wreck a beautiful house of dreams for a girl like Polly. Not if you were really a person of honor. And not if the person you loved was Tod Morgan, and you never even knew what he might be feeling about you.

Polly continued, "When I think of him I feel all trembly inside, and I can't wait until I see him. And then when I'm near him I feel all fluttery and funny—"

"Oh, I guess it's love," Ann said laughing at the childish description. Laughed even though there was a pain hidden beneath it.

"Well!" Polly began and then said hastily, "Oh, I forgot to tell you, Nancy said Julia was fixing your breakfast."

Ann jumped out of bed and peeled back the covers. She was glad to get off the subject of love. The thought of Tod's coming marriage wasn't something she could think about calmly. She'd certainly have to go away somewhere. And she was in a panic for fear her emotion betray her to the family.

She went down to the mill and found that operations had resumed. Tod came striding through the office in his dusty brown cords and boots and paused to speak to Miss Simpson. He looked tired and worried.

Ann was busy hanging up the blue cloth coat and tried to keep her back to him. She straightened her gray wool dress with the leather belt and red yarn trimming.

He was saying, "This loss of time just about finishes our chances of having a full order on both contracts. We didn't have enough time anyway to make tomorrow's deadline."

Miss Simpson said, "And we'll be left with a large supply on hand and we can't afford that."

He sighed. "Well, we won't worry about it until it is a certainty."

THE REST of the day and the long night was like a nightmare. It was a losing battle and they both knew it. To make it worse, word was sent for someone to come up to the tract of North Hill timber. Tod



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couldn't leave, so Danny went up to see about it.

Stan's wife was worse, and he couldn't leave her so the machinery took that occasion to get balky. Tod rolled up his sleeves and tried to find the trouble.

Ann watched while he got streaks of grease on his face and across the spotless white shirt. She wore a pair of slacks of hunter's green with belted jacket. She stood close to him hoping to get a little comfort out of it and not caring if the place was full of grease.

He said, "I wish I'd have been smart and studied mechanics in school when I had a chance to." Then, "You just as well send the men home. I simply don't know a thing about this."

Ann did, reluctantly, and then when the lights were snapped off the mill looked pitifully cold and deserted.

Tod led the way into the office and flung himself into a chair and yawned loudly. He was so sleepy he was groggy.

"Go home to bed," Ann suggested timidly. "I'll stay and watch for Danny."

Tod shook his head and stretched his long legs in their brown leather boots. "He should be back any minute." He looked at his watch. "See, it's almost daylight."

"Maybe that's Danny now!" Ann exclaimed, startled at the pounding that came from the front entrance.

She flew to the door but when it was opened there stood an excited Miss Simpson. She was enveloped in a long black coat of an indefinite shape. Her hat was askew and she looked in a flurry of excitement.

"Oh," she panted, "the most awful thing has happened! I've heard through a friend of mine that Charlie Walters has left town and that Darwin has been thrown into bankruptcy!"

"Well," Tod scratched a tousled red head and grunted. "That's good and bad! We couldn't fill their order, and now we're left with what we have on hand and no way to meet the payroll!"

Ann felt sick. "Let's go home," she said faintly.

THEY WERE outside and just leaving when Danny drove up in the rattling Mayflower. "What's wrong and why are we shut down?" He yelled.

Ann came over to the car beside Tod where he stood with one foot on the running board and squared her shoulders.

"It's my fault," she admitted. "I was in too big a hurry to show how smart I was. I've been like that all my life," she added bitterly. "I fussed with Tod just to show him I was superior, and I've loved Nancy to distraction but I've always dominated her unmercifully."

"Shut up, you nitwit!" Danny growled. "I want you to listen. We aren't broke—not the Morgan Milling! You haven't given me a chance to tell you what I found out up on the North Hill tract."

Tod was looking at Ann and not paying any attention to Danny. "You aren't to blame for what happened, Ann," he said. "I am because I was all het up to manage the place before you got a chance at it."

"Say," Danny exploded. "Will you two dopes be good enough to listen? That North Hill tract that Sam has been saving turned out to be walnut!" He had their attention now and he laughed excitedly. "No wonder it wouldn't do for your Federal Housing. The government wants it for gunstocks."

"Yes, yes, of course," breathed the astonished Miss Simpson. "Now, please take me home. I feel the need of a little stimulant—"

"I'll take her," Danny offered and they jerked away in the trusty Mayflower.

Ann was very still as they drove home and stopped beside the white picket gate on Vine Street.

Tod turned to her gravely. "I've just discovered something rather astounding."

She hoped he wouldn't harp back on the subject of Charlie.

"I've just found that life would be interesting and full of spice if a guy like me had a gal like you to work along beside him. Sure, we'd fight, but we'd kiss and make up. Oh well, there's no use thinking about it." His voice shook a little. "Sure, I remember—there's still Polly."

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He turned in the seat and looked at Ann, and her throat hurt at what she read in the bewildered grey eyes. A mist sprang over hers.

"My darling," he said gently, "why couldn't we have found out about this sooner?"

Ann just sat there. There were no words with which to answer. They had wasted all their precious time quarreling when they should have been loving.

"Would it do any good if I said I loved you?" he asked hesitatingly. "And that I think you're the loveliest thing that ever happened?"

She dropped her brimming eyes and shook her dark head. "No, we musn't! It will only make it harder, Tod. Let's keep this love of ours sweet and untarnished. Polly trusts you, and we have no right to be selfish."

**T**HEY GOT out of the car and walked slowly forward. Ann felt as though her heart were dying. Their steps sounded so loud to her strained ears that they were almost deafening.

Nancy was in the hall. "Come into the library," she cried, and her voice was shaking.

Ann thought desperately, "I hope she isn't going to scold us." This was so new and terrible that she felt she couldn't discuss it with anyone, even the white-faced Nancy.

Tod turned Nancy towards him. "Come on," he ordered her, "out with it! It can't be as bad as you think it is."

"Oh dear," Nancy wailed. "But it is! It's the children."

"Children?" Ann repeated. It was very confusing.

"You know, Dan and Polly. They've eloped and left me to tell you!"

Ann suddenly sat down because her knees were too weak to hold her. She put her head down on her arm and began to cry weakly. When you just have built yourself up to be self-sacrificing, and then have your happiness tossed unexpectedly back in your lap, it's very upsetting.

"Now, don't you worry about that, Nan-

cy," Tod was saying. "Just let me handle this, please, Nancy."

Ann heard the door close on her mother's retreating figure. Tod dropped down on a stool beside her. He pulled her over into his arms and held her.

"Stop crying, sweetheart," he said gently. "According to the rules, this is the happy ending. And with your face all wet with tears how do you expect me to propose romantically?"

She laughed a little as she mopped her face with his big white handkerchief. If Tod was going to kiss her she certainly didn't want anything to spoil it.

**N**OTHING did. When his mouth came down over hers, time stopped, and her heart set up a terrific clamor. His kiss was like charged lightning and sent heady, excited little thrills racing over her.

He raised his head. "Whew!" he exclaimed, "Honey, that just about did it. I guess by now you get the idea that I'm pretty crazy to marry you."

She hid her flushed face against his neck and said, "Oh Tod, we'll have such terrible children!"

He laughed uproariously. "Well, kids wouldn't be any good without tempers." And then, "By the way, what started us quarreling in the beginning?"

He added, "Of course I knew that at least it brought me to your haughty attention and took your mind off of Charlie. I never liked that guy!"

She felt her crazy heart lifting happily. "It started when I was ten, in school, and you sat behind me—you used to poke me in the back with a pencil and I'd ignore you—"

"Was that it? Sure, I remember! I put a little frog down your back, figuring it would get me some attention—"

"It did," Ann admitted. "But, let's not bother with the past, Tod. I'm anxious about the future. I'd just rather you'd kiss me, darling."

He did. It took a long time and he didn't need any other invitation.

Nancy finally looked in and smiled in relief.

# No Time for Sailors

By Jan Holland



"Beginners," Penny told the sailor scornfully, "take the outer edge!"

PENNY knew a number of items that went together and made sense. Good, common sense. Like ham and eggs. Like hot dogs and mustard. Like Thanksgiving and mince pie. She could understand them; get a warm, comfortable feeling out of thinking about them. Even while she laced and tightened the white skating shoes over her slim ankles, for a spin that would take the kinks out of her office-cramped legs, they sounded right.

But a sailor and a girl! That item was different. That was a combination

that made her amber eyes turn almost black with anger. That made her wide sweet mouth into a straight red line. That made her wish with a quickly swallowed sob that she had never met Andy Martin, a slim-hipped ensign in Navy blues. He could have said, couldn't he, "Wait for me, Penny?" "Only two years and the Navy says O.K. for new ensigns to marry. Wait for me." And she would have waited.

But Andy Martin, who laughed easily, had loved as easily, and then sailed away. And a girl with soft blond hair, and a

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quick, warm heart who had been, in the years they had grown up together, pal, adviser, finally sweetheart—well, a girl like that could watch and wait in vain for a certain ship that never nosed its grim prow into the same Navy Yard again.

I'll *never*, she thought grimly with a tug at the cowhide laces, go through that again. Never! I've no time for sailors!

Penny stood up from the bench, snapped back one foot to release the spinning wheels. Then rose on her toes like a dancer and was off in a smooth glide that rushed faster and faster, until she seemed a carved figurehead straining against rushing wind. Her flowing motion made the other skaters in the big rink seem to stand still. Head down, she rounded the curve of the polished oval with a smooth shift of balance—and decided she could do with tightening her right shoe. She turned out one foot to slow her slippery progress.

The floor rose—smacked her with vicious force; the ceiling lights swung in a complete arc, and there was the clash and clatter of skates making quick detours to keep from running over her.

Her single impression was that a Mack truck had hit her! Before she fell she had felt the impact of something big and hard and very close jam against her as she had slowed. Then had come the blitz—and a million stars testified to the fact that her brain and her back had been jarred out of all proportion to being flattened out by a mere fall.

**T**HAT whooshing sound was her breath as it crowded back into her protesting lungs. And that iron grip under her arms must come from a crane—the kind that lifts hugh bales of stuff onto waiting decks at the wharf. The stars receded—maybe they were just the lights that swung back to the ceiling where they belonged.

She was aware that she had been picked up, aware that someone was holding her upright. She was aware that she looked up into a pair of contrite blue eyes in a tanned face, and an uncertain smile that made a very pleasant thing of his broad mouth. Her hands stung where they had

hit the floor and the blood still sang inside her ears. She made a brave beginning of a smile, her lips tremulous with the effort not to wince. Then her clearing eyes became angrily aware that the slim, muscular body was encased in a tight tunic that bulged over an expanding chest, that the endless legs wore bell-cuffed trousers. That this Mack truck that had run into her, this iron crane that had swung her up off the floor as though she were a feather—was a *sailor!*

A sailor who was saying, "Gosh—you skate like the wind! I never thought you'd veer course!"

She moved swiftly, skated backward until her knees encountered the bench against the wall, and sat down.

"Beginners," she scornfully told his towering figure, "take the outside edge!"

There was a quick change in the eager eyes above her. Penny's scrambled wits recalled the blue marbles she had played with as a kid. They were like his eyes, which raked her from the top of her tousled hair down the slim lines of her beige covert suit, to the tips of her wheeled shoes. He missed nothing, probably not even the racing of her heart.

"So you don't—" his voice was deliberate, maddeningly slow. "—you don't like sailors! My mistake!"

He wheeled, touched his finger in mock salute, and was off in a glide that took him swiftly out of hearing.

So he missed the gasp of surprise that widened Penny's eyes and made the blood change her delicate skin to the soft rich pink. How did he know that? Her eyes followed the weaving figure of blue through the maze of skaters—those shoulders broad enough to block a door, moving with easy grace; the fair head held above them as though he were reaching for the sky.

Blood scorched her cheeks again. "Boy, can *he* skate!" She said the grudging words out loud, but in the noise of the rolling skates, no one noticed. And she had called him a beginner—a rude remark even when it was true.

In a moment she was on her feet, brushing her suit into smooth lines again over

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her hips, wanting to be trim and cool and perfect when those cold eyes came traveling her way again. They had to when he had circled the room and was on the home stretch.

**S**HE WAS a swift arrow in the moving stream of skaters just before he reached the bench, cutting into the narrowed inner circle of skaters. She knew that her tawny head would move faster even than that fast company—that more than one pair of eyes moving above slower feet would look admiringly at her as she flowed past. Maybe that pair of cool, ice-blue eyes might find it hard not to watch also.

She found those eyes looking down on her head; pacing her, finally matching her rhythm. They went once around the complete rink ignoring each other. Spots of color were high on Penny's cheeks. If this sailor, or any sailor, thought she was going to notice him, he was mistaken! She had wasted enough time on the Navy. Lesson one, she sternly reminded herself, is that sailors love lightly and often. Lesson two—that ensigns do the same!

Henceforth she'd walk—or skate—an even line, alone! Her heart would be carefully boarded up and marked, *Closed*.

"You're Penny Warren," he was saying, swaying to her slightest change in rhythm. He was looking straight ahead so that she couldn't see his eyes even after he had startled her with this announcement into looking up at him. "You use the North elevator at the Custom House and get off at the sixth floor. I've inquired. Just for the record—I'm Dirk Petersen, assigned to the recruiting station on the second floor. I just wanted you to know that I wasn't staging a pickup!"

She lost him at the curve because she skated on, and he skated out. She couldn't stop to turn—it wasn't allowed—and she couldn't skate with her head turned like a turkey looking back. She would only run into disaster again. When she came back to the spot where he had disappeared, she went through the line to the bench. But there was no sailor there. Only the

memory of a pair of big hands that had the strength of steel, and were very gentle. Only the memory of a hard, big chest against which she had collided and been shaken up. There was something else missing, too. The little sign over her heart that had been marked, *Closed*.

**T**HE BIG white arrows lettered, *Join the Navy*, wound from the entrance of the Custom House, through the black-tiled halls, up the rotunda of the wide stairs to the second floor. Penny had accepted them always as she had accepted the bustle and excitement that were constant in the corridors since December.

Waiting for the elevator, her eyes followed the signs curving up the stairs. No wonder the boys who streamed up those stairs with eager faces and grim mouths found the invitation irresistible. It was all she could do to keep her own feet from running up, too! A quick grin shadowed her lips, as she stood in the little puddle of rain she had brought in with her.

Her eyes darted up and down the corridor. Sailors, it seemed, never used the elevators. Their long, blue-clad legs made quick work of the steps instead.

If Dirk Petersen came barging in this morning while she waited for the elevator to stop for her, she'd act as if she had never set eyes on him. The fact that she had tossed in her bed the night before, and had dreamed she was tossing on the high seas—a big blond sailor warning, "Don't veer course!"—had nothing to do with it. He wouldn't know—and she would never tell him.

At the same time, each time she thought of his accusing, "So you don't like sailors!" her face burned, and she longed to find out how he knew. The way he said it, it sounded as though she were unpatriotic, or snobbish, or rude—or all three!

She stopped scowling, and flashed her sunniest smile as the elevator stopped.

"'Morning, Miss Warren, y'all look just like an angel, in that white thingamajig covering your head. T'ain't far from the truth, either!" the old man muttered deep in his throat, and his gnarled hand made

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a barrier across the space where Penny stood, so that the wet clothes of the in-rushing crowd would not touch her. Penny made herself as small as possible against the wall of the elevator. She didn't want anyone to notice that Jerry was taking care of her. He was such a dear.

Later, at the noon hour, she stood at the entrance of the building, out of sorts with the weather. It seemed hardly worthwhile to take her usual Saturday brisk walk for lunch at her favorite tearoom. With a shrug, she ducked her head, rushed around the corner toward the drug store.

She was inside the door, breathing hard from the tussle with the wind and the rain, throwing back the white hood of her raincoat, before she saw that the place was full of sailors! With her pale skin peach-blown from the exertion, her eyes wide with surprise and uncertainty, she looked particularly lovely.

A chorus of voices hailed her. "Over here, honey-chile!" . . . "Make way for a stream-lined job!" And a dozen other obvious but good-natured invitations. Panicky, she turned toward the door, her face scarlet. A shadow loomed beside her, and a deep voice with a laugh in it, said very loudly, "Pipe down, sailors!" and in the same loud voice, as though for their benefit, "O.K., Penny, let's go!"

**T**HE DOOR was opened by a hand above her head, her elbow was grasped firmly in a big, warm hand, and she was outside again. The rain felt wonderful on her hot cheeks, as she realized that it was Dirk Petersen who had saved her from the joshing.

At the same time she realized that he had his nerve with her—calling her Penny!—taking her in tow, as though he owned her!

At the corner, however, when he let go her arm and said stiffly, "You'll be all right now. The boys didn't mean any harm. I knew you didn't like sailors," she realized with a shock that she didn't want him to go at all.

He would have left, but her voice stopped him.

She turned squarely toward him, her mind racing. "How do you know," she asked furiously, "that I don't like sailors? What makes you so sure? Just because—"

From his towering height, he looked down at her. The white transparent raincoat pulled close to her slim waist was unbuttoned. Her dress, the color of a daffodil stalk, was open at the throat, and caught with a large topaz pin in a sharp V at the base of her throat. Dirk's eyes didn't quite reach the point of the pin. They lingered on the chin tilted up to him, at the corners of her mouth where the hidden dimples etched slight shadows.

The icy film in his blue eyes slowly melted. Maybe the warm June rain falling softly around them had something to do with it.

"I'll tell you how I know," he said. "I've watched you for the last three weeks—since I've been detailed here. You're darn sweet to that old crippled man who runs the elevator. You never run by the newsboy outside the door without buying a paper—lots of times you don't even wait for change. You've kept that revolving door from spinning too fast behind the back of people older and slower than you. You're always doing something nice for someone. You *like* people. My kind of a girl. So—" he took a deep breath, "—so, when you acted like a spoiled brat just because I skated into you, I knew it couldn't be me that made you mad." His eyes traveled soberly down the long blue length of him and came back to her. "It must have been the uniform!"

**H**E watched the bright color flame high in her cheeks, watched her wet her lips with the tip of her tongue before she stammered, "That's not true—that is—you don't understand—" The words dwindled and died away.

What could she tell him? Her honesty made her admit to herself that he had spoken the truth. But to put it that way—to make it look as though she despised the uniform of the United States Navy—why, why, it made her *hate* him!

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She found her tongue again. "You're so smart—you add everything up and make it come out right—for yourself! But you're not smart enough! Maybe I don't like men in uniform. Maybe I have a very good reason not to like them. Maybe I have reason to believe that a man in uniform thinks a girl is fair game. Just because he has other things on his mind, he forgets the rules. He thinks the war is like a big football game—fun, excitement, glamor, color, cheering crowds—and goodbye, I'll be seeing you!"

She had to stop for breath, and to swallow the angry lump in her throat. She looked away quickly, so that she had an excuse to blink her eyes. She'd be darned if she'd cry! So she missed the expression on the big sailor's face, missed the smile that came out of hiding on his wide mouth.

Her chin was suddenly cupped in a gentle hand, turned upward toward him again. "Gosh," he said softly, "what a heel that sailor was!" The look in his eyes, added, "And what a dope!"

She twisted away. "He wasn't a sailor."

"No?" It was quick, hopeful.

"An ensign," she added, and was immediately sorry.

"Oh." It had a flat sound. He didn't move, but Penny had the distinct impression that he had stepped away.

"New?" he asked.

Penny made herself busy shaking out the folds of her wet raincoat. "Yes," she answered shortly.

There was another breath above her. It wasn't a happy sound. "He'll be back," said Dirk matter-of-factly.

She looked up at him quickly, her eyes hopeful. Though she wasn't aware of that. How did he know? How did this man know so much? He had been clever in analysing her reaction to him yesterday. Maybe he knew even more than he told.

"Well—" he twisted the pancake sailor hat in long fingers. "Well—I guess I'll take my walk."

"Walk?" She was making conversation, like a silly kid, because she still didn't want him to go away. "In the rain?"

"Sure!" He grinned at her, and it sent a glow through her that she would have to recapture later—now she had to keep on talking. It was fun, exciting.

"Sure," he repeated. "Don't you like to walk in the rain?"

"YOU bet," she answered warmly.

"But you—a sailor—it's like a busman's holiday, isn't it?" She laughed, and it was a lovely mingled with the warm, misty rain, the smell of wet lilacs from the vendor at the corner, and the wet swish of taxi wheels hurrying past.

"Look out!" With the lightest touch, he had lifted her out of the way of splashing a taxi churned up. For a split second, she had the impression of having wings.

They walked toward the Parkway. It was his favorite walk, he told her—out toward the river where he sometimes helped kids fish with their home-made fishing lines, or just lay on the grass and watched students from the University practice in their long graceful sculls. They were developing into a good team, he told her. Sometimes he timed their stroke. Oh yes—to her quick look of questioning—he'd rowed, at college.

By the time they reached the river, Penny was hungry. They had stopped at a stand on the way, bought apples which Penny had stowed in the bag she carried; a bag of pretzels which, to Penny's delight, Dirk had made disappear somewhere under the tight confines of his blouse without showing; and a handful of chocolate bars which he carried carefully inside his hat. Penny found herself holding her hands deep inside her pockets for fear she'd give in to a crazy desire to find out with her fingers whether his hair was as smooth as it looked!

He spread the newspaper which he had kept tightly rolled up under one arm, under a big tree, and sitting under it, they ate ravenously. The smell of fresh wet leaves, of a river in the rain, would stay with Penny as long as she lived, to be brought out and savored whenever the first year of the war should be mentioned. To be remembered with a deep stirring of

## SWEETHEART STORIES

the senses that day she had come to know Dirk Petersen—sailor.

"I'm off duty until four," he told her, crushing a pretzel to make crumbs around the base of the tree for birds who would forage later. "Then I'm on detail again until eight—" He looked at her expectantly—like a little boy who wants a cookie but wouldn't ask for it.

SHE laughed at him. "All right, sailor! I'll be at the skating rink practicing that stop you interrupted yesterday. I thought," she said shaking her head ruefully, "that a ton of bricks had hit me."

He helped her to rise. "No—" he contradicted her, his voice low and his hands were warm holding both of hers tightly, "—no, the ton of bricks hit *me*."

She had to look up, so she could laugh it off. But the laugh caught in her throat at the look in his blue eyes—as though a thousand candles had been lit in their depths, burning deeply, steadily.

She was close again to that broad, hard chest, thudding now with the beat of his heart—the thought scudded through the turmoil in her head. It steadied her, pulled her thoughts back into focus, so that she pushed gently against him with her hands, so that she could whisper, "Don't spoil this—"

The candles in his eyes blazed, flickered, and were gone. His hands were very gentle as they released her, then were very busy tidying up the place where they had sat. With his back turned, he rolled the damp newspaper into a tight wad, and said above the crackling of the paper, "Forgot my rank, I guess."

It was like a slap in the face. Penny's hand flew to her mouth—Andy! She had forgotten all about him. And Dirk had remembered. For a moment, as he released her, she had been sorry that he hadn't kissed her, that he hadn't brought those eager, firm lips down on her trembling ones—even though she had begged him not to. Now she was fiercely glad he *had* listened. What a sap she was! . . . He would have thought her an easy mark—ready for a kiss with any man in uniform. For some deep,

urgent reason, she wanted him to think well of her; she couldn't bear it if he thought of her; she couldn't bear it if he thought of them as just a sailor and a girl—any girl.

She waited for him on the path with a little smile for him that told him nothing, that didn't even admit that she had heard that rumbling, "Forgot my rank—"

They had to hurry, after they found out what time it was, so that there wasn't much time for talking as they went toward the bus lines. Among the people there, all they could manage was, "See you later," with a grin that was white at the edges, from Dirk.

And a, "You bet!" that was apology and gratitude, and something infinitely softer from Penny.

The house was orderly and cool and very quiet when Penny let herself in half an hour later. She took off her raincoat in the hall, stepped out of her shoes so that she wouldn't track mud over the carpet, and stood staring at herself in the little mirror over the hall table for quite a while, before she became conscious of the white paper with Penny scrawled across it, staring at her from the table top.

"Darling," her mother had written, "Andy Martin's in town—his ship came in today—he's coming for you at six. I've laid out your chiffon. Have fun. Don't stay out too late."

She had to sit down quickly, so she sat on the floor, and read the note again. "His ship came in today. Call for you at six—"

SHE waited for the excitement. She waited for the wild, sweet racing of her heart to tell her that Andy was home again, that he was coming for her. Andy! But it didn't come. There was a barrier—something held it back. Penny pushed the rumpled hair off her forehead, bit her lip, dug the nails into her palm. Something was wrong, wasn't it? Something—Of course. She had a date with Dirk. She scrambled to her feet. She'd call him—explain. Then she realized she didn't know where to call him. All she knew was that he was "on detail". It could mean anything.



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Up and down the hall she stalked. She pulled off the heavy silver bracelet she wore—a favorite gesture when she was upset, or tired, or trying to think—and twirled it on her finger. Then came to the mirror again.

“Penny Warren,” she told her image, “you’re the two-timingest, most scatter-brained thing that ever walked! Use your head! It’s more than a place to park a permanent!” Like a child counting, she enumerated the facts on her slim fingers. “Andy Martin is your best friend; he’s home again; he wants you to go stepping with him. You cried your eyes out because he went out of your life, didn’t you? Well—he’s in again. So what? So you’re stubbing your toes over the fact that you have half a date with a sailor who walked you through the rain and fed you pretzels and apples—and I might add, *didn’t* even kiss you!”

She ran up the stairs, came short of scalding herself under the shower to take her mind off her problem, rubbed her slim, lovely body into a contended glow; and emerged from her room at five minutes of six looking like a slender flame—from the top of her shining amber curls, down the exquisite shadings of the billowy chiffon that went from the yellow of candlelight at her shoulders, to the deep, orange heart of a fire around her feet.

The bell whirred on the stroke of six—it was Andy Martin who had taught her uncompromising promptness—and she flew down the steps.

“Lollypop!” The silly childish name came out in a stronger, deeper baritone than she’d expected. Andy had grown older in six months. Then she was scooped up and hugged to within an inch of her life. He put her down finally. “Let me look at you! Gosh, you’re pretty! Freckles gone, hair piled up, thinner than you were—good, I like ’em lean—and a bit of an all right drag for an old man of the Navy! Let’s go!”

**H**E SNAPPED the brimmed cap on smartly, held out the long, weightless cape she had dropped on a chair. The cape

was made of layers of chiffon to match the dress. When Penny wore it she looked exactly as though some fairy godmother had waved a wand and covered her in shimmering gold.

He drew her toward him. “Penny,” he said huskily, “you haven’t kissed me.”

She looked up at the handsome face above her, at the dark eyes that burned in the deep sunburn of his face. This was Andy—proud, strong, very sure of himself—and her heart began that wild hammering she had looked for and couldn’t hear an hour ago.

Demanding, arrogant, his mouth sought hers. When his lips would have seared hers with the flame she used to know, she turned quickly, and it was the cool ivory of her cheek that he kissed.

He laughed, put one finger under her chin to bring her face back again. “Punishing me? Is that it?” Beneath the banter, there was hurt in his eyes.

Suddenly she was ashamed, ashamed that she should withhold so small a thing as a kiss when he had come running to her as soon as his ship was in. What a miser she was; what an unthinking prig she was! She lifted her sweet mouth to him, her eyes shining. “I missed you, Andy,” she said and thought of the sleepless nights, the hard-fought days when the mail brought nothing for her.

They danced and had dinner at the Bentley, small, brilliant, and exclusive. Other Naval officers off Andy’s ship were there, all deeply sunburned, chasing fun and hilarity as though it were the most important things in their lives. Penny, cut in on, admired, lavishly complimented, wondered whether the last six months had made so little impression on them as not to matter. Or, on second wiser thought, was it that they wanted to forget as quickly as possible, what they had done, what they had seen?

It was while she repowdered her nose, and took a deep breath of the cooling air on the balcony high above the city streets, that she tried to straighten herself out.

Long ago—or was it only yesterday?—while she was skating, she had told her-

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self that she was through with the Navy. She had convinced herself that Andy Martin had taught her a valuable lesson. That all her tears after he had gone, without saying a word to secure their future, was so much water washed under the bridge. That she was a smarter and wiser girl. She'd vowed she would have no time for sailors in her life!

And on top of the vow had come a tall sailor with a head of pale gold, with gentle hands, with deep understanding and knowledge in his blue eyes who had knocked the vow right out of her mind—as easily as he had knocked her feet out from under her at the skating rink. Well, she had stood him up—through no fault of hers. He'd never look at her again now. He had a strict sense of sportsmanship, of sticking to simple truths, of analysing a situation from all angles. He would probably come to the conclusion she hadn't been worth looking for, hadn't been worth the gentleness with which he had treated her.

She flung her head up to the clearing sky. It had stopped raining, but the air was still reminiscent of the rain-sweet air of the afternoon. She'd forget him easily enough—except when it rained.

**T**HAT is, if she could forget the words he had said sitting under the dripping tree, "I put my own seal on things I love, Penny. Back home there's a dog that'll tolerate others feeding him, but his nose will point toward the East every day while he waits for me. There's a sloop tied up in the lake that kicks like a broncho if anybody but me tries to steer her." He had laughed, as though it were a bit silly, "and the girl I love will wait for me—when I find her." His incredibly blue eyes had blazed into hers. "Does that sound silly to you—or stupid?" Penny had reassured him lightly, although her throat had been tight. Of course his girl would wait!

He had been about to kiss her, and she had stopped him. Penny's heart stood still for a blinding second. Would his kiss have been his seal on *her*?

She shivered, as though the June night

had turned cold, and with a swish of her skirts, turned hastily to go in.

Andy, a scowl on his handsome dark face, was watching for her, watch in hand. "Detail—Penny—down at the Yard. Some silly service dance. I'm officer of the night. Hurry, please."

They flew down the broad street to the Navy Yard in a powerful Navy car, an undistinguishable sailor at the wheel.

Sitting close to her in the rear of the car, Andy's arm was around her shoulders, drawing her to him. His voice, dropped below the purr of the motor, was langorous with the cocktails he had had, with the quickening of his senses which her nearness aroused. Penny knew that tone.

"Andy," she murmured, "the driver—"

He didn't listen. "Penny, I couldn't forget you. I tried—" Penny's shoulders stiffened, and the dark hid the burning on her face. "But I couldn't." He laughed. "You know, a Naval officer is better on the loose—maybe that's why the Navy wouldn't let young ensigns marry for two years—until they got something out of their systems, I guess. But that's changed now."

Maybe he was sensing the indignation that was drawing her away from him. His voice hurried. "It's not public yet, Lollypop, but the Navy abandoned its rule that officers can't marry for two years after they receive their commissions. I've two weeks in port. Penny darling, let's get married—*tonight!*"

She had to answer him. She couldn't just sit there like a bump on a log expecting him to know what she was thinking, expecting this ride to last forever, so that she wouldn't have to come to a decision.

**T**HERE were two Pennys riding in the big car beside Andy Martin. One, a freckled, long-legged girl with sunburned hair, saying earnestly, "I'll marry you when I grow up, Andy, if you'll just drag me to your Hops. Please, Andy!"

And the other Penny, slim, grown-up, who had cried stormily into her pillow because Andy Martin had *not* asked her to marry him. But who, because of something that had come into her life within the last

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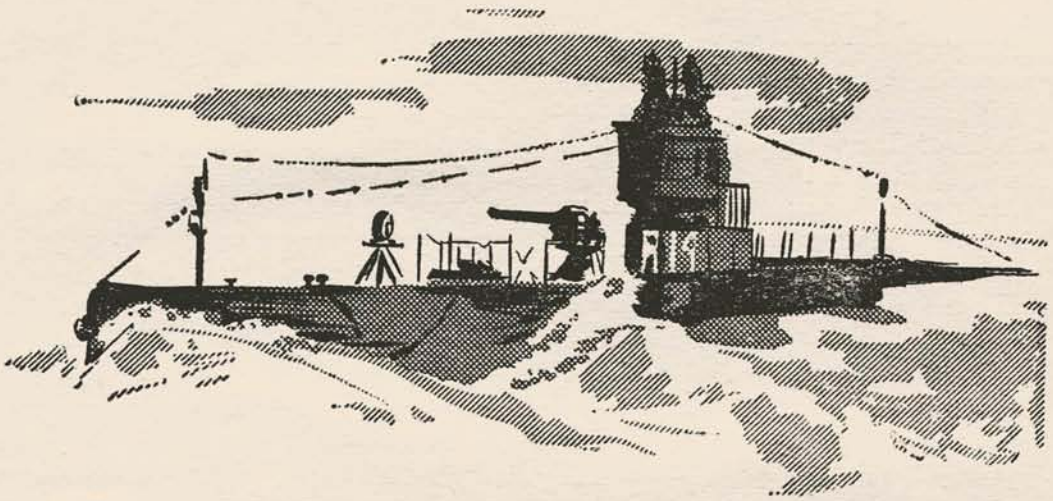
twenty-four hours, couldn't, for the life of her say now, "Yes, Andy darling, I want to marry you!" He expected her to say it. As he had a right to expect her to say.

She turned her face swiftly into the hollow of his shoulder, her eyes tight, her teeth clenched. "Don't tremble, darling," Andy was saying, "and don't hide your face. I want to kiss the bride!"

She gave him her lips, but she kept her eyes closed. She tried to shut out the picture of those lips that had said tenderly, "What a heel that sailor was."

ny's bewildered eyes swept the sea of blues. All these boys—all sailors.

In her drifting chiffon evening dress, she was a target for hundreds of eyes. Most of the girls, invited for the dance by USO organizations, were in street clothes. Penny walked close to Andy. Andy, stalwart, handsome, very severe, very much officer-of-the-night. This was glamor, romance, color; the world in which Andy moved, would always move. "Drag me to your hops, Andy, please," she had once coaxed. He was Annapolis, with the heredity of



Her hands were tight fists. He's not, he's not! she stormed at the silent blond shadow riding on the other side of her. A shadow who jeered. He didn't care what happened to you when he went away—he'll go away again. And you'll wait, and wonder what he's doing.

She sat up with an angry twist of her shoulders. The car was stopping. Andy was straightening his tie, smoothing his hair. He muttered, "You better powder your nose—we'll be on parade."

It brought Penny's senses back. Fiercely glad that they were at their destination, she stepped from the car, her head high, her slim shoulders thrown back, proving to herself that she was glad she was going to be Ensign Martin's wife.

The big Recreation Hall at the Navy Yard literally swarmed with sailors. Pen-

Navy in his blood. He would always follow the sea.

She was grateful that greetings, checking with the officer he relieved, took Andy's time. It gave her a chance to accustom herself to the sweep of admiring glances that came at her whichever way her eyes moved.

She breathed deeply . . . and looked straight into a pair of eyes so blue that they caught her breath, so coldly furious that she winced as from a physical rebuff. Dirk *here!*

**H**E CAME slowly forward as though against his will, as though he didn't want to come. His eyes were so glacial they sent a chill over her bare shoulders.

"Dirk," she breathed, "I'm sorry. Did you go to the skating rink?"

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"Yes."

"Dirk, I didn't know where to reach you—" She was begging him to believe her, forgetting where they were, knowing only that it was important that he believe it wasn't her fault. Decent, square—my kind of girl—he had called her. "Dirk—" she began again and wasn't aware that Andy was beside her until the sudden stiffening of Dirk's tall figure; the snapping to attention in the presence of an officer told her. Dirk's eyes, as they swept to Andy, had that opaque quality.

Andy's voice was stiff, annoyed. "Is this man bothering you, Penny?"

Penny looked up quickly. "No!" she said too eagerly. "No, of course not! This is Dirk Petersen—Dirk asked me to dance with him." It was an inspiration, and the blood rushed up into her face.

Andy gave his consent with a curt nod, his brows scowling, his eyes not quite trusting.

She swept away in Dirk's arms, forgetting to look back reassuringly at Andy, forgetting everything except the fact that she would have an opportunity to explain. He held her as though she were made of cardboard—and he of steel.

The blood drained from her face. What a fool she was! What did it matter to him what she had to say? From the distant expression on his face, from the stiff manner in which he danced, was sure he didn't want to hear any explanations.

"I want a drink," she said abruptly.

Dirk steered her expertly to the back of the hall where the canteen had been set up, mobbed now by clamoring sailors and laughing girls. Dirk watched her silently as she sipped her pop. She put down the bottle with a little crash.

"Let's get out of here for a minute, Dirk. I want to talk to you. Please!"

Dirk's eyes glanced for a second across the crowded room to the musician's stand, where they had left Andy. A little smile that wasn't humorous tightened the corners of his mouth. "Let's go!" he said.

Outside there was a tiny wooden porch, with a bare rail. Not romantic, not even inviting.

**T**HE WIND from the Navy Basin molded the soft dress against Penny's figure. The moon had come up, very pale—shedding just enough light to gild Penny's hair and dress and sandals and turn her into a little gold statue—just like her name. Dirk's eyes followed the moonlight on her as though to store the picture of her away for many voyages.

His voice expressionless, slow. "I went to the rink. When you didn't come by eight-thirty, I knew you wouldn't be there. A girl like you doesn't get to places late. I phoned your house and there was no answer. So I came down here because a sailor can get awfully lonesome wandering city streets." There was a heartbeat of silence. Then, "So Ensign Martin was the one who forgot the rules, who made you distrust men in uniform?"

Penny's cheeks stung. She started to say something. He wouldn't let her.

"Ensigns are permitted to marry now," he said quickly, his voice rough, very angry. "Is Martin going to marry you?" There was threat in his voice, as though he were challenging something hostile, and was not afraid.

Penny tried to speak but the tears in her throat made it hard to do anything but swallow. She tried again. "I—" and she saw Dirk through a blur. She knew suddenly—and too late—what it would mean to be sheltered by a man's deep sense of honor, to depend on him for strength, to follow him where he would lead because he had set his seal on her. She knew and was desolate, because it had come too late.

Her tear-wet eyes were turned up to him, her fingers laced tightly in each other to keep from touching him, when Andy appeared.

The scowl was a dark ridge across his sunburned forehead, his lips a grim line. He ignored Penny. "Petersen," he snapped, as Dirk became ramrod straight before him, "you know the rules?"

"Yes, sir."

"You know that enlisted men may not take ladies out of the hall without orders?" He looked from Penny to Dirk. An unpleasant smile touched his mouth.

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"Yes, sir."

There was a moment of silence through which the two men measured each other, the blond sailor a tower of suppressed energy, the officer very scornful, very sure of himself. Penny didn't realize that she was praying Dirk wouldn't hit him. Dirk didn't move, but his muscles seemed to have turned to rock.

"Report to your quarters, Petersen!" The words snapped coldly, as though Dirk were beneath notice. Andy's head inclined slightly, and a figure appeared out of the shadows to stand beside Dirk—a figure wearing an MP on his sleeve.

A sharp breath escaped Penny. *He wouldn't*—just because they had stepped out for a minute.

**S**UDDENLY she was a whirl of color beside Dirk. "I asked Dirk to take me out!" she told Andy furiously. "I—I felt ill!" It was a lie, but instinctively Penny knew that an officer couldn't countermand orders already given without good reason. And Penny knew she would fight for Dirk, no matter how she had to do it. Because she knew she loved him—and his seal was on her.

Andy looked down into her eyes. She faced his fearlessly. What he saw there made the anger die out of his face, made him pale. He kept up the pretense. "You should have told me," he said shortly, "I would have seen that you were taken home—safely." His eyes flicked in the direction of Dirk. "I'm sorry you behaved this way, Penny. You should have thought of my position—"

His position! That would come first, always. She would come last. She made her decision quickly and took a deep, deep breath to sustain her.

"I want to go home, Andy," she said fearlessly, her shoulders proud, "with Dirk Petersen! Goodbye, Andy, and good luck—always!"

She held out a firm slim hand. For a moment, she was afraid he wouldn't take it, afraid he would say something she would never be able to forget.

"Goodbye," he said at last, and touched

her hand. She might have known, of course, that years of precise training in form, that a generation of tradition would keep that dark head proud, those clipped words steady.

She waited for Dirk to bring her wrap. She waited until they were in the taxi before she let the tears come. She was crying for Penny Warren, the girl who cried once because a man had gone away without saying, "wait for me." Now that girl was crying because, when the man did come back, all she could say was, "No, I'm not having any." She didn't love him.

**A** PAIR of large, gentle hands, with great tenderness, cupped her shoulders, turned her tear-stained face to him. Penny's lips parted, her eyes sought his. The thousand candles were lit again.

"Penny," he said softly, "there won't be any gold braid to be proud of—no position of 'officer's lady' to live up to—but there'll be all my love, darling, forever, and ever. And when I kiss you, Penny, and set my seal on you"—a tender grin lid up his face—"it'll be for always. No turning back, Penny—ever."

She was close against his big chest again. Her arms were around his neck, her face eagerly turned to his. Their lips met, clung—held as they snatched at stars, and at peace, and at glory. When he let her go again, there were tears in both their eyes. "For always," he whispered.

"For always," she breathed.

They had to sit straight beside each other, their fingers warm and close, as the taxi swung into the lighted city streets. She looked up at the fair head above her, at the eyes which adored her. "There *is* a dog who watches, isn't there, Dirk?" she asked shyly, "And a sloop that bucks like a broncho?"

"And a low white house that looks out at the water," he continued for her. "Say—" his voice was eager with excitement, "I'll show you a stop for your skating that I figured out from my skiing. Penny, you'll love skiing on our hills."

"I'll love everything," she said. "I'll love everything, so long as you love me."



"I knew I'd find you some day," Shep said huskily. "And I knew when I did there wouldn't be any preliminaries to the real thing."

# Marry In Haste

By Doris Knight

**M**ONETTA GRAEME took a call from Washington and then answered San Francisco on the other phone. The office boy came racing in to see if she could see Mr. Warren of the 56 Club. Monetta signed ten letters and then pushed back her dark hair and said to her little blond secretary, "Let's see. Where were we? Oh, yes. It is rumored that the Kenneth Randalls will Reno-tice very soon. They say that Clara has better pastures staked out for—"

Monetta broke off to say, "What under heaven is the matter with you, Sallie?"

The little secretary, instead of taking down the notes for Monetta's famous gossip column, was crying wildly into a very damp handkerchief.

Sallie looked up. "You—you machine!" she stormed. "You selfish, egotistical, selfish machine, you! You know you promised I could get off at four-thirty to see Ned. He's flying in from Texas and he'll be at the air field for only an hour. Then he'll be in China or the Philippines or Australia, or—or anywhere! Maybe he'll die! This is the last chance I'll have to see him, maybe, and you said I could go. But just because some of the Society drips you think are so important are going to break up, you keep me here, while Ned—" She dissolved in tears again.

Monetta looked at the clock aghast. It was quarter to five. She took up the telephone receiver and said, "Dora, give me St. Swithin's Hospital."

While she waited for the connection, Sallie raged on, as if she were wound up and couldn't stop: "You aren't a woman at all! You're a—a mechanical tabulating machine of other people's emotions. And you haven't any emotions yourself. You never had a sweetheart and you never let yourself love anybody! No—it might get under your skin! You're—"

St. Swithin's answered.

Monetta said calmly, "This is Monetta Graeme, of the Call-Clarion. The gossip column, *Around Town with Monetta*, you know . . . Yes. Yes, I remember you people said you'd do me a favor if I ever needed one, after the way I killed that story that would have harmed the hospital. Yes. . . Well, I want an ambulance with a big siren on it. Right away. My secretary has to meet her fiancé at La Guardia Field. He has just half an hour and she's late now. She has to get there in record time. . . Yes. Yes. That's it. . . In five minutes, then."

She cradled the telephone and turned to Sallie. "Turn off the tears, pet! Get fixed up on your way out to the air field. You'll be there by the time your Ned gets in."

Sallie gasped out apologies and thanks and fear that Monetta was going to fire her, all at once.

Monetta said, "Get along with you, Sallie! This outburst was on me. I had it coming. Awfully sorry I forgot. And of course you won't lose your job!"

Sallie scuttled off, suddenly all smiles.

**M**ONETTA put a sheet of typewriter paper in her machine and pounded out: "Cupid Always Finds A Way, it seems. A little blond secretary of a gossip columnist got to the air field in time to bid her soldier sweetheart goodbye before he took off for the War Zone. That is news. But the way the gal got there was a bit different. In a hospital ambulance, no less. Cupid is certainly streamlined, these days!"

She ripped the paper out of the typewriter and rang for Jimmy, the office boy. "Tell them to put this at the bottom of my today's column," she ordered crisply. "They can cut out that item about the Stuyvesant Fowlers acquiring one of the lions at the zoo for a household pet."

Jimmy said, "Yes, Miss Graeme," in a respectful tone, and went racing off.

## SWEETHEART STORIES

Monetta shut the office door and went over to the mirror in the corner of the room. She was remembering something that she'd always been too busy to notice before. Jimmy was girl-crazy. He played up to everybody with skirts on. Except Monetta. He treated her like a—a machine.

An echo of Sallie's furious words came to haunt her. "You're a mechanical machine of other people's emotions!"

She looked at her reflection in the mirror. Dark eyes, bright and alert, with long curving lashes. A straight little nose and a generous mouth. Sleek glamorous-appearing dark hair with blue-black lights in it. A good make-up job. A slim, rounded figure, beautifully clad in a sleek black frock which cost eighty dollars at a Madison Avenue shop. Perfect legs and slim ankles and small feet, smartly shod.

"There's nothing the matter with the way I look!" said Monetta to her reflection. "And I have plenty of boy friends to take me places. I could go out every night in the week with a different man, if I wanted to. I'm a fool to pay any attention to Sallie's ravings."

The number-one telephone had been ringing away monotonously for quite a while. Impatiently Monetta went over and said, "Monetta Graeme speaking," in her crisp, businesslike voice.

A man's tone came back to her mockingly. "Oh, is it the famous Monetta Graeme? You sound exactly as I thought you would. Selfish, sexless, and awfully, awfully career-woman!"

Monetta gasped. "Well!" she began furiously.

He went on: "I think you're a louse, Miss High-and-Mighty Smart Monetta Graeme. Get that? A l-o-u-s-e. Something that burrows in and bites nastily. Something that never comes out in the open to find out what harm her beastly bitings do! You listen to me, Miss Gossip-Mongering Graeme! You broke up my sister's marriage with your baseless, beastly innuendoes. My sister's husband has left for Reno and my sister is contemplating suicide. I'm going to get you for what you've

done! I'll get even with you for this if it's the last thing on earth I do. Get that? I'm giving you this warning because I'm more fair than you. I believe in warning first, before I strike. Which is more than you do, you female termite!"

*Bang* went the phone, hurting Monetta's ear.

As she put it back on the cradle, her hand shook a little.

**S**HE'D been running the most popular gossip column in Manhattan's afternoon newspapers. She'd done a lot of good—helped a lot of people. But there were some who hated her and she was used to threats. But this was different. The man hadn't sounded like a crank. He was in dead earnest. His voice was deep and charming. She would have liked his voice very much indeed, if he hadn't been saying such awful things.

She shrugged, just to show herself she didn't care. Then, despite herself, she went burrowing through the week's gossip clippings which Sallie had cut out and clipped together for Monetta, for reference.

She couldn't find anything that could have referred to anyone's sister, except the crack she'd made about Paulette Parker taking that weekend trip to Atlantic City with that bogus count. The police had caught up with the count and so the story of Paulette's foolish indiscretion had come out.

Monetta closed her eyes, the better to think things out. It was a trick of hers. She thought honestly, Maybe it was my fault that the cops landed on Count Raffelli at Atlantic City. My column gave them the tip-off that he was there, and up to his old tricks of blackmailing a rich, foolish young matron out of her jewels because she'd sneaked away with him. The police had caught the pair, just as the Count was dropping his glamorous line and getting down to business by demanding Paulette's diamond bracelets. So they nabbed the Count, and Paulette will have to appear against him. She can't get out of it. But she shouldn't have been



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so silly about the man. Her husband would have found out about it anyhow, even if I had kept my hands off. The Count always works his blackmail both ways—the wife and the husband too.

**T**HOROUGHLY out of temper with the day and herself, she closed her typewriter and went to her dressing cubicle and put on the smart new hat with the wisp of attractive veil that had a heart in black sequins just over the left corner of her mouth.

The Hat Shoppe had donated the hat because she'd given them a plug in her column awhile back. She slipped into her sleek black coat and caught up the shining purse—sent by the Bag Store—and the long black suede gloves with her initials in white across the backs. (She'd bought those herself.)

The telephone rang and for a minute she was tempted not to answer it. But she told herself she was being a chump, so she drew a deep breath and said, "Hello. Monetta Graeme speaking."

It was Dinky Larrabee. He said plaintively, "What gives, Beautiful? I've been out here in this ratty outer office for a full half hour, waiting for you. Had you forgotten I'm taking you to the Flyers' Cocktail Party at Cynthia's?"

Monetta had forgotten. She was awfully glad, now that there was somewhere to go. She said, "Sorry, Dinky, press of business, you know. Be out in a jiff."

She thought as she put on brilliant lipstick, Dinky Larrabee is rich and Social Register and he's crazy about me. So that proves I'm not a flop as a female!

But Monetta had to be honest, even with herself. So she told herself, Dinky's wild about publicity. You can give it to him, lamb. That's the only reason he gives you such a rush. Stop fooling yourself!

Dinky sort of bore that out, the minute she arrived. He said, "You look ravishing, darling," not even looking at her. Then, "I hope some of the other columnists spot us together at this brawl, sweet. I love to be quoted as being the escort of the super-duper Monetta Graeme!"

Monetta smiled wryly and went to the cocktail party.

Monetta got around a lot. She had to, in her job, and it was easy because she was amusing and witty and entertaining. She always got bids to everything worthwhile.

Usually, she loved parties. They were such fun! But there was something the matter with this one.

Perhaps it was because Dinky drifted away from her the moment he saw that fluffy Deborah Durham, who was playing ingenue in "City Stars." The way he looked at Debbie was something very different from the calculating expression in his eyes when he gazed at Monetta.

Stew Edwards came over and kissed her and told her she was looking ravishing. It seemed to be the stock phrase that afternoon. He said, "Got any off-the-record dirt, darling?" and waited expectantly.

But there didn't seem to be any sparkle or wit in Monetta that day. Instead of telling him a barbed, amusing story about somebody's folly, she said bluntly: "Do I lack sex appeal, Stew?"

Stew said, "Of course not, darling. You have been lapping 'em up, haven't you? Better go home and sleep it off, love." And he drifted away.

**F**OR the first time in her colorful life, Monetta was left standing entirely alone on a sort of little marooned island, right in the midst of a crowd that was having a good time. She felt panicky, and looked around wildly for a lifeline.

She found it.

Clear across the room was a man, staring fixedly at her. He had big, capable-looking shoulders and he was taller than any other man in the room. His eyes were blue and the light glistened in his blond hair. He had a fine head, a rugged, sun-bronzed face. But it wasn't any of those things that attracted Monetta to him as if a magnet were pulling her his way.

It was his mouth. It had strength and humor, courage and candor, and sweetness. Just now that mouth seemed to say to Monetta, "Watch yourself, gal! I've

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been waiting for you all my life! When I kiss you, you're going to stay kissed. For keeps."

Perhaps, if all those things hadn't happened that day to make Monetta less sure of herself and her feminine appeal, she would have crushed the thrill she got, just looking at that man. As it was, she let herself go and her eyes went melting under his gaze.

He crossed the room to her on the instant, pushing people out of his way, as if he didn't know they were there.

Monetta's heart was thumping like mad by the time he reached her. Her cheeks were burning. It was so long since she'd blushed, she felt horribly self-conscious. He drew her into a quiet corner, and his blue eyes searched hers deeply.

"I knew I'd find you some day," he said huskily. "And I knew when I did find you that there wouldn't be any fool preliminaries or sparring. It would be just this way!"

Then he took her in his arms and kissed her long and passionately.

That kiss made her feel tinglingly alive and at the same time meltingly yielding as she clung to him.

She forgot she was in the middle of a chattering group of sophisticated people who laughed at love and scoffed at life and made fun of everything people used to call sacred. What she felt was no fleeting thing-of-the-moment; it was something strong and deep, yet tender. Something meant to endure.

When he let her go, he said, "This is real. I don't know how it came about or why, but it's something that was meant to be. You feel it that way too, don't you. You must!"

Monetta was silent, too moved to speak. She looked up at him, disturbed, wondering. Suddenly he smiled, and he said simply, "Let's get out of here. Away from the mob."

**H**E DIDN'T wait for her to agree. He just took her by the arm and hurried her out of the cocktail party and into the gathering dusk of evening outside. The



air was fresh and marvelous, after the stuffy atmosphere of the cocktail party. The sky, glimpsed between the tall, Arabian Nights towers of the city, was intensely blue. The whole world was more exciting and thrilling than Monetta had ever known it. She felt more tinglingly alive, too. She was keyed to everything romantic.

The man got one of the horse-drawn hansoms that drowsily wait for lovers on the edge of Central Park. He gave the old cabby a bill and said, "Just drive around in the park," and then he got in beside Monetta, sitting close to her.

She was so aware of the magnetism of this stranger that she trembled. He took her into his arms again and held her close to his heart, but he didn't kiss her again. Instead, he talked, softly, persuasively.

"I'm a queer sort of duck," he told her. "Incurably romantic underneath, hard-boiled on the surface. I've never let anyone know, before, how romantic I am. But you see, dear, I've had this dream in the back of my mind all my life. That somewhere, somehow, I was going to meet the One Girl, and when I did, she'd *know*, just as I did." He drew a quick, sharp breath. "And I promised myself something else, too. That in the first five minutes of play I was going to ask her to marry me. No courting, no preliminaries. Just two people who were made for each other, meeting and knowing right away—and getting married."

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She sensed that he was rather embarrassed, now that the proposal had been made. But she wasn't thinking about that. She was finding out that she'd heard his voice somewhere before. She'd been so swept off her feet before this that she hadn't placed it. But now she was sure. He was the furious Voice threatening her on the telephone this afternoon!

She said weakly, "But—we don't know each other's names, nor anything about us!" That was sort of incoherent, but she was beginning to feel an awful ache in her heart—a panicky sort of ache. "Maybe we wouldn't approve of each other with our minds, the way we click with our feelings."

He said, "That's the whole point of this, darling. We marry without knowing anything at all about each other. Take each other on faith. Are you game, darling?"

Monetta remembered that this was the man who hated her. Strange—

She said slowly, "Are you sure you don't know anything about me?"

He said, "Look, sweet. I know all the important things. You're beautiful, and you're all woman, all fire and light, and for some obscure reason you like my kisses. That's all I know. That's enough."

**M**ONETTA hugged those things close to her breast. He thought she was beautiful! He thought she was feminine and alluring. He wanted her, just as she was, and without questions. Well, why not get married like that?

She was pretty blasé about marriage, was Miss Monetta Graeme of the gossip column. Her scouts brought in juicy items all the time to prove that love was a snare and delusion, and that no one found marriage sacred, but just a sort of football to kick around. A lot of the people who had grown up together and been engaged for ages made the worst mess of marriage. She had thought, back in the far corners of her mind, that some day she would get married. But she had never fallen in love until now. Marriage had never seemed so awfully important to her until now. Then why not take a chance? It was sudden—

yes. But thousands of romances came that way suddenly, out of the blue. And if two people felt that way—

She drew a deep breath and said, "This is the craziest thing in the world and I hope you're sober and sane, because I'm in a pixie mood myself. I'm just bewitched enough to take a chance. Let's go!" He kissed her, and she was floating along on a cloud, after that.

Dimly she was aware that they exchanged the hansom for a taxi and drove out to the airport. Once there, they chartered a plane.

It was heaven, winging through the skies held close in this man's arms, having him say wonderful, magical things to her.

And then they were in Virginia, and they had to come down to earth. Monetta's real name was Karen Kirkpatrick. She'd used the other two names for so many years that she'd almost forgotten. But she was glad she had them to fall back on now. Especially when she saw him put his name down on the license as Shepard Blanding McClure, III. That was Paulette's brother, right enough. Her name had been McClure before her marriage a couple of years ago. Her father was Shepard Blanding McClure, II.

Monetta felt cold all over. "Look, Shep," she said quietly. "I know quite a lot about you now. You've been in the papers a lot. I should have recognized you from your pictures. I know that your family is rich and Social Register, and that you broke away from them to take a commercial flying job. I know that you've broken a lot of records and done a lot of important things for aviation, and that you fly clippers and things across the Atlantic. You've been trying hard to get into the Marine flying corps lately, but they won't let you because you're more important in a commercial flying job." She took a deep breath. "So you see," she went on, "since I know all these things, it isn't playing the game quite square not to tell you who I am. *Before* we get married." She stopped for a minute, to gather courage.

She thought, I didn't know a person

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could fall in love this hard! I'm burning up when I think of going through life without seeing Shep McClure again. I haven't known him two hours, and he's more important to me than breathing!

Shep smiled at her tenderly. "You can tell me afterwards whether you've had three husbands before this, or do a spot of murder in your spare moments. Come on, darling, we've got a date with the Justice of the Peace."

Monetta thought, I'm getting married to a man who is going to hate me like poison when he finds out who I really am. I'm letting myself in for a heartache I'm never going to get over.

But she married him just the same.

The ceremony was over in an incredibly short time. Shep kissed her tenderly. "My wife!" he said huskily, and there was such deep happiness in his voice that Monetta's throat tightened with the ache of tears.

**T**HERE followed a two-day honeymoon which was so perfect that Monetta realized that all her life she had been waiting just for this. This was what she had been born for. To be with Shep. This was why she had found every other man so boring and uninteresting.

Shep's mind matched her own in quickness. They became happy, congenial companions in no time, as well as lovers.

Shep brought her flowers every day and little gifts every time he went out. Once, when she came back into the big, charming old-fashioned hotel room where they were staying, he was gone. Such a sense of desolation swept over her that she felt faint and sick with the force of it.

And then she saw that written in the dust on the huge old-fashioned dresser were the words, "I love you!" and the words were repeated in powder on the mirror! Her heart sang again.

Those two days together were heaven.

She thought, We smart sophisticated round-the-towners were the dumb ones after all! The little girls who believe blindly in love are right. Nothing is more wonderful than this. Nothing!

Shep had to leave to take his plane

to Lisbon on the third morning. He asked her a question about herself, for the first time, on that fateful morning.

"I suppose you have an apartment in town?" he murmured, his face against the soft clouds of her hair.

Monetta drew a deep breath. She'd been trying to gather courage to tell him the truth, but it got increasingly difficult. Because Shep opened up to Monetta. He told her all his likes and dislikes—and the thing he hated worst on earth was a career woman!

He hated women reporters and women announcers on the radio, and most of all he despised women gossip columnists. She could understand a little why that was, now that she knew about that streak of sentiment which was so deeply ingrained in him. It explained why he had taken up cudgels so valiantly for his sister, Paulette. It was because of that very sentiment that Monetta loved him. He thought Monetta Graeme had ruined his sister's marriage and lost her chance of happiness. He didn't realize that Paulette was an irresponsible, little thrill-chaser, who would have come to grief sooner or later whether gossip columnists existed or not.

He repeated his question. "I want to send you a cable when I get to Lisbon. You'd like to know, wouldn't you?"

"Oh, yes," she gasped. "Yes!"

The end of the world seemed to have come, when she thought of anything happening to Shep. She looked out at the grey of the day outside. Rain was beating slantwise against the window-pane and sliding down greasily, in a monotonous way. Wind was bending the trees double. She thought of a clipper up there in the sky, scudding across the Atlantic, and the pit of her stomach hurt suddenly, agonizingly.

"Oh, darling, I do want to know!" she whispered, clinging to him. Then she gave him her New York address.

He raised his eyebrows slightly. "Swanky address, darling," he murmured as he wrote it down on a bit of paper. "I haven't married an heiress, by any chance, have I?"

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"I've found out that pride and anger are nothing to love," Shep told her.

She said, too hastily, "'Fraid not, dear." Then she added, "I haven't any parents or any relatives. I'm alone in the world."

He kissed her lingeringly. "I'm your family, darling."

Monetta thought wildly, as he held her in his arms in the thrilling half hour before they left to fly back to New York, "I'll give up my job and all my old life. I'll be just plain Karen Kirkpatrick, the way I started out three years ago."

It was awful, saying goodbye to him. He wouldn't let her go to the clipper. She was glad of that, because she knew all the political people and socialites who traveled

the clipper and discovery would be inevitable. She was still afraid to let Shep know who she was. Maybe some day he would be so much in love with her that she'd dare tell him, because the truth couldn't hurt him later. He'd understand.

**W**HEN Shep had been gone an hour, Monetta realized that she couldn't walk out on her old life and her old job. She had a contract.

She had a myriad contacts in this existence of hers which she had built up so painstakingly and efficiently, thinking it was exactly what she wanted for herself.

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She had phoned Bill Rand to take her place on Saturday, saying she had a bad cold and was going to stay in bed. Nobody knew she had been married. She put her wedding ring away in her purse, along with the wedding certificate and the gay little silver ribbon that had gone around her orchid wedding corsage. She wanted to put her wedding ring on a bit of ribbon and hang it inside her blouse where she could feel it comfortingly on her warm skin, but didn't. She put it in her smart handbag—and felt chilled with the bleakness of separation, crushed with its heartache, and lonely enough to die.

The rain kept thudding down, a dismal accompaniment to her lonely thoughts. The wind whirled around the tall newspaper building, moaning like a homeless ghost.

But with all her aching loneliness, it was nice to get back to the office. That fact hit her like a blow in the face. She hadn't expected it. She didn't love Shep the less, but she knew now that she wanted both Shep and her job. Which was just too bad!

Bill Rand eyed her speculatively. "You look like the well-known cat with the canary feathers around the mouth," he said frankly. Bill was married and had a couple of kids he adored. He added, "You look less like any gal with a bad cold in the head than any I've ever seen. If you weren't the aloof Monetta Graeme, who figures men are just to be kicked around, I'd say you'd gone overboard for some guy. Ah, me!"

Monetta was furious at herself for blushing. She said, "Anything break on Saturday, Bill?" to change the subject.

Bill nodded. "Plenty. Are you sure of your facts about that Paulette Parker thing, Monetta? You're getting sued again, and this time there's plenty of dough behind the boys bringing the suit. The Shepard McClures, no less."

"Oh," said Monetta, feeling faint.

Bill Rand said, "You'll beat the rap as usual, darling—don't look so sunk!" and went back to his own office.

Monetta sat there, feeling as if the bottom had dropped out of everything.

BEVINS called her and said worriedly, "Look, Monetta, we're behind you all the way on this Paulette Parker suit, but the paper stands to lose half a million bucks, and there isn't that much money in the world so far as we're concerned. We're up against it. The richer people are, the better and more boldly they lie."

Monetta said hesitatingly, "Maybe they'll settle out of court. Maybe I could apologize publicly in the paper and say I made a mistake."

Bevins bellowed so that her ear hurt. "Apologize my eye! What's come over you, Monetta? We're right on this thing and we fight to the death! The Call-Clarion never backs down. What are you thinking about? Besides, we're cooperating with the police on this thing. They want to jail this bogus count for a nice long stretch."

Monetta began to have a hunted look. The rain kept thundering down. She thought of Shep flying through all that fury of elements. She had to choke back a sob of fear.

Sallie Fletcher came racing in, late as usual and full of excuses as to how it happened. She was burbling with happiness. Her sweetheart had brought her a gorgeous diamond engagement ring. Now she felt just ever so much more engaged, if Miss Graeme knew what she meant. Monetta said she did.

Sallie's boy friend and she had talked and kissed a lot and had a wonderful time. Sallie had loved the ride in the ambulance out to the air field. She'd simply adore Monetta as long as she lived. And would Monetta ever forgive her for the simply *awful* things she'd said, that she hadn't meant at all?

Monetta said, "Think nothing of it," and mused to herself that Sallie's impulsive words had played a big part in landing Monetta herself in the midst of love!

The San Francisco correspondent rang up to give Monetta a hot lead on a new triangle in S. F. society circles. Betty Jane, who covered Manhattan's stage circles, popped in to tell about a new engagement between a leading lady and her head chorus man. Les Raymond, from the

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nightclub fraternity, had an item about a hardboiled nightclub proprietor falling for his star headliner. The telephone operator from downstairs called up to ask timidly if Miss Graeme would put her in the column. She'd just got engaged, and her boy friend was simply crazy about seeing his name in the paper.

Love, love, love! Everybody seemed bitten by it!

The wind kept whistling around the building in an eerie, lonely way. Thunder rolled and lightning flashed. And more flashes came in all over the country about people falling in love.

Monetta listened with much more sympathy than would have been possible for her three days before.

The day kept on exactly like any other day. The scouts from all over the country telephoned in their tip-offs. People asked Monetta to dances and parties. Dinky rang to reproach her for walking out on the cocktail party. "Everybody's talking about the way you and Shep McClure went to town on that kiss!" he finished, and there was more warmth in his voice than had ever been there before.

"You never coöperated like that when I kissed you," he grumbled. "How about stepping out with me to the Consleman's brawl tonight?"

"Sorry, Dinky. Booked to the teeth," she told him blithely. Evidently, Shep's kiss had shown the rest of her world that she was a woman, not a news-gathering machine!

The mail came in.

On the very top was a big envelope addressed in a masculine handwriting that made her heart turn somersaults. Shep's handwriting! It had become so familiar in the last two days she couldn't miss it.

Shep—Shep McClure writing to Monetta Graeme!

Had he known who she was all the time? She almost died. Her hands shook so that she could hardly get the letter open. The letters written on the page danced and jittered before her eyes.

"Miss Monetta Graeme," was the curt beginning of the letter.

Circumstances made it impossible for me to come in and tell you personally, to your face, what I told you over the telephone. But the next time I am in the vicinity I shall give myself that extreme pleasure. In the meantime, a suit has been entered against you for libel. It is nothing new for you to be sued, I know. But this is one suit you will not win.

My sister has told me under oath that she was never in Atlantic City with Count Rafelli. You were woefully misinformed, and you have done my sister such harm that nothing you can do now can undo that harm.

I hope your sleep is haunted by the thought of the woman you have pilloried into losing reputation, husband and home. But a ruthless person like you has no conscience. I had forgotten that fact!

Shepard McClure.

Monetta kept on staring at the letter. Sallie looked at her curiously. "What's the matter? Bad news, Miss Graeme?"

Monetta said, "Not at all," and folded the letter, touching it as if it burned her fingers.

For three hours she kept her mind strictly on business. It had become a matter of pride with her to turn out the best column possible just to justify herself to herself.

WHILE Sallie was out to lunch, she put in a call to Carla Lewis, the scout who had telephoned in the tip about Paulette Parker. When she got hold of Carla, she said, "Was it Paulette Parker who was with Count Rafelli in Atlantic City on the tenth?"

She wasn't at all surprised to hear Carla stammer and stutter and finally gasp out, "Oh, Miss Graeme, I made such an awful mistake! It was a girl who looked terrifically like Mrs. Parker, but it wasn't. They showed me a picture of this other girl and—"

"Who showed you a picture?" asked Monetta crisply, knowing perfectly well.

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Carla gasped, "Oh, I'm so sorry about this, Miss Graeme, but—"

"Count yourself off the Call-Clarion payroll as of now," sighed Monetta. "Not that it matters to you, for I suppose the McClures have paid plenty for you to rat on me."

She slammed down the phone on Carla's rapid protestations.

Lunch that day tasted like sawdust. When she came back, Captain of Detectives Salback was waiting for her.

"The McClures have cooked up a story that it wasn't Paulette Parker with that phony Count!" he snapped. "We know perfectly well it was, but they've got every loophole covered. Can you do anything about making her come through, Miss Graeme? It means a lot for us to lock up that phony Count. He's been preying on silly, title-crazy women so long. I thought this time we had a fool-proof case. Of course we should have made the McClure-Parker woman sign an affidavit against him right then and there. But she was having hysterics, taking it so hard that we felt sorry for her. We thought she'd have to come forward when the trial began anyhow. We didn't dream the McClures would pull anything like this!" He sighed.

Monetta said quietly, "I'll try to see Mrs. Parker, but I know it won't do any good. They're all vicious against me. As a matter of fact, I have a libel suit on my hands."

He got up. "We'll testify in your behalf, Miss Graeme," he said gruffly. "Sorry about this." He left.

Monetta sat there, feeling utterly sunk.

She read that letter over again. There was an unforgiving, stiff side to Shep's nature. When he found out she was Monetta Graeme, it would be the end for Monetta. She was due for that heartache she'd been fearing all along, and it was going to be such a bitter heartache that she felt like dying at the very thought of it. If only she hadn't let herself love Shep so much! But it was much too late now for regrets.

She thought, Somehow or other, I've

got to talk to Paulette Parker. After all, she is Shep's sister. There must be *some* good in her!

She telephoned the McClure town apartment, which was a twenty-room place in Park Avenue. No dice. She went there, but she couldn't get past the uniformed doorman.

Then she got her scouts to work. She knew Paulette's type. She wasn't the sort to mope at home. She'd be stepping out somewhere to cry on everybody's shoulder and gather sympathy and adulation on every hand.

Late in the afternoon Monetta got the dope. Paulette was going to the Consleman's party at the Ritz. That rang a bell in her memory. Dinky! Dinky had asked her to go to the party with him. She called him at once. He was more than delighted to take her. He sounded awfully smug about the whole thing, as if she'd just been playing hard to get. Monetta didn't care about that. She didn't care about anything. If only she could get Paulette to call off this suit!

**M**ONETTA got Filipe of the Waldorf to stay at his swanky beauty salon for an extra hour for her. He did it gladly, eager for a mention in her column. Her hair-do was a masterpiece, and he had his head operator give her a facial, saying, "Mademoiselle looks just the least bit tired."

Monetta agreed with him. She knew she looked as if she had been pulled through a wringer. Evidently a broken heart showed on your face. Her eyes looked enormous, and violet shadows lay deep beneath them.

The facial made her look young.

She dashed out and got a taxi in the pouring rain. The taxi driver recognized her and asked her to put his name in her column.

She wore a sleek black-and-white number that was quite daring. One half of the dress was white satin and the other half black velvet. It swirled around her lovely figure, whirling out fan-wise about her small black jet slippers.



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Dinky tried to make love to her in the taxi and she had to laugh to cover how annoyed she was. She was glad when they arrived at the Consleman's party.

Everyone in town who counted was there, and the first person Monetta saw was Paulette. Paulette, all in filmy white, looking just too innocent for words. She had a sort of filmy veil over her head, East Indian fashion, and it was a most appealing outfit.

Monetta waited for her chance. The moment Paulette was alone for a minute, Monetta shook off the stag line and went over to her. "I've got to talk to you, Miss Parker," she said, her voice shaking a little.

Paulette turned around with surprising swiftness. She said, "*You!*" and her pretty, soft baby face went ugly on the moment. Then her hand shot out, with plenty of force behind it. Monetta was so astonished, she just stood there, rooted to the spot.

But there was worse to come.

A man talking to a group of men and women nearby turned at the sound of that resounding slap. He stared, his eyes bleak and cold and hateful.

It was Shep!

MONETTA felt the floor billowing under her feet. She wished she were the fainting sort. But she wasn't. She just stood there, feeling chilled to the very heart.

He came over and took Monetta's arm, but there was nothing tender in his grip. Just iron hate. He said to Paulette, "I'll handle this!"

He took Monetta out of the ballroom into the lobby. Then he said, "You are lower than things that crawl, Monetta Graeme!" and his look seared her with its anger and contempt.

Monetta, always so facile with words, was struck dumb. She gasped out the thing uppermost in her mind. "What happened to the Clipper? Why are you here?"

Shep said curtly, "Bad weather. Grounded. We hope to get off tomorrow." He added, after an icy pause, "I came dash-

ing straight back to spend this extra day with my loving wife!" The way he said that stung. It made her shiver. "I went to your apartment, and your maid told me the true identity of the contemptible woman I had married!"

Monetta gasped, "It was your own idea, Shep, getting married without knowing anything more about each other—"

Shep snapped, "You could have told me you were the woman I hated, when you found out I was Shep McClure!"

Monetta said weakly, "But I'd fallen in love with you by that time!"

He didn't pay any attention to that. It was plain that he didn't believe anything she said.

He went on, in the same low, furious tone, "So you stoop so low in your garbage-gathering business that you even marry to keep out of a lawsuit! Well, Miss Breaker-of-Homes, this is one time you underestimated your opponents. Your being Mrs. Shep McClure isn't going to stop this suit! It's going to make things just that much worse for you. Because I'm going to get up there on the stand and tell how you tricked me into marrying you, trying to spike this suit!"

Monetta got mad. She said, "Everything you think is right, isn't it, McClure? Well, let me tell you *this*. Your sister hasn't a loyal bone in her. This isn't the first time she's cheated that nice husband of hers. Everybody knows she's a notorious thrill-chaser. She's just no good! If it hadn't been for the fact that the police wanted to nab the Count, I wouldn't have bothered to chronicle what everybody from here to California already knows!"

For a minute she thought he was going to strike her. He said things, low and indistinct, coming from between clenched teeth. Bitter, insulting things.

She thought frantically, Why do people who have loved each other hurt each other so hideously when there's a quarrel? All the passion seems to turn to venom. I wish I were dead!

Shep was talking more slowly now, deliberately. He said, "I suppose you're going to put your own heart in your col-

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umn for the world to pick at, just as you've done with my poor sister! Like fun you are—not *you!* When it comes to your own hurt, you'll crawl away by yourself and lick your wounds in a dark corner somewhere." Then he laughed cynically. "But I'm forgetting—you aren't hurt! You haven't any heart to be hurt. And pride is something you know nothing about. So I'm wasting sympathy over you, my dear Mrs. McClure! And if I ever see your lying face again, I hope I choke!"

A LONG time later, Monetta was back in her office. She wasn't quite sure how she got there. She'd been riding around and around in the rain in a taxi for hours. And now it was one in the morning and she was banging out copy in the stillness of the empty office.

Nobody was around but the watchman and a couple of reporters who had to stay by the teletype to be sure nothing big broke without the paper knowing. They were dozing in their chairs outside. The presses began turning at nine in the morning, as the paper was an afternoon paper.

Monetta said slowly, "He was right about one thing. I must take it, if I dish it out." Painstakingly she typed:

What well known gossip columnist with the initials M. G. got her face slapped by what young matron at the Ritz last night? Society is all agog over the fact that the gossip columnist married Shepard (Clipper Pilot) McClure at a veddy, veddy quiet ceremony in Virginia the other day. But when the groom found out the bride's identity, he repudiated her before everyone at yesterday's swank Consleman affair at the Ritz. He gets a Lisbon divorce when his Clipper lands there next trip.

She hesitated a long moment and then typed firmly:

It is rather a joke on the gossip columnist, as she has been reported hard-to-get, but it seems she is so-o broken-hearted that the torch is consuming her.

"There, Mr. Shep McClure!" she said, through her teeth. "That'll show you I can take it!"

All the rest of the night she worked, getting her column ready for the next day.

Sunrise was making the sky rosy by the time she finished. She laid the column on the desk with a note for Sallie to run it exactly as she had typed it out, and then she slipped out of the building and wearily went home.

THE town certainly buzzed the next day. Monetta went to the office with her head held high. She turned out her column as usual, answered telephone calls, and did her work like an automaton.

It helped to work. Nothing could ease the awful pain in her heart. But work did help, a little. It was like a sedative that dulled the tormenting thoughts.

Bevins was awfully worried about the trial. Things weren't going so well. It looked as if the McClures were sure to win.

The newspaper had been grand to Monetta. She felt she owed them a lot. She tried to think what she could do to get the paper out of the jam. Finally she thought of Ted Parker, out in Reno, establishing residence for the divorce. She put in a call to him.

He slammed the phone down on her, the minute he knew who she was. So the second time she called she said it was Paulette Parker, and when he answered, she started talking in a regular flood. He listened. Monetta could be awfully persuasive when she wanted. It was funny—the only time her gift of words failed her was when she talked to Shep. She loved him so much that she couldn't tell him how things really had been. She just choked up and went dumb.

She talked to Ted Parker for half an hour, until he said finally, "I think you're a swell gal, Miss Graeme. I'll go back to Paulette on condition that she stops the suit. I still love her. I guess love is something you can't turn on or off as you would a spigot. Knowing Paulette's wacky hasn't stopped my loving her, so I'll go back.

## MARRY IN HASTE

You haven't anything more to worry about."

It seemed he was right. The next day there was a reconciliation between Ted Parker and Paulette. They left for California on a second honeymoon. The slander suit was withdrawn, and everything was swell. Everything but Monetta's love and her future life.

She put the whole story of the reconciliation in the column. Then she waited, marking time.

Days slid by, leadenly. The Clipper was home. But Shep made no move to get in touch with her.

Worse than that, one day she got a folded paper that looked awfully legal. It was all in Portuguese, but it didn't need an interpreter to tell her it was a divorce decree. She put it away in a little box that contained a tarnished silver ribbon which had once been around a wedding corsage. There was a silly little doll Shep had won at the shooting gallery at that street fair they'd gone to, that second night, and the wedding ring, and the marriage license—ghosts of her memories. Queer how such a tiny box could contain all there was of life. . . .

**T**IME dragged on. Monetta made every attempt to see Shep. She hung around the landing field when the Clipper came in. She dogged his apartment. She rang up at all hours. Shep was too smart for her. She never caught so much as a glimpse of him.

She put that all in her column, baring her heart to the world, laying aside her pride. Because Shep had said she couldn't take it, as well as dish it out.

One afternoon, Bevins called her to his office. "Your column is losing ground!" he told her bluntly. "People don't like this personal soul-searching you put in as a lead item."

Monetta felt tears sting her eyes. "I'm sorry," she said. "You can have my resignation any time you like."

"Don't be a dope!" said Bevins sharply. "You're still the top attraction in the gossip world. Only do go slow on yourself, won't you?"

Monetta said, "I don't suppose you'd understand, but—that was a sort of penance. There won't be anything more about me in my column. I promise you that."

That was the night she saw Shep for the first time in two heartbreakingly long months. She'd gone to the opening of the Southy Galleries with Dinky. Everybody important was there.

Monetta was thin, and she looked as if she'd been living on nerve alone. But she was very smart in her hunter's green suit with the gay little green hat set on one side of her dark head. Dinky was proud to be seen with her. In fact, he got so sentimental he proposed marriage, in a half-hearted way. Monetta didn't even hear him.

Shep was staring at her clear across the room, just as he had done that first day when they had met at the cocktail party. For just an instant they looked into each other's eyes and realized the old attraction was there, stronger than ever. Then Paulette came up, and the thread between them snapped.

Monetta knew that it hadn't worked out with Paulette and Ted. Paulette had found a man in San Francisco she used to know a long time ago. She had sneaked out to meet him. Ted had packed up and come back to San Francisco without her.

The little tramp! thought Monetta resentfully, hating her with all her heart.

And then, abruptly, the things began to happen.

**A** MAN came into the galleries who had no business to be there. A down-on-his-luck, tattered-looking man with a gaunt face and evil, blazing eyes that didn't look quite sane. With a queer prickling of her spine, Monetta recognized him. Count Raffelli.

They hadn't been able to convict him without Paulette's testimony. But the McClure money and prestige had done their work. The bogus count found himself barred from all the old haunts where he had found gullible ladies with lovely jewels. The McClures had done what the police had been unable to accomplish. The Count was definitely out.

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And now, here he was. Nobody was paying any attention. The artist who had the gold medal painting at the exhibition was entering the hall. All eyes were turned toward him. All except Count Rafelli—his eyes were blazing with hate and they looked directly at Paulette!

With a swift, fateful movement, he jerked a revolver out of his pocket. He aimed straight at Paulette, and murder looked starkly out of his face.

Shep was standing with his arm linked in his sister's arm. If that bullet found its mark, Shep would be hurt, too. Maybe killed!

Without counting the cost, Monetta sprang forward, screaming a warning. She shrieked Shep's name as the bullet intended for Paulette found its mark in her own soft breast. She pitched forward on her knees, feeling queerly dazed, and not quite sure what had happened.

Then tearing pain began to rip at her ferociously. She hadn't known a bullet wound could hurt like this. She clenched her teeth to keep from crying out in her pain.

Dimly she was aware that people were crowding round her. Their faces wavered and spun about as if they were on a merry-go-round. She tried to speak Shep's name, but her strength was gone. With a little tired sigh, she lay still, her face as white as the crisp little pocket handkerchief in her top pocket had been, before it became crimson. . . .

Slowly, reluctantly she came back to consciousness. White walls. White ceiling. A smell of antiseptics in the air. A hospital, of course. She turned a little on her pillow and felt a stabbing pain.

Suddenly, remembrance flooded back. "Shep!" she whispered. "Was Shep all right?" Her voice seemed to come from a long way off.

Miraculously, Shep himself answered. His face was against hers. He was kissing her soft, tremulous lips. Kissing them wildly, passionately. Kissing back into Monetta the will to live.

Monetta dared not open her eyes. She thought contentedly, If this is death, it's

fine! and fumbled for Shep's firm warm hand. She curled her cold fingers trustfully around his palm and drifted off to sleep.

The next time she came back to consciousness she felt stronger. She opened her eyes and saw that the room was filled with flowers.

She asked the nurse about them, studiously keeping away from that beautiful delirium when she had dreamed that Shep was kissing her.

The flowers were from people in all walks of life. People she had helped. People to whom the publicity of her column had meant the difference between starving to death and a good job.

THE nurse bent over her and took her temperature. "You're a wonder, Mrs. McClure," she said. "Anybody else would have been dead after what you've been through! The bullet came within that much"—she held up her finger—"of your heart. It was a perfect miracle. And now, two days later, you haven't even a temperature. It's great! We'll have you out of here in a couple of weeks."

Monetta didn't hear anything but the fact that the nurse had called her "Mrs. McClure." She said, not quite daring to breathe, "Shep—"

"He's right outside, Mrs. McClure. Just where he's been all the time. I never saw such devotion. Never!" The nurse's eyes were misty. She smoothed Monetta's pillow, then added self-consciously, "My boy-friend is crazy about publicity, Mrs. McClure. If you could put me in your column, he might—"

Shep came in just in time to hear that. He kissed Monetta long and tenderly.

Monetta clutched his hand tightly. She gasped, "Oh, but I'm not going to have a column any longer, Nurse." That was to tell Shep she was hauling down her flag. She meant to add something else, but Shep cut in.

"Don't you believe her, Nurse. She's delirious! I'll see that you get in the column all right. You helped save my wife's life. I'll put you in the column myself, if Mrs. McClure doesn't!"

## MARRY IN HASTE

The nurse gave them both a very bright-eyed look. Then she tiptoed out.

Monetta gasped, "Shep, I—"

Again he wouldn't let her talk. "When you get well you can kick me," he said grimly. "I've found out a lot of things since that bullet went off. The first and most important is that pride and anger are nothing compared to love."

Monetta lay perfectly still and thought, I want to keep this moment forever.

He went on: "Next, Paulette got such a scare that she told the truth for a change. She's awfully sorry about everything, but—well—"

Monetta shook her head a little. She gasped out the thing uppermost in her mind. "You called me your wife! The nurse called me Mrs. McClure. But that Lisbon divorce—"

**S**HEP got red-faced all at once. "I'm a heel, darling," he said. An awful heel. I hate to have you find it out, but I am. That wasn't a divorce decree. You can't get divorces in Lisbon any easier than any other place. I just counted on your not knowing Portuguese and being too proud to get anybody to translate."

Monetta's heart was singing. "Then what was it, darling?" she asked him.

He grinned. "It said Decree at the top very impressively, and then it had both our names. It's a document that allows us to eat at any restaurant in town without a ration card!" He added, "Even when I was so furious with you, darling, I was figuring

on that document coming in handy one day when I could wangle a trip for us."

"Oh, Shep!" Monetta whispered. "Oh, Shep, I love you so!"

Shep said, "Before I kiss you within an inch of your precious life, Mrs. McClure, read this! I went down and wrote it myself to head your column. Monetta read:

What Clipper pilot is feeling like the Heel he is, because his wife, whom he treated abominably, turned the tables, by taking the bullet intended for him? The answer is: Shep McClure, who is writing this column today in his wife's absence.

Monetta didn't read any more. Her eyes were too filled with happy tears. "Oh, Shep, darling!" she cried.

Shep said complacently, "I can write a pretty nifty column myself, it seems. We got a lot of letters on this one, and Bevins says the paper's circulation has gone up five thousand! I'll help you with the column between flights, if you like."

Monetta saw through all the self-assurance and boasting now, and she knew that Shep was like a very small boy storming and blustering because he was scared he'd lost something terribly precious to him, through his own stubborn fault.

"We'll write a swell column together," she told him, holding out her arms. "In life and love as well as on the paper."

His kiss was passionate and tender and jubilantly happy.

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Love Is for Keeps

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"A man can't promise to love one woman the rest of his life, darling," Andy said.

# Love Is for Keeps

By Mary King Gilmore

**W**HEN SHE rang the Bellamy bell, Adele Holcombe felt more than just concern over the Bellamys' impending divorce. She had an almost personal sense of loss, as if her own marriage were cracking up before her very eyes. That is, if she'd had one.

Meg Bellamy was her best friend. She had introduced Buster to Meg. She had been bridesmaid at their wedding and had seen a lot of them during the four stormy years of their marriage.

She sighed. Love just couldn't end like that!

Suppose Andy hadn't disappeared on that grey, long-ago day? Suppose she'd been married to Andy these four years, instead of counting off each solitary day on a rosary of loneliness, and this was *HER* marriage, hers and Andy's, that was breaking up?

She shivered and pressed the bell again. *Her* marriage could never break up, for the simple reason that she'd never marry anyone but Andy. Even though he'd been gone four long years, she loved him.

But then, hadn't Meg and Buster been deeply in love too?

Buster Bellamy opened the door. "Oh, it's you, Del. Come in." He was in his shirt sleeves, his dark hair was ruffled, and she was shocked at the look of desperation in his dark eyes. "I thought it might be Meg," he said raggedly.

She looked around the disordered living room. "Meg hasn't come back then?"

"No." His voice was bitter. "She left me."

"I hoped she'd changed her mind, Buster. I'm so sorry!" Del sank forlornly into a chair. "I've tried so hard to convince her she's making a mistake."

She had been so sure that *this* marriage would last. A marriage made in heaven. She remembered thinking that, standing there in the sunlit church, in her shell-pink

dress and her bridesmaid's hat. She could still smell the lilies of the valley in her bouquet, hear the muffled crying of Meg's mother, feel the hushed solemnity of the moment when her two best friends had sworn lasting fidelity to each other.

She remembered, too, the white, awed look on Andy's face during that ceremony. He was only twenty, but she'd been in love with him even then.

Buster's tortured voice brought her back to the present. "She's divorcing me, Del. Can't you do something to stop her?"

The doorbell rang and a look of eagerness replaced his worried expression. "Gee! Maybe she's changed her mind!" He ran to the door and flung it open.

"Why, Andy Chilton, where did you come from?" Del heard him say. But it was a moment before that name really registered in her mind. Then she was out of her chair, crying, "Andy! Andy, is it really you?"

"Hello, Del!" His voice was just as she remembered it. And his hair! The minute he removed his hat, it fell forward, the same as always, in a curly, yellow mass. His face was still quite boyish, but his blue eyes were different. "Thought I'd come around and sit up at the wake!" he said.

"Wake!" Buster repeated dully.

"Yes. I was around when your wonderful romance was born. Now I'm here to help you bury it."

**D**EL'S eyes still searched his face for signs of change. His cynical words matched his eyes but were incongruous when you looked at his youthful face and long lanky figure. Something has changed him, she thought, but what? Is it disillusion over Meg and Buster cracking up, or is there something else? Something deeper, more personal?

"When did you get back?" she asked. "Are you staying, Andy?"

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"Came yesterday. I've got my old job back at the Roxy. Well," he dug his hands into his pockets and some coins jingled. "Don't they generally serve drinks at a wake?"

So he would be working as projectionist at the theater again, just as if the past four years had never been. The thought of Andy living and working in the same town made her tingle with excitement.

She wanted to take that lovely feeling home with her, to keep it new and shining, so she picked up her bag and gloves. "You two stay and drink. I have to get home to bed."

"I'll take you home," Andy said at once, following her to the door. "My car is outside."

They said goodnight to Buster, and Del thrilled to the touch of Andy's hand on her arm as he helped her into the car.

"Live in the same old place?" he asked.

"No. I live with my aunt on Beach Street. Did you know that Father died two years ago and that I'm a working girl now?"

"Yes, I knew. Where do you work?"

"At Quantell's. From nine to five, mending silk hose for the store's customers. What have you been doing, Andy?"

"Trying to grow up, mostly."

Del felt a small shock at his words. What did he mean? She watched him, driving easily, apparently relaxed.

"What's wrong, Andy? I don't know, but you seem strange. The old Andy would have kissed me hello," she said.

"That's easy!" He pulled over and stopped the car. "This Andy would kiss you hello, too."

His lips were firm and warm on hers, and impetuously she put her arms around his neck. But just as all the pent-up yearning of four years surged over her, he released her.

"Hello!" he said and turned back to the wheel.

"Hello!" she whispered. She thought, aching, He didn't really *want* to kiss me! It was if he'd said, "You asked me to kiss you and I did—so what?"

THE CAR stopped in front of her apartment, but he made no move to get out. He was silent, his fingers absently drumming on the wheel.

Perhaps he was in love with someone else. After all, in four years—why, he might even be married!

She moistened her lips and said, "I suppose you've been in love many times over in all this time."

"No, I haven't."

Another little silence. Del felt her nerves tighten.

"So you forgot me, just like that?" she said.

His elbow jabbed her arm as he dug his hands in his pockets. "How about you? I hear all the news, you know, Del. One romance after another, in and out of love a dozen times since I left. And how about the chap named Blakley? The one you left standing at the church?"

"I wasn't in love with any of them," she said hotly. She couldn't tell him that she had gone from one romance to another, trying feverishly to fill the void in her heart, trying to smother her longing for him. "As for Blake, I—I thought I could marry him, but I just couldn't go through with it. I didn't love him enough."

"Love!"

The scorn in his voice was like a slap. What could have happened to make him so cynical? She wasn't sure she liked this new Andy. She said sharply, "What's come over you? You're not the same Andy!"

"No, thank heaven!" he replied fervently.

"I'm sorry I asked you to kiss me."

"Don't be. You're a darn kissable girl, Del. I guess you know that. But with you, kisses and engagement rings are all mixed up with each other."

"And what's wrong with that?" she flared, and then could have bitten her tongue for having said such a thing.

"Engagements have a way of leading to marriage." He pushed his lanky body out of the car and came around to open the door. "But you see, Del, I'm not in the mood for matrimony."

Ah, I hate him! she thought as she



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tossed restlessly that night. To have him back after four years, only to have him say he's not in the mood for matrimony! But why?

She longed to delve further into the fascinating mystery that was Andy, to know what made him so bitter. Yet she was afraid. She sensed that knowing would mean heartbreak for her. But heartbreak or no, she vowed silently, I've got to know!

**R**OSE CHILTON, Andy's cousin, gave a party for him the next night. Del danced with Andy, to the music of recordings, and wondered why she'd been so upset the evening before. Here she was in Andy's arms, all their friends automatically paired them off together, and the future held magical possibilities. As her smoke-grey chiffon skirts billowed across his neatly creased blue trouser legs, excitement glowed in her grey eyes and flamed in her cheeks.

"Andy," she cried, with a new recklessness, "Tell me you're glad to be back, glad to see me!"

His arm tightened about her waist. "I am. You're even prettier than I remembered you, Del. I used to think there wasn't another girl like you in the world."

She tilted her head, and as she spoke only a small edge of sharpness cut through the surface smoothness of her voice "Were you in the mood for matrimony then?"

He looked down at her, at the dark hair that grew in an intriguing point on her broad forehead, the grey eyes shadowed by long, black lashes, at the sweetly curved mouth.

"If any girl could change my mind," he said, low, "it would be you!"

Happiness flowed in on her like liquid gold and she caught her breath. "Andy!" she whispered "Andy!"

Later, although she had anticipated a long ride in the moonlight, he took her directly home.

"The moonlight," he said, "plus that starry-eyed look you're wearing would be too much for me, I'm afraid. Did you know I'm called gun-shy Andy?"

As he lifted his hand to the door handle, Del taunted him, saying, "You're afraid! And I don't mean gun-shy. You've been evading my questions ever since you got back."

He couldn't leave her as he had the evening before, with her heart full of unanswered questions—questions that would torment her all through the sleepless night.

His hand fell away from the door handle but he did not look at her. "I *am* afraid," he said very distinctly.

Del turned toward him swiftly, shocked at the bitter intensity of his voice. A queer, hot feeling, almost of fright, spread through her as she listened. Each word seemed to come from down deep, as if it had been hurting him for a long time.

Before she could speak, Andy went on, his voice bitter.

"I should have known how it would be. I should have had sense enough to stay away. I want to kiss you—more than I've wanted anything for a long time." He pressed his hands against his head. "You've got me all mixed up again!"

He wanted to kiss her. . . . A wild, tingling joy throbbed in her blood and she thought, He's *going* to kiss me!

As if he read her thoughts, he said brutally, "Don't let it throw you!" He straightened, and his voice was once again bright and casual and uncaring. "There are matrimonial strings tied to your kisses. Well, not for me, my pet!"

She gripped his arm and shook him furiously. "You're the most exasperatingly stubborn man I've ever met! You're conceited and hard and hateful! I hate you, do you hear? Thoroughly!"

"All right!" he said harshly. "You asked for it! You wanted explanations, so I'll give them to you. Now—once and for all!"

"I'm listening, Andy."

**H**E PUSHED back his hat and that unruly lock of yellow hair fell forward again. "I was best man at a wedding once. The first wedding I'd ever seen. I was only twenty."

He paused. When he spoke again, his voice had dropped to a low, thrilling pitch

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and Del felt queerly breathless and hurt.

"Remember the sun on those stained glass windows? And the flowers? And the organ music that made you tremble and want to—want to darn near bawl?"

"Yes," she said huskily. "I remember!" Her throat ached at that memory. If only it could be recaptured! If only another such moment could be hers, this time with Andy the groom and she the bride! Dear heaven, was that so much to ask?

She leaned closer as he went on: "Then the music stopped. The minister asked the usual questions and they answered, without hesitation. Then there was the ring. Remember how hushed and solemn it all seemed?"

"Yes," she said softly.

He stirred suddenly and sat up straight. "Yeah. All the props were there. And when you're twenty they can seem mighty impressive. But I've never forgotten how shocked I was at the idea of a man standing up there and vowing to love one girl until death. It struck me all of a heap, thinking how wrong it was. They stand there and swear, in all sincerity and solemnity, a vow they have no more idea of keeping than—"

"Oh, Andy, of course married people keep their vows!" Del protested. "You're just being cynical!"

"How about Buster and Meg?"

"They're just one case. You can't—"

"How about my mother and father? Since they divorced each other, they've been married and divorced several times. They get a divorce almost every other year, as casually as they'd buy a coat."

She laid her hand on his arm. "I'm sorry about you parents, Andy. But you mustn't let them make you bitter."

"Do you know what percentage of marriages end in divorce?"

"Oh, why get statistical!" Dell was getting a little desperate. "If a girl really loves her man she'll keep her vows—and so will he."

HE SHIFTED about to face her. "You want me to believe that *you* would?"

She could see his face in the half light coming from the corner street lamp. She whispered, "Yes, I would!"

He threw back his head and laughed. "The more you talk the more you prove *my* point. For four years you've flitted from

romance to romance—what on earth makes you think you wouldn't flit from divorce to divorce?"

The air in the little car was charged with tension. Every bit of her being was alert to catch the feel of what lay behind his words. Did he mean that he loved her but didn't trust her?

"You don't know what I would do—you can't speak for my behavior, either

present or future," she told him defiantly.

"No, and neither can you. Well, you'll never catch Andy Chilton standing before an altar making vows, when he doesn't have the least idea what he's doing!"

"But if you loved a girl—"

"Love has nothing to do with it." He reached out and gathered her hard against him. His mouth fastened on hers.

"You see?" He thrust her back. "That could be love. But the only thing a girl like you wants is marriage. You want marriage first, last and always. Love in a strait jacket."

He opened the door, stepped out and held out his hand for hers. "You see, we're right back where we started, Del."



"I've never loved anyone else, Andy."

## LOVE IS FOR KEEPS

He was a brute, she decided later, as she tearfully prepared for bed. No, he was adorable. And lost. He was bitter, and mistaken and stubborn. But she loved him.

He came to the store the next morning and stopped at her counter. "Del, I've something to say to you. I'll be around about seven-thirty tonight. Right?"

"All right, Andy." She watched him walk out of the place. He's got the lanky look of a boy, she thought, and with that glowing, pink-cheeked face and yellow hair he looks about seventeen. Until you look into his eyes.

She bent to the silk stocking she was mending. I wonder—will he tell me he's changed his mind about marriage?

Perhaps if she made herself indispensable to him—if she could be so necessary to his happiness that he'd want her to be near him always. . . .

**T**HEY drove in silence. The night was starry and still, and the air was filled with the myriad elusive smells of awakening earth in spring. Del sighed, vibrantly aware of Andy, here with her in the dark intimacy of his little coupe.

The car stopped, the motor coughed into silence. She wondered if he'd kiss her.

"I thought I'd tell you," he began, not looking at her, "that I'm going away again."

A chill blacked out the warm anticipation she had felt. "Going away! But you've just come! You've got your old job back and you said—"

"I said I was staying. But now—well, I can't stay. I want you, more than I'd ever dreamed I could want any girl. But you want marriage and I don't, and so I have no right to stay. If I go, you'll find someone else. Someone who'll say all the right vows and make all the right motions—"

"Don't be so cynical!" she cried, her lips trembling. "It doesn't become you!"

"I'm sorry." His voice sounded weary. "I'm only trying to tell you how I feel, honestly. I want you now. I'd swear anything in order to win you. But how do I

know how I'll feel ten years from now? How do *you* know? I suppose you think we could get married anyway. And if we fell out of love—well, there's always divorce. But there's no such thing in my book. Once I'm married it's for keeps. That's why I'm scared. I can't promise a thing for always and be sure I can keep such a promise. Don't you see?"

"No, I don't see," she faltered. "All I know is that I love you. I've never loved anyone else, and I never will."

"Oh, Del, my sweet," he murmured raggedly and took her in his arms. There was desperation in the way she clung to him, and sweet abandon in her response to his kiss. He pressed her fiercely against him and she twined her arms tightly about his neck. Every nerve in her body throbbed with the knowledge that he loved her.

His kisses grew less fiercely demanding, became sweet and achingly tender.

"Sweetheart," he breathed, "I can't leave you. I can't!"

Her lips left his lingeringly. "Then don't go, darling," she whispered.

"But what will we do?"

Del still had her fingers twined in his hair. She gave a little tug. "We'll work it out somehow. You'll see."

But later, as she tossed feverishly in her bed, she could not see a way out. Andy loved her, but was afraid of marriage.

There's always love without marriage. Yes, but do I want that? There's something so shining and beautiful about my love for him, I want to keep it that way. And I will.

But the next evening Andy had made up his mind, once and for all. They sat before the fire in her apartment, Andy on the edge of his chair as if ready for instant flight, and Del on the sofa, her puzzled eyes on his face.

"What is it, Andy?"

"I'm enlisting in the Army. That's final, so this is goodbye."

"Oh, no, darling. No!" Del put out her hands like a hurt child. "But why?"

"Don't touch me," he said irritably. "I can't think straight!" His usually ruddy cheeks were pale and he sat worrying his

## SWEETHEART STORIES

lower lip with his teeth. "I've been waiting for the draft board to get around to me, but they haven't, so I'm going to hurry it up a little, that's all."

**T**HAT'S all. But she knew it wasn't all. He was running away from her, from love, from responsibility.

"Aren't you afraid you'll be asked to swear something?" she asked sarcastically. "You'll have to swear to fight for your country when the time comes and—"

"That's different. That's got nothing to do with love."

"Oh, yes it has. You love your country, so you swear to fight for her."

"Shut up, will you!" he cried and got to his feet. He ranged around the room, his hands thrust deep in his pockets, his head bent. "I'm leaving Tuesday, Del, we have till then."

Del sat clasping and unclasping her cold fingers. His voice came to her from another part of the room. "We have the weekend, Del. Why can't we go away somewhere, have just a little while together?"

He came and threw himself at her knees. "Will you, Del? Do you care enough?"

She reached her hand to his hair. Ridiculous, how she loved to twine her fingers in that tumbling forelock of yellow curls!

No, don't touch him. Just be very quiet, she told herself.

"I'm sorry, dearest," he murmured in a lost sort of voice. "I can't offer anything permanent."

A broken little laugh escaped her. "You're still not in the mood for matrimony, is that it?"

"Don't!" he cried, and caught her in his arms.

She turned her head from his searching lips and shrank away from him. He didn't care—not enough. Not nearly enough.

"I can't go," she said, very cool now, her emotions under control. "It would cheapen the way I feel about you. I love you, not for just today, but for all the days to come and the hours between. If you're ill, or maimed, if you need me or not,

I'll still love you. I want to be by your side always. I'll love you till life is done. And," she ended huskily, "that can only mean marriage, Andy."

**H**E LOOKED at her in silence for a long time, then got slowly to his feet. Del watched him put on his hat, one hand pushing back his hair, the other adjusting the hat just so.

She caught him at the door. "Andy!" she cried. "Andy!"

She threw her arms about his stubborn neck and laid her forehead with its dark widow's peak against his mouth. "Andy," she faltered, "give me time to decide. I'll give you my answer tomorrow night."

He kissed her swiftly. "Tomorrow night then," he said gently, and was gone.

The next day was Friday. Del sat at her counter, her head bent over endless stocking runs. Her needle flashed in and out. It was go with Andy, or lose him forever.

She blinked her long lashes so hard to hold back the tears that they threatened to entangle themselves in the silken mesh of her work. For she knew she would not be going with Andy.

She told him so that night. "My answer is no, Andy."

His face blanched at her words, but he didn't seem surprised. "I guess I always knew what your answer would be," he said slowly. "Well—goodby!" He turned away with dragging steps. "Goodby!"

Del couldn't bear to watch him go. She fled to her room and smothered her sobs against her pillow. Why was a beautiful dream given to a girl, only to be snatched away? Her memory of Andy would always be an empty, hollow thing, for there would be no remembered happy fulfilment to their love.

Gradually, her sobs merged into the deep breathing of sleep.

Del went through the usual routine on Saturday morning, a quick shower, a plain black wool dress zipped up with one hand while she reached for clean hanky, purse and gloves with the other. All her motions were automatic, from force of long habit. For her mind was busy dragging her

## LOVE IS FOR KEEPS

thoughts back from dangerous ground.

This was Saturday. She and Andy might have spent it together.

She walked past the hall telephone.

Then she stopped and stared at it, her eyes filled with longing. She had only to lift the receiver—! She had loved Andy and longed for him so long—

Her heart began to race as she picked up the receiver and dialed the store. No, she wasn't coming to work for a few days.

That was that. Now, for Andy's number. With a few snicks of her red-tipped finger, she burned her bridges behind her.

She heard Andy's voice and she said unevenly, "Andy, it's Del. When do we start?"

His whoop of joy made her smile. "Darling! Can you be ready at eleven?"

"I'm ready now."

"Swell. I'll be right there."

**T**O DEL, there never had been such a gloriously golden spring day. She lowered the car windows to sniff the fragrant wind, laden with the earthy smells of growing green things.

She sat close against the reassuring warmth of Andy's body and thought fiercely, "I am happy. I am!"

Then, suddenly, the fierceness was gone. There was only a bewildered emptiness in

her heart. Andy enlisting next week; Andy going away, this time for good. He would forget her.

"Andy," she faltered aloud, "if you really loved me you'd know it's for keeps. You wouldn't be afraid to promise—"

He said, not taking his eyes from the road, "We can turn back, you know."

She lifted her chin and said, "I'm not afraid, Andy. You know that."

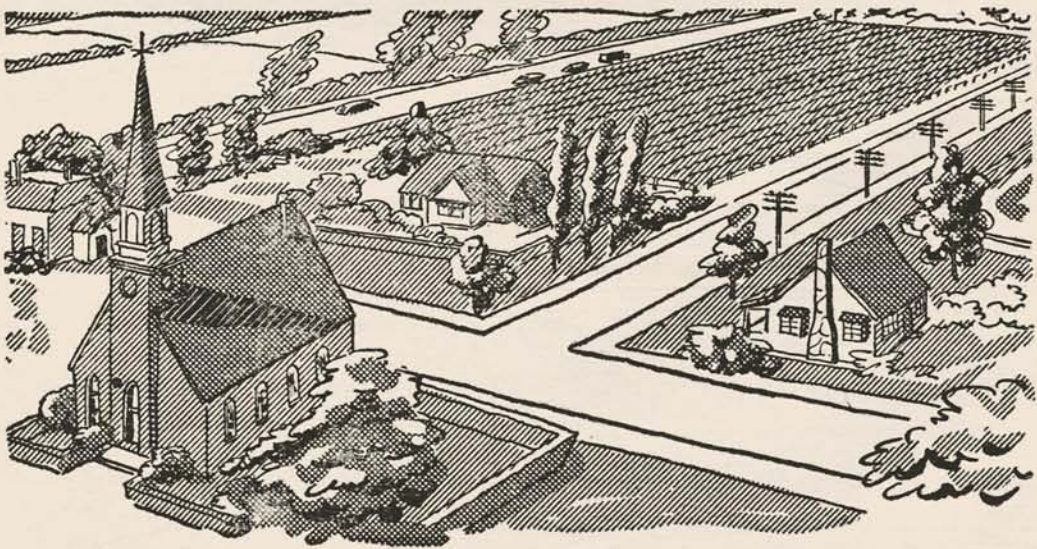
"Yes," he laughed suddenly. "You always were a plucky little thing. One of the things I admired about you. In fact, I wanted to marry you once. When I was about seventeen."

Her grey eyes wistful, she whispered, "What happened to that Andy?"

"Oh, he got lost in the shuffle of life. By the time I was twenty and you and I stood up for Buster and Meg, my father had divorced my mother, remarried and divorced again."

His voice was bitter again and Del wept inside for that young Andy's hurt and disillusion, and for his loneliness. She felt a deep anger at all the forces that had combined to change him into this remote, cynical, young-old man.

**H**OW DOES it happen so many couples celebrate their golden wedding? she wondered. Do they live together that long



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because of marriage vows, or because their love is great and enduring? People like Uncle Bert and Aunt Kate, for instance.

Suddenly Del caught her breath. An idea, new and shining with untold possibilities, possessed her. She turned to Andy and said eagerly, "Have you decided where we're going? If not, may I choose the place?"

He grinned indulgently. "Sure. Whatever you say."

"Let's go to my Aunt Kate's in Bayonville. That's in this direction, about fifty miles off the main highway."

"I don't care how far it is," Andy interrupted amiably, "if that's where you want to go, we'll go. But have you thought what Aunt Kate might think?"

"I don't know. But we visit there today. We can leave tomorrow, on some pretext."

But we won't leave tomorrow, Del thought determinedly. By that time my plan will be working, and if we do go, there will be a wedding.

They turned off on the gravel road to Bayonville and Del was silent, busy with her thoughts. Her plan *had* to work. Twelve hours or more under the neat roof of Uncle Bert's farm house and Andy would be a convert. Once he saw how happy they were after years and years of marriage, he would slough off his warped ideas and all would be well.

"Dear God," she thought achingly, "make it so, please!"

"This is it," she said, and sat up with anticipation.

"Don't forget," Andy said urgently, as he stopped the car beside the wide front porch, "that I love you sweetheart. Do you know that? That I love you?"

"I'm not forgetting," she murmured softly, "not for the space of a single heartbeat. I love you—and I always will."

He bent to kiss her just as a woman's surprised voice exclaimed, "Well, Adele, dear!"

They looked up to see Aunt Kate standing at the car window, smiling. "Is it really you? Get out and come in. It's been a long time since you've come to see us!"

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You, too, may experience that strange mystical Power which comes from talking with God, and when you do, if there is poverty, unrest,

unhappiness, or ill-health in your life, well—this same God-Power is able to do for you what it did for me. No matter how useless or helpless your life seems to be — all this can be changed. For this is not a human Power I'm talking about—it's a God-Power. And there can be no limitations to the God-Power, can there? Of course not. You probably would like to know how you, too, may talk with God, so that this same Power which brought me these good things might come into your life, too. Well—just write a letter or a post-card to Dr. Frank B. Robinson, Dept. 55, Moscow, Idaho, and full particulars of this strange Teaching will be sent to you free of charge. But write now—while you are in the mood. It only costs one cent to find out, and this might easily be the most profitable one cent you have ever spent. It may sound unbelievable—but it's true, or I wouldn't tell you it was.—Advt. Copyright, 1939, Frank B. Robinson.

"Aunt Kate," Del said, as she kissed her aunt's soft cheek, "this is Andy. May we stay the night?"

"How do you do, Andy?" Kate gave him her firm handclasp. "Of course, child!

SHE started up the steps just as Uncle Bert came up from the barnyard. "If it isn't little Del." His seamed old face was even more wrinkled when he smiled.

He shook Andy's hand. "Andy, eh? Wasn't he the lad who used to tease the life out of you when you were about fourteen?"

Del smiled, remembering. "The very same," she said.

"You might tell your Uncle Bert," Aunt Kate's voice cut in, "that if he'll go kill a chicken, I'll make hot biscuits for supper."

Del stared at the older woman with open-mouthed surprise.

"Tell your Aunt," Bert said, his eyes carefully avoiding hers, "to go in the house and tend to her affairs, I'll tend to mine!"

He stalked off toward the chicken runs. Del's eyes were bewildered as she and Andy followed Kate into the house. What

on earth was wrong here? Was it a game?

By the end of supper, it was only too clear what was wrong. Her aunt and uncle simply weren't on speaking terms.

Just when I needed their shining example so terribly much! she wailed inwardly, acutely aware of Andy's poorly hidden *what did I tell you* expression.

Uncle Bert pushed back his plate and asked with elaborate casualness, "You young folks getting married?"

Andy said nothing. Del felt her cheeks burn and floundered about for words with which to explain.

"Tell your uncle to mind his own business," Kate came to her rescue. "His nose is longer than his sense. *Are you getting married, child?*"

Del felt the tears near as she looked helplessly at her aunt. "I think it's wonderful," she said wistfully, "that you two have stayed married over fifty years. Have you ever regretted promising to love until death?"

Aunt Kate's bright gaze fastened on Andy with sudden understanding. "Never!" she said emphatically. "Not for any-

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thing!"

She talked on, but was careful to avoid looking at Andy. "After a while, it's not the things you've promised, so much, that keep a man and wife together. It's the little things, the habit of love, the memories—"

"Huh!" Bert pushed back his chair and, with great dignity left the room.

"There comes a time," Kate continued, as if no interruption had occurred, "when you know there never could have been anyone else. Then promises don't matter. You don't fret at them any more. Marriage vows are bonds, yes—" Kate's wise old eyes rested for an instant on Andy's bent yellow head—but they wear longer and bind less when you don't strain against them."

There was a silence, then the scrape of a chair as Andy got up and went out. Del's sigh was so deep it might have been a sob.

"Never mind, child," Kate said softly. "Darling, don't fret!"

"But you and Bert aren't even speaking!"

"Oh, that!" Kate snorted. "Just one of our little diversions. Sauce for the pudding that gets a mite stale at times." She began energetically on the dishes. "The good sound things, the things that matter, are still there, my dear, underneath."

WHEN they'd finished the dishes, Del asked, "Aunt Kate, what started you off this time?"

"It's Bertie," Kate replied with exasperation. "He wants to sell the farm and live in town. Getting frisky ideas in his old age."

Del wandered thoughtfully out to the barnyard, and met Bert just returning from evening chores.

"Why do you want to sell the farm?"

He looked around at his well-tilled acres with fond pride in his eyes. "Why? Because the work's too much for Mama. She's failing, Del. I've been trying for two years to get her to move into town, take life easier. But she's a mighty stubborn woman!"

"You wouldn't want her any other way,



## FOR LOVE ALONE

would you?" Del understood them now.  
"No—I reckon not."

A sweet-scented dusk lay in soft folds over Aunt Kate's old-fashioned flower garden when Del found Andy wandering there.

When she stood near him he said quietly, "It was a neat idea."

"You guessed?"

Then her wonderful plan had failed—most certainly so, now that Andy had guessed what it was. She sighed.

"I'm sorry, dear." His hand was warm on her arm. "I wish I could be everything you'd like me to be."

"Oh, Andy dearest," she cried, and slid her arms about his neck, "please marry me."

He pressed her close and laid his cheek against hers. "I want to," he whispered huskily, "but—"

"But why?"

"Del, as I see it, love comes and goes without our volition. These old folks are just lucky, that's all. They didn't know fifty years ago that it *would* last. A man can't promise to love one woman the rest of his life. He doesn't know that he'll do any such thing!"

"Then you don't love me." It was a statement, bitter and bleak.

He laid his lips hotly against her. "Oh, darling, I love you so! Enough to promise anything!"

"No." She disengaged herself and turned away. "I don't want your promises unless you mean them."

He made no move to stop her as she went listlessly into the house and up to the room that Aunt Kate had given her. That was that, then.

She looked somberly at the silver moonlight that sliced across the old-fashioned spread on the bed. And then suddenly she was crumpled up on it, crying. "It might have been so beautiful!"

**W**HEN she came down next morning, Andy was at the breakfast table with Kate and Bert. She sensed a difference at once, as all three turned to look at her.

"Darling," Andy said, rising, "how would you like to have Kate and Bert stand up

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for us?"

"And how would you like to get married right here in this house?" Bert asked.

"I'll make the cake myself," Kate added happily.

Del stared at Andy, breathless.

He folded her into his arms. "Yes, dearest—married," he said gently.

Del stared wonderingly past Andy's shoulder as Bert smiled at Kate. She saw him pat her hand awkwardly, then he cleared his throat.

"Why, Aunt Kate," Del cried happily, "you and Bert are speaking again!"

Kate smiled entirely without embarrassment. "Andy here made us ashamed of ourselves," she explained matter-of-factly.

Del looked at Aunt Kate, at the quiet serenity of her brow, her deep, understanding eyes, and thought, No matter how they disagree, she knows, without even reaching out her hand, that he's right there. They're close, even when they're apart. I wonder if she knew that when she married him, fifty years ago?

Kate looked up and met Del's eyes, the wide, questing eyes of youth. "The more you give," she said gravely, "the more you find you have to give, and the more life gives you in return."

It was as simple as that. Del smiled warmly, then followed Andy out to the sunlit porch. "So you're in the mood for matrimony now?" she asked with a quiet smile.

His face was grave as he said, "I'm asking you to marry me, Del, because I love you. The way I feel now, it will endure till the very end of time."

"Oh, darling," she cried, "that's all there is to it. Falling in love with each other was something outside ourselves, it just happened. But now we'll be together, and together we'll make that love deep and enduring. Why, Andy, it will never die!"

Like a man who has wandered far in bitter weather and come home again, Andy drew a deep breath of peace and contentment. The cynicism was gone from his eyes. "For always!" he said. And the tenderness and passion of his kiss was a vow, a pledge to all the years ahead.

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YOUR LODGE  
EMBLEM HERE

YOUR INITIALS  
HERE  
**FREE!**



This beautiful three-color life-time Identification Plate carries your full name, address and social security or draft number.



**Also FREE** If you order at once we send you this beautiful Identification Key Tag and Gilt Chain to match, hand engraved with your name, address, city and state. Will last a lifetime.

Men:—Here, without a doubt, is positively the greatest Billfold and Pass Case Bargain that you'll be likely to see for a good many years to come. For a high quality Calfskin Billfold, beautifully engraved in gold, with your LODGE Emblem and Name, you would expect to pay up to \$4.50 and consider it a marvelous buy. If you take advantage of this sensational introductory offer, you can get this superb genuine Calfskin Wallet and Pass Case for only \$1.98, and we will send you absolutely free a specially designed three color lifetime Identification Plate, which carries your Social Security Number, your Name and Address or your Army Draft Number. This fine grain calfskin Billfold must actually be seen to be fully appreciated. Besides the spacious compartment at the back which can be used for currency, checks, papers, etc., it has three pockets each protected by celluloid to prevent the soiling of your valuable membership and credit cards.

When closed, this handsome Billfold has the soft velvety feel you find only in quality Calfskin. Your LODGE Emblem and Initials, are beautifully embossed in 23 karat gold on the face of the Billfold. Due to difficulty in obtaining choice leather because of war conditions, the supply of these Billfolds is limited. Remember if you send your order promptly, we will include absolutely FREE, a beautiful identification Key Tag and Gilt Chain to match, all hand engraved with your Name, Address, City and State. If after receiving your Billfold and Free Gift, you don't positively agree that this is the most outstanding bargain you have ever come across, return them to us and your money will be cheerfully refunded in full. Send your order today, without fail so you won't be disappointed.

## Rush This Coupon For This Once-In-A-Lifetime Bargain!

**ILLINOIS MERCHANDISE MART,**  
Dept. 240, 54 W. Illinois St., Chicago,

If you belong to a LODGE, state name here

Gentlemen: I enclose \$1.98. Please send me a Genuine Calfskin, Billfold with my name and Lodge Emblem engraved in 23k gold. Include absolutely free, a life-time Identification Plate carrying my full Name and Social Security Number, or Draft Number. Also include FREE an Identification Key Tag and Gilt Chain to match, all hand-engraved with my Name, Address, City and State.

My Full Name..... (Please print clearly)

Address .....

City..... State.....

Social Security Number..... Army Draft Number.....  
 Please ship the above C.O.D. for \$1.98 plus a few pennies postage and C.O.D. charges.

**IMPORTANT!**  
This Triple Combination Billfold makes one of the most handsome and appreciated gifts you could possibly give to any man! If you have a boy or a friend serving his country, surprise him with this hand engraved calfskin billfold as a gift. Send your order today!

# EASY WAY...

# Tintz Hair

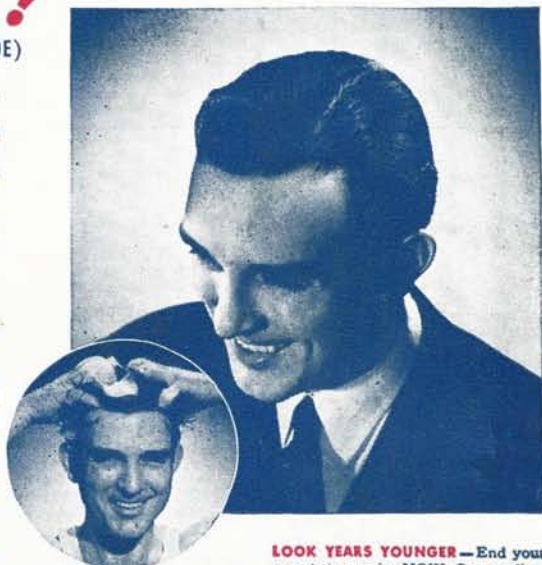
## JET BLACK!

(ALSO 7 SHADES OF BLACK, BROWN, TITIAN AND BLONDE)

*New Creme Shampoo instantly imparts lovely black color to hair that is*

**STREAKED • DULL • GRAY  
FADED • GRAYING • AGEING  
BURNT • LIFELESS**

THIS remarkable new creme shampoo discovery, Tintz Creme Shampoo Hair Coloring, lathers and washes out dirt, grease and grime as it *instantly* gives hair a real smooth, Jet Black Tint that fairly glows with life and lustre. Don't put up with gray, faded, dull, burnt, streaked, off-color hair a minute longer. Tintz Creme Shampoo contains genuine Paraphenylene Diamine and is a real Instant Hair Coloring. The first application leaves your hair completely tinted; black, lovely, easy to manage. No waiting for results. Colors so smooth and even, experts find it difficult to detect. Won't hurt permanents. Now being specially introduced all over America by mail for only \$1.00.



**LOOK YEARS YOUNGER**—End your gray hair worries NOW. One application of Tintz completely tints gray, off-color hair so it will not be detected. Order today on our guarantee of "satisfaction or money back" offer.

## SEND NO MONEY FOR THIS AMAZING NEW HAIR COLORING Mail Coupon on Guarantee Results Must Delight You or No Cost

Tintz' chemists have at last perfected an amazing new hair coloring method. It is a creme shampoo containing genuine PARAPHENYLENE DIAMINE, the best hair coloring agent known to mankind! Tintz Creme Shampoo Hair Coloring *instantly* colors all gray, streaked, faded hair right in your own home to a natural-like, lasting color that matches and defies detection. Won't wash off or run off. Positively will not affect permanent waves. Leaves hair soft—easy to manage.

**CHOICE OF 8 LOVELY SHADES**  
JET BLACK—BLACK—DARK BROWN  
MED. WARM BROWN—MED. DRAB BROWN  
LIGHT BROWN—AUBURN (TITIAN)—BLONDE

We want you to try Tintz Creme Shampoo Hair Coloring. We want you to take advantage of this special introductory offer and mail the coupon today. Send no money. On arrival of package, deposit only \$1 plus postage and tax with postman. **READ THE CAUTION**—Use Only as Directed on

Label—then shampoo-tint your own hair right in your own home. We are sure just one trial will convince anyone who wishes to dye their own hair that here at last is the hair coloring of their dreams! But if for any reason you wish to return the empty Tintz package, and you alone are the judge, do so in 7 days. We will immediately refund your \$1 and tax without question. This is today's big offer to anyone who wishes to INSTANTLY color hair! Don't delay but mail the coupon now—sure!

**SHAMPOOING SPREADS COLOR EVENLY.** It is impossible to do a blotchy job with Tintz Creme Shampoo Hair Coloring. If you can follow easy directions—results are guaranteed. Tintz contains PARAPHENYLENE DIAMINE—the best hair coloring agent known.

### MAIL THIS COUPON TODAY SURE

TINTZ CO., Dept. 91, 11,205 N. Michigan, Chicago, Ill.  
Canadian Office: Dept. 91, 11,22 College Street, Toronto, Ont.

Send one full size tube Tintz Creme Shampoo Hair Coloring in shade checked below. On arrival I will deposit the special introductory offer price of \$1.00 plus 10% tax and postage charges with postman on guarantee I can return the empty tube for any reason within 7 days, and you will refund my \$1 and tax. (If money comes with order, Tintz pays the postage.)  3 for \$2.50 plus 10% Federal Excise Tax.

Jet Black  Dark Brown  Med. Drab Brown  Auburn (Titian)  
 Black  Med. Warm Brown  Light Brown  Blonde

Name .....  
Print Plainly

Address .....

City ..... State .....