

**A
Maid
and a
Million
Men**

by
James G. Dunton

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indiscreetly by James G. Dunton

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A Maid and a Million Men

*The Candid Confessions of Leona
Canwick + Censored Indiscreetly by*

JAMES G. DUNTON



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To

THE BULL OF THE BOULEVARDS

Because

“There weren’t enough medals to go ’round!”

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A MAID AND A MILLION MEN

CHAPTER 1

THE MAIDEN'S PRAYER

There was a party up in Heaven the night that I was born and my mother's Guardian Angel was playing one of those now-you-see-it-and-now-you-don't shell games with the Court Jester while the Head-Man so far forgot himself, under the influence of the chorus of angelic yessers, as to do sleight-of-hand tricks with the Vital Statistics and the Orders of the Day. The whole court laughed to see such sport and even my mother's Guardian Angel must have thought it was a good joke on my father.

I heard the angels laughing as I came into the world and I cried out, as soon as I could, that it certainly didn't take much to entertain some people. Angels have no sense of humor, anyway; I've since discovered that you have to go in the other direction if you want to appreciate good jokes. Why, up there in Heaven, the whole court thought this was a wow, judging by the celestial thunder-peals of glee which accompanied the parlor tricks, but if you can see anything funny in playing a trick like that on an unsuspecting couple of innocent young lovers who thought Birth Control was a pullman porter, then I hope you go to hell where red-hot jokes are the devil's own sport!

Furthermore, the joke was not only on my parents, but also on us—for, you see, it happened that not only was I twins but also the other half of the consignment was a boy who should have been a girl while I was a girl who should have been a boy. The Head-Man certainly proved himself a magician; he scrambled our souls and temperaments and everything else so thoroughly that it would have required a better man than the Court Physician to put us together again as the Creator intended us to be, before that weak moment of kittenishness.

Even so, you'd think the Shipping Clerk would have hesitated at sending out a boy in a girl's body and vice versa. Of course, the two bodies did look very much alike, but we were unashamedly naked at the time and you'd think that even a government clerk would notice something funny in such a parcel. Perhaps my Guardian Angel matched pennies or shot craps with the Clerk, and the latter may have rolled a natural for my brother and an even number for me. After seeing some of the other shipments that went out on my birthday, I'll believe anything's possible. I recently met a man, born on that same day, who sniffs like a rabbit, eats like a pig, walks like a woman and brays like an ass; and I know a woman who would be a cat if she had a tail. The Clerk must have been on the party, too, and maybe had a little too much nectar besides. Anyway, the Head-Man scrambled everything from frogs to elephants and nobody else unscrambled them, so if your birthday was mine you probably decided long ago that Heaven isn't the most efficiently operated production plant that can be imagined. Even on good days, the service is rotten: nine times out of ten when you place an order for a boy you get a girl or vice versa—no wonder a lot of the circus freaks were born on my birthday!

My brother and I looked exactly alike. Indeed we were quite a biological achievement, because we even had identical moles in identical positions on our left cheeks. Father was actually quite proud of us and I think the burden of having twins was really responsible for his economic success, for he proceeded to accumulate more than enough money after we made our début in 1899. In fact, he became so successful that he never stayed long enough in any one city for us to become conspicuously familiar to even our nearest neighbors. He was always on the move, organizing new projects, developing new enterprises, rescuing his own and others' investments and turning everything to profit. He was a hard-working man and he loved to keep busy, but I think that all that hustling around year after year had a lot to do with mother's

untimely death when we were only ten years old. She succumbed to typhoid fever, but that was only the last straw, for she had never really had a chance to get strong and healthy after we appeared on the scene.

After her death, the head of the house didn't know what to do with us, it being obvious that he could not give us any care or attention and still keep up his program of industry; but he finally settled the problem by arranging a plan with our Aunt Elinor Canwick, his spinster sister, under the terms of which he provided liberally for us and for her on condition that she take charge of us and supervise our education. He gave Aunt Elinor carte blanche in all matters except one: he stipulated that we must receive, aside from whatever cultural finish she might provide, a thorough training in some practical occupation, in order that we might be able to earn a respectable living should our going to work become necessary through unfortunate circumstances. More specifically, he strongly advised that "they be trained in secretarial work, because such work will give them the best opportunities for improving their positions and for keeping in touch with the better class of people."

So we went to live in Wakeham with Aunt Elinor and I had even less chance to be as boyish as I felt because our dear Aunt had certain rather definite ideas about the limits of a young lady's sphere of activity. Also she was a confirmed art enthusiast and just as soon as she saw any signs of talent in either of us, she promptly did everything in her power to encourage us in the direction of artistic careers. We went to the best schools and had the best tutors obtainable; we traveled abroad and absorbed culture in many lands; we developed a certain amount of artistic creativeness and appreciativeness. And yet Aunt Elinor did not neglect the kind of training which Dad advised: indeed, I think he was rather proud of us, for we really did become quite proficient after studying stenography, typewriting, business English, commercial law, filing, and lots of other purely commercial subjects and had made them still more valuable by having mastered three foreign languages; so that at the age when most American boys and girls are completing high school with a smattering knowledge of half a hundred subjects, we were both capable of speaking and writing French, Italian or German, and taking dictation in any of them or in English. Aunt Elinor was proud of us, too. The last time I saw our father, before his accidental death in 1916, he and Aunt Elinor were indulging in mutual admiration exercises, congratulating each other on the results obtained. And we twins were the nicest, meekest, most harmless and un-regular kids that ever existed—at least, so we must have seemed.

But from the day of Dad's funeral, Aunt Elinor made a radical about-face and bent all her energies toward cultivating our artistic talents. No more commercial stuff now. She thought that Leon had distinctive poetic ability, so she saw to it that he became acquainted with all the literature and literary people that could possibly help him develop, while Leona, the big "I," being somewhat of a dancer and having been remarked upon by some really competent theatrical people, was promptly given over to the best dancing master available, after which my life was just one pirouette and kick after another—which really wasn't so bad because it was physical work and that was what I needed to keep me happy. We lived in Wakeham, one of the Big City's most fashionable suburbs, and moved in a very exclusive, art-loving and -fostering circle.

Life rolled away in its customary monotony and gradually the curtains of our horizon were drawn back to reveal new interests and new hopes. Leon and I seemed to grow more similar in appearance and more dissimilar in nature as we grew up. Aunt Elinor used to say that our sexes were all mixed up, that our natures were diametrically opposite to our respective physiques, and for once she was really near the truth, since I was very much of a tomboy while Leon was an ethereal-spirited, effeminate, poetic soul who cringed from all physical matters and even resented having to be near my dog Esky, who worshiped the very ground I walked on and evinced not uncertainly his suspicions of people who were too nasty nice to play with a pup now and then. Leon wasted no love on Esky and once declared that the pup's mother must have been promiscuous. Well, Esky was nothing but a mongrel, to be sure, although Aunt Elinor said his mother was a thoroughbred Eskimo dog, but even thoroughbreds have been known to have cuckold

husbands; mongrel or not, a dog instinctively attaches himself to the man of the house—but not so with Eskey. He hadn't any use for Leon at all, probably because Leon high-hatted him, whereas I liked nothing better than a chance to romp and wrestle with him.

You can readily understand how I looked upon my sweet brother. He did none of the things that regular boys do. Sports and games and any kind of exercise that was the least bit rough did not appeal to him at all. I even suspected that he was too damned nice to be interested in girls—but on this point I was mistaken, for I discovered that Vyvy Martin, one of Wakeham's deep-eyed débutante beauties, was more or less Leon's soul mate. One was about as dizzy as the other, so they made a perfect couple, entirely sufficient unto themselves—a condition which must, I suppose, be called Love. But you can imagine how I looked upon Leon when every impulse in me was toward the very kind of living which he shunned. It seemed that not a day went by without my wishing I were in his shoes so that I could chase off and enjoy myself as he should enjoy himself. Truly in mental and emotional equipment, we were as dissimilar as Tom Thumb and the Fat Lady.

The more fed up I became with our "cultured" friends and interests, the more Leon became absorbed in them. He was a thorough-going aesthete and the more æsthetic he grew, the more discontented I became, until it seemed that life held absolutely nothing of interest for me. For days and weeks at a time I carried a grouch and consoled myself by making the aforementioned complaints to the Creator. Every time Aunt Elinor entertained, I had to perform for the benefit of the guests, and afterwards everyone would feed her a lot of slush about my "remarkable talent for the dance." You might have thought I was some kind of thoroughbred dog, the way they studied me and passed comments on my body and brains. My Aunt should have known long before that time that her niece had a beautiful body and enough brains to know how to use it, but she continued to gather in the same old line of flattery and flowery compliments until you'd have thought it was her own body people were talking about.

Of course, not all of her parties were utter bores. Now and then a few genuine people appeared on the scene and once in a while someone actually interesting would be present. It was at one of her soirées that I met Jay-Jay Marfield, the rather attractively ebullient son of one of Broadway's most successful producers. Jay-Jay (from his initials, J. J.) was about twenty-six when I first met him and rather handsome in a sort of romantic fashion. My Aunt fell in love with him at first sight—principally because she thought that if I cultivated his friendship he could help me along in my career. My Aunt was not exactly a hand-shaker; she just had rather continental ideas about matrimony: marriage was a material affair to her. She would have been in ecstasies if I had married Jay-Jay and she used to tell him the most awful lies about my habits and disposition, et cetera. She tried all the traditional tricks of the match-maker, but I had my doubts about Jay-Jay's falling for her ensnaring line. As for me, I was willing enough to let him show me a good time—the which he certainly tried to do, with everything from the Russian Ballet to opium dens thrown in. He knew all the celebrities of the stage and was always on the verge of introducing me to So-and-So sometime—while in the meantime he introduced me to a crowd of artistic flat tires who indulged in attic art and garret orgies which were more asinine than sinful.

Jay-Jay and I got along famously, but from the start of our friendship I felt that I would never want to trust him very far. Perhaps I am naturally suspicious, but this Jay-Jay was one of the kind that you immediately suspect. Free and easy about everything, always immaculate, always flush and always conniving something that was neither good for himself nor good for me, he made me feel that I had always to be on guard or he would promptly connive against me.

Yet I enjoyed myself in his company—as who wouldn't if her only friends were so sappy they could be guilty of thinking a cockade was a kind of chicken broth! There are only two kinds of aristocratic boys: the devil-may-care variety like Jay-Jay and the sweet God-fearing innocents who make worms look like express trains. When the son sinks in the best of regulated families, he's usually reverting to the type of his pioneer ancestors who had to take both life and love in their two fists. Most blue blood was originally red

of flaming hue, and when families begin to forget that fact, you can lay odds that the deep old roots of the family maple aren't sending sap enough up to supply the high and mighty branches of to-day. When family trees get too high they wither at the top, and such dry sticks are only useful as fertilizer for younger trees. That's why the worst high-hats are invariably worn by people who are really low-brow.

Naturally, I enjoyed Jay-Jay's company at that time and not the least of the reasons for this lay in the fact that he kept me on edge and on the defensive most of the time. When a girl suspects that a man is about to assault her on the least provocation, she naturally gets a thrill out of the dare, and I was normal in that respect even though all the rigmarole of infatuation and love were utterly foreign to my nature. Jay-Jay knew I was a tomboy at heart and he played his cards accordingly. I fell headlong into the trap by responding to his dare.

Please don't imagine for a moment that anything melodramatic happened so soon as this. Jay-Jay was a perfectly nice young man—for quite a while. He could usually be depended upon to get intoxicated and he always took advantage of every opportunity for making love to me, but all this was direct and above the board—like romantic gestures, as it were. He didn't resort to underhand violence until quite some time later in our affair.

A few incidents that I recall off-hand will serve to indicate how we behaved ourselves during this more or less casual, but always threatening, romance. On one occasion he took us—Leon, Vyvy and me—to a masquerade in the Big Town, a huge affair that was given annually for the benefit of indigent members of the theatrical profession. It was Aunt Elinor's suggestion that Leon and I dress in identical costumes, therefore it was really her fault that Jay-Jay and Vyvy had a difficult time distinguishing us from each other, because my hair was tucked up and completely concealed under a grotesque hat so that Leon and I looked exactly alike. When Aunt Elinor inspected us before we set off, she exclaimed prophetically, "You'll catch your escort courting your brother!" And her laughter at this thought is sufficient evidence of her atrocious sense of humor.

The party proved to be a riotous success from my point of view, in spite of a few embarrassing moments, as when Vyvy saw Jay-Jay take possession of one of us and immediately assumed that the one he chose was I. She promptly pounced upon the other—and it really was I. Before I could quite recover from the shock, she had swirled me into the crowd of dancers and I decided I might as well play up to my rôle. It was really funny, so funny that I dared not trust my voice. Anyway, she did enough talking for the two of us.

And what things she said! It was a revelation to me—a revelation, I mean, of my sweet and innocent brother's poetic nature. She just poured sweet nothings into my ear and clung to me as if she were hanging from the gates of paradise and feared to let go for even a second. It was "O Leon, love!" or "O Leon, darling!" or "You exquisite thing!" or something equally romantic and foolishly sentimental, every step we took. I was congenially amused at first, particularly because my mind kept wandering to Jay-Jay and wondering how he, in his semi-intoxication, was managing my dear twin.

Before the dance was half done, I began to feel acutely uncomfortable. I began to realize that it's one thing to have a man whispering sweet nothings in your ear, but quite another to have another girl do the whispering even though she doesn't know you are a girl, too. However, I fought a good fight and was carrying on like a good trooper when suddenly the strain was broken by Jay-Jay pouncing unceremoniously upon us, with Leon trailing in the rear. Both were rather fussed up over the incident, although Leon appeared to feel that the joke was really on Jay-Jay. We all laughed over it, but Jay-Jay didn't think it was so funny. At first he claimed that he knew it was Leon from the start, but I could tell from the look on my brother's face that this was not so—or rather, that Jay-Jay hadn't acted as if he knew his dancing partner was a boy. And incidentally I never did learn just exactly how Jay-Jay happened to discover his mistake; knowing that he was capable of doing almost anything when half set, I neglected to ask for specific details even from my twin brother.

Throughout the remainder of the evening, Jay-Jay took no chances of being fooled again and even on the way home when there was nothing much to do but be friendly, he continued to be safely cool and distant—which suited me well enough, but didn't have the same effect upon Vyvy and Leon. I thought the two love birds had had a tiff about something, they were so chilly, but I soon discovered that Vyvy wasn't any more certain than Jay-Jay as to which of us was which. The discovery came when Jay-Jay suddenly declared, "If I pull off your hat and you've got short hair, you're not the one I think you are," and he promptly jerked Leon's hat from his head.... That settled that. He turned to me and I couldn't very well object to his attentions, as long as they remained mild, particularly since Leon and Vyvy immediately fell into a clinch that must have made their hearts beat as one for a couple of seconds at least.

By the time we reached Wakeham, Jay-Jay's accumulation of liquor was getting the better of his head and he ceased to remain mild in his love-making. I remember distinctly that the change was a terrible shock to me at the time and resulted in a wrestling match which assumed such proportions that the chauffeur so far forgot himself as to imitate Lot's wife. We weren't on speaking terms when we reached our house, and I didn't hear his apologies (nor any word from him at all) for a fortnight or more. I was momentarily furious—I couldn't imagine what the man expected of a girl like me.

Parties of this sort were a regular feature of the program for a year or more, but there were other features, also. We attended Bohemian studio parties which were more usually than not complete washouts from my point of view and led me to ask Jay-Jay why, with so many well-known and interesting people on his list of acquaintances, he persisted in messing himself up by associating with this deluded drivel of humanity. He just laughed and replied that "variety is still the spice of life—there's a time and place for everything, including dizzy artists."

After one of these garret endurance contests, I told him that he should have brought Leon instead of me, "because Leon would have reveled in this stuff." I had heard so much utter blah about "expressing one's soul" that I contemplated resolving never to dance again except on a ballroom floor. All this divine artistry stuff always has given me anatomical discomfort and there never was anyone interesting in those crowds of hairy-jawed winebibbers. They all talked and acted as if they knew better but preferred to be asinine, and to increase my disgust Jay-Jay invariably went to such places when he was in a drinking mood, which meant that I was in for a scrap before we got home.

If there's one thing I couldn't relish it was a man forever putting on a whisky flush, but I refrained from objecting too strenuously, because, after all, I was only seventeen and I had an idea that perhaps that was the way you were supposed to act when you're twenty-seven. I know that I frequently consoled myself with the thought that if I were a man, just for a night, I'd go out and deliberately drink Jay-Jay under the table, or even a chair. I used to imagine how enjoyable such a feat would be, and also how much good it might have done my gay courtier. I knew it would do my heart immense good.

You can see that there were at least nine out of ten traits of Jay-Jay's character of which I disapproved. He was everything that I didn't desire in a man. He was terribly vain. He acted as if, just because his father was prominent in the show business, he himself was something very special and deserved respect from everyone. He was neither brilliant nor exceptional in any way and I doubt if he had ever done a single thing worth mentioning, except play around with a telephone directory full of girls. Still he thought the world was his private oyster and that every girl was receptive.

Of course, you can easily see how he got that way. He was used to having girls make a lot of him because they thought he could and would help them to a stage career. However, that phase of the matter meant absolutely nothing to me. I refused to make a hand-shaker of myself, even for Art's sake—which refusal prompted Aunt Elinor to observe, "I sometimes wonder whether you and Art are really suited, Leona." And I replied that the wondering was mutual.

But in spite of all his faults and his damnable self-assurance in regard to my capitulation ("eventually, why not now") I continued to play around with Jay-Jay. With all his shortcomings, he continued to be

ardent and attentive—and a virtue like that naturally takes precedence in the mind of any girl in my position. As long as he wanted to keep up the chase, I was willing to be chased. There was a very clear distinction, according to my precocious maidenly philosophy, between girls who let themselves be pursued and those who allowed themselves to be apprehended: the same distinction, I have since learned, exists in every young girl's head, with certain slight concessions to individual circumstances. I was at that age: the age when you think you have living and loving figured out on a blue print.

My education went forward by leaps and bounds under the guidance of Jay-Jay and his friends and I must have changed considerably in a very short time, because Aunt Elinor soon got into the habit of remarking upon the fact that my language wasn't all that it should be and that I used it to express ideas which I certainly never thought up under her roof. I must admit that Jay-Jay had a broadening influence upon me: he introduced me to risqué anecdotes and bedroom ballads; I heard all the conventional off-color jokes that are in existence and a few that were quite unconventionally original; I became sophisticated in a certain way, after discovering that when some man tried to tell you that "every bowlegged girl is pleasure bent" or some other such bit of drivel, he was not necessarily insulting you by the very act of telling you such things; I became so wise that I could listen unblushingly to even such a story as the one about the good wife who assaulted the minister for saying, "There is no balm in Gilead" and explained her resentment by declaring, "'Tain't Gil's fault nohow. Nuther of us wants brats to bother with!"

I was still a tomboy at heart but my outlook had changed considerably; or rather, I had begun to be resigned to the fate of being a girl. I had the feeling most of the time that I might as well make the best of it—and Jay-Jay happened to be the best at the moment.

But to show what influence will do to a person: I even harbored hopes of taking Aunt Elinor on one of our parties for the sole purpose of getting her plastered—just for something to do that would be different. The only thing that kept me from doing it was the certainty that if she ever saw how disgustingly unsteady her "choice" could be, that would be the end of my affair with Jay-Jay, because her Puritan prudishness would override any momentary ambitions as a matchmaker.

So I contented myself by getting Jay-Jay to take Leon with us to one of his studio jamborees. I hoped the twin would drink more than he could handle. I wanted to see him completely piffed—I figured that if he once got utterly pickled it might cure him of being so obnoxiously poetic. Of the two—being pickled or being poetic—I much preferred the briny state.

But the attic party was a fizzle for me. I didn't have the pleasure of seeing Leon take even one too many. Furthermore my disappointment was increased by the fact that all those imitation artists actually went wild over Leon's poetry and the more they praised him the more he read to them. He didn't have time to take a drink. It was a terrible evening for me. I wouldn't have minded being proud of him, if the facts warranted it; but how anyone could feel other than ashamed of a brother who would read the stuff he read—and then boasted of writing—was beyond me. The only good thing he read to them they immediately squelched because they said it sounded too conventional, too formalized. Just because it made sense and was almost rhythmic!... I think my complete loss of hopes for my dear brother dated from that evening with those asses of the arts.

Furthermore I was beginning to be depressed again, because Jay-Jay was not the sort of fellow one could put up with forever. I mean, he was the kind you either had to submit to or fight with; there could be no happy medium of friendship for very long. I remember that we went to a Christmas blow-out in town and the entire party was well ossified, so naturally Jay-Jay was in his element, the more so because all the people were of the theater and knew him as his father's son. That one evening convinced me that show people are worse handshakers than politicians and my escort gave me acute shooting pains with his self-satisfied manner. He simply exuded manly confidence. He looked and acted as if he could take any girl he wanted, and then on the way home he was deeply grieved and insulted, not to say dumfounded, because I

wouldn't let him manhandle me. Said I, "It would take a better man than you, I'm sure." To which the simple fool merely said, "Keep on hoping, honey; I'm improving all the time!"

A week later, at a New Year's affair, he changed his tactics completely and made really decent and ardent love to me, just like a movie hero. He did everything except ask me to marry him. I was so surprised at his change of attack that I almost forgot myself. But then I remembered that you have to fight for anything you want to keep and it also occurred to me to wonder why he never had asked me to marry him.... Thinking it over afterwards, I concluded that it was his idea that one marries only as a last resort, after all other attempts have failed.... And I concluded also that the chief reason he was so eager in pursuit of me lay in the fact that he was beginning to doubt that he would ever have me. You'd have thought, with all the women in New York available for him, that he wouldn't have bothered with me. But I suspected then, and have since confirmed my suspicions, that the old wheeze about denial engendering desire may be a chestnut but at least its kernel is good....

As I said before, my education was going forward in spasms. Not long after that New Year's party, he threw caution to the winds, forgot his new plan of attack and resorted to the well-known cave-man methods. It was a veritable trial by combat. I wasn't mad—I just simply knew that I couldn't possibly give up anything to him. I wanted to be chased, but I'd be damned before I'd be caught. When I got home I looked as if I had been through a wringer, and that devil actually laughed at me and had the nerve to observe, "Now, I know you're the real thing, Leona!"... I stayed awake all night trying to figure out what he meant and I must admit that it was a year or so before I realized the exact meaning.

However, I was disgusted with him and didn't care if I never saw him again. At least I felt that way for several days. Then when I happened to overhear Leon and Vyvy discussing their future love nest, with Leon saying that his idea of heaven would be to work hard all day thinking up beautiful verses to read to a pajamaed Vyvy in bed at night, the whole business of love and love-making struck me so funny that I could laugh at my own little difficulties and regain some of my customary indifference. A few days later when Jay-Jay called again, I let him apologize—even let him get away with exclaiming, "My God, Leona, you can't expect a man to love you forever without any encouragement! Your devilish coolness is exasperating!"... Well, little children love to play with fire and no girl ever expects to burn *her* fingers. I agreed to go with him once more, if he promised to behave himself.

This party turned out to be more or less interesting, although Jay-Jay didn't keep his promise and most of the crowd were washouts. But there was a Canadian war veteran there who had just returned from France where he served with an aviation unit. It was thrilling to listen to his descriptions of the War. He couldn't dance because of a game leg, so I gladly did my bit by sitting out with him and letting him talk. He positively stirred me all up inside and I think that if we had been alone somewhere, I would have fallen into his arms. That's how he affected me—which was mighty strange, considering how I felt toward other men. This chap seemed different somehow—like a real he-man in comparison with such papier-mâché imitations as Jay-Jay and Leon and others of my acquaintance. However, the impulse was but momentary and my heart only pounded for a few minutes; during which I felt more panicky than thrilled.

That man left an indelible impression on my mind. I went home that night disgusted with Jay-Jay and disgusted with Leon. Jay-Jay said that if the United States went into the War, he'd be glad he could help his father run the show business (in which case there would have been a deluge of rotten shows on Broadway) and Leon suffered the tortures of hell every time the World War was mentioned. They both seemed like worms to me. I couldn't understand their attitude at all. And I once more cried out against the fate which had made me a girl instead of a boy. I sent up prayer after prayer and called on the Lord to do something about it all. It seemed to me that if Leon were more of a man I would automatically become more of a girl and I told the Lord as much, but I also suggested that if he couldn't do anything about Leon he could at least make something happen that would give me a chance to break out and get a little of the adventurous poison out of my system.

Well, all of a sudden it appeared that a couple of Yankees had finally got into Heaven: my prayers were answered!

CHAPTER 2

CORRESPONDENCE FROM HEAVEN

It never rains but it pours. Here I had worried through seventeen years without any answers at all to my prayers and now in a few short months there were more answers than there were prayers—I mean, it was just like having your mail lost somewhere and then getting it all in a bunch. It seemed to me that the Lord must have just returned from a holiday playing golf with the planets and found all my pleas and prayers awaiting his attention, so he set about clearing his desk immediately and thoroughly. Things came so thick that the year 1917 remains in my mind a jumbled nightmare.

Not that everything happened as quickly at all that: the sequence was spread over several months but I had become so accustomed to monotony and so resigned to my fate, that so many things in even so many months was a terrific shock to my nervous system.

The first thing that happened was not strictly my own private affair. The United States went to war when Germany added insult to injury. I was overjoyed, because it seemed to me that surely here was an opportunity for excitement and adventure.... And again I was disappointed. Girls of eighteen are good for only one thing in a war, and you don't get medals and service stripes for that kind of duty!

Jay-Jay went to work for his father, hoping to get out of going, and then when he saw he would be caught in the draft he managed to secure a soft job supervising the entertainment provisions of the eastern training camps. My hero! A man's man!

Then I went on the stage, because Jay-Jay offered to get me a place in a new show that was being thrown together up in Connecticut, and because I suspected that he was entertaining the hope that the atmosphere of the show business would help to break down my Puritanical resistance to his Satanic charms. I had to dance almost naked to get the job, but I made a bull's-eye from the start. The only trouble was that I had to keep thinking that Jay-Jay had practically dared me to join this show and I was so afraid I'd be contaminated by the traditional immorality of show people that I scarcely drew a normal breath while the show lasted. And every time I saw Jay-Jay the old battle was revived. He said he'd do anything to get me—and I believed him implicitly. I wouldn't have put anything beyond him. He'd try any possible way of skinning the cat, and my part in *Love Lights* was just another possibility. He was very circumspect in his love-making at the time, probably trying to induce a calm to precede the storm: as he said, "My love for you is so intensely hot that even an iceberg would melt sooner or later!"

Love Lights lasted three months, but I was ready to quit long before that. I had proved that I could stand the gaff and Jay-Jay had given up hopes of skinning the cat by that method. Now he wanted to *marry* me! Said he'd even marry me if that was the only way he could get me! Can you imagine such a proposal?

But I couldn't be bothered with it then, so he broached the subject to Aunt Elinor and I found her putting bugs in my ears every time I got near her. However, I stalled for time. I was in no mood to make any entangling alliances.

Also there was something far more important to think about. A miracle was happening before my very eyes! Vyvy contracted a severe case of heroitis and fell in love with the color of khaki, with the logical result that Leon was miserable. He actually lost weight trying to figure out some way of satisfying her demands that he make a hero of himself. The poor fellow hated the thought of war and fighting, loathed the idea of being thrown in with an uncouth gang of comparatively indelicate men, but he couldn't stand the

sight of Vyvy going out with men in uniform and he suspected that a man with a Sam Browne belt could do most anything with her. He talked with her, remonstrated and pleaded, called her hysterical and a lot of worse things—but Vyvy was adamant. “I won’t have a man I can’t be proud of!” she told him, at the height of their last argument on the subject.

Something had to give. It was a real crisis to them. And the next thing I knew Leon was making inquiries at recruiting stations as to the various branches of the service in which he could enlist. It was all very painful for him, but he was between the frying pan and a very hot fire; he had to make a decision of some kind—and he did, although I suspect that somebody dragged him in for examination and made him sign a paper before he realized what he was doing. Anyway, he enlisted—which proves something or other about girls like Vyvy. He came home actually proud of himself over the fact that he had passed the initial physical examination, but I noticed that he didn’t eat much for dinner that evening. And Vyvy very promptly indicated that she would throw over all her soldier friends, now that he had done the trick like a hero. She was not dizzy, after all; she knew that jealousy is a woman’s best weapon.

But poor Leon! He was suffering the torments of hell just thinking about being a soldier. I wished we could exchange places. I knew I would love it all—the coarseness, the roughness, the absolute hellishness of being a soldier appealed to me.... Instead of such a prospect, what I got was another, more importunate proposal of marriage from my hound. I thought this life was certainly a mixture of sweets and bitters, but I guess I was happy enough over the streak of manhood showing in my previously impossible twin.

I was so happy, indeed, that I agreed to dance for “the nice people” whom Aunt Elinor invited for a farewell party to Leon. She was all upset over her favorite relative’s impending departure for the War and she wanted to send him away in an unforgettable blaze of glory, so she planned this lavish entertainment at the house the night before he was to leave. And to make certain that people would remember the occasion she conceived the idea of my dancing in the nude behind a shadow screen to the accompaniment of Leon’s readings from his own verses.... It is apparent that I must have been happy over his enlistment to agree to any such thing: not the nudity but the poetic accompaniment—that, I knew, would be terrible!

And it was—so terrible that in the very midst of it poor Esky exploded in a howl that made everyone jump and almost disrupted the performance; and someone laughed rather equinely, which was still worse from my point of view. But we finally got through with it and I rushed into the house to dress and later to accept the usual bread-and-butter compliments from the assembled guests. There was nothing to do but dance the evening away and I proceeded to do this with whoever came my way, which was chiefly Jay-Jay, until Aunt Elinor sneaked up behind me and said she had a young man in tow who wanted to apologize to me. From that point on, life became steadily more interesting and Jay-Jay didn’t get all the dances, for the young man was the handsomest thing I had ever seen and his broad grin was just broad enough and yet refined enough to be infectious. My whole body underwent a quiver of excitement as soon as my eyes rested upon him. I smiled inside as well as out and was unconscious of everything except a mumbling from my aunt to the effect that “Captain Winstead has had me pursuing you for ages....”

He didn’t say anything and I couldn’t, so we just danced away and I felt as if I belonged nowhere else in the world so surely as there in his arms. That dance was unforgettable, a marvelous experience which thrills me even to this day. I was actually serenely blissfully ignorant of time and surroundings. I know such a statement sounds foolish and affected, but I certainly should know how I felt. Heaven knows, I never have felt like that more than once, so I surely should remember it.

We even danced two numbers in silence before the spell was broken by his making a belated apology for laughing so rudely during my dance. And he ended it by saying, “Of course, it was utterly damn foolish on my part!”

The way he said “damn” was to other men’s damns as a soothing melody is to a baby squawker’s music. From that point on, we were acquainted; it was just as if we had known each other for ages; he said that my dancing was just like a dream, that ... oh, I couldn’t begin to reproduce that evening in print:

he was just wonderful and he told me the most enchanting things ... we went into the garden and I learned for the first time how short a time it requires to become intimately acquainted with a man, if you like him... I never was the kind to believe in this love-at-first-sight stuff, but I know that I felt at once that Captain Clark Winstead meant all the world to me—and this in spite of the fact that I hadn't completely lost my head; I had a sneaking suspicion that he might not mean all the wonderful things he said to me... Yet even with such suspicions, I simply reveled in his presence. Say what you will about being made love to—it certainly is an indescribably delicious experience if you have the right man, and I did.

But, of course, there had to be a joker, and it finally appeared when he began to tell me how sorry he was that we had not met sooner, "For I'm leaving for Washington in the morning and probably will be sent to England immediately."

Well, the best we could do was exchange addresses and since he didn't know where he would be, he wrote mine on a scrap of paper and stuck it in his tunic, saying that I could write to him after I heard from him. Then he kissed my hands and naturally he didn't have to use force to get me into his arms.... In fact, I was clinging to him fearfully when everything went smash with the sudden appearance of Jay-Jay, looking daggers and so mad that all he could do was stutter.

I remembered then that I had told Jay-Jay we'd dance together again before the finale, so I escaped from the very embarrassing situation by squeezing the Captain's arm significantly and joining my pursuer, but not before the Captain said, "I hope we can have another before I go."

Jay-Jay danced as if this were a painful duty that had to be performed. I mean, he danced ferociously and in a silence which was broken only by a grunt now and then. Oh, but he was mad! And the madder he seemed, the better I felt, because this was really the first time I had ever seen him at all off guard or off poise and it does give a girl a thrill of satisfaction to see a proud and self-assured man take a tumble into jealousy.

When he finally did speak, he said the obvious things about cheating and not playing fair and ended with a sarcastic, "You know how I've wanted you, and all the time you've tried to make me believe that you loathed having a man touch you, not to mention kissing and caressing you. And now——"

"And now is there any law against a woman changing her mind?" I demanded.

"But why treat me as if I were black, if you've changed your mind about such things? That's what I mean! Am I black?"

Well, since he had come down to earth, I relented and told him, "No, I guess your ancestors were Caucasians. In fact, I was almost ready to accept your proposal, but——"

"But this fly-by-night interloper comes along and you act like a grammar school kid over him!" he exclaimed in disgust.

The argument continued through another dance and I gathered from his remarks that he wanted me to consider his proposal as still intended. He was, I think, really baffled: the incident had hurt his pride so that now he was more determined than ever to win me at all costs. And so it was that when Captain Winstead appeared to claim a last dance before he left, Jay-Jay didn't confine his voice to a polite whisper when he observed, "Thank God, he's going!"

The Captain and I said nothing at all while we danced. It was so divine that words would merely have bothered and when it had ended we both breathed a deep sigh of regret and somehow or other found ourselves on the veranda. His friends were already in their car waiting for him, but he didn't hurry. We stood there, my hand in his; his other arm went around my shoulders, and I tried to put into that last kiss all the tremulous fearful affection, all the sickening despair and exalting hope, all the really heart-breaking infatuation that was at once smothering and exhilarating me. No other kiss could ever be like that. I knew it and I think he did, because he didn't linger for another—just mumbled some sweet nothing and was gone.

Jay-Jay found me there staring out across the moonlit drive, feeling all weak and sad and utterly

miserable, trying to convince myself that this knight of the night had really meant everything he said and that I honestly did mean something more than a passing fancy to him. I couldn't banish the thought that perhaps I was just a foolish school kid, had been just another night and another girl in the Captain's crowded life. It was such a feeling that makes anyone feel sad and understanding: when you know you love someone and can't tell whether your love is returned or merely accepted—why, it's a terrible feeling. It made me understand how Jay-Jay must have felt all along, and I honestly tried to be nice to him the rest of the evening.

Jay-Jay blustered and fussed at first, then indulged in sarcastic remarks about the other man and prophesied that I would never hear from him again. Then when he saw that I wouldn't argue with him about anything at all, he quieted down and returned to the attack with his eternal proposals.

The fact was that I didn't pay any attention to his arguments; I couldn't even spare the time to think up answers to them: all I could think of was the Captain. I knew I should never experience such a feeling again if I lived to be a thousand: there isn't room in one lifetime to feel like that twice. And I kept telling myself that no man could have a woman thinking of him and dreaming of him every minute without trying to do something about it—or if he would, he'd be an awful fool. And I was sure that I had communicated to him some idea of how he affected me—or again he'd be a fool. And I knew he wasn't that.

However, the days passed and I heard just nothing at all from him. Jay-Jay had a few more days of leave and he hung around like a carrion crow with an I-told-you-so look in his eyes every time we met. And the night before he left to return to Washington, he popped a novel proposal that I could have an interesting job entertaining in the camps, if I would marry him. "I'll do anything for you," he declared, "provided I know you belong to me."

"But why not get me that job anyway?" I asked.

He just laughed at that suggestion. "Do you think I'd be instrumental in turning you loose like that?" he demanded. "Not unless you were mine—then I'd know you'd behave!"

Just like that! Well, you had to admit that Mr. Marfield was persistent and persevering and I had to take his proposal seriously, because I hadn't heard from the Captain, and that hurt tremendously, and after all it occurred to me that I really might be quite happy as Mrs. Marfield, even though I knew I could never love him as storybook heroines are supposed to love their husbands. I guess my Aunt's continental ideas had begun to sink into my mind, for I was beginning to admit to myself that marriages are seldom one long-drawn-out love affair and that I was probably childishly optimistic when I thought that mine would be one of the exceptional cases.

I told him I would think it over, and for the next few weeks I did little else but that. All I did was think—about these two men: the one who wanted me and the one I wanted, and whom I hadn't seen or heard from since the night we met. There didn't seem to be any excuse for his silence and yet I kept thinking up reasons for it and hoping against hope that each next mail would bring at least a post card.

That's what love does to you: makes you go crazy with hopes and wants and at the same time makes you capable of callously letting another go crazy wanting you. The whole triangular affair had me dizzy and I couldn't sleep nights for thinking about it.

So that's what I mean when I say that it never rains but it pours, even in the matter of having prayers answered. I prayed that the Lord would do something to change conditions and what did he do but bring in a man who made me change into a thoroughly girlish girl in one short evening! My prayers were answered, even in the matter of making Leon more of a man—but here I was more miserable than ever and I didn't know whether to thank the Almighty or send up another complaint.

CHAPTER 3

APPLE-SAUCE FOR THE GANDER

The only thing that kept me from going crazy or doing something rash during this time was the problem of the would-be hero of the family, my dear twin. From the first day in camp all he did was complain and not a week passed without a long letter full of nothing but kicks and regrets and weeping words. Even his letters to Vyvy, who was walking around with her head in the clouds of pride, carried an obvious undercurrent of pessimism and dejection, which he tried to explain away to her by saying that it was caused by his being away from her “beautiful presence.”

For a kid of his nature, it must have been a terrible experience from the beginning, which was a thorough physical examination in a roomful of naked men, not one of whom would ever suffer from inability to perspire, and during which poor Leon would have fainted dead away if the man next to him hadn't noticed his deathly pallor and pushed him to the one and only window in the room. He didn't actually pass out, but it seemed to him that from that moment on he was a marked weakling in the camp and there was none to give him a shred of sympathy.

When he went to get his uniform and equipment, the clerk took one look at him and threw a complete assortment of everything from underwear to blankets at him and when he came to array himself in these duds, he couldn't bear to look at himself, because the uniform billowed about him like the costume of a Turkish dancer with the sleeves of the blouse inches too short and the neckband two sizes too large. There must have been tears lurking behind his gentle eyes when he approached his sergeant and asked meekly, “Would it be possible to exchange these things for others of my size?”

And imagine how he felt when that hard-boiled individual rapped back, “Listen, Pretty Boy, who in hell do you think you are? In this man's army you take what they give ya and keep yer trap damn well shut! You ain't goin' to no swell tea party at the Waldorf-Astoria, ya know—ya're goin' to a first-class war, sweetie, so make up yer mind to it and don't bother me again with any damfool complaints about it. I ain't runnin' this war!” And he smiled sourly as if he had conferred a favor on the cringing recruit. Everyone else in the barracks laughed with the sergeant, as common soldiers naturally would do until the sergeant's back was turned, so Leon felt pretty small.... But he fooled them on the suit. He discovered there was a tailor shop in the camp and he was the first in his barracks to put himself in the tailor's hands. He really looked quite military when he finally got fitted correctly, but that didn't make him feel much better.

Then there was an obnoxious bunkmate by the name of Lowery who did his bit toward making life miserable for Leon. The very first night, when the twin was feeling blue anyway, this Lowery began to perform certain exceedingly unpleasant operations upon his feet, and when he noticed the look of anguish on Leon's face, he said, “I've walked so damn far in my time, buddy, that I got some kind o' trench foot. I get a new crop o' skin on my toes every bloody day and when it's hot they damn near drive me nuts.” And to one toe he gave a yank that looked vicious enough to amputate it. “They itch like hell, believe me, fellow!”

Leon harbored thoughts of murder every time he saw Lowery start his nightly ceremony of rubbing and pinching, and there wasn't any way of avoiding it, because the afflicted man never turned in until last call and the sergeant would have blasted Leon's soul to seven vari-colored hells if he weren't in his blankets when the lights went out. “It's a terrible thing, young feller!” Lowery informed him after they had slept

side by side for some days, but the information didn't make Leon feel any more sympathetic nor less sickened.

Yet Lowery's toes were nothing in comparison with the sergeant, who seemed from the first to have his evil eye on Leon. "Canwick," he would begin, as if he were about to confer a great honor, "somebody has got to go an' help take care o' the bathhouse to-day, and seein' the drillin' wears ya out so, I guess you'd better take to-day off and report over there. Ya see, we try to make everything as easy as possible fer everybody and also we try to teach every man somethin' worth while so that when ya get out ya can get a decent livin'. Now this bathhouse detail will teach ya so you can get a job in a Turkish bath when ya get out o' the army.... You'd go big in a Turkish bath fer women—ya know, they gotta have somebody's perfectly safe and harmless."

Everyone laughed at the insinuation and Leon hurried away to the new assignment, thinking that perhaps after all this work would be a little easier, only to discover that his duties were anything but pleasant for a tender-spirited person, what with having to scour pipes and scrub the concrete, pick up dirty discarded towels and other unclean things, distribute soap and collect slimy cakes, and watch the conglomerate mass of male humanity perform its ablutions amid a veritable barrage of dirty language and foul wit.... He was glad to be relieved and to let his legs ache the next day when an apparently indefatigable officer drilled them for hours and hours. His back and legs groaned in agony at every step and when he went to bed at night he wasn't at all sure he would be able to get up in the morning.

He had another honor conferred on him when the humorous sergeant extended a polite invitation to him to join the Kitchen Police for a few days o' rest. Leon told us that until that day he never had the least conception of how many potatoes there were in the world. He peeled and peeled and peeled until he felt certain there couldn't be any more potatoes in the country—but the next morning there was a brand-new batch even larger than the one he had done. His fingers got so numb that he couldn't feel the thousand and one cuts and scratches, and his wrists ached unmercifully while his back had a kink that seemed irremovable. After two days of this he returned to his bunk to find Lowery working on his toes and he prayed, not for Lowery's toes, but that he might be lucky enough to draw the dishwashing detail on the morrow.

He said he must have had a clear line to Heaven, for sure enough the next morning he moved to the tubs and spent the day keeping the water clean and washing out the serving pans. After looking at the refuse in some thousands of mess kits three times a day, he was unable to eat anything himself. That night he didn't know what to pray for and before he could make up his mind he went to sleep.

A few days later he was promoted to the garbage detail, the sergeant telling him, "You'll never make a real soldier anyway, so you might as well get some kind of training and be earnin' yer thirty bucks a month." On the garbage wagon he did less but more nauseating work, emptying huge G.I. cans of vari-colored swill, cleaning the cans, and then riding to the disposal plant on the cargo, where the wagon had to be swept and washed with infinite care against possible inspections. He didn't eat much that day either, nor the day after; and when he was returned to the mess hall, he was glad enough to tend the tubs. He managed to serve out the week, but he swore he lost ten pounds during that time, just from inability to eat.

The sergeant welcomed him back to the company and for two weeks appeared to have forgotten his existence. Then one morning he delegated him a special emissary to the latrines, and the poor kid, just recovering his appetite, lost it in the course of a single day's work with mop and broom and disinfectant can. Nor could he see anything humorous in the song which the other members of the detail persisted in singing to cheer them at their tasks, for it was a very dirty ditty, an ode to Latrina, the patron saint of that particular place. Leon said he knew the words by heart but had never sung the song because the words wouldn't pass his lips. The Ode to Latrina must have been a ghastly thing—but I wanted to hear it as soon as I heard it existed. Some such things are funny because they are so foul; there is such a thing as "shocking" humor.

However, Leon thought he had endured about as much agony and misery as was possible without passing out and he was just wondering if there could be anything worse befall him when an opportunity to escape presented itself. The sergeant called for volunteers who could “parley-voo frog,” and Leon couldn’t report to him fast enough. About a dozen others also declared they could speak French. Leon went them all one better by adding, “I can read and write German and Italian, too.”

“Who in hell cares if ya can talk Wop?” demanded the sergeant. “Pretty soon you’ll be tellin’ me you invented the laundry checks the Chinks use. What I ask was, ‘Can ya parley the Frog?’”

“Yes—fluently,” replied Leon stubbornly.

The non-com laughed. “That’s a good word—maybe if ya pull that on them, you’ll get the job, Grace. And it’s a damn sight better job than a fly-weight like you deserves in this man’s army.” Whereupon he sallied forth for regimental headquarters, with all who had answered satisfactorily, in tow. Arrived there he reported to a Captain who took the men in charge and after a lot of hemming and hawing and crazy questioning, Leon found himself chosen for the job—whatever it might prove to be.

He discovered that he now had the laugh on his former comrades, who had made him the butt of their jokes, for while they were laboriously attending to latrines, garbage cans, kitchen work and drilling, he was in comparative comfort attending the clerical wants of a Colonel who was farsighted enough to equip himself with a French-speaking clerk before the necessity arose for one. When Lowery heard of the nature of the new job, he frankly observed, “Dog-robbin’ is a hell of a good job fer an ole woman like you.” But dog-robbing or not, Leon knew a good thing when he saw it and he determined to make himself indispensable to his Colonel.

It was just after his promotion that Aunt Elinor, Vyvy and I dropped in for a week-end visit and made him show us everything in and about the camp. He took us to his “office” and even pointed out the Colonel who was getting into a car just as we came up, which made it possible for Leon to take us in and show us all about his work. It really wasn’t very intricate. I told him, afterwards, that as far as I could see, I could do his work as well if not better than he, and he retorted, “You’d probably make a better soldier than I am, anyway.”

But he didn’t feel so badly that day, what with Vyvy there and this new work so comparatively easy. The only fly in his ointment was that he feared this Colonel would be going overseas soon and that meant he’d go along. Leon was seriously worried about this. As he said, “Colonels have been known to get killed and anyone that’s with one might more easily get hit. Now Generals hardly ever get up in the lines, so I’m looking around for a convenient General to attach myself to.” His idea of unadulterated bliss (if such were possible in the army) was to be dog-robber to General Pershing. And he was so shameless about admitting it! However, I was glad he was making some kind of progress because the ordinary soldiers looked like a pretty dumb lot of cattle, not half so intelligent as the officers. Yet I would have been glad to be even a dumb private if I only could, which shows that my experience with Captain Winstead hadn’t really changed me completely inside for I was still interested in men’s affairs more than women’s.

I thought we had cheered the twin by our visit, but if we did its effects disappeared as soon as we left him, for his letters continued to be full of complaints and regrets. He wasn’t satisfied at all and his letters betrayed a yellow streak the width of his back. Apparently every moment he wasn’t busy, his mind was filled with gory imaginings and horrible visions of shell-torn bodies, stinking carcasses, burning flesh, blood, muck and god-awful corruption; and at night his dreams contained more gruesome details of his fate than fancies about his Vyvy. Each such night of mental anguish served to spur him on to work for promotion. His one consuming desire at the time was to go up, because he thought that safety lay in getting way up in the organization.... I was acutely ashamed of him because I realized that his ambition was prompted solely by cowardly fear. Such a man surely couldn’t get very far in the army.

Another thing which disturbed him considerably was the dirty army songs and rank stories. He thought

it was incredible that officers who looked like gentlemen could enjoy passing along a rotten joke or a shady anecdote. He couldn't possibly see that a little dirt now and then is relished by the best of men. He thought it was all very unnecessary and depressing, almost as bad as the foul ditties about the mademoiselles and their odd ways of loving or the legend of the Alsatian maiden who welcomed the invading Germans with the remark, "Well, officer, when do the atrocities begin?"

I really began to hate the thought of his going overseas because no one could tell what he might do in a pinch. He was scared to death already and although he had to act interested when his Colonel talked about going across, he actually was shivering in his boots and praying that something would happen to delay them.

But weeks passed and in doing so rather induced a lull in my worries about him because it seemed that they were never really going. Vyvy planned a big party for Leon, to take place whenever he could get away, and he made inquiries and told her to go ahead and plan on a certain week-end, at which time he felt sure he could get a leave. So Vyvy sent out invitations and had all her arrangements made—when on the Friday before the day of the affair, a letter came from him carrying the awful news that his outfit had received waiting orders and all leaves had been canceled. What a monkey wrench that was! And I had a note from Jay-Jay saying that he wasn't sure whether or not he could be present but asking me again if I would marry him on any condition at all. I answered immediately to the effect that I wouldn't even consider it unless he made an effort to go overseas. Now that Leon was going, poor specimen that he was, I had no patience with such a patriotic flat tire as Jay-Jay, in his soft and easy berth supervising "entertainments for the soldiers."

By this time I had lost all hopes of hearing from the Captain. I often thought of him and worried my poor brains trying to imagine what had happened to him; I kicked myself for not telling him flatly that night how much I loved him, because then I would have known by his silence that he wasn't interested at all. But this ignorant suspense was bewildering and devastating and I escaped from it all by reverting to my previous type—I projected myself into Leon's place and revived my never-dead tomboyish attitude and its interests.

That was the frame of mind I was nourishing when the news of Leon's confinement to camp arrived. I sympathized with Vyvy and tried to cheer up Auntie, who thought that going to France meant going to certain death, and my efforts were helped considerably that night when a second letter came from Leon, saying that he couldn't possibly get away because "orders are orders in this damnable place, although we surely won't go for a good many days yet and I'll be lying around here all the week-end doing nothing at all when I could just as easily be enjoying myself in Wakeham!"

You see, as soon as we learned that he probably wouldn't be going overseas yet, we all began to wonder how his getting away could possibly be arranged, if only for a few hours. I felt sorry for the poor kid, and for Vyvy, with her party all planned for the next night and both of them so eager for this last farewell meeting. It didn't seem reasonable to me that he could be only a hundred miles away and still be unable to spend just one evening in Wakeham with his Vyvy. She had got him into the War and now he couldn't even get away long enough to collect a farewell kiss in reward. I decided that there had to be some way out.... Leon had to get to that party, if someone had to die for it!

The next morning I drove down to the camp, carrying a suitcase containing one of his suits of civies, with cap, socks, shoes, shirts and everything. I planned to get there by noontime, find out what could be done and if worst came to worst, put my brilliant "last resort" idea into action, at the cost of my curly locks and perhaps my personal freedom. I would have had the haircut in Wakeham, but I decided that it would be bad luck: if I had it cut, Leon would manage to get a pass of some kind just to make my sacrifice in vain, for that was my luck. Not that I really wanted to carry out my great idea—I just entertained sneaking hopes. And besides I had to work very circumspectly in order that Aunt Elinor wouldn't get suspicious, for I figured that although she could be depended upon after the deed was done, she wouldn't

approve of it beforehand. As it was, she thought I was insane to drive down there in a snowstorm on what had every indication of being a wild-goose chase.

I said prayers again as Esky and I sped along the snow-covered roads—and the prayers had nothing to do with the snow, nor were they exactly complaints this time. I prayed for a sporting chance, for just a “break,” and I was in such excitement that I quite forgot about Captain Winstead as well as Jay-Jay Marfield and his proposals, for I was on the threshold of adventure—an adventure that would beat anything the fiction writers could offer for a heroine.

I was confident that, if my sneaking hopes materialized, I would learn to my own satisfaction that what was apple-sauce for the gander could still be sauce for the goose.

CHAPTER 4

A MASK OF KHAKI

Esky and I left Wakeham at eight o'clock that morning and arrived at the Camp at eleven thirty to find Leon in the slough of despond because he couldn't get a pass for love nor money. We talked over the situation and every other remark of his had to do with how much he wanted to see Vyvy "just once more." Well, I got sick of hearing it, and, although the sight of this vast military establishment had rather weakened my desire to go through with my last resort plans, I did finally suggest it to him.

"You're insane!" was his first comment, and then he added, rather huffily, too, "This is no time for jokes."

"I'm not joking at all," I told him. "I mean it. Isn't it perfectly possible? I've got a suit of your civies in the car; we can go outside and exchange clothes; you take Esky and go home, and I'll come in here and make myself at home until you get back. What's wrong with that? You said yourself that there's never anything to do on Saturday and Sunday, and you can be back here to-morrow afternoon. So what's wrong with that picture?"

Still he didn't seem to take me seriously. "I'd as leave go A.W.O.L.," he said.

"Yes? And maybe get caught and sent to Atlanta because you ducked out when the outfit was expecting travel orders? And you wouldn't want to throw up a chance to go overseas anyway. God, I should think you'd be so excited you couldn't think straight."

I could see that he was beginning to weaken, but he promptly thought of another objection. "What about your hair? You don't suppose anyone would be foolish enough to think I had grown hair that long, do you?" He thought that objection was insurmountable.

But I jumped it at once. "I'd just as leave have my hair cut boy fashion," I told him. "Can get it done somewhere in a few minutes' time. What do you say?"

Well, he didn't know what to say. He always was a slower thinker than I and it took him several minutes to digest the whole idea.

"There isn't anything that might come up during your absence, is there? I mean, anything that I couldn't do?" I asked, before he had time to answer.

He considered the possibilities for a moment and answered a rather dumb "No—I guess not. I could show you where everything is anyway."

"Well—" I said. "Then it's all settled. Let's start."

"But your hair!" he objected again, as if he were reaching for straws of argument for support, "Aunt Elinor will throw a fit when she sees you minus your hair."

"Pooh—what do I care for Aunt Elinor? And anyway, it'll grow out again. I can have typhoid fever or something for an excuse. Come on!"

"But, gosh, Leona—you don't know what you're getting into." He was just arguing for the sake of having something to say. "There's an awful gang in that headquarters barracks—swearing all the time, smoking and chewing, telling dirty rotten stories that'll make your stomach turn somersaults. Really, we'd better not——"

"Oh—hush!" I exclaimed. "My stomach's stronger than yours, old dear, so if you can stand it, I guess I can for a couple of days anyway. Besides, I think it will be kinda fun, hearing a lot of things a girl never

has a chance to hear when she's in dresses."

He capitulated. "Well, I would like to see Vyvy, and it does sound fool-proof."

"Come on, then!"

"Well, you're making the bed, remember!"

So we set off for his barracks, where he showed me his bunk and explained about the rules. Then we proceeded to his Colonel's office where he obtained a two-hour pass to leave the camp. It was while he was getting this that I had my first worry. And I didn't know just how to ask about it, either, since it's one of those things that even brother and sister wouldn't ordinarily discuss. Finally, however, I said, "You're sure there's nothing that could embarrass me?"

"Not a thing, as long as you use your head and stay out of trouble."

That didn't satisfy my curiosity, so I had to blurt out exactly what I meant. "How about those 'inspections' you have to go through every now and then?"

"What inspections?" he wanted to know. Which convinced me that he is dumber than I am.

"Why—don't you have some kind of physical exam every few weeks?" I insisted.

I was really surprised that he could laugh at such a thing, but he did. He thought it was a huge joke and kept on smiling about it even after he told me that there was nothing to worry about from that quarter as they had just had one of those intimate inspections two days before. I was very much relieved—and the idea is rather funny, at that, when you stop to think of it: just imagine me standing in line with a bunch of men and stepping up to let a doctor look me over! And imagine the look on the doctor's face when he saw before him a woman instead of a man! I guess Leon has a sense of humor after all.

Anyway, we went out to the car then and left the camp, driving way over to the other side of town to find a little barber shop where no one's suspicions might be aroused. I went in, and I admit that I felt rather foolish for a moment. But there was only one barber there and he was an Italian that could only understand English when it was accompanied by very clear gestures. And I told him I had had typhoid fever and therefore wanted my hair cut short like a boy's.

He was dumfounded, and acted as if he wouldn't believe me, so I plopped into the chair and explained with my hands just how I wanted it cut, so it would resemble Leon's as much as possible. Leon, being poetic, never had his hair cut awfully short anyway, so it really didn't seem so strange.

From there we went to a hotel, Leon driving while I tried to make my hat and the collar of my coat combine to offset the odd effect of the haircut. Just as we were getting out of the car, another hitch presented itself to my mind, and I said to Leon, "We can't change clothes in there!"

"Why not?" he demanded, his voice sounding as if I had scared the life out of him.

"Now, wouldn't it look funny to anyone who noticed us going in—a man and a girl—and then saw two men come out? If there happened to be anyone about who recognizes you, he'd smell a mouse immediately."

I can see now that my fears were practically groundless, but at the time it seemed as if someone would appear at any moment to divine our purpose, and Leon finally agreed that perhaps we'd better make our quick change somewhere else. "But where?"

I had to think hard. We couldn't go to a private house, for then whoever saw us would naturally wonder how a man and woman could change to two men all at once, and particularly a soldier and a girl to begin with. We couldn't go anywhere where there would be people. That was apparent at once, so I finally suggested, "Let's ride out into the country and find a nice secluded forest."

We did this, but didn't find a woods that could be used for a dressing room until we had driven more than fifteen miles from the camp. Finally we spied one, a sort of brush-covered little hill, and Leon went in first to change into his civies. When he returned, I took his clothes and came back a few minutes later with my dress, undies, shoes, hat and coat, in the suit case which I had used to bring down his clothes. We looked each other over and decided that everything checked. I complained about the army underwear—I

must say that it isn't any too comfortable on a girl—but that was a small matter, in view of the fun it was to be.

Then back to camp and in to the Colonel's office, so that Leon could show me where all the different "forms" and papers are kept, and what each was for. That took about half an hour, and just as we were coming out of the building Leon gave a start of fear and whispered, "Here comes the Sergeant Major!"

I began to shiver all over. I hadn't the least idea what I was supposed to do to a Sergeant Major. I started to salute but for once Leon thought faster than I; when he jammed his elbow into my ribs, I managed a foolish grin.

But the Sergeant Major was staring at us and before we had passed him, he said, in a very friendly tone of voice, "Sorry as hell about the pass, Canwick. I know you wanted it pretty badly."

I waited for Leon to say something, then suddenly—realized that it was I he was addressing, so I spoke up, saying with a grin of thanks, "Oh—that's all right, Sergeant. Guess I'll live through it." I stopped and looked at Leon, who had turned his face away. "By the way, Sergeant," I offered, "I'd like to introduce you to my twin brother."

"Surely—glad to meet you." And he shook hands with Leon before the other could realize what was going on. Then he added with a laugh, "I thought you looked a lot alike."

We all smiled then and I finally tore us away after remarking that my twin had come down to drive me home, not knowing that I couldn't get away. The sergeant-major said "Sorry" again and we separated—I, with a huge sigh of relief and not a little pride in my ability as a mime.

Well, we didn't lose any more time, but hurried to the car and out of the camp. About a quarter of a mile away, I got out, said good-by to Esky, told Leon not to fail to get back by to-morrow evening, and waved after them as they rolled away toward Wakeham. Esky acted as if he were going crazy. He barked and squirmed and yapped, and I guess he had Leon about crazy by the time they got home.

While walking back to the camp gate, I tried every kind of mental exercise to make myself think and act like Private Canwick, U.S.A. By the time I got to the man who took my pass, I was stepping along like a regular soldier, although my heart skipped about a dozen beats when the guard looked me up and down as he took my pass.

Once within, however, my self-confidence came back and I wandered aimlessly around the camp for an hour or more, familiarizing myself with the location of the main buildings. I visited the Camp Headquarters and stopped at the Y.M.C.A. Hut, where I purchased some of the stationery for a souvenir of this unusual adventure. I enjoyed my tour of inspection immensely and took real delight in saluting every officer I met. This was certainly a pleasure; every time I saluted, I looked straight at the officer and said, under my breath, "O Mister, if you only knew!" It was great fun.

The whole situation struck me as being exceedingly comical—and exceedingly unique. I have heard and read of many kinds of disguises, of royalty incognito, of masked heroes and heroines in many kinds of romance and adventure. I've read somewhere, in French and Italian literature, about lovers who carried on their amours in disguise, and about men and women who figured prominently in war and politics under assumed names and behind disguised faces. Medieval legends come to mind, fanciful tales of heroism by knights in deceiving armor, and of fair ladies who entertained paramours behind mysterious masks. Joan of Arc slept with an army, but she was known as a girl by all her soldier comrades. They say that there was a fighting outfit composed of Russian women and known as The Battalion of Death, but these soldiers were known as women also. There have been any number of modern stories and plays with plots depending upon the use of masks, veils, disguises and aliases; duels have been fought by women in men's clothing; and there was a famous duelist named Chevalier d'Eon, who dressed as a woman every time he appeared in Paris—because the King had banished him from Paris—and he had been the recipient of love favors from many courtiers, who thought he really was a woman. There has from time immemorial been something very alluring and intriguing about masks and disguises. They have been used for every

conceivable purpose.

Yet I can't think of a single situation similar to the one in which I found myself. It is one thing for a man to dress as a woman—nothing very dangerous in that. It's not unusual for women to join with men in the army, as long as they remain women and are known as women. But it's quite another thing, a very different and very unusual thing for a girl to be in the United States Army without anyone knowing about it. In this particular case, of course, there wasn't any real danger; but the situation remained very intriguing. On the face of it, my position was far more perilous than that of a woman soldier who is known as a woman—but, at the same time, far more enjoyable, for to be a woman among men without the men's knowing it is decidedly interesting, and has many intriguing possibilities. I thought this about the nearest I'd ever come to being able to enjoy the liberties and privileges of men, and I tried to exercise my mind appreciatively.

I had thought of all this during my walk around the camp and was still smiling inwardly when I returned to the barracks. Several men were lounging about the door; they offered a matter-of-fact greeting and I returned their perfunctory hellos with a smile and a nod. I wasn't quite sure of my voice. But no one paid particular attention to me, so I walked on down to my bunk and began a casual investigation of the assortment of odds and ends that Leon had collected.

Hung at the rear end of the bunk, with his slicker, haversack and embroidered ditty bag, I found his ukulele and, since I couldn't think of anything else to do, I flopped on the bed and began strumming the uke as accompaniment to my idle dreams about the oddity of the situation. It occurred to me that if anything should happen to cause my discovery, the newspapers would make a front-page story of it. The "yellow sheets" would pay almost any price for my story of the affair, giving all the lurid details of what I heard and did during these two days of soldiering. I could visualize the headlines, in big black letters, carrying to all parts of the country the story of the daring girl who took her brother's place in the army so that he could attend a farewell party with his beloved. After which, wouldn't it be nice to have golden offers from half a dozen theatrical producers; it'd be a marvelous way to break into the lime-lit ranks. What a publicity stunt!

When my thoughts arrived at this point, my fingers were strumming the uke rather excitedly—sort of muscular sympathy, I guess. Anyway, my reverie was abruptly ended at this point, for I heard a voice behind me call "Canwick!" And I rolled out with a start to stare dumbly at a soldier who appeared to be no higher nor lower than myself. He didn't wait for me to say anything, just rattled out his message and disappeared. He said—I recall it distinctly because I said it over and over about a dozen times before I could decide what to do about it—"Canwick, Colonel Davison is at Regimental Headquarters. You're to report to him there at once."

Those words marked the end of my brief spell of dreamy pleasure. The hitherto comic lark promptly developed into a very serious series of disturbing developments. After digesting the orderly's message, I decided that there was nothing to do but report to Colonel Davison—the which I proceeded to do, and came into his presence with my heart in my throat and my knees feeling rather unstable. It was lucky that I knew where the headquarters were and what the Colonel looked like; but I wasn't counting any blessings or naming them one by one at that moment when I wavered into his presence, and offered a weak "Yes, sir," after a comic opera salute.

"Canwick," the Colonel said abruptly, "I've praised you so much that now I have to pay for the praise by losing your services."

"Oh, no, sir!" I exclaimed, entirely at sea.

"Yes," he insisted. "General Backett has decided that he needs your services more than I do, so you and I must part. You've worked yourself into an enviable place, and I'm sure you will like General Backett." He stopped, looked at me a moment then added, "Are you sorry?"

Well, he didn't sound any more like a hard-boiled regular army officer than nothing at all and when he asked me that question, I was still so dumfounded that all I could manage was, "Uh-h—yes, sir, I am, sir."

At that he laughed and continued, "Well, I'm sorry to lose you. You were the ideal man for my work.... But then I wouldn't want to hold you back on that account. Doubtless General Backett will show his appreciation by a promotion."

"Is this—is this effective at once?" I inquired, hoping that he would say "Monday."

But he didn't. He said, "Yes, to-day. It happens that General Backett's special clerk has been down with blood poisoning for a week and that none of the men who have been tried as substitutes have satisfied the General. It seems now that the special clerk will not be able to go overseas with the organization and General Backett has taken my word for the fact that you can fill the bill. So you report to him at once and then come back to my office and straighten up the papers for your successor." He arose then and extended his hand, "And if I don't see you again, be assured of my best wishes, Canwick."

I shook hands and stumbled out of the place. I was sorry to leave him. I mean, it seemed a shame to leave such a nice officer on such short notice.

Upon inquiry of an orderly I learned that General Backett's office was in the next building and I proceeded there at once, despite my chills and shivers of apprehension. I didn't know whether Leon was supposed to have met this General man before or not, but since introductions don't count for much in the army anyway, I decided to act very stiff and formal and see which way the wind bloweth. So I waltzed in and told the orderly what I wanted and who I was and who sent me, and a few minutes later I was escorted into the General's sanctum sanctorum. I took one good look at him and would have beat a retreat because he looked so gruff and hard, but when he spoke his voice showed that he wasn't that way at all.

"You're Canwick, eh?" he asked, in a tone that made me like him at once.

"Yes, sir," said I, smiling a little, because at the moment I noticed how big and awkward he seemed for a man who had spent his life in the army.

"Well, Canwick, you've been invited to accompany me on a long hard journey, and the work begins at once. My man is down with blood poisoning and I must leave before he can get out of the hospital. I've tried a dozen clerks, but none have satisfied me and I'm taking Colonel Davison's word for it that you will. So you see you have a reputation to uphold." He smiled encouragingly.

I was shaking inside but I managed to say, "I'll do my best, sir."

He smiled again and continued, "In taking you, I am looking to the future, to a certain extent, because I believe I will need someone who is able to interpret French and at the same time take dictation and help in compiling reports. None of that will come now, of course, but will probably come sometime after we arrive in France. For the time being there are merely routine forms and letters to be done, and since there are about a million of these to be cleaned up before we go, you'd better do whatever you have to do and come back ready for work."

Well, I didn't have anything to do that I knew of, and I intimated as much, whereupon he said, "Your transfer papers—get your personnel officer to see to that. Also get your equipment and replace everything that can't stand inspection. By the time you return, I'll have these matters in order and we'll go to work."

So I said "Yes, sir" and left. It seemed to me he was in a terrible hurry and I hadn't the least idea who this "personnel officer" might be. I started to think the thing out, but then I remembered that everyone always said that a private wasn't supposed to think, so I just proceeded to do the only thing I could do—namely, find the Sergeant Major and tell him what was what and ask how.

I found him in the Y.M.C.A. listening to a phonograph record of the Marine Band, but when I told him what had happened, he promptly came along with me to the headquarters, spoke to an officer about me and told me he'd have the transfer fixed up at once. I asked him what I should do next and he laughed and told me to pack up my junk and have it ready to move to the Divisional Headquarters barracks when he came back. So I did and he finally came back, and I then moved—wondering, as I did so, what Leon would do if he returned to his old bunk before seeing me and learning about the change.

Then I reported back to the Colonel and told him what the General had told me. He was very nice about

it—I guess all Colonels are always nice about anything a General wants—and he told me not to bother about his records, that he would get them straightened out without trouble. I guess he, too, wanted this fellow Canwick for future rather than present work.

Back to the General's office. And when he said he had a million things to do, he minimized matters by about that number, for he kept me going for three hours, and left more to be done in the morning. He dictated at least a million letters—and poor me just by luck seeing an old letter with the form FROM: TO: SUBJECT: on it, which just saved me from addressing the first letter to “My dear Secretary of War.” There was another million of blank forms to be filled out and half the things I didn't know beans about, but he was awfully nice about everything and seemed to think it was perfectly natural that I should be ignorant about some of them. Anyway, I worked until I was dizzy. And the General smoked the vilest cigars I ever smelled. I bought a package of cigarettes—I just had to practice up smoking—in self-defense.

I wrote to Leon by Special Delivery. He'd have to get back by next afternoon, because from the way this General man talked, they were leaving that night, and I'd have to see Leon for long enough to explain about some of those things. And he'd have to know this General on sight.

Well, he ought to be happy: he'd wanted to get in with a General. Whew—if it were me, I'd rather be a real soldier, than have to work this hard all the time. I was actually dizzy.

I hoped Leon didn't tell Vyvy about me. I didn't want her blabbing it all over the place. It didn't seem like such a grand experience just now. And I hoped he was enjoying her party; if all this were in vain, I'd swoon like an olden heroine. I knew Auntie was having all kinds of fits about now!

Oho, for the life of a soldier!... I know I haven't mentioned every detail of interest in this adventure—and especially some of the funniest ones, like the cave-manly form of the man in the next bunk and the discussion of social diseases which was going on up in the other end of the barracks, not to mention certain problems of nature which had to be solved at the expense of distinct concessions on the part of a maiden's modesty. But then, I can remember these things, if I think hard enough. I certainly had never experienced anything like this before, nor probably ever would again. I only hoped nothing would happen to make me regret this escapade, for it *was* fun to be in with a crowd of men and have them think you're a man, too. My education went forward by leaps and bounds that day!

Never again would I pity myself for being tired: I was so all in by night that I could giggle into hysterics without the slightest provocation. For safety's sake I turned in but you can rest assured that I didn't remove as much of my clothes as the man in the next bunk did. This was a case of the proverbial shoe: it makes all the difference in the world which foot it's on.

CHAPTER 5

A MAIDEN SLEEPS WITH AN ARMY

—1—

If there's one kind of scenery I like more than anything, it's a winter landscape of rolling hills and evergreen trees laden with snow. Usually the sight of a snowy outdoors is very comforting—but not so that day. Every time I noticed the snow—and it had been falling thick and fast since early Sunday morning—it reminded me that Leon had to get back here that afternoon, and between Vyvy and the snowstorm, there was absolutely no telling whether he'd show up or not. So there was nothing very comfy about that snowstorm. Of course, it *would* do something like this at just this time. My luck again!

I was on the go all morning. General Backett certainly did believe in keeping busy. I discovered that morning that he was too old for regular duty and no doubt that was why he worked so hard: he evidently wanted to demonstrate his ability to stand the wear and tear, in the hope that he would get some kind of an active command after we reached France. “We,” did I say? Which just goes to prove how easy it is to lose one's identity: I kept thinking that I was going with the General, instead of Leon. It seemed perfectly natural, as if I had been expecting it for months.

Well, I wasn't going, so what was the sense of these foolish visions? And yet, it did seem perfectly natural for me to be chasing around getting my equipment checked and replenished and then leaving it spread out for inspection. Even that morning at first call, I rolled out as pretty as you please, grabbed a towel and rushed for the water-trough, scrubbed my teeth, washed my face in the cold water, emitted a few curses just to keep up with the other fellows, rushed back, combed my hair (that was rather awkward, I imagine) and ran out with the rest of them to the mess hall. That much was good fun, even though I already had noticed the snowstorm.

From breakfast on, however, my worries piled up just about as fast as the snow heaped up outside. On the go every minute, doing a lot of things that I knew nothing whatever about, chasing errands, reporting this to that officer and that to this officer and running all over the place like a chicken sans head. All of which I would have enjoyed, if it weren't for this doubt about Leon.

This doubt increased steadily, for some inexplicable reason. I could just see him at home there with Vyvy, hating like the very devil to think of going back. He probably watched that snowstorm with fascination, and kept putting off and putting off the moment of his departure. I could understand how he felt: he hated the camp and he hated to leave his Vyvy, and I knew he spent all morning trying to decide whether the outfit really would leave that night. I finally decided to telephone him, if he hadn't come by noon, but when noon came I found that I couldn't get out until later and had to put off that project.

Meanwhile, I had the shock of my life, for who should appear but Jay-Jay himself. I tried to duck—it was just my damned luck to bump into him anyway, for he didn't know where Leon was supposed to be in this camp—but he spied me and called, so I had to face him. Believe me, I did some tall trembling at that moment, although I realized that if worse came to worst and he did recognize me, I could make him see the joke of it and keep his mouth shut about me. I just waited to see what he would do.

“How are you, Leon?” he asked, sticking out his hand to be shaken. “Thought you would be in

Wakeham this week-end.”

Well, what was I to say? I thought fast, believe me. I couldn't say I hadn't gone, because then later he would go home and perhaps run into Vyvy or Auntie or someone else who was at Vyvy's party and then he'd probably learn that Leon was there. While I pondered frantically, my eye fell on his wrist watch and noted that it was just a little before two o'clock.

“Why—,” I stammered, “I did go home—just got back about half an hour ago.”

He looked at me kinda funny. “Your voice has changed, hasn't it?” he inquired abruptly.

I laughed. “God, yes—everything about me's changed,” I declared. “This damned army life changes you so you hardly recognize yourself.” I grimaced as if disgusted with the whole business.

“You must have had a skiddy trip down,” he observed then. “Rather rotten for driving, eh?”

“Don't mention it!” I exclaimed. “It was one hell of a trip! Leona came with me, in spite of Aunt Elinor's objections, and she started right back. God only knows when or how she'll get there in this weather.”

“She did?” he repeated. “Dammit, I wish I had known that. I'd like to have seen her. Don't know when I'll get to New York again. This is the nearest I've been for several weeks.”

“Been transferred, or something?” I asked, and offered him a cigarette, which he accepted before replying. “Got a match?” I certainly did try my best to sound matter-of-fact, despite the fact that this was the first time in my life I ever asked a man for a match.

“Sure—” And he produced a box, gave me a light, served himself, and continued, “Why, no, no transfer—just a rearrangement of the work we're doing. Means a lot of jumping around for me. Been down South the past three weeks, came over here from Washington yesterday and will be here until the middle of the week, when I move again.”

“Interesting work?” I inquired.

“Not very—I'm getting fed up on it. I'm even considering applying for a transfer so I can go over. After all, a man might as well be in the middle of this business.”

I nodded, and smiled—this didn't sound like Jay-Jay. I wondered if my ultimatum to him had had this effect.

“I say,” he suddenly interrupted. “Why don't we have dinner together this evening, or to-morrow evening?”

I almost blurted out “I'd love to”—which was the natural thing to say—but I caught myself and said instead, “Gosh, I'd like to, but it can't be done to-night because I'm so busy I don't know when I'll be free, and it can't be done to-morrow because we're leaving, I think, to-night. Thanks a lot, though.”

“You're leaving? Really?” he seemed completely astounded at this, but he came back quickly, “Well—” He extended his hand again, “Good luck, Leon. Be careful what you do with those mademoiselles and don't drink too much cognac on an empty stomach!”

“Don't worry about the mademoiselles!” I replied with a laugh. “And good luck to you. Hope we'll meet over there.”

We parted and I breathed a mile-long sigh of relief. But after I reached the office, I could smile at the thought of this odd meeting, and particularly at the idea of Jay-Jay's being so utterly dumb. I was sure that if I saw my Captain in dresses and black paint, I'd recognize him without any trouble at all—and I only saw him once in my life. Jay-Jay certainly must have been stupid.

About fifteen minutes after this meeting, luck came my way for once. The General decided suddenly that I could do some purchasing for him in town. “Get a pass for an hour and pick up these things for me,” he said, handing me a list of half a dozen things. I needed no urging; got the pass from the non-com in charge, and departed at once.

You can guess what the first thing I did was: hunt up a telephone booth that was secluded enough to allow me to say all I wanted to say. I found one in a lunch room and put in a rush call to Wakeham.

I spent fifteen hectic minutes waiting for the call to come through and when it did, I almost died of shock, for who answered the phone but my dear darling twin!

I was speechless for a moment. Adequate words for my feelings could not be spoken over the telephone, but I did try to give him a general idea of what I really thought of him for not leaving very early that morning.

“But your Special Delivery just came, about five minutes ago,” he declared. “I’ll leave in another five minutes.... But how am I going to get in there again? How are we going to change back?”

“How the devil do I know? You get here! The rest can wait. I’ll wait for you at the headquarters building.”

Aunt Elinor got on the line long enough to hear my voice. She sounded rather shaky when she said, “I feel better after hearing your voice, Leona dear.”

“I’ll see you in the morning, Auntie. Don’t worry.” And that was the end of that.

And this was the end of this. I’d been gone much more than an hour and my General was having forty fits by this time.

—2—

Several hours elapsed and my little adventure ceased to be interesting; even though I talked to Auntie by phone again it didn’t make me feel any brighter. Somehow or other, I felt damned pessimistic. I wished I had kept my bright idea to myself, instead of getting into this nerve-racking mess. Leon should have been there by this time, but he wasn’t, and no one knew where he was. Auntie said he left before three o’clock and had chains on the car, and he surely should be able to make it in six hours, even in a snowstorm.

Auntie was on the verge of hysterics, I guess. “What can you do? What can you do?” she kept asking.

“Why, I can’t do anything unless and until he gets here,” I told her. “What do you expect me to do, go out hunting for him?” It struck me that probably he had headed in the opposite direction. I suppose I really shouldn’t say such rotten things about my brother, but I just couldn’t help thinking things, knowing him as I did.

And then Auntie said something that gave me more to worry about. “Leon couldn’t find Esky anywhere,” she declared weakly. “We haven’t seen him since last night.”

I supposed the poor pup stayed out all night and would probably be down with distemper when I got home. Of course, no one would think of looking for him!

Auntie was enough to give anyone the willies when she got excited. “But, Leona, you must do something! What if Leon has an accident and can’t get there this evening? What *will* you do?”

As if there was anything I could do!

“You listen to me, Leona! If he doesn’t come pretty soon, you go right up to that General and confess the whole business! I’m not going to be worried like this!”

I had to laugh at that. *She* wasn’t going to be worried like this! And I should tell the General! Why, they’d probably crucify me and send Leon to Atlanta for life! I told her to sit tight and not to worry—everything would straighten out sooner or later. “And I’m all right, anyway,” I added for good measure. “Nothing to worry about.”

“Well—you call me the minute he arrives,” she insisted.

“Surely,” I agreed. “And if he doesn’t arrive—I mean if he calls you and says he can’t get here, tell him to lie low until you hear from me. If he doesn’t show up in time, I’ll send a letter to you for him. He’ll have to stay out of sight if he doesn’t show up here.”

Well, I finally got away from that phone and back to my bunk. We were going to Hoboken that night, as sure as my name was Leona Canwick. That is, somebody was going—was it me?

But I couldn't help wondering what I'd do if Leon didn't arrive. I couldn't think of a thing to do except do what he would do if he were here. I'd be in for one sweet time! If I got caught in this thing, thank God I wouldn't have to worry about one of those inspections for probably a month. Perhaps I could figure out some way of evading it by that time. But, oh, I did wish Leon would come! And I went back to the headquarters building again to wait for him.

Something told me that he wasn't anywhere near the camp! Any other man would have got there, if he had to break both legs and a couple of ribs. But not my dear sweet concaveman of a brother!

But as long as I was there, there was hope. When I left this camp, sometime before midnight—or rather, if I had not left it before that—the die would be cast, and there would certainly be hell to pay in more ways than one.

What a wonderful adventure this had turned out to be!!!

—3—

It was late Sunday night. Leon had not arrived. It was what you might call the eleventh hour and the fifty-ninth minute of this affair, and I was taking it for granted that I was in the soup up to my ears. The die apparently was cast. The Canwick blood seemed to have turned a sour yellow in at least one spot. I didn't know where Leon was, but I should have assumed hours ago that he would not be there. I don't know what I could have done about it anyway, except confess and get us both in a stew, but it got my goat to think that I forced myself into this martyrdom. But I was in it—and that's all there was to it.

O Leon, thou personification of courage, thou dear brave considerate brother, I really felt more sorry for you than for myself. A man as yellow as you was a fit object for the world's pity! I offered to help you with no idea that such consequences could be possible and with, I now realized, a mistaken conception of my brother's love and gratitude. This situation ceased to be funny a long time ago and if I did not pity him more than I hated him, I'd have given the whole show away before this. And the joke of it was that no doubt he felt confident that I would never do that.

And he was quite right: I would go through with my end of this thing in spite of him and his yellow streak. No future day in this man's army could be any worse than the one I had just put in—and which was not ended yet, so I felt sure that, barring accidents and given any lucky breaks at all, I'd be better able to stand what was coming than he would. If things ever got too bad, I'd throw up my part and let him take the consequences. After all, if I got caught in this, he was the one that would suffer. I doubt if he realized that!

However, being a generous and loving sister, I continued to give him the benefit of every possible doubt; I continued to hope that he hadn't deliberately deserted me in this predicament. And I took it for granted that he would at least be willing to do everything he could to protect me, and later get me out of it. If he did as I told him in my letter, without regard to his petty prejudices and silly comforts, he probably would save me from all sorts of embarrassment and himself from any amount of trouble and worry—for I could get along safely, if I was at all lucky. I'd made up my mind to get along—to lick this game if I had to kill off the general staff man by man.

I didn't know where he was now, but he'd surely get in touch with Auntie sometime soon, no matter where he was, and then she'd tell him what he must do—unless she passed out from the shock before that. Leon must stay away from Wakeham; even Vyvy must think he'd gone overseas. In my letter to him I promised to send her a few lines of love and kisses now and then to keep her happy.

I told him I'd write to him at Booneville—that was far enough away from home and far enough back in the woods to be a safe place for him to rusticate and hide for a while, until he could do something about me. He could lose himself in New York easily enough, but then he might get picked up somehow and made to enlist or do something. I suggested that he take the name of Leonard Lane, and stay at Booneville for a

while.

Auntie would have to let it leak out that I was down South or out West, doing war work of some kind, like entertaining in the camps. Anyone who knew me would accept that story easily. My letters to her would, of course, be censored—unless I could manage to get them okayed by the General. If censored, I'd have to send instructions to Leon in onion juice: write a letter and interline it with other sentences written in onion juice, then when he or she held it near heat, the invisible onion-juice letters would be made visible. I knew it worked: we used to do it when we were kids.

So far so good: but how was I going to get out of this? There was the big problem, and the only answer I could see from here was for Leon to get a passport, if necessary, and get over to France by hook or crook, even if he had to work on a cattle boat or an oil tanker—anyway to get there. The rest would be easy: we would switch and I'd come back in his place.... Sounds reasonable in theory; I only hoped it would work out in practice. It depended, of course, upon how eager Leon was to get there—but—oh, hell, when that factor entered in, I might as well give up, for he never was eager to do anything that might be hard work or uncomfortable.

As far as I could see now, with everyone all packed up and waiting for the C. O. to appear with the final word, my fate was lying helpless in the lap of the gods. Which reminds me that I just by grace of God remembered what Mark Twain or somebody like him said about telling the difference between a girl and a boy: the General tossed a packet of papers to me and I instinctively spread my legs to catch it in my lap—and there wasn't any lap there; but I saved the day by catching it with my hand instead. I don't suppose the General would have noticed such a thing anyway. No reason why he should—but then I couldn't be too careful. I certainly had to watch my step.

I tried all evening to get away long enough so I could step out to a hotel and have a decent bath. Those army clothes were kinda itchy and uncomfortable when you were not used to them, and a bath would feel fine—but how could I take a bath in camp? Or on the boat. Or when I got to France? This was getting serious! And there were certain other things that were bound to happen in due time, and from time to time, and would have to be taken care of, regardless of soldiers, sailors, marines, nurses and generals and in spite of war and hell. I could see from here that I was going to have some very unpleasant moments in this man's army. I was certainly in a no-maid's land!

Well—such is war! For Leon's sake, as well as my own, I sincerely hoped that he wasn't foolish enough to appear there in the morning looking for me: that would certainly be fatal. However, I wasn't going to worry about that—there was little or no danger of him being near there even to-morrow. I told Auntie to tell him to stay away from there if he couldn't make it that night. And also for him to send me some money, addressed to Divisional Headquarters. I didn't have much more than the price of a bath, and there was a lot of things I'd got to have before many days elapsed.

All packed up, from tooth brush to absorbent cotton. Bring on your damned old war!

No sooner said than done: came the C.O. His voice was like the bell that summoned me to heaven or to hell.

And, my God, what was this I saw before me?

—4—

I had a moment of renewed hope when Esky appeared just as the C. O., a pussyfooting lieutenant named Blaines, was giving the final instructions. I thought for the moment that perhaps the pup's presence meant that Leon was about. But I recalled, next moment, that Auntie had said the dog was nowhere to be found when Leon left, so apparently Esky had padded along through all that snow and hadn't seen Leon at all.

The poor pup was all in. He dragged himself up on the bunk and put his head in my lap, perfectly happy

to be there and have me rub his ears. I tried to get him off the bunk before the Lieutenant saw him, but Esky could be stubborn when he wanted to be, and refused to move, with the result that a few moments later this Lieutenant Blaines came along and spied him.

“Whose dog is that?” he demanded of me.

“Mine, sir,” I replied. The very tone of his voice grated on my nerves. I had met him before: he was some kind of an aide to General Backett, and he was in and out several times the day before. His full name was Chilton Blaines, and I didn’t think the General had a great deal of use for either his intelligence or his personality.

So I didn’t attempt any evasion about Esky, knowing at once what to expect from this snippy little shave-tail. He fulfilled my expectations at once. “Get rid of him, and immediately. You know as well as I, Canwick, that no pets or mascots are to be taken aboard. This is no old ladies’ home.” And he strode pompously down the line.

After he had disappeared and we settled down for another quarter hour wait, a big homely man across the aisle spoke up in a voice that carried to all corners of the shed. “Dat’s why dat bird don’t belong here—dis ain’t no old ladies’ home.”

“You mean the dog?” I asked stupidly, fascinated by his booming voice and his ugliness.

The big fellow grinned toothily. “Naw—dat Chilblaines, the God damn little sawed-off piece of punk.”

Whew! What an earful! But I managed to laugh at his description of the shrimp louie, and in a moment the big fellow and I became fast friends, for he promptly offered his assistance in the matter of Esky’s disposal. I gathered from his conversation that he not only liked dogs but that he loathed the sight of this snoopy “Chilblaines” as he called him, and that he would like nothing better than to slip one over on the aforesaid Chilblaines.

“We’ll trim de little squirt!” he declared. “Say, buddy, ain’t you workin’ fer de Gen?”

“General Backett,” I replied.

“Sure thing! Just the racket!” he exclaimed. “Nothin’ to it atall!” And he proceeded to enlarge upon his brilliant idea. “I been waitin’ fer a chance to get dat guy alone somewhere, and when I do, I’m gonna put his knees in his face so fast they’ll have to blast to get ’em out!”

“Well—I wish you luck,” I told him, although I didn’t want to encourage him too much because I figured this Chilblaines was just the sort of a fellow who’d go out of his way to make life miserable for anyone he suspected of being antagonistic to him. However, I hadn’t the least idea as to what could be done with Esky and I did hate to leave him for someone to ship home.

The big fellow, I later learned, knew some things that I didn’t, one thing in particular: namely that, as clerical dog-robber to General Backett, I could get away with a great many little sins of commission and omission that no common soldier could dare contemplate with impunity. This fellow had been in the army long enough to know the necessity of humility on his part, and he therefore got that much more pleasure from the idea of my slipping one over on his pet superior. Indeed, he was all wrapped up in the idea of getting Esky through the gangplank inspection and on board our transport.

“All we gotta do,” he repeated, “is get that pup into somethin’ ’at looks official. The top-kicker’ll probably be the only man ’at can suspect anything funny and he’s too damned scared of his job to say anythin’ if you tell ’im it’s somethin’ of the Gen’s.”

“But what if someone should insist on investigating?” I objected, hopeful but still in doubt as to the feasibility of the scheme.

“Aw hell, buddy!” he exclaimed impatiently. “Don’t you know there ain’t no river so wide it can’t be crossed somehow or other? It’s a million to one that we can walk right through without a hitch—why, there’s a whole g—— damned army got to get on that boat and they ain’t gonna lose no time over nobody.” His reasoning convinced himself but not me.

“And what happens after we’re on board? What if the dog gets loose? What if we’re caught in an

inspection on the ship?" I was convinced that it was too risky. "I'd rather arrange to have someone here ship him home to-morrow than take a chance on his being put out of the way in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean."

"Fergit it! Fergit it! Act yer age, buddy!" His booming voice was certainly persuasive. He sounded as if the scheme were all worked out and carried to successful conclusion. "Why, after we once get on that old scow, we can't get off, even if we want to. And nobody's gonna say anything anyway as long as we keep outa that dirty rotten little stinker's way."

At this point he demonstrated that he was chewing tobacco. When he spit, you expected the building to shake. It was really a fascinating sight: I never had seen anything quite like it: he gave his face a twist, aimed at a sawdust box about ten yards away, heaved a huge sigh and let fly in a long arch that usually ended in the sawdust box. The feat fascinated my sleepy mind so that I followed his argument in a sort of daze of admiration.

"Why, buddy," he continued, "there ain't nothin' to it atall! Not a worry! Not a wrinkle! If we get caught, your Gen'll fix it up—and anyway, what can anyone do out in the middle of the ocean? If Chilblaines threatened to throw de pup overboard, you know damn well the Gen'd put a stop to that! So what'd they do? Huh? Turn round and come back to let de dog off?... Why, buddy [Spit. Spit.] it's a set-up!"

I was convinced, or rather I let him go ahead with his plans. He procured a barracks bag and cut a little hole in the bottom of it. Then we tried various ways of carrying Esky in it. The poor pup didn't know what it was all about but I patted his head and told him it was all right, and the way he behaved proved to me that dogs have intelligence just like human beings. First we put the dog in head first; then we decided that he'd probably wriggle less if we put his head up so he could see and smell me and thus know he was all right. We tried this and I tried lifting it—it was no go. I couldn't have lugged it any distance at all.

"Let me have him," ordered my co-conspirator. And he took the bag, put a piece of board in it, stuck Esky in so his nose came at the drawstring, and picked up the bundle to carry it under his arm instead of over his shoulder as is the customary way of carrying a barracks bag. "You see, buddy, you'll be behind me and he can see ya and know it's all right. See?"

Just then the top-kicker's whistle blew and I had to submit to the plan. We started off, with the big fellow carrying Esky, besides all his own kit. Thank God we didn't have to walk far. We rode to the train in trucks. Nobody molested us and Esky behaved admirably, aside from a little stretching and wiggling which ceased as soon as I began to pet him.

When we boarded the ship in the morning, the big boy stepped lively up the gangplank with a smirking laugh, all prepared for Lieutenant Blaines, in case he happened to be around. But that gentleman was nowhere in sight. The officers at the rail gave my overloaded comrade a matter-of-fact glance, the top-kicker accepted his mumbled "some o' General Backett's stuff" and waved us past, and we followed the stream of traffic to the hole wherein we were supposed to spend the next fortnight or more.

The compartment assigned to our company proved to be too small by three bunks and the top-kicker finally assigned the big fellow and another odd number to join me in a little cubby-hole that used to be a paint shop and was now a hole just big enough for three bunks. Here we rested.

I found that the big boy's name was Ben Garlotz and that he used to be a prizefighter, under the ring name of Big Ben Bailey. He certainly had all the attributes of a rough, tough, genuine he-man. I liked him immensely and so did Esky, who was doomed to spend the duration of the trip under my bunk. The other bunkmate's name was Maurice Getterlow, and I believe he was some kind of a Semitic. We certainly made up a strange trio of bed-fellows—and Esky made an even stranger fourth member of the squad.

Dawn saw us in the lower harbor—and Private Canwick was en route to France. God help Leon and preserve Aunt Elinor from hysterics! I hoped they were both praying for me and that for once they might stand in with Mr. John Q. Headman!

CHAPTER 6

A JOY HOLE

—1—

I have never forgotten the first days on board that boat. “Well,” I said to myself, “if I am off to the war: to the war I must go!” And how! That tub we were on must have been a poor relation to a river steamer before it was commandeered for transport purposes. I don’t see how we kept up with the other ships that made up that squadron—I thought the destroyers or torpedo boats or whatever they were that we saw way off in the distance, hopping around like snake feeders, would lose us in the night. We were just chugging along—and a more monotonous voyage I never could imagine.

We sailed down into the lower harbor just after dawn, joined four other transports and set out to sea. Next day we picked up three more ships and a flock of these wasp-like naval boats, and now there were ships all around us as far as we could see. It was rather a pretty sight: sort of majestic, all these ships loaded with fighting men, plugging along sort of irresistibly; I mean, it made you feel so strong and invulnerable, or something like that. I know what I mean, so it’s all right.

As a matter of fact, I didn’t have much time to admire the scenery, because General Backett continued mercilessly to find things for me to do. Of course, in a way I was glad, because being busy kept me from worrying about my predicament and from getting into trouble. Anyway, the General never seemed to have a single moment when there wasn’t something on his mind, and anything that was on his mind automatically fell upon mine, for he depended upon little Leona unreservedly. That clerk that got blood poison must have spoiled him: he expected his dog-robber to be clerk, adviser, encyclopedia, file cabinet, errand boy, confidant, valet and information service, all in one and at once. He said the powers that be played a dirty trick on him, in that the officers who had been assigned to attend him were a collection of nitwits who were of no earthly good to him except for “show purposes.” “A staff’s a staff, even if for no other reason than that it exists and can be seen and counted,” he said.

Well, as far as I could see, he was about right. At least this Chilblaines was a total loss: he was a worse dog-robber than I. He and the others were just a bunch of errand boys and I often wondered if they were heroes in the eyes of their respective friends and families. I suppose they were truly heroic to some people: they say that every man is a hero to someone somewhere, but if that is so I don’t see how the Bible crack about great men being without honor in their own country can also be true. I guess there’s no man living who isn’t great in the eyes of somebody. I could even imagine how this Chilblaines was looked up to and admired in his home town. Well, he might be Lieutenant Blaines in his home town, but he was just plain “Chilblaines” around the ship. Ben said, “That snotty little runt could be dropped overboard and nobody’d miss him atall!”

And so, since his staff was sort of null and void for all practical purposes, General Backett relied upon little Private Canwick as his right-hand man. I certainly did feel important. I wanted to make myself indispensable to him, for in his protection lay my hope of safety. As Leon said, “One feels much safer with a general!”

Now I knew what traveling steerage was like, and I must admit that I didn't care much for it. I was beginning to feel a little unstable and Ben was likely to boil over at any time. Getterlow apparently had a cast-iron stomach—maybe he had traveled like this before.

As Ben said, "If war is hell, there must be some place worse'n hell, and we're there!" And I heartily concurred in that opinion. Our little cubbyhole opened off of Troop Compartment D-13, and we were extreme aft and on the water line, which made it necessary to keep the portholes closed all the time. Being so far aft put us in an enviable position just over the propellers and beside the pumping engines that sent the drinking water throughout the ship and the hot salt water to the enlisted men's showers.

Did I say "enviable?" Where Esky might exist in solitary comfort, in so far as space was concerned, there were three of us, two grown men and me, and Esky to boot, all packed in like the proverbial sardines—except that those poor fish are only two-deep whereas we were stacked three-deep, with the bottom bunk resting almost on the floor deck and the man on top, Getterlow, unable to turn over because of the low-lying deck above. Esky could just squirm under my bunk. Ben had the middle berth, and probably an ordinary-sized man could be comfortable in it, but not Ben.

Beside this tier of bunks was less than three feet of space—the dressing room for all three of us. A small ventilator came into the middle of the ceiling, and sent down a little breeze of cold air which was just refreshing enough to keep us alive and aggravate our misery by reminding us how cool and nice it was on deck. Of course, if you held your head under the ventilator for any length of time you might begin to feel that living was worth while, but the moment you removed your breathing apparatus from that one spot, your brains went reeling around in dizzy contortions and every breath seemed like a gasp.

Such a place would be almost untenable at best, with the portholes open, but they had to stay closed and the place was as dark as a potato cellar, unlighted except for the thin irritating rays which strayed in from a solitary blue lamp in the middle of the main troop compartment.... Truly there couldn't be any more hell in war than there was in this! The close, stifling, itch-producing atmosphere of the place defied description. Damp, heavy heat seemed to close about our heads and lungs, taking away all power of resistance, dissipating every desire to resist.

Those water-pumps next door, instead of alleviating the hot, sweaty air, augmented it by pouring forth merciless waves of saturated matter which conquered and depressed almost without a struggle. We could only get out through the main compartment, and the only way into or out of that equally uninhabitable hole was by a narrow ladder at whose upper end a hatch opened into a paint and carpentry shop—a veritable factory of fumes and odors that would be sickening enough anyway; if you felt kinda sick and started for the open air, you would have to go through this final chamber of destruction, and when a man's sick he don't feel well enough to endure that.

If you weren't sick when you started, you'd be sick by the time you got on deck, so you might just as well stay there and suffer.... It sure was one hell of a place. The only consolation I found in the situation lay in the realization that it would be so much more terrible if the occupants of this hell-hole were women instead of men: if a hundred women were jammed into a sweaty, stuffy place like that, there'd be no living there at all.

And yet we were not so bad off as some others. Indeed we were rather lucky, because, whereas each troop unit was allowed on deck only during certain hours of the day and never after dusk, we were able to grab off a little air now and then in the course of our travels about our duties, for Ben was an orderly and Getterlow managed somehow to disappear whenever it came time for drills or other routine company rules. He was a wagoner—in other words, a chauffeur, so I didn't see what excuse he could have for being absent from the company get-togethers. There couldn't be much chauffeuring aboard a ship. However, leave it to a Jew to get away with murder. You have to hand it to them, as Ben said.

I don't mean to say that we didn't suffer. Just one night was a lifetime of suffering, believe me. And during most of the day, this little hot-air pot was our chief domain and, except for our stolen and in-line-of-duty liberties, we remained there and suffered the trip as best we could—which was not very well, in the case of Esky, who found it rather close quarters for a healthy he-man of a dog. He was satisfied to stay put for a couple of days; that snowy journey to Camp about finished him; but soon he was full of pep and would have been on deck pronto if he hadn't been so well trained that he didn't know how to disobey my orders that he stay where he was.

He sure was one fine pup. Everybody liked him and anyone who couldn't finish his eats brought whatever he could carry back to Esky. Ben took a very paternal interest in him and a fiendish delight in hoodwinking the inspecting officers during the morning tour. As I was usually out at the time, Ben had to do the dirty work and take the risks. He would tuck Esky under my blanket roll when he heard the officers coming down the ladder into the compartment, and Esky stayed there without a wiggle, no matter how long he had to hold this uncomfortable position. It was so dark in there that the inspectors had to carry flash lights, and after the second morning, they didn't bother to do more than look in the door, so Esky was safe. It would have been safe enough now to leave him under the bunk, but Ben said that as sure as we did, Chilblaines would come along on inspecting detail and "Dat rat'll want to look in yer ears even!" So far, Chilblaines had failed to appear.

Ben was lying in his bunk trying to decide whether to make an effort to join the crap game outside, Esky was panting so hard underneath me that the head of my bunk was quivering, and I was about wilted. I'd have given my right eye for a bath—even considered surrendering my honor for one. I tried Christian Science to see if I could make my imagination control my body: if faith can move mountains, it certainly ought to be good for a little spell of comfort even in this god-awful sweatshop. Oho, for the life of a soldier in this man's war! What a dumb-bell I was to imagine there was anything glorious or exciting about this business!

—3—

One morning I came back to the bunk hole, found Ben there and told him, "The General says Chilblaines is sicker'n a dog and has lost everything he ever ate in his life. Isn't that good news?"

Ben just took one look at me and made a dive for the G.I. can that was set, for this very purpose, in the middle of the compartment. He was engaged there for some little time and the sounds he emitted could be heard above the monotonous hum of pumps and engines. When he finally stumbled back to his berth, he looked as if he had lost twenty pounds, but he managed a hollow-eyed grin and observed, "I hope he's unconscious the rest o' the trip! Might o' known somethin' was wrong when he didn't come snoopin' around all this time. Serves him damn well right." And he flopped into his bunk—or rather, his huge frame flopped, his legs hanging awry over the edge. He didn't have strength enough to lift them up, too.

I said that I thought Chilblaines' attack of seasickness was an act of Providence intended to safeguard Esky's passage. "Or maybe the vengeance of the Lord," I added.

"Ugh—" he groaned. "What the hell did I ever do to be treated like this?" He opened his eyes and stared at me. "Leony—be a good kid and get me a wet towel or somethin'."

So I got him a wet towel and a couple of lemons, and just as I was leaving, I discovered the remains of a plug of chewing tobacco on the deck. "Here's your tobacco, Ben," I said, laying it on his berth in front of his face.

"Aw, my God!" he cried out. "Don't ya know I'm sick! Christ, I think I'm gonna die!"

I had to laugh. "That's what everyone thinks, Ben, when they get seasick. I know what it is."

He just moaned and began sucking one of the lemons. I got out—looking at him made me feel unsteady,

too, and both of us couldn't be sick at once.

I spent that day running back and forth between Ben and the General, and I must say that being with the General was like recreation compared to what I had to endure there. Ben wasn't the only one that was sick. About half the compartment was on the trot to the G.I. can and up on deck every other man was sucking a lemon. The mess hall was doing a very, very dull business: you didn't have to stand in line very long now to get your chow.

And what an education I was receiving! Every man around me had a different way of swearing and it seemed that each one was trying to outdo every other one in the matter of thinking up the dirtiest, vilest, rottenest expressions. And since Ben was no slouch when it came to cussing, I got more than my share of earfuls.

If Auntie could only see her "Leona dear" now! I knew I was in the army. "Gangway for a bucket o' slop!"

—4—

Well, in spite of the salt-water soap that don't soap worth a damn, in spite of my tummy playing funny tricks that threatened seasickness, in spite of Esky having joined Ben in *le mal de mer*, in spite of the fact that we couldn't see our convoy any longer and that we were in the middle of the Atlantic and fair game for submarines, and in spite of hell itself, I felt pretty good that night! And that's saying a mouthful without a single promise for the morrow—for to-morrow I was planning to get a bath, in fresh water! I'd itched and squirmed and sweated and suffered as long as I could: to-morrow I was going to take the leap—if I got caught, I'd just have to get caught, that's all. I had to have a bath.

But that night I was happy anyway, because that afternoon I received a nice little surprise from the General.

He had sent me out with some papers for the Divisional Adjutant and when I reported back to his stateroom, I found him reading a paper-covered French novel which a colonel had given him the day before. I knew he could read French and I was surprised, not to say a little suspicious, when he asked me to translate several lines of the text for him.

"I can fuddle through the ordinary stuff and manage to get the general sense of a passage," he explained, "but now and then I find something that is too idiomatic for my limited knowledge and just don't make sense at all."

He handed the book to me and I glanced hurriedly at the title and the page which he indicated. Apparently the story was just another piece of French frankness: the French adore risqué situations and subtly dirty dénouements, but most of their novels and stories are false alarms. I mean, you expect something very exceptionally shocking, and it isn't at all. Well, that's the kind of a story my General was reading—with enjoyment.

I read the passage that had stumped him and we both smiled at the subtle suggestions in it. "Stuff like this," he remarked, as I returned the book to him, "is not good literary diet, but I find it refreshing if used sparingly."

"Harmless, I guess, sir," I observed.

He nodded in agreement, then continued, "By the way, Canwick, I've requested the personnel officer to find a vacant sergeancy for you—I believe in rewarding ability and industry."

I hesitated for a moment, then said very sincerely, "I appreciate your good opinion very much, sir. And thank you for the promotion, sir."

I was ready to depart then and there, but he made no gesture or remark of dismissal, so I shifted uneasily to the other foot and waited. Finally he spoke. "It just occurs to me, Canwick, that perhaps you

might like to make application for appointment as a field clerk. Better pay and more conveniences and privileges, of course, but you wouldn't be in the army. Would a white-collar job suit your ambitions?"

"Why—" I commanded the sun of my thoughts to stand still, but it kept right on racing around. What should I say? I knew what a field clerk was and before I could be one I'd have to be discharged from the army; being a field clerk would insure my safe progress and let me out of all my prospective embarrassments, BUT they don't give a man a discharge without giving him a thorough medical examination at the same time!

"You suit your own likes," declared the General. "If you want a commission as field clerk, I'll see that you get it. If you don't, I'll try to keep you happy as long as you're with me."

"I think, sir," I replied, sure enough of the choice now, "that I'd rather serve my enlistment and take my chances on promotions. I would rather remain in the army. Thank you just the same, sir."

He laughed. "Oh—don't mention it. Just occurred to me, that's all. I want to see you go as far as possible, because I think your training and ability deserve it.... Thanks for the help with the French, and I believe that's all for the present."

I eased out of his stateroom and hurried back to Ben. I found him stretched out on his bunk. He emitted a moan when he saw me, but when I told him the good news he raised himself on an elbow and exclaimed, almost heartily, "Sergeant Canwick! Well, I'll be g—— d——!"

This certainly was a funny war. Big Ben Bailey was a fighter; he could whip a dozen men my size; and he didn't know what fear meant—yet a little shrimp like me gets to be a sergeant and he remains a private. It wasn't as if we were going to do battle with our minds: we were going to war, to fight other men, and yet little me was worth more pay as a soldier than Big Ben was. It seems funny when you stop to think of it.

But Ben made a crack that also made me think. He said, "You enlisted in the Medical Corps, but you ain't gonna see the world through the same hole the rest o' the pill-rollers see it through." He seemed to think that was a joke, so I laughed with him, but damned if I could see anything funny in it. Some of the things I heard were utterly unintelligible to me—I was not up on the terminology of vulgarity yet.

—5—

The seventh day being Sunday I had to put off my bath—for various reasons. I swore to get it to-morrow, though, or die in the attempt. I was feeling fine, if it weren't for being so dirty and uncomfortable. I mean, my tummy had decided to be good and the cold sea air gave me all the life necessary to make one feel good.

I saw Ben take a chew of tobacco, so I guessed he was feeling better. In fact, I knew he was, for he spent the morning teaching me how to shoot craps. He insisted that I learn. I said I didn't have any money to gamble with, but he says, "Don't worry about that: you'll gamble with my money and I'll split the profits with you. You can't lose!"

"Why not? Why don't you shoot, if it's as easy as all that?"

"Gawd, Leony, but you're dumb!" he declared impatiently. "Don't you know what Beginners' Luck is? You never shot crap, therefore you'll win. See?"

So I learned how to shake 'em up and roll 'em out; how to bet, how not to bet; how to "talk to 'em" and what to do when they obeyed my orders. We were all set for the game which was sure to begin just after noon mess.

Well, I don't know just how to describe what happened. I was all aquiver with excitement: it was just as if I were going into a battle. We joined the game at the start and we were there at the finish. Between these two extremes was much of interest.

Several of the ship's crew came down to join in the game: sailors are supposed to be deadly crap shooters, I gathered from what I'd heard, and Ben insisted on betting against the dice for several rounds, "just to see what goes on here." We just about broke even in this kind of play.

The fourth time the dice came to me, Ben throws out a two-dollar bill and declares, "Canwick'll shoot this time. Two bones."

Nobody swooped down on it at first, but finally a sailor flips out two one-dollar bills, saying, "Two dollar bills must be lucky for you guys."

Well, I shook up the dice very nonchalantly and let 'em fly across the money. The sailor laughed. It was a crap: a one and a one.

"There's your two, big boy," said the sailor, pointing to the dice with the two up and gathering in the four dollars.

A five spot fluttered by my face and Ben said, "Try a five and see if a five comes for us."

The sailor took two dollars of it and another soldier took the remaining three. I shook them up and rolled again. A four! Everybody started making side-bets on whether I'd seven or four or "on the next roll." I rolled those damned dice until I was blue in the face. Roll 'em and go after 'em; roll 'em and go after 'em; over and over and over again, until I was sweating like a stuck pig. Side-bets were won and lost and everybody seemed to be making or losing or doing something one way or the other, except me. Ben placed bets, won and lost on the rolls. And then at last I rolled out a beautiful seven.

Our five dollars were gone. Seven dollars in all. I felt rather hectic and turned to Ben, ready to quit. "Get back there!" he commanded. "Don't you know it's never good luck to win right off?"

So I returned to the game and followed his instructions. On my next roll, we lost three dollars. Ben won a little against the dice. Then I lost five dollars more on my roll, and Ben won one against. Then Ben got mad and slapped down all we had; thirteen dollars. "Shoot the works!" he declared. And I was promptly covered.

That time I rolled a ten, and it required just three rolls to get from that number down to seven.

I looked at Ben. He growled and turned away. I followed him up the ladder and out on deck. When I caught up with him, I asked, "Where you going now?"

"To borrow ten bucks from a guy I know," he replied. "You wait here for me."

So I waited and while I hung around the door to the carpentry shop I heard the voice of a chaplain preaching to a crowd on the deck right over our compartment. It struck me as awfully funny: a preacher upstairs giving a sermon and a gang downstairs gambling!

Pretty soon Ben came back, with a grin on his ugly face. "Come on!" he called. "We'll trim dese guys yet."

When I got back in my old place in the circle, I noticed that the voice of that chaplain upstairs was audible even down here, and I mentioned the fact to the man next to me.

"That's Doc Lumber," he informed me. "He has about as much business in the army as I have in a lady's seminary."

"What's the matter with him?" I asked.

"Oh—nothing. He's all right, you know. Good preacher, but old-fashioned and too damned serious and literal-minded for an army chaplain. Nobody pays any attention to his preaching, anyway."

So I turned my attention to the game. Ben had made a bet against the dice and lost a dollar. On the next man's roll, he won a dollar. The dice came to me.

"We shoot one buck," announced Ben, throwing out the dollar.

It was no sooner covered than I rolled out a nine and repeated promptly. "Shoot the two," said Ben. It was covered and out rolled an eleven.

"Four bet," announced Ben, restraining me from picking up part of the four dollars.

"Let's play safe," I argued.

“You’re hot, Leony—let it ride!”

So I did and we proceeded to run wild, until Ben advised that we could now play safe.

After a while my mind began to wander around and my ears caught up the sound of the chaplain’s voice again. I looked up and discovered that a ventilator shaft opened almost directly over my head, which explained how the chaplain’s voice came down to us so clearly. Then it struck me as probable that our noise could be heard up on deck.

But up to this point the crap shooters had managed to keep their voices more or less subdued. Gambling was prohibited, of course, and most of these games were very quiet affairs.

Now, however, the game became rather exciting, due to several wild runs of luck to the profit of a corporal and a sailor. The voices began to sound a little higher and louder, as the men forgot to be careful. I decided that Sergeant Canwick would be better off up on deck listening to the sermon.

Ben didn’t mind, now that he had a surplus to work with. I told him I’d be upstairs if he wanted me, and he slid down into my place in the circle. I scurried up the ladder and ambled around within hearing distance of the Chaplain.

He appeared to be very much annoyed at something and I guessed at once that the noise from below had penetrated to him.

“It is beyond me, how such people can expect to attain any happiness in life! No self-respecting man would indulge in these wasteful pastimes. How could he, and expect to get anywhere?” Apparently he was talking about the game and the gamblers.

Almost immediately came an answer to his question, wafted up through the ventilator whose mouth was just behind him. “BOX CAR, papa! BOX CAR!” was what the Chaplain and everyone near the ventilator heard.

Someone smothered a laugh and there were many wide grins in the congregation, but the good man continued his exhortations, in such a loud tone that he almost succeeded in drowning out the cries of “Crap him! Crap him!” which followed in explanation of the strange statement previously rendered from the depths below.

The sermon proceeded undisturbed for some minutes then, but a little later when the trend of his talk led into the subject of guarding one’s moral well-being in the face of such temptations as would likely be faced in France, the reverend gentleman was again rewarded by another, even louder and better antiphonal chant from below. This time he cried out ardently, “Who is there that can afford to risk the whole future happiness of his life for the sake of these momentary pleasures of the flesh?”

I’m sure the voice that rumbled out the answer was Ben’s, for that “LITTLE JOE!” sounded as only my bunkmate could make it sound.

Several laughs greeted this phenomenon and the Chaplain was showing signs of losing his temper, but he resolutely continued on the subject of lust and the wages of sin. “How would I feel,” he demanded, “if the woman I wanted to marry should come to me with a sinful, immoral past?”

And Ben’s voice boomed out, as if it were timed for precisely that moment, “NATURAL, papa! NATURAL AGAIN, papa!”

That proved to be the last straw. The Chaplain sent a man after the Officer of the Day and I hurried down to warn the gang. The game broke up pronto and Ben came with me into our bunk hole, where he counted out the total receipts and figured out our profit. “Fifty bucks apiece ain’t a bad day’s pay, Leony!” he declared, handing me my fifty.

A few moments later the Officer of the Day appeared in our compartment and cast a curious eye around. No one knew anything about any crap game around there! Hadn’t seen a pair of dice for months! No, sir, not in here! The officer smiled knowingly and let it go at that. Some officers are like that—they have sense enough to know when to act like regular fellows.

As he departed up the ladder, a Limey who slept just outside our door spoke up and said, “Aw, the

Chaplain's a blowey bloke hany'ow an' oo in 'ell 'ankers hafter 'earin' habout 'eaven 'ere?" He was positively disgusted and I assumed that he had lost money in the game.

Personally I was glad the Chaplain did break up the game, because otherwise, Ben probably would have stuck around there until he'd lost all our winnings—and fifty dollars felt pretty good to me just then.

So, as Ben said, I had become a crap-shooting fool! Lord, if Auntie could see me now! I was wringing wet that minute from living in this hole of agony. That bath couldn't be put off another day. 'Twas better to have laved and lost all than never to have laved at all. That's how I looked at this matter, and barring a sub-scare or a torpedo, I'd be a clean woman to-morrow. Thank God!

CHAPTER 7

A DOG'S LIFE

—1—

We had been eight days on this deep blue sea and our convoy hadn't appeared yet. The General said we'd probably pick them up to-morrow or next day and in another couple days we'd be wherever we were going. Nobody knew where that would be, not even the Captain, but probably either Brest, St. Nazaire or Bordeaux, since those were the three ports that were taken over by the American Expeditionary Forces. No one could be sure, though: we might end at Le Havre or in England. This was a hell of a war: we were just like a shipload of freight: we don't know where we're going but we're on our way!

However, I felt much better now, regardless of the monotony and the suspense, for at last I did the impossible and escaped without being suspected. It was an experience!

Just around the corner from the General's stateroom was a lavatory and bath with a sign on the door reading FOR OFFICERS ONLY. (Which was rather brazenly ironic, because there was an old sign on the door, reading GENTLEMEN, and this hadn't been removed, the black letters had only been painted over: anyone might observe that Officers weren't gentlemen or the old sign would have been good enough for present purposes.) Even the General smiled at it.

However, I had decided several days previous to investigate this special domain of the favored, and I found it much more to my liking than the enlisted men's "head." There were only two or three enlisted men who were very much around that section of the deck, so no one objected to my going in there, since the officers who used the place knew that I was General Backett's dog-robber. Thus I was able to avoid visiting the more embarrassingly un-private "heads" which the enlisted men were supposed to use: the nearest one to General Backett's stateroom was on the deck below—very inconvenient for a busy individual like me. And besides, there were doors on the boxes: which helped a lot in the matter of privacy, I must say.

Besides all these advantages, this place had two showers—and private ones at that. I mean, with doors that latch and everything! Ideal!

So this day I waltzed in with a towel and soap tucked under my blouse. There was a Captain in there at the time, so I made believe I had come for another purpose and beat a hasty retreat.

A little later, I tried again and, not seeing anyone around, concluded that the time was ripe. So I started to undress. You see, there's no place to undress—I mean, no privacy. And I was just about to pull my blouse off when in comes Chilblaines. Well, I about fell over, because he was the one man on this ship whom I hoped never to meet in that bathroom.

I saluted him and began to button up my blouse, as if I had just been washing my face or something. He looked at me a moment after returning the salute, then stepped into one of the boxes and snapped the latch. I tucked my towel away again and departed.

About an hour later I got away from the General again and made a third attempt. This time I determined to take no chances. I locked myself in the shower and stripped for action.

Then I couldn't decide what to do with my clothes. If I left them inside, they'd get all wet. If I put them

outside, it would arouse suspicion, because the officers who use these showers leave their clothes in their staterooms and come down in slickers or overcoats. Finally I decided that the only place my clothes could go was up on top of the pipes at the back of the box, and there I put them. I didn't know for sure whether anyone outside could see them there or not, but I couldn't waste time trying to find out. I just turned on that wonderful warm water and proceeded to revel in its downpour.

Just as I got myself nicely lathered up, someone rattles the door and gives me the scare of my young life. A gruff old voice says, "Who's there?" And I looked through the crack under the door and saw two enormous bare feet.

What in the devil was I supposed to do? Let him come in and share the bath?

The feet padded around into the next box and I expected any moment to see a head stick up over the partition. But instead I heard him swear at something and then he said, "How long will you be in there?"

I had to say something, so I dropped my voice to as low a pitch as I could manage and still make my words carry. "About ten minutes—" I almost said "sir" from force of habit.

"This other shower's out of order," he grumbled and padded away.

I continued my bath. Rinsed thoroughly. Lathered all over again. Rinsed again. Turned off the water and made a hurry job of drying myself.

Believe me, I could pass a fireman's dressing test after getting into my clothes as fast as I did this afternoon. I was proud of myself.

And I was clean! Thank God I was pure again, within and without—and another difficulty had been surmounted, with credit and satisfaction.

When I closed that bathroom door and noticed that sign again, I had to laugh. All one needed in this man's army in order to get along was a little intelligence.

—2—

The day after my bath, we had trouble. I guess it was my own fault, for I should have told Ben about meeting Chilblaines in the bath, then he'd have been prepared for his visit the next morning.

The result of my negligence was that Esky was resting comfortably under the head of my bunk when the inspecting officers appeared, and when Ben saw Chilblaines it was too late to do anything about the pup. The snooty little lieut just had to poke his head in our place and look under the bunk. As Ben says, he would have looked under there if he didn't look anywhere else all day. And when he saw what was there, he exploded like a bomb.

"Is this the way you men were taught to obey orders?" he demanded of Ben, who glowered at him, although he must have been scared stiff. "How did that dog get aboard after I explicitly told Canwick to get rid of it?"

Ben shrugged his shoulders but didn't answer.

"Answer me! Are you dumb?"

"No, sir," declared Ben promptly. "First I know that dog was here—he musta followed us."

Such a brazen, impossible falsehood must have given the lieut chills and fever. "Followed you, eh!" he stormed. "That's mighty reasonable, isn't it, when officers were watching everything that came aboard!"

"Well—" Ben tried to help his explanation by details.

But the officer impatiently waved his words away. "Keep still! I don't want to hear any more of your prevarications. That dog must be got rid of at once. Tell Canwick he will hear from this without delay." And the puffy little runt stamped away to finish his tour of inspection.

As soon as he left the compartment, Ben hurried out to find me, and a few minutes later I discovered him parked for patient waiting in front of the General's door. He lost no time in recounting what had

happened and ended his recital with, "So you just beat this guy to it and tell the Gen. all about the works!"

Well, I couldn't decide what to do, but finally came to the conclusion that I could do nothing else but put it up to the General, although I wasn't as confident of his judgment as Ben seemed to be. I don't know how Ben knew so much about my boss, but he seemed to have implicit faith in him. Maybe it was as my partner says, "A man can't get to be a General unless he's a real human being!"

So I interrupted the General's home work in French and proceeded to tell him how my pet dog had followed me to camp, had been sent home and chained, had broken out and come a hundred miles through a snowstorm to rejoin me the night we left for Hoboken. "And now the Lieutenant has discovered him under my bunk and threatens to get rid of him."

"Well, sergeant, you did disobey orders, didn't you?" he observed, but not unkindly. Just sort of a paternal reproof.

"Yes, sir." I replied frankly. "But I'm willing to do anything, sir—anything at all, to get the dog home safely. I'll ship him back the day we land. Or—" I hated to say the rest, but he kept looking at me as if waiting for me to finish so I had to go on. "Or, if you say to get rid of him,—why—well—I'll do whatever you say, sir." My voice must've sounded rather jerky for a hard-boiled soldier.

My heart skipped several beats before he answered, but when he said, "He must be a pretty good dog to behave himself under such circumstances." I immediately felt relieved, for I knew then that he wouldn't uphold Chilblaines.

"I should say, 'Just forget about this matter, sergeant,'" he advised finally, and turned his attention to his book.

"And keep the dog, sir?" I asked, just to make certain.

"Yes. Yes, of course, you must keep the dog." He sounded rather impatient, as if he didn't like to seem too lenient, and I took the hint, thanked him and started to go, just as the door opened and Chilblaines himself reported. I decided to stay until I was sent out—which was immediately, for the General said, "You may go, sergeant," as soon as he saw who his visitor was. I closed the door behind me, but lingered for a few moments in front of it, using an unwrapped puttee as a pretext.

Sure enough, Chilblaines promptly reported my dastardly insubordination. I stopped breathing in order to hear what the General had to say on the matter, but his speech was so long that I almost choked. "Chilton," I heard him say, as if he were talking to a little boy, "I don't know whether you will ever go to a higher rank than your present one, but I'm quite certain that you never will until you've altered your attitude toward your environment, and particularly your subordinates. You must learn to look forward instead of backward, upward instead of down, and to value morale more than discipline. A martinet seldom if ever makes any real success in wartime. Discipline that doesn't embrace common sense will not make a powerful leader. Success is not won by wasting time on past defeats, but by working toward the victories of the future.... Now this dog matter is a case in point, something in the past. It makes no difference how he came aboard. The point is that he is here and, regardless of all the regulations, which are intended in this case to prevent what might develop into a general nuisance, he is doing no one any harm whatsoever. If there were a thousand howling, yapping, hungry dogs, it would be a different matter entirely—and would come under the ban of regulations. But one single little animal that bothers no one and makes practically no impression on the ship's rations—why, can't you see, man, how foolish it is to make a mountain of such a molehill?"

Chilblaines didn't answer, so the General continued, "There is nothing to be gained either for you or for the United States Army by breeding ill feeling from an incident like this, so let's just forget about it."

When I heard that, I beat a hasty retreat. A moment later Chilblaines appeared, very flushed in the face and looking rather uncomfortable. I chalked up a great big mark to the General's credit, believe me.

He surely was one fine man. Ben said he was a "damn good guy!" And Esky seemed to know something had happened, for he made no bones about romping all over the compartment, since Ben ceased to restrain

him. He made friends for us all over the place, and I felt pretty good.

—3—

Nothing much happened the next day, except a darned good time down in our hole, singing barrack-room ballads and telling dirty stories. I didn't tell any, but I did a good job at listening.

Oh, yes, something else did happen. Ben was fully recovered, eating like a horse and buying chewing tobacco again—and this last got him into trouble.

He was lying on his bunk, having a beautiful spree with his cud when the top-kicker called "attention" for inspection. But the top-kicker was a little late, and the result was that the inspecting officer had reached the bottom of the ladder by the time Ben rolled out. But Ben didn't stop to see how far down the officer was: he just screwed up his face and sent a torrent of tobacco juice in the direction of the G.I. can at the foot of the ladder. It was a beautiful shot and made a bull's-eye—after passing within an inch of the officer's nose.

The officer—he's a captain—stumbled backwards and sat down on the bottom of the ladder. He couldn't see Ben and Ben couldn't see him, and so when the captain arose to his feet he was favored with another narrow escape, this time from a hurtling ball of chewing tobacco. This missile didn't come quite so close to the captain's nose, but it made a bull's-eye in the G.I. can just as Ben became aware of the error of his ways.

The officer came to him directly. "Chewing tobacco during an inspection, eh? Didn't you hear the sergeant call you to attention?"

"Yes, sir."

"Didn't you see me coming down that ladder?"

"No, sir—I don't see how you got there so quick."

"Don't talk back. I don't need any of your opinions or thoughts."

"Yes, sir," Ben clamped his jaws together and kept his mouth shut throughout the merciless bawling out which the captain felt it his duty to give.

And then he noticed Esky. "Whose dog is that?" he demanded, as if he were glad to find something else to kick about.

But Ben fooled him. "General Backett's dog, sir," he declared. "Sergeant Canwick just takes care of him, sir."

The captain wheeled about and continued his tour, but Ben was shivering for days for fear the top-kicker would favor him with a detail on Kitchen Police or "head orderly," neither of which were very easy on the stomach. Ben said, "This war is just one g—— d—— thing after another and I ain't had a whole hour o' rest since it started!"

Personally, I thought we were getting along beautifully. If God would just stick with us—that's all I asked!

—4—

At last! On the eleventh day, and a damned rough one at that, we picked up the destroyers and subchasers that were to escort us through the danger zone and into port. It began to look as if we were getting somewhere at last. I certainly was relieved. I mean, enough is enough of this kind of traveling. If a cattle boat is anything like this, I really couldn't blame Leon much if he didn't hop on the next one to come to my rescue. Probably the animals on a cattle boat occupy a place just about like our compartment; if so, being

valet to the cows and horses can't be a very pleasant occupation.

We were talking about cattle boats and Ben said he knew a fellow once who took a job on one of them. "And he made a mistake and tried to treat a bull the same way you do a cow and the bull went mad and raised hell with him."

"What did he do?" I asked. "Kill him?"

Ben just laughed. "Well," he said, "he ain't dead. He can walk and eat and do lots o' other uninteresting things, but he might's well be dead as be the way he is."

Well, I couldn't figure out just what the bull did to his friend. Apparently it must have been something pretty awful—and I hadn't nerve enough to ask for more particulars. Curiosity wasn't going to kill this kitty.

Anyway, working on a cattle boat can't be much fun. And I couldn't imagine Leon in such a place. Funnier still was the idea of *me* doing that kind of work! However, if Leon came over that way, I'd probably have to go back the same way. I couldn't decide which would be worse: being in my present situation or in that one.

—5—

One hell of a lot of trouble next day! This young lady's army days seemed numbered—and a damned small number, too.

Of all the unexpected, damn-fool, crazy things that ever happened! It was, for once, my luck to be out when the blow fell, but my absence just delayed the agony. I couldn't possibly escape being discovered—and just when I thought everything was going along so nicely. Just my rotten luck!

Just after I left for the General's the top-kicker announced that the C.O. had ordered one of those damnably intimate "inspections" before we landed, and he proceeded to call the roll. When he came to me, he asked Ben where I was and Ben said, "With General Backett."

"Tell him about this when he comes in, Garlotz, and tell him to report to me." And the top-kicker lined them all up and led the way to the sick-bay, where they were duly looked over by a captain in the Medical Corps.

I came in after noon mess and Ben told me about it. "They caught one bird," he informed me. "Wonder what they'll do with him?"

"What do you mean?" I demanded, suppressing my excitement as much as possible.

"Was you born this morning?" inquires Ben sarcastically.

"But how in the devil could a man get anything on this ship. Don't you get things like that from women?"

Ben just laughed then. "Don't you know, Leony, that sometimes it takes nine or ten days for it to show up? That's why they waited until now to have this thing, because they figure that if a guy ain't got nothin' wrong with him now, he won't have unless he gets something from one o' these passionate mademoiselles."

I must have looked pretty scared, for he asked, "What the hell's the matter with you?"

"Oh, nothing," I replied, catching up my slipping nerves. "That stuff doesn't worry me any. I just haven't got time to chase up there to the sick-bay."

"Well, you might's well go and get it over with," he advised.

But I didn't. I beat it right back to the General's and believe me I managed to keep myself busy there all afternoon and part of the evening. But I didn't know what was going to happen. The top-kicker later came around and said, "I've been looking all over for you, Canwick. You're the only one the Doc hasn't seen, so to-morrow morning, I'll take you up."

Well, I was racking my brains, but if the morrow didn't bring forth any more than my brains had so far, then somebody was in line for a scandalous surprise to-morrow morning.

God, why did I ever get into such a mess! If I wasn't sure that they'd pull me out, I'd have gone over the side straight. The way I felt then, I'd rather have died than be discovered. It was awful!

—6—

I found it necessary to hide out the following day: when I wasn't with the General I managed to find other places to go—any place except the hole. And of course I was worried sick all day, and even then I wasn't sure whether I'd escaped or just delayed again the inevitable moment of detection. This suspense certainly was hard on a girl's nerves.

When I came in at night, Ben welcomed me with, "Well, Leony, you can thank me fer savin' yer stars this time."

"Why?" I inquired, at a loss to know what he was talking about.

"The top-kick's been in here a dozen times lookin' fer you, and every time I said you were busy as hell with the Gen."

"Well—I have been," I agreed.

"And I suppose you forgot all about that doctor that's been waitin' specially to meet ya?" he suggested with a smile.

"No—I didn't," I declared. "But I just haven't had time to chase after any doctors. I don't need a doctor for anything anyway!"

"You don't, eh?" He laughed. "Don't kid me any more, buddy. I'm yer friend anyway."

I began to wonder just what this big galoot had in his head. Did he suspect that I was avoiding the doctor. Apparently he did. What did he think my reason for this? Had he somehow become suspicious of my sex? All at once I felt panicky—actually like running away.

He continued to chew and spit, while I looked at him stupidly, trying to divine his thoughts. Finally he said, "You're the last man in the world I'd think it of."

"Think what of? What the hell are you talking about?"

"You know what I'm talkin' about all right. And so do I. And I'm tellin' ya to thank me fer savin' yer goose."

"How?"

"Well, I told the sergeant the last time he came lookin' fer ya that he ought to be ashamed of himself thinkin' that a pure sweet boy like you would ever have anything like that!"

"And what did he say to that?" I asked, relieved at last.

"Said he's gettin' sick o' huntin' you." Ben indulged in an expectorational feat and smiled at me knowingly. "An' so I says, 'Y'er wastin' yer time, sergeant. Why'n't ya just check him off and call it square?'"

"What did he say to that?"

"Said, 'How the hell do I know but what he's got seven varieties of venereal disease?'"

"Well—come on! What did you tell him then? I don't see how you've saved me anything." I was beginning to have fears again.

"Ya know what I said?" Ben demanded rhetorically. "I says, 'Why, sergeant, that kid ain't never been with a woman in his life! There ain't no more chance o' his havin' one o' them diseases than there is o' me bein' captain o' this ship!' And he says, 'Is that a fact?' And I says, 'Absolutely—he don't even know what a woman looks like underneath! He's the dumbest greenhorn ya ever saw!' And so the sergeant looks at me a minute and then he says, 'Well, I haven't time to chase after him any more anyway. We're going to

dock to-night and land in the morning, and as far as the C. O. knows Canwick's been examined just like the rest of us.'"

I almost fell on the big galoot's neck, but he had not yet finished his recital. "I says, 'Ye're just savin' yourself work, sergeant—needless work. I give ya my word o' honor Canwick ain't been near a woman an' he ain't got nothin' the matter with him.' An' he says, 'All right, to hell with him then.' And that's the end o' that, see!"

I laughed at his seriousness and told him, "I'm glad you have such faith in me, Ben. Thanks a whole lot."

"Faith in ya!" he exclaimed, as if I had insulted his intelligence. "Say, ya don't suppose I'm dumb enough to believe that myself, do ya? I just lied for ya, that's all. I don't wanta see ya get in trouble and lose yer stripes."

"But there's nothing the matter with me, you big goof!" I retorted.

He just laughed at me. "I don't care whether ya have or not—but you see that ya use yer own towel after this!"

So we just sat there for a while, neither of us saying anything. I was sorry he had that idea in his head, but I was mighty glad to know that the inspection terror was at least temporarily alleviated. Finally I thanked him for troubling to lie for me, "although it really wasn't necessary, as you think it was."

He apparently had been thinking it over during our silence, for he now came out with this: "I can't see how you could be so dumb about everything and still be on layin' terms with any women! You just don't know nothin' at all about that kind o' stuff—so I guess you must be tellin' the truth." He pondered for a moment, then asked, as if to clinch the matter, "Honest—ain't you ever been with a woman in yer life?"

I looked straight into his eyes and said, "No, sir, I've never done anything like that with a woman!" Which was, after all, entirely true.

"Gawd—what's the matter with ya?" he demanded.

"Oh—I just haven't any use for them, that's all. They just get you into trouble, don't they?"

And that ended that rather heated discussion, for he just laughed at me, and he laughed so hard I almost became worried again for fear he'd suspect me of being myself instead of my brother.... Well, anyway, I had escaped the eyes of that doctor. If he wanted to meet me, and if I had anything to say about it, he'd have to come back to the United States and be introduced to me. Huh—I wasn't showing all my private property to every Tom, Dick and Harry in the Medical Corps of the United States Army!

That night we were in the harbor at Brest and everyone was busy getting packed up ready to disembark in the morning. Also everyone, or about ninety per cent of us, were hit all of a sudden with dysentery: it was something they'd been feeding us on this ship, because almost everyone had it. It was damned inconvenient for me, I know that.

Well, I was sure 'nough in the army now!

CHAPTER 8

NO PLACE FOR A LADY

—1—

And so—This was Brest, France! Two more weeks almost disappeared into history. I was getting inured to this army life, for it was getting so that I didn't notice how fast the days flew by. There was something doing every day and I was busy—which probably accounts for the speedy passage of time.

I'd been thinking it over and decided when I got back home I'd write to the Secretary of War and suggest that they put a huge sign up in front of the entrance to this man's war and put on the sign these words: FOR MEN ONLY. This business certainly was for men only. It was no place for a woman—at least, not a nice woman, I mean a decent girl like me. Of all the rough-necks—I never imagined there were so many in the Land of the Free and Home of the Brave. I was meeting them here, though. I was thrown in with people that I'd never meet in the course of a lifetime at home: I mean, some of these men were specimens such as I would never have an opportunity of knowing in the United States. I guess one never knows how the other half lives nor how they think, but I was beginning to get a pretty good conception.

However, to get back to the story:—We came ashore on a dirty old lighter that must have been a coal barge before the war. The day we landed was one of the three hundred and fifty days of rain in the customary French year. Up around that part of Brittany, the natives must be thankful that Leap Year doesn't come every year, because the chances are it would be just another rainy day. The usual quota of sunshiny days there is one-per-month. I always recalled France as a land of sunshine and sparkle, but the first ten days in Brest sadly disillusioned me. We had only one day that didn't show a rainfall!

And imagine poor little me tramping through the mud and water in a cold, drizzling downpour—me, who was experiencing the first “hike” of this kind in my life! Everyone except the high officers had to march from the docks out to the Pontanezan Barracks, a walled camp that was built by Napoleon more than a hundred years ago. This place is four miles out of Brest, and it wouldn't have been such a bad walk if there hadn't been so much mud and other contributing causes for discomfort. We never had any adequate drill on board the transport, most of us were suffering from the effects of that awful dysentery, all of us were weak of legs and weaker in the stomach. It was certainly one tough stretch, and I hope I don't have to go to war like that any more. I'd prefer to ride to my death in a G.M.C. or a flivver ambulance.

When we were just getting started, Ben let Esky out of his barracks bag and observed very sourly, “If this ain't a hell of a fine way to welcome a bunch o' real heroes, my old man was a priest!”

A priest by the name of Garlotz! “Was he a priest, Ben?” the man on the other side of him inquired, probably for the sake of hearing Ben's profanity.

“Priest hell!” declared the big boy. “I don't think he knew what a priest looks like. My old man helped build the subway with a pick and shovel!” And he proceeded, between curses anent the weather, the frogs, the officers, the Government, the President, and General Pershing's progeny even unto the fourth and fifth generations, to tell us about his “old man” who, it seems, was a remarkably able man who never got a nickel for fighting but could beat the daylights out of his prize-fighting son any time he became drunk

enough to so desire. Anyone would have to read between the lines of that speech to discern the fact that Ben must really have thought a lot of his father. Personally, it never before occurred to me that he had a father: a man like Ben is so eye-filling that you just don't think of him as having a family somewhere, and a father and mother just like ordinary people.

Well, anyway, the column moved slowly forward, the under-officers feeling the strain every bit as much as the enlisted men and allowing us to break ranks and "fall out" with unexpected frequency. I guess we fell out at least five times before we reached the gate to the barracks, and when we arrived there we stood around for more than half an hour waiting to be assigned to quarters, while rumors of all kinds were running around and considerable confusion arose as a result of someone's remark that we'd probably have to sleep in pup tents outside the walls because the barracks within were all filled. This rumor threw Ben into a fit of profanity that could not be stopped until orders came to move along. Ben had no use whatever for pup tents. He said, "I can't get my feet under cover in one of those damned pillow cases!" Like most rumors in the army, this one proved false and we finally found ourselves located in a wooden shed just off the parade ground of the camp. We were soaked to the skin, but mighty glad to be there.

Everybody ditched his luggage and made a line for the little corrugated iron building around the corner. The dysentery was still operative.... Nobody was very hungry that noon, but by nighttime we were all ready for chow.

One reason for this was that we had no sooner begun to take life easy in our new quarters than Chilblaines appeared on the scene without any warning and told the top-kicker he had come over to see that the men got a work-out. "They might catch cold if they remain idle now, sergeant. Get them out and we'll warm them up for a half hour or so. Can't afford to leave any of them in the hospital here."

Well, everybody was sore. You could see that the top-kicker didn't like the idea at all, and the rest of us couldn't begin to express our thoughts. Whoever expected a headquarters company to go out and drill like a crew of infantrymen? Some of these fellows couldn't do much better than I did, and I had some tall and quick thinking to do to keep in line as we marched up and down and back and forth the length and breadth of that parade ground. Chilblaines kept us at it for an hour and some of us almost sat down in our tracks when he finally dismissed us. It was then that someone offered the information that "Chilblaines rode out with the General—that's why he felt so fresh and strong."

The chorus of curses and other kindred expressions that greeted this announcement almost made me deaf. Ben's opinion sounded literary and mild compared to the others, and he said, "Chilblaines musta been born in dog days, cause he's a son-of-a-b—— as sure as hell!"

I said that I thought he had an overdeveloped sense of his own importance in this army and that he probably figured this was a way to prove his leadership.

"Leadership hell!" growls Ben. "That guy couldn't lead me nowhere. I wouldn't even let him lead me to a drink of good rye whisky right this minute. If we was in the front lines and he told me to go forward I'd turn around and knock his teeth down his throat so he couldn't give orders." The thought of such a golden pleasure, however remote as a possibility, was a never failing source of enjoyment for Ben. His idea of heaven would be to have Chilblaines and himself locked in a room together.... Well, my opinion of Chilblaines is unprintable, too.

That drilling in the rain was a tea party, compared to what happened the following morning. At four A.M. we were called up by the top-kick, who was very apparently pretty mad about something. He ordered us all out in our slickers—which could mean just one thing: a bath.

As soon as Ben heard what was coming, he divined at once the fine Italian hand of Chilblaines. "That b——! There ain't a drop of white man's blood in that whorehound's veins!" He cursed him, between shivers, for all he had around his huge frame was the far too small slicker which the Q.M.C. clerk said was the largest size they had. "Jesus Maria! Gettin' a guy up at this hour, before daybreak, to take a bath!"

"Pipe down there!" ordered the top-kicker from the front of the shed. "There's only one bath and this is

the only hour we could get. Come along!”

But Ben was not to be so quickly calmed. “God Almighty!” he exclaimed. “You’d think we was criminals in a prison, instead of volunteers in an army!”

Meantime I was thinking in double time, for this call to the showers presented an unexpected problem that had to be solved at once. The top-kick was exhorting them to snap into it and I had to suppose that he would wait at the door to see that everyone went. I waited until Ben started for the door, then when he was directly between me and the sergeant, I ducked under my bunk and pulled Esky down beside me so that, with the blankets hanging down and Esky covering the front, I hoped to escape the top-kick’s inquisitive eye.

Sure enough, he came down the line to see that everyone had gone. For a breathless moment I was convinced that he was inspecting my bunk with suspicion. Then suddenly he turned and went away, closing the door behind him. But I waited several minutes, to make sure that he had gone.

Then I pushed Esky out of the way and threw off the slicker. Down at the end of the shed were two fire buckets, and to these I ran. I dowsed my head in one of them and poured the other over my legs. Then I ran back to my bunk and pulled off my shirt, and back to the buckets again. I was shivering all over, but I made sure that I was wet enough to look it, then I returned to the bunk and got ready for the crucial moment.

I had to stand there with the towel in my hand for several minutes before the first of the bathers returned, but as soon as the door opened I started a vigorous rubbing, and slipped into my clean shirt. I heard one of the men swear and another said, “I never saw such cold water in my life!”

When the top-kick appeared I was frantically rubbing my head and neck. He was shivering himself but he made a trip down the aisle and stopped rather suspiciously near me. I thought he was going to say something, but I exclaimed, “God, but that water was cold, sergeant!” And I was shivering so genuinely that he was impressed. He looked around our end of the shack and went back to his own bunk to dress.

Ben had come in during the inspection and when the sergeant had retreated, he leaned across the bunk and said, very confidentially, “He asked me where you was and I said ‘He’s been here and gone back already.’ It was colder’n a ninety-year-old witch an’ I don’t blame ya a bit fer duckin’ it!”

Good old Ben! He sure was a simple and good-hearted friend to me. He was so omnisciently clever about some things, so clever he readily accepted the simplest and plainest explanation and let it go at that. And he took pleasure in helping to slip anything over on anyone in authority. I thanked him sincerely for telling the top-kicker that lie and we proceeded to get dressed for what turned out to be a very dismal, dreary, hopeless day, the first of a series that were distinguished by their similarity in the matter of dreariness.

There was nothing much for any of us to do these days. Now and then the General had something to get out, but he had simply been marking time for the most part and when he marked time I exhibited my ability as a lock-stepper. Marking time was the one part of the manual of drill that I did best.

Ben and I listened to all the current rumors. We heard that we were going south from here to train for immediate action; that the Germans were raising hell and we’d be in the trenches in two weeks; that we were going to Italy to help the wops lick the Austrians; that ... that ... that ... and so on almost ad infinitum. And I knew that all of them were entirely false and without foundation. I don’t understand how rumors traveled so well in the army, but they certainly did spring up and cover the camp overnight. The whole army seemed to be just one vast buzz all the time. Every man you met had some inside news to impart. None of this bothered me, however, for the General had told me that the division would go to a training area for at least a month before being used for anything.

I went into Brest several times, but there was no particular excitement or entertainment to be found down there, because part of the city was under quarantine for cholera and the authorities had restricted all places of amusement that might interest me. Ben said he hadn’t seen a single one of these mademoiselles

that looked clean enough to be of interest to a man of his tastes, and I quite agreed with him. Most of them were disappointing—nothing like before the war. Now they all looked so hard and worn, and the ones that American soldiers met were the same ones that the English, Australians, Italians, Portuguese and French Colonials had met before us. An American soldier must be conceited indeed if he thinks he could teach these girls anything in the way of love and its devices.

It seemed to me that the French people were of two minds about us. The lower classes seemed to welcome us with open arms, call benedictions upon our heads, but they looked upon us as wild specimens of humanity from the outskirts of civilization. And in this view the upper-class Frenchmen concurred, I imagine, for the major portion of all France had had little or no acquaintance with Americans, not even the tourist class which has always been distinguished traditionally for its ignorance, lack of taste and vulgar displayism. As far as I could make out, the better-class French people were not quite certain whether we were savage barbarians or civilized Indians. They thought that they had nothing in common with us except this little matter of a war and the fact that we both belonged to the same species of the animal kingdom. They were glad of our help—just as they had been glad to use their own varicolored colonials, those half-savages who used knives instead of guns and refused to go into action without bayonets.

It struck me that they felt toward us much the same as we would feel toward an army of Russians or Japanese in America: we would rejoice over their coming to our aid, but we would feel rather condescending toward them and surely would not relish the thought of our daughters mingling with them as social equals. Nice French girls would not have anything to do with American soldiers: any more than nice American girls would accept Japanese soldiers without reservations.... From some of the first-person narratives I'd heard in this camp, I should say that some of these Americans were sadly deluded on this point. Their "conquests" weren't much to rave about, if they only knew the truth.

It was the lower classes that took us to their hearts. They discovered that Americans were jolly good fellows with pockets full of francs and a tremendous fancy for wine, women and excitement. Naturally they weren't so finicky. They weren't used to being finicky anyway. From the stories I heard, it seemed that they were even open-hearted enough to accept our colored soldiers as genuine American Indians: they thought the darkies were real cavemen, noble specimens of virile nature, who looked every inch the part and apparently, with a mademoiselle, more than established the fact of their virility. In some camp towns, the street girls didn't have anything to do with the white soldiers. Obviously they were as deluded as our soldiers were in other places.... Indeed, that was my view of the whole works just now: everyone misunderstood everyone else, and the result was a sort of not unpleasant but not very congenial confusion.... Of course, the mademoiselle end didn't interest me, but Ben said he just found out about a place where he could get a girl for a cake of American soap. I told him he'd better swipe a carton from the canteen and start a harem. He said that when the regulars first appeared in France it was possible to get the prettiest and most adept girl in town for a tobacco coupon, and he was bemoaning the fact that he had a whole box full of coupons at home that he was too late to use now. It certainly was tough: he should have enlisted a year earlier: he would have had children scattered all over France by now! I'll bet he was a son-of-a-gun with the women: sometimes he reminded me of nothing so much as a great animal, a sort of Bull of the Camps, as it were. Of course, I knew that he was more than an animal: the things he said very often showed unmistakable signs of intelligence, and he certainly was a good friend to have.

We had to drill several times, and every morning we had calisthenics. The setting-up stuff didn't bother me but the drilling was a little too much—I guess I wasn't built for that kind of stuff. My back got a kink in it and the muscles of my legs seemed to knot right up after a mile or so of walking under the strain of drill. Every morning when I heard the call to "fall in" my mind would start to sing that army ballad about the sergeants "who are the worst of all," because

“He gets you up in the morning before the bugle call;
And it’s Squads Right! Squads Left!
Right Front Into Line!
Then the dirty son-of-a-b——, he gives you double time!”

Of course it really wasn’t the top-kicker’s fault. He didn’t like to drill any more than we, but orders is orders. Even Eskey didn’t care for this kind of exercise. He came out with us the first couple of mornings, but very quickly decided that this was not his kind of play. Now he didn’t pay any attention to “fall in” but as soon as he heard “fall out” he was right in the middle of things, begging the fellows to play with him. He got enough exercise. He was the mascot of this Headquarters Company.

I wrote home twice during the fortnight. Nothing much to tell them except the events of our last four weeks, and to send my new address with A.P.O. number.

At last we received our first mail from the States and I didn’t know just what to make of it. There was a gushing letter from Vyvy—apparently Leon carried out my instructions and told her that he was coming over at once. But the letter from Aunt Elinor was not so reassuring, particularly the following parts:

“Leonard Lane is at Booneville.... Has a broken arm to show for his wild ride in that snowstorm.... Was lucky to be rescued less than an hour after the accident, but it was in the country and he did not reach me by phone until midnight.... He has not been home since that time.... Left the hospital and went direct to Booneville. But he will not stay here long. As soon as his arm is safely mended he will do something.... Poor boy ... just a bunch of nerves.... And I am very near a breakdown. If anything happens to you I shall never forgive myself.... Why did you have to be so foolish!

“Vyvy has called several times. She expects to hear from you as soon as you land. She also informs me that your Jay-Jay has been transferred and expects to go to France very soon. I intend to get in touch with him and ask him to look you up.”

Well, the last man in the world I wanted to meet was Jay-Jay. I’m quite sure that I couldn’t be with him very much before he would become suspicious. In fact I thought he suspected something already, because in the other letter which I received from Aunt Elinor, there was this disquieting information:

“Jay-Jay called, expecting to find you here. I was really sorry to tell him that you had suddenly decided to go out West as a camp entertainer. I don’t think he believed it: he seemed very surprised and said he couldn’t understand that at all. ‘Why didn’t she let me get her a place?’ he asked, but of course I told him that there was no telling what you might do. He asked about Leon and I gave him your address and asked him to see you and let me know how you are getting along. I’m so worried about you—but then you probably are better able to take care of yourself than your brother. I hope so.

“Vyvy met Jay-Jay in town. He said he had seen Leon in camp the day after her party, and Vyvy told him he must be mistaken because Leon did not leave here until three o’clock in the afternoon. I don’t know what he thinks, but he must have some ideas of his own.... I think you would do well to tell him the truth and let him help you. He has influence, you know, and might be able to make things easier for you.

“Another week or so and Leonard’s arm will be out of the sling. He is determined to act at once. I don’t know what he will do but will let you know as soon as I hear from him...”

Auntie was foolish. The idea of my confessing to Jay-Jay and being under obligation to him for his

silence! I knew him well enough to know that he would be delighted to have something like that on me. He was just the kind that would take advantage and I was in no position to defend myself under the circumstances. No, sir—I didn't want to see Mr. Marfield at all, and if I did see him, I didn't know what I'd say or do. He was suspicious already. If God was really with me, he'd keep us from meeting. I didn't like his type of officer anyway—and the more I thought about him, the less I liked him. I always said there was something about him I didn't like: it was that suspiciousness, I guess. You didn't feel that you could trust him at all, and I certainly did not want to take any chances on a man like that in a time like this!

My troubles seemed to be beginning. I hadn't had a good bath since that one on board ship and I couldn't see how I could get one until we moved from this place: there wasn't a single public bath in the unrestricted area in Brest. And to add to all this my tummy was feeling not so good and my back was aching sort of ominously. If it wasn't one damned thing it was another. Armies and war certainly are For Men Only. This was no place for one woman, and I can't imagine what it would be like if this camp were full of women instead of men. Anyways it would be worse than now. Women just can't be bunched and crowded in together.

It occurred to me that I might try Christian Science. They claim that if you have enough faith and wish hard enough, you can do anything—even grow a new limb where one has been amputated. I guess it would take more than Christian Science to change me into a man now: perhaps if my mother and father had used Christian Science, the change could have been made, or rather the necessity of change prevented. However, I doubt very much if those devilish little ova and those other jiggers, gametes or spermatozoa or whatever they call them, pay much attention to what their owners think and wish. I guess we *are* God's children, after all—more than our parents' probably.

Anyway, I wished I were Leonard Lane. I didn't feel so good. Maybe "fightin' is a lot of fun" but I just didn't feel kittenish enough to enjoy this prelude to battle.

And with that Jay-Jay to think about besides!

—2—

Unexciting days passed until a day came when we learned that we were leaving for Le Mans in the morning. Didn't know how long we'd be there, but from all I could learn Le Mans was a training area and the division might be there for a month or six weeks. The General seemed to think that we would be used as a replacement division. I didn't know where he got the idea but that was the dope.

Nothing new happened, except that I heard from home again and Aunt Elinor said Vyvy heard that Jay-Jay had left the United States: if that was the case, he was liable to blow in any time and if he should discover that my outfit was still here, I didn't see how I could avoid being found by him. Naturally I was glad we were moving out in the morning. He wouldn't be free to hop all over the A.E.F. looking for me and it might be a long time before he got to Le Mans, by which time I shouldn't be there. There was still hope.

Ben and I attended a song-fest in the afternoon—one of those affairs where a professional pep-guy gets up on a platform and leads the drunk-driven cattle in singing and cheering. Well, there was some excuse for cheering, as to-day the sun let us have a glimpse of himself, and that was cause for celebrating around this neck of the land of the franc and the plumbingless house. The songs, however, were really not much to write home about. Ben had learned already that "Pack Up Your Troubles" and "Madelon" were not army songs at all: they were for dress parade, he said. The real army songs were too dirty filthy rotten to sing at any sanctioned get-together. The real barrack-room ballads were fit only for barrooms and bedrooms and bathrooms—that is, if you sing in your bath... To-day we waited patiently to see if they would sing something interesting, but the best they had to offer was "Keep the Home Fires Burning"—and Ben almost

choked on his tobacco-quid when they started that. If there was one song that should never have been written, it was that! I quite agreed with Ben on that point. Ben said, “That song’s a lotta bull an’ what a man wants in a time like this is more calves and less bull!” Ben was certainly droll: he stood beside the “Y” window, waiting for the song leader to pass—I swear he only missed the poor devil’s nose by an inch. When my boy friend hurled the saliva, fond mothers shooed their loved ones off the street. A veritable Hawkeye!

CHAPTER 9

A LOUSY LADY

—1—

We'd been in Le Mans a month and nothing very exciting had happened. We came down from Brest in those French box cars that are marked "8 chevaux 40 hommes" and it took me a week to recover from the ride, after which I went out and found myself a bath—thank God again!

I was really forced into it, though. The General had been making trips all over the surrounding country and Chilblaines and I had usually gone along. We went to Alençon to see the place they were fixing up there to take care of horses that were shipped over for the cavalry and artillery—although the cavalry didn't have much to do in a war of this kind. We also visited Blois and its hospital center, and Tours, which was the headquarters of the Service of Supply. And we'd seen Orléans and Angers and I hoped to see Paris soon.

However, to get back to the bath:—We were on our way back from Tours when we had two flat tires in a row and Getterlow had to fix the second one, because we only had one spare. While we were standing around—I was trying to help him—the General noticed that I was doing quite a lot of fidgeting and scratching and finally asked me about it. "What's the matter, Sergeant?" he inquired. "Received your allotment of cooties already?"

Chilblaines laughed and I laughed, too. It wasn't news to me: I knew I had acquired a family, but I had put off doing anything about it until I could get a bath and a new change of clothes. But when Chilblaines laughed, I determined to do something without further delay.

The General didn't wait for me to reply; he just suggested, "If you have, Sergeant, for God's sake get rid of them at once."

"I will, sir," I said then.

But Chilblaines had to pipe up and say, "No use trying to clean them out of your clothes. I advise burning them and getting a new outfit—that is, if you can afford it."

Now, imagine an officer making a crack like that! As if I couldn't afford clothes just as well as he could! The way he said things gave me the willies anyway, and I just looked hard at him and said, "That's what I'll do this very afternoon, if I have time."

"Take time," said the General.

So when we were back in camp I proceeded to take time. I went into the city in search of a public bath where one could get a private bath. I carried with me a complete change of clothes and two kinds of medicine and a bluish ointment that was recommended by Ben and every other man whose advice I sought. I finally found a bath establishment and went in.

A woman who had the appearance of age but the manner of girlish youth welcomed me at the door and ushered me into the rear of the building, where there were several little rooms just large enough for a bathtub. The woman chattered glibly as she wiped out the tub I chose and drew the water, and when she brought the towels and soap she made no move toward leaving me to take care of myself.

I started to undress, beginning with my shoes and blouse. She hung up the blouse and pushed the door

shut. I didn't take off anything else, but just sat there on the stool and looked at her. Finally, when she didn't move, I said, "That's all for now, thank you."

All I got for my pains was a stream of French, telling me how nice it was to meet a fine young American boy who could speak such good French.

"But I want to bathe," I told her. "I don't need you now."

"Ah—mais non! non! non!" she exclaimed. "I will help you." She laid her hands on my shoulders.

This was too much. "No, thank you!" I told her. "I can get along very well. I wish to be alone."

But she didn't make a move until I got up and actually pushed her through the door. I pulled the latch across and proceeded to undress. Everything was quiet for several minutes and I was just on the point of removing my cootie-laden underwear—regulation issue, by the way—when I happened to look at the door and noticed a cracked panel through which I could see the old woman's eye peering in intently. I grabbed my breeches and hung them over the peep-hole. Just as I was getting into the tub, a knock sounded. "What do you want?" I asked.

"M'sieur desires a cognac for after the bath?" she sounded very eager.

She made me mad. "M'sieur wishes you to get the hell outa there! I don't want anything!" How does a woman get like that: if she were young, I could understand it—but a woman as old as she was made it a mystery to me. Apparently my education wasn't complete yet.

Anyway, I went on with my bath, and believe me, I scrubbed as I never scrubbed before. Then I drained the tub and filled it up again, and as soon as the water started to run, the old woman came back to the door with her jabbering, wanting to know what I was trying to do. I told her I'd pay for two baths and for her to shut up and go away. She kept talking but I wouldn't be bothered answering her.

After I was washed and dry again I applied my lotions and ointment in generous quantities—too generous, I later discovered, for my skin was so sore in some spots that I couldn't touch it. However, I got rid of the cooties. I dressed and opened the door.

The madame was right there waiting for me. She started right off telling me what a wonderful American soldat I was, how young and clean, and she finally attempted to taunt me into friendliness by saying that she'd bet I was still a virgin.

I had to laugh, as I told her, "You're right, for once." And, giving her ten francs, I hurried out of the place. I carried my clothes back to camp and burned them, cooties and all, in the incinerator. Then I felt clean again—until the ointment started to burn me up.

Several days later I made another visit to the baths and almost had to fight my way out. That woman seemed to be obsessed with the idea of making love to me. I guess I was not very curious. My next bath would be somewhere else, if there were any other place in town.

—2—

Having received another letter from Vyvy, I sent her a post card with the following endearing lines:

"Excitement all the time. Cooties but no war as yet. Mademoiselles aplenty but all ugly. All my love—all my kisses—and I wish you could be with us.

LEON."

A couple of days later I sent a note to Aunt Elinor. It was written on Y.M.C.A. paper, after I had spent some time visiting post card vendors in search of appropriate cards to send home. As all the vendors had nothing but photographs suitable only for private collections—some of them actually revolting in the scenes they depicted—I decided that they couldn't possibly get through the United States Mail. I did buy

about a dozen of the rarest ones—for no better reason than that the legless veteran who had them seemed to take it for granted that an American soldier was interested in such pictures. My education was proceeding again. I wrote to Aunt Elinor:

“I bought a wonderful collection of rare prints to-day. Too valuable to send by mail, so I’ll bring them home with me. Every time I look at them I realize that Home was Never like This!”

And it certainly wasn’t!

A few days later everyone was required to go to the movies in the Casino. I had no idea what was coming or I might have tried to escape the ordeal. I fell in with the rest of the outfit and sat in the midst of a crowd that was anything but ladylike. The picture was supposed to be educational, was entitled FIT TO FIGHT or something like that, and by the time it was over, I must confess that I wasn’t fit to do anything. Whew! And the comments the fellows made anent various familiar details. Every new sequence in the picture recalled some personal experience or story to somebody near me, and between the picture and the stories, I was blushing from my hair to my toes. After we came back, Ben said, resentfully, “They can’t kid me on that stuff! Seein’ a thousand pictures like that wouldn’t make me lose interest in a good-lookin’ shank!” I decided that Ben had a cast-iron system.

I wondered what had become of Leon. Aunt Elinor wrote that his arm was practically well again and that he had left Booneville. I wondered what he intended to do. I might have known that he wouldn’t stay there, although it would be a wonderful place for him to commune with nature and let his muse run wild in poetic ecstasies. It just goes to show that you never can tell about anyone. Anyway, I rather wanted to know what to expect of him.

Jay-Jay should have been in France by now. It seemed rather funny that I didn’t hear from him. Perhaps that meant that he didn’t really think I was here. He never did have much liking for Leon, so naturally would not break his neck to see him. But Jay-Jay was foxy: you couldn’t tell what he thought or was planning. It wouldn’t make me peeved if I never saw him. That’s how much I loved that gentleman.

—3—

Another short note came from Aunt Elinor to inform me that she had come across an old post card from Lisa Mantour, the darling of a maid who was with us at St. Malo years and years ago. Auntie wrote as soon as she found it, because she thought I must look up Lisa at once and thus be able to fall back upon her in case of discovery or trouble of any kind. It was awfully funny, too, because the post card was sent from this very city of Le Mans, and I’d be leaving in another day or so. So I made up my mind to find her, if she was still in the city. I’d have to manage to get away without Ben, because I didn’t want to risk his overhearing anything about twins that might stir his imagination. He had enough foundation for suspicions as it was.

I had my second hair-cut for this rôle. I was a pretty clean-cut young fella, believe me.

—4—

The next day I discovered to my horror that I did the dizziest thing! I burned up that letter from Auntie without copying the name of the man Lisa married. I knew her maiden name but I had one hell of a time trying to remember that other name just from reading it once in that letter.

So I ditched Ben and went in town to see if I couldn’t see some name that would recall Lisa’s. I walked all over the downtown section, looking at window signs and cards, and repeating over and over all the

possibilities that came to my mind. I knew the name started with “L” and I tried every possible combination of letters beginning with that letter, but nothing clicked.

It began to rain and I stepped into a corner doorway to escape the downpour. Two Frenchmen under umbrellas were standing in front of me, gesticulating so wildly that their hands were all wet, and one of them kept referring to some name that finally began to sound familiar. I listened more closely and, sure enough, that was the very name I had been trying to remember. I grabbed the man’s arm and demanded very excitedly, “Did you say ‘Lenotier,’ m’sieur?”

“But yes,” admitted the startled man. “Pierre Lenotier, our friend. Pourquoi?”

“That’s it! Exactly it!” I exclaimed. “And where does one find this Pierre Lenotier, m’sieur?”

The two natives stared at each other a moment, then stared at me; finally the one who had not spoken yet stepped from beneath his little roof long enough to point to the sign over the doorway in which I was standing. “You do not read, m’sieur?” he asked, with that gentleness which one affects in humoring a lunatic.

I stepped out and looked at the old sign over the door. It read

LE CHIEN ROUGE

PIERRE LENOTIER, PR.

“Merci, merci, m’sieur.” I laughed at him as I ran beneath the sign and into the café. Then I stopped, for there behind the bar was Lisa herself: a little older looking, fatter and perhaps harder faced, but I knew her at once. I started to yell across the room to her, but noticed that there were a few French and American soldiers at the tables, so I walked smilingly up to the bar.

I stopped in front of her and waited for her to say something. But she just stared at me, as if I were any other soldier wanting a drink.

“Lisa,” I cried out finally. “Don’t you know me?”

Apparently she didn’t. She had seen too many American soldiers to take much stock in any of them. I removed my cap and leaned across the bar. “Lisa, don’t you remember Leon Canwick?”

Her eyes gleamed at that and she smiled, but you could see that she couldn’t believe me, coming upon her so unexpectedly. Finally her grin broadened and she said, “C’est impossible! Mon petit diable! Leon! Non, non...”

But a good survey seemed to persuade her, for she led me then, amid a continual stream of happy chattering, into a back room which opened off the main room at the end of the little bar. Then she looked me over again, as if she couldn’t possibly believe what she was seeing. “Non ... non ... impossible!”

I laughed and told her that she was right. “It is not Leon at all.”

This was too much for her. She had to sit down—while she grumbled and gave out little explosive phrases of disparagement of these foolish Americans who play tricks on hard-working people. She spluttered and fussed and stared at me until I added, “This is Leona Canwick.” Then she just stared open-mouthed at me as if I were some kind of specter.

“What foolishness!” she finally managed to exclaim. “This is more worse yet! You joke: you are Leon!... You should not joke an old woman, M’sieur Leon.”

“But I’m not Leon,” I insisted. “I am Leona.”

Well, she refused to be convinced. We argued and I laughed until the tears came in my eyes. I’d never had so much real fun since I’d been in the army. She was just too funny, running out to wait on her customers and coming back to declare again and again that she had no time for any jokes. When I was too weak from laughter to argue further, I proved to her my identity in the only way in which it could be proved. She was too dumfounded to speak, so while she sat silently gaping at me, I tried to explain how I had come here. Finally she understood and believed me. Not until then did she really welcome me, with an abundance of hugs and kisses and much jolly laughter. We talked over the happy days at St. Malo and I told her about Leon and Aunt Elinor. Altogether, I must have spent an hour there, with her running in and

out from the bar to entertain me.

When I left, she threw her arms around my neck and kissed me smack on the cheek—just as a short, stocky, bald-headed and walrus-mustached man appeared in the doorway and glared daggers at us. I knew at once that this was Pierre, but something told me to keep going—and I went, before Lisa could introduce us.

I imagined he would raise Cain before Lisa had a chance to explain to him that I was really a girl. I hoped I wouldn't have to prove my sex to him in order to avoid his jealous scowl!

—5—

I stopped in to see Lisa again, the day following, and her husband was there. She welcomed me with a smile but, if looks could kill, I'd be a dead rabbit right now from the effects of old Pierre's glances. He was madder than the devil himself.

I asked Lisa why she didn't tell him the truth and save herself any trouble. She just laughed at me. "It is too funny, chère," she explained. "He thinks you are a man—and he is so jealous—ou la la!"

"But why not tell him I am a girl?" I insisted.

"Because," she said, "Pierre, he gets too much of the cognac and talks off his head. He speaks everything he knows when he gets beaucoup zigzag. Non, chère, I will not tell him. And he is so funny, anyway. It will do him good."

Well, I wished she had told him. He threw a dirty wet rag at Esky and wouldn't let him come in at all. He was liable to throw something worse than that at me.

—6—

Another day at Le Mans and I thanked heaven it would be the last. I suppose we had the Germans to thank, because they started their "big push" about three weeks before and threatened the whole Allied system of defenses by breaking through the British in Flanders. General Backett heard reports that didn't sound very good: apparently the Fritzies were putting everything they'd got into this offensive, because they figured that it was now or never. If they couldn't win now, before the United States poured in another million men, they might as well run up the white flag. However, everyone on this side seemed to be optimistic over the eventual preponderance of man power and the early end of the war.

How all this affected us, I didn't know, except that American troops were seeing action and the need for replacements was increasing, with the result that our division was designated as a replacement division and was soon to join the First Army Corps, the headquarters of which were at Neufchâteau.

But the General wasn't going with them. He wanted to in the worst way, but had to give way before younger and more physically robust officers. He was rather upset about it, I guess, but he was too old a soldier to kick. He said, "There's too much to be done, for any one man to complain about the disposition of his ability."

In a way I was sorry not to be going with the outfit, for then I might see some real action; but real action would be dangerous for me, and I liked working for the General so well and I got along so easily, that I was glad he was taking me with him. I mean, common sense told me I'd have less to worry about if I stuck with him. This headquarters company might be all broken up before long anyway and I might find myself a cook or pick-and-shovel expert—which wouldn't be so good.

Chilblaines would be with him, too—he was promoted to a captaincy, so he could act as General Backett's personal aide. And Getterlow was assigned to drive for him. Getterlow was a good chauffeur,

when he was sober—which was seldom.

I surely did hate to leave Ben. When I told him the news, he was almost heart-broken. “Can’t ya get me a job drivin’ er doin’ somethin’?” he wanted to know. “I’d give my shirt to get into somethin’ different. This orderlyin’ an’ doin’ nothing in particular is a hell of a life fer an able-bodied soljer like me.”

“Maybe Getterlow will get the can before long,” I encouraged him.

“How in hell did that guy get that job?” he demanded. “He ain’t no chauffeur. He told me hisself he used to work in a jewelry store!”

I explained that Getterlow had a wagoner’s rating and was assigned to this job by the officer who had charge of such duties.

“Well, I can’t see it!” Ben maintained. “I used to work in a garage an’ I know more about wagons than that kike will ever know. But I can’t get close enough to even touch an automobile in this man’s army.”

I told him I’d do anything I could to get him transferred if anything should happen to Getterlow—“In fact, I’ll do my best to help something happen to him. I’ll even buy a few drinks for him, if that will help any.”

“I hope he gets the D.T.’s!” Ben meant exactly that, too. “He’s nothin’ but a handshaker! This is a hell of a war an’ a hell of an army: if you’re a good cook, they make a machine gunner outa ya; if ya can run an airplane, they put ya to work in a canteen sellin’ cigarettes. I suppose, havin’ been a boxer, I’ll end up as a bugler! I know it ain’t yer fault, Leony—but ya do what ya can, will ya?”

And I surely wanted to, for I hated to leave him, more than I would if he were my brother Leon. He certainly was one damned fine egg!

That evening I went down to say good-by to Lisa. I didn’t stay long. Her husband was about and he didn’t take his eye off us all the time I was there. I guess Lisa didn’t think the jealousy joke was so funny now. She said he had accused her of everything from adultery to incest and that he told her he supposed he’d come home sometime and find her in the arms of a “big black American Indian.”

That was awful—I mean, for a man to talk that way to his wife. And Lisa must have been a good wife, too. But she wouldn’t tell him the truth. Said she’d manage him all right.

Old Pierre stopped me as I was leaving and he didn’t mince words at all. From what he said, I gathered that it was just as well for me that I was leaving Le Mans. M. Lenotier didn’t care to sell me any wine and didn’t want me in his café at all.... Well, I did hope Lisa could manage him. I’d hate to think that I had been responsible for making her miserable.

—7—

I went to Chaumont, for the General to report to G.H.Q., which was there. I saw more generals and colonels around there than I ever knew existed. A poor enlisted man might as well have his arm hitched up to his cap: you had to salute every time you turned around, and half the officers didn’t bother to return the compliment. I didn’t much care for a place that was so lousy with officers and it wasn’t going to make me mad to go wherever we were headed.

The General informed me in the afternoon as to the nature of our new work. “If this war had happened ten years earlier,” he said, “I would be taking my command into a zone of action—but that’s the price we pay for growing old. Now we’ll just work—and mostly far from the Front.”

“What kind of work, sir?” I inquired.

“Inspector General’s Department,” he replied. “General B—— is Inspector General of the A.E.F. and I am to operate as a representative of his office, although the major portion of our actual work will be in the S.O.S. and under the Headquarters at Tours.... Oh, it will be more or less interesting, and besides, somebody has to do it: someone has to keep an eye on these young officers who aren’t dry behind the ears

yet, and see that some enterprising salesman doesn't sell the Quartermaster Depot to the Spaniards."

Well, I never had heard of the Inspector General's Department, and I frankly admitted my ignorance.

"It isn't the Intelligence Division," he hastened to inform me. "We're not secret service operatives or anything like that. We're inspectors and reporters. We will inspect organizations and administrations and investigate cases of criminal misconduct and evidences of poor coördination between branches of the service. We merely report our findings and suggest corrections or improvements. That's our job from now on."

So now I supposed we'd go out and inspect something or investigate somebody. Well, it suited me, as long as we got out of Chaumont.

—8—

We arrived in Tours the next day after a rather hectic trip from Chaumont via Paris. I didn't care much for wartime France. Every house shut up tight at dusk. No street lights. Military Police every two feet asking you where you were going and why and who told you you could go. Not so pleasant.

New work too, although I hadn't done much yet, except just enough routine stuff to serve as an introduction to this kind of stuff. Entirely different from Divisional paper work, but I'd get it in time.

Just then I was all excited about something else: and I knew it was absolutely inane, utterly foolish of me, too. However, the fact remained that I did see Captain Winstead in Paris! Just the sight of him was enough to make me dizzy.

I assumed he had something to do with the Intelligence, for it was there that I saw him. He was talking with some officers in the entrance to the building, and Getterlow and I were sitting in the General's car, out of the rain. I had my slicker turned up around my ears and I just couldn't make my hands pull it down—I couldn't decide whether I wanted him to see me or not. In the first place, if he had a memory for faces, he might recognize me at once; and I didn't know whether he'd met Leon in Wakeham or not—if not, he would be suspicious at once. Besides I didn't think I could face him without giving myself away: he was handsomer than ever and I could have climbed right on his neck the minute I saw him again.

Anyway, he finally walked right past us and I saluted him. He didn't even stop to look at me—just saluted and went on his way. I suppose I was foolish to be so excited: probably nobody would be suspicious of me—I mean, after all, Captain Winstead would not have any reason to suspect that a girl was in France disguised as a soldier. I wished I had spoken to him.... This damned old war: he might not be in Paris the next time we got there!

—9—

My mail caught up with me in Bourges and brought letters from home and from Ben.

Poor Ben: he said he broke out with some kind of rash or measles or something equally childish and they sent him to the infirmary at Le Mans. "I'm ashamed of myself for having anything like this, but I'll stay here now until you poison Getterlow and get me out." I was surprised to find that he could actually write English that you could read. He must have gone to school at some time in his lurid past. I wrote and told him that Getterlow was coming to the end of his rope.

The letter from home inclosed some American Express checks, which would come in handy, and told me that Leon gave up trying to get across any other way and finally enlisted in a hospital unit that expected to come over very soon. Also someone had heard from Jay-Jay—and he was stationed in Paris!

Wasn't that just my luck! To have the man you love and the man that loves you in the same city. After

all, Paris was a pretty small place, in so far as American soldiers were concerned: there were only half a dozen places where they congregated, and if I got to Paris again, I couldn't try to see Captain Winstead without running the risk of meeting Jay-Jay.

And pretty soon Leon would be showing up over here, and it'd just be my luck to run into him—and further complicate matters. If Jay-Jay ever saw the two of us, he'd know at once there was something wrong.... Well, anyway, I had to retract all those horrid things I thought of my fair brother. Of course, he could have started sooner for camp, but then, after all, he started and did try to get there, and now he'd proved his mettle by enlisting again. Only I couldn't for the life of me see where I was going to end up. What if he should get killed over here, or lose a leg or an arm or something like that? I could never get out of this mess! It seemed like everything was going wrong all at once.

The General looked over the administration of the organization at Bourges and kept me busy for two days making out a detailed report of the place, giving reams and reams of statistics on every conceivable detail of the American establishment there. I was afraid the General was so full of regulations and knowledge of how organizations should function that my life from now on was going to be very hectic indeed. A couple of reports like this one and I'd be bleary.

We traveled in a big touring car. I had a field desk and a portable typewriter that wasn't worth two whoops, and which I didn't use unless I couldn't find a better one wherever we happened to be. Chilblaines was the boss's errand boy and Getterlow drove. I guess the General kept Chilblaines with him for the latter's protection: the lieutenant's father or mother or uncle or somebody was a close friend of the General's and I guess he figured the best turn he could do Chilblaines was to keep him away from any outfit that might go near the Front: Chilblaines wouldn't last a week up there. Someone would let the sky fall on him, probably.

I saved Getterlow from the consequences of his sins several times, just to avoid a scene. I hated to see a fellow get bawled out. But he was getting worse. He got drunk every time we stopped and he thought every mademoiselle in France had been waiting for him to arrive. The end was near.

The General discussed the possibility of getting rid of Getterlow. I wrote to Ben, but didn't hear from him, so didn't know where I'd find him when the time came.

—10—

We were in Tours five days but I was too tired to do anything but work with the General. We had a busy trip from Dijon on, jumping all over this section of France, visiting aviation fields, all kinds of training schools, hospitals, ordnance depots, quartermaster depots, motor transport parks, and God only knows what else. We were in all kinds of crazy places, including Cosne, Issoudun, Romorantin, Orléans and Blois, and now we were back in the headquarters of the S.O.S.

Found two letters here. One from Ben informed me that they finally threw him out of the infirmary and put him in a Casuals company. I'd have to move fast now or he'd be getting sent up to some replacement outfit, and once a man got up in that neck of the woods it took a lot of officerial influence to get him out.

I also had a letter from Jay-Jay, which gave me something to think about. He said he was asked by Aunt Elinor to look me up and see how I was getting along. Said he hadn't heard from my sister for months—"Do you know where she is now?" Wanted me to let him know if I ever got near Paris or Tours or Chaumont, because he was still in the entertainment business and those were the centers of activity. Said he'd be glad to see me any time I could get away.

Let us laugh! Wasn't he condescending! A sweet chance he had of getting a letter from this soldier! Why, he'd know my writing at once.

I suppose he had written to me at home and wondered why I hadn't answered. But Aunt Elinor hadn't

said anything about a letter from him. Well, anyway, he needn't think he could make me put my foot in it: I would write a letter to him and send it to Aunt Elinor to remail. That'd take over a month but it would throw him off the track. I'd make the letter very general and if the censor took the trouble to look at it he'd think it was a letter I'd received from a girl in the States. That for you, Mr. Wise Guy!

I heard we were going back to Paris soon. I couldn't decide whether to be glad or sorry, for the Lord only knew what'd happen there. I wanted like the devil to see the Captain, but I'd have hated like hell to meet Jay-Jay.

Wished I knew where Leon was. He was either here or on his way over—wherever he was I didn't want to be. No one town could be large enough for both of us: not in this man's army.

—11—

Wagoner Getterlow ceased to be a wagoner. The General finally decided that our chauffeur couldn't stand too much freedom.

Of course, as soon as I knew a change had been decided upon and that a new driver had to be got at once, I suggested Ben.

Naturally, Chilblaines had to be present at the moment to pipe up, "Has he ever done any driving over here?"

"Oh, yes!" I lied glibly. "Driven a lot, but now he's just out of the infirmary and is with a Casuals company at Le Mans. He knows all about cars."

"I don't think he is a fit—" Chilblaines began.

But the General interrupted to say, "If you are sure he will prove satisfactory, Sergeant, make out a request for his transfer and speak to the personnel officer about it at once. We mustn't be bothered too much with a matter of this kind."

So I made out a request and spoke to the officer who had charge of that line of stuff—I mean, of personnel and transfers. Private Benjamin Garlotz would burst in any time now.

Esky acted as if he knew something was up. He'd eat Ben alive when he saw him. I thought I could almost kiss the big galoot myself—but unfortunately kissing wasn't in the manual of arms and it wouldn't be very soldierly. Anyway I knew I'd feel better with him around.

CHAPTER 10

THE BATTLE OF LE CHIEN ROUGE

—1—

Can you beat it? After my going to all that trouble to get Ben transferred, we were informed that the big ape was in the jug at Le Mans!

God alone knew what he'd been up to. I thought of everything, from drunkenness and disorderly conduct to assault upon an officer. When the personnel clerk told me about it, I couldn't say a word, just vanished in order to digest this information. I couldn't decide whether to tell the General and ask his help or what to do. Finally I marched back to the clerk and told him that the General said that unless Garlotz was being held on a manslaughter charge, he should be released and transferred here at once. "Will that be much trouble?" I asked disarmingly.

"I'll see what can be done," he said. And that was all I knew about Ben for a while.

The General said, "That new man ought to be here to-day, shouldn't he, Sergeant?"

All I could say was "Yes, sir" and let it go at that.

—2—

The personnel chap told me they had arranged for Ben's transfer at once and that he was on prison detail, serving out a sentence on which there were several days to go yet.

"Did they say what he had done?" I asked.

The clerk laughed. "It appears that he ran wild one night not long ago and wrecked a café or something—nothing serious."

So Ben was on the way.

—3—

He arrived in the morning and was put to work immediately driving us around Tours. I think the General wanted to try him out before we started off on any journeys. Anyway, the result was that I didn't have two minutes alone with the new arrival until evening, and I was dying to ask him for an explanation of his fall from grace. So as soon as we were out of earshot of any listeners, I put the question to him: "What the devil have you been up to, Big Boy? What's the sad story about prison bars and fines?"

He gave me kind of a nasty look and said, "Don't kid me, Leony. Don't kid me."

"What do you mean 'kid you'?" I insisted. "It's right on your record in plain writing!"

"Listen—" he ordered, with a wave of his hand, "is that any way to thank a guy fer savin' yer life?"

"Whose life? When? Where? How?" I demanded, at a loss to divine what he was driving at.

"Say—don't ya s'pose I know who I see? What I wanta know is why the frog was lammin' hell outa ya.

What the hell you been doin' to his wife? I gave you credit fer better taste than that—but now I wouldn't put nothin' past ya!"

I didn't know what he was talking about at all, and promptly said so.

"Gee, that's rich, ain't it, now?" He laughed kinda sourly. "And here I been picturing you gettin' down on yer knees to thank me fer rescuin' ya! Instead o' which you got the guts to try an tell me ya don't know what I'm talkin' about. Gee, Leony, you're terrible!"

"And you're crazy as hell!" I retorted.

"Yeh—but I ain't so crazy but what I know why ya got me this transfer, an' I'll accept it as yer thanks." He laughed again, that same unhealthy ha-ha. "All I gotta say is ya musta been pretty hard up to be sidlin' after that greasy bartender's wife! You, of all people!... Ha-ha—I guess appearances is deceivin', eh?"

"Oh!" I gasped. So that was it! But I still couldn't understand the connection. I didn't see how Ben had got mixed into Pierre's jealousy. He had never been in the place with me and there was no reason for Pierre to connect us.

"I should say OH, too, if I was you," he observed dryly.

"But I still don't understand, Ben," I told him seriously. "What bartender and where did this happen?"

At first he refused to take me seriously, but I finally goaded him into explaining.

"Just to put the details fresh in yer mind—which seems to be purty fergetful all of a sudden—" he began with grave condescension. "I eased into a buvette in Le Mans one evenin' an' saw before me nobody but my old bunkee, Sergeant Leon Canwick himself, an' he was bein' mauled all over the floor by a little runt of a frog wid a bartender's aporn on 'im. I suppose you don't remember him at all, eh?"

"Go on with your story," I replied, beginning now to suspect the secret of the mess.

"He was doin' such a ferocious job on my old friend, Mister Canwick, that I thought I oughta take a hand myself. And while I was hangin' that frog on the chandyleer and givin' him back-stretchin' exercises over a cognac keg, my old friend picks himself up and departs toute suite, leavin' me there alone to face about a million gendarmes and twice that many M.P.'s. Nice fella, wasn't he?"

"Then what happened." I insisted, ignoring his query.

"Well—what could I do? It wasn't my fight anyhow an' I didn't know what I was fightin' for besides, so I just told the boys I'd go along quietly. They threw me in the jug fer being drunk an' disorderly."

"And is that all that happened?"

"No—not quite. I figured my friend, Sergeant Canwick, bein' such a good friend an' on accounta my savin' him an' all that—I figgered he'd be only too glad to come around and explain the argument and get me outa the jug, but instead o' that I stays there and has to listen to some frog interpreter tellin' that bartender's tale o' woe, an' in the end they decided, without my consent, that I had to pay fer the damage done to his damn old buvette by givin' up most o' my pay for four months. Course that struck me as one o' the funniest things that ever happened.... Besides which I discovered that I was supposed to spend ten days in one o' them prison gangs, one o' them heavy labor outfits.... An' it was so funny that I just laughed and laughed every time I thought of my good friend, Mister Canwick, an' how easy he got outa a bad lickin'."

"I don't understand it at all," I declared.

"Huh—maybe not, buddy, but I do—an' if you didn't have them stripes on ya and if you was a little bigger than the shrimp ya are, I'd give ya a lacin' right now to make up fer the one you missed."

He looked so grim and serious that I was really scared for a minute, but I insisted over and over again that I didn't know anything about the jam at all. "Honest to God, Ben—I haven't been in Le Mans for a couple of months—not since I left there with the General! That's the God's truth and I can prove it by the General! We haven't been near Le Mans!"

He looked at me then and I could see that he was beginning to have doubts. He wanted to believe me, I guess, but it didn't seem possible that he could be wrong. "If it wasn't you, who was it then?" he finally

demanded. "I'd swear it was you—looked just like you right this minute."

Well, I knew who it was. My darling brother had, I thus learned, arrived in this land of the fleur-de-lis. But I couldn't tell Ben that. I couldn't tell him about Leon, for if we should ever bump into him, Ben would be sure to wonder why his name was Leonard Lane. There was only one thing for me to say and I said it: "I can't imagine who the devil it was, Ben. I must have a double running loose over here—did he have a sergeant's chevron on his sleeve?"

That stumped him for a moment. "Damned if I know," he admitted. "I didn't stop to look. But he looked exactly like you—an' I still think it was you."

"Well, you're wrong. I give you my word of honor and I can prove that I haven't been in Le Mans since I saw you last." I insisted, and was gratified to see that he was impressed. "Anyway, I'm much obliged to you for saving what you thought was me, and I'll make up the money end of it to show you my heart's in the right place."

"What the hell's the idea?" he demanded. "If it wasn't you, why should you wanta pay the bill?"

But I didn't want to argue about it any longer and so I told him, "You've got me wrong, Ben. You may never believe it was not me at Le Mans, but that's the truth and can be proved. However, I do insist upon making up to you for the pay you're losing, merely because I appreciate your trying to help me when you thought I needed help. And that's all there is to it!"

"Well, it looks kinda fishy to me," he contended.

But I refused to argue with him. I made him take twenty dollars on account and I determined he'd take the balance as soon as I could get a check cashed.

I knew he didn't know whether to believe me or not, but I just couldn't explain the thing to him. Lord knows, there were enough loose ends to this affair already. I didn't know where Leon was or when I was liable to meet him. And Jay-Jay was liable to breeze into Tours any day. What if he should see Leon and me together? Might the good Lord stick with me yet a while!

I wished I could have seen that scrap in Le Chien Rouge! Poor old Pierre—Ben must have done an awful job on him. And to think that it was all my fault.... I wondered if Lisa saw Leon. Maybe it had been explained to Pierre by now: if so, we had something else to worry about. Oh, sweet existence!

—4—

God, but I worked those next two weeks! Believe me, there was a big battle being fought in this S.O.S., regardless of all the current jokes about non-combatants. About twelve hundred years ago a strong-arm Frankish hero by the name of Charles Martel turned back the invading hordes of Arab Moors that had swept up through Spain and was threatening all Western Europe. That Battle of Tours was one of the decisive battles of history, and this 1918 Battle of Tours was going to be a decisive one, too, for this was the very heart and lungs of the American army.

We'd just about covered all the nooks and crannies of this vast organization, from the base sections at Brest, St. Nazaire and Bordeaux, to the great depots of Nevers and the zone of action that began above Chaumont, but always we had to come back to the headquarters at Tours, and the center of this tremendous S.O.S. which constituted in itself one of the most expansive battles of the war—for it required three men to keep one man at the Front, and thousands times that three were warriors of the S.O.S. It was amazing—like a nation within a nation, a huge octopus of an organization embracing everything from hospitals and rest camps and leave areas to quartermaster and ordnance depots. It was all a gigantic business, a military government which owned and operated all its machinery, materials and human constituents.

Every day that passed impressed this realization the more plainly upon us. Troops were pouring in from the States. Supplies and equipment were being rushed along in tremendous quantities. And every ship that

landed meant that much more work for us, because as the camps grew larger and the workings of this great government became more and more involved and far-reaching, there was just that much more need of supervision and watchfulness. And that was our job.

The system grew from day to day. It developed to such an incredible extent that it seemed impossible for any one man, or little group of men, to comprehend its far-flung reaches. Even General Backett, who had a genuine talent for organization, confessed that he was amazed and bewildered by the stupendous sweep of it all. On one occasion he observed that, "Perhaps there is someone somewhere who knows what all is happening in this organization, but there are moments when I seriously question the existence of any such person.... At times it presents a perfect picture of chaos and confusion, but a single word from Tours brings instant response, and undeniable order appears suddenly from the confounding confusion. It is simply amazing! A glorious example of the efficiency and coördination which are inherent in Americans!"

It was a gargantuan enterprise and I had long since ceased trying to envision the whole works. Napoleon or Cæsar or somebody once said that an army travels on its stomach and if that is the case G.H.Q. must have been planning on going a long, long way—and the food supply was but one branch of this enormous business of supply.

The General said that when this war was won, the combat commands would get the credit—"but it will be these laboring devils in the service of supply that will have won the war."

And he thought that this war couldn't go on without him. He managed to find more business to attend to than any other five general officers that I'd seen. He worked like a nigger day in and day out—and he was really not any too young any more. I feared that he might break under the strain. He said that there was no limit to a man's capacity for endurance during a time of tension, but I had my doubts about anyone's being able to go on and on under an uninterrupted strain. I knew I was beginning to feel kinda dizzy at times, as if everything was in a terrible jumble. I was due for a leave of absence, but couldn't very well take one until the rush was over. There were big things in the wind up toward Germany and business was sure picking up.

—5—

Well, of course it was bound to happen sooner or later. I met the enemy and for the time being, at least, he was mine, although I had my doubts about his attitude. I refer, of course, to Jay-Jay.

I ran into him coming out of the headquarters building at Tours. Esky was at my heels and Ben was beside me. When I saw him I was panic-stricken and wanted to turn and run—but I couldn't do that because we were going out to the car and the General would be along any minute.

He started to come toward me just as I realized that Esky's presence might look very suspicious to him. I grabbed Ben's arm and told him to chase along and get Esky into the car, and then I stepped back and waited.

"How are you, Leon?" Jay-Jay greeted me, while his eyes made a quick survey of my person.

I told him I was getting along all right and asked about his own progress. We managed to talk about this and that for several minutes. He asked me why I hadn't answered his letter and I told him I lost it without copying the address. Said he hadn't heard from my sister since he came over here and I said I hadn't either, but that I thought she was still out West somewhere.

"Wasn't that her dog I just saw here with you?" he demanded suddenly.

"Dog?" I asked dumbly. "When?"

"Wasn't that dog and the big fellow with you a moment ago?" he insisted. "Looked just like Leona's Esky."

I managed to laugh. “Oh—that!” I said. “That’s my boss’s pup. The big fellow’s the chauffeur and I’m the General’s special clerk, so the pup sticks with us most of the time. He does look like Esky, at that.”

“You didn’t care much for Esky, did you?” he inquired with a smile.

“No—” I admitted. “He’s Leona’s and I don’t like dogs anyway.”

Conversation went on then, with ups and downs of critical moments. Finally he told me about meeting Vyvy and that she had said I didn’t leave Wakeham until three o’clock on the Sunday before I sailed.

“Oh—Vyvy,” I exclaimed. “She was so excited, you know. So glad to see me go. She forgot what day it was, I guess.... Anyway, you ought to know, for I’m damned sure I didn’t dream of seeing you at Camp that day.”

“No—” he admitted. “You didn’t dream that. You did see me. I just wondered, though, when Vyvy insisted that you were in Wakeham that noon.”

I laughed at him. “Don’t let that worry you,” I told him. “And you can report to my aunt that I’m doing very nicely—miles and miles from any danger!”

We both laughed at that simple crack and he said something about “fighting the battle of Cognac Hill and the Siege of the S.O.S.”

But the General appeared at that moment and I was only too glad to use the excuse to break away. Not, however, before he had informed me that he was going from Tours to Le Mans. Wasn’t that sweet fortune for you!

He would probably go to Le Mans, bump into Leon, and the beans would be spilled for fair. If there were a million men in Le Mans that he could see without hurting me at all, the chances would still be a million to one he’d meet Leon. That’s the kind of a gink he was—could be depended upon to do whatever you least wanted him to do.

I didn’t like him in the least any more. An able bodied man like him masquerading and dodging danger by supervising the people who entertain in the camps and rest areas. He was less of a hero than Leon: the latter, at least had finally come through with a vengeance—though without regard for my safety. Well, I could only pray that they did not meet. I hadn’t the least idea how to reach Leon. I cursed him for not writing to me. You see, blaming and cussing him was a habit of long standing.

CHAPTER 11

FAIR ENOUGH IN LOVE AND WAR

—1—

American casualties were beginning to come down from the sector around Château Thierry. There had been a bloody battle in progress up there. Reports had it that the Americans were advancing on Soissons, pushing the enemy back from Paris. At last it began to sound as if we were actually doing something.

It's funny how jokes came with wounded men: you'd think of anything but a joke when you saw one of them, but it's true that the more the casualties the more jokes about them. Once, I recall, I heard two fellows talking in a hospital and one of them was telling about a louie asking him questions, and it really was funny.

The louie asked him where he was hit at the Front and the doughboy replied that he wasn't hit at the front at all. The louie thought he was trying to be funny, but the man insisted that he was "hit in the rear, sir."

"What do you mean?" demanded the officer. "An accident? Then you aren't wounded—just injured. Here in the S.O.S."

"No, sir," replied the man, "I turned around to see where my lieutenant was and the next thing I knew I was in a first aid station."

The officer was puzzled, but thought he saw the light. "Cold feet, eh? Your commanding officer had to stop you from running away, eh?"

"Say—" says the man, insulted, "we was at the Front goin' across, I tell ya—an' I hear somebody yell something behind me. I thought it was the lieutenant an' I turned around to see. Just then something hit me in the rear and here I am."

"Oh—" says the louie. "You mean in the back, which was to the front!"

"Sure—in the rear," repeated the other doggedly.

"Oh!" says the louie and walks away, while the man cursed after him for being so dumb.

That isn't so funny in print, but it surely did sound funny the way that fellow told it.

I guess the joke that was best known and had the most variations in the whole army was the old one about the man in the hospital being interrogated by a kindly woman visitor who insisted upon knowing where he was wounded. I heard about a hundred variations of this story: every man you met had a new twist to it, so I guess it qualifies as *the* A.E.F. joke. Of all the endings, however, I think the best one is that in which the wounded man finally replies, "Madame, if you was hit where I was hit, you wouldn't a' been hit at all!" Maybe it seemed so funny to me because I'm a girl myself, but it's a good story anyway and is representative of the brand of Rabelaisian humor that bloomed in this man's army. And the wounded men were the worst ones for telling stories. I heard a verse of "Parley Vous" from one, about a Mademoiselle from Bar-le-Duc, which was positively putrid—it was so utterly vile that it took me two days to figure out just what it meant. I couldn't even write it in shorthand!

There was not much humor in my personal situation at this time. The suspense was awful! Complications were setting in.

One day, Chilblaines came in the office and stared at me as if he had seen a ghost. “Sergeant,” he demanded, “didn’t I just meet you on the street a moment ago?”

“Me?” I exclaimed. “No, sir—I haven’t been out of the office for an hour or more.”

He was plainly worried. “I would swear that I saw you getting out of a side car down the street, not more than two minutes ago,” he insisted.

“Well,” I replied, with a laugh, “you must have seen my double, sir, because I’ve been right here all the time.”

He wasn’t convinced, but of course he couldn’t argue the point any further. Finally he observed, “I never knew two people could look so much alike. There was a mole on his cheek, exactly the same.”

“Gee—that’s funny,” I admitted.

“Very odd,” he concluded. “Strange and remarkable coincidence, I should say.” And he dropped the subject, although he kept looking at me rather annoyingly all day. I hated to think of that dizzy pomme-de-terre getting any funny ideas in his head. He was bad enough as it was—God knows what he’d do if he thought I was in any way irregular. It would have been just like him to think I was some kind of a spy or something. I mean, if he thought I lied to him about being in that side car, he’d be liable to suspect almost anything.

All of which didn’t make me feel very comfortable—with Ben hardly pacified yet and Jay-Jay looking for trouble, and Leon doing God only knew what to make matters worse.

Everybody seemed to run across that brother of mine except me. Ben saw him once and almost caught him. When he came back and told me about it, after asking if I had been out, I wondered why he wanted to catch him.

“Because,” says Ben, “if that wasn’t you, it was the guy that got me in that jam up in Le Mans, and I just wanted to speak to him a minute—just long enough to crown him a coupla times.”

I couldn’t see what good that would do him but he seemed to think it would do a lot of good. He said he noticed there weren’t any chevrons on the fellow’s sleeve and he made a bee line for him, but Leon apparently was some kind of a dispatch carrier, for he hopped into a motor cycle side car and left Ben with a cloud of dust for his pains.

I wished I could get hold of Leon before he got us both into trouble.

If you dream of the devil long enough he’s bound to appear.

Who should I bump square into one day but my handsome Captain! I saluted and started to move on, for I had decided that he probably didn’t know Leon—I mean, that Leon probably didn’t know him. But he caught my arm and stared into my face very studiously.

“Excuse me, Sergeant,” he explained, looking straight at me. “I know your name but I can’t think of it. I met your sister one night last year—she danced and you read some poetry.”

I didn’t know what to say and when I didn’t say anything, he continued, as if he were trying to make me

remember the party or him. “Your aunt or cousin or somebody told me how much alike you and your sister were and I remember seeing you—just a glimpse—now what in the dickens is that name?”

Well, you can imagine how I felt! Here I had been dreaming about him all this time and he didn’t even remember my name! I had a good notion not to tell him what my name was, but I couldn’t very well avoid it, so I finally helped him out.

“Canwick! That’s it!” he exclaimed. “Of course. Why can’t I remember names? Well, anyway, I’m certainly glad to see you.”

“You’ll pardon me, sir,” I interrupted. “But I still haven’t the faintest idea as to who you are.” I had to call up all my resources to keep my voice in its assumed naturalness.

“My name is Winstead,” he hurriedly explained. “And your sister made a tremendous impression upon me—tremendous!” He hesitated a moment. “So tremendous, I must confess, that I forgot whether I had heard her last name or not. You see, I only saw her that one night and all I could remember was her first name. It’s Leona, isn’t it?”

I nodded, and suddenly I began to feel good again. I couldn’t keep from smiling and I had to tell him that I seemed to recall hearing something about him from my sister. “But why didn’t you write down her name and her address?” I inquired, as disinterestedly as I could.

“I did,” he replied. “Wrote it down and stuck it in the pocket of my blouse—and that’s the last I saw of it. Must have been thrown out by the tailor or someone, because when I tried to find it, it was nowhere to be found. And I was genuinely sorry, for I had told your sister I would write just as soon as I learned where I would be stationed. I suppose she thought I was having a good time with her, eh?”

“Well—” I tried to say something, but just couldn’t. So that was why he had never written. And he did remember, after all. I did mean something to him, judging by the way he acted now.

“Tell me about her,” he pleaded earnestly but with that same engaging smile that made my heart flutter in the garden back home.

I told him that my sister was very busy, entertaining in the camps.

“Over here?” he asked eagerly.

“No—over in the States,” I told him. “She tried everything imaginable, you know. She wanted so badly to feel that she was doing something in the War.”

“But tell me,” he interrupted, “what happened to the young chap, what’s his name? Marfield? I had the idea that he and your sister were more or less engaged.”

“Oh—Marfield’s over here now. Has something to do with providing entertainment for the men in camps.”

“I see.” He seemed very disappointed. “And he helped her get in over there, I suppose. Are they married?”

I had to laugh. “Of course not,” I told him. “He didn’t have anything to do with her getting into that work. And they’ll never be married as long as she has anything to say about it.”

“Aha—” he laughed. “That’s better. But doesn’t she like him? I’m interested, you see.”

“Well—” I replied with some hesitation, “I have a hunch that she thinks she would like someone else a lot more. You know how girls are!”

“Um—yes—surely.” He pulled out a package of cigarettes and I took one. We lit up from one of his matches and I waited for him to ask more questions.

But he seemed to have learned what he wished to know about my sister and changed the subject to me: wanted to know what I was doing, if he could help me along in any way, when I would be in Paris again, and whether I’d care to look him up the next time I got there. “We can find something to do, no doubt, and I’ll enjoy hearing more about that sister of yours.”

I told him I’d like very much to meet him in Paris, “but it would look rather odd for an enlisted man to be with an officer in a social way.”

“Oh—just forget that part of it,” he reassured me. “It happens that I am in a position to do just about as I please in anything of that sort, and besides I’ll have a good excuse for us: it just occurs to me that you are the very man I’ve been looking for. I’ll put you to work when you come to Paris.” He seemed to think this was an inspiration.

It didn’t strike me that way, however, and I told him so. I had enough work already without contracting for any on the side.

“But this won’t be work,” he argued. “Indeed, most fellows would consider it a pleasure—for there’s a very lovely lady involved in the affair and your work would be to make love to her or let her make love to you, if she so desired. Really, it would be a pleasure I’d reserve for myself, if it weren’t for the fact that the lady would be suspicious of any attentions I might lavish upon her.... I’ll explain when I see you in Paris. You’re just the type for the job—she plays around with middle-aged officers so much that a boyish chap like you will just about take her in tow without any effort. By George, this will be good!”

Well, I didn’t like the sound of it. In the first place he said he’d like to make love to her himself: that was no way for a man to talk, if he really loved somebody else! And the idea of me making love to another woman didn’t arouse any enthusiastic eagerness in my young breast. However, what could I say, except that I’d be glad to look him up in Paris.

Before we separated, he asked where he could write to Leona and I told him to send it to Wakeham, care of Aunt Elinor, who would forward the letter. I said I really couldn’t say just where Leona was now. But just after leaving him I sat myself down and wrote to Auntie, telling her to forward at once any letters that came for me.

That Captain certainly did get me all excited. I hardly knew what I was doing all day after seeing him. That “tremendous impression” he mentioned was mutual.

—5—

Next appeared a surprise in the person of Jay-Jay. He didn’t know where to find me, so he parked himself around headquarters and waited. Naturally I had to walk right into his arms!

I divined at once that he had something rotten up his sleeve and as soon as he spoke I knew the cat had busted the bag and was out.

He didn’t give me time to say anything. Just smiled wisely at me and started in making sarcastic cracks.

But I was in a hurry and told him so. “The General is waiting for me this minute and I can’t stop to talk now.” I said, drawing away from him.

“I’ll be here to-night,” he replied. “And you’d better see me! I want to talk to you.”

Well, what could I say? If I could be sure that he didn’t really know anything, I’d hide in the cellar all night to avoid seeing him. But that I couldn’t know, so I said I’d be at the entrance to the headquarters building at seven o’clock.

“Good enough. That’s the baby!” he declared, grabbing my hand and giving it a squeeze to emphasize his meaning.

And just at that moment Ben appeared. He didn’t say anything right away, but a little later when we were alone he observed suddenly, “You seem to be purty popular with the boys, Leony!... Was that guy tryin’ to make ya?”

I laughed at the idea of Jay-Jay being like that. Ben does think of the funniest things—but of course he couldn’t know, and it must have sounded funny to him for a man to be calling me “baby.” Well, anyway, I explained to him that this lieutenant was in the Entertainment Corps and had known me as an amateur performer back in the States. “So now he wants me to help him work up some stuff for an entertainment—a banquet some General’s giving,” I added for good measure. “Don’t get foolish about that ‘baby’ stuff—

that guy calls everyone ‘baby’ or ‘sweetheart’ or something equally inappropriate.”

He grinned and said, “Well—it sounded kinda peculiar!” But I could see that he believed me, so I stopped worrying about him. Which didn’t mean that I wasn’t worrying about Jay-Jay and trying to dope out some way of stalling him off.

I didn’t want to make him mad, for then he might get nasty. On the other hand, I didn’t want to be so friendly with him that he could begin getting familiar. I wouldn’t put anything past him—and I knew he’d lost all desire to marry me. What he wanted now was just what he always wanted, and he’d do anything under the sun to get it. That was Jay-Jay all over!

Well, I hadn’t determined upon any course of action when I started out to meet him that evening. Ben said he was going out and take a walk and I told him I might run into him later. “Watch yer step!” he admonished, with a laugh.

When I arrived at the appointed place, Jay-Jay was waiting. I saluted him, but instead of returning the salute he just laughed and told me to “Forget it.”

“Well—what’s on your mind?” I inquired casually.

He laughed again before saying, “I’ll give you three guesses!”

“Well—you want to borrow some money?” I suggested.

“Don’t be absurd,” he retorted. “You know as well as I why I’m here!”

“No—I’m afraid you have the advantage in that respect. I can’t imagine why you were so anxious to see me. I’m not my sister, you know.”

He seemed to think that was a huge joke, too, but he calmed down too quickly to let me think his laughter was genuine. “Why, Sergeant, I came all the way from Paris just to tell you that I have written to your Aunt to inform her how well you are getting along.”

“That was good of you, I’m sure.”

“But, of course, I didn’t tell her that both of you are getting along all right—although I could have said as much, I suppose.”

“Then you’ve heard from Leona?” I suggested with feigned eagerness.

“Yes—heard from her, saw her, and also saw Leon.”

I managed to laugh at that. “That’s not very hard,” I said. “It’s still light and he’s right in front of you.”

“Yeh?” he inquired sarcastically. “Well, well—it all certainly is interesting. Almost like a piece of fiction or a melodramatic play. If I weren’t so sure, I’d say it was impossible—if I didn’t know you so well....”

“I don’t get you at all,” I declared.

He lit a cigarette, then offered me one. “You didn’t smoke when I last saw you,” he observed.

I took one of his cigarettes and lit it, not bothering to answer him.

“Let’s take a walk down by the river front,” he suggested.

I didn’t want to walk anywhere out of the way. Night was coming on and I made up my mind that we two were not going to be together anywhere in the dark. But I couldn’t object to taking a walk, so we started out.

He did practically all the talking as we stepped along toward the river, along its bank for a short distance, and turned back toward the barracks. It was dark by the time we reached the entrance and I was trying to make up my mind whether he really did have anything on me or was just acting on suspicion. He had talked so much and really said so little of actual fact that I was becoming more confident of my position.

“Now, Leona,” he began finally, as we were standing in the dark beside the doorway into the barracks. “There’s no sense in your trying to bluff me on this. I know it’s you and I don’t see any reason for your being so high and mighty about it. Why not take me into the secret and not have so much to worry about?”

“You’re crazy as hell!” I exclaimed impulsively, although while he had been talking I had been trying to

decide whether or not it would be wise to take him into my confidence, as Aunt Elinor suggested. My impulsive answer settled the matter, and I continued on that line. "I don't know where you got this foolish idea, but I certainly don't relish the situation in the least. Your suggestion is positively absurd! You must be insane to think of such a thing!"

"You won't admit it then?" he demanded.

"Admit something that isn't true?" I exclaimed, with indignation. "Honestly, are you crazy?" I put as much contempt into this last question as I could muster. I knew it would make him furious.

And it did. "I suppose it was you I saw in Le Mans a couple of days after I saw you here!" he declared with a sarcastic pitch of his voice.

"Why, I suppose it was," I replied evenly. "I was in Le Mans not long ago, and it is very possible that you saw me there." Oh, what a lie!

He laughed. "Yeh—but it just happens that I noticed there were no chevrons on Leon's sleeve—and you're a sergeant." He laid his hand on my arm. "Laugh that off now!" he invited.

And I did try to laugh it off, ending with another little lie, to the effect that on the day referred to I happened to have on a new blouse which I had to take before the tailor got through with it.

"Say—do I look that dumb?" he demanded.

"No—you don't look very dumb," I admitted, "but you sure do talk dumb as hell."

Just then I caught the sound of a whistle—a familiar whistle, and sure enough, a moment later Esky bounded into view, followed by Ben.

I was scared stiff lest my tormentor say something so loud that Ben would hear it, but while I was entertaining this worry I felt myself seized in Jay-Jay's arms and I knew at once that the fight was on. I scratched and bit and kicked and did everything possible to prevent him from putting his hands where he wanted to put them: at the moment it seemed to me that the whole world depended upon my keeping him from satisfying himself that his suspicions were correct. He was terribly mad and some of his curses weren't very nice, but I was mad, too, and hated him from the bottom of my heart. I was so mad I could have burst into tears—but before that could happen, my assailant was suddenly removed from my vicinity and the next thing I heard was a dull thud as he hit the sidewalk some six or eight feet distant. Ben stood glowering beside me and Esky was dancing around as if he were having the time of his life.

Jay-Jay picked himself up and started to come back, but Ben told him to be on his way and "shut up."

Jay-Jay stopped, brushed himself off, and called Ben a vile name, adding, "You know what happens to men who assault an officer!"

"Holy Christ!" exclaimed Ben to me, but to Jay-Jay he kept up the bold front, saying, "I just showed ya what happens to officers who assault men, too. Guess there ain't much danger of a ladybird like you makin' any complaint fer gettin' what you deserve. Now, beat it!" And he stepped out as if he would crown him again.

Jay-Jay moved away then, but not before he sent an ominous speech to me. He said: "Sergeant Canwick will pay a good price for this—and that's a promise!"

If Ben hadn't been there I'd have told him that there's only one thing I could pay and I'd be damned in hell before I'd ever pay it to him!

But Ben was there, saying, "Christ's sake, Leony, didn't I tell ya not to have anythin' to do with them guys! I knew he was a lily the minute I laid eyes on him."

I started to tell him that his ideas were all wrong this time, but then I realized that it didn't make any difference what he thought of Jay-Jay: and I could laugh at the idea anyway!

What worried me was what Jay-Jay would do: he could tell on me, if he was sure I was Leona—but he couldn't be sure, for apparently he didn't talk to Leon in Le Mans, and he didn't succeed in finding out anything to-night. I had a hunch, based upon my knowledge of his make-up, that Jay-Jay would not say anything to anyone. He'd rather try again. He was mad now and he knew that I knew what to expect if he

did get wise to the secret. No—Jay-Jay wouldn't squeal. What I had to worry about now was keeping out of his way—if he found out the truth and I still refused to play with him: then, and not until then, would he squeal.... I'd have let him squeal before I'd give in to him. I always knew he was like that: nothing but a beast.

In a way I was relieved. Better be war between us than a long drawn out friendship that would be a constant strain on my ability to keep on good terms with him to prevent his telling. The more I thought of him, the better I liked Esky. And Ben was a veritable saint and jewel in comparison with him.

—6—

Jay-Jay didn't show up next day, so I concluded that he was only in town for that night. Or Ben may have given him a black eye which required nursing. Anyway, I was free again for the time being, and we were going to Paris next day, with stops at Blois and Orléans, and even if Jay-Jay was back in Paris, I might be lucky enough to miss him. I was glad in spite of the danger: for the first thing I wanted was to hunt up Captain Winstead.

CHAPTER 12

MADemoisELLE FROM GAY PAREE

—1—

For several days I couldn't seem to keep from thinking about poor old Lisa and her jealous husband and wondering whether or not they had made peace yet. It was a shame for them to have hard feelings, just because I happened to stop in to see my old nurse. I hoped Lisa told him the truth—if she hadn't before I got to Le Mans again, he'd hear it from me.

I was hoping that the General might change his plans and go to Le Mans this trip—much as I wanted to see the Captain—because I had to see Leon soon and find out what kind of a game he thought he was playing. If he had left Le Mans, there would be no other way of proving to Pierre that I was not a regular soldier except by, well, some kind of a vulgar display: if Leon was still there when I got there, then it shouldn't be very difficult to make the old buzzard believe our story.

Now, however, we were en route to Paris and I didn't know what was going to happen. The General was very irritable and jumpy and complained of headaches and nervousness. I thought he was about ready to cave in—and if so, what would become of us?

—2—

A few days in Paris and I knew very well that General Backett was weakening under the strain. The doctors told him he ought to take a rest trip down to the South or over to England, but he positively refused. He finally had to give up work for a while and went to the hospital way over on the other side of the city from where Ben and I had to stay. I didn't know what we would do with ourselves. He'd probably be there a couple of weeks anyway and there was nothing I could do, outside of a few routine things that didn't amount to anything. Ben and I had to report to the Intelligence every day, just to satisfy some crazy regulation, but outside of that we had the time to ourselves. And it was just my luck that Captain Winstead was out of the city and wouldn't return for two or three days yet.

The General didn't have any more faith in Chilblaines, for he had him assigned to temporary duty at Intelligence. Of course, he couldn't be of any help over there—no more help there than he was to the General—but the General wouldn't think of intrusting any, even very routine, inspections to him and he had to do something with him. It was the same as a leave of absence.

Maybe we'd have the laugh on Chilblaines, though, for they were liable to put him to work over there, not because he was a good man, but because, when good officers are scarce, any officer at all must do. And good officers were scarce just now, due to the heavy activity all over the A.E.F.

—3—

I arranged to have flowers sent out to the General every day during his stay at the hospital. I didn't tell Ben a word about the flowers, but next morning when we visited the General to pay our respects and see if there was anything we could do to make him more comfortable, the nurse told Ben the flowers had come from a florist's and that the card had an enlisted man's name on it. I might have known it.

As soon as we were outside again, he began. "Who in hell ever heard of enlisted men takin' flowers to a General?" he demanded in disgust. "'Course we want the Gen. to be comfortable and happy—but let him stay there! We don't want him to get well too fast—the longer he stays the more time we have for enjoyin' the sights of this beautiful city!"

"Oh, we'll have plenty of time," I reassured him.

"Don't make no difference," he insisted. "Nobody ever heard of an enlisted man sendin' flowers to a General! You must be crazy.... But what the hell do I care—it's your funeral!"

I had to laugh.

"Now what the hell are ya laughin' at?" he demanded. "'Course I gotta admit that some o' the things you do sure are funny! Funny as hell! Sometimes ya act just like a woman!"

I continued to laugh at him, and it got his goat.

"What the hell are ya laughin' at, ya little shrimp?" he exploded. "I'm the one that oughta laugh—I oughta laugh at you fer bein' such a damn fool as to send flowers to a General! The joke's on you, ya poor toad!" And he started to laugh.

Well, when he laughed, I had to laugh some more, and the more I laughed the harder he laughed. It developed into a contest and I was gasping for breath.

Finally he stopped long enough to say, "By Gosh, Leony, ya must have a good sense o' humor to be able to laugh at a joke on yerself!" And he burst into a guffaw again.

I was doubled up by this time, but I managed to gasp out, "I'm not laughing at that, you big goof! I'm laughing because I put on all the cards to go with those flowers,

"From Private Garlotz and Sergeant
Canwick, with hopes for a speedy recovery.'

Now laugh that off!"

"What!" he demanded.

I repeated the text of the cards and added, "And I ordered flowers to be delivered every morning for the next ten days!"

"O God Almighty!" he groaned.

He couldn't see anything to laugh at now.

War-time Paris was supposed to be rather a wild place, but so far we hadn't struck anything very terrible. Perhaps we didn't know where to look. Anyway, I got quite a kick out of taking Ben around and showing him the historic sights of the city. Nothing exciting about such things as famous "rues" and boulevards, cathedrals, theaters, parks and monuments, and Ben was obviously bored. We even went to see the railroad stations—that's how hard up we were for something to do.

Ben's idea of a good time would be to visit all the dives up Montmartre way, the House of Nations and peep-hole palaces that we'd heard so much about. When I got my courage screwed up, I intended to go with him on a tour of those joints. For the time being, though, stuff like that didn't interest me: my education had gone along pretty fast and I wanted to save something for later. Not that seeing those things would hurt me—Lord knows, just looking at dirty things won't soil anyone's soul. I just didn't see anything very interesting in the sights we'd probably see in those places.

Ben had heard all kinds of stories about some of these places. He told me some things that I just couldn't believe. Ugh! I didn't think they really did such things anywhere—and if I went to one of those joints it'd probably be out of curiosity, just to find out for sure whether they did or not. I was tired of hearing about impossible things and not knowing whether to believe or not. However, curiosity wouldn't kill the kitty.

—5—

One day Ben and I were standing on the corner of two avenues, which Ben said no white man could name, wondering what we could do to kill a couple of hours, when a pretty little drably clad mademoiselle parked herself beside me and remained there until I paid attention to her.

I nudged Ben and said, "Here's a chance for you, Ben."

He looked her over and decided that she would suit his taste. "But she picked you out," he objected. "Go ahead, Leony—she's a cutie. I'll mooch along and see you later."

He started to do this very thing, but I caught his arm before he could take a step. "As you were, Gibraltar!" I commanded. "I don't want it—you take it."

Well, he thought it over, gave the little lady another scrutiny, decided to stay. "Well, if you ain't specially interested, maybe she'd like to push along with a good man." So we switched places and he addressed himself to the girl. "A-hem ... er ... bon jour, mam'selle."

Very engaging and cheerful, I thought, very much astonished at the vibrant timbre of Ben's love-making voice. I decided not to run away yet. This sounded interesting, and I wanted to hear just how one goes about making a trade with one of these wild women of the boulevards.

"B'jour, m'sieu." She sounded very sweet and tender. I was really surprised, for I had expected to hear a tough voice that would shame a foghorn.

"Parley-vous Anglais?" inquired Ben.

"Une petite peu."

"Huh?"

No answer.

"I said 'Comment?'" insisted Ben.

She turned to him then and said, while she looked at me, "I said I speak Anglaish juste a little."

"Now, ain't that grand!" exclaimed Ben, expanding with relief. The mademoiselle smiled at him. "What's on yer mind? Whatta ya got on fer to-night, this evening, this afternoon, right now?" he inquired, leaning on one foot very nonchalantly—about as nonchalantly as a cow would look leaning on one foot.

"Me? For you?" The mademoiselle laughed. "Ou la la!"

Ben laughed, too, but retorted, "Sure! Who'd you think I'm tryin' to fix up—General Pershing?"

"Ou la la!" she exclaimed. "You want to keel me?"

Ben was getting uneasy. In an aside to me he said something about a horse collar and then returned to the attack with a forceful "Ferget it! Don't make me burst into hysterics laughin'. What's the dope? How about it?"

"O non, non, non," she told him sweetly. "C'est impossible! Such a beeg strong man! Ou la la ... non, non!... But your frien', is he int'rest?"

"Naw, he don't like women—he's a cherry tree," says my sidekicker deprecatingly.

"Nevaire wis a woman? Nevaire?... Ou la la!" She stared at me as if I were some kind of a strange animal that she had heard stories about but had never seen. "Oh—I sink he ees grand.... I like heem très bon."

"He won't go," declared Ben, beginning to get insulted. "Ferget it now! Don't be annoyin' my friend."

What about me?"

"Nevaire ... nevaire ..." she told him. "But I have zis frien' ... she will like you."

"Where is she?" demanded Ben. "Is she as good lookin' as you?"

"Yes ... très chic.... But your frien'?"

"Whatta ya say, Leony? This looks pretty good to me."

"Nothing doing here," I replied with a laugh.

"Aw, come on an' oblige the young lady, won't ya?" he pleaded.

I wished then that I had left when this intercourse began, but it was too late now. "No," I repeated. "I don't want to go, Ben. Can't spare the money now anyway."

"Aw, maybe they won't want anything but a coupla drinks o' vin rouge," he argued. Then he turned to her. "Combien?"

"Oo ... vingt-cinq francs ... fine, yes?"

Ben exploded. "Twenty-five francs! Fine, hell! Say, do ya think we look like generals?"

I thought this was my way out, so I joined in the protest. "We haven't seen that many francs for a month. You're too high-priced for us, mam'selle."

But the mademoiselle had allowed for a possible reduction and immediately disclosed that fact when she faced me to say, "Well, for you may-be, I make special price. Ten francs?"

"No—no—and again no!" I told her. "It's not worth that much to me. I wouldn't give ten francs for the best woman in the world!" I thought this was a pretty convincing bit of hard-boiledness.

"No?" she expressed her disbelief, and looked almost hungrily into my eyes. "Ah, but you do not know!... It ees worth plenty more than that!... You see ... you do not like, I geeve *you* ten francs, yes?"

"Holy Jemima!" exclaimed Ben. "Where the hell are we? Am I hearin' things?"

"Ten francs," repeated the sister of the streets.

"Now ye're talking, baby," Ben burst in again. "I wouldn't give twenty-five francs to the Queen of Sheba, but ten francs ain't so bad fer a queen like you."

"Too much money for me," I reiterated. "What do you do with all your money, mam'selle?"

"Oo la la ... must pay my room ... must eat, buy clothes."

"Huh—" observed Ben, "chargin' prices like that you must sleep in the Tuileries, eat all the time an' not wear nothing but diamond studded gold pants."

The mademoiselle didn't like the sarcasm. "You make jokes wis me!" she told him. "You make jokes wis my business!" I think she began to suspect that she hadn't made a trade.

Anyway, Ben piped up promptly and told her, "Business? Say, you ain't no business—you're a whole damned industry!... Now, if ya got any business sense atall, which maybe you ain't, you'll take my small contribution to the cause and let the next man pay the rent."

"What zis?"

"I said, why not take me and be satisfied for once in your life. You can't go wrong, sister: fifty thousand women can't be wrong!"

She didn't get him, but I did. What a boast!

All she said was, "I don't like beeg men! I like your frien'."

"Will ya take five francs and be happy?" Ben again.

She looked at me. "Ooo la la—I like heem ... yes."

Ben was discouraged. "Go ahead, Leony. I'll see you later."

"But, my frien' weel like you ... she likes beeg mans!"

"Combien?"

"Cinq francs ... if I esplain to her."

Ben beamed again. "She better be good lookin' an' young, mam'selle, or I'll take it outa yer hide!" Gee, the abuse these women stand! He was all ready to accompany the solicitous young thing, but I was panic-

stricken and wouldn't budge.

"Come, Leony. That's fair enough fer a good lookin' girl like her."

"Naw—you go ahead, Ben. I wouldn't spend even five francs for *that!*" I had to say something strong.

That did the trick. She was really insulted now. "You piker!" she spit at me. "What you want ... I should pay you anyway?... Nevaire wis a woman in your life! Bah!"

And she turned away, shook her head emphatically when Ben asked again, "How about me?" and flounced around the corner out of sight.

Ben looked after her for a moment, shook his head sadly. Then he remembered what had happened and turned to glare and growl at me. "What the hell's the matter with you, Leony? God almighty, ya can't expect to get anythin' decent fer nothin' in a place like this!"

"Aw, Ben, I don't care anything about going with a woman like that," I told him.

"Well, I don't know what kind of a woman you would go with, if you don't like that!"

"I don't either," I admitted frankly.

"And she liked you, too.... Gosh, but you're an awful damn fool sometimes!"

I didn't say anything so he continued to meditate and think aloud, ending with a huge sigh and a fatalistic, "Well, we know what this Mademoiselle from Gay Paree is anyway! After hearin' so much about her, it's a surprise to find her livin' up to expectations. She was a red hot cutie, alright alright."

We spent an uncomfortable afternoon. Ben's appetite had been aroused and he wanted to chase after every woman we met. Two or three accosted us openly, and Ben would try half-heartedly to make a trade, but knowing that I wouldn't go with him, he didn't work up much zeal over any of them. None were as pretty as the first, anyway.

Ben was disgusted with me. Hardly spoke to me that night. Said he didn't know what to think of me: "Takin' flowers to the General an' refusin' to go with the prettiest mademoiselle in Paris even when she offered to return your money if ya wasn't satisfied! Holy cripes! You act just like a woman—damned if ya don't."

So that's how matters stood between us.... To-morrow I expected to see the Captain. Ben would have a little freedom to chase the elusive chickens about the boulevards, and perhaps he'd calm down a little if he had any success.

CHAPTER 13

BELOW THE BELT

—1—

After stopping at the Captain's rooms next afternoon and not finding him, I was beginning to feel sort of depressed, because I couldn't be running in there every hour or so and his man didn't know just what time he would be back; but that evening, just as Ben and I were trying to decide what to do for excitement, there comes a call for me and I go downstairs to find the Captain himself, in civilian clothes, waiting for me. I was surprised, of course: why the civilian clothes and why should he take the trouble to find me? For a moment I thought he must be wise to the game.

But he wasn't, for he explained his coming quickly enough.

"If you are free this evening," he told me, without wasting many words, "everything will be perfect. There's a party at Madame Gedouin's and it will be the ideal time to introduce you casually and unsuspectingly. All right?"

I said "surely" and added that we were free all the time for the present, because the General was in the hospital.

"Fine!" he exclaimed. "I don't mean about the General: he's a great fellow, only he works too hard, I hear. But if you can just give your time to this matter for a few days, I feel confident that we can get some worth-while results."

He sounded too darned enthusiastic over this project. I immediately began to wonder just what he expected me to do with this Madame Gedouin who "might like to be loved a little now and then." Then, too, I wondered about Ben—it suddenly occurred to me that it might be a good thing to have Ben along: he had proved his ability to disrupt threatening dénouements several times previously, and probably could be depended upon in a pinch again. But how could I explain the necessity to the Captain. I couldn't, so I merely asked if I could bring my sidekicker along.

"The General's chauffeur?" he asked, and when I nodded, he promptly negated the suggestion, explaining, "You see, this is more or less a delicate matter and we will need to be very good actors to avoid arousing any suspicions. The lady in question knows that I am connected with the Intelligence: that's one reason why she keeps on good terms with me, and the same reason for my not trying to play her myself.... But I believe we can introduce you perfectly, easily, naturally, in fact, because I shall say frankly that you are the brother of the young lady to whom I am engaged.... If I say that, your presence will seem perfectly natural, but to make matters better, I'll let it be known that you are very close to a prominent general: that will help, I'm sure.... So you run along up and make some excuses to your friend. I've a car outside and will wait for you."

I returned to our room and told Ben that my sister's beau wanted me to go somewhere with him, so I wouldn't be able to go out looking for excitement. Ben didn't seem to mind. In fact, he frankly stated that at last he was going to have an opportunity to pick up a woman without stopping to ask me whether I'd go or not. I wished him luck and left.

During the ride across the city with the Captain—for this woman lived in the Avenue Cartier, across the

river—I was further informed as to what I might expect and what I was expected to do. “This Ada Gedouin,” he told me, just as a taxicab missed us by inches, “is a very clever woman.... Nothing ordinary about her at all.... Pretty, vivacious, altogether charming ... about thirty ... originally an American but she married a Captain in the French army and has been a resident of Paris ever since.”

“Where’s the Captain?” I inquired suspiciously.

“Dead,” he continued. “Killed in action two years ago. No question about the Captain, you understand. In fact, the woman may be all right, too—but I don’t think so. She’s too gay, too hospitable and generous for the benefit of officers who may possess valuable military or naval information!... However, our theory is that this woman, whose maiden name was Smith (which might have come from Schmidt) has been an operative of the German intelligence service for a long period of years—I mean, that she may have married Captain Gedouin for the very definite purpose of establishing herself safely here in the event of war, and of making the necessary connections for the obtaining of desired information about troop movements and concentrations and large scale operations plans.... You see, Canwick, her position is perfect for the purpose. Through Captain Gedouin she has friends scattered all through the backbone of the French Army and being an American it is reasonable for her to enjoy the company of American officers in and about Paris. She can pick up information without the least trouble or effort, and we are powerless to stop her unless we can find out how she disposes of this information. We’ve made inquiries among officers who have been friendly with her, but you can’t find any man who will admit discussing important military matters in the presence of unmilitary people. No man would admit that he had just happened to mention this fact or that fact, by way of conversation, and entirely without suspicion.... We can’t isolate her and forbid her friends to see her. What we must do is connect her, if there is a connection, with some avenue which we know leads to German information.”

“I understand that,” I remarked, when he stopped for breath.

“Well, I’m taking you completely into my confidence,” he went on, “because I’m sure you will keep the information strictly to yourself. You must act the part of an unsuspecting, more or less unsophisticated and uninformed enlisted man. You needn’t drop any hints about General Backett—it will be enough that she knows of the connection. In fact, the less you say the better, because your reticence may lead her to believe that you are worth cultivating. You understand, I’m sure.”

We rode some distance in silence, but my mind was laboring hard and I finally managed to ask the question that had been bothering me all the time. “Just what am I supposed to do—how far should I go with this woman?”

He laughed. “Go the limit, if the opportunity presents itself.... When you see her, you’ll agree that no good soldier would be reluctant.... She’s a beauty, and if she decides to cultivate your friendship, you can depend upon having a beautiful time.... But don’t get it into your head that you have made a conquest, because ten chances to one she’ll just be playing you for some ulterior purpose. Just keep your head and let your ears pick up as much as they can.... If things go as I hope they will, she’ll try to make you feel perfectly at home in her apartment ... probably let you sleep there now and then ... she seems to think it’s an honor to get fellows drunk and have them put to bed in her home: which is, of course, suspicious, because when a man’s drunk he’s liable to say anything and after he’s asleep he can’t know who goes through his clothes or reads his pocket notebooks.... Oh, it’s all jolly and cheery and appears natural enough, but it’s up to you to see if it is so natural as it seems.... It’s a wonderful opportunity: she can’t have any knowledge of you, since you’ve never been connected with the Intelligence, and you’re just young enough and clean looking enough to appeal to her—at least, that’s the way I dope it out. We’ll see how close I come to the truth.... And here we are.”

The house was a dark stone edifice, in appearance somewhat like an American apartment house except that this looked too old to be like any American dwelling house. I guessed at once that it had been a studio building before the war: this side of the Seine is full of old houses like that, used by art students because

of the low rents and other advantages. American visitors in Paris used to use such places, too, because of their inexpensiveness and privacy.

Madame Gedouin's apartment, though, surprised me, for it was spacious and well decorated—not at all what one would expect from seeing the outside of the building. Very obviously the Madame didn't live here just to save money, for the furnishings and decorations and bric-a-brac were all obviously expensive. The whole atmosphere of the place spoke of plenty of money and hospitality.

There were a dozen or more people there when we arrived and I noted at once that the men were all officers above the rank of Captain. And the women did not include a single one without beauty or charm in one way or another.

Madame Gedouin came forward to welcome us and I would have said that she was genuinely happy to see my companion. Taking his hand, she exclaimed, in a vibrant, thrilling voice, "I'm so happy that you could come, Captain Winstead! You are such a busy man that I feel highly honored whenever you spare a few moments to us care-free creatures."

The Captain smiled that engaging smile of his and told her that he sincerely appreciated her flattering opinion. Then he turned to me and said, "I hope you won't mind my bringing this chap with me, Mrs. Gedouin.... He happens to be my best girl's brother and is dependent upon me to show him a good time during his short stay in Paris.... Sergeant Canwick ... Madame Gedouin." And he stepped back to permit us to acknowledge the introduction, then observed pleasantly, "I felt that I couldn't go wrong in bringing him here, ... you always have such perfectly delightful times here, you know."

"Now—" she indulged in a little silvery laugh, like the sound of Chinese bells. "No flattery, Captain.... Just enjoy yourselves.... We've any amount of excellent champagne, there's wine in abundance, and I shouldn't wonder if there were a sip of cognac for you, if you wished it...."

And that's how I met Madame Gedouin. We made ourselves at home. The Captain introduced me to the officers and women whom he knew and the hostess made me acquainted with the others. I said frankly that I felt rather uncomfortable in the presence of so many bars, maple leaves and stars, and a hard-boiled-looking colonel stepped up and shook hands with me and said, "There's no war on in here, Sergeant. Just imagine we haven't any clothes on—we're all human beings, you know."

A major who apparently had been imbibing too freely burst out with a loud laugh that made everyone else warm up to me, and very soon I found myself being plied with champagne—far more than I would ever dare touch.... Altogether it was a good party and I enjoyed myself.

But the Captain's fond hopes didn't seem to be coming true, for the lady of the house spent more time with that hard-boiled colonel and a young captain than she did with me—in fact, she was just nice to me throughout the evening of drinking, dancing and telling risqué anecdotes. The party broke up into couples and I found myself paired off with a pretty woman by the name of Fernande Something-or-other. The Captain—and I could have pulled his hair out when I saw him—very early engaged the attention of a very dark, very seductively attractive girl and disappeared with her into another part of the apartment. I could hardly talk straight during their absence—but I guess it wasn't as bad as it looked for they kept running in and out during the rest of the entertainment.... Anyway, in so far as the Captain's plans were concerned, the evening was a total loss—or perhaps not quite, for Madame Gedouin did invite the Captain and me to join a foursome for déjeuner on the morrow. But I suspected she liked the Captain himself. Couldn't blame her: he was a handsome devil, and what a man with the women! There wasn't anything he couldn't discuss in a nice way with anyone: and he could talk to generals as easily and as convincingly as with the women. I must say that I think I had good taste when it comes to men.

When I rolled in at an ungodly hour in the morning, Ben was nowhere to be seen. Past breakfast and there was only one thing that could keep him away from his meals: well, maybe he'd quiet down for a while now. I hoped he wouldn't come back before I got away to-day: I hated to make excuses for running out without him. However, there was no book of etiquette when it came to war.

The luncheon engagement went off on schedule and there was a lot of drinking and talking, but I didn't drink much and there wasn't a great deal that I could talk about, so I just played the bashful boy and let the Captain do the vocal work.

Our hostess did ask me if I was enjoying my stay in Paris, to which I replied, as sincerely as possible, "I've really enjoyed meeting you and your friends far more than anything else."

"Isn't that sweet of you?" she said. "You do say the nicest things. I'm afraid you are understudying that gallant gentleman across from me," indicating the Captain. "Is that not so, Captain?"

"Not a very good example," laughed the Captain.

"Well—" she went on, smiling at us in turn, "I feel it my duty to say that if he follows in your footsteps in this city, he won't for long be the sweet innocent boy that he is now.... You know, Sergeant, the Captain is really notorious.... He's responsible for more than half the female suicides in the Seine!"

"Barking dogs seldom bite," I observed, with a smile, although I didn't feel like smiling. "Perhaps the Captain doesn't do as much damage as it seems he should.... Some of the greatest swordsmen very seldom really fight, you know."

"Bravo!" exclaimed the Madame. "I guess you're not as innocent as you look. Perhaps we'd better wait until you have demonstrated before we reach any conclusions. Yes, Captain?"

"It's these quiet little devils who are the real devils," declared my companion, winking at me. "I can think of any number of men who are perfectly devastating in a drawing-room but——"

"Yes...?" she encouraged him, laughing that tinkling silver laugh that was so delightful.

"Why—in a boudoir, it's a different matter," the Captain finished lamely.

"I think you need another little stimulant," declared the Madame promptly. "Your conversational courage is not up to scratch..." She procured another bottle of something and set it at his elbow. Then while he opened it, she remarked, "What you meant to say, I believe, Captain, was the same as General Bargrave said the other evening: that you can't judge a man's bed manners by his table manners."

We all laughed at that frank bon mot and the Captain replied in kind, "I've known lovely ladies to prove false alarms, too."

"Touché!" cried the lady—and I fell to wondering whether she meant that he meant her or was just acknowledging a good thrust at women in general. From what he told me, he had never investigated this woman personally; she couldn't be much of a false alarm, if he still would like to gain her favor.

Well, anyway, that's the kind of a party it was: harmless and pleasant and, so far as I could see, marking no progress toward our goal. However, the Captain didn't seem to be very downhearted about it. He said for me to keep at it—and we'd call again day after to-morrow.

Ben returned to the land of the living that day and we went out to see the General in the afternoon. He said he had a wonderful time: "When you ain't around to cramp my style, I just bowl over the mademoiselles like tin soldiers! There's about ten thousand women in this burg that have been just waitin' fer me to appear!"

"Gosh—you'll have to work pretty fast, won't you?" I observed.

"Boy," he retorted, "I'm built for it! It'll be hard work, but I ain't the kind to disappoint the ladies. I can stand it, don't worry."

That man certainly had confidence in himself. I told him I guessed he was the "bull" in boulevard.

He said, "No wise cracks! I'm God's answer to these mademoiselles' prayers."

What an answer! "Special delivery," as it were! Not the message, but the messenger that counts ... but Ben couldn't see any joke in that crack.

I didn't have to make excuses to Ben on the third day of the chase; he just ambled away to begin his efforts toward making the demand for women meet the supply, and I joined Captain Winstead at a corner about two blocks away—as he suggested.

He was in civilian clothes and I was glad, because, after all, an enlisted man doesn't feel entirely comfortable with an officer, regardless of how congenial the officer may try to be. He suggested that we try to find a little vulgar entertainment, and I suspected immediately that he meant go looking for women. But I was wrong: he meant that he wanted to show me some of the "show places." "There's a couple of more or less ribald dives we might visit, just to get away from what we are accustomed to," he explained.

So I followed him and we came at last to a cellar café, dimly lit and apparently very popular with American soldiers and their women. We found a table, not too conspicuous, and ordered some sweet drinks, because I said I preferred grenadine to anything else. We didn't talk much while these lasted, but spent our time looking over the crowd in the place. A gaudily clad woman, with one breast threatening any moment to pop out, was singing a French version of a popular American song and some half-drunk Americans were trying to sing with her. The place reeked with stale tobacco smoke and the smell of cheap perfume, but the grenadine tasted good.

"Let's try a cognac citron now," suggested my companion, when the grenadine had disappeared and the garçon stood again at our side.

So we had cognac citron and the Captain began to talk, in a low voice and with quick apprehensive glances here and there at our neighbors. "We've got to hurry matters a little," he informed me. "To-morrow I will not go with you to the Madame's. I will telephone her and beg off, but I'll ask her if she would mind entertaining you while I am engaged elsewhere. She knows you are close to General Backett and she knows enough about him to know that he's the kind of hard-working devil that would keep track of everything that's going on—so I haven't any doubt about her willingness to entertain you."

"But she doesn't seem to be very crazy about me," I objected. "She likes you."

"Oh—don't let her mislead you. She's nice to me because it's part of her job—if she's what I think she is. And as far as you're concerned, just take it easy and let her entertain you. Just wait for the breaks. Play with her if she wants to play, stay with her if she wants you to stay, sleep with her, do anything at all that will give you an opportunity of seeing or hearing something."

He offered me a cigarette and I accepted as I nodded understanding. This job didn't appeal to me at all, but I couldn't very well get out of it now. I mean, I hadn't any excuse that I could give.

I accepted a light and he continued, "If you can, try to get an idea of where her money comes from. She has a bank account down town, but her deposits are very erratic and the checks she gets from the States very seldom tally with the amounts deposited. We have traced the checks to a harmless-looking lawyer in New York, but we haven't questioned him because we don't want to give away our hand. We figure that she gets funds from someone here in Paris also, and if we can discover who that party is, we'll be on the track of real evidence."

"Don't you suppose some of these officers tickle the kitty?" I asked, adopting the slang phrase for contributing.

He laughed at that and gave me his reasons for believing that she was not that wanton. "She's too high brow, too much the social woman, to let herself be under obligations to any man. It would cramp her style and sooner or later ruin her. Anyway, if she were selling it, she'd concentrate on one at a time for better results: but you see she is on good terms with dozens of men all at once.... No, that's not the explanation. There's some other source of income. And that source of income is doubtless the outlet for her information, so if you get any hint of a connection of any kind, we'll play our hunch and follow it to the end. Beginning to-morrow, it's up to you. You can tell her how busy I am and so forth, just to keep the

story straight. And I'll get in touch with you around noontime each day."

"All right," I agreed, and we turned our attention to a group of soldiers at a near-by table who were beginning to warm up for a song. They were singing verses from the famous "Parley Vous" song. I can only repeat a few—but then, you probably know the rest, anyway:

"Mademoiselle from Aix-la-bains,
Parley-vous?
Mademoiselle from Aix-la-bains,
Parley-vous?
Mademoiselle from Aix-la-bains,
She gave the Yankees shootin' pains!
Hinky dinky parley-vous?

"Mademoiselle from Neufchâteau,
Parley-vous?
Mademoiselle from Neufchâteau,
Parley-vous?
Mademoiselle from Neufchâteau,
Would kiss you thus and so and so ...
Hinky dinky parley-vous?

"Mademoiselle from Biarritz,
Parley-vous?
Mademoiselle from Biarritz,
Parley-vous?
Mademoiselle from Biarritz,
If you loved her too much, it made her have fits!
Hinky dinky parley-vous?

"Mademoiselle from Bar-le-duc,
Parley-vous?
Mademoiselle from Bar-le-duc,
Parley-vous?
Mademoiselle from Bar-le-duc,
The names of her lovers would fill a big book.
Hinky dinky parley-vous?"

The way they sang this song was for one man to solo the verse part and everyone join in the "parley-vous" part. When it once got going, it went on forever, the crowd joined in to swell the chanting "parley-vous" and as soon as one soloist ran out of verses, someone else took over the lead, and on it went. There was something about it that got you: you couldn't help but hum along with the melody, and if it continued long enough you found your eyes closing and your senses slipping off into a lull of sleep.

So it was this evening. The Captain broke in once to remark that he had heard at least a hundred verses to that song and I replied that I guessed there was a verse for every town in France and a few extra; then we just had another drink and were content to listen to this Song of the Cities of France.

I couldn't begin to remember all the variations that we heard that night, but here are some of them:

"Mademoiselle from the city of Vichy,

Just like the liquor that makes you feel itchy!”

“Mademoiselle from the Côte d’Or—
The Old Gray Mare ain’t the same no more!”

“Mademoiselle from Châteauroux—
Enough for her is too much for you!”

“Mademoiselle from Chamonix,
An Alpine maid with a bag full of tricks.”

“Mademoiselle from Armentières,
She hadn’t been loved for fifteen years.”

“Mademoiselle from Neufchâtel
A chest like a barn, a leg like a bell.”

“Mademoiselle from S.O.S.
A bottle of wine and she says ‘Yes.’”

“Mademoiselle from Monte Carlo—
Out the window you must go!”

“Mademoiselle from old Toulouse,
A beautiful lady, but O how loose!”

“Mademoiselle from old Bordeaux
Takes your francs and growls ‘Let’s go!’”

“Mademoiselle from the city of Toul—
It ain’t no place for an innocent fool!”

“Mademoiselle from the city of Blois—
She took one look and said ‘Ou la la!’”

“Mademoiselle from St. Nazaire,
A virgin, she claims, till we got there.”

“Mademoiselle from Romorantin
Took your breath and left ya pantin’.”

I had heard some of these before, and a lot of others, but I never heard so many verses all at one time. They bade fair to continue all night, for as soon as one singer lost his wits or his voice, another popped up to carry on. Someone started the series, relating the sad story of one young mademoiselle, which starts with

“Farmer, have you a daughter fine,
Fit for a soldier just out of the line?”

“Yes, I have a daughter fine
But she’s too damned young for your design!

And this tragic tale ends with telling how the mademoiselle’s son—

“The little devil he grew and he grew,
He’ll grow up to be a soldier, too!”

It was just at this point that I suddenly became aware of someone’s presence at my shoulder and I looked up to find Jay-Jay Marfield studying me rather contemptuously. I decided, as soon as I recovered from the shock, to take desperate measures at once, obeying the military rule that the best defense is a good offense. I stuck out my hand and exclaimed, “Hello, Jay-Jay, you old hellion—how the hell are you?”

The look on his face changed as much as it would if I had hit him. And before he could recover, I continued with a half-drunken effort to introduce him to my table companion. “Lieutenant Marfield, shake hands with an officer and a gentleman and a judge of good liquor—Captain Winstead!”

The Captain smiled and extended his hand, which Jay-Jay mechanically accepted and shook as the Captain said pleasantly, “Won’t you join us, Lieutenant?”

Jay-Jay hesitated, mumbling something about “a party down the line,” but he finally sat down and explained his presence by saying, “I thought I recognized ... er ... the Sergeant here.”

Captain Winstead saved me from speaking by observing, “Yes—he looks so much like his sister, I imagine it makes you homesick just to look at him.”

“I beg pardon!” Jay-Jay was flustered.

But the Captain was either deliberately malicious, or else the drinks had really affected him, for he proceeded very unconcernedly, “She’s such a beautiful girl and he looks so much like her—and you were so fond of her, you know—or were you——?”

“But—” Jay-Jay was stumped. For the first time since I’d known him he couldn’t talk. I couldn’t decide whether he was mad or just flustered: his appearance indicated both or either. Finally he managed to ask, “How do you happen to know so much about me, Captain?”

“It’s my business,” laughed the Captain. “I remember meeting you, or rather seeing you, in a garden, and later indoors, with this charming young lady who is Canwick’s sister.”

“O-o-h!” says Jay-Jay, beginning to see the light. “I remember you now—you had me going for a moment.” And he managed to smile more congenially, now that he knew whom he faced. “Ever hear from Leona, Captain?” he inquired suddenly, and I could feel his mind’s eye twinkling sardonically at me.

All I could do was stare helplessly at the Captain, wondering what in the devil he would say—not that there should have been any doubt, for of course he hadn’t heard from Leona. Nevertheless, it was just one of those moments when you hope against hope for something unreasonable.

There must be something in mental telepathy. Anyway, I thought I was drunk when I heard that chuckling voice of the Captain’s saying, “Oh, surely—now and then. Of course, she’s rather busy now and having the time of her life out there. You knew she has been helping the boys keep up their morale in the training camps, didn’t you—or did that come off since you left the States?”

You could have felled me with a feather. Just what was the idea anyway? Why should the Captain be talking like that and twinkling his eyes so amusedly. My God, did he suspect me, too?

But I wasn’t the only one who was dumfounded and shivery. I noticed that Jay-Jay gave me a surprised look and fumbled rather awkwardly with the glass which the garçon had just served him.

And the crazy Captain continued his unconcerned monologue about my clever and bewitching sister, telling the most impossible lies and describing incidents and letters and everything in such convincing

detail that I was beginning to be sure he was having a good time at my expense.

Anyway, he got rid of Jay-Jay very shortly and turned his amused glance at me. The more I stared at him the more amused he became, until finally he indulged in outright laughter.

“Really,” I demanded, somewhat falteringly, “have you heard from Leona?”

“Of course not,” he replied promptly. “But you didn’t suppose I was going to let that fellow get away with any uncomfortable remarks, did you?... When you welcomed him so hilariously, I assumed something was up.... And, besides I don’t like the fellow: he’s one of those possessive, proprietary imps, and, remembering your remark about your sister not wanting to marry him, I just indulged in a little embroidery of the truth for my own enjoyment.... You really don’t mind, do you, Canwick?” he asked solicitously. “You know, of course, that I meant no reflection of any sort upon Leona.”

A great sigh of relief came up from the bottommost depths of my lungs. Whew! I burst out laughing and told him he “did it so perfectly, it even convinced me.”

He laughed with me—but I think, rather I hoped, we were laughing at different things.

We had another grenadine apiece and decided to call it an evening, but just before we arose to go, I saw Jay-Jay starting up the stairs to the street. He had a girl with him but he looked across at me very perplexedly. When I caught his eye I burst out laughing and held up my hand “thumb down.” He slapped his cap on the side of his head and pushed his baby roughly up the stairs and out of sight. Even a brave man can’t stand ridicule: Jay-Jay would think twice about being laughed at before he tried any more tricks with me. This mademoiselle was too far away to even think about having to pay: hinky dinky parley-vous? Vive le Cognac!

CHAPTER 14

IT TAKES A WOMAN TO CATCH A WOMAN

—1—

One day Ben was singing and an intellectual sort of chap in the next room piped up to tell him that his voice sounded “like two skeletons dancing on a tin roof and a pregnant bullfrog singing jazz.”

I was reminded of this the next night when I got home and found him there. He wasn’t singing, yet; he was just dying to explode about his adventure of the day.

“I been out with the sweetest little woman ya ever saw! An’ she talks English!” he declared enthusiastically.

“No lovin’ party to-night?” I inquired.

“Sure!” he exclaimed as if I had insulted him. “I’m tellin’ ya: this captain knew all the tricks an’ she didn’t skip any on my account! Boy, that captain made me forget home, mother, religion and all the wars that ever was fought! Why, Leony, that captain...”

“Hey! Hey! Just a minute!” I cried. “What were you telling me about staying clear of men like that?”

“Huh?”

“What’s this captain stuff. How the devil could you have a lovin’ party with a captain?... You’re drunk!”

“The hell I am!... I was in bed with the prettiest little captain you ever saw, not more’n two hours ago! Whatta ya think o’ that?”

“I think you’re drunk!” And he was slightly so.

“It’s a fact,” he insisted.

I had to laugh. The big blister preaching sermons to me about letting ladybirds get fresh and then he turns around and boasts about being in bed with a captain!

“I met her in a gin mill,” he continued, after a moment, “an’ she looked at me an’ gave me just one look—that was all this baby needed. I had her number pronto and in fifteen minutes’ time and three drinks we was on our way to heaven! She told me she came from Salisbury and I says I hail from New York—and she said she liked big men—and, well, I did the rest.”

“She?” I stopped in my undressing long enough to ask. “Where do you get that ‘she’ stuff? I thought your playmate was a captain.”

“She is!” he insisted. “She’s a captain in the Women’s Auxiliary Army Corps, and she comes from Salisbury—wherever the hell that is—somewhere in England.”

The light fell upon me and I exclaimed, “Oh—she’s a W.A.A.C. captain?”

“Say!” he bawls out. “What’d ya think I mean—an artillery captain? Ya dumb little runt!”

But I laughed at him. The idea of a buck private making love to a captain just struck me funny. He didn’t mind, though, and the first thing I knew he was launching into song—and what a song! Except for the first verse, it was the dirtiest, rottenest thing I’d heard yet. It was so bad I couldn’t even think it in shorthand!

“Where in the name of God did you pick that up?” I inquired between about the fifth and sixth verses.

“Captain taught me,” he replied glibly. “That’s called *The Salisbury Maiden*, an’ it’s a damned fine

song, if I do say so myself.”

I let him finish it, but managed to get him undressed enough to roll into bed by the time he had ended that rotten ballad: and it was a wonder to me the man next door didn't pipe up with another wise crack about my partner's voice. When he sang, your stomach turned over and your heart played leap frog with your throat and you saw little purple stars in the pink firmament about you. The two skeletons and the pregnant frog didn't begin to parallel the noise Ben made when he felt the lyric urge.

He picked up a couple of other dirty ditties that I refused to have anything to do with. One of them was that *Cafusalem*—The Harlot of Jerusalem: he said he learned it from an Australian in a house of ill fame. The other was a Limey marching song that starts off “Eyes right! Legs up tight!” My shorthand won't stand those, either.

—2—

Ben's singing occurred after my return from a large evening at Madame Gedouin's, with whom I had made slight progress: Ada was beginning to act interested. She said I was such a nice boy and so attentive and gallant to her that she really would have to be nice to me and see that I had a good time.

I was not sure what she meant but she was the kind of a woman who means about umpsteen times what she says: I mean that the things she said always suggested a lot more: she didn't denote an awful lot in her speech, but she sure did connote a mouthful.

Next day I was going shopping with her. But before I met her, I decided to play safe and buy myself a couple of cast-iron brassières: made out of canvas or flannel or something. I was glad I had sort of a boyish figure and was kinda flat chested. It'd be rather funny for a wild woman to start going over you and bump into anything like that.... I heard two soldiers talking about some kind of a contrivance that was used by women perverts. Now a woman like that wouldn't feel worried at all in my predicament. However, I preferred to be myself. Nothing like that for me!

Ben was talking in his sleep. He was courting that captain again. I wished he were going into the lioness' den instead of me.

—3—

Well, I went shopping in the afternoon with Madame Ada Gedouin, and I must say that that woman knew how to spend money. She didn't curb her tastes and fancies at all, and unless she got darned big checks from New York, the Captain was right.... She was a gay companion, though. Men turned around to look at her and I'll bet more than one of them envied me. And me nothing but a poor enlisted man! Why, it was almost a crime for a gink like me to promenade down the boulevards with a woman that was as pretty and richly dressed as the Madame! I wanted to run every time we passed an M.P.

Apparently business went on here in spite of the war. It was only at night that you could see the difference, for then there were no lights and the houses were all boarded up and shuttered to prevent any light from escaping. In the daytime the shops were open and doing a lively business, too, with all those Americans there ready and willing to buy this and that to send home to the “little woman.”

This afternoon, after we finished our tour of the stores, I felt it my duty to take my companion somewhere to eat and when I suggested it, she admitted that she was about famished. “You're a dear sweet boy,” she told me. “And I'll let you take me to Cuvier's.”

Not knowing where this guy Cuvier tended bar, I had to ask for directions, which she gave, with that silvery little laugh, much as if I were some child whose innocence and ignorance were in inverse

proportion to its age.

Well, Cuvier's proved to be something more or less special, but the major-domo, or whatever he was, very quickly found a secluded table for us and I extended myself in trying to please milady's palate. And everything I'd do or say, she'd come out with that "dear sweet boy" stuff and I felt like two cents. Enough of anything like that is too much to begin with.

Before the repast was finished we had consumed several shallow glasses of very stimulating wine, and the Madame had reached the point where she punctuated her flatteries by caresses and chummy little pats and finger kisses. If I hadn't had the wine, I'd have felt uncomfortable.

Anyway, as we were coming out of the place, I spied a familiar figure about ten yards away and promptly had shivers of apprehension—for the sight of Jay-Jay didn't make me feel very calm, even after the other night.

At just that moment the Madame breathed another one of those little ecstasies and gave my cheek not only a pat but also a very sweet kiss.... The shock was so great that I had all I could do to keep from stumbling. I managed somehow to bear up—even clutched her hand more tightly and stamped a vigorous kiss upon it by way of my other hand. Then I looked up, as if I had not seen Jay-Jay before—and the son-of-a-gun was right in our way, cap off, as if he expected me to stop and introduce him to this stunning creature. Perhaps if he hadn't been so damned nervy about it, I might have taken the trouble, but I didn't. I just saluted sharply and said "Hello, Lieutenant." The Madame favored him with a disdainful glance and we marched past him and into a cab, from the depths of which I peeked out to see him still standing stupidly in the middle of the pavement, looking as if he expected the world to fall on him in just a minute.

He apparently didn't know whether he was going or coming!... Now, if Leon would just keep himself out of sight, perhaps I'd have peace for a while.

Back at Madame's apartment, she busied herself about the place, telling the maid to do this and that and about a million other things, while I just plumped myself down and almost went to sleep.

About eight o'clock a frock-coated Frenchman with a kaiserish mustache and a two-point beard dropped in, and I was introduced to him. He was some kind of minister or other in the French government. He spoke to me in English and I answered in my own language. The Madame brought in some champagne and Whiskers had several. They began to chatter away in French, only now and then turning a few commonplace remarks in English upon me.

Since they didn't expect me to understand or talk French, I just kept quiet and listened. As far as I could make out, they didn't really have much to say to each other: they just talked a hell of a lot, but in the end it seemed to be agreed that the Madame would be delighted to meet him somewhere in Fontainebleau at eleven. I didn't know whether she meant eleven that night or next day, but I decided to stick around as long as she let me.

The Frenchman finally left and she returned to me. "O—I am so tired!" she exclaimed, arranging the pillows on the divan and motioning to me to come over. "Shopping invariably wears me to a frazzle.... Now, you sit right there like a nice boy and let your grandmother lie across your lap ... like this."

Which was a very nice position—at least, it must have been comfortable for her, with a whole stack of pillows under her head. She closed her eyes and threw her arm over my shoulder.... Then she began to play her fingers about the back of my neck and in my hair.... I thought turn about ought to be fair play, so I tickled her neck and ran my fingers lightly up and down her spine—or at least, where her spine ought to be.... She surely was a marvelously constructed piece of anatomy!

Now and then she crooned some damned fool thing to me.... I rubbed her temples.... She kissed the palms of my hands and called me a "little jewel."

After a while she began asking questions, in a sort of lazy, unconcerned manner, about my work, about General Backett, my sister, Captain Winstead....

"You rather like the Captain, n'est-ce pas?" I said.

“I think he is too dear to be true,” she said, and it sounded very genuine to me. “He is very charming, and very clever.... Your sister never need envy anyone else.”

“I think he’s a peach of a fellow,” I said, trying to sound sort of fraternal about it. “He’s been very good to me since I came to Paris ... and I certainly owe him something for introducing me to you and your circle of jolly friends.”

“Oh—you dear kid.” And she laid herself snugly against me, then pulled my face down to be kissed. “You’re the most comfortable and attentive thing to have about.... Do come often and stay late.”

... Yet, somehow or other she succeeded in separating me from that divan a half hour before eleven!

I found myself at home, waiting for Ben to come—probably with all sheets in the wind.

—4—

Saw my Captain next day at noon and told him about the Frenchman. He knew about him already. “She’s been playing around with him for several weeks,” he told me. “However, keep your eyes open—you may hear her pass on some remark that old Poiquerre makes.”

So I called up the Madame that evening and asked if she minded my dropping in. “The Captain is still busy and I’m at a loss to know what to do with myself.”

“Didn’t I tell you to come any time and stay late,” she replied laughingly. “Do come over—by all means, you charming baby.”

I hung up without much respect for the telephone. All this sweet flattery and cooing condescension wasn’t getting me anywhere.... But I went over and there was a little crowd there, dancing and talking about everything from military tactics to the Legion of Honor and funerals.

I found myself paired off with a little blond girl by the name of Germaine. She was jolly and talkative and not quite so *beaucoup pashe* as most of Madame’s friends. We had a pleasant time of it, and she complimented me upon my dancing and even went so far as to tell Madame she “really should dance with him. He’s marvelous, Ada!”

So Ada and I danced—very nicely, too, and afterwards she pressed my arm and told me it was “divine! —I’m afraid the captain was right in what he said about ‘these quiet little devils.’... Some woman will love you to shreds if you aren’t careful.” And she laughed that enchanting silvery chuckle that I’d been simply fascinated by time and again.

When the party broke up, I contrived to hang around for a little while. She came back to me tucking a piece of paper into her bosom with a laughing deprecation anent “these lovesick boys who insist upon writing what they fear to say!” But I had my doubts about the contents of that note, although my doubts arose from no actual reasons except suspicion.

I made a list of all the people who were there that night to show to the Captain. I had decided to keep my eyes open whenever any one of them was present again.

Next day the Captain would be back on duty by special invitation. Madame Gedouin was taking a party down in the country for bathing.

Which got a laugh out of one little lady. We couldn’t use the old familiar excuse this time—but it’d take more than a team of horses and a couple of tanks to get this chicken into any bathing suit! What a farce that would be!... I hoped the Captain didn’t begin entertaining any funny ideas—but this was one case where it couldn’t be helped. As Ben would say, “Here’s one poor fish that don’t like the water.”

—5—

If the Captain hadn't been so insistent, I would have found some excuse for staying away from that bathing party, but he refused to listen to any excuses and kept repeating his demand that I do everything possible to pick up the information that was so desired. So I went.

I dropped into the Madame's and had lunch with her before the other members of the party arrived. While she was getting ready to depart I wandered around the apartment, ostensibly surveying the many trick decorations and objets d'art, but actually studying every wall and floor for possible evidences of something secret or suspicious. But there was nothing of the kind and I finally accepted her invitation to come into her boudoir, where her maid was helping her put the finishing touches to her toilette.... I began to suspect that the Madame was trying to torment or tempt me, and there was a bare possibility that my reluctance to make any real kind of love to her had aroused her interest. Sometimes it must be true that lack of evidence of desire engenders desire: I mean if a woman thinks a man doesn't want her, very often she will go out of her way to make him want her.... At least, so I gathered from personal experiences that I had heard.

Anyway, I sat there beside her dressing table and watched the dressing proceed, the while she chattered gayly about this and that and every other thing of little or much importance.... Finally, before she had quite finished, the first of the visitors arrived and I adjourned to the reception room, where I found my friend Germaine and a bespectacled American major who very apparently didn't relish the idea of being introduced to an enlisted man.... Then Captain Winstead breezed in and smoothed the air a little by his friendliness to me.... In the space of fifteen minutes the entire party was assembled, ten in all, and we set off for the country in two cars, one an American service car and the other of French make and belonging to one of the ladies.

Madame Gedouin promised that we should see a most charming place and that we all would have a delightful evening, and I had to admit that I was glad I came, because this country estate, about twenty-five miles from the center of the city, was really the most comfortable and inviting place I'd seen in France. The Madame told us about its owner, an official in the French government.... If it hadn't been for the prospect of the bathing, I should have enjoyed myself immensely.

As soon as we had been served with refreshments, the Madame suggested that everyone find a place to change clothes. "And let's be off while the sun shines."

"Everyone going in?" I asked.

"All but Marie," she replied. "She's too French. I think that swimming is more appreciated by Americans than by any other race the world over. Every healthy American loves swimming."

"Here's one that don't," I told her.

"You little prevaricator!" she exclaimed. "Run right along and slip into your suit."

"I didn't bring one," I confessed.

"You didn't?" She sounded as if she really felt bad about it. "Well, we'll see if we can't find one that will fit you. You're so petit, I imagine you could wear a girl's suit."

"Absolutely not!" I declared. "My mother didn't raise me to be laughed at."

"Why, you dear sweet kid," she laughed, "I have to laugh at you all the time: you're so terribly unique!"

"Virtue in all things," I told her, smiling. "But swimming isn't one of my points of virtue—I regret to say. I never liked the water and I was actually uneasy on the trip coming over, because I really can't swim a stroke."

"I'd love to teach you—I think that would be just loads of fun.... And it isn't every man I'd bother that much about, you know."

I laughed and let her kiss me, but remained firm in my stand. "You chase along and have your fun," I insisted. "I'll toddle about and feast my eyes upon the sights."

She finally gave up trying and flew upstairs to change. But I had no sooner ducked her than the Captain appeared and I had to go through it all again.

"Mrs. Gedouin might not like it if you don't go in after coming on the party," he argued.

"Can't help that," I replied. "I've explained it to her and I don't think she minds terribly.... Anyway, if Marie can do her swimming on the bank, I guess I can, too."

"Well—of course—a woman might have a legitimate excuse, you know."

I laughed at that and told him, "I haven't any excuse like that, but I've got one that's just as good: I just don't swim, that's all!... Don't worry about me—I'll square myself with the Madame."

"Oh—it's not a matter of life and death," he reassured me laughingly. "Just seems sort of odd for a healthy little devil like you to hate the water."

"I guess so," I agreed smilingly. "But then the Madame says that's what she likes about me: I'm so 'terribly unique'!"

"Cut yourself a piece of cake!" he retorted cheerfully and emphasized his jolliness by slapping me on the back with such force that I coughed and spluttered and almost fell over.... I watched him depart: he was handsome, even in a bathing suit. My God, wasn't there anything wrong with that man? No man could be as perfect as he seemed to be—and if he could, he surely wouldn't fall in love with a little insignificant thing like me. Maybe that was the flaw—if he were perfect, he wouldn't do it. Also maybe he hadn't done it. Maybe I was kidding myself.

When the party went down over the hill to the pool, I wandered along and dropped easily into a conversation with the other noncombatant, Marie. We didn't have much to say to each other, but we managed to pass the time in comments upon the dexterity of this one or the diving of that, and an interesting discussion of the surroundings which ended in Marie's informing me that it had cost M. Dagnier a pretty fortune to keep this estate intact during the war, because there were so many purposes to which it could be turned due to its nearness to Paris and its many other obvious advantages.

It was at this point that someone asked me for a cigarette and I discovered that I had left mine in my tunic, in the house. "But I'll go get them," I offered.

"Oh—don't bother," said the young lady. "Ada has gone to the house and doubtless she will bring some back with her."

Nevertheless, I went to get my own and when I had gone but a few steps the Captain called out, "I don't like your cheap cigarettes, Canwick. Bring down the pack that's in my pocket, will you?"

I proceeded to the house and entered as quietly as possible, found my blouse and extracted my cigarettes, then continued upstairs to get the Captain's. I had no idea which room he had used and while I stood silently debating with myself at the top of the stairs, I became conscious of a very rapid and strange dialogue going on somewhere near at hand. My ears caught words that were unmistakably German and I distinguished one of the voices by its silvery tinkle. I tried to place the sounds, but could not and, fearing to make a noise if I tried to get nearer, I satisfied myself by attempting to catch the content of their conversation. I caught such words as "papers," "numbers," "army corps," "aviation" and "money," but the rest was an indistinguishable blur of sounds. Then I heard what sounded like someone moving and I ducked quickly into the first door I came to.

I held my breath and listened again. The voices were even plainer here and I guessed that they must be in the very next room to the one I was in. I heard the Madame tell her companion that "the money will be safe in the apartment" and then something about "a chaplain on Tuesday."

Their voices became inaudible then. A motor started up somewhere outside and I decided that the best thing I could do was take advantage of the noise to make my exit. I got downstairs and out of the house without anyone seeing me, and when I appeared again at Marie's side, with a cigarette hanging from the corner of my mouth, the Captain piped up to ask if I had brought his smokes.

"How the devil did I know where your clothes were!" I retorted. "You'll have to get along with one of my cheap fags."

He came up to get one and, although he continued the joke of bawling me out, I knew that he understood

the slight wink that I gave him. He lit his cigarette from mine and observed to Marie, "Don't ever have anything to do with these enlisted men, Mam'selle.... If this fellow didn't have a perfectly marvelous sister I wouldn't even smoke one of his cigarettes." With which he returned to his place near the diving board to continue his engaging chatter with the others, and a moment later the Madame reappeared, with cigarettes, matches, and a huge cocktail shaker, the top of which contained four small cups which were promptly appropriated. "I thought something like this would help the gayety of nations," she remarked cheerily, as the Captain took the shaker and began a Pipes-of-Pan dance with it.

When he came back to her, he observed lightly, "The perfect hostess always does the right thing at the right moment!... If this continues, I shall fall under the spell and propose to you myself!"

"Ou la la!" cried the Madame. "After all these years of yearning, I am to be rewarded?" She laughed with him as she filled his cup.

"May I never feel worse!" offered the Captain, raising the cup to his lips.

"Which might mean either of two very different things," laughed his companion. "Don't commit yourself, even in jest."

"But I do!" he insisted. "I mean that if I never feel worse than I do now, I shall have an exceedingly happy life."

The Madame turned to me to say, "You see what you are coming to, my young gallant?"

I forced a smile and replied that "after all, he does intrigue you.... I'm willing to come to that myself."

She glanced questioningly at me, as if she could not decide whether I was jealous of the Captain or just indulging in a flirtatious remark for her benefit. She dropped a hand upon my head and rumbled my hair as she said, with a light little laugh, "You need not envy him in that respect, mon enfant."

"Encore?" inquired the Captain, holding out the cup again and remarking further, as she filled it, "I might have known he would succumb to your enchantments, Circe."

"The truth has eluded you again, my dear Captain," she replied. "The pleasure of succumbing seems to be all mine."

"So?" exclaimed my friend in mock surprise. "Well, I will confess, Madame: I warned him to beware—and besides he is naturally bashful.... Why, do you know, Madame, they had to tie his grandfather in bed on his wedding night!... You see, it is inherent."

"You sinner!" the Madame called after his departing laughter.

"It's nice to hear yourself so frankly dissected," I observed, when she turned her attention again to me and my hair.

"Mon enfant," she said, leaning over to place a kiss in my ear, and handing me the cocktail shaker, "hold this while grandma takes one more dip, then she'll find something more interesting for you to hold."... Another tinkling laugh and away she went, leaving me to pour out a drink for Marie, and a moment later several for the Major and Germaine.

The Madame didn't stay in very long and when she came back, dripping and shivering, she took my hand and said, "Come along, little one... We must find something for your idle hands to do."

"The devil's supposed to do that," I said, but I arose and followed her to the house, where she led the way upstairs and into the very room whence I had heard the conversation in German.

"Just one more minute and I'll be with you," she told me as she took a towel and a kimono and stepped into a dressing closet.... And she wasn't gone more than a minute, either. I don't see how she could remove her bathing suit and dry herself in such a short time. However, there she was—and no bones about it. She gave me a fervent kiss in passing and then asked me to hand her the chemise which lay on the chair beside me. She put it on, without getting up from the seat on which she had settled. "Now that long affair, please, baby," she went on, and I passed her the brassière. "You might assist me, honey," she suggested; so I went over and hooked the brassière—but when that was done she threw her arms up and around my neck and pulled my head over her shoulder so she could kiss me.... I began to get a different view of

things right then, for that one embrace was so mad, so fervent, that I understood immediately that she meant business.... I felt rather panicky, but I stubbornly stuck it out, and when she released me, I offered to help with her hose and shoes.... Between the operations there had to be a certain amount of caresses, but I managed to keep busy, even going so far as to help with her hair, for which I was rewarded by a terrific kiss and the following testimony as to my character: "You're the dearest, sweetest, darlingest man I've ever known!"

"Rather a large order," I reminded her.

"But you are, honey!" She busied her gaze with the mirror as she continued, "You see, I get so sick of being nice to old men and middle-aged men and men who have lost all the touches of youth!... Sometimes I feel as if I had never had any youth myself ... as if I had always been grown-up and in the company of grown-ups.... You can understand, can't you? You understand everything, I believe."

"The Captain isn't an old man," I observed maliciously.

"Captain Winstead?" she exclaimed with a laugh. "No—he's not so old, but loving him would be just like loving a *matinée* idol. He's clever, dashing, fascinating, everything desirable—and that's just why I am not interested in him. You can't trust a man who is too perfect.... But, you are just ideal, you darling boy!... And you've been so nice, so attentive, so deferential and considerate ... well, it's a relief, to say the least."

It seemed to me that her ardor had cooled. Perhaps she thought she had said too much. At any rate, the dressing was finished without any amorous threats that I could fear, and by the time the others began drifting in from the pool, we were ready to appear below. She was putting the finishing touches on her face when the sounds of their coming reached us, and she hurriedly completed the task while I jumped to obey her "Find me a cigarette, like a good boy."

Well, that was just the beginning of an interesting evening. Madame was, I guessed, a special friend of this M. Dagnier, for she seemed to have *carte blanche* possession of the place. There were only two servants in the house, and only one of these was a house servant, but we had a very complete dinner, minus the service. And M. Dagnier's wine cellar certainly suffered from the repeated assaults made upon it.... Altogether it was a very jolly time and everyone enjoyed it to the extent of their capacity.

Off and on during the evening, I found myself alone with the hostess and I did my duty—in so far as it was possible to do it. I suppose she wondered why I made no serious advances to her: I'm sure she thought I was infatuated, and the combination of the two things had obviously aroused her interest, for she made no bones about liking me.... It seemed awfully funny. Now and then I felt like some kind of an unworthy thing: I mean, she really was so nice, so generous and so utterly sincere to me, that it didn't seem honest or right for me to deceive her this way. I think she was telling the truth when she said I was a tremendous relief from the men she had had to play with. But she was an enemy and her operations might be taking the lives of countless thousands of American boys and men, so, of course, when I remembered this point, I had no compunction about deceiving her.

We got back to Paris about midnight. Everyone was feeling happy and I expected the Madame to invite them all in for a few good night drinks, but she didn't.... I was dropped at the barracks door, without having had a chance to report my discovery to the Captain.

—6—

Captain Winstead sent an orderly over in the morning to tell me that he would meet me at one o'clock and take me out to see General Backett, so I told Ben I had to take an officer out to see the General and that he did not need bother about going out unless he wanted to.

"I guess the Gen'll get along just as well without my good wishes," was his reply, so at one I met the

Captain and we talked as we rode along across the city.

He listened intently to my account of the conversation which I overheard yesterday afternoon, and when I had finished he said, "I don't recall ever seeing any chaplain with her, but he might very easily see her every week or every few days without arousing any suspicions. However, we'll manage somehow to keep track of the Madame all day Tuesday and see if any chaplain shows up.... As far as that German goes, it only serves to strengthen our suspicions: we can't take her on suspicion, because that would definitely sacrifice the chance of getting the other party and tracing the line of information—and, after all, that's what we want. The Madame is just one cog in a machine, and we want to wreck the machine itself...."

"I'll keep at it," I assured him.

"By all means," he continued. "She's interested in you now and I think you can get away with murder because she has put you down as being perfectly harmless and very innocent. You play your part to perfection." He drove on in silence until we were almost at the gates of the hospital, then he remarked, quite suddenly, "Why didn't you tell me you can speak and read German?"

"How should I know you'd be interested?"

"Quite right," he admitted quickly. "Only it just occurs to me that you're wasting your time working for General Backett. We could use you in our line very well. Speaking both French and German as fluently as you do is no mean accomplishment, I can tell you."

"Oh—I use both of them now and then," I told him. "Not long ago we inspected a prison camp and I talked with several Deutschers for the General, and we're always bumping into Frenchmen who can't speak English worth a nickel."

"Yes, but we could use you," he insisted. "After we see how this affair turns out, I'll see about getting you shifted to Paris Intelligence. I'd like to have you around, anyway. And besides, the work would be easy and interesting."

I didn't say anything: what could be sweeter than having to work with him all the time?... But it would take a very influential Captain to persuade the General that such a transfer would be for the best interests of the service.

When we were shown into the General's room, the Captain introduced himself at once and said, "I just wanted to meet you, General, and say that I hope you will not consider this Paris stay as a leave-of-absence for Sergeant Canwick, because I have put him to work in a very important case and it would hardly be fair to him to have it count as a leave."

"He'll get a vacation some day," replied the General.

"I'm sure he will earn it," declared the Captain. "I hope you don't mind my making use of his services while you are resting up."

The General chuckled good-naturedly. "Perhaps you are doing him a good turn, Captain. A busy man doesn't get into trouble, you know." He looked at me then and added, "It wouldn't do any harm to put Garlotz to work, too. He's looking a little the worse for wear. I should have known enough not to turn a man like him loose in Paris."

"He's having the time of his life, sir," I hastened to assure him, for Ben's sake. "He won't get into any trouble, I'm sure."

"All right," he assented. "I'll be out of here before long now, so you will all do best to make hay while the sun shines." He looked at me again, and asked, "Where's our mascot to-day?"

I told him Esky was at home with Ben.

"By George, I never thought I'd get so used to a dog that I'd really miss him when he fails to appear."

Thus the talk drifted away from anything very interesting and the two officers discussed various subjects of common interest to them, while I just sat and waited for the Captain to disengage himself.... When we finally got back to our barracks, it was after four o'clock. We arranged to meet next day and I promised to do my damndest with the Madame.

So that night I went up there and found the Madame alone. She suggested that we take a long walk for our health and this we did—so long in fact that when we returned, she almost immediately declared her intention of retiring and added, “But I don’t mind if you stay and keep me company for a while.”

I stayed. She went to bed and I went in and lay on the bed beside her.... Finally she dozed off, only to awaken a few minutes later with a start.... “You can just as well stay here to-night, cher enfant—if you’ll be good.”

But I didn’t want to stay there, and I told her, as I kissed her good night, that “I might be good if I stayed here, but I’ll probably be better if I go home.”

She laughed and made me kiss her again.... She wanted me to stay.... But Leona wasn’t going to stay with any woman unless she had to—and there was nothing to be gained by staying that night: there was no one else there except the maid.... I finally got away, but not without an argument which ended abruptly when she suddenly exclaimed that she was ashamed for making such a fool of herself over a mere boy. When she thought of that, she regained control of herself and of the situation, for she dismissed me with a laugh and kiss and told me to “let me see you again to-morrow.”

So I went home and found Ben trying to read a French newspaper upside down.... He did look kinda peaked, now that the General mentioned it. Perhaps ten thousand women were too much for the bull of the boulevards after all!

—7—

I stayed almost all the next night at Madame’s, because she had a party on, and two of the guests passed out and had to be put to bed. One of them was a Major from Chaumont and the other a Captain who was liaison officer between the French and American commands north of Paris. There was much discussion of military affairs during the evening and there seemed to be no question about big things scheduled for the first week of September. The Allies had something big under way, and I caught the Madame paying close attention to some of the information that was being thrown about so freely.

So I stayed, on the pretext of helping take care of the indisposed officers, and even went so far as to plead sleepiness myself. But nothing untoward happened, so far as I could see, although the Madame and the maid were up and around until very late and I’m quite sure that I heard the maid go into the room where the Major was sleeping, while the Madame was playing with me on the divan in the reception room.

But you can’t hang anyone on suspicion.

—8—

Another night at Madame’s and I had my first glimpse of her when she was under the influence of liquor. She got mad at me for some reason or other—I guess it was because I wouldn’t manifest any evidences of a desire to love her. So she proceeded to drink up everything in sight, and she had a remarkable capacity, I must say, although she finally began to show the effects. She didn’t pass out, but she did go to sleep for a little while and when she awoke, she must have thought I had gone for she burst into some of the choicest German profanity I ever hope to hear, but the maid came running in at once and contrived to let her see that I was still there.

She just laughed, however, and declared, “I wouldn’t exchange my baby sergeant for ten generals!”

But before she could begin “loving me to shreds” as she had promised earlier in the evening, I hastened to tell her I was feeling kinda unstable and wanted to go home.

She really thought I was the funniest young kid she ever met: no doubt I was, but not in the way she thought.

—9—

The next day was a busy one. I mean, quite a lot had happened in the matter of France and America versus Madame Ada Gedouin.

In the first place, I went over to her apartment just after noon and parked myself for the day. About two o'clock she decided that we'd better go out for a stroll and a peep in some of the shops, so we set off, after she told the maid she might go out also.

We went to a dozen places and were gone altogether about two hours. When we returned the maid was there, but I wandered into the boudoir with the Madame and made myself useful. She sat down before her dressing table and I stood behind her, playing with the curls at the nape of her neck and talking of this and that.... I saw a long envelope on the corner of the table and I knew at once that it had been put there since we left the apartment, for I had been in there before we went out and there had been no envelope there then.... I didn't show, by even so much as a second glance at it, that I had noticed the envelope especially, but the Madame finally picked it up and said something about the maid collecting a loan for her. Whereupon she opened the packet and removed its contents. All I could see was that it was paper money of large denominations; she folded them quickly and tucked the batch into her hand bag, handing me the envelope and saying, "Be a good boy and put that in the fireplace in the other room."

I went into the other room and called back, "Shall I burn it up? There's nothing else here to burn."

"You may as well," she replied and I drew a piece of note paper from my pocket, crumpled it in my hand and touched a match to it. The envelope went into my breeches, inside, because I didn't have time to fold it and put it in one of the buttoned pockets.

When I went back to the boudoir I asked her why she burned everything up, even in hot weather. "Why don't you have a wastebasket instead of a fireplace?" I asked.

"I've always loathed the sight of a wastebasket," she replied. "Besides the fireplace is handy and the ashes are so much less for the maid to carry out than papers would be...."

"You're very considerate of others, aren't you?" I observed, placing my hands on her shoulders and leaning over for a kiss.

"I'm too considerate sometimes," she murmured into my ear. And she made that kiss speak worlds and worlds. Then she pushed me away and laughed, not too pleasantly, as she said, "Dammit, young one, you're making me perfectly miserable!... Sometimes I wish Captain Winstead had wished you upon someone else."

"Would you rather I didn't come?" I asked quickly, trying to sound very hurt.

"God, no, honey!" she answered, and her voice was thrillingly vibrant. "I wish you would come and stay—and I mustn't be wishing such things!"

"Why not?" I inquired ingeniously. "They say if you wish hard enough, anything will come true."

She turned to me then and took my hand, saying, "Such wishing isn't good for me.... And what I would wish could never possibly come true." She turned back to the dressing table with a flourish and raised her voice to say, "Don't bother me, now, little one. You know you get me all upset.... I think you derive some diabolical delight from tormenting me."

I laughed and let it go at that, and the rest of the afternoon and evening passed without anything further of great interest, although during the evening, when several of her friends dropped in to talk and drink, I caught her more than once studying me in an interested but detached sort of way. I really felt a little uncomfortable and began to wonder if she suspected anything, or if the maid had seen me stick that

envelope down my breeches.

Later, when I was about to leave, she asked me if I were never going to please her by staying there instead of traveling the long distance across the river to my barracks. “You’ll be leaving Paris some day soon, my dear, and perhaps we might never meet again—who can tell?”

All I could do was squeeze her hand and blink my eyes. For the life of me, I couldn’t help but feel sorry for her. She was really so sincere, and her position must have been anything but comfortable there in an enemy city. She was a spy, of course, but one couldn’t help but admire a woman as remarkable as she was. Nor could you blame her for being so brazen about a pleasure which she thought would be genuine—she dealt in counterfeit interest and love and passion so much that it seemed a shame that she could not consummate just once at least her desire for something she really wanted.

I knew it wasn’t a very nice thing to think about, but if Leon showed his face in Paris while I was there, his dear sweet sister would do something that seemed utterly impossible for her or anyone else like her to do.... I guess this job was getting under my skin. I wasn’t built for being hard-boiled.

The Captain got the envelope and examined it carefully under a microscope. There were faint finger imprints on it and it would be photographed and the prints compared with those in the police archives. He said, "If they aren't the Madame's—and I doubt if they are, since she hardly touched the envelope—then they may check with someone whom the police already know."

"How about the chaplain?" I asked him, remembering that I had been with the Madame practically all day and that his operatives were supposed to keep an eye on the place every minute of the day and night.

"Business picks up," he replied cryptically.

"What do you mean?"

"Well—the maid was shadowed. She met an army chaplain whose name is Keith and who comes from Louisville, Kentucky. We don't know what passed between them, but it is possible that the money came from that chaplain.... I wasn't going to tell you the whole story until we finish, but you may as well know it, I suppose."

I couldn't help feeling an aching hurt, but I didn't say anything.

He noticed my change, however, and promptly explained it all away by saying, "We just wanted you to go ahead with the Madame as if nothing had happened and we thought you could do it better if you had no idea of what had happened. However, now that you know it, you've just got to act your part in spite of the knowledge. We can't close in on her yet: we can't take this chaplain in for questioning just yet, because we want to keep our eyes on him and see what he does with his days and nights. And meantime, you've got to go through with your part. You're doing fine—better than anyone could have done with a woman like her. And sooner or later, we'll nab her. It's only a question of time now. So keep up the good work, and don't let her get suspicious, for that would spoil the whole plan."

So back to the Madame's that night. Ben and I went to see the General late in the afternoon and then he dropped me at the Madame's.

"Want me to call fer ya, General?" he mocked as I stepped out.

"After all, why not?" I replied. "Say, about ten o'clock to-night?"

Ben was surprised but he went through with it gamely. "All right, General, sir—only if I get in trouble fer runnin' around in this car, you'll have to take the blame, General, sir!"

I never expected him to show up, but he did just that and in typical Ben-like fashion, opening the door without knocking and walking right into one of the most mixed up lovin' scenes that ever happened. The Madame and I had finally come to a show-down and I was having the time of my life trying to keep her away from the secret sections of my anatomy. God, how that woman could make love! I learned about women from her all right—but I couldn't see any fun in it at all and was just about ready to start throwing things when Ben appeared. I mean, I had gone as far as I could, and I couldn't go any further because if I had the Madame would have found out the truth and then she'd have been suspicious of my motives immediately—and then the Captain's plans for a coup would be all ruined. And anyone who thinks it isn't a delicate problem to keep a woman from finding out that you're a woman and at the same time keep her from getting mad at you—well, a trial will illustrate how I felt.

She didn't see Ben at first and he was treated to a choice line of endearing terms and brazen invitations. He stood dumfounded for a moment, as if he couldn't quite get the drift of the situation, but when he started to tiptoe out again I yelled and the Madame saw him. And maybe she wasn't mad!

She pulled herself together in just one movement and lit on him in a veritable fit of denunciations and deprecatory explosions. She didn't give him a chance to explain his presence, and when she acted like that I couldn't say anything because I was afraid she was near the limit as it was.

So I just let Ben take it while I slipped into my slicker and found my cap. When she pushed him out the door, I was right behind her, ready to hop after him.

She calmed down quickly and asked me again if I wouldn't please her "just this once!"

But I hugged her and rubbed her neck and caressed her and kissed her and told her we'd better make it some other night. By that time I had managed to get around her and as soon as she let me go, I slid through the door and ran down the stairs, where I found Ben waiting in a dilapidated old taxi.

"General," he saluted me, "your car." But after we were seated and on our way, he turned to me in disgust. "Now, Leony, I'm gonna break yer head fer ya if ya don't perk up and act like a man!" he declared earnestly. "What'ya suppose the Lord built ya that way for?... If I ever hear of ya throwin' away a lovin' party like that one again, I'm gonna step right in an' take it away from ya!... Why, she's the best lookin' woman I've ever seen in my whole damned life! Are ya crazy?... I'd give ten years o' my life to put my shoes under her bed just once!"

I got mad. "All right," I told him. "To-morrow I'll take you over there and you can help yourself. You're welcome to all of her lovin' you can get!"

He was quiet for a while then, but he finally burst out with "Here I am workin' myself skinny tryin' to satisfy these Parisian women, an' you, ya little shrimp, actually run away from the best lookin' and most deservin' one in the whole pack! Ain't ya ashamed of yourself?"

"I'll take you over there to-morrow," I promised.

All he would say after that was "Seems damned funny to me ... damned funny...."

Which was just two damns funnier than it seemed to me.

—11—

Well, I took Ben to the Madame's on the pretext that he wanted to apologize for breaking in so unceremoniously last night. She accepted the apology graciously and I think she expected him to leave.

But Ben had no intention of leaving and, as I had told him I would leave them alone, I began to wonder how I could manage to get out without taking him with me. As a starter I turned on the phonograph and put on a peppy record. As the Madame likes to dance, I was not surprised when she submitted to Ben's invitation to dance with him.

However, Ben wasn't much when it came to tripping the light fantastic and the Madame could not be blamed for suggesting that they call it enough after but a few steps.

"What's the matter?" inquired Ben, naturally suspicious and belligerent.

The Madame laughed and told him that she "never could dance very well with big men.... I don't like such tremendously big men half as much as I do little fellows like the sergeant."

If she had said anything but that, the evening might have gone along without any exceptional disturbances, but the declaration of preference was to Ben like the proverbial red flag to the bull, and he arose to the occasion promptly to demand, "What the devil's the matter with these Parisian dames?... Don't like beeg men!... Huh! When a woman says that to me I just make up my mind that if she an' I ever get alone together, I'll make her like me or mangle her!"

"Ou la la!" laughed the Madame. "A genuine cave man, eh?... Such a droll friend for Sergeant Canwick!" And she laughed again.

Well, I knew Ben was going to get rough, regardless of my presence, and I was wondering how in the devil I could get him out of there, because I'd be in a pretty pickle if the Madame got all torn up, and with me standing right there. I mean, she'd naturally expect me to act like a man and crown Ben or something—but I could just see myself trying to crown that big blister.

Ben was starting to amble across to the divan on which she was sitting when we were all startled and

relieved by a knock on the door.

“Berta!” the Madame called, and the maid promptly appeared, answered the knock and announced that Major Fergus and a friend were there.

Just the mention of a major was enough to quiet my bulldozing friend. He retired to a secluded corner where he would not have to face the officer and I took advantage of the moment to tell the Madame I had to step out for ten or fifteen minutes.

“Is your battling friend staying?” she inquired with a very wise smile.

“Oh—he’ll be all right,” I told her. “And I’ll be right back anyway.” She laughed and I hurried past the major and his mademoiselle and went out for the air.

I thought I walked around for at least a half hour, but when I came back to the house I realized that I hadn’t been gone more than fifteen or twenty minutes. I made as little noise as possible ascending the stairs and when I stopped in front of her door, unmistakable sounds of a struggle and argument came to my ears. It sounded desperate and I was on the point of knocking, when I heard the Madame suddenly laugh. Then she said, “All right, you wild man—but let’s have a little champagne first to help matters along.”

Well, if that’s the way she felt about it, it was none of my business, so I removed myself to the air again. I don’t know why, but I actually felt disappointed. I never really believed the Madame would give in like that to just any man who fought hard enough to overpower her. I was disgusted with her, I guess.

Fifteen minutes later I returned again—and all was so very quiet that I concluded my presence would be rather superfluous. So out to the air again.

When I returned the next time, about twenty minutes later, I walked boldly up to the door and knocked. The Madame herself let me in. She smiled queerly at me, and I could not meet her eyes. I glanced around the room and spotted Ben stretched out on the divan, apparently sleeping the sleep of the righteous.... I couldn’t figure it out.

When she noted my bewilderment, she laughed lightly and said, “Your friend, the giant, is like all giants, little one: he met his Jack.”

“Meaning?”

“He can’t stand his liquor.”

That seemed funny, but I didn’t say anything and when she said, “Come in the other room and we’ll have some wine,” I followed her dumbly and drank the wine she offered me.

Aside from the fact that her hair was somewhat mussed and her neck showed several red streaks and unnatural marks, she didn’t look as if she had undergone any titanic struggle—or anything else titanic. I was beginning to wonder just what the devil had happened. I mean, I couldn’t quite figure out what Ben had taken while I was taking the air.

But the Madame interrupted my wonderings to suggest that I take my friend out for a little walk and come back later. “He’s in a stupor now and I don’t feel comfortable with a man like that around. He’ll be all right in a little while.”

So I roused Ben as best I could—which was not very much. He didn’t pay any attention to my shaking and pulling and commanding. But when the Madame began slapping his face and jerking his head back and forth, he opened his eyes and began to come to life. The Madame dropped out of sight and I had no difficulty in getting him out of the place. We walked around for ten or fifteen minutes, Ben’s head clearing a little with every step, and I finally decided that he was presentable again, so we returned to the apartment ... and found the door locked, and there was no answer to my knocking. Ben was all for breaking down the heavy old door, but I dissuaded him and finally got him out and into a rat-trap of a taxi that must have been one of those that helped save Paris a couple of years before.

As we bounced away toward the barracks, I asked him what had happened and “Are you satisfied now?”

For answer he called me seven different kinds of an unmentionable progeny.

So I asked him again, and added, "What became of the major and where did the maid go to?"

"The maple leaf only stayed a few minutes, him an' his broad."

"And the maid?"

"She came in and said she was supposed to meet some guy named Keith an' the boss told her to bring us some champagne before she went."

"And then what happened?" For an innocent girl my curiosity about such situations was unspeakable.

"Why—she gave me a big goblet o' champagne an' I downs it at a gulp.... It tasted damn funny but she had me all worked up so I couldn't think straight anyway, the little b——!"

"What you kicking about?" I asked in surprise. It didn't seem to me that a man should talk that way about a woman after she's been good to him.

"Kickin' about?" he demanded. "An' you bouncin' in about two minutes later! That's what I'm kickin' about!"

"You're crazy," I told him. "I stayed away almost an hour. What were you doing all that time?"

"Oh—fer Christ's sake!" He was mad—at me, I assumed, but I was wrong. "What a dumb b—— I am!"

So I didn't know yet what had happened.

—12—

This affair was ended, in so far as I was concerned. The General came out of the hospital finally, full of pep and ambition and said he wanted to leave Paris next morning. "We've had a good rest and now we'll get back to the business of winning the war," he told me. "There's much to do right around here, but I want to get away from the city for a while, so we'll drop down to Le Mans and Orléans and then come back here in a week or so."

I reported this to the Captain at once. He was keenly disappointed. Also confessed about taking Ben over, and about the maid and the man named Keith. He blamed me for taking Ben, and also for not hanging around so I could follow the maid when she went out to meet the chaplain.... "However," he said, "you've helped a lot, and I'm going to see about having you transferred, after the General has cleaned up some of his work." He made me promise to look him up as soon as I got back to Paris.

Upon his suggestion I called upon the Madame to say good-by. She welcomed me as usual but rebuked me for bringing "that woman-eating animal to see me."

I told her I was sorry. That I didn't think he would act like that.

"Don't worry, youngster," she informed me. "Ada doesn't give in to any man unless she wants to—and, to be frank with you, there's only one man in Paris whom I would favor in that way...."

"Yes?"

"... and he is here at this minute," she finished, ending with that funny little laugh.

"You're a good joker," I replied with a smile.

"No, I'm not joking, little one," she insisted. "I know what you think—or, at least, I assume I know. But you have the wrong conception entirely.... I believe in being free and generous and in having a good time with my friends ... but of all the men whom you have met here, there's not one who can boast of a real conquest here.... You see ... oh, there are many things you can't understand, youngster.... And now you're leaving." She caressed my cheeks with her lips and fingers, and continued, pleasantly and sincerely, "I'll miss you, cher enfant.... It's been so nice, having you around.... Promise grandma you'll be a good boy and stay away from the mademoiselles until you come back to me?"

"I promise faithfully," I told her.

She kissed me with a smothering fervor, and as she closed the door behind me, murmured, "Hurry back,

youngster, like a good boy!”

I forgot to ask her why she wouldn't let us in last night, when we came back; but I assumed it was on account of Ben.... Well, I did feel sorry for her. She was perfectly able to take care of herself, but sooner or later she'd be caught and then—well, they shot Mata Hari. It didn't seem that any good could come from killing a woman who was as game, as clever, as altogether interesting as she was.... You see, I loathed having to put up with her caresses and her kisses, but I could understand how a man must feel, if she liked him ... and I couldn't help liking her and feeling sorry for her.... However, there was a war on: at least, so I'd heard, and to-morrow it was back to the grind for us.

CHAPTER 15

THE TWAIN MEET

—1—

On Saturday afternoon a few days later, the mail from Paris brought me a short note from Captain Winstead to tell me that:

“Your friend Marfield found me at the office this afternoon and I gathered that he is hunting for you. I took the liberty of telling him you had already left Paris for parts unknown—although, of course, I knew you planned to leave to-morrow morning. He wanted to know where you were going from here, but I professed a colossal ignorance of your plans.... Just wanted to let you know about him, in case you should want to see him or get in touch with him. He didn’t say what was on his mind.”

Lord only knew what was on his mind. Knowing him, I knew that it was impossible to predict anything in regard to him. All I hoped was that he hadn’t been investigating my whereabouts at home, and that Leon hadn’t bumped into him.... Why did a man have to be like that? He could just as easily forget about me and mind his own business—but I knew he wouldn’t be satisfied until he’d either got me where he wanted me or forced me to a showdown, with all its embarrassments.

However, I was not worrying so much about him just now as I was about Leon. I mean, if I could find my brother and put him wise to what had happened, perhaps he could be on guard against Jay-Jay and do his part toward insuring my safety. Also, I wanted to straighten out the tangle in which my visit involved Lisa. I was determined to risk any consequence at all to make up for what trouble I’d caused her, and her husband had to be informed of the truth. It would help matters a lot if Leon were with me when I called there.... I hadn’t the least idea where to look for him, but I decided to go on a hunt which I hoped would result in finding him.

The mail from Tours brought a letter from Aunt Elinor and one from Vyvy. Aunt Elinor’s note was brief but she inclosed something else that was an entirely different matter: a letter from Captain Winstead which began with explaining his loss of my address and begging for my forgiveness and ended with veiled but sincere protestations of love. He said he wanted me to believe that that night in the garden “was not just another night and nothing more.” I was perfectly willing to believe him, after the way he’d talked to me about my sister—but I didn’t much care for the way he fell in love with all these pretty mademoiselles he met. This letter was apparently written just after he met me in Tours. I had to answer it *toute de suite* and send it to Auntie.... Poor Auntie: I guessed she was about distracted by this old war.

The most interesting part of Vyvy’s letter follows, because it is worth preserving and I saved it to give to Leon when I saw him:

“Your attitude, my dear Leon, is beyond me. I can only surmise as to what has happened to you and to the burning world-moving passion which you once professed so eloquently, but I

am convinced at last that you have succumbed to the vulgar charms of some petite mademoiselle and that the love-loving creature has estranged you completely from me.

“Please tell me frankly if this is true. Your matter-of-fact ‘duty’ cards do not begin to appease the hunger of my heart, but rather would I go without their incredible meagerness and empty promise than feel continually, insistently, day after day, that you are—the real you that I loved—no longer wholly mine.... You must know what you mean to me: why do you act this way? I want to understand, so please explain and try to remember how much you once said you loved

Your
“VYVY.”

I didn’t realize, until I read this, that I had not written to the poor girl for over a month. She had a right to be wild by this time. I could hear her calling Leon every bad name she knew, and she was not ignorant by any means. So I supposed I’d have to sit down and pen her a long and worshipful epistle, telling her all about it.

No, on second thought, I wouldn’t. I was sick of writing love letters to a girl. Why couldn’t Leon write his own love letters? I’d wait until I saw if he was still in Le Mans and if he was, he could just sit right down and do his stuff for the sake of his velvety Vyvy. And he could just keep on writing to her.... That’s one thing that would be off my mind.... Then I had a haircut: that was another thing off my mind. Pretty soon there wouldn’t be anything on it except my own business. God, but that would be a beautiful day for me!

—2—

Ben and I were promenading with Esky the following afternoon when we bumped smack into Leon, just about a block from Le Chien Rouge. If I had seen him first, I would have managed somehow to divert Ben’s attention so that I could see Leon without Ben’s knowing about it, but the way it happened, Ben noticed Esky was acting funny and when he looked across the street he saw something that made him roar out impulsively, “Hey, you!... You’re the guy that got me in the jug! Come over here!”

That was the first I knew of Leon’s proximity and I turned to see him stepping across the thoroughfare in compliance with Ben’s command.

Before I thought, I cried out, “Hello, Leon. Lord, but I’ve been wanting to see you!”

Ben turned about and faced me, but before I could say anything to him, Leon was with us, greeting me with a rather doubtful “Hello.” He kept eying my companion suspiciously, as if he expected to see him draw back for a lusty swing any minute. And I was trying to think fast: Ben had heard me call him by my own name, and some explanation would have to be given for that. Also, he’d wonder why I said I couldn’t imagine who this double of mine was. Yes, Mr. Ben was bound to get some explanations, but not just now.

“Ben,” I said, taking his arm and giving him a push, “do me a big favor and take a drink for yourself somewhere, will you?... I’ll explain everything to you later, but just now I’ve got to talk turkey to this man.” I waited until he agreed with a grunt and started away with Esky at his heels, then I called after him, “That’s a good sport, Big Boy.”

Then I turned to my brother. He just smiled at me and said, “I suppose you’re happy now, eh?”

“Say!” I exclaimed. “If you don’t want to be killed on the spot, don’t talk to me about being happy.... There have been times since I last saw you when I could have murdered you in cold blood! Where in the name of God have you been and why didn’t you get in touch with me?”

“Well—” he began, placatingly. “For a long time, I couldn’t see any advantage in writing to you. In the first place, it isn’t good for us to be seen together. In the second place, I don’t see how I can help you any. I tried every way possible to get across here without enlisting, but there wasn’t a prayer, so I finally got mad and enlisted and here I am.”

“But what do you expect me to do?” I demanded. “How am I going to get out of this man’s army?”

“I’ve doped it all out,” he replied easily. “If worse comes to worst, I’ll desert and take your place. You resume your proper attire, no one will be the wiser.”

“You’re as brilliant as ever, aren’t you?” I observed after a momentary digestion of this idea. “I suppose you aren’t aware that Jay-Jay Marfield is over here and is dogging me for a show-down already. Also, what would I do in dresses over here? How could I get a passport to get out of France when I couldn’t show any record of having legitimately entered the country?... Perhaps the scheme might work after the war is over, but that may be a couple of years yet—and I’m sure I can’t stand even one more year of it. I’ve got one service stripe already and I don’t crave for any more.”

“Well—we’ll have to dope out something,” he admitted. “However, for the time being, what’s on your mind?”

“Plenty!” I exclaimed. “For one thing I’m in a jamb with Lisa Mantour’s husband—you know, Lisa, at St. Malo? Her husband runs this café on the next corner, Le Chien Rouge, and he threatened to shoot me for coming to see his wife. Lisa wouldn’t tell him that I’m a girl because she’s afraid he’ll talk when he’s drunk, and I guess he’s been raising Cain with her on my account. So now I’m going to tell him the truth and in order that he’ll believe it more readily, you’ve got to come along and face him, too.”

“I don’t want to face that man again!” he declared stubbornly. “I wandered in there about two months ago and he lit on me with a bung-stopper. I didn’t know he had a wife, much less that she was Lisa, and I didn’t know what he was jabbering about until that big fellow there came along and flew into the scrap—and then I ducked.”

“Yes, I know about that. He thought it was me—in fact, he’s had his doubts about it up until just recently. Now he knows it wasn’t me, but I’ve got to explain us to him some way.”

“Tell him we’re twin brothers,” he suggested.

“I guess I’ll have to,” I agreed. “But I told him before that I couldn’t imagine who you were. And calling you ‘Leon’—that will call for an explanation, too. But I’ll settle him. He can wait. The important thing is to get old Pierre fixed up. How about it?”

He started to smile as he replied, “But his place isn’t open to-day and I’m going on leave to Paris in the morning. I don’t see how we can make it now.”

“When you coming back?”

“Ten days—but my outfit will be moving out of here then, if not sooner. We’re going up to take over a hospital near Toul.”

“Then we’re going to see Lisa and Pierre before you go. What time you going in the morning?”

“Too early to get down here first.”

“Then come on.... We’ll find them somewhere.” And I took his arm and marched him up the street to the corner where Le Chien Rouge is located. I tried the front door and found it locked and barred, but around the corner there was another door which I assumed led to their living quarters and on which I knocked loudly and long.

Finally the door was opened a crack and Lisa looked out. When she saw who it was, she threw the door open and welcomed us both with open arms and many kisses, and to Leon she said, “I would not believe she was not you onteel she prove it!”

Leon laughed in embarrassment, but just at that moment I spied Ben and Esky coming around the corner, so I pushed Leon in and called to Ben that I’d be with him in a few minutes.

Inside I quickly told Lisa that she had to explain everything to her husband. “It makes no difference

about his talking. We must risk that.”

“Do not fret, chère!” she argued. “It is but words that open his mouth. I weel feex him.”

We argued back and forth until she finally consented, and I suggested that she call her husband so that we could prove everything to him at once.

“But he is not here,” declared Lisa.

“Then to-night?” I asked. She nodded. “Can you meet me here at eight, Leon?” He reluctantly agreed to come.

“He will be here sure at that hour,” Lisa told us as we departed.

Leon walked past Ben’s glaring eyes without a blink of recognition, but I came along a moment later and promptly began explaining the mystery to him. “You see, Ben,” I told him, “I’ve got to trust you to keep this to yourself—I know you will, because it means a devil of a lot to me.... The truth is that the fellow you just saw is my twin brother. His name is Leonard, but we always called each other either Leon or Leonard—you know, just a kid trick we never got over.... I didn’t say anything about him before because I didn’t know he was in France. You see, he got into a scrape back home and disappeared; now he’s serving under a different name. That’s why we can’t be together much, because we look so much alike that anyone would notice the difference in names and be suspicious.... You see how it is, Ben. I suspected, when you told me about that fight, that it was my brother, but I could not quite bring myself to tell you the secret then. However, now it’s all right and I know you’ll keep it to yourself, won’t you?”

He was grinning good-naturedly. “Aw, hell, yes!” he replied. “I knew there was somethin’ cockeyed goin’ on, but I wouldn’t ’a’ said nothing about it, anyway.”... So that was that.

We wandered around then and finally had dinner and wine in a little place that stayed open on Sunday, but you had to enter by the back door. I paid for the grub and the wine. Indeed I bought plenty of wine and let Ben drink his fill, for I was anxious to get rid of him before eight o’clock. I suppose I could have asked him to chase along alone, but I didn’t, and the result was that he came back to Le Chien Rouge with me, although he was feeling so sleepy that I doubt if he knew exactly where he was at first.

Leon didn’t appear on the dot, so we had to hang around the corner for some few minutes. Ben sat down on the doorstep and Esky went prowling around looking for something to interest him—or maybe he recognized the place because of the bar rag that was thrown at him when we were there last.... Just as Leon appeared, Ben grabbed my leg and said, “Leony, that bald-headed pirate in there is givin’ Esky a chunk o’ meat.” I looked down, and there was Ben, leaning against the side of the doorway, peering into the darkened barroom through a crack beneath the shutters.

“I guess he knows it’s all right now,” I said, thinking at once that Lisa had explained to her husband and that now he was trying to make up with the pup. “You wait here for me, Ben,” I told him, as I went around the corner with Leon.

Lisa welcomed us happily and exclaimed, “I have just tell him and he do not beleeve it!” Then she turned and called, “Pierre! Venez ici!”

The old man came, saw, and was convinced. “Which is ze jeune fille?” he asked, grinning cheerfully.

He looked me over for a moment and muttered, “Trés bien ... très bien ... I t’ought you make cooked-up lie before zis.” He admitted that he believed us now, but still he did not seem to be entirely happy over the discovery of his error. He left us with Lisa and I heard him moving around, first in the barroom and then outdoors, as if he were looking for something.

We had been there perhaps ten minutes when Ben appeared in the door, asking stupidly if we had seen the pup. “He ain’t outside,” he declared, as if that were news. “He ain’t outside.”

I whistled and called and finally Esky appeared from within, lapping his jaws from the feast he had just had. Old Pierre tried to get him to come to him, but he wouldn’t have anything to do with him, just got behind Ben’s legs and looked at Pierre sort of queerly, so much as to say, “I’ll eat your meat, but I don’t want to have anything to do with you.”

Ben took him out. A moment later we bade good-by to the Lenotiers and joined Ben at the corner. As it was early yet, I suggested that we take a walk to the park and give Ben a chance to get some air. So we walked away and found a bench, whereon Ben flopped down and promptly began to doze off, with the result that Leon and I had an opportunity to talk about ourselves to a certain extent.

I gathered a lot from what Leon told me and now I could better understand the change that had come over him: for he certainly was a different man altogether. It seems that the mood in which he went to Booneville passed away as soon as his arm began to heal, and he had nothing to do but think about how rotten he was. The solitude—of whose virtues and beauties he had sung so often—closed about him depressingly and even the sounds of his own voice came back at him with echoes and reëchoes from the hills. He had never been sociable nor friendly, and the natives of Booneville cast suspicious glances at him upon the infrequent occasions of his visits to the post office. He discovered that the torments of loneliness, of strange-noised nights and uneventful days, were far worse than any of the fancied or real horrors of war. I guess he made up his mind then that the army was a better place for him than Booneville, and I don't think he cared a great deal whether he succeeded in getting across to rescue me: his idea was simply to go out and do something that would revive his self-respect and prove to himself that he was no weakling or coward.

It may be that he feared my being detected, in which case he would have been found and sent up for desertion, no doubt. He may have figured that he was safer in the army than he would be out of it—should anything happen to me. And after he was in again, he found it was just as easy to make the best of army life as it was to make the worst of it. He was thrown into a company that showed in its personnel an exceptional cross section of American citizenry, and he stuck out his chin, determined to take what was given him, made no effort to shirk his duties, however unpleasant they happened to be. He discovered that the noncoms thought him a clever and promising man, and his comrades called him a good fellow. It must have seemed awfully easy to him now that he didn't fight against it.

He served his soldier's apprenticeship over again, with all the unpleasantness of kitchen police, garbage detail, latrine duty, grounds police; took the unpolite commands of the drill and training field with actual zest; learned to wash his clothes and sew on buttons and do any number of other things which he once thought were utterly, unspeakably, impossible for a person of his æsthetic plane. And he filled out in the chest, so that he looked as big across the front as I did.

I told him about Vyvy's letters and showed him the one I just received. He laughed as he read it and said, "The nearest thing to a mademoiselle I've touched is a dirty smelly old G.I. can."

I looked at him in surprise. That sounded like a dirty crack to me—and dirty cracks were the last thing I would expect from my brother.... There was no question about his being a changed man.

Well, I guess he had learned a lot, and it had done him a world of good. He found that the army was not made up entirely of fools, cowards, roughnecks and knaves, and that there was something to the business besides quarreling, getting drunk, swearing inordinately, indulging indiscriminately in sexual pursuits, plotting against superiors, hand-shaking and pulling political strings, and going A.W.O.L.

He said his outfit contained men of all types and kinds. Men from colleges who could discuss literature and the fine arts as well as the arts of war. Men who looked upon the adventure at hand with an optimistic philosophy that reassured all who knew them. Men from the slums who swore and cursed disgustingly but would give the shirts from their backs if you happened to need them more than they. Men who told dirty stories and sang rotten songs about unmentionable obscenities one minute, and the next conversed in language that would do justice to a Ladies' Aid meeting. Men who read books and wrote many letters, who showed you pictures of their best girls at home and told you stories about their families and their friends and their former occupations. Men who could work in muck and mud all day, and were able at night to talk intelligently and sincerely of the finer things of life. He even had some buddies who liked poetry as much as he did, but they had adapted themselves to the rimeless rhythm of the life about them.

He had found that the noncoms were not all bullies to their subordinates and kowtowing toadies to their superiors. Some were like this, but more often they were hard-working, serious-minded fellows, eager to carry on, get the ugly business finished as soon as possible, and return home.

To men and officers alike this war was the great adventure. Its discomforts and sufferings and dangers were just things to be taken as part of the day's work. A man put up with anything to be able to say some day, "I was there."

He had found, as I had found, that all this business of being at war was not a mess of corruption, beastliness and brutality. There were other features to this life than those that are so cried about and proclaimed. It was a glorious adventure! I don't mean to pollyanna the grimy business, this drab and dreary affair in which men walked blindly into almost certain death or injury—what I mean is that there unquestionably was a fine, an ideal, a truly noble side to the thing. Like beautiful flowers growing out of a bed of filth and rot. Like the lovely poppies that they say grew on the graves filled with the rotting bodies of men in the battlefields.... That isn't exactly what I mean, but the idea is there, and I was glad to learn that Leon had come to feel toward it all much as I was feeling. It seemed to me that through coming to an understanding of and sympathy for other men, Leon had himself become a man. I doubted if Vyvy could realize the change, even if he wrote to her, but she had nevertheless been the real maker of this man whose name she didn't know.

I told Leon he could write his own love letters now, but he said "The man who censors my mail would wonder what the idea was if I signed my real name, and Vyvy would be wondering if I signed my alias.... You'd better keep on as you are."

"I don't want to," I told him. "I can't do justice to the subject and Vyvy is entitled to hear from you herself.... I'll tell you: you put your name and rank and everything at the top of the first page, don't you?"

"Surely."

"Well, you write to Auntie and inclose a letter to Vyvy. I'll write to Auntie and tell her to cut the top from the first page of your letter, then forward the rest to Vyvy. My mail isn't inspected half the time and no one would think anything anyway."

"Nope," he insisted. "Vyvy'd wonder why the letter didn't come direct."

"Well—then—you can write to me without having your letters censored. Send your letters to Vyvy via me. What's wrong with that?"

"Nothing, I guess. I'll do it."

So now that was off my hands and my head felt a little easier on all scores, for I told Leon all about the Captain and Jay-Jay and the Madame and everything and he was prepared for whatever might happen now. I almost told him to look up the Madame—but I just couldn't do it: it didn't seem decent to fix up a loving party for your own brother.... He would write to me from Paris, and we'd meet again as soon as possible.

Ben and I didn't get back to our barracks till ten and it was twelve before we turned in. Esky was sick. We didn't know what was the matter with him, so didn't know what to do for him. Probably be all right by morning, but I hated to see him sick. He looked and acted too pitiful: I couldn't sleep all night if he was going to be prowling around and sticking his nose into my ear every few minutes. But that was just what he did when he felt funny.

Ben was asleep. Esky stuck his nose into his ear and Ben must have been dreaming, for he mumbled something about "you know my weak spot, honey." Maybe he thought it was that Captain of W.A.A.C.'s.

Monday was a terrible day. The General worked me like a nigger. Esky was sick and Ben said he'd been

poisoned by that meat Pierre gave him yesterday. When I told the General about it, he told Ben to take the pup and cart him out to a veterinary in the car. Pretty special for a dog to ride to a veterinary in a General's car. Ben came back to report that the vet didn't know whether he could pull him through or not, said he was probably poisoned, that he might go blind.... I felt too terrible to think about it. We got some medicine and Ben and I took turns all night getting up to give it to him. The poor pup! He just lay around and looked miserable and threw up everything he ate and a lot of blood, too.

—4—

The next day it looked as if Esky couldn't possibly get well again. He didn't walk around at all—just lay there on his side and breathed so awfully hard that it made me want to cry just to watch him. When I patted his head he opened his eyes lazily and gave his tail a couple of feeble wags.

In the night he kept coming to my bunk and sticking his nose up to me. He'd always been taken care of before this and I suppose he couldn't understand why I didn't help him when he felt so awful. It was terrible to have a dumb animal depend upon you like that—and you not knowing anything to do to help him.

The medicine was getting the poison out of him, but it had weakened him so that he was nothing but bones already. I was patting his head that afternoon and I just couldn't keep from crying when I realized that he would probably die. I was crying and sniffing like a little kid when Ben came in and saw me there acting like that. He didn't feel very well himself, but of course he wouldn't cry about anything. But I couldn't stop, and everything he said made me cry harder and harder, because I kept recalling things Esky had done in his short life and everything like that just made me think my heart would break open any minute.

Ben said, "Aw, hell, Leony, don't do that!" He put his arm around my shoulder and patted my back roughly, trying to make me feel better, and when I kept on crying, he said, "If I didn't know what a good pup he is, I'd swear you was a woman by the way ya act.... Come on, now, Leony.... Cut it out!"

I finally regained control of myself but I must have looked pretty miserable, for Ben suddenly got up and went out without saying anything. I thought he had gone because he couldn't stand any more of my foolish crying.

But that was not the whole reason. He came back about an hour later and said he'd been to see the veterinary again. "An' I told him what was in that meat an' he gave me this stuff." He lifted Esky's head and almost emptied the bottle down his throat.

"How'd you know what was in that meat?" I asked him, suddenly realizing that he must be keeping something back.

"Oh—I found out," he evaded.

"How?"

"Well—I went down to The Red Dog and wrapped my fist around the old man's neck an' wouldn't let go until he confessed."

"Oh, God, Ben—you didn't!" I exclaimed, thinking at once of the possible trouble that might come, if Pierre got mad.

"Yes, I did," he insisted. "And I gave him a punch in the jaw for good measure, the dirty b——!"

Well, Esky was still alive, but he hadn't showed any signs of improvement.... I was just sick all over.... Probably Esky would die and Pierre would be mad and tell on us, and everything would be ruined.... And poor Ben couldn't understand why I was sorry he punched Pierre's head.

At last the vet said Esky was going to pull through, with any luck at all, and Ben and the General, and even Chilblaines, were all happy as kids. So was I.

But I stopped at Lisa's in the evening and Pierre lit into me for all his troubles. He had a black eye and he was mad through at all of us.... Lisa said she wished we hadn't told him the truth yet, and I suppose it would have been better if we had stayed away from the place altogether.

Well, everything seemed to go wrong at once.... I was working like a nigger. My head ached from taking dictation and my fingers ached from punching the typewriter. But thank heavens, we were about done here.... We'd move over to Orléans in an other day or so.

And then back to Paris—to Captain Winstead—to Jay-Jay—to God knows what else.

At Orléans a letter came from Leon. The contents tell the story as well as I could:

“Why didn't you give me the low-down on this wild woman of Paris? I wasn't at all prepared for the shock. She is too beautiful for words: but the language she uses!

“I was walking along in front of the Louvre yesterday when a cab stopped beside me and a woman commanded me to get in. Not having anything better to do, I hastened to comply, but as soon as I got in, she threw her arms around my neck and kissed me as I have never been kissed before. And she kept at me to explain why I hadn't let her know I was in Paris again. She kept calling me ‘youngster’ and ‘my little home companion’ and ‘baby face,’ but I didn't mind that as long as she did the other things she did. Why, if Vyvy ever imagined that I had been with a woman that beautiful and that love-loving, she'd never speak to me again.

“I didn't know what to tell her, so I just didn't say anything, but kept her busy doing other and more interesting things than talking. I assure you, we had a delightful ride, across the river and up to a studio building.

“But as we entered the building, three men who apparently were officers of the Parisian police, stepped out from their concealment behind the ornamental doorway and seized my beautiful companion very unceremoniously and none too gently.

“She was furious and highly insulted, but one of the men said something to her about ‘Keith’ and ‘Berta’ and then she turned on me. She started to swear in German and the officers laughed at her, so she turned her tongue upon them.

“The officers apparently thought I was the one who had brought about her arrest, for they grabbed me in turn and kissed me hither and yon while deluging me with congratulations on all sorts of impossible achievements. I backed away in confusion, and the last I heard of or from the lady came as they led her up the steps to go to her apartment. Then she turned and actually smiled at me and said, ‘When the heart ignores the head, youngster—I admit you deceived me.’

“‘I'm sorry—,’ I said, because I couldn't help it. I hated to see her go like that.

“But the point is: what in the name of heavens have you been doing to get a woman like that?”

And I'm sure I couldn't answer that question, for I didn't know myself. It just came about, that's all.... And so the Madame, the charming, beautiful Ada Gedouin, had gone. I couldn't say that I was glad—I just

couldn't.

CHAPTER 16

BEAUCOUP ZIGZAG

—1—

In Tours another letter came from Leon. That man was likely to have us both hung before another month was out! What did he do now but run right into Jay-Jay, and the latter welcomed him with open arms:—

“I told him he must have the wrong man, because I had never seen him before in my life, but that didn’t impress him at all. He insisted that I show him my pass and then that I accompany him. I didn’t know where he was going—I thought at first he was taking me to an M.P., but we walked past a million M.P.’s and finally ended in a dirty flat in a dirty building, and he told me to make myself at home.

“We had a smoke and then he said, ‘Now, listen to me.... I know there’s a pair of twins by the name of Canwick running around loose through the A.E.F. and I’m going to find out which of them is which. One of them’s a girl, and that’s the one I want—get me?’

“I just laughed at him and repeated that ‘My name isn’t Canwick—it’s Lane.’

“‘I don’t care a damn what you say your name is: I know you two are twins and one of you is a girl.... Now, which one is it?’

“‘Pardon me, sir,’ I said, ‘but you haven’t been around where the big guns go off, have you?... I mean, is it the kind of shell-shock that makes them violent?’

“Oh, but he was mad, and the madder he got the more I laughed at him, the prime egg!

“He said a lot of nasty things and finally went into another room and came out with a gun in his hand. ‘Now,’ he commands. ‘You strip!’

“I naturally indulged in laughter. This impossible affair sounded like some kind of a comic opera.

“But he meant business and said so. I honestly think he’s a little bit off in the cockloft.

“Fearing that he might get really careless with the firearm, I decided to humor him—so I stripped, but by the time I had removed my blouse and shirt, he was beginning to lose his confidence. I asked him if that was enough, but he insisted that I should strip.

“Well, you can imagine how I felt—although it really struck me as a huge joke on him.

“Instead of being disappointed, however, he seemed to be reassured for he said, ‘I knew it! I knew that sergeant was her.... I should have known as soon as I saw her with that Captain....’

“I stopped in my dressing to laugh at him—which made him mad again. ‘Your sister will laugh, too!’ he stormed at me. ‘She thinks she’s pretty wise, but she’s not fooling me again!... And I can make it rather pleasant for that Captain, too!’ The son-of-a-gun actually smiled. He surely thinks he’s going to do something wonderful for somebody—and I don’t think it’s you.

“So it appears that we are in a fix. He’s obviously a little cracked, but we can’t take advantage of that fact without giving ourselves away. I don’t know what we can do—do you? I told him I was leaving Paris to-morrow and going to Toul—which, of course, is not true. I’ll

be here almost a week, and I only hope we don't meet again.

"But what will we do? If he finds you again, the jig will surely be up.... I'll do anything I can to help: I'm even considering the desirability of bashing him over the head with a bottle—but then he'd doubtless recover.... So what'll I do?"

"I'm at your service,

"LEONARD."

Well, what in the devil could be done? It seemed that sooner or later someone was bound to find out about me. Old Pierre had probably told someone about me already—although there was just a chance that no one would believe him anyway. Jay-Jay, however, could do anything he liked. If we met and I did not talk turkey to him, he'd probably go straight to the General or somebody in authority and have me dragged up on the carpet. And if there was anything that would look funny, it would be me, posing in the nude before the General.... Once more—I wished to Gawd I'd stayed at home and let this damned old war take care of itself. I was dizzy from thinking about it.... And I knew exactly what that evil-minded devil thought: that the Captain was in on the secret and that it naturally followed that we were having a good time by ourselves. The dirty envious skunk!

Well, anyway, we were off to Paris again next day—and nature and fate would just have to take their courses. I was about ready to give up.

—2—

I didn't have a chance to find Leon, but Ben and I bumped into Captain Winstead outside the Intelligence office, while we were waiting for the General.

You could have knocked Ben over with a feather when the Captain rushed up to me and gave me a real warm greeting. I introduced my companion and the Captain laughed, "Yes, I've heard about you, I believe.... You haven't tried ravishing any more beautiful Parisians, have you?" The Captain smiled at him sympathetically.

Ben grimaced, but admitted that "That woman sure did set me on fire!"

"She set them all on fire," declared the Captain. "It was a cinch. These American officers just toppled over like stalks of grain before a mowing machine.... But she won't cut down any more of them for a while."

"Why not?" demanded Ben. "Somebody beat her up?"

"No—no—" And the Captain explained about the Madame then. "She had been operating here in Paris for more than three years and the French had been unable to get a thing on her.... We tried and found enough to arouse our suspicions, but she was too clever to fall for any of our decoys. She ruined one of our best men: we set him on her trail and damned if he didn't come back ten days later to report that he was convinced she was on the level and that he intended to marry her! We sent him away for a rest.... Then we set up the sergeant here, hoping that his boyishness would intrigue her—and it did.... On the basis of information the sergeant obtained, we built up a case against her, located and identified her accomplice who was masquerading as an army chaplain, even to taking the name of a chaplain from Kentucky who has never been in Paris at all but is on the books as being in France.... And we gave the facts to the French and let them put her away.... She is not an American, although she must have spent a good many years there. She's a German by birth and her maid is probably German. The chaplain is known to the French service and was identified by the finger prints on an envelope which the sergeant managed to acquire. The money was coming to this chaplain from England and Holland and being turned over to the

Madame through the maid, who was supposed to be in love with this chaplain.... A very pretty mess altogether, and we're obliged to this young fellow for our success in catching them."

"What will happen to them?" I asked. "Will they shoot the Madame?"

"Nobody knows," he replied. "But I doubt if they do. The Allies are on the go now. We've a preponderance of man power and equipment. It's just a matter of time before Hindenburg and Ludendorff will be beaten under.... So perhaps our friend, the Madame, will be spared. If she had been caught a year ago, there'd be no question about her end. It makes all the difference in the world who's winning the war, you know."

Just then the General appeared and the Captain said, "What's on for to-night? Why don't the two of you come along over to my place and we'll hunt up some excitement. I've been working hard and need a little relaxation—and besides, you haven't told me anything about your sister."

I said, "All right—at seven, then," and he saluted and left us, just as the General got in the car.

Chilblaines wanted to know if that was the man who was supposed to be so clever and the General told him it was. "One of the best men we've got in France," explained the General. "And a good looking, upstanding officer at that."

When we were alone, Ben wanted to know how come: "What's the idea of a Captain wantin' to go on a party with two common bums like us?"

"He's a friend of my sister's," I explained. "And a darned good sport.... He'll be in civies probably, so we won't feel uncomfortable.... And he knows all the dives in Paris, Ben."

That of course was good news to Ben, and he was all shaved and brushed up, ready to go long before I was.

The Captain liked his wine and his women—and I can't say that I appreciated the latter. He wanted to make love to every good looking woman that came along—and I could dig their eyes out!... To-night we were sitting in a buvette, just starting the evening, and after he and Ben had consumed about a dozen drinks, they got really friendly and the Captain began to rave to him about me.

"Have you ever seen Canwick's sister, Ben?" he asked. "Boy, she's a whole art museum! Perfectly beautiful, Ben—perfectly beautiful!... And she looks enough like Canwick to let anyone know they're twins.... Why, anyone that didn't know them couldn't tell the difference between them.... How about that, Sergeant: I'll wager your nurse used to have to lift your dresses to make sure which was which."

Ben looked kinda funny for a moment, but he was feeling too good to be very suspicious about anything, and when I laughed at the Captain's crazy remarks, he joined in and socked me on the back so hard I almost swallowed my teeth.... I was thinking fast, however, because I knew Ben would have to be told something sometime soon, and as soon as I had an opportunity I explained him to hurriedly, "We're not twins at all, Ben—we're triplets: Leonard and I and the girl he's been raving about, but he doesn't know anything about Leonard, so please don't say anything about him."... He winked understandingly and I told myself that I had successfully crossed another bridge.

After this when the Captain got going on his favorite subject, I just winked at Ben and didn't worry.... God, I hoped nothing else happened: pretty soon we'd be a sextet!

Another party with the Captain. He thought Ben's the best entertainment he'd had in a long time, and Ben just lapped up appreciation. The two of them got plastered to the eyes and thought they owned the city.

This night we went to what was supposed to be the wildest show in Paris and I was forced to sit between those two and listen to Ben's barbaric comments being echoed and approved by the Captain, who approved not only because of Ben's funny cracks, but also because he liked some of those sensuous

looking creatures who paraded across the stage in their birthday suits.

When a big-tummied blonde made her appearance, Ben piped up, “Pull in yer belt there, Blondy!” and everyone laughed at him, so he added, “This is a burlesque show, not a baby farm!”

People all over the house heard him and applauded, and the Captain said, “You tell ’em, Ben.... We want to see a few little ones.”

“Look at the hips on ’at one with the black hair—the second one from the end!” Ben observed a little later. “Looks just like a lollypop to me, Captain!”

“Built for comfort and speed,” laughed the Captain. “How much you bid for it, Ben?”

“If ye’re sure she’s in first class runnin’ order, Captain, I’d ’low about ten sous fer that on a good night!”

“How much on the one in the middle of the second row?”

“Aw, I wouldn’t give her standin’ room in a bed!” declared Ben. “Breastworks like the defenses of Verdun ... too big fer this boy. I don’t like beeg women!... Eh, Leony?”

“I’ve never seen one yet you wouldn’t take!” I told him dryly.

But he missed the crack and continued his raving. He spied a little red-headed pony and went into ecstasies, ending with, “Home was never like this!”

I had to laugh with them. Home surely never was like this. Why, you could be arrested in America for just thinking about seeing a show like this.

It all got my goat. Captain Winstead was too darned adaptable: he could make himself at home in the rottenest places, just as easily as he did in the best of society.

We ended the evening at a cabaret where the cigarette girls wore nothing but loin cloths and the entertainers wore nothing at all and came right down beside our table to dance and make eyes at my companions and me.... I hadn’t any liking for that kind of stuff. If the women were beautiful it would be different. But they weren’t: most of them were homely as sin, with breasts that could whack on their knees or tummies that hung down like big bags of meal. They all looked the worse for wear—I guess it was too much to expect anything different from women who’d had to entertain a half dozen different visiting armies since this war started. I didn’t see how they could have any shape or kick or anything else left.

The Captain said Ben was too drunk to think about women when they finally got around to dating up any, so I got them out and took them home. The Captain said I was a good man to have around, just for that purpose.

He must have been working terribly hard, for he hadn’t relaxed enough yet. For the next night we planned going on an apartment party with some half-decent mademoiselles. I wasn’t very crazy about it, but I thought I’d better go to look after them. So far the Captain had just talked—maybe if I was around he’d manage to stay inside the line. I hoped so.... It would utterly disgust me to find him really going with any of those dirty women. Those mademoiselles were community property, and I should think a man would feel about as happy over using one of them as he would over using a toothbrush that had been used by a thousand other men. I could understand Ben: he was just an animal when it came to that. But I should think a man like the Captain would be interested only in exclusive, more or less virginal women.

Well, we had a fiasco that evening, and bad news next morning, for Jay-Jay called upon Captain Winstead and made a lot of insinuations when the Captain told him he didn’t know where I was or would be. The Captain asked me why “that fellow Marfield is so anxious to find you,” but I got out of it by saying that my sister had thrown him over and he was mad “because she won’t write to him.”

Then at night that crazy devil suggested a strip poker game and the women who were there readily

agreed to go through with it—much to the delight of Ben. There were five girls there, and just us three to entertain them, so the Captain thought strip poker was as good a way of doing it as any other—or that's what he said.

I didn't have any difficulty making bets, for two of the women promptly decided to make me their prey and every time they had a chance to bet, they insisted upon betting with me. Maybe there isn't any such thing as love at first sight, but I know for sure that there is such a thing as love-loving women loving to love at first sight. They didn't make any bones about it at all, and before the game had progressed far these two were actually scrapping about which one was to have me.

And I couldn't seem to keep out of that game.... I did win several times, and had one of the women down to her chemise, but all the time I was losing, too, first my shoes, then my blouse (when I thanked God for having put on my cast-iron brassière) and then my puttees.

At this point I tried to escape. I told them I didn't like the game and wouldn't play any more. But the two birds of prey got a strangle hold on me and I couldn't get away.

At the very next hand, I lost my breeches, and the two of them sprang to collect their winnings. But I was frantic now and I made a mad lunge through them, grabbed up my shoes and blouse and dashed into the next room, snapping the door lock behind me.

When I was dressed again I listened to their arguments and pleas, but I wouldn't come out until they promised to count me out of the game. I thought I was all set then.

But such was not the case, for apparently my boyish modesty had just served to arouse some longing in the hearts of these thrill-hardened women. I was taken possession of at once and thereafter throughout the evening I didn't have a moment to myself: always there was at least one pair of arms around my neck and I was being kissed and caressed until I could have yelled out in an agony of disgust. The party broke up finally when I had to resort to physical force to extricate myself from the very unladylike and intimate embrace of one of my passion-ridden females. I had to do it. If I hadn't hit her, she'd have known as much about me as I do myself.

Ben gave me hell on the way home. "What'n 'ell's a matter 'th ya?... Them was all good girls.... What th'ell ya wanta fight for?"

"I don't like that kind of parties," I explained.

"Damfidontave my doubts about ya sometimes, Leony," he declared thickly. "Ya act just like a woman sometimes."

I didn't argue with him because I knew he was drunk enough and had had such a good time that he would not let my sad case bother him for long.

—5—

Saw Leon for a few minutes next day and talked over our predicament. Neither of us had anything to offer, so we didn't come to any decision. He was leaving Paris in a couple of days, but I'd see him again before he went.

In view of what happened later, I was glad I was going to see him again, because we simply had to do something. I ran into Jay-Jay and had to duck down an alley and through a haberdashery in order to elude him. He was just like a bad tooth: you forgot about him until he began to hurt again.... Now that he knew I was in Paris he'd be on the watch for me.... I didn't know what to do. The only thing that I could do, as far as I could see, was tell my troubles to Captain Winstead and let him devise some means of getting rid of Jay-Jay. I was sure the Captain would not try to take advantage of my predicament—but of course I hated to tell him the truth.

However, I made up my mind to do it the first chance I had, so that evening before Ben joined us I tried

to lead up to the subject by asking the Captain if he thought it was possible for a woman to disguise herself as a man and get away with it for very long.

He said promptly that it would be exceedingly difficult. "A man can disguise as a woman and go on forever, or until he reaches the morgues, but a woman ... why, you can tell a woman every time. With any cleverness at all, a man can take a wig and a few rags and practice with his voice a while and come out a woman that can pass in any crowd. But a woman is entirely different. You never heard of a great male impersonator, did you? I mean, a woman who became famous because she could make up as a man? No—because, well, you can spot a woman every time, in spite of the most masculine of clothes and manners."

I had to laugh. This was the man whom General Backett said was one of the "cleverest in France." But I didn't forget what I was aiming at, although I couldn't, for the life of me, see how I could tell him. I just continued the conversation by asking, "What sense would you rely upon to detect a woman in disguise?... Sight, hearing, taste, smell, or touch?"

We both laughed. I guess we were thinking of the same thing. Anyway, he answered me. "Well, of course, I wouldn't recommend the use of the sense of taste or smell, although doubtless either would prove effective means of discovery. You could not depend upon the sound of the voice. No doubt the sense of touch could be relied upon as the surest method, but then it would be rather a delicate problem to bring about a situation in which you could try out the sense of touch. I mean, if a woman were in disguise she certainly would be careful not to let anyone feel around looking for evidence that would promptly give her away.... I guess the best way—well, you can usually tell a woman by looking at her. I guess the sense of sight is the one we'd have to use."

"But you couldn't be sure, just from looking at a woman, could you?"

"Well—it's a case of the little things counting," he replied, with a smile. "Sooner or later she would give herself away. We'd just keep our eyes open and see what we would see."

We didn't have a chance to continue the discussion nearer the real subject that was on my mind, for at this point Ben appeared and we set off to visit a woman named Fernande, whom the Captain described as second only to Ada Gedouin when it came to "that sensuous loveliness."

He told Ben to be on his good conduct to-night, "because we can't tell who is liable to be there. She has some very hoity-toity friends."

Ben behaved for a while—until the drinks began to function in his anatomy and his brain. I tried all evening to get a few minutes alone with the Captain, but between his fervent attentions to the rather beautiful Fernande and Ben's disorderly conduct about the place, I didn't have a chance until we were on our way home, by which time he was the container of such a variety of wines and beverages that he dozed off before I could even begin to talk to him.

Ben finally decided that some sparkling water would revive all of us, so he stopped the cab and went in search of a bottle.... I found the Captain's head slipping onto my shoulder, and I momentarily forgot what an unpleasant evening I had had. His hair brushed against my cheek and it seemed so natural, such a little thing, that I just couldn't resist the impulse to brush my lips ever so lightly across his mouth.

"Ah, Fernande!" sighed the Captain, and I could have choked him.

"LEONY!"

I almost fainted dead away from the shock, for there was Ben, back again and with a bottle. He had certainly seen me kiss the Captain.

He climbed into the cab and growled thickly, "Good thing we're goin' home. You're drunker'n a cow's tail!"

The Captain opened his eyes stupidly and said, "I thought that Fernande was making love to me."

"Fernande, hell, Cap!" exclaimed Ben. "That was Leony tryin' to wake ya up.... He's drunk, an' ye're drunk ... an' I guess I'm the only sober man in the party."

I saw my way out then, so I began to laugh uproariously, trying to sound as cockeyed drunk as I could. I

laughed at Ben when he told the Captain “Leony’s drunker’n a soupbean!” And I laughed when the Captain surveyed me, mockly critical, and voiced his opinion of people “that get drunk all of a sudden without giving any warning.” And I laughed again when Ben bawled me out, saying, “I’m ashamed of ya, Leony. Damfyever thought I’d live to see you in this condishun.”

I laughed so much that the Captain told Ben, as the former was leaving us at his door, “We can’t stand that laugh, Ben. Have to leave him at home after this, I guess.”

On the way home then Ben told me “A man ’t can’t carry his likker like a gentleman ain’t got no business in the comp’ny o’ gentlemen.”

But I didn’t bother to answer him. My throat was dry from the strain of so much laughter and I had had a miserable evening. Ben fell asleep in the cab and I had to slap his face to wake him up when we reached the enlisted men’s hotel where we were stopping.

And now I couldn’t decide whether to tell the Captain or not.... Maybe he’d not love me at all if he knew it was me in these drab O.D. breeches and with the haircut. If I told him, it might spoil everything between us.... And if I didn’t tell him, Jay-Jay would probably spoil me....

—6—

The next had certainly been an exciting day, although nothing exciting happened prior to five o’clock, at which hour the General dismissed me for the day. Ben had to wait for the boss, so I set off on foot to go home—and I didn’t get there until eleven at night. What happened between the hours of five and eleven is a story in itself.

It all started with Jay-Jay appearing from nowhere and catching up with me before I even knew he was anywhere around. I couldn’t get away, so I made the best of it and greeted him matter-of-factly.

“I knew I would meet you again, L-e-o-n-a,” he said pleasantly.

“For God’s sake!” I exclaimed. “Are you still out of your head on that subject?”

“Not at all,” he replied cheerfully. “In fact, I’m sure I never was wrong about it. So now, sweetness, what do you intend to do about it?”

“I don’t intend to do anything, you simpleton.” I tried to walk away, but he stuck to me like a leech.

“You may as well stop and talk to me,” he said, “because this time you’re not going to get away.”

I stopped and faced him. “What do you want?” I demanded. “Haven’t you any conscience or shame or anything that normal men have?”

He just smiled superiorly. “My conscience doesn’t bother me in the least, simply because you lied to me and wouldn’t let me in on the secret—for reasons that are now obvious to me.... If you had played square with me, I would have done the same with you, but you preferred to play your game with that tin soldier captain, so now my conscience doesn’t give even a twinge.”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about,” I insisted. “What do you expect me to do? What do you want?”

“Oh—nothing much,” he replied with that wise smile that I hated. “Little enough to ask in return for my silence.”

“You’re crazy, Jay-Jay. Honestly, are you shell-shocked or something?”

“Not crazy at all.... I just don’t like these French women, that’s all.... And since you are obliging the Captain you may as well oblige me: do your duty by your country, you know....”

I was furious. I was so mad my mouth chattered and I couldn’t speak at all. If I knew how to hit a man real hard, I’d have killed him on the spot.... The dirty rotten bum!

He knew I was mad, and he, too, lost his temper. “No more evasions or beating around the bush!” he declared. “Are you or are you not coming with me?”

I saw a taxi coming slowly along the street, apparently looking for a fare. I decided to make a break.

"I'll call an M.P. and have you taken in, if you don't come," he was saying.

There was an M.P. not more than a hundred yards away. I couldn't wait any longer. I drew back and spit in his face as an answer and ducked into the street just in time to get on the running board of the taxi as Jay-Jay called to the M.P. and they started in pursuit.

A few minutes later I landed at the Captain's and rushed into his room... And what happened after that can best be told from another point of view.

About five minutes later Jay-Jay appeared at the Captain's door with an M.P. behind him.

"What's on your mind?" inquired the Captain pleasantly, looking up from the table on which he was playing rummy with Sergeant Canwick.

"That girl is under arrest," spluttered Jay-Jay, marching up to the sergeant and seizing his shoulder.

"What girl?" demanded the Captain, in surprise.

"This girl!" retorted Jay-Jay. "We saw her come up here. She's the one we're after."

"Just a minute.... Just a minute, Lieutenant," the Captain crooned, getting up from his chair and walking around the table. He grasped the hand that held Sergeant Canwick's shoulder and the hand was removed instantly. "Now ... if you will explain this intrusion in some sensible manner, I will listen. The sergeant happens to be a friend of mine and I feel certain that he has not broken any rules or regulations.... Now, what's on your mind?"

"Don't make me laugh, Captain," replied Jay-Jay with a snarl. "I hate to spoil your little fun.... I believe I could mention a few violations on your own part, if it becomes necessary."

The Captain laughed. "I pay for the wine I drink, Lieutenant." Then he turned to the M.P. and asked, in a pleasant voice, "Can you tell me what you're looking for?"

"Don't know anything about it, sir," replied the M.P. "The Lieutenant called me to help chase a man who hopped a taxi and came here. That's all I know about it, sir."

"Is this the man?" asked the Captain, indicating the sergeant.

"Can't prove it by me, sir," replied the M.P. "All I saw was his back."

"Of course it's the man!" Jay-Jay broke in impatiently. "I ought to know. It won't do any good to equivocate, Captain! You know as well as I what the situation is, and I'm going to see the end of it."

"Just what is the situation that so needs to be put to an end?" inquired the Captain. "That is, I'd like to know, if you think you can tell me without indulging in any more unpleasant insinuations.... You know, Lieutenant, there's no court-martial for hitting a man who insults you." He smiled meaningly at the Lieutenant. "Now, the situation is what?"

"Don't talk to me about insults and courts-martial, Captain.... You know as well as I—better, no doubt!—that Sergeant Canwick, your *very dear friend*, is a girl!"

The Captain seemed surprised as he turned his attention to the sergeant and asked, very seriously, "Sergeant, have you been deceiving me all these years?"

"Enough of this!" stammered Jay-Jay. "I didn't come here to fool around like this. The sergeant is under arrest."

"What for?" inquired the Captain. "For being a girl?"

"For enough!" retorted Jay-Jay, apparently at a loss to know just what the sergeant could be accused of. "Anyway, he's under arrest. Take him along, Corporal. I'll be responsible."

The M.P. stepped hesitatingly into the center then, but before he could touch Canwick, the Captain spoke up again, and this time his voice had none of that mellow sarcasm that had marked it before. "We've had enough of this!" he stated incisively. "What kind of damned fool nonsense is this?... You burst into my room and try to tell me that a boy I knew in America and have known intimately over here is not a

boy at all, but a girl. What kind of damned nonsense is that?"

The M.P. stopped. Jay-Jay was momentarily taken back by the obvious sincerity in the Captain's words, but he quickly recovered his pose of domination. "I suppose you want me to believe that you are not aware of the sergeant's sex, Captain?"

"I don't give two damns in hell what you believe, Lieutenant!" replied the Captain. "What you think or conceive in your stumbling stupidity doesn't concern me in the least. But you have seen fit to crash into my rooms without any invitation from me, and I demand an explanation at once ... and a sensible one."

"Don't you believe that that is Leona Canwick sitting there?" Jay-Jay's voice was almost screaming.

The Captain laughed. "Is this a joke, Lieutenant?"

"Dammit all, Captain, that *is* Leona Canwick!"

"I'm afraid you have been sleeping in a distillery, Lieutenant.... Of course that isn't Leona ... why, I had a letter from Leona just this morning, mailed in New York two weeks ago, and this chap has been over here for seven or eight months at least."

"Let's see the letter, Captain."

"I have half a mind to pitch you through the window for your impertinence, Lieutenant.... You are an insufferable pup!... Nevertheless, to show you how foolish, how utterly foolish your suggestions are, I will let you see that letter."

He went to his trunk and returned quickly with a letter, addressed to him in handwriting that looked very much like Leona Canwick's and postmarked New York. "Would you like to see the signature also, Lieutenant?" he asked, flipping over the page to show the end of the letter. "Are you convinced now? Do you believe me?"

Jay-Jay didn't reply at once, but finally he said boldly, "There's only one way you can convince me: let the sergeant strip right here and now."

"You are insulting," declared the Captain. "That's a hell of a thing to ask any man to do—regardless of what you think."

"There you are!" taunted the other. "If he has nothing to fear, why should he mind undressing?... He'll undress here or come to police headquarters and do it—I can promise you that!"

"You aren't making any threats, are you, Lieutenant?" the Captain inquired mildly.

"I'm making nothing!" stormed Jay-Jay. "This nonsense has gone far enough, sir.... I insist that Sergeant Canwick strip, either here and now or at police headquarters. Which will it be?"

"Sergeant," said the Captain, "do you mind humoring this lunatic?" But before the sergeant could answer, he continued, "No—as you say, Lieutenant, this nonsense has gone far—so far, indeed, that I insist that we go further, go the limit.... We will go to police headquarters at once."

While he put on his tunic, Jay-Jay walked around the room and even contrived to steal a glance into the adjoining bedroom. "Would you like to see if I have anything concealed up my sleeves, Lieutenant?" inquired the Captain humorously. He took off his cap shook it violently. "You see, nothing in the hat... Shall I empty my pockets for your scrutiny?"

He was not very gentle in shoving the visitors through the door—and the party set off for police headquarters.

Arrived there, Captain Winstead insisted upon seeing the Provost Marshal, and when that officer appeared, shook hands with him and briefly explained the purpose of the visit. The provost smiled and led them into his office, where he asked Jay-Jay for an explanation of his attitude and his reasons for wanting the sergeant arrested. The whole matter was threshed over again and finally the provost turned to the sergeant and asked him if he had anything to say on the matter.

"Not a thing, sir," replied the sergeant, "except that this man has been hounding me at every opportunity, even going so far as to try to tear my clothes off me."

"Where was that?" inquired the provost.

“In Tours.”

“And does General Backett know about this?”

“No, sir—I didn’t need to tell him. The General’s chauffeur came along and knocked the Lieutenant into the street.”

Jay-Jay flushed to the roots of his hair.

The provost said, “Well, we will settle this matter for once and all. If the Lieutenant’s charges are true, it will be a case outside my jurisdiction but you will be in a difficult position at best. If what he says is proved untrue, then that is an end to it and any further molestations from him will call for severe action.... I’ll ask you to remove your clothes, sergeant, without leaving the room.”

The sergeant went over into the corner and while he removed his clothes, piece by piece, and with his back to the officers, the Captain observed to the Lieutenant, “If what you say is proved untrue, Lieutenant, I shall expect you never to bother me again with any foolish insinuations. Do you understand?”

But the provost interrupted to say, “You needn’t worry about that, Captain Winstead, if the sergeant is really a man.”

At that moment Sergeant Canwick stood up and turned to face the assembled inspectors.

The M.P. who had accompanied the Lieutenant to the Captain’s rooms was the first to laugh—for which the provost promptly rewarded him with a scowl.

Then the Captain began to chuckle.

And then the provost himself had to laugh—for the look on Jay-Jay’s face was enough to make even the General Staff burst into guffaws.

“You may go, Lieutenant,” suggested the provost.

Sergeant Canwick stood with his breeches in one hand and his shirt in the other, laughing so hard that he couldn’t begin to get into either.

It was fifteen minutes before he managed to get dressed and he and the Captain saluted the provost, thanked him, and returned to the Captain’s rooms.

When the door had shut, the sergeant began to remove the blouse with the sergeant’s chevrons on it, as he observed smilingly, “That’s the funniest thing I ever went through!... You sure are a brick, Captain.”

The Captain was still laughing when he went into the bedroom and opened the closet door to permit its occupant to come out.

“Lordy lord!” I exclaimed. “I’m almost suffocated!”

“Well, get your breath,” said the Captain, “and then explain how come this masquerade, young lady—now you are saved from the villain’s clutches.”

“If you don’t mind,” interrupted Leon, getting into the blouse which I gave him, “I’ve got a lot to do and not much time in which to do it, so I’d better run along. I’m leaving Paris in the morning.”

“You be sure to write to me!” I told him. “And for heaven’s sake, stay out of trouble and don’t get yourself killed, or I’ll never get out of this army.”

He laughed. “Stay out of trouble yourself, sweetie. You’re the one that causes all the difficulties.... I’ll leave her in your hands, Captain, and if anything comes up that requires my help, I’ll go A.W.O.L. any time to oblige.... So long....” And out the door he went, with us smiling after him.

“Well, I’ll be damned,” declared the Captain, after he had gone. “This beats anything I ever heard of.... And you and I have been on some funny parties together ... some very funny parties....” And he burst into laughter that kept up so long I had to laugh, too, for after all the memory of such things as that strip poker game, and the Madame Gedouin affair were enough to make anyone laugh.

“No wonder the Madame complained about your being so cold to her!” exclaimed my friend. “Oh—oh—oh—this is rich!”

“Well, what do you intend to do about it?” I asked.

He sobered up long enough to say, “Apparently I’ve demonstrated what I will do, haven’t I?”

We just sat there and looked at each other then. He couldn't seem to get used to me as a girl and I couldn't seem to feel like a girl, except that I felt happy and safe for the first time in months. Just before Ben arrived, he came over as if he would take me in his arms, but he stopped and said, very frankly, "Gosh, I can't even kiss you—it doesn't seem right at all."

"You'd better not be kissing me," I told him. "You'd forget yourself sometime and then Ben would be sure we were crazy. Ben doesn't know anything about the secret except that my twin brother is in the army under an assumed name."

"Don't worry about that ten-minute egg," he told me. "We'll negotiate some way of keeping you safe and worryless.... I'll try to get a transfer. Get you in with me!"

"Well—I don't know," I admitted doubtfully. "It would be lots of fun, but ... well, I don't know."

Then Ben arrived and we started out on a party that turned out to be loads of fun because the Captain could not make love to any of the women and none of the women could make love to me—because whenever anyone tried it, he just burst out laughing so hard that I had to laugh, too. We were just like a couple of kids, and Ben thought we were crazy.

Maybe we were, but the Captain seemed to be very happy. And I'm damned sure I was!

Although the Captain hadn't had any chance to make love to me, we became better acquainted and everything was going along smoothly. He didn't pay any attention to the pretty mam'selles any more and he didn't drink but only a little now and then, and Ben said, "Damfidont believe you guys is what they calls satiated! Grog shops and ladies parlors don't appeal to ya atall any more.... Well, it takes a strong he-man to stand the gaff in this burg—which bein' so, I'll see ya later!"

We were glad to be alone for a while—and if another Intelligence man hadn't come in, I think we both might have forgotten that I was in a man's uniform.... Oh, I loved that man so terribly much: so much it almost hurt sometimes!

He was a wild man! He wanted us to be married just as soon as possible!

But we were leaving Paris next day for a trip down the coast, to look over the bases at Brest, St. Nazaire and Bordeaux, so I wouldn't become the secret bride of Captain Clark Winstead for at least a few more weeks—all I hoped was that nothing happened now to ruin everything. But, of course, it would be my luck.... Well, we couldn't cross a river until we got to it, and then maybe we'd find a bridge. I hadn't fully recovered from the shock of the last good luck I had: I mean about Jay-Jay, for it was just luck and nothing else that the Captain ran into Leon and mistaking him for me insisted upon taking him to his rooms. It was just dumb luck: if it had happened the day before, or the day after or an hour later, it wouldn't have done me the least bit of good, and I don't know what the Captain would have done under the circumstances, if Leon hadn't been there to take my place in the ordeal.... As I say, I couldn't expect too much luck—but I did hope that Jay-Jay was finished, once and for all.... As for marrying Captain Winstead, well, that was something we'd just have to worry about for a while.

Upon his suggestion I sent a hundred francs to Pierre Lenotier to square up for the black eye Ben gave him, so perhaps that worry was off my mind at last, too.... It's remarkable what a few nights in Paris can do for one, if you happen to be lucky!

The Captain said he was going to try to get me transferred to his office. We could be together almost all the time ... and then what would happen? Frankly I didn't trust myself very far! Even with the best morale, army life *was* demoralizing!

CHAPTER 17

THE DEATH SHIPS

—1—

We had to go down to Brest by train because our wagon broke down just outside of Paris and when the General heard that it would take perhaps two days to fix it, he told Ben to stay there and bring it down, and the rest of us took a train.

It was sure one long tiresome journey even in a half-decent French train—which corresponds to a third-rate American railroad bus.

And then to cap it all, when we arrived in the station, a sergeant rushed up and took our baggage, threw it on a truck and drove away before we could even begin to wonder at such actions. The General had wired for a reservation at the Hôtel Continentale, so we proceeded thither at once. The maître bowed us in and told the General that his bags had already arrived and were in his suite.

We went up and almost immediately the General thought of something he wanted from his trunk. I went over to get it, the trunk opened easily enough, but there on the very top of the contents was a pair of very fancy garters, a pair of silk bloomers, a shimmy and a pair of silk hose, all more or less mussed, as if they had been worn. I took so long getting what he wanted that the General finally came over, and when he saw the assortment of ladies' wear he exploded like an H.E.

"What in the devil is this?" he demanded. "Is this a joke Sergeant?"

I said that I didn't know anything about it.

He was dumfounded. Chilblaines was smiling behind his hand and I was having a hard time controlling myself, for the very idea of the General taking such souvenirs from a woman was utterly ludicrous.

Then he took a look at the end of the trunk and he, too, began to laugh. "Huh—that's not my trunk!" he declared, reaching down to read the tag on it. "Colonel Everard Clark, Base Headquarters, Brest, Finistere.... Well, Colonel, this is very illuminating, indeed!" He stopped and looked at me, saying with a broad smile, "The Colonel must be running a laundry."

Well, I thought the General was a good sport to take it like that. Even when I suggested that it was all probably due to a mistake on the part of the non-com who brought up the luggage, he just smiled and said, "We'll just leave it open like that and wait for the Colonel to come for it."

Sure enough, not many minutes elapsed before the Colonel appeared, very much winded, to ask if we had his luggage. "That fool sergeant brought your kits to my room."

"Is this your trunk?" inquired the General, indicating the open trunk with the underthings gleaming from the top.

The Colonel was very much embarrassed but he admitted that it was his, explaining hastily, "Some things I bought to send home."

"Oh—" exclaimed the General. "Bought them from a living model, eh?... Or did you just try them on to see if they would fit?"

"I—er—that is—you see," the Colonel tried to explain. "I bought them——"

"I don't doubt it at all, Colonel," declared the General, laughing, "and I'll wager you paid a high price

for them, too!"

"Rather expensive," admitted the Colonel lamely.

"I'm sure your wife will be glad to get them," the General observed cheerfully. "Wives always appreciate such things, I believe."

The Colonel was very embarrassed. He tried to smile but couldn't. He tried to speak, but couldn't. Finally he just slammed down the lid and seized the handle of the trunk. On his way to the door he saluted and said, "I'll send your things right down, sir."

After he had gone the General shook his head and smiled broadly, saying again, "I'm sure his wife would be glad to get her hands on those things!"

It was all very funny and it made me think of a verse of Parley-Vous that I had heard many times, about

The Colonel got the Croix de Guerre
And nobody knows what he got it for!
Hinky dinky parley-vous?

—2—

Ben finally arrived in Brest, about four days late. Said the roads were terrible—but I knew Benny had a pretty good time along the route. Anyway, we went on down to St. Nazaire and went traveling around after we got here, looking over everything from wharfs to warehouses and hospitals.

Naturally, if there was anything going on anywhere, we would be just in time to get in on it: and that's what happened at St. Nazaire, about the third day we were there, for the "flu" hit the place and just naturally knocked all the red tape and organization into a cocked hat. That whole area was a huge madhouse for more than a week, and I doubt if anyone knew really whether he was going or coming. I felt sick just from thinking about it.

The terrible plague swept into St. Nazaire on the ships that came from the States and swept its way across the whole area within two days' time. It was awful. Death must have grinned in glee as he counted the thousands of strong young bodies turned purple and black, falling into his lap.... Coming with the suddenness of a Brittany storm, the epidemic spread its net of conquest, virtually unopposed, and it seemed as if the grinning skeleton behind it knew that the victims were helpless, stupid as dumb beasts, bewildered and terrified but utterly helpless to cope with this onrush of sickening death.

The worst of it came with the arrival of two great transports, loaded with thousands of cases, dead and alive, of this mystifying plague. As soon as General Backett heard of the seriousness of the situation and learned how inadequate were the facilities for handling this burden, he promptly insisted that he be allowed to go to work and that his car and his assistants be used wherever necessary. He himself undertook duties from which he graduated thirty years before, and Chilblaines, made useful in various capacities by the General and other superiors, very soon felt that he had done his bit for one war.

Ben and I worked like niggers, after converting the car into an ambulance. We made so many trips between the docks and the hospitals that it seemed impossible that the ships could carry any cargo besides this one of dead and dying.

"They ought to be flying black flags," I told Ben, as we helped an ambulance driver slide a stretcher bearing a dying man into his car.

"Shut up!" he retorted. "Ya gotta laugh at 'em an' tell 'em they'll be all well in a coupla days.... Don't kill 'em with talkin' if they ain't dead already."

But cheer was out of the question. We arrived at the hospital just after the ambulance and the man we had helped to lift in was dead and turned purple. "He died sometime on the road," whispered the driver.

“Damned near scared me pink when I opened the door an’ saw that in front o’ me!... He didn’t look so bad when we put him in here, did he?”

“Boy,” muttered Ben, “ya can’t tell anything by looks in this stuff!... They look all right—ya turn yer back a minute—and when ya look again they’re deader’n hell an’ turnin’ all colors o’ the rainbow.”

—3—

Once, some days later, while helping to unload a hospital train, Ben was carrying the forward end of a stretcher and in stepping down from the train onto the platform he gave the burden a twist in an effort to avoid slipping. He turned around and smiled at the poor chap whose never-to-be-worn shoes hung over the bar of the stretcher, but the smile didn’t get a smile in return. Instead, the man launched into a stream of vile invectives that made my listening ears burn with shame.

“Don’t be grinnin’ at me, ya big slop-eared bastard!” he cried out. “I don’t want any o’ your God damn smiles!... An’ handle that careful, ya leather headed cow! Whatta ya tryin’ to do, ya thickhead!... Tryin’ ta dump me outa here?... Just try an’ shake me up! Any lip from anyone o’ ya an’ I’ll get up an’ knock the brains outa yer head!”

Ben tried at first to smile away the legless man’s curses, but I could see that he was having a hard job of it. I don’t think Ben ever took that kind of talk from any man in his life, so I expected him to drop his end at any minute or at least turn around and blast hell out of the fellow in terms as good as he gave. But Ben plodded on, while the man continued his profane yelling.

“What the hell ya doin’ in France anyway? You dirty slackers with yer yella bellies.... Why don’t ya go up an’ fight instead o’ layin around here, three hundred miles from the front!... Why? Cause yer a bunch o’ God damn cowards!... Don’t laugh at me, ya big pill-roller!... Put me down!... Put me down, ya God damn slacker....”

But Ben went on while I followed in more or less fear lest the shell-shock case suddenly heave himself out of the stretcher. We reached the ambulance in safety, however, and after the canvassed poles and their burden had been deposited in the racks, Ben bawls out, “There ya’re, big boy! Sorry I can’t stay an’ talk to ya.” I closed the doors and the car bounced away over the cobblestones.

“Gee, couldn’t that guy cuss!” exclaimed my comrade as we walked back for the next cripple. “I never was talked to like that since I was a kid an’ dropped a hammer on the old man’s head.... If that guy’d had two feet, I’d a socked him galleywest right there!”

Some of the men standing around were smiling, as if the incident had been a good joke on the big fellow. What utter damn fools some people are! I gripped Ben’s arm and told him “I’m glad you controlled yourself, Ben.... It would have made a fine fool out of you if you had told him where to get off.”

He just laughed. “What the hell could a guy do with a bird like that?... The poor bastard’s had enough trouble to make any man cuss.”

“Yes—he’s entitled to be called a hero, I suppose.”

“Well, he sure sounded like the genuine article alright,” he agreed.

I told the General about the incident the next day and he surprised me by saying, “We’ll give him a surprise, Sergeant... Garlotz has been a good man all the way through, and anyway we shouldn’t be riding around behind an ordinary private: I think we can find a little extra pay for him before long.”

So I didn’t say anything to Ben about the matter, but soon after the General broke the news to him and told him it was a reward for good behavior and especially for his decency to the legless man.

Ben thanked him and I expected him to thank me when we were alone, but when that moment came he appeared to be genuinely distressed over the business. “If I fight I get throwed in the jug and stay a private,” he argued. “If I don’t fight, I get congratulations and stripes. What the hell kind of a war is this,

anyway?”

Well, there was no explaining such things to a man like that, so I just let him argue.

CHAPTER 18

THE BEST MAN WINS

—1—

Well, we got to Paris again and now I was Sergeant Major Canwick and the promotion came about as a result of Captain Winstead's trying to get me a transfer. He discovered that he would have to talk to General Backett about it and the General promptly and irrevocably declared that he couldn't get along without me. "Isn't an old soldier entitled to any consideration in this army?" he asked the Captain. "If I didn't have Canwick, I wouldn't have any staff at all."

And the upshot of it was that I received a boost, in appreciation of my services. The General told me, "I had forgot about you, Sergeant, until that Captain came around suggesting that I could get along without you."

So I suppose I had to thank the Captain for it.... Besides, I didn't know whether I would be any safer with him anyway. No doubt I wouldn't get caught up by any inspections or anything like that, but when you're with a man all the time, and you love him as terribly much as I loved the Captain, and there isn't much to do except love him and let him love you—well, I didn't think it would be the safest thing in the world.

The best thing for us was to get married: but we hadn't been able to figure out a means of doing it. There were all sorts of obstacles: the army regulations required a lot of information about the girl and the French had a lot of red tape that you had to go through. It looked rather out of the question at present, but the Captain said he'd dope out some way—and I hoped he would, for he was "mon homme" or I was crazy as a bedbug.

Big things were in the wind. Everyone there in Paris had the spirit of victory now. No more pessimism. No more kicks and complaints and passing the buck. Allied hopes were running strong at last and it looked as if the Germans were on the run. The Allied armies were driving ahead relentlessly from the Rhine to the sea. It was just as if the proverbially slow grinding mills of the gods were at last beginning to grind into the promised and inevitable dust the selfish ambitions of that predatory Prussian gang.... All about us was activity and renewed enthusiasm. A new spirit seemed to permeate the atmosphere of the French capital, and even the General was moved to comment upon it.

"It looks as if the fireworks would end without our getting even a glimpse of them!" he said regretfully. "God knows I want the business over, but I'm going to get up there where the action is just once, for at least one glimpse, if I die in the attempt!"

I didn't know what we could be doing up there, but I was just as curious to see it at first-hand as the General was. It wouldn't make me mad if he managed to go up.... Which reminded me that Leon was up there somewhere. I hadn't heard from him. Didn't know where he was. Wouldn't know if he were dead. If anything happened to him, I'd be in a beautiful mess, to be sure!

Yet, somehow, for some unaccountable reason, I just couldn't picture Leon getting himself killed. I couldn't imagine him in any field of danger, regardless of the great change that had come over him. My memory of the old Leon was too keen to permit me to worry much about him throwing his life away. So I

wasn't reading the casualty lists very anxiously. I did wonder sometimes if he was in danger and if he'd found it possible to obey the admonition that was the motif of that marching song he so hated: I mean the one about "*Keep Your Britches Dry*."

I'd ceased to worry about him, though. What I wanted now was to get married—and how! The Captain was a changed man: honestly, I hardly knew him, he was so different. No more wild parties. No more women. No more anything, but me. He had managed to get the soldier part out of his head and now he thought of me only as a girl. He called me Canwick when Ben or anyone else was around, but the minute we were alone it was "Leona" this and "Leona" that. If he had called me Canwick or Sergeant then, I'd have passed out from the shock: I mean, if nobody was around. We sure were a funny Damon-Pythias combination, and I'll bet there was more than one man in this man's army making dirty cracks about us behind our backs.

My rôle now was in many respects more difficult than it was before the Captain learned of my identity. Then I was a man all the time and to everyone. Now I was a man one minute and a woman the next. I had to change character so quickly sometimes and with such little warning that it was a wonder I hadn't given myself away before this. It was really very trying on the nerves to be feeling nice and comfy with the man you love and then have to effect a sudden transformation into a semihard-boiled egg of a sergeant just because somebody else blew in. And I could see that it was trying on the Captain's nerves, too.

—2—

Well, part of the difficulties were solved. The Captain hit upon the idea of calling me by the same name "Leony" under all circumstances, in order not to keep him on the jump all the time. Well, I didn't mind, but I couldn't retaliate: I mean, I couldn't call him Clark all the time. I had to hop around between Clark one minute and Captain Winstead the next. However, we were progressing.

Ben was kinda shocked the first time he heard the Captain call me Leony instead of Sergeant or Canwick, but the Captain said, "What the hell's the matter with you? Haven't I as much right to call him Leony as you have?... And I call you Ben, don't I?"

"Sure—sure," agreed Ben. "It just seems funny to hear an officer callin' the kid here Leony, that's all."

"Aw—go take a drink for yourself, Ben," the Captain told him laughingly.

So I guess Ben didn't suspect anything funny. He was so used to being called Ben that it seemed perfectly natural for anyone to call him that. If General Pershing ever happened to mention the name in his hearing, Ben would have assumed at once that the Commander in Chief meant Ben Garlotz, and would have promptly reported to the General.... Ben was a good guy all right, but he didn't need to get funny ideas just because people used my nickname as well as his. My nickname was as good as his, even if it did sound sort of effeminate and odd. But then there was a lot of odder things in the world than that.

We were in the army yet: but nobody would know it to judge by the way I felt most of the time. "In the clouds" would be more appropriate as a descriptive phrase.

—3—

Well, we were working pretty hard those days and the General was pulling strings in an effort to take a trip up to the active sectors.

Ben was determined we should all go out for a celebration one night and the Captain had a devil of a time convincing him that he was "off the wine and women." We finally did get rid of him, however, and we spent the rest of the evening trying to dope out some way of getting married.

It certainly was a problem. In the first place, the very idea of two soldiers getting married, to each other, was enough to make anyone laugh. How could we explain to any priest, minister or chaplain that one of us was a woman? Who could say which was the bride and which the groom? And who would be crazy enough to perform a ceremony for such a pair of obvious jokers?... The end of the evening found us exactly where we started: I didn't see how we were ever going to get married until after this war was over. But Clark insisted that we do it, somehow. Well, I wasn't going to worry any more about it. If he could think up some means of getting us married without me getting into trouble, all well and good. Otherwise—well, I did want to marry him as soon as possible.

When Ben came home that night he was lit to the ears and insisted upon singing. I gathered that he had just mastered the words to that Franco-American ditty that runs like this:

“Bon soir, ma chère!
Comment allez-vous?
Voulez-vous jig-a-jig avec moi ce soir?
'Oui oui—Mais où?’
Donnez moi, chère, ici
Une baiser toute de suite!
Et si vous jig-a-jig avec moi ce soir—
Ou la la, chère!”

And when Ben bellowed in French, he slid over or mispronounced all the words he didn't know and emphasized with a roar such unmistakable things as “jig-a-jig” and “toute de suite.” His music was atrocious!

He had picked up another ballad that's crude but rather cute:

Sacré nom de nom de nom!
La mademoiselle she wouldn't come—
He offered her francs, he offered her rum—
But mademoiselle she wouldn't come.
Her grandmère cried “O nom de nom!”
He said “She's pretty but beaucoup dumb!”
O sacré nom de nom de nom
de nom de nom de nom de nom!—
La, mademoiselle's too dumb to come!
Sacré nom de nom de nom de nom
de nom de nom de nom!

Indeed, my bunkmate was so busy learning additions to his repertoire that he really couldn't have much time left to get suspicious of me.... He was mumbling that “nom de nom” thing even after he got in bed, and I think he must have sung himself to sleep: at least he was still crooning it when I dropped off to keep my date with Morpheus.

A few nights later we had a close call. It was such a close call that I had the shivers. That dumb-bell Ben comes tramping into the Captain's, opening the door even as he knocked, and for about five seconds I was paralyzed, for I didn't have enough time to think, let alone extricate myself from Clark's arms.

Just by grace of God the only light in the place was what came in from the bedroom, so Ben really couldn't tell exactly what he was seeing. He stood there stupidly staring at us for a minute or so, then the Captain says, "Where's your sidekicker, Ben?" And Ben was so flustered, he just said "'Scuse me, Captain—I'll go find him." And out he went, closing the door behind him.

He didn't find me, however, and when he came back an hour later, I was still there. He looked rather funny at me but started in to kid the Captain about his "lovin' party" saying, "Ya oughta lock yer door when ya're plannin' anything like that, Captain! The broad's husband might walk in on ya, ya know."

I guess the Captain thought we'd better treat him well, under the circumstances, for he hauled out a bottle and three glasses and we had several shots of refreshment.

Finally Ben recalled that he had been looking for me. "Where the hell you been, Leony?" he demanded.

"I had some errands to do," I replied. "And I figured I'd meet you here anyway."

"Did ya see the mam'selle the Captain had?" he winked at me behind his hand.

"No—guess she left before I showed up," I said.

"She usually does," said the Captain, with a laugh.

Well, after a couple of drinks, Ben asked the Captain if he wanted to hear the new songs he'd just learned, and when nobody offered any objections he entertained us for half an hour bellowing out those barbaric ballads, while the Captain kept time for him by clicking a silver pocket-piece against a wine bottle.... There was no getting rid of the big boy that night.... And we were no nearer getting married!

—5—

Three days later the General connected and we were going on a jaunt to see the sights. I asked him where we would go and what we would have to do.

"We're going up through Château Thierry and Epernay and right along until we reach Toul and Nancy.... Just a little tour of observation ... look over some hospitals and their subsidiary organizations ... see how this war is being fought ... may even get a glimpse of fireworks and hear a few boches groan!"

"When do we go?"

"Oh—not for several days yet."

So I reported this news to Clark as soon as I could get in touch with him, and we both just walked the floor and racked our brains for a scheme that would enable us to get married.

"Dammit all, Leona!" he said, over and over again, "Something must be done! You're the first girl I ever wanted to marry, and here you are chasing away off to the woods. God only knows when you'll get back!"

"Well—I'll be back sometime," I reminded him, trying to make us both feel better about it.

"Sometime isn't as good as now!" he declared. "You're the first girl I ever wanted to marry, and by the lord chief justice, I'm going to marry you, somehow, somewhere——!"

"Sometime!" I added, with a kiss for good measure.

"Not sometime: now!" he insisted. "I want you more than it's right for any man to want a girl without getting her.... And what if something should happen to you? My God, I'd never forgive myself!... I ought to get you transferred in spite of General Backett.... I'll get you a commission.... Or have you made a Field Clerk ... I'll do something to keep you from going up there!"

"Don't be foolish, sweetheart," I told him. "I really want to go, for one thing; and also if you made any great effort to get me out of it, you might just get me into trouble.... Better to let well enough alone ... I'll be back, safe and sound.... Let's enjoy what little time we have now...."

But he was not to be calmed. He kept pacing back and forth, talking impossible things and swearing politely over the way things were going, when he suddenly stopped and burst into smiles.

“Comment?” I inquired.

“I’ve got it!” he cried gleefully. “Just the thing! My God, but we’re dumb not to think of such a simple way!” He danced a jig of jubilation.

“What is it?” I asked. “Have you gone crazy?”

“We’ve got to get a license before we do anything else,” he finally explained. “We’ll go to a shop tomorrow and get you outfitted from pate to pied in the chicest apparel a mademoiselle can wear. Then we’ll trip along and visit a mairie somewhere outside of Paris.... Très bien!”

“But how can I use my own name?” I objected, trying to find loopholes in his scheme.

“That’s just the reason for going outside the city, chère,” he explained. “We’ll drift out to some little burg and nobody will be the wiser about Miss Leona Canwick, born in Wakeham.”

“I wasn’t born in Wakeham.”

“Well, wherever you were born—it makes no difference.... And in a few short days from now, we’ll get us hitched tightly together pour la vie!”

“Well—” I tried to think of some other objection, but I couldn’t, so we finally agreed to try his plan next day.

In the morning I got away long enough to purchase a frock and everything to go with it, from hat to shoes, and had it all sent to the Captain’s rooms, in his name. Then in the afternoon I got away early and met Clark. We had a bite to eat and went to his place, where I made a quick change to the new clothes. He had to run out to get me some rouge and lipstick and face powder, but eventually I looked decent enough to appear on the street. Clark held me at arm’s length and surveyed me critically; then, when he was satisfied, he insisted upon mussing me all up by kissing me and almost crushing me in his arms, so I had to waste more time on my toilette.

Finally we set off, but we no more than got out of the door before we bumped into Ben himself, and the look on his face was enough to make a wooden soldier laugh. “Uh—uh—uh—” he tried to speak but succeeded only in gulping and staring the harder at me.

I didn’t know what to do. It occurred to me to laugh and tell him that we were playing a joke on one of the Captain’s friends, but I didn’t have time to carry this inspiration into action, for the Captain spoke up, almost without any hesitation at all. “Glad to see you, Ben... Also glad to have you meet Leony’s twin sister.... You’ve heard me speak of her, haven’t you?” He turned to me and said, “Miss Canwick, this is your brother’s best friend and dearest enemy, Sergeant Garlotz.”

“How do you do, Sergeant Garlotz,” I said, smiling brightly. “I’m awfully glad to meet you ... I’ve heard of you through Leon.”

“Glad to meet you, Miss Canwick,” he mumbled awkwardly, continuing to stare at me. “You’re the livin’ image of your brother ... only nicer lookin’, o’ course!” He managed to smile as he gave this final observation.

“Don’t be flattering my fiancée,” interrupted the Captain. “Were you looking for Leon, Ben?”

“Yeh—I thought he’d be here with you, Captain.”

“He’s supposed to be, sometime this evening,” my companion informed him. “He hasn’t seen his sister yet.... I saw him, perhaps half an hour ago, and he said he had an errand to do.... Let’s see, where was he going?”

“Maybe I could find him,” Ben observed, willing to say anything that would necessitate his staying a few minutes longer.

“I’ll tell you what you do, Ben,” said the Captain. “He was going over to see M’sieur ... what the devil was that name?... Oh, yes: M’sieur Taureau. You can get him on the phone at Les Abattoirs de la Rive Gauche, on the ... let’s see ... on the Rue des Morillons.”

“Huh?” Ben grinned his ignorance. “If you’ll just write that down, Captain, I’ll try an’ get him.... He’s an awful guy to keep track of, ain’t he?”

We smiled our agreement while the Captain wrote down the address on a slip of paper. "There you are, Ben.... And if you find that rascal, tell him to get over here as soon as possible."

"Yes, sir," says Ben, moving away, but turning to tell me that "I'm glad to've met ya, Miss Canwick."

"The pleasure is mutual, Sergeant Garlotz," I said, as he disappeared into the stairway.

We waited a few minutes then. Time for a few kisses and caresses. Then we set off once more, found a taxi, rode for an hour or more and arrived in Corbeil just in time to transact our little business. It was no trouble at all. A few questions. Captain Winstead showed papers to identify himself. We signed some book, and the trick was done. Another ride and we were back at the Captain's and I was getting out of that outfit and into my O.D.'s. While I dressed I ran over in my mind the various scenes of this little play and when I came into the other room to rejoin Clark, the first thing I said was, "You've got me into a fine mess with your jokes? What if Ben tried to phone that address you gave him? He'll be tearing mad and will suspect right away that I am not what you said I was. Then what will I say?"

"Oh, he probably didn't even try to phone M'sieur Taureau," he replied, with a laugh. "And if he did, we'll just say it was a joke, that's all.... Of course, you'll have to tell him your sister's in town ... tell him she just arrived in Paris from Spain."

"But he'll want to see us together as sure as I'm standing here," I objected.

He didn't have any suggestions to make in this regard, until after he had thought it all over again. Then he said, "Well, you'll have to tell him that your sister is leaving town to-night. Then he won't wonder why he doesn't see the two of you together, because you can't be together if she isn't here." He reached for his cap and blouse. "Just the thing! And I'll run over to the hotel now, before you go home. I'll tell him we've been waiting hours for you to show up and say good-by to your sister before she leaves ... that you had to go because you're with a party of friends.... And for him to give you holy hell for not keeping your appointment with her.... How's that for a foolproof story?"

"Sounds all right," I admitted. "But what reason have I for not keeping the appointment?"

"Just say you couldn't get here and couldn't get us on the phone.... You can blame anything on the Paris telephone service, you know."

So his plan was carried out. He found Ben at home and told him his story before Ben had a chance to ask about the joke. Then when he returned to the rooms, I left and went home to receive a verbal trouncing from my roommate. He had finished two bottles of wine and was feeling rather cocky, so told me in great detail about meeting my sister with the Captain and about the Captain coming to find me "because your sister had to go on without sayin' good-by to ya!... Ain't you a fine specimen of Amer'can manhood, with a nice li'l sister like that, an' you oft somewhere gettin' cockeyed? Ya oughta be ashamed o' yourself!"

I told him I was and tried to act and sound very sorry because I had missed my sister. But as soon as I had him calmed down on that score, he changed to the subject of the telephone address the Captain gave him.

"What the hell's that guy think I am anyway?" he wanted to know. "I ask him where you was an' he wrote down this address an' told me to call ya up there. So I went out an' found a telephone an' asked a frog to get the number for me, an' he wouldn't do it: just stood there and laffed at me."

"What for?" I asked innocently.

"That's what I wanted to know, an' he says, 'You cannot have those number.'... I says, 'How do you know this Monsoor Taureau ain't got no phone?'... He says 'Your friend have play joke with you. M'sieur Taureau is M'sieur le Bull, comprenez-vous?'... 'Whatayamean Bull?' says I.... 'Eet is—what you say? a place where peegs is killed? what you call him?'... 'Slaughterhouse?' I says.... 'Oui—that ees it, M'sieur.... Your frien's 'ave tole you to call M'sieur le Bull at the slaughterhouse on the Left Bank ... a joke, non?'... An' I says it's a hell of a joke!"

"Did the Captain do that?" I asked incredulously.

"Course he did!... An' what if I'd gone way the hell and gone over there to find ya?... Say, I'd 'a'

busted somebody's head!"

"Aw, don't get sore about a little joke," I told him. "You know the Captain. He knew you wouldn't go over there....' Be a sport and laugh at a joke on yourself!"

He was finally pacified and we turned in for the night.... My head was going round in circles from the strain of the marriage business....

—6—

We had a marriage license, or its French equivalent, but we were not married yet, and two days had gone by. The General was working like a madman, trying to clean up everything around there before we went, because he said we would probably not get to Paris again for six weeks or more. I was sweating gumdrops.

Next evening I expected to be married. I had no trousseau, except a new pair of breeches. No wedding gown, except the street dress I bought the other day, and which was still at Clark's. I hadn't even a bridal nightie—not even a pair of pajamas: I had had to sleep in my underwear and with my shirt on for so long that I'd probably pile in the same way on my bridal night, just from force of habit. What an unromantic affair this was! No friends to witness the ceremony. No bridal reception. No wedding veil. No flowers. No perfumed bed of alluring softness. No honeymoon. No nothing, except the man I loved which was more than a lot of women have when they get married.

—7—

I shall never forget any of the details of that last hectic night in Paris! Trouble began with Ben, as usual, for he showed up at Clark's and refused to leave. "This is our last night in Gay Paree, an' we gotta celebrate to-night if we never do again!" he declared, while Clark and I swore under our breaths at the big galoot.

We were in a hurry anyway, because we didn't know how long we had to get this wedding over with and every minute wasted might be a fatal loss. I was just about to change my clothes, when Ben came in, and of course then I had to postpone any changing until we could get rid of him.

Finally the Captain took him out for a few drinks, thinking I could change while they were out, but I refused to take a chance, because I figured Ben would be suspicious for sure then and would naturally demand to know what had become of Sergeant Canwick, now that his sister was here. Clark was surprised when they came back and found me still there and in uniform, but I managed to explain my attitude without Ben getting wise, so we fell to devising ways and means of getting rid of him.

But Ben was determined to be a monkey wrench that night. He wouldn't budge for love nor money. Clark wanted him to carry a note to a woman over on the other side of the city, but Ben just laughed and waved the suggestion aside, saying, "No, sir, Captain, you don't think I let guys fool me twice in one week, do you?... No, sir! Benny ain't chasin' no errands or carryin' any messages anywhere this fine night!... Where you guys go to-night I go also!"

Well, after about half an hour of this, the Captain said, "Let's go find a few drinks for ourselves, since Ben's so anxious to inflame himself to-night."

So we went out and parked in a café the Captain knew. There were two sections to the place and we were in the side where the bar wasn't. After several drinks, gladly paid for by Clark, he told Ben to go up to the bar and pick out what he thought was the best stuff they had on the shelves. Ben fell for it, and as soon as he disappeared around the partition of the place, we ran out the other door and started away down

the side street.

We hurried as much as possible, hoping to make the rooms before Ben could get there, but, sure enough, when we turned into the Captain's street, Ben lumbered up beside us and demanded to know what the big idea was.

"For God's sake!" exclaimed Clark. "We're coming right back! What did you think—that we're trying to give you the slip?... Don't be foolish—I just happened to remember some papers I left layin' around my room and we're going back to get them.... Why don't you go back and get those drinks ready? We'll be with you in a few minutes."

But Ben said he'd wait for us to come with him, so we plodded back to the rooms and Ben and I waited downstairs while he made a show of getting those papers he had mentioned.

We then went back to the café and Ben made a garçon of himself running back and forth between our table and the bar. Between times, Clark and I tried to talk over the possible escapes.

"The big ape!" muttered my man, behind Ben's back. "He's bound to stick with us.... You can't wear that rig now, that's certain. And it's getting later all the time. We've got to ride to Corbeil.... Damn that man anyway!"

"The General says we may not be in Paris again for six weeks or more," I said, just to make us both feel worse.

"O God!" exclaimed Clark. "Isn't there any way we can fool that cussed Ben?"

Ben came back just then so I didn't have to answer, but by the time he left us again I had an inspiration, and promptly told Clark of it. "It sounds crazy, of course, but Ben expects crazy things of us.... Why don't you go back to the rooms, rig yourself up in skirts, powder up, and come along?"

"My God, Leona—are you joking?"

"No—really—we can tell Ben you want to play a joke on one of your friends later in the evening."

"But how does that help us any?"

"Well—maybe we can get him so drunk he'll go home and go to bed, and then we can slip away to Corbeil and get married."

Clark smiled doubtfully. "I'll try anything when it's necessary," he said. "We'll have to work pretty fast and we'll probably go broke buying drinks enough to put that tanker under the table.... But I can do that in these clothes—why the masquerade?"

"Because then, wherever we are, we can go right along and get married without having to go back for me to change."

"You mean I'll be the bride and you the man?" he demanded incredulously.

"Surely.... You give me the papers and your belt and bars, and I'll be Captain Winstead for the evening."

"It's a go!" he agreed. "But I'll keep my uniform on underneath, in case there should be any trouble. We can fix you up in the taxi on the way out to Corbeil."

So he left us and I set about pouring drinks into Ben while I explained about the Captain's impending joke on his friends. Ben thought it an excellent joke. Said he'd much rather have a woman on the party than an officer, "because bars and badges give me the willies."

Note after note came out of my pocket never to return again. Clark came back, looking very modish in the outfit he had procured somewhere. We set out to let Ben drink the city dry, and I knew from the beginning that it was going to be a long drawn out process, because his capacity was really something to wonder at. I mean, it was just like a bottomless well, and a dozen drinks more or less didn't make much difference in the total depth or effect.

After we had visited four places, he began to get suspicious because we weren't drinking with him, so Clark had to join him a few times.... We went on, from one wine shop to another, from café to buvette, from dive to cabaret, on and on through a never ending series of stops for things to dull the spirit and

anesthetize the mind of this persistent “best man.”

I was beginning to wonder if we hadn’t better tell him the truth and let him be the “best man,” but when I stopped to think it over carefully, I concluded that this would be most inadvisable. I had to travel with him for months yet and besides when he got drunk he might tell anything he happened to remember.... The game went on.

But no results, nor indications of success, rewarded our efforts. We plied him with drinks, and it seemed that the more we gave him the more sober he grew: it was just one of those nights in his life when he could have drunk every variety and vintage of wine, champagne, cognac, rum and gin, and still have stayed on his feet with an air of mastery. He simply defied our dreams of wedded bliss, and as the hours moved slowly by us, my dreams began to tumble into nothingness.

At one place he decided that I was entirely too sober for the party and insisted that I join them in at least one good drink “just to please the nice lady”—meaning Clark. I couldn’t escape it, so I drank.

Now, I’d never tasted cognac straight except down there at St. Nazaire, when I did succeed in downing a few glasses of it, so it wasn’t any wonder to me that I choked and coughed and sputtered when that red bolt of liquid lightning hit my throat.... Ben socked me on the back so hard that I sprawled right across the table—but it did cure the choking, because it knocked the wind completely out of me.

Clark put his arm around me, dried my eyes with his handkerchief and caressed me until I regained my breath.

Ben looked on in dumb wonder and finally exclaimed. “That’s a fine way fer an officer to be treatin’ an inferior!... Why don’t ya give her yer smellin salts?”

“You big dumb-bell!” Clark told him. “You knocked the wind out of him!... And no more of your wise cracks.”

But Ben was beginning to feel unconquerable. “You two soul-mates!” he bawled at us. “’Sgood thing yer in those women’s dud er somebody’d think the both of ya’re queer!”

“Shut up and have another drink,” suggested Clark. “Will ya join me, Leony?” he asked.

“No, thanks—I can’t stand that stuff.”

He turned around and called to the waiter. “Garçon! A bottle of that pink water ya got on the shelf up there!” And when the garçon did not at once obey, he arose majestically, muttering, “Slowest damn butler we ever had!... I’ll get ya a bottle o’ somethin ya can drink, Leony!... You ain’t got hair ’nough on yer chest yet to drink cognac!”

I looked quickly at the Captain: the devil was actually laughing at that crack! But he straightened up to say, “If we don’t ditch him pretty soon, we may as well kiss our honeymoon good-by, chère.”

When Ben returned with the bottle of wine, we renewed the attack with a vengeance. I drank several glasses of wine to get him to drink a dozen of other things. Clark had to drink with him half the time, and I could see his eyes getting drowsy. I felt rather sleepy myself, and miserable. Clark began to get hilarious—and looked too comical for words in that woman’s raiment.

Suddenly he said, “Benny, I’ll wager you can’t down a bottle of rum and a bottle of wine in quick succession without stopping!”

“The hell I can’t!” retorted Ben. “What’s bet?” “Twenty francs and the charges.”

“You must be drunk, Captain,” opined Ben. “But I always say, ‘Never turn down a bargain’ and ‘Never count a gift horse’s teeth.’ ... Ya’re on!... Garçon! Garçon! Vit! A bottle o’ that Jamaica Niggerhead and another one o’ that pink ink!... Vit!”

As soon as the bottles appeared, the Captain laid twenty francs on the table and told the garçon to wait a moment. Ben ups with the rum and drains the bottle, grabs the wine with the other hand and drinks the whole quart as a chaser, while the garçon stared at him with a sickly grin. “B-a-a-a-a-a-a” bellows Ben, smacking his lips so loudly that people all over the place turned to look at us.

The Captain paid for the drinks and Ben pocketed the twenty francs, only to pull it out again

immediately to order something else. “And say, you guys!” he says, while the garçon is serving us. “Did ya ever see me stick pins and needles through my jaws?” Whereupon he pulls a sewing kit from his pocket, takes half a dozen pins and jams them through his cheek. Then he stuck three needles through the other cheek. And he opened his mouth and let out a roar that shook the house. He looked fantastic, with his cheeks puffed out and the gleaming pins and needles sticking out from them.... At last, I said to myself, he’s getting drunk!

It was almost closing time now and I decided to make a last break for freedom from the big monkey wrench. I sent him to the bar for a bottle of wine, then I seized Clark’s hand and literally dragged him off his seat and out the door.

But it was no go. Ben saw us and followed, bellowing like a million giants. On the pavement he caught up with us and demanded, “Where ya goin’? What’s the rush?... Christ A’mighty, anybody’d think you two had somethin’ to do ’sides paint this ole burg red, white and blue!... Now I suggest that we go visitin’ in some nice ladies’ parlors, mes amis!” And then he started to sing: “Bon soir, ma chère,” etc., in that rattling, growling, devastating howl of his.

Then he wanted us to have a drink of his own private concoction, a bottle of which he produced from his pocket. The Captain had to drink with him. Once more. Again. Clark was acting rather dizzy on his feet, but he managed to inquire, “My God, Ben, what is that—liquid dynamite?”

“Tha’s a Devil’s Dream,” Ben informed us. “In-vented by your own true an reliable frien’, Benny Garlotz, now making his last personal appearance in this city.... Captain, that stuff’s got everything in it that can be put in bottles, and two drinks of it makes ya a bona fide life member of the Anti-Saloon League!... It’s got a kick like a Mack truck and is guaranteed to make twins turn into quadruplets before yer eyes. Three drinks of it will make a buck private a General, and four drinks has been known to make a ninety-year-old woman have a litter o’ pups!... Step up, folks—roll up, tumble up, any way to get yer money up!... Money back guarantee goes with every bottle! Good for coughs, colds, burns, chills, fever, fallen arches, floatin’ kidneys, exhaust troubles of all kinds. One of the finest lubricants your transmission will ever have! The best oil in God’s world for petcocks, game cocks, haycocks, and all kinds of diseases, by jeeses, by jeeses!... It’s stronger’n garlic, onions, dead fish, or a decayed soldier! Used by the natives in South America to make reptiles eat their tails.... Good for anything, folks! God’s gift to man! Cures fits an’ kills cockroaches! Five drinks’ll make a mademoiselle rape her grandfather!... I’ve used it for years, and to it, ladies and gentlemen, I attribute my virility and fertility! Babies cry for it! Virgins die for it! Women lie for it!... And all for the small cost of one small nickel, half a dime, fifth of a quarter.... Hey, you guys, where the hell ya runnin’ off to?”

“For God’s sake, Ben, you’ll get us all pinched!” I told him, when he caught up with us.

“All right,” he agreed. “I’m drunk and proud of it! You’re drunk an’ ashamed of it! Captain’s drunk an’ don’t know whether he’s shamed or not!... Les go home while we can still get there!”

And he linked arms with us and started away. I gave up. What was the use of fighting a man like that? Besides, Clark was obviously too drunk to even think about getting married. A fine man to marry—couldn’t even stay sober on his wedding night! Ben began to sing:

“Sacré nom de nom de nom,
La mademoiselle she wouldn’t come,
He offered her francs, he offered her rum,
But the damned little fool she wouldn’t come!
Her grandmère cried ‘O nom de nom!’
I said ‘She’s pretty but g—— d—— dumb!’

“O sacré nom de nom de nom

de nom de nom de nom de nom,
La mademoiselle's too dumb to come!
Sacré nom de nom de nom
de nom de nom de nom de nom!"

And we marched away in the general direction of home, to the rhythm of that inane ditty that Ben picked up in that terrible city. We must have been a fantastic spectacle!

We finally reached the door that led up to the Captain's rooms and I looked around for a cab, found one and bundled Ben into it. Then I returned to the doorway to see if Clark was all right. He pulled me into the shadows and asked, "Has he passed out? Is it too late?"

"Are you drunk or sober?" I demanded, wondering if I had misjudged him.

"Sober as a judge," he replied. "But he doesn't know it. How about that marriage ceremony?"

I held out my watch for him to see the time, as I said, discouragedly, "I guess Fate's against us!... We'll have to put it off, that's all."

"That damn big boozier!" he grumbled. "I'd like to smash his head for him!"

"Oh—he's blissfully ignorant of our intentions," I said.

"Damn him just the same!" And he swept me into his arms and held me there, crushed against him, while he kissed me and kissed me and kissed me.... Oh, but I wished then that we were married!

We heard Ben stirring so I had to run—and that was the nearest I came to being married that night, and the best farewell we could manage. I took Ben home and set him on his bunk. I sat down beside him, undecided whether to undress him or let him sleep with his clothes on; but while I was deciding, he began to undress himself, starting at the bottom.

My legs hung down beside his, and every time he made a lunge to capture one of his own, he caught one of mine instead. But that didn't make any difference. The first one he got a good grip on was one of mine, and he unrolled the puttee, unlaced the shoe, blissfully ignorant of the fact that it wasn't his own foot at all. Then he dropped it to the floor to rest from the exertion.

A moment later he continued his work, intending to remove the shoe this time, but when he reached for it, he missed and brought up one of his own instead. He proceeded calmly to undress that one, but he lost it before he could pull the shoe off and had to go hunting for it again.

But again he got the wrong one: this time the one of mine which was already prepared. He pulled the shoe off and dropped the leg down in its place, heaving a big sigh of satisfaction as he did so.

One more to go! He reached down to get it, caught the other one of mine and removed the leggings and untied the string, but again he lost it before he could pull off the shoe. When he tried to get it again, he got his own other one instead. He pulled and pulled and grunted and grunted, but in vain, because, of course, the shoe wasn't even untied yet. He swore then, and dropped the foot to the floor. Then he leaned over and looked down upon the four feet that were dangling there. "Benny," he mumbled with a chuckle, "ya're drunker'n a cow's tail in flytime!"

He reached once more for the foot that appeared to have an untied shoe on it, but he couldn't pull it off, so gave up, unwrapped the legging, unlaced the shoe, but lost the foot before he could complete the job.

He was sweating gumdrops now as he took another long look at the four feet. Making a great effort, he lunged after one of them and brought up the one of mine that he had worked on first. The shoe was untied, so he pulled it off and solemnly planked it on the floor. He began to chuckle. "Guess ya ain't so drunk, Benny, when ya can take ya're shoes off!" And then, although neither of his own shoes were off, he fell back across the bunk with a lusty grunt of satisfaction. The poor devil had taken off two shoes, and he knew he only had two feet, so his conscience was perfectly clear in the matter.... No, he wasn't drunk!

Well, I could have laughed or cried. I just felt like being hysterical—doing anything crazy! I looked at him, pulled him around so his feet and head were on the bed, looked at him again and said, "Why in the

name of God, didn't you do that three hours ago, you big roughneck!"... Then I crawled into bed and cried myself to sleep, because I knew he'd never hear me crying, and a girl just has to cry once in a while.

By the time we got ready to pull out in the morning, my nerves had quieted down and I felt more like myself. After all, why should we worry and fret about it—we'd get married later. I told Clark as much when he came down to see us off, but he still felt sore about it and he said, "The next time, we'll get rid of him if we have to have him arrested!"

Ben appeared just then, and greeted the Captain with a hangover grin. "Well, Captain, your honor, sir, I certainly did hate to have to show you to your home, last night, but I was afraid o' gettin' pinched for bein' with a disorderly lady."

I thought Clark would take a poke at him then, but he didn't and after a minute or so he actually smiled at Ben and said, "You're still drunk, but I hope you can sober up before you get up where there's any danger.... And Ben, Leony's sister made me promise to take care of him, so I'll have to leave him in your charge. See that he comes back safe and sound, will you? His sister'd be off me for life if anything happened to him."

"Captain, sir," replied Ben, taking his hand so solemnly that I knew at once he was still drunk, "I like you, I like Leony, and I liked his sister, and I can tell you that unless Leony begins gettin' too familiar with me, I'll bring him back as you mention.... Don't worry about us, Captain!" He laughed. "There ain't no boche got my number! No, sir!"

And just then the General and Chilblaines appeared. Clark saluted them and us and walked away.... A few minutes later and we were off to Meaux and Château Thierry. I guess I was just as happy now that we didn't get married, for it occurred to me that it would be just my luck to start raising a family the very first thing. I remember that I once said

“When I get to be a lady
I’m going to have a baby
If I can
Just to prove I can.”

But I was no lady just now and having a baby under the circumstances would have been nothing short of burlesque. Just imagine the headlines in *The Stars and Stripes*, the newspaper of the A.E.F.:

A.E.F. SERGEANT MAJOR A MOTHER

HE GIVES BIRTH TO 10-LB. BOY

Mother and Child Doing Well

Phenomenon complete surprise to even closest friends. General Pershing sends congratulations, but says he does not believe report. Sergeant-mother says boy’s father a secret-service worker. No one can deny it. Authorities promise thorough investigation. Very Special Delivery blamed on stork. General Harbord wonders if Sergeant can produce pigeon from silk handkerchief. Adjutant General threatens court martial of Sergeant for conduct unbecoming a noncommissioned officer.... Scandal spreads. Certain ominously rotund general officers under suspicion.... General Staff considering the issuance of manual on Care and Feeding of Infants as part of regular equipment.... France offers bounty for children regardless of their source. Doughboys say they can meet the demand. Bull market expected....

It wouldn’t sound nice at all, and I’d not only get into trouble with the army authorities, but I’d also be kidded to death about the matter.... Of course I hadn’t had any experience, but I was willing to bet that I wouldn’t go very long without starting something; and I was content to believe that I’d started enough already, without starting any babies!

Which just goes to show that there is a bright side to everything. I was turning into a regular pollyanna: getting so I could always find something to be thankful for. And as an expression of my appreciation of his unwitting efforts to save me from an embarrassing fate, I bought Ben a couple of good solid drinks at our next stop. No one could call me an ingrate!

CHAPTER 19

THE COST OF CURIOSITY

—1—

In order to set down in proper order the incidents which we experienced between the night of October 31, and November 4 up at the Front, I have tried to reconstruct, from the memory of what others have told me as well as what I felt and saw and heard myself, the terrible experience through which we had come. Some of the scenes I did not witness myself, but I feel now, years later, that I know exactly what happened and what each man said at the time. Just thinking of it makes me want to cry.

On the 31st of October we stopped at an evacuation hospital and spent the afternoon there, because the General wanted to look around a bit and see just how a medical unit of this kind functions within firing distance of the front lines. It was about dusk when we left the hospital, with a borrowed pill-roller as a guide, to show us the more or less circuitous route to the next station of centralization, about twelve kilometers to the east.

I had no idea we were in any danger and I don't think any of us had any feeling of apprehension as we traveled along in silence over the muddy, rutted road, on which other cars were moving in the same direction. But the guide explained to us that this road was a bending connection of highways which dipped close to the lines at its northern bend, and as we got farther and farther along toward that apex, we did begin to feel a kind of strain, although all was as quiet as it had been.

We had passed several guard posts on the way, each of them waving us on after a perfunctory glance at us and a word of explanation from the guide. In between these points, I had been dozing off, due to the rhythmic whirr of the engine and the fact that nobody had much to say. Even Esky thought it safe enough for him to lie curled up in the tonneau at the General's feet.

Ben was watching the unlit road with squinted eyes, his jaws set as if in defiance of the difficult going, his mouth opening only when necessary to acknowledge the directions which the guide, sitting between us, gave.

We had passed the halfway mark of our journey when suddenly the lulling stillness was broken by Ben's exclamation, "They're shootin' fireworks for us! Suppose they got the band out to welcome us, too?"

Before he had spoken, we all saw the sudden change in the sky ahead of us. We could see the splurging illumination spread across the skyline a few miles to the front of our position, and in the next moment the terrible stillness became a chaos of noises, the booming ear-splitting thunder from big guns not far distant punctuated by the rattle-tat-tat and z-z-z-z-z-z-z-z-z of small arms. The road was plain to see now, but Ben turned for instructions before proceeding. "General, sir, seems like we're headin' square into that celebration.... Do we go on?"

"What do you think, young man?" the General demanded of the guide. "Where are we and is the road safely distant all the way?"

"Safe as anywhere," replied the guide. "That probably isn't much of anything, anyway, but the advance going up another hitch.... And even if it's a boche movement, their fire wouldn't reach this road: our

artillery will push them back in a jiffy if they're too close for comfort.... It's just as safe here as anywhere around this section."

"All right, Sergeant. Go on."

But a few moments later, after the bursting of shells and flare of explosions had become suddenly closer, the Captain said, "This looks more like a counterattack to me!... It's coming this way or I'm a fool!"

"Sounds rather interesting," observed the General, peering out into the spasmodic darkness. "Seems to be a general movement for miles around.... Also getting more intense."

Then we heard a different kind of noise, a whirring, droning, singing, mechanical music, that aroused the guide to observe, "An airplane buzzing up there somewhere, too." He shrugged his shoulders as if it didn't bother him at all, but I suspected that his leathery nervelessness was only an affectation, a pose for the benefit of us tenderfeet from the rear who had never seen any action before. He had told us that he had been in this sector for months, and I imagine it did his heart good to feel that these other men were suffering as he had once suffered himself. "Those airmen aren't much good any more, anyway," he added. "They never do any damage around here."

But even as he finished speaking, Ben jammed on the brakes so hard that we all plunged forward out of the seats. "Godamighty!" declared the big boy. "A piece o' somethin' went right by us!"

He started forward again, but hadn't shifted into high before the road in front erupted into a giant geyser of mud and stones and darts of flame. "Holy knock-kneed bishop!" Ben exclaimed, jamming on the brakes again and coming to a stop within a few yards of the new formed crater. "This is war sure 'nough!... Go on, General?"

The General peered out and around again. "Apparently we're in the middle of things here. It's as bad back there as it is up ahead."

"Sure," said the guide. "Drive right around that hole and we'll probably duck right through it all without a scratch.... We can't go back now."

"All right," said Ben, and he proceeded to navigate the tour around the hole. "Gad, but that was a whopper, huh?... Leony, ya better put yer prayin' cap on."

We went slowly on, Ben swerving unconsciously here and there as the bursting of shells struck on his nerves. The General was studying the surroundings from one side of the car and Chilblaines peered silently from the other. I could only sit stiff and rigid, waiting for something to happen.

Suddenly Ben began to chuckle.

"What's the joke?" inquired the guide.

"Leony," said Ben, ignoring the guide's question. "Remember that song they used to sing in Paris?" He began to mumble:

"Sacré nom de nom de nom,
La mademoiselle was pretty but dumb
Many are called but few can come
O sacré nom de nom de nom!
She refused his francs, refused his rum,
Because she said she couldn't come.
Her grandmère cried, 'O nom de nom!'
'Where does she get such dumbness from?'
O sacré nom de nom de nom!
O sacré nom de nom!

"That damn thing keeps running through my mind all the time!" he told us. "Every step I take, every

move I make—it's 'sacre nom de nom de nom, the mademoiselle she couldn't come.' 'Nough to give a guy the willies!"

"Did you ever hear the one about the Spanish Gentilio?" asked the guide.

But before he could sing it, the car was shaken by a tremendous boom that came from an explosion so near it rocked the earth. We came to a sudden groaning stop, with the left front corner of the car apparently in a hole.

"What happened then?" demanded the General.

Ben got out and investigated. "Musta hit somethin', General, sir. That wheel's busted all to hell!"

"Can't we go on?"

"'Fraid not, sir; it's ruined." Ben turned and stared in the direction of Germany. "The g—— d—— Dutch b——! Probably just waitin' fer a General to appear on this road!"

"No," said the guide, "I'd bet a dollar to a doughnut that the Dutch are acting on some misinformation.... I'll bet they think there's reënforcements or supplies comin' up this road to-night.... That's the dope exactly!"

"Why didn't you say something about it sooner?" demanded the General irritably.

"Yeh!" Ben bawls at him. "This is a fine g—— d—— place fer us to be if them Dutch c—— s—— are gonna shell hell outa this road the rest o' the night!... A hell of a lot of help you been to us, guy! We oughta put you up in front of a couple speedy bullets, just to teach ya a lesson."

"How the hell did I know what those birds were planning to do?" retorted the guide. "I haven't any way of knowin' what those Deutschers think is goin' on this road!"

"Shut up, you two!" commanded the big boss. "Where do we go from here, young man? Can you get us out of here without us getting killed?"

"Sure," the pill-roller replied. "We can take the next road to the left and get back toward where we came from."

"Road!" exclaimed Chilblaines. "We don't want to get on any more roads! Look at the one we're on!"

"Yeh—that's this road," explained our guide. "But the other road is probably nice and quiet. You see, this is a loop road, the main thoroughfare through this section, feeds the forward stations from both sides."

"How far are we from the bend?" asked the General. "And does this other road turn off before we get there?"

"We're almost there now," replied the other. "There's a lot of paraphernalia up there and a regimental headquarters and aid station. Now this other road turns off just before we get there and runs off to the left for about a mile and then turns south again."

"Well, let's go somewhere," said the old man. "We can't do ourselves or anyone else any good by staying here.... And it's starting to rain, too!"

So we set off, the rain coming down in a cold drizzle that served to make more colorful the flaring illumination, but in the intervals it rendered the darkness more opaque. Shells were bursting along the road with increasing frequency, and now and then one came very close to us. The heavens above were full of sounds of guns and planes. Between the flashes of the flares you couldn't see your hand before you. The going was exceedingly difficult, through fields and paths of deserted farms that had recently been peopled by shells and soldiers.

It seemed that the further we went, the more active things became. Shrapnel bursts came perilously near and in the darkness between the flares we stumbled into holes and picked ourselves up from muddy sprawls. Ben cursed the boches and the guide continuously, but the rest of us had enough to do to keep on our feet as much as possible.

At last we came to the road and the guide said "Here we are!" as if he had done something heroic in leading us there.

The General looked around and pondered. "How far are we from that regimental headquarters now?"

he asked, wiping the water from his face.

“Oh—not much of a walk,” answered the guide. “But I’ll bet it’s hotter’n hell out there right now.”

“Which way is it?”

“Straight along the main road there.”

The old man again looked down the two roads. Then he turned to the guide and said, “Young man, you are free to take that side road if you want to. So also are the rest of you men. But I’m going to keep on until I come to that regimental station. I’d rather take a chance of getting hit where there’s a crowd than out on some dark cowpath that’s blooming with shrapnel.”

The pill-roller hesitated a moment, then said, “All right, sir. I would rather take the side road, but you can find the station without me easy enough.”

“Any of you men want to go that way?” He looked inquiringly at his wet and sorry looking retinue.

“I’ll stick with you, General, sir, if ya don’t mind,” Ben piped up. “I’d rather get killed with a General than get drunk with a guy like that pill-roller.... And I’m sure Eskey prefers to stick with you, General.”

“Here, too,” I said, and Chilblaines, who must have wanted to go with the guide, found himself plodding along behind the gray-haired old-timer. A queer outfit to be turned loosed in a place like that: four tenderfeet and a scared pup, plowing along in mud that sometimes came up to your knees!

We had not gone very far before it became apparent that the pill-roller was right about the heat of the fray increasing toward the station. The air was full of flying bits of metal, rocks, dirt, gases, and blinding flashes of light. The rain dropped on us and was not noticed in the excitement of picking our way along a few yards at a time. Injury and possible death scraped us close at almost every step.

Yet we probably would have succeeded in reaching the station in safety, if we hadn’t become separated as the result of a series of shells bursting so near that we had to scatter, and we scattered so wide that we couldn’t get together again because of the shells dropping between us.

I found myself with the General and we figured Chilblaines, Ben and Eskey must be about two hundred yards across from us, toward the main road again.

I found out later that Ben was yelling my name at the top of his voice, but I never heard him at all, and after we waited several minutes in a vain hope of rejoining them, we finally set off toward the station with the idea that they had probably gone on also.... We stumbled on and on, but it was a long time before we reached that station, and by that time, Ben and his party had been there and gone again.

We very quickly learned the exact nature of the situation: this station was the apex of a triangle, the connecting point in the rear of two wide-flung flanks. So far the enemy fire had been missing the station because it was concentrated on the front and rear, particularly the rear, to prevent any reënforcements or assistance from coming up. The whole business was a useless, promiseless dogfight that had done nothing but stir up a lot of trouble, although the left flank of the American position had been forced back some little distance. Officers in the station told us we were lucky to come through that shelling alive.

And they also told us about Ben and Chilblaines and Eskey. It seems that they managed to go straight through to the station, where they promptly inquired about us. But none had seen us, so Ben set off again with Eskey at his heels in an effort to find us.... A little later he came back lugging a smallish figure, which he planked on a cot and talked to for a few minutes. Then he found Chilblaines and said, “Captain, you gotta come along! The General’s out there an’ Leony’s out there an’ I can’t carry them both, if they’re hurt!”

But Chilblaines refused to budge.

“Captain,” cried Ben, so loud that everyone in the place heard him, “are ya comin’ or do I have to drag ya?”

“Since when do we take orders from you, Garlotz?” demanded the Captain, with a sneer.

“Yere beginnin’ right now, you yella bellied stick!” And Ben seized his arm and gave it such a wrench that the officer had to follow. “Now, ya come along er I’ll brain ya!”

It was just after their departure that we showed up and heard the news of them. The General fumed and fretted and talked of going out after them, but before we could get anyone who knew the section to go with us, Chilblaines came running in, one cheek bloody and an eye starting to swell shut. He rushed up to the General and cried out, “Garlotz has gone mad! Stark staring mad!... We were out there looking for you ... he rushed at me and tried to choke me to death!”

“Where is he?” demanded the old man.

“Out there ... he collapsed or I’d be dead now.”

“Dammit, man!” exclaimed the General, shaking him roughly. “He must be found! Where were you when this happened?”

But Chilblaines could only tell us in a general way where he had been. The General grabbed the first stretcher-bearer that passed and we started off, but when we had gone a few steps, I turned to him and said, “You don’t need to come, sir. We can find him.”

Before he could answer, something touched his hand and he looked down to find Esky there, looking up at us with worried eyes and without wagging his tail.

“You’d better not come, sir,” said the man with the stretcher. “We’ll follow the dog.”

So the General went back, and we went on, letting Esky’s trotting lead show us the way.

We found him about a quarter of a mile away. He was unconscious when we picked him up, and we hurried as fast as we could in getting him back.

The General had a cot waiting for him and instead of sending for an attendant he rushed off himself to get one.... Ben opened his eyes and stared at me. “Leony, damn yer soul!... Where ya been?... I hunted all over hell fer ya.”

The General and the attendant came up then and Ben groaned from the man’s rough examination of his back. But he continued to talk to me.

“I had a fight, too, Leony,” he said, mumbling some of the words indistinctly. “Did ya hear about that yella skunk hittin’ me in the back with a rock when I wasn’t watchin’ him?... The dirty yella bum!... Ya should ’a’ seen it, Leony!... I just whaled hell outa him ... then I got dizzy.”

“You weren’t hit by a rock, big boy,” the pill-roller said, with a laugh. “You’ve got a piece of shrapnel the size of your fist in your back.”

“Huh?” Ben’s eyes opened in wonder and disbelief. “Felt like a rock when it hit.”

His breath was coming in short gasps now. His face was a dirty white, the rough texture of his skin standing out like the contour lines on a topographic map.

“Chilblaines didn’t hit me?” he asked after a moment.

I told him, “No—a piece of shrapnel. Now lie still and take it easy. You should have stayed in here instead of wandering around all over France.”

“How’d I know ... you were ... safe?” he mumbled. “The Captain tole me to take care of ya.... Say....” He glanced up to see if the General had gone. “I found yer twin brother out there, too... Leony ... dog-gone ya ... why in hell didn’t ya ... tell me the secret before?...”

“Be quiet, Ben,” I told him, wondering about Leon and about what the General might hear.

But a surgeon came then, and a nurse. They examined him again, tried various things, shook their heads and tried other things ... something else ... a shot in the arm when Ben began to moan....

He began to talk again, rambling from one thing to another, his speech a mumbling almost unintelligible, although I could understand the trend of it. “All that fight for nothin’ ... I’d ’ve killed Chilblaines ... like to get hold o’ the Dutchman that sent that shell over ... God, I’d like to fight somebody ... just fight ... fight.... Gonna fight again when I get back home, Leony....”

The attendant heard this last and said, with a funny smile on his face, “Big boy, there won’t be any fightin’ where you’re goin’.” And he turned on his heel and went away, the General following him and demanding that something be done.

“What’d he say, Leony?” Ben asked, and, because I couldn’t answer him, I dropped down to my knees and buried my face in his arm. I couldn’t keep from crying, but I guess Ben was the only one who heard the sobs and knew that I was shaking like a leaf in the wind.

He tried to lift his hand to pat my shoulder, but he couldn’t. “Leony ...” he mumbled. “Damn yer soul ... don’t do that!... Don’t do it, I tell ya! Yer brother said you was a girl ... now I know it.... Don’t do that!... Ya’d be a damned good soljer if ya didn’t cry, Leony.... Don’t do it, Leony!... I can hear yer heartbeats.... Member that song.... Sacré nom de nom de nom ... just like heartbeats, Leony.... O-o-oh ... don’t ... don’t do that....” He gave a gasp. I felt his muscles twitch. “Funny damned thing ... Leony ... I’ll tell ya bout it ... later ... Leony ... the lights ... the lights ... Leony! ... the lights ... they’re goin’ out ... O-o-o-o-h, God!” A gasp like a great sigh of relief. The arm against my head dropped away.... And Big Ben had gone west.

I drew back and stared dumbly at him. The attendant came back, looked closer, felt the pulse, the heart, pulled the blanket over the strong homely face. I stumbled away, passed the General without a word, and went out into the rainy night. I thought I should burst into tears and I wanted to find a secluded dark corner that would let me cry fearlessly. But when I found a place, my grief-ridden eyes stared up into the flashing sky, and no tears came. If I could have died that moment, I would have been happy. Esky came to me and snuggled under my arms. He knew what had happened, and Ben had been a good friend to him.

My mind was dazed, my senses numbed by this awful unexpected, unnecessary loss. I could not weep, nor could I speak with any degree of certainty that what I tried to say would be said, but I finally went back into the hut, where the General met me.

I tried to say something. My lips must have quivered, for the General put his arm around my shoulders and I heard him telling me, “I know how you feel, boy.... Terrible to lose your best friend like that ... terrible!... Did he have any folks, do you know?”

I shook my head. Ben had told me once that he didn’t have anyone who cared whether he lived or died.

“But surely there must be someone somewhere in this world to mourn for a man who would do a thing like that!” argued the General. “Why, he went out there to get us, Sergeant!”

“I’ll miss him,” I managed to say, my lips trembling.

“So will we all, Sergeant.... I’m sorry ... very sorry!” And he walked away from me. I knew what he meant: it was his curiosity that took us up there, that cost us Ben’s life. I knew what he meant, and I knew he meant it when he said he was sorry. I knew by the way he talked and acted that he was really damned sorry. That’s what made it worse: a man like the General feeling that he was responsible for a fellow’s death! If it were some officer you could swear at and hate for it, you could get rid of your pent-up feelings by swearing at him and hating him. But, God—you couldn’t hate a man like the General.... Ben wasn’t here—that’s all there was to it—and nobody was to blame for a thing like that. All you could do was feel terrible and keep it to yourself.

After a while, when I had calmed down a little, I went in search of my brother and found him resting comfortably in an adjoining shed. He was very weak and couldn’t talk much. He had lost a lot of blood, but the wound was only a leg wound and would heal all right in time. I asked him how he happened to be out there and learned that he had been on his way back to the Evacuation Hospital to get medical supplies for the aid station, was forced to abandon the road and his motorcycle, got lost in the darkness and walked into a piece of shrapnel.

I told him about Ben and that the General might get a medal for him. “Good!” he exclaimed weakly. “He was a brick. But you’d never take him for a hero.”

“I guess heroes are born, not made,” I said. “They only show up by accident, when heroism is least expected of them or anyone else.”

I couldn’t talk to him any more. I told him to get in touch with me after he landed in a base hospital. He promised he would. I went outside again; Esky and I sat there watching the fireworks.... After a while they ceased.... Ambulances appeared.... The General called me and we piled into a car.... And all I could hear

was that “Sacr  nom de nom de nom ... de nom de nom de nom de nom...” Every sound, every noise, every movement, sang it over and over as if all the things about me were determined to imprint it indelibly upon my consciousness and my memory.

Perhaps it was lucky for us that we got out that night, for the next morning at 5:30 the American and French artillery began to lay down a barrage to cover the advance of troops all along the line. The Germans counterattacked in spots to cover their retreat. The battle was on to what looked like the end, for two days had seen the steady retreat of the Germans and the capture of enormous quantities of men and supplies.

We got our car back, with a new wheel, and a new driver. We stopped at St. Mihiel and then at Bar-le-Duc. Next day we’d go on to Toul.

I could hardly think. My brain was in a dizzy whirl. I wished my Captain were there. I wanted so much to talk to someone—anyone that could understand.... I missed Ben so damned much. I didn’t know anything about death. What is it? Can it be that a man dies and that is the end of him? I didn’t believe it. There *is* such a thing as immortality. Ben was dead, but he lived on in my memory, he’d never be really dead to me. I even caught myself looking around sometimes, expecting to see him standing there at my shoulder, swearing his beautiful profanity, dreaming of unconquered women and unvisited caf s, offering to give you the shirt from his back if you needed it. A real honest-to-God man like that could not be gone forever: I think he’ll always be with me. The best part of him will always live in my memory: and if the best part of you means your soul, then it’s true that the soul never dies.

—2—

At Nancy we heard that the Rainbow Division had occupied Sedan and the Germans were suing for peace.

A letter from Clark caught up with me here. He had been promoted. It was Major Clark Winstead now. But he was worried lest he be sent away on some mission of some kind that would keep us from meeting again over here.... That would be the last straw. Leon in the hospital and Clark away off somewhere, and Ben not here to stick by me.... I was sick of it all: just sick and discouraged and homesick and lovesick and just sick. And I couldn’t get rid of that crazy tune Ben used to sing: Sacr  nom de nom de nom. I couldn’t walk around the block without my head ringing from it. It had a rhythm that wouldn’t be stilled.

CHAPTER 20

THE TAIL OF THE TALE

—1—

The War was over, and I was glad. There was no fun in this army game now that Ben was not here. I didn't know what to do with myself. The new man was a good fellow, I guess, but it didn't seem natural for him to be in Ben's place, and I just couldn't be more than casually friendly to him. I'd be glad to go home and get away from all this. I had had enough. More than enough.

We were at Nancy when the Armistice was announced. We stood at the window in the General's hotel room, overlooking one of the main public squares, and watched the milling crowds stumble around in confusion, as if they wanted to celebrate but didn't know how. At first nobody would believe that this four-years' struggle had really ended. Men and women just stood about and stared dumbly at one another, wondering if it could be true.

Later, however, they did begin to celebrate. The cafés put the contents of their shelves upon the bars, every house door was opened and had "Welcome" written all over it, mademoiselles threw their arms around every man they met, strong men drank and wept for pure joy and women wept tears of gladness and sorrow all mixed in together. It was a gala day by mid-afternoon and I imagine every little village felt the exhilaration of the long-hoped-for moment quite as much as did Paris and Tours, Lyons and Marseilles.

That afternoon the General watched the surging mob of men and women of various nationalities welcoming the news in the square. People were beginning to get hilarious and drunken soldiers were being caressed by every woman that passed. I was feeling aglow with some kind of happiness that I couldn't quite define: there was a lump in my throat most of the day. Chilblaines was obviously tickled to death with the prospect of an early return to his home.... And then the General observed slowly, "Let them celebrate and enjoy themselves while they can! The poor creatures do not realize that the part of this business that's to come will be worse in some ways than what has gone before. It will be years and years of toil and confusion and misunderstanding and suspicion and squabbling before the peace and happiness and security which they are celebrating will be actually in their possession.... After a war like this, the peace is usually harder to stand than the war was.... Let them rejoice when they are assured that there will be no more wars! This war may be just the beginning...."

This declaration coming from the General served to dampen our spirits a little, but before the evening had come I slipped away and tried to join in the celebrating.... But there was no fun in it for me. I just couldn't be gay, no matter how hard I tried. I drank wine and even a sip of cognac, but the something inside that controls your feelings just refused to click. The more revelry I witnessed and the more hilarity that surged about me, the more poignant came my memories of Ben. How he would have loved this! He would have been in his glory in this mad multitude!

It was funny I should feel this way. I didn't love Ben, in the sense that I loved Clark. My feeling for him was something entirely different altogether. Yet I felt the loss of him every minute of the day. I guess it was like one of those wonderful friendships between men: I mean, I didn't look upon Ben from a girl's

point of view at all—he was just my pal, my buddy, my chum. And I guess it's as bad to lose your chum as it would be to lose your lover.

—2—

I was back in Tours again on the 1st of December after wandering all over that rainy country. Received a letter from Leon saying that he was at St. Nazaire in a hospital and expected to be sent home on the next ship out. He was going to write to me as soon as he arrived, and as soon as he was discharged he'd have to do something about getting me out of this army. This was a devil of a predicament to be in: I couldn't say that I wanted to go home, because I couldn't be sure I could get out when I got there. We'd simply got to wait until Leon's leg was all healed up, otherwise I'd be nabbed when I went up for discharge. I was beginning to get worried about it. The General was talking about asking to be sent back to the States. He said there were too many officers over there now and some younger man could do his work just as well as not. He asked me why I didn't get a discharge over here and travel around a little.... How in the devil could I get a discharge! If I could get one, I'd get married.

I spent Christmas with Clark in Paris, and we managed to have a good time. He told me, for the first time, how sorry he was to hear about Ben. "The big galoot was a good man in all the ways that count," he said, after I told him the details of the misfortune. "I'll always be thankful to him for his effort in your behalf—it was wonderful!"

He wanted us to get married, but I absolutely refused. "If I were out of the army, I'd marry you in a minute," I told him. "But I simply can't now.... Besides, it just doesn't seem right or decent, or anything.... I want to be married like all decent people are married. I don't want to be dodging M.P.s and worrying about babies and having to play two rôles all the time day in and day out. Can't you understand, dear?"

He did understand, but we couldn't either of us think of any way to speed matters along. And the worst of it was that he expected to be sent back to the States within a few weeks on some mission or other. I probably wouldn't get back over there for months.... But what could we do?

—3—

Our worst fears were realized. Early in January Clark told me that he was going back to Washington, leaving in three days.... And he was mad because I wouldn't marry him before he went. But I wouldn't—that was all there was to it. I'd got enough to worry about already without taking on any more worries.

A letter from Leon carried pleasant news. They took you from the ship when you landed in U.S.A. and made you take off all your clothes and take a steam bath while your clothes were being deloused. He said he hadn't figured out any way of getting around the delousing plant, and I'm sure I didn't know what I could do when that moment came. It began to look as if I was stuck in France for the rest of my life: couldn't go home for fear of a delousing plant!

Well, I could stick it out, I suppose, until Leon got well and could come over here to take my place.

God, but I hated to see Clark go! I'd be all alone in this man's army after he left. C'est la guerre, I guess.

—4—

At the end of January I received some letters from home which told me that Leon had his discharge and

was hanging around New York trying to figure out some way of getting back over. He couldn't get a passport under his own name, because I was using it, and he couldn't get one under his alias, because he couldn't show any birth record. I thought that in a pinch he could dress in my clothes and get one in my name—but after the wear and tear of army life he wouldn't make a very good looking girl, and it would have to be an extremity to make him do it. But what could be done about it? It would certainly be a shame to get this far with the impersonation and get caught—and in a delousing plant, at that! Would be like winning medals and then dying of the measles, as Ben said. Well, I'd got his address in New York and had got to tell him to do something pretty soon, because I couldn't stay over there forever! I was getting sick of it all. I didn't have any fun or excitement like I used to have with Ben. I never realized before what an awful difference a friend's presence or absence could make in anyone's daily life. The General said I looked as if he were working me too hard, but actually we weren't working any harder than before the Armistice. The only difference was that now we spent most of our time making investigations of thefts and property losses and damage suits brought by French citizens against the army and its members, whereas before we had a much wider and more varied program of work.

—5—

Just as I feared. I was doomed. The General got himself relieved and ordered back to the States and he thought he was doing me a good turn by arranging that I be sent back immediately also, so here we were, ready to embark, and I was just chilled through with expectations of what was in store for me. I hadn't the least idea what I was going to do, but just to be doing something I sent a cable to Leon to park himself wherever this ship docked and be ready for any kind of an emergency. I had to word the message very cryptically and in good terms, but unless he was too dumb to live he'd understand and be there.

What would happen next—God alone knew!... Also I hadn't heard from Clark lately. He was kinda peeved when he left Paris and I was wondering whether our little affair weren't just a brief romance after all. I'd certainly feel terrible if he decided to change his mind about me: he was the only one who knew about us, and if he went back on me now I'd feel ashamed the rest of my life. I mean, if I did get through safely—and I didn't see how I could!—I really ought to marry him to keep his mouth shut about my ever having been in this man's army. But I couldn't make him marry me—after all, I was not a ruined woman or anything like that, and I really hadn't any claim on him, except that I loved him a dreadful lot. That ought to be enough—provided he loved me.

However, a fig for that till this mess was cleared up!

Homeward bound, on board the U.S.S. M——!—and I knew every hour that passed brought me nearer to my doom. I liked sea voyages, but I'd be damned if I could enjoy this one. Just like riding to the guillotine.

I had a funny experience coming over. Happened to pass the sick bay and a fellow was lying there near the door so that I couldn't miss seeing him. I caught him staring at me, and then he smiled. I couldn't place him at first, but finally I did. It was that Lowery, the fellow with the toes that used to get Leon's goat back in camp. I went in and spoke to him then. "What's the matter with you?" I asked.

"Got my foot smashed in a cave-in and they had to take it off," he replied, much as if the whole thing were a matter of no importance.

"You don't look very sick over it," I said with a smile.

"Why the hell should I be sick over that?" he demanded with a laugh. "I've only got one set o' toes to mind now!" And he reached down toward his good foot. "Honest to God, buddy, they itch like hell all the time!"

I had to laugh. I was a regular pollyanna now. "There are advantages to all things, eh?" I observed, and I reached over and gave the disabled one's toes a dozen or so violent rubbings, while he just lay back and stared at me in amazement.

"My God!" he exclaimed. "I must be beaucoup zigzag!... Boy, war may be hell on some fellows, but it sure did you a hell of a lot of good!"

I pinched his big toe and left him with a laugh.

The big day was due to-morrow. I was desperate, and I evolved a desperate scheme. If it worked, I was saved. If it flopped, I was a stripped chicken.... Once again I started saying my prayers. There had to be some Omnipotent Power above who could spare a few moments in which to help me safely by that damned delousing plant! Might he take the time—I was a maiden in distress if there ever was one!

—6—

Leon was on hand at the docks in New York, although I don't know how he managed to get so close to the works. He followed me with his eyes and saw which truck I got in, then he hopped in a car, which he must have just purchased, and followed closely along.

We reached a camp somewhere or other over in Jersey and piled out of the truck.... Well, what happened was that I had five ten dollar bills in my hand and it takes a good man to withstand the lure of cold cash. I never went through that damned delouser after all, for I bought my way out on the promise that I'd return in ten minutes—and as far as that bozo knows, I returned. However, Sergeant Major Leon Canwick was himself in person this time, and he didn't mind undressing before anyone now: in fact he said he'd just as leave undress before the Queen of England if she asked him to. That's what the army did to him.

Well, I went into New York in his clothes, waited to hear from him. As soon as I knew that he was safe, I'd buy some clothes and hop for Wakeham. "Home, boys, Home, boys, 'tis home across the sea! Home, boys, Home, to the land of Liberty! We'll hang Old Glory to the top of the pole, and we'll all of us reënlist—!" But not this chicken.

I was still shivering from the nerve strain.... And, I wondered where my lover was to-night?

—7—

Speedy work on Sergeant Major Canwick: he painted his scar with some kind of grease paint, took his physical exam without a shiver, and was home again. Vyvy loved him more than ever and actually made me blush telling him about his wonderful letters!

I wrote to Clark as soon as I got home, but I hadn't heard anything from him and didn't know whether he was still in Washington or back in France—or anything else about him. Frankly, I didn't feel so good about it now. I wanted that man when I wanted him. And I was all dressed up now with no place to go. Auntie said my language was disgraceful but she didn't mind, so I spent most of my time with her. And poor Esky hadn't got used to me in dresses yet. He acted really funny: didn't know half the time whether it was Leon or me that was in front of him.

One afternoon Leon was getting ready to go out, when the doorbell rang and he was handy, so he answered it. A man in uniform rushed in and wrapped his arms around my dear sweet brother and was going to kiss him right on the mouth!

But Leon hauled off and pasted him one in the jaw, and there was such force in the blow that the visitor promptly desisted.

“What’s the big idea?” demanded Leon, without batting an eye.

“Why—uh—er——”

But just then I appeared and fluttered prettily into view. My hair was curled just the least bit at the ends and I was all made up to look my prettiest.... I almost fell down the stairs and into his arms, and all I could say was “Clark—you darling!”

“Oh ... Leony, you little devil!”

We forgot all about Leon. I thought he had gone out, but a few minutes later—about the end of kiss No. 11—the bell rings again and in pops Vyvy with a book under her arm.

“Look at it! Look what I’ve got!” she exclaimed. “It’s the very first copy, too!”

Well, Clark had never met Vyvy, but before we made any introductions, we both looked over her shoulder to see what kind of a wild animal she had captured. On the back of the book were the following illuminating lines:

*KOCKEYED RHYMES
OF A KHAKI KID*

By
Leon Canwick

My dear sweet love of a brother was a real genuine honest-to-God poet after all! Vive la muck of war!

What Clark and I did the rest of the evening defies description in mere cold words. Any remarks on my part would be superfluous.... Really truly, if any girl ever loved a man more than I did him, she belonged in a nut conservatoire!

A week later Clark received his new assignment sending him back to Europe within a month.... Naturally we were very rushed: one just can’t pick up one’s hankies and have a wedding!

There must be disappointments even in paradise. I mean, everything can’t be just sunshine and roses.... All of which is apropos of a letter I received from the Bureau of War-Risk Insurance, informing me that Sergeant Benjamin Garlotz had changed the beneficiary of his compulsory insurance policy on October 20, 1918, and that I was the beneficiary. General Backett was the secondary beneficiary. I didn’t know how to feel about it. The letter came to Leon, of course, and when he passed it over to me, I just had to cry; good old Ben ... must have changed his policy just after that dreadful experience at St. Nazaire and his unexpected promotion. And I thought at the time that he didn’t appreciate the promotion!... The money would go back to France where Ben’s body was. We would give it decent burial ... put a stone above it that would catch the eye of whosoever should pass ... and all who saw it would read there of a hard-boiled guy who had no one at home to mourn his heroic death.... As General Backett said, in telling me about the medal for Ben: “There weren’t enough medals to go round—but he needs no medal to make me proud of him!”

The most wonderful things never happen. It would have been so good to have Ben be our best man after all....

There was a wedding in Wakeham’s largest church. There were ushers in quantity, bridesmaids and flower girls, all the traditional pomp and splendor of a beautiful wedding service ... but there was no best man! My Clark could never in all his life do anything that would make me honor him and love him more than I did because he suggested this fine way of honoring the man who was the best of pals to both of us.... A man that could think of a thing like that and do it was almost too fine to be true. It injected a sad note

into what would ordinarily have been a festive occasion and we had to explain it by referring to Ben as a dear friend of Major Winstead's—but we were both glad that we did it. I mean, a thing like that makes you feel so warm and good—and it made us love each other all the more ... it was as if Ben's death bound us the closer and faster together. This was not really so odd, since we owed Ben such a lot: he was my friend, faithful and good to me; he was my tutor in the vulgar arts that make life interesting; to him I was indebted for much of a liberal education—an education which was blissfully completed during that honeymoon in the very land and among the very scenes of my adventure.

Back to France on *the* great adventure, the one and only adventure which a woman can't have without a man's assistance!— Back to the theater that had been “for men only”—but now the play was ended, the mask was off, the Canwick tomboy was a blushing bride: for I have to report that I still could blush!

And that is the Tail of the Tale, for since that first night beyond the altar I have conscientiously rendered unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and unto the Headman all that's left—for, after all, my prayers *were* answered. And HOW!

The rest is silence.

THE END

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