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"THIRTY DAYS HATH SEPTEMBER"

(A novel)

by

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- CHAPTER 1 -

1 September, 1947.

Ted Cummings buttoned his shirt and adjusted his tie. He reached for his coat and turned to the Doctor.

"Well, sir?" he asked quietly.

Dr. Fenton pushed aside his stethoscope case and leaned forward over the desk.

"Ted," he said, "I'll have to send you to hospital. It will just be for a while. I want them to do some tests, that's all." His voice sounded gentle and persuasive - too gentle and persuasive.

Ted sat down, facing the older man. He looked white and drawn and his hands were gripping his knees. "I want the truth," he said. "It's my heart, isn't it?"

"Well, it might be," answered Dr. Fenton slowly. "And, as I happen to be fond of you, I don't want to take any chances."

Ted raised his head until his eyes were on a level with the Doctor's. "I never saw you look more uncomfortable," he breathed. "In fact, you look positively ill yourself. You've got to tell me what is ahead of me. For Margaret's sake. For my own sake." He paused and bit his lip. The very atmosphere seemed charged with emotion. "For Dick's sake," he concluded.

At the last name, the Doctor rose wearily from his chair. In his face were etched the reflections of a thousand tragic scenes witnessed by him from the same chair in his thirty-two years of practice. But this was different. He had known and loved this boy all his life. Had Ted not been the best friend of Dick, his only son? Ah yes, this was indeed different. Dr. Fenton walked around to the rear of Ted's

chair, and gently laid his hands on the boy's shoulders. He fought to control the twitching muscles around his mouth. He was vaguely conscious of being surprised at the depth of his emotion. He had thought that his feelings were still benumbed by the news of his son's death. How long ago had that been? Ah well, no matter. He pressed his fingers more firmly into Ted's shoulders.

"All right, Ted," he said heavily. "It's pretty bad. You have a heart condition that we call endocarditis." Ted gasped. "Then you've heard of it," continued Dr. Fenton. "Yes, my boy, it's serious. You see, I would say you had only a month to live. I doubt whether even rest and hospitalization can prolong your life more than a matter of days."

In the reception room, the Doctor's buzzer rang. Outside, a bus charged angrily down the street. From somewhere else came the sound of a ticking clock. But in the office, there was no noise save the breathing and heart beats of two men. For long minutes neither moved. Finally the younger man stirred and Dr. Fenton dropped his hands to his sides. He returned to his chair behind the desk. He was once again the kindly but dispassionate man respected as the city's leading physician.

"Would you like me to break the news to your Mother and Dad?" he asked gently.

Ted shook his head.

"To Margaret?"

"She must know nothing about it," the boy muttered. "I'll just say the wedding will have to be postponed."

Once again the two men were silent. Then Dr. Fenton rose to his feet. Perhaps he was not so dispassionate. His face was ash-gray

and his fingers trembled.

"Ted," he began, "you know how I feel about this. There are so many things I usually say at such times, but I couldn't say them to you. I feel so helpless, so futile. I even feel that somewhere, somehow, Dick is looking accusingly at me. And I can do nothing - nothing!" He was slowly making his way to the door, with Ted following mechanically after. "Now don't do anything rash. Drop in and see me at the same time to-morrow. We'll be able to discuss things more calmly then."

"A month!" murmured Ted. His eyes were blank, dull, covered over with a million pin points of pain. Suddenly they filled with tears. "Oh why couldn't Dick have been spared if I had to go?" he cried. "We had so many dreams, so many plans. Now who is going to do all those things for him? There will never be a son to represent either of us! There will never be a fruit farm that two young fellows had dreamed of setting up!" He leaned against the door. "And Margaret! What of her? And Mother and Dad? Why did I survive those months in Holland only to face this?" He laughed harshly. "Dead of heart trouble at 27! It's all so hopeless." He straightened up and held out his hand. "Thank you for telling me, sir. And for all you've done. I'll be back to-morrow but I have a lot of thinking to do. You're sure I can count on thirty days?"

"As sure as I can be of anything like that, Ted."

"Can I play tennis to-night? Margaret and I had planned on a couple of sets and dinner at the Club."

"I wouldn't if I were you. You should avoid all strenuous exercise and get as much rest as possible."

Ted smiled. "It couldn't make much difference, could it? Good-bye sir. See you to-morrow." He closed the door behind him.

Dr. Fenton paused with his hand on the door knob and then walked over to the window. Ted was sauntering along the street, head down, hands in his pockets. What thoughts were running through his head, wondered the older man, what bitterness was searing his soul? What was it all about, anyway? He remembered how shocked he had been when a girl of 22 had died the year before, of cancer. But this was worse. This lad with the bright smile was his greatest link with the memory of his son. He couldn't die. He must-----

There was a tap on the door and his nurse entered.

"Mrs. McCullagh is next, Dr. Fenton," she announced. "Shall I show her in?"

"No, Miss Wilson. I can't see anyone else to-day. Say I've been called out on an emergency."

For the first day in September, the air was soft and balmy. Along the tree lined avenues, a few leaves fluttered lazily to the ground. Gardens were ablaze with their late summer exhibits. Everyone seemed to be out of doors in an effort to soak up as much sun shine as possible before the cool fall weather set in. Ted felt that he had never before seen so many happy and smiling members crowded onto the six courts and the surrounding terrace of the Riverview Tennis Club. He alone seemed to have a care or problem in the world. Yet he knew that that was not so. There was Judge Miller, whose wife was dying of cancer; George McLean, whose wife was suing him for divorce; Fred Hargreaves, whose leather goods business was supposed to be going on the rocks, and Bill Donnelly, Ted's closest friend since Dick's death, whose nerves had never properly healed from three years' bombing operations in the Air Force, and who had been unable to find a job that interested him.

Ted had wanted desperately to be alone, to prevent the passage of time, to avoid all contacts and, above all, to stop himself from thinking. But after he had left the Doctor's office he realized that the only way to keep his sanity was to talk to someone - anyone. He bumped into a young man on the street, so that he could murmur "excuse me." The young man only glared and said nothing.

His hand flew to his pocket. No cigarettes. He had to have one immediately. He dropped in to a cigar store. Mr. Caplan, the owner, knew him.

"The usual?" he asked, grinning a welcome.

"Yes," answered Ted shortly. Suddenly he wished to be alone. How could he have ever been anxious to talk to someone? He had so many problems that had to be decided forthwith. My God! How could he face his family! He flicked his tongue over dry lips.

"Nice day," ventured Mr. Caplan, as he reached out for a package of Ted's brand.

"Yes."

Nothing daunted, Mr. Caplan ambled over to the cash register. "The World Series will be starting soon," he announced cheerfully.

Ted was lighting a cigarette. His hands were shaking. He merely nodded.

Mr. Caplan passed him his change. He shot him a penetrating look, but Ted did not notice. He was already on his way out the door, blinking uncertainly in the sunlight. He swayed, and leaned momentarily against the glass front of Mr. Caplan's store. He could feel two or three people glancing at him. When the objects around him had resumed their proper perspective, he squared his shoulders. Where was he going? Everything seemed so hazy! If only he could shut off that sunlight, he might

be able to think more clearly. Margaret could help him. He must find her. He remembered that he was to meet her someplace. Ah! The Tennis Club.

He turned and walked slowly in that direction. It was funny, he was thinking numbly, how his life was so bound up in that place. It was there that he and Dick had battled three years in succession for the club championship. It was there that he had had his first date with Margaret. On a bench at the end of the courts, Dick had proposed marriage to Joyce. Or was it the other way around, he wondered.

He thought of his first meeting with Margaret.

It was July 1942 and he and Dick had been on their last leave before going overseas. They walked over to the Club one afternoon and were greeted at the door by Mrs. Clarke, perennial chairman of the dance committee. She let out a scream when she saw them.

"Why, boys," she boomed, "you're just like manna from heaven. Two men! Why, it's practically unheard of!"

Both the boys flushed. "You see.....," Dick began.

"I see you, and that's enough for me!" She advanced on them, and Ted thought of the mountain advancing on Mohammed - only this time there were two Mohammeds, and very embarrassed they were. "Got any girls?" she asked, and threw in a wicked glance for good measure.

"Girls?" Dick repeated, taking a deep breath. "Why, you see..."

The lady shook her head sadly and Ted was fascinated by the movement of her jowls. They reminded him of something. What was it? Something that came in six delicious flavours. But Mrs. Clarke was taking them into her confidence. "..... a sweet girl," she was saying. "My husband's niece, you know. Well, she is visiting us this month and has

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a little friend with her. Lovely girl, too. Just between the three of us, I thought of you two boys immediately. I want to get up a party and come to the dance here to-night. What do you say?" The forty occupants of the lounge were conspicuously interesting themselves in some form of conversation or literature.

Ted flushed scarlet. "Well, you see....."

Mrs. Clarke modulated her voice, as she plunged into a reverie. "Now I wonder whether we should have dinner here or at the house. Here, I guess. Mary is getting to be such a problem if I bring anyone home to dinner. And maids are so hard to get nowadays. Bertha went to work in munitions, Jessie married a soldier and has gone to live on the coast." She sighed, and the whole room seemed to heave with her. "Mary will probably end up as Commander of the Red Cross. I don't know what the world is coming to!" There was a pause while she allowed her extensive audience to absorb the wisdom of her words. "I have it," she suddenly decided, and a profound quiet settled over the lounge. "You'll gather at my house at 6.30 for sherry - oh! I forgot! You boys are officers in the Army now. Something a little stronger might be welcomed, eh?" She reached out and favoured Dick's ribs with a playful dig. He fell back three or four paces. "Ah well, I may be able to scare up a highball or two! After that we will come here for dinner and then Mr. Clarke and I will leave you young people to enjoy yourselves at the dance. I know what you officers are like on leave! Mr. Clarke was an officer in the last war, you know. Well, I must speak to the chef so that we have something special. See you at six-thirty!" She beamed at the two speechless youths, the piano in the corner, the radio, the magazine-covered table and all the members in the lounge, with equal impartiality.

At the door of the kitchen she turned around. "I forgot to tell you that the girls are wonderful dancers and so pretty. Till six-thirty then!" With another sly look and wave of the hand she disappeared.

Everyone in the room began to chatter at once and Dick and Ted were bathed in amused glances.

"Hell!" growled Dick, as they tottered to a chair.

"Oh! I don't know. Often when you think you're going to be bored, you have your best time. Remember the Pearson's party? I had to drag you there and then at four-thirty in the morning I had to drag you home! By the way, whatever happened to Snookie Smith?"

"Snookie Smith! Snookie Smith! Why worry about Snookie Smith when we have to worry about these two tomatoes! I know one thing - Mrs. Clarke's niece is yours!"

"O.K.! Sight unseen, I'll take the niece. Anyhow it's Mr. Clarke's niece and he's not a bad old stick. Now let's get out on the courts and have a set. I'm getting tired of being stared at."

With the aid of Ellen, Dick's twin sister, a scheme was devised so that a message would conveniently call Dick and Ted away if the girls should prove too young and boring.

"Now don't forget, Sis," cautioned Dick. "We are to be at the Club for dinner at seven-thirty, so at seven o'clock sharp you put in a call for me. I can explain to the Clarkes that Headquarters is calling and wants Ted and me to report down right away. But if the girls are interesting, I'll just pass the call off as a routine thing." Ellen threw her brother a glance of disdain. "Well," he said defensively, "you yourself said you'd caught a glimpse of the girls and that they were pretty

terrible. And Ted and I were forced into the thing. We weren't given a chance to refuse."

After he had left, Ellen turned to her mother with a broad wink.

"Those two conceited young men may not know it," she chuckled, "but they are in for somewhat of a surprise to-night."

And indeed they were. They arrived at the Clarke's house punctually at six-thirty. Both forced a smile when Mr. Clarke opened the door.

"Come in, boys, come in!" he said jovially. He was a small man, who was physically overshadowed by his wife, although she seemed subservient to his every whim. At least in public. He led them to a cloak-room. "Just throw your hats in there. It's going to be a grand night for the dance, isn't it?"

"Yes, sir," they chorused. Their eyes were constantly seeking out the drawing-room. Suddenly Mrs. Clarke was approaching them. With a brown velvet dinner dress trailing the floor, and with a feather ornament jutting out from each shoulder, she looked more enormous than ever.

"Aha! There you are!" she yelled heartily, as if they had all been engaged in a game of hide and seek. "I want you to come in and meet the girls now. You lucky boys, you!"

With one arm around each of them, and leaving Mr. Clarke to trail behind, she swept them forward to the threshold of the living-room. There she suddenly stopped. Ted's eyes widened at what he saw and Dick skidded down the two steps leading into the room.

Mrs. Clarke's voice rang to the rafters, and doubtless beyond.

"Here they are girls," she trumpeted. "This is Lieutenant Richard Fenton and this tall fellow is Lieutenant Ted Cummings. And boys, the girl in blue is Mr. Clarke's niece, Margaret Thomas, and the one on the right is her friend Joyce Parsons.

Mr. and Mrs. Clarke beamed from the entrance while the young people muttered shy 'How do you dos.' "Your sister has betrayed us," hissed Ted as he and Dick advanced across the room. Dick nodded miserably. Mr. Clarke busied himself pouring drinks while Mrs. Clarke tried to smooth over the embarrassed moments of silence. As planned, Ted sat down near Margaret Thomas while Dick devoted himself to her friend. Both eagerly accepted the rye and waters that were proffered.

By seven o'clock, the boys were sipping their second drinks and all traces of embarrassment were gone. Ted was glancing at Margaret with more interest than common courtesy would dictate. Dick was smiling cheerfully for no apparent reason and Mrs. Clarke was talking. She was reaching the climax of her favourite discussion - the opening of the second front. Having quoted the views of such authorities as Marshall Stalin, Winston Churchill, H.V. Kaltenborn, the Hearst press, and Major George Fielding Elliott, she was reaching her own conclusions.

"-----and I would hate to think that one of our boys will be sacrificed until we are absolutely assured of success. After all, the Russians have no right to complain. We held the fort alone while they played up to Hitler and Ribbentrop." She suddenly turned to her husband. "Isn't that so, dear?" she asked.

"Yes indeed," he said, a little too brightly. He sounded like a bit player in the five hundredth performance of the same play, thought Ted absently.

"Well then," continued Mrs. Clarke, "I think we are absolutely....."

A clock struck seven and the telephone rang. Dick started, and a few drops of his drink spattered on to his uniform. Ted was on his feet.

"I'll answer it," he said.

"No, dear. It's quite all right," and Mrs. Clarke left the room.

"Did anybody hear the news to-night?" Margaret asked.

"Hello? Mrs. Clarke speaking," they could all hear from the next room.

"Yes. There's nothing new," said Mr. Clarke. "I'm jolly glad they're stepping up the air attacks. Soon they'll be sending a hundred planes over every night."

Ted was still on his feet. Dick was trying to catch his eye. Joyce regarded them strangely.

"Oh yes dear! How are you?" came from the other room.

"Bill Donnelly arrived in England safely," ventured Mr. Clarke. "His mother just heard to-day"

Ted sat down. "Oh, did he?" he said vaguely.

Dick rose from his chair and passed cigarettes to the girls.

"Oh! please use mine," said Mr. Clarke.

"Oh Ellen, no!" thundered Mrs. Clarke from the next room.

"It can't be that important!"

Ted and Dick exchanged quick glances.

"What's the matter with you two?" asked Joyce. "You look as if you have St. Vitus Dance."

Dick smiled bleakly. "I'm just wondering if that's one of Ted's old flames on the phone. They chase him everywhere." Ted glared. Margaret stirred slightly and flushed.

"What about the poor girls?" Mrs. Clarke was asking petulantly. "Really Ellen, I think these generals are absolutely devoid of feeling. If two boys can't enjoy a little leave without being called to Headquarters, it's a queer thing."

The boys were scarlet. Silence settled over the living-room.

Then Ted sprang to his feet. "Why," he cried, "Ellen must be calling about us!" His voice sounded strange to his own ears.

"Does this mean the party is off?" asked Margaret. Her voice seemed to be void of all inflections but her bosom was heaving rapidly. She wore an open neck evening dress and Ted took a moment off to be enchanted.

"I don't know," he said finally.

"I'm sure something can be worked out," said Dick.

"Well, all right, Ellen. I guess there's nothing we can do about it." They heard the receiver crash on to the hook and Mrs. Clarke was standing in the doorway. She was trembling with rage.

"It just isn't fair," she said, spreading her arms out before her. "You boys deserve a leave and we go to work and arrange such a lovely party and it has to be spoiled."

"Yes," said Dick. "We heard."

"It just isn't fair," thundered Mrs. Clarke.

"Oh my!" sighed her husband.

"Maybe if they phoned Headquarters," suggested Joyce timidly.

Ted's face lighted up. "A wonderful idea!" he shouted. Mar-

garet was eyeing him rather strangely. "I'll call them and I just
bet everything can be straightened out-----" *ITALICS*
END.

Yes, thought Ted, I called all right and carried on a
fascinating conversation into a dead line. The generals were placated, the girls were escorted to the club, and the course of four
lives was changed. Now he was going to the club again and two of
those same lives would be changed once more. But now there would be
no hope, no happiness.

"Goddamn it!" he muttered hoarsely, as he aimed a vicious
kick at a small stone.

CHAPTER 2

2 FEBRUARY, 1945.

The young man turned over in his bed and groaned.

"Why is it that as soon as I get to sleep you wake me up?" he asked.

"Because," answered the nurse, "it's six-thirty and time for your breakfast."

"If I were on a night shift, I might welcome breakfast now," murmured the young man, as he sat up and rubbed his eyes. "But I'm not on a night shift and I'm sleepy!" He grinned owlishly at her. "Unless of course you mean to climb in here with me."

"I most certainly do not want to climb in there with you - now or any other time!"

"Just as well. You look awful at this hour of the morning."

"It's not me, Captain. Blame it on those bleary eyes you're looking through." She drew herself up and attempted to look like an efficient nurse of the Canadian Army. But her eyes were twinkling.

"Open your mouth. I want to take your temperature."

The young officer looked shocked. "Nurse!" he said accusingly. "Have I not told you that there are certain rituals a man must perform before he does anything else in the morning? Hand me my gadget!"

"I'll hand it to you," she said smiling sweetly. "Right over the head. Before you do one thing, you put this thermometer in your mouth."

The thermometer was popped into his mouth. He winked at the nurse.

"You know, Captain," she said, "there is exactly one minute

in the day when I am able to get in one word with you. And that is when I have your mouth full of thermometer. So now relax. I have lots of news. First you are off the seriously wounded list. Secondly the bandages will be coming off your legs to-day and you will start walking around to-morrow. And thirdly you will be shifted out of your nice private room into one of the wards. No more special privileges for you, my fine feathered friend." She cocked her head on one side. "And oh yes, Captain Fenton. I just received some news this morning that made me deliriously happy." She reached forward and pulled the thermometer out of his mouth. "Huh!" she grunted. "Normal again, you big fraud. What was I saying? Oh yes! Well, I have been moved. I'm on a draft to the continent," she paused. "The news just came through this morning," she concluded aimlessly.

Dick Fenton looked serious. "Oh! I am sorry," he exclaimed. "You know, Nance, they say that every woman falls a little in love with her doctor. I think it's probably equally true that every patient falls in love with his nurse."

Nursing Sister Marvin smiled. She was an attractive girl in her early twenties. Her face was soft and unlined and her body looked plump and desirable beneath the austere nurse's uniform. Only her eyes looked hard - hard with three months' constant attention to men flown back from the front with every type of desperately serious and bloody wound possible. Now those eyes looked wistful. She discarded her flippant tone and reached for the patient's hand.

"A little, eh?" she asked softly. "Sometimes the nurse would like to fall too, but with thirty patients to look after, with enemas, amputations, shrapnel, slop pails and hysterics, there is little room

for anything but the bare essentials." She laughed harshly. "When some of those boys have asked me to be more than a nurse or a mother to them, I've often longed to. No pretense. No questions asked. Just a few moments blessed relief from suffering and fatigue."

Ted was stroking her hand. "Why," he said, "you're tired out. Aren't they going to let you have a rest before sending you off?"

She shook her head. "I'm leaving here to-night and our draft should be on the continent within the week. I'll certainly miss you. I have often wondered what would have happened if you had been my only patient." She withdrew her hand and smiled. "Then I would have had the time to practice all my wiles on you!"

"I would say you'd done well enough. But for you probably I wouldn't be here!"

"That's rubbish and you know it. But I love hearing it. By the way, my relief is here. Nursing Sister Wilma Barnes. Confidentially, she's an old hag. One of those frustrated old maids with a perpetual hate on. Her buck teeth will scare you to death."

"I don't scare easily, Nurse. After you, I feel as if I could stand up to anyone! And for heaven sake stop gassing like an old windbag, will you? Hand me that gadget! I'm a big boy, I know, but I'm also human."

Dick was unprepared for what happened later. He had just dozed off after lunch when there was a tap on the door. Nursing Sister Marvin poked her head around the corner.

"Are you looking beautiful?" she asked.

"What is it now?" he countered drowsily. "Pill, hypo, rubdown? I assure you, Nurse, I never felt better and am in need neither of a sedative nor a laxative. In fact, you can take the afternoon off!"

The nurse went over to him. "Up you get," she ordered, as she fluffed out his pillows. "I have seen you in all stages of despair but there's no use scaring Nursing Sister Barnes right at the start."

"Oh!" he grunted. "So the old bat's coming in, is she?"

"The old bat is in!" It was a soft, liquid voice. Cool water in the desert. Sunbeams dancing gaily on a sparkling ocean. Dick held his breath. He was conscious only of dark red hair, and enormous grey eyes looking reproachfully at him from a round pale face.

Nancy Marvin burst out laughing. "Just my idea of a joke!" she said rather too brightly. "I told him that you were a frustrated old crab, Wilma. Wilma Barnes, meet my favourite patient, Captain Dick Fenton."

"Hello," said the girl simply.

"Hello," said the boy in the bed.

"And watch your language with Wilma," cautioned Nancy. "She's not a hardened old character like I am. She just landed in England two weeks ago and this is her first posting."

"I'll make everything as easy as I can," said Dick, without taking his eyes from Wilma's face. Heart shape, it was. And provocative.

Nancy wavered uncertainly. At length she seemed to make up her mind. "Come on," she said briskly. "This one isn't the only pebble on the beach, though sometimes you'd think so. We've spoiled him to death." She grabbed Wilma and they left to visit the rest of the ward.

For several moments Dick remained motionless, his eyes riveted on the doorway. He looked puzzled. He reached for a pad and pen on the table beside his bed.

'Dear Ted,' he wrote. 'The most extraordinary thing has just

happened to me. Five minutes ago a new nurse walked into my room. I only know that she has reddish hair and the largest pair of grey eyes that I've ever seen. And you know, I think I'm in love. Me! Why, it's incredible!!! I guess that's the sort of thing you can expect when you spend five weeks flat on your back. I can hardly wait for her to come back again so I can have another look. Maybe the feeling I had in my chest was just indigestion."

There was a knock at the door. Dick looked up hastily.

"Oh hello Tom," he said. "Come on in." He laid aside his pad and pen.

"Say! Have you seen the new nurse? What a dish! The fellows in the ward are beside themselves."

"Oh, they are, are they? Well, you just run out and tell 'em that I saw her first and hands off."

Lieutenant Thomas Goodall looked surprised. "Wait a minute, did you know this babe before?"

Dick lowered his voice. "Gosh no," he replied casually. "I've only seen her for two minutes. Can't you take a joke?"

"Well, if you're interested, you'd better not waste too much time in formalities. She's like the new moon - she has all the wolves howling. Or is it a full moon?"

"Wolves don't need a moon," Dick said, "but thanks for the tip. You look as if you have something on your mind."

"Yeah. I can't get them to tell me how my stomach is coming along. I feel fine but they don't seem to want to let me out of here. Isn't that just like our army? Thank God we have some smart Allies in this war."

"Uh-huh. Dick had heard this type of conversation before and it left him unimpressed. "Perhaps the people in their armies are thanking God for us," he said.

Tom shot him a look of disdain. "Some armies are perfectly run," he answered vaguely. "For instance, I have been studying up on the Russian Army. The most wonderful comradeship exists between all ranks there, and promotion is entirely on merit. There's none of this darned kowtowing to the right people that we have here."

"Naturally not," answered Dick, trying to keep from smiling. "If the right people think maybe you don't like them, you're not around long enough to kowtow to anyone!"

"It's all very well to joke," said Tom sourly. "You just haven't studied it."

"Neither have you - first hand." Why is it, thought Dick impatiently, that no Communist or would-be Communist ever had a sense of humour?

"Now don't misunderstand me," said Tom hurriedly, as if divining Dick's thoughts. "I'm no damned Communist, though I think we could learn a lot from them if we were not too smug and self-satisfied to try. But I'm so sick of having these industrialists run everything. Now in Russia-----."

"Tom, don't think I'm rude, but I'm awfully tired and really we've gone over all this before. Why not try to convert somebody else?"

Tom rose to his feet. He was a tall man, probably about thirty-five years of age, with a heavy black moustache and an inclination towards corpulence. Dick thought him flabby - both mentally and physically. Right now he was smiling, rather wanly.

"You're feeling better?" he asked, changing the subject abruptly.

"Yes, thanks," Dick answered. "My bandages will be a thing of the past by to-morrow."

Tom sighed. His eyes were accusing. "You're lucky. I want to meet some friends of mine in Aldershot next Friday, but it looks as though I'll be out of luck. I wish I could get some definite news. I never knew that ulcers could be such a bore."

"And by the way, Comrade-----" Dick began.

Tom winced. "Dick, don't call me that, even in fun," he snapped. "Do you want to give people the wrong impression?"

Dick laughed. "I just wanted to tell you that this is my last day as a Capitalist. To-morrow I am to give up this room of splendour and I will be herded in with the proletariat."

Tom glared. "You're impossible," he muttered. He mustered another bleak smile. "See you later," he said, and left the room.

Dick lay quietly for an hour or so, and let his mind drift along in any channel it chose. He thought of his good fortune, and for the thousandth time silently blessed the surgeon who had refrained from amputating his left leg, smashed though it had been. Now, the bandages were to be removed, and the doctors promised him no stiffness, though there would be an unseemly scar or two. But what was wrong with a scar, he asked himself. It would almost vanish, in time. By now, his family must be over worrying about him. Twelve cables they had sent in those first three weeks, begging to be reassured. Yet for two weeks, his name had been on the dangerously wounded list and only now was it being removed from amongst the seriously wounded. What a strain it must have been for them all at home. But now he was safe and well and he was told that probably he would be restricted to administrative duties in England for

some months. And he was sure the war would be over in six weeks. Everyone was talking that way. He hoped so. For everyone's sake he hoped so, but especially for Ted's. How much more could his nerves stand, even if he were to remain uninjured? Dick shuddered involuntarily. What right had he to be safe and sound while Ted was out there? He wasn't to think about it, the doctors had said, but what did they know of such things! Even that psychiatrist Johnny did not seem to understand. Dick tossed restlessly on the bed and then reached over and turned on the radio. The B.B.C. offered two programmes. He dialed to one. It seemed to be a lecture by a clipped-voiced woman on bird life somewhere. He quickly flipped the dial to the other station. Chamber music. God, he thought, how I hate Chamber music! He found the newly-formed American Forces Network. Popular records. That was more like it. It reminded him more of home. A new record was just starting. 'Sleepy Lagoon'. Ye Gods - that was the number that was so popular in the summer of '42, just before he and Ted had left for England. He smiled, in spite of himself, when he thought of that first evening at the Tennis Club with the Clarkes and their two guests, Margaret and Joyce. The music was 'Sleepy Lagoon' and he remembered they were playing it when he first danced with Joyce -----.

ITALICS
START

"Hm!" he murmured lazily into her ear. "You dance beautifully."

"All the better to catch the men with," she replied.

Dick decided to try another tack, so after a pause he murmured
"Lovely orchestra!"

Joyce sighed and snuggled close against him. The scent of lemon rinse was in his nostrils. So was her hair. Every time he breathed, three or four of them tickled the inside of his nose. He felt an overwhelming desire to sneeze.

He sneezed.

"Oh! I'm sorry," he exclaimed as he disengaged himself hurriedly and fumbled for a handkerchief.

"Don't tell me you're catching cold," she said sternly.

Dick felt so dismayed that he sneezed again. "Oh no!" he replied hastily. "Too much smoking, I guess!" His nose was blocked and his eyes felt bleary. He suddenly hated the Clarkes and this cool, slim young woman standing before him. Ted came dancing by with Margaret and took time out to slap him on the back. Dick hated him, too.

"Don't just stand there," said Ted. "Get mobile."

"We'll go out for a breath of air," Joyce announced as she linked her arm through Dick's. They sauntered out onto the veranda, threading their way through tables and chairs. Dick nodded to one or two of the members he knew.

"One of these tables?" he asked Joyce.

She shook her head and led him down the stairs. The moon drenched the tennis courts with a soft, mysterious glow. The scent of roses filled the air and was wafted to and fro by a warm summer breeze. Even in the middle of a large city, a hush seemed to have descended, at once drowsy and stimulating. It must have been on such a night that Adam first decided to investigate the mysteries of life, and ever since that time, on similar nights, unsuspecting and unwary males have asked the same question in a million ways. It was a night for the passionate and worldly love makings of Antony and Cleopatra, a night for the tender and heart rending yearnings of Romeo and Juliet. It was the perfect summer evening of 1942.

Dick sneezed again.

He blew his nose and murmured apologies. Joyce held firm to his arm. She sighed wistfully.

"Where to?" he asked.

"To that love seat in the corner," she replied softly. "You can make love to me there and no one should disturb us for a while.

Dick dropped his handkerchief. All he could say was 'Uh?'

Joyce smiled tenderly. The night seemed to hold her completely in thrall. "Who can tell when such a magnificent opportunity will occur again?" she asked. "The moonlight, the roses, the faint strains of the orchestra, the soft summer breeze and, above all, you and me."

Dick found himself in front of the love seat. Joyce's lips were close to his. He backed up one pace - and sat down.

"But I've only known you for three hours," he protested.

"And in a week or two you'll be gone," she said. Her voice became stronger, urgent. "Don't you see? This isn't just something that's cheap and silly. It's terribly important. It might develop into the most beautiful thing in our lives. Oh Dick! Let's give it a chance!"

Her eyes shone. Lemon rinse, roses and the scent of a sweet but intoxicating perfume enveloped him. She leaned against him and her shoulder strap became dislodged, revealing part of a soft, white breast that shone like alabaster in the moonlight. Her arm reached around his neck.

Slowly the expression in Dick's eyes underwent a change. They were brightened by a spark of understanding, then filmed with the thousand subtle shades of tenderness and desire.

Eagerly he bent his head to hers. "You darned little fool," he muttered. "You may be right at that."

ITALICS
END.

Dick smiled at the memory. A pale shaft of afternoon sunlight fell across his pillow, and he blinked. Then more serious thoughts seemed to run through his mind and a shadow fell across his face.

There was a knock on the door. He shut off the radio. "Come in," he called.

The door opened and for a moment he thought that Joyce stood there. But no - this girl had reddish hair, not black, and she was two or three inches taller. Her smile was more dazzling and the complexion clearer.

"Asleep?" asked the new nurse.

He smiled at her. "No! Just woolgathering. Come in and tell me the story of your life. I need pepping up."

The girl's smile wavered. "I'm afraid I have neither the time nor the inclination. And I doubt if it would pep you up. I only came in to tell you that a Captain Fred Anglin phoned. He will be in to see you to-morrow. He wanted to know how long you'd be in, how you were etc. etc."

"Fred Anglin!" Dick exclaimed, in surprise.

"I think he wants you for some job or other," Wilma said. "He was speaking to the Colonel."

"He and Ted and I were together on an Infantry Course last year," Dick explained. "But he's in the Intelligence Corps now and I don't know what he'd want with me."

"Well anyway, that's the message." Wilma turned to leave. "And by the way, it looks as though we won't be taking any more patients into the hospital for the next two weeks. So, unless someone in one of the wards gets much sicker, you should be able to keep your room." She reached the door. "Spoiled brat!" she muttered. Then she was gone.

Dick reached out for the pad and pen on the table. "Well, Ted, it's a few hours later. I had hoped I was only fooling when I talked about my new nurse before, but unfortunately, I wasn't. She's just been in again and my God! she's attractive. Strange though. She can't see me for sour apples!! What the hell will I do now? And apparently Fred Anglin is around and wants me for some sort of job in the Intelligence Corps. He's coming to see me to-morrow. It should be a most interesting day for me, all in all, and I can only hope that you, too, will find something cheerful in it.

Take care of yourself - I'll drop you another line to-morrow night.

Yours,

Dick."

- CHAPTER 3 -

1 September 1947.

"Hullo darling! Waiting long?"

Ted looked up quickly. What was it about this girl that had bound him to her, whether they were to-gether or apart, for over five years? It was not her voice, which was often nasal, more often flat. Her hair was no particular colour and she was certainly too thin for her height. I guess it's because she's an ordinary girl, he thought, and I'm an ordinary guy. But she did have beauty! A beautiful mouth fashioned for laughter and kisses. A twinkle in her eyes. And a new born radiance. She most certainly was beautiful. More beautiful every day. But now that beauty was not his. He had no right to it. His throat contracted. He turned his head away. He could not bear looking at her.

"Why Ted! Whatever's the matter?"

"Nothing," he said. "Have you your car?"

"Yes. Did you forget something?"

Ted reached for her hand. Oh God! he thought. Let me think of some easy way. "No. But it's hot, and I thought we might go out along the lakeshore for dinner. Just for a change."

"But our reservations here! And we were going to play tennis."

Oh God, please. "I thought a change might be nice." Supposing Dr. Fenton's wrong? After all, there has been no electro-cardiogram. No hospital reports. No medical consultation.

"Ted, are you feeling well?"

"Perfectly, dear." Doctors have made mistakes before. They are only human.

"Then don't look at me as if you didn't know me, and tell me what this is all about."

If I could only stop this terrible throbbing in my head! If I could only think! "Nothing's the matter. Let's get out of here." He spoke more sharply than he had intended.

Margaret said nothing and led the way through the lounge to the front entrance. A waiter called his name across the room.

"Mr. Cummings! Telephone!"

"Thanks," he said. He walked to a corner of the room and sat down heavily. He lifted the receiver from the table as if it were fashioned of cast-iron. Margaret stood beside him. She looked puzzled.

"Hullo?.....Oh! Dr. Fenton!.....Yes, fine thanks..... No. Margaret and I aren't going to play. We're going to drive out to the country for dinner."

There seemed to be a pause on both ends of the line. Ted was tapping his foot on the floor.

"Sir. About our little chat to-day. Couldn't you have been wrong about that fellow? Perhaps a spell in hospital would do the trick?"

There was another pause. The Doctor must have responded in the negative. "I see," Ted replied. "Well, don't worry. I've just seen him and he's not going to do anything rash. But thanks for calling, sir..... All right. Good-bye."

He placed the receiver on the hook and turned to find Margaret looking at him anxiously. Her face was pale and her eyes seemed larger than he had ever noticed them. "What is it?" she whispered.

"Nothing." He grabbed her arm and piloted her through the room. "One of the lads from my old unit came to see me the other day and I advised him to consult Dr. Fenton. I thought that he might have had ulcers or something. But now Dr. Fenton just phoned to tell me that the boy was

really seriously ill."

"Oh! I'm so sorry," said Margaret. Nonetheless she looked relieved and the colour flooded back to her cheeks. Poor kid, thought Ted. She's happy because she thinks that someone else is dying of something, and that other people are going to suffer. But here I am the one who is dying, and it's my people who will suffer. He tightened the grip on her arm.

They were quiet as Ted steered the car out of the city into the darkening countryside. The air was cool and fresh. Margaret sighed contentedly and laid her head on his shoulder.

"Your idea of a drive was such a good one," she murmured, as she snuggled closer and sighed again. "Just think, in twenty-six days I'll be Mrs. Ted Cummings." She reached up and ran a finger over his cheek. "Am I taking your mind off your driving, darling?" She laughed. "I wonder if I'll have the same effect on you in five or ten years?" Ted said nothing. His face in the gathering dusk was ashen grey but Margaret was too excited to notice. But when she asked him a question and received no answer, she stared up at him in surprise and pulled away.

"Ted," she cried. "Draw over to the curb. Stop the car."

"Why Margaret, is anything....."

"Kiss me, Ted. Kiss me and tell me everything is all right. For a moment I felt that something was wrong - you seemed to be somewhere else altogether." The car was at a standstill and she flung herself into his arms. "Oh my dearest, if the time ever came when you didn't want me, I think I'd die. Say that will never happen. Say you love me."

"Oh honey," he breathed, after he had kissed her urgently on the mouth, the hair, the throat. "I do love you. Maybe I don't say it often

enough and maybe I don't say it well, but you're my girl. You always will be my girl. No one else has ever meant a thing to me and no one ever will. You know that."

She kissed him lightly on the chin and disengaged herself from his arms. "That's what I wanted to hear." She smiled at him but her eyes filled with tears. "I had the feeling that someone was walking over my grave, but I'm all right now."

They drove along for a while in silence.

"Do you remember the night that we met?" Margaret asked presently. As it was a question that one of them asked the other about once a week, it required no answer. "We've changed so little since then. And we've been so lucky. I knew right from the start that I was going to marry you if it was the last thing I ever did. You were a cooked goose, darling. When Joyce and I got home that night, we compared notes until morning. It was funny that both of us should have fallen in love on the same night. But our techniques were certainly different. Of course, so were the objects of our affection!"

Margaret rambled on, reminiscing and thinking out loud while the miles sped by. As they approached their destination, Ted grew desperate. He realized that what he had to say should be said before they were in a lighted building. He wanted his face in the shadows so that Margaret might not notice the truth lying hidden there. The time to speak was now. He reached over and covered one of her hands just as she was nearing the climax of her tale.

"And when you didn't even try to kiss me good-night....." she was saying.

"Honey, we'll have to delay our wedding two or three weeks."

".....I was so insulted I could have kicked you right in the shins. What did you say?"

"Now don't get upset, but we'll have to postpone our wedding for two or three weeks."

"Ted Cummings! How could we? Why should we?"

Once more he stopped the car and turned to face her. She had withdrawn her hand and was sitting, stiff and uncomprehending, in the far corner.

"Darling," he said as naturally as he could, "try to understand. The firm wants me to go down to Philadelphia for them on a big deal. If I make a success of it, it will mean a big boost for me. Maybe I'll even be assistant sales manager."

"But surely you've told them about the wedding."

"Why, of course. I told them about it when I arranged to take my holidays in September. But this just came up a few days ago and they've all been busy explaining what a great opportunity it is, what it will mean to my future and how I shouldn't miss it. It's a sort of convention but there will be a big business deal involved as well, and I shall be the firm's only representative there." He was pleading earnestly now, almost as if he believed it himself.

Almost, but not quite.

"So that's why you have acted so strangely to-night," Margaret said. Something still seemed to mystify her. "When do you leave?" she asked.

"About the twentieth, I think."

"Well, then, we'll just slip away and get married ahead of time, and add Philadelphia to our itinerary." She smiled at him. "See, darling? It's all so simple!"

"No, it isn't. Do you think for one minute that I could pay any attention to either the business deal or the convention if we were on our honeymoon? As it is, I'll be breaking my neck to be through with it and get back to you."

"Well, then, let's get married ahead of time, and you can go on to Philadelphia yourself. It's terribly unlucky to postpone a wedding and everyone will wonder what's behind it."

"Let them wonder. It will do them good. Besides, if we got married ahead of time, nothing would be ready for the big church wedding that both you and your mother have planned on. You've always told me that, if you're only going to get married once, you want to have something special to remember. Well, we can still have all the trimmings two weeks later - October the eleventh. All we have to do is notify the guests, and change our hotel reservations."

"And the caterers, and the minister, and the people who are coming in to renovate the house and about six thousand others."

Ted reached over and tried to draw her to him, but she resisted. She looked more dazed than annoyed. "I know how hard it is on you, honey," he said tenderly. "After all, it was to have been my wedding too. What else do you suppose kept me going for that awful year? After Dick was wounded and left the Unit, I never knew from one day to the next whether or not I'd be able to keep going. It was only thinking of you that did it. And the year and a half that I've been home seems like an eternity. But now we have an apartment and my salary is more than enough for us and it looks as if everything is going our way. If I should get this other promotion, it would mean that we could afford to raise a family right away."

"All right, you win." Margaret's lips were smiling but her voice sounded tired. "Still, there seems to be more to this than would

meet the eye. Is Mr. Courtland still your boss?"

"Why, yes. As a matter of fact, it is he who is arranging this whole thing."

"He and his wife are coming over to have dinner with Mother and Daddy to-morrow night. I think I'll just have a little chat with him and make sure he doesn't send you to Honolulu the day our son is born."

Ted took a deep breath. "Margaret," he said and his voice was harsh, for this was an angle to which he had given no thought at all, "you must promise me that you will never mention a word of this to Mr. Courtland. Do you understand? Not a word!"

There was silence for fully a minute.

"Take me home, please," Margaret said in a small voice. "Mother and I will have a lot to do and we might as well get started right away. If you are hungry, you can come in and I'll fry you an egg. As for the wedding, I'll plan for October the eleventh. To Mr. Courtland, not a word. Any other instructions?"

There was a grating of gears as Ted started the car and headed for home. His chest ached, and he did not know whether it was emotion, or whether his heart was behaving badly. He found it difficult to breathe and opened his window wide. Why didn't he tell Margaret everything now? No, she would insist on marrying him right away and it would ruin her life. Far better for him to let on that he was leaving for Philadelphia but instead to go to the hospital under Dr. Fenton's care. Once there, he could break the news, not only to Margaret, but to his mother and father as well. He felt his hands trembling on the wheel, and then he was aware that Margaret was talking to him.

"Ted Cummings, I've loved you for five years and through that whole time we have never had any more than a minor disagreement. But if to-night is to be a preview of our married life, then I'll be a very disillusioned girl indeed. First of all you calmly announce that our wedding is to be postponed after everything is arranged. Then you snap my head off when I say I'm going to talk to your boss. Finally you just keep quiet and drive along as if you were going to your own funeral. None of it makes sense."

"It will, honey. Everything will turn out all right. I promise you."

It might be all right for you in four or five years, he thought. You will be able to fall in love again and marry someone else. He stole a look at her. Her face was white and drawn, and the smoothness of youth was being supplanted by the lines and shadows of maturity, but he loved everything about it. The thought that she might later be able to fall in love with another man, the thought that he might soon be just a faded photograph or two and a bundle of letters tossed into the attic, was like a hard blow in the stomach. He felt winded and sick. What was it all about? Why was he brought so close to learning the essence and something of the meaning of life with this girl only to have everything snatched away from before his eyes? And anyway, what was it one should leave behind? The love and goodwill one stores up soon fade from memory. The world was no better a place for having had Ted Cummings spend twenty-seven years in it. Twenty-seven years! Just a youngster, his father had called him last week. And his mother was forever introducing him to people as her baby. Nothing he could ever say would stop her. Everyone would laugh, his mother would beam, he would get red in the face and there it was.

He knew that he should say something to assuage Margaret's feelings. She sat there, in the opposite corner of the front seat, completely baffled, waiting to be allowed to reject an overture of love and affection. If he were to speak only a few words, she would accept both his decisions and his overtures, and they would ride back to town at peace, in their accustomed harmony, and her head would be snuggled against his shoulder. But what can I say, he wondered frantically? If he were to essay one more lie, he was sure that Margaret would discover something of his secret. Too much physical contact, or even words of tenderness, would break him down and destroy him. Besides, he was a little disappointed at her for having put up so many arguments. Could she not divine that the whole thing was desperately serious? Could she not place the unlimited faith in him that he would have been willing to place in her? He was well aware that he was being unreasonable, and it only made him more stubborn.

The minutes crept by with excruciating slowness. He stole a glance at Margaret. Her head was pressed against the door of the car and her eyes were closed. Were their last few days together to be spent under this ghastly cloud? Could he not drop some small hint of the real nature of the postponement? No. Better to have the cloud of misunderstanding hanging over them than the shadow of death. She seemed asleep now, but of course she couldn't be. Her mind must be feverish with doubts and conjectures as to any hidden reasons for the delay, and frantic with worry over all the changes of plan that such a delay would entail. Ted's own brain was spinning like a top. He felt as he always did when he drank too much gin - dizzy, sick and depressed. He slowed the car down to twenty miles an hour. A steady stream of traffic rushed by him. His eyes throbbed

and ached from the glare of the on-coming headlights. The night was full of the sweetness of new-mown hay and the cool September air caressed his face. He still felt hot.

Will it be any harder to leave her now than it was when I left for England? Yes. He knew her much better now and he loved her with his whole being. Furthermore from this there was no return. And yet he had not always been in love with her. Or had he? His mind flew back to that first night, their first date. She had seemed cool and detached and she took everything for granted.

ITALICS
START "Lovely night, isn't it?" he had murmured as they were waltzing. The Clarkes had long since returned home and Joyce and Dick seemed to have disappeared.

"Very nice," she said.

He tried again. "You waltz beautifully," he said.

"Thank you," she replied.

He stopped dancing and glared at her. "Dammit," he growled, "don't you ever enthuse about anything?" Fred Hargreaves, who was ploughing his wife around the room, nudged him in the ribs and gave a loud chuckle. Ted flushed and resumed dancing.

"Do you want me to tell you that you're the best dancer I've ever danced with?" Margaret asked. "If you do, then I am very disappointed in you."

"You might at least act as if you're enjoying yourself," Ted pouted. "You look and act as if you're bored half to death."

"Well, I'm not," she retorted. "Or rather I wasn't till this conversation started." They were dancing very formally now, stiff, far apart, eyes averted. The orchestra broke into a dreamy fox trot. Slowly

and almost imperceptibly they drew closer to-gether. In no time at all Ted's lips were resting in their accustomed position on Margaret's temple, and her arm had almost completely encircled his neck. Many of the older couples smiled indulgently at them. Unaware of any undue attention they might be receiving, the young couple danced as if no one else was in the room.

"Do you like tennis?" Ted suddenly asked.

Margaret drew back. Her eyes twinkled. "Am I supposed to be breathless and say how much I adore it?"

"I only thought that if you and Joyce liked to play," he replied with dignity, "we could have a foursome over here to-morrow."

Margaret's eyes grew softer. "I'd love that," she said.

"Good," he said and smiled. "I feel better when you answer like that." He suddenly looked very young. "I seem to have no defense against sarcasm."

After that the evening had been more pleasant. Margaret was more at ease, although her behaviour still puzzled him somewhat. Ted was unable to determine whether she liked him a little, a lot or not at all. He finally decided that she liked him a little and that he liked her a little. Love was the farthest thing from his mind.

It was almost three o'clock when he and Dick had left the girls at the Clarkes' and started for home. Dick was quiet and he looked mysterious.

"What the hell's the matter with you?" Ted asked him jovially. "Didn't you have any fun? Goodness knows you were roaming around the courts for long enough."

For a while there was no answer. Then: "Do you believe in

love at first sight, Ted?"

Ted was thunderstruck. He could only stop and stare. But he noticed the bewildered expression on his friend's face and the traces of lipstick on his lower lip. Truly this was a new Dick Fenton. Ted whistled.

"Well, I can certainly see that you do, and now you can wipe that lipstick from your mouth, old boy."

"Oh!" exclaimed Dick, apparently disconcerted. "It's all beyond me. Joyce claims that.....Oh well! We can get a good look at them to-morrow in the daylight. That will probably change our minds."

"Whose minds?" asked Ted suspiciously.

"She'll probably look a fright in shorts," pursued Dick.

They arrived at the corner where they were to separate to reach their own homes. Usually they stood and talked there for minutes, if not hours. This night, however, Dick seemed in a rush to be off.

"'Night, Ted. Call you first thing in the morning. I'm tired." He walked hurriedly away.

Ted scratched his head. "Well," he muttered, puzzled. "I'll be damned....." *ITALICS* *END*

He was approaching the same corner on his way to Margaret's home. A red light flashed at him from nowhere, and he jammed his foot on the brake. Margaret was jerked forward and opened her eyes.

"Sorry," he said. "Have a good sleep?" He knew it was a foolish question and was glad when Margaret ignored it. She was still an able mistress of sarcasm on occasion and he was still awkward in coping with it.

She gathered up her purse and straightened her hair. In a

couple of minutes they had drawn up before her parents' new house.

To his surprise, she smiled. "Darling, I had better go in alone. I can explain to Mother, and then we can beard Daddy and everything will work out all right." She reached over and kissed him lightly on the cheek... He made no move. "I love you," she whispered. Before he could reply, she had slipped out of the car and was running swiftly up the path. She's the only girl I ever knew who can run gracefully, he thought. His throat contracted as she waved to him from the doorway. She was going in alone to face all the questions and cross-examinations. Still, he knew it was for the best as he was in no position to stand up to much. And Mr. and Mrs. Thomas might be more shrewd and discerning than Margaret if they were to look at him.

He drove Margaret's car on to the driveway and slipped the key into the glove compartment.

Then he turned and walked slowly home.

- CHAPTER 4 -

3 February, 1945.

"Well," asked the Doctor, smiling. "What do you think of your legs now?"

Dick wanted to return the smile, but his face looked haggard. "You're sure they're mine, eh, Doc?"

"Quite sure. A couple more days of being up and around and you'll begin to get your strength back." His tone became more serious. "You're a very fortunate boy. First, you're alive. Second, you have both your legs. Third, you'll have only a couple of small scars to show for it all. See that you get up for a few minutes this afternoon. If you're very tired just walk over to that chair, sit in it for a while and then walk back to bed. Miss Barnes here will give you a hand, won't you, Sister?"

"Yes," said the nurse, without a great deal of enthusiasm.

The Doctor patted Dick on the shoulder. "See you later," he said and left the room. Wilma followed, bearing medical charts under each arm.

For an hour Dick lay on the bed, tossing and turning. He felt so tired that he was unable to sleep. He knew that he should be rejoicing over his good fortune and he was grateful, but somehow not as elated as he had expected to be. Here he had been on his feet for the first time in six weeks and his legs were in good condition, yet he was not nearly as excited as he had been when he had first met Ted in the finals of the Club championship. Or when he had placed fourth in his officers' training class. What's the matter with me, anyway, he wondered angrily. He was unable to delude himself for long, for he knew only too well what was the matter. He had been trying to think of Joyce while it was Wilma who was

occupying his heart.

He was attempting to bring Joyce's face into focus and was having difficulty. He could only visualize Wilma's glossy red hair, Wilma's large grey eyes and white skin. What was it about Joyce that had captivated him, he asked himself frantically! 'Buttons' he used to call her. That was because of a snub nose. He shut his eyes tight. He pictured dozens of snub noses, but none of them seemed to belong to Joyce. Finally a more aquiline nose appeared on the scene. Grey eyes and red hair fitted into place and Wilma once more dominated his thoughts. He sighed and opened his eyes.

"Nuts," he grunted.

Why he liked Wilma Barnes, he did not know. She paid him scant attention and indeed, seemed to like him not at all. He tried so hard to be pleasant and natural that he realized he actually appeared gauche and conceited. It had never been that way with Joyce. Ever since that first night on the tennis court, it had seemed as if they had known one another always. Joyce had been confident that theirs was a true and deep love, and Dick had been inclined to agree. Except for a very short time. The day after they had met, Joyce had called him 'darling' in front of Ted and Margaret. Dick had been embarrassed. "Please don't do that, Joyce," he had said, self-righteously. He felt particularly annoyed that Ted should have heard it. He had been meaning to speak to his friend about Joyce and her romantic ideas but had failed to get around to it. He found it hard to believe that he had fallen in love and would now place someone ahead of Ted. He felt that Ted, too, would find it difficult to understand. At any rate, the day was ruined. Dick tried to avoid Joyce and find Ted alone so that he could explain. Ted was too

jovial and kept up a rapid fire commentary of inane chatter. Joyce looked abashed, and took refuge from Dick's cold glances in a seeming indifference. All three sought the company of Margaret, who seemed amused by it all, and not much concerned. Dick remembered well the tennis games, when he and Joyce had teamed up to trounce Ted and Margaret. And afterwards the dinner at the club - how could he ever forget it!

ITALICS
START. They had cocktails, and started their dinner with tomato juice. By the time the meatless main course had been placed before them, the well of conversation had run dry. Every film any of them had seen in the previous two or three months had been reviewed. All the important movie stars had been appraised. Ted and Dick held a spirited discussion on the merits of the St. Louis Cardinals, but it was soon evident that the girls did not follow baseball. Books were mentioned by Joyce, but it soon developed into a monologue because Margaret claimed that she found the modern novels trashy, and the boys had had neither the time nor the inclination to read more than Life and The Readers' Digest in their two years of service. Ted's dissertation on radio fell flat because all the important and popular personalities were on summer vacation. The war had eliminated practically all forms of tennis championships, and, as no one felt inclined to discuss the possibilities of a second front, conversation had dwindled to an occasional "Salt and pepper, please" or "My, I thought the orchestra was in good form last night." More often, as the main course neared its end, the silence at the table was broken only by the crunching of melba toast or celery. To make things worse, a summer storm sprang up with lashing winds and rains beating against the wooden walls of the building. Dick always felt that

there was nothing more depressing than a tennis or golf club in the rain. He gloomily laid down his knife and fork. He was certain that his brief and romantic interlude with Joyce was at an end. He was glad of it.

Fate decided differently. A voice behind them thundered out a "Hullo!" "What an appalling night!" was added for the room at large. It was Mrs. Clarke. Mr. Clarke waved and smiled, then sat down in the far corner to talk to some friends. Mrs. Clarke came to the table. She beamed at them. The two boys jumped to their feet. Any diversion would be an improvement.

"Well, isn't this nice," she said, and she sounded like a bear that had stumbled on a barrel of honey. "Please sit down, boys. I can only stay a second." She reached out and pulled over a chair from an adjoining table. "Did you have a good game? Isn't it too bad about the rain! I do hope we have a nice August. Mr. Clarke and I are going to the Muskoka Lakes, you know. How was the dinner?" She helped herself to some celery. "I don't know how long we'll be able to hold on to our chef. One of our old members has been appointed vice-president of that new war plant and I just know he's been making overtures to Henry to be one of the cocks out there in their commissariat." She quivered with indignation and absently began to toy with a roll that had been left on the table. She made a great effort to brighten up. "But you all look so happy. It must be wonderful to be so free from worries and responsibilities. I often wish I could just jump into the Army and get away from it all." She took a bite of the roll.

"I want to thank you again for the lovely dinner last night," said Ted politely.

"Yes, wasn't it fun!" Mrs. Clarke's mouth was full of roll

and her voice sounded muffled. "And it was such a lovely night for the dance. You know, Mr. Clarke proposed to me right in the middle of a dance floor. 'Marie' he said, 'I want you to know.....'"

"Don't you think it's time we were moving my dear? I'm sure these young people are much more interested in their own lives than in ours." Mr. Clarke had arrived at the table and had laid his hand on his wife's shoulder. The boys started to rise once more, but he waved them back to their chairs.

"But John," protested Mrs. Clarke, "you proposed so beautifully and," she added, gazing archly at the two embarrassed officers. "I just wanted to make sure the boys knew how."

Mr. Clarke looked apologetically at the dinner guests and hurried his wife away. Silence hung over the young people like smoke over a factory.

"But John," boomed Margaret suddenly, "you proposed so beautifully!" It was a devastating satire of Mrs. Clarke and everybody laughed. The party at the next table heard it and they laughed too. Soon the whole dining room had taken it up. The din was so great that the chef poked his head out of the kitchen door to see for himself the cause of such riotous behaviour.

Only Margaret seemed to remain calm and serious. "Come, come," she said sternly, as her three companions rocked from side to side in helpless paroxysms. "It wasn't that funny."

The tension was relieved. The boys had asked the girls to a concert. Dick saw Joyce squeeze Margaret's hand under the table and murmur a 'thank you'. His heart warmed to them both.

Dick and Joyce walked home from the concert hand in hand.

"Let's never have a misunderstanding again," breathed Joyce.

The air was cooler after the rain and the green lawns, shining in the glare of the street lights, winked and glinted at them as they passed. The clouds were being swept from the sky, revealing the always breathless extravaganza of moon and stars.

Dick felt uncomfortable. He would have withdrawn his hand had it not seemed rude. Instead, he pressed Joyce's hand more tightly and murmured unintelligibly but reassuringly.

"Everything's all right now though," said Joyce. She leaned a little against him and hummed a few bars of 'Blue Skies'. Fleecy clouds once more obscured the moon. They reached a vacant lot and the protection of a large maple tree. A squirrel scurried up one of the branches. Joyce drew Dick into the shadows and interlaced her hands on the back of his neck. She shed the perfume of youth and of romance, and it enveloped her in an aura of mystery and of life. Her eyes glowed tenderly and her lips were soon soft and yielding under his. Dick wondered vaguely why he was doing this. He wanted to soft-pedal this attachment, not become more involved in love making and emotional scenes. He would break away and walk her quickly home.

She ran her fingers through his hair and brushed her face against his. "Isn't it exciting getting to know people and finding out they mean a lot to you?" she whispered.

This was ridiculous. Ted would be waiting for him on their street corner and wondering what had become of him. Anyway, he wasn't terribly interested in all this. "Yes," he whispered back, and kissed her again.

"Aren't we lucky to have another beautiful, romantic night?" Joyce asked after a while. "It's a good omen, darling."

That word! Really it was silly between two strangers. Besides

no one had ever called him darling before. He would have to tell her not to do it again. But she was so sensitive. How silly it all was. He wondered idly if she had used lemon rinse again. He buried his face in her hair.

"Did I tell you what a wonderful time I had last night?" she asked him. She was holding him close now, as if she would never let him go.

What's she doing holding me so tight, he wondered. He felt that he wanted to free himself from her arms and dash off - off to Ted, off to the army, off to some girl who would not make a guy feel so trapped. He must get away now. This minute. "I had a wonderful time too," he said and his voice sounded husky and unfamiliar. He pressed her tightly to him.

Suddenly the wayward clouds scampered off and a bright moon destroyed their privacy. Only a thin branch protected them from the lighted street, with its stream of summer traffic, and the sidewalk with its occasional pedestrian. Joyce tilted back her head and laughed.

"We must move," said Dick, as he glanced around.

Joyce brought his head down to hers, "you're always worrying about something, aren't you, darling?" she said, and a myriad lights were dancing in her eyes. "Can't we just relax and enjoy life as it comes along?"

Dick caught his breath. "Relax?" he queried, with a wavering grin. "No. But we can enjoy life as it comes along."

Later, when he reached the corner nearest his house, he looked for Ted, but in vain. "I'll explain it all to him in the morning," he thought. After a couple of steps, he stopped short. "What is there to explain?" he muttered aloud. He stood still for some time, his forehead

furrowed, one hand stroking his chin. At length he appeared to have reached a decision. He nodded and smiled to himself and walked briskly home. Overhead the moon beamed and every star in the sky winked playfully at him. *ITALICS* *END.*

Yes, Dick was able to visualize the whole scene, but he could not see Joyce's face. He could remember the whole conversation, but he could not hear Joyce's voice. He could recall the moments when her lips met his, yet feel no thrill. He felt more depressed than ever. And now that he gave it some thought, he remembered Nancy Marvin telling him that, while coming out of the ether after his operation, he had called for his mother and for Ted. No mention of Joyce.

Voices sounded outside his door. His pulse quickened. His depression dropped away from him. Wilma! Why was he always fated to fall in love at first sight? For love it must be. Of course, this feeling for Wilma could fade and his love for Joyce return stronger than ever. That was it! A temporary infatuation! He felt much relieved.

There was a knock at the door.

"Come in."

Wilma ushered in a tall, thin young man in his middle twenties. His brown eyes crinkled in a warm smile and he advanced to the bed with outstretched hand.

"Dick!"

"Fred!"

Wilma watched them from the door. "I told him your bandages had been removed this morning and that you had taken your first exercise in six weeks but he waved me to one side. He told me I mustn't impede the war effort. And it's not even a visiting hour! It's just as well

he and I come from the same town!" She smiled warmly at Fred Anglin and withdrew. Dick felt a pang. Was it jealousy? Wilma poked her head back around the door. "Just ten minutes!" she sang out. She was prettier than ever.

Fred whistled. "Just ten minutes! She drives a hard bargain! Well, I'd better get right down to brass tacks." He placed his brief case beside the bed and pulled up a chair. "You look swell, Dick."

"Thanks, Fred. They tell me I'm pretty lucky."

"Yeah. Now you'll be out in two or three weeks."

"I hope so. I'm sure sick of this place."

"Gee it's good to see you again. How's your old side-kick, Ted Cummings?"

Dick's face clouded. "Still in the thick of it. I wish he could get something like I got and have a good rest. I feel terribly guilty being here."

Fred lowered his eyes and stared at his boots. "At least you've been over there. I'm fated to stay in England forever. And that's what I came to see you about, Dick."

"Yes?"

"Yes. I was speaking to the doctor who operated on you and he says your category will be lowered. No more front lines for you. In other words, you will be fated for England, too."

Dick nodded. He had already discussed that possibility with the Doctor and he knew that his category would be lowered for at least six months. He could go back to a training centre in Canada as an instructor, but he did not wish that. Not with Ted in France. And less than ever now. His category would allow him to remain in England in an administrative capacity and that was what he wanted.

"So I am offering you a job. A job with me, in the Intelligence Corps. Interested?"

Dick laughed. "Me in the Intelligence Corps? Why, I barely passed my junior matriculation!"

"You are still a damned good officer and the type we need. I've been to London and the powers-that-be have concurred if you are agreeable. I need someone to work with me in the Reinforcement Unit areas."

"Tell me more."

"First of all, are you interested? Because, to give you some idea of the type of work, I will be forced to reveal some trade secrets that are not generally known."

"Yes, Fred, I'm interested. As long as I'm going to be in England, I might as well chase a few spies around. Will I get any extra rank or pay?"

"I doubt it. The Intelligence Corps isn't noted for its generosity in either department. That's why we have such trouble holding onto our good men. They are all seduced sooner or later into some fancy staff job. And don't believe that your job will be glamorous. I doubt if there will be any spies, and the work is apt to be tedious and routine. Still, you will be largely your own boss, you should be able to move around the countryside a bit and I really think you'll like it. If you don't, you can quit. Still interested?"

Dick liked Fred. "Count me in. I'm sure I'll enjoy working with you or for you - whichever way it is."

A smile flashed across Fred's face, transforming a thin, angular face into one of charm and character. Gone was the seriousness as Fred

allowed his youth to triumph over his sense of responsibility.

"Swell," he said. "We should have some good times." He looked at his watch. "Hullo!" he announced with surprise. "I've stayed two minutes too long. I'd better leave before Wilma throws me out. I'll be back to-morrow with the gen and meanwhile you get some rest." He gathered up his brief case and his cap. "So long, partner. And don't forget. You haven't committed yourself if you should happen to change your mind."

Dick leaned back against the pillows. He felt exhausted and his head was spinning. He closed his eyes. If only he could sleep. In no time at all there was another knock at the door. "Wilma!" he thought and sat bolt upright.

"Come in," he called, and he forced his voice to be clear and fresh.

It was not Wilma. It was Tom Goodall.

"Oh," Dick grunted, and he did not sound as cordial as he would have wished. "Hullo, Tom."

Tom hung over the foot of the bed. He was obviously aggrieved. His large, black eyes were sullen and accusing. "I wanted to come in to see you earlier but I heard you were not allowed visitors," he said pointedly.

"Nor am I," Dick snapped. "Captain Anglin just dropped in to see me on business."

It was Tom's turn to grunt. "Well," he asked grudgingly, "how do you feel?"

"All right, but rather tired."

"I suppose that means that I should get out."

Dick managed a smile. He felt sorry for Tom Goodall, and his conscience bothered him when he was not pleasant to him. "Drop in after supper and we'll have a game of cribbage."

"O. K." Tom seemed only partly mollified. He sauntered slowly to the door. "What is this fellow Anglin with?"

Something too casual in the tone caused Dick to glance up sharply. Tom's face was a blank.

"Oh," said Tom quickly. "Something hush hush?"

"Oh no!" Dick answered, and his voice, too, sounded overly casual. "Some staff job I believe." He wondered what connection, if any, there was between the two men. "Fred and I went through officers' training to-gether."

"I see. I was just wondering where I might have seen him before, that's all." He was about to say something further on the subject, then abruptly changed his mind. "See you later," he said and was gone.

Dick reached out for the pad and pencil beside him. He discovered his last letter to Ted which had not yet been posted, and he decided to add a few lines. "Believe me," he wrote, "this has been a most interesting day, and I'm exhausted. Fred Anglin did want me for a job in the Intelligence Corps and I accepted. My bandages were removed and my legs look amazingly well, though they're about as muscular as match sticks. I walked for the first time in six weeks - at least two yards - and I feel as if I have been over the assault course. I have also given lots of thought to Joyce and am going around in circles. Do write and tell me if you can remember Margaret perfectly - her eyes, her hair, the way she speaks. I'm all balled up.

"Sorry I can't be brighter but I'll try harder next time.
I keep wondering if there isn't more to this Intelligence Corps thing
than meets the eye.

Dick."

- CHAPTER 5 -

1 September, 1947.

The grandfather clock was booming out the hour as Ted opened the front door. Eleven o'clock! He closed the door carefully and locked it, and crossed the hall. His family must be in bed. All the lights were out in the living room. He walked slowly up the stairs. Each footstep seemed to require endless effort and concentration. He realized he had not eaten since noon. He halted on the third stair from the top. Would he go down to the kitchen and make himself a sandwich? Could he swallow even a glass of milk? He stood there in the dark, scratching his head. Suddenly it all seemed very funny. He checked an insane desire to laugh. He crept up the last three stairs. He felt sick, and staggered to the bathroom. He clung dazedly to the toilet bowl and retched. He retched until he was sure he could stand it no longer. Fortunately his mother was listening to the eleven o'clock news, and the noise from the radio protected him. He ran some cold water in the wash basin and bathed his face. A quick glance in the mirror warned him that he should avoid his father and mother until the morning. He brushed his teeth and tip-toed past his parents' room.

Immediately the radio was turned down. "That you, Ted?"

Why was it that he was never able to pass that room without his mother hearing? "Yes, Mother."

"Bill Donnelly called, dear. Do you want to call him back to-night?"

Bill was to have been best man at his wedding. "No, Mother. I think the morning will do."

"Did you have a nice day?"

"Yes, Dad." Probably they would both want to hear about it.

"I'll tell you all about it in the morning. Good-night!"

"Good-night."

No sooner had he closed his door than his mother opened it. She was a spare woman in her late fifties and her hands moved constantly when she talked, which was often. Her husband was twelve or fifteen years older than she and she ruled him as she did the rest of the house - benevolently but completely. At least, she believed it to be completely. As Ted was an only child, it was not until the coming of the war that he had the final say about his own activities. However, since he had returned home early in 'forty-six, Mrs. Cummings had been wise enough to interfere very little in his affairs. When he and Margaret insisted on waiting a year and a half before marrying, thereby throwing away the best months of their lives, she told everyone that that was their own stupidity. And, when they insisted on attending to all the details of the wedding themselves, and tired themselves out in the process, that was their concern also.

"Is anything the matter, dear?"

"No. Mother. I'm just a little tired."

"You should have a healthy colour after your summer holiday, even though you only took a week. Yet here you are as pale as a ghost. You need more sleep, young man. And don't worry so much about this wedding. Everything's going to be just fine." She surveyed him critically. "Just fine," she repeated, but she was frowning.

"Yes, Mother." He kissed her tenderly on the cheek and propelled her to the door. It would be even harder to tell her the truth than Margaret. After all, it was conceivable that Margaret could find another love, but his mother could never find another son.

Mrs. Cummings smiled, but doubtfully. "Well, sleep tight," she said.

But, when the clock struck three, Ted still had not slept at all. His head was splitting and emptiness was gnawing at his stomach like a living thing, yet he did not bother to move. The same question was still spinning around in his brain. "What should I do with my thirty days?" To that, Ted Cummings had no answer. He knew, of course, what he would like to do. Marry Margaret and disappear with her to some isolated retreat. But that was just what he must not do. Margaret must be left free and unencumbered. He could at least help her by making sure of that. For his family, he could do nothing.

He stared despondently out of his window. Patches of clear sky were visible through the row of elms towering above the house. It was sultry and there was not a rustle of air through the leaves. He raised himself on one elbow and looked down. A car purred by. A man and woman in the front seat were pressed close together. The car turned the corner. There was a hush. The city was asleep. Yet he was able to distinguish lights in three nearby houses, and several rooms were ablaze in the Abbott Apartment house. What was it? Revelry? Worry? Sickness? Even death? He shuddered slightly and snapped on the bed light beside his bed.

"Coward," he muttered, and turned it off.

Would he carry on until the twentieth or so, and then get out of town by himself? That was too melodramatic and unnecessarily grim. His family would have to know the truth. So would Margaret. They should be with him at the end. After all, he was not the only man to die in his twenties. He was not the only man whose dreams vanished in a puff of smoke. But then he was one of the few to whom fate could say 'you will die on Wednesday, October the first at half past five in the

afternoon.' A death sentence! Perhaps he could hope for the fourth or fifth of October. Fate might grant him a short reprieve. He was not sure that he would want it.

Then, with blood-chilling suddenness, the thought of suicide crossed his mind. His pulse raced wildly and beads of perspiration stood out on his brow. He realized that the thought had been in the back of his mind ever since his talk with Dr. Fenton. How simple it would all be. How could it be wrong? He was going to die anyway. An eerie excitement vibrated through his body. How could he do it? He must try to make it look so natural that even Dr. Fenton would not guess. He started up in bed. The thrill inside him was almost sensual in its intensity. When would he formulate his plan? Now? He put one foot out on the carpet. Slowly he dragged the other one from under the bed clothes. He stood up, wavered, and collapsed in a heap on the floor.

He revived in about an hour. One arm was still lying across the bed. When he had begun to lose consciousness, he must have clutched at the covers and thus broken his fall. He lay quite still for a moment. He felt no pain anywhere, so apparently he was not even bruised. His head was still aching, but, as it was lying on his left arm, it could not have hit the floor. He picked himself up and fell back across the bed. Two more hours must have passed. He awakened to find himself shivering. A glance at his watch showed him that it was almost six o'clock. It was pouring rain and the elms were bobbing back and forth, back and forth. The birds in the park were making themselves heard as they prepared for a new and busy day. They would soon be leaving for a new life down south. In about a month. Thirty days. Ted dragged the covers over him and closed his eyes against the burning pain in his sockets.

He was drained of all emotion. Surely he would be able to

think clearly! He must decide on his line of action. Courage returned. Or was it indifference? At any rate, he dismissed the thought of suicide from his mind. Perhaps around the twentieth of the month or such time as he would be unable to act normally..... A lifetime with Margaret squeezed into nineteen days! Probably the cloud of the postponed wedding would be constantly over their heads. He would try to make it up to her in little things - the small attentions that he so often neglected. Then on the twentieth he was supposed to leave for Philadelphia. Well, he would not go away. It might be wisest then to enter the hospital. Perhaps he could even reconsider suicide if he could only discover an effective, suspicion-proof method. To enter a hospital and know you would never come out alive! Or to snuff out your life with your own hand when you could have so much to live for! He tossed and turned savagely as panic and terror sought to control him. Death! What was it anyway? What did it mean? Would Dick be waiting for him somewhere or would it be a nothingness, the end of everything? Surely everyone, no matter how devout, must have some hidden, if not openly avowed, pang of doubt about life everlasting. What about still-born babies? Could they have souls? Who could judge them? And how about Ted Cummings? What sort of life had he led? How would he be judged? Supposing he were just laid in the cold earth and that was that? Then what would have been the purpose of it all? What was the purpose of his death anyway? Was there any meaning to life? There must be, but what? Maybe the minister, young Steven Savage, could help. He was an army veteran with a practical approach to life and Ted liked him. Then, too, he must talk to Dr. Fenton, as a medical man who had lost his son.

If only he could understand what life and death meant! If only he could feel that his having been on earth counted for something!

He thought of his mother. All her life she had worked hard to give him every advantage. All she asked out of life was that she could rule her husband and be proud of her son. Her husband, a stock broker, was only too glad to be ruled as long as everything was made comfortable for him, and Mrs. Cummings was only too glad to ensure that everything was. Once, about twelve years previously, Mr. Cummings had shown signs of restlessness and developed an extra-curricular interest in his secretary. After three dinner dates and a furtive visit or two to her apartment, the blond young woman announced that she was leaving for another job. Mr. Cummings never knew why, but was too relieved to do anything more than thank providence. From that day forward, his private secretary was a cousin of Mrs. Cummings, a tall angular woman in her fifties known in the office as The Moustache. Her relations with her employer were correct.

Again, during the depression, Mrs. Cummings was faced with another crisis. The brokerage business was barely making ends meet and Mr. Cummings' income was cut by almost two-thirds. At that time Ted was twelve years of age and attending the most exclusive boys' school in the city. Mrs. Cummings had no intention of removing him from that environment and placing him in a public school, no matter how else she had to economize. So she spent three months studying dress designing, which had always been a hobby of hers, and procured a job in the city's most select department store at a time when people were being dismissed by the thousands. She did little but greet the customers in ladies' dresses, but her name was synonymous with success, her husband was one of the city's best known citizens, and the store was very happy to pay her three hundred dollars a month. She worked there for six years. She

had promised her husband that she would resign when his salary was twice hers. In 1937, when she was earning four hundred and fifty dollars a month and was a personality of distinction in the world of fashion, his salary topped a thousand, and she reluctantly handed in her resignation. She had succeeded in keeping Ted in exclusive schools and she had taken a great deal of responsibility from her husband's shoulders. She was generally regarded as a model wife and mother, but hers was too positive a personality not to have acquired more than her share of enemies.

She was determined that Ted would never get as far away as boarding school, and so he received all his schooling in the city. She wanted to be all in all to him, so she learned to ski, and played active games of tennis and golf at an age when most women have confined their most strenuous activities to the bridge table. Bridge Mrs. Cummings did not play until the advent of the war. She felt that it would take her too often away from her son. Her husband played poker once a week with a group of his friends and they were both content to leave bridge to others. After Ted joined the Army, they felt isolated from their fellows. They joined a bridge club and, within a year, they were amongst the most sought after players in their community.

Until Ted and Dick had become fast friends at the age of fifteen, Mrs. Cummings had done her best to screen her son from any too close a companionship. Dick was the first close friend Ted had ever known and Ted entered into the relationship gratefully and with all the passionate enthusiasm of youth. Dick could do no wrong and, where he led, Ted was happy to follow. Dick never took advantage of him and gradually eased the relationship into a fifty-fifty partnership. All through college, where they studied identical courses, they were called 'The Twins'

and rarely was one ever invited anywhere without the other. Innumerable were the co-eds who interested themselves in either one or the other, but sooner or later they were all forced to admit defeat. They could not fall in love with two men at once, which was apparently what they had to do to make any progress with either. Several even tried various means of breaking up the friendship, but all attempts proved futile.

Mrs. Cummings watched the friendship grow and ripen with mixed feelings. As soon as she realized what was happening, she was cold and distant to Dick, but in Ted's presence she always managed to be the essence of cordiality. Dick was secretly wounded, but unfailingly polite and cheerful. Mrs. Cummings then began, whenever it was humanly possible, to plan trips out of town with her son and husband, but these rarely materialized. Mr. Cummings even took one of his rare stands against his wife's attempts to break up the relationship, although he knew his son so little that they were both embarrassed when left alone together. When Ted at length understood why so many trips were being planned with Dick excluded, he refused to go.

Gradually he underwent a change. He became more thoughtful and less selfish. He lost a slight stutter that had always plagued him upon meeting strangers, and a rather timid and wistful smile became, more often than not, an extensive and happy grin. He was always the more serious and introspective of the two, but he soon found that most of his troubles vanished into thin air now that he had someone with whom to share them.

Mrs. Cummings could not but fail to notice all this, and she soon appreciated what Dick's friendship had done to her son. In spite of

herself she grew fond of this boy and came to love him almost as she loved Ted himself. They became fast friends and Mrs. Cummings set about to rule him as she ruled her husband and son. Dick always yielded the small points of contention but remained adamant on the less frequent major ones. He encouraged Ted to do the same, in as subtle a way as possible, and Mrs. Cummings never realized that her command was often forfeited.

On one point Mrs. Cummings was determined. There could be no romance in her son's life that would ever lead to marriage. She would see to that. She was so frank and open about it that her friends thought that she was joking. Everyone, that is, but Dick. Ted never thought about it at all. As the boys rarely asked the same girls out more than half a dozen times, Mrs. Cummings felt more and more reassured. The war seemed to fit right in with her wishes. "Of course," she would say to all her friends, and more particularly to Ted and Dick, "no one with any brains would ever think of marrying in wartime." "But Mother," Ted once protested, "weren't you and Dad married in 1915?" "Your father and I were different," she replied loftily, and the subject was dropped. Later she insisted that no comparison could be drawn between the two wars, anyway. And many of her friends were inclined to agree.

With the advent of war, Mrs. Cummings busied herself in numerous organizations. She talked less and never laughed, but was quick to assure her friends that Hitler would be beaten within a year. Her hair turned grey and her age became apparent for the first time in her life, but never did she allow herself an idle minute. "If we women really work hard behind the scenes," she would explain, "no matter at what trivial-seeming or menial task, it is just possible that our sons

may not be called upon to leave home." She felt so strongly upon the subject that she broke with many of her oldest friends. Whether separately or together, she and Mrs. Clarke were on every important woman's committee in town. Somewhat irrationally, Elspeth Cummings hated Marie Clarke more than any other woman she had ever known.

When Dick and Ted entered the army on the same day, and joined the same infantry battalion, Mrs. Cummings merely seemed to work the harder. Six days and five nights a week she worked. On Sundays she did her housework and on Tuesday and Friday nights she played bridge. When the boys' battalion left for duty elsewhere on the continent, there was no perceptible change in her routine, except that every night she would write Dick a short note. Mr. Cummings would drop off to sleep hearing the scratch of her pen dashing over a monogrammed sheet of paper from the next bed. On Sundays she took time out to mail Dick newspapers and a parcel of some sort. Only on those rare occasions when Dick and Ted came home on leave would Elspeth allow herself any respite. Then she would plan entertainments for the boys in her own home. She would arrange parties beforehand for most of the evenings, and would ensure that both boys never were paired with the same girls more than twice. Dick accepted this situation with good-natured tolerance, while to Ted there was nothing strange about it at all.

Late in 1941, the boys were both sent to Officers' Training School. Dick had been offered a chance at his commission earlier but had declined until such time as Ted was selected to attend also. Both did very well and, by using a little political influence, were earmarked to join the same battalion in the United Kingdom. They came home in May for three weeks of one of Elspeth's leaves, all specially planned, and then departed for an embarkation centre and, presumably, overseas. A

change in shipping plan, however, forced them to remain in the camp for six weeks and one day everyone was told to take a further two weeks' leave. Dick and Ted arrived home with no advance warning and Elspeth was caught unprepared. She was committed to a good many meetings and was unable to do all the entertaining she would have liked. But after all, the boys were on their very last leave and she was sure that it would be too late for any girl to make much of an impression. Besides, it was summer, and the boys usually tired themselves out playing tennis all day, and so were ready for a good night's sleep.

When Ted told her of Mrs. Clarke's invitation to dinner, Elspeth snorted. "I'm sorry for you, dear. Any girl who stays with her must be terribly hard up for something to do." Yet some vague but gnawing instinct caused her worry. She called off a meeting she was to attend and startled her husband by suggesting that they attend a movie - their first in over a year. She even thought of staging a fainting spell and thereby having Ted called home to her side. The movie helped not at all and she sat up playing solitaire until one o'clock. When Ted arrived home, she was in a state of nervous exhaustion, but did not call out to him. She lay awake worrying until dawn.

At breakfast next morning, she scanned his face closely. She could discern no change in him and berated herself for her useless worry.

"Nice time, dear?"

"Uh-huh".

"Girls pretty?"

"Not bad."

"Where did you go?"

"Tennis Club."

Elsbeth smiled fondly on him. "I'm surprised that it was any fun at all. Marie Clarke is such a loud and common woman. How did her house look?"

It was Ted's turn to smile. "Spotless," he replied.

"Well, that's a change." She seemed to dismiss the subject of the Clarkes, the party and the girls as something far too unimportant to warrant further discussion. "You know, dear, I cancelled my appointments for to-day. I thought we might run up to Aunt Bertha's place and you and Dick could have a swim and we could get back in time for dinner with your father. Bertha will want to see you before you go and I know your father feels that we too often leave him out of things. We might even ask Dick's mother to join us."

Ted flushed. "I'm afraid I can't make it," he said. Dick and I have asked these two girls to play tennis. We had planned to play after lunch and perhaps have dinner again at the club."

Elsbeth was thunderstruck. So her presentment might have been right after all! "With those two homely girls you met last night?" she asked. She spat the words out as if her mouth were filled with sour lemon juice.

"They're not homely, mother. After all, you haven't even met them."

"No dear. Of course you're right." Why hadn't she planned this trip to Bertha's earlier? "You must bring them around to the house and let me meet them."

"Goodness, mother, we're not going to marry the girls. We just asked them if they would like to play tennis and they said yes, they would."

Elsbeth summoned up all her resources and mustered a smile.

She assumed the slightly martyred air that so often brought her husband and her son to their knees. "Well, dear, just as long as you have a good time. After all, it's your last leave and I - that is, your father and I - want you to have all the fun you can."

Ted sighed, asked for another cup of coffee, and the subject was not discussed again that day. Ted was much too preoccupied with Dick's behaviour to give much thought to Margaret. When Dick still neglected to explain his feelings towards Joyce, Ted decided to let time take care of everything. After all, Dick would explain eventually, if indeed there was anything to explain, and there was no reason for anyone's feelings to be hurt. Nevertheless, his were.

The morning after the concert, Ted asked his mother if she would still like to meet Margaret. They were all going to a show later, but he was sure that Margaret might be prevailed upon to come to dinner, if his mother so wished. Elspeth definitely did so wish, and besides, as she pointed out to Ted, it would probably be a treat for the girl if they could get her away from that wild aunt of hers.

Elspeth spent the day wrapped in deep and serious thought. If only she could bring herself to like this girl! She was so glad that Dick would not be present at the meeting, for she knew that he understood her far better than did her own son, and she knew too that if she did not like this girl she would try, in some subtle way, to destroy her in her son's eyes. At ten o'clock, when she left her house to attend a meeting of the Red Cross chapter over which she was to preside, she hated Margaret Thomas. She hated her so much that she made several mistakes in her speech, and seemed to pay not the slightest attention to what was going on around her. Her behaviour was very marked, and many of her friends openly suggested that she was failing. The incident reached the

ears of Mrs. Clarke who remarked to her sister-in-law Mrs. Thomson in particular, and a room-full of Bundles for Britain knitters in general, that all dictators come to grief sooner or later and goodness knows, Elspeth Cummings was the bossiest woman in town. It was a subject that interested Marie Clarke in so small degree, and she gave full and vociferous rein to her thoughts for over an hour.

During the afternoon when, as Secretary, Elspeth was meant to be taking careful notes for The Greek Relief Fund Committee, she decided that possibly a grandchild or two would be a good thing. If this girl and Ted were to elope, it was just conceivable that one might be born while Ted was away. She smiled speculatively at the moment when the speaker, the Greek Consul, reached the most heart rending part of his talk. The president of the society glared at her, and Elspeth glared right back. It provided more ammunition for the gossips but the thought of a grandchild cheered Elspeth. The lines around her mouth softened. To think of her baby a father! By the end of the speech her face had hardened again. To think that the girl was the niece of the husband of that woman!

Both her brain and her body were spent at the conclusion of the meeting, and she decided not to visit the canteen that day. Instead she walked home - she steadfastly refused to accept an extra gasoline ration for all her activities - and inspected the preparations for dinner. Neither her husband nor Ted seemed to be in, so she bathed and lay down to rest. Her mind was still tossing in every direction. He must be interested in this girl, she concluded, for never before had he taken anyone out three nights in a row. And somehow she felt that this was different, that destiny and not she was in control of the situa-

tion. Perhaps I should accept it meekly, she thought. But as she dressed for dinner she realized that she would probably do everything in her power to break off any attachment unless she liked the girl very much. And Elspeth Cummings was not prepared to like the girl very much.

Her husband walked into the room.

"After all, Ted's only twenty-two," she flung at him.

"What on earth has gotten into you?" he asked.

"Oh, Ted's bringing some girl in to dinner. She's related to those Clarkes and she's probably something dreadful. You heard him talking about her yesterday." She was pacing the floor. "I'm wondering if we shouldn't do something about it," she mused softly.

Mr. Cummings was grinning, but gradually his face grew serious. He grabbed his wife's wrist and whirled her around to face him.

"Elspeth, I'm usually the most patient man in the world and I'm not much given to interfering with you and your ways, but you leave Ted alone. If he should want to get married, that's all right with me. And I have enough faith in him to know that any girl he picks will be all right, too. Why, you're ready to condemn her just because she's related to the Clarkes, although I don't think you'd want her no matter who she was. Well, your days of controlling the boy's every move are over. I haven't said much, and perhaps I haven't been a very good father, but it's a constant source of wonder to me that the boy has turned out as well as he has. But now he's on his own. Do I make myself clear?" He was leaning over her and breathing heavily. Elspeth wondered if this fantastic scene would end by his making love to her. But no, that had not happened for..... That was impossible. Still, she was amazed that he was still capable of such passion.

She pulled her arm free and stared at him coldly. "Quite," she answered evenly. "You had better hurry or you will be late." She turned abruptly away so that he would not see too deeply into her eyes. For she had made a startling discovery. At the age of fifty-four, she was still physically in love with her husband. Her body was consumed with liquid fire. She applied the finishing touches to her make-up and hurried downstairs. She was trying to determine what she could possibly say to this girl, yet all the time a picture of her husband kept flashing before her eyes. "But I haven't given him a chance," she thought wildly. "I've been so blind and selfish ever since I worked in the store. Always tired and in a rush." She remembered things as they were, as they might have been. As they might be yet if only.....! She bit her lip. There was so little time.

Then she saw Margaret.

She had determined on nothing in particular to say, so instinctively fell into the role of the experienced hostess.

"Why, you must be Margaret," she cried, as she held out both hands. "It was so nice of you to come. Mr. Cummings and I have heard so much about you from Ted." Why, she was thinking in surprise, this girl must feel the same way about Ted as I once felt about his father. The thought that Margaret might not be in love with her son, or vice versa, never crossed her mind.

"Thank you," murmured Margaret, a propos of nothing in particular.

"Come into the living room, my dear. Ted should be right back. I imagine he has gone to fetch the cocktails."

Elsbeth surveyed the girl critically. Plain, she decided, yet a girl of character. No one could ever push her around. A trifle gau-

che, but she would learn. And a beautiful smile. Yes, when Margaret smiled you forgot that her hair was nondescript and that her eyes were too narrow. Her teeth were white and even and her lips were red and full. The ideal model for some sort of tooth-paste.

"And how is your Aunt?" asked Elspeth, though she made it perfectly clear from the inflection in her voice that Marie Clarke's health was of small concern to her.

Ted made an entrance so hurried that he tripped over a corner of the rug and the cocktail shaker hovered precariously on the brink of the tray. Elspeth gave a little scream and put the odious thought of Marie Clarke to the back of her mind. Later, she felt, she could do more justice to a few stinging barbs.

Ted righted himself and the shaker and smiled at the women. He looked as if he were very proud of himself.

"I see you two are getting to know one another," he said. He put down the tray and ran his fingers through his hair in an uncertain way. It was a habit of his father's, and Elspeth found it most endearing. Her resistance completely melted. She was sure that Ted loved this girl and she would not let him down. Besides, he could not marry her until the end of the war, and maybe in that time she would meet somebody else.

"Yes, indeed," she replied, smiling. She could hear her husband descending the stairs, and she spoke loudly and distinctly. "I feel already as if I've known her all my life. I think she's a darling. Just a darling." When Benjamin Cummings' eyes sought hers from the doorway, she knew that he understood.

Ted never forgot that meeting. His father was, of course, perfectly polite and even affable. Elspeth fairly scintillated and, by the end of dinner, Margaret was her slave. Her admiration for the older

woman's charm and capabilities never diminished.

Now it was four o'clock on a clear, cool morning of September the second, 1947. Margaret and Elspeth were both asleep, though their slumber was troubled and restless. Ted was wide awake. What would life hold for his family with him gone? All the old questions were unanswered. As he lay on his back, tense and strained, his eyes fixed unseeing on the ceiling and his fists clenched at his sides, he realized that he had never felt so helpless and so uncertain.

Suddenly he stirred. "Oh Dick," he groaned. "Help me. What should I do?"

- CHAPTER 6 -

4 February, 1945

Fred Anglin was looking serious.

"Yes, Dick. We feel that your friend, Lieutenant Goodall, is very active in the party, perhaps even the leader of a Communist cell. I don't think he knows it, but he has been kept under surveillance from the day he joined the army, and the R. C. M. P. were curious about his activities for quite a while before that. Just like the rest of his tribe, he was a great pacifist prior to June, 1941. Then he suddenly developed a brand new patriotism. Early in 1942, it was decided by the party hierarchy that he would be valuable in the services. So he joined the army. For a long time he was kept in Canada, as the Intelligence Corps thought they could keep closer tabs on him there. But he really wanted to come to England to make fresh contacts and to spread the gospel a little further. They did not want him to become suspicious so he was sent over here last April. As he feels no allegiance to either the crown or his own country, he was definitely tagged to remain here in the United Kingdom. We didn't want a man like that stirring up trouble among troops who were under fire. Consequently Goodall was given only routine jobs in dull places like Aldershot and Farnborough and that has given his resentment a chance to fester even more, but it can't be helped. Now he can't even brag to his comrades that he has been in action." Fred paused. "He's only one of a large number that I keep an eye on - men whose loyalties are in doubt and whose allegiances are elsewhere. For the most part they are rats who don't give a damn about anything decent, or even about winning the war. They are always sewing seeds of dissension which they hope will ripen into full Communism. Well, we have them pretty well pegged. In each unit,

only one of the senior officers knows about the existence of such men, and he forwards reports every so often. The reports from this hospital about Goodall are vague. The Colonel here feels that he does not know much about him, but what he knows is not good. So, as long as you're here, you can start off by keeping me informed as to his activities. And I must impress upon you again the need for the strictest secrecy. After all, some men under observation are perfectly free from all taint of subversion and it is hardly justice to blacken their names. And conversely, we could hardly glean much information from these birds if they knew that we were watching them."

It was Dick's turn to look serious.

"It seems a little grim to spy on a guy who is supposed to be my friend."

Fred shrugged. "It's all part of the game," he said, "though of course it is most unlikely that anyone else you know would ever be under suspicion."

"O. K." Dick smiled. "Please don't think I'm complaining. It just seemed a little raw, that's all. But I guess it's no worse than their game. Tell me, will I ever get an Intelligence course out of this?"

"I doubt it. It's pretty late in the game and your work won't be terribly complicated. There's one other job that you might do later on if you think you'd enjoy it."

"What's that?"

"Well, if things go well, we should soon be overrunning prisoner of war camps. Our fellows will be given a cursory examination on the continent and then they will be despatched here for more detailed questioning."

"Yes?"

"We believe that some Europeans will try to disguise themselves as Canadians and try to get back here or to Canada."

"Spies?"

"Possibly. But also some fairly innocent jokers who want to get the hell out of Europe. For instance, a Frenchman may try to impersonate a French Canadian. Or, as you suggest, the Germans may try to send through a saboteur. Even one saboteur could cause a lot of trouble. Security precautions will be more and more relaxed as the war nears its end."

"I hope to God the end will be soon," said Dick, fiercely.

"Any news of Cummings?" Fred asked.

"Not for a week. I suppose things are pretty grim."

Fred rose and laid a hand on Dick's shoulder. "Don't worry," he said, "I don't believe there's been any mail from the continent for three or four days. You know, the higher you can keep your spirits, the sooner you'll be up and about. And I hope that's soon because I'm looking forward to working with you."

"Thanks, Fred. Thanks for everything."

"Be seeing you, boy." He opened the door just as Wilma raised her hand to knock on the other side. "Aha!" he cried, and gave her a bear hug. "And how's my little home town gal?" He beamed at Dick.. "You know, our Chamber of Commerce considers her one of the town's prime assets."

She patted Fred's cheek. To an agonizing Dick, it seemed like a caress. He was even less enchanted by her next words. She told Fred that she wished to speak with him in private, and they left the room arm in arm. She closed the door carefully behind her and turned to face Fred as soon as they were in the corridor.

"Fred," she asked softly, "you've been away from Home for a long time now, haven't you?"

"Over four years."

She hesitated. Her cheeks were flushed and she was pushing some imaginary object around with the toe of a white shoe. "Have you been getting all the home town news from your Mother?" she asked finally.

Fred looked at her, and there was a note of compassion in his voice as he answered, "I know everything and believe me, your private life is your own business as far as I am concerned."

She smiled weakly at him. "Thanks. It's just that if I should - that is....." She broke off and glanced towards Dick's room. The movement was barely perceptible and perhaps unintentional, but Fred caught - or believed that he caught - its significance.

"I understand. 'Bye Wilma. I'll write the folks and say you're looking swell."

For some time, Wilma remained motionless. A noise at the far end of the corridor finally aroused her. She started, and looked guiltily about. No one had seen her. She caught her breath and turned back towards Dick's door. She put her hand on the knob.

"I can't! I can't!" she sobbed aloud, and sped down the hallway.....

During the afternoon the mail arrived, and with it three letters from Ted. They were short, disjointed notes to be sure, but they did convey messages and the news that Ted was still uninjured and going strong. It was the last note of the three that really cheered Dick. Ted intimated that he might soon be due for a breathing spell. Any news that might give away troop dispositions was forbidden, but the boys had

evolved a code and Dick was able to read between the lines. He ^{tr}ashed around in his bed. He wanted to tell someone. But who around here would be interested in Ted anyway? And damn it, where was everyone? Why had Wilma not paid him any attention all day? The doctor had made a quick examination, and the orderly had been in several times, but of Wilma there had been no trace since her brief appearance in the morning with Fred.

"Huh!" he grunted. "I certainly count with her!"

He decided to put her out of his mind and he reread Ted's letters. How long had they been best friends now? Almost eleven years? It hardly seemed possible. And never had they been separated before. Dick kept tossing restlessly about, although he knew that his legs should be kept as still as possible. Thinking of Ted over there in the thick of it always made Dick feverish with anxiety and filled him with an explosive sense of agitation. He pounded his fists on the bed and buried his face in the pillow. Always keep calm, the doctors had said. Never let yourself become too excited. He forced himself to remain still.

"But nothing will happen to him," he thought desperately. "It can't. Nothing can split up our team for long."

Gradually he calmed down. His heart pounded less wildly. Drops of perspiration stopped their wayward course over his ribs and gradually dried against his skin. He threw off some of the bed clothes.

Eleven years and only one misunderstanding! And that brought back a picture of Joyce. For a fleeting second she came to life before him but the vision vanished as quickly as it had materialized, leaving only Ted's face brooding and reproachful as it had been that July day, oh so long ago.

ITALICS
START.

He had been meaning to tell Ted about his feelings towards Joyce, but the occasion never seemed opportune. For some inexplicable reason, too, he delayed telling him. So he tried to act as if nothing untoward were happening, and failed miserably. He and Ted were avoiding being to-gether.

One day he had promised to telephone Ted to plan a trip into the country and he had forgotten. Instead he took Joyce to the club and they spent the morning playing tennis. Joyce looked serious and pre-occupied and so did he. Every few minutes he would say to himself: "Why I'm in love!" He was not quite sure if he liked the idea, especially as he would be leaving the country so soon. And this morning, Joyce seemed withdrawn from him. So they spoke but little, and parted after making plans to meet again that evening.

It was then that Dick saw Ted, who was parked in his Mother's car a little way up the street. Ted must have been watching for him, yet, as Dick swung around from the Clarke's path, Ted started the engine and pulled away from the curb.

"Hey!" hollered Dick. "Wait for me."

Ted turned as if he had just seen him. But his face looked strained and his voice was not natural.

"Hullo there." He opened the door and Dick jumped in.

"Hi! Going anywhere special?"

"Nope. I had thought I might drop in on the Clarkes to see Margaret but then I realized it was too near lunch time."

"Joyce and I were playing tennis."

"Oh?"

"Look here, Ted. I think there's something you should know."

Ted was apparently exerting every bit of his concentration on the driving, although the suburban streets were all but deserted.

"Yes?"

"I feel I should tell you that....." He paused and then rushed on. "Well, damn it, Joyce and I are in love."

The silence was shattering. Ted swerved to avoid a squirrel. Then he relaxed, and his face broke into a wide grin. He reached over and pummelled his friend's arm.

"Well, you old son of a gun! I was expecting something like that but you were so damned secretive I didn't know what was going on." He looked carefully at his friend, "You're not going to elope right away or anything like that, are you?"

ITALICS
END.

Dick remembered that he had pooh-poohed that suggestion heartily, although in truth the thought had crossed his mind. At any rate the brief discussion had cleared up any misunderstanding that had existed between himself and Ted. And now Ted was over there, while he was in this wretched hospital. It was agonizing.

Dick decided that he should write his mother, yet somehow he was not in the mood. He was in the mood to do absolutely nothing - just to lie there and brood. So often since he had been wounded had he felt like lying still and thinking of nothing in particular. Or rather of letting images and scenes flit across the screen of his mind. It might be of a Christmas at home when he was a youngster, and of how he and Ellen would creep down the stairs to the living-room in the dead of the night for a glimpse of Santa Claus. He remembered how, on one Christmas morning, he and his sister had found the door locked. "Aha!" Mrs. Fenton had said. "Santa has hidden the key. I guess we will all have to hunt

for it." And hunt they did, wildly and hysterically, until the key came to light under the dining-room rug. Dick thought often of his mother with her smooth and gentle face and her soft, sad smile. For Mrs. Fenton, who loved children more than any woman he had ever known, had lost two of her own in childbirth. It was a loss for which there was no atonement. Dick remembered too that on Hallowe'en, when the children came in droves to their front door with the time-worn plea of "Charity, please?" she would answer every ring herself and load each child down with apples, candy and assorted toys and trinkets. She was known far and wide as the kindest lady in the neighbourhood, and Dick always felt a flood of pride merely by thinking of her.

He thought of his father often, too, though less often than of his mother. For his father had always been so busy that, both as boy and young man, Dick had rarely shared many interesting experiences with him. Yet he knew that his father was a highly honourable and highly honoured man, a man with an enormous medical practice, a man who was ever dignified and kindly and nearly always even-tempered. Never did he punish his children for any youthful lark although once he had lost a wealthy patient thereby. Mr. Theodore S. Birch the third and family had honoured Dr. Fenton by calling on his services for several years. As the whole family was neurotic, it was a very lucrative account, indeed. One day, Dick recalled, he had been playing nothing in particular in the Birch garden with young Master Theodore S. the fourth. They had uncovered an over-ripe tomato and it had been thrown in to the air. Somehow the haughty face of Mr. Theodore S. the third had come in contact with this tomato, and the person of Theodore S. the fourth had made itself scarce. Crimson with rage and tomato, the elder Birch had

marched Dick directly into his father's office, right past a group of astonished patients. He demanded retribution there and then. Dick insisted that he was innocent but would say no more. Dr. Fenton believed him and asked an enraged Mr. Theodore S. Birch to kindly vacate the premises. It established a bond of mutual confidence and respect between father and son that was increased, at least on the father's side, when young Theodore confessed, some three years later, to having been the wielder of the reprehensible tomato.

Dick would think also of Ellen - serious, scholarly Ellen. He was sure that all boys considered her homely, and he nicknamed her 'Spinse', as short for spinster. His mother never failed to remonstrate with him when he used this questionable appellation, but he would always insist in deadly earnest that, as she would obviously be an 'old maid', she might as well accustom herself to the idea early and so save her feelings from being too badly hurt in later years. When, on his last leave at home, he had seen that she was constantly being invited out, even in a city which had lost much of its eligible manpower, he was the most surprised and delighted brother in town.

Of Joyce he tried to think, often, yet it became increasingly difficult to visualize her. He could remember many scenes, but he was unable to place her in any of them with the vividness that was her due. While he was in action on the continent, there had been little time for any such thoughts. Trying to keep himself and his men alive had eaten up practically all of his waking moments. Ted claimed that he often thought of Margaret under the stress and strain of battle. Dick found that the ordeal was easier if he tried to keep his mind a complete blank. So it was with a sense of shock, when he was convalescing, that he realized how far apart they had drifted. Often he tried to think of

that one evening when he felt that his cup was indeed flowing over. Never, before or after, had he and Joyce been able to experience that poignant oneness, that trembling ecstasy of first love. He decided to relive the scene again.

ITALICS
START It was the evening of the day that he had ironed out his difference with Ted. He felt singularly happy and free of heart as he and Joyce walked home from a movie. Joyce was quiet, and the radiance in her face was not unmingled with uncertainty, but Dick was animated and vivacious enough for both. On his insistence, they borrowed his father's car, and they rode far out into the country. He talked meanwhile of his family, his friendship with Ted, his college days and his army career. Only when he had completed the story of his life did he stop the car. Joyce was nestling contentedly against his shoulder.

"Let's walk down to the shore," he said.

They crossed the road and picked their way carefully through coarse grass and pebbles. Soon they found a sandy strip and Dick threw his coat down at the base of a tree. He went to take Joyce in his arms but she eluded him, and kicked off her shoes.

"Let's go wading," she said breathlessly.

"Oh nuts!" Dick exclaimed. "At a time like this, who the hell wants to go wading?" But he acquiesced cheerfully enough and followed her to the water's edge.

The timid lapping of the lake as it stirred restlessly against the shore; the whispering of the leaves stirred into reluctant motion by a warm breeze; the scent of pine cones enhancing the glory of the night; moonlight glinting upon a smooth body of water - all these were engulfed in the velvet, intoxicating mystery that is a summer evening. Joyce

caught her breath and took Dick's hand in her's. He pressed her to him and tears of emotion and happiness welled up in his eyes.

"This is the moment we have waited for," he breathed.

"This is the moment that may never come again." He lifted her face to his and kissed her tenderly. So they stood, lost in an embrace, united for a brief second in time, their bare feet in the water, their heads amidst the stars of love and youth. A cloud, heavy and cumbersome, lumbered across the sky. The breeze doubled in intensity. Joyce sighed, then shivered. The two young lovers walked back to their first shelter under the tree.

They started to put on their shoes. Dick shot Joyce a side-long glance. Suddenly she was in his arms and his lips were on hers, fierce and demanding. As the cloud had blotted out the softness that was the summer night, so did man's animal instinct blot out the tenderness of a youthful romance. Dick's hands were exploring the firm young body locked against his. It was as if he intended to rip away the blouse that covered her breasts. She put her hands against his chest and pushed.

"Please, Dick," she whispered. "Please, not like this. You're ripping my blouse." She gave one final push and drew away from him. "You look so strange. Please listen to me." Her voice was stronger now and shattered the stillness of the night.

He looked so ashamed that she was obviously deeply touched. He opened his mouth to speak, but she anticipated him and drew her finger over his lips. "I did not want it done that way," she said, "but darling I know what you're going through. Soon you'll be leaving." She drew back into the haven of his arms. She avoided his eyes and her voice was low and husky. "It's all right with me," she continued quickly. "But let's more slowly. I'll need a little time." Dick stared at

her incredulously as she mumbled on. Eventually she lifted a tear-stained face to his and slid her arms around his shoulder. "There could never be anyone else," she said. "I love you so terribly."

Dick rose to his feet and pulled her up gently with him. "We're going home," he said. "Right now."

The drive back to the city was accomplished without a word being spoken.

He could remember that she looked piquant and that he felt he was renouncing the great love of all time. The whole scene made him feel mature and worldly. For the first time in his association with Joyce, he had mastered a situation.. How could he destroy this girl whom he loved? Besides, he was ashamed at the passion he had unleashed in her. And he was ashamed at himself for being ashamed. *ITALICS*
He decided that he was a prude. *END.*

How many times, in a transport of desire, guilt and loneliness, had he lived over that scene? The memory of her warm body pressed against his had, for a short while, been unbearable. Now he was unable to feel any emotion whatsoever. He wondered vaguely why he had not taken more advantage of the situation. But of course that had not been the end of it. There was the next day when ,

His thoughts were interrupted by a knock at the door. Tom Goodall hove into view. He reminded Dick of a horse. But not a very good-natured horse.

"Hullo, Fenton," he said.

"Hullo, Tom," Dick answered. He looked at him sharply. Fancy investigating a real live Communist as well as having him for a companion! "Feeling better?"

"No. I seem to get an awful lot of splitting headaches."

"Oh! That's too bad. It doesn't look as if you'll be getting down to Aldershot soon then, does it?"

Dick Fenton's duties in the Intelligence Corps had begun: a mild beginning indeed for a career that was to prove one of sheer melodrama.

- CHAPTER 7 -

2 September, 1947.

It was a hot Tuesday afternoon and Dr. Fenton sat in his office, his fingers beating a steady tattoo on his desk. His talk with Ted before lunch had accomplished nothing and he was at a loss to know what to advise. It was like viewing something at too close a range. Everything assumed such gigantic proportions that the whole perspective was out of focus. If only Ted would explain to Margaret! She should be the one to have the final say about the marriage. Should he break a confidence and tell her himself? For Ted would definitely not recover. Of that he was certain. But would Margaret not be the happier and wiser woman if she were to share the month or so that was left? All thoughts of pity aside, what should a woman do? More important, what would a woman want to do? Dr. Fenton did not know. It boiled down to a case of romanticism versus realism.

He decided to ask his wife what she would have done in such a situation.

Dr. Fenton's office adjoined the basement of his house, so all that was necessary to summon her was a call at the foot of the stairs. He walked slowly through his deserted waiting room, deserted because, during the summer months, he played golf with three of his associates every Tuesday afternoon. However to-day the golf course held no appeal for him. He had to help Ted settle his tragic problem. And somehow memories of Dick were returning with greater force than ever before.

He reached the foot of the stairs and called to his wife.
"I have a problem, dear. Would you mind coming down?"

Several times before in his career had he called her down to his office to help him iron out someone's difficulty and it always had

to do with a woman's angle in marriage or divorce. So Mrs. Fenton was not much surprised at the summons.

He had returned to his desk, and she sat down across from him. Her eyes were shining and she was immensely flattered and pleased that he should rely on her judgment.

"Marion," he said, and he promptly rose from his chair to wander around the room, "what I have to say is sad and depressing and yet it is of great importance to me. It concerns two young people, one of whom I brought into the world, and both of whom I am very fond. These two are very much in love. Marion, I want you to think back thirty years and put yourself in this girl's position. You can do it because she's fine and decent and courageous and so are you."

She caught and held one of his hands as he stopped beside her. "Thank you, dear" she said, but her eyes were showing traces of alarm. "I'll try to understand."

"This young couple have been planning marriage for some years. He met her during the war when he was in the army, but he left the country soon afterwards. They remained faithful to one another, and were soon engaged to be married. He came home safely and everything seemed to be turning out splendidly. He had a good job, they found a place to live and the marriage date was set. Their cup was overflowing. Then the boy came to see me professionally. I realized that he had an incurable heart condition and about thirty days to live.. The wedding is due to take place within that time. Now the question is this. Should the girl be told? For if she is told it is certain that she will wish to proceed with the wedding, and the boy feels that that would be unfair to her. He wants it postponed, but with the girl having no knowledge of the real reason."

Marion Fenton was on her feet and it was with a sense of shock that her husband noticed the tears in her eyes and heard her reply. "If Margaret really is like me, then yes, yes, she should be told. Even if it is for only thirty minutes, let her have the joy of marrying him. And let Ted at least have the chance of dying a happy man, whose life has been properly filled out." She rested her hands on Dr. Fenton's shoulders. "How awful this must be for you, my dear. I can't believe it possible." Her face was molded in lines of suffering and sorrow, and Dr. Fenton recognized there the haunting expression that was with her for so long after the death of their son.

"Of course you would know who I meant," he said softly. "I suppose my telling you without any preparation is a fair indication of my mental state. Sadness and misery! Is there no end to it?"

For a while they stood in the quiet room, regarding each other closely yet seeing nothing, thinking of a thousand things yet in reality thinking of nothing. For Meredith Fenton had brooded over the question of Ted and Margaret to such an extent that his brain felt as though it would surely snap under the strain. Marion Fenton wanted to keep her mind a blank until she could give way to her grief when she would be safely screened from her husband's anxious eyes. For she knew that he would be even more worried were he to discover that two or three times a week she was still subject to fits of grief so overwhelming that she had to retire to her bedroom and lock the door. Then, after a few minutes, she would again be able to carry on normally. In a few days she would be stricken with grief again.

The doorbell rang, yet neither Marion nor Meredith Fenton made any move.

There was a knock at the inside office door.

"Come in," called Dr. Fenton, in surprise.

Margaret Thomas entered. "Hullo, Uncle Meredith. Hullo Aunt Marion." Gravely she kissed them both on the cheek.

"My dear, is this a social or professional call?" asked Marion. She kept control of her voice. Her face was smooth and serene. She made sure that her eyes were averted.

Margaret smiled. "It could be either," she replied.

Marion was moving toward the door. To her husband she had never looked lovelier. Her white hair with its soft curls provided a halo for her sensitive face. She looked ethereal. And fragile... He moved to her side. "I'm quite all right, dear," she said hurriedly. "We'll have a cup of tea before you leave, Margaret," she added. They could hear her moving swiftly through the waiting room. She was running up the stairs as Meredith closed the office door.

Margaret was looking puzzled. "Isn't Aunt Marion feeling well?" she asked.

"I think so, but you know she will never completely recover from Dick's loss. And now that Ellen's married and in Vancouver, poor Marion often seems distraught. It's too bad that we can't always have our children near us as we grow older. I'm so busy that I rarely see Marion all day, and often I work until nearly midnight. She's withdrawn so from everybody that she must be pretty lonely. But this winter I am definitely taking a month's holiday and we will go to Bermuda. That should do us both the world of good."

"Yes," Margaret agreed. "I thought that she looked rather strained just now. Mother often phones her to come over to the house

for bridge or tea, but she is rarely successful. Usually Aunt Marion says that she's too tired, or busy or something."

Meredith nodded his head. "I know," he said. "She usually goes for long walks in the afternoon. She says that the only way she can sleep at night is by wearing herself out during the day. I wish I could do more with her and for her. But I can't." He studied the girl sitting opposite him - as Ted had sat opposite him twice in the last twenty-four hours, as all his patients had sat opposite him at some time in the last thirty years. To some he had given news of continued life and happiness. To others, death and despair. He had listened to outpourings that would have made headlines in all of the city's scandal sheets. He had seen dozens of people whom he had considered weak display infinite courage under the impact of tragedy. On the other hand, many a man, considered vigorous and robust by his friends and family, had sat in that chair and wept as he told a personal narrative of love or hate, ambition or frustration, wealth or ruin, life or death.

Dick had sat there, one day long ago, and had told him of his love for a stranger.

"It's odd," muttered Dr. Fenton, as if he were talking to himself, "but Dick seems to be on my mind more than usual to-day. It's one of those days when I just can't believe he's gone. Looking at his mother brings him back to me, too. He inherited her softness of face and disposition, and those same honest blue eyes. I wish I could say that I had stored up a great many memories of him but I'm afraid I was always too busy." He looked eagerly at Margaret. "But I can remember every detail of the interview we had about Joyce."

"Tell me about it," urged Margaret, but it is doubtful whether he even heard her.

"It was in July and I had had an easy office hour. Just when I thought I had seen my last patient, Miss Pierce announced that there was a young Lieutenant waiting to see me. That was Dick." He adjusted himself in his chair so that he could command a better view of a picture of his son in uniform, which shared honours with an antique clock on the mantel. "He walked right into the room and sat down. He was blushing and he looked so terribly young. Yes, and embarrassed, too. I knew that something important was coming, but as he did not appear ashamed or afraid, I didn't worry. Actually I never had to worry about him. I guess he was just uncertain as to how to begin. I remember offering him a cigarette, and he seemed to smoke it half^{way} down in one puff. Finally he looked me in the eye, and he was so like his mother that I was startled. 'Dad', he said, 'can you remember when you were in love?' Aha, thought I, so it's love is it? I told him that I could remember very well, because I was still in love. That apparently surprised him very much, but I told him that he had a very lovely mother and that we were both very lucky men, indeed. I suppose I was rather carried away. I usually am on the subject of Marion. I wish she were looking better now." He sighed. "Well, anyhow, my monologue gave him time to collect his thoughts. Finally he took a deep breath and confessed that he was in love. Or at least he thought it was love. He wanted to know how he could be absolutely sure. I said I knew of no positive test, but that separation sometimes told the story. Then I added that I might be more of a help if I knew who the young lady was. For the next five minutes I was treated to one of the most glowing descriptions that a girl ever inspired. I must say

that my first reaction was one of intense surprise, and I wondered how Marion would take it. But I had great faith in Dick's judgment. 'You'll love her, Dad,' he kept saying. 'She says she knows she's going to love you and Mum, too.' Then another thought came to me. 'Are you making any plans to become engaged or married?' I asked him. 'After all, you have only known the girl for a very few days.' He looked so vulnerable and so unsure of himself that my heart bled for him. He said he did not know what to do. 'How does the girl feel about it?' I asked. At that, he did not seem to know what to say, and I had to coax the answer out of him. When he answered that he guessed she would like to get married right away, I must admit that my opinion of her slipped just a little. It's nearly always the girl who has her way in things like that, you know, and I was rather anxious. But instead of saying anything I asked when his mother and I might meet her. 'To-night,' he replied, and his smile - Marion's smile - was something to warm your heart."

The ring of the telephone jarred into the midst of his discourse with a pulse-quickenning jingle. "Marion will answer and say I'm busy," he prophesied. At the end of the sixth ring no one had answered, so he lifted the receiver. It turned out to be a Mrs. Bishop - Mrs. James J. Bishop of 128 Edgcombe Road - and it appeared that the lady was suffering most dreadfully from hives. Could the doctor prescribe something? It seemed that the doctor could, and he did. Thereupon the lady was very much pleased, and the doctor promised to visit her the next morning if the hives had not disappeared. He replaced the receiver on the hook, and turned apologetically to Margaret.

"I guess Marion went out for a walk. She has had some

upsetting news to-day and doesn't feel well. Poor soul! I wish she were the one with the hives. Or any light ailment that I could treat with a certain amount of success. Not that the darned fool who called me has the hives. Ten chances to one it is just a small bite of some sort, but she is rich and idle enough so that it can assume gigantic proportions." He stopped, and his eyes returned to the photo on the mantel. His voice reassumed a flat, recitative tone. Margaret did not seem to move as much as a muscle. "I wanted to ask about Joyce's family, but I soon decided that that would not be a very wise step. I suppose I wanted to ask a thousand questions, and yet was unable to put one into words. He repeated his eulogy of Joyce and I could still think of nothing to say, except how much I was looking forward to meeting her. I was sorry that, with all the girls he had known and taken out in his own crowd, he had to settle on one who was from out of town. That he had settled on anyone at all was surprise enough! Still, we sat here in perfect harmony and understanding, my son and I, and the realization of our friendship made me very happy. 'You know how I'm anticipating meeting her, son,' I said, 'and you know that whatever you decide is all right with me. But remember there is a war on and that you're on your embarkation leave. You want to be sure not to do anything that will jeopardize your chance for happiness in the future.' 'Don't worry, Dad,' he said, 'I won't make any final decision without consulting you.' How I loved him for that! I asked him if anyone else knew how he felt about Joyce. 'Only Ted,' he replied, 'and you know, Dad, he approves one hundred per cent.' I was relieved to hear that, although I felt that Ted would have been loyal under any circumstances. 'Well, supposing you go up and tell your mother,' I suggested to him, 'and let on that she is the first one to know. She will be

very flattered and happy, just as I have been.' You know how impetuous and affectionate Dick was. He ran around the desk and gave me a hug. Then he ran out of the office and up the stairs. He was never down here again."

Meredith turned slowly around and faced Margaret. Silence weighed heavily on the room, until it was once again blasted by the raucous discord of the telephone.

Dr. Fenton picked up the receiver once more.

"Yes," he said heavily.

"Hullo, Doctor. This is Ethel Birkett." It was a loud voice, and could be clearly heard by Margaret. It was a voice that articulated every word carefully, slowly and precisely. Meredith shrugged his shoulders and shook his head resignedly. Margaret leaned back and lighted a cigarette.

"Yes, Miss Birkett."

"Doctor, could you come over? I'm not feeling very well."

"What seems to be the matter?"

"I don't know, but I had to leave the office. I thought I was going to faint." She heaved a sigh that fairly rocked the phone on its base. "I have a splitting headache," she concluded plaintively.

"What are you doing for it now?"

"Nothing, Doctor. I thought I should consult you first. I wasn't sure whether to take a stimulant or a sedative."

Dr. Fenton smiled in spite of himself. "Have you eaten anything out of the ordinary to-day?"

"Well now, let's see. For breakfast I just had orange juice, toast and coffee. I take my coffee clear." There was a pause. "No. It couldn't have been that. But of course I had lunch downtown and you

know restaurant meals these days, Doctor. My goodness they could feed you anything. Do you know that I had soup, shepherd's pie, custard and coffee and it cost me ninety cents? Without tip. Isn't that shocking, Doctor? Why, even last spring it would not have cost much more than half that."

"Umh. I think you probably have a slight case of indigestion, Miss Birkett. Lie down and have a rest and if you don't feel better by dinner time, call me back."

"Should I take a sedative, Doctor?"

"No. I think a cup of warm milk or cocoa and a little rest should do the trick nicely."

"Oh! Thank you, Doctor! I'm sorry for taking up so much of your time, but you're such a comfort."

"That's all right, Miss Birkett. Good-bye."

"Good-bye, Doctor!"

Margaret laughed. "That was some conversation," she said. "I must remember to keep my voice low when I next telephone you."

"I feel sorry for Miss Birkett. Imagining illnesses and talking to me are the only emotional outlets the poor soul has. Yet I have so little patience with her when I think of those who are really ill."

Margaret ground out her cigarette. "Uncle Meredith, has Ted been to see you?" she asked abruptly.

"I knew all along you were going to ask me that. Don't you know, my dear young lady, that patients' visits and confidences are not public property?" His bantering tone was woefully at variance with the pallor of his face.

The girl seemed to appreciate neither. "I know that," she

said seriously, "but Ted wants to postpone our wedding for two weeks. He says it's because his firm wants to send him to Philadelphia. Against his wishes, I could even say his orders, I have checked up and found out that it is not true. No trip to Philadelphia has ever been indicated. Oh! I hated spying on him, and doubting him. But after all, it concerns the rest of our lives together and I had to know. I don't doubt his love for me. It's not apt to change overnight after all these years. Rather I feel that he wishes to protect me from something. From what, though? Can he be ill?" She reached over and caught Meredith's arm. "Has he been to see you?"

"It's a direct question and deserves a direct answer. Yes, Margaret, he has been to see me. But only this minute have I made up my mind whether or not to tell you. I think you should know that Ted has postponed the wedding because he is ill."

"Ill, Uncle Meredith? Is something wrong with his lungs? He had pleurisy twice while in England. It couldn't be T. B.?"

Dr. Fenton shook his head. His own heart was behaving irregularly and he felt more exhausted than at any other time in his life. He was determined that never again would he look after anyone of whom he was very fond. But that was ridiculous and he knew it. "Ted felt that he was right in deferring your marriage, Margaret. I can't presume to judge, although there are excellent reasons for his decision. He has a very bad heart, my dear, a very bad heart indeed."

Margaret's voice barely reached him, so low it was, although it was under perfect control. "How bad would you say? Can it be cured by rest?"

"Nothing can cure it. God knows I would like to offer you encouragement but I can't. Apparently he had been feeling tired and had

had a few dizzy spells. When he came to see me the other day, I found him to be suffering from an advanced form of endocarditis and I am convinced that he cannot live beyond a month." He hoped that the girl would give way to some sort of violent emotion. If held inside too tightly, grief was like a cancer, rotting the human system, gnawing at the nerves. But Margaret was deadly calm. She was clutching her purse and her eyes were on the floor. Dr. Fenton waited anxiously.

He was totally unprepared for what followed.

"I don't believe you," she said, and her voice was still low and controlled. "I never want you to talk that way again, either to Ted, to me or to anybody." She rose to her feet. "I am going to see him now. You medical men underrate one simple thing - faith! Ted Cummings and I will be married as planned on the twenty-seventh and we'll be happy, too. You wait and see. I'll have to undo all the harm you've done but I'll succeed. I love him and nothing can take him from me. Nothing!"

She ran out of the office and left Dr. Fenton rooted to the spot. He was unable to convince himself that he had heard aright. That Margaret could so readily override his considered opinion! And she was so positive! Was that mere youth, or did she indeed know? How he wished she could be right. She couldn't be, but he prayed for her with all his heart. Maybe a few extra weeks, but even that was unlikely. He pressed his hands to his head. Marion! Where was she? He thought he might be physically ill. He needed a check-up himself.

He started out of the office. "Marion! Marion!" he called. As if in answer, the telephone rang. Slowly, reluctantly, he returned to his office. He slumped into his chair and lifted the receiver. His collar was damp and wilted. The air in the room was hot and oppressive.

"Yes?"

"Hullo, Doctor. This is Ethel Birkett."

His voice sounded natural.. Almost hearty. "Well, well, Miss Birkett. I thought you were supposed to be resting."

Five minutes later, when he went upstairs, his wife was nowhere to be found.

14 February, 1945.

"Fifteen two, fifteen four and eight are twelve. I skunked you!" Dick grinned cheerfully at his opponent.

Tom Goodall was glaring. He threw his cards on to the table. "That's enough for me," he said grouchyly. "I guess I owe you eight shillings." He searched in his pockets. "I don't know why I play this damned game. I never win."

Dick laughed. "It's not really as bad as that. It seems to me you won yesterday."

"Yes. Two measly shillings."

Dick was tidying up his room for the night. He looked healthier and stronger than he had ten days previously but his face was grey, and dark shadows made their impression under his eyes as soon as he exerted himself to any degree. "Are they ever going to grant you a week-end leave?" Dick asked.

"I hope so, but you know that no one likes me in this place. I never seem to get any of the privileges that other people do."

"Rubbish," snorted Dick.

"It's true. They're jealous of me because I hold advanced, intellectual ideas. Well, they'll be sorry some day!"

Dick shuddered in spite of himself. Could that 'some day' ever come? In Canada? Stranger things had happened to an unwary people. Fred had hinted that there were more Communists and Communist sympathizers in the Army than most people would ever suspect.

Tom was pacing around the room like a caged animal. Dick had been successful in drawing him out on the subject of Communism and it had lowered many of the barriers between them. Tom had all but admitted his party affiliation. "They think I'm the only leftist around here, but

I'm not. Just because a few of us are smart enough to look ahead and realize that we can never go back to that filthy capitalistic life we knew before, they hamstring us. Well, our day will come."

"Yes, yes, I'm sure it will," snapped Dick impatiently. Then he remembered his Intelligence report. "You'd better line up some of these liberal thinkers and take them to Aldershot with you when you go." It was a shot in the dark, but it had an effect.

"What do you mean? I told you I was just going to Aldershot to visit friends. Nothing more, nothing less."

Dick appeared to be completely uninterested. He was smoothing out the sheets on his bed. "I hope to be allowed to go to London this week-end," he said. "Anything to get out of here for a while."

"Yes, but you're leaving for good soon. At least they've told you that much. They have never told me anything. And sometimes my head aches so that I think I can't bear it. Then, just when I'm ready to throw myself under a train, it eases up. And after a day or two, I always get another attack. Yet no one will tell me what the trouble is."

"Never mind," said Dick. "Your ulcers are better."

"Uh-uh." Tom was wandering aimlessly around the room while Dick was getting into bed. "Why didn't you tell me that Fred Anglin was in the Intelligence Corps?" he asked suddenly.

"Didn't I tell you that?" Dick's tone was bland but he felt that he would bungle any shrewd cross-examination.

"So you knew?"

"Well, I knew that he was on some branch of staff."

"Didn't you say once that he came to see you on business?
And was that not connected with a job in the Army?"

"Yes."

"Are you going into the Intelligence Corps too?"

"What's the idea of this grilling?"

Tom laughed, and it was a forced laugh if Dick ever heard one.
"It's no grilling. I was just wondering what you were going to do when you got out of hospital."

"It will have to be something in England but I don't quite know what yet." Dick decided that it would spoil all his plans if he were caught out in a lie. "Fred wants me to work with him," he admitted. He was unaware of it, but the expression on his face was the perfect blend of innocence and candour.

"Oh!" said Tom. "What on earth do the Intelligence Corps do in England?"

Dick slipped under the sheets. "I don't know yet. They try to keep the Germans from knowing what goes on over here, I guess."

Tom grunted. "Sounds dull to me." He started for the door, then turned back. His long face showed unexpected traces of animation, and a wan smile was spread thinly over his features. "I just want you to know, Fenton, that I'll be damned sorry to see you go. Intellectually you may be naive and undeveloped but you're a good fellow and the only one around here I could put any trust in." He reached down and patted his shoulders. Dick instinctively drew away but Tom seemed not to notice. "Yes," he intoned solemnly, as if he were pronouncing a benediction, "I shall miss you."

Dick was apparently expected to reply in kind, but he was completely tongue-tied. Tom walked to the door, a little crestfallen

perhaps, but with the air of one who has seen his duty and has done it. Dick was just able to call out a 'Good-night, Tom. Thank you,' before the door closed.

Dick turned out the light with mixed feelings. Why was he spying like this on Tom Goodall? What did he know of Communism anyway? Precious little. Russia was a police controlled state and foreigners knew and saw only what the men in the Kremlin wanted them to know and see. He recalled that there was a bloody revolution during the last war, and he also remembered a movie where Rasputin had been all mixed up with the death of the Czar. Then the Communists had taken over. Why weren't they content to stay in their own back yard? He was convinced that the apparent wish of the Russian Communists to impose their theories on the world did not stem from any sense of idealism, nor could he imagine the Russians zealously burning to aid suffering humanity. Dick knew that all Communists in Canada were pacifists before Germany attacked Russia, simply because Moscow had dictated that they should be. It baffled him how anybody would want to be controlled by foreigners. How could a fellow like Tom Goodall know what went on in Russia? Yet he wanted to impose that type of government on his fellow-countrymen. But possibly the war had changed Russia. Roosevelt and Churchill were always paying compliments to 'that great man' and to 'our magnificent ally.' Furthermore Russia had abolished the Communist Internationale. When all was said and done, they were involved in the same fight. Then why watch Tom Goodall? Surely those who were in authority over him in the party wanted Germany to be defeated. Surely Tom was willing to work toward that end too. And yet he was watched constantly! Why, it was employing the same tactics as the Russians would employ. Except, of

course, there would be no force brought to bear upon him unless he were found guilty of treason, and that was incredible. Dick stretched and yawned. Communism! It meant so many things! He'd have to have Fred explain it all when next he saw him. Really, this spying on a man who trusted him was getting him down. Poor Tom! What a lonely and unhappy man he must be! And what a mawkish show of affection that had been! He was sorry for Tom, but he would be damned glad to get away from him. Dick yawned again. Wilma, he thought lazily. Wonder where she can be. He was asleep.

Towards morning he had a nightmare. He was walking along a street, whistling, hands in pockets. Suddenly there were no lights. He shuddered. He was in a blackout. By straining his eyes he was able to distinguish a row of gloomy, grey stone houses. There were small plots of grass in front of each, and a continuous low stone wall. He kept walking, but he was whistling and cheerful no more. His whole body was prickling and tingling in mortal fear. He wanted to turn around but his legs propelled him on, on, deeper and deeper into the blackout. He must be in England, but where? The inner compulsion that he had to go he knew not where grew stronger, and the fear increased proportionately. He began to run. A sob escaped him. He must be approaching an intersection. He noticed a street lamp. It threw a sombre, eerie light down to the sidewalk. Nothing could harm him if he could only get out of the darkness. He would stop in that circle of light and rest. Hurry! Ah! What's that? A man loomed up before him, a young man who was obviously waiting for him, blocking his way. He looked familiar. Some of Dick's driving fear disintegrated and he felt a thrill of hope. He pressed on. Could it possibly be..... No. Impossible. But it was! Ted! Oh my God, how glad he was to see him! He was about to fling himself against

him when he noticed the expression on Ted's face. There was no joy there. Only horror. And an infinite sadness and compassion. He was motioning his friend to go back. Then, just when Dick reached him and was about to grab him by the shoulders, Ted disappeared. Fear returned, more paralyzing than ever. Dick wanted to lean against the post, to rest in what little light it shed. But he was moving on. He made a right turn. He did not want to go down that street; it was even more forbidding than the other. But he had to. He was running again and sobbing brokenly. His footsteps rang out on the pavement. There was no way of muffling the sound. Everything was pitch black. He was unable to make out even the buildings near him, but he did distinguish a tall church steeple. Was that his destination? He heard his Mother's voice. It was soft and gentle. "Wait, Dick," she was calling. "I'll go with you. Wait!" He pressed forward regardless, and soon he could hear nothing at all. Just his boots clanging on the cement. And always the terror grew. Then there was a girl. She came running down one of the paths. She, also, was trying to hold him back. She grabbed one of his arms but he shook her off. Was it Joyce or Wilma? It might even have been Ellen. Why couldn't someone stop him? Never mind. He had to reach the bottom of that street. Aha! He must be growing accustomed to the darkness. He was able to distinguish a brick air-raid shelter. It was across the end of the street. Someone was waiting there for him. He had known all along that there would be someone, somewhere. But who? He stopped. What was holding him up? His knees were like jelly. Behind him he could hear a woman crying. Perhaps several women. Perhaps all the women he had ever known. He moved forward cautiously. The church was now directly across the street. The house on his right had been damaged by bombs. Part of it was a pile of rubble. In the midst of these

ruins, his father was standing. Suddenly the old man buried his face in his hands. "It's too late," he was moaning. Dick longed to console him, but his attention was diverted by a slight scuffling sound outside the shelter. He steeled himself. So this was the person he was to meet! He was calmer, but terror still held him in his grip. "I must see! I must see!" he muttered. A man seemed to be slipping around the side of the shelter towards him. Was that a black cloak? Dick stumbled forward. Now he would know! Now! There was a blinding flash of light. Dick screamed.

He opened his eyes to find that his light had been turned on and that Wilma and an orderly were bending over him.

"Captain Fenton! Wake up! Wake up!"

He raised himself with an effort. He was trembling and he fought to control himself. "I guess I must have had a nightmare," he said sheepishly.

"I guess you did!" Wilma's tone was not unsympathetic. "You've wakened half the hospital." She dismissed the orderly and straightened Dick's bed clothes. "And just look at you," she scolded him good-naturedly. "You've perspired so that you're soaking wet. I'll get you another night shirt." In no time at all she had given him an alcohol rub and he was decked out in a clean night shirt. After she had remade the bed, she surveyed Dick critically. "You look washed out. Better go back to sleep. It's only five o'clock." Her voice had regained some of its brusqueness.

"But I'm wide awake. And since you've gone on night duty, I never see you. I think this nightmare was worth it."

Wilma blushed. "You should be leaving us soon," she said finally. There was no hint of regret in her voice. She was merely sta-

ting a fact.

"In a couple of weeks, I think." Dick could think of nothing more to say, yet he was unable to take his eyes from her face. Her complexion was as clear as any he had ever seen, and her large grey eyes were ringed with long lashes. He knew that her skin would be like velvet to the touch. He watched her as she took off her cap and ran her fingers through her hair. It was dark red, sleek and glossy. He felt awed. What could he say to keep her in the room? How could he ever come to know her? His banter only served to alienate her. Still, he would keep trying. Violet shadows under her eyes made her look very young and defenseless. For a moment, as he caught her eye, he thought that he noticed a startled expression hidden there. He could think of nothing to say even though the girl's manner was softer and she was obviously lonely. She looked very unhappy. A flood of sympathy for her - he knew not why - swept over him, but his tongue remained firmly anchored in his mouth.

She twirled her cap around her fingers. "Well....." she began, uncertainly, and she moved towards the door.

The spell was broken. "Thank you for all you've done," he said, and the words gushed out like water pouring through an opening in a dam. "But please talk to me for a while. I'd like so to know you better before I leave. I hardly ever seem to see you and when I do you treat me as if I were a dummy in a store window. I'll be darned if you're not the hardest girl to know that I've ever met."

Her eyes narrowed, and the corners crinkled into a smile. She tilted back her head and showed two rows of small, white teeth.

"Aha," said Dick. "You should do that more often. On you

it looks good."

Wilma was laughing now, yet laughter did not come naturally to her. She was soon serious again. "I have to watch my step, looking after all you attractive boys. My heart is always so full of sympathy for you that it would be easy for someone to take advantage of it."

"So you go around looking gloomy?"

"That's unfair. You haven't seen me with anyone who needs sympathy or a little humour. You were well on the mend when I arrived."

Dick wanted desperately to ask her if she could be granted leave the next week-end and meet him in London for a date. Nothing underhanded, mind you. Perhaps they would go dancing. Or to dinner and the theatre. Then on Sunday they could hop a train and spend the day exploring some little town in Kent or Sussex. He must ask her.

"Well, did you?" she was asking him impatiently.

He started guiltily. "Did I what?" he asked in return.

"That's just great," she said, and something of the old veil of indifference stole across her face. "You ask me to talk to you and as soon as I start to tell you something about myself you pay no attention. You men are all alike." She headed for the door.

Dick sat up in bed. "Hey, now, wait a minute! Just because I was looking at you and wondering if I had the nerve to ask you for a date is no reason to fly off the deep end."

"Now you're being rude." She was grasping the door handle. He could see that her knuckles were white.

"God damn it, I'm not rude! I wondered if you could get a forty-eight this week-end and then we could go up to London."

"I'm sorry," she said coldly. "That would be quite impossible."

"That's all I wanted to know," he said, and he dove back under the covers. "Good-night." He emphasized the 'night' as insultingly as he could. His back was to her.

"You're a beast," she said, "and the most hopelessly spoiled patient I've ever been unfortunate enough to run across." She closed the door and was gone.

"Huh," grunted Dick to himself, "to think I wanted to make a date with that curmudgeon. She'd drop the temperature of an iceberg twenty degrees by just breathing on it." He put Wilma out of his mind. He wanted to think over the nightmare he had been through and make an attempt to analyze it, but he was too exhausted. He fell into a heavy sleep immediately. It was eight o'clock when he awakened and assured himself that the last thing on earth he wanted to do was to have a date in London with Wilma that week-end.

He spent the morning wandering about the ward, talking to the boys. Just before lunch, an orderly distributed the mail. He received four letters. The first one he opened was a note from the minister at home. The minister and congregation of Parkside United Church congratulated him on his splendid recovery and wished him well. As a more tangible token of their esteem and affection, they had mailed a parcel of food under separate cover. The next letter he read was from his mother. She told him in great detail of his family's activities. Never did she write anything that could possibly cause him the slightest alarm or worry. Everyone was always well, and if there was sickness, he only knew of it when it was all over. He could picture her, writing the letter, bent over her desk in their sun room. Perhaps the sun was streaming across her white hair. Perhaps rain or snow was beating against the glass. But

Her soft, brown eyes would be glowing with love, while she shared her news and hopes and secrets with him. She was home and comfort and understanding, and, as usual, the ending of her letter brought a lump to his throat. "And oh! my dear, you are always in our thoughts. With love such as ours to guide you surely God will see fit to take care of you always. We are forever asking each other how you might be getting along, and praying for your speedy recovery. We received our second letter from Lt. Col. Ashton the other day and your father is so proud that he carries it with him everywhere. Then there are Ted's letters filled with references to your bravery and courage, but he might be just a little prejudiced! Letters or no letters, you are our son, and to love you and be proud of you always is the wish of your Mother. P. S. Joyce is coming in for dinner to-night."

Dick cleared his throat and reached for the next envelope. It contained a note from Ted, and, of necessity, forwarded little in the way of news. Just to know that he was alive and well was all that Dick asked. "You ask if I can remember exactly how Margaret looks," Ted wrote in part, "The answer is no, Dick, not entirely. We had so little time to-gether. But I can think back over those few days and know that I want more just like them. And I know that when I get home, there will be many more just like them. Don't worry about not being able to remember everything about Joyce. That doesn't mean anything. But beware of this redhead. I think I should take a run over and see how everthing's going with you. I distrust redheads! And God! wouldn't it be wonderful to see you again....." Wouldn't it indeed, echoed Dick. He was tired of discussing women and politics and the advantages of the English pub with a lot of fellows whom he would never miss if they dropped right out

of his life - as indeed they were doing every day. To slip back into that effortless, harmonious companionship with Ted seemed the most desirable thing in the world. He sighed. One more letter. It was from Joyce. It only interested him in so far as it related news of other people he knew. It might as well have been written by an unknown member of the church. She chided him because he had written so seldom lately, and, whenever he did, his notes were so short and impersonal as to convey nothing at all. She was not complaining, mind you, but he did seem to find time to write long and newsy letters to his family. How were the nurses in the hospital? Did he have any special one looking after him? She was hoping the Red Cross would send her overseas soon. She had had dinner with his family the night previously. They were all looking just fine and, of course, he was the topic of conversation for the whole evening. She sent all her love.

He put the letter aside. He stretched out on the bed and frowned. Dinner with his family! Gosh! He could remember the first time she had had dinner with the Fentons. Everyone had known that he and Joyce were in love, and somehow it was rather disturbing. He thought that Joyce might be uncomfortable under a concerted scrutiny. He had asked Margaret and Ted to join them, so that the family's attention would be dissipated a little.

ITALICS.
START. He thought that Joyce looked lovely and, in a facetious attempt to disguise his real emotions, he told her that she was a homely little thing and that he would start calling her 'Buttons'. She loved the name. No mention was made of the night before. They were both too embarrassed to refer to it. They walked to his house, arm in arm, chattering inconsequentially about many things.

"I wonder if Margaret and Ted are here," ventured Dick, as they climbed the front stairs.

"I don't know." Suddenly she clung tightly to him. "Dickie, I'm scared. Suppose they don't like me?"

Dick laughed. "I've heard that question asked dozens of times before - in the movies. Anyway you have nothing to worry about. Mother always said that I had excellent taste in choosing girls."

"Oh! She did, did she? How many do you choose a week? Besides, darling, I was the one who chose you."

He was already inside the door and the introductions were under way.

"Mother and Dad, I want you to meet Joyce, Joyce, I want..."

His father looked selfconscious. He was trying not to overwhelm her with a 'prospective father-in-law curiosity' and was having little success. But Mrs. Fenton broke in.

"Of course, dear. We have heard so many lovely things about you, and now I can understand why." She drew Joyce into the circle of her arms and gently hugged her. She smiled approvingly at her son.

Dick's heart was nigh to bursting with pride in Joyce and affection for his mother. He knew he could always count on Marion Fenton to do and say the right thing. Hers was the most beautiful face he would ever see.

They adjourned to the parlour where they were soon joined by Ted and Margaret. Cocktails were passed, and Dick helped himself liberally. At the end of his third, he was moved almost to tears. The four people he loved, all gathered to-gether in the same room! And Margaret. He was fond of her, too. He hoped that she and Ted might become interested in one another, but he supposed that life did not work out that way.

He was very quiet, which was most unusual for him, but he was unaware that his behaviour was in any way strange. He wanted Joyce to have every advantage in front of his family, and he was secretly delighted that she was able to catch and hold the limelight. He realized vaguely that Ted and Margaret were quiet also, and thought that they, like himself, were only too happy to render silent homage to the guest of honour.

Dinner was not altogether successful. Dick ate ravenously, but the after-effects of an unaccustomed number of cocktails were little short of disastrous. He felt terribly sleepy. The more he ate, the sleepier he became. He was positive that both his mother and Ted were regarding him anxiously, so he spent the last half of the meal smiling reassuringly at one, then at the other, then beaming encouragement to Joyce, then battling to keep his eyelids open. After each battle, the performance of smiles would begin anew. It was suffocatingly hot. Snatches of conversation reached him, but they were almost unintelligible. It was like being troubled with an aggravating buzz in the ear. The noise seemed to be coming from so far away that it could hold no possible interest for him. Why had everything gone wrong? He felt that someone at that table was being unsympathetic. Did someone not like Joyce? With all the mock dignity of alcoholism, he held himself erect in his chair. His glance around the table was haughty and challenging. Everyone seemed reasonably pleasant. Joyce was relating some tale or other, and the others were all listening. Dick pressed his foot against hers. For a fraction of a second, she halted in her narration. Dick smiled fatuously around the table, and wagged his head in self-satisfaction. Instantly tears, whether of pride, joy or self-pity he did not know, surged into his eyes. He blinked them away. While Joyce continued

her story, coffee was put before him. He sipped it. Ugh! It was black, and his mother knew he always took cream and two lumps of sugar. He looked at her reproachfully, fighting back a new wave of tears, but she was trying to induce Ted to have another piece of pie. He glanced furtively at his father, but he was listening to Joyce. What on earth was she talking about? Dick drained his coffee cup. His head soon began to clear. He noticed for the first time that his mother had gone to great lengths to decorate the dining room table. For the first time, too, he realized that he had been eating by candle light. Why, he could not even recall what he had eaten! He chuckled, and passed his coffee cup to his mother.

"Yes," she was saying to Joyce, "Dr. Fenton used to love lingering over his coffee in the living room on those rare evenings when he did not have to rush out. But now we have no help, you know, and it is too much of a nuisance. And really, we're so lucky. No bombs and no privation. More coffee, Dick dear?" She smiled as though he were a paragon of all the virtues, and not a stupid kid who had ruined her wonderful dinner party. Dick squirmed.

"Yes, please. And clear." He was determined to rub the salt into his wounds.

Silence had settled over the dining-room. His mother poured the coffee and handed him his cup. Still no one spoke. Obviously it was incumbent upon him to say something. But what? Suddenly his face brightened.

"I saw Mike Johnson downtown this morning, and it was the funniest thing. He waved and started across the street so I" Dick faltered. Joyce was kicking his leg and Ted's eyes held a warning.

Dr. Fenton cleared his throat. "We enjoyed that yarn with our main course, Dick, but don't you think it's a little soon to go over it again?" ^{ITALICS} _{END.}

Yes, thought Dick, as he put the four letters in his writing case, that was the first time that he had ever imbibed too freely, and it had to be in front of his parents. How humiliated he had been! And then later that night..... But why go over that again?

All the rest of that day he was listless and depressed. Hospital fever, they called it. He kept thinking of his family at home. What were they all doing? Was his Dad in his office? And how was Ted faring? He was forever having premonitions that his friend would be killed. What should he say to Joyce when he wrote? Should he mention Wilma? Oops! He had forgotten! He was through with Wilma. He would go up and have a quiet week-end in London by himself. Wouldn't that be dull! He knew he would be expected to spend that evening playing cribbage with Tom Goodall, and then jot down in a report any remarks he made that might be construed as seditious. Huh!. And that awful nightmare! Whose face could that have been at the end of the road? He was unable to entirely shake off a sense of uneasiness.

Yet, by supper time, he seemed to be his old self. He could never sustain any emotion for long, be it hate, anger or depression. Why, he thought, as he half-heartedly attempted to spear the baked beans on his plate, I sound like the hero in a soap opera. But then, wasn't everyone's life these strange days fit for a soap opera now and then? Surely no one could live a life so dull that at least a good part of it could not be dramatized. By the time he was drinking his cold tea and smoking a cigarette, he had decided that he might as well play his cribbage with Tom right away. Then they could see the movie that was being

shown in the ward, and he could go to bed early. He was tired and a good night's sleep should do him good.

He went out into the corridor and headed for the Officers' ward.

Wilma was almost upon him before he saw her.

"Oh! Good evening, Sister."

"Good evening, Captain Fenton."

Dick continued on his way to find Tom.

3 September, 1947.

Ted tapped his foot impatiently at the entrance to his Mother's room. Mrs. Cummings was talking on the telephone.

"Oh, my dear, you don't say.....Why, I saw her last week and she did look rather badly. But at her age! Aren't some people fools!.....Yes, she's at least that. I went to school with her, you know.....No, I would say she was older.....Yes, more like fifty-eight. Really, what next! And that hat she was wearing! Who did she think she was trying to fool? You and I have known her too long for that.....Why, she has been one of my best friends for years.....Oh! So am I, dear. Very fond of her! But I do think someone should put her wise to a few things.....No. I hadn't heard that. Do go on."

There was a long pause, punctuated by a few gasps from Elspeth. Ted cleared his throat. "Mother....." he began.

"Sh," she hissed. Then she smiled, and spread one of her hands in the air. "You know what an awful bore this woman can be," her expression seemed to say.

Ted shook his head in resignation. Since the demise of all her wartime activities, Elspeth Cummings had been throwing her vast energies into two fields of endeavour - clubs, whether for bridge or charity or both, and telephone conversations. But these were poor compensations, and she was left with a great deal of time on her hands.

Now she was breathing 'No' in such an incredulous tone of voice that one might think, well, one might think anything. Ted tapped his foot even more vigorously.

"You don't say, Janet.....No, no. I won't say a word to a soul. You know me. But the whole thing has given me quite a turn.

I'm so fond of Joan.....Everything's coming along famously, thank you.....Yes, she's a lovely girl and we're both very fond of her..
.....No, I have very little to do. Ted and Margaret seem to think that they can manage their own affairs without help from their elders. And a groom's mother counts for so little at her son's wedding.....Yes, doesn't she look badly! She never really got over Dick's death and I suppose this wedding has brought everything back."

Ted bit his lip. "Mother, for heavens' sakes!" he exclaimed.

"You know, Janet, it was strange. I met her yesterday afternoon when I was coming out of the hairdresser's, and she passed right by without even looking at me. I didn't know what to do.....Oh, it couldn't be that! Although, come to think of it, I do recall that someone once said that he was very interested in Isobel Trent. But no. That couldn't be it."

Ted's eyes were flashing. "Good-bye, Mother." He turned on his heel and abruptly left the room.

"I'll call you back later, Janet. Ted's going out and I must speak to him.....Yes, dear. Bye-bye."

She ran swiftly down the stairs and confronted her son in the front hall. She laid her hands gently on his shoulders, and smiled up at him.

"I'm sorry, darling, but that Janet McGillivray is such a talker. Gossip, gossip, gossip. You'd think that these women would have something better to do."

"Belonging to twenty different clubs doesn't seem to stop you," he returned darkly.

Her hands fell from his shoulders and she idly glanced over

some mail that had been left on the hall table. Her eyes were expressionless. "Did I hear you say you would be out to lunch, dear?"

"Yes. I'm meeting Bill Donnelly. And now you'll have to excuse me. I'm late. See you to-night." His voice was stiff and formal, and he left hurriedly, without kissing her good-bye.

'He's still mad at me,' Elspeth thought. 'He thinks Marion Fenton is so perfect! I sometimes wonder if he doesn't prefer her company to mine. She may have most of the virtues, but she's dull. He'd go crazy living in a house for long with anyone like that.' She threw the letters back on to the table. 'We've grown so far apart lately. And now he's leaving me for good. My son - married! Still, he's looking better.' She drew her dressing-gown more tightly around her. 'I suppose he'll be dropping in to see Marion again to-day.'

She returned to her room and dialed Janet McGillivray's number. After all, she could be right about the reason for Marion's strange behaviour. It was quite conceivable that Meredith Fenton could be interested in one of his patients. He was still an attractive man, and life with that woman must be pretty monotonous.

"Hullo, Janet?.....Now, let me see, dear. Where were we?"

While Elspeth spent most of the morning on the telephone, Ted was desperately trying to attend ^{to} ~~the~~ business at the office. Yesterday he had been in an abyss of despair, anxious to call off his wedding, contemplating suicide, a man with only a month left to him. Yet to-day, he was filled with hope and the will to live. He would fight this thing and beat it somehow. He could do it. He would do it. He would be married on the twenty-seventh as planned, and share the remainder of his days - no, years - with Margaret after all. She was so right. Faith!

That was all that was needed. Faith! At that point in his meditations, he always frowned. It was not as though he did not trust Dr. Fenton or his judgment. He loved and respected him too much for that. Perhaps if he did go to the hospital for tests and treatment.... But no. Margaret had said that that would do no good. Faith was the cure and faith he would have. Then, of course, there was his love for Margaret. Never did he think that he could love anyone as much as he had loved her in the last twenty-four hours. There had been a very dramatic scene the evening before. First of all there had been his stunned surprise when she told him of her visit with Dr. Fenton. Then he was pouring out his tale to her. She was so rational, so understanding. In no time at all he was in complete harmony with her ideas. Marriage on the twenty-seventh, as planned, seemed the only logical course to follow. Margaret insisted that not one change in schedule would they make. As he held her in his arms, as they laughed and cried to-gether like two small children discovering each other for the first time, it had all seemed so right, so easy. Under her spell, he had gone home and slept the night through as if he had had nothing whatever on his mind.

This morning, her spell was gone, and once again Ted was beset by doubts. What if faith were not enough? Supposing Dr. Fenton were right? Then he would probably die a day or two after the wedding! No, he must not think that way. He must believe that he was well. As a matter of fact, he felt better already.

His thoughts chased themselves around in this circle at least twenty different times while he tried to concentrate on the business at hand. At twelve-thirty he left the office to meet Bill Donnelly for lunch. Much as he liked him, seeing him only made Ted realize the loss that he had sustained in Dick's death.

The restaurants near Ted's office were all crowded, so the

two friends finally contented themselves with a sandwich and a glass of milk in a corner drugstore. Conversation was well nigh impossible. As they perched on stools near the counter, they were subject to innumerable jabs in the back. The din of countless greetings and conversations was augmented by the clinking of dishes and silver, and the hollering of the waitresses as they bawled their orders to the kitchen through apertures in the wall. On the few occasions where it seemed feasible, Ted brought Bill up to date on the latest developments of the wedding. Of his illness, he said nothing, nor did he intend to. As far as he was concerned, the subject was closed.

They fought their way out of the drugstore and joined the mid-day throngs who were joshing each other around on St. Catherine Street. The sunshine was brilliant and it was hot.

"Let's go sit in the park on Dominion Square," Bill suggested.

They were separated again before Ted had a chance to reply. After a search, they found a vacant bench. It was in a state of great disrepair, but they sat down anyway. Bill stretched his long limbs.

"Never saw so many American cars," he said idly. "Nearly all from New York, too. There must be a lot of money floating around."

"Bill, what have you done about a job in the last few days?" It was not like Ted's voice at all. It sounded stern and parental.

"Oh," Bill answered vaguely, "I've been down seeing a few people."

"Who?"

Bill evaded Ted's eyes. "Oh," he repeated, "a few people." As Ted pursed his lips and seemed about to make a stinging reply, Bill continued quickly, "I dropped in to see your Dad again yesterday. But he had no new leads. I don't think I'd like business life anyway. I don't see how these people can stand it." He had been inhaling deeply on a cigarette. After each puff, he would tap it several times with a slim fore -

finger and then put it back in his mouth. Nor was his face ever still. If he was not blinking, he was either licking his lips or wrinkling up his nose. Only when he was absorbed in his painting was his face in repose. Always he was smoking. He lit another cigarette now from the old one.

"You knew damned well that Dad wouldn't have anything in mind for you or he would have called you. Why not try someone else? This hanging around doing nothing is going to become a habit. There are lots of jobs if you really want to apply yourself and look for them."

"I'll be all right," Bill growled. "I have lots of money in the bank and I can afford to wait for something good."

"But can you? You're twenty-nine now and no one wants to take on a man in his thirties if he can hire a young lad in his twenties. And you've been supposedly looking around for a year and a half. Even if you had done well last year in college it would have been all right, but what happens? You do no work at all and they throw you out. You can't afford to waste your time like this any longer. You've got to settle down!"

"Why?" asked Bill, and there was a wealth of cynicism and bitterness in his tone.

"Well, for one thing, your two or three thousand dollars won't last long if you continue to squander your money like you've been doing. And for another, you'll meet some girl soon and want to get married. Then what?"

Bill snorted. "Huh! I never have anything to do with women, and you know it."

"I didn't mean women, I meant woman. Women-haters usually fall harder than anyone else."

"No, Ted. That sort of thing is all right for you, but it's not for me. I like to feel free; I don't want to have a wife and a flock of kids tying me down. Besides, what kind of a world is this to

bring kids into? Didn't we just finish a war? And aren't we heading straight for another? Why should I worry about making money and settling down when we'll all be uprooted again in a couple of years? And why should I be the cause of children coming into the world to face atomic bombs and hell on earth? You and I know what war can mean. Do you want your son to go through what we've been through?"

The blare and bustle of traffic pressed in on them from all sides. Taxis were honking furiously in a mad rush to save a few useless seconds. Street cars clanged up and down the street in the care of ulcer-ridden motormen. Pedestrians milled gloomily about in their fruitless search for a tasty and inexpensive lunch. Yet it was obvious that everyone was delaying a return to office confinement for as long a time as possible. Dust and gas fumes might permeate Dominion Square, but there was sunshine pouring down on the multitudes, and the unspoken, almost unrecognized and often surly companionship of a crowd of city workers was evident.

Ted wondered how he should reply. A pigeon fluttered down and surveyed him quizzically from the neighbouring park bench.

"Hell," Bill continued, "why can't we fight the Russians and get it over with now? But no, we'll keep fencing and pussy-footing around until we've forgotten everything we've ever known about war. Then, when we're all smug and lazy and indifferent, bang! we'll be attacked again. Do you see any difference between the state of the world now and back in 1935? Hitler was perhaps more frank about his intentions, but no one believed him. Of course, we now have the United Nations to save us! They've united all right, united to keep sniping at one another and fighting to prevent any decent legislation from being passed. No. You can do nothing when a strong nation is wilfully bent on chaos and destruction."

"Frankly, Bill, I think you feel that way because it soothes your conscience. You want to make everyone believe that the world is going to wrack and ruin and then they'll think that you're quite smart in just loafing and having a good time."

Bill was candid. "I suppose that's what a psychiatrist would say, and probably he'd be right. The thought that I have to be such and such a place at such and such a time, and do such and such a thing, would make me nervous. Frankly, I'd loathe any of these modern business firms. I don't think I could stand working in one."

But Ted was still considering the **post** war world. "In spite of what you say I hope to marry and bring several children into the world, and I hope they have the courage to try to make it a better place. Furthermore, I think they'll succeed. I don't think there's going to be a war for a long time to come. What percentage of the people in the world want war?"

"That has little to do with it, my friend. But even so, I think you might be surprised at the number. To some it means excitement and glamour and more money. To others, it means a uniform and a chance to get away from home and routine: dull, stifling day-by-day routine."

"Still, I'll bet that not more than one-tenth of one per cent of the people to-day want war. Are really looking for it, I mean."

"Yes, but unfortunately nearly all those who are really looking for it and are in a position to do something about it are in one country. And, I might add, running that country. And I might add further that they control the lives of a good many millions who will trot obediently off to war whether they want to or not."

"Well, as I see it, we can only attempt to elect honest men who will do their sincere best on our behalf. But I'm certainly not

going to lie down on the job because there's a slight chance of war with Russia somewhere in the future. The mere fact that all these countries are in one organization such as U. N., and are able to say frank things to one another's faces is an act of progress. It's encouraging."

Bill grunted. "Yeah, and these fine men from the democracies make fine speeches, and no one in Russia ever hears of them. So we're warmongers, imperialists, reactionaries!"

"But that doesn't mean to say we're going to war."

"It doesn't, eh? The only way we can avoid it is for us all to become Communists. And I'd give the bastards cause to shoot me the first day they were in power." He looked earnestly at his friend. "Don't you ever give any thought to the state of things? Don't you ever long to help the millions of down-trodden Europeans controlled and persecuted and spied upon by a force of sadistic, secret police? Don't you realize what it can all mean to you?"

"Probably not as often as I should," Ted admitted. "But then this is still a free country and I have other things on my mind. I like my job and I'm trying to make a success of it. I am about to get married, and I want to make a success of that too. I suppose that to-day I'm a pretty happy fellow, and rather pleased with myself. It's nice and warm, the sun is shining, and I see no reason to be depressed. And if you had a job to occupy your mind you'd have far less time to be so low in spirits." It was Ted's turn to look earnest. "That's the wedding present I want from you, Bill; the news that you have a job."

"Well, I suppose some day I'll have to find one, but I'm still in no rush."

"Why don't you take a few of your sketches and show them around?"

"Good God, no. They're not good enough for that."

"I thought they were very good."

"What do you know about painting?"

"Nothing, I guess, but I flatter myself that I at least have a little taste."

Bill rose to his feet. "Well," he said. "Nice to have seen you. I'll let you get back to your sweat shop."

Ted rose too. "What are you going to do with yourself all afternoon?"

"Oh, I don't know. Go home and work in the garden, I guess. Wouldn't it be nice if you could do what you wanted on a beautiful day like this?"

"I've trained myself so that I almost want to go back to work after lunch each day. We have a lot of fun in the office."

"Hm. Well, so long, Ted."

Ted shook his head sadly. "Can't I ever get you in the right groove?"

"No, I'm a pretty hopeless case. 'Bye." He loped out onto the street and managed to squeeze himself into an already overcrowded street car. Ted sauntered slowly through the crowds in the direction of his office building. He knew that he was wasting his time. He would never make anything out of Bill. The man was a war casualty. A fine and sensitive brain and body were riddled with neuroses and tortured by self doubts. Because he carried the cares of the world on his shoulders, he felt that the world, in exchange, should look after him. Neither his

two older brothers nor his father could do anything for him. He refused to see a psychiatrist. Both Dr. Fenton and Mr. Cummings had talked to him. It was all to no avail. Bill occasionally wandered downtown to interview some business man, but he steadfastly refused any offers of employment. He spent a large part of his time painting in a studio in his father's house and then refusing to let anyone other than Ted see the results of his labour.

Ted soon forgot about Bill and spent the afternoon restraining a wild impulse to burst into song. Margaret was right! Everything would turn out for the best. He was happier than he had been for weeks. Certain it was that the shadow of tragedy had intensified the love that he and Margaret felt for each other. He telephoned her twice merely to tell her how much he loved her. Later he called again to suggest that it might be nice if they dropped in on the Fentons, and he was surprised when Margaret rather brusquely insisted that she would be unable to join him there. They made plans to go for a drive into the Laurentians for dinner, but Ted decided to visit the Fentons beforehand, whether Margaret was with him or not.

He found that Dr. Fenton had just completed his office work, and was reading a newspaper in the living room. When Ted entered the room, Dr. Fenton leaped to his feet. He looked as if Ted were the last person in the world he expected to see.

Ted smiled and held out his hand. "Surprised to see me, sir?"

Meredith piloted him to an easy chair. "As a matter of fact I am - a little. And looking so well and cheerful, too."

"That's due largely to Margaret," Ted answered, silently praying that he might be tactful. "She's teaching me to have faith. She insists that if I believe in my heart and soul that I will live to

be ninety-five, then I will. So she has talked me into proceeding with all our plans, as scheduled."

"I am glad to hear it," Meredith replied, and he, too, invoked the deity to direct him down the paths of tact and judgment. "Faith can often be a great healer. And I must say that you seem like a new person. You look ever so much better to-day." He smiled heartily, albeit beseechingly, at the young man. "I want you to know how I hope I can be wrong. Your happiness means a lot to me." He broke off abruptly. He feared that he might reveal his true doubts if he kept on. "Let me get you a drink," he concluded.

Ted was relieved. "Just a short one," he replied. "Rye, if you have it."

"I'll call Mrs. Fenton. I know she would like to see you." He left the room, patting Ted on the shoulder as he passed.

Ted leaned his head against the back of the chair and closed his eyes. Suddenly he was tired again. He was foolish to have come back to this house. Details of his two unhappy professional visits to Dr. Fenton swam before his eyes. He must shut off his brain quickly before the mere presence of the doctor undid all of Margaret's good work. Already he was beset by doubts. That now familiar tremor of panic was bubbling up through his veins.

He opened his eyes and glanced desperately about him. What would he think about? The thud, thud, thud of his heart filled the room. What would quiet it? His eyes swept over the two Louis Quinze chairs that Mrs. Fenton prized so highly; the Persian rug and crystal chandelier afforded him no relief. Cigarette boxes, fancy ash trays, lamps, the

piano and a cigarette lighter in the shape of a mariner's wheel; all these objects left him mentally barren. And all the time the sensation that he might be going to die soon, despite his recent hopes, was gaining momentum and threatening to crush him.

Then his eyes chanced to light on a row of silver cups flanking a picture of Dick atop a book shelf. Two of the cups, he knew, had been won by Dick at a boy's' camp, and two or three had been picked up at school. But seven had been won at the Tennis Club and in other championship tournaments in the province. Ted at once had a vision of a stocky young man in white shirt and flannels bounding over the tennis court, trim and muscular, a natural athlete. He could remember many an occasion when he and Ted had battled it out in tournament after tournament. Each put every ounce of his energy into the contest and, no matter who emerged the victor, the match would only serve to strengthen the bonds of friendship between them.

Ted smiled slightly and closed his eyes. He had suddenly recalled that chaotic night when the Fentons had met Joyce for the first time, and he and Margaret had been invited to join the dinner party to ease any tension that might arise on such a momentous occasion. Joyce was a girl, however, who always carried her own tension with her. She was so intense and so vivacious that it was difficult to be completely at ease with her. Ted felt that he was expected to be constantly uttering witty sayings to keep abreast of the 'bon mots' that she delivered with such determined gaiety. It palled on him.

What was it that he wanted to remember about that evening? It was not only the amusing incident of Joyce examining Dick's trophies. Ah yes, of course! It was Dick's behaviour at dinner!

ITALICS
START.

Dick had had too much to drink. Then, all through the soup course, he had been too excited to eat. He chattered like a magpie. He recalled various army experiences and told jokes, even a decidedly off-colour account of the travelling salesman and the farmer's daughter, followed, to Ted's increasing horror, by a limerick about the young girl from Calais. Mrs. Fenton's usually serene brow was furrowed, and Dr. Fenton's face registered the slight amount of disapproval of which it was capable where it concerned his only son. Joyce tossed remarks at Mrs. Fenton whenever the opportunity presented itself, and Margaret was silent. Ted himself was constantly called upon by Dick to verify and corroborate humorous anecdotes of their army experiences. Any attempt to head Dick off proved futile.

With the arrival of the main course, Dick grew increasingly quiet, until finally he said nothing at all. He was apparently carrying on an inner conversation with himself because his face registered a gamut of emotions ranging from joy to deep gloom. Joyce gathered up the conversation reins and breathlessly forced them to gallop headlong with her through the remainder of the meal. However each person seemed to be too preoccupied with his own thoughts to pay much heed to what she was saying, although she had cast a spell over them. As far as Ted was concerned, he did not like the spell. Yet he was fascinated. He scrutinized her closely. He decided definitely that he had little use for her. Come to think of it, he had never liked snub-nosed women. And what a play she had made for Dick. How could the peer guy tell whether he loved her or not? Love at first sight, indeed! How could he be so gullible? Ted continued to survey her critically. She did not

have a bad figure, but she was certainly no hell to look at. Her hair looked as if she had tossed it about any old way just so that it would not drag in her soup. And the dress she was wearing to-night revealed far too much of her. Surely Mrs. Fenton would disapprove! Furthermore, the girl seemed to have no pride. Her eyes rarely left Dick's face. She wore her heart on her sleeve to an absurd degree. Dick must have more sense than to want to go through with this ridiculous thing! Ted decided that he would have to discuss it with him, and be firm. After all, it was his duty as best friend.

With a start, he felt Dick's eyes rivetted on him. During most of the main course and throughout dessert, Dick had obviously been waging a losing battle with his eyelids. But now he was evidently wide awake. He looked protectively at Joyce and then glared around the table. His eyes lighted accusingly on Ted. Ted was startled. Did Dick divine that he was hostile towards his intended fiancée? No, apparently everything was all right, for now he was smiling at everybody. Ted felt relieved and became involved in a short conversation with Dr. Fenton. When he looked across the table at his friend again, the silly ass was choking back tears! Ted shook his head. If this was all part of the game of love, it was not for him. He watched Dick drain his coffee cup and ask his mother for more. Silence reigned, or rather, Joyce discontinued her monologue. Dick looked flustered. It was evident that he was casting about for some bright yarn that would prove his sobriety. Ted held his breath, for here he was repeating a long, dull story that he had recited over his soup. Dr. Fenton stopped the recital and the dinner broke up. Dick linked his arm through his friend's and they left the dining room together. The ladies retired upstairs and Dr. Fenton disappeared into his office.

"Oh brother!" groaned Dick, as he and Ted settled themselves in the living room. "What a fool I made of myself! After all the trouble Mother went to, I was too tight to even notice anything, much less show my appreciation." He buried his face in his hands. "I feel awful," he added plaintively. "I'd give anything to be able to go straight to bed."

Ted laughed. "No bed for you, Casanova. You'll have to escort your young lady home."

Dick brightened. "Isn't she lovely, Ted? Don't you think she's simply wonderful?"

"Uh-huh!" There was no use discussing this thing now. But he must talk seriously about it some time soon. To-morrow, maybe. Yes, to-morrow for sure.

"I'm just not half good enough for her," Dick decided. The flush was gradually draining from his cheeks; he looked washed out, but his natural high spirits seemed to be returning to the fore.

"Well," said Ted, drily, "I wouldn't go that far."

The sarcasm in his voice was wasted on Dick, and before anything more could be said, the ladies had returned.

"It was such a lovely dinner, Mrs. Fenton," Margaret was saying. Ted was surprised. It was the first sentence that she had uttered for at least a half hour. He saw that she looked tired. He wondered vaguely if she had been out late with someone the night before.

Joyce ran over to Dick before he could rise, and sat on the arm of his chair. "Yes, indeed it was, Mrs. Fenton," she echoed. Ted was sure that she was wishing she had made the remark first. She put her arm around the back of the chair, but gradually it slid down to

Dick's shoulders. Good God, did she think that someone was going to pry him away from her?

Joyce resumed her prattling and Ted turned his attention to Margaret. To-night he seemed unable to meet her on common ground. They discussed trivialities but eventually they were forced to lapse into silence. Joyce's chatter proved too much for them. Shortly afterwards, Dr. Fenton rejoined them.

Almost simultaneously with his arrival on the scene, Joyce spied the silver cups. "Oh my!" she ejaculated, and dashed over to them. "Are all these yours, Dickie darling?"

Ted winced. Dickie darling, indeed!

"I'm afraid so," Dick answered. His face was brick red. He noticed the quick glance that passed between his mother and father. So did Ted.

Joyce examined every cup and supplied a running commentary with each scrutiny. "But how wonderful," she would say. "Oh Dickie, how simply marvellous." Or "Little did I know to-day that I was playing with such a champion."

The Fentons and Ted and Margaret sat back to enjoy the show. At last Joyce had finished, and she rushed back to the edge of Dick's chair.

"It's too wonderful," she breathed ecstatically. "I just adore athletic men."

Ted was unable to hold back a cough. Surely she was joking! But no, she was deadly serious. Ted decided that she was far too intense to ever joke about anything. Dr. Fenton was openly smiling, but Mrs. Fenton looked serious and faintly troubled.

No one knew what to expect next.

Joyce, totally oblivious of her surroundings, was gazing adoringly into Dick's eyes. She seemed to be struggling with herself. Suddenly she could bear it no longer. She bent over and kissed him on the forehead.

As far as Ted was concerned, that was the end of the party. He could not bear to look at Dick's face again. He signalled to Margaret, made his excuses to the Fentons, and fled from the house. *ITALICS* *END*

He opened his eyes. Dr. Fenton was handing him a drink. "Thanks," he muttered, and took a bigger sip than he had intended.

"I can't find Marion," Meredith said and he sounded somewhat dismayed. He, too, drank freely from his glass.

There seemed little to say. Ted was wishing that he had not come. At length the silence became agonizing.

"Busy lately?" asked Ted. The sound of his own voice made him start.

Meredith seemed to drag himself back to reality with an effort. "Yes," he replied. "Surprisingly so considering the beautiful weather we have been having these past two months. Still, I guess nice weather is not much help to people who contract cancer or some form of heart condition." He flushed, and quickly drained his glass. "Let me get you another, Ted. Can't fly on one wing, you know."

Ted also finished his drink and he rose to his feet. "I'm afraid I'll have to, sir. I'm to be at Margaret's at six o'clock, and we're driving to St. Adèle for dinner. I must be on my way. I just wanted to drop in and say hullo."

"And I appreciated it too, Ted." Meredith slipped an arm around the younger man's shoulders as he opened the front door. "You tell Margaret that Mrs. Fenton and I want you to come out to dinner with us one

night next week. Ask her to decide on a night and give Mrs. Fenton a call." Meredith seemed to remember something and dropped his arm dejectedly. "I forgot. Maybe she won't want to go."

"Oh! I know she will, sir," Ted replied quickly.

Meredith's mind was now on another tangent. "If Marion is not up to it, I'll take you myself." He smiled. "Do me good. I haven't had a night out for weeks."

"I'll look forward to it, sir, and so will Margaret. I hope Mrs. Fenton's feeling better soon. Many thanks for the drink." He was already down the stairs. Meredith was gazing after him thoughtfully. Ted turned the corner and hurried to the nearest street car stop. Suddenly he pulled up short.

Approaching him on the sidewalk was an old woman. Although the thermometer registered eighty-six degrees, she was clad in a heavy, cloth coat. It was stained and greasy. Her shoes were covered with dust and her tattered stockings were wrinkled. Perched on her head was a round hat bedecked with flowers, and strands of hair were straying in every direction. The face was lined, and the mouth was slack.

It was the eyes that really arrested Ted's attention. He had never seen eyes like them. They were piercing yet unseeing, glazed yet filled with cunning. They were staring fixedly ahead, and he stepped aside to let the woman pass.

He hurried on to meet Margaret. He needed her warmth and assurance so much that he ran frantically along the street without even waiting for the street car.

He felt sure that Marion Fenton would never again be in any condition to entertain at dinner.

16 February, 1945

Dick sat comfortably in his first class coach, en route to London, and idly inspected his companions. There was the inevitable middle aged gentleman in the corner, safely protected from prying eyes by the London Times, although, Dick mused, it might just as well have been the Daily Telegraph. Next to him sat a young English naval rating. He was twisting his cap in his hands, and gazing out the window. The rapt expression on his face caught and held Dick's attention. His eyes were devouring the scenery with an indescribable wistfulness and content. No tree, no nondescript suburban or country home, indeed no blade of grass seemed too unimportant for his minute inspection. In those wide, blue eyes there was an abundance of tenderness, an abundance of longing, and yet uncertainty and nervousness, too. Dick was consumed with curiosity. How long had this lad been away? How many ships had been blown out from under him? How many people would, this very moment, be preparing a rousing reception for their sailor boy? Would those eyes tonight be sparkling with excitement and happiness? Would they be glazed with the effects of a celebration that so often befell a returning hero? Would he be greeted by a little, old white-haired mother? The only thing of which he could be reasonably sure in war torn England was that his friends, the boys with whom he had grown up and attended school, would not be on hand to welcome him. They would be in far off places awaiting their own return for a few precious days of home and family, or big city and hell-raising.

Just for a fleeting second Dick wished that he, too, could be speeding across his own country - going home!

The train pulled into a station.

"This is Woking, Woking Station," chanted a female voice over an intercom system. To the Canadian troops she was more than a female voice. She was an institution. Dick felt that it was she, and she alone, whom God had intended to say those five words - "This is Woking, Woking Station!"

Apparently no one in the carriage was getting out. The sailor leaned forward a little. He was busily scanning all the faces on the platform. He seemed more excited than ever.

Dick only ceased his contemplation of the sailor when he realized that he himself was the subject of close scrutiny. He glanced hastily to the sailor's left. A girl - she might have been twenty or twenty-one - was in the process of lowering her eyes. The action was demure but the play of the lips as she did so was bold and inviting. Dick sized her up in a glance. She was blonde, though not naturally so, and moderately attractive, and she had the English girl's traditionally beautiful complexion and ugly legs. She was tired and she worked hard at some job that the government had selected for her. She was completely sold on dates with Americans and Canadians, and enjoyed chewing gum and American films. She was thin and hungry, but not as thin and hungry as she would have been had she not been so fond of Canadian and American servicemen. To the older people of England Canada was, after all, a recently 'liberated' colony, and reported to be mighty cold and barren at that. Canadians at home were spoiled and were undergoing no hardships, and most of their soldiers were wild young men who drank too much. Yet there were extenuating circumstances. At least Canada was a part of the Empire who came to the aid of the Mother Country without having to be attacked. But look at the Americans! They were worse. They had all the

annoying qualities of the Canadians plus a galling conceit, even more money and an infuriatingly patronizing generosity. Furthermore they questioned the idea of a royal family - though they were flattered beyond all reason if that same royalty ever spoke to them - and they seemed to think that the existence of an empire was not in accordance with true democratic ideals! After six and a half years of war the older generation in England was ready to tolerate the Canadians, but the Americans were quite beyond the pale.

This young, blonde girl, however, was only fourteen when war broke out. The glories of empire meant little to her, and she had read too much in foreign periodicals and in articles by her left wing politicians not to feel just a little uncertain about India. She could barely remember England when it was not tortured by the threat of war or by actual hostilities. She knew but little of the enchanting country that England could be, with its cozy fire-lit inns, its quiet and verdant countryside and the joys of the countless thousands who used to pour into football stadiums, cricket fields and race tracks, in gay, holiday spirit. It was not her lot to sample scones dripping with butter and honey. Her's was the existence of breaded sausages, queues and government directives on all but the most private functions of life. Her elders, of course, told her and each other that England would pull through, that she would rise to command world affairs once more, but, even after the heroic stand of 1940, this young girl was skeptical. That the war would be won there was no doubt, but whose world would it be afterwards? Russia's? America's? And did it really matter so much, provided that everyone could live in peace?

Never had this young girl been taken for a spin in the country

by a young man. Perhaps she had been for a hurried jaunt or two in a jeep, but it was her misfortune to travel either by foot or by bus, by tube or by train, and never for pleasure. Her parents and their friends were apt to lay the blame for all the present austerities and hardships of the nation on Germany, for marching into Poland; on France, for being so corrupt as to fall in 1940; on the United States for not entering the war sooner; on Communists, for being Communists. But this young girl was more apt to look reproachfully at her parents and their friends. She faced life more squarely than they, and very little was sacred to her scorching cynicism. She was versed in the art and mysteries of sex.

Young Englishmen were almost unknown to her. Perhaps Cousin Jim would blow in on two weeks' shore leave, or one of the neighbour's boys would be granted a short period at home to convalesce from a wound. She was too busy to see very much of them. But, living in the south of England, she soon became exposed to Canadians - thousands of them. And shortly afterwards she began to notice Americans - hundreds of thousands of them. They laughed more than the men she had known and imagined. They made more demands upon her, yet they were kind and thoughtful and extremely generous, and they were far more attentive to her in the little courtesies of life than her own countrymen. It seemed that in America the women had much more say as to the running of the home and their husbands' lives, and this prospect was very pleasing to her. It seemed a most desirable thing to marry one of these wealthy, young men and go to live in their wonderful land, even though one American had told her that he owned a ranch in New York City and it was sometime before she learned that there was barely room in New York City for Central Park, much less any ranches! If she had lost her virginity young, what of it? She might be killed at any moment, and nothing was normal these days. There was nothing to hold firm to;

nothing to grasp. And these young lads were so lonely! Who knew what the future held in store for them? Could it be so wrong if she added a little colour to two drab fear-filled lives and met a homesick soldier in Brighton for the week-end? Her mother was too busy in a factory or involved in some other type of war work, as well as trying to run a house despite all the wartime inconveniences, to offer any advice. Or indeed, to know much about what her daughter was doing. Her father was busy, too. Perhaps he was still young enough for the forces. Perhaps he had been directed to a job elsewhere. At any rate this girl made her own decisions, and made them with all the assurance of youth. She loved the company of men. She knew few other pleasures.

The train pulled out of Woking station and continued on its way to London. The middle aged gentleman rustled his Times as he turned the page. The sailor rested his head against the back of the seat and closed his eyes. But only for a moment. He soon jerked them open and once more they were brimming over with excitement. The girl stared hard and long at Dick. Dick stared back, but was the first to lower his eyes.

Casual pick-ups had never interested him. Even in the strange, unnatural army life of a Canadian officer in England, Dick had never lost his distaste for a cheap and tawdry affair. Was he unnecessarily abstemious? Was he, in fact, just a timid, callow hypocrite? Dick felt not. He had no envy for so many of his fellow officers who threw all moral restraint to the four winds with a shrug of the shoulders and a closing of the conscience. "It's war," would be the excuse. "We'll be settling down soon enough when we get back home." Possibly, Dick reflected, he would have turned to the same source of entertainment had it not been that he and Ted were so often able to get away together. Since his engagement to Margaret, Ted rarely showed even a flicker of interest in

any woman. He assumed that Dick's views corresponded with his own. So the two friends spent their leaves together exploring the country - Dick loved Cornwall and Ted preferred Scotland, so they alternated - or seeing plays in London, or visiting some old friends of Mrs. Cummings' who lived in Manchester. Always they enjoyed themselves immensely. They asked only to be allowed to discover Britain together. They drank more than was customary, perhaps, and spent money recklessly, but nothing had ever happened on any one of those trips that would have given Margaret or Joyce a moment's concern. There were several incidents that occurred when Dick, for some reason or other, was away from his unit alone. But he was not especially proud of these interludes, few though they may have been, and kept any untoward details strictly to himself.

The girl was looking away, now. Had she given him up as a hopeless case? A spark of masculine pride glowed within Dick, but he extinguished it. It was not as if he did not devote a certain amount of his leisure time to thinking about such things.....but..... At any rate, the train was making so much noise that private conversation was impossible. He reached into his haversack and pulled out a pocket edition of Time magazine. For several minutes he read undisturbed.

The train stopped again.

"Walton," breathed the sailor rapturously.

The gentleman in the corner folded his Times carefully, grabbed up his coat and hat, and left the compartment. The girl merely stirred in her seat. She looked bored.

"A pretty place, Walton," said a voice from beside Dick. An English woman of some fifty years was smiling at him. He returned the smile. She had a lovely voice.

"Yes," he agreed.

"Have you ever spent any time here?" she asked.

"Once," Dick answered. "I came down for a week-end to meet a friend of mine."

"Oh," said the lady. "Did you manage any fun?"

"Well, we only stayed overnight. My friend was on a course near Brighton at the time and I was in Aldershot. London was out-of-bounds so we decided to meet in Walton. We just went to the cinema" (would he always stumble over that wretched word?) "and had a drink or two."

The girl across the way was listening attentively. The lady continued to smile. Dick was fascinated by the softness of her accent. He decided that she was definitely of the 'upper crust'. He imagined her as a lady of title, living on some huge Hollywood-like estate. "Have you been treated well over here?" she asked.

"Oh yes, indeed," replied Dick hurriedly. "Very well."

"We do try, you know," she continued, "but it's so frightfully difficult to entertain. We just have enough to make do ourselves. But I must say you Canadians are very generous. Why, I invited two young sergeants to visit me last Christmas and they arrived with enough goodies and foodstuffs to stock a grocer's shop."

"They were only too happy to be allowed into a home," Dick said.

"Yes, the poor dears. It must be ghasty for you all over holidays. And your boys are so brave. They have done so much of the fighting lately. It must have been hard on them being bottled up on this little island for so long."

The sailor must have been nearing his destination, Dick thought. His cap, somewhat battered, was in his lap, and his short,

thin fingers were gripping his knees. The girl had definitely given up hope and interest, but Dick did not mind. He had found someone with whom he could talk intelligently.

And talk they did. They discussed the unwillingness of the Canadian government to enforce conscription for overseas service, which manoeuvre the English, although sympathetic and polite, found very difficult to understand. So did Dick and most of the Canadian army, for that matter. The lady entered upon a description of a third cousin who lived in Regina. They discussed Canadian winters and Dick surprised her greatly by describing the stifling heat of the summers in Montreal. The lady mentioned that she had a son in Burma, another in the Fleet Air Arm and a daughter in the A.T.S.; Dick mentioned Ted, and his probable whereabouts in Europe. She talked of her garden and of the vegetables that she was growing. He told her how much the Canadians admired the English for their courage and fortitude under duress. She was discoursing at some length upon the relative merits of President Roosevelt and Prime Minister Churchill when she glanced out of the window and noticed the rows of nondescript, bomb shattered dwellings that heralded the approach to Waterloo Station. She stopped abruptly.

"Are you ever down around Maidstone?" she asked.

"Why, I have been. I love it."

She reached into her purse and took out a pencil and a scrap of paper. She wrote something down and handed the paper to Dick. "Lady Margaret Fitzsimmons," he read, and her address in Maidstone followed. "My name is Dick Fenton," he told her.

"I have enjoyed meeting you and talking to you so much, Captain Fenton," she said. "I do wish you would drop down some time and

have tea with me. Or, better still, come for a week-end. My husband was killed in London during the blitz and I live with my mother and an unmarried brother. We'd love to have you, and we'd do our utmost to make you comfortable."

Dick was touched. "You're very kind," he murmured as the train swayed into Waterloo Station. "I would be delighted to take advantage of your kind invitation." He felt gauche and stilted before such thoughtfulness and generosity.

She held out her hand and her grip was firm. "I shall look forward to seeing you, then," she said.

Dick opened the door of the compartment and Lady Fitzsimmons stepped nimbly out. With a cursory, backward glance, the girl followed. The sailor hung back. Dick was certain that London must be his home. He smiled encouragingly. Doors were banging right and left and a crowd of people were racing up the platform into the station. Dick plunged into the throng. The sailor and the girl had become nameless memories. He would never know who met them, where they went, or what fate would befall them. But he liked Lady Fitzsimmons, and decided definitely that he would call on her some day.

He walked over to a Canadian Officers' club near Victoria Station where he had reserved a bed. He found that he was hungry, so he ordered a cup of tea and a bun in the cafeteria. Then he was shown to his fifth floor room where he was able to freshen up. He realized that the excitement and activity of the day had tired him, and he lay down to rest. When he awakened he felt revitalized, but he did not feel up to attempting any strenuous activity. He put out of his mind any prearranged ideas that he had entertained about touring the city or visiting a theatre. He indulged in idle chatter with a few officers whom he

had met somewhere in his travels, and finally ventured out for a stroll.

The black-out was still in effect and the night was black as pitch, yet, even if he could see nothing of the city save a few sombre silhouettes, merely to feel the London sidewalks underfoot filled him with a thrill of gratification and surprise. He drank in the fog and soot laden air with great gulps and exulted to think that he, Neville Richard Fenton, was actually walking towards Westminster Abbey and Buckingham Palace. For these were the erstwhile symbols of pomp and greatness and empire, and now they were the symbols of dogged courage, religious freedom and the will of survival. He entered the Abbey, which he had already explored several times with Ted, knelt for a few minutes in prayer, gazed about him in awe, and silently withdrew. He jumped on a Victoria bus and within ten minutes he was ordering dinner in the officers' club. He would have given a great deal for an order of ham and eggs, or a thick sirloin steak, but he contented himself instead with liver and onions. The club was well stocked with fresh milk, and he was at least able to take advantage of that situation. He downed four glasses.

He went upstairs to a writing room. He must write Joyce. Despite his good intentions, he had not written for two weeks. Gloomily he pulled a piece of paper towards him and jabbed his pen in the ink well. For a while he thoughtfully chewed a knuckle. Then he pulled another sheet of paper towards him. He made a cross. He bisected the angles. He drew a circle around the cross. He bisected the smaller angles. He drew a succession of wavy lines through the resulting masterpiece. He put aside his pen, and lit a cigarette.

He picked up his pen and began to write. After five minutes he had written merely the address of the hospital. Then he wrote, 'Dear Joyce.'

Dear Joyce? Only dear Joyce? He could remember that he escorted her home after his mother's dinner party and poured passionate love words in her ear the whole way. He blushed faintly as he recalled them. How could he have been so puerile? It must have been the effect of his father's cocktails. Anyway Joyce had loved the endearments, and he had imagined that he was enraptured. She was the love of his life. But now she was just - 'Dear Joyce.'

One Major Leonard, with whom he had once been on a battle drill course, approached him and suggested that they play cribbage when Dick's letter was finished. Dick leaped to his feet, folded the letter and suggested that they play immediately. They played five games, during which time Dick's conscience spoke louder and louder. They finished at nine-thirty. Dick yawned and stretched.

"Well," he said, "guess I'll hit the hay."

"Aren't you going to finish that letter?" his opponent asked.

"I should," Dick replied, smiling fatuously at his conscience, "but all the desks are occupied." Just then one was vacated.

Dick sighed. "Some days you just can't win," he said.

"Thanks for the game."

He sat at the desk and opened up the letter. "Dear Joyce," he read.

ITALICS What a night that had been! They had walked up the hill
START. and through the park hand in hand, hip pressed against hip, leg against leg. They were as one. Two or three times he had stopped to kiss her.

She was all the popular love songs rolled into a modern symphony. *ITALICS
END*

He took up his pen once more. "Just a few lines to let you know that I am hale and hearty, and have been given a week-end pass from the hospital."

*ITALICS
START* They were soon sitting on a bench, partly screened from public view by a hedge. As Dick went to take Joyce in his arms, she resisted. Dick was thunderstruck. Then petulant. "May I ask why not?" he demanded. "Dickie boy," she whispered, in such a way that Dick was sure that she was about to deliver a premeditated address, one that she had rehearsed many times, "you know my home is in Brantford. So is Margaret's. But I guess you really don't know much about me yet. Margaret's father is going to be moved to Montreal, I hear, but mine is a lawyer and I know he'll never move! Of course, there's no real reason why he should, I guess. However....." At this point, she hesitated. Dick was eyeing her cautiously. This girl was certainly loaded with surprises! What next? "There's a boy there," she finally blurted, "and he wants to marry me. He will be there when I go back next week and he wants a definite answer." *ITALICS
END*

"I am in London now, in an officers' club. I have just played five games of cribbage with Bob Leonard, a chap I was on a course with once."

*ITALICS
START* There was silence for a minute. Dick stared at her incredulously. "This hardly ties in with what you told me last night," he said coldly. She grabbed hold of his arm and squeezed it. "Oh Dickie! I didn't say that I wanted to marry him." Her voice was edged with panic. "You know I love only you, darling. But I'm twenty-three and a girl has to think of the future." "I see! What's he like - this sailor?" "Oh!

He's tall and dark and very good looking. Not as good looking as you, though darling." She looked worshipfully at him but Dick only emitted a stern and forbidding 'Well?' *ITALICS*
END.

"I am feeling ever so much better now, and there's certainly no need for anyone to worry about me. I think the parcels and the letters helped as much as anything."

ITALICS
START Joyce's lower lip started to quiver. My God, thought Dick, I am being subjected to the two most deadly weapons in a woman's arsenal - the other man routine, and tears. Yet he was enjoying himself. He wondered what limpid pools looked like. He was sure that Joyce's eyes resembled them. He stared fondly at her. Why, she was just a child! She shook her head slightly, raised her chin and looked him squarely in the eye. Women cheat so unfairly, he decided. He stooped to kiss her. It was the only thing he could think of doing, and besides, he wanted to kiss her. *ITALICS*
END.

"I hope to be completely clear of the hospital within two or three weeks. It can't be too soon to suit me! I have been offered a staff job around here which I guess I'll take. No promotion, but the work sounds interesting."

ITALICS
START He kissed her for a long time. She had won. He knew it. And he knew that she knew it! "You write back and tell that sailor that you're engaged - engaged to be married to a soldier and a fighting man!" The smile died out of his eyes. "Oh my darling," he whispered hoarsely, "I love you so. Will you marry me?" He was appalled at his lack of originality. But it was a type of speech to which he had never given much thought. Her answer was even less original. "Of course," she said, and once more offered him her lips. *ITALICS*
END.

"It will be wonderful to do a job of work again. I am getting so lazy that I hate to write my own name! I wish Ted were over here with me. I expect I'll be seeing him on leave one of these days, and then what a time we'll have!"

ITALICS
START "Of course," Dick said, "we can't get married until the war's over. After all, we've only known each other a very few days. And in a short time I'll be gone and who knows how long it will be before we see one another again? No. Marriage is out. But I have you, Buttons, and when the war's over we will make up for everything we've missed." "Of course, dear," she replied. There was something in her voice that caused Dick to glance sharply at her, but her eyes were down-cast. *ITALICS*
END.

"Had quite a good meal to-night - liver and onions - but how I long for good old fashioned bacon and eggs or any one of Mother's specialties! I'm glad you've been in to see the family recently.. They need a little cheering up, I guess."

ITALICS
START "Gosh, I had too much to drink to-night," Dick said. "Or perhaps the excitement's been too much for me, but I'm awfully sleepy all of a sudden." Joyce pressed his head to her shoulder and ran her fingers through his hair. "Then have a little sleep, my dearest," she said softly. "It's been quite a day. You may not know it but you've made me the happiest girl in the world. And I know I'm the luckiest." "Silly little goose," he muttered sleepily, as he pressed up close against her. *ITALICS*
END.

"I'm glad you're keeping so well. Don't work too hard on that job now! Get out and have some fun."

ITALICS
START The park attendant found them sound asleep at three-thirty and told them, regretfully but firmly, that park benches were not to be

used for such purposes. ^{ITALICS}
^{END.}

"Must go now Joyce. Thanks again for that wonderful parcel. Write soon." He scratched his head. He stared thoughtfully at the paper for some minutes. Finally he shrugged. "Love from your Dickie."

He heaved a sigh of relief, addressed the envelope, dropped it into an outgoing mail basket, and went happily upstairs to bed. He had really accomplished something.

The next morning he was up at seven o'clock. He paid particular attention to his toilet, ate a large breakfast, then dashed out of the building and hailed a cab. He alighted at Waterloo Station, bought a platform ticket and passed through the barrier just as a train ground to a stop.

He stood still, and anxiously surveyed the crowd. His eyes darted everywhere. At last his face broke into a wide grin. He ran forward. There she was, red hair, blue eyes and all!

"Wilma!" he called out joyfully. He was at her side, relieving her of her kit bag. "Wilma. I was so afraid you might change your mind and not come!"

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The water bubbled, clear and cold but joyous in its release, out of the mountain spring. Glinting cheerfully in the early afternoon sun, it was to begin its journey to the valley below, where it would at length disappear, absorbed into the soggy earth of a dried-up river bed.

Surely, at the commencement of its trip, it must have been conscious of the magnificent scene which it surveyed. Surrounding its own mountain were other hills and mountains of the Laurentian chain. Some of the nearby hamlets, such as St. Adele, Mont Rolland and St. Marguerite, were faintly discernible. Wisps of smoke revealed the location of many a rustic mountain resort. Wooden fences of all descriptions zig-zagged crazily through the countryside. Clusters of evergreens crowned most of the hills, but the leaves that were waving lazily from the deciduous trees were still green and fresh. The Montreal highway twisted its way into the distance, and the fretting, speeding cars racing along its broad lanes presented the picture of a narrow slow-moving ribbon on a white band. Closer at hand, in complete contrast, a team of horses stumbled up a steep trail. The French Canadian farmer urging them on was bent on obtaining lumber for the coming winter. The dancing stream seemed aware that it was an integral part of the beauty of Montreal's play hills. Gay and abandoned, it was obviously enjoying itself.

Gaining speed, it raced around a corner. It entered a grove, where a cluster of towering trees shut out the light. It soon burst out triumphantly into the clear, and the sun danced cheerfully on its icy, blue surface. It turned many of the smaller stones over in its impetuous haste. On, on it hurried. Ever downward. It darted about the forelegs of a deer, who was nonchalantly

drinking the clear water. It tugged at a root^ting branch, and finally wrenched it from the withered bosom of an old birch tree. Stream and branch went gambolling down to-gether. Their frolic was ended when the branch was held up at the next turn.

Down slid the brook, past a couple of rabbits, who were foraging through some ferns for their lunch. The ground was becoming more open now. On a nearby tree, a sign pointed to a path through the woods. It was a distinguishing mark for skiers, informing them of the number of the trail and of their destination. A Scoutmaster was puffing his way up the path, and six young Scouts were scampering wildly around him. Instantly they were out of sight as the brook charged on. It was wider now, and shallower. More and more the stones were rattling and tumbling over one another in their eagerness to move forward and explore the great unknown.

The ground became less precipitous. Soon it evened out and the stream dashed through a wide, open plateau. A large boulder almost blocked its path. The water broke into ripples and beat angrily against this impediment, but it was forced to split into two before it could gather itself to-gether and hurtle down the last steep grade to the valley below.

On the large, flat-surfaced boulder lay a boy and a girl. The girl's head was cradled in the hollow of the boy's shoulder; idly he traced the line of her jaw with the tip of his fore-finger. She sighed and raised her tousled head. He kissed her.

Margaret adjusted her position until her lips were on a straight line with his.

"Just to make it easier for you, darling," she murmured. He kissed her again, a burning kiss that was hard and insistent.

She stirred restlessly. "Darling," she breathed.

She was barely audible above the swirling of the waters.

"Uh-huh?"

"Darling, let's talk about making love. You know, sex and stuff."

He raised his head to look at her quizzically, almost reproachfully.

"Well, you needn't look so old maidish," she said, and she drew a little away from him to rest her head on her hand, "for, after all, we have talked about it before, you know, and we do practise it to a degree, and we are reading rather a frank volume that Dr. Fenton recommended!"

He laughed ruefully. "I know," he said. "It's just that I heard the words 'sex' and 'sexy' thrown around so much in the army that I hate to hear them coming from you."

"Then you won't dear." She returned to the shelter of his arms, her eyes roving thoughtfully over a clear, blue sky. "But you know, I feel closer to you now, in this beautiful setting, than I have ever felt before. I think I love you more, too. And maybe it's the sun pouring into me, or the sense that you and I are alone and cut off on a desert island, but I want you more than I have ever wanted you before. Physically, I mean. I wouldn't know any fear or hesitation or embarrassment. I'd just yield readily if you were to want me." She brushed her lips over his neck, which was tanned and firm. He pulled her closer to him. "I don't know," she continued, "I'm probably all wrong, but I feel that when two people are in love, the first time should be spontaneous and under as ideal and beautiful circumstances as possible. 'Wedding night' has such a smutty sound. To so many people it is the fitting culmination of a romance instead of the beginning of an intimate companionship. Don't you sometimes feel that the glamour is taken out of something when it is expected of you? By ten o'clock on our wedding night

you and I will be expected to be in bed to-gether - and for the first time. Our parents will be thinking about us, and they'll be anxious. Our unmarried friends will be thinking about us and they'll be curious. Our married friends will be thinking about us, and they'll be nostalgic. The association of ideas will be enough to drive them all to bed early themselves. Don't you think it might be kind of fun to fool them? If we - if we were to do it now, say, and then, on our wedding night be out somewhere dancing till dawn and drinking champagne? Don't you think that would be kind of fun?" Her hand was inside his shirt now, and she was running her fingers over the smooth surface of his chest. He caught at her wrist, and held her hand steady over his heart.

"Margaret," he said. "Do you know what....."

"Oh! I know!" she interrupted. "I'm a nice girl, and so it just couldn't happen until ten o'clock of our wedding night. Not nine o'clock, mind you, because haste would be unseemly and we must be refined. Not now when we want to, when it would be the most natural thing in the world. But comes ten o'clock of our wedding night, I'll tuck my timid little hand in yours and that will be the signal. We won't be able to delay it any longer. The folks at home will be thinking of us and they'll be guessing correctly. We'll be tired and on edge. You'll be horribly embarrassed and I'll be positively scared to death."

She was still lying by his side, but she was tense and rigid. She had withdrawn from him completely.

Ted pulled his pipe out of his pocket, and knocked it several times against the rock. He put it in a corner of his mouth, and he was surprised to find that his hand was shaking. The little laugh that was meant to be casual and reassuring sounded forced and brittle as the breeze hurried it away. He removed the pipe from his mouth, knocked it several times against the rock, and shoved it back in his pocket.

He pulled Margaret closer to him and turned on his side

to face her. There was more tenderness than passion in his eyes.

"Come on," he coaxed. "It won't be that bad, I promise you. I'll take good care of you, and if you really want to fool everyone, why, we can dance all night and drink champagne, and wait till the next day. By then we should be perfectly safe.-- people can't keep on thinking about us forever, you know!" He put his hand under her chin, and raised her head. "Come on," he insisted. "Just a little smile." The corners of her mouth turned up slightly, and she wrinkled her nose at him. He grinned at her, and kissed her lightly on each eyelid and the mouth. "We've waited a long time, hon, and I know it hasn't been easy for you any more than it has for me. Chastity can be maddening. Yet we've held out this long, and we only have twenty days to go. Wouldn't you rather face your wedding day with the knowledge that the mysteries of life were before you? Yes, and all the joys and beauties!" He looked at her earnestly. "And we will make them beautiful, darling, even -- even the first time." She was in his arms again and his lips were finding her mouth, her throat and the hollow between her breasts. "Oh my God, why do I love you so?" he groaned.

She soon disengaged herself with a husky, "There, there, darling. There are twenty more shopping days till Xmas, and we decided not to fill our order at once." She sat up, buttoned her shirt to the neck, shivered, slipped into the sweater on which her head had been resting, and rearranged her hair. "My," she said when she had recovered her poise, "I hope you won't think too badly of me, sir. I'm becoming positively abandoned."

"In word only," Ted replied. "In deed, never! You are more conventional than Queen Mother Mary."

"You're right. I suppose I'm the cold type, and so it's always been easy for me to stay on the straight and narrow."

"Whatever type you are, it's what I want," Ted countered. His voice was matter-of-fact now, and he was lighting his pipe with the loving care that such a possession deserves. He knew that he and Margaret would make no more love that day.

Margaret turned to face him. Her eyes were still shining excitedly. "Just one more thing, darling," she said, and the words tumbled breathlessly out. "Let's spend our honeymoon here! "

"What?" Ted could scarcely believe his ears. "With all our reservations made in New York?"

"Well, we can cancel them without saying a word to anyone, and then we can drive up here. It would be kind of fun to fool everybody."

Ted shook his head, but he was laughing. "You're bound you're going to fool everyone, aren't you? One way or another."

"It's not only that," answered Margaret softly. "I think this has been the happiest day of my life. I would love to come back here, and sit with you on this same rock when I am Mrs. Ted Cummings. Besides, by the end of the month the Inn should not be too crowded."

Ted smiled. Nearly all trace of the worry and strain of the past week had left his face. He looked young and boyish as he readily assented to this change in plan. They finally decided to spend a week in each place. They felt like conspirators and were highly pleased with themselves. Then they were silent. Ted was puffing on his pipe, deep in meditation; Margaret was gazing abstractedly over the plateau.

"You know," she said finally, "I have been thinking a lot about Joyce lately. Poor kid! Do you think she will get down for the wedding?"

"She said she expected to." Ted's voice did not betray much enthusiasm.

"It will be so terribly hard for her. I was awfully sorry when she said she wouldn't be my maid of honour, but it's probably all for the best." A leaf fluttered languidly on to the rock.... She dropped it into the current, and watched it galvanized into activity as it sped away. "Ted dear," she continued after a minute, "what are you going to do about that letter? Are you ever going to show it to her?"

Ted clamped his pipe more firmly in his mouth and hugged his bony knees with his hands. "I've been thinking about that letter," he said slowly. "I'll have to decide when I see her. I guess I should have destroyed the damned thing long ago."

Nothing more was said for some time, and again it was Margaret who broke the silence. Her voice was low, and she was staring intently at the smoke that was rising from the chimney of a log house in the valley. "I feel ashamed of myself for my rude outburst to Dr. Fenton. And now with what you've been telling me about Aunt Marion - but I don't care," she said fiercely. "He's just an old woman, and I couldn't have you moping around thinking such dreadful things. Especially when it was all such pure nonsense."

Ted was staring fixedly in the other direction. His face was cold and stiff. "I have never felt better in my life," he muttered. He said it mechanically, but it was doubtful if Margaret even heard him. She was obviously in the midst of reciting something that required the cooperation of all her faculties. They had not spoken of his illness for five days, and it was a difficult subject.

"But now that you're so well, he must be feeling pretty badly about everything. And there are probably things that I could do to help. So let us drop in and see them to-night."

"All right," said Ted. It would be an awkward evening, but it had to be faced sometime. "We'd better get moving. We're supposed to be at the Carsons' for dinner at seven and it's nearly four now."

Margaret rose to her feet and gathered to-gether her possessions. Ted took her hand to help her jump to land. "I want you to know, darling," she said quietly, "that this day alone has made everything worth while for me. This rock, this hill, this sky - I'll never forget any of them. And I'll never forget any of them because I shared their beauty with you. And how lucky we are, my dear! Think of all the days ahead of us that can be so beautiful if only we let them. We must be sure to always give them a chance." She kissed him lightly on the forehead. "I love you so," she said, and leaped nimbly off the edge of the rock.

Ted blinked hard. "God damn it," he thought, "I'm getting emotional these days." The lump in his throat could not be dispersed for some time.

The traffic into Montreal was heavy, and Ted drove comparatively slowly. In the back of his mind was the fear that if he just should - mind you, he knew that he wouldn't, but if he just should - have a heart attack, the car would be travelling slowly enough so that Margaret would not be injured. She, however, showed perfect confidence in his driving. While they were still in hilly country, she surveyed the landscape with interest, and interspersed her remarks about the wedding guests and gifts with: "Oh! Look at that lovely little cottage," or "Look at the purple shade of those hills!" as if she had not travelled this highway a hundred times before. After St. Jerome, however, when the road became flat and the scenery uninteresting, she was content to rest her head on Ted's shoulder and fall asleep.

At St. Rose, on Montreal's outskirts, the noise of the traffic awakened her.

"Why," she exclaimed in surprise. "St. Rose! I guess I've been asleep for a long time.

"It's done you good," he said. "You look like a little

girl who still believes in Santa Claus!"

"Thank you, sir," she said. "You're no slouch yourself." She linked an arm through his. Cars were pressing in on them from all sides, but Ted was driving automatically. He and Margaret might as well have been the only two human beings for miles around.

"You know," he said softly, "you're as pretty as you were the first day I kissed you."

"My, compliments are really flying to-day," Margaret said. She moved closer to him and rested her head against his shoulder. "Of course, it's blarney." Ted made no reply. "Please carry on," she said hastily.

"Come to think of it," Ted continued stoutly, "you're prettier."

"You're slipping, darling. That second remark took you a long time." Margaret laughed, "But what a day that was! Everything happened at once. Joyce and I were sitting in our room at the Clarkes' and she was telling me how sure she was that she and Dick would elope before he went away, and at the same time she was feeling sorry for me. She knew that I loved you, but she thought that you were a cold fish."

"Oh, she did, did she?"

"I'm afraid so. I was almost inclined to agree. I really thought I was losing my touch! However, there was Joyce carrying on her usual monologue about Dick when the telephone rang. Mrs. Clarke called her, and when she came back I thought she was going to faint. When she told me that you had both just received word that your leave was over and that you had to take a train for camp in two hours, I felt that I could have used a good faint myself! How could I ever make you fall in love with now, when we could not even have an emotional parting all by ourselves? It wanted to crawl away and die."

How well I remember that parting, Ted thought. He and Dick had relived it so many times. Every word that any one of them had uttered, every gesture and expression of those who were to be left behind.

ITALICS
START It was ten o'clock when the telephone rang. He was still asleep but it had wakened him, and his mother's voice sounded strange when she called him.

"For you, dear. It's a telegram."

"All right, Mother." He leaped out of bed and padded in to her room on his bare feet. He lifted the receiver with a pounding heart. Was this to be just another false alarm? No, it was not. The telegram advised him that he was to proceed to Debert, Nova Scotia on 'special duty', and that he was to report to his battalion orderly room by 2359 hours, seventeen July instead of twenty-six July as originally ordered. He whistled. "Jesus," he breathed as he dropped the receiver on the hook.

His mother stood by, pale and anxious. "I guess I'll have to go right away," he was telling her. He pursed his lips. "What administration! You can always trust the army." He grabbed the phone again, and dialled the Canadian National Railway number. "When does your next train leave for the East Coast?...Twelve-twenty? Thank you." He hung up. "That's the only train that can get me there on time. Mother, you'll have to help me." He was dialling again. He grunted something unintelligible ("Now Ted, there's no need for so much swearing," said Elspeth.) and put down the receiver. "Busy. Dick must have been notified too. Keep trying to get him, will you Mum? And Dad. And my God, I must call Margaret." Again he lifted the receiver.

"Here, dear, let me. When I can get any one of them, I'll call you. And I'll see about sleeping accomodation on the train. I hate to think of you having to sit up all night. Now you go and get dressed."

"Thanks, Mum." He kissed her tenderly, and for a moment she held him close to her.

"There, there, now. Get on with you." Her voice was uneven, and she quickly turned away from him and dialled her husband's office number.

The next hour and a half was a nightmare. Ted had very little packing to do, as most of his luggage was already at the embarkation depot at Debert. But there were other duties. He had to call Aunt Vivien in Ottawa, as she was planning to leave the next day to come down to see him. Then there was Mrs. Turnbull, who was his mother's best friend, and who would have been most offended if he had not called to say good-bye. Three khaki shirts were overdue from the wash, and he dashed down to the laundry to pick them up. He was unable to locate his key ring, which finally turned up safe and sound in a corner of his haversack. And Elspeth insisted on her husband making frequent calls to the head office of the railway concerning berths for the train; all to no avail. "However, if there should be a cancellation, Mr. Cummings, we will most certainly keep you in mind," was the stock reply.

The Cummings family reached the station at exactly twelve o'clock. Elspeth had been gay and vivacious and full of last minute instructions. Mr. Cummings was silent. He looked old. Ted elbowed his way through the crowd to the station wicket and flashed his pass at the attendant. He ran down the platform to a third class coach. There were very few seats left. He spotted Dick ahead of him, and they managed to unearth a double space, on which they dropped their belongings.

"Hell," Dick growled. "I've been so rushed I haven't seen Joyce. Here we've been engaged for about twelve hours, and now I won't have a chance to be alone with her again."

"Are the girls here?" asked Ted, as they sprinted back up the platform.

"They were just coming in as I left to get a seat on the train," Dick replied.

As they walked back into the station, nodding and shouting to other men of their unit who were also being recalled hurriedly, they spotted their family groups.

"Ye Gods," Ted muttered. "I'll bet Mother and Mrs. Clarke haven't been that near one another in twenty years!"

"Do 'em good," said Dick, somewhat irreverently. They reached the knot of desperately smiling strangers - for surely their parents never really acted like this!

"Did you find a seat?" asked Dr. Fenton, his face lined with anxiety and concern.

"Yes, thank you," answered Ted. "Two, in fact. We're sitting to-gether so we'll be able to take care of one another."

Mrs. Clarke stepped forward and clapped each boy heartily on the shoulder. "Probably I'm doing the wrong thing, and your parents will be cross at me," here she looked directly at Elspeth, "but I've brought you a small going-away present. You might want to take a few sips out of these if you should get depressed on the train." She handed each boy a twenty-six ounce bottle of rye whiskey. "I wouldn't think of giving you this unless I knew you were capable of handling yourselves like gentlemen."

Elspeth turned to Marion. "Isn't it nice that we never have to worry about our boys drinking too much? They have so much sense."

"Oh yes, indeed," Marion replied. She looked so beautiful that everyone in the party turned towards her for a moment. Her eyes were large and luminous, and fastened on her son's face. She was deathly pale. Her smile fooled nobody. Meredith was regretting the fact that Ellen had gone on her holidays, although of course she had planned to be back well before Dick's original departure date.

Dick was torn between the desire to comfort his mother, and an aching longing to talk to Joyce. He took Joyce's hand and looked about for a space where he might have some privacy. There was none. The station was jammed. People were constantly milling about, pushing them this way, pulling them that. Men in uniform abounded and many scenes of farewell were being carried on all around them. The gateway leading out to the track of the Maritime train was plugged. Dick pressed Joyce's hand and looked at her imploringly.

"There'll be no scene," she whispered, and smiled up at him. He put his arm around her and held her close.

"I love you, dearest," he murmured.

Word came over the loudspeaker that the train was due to leave in five minutes. Ted was shifting from one foot to the other while his mother monopolized the conversation. Finally Mr. Clarke walked over to the boys and shook their hands.

"We will be seeing you soon again, boys," he said. "Meanwhile my hat's off to you both." He doffed his hat. What a comical little duffer, thought Ted. "Come my dear," he called to his wife.

"Yes, right away," she replied meekly. She turned to Ted and threw her arms around him. She repeated the performance with Dick. "It's been a great privilege to see something of you both this leave," she said, and her voice was rich with dignity and wistfulness. "It was almost as if Mr. Clarke and I had had two sons of our own." Elspeth looked on in amazement as her arch rival turned and threaded her way through the crowd, dabbing at her eyes with a handkerchief.

For a few seconds the little group was locked in agonizing silence. Eight pairs of eyes scanned the floor for inspiration.

"Hadh't you boys better....."

"Well, I"

"The train will be leaving in less than"

Everyone was talking at once. Everyone was smiling with a fierce intensity. Of all the smiles, Mr. Cummings' was the most ghostlike.

"I should be getting used to saying good-bye to you by now," he said, as he embraced his son, "but I think it gets harder all the time."

Ted said good-bye to Meredith and Marion, and then turned his attention to Margaret. "So long," he said lightly. "It's been lots of fun." Elspeth was watching closely as Ted bent to kiss the girl on the cheek. Margaret turned her head so that he found her lips instead. Elspeth gasped. What she had been predicting for so many days was coming to pass before her very eyes. Her son must be realizing his love for this girl. He was kissing her again and again. Elspeth was disturbed by Dick coming to say good-bye. Reluctantly she turned to speak to him. When she could again transfer her attention to her son, she knew that she had really lost him. Lost him? Was that the right word? At any rate, he looked dazed and astonished. And very, very happy. He and Margaret then started up a very excited and animated conversation.

With his arm still around the girl, he moved over to his mother.

"Mother," he said abruptly, "this may come as a bit of a shock....."

"No, it doesn't, dear," Elspeth replied. "I've known, and now I'm glad that you know, too. And especially glad that you found it out yourself before it was too late. I think you're both very lucky. Good-bye, my dear son, I'm going now. Come back safe." She hugged him and was gone. Mr. Cummings followed, although it was obvious that his wife's parting remarks only mystified him.

Gently Ted disengaged Margaret's arm from his.

A steady surge of humanity was gradually inching them towards the barrier. He noticed that the Fentons had left and that Dick was kissing Joyce a lingering farewell.

"I'm going to buy the ring right away," he said excitedly to Margaret. "And write me at Debert as soon as you get home - when you first knew you were in love with me, and all the rest." He kissed her. "Be waiting for me, sweetheart. I'll be back."

He met Dick at the gate and they passed through together. They turned to look back at two anxious, white faces, which immediately lightened up as if activated by an electric switch, but which, almost as speedily, became but two drops in a vast ocean.

"Say," said Dick without much enthusiasm, "we're going to travel in style after all. A drawing room no less. Dad gave me the ticket just a couple of minutes ago."

Ted brightened. "Ah," he said. "I must say you and I usually manage to get the breaks. Now I'll be able to write Margaret a nice, long letter in comfort. Did you know that I was in love with her?"

"Yeah," said Dick shortly. "Congratulations."

"I'll get our luggage," Ted announced. He had never seen Dick look so miserable. "You latch on to that drawing room."

Half an hour later they were comfortably ensconced in the privacy of their drawing room, and were infinitely more cheerful.

"I wish to propose a toast," Dick was saying, "to a gallant woman without whose peerless wisdom and generosity this amber fluid would not be passing down our throats."

They drank.

They refilled.

"And I," said Ted, gravely, "want to propose a toast to those eight people who were there to see us off. I pray to God that they'll all be there to welcome us back."

For a while, there was silence.

"Hear, hear," whispered Dick.

By midnight, despite the admonition of Mrs. Clarke, the two bottles of rye were empty, and Dick and Ted and five other officers of their unit were harmonizing furiously on 'Down by the Old Mill Stream'.

It was two o'clock in the morning before the two hilarious occupants of the drawing room climbed into their berths.

"Gosh," said Dick. "This is it at last." He shook his head. "I'm damned glad that station scene is over. How I was dreading it!"

"Holy baldhead!" Ted spluttered. "I forgot to write Margaret. You see that I do it first thing in the morning."

"Yes, sir. As I'm drawing your tub, sir. Will there be anything else, sir?" Then he chuckled. "Being an engaged man entails many responsibilities, young fellow. No more freedom for you! I'll enlighten you further to-morrow. Good-night."

But Ted had already dropped off to sleep. ITALICS
END.

The car had entered the city now, and had passed Snowdon Junction. The air was no longer bracing but surprisingly hot and humid for a September evening. They were making slow progress, for every car in Montreal seemed to be on the roads. The sun was disappearing behind Westmount mountain as they drove up to Margaret's house.

"I won't be a minute, dear," she said. "Are you coming in?"

"No thanks," Somehow thinking of Dick and the old days had softened his mood. He was melancholy but not depressed. He could think of nothing better than being alone for a few minutes. Besides, Mrs. Thomas might be at home, spoiling for a chat. He was very fond of his prospective mother-in-law but she was, to put it mildly, a going concern, and one of Montreal's most avid chatterboxes. 'I'll drive around by the Fentons' and

find out if they can see us for a few minutes later on. Then I'll come back for you."

Margaret smiled. "All right. But don't be long." She skipped gracefully up the path, and waved from the doorway. Ted's chest contracted as he smiled at her. What a picture she made!

Instead of proceeding immediately to the Fentons', Ted headed for the look-out on top of Westmount mountain. Although not quite as high as its neighbouring look-out on Mount Royal, one was still able to obtain a panoramic view of Montreal and most of its suburbs, of which Westmount was the most affluent. Also one could see the sparkling St. Lawrence river with its two main bridges, the old Victoria bridge, and the modern Harbour bridge, and diverse mountains both in the province of Quebec and in the states of New York and Vermont. He hopped out of his father's car and wandered up and down, gazing idly at the iron arrows embedded in the concrete railing. Yet he was remembering other things. His mother used to bring him up here for walks when he was a baby. Later, as a school boy, he used to play baseball on the stretch of level ground behind him. He practised his first stem turns and learned many of the intricacies of skiing on this mountain. He kissed his first girl in a car which was parked behind the arrow pointing to Mount Bruno. He remembered distinctly, because afterwards he and the girl had tried to carve their initials in the cement behind the arrow to commemorate the occasion. From here he had also watched the sun rise one April morning after his first all night college party. And how many problems had he and Margaret thrashed out on this spot, how many cigarettes had they smoked in its sheltering darkness, during the last eighteen months!

Ted walked back to the car, feeling that he was in a trance. Nothing seemed real. Could Dick be dead? Impossible! Were he and Margaret really to be married in twenty days? Was he only to sleep

twenty more times in that friendly room that was his - so utterly his - in the warm comfort and security that was his family's house? The end of 'mine' and the beginning of 'ours'! In sickness and in health. Till death do us part. Could this really be Ted Cummings climbing back into the car? No. It was only a detached spectator. It was but a projection of Ted Cummings, someone who could watch but not suffer, an airy spectrum with the advantages, but none of the drawbacks, of flesh and blood.

Ted turned the car around and headed down the circular roads, past the palatial grey stone mansions, slanting green lawns, stately streets and trim rock gardens of his neighborhood. Yet Ted was conscious of no beauty. He had learned at last the art of throwing a protective numbness over his senses and thought processes. Or so he imagined. When he reached the Fenton house, he felt that he was capable of feeling no emotion whatsoever.

It was an old fashioned brick house set back from the roadway, yet easily recognizable to anyone who might wish to find the doctor's office. Ted drove up the short runway leading to the front door. Dusk was settling over the city yet there were no lights showing from the house. Nevertheless Ted jumped out of the car. A street car rattled down the next street but otherwise a hush seemed to have fallen. Ted rang the bell. There was no sound. He waited a minute or two, then strolled around to the office door. He rang that bell. Still he could hear nothing. Then he felt uneasy. He thought of Marion as he had last seen her. A chill crept over him and he shivered. Could there be anything desperately wrong? He stepped back and surveyed the house. Then it was that he noticed a curtain moving in the living room. Someone must be in that building! He rattled the door handle, and then he pressed the bell for fully a minute. Still there was no response. He looked back at the living room. Who was watching him? Why the devil wouldn't they let him in? What was the matter

with Mrs. Fenton anyway? He walked slowly back to the car. He felt like running and getting off that property as quickly as possible, yet he refused to give those unseen eyes the satisfaction. Instead he returned to the front door. He rattled the knob furiously. What could be happening to those two people whom he loved so well? Had it not always been tacitly understood that he would do everything possible for them if anything happened to Dick? His emotional faculties were once again keen and sharp. He had never felt so frustrated. Well, he could be stubborn too. He leaned against the doorbell.

A hand descended on his shoulder. "Looking for me, Ted?"

Ted jumped as if he had been shot. His heart beat wildly as he whirled around. "Why, Dr. Fenton, I thought you...that is..."

"Here, here, my boy, you look as if you'd seen a ghost. Is anything the matter?"

"No, sir. I couldn't get any answer, that's all, and I felt that someone was in the house."

Dr. Fenton laughed - a hollow mockery of the cheerful laugh that had but recently delighted patients the city over. "You were mistaken. No one is here. Unless it is a burglar, and I doubt that." He tucked his medical bag under one arm, and pulled his house key out of his pocket. "You see, Marion is at her brother's, and I am going to meet her there for dinner." He looked at his watch and he emitted a low whistle. "I had no idea it was so late. This wasn't a professional call, was it, Ted?"

"Oh, no," replied Ted hurriedly. "Margaret and I had thought of dropping in to see you later on, and I came around to see if you were free for the evening."

"Oh, isn't that too bad." Meredith opened the door, dropped his bag in the porch and turned to face his visitor. He looked

like a defeated old man, and Ted was sure that he was growing smaller with age. "We'll probably be quite late and then I must get Marion to bed. She hasn't been very well lately. Just nerves, I think, but one can't be too careful at our age." He spoke hurriedly and the door was gradually creeping shut.

Ted knew when he was beaten. "Some other time, then. Good-bye, sir," he said.

Dr. Fenton opened his mouth to speak, and then apparently changed his mind. His eyes were heavy with sorrow and fatigue, and they were red-rimmed. They were the last things that Ted noticed as the door closed.

He returned to the car with a heavy heart. Was Mrs. Fenton in the house all the time? A chilling thought that he had been fighting to suppress for days kept growing in his mind like a living thing. Marion Fenton had gone insane, and was being kept at home under guard! How awful! He must talk about it to Margaret.

Yet, when he arrived at the Thomas home, Margaret came running out with news that furnished conversation for the rest of the evening.

"Oh, Ted," she called to him. "I've just received a wire from Joyce and she'll be here by the end of the week. Won't it be wonderful to see her again?"

- CHAPTER 12 -

26 February, 1945.

"Hey, fellas, for God's sake give me a break and get out of here. They'll never let me leave this joint to-morrow morning unless my packing's all done. And furthermore I want to straighten up this room. Right away."

The room was indeed a shambles. Seven or eight hospital-garbed young men covered every bit of available sitting space, which at best was limited to one bed and one chair.

"I don't think much of this fire-trap anyway, do you, Hodgkins?" asked one of the men on the bed.

Hodgkins gave vent to a prodigious yawn. "Frankly, old boy, this whole performance is boring me stiff."

"Who the hell has a cigarette?" asked a figure on the chair.

Something stirred beneath him. "If you would permit me to draw breath," gasped an unseen body from the folds of the cushion, "much less move an arm, I would be delighted to oblige."

The man on top merely drove an elbow down into the bowels of the chair. There arose an anguished howl. A few succinct army expressions rent the air.

"I must have six cartons of cigarettes at least," Dick mused, as he bent over a half-packed valise. "You may divide four of them amongst you."

"Now I always did say that Fenton was a good man," came from the man on the chair. "Eh, Miller?" Once again the elbow was brought into play, and the same muffled howls were forthcoming. In fact, it took the combined efforts of the man with the elbow and the two men sitting on the arms of the chair to keep the unfortunate Miller subdued.

Another man, with incredibly long legs, was sprawled out on the floor. "What the hell does that conceited man think we're here for if it's not cigarettes?" he asked the room at large. "And food, of course. He's the hospital's greatest receiver of parcels."

"You should know, old fruit," drawled Hodgkins. "You're always around to eat most of the contents."

"Isn't 'parasite' the correct word for such a man as Dobbin?" asked Hodgkin's companion on the bed. "Or maybe it's vulture."

"I'll vulture you," roared Lieutenant Dobbin, and he climbed up on to the bed with a determined gleam in his eye. A third man, who had been resting quietly, belaboured all three with a pillow from his vantage point at the head of the bed. They turned on him. "Uh-uh! Remember my back, gentlemen! A slipped disc is something that can't be fooled with. No undue exertion, you understand." He patted the pillow gently, curled up once more into a ball, and closed his eyes.

Miller, in the chair, was showing signs of renewed activity.

Pandemonium was in full swing.

Dick had been bent over some parcels, but now he straightened himself. "I have four tins of chicken to give away," he announced quietly.

There was dead silence.

"And four cartons of cigarettes."

Only the sound of heavy breathing.

"And several other items."

Eight beaming, friendly faces were turned to him as flowers to the sun.

"But none of you bastards will get a god damned thing unless you get the hell out of this room right away!"

The eight faces assumed injured expressions.

"I say, Hodgkins," said Captain Bixby from the bed, "do you somehow have the feeling that we have outstayed our welcome?"

Hodgkins sighed. "I'm afraid so, old boy. I'd be the last person in the world to say anything derogatory about dear old Fenton, but I do feel that he's getting a little big for his breeches."

All the men were on their feet except Miller. Two men still had him pinned in the chair and he was stuttering with rage.

Dick laughed. "You sure as hell look like a bunch of lead swingers to me! If anything is wrong with any one of you, I'll eat my shirt."

They all stared at him, their eyes filled with reproach.

"I say, Hodgkins, should we show him our operation?"

"It would be most embarrassing if I did, old boy. Haemorrhoids, you know."

"Oh. So sorry."

"Quite all right."

Miller rose to his feet. Someone pushed him back again. He yelped in his frustration.

"Very funny, you characters," Dick snapped. "Now, out!"

Someone opened the door, and they all gathered around it.

"I wish I had learned one thing from our Captain Fenton," said Lieutenant Dobbin innocently.

Dick raised his eyebrows suspiciously. "There's no use my asking what. I know I shall be informed."

"Your charm with the nurses. Red headed ones." Dobbin gave a wolf call that could have been heard three counties away.

Dick threw a shirt at him and the gang disappeared with cries of 'See you later,' and 'S'long,' and 'Thanks for the offer of the weeds.'

Dick chuckled to himself and continued with his packing. He was not being successful in any marked degree, and was about to turn his attention for a while to some letter writing when there was a knock at the door and the long angular face of Tom Goodall hove into view.

"I see that those hooligans have gone," he observed sourly.

"Hooligans?" Dick repeated in surprise.

Tom grunted. "All they're good for is making a lot of noise. Some discipline in this army! If they can be so energetic why can't they be doing something for the war effort instead of acting like two-year-olds in here?"

"I think you know perfectly well why not," Dick replied patiently, "but I don't mind refreshing your memory. Six of them were wounded on the continent. Miller had his ankle bone shot clean out and is waiting for transportation home. It's quite obvious that Dobbin has lost a good part of his face. He's afraid to go home, looking the way he does, and I don't blame him. Bixby was trapped in a burning tank for some time and his body would be unrecognizable to his own mother who, by the way, died three weeks ago. Hodgkins has a stomach full of shrapnel. As a matter of fact, in getting at the shrapnel, they had to remove a lot of his intestine. Little bits and pieces of steel keep trying to work their way out of him each week. Is that enough for you?"

"Huh!" Tom removed a haversack from the chair, which bore

signs of having been the storm centre of a riot. He dropped back wearily into the cushions. "Damn this war, anyway," he growled.

"You're sick of it?"

"It certainly would be over by now if we'd taken the Russians' advice and started a second front two years ago. But how can we ever win anything with all these useless reactionaries running things?"

"Please, Tom, no party line to-day. After all, I'm leaving to-morrow and I'd like everything to be pleasant."

"That's no party line. That's common sense."

Dick thought that he might just as well continue with his packing.

"Would you mind handing me those pyjamas? They're on the bottom ledge of that table.....Thanks."

Dick pulled two shirts out of his valise to make room for the pyjamas. Then he pulled the pyjamas out and put the shirts back. He tried to close it but a sock kept getting in the way. He pulled out two pairs of socks and a tie. The valise closed and Dick breathed a sigh of relief. But his triumph was short lived. A pair of white underwear shorts was protruding over the side. He was a defeated man. He sat down dejectedly on the bed.

"Never could pack," was his unnecessary comment.

"May I try?" asked Tom.

"Why sure. Go ahead."

In less than five minutes the valise was packed and properly closed and contained all the articles which had proved so impervious to Dick's packing technique. Tom's expression as he returned to his chair

was positively benign.

Dick thought that Tom looked smug. "Thank you," he said curtly, and scowled.

Tom looked like an English setter who had been refused a bone. "That's all right," he said limply.

Dick felt ashamed. "Say Tom, I've got something for you." He fished around underneath his bed. "Here are a couple of books that you may not have read, and a small parcel of food that just arrived from my sister. I've packed all the food I can possibly take away with me, so don't feel hesitant about accepting it."

"Well, thanks Fenton. That's very generous of you. I haven't received a parcel for some time." He coughed. The grey 'hospital pallor' of his face was tinged with red. He was obviously about to say something of importance. "It's been a real pleasure knowing you. I shall miss you."

"Thank you, Tom. I'll be located in Farnborough, so if you're ever down around there you must look me up."

"I had expected to be in Aldershot on Friday to see some friends, but they tell me I can't leave here. A couple of weeks, they say. It's enough to drive a man crazy. They won't even tell me what's wrong with me. I'm sure it's more than ulcers. It's probably cancer."

"Oh, nonsense!"

"I guess not, though. They're always hinting that my nerves are in bad shape. But as I said to those psychiatrist fellows, who wouldn't feel edgy, never knowing when the devil he was to be allowed out of this prison? They never even give me a week-end leave."

"You've seen a psychiatrist?"

"Yes, three. But don't you let on to a soul. Apparently

they're seen by everyone who is suspected of having ulcers, but still, I don't want anyone to know."

"Well!" Dick exclaimed.

"You sound surprised."

"Well, yes, I am, rather. At least, I'm surprised that you didn't mention it before. It's certainly no disgrace. I saw one soon after I got here. He helped me, too."

"Fenton, be honest with me. Why do you suppose they had me see three psychiatrists?"

"Gosh, I don't know, Tom. Anyway, I'm sure it's nothing to worry about. They're probably trying to decide what effect your nervous condition has on your ulcers."

"Maybe. But it really doesn't matter. I have more brains than all those crackpots put to-gether." He paused. "I have something I want to give you, too," he said. He tossed a book carelessly on the bed. He rose to his feet. "Read it sometime and tell me what you think of it. I'll see you later."

Tom left the room. Dick shook his head. A book! It was bound to be Communist propaganda. It was entitled simply 'The World To-day', and he had never heard of the author. How dull! Of course, he'd have to take it, if only for appearance's sake. But there was certainly no room in the valise. He sighed. Oh well, he'd have to wedge it into the haversack somehow. He picked it up. Out of the pages fluttered a piece of paper, to fall on the floor at his feet. He stooped to retrieve it and saw that it contained an address. An Aldershot address!!

Dick felt a surge of excitement. The hide-out of Tom's Communist friends. 'Marlowe' read the note, followed by the address.

Gingerly Dick picked it up and looked on the other side. There were a series of dates, including the following Friday. Aha! A list of meetings! Obviously this was a scrap of paper that Tom would eventually miss. Maybe he was on his way back for it now. Hurriedly Dick slipped it inside the book, and tossed the book on the bed. This was getting interesting. How to get the piece of paper back to Tom without having him suspect that it had been seen? There was only one thing to do. It would have to go back inside the book.

"You're getting very smart, Richard, my friend," muttered Dick to his image in the mirror. He grabbed the book and headed for the officers' dormitory. Tom was propped up in bed, writing a letter.

"Tom, I do hope you'll understand but I honestly haven't room to pack a safety pin, much less a volume of this size! I don't think even you could squeeze it in. May I take a rain check^{ck} and come back for it after I'm settled?"

"Why sure," said Tom, matter-of-factly, "but I would like you to read it."

Dick deposited the volume carefully on Tom's bedside table. "Thanks," he said. "I would like to."

That was neatly done, he thought, as he returned to his room. He grabbed up a chocolate bar from home, and began to chew on it. Fred Anglin would be glad to have that Aldershot address. God knows how many other Canadian servicemen went there. It was probably the Communist headquarters for the whole district. But, hold on! What if it were a deliberate plant? Of course! Why had he not thought of that before! Tom knew that he was going to be joining some branch of the Intelligence Corps. Possibly Tom was suspicious of Dick's friendship and wished to put it to the test. Dick stretched out on the bed and stared pensively

at the ceiling. It was good to try to think again, but the old brain was pretty rusty! He did not want to start working for Fred with any strikes against him. Tom had talked of a meeting to be held this coming Friday in Aldershot. Actually he had said that he wanted to visit friends but Dick had come to realize that with Tom, attending a meeting and visiting friends were synonymous. Also Tom had said that the hospital would not grant him a pass. Well, that angle could be checked. Obviously, if the orderly room said that Tom had been given a pass, then his Communist friend was laying a trap for him. If not, the possibility was that everything was above board. Dick then reached another decision. He would investigate this thing alone, without saying a word to Fred Anglin. It might turn out to be nothing at all, and he did not want to have Fred laughing at him.

His course of action having been decided to his satisfaction, Dick then reached for his writing case. He had received a letter from his sister that morning which had given him much food for thought. For one thing she had written: "Don't drop dead, now, but your little sister's engaged. I asked Mum not to mention anything to you, so I could surprise you with the news myself. Needless to say, Dickie, he's a pretty wonderful boy and I know you'd like him. Thank goodness the family approves! The only drawback is that he lives in Vancouver and that's where I shall have to live after the war. He's a flying instructor here, but expects to go back overseas next month. Gosh, he's handsome!! He has blue eyes, curly fair hair, broad shoulders and all the things a gal dreams of and never really expects. Oops! I almost forgot. His name's Donald MacMurtry, and you'll be hearing lots more about him." The news was indeed a thunderbolt. Little Ellen - engaged!

He couldn't believe it. So she would be 'Spinse' no more now, but Mrs. Donald MacMurtry! It was just like her to mention nothing about the date of the wedding. He had immediately sent a cable of congratulations and had also enquired whether the great event was to take place before MacMurtry was to return to operations. There were a thousand questions he intended to ask, but they would have to wait until next he wrote Ellen. His mother would probably be more explicit in her next letter. The other item of interest in Ellen's letter concerned Joyce. "Your fiancée drifted in last night and, if I may be permitted to say so, I think you're a stinker. She broke down and told me that you hardly ever wrote any more and when you did, you never said anything worthwhile. Do you love her any more or don't you? For heaven's sakes tell her, and put her out of her misery. That girl has it bad. I can't help wondering about the nurses in that hospital of yours. Could it be that my big, strong brother has taken another tumble?"

"I'm a rat," Dick thought and immediately grabbed an air-mail form. "I'm going to do this if it kills me, and God knows it will make a liar out of me. But after all, I'm engaged to the girl. I'm not engaged to Wilma. I'm engaged to Joyce!"

"My Darling," he began. "I've been thinking of you all day and decided that I just had to write you. I'll be leaving here tomorrow and gosh knows when I'll have another opportunity. I loved your last two letters, honey....." As soon as he had finished, he rushed out to mail the letter before he had a chance to tear it up. But somehow he felt no better for having written and mailed it. Rather, he felt shabby and depressed.

"Oh, what the hell," he growled. "Damn women anyway," and he stomped back to his room to write a letter to Ted.

It was almost supper time when he finished. Darkness was settling over the hospital grounds and he hastened to follow blackout regulations. His room looked like a monastic cell. Everything had been packed but his shaving kit and a pair of pyjamas. To-morrow morning he would swap the hospital garb for his uniform, which hung, clean and pressed, on the back of the door. Underneath the bed he had piled up all the provisions that he would leave for the men remaining behind. He had also packed two other parcels, despatching one to the family that he and Ted visited in Manchester and the other to his new found friend in Maidstone, Lady Fitzsimmons. There seemed to be nothing left to do. He was contemplating turning on the radio when there was a light tap at the door.

"Come!"

It was Wilma. Dick's eyes lighted up.

"Pray enter," he said. "Make yourself at home."

"Thank you," said Wilma, but she still stood uncertainly in the doorway.

"Well, come on in. Does the invitation have to be engraved?"

She smiled - a small smile that seemed to be more a nervous reaction than any symptom of pleasure.

"Ye Gods," cried Dick in despair. "I must scare the day-lights out of you!"

"You do, rather," said Wilma. Despite the strain she had been under of looking after wounded men for the first time, she seemed incredibly young. But there was no doubt that she was tired. Her face was thin and pale, and it had lost its heart-shaped appearance. Two new lines had already appeared at the corners of her mouth. Yet, with it all,

her expression remained wistful and soft under the harsh light. "I feel a little breathless, and it can't be the altitude!"

"You! The calm, cool and crisp type! Miss Efficiency of 1945!"

"Strange, isn't it?" she breathed.

Dick walked over and closed the door.

"Do you think you'd better?" she asked, and she was in dead earnest. "After all, you don't need a nurse any more, you know. People will wonder."

For answer, he caught her hands. She was in his arms and, for a crowded moment, his lips were on hers. It was she who broke away.

"Please, please," she gasped. "It's been so nice and friendly. Let's keep it that way."

"But, gosh, is it so desperate that I should want to kiss you? After all, you're a pretty girl and I - well, I like you."

"I like you too," Wilma said, "and I suppose I'm acting rather like a schoolgirl." She seemed to be making up her mind about something. "Dick," she continued, "do you realize that we know nothing about each other's personal lives? You know nothing about me. Nothing whatsoever!"

"Yes, I do. You're a swell kid, and it's written all over you. I knew it the moment I saw you."

"Thank you," she said. For a moment her face shone with an unguarded happiness, but the expression of gravity soon returned. She plucked nervously at a thread under her cuff. "If you want to see me any more, there's something you must know."

"Well, I certainly want to see you again, so shoot!"

"Not here," she said. "Not like this. I suppose I'm fishing, but I'll be free this Thursday night. I'll meet you somewhere."

"Wonderful." Dick looked relieved but still anxious.

"We'll have dinner in Hindhead. Meet me at the front door here.

Six-thirty."

"It's a date." She too looked relieved. She held out her hand, and Dick took it. "Good-bye, soldier. I had qualms about you at first, but you were indeed a pretty model patient. I wish you luck in your new venture. And now I must go. There are a lot of sick boys around. See you Thursday."

Before Dick could reply, she had gone. All that remained of her was a faint scent of perfume and a look of adoration in a young man's face.

Presently there was another knock at the door and an orderly presented himself.

"Captain Fenton?"

"Yes."

"Colonel Spottsworth would like to see you immediately, sir, in his office."

"Well," breathed Dick in surprise. "Thank you," he said to the orderly. "I'll be right there."

Colonel Spottsworth had originally been a nose and throat specialist in St. John, New Brunswick. By dint of a pleasing personality and a conscientious attitude he had risen to command one of the largest Canadian hospital units in England. Dick had seen him several times and the Colonel, whose work was now entirely administrative, had always shown a sympathetic interest. But it was not customary for the officer commanding a hospital to summon a departing patient merely to bid him good-bye and good luck. Dick wondered what was up.

He was ushered immediately into the Colonel's office. It was

cold, but a fire was struggling to be cheerful from a small grate. It succeeded only in looking pathetic.

Colonel Spottsworth smiled. "Ah," he said affably, "nice to see you up and about, Fenton."

"Thank you, sir."

"You're leaving us to-morrow, I hear."

"Yes, sir."

"Well, well, you've made a splendid recovery."

"Yes, sir. I've been very fortunate."

"Sit down, Fenton." The Colonel motioned him to a straight-backed wooden chair on the other side of his desk. "Cigarette?"

"No thank you, sir."

The Colonel lit one and leaned back in his chair. "I wanted to speak to you about a Lieutenant Goodall, who is a patient in this hospital." He lowered his voice. "I used to have to submit some wretched reports on him to Captain Anglin of the Security section, but I believe you've been doing it lately."

"Yes, sir."

"Damned nuisance, all these reports. However, as you're being discharged to Anglin's section to-morrow, I thought there were a few things you should pass on to him."

Something crackled and popped in the fireplace. Colonel Spottsworth eyed the coals reflectively and then turned back to Dick.

"As yet there is no conclusive proof, you understand, but this Goodall has been examined thoroughly by three psychiatrists. It was felt from the very beginning that the man's stomach ailments were brought on by some nervous condition, and the psychiatrists' reports all

tend to support this contention. They feel that he is suffering from an anxiety neurosis, and that any extra strain on his nervous system may well result in a complete nervous breakdown."

Dick was startled. "As bad as that?" he asked incredulously.

The Colonel rose and poked at the fire. He tossed a piece of coke on to the feeble embers. "Yes," he replied slowly, "and maybe worse. He has just been given a further series of xrays and, as soon as we can consolidate all the different reports and tests, we will recommend that he be returned to Canada immediately for discharge. You may tell Anglin that he will be forwarded a copy of the final report. It should be prepared for my signature by the end of the week." The Colonel reached out for his 'In-Basket', a sign that the interview was over.

"I wonder if you would happen to know, sir, whether or not Goodall would be given leave to visit friends in Aldershot this weekend or, more specifically, on Friday night, March the second."

"Goodall applied for leave to go to Aldershot, but it was turned down on my orders. As far as I am concerned he will not leave this hospital until he is transferred to an embarkation unit." By now Colonel Spottsworth had selected a letter from his basket and had spread it out before him. "You'll pass my message on them, eh Fenton? And you might ask Anglin if I am to continue with those wretched reports now that you're gone. There doesn't seem much point to it with Goodall being confined to the hospital and about to be sent home. But you'd better have Anglin call me."

"I will, sir." Dick stood up.

"Fine." The Colonel rose and held out his hand. "Good-bye, Fenton, and good luck."

"Thank you very much, sir." Dick felt that he should say something more, something complimentary about this man and the staff of his hospital, but he could think of nothing appropriate. He merely shook hands, attempted to assume an expression of appreciation, and departed.

He walked briskly across the court yard that separated the administration building from his hospital wing. It would seem odd being on his own again. And such a strange job! What on earth did he know about Intelligence or Security? The whole thing was probably a mistake. Still, they must have wanted him, for Dick knew that every man entering this branch of the service was very carefully screened and Fred had hinted that his, Dick's, background and beliefs had been thoroughly investigated. Well anyway, he wouldn't have to stay with the job if he didn't like it. He walked through the hospital ward, and stopped to chat with two or three of the patients. Tom was still lying on his bed as he passed and he was gazing intently at the ceiling. Dick stopped. Slowly Tom turned his head until their eyes met. Dick shivered. He wanted to pass right along, but of course he couldn't. Besides, why should he? Tom looked friendly. Furthermore the man was ill, and needed his help.

"I'll be back in a minute, Tom. I just want to get rid of this greatcoat." That wasn't a lie. He was already overtired and the weight of the coat was wearing him down.

He reached his room and opened the door. Funny, he was sure that he had left the light on. He reached for the switch. He snapped it. Click!

"Surprise! Surprise!" came from all corners. The eight young men who had visited him earlier in the day were present, as well

as a young medical officer and two nursing sisters, one of whom was Wilma.

"I say, old fruit," said Hodgkins, "we decided that this was a good excuse for a party. So we pooled our resources and prepared this feast, most of which, I might say, is composed of the goodies from under your bed." Dick glanced under the bed. Sure enough, it was bare. Even the cigarettes were gone. "However," Hodgkins continued, "we have added to it and have even managed to smuggle in six small bottles of rye! Of course, as far as the staff here is concerned, I'm only kidding. It's really coloured water." There was ^a ripple of laughter. "And we must be quiet unless we want these honoured guests to get into trouble. But, Captain Fenton, we want you to enjoy yourself so that you can carry away some happy memories of this great institution."

"Hear! Hear!"

"Speech!"

Dick flushed with pleasure and embarrassment. Tom Goodall was forgotten as the party waxed strong until after 'lights out'. Yet subdued sounds of revelry reached the ears of most of the patients of the Officers' ward. For a long time, Tom lay quite still. Then he reached over and picked up 'The World To-day'. He thumbed through it and came upon the sheet of paper which contained the addresses. His expression was inscrutable and he tore it into small shreds and dropped it into a wastepaper basket beside his bed.

Next morning Dick dashed through the ward and bade everyone a hasty farewell. Tom received no special attention.

Tom Goodall watched his friend from a window, as the departing patient walked across the quadrangle to report to the orderly room.

He was still watching, with his taut and strained face pressed against the window pane, as Dick came out again and stepped into a waiting station wagon that bore him out of sight.

- CHAPTER 13 -

12 September 1947.

Montreal's new Central Station was bustling with activity. Trains seemed to be arriving from everywhere and escalators were working at full speed to transport the passengers upstairs from the track level. The garish friezes that dominated the walls gazed down impassively at the scurrying crowds.

"I hate this station," Ted complained. He was attempting to pilot Margaret through a group that had just risen from the bowels of the station. "It's so damned cold and glaring. It has no soul!"

"Oh, I don't know," murmured Margaret absently as she dodged two children, who, in turn, were trying to dodge a frantically pursuing mother. "It's always clean, and it's new looking."

Ted stubbed his toe on a porter's hand cart. "Hell," he growled, "why can't anyone watch where they're going around here?"

Margaret laughed. "Why darling, you just got up too early, that's all. And out of the wrong side of the bed, too. I can see our breakfasts are going to be pretty dismal affairs."

Ted grunted.

"Come on, come on," coaxed Margaret. "All I ask is one, tiny smile." Tall as she was, she was almost running in an effort to keep up with his long strides.

Ted looked down at her. His eyes started to twinkle.

"That's better," Margaret said. She was peering at a sign board. "Well, here we are. The train should arrive in two minutes."

"Gosh hon, I won't know what to say to the girl. It's been over five years and that's a long time in anyone's language."

"Well, just be natural. I haven't seen her since 1944 and

I'm not worried."

"Yeah, but she was your best friend. I didn't even like her!"

"Oh, go on. You were just jealous of her, that's all. I watched you when Dick and Joyce announced their engagement. You found it hard to get used to the fact that Dick would be putting somebody ahead of you."

"It wasn't that at all, really. But she was so syrupy with him, and so possessive. She used to make me feel sick."

"She was just very much in love, that's all."

"Well, you know you wouldn't hover over me every minute of the time as if you expected some hostile spirit to whisk me away."

"I don't operate that way, darling. I'm the cold, detached type. Remember?"

Ted smiled at her. "I'm much more apt to remember times when you weren't."

"Don't be horrid darling. I can't be a lady all the time, you know."

Two station policemen were moving people away from the area in front of the escalator head.

"Thank God the train's here. My tummy's rumbling."

"Silly boy. Why didn't you eat something before you came down?"

"You don't think that Mother would ever get up at that hour in the morning to feed me?"

"Why, you spoiled brat! Are you so helpless that you can't feed yourself?"

"At seven a. m. - yes!"

By now the escalators that they were watching were in motion. A hat hove into view, followed by a face that could obviously have benefitted from several hours' more sleep. Two girls were next.

"Gosh," breathed Margaret. "I wonder if she's changed."

"I hope so. Say! Get a load of that riotous hat floating our way! Is that part of the 'new look'?"

"No, darling. There are too many vegetables on it."

They were shouting at one another in order to be heard over the clangor of the innumerable greetings that were being carried on all around them. Up and up came the escalator, disgorging its stream of human flotsam, which was anxiously scanned by Ted and Margaret. They manoeuvred for a position by the railing.

"Trains," moaned Ted in despair. "What a bore!"

They both spied Joyce at once.

She was wearing a navy-blue, cloth coat and no hat. Tucked under her left arm were a purse and a large magazine. In her right hand she was clutching a valise. Ted was flooded with a thousand emotions. He dreaded speaking to her, dreaded looking at her. He moved closer to Margaret. She linked her arm in his and they moved forward to meet their visitor.

"Joyce! Oh, Joyce!" Margaret called.

Joyce turned slowly to face them. For one split second, in a crowded station, beset on all sides by porters, travelling salesmen, commuters and vacationists, three people, whose lives had once been bound to-gether, paused to examine each other in a new light. Margaret's face revealed exactly what she was - a happy and a contented woman. Yet a faintly troubled expression lurking there showed that she was not so selfish that she would not wish others to be happy, too. As for Ted, he felt

that he was like the rabbit hypnotized by the snake.

Yet this girl looked harmless enough. At any rate, she was a complete stranger. Her black hair was sleek and brushed severely back from her forehead. It was tied to-gether in a bun at the nape of her neck. Her face was round and plump, yet youth and gaiety had been driven out of it. It was a face of suffering. The nose was small and flat and the lips compressed into a thin line. She wore no make up. Her coat was apparently designed to make her look formless and shapeless. Ted continued his appraisal of her face and figure. He noticed that her ankles were still shapely but that the effect was ruined by a pair of sexless, flat sandals. All in all, he was shocked by her appearance. She was completely nondescript. What had a friend of his once said of a girl? Ah, yes. She had about as much sex appeal as a raw carrot! But there was no need for Joyce to be as dowdy as this. He and Margaret would certainly have to do something about her state of mind. How was it possible for anyone to enjoy living with grief for so long? For the strange thing about this girl was that she did not look unhappy. Martyred and misunderstood, maybe, but not actually unhappy.

Joyce was the first to return to the teeming world of reality. She dropped her valise and ran forward. "Maggie dear! Oh, how wonderful to see you!"

Margaret threw her arms around her. "Gosh, it's so wonderful to have you with us." They hugged one another warmly.

Joyce brushed away a tear and turn slowly to face Ted.

"Hullo, Ted." Her voice was firm. Ted avoided her eyes.

"Hullo, Joyce. It's nice to see you again."

"Thank you."

They all stood about helplessly until Joyce turned to pick up

her suit case.

"Well," said Ted with strained heartiness, "we must attend to your luggage, Joyce. Then I'll see you both to the car and I'll wander up to the office. Got to earn a living, you know."

They started over to the baggage room.

"Ted Cummings, you be sure and have some breakfast before you go to work! Even if you're late, they can get along without you for a few minutes."

"Henpecked already," Ted laughed. The girls smiled. The tension was somewhat relieved.

In fifteen minutes Ted was devouring bacon and eggs in the station restaurant, and Margaret was driving Joyce to her home. The pre-nine o'clock traffic rush was in full swing and progress was very slow. Margaret nosed the car into St. Catherine street, and then followed along in the wake of a snail-paced street car. Joyce leaned against the door of the car and lighted a cigarette.

"Well," she said finally, "the old place doesn't seem to have changed much."

Margaret swore softly at the taxi driver who cut in so abruptly ahead of her, and then she turned the car up Peel street. Driving required all her attention until the traffic thinned out as she started to climb Cote des Neiges hill. Then she spoke earnestly to her silent companion.

"Joyce," she said, "tell me, honestly; how are things with you?"

Joyce swung around to face her. Her expression was bland; it was as if the question had been put to her already a thousand times, both by herself and by others. "I don't complain," she answered evenly.

"But do you go out at all? Do you see people?"

"Oh, of course."

"Do you go out with anyone in particular?"

"No indeed. Who could ever take Dickie's place?"

"But you can't go on living like this forever. You're still very young and you'll fall in love again. Then everything will assume a more cheerful perspective."

"Maggie, I'll never fall in love again. Never, never!"

"Don't be silly. Of course you will. All my friends who are war widows have remarried."

"Ah! But there's a difference. I'm not a war widow. I'm just that unimportant creature - the woman who lost a fiancé, the woman who never had a chance, who never lived. In short, I'm a frustrated old maid."

"That's a bitterness that you must outgrow. Everyone's life, if you look deeply enough, contains something that could breed bitterness or sorrow. We all have our battles to wage." Margaret bit her lip.

"Maggie, you have everything. In fifteen days you'll be married and that's exactly what you want of life, just to be married to Ted. And I know you'll both be very happy."

"But Joyce, sometimes you have to fight for what you want in this world. And sometimes you have to become a different person entirely before you're successful. Things are not always what they appear on the surface."

She spoke with so much feeling that Joyce glanced at her, puzzled. "Well, anyway, you didn't have to worry. Everything worked out perfectly without you having to lift your little finger."

"Yes."

They drove along Westmount Avenue in silence. Joyce broke the spell only as they approached the Thomas house. "I've tried, you know, Maggie. But after the first date or so, I've always realized it's been no go. And when any one of them tried to touch me..... But worst of all is when I meet someone who looks like Dickie. My hopes rise and I invariably think that this time will be the exception - this one must be for me. That's when it's worst. The boy I met who reminded me the most of Dick, at least in looks, turned out to be the most conceited and the most boorish man I have ever known. I didn't go out for a month after that disappointment."

Margaret turned the car into her father's runway. "I'll have to find you someone as little like Dick as possible," she said lightly, while in her heart she despaired of Joyce ever marrying.

Ted passed a restless day at the office. Seeing Joyce again after all those years brought back wave upon wave of vivid memories that he thought had surely been long forgotten. Mostly they were memories of Dick; gay and happy scenes from an adolescence that had long since been laid to rest. It was unbearable for him to contemplate how much laughter and happiness had gone out of his life. His mind was like an open wound; his memory was the salt that he sprinkled into it every few seconds. For, as always, mingled with his thoughts of Dick, were thoughts of his own plight. How right was Margaret? Faith was all right in the daytime; it was easy to be optimistic when everything around you was bright, when you were surrounded by those you loved, and when your mind was keen and actively engaged. But at night, when there was no light, when there were no people, when there were only four walls of a room and a heart beating

wildly in the darkness, how strong must faith be then!

During the course of the morning Ted wrote five long and involved business letters. All of them had to be rewritten, one as many as four times. The stenographer, who worked for three other men as well, was inclined to deal with him patiently, and so were his superiors, but they were all glad that the day of the wedding was drawing near.

By noon he had snapped at the office boy and had berated a junior clerk for an error that he himself had committed. Lunch was the last thing in the world that he wanted, but he struggled with a sandwich and a glass of milk in the company's cafeteria. He hastened back up to his office. He was bewildered and uncertain. All of Margaret's attempts to heal his wounds were rapidly being undermined.

Damn it, he finally decided, I'll do it!

He looked up a telephone number in the city directory and put through a call.

"Dr. Percival, please.....Hullo, Bud? Ted Cummings.....
O.K. thanks. How are you?.....Swell.....Yes, pretty soon, now. It
can't come quickly enough to suit me.....Say, Bud, I wonder if you could
arrange an electrocardiogram for me at the hospital.....Well, to-day or
to-morrow if possible.....Oh! Well then, as soon as it can be arranged.
.....Oh no, I'm fine. It's just routine. Want to make sure that every-
thing is under control before the big day.....That's swell, Bud. Thanks
a lot."

Well! Now he'd know for sure. He felt better. He was doing something that he had promised Margaret not to do but he felt that he was morally in the right. No matter how the tests turned out, his nerves would surely be the better for his decision. The phone rang. "Cummings here.....

Yes, Bud.....Wednesday at ten? Fine. Thank you very much." There! It was done. Of course, he would have to wait five days, but at least he had embarked on a course of action. His work seemed much simpler after that.

He left the office on the stroke of five. Margaret and Joyce were waiting for him in Mr. Thomas' car. Already Joyce looked better. As it was still very warm, she was wearing a silk, print dress, and a different cloth coat. This coat accentuated the lines of her figure and she seemed much more feminine. Margaret had taken her to the hair dresser's, and her hair was now fluffed out and curly. It gave her face more character, and did not accentuate the roundness as had the sleek hair-do. A few feathers, on what must have been a hat, shot up from the front of her hair. Joyce jumped out of the car so that Ted could sit in the middle. To his surprise, he thought that she looked cute.

"Ted," she announced, by way of greeting, "your future wife is trying to transform me into a glamour girl. It's made me feel better, anyhow!"

"You look swell," he said, with genuine enthusiasm. Margaret started the car and they pulled away from the curb. "Hi, hon," he said, and poked her gently in the ribs with his elbow.

She leaned against him a little. "Hi yourself," she replied softly.

"What have you two been up to all day?"

"Why, we've been talking our fool heads off, and then Maggie and Mrs. Thomas and I took the afternoon off to go shopping. I bought two new dresses and three hats."

"And she's a knock-out, too," said Margaret stoutly. "By the

way, what do you two characters want to have, tea or cocktails?"

"We'll be drinking to-night so I think we should have a nice, stiff cup of tea," Ted replied.

"Drinking to-night? Ted Cummings, I thought you said you were tired and just wanted to go to bed early."

"Can't a guy change his mind?"

"Come on now. Confess. Who changed it for you?"

"All right, Miss Smartey, you know everything. Supposing you tell me."

"The only time I was ever smart was when I got you to propose. Remember?" She linked her arm contentedly in his. When she narrowly missed colliding with a street car, she withdrew it hurriedly.

Ted darted a glance at Joyce. Her face was averted. "It was Bill Donnelly," he said quickly. "He wants to meet Joyce so I said we'd drop over for a while. I didn't think you had planned anything. Besides, there's something I want to do there to-night."

"What?"

"You'll see."

"That all right with you, Joyce?"

"Anything at all."

"Where to for tea?"

"We're just coming to a little tea room," said Joyce, pointing to the side of the street. "And there's actually a parking space to go with it."

Margaret manoeuvred the car into this vacant spot like an expert, and they walked into a large room filled with small tables. A

smartly tailored woman ushered them to a secluded retreat in the corner. Each table was covered with a red and white check table cloth, and held a large glass ash tray. A French-speaking waitress came over to serve them, and Ted gave the order in French.

"Does me good," he explained, after she had gone.

"This whole trip has done me good already," Joyce said softly. "You don't know how I was dreading it. After all, I haven't been here since Dickie's death. I thought I'd be unable to face the old places. But I found that I could and I did. We even visited the Tennis Club this afternoon, and later I walked through the park and sat on the same bench - at least it was on the same spot - where Dickie proposed. I must confess that I felt a little tearful while I was at the Tennis Club, but by the time I had reached the park I felt practically no emotion at all. You know, I tried. I honestly tried to feel sad and tragic. I always used to be able to, but to-day, even though I was in the same places where Dick and I fell in love, I couldn't. I realized that I couldn't even remember what he looked like. After all, it was over six years ago when he left me." Her eyes were fixed on her hands, which were folded quietly on the table in front of her. "It isn't easy to say this but I think I may have been a fool all these years and nobody had the courage to tell me. Of course, it was a tragic loss at first, but after the pain and shock wore off, I think I enjoyed being the martyr. Or maybe feeling that way was all that kept me from going mad with loneliness and heartbreak. Dickie and I had so much, you know."

Ted squirmed in his chair. Margaret shot him a warning glance.

"Yes," Joyce continued calmly, "these things can't go on forever but it took a trip to Montreal to teach me so. When I came to that

park bench and felt perfectly blank, it was like looking into a mirror. A distorted mirror. And I didn't like what I saw."

Ted and Margaret looked embarrassed.

"I hope you don't mind my rattling on like this," pursued Joyce hurriedly, "but I haven't really let loose for so long that I can't help it. I only wish now that I were to be the maid of honour after all. I'll never forgive myself for not accepting but I was afraid that I might not be able to go through with it. I didn't want to let you down. You see, I was rather jealous and resentful of your happiness. I didn't realize it, but I was."

The waitress brought the order to the table. They ate in comparative silence yet they shared a far greater understanding. Joyce had helped to clear the air. Ted felt immeasurably better. He pressed his leg against Margaret's under the table. What a girl! She grew lovelier every day. He felt a consuming desire to kiss her, to hold her in his arms. He busied himself by spreading more strawberry jam on his last piece of toast. He drained his tea cup.

The woman in the tailored suit approached the table. She was smiling.

"Was everything satisfactory?" she asked.

Ted thought her French accent was charming. "Yes, indeed," he replied.

"Would you like to have your tea cups read?"

"Oh no, thank you," said Margaret quickly. "We must get right home."

"Oh, it won't take a minute," coaxed Joyce. "Will it?" she asked, turning to the woman.

"No, mademoiselle. Not if you wish a quick reading."

"But it's all so silly," Margaret persisted. "Don't you think we'd better move, Ted?"

"No," said Ted firmly. "Not at all. I think it should be fun." He looked squarely at her.

Margaret straightened herself in her chair. Her eyes fell. "Very well," she said quietly. "I seem to be outnumbered. But be brief, if you please. We really must hurry."

"Oh isn't this fun!" squealed Joyce happily. "Here, do me first."

The woman clutched the cup in both hands and compressed her lips. For a full half minute nothing was said, but she finally looked up. "Things haven't been going too well for you lately, but I see happiness ahead. And it will come soon. You are going to meet a tall, dark man and you're going to marry him. Not this young man," she said, indicating Ted, "but another." She paused to study the cup more closely. "Above all, I see a surprise. Yes, there's a surprise here that will threaten your hard won happiness. You've got to be strong about it and show courage, mademoiselle. There's no indication what sort of surprise, but it will be the last thing in the world you'd expect. It might have something to do with money. I don't know. Anyway it will be overwhelming."

She turned her attention to Margaret's cup. Margaret was leaning forward over the table, white and still. The woman looked puzzled. "You two are great friends?" she asked.

Joyce and Margaret nodded.

"Then perhaps it's not so strange. Because you, too, will be involved in this surprise, mademoiselle, and it will also have a far reach-

ing effect on your life. I wish I could tell you more about it but I can't." She busied herself with both cups. She put Joyce's down and turned her attention back to Margaret. "You will know happiness too," she continued. "Even greater happiness than your friend, though it may not be so lasting. Still, I see that you are one who makes the most of every moment. It's always a good idea."

Margaret stared at her, fascinated.

The woman reached out for Ted's cup.

For several moments she did not speak.

"This surprise that I mentioned," she said in a low voice, "is going to affect you most of all, so much so that I am afraid it will react unfavourably on your health. Watch yourself, young man. Be prepared for any eventuality." She cleared her throat. It was as though she were forcing herself to be cheerful. "You, too, are about to know happiness, however. A great happiness. I see a trip too, and unless I miss my guess, it's a wedding trip."

Joyce clapped her hands. "Isn't she wonderful?" she exclaimed. "I always said there was something to this fortune telling business!"

"It's been very nice," said Margaret, as the woman seemed about to continue. "Thank you. Do you want to come with me to the ladies' room, Joyce?"

The two girls left the table, and Joyce could be heard protesting their rude departure all the way across the room. The woman followed them with her eyes. "I hope I haven't said anything to upset the ladies," she murmured to Ted. "Your fiancée seems rather upset."

"Oh no, that's all right," Ted replied hastily. "We're being married in a few days, you know, and she's just a little jumpy." He

handed the woman some money.

Her dark eyes were enigmatic. "Thank you, monsieur," she said, as she withdrew. "I wish you all the happiness in the world. And, entre nous, I don't think that the surprise will have anything to do with money. But be on your guard, monsieur. Bonjour!"

On the way home in the car, Joyce chattered excitedly about the great surprise that was awaiting them all, but neither Margaret nor Ted ever broached the subject of the fortune teller again.

After dinner, Ted called for the two girls and they set off to walk to Bill Donnely's. Each one seemed occupied with his or her thoughts, and there was little conversation until they approached the Fentons' neighborhood.

"Joyce called Uncle Meredith to-day but there was no answer to either the house or the office phone," Margaret announced to Ted.

"I didn't want to say much to her. I thought I'd let you explain, dear."

"Goodness," said Joyce, "is it something serious?"

"Joyce, we don't know," replied Ted gravely. "We hope not, but we feel that Mrs. Fenton may be mentally ill in some way. This is to be kept strictly between us but I feel that she is a virtual prisoner in her own house."

"Oh, Ted, that sounds fantastic!"

"Possibly, but while I have no proof I have some pretty strong reasons for believing as I do. First of all, I went to visit them and could get no answer. I knew someone was in that house because I saw a curtain move. Yet while I was still at the door, Dr. Fenton came along and insisted that no one was home. Well then, yesterday I dropped around again to ask him to have dinner with us. Mother had heard that Mrs. Fenton

had gone to visit her brother and we thought he would be alone. But he wouldn't come. He pleaded previous engagements. Yet again, I felt that someone else was in that house. This time I heard noises from upstairs, as if someone were shuffling down their hall. But Dr. Fenton laughed and said it was only the char woman. Joyce, I felt differently. It was Mrs. Fenton. I'm positive." He decided not to mention Marion's appearance on the street that day. It was just possible that he had been mistaken. Perhaps it had not been she after all.

"That's too melodramatic," scoffed Joyce. "I'll run in tomorrow, and I'll bet I can clear up the mystery in two minutes."

"Joyce dear," counselled Margaret, "I would advise that you go at this thing very carefully. We don't want to upset Uncle Meredith. If anything's wrong, he'll be able to settle it as well as anyone can."

"We'll see," said Joyce, and that seemed to be that.

Bill was waiting to receive them. They adjourned to the ping pong room in the basement.

"Drinks?" asked the host, as he bustled around a small bar in a corner of the room.

Joyce looked surprised. "Why, you crazy boy," she said.

"It's not even eight-thirty yet."

"That's all right," said Bill cheerfully, "the sun's over the yardarm." Entertaining gave him a certain dignity, Ted noticed. He was more composed and less jittery, and his face was not so apt to twitch. Ted remembered in some surprise that Bill had been considered handsome in school. Far handsomer than either himself or Dick.

"I'll have a beer," Ted requested.

"Nothing for me, thanks," said Margaret.

"I certainly won't have anything, either." Joyce was still looking critically at him. "Maybe later."

Bill poured a highball for himself and a beer for Ted.

"Bridge?" he asked.

Ted thought that bridge should be the solution.

"What a boring game," Joyce complained. "I've never really bothered to take it up."

Ted felt that his original impression of Joyce was confirmed. He would willingly have strangled her. Bill, however, seemed not in the least disturbed.

"Well," he countered affably, "I have a new album of recordings by Artur Rubenstein. How about running through that?"

"Oh, that would be wonderful!" exclaimed Joyce. "Which album is it?"

"I'll leave it to you to guess," said Bill, as he turned his attention to the gramophone.

"I love the classics, don't you?" Joyce breathed.

Margaret was looking at her closely. "I love any music," she answered. It was true. She could listen to music forever, yet she could not distinguish Brahms from Shostakovitch, Stephen Foster from George Gershwin.

Bill played through Rubenstein's album. It was Grieg's Piano Concerto. No one spoke. Bill seemed in a trance. Joyce watched him and Margaret watched her. Ted kept his eyes averted from everyone. The music moved him profoundly.

The concert ended and, for a while, the conversation was lacklustre. Joyce bombarded Bill with questions about his occupation - or lack of one. He was vague about what he had done, but positive about

why he did not want to do more.

"Well," she said stoutly, "I don't blame you for taking your time in looking around. After all, a life's work is not something to be decided upon lightly. But painting is fascinating. Can I see some of your work?"

Bill hesitated. "Next time you come," he temporized. "I'll have some out on display."

"Now don't you forget," Joyce insisted.

"Excuse me a moment," interrupted Ted, and he left the room. He could hear Joyce still talking about the art of painting as he went upstairs. In the upper hallway he paused to listen. There did not seem to be anyone around.

"Anybody home?" he called out softly.

There was no reply. He ran up another flight of stairs and down a short corridor. At the end of this hallway was Bill's ^{studio.} ~~workroom~~. It was not locked, but he had forbidden his family to enter it except for the purpose of cleaning. Ted darted in and looked hastily around. He opened a cupboard and there, before him, was a pile of canvasses. He picked out the back three and withdrew. He sprinted down the stairs and out to his car. He opened up the trunk and laid his bundle on a large sheet of paper that he had placed there previously. Then he locked the trunk, and returned to the ping pong room.

"But every man needs some woman to look after him," Joyce was insisting. ("Hideous female propaganda," Bill murmured, winking at Margaret.) "Men are such babies really. For instance, let's take you."

Ted slipped quietly into his chair. Margaret was looking at him rather anxiously. He smiled reassuringly at her.

"You must have room for another beer now," Bill remarked,

and everyone laughed except Joyce, who seemed anxious to carry on with her discussion.

Ted accepted another beer.

"All right, then, what about me?" Bill demanded of Joyce.

"Well, for one thing, if you had a wife you probably wouldn't be wearing that absurd blue tie with a brown sports coat."

"Listen," said Bill with some heat. "If there's one thing I shall always insist on choosing myself, it's my own ties."

"Oh, I think your tie shows excellent taste. But, even if you are a painter, I feel that women have a better colour sense than men. I think that I would have chosen one of your other ties to wear with that jacket."

Bill grunted. Joyce, aided from time to time by Margaret, held forth on the advantages of wifely care. Ted felt that there was nothing for him to say, and even Bill desisted from interrupting - very often.

By eleven o'clock Bill was claiming that it was all a conspiracy, that he was perfectly happy being free and single, and he suggested that they tuck into some sandwiches that his mother had prepared earlier.

By eleven thirty, they were lingering over second cups of coffee, and Bill was discoursing on his favourite subject - the imminence of war with Russia. Joyce was thunderstruck.

"Why," she exclaimed aghast, "you wicked boy! It's talk like that that brings on wars. Supposing we were all to talk that way? What do you think would happen then?"

"Peace in our time," replied Bill.

"How on earth do you figure that out?"

"Why, it's simple. Any country which entertains thoughts of war tries to convince others that war is really not imminent at all. Lots of gullible people in the democracies are taken in, even though the monster is happily swallowing up country after country around him, and they promptly start 'Let's Keep our Boys out of Foreign Wars' Clubs. That's just dandy for the aggressive nation which soon has things its own way. But if that nation thinks that we are strong and vigorous, and that we are prepared to fight a long war, then it will never attack. Q.E.D."

"But you've got to prove that Russia has aggressive thoughts in her head. She has done nothing except to strengthen her own borders, or at least make them comparatively safe from attack. How do they know that the United States won't send over an atom bomb first?"

"Yes, the Americans are so noted for starting wars."

Ted rose to his feet. "This has been a perfectly charming argument," he said, "but really, I've heard it before at a far more convenient hour."

"Yes," Margaret agreed, "we really must head for home."

Outside, in the car, Joyce turned to Margaret. "Thank you for introducing me to someone as little like Dick as possible," she said thoughtfully. "But you know, they both have one trait in common. Dick needed someone to look after him, and so does Bill."

- CHAPTER 14 -

27 February 1945 .

The station wagon pulled up in front of the small house with a squeal of brakes. Dick emerged and looked about him with satisfaction. His chauffeur, Fred Anglin's driver-batman, led the way into an office. The only heat in the room was supplied by the usual meagre fire in the usual miniature grate. The walls could boast only of two large calendars and a security poster ('Don't talk,' it screamed, 'the enemy has ears,' and it showed the usual thin-lipped, sardonically smiling German watching with fiendish glee as an Allied vessel slowly sank beneath the waters.) The room itself was bare except for a desk, three chairs, and a small, steel filing cabinet that was hidden away in a corner.

Fred greeted Dick at the door. The corners of his eyes were crinkled in a cordial welcome. "It's wonderful to see you, Dick. You're looking ^{fine} ~~fine~~."

"Thank you, Fred. I'm really looking forward to working with you. In fact, I'm looking forward to working, period."

"Well, I don't know whether there'll be enough to keep you satisfied for long, but I'm hoping that everything will work out just swell!"

"Me too."

"Come and I'll introduce you to the boys, and then we'll go down and have a look at the diggings. Our billet is a pretty grim spot, but our choice is limited, to say the least. We'll have to eat out, too, except for breakfast, and the choice of food is more limited still. But

we'll have fun." He pressed a buzzer. Almost immediately a Sergeant Major appeared on the scene.

"Sergeant Major Elliott, I want you to meet Captain Fenton."

"How do you do, sir."

"How are you, Sergeant Major?"

"As you know, Captain Fenton is going to be with us for a time," Fred explained. "I thought I'd introduce him to the boys before I show him the mansion he'll be living in."

"Yes sir. I'll gather the boys to-gether." The Sergeant Major vanished.

"He's a marvel, that man. I think you'll like the fellows, too. They all live out on a subsistence allowance and are scattered around the area. Of course there isn't nearly as much for them to do now that most of the army is on the continent, but I guess they keep busy. As long as they hand in reports conscientiously and I receive no complaints from the units they look after, I give them a free hand. They've never let me down yet. They handle a great many security lectures, although I do manage to give a few myself."

There was another light tap on the door, and the Sergeant Major reappeared. "The men are ready, sir," he said.

"Thank you." Fred led the way down the hall to a small room that was used for meetings by day and poker games by night. "Most of these fellows are better educated than I," he explained to Dick. "We have a lawyer and two school teachers, amongst others." He opened the door of the meeting room. The men jumped to their feet and stood stiffly to attention.

Fred smiled at them. "Thanks, boys," he said. "Please sit down." They did so. He motioned Dick into a chair beside his at the

head of the table and they, too, took their places. "I've asked you all to come in this morning to meet an officer who is to be with us for a while. I think we're very fortunate to have him. He went through officers' training at the same time as I did, and graduated near the top of his class. He came over here immediately afterwards and saw seven months of action as an infantry officer on the continent." Dick was fidgeting as he felt the men attempting to size him up. "The only reason he's here with us is that he was severely wounded and was just discharged from hospital to-day. He has been restricted to duties in England. And I can tell you one other thing that isn't generally known - he has been recommended for the Military Cross." His brief pause was both dramatic and effective. "Boys, I want you to meet Captain Fenton."

There was a murmur of greetings, and then Fred introduced each member of the section personally. Dick was impressed. He liked their polite manner, and he liked the obvious esteem and affection in which they held their 'boss', Fred Anglin. He stayed and chatted to them for a while until Fred explained that they would all meet again that night for a poker party. Then he suggested to Dick that they drive to their lodgings.

"Does anyone sleep here in the office?" Dick asked.

"Only one of the men. There must be someone around at all times to answer the phone."

The boarding house turned out to be a spacious old home set back from the road and surrounded by a trim hedge.

"Hm!" said Dick in surprise. "I didn't expect anything as grand as this!"

"I'm sure it used to be very nice but it's certainly in a

state of disrepair right now. Once upon a time there were several boarders, I'm told, and they had themselves quite a gay time, but last summer the old woman who owns the house suffered a stroke. So she threw out all her boarders except the officers connected with the security section. There's a wartime law under which she has to keep us, but she sees that we don't get any more than she is absolutely forced to provide."

"What's she like?"

"I've never laid eyes on the old bat. She's bed ridden."

They walked up the path.

"Fred, did you say that you were the sole boarder?"

"Yes."

"Then don't tell me you're the father of the occupant of that baby carriage!"

Fred laughed. It was a rich chuckle, and he so obviously enjoyed giving free rein to it that Dick was always anxious to say something witty.

"I don't think you'd say that if you saw the mother," Fred explained. "She's looney as a march hare. But it's a very cosy set-up. You see, the father's a Canadian, with a wife and six children of his own back in Quebec somewhere. He comes here for a visit whenever he can get leave. Matter of fact, he was here last week-end. Ah! Here's Flora now."

A young woman in white uniform arrived on the scene. Her eyes were vacant and her jaw was slack. Her hair looked as tidy and clean as the cord on a well used mop. Her large feet were encased in slippers that were in shreds. She stared blankly at the men.

"Flora, this is Captain Fenton. Have you his room ready?"

"Yes sir. Mrs. Harrison said he was to have the one next to yours." She shuffled along in front of them and threw open a door. "Thank you, Flora," Fred said by way of dismissal. She left them, and the scuffing of her slippers along the floor grew fainter and gradually died away.

"Well, this is it! Not exactly the royal suite but you have a bed, a bureau and a window and I doubt if you'll be in here much anyway. I keep my spare uniforms in the office and so I never come back from morning till night. For one thing the sight of Flora is too depressing. For another, it's like the tombs. No one's ever around."

"I can see why." Dick dropped his valise and haversack, and tested the bed. "Not too bad."

"Well, I'll leave you to get settled. Wander up to the office when you're ready for lunch and I'll introduce you to the local eatery. Let me warn you, though - by twelve-fifteen they're out of sausage meat and by twelve-thirty they're out of brussel sprouts. So you'd better meet me at twelve. Walk straight up to the top of the road and turn right. You can't miss it, old top. Then, this afternoon, if you feel up to it, I'll take you around and introduce you to a few of the characters who run the units around here."

"Sounds swell. Thanks a million, Fred. I think I'm going to enjoy my stay here very much."

"Good. It's great to have you. By the way, I know my ulterior motives are showing but I'm long overdue a leave. Do you think you'll be able to take over in a couple of weeks?"

"Sure, if your Sergeant Major's smart enough to know all the answers."

"He knows them, all right. I never have any worries when he's around. All I'm needed for in that office is to sign letters."

"Well then, I guess I can take over."

"Good. By the way, I have no plans for this week-end if there's any place you want to go."

"No, I don't think so, thanks." But he reconsidered. "Come to think of it, maybe after Thursday night I'll be more anxious to take advantage of your offer."

Fred grinned knowingly. "O.K. old boy. Just say the word. See you for lunch!"

Dick opened his valise and spread a few of his more treasured possessions around the room. Soon his mother was regarding him fondly from the bureau and Ted was grinning cheerfully from the mantel. Dick stuck snapshots of his father and Ellen in the side of his mirror, and left two large photographs of Joyce in the bottom of his suitcase. He peppered the bureau and mantel with brushes, combs, books and various other articles of his kit, but still the room looked cold and bare. Even the addition of two lightly clad and well proportioned young ladies - one over his bureau and the other over the foot of his bed - had no effect. He shook his head. "Well, I tried," he muttered, and decided that it was time to meet Fred for lunch.

Lunch turned out to be, as Fred had suggested, a slightly less than sumptuous repast of sausage meat, plain and undisguised; brussel sprouts, saltless and watery; and potatoes, cold and greasy. A porridge-like dessert was no more appetizing.

Fred laughed ruefully. "Well, never mind," he said. "It's cheap. And to-night we'll spread ourselves to dinner in the hotel. The

meal may not be so much better, but at least we can hoist a couple beforehand, and the surroundings will be more glamorous."

Dick had a strenuous day. With Fred he visited many of the army camps in the vicinity - reinforcement depots they were for the most part, where men received their final training and documentation before proceeding to the continent. Never had he met such a staggering array of Lieutenant Colonels and Majors. He returned to his room more than ready for a short rest and a bath, only to find it filled with his heavy luggage which had been forwarded from the kit storage depot. So he spent the next hour filling his cupboard and the drawers of his bureau with more clothes than he would ever need in five years. He then met Fred and they adjourned to the local hotel. One drink led to several and Dick renewed acquaintances with at least a dozen officers and men whom he knew and who were stationed nearby. Fred was always at his side, insisting on buying all the drinks and introducing him to anyone who might possibly some day be of service.

Life for Dick assumed a much more roseate hue. His legs, which had been stiff and aching all afternoon from the unaccustomed exercise, now felt as though they did not even belong to him. In short, he had forgotten that he had any limbs at all. The pallor had left his cheeks which now shone like prize Mackintosh apples. There was a sparkle in his eye that matched Fred's. Fred, in fact, spent the evening beaming on all and sundry. He had a companion to work with whom he liked and admired, and furthermore he would now be able to take that leave to Cornwall that he had planned for so long. He bought a fifth round of gin and orange for himself and Dick and three others who had ventured too close.

Dick remembered later that the conversation had been extremely witty, and that he and Fred had convulsed their companions for fully half an hour with scintillating repartee. There was also some vague recollection of a sixth drink. It seemed that he and Fred had known each other for three years, seven months, eight days and several hours and somehow this made it imperative that he buy another round. They slid into the dining room at eight-thirty, entirely oblivious of the rather frigid glares being tossed their way by the waitresses. Soup appeared, as if by magic. Of that they were sure. But neither could remember what followed. Fred thought that they had choked down some plaice; Dick was sure that it must have been rabbit stew. At any rate they were both agreed that the conversation had continued in a sparkling vein and that they had injected a little life into the staid old room. They decided that they would have to have dinner like this every night - until each one looked at the bill and then into his wallet. After that, they were very sober.

"I think we should do this once a week," Fred ventured cautiously as they were walking back to the office.

"Yeah. Any aspirin in the office?"

"Sure, but you won't need any. The party should be in full swing by now and the boys always manage to lay in a good, big keg of beer."

"Thanks. I'll stick to the aspirin."

Fred looked hurt. "But this is a party," he remonstrated.

"I know, and I'm enjoying it," Dick insisted, "but I would like to be able to manoeuvre when it's all over."

Fred laughed. "You will," he said. "I'll take care of you."

"That's damned white of you, but who's going to take care of you?"

"The Sergeant Major. I take my cue from him. As soon as he starts to cast an anxious eye upon me, I stop drinking." He laughed again. It was certainly an infectious sound. Dick laughed too. And he was quick to note that the Sergeant Major threw anxious glances at both of them as soon as they walked in the door. True to his word, Fred drank sparingly. Despite the constant entreaties and ministrations of the ten other members of the section, Fred consumed but two glasses of beer the whole evening. Dick restricted himself to one aspirin and a glass of water. He could see that his abstemiousness was a grave disappointment to the men, but he knew that he had made a lasting friend of the more temperate Sergeant Major.

The poker game lasted until one o'clock and Dick enjoyed himself immensely although his head was aching and he lost over three pounds. The men were all very friendly but never once did any of them overstep the slight line of distinction that separated efficient officers from well trained men. Yet there was no feeling of restraint. Fred obviously had their respect and, by being friendly and natural with them, Dick hoped to earn it, too. Excellent refreshments were served, and none too soon, as several of the poker players were evidently in need of some solid nourishment. One member produced a banjo, and another, the possessor of a surprisingly fine tenor voice, led the group in a sing song. Finally there were jokes, a limitless fund of typical army jokes in which one leads to another in an endless, unbroken chain. Dick laughed heartily at them all, even the filthiest ones, but followed Fred's example and did not offer any of his own.

It was three-thirty when the party broke up. "My God, I'm thoughtless," Fred exclaimed as they headed for home and bed. "This afternoon I drag you all over the countryside and to-night I keep you up until nearly four o'clock, and here it's your first day out of hospital. You must be dead on your feet."

Dick mustered up a faint smile. "Not at all. I've enjoyed myself. And I think you've got a darn fine bunch of fellows there."

"Well, I certainly like them," Fred replied. "But I refuse to be switched off the main subject - namely, you. To-morrow morning you will stay in bed. Understand?"

"Yes sir. When may I get up, sir?"

"Noon, and not a moment before."

Fred opened the front door of their lodgings, which was never locked. "Now remember what I said! You have a good rest to-morrow."

"Yes, sir," Dick paused at his door. "But I would be most obliged if you would call me for breakfast. It upsets the flow of all my digestive juices if I miss any of my meals." He winked at Fred. "Good-night," he said, as he went into his room.

"Good-night Dick." Fred stood there for a few seconds, looking at the closed door, with a worried expression on his face. "He's overdone it to-day," he mumbled, as he entered his own room. "Like hell I'll call him for breakfast."

Dick was actually so exhausted that he fell into bed still wearing his underwear and his shirt, and then was unable to fall asleep. He lay there, tossing and twisting until the bed was hot and the covers all askew. That desperate feeling overtook him that comes to anyone suffering from insomnia who knows that to-morrow is to be a heavy day.

His mind was racing from person to person with feverish intensity. There were visions of Ted being blown up as he led his company into action. He thought of his family. He tried to picture his sister's fiancé. He knew that the time would soon come to write another letter to Joyce, but should it be couched in the language of a lover or a friend? If he were to be sent home to-morrow, could they possibly take up where they had left off? He doubted it. These obscure visions of Joyce instinctively led him to thoughts of Wilma. Disturbingly intimate thoughts that caused him to thrash around in his bed more wildly than ever. What on earth could it be that she had to tell him? That she did not love him? That she, too, had a fiancé somewhere? Fred had never volunteered any information and Dick had been too proud to ask. Never mind. Thursday night would be the night, all right. Why the hell did it seem so damnably far away? Wasn't it five o'clock Wednesday morning already? He groaned. His legs were throbbing and there were a thousand little hammers tapping the inside of his skull. He buried his face under the sheets and vowed to himself that he would not move so much as a muscle until sleep overtook him. He had one more vision of Ted being bayoneted. He thought of Wilma as she had been during the party in his hospital room - a warm and vital woman, with no trace of the rather bitter and sarcastic sang froid to which she sometimes fell victim. And that red hair! He groaned again.

It was nearly six o'clock when he finally fell asleep.

There he was again on a street which, by now, he could recognize. He was once more bathed in the enshrouded rays of a street lamp at an intersection, and prickly fear was covering his body with goose pimples. He knew that he could turn only one way. He squared his shoulders.

He had been down this street before. The dim outline of the houses and the church was familiar. Well, nothing drastic had happened the last time, and he was determined to be calm and cool now. Yet the palms of his hands were wet and he knew that his knees were shaking. On he went as before but this time there was no sound of weeping, no one offering to accompany him. His shoes rang out on the sidewalk. Soon he stopped and sniffled. Something was burning. He looked around. There! Through the darkness and the fog! That house on the right was on fire. He started towards it but he was unable to walk quickly and it was some time before he reached the gate. By then smoke was pouring out of the windows, and he could see the dancing flames through the glass partition of the front door. His heart was beating wildly now, although it was not the fire that caused his panic. He dropped to his hands and knees and crept stealthily up the side of the path under cover of some bushes. The smoke was stinging his nostrils, burning his throat. Yet he must reach that front door unseen for someone would be waiting for him in that house. Then it was that he saw it. A shoe! A large, black shoe. He gasped. At last he could see the fiend who controlled him so. He looked up - slowly and with mounting horror and reluctance his eyes travelled up the pant leg that confronted him. Before he had even reached the knee a blinding flash of light illumined the darkness and a mighty explosion rent the air. Dick was hurled to the ground. He tried to raise himself up but he had no strength. He struggled desperately. He must see that face! He cried out in his frustration. He cried out again and again.

He awoke to find himself on the floor. Fred had switched on the light and was standing over him.

"Dick, for God's sake, are you all right?"

Dick passed his hand wearily over his eyes. "Yes, I'm all right." He got up and threw some of the bed clothes back on the bed.

"What time is it?"

"Seven o'clock and raining like a son of a gun. It's still pitch black outside."

"Uh-huh." He sat down on the edge of the bed. "I'm terribly sorry I disturbed you but I just had a nightmare. It's very strange. I had exactly the same type of dream while I was in the hospital. I was screaming in my sleep there too, until Wilma woke me up."

"What's it about?"

"Oh, a street that I wander down in the dark. I can't stop myself although I know that someone along the way is waiting to kill me."

"Sounds a little grim."

"Brother, it is grim."

"Are you all right now?"

"Yeah. Fine. Are you going to get dressed?"

"God, no. I don't get up till eight or a quarter after."

"Well, don't forget to call me. And thanks a lot for coming in."

"Think nothing of it. I want you to take it easy for a while. I made you do too much yesterday."

Fred returned to his room and Dick straightened out his bed. He was almost ill with weariness, and this time he fell into a drugged sleep from which he did not emerge until eleven-thirty. He looked at the small travelling clock beside his bed.

"Jesus Christ!" he exclaimed and jumped up.

He met Fred for lunch and afterwards they sauntered back to the office. The skies had cleared and the earth smelt soft and sweet in the afternoon sunlight. The boys sat outside on the steps as long as their consciences would allow them. At two-thirty they went reluctantly indoors.

"By the way, have you any civvies?" Fred asked.

"Yes. Of a sort."

"Well, you can wear them any time you want. It's one of the charms of this job. It's so that we can investigate without being mysterious, I guess, or too noticeable." Fred sat down at his desk.

"Here's some mail for you. My, the hospital sent it over quickly."

Dick thumbed through five letters, and then opened one from Ted. He let out a howl. "He's getting some leave and he's coming over! I can't believe it!" He read on avidly. "He says he's sure I must be out of hospital by now and that I should be with you. Therefore I'm to expect a phone call from him any day after this Sunday."

"That's wonderful, Dick. I'll postpone my leave till he's gone."

"Thanks for offering, Fred, but there's no need. He says he's exhausted and that he's lost twenty-five pounds and that all he wants is a room with a comfortable bed so that he can sleep. He also says he's hungry."

"For food?"

"Yes. With Ted it would be for food."

"Well then, you'll have to feed him at the hotel."

He next came to a letter from Joyce. He opened it slowly, in a state of reluctant curiosity. It was the cheeriest sounding letter

that Joyce had written him in months. She had just received the note that he had sent her from London, the one which he had written as if he had still been in love with her. At the end of the letter she announced that she was going back home to Brantford. The Clarkes and the Thomases and the Fentons had all been very kind, but her mother had not been well and she was returning home to help take care of the house. Dick found himself unable to care less where she went. Then he rebuked himself.

Fred glanced at him. "Hullo," he said. "Bad news? You look as though you've lost your best friend."

At that very moment Dick made a decision.

"No," he said firmly. "But I've just decided to break off my engagement. Fred, old boy, you're now looking at a free man."

13 September 1947 .

Ted pushed a piece of scrambled egg around on his plate. Elspeth was watching him.

"Not hungry, dear?"

"No, Mother. Not very."

"But you usually love your breakfast!"

Ted did not answer. Instead, he looked unseeing at the sports page of the Gazette. How could he tell his mother about the Fentons? What was there to tell? Anyway, his mother resented Marion Fenton and the interest that he took in her. Not that she would wish any harm to befall her, but, if Marion were inconvenienced by some small misfortune, Elspeth would not be too sympathetic. It was another instance of the maternal jealousy to which Elspeth so often succumbed.

She tried another tack. "I'll be downtown to-day, dear. Is there anything I can get you?"

"No thanks, Mother." Ted was depressed not only when he thought of the Fentons; he had not been able to forget the prophecy of the fortune-teller, and her gaunt face and her black eyes seemed to be burnt into his memory. It was not what she said; it was what she did not say. Ted pushed away his plate. This was ridiculous! Letting an old crone and a cup of tea upset him!

"Mrs. Shaw phoned to ask whether I thought you and Margaret would prefer a pair of sterling silver candle sticks or a decanter. I knew that you were to get two decanters from your aunt Vivian, so I suggested the candle sticks."

"Fine." The worst part of that damned tea cup reading was that it drove a further wedge between him and Margaret. It was just another incident that they would never be able to discuss with perfect freedom. Ted realized that his faith was waning, yet he still clung to Margaret's belief

that he would live for years. He must!"

"I've simply got to make another attempt to buy a hat to-day. They all look so perfectly fantastic on an old face like mine."

"Oh, I don't know why." Yet, come to think of it, Margaret seemed to be evading any discussion of his supposed illness. Whenever there were signs that it might be mentioned, she changed the subject directly. Could it be that she, too, was losing faith? He would put it up to her once more - after he knew the outcome of his electrocardiogram.

He felt a hand descend on his shoulder. Elspeth was standing over him and she was looking concerned. "Dear, what is it?" As Ted started to protest she hurried on. "It's no use saying that everything's fine because I know differently. After all, you're my son and I understand you pretty well. More than that, my dear, I love you more than anyone else on earth. Always remember that. And when you're upset about something, then I'm upset too. And we've both been upset for two weeks." Ted had laid aside the paper and he was staring fixedly at his coffee cup. "I know you haven't confided in me in some time and I've told myself that it is all part of the process of growing up. But you know, son, a burden shared is often a burden halved." She slipped her arm around him and stroked his forehead, something that she had not done for many years. Ted was deeply moved. How nice to be comforted; what bliss to be able to pass off one's worries. How many times as a small boy had he not run to his mother with some overwhelming hurt! But of course he was a small boy no more. His problems and his personal tragedies were now his own, to be faced and conquered by him alone. He moved ever so slightly away from his mother. Immediately she dropped her hands to her sides.

"Everything's all right with Margaret?"

Ted nodded.

"You're still happy about the marriage?"

Ted nodded again. He did not dare to look at her. He wondered if he could trust himself to speak.

"There's nothing wrong with your health?"

"Oh Mother, why are you cross-examining me like this?

Of course there's nothing wrong. I'm just a little tired, that's all. And excited. After all, one doesn't get married very often." He realized that his voice, which was usually soft and low pitched, was now loud and strident. He tried to soften his tone. "Don't you worry about me, Mother," he continued, and he looked at her tenderly. "I'm all right." With that he left the room. "I'm going out for a walk," he called from the front hall. "I'll be back for lunch." The front door opened and banged shut.

Elsbeth stood where she was for some time. All her life she had planned and schemed for her family. Her husband did not seem to need her any more. After a brief and middle-aged, but passionate and idyllic, interlude during the war, their relationship was back on its usual impersonal plane. As long as he was in the house, she dominated him. But of late he had been spending more and more time playing bridge at the club. Elsbeth was obliged now to fall back on women's company in the evenings. She saw so much of her friends during the day at luncheons and club meetings that she hated having to see them again at night. She must have failed somewhere, she was thinking. In fact, she must have failed everywhere. Her husband was slipping away from her and now her son was leaving her. But then he had been slowly but surely withdrawing from her ever since he had first met Dick. And now he had Margaret. Elsbeth's brow was furrowed with concern. What could be wrong with him? He was definitely much thinner. His face was white, and the hollows in his cheeks made him look almost cadaverous. If anything was troubling him, why ~~could~~^{did} he not tell her? Could it be something that was strictly between himself and Margaret? Or could it

be something that was so serious that he wanted to spare her? After her talk with him this morning, and after his unusual outburst, Elspeth was convinced that her son was undergoing great suffering. And, whether it was mental or physical, he seemed to be suffering alone.

There it was, then. She was much less active in club work now. Her husband was not only indifferent, but almost hostile. She had never been able to grow fond of any of her women friends - fond enough, that is, to confide her personal problems to them. And now she was rebuffed by her own son! It was just too much. Tears welled up in her eyes. "You silly old fool," she told herself sternly, "you haven't done this for thirty years." But the tears kept coming, faster and faster. They rolled unchecked down her cheeks and splashed on to her blouse. Her new, white blouse.

Suddenly she flung herself on to a chair and buried her head in her arms. Her hair, over which she took such infinite pains, spilled over and fastened on to a plate covered with toast crumbs and the sticky remnants of some marmalade. She paid no heed. She sobbed violently and allowed the tears to flow unchecked. "For all the use I am, I might as well be dead. I might as well be dead. I might as well be dead."

Gradually the sobbing decreased in intensity. There were no more tears to shed. Her throat and her chest ached and burned. Slowly she raised her head until she was looking into a mirror on the wall. She saw the face of an old woman with straggly hair, red-rimmed blue eyes, thin lips in need of repair, and lines. Everywhere deeply etched lines.

She shook her head and rose to her feet so that she might examine herself more closely. "Oh, I don't know," she said aloud. "A new permanent, a new hat and some make up and I'll hold my own at that wedding." She tilted her head to one side. "That's better! I'll go and buy that hat right now! My husband and my son will be proud of me yet." She continued

to scrutinize herself and tilt her head this way and that, and she even managed a gay little smile.. She thanked God for an irrepressible optimism. She needed it!

Meanwhile Ted was sauntering slowly along Westmount avenue. Free Saturday mornings had been but recently instituted by his firm and he was still unused to them. He wondered what on earth he could do with himself. Margaret, he knew, was having a fitting for her wedding gown. Bill would probably be hanging around doing nothing, but somehow or other he did not feel in the mood for Bill's pessimism. He was in need of a more stimulating diversion. And then the thought struck him. Of course! Embarrassed with himself at first, even a little ashamed of such emotions, he set off for his church. It was the first time in his life that he had ever dropped into the church on a week day merely to pray.

The organist must have been practising. The atmosphere was rich and soft, like velvet. Purple velvet. Two or three other people were sitting quietly near the front, yet Ted did not notice. He slipped unobtrusively into a back pew, and knelt on one of the cushions. He closed his eyes and leaned forward to pray. The music seemed to flood his mind to the exclusion of all conflict, all thought. He was prepared to pray, yet he could not. He remained motionless. The organist reached the end of a Bach toccata. The silence in the church was startling. Then there was a soft scuffling of feet, and a woman walked up the aisle and out the front door. Soon the organ spoke up softly. Schubert's 'Ave Maria'. Ted stirred slightly. He still seemed unable to pray in any formal fashion, but he knew that he was in communion with Someone, somewhere. He was more sure of it than he had ever been of anything. And he felt a peace that was a balm to his soul. He thought tenderly of all the people whom he had ever loved - he realized that there had been only four in his whole life - and pictured each one in characteristic scenes. The organist ceased, the three

women in the front row departed. Still Ted did not move. He felt refreshed somehow, and cleansed, but he hated to leave without offering one formal prayer. It was a long time, he remembered ashamedly, since he had prayed for the well being of Dick's soul. Or for the health and happiness of his own family. Or indeed for anything that did not affect him in some selfish, temporal way. So he waited.

At length something happened. He knew what he must do. No matter what the hospital reports might advise, he would carry through his plans to marry Margaret. And he would have faith. It might not be faith in a long and healthy life, but it would be a faith that what he was doing was for the best and that Someone was watching over him. He felt isolated and alone no longer. He would carry on as normally as circumstances would permit until the end. There now! He breathed a sigh of relief. He had made a decision. Or was it he who had made the decision? Could it be that....?

He rose to his feet. His knees were stiff and cramped. He looked around the church. There was no one there. "Thank you," he murmured softly. Then he glanced quickly around once more. How trite that remark had sounded! Yet why? Actually, he felt relieved, and for that welcome relief he was sure that he could thank this visit that was, for him at least, singular. He was grateful. From now on, he would pray more often.

He blinked uncertainly as he walked into a blaze of sunlight. Rarely could he recall having seen such a clear and warm September. He consulted his watch. Ten forty-five. He could drop over to the Tennis Club but the temptation to play would be too great. He had determined that he would give any strenuous form of exercise a miss until he knew more about his condition. Besides, he was not in the mood for tennis.

He would make one more effort to see Dr. Fenton. He must

have another try at seeing Marion.

As he was approaching his destination, a car drew up on the other side of the street and he was greeted by a loud honking of horn.

"Hey Ted! I want to talk to you."

Ted crossed the street. It was Bill.

"What are you up to?" he asked him, warmly. He was glad to see him.

"Going downtown. Want to come?"

"No thanks, Bill. I can't."

"I think I'll buy a suit. Haven't had a new one in ages. Besides, I should have one for your wedding."

"Haven't you left it rather late?"

"I'll be all right. I know a man." He lit a cigarette. "That was good fun last night."

"Yes, thanks very much. We all had a grand time."

"Er, do you think Joyce enjoyed herself?"

"I'm sure she did."

"I'm glad. I feel that she could use a few laughs after the tough break she's had." He drew an especially long puff on his cigarette.

"I thought you said she wasn't attractive?"

"Oh, come on," said Ted, somewhat panic stricken. "I never said that! You haven't passed that around, have you?"

Bill laughed. "Don't worry. But I think I'm going to give her a call today. She intrigues me." He slipped the car into first gear and raced the motor. "Maybe she's right. Maybe I do need someone to look after me! See you around!" The car sped off.

Ted stood where he was, open mouthed. Yet why not? They were two people who found it difficult to fit themselves into a conventional modern day pattern. They might easily find happiness to-gether. Joyce could boss

and mother Bill to her hear^t's content and he would love it. Ted realized that Bill's success with women had always been limited. For one thing, he was too bombastic. He monopolized the conversation whenever he could, and very few women can stand that sort of treatment for long. He hated dancing, and considered moving pictures a waste of time. Small wonder, then, that women found him a bore, and, well, 'strange' was the more polite adjective with which he was most often tagged. Ted chuckled. If Joyce could break down that uncompromising attitude of his, his hat was off to her. Then he remembered how she had subdued Dick in a matter, almost, of minutes, and he shook his head. She was not a woman to be underrated.

He neared the Fentons' house and stopped. Was he making a fool of himself? Joyce certainly thought so. Even Margaret was wondering. Yet he had seen Mrs. Fenton - and really, it could have been no one else - in a state that was definitely far from normal. She gave every indication of having suffered a nervous breakdown of some kind. And he had never seen her since. Then there was Dr. Fenton. He looked as if he had aged ten years. Evidently there was something disturbing him to a marked degree. Finally there was the definite feeling that something secret and, yes, sinister, was going on behind those walls. No, he was not making a fool of himself. He was right to investigate. He crossed the road and walked up the path to the house. Just at that moment Meredith Fenton rushed out of the front door and ran towards the car. He was in a wild state of disarray. He jumped into the car, started up the engine, and backed hurriedly down the driveway. In so doing, he nearly struck Ted. He noticed the younger man for the first time, and the car skidded to a stop.

"Ted, my boy, have you some time to spare?"

"Yes sir. Of course."

"Then jump in. Something very unf^ortunate has happened

and ^{you} could be a great help to me." He held the door of the car open and Ted leaped in.

Meredith drove along for a while in silence. Ted sat in his corner, tense and expectant. Finally Meredith spoke.

"Yes Ted, I've felt sure that you ~~had~~ 've known that something was wrong with us. Well, you've been right. I thought that perhaps I could patch everything up without telling anyone, but I see now that that's quite impossible. Still, only Marion's brother and one other person know what I'm going to tell you, so I would appreciate your discretion."

"Oh sir, you know....."

"Yes, I know, Ted. We need say no more about it." He cleared his throat. He was approaching the business section of the city and had to move comparatively slowly. "There is no need my telling you that this all concerns Marion. You see, Ted, with some people, grief can be absorbed without too much lasting danger to the nervous system. Others work off a personal tragedy with tears or hysterics, or else they talk about it until the worst part of the strain is over. But when we received word about Dick, Marion did neither of these things. True, when she talked about him, tears would come to her eyes, but she never really broke down. At least, not in my presence. And the shock must have been calamitous to her. She was always so ready with sympathy for others. And it was always completely genuine. If a friend of hers was in trouble, she suffered with her. You know that. Well, for weeks after Dick's death she went around as if nothing had happened. At first I was worried. I wished desperately that she would give vent to her grief somehow. But everything seemed so normal and she was so successful in acting as if nothing had happened, that my fears were soon lulled. And, of course, I was under a strain myself. After the first few days I had to return to my practice, and I think that I was busier that spring than ever before in my life. But

Ellen was with her mother a great deal, and that helped."

For what seemed to Ted the fiftith time, Meredith ran his hand nervously over his face. It was a new mannerism - a sign of uncertainty in a man who had always seemed completely self-possessed. Ted noticed, too, the sagging chin line, the grey pallor of the face, and the black pouches that had recently formed under his eyes. Ted was suddenly aware that the knuckle of his own left index finger was red and raw. He had reverted to chewing at it when under strain, a habit in which he had not indulged for two years. He rammed the hand into his pocket.

"Apparently it did not help enough," continued Meredith softly. The car was halted for a red light at the corner of Peel and Sherbrooke, and it seemed that they would be stationary there forever. "Marion and I had moved into separate rooms, which, I might say, is a mistake in any marriage at any age. I would come in late at night, tired out, and go straight to my room to grab some sleep. Oh! I blame myself for so much of this. So very much!" The light changed but Meredith flooded the engine and the car stalled. Immediately a flurry of honking broke out from behind them. Ted turned around and glared furiously. Meredith fumbled with the starter. The sounds of impatient honking increased. Ted was just about to leave the car and say a few choice words to all concerned when the car leaped forward. All the cars behind were still motionless because the light had changed again. A taxi driver allowed himself one final blast of frustrated rage. Ted muttered under his breath and Meredith mopped his brow. Ted lit two cigarettes and passed one over. Meredith puffed at it greedily.

"When the boys started coming home and we went down to the stations or to friends' homes to greet them, we went through anxious times. As you know, Marion was on the welcoming committee for the boys of your Unit. I wanted her to hand the job over to somebody else, but she wouldn't.

Meeting you was hardest of all. We were so terribly glad to see you, but of course it brought back everything so clearly to us." It's funny, thought Ted, staring out the window, how all of these lovely old homes have been turned into boarding houses. He wrenched his head back to look again at Meredith's profile. He couldn't watch him. How could he ever forget the brave smiles and words of those two people who met him at the station? And the questions they asked about Dick's death? ".....so worried about keeping up my own appearance that again I left Marion down. I couldn't have noticed that she was suffering more than I. Then Donald came back, and there was Ellie's wedding. That was a diversion but, by the end of 1945, she was gone. And all the way out to Vancouver! Marion and I were alone in that house for the first time in our lives!"

They had passed McGill University now. Sherbrooke Street had narrowed as they approached the east end of the City. Ted felt a sense of depression - even of dread - steal over him. He wished that Meredith would not pause so often, yet he hated to have him go on. He adjusted the small window so that the air poured all over his face and through his open shirt.

"It must have been awful for her alone in that big house. We couldn't move into an apartment because of my office being in the same building as my home. And besides, it would have meant the severing of our last connection with Dick. So we stayed on and I seemed to be working harder than ever. However, Marion was out playing bridge a good deal, and she started to do a little entertaining, so it was all right. Actually, it was about three months ago when I first noticed a great change in her." He turned off and headed down a narrow street that Ted knew was noted chiefly for its disorderly houses. Children were all over the place and slovenly mothers sat languidly on front door steps. Meredith drove down a short way, and drew the car into the curb. "Here we are," he said. "I dare say we shan't have to wait long."

Ted looked around him incredulous^lly. What Marion Fenton would have to do with this slum and squalor, he could not imagine.

"It seemed that Marion was passing through overwhelming periods of grief, and that they were occurring with ever-increasing frequency. She went out less and less. She complained of sleeplessness, and once or twice I prescribed sleeping pills for her. Two or three times I thought that I missed some sedatives from my office, but I never connected their disappearance with her. One day, apparently, Marion was down this way visiting a family of one of the lads from your Unit. It was some welfare job. She felt that she would go crazy without some sort of relief and she had a nervous attack right out on the street. She tried to pull herself together but without much success. She knew that she would be unable to steal any more narcotics from my office, so she decided that this would be a good neighbourhood to look for some." He looked sadly around. Ted was motioning two children away from the mudguard. "She was right. She pleaded migraine, or something, and right then and there was put in contact with someone who was peddling the stuff. When they saw how she was dressed, they soaked her plenty. She rented a room in that hotel down there," with a shudder he pointed out a dingy, squalid, low-roofed wooden house a few doors down the street, "but she was rapidly acquiring the cunning of a dope addict. She dressed shabbily and found a new operator. She would go down to the room wearing her ordinary clothes, change into some old rags, and then find the operator. He would hand her what she wanted and then back she'd go to the room and give herself a shot. Then, after a while, she would change back into her good clothes and come home."

Meredith leaned back against the car cushions and closed his eyes. He looked as if he were close to a collapse. Ted longed to comfort him, but what could he do? He turned his head away. Two boys of about

eight were fighting almost directly outside his door and he watched them absently. They were shrieking at one another in a language he was unable to understand, but there was no mistaking their hostility. Finally one boy tripped and fell. The other kicked him twice in the stomach. The fallen one lay prostrate. His face was chalk white. Satisfied that he had won, the victor spat at him, pulled a cigarette stub from his pocket and lit it. He sauntered up the street. Ted was about to investigate the fallen youngster, when that worthy opened his eyes, grimaced with pain, and clambered slowly to his feet. His eyes were filled with a smouldering hate, and he was biting his lower lip. Suddenly he shot up the street and tackled his erstwhile opponent around the knees. The fight was resumed. Ted could hear some bloodthirsty yells but was unable to see anything. Besides, Meredith had resumed his tragic tale.

"As I say, I became suspicious about three months ago, but I couldn't credit Marion with taking dope. I thought that she was far too unversed in the ways of the world to ever find any, for one thing. But she was acting very strangely and I was worried. One day when she was out, I searched her room. Imagine how ashamed I felt when I found nothing. I put it down to nerves, and we went on our holidays last month. But somehow it wasn't successful. We were poles apart. I tried to comfort her but I guess I was clumsy and awkward. After thirty-two happy years, I felt that our marriage had soured and there seemed to be nothing I could do about it. One thing, though, I am sure of, when we were away she rarely, if ever, took any narcotics. But she drank three or four cocktails a day, and that surprised me. Furthermore, the holiday seemed to do her no good. So I was no further ahead when I returned to

town three weeks ago." Meredith opened his eyes with apparent reluctance and looked anxiously up and down the street. Ted need not have been there. Meredith was talking as if to himself. Ted looked around, too, and was startled to find a pair of blue eyes peering questioningly at him through the window. They belonged to a girl who must have been in her early teens, yet who was ludicrously dressed to give the appearance of maturity. Her hat was concocted out of an old piece of felt and had a blue and gold feather wrapped around it. Her hair was frizzled and a dirty mouse colour; large, mascaraed eyes and a scarlet mouth were startlingly evident in a face that was deathly white. She wore a skirt and a blouse. Over these, a cloth coat, trimmed with imitation fur at the wrists and collar, was held open by her hands which were thrust casually but firmly into the pockets. The whole appearance was one of defiant cynicism, middle-aged youth, bitter weariness. Ted glanced quickly at Meredith, but the older man had once more closed his eyes and given himself up to utter exhaustion. Ted turned back to the girl. They almost bumped noses, for her head was inside the car window by now. Ted was oppressed by the suffocating odour of cheap perfume. He shook his head quickly. The girl seemed loath to go.

"Allez-vous, en," he hissed. "Mon pere est malade."

The girl looked at him doubtfully. Apparently she thought that he was a shyster for she treated him to a brief but lucid harangue in French. Then she left and walked languorously down the street. Ted noticed the swing of the hips, the sheer fit of the coat over her thighs and buttocks. He shuddered.

Meredith stirred. It was as if he had come out of a trance. He passed his hand over his face.

"What was it I was saying?" he asked.

"You had just returned from your holidays," Ted answered gently.

"Ah, yes." The voice was almost a whisper now. "My suspicions mounted rapidly. Then, ten days ago, the lid flew off everything. Marion went through the ritual of changing her clothes in this room of hers, and headed out in her rags to buy some of this stuff. But when she returned to the room she found that all her good things had been stolen. She was distraught, and promptly gave herself a larger dose than usual. Then, instead of having a sleep as she usually did, she lost her head and started for home. She took a street car and apparently walked the last part of the way. I don't know if anyone saw her, but I am hoping not. At least, nobody has mentioned anything to me. As a matter of fact, Ted, it was the night that you dropped in." Ted said nothing. "Of course, when she came in that night, I knew. I called her brother, and also arranged for the services of a very good and trustworthy nurse whom I knew. We tried to take care of her, and gradually she confessed the whole story." He buried his face in his hands. "My poor, beautiful Marion!"

He paused to blow his nose. Ted felt sick to his stomach. What next? he wondered.

"It was that cursed war," cried Meredith, passionately. "Look at all the millions of lives it has ruined! It took away my son, and now it's working hard to take away my wife. But I won't let it. I'll fight it, do you understand? I'll nurse Marion back to health if it's the last thing I ever do." Suddenly he was calmer. "You suspected something, didn't you? But you see, I didn't want to tell anyone unless

I had to. And things seemed to be going so well. Marion was responding splendidly to treatment, and I was planning to take her away by the end of the week. She wanted to get well and was doing everything she could to help effect the cure. Her will power was magnificent. I had told her yesterday that Ellen was coming for a visit, and would go away with us. I didn't tell Ellen the truth, but I had said that her mother wasn't well and needed her. So Donald and the baby are going to his mother's and Ellen will be here for two or three weeks. Marion was so excited! We relaxed our vigil slightly and this morning she disappeared. So I'm watching for her to turn up at her room."

"But she'll know that you'll look here. Surely she'll go somewhere else."

"No, Ted, because she would never tell us where this room was, or, for that matter, where she got her supplies. But I put detectives on the track, just in case this eventuality should ever arise. And we found out that the room has been rented by Marion until the end of the month. So I feel sure she'll be along."

"I see. What if she comes down the street and notices the car?"

"It's more likely that she'll come up because the house is so close to the lower street, and her street car will run along there. I'm banking, of course, on the hope that she isn't here yet. It would take her a long time to get to this district by street car, you know."

"I'm perfectly willing to look in at the house."

"No, I don't want any excitement. If she's in the house, we'll just have to wait until she comes out. Meanwhile you can keep a watch down the street, if you don't mind, and I'll keep an eye on the rear-view mirror."

Ted lit two more cigarettes and they sat smoking in silence. Kids were tossing a rubber ball back and forth over the hood of the car, and two or three times it struck the windshield, but neither paid any heed.

Ted felt her approaching before he actually saw her. A strange prickly sensation in his spine caused him to stiffen. There, coming up the street, was a woman carrying a small hand bag. He strained his eyes. The glint of the sun on the car, and the actions of the children as they darted to and fro in front of him, caused him some uncertainty. Yet he knew. There was no doubt. His mouth was so dry that he was unable to speak. He finally nudged his companion and pointed frantically down the street. He was furious with himself for not being calm and cool.

Gradually the figure took shape. She was walking very slowly. The grade at the foot of the street was steep, and she paused every few moments to regain her breath.

Ted found his tongue, but it was furry and thick. This must all be a continuation of that awful nightmare that began two weeks ago. "Shall we get out?" he hissed.

Meredith was trembling. "No," he said. "I want to watch for a bit. She'll have to cross the street anyway, if she wants to get into the house."

Slowly, tortuously, the lone figure climbed the hill. As if conscious of the heightening tension, the children gathered up their ball and moved away. A bakery wagon rattled by, and then there was nothing to obstruct the view of the men in the car.

Marion reached the level of the house in which she still rented

a room. She stopped, and turned to face it. She did not notice her husband's car, which was thirty yards away. Meredith sat waiting, for what he did not know. Ted's hand was frozen on to the door handle. His knees felt so weak and shaky that he was positive they would not have the strength to support him. Meredith released the hand brake, and the car slid down the hill for a few yards. Still Marion did not notice. They could see her face now. A terrible struggle was reflected there. She stood unmoving for some minutes. Ted made a movement as if he were going to open the door, but Meredith closed his hand over his wrist and held it in a vise-like grip. He must have known then what her decision would be, for his face brightened at the same time that Marion's grew distorted. Her lips were moving. Then she turned away from the house, dropped the hand bag, and started up the hill towards the car. Her words floated through the open windows. "I won't!" They could both hear her broken sobs. "I won't!"

Meredith was beside himself with joy. "Oh, my dear," he cried out. "You're all right. You're going to be all right." With surprising agility he leaped out of the car and ran to her. Ted saw him take his wife in his arms before he himself slipped silently out, crept around to the back, and walked briskly up the hill. He felt that he could not stand another emotional scene. He hoped that Dr. Fenton would not mention that he had been there. He had no wish for Mrs. Fenton to know that he had learned her secret.

When he reached the top of the hill he found that he was out of breath, his heart was beating clear up to his throat, and he was soaking wet. He shook his head grimly as he hopped a passing bus. I'm really some figure of a man, he thought contemptuously.

By the time he had arrived home, he was exhausted. A cold

shower washed away much of his fatigue and he arrived at the luncheon table somewhat refreshed. Conversation was desultory, to say the least. Elspeth felt that as long as no one told her anything, she did not see why she should be the life of the household any longer. Mr. Cummings seemed to have less to say with every passing day. Ted was completely immersed in recollections of the scenes he had just witnessed.

The phone rang. Ted answered. It was Bill.

"Hi!"

"Hullo Bill."

"Feel like doing anything to-night?"

"In what way?"

"Oh, a show or something."

"Might do."

"Good. I've just called Joyce. We can all have a drink somewhere afterwards."

"Well! Moving right in, eh?"

"How do you mean?"

"Oh, nothing. The thought of you going to a show slays me. But I think it should be fun."

"I'll investigate the hidden meanings later. Meanwhile I'll arrange to have the car and pick you up at eight o'clock."

"O. K. Fine."

"See you later."

"So long."

Ted hung up and started to return to the dining room. The phone rang again.

"Hullo?"

"Hullo, darling."

"Hi, hon."

"Hear what happened?"

"Yeah. Bill's taking Joyce to the movies. Now ain't that something? I'll bet you're busy trying to make something out of it!"

"Meanie! But mark my words: I think things are going to happen in that direction."

"Just like a woman. Always match making!"

"Talking about match making, darling, what are you going to be doing for the next sixty years?"

"Making love to you!"

"Mm. Sounds nice. Can you spare a little this afternoon? Besides, I need a man with muscles to help me dig some suitcases out of the basement."

By now, Ted's lips were practically inside the mouthpiece. "Anything, honey," he crooned. "Just so long as you're there to be kissed."

A voice penetrated through the cloak room wall from the dining room.

"Ted Cummings, you come and finish your lunch this instant. Your tea is getting stone cold."

1 March, 1945 .

"I say, Hodgkins, do you see what I see?"

"I don't know, old boy, what do you see?"

"A rather peculiar looking object heading up the ward.

Strange! I could swear I'd seen it before."

"Been to the zoo lately, old chap?"

"No. But I have been to the Aquarium. Charming spot, the Aquarium. I picked up the most smashing blonde there, once. Between the stuffed whale and the tropical sun fish."

"I picked a blonde up once. I enjoyed it even more when I put her down again. If you know what I mean." He sighed wistfully.

"It was such fun - for a while."

"Just for a while?"

"Yes. Husband you know."

"Oh! Quite! Frightful bores, husbands."

Dick grinned at them uncertainly. They were paying him no attention. "Hi, fellows," he said. He had only been away from them for two days, yet he felt like an outsider already. A ruddy stranger. Was there an unacknowledged resentment felt by those left behind towards those who were discharged first? Dick was uncomfortable, and longed for a show of friendly recognition. The constant banter of Hodgkins and Travers, which he had once found so spirited and amusing, was now beginning to pall.

"I say, Hodgkins, would you mind informing this character that if he wishes an appointment he must see one of my Adjutants?"

"Delighted, old boy." Hodgkins studied Dick critically. The rest of the boys on the ward were watching and grinning, withholding any form of greeting until this performance was over. Hodgkins was looking very serious. "Hm," he breathed. He walked all around Dick, sizing him

up as if he were on an auction block. "Hm," he repeated.

"Now, look here....." Dick began, and his voice was positively thunderous.

"Beastly bad form, raising one's voice, don't you think, Travers?"

"Indeed I do, Hodgkins."

There was silence. Dick growled something unintelligible. A snicker was wafted their way from one of the beds.

"Hasn't changed much, the boy," observed Travers amiably.

Dick was scarlet. It seemed that everyone was watching his every move. "Finished, fellows?" he asked, and his voice was honey sweet.

Hodgkins and Travers beamed fondly on him. "Why, it's our own Dickie Fenton," bubbled Hodgkins in apparent surprise. "I didn't know you, all dressed up and everything."

"You looked much more seductive in your night shirt, but it's good to see you anyway," added Travers.

Apparently Hodgkins had nothing further to say to Travers, and Travers had nothing further to say to Hodgkins. It was open season on conversation and all the men in the ward threw questions at Dick simultaneously. He felt better. He talked cheerfully with everyone.

"Where's Tom Goodall?" he asked finally.

Hodgkins assumed a coy and demure expression. "Waiting for you to have a little chat with him, I expect," he said slyly. He rubbed one forefinger along the length of the other one.

"Oh, don't be such an ass. Where is he now?"

"Probably down with a psychiatrist," ventured Miller. "I don't think he's uttered two words since you left."

"Such devotion," murmured Dobbin.

"You fellows certainly reduce me to hysterics," snapped Dick acidly. But he was ashamed of himself for ever having shown signs of

pique. There was no doubt that they were all pleased to see him, and he was certainly glad if he could brighten up their evening in any way.

It was then that Travers noticed a suspicious bulge under Dick's trench coat. He looked significantly at Hodgkins.

"Isn't it nice to have our boy back with us," he exclaimed.

"Charming," breathed Hodgkins ecstatically. He caught on immediately. "Just charming!" He then engaged Dick in earnest conversation and Travers skillfully lifted a bottle of rye whiskey from the visitor's pocket. The suspicious bulge was flattened. A snicker broke out all over the ward. Dick smiled fondly at everyone.

"S'long, fellows. I must look for Tom. See you soon." He started to walk up the ward and then turned suddenly. "I say, Travers," he said, "don't forget to pass that bottle around. Can't have you getting roary-eyed all by yourself, you know." He was very pleased with himself. Travers and Hodgkins were obviously very disappointed. "Ta-ta!" Dick marched out of the ward.

Fred had been very obliging and had offered Dick the use of the station wagon for the evening, although actually no one was ever supposed to drive an army vehicle for pleasure. But if Dick were to be involved in any trouble, he could just say that he was out on a security check-off, for instance, to see whether or not he could sneak into the vehicle park of the Ordnance Depot, under cover of darkness. And, of course, Wilma would be in uniform, so he could always say that he was giving a lift to a member of the Armed Forces. Not that the Provost would ever check up, but it was just as well to have a few answers on the tip of his tongue in case!

He looked at his watch. Six-fifteen! He still had fifteen minutes to spare before he was to meet Wilma, and he wanted to spend them with Tom. He had two tins of lobster for him. A thought struck him and his hand flew to his pocket. Gone! Those ...! So the last laugh was

theirs! He chuckled ruefully. Well, anyway, he had a few cigarettes for Tom, if nothing else. But where could the man be? He looked into the lavatory. Tom was not there. He finally spotted him sitting alone in a small library that had recently been redecorated for the benefit of the convalescents. If Dick expected Tom to enthuse over his visit, he was speedily disillusioned.

"Hi, Tom."

Tom's reply was a grunt.

"Well," said Dick in surprise. "Perhaps I should go out and come in all over again."

Tom seemed to rouse himself. "Guess I'm just jealous that you're on the outside, and I'm still a prisoner," he growled sourly.

"Well, it shouldn't be long now. Have you heard anything?"

Tom grunted for the second time. "Not a word. But the orderly room sergeant loosened up enough to say that I was going back to Canada soon."

"Well, that should be nice."

"Yeah? Well, why don't you go back? You could if you wanted to."

Dick could think of no reply. "Nothing seems to have changed much around here," he said lamely.

"I was reboarded yesterday, and they told me to expect a completely new classification," Tom continued wearily. "But they didn't say why, or how."

"Are you feeling better?"

"I get these blinding headaches," he replied. "And I seem to be getting more and more of them lately." He was clenching and unclenching his fists. "The whole damned thing's getting on my nerves." He looked ill and tired.

"I shouldn't wonder."

"You're looking better." It was said almost grudgingly.

"Thanks. I'm feeling fine."

There seemed nothing more to say. Dick was wishing that he had never come. There seemed no common ground at all on which to meet Tom, now that they were no longer patients together in the same hospital. The more drawn out the silence, the more difficult it was for Dick to reopen the conversation. He felt himself flushing with embarrassment. It only served to make matters worse when he noticed that Tom was scrutinizing him closely through half closed eyelids.

"I've missed you, Fenton," said Tom suddenly. It was as if he were bestowing, on behalf of his king, the greatest honour offered by his country. His voice was deep and resonant.

Dick was at a loss for a reply. He opened his mouth and moved his tongue around, but not one word could he coax forth. He wondered angrily how he could ever have landed into this situation.

Tom was still regarding him closely. Dick forced himself to look at him, but it was an effort. He was no more successful in raising a friendly smile than he had been in conversation.. But Tom was elaborating on his previous statement. "I had never realized before what a magnificent thing was friendship," he was saying softly. He was interrupted by an orderly, who poked his head around the door.

"Seen Captain Batchelor, sir?" he asked.

"No, I haven't," replied Tom curtly.

Dick regained his elusive powers of speech. "I had two tins of lobster for you," he said, and he could even smile, although he felt that it carried no more warmth than the smile of a politician who has lost an election. "But I'm afraid they never got past those hawks in the ward. They picked my pockets."

Tom did not intend to have the subject changed. "You know, Fenton, I liked you right from the start, but I was envious of you. En-

vious because you had a start in life and I had nothing. In fact, you stood for everything that I resented. You've never had a worry in your life, have you? You've never known the meaning of insecurity. While you were attending expensive schools and colleges I was doing manual labour in a mill. Do you know what that meant? You do not! Well, it meant ten hours a day in a dingy fire trap that should have been condemned forty years before. It meant a starving wage, at first, of twenty cents an hour. But the president of the company! He made thirty thousand dollars a year out of the mill alone. On top of that, he owned half the town. And what he didn't own his relatives did. And did they ever worry about us? Did they ever look into the conditions - the squalor and poverty and the despair - that was prevalent right under their very noses? They did not! They saw nothing and wanted to see nothing. How we hated and despised them in that town! I saw my mother die of tuberculosis and no one raised a hand to help her. Two years later my father's hand got caught in a piece of machinery at the mill. It had to be amputated. It's a little different from your life story, isn't it, Fenton? You don't wonder, do you, that I don't smile as much as you do, that I haven't all your graces and your charm?"

Dick stood beside a stack of books with his head slightly averted. He was still embarrassed. The last thing in the world that he wished to hear was the life history of a man, suspected of disloyalty to his country, on whom he was obliged to report to higher authority once or twice a week. He felt a sense of shame, and yet he also felt a mounting indignation. Did Tom Goodall think that he was the only person on earth who ever started life under a disadvantage? And besides, had he not seized the opportunity to serve his country and become an officer? His country? Come to think of it, what country did he consider to be his own? Dick longed to make answer, but Tom was talking again.

"I left the mill when I was twenty. I had obtained my junior

matriculation by correspondence and I went to work in a bank. I found that I had replaced one form of slavery by another. No physical danger but I found the most crushing and deadening routine. I felt stifled. And I was still being paid a starving wage. I could do practically nothing to help my father or my younger sisters. But I met some of the so-called right people. What a laugh! They taught me to play badminton and tennis, and I even found myself with a commission in the Reserve Army. And I worked! I worked like a slave. But there's no chance for honest endeavour in this system of ours. After being with the bank for ten years and working every night until I could have dropped with exhaustion, there was an opening for an assistant manager in the next town. I felt, and quite reasonably so, that my chance had come. But do you know what happened? A man was given the appointment who was two years junior to me in length of service, and five years junior in age." His eyes were blazing now and his voice was harsh and strident. "And do you know who that man was? The new assistant manager? He was the younger son of the president of the mills." He laughed derisively. "And you talk about your democratic society! "

Dick wondered if he should say something or if he should wait. He knew, from an R.C.M.P. report he had read, that Tom had been unpopular with his co-workers and was not considered a great asset by anyone. He could tell him that he was not even highly regarded by his own party. But a look at Tom's face - it was contorted with hate and baffled envy, and a large vein was standing out worm-like on the side of his head - stopped him.

"I wanted to resign but I couldn't. I had to live, and my father needed whatever support I could give him. But I did no more work than I had to. I realized that something would have to be done to revitalize our society, something that would reduce us all to the same level. What right had old George McKinley playing God with half the lives of the

town? God, did I say? Ha!" He looked as if he might explode. The skin was drawn tight over the bony, angular face; it was as if the forehead and cheek bones were going to burst clear out into the open. And the vein over his temple throbbed more angrily than ever. "I turned to politics. And yet, even there, where a group of far-seeing men in my party are trying to help mankind, we knew nothing, but opposition and frustration. And, a few months later, with the beginning of the war, persecution. At the start you know, it was never a war of the people but a war of a few industrialists using the uneducated masses to protect their vested interests." Dick began to squirm. He had found his tongue now, all right, and had to bite it to keep from using it. Tom was hurrying along. "When I could ~~eventually~~ ^{honestly} feel that the war was a thing of meaning, then I joined up." Three weeks after Russia was attacked, Dick was thinking, and at that he was ordered to enlist by his political superiors. Dick had perched himself on the edge of a desk by now and was able to look Tom in the eye without any trouble. Certainly he was conscience-stricken no more, but merely fed up with this man. "The army was little different. They had to give me a commission before long because I had had one in the Reserve Army. But no one has ever offered to help me. Always I have tackled everything alone. And I've done my jobs well in spite of everyone. Senior officers! How I hate them - so smug and complacent because they have some red to wear on their tunics." He spat out the words and then buried his face in his long thin fingers. Dick noticed that the nails were chewed down to the quick.

"Now you know a little more about me," Tom murmured finally. "I've never had time for normal, human relationships. I've never had the time, the money, nor indeed the inclination, to take a woman out more than once or twice. Nor have I ever had a close friend." He moved over to Dick and laid his hand on his shoulder. Dick remained where he was, frozen to the spot, every nerve and muscle crying out their revulsion.

But Tom's hand soon dropped to his side and he began a restless pacing. "I guess you're about the first real friend I've ever had." The pacing grew faster and faster. "I do hope that we can continue being friends when the war's over." The lines on his face had softened, and the expression in his eyes was beseeching. His whole attitude was one of the spaniel devotion. But his eyes soon clouded over, and the long, thin fingers reached out and grasped Dick's arm with a frightening force. "Don't let me down, Fenton. You're about the last bit of faith I hold. Always remember that."

He turned and ran out of the room.

Gosh, Dick thought. Just when I was about to give him the story of my father's life, right from poor farmer's boy to successful physician! And that's not all. I could have spared him a few choice epithets about the Communist party. I wonder if nearly all the members of the party are not like Tom - bitter, warped, frustrated, always anxious to blame everything and everyone for their failure except themselves.

Then he felt depressed. Tom's presence always had a dismal effect on him. Poor Tom! Yet he was repulsive, both physically and mentally. Dick could hardly contain a shudder as he thought of that bony hand on his shoulder. He roused himself, and walked slowly towards the main entrance. He was late and Wilma would be waiting. Wilma! Even thinking of her made him feel better. Yet not much. Tom's last words felt somehow like a thinly veiled threat. Had he guessed that Dick was shadowing him? Dick decided to check once more with the orderly room to ascertain whether or not Goodall had a pass for Friday night to go to Aldershot. The orderly room sergeant was sitting in the office writing a letter. He remembered Dick and speedily supplied him with the information he required. No, he said, Lieutenant Goodall had not been granted a pass for to-morrow night. But he had heard it on good authority that he was being transferred to a depot very soon from whence he would be sent home.

It was all right then, Dick decided, as he waited for Wilma. Tom would not be in Aldershot to-morrow, so he could watch discreetly from a distance and see if he could identify anyone else who might be at that address. He was still determined not to mention anything about it to Fred. Not until after he had investigated. He yawned and leaned his head against the back of the hardwood bench. Any untoward activity, whether physical or emotional, tended to tire him more than he cared to admit. Soon he was dozing, despite the click clack of army boots on the floor around him, and the occasional buzzes of conversation. He was floating through space - a vast, inky vacuum where he could neither see nor hear. Soon, however, he noticed a lamp post shedding a feeble light. He had been there before. Yes indeed! There was the street that he always felt constrained to investigate. But this time was different. He would show himself and whatever power was responsible for drawing him on, that he had a strong will of his own. Just as his feet touched the sidewalk, he wrenched open his eyes.

He was more depressed than ever, and even thoughts of Wilma were not able to dissipate entirely the leaden feeling that seemed to have benumbed his whole mind and body. He looked at his watch. It was almost seven o'clock. Wilma was late. He would feel better when she came and they were able to leave the hospital behind and breathe some fresh air. This entrance was enough to give anyone the creeps - a bare hallway with subdued lighting and the fog pushing its feathery tentacles through any aperture that it could find. He had a headache and his eyes were smarting. He got to his feet and began to pace up and down. It was very cold. Why didn't Wilma come before the evening was ruined beyond all hope of recovery?

"I'm so sorry to be late, but we had a draft of wounded men come in this afternoon and I just couldn't leave earlier." She linked her arm through his. "Am I forgiven?"

For several seconds Dick looked at this girl and was speechless. All morbid thoughts fled from his mind. He only knew that the evening had been saved. He smiled and pressed her arm firmly into his side. "As long as you're here with me there couldn't possibly be anything to forgive," he said at last.

She blushed. "That's a very pretty speech," she whispered. "Thank you."

He piloted her out the door and into the waiting station wagon.

The lounge and dining room of the inn at Hindhead completely restored Dick's customary good humour. When he stepped inside from the fog, and the blackout, it was as if he were completely shut off from the outside world. There was no such person as Tom Goodall; he never had nightmares; there was no girl thousands of miles away in Montreal with a ring - his ring - on her finger. There was just this young nurse beside him with the soft, wavy red hair, the large eyes and the clear complexion, who was to have dinner and spend the evening with him. Then with a start he realized that she had something of importance to tell him. For the second time that night he was to be told the story of someone else's life. Whatever secret was to come, he was not worried. She obviously was not married or engaged, and he felt that she liked him. They sat down on the sofa. The fire was bright and cheerful; the lighting subdued.

Dick helped Wilma out of her coat and arranged it across her shoulders. "Firelight does wonderful things for you," he said softly.

It was then that he realized the plain truth. He could doubt it no more.

He was in love with Wilma. Deeply and forever in love.

"Something to drink, sir?" An aged waiter was hovering over them.

Dick was consulting his watch. "We have half an hour," he announced to Wilma. "Our table isn't reserved until a quarter to eight." He looked cheerfully at the waiter. "What have you got?" he asked him.

"Just gin, sir," the waiter replied apologetically.

Dick wished that he knew more about Wilma's likes and dislikes. Did she drink gin and if so, with what? He wanted the waiter to think that he knew her intimately. He wanted everyone to think that she was his girl. He looked at her enquiringly. She nodded her head with an almost imperceptible movement. Dick smiled. "Two, please," he said confidently to the waiter. "With orange." England in wartime offered very little other than some type of synthetic fruit juice to go with gin. And never was there any ice.

The waiter moved away. Dick noticed Wilma's hand lying in her lap. It was a beautiful hand. It looked as if it were incapable of doing any rough work on a hospital ward. It was soft and smooth looking, and snowy white. The nails were glistening but natural; each one reminded him of a shell. A beautiful, symmetrical shell. He reached over and slipped the palm of his hand under this most desirable of objects. He caressed the back of it with his thumb. She sighed and stirred slightly. He raised his eyes to her face. It was flushed somewhat from the fire - or was it from the fire? - and the reflection of the flames was dancing over her austere blue uniform. Yet she was completely feminine. It was only the strongest self control that kept him from gathering her into his arms. Her head belonged on his shoulder, not a couple of feet away resting on the back of the divan.

She turned to face him. He read his answer in her eyes. Yet it was a veiled answer. Love there was, but caution too. And he felt that he had caught a trace of disillusionment or bitterness.

"Your drinks, sir." Apparently the waiter had been bending

over them for some seconds. He sounded impatient.

"Sorry," said Dick. He withdrew his hand from Wilma's lap with an infinite reluctance, and passed her a drink.

She took a sip, and placed the glass carefully on a table in front of her. Dick passed her a cigarette and she lit it. "You know," she said, as she settled back into the sofa, "I think I'd feel an awful lot better if I told you what I had to say right now. It's hanging over my head like the sword of Damocles."

Dick knew a moment's concern. "Gosh," he gasped, "is it that serious?"

"What girl can take herself seriously nowadays?" She was trying to speak lightly but her face was stiff and strained. She gazed into the fire, and then around the room to make sure that no one was near them. She glanced beseechingly at Dick, who, by now and in spite of his earlier nonchalance, was filled with apprehension and concern.

"I'd love to hear the story of your life," he assured her. He reached for her hand again, and cradled it in his own. Whatever she'd done, it would make no difference. But she must always be beside him like this. Always! He pressed her hand. Again he had a longing to take her in his arms. He brushed the back of her hand with his lips. He wanted to say something soothing and endearing, but he did not trust himself.

"I was born on a small farm in Northern Ontario," she began. Her eyes were on the fire and her voice was so low that he had to move closer to her in order to hear. The contact comforted him. Anything, he thought. It makes no difference what it is!

"We were very poor and I was one of eight children. But my father was determined we'd all have the education that had been denied him. We never seemed to have any decent looking clothes, and I've known the time when we've all been good and hungry for days. But the house was filled with books, and we were all taking correspondence courses of one kind or

another. My mother was a great help to us, as she had been a school teacher." She leaned a little closer towards Dick and he seized the opportunity to slip his arm around her. There were people sitting on the other side of the room looking faintly amused, but neither Wilma nor Dick noticed them.

"My father showed foresight," Wilma continued quietly. "Two of my brothers continued their studies and worked their way through college. One is a dentist in North Bay, and the other was a school teacher in Timmins before he joined up. I was next oldest and, when I was seventeen, I left for Toronto, fired with the ambition to be a nurse. I went through my training and graduated in 1942" She reached down to take a sip of her drink. Dick drained his glass and motioned the waiter for a repeat order. He was afraid to have Wilma continue, yet frantically impatient that she was speaking so slowly.

"The hard part is coming," said Wilma, with a nervous laugh. "Maybe you think I'm presuming or attaching too great an importance to all this. But you see, you will be the first person who has ever known the whole story, at least from my lips, so it's not easy." Dick murmured reassuringly with a calm that he did not feel.

"Shortly after I graduated I met Alex. He was a patient of mine, in fact. He was quite a bit older than I, but very wealthy and he came from one of Toronto's oldest families. He was in the hospital for an appendectomy and stayed for at least a week longer than was necessary. As soon as he was sent home he began showering me with attention. I grew weary of returning expensive gifts, but my room was always filled with his flowers. Two other boys, who were my own age and who used to take me out occasionally, decided that they couldn't stand such competition, and stayed away. I was dependent on Alex more and more. Furthermore I was flattered. He was handsome and knew everybody, and I was terribly excited. Imagine how I felt, then, when he asked me to marry him. Me! A poor farmer's daughter who had

to learn which fork to use with which course at a formal dinner party. I took him home, thinking that a glimpse of our farm would cure him, but he was perfectly charming. Strangely enough no one at home liked him. But I had made up my mind. It was to be wealth and security for me and besides I was wildly infatuated. So, on November the twelfth, 1943, I became Mrs. Alexander Clifton, the third."

Dick stiffened and his arm fell from around her shoulder. Surely this was not possible. Wilma turned to face him and, at the same time, looked anxiously about the room. There was still no one near them but her voice was lower than ever and her eyes downcast when next she spoke.

"This is the hardest part," she whispered. "I don't quite know how to say it, except that you'll find reference to it in every book on sex psychology." Her fingers were nervously plucking the sofa covers. "You must remember that I was very young and inexperienced. Despite the fact that I was a nurse and supposed to know all about everything, I hadn't given much thought" She broke off then plunged on. "I was raped, Dick. Raped on my wedding night. And not once, but three times." She shuddered and closed her eyes. Dick sat motionless, feeling useless and rather idiotic, yet aware of an overwhelming compassion welling up within him, and a towering rage against this unknown monster.

The old waiter shuffled up^t to them with two more drinks. Wilma turned her head away from him with a quick, nervous gesture. Her first drink was only half finished. The waiter apologized to Dick for the time he had taken, and explained why he had been delayed. Dick heard nothing. Automatically he handed over a pound note and told the astonished waiter to keep the change. Wilma remained hunched over on the far side of the sofa. She had drawn completely away from him, and Dick could not even see her face. They remained this way, each one struggling for the control of his emotions, until a noisy party of Canadian officers passed through the lounge and into the dining room. Someone stirred the fire and added another

log. Then the lounge was deserted. They could hear only the crackling of the fire, and the assorted dinner-type noises of voice and cutlery issuing through the half open dining room door. A booming male laugh from that room seemed to rouse Wilma.

"We had flown to Victoria," she continued, turning around to face Dick once more. "Had I been nearer home, I think I would have left him next morning. But I couldn't. The three weeks we spent out west were like a nightmare to me. More and more I realized that this was a different man to my fiancé. He knew, of course, how I felt, and kept telling me how much I owed him, and what he expected of me. I loathed the very sight of him. He wanted a servant, not a wife. I might have been forced to live with him forever except for what I found out soon after we returned to Toronto." Her voice had trailed off into a whisper. "He was diseased."

Dick by now felt like a boxer who has been badly mauled, and is hanging on the ropes. He wanted to reach over and at least cover Wilma's hand with his, but she seemed so remote that he did not dare. He felt that, to steer her love in his direction, he would be called upon to exert the utmost tact and patience. He gulped down the rest of his drink, and tried to imagine what this Alex might look like.

"There's very little more to tell," Wilma was saying. Her voice was lifeless and dull and Dick could understand how much the recital had exhausted her. Regardless of the consequences, he reached out for her hand. But she did not draw it away. It remained in his, inert and damp. "I sued for divorce. I had to use a little blackmail before he would agree; it was the first time any Clifton had ever been divorced and his family were horrified. When all that unpleasantness was over, I spent two months in a sanitarium. Not that I had contracted the disease, but my nerves were pretty badly shattered. And there you are, you see." She attempted to smile at him. "That's my secret. And the whole thing has left me afraid of

men, even when I know they're sweet and kind like you. Kissing someone only brings back the most foul memories. I don't know that I can ever change."

It was too much to be borne. "Of course you can change," he whispered passionately. "Nothing is impossible if you love someone, and if someone loves you. Here! Look at me!" Slowly, she raised her head until her eyes were on a level with his. It was the second time that he had seen her looking bewildered and vulnerable. He ached to protect her, to smooth out the lines of worry from her forehead. Yet she was looking at him trustingly, and that was encouraging. "I love you," he said, and there was only a faint echo ringing through his mind. It was not strong enough to carry him back to a park bench on a July night of long ago. "I love you so much that I know you must love me too - at least a little." His hand was supporting her chin, and their lips were only inches apart. A party of four emerged from the dining room and paused to watch this performance. Then they passed on, with apparent reluctance, to an inner lounge. "Let me help ^{you} ~~me~~," he whispered. "Give me a chance."

They were interrupted again, this time by the head waiter. "Your table is ready, sir," he announced from a discreet distance. It was obvious from the tone of his voice that the table had, indeed, been ready for some time, and that he was conferring a favour on them by letting them dine at all.

"Be right there," said Dick. The man bowed slightly and withdrew. "It was certainly a great mistake trying to thrash this thing out here. It's about as private as a goldfish bowl."

"I'm sorry," Wilma said. She reached into her bag for her compact. "It's all my fault. But I just had to get it off my chest right away. You don't know how much better I feel. You're a wonderful listener." She surveyed herself critically in the mirror. "I look a fright," she said.

She seemed to be rapidly returning to normal. The crisis was over.

Dick was filled with the desire to discuss the question further. He felt that, if it was to be a campaign, he should lose no time in launching it. Yet he reasoned that the next move was hers. After all, he had professed his love, and she could be in no doubt as to his sincerity. The dinner progressed pleasantly enough, however, and the subjects discussed were trivial.

"Thank you for all you said to-night," she told him as they were driving back to the hospital. "It was wonderful to hear, whether you meant it or not."

"You silly little goose. Of course I meant it. And I can prove it. It happens that I was engaged to a girl at home, and now I've broken it off."

"Oh Dick! You shouldn't have. Not on my account."

"And why not? I'm in love with you."

"But I'm such a poor risk. Why, I'm not even normal. I may never be able to marry again."

"Then I doubt if I'll marry either!" He suddenly slowed the vehicle down and pulled over to the side of the road. "Now," he said sternly, "I'm going to kiss you and no nonsense."

He bent his face over hers. The kiss was soft and gentle.

"There, now," he murmured. "That wasn't so bad, was it?"

His next kiss was more insistent. The third time, he narrowly avoided throwing discretion to the winds. He felt that the response was encouraging. It may have been mild, but at least she had not drawn away from him.

As they approached the hospital, she broke a long silence.

"I can get leave this week-end," she announced timidly.

"You can? Wonderful! So can I! Where'll we go?"

"Wherever you say,"

"O.K. Leave everything to me. I'll fix up something wizard for us. And I am in love with you, Wilma. I never knew that I could feel like this."

"Not even with the girl at home?"

"No. I'll tell you all about her over the week-end. Not that there's much to tell. I've only been with her for about a week in my whole life."

They arrived at the hospital. She leaned over and kissed him on the cheek. "It's wonderful being with you," she said. "Make me love you. I doubt if I'm worthy of you. But make me love you!"

All the way home in the station wagon, the words echoed around his heart like a prayer.

He put the car away and walked down the street to his boarding house. The night was cold and clear but very few people seemed to be abroad. As he approached the house a group of Canadian soldiers passed and they were singing. He stopped to listen. "There's a Long Trail A-Winding! They were doing well, too. Dick nodded affably at them, although it was doubtful if they noticed him in the dark. He was happy and excited and burst noisily into the house, longing to have a chat with Fred. But Fred was obviously asleep and the house was in darkness.

He entered his room and immediately his elation vanished. He hated that room. He removed his boots and tunic, and put on his bath robe and his slippers. Then he found his writing case and pen and placed them, along with cigarettes and a lighter, on the small table beside his bed. With a determined gleam in his eye he pulled a chair up to the table, lit a cigarette, grasped his pen firmly in his hand, and then sat back in the chair. After a short while he leaned forward again. 'March first 1945,' he wrote. 'Dear Joyce' Once again he sat back, chewing idly at the end of his pen.

An hour later he was still seated in the same chair. His hair

was tousled, and there were deep lines under his eyes. The floor was littered with pieces of paper that he had crumpled and hurled away from him. His hand was shaking slightly as he held in front of him a sheet of Canadian War Services note paper. In a grim sort of way, he looked rather pleased, and began to read aloud. 'My dear Joyce, I hope that this letter does not cause you too great a shock, but I felt that I had to write it to-night. Actually, I suppose that I should have written it a few weeks ago. No doubt you will find it difficult to understand, and I'm afraid you may think rather harshly of me, but I've met someone and fallen in love. Try to believe me when I say that it is the last thing in the world I would have wanted, but it was something beyond my control. After all, you must have difficulty in remembering me just as I, of late, have experienced difficulty in remembering you. When all is said and done, we only had a very few days together. I feel that this might cause you embarrassment and therefore I would be only too glad if you were to say that the engagement was broken by you. Ted and my family are the only ones I'll mention it to. About the girl, who, by the way, is a Canadian nurse, there is no use my saying anything as yet. I don't even know how she feels about me. But naturally it's not fair to anyone concerned if I am in love with her and still engaged to you. I do hope that we can be friends always, and for any pain I may have caused you, I am most truly sorry. Regretfully, Dick.'

Dick looked at the letter for a while longer, grunted, and addressed an envelope. He put the letter, unsealed, into the top drawer of his bureau. He must write his family and mail both letters at the same time.

He felt somewhat relieved; yet, when he retired to bed, he was unable to sleep. For hours, he lay still, wide awake and exhausted.

It was almost daylight when he dozed off. He had a dream about Joyce, and was able to picture her with startling clarity. The reproachful expression that he could see on her face was enough to touch the heart of any man.

18 September, 1947.

Ted left his desk a little early in order to be at Dr. Percival's office at five o'clock. Ted liked Bud Percival who, for some time, had been the medical officer attached to his unit. He had made the appointment before Bud had had a chance to see the hospital reports, and so had no clue as to whether the news would be good or bad. At any rate he did not want to think of it and thus be emotionally upset before he even arrived in the doctor's waiting room. So he paid particular attention to all the store windows that he passed, and picked out dozens of articles of all types and descriptions that he would have liked to buy for Margaret and their apartment.

Bud was one of the very few young doctors of his graduating year (McGill '40) who was contented with being a general practitioner. While most of his class mates were still struggling with post graduate work, he was rapidly acquiring an enviable practice. He apparently lived only to serve humanity, and worked from early morning till late at night. He was single, and was considered to be one of Montreal's prize 'catches'. But he devoted his few spare hours in winter to playing squash, and in summer to golf and sailing, and had little time left over in which to enjoy the society of women.

Ted reached the waiting room at five minutes to five. Bud shared this large, impersonal room with three other doctors.- a heart specialist, a nose and throat specialist and an oculist. The arrangement was very beneficial to Bud, as these men were older and well established and passed a great deal of work his way. Ted sat down on an uncomfortable ~~the~~ wooden chair and attempted to console himself. But the reason for his visit now struck him full force. He thought ruefully of how nervous he used to feel waiting to be ushered in to the dentist's office, and wished that it were such a trivial thing as a dental appointment now. He studied

the four doors leading into the different offices. His eyes lingered for some seconds on one marked J.R. PERCIVAL, M.D. He wished that the door could be hermetically sealed. Could he hear someone moving around in there? His heart was racing. He wanted to run helter skelter out the front door and never learn about that test. Why had he not been able to accept the situation as trustingly as Margaret?

A nurse stepped out of one of the offices and sat down at a desk. She was obviously the receptionist. Ted went over to her, and gave his name. She smiled attractively.

"Oh, yes, Mr. Cummings. Dr. Percival will be free to see you in just a minute." The words chilled his blood.

He resumed his seat. His face was flushed and his eyes blood-shot. Fancy having to go through all this again! He knew what the result of this visit would be. Why was he not content to leave himself a small loop hole of doubt to crawl through? He had gone over all this so many times! He only knew one thing. He was going ahead with his plans no matter what the hospital report might show. It was either that or suicide, ~~as~~, and he certainly had no intention of shortening those few days he might have left to him. But then, of course, he might have more than a few days. A few years maybe! That wouldn't be so bad. He could crowd a great deal of happiness into a few years.

A door opened and his body grew rigid. The receptionist was called in to Dr. Martin's office. The door closed. Ted found that he was gripping his knees. He hoped that the doctor would not have to examine him for he was soaking wet, and in dire need of a shower. He decided to divert his attention from thoughts of the forthcoming interview, so he looked at the magazine supply. There were three 'Times'; all old issues; 'Good Housekeeping'; no good at all; 'Fortune'; how could he ever concentrate on that! He could see some 'New Yorkers' on a table in the corner,

but he lacked the energy to go over and pick them up. He doubted if his knees were strong enough to carry him. There were three other people in the waiting room, and he decided that he might as well concentrate on one of them. He chose a middle aged man with short, stubby, tobacco-stained fingers and anaquiline nose. He was about to invent a private life for him, when a white uniform approached and blotted the man out of his vision.

"Dr. Percival will see you now, Mr. Cummings." Did he detect a note of sympathy in her voice? Ted dared not look at her, in case his fate were written in her face. He would prefer to hear the verdict from Bud. Anything to delay the moment! He remembered no more until he found himself in Bud's office, carefully closing the door.

Bud was walking towards him with outstretched hand. "Hullo, Ted. Nice to see you." His face was solem and troubled.

Ted grasped his hand automatically. He felt calmer now, and the obvious sorrow engraved in Bud's face did not escape him. "So," he whispered. "It's true!"

Bud faltered. "I beg your pardon?"

"Bud, I took rather an unfair advantage of you. I think I should have explained something to you before." He sank into a chair, and Bud leaned back against his desk, surveying him curiously. "You see," Ted continued, "my condition is written all over your face." Bud was about to protest but Ted smiled sadly and shook his head. "Don't," he protested. "I've been through all this before. You see, Dr. Fenton examined me at the beginning of the month and told me that I had endocarditis. I hated to accept his judgment and yet I didn't want to hurt his feelings and insist on hospital tests. So, when I could stand the suspense no longer, I called you. My fiancée, you see, insists that what I need is faith. But I can see now that I need a lot more than that." He was twisting nervously about on the chair. "How long, Bud?"

The youth in Bud's face vanished temporarily and he displayed an unexpected maturity. Yet his face looked deeply sympathetic, and it was as if every word were to cost him a wealth of effort. This was the first friend whom he had ever sentenced to die. "How long did Dr. Fenton say?" he asked cautiously.

"Thirty days. That was on the first of September."

"Well, the electrocardiogram shows that you can count on more than that. If you're careful, it might even be a matter of months."

"I see. That's a slight reprieve, and I'm grateful for small mercies. After all, I'm getting married in ten days."

Bud continued to look worried, but he said nothing.

"I know. You think I have no right. But believe me, I've thrashed it out with myself a thousand times, and I have decided to let events take their natural course. And I honestly feel that Margaret wants it that way."

"I wasn't thinking of the moral side, Ted. From the engraved invitations I received and all the announcements in the paper, I gather that it is to be a wedding of some size. And that will impose a great strain on your system, that and the excitement of the honeymoon."

"I must take that chance. Thanks for everything, Bud. There's no need in my keeping you any longer. I'm just going to sail along as if nothing were the matter. And I can thank God that I haven't got cancer, or something really painful.. It could all be a lot worse."

"Yes," Bud agreed. "Of course it could. By the way, has Dr. Fenton prescribed anything?"

"Rest is about all, I guess."

"Well, I'll have something sent along from your druggist and you just follow the direction on the bottle. Do you want me to call Fenton and tell him I've seen you?"

Ted smiled wanly. "Don't worry, Bud. There are no ethics to worry about. Dr. Fenton and his family are down in the Berkshires for a holiday. They won't be back until the day before my wedding. If then." He rose uncertainly to his feet. "Thanks for everything. See you at the church, if not before."

When he had gone, Bud leaned against the back of the door. 'I must get hardened to this,' he thought desperately. 'And I must learn to keep my head.' He ran a finger along the inside of a wilting collar. 'But he really threw me for such a loss. And such a nice guy. I must phone to-night. I can tell him some things that can at least help him.' He roused himself with an effort. 'But I mustn't get so upset in the future.' He allowed himself a minute or two more in which to regain his self composure. He swallowed an aspirin with a glass of water. Then he opened the door.

"All right, Miss Tucker," he said briskly.

Meanwhile Ted had sauntered slowly up the street. He came to a restaurant that he and Margaret occasionally visited. He paused. He looked blankly about and then seemed to recover himself. Up a flight of stairs was a dining room; downstairs was a bar. He looked about him again. His face was glistening in the late afternoon sun. He licked his lips. Then he walked down the stairs - carefully, as if each one were in some way a trick to upset him - and opened the door. He blinked and squinted in the unaccustomed darkness. It took a while for everything to fit into place. It was the head waiter who finally advised him that all the tables were filled, but that there was a vacant stool at the bar. He surged forward and sat down. He asked for a rye and water. While waiting for it to be brought to him, he planted his elbows on the glossy surface of the bar and buried his face in his hands. First he became conscious of a soft buzz of conversation. He was not alone in the world, then. The muted strains of a Strauss waltz floated gracefully into his consciousness from a device

in the ceiling. Somehow he found all these sounds soothing. The clink of ice in a glass caused him to open his eyes. The bartender was standing there watching him, his face a mixture of doubt and anxiety.

"You all right, sir?" he asked.

Ted was embarrassed. The two men on his left had stopped their discussion of second hand cars, and were staring at him. "Fine," he muttered. He raised the glass to his lips. His eyes found the mirror, only partially obscured by bottles on shelves, which was directly in front of him. He knew at once why the bartender had looked so worried. His hair had lost its wave and was all over his head. He had developed a habit of running his fingers through it. His eyes were red-rimmed and heavy with fatigue. His face, always long and thin at the best of times, was now skin and bone. The nervous flush had gone and he was ash white. The ice was rattling in his glass. His hand was trembling. He swallowed the drink and asked for another.

He felt as if Dick were beside him. Ted lifted his head high. He was not a young man, bowed down by sorrow, drinking alone to instil courage into a doomed body. He was a young man drinking with his best friend in light-hearted celebration of his forthcoming marriage. All day long he had felt as though Dick were close to him. He had never needed him so much. It was impossible to go to Margaret for help and comfort. She was too intimately involved in his plans. And his mother and father would be too prostrated with grief to be able to offer any solution. Of course, there was no actual solution, but Dick would have known the best course of action to follow. Ted smiled wistfully. Had his friend not always been the more astute planner of the two? Also he had been the more practical, despite his light hearted exterior. As Ted was downing his second drink, he and Dick were arguing over the best place to spend a leave.

Dick, of course, was being stubborn and insisting on Cornwall. Or were they sitting in a pub reminiscing about their college days? It didn't matter. They were to-gether again, and Dick understood. He always understood about everything. Never would Ted find anyone else to take his place. Ted blew his nose and pushed his empty glass once more towards the waiter. The waiter was reluctant, but replenished it.

"Dammit, mustn't be serious, Dick, old boy. This is a night for rejoicing. At least that awful doubt has been removed. Now I know that I'm going to die. And soon. It's all pretty grim, but at least I can think of you up there waiting for me. It makes it so much easier. But come, now. Mustn't be serious! I wish I knew a joke to tell you but I can't think of one that's appropriate. Gosh but I've had three drinks quickly! Looks like you'll have to take care of me to-night, old boy. Remember the night in Edinburgh when you insisted on buying drinks all round? It cost you four pounds ten. You never knew this but when you showed renewed signs of generosity I poured some gin and beer into your whiskey. You wouldn't think I'd ever try to slip you a 'mickey', would you? My plan was successful. Within five minutes I was trying to keep your head from falling into the 'john', but at least it saved you four pounds ten. Six pounds more likely, for the news had spread and people were pouring in for a free drink on this crazy Canadian.

The bar tender was looking in amazement at this young man who was chuckling so strangely to himself. Haughtily Ted pushed his empty glass to one side. It would have been so much easier to maintain his dignity had the wretched bartender not shown such a strong tendency to split into eight or ten exact images. It was so difficult to know which one to reprimand. Ted blinked, and rubbed his eyes several times, but all those men were still there and they looked more alike than ever. He gave it up. "Cheque," he demanded of the image who seemed to be nearest to the middle.

All the men promptly vanished. Then Ted was looking at the strangest man he had seen yet. He was sitting across from him and apparently very confused. Ah! Of course! He laughed shakily.

He thought of a little rhyme. 'Beer on whiskey rather risky.' It spun round and round in his head. It sounded like fun. "Waiter, add a pint of beer to my cheque," he demanded airily. Both were brought to him simultaneously. He paid his bill and downed the beer. Then he practically ran out of the bar because he was seized with an insane and almost uncontrollable urge to cry out. He must make some noise! But he could think of nothing that would suit the occasion. Besides, they had added some new steps outside. It just wasn't fair. They required too much attention. Whoops! There we go! Steady! Breathless and triumphant he reached the sidewalk at the top. He looked at his watch. It kept jumping up and down his wrist, and both of the hands were racing wildly around their orbit. By exerting great patience and by closing one eye, he finally came to the conclusion that it was five minutes after six. He had only been in the bar twenty minutes.

"I'm drunk," he muttered aloud. "I'm good'n'drunk and I'm glad of it!" The sidewalk showed an alarming tendency to roll. It was like being on board ship. Gangway! All ashore that's going ashore! Ooh! This would never do. First he was walking up the right hand of the sidewalk with great dignity; then he was all but pitched headlong into the gutter. He swept around the corner on to Sherbrooke street and headed towards the Ritz Carlton and the haven of a taxi. He told the driver his address, and fell asleep.

Elsbeth answered her doorbell to be confronted by the unheard of spectacle of her Ted being supported by a taxi driver. She let out a

little scream. Ted winked at her.

"He's all right, lady," said the taxi driver reassuringly. "Just been sniffin' too many corks, that's all." He deposited his load on a sofa in the front room. "That'll be eighty-five cents."

Elsbeth paid the man and returned to look at Ted. He was sound asleep. She tucked a blanket around him and tip-toed out of the room. She met her husband in the hall.

"Ted's drunk," she exclaimed dramatically.

"Probably met some of the boys and had a few beers," he answered, apparently undisturbed. But he soon reconsidered. "Very drunk?"

"He's asleep on the sofa. I'm worried about him. He's not himself. Something terrible is the matter with him."

"Nonsense. I was in a state of nerves, too, ten days before I got married. He'll be all right."

Elsbeth shook her head sadly. "No. There's something drastically wrong. I know. And yet apparently we can do nothing." She turned to him beseechingly. "At least, I can do nothing. You have a talk with him later. Really, this is so unlike him. He knew that Margaret and Bill and Joyce were coming to dinner. I just hope they don't have to see him like this." She walked slowly towards the kitchen. Mr. Cummings went in to the front room and sat down where he could watch over his son. The longer he sat and watched, the more uneasy he grew. Yet he was unable to tear himself away, unable to move his eyes from the face that was half hidden amidst red cushions. It was only when the doorbell heralded the arrival of guests that he left the room.

While everyone else was sipping a cocktail, Ted was under a cold shower. He felt sick and miserable, but at least he was sober.

He vowed that he would never be so cowardly as to drink too much again. By the time that he had shaved and dressed, he was feeling better. But there was a hollow feeling inside him that he knew would be with him until the day he died.

He went downstairs and greeted everybody. He apologized for being late. 'Met some of the old gang after work,' was all he would say. In fact, he said very little more to anybody, and dinner was rather a dismal affair. Bill poured out his views on the future of the world with a minimum of interruption. Joyce, however, seemed to have developed a new restraint. No one noticed. Margaret and Elspeth and Mr. Cummings spent the meal secretly watching Ted.

It was while they were lingering over coffee that Bill announced the news of his job.

"I don't want you all to drop dead of shock," he began, "but I have a job." A murmur went up all around the room. "And I owe it all to Ted."

"Gosh," said Ted, blushing. "I didn't realize that it would all happen so quickly!"

"It seems," pursued Bill, "that one night last week, while at my house, said Ted Cummings went up to my sacred studio and stole three of my drawings."

"Borrowed," corrected Ted, flushing still more deeply.

"Ted!" Elspeth sounded shocked.

"Then he peddled them all over town. He went to architects and commercial artists and God knows who! Imagine my surprise in the last two days to find myself swamped by calls from all these people. Well, I had three calls anyway! One firm said thanks very much for letting them see a sample of my genius but they couldn't use me. So that left

two. Fancy having two firms call up and ask you to work for them! Down I went with a few more of my things and I finally settled on an advertising agency. With the type of work I'm going to be doing, I'm practically my own boss. Of course, there's a probationary period, but I'm sure I can handle it. And my salary! I couldn't believe my ears when they told me!"

He spoke quietly and earnestly, without many of his old facial contortions. He had assumed a new dignity and self confidence. Elspeth found herself liking him for the first time in her life. Mr. Cummings looked relieved. Bill's weekly visits to his office had never served any useful purpose and they were usually embarrassing to both parties.

"Congratulations," he said, with an unaccustomed heartiness. "We'll have to celebrate this." He drew a little black engagement book out of his vest pocket and thumbed through the pages. "I'm free for lunch next Tuesday. Supposing you join me at the Club? How about one o'clock?"

"Wonderful, sir. Thank you very much." Bill was flushing with pleasure.

"That's really perfect." Ted was grinning broadly. "That's always been the wedding present I've wanted from you. When do you start?"

"To-morrow."

Elspeth gathered up the coffee cups and went to the kitchen. The three men were talking business. Margaret turned her attention to Joyce who, apparently, was deep in thought. Her forehead was furrowed and her eyes were focussed on Bill's face. Could she have been comparing him with her memory of Dick? Yet no two people could have been more

different, either in temperament, looks or character. Margaret stole a glance at Bill. He was taller than Ted and, despite his highly strung condition, he was growing fat. His neck was oozing over his shirt collar and his jowls were developing to the point where they quivered whenever he was emotionally disturbed. But his hands were not thick, and his fingers were long and slim. It was not so much that he was fat as that he gave the impression that he would be fat in very short order. Yet he was not unattractive, and Margaret could understand how a girl with a crusading spirit like Joyce's could be interested in doing something about him. But Margaret was surprised to find that Joyce's expressive, brown eyes were not glowing softly as they were wont to do whenever Dick was near her. Instead they were troubled and wistful. At length she gave a little shake of the head and turned to Margaret.

"Let's go see if we can help Mrs. Cummings in the kitchen."

Joyce had never confided her feelings about Bill, other than thanking Margaret for having introduced her to him. Now, as Margaret followed her to the kitchen, she decided that, as a match maker, she was a failure. But of course with Joyce, one could never tell!

The evening passed quietly and, considering the way it had started, very pleasantly. An outsider would have been oblivious of the underlying tension. Certainly Bill thought that everything was serene. He took care of the conversation for everyone. Before the evening was over he had declared war on Russia four times and had advocated some very strong pieces of anti-Communist legislation. He also elaborated on his plans for Ted's bachelor dinner. He was too excited to notice that Joyce was adding very little to the discussion, nor did he realize that he was the object of her scrutiny for most of the evening.

Ted, however, was hyper-sensitive to all that was going on.

He sensed the struggle that was raging within Joyce, and he knew that he, himself, was being watched carefully by Margaret and by his family. Margaret did not know about his escapade before dinner, but he looked so pale and exhausted that she must have guessed that something was the matter. And, with such a momentous personal problem as this, how could he ever carry on this intimate relationship with her day after day ad infinitum, as though nothing were going to happen? Right now she was regarding him anxiously. He winked at her and grinned. She looked startled, as if it were the very last thing that she expected him to do. Finally she smiled. How beautiful she was! How could he ever go away and leave anyone as lovely and as desirable as that? The smile fled from his face. He had to force it back again when he saw that she was still looking at him.

His mother and father caused him the greatest concern. His mother had been worried about him before, but now it was evident that his father was upset, too. And what a humiliation it had been for them when he had been brought home drunk by a taxi driver. He was not acting like a happily engaged young man who was in love with his fiancée. He should, perhaps, give them an inkling of what was ahead, but it was unthinkable now. He would wait until he returned from his honeymoon. The poor souls! Their only son lived through a war and then came home to die of a diseased heart. What would be left for them when he had gone? Margaret, of course, would be kind to them, but she might marry again. He gritted his teeth. He must not think of that possibility. If only his mother and father would stop staring at him! His mother looked positively accusing. He knew that he was a great disappointment to her, but he could do nothing about it. He smiled on them both, and then fled to

the refrigerator to find another beer for Bill. He thanked God that Bill was so loquacious. That helped a little.

At ten-thirty Joyce consulted her watch. "My goodness," she exclaimed, "look at the time! If Bill is to be fresh when he starts work to-morrow, we must go." She literally bounced out of her chair and went to the front door. "Why, it's a beautiful night," they could hear her saying in the front hall. "I have an idea. Why don't we walk home? Bill hasn't got his car and it will save Ted from taking his out of the garage. We can drop Bill off en route so that he can get a good night's sleep, and then Ted can see us girls home."

It was agreed upon, and they were soon ready to leave. They all felt that they needed some fresh air. The night was clear, and it was very cool. Fall had arrived.

Bill was still feeling chatty. As they sauntered along the quiet streets towards his house, he described much of the art of painting. It was one of the unfortunate traits in his character that, whenever he was very interested in anything, he talked about it to such an extent that he bored his audience to the point of distraction. What was actually a lack of self-assurance earned him the reputation of having a colossal conceit. To-night, however, his various monologues had been a godsend. Ted and Margaret had long since acquired the technique of pursuing their own thoughts while appearing to concentrate on everything that Bill said. Joyce appeared to be involved in thrashing out some personal problem; her lack of attention was obvious to all but Bill.

They arrived at the Donnelly's home. Margaret and Ted were prepared to walk tactfully ahead to wait for Joyce, and Bill seemed ready for a final and brief good-night talk with her. But Joyce clung to Margaret.

"Good luck to-morrow, Bill," was all she uttered. "Be sure and have a good night's sleep."

Bill was visibly surprised and not a little chagrined at this offhand treatment. Ted could see that he expected something a little different, and, in consequence, he infused an extra note of warmth into his voice as they parted.

They watched Bill run up his front stairs, three at a time, and everyone waved. Then Ted and Margaret and Joyce moved on in silence.

"I thought it might have worked out all right," Joyce said, after a while. "But I can see now how wrong I was."

"Whatever do you mean?" asked Margaret.

"I mean that I thought I could feel enough interest in Bill Donnelly so that I would want to see a lot of him. I thought that he needed me and that I could do so much for him. But now he's all fixed up with a job and won't need me after all. And besides, I keep thinking of Dickie. This is just one of those days when I can't seem to get him out of my mind."

Ted frowned.

"Remembering someone who is gone is lovely, Joyce," Margaret said quietly. "But you're acting morbidly. It's no reflection on what Dick meant to you if you fall in love again. He would want you to. And I think that Bill does need you. Just because he has been offered a job does not mean that he will do well at it. He certainly seems to be interested in you, and I'm sure that you could do a great deal towards making that boy a great success. Ted assures me that he has an outstanding talent and that, to get to the top, he only needs an encouraging hand. I think that you could supply that hand." Margaret looked at her friend out of the corner of her eye. "Besides, you need him!"

Joyce flushed. "Nonsense," she scoffed. "And anyway, aren't you rushing things?"

"No. Not really. I've never known Bill to take out any girl more than two or three times, and even then the dates were usually spread over a period of months. But here he's asked you to do something every night since you've come to town." It was Ted who spoke now. He was more than a little fed up with Joyce and this ridiculous attitude. Obviously she needed a husband and Bill needed a wife. They had both admitted their interest in one another. What could be simpler?

They were walking up a steep incline now, and conversation was becoming increasingly difficult. When they had laboured to the top, and were within a stone's throw of Margaret's house, Joyce stopped. The look of self-tragedy had returned to her eyes. Somehow her whole body seemed to have drooped. It had resumed its old flaccidity.

"It's all very well for you two to talk," she complained. "Everything's worked out perfectly for you. You must remember that everyone else's problems are not as elementary as yours." She unloosed a deep sigh upon the night air. Ted looked significantly at Margaret. "Dick and I could have been just as happy. He planned so many things for us. His letters from England were filled with what we would do with our lives. Our marriage would have been so full, so rich! And the last letter I received from him was so full of tenderness! If I had ever entertained any doubts about his love cooling, that letter certainly dispelled them." They were standing in front of the Thomas house. "Ours would have been the perfect love affair," she concluded. She looked confidently around, as if for confirmation.

Ted's right hand gripped Margaret just above the elbow, while with his left he produced his wallet. "Joyce," he said, and his voice

was grim and determined, for another scene was the last thing in the world that he desired. "Joyce, I have something to show you." He was by now holding a letter. Margaret gasped in alarm. "I have to do it, Margaret," he said to her. "It's ridiculous to let this thing go unchecked another day. Joyce will keep remembering her love as more perfect with every year, and it's ruining her life. Will anyone be in your living room?"

"I doubt it." She was very tired and deeply troubled. She opened the front door and ran in. "No. The coast is clear. Mummy and Daddy went to a movie and Campbell is out with his girl. But Ted....."

"Margaret, my mind's made up." They all entered the parlour. Margaret turned on some lights. Ted turned to Joyce, whose face betrayed a strange mixture of curiosity and apprehension. "I have something to tell you that may be rather a shock. Do you feel up to it?"

Joyce nodded.

"That letter you received from Dick was not the last one that he wrote you. When I was going through his effects in that boarding house in Farnborough, I came upon a letter addressed to you lying in his drawer. Something he had said to me just before his death caused me to look at what he had written. I felt that there was no use hurting any feelings unnecessarily. And besides, I was in no fit condition to worry about ethics. The envelope was unsealed although the letter had been written several days earlier. I read it through, and decided against showing it to you. I could see no good that could come of it. So I folded it carefully and put it in the back of this wallet. It's only been out once, when I showed it to Margaret. She felt the same about it as I did. But your state of self-delusion has lasted too long." Margaret had come up to take her place beside him, and had linked her arm through his.

Joyce stood facing them. She was terror stricken.

Ted held out the letter. It was faded and crinkled. For a while, Joyce made no move. Then slowly, agonizingly, she reached out her hand. The paper shook as she opened it up. Ted and Margaret watched her anxiously. She made no movement until she had scanned both pages. Then she read them again.

Her face hardened. No longer could it be called soft and self-pitying. The eyes flashed and the lips compressed into a straight line. She tore the letter into a hundred fragments and looked wildly about the room. She spotted a waste-paper basket and rushed over to it. She dropped the pieces, one by one. She walked slowly to the door. She stopped. She leaned against the panelled woodwork. Then, very slowly, she turned around.

Ted felt as if he should applaud a magnificent performance. Margaret gripped his arm more tightly.

Joyce's eyes were filled with tears and her face was drained of colour. "So," she whispered softly, "You've known about this all along and you've never said a word! What a humiliation you've put me through! But I suppose this all comes under the heading of trying to teach Joyce a lesson!" Her voice was growing louder and harsher. "And this other girl! I suppose you met her?" Ted opened his mouth to reply, but Joyce gave him no chance. "Don't tell me. I don't want to know." Slowly she raised her head. It was a gesture of pride and defiance. Then she spoke more quietly. "I thought you were my friends. But to think that you could do this to me!" The tears were flowing rapidly. "It's inconceivable." She pressed the back of her hand to her mouth, and sped swiftly out of the room and up the stairs.

"Exit Bette Davis," breathed Ted.

Margaret roused herself. "Darling, I must go upstairs and make sure that she's all right."

Ted pulled her close to him. "She's only mad at us because she's found out that her heart's no longer broken." Her lips were next to his, and they were warm and soft. "Talking about hearts," Ted murmured, "you should hear what you're doing to mine."

The sound of a faint sob reached them.

Then absolute quiet prevailed all over the house.

2 March, 1945 .

All in all, it had been a pleasant day. Early in the morning, Fred had been called away to lecture to a group of men who were proceeding on draft to the continent. It was a Friday, the day when all members of the section reported to headquarters for a meeting. Dick was asked to preside. Of course he knew very little of what was going on, and the sergeant-major took charge of everything, but he felt that he was learning something of the function of the section and the way that it was administered. When the meeting was over, he spent some time talking to the different men, and then they took him to lunch at the hotel. He felt honoured, and especially pleased over a remark passed by the usually austere sergeant-major.

"You know, sir," he rumbled in his bass voice, mellowing after his second beer, "the boys like you. If, as rumour indicates, Captain Anglin is sent to the continent, they hope that you will be allowed to take over."

It had been a pleasant day.

He had almost forgotten what England could be like in the spring, yet he had had a preview of spring that afternoon. Fred had returned and suggested that they visit one of the units on the outer edge of their territory. It was a beautiful day, and Dick was delighted with Fred's plan. They travelled over many of the Hampshire and Surrey lanes and byways and, while Fred was forced to confine his attention to the task of guiding the station wagon through some incredibly narrow stretches, Dick was ecstatic over the trimly kept edges, the verdant carpeting that was becoming apparent everywhere, a few picturesque houses with thatched roofs, and a glimpse of two or three large estates. "Gosh, I wish we could take some of this home," he said. "You should see Ontario in the

spring," was Fred's reply. Furthermore, he was far from ecstatic over the condition of the English roads, and gave free, vocal rein to his feelings. Once, indeed, when they had suddenly been confronted with an English lorry as they were rounding a very steep and narrow curve, it looked as if all concerned were in grave peril. Dick practically drove his feet through the floor boards, but Fred was able to swerve the vehicle right up against a hedge. The lorry lurched by, and they both gasped with relief.

Later, on their way back to Farnborough, they stopped at a roadhouse for tea. The massive wooden structure apparently was hundreds of years old. Dick was enchanted. They were shown to a corner table and they gave their order to the waitress. Dick looked around him.

"What kind of architecture would you call this?" he hissed.

Fred shrugged his shoulders. "Haven't the remotest," he replied.

Dick was fascinated by the low ceiling and the panelled woodwork. Around the dark walls were hung weapons of all descriptions and of all ages - bows, arrows, blunderbusses, swords, rifles, pistols. Dick was unable to count them all. Across from him was an enormous fireplace that, he felt sure, must be capable of heating the great outdoors. As it was, it held only two small logs, which shed enough heat for the room. Dick was interested in a coat of armour, too, which stood in a far corner. There were two hallways leading out of this room, presumably to the kitchen and the sleeping quarters, and, on the space of wall separating these passages, there hung two portraits. One old gentleman, fierce of eye and long of beard, might have lived a hundred years ago. The other looked as if he were a first cousin of Henry the Eighth. A huge arras covered the opposing wall. Dick had commenced an examination of the

sparkling chandelier, when tea was placed before them. Strange to relate, it was excellent. For one thing, both he and Fred were given a soft boiled egg. They were incredulous and set about to enjoy their greatest treat in weeks. They felt that they had made a great discovery and vowed that they would visit the place at least once a week.

As they drove back to their office, Fred engaged himself in cheerfully making plans for his leave. He had contacted an Air Force friend of his and they were to leave for Cornwall on March the ninth.

"Are you sure that won't ruin your chances of getting together with Ted?" Fred asked.

"No," Dick insisted. "I don't think Ted cares where he goes as long as he can eat well and sleep in a comfortable bed, and tie one on every night before dinner. And then, if he wants to go to London, I can commute. We can get to all the shows he wants."

"I just hope it works out all right."

"Don't you give it another thought."

A letter from Ted was awaiting Dick in the office. Ted had, by now, received word that Dick had been posted to the Security section, and was planning to meet him there on Monday. Everything seemed settled.

"Well, that's swell." Fred was relieved. He was so anxious that everything should go well on Ted's leave that Dick was embarrassed. "I'm not leaving till Friday afternoon, so you'll have four days, anyway. I want you to feel free to take off anywhere."

"Thanks," Dick said. "I feel I should stick close to home, though, and learn something of what goes on around here."

"Nonsense. You'll be perfectly safe with Sergeant-Major Elliott. He knows everything. And Captain Ross at Headquarters is always a good Joe if you're stuck." He sighed contentedly. "Isn't this a wonderful set-up? No one ever worries about us and we're never interfered with."

I just try to be careful that I don't spoil everything. Good things are usually ruined that way." He glanced at his watch, and whistled. "I'll have to dash. I guess I forgot to tell you, but I've been invited out to dinner by some friends of mine in Aldershot. I met them through the service club, and they're awfully decent. Not that I've discovered many decent people in Aldershot," he reflected darkly. "They hate servicemen around here and they'll rook you right and left if you give them a chance. I hope the Canadians find a better spot than this in the next war!"

"Fred, I have a couple of things I want to do in Aldershot to-night. Would you mind if I took the jeep?"

"Not at all. Park it over by the police station if you're going to be any length of time, and let them know that you're around. Just tell them you're there on security business."

Fred left soon afterwards, and Dick put through a call to Wilma. It's all fixed, he told her. He had thought that they should really celebrate, and had engaged two rooms at the Savoy. He ignored her gasp. What did money matter? This was to be an occasion. Furthermore, he had booked tickets for Lunt and Fontanne, and has reserved a table afterwards at a night club just off Grosvenor Square. For Sunday, he had made the necessary arrangements, he informed her mysteriously, and they'd be out in the country. He would say no more. It sounded like the perfect week-end, though, and Dick was exuberant. However, the thought of what lay immediately ahead sobered him down.

He wandered out to the door of the building. Two of the men were in the yard working on their motorcycles. Fred's driver batman was cleaning up the walk. The sun still shone with amazing force. It was a very tranquil scene and presented a great contrast with the turmoil that was beginning to churn within Dick. For two cents, he wouldn't

do this to Tom. Of course, Tom wouldn't^{be} there. Maybe nobody would be there who would be of interest to the Canadian military authorities. He was glad that he had not mentioned anything to Fred. He might not even go. At any rate there was time to go into town to see a movie before he had to make up his mind.

He waved good-bye to the members of the section who were still around, hopped into the jeep, and sped off towards Aldershot. He parked the vehicle at the police station and walked around to the cinemas. He found a film that he decided would not require too much concentration, and he went in. He loved the English cinemas. This one was big and roomy, and, most important, the patrons were allowed to smoke. He settled back in his seat, and gave his attention to the screen. The hero, obviously waging a losing battle with advanced middle age, was stalking the heroine. The heroine, who might well have been his daughter, looked like a precocious girl of twenty trying to act a glamorous thirty. She stopped, posed, turned, posed, tossed her head and eyed him hungrily. They advanced purposefully to the centre of the screen. The girl on Dick's left squaled^e, which was a clue that she was probably sitting through the picture for a second time, and that the big love scene was about to commence. So far, Dick's mind was still on Tom and that address. He felt fidgety. There was a hush in the theatre as the two principals glared at one another. Who was going to strike whom? Ah! They changed their minds. They were in one another's arms! They were making passionate love in the Hollywood manner. The only way the audience had of knowing that it was passionate love was the muscle that kept twitching in the hero's jaw. The heroine merely looked predatory. It was proving far too exciting for the girl on Dick's left. She was squeaking again, and was squirming as violently as though she had the 'seven day itch'. The hero and the heroine were now standing cheek to cheek. First the audience

was given a glimpse of the hero's profile, complete with twitching muscle; then the score was evened and the heads of the principals changed places. Finally their lips ground to-gether. The young girl on Dick's left was panting with emotion. "They really hate one another, you know," a woman in back was hissing to her friend. "She's killed his chum, and has tried to kill him and he suspects her. In the end he kills her in self-defense and marries a nice, young girl. I read it all in a movie magazine." She was told, in several different ways to be quiet. The kiss was fading from the screen. Dick had taken a violent dislike to the hero and wished that he could fade with it. The next scene took place on a rainy night. A girl - probably the 'nice, young girl' - was walking along the street. All at once a man confronted her out of the shadows and she screamed. So did several people in the audience, including Dick's neighbour, who was so excited that she kicked him in the calf of the leg. That was enough. He knew the solution to the mystery, and he was in no mood for a show anyway. He got up and excused himself through to the aisle disturbing, en route, a Canadian soldier and his girl. Those two made the couple on the screen look like rank amateurs instead of two lovers whose combined marriages totalled about six.

He sauntered upstairs to the cinema cafeteria and put in his order of tea, and beans on toast. It was seven o'clock, and still light. He reviewed his plans, which were very simple. At about nine o'clock he would drive the jeep over to the street in question and park it across from the house. An air raid shelter had been erected in the centre of the street at this point, and would obscure three-quarters of the jeep from the building. Even if the people in the house saw the vehicle parked there, they would have no reason for suspicion. For on the other side of the street, about thirty yards up the road, was a theatre. Senior officers often had their drivers call for them after a show. So

there should be nothing strange about that. Besides, he had examined the street carefully from end to end, and that was the only practical vantage point. He had no desire to stand in the air raid shelter for what might be two or three hours. And fruitless hours at that.

He drank his tea straightway, but toyed listlessly with his beans. He was not hungry. He was unable to drive a picture of Tom, with his lank and angular face, from his mind. For Tom was a man who felt, and perhaps with some justification, that the world was always against him. He had fallen a ready prey to Communism and was now in such a state of mind that a mental breakdown was imminent. How much of a menace could a man like that constitute to the Canadian army? And yet, regardless of Tom's importance in the scheme of things, the meeting that was taking place might conceivably be of harm. And some of the people involved might be dangerous. And Tom should be on his way home to Canada by the time any investigation was under way. He might never know a thing about it. Even if he did, Dick would probably never see him again. He pushed his plate away and left the table. He had definitely decided to go through with this thing but he was haunted by a pair of accusing brown eyes, and over and over he kept hearing a hoarse voice pleading - "Don't let me down, Fenton. Please don't let me down!" Dick shook his head. It was all damned foolishness.

Dick wandered back to a seat in the theatre in time for the climactic scene. The hero was creeping through a dark room, holding a revolver. Suddenly two shots rang out. He whirled, alarmed but unscathed, and fired several shots blindly into the other end of the room. Imagine his stunned horror when the heroine fell, dying, to the floor. There was a death scene where the heroine, as immaculate and unruffled as a model in Vogue, confessed all her sins (mayhem, extortion, murder), and attempted

a reconciliation. The hero, muscle twitching furiously, was understandably rather cool to these overtures. But he magnanimously pretended to forgive all and used two or three long words which apparently explained her mental condition. At any rate he was successful in causing the audience to sympathize with her, and at the same time he must have pleased the censors. In the final scene the hero is walking off into the dawn hand in hand with the 'sweet young girl', who was apparently around as a sort of second string heroine. Someone must have dreamed her up, Dick reasoned wearily, because a big name star must always walk off with a girl. No one is ever able to resist him. Dick paid little attention to the added attraction, a rather unfortunate British attempt at a musical comedy, and left before it was finished.

The night was mild, and the stars were twinkling down from the heavens. Dick was conscious of the hum of a squadron of planes in the distance, until it was drowned out by the roar of a bus climbing the hill. Almost unwillingly he turned his steps towards the police station. The night was dark, but far from being pitch black. The moon, shining serenely down upon the army town, was worrying not at all about upsetting the plans of such an insignificant mortal as Richard Fenton.

Within ten minutes Dick was parked behind the air raid shelter. There was no apparent activity in the house that he was watching, and he was thus able to keep his eyes trained for a provost, or any traffic coming down the street from behind him. If anything happened along, he would have to move, because there was no room for any kind of vehicle to pass between him and the shelter. The minutes ticked slowly by. Four times he moved, only to drive around the block and take up his position in the same spot. The moon was blotted out by heavy clouds, and he watched the stars extinguished, one by one. It grew colder, and he was

thankful that he had the protection of a heavy, sheep-skin coat. He watched dozens of people, civilians and servicemen, walk up the street. He recognized two or three officers whom he knew but he did not speak to any of them. His only amusement was in counting the number of couples who disappeared into the air raid shelter. Eleven! Two of them were farsighted, or experienced, enough to carry rugs. No one either approached, or left, the nondescript house across the street.

Sitting, waiting like this, reminded Dick of a day in action, his last day. He had been better able to control his thoughts lately. No longer was he often tortured by remembering the explosion that blew Windy Mitchell into small pieces, and the scene afterwards when Dick came upon his hand and his wrist, the big brown mole on the joint of the third finger still intact. He could forget, too, for as much as hours at a time, the day when fourteen members of his platoon, men in whose company he had worked and trained, drunk and played, eaten and slept for the past two and a half years, were riddled by machine gun and mortar fire. He thought of his beloved company commander, killed at Caen, and of the company second-in-command who died two days, later, leading a section of men into the open to attract a withering fire from the enemy that each man knew would mean certain death. Yet, by so doing, by focussing the enemy's attention elsewhere, the rest of the company, or what was left of it, had been able to ford a small stream virtually unnoticed, and press home a successful attack. Dick tried to direct his reminiscences into more pleasant channels, but these tragic memories were too powerful for him. Despite the chill in the air, he was soaking wet. His heart thudded against his ribs as frantically as it was wont to do when he was first admitted to hospital. Why did he have to feel this way now? He was so engrossed in his reverie that he failed to notice a figure

slip out of the lane behind him and approach the back of the jeep. Just as the figure was drawing level, Dick threw a quick glance at the house opposite, started up the engine and drove off. He felt that he had to do something before he lost control of himself completely. But, for a while, the battle scenes stayed with him.

ITALICS
START

Once again it was that bitterly cold January day and all hell had broken loose on their sector. Dick's company commander had just been stricken with an appendectomy, and the command had fallen on his shoulders. His feelings were a mixture of pride, inadequacy and fear. It was eleven o'clock in the morning when he decided to go forward and have a look at the two company outposts. He and an orderly were creeping along the side of a dirt road when there was an ear shattering explosion in a field to their right. Both men dropped flat out on the ground. Dick raised his head and scanned the field. He was just about to move on when he heard a man cry out in agony. Again and again the cry came from the middle of the field. Dick made up his mind to go to his rescue. But he was too late. The orderly cried out: "Why, sir, that's old Murray." Barely taking any of the usual precautions, the orderly darted across the road. Before he had cleared twenty-five yards, he was dead. He had been shot through the head.

The man called Murray was still groaning and calling for help.

For some unaccountable reason, Dick was frightened, more frightened than he had ever been in his life. It was as if all the fear of those seven months in action had crystallized to transform him into a fear-crazed, paralyzed wreck of a human being. He was shaking. The noise of the battle that was raging all around him seemed increased ten-fold. He put his hands to his ears. He looked at the inert, torn, bleeding

form of the orderly who had been talking to him one minute before.

"Run," shrieked a voice in his ear. "It doesn't matter where. Just get out of this hellish mess." But a voice in the other ear was audible also. It wasn't so loud, but it kept insisting that all this fear was bound up with lack of sleep and food, and with battle fatigue. Pride, it said. Responsibility. You know you're not going to run away no matter how much you want to. So get on with you.

Murray cried out again.

That was it. Dick raised himself off the ground. The movement required an incredible amount of effort. Slowly, with infinite care, he crawled to the edge of the road. He flung himself across. So far so good. His heart was pounding so loudly that he was sure the enemy could hear it. He wondered vaguely if the outposts were doing their job. Then, while his eye and his brain calculated the best way of reaching Murray, his mind tried to conjure up a picture of Joyce. Just a momentary flash to bolster his courage and tide him safely through this ordeal. For the first time, he failed. There was no Joyce. He could see only a field with a few bodies, a field being raked by machine gun and mortar fire, but a field with a writhing, groaning soldier who must be helped. Just for a moment, Dick thought of an 'out'. Surely this man was not so important that he, as acting company commander, should risk his life and perhaps jeopardize thereby the safety of his whole company merely to rescue him. For there were only two lieutenants left, neither of whom had had much experience in battle. Yes, he should probably turn back. But all the time he was racing towards a hillcock. He made it. His breath was coming in sobbing gasps. The enemy had spotted him. He could hear bullets embedding themselves in the other side of the dirt mound. Well, they could always call on Ted to take over the company. (But that was defeatist talk!)

Dick looked about him. Behind, the hedge lining the road. To the left, a clear space for a couple of hundred yards, then a slope leading to a bare, grey forest. Somewhere in that area there was at least one machine gun nest. Somewhere, too, there were mortar emplacements. Ahead of him, the field, littered with dead bodies. He could have touched three of them. Two were Germans, who had had control of this area up until nine o'clock the night before; one was a member of his company. He looked quickly away from this young boy, whom he knew very well. He could see Murray quite plainly; the man's calls were now mere gurgles in the back of his throat. He glanced quickly to his right. More fields and, two or three hundred yards back, his own troops. But, for all the men he could see, he might as well have been in the middle of the Sahara desert.

There was no point looking around any more. What the hell had happened to his nerve? He had never felt like this in his life. Ted would be ashamed of him. What's more, his own men would despise him. Now Murray had seen him, was trying to edge towards him. Only ten or twelve yards separated them. Dick moved out. He was beside Murray. Then he heard it coming. The 'thing' that he had known was marked for him was on its way. There was only one possibility. He threw himself over the soldier whom he had struggled forward to protect. The crash shook the very ground, but Dick remained inert on top of Murray. He felt a succession of sharp, searing pains; then it was as if his legs had been cut off. He opened his eyes. He was alive anyway! Murray stirred and Dick rolled over. He saw that Murray had not sustained further wounds. He glanced at his own legs. They looked queer, somehow. Jagged things were sticking out of them, and the trousers were matted with blood. He felt sick, and retched. Part of the vomit went over

Murray, but the man did not notice. He had lost consciousness. Dick found that it was getting dark. His head was swimming. He could remember struggling and pushing and rolling around until Murray was on his back and he had pinioned his arms under his neck. He could remember screaming with pain every time Murray's boots kicked the jagged things sticking out of his legs. Of his weird crawl from the field to the edge of the road, he could remember no further incidents. But it had seemed to him as though he were swimming through a sea of blood, and that there was an octopus battling with him. As soon as he tore off one fiendish tentacle, the octopus would try to choke him with another. Dazzling lights were flashing down from the sky. Suddenly it all went dark. He and the octopus sank under the blood. He reappeared once on the surface and screamed for help. His struggle was futile for he had no strength left. He plummeted downward like a stone. The battle was over *ITALICS* END.

Dick was back in his appointed spot across from the house. Just think, he muttered savagely to himself, they want to give me a Military Cross when I was the most scared man in the Canadian army. I was so damned near yellow it wasn't funny. And there's poor old Ted sweating it out and getting no recognition. He's said that he's often felt like I did, but I wonder. And then to have Murray die on the way over, while I was still struggling with him! Christ, what irony!

But he was feeling better. These scenes just had to be thought out. Like unwelcome guests they kept forcing their way forward from the innermost recesses of the memory. The only way to get rid of them was to entertain them for a while. And now, each time they went away, they left him alone a little longer. Thank God! There was a time in hospital when it had seemed likely that they might have unhinged his

mind. Dick was sure that they were going to, although no one else knew anything about them. Not even the psychiatrists suspected that he was subject to fits of nerves. And now he was almost better. If he could only get rid of that recurring nightmare about the street he had never seen! He shivered and pulled his coat more closely around him. Then he lit a cigarette.

He glanced at his watch. Eleven ten. He would stay until eleven thirty. He looked at the theatre. It was closing for the night. The last patrons were sauntering out of the doors. The houses across the street were in total darkness, of course. No activity there. Everything grew still. Dick finished the cigarette. He was sleepy. He must go home! He yawned.

Once again a figure slipped out of the shadows behind him. It walked carefully, slowly towards the vehicle. Dick's head was nodding in the front seat. The figure was now alongside the tail light. Dick's head fell forward and he opened his eyes. He shook his head. The figure glided back into the protection of a wall. Dick looked around him uneasily. Then he could hear footsteps. Someone was walking down the street, humming.

The man in the shadows grunted softly. His eyes were smouldering with hatred. But the man who was walking down the street stopped beside the jeep.

"Well, well. I thought I recognized the markings!"

"Hi, Fred!"

"What the hell are you doing parked here?" He hopped in.

Dick started the engine. "Will you believe me if I tell you?"

"Well, my boy, that all depends on how plausible you can be. There's a sex angle, of course?"

Dick grinned. "Wish there were. But actually it's like this." The jeep started up and moved away.

The man stepped out of the shadows. Even in the war time blackout any passer-by would have been startled by his face. It was long and angular and ugly. It was the face of a man with his guard down; the mouth was twisted and savage; the eyes were piercing and cruel.

For a while he stood quite still. Then he burst out laughing. He laughed until the tears ran down his cheeks.

Finally he turned on his heel and walked swiftly down the street.

The Wedding Day .

Ted's feet were on the floor before he had really opened his eyes. His brain was instantly active, so active, in fact, that he was not able to concentrate on one single, coherent thought. He looked at his watch. Seven thirty! How could he have slept so late on his wedding day? But of course! He had tossed and turned all night, and had heard the big clock on the downstairs hall bang out every hour until four. What did he have to do this morning? He couldn't think of much; in fact, Bill was taking care of everything. He felt like a useless appendage.

He still had not answered the question that had been uppermost in his mind for the past four weeks. Was he being conceited and selfish in thinking that a month or two of marriage with him could compensate to Margaret for a lifetime of widowhood? He shook his head sadly. No man was that important, least of all Ted Cummings. When all was said and done he was just a young fellow approaching his thirties, with a fairly good job, and excellent prospects - if he were spared so that he might realize them. He walked over to the mirror. He was no great shakes to look at, that was a cinch. His hair was brown and, at the moment, sticking straight up from his head. Why the devil did he ever wash it last night? It was wild and uncontrollable and he'd have to pay special attention to see that it was properly flattened down during the ceremony. Oh well, what the hell! He was staring into a pair of greenish blue eyes. They looked tired all the time now, and the network of lines emanating from the corners was deeply etched. There was black shading under the eyes, and hollows under the cheeks. Yet his nose was straight; and his mouth, so everyone always told him, was

his saving feature. If his face was long and thin, at least he could always smile and show even, white teeth. His body was lithe and supple and his movements were graceful. He usually kept himself in the pink of condition. But..... Poor Margaret! He shouldn't be doing this to her. It just wasn't right. He paced around the room. But he couldn't go over all that reasoning again. The die had been cast. It was up to him to enjoy this day, the culmination of his fondest wishes. And, as long as he was able, he would make it up to Margaret. She would be the happiest woman alive if he had anything to do with it. Perhaps, with all their senses and perceptions sharpened, with the feeling that each time he held her in his arms it might be the last, perhaps with that tragedy constantly stalking them, they might be privileged to know a happiness more pure and complete than those lovers who felt that an infinite lifetime was at their disposal.

While he was throwing his bath robe over his shoulders, he heard a tap at his door.

"Come in."

It was Elspeth. "Hullo, darling. Sleep well? I brought you a cup of coffee." Ted looked surprised. "I couldn't sleep, so I went down early and put on the percolator," she explained, smiling. She put the cup and saucer on his bureau and turned to him. "Oh, my dear, it will be hard for us both without you. But after all, we've been without you before. Just as long as you're happy, that's all we ask. And you should be. Margaret's a fine girl. I won't deny that you've worried me lately. You've had something really serious on your mind and I've prayed every night that your troubles might cease, whatever they are. And I feel that my prayers have been answered; you look better. Much better. You'll be the best looking bridegroom of the year

and I'll be bursting with pride." She reached up and kissed him. Just for a moment he held her, and with her his childhood, his health, his security.

As soon as she had left the room, his father entered. He looked old and strange, but he was smiling.

"How are you feeling, son?"

"First rate, thanks, Dad."

"It's a lovely day for a wedding."

"It certainly is."

"Is everything all right, son? You've been acting rather queer lately, and your mother and I have been wondering."

"Everything's fine, Dad." Ted turned to look out the window.

"You're not worried about, uh, well anything? That is, you and Margaret..... I know young people discuss these things nowadays, but....."

Ted's father had never broached this subject before, and Ted could see that the conversation was going to be painful. He turned away from the window and grasped his father's arm affectionately. "Everything's going to be all right, Dad. Don't you and Mother worry about a thing. Now I must go and shave." He fled.

He toyed with some breakfast and rearranged some of his packing, and so was able to while away the minutes until nine-thirty. Then he was seized with the desire to see Margaret. He must talk to her! He dialled her number. She answered.

"Yes?"

"Hullo, darling. Nervous?"

"Terrified. I'm sure I'll never get up that aisle."

"It seems so long since I've seen you, sweetheart. What

with the bachelor dinner on Thursday and all those people at your place last night, I feel that we're veritable strangers. I think I'll just drop over and renew acquaintances."

"But Ted, you know that's bad luck. Besides, I'm doing a thousand things."

"Hon, I feel so restless I think I'm going to burst. And I'm just dying to tell you how much I love you."

"Honestly? I love you too, darling. You'll never know how much. Yes you will too. You'll know later." She chuckled breathlessly. "Come to think of it, you'll know quite a lot later. Now I must fly. Go for a drive with Bill or talk with your mother or something."

"Yeah. O.K. hon. You go back to your chores. I'll call you at noon."

"Ted, say you love me again. Just once more."

"I love you, honey."

"Oh, that's wonderful. Everything's so worth while when you say that. Keep on saying it forever, darling."

"Don't worry. I will. Bye, hon."

"Don't forget to call me at noon."

"Are you kidding? I'll be counting the minutes."

"Bye then, darling."

"Bye, hon."

What to do now? It was a lovely morning so he thought a walk might be in order. But he had first of all to escape from his family. Elspeth thought that he should rest; Mr. Cummings wanted to take him along while he did a couple of messages. Ted spent a few minutes explaining that he wished to be alone for a short time. They

thought it a rather odd request, but they let him have his way.

The air was cool and brisk and Ted sauntered slowly along the leaf-strewn sidewalks, paying no attention to his direction. Soon he found himself a few houses removed from the Thomas house. Two delivery vans were in front of the door; one was from a florist, the other was probably delivering a gift. Wedding presents! He could scarcely credit that all those gifts - the flat silver and the chinaware and the coffee tables and the ash trays and the household appliances - would grace the three room apartment that he and Margaret had rented. Most of the things would have to be stored for years. A dinner service for twelve would be quite unnecessary for some time to come. Perhaps it would never.....

Ted turned and walked briskly towards the church. He thought that he might have a chat with the minister, Stephen Savage. He opened the massive oak door, and the scent of gardenias smote him. The sickly, sweet smell of the masses of flowers was almost overpowering. It was difficult to judge whether the church was being made ready for a funeral or a wedding! He stood for a moment at the back and tried to accustom his eyes to the gloom. It was so difficult to realize that in a matter of hours he would be standing up in front, shaky in the knees, murmuring an 'I do' that would transform him straightway into a married man. It should be the happiest day of his life. Under normal circumstances it would have been. Ted sank into one of the pews and buried his head in his hands. God's will could not be changed, but oh! how unfathomable at times!

He was completely relaxed as he knelt there, his hands clasped over the back of the pew in front, his head resting lightly on his arms. A hush had settled everywhere. Everything was subdued and unhurried and

there was nothing harsh or discordant to jar on raw nerves. The sounds of the outside world were muted; the light filtering through the great stained glass windows was soft. Peace! That was it. Peace of soul. That was what everyone strove for, and yet so few were able to attain. Communists, for instance. And atheists. How could they ever be really happy, or secure? He was flooded with a sense of well being. It was unnecessary to go through the formalities of praying. Merely to relax in the sight of One who knew all things was healing. Ted wished that he had realized the power of prayer and meditation when he was in good health. He could not remember devoting his whole attention to God since he had left the battle field. He remained quite still. Perhaps he was even asleep. But he was at peace, and he was contented. No matter what happened, this was to be the day of days for him.

After some time he was conscious of someone watching him. Someone was intruding upon the sanctity of his thoughts. Slowly he raised his head. The spell was broken, so he might as well go home anyway.

"Ted! I thought it was you." Stephen Savage was standing over him, smiling, his hat in his hand. He was obviously on his way out to make a call on one of his parishioners.

"Hullo Stephen. I just thought I'd come around and make use of the hall."

"I'm glad. I hope you haven't any dire problem. Usually bridegrooms suffer quite enough in church during the ceremony without spending the morning there, too."

Ted was debating whether or not to tell Stephen the whole story. Several things decided him against it. Obviously the young minister was busy, and, no matter what he might advise, Ted was going

through with the wedding, anyhow. But when he came back from the honeymoon, Stephen could be of inestimable comfort, and of great assistance in helping tide his family over their period of grief. Margaret would need his counsel, too. For this young preacher was loved and respected by all his parish. It had been that way in the army and it was that way now in 'Civvy Street'. Ted had met many padres of all denominations and they had ranged, in effectiveness and personal integrity, from very, very good to very, very bad. But nowhere had there been a man who had commanded more respect and affection from men of all types and religions and races than Stephen Savage. He was tall and young and broad-shouldered; he was unfailingly courteous although he could be stern when the occasion demanded it; he smoked and drank an occasional highball when he felt that it was expected of him, but never to any excess. Most of all, he believed in God, and he was a man of humility and sincerity. He was that rarest of mortals, a good man with a strong character and a sense of humour. As a result he had been given this church, one of the largest Presbyterian churches in Canada. Ted had cheerfully swung over from the Anglican church that he had originally attended with his family, just to be with him. He revered Stephen Savage as he had never revered any other man.

They walked up the aisle to-gether and stood on the steps outside the door. Ted still had not answered him, and Stephen looked anxious.

"Everything is all right, isn't it, Ted?" he asked.

"Yes Stephen, I'm a pretty lucky fellow. I don't think I could be more in love if I tried. But I have one problem. I won't bother you with it now, but I'd like to make an appointment with you as soon as I get back."

Stephen was continuing to regard him closely. "I thought that you had been acting rather strangely of late," he said. (How many more times am I to be told that to-day? Ted wondered.) "Are you sure you don't want to tell me now?"

Ted shook his head. "It will keep," he insisted, attempting to assume a jaunty air. "It's nothing drastic."

"I don't believe you," Stephen retorted, "but it's up to you. I'll give you a call at the office two weeks from Monday and we'll arrange to get to-gether. Ted, you're not regretting this marriage?"

"Oh God, Stephen! Don't think that for a minute. My marrying Margaret is the greatest move I ever made. And I fully realize how lucky and undeserving I am."

Stephen looked somewhat relieved, but not altogether. "Well, I'm glad to hear that. Got your speech all planned for this afternoon?"

Ted smiled. "I'm dreading that as much as standing up in the front of the church before all those people."

"There's nothing to worry about, Ted. You'll find yourself enjoying it before you're through. Meanwhile, just go home and relax."

Ted laughed ruefully. "Someday you may go through this yourself, and then you'll know what it feels like. Well, so long Stephen. Thanks for all you've done. I'll see you later."

"Yes indeed. I'm looking forward to it. Good-bye, Ted."

Ted watched Stephen run nimbly down the stone steps and walk briskly along the street. He glanced at his watch. Almost noon! He must go home. Bill would be there, and everyone would be waiting for him.

He was right. Not only were Bill and his mother and father waiting for him, but they were anxious. Yet there was nothing to be done.

Or if he actually did think of some little thing, one of his three guardian angels would dash off and insist on doing it for him.

His mother had prepared a very tempting salad luncheon, but he could do scant justice to it. He found, too, that he was unable to contribute his share of the conversation. He had not felt so jittery since he had acted a small part in a college play before the war. And, of course, everyone was so full of concern. He found it difficult to restrain himself. Why couldn't they act naturally? Or, better still, pay no attention to him?

It was worse after lunch. He and Bill offered to wash the dishes, but Elspeth would not hear of it. So they all sat around the living room. The wedding was to be at four o'clock and they were all to leave the house at three-fifteen. Elspeth withdrew to change, and Ted followed suit.

The minutes dragged by. Mr. Cummings paid scant attention to his 'Financial Post'. Bill thumbed through several magazines, tossed them aside, wandered over to the piano, played a few bars of a Chopin etude, gave it up, wandered to the front door to see if the sun was still shining, and then began the performance all over again. At two-thirty he and Mr. Cummings also went upstairs to make ready.

The minutes ticked steadily by and, exactly at three-fifteen, a large, black limousine pulled away from the curb outside the Cummings' house and whisked them all off to the church. Ted turned back for a final glimpse of the home that he had known all of his life. Henceforth he would only visit his family as a guest. The thought shocked him rather, if anything that was not catastrophic could have shocked him at that moment. His mind was far from rational.

When they reached the church they found, to their surprise,

that there were several guests seated and waiting for the show. Ted felt more and more like a man who was about to be hanged.

"Ye Gods," he breathed to Bill, as they were carefully hanging up their fall overcoats in the small cloak room, "why does our so-called civilized society have to make such a gruelling ordeal out of the simple union of two people?"

"You've got me there," Bill answered. Then his face brightened and he reached into his overcoat pocket. "I have a little something here," he said, as he furtively removed a shining, silver flask, "that you'll find good for anything from snake bite to double pneumonia. And it's a must for all bridegrooms." He proffered his cure-all to Ted.

"I don't know," Ted murmured doubtfully. "I don't think I should. I feel terribly hazy about everything as it is."

Bill was insistent. "No arguments now," he commanded sternly. "I certainly need a snort and goodness knows, thy need is greater than mine, as Hamlet said. Or was it Julius Caesar?"

Ted smiled and took the flask. He tilted back his head, swallowed, gasped, and passed it back. Then a strange feeling stole over him. It was as if Dick were standing there, cheerful and calm, talking him out of his nervousness as he had done so often before on so many different occasions. Like the time he reached the finals of the provincial tennis. Or the time he acted in the college play. Good old Dick! How he would have enjoyed officiating on this day! Ted felt his presence more strongly at that moment than he had in months. The sensation flashed over him in a second, and once more he was conscious of Bill there beside him, enjoying a much greater swig from the flask than seemed necessary. Bill winked at Ted and returned the flask to his pocket. They left the room and stood at the back of the church. Ted noticed a

steady stream of people. There were twenty minutes to go but at least a hundred guests had arrived already. Ted gulped. He was behaving like a scared school boy who had been sent to the principal's office to be punished. He was ashamed of himself. Dick would have been ashamed of him, too. He squared his shoulders. He bowed to a friend of his mother's. He should have felt better but he didn't.

He was able to speak a few words to each of the ushers. There was Margaret's young brother, Campbell, fat and jolly and full of life. There was Ted's first cousin, Maxwell Hurst, looking vain and prosperous at thirty-two. And well he might. His father had left him several hundred thousand dollars and a thriving insurance brokerage business in Toronto. Ted was never very fond of him but Elspeth insisted that he be included among the ushers for reasons of prestige. Ted did not know why having Maxwell Hurst as an usher should lend prestige to any wedding, but he finally capitulated. There was Terry Walters, with whom he had gone through school and who was now starting a promising career in the external affairs department in Ottawa. And lastly, there was Martin Overton, a brother officer of his and Dick's. Ted liked him tremendously but was rarely able to see him. It was one of those common instances where a friendship was restricted because one party was tied down by family responsibilities.

When that interlude was over, his eyes strayed to his watch. Three forty-three! Margaret would be leaving the house.

The next thing he knew he was in the vestry, and Stephen was smiling at him.

"You're looking a little white," he said, "but you'll pull through. They all do. And now Bill, I think you'd better escort him

outside, and you can take up your positions." He patted Ted lightly on the back. "You'll see more of me," he promised jokingly. Ted was led away like one in a trance. Stephen looked after him and laughed, but he was puzzled.

Ted stood outside in the church with Bill, teetering on his heels and consulting his watch. Three forty-seven! Margaret and her bridesmaids would be arriving by now. One minute he regretted having had the drink; the next minute he wished that he could sneak off and have another. He felt the way a drowning man was supposed to feel. His whole life was flashing before his eyes. Although Bill was standing beside him and occasionally trying to whisper something, Ted was oblivious. For no reason at all he was remembering the day when he and Dick went down to McGill to register for first year. Once again he had the feeling that it was Dick and not Bill who was standing so close beside him. As he glanced again at his watch, he noticed that his fists were clenched and his palms were wet. Three forty-nine! Would four o'clock never come? He tried to project himself into the future. Just two hours into the future! The ceremony would be over by then and he would have shaken hands with everyone in the reception line. He thought that he might occupy his mind by rehearsing his speech. But what was the use? His opening remarks would have to be impromptu and depend upon what the previous speaker had said. He prayed that his hotel reservations would be satisfactory. He and Margaret had stuck by their plan to spend a week in the Laurentians and then fly down to New York. They had managed to fool everybody, for even the immediate families thought that the entire honeymoon was to be spent in New York.

Ted shifted his weight on to his other foot. Margaret! His

wife! And fancy being able to spend a two week holiday with her - fourteen whole days of fun and laughs and love. He shifted his weight back to where it had been. It seemed incredible that this day had finally come. Bill was smiling at something, and apparently trying to convey something through signs. Ted had not the remotest idea of what he meant, but he managed to return the smile. He finally heard Bill whisper: "Only eight minutes, chum. Won't be long now." For the first time Ted became conscious of the fact that the organ was playing softly. His eyes swept the seemingly endless rows of pews. Good God! What a crowd! Could all these people be friends of theirs? Impossible. His mother and father were beaming encouragement on him from the front pew. Even Margaret's Uncle George was smiling at him, and Uncle George was a man who rarely smiled. Ted transferred his attention to the ushers. They were as busy as a crowd of ants swarming out of their sand hills in search of supplies. He noticed cousin Maxwell piloting Mrs. Thomas to her pew. Trust Maxwell to look after the most important personages. His prospective mother-in-law was turning her most ingratiating smile upon him, and upon three quarters of the guests as well. She sat down and immediately her eyes sought Ted's. They understood and liked each other and Ted somehow felt better now that she was there. Then, with a start, he realized that if Mrs. Thomas had been seated, Margaret could not be far behind. Three fifty-eight! He gave a nervous cough and smiled weakly at Bill. The organ stopped. A stillness gradually settled over the church. The moment was fast approaching and everyone was anxious for a look at the bride. Ted wished that he could do anything but stand still. If only he could yell, or turn handsprings, or wander around and talk to people. Why didn't something happen?

The organ peeled out the opening bars of the wedding march.

Stephen appeared before them, as if by magic, and Bill was edging him closer to the centre of the altar. Everyone was rising and all heads were turned towards the bride. And when Ted saw her, walking down the aisle with the composure and dignity of a queen, all his fear and uncertainty left him. He wanted to run down the aisle to meet her. But of course, this was her great moment. She was more beautiful than even he had ever dreamed! He sensed, rather than heard, the soft chorus of 'ohs' and 'ahs' that greeted her every step. Never had he seen anyone so lovely. His throat contracted. It was only when her father gently transferred her arm to his that he felt her trembling. And then he was able, through his newfound calm, to transmit a feeling of self confidence to her. From then on, Ted and Margaret began to enjoy their own wedding day.

Ted kept his eyes rivetted on Margaret's cheek. He was so absorbed in watching her that he could remember nothing of the service until he realized that he and Margaret were about to make their responses. He was being married! And to this girl whom he loved with all his heart! How lucky he was! He wondered what the congregation would think if he were to slip his arm around her waist. Now Bill was giving him the ring. Apparently everything was proceeding according to plan, and he was making the correct answers in the correct places. But surely this was happening to some other guy! Ted Cummings must be just watching this performance in an offhand, detached sort of way.

"I now pronounce you man and wife."

A ripple ran over the people in the church, stirring them as gently as a soft breeze rippling over water.

He kissed Margaret very lightly so that he would not smear

her lipstick.

He was well and truly married.

The signing of the register took but a few minutes and then they were walking up the aisle, arm in arm, radiant and smiling for the photographers. Ted was conscious of but a very few people. He glimpsed his family and Margaret's swinging into line behind the bridal party. There were the Fentons! How wonderful of them to cut their holiday short. He couldn't miss that fantastic hat of Marie Clarke's, with the yellow feathers sticking up into the air. And then there was Joyce, who had spurned a front row seat and who was sitting by herself near the back. She seemed to be completely over the fit of pique about the letter, for she was smiling, and her eyes were sparkling and shining with half shed tears. Ted hoped that they were friends again, but wondered if he would ever understand the girl.

Margaret's face was turned towards him. "Happy, darling?" she asked him, scarcely moving her lips in case a photographer was in the act of flashing a bulb. One was.

When Ted looked down at her, he was too choked up to answer. But that look spoke volumes.

The reception was held in the Thomas house and by four o'clock Marie Clarke was slapping her husband on the back and announcing that she was damned if she wouldn't need a shoe horn to turn around. To facilitate matters it had been decided that only Mrs. Thomas and Elspeth, the bride and the groom, and the best man and matron of honour would form the receiving line. By now Ted was so relieved and excited, that he felt that he could do nothing wrong. He was inordinately proud of himself for saying just the right things to the right people. He did not know whether to attribute this amazing success to the fact that

Margaret was standing beside him or to the silver flask which Bill had been carrying and which, by now, was emptied of its contents.

As soon as all the guests had been properly greeted, Ted fetched Margaret a glass of champagne, gulped one down himself, left Margaret surrounded by a cluster of admiring aunts and cousins, and went off in search of the Fentons. He found the three of them - Meredith, Marion and Ellen - standing to-gether in a corner. They looked bronzed and healthy after their trip. Marion's face had regained its serene composure although there were lines now in that smooth skin that Ted had never noticed before. Meredith was smiling cheerily and Ellen was the same laughing, teasing girl. With a pang, he realized that she resembled Dick more strongly than ever.

"It was wonderful of you to come back just for this," Ted told them. "You know that it wouldn't have seemed right without you."

"Oh, my dear boy, we wouldn't have missed it for anything." Marion took his face in both her hands and he bent down and kissed her. "I'm so happy for you," she whispered. "I've been living through this ceremony as if it were Dick's. And don't let us feel sad thinking about him to-day." She was holding fast on to Ted's hand. "I know he's watching us, and he would want us to enjoy ourselves." Meredith patted Ted on the shoulder and Ellen threw her arms around him and hugged him. Ted blinked back the scalding tears, yet they were not tears of sorrow. He was thanking God that Marion had been restored to health and that so few people really knew what she had been through.

When Ted left the Fentons, Meredith followed him. "I just want to thank you for helping me out that morning, Ted. Incidentally, Marion had no idea that you saw her. But I'm glad to say that we shan't

have to worry about her any more. She's well now. She is going out to spend a month in Vancouver with Ellen. They're leaving on Wednesday." He paused. It was difficult to speak softly in the midst of such a babble of voices and besides at least ten people were hanging around close at hand, awaiting their chance to speak to the groom. "So let me thank you again for everything," Meredith concluded, "and tell you how much I hope everything turns out for the best. I know you'll have a happy life with Margaret." The men shook hands, but their eyes did not meet and when Meredith returned to his family, much of the spring seemed to have gone out of his step.

Joyce accosted Ted as he was about to enter the dining room.

"It's a wonderful wedding, Ted," she told him. She was ill at ease. "I just want you to know that I have enjoyed every minute of it. You and Maggie make a mighty handsome couple." She was speaking very rapidly and breathlessly, and Ted's head was bent close to hers in an effort to hear. "You probably think I'm awfully stupid," she continued. "Well I have been, but I think I'm grown up now. Thank you for reading me that letter, and I'm sorry I behaved so abominably. But it's hard to give up a dream after all these years. I've been trying to picture what the other girl must have been like and how Dick's death affected her, but I had to give up. Anyway, it doesn't matter now. I'm going to settle down in Montreal, you know. I have a job in Margaret's old office." Her eyes strayed towards Bill, who was seated at the table motioning Ted to join him. "I won't keep you, Ted, but bless you honey, and thank you for everything." She reached up and kissed him, and then darted ahead of him, wiggling through the crowd that was almost blocking the entrance to the dining room.

My God, thought Ted, this is really a day of surprises!

The Thomas' dining room was a very large room with sliding doors opening into the hall, and French windows that opened out onto a terrace. The two sideboards and the large, round table had been removed. In their place a long table, which could seat certain members of the bridal party only, had been placed near the wall. That would leave room for about fifty guests to stand and sip champagne and watch the proceedings. There was a microphone on the table, and a loud speaker system had been installed so that guests in the living room across the hall, and others downstairs in the spacious games room, could hear all that was going on.

The other seven people who had formed the reception line, plus the four bridesmaids, were already seated when Ted slid into his place. He had a word for everyone and a kiss for Margaret. A photographer was on hand, and several pictures were taken while the bride and groom experimented with the cake knife. And a real work of art that cake was, with its three glittering white tiers. Ted hated to destroy it.

He sat down and toyed with the chicken patty before him, but he knew that he would be unable to hold anything on his stomach. He wished fervently that his speech were over.

He winked at Margaret with a gaiety that belied his true feelings. "Do you know that I married the most beautiful girl in this entire crowd?" he whispered.

"I had to be, to catch the handsomest fellow," she returned, laughingly.

Ted squeezed her hand, and then he noticed that Stephen Savage was approaching the microphone with a purposeful gleam in his eye.

The young minister spoke well and amusingly, and not as if he had to go through this tedious performance several times each week. Ted listened with a frantic intensity so that he might seize upon some phrase with which he could start his own speech. He was so desperately attentive that he heard nothing, although he realized that Stephen was saying some nice things about him and Margaret. Far too soon there was a prolonged burst of applause, and then Ted was on his feet. Bill placed the microphone squarely in front of him and he waited for the clapping to die down. Margaret slipped her hand into his. Once again she was able to restore his self confidence. But only for a moment. He glanced down at the notes that he had so carefully prepared. They were a blur. Suddenly he felt chilled, and shuddered. He was living in a fool's paradise. So many people had warned him against the future; he saw the grave faces of Meredith Fenton and Bud Percival, and even the fortune teller as she bent over his tea cup. 'Fool,' they were saying. 'Poor, deluded, selfish fool.' Ted was unable to catch his breath. He was gasping and his forehead was glistening in the light of the chandelier.

The guests were quiet and expectant. The notes on the table were swimming before Ted's eyes. He passed his left hand over his face and clung tightly to Margaret with his right one. He swayed slightly. The guests were puzzled by the delay. The group at the table were all studying their plates with a show of unconcern, and so did not notice. Ted steadied himself and smiled. He began to speak, haltingly at first, but gradually he recovered his poise and his audience was charmed with him.

Only Bud Percival and Meredith Fenton knew the effort that the speech was costing him. And Elspeth. For some unaccountable reason

she was filled with a dread that she could not explain.

Most of the guests were still standing around at six o'clock, waiting to give the newlyweds a rousing send-off. There were several false alarms but at last they came running down the stairs. There were hurried good-byes to parents and the closest friends. Then Margaret raised her arm and threw her bridal bouquet. It was caught by Joyce, amidst the hopeful cries and disappointed groans of all the young ladies present.

Ted held tight to Margaret's arm and tried to pilot her through the mob. Everyone was shrieking now and confetti was everywhere. The crowd was surging toward the front door, engulfing even the more staid and sober in the group. Marion, for instance, found herself trying to pour a handful of confetti down Margaret's neck, and both Meredith and Mr. Cummings, red of face and lusty of lung, were calling out their last good-byes and good lucks to Ted. Marie Clarke could be heard exclaiming that there was nothing in the world that made her so happy as a wedding, and then she burst into tears. Elspeth and Mrs. Thomas were running along behind Ted and Margaret, laughing and smiling. Just as they all reached the narrow front door, Ted was able to turn around. His lips formed the words 'Don't worry.' Then the crowd was pouring out onto the street.

Only Joyce was left behind in the hall. The crowd had swept around and past her and she was standing in a dark recess gazing at a bouquet that was already showing signs of fading.

"I wonder," she murmured. "I really wonder."

There was one man left downstairs in the games room. He was looking pale and anxious as he stood in front of the fireplace, his head resting on the mantel. He was haunted by the joy that he could see in the eyes of the bride and groom. Bitter, tragic joy! He turned and

walked slowly through the room. The air was dense with stale smoke, and cigarette butts had been ground out all over the newly polished, wooden floor. Coffee cups and small plates and champagne glasses were everywhere.

From upstairs came the joyous screams of the guests as they shouted the bride and groom off the premises.

The man left the games room. His lips were moving noiselessly. He closed the door and walked slowly up the stairs.

"Dear God, is it worth it to them?" muttered Bud Percival in despair. "Could it possibly be worth it?"

The Week-End .

Early Saturday morning Dick boarded the train for London. He had the week-end all planned. Wilma would be coming up to town about five o'clock and she was to meet him at the Savoy Hotel. As he had told her, it was to be a truly gala occasion, with money no object. After a drink or two at the Savoy, they would attend the theatre - Dick was feeling very proud that he had procured those two tickets to the Alfred Lunt-Lynn Fontanne show - and then a night club. On Sunday they would take the train to Maidstone and have lunch with Lady Fitzsimmons. Dick had phoned her, and she had seemed genuinely delighted at the chance to entertain him.

Dick drove straight from the station to the Savoy, checked in, admired the unaccustomed opulence of his room, and went immediately to the Ontario Services Club, a combination restaurant and recreation lounge for all service personnel, which was sponsored by the province of Ontario. It was a Mecca for all Canadian troops in London. Dick went up to the lounge, read a few magazines, and had lunch. He decided that he should write a letter home. He must advise his family of the decision he had taken in regard to his engagement, and then he could mail their letter at the same time as Joyce's. He sat down at a desk but he soon realized that he was too anxious and eager for Wilma's arrival to be coherent. He gave it up and looked around for someone to talk to. He could find no one very interesting, and was soon seated in the cinema across the way. He paid no attention whatsoever to the film and, within an hour, he was on his way back to the Savoy in the hope that Wilma might have arrived ahead of time.

She walked into the lobby as she had promised at five o'clock.

She registered, and Dick barely gave her time to deposit her haversack in her room before he whisked her off to the Royal Automobile Club, of which organization he was a wartime member. They had two drinks and discussed trivialities. Of course, Dick did mention four or five times how deeply he loved her, but for the most part he was content that their relationship be built up on a solid foundation of comradeship and understanding. From there, he was convinced that the step to an abiding love would be an easy one. He wished to bathe her in affection, and cater to her every whim in an effort to blot out the terrible memories to which she must be subject. He would be content to let her make all the advances, and pray that she would wish to do so! As he had told her, he was willing that she dominate the relationship in any way she wished until she was ready to fall in love with him the way that he was in love with her. And her answer was encouraging. "You do me more honour than I deserve," she had said. "I could ask for nothing nicer than to fall in love with you."

They both enjoyed the play very much, and were greatly impressed by the artistry of Lunt and Fontanne. Their supper club rendezvous was not quite so successful. The orchestra was bouncy. The food was poor. The room was hot and crowded. And dancing was almost impossible. The floor space seemed about as large as a postage stamp and there were always about two hundred people anxious to move around it. Dick and Wilma made two or three attempts to brave the whirl, but were soon content to remain at their table. Dick was hoping to hear a dreamy and sentimental tune, but the orchestra insisted on jazzing everything they played. Dick ordered a bottle of white wine with their chicken (or was it rabbit?) and their outlooks on life improved immeasurably.

Dick was soon telling Wilma much of his life's history, and she narrated some anecdotes of her life both on the farm and in training.

Dick was surprised when, later in the evening, she asked about Joyce. He was gratified, too, and felt that he must be making some progress at last.

"It's funny, you know," he said, "but there's so little to tell. It's just one of those wartime romances that goes astray when the lovers are separated." He hesitated. "Joyce is a hard girl to explain."

"Good looking?" asked Wilma, casually. She was twirling her wine glass by the stem.

"Why, yes. I guess you'd call her attractive, at least. Strangely enough, I can barely remember what she looks like, except that she has a button-like nose and wavy black hair. And a definite will of her own. She decided that we were destined to be great lovers a few hours after we had met." He flushed. "I didn't mean that to sound supercilious. She just felt that we were made for each other, I guess. And maybe we would have been, under ordinary circumstances. We saw a lot of one another in the next week, and became engaged. Then I was sent overseas, and that was that. Actually I've known for some time now that things haven't been the same. And as I look back, I realize that I could never have been in love with her. My feeling for you is infinitely stronger. I hope I'll be able to prove that to you, sometime."

Wilma laid her hand over his. "My dear, you're proving that to me all the time," she said softly. Dick's ^{heart} bounded suddenly, almost painfully. His inner glow had nothing to do with the cocktails. Or the wine.

The conversation was soon bubbling with the exuberant effervescence of champagne. Neither one said anything serious and the moments flew by. At last some of the diners showed signs of leaving, and a few square inches of dance floor became visible to the naked eye.

"We'll probably feel like tooth paste being squeezed out of a tube," quipped Dick, "but we might make a slight impression on that dance floor if we just hold our breaths."

Wilma smiled. One would think that she was a happy, normal girl in her early twenties, without a worry in the world. And, indeed, for this evening, she felt like one. She looked so carefree and so lovely! What more could he ask? Ellie was going to be married. He had written that letter to Joyce (he must post that damned thing right away!). His mother and father were well, and so happy that he was comparatively safe in England. In a day or two he would be able to get moderately fried with Ted. Fried, hell. They'd get drunk! His new job should be fun and not very demanding. And this girl he was following to the bandstand - whom he would follow to the ends of the earth - this girl with the trim figure, the wavy, soft red hair and the beautiful, expressive eyes, was showing signs of, well..... She turned to face him, her arms outstretched, her head thrown back. Dick's smile froze on his face. He reached out for her with a feeling akin to reverence. He laid his cheek against hers. It was as soft and smooth as he knew that it would be. They were unable to move much, and for the most part had to be contented with swaying gently back and forth. Dick's grip gradually tightened. She did not seem to resent this close contact. Her arm had slipped around his neck, and she was humming, very softly.

"Oh Wilma," Dick murmured passionately, as he buried his face in her hair, "you've got to get well and marry me. You've just got to!"

When they finally left the night club, there were only two American sailors and their girls in the room. A taxi that Dick had ordered was waiting for them outside, and they were soon bounding through the darkness towards the Savoy. For the first time during the evening, conversation did not flow freely and Dick knew a moment's discouragement. But not for long. He stretched his hand out along the seat and Wilma's was there. Apparently she was waiting for him to make such a move. He stroked her fingers in silence for the rest of the drive.

Their rooms were situated close to one another, and on the same floor. They stepped off the lift. The corridor was deserted. They reached Dick's door first.

"Nightcap?" he asked uncertainly.

"That would be nice. I'm not the least bit sleepy," she replied. Dick unlocked his door and, with a last look around to ensure that no one was watching, he ushered Wilma into his room. She removed her top coat and gloves and examined herself in the mirror. Then she sat down on the edge of the bed.

Dick removed a flask and two small, aluminum glasses from his haversack. "Scotch," he announced briefly. "O.K.?"

"Wonderful. I've had nothing but gin for weeks." She laughed. "That sounds dreadful. I'm really not an alcoholic, you know. It's just that, whenever I do have a drink, it always turns out to be gin."

"I know exactly how you feel. I never drank gin in my life

until I hit this place." Dick poured the scotch carefully into the glasses. "Under the circumstances, I think water is in order," he said.

"Yes. I guess it wouldn't do to have room service find me in here at this hour of the morning. Honour of the service and all that sort of thing." Wilma laughed again, but it was a breathless sound, almost mirthless.

"No," said Dick. "Not that we could get anything but water anyway." He stood in the centre of the room holding a glass in each hand. "I guess I'd better get some water from the bathroom."

"Yes," Wilma agreed.

"Do you like a little or a lot?"

"A lot, please."

"All right."

He went out cautiously, as if the hotel staff were particularly interested in spying on his nocturnal habits. This great caution was strange, too, he reflected, because it was Ted, and not he, who had always been the diplomatic one. Ted would have jumped out of an eighth storey window rather than compromise a lady. Dick ran the water. At that instant there was a crash. It was like several thousand small explosions rolled into one. Dick started, and water rolled over the edge of one of the glasses. Nothing depressed him more than the sound of those hellish rockets. The majestic reverberations were now being carried away on the cold night air. It must have landed close because the hotel had trembled. Whenever a rocket landed in the city, it meant that life had suddenly been snuffed out somewhere. It gave absolutely no warning of its approach, and the damage was widespread. Dick had

heard that one had recently hit a taxi filled with American soldiers and that there had never been any sign of the bodies. They were blown to bits, in the truest sense of the word.

He returned to his room. No one had seen him. He set down the glasses. But what was this? Wilma was not there. He even called her name as if he expected her to come crawling out from under the bed. "Well!" he exclaimed aloud. "Well!" He sat down and took a sip out of one of the glasses. Did she fear that he was going to harm her? Surely she did not think him as low as that, after she had taken him into her confidence. He took another sip. But no, that couldn't be it. If he knew anything about women, she liked him. Not loved, maybe, but at least liked him well enough to trust him. Ah! Perhaps she had gone to the bathroom. He glanced around. Her coat was gone. So was her purse. Well, he'd wait and see. It hardly seemed likely, but maybe she'd be back. He waited. He sipped. No sign of her. He had been stood up. That was the plain and unadulterated truth. Boy, he knew a lot about women! Yeah. They really went for him! He drained off the first glass. Come to think of it, it was really a hell of an insult. He picked up the second glass and swished the liquid around. The lines of hurt and anger in his face gave way to furrows of concentration and, finally, resolve. He jumped to his feet. He had it! He'd leave. Pay the bills and grab the milk train to Farnborough. He went over to pack up his shaving kit, then turned around and sat down again. That was childish! He would carry on in the morning as if nothing had happened. He wouldn't have to see her next week anyhow. Ted would be around and besides, Wilma had said that she was to be on night duty. He'd just have to work hard at forgetting her. His face softened. But she was such a nice kid and she'd had

such a tough break. Maybe he'd worked too fast. The mere fact of being in a hotel room with a man had brought everything back! Dick was on his feet again. Of course! What a fool he'd been to rush things. He pushed the second glass away from him. The poor kid was mentally upset. Well, he'd make it up to her to-morrow. He'd apologize and then they'd never mention the subject again. And why should she trust him, really? Actually she knew very little about him. Perhaps she thought he was married. He could be. Damned near was, come to think of it. Still, she might have left a note. It didn't help a fellow's self confidence any. And, damn it, she did appear to have enjoyed the evening.

He removed his tunic and hung it in the clothes closet. He returned to the edge of the bed, sat down and stared gloomily at the floor. Perhaps she knew that it was hopeless and had left him before he fell too deeply in love. But of course it was too late. He took off his shoes and let them drop noisily to the floor. Perhaps she had left the hotel. He could go to her room to find out. But..... What was that? Oh, nothing. Yes, it was. There it was again. A light tap at the door. Wilma! Wilma had returned. He bounded to the door and flung it open.

Wilma stood there. He was conscious of the scent of perfume. And she was clad in a negligee.

"Quickly," she whispered. "Let me in. It's a good thing I didn't have far to go." She brushed past a gaping Dick and entered the room. For a few seconds he did not move. Then, whipped into a frenzy of activity, he slammed the door and whirled to face her.

"Wilma! My God! Did anyone see you? You shouldn't have...

"Are you ill?" Even to his own ears, he sounded like a jabbering idiot.

She laughed. In spite of her strained, white face she laughed. She looked exhausted once the laughter had ceased, and her eyes seemed larger than ever. "No one saw me. And I'm not ill. But I had to see you." She turned away from him. "You see, Dick, I realized to-night how much you did love me. And I also realized that I should be in love with you. And I think I am. There's only one thing standing in our way." Her eyes were filled with tears. Dick was too spell-bound to move. "No matter how we may talk about it and rationalize, there's only one practical way to find out whether or not I can ever be a proper wife to you. And you're too fine a person to keep waiting for something that may never materialize." When she turned around, her face was soft and tender, and her eyes were shining. She walked to him and placed her hands on his shoulders. "I want you to make love to me to-night, Dick, real honest-to-goodness love. If we both find it as successful as they say it should be when two people love each other, then I'll be proud and happy to marry you. If it's not, then my dearest, we'll never see each other again and you'll have to forget me. And forgive me too, I'm afraid. Is that fair, darling?"

"Fair? Oh, my God, sweetheart, I can't do this! Not yet! Why can't we wait a while? It's too big a chance for me to take! I might lose you forever." He looked young and uncertain and rather distraught. "Can't you see what this might mean to me? There's no need to rush things on my account. I can wait, darling."

She was in his arms. The warm softness of her body was pressed against him. And her lips were waiting for his. "No, Dick.

We can't wait. I have a chance to go to the continent. I'll be off next week, if I find I can't love you."

Dick tightened his arms around her and kissed her. It was a hard, lingering kiss that was returned. Dick's voice, when he spoke, was husky with emotion; his eyes were filled with a mixture of hope and desire. He had never felt this way before. "Then try, darling. Don't think of anything but us - our future, our happiness, our home and our children. With you beside me, I can amount to something. I swear it." He kissed her again. "Without you, life would be less than nothing." He gathered her gently in his arms.....

Big Ben had struck five. Already there were glimmerings of dawn over London. A rocket exploded near Euston. But elsewhere the city was quiet. In the Savoy Hotel a staff was already at work, cleaning up the lobby. Most of the guests were asleep, but not all. For instance, in room 535 a young woman was lying on her back with her eyes wide open. She wondered how she could ever move her cramped arm without disturbing the head that was resting on it. And for the fiftieth time in the last half hour she gazed in surprise at the sleeping form lying so close to her. She turned on her side and inched towards it, until their bodies fitted together like two pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. She raised her head, and gazed tenderly at the face beneath her. "My lover," she breathed, and kissed him on the temple. He stirred. An arm encircled her neck and he drew her face down to his.

The next day was the happiest of their lives. Wilma slipped out of Dick's room at seven o'clock, after having started to make the effort an hour earlier, and they met for breakfast at eight-thirty. At first they spoke little. Their hearts were too full of joy and thankfulness. They decided to leave early for Maidstone. Lady Fitzsimmons

would have gone to a great deal of trouble, and it was inconceivable that they should let her down. They were able to find an almost vacant coach on the train. The only other occupant was an old lady who promptly fell asleep. So the two - the slender Canadian nurse and the stocky Canadian Army officer - began to make their plans, the wildly exciting plans of two lovers discovering one another.

"I wish I could buy you a ring to-day, sweetheart," Dick said. "But I'll come up to London and buy it to-morrow. I can't wait a whole week while you're on night duty."

"I could probably come up to London with you and we could buy it to-gether."

"To-morrow?"

Wilma laughed. "No, but Wednesday. To-morrow I expect to ask for permission to marry."

Dick squeezed her hand. "Me, too. Isn't it all a miracle? I can't believe it."

"Me neither. If you only knew how depressed I used to feel thinking about my future. My disposition was getting poisonous, too. Remember the time we had a fight because you weren't listening to what I was saying?"

"No. I don't remember anything before last night." He glanced at the old lady. She was asleep. He reached over and kissed Wilma. Several times. "I never thought I could be so happy," he murmured.

"I've never been happy before, really," she said. "So imagine how much more wonderful I feel than you."

"Impossible. No one can feel better than I because no one can be as much in love as I."

And so the time raced by until they reached Maidstone. Dick sighed as the train pulled in to the station. "Gosh this is going to be a wonderful week," he said.

"And to think I'm going to be on night duty!" Wilma groaned. "But I certainly want to meet your friend Ted. You'll have to arrange a bang-up party for three."

"Don't worry, I will. We'll all go up to London Wednesday, buy the ring and celebrate in real style."

They enjoyed their visit with Lady Fitzsimmons, although the restraint imposed by strangers on their new found happiness was rather galling. It was a rainy day but a blazing fire had been prepared to greet them, and a cup of coffee. Conversation flowed easily, even though Dick was rarely able to take his eyes off Wilma and keep his mind on the remainder of the company, which included Lady Fitzsimmons' brother and mother and, just before lunch, the vicar and two friends. It was a very pleasant gathering and the hostess provided some excellent pre-war sherry that had been lying around, she insisted, waiting for just such an occasion as this. Luncheon was excellent. Lady Fitzsimmons must have used up a week's supply of ration coupons. Dick's conscience was only eased because he had brought her some tinned goods, over which the lady was almost pitifully grateful.

Very soon after lunch Dick and Wilma made their excuses and left for the station, but not before it had been arranged that Lady Fitzsimmons and her brother were to be Dick's guests in London the following Wednesday.

"Confidentially," he said, as they were leaving, "Wilma and I are going to be shopping for an engagement ring, and Ted (you've heard

me speak of Ted) is going to be with us. So we'll expect you. The Salted Almond at twelve-thirty." The joy of living was in his face, plain for all to see. "It will be a bang-up celebration," he concluded enthusiastically.

Lady Fitzsimmons assured them that she would be enchanted and thanked Dick yet again for the tinned goods. Wilma was acting as if she were prepared to begin her good-byes all over again, when Dick whisked her off. "This politeness can be carried too far," he told her laughingly. "I said good-bye to everybody at least three times and I was damned if I wanted to make the rounds again. Besides," he added as he took her arm and pulled her nearer to him, "I happen to love you and I haven't been able to tell you so for three and a half hours."

"Let's hurry and see if we can find another empty carriage on the train," she suggested.

"Wizard idea," he agreed and they walked swiftly in the direction of the station. They were puffing and breathless when Dick suddenly stopped. "Where do you think we are going, anyway? Here we are killing ourselves running to the station and the train is not even made up here." They laughed like school children and he kissed her in sight of three startled old ladies, two children and a wire haired fox terrier.

"It's like I been telling you, Hester," they could hear one of the old women saying. "You don't ever know what these 'ere Canadians are going to do next."

And Dick and Wilma burst into further peals of laughter.

The train trip back to Wilma's hospital was a long and tiring one. All the coaches were crowded and stuffy. Wilma slept most of the way to London. Dick remonstrated mildly with her while they were in the

taxi bearing them from Victoria to Waterloo stations, but her excuse was only too logical. "I must sleep sometime," she said archly.

"I'm going to be on duty all night, and, if you'll remember, sir, I didn't get too much sleep last night." His only reply was to kiss her again. Indeed, Dick thought cheerfully, it seems to be my reply to everything.

It was ten o'clock before he had left Wilma at the hospital and returned to Farnborough. He hopped off the bus near the security office. Perhaps there would be some mail for him. For the first time in months his step was jaunty and he was whistling. He unlocked the front door and walked in. The duty corporal was brewing tea in the recreation room and listening to the radio. He seemed surprised to see him.

"Good evening, sir. Have a good week-end?"

"Very nice, thank you, Corporal Bishop."

"You haven't seen Captain Anglin, I take it, sir?"

"No. Should I have?"

"He's very anxious to see you, sir. He's gone down to your quarters."

"Nothing serious, I hope."

"Oh, no sir. On the contrary. I think he has good news for you."

"Well now. I wonder what the hell's up."

"Cup of tea, sir?"

"No thanks. I'm much too curious. I just want to run in and see if there's any mail for me in the office."

There was. Four letters, to be exact. Three - two from his

mother and one from Joyce - had been forwarded from the hospital. He put them carefully into his tunic pocket. He would read them when he reached his room. The fourth one aroused his curiosity. It was in a strange handwriting, and was addressed to him in care of the section. He ripped open the envelope. Perhaps that writing wasn't so strange. It was beginning to ring a faint bell. Ah yes! 'Dear Fenton,' he read. 'I've got to see you. It is a matter of the greatest importance. As a fledgling member of your precious Intelligence Corps, you should be very interested in what I have to tell you. And show you. But I must see you alone, otherwise the whole plan will be ruined. I am in London now, out of that jail at last and you can find me at..... It's close to Paddington. I'll expect you there Monday night at eight o'clock. Don't disappoint me. I'll be going home in a few days and it will be the last favour that I shall ever ask of you. Your friend. Thomas H. Goodall.'

Dick took a deep breath. Why, the whole thing sounded crazy. Was Tom having a change of heart before going home? London wasn't Fred Anglin's area, anyway. He should turn this over to the section which operated there. But then, maybe it had nothing to do with Communism. Maybe it was something personal. No. That didn't fit in. How like that man to be mysterious! Surely, if he went, it would be the last time he'd ever see him. All right. He would visit that address provided that it did not interfere with his meeting Ted. He sighed. What next? He memorized the address and tore the letter into small shreds.

It was not until he was half way to his billet that he forgot about Tom Goodall and remembered how happy he was! Wilma was going to marry him! His mind dwelt blissfully on the week-end just passed. He

couldn't have believed that such happiness - no, such ecstasy - was possible. To hell with Tom. He quickened his pace.

He ran into his boarding house and bounded into his room. Fred was there, and -

"Ted!"

"Dick!" They were wringing each others' hands.

"But I thought you weren't due till to-morrow."

"That's the army for you. One never knows."

"My God, it's good to see you."

"I can't believe it's possible."

They stood back and surveyed one another critically.

"You're looking well, Dick. Much better than I expected."

"You look better than I thought you would, too, but you could sure stand some fattening up."

Fred spoke up. "We're going to start working on him right now. You pour yourself a drink from that bottle, Dick, while I see what I can unearth in the way of food. I'll be back in a minute."

"Well," Ted exclaimed, when they were alone. "Tell me what's new. What gives with this red head?"

Dick busied himself with the bottle and feigned nonchalance. "We're going to be married, Ted. We just made up our minds last night. We're both applying for permission this week."

Ted spluttered into his drink, which splashed over his tunic and tie. He choked and he coughed. "What do you know!" he said, as soon as he had recovered his powers of speech. "And what about Joyce?"

"I've written her a letter. It's in the top drawer there. I told her that our engagement was off, but I didn't know then that Wilma and I were to be married."

"I think that's wonderful. Can I meet the lady to-night?"

"No. She's on night duty. But we're all going up to London on Wednesday for a big party. You're going to help us buy the ring, just like I helped you buy yours."

"Should be quite a day. Fred says you can have all the time off you want till Friday morning. Not knowing about your romantic entanglements, I took the liberty of engaging us a room in London for four days."

"That will be fine, Ted. Wilma's on night duty so I wouldn't be seeing her anyway. And she can come up Wednesday and spend the day with us."

"Swell. The service clubs were all booked up so I reserved a room in a small hotel."

"Fine. I only have one thing on my mind. I promised to see a friend of mine from my hospital days to-morrow night at eight. He gave me a London address. It sounded serious, so I guess I'd better go."

"That's O.K. You can leave me in a comfortable pub and collect me when you're through with him."

Dick laughed and soon Fred had returned. He had found some bread and margarine, and, with the contents of a parcel from home, he had made some tongue sandwiches. Dick and Ted complimented him on his prowess. Apparently encouraged, he dashed out and returned with some fruit cake and a bottle of olives.

"Fill up your glasses," he said gaily. "This is going to be a real party." The others needed no urging. Fred raised his glass. "To you both," he continued, "and may you have a wonderful leave."

Ted sipped his drink thoughtfully. Then he looked at Dick. "So, it's off with the old and on with the new!" he murmured. He took another sip and his face was expressionless. "And who could say which one was the luckier!"

Wedding Night.

The car drove up to the inn with a flourish.

"Now remember," Ted warned. "None of this newlywed stuff. We don't want everyone gawking at us. We must be blasé and nonchalant."

"Quite, dear," Margaret answered.

A bellboy was standing at the door of the car.

"Ah," said Ted. "Our luggage is in the back, son. Mr. and Mrs. Edward Cummings. We have reservations."

"Yes sir," said the boy, and ran around to the trunk.

"You and your nonchalance," scoffed Margaret, as she alighted. "You announced us as though we were the Duke and Duchess of Windsor."

"And why not? We're pretty important people - to us!"

The boy came around from the back of the car, grinning broadly. He disappeared inside the inn with two suitcases.

"Well, what do you suppose was the reason for the hilarity?" Ted asked. Margaret walked around to the back, and then returned, her eyes twinkling merrily. She whisked a large piece of cardboard from behind her back. 'Beware of the driver! Just married!' was printed thereon, in bold type.

"I'll be damned," growled Ted. "They must have put that one on when we were moving away from your house. It wasn't there when we started off. I wonder how we could have missed it when we got out to shake the confetti out of our clothes?" He glanced quickly around. No one was in sight. He grabbed the offensive cardboard and thrust it under the back seat. Just then the bellhop reappeared on the scene, in search of extra bags. "Here." Ted flipped him fifty cents. "Don't you tell

anyone that you saw that sign. Just some friends of ours playing a little joke on us." He smiled engagingly.

"Yes sir," answered the bellboy, who, Ted thought, was struggling to keep a straight face.

Ted parked the car, and then he and Margaret walked up to the reception desk. The clerk smiled at them.

"Mr. and Mrs. Edward Cummings of Montreal," Ted announced.

"Ah, yes sir," the man said briskly, and burst into a frenzy of activity. "Would you mind registering, please?" He seemed to uncover the inkwell, pick up a pen, dip the pen in the well, hand it to Ted, smile reassuringly at Margaret as though apologizing for the fact that there was nothing for her to do, whirl around and grab a key from the letter box, hand it to the bellboy, and rest his hands on the desk beaming fondly upon Ted, all in a split second. Ted started to write. The little man seemed satisfied with his progress and decided to burst into conversation. "You have one of our nicest rooms, Madame," he explained to Margaret. "Second floor, with a marvellous view of the whole countryside. Simply marvellous!" Then he thought of something much more serious and glanced meaningfully at the clock. It was seven forty-five. "Dinner till eight on Saturdays," he said. "Week-days, seven thirty." He smiled benignly once again. "Breakfast, eight to nine thirty," he added, as an afterthought.

Ted had finished registering. He straightened up. Two pieces of confetti floated down from under his collar. Margaret giggled. The desk man looked ecstatic, and wagged his head roguishly. "You couldn't fool me," he said, in the sing-song voice one uses with naughty children. "I knew!" He lowered his voice to a confidential whisper. "Two other newly married couples came this afternoon, and two more

expected to-night." He winked.

Ted was scarlet. "Thank you," he snapped to the man. Now they'd be subjected to that intolerable staring that newlyweds always attract. But still, with four other couples..... He nodded more affably to the desk clerk who was looking positively crushed, and took Margaret's elbow. They followed the bellboy up to their room. It was too dark to see anything from the window save a faint outline of hills, but the room itself was all that the clerk had indicated. It was a bed-sitting room, really, and boasted a desk, two bureaus, two bed tables and two easy chairs, besides a large double bed. All the furnishings were a shiny red maple. Or at least they looked like maple to Ted. At any rate everything looked new, even the bright, ~~print~~ *chintz* curtains on the window. The bellboy deposited his load, switched on a standing lamp in the corner, and threw open the bathroom door.

"Will there be anything else, sir?" He still appeared to be smothering a grin with difficulty, and Ted found it very disconcerting.

"No, thank you." He tossed him an extra quarter, and the boy withdrew.

Margaret was examining the cupboard space and hanging up her coat. "This is a darling room, Ted. I know I shall hate to leave it, even for New York." She busied herself next with her own suitcase.

"Yeah," Ted assented absently. "It looks swell. That damned little bellhop. He'll probably keep snickering at us all the time we're here."

"I shouldn't worry about it, dear." She was darting in and out of the cupboard. Suddenly she stopped what she was doing and grabbed up her purse. "I almost forgot. We have just five minutes to get

into the dining room." She disappeared into the bathroom, blowing him a kiss as she closed the door.

The dinner was delicious, but neither Ted nor Margaret ate enough to realize it. Ted was hoping that they might have some champagne with the meal, but there was none in the house. The conversation, however, was animated, and they both chatted about the wedding. A quick survey of the large room had failed to uncover a familiar face, so they relaxed. They laughed over such things as the hat worn by Mrs. Clarke, and the amazingly cheerful countenance of Margaret's Uncle George. Margaret reviewed the salient features of Stephen Savage's speech, as Ted had admitted that he had been too nervous to catch much of it. Then Margaret decided that it might be fun if each of them went over their day and explained how the different situations affected them. She claimed, for instance, that she underwent a mental blackout when she had walked down the aisle with her father. But once she had joined Ted at the altar, she said, she began to enjoy herself immensely. "In fact," she concluded with a smile, "I really loved it all. It couldn't have been nicer. This whole day had been beyond my wildest expectations."

"Mine too," Ted agreed.

"Tell me about your day," she urged.

He did. The dessert was on the table, and he told about his walk, and something of his visit to the church and his chat with Stephen Savage. Over coffee, he told her of his nervousness when they reached the church for the ceremony. He ordered a liqueur, and carried on with his views concerning the various speeches. Margaret was surprised. She had never known him to hold forth for so long on any subject. She was usually the one who rattled on at great length about everything under the sun. She suddenly realized that they were all alone in the dining

room and that their waitress was ey^e_{ing} them with open hostility. She hated to interrupt him because of the annoyance of someone she did not even know, so she let him finish. As soon as she could break in without appearing to cut him short, she said: "Darling, I think we're the last ones in the dining room."

"Oh my God, so we are!" He grabbed up their cigarettes and they left. Ted apologized to the waitress.

"I understand," she said, but she looked sullen.

"Jesus Murphy," Ted exclaimed. "Is everyone psychic around here? Or are our neon signs showing?"

They wandered out into the lounge, hand in hand. It was crowded, mostly with middle aged people intent on bridge games or jig saw puzzles. Some were merely chatting and a few, evidently with magnificent powers of concentration, were reading. The room was brightly lighted and Ted felt that they were being discreetly studied by a dozen pair of eyes. He looked around for a place where they might sit, preferably in some dark corner. Suddenly his hand squeezed hers.

"Ouch!"

"Honey, I just thought of something awful." He dragged her over to the reception desk. The same little man was on duty. His watery, blue eyes gleamed happily, and even his meagre, mouse-coloured moustache seemed to take on new vigour at their approach. He bowed slightly.

"Everything is satisfactory?" He was kindly and fatherly now. He must adapt his mood to fit every guest.

"Yes. By the way," said Ted, as he grabbed the register, "I forgot to do something here."

"I took the liberty of adding Mrs. Cummings' name myself,

sir." He was forgiving, albeit a trifle condescending. "It's a common error sir - at first."

Ted thought that if he ever saw that coy smile again, he'd let the guy have it, right in the teeth. "I see," he growled. "Thank you." He moved away.

"Oh Ted!" Margaret said. "Now the poor little man looks sad again."

"Poor little man nothing. He's a....."

"Tut tut, darling. Let's forget the little man and go exploring."

They soon found the bar. An orchestra was playing and several people were dancing. At least the boys had hold of the girls' hands and were tossing their partners around with nonchalant abandon. Margaret and Ted selected a small table in a corner and sat down. They ordered drinks. But the conversation did not flow as freely as before. Nothing, it seemed, had ever happened before they were married. And it became more and more difficult to talk of the rest of the honeymoon. At any rate, everything was planned, and there was nothing to discuss.

"Gosh it will be wonderful to sleep in to-morrow," Ted remarked.

"Yes, won't it?" Margaret agreed, and blushed. Why, she did not know.

"I know a smashing place to go for a walk," Ted went on.

"Oh, that will be nice. I love long walks in the fall."

That was inane. Of course Ted knew that she loved long walks in the fall.

After that attempt, they were silent. Margaret snuggled close beside him and they watched the antics of the other guests, in fascination. Their small table was the only quiet spot in the room. The place

resembled a madhouse. They did not attempt to brave the dance floor. They were content to sit and relax. But soon their drinks were finished. Ted shivered. Margaret slipped her hand in his and, with one accord, they rose and left. They walked through the lobby to the stairs. The huge room was still crowded but no one paid any attention to them. At least, not openly. Ted and Margaret both happened to glance at the large, round clock over the mantel. Five minutes to ten.

He put his arm around her waist and chuckled. "Well, never mind honey," he said. "We're at least fooling them in one way. They think we're in New York."

"You know something, darling?" she asked him. "I'm glad we waited. And I wouldn't care where we were. Everything's all right, just as long as you're here beside me." She reached up and kissed him on the cheek and they continued up the stairs to-gether.....

Margaret and Ted were actually foremost in the thoughts of a great many people that night. Bud Percival, for instance. In the five-roomed bachelor apartment that he shared with a college friend, Martin Barrington, Bud paced restlessly up and down the living room. Martin, who knew most of Bud's professional secrets and who was a chartered accountant in one of Montreal's leading firms, had tried everything he could think of to placate the earnest, young doctor. Perhaps he'd like to go out on a party? No? Well, it was a mild night - how about shooting off some golf balls at a driving range? A drink, perhaps? A game of cribbage? Several drinks? They could ask in some of the gang and burn up the joint! Or go out on ambulance calls and find someone who was in need of medical attention. Anything! Murder! Arson! Rape! "Why," he exclaimed, as he poured himself a drink, "we haven't sat around looking at one another on a Saturday night for ten years."

"I'm sorry, Marty. I'm not up to much to-night. You go ahead and do something."

"Oh no. What's a party, anyway? Just a lot of fools acting more foolishly than they usually do." He stretched out on the sofa and took a long sip of his drink. "Besides, we're on the third floor, and you could do a lot of harm to that concrete wall if you were to bounce your head off it."

"But I failed, Marty. Of course, Fenton failed too, but I'm close to the lad's own age and should have been able to do something. His marriage is tragic and that girl is going to be twice as badly hurt as she would otherwise have been."

"Now look, Bud, if there's anything on which you're not qualified to speak, it's the subject of marriage. Let the poor souls be happy while they can. Besides, why think about them now? I'll bet they're not thinking about you!"

"I can see so clearly how it will end out and it's not pleasant, Marty. His legs will start to swell, and he'll get dizzy spells and find that he's always short of breath. And then one day soon, bang! He'll be put to bed and he'll never get up. It's not a pretty picture, Marty, and I can see it all. And two nice, young people's lives will go up in smoke."

Martin was on his feet and his voice was stern. "Bud Percival, what kind of a doctor will you make if you let everyone's personal life get mixed up with your own? You'll break down within a year. This won't be the last of your friends whom you'll have to watch die with some lingering disease. You did everything you could for Ted Cummings, and apparently neither you nor Dr. Fenton nor any power on earth could have prevented him from marrying this girl. So come on, now. Snap out

of it!" He slapped him heartily on the back. "We're going out. The Mitchells are having a house warming and you and I will attend it if I have to drag you there by the few strands of hair you have left. You can make a start by finishing my drink. I made it strong enough for both of us.".....

The Fentons and Ellen had dinner in a neighborhood restaurant, and were sitting quietly in their living room. Meredith had been worried about the effect of the wedding on Marion, but she seemed to have taken it in her stride. At least twenty times she had said how much Dick would have enjoyed the day. They reviewed the highlights time and again.

The lights were all off in the room and they were seated around the glowing embers of a fire.

"I think you and I should have been spending the evening packing, Ellie," Marion said, smiling gently at her daughter, "instead of sitting around here raving about Ted and Margaret."

"It will keep till the morning, Mother. You know, I think these quiet chats with you and Dad are what I've missed more than anything else, living in Vancouver. If only you could drop in and see us occasionally."

Meredith stroked his daughter's hair, and smiled. "I think you two had better go up and get some sleep."

"Aren't you coming?"

"In a minute, my dear. Just being able to relax here with nothing on my mind is a wonderful luxury for me. It will seem hard as the deuce to start in again on Monday morning."

"Don't be long, dear."

"No. I won't. I'll see you both in a couple of minutes."

He watched his wife and daughter leave the room, arm in arm. For a while he gazed fondly after them and then his thoughts must have changed, for his eyes became sad and troubled. He leaned forward in his chair, clasped his hands between his knees, and stared contemplatively at the fire. Minutes passed. The last of the logs was slowly crumbling into ashes, but still Meredith did not move. No longer were there any flames to dance before his eyes. The room was in darkness. Nor was there any heat. Marion called from upstairs and Meredith roused himself. Slowly he pushed the chair back into its proper position in front of the radiator. But he could not seem to tear his eyes away from the fireplace. An isolated piece of cellophane cigarette wrapping caught fire. It hissed and flickered and flamed and was no more. Only a few of the ashes were glowing as Meredith adjusted the fire screen.

"Dying embers," he murmured. "How appropriate. How terribly appropriate." He turned and walked slowly out of the room. He was a stooped, old man.....

Stephen Savage had retired early, as he always did on a Saturday night, in order to be fresh for his rigorous Sunday duties. Usually, as he lay in bed, he ran over the outline of his sermon. But to-night was different. He was troubled, and he did not know why. Yes he did too. It had to do with Ted's wedding. Perhaps he should have insisted on knowing the boy's problem before he married him to this girl. But that was silly. They were both wonderful people. Stephen rearranged his pillows and closed his eyes determinedly. But it was no use. Ted's troubled face stood between him and sleep. Now, why? It was most certainly a love match, and where there was true love there was seldom much to worry about, at least at their age. Anyway, they were

probably deliriously happy now! He blushed at the daring of his own thoughts. But he did not envy them their happiness. His was a full, rich life. Being married would probably only be a distraction. He thrashed around in the bed, searching for a cool corner. He planned a list of the parishioners whom he would visit during the week to come. He delivered a prayer for poor old Mr. Staples, seriously ill after an intestinal operation. His mind refused to cease its feverish activity, and it was late when he fell asleep. The last thing he could remember was seeing Margaret and Ted standing solemnly before him at the altar...

The young members of the bridal party and a few of their friends had carried on to attend a dinner dance at the Normandie Roof. Everyone was in the finest of spirits and the evening proved so successful that they all decided to remain on for the supper dance. Bill was feeling extremely well pleased with life in general, and himself in particular. Had he not been a most efficient best man? Everyone had complimented him on a job well done, and praise, and most especially praise from Ted Cummings, meant a great deal to Bill. He had thoroughly enjoyed the whole day. True, he had felt a little nervous about every-

thing at first, but he had soon gained self confidence. His speech at the reception - the first formal speech he had ever made - had gone over with a bang. Everyone had laughed in just the right places and he had been applauded as roundly as had Mr. Savage. And now he was at a night club! He hadn't been out dancing in years. And he was doing all right, too. No fancy steps, mind you, but he could hold his own. And Joyce! He was really making progress there. A fellow could go a long way if he had a girl like that. And he could enjoy doing things for her now that he had a good job. And Bill loved his job. Furthermore, the agency seemed pleased with Bill. His hours were to his liking and, all

in all, things were looking up. And for all the improvements in his life he had to thank Ted. His heart swelled with gratitude. It was through Ted's efforts and faith in Bill's ability that he now held down such a wonderful job, and it was through Ted and Margaret that he was now dancing with Joyce. He held her a little closer. She raised her head from around the region of his chest and he winked down at her.

"It's been a wonderful day," he said. The dance floor was very crowded, and most of the dancers were doing little more than moving two inches to the right, then two inches to the left, then two inches to the right..... Very monotonous, but it could be very pleasant if you enjoyed holding the girl you were with.

"Yes," she agreed.

She looked lovely, he thought. She was fast becoming all he had ever dreamed of in a girl. "Gee, I'm crazy about you, Joyce."

"Why, Bill!" She seemed surprised, and anxious to change the subject. "I wonder how Ted and Margaret are getting along." She was blushing, and she lowered her eyes.

"Oh! I guess they're doing all right," he said gruffly.

They finished out the remainder of the dance in silence.....

Elsbeth and her husband had entertained the Thomases at dinner. It had not been too successful because all four were exhausted. Mrs. Thomas was a large, raw-boned woman with grey hair, a zest for living and a will of her own. Mr. Thomas was also large and also had a zest for living, but he was quite content to sit back and let his wife do the talking. Usually, when the four met, the men were merely able to squeeze in a 'hullo' and 'good-bye'. But to-night, ^{during dinner,} neither ^{had} woman ^{men} talked much and they ^{men} found that they actually had several common interests. They began to like each other.

Their wives looked haggard. Mrs. Thomas was worried, but it seemed to imply lack of confidence in Ted to say so. Not that she had anything to worry about, really, but she was imagining all kinds of accidents on lonely stretches of the New York state highways. She was rather upset that Margaret had left no forwarding address. Mrs. Thomas had no idea where the two young people were going to spend the night, but she hoped to have a telegram from them. As the evening wore on, her worries for her daughter were of quite a different sort. But there was nothing she could do about that. Elspeth, too, though happy enough about the marriage, was worrying. Ted was looking a little better, but still he was not himself. He was so thin! Maybe this holiday would fatten him up. But New York! Who could get fat spending two weeks rushing around New York? She had managed to rid herself of her previous feeling of dread, but she was unable to feel cheerful even though she and Mrs. Thomas gossiped at great length about the dress and the private life of every woman at the reception. For Elspeth was not only worried about her son; she became alarmed whenever she noticed her husband. He looked dreadfully old and tired. Then she realized with a shock that he was seventy-three. He was an old man who was about to retire from his business.

Yet sporadic as the conversation was at dinner and over coffee and liqueurs in the lounge of Mr. Cummings' club, Elspeth was content to delay her return home as long as possible. How dreary it would be, and how lonely! How awful to spend her remaining years with a man who was not only old but a completely indifferent stranger! Of course, she would not be much troubled with him. He spent nearly all of his time playing bridge in this club. But that only made her situation the lonelier. She must start to travel. Anything but being alone in

that house day after day.

With a start she realized that Mrs. Thomas was making ready to depart, and that Mr. Thomas and her husband were already leaving the lounge for the men's room.

"It was such a lovely idea of yours, Mrs. Cummings. It's helped to pass the evening so nicely. And I won't deny that I have been dreading to-night. Not that there is anything to worry about, you understand, but it's just..... well, you know."

"Very well indeed," Elspeth replied. "What time do you think they will make New York to-morrow?"

"Not until evening, I shouldn't think. I doubt if they've driven very far to-night."

"I do hope there's some message from them at home."

"Oh, I do too. But I'm really not expecting anything. I mean, I won't be worried if I don't hear from them for a day or two."

And so they attempted to console themselves until at last Mr. Cummings was driving Elspeth home. She was numb with mental and physical fatigue, and a paralyzing sense of depression. When they reached their house, she ran quickly up the front steps. She did not know that she was capable of such energy. She looked all around, but there was no sign of a message anywhere. Of course there wouldn't be. A wire would be phoned to them, not slipped underneath the door.

She could hear her husband putting the car away in the garage. She threw off her coat and hat and walked, without thinking, into Ted's room. It was in a state of chaotic disorder. The bed had not been made, and Elspeth was sure that the imprint of her son's head was still faintly discernible on his pillow. A blazer that he had decided to leave

behind at the last minute was hanging over the back of a chair. She ran her fingers over it lovingly. Soiled clothes were dotted all over the floor. There, on the bureau, was the old pair of military hair brushes that she had given him - oh! years ago. She studied the two pictures of him that were on the wall. One was taken when he was a fat, white haired little tike of two years; the other was taken in uniform. Elspeth's eyes were blinded by tears. Automatically she straightened up the books on his dressing table. She resisted a temptation to throw herself across the bed. Instead she walked slowly around it to the door. With her hand on the light switch she turned to sweep the room with her eyes in one more loving glance. She choked back a sob, extinguished the light and wheeled around. She let out a startled gasp. A man was in her way. But it was only her husband. She brushed the tears quickly from her eyes. He had never seen her cry.

"It can't be that bad, my dear. Ted's gone, but he's happy and we'll soon be seeing lots of him again." He took her gently by the arm. "I think it's time that you and I went on a little trip. I'll make arrangements to-morrow and we'll head down to Virginia some place. Nothing to keep us at home now, eh?"

"No Ben, you're right," she said. She was both surprised and pleased. Her voice was steady and there was no hint of tears. "There's nothing to keep us at home now, and I should love to go to Virginia."

Slowly but surely Saturday, September the twenty-seventh eased into Sunday, September the twenty-eightth. The temperature dropped steadily, and clouds scudded swiftly across the face of the sky. For some, like Elspeth Cummings and Mrs. Thomas, it was an unsettled night of turning and tossing. For Stephen Savage, it was a dream-filled night

of fitful sleeping, and when he awakened, a few minutes before the dawn, the glowing face of Margaret and the worried face of Ted were the first images to fill the screen of his consciousness. Aided and abetted by Martin Barrington and several guests at a housewarming, Bud Percival soon drank himself into a state of blissful stupor. It was the first time he had been drunk since VJ night. When Meredith Fenton awoke, pale and haggard, late Sunday morning, the ashtray beside his bed was filled to overflowing with cigarette butts. And, in a parked car on a dead-end street, a short, pert looking girl named Joyce Parsons was excitingly responsive to the rather awkward advances of a tall, shy young man who knew little of the ways of women.

In a hotel room, as the first streaks of dawn crept over the Laurentian mountains, a boy and a girl were locked in each other's arms. The boy stirred.

"Happy, honey?" he asked softly.

"Oh my darling," she breathed. "I wouldn't have believed it possible."

Her rapturous outpourings were only silenced by the furious yet gently exploring pressure of his lips on hers.

The Rendez-vous .

They were sitting comfortably in an attractive bar near Regent Street. It was a small, private club and Dick and Ted had been induced to join it by a brother officer soon after their arrival in England. The members were all very friendly and it was a congenial spot in which to while away an idle hour.

Dick looked at his watch. Seven-fifteen.

"Have another snort and relax," Ted suggested.

"You just see that there's a little something left for me when I get back," Dick said. "I shouldn't be any later than nine."

Ted was aggrieved. "This is certainly one hell of a mysterious do. Damn it, we could have gone to a show or even down to Brighton to see the sights, and what do you pull? You chase off mysteriously as if your life depended on it."

Dick drained his glass and laughed. "It's nothing mysterious, and I'll tell you all about it later. Meanwhile you'll be as happy as a lark sitting here pushing them back. Besides John will be around in a few minutes." Dick got to his feet, gathered up his belongings and slapped his friend on the back. "Gee, it's good to have you around again, you old crab."

He left the building and stood uncertainly by the front door. Would he go by taxi, or try the tube? He decided on the tube. He had plenty of time to spare and, besides, he could see an entrance to a tube station up the street.

"Hi," sang out a voice from beside him. "I hardly knew you in that civilian get-up."

"Hullo, John, Nice to see you." John Foxe was an officer from his old unit. He had come back from the continent on leave with Ted, and had arranged to meet him here tonight for a drink or two. Dick and John

shook hands. Dick always felt a little uncomfortable meeting any of the old gang now that he was out of things and stationed in England. He looked down at his sports coat and grey flannels. "I thought it might be nice to get out of uniform for a change," he explained. "As a matter of fact, I just found out that I was allowed to wear them."

"I wish I could find mine," John said, "but I don't know where the devil they'd be." Then he noticed that Dick was heading away from the club. "Hey, why are you chasing off? I thought we were all going to get loaded."

"I won't be much more than an hour. This isn't a pleasure trip. It's sort of business."

"Sounds dull. Ted inside?"

"Yeah. Very anxious for some company. Say John, you were kicking around London for quite a while. How long does it take to get to Paddington by tube? Is it complicated?"

"Oh God, Dick, it's been so long I can't remember. Not that I ever knew that district well anyhow."

"Well, there's only one way to find out. See you later!"

"Don't be long." John Foxe ran up the stairs of the building and through a door marked 'Regency Club. Members Only.' The room was small and he was able to pick Ted out immediately despite the haze and the crowd. Ted waved and rose to his feet. John started to check his coat. Then it happened. There was an ear-splitting explosion, followed by the tinkling of glass, and several thundering reverberations trailing off in the distance. The building shook and trembled. It seemed to rock for a while and then slowly to settle back on its foundations. The chandelier in the lounge smashed itself in its weird crash against the ceiling. There were screams and groans and calls for help from all corners of the room. Every guest had been thrown to the floor. Bits and pieces

of glass were everywhere. The curtains swung crazily in and out of the gaping windows. There was a moment of pregnant silence. Then the noises continued, and in ever-increasing volume. It was dusky but not yet dark. Ted was pitched over a table and some chairs, and he skidded a few feet along the floor on his stomach. He was surrounded by fragments of glass and wood and plaster. A woman picked herself up dazedly from where she had been lying across his legs. The chandelier crashed to the floor. Someone screamed. The bartender was groaning. The ^{bar} itself was demolished. A few people were on their feet by now. One man announced that he was a doctor and began running around to examine all those who were still stretched out on the floor. Gradually the noises from the outside began to filter through the open windows. It sounded as if one half of London were shouting, and running madly up and down the street.

Gingerly Ted bestirred himself. He was stiff and sore but no bones appeared to be broken. He ran his fingers over his face. Blood! In nine months of action on the continent he hadn't so much as cut his finger, and on the second night of his leave in London he was damned near killed. He put his handkerchief to his head. It didn't seem to be anything serious. Above the reigning pandemonium he heard a groan - a new groan. My God! John! Ted felt dizzy when he stood up, so he crawled into the cloakroom on his hands and knees. There, under at least two dozen overcoats, lay John and the check girl. Both had sustained bumps on the head and both were now regaining consciousness.

"Coo!" the girl ejaculated. It seemed to Ted somewhat of an understatement. She rubbed her eyes and shook her head. "I wonder if the Missus is all right," she muttered, as if this were all a routine occurrence. She recovered rapidly and ran out into the lounge.

John sat up. He felt the egg-like lump on his temple and smiled ruefully. "I" thing^k I preferred it on the continent," he said.

They helped each other to their feet. Everyone was milling about, and no one in the room seemed to be seriously injured. Already there was a small knot of people looking out the window on the scene of tragedy which prevailed up the street. Crash followed crash as many of the walls around them crumbled to the earth. One of the buildings had caught fire. Ted could smell the acrid smoke, and the noise and crackle of the flames were added to the general hubbub^e.

Ted had a sudden blood-chilling thought. He grabbed John by the arm. "I wonder where Dick is," he said.

John was still rubbing his temple. "I saw him at the door and he was heading for the tube station."

"We'd better have a look for him."

They ran down the flight of stairs to the street and pushed their way through the crowd. Smoke and dust had cut the visibility to nil and a fog was slowly settling in. Several ambulances were arriving on the scene. Explosions like this were an old story in London. The machinery for handling fires and casualties and dangerously weakened buildings was always geared for prompt and efficient action.

Right now a crowd was surging up the street towards the entrance to the tube. Ted grabbed the man next to him by his coat. "Where did it land?" he roared in his ear.

"I hear it caught the entrance to the tube. Pretty bad. They expect a good many casualties."

"Oh no," breathed Ted.

John's usually ruddy complexion paled, and he eyed his companion in alarm. "By my calculation," he hollered, "Dick would have just had time to make that entrance. Of course," he added doubtfully, "he could have changed his mind and hailed a cab or a bus."

Ted was pushing his way through the crowds with a desperation born of an evergrowing panic. Dick would be all right though. He probably had time to get right down the stairs into the shelter of the platform. Perhaps he had even been able to hop a train right away. As they drew nearer to the scene of the tragedy, they became conscious of a chorus of wailing and sobbing. 'Bobbies' were trying to clear the streets. They were warning of falling walls, of the fire that threatened to spread. They were roping off a large part of the blasted area. Ted tried to climb under the rope, and was stopped by a gruff "Here! Here!"

"Maybe I can do something, officer," he said. "And I want to check up on my friend. I have reason to believe that he was near the tube entrance at the time of the crash."

The bobby looked grave. "Entering the tube, you say?" He glanced in that direction. The whole area was completely demolished. People were digging in the ruins. "I don't wish to alarm you, young fellow, but according to eye witness accounts there were anywhere from four to nine people at the entrance to the station when that thing struck. They're blown so to bits that it's doubtful if we'll even find a limb. There'll be a good many casualties out of this devil!"

Ted was holding on so tightly to the rope that the palm of his hand was raw. He swayed slightly. John stepped up beside him.

"Say!" the bobby continued. "You should have that cut on your head attended to. There's a dressing station over there."

"It's not the cut," Ted muttered between clenched teeth, although a rivulet of blood was coursing down his cheek and dripping off his chin. He brushed past the policeman and made his way towards the pile of rubble. He held back for a moment in dread and then he and John offered

their services to a man in some sort of uniform who seemed to be in charge. The man gave them some tools and they began to dig. It was almost pitch dark now and the fog was making great headway. It muffled most of the sounds and almost overpowered the bright flares that had been placed around the area to aid the rescuers and other workers.

Ted worked for an hour, steadily, ceaselessly, relentlessly. He was different from these others. They were just digging for strangers, really. No one would be likely to know who was entering the tube at that moment and besides, no information was ever given out on either the wireless or in the press about rocket bomb activity. So, in this case, the next of kin of the casualties might never know the true facts, for apparently those around the entrance had been literally blown into nothingness. A few scattered limbs had been found but that was all. There were no possible means of identification.

Ted mopped his brow. "It's no use," he said wearily to John, who was still toiling beside him. "He's dead." The fog was very thick now yet he could distinguish hundreds of people ^{wandering} ~~standing~~ around, both within and without the cordon. Only one ambulance remained, and the fire seemed to have been conquered. A deathly stillness, broken only by the sound of a hushed voice or the clink of pick on concrete, was gradually settling over a scene that was utterly depressing and desolate.

John laid aside a shovel that he had been using. "Let's go back to the bar," he said gently. "It's just possible that Dick might be safe and return there to look for you."

Ted was rendered dumb with grief. "This is worse than anything yet," he whispered through stiff lips, "worse than I thought anything could possibly be." John was holding his arm and leading him, stumbling and groping through the darkness, in the general direction of their club.

But when they arrived at the building they found that no one was allowed to enter. It had been condemned as unsafe. And of Dick there was no sign.....

Dick had not headed for the tube. No sooner had John disappeared inside the club than a taxi pulled up and discharged a passenger. "Oh nuts," murmured Dick and hopped in. He gave his address and settled back. The driver shot off, away from the ill-fated tube station, and turned a corner.

"We're in for a bad fog," he ventured.

"Looks like it," Dick agreed.

It was then that the rocket struck and the earth shook. The people on the sidewalks paused - looked grave or startled or frightened or all three - and then continued sadly on their way.

The driver whistled. "That was a close one, mate," he said.

Dick was worried. He craned his neck out of the car window. The building that housed his club still was standing, at any rate. "You don't think that rocket would have come down right where you picked me up?" he asked.

"Naw," said the driver. "It was nearer Piccadilly way."

Dick tapped his foot reflectively. "I wonder if I should go back," he muttered. But the taxi was bounding along, darting neatly in and out of the traffic, so he decided to go ahead and put this ordeal behind him as quickly as possible. He could phone the club when he reached Tom's address.

Tom! What on earth would he have on his mind? He must be on leave prior to being sent home. The closer they drew to Paddington the more uneasy Dick became. Tom was probably having a change of heart. Maybe he wished to divulge the names of a few of his Communist friends.

That was it! Still..., He couldn't have had that nervous breakdown that Colonel Spottsworth had warned about or he wouldn't be around on leave. At any rate he was certainly lousing up what could have been a most pleasant evening. Dick noticed that the fog was stretching its dank and clammy fingers right inside the cab. He drew his trench coat more tightly around him, and huddled into a corner. By now the cab was crawling along, keeping close to the sidewalk, for traffic was almost at a standstill. Suddenly Dick felt very depressed. The last thing in the world he wanted was to have Tom Goodall talk to him about Communists or Fascists or any other revolutionary movement. Dick felt an overwhelming need for laughter and light and companionship. He leaned forward to tell the driver to turn back, that he was changing his plans. But that wouldn't do. Tom would want to meet ^{him} ~~in~~ somewhere else and it would probably be just as inconvenient.

"Regular pea-souper this is," the driver was saying.

"Would you wait for me and drive me back?" Dick asked him.

"How long will you be?" the man countered.

"I don't know," Dick replied.

"Sorry," ~~he~~ ^{you} said. "I'd like to oblige you, mate, but ^{you} know how it is. The fog's getting worse all the time and I'm anxious to get home. I'm way out of my beat right now."

No more was said for a few minutes. The driving became more and more difficult. At length the driver stopped the cab. "Here's your street, sir," he announced. "It's closed to vehicles because of bomb damage. It's a blind street anyhow."

Dick fumbled with his change and managed to see clearly enough to pay the driver. Then he was standing on the curb and the taxi was drawing away. He sighed, and walked the few steps to the corner of the street. A wartime lamp was shining feebly but its rays were obliterated

by the fog. Dick turned down the side-street. He kept close to the hedge. He would have to walk up to the door of the first house he came to in order to see the street number. He began to shiver, yet it was more from apprehension than cold. What was the matter with him, anyway? He was walking very slowly because he could barely distinguish his own feet. What strange, eerie noises they made on the pavement! Something about this whole situation was familiar. He felt lonely and isolated. This was crazy! He kept groping his way along. The hedge had given way to a stone wall. All of a sudden he stiffened. Of course! That awful nightmare! He could see nothing yet he knew that there would be an air raid shelter at the end of the street, and a church steeple in the distance. Then he laughed in his relief. ^{9:14} ~~It~~ was only that annoying nightmare again, ² ~~he'd~~ wake himself up. But no! This time he was awake. Well, what was there to be afraid of, anyway? A little fog? A strange street? He snorted in self-derision, and moved along more quickly. He soon reached a path. He was looking for number 36. He walked up the path, and up the front stairs of a house. Number 22. The house appeared to have been badly damaged. Many of the windows held jagged, shattered frames, and the place was obviously vacant. Dick walked back down the path to the sidewalk, more depressed than ever. He was unable to scoff away a feeling of panic that was threatening to envelop him.

On he stumbled, now able to see a foot or two in front of him, now feeling his way solely by the aid of the stone wall. He forced himself to be calm. Indeed, he knew of no reason why he should be anything else, except for the fantastic similarity to those damned dreams. It was enough to give anyone the creeps. He struggled along and he made his way up the path of another house. Number 30. He was getting close. This house was even more badly smashed up than the preceding one. All

hell must have been bombed out of this street!

He was back on the sidewalk again. By counting the number of paths, he was positive that he could find the right house without any more unnecessary investigation. This wasn't such bad fun really. At least it was exciting and different. He began to feel better and even whistled a little tune. He would get this interview over with quickly and be back at the club with Ted and John in an hour. Then he remembered the explosion. Worrying about the possibility of Ted being injured wrenched his mind from the thought of his forthcoming visit. He must telephone Ted as soon as possible. He moved more slowly. He was nearing his destination now. The next path should be the one. He looked around him. He could see nothing. Then, for a brief moment, the fog lifted. He had a quick glimpse of a row of dull, grey stone houses on each side of the street, and an air raid shelter at the end. Fascinated, he turned his head to where he knew the church steeple would be. Slowly. Reluctantly. And there it was! His pulses were racing. Could he be overwrought? Could it be his imagination? He rubbed his eyes and looked again. Too late! The fog had once more enclosed him and had blotted out his surroundings.

He squared his shoulders and walked up the path as briskly as the night would allow. Tom was a good friend, and he was coming to visit him and help him. Although what the hell the man would be doing in a broken-down old house like this was beyond all understanding. He stood at the front door and peered at the number. He had to trace the raised silver lettering with his finger. Yes! Number 36 it was. He finally discovered the doorbell and pushed it. A hollow clanging reverberated through the house. He withdrew his finger. Silence. He ran his hands over the side of the building, and cut his thumb on a jagged piece of glass. He swore softly, sucked at the blood, and pressed the bell again. If there

was no response this time he could go back to Ted and that drink. No one came. There was just that weird jangling. He turned to leave with a sensation of relief. The feeling that someone might be waiting for him somewhere down the path stole over him. His skin prickled. Even seeing Tom might be better than this. He turned back and tried the door handle. It opened, and he found himself standing in a hall. He caught a glimpse of whitewashed walls before he noticed the light switch. Then he closed the outer door. He pushed the switch, but nothing happened. He tried again. Still no light. He decided to try the inner door, and if that were locked his duty was at an end and he could go. The thought of the rocket explosion was preying on his mind. But the inner door did open and he was in a spacious entrance. The windows must have been broken all over the house because the cold and the fog were still pressing down on him. Dick shivered and stood uncertainly, shifting from one foot to the other. How did he ever get involved in a mess like this!

"Fenton?"

The voice seemed to come from somewhere downstairs in the basement. "Yes. Where the hell are you?"

"Here. Downstairs. Just open the door on your right and come down. Watch yourself because some of the steps are loose."

Dick felt somewhat relieved. "O.K." he said

Ted and John were walking down to Canadian Military Headquarters in Trafalgar Square. Running was more like it, for Ted was pushing through the night at a fast clip, with John Foxe at his side. When they reached the headquarters, Ted demanded to speak with the Duty Officer, a rather tired looking young man who obviously resented being disturbed in the midst of his detective story. But he did all he could to help. Ted phoned the hotel, where he and Dick had reserved a room for the night. The proprietor

promised to get in touch with Ted immediately if Dick should come in. Then they contacted Fred, through the Security Section. No, there was no sign of Dick. Fred was very upset, and wanted to come up to London immediately, but Ted persuaded him to stay where he was. It was just possible that Dick might show up down there.

Ted slumped down in his chair. John was watching him in some anxiety. "Come on," he said. "There's nothing more you can do here. Let's go back to your room. You need some rest."

The Duty Officer agreed with John. "I'll keep you posted," he promised.

Big Ben was chiming eleven strokes as Ted and John managed to flag a taxi in Buckingham Palace Road and were borne away towards Ted's hotel. By now the fog had lifted, and the rain was beating down upon the streets of London. But Ted was too stunned to notice.

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Dick walked slowly down the stairs. There was a door half opened at the bottom. He could distinguish a large room dimly lighted by what appeared to be several candles. He was at the foot of the stairs. At the entrance to the room. There was no sign of Tom. He hesitated.

"Tom."

"Around here."

He entered the room. The door slammed shut behind him. He whirled around. Tom was standing there. In his right hand he was clutching a revolver. With his left hand he was locking the door. His eyes were wild and blazing. He had a several day growth of beard. His mouth was twitching and seemed larger than ever in his white face. His shirt was open at the neck and his whole appearance was dishevelled. He slid the key into his pants' pocket and motioned Dick to the back of the

room.

Despite his premonition, Dick could scarcely credit what he saw. "Tom," he gasped. "What are you up to?"

Tom laughed. In fact, every time his lips twitched, he gave vent to a dry, mirthless chuckle. "Keep moving, Fenton," he said harshly. "Keep moving!"

Dick moved slowly backward. The room seemed to have been used for meetings of some kind. There were a number of chairs, ^{arranged} ~~placed~~ in some semblance of rows, and several wooden tables were placed at the front, towards which Dick was being driven. A flimsy curtain stretched across the room at this point. There was a lighted candle on each table. Dick's eyes were constantly searching for a way of escape. He saw none. There were three small windows, but they were at least three feet above the floor and were heavily boarded.

"Goodall," he rapped out in as stern and commanding a tone as he could muster, "if this is a joke, I fail to see its humour. Put down that gun!"

Tom jerked the gun up and down. "Back," he snapped. "Back." He began to laugh.

Dick backed into a table and the candle rocked precariously on its base. He determined to make his stand from there. Tom urged him on no further. Dick leaned back and rested his hands on the edge of the table.

"Fold your hands in front of you," Tom snarled. "And none of your cheap, intelligence tricks."

Dick's eyes were never still, but he was becoming increasingly alarmed. He could see nothing that might be of any help to him. Tom was about six feet away and the flicker of the four candles cast weird

reflections over a face distorted with evil and cunning. He laughed again. Dick shuddered. Surely this couldn't be happening to him!

"You can make out your intelligence report now, Fenton," Tom said suddenly. "It will be your last one, and I can give you lots of material. All the names of the civilian party members who meet here, the Canadian army members, and the plans we have to spread the good word among the troops. We've made a good start, Fenton, don't ever forget that. But we'll do better."

"Tom, you're ill," Dick said quietly. "Let's talk this thing over as friends, and we can reach an understanding." He stirred and moved slightly forward.

Tom was instantly alert and he laughed more harshly than ever. He waved his revolver at Dick. "Aha!" he exclaimed. "You'd like me to give up this revolver! That would put us on an equal basis. That would be convenient, wouldn't it? You're naive, Fenton, just like the rest of the filth and the wealth you represent. But you scheme! Always scheming to keep the other nine-tenths of the world in bondage." He took a step forward. "Why should I give up my gun?" he screamed.

"Because," Dick replied, "Then as you suggest, we'd on an equal footing." Talk, Dick, he told himself desperately. Talk and stall. And he did, for two or three minutes. But he could see no out. He was doomed.

Tom laughed occasionally, but he seemed to be paying no attention. One of the candles sputtered and died. A corner of the curtains had parted slightly and Dick caught sight of several packing cases. Nothing much to help him in there.

"You wonder where we are?" Tom was asking. "Well, this is where we meet once a week. Didn't know that, did you? Well, we had a

wonderful meeting last night. You see, I'm on leave now from a repatriation depot." He laughed. "Or didn't you know that either, Mr. Intelligence Corps?"

"I haven't the faintest idea what you're talking about," Dick told him. He saw that the only thing he could do was try to knock over a table and then jump on Tom while the man's attention was distracted.

Tom explained, to the accompaniment of peals of laughter, how he had come to hate Dick when he had learned that Dick was interested in him as the subject of a report, and not as a friend. It was useless for Dick to try to explain his own side of the story, and Tom never gave him a chance. Tom said that he had managed to slip away from the hospital unnoticed the night that Dick was investigating the Aldershot address. The slip of paper in the book was indeed a trap that Tom had laid. It was the home of the chief of police that Dick had watched, Tom told him mockingly, and as soon as he saw Dick sitting there in the jeep he knew that he had to kill him. But Fred's appearance had prevented him. Then he had thought of this house. What an appropriate place for Dick to die! A secret Communist headquarters where only the leaders met! A deserted bomb-ravaged house on a deserted bomb-ravaged street! More and more Tom's finger began to twitch on the trigger of the revolver. The sinister noise that issued from his throat became less a laugh and more a sob. Dick found it more and more difficult to think clearly. In his wildest dreams he could never have imagined himself as a central figure in such a scene.

"At last, Fenton," Tom said, "I thought I had found a friend. Oh, I knew you were in the Intelligence Corps, but I couldn't believe that you would deliberately spy on me. Still, I had to find out for sure. And I did! I was sorry, too, Fenton. Very sorry. I thought you were different."

"I am different, Tom," Dick insisted desperately. "You should know I'm your friend. Look at all the things I've done for you. Why"

"That's enough!" Tom's voice was a hysterical roar. Then his expression grew calmer. He looked pleased with himself and laughed quietly. "Do you know what I intend to do with you, Fenton?" Another candle sputtered and died. The room was so murky now that Dick had difficulty in seeing Tom's face clearly. "We're going to have a nice fire down here. An accident, of course! I've spread a little gasoline around to help everything along. In this deserted street it won't be noticed for a long time. You won't mind it too much, because you'll be dead. Dead, Fenton. Do you hear me? Dead!" He laughed and moved a little closer to his foe. "Shot through the head! A much better way to die, isn't, Fenton?" He paused. "I must think....There was something else. Ah yes." He was standing next to Dick now and he ran his hand over his body. "That's right, Fenton. Your wallet. Just in case it doesn't burn." He removed it from Dick's sports' coat. "I'm so pleased you wore civies. You'll never be traced. No one will ever know what became of Captain Richard Fenton, spy and sneak." He slapped him viciously across the mouth. Dick could feel a trickle of blood run down the back of his throat.

It was now or never.

Dick shoved back the table with one hand and lunged for the gun. It went off, but he had knocked against Tom's hand, and the bullet had lodged harmlessly in the ceiling. He had thrown Tom on the floor but he fell with him, and Tom had a grip on his throat that was born of mental derangement and desperation. The revolver was out of reach of both. Dick drew up his knee swiftly. He had learned much of the dirty way of fighting in commando training and thanked God for it. Tom grunted and loosed

his grip slightly and Dick drove his fist into his face. The room was growing lighter. The candle on the table had fallen to the floor and had set the curtain ablaze. No doubt the gasoline was helping the flames for already some of the crates were burning. In fact, little spurts of flame were running over the floor and the two men were rapidly being encircled. They rolled over and over, pounding, kneeling, choking, gouging. Tom happened to kick the swaying curtain with his foot. It fell, a raging fury, to the floor. When the men rolled over, it soon enveloped them. The crackle of the flames was growing louder. Most of the wooden chairs were catching. The gasoline was doing its devilish work. Dick's sports' coat was smoking, and Tom's hair was ablaze. Both men were screaming, but were unable to break away either from each other or the flames.

Outside, the fog shrouded the city as completely as ever. A few wisps of smoke were escaping from the boxed-up basement windows of a derelict house on a derelict street, but who was to notice? And the human screams issuing forth through the battered old walls were carried swiftly away until finally they ceased altogether.

The Party.

Ted dried himself down and finished singing the popular song that he had begun in the shower. After all, it was New Year's Eve and he wanted to celebrate. He and Margaret intended to drop in at the Clarkes' for a drink, and then they were going to a party at a badminton club that Margaret and Joyce had both joined. He had not bothered to become a member. Fast action games like badminton and squash were not for him any longer.

He surveyed himself in the mirror. He had looked at his own image more in the past three months than he ever had before. Outwardly he could notice very little change. His face was a little fuller, perhaps, and his hair was greying at the temples. And although the shadows under the eyes were extending farther and farther into the cheeks, no one would have seen much of a difference in the appearance of Ted Cummings since his wedding. That is, no one except Ted Cummings. He turned away from the mirror and, almost against his will, his eyes sought out his ankles. Yes. There was the evidence. Both Bud and Dr. Fenton had warned that one of the symptoms of endocarditis was a swelling around the ankles. And both of Ted's ankles were swollen. Furthermore he had been warned that shortness of breath and dizziness were two other features of the disease. He was now subject to both. Merely to walk up a flight of stairs was tiring. Grimly he pursed his lips. Well, he had had three months of a happiness more complete than he would ever have believed possible. It was fantastic to think that it could end so soon, but there it was. The proof was in his ankles, in his lungs, in his mind. But he was rapidly acquiring skill as an actor, and he would drink to the new year to-night with the optimism of the best of them.

He slipped into his bathrobe. He felt better, but he was singing no more. Another serious thought demanded to be heard, a

thought that had been in the back of his mind ever since he knew that he was going to die. But, under the circumstances, it was a difficult subject to think or talk about and one that he and Margaret had left unmentioned. He was sure that she knew his feelings on the matter, but he must clear the whole thing up, once and for all.

He opened the door leading into the bedroom. She was sitting in front of a mirror, clad in a negligée, removing some curlers from her hair. She was beautiful. It didn't matter what she was doing or how she was dressed - she was beautiful! He walked over and kissed her shoulder. She took time out to caress his cheek.

"You look gorgeous," he murmured.

"Thank you, darling. I love to hear you say it even though I know you're so easy to please." She continued to remove curlers and pat her hair carefully into place. "Just be sure you say nice things about my new dress."

Ted was busying himself putting studs in his dress shirt. "Mag," he said slowly, "there's something you and I haven't discussed but which has been on ^{my} mind lately. Perhaps this isn't the night to speak of it, but.....Well, it's about our having children."

Margaret froze into an awkward position. Her hands were halfway up to her head. "Yes?" she enquired.

"Honey, I'm feeling better than I have for years, but until I can get a clean bill of health from the doctors, there must be no children. It's not that I don't want them. I like kids well enough, but, oh you know what I mean." He regarded her anxiously. "You do understand, don't you?"

Margaret had continued to arrange her coiffure. Her voice, when she spoke, was light and assured. "Perfectly, darling. And you're not to worry. Just you leave everything to me. Now come over here

and tell me what you think of my new hairdo. It's just for you." She cocked her head roguishly. "Like it?"

"Honey, I love it. Did I remember to tell you that you were the most beautiful girl in the world?"

She was smiling happily, but when she held him in her arms her clasp was tighter than usual, and she made sure that he was unable to see her eyes.

It was ten-thirty when they arrived at the Clarkes', and the party was in full swing. There were at least fifty people milling about, a great many of them unknown to both Ted and Margaret. But the Fentons had been invited, as well as the Thomases. Ted's mother and father were in Vancouver, having left the day after Christmas for a month's visit. Ted had done nothing about acquainting them with the facts of his disease. He had made vague plans about breaking the news to them on their return from this trip - indeed, he could delay it no longer for he knew that Elspeth was sure that something was wrong - and had enlisted the services of Stephen Savage and Bud Percival to help him. He would have to speak to Meredith, too.

But he looked like a normal, healthy young man as Mrs. Clarke piloted him and Margaret through the crowd, now introducing them to some of her friends, now asking them some personal question of their married life in a ringing voice that could be heard throughout the house. At last they found themselves next to an improvised bar. Marie clapped each one heartily on the back.

"Just help yourselves, children," she boomed. Her smile was as hearty as her voice. "It was so nice of you to come! I'm afraid it will be very dull for you with so few young people but Joyce and Bill should be along presently, and I want you to feel free to leave whenever

you wish." She winked broadly. "I know young people like to be by themselves on New Year's Eve."

The house was gaily decorated, and ablaze with lights and bright colours. The Christmas tree was blinking cheerily in the corner, and large, red-ribboned bows, sprigs of holly and mistletoe, and bands of Christmas cards strung up above the entrance to the living room added to the festiveness of the occasion. There were the usual cheery 'cocktail party sounds' of ice tinkling in glasses, cocktails being shaken, effusive greetings, hushed 'stag' jokes being delivered in remote corners, the wailing of the departing guest vocally threading her way through the room in an effort to find and thank the hostess, and the background music. Always somebody adds to the din through the medium of a piano or a gramophone or a radio.

Margaret soon wandered off with the president of Ted's firm and a rather mellow middle-aged woman in a startlingly red dress who insisted every few seconds on running her fingers through the sad remnants of his hair. Mr. Patterson seemed to be enjoying the performance but his wife, who was not too far away discussing the problems of domestic help with a group of ladies, seemed not at all pleased. Ted chuckled. He disliked Mrs. Patterson anyway. He was standing alone, sipping his drink. If there was one thing in the world he hated, it was to stand alone at a cocktail party. You felt as if you were the furtive centre of all eyes, and it was difficult to appear as if you might just possibly have a friend left somewhere in the world. Ted assumed a defiantly cheerful expression of nonchalance. Coolly he began an examination of the women's hats. Those weird and wonderful objects amused him for a few moments. He refilled his glass and glanced around. Joyce and Bill had not arrived, and Margaret was deep in conversation with Mr. Patterson. The woman in red had transferr-

ed her affections to Mr. Clarke who was looking happy and bewildered and rather drunk. Ted sighed. He was beginning to feel sorry for himself. What a hell of a way to wind up a year! He sauntered casually over to a table that was laden with nuts and red mints and hors d'oeuvres. It was then that he saw Meredith.

"My, I'm glad to see you, sir," he said, and his voice was warm and affectionate. "You and Mrs. Fenton are the ones I really came here to see." Just then Ted saw his mother-in-law across the front hall in the dining room. He waved and she blew him a kiss. He and Margaret had had dinner with the Tomases, so he did not deem it necessary to go over and talk to her.

Meredith looked pleased. "I'm so glad, my boy. I was hoping you'd be here."

A maid passed by with a tray of cocktail sausages. A group had gathered around a nearby piano and were practising 'Auld Lang Syne' so that they would be ready for midnight. And Ted could spot Marie Clarke advancing on them with that gleam in her eye common to hostesses who feel that certain of their guests are being too quiet and peaceful and, come hell or high water, must be introduced immediately to somebody on the other side of the room. There was a loud scream. The woman in the red dress had encountered an unwary male under the mistletoe, and he was promptly seduced.

As the cocktails and highballs found their mark, and more and more people arrived from previous social engagements, the noise grew greater and greater.

Meredith caught sight of Marie Clarke heading their way and he tapped Ted's arm. "Follow me," he commanded hastily. They battled their way out of the room, nodding to their acquaintances as they did so, and Ted

found himself following Meredith up a flight of stairs.

"I thought the upstairs was for ladies only," Ted remarked in some consternation.

Meredith laughed. "No," he assured him. "Clarke has a small den up here where I'm sure we can be quiet."

Soon they were settled comfortably in a study that was surprisingly masculine to be the retreat of one who looked as little virile as Mr. Clarke. However, there were two comfortable leather chairs which Ted and Meredith immediately put to good use. For a while both men sipped their drinks reflectively, and made an elaborate study of a large print which adorned the wall and which showed three hunters cornering a fox. Each seemed to be awaiting the opportunity to guide the conversation into a delicate channel. Meredith was the first to speak of anything personal.

"You know, Ted, I never fail to think how strange it is that there was no trace of Dick's body." He shook his head. "Maybe it was just as well. Poor lad! He went quickly anyhow."

"Yes," Ted agreed. Even after three years it was still as difficult as ever to speak of this subject to either Marion or Meredith. "He could never have known what struck him."

"What a ghastly night that must have been for you!" It was as if Meredith had thought of Ted's feelings on the matter for the first time. "But all your messages, and most especially your frankness in telling us exactly what the situation was, kept us going somehow. You know, I don't think we ever thanked you enough for all you did."

"I'm afraid I did nothing very much. I only wish it could have been to some avail," Ted apologized. "After all, I've never had another friend like him, and I never will. It's funny, but I often think

of him as being beside me, and giving me advice and help when I need it."

Meredith looked pleased at this tribute. "He thought the sun rose and set on you," he said. He closed his eyes and leaned back in his chair.

Ted swirled the liquid around in his glass. "You know, sir, there's something about Dick that you don't know. He had met a Canadian nurse in England and was about to buy an engagement ring when he when it happened."

Meredith sat bolt upright in his chair. His eyes were incredulous at first, then faintly accusing.

"I know." Ted looked miserable. "I guess I should have told you, but Joyce knew nothing about it and I saw no reason why she should be hurt when it could do nobody any good. Wilma - she was the girl in England - agreed with me, so I kept the letter secret that Dick had written to Joyce, and which I found among his effects. He had told me just the day before that he hadn't posted it because he was waiting to write one to you and he wanted to post them to-gether."

"What was this girl like? Why hasn't she been to see us?"

"I liked her. She was obviously very much in love with Dick and when I told her what had happened, and how he had left me barely five minutes before the rocket landed, she went all to pieces. Then she said she could go on draft to the continent immediately. That seemed like the best solution. A week later, as my leave was ending, I received a short note from her thanking me for coming to see her and intimating that she was off to Holland. She couldn't tell me outright, of course,

because of security regulations. We corresponded now and then but she never volunteered much information about herself. She said that she didn't want Dick's family to know about her because it would be hard on Joyce, and it could make no difference to Dick. I never saw her again. She's married now and living in England. Matter of fact we ~~still~~ write each other occasionally and she ~~still~~ seems interested in how we're all faring."

"Strange," Meredith reflected. "Still, it's not likely she'd be able to come to see us if she's married and settled down over there. But I ~~still~~ can't believe it. I thought that Dick would have been in love with Joyce forever. He certainly acted that way when he was here." His voice grew more decisive. "We won't tell Marion. It would only upset her and she's been so well lately. Joyce doesn't know either?"

"She didn't, until last September. She was acting so stupidly - at least," he added hastily, "I thought she was acting stupidly-that I felt the only way to jog her out of her state and get her to enjoy life was to show her the letter. So I did and after she'd read it, she tore it up. She took it pretty hard."

"I think you were wise, my boy. Joyce is a very vital, young woman and needs to settle down and marry and have a few children. And I think your strategy must have worked. She seems to be out a lot with your friend Bill Donnelly."

"Yes," Ted replied. "I hope they decide to get married. It should do them both good." He paused, then leaned forward in his chair. "There's something else I want to say to you, sir. It's somewhat in the form of an apology and it's a little difficult to put into words."

Meredith butted a cigarette. He seemed to know what was coming. "Yes?"

Ted was on his feet and pacing nervously up and down. "Some things are hard to accept, sir," he began. "And I hated to accept the fact that I was going to die. But I did, and had full intentions of making my plans accordingly. However, when Margaret heard of your verdict, everything was different. She refused to accept it and for a short while she even had me believing that faith could do the trick." He suddenly stopped and his face assumed an expression of guilt. "Oh, but this is rotten of me," he said, "spoiling your New Year's Eve with a conversation like this!"

"Somehow, Ted, one night is much like another to me," Meredith said slowly. "I suppose I would feel differently if Ellen were near me and if Dick were still alive, but the end of a year means nothing to me, except," he added with a wry smile, "that this is one night I'm not apt to be called out. People often need their doctors on New Year's Day, but rarely on New Year's Eve. Furthermore I'm perfectly comfortable and would much rather be up here talking to you than down in that mob dispensing free medical advice to half the guests. Three perfect strangers told me their complaints in the space of about twenty minutes and I'm afraid I found it hard to show patience with them. But you're the closest thing I have to a son, Ted, and I'm always honoured when you bring your problems to me. And it doesn't matter when or what or how."

"Thank you, sir. I'm grateful. Well, anyway, the strain of not actually being certain in my own mind was getting me down. You were away so I phoned Bud Percival and arranged for an electrocardiogram. Then I knew. Fortunately they said I had a few months. I didn't tell

Margaret what I'd learned because I had promised not to have any tests done. But I had to know! You see that, don't you?"

"Of course," Meredith replied gently.

"I was selfish enough to go ahead with the marriage and I must say that I've been happier married to Margaret than I would ever have believed possible. But now I see the handwriting on the wall. The symptoms you and Bud warned about are becoming evident. Look!" He showed Meredith the swelling around his ankles. "And of course I'm tired all the time and any exertion makes me lose my breath." Ted seemed to be begging for some assurance that he knew only too well could not be given.

Meredith turned his head away again and blew his nose. "Does Margaret realize all this?" he asked, when he had succeeded in composing himself.

"I don't think so. But the hardest thing of all lies ahead of me. I have to tell Mother and Dad when they get back from Victoria in three weeks. Will you help me, sir?"

"Of course my boy. I....."

There was a light tap on the door.

Meredith called out a husky "Come in." Ted turned away.

Margaret entered. "Oh," she said. "So this is where you two have hidden! I thought as much." Ted was facing her now, and she looked doubtfully at the two men. Then suspiciously.

"Ted was just telling me about Dick's engagement in England," Meredith explained to her. "It gave me quite a turn."

"I see," Margaret breathed. She appeared contrite. "Oh. I'm sorry. It must have been upsetting for you, Uncle Meredith."

Meredith passed his hand over his forehead. His face was grey. "It's all right," he said softly. "We just won't tell Marion,

that's all." He finished his drink and rose to his feet. They all moved towards the door. "We'll talk about it again, Ted."

"I'm sorry to have brought it up, sir," Ted apologized. "I had always intended telling you at some time or other, and to-night I just got carried away. But I'm afraid I upset you."

Meredith smiled. "Nonsense," he said. "I enjoyed our little chat very much. I would have been thinking of Dick to-night anyway."

The hubbub from below grew louder and louder as they approached the stairs. A greatly augmented group was singing around the piano but above everything else they could hear the voice of Marie Clarke exhorting everyone to fill up glasses in preparation for the new year.

"Say, we must hurry," Meredith said. "There are only five minutes left of 1947. I'll see you later. I must find Marion."

"We should take off for the club, darling," Margaret told Ted. "We paid a lot of money for those tickets!"

"Yes," Ted agreed. "I'm sorry I was so long upstairs. Where are Bill and Joyce?"

"Down here somewhere. They're champing at the bit."

"Well, we'll just toast the new year in and then we'll go. Give me your glass and I'll do a little something for it."

"Just a small one please, dear."

Unfortunately Ted walked under the mistletoe at the same moment as the lady in red. "Darling," she shrieked. She threw her arms around him and kissed him. Ted could do nothing to defend himself.

"Umh!" the woman said appreciatively to all those within screaming distance.

"This one's young and interesting. A virgin, I'll bet. Happy New Year, darling." She kissed him again.

Ted was scarlet. "Excuse me," he muttered as he threaded his way through a grinning crowd. He sought refuge by the bar and the hired steward refilled his glasses. Most of the guests who could still stand were joining hands and forming into a circle. Someone had turned on the radio and the announcer was advising all and sundry that 1947 had sixty.....fifty-eight.....fifty-sixseconds to go. Ted and Margaret battled their way towards each other.

"Happy New Year!" shouted the man on the radio who was broadcasting from Times Square in New York.

"Happy New Year!" shrieked everyone in the room. Favours were tossed happily about and all the guests made an appropriate New Year's Eve noise. All the men dutifully kissed their wives and then looked around for more interesting and diversionary fields to conquer.

Ted deposited his two drinks on a small mahogany table, and gathered Margaret into his arms.

"Oh darling," she whispered into his ear, "thanks for everything. And thanks especially for you!"

Ted could trust himself to say nothing. He kissed her and held her close.

"Break it up! Break it up!" roared a voice from beside them.

Reluctantly they drew apart. Margaret was immediately snatched away by Bill, and Joyce was gazing up at Ted.

"Hey big boy, you should look happy and festive. I'm hanged if you don't remind me of a condemned man. No pun intended," Joyce added hastily.

Ted did his best to smile at her, and he bent down to kiss her on the cheek.

"Oh no you don't," she said. "Not on New Year's Eve!"

She entwined her arms around his neck, pulled his head down on a level with hers and, when she released him, Ted Cummings knew that he had been kissed. "There!" Joyce exclaimed in some satisfaction. "I feel that that was one of my more noteworthy efforts."

Ted laughed, and then he was shaking hands with Bill.

"Come on," Bill cried impatiently. "Let's finish our drinks and get out of here."

"I second the motion," Joyce said gaily. "And I suggest we all go in Bill's car. Ted, you leave yours here and you can come back and reclaim it at the end of the evening."

That was decided upon. While the girls went upstairs for their coats, Bill thought that he might just dash over and 'hoist one for the road'. Ted greeted his 'in-laws' and then went in search of Marion Fenton. He found her, sitting quietly beside Meredith, in a far corner of the room. They both seemed absorbed in their own thoughts, and very much out of place in the midst of the pandemonium that was reigning around them.

Meredith rose and shook his hand, and Ted slid into the vacant chair. Marion put her arm around his neck and held him close. "Thank you, my dear," she said warmly. "We know you came here to-night mainly to be with us and we do appreciate it. I've always said that Dick had so much to live for and that one of the best things in his life would have been his friendship with you." She released him with a pat on the cheek. She had aged a little, perhaps. Her eyes had lost something of their clarity and her skin had acquired a line here and there, but her face was still serenely beautiful. How wonderful that she had so completely recovered from the ravages of her recent illness. Ted could never bring himself to think of it as anything more than an indisposition, such as the grippe.

"Now run along with you," she added, "and have a good time. You know that and you and Margaret are coming in to have dinner with us next Tuesday."

"Wonderful," he said. "I'm looking forward to it."

It was only after Ted had left them that Marion reached into her purse and pulled out a handkerchief. She daubed at her eyes, but the lines of her face were rigidly set in a light smile. Meredith reached over for her hand.

"I know, dear," he murmured consolingly. "I know."

Ted and Margaret and Joyce and Bill were piling into the small car that Bill had just bought. They all laughed as they watched Ted manoeuvre his long legs in an attempt to be comfortable in the back seat. Bill struggled with the starter. It was a cold night and it took two or three minutes for the car to warm up. Then they started off down the hill.

Joyce turned around and smiled. She was radiant.

"We want you two to be the first to know," she said.

"Bill and I have just decided to get married."

The Awakening.

The hospital room was small, and the walls and the ceiling were white. The room contained, in the way of furniture, only a chest of drawers and a chair, and the usual hospital bed. There was one window overlooking a row of nondescript brick houses. The chintz curtains, which provided the room with its only bit of colour, were frayed and torn. There was a small vase on top of the bureau but it held no flower. A screen was pushed haphazardly into one of the corners. At ten o'clock on this March morning, a gentle breeze was blowing the curtains far into the room, which was made bright, almost dazzling, by the sun's rays on the white walls.

A figure was in the bed. It was impossible to see who he was or what he looked like. His face was completely covered with bandages. His hands, also heavily bandaged, lay inert on the thin coverlet. His whole body was motionless. Only ^{by} ~~the~~ examining the hair that cropped up here and there among the bandages, could one tell the sex.

The door slowly opened and two men entered the room on tip-toe. One was of middle age and clad in white, with a stethoscope around his neck. The other was younger and was carrying a sheaf of papers in his hand. The doctor walked over to the bed and felt the patient's pulse. He called to him softly, not once but many times. There was no response. The doctor pursed his lips and shrugged.

"Still unconscious?" the other man asked.

The doctor nodded.

The young man consulted one of the sheets of paper. "Well, let's just run through some of the pertinent details, doctor, if you don't mind. At twelve thirty on Monday morning, a man by the name of Phillip Bates, returning home from work, stumbled over something. It turned out to be the body of a ~~man~~ man who was lying half dead in a field and

suffering from third degree burns that had apparently been incurred several hours earlier. As it was a cold, wet night, the man was also suffering from exposure." The narrator flicked over the sheet. "Bates immediately contacted the police and the man was rushed to this hospital where his condition was considered critical in the extreme. To this moment, two and a half days later, he has not regained consciousness, nor have we one shred of evidence as to his identity." The man stopped, and looked glumly at the doctor. "This is a hell of an assignment to hurl at a man who has just solved a gruesome murder in Brighton," he growled. "Dull as bloody dishwater." His eyes returned to the papers in his hand. "Our unknown was clad simply in a pair of brown shoes, black socks, jockey underwear shorts, white shirt, brown tie and grey, flannel trousers. He wore no coat of any kind and carried no identification. Furthermore every article of his clothing could have been purchased anywhere in England or America or Canada. But the civilian clothes would seem to pinpoint him as an Englishman and the scars on his legs - which you people say have been inflicted recently - would seem to indicate that he had been discharged from the services within the last month. Or perhaps he was on sick leave." The man put the sheets of paper back in the folder and drew closer to the bed. He was resentful and bored, yet curious. "My God, even his own mother wouldn't be able to identify him, all wrapped up like that." He yawned. "Guess we'll just have to wait till he revives. Or will he revive?"

The doctor looked grave. "He has a small chance," he replied, very softly.

The man stretched. "Going to be tough. The nurse tells me he's apt to be blind and all scarred up beyond recognition."

The doctor put his finger to his lips.

"But he's unconscious, isn't he?" asked the other, bending over the bed and peering into the mass of bandages.

"I think so. But sometimes even unconscious people can absorb just what you don't want them to. Let's finish our discussion outside."

"As you wish. Have you anything else to tell me?" The man opened the door and stood back to let the doctor go out ahead of him. "The Inspector's getting rather impatient, and he's very anxious to clear this whole thing up."

"So are we," murmured the doctor as he left the room. "So are we!"

The door was closed.

There was no sound or movement in the room except for the soft swishing of the curtains. The sounds from outside were muffled and indistinct. Then from the bed there came a soft gurgling. The lips, the only visible part of the patient's face, moved slightly, but nothing intelligible was forthcoming. Then there was a further movement, almost imperceptible, in one of the bandaged hands. But the effort proved futile. It was obvious that there was not enough strength in the man's body to accomplish anything.

But though he could neither speak nor move, Dick Fenton could think. Confused at first, he had been able, just before the doctor and the representative from Scotland Yard entered the room, to recall his visit to Tom Goodall. He tried to fit everything together chronologically. There had, of course, been a desperate fight. He could remember that part of the evening vividly, and also the fact that a candle fell from a table and caused a curtain to catch fire. Shortly afterwards he and Tom were enveloped in that flaming piece of cloth and it had been a life and death struggle to escape from it and from the frantic clutches of his enemy. Dick finally succeeded only when he landed a lucky blow that rendered Tom unconscious. At that time Dick was one searing, screaming mass of pain.

He could scarcely see, and breathing was almost an impossibility. He ripped off his trench coat, which had started to burn, and he attempted to smother the flames that were covering Tom's whole body. How could he ever forget that! He decided that his efforts were in vain, because it appeared as if Tom were already dead. This was his funeral pyre. Already Dick could smell the sickening odour of burned flesh, but whether it was his own or Tom's he could not tell. He staggered to his feet. All the crates behind the curtain were blazing now, and the room was indeed a holocaust. Flames were licking their greedy way up the walls. It was suffocatingly hot.

Then Dick's memory grew vague. He remembered struggling with Tom's body in an effort to pull it across the floor to the door. He was sure that, in the process, he must have fainted many times from exhaustion and pain. He made such slow progress that he determined to find out, once and for all, whether or not Tom was alive. He peeled off his own sports coat and tried to blot out the flames around the vicinity of Tom's heart. He reached in with his hand to feel the heart beat. The skin was dry and hot. The odour of singed hair and flesh was by now so strong that Dick grabbed for his nose. He quickly withdrew his hand when the pain in his face caused him to scream. Or had he ever stopped screaming since the middle of his fight with Tom? At any rate, Tom's heart was still. The man was dead. Dick removed the key of the door from Tom's pocket. He tried to keep his eyes averted from the dead man's face but he could not resist one quick glance. The expression was arrogant and was at variance with the look of terror in the eyes. Yet even death and fear had failed to erase the look that had greeted Dick at the door, the look that was wild and savage and infinitely cruel. The fire was increasing in unbearable intensity. Dick remembered that he had been unable to stand up and, after

tossing the remnants of his charred sports coat over Tom's face, he had been forced to crawl across the room on his hands and knees. When he opened the door the fury of the fire increased tenfold. Dick crawled out and slammed the door shut with all the force he could muster. He recalled hearing a great crash. He was sure that there would soon be nothing left of Tom Goodall save a few ashes. He dragged himself up the front stairs and out the door into the night. He was a mass of pain and heat and he was trembling uncontrollably.

Try as he might, Dick could remember no more. He lay in the hospital bed unable to move, not able to see, filled with a growing awareness of the seriousness of his plight. He could tell that most of his body was bandaged. Another siege in hospital! The pain was excruciating, and it was impossible for him to think clearly. But he must have someone contact Ted and Wilma immediately. They would be worried to death. He decided to call out. Nothing happened. He felt as panic stricken as a man can be who is heavily drugged. Then for the first time the realization of two facts stole over him. The bandages completely covering his face forced him to fear first that he might be blind and secondly that he might be so scarred as to be physically repulsive. He made a desperate effort to move, to do something, but he couldn't. He had exhausted himself, and he slipped back gratefully into a coma.

The conversation of the young man from Scotland Yard roused him. He wanted to cry out, to say something to the two men, but it was a physical impossibility. And then, as the men talked on, Dick felt less and less like making it known that he could understand. They knew nothing of him, then! Nothing at all! But of course! Tom had removed his wallet, and his identification bracelet was on his bureau with a broken clasp. Hearing those fateful last words, hearing from someone's lips the probability

that he might - no, would! - actually be horribly scarred and possibly blinded, proved too great a shock. Dick prayed fervently for death and again he slipped back into a state of unconsciousness. He revived momentarily when he was given a blood transfusion, but the next time his senses were clear he once again seemed to be alone in the room.

Blinded and scarred! How could he ever go home like that? One or the other would be bad enough, but both would be insupportable. Wilma, of course, would insist on marrying him anyway, but he would only be half a husband. An eye-sore. Probably she would shudder if - and when - she had to touch him. And his family! They would be forced to wait upon him, at least for a while. What an ordeal for them! Even Ted would be called upon to do a great deal. All of them tied down because of him.

Dick's head was beginning to feel clearer. Somehow he knew that he was going to live. If he wanted to! If he wanted to? And did he? Lots of men had taken that way out, and who in this hellish world could ever blame them? Doubtless by now his family had been notified that he was missing. Ted would have contacted Wilma and they would be frantically searching. What would they decide to be the cause of his disappearance? They knew nothing of his intended appointment, except that it was near Paddington. They would never connect him with a fire in a deserted old house. No. But then they would discover that he was not in a morgue, so that would be pretty convincing proof that he had not been killed in a street accident. And of course Ted would know that he had not committed suicide or anything drastic like that. He wasn't the type, and he had had everything to live for. Hospitals! Strange! Why had they not checked the hospitals! Apparently after three days they couldn't be going to. That would indicate only one of two things. Perhaps they thought that he had

been blown to bits by enemy action, or perhaps they had mistaken another body for his. At any rate he felt that he would never be discovered if he played his cards properly.

He had a vivid picture of his mother receiving the telegram, and it was heart rending. He felt a tear start to his eye. His poor, gentle mother! After the shock of hearing that he was severely wounded in action, she would have been lulled into a feeling of security that he was safe in England. He would have to steel himself against thinking of her. Better his mother and father think him missing and presumed dead, though, than be forced to see him as a hideous thing. He would wait and see what else the doctors had to say. If it seemed too hopeless, or if in time there was no improvement, then some nameless man, the victim of a helpless insomnia, would commit suicide. And far better that his family think of him as killed by enemy action. If, as seemed improbable now, he recovered and looked somewhat like his old self, then he could go home. But he swore to himself that he would never return to Canada unless his identity were discovered, or he was normal and at least moderately presentable.

Suicide! The thought of such action was repugnant to him, yet it might prove the best way out. No suffering for him and no troubles for those who loved him who, at any rate, already considered him to be dead. Around and around whirled these thoughts in his brain. They were harrowing, and it was incredible to think that, because of a madman's revenge, his life would be permanently blighted. Four days ago he was planning to get married. Now he was lying in a hospital bed, desperately ill and scarred, a man who was willing to renounce his name, his family, his country. The full impact of what he was planning to do struck him with ever increasing force until the mental agony was greater than the

physical. But if he were to tell the authorities, what then? Ted and Wilma would be summoned. Ted would stay by his side until his leave had expired. Wilma would insist upon marrying him. And his family, who for three days had been imagining him dead, would be forced to suffer untold anguish all over again and picture him lying here, burned from head to foot and blinded. Then what if, when the bandages were removed, he found that he was too ugly for even himself to stand?

And Tom's family. It would be doing them a kindness too if he kept quiet.

A nurse walked in every few minutes, but he gave no sign of recognition. He still had more thinking to do. He feigned unconsciousness whenever she took his temperature or felt his pulse. Once or twice he was given a hypodermic, and then it was difficult to keep from squirming as the needle was thrust into his arm. He found the physical pain growing more and more unbearable. His face, for example, was an expanse of flaming, quivering nerves, and his legs and his hands were throbbing and aching. The rest of his body was itchy, yet he was unable to muster sufficient strength to move even a finger. Gradually his thinking became more confused until at last he found that he could not think coherently about any one of the problems facing him. He fell asleep.

He did not know how long it was before he awakened once more. It was impossible for him to see whether or not there was any light in the room. He knew only that he was suffering intense pain and he felt as though his head were in a vise that was slowly crushing him to death. He stirred. He found that he could move around a little.

"Aha," said a man's voice from beside him, and he recognized it as belonging to the doctor who had been in the room earlier. "How are you feeling, young man?"

Dick opened his mouth to reply but a warning flashed across

his mind. If he spoke, it would give away his nationality. Then he could be easily traced. There was only one thing for it. Not only would he have to be a sufferer of amnesia, but struck dumb as well. So he closed his mouth again and attempted to move his head. He was only partially successful and the pain was excruciating.

It was two days later before the hospital authorities realized that the patient in Room 305 could neither speak, nor remember anything about himself. They shook their heads gloomily. The poor man would require countless skin grafting operations, and he might be blind. It was very sad. Besides, who would pay for all these operations and the services he would require?

A week later the questions were still unanswered. It was the day, however, when the bandages were to be removed from Dick's eyes, and at least they would know whether or not the young man would be able to see.

Dick was lying perfectly still when they told him. To know after ten soul searching days whether or not he would be blind! Had it been ten days or ten thousand? Three days before he had almost decided that he would announce his true identity. But a whispered conversation outside the door had caused him to change his mind, once and for all.

"This one 'ere they say will need more than thirty operations and even then he'll look a positive fright."

That was all he heard, and probably it was only the woman who cleaned the room talking to another scrubwoman, but it was enough to make him determined, definitely and irrevocably, that he would never say who he was until he was at least tolerable looking. The idea of suicide was taking greater root, but there'd have to be no hope at all before he tried that. He would work for the hospital in any way they wished while he was undergoing treatment, but, if he ever became a real drag.....

He made up his mind that, as far as speech was concerned, he would only talk when he had mimicked perfectly some type of English dialect. His doctor's preferably. He spoke smoothly and softly, and Dick liked the accent.

The Scotland Yard representative had been in to see him several times, but had been able to elicit no information from him. Despite the fact that the bandages covering Dick's hands were now very thin, he was unable to write down any answers to the questions put to him, even if he had wished to. And even to read or shake his head was both awkward and painful. So the man was always forced to withdraw in baffled frustration, and Scotland Yard was no further ahead with the case of the man in Room 305.

And now the bandages were about to be removed from his eyes. While Dick was lying quietly with doctors and nurses fussing around him - and medical students too, for this was an interesting case - he decided dispassionately that, if he were blind, he would take his own life as soon as possible. If not, he would at least be able to assess the damage done to his face and body.

Very gently now, the head of the bed was raised. Strong arms were placed behind his shoulders and he was lifted slightly off the pillows. Deft fingers were working to untie bandages around his head. One layer was removed. Two layers. Three layers. It was still pitch black. Dick strained his eyes in an effort to see at least a ray of light. More and more bandages were unravelled. The process seemed to be endless. And then -

"There!" exclaimed the doctor. "What do you see now?" He stood back to peer anxiously into the pair of squinting, winking eyes confronting him. "Can you see anything?"

Dick nodded. His eyes were blinking furiously and, ashamed though he was in front of all these people, a tear rolled over the lid and trickled down into the bandages covering the rest of his face. His eyes were smarting and stinging and he was unable to check the flow.

"Can you see me? Can you see all these people?"

Dick looked slowly around and nodded. Then he closed his eyes and leaned back in utter exhaustion. The tears were uncontrollable and he began to shake. Stop it! he kept telling himself sharply, for he certainly didn't feel like crying. On the contrary, he felt a relief that he could see, and a spark of hope. He also felt an overwhelming curiosity to look into a mirror, and yet a haunting fear of what might confront him there. Mostly, however, he felt a devastating loneliness. More strongly than ever he felt the harsh effects of the decision he had made. For the thousandth time he felt the urge to confess everything. He opened his mouth to speak. And, as always, he closed it. He must see his face before he did anything.

Each succeeding day was worse. He was soon able to read for short periods ("Well! At least he doesn't seem to be one of these Poles or Free French," snapped the Scotland Yard man. "He can read the English papers all right.") but this did little to stem the growing tide of bitterness that was rising within him. Had he not suffered enough? Why, when happiness was right within his grasp, did it have to be snatched away? Was there no justice anywhere in this world? Hot, blinding tears of impotent rage would scald his eyes. Never could he speak, and he scorned the overtures born, he was sure, of pity, that were made to him by the hospital staff. For the most part, he lay on his back and stared up at the ceiling. To keep from going mad, he lived his life over and over. And he tried desperately to pretend that he would soon be going home, a normal,

presentable human being. Sometimes he deluded himself for as long as five minutes.

The bandages on his face were changed often, and then the nurse would smear his skin gently with strange looking jellies and salves. He was never allowed to see a mirror. He would look enquiringly at the nurses and doctors, but they never volunteered any information. He knew, however, that the burns must have been very damaging and very severe, for his face had grown practically no beard. And that was a bad sign. Yet his strength seemed to be returning, slowly but surely, and he felt that the day was near at hand when he would be able to struggle out of bed, grasp hold of the bureau, and have a good look at himself.

First, however, he felt that he could safely recover his powers of speech. By dint of much practice when he was alone at night, and by paying the strictest attention to every word the doctor said, he had acquired enough self confidence to blossom forth as an Englishman. It was well nigh time. He had been examined by a score of doctors, and all had said that he would soon be able to talk. In fact, they were all mystified that he had been rendered speechless for so long, but of course it was attributed, along with his supposed amnesia, to shock.

So, one Monday, he made encouraging gurgling noises. All the doctors and nurses who came to see him looked pleased, including Dr. Kittridge, whose voice he was trying to copy. On Tuesday, when Dr. Kittridge came in the room and asked how he was feeling, he answered him. "Splendid, thank you." Dr. Kittridge was delighted. Dick was not sure just how much he should talk, or how coherently. He had planned to speak only a little, but it was all so exciting and stimulating that he babbled on for quite some time. He was very proud of himself. One of the nurses murmured that he spoke like a Cambridge graduate of her acquaintance. The doctor, however,

and the Scotland Yard man who was instantly called, both felt that his home must be somewhere around London. The Scotland Yard man, who, Dick at last found out, bore the name of Hubert Parkins, decided to reopen the case and dashed off to check, for what must have been the tenth time, the disappearance of any Englishman in the metropolitan area.

Dick found that the accent was much easier to assume and perfect than he had imagined. Partly this was, of course, because he heard nothing else but English accents all day, and partly because he was gifted with a certain talent for mimicking those around him. Talking eased the tremendous tension within him and the hours dragged less excruciatingly. But Dick looked forward to only one thing, sleep. It was the sole diversion that could dull his overwrought brain and still the longing in his heart; it was the one way he could again spend a little time with those he loved.

His strength was gradually returning. Although it was a painful performance, he was able to move around in the bed with a certain amount of freedom. The bandages were removed from his hands. He was encouraged. They did not look as badly as he had imagined. His knees, however, were very badly scarred and Dr. Kittridge told him that they would be stiff and sore for a good many weeks.

Then one night, about four weeks after Dick's admission to hospital, the doctor had a serious chat with him about the future. He asked him what he would like to be called. Dick thought for some time before finally replying that he had no ideas at all. For no particular reason, they finally decided on John Bennett. That settled, the doctor went on to say that Dick was a very interesting medical study, as were all amnesia victims, but that he would need a great deal of treatment, both surgical and psychiatric. Dick knew a moment's worry when the doctor

warned that the psychiatrists would put him through a series of exhaustive tests. It sounded more ominous than the number of skin grafting operations that were promised him. Dick said that he would like to repay the hospital authorities - although it would be in a most woefully inadequate way - by working for them in whatever capacity they saw fit to employ him. It was finally agreed that, whenever he was physically able, he would work in the accounting office.

Day by day Dick's urge to see his face grew more relentless and overpowering. He could think of nothing else. It became an obsession, the more so when he realized that it was all bound up with his going home or committing suicide or continuing to be a ~~non~~entity in England. One day he decided that his opportunity had presented itself. His facial bandages had been removed and replaced by what Dick thought must be flimsier and less complicated coverings. At twelve o'clock noon someone brought him his lunch. Excellent! He should not be disturbed for half an hour, and he had only to walk ten feet to the dresser.

He moved the tray to one side, and pushed back the bed covers. Then, slowly and deliberately, he swung his legs over the side of the bed. They were still bandaged and unbelievably thin. He sat up then, and let his toes touch the ground. Already he felt tired, and he hadn't even started. Soon he was hot and flushed. By now his feet were flat on the floor and he attempted to put some weight on them. The room was spinning. That would never do! He fell back on the bed. He soon realized that he could never support any weight at all, for even if his body was thin and emaciated, his legs were ^bput puny match sticks. And his knees felt as if they would crack open if he bent them. He rolled over on his stomach and let himself slowly and gingerly over the side of the bed until, with a bump, he was lying flat on the floor. He cried out in pain. Apparently no

one heard him. For a few minutes he remained motionless and panting, then he spanned the ten feet to the bottom of the dresser by a tortuous motion akin to the breast stroke. He reached around to the back of his head with trembling fingers and fumbled with his bandages. Each second was filled with searing pain, fraught with agonizing suspense. Several times he heard people pass by his door. But he mustn't be stopped now!

At last it seemed that a sufficient number of bandages lay on the floor around him. His face was throbbing and smarting without its accustomed protection. For a while, Dick lay still. He was faint with pain and exhaustion. His heart was thudding wildly and erratically and every breath was a choking sob. Then slowly, but with grim determination, he reached up with an arm and caught hold of a knob on one of the bureau drawers. He pulled himself closer and then up shot another arm. Slowly, desperately, sobbing all the time, he managed to raise himself. His head crept up past the first drawer. Past the second drawer. In line with the third drawer. Then his hand slipped, and his body seemed about to crash. He cracked his head on the dresser but saved himself. Then the inexorable upward movement began again. Finally his head was on a level with the top. His hands clutched frantically at the back of the bureau, and his knees were pressed, shaking violently, against one of the drawers. By now he could feel no pain. His hair appeared in plain view in the mirror. Then his forehead. Then his eyes. His sobbing ceased. There was only the sound of his knees as they rattled against the drawer, and the scraping of his nails as they retained their slim hold on the back of the dresser. Finally Dick, with a superhuman effort, was able to thrust his face against the mirror.

There was a second of complete silence, followed by a whimper. Both the bureau and the body clutching it rocked crazily from

side to side.

Then, with a scream, the body loosed its hold, and Dick and the bureau crashed to the floor together.

The Message.

The warm, late February sun was streaming into the apartment kitchen. At a table in the corner, Ted was reading the hockey results in the morning paper, and Margaret was looking thoughtful as she sipped her coffee. She was thinner than she used to be, and her complexion was not as clear. But mostly it was her eyes that had changed. They were veiled now, and rarely did they light up when she smiled. Her lips might curve upwards, she might even laugh, but her eyes sparkled and danced no more.

"Are you sure you're well enough to go to work, dear?"

The paper rustled in the affirmative.

"Be sure and come home, now, if you don't feel up to it."

Another rustle.

"Martha's giving a tea for Joyce so I may be a little late getting back. If I were you I'd leave early and have a good nap before dinner."

Ted folded the paper and laid it carefully beside Margaret's plate. "Yes dear," he said. He left the table, but in a short while he was back, wearing his winter coat and carrying his hat in his hand. "Don't you worry, hon. I'm all right." He buried his lips in her hair. "Bye," he said softly. Somehow whenever he and Margaret had to say good-bye for even the shortest time, it was always a tender occasion.

She threw her arms around his neck and clung to him for a fraction of a second. "See you to-night, darling," she promised. She kissed him. "It's only nine or ten hours away, but it seems like forever."

Ted walked briskly out of the apartment, ran down the flight of stairs to the ground floor and out on to the street. Despite the sunshine, it was cold, and patches of ice dotted the sidewalk. When

he turned a corner and was out of sight of the apartment building. Ted slowed down. His walk became the hesitant, faltering stumbling of an old man afraid of slipping and breaking a hip. He soon reached a taxi stand. He glanced around and then stepped quickly inside the leading vehicle. For a month now he had taken a taxi to and from work. Battling his way downtown on a streetcar was too exhausting. And Montreal's tramway system was not noted for either comfort, or consideration to its struggling passengers.

Every moment during the day seemed at least an hour. Ted's head ached and his brain was foggy. When his lunch hour came he did not even have the energy to brave the company cafeteria, which was just an elevator ride away. No one seemed to notice that he missed his meal and he was grateful for that. By three thirty he knew that he could stand it no longer. So weary was he both of limb and of mind that his condition did not even depress him, and he failed to berate himself for having been selfish and short sighted enough to have married Margaret. The only thought that he had of his wife was that she would be out to tea, and therefore, he could go home early without causing her any alarm. It took him ten minutes to summon up the strength to tidy ~~up~~ his desk and push himself out of his chair. Then he walked over to the office manager and explained that he was ill. He was told to go home and have a good rest; nor did Ted fail to notice the looks of concern to which he was treated by the office staff when he left. It's all so damned galling to a man's pride, he thought in despair, as the elevator dropped him down to the street level. But maybe this was not the end. He might be lucky enough to recover and to know a further period of good health.

When he arrived home he found the apartment deserted and dark. The sun had long since disappeared and a soft blanket of snow was covering the city. Ted switched on several lights, picked up two letters

addressed to him and entered the bedroom. Now that he was away from the office and able to relax, he felt rather better. He removed his shoes and his suit, slipped into a dressing gown and slid under the top coverlet. He thought of the two letters that he had dropped on to the bedside table. But his eyes were shut and he decided that reading them at that point would cost him too great an effort. One of the envelopes was typewritten and bore an English post mark. That was the one that had aroused his curiosity. It was possible that Wilma had sent it, but she had never used a typewriter before.

His mind immediately flew back to that letter when he was awakened by the sound of the radio from the apartment above. He kept his eyes closed, and made himself as comfortable as possible, but it was no use. He would have to find out who had sent it before sleep would return. He opened his eyes. It was dark now, and the sombre winter evening was pressing against the window pane. Ted had always hated going to sleep in the afternoon and waking up in the darkness. But the apartment was cheery and he was glad that he had thought to turn on several lights. As he reached out for the envelope he glanced at his alarm clock. Almost six o'clock. Margaret should be home soon. He hoped so. Not only did he feel the need to have her near him, but he was hungry. He had eaten nothing since breakfast.

He was just tearing the envelope open when he heard a key rattling in the lock, then a quick footstep outside the door, and a voice cheerfully calling "Yoo hoo!" She walked into the room, taking off her coat and hat as she did so. She deposited them on a chair, and dropped down on the bed beside Ted. She ruffled his hair and kissed him.

"How're you feeling, darling?"

"Fine thanks, dear. I've just had a wizard snooze. How

was the tea?"

"Dull thanks. It was quite fun to see some of the girls, but I kinda missed my old man."

For answer, he kissed her. A good many times. The letter fell to the floor. Finally Margaret noticed it.

"Who's your English letter from?" she asked. "I've been curious all day. It couldn't be your wicked past catching up with you, could it, darling?" Yet her voice betrayed no great concern, or even interest. She sounded as if she were waiting for a chance to switch the conversation to a much more vital subject.

"You're the only past I want," Ted assured her, as he reached for the envelope and extracted the letter. "And present. And future."

"Thank you, darling," she murmured softly. But she took the letter out of his hands and put it back on the dressing table. "Hold me," she continued urgently. "Oh Ted, hold me close."

Ted was surprised. "Why, hon, whatever's the matter? You're shaking."

"Yes I know. I'm sorry. I'm behaving very stupidly. But don't let me go yet." There was only the muffled prattle of a radio commentator reaching them from upstairs. "Ted, I want a baby."

Ted released his hold and looked at his wife in surprise. Almost in horror. "Why, we've been all over that before. Until the doctors"

"Oh, I know," she threw at him bitterly. "Until the doctors promise you'll live to be a hundred and ten, we'll have no family. But Ted, you may be ninety-three before the doctors reach a verdict, and then it will be just a little late."

"But honey, you know how I feel about it." There was a note of grave concern in his voice. It was edged with panic.

"But I feel differently and, after all, I'm the one who's having the baby. And Ted dear, I want it now. I'll soon be twenty-seven, and it's really time I got under way." She was back in his arms, stroking his hair. Ted's defenses were crumbling. It was so difficult to state his case convincingly without either seeming dogmatic, or presenting her with the plain facts of his illness. But he had one more trump card: a compromise.

"Come on, honey," he coaxed. "Let's just give it one more year. I promise you that next year, no matter what the doctors tell me, we'll plan on a baby. How's that?"

"Not bad, darling." She held him tight. "But you're a little late."

"Uh?"

"That's right. By next year you'll be a father. I dropped in to see Uncle Meredith earlier this afternoon and by his reckoning it should be around the third week in October." Margaret could feel Ted's body become tense and rigid. "I know it's a shock, my dear. But it's my responsibility. It's all I need to complete as great a happiness as any woman could have had. Try to understand that. I'm not afraid of the future. No matter what happens now, I can never be really lonely. I'll have your son to help me. Your son, Ted. And he's going to bring happiness to so many people. Already Uncle Meredith is looking on him as his own grandson. And you know how happy your family will be! It will complete their lives. Try to think of it that way, darling. I don't mean to be corny, but try to think of it as a natural, joyous act of God. You will try, won't you, darling?"

She looked into his eyes and seemed satisfied with what she saw. Ted could say nothing. He pulled her down beside him, and for a long time they lay there, not moving, not speaking, Margaret's head resting in its favourite spot against Ted's heart. If it was beating irregularly, she did not notice. If her husband's eyes held an expression of utter sorrow, she could not see.

It was not until the radio upstairs announced that it was seven o'clock that she stirred. "Dinner," she mumbled drowsily. "How about a nice, cheese omelet?"

"What did Dr. Fenton say about your condition?" Ted's voice sounded as if it came from afar. It was the first sentence he had uttered since Margaret overwhelmed him with the news.

"Perfect," she answered brightly. She was sitting on the edge of the bed now, rearranging her hair. "He says I'm a horse and should have a dozen." She spanked him lightly. "And you're not to worry on that score. In fact, I won't have you worrying at all." She kissed him. "Cheese omelet?"

"Swell."

"Now I'll let you read your letter. But be sure you tell me what it's all about!" She left the room.

Ted picked up the letter, but for a while he lay perfectly still. He could hear Margaret in the kitchen as she set about the job of preparing the meal. Friendly, homey noises that he loved. Her humming. The tap running. The clink of aluminum ware as she selected a pot from the kitchen cupboard. Her quick step as she glided from the sink to the stove. He pursed his lips, and smoothed out the letter in his hand.

As he started to read he looked puzzled. His eyes raced back and forth across the typewritten sheet. Soon his expression was

dazed and incredulous, and his hand was trembling. His face was flushed, but when the colour drained away it was as white as the pillow case into which it was pressed. With his eyes still glued to the letter, he leaped out of bed, walked across the room, across the narrow passageway and into the kitchen. His lips were moving but he was making no sound. He might easily have been walking in his sleep. When Margaret saw him, she ran quickly to him. He was swaying in the doorway.

"It's from Dick," he whispered wildly. "Dick Fenton. Margaret, he's alive! He's coming home!"

Margaret snatched the letter out of his hands. "Oh my God!" she exclaimed. "Oh, Ted! Can you believe it!" She noticed that he was leaning heavily on her. She tore her eyes away from what she was reading to look at him. "Come on," she ordered briskly. "This has been too great a shock. Back to bed with you!"

She led him by the hand back to the bedroom. "Dick," he kept murmuring. "Alive!"

They sat on the edge of the bed and reread the letter together. I should be the happiest man alive, Ted kept thinking. I'm going to be a father, and my best friend has miraculously returned to life. He sighed. But he wouldn't be around to enjoy either. Suddenly death seemed a much more terrifying thing. Had he not always counted on Dick being up there waiting for him? What a topsy-turvy world this could be. Was the war not responsible for making so many normal people lead such fantastic and tragic lives? Or was it the subconscious desire of so many people to lead fantastic lives that brought on wars?

Ted leaned back against the pillows and closed his eyes. He could make no sense out of life. It was all too much for him.

"This letter certainly doesn't give us much information,"

Margaret was saying. "He'll be home in a month. Don't get a shock when we see how badly scarred he is. He'll write us again in a couple of days in greater detail. Break the news to his mother and father as gently as possible. Gosh, you'd think the news was bad instead of sensational."

Ted was looking more animated than he had in days.

"Incredible!" he said. "But how he ever kept his identification a secret all these years is beyond me. In fact, the whole thing is beyond me. What that poor guy must have suffered." He was out of bed again, pacing the floor.

A strange smell floated into the room from the direction of the kitchen. "Ye Gods!" Margaret exclaimed. "Our omelet!" She dashed off. In a moment she was back. "I have a bright idea. As dinner will now be delayed for some time, we'll have a good, stiff drink. I think we could do with one."

A highball restored their composure. Somewhat, but not entirely. The drink went to Ted's head and he remembered that he had had no food since eight-thirty that morning. But he was exhilarated enough to feel optimistic about having a few months left to spend with Dick. He telephoned the Fentons. He spoke to Meredith and told him that he had the most marvellous news imaginable and would he and Mrs. Fenton please drop in? Meredith, of course, thought that it was a celebration in honour of Margaret's pregnancy, and was curious only when Ted told him that the news had nothing to do with Margaret. They would be over, Meredith promised, when he had finished his calls. Probably about nine-thirty.

It was while Ted and Margaret were washing the dishes that Margaret thought about Joyce. "He didn't say anything about being engaged or married, did he?" she asked.

"Oh, I don't suppose he could have married," Ted reasoned. "If he felt too proud to come home with a disfigured face, I doubt if he'd have found a girl."

"What do you suppose this will mean to Joyce?"

"Oh God. I hadn't thought of Joyce. But it couldn't mean anything to her now. After all, she and Bill are perfectly happy and their wedding's in May."

"Still....." Margaret seemed to be considering. "Joyce is at Bill's for dinner to-night. Phone them and ask them to come right over. We'll be finished with them before the Fentons get here."

By nine o'clock Joyce and Bill had arrived. Margaret poured them both a drink. They sat around the bedroom because Margaret had insisted that Ted go back to bed. And Ted had been only too glad to oblige. He was exhausted.

Both Joyce and Bill had changed noticeably and, all their friends agreed, it was for the better. Joyce took a much greater interest in her clothes and her physical appearance, and she also said to it that Bill was better groomed. Bill seemed to fill Joyce's life completely and she had lost her grudge against mankind. She looked healthier, and her eyes had lost their tragic expression. She dominated Bill and mothered him and yet was eager to do his every bidding. Bill loved his new life, and showed a new tenderness and thoughtfulness, not only towards Joyce but towards his family and friends as well, that Ted would never have believed possible. He talked less too, and though he was more alarmed than ever about Russia's intentions and the spread of Communism, and was still prophesying an early war, he was less apt to beat his listeners over the head with his views and theories. Many of his nervous mannerisms were disappearing. His future was bright. There was no longer

any reason for him to fear failure and loneliness.

Joyce's foot was tapping the floor in her impatience.

"For goodness sakes, you two," she said in exasperation, "what on earth is the matter with you? What is this great secret?" Then her face cleared. "Oh, I know! Maggie, you're going to have a baby."

"As a matter of fact, Joyce, I am, but that's not what we brought you here to tell you." Joyce and Bill were now openmouthed. "You tell them, Ted."

"Joyce, do you remember one day last fall when we had our tea cups read? The woman told us all to expect a great shock. Well, extraordinarily enough that shock is here. It's something that's completely incredible, and yet it's marvellous news too. Dick Fenton is alive."

The glass in Joyce's hand dropped to the floor. It did not break, although the liquor spilled and ran around the room in rivulets. No one noticed. Bill jumped up, sat beside Joyce and put his arm around her...Ted wondered whether Bill knew that Dick had fallen out of love with Joyce. He handed over the letter in silence. Bill should know after reading it, because Joyce's name was not mentioned. Margaret was unobtrusively mopping up the floor and refilling Joyce's glass.

"He doesn't say anything about being married or anything," Joyce observed, dully.

"No. I gather that he just wrote a very brief note to shock us as little as possible. We should get more details in his next. I guess he figured that Margaret and I would be able to break the news more gently to his family than he could by writing them direct. But what we can't figure out is, how did he know our address?" Ted was studying Joyce closely. Won't it be galling for her if she has to tell Bill at this late date that Dick threw her over, he was thinking. He wished that he could feel more sympathetic. Was he never to really like the girl?

"But to return from the dead!" Joyce was whispering. Suddenly she buried her face in Bill's coat and burst into tears.

"There, there, honey," he crooned soothingly. "Everything 's going to be all right." He picked up her glass. "Here. Have a sip or two of this."

She shook her head. "No thanks. I'm O.K. now."

"Sure?"

She nodded.

Bill finished her drink. "Gosh," he said, "I sure needed that!" He came over and sat on the bed beside Ted. "You look all in, boy. I guess it's been too much for you, too."

"Ted hasn't been feeling well all day," Margaret put in quickly. "And the shock of approaching fatherhood, and then this letter from Dick - well, it's been pretty strenuous." She was smiling, but she looked ill herself.

"Thank you," Joyce was saying. "Both for the drink and for letting me know. I'll call you to-morrow, Maggie. Come, Bill."

"Take care of yourself, kids, and watch out for Junior. Sorry we couldn't have shown more enthusiasm about the great event, but you know that we're thrilled ^{for you} ~~about it~~." Bill slapped Ted on the leg. He had kept his tone flippant, but his face looked anxious and his eyes were twitching furiously.

When they had left, Margaret went into the kitchen and finished cleaning up for the night. Ted was glad, for he wanted to be alone for a few minutes. He could pray now but for two things. That he would be spared long enough both to welcome Dick, and to see his child. Every day he seemed to have more to live for, yet every day his health permitted him to enjoy life less. He braced himself for the emotional

ordeal which confronted him, jumped out of bed and poured another drink. He poured one for Margaret, too. Hell, why shouldn't he celebrate tonight? One would think this news was gloomy, or something.

At ten o'clock the Fentons arrived, apologizing profusely for being late. They were smiling and cheerful for they loved nothing so much as to be invited to the apartment. Marion obviously thought that it was just a social call she was paying, but Meredith's pleasure was tempered somewhat by Ted's haggard appearance. And he had no idea what the surprise might entail. Ted and Margaret were so ill at ease that he decided that the news was definitely bad despite Ted's assurance over the phone. Perhaps they wanted to acquaint Marion with the true state of Ted's health. She had convinced herself that there was nothing to be alarmed about despite Meredith's diagnosis. He'd lived much longer than Meredith's thirty days, hadn't he? Besides, he couldn't die. Not Ted!

"We have the most extraordinary news for you," Margaret said, when everyone was settled. "It's going to be such a terrific shock that I don't know how to say it."

"It's wonderful news," Ted added quickly, when he saw the alarm that spread over their faces. "And it's fantastic. Tell me now, if you could both make a wish for something - anything - what would it be?"

Meredith and Marion merely looked puzzled.

"Well," persisted Ted, "supposing.....Oh, you try, Margaret."

"Why don't you just tell us straight out," Marion suggested gently.

"Very well." Ted drew a deep breath. "It's about Dick. He's alive and well." Marion swayed in her chair as though she had been

struck, and Margaret hastened to her side. Marion clutched at her hand. "I have a letter from him and he asked me to break the news to you gently," Ted continued. "He doesn't say very much but from what I can gather he was very badly burned the night I last saw him in London, and it doesn't appear to have been at the tube station at all. I don't know where it happened, but he was afraid to come home with such a badly scarred face. Anyway he's coming home now." Ted passed Meredith the letter. Meredith stared at it uncomprehendingly.

Neither Ted nor Margaret knew quite what they should do next. "He says in his letter that he's going to write again in a day or two and give us more details," Margaret added anxiously.

"Oh, my boy!" Marion breathed. "Oh, my boy!" Tears were pouring down her face and she was shaking violently. Margaret was holding her.

Meredith passed the letter back to Ted. He was a man in a daze. "You read it," he begged. Ted did.

"Please read it again," Marion asked. Ted obliged again.

"All these years," Meredith said, "and we could have been helping him."

"How he must have been suffering," Marion whispered. "All his youth thrown away."

"We must be prepared for a different boy who left us six years ago," Meredith cautioned.

Ted watched them with an aching heart. When the initial shock had worn off they began to make plans, wild, extravagant plans for this son who was miraculously returned to life. How circumstances change, Ted thought. He could remember so vividly the night that his family had sat where the Fentons were sitting now and he had tried to tell them about

his illness. Margaret and Bud and Meredith and Stephen had all been standing by in the kitchen but Ted has insisted on breaking the news himself. It took the testimony of both doctors to convince Mr. Cummings, but Elspeth had known for some weeks - ever since the beginning, in fact - that something was dreadfully wrong. Yes, that had been an appalling night. It was like telling them that their whole life had been wasted and that now there was nothing left for them. There was one thing, though. His marriage and illness had drawn them together, but of course the news of his impending death had aged them incredibly. Ted thought of his baby. Maybe now they wouldn't consider their lives to have been so useless and futile. He must call them as soon as the Fentons left. That might give them courage and hope. He looked sharply at Margaret. Could that be why... Of course! What a heart that girl had. And what courage!

At long last the Fentons had talked themselves out. They were almost convinced that they had known all along that Dick was alive. After all, he was their boy, wasn't he? Marion wondered whether Joyce and Dick would want to take up where they had left off, and the others decided that this was not the time to discuss Dick's romantic entanglements. Already Marion looked like a new person.

"Come, Meredith," she said. "We must put through a call to Ellie. Won't she get a shock?" For the first time she realized that Ted had not moved out of his bed. "Ted dear," she asked in some concern, "you're not well?" She walked over to him and laid a hand on his arm. "You need to get more rest. You're looking tired. And we all have so much planning and excitement ahead of us."

And outside, by the front door, Margaret was talking to Meredith. "You will come by to-morrow and examine him thoroughly won't you, Uncle Meredith?" She looked him squarely in the eye and lowered her

voice. "Then you can tell me how much longer I can expect."

The Meeting.

Dick sat on the edge of his bed and swung his legs back and forth. He had the day off and he decided that he might as well take his usual walk over to the Ontario Services Club. It was a beautiful summer's day, and who knows? He might spot someone he knew.

He jumped up and glanced into the mirror. Not that anyone could ever recognize him. Two weeks before, he had undergone his eighth plastic surgery operation, and his face was swathed in bandages. The pain was not as great as he had expected but the discomfort was extremely aggravating. He left his small room in the basement of the hospital and walked upstairs. He passed the admitting offices where he worked, and stepped out the door into the late August sunshine. He stretched, and inhaled as deeply as all his bandages would allow. He looked up and down the street. It was the first time that he had been outside the hospital since the end of hostilities with Japan. It was stupid, he knew, but he had half expected the city to have changed. Yet it hadn't. The street was the same as ever - shabby and dirty. Across the road were the shells of two houses, and in front of them a neat pile of masonry and rubble. Also in sight was the inevitable brick air raid shelter standing as the symbol of war, and man's inhumanity to man. Dick scanned the faces of the passers-by. There was no change there, either. Their faces were too tired and wan for any relief to show, at least on the surface.

Come to think of it, even the sun had been reluctant to show itself all summer. The weather had dove-tailed perfectly with Dick's mood. At least twenty times a day he was more than ready to chuck his anonymity, but a glance at the mirror or a word or two with Dr. Kittridge always held him back. So he remained the enigmatic John Bennett, desperately lonely, frantic to learn some news of his family, the man who

rarely spoke, never smiled, whose face was mercifully covered by bandages. Dick tried not to think of all those dead days as he walked to his bus stop. But what else ~~w~~as there to think about? The old days, perhaps. Or book-keeping and accounting, which he was studying. Or the study of politics, which he had made his hobby. And suicide! Every day it was looming up as a more satisfactory form of escape. For it would be years before his face would be good for anything but frightening children and arousing the half pitying, half horrified stares of adults. Eight operations had done little to improve him. There were a great many more ahead, and no promise was held out to him.

There was a small queue waiting for the bus, and Dick stepped patiently into line. Waiting patiently! That was all he could ever accomplish these days. And for what? Nothing! All he was able to do was read and try to stifle that unbearable ache in his heart. He had no way of knowing how things were with his family. They were the ones who would probably be suffering the most. But how could he let them see him like this! Even now, with his face all covered, two or three people were staring at him; whether from sympathy or from curiosity it was equally upsetting. Well, they'd stare even more if he were to rip the bandages off! His bus pulled into the curb and he stepped aboard. He went upstairs. He could see more from there. It always interested him to look down on the small taxis darting madly in and out of the traffic. He found a seat at the front.

He reached into his pocket for some change. Then he leaned back. Sometimes the course he had chosen to follow seemed wicked. To-day, for instance, he felt guilty of all sorts of things. If he only knew whether or not his family were reconciled to his death, he could act accordingly. But there was no way of knowing. And with every day it grew

more difficult for him to conceive of breaking this spell, of contacting his mother and father. Poor souls! The bus jolted along. The unaccustomed motion made him feel uncomfortable. He closed his eyes. That only made things worse. He opened them again. If only he could confide in somebody! Anybody! The old man with the rolling gait who was coming along to collect his fare. The woman opposite him with the shopping bag on her arm.

His day off! He would really prefer working. One day he had gone to a show. On the others he had paced up and down, up and down, in front of the Ontario Services Club. For three hours he had watched. Perhaps Ted would wander in. They should be repatriating him soon. Every time that Dick thought of Ted it was with a pang of anxiety. Could he have been injured by the rocket explosion on that fateful day? If only I had insisted on that taxi driver turning back, Dick thought for the thousandth time! And Wilma! He twisted and turned in his seat. Would she have fallen in love again? That was the thought that tormented him most. It stole through his dreams in the dead of night; stood out in bold print in his accounting books in the office, and generally insinuated itself into all his waking hours. He realized that he had a dread of Wilma seeing his face that was equally as great as the dread of shocking his family. Greater, in fact! But if he could just catch a glimpse of her! It would supply his barren mind with a beauty that it could feed on for months.

His mind was seething until finally he reached Trafalgar Square. You never could tell who you might meet around Canadian Military Headquarters. He walked slowly along. He passed an English Brigadier. He started to bring his arm up to salute, but restrained himself in time. Along the Mall he went, and up Regent Street. There were a great many

Canadian servicemen in evidence, but none of them did he know. It was impossible to feel too glum in such glorious sunshine. He wished that he might expose his face to it. But perhaps even the sun would stop shining at such a monstrous sight. Ah. There was the club. He would just walk up and down for a while, have a bite to eat in a restaurant in Leicester Square, and then possibly see a show. A comedy.

An hour later he was exhausted and his feet were hurting. But fatigue from some form of physical exertion was a welcome change. Perhaps he would fall asleep immediately to-night without having to first conquer that all-consuming sense of futility and depression. He must head for the restaurant before he defeated his purpose and became too tired. That only caused greater pain. Already his knees were stiff and aching. Besides, he had not seen anyone very exciting. There were two sergeants and a private from his unit; a naval officer with whom he had gone to school; and a Major from Winnipeg who had been on a battle drill course with him. Each one had returned his stares, but of course, none had recognized him.

It was five o'clock. Really, it was too early to eat, and he was not in the mood for a show after all. Why sit through two or three hours of other people's troubles when he had so many of his own? He gave a last glance through the plate glass windows of the club. Suddenly he knew what it was that he wanted to do. It was something that had been crouching nervously in the back of his mind for weeks. He would visit that fateful address in Paddington. He had to find out if that house had been burned to the ground. He might even be able to find out if Tom's body had ever been discovered. Vigorously, he nodded his head. He would take the tube from Piccadilly Circus. He walked up Regent Street. The sidewalks were crowded but he knew no one. He was moving slowly, keeping close to the wall of the building on his right. He reached the corner of Piccadilly

and ran into somebody. It was a girl. She was a nursing sister. A Canadian nursing sister. My God!

"Wilma!" It was out before he could stop it, while the girl was stepping aside to pass him. "Wilma!" There! He had done it again. It was a choking, sobbing cry, a release of all the pain, the bitterness, the anguish, the terrible, wracking loneliness that had been pent up within him for so long. She had stopped, and was looking at him, her face a study in perplexity. Dick was turned to stone. He was staring straight ahead, unwilling to face her, unable to move. Two or three passers-by were eyeing them curiously. It appeared as though one man might intervene but, with a searching glance, he walked on.

Wilma was still puzzled. "I'm sorry," she said. "I'm afraid....." Her voice trailed off. She stepped back two or three paces so that she might see his face.

Run, you fool! Turn and run! She can't suspect yet. Get away from here fast or everything will be ruined. But it was impossible. He just stood there, rigid and irresolute. Wilma was directly in front of him. Slowly his eyes travelled up from the sidewalk. Slowly and painfully, yet with a wildly racing excitement, he raised his eyes until they were on a level with hers. It was like playing an awful game. If she recognized him, he would have to take the consequences. If not, then he could go on his way. After all, he had hung around here knowing that she would probably visit the club sometime, realizing that he could very easily meet her. But fool that he was! Oh the self-deluding fool to think that one look would ease the pain inside him. It was worse already. A thousand times worse to have her near him and not recognize him. What should he do? Breathing was difficult. He was sobbing.

Their eyes met.

Wilma's face was deathly pale. "Who are you?" she whispered hoarsely. Her eyes were large and wild. "What's the matter with me?" She passed her hand over her face. "I don't understand it. I....." She was looking at him again. Her whole expression was growing more and more incredulous. She took a step forward. "He doesn't say anything." She was mumbling now and she was all but incoherent. Dick remained as rigid as a statue. Only his eyes were moving and they were devouring her - her hair and her mouth and her body. She knows, he was thinking. She knew from the first. And what a terrible shock for her! But his body was paralyzed. So was his tongue.

"It can't be!" she was saying wildly. "It just can't be. It's some terrible, hideous joke." She stumbled backwards. "I'm losing my mind." Her voice was rising. "Go 'way. Can't you see what you're doing? Leave me alone!" Two or three people had stopped by now, and were watching them. Wilma screamed. She swayed and was on the verge of collapse. Dick sprang forward and caught her in his arms. A crowd was rapidly gathering. Wilma's eyes were fluttering and her face was registering terror. Dick's brain somehow came alive.

"It's all right," he said to those around him. "It's just that my girl has never seen me with all these bandages and she's had a severe shock. Give me room please." The crowd - which by now numbered at least fifty - gave way while Dick went to the curb in search of a taxi. Wilma was leaning heavily on his arm, her head on his shoulder. I'm trapped, he told himself joyously. If I were to run away she might think that this was all an illusion, that she was out of her mind. No. They would have to face the truth, and face it together. He was piloting Wilma to the curb. Somehow he was able to forget - almost - that his face was disfigured and swathed in bandages. A cab rattled along. It stopped, and Dick gently

deposited Wilma on the back seat. He climbed in and sat down beside her. Their audience drifted away, and Dick told the driver to just drive - anywhere. The driver seemed not at all happy at his assignment, but he moved out into the traffic.

For two or three minutes Dick sat perfectly still, watching the girl next to him, holding her hand. Her head was resting against the side of the vehicle, her face drained of all colour, her eyes closed. Dick wondered if he might not be dreaming all this. Finally, without opening her eyes, Wilma began to speak, softly at first but with gradually increasing strength.

"Dick! You're here after all these months! But why did you do this to me? Why?" The colour began to surge back into her cheeks. Her eyes flew open. "But of course. You've been injured. Terribly, terribly injured and you haven't wanted anyone to know. That's it, isn't it?" She threw herself into his arms. He grimaced with pain, but held her close nonetheless. "You haven't wanted to hurt me! But how could you just disappear like that? I don't see how. Oh! I love you! Why didn't you send for me? I wouldn't have told anyone. How thin you are! If you only knew what I went through. Oh but my dearest, how you must have suffered. All alone! I can't believe it. The whole thing is incredible. Hold me tighter! I swear I'll never let you out of my sight again. How are you feeling, darling? Was it dreadful?" She drew back to look at him. Her wildly excitable voice was proving of interest to the driver, whose head was bent back in an effort to hear what was being said. Wilma was gingerly tracing the edge of the bandages with her fingers. "Were you burned, darling? Was that it? Tell me everything." She was back in his arms. Her lips managed to find his. "I prayed and prayed that you'd turn up. Ted and I had searches going on everywhere. But he was so convinced

that you were blown to bits at the entrance to a tube station. He soon had me convinced of it, too. Oh, but I should have known. I shouldn't have given up so easily."

Gently Dick disengaged her arms from around his neck.

"I should never have come here looking for you, Wilma. It was wicked of me. You've only to look beneath these bandages to know what I mean. My face is repulsive. In fact, it isn't even my face any more. I'm a stranger to myself."

Wilma had grasped the true situation and was rapidly gaining control of herself. Her eyes were shining with a happiness that refused to be dimmed. "You're no stranger to me. You're you and that's that. I fell in love with you and not your face. Oh, your face may have had something to do with it at first. Come to think of it, I guess it had quite a lot. But it makes no difference now. There are so many other things about you I love. Your hands, for instance." She noticed, for the first time, that they were badly scarred, but her face never changed its expression. Dick, who was watching her closely, was much relieved. He was never self-conscious about his hands again. "Your voice. Your mind, which is so honest and so fine. Your ideals. And a thousand other things. But most of all, Dick Fenton, you revived me. I was a nothing until I met you. Felt nothing. Saw nothing. Did nothing. And by your love and your patience you changed all that. Don't you see? Why, I'm practically your creation! So what do I care about a face!" She looked about her. "Where are we?"

"I told the driver to just keep moving."

"Do you want to know something?" she asked him. "I was posted back to this country from the continent two weeks ago and this is the first time I've had the nerve to come up to London. But for months

I've been planning to come up alone and I knew exactly where I'd stay, painful though it all might prove." Her laugh was breathless and embarrassed. "It was to be like visiting a shrine." She leaned forward and directed the driver to the Savoy Hotel. Then she returned to Dick's arms. "Understand now?" she whispered softly. He was about to say something but she stopped him. "Please. Not another word till we reach the hotel. I want to hear every last detail, but I don't want to be interrupted. So we'll wait till we're cozily settled." She held him tight. "Oh my darling! To think, you're back with me!"

When he entered room 535 Dick was assailed by the strongest memories. He reached for Wilma's hand. All at once he was the one who needed to be comforted. He realized that he was unwell and that, actually, he had never really recovered his strength since he had been wounded and flown back to England. Gosh, how long ago was that? While Wilma was regaining her composure, Dick was becoming more and more unnerved. He sat in the easy chair watching life flow by in the teeming city below while she busied herself doing nothing in particular, but giving him the opportunity to relax and begin his story at leisure.

At first Dick had meant to keep his account factual and unemotional. But that was impossible, and very soon he was telling her of the pain and the anguish that the last few months had cost him. He knew that he was asking for the love and understanding that had been denied to him for so long, and Wilma was more than ready to provide it. She made him lie down, and covered him up with a blanket. She lay down beside him, keeping her head averted so that she might not notice if he were to break down. He didn't, but it took him an hour to tell her of his visit to Tom and subsequent anonymous stay in the hospital. Wilma then passed on the bits of information that she had received about his family

through Ted's short and infrequent letters. Dick was almost sick with relief when he learned that they were all well.

When she was through, there was silence for some minutes. "Dick, you must notify your family immediately," Wilma said at last.

Dick shook his head vehemently. "No, I can't." He buried his face in his arms and waited until he had grown calmer. "You say they're well?"

Wilma nodded.

"Apparently they're making out all right," Dick muttered, "and I must be thankful for that. No, they think of me as dead, and it's better that way."

Wilma was horror stricken. She raised her head so that she might the better see his face, and then she remembered. The bandages were so extensive that even looking into his eyes was a difficult performance. "But that's so callous! You must realize that they're living through hell now. And then there's Ted. By the time he left to go back to the continent last March, he had worked himself up into such a state that he was believing himself partly responsible for your death. You don't suppose all these people's lives wouldn't be happier having you near them?"

"Me, yes, but you see, I'm not me any more." He paused. "Wilma, I think the time I was most callous was when I set out looking for you to-day. Sooner or later you'd have forgotten and married someone else. How that thought used to haunt me!" He hurried on. "Ted, too, will be married to Margaret, and he'll always have lots of friends. It's not that I don't realize how much you've suffered because of me, for I know how I would have felt if anything had happened to either you or Ted. And of course I know that Mother and Dad are going through absolute torture. But they have Ellie, so they're not quite alone." He was speaking very slowly.

"Just think of the upheaval if I were to go home now, looking as I do. I'll need at least two dozen more operations. After I've had them, and only if I appear half way human, will I go back. But not now. My nerves couldn't stand the looks on everyone's faces and the fuss they'd all make over me. Probably I'd break right down and then things would be worse than ever. Believe me, I've had nothing else to do for months but think of this very thing. I've approached it from every conceivable angle. I never expected to get away with this amnesia thing but I have, and I'm staying right here until I can see the results of those operations. Of course, when you go home you can keep me posted on everybody, and I might change my mind in event of an emergency. Not otherwise."

Wilma snuggled closer beside him and linked an arm through his. She was smiling. "When I go home? My dear, I've just come home. I'm going to apply for a discharge right here and become Mrs..... what is it? John Bennett? John and Wilma Bennett. Hmm. Not bad! And if an amnesia victim can't marry, well, we'll find an answer to that one too." Dick pulled resolutely away from her. "And there'll be no nonsense about it," she ordered. "You're stuck with me."

Dick swung himself off the bed. "I couldn't let you do it," he said, pacing excitedly up and down. "Why should you tie yourself down to any future as uncertain as mine? It's ridiculous. I have no money."

"I'm a nurse, you know. Probably I could get a job in your hospital."

"But how could I fit you in without giving the show away?"

"Say you picked me up somewhere. The morals of the Canadian Nursing sisters have been questioned before and we've managed to

survive."

"Wilma, it's wonderful of you, and it's loyal of you, but you must also realize that my nerves are badly off balance and not one day has passed when I haven't thought of suicide."

"But you wouldn't think of suicide if you married me. You'd have something to live for. Can't you see that?"

Dick stopped his pacing. Wilma, too, was on her feet and he was confronting her. He laid his hands roughly on her shoulders. "Wilma, I'm going to put you through one more shock to-day. Here." He scribbled a telephone number on a piece of paper. "Now, I'm going to take off these bandages. Don't say a word. Just look - if you can stand it - then help me on with them again.. After that I'm going back to the hospital. You think everything over carefully and you can phone me after a week if you still want to go through with it. But remember - you mustn't say a word till after I've gone, and then you're not to get in touch with me for a week. Is that a deal?"

"But Dick, this whole thing is....."

"Is that a deal?"

She nodded. Their eyes met and held. Then, as if he were acting under a hypnosis, Dick reached around to the back of his head. His trembling fingers plucked clumsily at several knots. The whole performance seemed endless, but never did Dick's eyes stray from the white, taut face before him. Wilma even managed a small, reassuring smile as the bandages started to peel off. She had no idea what to expect. She was soon able to notice that the scars started on the forehead, just below the hairline. Thank God I've seen some pretty bad cases of disfigurement, she thought. Otherwise I couldn't stand this. Her knees were shaking. Surely it would be easier on her if she could sit down. More and more the bandages were being unwound. What Wilma saw was worse than she had ever imagined.

She wanted to scream, but she had to keep that idiotic grin on her face. She dug her nails into her palms. No! It was too much. She couldn't stand any more. Her Dick, with the cheerful smiling face reduced to this! No wonder he had decided as he did. Then, with a wrench, he ripped off the remainder of the bandages. He cried out in pain.

Wilma let out an involuntary gasp. "Oh, my darling," she breathed, and flung herself into his arms. She kissed the spot on the right hand side of his head where an ear used to be. She touched the dry, white skin of his parchment-like cheek. She tried to ignore that part of his face which was once a nose. But she noted with relief that his eyes were apparently uninjured - through his eyebrows and lashes had gone - and his lips and his teeth had been spared. But above all, wasn't he Dick? Her Dick? What did the face matter! What difference how handsome or how ugly - one soon gets used to any face.

She drew back. "Is that all you're worried about?" she scoffed. "Then you may consider yourself about to be hitched up, John Bennett. I love you more than ever and, as I believe I told you once before, I'll be proud to be your wife."

But, as she held him in her arms that night and he slept soundly and dreamlessly for the first time in weeks, Wilma Barnes was worried. She was under no illusion as to the hardships and trials that lay ahead. Dick would not go back home looking as he did, and she could not find it in her heart to blame him. So she would have to sever all connections with her family and friends, perhaps for years, perhaps forever. She would be tied to a man without a country, a man whose nerves were almost at the breaking point, a man at whose face she could barely repress a shudder.

It was worth it. His return from the dead had revived her and she was vibrantly alive. Idly she stroked that small portion of his shoulder that was not covered with bandages.

I love him, she thought as she was dropping off to sleep, and my love is returned. No woman has any right to ask more.

The Preparations.

Margaret paced anxiously up and down the small hallway. Would they never come out of that room? All this excitement was far too much for Ted. Yet actually, did it make much difference? Was he not dying - breaking up and dying right before her eyes? How much more of this could she stand? The 'Yes, I think Ted's a little better, thank you,' or the 'Oh yes, we're expecting him up very soon' remarks were becoming harder and harder to deliver convincingly. But worse, far worse, was Ted's silent attitude of self-reproach. He would never get up again. He knew it now. She bit her lip, and realized that it was raw and tender. Well, she loved him and had made his last months happy. And he had earned that. God knows, he had deserved some break. She went into the kitchen and closed the door. Neither Bud nor Meredith had ever seen her with all her defenses down. She leaned her forehead on the cool, shiny surface of the frigidaire. That was better! As soon as the doctors left, she would have to spruce up. With Dick arriving to-morrow there was bound to be a raft of visitors to-night. Maybe even the press, though she had been successful in keeping them away so far. What terrific publicity there'd been! She raised her head and wearily opened the door of the frigidaire. What could possibly tempt Ted for dinner? She pulled out two lamb chops. They usually looked attractive on a plate. But goodness knows, there was probably nothing in this world that would appeal to him. She blinked back the tears. She must find a mirror. She went back to the hall, grabbed up her purse, and studied herself in the small glass of her compact. Some rouge would take care of the lack of colour in her cheeks, but there was nothing that could remove the shadows from under her eyes, or puff out the hollows under her cheeks. And her dresses all needed to be taken in. She always was thin but now she was merely skin and bone, and

would apparently have no need of her maternity dress for weeks. She applied some lipstick, and pressed her lips together over a piece of kleenex. She ran a comb through her hair. What an unholy mess it was! Still, she had no time for a permanent. As long as Ted noticed no change in her that was all that mattered. She snapped her purse shut. But why fool herself? He could see the difference, and of course, blamed himself. Every day it was growing more difficult to avoid discussing the true situation with him. And neither one of them was very adept at play acting. To-night, Margaret decided, she would tell him exactly what was in her heart. If he had to die, and there was no doubt now that he did, he must die with the knowledge that he had been successful in making her the happiest woman alive. And, for a few weeks, she was sure she had been. Except, of course, for that awful knowledge.....

The bedroom door opened and Bud Percival emerged. Margaret could hear Ted and Meredith talking excitedly about Dick's impending arrival. Then Bud shut the door and came over beside her.

"Any change?" she asked him.

He shrugged. "He's about the same."

"If only he could live to see our son! Oh Bud, we must aim for that."

Bud opened his mouth to reply, but Ted was calling them. They went into the bedroom.

Ted looked accusingly at Margaret. "What's all this I hear about you not going down to the station to-morrow?" he asked.

Margaret walked over and took hold of his hand. "You know it'll be crowded and noisy, darling. Dick's coming to the apartment to see you as soon as he can get away, so I might just as well wait with you."

"Nonsense. The reception at the station will be something to see and I've just arranged that Dr. Fenton pick you up."

"Oh, that's too much trouble. Uncle Meredith will be too rushed."

"Not at all, my dear. I'll be around at eight-thirty."

"But Ted, that means you'll be alone all morning!"

"And high time too. I have a lot of reading I want to do, and besides, how do you know I'll be alone? That Mrs. Bellows from the third floor would be delighted to come down, I'm sure. Gorgeous gal." He winked at Bud.

"Well, that's settled then," said Meredith.

"I'll drop around on my way to hospital, Margaret," Bud assured her. "That should be between nine and nine-thirty."

Margaret shrugged. "You've talked me into it," she said listlessly.

Soon the doctors left. They said very little to her about Ted's condition. What was there to say?

"Gosh," Ted was exclaiming when Margaret came back to the room. "I don't know how the Fentons ever held themselves back from going to New York. I know I wouldn't have been able to."

"I think Aunt Marion was very wise in deciding against it. It would have been different if Dick had been alone, but with Wilma and young Marion there, it was another story. They'll step right from the boat to the train and will probably be interviewed by dozens of newspapermen en route. Then, as Aunt Marion said, if the family were along, they'd sit up talking all night on the train and Dick would be exhausted when he arrived home. No sir. I think she was very smart."

"Maybe," admitted Ted grudgingly. He reached for a magazine, glanced at the cover, then tossed it back on the table. "What's for supper?"

"A chop, dear. How does that sound?"

"O.K."

"Ted, it's time we...."

The doorbell rang. Stephen Savage had come to call.

"I brought the Star along," he said, after he had greeted Ted and Margaret. "I thought you'd like to see it." He handed it to Ted and pointed to a picture. Ted switched on a light over his head.

"'Canadian Enoch Arden returns home;'" he read. "'Ex-army officer, wife and daughter dock at New York.'" He studied the photograph. "Holy baldhead! This picture looks even less like Dick than the earlier ones."

Margaret sat down beside him on the bed. "It's really a different face," she whispered. "And I suppose he has a brand new personality to go with it." They were both absorbed in the photograph and Stephen watched them silently.

Ted's eyes travelled down the column. "Another anti-Communist speech," he said. "Good, old Dick. He's really got himself worked up on the subject." He whistled. "Why, he really means it!" He turned excitedly to Stephen. "He says he'll go anywhere on the continent to make a speech, particularly to those colleges which boast a few noisy Reds in their undergraduate body."

Stephen chuckled. "All the columnists are very disappointed. They expected long stories on his meeting Wilma and his marriage and how he felt when he decided to cut himself off from his family and friends. And what do they get? One speech after another on the evils of Communism. I think it's marvellous."

"I can't wait to see him," Ted muttered. "Dick! A national celebrity! You know, over and above this Communist business, I think he's been holding back on his personal experiences so that we can hear about

them before the whole American reading public."

"Listen to this!" Margaret was still reading the paper. "It says: 'Right after his statement Fenton was asked by a member of the press if his aversion to Communism was not prompted by the fact that one had attacked him and caused him so much grief and pain. He replied, that, although that man was the reason for his original interest in the subject, his distrust of it came from both intensive study on all types of political ideology while he had nothing else to do in hospital, and observations made on his trip to Europe. He was then rather sneeringly asked if he thought that all Communists were mental cases like his ex-army friend. He laughed at this and replied that, on the contrary, most Communists were too cold and unemotional for nervous breakdowns. Nervous breakdowns, he added darkly, were far more likely to come to those decent, God-fearing people who were forced to live under a Communist regime. And on this note the interview ended. Fenton and his wife and baby daughter were whisked off to the immigration authorities. But of his life as an anonymity in England and his romance and marriage, which have captured the imagination of America, there was no word.'"

There was silence in the small apartment. Obviously this was indeed a new Dick. Not only would they see a new face, but there would be a new mind as well, vigorous and alert. It seemed that he was now a man with a message.

"Fighting Communism's fine," Ted murmured, "but I hope he hasn't lost his sense of humour. All fanatics - whether religious or political or anything else - get so filled with zeal and their own importance that they become insufferable bores. At least to me." He leaned back against the pillows and closed his eyes. "Don't you agree, Stephen?" His head was directly under the light which accentuated the

hollow cheeks and sunken eyes. Stephen repressed a shudder. He was staring at the fleshless skull of a dead man.

"Yes," he replied.

Ted reached out for Margaret's hand. "It's too bad the world isn't made up of simple and unimportant people like us, isn't it, dear? There wouldn't be the great music or painting or architecture. In fact, we might be living in the Dark Ages. But there'd be no wars or atom bombs or 'icms' to tear the world apart, and we'd all be a lot happier." He opened his eyes and smiled sadly at Stephen. "It's so easy to know what's of importance when you're - ill."

"I know just what you mean, Ted," Stephen agreed. "That's one of the reasons why I love coming to this apartment. There's happiness here, and two fine people who've been sharing it. And I'm honoured to feel that I've been allowed to witness a little of it." He got up out of the chair.

"Do stay and have a lamb chop with us," Margaret said.

Stephen glanced back at Ted, whose eyes were closed once again. "I'd love to some other time," he said, "but I really must be moving along. I'll drop in day after to-morrow when the excitement's all over." He pressed Ted's thin fingers and was gone.

For her own sake, Margaret was sorry that he did not stay. Ted would have a sleep and she would be left alone with her thoughts. To-night, she did not know whether she could stand them. She tip-toed back to the bedroom in case Ted had fallen asleep. She turned off the glaring top light and opened the window. It was a warm spring night and the room was stuffy. She reached the door.

"Honey!"

"Oh Ted! You startled me. I thought you were asleep."

"Honey, I'm sorry."

"That's all right, darling. I don't scare easily."

"I mean I'm sorry for getting you into this mess."

Margaret came back to the bed. Then, with a little cry, she threw herself down beside her husband and buried her face in his shoulder. She was furious with herself. She was unable to think of a word that might comfort him, yet never had she loved him so much. The arm thrown around her was thin and feeble; the body that she knew and loved so well was emaciated.

"I've been so selfish," he was whispering. "And you've been so marvellous. Don't think I don't know what you're going through." His lips were brushing against her hair. "I've been such a fool. It's only since I've been lying here that I realized that of course you've known, ~~all along~~. You've known all along. You've really dedicated your life - or I should say sacrificed it - to my happiness. Well, you were successful. I've been happier than I could ever have believed possible. And as for your having a child, I know your reasons for that too. You've given my mother and father something to live for. And you've given some purpose for my life."

He would have gone on had Margaret not found her voice. "Ted Cummings," she said sternly, and she raised her head to look at him. "You want to think of me as a completely unselfish martyr and I won't let you. I'm a ~~pretty~~ headstrong and independent person and all my life I've done pretty much as I wanted, and sometimes I've hurt people and made enemies in the process. That your love brought out the best in me is natural. But I acted like any other woman in love. After all, I had waited five years to marry you. Do you think I was going to let any old doctor's report put me off? I was not! I was selfish enough to want some happy days with my husband. I didn't want you to run away from me,

nor did I want you to mope over what was inevitable. So I pretended to you and to myself that Uncle Meredith was at least exaggerating and probably altogether wrong. And darling, I wouldn't trade these months with you for centuries with the handsomest, cleverest man on earth."

She kissed him. "As for the baby, I want him. He's my guarantee against loneliness. I'm being quite selfish about it. I must have something to live for, too. And he's going to be just like you. If it makes our families happier, well, that's very nice, but I'm selfish enough to want him for myself. Furthermore, young man, don't you ever talk to me in that way again. You couldn't have escaped from me if you'd run to China. I married the finest husband in the world and I'm proud of it." She kissed him again and tucked the sheets in around him. "Not another word, now. You must be tired, and your family said they were coming in to-night. And goodness knows who else. But there won't be any phone calls. I'm not putting that receiver back on the hook until Dick is here for at least three days! Have a good sleep now darling, and I'll call you when dinner's ready."

Blinded by tears, Margaret went out to the kitchen. She was fed^{up}_^ with holding herself in. She might as well let down completely. She closed the kitchen door and burst into tears. For several minutes she sobbed and cried. Then she bathed her eyes, generally freshened up and felt somewhat better. At least now she was sufficiently drained of emotion so that she could face the Cummings. Their white-faced striving-to-be-natural anxiety was the hardest thing of all for Margaret to cope with. And it imposed an even greater strain on Ted.

Margaret served both dinners on a tray in their bedroom. No reference was made to any serious topic, and the meal was actually quite a pleasant and gay affair. Margaret was cheered by two things.

Ted laughed several times, and he seemed to enjoy the meal. He listened to some news broadcasters on the radio, all of whom made reference to Dick's impending Montreal arrival, while Margaret washed the dishes. Then she brought in some knitting and sat down beside him.

"Dick returning!" Ted exclaimed. "Honestly, I still can't believe it's true."

"Ted darling, you'll try not to get too upset to-morrow, won't you?" There was a trace of desperation, of futility, in her voice. "Remember what the doctors said." She was tapping her foot on the floor. "I don't know how I could ever have let you talk me into going to the station and leaving you here all by yourself."

Ted smiled confidently. "Now, don't you worry. I'll take everything in my stride and it won't upset me in the least."

The doorbell rang.

It proved to be, not Elspeth and Ben Cummings, but Joyce and Bill.

"We're not coming in," Joyce announced. "We just dropped by with these books for Ted."

"That's sweet of you. He's nearly finished the books his mother sent him. But you must come in. Ted would be so glad to see you!"

"Well, just for a second to say hullo."

Bill went right in to the bedroom. Joyce lingered in the hall. They had but recently learned of the severity of Ted's illness.

"Maggie, how is he?"

"About the same dear, thanks."

"Remember, you just say the word whenever you want me to come and stay with you, if you think I could be a help."

"Thanks, I will."

Margaret busied herself rearranging some flowers in a vase. "Still happy about everything?" she asked.

"Wonderfully, although Bill's family is furious with us." She was pouting. "You'd think they'd have got over it by now."

"Well, it was a bit of a shock to them!"

"I know, but after all, with you and Ted tied up and unable to officiate for us, a big wedding seemed stupid. Then with all the news about Dick, I somehow felt I wanted security, and I wanted it fast. You must understand that I'm in love with Bill and I'll make him a good wife, but I must confess that I wanted to be married before Dick arrived. And then, when we had the offer of that cute flat, we decided to wait no longer. It all seems logical to me, but try to explain it to the families." Her brow was furrowed and her round face was radiating annoyance. "Anyway, it saved Dad a fortune. Not only a trip from Brantford but a huge reception in some hotel here. They didn't mind so much, but Mrs. Donnelly!" She set her lips in a grim line. "She keeps telling Bill that she can hardly face her friends. She knows they all think that we had to get married. I'm glad to say that Bill is now quite firm with her and tells her that her remarks are really a great insult to me." Margaret had closed the bedroom door and was edging Joyce into the kitchen. Surely Bill wouldn't enjoy hearing all this! "Serve the old battle axe right if I got pregnant right away. I would too, if I had my way. But you know Bill! We must wait; we mustn't upset mother. Dear, precious mother!"

"You'll get on better with her in time. But all her plans about a nice big wedding went up in smoke and she was looking forward to it so. She's not such a bad sort. ~~But~~ You've got to back down a little and give her half a chance."

"She's an old bi.....tartar!" Joyce sighed. "Well, she's my problem. I'm trying to get Bill to have his firm move him to Toronto. They have a big branch there, you know."

Margaret was frowning. "You've done a lot of planning and battling for a bride of six weeks. Don't push so hard! Everything will smooth itself out in time."

Joyce threw her arms around her friend. "Maggie darling, I'm a beast. As if you haven't enough troubles of your own, I burden you with my puny ones. You're not to worry about me. I'm a happily married young woman, and a lucky one." There was a pause. "Should I go to the station to-morrow?"

Margaret was surprised. Joyce at the station to meet Dick was the last thing she had ever imagined. "Why, I don't know, Joyce. I didn't know you were thinking of it."

"Well, I thought if I didn't people might think I was afraid to. Or still hurt. Or something."

"Oh come now!" Margaret spoke as if to a child. "No one even knows that it was he who broke off your engagement. And with all those newspapermen who'll be around, someone might easily twig that you used to be engaged to him. Then you'd be really embarrassed. You're lucky that they haven't ferreted that fact out already. They probably would have if they hadn't been so anxious for details of his married life." Joyce was pacing up and down the kitchen chewing on a biscuit that she'd found in a cookie jar. "What does Bill think you should do?" Margaret asked finally.

"Bill? Oh, I haven't spoken to him about it."

"Joyce, you're incorrigible!"

The bedroom door opened and Bill came out. His suit was

smart and well tailored and his face had filled out. Margaret was amazed at the change in him.

"We must go," he said to Joyce.

"Yes, dear," she replied meekly.

Margaret chuckled.

"I'll just peek in on Ted," Joyce said. She left the kitchen.

"Did you find him cheerful, Bill?"

"Marvellous." Bill's eyes were shining with admiration and affection. "I don't know how you both do it." He bent down to kiss her cheek. "We'd stay, but to-morrow's going to be a big day for you. And you know where you can get me at any time. Promise me you won't forget that, Margaret. Don't put me too far back on the shelf just because Dick's coming home."

Margaret was touched. This tall and clumsily moving young man was becoming a more valued friend with every passing day. He was so much more gentle than he used to be. And quieter! Could that mean that Joyce had made him happier and more contented with his lot, or was she.....He was smiling at her. She hastily smiled back and slipped her arm through his. "I won't forget, Bill dear," she said warmly. "And thanks."

After Joyce and Bill had left, Margaret returned to her knitting while Ted listened to the radio. She was depressed. A visit from Ted's parents was always such a strain these days.

They arrived at nine. Mr. Cummings was burdened down with a large basket of fruit and some magazines. They came into the hall, but refused to even take off their coats. They were both pale. All the animation had left Elspeth's face, and her eyes were those of a condemned woman. Mr. Cummings, who not so long ago had been burly and square -

shouldered, was now stooped and frail. Since he had learned of Ted's illness, he had lost over twenty pounds.

They all adjusted their smiles and walked purposefully into the bedroom.

"Hullo, my dear," Elspeth kissed her son and Benjamin patted him awkwardly on the arm.

"We're only going to stay a minute," Elspeth continued. She fussed with Ted's coverlets and moved a few things around on his bedside table. "What I really came for was to say that your father will take Margaret to the station to-morrow and I'll come here and stay with you." She was still smiling. Benjamin was standing at the foot of the bed, hat in hand.

"Thanks, mum, but the Fentons are taking Margaret along with them."

Elspeth's eyebrows flew up. "And leaving you alone?"

"Yes. I want all of you to go. I want Dick to have a gang on hand so he'll know that no one has forgotten him."

Elspeth's eyes had found her husband's. He cleared his throat and spoke up. "Ted, that's a very nice sentiment, but your mother....."

"Please, Dad, humour me in this. You'll only be gone an hour or so and nothing can happen to me. Besides, Bud Percival is dropping in."

"He insists on having it that way, I'm afraid," Margaret said. "We've all tried our best to talk him out of it, but with no success."

"Well!" Elspeth was having difficulty in keeping her expression bright and cheerful. This time her husband's eyes caught hers

and they were stern. She managed a bright little laugh. "Stubborn people, these Cummings," she said. She patted Ted lightly on the cheek and brushed her lips over his hair. "Good night, my darling," she said. "Be sure and see that he has a good night's sleep, Margaret. My, tomorrow's going to be exciting! We could hardly be looking to it more if it were you, Ted."

Mr. Cummings came around to the head of the bed. "Good-bye, son," he said simply. When he and Elspeth visited Ted and Margaret, "Hullo, son," and "Good-bye, son," were usually the only words that Benjamin ever uttered unless he was prompted by his wife to give the young people some advice. He escorted Elspeth into the hall.

"Good night," Ted called after them. "The fruit's going to be wizard." He busied himself in peeling an orange.

"Thanks for dropping in," Margaret said. "It was lovely of you to bring the fruit. Ted so loves receiving things."

"He looked better to-night," said Elspeth eagerly.

"Indeed he did," Benjamin agreed heartily.

Margaret stared at the floor. "Yes," she said evenly, "I don't think we have anything to fear to quite a while yet."

They all looked at one another.

"Good night, my dear child," Elspeth said. Her smile was gone. Margaret had never seen her looking so plain and dowdy. They kissed Benjamin said nothing, but he, too, kissed his daughter-in-law.

"See you at the station," Margaret promised as she held open the door. "Sorry I won't be going with you."

Elspeth took her husband's arm as they walked down the stairs. She was trembling. She brushed her head against the rough tweed of his spring coat.

"There, there," Benjamin comforted, as they walked out into the soft night air. "Remember young Ted, my dear. We must keep alive and well for him." He fumbled for the keys to his car. "We're really luckier than we might have been!"

But their eyes were wet, and not another word was spoken all the way to their home.

Farewell.

The buzzer rang.

"Oh Ted darling, there they are!" She kissed him and looked at him anxiously. "Are you sure you're going to be all right?" she asked for the hundredth time.

"Why, of course." He smiled reassuringly. He pulled her down to him and kissed her again. "You look lovely, hon. You'll be such a pleasant sight for Dick's tired old eyes."

Margaret laughed. A little of the sparkle had returned to her eyes, and the excitement had brought some unaccustomed colour to her cheeks. "Darling, I'll be back as soon as I can. You have everything you want?"

"I sure have," Ted answered softly.

"Thanks. Now try to rest. "Bye!"

"Bye, hon."

She was gone and Ted was alone. For some minutes he lay quite still, his eyes fixed on the ceiling. Then he reached over for the telephone and dialled a number.

"Bud?....Not bad at all, thanks. And you?.....Great..... Yeah, Margaret's just gone. And that's what I phoned about, Bud. Would you mind delaying your visit till noon?....Well, some friends of ours have arrived in unexpectedly from out of town and they're spending the morning with me....That'll be swell.....No, honestly, I'm feeling much better....Seeing you, boy."

He lay back in the pillows. Then he dialled another number. "Hullo, will you send a taxi to the Fairlie Apartments in half an hour? Apartment twelve....That's right....Thank you."

He consulted the clock beside his bed. Eight-forty. There was no chance of his family dropping in now. Everyone would be at the

station early. In fact, a veritable mob of the curious was expected to be on hand. The Gazette this morning had given more particulars of Dick's arrival and a further feature article was prominently displayed on page three. Ted would be quite late getting down, but Dick's train was apt to be a few minutes behind schedule and then the poor guy would be tied up for some considerable time with newsmen and photographers. Ted's expression was determined. It was inconceivable to think of Dick arriving, and him not being there to greet him! He was thankful that he had had the foresight to get up for a few minutes every day when no one was around. He threw back the covers, and was on his feet almost before he realized it. He wavered uncertainly. He gathered together all the clothes that he would need and returned to the bed. He sat down heavily. He was soaking wet and gasping for breath. He resisted an overwhelming temptation to fall back against the pillows. The whole scheme was crazy! But no. He'd feel better as he went along. He slipped out of his pyjamas. He shivered, although the room was warm. Ten minutes later he was dressed. He walked slowly into the living room. He was dizzy and sick with exhaustion.. He leaned against the sideboard and poured out a drink. It was definitely contrary to all orders, but it might at least provide him with the stimulus to get down the stairs. He drank it straight shuddered, wiped his lips and went over to the sofa. He was about to sit down when he heard the buzzer. He turned and walked slowly into the hall. His eyes avoided the mirror as he passed it. He picked up his hat and coat and opened the door. He glanced quickly up and down, but there was no sign of anybody. He closed the door behind him and, with the banister as a guide, he walked down the stairs. His knees buckled once or twice, but he made it. The driver was standing impatiently outside the door. Ted squared his shoulders, tried to control his noisy breathing, and

walked briskly out into the warm, May air.

The taxi driver followed him, and opened the door of the cab.

"Windsor Station," Ted ordered.

Through the heavy, early morning traffic they went. The driving was jerky and uneven. Ted felt sick to his stomach, but he would not think of turning back. His mind grew hazy, and soon he was dozing. He opened his eyes as the cab swung around Dorchester onto Stanley, and he recognized the new Laurentien Hotel. Then the taxi drew up in front of the old grey stone building and Ted gathered to-gether all his resources so that he might alight without being conspicuous. He did not even glance at the meter, but slipped a dollar into the driver's hand and walked briskly into the station. He was thankful that the doors opened automatically, and that he had to exert no force. There now! That wasn't too bad. He was inside. Wouldn't everybody be surprised to see him! How nice it would be if he could sit down. His footsteps were faltering, and suddenly he stopped altogether. What was dazzling him? He shielded his eyes. Why wasn't there something he could lean against? Ah! There was something! A statue! But whose? No matter. He bowed. But when he went to rest his shoulder against it, it had vanished. How extraordinary!

What was he doing here anyhow? He held his head to keep out all the noises. He must be in a station. All those trains rushing in and out! But it was more like a tomb. Or a great big echoing, vibrating vault. It was frightening. Supposing all those big doors were to close. Then how could he get out? He shuddered. And the constant racket! Where was Margaret? Dammit, it wasn't like her to let him down like this! He staggered along for a while. Perhaps he'd feel better if he could throw up. He leaned his head forward but promptly became so dizzy that he straightened up again. Well! A crowd of people standing in the middle of

the station. Probably some politician making a speech. Or a movie star. Say! He must phone Margaret and arrange to meet her after work so they could take in a movie. They hadn't been for ages. It was taking such a long time to reach the group of people. Probably all a waste of time. He could recognize no one. And he really should be getting back to the office. He was spending too long over lunch these days. But..... He passed his hand over his face and licked his lips. He had come to this infernal place for something. Or to meet someone. Yes, that was it! To meet someone. Now, who? His mother and father were in town. Or were they? He must try to remember. Orange juice. That white, cold pitcher of orange juice. Why didn't his mother bring him something to drink? Couldn't she see how thirsty he was?

With a final gasp of relief he leaned against the iron gateway leading to the track. He only managed to stay moderately erect by grasping the bars with his hands which he kept behind his back. His throat was dry and rasping. Soon he was conscious of the glare of popping flashbulbs from nearby, and he even made out the whirl of a newsreel camera.

Suddenly, above the din, he heard a stranger speaking.

"But Captain Fenton, we've had very little about your marriage. Couldn't you give us a slant on that?"

It was then that he distinguished Dick's voice. It was as rich and as resonant as ever. Ted grasped the bars more tightly. He felt as though he were slowly emerging from a bad dream. Surely everything would be all right now! "I owe the fact that I am here to-day to my wife," Dick was saying. His voice had retained much of its English accent. "She was the one who made my life tolerable. You see, when I met her after my accident - ran into her on the street was more like it - and gave myself away, I was faced with about thirty operations. I was

stared at wherever I went. I was desperately lonely and depressed. But Wilma changed all that. She took her army discharge in England and my hospital was only too glad to employ her. We were as happy as circumstances could allow, and nobody ever twigged that we had known one another before. I suppose everyone wondered what a good looking girl like her could see in a broken down, faceless character like me. I know I couldn't figure it out." Dick and Wilma must be gazing lovingly into each other's eyes. Three or four cameras flashed all at once. "She was always after me to get in touch with my family, but I was determined to wait until I looked more human. I was afraid of having a complete breakdown if I came home at such a time. Besides, Wilma was corresponding with my closest friend who, of course, had no idea that she was married to me, and we heard the local news from him. Around the time when I only needed two more operations, he sent us some personal news that didn't sound just right to me. So we made our reservations home, and went on a short junket through Europe, and then I confessed." Dick was hurrying along as if all this were extremely unimportant and he had far weightier subjects to discuss. "At first we thought that I should claim to have recovered from the amnesia attack, but then we decided to confess all. And I must say that the authorities were very understanding."

"Did you ever go back to see the house where you were injured?"

"Yes, but the whole block had been torn down."

One or two people in front of Ted had left, but it was still impossible for him to see anybody he knew. Obviously Margaret and the rest were in the centre of the circle. Ted was again assailed by dizziness. He slid down several inches on the railings. No one noticed him. For several minutes he could neither think nor see nor hear.

Only his hands clutching onto the bars kept him in any kind of an upright position. His face was grey and drenched in perspiration, his eyes three-quarters closed. People were beginning to drift away from the crowd, but those who noticed his strange appearance thought him drunk.

When Ted was next in a position to realize what was happening around him, he saw that the gathering had thinned out quite noticeably. Dick was again warning of the dangers of Communism, and restating his intention of visiting every town on the continent that would listen to him.

"Do you believe we'll have war with Russia?" he was asked by a reporter in an almost insultingly bored tone.

Dick did not seem to notice the implied mockery. "I would say that the chances are yes, we'll have war," he said soberly. "At least, the way things are heading. I see too great a resemblance between now and 1936 or 7 to feel much optimism. I feel that the only small chance we have of attaining peace is in standing up to the Russians all along the line. It paid off in Italy. We forced an apology from them in Berlin. But we'll have to do better. We'll have to bring justice and freedom and the material things of life, not only to the European countries, but to our own country as well. Look at Montreal's slums! Communism feeds on ignorance and poverty and squalor, and it certainly has plenty of chance right here. Don't you see? Feeding Europe is essential, but we also have to clean up at home. It's not up to this province to ban Communism. Its duty is to outlaw the causes that foment Communism. And our duty is to see that men and women enter politics who will do just that! We can never be one hundred per cent successful, but at least we'll have made an honest attempt. We must never let up. We've

got to make our ideas of democracy shine like a beacon for all the world to see. There's no use our telling these other countries we have a perfect form of government. There's always room for improvement. But we want to be able to tell the world that we have a form of government that is constantly improving in a peaceful, orderly way, with everyone guaranteed the essential freedoms that we are so apt to take for granted over here. We have a great many things to be proud of, but I feel that we can only hold our heads up high when we have cleared corruption out of politics and elected honest, upstanding and progressive men to our parliaments and world organizations."

"Are you entering politics?" It was the same voice. Cynical. Almost hostile.

"I hope to," Dick answered guardedly.

Ted felt a little stronger. He had straightened himself to his full height. His head had cleared. If only those damned photographers and hangers-on would go, he'd make himself known to Dick. He blinked two or three times. That was better. It was then that he saw Wilma. Yes sir, it was unmistakably Wilma. Her face was thinner, but her hair was as glossy and as red as ever. She was holding on to a little tow-haired girl with one hand, while her other arm was linked possessively through the arm of a stranger. Good God no! It was Dick! The eyes were his but.....Ted wondered if it were possible. His hair line had receded to a point half way down his skull. His ears, that used to be prominent, were now small and orderly against his head. His nose was straight where it used to turn up. The skin was white and scarred and pinched. And the shape of his face was long and triangular where it used to be round.

But it was Dick. God bless him!

The newspapermen seemed to have finished with him. Most of

the crowd was dispersing. One or two people were pressing him for autographs.

Ted knew a moment of panic. He must speak to Dick now. His friend must not be allowed to think for one more minute that he would not be there to meet him. He weaved forward.

He was arrested by a scream.

"Ted!" It came from Margaret.

He stopped. He swayed slightly. Everyone was staring at him. There wasn't a movement. The air was electric. Then there were startled gasps from Elspeth and Marion and Ellen. But no one seemed to have the power to budge except for two alert cameramen.

For the first time, Dick's eyes met Ted's. First they widened in surprise and joy. Then they narrowed in alarm. He took a halting pace forward. "Ted!"

The newsreel man was frantically fumbling with his equipment.

Ted stumbled on. Margaret at last was able to make a move, but Dick reached him first.

"Oh Dick! I can't believe it!"

"Mummy, Mummy. What's Daddy doing now?"

Wilma gathered her little girl into her arms. "Hush, darling," she whispered. Then she turned her head away.

Dick clapped his hands on Ted's shoulders. "Ted, old boy! You shouldn't have come."

Meredith and Benjamin were looking after Elspeth, who was close to a collapse.

"Worth it. Wonderful to see you." He lurched and would have fallen but for Dick's hold. "Look after Margaret and Mother and Dad," he whispered. "Turnabout's fair play, eh?" His knees were buckling but

he attempted to grin. "Marvellous seeing you, you old....." He gasped. His face twisted in pain and he crumpled into Dick's arms.

There was another scream.

Then, silence, broken only by a trainman's "All aboard!"

Dick let his friend gently down to the floor, and knelt over him.

Margaret dropped down to her knees beside him. He grasped her hand.

For a moment she stared at Ted incredulously. Then she hid her face against Dick's chest and burst into tears.

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