

Appointment With Love

Six minutes to six, said the clock over the information booth in New York's Grand Central Station. The tall young Army Officer lifted his sun-burned face and narrowed his eyes to note the exact time. His heart was pounding with a beat that shocked him. In six minutes he would see the woman who had filled such a special place in his life for the past thirteen months, the woman he had never seen, yet whose written words had sustained him faithfully.

Lt. Blanford remembered one day in particular, with worst of the fighting when his plane had been caught in the midst of a pack of enemy planes.

In one of his letters, he had confessed to her that he often felt fear, and only a few days before this battle, he had received her answer: "Of course you fear ... all brave men do. Next time you doubt yourself, I want you to hear my voice reciting to you: Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I shall fear no evil, for Thou art with me..." He had remembered, and it had renewed his strength.

Now he was going to hear her real voice. Four minutes to six.

A girl passed close to him, and Lt. Blanford stared. She was wearing a flower, but it was not the little red rose they had agreed upon. Besides, this girl was only about 18, and Hollis Maynell had told him she was 30. "What of it?" he had answered. "I'm 32." He was 29.

His mind went back to that book he had read in the training camp. "Of Human Bondage" and throughout the book there were notes in a woman's writing. He had never believed that a woman could see into a man's heart, so tenderly, so understandingly. Her name was on the book plate: Hollis Maynell. He got hold of a New York City telephone book and found her address. He had written, she had answered. The next day he had been shipped out, but they had gone on writing. For thirteen months she had faithfully replied. When his letters did not arrive, she wrote anyway and now he believed he loved her and she loved him.

But she had refused all his pleas to send him her photograph. She had explained. "If your feeling for me had any reality, what I look like won't matter. Suppose I'm beautiful. I'd always be haunted that you had been taking a chance on just that, and that kind of love would disgust me. Suppose I'm plain, (and you must admit that this is more likely), then, I'd always fear that you were only writing because you were lonely and had no one else. No, don't ask for

my picture. When you come to New York, you shall see me and then you shall make your own decision.”

One minute to six... he flipped the pages of the book he held. Then Lt. Blanford’s heart leaped. A young woman was coming toward him. Her figure was long and slim: her blonde hair lay back in curls from her delicate ears. Her eyes were blue as flowers, her lips and chin had a gentle firmness. In her pale green suit, she was like springtime come-alive.

He started toward her, forgetting to notice that she was wearing no rose, and as he moved, a small, provocative smile curved her lips.

“Going my way soldier?” she murmured.

He made one step closer to her, then he saw Hollis Maynell.

She was standing almost directly behind the girl, a woman well past 40, her hair tucked under a worn hat. She was more than plump; her thick-ankled feet were thrust into low-heeled shoes. But she wore a red rose on her rumpled coat. The girl in the green suit was walking quickly away.

Blanford felt as though he were being split in two, so keen was his desire to follow the girl, yet so deep was his longing for the woman whose spirit had truly companioned and upheld him; and there she stood. He could see that her pale plump face was gentle and sensible; her gray eyes had a worn wrinkle.

Lt. Blanford did not get hostile. His fingers gripped the worn copy of Human Bondage which was to identify him to her. This would not be love, but it would be something precious, a friendship for which he had been and must be ever grateful...

He squared his shoulders, saluted and held the book out towards the woman, although even while he spoke he felt the bitterness of his disappointment.

“I’m Lt. Blanford and you... Miss Maynell. I’m so glad you could meet me. May...may I take you to dinner?”

The woman’s face broadened in a tolerant smile. “I don’t know what this is all about, son,” she answered. That young woman in the green suit who just passed gave me a rose to wear and said that if you asked me to go out with you, I should tell you she is waiting in the restaurant across the street. She said it was some kind of a test.”