

SERIAL STORY

CONSCRIPT'S WIFE

BY BETTY WALLACE

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YESTERDAY: Paul parks on a byroad, after Martha tells him of Suzanne's threat to go to Bill. Paul admits he is in love with Martha, but has kept it secret, because he is Bill's friend. He demands that she come back to the office, give up this killing work. Martha refuses, asks to go home. Paul slams the car into gear, darts out on to the highway. A car speeds toward them. There is a crash!

AFTER THE ACCIDENT CHAPTER XIX

When Martha Marshall opened her eyes, at last, she was lying on someone's coat in the road. A man was bending over her. A strange man, with frightened eyes, like burned-out holes in his face. "Are you all right now?" he asked huskily. "I'm fine." Memory came flooding over her. People, magically appearing from nowhere, were milling around her. They must have stopped their cars on the highway, she thought vaguely. When the crash came . . . She became aware, then, that there was a stinging on her cheek. One arm was numb. She lifted her head, and the man bent quickly and slid his arm under her shoulder. Her head was spinning. But she could sit up. She said, "I'm all right. Nothing broken."

The man looked down at her leg. Her stockings were torn, and there was blood. But Martha touched the spot and told him, "A scratch, see?" She moved her legs, and then she was clinging to him, to stand. The faces of people, the moving lights from electric torches, the beams from parked cars, all made a swirling pinwheel before her eyes. "Paul? Is he all right?" "Wordlessly, the man turned his head. Martha saw then the little group around something on the ground. Horror welled up inside her. She tried to go toward them. "Don't," the man said. "Wait."

But she couldn't wait. She walked, shakily, scarcely knowing she walked, to where they were bending over Paul. "Is he dead?" she asked fearfully. "Is he dead?" A state trooper straightened.

"No, he's not dead. He's had a nasty knock on the head, though."

A woman told her, gently, "There's an ambulance coming. She tried to lead the girl away. 'You can't do anything. Don't look.'"

The shrill whine of a siren filled the air. Always, afterwards, the sound of a siren was to bring back to Martha Marshall that hour of horror; the white stretcher onto which they lifted Paul's prostrate body; the grave face of the ambulance surgeon; the voices of men and the sharp commands of the trooper.

She was to recall the crumpled ruin of what had been Paul's new car; and the shattered headlights and bashed-in radiator of that other car. She was to remember how glass littered the road, and crunched under her feet; how her cheek stung, and blood came away on the handkerchief someone gave her.

She wanted to ride to the hospital in the ambulance with Paul. They wouldn't let her. The man who had first bent over her helped her into a black sedan. "I'll take you. Your bruises and scratches better be looked over, too."

But in the hospital, after a scant going over, they paid little attention to her. It was Paul, swiftly taken into the emergency room, over whom they worked.

She wanted to get to a phone, too. She had to call Eugene. She had to tell him what had happened. The man who took her to the hospital was kind. "Suppose we sit here and wait until we find out about him. Then you can telephone and I'll take you home." He was a middle-aged person, and his concern for her touched Martha.

"Don't bother about me, please." "I want to. A man I never saw before went to a lot of trouble for me, in an accident once, and I'm paying it back." It was then that she saw the scar which reached from his ear along his throat and down into his collar. She touched her stinging cheek, and a sickening fear washed over her. "I-I might have been disfigured," she thought swiftly. "Oh, how lucky I was! How lucky!"

But Paul? Had he been lucky? There was a tight band over her chest, constricting her lungs so that she couldn't breathe. Tighter and tighter, as the minutes lagged and still no one came out of the closed door of the emergency room.

The man signaled a nurse and spoke to her. She went away, to come back with something in a glass for Martha. "Drink this. It will help you."

Martha pushed it away. "I don't need anything." Just then, a doctor came out of the emergency room, and she ran toward him. "How is he? What is it? Is he going to be all right?" "He's suffering from concussion," said the doctor. "Not severe, I think. And he has a broken collar bone." He added hastily, "A collar bone which is broken requires merely a strapping. The patient usually walks around in one piece. And the concussion, I feel sure, will pass off by morning."

She wanted to see Paul. "I think not," said the doctor. "If you don't want to stay here overnight, getting over the shock you've had, you'd better go home and go straight to bed."

She protested, but it was no use. The kindly stranger drove her home. It was he who explained to Eugene what had happened.

Eugene was stumped, almost angry. "For God's sake, Martha, what on earth were you two doing away out there, on that back road?"

The stranger said, "I don't think she's quite up to questions. Martha thanked him for all he had done, and he patted her shoulder. "Go to bed. There's nothing to worry about."

She could hear him, talking to Eugene, as she undressed slowly. Her arm, she found, was black and blue, and there was a nasty welt on her hip. Her right leg was scratched and bruised under the iodine they'd painted it with at the hospital. The mirror gave her back the image of a pale, big-eyed girl with an angry scratch on her cheek and tumbled hair. Wearily, she slipped into bed. Her head was banging cruelly.

But she must have slept. She must have slept as only the exhausted can sleep, for it was long past breakfast time—she could hear Genie and Sis shouting outside her window when she woke.

Eugene was home. "Had to stay," he said matter-of-factly. "One day more isn't going to matter." "Did you phone the hospital about Paul?" "Yeah. He's all right." "She remembered Helen. "She must be worried about your not coming last night." "I sent a message by the nurse." "Don't tell her about this!" "Think I'm crazy?" He turned to go. "Are you hungry? I've got some coffee." "I'll be out in a minute. I want to see Paul as soon as I can, too." "Sure. But he's all right." And then he said, standing there in the doorway, "Bill called up here last night while you were out, Martha."

"He did? From camp?" Regret gnawed at her. "If I'd only known! I'd never have gone out, and all this wouldn't have happened. Why in the world didn't he let me know he meant to phone?" Eugene cleared his throat. "Matter of fact, he was kinda surprised when I told him Elliott had driven over here. And he said he'd gotten some kind of pass right after inspection this morning he'd leave camp. To spend the week-end with you." "Martha's eyes flew to Eugene's. "You mean—he's on his way now?" "Yes," said Eugene. That's what I mean. Can't take over a couple of hours from camp on the train. It's nearly 12 now." "Oh, my face! And—and he'd want to see Paul. . . . Her thoughts raced. Out of the back of her mind, blotting out the joy and anticipation, there came a sudden question. Had Suzanne managed to see Bill at camp already? Was that why he was coming here, so unexpectedly, and so immediately after Paul's arrival?" (To be continued)

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Roosevelt Asks More Money for WPA Needs

WASHINGTON, Jan. 31. (AP)—President Roosevelt yesterday asked congress to provide an additional \$375,000,000 to operate the work projects administration from March 1 to June 30. He also requested that the limitation on expenditures of relief funds on defense projects be increased from \$25,000,000 to \$50,000,000. WPA was given \$975,650,000 by the last congress to spend until March 1. The president accompanied his request by a letter from the budget bureau which said that the \$375,000,000 together with a small balance on hand, would provide work for about 22 per cent of the estimated unemployed until June 30.

Martin Will Resign as National GOP Chairman

WASHINGTON, Jan. 31. (AP)—Representative Joseph W. Martin, Jr., of Massachusetts announced yesterday that he planned to resign as chairman of the republican national committee on March 21. He said the committee would meet here on that day and "at that time I will submit my resignation."

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High School Activities Related at Rotary Meet

Details of three important Roseburg high school activities were told members of the Roseburg Rotary club and their guests at the regular weekly club luncheon yesterday by the heads of those school projects. Lou Britton, editor of the Orange-R, weekly school paper, described the publication and explained its business management. Florence Hamilton, editor of the school annual, the Umpqua, for this year, told of the work of publishing the annual. Sam Shoemaker, Jr., chief of the Warrior Guards, school service organization, detailed the work of the guards. The program was directed by Ed Bryant, student-Rotarian for the past semester. It was his last meeting with the club and he gave a brief talk on school activities, with specific information on the subject of debate.

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