

SERIAL STORY

CONSCRIPT'S WIFE

BY BETTY WALLACE

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YESTERDAY: Suzanne and Martha search the bars, but find no trace of Bill. Early next morning, Martha telephones camp headquarters, asks for Bill. The adjutant tells her Bill is A. W. O. L., that he will be classed as a deserter if he does not return. Almost immediately Paul calls from New York. Bill came to the hotel, knocked Paul down. He disappeared then. Paul is worried for Martha's safety, is hurrying home.

BUTCH SOLVES THE PUZZLE
CHAPTER XXIX

Suzanne Decker, still in her nightgown, her feet bare, ran into Martha's room the moment she put down the receiver after the phone call from Paul. She slipped her arms around Martha's shoulders.

"Don't worry, Martha. We'll find him. We'll bring him back to camp."

A new assurance radiated from her, a calm certainty. "I'll see this through for you, because I blame myself for every bit of it. If I hadn't started it, spouting all those senseless accusations there in the hospital, Bill wouldn't have become jealous and crazy. "I lost my head, Martha. Now Bill's lost his. You see, that's why I can understand about him. He must be going through the same things I went through. Jealousy, suspicion, a sort of savage rage that makes you want to smash out and hurt someone. It's like a storm—like a black thick fog over everything, and you see things distorted, out of all proportion. Little unimportant things seem sinister—everybody's against you—you want to make someone pay for what they've done to you. "Bill wanted to make Paul pay. I—oh, Martha, forgive me, I wanted to make you suffer! Don't blame Bill. This isn't his fault. It's mine. But I'm going to straighten it out. I swear I will!"

Martha was weeping softly. For that one wild moment when Suzanne had left the corviding jealousy in her heart reach out to tear at them all with cruel claws, they were paying with this nightmare of disaster. The forces Suzanne had set in motion then were speeding now, like an express train out of control, to smash into tragedy their love, their marriage, Bill's year in the army which should have been a sacred duty.

"Get dressed, Martha," Suzanne reached for the phone. "I'm going to do exactly what Paul did in New York. Hire a detective agency, first thing." Afterward, she insisted on Martha's eating a complete breakfast. "Orange juice isn't enough. Eat that toast. Take some eggs. Drink your coffee!"

At 9:30, Suzanne went back to the phone. She spoke to the Chief, at his home. "I've just talked to Paul Elliott in New York. It's very important that if Mrs. Marshall's husband should come to the office, you must keep him there. Lock him into a private office if you have to. Mrs. Marshall won't be in today." She hung up, giving no explanation. They went to Mrs. Larkin's first. Bill hadn't been back there. "If he shows up, telephone this number at once!" They left Mrs. Larkin with her mouth wide open.

At noon they drove to the airport to meet Paul's plane. He looked rumpled and disturbed. A blue bruise under his right eye and a puffiness on his jaw were silent reminders of his meeting with Bill. Martha swallowed hard before she could say, "Hello, Paul."

Suzanne didn't bother with greetings. "Any news in New York before you left?" "No." He looked at Martha. "I'm sorry as the devil. But I couldn't do anything with him. He was drunk."

"I know, Oh, Paul, what'll happen to him if he doesn't go back to camp?" "Nothing he doesn't deserve," Paul said grimly. But at her white face, at the misery in her eyes, he relented. "I guess it's not all his fault, he muttered. "We'll find him. We'll smooth things out."

But they didn't find him. The

long hours dragged on and on. Endlessly. Martha sat in the car between Paul and Suzanne, going from one building to another. They checked up on the YMCA, on all the hotels, on overnight rooming houses. They consulted with the detective agency, and drove around to find out if by any chance Bill had appeared at Air Transport. At 6 o'clock Martha was faint and terror stricken. Hope seemed to be dying inside her. She couldn't even tell herself any more that they would find him.

She could only sit there in the car, thinking of Bill as he must be thinking of himself. Suzanne's words this morning had illuminated some of that for her. Bill thought he was a wronged man, a man whose wife had been running around with his best friend. Bill thought of himself as shamefully treated, so he had kicked over the traces, venting his bitterness at the shackles of discipline.

Martha thought, too, of stories she had heard. Stories in which men like that went out on wild benders, reeling through the streets of strange cities, meeting with unspeakable accidents. Fear, a dark and paralyzing force, grew swiftly and relentlessly. Her numbed brain, her tired body, could fight it off no longer.

"Oh, Paul, I know Bill's hurt. Maybe he's dead. We'd have found him if he weren't in a hospital somewhere. Or a morgue. I feel it, Paul. I feel it." She was babbling, suddenly unable to curb this hysteria.

Paul's foot tramped on the brake. Suzanne said, "She's caved in, that's all. Take us home, Paul. I'll put her to bed."

"No, no! I must go on. We must find him. Even if he's dead, I must know."

"He's not dead," Suzanne said harshly. "We'll find him. But you'll be a wreck on our hands if you don't get some rest."

Lying in bed, Martha's fears marched on in her mind. She couldn't rid herself of the terrible pictures of Bill hurt, Bill killed. Suddenly a chill shook her, and then another. She was shuddering in uncontrollable spasms, and Suzanne, frightened, sent for the doctor.

Martha never knew what Suzanne told him. Her teeth were chattering, her head was swimming, but she kept moaning, "Doctor, I'm all right. If they'd only let me up! I've got to do something. I've got to find him!"

"You've got to get quiet, Madam!" The doctor swabbed a spot on her arm, jabbed in the needle, and said, "Now go to sleep!"

"I can't, I can't." But in a little while, she felt the drug taking hold. Dissolving something in her brain which wanted to hold on. Something which fought, and was losing slowly. . . .

It was morning when she awoke. Late morning. And Suzanne's face told her at once that Bill was still missing. "Paul's on his way over. We're driving to camp, to look around the town close by. The detective

OUR BOARDING HOUSE



HULLO, UNCLE BULGY! I MEAN BULGY! LEAMP-KAFF-KAFF! ARE YOU SPOOFING, AMOS! GAY, I GOT A SWEET INVENTION IDEA! I READ THAT FISH QUIT EATIN' WHEN IT'S GOIN' TO STORM. HOW ABOUT A POCKET FISHBOWL SO YOU'D KNOW WHEN TO COME IN OUT OF THE RAIN?

WHY NOT CARRY A WILD DUCK ON A LEASH, AND YOU'LL KNOW WINTER IS COMING WHEN THE BIRD TRIES TO FLY SOUTH!

DID THE BEE EVER GET INTO GRANDFATHER'S BONNET?

THINKS MAYBE HE WENT BACK AND DIDN'T HAVE THE NERVE TO REPORT. SOMETIMES THEY DO THAT.

NOT BILL, MARTHA THOUGHT. IF HE WENT BACK, HE'D SEEN IT THROUGH ALL THE WAY. BUT SHE SAID NOTHING. HER MIND

SEIZED ON THE FACT THAT PAUL AND SUZANNE WERE GOING AWAY. SHE'D BE ALONE. SHE COULD GET UP—LOOK FOR BILL HERSELF—

SHE LAY THERE, UNCOMPLAININGLY, WHILE PAUL CAME IN AND ASKED HOW SHE FELT. SHE NODDED WHEN

HE SAID, "YOU MUST SAY IN BED, MARTHA. THE DOCTOR SAYS YOU MUST." RELUCTANTLY, HE LEFT WITH SUZANNE. SHE WAITED UNTIL SHE HEARD THE CAR START OFF. THEN SHE GOT OUT OF BED RESOLUTELY.

A CAB TOOK HER TO THE GARAGE

With Major Hoople

where she had left Peg, after she drove Butch out to the farm. Standing there in the garage, waiting for the man to get the dilapidated old car out from behind the truck that hedged it in, Martha thought suddenly, "The farm! Butch! If Bill were anywhere in town—if he was upset, didn't know where to go—he'd think of Butch!" Her lips began to quiver. Of course!

She remembered how she had thought of Butch as the only child they had. She recalled how Butch's warm body, his adoring brown eyes, the little rough kiss of his tongue, had been her only comfort in those black moments when she was driving away from Helen's, back to Air Transport, after her quarrel with Bill.

"Bill loves Butch even more than I do!" In a great shining blaze of certainty, she drove out of town to the farm. She ran from the car straight through the path to the runway in the back of the house.

"Butch!" she called tremulously. "Butch!"

There was the answering bark of a pack of animals. The high yelping of a little rox terrier, the growl of a chow. Butch's own familiar sharp, delighted voice.

Then, rounding the corner of the house, Martha stopped short. For Butch was barking, jumping excitedly at the feet of a tall man in olive drab.

"Bill!" she screamed. "Oh, Bill, we've looked everywhere for you!"

(To be continued)

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Curtis Waters, Native of
Roseburg, Dies in Spokane

Word received here announced the death at Spokane, Wash., February 3 last of Curtis W. Waters, a native of Roseburg, at the age of 81. He was the son of the late Mr. and Mrs. Henry Waters, pioneer settlers of Look-Inglass, and was known by older residents of this locality. After moving from Roseburg 50 years ago, Mr. Waters became prominent in official life in eastern Washington. He served in the Washington legislature, and as internal revenue collector and tax commissioner. His wife died three

years ago. He leaves a son and a daughter, L. B. Waters of Seattle and Mrs. R. A. Bell of Spokane. Mr. Waters was a cousin of Mrs. Sadie Bosard and Elmer Wells of Roseburg.

Goes to Portland—G. H. Moore, Southern Pacific trainmaster here, is spending a few days in Portland on business.

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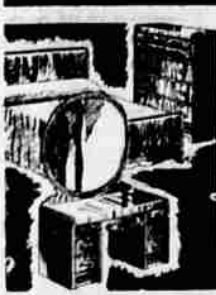
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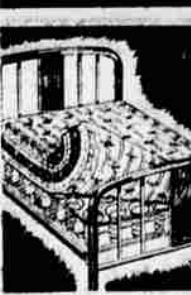
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