

LITERARY PAGE

Phantom . . .

And We Will Be Safe Together

By DUNCAN WIMPRESS

MARTHA'S fingers loosened and let the pen drop to the heavy sheet of "best" stationery. Her eyes raised slowly, unseeingly, until she was gazing out through the wide front window at Maple street's quiet peacefulness. A boy, pumped hurriedly by on an ancient bike, one front leg rolled to clear the chain. A pup sniffed inquisitively along the front fence glanced about for a more interesting subject and finding none, trotted on quest of new worlds. Two high school girls giggled their way down the other side of the shady street.

But Martha saw none of this. Martha had more important things to think about. This letter, for instance. Her gaze returned to the paper before her. Her lips moved as she read what she'd written.

"Dearest Hans, I don't exactly know how to begin this letter. I never thought I would have to write one like it, but I do. . ."

Slowly, her eyes still glassy with reminiscence, she tore the letter once across the middle and dropped it into a wastebasket at her side, already half-filled with similar sheets.

How could she do such a thing to Hans? How could she hurt him so when, for as long as she could remember, he'd been the boy who'd meant everything to her? But still, there was John. Dear, tall, dark, ugly John. How different from stocky, blond Hans he was . . . and yet, how much alike!

Listlessly, she pulled another sheet of paper across in front of her and began to write.

"Dearest Hans . . ." Hans . . . Hans, the boy who'd given her courage in that dark hour when their Dutch homeland had been overrun with the vermin of the Man. Hans, who had come home from fighting over the front to assure her that everything would be all right. Hans, who, when Holland had fallen, had taken her out of the grim tragedy of it all and arranged her trip to America.

She remembered her arrival and how kind the McLeans had been to her from the very first. How they had taken her right into the family, overcome her shyness and brought her home to this small, secure, middle-western town. Hans had not come over with her. He had gone on to England to continue fighting. He'd been there until just last week. Until the day she'd received the telegram.

She could see that wire as if it were lying on the desk before her.

"Arrived Toronto today. Return in three weeks. Please come up and we'll be married. All my love. Hans."

She remembered how the butterflies had played in her stomach when she'd read the message. "Come up and we'll be married." That was because Hans didn't know she'd met John. Hans didn't know she didn't love him any more. And now she had to tell him.

* * *

JOHN wore a uniform too, sometimes. A white uniform with gold wings on his chest. But John was only a reserve. He had no reason to go to war. The United States was helping in other ways than fighting, but she would never actually enter the war. She was too big and steady . . . and safe. John would be able

to stay with her always and keep her and protect her.

She'd met John at the country club dance last month. He was so tall and had such an engaging grin that she'd liked him at once and when he'd suggested going out the next evening, she'd accepted. Neither one had suspected what it would lead to. It was a week later they had discovered they were in love and it was then that she'd told John about Hans.

"There's something you should know, John," she'd murmured against his solid, capable shoulder.

"Hush," his whisper was soft. "Moments like these don't happen very often and it's bad luck to disturb one."

Martha had raised her head and looked him full in the face.

"There's another man," she'd said abruptly.

The spell had snapped like an over-taught rubber band.

John had stiffened. She remembered how the crimson had mounted along his neck and ears.

"Why didn't you tell me before this? You know it wasn't fair to let things go on. You shouldn't have done it!" His voice was harsh from shock.

"I'm only telling you now because I want to be honest. I think you should know about him. But before I go on, I want you to know that I love you more than anything or anybody in this world." Martha was almost crying as she continued. "Hans and I have intended to be married for years and years. It was one of those family-arranged affairs. He's a Dutch flyer. He's fighting with the British now. Hans was the one who got me out of the old country and saved my life. I wanted you to know about him. I thought you should. He's one of the finest men I've ever known, but I don't love him. I have the deepest respect and admiration for him, but not love . . . Now if you still want me, I'm yours." Her head went down as she finished and a tear slid slowly to her hands, folded in her lap.

"Want you?" John's voice was again soft and intimate. "Darling, what has happened to you in the past is your business. I only know you're going to have

a wonderful future . . . safe with me."

And so she'd promised and now she had to tell Hans.

* * *

HER eyes rested on the two neatly written words. "Dearest Hans. . ."

The doorbell sharply violated the heavy silence. Martha started and then went quickly to the door. A messenger boy smiled, handed her a telegram, gazed past her into the house inquisitively and, with a wave of a hand, was gone.

Martha turned and walked slowly back to the writing desk, the telegram held up before her with both hands. She sank into her chair and without removing her eyes from the envelope, took up a letter opener and slowly slit the flap.

"My squadron's ordered back to duty in four days. Come at once and marry me before I go. All of us anxiously awaiting your arrival. Please fly . . . and hurry. Love, Hans."

Martha gasped and read the message through again.

Four days. That meant she would have to leave tonight if she was to get there soon enough for them to have any time together after the marriage. And then Hans would leave again for England. Perhaps never to return. And she would be left alone . . . alone and perhaps a widow.

Martha shuddered convulsively. Why should she go? She knew she loved John. He was kind and good and he loved her. It would be easier for Hans if she simply told him. Why make a farce of the whole thing? She simply wouldn't be able to stand the uneasiness of a life with Hans. About all things she wanted security . . . safety . . . and John meant just that.

She crossed quickly to the phone and dialed John's number.

"John? I've just received a telegram from Hans. Could you come over at once?"

* * *

JOHN seemed to fill the room as he entered unannounced and came to her.

"What's wrong, darling? Has

something happened to him?" Honest anxiety sounded in his voice. He didn't know this man . . . this rival, but he felt a sincere respect for what Hans was doing and for what he stood.

Silently, Martha handed him the telegram. As he read, his lips tightened.

"You'll go, of course." His tone was more a command than a question. "You owe it to him."

"But, John, I don't love him. It wouldn't be fair to any of us. It could never be an honest marriage."

"You owe it to him." The sentence was definite . . . final.

Martha bowed her head.

"I'll phone him tonight . . . long distance."

John turned and without a word left the room. As he passed through the door, he glanced back at Martha and there was something new in his eyes . . . something shining and true . . . respect for the right thing . . . honestly done.

* * *

"HELLO, Hans? Is that you?"

"Yes, yes, of course it's me! How are you, dear? Did you get my telegram?"

She could see him now. Solidly planted before the phone . . . his eyes calm and smiling . . . his blond hair tousled and uncombed. . . a dirty jacket slung around his shoulders with a torn sleeve hanging carelessly down one side . . . grease on his broad, honest face.

"Yes, I got it."

This was it. This was the time to tell him about John. But she was so far away. It was all so impersonal. She braced herself against the back of the chair and spoke quickly.

"I've met a man down here with whom I've fallen in love. He's

The sea is not for us,
Who love so well the hill;
The driftwood and the dunes
Forebode us none but ill,
When by their very hush
The mountain peaks will call,
And for the pounding sea,
We shall not hear at all.

Yet I am terrified
For fear the phantom sea
May cast a wondrous charm
To snare the soul in me
That I might never walk
On wooded hills again
When spruce and tamarack
Are hung with autumn rain.

—By Claudine Biggs

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in the naval reserve but is a civilian now. He says I must marry you. I'm still very fond of you. I will marry you if you want. I will fly up tonight if that's what you want." Her voice was a rapid monotone. It was like that of a child who has learned a poem by heart for the Christmas play and wants to get it said as soon as possible. She stopped for breath. The man at the other end was silent.

"Hans, are you still there?" "Yes, I'm still here." The voice was quiet . . . almost a whisper. "Do you love him very much, Martha? Are you sure?"

"Yes, Hans, I do. I know what I'm doing to you, but I wanted to be honest. I'll come if you want me."

"No, Martha. You'd better not. I was planning to have you return to England with me after we were married. I've passage booked on the 'Leander' for you, but I can cancel it. It might not have been safe anyway. I'm flying back this week. Please write and tell me about him. I'll always love you, Martha. I hope you'll be very happy. I . . . I'd better go now. I'd rather like to be alone. Goodbye and good luck." The line clicked dead.

Martha, her tear-blinded eyes open wide, slowly replaced the receiver. Her hand dropped to her lap.

Lean, brown fingers reached over and took the hand carefully. She looked up. John stood over her, tears in his eyes, too. Neither said a word. Soundlessly, he sank down beside her and she went into his arms as a wandering child coming home.

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Fisticuffs in the Nineties

JOHN THE GREAT: The Times and Life of a Remarkable American, John L. Sullivan, by Donald Barr Chidsey. Doubleday Doran. \$3.

This is the story of one of the greatest pugilists of all time; it is a detailed description of his life; but it is more than that, it is a lusty picture of the energetic eighties and the gay nineties.

Many threads are woven into this narrative; how, for instance, Richard Kyle Fox brought into being nation-wide interest in sports, and forced sports pages in newspapers into existence through the medium of the Police Gazette.

Mr. Chidsey does not mince his words; he is not afraid to tell both sides of the picture. Sometimes the scenes he paints are not too pretty; but always one has a feeling that he knows what he is talking about; the wealth of detail is convincing.

He tells of the meteoric rise of

the Police Gazette, and how Fox must have chuckled when he received this note from "Sempronius," Texas:

"Have been on the move so much lately that I have not received the Police Gazette regularly. Please send me a copy here and oblige, Jesse James."

With the great fighter we travel to London, hobnob with royalty, frequent bars, fight many a round with such men as James J. Corbett, Paddy Ryan, and Joe Goss.

The thing that is bewildering about the whole book is that one wonders all the way through how such a dull, quarrelsome bully could have been the idol of his day. Mr. Chidsey paints him as being drunk most of the time. He was a spendthrift. He was not well educated.

Yet he is better remembered today than many of his famous contemporaries. His name was heard everywhere. Kings and

presidents were glad to shake his hand. He was "the great Jawn L."

John P. Marquand, in an illuminating little introduction, explains in part the reasons for this hero-worship.

First, says Marquand, "Mr. Sullivan said frequently and profanely, drunk or sober, that he could lick any so-an-so in the world. Others have made this same remark before and since, but Mr. Sullivan was different from most of the others; he was always ready to try it, and usually he could do it. . ."

Furthermore, he continues, he was always ready to stand drinks on the house, he was a handsome physical monument, and he was generous with his huge income.

But at the root of it all, says Mr. Marquand, he satisfied a need for hero-worship, was an ideal for wishful thinkers. He was symbolic of the times, a unique piece of Americana.—C.G.

IT was three weeks later Martha heard the announcement. She was sitting with John in the front room of their Hawaiian honeymoon cottage. They'd been there just a week. Mary had been playing cards, John, reading, but now they just relaxed in the large chair, silently content in each other's company. Safety and security radiated through the dimness. The radio played softly from the corner. Suddenly the music stopped and an announcer spoke quickly in that breathless, news-flash manner.

"The United States navy tonight announced the sinking of two ships in a trans-Atlantic convoy bound through the stormy seas to England. The British destroyer 'Whitelash' and the passenger-freighter 'Leander' were both sent to the bottom. Several survivors were picked up from the 'Whitelash,' but the 'Leander' went down with all hands and passengers."

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