

CONSCRIPT'S WIFE

WALLACE

CHAPTER II
Bill pleaded. "Darling, look like that. It's I have to go, I have

steadied herself. Her face came back into the saw his crisp dark tightened line of his fingers went up, to pat

had been conscripted, at- there was nothing they to change it. He would for a whole year. His needed him. The United America...

lights flitted in and out, starting birds. Bill would But there was no war, caution, a defense. Only an Army Camp. Duty... men enlist. Bill was "Lots of men join for a career."

Bill, you—you talk as if it to already. He was, something stabbed at her she realized that almost be an adventure for something different, he even welcomed

like that. He had curi- a boundless thirst for Marriage had not set-

softly. "Maybe I'll be you, Bill." She thought, "Like a little boy. Play-

alked out into the street, sty and dilapidated, so

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Martha said, "I'll ask for time off. I want to stay with you every minute, until you—leave."

She stumbled as she got out of the car. The blood pounded in her ears. It seemed to her almost as though she was saying farewell to the gay and careless life they had known until now. Saying farewell to the laughter and dancing and the irresponsibility.

The country had given her husband a stern duty to perform; and she, as his wife, had her part in it, too. She'd have to stay home, alone and waiting. She'd have to come to this office every morning. Not as before, simply because it made things easier—but because now there'd be her own living to make.

Duty, it was a big word. Strangely, an unfamiliar word. Martha Marshall thought, as she walked into the sunny office where she typed specifications for airplanes, that perhaps their generation—hers and Bill's had heard all too little of duty until now. It had never been a stern taskmaster to be reckoned with. No one had preached its necessities, it had no part in their lives.

Paul Elliott raked his strong fingers through his hair when she told him Bill had been called. "Nice meal! I thought they'd use some discretion. First crack out of the fishbowl, they hook a married man."

He told her to go right home. "I'll fix everything."

The thought of duty stayed with her. While she helped. Bill pulled out dresser drawers, sort out underwear, pack his suitcase, she thought, "At least this isn't such a hard duty. I'm not sending him to war. Not yet."

The store had given him a month's salary. "For the next six months, Martha, they'll send you a check for half salary. Decent, huh?"

"Wonderful of them." They had awakened to duty, too.

It all happened so swiftly. She could hardly believe it when she woke one morning to the sound of Bill's shower running, the sun streaming in the windows, and the voice in her brain saying, "This is the last day. He goes tonight. Tonight!"

At breakfast, he said, "I'm actually liking the idea. I was getting fed up at the store. Felt like a mule on a treadmill. Same old customers, buying the same old junk. Asking them, got a job, how much you make, how much can you pay a week?"

Her breath caught. "I didn't know you weren't happy."

"Sure I was happy." He was almost impatient. "But things get monotonous after a while." They'd gotten monotonous in New York. That's why he came here, she remembered.

She laughed it off. "The Army won't be monotonous. Not much. Drills and hikes or whatever they call it."

Paul rang their doorbell half an hour before train time. "I should have brought flowers," he said. "But I got this." It was a compact kit, leather, with comb and mirror and razor and chromium containers for soap, toothpaste, shaving cream.

"Say, that's swell!" Bill grinned. "A pint would have been useful, too."

The three of them piled into the front seat of the old car. Bill slung his suitcase in the back. A dejected Butch, leaping in behind them, sniffed unhappily and asked in low growls what was wrong.

"Look," Paul said, as they turned into the station drive. "The parking lot's jammed." Laughing girls, and girls who weren't laughing, and men carrying suitcases, and older women clutching handkerchiefs, were getting out of the other cars.

"I'm not the only one who's being left behind," Martha said. It was cold comfort.

Inside, the station was crowded and noisy. As they pushed their way toward the gate, Paul said, "Reminds me of a scene from a new reel. Kissing the boys goodbye."

Martha's eyes stung, her lips quivered. But she had promised herself she would send Bill away with a smile.

"You'll write to me, Bill?" Every day?"

Bill set his suitcase down. "Well, this is it, honey." His arms reached for her, and suddenly she was clinging to him. "Bill. Oh, Bill, darling."

"Don't cry, honey. I'll be thinking of you every minute."

He shook hands with Paul. "Take care of her, boy," he said gruffly. "I'm depending on you."

Martha stood there, a girl of stone, as Bill mounted the little steps into the train. His face appeared at a window, over someone else's face. She picked up the corners of her lips and smiled. She waved to him.

A voice cried, "All aboard! All aboard!" There was the rising snort of the engine, the deepening rumble of wheels. The train began to move. Martha waved frantically. Suddenly she was running, trying to keep up. "Bill! Bill!"

Paul said, "Martha. Don't."

She scarcely heard him. She was running a long side the train, her eyes on Bill's face. "Goodbye, darling. Goodbye." But she wanted another moment of seeing him. She ran as if, somehow, she could keep up. As if, somehow, she could prevent being left behind.

But inexorably the train moved faster. Bill's face was drawing away. Then it was gone. Her arm dropped to her side. "He's gone. I'm alone."

Paul was running toward her. All at once, she was laughing. "Paul," she cried hysterically. "Paul, I'm a conscript's wife now."

(To Be Continued)

LITTLE ORPHAN ANNIE



ON IT WAS A WONDERFUL SHOW LAST NIGHT. MOMMY? ALL THOSE ACTORS! AND THEY YELLED AT EACH OTHER AND GOT ALL RED IN THE FACE—HA HA!

THOSE WERE THE LAWYERS—GUESS WAS THE ONE WHO DIDN'T YELL—DO YOU REMEMBER HIM, BILLY?

YES! HE WAS TALL WITH GRAY HAIR AND HE SMILED A LOT. DIDN'T HE? EXCEPT WHEN HE LOOKED AT POPPY.

YES—HE IS THE VERY FINEST TRIAL ATTORNEY IN THE STATE. JUDGE CAIRNS ASKED HIM TO HELP US—

JUDGE CAIRNS? OH, HE WAS THE ONE WITH THE FUNNY BLACK BATH ROBE—I LIKE HIM—I SAT ON HIS LAP—REMEMBER? HE'S NICE—

EVERYONE WAS NICE TO US, BILLY—AND NOW YOU'RE MY LITTLE BILLY FOR EVER AND EVER—

BUT I WAS ANYWAY—B-R-R—I WAS SCARED O' POPPY—HE WAS SO MAD—HE STARTED TO HOLLER—BUT JUDGE CAIRNS JUST LOOKED AT HIM AND HE SHUT UP QUICK—REMEMBER?

LET'S NOT REMEMBER ANY MORE, BILLY—LET'S JUST TRY TO FORGET AND START NOW, ALL NEW—

HAROLD GRAY

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Mother Decree



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