

# LAST LOVER

BY Helen Topping Miller

Twenty-five years have elapsed since the disappearance of Richard McFarlane in World War I and his wife, Julia, is beset with fresh worries as the children she has raised with the aid of her father-in-law, John I. McFarlane, become involved in World War II. Ric has "washed out" of the air corps while Jill falls hopelessly in love with Lieut. Spang Gordon. Jill and Spang go to a dance and when Spang doesn't profess his love for her, Jill is hurt. He does tell her, however, that Ric is paying attention to a divorcee of questionable character. Jill determines to go to camp to see her brother and also to talk to Spang again. She tells Julia her plans.

## CHAPTER VI

"I think it's a beautiful idea. Dave was in love with you when you were seventeen, he told me so. Grandfather's old, and I'm not going to be around forever—I hope. Though you may have me on your hands. Maybe I'll be one of those bright spinsters who fade reluctantly and get hopsy, with tanned-leather hides and lean hands that grab for highball glasses. Or I might turn coy and wear pastel-colored clothes too young for me, and make up tales about my lover who died in the great war. Could be."

"Don't be disgusting, Jill!" Julia spoke crisply, as she went out.

Julia went to her room and closed the door. Though the working outfit she wore was soiled and dusty, she sat down on the edge of her prim, white bed. Jill's abrupt remark, flung in her face as ruthlessly as a dash of cold water, had set stirring within her that current of rebellion that she had fought so long and conquered up to now.

Why couldn't she grow old? Old and cold and patient, with no dampened fire flaring to trouble her at unexpected moments, no dreams to drift like sunken clouds across her dull horizon? What a relief to be old, so that she would never again have to know this aching lack, this hunger within herself for a little understanding, a little tenderness!

Richard was dead, and yet he would not die. Something of him stayed alive, to tease and haunt her, as he had tortured her when her love for him had made her abject and naive and too pitifully vulnerable.

For years John I. had been nagging at her to have Richard declared legally dead. So many things were involved, he argued. The title to the property, her children's inheritance, everything she had worked so long and so hard to attain.

What money John I. had, Julia knew, was willed to Jill. He had always been a little impatient with Ric, dubious about him. Money ruined the McFarlane men, he declared, softened and spoiled them. Only work could save them. Because she knew how John I. felt, Julia had been a bit more generous with her son, foolishly generous, no doubt, but her lenience had eased some grimness in her, the unforgetting thing she had not been able to conquer.

The war, the air corps, had been right for Ric, she was certain. The farm had always irked him, but his desire for speed, his audacious spirit, his arrogant recklessness would be appeased by combat. She had put her maternal apprehensions down and forced herself not to worry. Ric had to do this thing, it meant salvation for him. And then for some reason unexplained—because a desperately efficient army machine never bothers with explanations—Ric had failed his examinations for the cadet corps.

"The punk!" Jill had been scornful. "He slid through college on his ear, and he expected to get by a military board the same way. He'll be a Joe gunner or a grease monkey now."

## Haunting Memories Of Richard

But Ric's luck had held, the same luck that had been with him when he talked himself out of jams at school, when he slid free of speeding charges, when he wangled extra money from his fuming grandfather. He had got an assignment to officer's school.

"He'll flunk it, you'll see," Jill said.

But Julia had held to hope because she was Ric's mother. Ric was her deep heart, Ric was the man in her life. But never from her handsome, insolent son had she had consideration or tenderness. To old John I. she was a partner, adequate, standing on her own feet, wise. But to Dave Patterson she was a woman.

Leaning her burning cheeks in firm palms, Julia wondered if she had depended on Dave too much. He had been the one person to whom she owed no responsibility other than the gladly given gift of kindness and comradeship—he had been a rock on which at times her weariness had rested. She had been fooling herself, of course. And now Jill's sharp young ruthlessness had torn all her carefully arranged pretenses to shreds.

She had known for a long time that Dave's feeling for her was more than friendliness. She had

pushed the knowledge away, she had refused to acknowledge it, even to herself. She had tried to hold him off, yet keep him, too. She knew now how unfair she had been. Somehow, she had to make it up to Dave. That she could love him in return was something this rigid thing in her heart would not permit her to consider. She had frozen herself into a mold so long ago. She could not alter the form of what she must be to herself, but with that sureness came an overwhelming loneliness. She had dedicated herself to a memory, to a ghost, and it was like being chained to an unanswering tomb. The dreadful part was that there was always that secret feeling of menace about that tomb.

"I'm a fool!" she said aloud, sharply, snatching her hands down and jerking her body erect. She doused her face with cold water, gave her hair a few disciplining strokes with a brush. She had to take the truck and go out and check the corn yield with John I.

Love—she twisted her mouth as she thought of it! There was no time for love. And no dignity



"So nice to see you again, Spang."

about it for a woman past forty, a woman who had spent herself for love once and got only a promissory note for recompense.

That it had been only the fevered passion of a girl, that this other ache in her heart was real and living, she would not admit, even to herself. But Dave must not be hurt. He had loved another woman once, been married to her for a brief time, but she knew that that old love was now only something frail and sweet to Dave, a fragrance like that of a pressed flower, a wreath laid on a slender grave. But that grave had closed, while if she, Julia, had a grave to keep it would not green, it would not soften with time, it gave her no peace.

## Brother and Sister Talk

A sidling thought came into her mind. Perhaps if she was clever about it, she could maneuver Dave into falling in love with Jill. He was too old for her—as old as her father, as a matter of fact—but Dave's heart was youthful while Jill had grown a little too mature, had let her age trouble and tense her.

It would solve two of her problems, it would ease her conscience, she thought. But also it would leave her terribly alone. With no one but John I., who fought off age fiercely but who must succumb inevitably to what he called "that damn almanac."

She would not think about herself, she would not think at all. She would concentrate on meat-curing formulas, she would give up bothering about lip-stick and the right foundation garment. She would grow old, like a country woman, with no graces—utilitarian. She made herself believe this as the little truck rattled up the rocky lane and through the gate into the vast cornfield. She walked between the ripening rows and jerked at thorny vines that snatched at her ankles, she tore away husks and examined the drying ears critically.

Old John I. marched beside her, saying nothing. But she could almost feel his keen eyes burning into her, she knew what he was thinking because he had told her bluntly not so long ago. That she was a sentimental, weak-minded fool!

The hotel near Ridley Field was always excitingly full of officers and other uniformed men, and Jill had a new dress of aquamarine faille that brought out all the fruity tints of her hair, and a saucy little hat that did exactly the right things for her eyes.

She called the field and left a message for Ric as soon as she arrived, and presently he telephoned her, his

voice sounding just a trifle impatient.

"Hello, Jill. I wasn't expecting you down. Mother with you?"

"No, Dooley didn't come. How are you? Can you get off to have dinner with me tonight, Ric?"

Ric hesitated for a breath. "Not sure," he said then. "They've been mighty tight with passes lately. I'll see what I can do and call you later."

"I thought you always had a B pass into town."

"They've canceled a lot of passes in our squadron. I might be able to wangle one. Stick around the telephone, and I'll let you know."

"Tell them your only sister came miles to have a look at you. You aren't being shipped out, are you, Ric?"

"No orders yet. Nothing but rumors. Mother all right?"

"Oh, yes, everything is fine. Try to get in, will you? I came a long way to see you."

"I'll do my best, Jill, but this is the army, you know."

Jill hung up with some irritation. Now she must wait till she heard from Ric before she called Spang. She tried to summon a gay assurance as she made herself pretty before the mirror, but her heart was shivering and she decided that if Spang brushed her off casually this time she would go back to the farm and devote herself to pigs forever.

An hour passed before Ric telephoned again.

"Sorry, Jill, no soap. Tough luck for both of us."

"Could you see me at the gate after five, if I came out in a taxi, Ric?"

"Can't even do that. I'm stuck on a detail tonight. Sorry I didn't know you were coming down, or I would have tried to make a swap of some kind. Let me know a week in advance next time, will you? And give Mother my love. I'll try to write next week. Been busy as the devil."

"All right, Ric. Sorry. Good-by." Probably he had had his pass canceled for some reason that he didn't want to tell her. But now Ric was definitely out of it, and she was free to spend the week-end as she pleased. So she put in another call for Lieutenant Spencer Gordon, only to be told that the lieutenant had signed off the post and gone to town.

Well, if he was in town there was a chance that she might meet him, so she touched up her make-up and gave her hat the right tilt and went downstairs. For all her reckless remarks to her mother, she had always despised girls who ran after men and were easy to get and therefore vulnerable, but this was different. She wasn't going to hurl herself at Spang's head. She was going to be lightly indifferent, though heaven knew it wouldn't be easy, keeping a cool head while her heart was burning like a mad bonfire!

Spang was nowhere about when she went down, but she knew that this small and continually crowded hotel was the town rendezvous for all the officers and men at the field.

So she went into the dining-room and took a long time ordering her dinner, not looking around, ignoring the groups of jaunty lads in khaki who turned on her bright, direct glances.

If Spang came into the room she would know it. Something acute within her, tuned to response, would know when he was near. She was so sure of this that she ate very slowly, buying an evening paper from a soiled little boy, studying the pages with exaggerated interest between sips of the slightly warm tomato juice they brought her.

So she was startled an hour later when, the dinner having dragged itself out through three cigarettes, she rose at last to go, and there was Spang sitting near the door with two other officers. They were finishing plates of apple pie.

## Second Meeting With Spang

Spang jumped to his feet as she approached, and the other men got up, too.

"Why hello, Jill!" he cried. "I didn't see you in here. May I present Lieutenant Crawford and Lieutenant Stark? Miss McFarlane."

The two young men bowed, and Spang pulled out a chair.

"Sit down and have something more with us, Jill. When did you come down? Mrs. McFarlane with you?"

"No, I came alone." Jill dropped into a chair, leaned her chin on her palms, smiled at the three of them impartially. "I came down to see Ric—my brother," she explained to the two strangers, "but it seems he's forfeited his pass or something, and I was just making up my mind whether the bus or train would be the most hectic way to get home. So nice to see you again, Spang."

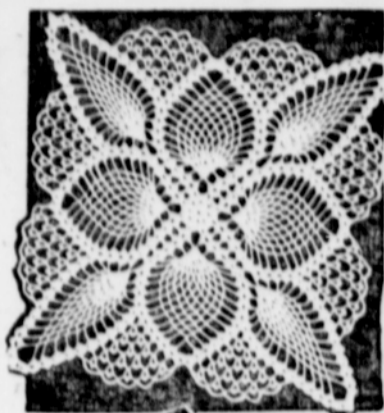
"You mean you were going home without even letting me know?" Spang demanded, scowling at her.

"I did telephone." Jill kept her touch light. "But you'd left the post, and it didn't occur to me I'd meet you here."

(TO BE CONTINUED)

## NEEDLECRAFT PATTERNS

### Pineapple Square Has Many Uses



YOUR favorite pineapple design makes this square of dozens of uses. Crochet one and you've a

doily; three, a scarf; twenty, a cloth.

Whether you make one of these large pineapple squares or many, you'll have crochet you'll proudly use. Pattern 570 has directions.

Due to an unusually large demand and current conditions, slightly more time is required in filling orders for a few of the most popular pattern numbers.

Sewing Circle Needlecraft Dept.  
Box 3217 San Francisco 6, Calif.  
Enclose 20 cents for Pattern.  
No. \_\_\_\_\_  
Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_

## Gas on Stomach

Relieved in 5 minutes or double your money back. When excess stomach acid causes painful, suffocating gas, sour stomach and heartburn, doctors usually prescribe the fastest-acting medicine known for symptomatic relief—medicines like those in Bell-sore Tablets. No laxative. Bell-sore brings comfort in a jiffy or double your money back on return of bottle to us. See at all druggists.

## NYLON HOSIERY

from mill to you  
Ladies Fall-Fashioned fine gauge  
Newest Shade 8 1/2 to 10 1/2  
Box of 3 pairs \$5.50  
Add 10c per box to cover Mailing Cost  
Send Check or Money Order to:

## FAMOUS MAKE HOSIERY

2116 York Road, Elkins Park, Penna.

## "COLD BUG" GOT YOUR CHILD?



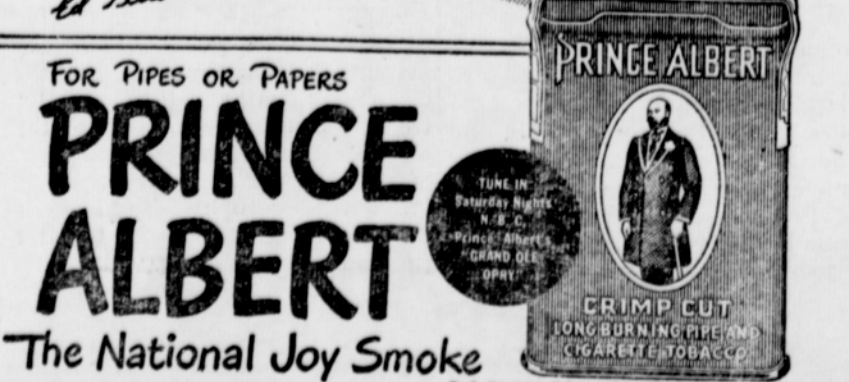
Get MENTHOLATUM quick!  
TIGHT, ACHING MUSCLES ARE MY SPECIALTY!  
Poor little chest muscles all sore and "achey" from hard coughing? Quick, Mentholum. Rub it on back, chest, neck. Your child will like that warm, gently stimulating action. Helps lessen congestion without irritating child's delicate normal skin. At same time comforting vapors lessen coughing.

## One Great Tobacco Pleases Two Kinds of Smokers!

For pipe or rolling—the tobacco that means more pleasure is rich-tasting, tongue-gentle Prince Albert!



"I've rolled my own with Prince Albert for years," says Ed Boarn. "Crimp cut P. A. rolls up quick as a shot. Every cigarette is firm, easy-drawin', and tastes right too!"



FOR PIPES OR PAPERS  
**PRINCE ALBERT**  
The National Joy Smoke  
R. J. Reynolds Tobacco Co., Winston-Salem, N. C.



## DELICIOUS! BRAN MUFFINS

Flavored With Fresh Orange!

So quick and easy to make, too!

Kellogg's toasted All-Bran and fresh orange juice! Yummy! What flavor!

1/2 cup shortening 1 1/2 cups sifted flour  
1/2 cup sugar 2 teaspoons baking powder  
1 egg 1/2 teaspoon soda  
1/2 cup Kellogg's All-Bran 1/2 teaspoon salt  
1 teaspoon grated orange rind 1/2 cup orange juice  
1/2 cup milk

Blend shortening and sugar. Add egg; beat well. Stir in Kellogg's All-Bran and orange rind. Add sifted dry ingredients to first mixture alternately with orange juice and milk. Stir only until flour disappears. Fill greased muffin pans two-thirds full. Bake in moderate oven (400° F.) about 30 minutes. Makes 10 orange-y muffins.

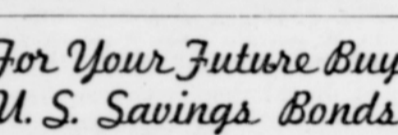
Good Nutrition. See! All-Bran is made from the VITAL OUTER LAYERS of finest wheat—serve daily as a cereal.



## GOT A COLD?

Help shake it off with HIGH ENERGY TONIC

If you are run down—because you're not getting all the A&D Vitamins you need—start taking Scott's Emulsion to promptly help bring back energy and stamina and build resistance. Good-tasting Scott's is rich in natural A&D Vitamins and energy-building, natural oil. Buy today! All druggists.



## For Your Future Buy U. S. Savings Bonds

## KID O'Sullivan SAYS

Cushion life's walk with SOLES as well as Heels by O'Sullivan



AMERICA'S No. 1 HEEL and sole Tough and Springy

## THE QUINTUPLETS

always use this great rub for COUGHS due to COLDS Child's Mild MUSTEROLE

## GIRLS! WOMEN! try this if you're NERVOUS

On "CERTAIN DAYS" Of Month—

Do female functional monthly disturbances make you feel nervous, irritable, so weak and tired out—at such times? Then do try Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound to relieve such symptoms. It's famous for this! Taken regularly — Pinkham's Compound helps build up resistance against such distressing conditions as nervousness, irritability, and a host of other ailments.

LYDIA E. PINKHAM'S VEGETABLE COMPOUND

## Watch Your Kidneys!

Help Them Cleanse the Blood of Harmful Body Waste

Your kidneys are constantly filtering waste matter from the blood stream. But kidneys sometimes lag in their work—do not act as Nature intended—fail to remove impurities that, if retained, may poison the system and upset the whole body machinery.

Symptoms may be nagging backache, persistent headache, attacks of dizziness, getting up nights, swelling, puffiness under the eyes—a feeling of nervous anxiety and loss of pep and strength. Other signs of kidney or bladder disorder are sometimes burning, scanty or too frequent urination.

There should be no doubt that prompt treatment is wiser than neglect. Use Doan's Pills. Doan's have been winning new friends for more than forty years. They have a nation-wide reputation. Are recommended by grateful people the country over. Ask your neighbor!

## DOAN'S PILLS