

LAST LOVER

BY Helen Topping Miller

Jill McFarlane, whose father, Richard, disappeared in World War I, is in love with Lieut. Spang Gordon. Her brother, Ric, becomes involved with Sandra Calvert, a divorcee. Jill is thrown from a horse and during her absence Richard returns, telling her mother, Julia, that he is now Captain Mackey. He sees Ric at camp and later threatens Sandra, but the two marry anyway. Richard has Ric transferred and Sandra arrives at the farm to live. Jill and her grandfather, John I., try to make things so uncomfortable for the woman that she will not stay. She starts Julia by recognizing the picture of Richard in Jill's room as that of Captain Mackey as a young man.

CHAPTER XVII

"I haven't even dared let myself think since Ric's letter came. And there's another danger, Dave. This woman knows Richard. She knew him in Hawaii. He telephoned last night. He told me that he had tried to prevent this marriage by having Ric sent away, but that they were too quick for him."

"So Ric knows about his father?"

"No, Ric doesn't know. Richard didn't tell him. And Jill doesn't know."

"They'll have to know, Dooley. Surely you can see now that your only protection is the truth?"

"Dave, I can't tell them! I can't make myself do it."

"But Richard is alive! You have a living personality to deal with now, not a shadow, not a memory. I think you're taking an awful chance, Dooley, risking a shock to Jill much worse than the truth would be. I think you're dead wrong."

"Maybe I am," she sighed. Dave steered carefully through the thin traffic on the edge of the town.

"To my mind, the best protection Jill can have is the truth. But I'm not going to argue with you. It's your own problem, you've had the misery of it all these years, you've got the anxiety of it now. You may be able to count on Richard to keep his identity concealed. It's to his own interest, of course. It would be definitely awkward for him if the War Department got wind of it. There are always a few blackbirds in every army, but if they're found out it doesn't go well with them."

"What is a blackbird?"

"A man who gets discharged from a military unit for some reason, or who deserts or leaves his command without complying with regulations and then enlists somewhere else under an assumed name. That's the spot Richard is in, right now, and he's probably more acutely aware of it, than even you are. I doubt if he'll start anything. He was taking a risk, even to let you know that he was alive. But if this woman knows anything about it, that's another angle and a bad one."

"She saw Richard's picture in Jill's room and identified it instantly as a picture of Roger Mackey. I could see her mind working. She's a type I've never met before, Dave. I don't know exactly how to deal with her."

"Why on earth did Ric send her to you, anyway?"

"Because he didn't know what else to do with her. He was shipped out suddenly — Richard did that — and I suppose she had no money. There's nothing at all to do, Dave, but wait."

Failed in Her Duty to Ric

"Here's the movie. I suppose we should go in." Julia's voice was weary. "Go in and look at imitation tragedy and forget our own. The sickening thing for me, Dave, is the realization that I must be a very weak person. No strong woman could have muddled up one life as I have muddled mine."

"What did you have to do with it?" Dave demanded, a little angrily. "Did you create any of these circumstances, by any act of your own? You've taken what came with courage and made the best of it. I won't have you blaming yourself."

"But I must be to blame for Ric. A mother has to be to blame, Dave. Your child is given to you — clean, plastic clay, nothing carved upon the surface at all, all new and untried, to make of it what you will. I haven't even a father's influence for an alibi with Ric. I failed somehow to put strength into his spirit, to make him wise enough to judge values, to give him the courage to reject everything that wasn't good and fine. It isn't pleasant to know that you've failed with your only son."

"You're all wrong, Dooley. Any psychologist would tell you how wrong you are. You aren't given a child like a sheet of white paper with nothing at all written upon it. What is born to you is a record, the long scroll scribbled all over with the story of generations of McFarlanes, their weaknesses, their meannesses, their nobility, traits over which you have no control whatever."

"I did have the control of direction. I could have put power behind the weakness and eliminated the meanness and built up what was good, but I didn't. I couldn't somehow ever get near to Ric, Dave. I could only give him love, and he

accepted that, but always with that faint tinge of condescension. I suppose it was because he had no father. There was a maleness in Ric that only a father could have touched. I was always less a parent to him than just another woman. By the time he was seven he was treating me with the same sort of casual indulgence that Richard used to have for me. He told me the truth when it suited him, and when he felt the urge to deceive me, it never bothered him for a minute."

"You gave your children two parents, Dooley. Don't forget that."

"Jill said that the other day. And I was always aware of it, with Ric. He has that charm that Richard has, that trick of getting what he wants, of being untouched by the disapproval of other people, a kind of veneer that kept him apart, so that he was himself, complete and just a little arrogant, entirely pleased with himself and slightly amused by all the rest of the world. There's a deadly kind of fascina-



"You may have changed Richard's direction, but you didn't destroy him."

tion about it. It makes you want to break through and make the person who owns it aware of you. Even when I was so furious at Richard Sunday night when he came back, I was feeling that irritation, the impelling to crash through that shell of his, get past that mocking smile, find some vulnerable spot, some place where he could be hurt. Ric's like that, too. Suave and charming, and entirely remote. But I should have done something about that when he was small."

"That very aloofness may save Ric, Dooley," Dave reminded her. "If I'm any judge of human nature this woman he has married won't like it. She'll want to absorb every thought and feeling Ric has, she'll eat him alive the way some spiders devour their mates. Her very lack of reticence and reserve will repel Ric, if it hasn't done that already. She dragged him into this marriage, by some female trick, of course, and a few weeks away from her will cool him down. Very likely he's wondering right now what he saw in her, and how he's going to get out of the mess he's in."

"I think," Julia said, opening the door and gathering up her purse and gloves, "that the McFarlane men were not meant for marriage at all. There's an atavistic thing in them, a strutting sort of insolence that goes back to plumes and sabers and knights riding alone. The woman who innocently lures a McFarlane man into marriage destroys him. I destroyed Richard, and Sandra will wreck Ric."

Sandra Puts On an Act

"More fantastic nonsense!" growled Dave, getting out his wallet before the lighted ticket window. "You may have changed Richard's direction, but you didn't destroy him. What was in him would have worked the same destruction anyway. Well, let's see what sort of pale imitation of the real thing Hollywood has to offer."

Jill dragged her feet upstairs wearily. She had worked hard that day, tiring herself to exhaustion, forcing her young body, handicapped by the broken arm, to tasks that she had never known before, because the need was so great now that the man-power shortage had moved in on Buzzard's Hill, and because when every bone and muscle screamed with weariness, she could sleep, she would be too tired to think.

In one day life in the old house had abruptly stiffened to this horrible, watchful formality.

Why had Sandra come to Buzzard's Hill? She must have hated

coming, being pushed off in a state of dependence, among strangers, yet she had come. And undoubtedly, Jill decided, Sandra was a resourceful creature.

Did she believe that when the war was over, Buzzard's Hill would belong to Ric, and that the others would be brushed off casually, that she would step into the comfort and security that Dooley had worked so hard for years to win for them all?

"I'd kill her first!" Jill thought angrily. "I'd strangle her with my bare hands!"

She kicked off the beige pajamas, and got into the tub and lay there, soaking in the comforting hot water, letting her mind drift off blankly. The radio was playing in Ric's room, some jive thing. Sandra had come up as soon as Dave went away, bored with Jill and drowsy old John I., giving them only the curtest of good nights.

Overhead Jill heard a plane flying, slowly, circling over the town. The beat of the motors was low and near, and she sprang out of the tub and wrapped herself in a towel and crouched at the window to glimpse the skimming lights, the shadow of fleet wings against the purple night sky. That was Spang's sky up there, Spang's "wild blue yonder," the hollow, secret, endless roadway that Spang was traveling so happily now.

Awkwardly she scrubbed herself dry, wriggled into a night gown, slipping her arm back into the sling. Then she was aware of Sandra, standing in the door, watching her.

"Funny thing," Jill was thinking as she looked at the reflection of Sandra in the mirror, "no matter how much she dresses up you always feel that somehow she isn't quite clean." Aloud she said, "Hello, Sandra. What's on your mind? Is your room all right?"

Sandra came into the room, perched on the end of the chaise longue, draping all the flounces gracefully about her legs.

"It's all right," she said, grudgingly, "but awfully lonely! You don't know about missing a man so much it makes you ill, Jill. You couldn't."

"Oh, couldn't I?" Jill thought, angrily. But she kept her voice casual and her face controlled, as she went on brushing. "It is sort of tough to have your bridegroom snatched away from you, isn't it? But you must have known that something like that would happen. You'd been married to a soldier before."

Sandra's teeth clicked. "It needn't have happened. It was all done for spite by an officer who hates me. He contrived to have Ricky sent away. We had forty-eight hours! Forty-eight hours of each other, and then there I was — alone!"

"But of course you were more or less used to being alone. The adjustment wasn't quite as difficult as though you'd been with Ric for months or maybe years."

"You don't know anything about love," Sandra remarked. "You don't know what torture it was, seeing him go! All I could do was stand there at that gate and watch him trudging away, looking back to wave at me. . . ." She began to cry, carefully dabbing away every tear, her mouth twitching.

Words Between Two Girls

"If Ric hadn't had a home for you to come to, it would have been bad, wouldn't it?" Jill kept her eyes on the mirror, catching glimpses of Sandra over her shoulder. "Just what would you have done, anyway?"

"I don't know. I'd have had to do something — try to follow Ricky. I suppose."

"Or perhaps," Jill was cool, "you wouldn't have married him at all? You're a smart woman, Sandra. Somehow I can't see you marrying a boy — even one so attractive as Ric, just on an impulse."

"I suppose you're trying to say, without being nasty about it, that I married Ricky because I thought your family had money?" Sandra said viciously. "I wasn't thinking about his family when I married him. I was only thinking that at last I loved a man who loved me and that we had something beautiful that we mustn't lose!"

"And now," said Jill, a deadly coolness smooth as glass in her voice, "you've lost your idyllic love and got a lot of stodgy in-laws instead. Tough break?"

"It's quite all right," Sandra studied her nails. "I knew how it would be before I came. Ricky warned me. He told me that you were very possessive, Jill, that you thought you had a private mother, and that he had always been made to feel like an outsider in his own home."

Jill lifted her eyebrows. "Ric's really wonderful when he sounds off, isn't he? If you didn't know him awfully well you might believe every word of it. You'd almost believe that his home was a place he really cared about, not just an address handy to write to when he needed a check."

"You don't know very much about your brother, do you?" Sandra was cool, too.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

HOUSEHOLD MEMOS... by Lynn Chambers

Save Your Sugar For Canning, but Bake Sweets, Too



If you need luscious chocolate cookies quickly, make these, which take so few minutes to bake and frost. Children adore them and your guests will give them an encore.

The oldest of our rationed commodities is still with us even though the situation has eased to a certain extent. The sugar bowl is, perhaps, still not as full as we would like to have it, but we can still manage to have our sweets and still save enough for canning if we are watchful.

The youngster will still come in peeking into the cookie jar, and we still have guests who like a bit of a sweet as they spend an evening of conversation or games with us. For these purposes I have selected some recipes which we will all find useful.

For the cookie fans, here are some recipes which are bound to please:

Molasses Cookies.

(Makes 75)

- 1/2 cup shortening
- 1/2 cup molasses
- 1/2 cup brown sugar
- 1/2 cup thick sour milk
- 3 cups sifted flour
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 2 teaspoons baking soda
- 1 teaspoon ginger
- 2 teaspoons lemon extract

Mix shortening which has been melted with molasses and sugar and stir until smooth. Add sour milk, then sifted flour with salt, soda and ginger. Add lemon extract. Mix until smooth. Chill until firm. Roll dough on a lightly floured surface to 1/4 inch thickness and cut into assorted shapes, as desired. Place on a greased baking sheet and bake in a moderate (350-degree) oven for 8 to 10 minutes. Roll thinner if crispier cookies are desired.

Chocolate Frosted Cookies.

(Makes 3 dozen)

- 1 1/2 cups sifted flour
- 1 1/2 teaspoons double-acting baking powder
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 3 squares unsweetened chocolate
- 4 tablespoons butter
- 1/2 cup sugar
- 1 egg, unbeaten
- 1/2 cup milk
- 1 teaspoon vanilla

Sift flour once, add baking powder and salt and sift again. Melt chocolate and butter over hot water; add sugar and mix well. Add egg and milk alternately and mix until smooth. Add vanilla. Drop from teaspoon on greased baking sheet and bake in a moderate (350-degree) oven for 7 minutes. When cold, spread with fudge frosting and place a half pecan in the center of each.

Quick Fudge Frosting.

- 3 squares unsweetened chocolate
- 2 tablespoons butter
- 12 marshmallows, cut in pieces
- 1/2 cup water
- 2 cups sifted confectioners' sugar
- 1 teaspoon vanilla

Place chocolate, butter, marshmallows, water and salt in saucepan. Heat over low flame until chocolate and marshmallows are melted and mixture is smooth and well blended.

Remove from fire and add remaining ingredients. Beat until right consistency to spread. Use on chocolate frosted cookies or to cover top and sides of two eight-inch layer cakes.

With just 1/2 cup of sugar and the use of a sugar substitute, you can satisfy the sweet tooth with no less than 30 delectable cup cakes:

LYNN SAYS:

Try Pleasing Variety

In Everyday Foods

A dash of lemon juice is good for bringing out the full flavor of almost any kind of fruit or berry pie.

When you want a combination fruit pie, try one of these pairs: pineapple and raisin, pineapple and cherry, cranberry and pineapple, apple and pear, apple and cranberry, apricot and pineapple, apple and raspberry, or strawberry and rhubarb.

LYNN CHAMBERS' MENU

- Vegetable Platter: Asparagus, Cauliflower, Tomatoes and Corn
- Toasted English Muffins
- Deviled Eggs
- Molded Grapefruit Salad
- Beverage
- *Strawberry Pie
- *Recipe given.

Plain Cup Cakes.

(Makes 30)

- 2 cups sifted cake flour
- 2 1/2 teaspoons baking powder
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 cup shortening
- 1/2 cup granulated sugar
- 1/2 cup corn syrup
- 1 egg, unbeaten
- 9 tablespoons milk
- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- 1/2 teaspoon lemon extract

Sift together flour, baking powder and salt. Cream shortening and sugar together until light and fluffy. Work in corn syrup and beat until light. Add 1/4 of flour mixture and blend in thoroughly. Add unbeaten egg and beat thoroughly. Add remaining flour and milk alternately, beating smooth after each addition. Blend in vanilla and lemon extract. Turn into greased and floured muffin tins and bake in a moderately hot (375-degree) oven for 25 minutes or until done. Frost as desired.

Sugarless Chocolate Icing.

- 2 squares unsweetened chocolate
- 1 can sweetened condensed milk
- 1 tablespoon water
- Dash of salt
- 1/4 teaspoon almond extract

Melt chocolate in top of double boiler. Stir in gradually the condensed milk and cook 5 minutes over hot water. Stir until smooth. Remove from heat and add water, salt and almond extract. Cool and frost cup cakes.

Strawberries are here in all their bright gayety and will add a delicious sweet dessert to your menus for their extremely short season. Because the berries are so sweet, you can take it rather easy on the sugar when sweetening them. In fact, many people find them so sweet that they use no extra sweetening at all.



Berries like strawberries, which are naturally sweet, need little extra sugar. Plan to serve them in pies, tarts and as shortcake as often as possible during their short season.

*Strawberry Pie.

Prepare 1 baked 9-inch pie shell. Just before serving, wash and hull 1 quart of fresh strawberries. Sweeten lightly to taste and then fold into 1/2 pint of cream which has been whipped. Spread in pie shell and serve. Or sweeten berries to taste and fill baked pie shell. Top with whipped cream which has been garnished with whole berries.

Winter pears make tasty pies for faded spring appetites. For something a little different, try this French Pear pie.

French Pear Pie.

- 6 cups sliced fresh winter pears
- 2 tablespoons lemon juice
- 1/2 cup corn syrup
- 1/2 cup sugar
- 1/2 teaspoon ginger
- 2 tablespoons flour
- One 9-inch unbaked pastry shell

Select pears which are firm but not hard. Peel, core, slice. Mix with lemon juice, corn syrup, sugar, ginger and flour. Place in pastry-lined pie plate.

Topping.

- 1/2 cup shortening
- 1/2 cup brown sugar
- 1 cup flour

Cream together shortening and sugar. Mix in flour. Spread over pears in pie shell. Bake at 375 degrees for 45 minutes, or until pears are tender and topping is brown. Eight servings. Serve warm or cold. Released by Western Newspaper Union.

Make pastry ahead of time and allow to chill before adding the water if you like the crust flaky. For cream pies, be certain the filling as well as the pastry shell is thoroughly cooled before putting the two together.

When you make an attractive red berry pie, always use a lattice crust so that the beauty of the berries can be seen immediately.

If you do not want a top crust or crumble topping, make a lattice top out of the scraps of pastry. This is easy on your budget too.

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