

prisoner-of-war camp. He and Pat attended concerts together. They sat in the park . . .

Mary had just finished changing when she heard the car pull up. From her window she watched them standing arm in arm on the sidewalk. Sandy's face was lifted in the sunlight as he drew in deep breaths of air. He was, Mary agreed, intensely good-looking: tall, square-shouldered, with clean-cut features. She hurried downstairs to greet them.

"Welcome, Sandy," Mary said warmly as she held out her hands, one to Pat and one to the boy. She saw the pleading look on Pat's face and smiled reassuringly. Sandy, responsive to her greeting, fixed steady blue eyes upon her. Slowly his hand came up but it did not find hers. In an instant of shocked recognition, she took the boy's hand and said softly, "Come inside, children."

"Can we have drinks in the garden?" Pat's voice was controlled. "Will you tell Daddy?"

"Good idea," Mary answered. "I'll ask him to bring them out."

"It's good of you, Mrs. Corton," Sandy said. "I'm sure glad to be here."

"We're glad to have you, Sandy. Now go along with Pat."

Mrs. Corton went into the living room, closed the door, and murmured, "George, oh George."

"What's wrong?" Disturbed by her stricken expression, he came over and took her in his arms.

"Sandy's a beautiful guy all right," she faltered. "But . . . he's blind."

George caught his breath. "Poor little Pat."

"What are we going to do? We can't let her sacrifice her whole life."

"Take it easy, darling. Maybe it's just temporary."

We've got to approach this with great tact, Mary—and great tenderness. We can't kick a boy in his condition."

"No, we can't do that. But it's no life for Pat."

"No life at all," he agreed. "Where are they?"

"In the garden. I said you'd bring out some drinks."

He braced himself. "Let's go. We'll work it out."

Lunch, despite their apprehensions, was a success. Pat sat beside Sandy and, as though it were the most natural thing in the world, cut up his food and eased his embarrassment. The relationship between the two was one of complete understanding and confidence.

Sandy soon lost his early nervousness and displayed a sparkling, optimistic personality. He had a crisp sense of humor that rejected the idea his infirmity was a handicap. He was keenly interested in the vocational training he was taking and had been promised a job which, with his small private means, would insure him a reasonable income.

AFTER LUNCH, when they were all sitting in the garden—Pat and Sandy hand in hand—Sandy said, "Being the way I am makes me appreciate things a whole lot more. You develop an insight that's pretty accurate, and you learn things that normally you'd miss." Then he became grave. "Mr. Corton," he said, "this is kind of serious for you and Pat's mother, isn't it? Please tell me, how do you feel about it?"

"It is serious," George answered hesitantly.

"I want to be honest with you," Sandy continued.

"I won't recover my sight. Pat knows that."

Pat said, "He's got my eyes."

"That's not much consolation to your parents, honey," the boy said.

"You're quite sure—about each other, I mean?"

Mary asked. "The future . . ." She broke off.

Sandy leaned forward. "I've had no doubts from the moment I first met her. You know something; Pat's beautiful. You won't find a more beautiful girl anywhere in this world."

Glancing at her daughter, Mary saw tears brimming in her eyes.

"She fusses about a silly mole under her eye," Sandy went on with a smile. "But I don't see one. What I do see is a beauty that just grows, that's got nothing to do with looks. It can't ever be marred or taken away. A man who's given that would cherish it all his life." He paused. "I admit this all sounds pretty selfish. I guess you're both wondering what I've got to offer Pat."

Mr. Corton hesitated before speaking. "It's more important to us that she should be satisfied on that score. What do you think, Pat?"

"If you love someone," she said, "you want to share—everything. You and Mummy know that. You've always been that way." She tightened her grip on Sandy's hand. "I didn't tell you about Sandy because I couldn't risk losing him. He'd have pulled out if you . . ."

"We understand, darling," Mary intervened.

"I still will if you think that's best," Sandy offered.

Pat turned swiftly and laid her other hand on his arm. "I wanted you to see for yourselves. I knew that if this were right, there'd be a right time for you to meet, and then you'd understand."

The silence that followed was momentary. To Pat it seemed like forever. Mary turned her head and sought her husband's eyes. George reached out his hand for hers.

Clearing his throat he said, "Take care of her, son."



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