

Katie's temples began to throb. Could it be—was there a child—

"Mrs. Briggs," the voice continued, "I'm calling to correct an error." She paused. It seemed a very long pause.

"You see, Miss Donovan is one of our younger staff members. When she met you and your husband, she liked you so much that she told you what you hoped to hear—that we'd have a child for you soon." Again she paused, and Katie waited, her heart pounding, tears burning her eyes.

Finally Miss Sherwood said, "Miss Donovan shouldn't have said that. We can never promise *when*, not even vaguely. I thought I should tell you, so that you wouldn't be holding your breath anxiously."

"But we *are*, Miss Sherwood." As soon as she spoke she regretted it.

"I understand," Miss Sherwood said.

"Thank you for calling," Katie murmured, and hung up. So Miss Sherwood understood, did she? How could anyone understand? Even Phil didn't. What had he said, exactly? That she cared too much—that was it.

Tears started, but she squeezed her eyes shut, refusing to cry. Oh, to be somebody else! Gwen, for example. To know that life was beginning, that love and trust and faith were creating a child. Katie even envied the months of ungainliness, the pains.

She went into the bedroom and drew open a dresser drawer of baby things she'd been buying for almost a year, each tiny garment a prayer. From a corner of the drawer she took out the box that Gwen had given her for a first anniversary joke.

The beige-and-blue dress was so pretty, so delicate, so unworn. She put

it on over the dress she wore, and still it was loose. She gazed at herself in the full-length mirror.

KATIE WAS about to take it off when she heard a key in the lock.

A moment later Phil walked into the bedroom and saw her. He stopped and all the color drained from his face, leaving it hard.

Katie could not speak or even go to him. His lips began to tremble, and he swallowed hard, looking like a small frightened boy having trouble with his Adam's apple.

"Darling—" Katie began.

"Take it off!"

She started toward him but he backed away, his voice rising. "I said take it off!"

She obeyed, while he stood immobile. She folded the dress. "I'm g-giving it to Gwen tomorrow." Her voice shook. "I wanted to wear it—just once—for a moment."

She moved into his arms, needing his strength. "Oh, Phil, the agency called—" And she told him what Miss Sherwood had said, while he stared at her lifelessly, saying nothing.

And suddenly Phil's face crumpled, his voice broke. "Why?" he demanded. "Why? I don't understand."

She couldn't answer. She could only see the piteous lines in his face, the misery she had never noticed before—because she had been so concerned with her own feelings!

Why, he cares as much as I do. He cares too much, too.

Now she knew what he'd meant in begging her not to care too much. If you cared too much, you could kill yourself with bitterness and heart-break. You mustn't. Instead, you had to go on, learning to wait, learning to live from day to day until the joyous time came.

You had to accept life, unless you wanted to die a new death every day. You simply must *not* try too hard or care too much.

"Phil," she said, with a smile she didn't believe she could manage. "You care too much. Darling, don't burn yourself out."

He stared in astonishment, as though it were impossible that it should be *she* who was comforting *him*. Then he took her in his arms, possessed by a certain new strength. "Do you mean what you're saying, Katie?"

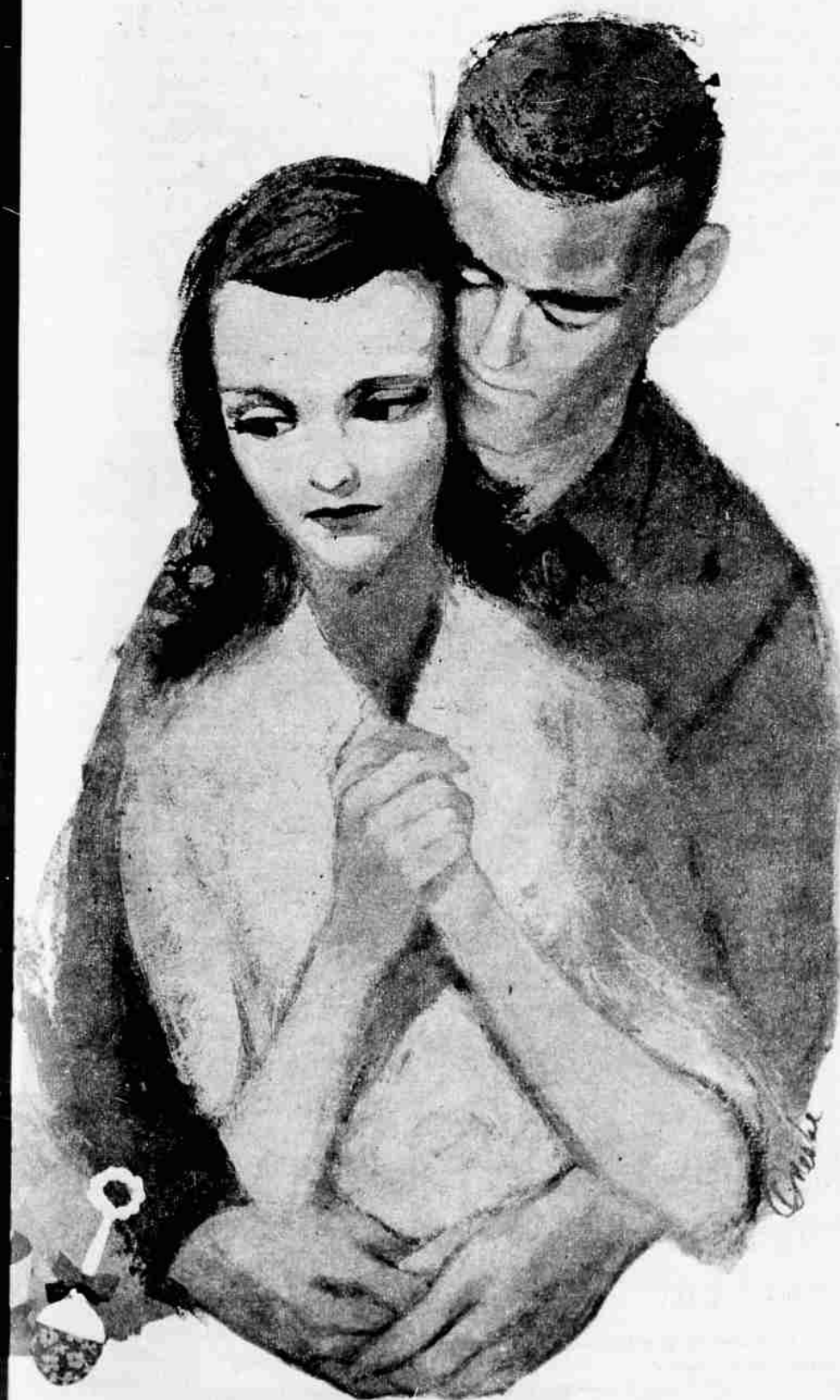
Into his ear she said, "I'm going to buy baby oil and talcum powder tomorrow. You know, the agency *could* call us soon, no matter what Miss Sherwood said."

His arms tightened around her. She knew their marriage had never been so beautiful as now; they had never been so close.

"After all," Katie added, "we've got to be ready."

Phil held her away from him for a moment, studying her face as though he saw it for the first time. Then an exultant smile lit his own features.

"You and I are ready for anything," he said.



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