

SERIAL STORY

DRAFTED FOR LOVE

BY RUTH AYERS

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YESTERDAY, Kent goes on a mission. He is told that April is in the city. He is told that April is in the city. He is told that April is in the city.

APRIL MEETS TROUBLE

CHAPTER IX

NOW the thing to do was to harden her heart. April didn't look at Kent after she stepped into the room. The day was over, the game ended. She had played her part right up to the last tag-line.

Tomorrow, Ann might come home. If she did, April would tell her what she had done and make it perfectly clear why. "He doesn't mean anything to me," she would say. "I only wanted to help you."

If Ann didn't return, there'd be some way she, April, could avoid seeing Kent. She began to think of Ann. Ann the gentle one, the sweet one with the silver voice who'd have her great chance tonight.

"Steady there," Kent advised as the roadster rocked on the red road.

"I'm trying to beat the storm," Kent said. "It ought to be taken the wheel for the trek home. It's too much for you, Ann."

"Not at all," she bit off the words. "I like it."

The top was up but already the first sweep of gale tore at the side of the car. Nip, the wire-haired, snuggled close at April's side.

Kent hunched forward, straining as if he couldn't bear his helplessness.

"If I could only see you for one second," he said. "I bet your eyes are sparkling and that there's a charcoal smudge on your nose. I like to look at you when you're intent on something, Ann. You have a lift to your head that I'm crazy about."

April fought down an urge to say, "Yes, you would like to see Ann now. Five hundred miles away and as intent as all get-out on an audition with the great Vivano tonight." But no, she clamped her lips and made the speedometer dance a little faster.

DUSK blurred the daylight; night came on. The wind was a roaring cavalcade behind them, pushing them on. April knew she must reach Kent's home before the storm broke. If she timed it right, she'd have a perfect excuse for leaving him at his gate without further farewells.

On and on, the miles sped but even on the short cut they seemed twice as long as they had been this morning. Once the engine balked. Once she stopped for gas. Another time she tried to slip past a truck and almost sent the car in a ditch.

All the things Kent had said about her came back. It was so funny to think of Hal Parks. Hal was sophisticated, smart, worldly and he liked her. Ann, yes, blast him, he was the one who indirectly had started her on this ill-fated fling when he'd said there were other things you could be drafted for besides the army.

Drafted for love! It sounded swell but she'd been turned down, rejected, service deferred.

"We're sure playing tag with the storm," Kent said, innocent of the storm that brook her to the core.

"You bet," she felt his eyes on her as the car sped. Ann never drove spectacularly.

"Where are we now?" "Only about five miles to go."

Four miles, three and then as she reached the hill road that led to Pattonville she could pick out the lights of the town far below.

Preparation was on her face, her hands tensed when she finally slowed the car.

"At last!" Her words were a long sigh. "Swell going," Kent said. "If I hurry, I can make it to my home."

As she spoke, there was a warning rattle on the hood, a spattering on the canvas top.

"Hailstorm!" Kent was brief. "We'll make a dash for the house."

April spoke above the wind. "I'll take you to the gate and then return. Mother and Dad, they'll be worried."

But even in his sightlessness, Kent had leaned over and was unfolding her in strong, sure arms.

"Come along, Nip," he called and bore April triumphantly through the gate and up the brief walk to the door.

Laughing down, he said, "Ann, gal, anyone would say you were a lunatic. Think I'm going to let you go off alone in a blitzkrieg!"

"No, Kent. I want to go home, I must!" The wind threw back her voice.

FOR April knew once she crossed the threshold of the Carter home, disaster awaited. Great-Aunt Elizabeth Carter would know she wasn't Ann Burnett.

She tried to remember what Ann had said about Auntie Carter but it seemed now as if the hailstones were pelting her brain and bletting out every thought.

"There," Kent said, half carrying her across the threshold after he'd opened the big, gridded door. "This is what you might call symbolic."

"No, I'm not cold," April chattered. "I'll stand here just a minute—then I'll have to go."

In the shadows of the cavernous hall, April saw the parlor leading off to the right. It, too, was cavernous with heavy carved furniture, oil paintings and a massive square piano.

And over the mantle was a mirror. April's eyes met April in the mirror and she knew with her coat and cap off, no one could ever mistake her for Ann, no matter how dim the light.

But except for the fire hissing somewhere at the other end of the house, there wasn't a sound. Perhaps she wouldn't have to see Auntie Carter after all!

"Kent," she began. "I'm a sight. Please, I couldn't see anyone looking the way I do."

As if this had been an invitation to catastrophe, a voice spoke out of the silence of the upper hall.

"Kent, as that you?" "Yes, Aunt Elizabeth."

April followed his eyes in the direction of the stairs where a small, stout figure was poised.

(To Be Continued)

OUT OUR WAY

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FRECKLES AND HIS FRIENDS



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With MAJOR HOOPLE



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