

THE OLDEN DAYS

PREFACE

Teen-age aggravation is nothing new. Mothers, the world over, simmer in the same stew, but mine boiled over one day. I sat down, and started writing; hoping to vindicate the existence of myself and my unfortunate generation. I say unfortunate because we have produced a provoking generation who, in time, will produce another provoking generation, I hope. Once I told my daughter that the worst thing I could wish for her was that some day she would have twins, each equally as ornery as she. And if that doesn't nominate me for the nastiest mother of the year, I'll eat my hat.

The nightly diet of old and gory World War II pictures on television led me to discover that the children of today devour them as a stimuli to their blood-thirsty little minds, and then lick their chops for more. A few probings, and I found they had no conception of the true horrors, let alone even know the factual histories of Hitler, Mussolini, or Stalin. Indeed, students were studying this era as they would ancient history, with boredom and, frankly, without comprehension.

"Do you mean you never heard of the persecutions and atrocities before the Eichman trial?" I asked my daughter. Amazing. It was only yesterday.

Sadly, Ruth looked at me. "How should I know about them? They happened in the olden days."

Talk about being hit in the face with a cold wet fish. I looked in the mirror and, sure enough, my once black hair was now dull, and a depressive salt and pepper.

Then the conversation changed pace. It seemed Ruth had to have a short, short poem, or a reasonable facsimile, for English class the next day. In a chiding way, I said, "How's about -

You poor mad dog baying at the moon,
Don't you know you are a loon,
Me, oh my, oh, goodness-gracious,
What could be less efficacious?"

"What brought that on?" she asked.

"Well, we were talking about mad dogs, weren't we?" She shook her head.

"It's a joke, Bub," I weakly covered.

"Really, Mother, you're way out. Sometimes I wonder if you were ever alive."

And that did it!

Pearl Harbor Day, December 7, 1941. A state of shock locked the nation. The numbness persisted throughout the day; color coming back to our cheeks not until the next morning when war was officially declared. Even then we staggered, as in an alcoholic haze. But that day, when those five words, "Pearl Harbor Has Been Bombed", blasted a radio program to smithereens; the same happened to our lives. Desperately and tragically, our peaceful pursuits were shot to hell. Our love life, our homes, our way of living became as foreign to us as beer soup to the Chinese. True, we waded through it all, sometimes griping, sometimes laughing, sometimes crying; but the stain remained forever.

However, I am digressing. It is the day of our metamorphosis that I wish to discuss. Everyone who is old enough to remember that day, I'm sure, had his own personal brand of shock upon receiving the news, and bets are even that he can recollect to the smallest detail just what he or she stopped doing at that breath-taking moment.

Some arias were swallowed in mid-phrase, some shoes received a half-shine, some food was partially cooked; all work was half-done and some never resumed. What were you doing? I was cleaning out my dresser drawers. As the words penetrated, and the meaning became apparent, I automatically stuffed everything back into the drawer. No semblance of neatness did I try to obtain. I simply slammed the drawer hard, just as I slammed the door upon my happy thoughts.

You see, my husband had been released from the army, for overage, seven days before. We had married six months previous to this, when the over-age discharge was imminent. Hy was one of the first to be picked for the Draft. We had thought of marriage before this fish bowl drawing, but dear Hy, gallant as usual, said he would not hide behind a woman's skirts,

and would take his chances with Uncle Sam. "After all, Dear, they say I'll be back in a year". And let this be a lesson to you, my children, don't even trust your own uncle.

Well, we had bought a house, and were in the process of moving our belongings to our new home. What a farce. You say we should have known better, the political situation being what it was. Sure, sure. But, as today, does youth ever think except what they want to think? I grew up that day. The rose colored glasses were snatched from my eyes, never to be replaced.

The boys (my husband and brother-in-law) were out hunting. Quail. But soon, we all knew, it would be for larger and more priceless quarry. Who was going to break the news to them?

Mother was in the kitchen preparing dinner when the Furies descended. Every week my sister, Muriel, and her husband of not yet a year, and Hy, Johnny, my son, and I had Sunday dinner with the folks. Mother cooked a whopping good one. Dad sometimes helped. He always stuffed the turkeys or the chickens. It was his pleasure and our dismay. By the time he finished, every available pot and pan was piled high in the sink. And there were no electric dishwashers in those days - just us poor defenseless females. The stove was greasy from popping butter; the kitchen table was littered with careless and high-handed mixing. This meant nothing to him. He was no scullery maid. He was a cook, a good one, and he knew it. The finished product was delicious, and if we didn't brag about it, he did.

Being with the family on Sundays was a must. Dad was the type who demanded respect, and to be surrounded by his women at the dinner table; to be the patriarch, well, that was his dish of tea. Little did he know that soon we would be gathered around his table day and night for the "Duration".

Actually, the more people he had for dinner, the better he liked it. He was in his element when he could say, and always did; that everything on the heavily laden table was from his place. "Farm", we did not dare call it. He had ten acres, and had it stocked with every farm creature, including a few extras, such as Belgian hares, racoons, cats, dogs, riding horses, burros, and peacocks. These latter "critters" were more noisy than beautiful, in my estimation. Often they yelled "Help" so loudly and clearly that it is a wonder the neighbors didn't come running to the distress area. In addition to this he had a vegetable garden, a berry patch, and an orchard; yet to Dad "Farm" was a bad word. It was his estate, and it was only fourteen miles from St. Louis. So how could it be a farm?

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Mother and Dad acquired their "country home" in the spring of 1937. Dad had been Mayor of Maplewood, and had just been defeated for his third term. At that time he was ripe for a change. He was bored and disgruntled. The idea of picking up the pieces of his political career, and moving to greener pastures intrigued him.

Mr. Marcus, a good friend, who had supported him when he ran for Judge of the County Court (which he lost by a very narrow margin. The morning papers had him elected, but by the time of the evening editions, he was an "also-ran") and who was on the Highway 50 and 66 committee with him, told him of the property next to him in Ballwin, which was for sale. Mother and I "pooh-poohed" the whole ridiculous venture, but once Dad's interests were aroused nothing short of heart failure would deter him from "at least looking".

It was a beautiful old red brick farmhouse set in a frame of cedars. It had a huge white barn, and handsome chicken houses. The latter reflected

the dollar signs in Dad's eyes. He was never adverse to a fast buck. Mother spotted that look as he stared at the coops. "He's counting his chickens before they're hatched," she correctly thought; and then and there resolved to be no nurse-maid to a brood of peeping chicks. Sure enough, they were the first things torn down. She won the first round.

The house offered endless possibilities. Mother was interested. What she couldn't do with it with a bit of remodeling! Arthur, her nephew, an architect of tremendous ability, would make it the show-place of her husband's dreams. Of course, she hadn't asked him yet, but he would, she knew.

The history of the old house was thrilling. No, George Washington had not slept there, but President Grant had. It was old, and a proper setting for her antiques. True, the antiques were all down on their honest-to-goodness farm of two hundred sixty acres near Grubville, Missouri. (Isn't that an awful name? But, it was apt. The terrain was so rocky there, the natives really had to grub for a living.) But Mother knew that if they decided to buy this provocative place, the old farm would have to go. Eventually it did, and the furniture was moved to Ballwin. Well, when Mother found the old, old trunk in the hay loft, and discovered the Civil War love letters, that settled it. She was in accord with Dad.

I was against the deal from the start. Two years previous, I had obtained ~~my~~ divorce from my son John's father, and now I was working for Dad. I had been born and bred to city life. The wide open spaces left me cold. The farm at Grubville I detested; and now this! From the beginning, I revolted against the whole idea, thinking defiantly that they could move, I would take an apartment in town. Dreams, only dreams. I knew, with certainty, that if I as much as uttered a word, I'd be fired so quickly my

head would spin. "You'll like it, Eunice," Mother said, "and Mr. Marcus has the most handsome son." But I, being like all unattached young females, immediately thought of him as a prospective husband. You know, it's a wonder there are any bachelors left in the world. They just don't have a chance when a woman begins her positive thinking.

I weighed her words for a minute before exploding, "So what? I just divorced a Catholic, and now you want me to get interested in a Jew. You, yourself, said mixed marriages are for the birds. And come to think of it, that's a silly expression. Did you ever see a robin mated to a jay? A Sparrow to a Wren: A starling to a crow?" Oh, I was vehement, all right; so sure of myself. Yet you see what happened. It's a happy marriage, too. I should know. I've been married to Mr. Marcus' handsome son for twenty-two years now.

Muriel, my sister, was away at college. She had no vote on the project. Aunt Flora, our maiden aunt, and Mother's sister, lived with us. She had no vote. Come to think of it, none of us had a vote. It was a cut and dried case from the start; and they signed the final papers a month later.

The first of May we began daily pilgrimages to inspect the carpentry work, and to do a little ourselves. My two and a half year old son, Johnny, was a regular "Mr. Fix-it;" his job being inspector of the paint cans, turpentine bottles, and putty rolls. Nails went into his pockets, and some into the walls, after he discovered a loose hammer. The workmen all groaned when Johnny hit his stride. Mr. Harris really cried when the young master of all he surveyed manfully strode across his freshly shellaced floors.

Poor Harris. He was quite a character. He was a former policeman who thought working for us would be a healthful, peaceful job. He jumped at the chance of being our yard-man, but at this stage of the game, he

was carpenter, painter, and general handy-man. He, also, stayed on the place as night watchman. Dad had a nice room built for him off the barn, and he was quite comfortable. He was a garrulous old soul, and soon made friends with all the residents of Ballwin, there being only about five hundred at that time. After being there a month, without the family in residence, he became to feel that he was the boss, and we tread lightly, knowing a man of his diversified abilities was hard to find. But one day he met his Waterloo in the form of my cousin, Arthur, the architect, and real commander-in-chief of the outfit. Tact he had not, but talent and "know-how"; aplenty.

Harris was busy mending a pillar. "You're not doing that right," Arthur said to him. Harris' face darkened. No young punk was going to give him orders.

"Oh yeah, how do you know? I bet you can't even drive a nail straight,"

Art looked him up and down. "No? Well I can't lay an egg, either, but I certainly know when one is rotten." He turned on his heel and walked away, leaving Harris the most flabber-gasted and purple-faced individual I ever saw.

Things were shaping up to the queen's taste (Mother's) inside the house. The large butler's pantry was yanked so that one big room remained. This, in turn, was converted into a smaller kitchen and breakfast room, with a lavatory to the side facing the long screened back porch. A new electric stove and refrigerator were recessed into the walls, and a modern sink replaced the old black galvanized job. The faucets were bright and shinny, and turning them on full force, Mother was aghast to find only a thin stream of water trickling through. The cistern was almost dry!

Curse? Dad's "rough-fined" vocabulary bounced off the walls of the empty rooms and resounded in a tremendous hollow baritone. I'm sure the parishioners of the little Methodist Church, a half-mile away, heard the blasphemy above the chords of their organ, as it was a beautiful balmy Sunday morning. All our windows and doors were open, as were theirs. I'm positive, because just a few minutes before I had heard their voices raised in praise of the Lord. Johnny thought it was wonderful. The louder Dad bellowed, the louder John became, running around damning it all to hell, until I practically had to muzzle him. No-one dared laugh. It was all too dead serious, and meant only one thing - a deep well. This possibility Dad had not taken into account, and it did mean a large expenditure of money, which commodity was getting mighty scarce at this time. I'm sure everyone who has remodeled has found that actual costs always exceed the estimate.

Well, the next week they started the well, and that was really a hole in the ground. Down went the drill deeper and deeper, day after day. When they reached two hundred feet and still no water, Dad groaned aloud. From there on down it was a dollar a foot! Mr. Marcus, now our new next-door neighbor, and Dad's bosom chum, didn't help clear the air, either. "You should have drilled over here, John, " he positively stated. "There's no water where you're digging. Why didn't you use a waterfork?" Why, Why? Even Dad was beginning to wonder. But finally at three hundred-twenty-five feet, water came through, nice sweet water, and hard as nails, as we discovered later. So then a water softener system had to be installed.

Mother's fondness for the cedar trees put us all to work on the long week-ends, whitewashing the trunks with some kind of insect repellent: My back ached from morning until night, sissy that I was. Mother, too, slapped on the goo. She was no straw-boss; but Mr. Marcus was; and though he told

us what to do, and how to do it, he made no secret of his dislike for the evergreens. "You should cut them all down, and sow more grass seed. A nice green lawn, that's what you should have." "Cut them down!" Mother lifted her eyes to the sky in mock horror. "They are God's creation."

"Sure," Marcus answered, "But He sure played a dirty trick when he made them. Did you ever sit down on their needles?" Many times later we did, and cussed the sticky little devils. At that time, however, our love for the great outdoors was as sentimental as puppy love, and was not to be diminished by seasoned knowledge.

After the mill-work was completed, and the carpenters, and the painters had folded their tents, the paper-hangers arrived. This meant additional joy for Johnny; who (his usual sweet, little, innocent self) merrily dunked and swished paste all over himself and the newly painted wood work. Mother was calm, cool, and collected about this small mis-hap; all but wringing his little neck. The paper-hangers stared morosely at the child, muttering obscenities under their breaths; then went on with their job of papering the little darling's room. A nice job they did, too, except that they used the hall paper by mistake. Mother, at this point, was tearing her hair. All things pass 'tis said, and so did this motley crew. Another arrived the following day. Johnny was leashed, and Mother retired to the orchard with a book. Work progressed, and finally one day in June, we all moved in, bag and baggage.

This memorable date was June 20, 1937, Mother's birthday, and, incidently, four years later, my wedding day. But I'm jumping the gun. Although we moved to Ballwin in June, it wasn't until July that I met Hy. He was all that Mother said he was, and more. Johnny liked him, too, though he had odd ways of showing his favor, such as pulling his hair, punching him in the stomach, and crawling onto his lap, tweaking his nose.

Our first date was the Fourth of July, a most appropriate day for my heart to start popping. Life from that day on was a continuous symphony of pleasant harmonies. Once in awhile there was a crescendo, or a few discordant notes, but, as a whole, they were light, gay, and singing years.

Now, after enjoying four and a half years with our folks in their renovated and lovely country home, we were suddenly confronted and confounded by the paralyzing certainty of war. We joined Mother in her custom-built kitchen, and gathered around the table, a forlorn little group. We sat. She worked silently, every now and then wiping away a bit of moisture from her glasses. Still we sat, and she worked, and after what seemed an eternity, the two hunters walked dejectedly into the house. No birds. Not even a dog's smell of them, and certainly our news was not about to raise their spirits. We looked at each other speechless, tossing the wordless ball back and forth. Finally Dad caught it, and made his pitch, a nervous laugh at the back of his throat. "Guess you'll have to put away the shot-guns, Boys. You're going to use rifles now. Pearl Harbor has been attacked!"

Chapter II

Hy went back to the Army in February, to a camp in Seattle, destination unknown; however, it was obvious that Alaska would finally take him to her snowy breast. She received him gladly and held him tightly in her frigid grasp for two and a half long years - years without warmth for him, years in which the icy fingers around his heart never melted, years when my heart, too, kept time with his in a cold sluggish beat.

Now there was the matter of our newly purchased house on Geyer Rd. Sell it? Rent it? I felt more like burning it. But the problem was easily solved. My sister and her husband, George, lived in a small 3 room apartment, but a house in the county was more to their taste, and I just "happened to have a house"; consequently a deal was made to everyone's

satisfaction, and they moved in. My furniture stored, I handed over the keys to them and back to Ballwin I went, a war time grass widow, but not a merry one, as you can well imagine.

Johnny hadn't had the chance to move in with us on Geyer. He had stayed on in Mother's care. She had assumed this responsibility when he was just two and a half months old, and John was in her charge until he was twelve. With her love and guiding hand, she laid the ground work for his thoughtfulness and social graces in later years. I was more a sister than a mother to him, and both of us were influenced and led by my parents, their decisions always being final. They were the Supreme Court of our little world.

New housing arrangements were made upon my reluctant return. Johnny was to take over Aunt Flora's room, and I was to occupy the room adjoining.

Aunt Flora, too, had been caught up in this world-wide storm. Her nephew, Arthur, the same Arthur who had helped us with the house, was captured by the Draft Board; and he had to leave his hearth and Roosevelt's fire-side chats for alien environments. He didn't want to leave his beautiful home empty - he was a bachelor - so the logical answer to this problem was for Aunt Flora to become its mistress for the Duration.

How she hated to leave. She had been with Johnny since the day I had brought him home, and had often stuck a bottle of formula into his howling mouth, before leaving for work in the morning. And then there was Bonnie, her Scottie, whom she couldn't take with her. She held a fine position with Union Electric, and, naturally, being gone all day couldn't possibly take care of the pup. And Arthur had a cat, a large yellow Porsian cat; so Bonnie's residence with her was out of the question.

Johnny loved Aunt Flora. He, along with Bonnie, tagged her footsteps as soon as she returned home in the evenings. When he was three,

he used to follow her to her room, sissors in hand, and sit on the footstool close to her chair. Part of Flora's work was to clip items from the newspapers pertaining to Union Electric activities. Many hours she spent at this tedious job, snipping and searching the columns; Johnny cutting away happily at the comic section. One night I glanced through the door at the busy pair. "What are you doing?" I asked Johnny. Up popped his head, his eyes bright, as he proudly answered, "I'm cutting sta-tis-ti-cal sum-ma-ries." No wonder he's a lawyer today. His love of words was apparent even then.

Flossie, as we affectionately called her, used to listen to his prayers at night, after which ensued many serious conversations. One of the most frequently quoted came quickly upon the tail-end of a Now I Lay Me. "Amen. Aunt Flossie, what's diarrhea?"

Flora was shocked. Mostly, I suppose, because the question was so surprising, and so far removed from his hastily completed communion with God. She stammered, as she always did when confused, "Why, Why, Johnny, do you ask? Do you have diarrhea?"

"No," he replied, "but Gramps says the horse has."

Yes, Flossie hated to leave her "Little boy", but she managed to see him over the week-ends. She, too, joined the Sunday Dinner rituals. Well I can remember her blasting up the driveway in her old Plymouth oil burner. It was a noisy contraption; so noisy, in fact, that any minute we expected it to take off like a cub plane. But it got her there, and that was the main thing. The sparkle in John's eye, and his mad dash to the "Cock-pit" upon arrival was positive proof of that.

John and I moved into our new quarters; the two bed-rooms toward the rear of the house. John's room had a sleeping porch attached, and mine had the entrance to the back stairs. It was a happy thought of Mother's. I

could come and go as I pleased without disturbing the occupants of the front bed-rooms. And I suppose she thought the close proximity of our rooms favorable to our morale. I know she always thought I should see more of my son. The fact that I usually retired well after he was asleep didn't give us any more contact than before, but it was the thought, and the right thing to do. And she was right. It did help. Our closeness gave Johnny a sense of security, and it gave me security, too; especially one spring night.

In early spring the farmers burn the debris of old crops in order to clear the land and to plant a-new, or some such reason. Anyway, all around us were black and seared fields. This, of course, ran the wee field-mice from their homes, and led them to seek new environments. The barn was a fine shelter, but too dangerous; too many cats. But the house, now that was a haven. However, here these poor innocent pilgrims had to combat the cruel but necessary (to us) traps. All farm-houses have them, even a glorified one, such as my fathers. In my father's house there were many mouse traps. My room had two.

This night John had fallen asleep while I was writing my usual end-of-the-day letter to Hy. After finishing, I put out the light and drowsily tumbled into bed. No sooner had I placed my head upon the pillow when "snap" went a trap. "Johnny!" I screamed. "Wake up. There's a mouse in the trap!"

Poor little Johnny stumbled into my room, rubbing the sleep from his eyes. He picked up the captive, lethal weapon and all, and trudged down the stairs, and out the back door to the ash-pit. Then he returned, re-set the trap, and went back to bed. Just as he was settling himself, "snap" went another. He groaned, and started to get up. "Snap!" There were two this time; so off went my big game hunter again, repeating his

first performance. Coward that I was, I shivered under the covers while my poor boy marched up and down the stairs like the King's men. Believe it or not, we caught eight monsters that night. They grew larger in my imagination with each crash of the guillotine. Johnny giggled and giggled. He thought it was very funny, but I failed to see the humor. Mice I didn't appreciate; but my son, I did, from that moment on.

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At this time I was not working. I was home, but I was lost. I had the feeling of being in limbo, (Everyone-else had the same feeling, and I'm afraid it lasted throughout those four long years.) but now as I look back ~~in retrospect~~, I find my perspective changed. Life had not been empty, only our heads. We had been able to laugh, and we had coped with our work successfully despite aggravations and frustrations. Our lives had just changed channels for awhile. It was a time of trial and stress, but, as a whole, I think we later returned to proper course again, much wiser for all its vicissitudes.

I turned to photography for solace and diversion, going into it in a big way, buying equipment as indiscriminately as a child would candies. My dark-room was mongrel - the bath-room, after dark. Often I worked until the small hours of the morning developing poses of Johnny in every conceivable position and place, portraits of Mother and Dad, and close-ups of the dogs, cats, cows, etc.

Tiring of the conventional, I made ready for still life. Armed with camera, film, filters, and tripod, I set out on my expedition, taking Mother with me. A tree, I wanted a tree, a certain type tree, and I wanted white billowy clouds to accentuate the dark subject; a study in black and white. My hopes were high. Driving way out the old Ballwin Road, I suddenly jammed on the brakes. There was the tree beckoning to me from far out in a field. Grabbing up my paraphernalia, I left Mother in the car, and hiked over

the furrows to the tree.

I was particular about getting the correct angle, filter, and lens setting, taking my own sweet time making my decisions. Back in the car Mother grew restless and warm as there wasn't a breath of air stirring, unseasonable weather for that time of year. Time must have passed slowly for her, but I was oblivious of all but my picture. Finally when I returned, satisfaction and perspiration oozing from my pores, I found her glowering, madder than a wet hen. "What happened," she snapped, "wouldn't the tree hold still?" And that was the first and the last time she ever went with me on a photographer's safari.

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But back to the problems at the old homestead. Both domestic help and yardmen were at a premium. Harris had left for defense work, and since his departure we had run through several incompetents. Some stayed a week, some a month, some a few months, but all left sooner or later for various and sundry reasons. As Dad said, "the majority stayed long enough to get the wrinkles ironed out of their bellies." All but one. He went to bed one night and quietly passed away. We found out later, from his son, that he had been ill when he came. "Papa took the job because he wanted a comfortable place to lay his head. He always said he wouldn't die with his boots on."

His replacement was a crotchety old sinner named George. He fancied himself a farmer, but as far as I could see, all he was good for was to feed and water the stock, and he grumbled about that. His one passion was food, the amount he could stow away was unbelievable; and Johnny was the direct recipient of his hatred toward children. His vocabulary contained the vilest words I have ever heard, and I've heard plenty. Johnny sensed this antagonism at once, and, childlike, did everything he could to

provoke his wrath, absorbing the vicious oaths like a sponge.

One day Mother heard cursing and screaming outside the house. She ran to a window and saw Johnny sitting at the top of his sliding board. George was down below, and both were trading hair curling epithets. Neither, it seemed, wanted to be outdone by the other, and soon the air was thick with filth. Needless to say George was sent packing within the hour. Johnny's mouth was washed out with yellow laundry soap, and he was given a spanking, too boot. Once more poor Dad had to scour the district for another man.

And then came Henry, a bow-legged little man of German extraction. He was a jewel, and stayed with us until the bitter end. He and Johnny were pals, from the first day he came to work, and Henry taught him all he knew of the wonders of Mother Nature. He was kind-hearted and good. His love of animals extended even to the bugs on the tomato vines. Carefully pinching off a ladybug, he would call Johnny and say "Look, John, isn't this a cute little bugger."

And Henry had a green thumb. His roses were as large as his tomatoes, and his tomatoes were as large as his cantelopes. He talked and coaxed all plants to his bidding. In fact, his love for flowers was almost an obsession. If you smelled them, beware of breaking the stems or bruising the leaves; and never, never, never cut them without his permission. Even if you had that, you were allowed only a few, and those of his own selection. He caught Mother one day snipping a few for her table. Oh, boy, did he give her why-for. "You'd think they were his roses," she grumbled. And in a way, they were. They always bloomed "their damdest" under his ingenious hands.

Henry was literate, too, although his taste in literature was simple. I remember one winter he read the complete set of "Tom Swift" we had stored in the barn. Looking back, I guess we could call him the egg-head of all our hired help.

Although Henry did much to keep us secretly amused, Dad and Mr. Marcus were the top comics, but not intentionally, of course. Sometimes their relationship to each other reminded us of two small bickering boys. Both were opinionated and headstrong. Both were ready to fight at the drop of a hat, but despite their numerous spats they were the best of friends.

We used to sit out on the front lawn on warm pleasant evenings discussing everything from the war effort to sex, and believe me, this provided grist for many arguments. One night, after an unusually stormy session, Marcus arose abruptly. "Drive me home, Eunice," he demanded.

Dad's silence could be cut with a knife, and I knew his face was red, even though I couldn't see it in the dark; so I quickly obliged before Vesuvius erupted. Marcus' parting words to me were sputtered in rage, "Your father, he's a damned fool!"

And upon returning home, my father's greeting was, "Your father-in-law, damn him, he's nuttier than a fruit-cake."

It was the same about their respective businesses. Dad was a distributor for the Texas Oil Company, and Marcus was a distributor for Phillips Petroleum. Vehemently, each declared his gasoline the better. And if I really wanted to see them "flip their lids", all I had to say was "What difference does it make? They both use the same pipe-line." Oh, Brother, then it was time to take cover.

One ^{FEUD} ~~feud~~ lasted a whole week. Finally, champing at the bit, they could stand it no longer, and sought out each other's company. Off they went, arm in arm. "Come on, John, I think Mama might have some fish-soup for you." Marcus knew it was Dad's favorite, but my malicious thought was that maybe he hoped Dad would choke on a bone.

Once Dad did swallow a bone, a pheasant's wish-bone. After it was removed whole from his stomach, guess what he did with it. He had it

gold-plated, and wore it as a tie-clasp. As I said before, we were all off the beam in those days.

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The month of March slid by, making me a year older, and April first arrived bright and clear. "Coming events cast their shadows," but there were no shadows that day, though I should have known. It was All Fool's Day, which automatically made it my day, and, as it transpired, it, also, made it my D Day.

The zero hour approached slowly but steadily, and when Dad came home from the office filled with woe it was "over the top, Boys! His filling station at Geyer and Manchester was going to close. Norman had enlisted in the Navy. A blow, because with the growing scarcity of men, good operators were like hen's teeth.

There was only one thing he could do - take it over himself, and let his man in the office do double duty. But there was one small hitch. Paul, a slightly effeminate fellow, a cracker-jack book-keeper, drew the line at manual labor. "Mr. Fels," he flatly stated, "I will take your dictation, I will keep your books, but I will not soil my hands in a dirty filling station."

So who do you think ended up soiling her patties. You guessed it - little ole me.

Chapter III

Thus Fate, in its usual devious way, had decreed me book-keeper, grease monkey, and pump jockey! And I'll wager that I was the best dressed auto wet-nurse in the business. No uniform. No blue jeans. No daughter of my father was going to look like a crumb-bum, regardless of occupation. So I wore dress slacks, hand-knit sweaters, and trim suede jackets. The cleaning bills alone would have consumed my salary, if I had had to pay

them; but Dad had a friend in the business who assumed full responsibility. It seemed Dad had done him a favor once; (it must have been a big one) consequently, he did all our cleaning gratis. Good old Sol, I'll never forget him. He always had a smile, or a joke, and during those days the cleaning business was far from a joke: It was dog eat dog.

Keeping the oil company books was nothing new. I had done it for years, but the station books were all Greek to me. Checking the gasoline used against the remaining gallonage; and co-inciding the daily consumption with the cash drawer; balancing to the penny at the end of the day was a complicated procedure. How did I reconcile the money received from grease jobs, tire changes, and sundry? It was quite a poser those first few weeks. Often I would wait on a customer, ring up the sale, but forget to enter it on the tally sheet. I learned the hard way. Really though, it didn't take any brains. It was just a matter of coordinating the physical with the mental, quite similar to shifting gears automatically after learning to drive.

The oil company, too, had an irritating factor. Fuel oil was on the ration list, and all the gallons delivered to our accounts had to have the required number of stamps to cover. Sometimes the drivers, Ed and my brother-in-law, George, better known as Stub, didn't have time to paste them on the provided sheets, leaving the task of licking and securing them to the forms with the proper invoices until closing time. Stub, Ed, and I made quite a "to-do" about this trifle. I can say "trifle" now, but it was a pain in the neck then.

I think I had been "back on the job" about a week when Mother brought Johnny in to see his own patriotic Mother. The station was a pretty little white and green building, with a rock-edged flower garden to one side. The weather being mild, we sat on the grass and ate the basket-lunch she had made for the celebration. We sat around chatting and munching, and we

were lucky. No customer came until the very last bite. John, of course, was eager to help, so I let him hold the valve caps while I checked the lady's tires. Then I showed him how to operate the handle on the gas nozzle. He caught on quickly for a seven year old; and except for the child labor law, I might have taken him on as an assistant. Next I checked the oil, and let him puncture the can, ~~was~~ the guage showed a quart low. He watched until my head disappeared under the hood and then off he wandered. The grease pit was in his direct line of vision.

Mother was picking up the remains of the lunch, and I hadn't noticed his departure because my "lady friend" had asked me to "check the battery, please." Women always expect more for their money than men, and this gal was no exception in demanding her pound and a half of flesh. Suddenly we heard an ear-splitting scream, and all three of us, Mother, Mrs. ~~Sny~~lock, and I ran toward the pit. We stood looking down into its bowels, and there we saw the blackest little Caucasion male in St. Louis County. He had fallen head long into a pan of dirty drain oil. After fishing him out, drying him off, and gingerly examining him for broken bones, Mother packed the howling banshee into the car and headed for home and the scrubbing brush. From the rear window John balefully glared at me until out of sight. For some unknown reason he held me responsible for his plight; and for some length of time I stood there cheerfully contemplating homicide.

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That spring brought forth more than flowers. People, friends of mine, Muriel, and Dad, popped up like mushrooms. You see, I was a novelty. They hadn't been conditioned as yet to the sight of women doing men's work. However, I didn't mind. The job was fun, the work not too strenuous, and I guess I rather enjoyed the attention. Anyway, it was good for business. They just couldn't stare, you know. "Fill'er up", and I'd ham it up, knowing they wanted to see me in action.

One day Muriel drove into the station, grinning like the proverbial "Chessy Cat", and proudly announced that since expanding from her apartment to the house on Geyer, she was now expanding her girth. Hallelujah, I was going to be an aunt! My cup runneth over; and so did the gas I was putting in her car. It shot up in the air, a veritable geyser, and drenched me to the skin. No one dared come near me with a lit cigarette the rest of the day. I was a walking essence de Fire-chief. That day I discovered, too, that nail polish and gasoline are mutual enemies. So, war casualty, number one, I decided to forego my weekly manicures. Pampered hands became a thing of the past.

Marcus came in the following day. Not to buy gas, heaven forbid, but to see how the wife of his elder son was faring. Also, to invite me to the Seder Services that week-end. Passover came a few days before our Easter. "Mama's unhappy with the boys gone," he said, "and she's used to big dinners the First Night. So come, join us at our table."

And what a night that was. I dressed in my finest bib and tucker, and wore a bit of jewelry. It felt good being feminine again. "How did you know ^{WEAR} to wear your best?" Mrs. Marcus inquired. I didn't, but silence is golden, and if she wanted to think me smart why should I disillusion her? Everything was new to me. I never before had attended these home services, and I found them lovely. The singing at the conclusion was gay, and though I couldn't read Hebrew, I could follow along with the English equivalent printed beside it in the Haggada. That is, I could after I discovered that you read it back to the front. I was "a crazy mixed-up kid," but they were patient in helping me over the rough spots.

The table was set before I arrived. My curiosity aroused, I asked many questions. Well, how else was I to learn? It was an education in itself. Near Pop Marcus' place, setting on a plate, was a large napkin folded in four parts, and in each of the three folds was a whole piece of matzoth. On a platter next to it was the Pascal lamb - a roasted lamb-bone,

and a roasted egg. In another dish was the Moror, or bitter herbs, and next to it, the Charoseth, a mixture of grated apples, almonds, cinnamon and wine.

It was a never-to-be-forgotten dinner: Matzoth balls swimming in delicious chicken soup, (my first venture there, but not my last. I have even learned to make them myself. You ought to try them sometime.) baked chicken, potatoes, fresh asparagus, a green salad, stewed dried prunes, the Passover sponge cake, um-m-m, and strong black tea - a gastromic delight.

Services began at sundown, and as it was growing close to that time, and Pop hadn't arrived, everyone was beginning to display signs of nervousness, especially Mrs. Marcus, as she placed a dish of sliced hard boiled egg in salt water upon each plate. The candles, to one side, were lit, glowing softly over the pure white table cloth. It was almost time. Where was that man? Just as we were about to voice our concern, in rushed Marcus. He hurried up the stairs to freshen himself, and came down just in time. He seated himself at the table, and innocently said, "I'm ready, Mama. We may begin."

Mama stood there staring. No one sat down, taking our cue from her. "What's the matter?" he grumbled. "I'm hungry. Why don't you sit down? Whom isn't ready?" and he glowered at us all.

Mrs. Marcus stood her ground. "You're not, Papa. You forgot your hat!"

Sheepishly he arose, set it carefully upon his bald pate, then resumed his place at the head of the table. We slid silently into our seats. The Passover had begun.

Like my father I had a fondness for good cars - big purring motors with power bursting forth at the slightest touch of the accelerator. I

liked the long sleek lines, the richness of upholstery. To hold the wheel of such a car was sheer exhilaration. One day a beautiful green Packard drew up along side the pumps. My eyes sparkled. It was a pleasure even to fill it with gas. Sticking the oil, I beheld the awe-inspiring (for me) engine. The young man in the driver's seat watched me as I lovingly wiped the wind-shield. "You don't know anyone who would like to buy a good car, do you?" he asked.

I gasped like a floundering fish. "This one?" I was answered in the affirmative, and immediately my brain started clicking off the cash in my bank account. Honestly, I all but licked my chops to stop the drooling. So-o, to make a short story shorter, I bought it!

Upon it I expended all the elbowgrease I had. Roping in Stub and Ed, we gave it a Simonize job, polishing and buffing until its shine outdid the sun's. Yes sir, I drove back and forth to my menial tasks in royal splendor; an incongruous combination, but morale building, to say the least.

I, also, had a new puppy, a Cocker Spaniel, whom Mother promptly dubbed "Trouble". He was that to her, you may be sure, for she had the trouble of house-breaking him, whereas I had only the pleasure of the finished product. Usually in the evenings, I would bundle him, Johnny, and Hy's sister, Sara, into my mechanical Pegasus, and off we'd fly down Manchester Road. The speedometer dial turned red after seventy. Eyes glued to the road, I'd yell "tell me when it's red!" Johnny would jump up and down in glee, but Sara would sit there frozen. Her lips couldn't move; therefore, it was Johnny who, simultaneously, watched for the danger sign on the dial and for traffic cops who might be lurking behind bill-boards.

No drive was complete for my son until we stopped for a snack. It didn't matter if only a short time had elapsed since dinner; he was always hungry. A hamburger and a malt was his idea of heaven. We laughed and

poked fun, but never failed to stop at a way-side stand where we gave the order in triplicate. It's a wonder we didn't get as fat as "Aunt Eppie Hogg", for night after night we used Johnny as our excuse for "three hamburgers and three malts".

One night, as the car-hop was handing us our calories, Trouble made a wild leap from the back seat to the front, almost upsetting the tray into my lap. "Back, vermin, back!" I shouted, quoting from "H.M.S. Pinafore".

The young lad looked at me in horror. "Is that really his name?" he asked. Well, our laughter filled the air that night. It didn't take much to make us silly. And merrily we drove home to impart this "little gem" to our folks.

Speaking of cars, Muriel and Stub had a 1941 Maroon Chevy coupe, which they called their "Little Jewel". Stub was as daffy about cars as Dad and I, and he spent many hours with "spit and polish".

'Twas a Sunday afternoon when it happened. After washing his proud possession, he had parked it in the barn, a drizzle of rain was falling and he didn't want the wax spotted. At that time we had a colored couple working for us. (This was the pre-Henry period.) Joe was a "vine", smuggling in the grape on his day off. We didn't know it, but he had decided to paint the inside of the barn white. Johnny noticed Joe stagger, and called to him from the kitchen window. Joe slowly turned around, the brush in his hand raised like a dripping torch. After his befuddled mind deemed the call unimportant, he again started slinging the paint. Stub, rounding the corner of the barn, stopped and stared dumbfounded. At last he found his voice, and use it he did. He ran old George a close second for profanity during the next few minutes. Mayhem was in his heart. Joe, his position reversed, had gone on painting, but in his exceedingly well marinated condition, he hadn't noticed that he was

painting not the wall, but Stub's car.

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In the fall of that year the gasoline business was going from bad to worse. After much deliberation, Dad decided to close Geyer and Manchester and to move to his larger station in Maplewood. With that move, our initiation over, we learned the meaning of the word "labor".

It was an important station located in a strategic part of town, and the volume of gasoline disbursed constituted a large portion of our income. Taking over this "baby" meant the boys would have to lend a hand, and a big one, after their daily truck deliveries were through.

We serviced two large trucking concerns, and when those drivers came in it meant "on the double, Girl!" Talk about jumping. The trucks would all line up, and drivers would congregate inside for congenial conversation and much horse-play. Meanwhile, I would service a truck. Leaning over those monsters to stick the oil really kept my vertebrae flexible. When one was finished and the ticket made out, I would move it to the side, and then start on the next. Sometimes the big lugs inside would give me a lift, but more often than not, they stood watching and wise-cracking. It was rugged when both outfits came in at the same time. Each thought he had priority, and I would be run ragged trying to show no partiality.

So now here I was scrambling over trucks like a monkey when Dad had a brain-storm. I ought to be a tire inspector, too. The tire board agreed with him, and so from that time on, if I was not on top of cars, I was underneath, flat on my back on my little scooter, checking serial numbers and bad casings.

Of course, there was the little matter of book-work, too - the oil company's, the station's, and Stub's tire and battery company's. That set was wished on me not long before our move. And I was a notary public.

Sandwiched between jobs I witnessed papers to beat the band. There's no doubt about it, those were busy days; never a dull moment, but we had fun, too.

The day that Stub's and Muriel's son was born was one to be long remembered. Stub passed out the cigars; Dad passed out the liquor; and I all but passed out, period. There wasn't a customer who didn't drive away happy. And why not? They all had received a smoke, a short snort, and merry though erratic service.

However, this was but the second stage in that mad little game of selfpreservation. If we thought we were over-worked then, we must have had a rude awakening. Compared to what followed it was child's-play.

The announcement came - and there was nothing we could do about it; nothing, except to gird our loins and to dig in for a hard and bitter battle. Gas Rationing, that war-time exigency that knocked the American public's extravagant driving habits into a cocked hat, came into being.

Chapter IV

The eve preceding Rationing was a night-mare to gasoline dealers throughout America, and our station was not the exception. Never in all my life had I seen such mass hysteria over a common commodity. I was too young to remember the night before Prohibition, but it couldn't have been worse. This night people used bottles, too; in fact, anything available that would hold liquid. One woman brought in a dozen glass jars and an old oil stove with a two gallon tank. I hope no one ever lit the stove by mistake. There were many explosions in those days from cached illicit gasoline; but that came later. Now it was fill, fill, fill, all day and all night: drums, tanks, cans, bottles, jugs, Name it; they had it.

Every truck, every car, every motorcycle, yes, every lawn-mower, had its tank filled to the brim. Stub worked, Ed worked, our new boy Tad worked, I worked, and, believe it or not, Dad worked. We pumped gasoline beyond expectation, pumping until our hands were blistered, and our clothes and shoes were sodden. At times a vapor lock would form in the auto tank, caused by filling too fast, and gasoline would shoot up into the air like a fountain, cascading down in a cold wet stinking spray. But none of us seemed to care, probably because we were beyond feeling.

Stub and Ed delivered gas left and right. Every station was caught in the panic, and they were fighting time. What a rat-race! It was ten p.m. when they pulled in home-port for a much needed rest; a rest they didn't get. That's when they went on the pumps.

People actually jammed the inside of the station as well as the outside; groups huddled together gabbling like geese. I would have to fight and shout my way through to the cash register. The only silent thing in the place was the pin-ball machine standing against the wall. Usually its incessant ping was nerve-wracking, but this night it stood forlorn and forsaken.

At mid-night, on the dot, the pumps were shut down and locked. A representative from the ration board saw to that, and that final click was music in my ears. We all slumped onto chairs, too exhausted to move, but, suddenly, I realized my work was not done. The tally had to be taken for Uncle Sam, and the books had to be closed for the day. Everyone-else went home, but I stayed there behind bolted doors, doggedly adding and subtracting. The day's loot had already been counted, and Dad had taken it away with him, so there was no danger of my being slugged. The total in front of me, I held my breath, and began the reconciliation, and you know what? I balanced to the last grimy penny. Oh, but I was proud of myself. Tired as I was, I still had the energy to pat myself on the back. And here I am, years later, still tooting my own horn.

The next morning's drive to work reminded me of New Year's early morn. The quiet hurt the ears; the lack of traffic was distracting. It was like moving in a vacuum. Arriving around nine, I found the Simon Legree from the War Board impatiently cooling his heels. Sure, he was bright and chipper, he hadn't fought the angry horde the night before. "You're late", he grumbled, "and I have other stations to check." I wondered what made him think they would open any earlier, and almost made a nasty rejoinder until I remembered that he would be cracking the whip over us for a long time; so I quickly "buttoned my lip", a hard thing for a woman to do. After he officiously and officially checked the storage, the gasoline gallonage immediately was reduced to A. B. C., and T stamps. It would be many a moon before we would again hear that hearty shout "fill'er up, Boy".

The morning dragged into noon. Tad and I sat wiggling our thumbs and swilling coffee. He listlessly swept out the place twice, but I did nothing. I was too tired to buckle down to anything resembling work. Finally a car drove in. Tad took it. No gas, just an oil check. Again we sat. A little later, another car, but it was only Tad's "girl friend". Tad had a wife, (a mountain of a woman) and eight of the cutest little chocolate-colored cherubs you ever saw, but he still had a gal. Also, he didn't dare throw any stones in Meadow Park, the colored section of town, lest he hit one of his numerous "wood-colts". Tad didn't brag of his exploits, but he didn't keep them secret, either. I wonder if he has survived after all these years, or if he ended up with his just desert; his throat slit from ear to ear.

He was so preoccupied "sweet-talkin" this current flame that he didn't see, or didn't care to see, the coupe that slowly wended its way to the pumps. I was there saluting. My first customer of the day, a cheery little old lady waving her ration book like a flag. Her A sticker

was firmly in place on the wind-shield, and her back window bore the sign "Is This Trip Necessary". "One stamp full, please." An A tag was three gallons. We exchanged a few pleasantries as I inserted the hose, but she no more needed gas than a hole in her head. Two gallons and it gurgled and spewed all over the ground. Her merry manner dissipated into a horrified shriek, "You're spilling it, you're spilling it!"

She insisted that I owed her a gallon of gasoline, and said that she would expect four gallons the next time. "Absolutely." I rocked back on my heels, my head reeling, ready to throw in the towel. I knew what that would mean. And it did. Her unyielding demand proclaimed Innauguration Day - for a new set of books.

As month followed month, we were faced with more and more automative problems. Everyone was car conscious and expected service "in and above the line of duty". Old heaps received the same loving care as the later models. More, I guess, for they were forever dropping bolts and nuts, leaking oil, or precious fuel, and their tires were howling for replacement, replacement that couldn't be.

The tire situation was bad. One almost had to be in an essential industry to jar loose one single measly tire from the board. If the side-walls were any good at all, I recommended re-capping. (As a tire inspector I was a lesser Scrooge of the hated out-fit.) Re-capping was obtainable, no certificate was needed, and we did a land-office business. Every week the truck was stacked to the top, tires roped into place to keep them from being lost. Each serial number was recorded, and woe be unto us if anything happened to those little jewels.

Our harrassments were many, but one worry we didn't have. Since the curtailment we, at least, didn't have to bother with road maps and route charts. No one was taking trips. Even we, in the business, restricted our driving. Gas, of course, was easily available to us. We had more

truck stamps than we needed, (who was to know if it went into our cars or the trucks) and we, also, had B and C stickers. We were essential to the point that the essential workers needed us for transportation. But, anyway, we didn't go over-board, and we tried to confine our pleasures to more patriotic pursuits than joy-riding. Dad's fertile brain came up with the idea of purchasing a driving horse. But that's a story in itself.

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Bertie was the sweetest little English hackney horse I ever saw, well mannered, good confirmation, and a high stepper. When hitched to the small two-seater buggy, he strutted his stuff like the thorough-bred he was. I had never before done any driving, but I was willing to learn. Dad taught me the fundamentals, and I practiced going round and round the drive-way at home. After he felt that I could handle the tiny beast, he pointed me to the road. "This is the life", I thought as I was carried along. "No smell of gasoline, and plenty of fresh air." It was a thrill just watching the handsome animal's muscles ripple as he pulled against the harness.

I waved to Sara Marcus, who was sitting on her front porch. "Come on," I gayly called, "I'll take you for a ride." Sara was scared pink at the mere sight of horses, but she was bored, and ready for anything other than sitting and brooding. She climbed in (but gingerly) and off we went at a trot.

"This is fun", she said after a long silence. "Where are we going?"

"I thought we would ride over to Clayton Rd., then circle back," I answered. A nice little jaunt, bringing us back home in time for dinner.

All went well until I pulled over into a lane to let a Diesel truck go by. I was afraid the noisy monster might disturb the horse. It didn't. Nothing bothered Bertie, that is, except yours truly. I had him in the lane, but I didn't know how to back him to the road. I pulled on the reins, and

he backed; but to one side was a ditch full of dirty rain-water, and we were going in that direction. Trying to stop, I pulled back harder, but without that magic word "whoa". I guess he thought "you poor stupid woman, I am backing", so he obligingly continued, and, whoops, down went the buggy, Sara and I tumbling out willy-nilly.

We clambered up the bank, laughing and wiping the muck from our hands and faces. Righting the buggy and turning poor Bertie around manually, (he hadn't even attempted to bolt) we climbed back in, and continued our drive, dirty and disheveled, but as carefree and happy as if we were in our right minds.

After Bertie had used up a great deal of his "tread" keeping me happy, I, unjustly, and unkindly, repaid him by discarding him without conscience, and purchased a five-gaited riding mare, named Barbara. Traded is a better word, though I had to add to the price of the mare. And I bet Bertie is still giving me the horse - laugh. Barbara turned out to be a "stump-sucker", and she was, alas, road shy.

I traded her for another little mare. Bess was the best racking horse in the business, and I had to add a goodly sum to my swap; but that is the story of horse-trading. The dealer always wins. It's "your horse and too boot". In the long run a good horse represents an enormous investment.

Well, I had some wild rides on that "oat-burner". Once as I was racking over a side road, as comfortable as if I were sitting in a rocker, a shot whistled through the sleeve of my jacket, grazing the arm slightly, but scaring the wits out of the mare. (Some careless hunters were on the loose.) Bess bolted in a frenzy, and I was helpless. When I saw a major intersection coming into view, I knew I was headed for real trouble if I couldn't stop her. So I yanked on the reins with all my strength. She slid to a stop, then reared directly in front of an automobile, coming down with both front feet on the hood of the car; I "pulling leather" all the way.

Another time Bess and I were riding along, minding our own business, when we passed a corral. Bess started dancing and prancing. Her whinnies were loud and clear, and presently they were echoed by a voice from within the enclosure. Casually, I glanced in its direction, and saw a large black stallion running up and down like mad, bucking the wires. Then, and only then, did I come to my senses. Dad had said something that morning about the mare being in heat. This I had promptly forgotten until now, when the meaning was ominous. I urged the gal onward, and she responded reluctantly. Looking back, I saw the stud rear up, almost clearing the fence, meanwhile trumpeting to the winds, and the mare's sensitive ears. But now we were in a full gallop, making tracks fast. My imagination was running riot, too. It held the horrible picture of being trampled, and covered along with Bess, by that fool sex-crazed stallion. I'm sure his name must have been Tad.

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Back at home, Johnny saw to it that there never was a dull moment. I'll never forget the evening I came home from work and found him with his arm in a cast. Mother had more than her share of troubles rearing that harum-scarum young scamp. It was the first of the month, I remember, because I was up to my ears in statements, and was bringing some home to finish after dinner. Knowing this was my busy time, she had spared me the excitement and worry. "How did it happen?" I asked Johnny: his only response being a muttered "that darned Andrew".

Mother filled in the details. John and Andrew had been playing "Tarzan". Climbing to the top of a tree, Johnny had tossed a rope over a bough to Andrew standing below. Andrew was supposed to have held on to his end with both hands while Johnny jumped down. The idea being that as he came down, Andrew would go up. But Andrew had turned chicken. Frightened, he had dropped the rope, and "Boy" came down hard, breaking his arm in two places.

Mother grumbled along with Johnny, "that darned Andrew", and I shook with laughter. She didn't think it was funny, "not one bit". So perhaps I have a perverted sense of humor. I thought it "hysterical".

That was but one of Johnny's escapades. The one in early July was a hum-dinger. It was a Sunday afternoon, and we were all seated at the dinner table; (dinner was always at noon) that is, all but Johnny who was spending the day with one of his little chums. The phone rang: Dad answered but was back in a jiffy. "Get your son," he commanded, "I'll call the doctor, and you take him direct to the office."

Stub drove me to the Reichmann's, (Good ole Hy was missing out on all the goodies.) and there we found Johnny, white as a sheet, his foot bathed in blood. A spear of glass was thrust through his heel, protruding from the instep. I turned as ghostly white as John. The boys had been wading in a pond, and John had stepped, or jumped, on a sunken splintered bottle. Stub wasted no time. He gathered up the child in his arms, and placed him gently on the rear seat of his car. Off we flew - gas rationing, tire rationing, traffic cops be damned.

The doctor was waiting, anesthetic ready. Well, the anesthetic made him sick, the tetanus shot made him sicker, and the pain was excruciating. Though I was terribly upset and sympathetic, it was Mother who had the care of him during the following weeks. I wonder who started the rumor about the joys of being a grandmother - some aged "Elsie Dinsmore", no doubt.

That summer Mother canned bushels of vegetables and fruits. She made tomato juice, chile sauce, catsup, pickles, relishes, and lined shelves, row after row, with jellies. Our orchard had been exceedingly prolific under Henry's green and able thumb. Apples, pears, peaches, apricots, damson plums, mulberries, too, which made mighty good pies. Henry would pick, and Mother would stew, in more ways than one. We had sugar rationing stamps for preserving, and she used them all. The odors emanating from her kitchen made

the mouth juicy. She had no help, only advise from dear father, and often before it was time for her to prepare dinner, she was ready to drop. Yes, she worked like a dog all summer making delicacies for her family, and I doubt if we ever once said "thank you". We were all too preoccupied with our own personal griefs.

In August Muriel had her little sandcastle washed away by the tide. Stub received his "Greetings". There was much "weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth". This was a bitter pill for her to swallow, and for Dad, too. Stub was his right-hand man. His departure would leave a big hole in our organization. Of course, we could replace him to a certain degree, but Muriel couldn't. Her void would be great. She was young, very much in love, and her son was but eight months old. It was a heart-breaking day when she came back home with her child. Now the dogs of war really were nipping at the heels of the Fels - family.

Chapter V

Muriel's return to the fold intensified the patriarchal tendency in our father. Now, besides his wife and two daughters he had his two grandsons. He had always yearned for male heirs, and this denial had developed a frustration that he attempted to conceal by dictatorial posturings. Still he was a nice tyrant, and he took a lot of "gaff" from us; but differ with him, never. As head of the house, his word was law. No amount of arguing could change his mind. "Female logic, bah." He was out-numbered by his women, but he could out-shout them. However, the odds changed abruptly. With two males added to the house-hold, it was "even Stephen". The boys would be molded to his pattern. He took over without any ado, and they idolized him. But if any molding was done, it was by them, not by him. They could wrap him around their little fingers, and they were well aware of it. Gramps was their refuge, their rock, their pal. Instinctively they knew on which side their bread was buttered; but their affection for him was genuine.

Honestly, it was heart-warming to see them together, Georgie perched on Gramp's shoulder, and Johnny tagging along like an over-grown puppy. It was a happy time for the children and a happy time for Dad - and it gave us mere women a chance to acclimate ourselves to the differences in our temperaments, which were thrown askew by our husbands' call to arms.

Muriel had a natural loving, kind, and easy-going disposition, but at present her wound was open and raw, making her super-sensative, and prone to tears. She was an extrovert. Like her father, she loved people, (and they loved her) and their presence was as necessary and important to her ego as food and drink to her physical being. Unfortunately, her social life was curbed to a degree by gas rationing, which did nothing to help build up her morale. But she bounced back to normal quicker than I. Her innate sweetness, plus a good sense of humor, conquered her tears, and did much to restore our spirits.

I only wish I could say the same about myself. Often I was insufferable. Always moody and introverted, there were times when I was sullen, the blackness of my gloom settling over the whole family like a deep fog. My tact was deplorable, causing hurt without intention. "Me and my big mouth." I cursed it then. I curse it now. I think all my life I have been putting my foot in it. It's a big foot, I'll grant you, but for me it's easy. As I said before, "I've got a big mouth."

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When Muriel brought Georgie home, he was at the creeping stage, but he was never one to let the grass grow beneath his knees. He moved like a bolt of lightning, devastating all within reach. No obstacle would stop his advance. Like a Sherman tank he drove ever onward, his relentless charge terminating only at his given objective. Johnny nicknamed him, and properly, too, "The Blitzkrieg", and "Blitz" he remained for the Duration.

Even at that tender age he had an avid curiosity, and Muriel had a full-time job just extracating interesting objects from his mouth, nose, and ears. One didn't dare leave a high-ball within his sight, or reach. She learned that the hard way. Someone did, and Georgie downed it without anyone's knowledge. He was the most inebriated little citizen we ever saw. Trying to crawl, he would fall flat on his face, sprawling awkwardly on his little belly. Muriel tore her hair. She knew she couldn't let him fall asleep. She bounced him, she jounced him. She stuck her finger down his throat. It was amusing, but it was alarming. However, he survived. Most children do live on in spite of their parents. With all Johnny's mishaps, I have positive proof of this truism.

The Junior Blitzkrieg's first birthday was a most memorable event. Muriel had planned the celebration for days. Stub had finished his basic training, and was on his way home from Oregon. He was due to arrive on this all-important date.

But, first, a flash-back. Oregon brought this tid-bit to mind. While there, Stub had met a lovely family, who did their part by entertaining homesick lads in their home. Stub had accepted their hospitality, joining them for dinner. Later he wrote the full particulars to Muriel. But he made one mistake. He mentioned the daughter. And Sister-Baby blew her stack. Her first out-pouring of jealousy was incoherent and violent, but, gradually, she subsided to a simmer, ending her tirade with a mis-quote, a classic of all times. "And you know as well as I do that the best way to get a man is to grab him by the stomach".

We tried to hold back. Really we did. She was so serious. But it was just too much. Doubled over, we roared with laughter, inexcusably adding insult to injury. She fled the room in tears of wrath.

So now she was in a tizzy of anticipation. Everything had to go right. "It simply had to". The cake was baked, the turkey was turning a succulent golden brown, the vegetables were well on their way to complement

the big fowl, and all of us had sworn an oath to be on our best behavior. It was almost time for "lover boy" to make his appearance.

Grabbing up Georgie, she headed for the bath, unbuttoning him as she raced up the stairs. We heard the water running for his tub, and then a scream, nearly splitting our eardrums. Taking the steps two at a time, we found her sitting and staring at the baby's nude body. He was blotched with red over every inch. "Johnny did it," she sobbed. "He gave Georgie Chicken Pox for his birthday! What will Stub think? He's as red as a beet." He was, and he was getting redder by the minute.

Johnny giggled. He was well now, and I suppose, somehow, we had forgotten, or ignored, the contagious period, and Georgie had come into direct contact with him and his pox. Blitz was a light blond, and he looked worse than John when he had served his stint in bed.

In the middle of this confusion, Stub came marching through the house. Muriel held up their son. Stub stopped, looked, and exclaimed, "My God what is it?" And Muriel and Georgie howled in unison. Such was the reunion of father, mother, and son. Happy days? Well, it all depends upon the way you look at it.

It turned out, after all, that we had a few C Sticker friends and relatives. Or was it T Stamps they used? We asked no questions, nor did we raise our eyebrows at this infringement of the law. What the heck, we gave them away ourselves - to a limited few - and no harm was done to the war effort. We figured that if Uncle Sam was so ridiculously liberal with our trucks, we might as well share our wealth. I suppose our reasoning was wrong, but we felt no guilt.

One night, not so long after Stub had gone to training camp, his parents drove out to commiserate with Muriel and the family. We congregated on the lawn, as usual during the summer months, and Dad mixed a refreshing batch of mint juleps. There is nothing like them as an antidote to the

doldrums. Presently our conversation changed from the drab to the cheery, and we "yakety-yaked" a mile a minute, Muriel's hearty laughter chiming in with the rest of the jovial group's.

The night was hot and humid, and the ice in the drinks melted fast for those who sipped. Mine didn't have a chance, but Mrs. Ker, Sr. needed to refrost her glass. Muriel went into the house with the empty ice-bucket, and was gone so long we decided to investigate. Perhaps Georgie had needed attention, but no, we found her in the kitchen, tea kettle in one hand, and a sauce pan in the other. Like Lot's wife she was standing motionless staring up at the ceiling. Number One - She had forgotten the water she had put on to boil for Georgie's formula, and, Number Two - She had forgotten the eggs she had been hardboiling for some reason or other. Both the pan and the tea kettle's bottoms were burned black, and the eggs had exploded, hitting and sticking to the ceiling in an unholy mess. She was dumb-founded at her handi-work, and her eyes were beginning to flood, so we knew we would have to do something fast before she drowned in her own tears. Everyone had had a similar experience, and hurriedly recited it in graphic but comic detail. At last we broke through her wall of self-pity, and a weak smile hovered over her lips. Dad made a huge lovingcup, tangy with mint, and heady with bourbon. This ambrosia was passed among us, making the rounds several times. Gaiety was resumed, and, needless to say, sleep was not a difficult achievement that night.

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We formed a poker club to help pass the long chill evenings that fall. There were Mr. and Mrs. Marcus, Sara, Mr. and Mrs. McKinna, Mother, Dad Muriel and me. As a poker player I would make a good first base-man, but, happily, none of us took the game seriously. We even invented games that would have made a dyed-in-the-wool poker fan throw up his hands in horror. The more cards we had wild, the better we enjoyed it. Who anted what, how, or when made no difference. It was the companionship that mattered, the

noise, the laughter, the potato chips - not the poker chips. How we gorged ourselves on those evenings - pop-corn, peanuts, beer - and to top it off, after our appetite for cards became jaded, an indigestible lunch of salami, shrimp, herring, potato salad or spaghetti.

Other evenings we listened to the radio, or played the phonograph. We devoured books, wrote letters, and Mother and Muriel knitted miles and miles of yarn, making sweater after sweater. I am ashamed to say that during all those years I made only one, which when finished, fit like a potato sack. But sister's were beautiful. She took great pains and pride in her work.

She, also, turned out to be a cracker-jack house-keeper, taking a great deal of the burden off Mother. Oh, we almost always had a girl. In fact, we had girls, girls, girls, bevi2s of girls to help with the house-work during those years. One at a time, of course, but none stayed any length of time. The work was too hard, or the hours were too long, or they ran off and married sailors, but the greatest majority were entirely too incompetent.

The finest representative of the latter group was Mattie. She was a young thing whose mind (if you could call it that) was forever on the opposite sex. She always had a boy squiring her home, and she stayed there only long enough to change into her "going out clothes". She must have stayed out half the nights because she was bleary-eyed when she returned to work in the mornings. Her dismissal came about when Mother, searching for her high and low, found her sound asleep on the top step of the front stairway.

In her wake we had Annie. No - Gloria came next, but she stayed only until she had the opportunity to clean us out of our silk stockings, sneaking off with them, artfully wrapped around her middle. Then came Annie, and she stayed with us longer than any, almost to the bitter end. She was a bit on the flighty side, but she was a nice girl, and she did "aim to please".

Not too much fault could be found with her work, though she had an irritating habit that exasperated us to the Nth degree. After dinner was finished only the dishes remained between her and freedom; consequently, she would stand near the door, her eye peeled for an empty plate. When she spied one, she quickly grabbed it for the awaiting dish pan. Many were the times we had our plates snatched from under our very noses, before we had time for seconds. There was no chance of over-eating when she was around.

Laundry-work had been a never ending problem in Ballwin, too. There were no launderettes, and former laundresses had become riveters. Wasn't defence work more patriotic? Well, that was a moot question, but one thing we did know - it was definitely more lucrative. So Muriel stepped into the gap made by the long line of deserters from the homefront. It couldn't have been fun for her, but she did it cheerfully and willingly.

She did the ironing, too. I can see her yet running the iron back and forth over the clothes in perfect time with the music bursting over the air waves; her radio an anesthesia for the back-breaking and mountainous task before her. I couldn't have done it. I would have gone stark raving mad within a month.

And so there we were, the two sisters, both trying to make the best of a bad bargain. Our jobs were not glamorous, but someone had to pick up the pieces of our broken homes and business. We expected no praise, nor pats on the backs, but when our cousin, A WAC officer, called on us during her stop-over between trains, - New York to Texas - we turned a little green. Her trim uniform and jaunty little cap symbolized Adventure, that spicy ingredient missing from our daily fare.

For a full two hours we sat listening to her spritely tales, dissatisfaction slowly seeping through to the very marrow of our bones. Our discontent turned into resentment, when later we walked with her through Union Station toward her train. Men, G.I. Joes, like our husbands, had to salute

this frail little girl who played soldier. However, before she boarded, she, too, had to snap to attention, and as we witnessed her compulsory deference to her superior officers, our good humor was restored. She was just a little cog like us in the giant wheel of mobilization. We, collectively, had a job to do, and where we did it, or how we did it, mattered not one iota. The V for Victory depended upon us all. A noble and patriotic conclusion, wouldn't you say? But coming from somewhere, and sneaking around the corner of my brain a "Kitty, Kitty, Kitty" softly mewed, "and we don't have to kow-tow to Brass, either." Sour grapes? Well, maybe. I have often wondered.

Chapter VI

Meanwhile, less and less gasoline was being sold. Small stations out-county were folding every day. Defense workers were moving closer to town. Boarding houses were over-flowing. Every day was field day for the proprietors. These migrants, also, were buying their gas at larger and better equipped stations. They were coddling their cars, and wanted more and more tire and mechanical attention. Trained mechanics and attendants were at a premium, and premium prices were paid for their services. This was something the smaller stations could not do, and they couldn't eke out an existence on A stickers alone; so, sooner or later, they closed. Some joined the swollen ranks of classified war-workers, and some went back to the farm. They still enjoyed eating three meals a day. It was a difficult habit to break.

Where-as, we used to keep two trucks going full tilt all day, and often talked of getting a third, we were now reduced to one truck, and more often than not, it was in at noon.

Ed, because the draft board was breathing hot on his neck, had taken a job as meat inspector. This was the day of inspectors. They even had inspectors

of inspectors. Stub was in training for cannon fodder; so we had to start looking for a new man. It took a while because the job of driving a gasoline truck was not too popular. The rationing coupons complicated the task, and scared off many who applied. But find one we did, after much sifting and re-sifting. His name was Lee, and he was so good that, believe you me, we handled him with kid gloves. The gas business was no longer Employer and employee. It was Employee and employer. That this was only the beginning of the shift in such relationships, we did not know. Now it is old hat, but then it worried us as a dog worries a bone.

As far as the station business was concerned, the customer was always right. His needs and demands were subserviently obeyed, p.d.q. Losing a customer was a minor tragedy, and we moved heaven and earth to please. Slipshod service was intolerable. Efficient briskness, and a smiling face accompanied each request no matter how small. There were days when cheerfulness was but a mask; however, Service with a Smile went on and on. Hollywood was not alone in producing Academy Award winners.

There was one society matron who drove a big Cadillac sports coupe. She drove in one day, swathed in furs and haughtiness. Disdaining my cheery good morning, she barked out her orders like a top sergeant. "Check the oil, tires, and battery. Clean the windows. Two T stamps of gas. Charge it, and collect the stamps from my husband."

No if you please, kiss my foot, or anything. What would you have done? Well, ordinarily, I would have done the same, but these were war times, remember. We could not afford to lose a big trucking concern's business, and this little doll was just the one to put a bug in her husband's ear. So I turned her over to Tad, and crossed the gas island to wait on an old junkheap that had just boiled up to the pumps. "Better it than I," I thought as I pulled off the radiator cap to let it blow off steam.

Our station shared the same building with a large grocery company. Only high boards separated the warehouse from our garage. All day long,

trucks would pull up to the freight entrance and unload their stock, the boys swearing, and laughing, and joking as they piled the canned goods high to the ceiling.

Though canned goods was not rationed, the purchase amount was limited by the retailers, and such items as tissues, coffee, canned milk, cigarettes, black pepper, and spices were often missing from the shelves. Georgie's diet consisted of a formula made with canned milk, and Muriel was kept hopping from store to store in order to keep Junior fat and sassy.

One day, after an unusual amount of buffoonery, one of the men yelled, "Danger down below! Beware of falling cans!" And from over the top of the dividing boards, a case plummeted to the floor.

There was a scurry of feet as it landed; and a muffled voice called from the distance, "It's only us mice."

A toot came from outside, and I flew to the pumps, seeing, from the side of my eye, a stealthy figure pick up the case and put it into the trunk of my car. Coming back, I found a note attached to the handle, "Do not open 'till Ballwin", and, thief that I was, I didn't. But I'm sure Georgie gurgled "thank you" for the next few weeks, as he sucked greedily away at his bottle. I never did find out with whom I was an accomplice. Perhaps it was merely the cow who jumped over the moon.

When Stub left, the tire and battery business landed in my lap. The batteries were my babies to carry and nurture. And if you think they don't need attention, you are badly mistaken. Every day or so, the stored batteries had to be tested for efficiency, and checked for water. And here was another gimmick. Most people thought distilled water was all that went into them. Sure it was. The distilled-water bottle was carefully filled and re-filled from the regular old cold water hydrant. We, as every filling station, knew it would not corrode the batteries, but the general public would have had a conniption fit if they had known. Drinking water was

alright to rust their pipes, but not their batteries.

Time after time my slacks were eaten by the darned battery acid. They looked as if an overgrown moth had used them for a gourmet dinner. I kept the clothing stores happy if no one else, least of all myself, my purse becoming as riddled as my pants.

Batteries are heavy, and lugging them to the various stations made my innards and back protest, though in vain. My disposition, too, was wrecking my digestion. Oh, the majority of accounts would help me lift them from my car to the rack, but there were several stinkers. One in particular I'll always remember with hatred in my heart.

It was at the end of a snowy and bitter-cold day when the customer's call for three extra-duty Buick batteries came through. We had been run ragged checking and fortifying cars with anti-freeze. Good battery weather it was, too, and we had installed quite a few ourselves, so I recognized the urgency of the call. With hands blue, and fumbling with cold, (We had only an old pot-bellied stove in the station, dangerously red and thin, over which we occasionally rubbed our numbed fingers.) Tad helped me load the messy things into my car, and off I went, thinking how lucky the fellow was that I had them in stock.

When I arrived at his place of business, I found him hugging his own stove. "Put them over there", he ~~unceremoniously~~ greeted me.

"Okay," I said, "can you give me a hand?"

He stared at me as if I had suddenly lost my senses. "Listen you," he shouted, "I'm buying these batteries, you're delivering them, and if you can't do your job, quit. I'll buy some place else."

I placed them on the shelf, fuming inwardly. Never as long as I had been on this job had I been treated so roughly. And why? He may have been tired and cold, but so was I. "Two bits" said that he had quarreled with his wife that morning. If he had, I sincerely hoped she had won. Even more, I hoped she would poison his coffee that night.

The snow continued to fall, coming down in almost a solid blanket. Driving was difficult. At least a foot of snow was on the road, and traction was slow. The maintenance crews hadn't ventured to clear the highways as yet. By the time I reached home, our driveway was obliterated. A steep bank fronted the drive. In late spring it was a mass of climbing red roses, but now the drifts had piled high above it, levelling it to the entrance. Knowing that it would be impossible to determine the mouth of the drive by making a right turn, I drove up to Marcus' station, and turned around. Facing the incline at the correct angle, I plowed through without any difficulty, my chains firmly gripping the snow.

But an hour later Dad neared his Nemesis. My tracks had been covered, the snow still belching from the skies. Foolishly, he turned into what he thought was the drive. It was the bank, and there he stuck, front end nosing up almost perpendicularly. Henry rushed out, shovel in hand. He dug, and he dug, and he dug. He sprinkled ashes under the rear wheels. Then as Pappy raced the motor in reverse, he pushed, but to no avail. The entire procedure was repeated, and, finally, the car rocked loose.

Now wouldn't you think a full-grown man would have learned from this experience? Not my father. Instead of going up the road to turn around, as I had done, he tried again, and instantly, his car was again clawing the embankment.

Henry cursed fluently, but who could blame him? It was enough to make a saint curse. He knew that after releasing Dad again, it would be his back-breaking task to clear the whole drive later, when the snow had ceased falling.

We, all at the window, watched the tree-ring circus, and knew that little Henry was about to explode. But Mother knew just what to do to relax the tension. As soon as the two half-frozen, but boiling mad, men entered the room, she shoved cups of hot buttered rum into their hands. Almost scalding

their tonsils, they downed them at a gulp, and, without a word, held up their mugs for more. Peace was restored as the warmth flowed through their bodies. Once more Mother had saved the day.

I guess it was around seven that night when Johnny piped up, grinning from ear to ear, "you know I have an accordian lesson at eight".

Ye gods, I had forgotten, and I guess he thought it so bad outside that I wouldn't again brave the elements. But I called his bluff. "Okay, get your accordian, and let's go."

He stared at me in disbelief. I meant it. Though he never progressed beyond "Mexicali Rose" on his squeeze-box, at this time I had high hopes of having a musician in the family. Dreams, idle dreams, but dreams which made me fool-hardy enough to tackle the snow again. Did I say something about my father's foolishness? Definitely, I was not one to talk. A chip off the old block. I had the same bull-dog tenacity.

Luckily, the snow had stopped, and cinders were scattered on hills and intersections. But, as a whole, it was tough sledding. We made it back to town a half hour late for the lesson. Still it was fun. And guess what - Johnny was the only pupil to appear at the school. The weather was too bad for those living right there. Ho, we were made of sterner stuff. "Neither snow, nor rain, nor sleet," and all that jazz, and all for "Mexicali Rose".

Father, too, was undaunted, or perhaps he was subdued by yesterday's bout of mountain climbing. At any rate, he set forth the next morning, bucking the highway, which was now slick as glass. And he made it safely to town. He had tailed a car all the way. Not once did he try to pass, and for him that must have been an ordeal, as he had a positive phobia about being out front. But, he played it safe, and followed the leader; a mite too close, but following, never the less. Keeping his eyes glued to the man's bumper, he failed to see the stop signal flash red at the Boulevard.

The car ahead stopped, to Dad's surprise and consternation. He slammed on his brakes, but not in time to avoid hitting the poor man's rear-end, (the car's, I mean) then he spinned on the icy snow, turned around twice, and smacked his helpless victim again.

By this time, traffic was snarled. No-one could move, both lanes were blocked. Impatient drivers tooted their horns noisely and steadily. Knowing he was at fault, Dad, meek as a lamb, stepped from his car, expecting an onslaught of vindictiveness. Much to his surprise, the young man was courteous and consoling. "I know you couldn't help it," he said, "It's hard to brake on ice."

Dad later told the story to us, embroidering facts to suit his sense of the dramatic. "You know," he said, matter-of-factly, "he was the nicest fellow I ever hit."

And he had hit plenty. His vanity forbade him to wear glasses, and this factor combined with sheer carelessness led to more collisions than he cared to admit. His mechanical sense was nil, and he tore teeth off the gears as he would corn off the cob. I honestly think he was the only man I have ever known who could ruin a brand new automobile within a week. Those war years were hell for him, and for the repair-men who had to keep his car in a semblance of running order. They were costly years, too. This last episode cost him a pretty penny. Personally, I think he was taken for a ride, but he still stoutly maintained that he was the nicest guy he ever hit. And that ended that.

So - Another winter passed. It was spring again. The fruit trees were in bloom, and Hy wrote from the frozen north, where the Army was

Often I would read portions of the letters to the family, and they never failed to chant his ending in unison. But by this time, I was beginning to wonder if he would get back. The war seemed as if it would go on forever, and restrictions became tighter and tighter.

Our station, too, was suffering from battle fatigue. One trucking outfit had "turned up its toes". Others were clamping down on mileage. It wasn't the lack of gasoline that necessitated this action; but, the tire situation. Some cars were, literally, running on their rims. Finally, Tad left for parts unknown, and we were short-handed once more.

When the lease expired in April, Dad decided not to renew. There was another station, farther into town, that needed "a shot in the arm." And so we were off - Destination Lyndover.

This station was in the residential part of town, situated on the corner of Big Bend and Lyndover. It was a different class of trade here, and meant I didn't have to crawl over trucks. Dad, figuring the real estate value would soar in future years, bought the property outright. It was quite a venture to buy a filling station at that time. People thought Dad had "flipped his wig", but, as usual, his business acumen proved the scoffers wrong.

We leased the station to a very capable young man whom the military had discarded because of a ~~perforated~~ ^{PERFORATED} ear-drum. This, automatically, emancipated me from full time duty at the pumps. A half day was all that was required, except, of course, I was expected to help during the evening rush hours.

My book-work remained the same, but I was now able to add a column of figures without interruption, a pleasure I before had been denied. This

Chapter VII

No-one was more flabber-gasted than I when I found myself working for Frankie's Feed Company. Father had maneuvered it so adroitly that I was pulling the handle of an adding machine before I had time to question my sanity. I had been brain-washed with soft soap. Oh yes, I was the girl to straighten out Frank's books. No one could do it better. The poor fellow needed some one he could trust, and blah, blah, blah.

So there I was with a job on my hands straight from Bob Ripley's column. And "Believe it or not", if I thought the gasoline business was confusion, I found the feed business positive bedlam.

My working hours now were staggered. From eight to one, at the filling station, from one to five, at the feed company, and then back to the station until six-thirty, with perhaps a delivery or two of batteries on my way home - Mondays through Fridays. Saturdays and Sundays and nights, I worked on the other books. The first of the month statements and balances, also, helped to keep me out of mischief. Youth is elastic, and so was my brain, I think. At least, the men in the white jackets haven't caught up with me as yet.

I wonder if I can re-set the stage for the feed company. Bear with me while I try. Entering the office off the truck-drive, (there was no other entrance) one found a small waiting room separated from a diminutive office by a room-divider. Setting on top the divider shelf was the order pad, and a battered beer bucket filled with tepid water. The office, itself, was so small that as I sat at my desk, there was room only for the boss to "scrootch" past my chair to the safe at the other end of the room. Resting on it was the cash register; consequently, he "scrootched" past my desk at least a hundred times a day. Directly to the left, joining my desk, was a steel locker, containing papers, ink, and miscellaneous; the miscellaneous including a fifth of whiskey and a shot-glass. More "scrootching". Usually, the radio, fastened to the wall above my desk, was blasting the ball-game or news.

And customers, always men, stood at the rail, gabbing incessantly in voices raised to compete with the radio. Sprinkle all this with grain and meal dust, the people, too, and you have the picture. God help those who had a dust allergy.

These two rooms were partitioned off from the warehouse with glass making it possible to see every sack of grain stored mountain high in all directions, and in every nook and cranny. Trucks pulled in and out all day long, either loading or unloading, while two cats ambled nonchalantly under the wheels, or over the cabs. I always expected to see a squashed cat, but each of their nine lives must have been lucky.

So it was in this atmosphere that I was expected to untangle Frank's muddled books, record the daily invoices, and answer the telephone. That phone was a full time job by itself. Everybody, but everybody, was raising chickens, ducks, rabbits, pigeons. And there again, I found the women more irksome than the men. Certain feeds came in printed sacks, which were used as dress material. "And be sure the sack is the same pattern as the last. I ran out of goods."

It was enough to drive one to drink, and often did. When Frank became too exasperated, he threaded his way to the locker, and "belted down a quickie". Then he grabbed the beer-bucket and swallowed an ity-bity chaser. The cigarette, invariably, was next, followed by a handful of Sen-Sen. To this day that insidiously sweet odor lingers nauseously in my nostrils.

One afternoon, after Frank had completed this ritual, he left the office to supervise the unloading of a truck. One of the cats scooted in as he closed the door, and jumped up onto the railing shelf where he calmly and daintily quenched his thirst from the bucket. When Frank returned, he reached for the pail. The cat and I sat and watched, fascinated as he raised it to his lips and drank with large and noisy gulps. Many a drink I had with Frank through the years, but never again did I take a chaser from that bucket.

These cats were fat and sleek, as they were contented and happy. And well they should have been. They didn't have to work hard for their meals. Succulent corn fed mice were abundant. Often my stomach churned as one kitty or the other brushed past my leg, a squirming rodent clenched between its jaws. And along with their meat course, they always had a saucer of milk. Frank never failed to keep it filled.

For one whom is as deathly afraid of mice as I, I was surely in the wrong environment. But by swallowing a million screams, and working with ragged nerve-ends, I allowed the little mouse boys and girls to scamper merrily under my desk, playing tag. Sometimes it was cops and robbers, the cats joining in the chase. I was too paralyzed to move. But did I get sympathy? Indeed not. The men howled with laughter, pointing their fingers at me as tears of frustration ran down my cheeks.

The drivers enjoyed the novelty of having a woman in the office. Like small boys they hung over the railing, talking and joshing; each trying to top the other fellow's joke. They were nice boys, but I scarcely had time to do my work, let alone try to retaliate with snappy repartee. So half the time I nodded my head in accordance, or smiled knowingly, the gist of their remarks escaping me completely. They didn't know the difference, and I doubt if they expected an answer. Anyway, they chattered on and on, like Tennyson's brook, captivated by their own wit.

One day I reported for work a little early, arriving during the noon lull. Oh, it was so peaceful. Seating myself at the desk, I switched the radio over to a different station, thinking I could enjoy a few minutes of music before the usual afternoon pandemonium.

But I had barely begun to relax when Buck, one of the drivers, stuck his head in the room. "What's all the noise? Did you step on a cat's tail?"

Out of sheer contrariness, I turned up the volume, and coolly stated, "It's "Scheherazade" by Rimsky - Korsakoff, and I like it."

"Rim-ski-kor-ski-do", he laughed. "Don't tell me you buy that long-haired jazz?"

The expression on his face looked so pained, I really had to smile, but the smile frosted over immediately as he flipped the dial and "Stri-ke two" blasted the orchestra off the air. Frank came in, the phone rang, a truck beeped, as it backed into the warehouse, and normal routine was resumed. "Another day, another dollar."

Some-how or other, Frank's place was the focal point for the local politicians. They would lounge around, highballs in hands, discussing community problems, giving Roosevelt hell, or critizing the conduct of the war. Smutty stories abounded. These, of course, I was not supposed to hear, but how could I help it in that two by four office? Some were pretty funny, and I tucked them away for future telling, but the really filthy, I shed as a duck does water. Actually, my presence was ignored, even though they had to walk and talk around me. And I never interrupted, (maybe, I was afraid I'd miss something) but now and then, I had to ask Frank a question, or consult him about an order, when I couldn't read his handwriting.

Working there was a liberal education. All types of people gathered in those two rooms, some buying, some selling, some just seeking genial companionship. I came in for my share of "funnin'", but I will have to admit that a "hands off" policy was strictly enforced, both by me and my good-natured boss. No passes were made. And, Mr. O. Nash, I didn't wear glasses then, either. So you're wondering, am I bragging or complaining? Neither, just explaining. One learned to roll with the punches in those days.

If cleanliness is next to Godliness, the feed store's lavatory was Satan's own special province. A powder-room it was not. Decidedly, it was no place to linger; therefore, I relinquished all rights and privileges upon first sight.

Now, there were times when I wished that I had greater fortitude, or less squeamishness, but as the hours ticked away, I was comforted by the thought that the station and relief was just a mile away. Anticipation

made the mile seem longer, but, eventually my dream-haven became an actuality.

Rushing into the station on one such evening, I made a bee-line for the door marked "Ladies". I was behind it only a second or two when I abruptly emerged yelling, "Earl, where are the pliers?"

Thinking something was wrong with the plumbing he by-passed me, the necessary implement in hand. "Give it to me!" I shouted.

"I'll fix it," he drawled. "Is the faucet stuck again?"

"No", I screamed "It's my zipper. My pant's zipper's stuck. Damn it, give me those pliers!"

The next morning, my composure still shaken, I sat down to my typewriter. A group of men were standing near-by, their silly grins betraying their innocence of the story. I reddened perceptively. And then, that afternoon at the feed-store, what did I find ingenuously propped beside the phone? A pair of pliers. ^{"HOLY COW"} ~~"HOLY COW"~~, and they say women gossip.

It was during this time that I pulled the biggest faux pas of my life. A former school-mate of mine, a charming young woman, had invited me to dinner. Her husband was out of town, and she thought it would be fun for the two of us to while-away a long nostalgic evening.

It would have been, too. And the dinner would have been delectable, but, unfortunately, at eleven o'clock that night, already in bed, my weary brain flashed a distress signal. Valeria's dinner! I sat up, consternation and mortification sapping any coherent thoughts I might have had. What could I do? How could I make amends? How in the world did you tell a person you had forgotten their dinner engagement? It was Inexcusable. Whipping myself to a lather, I didn't sleep a wink the rest of the night.

By early morning I had made my decision. I stopped at the florist on my way to town, and picked up a dozen roses, and then drove to her home. Abjectly, I presented them as a peace offering, and I told her the absolute truth. She accepted my apology, lady that she was, and is, but I doubt if she has ever really forgiven me. I know I have never forgiven myself. I

am cringing now at the memory.

-2-

How Mother ever clung to her reason is unfathomable. Every day presented new problems, new fears, and new excitement. But the only time I knew her to be rattled was when the orchard caught on fire. She, having visions of the house catching like tinder, shoved Johnny outside to safety, grabbed the phone and called, not the fire department, but me, in town, twelve miles away. However, by the time I got through to Ballwin, the volunteers had arrived and had everything under control. Yet, when real trouble brewed and bubbled over, it was she who took command, and I who went to pieces. The most auspicious of these occasions was the time I nearly parboiled my son.

During the summer months if hot water was needed for bathing, it had to be heated on the stove and carried upstairs to the bathroom. We had no electric hot water-heater, (frankly, I don't remember if they were in use at that time) and the only gas supply was butane. At any rate, I had heated a large canning kettle full of water, and had set it on the floor beside the chair in preparation for John's ablution. And, as is usual with small boys, he didn't want a bath.

I grabbed the youngster by the collar, and stood him on the chair, where I impatiently peeled off his clothes. He wiggled and jiggled, and fought like a bear cub. Then, all of a sudden, he slipped and fell crab-wise into the pan of boiling water. His screams were terrifying. The water spilled and splashed all over his lower extremities. I couldn't move. I was petrified, but my vocal chords were not, and I stood there screaming, like a maniac, in unison with the poor child's shrieks of pain.

Mother flew up the stairs, sized up the situation at a glance, and before I came back to reality, she had scooped Johnny off the floor, called the doctor, and had him there smearing the boy with ointment.

Poor Johnny was in bed several weeks, lying there with salve the only cover on his body. His ~~burns~~ were serious and painful, and I suffered

every minute of the day with him; but again, remorseful and sympathetic as I was, it was Mother who had the brunt of the job, nursing him tirelessly through those miserable weeks.

Every night, after work, I would read to him by the hour, or until my throat rasped unintelligibly. My many thanks go to the "~~Bobsey~~ Twins". Their escapades tickled John's fancy, and made his evenings more bearable.

Johnny had always kept Mother in a state of anxiety. Whether he was accident-prone, or reckless, I don't know, but he managed to keep her, and the doctors, hopping. Once he had swallowed finger nail polish remover, and had to have his stomach pumped out. Another time he was way-laid by some older boys, and a concussion resulted. He ran nails through his body like a faker. Then there was the time he tried to fire the furnace by saturating the coal with kerosene, and it was "Look Mom, no eye-brows, no eye-lashes, no hair."

Georgie, too, helped keep the air electric. I'll never forget the first and last spanking Dad gave him. Muriel, Mother, and I were in the kitchen washing the dinner dishes. It was the girl's night off. Our chatter was cut short by a "Rebel Yell", and then "whap, whap, whap". Georgie ran sobbing to his mother. Dad followed in his foot-steps, his face as red as a turkey gobbler's comb.

He had been asleep on the sofa when he was awakened by a searing pain on his cheek, and the smell of smoke directly under his nose. Georgie had set fire to the fringe on the pillow, and was sitting on the floor watching the flame when Dad had unceremoniously leapt to his feet. In his rush to extinguish the fire, Dad had stumbled over the tot, and had nearly broken his neck. The spanking that followed added insult to injury, to Georgie's way of thinking, and he avoided Dad for a week. Lollipops, ice-cream, nothing would change his mind that "Gramps was a mean man".

Yes, by rights, mother should have been popping gray hairs by the second, but she didn't. Her youthfulness and vitality were extraordinary.

She constantly amazed people with acrobatics. Back bends and splits were child's play to her. My old back squeaked on its hinges when I attempted such "sheepmigans". "Never let your spine stiffen", she often said. "You are as young as it is flexible."

Frank and she would have made a team. He could sling a hundred pound sack of feed to his shoulder with one flip of the wrist, and dance a jig all the way to the truck. I grew tired just watching, but he could keep it up all day. Both, also, had a good sense of humor, and Mother approved heartily of our little joke on Dad.

Henry had taken a "leave of absence". He quit, to be more explicit, but we all knew he would be back. In the meantime the stock had to be fed, so Dad hired a man named Dan. He was a likable old man, but after a week, he decided he was lonely. He wanted a dog. Now, we had two dogs at the house, my cocker spaniel, and Mother's bull-dog, Toughie. But they weren't his. He wanted one of his own.

This seemed like a reasonable request, but Dad was stubborn. "Let him take one of the kittens," he countered.

So, to make a long story short, I bought him a cute little fox terrier pup. I couldn't help it. As I passed the window of the pet store, he implored me to take him home. Ten dollars and I parted company, and the pup became Dan's "Own".

Dad, not liking to be crossed, raised another objection. A silly one, as far as we were concerned. "I want have a dog on the place that isn't pedigreed".

Hot under the collar, I glibly retorted, "He has one. I'll bring it tomorrow". But I had no more idea than the man in the moon where I was to find one.

The next day, telling my tale of woe to Frank, he came up with a brilliant idea. He had a batch of dog pedigree blanks, sent to him by the feed manufacturers. Why not copy his dog's pedigree and give it to Dad?

"Anything to keep him happy," he said, "and just tell him the registration papers haven't been filed as yet."

Gleefully, I set to work. And when I finished, I had the nicest line of blue-blooded ancestors a little mongrel ever had.

Mother approved of us setting Poppy down a peg, and so Own became a pseudo-bonafide pedigreed pup. I always had an excuse for the registration papers, but Dad never did learn the truth, nor did Dan. When he left, he took Own with him, gilt-edged papers and all. Henry came back, and though this put Dad in a better frame of mind, Mother, Frank, and I agreed that our little white lie should not be revealed. It had served its purpose. "Let sleeping dogs lie," Mother wisely decided. And Frank and I grinned, comrades in deceit.

Chapter VIII

After Dan and Own had bade us farewell, we again became a two dog family. For how long, we didn't know, as Dad was unpredictable, and I, well, I was cut from the same cloth. A sad-eyed pup softened not only my heart, but my head.

Poor little Bonnie had been trampled to death that spring. We all mourned her loss, but Aunt Flossie was heart-broken. She arrived about an hour after the accident, and when the gay wee Scottie didn't rush to meet her with frenzied yipes of joy, she asked without preliminary greetings, "Where's Bonnie?" And that question wasn't easy to answer with big choking lumps in our throats.

That Sunday my Mother's brother, and his family, had come out for a barbeque. Don't raise your eyebrows. The meat stamps were all in order. Dad bought his steaks on the hoof. Our deep freeze groaned with meat of all kinds. Lucky us, and our guests, who usually went home with a steak tucked under their arms, and under their belts, too, as Mother cooked up

Well, after we had wiped away the last bit of barbeque sauce from our chins and sticky fingers, we strolled leisurely down to Marcus' pond for some lazy pole-fishing. Bonnie scampered back and forth, urging us slow-pokes to a faster walk. To get to the pond, we had to walk through a large field where several steers and horses grazed. And it was there that it happened. Bonnie, too excited for caution, ran under the legs of a Percheron. The horse side-stepped, and one big hoof plunked down upon Bonnie's back, crushing the pup like a bug. In one short second, the happy little creature lay inert and broken.

My cousin picked her up, and we slowly walked behind him, back to the house. Lifting my eyes, I noticed that she was being carried as a hunter would a rabbit, dangling limply, head down. "Pick her up," I screamed. "You're treating her like a dog!"

Amusement at my words flickered for a split second over Bob's face, but he did as I directed, and we continued our sad procession over the lumpy field. Once home, Henry took over, gentle man that he was, and he quietly buried the small dog, whose blithe spirit had brightened eight years of our lives.

-2-

As I said before, no-one ever knew what Dad would bring home next. Once it was a raccoon, then a rabbit. Another time it was a skunk. It stayed just long enough for us to discover that it had not been "De-skunked". Johnny and Georgie stank to the heavens for weeks, or so we imagined. We soaked them, and scrubbed them, and perfumed them until they howled every time we looked in their direction.

We had turtles, snakes, ducks, and a little vixen. She was cute but *foxy*. (Oh, what a horrible pun.) And she lived with us until one night when she sneaked from her pen to the hen house, where she "made like" Hitler, with her own particular method of slaughter.

And then, one warm summer day, Dad walked in through the kitchen door, a small cage in hand. "Georgie, Georgie," he called, "look what Gramps has

for you."

Mother, dusting in the hall, waited for the unveiling. Dad approached, whipped off the cover, and two little hamsters were seen cowering in the corner of the cage. Georgie screamed with delight. Mother screamed with vehemence, "Take those horrible crawly creatures out of my house!" She ran to the front door, and literally pushed him outside.

Meekly, but with a twinkle in his eye, he obeyed, and climbed into his car, setting the box on the seat. He drove off, and that was the last seen or heard from him until way after dinner. Mother, by this time, was a bit apprehensive, and when she heard his car crunching the gravel in the drive, she ran to the window. She stood staring for a minute or two, and then broke into a shout of laughter. We ran to see, as she pointed to the car. And, there was Dad, and there, sitting beside him, was a huge Great Dane - this monster an exchange for Georgie's tiny hamsters.

Monty, named for General Montgomery, was a well trained brute. But he had one idiosyncrasy. He was a one-man dog, and would mind only Dad. When dear father was gone, the animal, with boundless energy, would romp and play, bowling Georgie over like a ten-pin. This went on for days, and then Muriel, distressed at the change of Georgie's blond complexion to black and blue, put in her two cents. It was enough to buy off the dog, and Monty left, without further ado. Dad sulked for weeks.

-3-

Little Georgie had become quite a character. Full of devilment, he devised ways to tease, chuckling gleefully at our pretended discomfiture.

Music was an essential to living in those days. Georgie's taste, like Muriel's, was catholic. Mother's forte was Strauss Waltzes. I leaned toward the classical, and Dad enjoyed light operas. Johnny preferred Gilbert and Sullivan, thinking it quite daring to listen to the "Mikado", especially, its Japanese War Song. And so, our house was always filled with

melody. The louder the better thought Georgie, and Muriel was forever flicking his fingers from the volume control.

There was one popular song, in particular, that I found intolerable, and Georgie knew it. He begged Dad to get him the record, and after his whim was granted, he played it loud and long. "One Meat Ball" became standard and consistent noise from the phonograph. I would throw up my hands, and grit my teeth, in simulated horror, and Georgie would hold his shaking sides. Even after he tired of the din, he would sneak up behind me, and lisp, "One Meat Ball, Neenie."

"Nenie" was the nearest he could come to the diminutive of my name. Eunie, I was called by the family, but A. G. (after Georgie) "Nenie I became, and "Nenie" I remain.

One day, coming home from work, I found Muriel in the kitchen ironing. I started tramping up the back stairs when Muriel cautioned, "Be quiet, Georgie's asleep."

Where-upon, I tripped on the top step, and fell sprawling into my room. An unaccustomed and unforgivable "Jesus Christ" issued from my lips. Really, I was ashamed because very seldom did I take the Lord's name in vain. But Georgie, in the next room, rattled his crib, and shouted "Dee-sus Ti-st". I snickered.

Muriel banged down her iron and yelled, "That's not funny. You stop teaching my child bad words."

Instantly, I was up in arms. "And since when is Jesus Christ a bad word?"

"Well, it is the way you said it, and I don't want my son to hear it again."

Mumbling to myself, I slammed the door hard, and threw myself upon my bed. All was quiet, upstairs and down, and then I saw the door to Georgie's room open stealthily. A little blond head poked around the corner, eyes sparkling with mischief. "Dee-sus Ti-st, Neenie". Just a stage whisper, and

the door closed silently.

Muriel came running up the stairs. She grabbed up the child, spanked his little bottom red, and tossed him back into his bed. Glaring at me, she returned to her work. I, shame-faced and contrite, went in to comfort Georgie, but the little imp looked up at me, with tears still flowing, and whispered into my ear, "Dee-sus Ti-st, Neenie". As usual, he had the last word. Yes, I guess Muriel was right. I was a bad influence.

-4-

During this whole week, Mother had been canning tomatoes. The crop was heavier than the year before, and the tomatoes were big, luscious, red balls. That night Henry told Mother he would have, at least, two bushels for her the next day. She groaned, but sent us down to the cellar to find jars.

The next day dawned hot and sticky, but Mother, steadfastly, went on with her preparations. Absorbed in scrubbing jars, she nearly jumped a foot when Henry noiselessly appeared in the kitchen. "Mrs. Fels," he said, "there are no tomatoes."

Mother stared at him without comprehension. "Somebody cleaned out the patch last night," he continued. "They took every bloomin' tomato we had."

Mother gasped. Henry thought she was angry, but I recognized it for what it really was - pure unadulterated relief. Dad was mad, though, and he was bent on catching the thief. "You'll have to go to Uncle Frank's today", he said to me. "I have other fish to fry."

Uncle Frank (not to be confused with my boss at the feed-store) was a widower, and his son was leaving for overseas. I agreed to go, welcoming the diversion from work, and besides, I liked Uncle Frank, and was glad to give him moral support. However, before night fell, I needed support, myself.

Fortunately for me, it was in the morning that I was arrested for speeding. The Case of the Missing Tomatoes had made me late, and I had things to do before I took off for the day, so I pushed too hard.

Scooting through the town of Brentwood, slightly above the speed limit,

I was hailed to the curb by a local traffic cop. "I'm sorry, Officer," I stated. "I didn't realize I was going too fast." [^]Not much, I didn't.

"Your name?" he asked.

Giving him the information, I hopefully added, "I'm John Fels' daughter. You know him? He is the former Mayor of Maplewood."

These magic words had always before thwarted a ticket. But not with this up-right minion of the law. "Yes, I know him," he growled, "and you have a heavy foot just like 'im". So saying, he made me a gift of the ticket.

That afternoon Uncle Frank, Little Frankie, (He was over six feet.) and I went to an air-conditioned tavern for a few short beers. One called for another, and another called for another. By train time, we had reached the song-fest stage, inquiring in questionable harmony "Who Put the Overalls in Mrs. Murphy's Chowder?"

A blast of hot air hit us as we opened the door to the street. My knees buckled. Surely, a few beers couldn't do that. Well, it did, and how I ever took Uncle Frank home, and then made it back home to Ballwin, I'll never know. I still thank my lucky stars that my friend, the policeman, wasn't around to see my erratic course.

I arrived home well after the dinner hour. The folks were sitting on the front porch. Georgie was perched on Johnny's back, playing "horsie". I merrily swooped him up, and tossed him skyward. Everyone held their breath until he was safely back in my arms. My tipsiness was evident. Without a word, Muriel took Georgie to her bosom for safe keeping, and Mother steered me to the dining room. I tried to eat, but bed was much more inviting. After I tumbled, or stumbled, into it, I knew no more 'til morning.

And what a morning! My head felt as large as the keg that had made it so. Dad, feeling that he was more or less responsible for my lapse of discretion, brought me breakfast to my bed. It was rather sweet of him, but rather foolish, too. He ought to have known better.

My stomach turned over as I viewed the sausage and egg. The coffee, fine,

but the food, oh. My head cradled in my hands, I spied Trouble, wagging his tail in anticipation of the feast. I gladly and willingly accomodated him; Dad, of course, being gone. He chomped it down with resounding gulps. I dared not watch. The sound was bad enough.

Downing the coffee, I slowly arose to make ready for the day. Any sudden movement, and I felt the floor rise and fall, as if I were aboard ship. But by the time Dad reappeared to take the tray, I felt that I might live, but please don't anyone talk above a whisper. "How was the breakfast?" he asked.

"Why does he have to shout?" I wondered, and then realized he expected an answer.

"Delicious," I lied between my teeth. And with that, Trouble, my sweet little Benedict Arnold, went "oops", and there was the breakfast on the floor at Dad's feet.

If looks could kill, Dad would have been a murderer. And that mutt, well, he just proved something I had always been told. Diamonds are a gal's best friend - not her dog.

Chapter IX

Every night we listened to H. V. Kaltenborn's war news and commentary. Indeed, we hung on to his every word, up to, and including his "and this is H. V. Kaltenborn saying 'good night'", which was Georgie's cue for bed. He, too, sat there, not as mute as we, but as equally loquacious as Mr. K. With the last syllable still lingering in the air, he arose, solemnly lisped, "Good night, Mithter Kaltenborn", and hippety-hopped gayly up to his room.

He took the war in his stride, this Junior Blitzkrieg. He was a bomber, a destroyer, a tank, whichever struck his fancy at the moment. And when he was a para-trooper, it was "look out down blow".

All the radio talk "give blood and save a soldier's life" intrigued him.

of course, he had to examine and re-examine the little patch of adhesive on the arm.

I received a small medal after my thirteenth pint, (of blood, Smartie) telling him it was the Congressional Medal of Honor. "Why, Neenie, why?" And why did I bring up the subject I wondered, as I lay wearily upon my bed.

And why had I given that particular day? It was the day of Dad's big outing for the Texas Company personnel. A turkey-shoot, no less, which involved a lot of work, and a lot of hospitality. I, definitely, was not in the mood to exude charm; and I silently gave thanks for Muriel and Mother, who had more than enough to go around.

Dad was a good host, and if people didn't have a good time, it was through no fault of his. He wined them, and he dined them, and he kept the conversational ball rolling. Never shy, he was not adverse to blowing up his image, or his story, amusing us, but, actually, impressing his guests.

Sometimes, we thought, his exaggerations leaned toward the ridiculous. There was the time he told the tale of his trip to Jefferson City with some Senate members and a couple of representatives from the County Board of Equalization.

"We were tearing along about ninety miles an hour," he said, "in a big black limousine, when, all of a sudden, a car from the opposite direction loomed in front of us. He was passing on a curve. Well, our driver swerved, and we left the road, with him jamming on the brakes. The car tore through a wheat field, and, finally, came to a shivering stop. (Oh, he could tell a story, my pop.) And you know what? There was no damage to the car, except a flat tire. We had been going so fast, a grain of wheat penetrated the tube."

Everybody looked their amazement, but, I thought, "Oh, come now, Father: That's too much to swallow."

But - several weeks later, I was having lunch with him, and one of the state senators. "Did your father ever tell you about the flat tire ^{we} had on our way to Jeff City? You know, it was the dog-gondest thing. A sliver of

of wheat went right through the tire."

Oh, brother, did I have to eat humble pie. But then, he told so many tall tales, that he was like the little boy crying "Wolf". When he did tell the truth, it wasn't recognizable.

The day of the turkey-shoot, he was in rare form, and the party was going strong when, finally, he set up the target board. We all drew numbers for places, and the contest began.

Just previously, he and I had bandied a few sharp words. But that was nothing unusual. Mother often said we were so much alike that we couldn't possibly keep the peace. Anyway, when it came my turn to shoot, I was handed a new double-barrelled, two trigger shotgun. I had never used it before, and didn't know of its strong recoil. I was weak, too, from my blood donation. So when I shot, the kick paralyzed my arm, and my finger, accidentally, hit the other trigger.

Dad, not expecting the second shot, had reached out for the target, and caught the lead pattern in his hand. Dripping blood, he turned and faced me, disbelief showing in his face. "I knew you were mad," he said, "but I didn't think you were mad enough to shoot me."

I was horrified, first, at what had happened, and, second, to think he thought I could have murder in my heart. I didn't then, but after he finished telling me off, (in front of all those people) I strode off, yelling, "too bad it wasn't your head, instead of your hand."

Oh, later, we kissed and made up. That was one nice thing about us. We ranted and raved, but after we had it out of our systems, we went on as if nothing had happened. The party continued without further incident, but I remained shaken the rest of the day. I had come too close to personal tragedy for comfort.

After the turkey-shoot, blood was spilled in earnest. As soon as the weather turned cold, the butchering began. Mother and Muriel stayed behind

closed doors, and did everything they could to dim the sounds of slaughter. I stayed at the office as long as I could, coward that I was.

But, outside the house, back near the smoke-house, the men worked noisily and efficiently. Huge kettles of water were kept at the boiling point the whole day long. It was cold, very cold, and much stamping, and flapping of arms accompanied the gory task. Neighboring farmers arrived early in the morning, and stayed late in the evening. The ever-present bottle of whiskey was passed from lip to lip, to warm up their innards, as they scooped out the innards of their kill. Ick! Let's skip it, and go on to the next day, when the sausage was made; an untidy, greasy job, but decidedly, less ghoulis.

I, usually, came home at noon to help with this job. All hands were needed, and we worked in shifts. Dad and Henry spent the morning grinding the meat, and placing it into tubs. Later the spices were added and blended. I can still see Dad, up to his elbows in meat, kneading, and mixing, and spilling; and hear Mother, trying to keep a semblance of neatness in her kitchen, yelling, "Be careful, John, you're dropping it all over the floor."

And then with the next breath, knowing Dad's heavy hand with the seasoning, "Not too much garlic!" But her admonitions were futile. The floor soon became a greasy skating-rink; and the sausage, as indigestible as it was delectable.

Then came the messier work of stuffing the thoroughly cleaned casings. We had a little machine attached to the table for this purpose. The meat was tamped into the top, (like a grinder) and the casings were fitted over the nozzle on the side. As they filled, we, on the production line, tied them off into links. Some of these sausages we kept fresh, and some were smoked. Which were better depended upon the individual taste, but, I, personally, couldn't look a sausage in the face for weeks, so, honestly, I was no criterion.

The beef, and the rest of the pork had been sent to the frozen food locker for quick chilling, and to be cut into roasts, steaks, or chops. We

knew that in a few days, we would have the packaging to do, and we sighed, as we dragged ourselves to bed that night.

The format was always the same. Dad would bring the meat home in boxes, which he would cart in one at a time, while we wrapped and labeled, and wrapped and labeled. Then they would be hauled down to the cellar, where they would be put into our own freezer. The hams and bacons would be put in the smoke-house, along with the sausages, where Henry would keep the hickory wood smoking in the stove until the flavor was just right.

Deadbeat, we needed no lullaby to induce sleep, and soon the house was quiet except for a few interspaced snores. But, suddenly, I was awakened by an inhuman howl. No, I am not going to tell you it was the ghost of one of those poor slaughtered beasts, but it was a big black shaggy dog, one of the pair of French Sheep dogs Dad had recently acquired.

Jacque had been tied to a tree to keep him from getting into the greasy tubs, we had been too tired to wash. Fritzi, his wife, was keeping Henry company in his room; and Jacque was quite unhappy over the separation, and the indignity of being chained. His mournful wail was eerie at three A.M., so I, groggily, descended the stairs and went outside. Releasing the dog, but keeping a firm grip on his collar, I brought him into the house. "It's the basement for you, Boy," I whispered. "I need my sleep."

Well, I opened the basement door, and pushed him forward, but he balked at the top step. I pushed again, and he refused to budge. "There's more than one way to skin a cat," I mumbled, as I moved in front of him, and stepped down the first step. Placing my hand firmly upon his collar, I pulled hard. At the same time, he decided to attempt the stairs under his own power, and, I, losing my equilibrium, fell over backwards and bumped down the stairs like a sack of potatoes. It's a wonder I wasn't killed, and it's a wonder the racket didn't awaken the household. But do you know, not a soul stirred. They were dead to the world. My bruises, black and blue by morning, had to be explained to a surprised and incredulous audience.

Those two dogs, Jacque and Fritz, were beautiful animals, fine specimens of their breed, but they yanked the welcome-mat out from under their own feet. My fall on my derriere had nothing to do with their departure. It was Henry who issued the proclamation: "Either they go, or I go".

"You know, Mrs. Fels," he added, "John ought to have his head examined. They're digging up all my roses."

When Mother confronted Dad with the bedraggled evidence, he simply shook his head. "But they're such friendly dogs."

"I know," she agreed, "That's why I can't understand Mrs. Dee selling them to you. Why did she, anyway?"

And, sheepishly, he replied, "because they ruined her flower-beds."

-3-

Johnny was ever the entrepreneur. He picked suckers off the strawberry plants, and plucked lady-bugs from the tomatoes, at so much per row. He shucked corn for Mother or shelled peas, or strung beans, (basketsfull for canning) all for a nominal fee. He even went so far as to aggravate Muriel into tossing a shoe at his head; the little knave knowing that sooner or later, she would try to salve her conscience, by giving him fifty cents.

One day Mother decided to straighten her bureau and dresser drawers. What she didn't want, she threw into a heap on the floor. Johnny, passing through, saw the plunder, and his eyes lit up like neon signs. Without saying a word, he bundled off the discarded purses, necklaces, compacts, lipsticks, all the odds and ends that Mother had stowed away for years.

When next seen, our little merchant was approaching us, grinning as broadly as the cat that ate the canary. In his hot little fist he clutched two dollars and twentyfive cents. "I sold all the purses," he proudly announced. "and one compact. The mirror was cracked. so I only got a quarter for that."

The youngster had gone up and down the highway, and over all the side roads in Ballwin, peddling his wares. He was tired but happy, and the

Mother thought it was disgraceful, and Dad thought it was enterprising. Perhaps it was a little of each, but we all thought it funny.

In the fall, Johnny spent hours hulling black walnuts. Henry had made him a board with a hole in the center the size of a nut; and Johnny would squat on his haunches, shoving the nuts through into a basket, dispelling the hulls at his feet. His hands and arms became stained, and streaks from the brown juice decorated his face. The darned stuff wouldn't wash off, but Johnny didn't care. He didn't mind looking like an Indian as long as money was involved.

Finally, he filled a gunny sack, and putting it into Georgie's wagon, he hauled his load up to one to the stores. He went in like the eager beaver he was, but he came out with considerably dampened spirits. Yanking his wagon viciously, he headed back toward home. As he passed the Marcus place, he noticed Mrs. Marcus in the yard. Disgusted as he was, he didn't forget his manners, though his greeting was far from jovial.

"What you got in the wagon, John?" she asked.

"Walnuts," he answered. "I spent the whole morning hulling them, but Mr. Patton said they were worth only thirty-five cents to him. So I kept them."

"I don't blame you," she sympathized. "I'll tell you what, Johnny. I can use them for cakes. I'll pay you a dollar for them now, and I'll give you a dollar when you shell and pick them for me some rainy day."

Johnny danced for joy. There was a woman after his heart. The deal was made, and he triumphantly returned home, the super-salesman once more.

He kept his cash in a tobacco sack, and now it was so full it was hard to tie. "Want to put your money in the bank?" I asked, knowing better than to have asked such a silly question.

"Nope," he answered. "I'm going to buy Christmas presents with my own money this year."

And he did. I took him to Walgreen's Drug Store, and a busy little bee he was there. After his selections were made, (I gave him no advice.

The decisions were his to make, I felt.) we went to the cashier's cage.

"Give the girl your money," I told him. But he clung tightly to his meager hoard.

"Come on, Johnny, produce," I laughed. It took a lot of persuading, while customers in line behind us shuffled their feet impatiently, but he "coughed-up" at last. And then he strutted like a peacock. Gifts with his very own money. It was a first in his young life. He bought a present for Mrs. Marcus, too, and I was very proud. I knew now that I would never have a Silas Marner on my hands.

Christmas neared, and preparations went on as usual, despite the fact that Stub's outfit had left for Europe. Muriel was very low, and the water-works were turned on at the slightest provocation. To make matters worse, Stub had sent her a recording of his undieing love and devotion. She played this sticky record morning, noon, and night. With Georgie sitting on her lap, she listened, and watched the platter go round and round, while her sobs rose and fell in cadence, spilling over bitter tears onto Junior's blond pate. In later life he developed a heavy crop of hair, which, I have always contended, was due to its liberal irrigation during his tender years.

Ah, yes, tempers were short, and sometimes were lost, but like all the other bad times, we came through with a minimum of scars.

Christmas Eve was a night never to be forgotten. Naturally, we couldn't put up the tree, or lay out the presents until Georgie was asleep. Johnny was old enough to help with the tree, but even his gifts were not set under the branches until he had retired. Consequently, it was about nine-thirty when we bustled about, getting together the toys that had to be assembled.

Muriel had bought Georgie a small table with chairs to match. He was primed for the gift, as she had "tabled and chaired" him for weeks. It was her piece de resistance; so well you can imagine her chagrin when she opened the carton and found the legs for the table missing. She furiously ripped the

box apart, hoping they would be tucked away under the packing, but, no, it was as empty as Mother Hubbard's cupboard. It was a major catastrophe, and I say that in all sincerity. The stores were closed; not that it was so late, but because it was Sunday. "Why does it have to be Sunday?" Muriel wailed, "And whoever heard of Santa bringing only a half ~~a~~ gift?"

Confusion reigned until Dad, using all the brass nerve he could muster, (and that was plenty) kept the telephone lines hot with persistent calls. Knowing almost all the merchants in Maplewood, he called their homes to see if they knew who ran the store where Muriel had made her purchase. It was a newly opened chain-store, and the manager was unknown to him. It seemed as if he were to Dad's friends, too, but, at last, he hit pay-dirt.

It was way after ten by then, but time was immaterial to Dad. The phone buzzed and buzzed. Our spirits sank. No one home? But, finally, there was an answer, and the one-sided conversation began.

The fellow lived in St. Louis, as far from Maplewood in his direction as were we in ours, but after listening to Dad's plea, (and Muriel's weeping, in the background) he consented to meet Dad at the store, where he would try to root out the "awol" table-legs. Needless to say, this restored our belief in Santa Claus, as well as it restored our sanity.

While Dad was gone on his errand of mercy, we merrily trimmed the tree, put up the wreaths, and put down a few egg-nogs.

The next morning Georgie and Johnny were up at the crack of dawn. Muriel roused the family, and we slipped into our robes and slippers, stalling the children long enough for Dad to tip-toe down the stairs to light the tree, and to blow the tiny silver trumpet, that hung amidst the tinsel. This was the signal for the grand rush to the living-room. Christmas had begun; our woes were dissolved.

As Georgie stared at his table with shining eyes, Muriel's became misty. It was then that we realized what a Good Samaritan the store-manager had been.

We realized, too, that he had given us the most wonderful Christmas present of all - a renewed faith in the kindness of man.

Chapter X

April 12, 1945. Does that date mean anything to you? Well now, it did to the nation, to me, and to Johnny, who had been born, and lived his ten and a half years knowing only one president. In fact, he doubted if there had been any others; history to the contrary.

He had heard the man Roosevelt cussed and discussed as long as he could remember; and he could mimic "mah friends", and "Ah hate wah" to a T. With a slouch hat, a broad smile, and with Gramp's cigarette holder clenched between his teeth, he would raise his hand, fingers spread for the V for Victory. He knew the facial expressions, the mannerisms, and the voice inflections. Yes "the indispensable man" was as much a part of his life, and as familiar, as those of us ~~close~~ close to him. Therefore, he was as shocked as we when we heard the solemn announcement, "President Roosevelt is dead."

Mind you, we were all Republicans; Dad an avid one, but even he, usually so vociferous, was stilled by the tragic news. Like Johnny, we felt a deep and personal loss; but each of us re-acted in his own inimitable way. Mother cried. Muriel questioned the effect upon the course of the war. I wondered about the little man from Missouri. And Dad, when speech returned, cursed. "Well, I'll be damned."

Dinner time rolled around, but no-one wanted to miss a word of the broadcast; so we filled our plates, and filed into the living room, where we sat chewing our food, and straining our ears. I'll never forget, we had greens cooked with a ham/hock; lambsquarter, gathered fresh that morning by our girl, from the banks of the creek. Other food was on the table, but, so help me, I can't remember what it was.

Well, anyway, we were sitting there, digesting our food and the meaty news, when we were startled by the unexpected presence of a guest, who, gayly

she began, and then noting our long faces, she exclaimed, "What's the matter with all of you? You look as if you had lost your best friend."

"Maybe we have," replied Mother. "Did you know that Roosevelt is dead?"

Now, this lady had never seen eye-to-eye with the president. His views were not her views, and she had never made any bones about it. Thinking Mother was joking, she shouted, "Hallelujah, the country is saved!" But when she saw that her humor was lost upon us, and when she heard the excited words of the announcer, she stopped dead in her tracks.

"Grab a plate, and join us," Dad invited. She nodded, and in a few minutes, she silently took her place in the small intent circle gathered around the radio.

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That the war was on the wane, we knew. Hy was back in the States, at Fort Benning, and was awaiting a long promised furlough. The day before the president died, he had called and said that he would be home within five days. Like a balloon, I was soaring in the clouds, but forty-eight hours later, I came down to earth with a bang. Another call from Georgia, and it was Hy. "Listen", he said, "I just sneaked out of quarantine, so I'm going to have to talk fast. No furlough now. I'll let you know later if I can get sick leave."

"What's the matter?" I gasped. During his two and a half years in Alaska he hadn't had so much as a cold, and now that he was on the mainland, what?

"Measles. And don't laugh. It's not funny."

No, it wasn't funny to him, nor to me, but to the rest of my precious family, it was hilarious. "Measles!" And they bent over with laughter. What I said isn't printable, or if it is, it shouldn't be. I hadn't been around truck drivers all those years for nothing.

Actually, his home-coming was delayed only a short while, but it seemed an eternity. He was so near; yet, so far. I took a lot of ribbing from the fellows at the station and at the feed-store; so much that my nerves became frayed, and my disposition, snappish. Of course, this egged them on to

more and more torment. I should never have let them know that they could "get my goat."

But the happy day came at last. I had received a telegram that Hy would arrive at the bus depot on such and such a bus, at such and such a time. Six~~ty~~thirty, P.M., to be exact. I raced home to change clothes, and to pick up Johnny. Taking as much time and pains with my toilette as if I had to stand inspection, (wearing a real, honest-to-goodness dress, not slacks) I finally took off for downtown St. Louis. Johnny was so clean he shined, and his hair, even his cow-lick, was slicked down, tight to his head. It wouldn't stay that way long, I knew, but I had high hopes that it might last until after Hy's first glance.

We made good time, and still had fifteen minutes to kill after we parked the car. After checking with Information, we sat and waited for the Bus. And we waited, and we waited. An hour later it pulled in.

Johnny was all but jumping out of his skin with excitement, and I was no ice-berg, myself. People descended, one by one, until the bus was empty of all passengers. No Hy. Sick at heart, I went back to Information, only to be told there would be no more busses from Georgia until mid-night. Disappointed and dispirited, we returned home, a long drag back to Ballwin, over twenty disgusted miles.

We turned into the driveway, and there was Mother wildly flagging us to a stop. "Hy called, and he's at the depot. He came in on a chartered bus."

Stepping on the gas, without so much as a "thank you", or a nod of the head, I tore out to the road. Back down-town. This time I found my long lost soldier, standing on the curb in front of the station, grumbling because I hadn't waited a few minutes longer. What an auspicious beginning. I guess I should have consulted my crystal ball.

Hy went back to camp, his furlough, or sick - leave, as the army called it, terminating two days before V-E Day. V-E Day, that long yearned-for,

long prayed-for day. How did you celebrate it? Most people can remember every blessed hour of it. I can't. I can't remember anything. You see, I was in bed, chuck-full of sedatives.

The night before I had wrecked my car, my nice shiny, green, beautiful car. And I mean, I mangled it. Ask the junk-man, he'll tell you. He gave me five hundred dollars for the remains of my once pride and joy. Never one to do things by halves, I did this job up brown. The force of the crash folded the rear-end like an accordion, and if I hadn't taken Muriel and Georgie home before I barreled up the road, it would have been curtains for them. They would have been sitting on the back-seat! It's too bad I didn't let Mother out at the same time, but the night was young, and Dad had a pinocchle game going at the house.

We had been visiting, but Georgie's bed-time had sent us home early; that, and the fact that Muriel and I had tiffed. Temper, temper, temper. Learn to control it, my friend. Look what happened to me. Anyway, I was still in a huff when I laid rubber, peeling around the drive. Usually, a ride cooled me off, but this time I didn't go far enough to clear my head. Instead I knocked it senseless.

With the gas pedal flat to the floor-board, the speedometer showing ninety, and taking a curve on two wheels, I was horrified to see the engine of a car staring straight into my head-lights. Slapping on the brakes, I wheeled desperately to the right. And then I knew no more. But I heard later that I had hit two trees, jumped a culvert, and then roughed up a telephone post.

The right door was torn from its hinges, and Mother "flew through the air with the greatest of ease", landing in a cornfield. I was wedged under the dashboard. Instinctively, I must have ducked to avoid the windshield, and, wonders upon wonders, before "the lights went out", I had turned off the ignition. The gods were with me.

When I came to, I remember disentangling myself from the steering-wheel and foot pedals, and staggering to my feet. I weaved through the cornfield in search of Mother. (Shades of "Chloe". Spike Jones had a parody out, at that time, on the song. "Chloe", he'd bellow, "where are you, you old bat?"

"I'll bet that's what you were yelling", laughed dear ole Mom, when she was able to laugh, weeks later.)

A boy, with a flashlight, came to my assistance, and we found her lying limp in the field. He stood there gawking, but when I said, "Help me put her in the car so I can take her to the doctor," he opened his mouth wide, and shook his head.

I was beginning to wonder if he were slightly moronic, when, finally he quietly stated, "Lady, you have no car. The chassis is off the wheels. You left them way back there," and he pointed over his shoulder, out into the dark. Those were "famous last words". Down I sank again into oblivion.

And so, V-E Day was one day I missed. But that's not all I missed. The day before Hy left, he said, "Now, don't forget to pay your car insurance. It expires on the sixth." But, with all the hub-bub of his departure, and my return to work, which had piled up sky-high, I forgot his words, completely. My little temper tantrum cost me plenty. Not one red cent could I collect for damages. I thought the nasty insurance company could have sent me a sympathy card, at least. But no, nothing.

A new car was out of the question. Remember, they had stopped making them for the duration. And the chance of finding a good used car was as slim as finding a needle in a hay stack. But we sent out scouts over the states of Missouri and Illinois. For weeks they scoured the countrysides with fine toothed combs before finding anything that didn't belong in a museum. In the meantime, I used Muriel's Chevy for transportation to and

With V-E Day come and gone, V-J Day could not be far behind. The handwriting was on the wall; total victory was in the making. This meant that the boys would be coming home in the very near future; home to gather up the loose ends of their disrupted lives.

A feeling of guilt persisted within me. My negligence in not renewing the car insurance was going to dig a deep hole in my bank account, a bank account that wasn't as large as it should have been by rights. "Oh, shucks", I had always reasoned, "what's money for, except to spend?" I was half grasshopper, and half ant. Some I had laid aside, and some I had spent. I had bought phonographs, records, dogs, horses, and saddles. I had bought the kids scooters, rocking horses, and trains. Yes, I had bought them joy, happiness, pleasure: stars in their eyes. I would have bought them the moon if it had been for sale. But now, I had to buy another car. It wasn't fair to Hy. Self-recrimination rocked my soul, and then, glory be, I went on an economy spree. It didn't last long, but it was efficacious in as much as it helped ease my conscience.

If ever I wondered where Johnny had picked up his gift of gab, and trader instincts, I knew now. I had to look no farther than to his mother. Always I had given Dad the dubious credit, and I guess, really, he was the stem. My father, his daughter, my son. I took stock of my superfluous possessions, and planned my sales campaign. I would have sold my birth-right if it would have put money in my coffers.

First, I sold my horse, but not the saddle. I sold that later to the highest bidder. I had a lovely fleur-de-lis lapel watch that went to Frank. He had eyed it covetously for months, and when I mentioned it was for sale, he snapped it up before I could quote a price. I kept my wrist-watch, so I was able to tell the time of day.

Next, I sold a pocket-watch, (of Hy's, incidently) a cameo ring, a broach, and a key-chain. Some of my darkroom equipment brought in a tidy sum,

but later I replaced it - at a financial loss. This was a case where I "saved at the spigot, but let it out at the bung." However, I saved face by an unexpected wind-fall.

My vanity of vanities was diamond earrings. Their icy blue glitter held me fascinated. Just by a toss of the head, catching the light, they danced and sparkled like the sun upon the snow. Mother had a set that spot-lighted each ear lobe. Magnificent jewels. Sone day, I vowed, I would have a pair just like them.

A smaller version adorned my ears. You didn't need a magnifying glass to see them, but they weren't rocks, either. I was contented with them for the time being - "until my ship comes in", I dreamed. These little gems I wore every day. The only time I removed them was when they needed cleaning. They were the one touch of femininity that belied my pants.

Well, one day at the feed store, I sat mulling over the books. I could not strike a balance, and I was non-plused. The "hootin' and the hollerin'" that was part of the unloading of a truck didn't help my powers of concentration, either. I flipped my pencil across the desk, and reached for a cigarette. Just then, the fellow who drove for Spotless Coveralls stepped into the office. "Howdy", he greeted. "Are the uniforms ready to go?"

I stooped down to look into the lower drawer of the cabinet, and as I did, the light from the desk lamp caught one of my earrings. The sudden sparkle attracted his eye. "You know, my wife has always wanted diamond earrings, but I never seem to get around to buying them. Yours are prettier than any I've ever seen."

As quick as a flash, I reached up and unscrewed them from my ears. Holding them out in the palm of my hand, I said, "Why don't you surprise her tonight?"

"Damned if I won't ," he said. And without blinking an eye, he pulled out a big fat wad of bills. He peeled off enough for my satisfaction, pocketed

his treasure, wrapped in a tissue hankie, and left me standing there, ears-a-la-nude. There was no quibbling, no haggling. He made the deal fast, giving me no chance to change my mind. And so it was, that my stint of penance ended. I had made the supreme sacrifice.

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Word came at last that a Ford coupe had been found in southern Illinois. Was I interested? By that time, I would have taken a motor-scooter. And I practically did. It was a two-seater job, a glorified scooter, but it was clean, and it had a good motor. The tires weren't too bad; a little recapping, and I would be in business. The price was highway robbery, but what could I do? I was desperate for a car. It was delivered the next day, cash on the barrel-head, and once more I was mobile.

I drove it to the station, where we worked on it all day. We installed a new battery, filter, and points. We tacked on a couple of spot-lights, put in a new floor mat, and covered the seat. We washed it, waxed it, polished it, and shined up the chrome. Earl stepped back and admired our efforts. "Boy," he said, "she looks like a million dollars."

"Baloney", I retorted, "no matter how much you shine her, or how much gingerbread you put on her, she's still a Ford". Snooty, wasn't I?

In spite of my contempt the little car gave me good and faithful service for over a year. Then Hy traded her off on a soft purring number that smelled like, looked like, and was a brand new car. But it was the ole tin Lizzie that took me to Jefferson Barracks to pick him up after his discharge from the army.

August 6th the atom bomb was dropped upon Hiroshima, and the whole world was aghast at the devastation it wrought. Three days later, the bombing was duplicated at Nagasaki, dissolving the war with its gaseous mushroom of horror. Though V-J Day wasn't official until September 2nd, the army began demobilization immediately after the release of the A bombs.

The sun was hot enough to fry an egg, and the wind that whipped through the open windows of the car was a blast from a fiery furnace, but I felt nothing. As though I were clad in asbestos, I ignored the heat, and drove faster and faster toward the Barracks. This was The Day, August 31, 1945. Uncle Sam had, at last, relinquished his rights upon my man. He was coming home!

Nine months later, lacking one day, my daughter Ruth was born; she, who wondered if I had ever been alive.