

Appointment with love

By S. I. Kishor

Six minutes to six, said the clock over the information booth in New York's Grand Central Station. The tall young Army officer lifted his sunburned face and narrowed his eyes to note the exact time. His heart was pounding with a beat that choked him. In six minutes he would see the woman who had filled such a special place in his life for the past 18 months, the woman he had never seen yet whose words had sustained him unflinchingly.

Lt. Blandford remembered one day in particular, the worst of the fighting, when his plane had been caught in the midst of a pack of enemy planes. In one of those letters, he had confessed to her that often he felt fear, and only a few days before this battle, he had received her answer: "Of course you fear...all brave men do." Next time you doubt yourself, I want you to hear my voice reciting to you: 'Yeah, though I walk through the valley of Death, I shall fear no evil, for thou art with me.'.... He had remembered that and it renewed his strength.

He was going to hear her voice now. Four minutes to six. A girl passed closer to him, and Lt. Blandford started. She was wearing a flower, but it was not the little red rose they had agreed upon. Besides, this girl was only about 18, and Hollis Maynell had told him she was 30. "What of it?" he had answered, "I'm 32." He was 29. His mind went back to that book he had read in the training camp. "Of Human Bondage" it was and throughout the book were notes in a woman's handwriting. He had never believed that a woman could see into a man's heart so tenderly, so understandingly. Her name was on the bookplate: Hollis Maynell. He got a hold of a New York City telephone book and found her address. He had written , she had answered. Next day he had been shipped out, but they had gone on writing.

For thirteen months she had faithfully replied. When his letters did not arrive, she wrote anyway, and now he believed he loved her, and she loved him. But she had refused all his pleas to send him her photograph. She had explained: "If your feeling for me had no reality, what I look like won't matter. Suppose I am beautiful. I'd always be haunted that you had been taking a chance on just that, and that kind of love would disgust me. Suppose that I'm plain, (and you must admit that this is more likely), then I'd always fear that you were only going on writing because you were lonely and had no one else. No, don't ask for my picture. When you come to New York, you shall see me and then you shall make your own decision."

One minute to six... He flipped the pages of the book he held. Then Lt. Blandford's heart leapt. A young woman was coming toward him. Her figure was long and slim; her blond hair lay back in curls from delicate ears. Her eyes were blue as flowers, her lips and chin had a gentle firmness. In her pale-green suit, she was like springtime come alive. He started toward her, forgetting to notice that she was wearing no rose, and as he moved, a small, provocative smile curved her lips. "Going my way, soldier?" she murmured.

He made one step closer to her. Then he saw Hollis Maynell. She was standing almost directly behind the girl, a woman well past 40, her graying hair tucked under a worn hat. She was more than plump. Her thick-ankled feet were thrust into low-heeled shoes. But she wore a red rose on her crumpled coat. The girl in the green suit was walking quickly away. Blandford felt as though he were being split in two, so keen was his desire to follow the girl, yet so deep was his longing for the woman whose spirit had truly companioned and upheld his own, and there she stood.

He could see her pale face was gentle and sensible; her gray eyes had a warm twinkle. Lt. Blandford did not hesitate. His fingers gripped the worn copy of "Of Human Bondage" which was to identify him to her. This would not be love, but it would be something special, a friendship for which he had been and must

be ever grateful... He squared his shoulders, saluted, and held the book out toward the woman, although even while he spoke he felt the bitterness of his disappointment.

STOP HERE and think!

What should Lt. Bradford do?

Should he turn and run while he still has a chance to, or should he be true and faithful and accept the woman whose letters has so faithfully given him the courage to face danger while he was in the army?

What would he do if the love which had developed through her letters was real?

What would you do in the same situation?

Continue

"I'm Lt. Blandford, and you're Miss Maynell. I'm so glad you could meet me.
"May, may I take you to dinner?" The woman's face broadened in a tolerant smile. "I don't know what this is all about, son," she answered. "That young lady in the green suit, she begged me to wear this rose on my coat. And she said that if you asked me to go out with you, I should tell you she's waiting for you in that restaurant across the street. She said it was some kind of test."