

The Project Gutenberg eBook of Nancy Dale, Army Nurse, by Ruby Lorraine Radford

This ebook is for the use of anyone anywhere in the United States and most other parts of the world at no cost and with almost no restrictions whatsoever. You may copy it, give it away or re-use it under the terms of the Project Gutenberg License included with this ebook or online at www.gutenberg.org. If you are not located in the United States, you'll have to check the laws of the country where you are located before using this eBook.

Title: Nancy Dale, Army Nurse

Author: Ruby Lorraine Radford

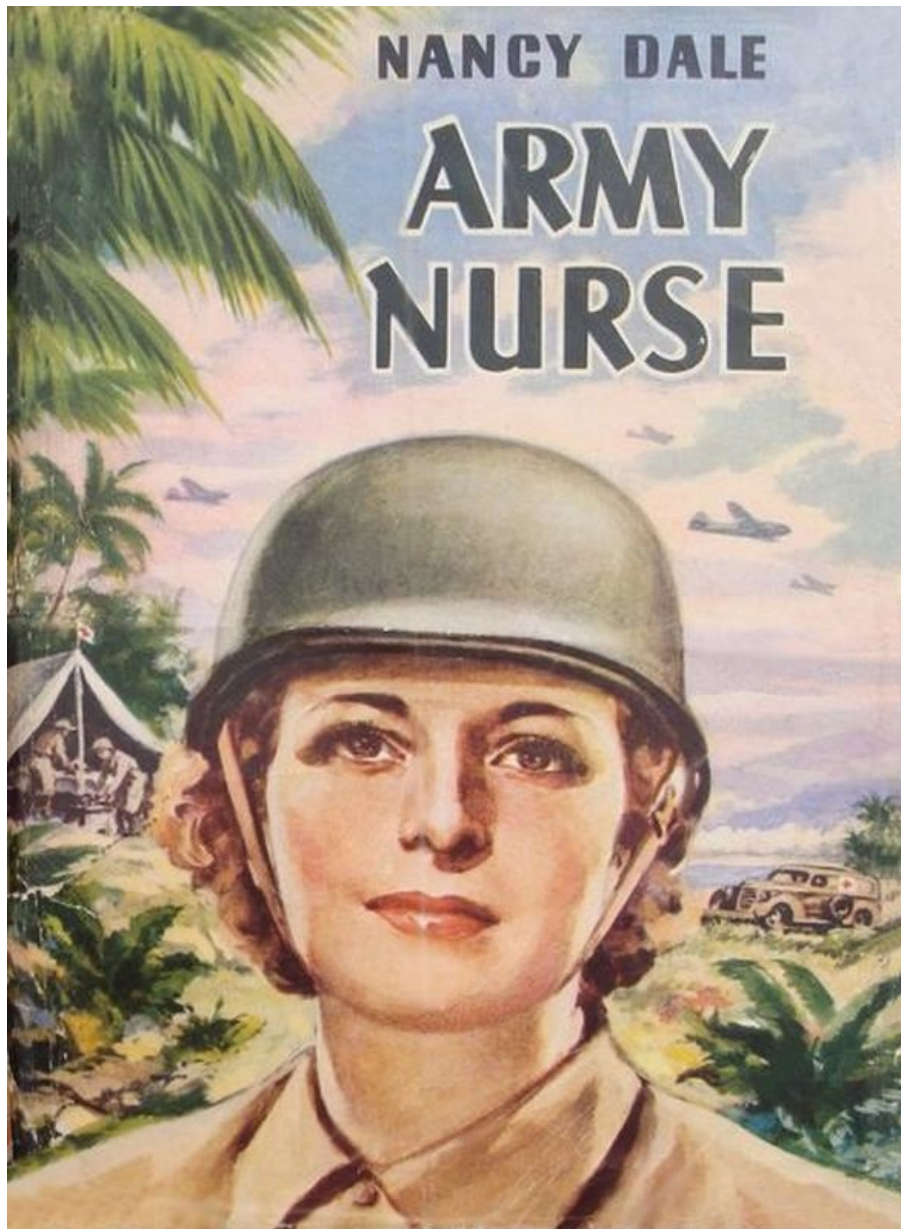
Illustrator: Henry E. Vallely

Release date: November 7, 2014 [EBook #47307]

Language: English

Credits: Produced by Stephen Hutcheson, Carolyn Jablonski, Rod Crawford, Dave Morgan and the Online Distributed Proofreading Team at <http://www.pgdp.net>

*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK NANCY DALE, ARMY NURSE ***



NANCY DALE
ARMY
NURSE

NANCY DALE

Army Nurse

Story by
RUBY LORRAINE RADFORD

Illustrated by
HENRY E. VALLELY



FIGHTERS
FOR
FREEDOM
Series

WHITMAN PUBLISHING COMPANY
RACINE, WISCONSIN

Copyright, 1944, by
WHITMAN PUBLISHING COMPANY
Racine, Wisconsin

PRINTED IN U. S. A.

All names, characters, and events in this story
are entirely fictitious

To Whom It May Concern

Those men wounded beneath their battle flags
May or may not have a fighting chance.
Nurses are needed, yet recruiting lags
While every mile of ground our troops advance
Is bought with blood and even lives expended;
Though death to some has always been the price
Of victory when any right's defended,
Nothing excuses useless sacrifice!
Whether or not the men in foreign lands
Have little nursing care to ease their pain—
Or die perhaps—the answer's in your hands.
Life means so much to them! Can you explain
To any youth who fought, suffered, and bled,
Why you did not serve, too, beside his bed?

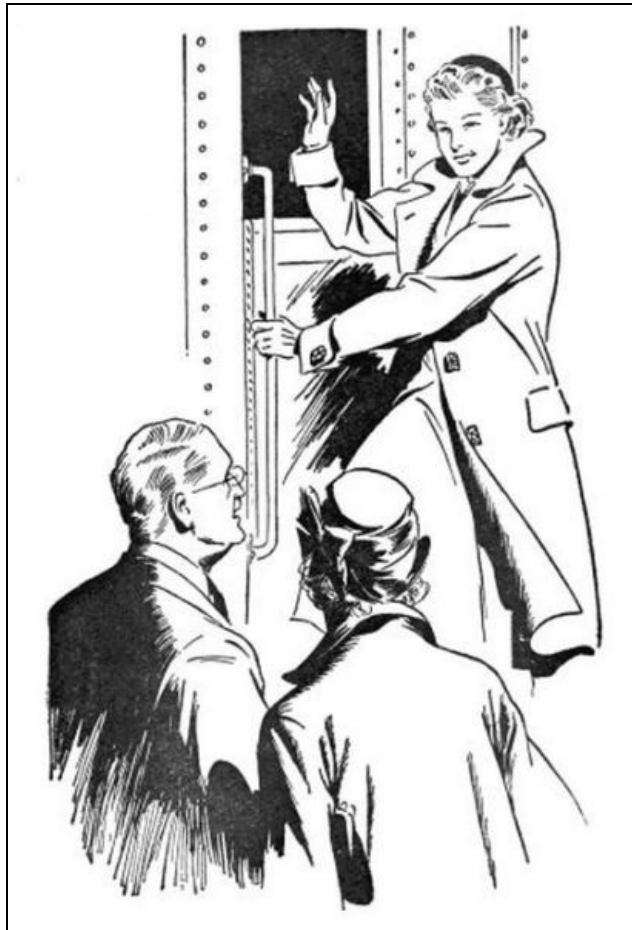
—RUTH ARUNDEL PIERCY, R.N.

From *The American Journal of Nursing*,
Vol. 44. No. 2. Feb. 1944, p. 97.

By permission of *The American Journal*
of Nursing.

CONTENTS

	PAGE
I. Emergency	11
II. Hurdles	23
III. Suspects	35
IV. The Gas Chamber	47
V. Official Notice	57
VI. Camouflage	65
VII. Letters	79
VIII. Port of Embarkation	91
IX. Alert	101
X. Embarkation	110
XI. At Sea	119
XII. A Dream	131
XIII. Tommy's Bombardier	145
XIV. Bruce's Report	158
XV. Parting	168
XVI. Beach Landing	178
XVII. The Gunner's Story	192
XVIII. A Test	205
XIX. Adrift	216
XX. The Plane	228
XXI. Rescued	238



Nancy Waved to the Middle-Aged Couple

Nancy Dale

ARMY NURSE

11

CHAPTER ONE

EMERGENCY

Nancy stood on the steps of the train and waved at a misty-eyed couple, a man and woman of middle years. Strange how she could be so close to tears, yet so buoyantly happy all in the same moment.

The train began to move slowly and Nancy called back, "Be sure to forward all Tommy's letters, Mom!"

Her mother nodded and smiled, while her father lifted his hat in that courtly way he had. Nancy could scarcely believe that at last she was on her way to becoming a member of the great Army Nurse Corps. In fact she was one now, for she had already taken her oath of allegiance. This slowly moving train marked the beginning of a wonderful journey that might take her anywhere in the whole world—Africa, Italy, India, the Arctic or the South Pacific.

She had been praying ever since she joined that it would be the South Pacific, not only because her brother was there flying a bomber over the tropical blue waters, but because the tropics had always seemed fascinating. But little did she dream what she must go through before she saw again that beloved couple she had just left.

12

As she turned back into the Pullman she suddenly felt empty, with that awful, hollow, going-away feeling. She thought how lucky she had been to get her nurse's training right in her own home town. She had never known the feeling of homesickness, for her few brief trips had all been for pleasure. But this was different and far more exciting, yet she knew suddenly now that it would also have its heartaches.

From her seat in the car she caught one more glimpse of her parents. How lonesome they would be with both their children in the service! For a few minutes, as the train crawled out of the city, Nancy could think of nothing but the two she was leaving behind.

How concerned poor Mom had been when she said, "Do be careful, darling, about getting wet. You know how easily you take cold when your feet are wet."

Nancy had promised to be as careful as possible, but didn't fret her mother by saying she was afraid there would often be days on end when her feet would always be wet, if her experiences were anything like the overseas nurses she heard from in Italy and New Guinea.

Not until the last house of her beloved town had vanished beyond the green hills did Nancy turn her gaze to the inside of the Pullman. She noticed now that practically everyone was in uniform, both men and women. There were two WACs across from her, and an ANC captain a little farther up.

13

She thought it would have been more fun had someone been going with her. This trip to the capital was always so slow and boring, then there would be a tiresome wait before she took the sleeper for Alabama. She tried to read but was too keyed up to concentrate. She could think of nothing but the great adventure into which she was going. Settling her head against the cushion she faced the window, watching the rolling hills. Suddenly she realized she was tired after all the excitement of farewell parties and packing. How grand everyone had been to her! Since she was the only volunteer in her class, she had been given a dance at the Nurse's Home. How could anyone stay behind, she wondered, when the fighting men needed so many nurses?

Drowsiness was creeping over her when she caught the low tones of two men behind her. The fact that they were speaking in a foreign tongue pricked her to alertness. She leaned closer to the window and concentrated. They were talking almost in whispers, but she heard the guttural syllables of several German words. She had studied a little German in her high school days in order to sing some selections from the Wagnerian operas. Now she caught the words, *ute Abend* and *acht Kuschen*.

"Tonight ... eight cars," she translated.

14

The Pullman conductor came down the aisle, and the men fell silent. If they hadn't become so abruptly silent at his approach, Nancy might have thought little of the whispered conversation. Though she tried to dismiss her suspicions, attributing her sensitiveness to the fact that she had just entered the service, she could not forget the two men speaking German fluently who sat behind her.

After an interval Nancy decided to take a look at the pair. She started down the aisle under pretense of getting a drink of water. The man nearest the aisle had the broad face and blond complexion of a typical German, though he wore the uniform of an American soldier. The other was in civilian clothes, and wore a small mustache. All Nancy could glean in her hasty inspection was that he had a lean countenance, dark coloring, and wore dark-rimmed glasses. On her return she noticed that the blond had a corporal's stripes on his sleeve.

If he was a spy, surely the army would have detected it before making him a corporal, she thought, and promptly tried to dismiss her suspicions. Not until eleven o'clock that night when she was hurrying with the crowd to go aboard the west-bound train, did she again think of those words spoken in German behind her. Her Pullman was at the end of a very long train. Soldiers were filing

into the front coaches. She counted eight cars ahead of hers.

Suddenly she recalled the words she had heard behind her at the beginning of her journey, *acht Kusches*. And here they were, eight coaches of service men. Again she thought of their words, *ute Abend*. Tonight! Could there possibly be any connection between those words and this troop train?

Nancy followed the redcap to her Pullman seat with a feeling of uneasiness. She knew that spies all over the country were busy trying to get information about the movements of troop trains and transports. She pressed her eyes to the window and looked out at the milling crowd. Then suddenly she saw the blond corporal. He did not get aboard the train, but watched the troops marching down the paved walk between the tracks. Then he turned sharply and hurried back toward the station. The man in civilian clothes was not with him.

Nancy tried to shake off the nagging uneasiness that haunted her even after she was comfortably stretched in her berth, and the train was rushing out across the red Georgia hills. But her interest in what lay ahead was too keen for her to remain depressed. Several times she raised the shade to peep out when the train slowed at small towns where street lights twinkled sleepily, but at last the hum of the wheels lulled her to sleep.

Then suddenly, several hours before dawn, there came a terrific crash and jolt. Nancy caught wildly at the clothes hammock to keep from being hurled into the aisle, as the Pullman crashed to a stop and toppled slightly to the right. Screams and moans were heard above the grinding noises.

Nancy clung to the hammock a moment, too stunned to move. She expected the tilting coach to crash to earth any moment. Lights had vanished beyond the cracks of her curtain. With shaking hands she found her flashlight in the zipper bag left at the foot of her berth. She opened the curtain and turned the light up and down the aisle. Several who hadn't been thrown from their berths were climbing out, wanting to know what had happened. Groans, curses and cries only added to the confusion.

Then with the speed of a fireman preparing to answer a call to duty, Nancy put on her clothes. Some sure instinct warned her that in a few minutes there would be no time to think of herself. At last her long legs swung down from the berth. Her flashlight showed some people still lying where they had fallen in the aisle. Some actually climbed over them in their frantic haste to get out of the leaning Pullman.

She turned her light on the nearest injured person. It was a gray-haired lady, moaning that her arm was broken. A big man, clad only in his undershirt and army trousers, emerged from his berth.

"Here, give me a hand," ordered Nancy. "This lady has a broken arm."

The soldier, who was of powerful build, braced himself against the berth on the lower side, and lifted the stunned old lady to his shoulder. Nancy held her flashlight so he could see as they made their way toward the exit. She snatched a sheet to use for bandages from one of the berths as she went.

On reaching the platform they found the Pullman was leaning precariously against a clay cut on one side, while the steps on the other were high in air. Flares had already been lighted beside the track, and eager hands reached up to help with the injured woman. Nancy never remembered how she got down herself. Her one idea was to help the little old lady whose wavy gray hair was so like her own mother's.

"Do you have a pocket knife?" she asked the service man as he was stretching the woman on the ground.

He dug in his trouser pocket and produced one.

"Cut me a splint off some bush or tree," she ordered. "I'll have to protect this broken arm till it can be X-rayed and properly set."

She took off her coat to cushion the gray head. While she waited for the splint she saw that injured people were being brought from the three rear coaches. Just beyond the clay bank which had saved their car from greater damage, she saw that several coaches had overturned and telescoped into a horrible mass of wreckage.

The soldier came back promptly with a good splint from which he was deftly peeling the bark. To Nancy's surprise he knelt on the ground, and in the light of her flash began to manipulate the broken bone into position. One glance at those skillful fingers and Nancy exclaimed, "Oh, you're a doctor!"

"Yes," was all he said as he proceeded to the business of the moment.

"Thank God," she said earnestly, and began to tear the sheet into bandages.

As she had done numberless times before in the emergency room, Nancy helped bind up the broken arm.

"I see you've at least had first aid," he said as they worked.

"I'm a nurse," she retorted as tersely as he had informed her he was a doctor.

"There'll be plenty for us to do tonight," he told her.

When the arm was set, he lifted the frail woman and carried her out of the cut.

"Wait here with her," the doctor ordered. "I'll go back for my bag. She should have a hypo. You can help."

Someone had placed some boxes for steps at the rear entrance to the coach and he returned that way. They were still hauling people out and stretching them beside the end coach, which by some miracle had not overturned. To Nancy's surprise she recognized the ANC captain she had noticed on the train yesterday afternoon. She was trying to stop the bleeding in a leg wound of a man next to Nancy's old lady.

"Please, someone try to find a doctor," she said to no one in particular.

"One was here just now," Nancy told her. "He'll be back in a moment. He went for his bag."

Nancy bent to help the captain make a tourniquet below the injured man's knee. She had just secured the knot with a stick when she saw the doctor returning. The ANC captain straightened and saluted.

"This man will have to have some stitches, Major," she said.

"I'll look after him."

To Nancy's consternation she saw that the soldier she had just been ordering around, had put on his coat. His gold leaf indicated him a major, and the caduceus that he was a member of the medical corps. She felt terribly embarrassed at her mistake.

He seemed to think nothing of it, however, for he explained to the captain, "I'll keep this young lady to help me. She says she's a nurse."

"Then I'll go look after some of the others," said the captain, alertly.

Major Reed was stooping to give attention to the injured man, and asked as he did so, "Where did you graduate?"

"Stanford Hospital. I'm Nancy Dale. I just joined the Army Nurse Corps and am on my way for basic training."

This explanation seemed quite satisfactory to the major. He set his bag on the ground and pulled the zipper. "Give the lady there a hypo. We'll need one here, too. Tell Captain Lewis to get what she needs from my bag."

Until the sun rose over the red clay hills Nancy worked beside Major Reed, setting bones, sewing up cuts and giving sedatives to the hysterical. Several automobiles had gathered and focused their headlights upon the scene. Though Nancy had never faced such an emergency, she did not lose her head, nor did her hands shake as she worked to relieve the injured.

Only once did she feel an inward tremor and that was when she thought of how she had ordered Major Reed around. But there was no time to dwell on that in the busy hours before the arrival of nurses, doctors and ambulances from the nearest town.

"Someone to relieve us at last," said Captain Mary Lewis, who now looked as weary as Nancy felt.

"I phoned the camp for a car to be sent for us," Major Reed told them. "There'll be plenty of room for the three of us and our baggage."

Nancy glanced from one officer to the other in astonishment. "Oh, are we really within driving distance of the camp?"

"Only about fifty miles," replied Major Reed.

"And you're both going there?"

Captain Lewis nodded and smiled. "I've been on a tour of inspection, and Major Reed has been assigned work there."



"I'm Nancy Dale," Nancy Told the Major

"Then I can get there almost as soon as scheduled," said Nancy in relief. "I was worrying over being off schedule."

"Young lady, if you ever had a good excuse for being late you have it this time," said the major. He looked down at her a moment and smiled whimsically. "I'd say she's made of good fighting stuff, wouldn't you, Miss Lewis?"

"I'll say," agreed Miss Lewis. "She's had a fine try-out tonight."

Nancy's face flushed, then she burst forth impulsively, "Oh, I hope they'll think me good enough to send to the South Pacific."

"That's something we have to leave to our Uncle Samuel, young lady."

Nancy was silent a moment, then looked up at the major shyly out of the corner of her eye. "I owe you an apology, sir."

"How's that?"

"For ordering you about—demanding that you cut me a splint. But how could I know you were a major?"

He broke into a hearty laugh. "Well, Miss Dale, I can't see that an officer is due any respect when he goes around in his undershirt. You did what any nurse should have done."

"That must be your car over there, Major," said Miss Lewis.

"So 'tis. Let's get our baggage and be off."

HURDLES

At Major Reed's request a young private brought Nancy's baggage from the Pullman and packed it in the car. The major gave the local doctor last minute instructions about some of the injured, while Nancy and Captain Mary Lewis waited for him. It was the first five minutes Nancy had had since the accident to think quietly about the catastrophe.

With a sudden inner jolt she recalled the two German-speaking passengers who had sat behind her the previous afternoon. Could there possibly be any connection between their whispered conversation and this tragedy? The demand for her services during these last horrible hours had driven out all other thoughts except the use of her skill in helping the injured.

When the doctor returned to the car and started to get in, Nancy said, "Major Reed, there's something I believe I should tell you before we leave here."

He glanced at her, his foot lifted to the step, and said absent-mindedly, "Yes?"

"This may or may not have any connection with the wreck."

"They've already found evidence that it's the work of saboteurs," he told her frankly.

Nancy felt the blood drain from her cheeks. What would they think of her not mentioning her suspicions sooner? She had gone too far now to remain silent. Briefly she gave an account of the German conversation behind her the previous afternoon.

"I might have thought little of it," she hastened to add, on seeing the scowl on the major's face, "but on boarding the train last night I noticed there were eight troop cars. Instantly I thought of what the two men behind me had said. I also noticed the blond corporal watching the entraining men. He stood at the edge of the crowd outside my coach."

"You should have reported him as a suspect," stated Captain Mary Lewis sharply.

Nancy flushed, and asked, "To whom should I have reported him? They would only have laughed at me. Nobody on that train knew who I was."

"Never take a chance when it comes to anything like that," said Major Reed. "Where large numbers of lives are involved it's excusable to be suspicious of your own brother, rather than take any chances."

Nancy didn't flare up in anger or burst into tears, but looked the major squarely in the eyes. "I'm sure you're right. Had I been at a hospital, or in camp, I would have reported my suspicions to the right authorities. Under the circumstances, sir, what would you have done?"

The major got suddenly into the car and slammed the door. "I would probably have done exactly as you did, young lady."

Then Nancy did want to cry from sheer relief. Their car crawled off through the traffic congestion at the scene of the accident. The highway ran parallel with the track for some distance. They had an appalling view of the twisted mass of wreckage in the forward part of the train. At a group of official-looking cars, Major Reed had the driver stop. He got out to talk to two men. A few minutes later he brought them over to the car and had Nancy give a description of the two suspects she had noticed on the train.

"You are to be commended, Miss Dale," said Mr. Nelson, the taller of the two strangers, "for at least giving the suspects a looking over."

"I had to see what they were like after I heard them whispering in German!" exclaimed Nancy. "But when I saw one was a corporal in the army I thought perhaps I was being too suspicious."

Mr. Nelson laughed bitterly. "We've picked up several spies lately, disguised in soldier's uniforms. A man isn't always to be trusted just because he wears our colors."

"I suppose it would be impossible now to locate the pair," said Nancy unhappily. "The blond could be anywhere among the thousands back there at the station, or hundreds of miles away by this time."

The other plainclothes official said, "You underrate our Secret Service, miss. The description you've given is elaborate compared with some we get. We've sometimes caught 'em on little more than a shoestring."

He saluted respectfully and their car rolled out to the open country, and across the red clay hills. They were all too tired for conversation, even if they had had the heart for it after such a depressing experience. Captain Lewis did not seem inclined to conversation, and Nancy was glad enough to ride in silence. She snuggled deep into her corner, and was actually asleep before they had left the wreck five miles behind.

Some time later she was startled by a gentle hand shaking her shoulder. "Here we are, my dear," Miss Lewis was saying. Nancy opened her eyes.

She sat up with a start, wondering if there'd been another wreck. To her amazement she found they had stopped in front of a long, one-story building. Some white-uniformed nurses were coming down the steps. Across the lawn she saw another group in coveralls.

"You mean we are actually there—at camp?" she asked in amazement.

"You slept like a baby all the way," said Captain Lewis. "That ability to relax at once will stand you in good stead when you get in the thick of things."

Nancy was pleased. "Mother has always said if anyone would give me a pillow I could go to sleep any time, anywhere."

"And this time you didn't even have a pillow." Then suddenly Captain Lewis assumed her official air. "Lieutenant Hauser will show you to your room and help you get settled. Would you like to join me at breakfast when you get cleaned up?"

"Oh yes, thanks. This brisk morning air has really whipped up my appetite."

Not until long afterward did Nancy discover what an honor Captain Lewis had bestowed upon her. Too many new and exciting things were happening just then for her to appreciate the full significance of the invitation.

Captain Lewis introduced her to Lieutenant Hauser who was rather short and stocky and had a ready smile. She gave Nancy the comfortable feeling that there was really no difference in their positions, even though Miss Hauser was already a first lieutenant.

"Your roommate is Mabel Larsen," explained Miss Hauser. "She got in yesterday and already knows enough to show you the ropes."

They went down a long, narrow hall. A moment later Miss Hauser opened the door of a neat little room with two beds, attractive cretonne drapes and comfortable chairs and floor lamps.

An exclamation of delight escaped Nancy, "Oh, I thought we'd be sleeping on army cots in tents!"

"You'll get plenty of that later. Better enjoy these comforts while you have them," Lieutenant Hauser warned her. "Mabel's out on the obstacle course right now. You'll have a chance to do some unpacking and clean up before she comes in."

Miss Hauser pointed out a list of rules tacked on the door, told Nancy where the dining room was and left her to her own devices. An hour later when Nancy came back from a hearty breakfast with Captain Lewis she found Mabel Larsen stretched on her bed.

Mabel merely lifted her head when Nancy came in, and greeted her casually. "Oh, hello! You're the latest shavetail, I suppose?"

"I'm Nancy Dale, and they tell me you're Mabel Larsen."

"Glad you came. Sorry I can't be very formal just now, but I'm all in—got only fifteen minutes to get my wind back." She groaned softly. "Gosh, but my legs ache!"

"What's wrong? Are you ill?"

"Oh, nothing that won't be worse tomorrow! Just wait till you try those hurdles!" Mabel turned over cautiously and groaned again. "I might've been pounded by Japs from the way these shanks feel."

Nancy laughed in spite of herself. "You must've been neglecting your daily dozen before you came here."

"I've never been one of those exercise addicts," stated Mabel. "I've always gotten enough floor work in the wards without this one, two, three business." Mabel reached for a bottle of rubbing alcohol and began to massage her rather plump legs.

"Wait, let me do it," said Nancy.

Mabel lay back on the bed and gave herself up to the enjoyment of the soothing touch of Nancy's hands.

"You oughter been a masseuse," she sighed. Then after a moment she asked, "Why were you so late? We thought you were coming on that early train."

"There was a wreck," said Nancy, reluctant to recall her trying experience.

Mabel sat up suddenly. "You mean the train you were on?"

Nancy nodded and gave her a hasty sketch of what had happened, and their work with the injured.

"Well, if I'm not the daughter of a sloth!" burst forth Mabel. "Here I am letting you give me an alcohol rub when you've already been working like a trooper for hours!"

"Oh, I got a bit of sleep coming over in the car, but Miss Lewis suggested that I go to bed again till lunch time. I had breakfast with her just now."

"Not Captain Mary Lewis?" asked Mabel.

Nancy nodded as she began to take off her clothes.

"Well, aren't you the lucky bloke!" exclaimed Mabel. "Hobnobbing with the majors and captains on the very day of your arrival."

"It just happened that way."

"Think of the chance you had to prove to 'em right off the bat what stuff you're made of. Some people do have all the luck."

Nancy didn't know just what to make of this talkative roommate, but she was too tired to care just then. She found her rumpled pajamas in the zipper bag and got them out. In the meantime Mabel was painfully putting on her uniform to report to class.

"They'll probably give you a bunch of this gear this afternoon," Mabel said. "I never had so many new duds all at one time as they issued to me yesterday."

"Miss Hauser said I'd get my uniforms this afternoon, and be given my schedule, too. After that experience this morning I'm rather glad I don't have to get down to business till tomorrow."

Nancy crawled into bed and was thankful to find it very comfortable. She watched her new friend straighten her tie and set her new visor cap at a rakish angle on her reddish curls.

"Boy, do I feel swell in this uniform," boasted Mabel. "It sure boosts your morale to feel you're really one of the bunch at last. I've been raring to get in for months."

"So have I," Nancy told her. "But I only graduated last month."

"Shake, sister! You're a gal after my own heart. I just finished, too." The irrepressible Mabel seized Nancy's hand that lay on the spread. "I believe we're gonner hit it off fine."

"We'll make a team to whip the Japs," Nancy said, entering into the spirit of her banter.

"Say, that's swell! So you want to go down under, too?"

"You bet! My brother's flying a bomber there."

"I've got a sweetie out there, too. Yeah, we'll make a team—the long and short, the chestnut curls and the strawberry-blond mop, your common sense and my nonsense."

Then they were both laughing and the ice was completely broken.

Mabel glanced at her watch and bounded toward the door. "Be seeing you later," she called back.

Nancy felt as though a whirlwind had just passed, and she settled into her pillow with a sigh of relief. She felt certain she was going to like her new roommate. Though most of her remarks were flippant, she showed that there was the right sort of stuff underneath.

After a couple of hours' sleep and a shower, Nancy felt ready to tackle her new life. She spent the rest of the afternoon being fitted for her clothes. She was surprised to know the old blue uniforms were no longer issued, and that she would wear olive drab for dress.

"They found the Japs wearing blue sometimes in the Pacific area. It proved confusing," Lieutenant Hauser told her. "White uniforms are not customarily worn, either, by nurses at the front—too easily spotted from the air. All these changes are the result of practical experience."

When Nancy went out to supper with her new friend, Mabel remarked, "Leisure's a scarce commodity round here. We put in eight hours of hard work every day, counting all the classes, ward work, drills and stuff. Six days a week, too, sister!"

"I'm used to that," Nancy told her.

Nancy's real initiation came the next morning when they were routed out before daylight for half an hour of calisthenics. Mabel stuck close to give her a prod or hint against doing things wrong. That morning Nancy also noticed Tini Hoffman for the first time. Unlike her nickname Tini was of a large build, and she seemed not to have the slightest sense of rhythm or coordination. She was constantly getting out of step and throwing the line off.

"All right then I'll step out!" snapped Tini, when she had been reprimanded the third time. "I can't do anything to please you."

"You'll stay in ranks and keep trying till you do it correctly," Lieutenant Carson stated. "Or else!"

After that the girl stomped about like a spoiled child, making the dust fly over those around her. Nancy wondered why she was here at all if she had not come in the spirit of cooperation with the training program.

"Too much silly falderal," she heard Tini say in a low tone when the formation broke up. "I came in to nurse the sick, not to do a lot of crazy drilling."

That afternoon Tini was close to Mabel and Nancy when they were jumping some hurdles. Nancy's long legs swung easily over the first two, but the last took all the ability she had. Tini, however, didn't even try to go over the last, but quickly ducked under when the instructor wasn't looking.

"Go back, you cheat!" snapped Mabel. "We're not going to have any duckers-under in this unit."

Mabel's bluntness attracted the attention of Lieutenant John Warren, who was putting them through this phase of their training. He called out good-naturedly, "Now, now, young lady! You have to take it over the top, you know."

Tini knocked down the bar twice before she finally made that last hurdle. She scraped her chin the first time she hit the gravel. When their instructor was out of hearing she gave him some back talk, and continued to grumble while she crawled parallel with Nancy and Mabel under some lengths of chicken wire.

Nancy was sure her palms had as much earth on them as skin when she finally came triumphantly through on the other side. "Boy, what an experience!" she burst forth, when she got up to brush herself off.

"Just imagine how much faster we could do it, if the Japs were using the soles of our G.I. shoes for target practice," Mabel reminded her.

"There's just no sense in all this," complained Tini, wiping her gritty palms on her coveralls.

Nancy didn't like this girl, nor her attitude, and found she couldn't keep silent any longer.

"Looks as though you'd better get out of this right now," she snapped. "If I understand the reason for all this, it's for our own good—to prepare us for real trials to come if we're sent into the fighting areas."

"Mind your own business," snapped Tini like a spoiled child. "I've got a right to blow off if I want to."

She stalked on to the next test. Here they were required to swing by a rope down the side of a ravine. Nancy and Mabel followed slowly, and Mabel said, "If they keep her on she'll get our unit into trouble, sure as life."

"I doubt if they keep her with such an attitude."

"She griped like that all the way through nurse's training," Mabel explained.

"Oh, was she in your class?"

"Yes. We came here together, too. You have to hand it to Tini, though. She has a keen mind and makes grand marks. They had no grounds for turning her down, I suppose."

"She makes me feel as uncomfortable as those suspects on the train did."

"Yeah!" agreed Mabel. "There're more ways of working against Uncle Sam than outright sabotage."

SUSPECTS

In the busy days that followed, Nancy, with the other girls of her unit, was plunged into the intensive work of preparing for service in the fighting zones. Fully alert to the importance of these instructions, Nancy worked even harder than she had during her nurse's training. Here they must put the lectures and discussions into practice at once.

The day after her arrival there were lectures on military courtesy and customs of the service. They were told how to wear their uniforms, and how to recognize the various insignia of office.

In their room afterwards Nancy and Mabel had lots of fun practicing the military salute.

"You've got to learn to do it automatically," said Mabel. "Your fingers should go to your forehead when you see a superior officer as instinctively as your foot goes to the car brake in an emergency."

"And I suppose it will prove to be 'a restriction' emergency if you don't," Nancy came back with a laugh.

For the next day or two they saluted every time they passed each other in their room and had some good laughs over their actions.

"Tini Hoffman says she hates to salute," Mabel confided. "She says it makes her feel inferior."

"If Tini isn't careful she's going to get kicked out of this training camp," Nancy said. "I don't like her attitude one bit."

"Neither do the instructors. But she's got an uncle who's a colonel or something—anyhow he's one of the bigwigs in the training program."

"I don't imagine that will have any influence if she doesn't make the grade," Nancy replied. "I'd hate to think of the kind of army we'd have if it did."

"You may be right," Mabel conceded. "But what's more, I don't even like her name. It's much too German."

"I think we ought to be careful about things like that," warned Nancy. "There're plenty of good, loyal Americans, you know, with foreign-sounding names."

"Yes, of course. But when a foreign name goes along with a rebellious attitude it makes you wonder."

Something happened a week later to make the two girls think more seriously than ever of Tini Hoffman and her strange conduct. After their eight hours of work, the nurses were free to seek recreation, go into the village on shopping tours or to movies. And they were usually ready for a change when their day's work was over.

One evening Nancy and Mabel had stopped in a drugstore for a soda after going to the movies, and they came unexpectedly upon Tini. The drugstore they had entered was very narrow in the rear, with little, private booths down each wall and an aisle in between for serving. The girls slipped into one of the booths to have their soda and chat about the picture. Couples filled all the other seats and crowded around the tables in front. Most of them were men and women in uniform.

"We're lucky to get seats," said Mabel.

While waiting for their order to be filled, Nancy said, "Oh, I meant to get some cleansing tissues."

"I'll get 'em for you," offered Mabel. "I promised to pick up a package here for Miss Hauser. She phoned her order over."

While Mabel was at the drug counter Nancy sat idly gazing around at the chatting groups. Then suddenly she noticed Tini Hoffman directly across the aisle. Tini was so busy talking to a man in civilian clothes that she hadn't noticed her dormitory mates. She sat with her elbows on the table, her hands folded under her dimpled chin, while her blond countenance beamed on her companion. Nancy felt sure Tini's hair was bleached, and wondered what it would look like after several months in the Pacific islands. It was too golden-blond to be natural. It proved amusing to find Tini so pleased with her situation for once.

So fascinated was Nancy in watching Tini that Mabel was returning before she gave the gentleman opposite Tini a fleeting glance. Then suddenly her eyes became fixed. Where had she seen that lean profile before? She tried to hold herself under control as her mind tied up the loose ends of memory. The longer she stared, the more positive she became that the horn-rimmed glasses and small mustache belonged to the same man who had sat beside the blond corporal the day she left her home town. Though she had had only a hasty glance as she went down the aisle of the train those faces had become indelibly impressed upon her mind.

As Mabel came nearer, Nancy saw Tini's companion watching covertly. She couldn't blame any man for being attracted by Mabel, for she was really worth looking at in her trimly fitting uniform with her cap sitting jauntily on her golden curls. But the man's heavy-lidded glance had little admiration in it, only a sort of cynical calculation.

Nancy felt she must know if he was really the blond corporal's train mate. Impulsively she said as Mabel handed her the package she had bought, "*Danke schoen.*"

She deliberately used the German word for "thank you," and spoke loud enough to be heard across the aisle.

Her trick brought the expected result, for the man turned sharply toward her. Mabel glided into the seat opposite and glanced at her with a puzzled frown. When it was too late for regrets, Nancy felt the hot blood welling to her face. Others may have heard her, too, and what would they think?



Nancy Discovered Tini Across the Aisle

There was even a chance that the man might recognize her as the same girl who had sat in front of them on the train, even though she had worn a green suit then and was now clad in olive drab.

"At least," she thought ruefully, "I could swear he's the same man. But what's he doing here with Tini Hoffman?"

Mabel had to speak to her twice before she heeded.

"They make grand sodas here, don't they?"

"Sure do!" Nancy stuck a couple of straws in hers so hard they bent double.

"What's wrong?" asked Mabel under her breath.

Nancy glanced warily at the couple across the aisle, nudged Mabel with her foot, and laid her finger cautiously on her lips before she placed the fresh straws in her glass.

Mabel wisely changed the subject, and remarked, "Cleansing tissues are sure hard to get now. Guess we'll have to get all ours hereafter at the P.X."

"We'll need plenty to take across—if we get to go over."

"Yeah, my friend Lydia, in North Africa, wrote me we'd better take along plenty of stuff like that."

Suddenly Nancy was impatient to be through with their sodas and out of the drugstore. She meant to take no chances on suspects this time, but report what she had seen to Captain Lewis. She finished her soda in a hurry and reached to the back of the table for her purse.

"Let's get going," she suggested.

"Not till I finish the last spoonful of this ice cream," Mabel said firmly. "I'd think about it regretfully every time I'm marooned somewhere on a desert over there."

"Then I'll go ahead and be paying."

"What's all the hurry?" Mabel wanted to know, an edge in her tone.

Out of the corner of her eye Nancy saw that the sleek gentleman across the aisle was watching them. Then she noticed that Tini's attention had wandered sufficiently from her companion to recognize them.

"Hiya!" she said with a proud toss of her head, which plainly showed her personal triumph over their dateless condition.

Nancy returned the greeting and led the way out. When they were on the street, Mabel slipped her arm through Nancy's and inquired, "What's wrong? You acted as though you were sitting on nettles."

"Nettles would have been mild to the prickles I felt."

"What do you mean?"

"That man with Tini looked exactly like the one who was with the blond corporal I told you about on the train."

"Oh! So that's why you thanked me in German?"

"Of course. I wanted to see if I could get a reaction out of him."

"And did you?"

"I'll say. He shot a glance at me as if I'd poked him in the ribs."

Mabel grunted. "Don't see where that proves anything. Anybody using German words in these times should surely make people sit up and take notice."

"But I could swear he's the same, Mabel. Dark-rimmed glasses, small mustache, lean face, and a very immaculate, tailored look about his clothes."

"Well, what are you going to do about it?"

"Go straight to Captain Lewis. I'm taking no chances again, even if it gets Tini into trouble."

"She may be working with him."

"She's certainly acted in a way to make us suspicious," agreed Nancy.

"Oh, she's always acted like that—behind the backs of those over her. I never paid much attention to that. She's an only child, very spoiled. Her parents have oodles of money."

"Then she didn't have to take nurse's training—for a way to make a living."

Mabel laughed significantly again. "At the time she went in she was in love with one of the hospital internes. It gave her a chance to be with him more."

"Evidently she didn't get him."

"She sure didn't. Soon after he got settled with his practice, he married a real sweet girl. By that time Tini was so nearly through her training she couldn't quit without causing lots of talk."

"Strange for her to take on the hardships of the Army Nurse Corps."

"She wanted to get away from home and the catty people who enjoyed her being jilted."

"Too bad to have such an experience so young," said Nancy, suddenly feeling sorry for Tini.

"She surely was thrilled at having that new fellow tonight."

They were moving into the throng at the bus stop now, and fell silent, for they had been warned about too much talk within the hearing of others.

"Spies can find meaning in your most innocent remarks," Major Reed had warned them.

They couldn't find seats together anyhow, so the girls rode in silence back to the camp. Quite a number of other nurses were coming back to the camp on the same bus, but Nancy was glad not to sit with any of them, for she wanted to think about what she would say to Captain Lewis.

When she went straight on to their room with Mabel, her friend said, "Thought you were going to report what you saw to Cap'n Lewis."

"I didn't want any of the others to see me going to her," explained Nancy. "I'll wait a few minutes till they're all in their rooms. This thing is best kept under lid."

"Sure. I agree with you."

"Tini's made enough enemies without adding suspicion to her troubles."

When the halls were empty Nancy slipped downstairs. Miss Lewis's bedroom was next to her office, but to her consternation she found all the lights out. She hesitated to wake her, yet didn't want to wait till morning to make her revelations.

Over and over again she had been haunted by the idea that the train wreck might have been

averted if those German-speaking passengers had been apprehended in time. Yet she still couldn't see what she might have done about it. But this time she did know what to do, and she meant to do it.

She was still hesitating in the hall when she noticed a light in an office farther down, and heard men talking. Suddenly she recognized Major Reed's hearty laughter. The hours they had worked together that night at the wreck had made him seem so human and likeable to Nancy, that their difference in station could never again be a barrier to understanding.

Eagerly she hurried toward his office. The door stood open. She paused in the doorway till her eyes came to rest on the major among the group of men.

"May I speak to you, Major Reed?" she asked. He glanced at her, surprised, then asked, "Anything wrong, Miss Dale?"

He crushed his cigarette into an ash tray before he moved toward the door.

"I meant to talk to Captain Lewis, but her lights were out," Nancy explained, as she backed into the hall, indicating that their conversation must be private. "I must speak to someone."

"Yes," he said when they were outside and the door was closed. "What's wrong?"

"I think I just saw the man who was with the corporal that day on the train."

"Where?"

"In a drugstore in the village. I don't want him to get away as the blond man did."

"The blond didn't!" stated Major Reed with a chuckle. "The FBI now have him in their possession."

"Not really!" exclaimed Nancy, her face lighting.

"Yes. It will be some time before he's in circulation again, if ever. But this other—where'd you say you saw him?"

Nancy gave a hurried report of her encounter with the suspect and Tini in the drugstore. While she talked the major stroked his chin and stared at the floor.

"Uh-huh. I see. You say he was dating Miss Hoffman?"

"I haven't any idea where she met him, of course."

Major Reed glanced at his watch. "You came in on the last bus?" he asked.

"Yes, I did."

"Did Tini Hoffman come with you?"

"I don't think so. In fact, I'm sure. The bunch of us came up from the bus stop together."

"Then she'll have to come on the next bus, or be late checking in." He was silent a moment, then spoke again as if thinking aloud. "He would already have put her on the camp bus before anyone could make it to town in a car to follow him."

Nancy admitted this was true. It seemed too late to put anyone on his trail tonight. "Tini will probably be dating him again," she said. "She seemed tickled pink with him."

Major Reed dug his hands deep in his pockets and admitted, "Yes, that seems the surest chance. But I can't ask you to act as a spy against one of your fellow students."

"Nor do I want any such position," stated Nancy frankly, "but where the welfare of our unit or our country is involved, Major Reed, I fear we have no choice."

He looked her squarely in the eyes then with frank admiration.

"You have a wise head on your shoulders, Miss Dale. If anything else comes up let me know."

They heard the last busload of girls out front long after Mabel and Nancy were already in bed. It was so much later than Nancy expected. Major Reed might after all have reached the bus station in time to see their suspect put Tini aboard. She wondered what he had done about it.

THE GAS CHAMBER

The following morning a scheduled lecture on military law was postponed for an impromptu talk by Major Reed. Nancy's heart skipped a beat when Lieutenant Hauser introduced the major to the assembled unit. Instinctively she felt his appearance had something to do with what she had told him last night. And she was right.

He talked to them for an hour on the subtle ways in which the enemy succeeded in getting information. He admonished the nurses about silence in public places, and prohibited discussion outside the camp grounds about what was going on inside. He warned them against picking up conversations with strange men who might craftily get information from them. He finished his talk by giving a half-dozen actual incidents where absolutely loyal men and women had witlessly supplied the enemy with vital information.

"This is for your protection as well as for our boys out there on the battlefronts," he told them. "I warn you to make no close contacts with strangers."

As the girls filed out of the lecture room there was awe in their whispered remarks. Most of them felt more keenly than ever the responsibilities of the task ahead.

As they went to the grounds for instructions in using gas masks, Ida Hall and Tini Hoffman were close to Nancy and Mabel.

"I noticed you had a mighty swell-looking date last night," Nancy heard Ida saying to Tini. "Where'd you pick him up?"

"I didn't pick him up," retorted Tini. "I met him in Charleston."

"Recently?"

"When I was on vacation after finishing my nurse's training."

"Oh, I see." Ida's manner showed she didn't like Tini any more than most of the others.

"You surely can't accuse him of trying to pick me up," Tini flared, fully aware of the implications in Ida's remarks, following so close on that lecture. "He encouraged me to come into the ANC. In fact he was the very one who suggested it."

"You must have made a hit with him," put in Nancy, "to have him come all the way over here to see you."

Tini looked pleased, and toyed with her blond curls before she said, "Well, you see he's a traveling salesman and gets around."

"Huh, he must be luckier than most if he can still get gas to be a traveling salesman," commented Mabel.

"Oh, he uses the trains. His territory is too wide for a car in these times."

Nancy smiled disarmingly as she asked, trying to seem casual, "Dating him tonight?"

"If he can arrange his business so he can be back in the village."

There was no more time for probing, for their instructor, Sergeant Fuller, was calling them to attention on the pine-clad hill where they had already received their preliminary instruction in putting on and taking off their gas masks. The structure of the masks had been explained in detail, and a lecture given on the various types of gas, and how to care for gas casualties.

This morning, however, came their first really difficult test. They had to go through the gas chamber, as they called the little house on the hill where the tests were made.

"Gosh, I'll sure be glad when this is over," moaned a small, brown-eyed girl, Grace Warner, whom they had dubbed "Shorty."

Grace actually looked no more than sixteen and wore her hair with a bang-bob which made her round, childish face seem even more immature. Her voice, too, had a thin, babyish quality. Though the nurses teased her quite a bit, she was a general favorite.

Shorty was between Nancy and Mabel when they lined up for the gas-chamber test. Her big brown eyes were apprehensive as she looked at Nancy and said, "If we could go through there once and have it over with I wouldn't mind so much. But three times—gosh!"

"The first won't be so hard," Nancy said consolingly. "We just walk through the front door and out the back—to be sure our masks don't leak or anything."

"Only tear gas, anyhow," Mabel added. "It's not nearly so bad as the others."

"That's what you think," said Shorty. "One of our nurses back home said she got badly burned about the neck and wrists when she took the test."

"She probably wasn't as snugly protected as we are. That's why they make our shirts now with the extra protection flaps at the cuffs and front. No skin exposed," explained Mabel.

The nurses stood in line, their gas masks on. Already they could hear laughter and nervous giggles on the other side, as the first of the group marched through and came out triumphantly to take off their masks till time for the next test.

Nancy and her friends didn't mind the first test so much, though they were glad enough to hurry out the back door. On the second trip they went in with their gas masks on, took them off inside, then hurried out.



"I'll Be Glad When This Is Over," Moaned Shorty

"Oh, boy, is this fresh air good!" exclaimed Nancy, when she rushed out the back door.

"It was awful!" wailed Shorty. "My face is stinging all over. I wouldn't go in there again for anything!"

"But you have to!" stated Nancy. "The hardest test is yet to come."

"I can't! I just can't!" wailed Shorty, her cheeks wet with tears that had not all been caused by the stinging gas.

"If you don't go through it you'll never get overseas," Nancy warned her.

"I don't see why they put us through all this misery," wailed Shorty. "We know how to put on gas masks in case there's any trouble over yonder. No sense in torturing ourselves like this when we may never have to put 'em on again."

Nancy caught Shorty by the shoulders and shook her slightly. "Now you cut out that kind of talk, or they'll not let you go down under with us."

"Come on," warned Mabel. "It's our turn again."

Nancy caught Shorty's hand. "Come on, honey," she said in a wheedling tone. "We'll go through together."

Nancy, herself, had really dreaded this final ordeal, but having to bolster Shorty's confidence left her little thought for her own fears. She shoved her little friend through the door saying, "Now, put on the mask—quick!"

Shorty already had her mask over her face when Nancy followed through the door. In spite of their speed their trembling hands fumbled a bit before the masks could be put into place, and so they felt a bit of stinging. When they were securely masked, however, Nancy urged the excited girl toward the back door.

"It wasn't so bad after all, was it?" asked Nancy, after she jerked her mask off and filled her lungs with fresh air.

"Could've been worse. But I guess I never would have got through at all, Nancy, if you hadn't made me," Shorty admitted in a shamefaced manner.

"Hope we don't ever have to use these for the real thing," Mabel said.

"I heard a major, just returned from overseas, tell about how the Japs often cry 'Wolf' about gas," said Nancy, sitting on the brown pine carpet with the others to rest a bit.

"What do you mean—cry wolf?" asked Shorty.

"When our men are coming ashore from the landing craft the Japs often throw up a smoke-screen and cry, 'Gas'. They say there's nothing breaks the men's morale easier than the fear of gas," Nancy explained.

"That's just too horrible to conceive of," said Ida Hall.

"At least it's consoling to know it hasn't been used so far," put in Mabel.

"No telling what they'll do at the desperate end," Nancy warned them. "I don't mean to miss a trick in these gas-mask drills."

"I heard we'll have to go through the gas chamber again at the port of embarkation," Ida Hall informed them.

"Good night!" flared Shorty. "As if three times would not be enough."

"These masks belong at the training center. They'll issue us new ones at the port. We have to test them out," Ida explained.

The weather had turned warm and Nancy was glad to get back to their quarters and have a good shower when the day's classes and drills were over.

Mail came twice a day, and the nurses always haunted their boxes right after breakfast and just before the evening meal. Nancy talked with her parents every Sunday over long-distance telephone and had letters from them and friends back home almost every day. Letters had never meant so much to her in all her life. She could now appreciate how important they were to Tommy and the other boys out there.

That evening Nancy was thrilled to find a letter from Tommy, which had been sent on from home. "One from the South Pacific!" she cried, waving the letter at Mabel, who was just opening her own box.

"And I have one from my Jake!" exclaimed Mabel. "What a red-letter day for the long and short of our unit!"

The girls moved out of the milling crowd at the mail boxes and opened their letters near a window.

Nancy stopped in the midst of her reading to tell Mabel joyfully, "He has only a few more missions to fly and then he'll be coming home. Now wouldn't that be something if I got sent out there while he comes back!"

"Surely fate wouldn't play you such a mean trick as that, Nancy!"

"Is your sweetie all right?" asked Nancy.

"He is now, but the poor chap's been in the hospital. He didn't say what for. Isn't that just like a man?"

"Better watch out. He may fall for some of those nurses."

"If he's that fickle I'd rather know it now," Mabel said with a toss of her head. "But really I'm not uneasy. Jake's sold on my red head. There aren't so many redheads, you know."

"He'd better not go to Turkey then. They tell me there're plenty of red-headed dames there," put in one of the nurses near by, who had overheard their conversation.

Nancy finished her letters and while waiting for Mabel she noticed Tini standing not far from them. There was a scowl on her face as she impatiently tapped her fingers on the window ledge. A slit envelope and an open letter were in her hands. Nancy couldn't help noticing the return address on the envelope, "Hotel Carlton."

"Bad news?" asked Nancy.

"My good-looking date had to leave unexpectedly," Tini replied. "Makes me sick!"

"You've been lucky to have him here at all," Nancy said. "Most of us have been dateless for three weeks."

"Huh, I always have dates wherever I go."

"Sure, you're different," Mabel said sarcastically. Her long acquaintance with Tini left little patience with her superior attitude. "The rest of us made up our minds when we came into the Army Nurse Corps, to give personal consideration second place for the duration."

"Zat so!" snapped Tini, rudely turning her back.

Nancy and Mabel exchanged significant glances as they left for the mess hall. As Nancy ate her appetizing dinner she thought over what she had just learned. She felt actually sick at heart over this unpleasant business of suspecting a fellow student.

She had no desire to be a spy. Yet when she recalled the horrible scenes at that wreck, caused by sabotage, she shivered. She would never forget the dead and dying she had ministered to that awful morning. As much as she hated the unpleasant position into which circumstances had again thrust her, Nancy was determined to let no squeamishness make her keep silent. She had no choice but to report what she had just learned about Tini's date to Major Reed. If the man was really an enemy spy, he must not be allowed to escape again.

OFFICIAL NOTICE

Nancy excused herself before Mabel and her friends had finished eating, and left the mess hall. She found Major Reed alone this time, sitting at his desk. She was not unmindful of the brightening of his face when he saw her. He was such a large man he seemed older than he really was. Nancy had at first thought he was about thirty, but now he seemed nearer twenty-five. He had gone far for one so young.

"Come in, Miss Nancy," he said cordially. He jumped up and placed a chair for her, then closed the door. "You have more information?"

"It may or may not be important," she told him a little sadly. "Frankly, Major Reed, I don't like this business of reporting on a fellow student—yet I dare not hide what I hear."

"I fully appreciate the awkwardness of the situation," he said with understanding, "but these are really times that try men's souls. We have to do many things differently now."

"I'll say," she agreed.

"I was just reading here," said the major, indicating a magazine he had put down at her entrance, "that our vice-president says the time is past when we must see no evil, hear no evil, and tell no evil. We must do all three until evil is wiped out. Right now you are in a peculiar position and the only one on whom I can rely."

"I'll try not to betray your trust," she said. "I learned just now that Tini's friend had been staying at Hotel Carlton over in the city. I'm afraid he's already left there. He wrote her he had to leave unexpectedly."

Suddenly the major's hearty laughter filled the little room. "So he got wise to the fact that he was being watched!"

"Oh—so you already knew he was staying there?"

Major Reed became wary. "We had a line on him."

"But how?" asked Nancy. "Tini did come in on that next bus the other night. Nobody here had time to get into the village and follow him after he put Tini on the bus."

"I acted on your information promptly. There's such a thing as the telephone," he reminded Nancy.

He made this unsatisfactory explanation with a finality that told her she must inquire no further into his end of the business.

"Have you learned anything else?" he asked.

"Yes. Tini told us she met him in Charleston. He's a traveling salesman, uses the trains instead of a car. He suggested that Tini join the Army Nurse Corps."

"So!" Major Reed's dark eyebrows lifted slightly.

"Mabel Larsen took nurse's training in the same hospital with her. She said Tini went into it originally because she was crazy about one of the internes. But that may be only gossip, for it does sound mean. I'm afraid Tini isn't very well liked."

Major Reed was abstractedly making crosses on a scrap of paper. Finally his pencil stopped, and he looked squarely across at Nancy.

"Has Miss Hoffman done anything to make you feel she has gotten on the inside merely to supply information to our enemies?"

"That's a stiff question, Major."

"I know it is. But you're in a better position to judge of such things than any of the instructors."

"Tini gripes a lot about regulations and the hardships of the military training, but Mabel said she was always complaining during her nurse's training. She's an only child. Her family has plenty of money, and she's rather spoiled. All those things have to be taken into consideration."

Nancy saw the ghost of a smile flicker around the major's nice lips. Then he said, "But you've evaded my question."

"Oh, no. I'm not trying to evade, because I honestly don't think Tini has the makings of a spy. I think she's motivated entirely by selfishness. She would be horribly bored here without dates—she'll go with most anybody rather than be dateless."

"I suppose with a little flattery a man could wheedle a good bit out of her."

"You may be right," Nancy conceded.

She rose to leave and he stood up.

"All this has been a great help," he told her. "But keep in mind it's still between us two."

She was almost at the door when he added, "And by the way—a notice has just been put on the bulletin board that will interest you."

"Oh, are we going to be sent overseas soon?"

He laughed again. "You're optimistic! Some nurses have been waiting to go over for a year or more, and here you're expecting to go in a few weeks."

"It has been done," Nancy came back promptly. "Oh, Major Reed, if they'd only send me to the South Pacific in a hurry! I have a brother out there who's almost finished his flying missions. If I get there before he comes back, I may have a chance to see him."

"Just keep your shirt on," he told her. "You'll probably get into the thick of it before it's all over. I'm afraid there's more than we dreamed of ahead. That notice out there says you're to get a taste

of tent life, starting Monday.”

“Oh, that’s really to my liking!” exclaimed Nancy. She hurried away to find Mabel and tell her the news.

On Sunday just before supper Nancy and Mabel were packed to start off by army truck at dawn next morning. It was exciting to put into practice their instructions about packing compactly for travel, for they were to move on now as if they were going into a combat area.

“Seems like the real thing,” said Mabel eagerly.

They had had their supper and were ready for bed early when they heard a knock on their door. It proved to be Lieutenant Hauser.

“Long-distance call for you, Miss Dale,” she said when they opened the door.

Nancy stood stunned for a moment. Her arrangement with the folks back home was that she would call them every Sunday at two o’clock, as long as phone calls of that kind were permissible. She had talked with her mother and father only a few hours ago, though she had not been able to tell them she was moving on to another address. They would have to be informed about that later when the unit had arrived safely. To have them call back like this alarmed her. She knew no one else who would call her by long-distance telephone here.

“She said you had a long-distance call,” Mabel repeated, when Nancy still stood where she had received the message.

“But why would they be calling back?” Nancy wanted to know.

“Oh come on, gal!” exclaimed Mabel, wrapping her housecoat around her and taking Nancy’s arm. “How will you ever face all those bombs if you get so scared over a little telephone bell ringing?”

Nancy could think only that something terrible must have happened to her parents. She let Mabel lead her like a sleep-walker to the phone in Lieutenant Hauser’s office.

“Hello! Yes—this is Nancy. Oh Dad, that you? I was afraid something was wrong with you or Mom.”

Mabel could hear Mr. Dale’s deep voice as she stood close to Nancy: “No, we’re all right, but we had upsetting news just now from the government—”

“From the government—you—you mean about Tommy?” asked Nancy.

“They report he’s been missing in action over enemy territory since the second of March.”

“Oh Dad!” wailed Nancy. “It can’t be true! It just can’t! God wouldn’t let anything happen to our Tommy.”

“Not if our prayers can keep it from happening, darling,” came the firm voice confidently over the wire. “You just keep on praying like we’ve been doing all along, and he’ll be taken care of.”

“Oh Dad, how I wish I could be there with you and Mom right now! How is she?”

“Just the same brave saint she’s always been. She’s writing you a letter now to hearten you.”

“Kiss her for me,” said Nancy. “And tell her I’ll pray harder than ever.”

Nancy put down the phone and faced Mabel.

“I could hear what he said,” her friend told her gently. “Don’t give up hope, Nancy. Lots of times they turn up after they’re reported missing. Maybe he’s not dead.”

“Oh, no, he’s not!” Nancy asserted firmly. “I’m not going to think of it for a minute. He wrote me in that last letter he could feel our prayers helping protect him, and he’s going to feel it more than ever now.”

From sunrise till mid-afternoon the following day the convoy rolled smoothly west along the paved highway. At noon they stopped in a large city to eat a lunch the canteen girls had prepared. It was good to get out and stretch their legs after sitting on the hard truck seats all morning. No one knew where they were going, or how long they would be on their way, so the nurses made the best of their hour’s rest. They took turns in the canteen dressing room, freshening up to continue their journey.

While they rested Nancy slipped her brother’s last letter from her pocket and re-read it. Mabel caught her at it and tried to cheer her.

“Come on now,” she said, “it does no good grieving.”

“I’m not grieving. It—it makes me feel more certain he’s going to come out all right when I re-read his letter.”

“Let’s take a sprint around the block,” suggested Mabel. “We have a few minutes before we take off.”

“Not a bad idea. A little exercise will do us good.”

“We may never get a peep at this burg again. I sure don’t mean to miss anything on the way.”

Other girls were out pacing up and down the sidewalk in front of the canteen, but Nancy and Mabel wanted to see more. They were in the heart of town, and the street back of the canteen had many attractive shop windows. Nancy kept glancing at her watch as they paused to admire the pretty dresses.

“Do you feel like someone who’s renounced the world when you look at those dresses?” asked Mabel.

“Oh, well, it won’t be forever,” Nancy said consolingly. “At least we can still wear evening dresses for dances on the post, Miss Hauser said.”

“Yeah! That will be a slight morale booster.”

“I never felt more smartly dressed than I do in this uniform,” continued Nancy.

“I must admit they do look rather stunning,” Mabel agreed.

The next store carried drugs, and they were about to pass by when Nancy seized Mabel’s arm. “Say, that looks like Tini in there!”

Mabel stepped back and looked in. “Sure is! Come on, I’ll get some dental floss and see what she’s up to.”

As they went in, Tini’s back was toward them. She sat on a stool at the soda counter, drinking a coke. Why had she come here for a coke when they had all the cold drinks they wanted back at the

canteen? Tini was leaning across the counter, turning her charm on the soda jerker who was at least five years her junior. What was she up to now, Nancy wondered?

CAMOUFLAGE

Nancy was not too surprised when she found Tini having a whispered conversation with the soda jerker in the strange town. Tini seemed always involved in some undercurrent.

She glanced at her watch and saw they had only five minutes before the transport was due to move on. "We've got to beat it," she told Mabel.

"Better come along, Tini, or you'll be left behind!" warned Mabel as they went toward the door.

Tini threw her money on the counter and overtook the girls.

"Don't see why you wanted a coke 'round here when we had plenty of free ones at the Canteen," Mabel said.

"Oh, just an excuse to talk to the clerk. I wanted to ask him if Carl Benton had been here lately."

"Carl Benton," repeated Nancy as they almost ran toward their trucks. "You mean that fellow you dated back yonder?"

"Sure. He sells soda-fountain supplies. Said he came through here often."

"Did that chap know him?" asked Nancy.

"Dumb bloke—no! He's only had that job a few days."

"Surely you've heard from him since he left," said Mabel, not without an acid flavor in her tone.

"You bet! But I thought if he was around this way I might get a chance to see him again."

"May as well put him out of your mind," Nancy suggested.

"Gal, if my hunch is right we won't be doing any dating till we get through some maneuvers ahead of us," said Mabel.

Toward sunset it began to look as though Mabel's hunch had some material foundation. They turned off the paved highway and bumped for five miles over a rutted clay road before they entered a swamp made shadowy by the Spanish moss that hung from the oaks, cypress and sweet gum trees. Though the nurses were tired after their long day's travel, Nancy and Mabel exchanged satisfied glances.

"Say, gal," whispered Mabel. "Looks like they're preparing us for the real thing."

"We'll sure have to sleep under nets down here or there won't be any snoozing," said Nancy.

The sun had already gone down, leaving a red glow in the west, when the convoy circled a clearing in the swamp where there was a small tent village already set up. The passengers climbed out gratefully, each nurse loaded with her personal baggage.

Lieutenant Hauser called the roll and assigned four girls to each tent. The tents were numbered, so the nurses hurried off to see what their new homes were like.

"Four cots and that's all!" exclaimed Mabel, the first to reach number four, their new habitation.

Nancy's heart had taken a dive when she learned that Tini and her former room-mate, Ida Hall, were to share the tent with Mabel and herself. Had this been prearranged by Major Reed, she wondered? She certainly had no desire to continue serving as a day and night watchman for Tini Hoffman.

"Must think we're made of cast iron," complained Tini when she tried out her cot.

"But here are mattress cases," said Nancy. "We can stuff 'em with Spanish moss from the trees and make grand mattresses. We used to do that when Dad took us fishing in the river swamp."

"Not a bad idea," agreed Ida.

They took their casings and hurried off under the trees to fill them before dark. The suggestion spread, and soon the swamp was alive with nurses preparing for a comfortable night's sleep.

Their mess hall was a long tent in the center of the camp. They ate by lantern light. The food was all from cans, and cold, but the nurses were too hungry that night to be critical.

"Say, this is going to be real fun," said Mabel, as they made their way back to their tents by G.I. flashlights.

Though it was spring the swampy air had a penetrating chill, which, however, did not discourage the mosquitoes at all.

"When we used to go camping we drove away the pests with a big campfire," said Nancy, thinking sadly of the good times she had had with her dad, Tommy and their friends at their swamp shack.

"No fires here," said Ida. "I heard Lieutenant Hauser say we must live just as if we were in range of enemy fire."

Each tent had one lantern that hung from the center pole. Under it Nancy nailed a puny mirror, which had to serve all of them in turn. They transformed canned goods packing boxes into chairs. Their individual toilet articles had to be fished out from their musette bags every time they were used.

As neither Mabel nor Tini had ever been camping, they had their initiation that night in sleeping under mosquito nets.

"Gosh, feels like a prison in here!" exclaimed Mabel.

"A prison you'll be glad to stay in," Nancy informed her, "when you hear how those mosquitoes sing outside it."

Long before day, however, each of the nurses was rolled in a blanket under her net and the discouraged pests had returned to their swamp muck.



The Nurses Washed Their Clothes in the River

In the days that followed the nurses discovered what it meant to do all their bathing and clothes washing in the shallows along the river shore. With only a compass to guide them, they learned to cut their way through the dense undergrowth of the river swamp. More than one rattler had to be killed in the process. But many others they left alone, as they had been given careful instructions about poisonous snakes and insects in various parts of the world. They crossed streams and lagoons in high boots, and several times ate from their mess kits the food they prepared for themselves on all-day hikes.

All nursing work was suspended while they were put through these physical fitness tests. To Nancy's amazement, Tini Hoffman stood hers along with the others, for she seemed to understand its significance. Tini became another person when there were no men around on whom to turn her charms.

They had been camping on the river shore only three days when at breakfast one morning they were given orders to be prepared to leave by noon.

"I'm surely ready to go," said Tini, who sat next to Nancy on the long bench at the table. "It's been an eternity since we had any mail."

They seemed so remote from civilization here that it seemed ages to Nancy also since she had heard what was going on in the rest of the world. But their high hopes proved premature as they were not yet scheduled for city lights.

Lieutenant Hauser gave the orders. "Every group is to take down its own tent, roll and pack it, according to previous instructions."

Buzzing with talk and excitement the nurses scattered to their various quarters. Nancy had left her washing on a bush over night, so snatched it up as she hurried back to begin packing. Ten minutes before twelve all tents had been cleared to the last tent peg, and the nurses began to pack their belongings into the trucks in which they had arrived. It was thrilling and exciting business, for none of the trainees knew where the next stop would be.

To their surprise the convoy did not move out by the way it had come. Instead it turned toward the river. The nurses had discovered no bridges in all their hikes up and down the small stream, so they were not surprised when the trucks had to cross the stream at a shallow ford. For the first time they had a sample of what it would be like to travel where there were no paved roads and bridges.

After leaving the river the trucks moved on to higher ground. They left the gray-bearded trees behind and plowed through sand-rutted roads winding through a pine forest. At noon they stopped to eat from tins under the sighing pines. Then they learned they were not on their way back to their original training center.

"In about two hours we will pitch our tents again," explained Lieutenant Hauser. "Some of your most difficult work is just ahead. Our camp will have a public highway on one side, but I warn you to talk to no one outside our unit, or give out any information about the tests you're going through."

"You mean we can't even write our friends about what we've been doing on this trip?" asked Mabel.

"Certainly not! Too many times spies have deduced from the nature of a group's training what its overseas destination might be."

A surprised murmur swept over the semicircle of young women sitting on the carpet of brown pine needles. Nancy wondered about the letters Tini had written every day while they were in camp. She herself had written long descriptions of their camping life to her parents, but she realized now those letters she had been hoping to mail would have to be torn up.

But Miss Hauser was continuing, "This period is a try-out for actual overseas duty. We must conform to all restrictions we would have there."

"Overseas duty!" Those were the magic words they had long wanted to hear. They brought a joyous outburst from the eager nurses, that ended in clapping.

"Aren't we the lucky blokes!" exclaimed Mabel.

"And say, it looks as though it's going to be in the tropics," Nancy whispered.

When they rose to go back to the trucks Tini began to complain. "It's utterly silly not letting us tell anything about what we've been doing in the swamp."

"Ah, gee, who minds that?" asked Mabel. "After all, we agreed to submit ourselves to this rigorous training."

"Of course we did," said Nancy. "I'm sure they have good reasons for all these restrictions. You can never tell what spies may make of the smallest bit of information that may leak out."

When they were rolling along again in their trucks, Nancy recalled how Tini had spent all her spare time back on the river shore, writing letters. Every night she had pushed her cot close to the lantern and sat under her mosquito bar to finish her writing. With her usual lack of consideration for others she kept the light burning till the tent swarmed with mosquitoes, moths and other insects.

"I bet she'll try to mail those letters in spite of what Lieutenant Hauser said," Nancy thought with disgust.

For the next twenty-four hours, however, there was no time to dwell on her tent mate's tendency to insubordination. The nurses had thought they had stiff training in the swamp, but they truly got a taste of real training when their journey ended in the pine thicket at three that afternoon. No sooner were the ropes tied to the last tent peg than they were ordered to a near-by field.

They found several soldiers with guns in the bushy cover on the edge of the field. When the nurses came up in their coveralls and G.I. shoes, Sergeant Tanner gave them instructions.

"We're going to let you find out what it feels like to be fleeing with the enemy firing behind you," he said, a mischievous twinkle in his brown eyes. "You're to start across the field, and every time a blast of firing comes you're to fall on your faces."

"We won't need any second invitation to do that," said Mabel with a giggle.

"When the whistle blows that's your order to advance again," continued the sergeant.

Nancy looked at the guns with some apprehension. She would be truly glad when this was over. Shorty was all a-jitter again.

"Nancy, I'll run close to you," she said.

"Sure," agreed Nancy, recalling their trying time at the gas chamber.

"Somehow I always feel safer when you're around."

At the signal they were off across the corn stubble left from last year's harvest. As a child, Nancy had read how that other Nancy—Nancy Hart, and other women of Georgia, advancing in a field of corn stubble had taken part in the battle of Kettle Creek, and driven the British from upper Georgia during the Revolution. How little she had dreamed that she, another Nancy, six generations later, would be rehearsing for battle in a war for liberty that encircled the globe in just such a field.

The nurses had run only about a hundred feet when there came a roar of gunfire behind and far overhead. Almost everyone wondered if her neighbor had been struck as she saw her dive for the earth.

"Golly Moses!" groaned Mabel. "I'm scared stiff!"

Nancy giggled nervously as she turned to see her pal's forehead smeared with dirt where she had tried to go through the corn furrow.

"Exciting, but awful!" she agreed.

At the sound of the whistle they were off again. Over and over the gruelling performance was repeated. Then they had to turn and come back across the field in the face of the fire. Nancy found this easier. At least they could see that the shots were going far above their heads.

Most of them came in across the goal line triumphantly, though some were slightly hysterical between laughter and fear. Only two or three staggered back, tense and shaken.

During the rest of the afternoon their men instructors gave them illustrations of jungle camouflage. In the densely wooded section below the pine thicket and bordering a creek, they had to try to locate a half dozen men whose helmets and garments had been camouflaged.

"Hide and seek when we were kids was never half as thrilling as this," said Nancy, as she and Mabel started off on the search.

Next morning Nancy, Mabel and Ida Hall were among the dozen nurses instructed to camouflage themselves and hide in the woods for the others to locate. Nancy had dabbled at painting in school, and did a fairly good imitation of bay leaves across Mabel's face and coveralls. Then before their small mirror she touched up her own countenance to look like woods' shadows. A net was secured over her helmet and in it she twisted pieces of jasmine vines and bay leaves, leaving some of the vines to trail down across her face.

They were given ten minutes to hide before the others of their unit were sent in search of them. Nancy found a spot of dense growth not far from the highway where a scuppernong vine trailed over some low bushes, and a near-by jasmine crowned an old stump with yellow blossoms. She stretched flat under the scuppernong, and stuck her head among the yellow blossoms. Certainly she could not have found a more fragrant hiding place.

She heard the shot fired for the search to begin, then came faint sounds of the cautious searchers. In spite of orders, whoops and little screeches escaped the nurses when anyone was discovered. Several passed close enough for Nancy to touch them, but still she wasn't noticed. Like an ostrich sticking his head in the sand, Nancy closed her eyes at each approach, feeling somehow that she was better hidden that way. Someone was coming near almost at a run when the shot was fired to end the race. Nancy was thrilled to know she was among those who had missed being found.

She was about to crawl out of her hiding place when she saw that the approaching girl was Tini Hoffman. Tini seemed to have no interest in the search, however, but was intent on reaching the highway. While Nancy had crouched under the bushes she had heard several cars go by. Cautiously she lifted her head as Tini passed and saw some letters sticking from her coverall pocket. Suspicion stirred. No doubt Tini was intent on mailing those letters she had written in the swamp describing their activities.

Instantly Nancy had a hunch that she meant to stop some passing car and get the driver to put her letters into the nearest post office. But she couldn't run out there and accuse her of such an intention. There was nothing to do but watch her.

She saw Tini running, and in the distance a farmer's truck coming down the hill. Nancy crawled from her hiding place and hurried from tree to bush on Tini's trail. The car was quite close now and Tini jumped a ditch and ran to the pavement. So intent was she on attracting the driver's attention, she was completely unaware of Nancy's approach.

Tini waved her letters and the driver slowed. When he stopped, she called out, "Will you drop these letters at the nearest post office for me?"

"Sure, lady," agreed the farmer at the wheel. "Glad to 'comodate you, miss."

With a leap across the ditch Nancy was at Tini's side. She reached for the letters as Tini extended them toward the man.

"You know you shouldn't do that, Tini!" she burst forth.

The farmer gaped in amazement at this strange creature draped in leaves and covered with splotches of paint.

"How dare you?" burst forth Tini. "I've a perfect right—"

"You have not!"

"Give me my letters."

"I will not! And if you try to take them I'll report the whole business to Lieutenant Hauser."

"Reckon I'll be moving on," said the farmer uneasily, looking at both of them as if he thought they had just escaped from an asylum. He chugged his motor into action, but before he rolled off he glanced at them compassionately and said, "Y'all better be good now and go back to the 'sylum, so Doc can take care o' you."

LETTERS

As the farmer's truck rolled away Tini glared at Nancy. She stomped her G.I. shoes on the pavement and burst forth, "How dare you? Hand me my letters!"

Laughing suddenly Nancy handed them to her. "He thought we had escaped from the asylum across the hill," she chuckled.

"You look like a lunatic!"

"And you act like one!"

Tini turned and stalked back into the pine thicket. Nancy took off her be-decked helmet, mopped her hot face with her sleeve and followed.

She finally overtook Tini and asked, "Why did you do that, Tini?"

"I have a right to mail letters if I like."

"Then why didn't you send them through the regular channels at the camp?"

"Who wants somebody pawing over your letters, looking at addresses?" asked Tini.

"I don't believe anybody pries into who our letters are sent to."

"And what business is it of yours?" Tini stopped suddenly and turned on Nancy.

"Any regulations given to this unit concern us all," stated Nancy firmly.

"Zat so!" Tini's tone was biting with sarcasm.

"And if I broke the regulations it would be your business to jack me up." Suddenly Nancy's tone became pleading. "Tini, can't you see that all these rules are for our own good, and the safety of the boys out yonder we're offering our lives to save?"

"I understand what we're going into the same as you, Nancy Dale. But some of the restrictions are utterly silly."

"We've got to trust the judgment of our superiors about that. They understand the whole situation better than we do."

"I see no reason why we can't tell our family and friends what we've been doing. I didn't let out any military secrets in those letters."

"The other night under the net you asked me how to spell camouflage. You were evidently telling them about our instructions in camouflage."

Tini's fair face flushed. "Well, what of it?" she snapped. "It's no secret that our men use camouflage."

"You shouldn't write about it for the simple reason that Lieutenant Hauser ordered us to say nothing of the things we've been doing on this trip. Those are orders. The very fact that you tried to get somebody outside to post your letters proves you have a guilty conscience about the whole business."

"And where did you get the right to jack me up about anything I do?"

"I have only the right that every American should use—to try to see that information about our military activities doesn't get into the hands of our enemies."

"So you're implying that my family and friends are enemies!" Tini's eyes were flashing fire now.

"Oh, Tini, this is so absurd," mourned Nancy.

"Of course it's absurd your trying to stop my sending mail out."

Suddenly Nancy lost all patience. She stopped short and by her very manner forced Tini to stop. "You have no reason in you, Tini!" she exclaimed. "Now I'll give you two choices—you either hand those letters to Lieutenant Hauser to be mailed, or burn them."

"So! Since when have I had to take orders from you?"

Nancy ignored the question and continued, "You know perfectly well that the rest of us tore up the letters we wrote in the swamp before we knew we were not to write descriptions of what we had been doing. Those letters you have must have been written back there. You've had no time for writing since we came on here."

Tini ignored the plain truth with which she had been faced and started on toward camp. Nancy caught up with her, saying, "If you don't do one or the other you'll place me in the embarrassing position of having to report what just happened to Lieutenant Hauser."

"So you're one of the spying, little tattletales!"

Nancy's brown eyes were full of fire now as she said, "Tini Hoffman, this is no schoolgirl business we're in. Thousands of lives may sometime be at stake because some thoughtless person like you has seen no sense in certain censorship restrictions. If we don't conform to those regulations now, it'll be too late to learn how when we get over there. I'm taking no chances, Tini, no matter what you or anyone else may call me."

With this statement Nancy swung away from Tini and took the nearest path back to camp. Before the tent tops were in sight, however, Tini overtook her.

"All right," she said in a peevish tone, "if it'll ease your pain I'll burn the dern letters."

"That's the sensible thing, Tini."

They stalked on under the sighing pines in silence. Nancy felt quite wretched over the whole situation, not only at Tini's persistent disregard of the regulations, but at the awkwardness of her own position in discovering her at it, time and again.

However, she was determined to see that Tini did burn the letters, and said as they came in sight

of the cook's fire, "You could burn the letters there, Tini, and have it over with."

Sullenly Tini stuck her four letters into the flames. Nancy paused a moment beside her to see that they really burned. While they waited a group of nurses had come in with a camouflaged captive.

"Oh, there's Tini!" one of them called. "Did you catch Nancy?"

"Me catch Nancy!" exclaimed Tini with mock humility. "It's Nancy who catches me always!"

"What do you mean?" asked Ida Hall, who was in the group. She glanced from one to the other, sensing that something was very wrong between them.

"Nancy's much too good for me to catch her at anything," continued Tini, unmindful of how her sarcasm might be taken.

When she stalked off alone Nancy spoke to Ida wearily, "I was still hiding when the gun was fired."

"Then you and Janice Williams were the only two who weren't caught," Lieutenant Hauser told her a few minutes later. "You'll have the honor of presiding at supper and serving the ice cream and cake."

This brought exclamations of delight, which only subsided when Lieutenant Hauser lifted her hand for silence. "But I have something that I think will be even more welcome," she said.

"Hope it's mail from home," said Nancy. During the past week she had longed for that letter her mother had been writing on the night she heard about Tommy.

"Exactly what it is," said Miss Hauser.

As the mail was dug from the big mail pouch and handed to the nurses, happy exclamations went up. One by one the girls went to their own quarters to enjoy their letters in the privacy of their cots. Nancy kicked off her muddy shoes, and discarded her dirty, painted coveralls and sat cross-legged under her mosquito net. She ripped open her mother's oldest letter. She couldn't keep back the tears as she read the brave words, written while her own heart must have been so heavy.

"We must not let ourselves think for a moment that our Tommy is dead," her mother wrote. "If he is a prisoner of the Japs he will need all the prayers and helpful thoughts we can send him. Only last week at church Philip Brinkley, who was shot down over Germany and made a prisoner, told us a little about his escape. But the thing that impressed me most was what he said about our prayers. He said he could actually feel the prayers we sent up for him at our mid-week meeting. You know that's when we especially hold thoughts for those who have gone over. We must make Tommy feel our support and God's that way, too, darling."

Tears were swimming in Nancy's eyes when she finished the letter, not because she feared Tommy was really dead, but for the beautiful bravery of her mother's letter. She dried her eyes finally and picked up the rest of her mail. Two were from girl friends back home, another from an old beau.

Then her heart skipped a beat when she saw the last was from Australia. It wasn't Tommy's writing, though the script was slightly familiar. When she ripped open the letter she saw it was from her mother's friend, Miss Anna Darien, in Sydney. Miss Anna and her mother had been in college together. Instead of marrying, Miss Anna had specialized in philosophy and was now a lecturer of international repute. The war had caught her in Australia, and there she must stay for the duration.

When Nancy read the prized letter she called across to Mabel on the next cot, "Say, listen to this—Miss Anna Darien, a friend of ours in Australia, saw Tommy recently."

"Not really! What does she say about him?" Mabel asked, dropping her own letters to listen to Nancy.

"Here—I'll read it to you. She says, 'You can imagine my surprise when Tommy, on a brief furlough, came to call on me. It was hard to believe that anyone could mature so fast in three years, since I saw him back in the states.'"

"When was that written?" asked Mabel.

Nancy glanced at the date. "Oh my goodness—two months ago. Took a long time to come. They used to reach us in a month."

"Quite a while before your brother took that fatal flight."

"Yes. But it's wonderful to hear from somebody who's seen him that recently."

"Go on. What else did she say?" urged Mabel.

"'He asked me to write you'," continued Nancy. "'He knew you would be delighted to hear from someone who's seen him over here. You'd really be proud of this brother of yours, Nancy. What a responsibility it is to be a pilot on a bomber! Already his chest is gay with decorations, but to me he's the same dear boy he used to be when I visited your home. He told me to tell you not to worry about him, that if the Nips get on his trail he'll play the same trick on them he used to play on you. He said you'd remember his childhood prank that always brought you to tears.'"

By this time all four nurses in the tent were listening and Ida Hall asked, "What was that, Nancy?"

Nancy was trembling between tears and laughter as she explained, "He used to play dead! And he trained our old dog, Bozo, to do it, too. I used to tag him around something awful, and just to get even he'd sometimes sprawl on the ground, looking dead as Hector. And Bozo would be near by, his old legs flopped over. Many times I thought Tommy wasn't breathing. I'd shake him and begin to cry, then he'd jump up and grab me. Then I'd be mad sure enough!"

"Not a bad idea—that playing dead," commented Mabel. "One of the fellows we had in the hospital back yonder said he tried it once, and the Japs just passed right over him in the field. If he'd batted an eyelash they would have jabbed one of their awful bayonets right through his vitals."



Nancy Couldn't Keep Back the Tears

Before Nancy had a chance to read all her letters the warning bell sounded for them to prepare for chow. She had only time for a face and hands washing, using her helmet as a basin. A clean pair of coveralls was the extent of her dress-up for the honored place beside Janice Williams at the table.

Every one was in a high mood. They all made merry over the best dessert they had had since they left their original camp. Through the hilarity Nancy felt an undercurrent of expectancy, as if some important news were about to break through. Even Lieutenant Hauser seemed in a buoyant mood.

When all had been served ice cream and cake Janice leaned closer to Nancy and said, "I hear that Major Reed came out on the truck that brought the treat from the Canteen."

"When?"

"While we were out on camouflage."

"Something must be cooking," Nancy said with anticipation.

"Nell Streets cut her foot so didn't go on the hunt. She saw the major and Lieutenant Hauser having a long confab."

"Wonder what's up?"

"Nell has a hunch we're going to be alerted before so long."

"They've really been putting us through the paces. Wouldn't it be wonderful if they sent us to the South Pacific?"

Tini Hoffman sat next to Janice, and Nancy suddenly became aware that she was listening to their conversation.

"I can fully understand now why Lieutenant Hauser insists that we say nothing about the nature of our training," continued Janice. "It surely indicates the tropics. That information in a spy's hands might place a few bombs in our path."

"That's exactly why we can't be too careful," said Nancy.

She glanced at Tini, and saw that she actually had the conscience to flush under the memory of what she had been about to do. Later as they returned to their tents in the twilight Tini overtook Nancy.

"I'm glad you made me burn those letters, Nancy," she said. "It was thoughtless of me to try to send them."

"I'm glad you realize it, Tini. Of course it's not easy for any of us to submit to so many restrictions, but we have to submit if we expect to be of any use."

"I was afraid my best beau would think I didn't care, it's been so long since I sent him a letter. But I had two from him just now. He says he knows there'll often be long intervals when we can't hear from each other. He's so understanding," murmured Tini.

"We've got to think of the good of our unit and our boys over yonder, Tini," said Nancy, "and ourselves last." But she wasn't so certain, even as she spoke, that the spoiled Tini would think of anything but her own wishes next time she was tempted to break the regulations.

PORT OF EMBARKATION

At breakfast the following morning Lieutenant Hauser rapped for attention with her knife. Expectant faces turned quickly toward her, for the feeling that important changes were just ahead had swept the camp like a tidal wave.

"I have good news for you," said Lieutenant Hauser.

The nurses waited for no more. Their eager exclamations swelled into cheers that swept the mess tent.

An odd expression tightened their commanding officer's face a moment before she continued, "I see our enemies are not the only ones who get a foresight of our movements."

This brought an alarmed silence. But Miss Hauser quickly relieved their tension by smiling as she said, "Naturally you've been looking forward to, and preparing for this news. We have been ordered to a port of embarkation."

This really brought cheers that rang through the pine woods.

"When? Where?" Two thoughtless ones asked eagerly.

"Those are sealed orders," replied Lieutenant Hauser. "We'll know where only when we get there. My immediate orders are to tell you to be ready to roll out of this camp in an hour."

Those who had not eaten all their breakfast forgot to finish, as they hurried off to pack and roll up their tents.

"Just a minute," she called after the too-eager ones. "The orders I have already given about writing of our activities are more binding than ever. If you must write home merely say you're well and busy. There was one train wreck not so long ago when someone let it slip about troop movements. You don't want to invite any such disaster again."

For the first time Nancy felt a gulf widening between herself and the two loved ones back home. This was really her first great test.

Someone had asked Miss Hauser a question Nancy had not heard, but now she listened while their First Lieutenant said, "I think it might be safer just to send out cards. Then you'll be more careful not to say on them anything that might betray our movements."

At noon that day their convoy drew up at the rear of a hotel in a city so large it had taken them a half hour to reach its busy center. They were herded into a long room where a hotel clerk assigned them their quarters. There were to be only two to a room once more, so Nancy and Mabel managed to get together again.

When Nancy found there was a bath with shower she was exuberant. "Won't it be wonderful to get really clean all over once more!"

She was peeling off her coveralls as she talked.

"We'd better enjoy the clean-up while we can get it," Mabel warned. "I figure we've got a long train journey ahead no matter whether we embark on the Atlantic or the Pacific."

The changes were swift from then on. They had lunch and an elaborate dinner that evening in a private dining room. To Nancy's delight Major Reed had lunch with them. Before leaving the dining room Captain Lewis, who had arrived with him, gave them a talk, praising their diligence and cooperation during the training period.

Just before she finished she said, "I would suggest that you stay in your rooms and rest as you must be on your way again during the night." That was all. No one knew what would be their method of transportation or where their destination.

"Might as well be a prisoner," complained Tini, when she packed into the elevator beside Nancy. "I wanted to get my hair set. I look a fright."

Nancy nudged her and whispered, "Be quiet! Elevator boys have ears, too."

The nurses found the hall of the floor they had taken over jammed with baggage brought over from their basic training camp. Nancy's and Mabel's foot lockers had already been placed in their room.

"Everything seems to run smooth as magic," said Mabel. "Wish they'd let us go to the stores to get a few things."

"I imagine we'll be given time to get the last-minute necessities at the port of embarkation," said Nancy. "I hear we have to take more shots and physical exams after we get there. That takes time."

At eleven o'clock that night they marched aboard their Pullman, as Nancy had seen those soldiers file into the fatal eight cars less than six weeks earlier. It seemed incredible that she had learned so much in such a short time.

Though Nancy was generally ready for sleep she felt wide awake that night. She had no patience to wait till morning to learn whether they were traveling east or west.

Two nurses had been assigned to each lower berth and one to the upper. Nancy, Mabel and Tini had one section, so Nancy quickly volunteered to sleep in the lower with Mabel.

"You're larger than either of us," she said to Tini. "You'll need more stretching room."

"Thanks," said Tini, accepting the favor as if she were really more entitled to it than the others. "I never slept with anyone—know I wouldn't get a wink."

When the two friends packed into the lower Nancy whispered, "I can hardly wait till morning to see whether we're going east or west."

"Would seem too good to be true to be sent to the South Pacific," said Mabel.

"If training's any indication they've certainly been preparing us for that."

They turned out the light and after a while Mabel raised the shade a little. She lifted her head and peered out. After an interval she whispered, "Nancy, we really are heading west!"

"How can you tell?"

"By the stars. See—yonder's the North Star, and the Big Dipper low on the horizon."

Nancy remembered enough from her Girl Scout days to recognize the northern constellation at the left of the train. For several minutes she kept lifting her head to peer out, and assure herself that they were really keeping an even course into the west. Finally she settled back with a feeling of great satisfaction and tried to sleep.

The Pullman was silent now, except for the humming of the wheels beneath them. Nancy was almost asleep when she heard a peculiar sound overhead. She opened her eyes and saw through a crack at the edge of the berth that Tini's light still burned. She concentrated her attention on the almost imperceptible sound. It was like the scratching of a pen on paper. Instantly she knew Tini was at her letter writing again.

"Do you hear something, Mabel?" she asked, nudging her friend.

Mabel lifted a sleepy head to listen. "Somebody writing with a scratchy pen. Must be Tini. Never would have thought she'd be careful enough to keep a diary."

"Maybe it's a letter."

"But Miss Hauser asked us only to send cards."

"I'm afraid Tini doesn't give much heed to what Miss Hauser asks."

"Well, it's not my little red wagon," said Mabel, and settled back on her pillow. Her regular breathing soon indicated that she slept.

Nancy stayed awake long after the pen scratching stopped, wondering uneasily about Tini. It seemed uncanny how the girl was always stuck right under her nose. Did her superior officers do it by deliberate intent? Before she finally slept she made up her mind to be more alert than ever where Tini was concerned.

The following two days, however, were so filled with the wonders of travel that Nancy temporarily forgot that Tini could be such a thorn in the flesh. She had never been west of the Mississippi. For the first time she saw the great western plains and thrilled when the mountain ranges beyond loomed on the horizon. She had never dreamed mere color could be so intoxicating until their long train crossed the first canyon. It was like a fantastic dream, yet a sight never to be forgotten.

The nurses had the best food the diner afforded. On their swaying journeys to and from the diner they discovered that the train contained many soldiers. None of the nurses lacked for diverting companionship then. But Tini couldn't be satisfied with one, she must keep two or three buzzing around her all the time.

On the second day at noon Nancy and Mabel were in the diner when the train stopped longer than usual at a small-town station. Nancy, sitting next the window, glanced out to see Tini hurrying across the tracks, and into the waiting room. Nancy could have sworn her right pocket was bulky with something, letters no doubt. Tini was gone only a few minutes before she returned carrying a magazine, but Nancy was sure her pocket looked less bulky.

"Stubborn as a mule," said Nancy to herself in disgust. "She was determined to send a letter to Carl Benton."

In spite of the number of men available many of the nurses spent their time playing cards, or catching up on their magazine and book reading, for which there had been little chance during their weeks of training.

On the third day they de-trained at the city of embarkation. Army trucks were waiting to take them to another temporary abode. Again it was a large hotel, where an entire floor was assigned to them. Cots had been put in the double bedrooms, and again Nancy was packed in with the room-mates she had had in the tents. They had only an hour before they were to report in room three for instructions. Everyone was eager to hear about the next step, and the room was full before the hour was up.

"First and most important," said Lieutenant Hauser, when she stood before them once more, "you are to hint to no one that we are preparing to embark. No nurse is to leave the hotel without signing the register when she goes out and when she returns. I prefer that you go shopping or to the theater in groups. There are plenty of Red Cross volunteers ready to show you around. You may want to buy many last minute items not included in government issues. Each of you may take one of these typed lists of suggestions, so you won't forget something important you may need out there. Do all you want to do promptly, for when we are alerted no girl can leave the quarters."

Lieutenant Hauser glanced at her notes and added, "Nor are you to have any guests in your rooms. And everyone must check in by eleven o'clock."

Nancy was relieved that they would be allowed to go out and do some last-minute shopping.

"I understand the Red Cross has planned several social functions for you, which you must attend as a unit. There will be one dance here at the hotel at which you may wear evening clothes." She smiled knowingly. "You may not have a chance to dress up again for a long time. I want you to enjoy yourselves as much as you can here—go to the movies, see some good shows, but always be careful to observe strictly the rules I have laid down."

The nurses found, however, that the evenings were about the only time they had for recreation, for there were numberless things to be done in preparation for departure. When Mabel read her list of instructions she fell back on her bed.

"I'll never get my last-minute shopping done," she groaned. "I'll feel like a bug-house by the time we finish with all these inoculations—bubonic plague, cholera, typhus, yellow fever."

Nancy scoffed. "You're such a wind-bag, Mabel. You know we've already had lots of them. This final checkup won't be so bad."

"At least I'm already immunized to smallpox and have had my typhoid shots."

"But say, doesn't that list really spell the tropics to you?" Nancy asked happily. "Wouldn't Dad and Mom be thrilled to know I'm headed in Tommy's direction?"

"With present restrictions on mail it'll be a long time before they hear that," Mabel reminded her.

"Anybody heard when we're sailing?" asked Tini.

"If you ask me I don't want to know," Ida Hall told her. "Too much responsibility to have such knowledge."

"I figure it'll take at least a week to unwind all this red tape," said Mabel. "They even want us to make our wills. Golly Moses, I haven't anything to will anybody! Just a few pieces of cheap jewelry. Money's never stuck to my fingers long enough for me to accumulate anything."

"You'll be getting more pay overseas," Nancy reminded her. "And there won't be any place to spend it, if we really get near the front lines."

However, Mabel did make out a will of sorts. The two friends went together to attend to this bit of business. Nancy's will was only a simple statement leaving all she had to her parents. As they left the office where their signatures had been witnessed Mabel said with rare seriousness, "I haven't any near kin, Nancy, so I'm leaving all I have to you."

"Oh, Mabel!" she exclaimed, her eyes suddenly blinded with tears.

"Not that I have anything much, but—but I'd just like you to know how you rate with me."

Nancy squeezed her friend's arm and said softly, "I've never had a friend like you, Mabel—so close I mean. You surely find out about people when you live as close to them as we have these last weeks."

"Makes us seem we've already known each other a lifetime."

Mabel, always afraid of seriousness and sentiments said with a laugh as they approached their room, "I wouldn't have told you about it, if I'd had enough to make it worth your while to put a spider in my dumpling."

ALERT

During those first busy days at the hotel Nancy saw little of Tini. Though she managed to get in always before eleven, and was at hand for breakfast, she took most of her other meals out.

One noon when Nancy, Mabel and Shorty were on a shopping expedition they came across Tini in a swanky Chinese restaurant, sitting at a table with a smart-looking woman, obviously about ten years her senior.

Nancy's trio, in a high mood, was having a final fling. They had carefully checked over their funds to be sure they would have enough for a meal in this expensive restaurant. They were surprised and not altogether pleased to find Tini ahead of them with someone who would probably foot her bill.

"She hasn't paid a particle of attention to what Miss Hauser said about our going in groups," Mabel grumbled on seeing Tini.

"Has she ever paid attention to any regulations she could break and get by with?" asked Shorty, whose round, babyish eyes took in more than her guileless face betrayed.

Nancy gave her attention to the menu card, but when the other two were occupied with thoughts of food she sent the woman sitting opposite Tini a critical look. The stranger was a blonde like Tini, but her chic hat and smart clothes could not hide the hard sophistication in her face. A group of WACs came into the dining room, and Nancy saw the woman's eyes follow them to their seats. Two army nurses, not of their unit, entered a moment later and again she trailed them. Nancy made up her mind to ask Tini later about the woman, then tried to dismiss the unpleasant subject, and enjoy this meal they had been anticipating.

The chop suey and Chinese tea proved to be all that had been anticipated. Though they dawdled long over the food Tini and her companion were still at their table when Nancy and her friends rose to go.

When they had left their tips and paid for their food Mabel said in an impish tone, "I've gotter pass by Tini's table on the way out."

"Now, Mabel, what are you up to?" asked Nancy.

Mabel made a face at her and retorted, "None of your business!"

Tini's back had been to them, but now she glanced up and saw them, and Nancy noticed the flustered look on her face.

"Hiya, Blondie!" burst forth Mabel. "Chow was swell, wasn't it?"

Tini nodded at them coolly.

At the door Mabel said, "Oh, boy, did she and her high-brow friend snoot us!"

"High-brow, did you say?" asked Nancy in a sarcastic tone.

"You shouldn't tease her so, Mabel," Shorty chided. "Tini's such a stickler for form."

"Social form only," added Nancy. "Not military form."

"Dumb bloke! That's all the sense she has," said Mabel in disgust.

The girls spent another hour shopping, then were too weary for any more that day, so returned to the hotel. They stopped in the lobby for Mabel to get a magazine, and Shorty some mints. Too tired to stand, Nancy dropped into one of the large chairs in sight of the elevator. She was sitting there in a fog of weariness when she saw Tini and her luncheon companion come in and ring for the elevator.

"So," thought Nancy, "you're either taking her up to our room—which is against regulations, or she lives in the hotel herself. In either case I mean to find out where she goes."

Nancy had no time to let Mabel and Shorty know she was going up, but made a dive for the elevator as the passengers crammed in. Their room was on the eighth floor, but to her relief Tini's friend got off at the seventh.

Several other nurses got off at the next floor with Nancy and Tini, but the two girls found themselves side by side as they approached their own door.

"Mabel certainly embarrassed me in the restaurant this noon," said Tini in an ugly mood.

"Oh, you know Mabel!" exclaimed Nancy. She slipped her key in the lock and opened the door.

"She's very common and loud at times!" snapped Tini.

"But with a heart of gold," stated Nancy. "I'd trust Mabel with my own soul."

"Hump!" grunted Tini as she tossed her cap to the bed.

Nancy sat down on her cot and slipped her aching feet into her bedroom slippers.

"That was a beautifully dressed woman you were with. Where'd you meet her?" asked Nancy.

"She's Carl's aunt, Mrs. Webber. He made me promise to look her up if we got to the west coast."

"He did. Does she live at this hotel? I noticed she got off at the floor below."

"Oh, no. She's only visiting here—came to meet me."

"I see. But how could she know you were here?"

"Carl wired her."

"How did Carl know?"

Suddenly Tini flared. "And what business is it of yours?"

"Oh, what a nettle you are!" said Nancy.

Mabel came in a few minutes later. "You really got ahead of us," she told Nancy. "Didn't know you were coming on up." Then her gaze fell on Tini, and she left the rest of her remark unfinished.

"Sure," said Tini, sitting up suddenly, "she had to come up and spy on me and my friend."

"Why Tini Hoffman!" exclaimed Ida Hall, lifting her head from the bed where she had been recovering from the after-effects of some shots. "How can you be so rude?"

Mabel went to the foot of Tini's bed and fairly shook it in her rage. "Let me tell you something, Tini Hoffman. If you didn't have a bad conscience about the way you've broken the regulations ever since you got into this unit, you wouldn't make such a remark."

"Mabel's right," Ida Hall agreed. "Anyone who can't stand up under watching by all the rest, has no right to stay with us. This is serious business, Tini. You can bet your bottom dollar none of us is going to let anything crooked get by."

Tini began turning the pages of a magazine to show them how little importance she put on what they said. A strained silence filled the room, and Nancy was thankful when it was time to dress for dinner. Mabel was a fast dresser and sat checking over the list of necessities while she waited for the others.

"Well, I think I have everything mentioned on this list that I want to take," she concluded. "Do you gals want me to read it over to see if you've forgotten anything?"

"Good idea," said Nancy, giving her auburn curls a final touch. She had had her hair set early that morning, and wondered when she would ever get inside a hairdresser's again.



*"She's Carl's Aunt, Mrs. Webber," Tini Told
Nancy*

“Bathrobe, bedroom slippers, brassieres, garters, garter belt, girdle, handkerchiefs, money belt —” Mabel began.

“For goodness’ sake!” burst forth Tini. “Can’t you see I’m reading? I’ve checked that list a dozen times and have everything on it.”

“If them’s orders, Shavetail Hoffman, I’ll desist!” exclaimed Mabel, snapping to attention and giving Tini a mocking salute. “Come on, girls, let’s beat it,” she added, turning to Ida and Nancy. “I’m ready for more chow.”

Though Mabel tried to dissipate the stormy atmosphere by her light mood, Nancy could not shake off her depression and a sense of foreboding. The nurses and medical officers had a long, private dining room at the rear of the first floor. Nancy noticed that for a change everyone seemed to be on hand.

Major Reed was in a high mood as he sat with a group of his medical officers. Nancy’s heart swelled with pride when she glanced from one to the other of their personnel. Here were medical men trained in all branches of healing, and nurses with various specializations for assisting them.

At the end of the meal, when Nancy was finishing a piece of lemon chiffon pie, she glanced up to note that the room had been cleared of waiters, and Sergeant Bohler was standing at the rear door by which they entered. Then all eyes were drawn, as if by some strong attraction, toward Major Reed, now standing by his table.

“I have the privilege of informing you,” he began, “that we have been alerted. No member of this unit will leave the hotel again, nor may you use any telephone, send out any mail, or by any means communicate with any person outside this room that we will embark in a few hours. Everyone must be packed and ready to leave at any moment. When you come down to meals again come prepared to march to your ship, if necessary. Everything in your rooms must be ready for instant departure.”

No cheers greeted this long-anticipated order, for any demonstration might bring information to alert spies they knew were not far off. Sergeant Bohler left the door, the waiters returned to clear off the tables and the nurses and doctors went straight to their quarters.

When their door was closed Mabel burst forth exuberantly, “Boy, oh boy! To think we have sailing orders at last!”

“I’ve got that hollow, going-away feeling for the first time since I left home,” said Ida Hall a little wistfully.

“It surely does make you feel serious when you stop to think what we may have to go through before we get back to these shores,” said Nancy.

“But we’re going to see the world, gals, before we get back!” Mabel was the only one who had no close relatives to leave behind, so her adventure-loving wings had no silken cords to bind them to home shores.

“Wish they’d waited another day, dern it!” exclaimed Tini. “Just my luck though. Wonder how long we’ll have to wait.” It was the first time she had spoken since they returned to the room.

“I imagine Major Reed doesn’t even know that,” said Nancy. “We’ll just have to be ready to go at any minute.” She was already gathering up her toilet articles from the dresser as she spoke.

“I’ve heard they often go aboard ship about midnight,” said Ida. “We’d better keep on most of our clothes.”

It was about ten o’clock before they finished packing and turned out the lights. Taking off only their coats, the four nurses lay down on top of their beds. Nancy dropped into a light sleep, but was roused by an almost imperceptible movement near the door well after midnight. Though the room was in total darkness she knew someone was moving across the carpet. A beam of light fell across Tini’s empty bed as the door was opened with noiseless caution, and Tini herself stepped into the hall.

EMBARKATION

The moment Nancy saw Tini step into the hall she knew she was intent on making some secret contact with someone outside their unit. With noiseless speed she jumped from her bed and followed through the door in her stocking feet. In spite of her prompt action Tini had vanished by the time she reached the dimly lighted hall.

She couldn't have rung for the elevator and taken it in so short a time. With swift insight Nancy surmised she was headed for her friend on the seventh floor by way of the fire-escape stairs. How glad she was she had made a point of asking Mrs. Webber's room number at the desk last night before dinner.

For an instant Nancy stood there in the silent hall in an agony of indecision. What should she do? She was tortured between two speculations—that Tini, herself, was a spy in their midst, or had innocently, but foolhardily let herself be drawn into a net of spies. No matter which she was it seemed obvious her intention was to let Mrs. Webber know they were alerted.

She thought of Major Reed. Even had she known his room number she would have hesitated to go to his room at this hour of the night. Lieutenant Hauser was three doors down the hall. Even while Nancy was trying to decide what she should do, she was on her way there.

To her relief she saw light under the crack of Miss Hauser's door and found her superior officer fully dressed. Nancy wasted no time in preliminary explanations, but burst forth as soon as she was inside. "Tini Hoffman has gone out—to Mrs. Webber's room, 705," she said. "She's Carl Benton's sister. They'll find out we're alerted."

"Thanks, Nancy. This is not unexpected," Lieutenant Hauser said, and acted promptly, picking up the phone. "Connect me with Major Reed, room 829," she told the operator.

A moment later she was saying into the phone, "This is Blanche Hauser. Nancy has reported the expected. Set off the action—705."

She was as cool as a veteran under fire when she put the phone back in its cradle. "We're not surprised, Nancy," she said, seeing the girl's puzzled look. "We have the trap set, and had to let things go this far in order to spring it."

Nancy's brown eyes were wide with wonder as she asked, "Then Tini *is* a spy?"

"I think not—just a fool in the hands of spies!"

Nancy wanted to cry, but she couldn't let her superior officer see her give way in this crisis.

Miss Hauser came to where Nancy had dropped limply on the foot of the bed. She placed her hand affectionately on her shoulder and said, "Of course I know all that's happened before, through Major Reed. You've been wonderful, Nancy—dependable as old Plymouth Rock. Without such as you our national freedom would long since have been undermined."

"It hasn't been an easy position," Nancy admitted.

"We've been fully aware of that. But when you stop to realize you've probably saved our convoy from some horrible disaster what does any of that matter?"

"Are you sure it's not too late?"

"I hope so. Your prompt action has always been taken just in time. You'd better go back to your room now, or your other roommates may rouse and be curious."

"I'm afraid I'll never sleep, not knowing what's happening."

"You deserve a full explanation, Nancy, but it probably won't come before sailing. I'm not at liberty to say more. Major Reed will have to do that."

With what composure she could command, Nancy went back to her room and crept to her cot without rousing the others. She strained her ears at the sound of the elevator gliding up and down several times, but it told her nothing of the stark drama being enacted on the floor below. Never before had she felt so like a small cog in a gigantic machine. She must perform her function efficiently, leaving to a greater mind the finished product that the machine turned out. Toward dawn she finally went to sleep and didn't rouse till her two friends were ready for breakfast.

"Tini must be hungry this morning," said Ida Hall. "She's already gone down."

"But she left her coat and cap," Mabel observed.

Nancy said not a word as she touched up her lips. When they returned to their room an hour later all the things Tini had left on her bed, musette bag, pistol belt, canteen, short coat and overcoat, were gone.

When Ida Hall commented on this, Mabel observed, "Her foot locker and suitcase, too. Something's gone wrong, girls—wonder what?"

Nancy could only remain silent, feeling miserable and deceitful, even while she wondered what had actually become of Tini. When nothing more was seen of their blond roommate by lunchtime, Mabel confronted Miss Hauser with a question about her in the dining room.

Miss Hauser's manner was as casual as could be when she replied. "Miss Hoffman didn't pass all the tests," she said. "Some do fail to get over at the last minute, you know."

Silently the trio went back to their room. Each sat on the side of her bed, staring into space. After an interval Mabel said, "She didn't fail on her physicals, I can bet you that. Tini's strong as a mule."

"And just as stubborn about having her own way," Ida asserted.

Nancy offered no opinion, for fear she would betray more than she should. The afternoon dragged

by. Nancy brought Shorty in to be a fourth at a table of bridge, and they played until time to go down for dinner.

"I didn't think units were held over, after alert, more than twenty-four hours," complained Mabel. "Sure wish we'd get on the move."

"Maybe the convoy is delayed somehow," suggested Ida.

Nancy wondered if Tini had anything to do with the delay. She tried to forget the unpleasant incident. When they were in the dining room that evening she suggested, "You girls had better lay in a good meal. This may be the last you'll get before you're too seasick to eat."

They took her advice and put in full orders. A few in the crowded dining room had started eating and Nancy had taken only one bite from the breast of a chicken when Major Reed came in. His face told all who turned toward him that the moment had come.

"This is it!" he said, when he rapped for attention. "You will file out immediately to the room across the hall and wait further orders. Your room baggage will be taken care of."

Now they understood why they had been told to come to meals, prepared for marching orders. They filed into a drawing-room across the hall. Some did not even sit down, expecting to be on their way to the docks at once. However, when an hour passed and marching orders had not yet come, they lit more cigarettes and hunted seats. Nancy, Mabel, Ida and Shorty huddled together on a window seat.

"Why in heck didn't they let us finish our dinner?" Mabel wanted to know. "I'll see that wasted, juicy steak to my dying day."

"I'd be glad for even a drink of water," said Shorty.

"No law against drinking from your canteen," Nancy told her. "I guess this situation rates as an emergency."

The time dragged into an eternity. Everyone wondered what had happened. Would they be sent back to their rooms for another night's sleep? Then at long last Major Reed appeared to give them the final alert. Nancy glanced at her watch. It was ten minutes of twelve. They had been waiting in this room over four hours. She wondered what was back of the delay.

They were packed into trucks waiting in the alley at the back of the hotel. Then by dark, back streets, their convoy approached the dock. When the nurses were lined up beside a long warehouse Nancy's heart swelled with pride that she was one of this brave, snappy unit. Every nurse wore her dress uniform and carried her overcoat over one arm. Her musette bag, filled with a score of oddments she might need in an emergency, was slung over her shoulder. In her pistol belt was a first-aid kit, and on her left hip was a freshly filled canteen.

With a rhythmic shush, shush of many feet they passed by the long warehouse, and went across the dock to the great ship rising like a giant from the water. To Nancy it seemed incredible that anything so large could remain afloat. She had taken only two ocean trips in her life, and those were on small, coast-wise steamers between Charleston and New York in the good old days when no subs darkened the waters, nor death wings roared overhead.

They marched up the long gangplank and were directed to their quarters. Everything moved with oiled smoothness. The staterooms had been turned into bunk rooms. Some of the larger ones, that had once been luxury suites, had as many as sixteen bunks lining the walls, three tiers deep with a double bunk to each tier. Fortunately Nancy, Mabel, Ida and Shorty got together once more in a small four-bunk cabin. Each nurse would have to use her bunk for lying, dressing and sitting, for all floor space was filled with the hand luggage.

Each nurse hung her helmet on the head of the bunk, close to her life preserver and well-filled canteen. In her musette bag Nancy had crammed what she thought she might need in case they had to take to lifeboats. She had a small flashlight, some milk chocolate, a change of undies, an extra pair of dark glasses, cleansing tissues, a small comb, two tins of concentrated food, and many other odds and ends.

An hour after going aboard the nurses slipped off their coats and caps and stretched out on the bunks, prepared to jump up the moment there was any indication of leaving the dock. But for hours longer there came that steady tramp, tramp of soldiers' feet as the transport was packed to sardine-tin tightness.

It was still dark, however, when Mabel shook Nancy out of a sound sleep to say, "I think we're moving!"

The other two girls were already pulling on their overcoats to go on deck, and together they rushed out. Faint streaks of dawn were in the sky. Hawsers had already been released and the giant ship was being eased out of the harbor by tugs that looked like midgets in comparison.

The first light of day was striking glints from the water when they slipped through the submarine net at the mouth of the harbor. The net-tender waved at them, and Nancy thought a little wistfully that this was the only farewell they had had. She watched the shoreline of our country recede, not without a feeling of sadness dulling her joy. But her sadness was more for those she left behind than any fear of what might be ahead. She was young and strong and eager to do her share, fully aware of the privilege and responsibility of being part of this great task force.

Her group, huddled close together, had fallen silent when suddenly the loud speaker began to bellow, "Life jackets—all personnel must wear life jackets."

There was a general exodus to individual quarters to don the uncomfortable rig, which they dubbed their "Mae Wests." Not until their journey ended, weeks hence, could they be separated from them again.

Nancy couldn't sit still after she was safely girded in her life jacket. She kept popping her head up to the porthole to see what was happening outside. One of the others filled the spot every time she vacated it.

They had orders to line up for breakfast at seven. The nurses were scheduled to eat first. It was an hour, however, before they had been served and could finish eating.

When they reached the deck again Nancy burst forth, "Look, girls, this is the real thing!"

They joined her at the rail to see that their transport was now one of a great convoy of vessels of all sorts, moving steadily into the southwest.

"Breath-taking, isn't it?" said Shorty.

"I can hardly believe we're really on our way at last," said Nancy happily.

AT SEA

That journey across the Pacific was a never-to-be-forgotten experience. Though the intensive training of the last busy weeks was over there was still plenty of routine in their lives. "Abandon ship" drills were part of every day's program. They never knew when they were coming, nor whether, this time, it was the real thing. Every nurse, swathed in her Mae West, must be standing at attention by the lifeboat assigned her when the Colonel passed for inspection. Nor did his inspection stop there, but their quarters must always be tidied so as to bear the scrutiny of those piercing gray eyes.

The soldiers laughed at the women when they appeared with the most unexpected items to be taken along just in case this life drill was the real thing. Ida Hall invariably came out wearing dark glasses while Mabel always brought a rubber bathing cap.

"I've got to protect my permanent from the salt water," she explained, when a young sergeant asked if she was going swimming. "I figure I won't get another wave any time soon."

Nancy had a horror of being adrift without lights and water, so always had her flashlight and a well-filled canteen.

"If I forget everything else I hope I won't leave my knife behind," said Janice. "I may need it to slay sharks or cut up fish to eat."

Though they got what fun they could from this serious business, it gave Nancy a feeling of safety to know that everything had been so carefully planned for their welfare. She couldn't help wondering at times, however, if Tini's wilfulness had really supplied the enemy with information they sought about the convoy. She had caught only occasional glimpses of Major Reed, but at no time was there opportunity to speak with him privately, so her curiosity about the whole matter had to be stilled.

Every time she looked across at the great flotilla of ships to port and starboard, fore and aft, her sense of security grew stronger. She was never weary of watching the sea and those other ships.

In spite of their drills and regulations they had much real leisure, which was most welcome after so many weeks of rigorous training. Most of the small discomforts of the crowded transport could be endured, but Nancy did feel the pinch of their limited water supply. With so much water all about them it seemed strange to be rationed on water, but on such a packed ship the water supply was a real problem.

They had to line up for the bathroom, then each nurse was allowed only a basin full of water for bathing and clothes washing. The girls had to dodge about their cabins to avoid the lines of clothes constantly drying. However, most of them stayed in their cabins only for sleeping and dressing, so could make the best of what could not be helped.

For dinner the first evening they changed to their summer beige suits, for there was to be dancing afterward. There were numberless men for every girl, so none lacked for partners. Nancy was surprised about ten o'clock that first evening to glance around and discover Major Reed asking her for the next dance. This was the first time he had spoken to her since Tini had vanished from their midst.

"Oh, you!" she exclaimed eagerly.

She gave him her hand and they moved on to the floor, but the place was so packed it was like trying to dance on a dime.

Nancy laughed and said, "It's impossible!"

"And the air's thick enough to slice," he added. "Why endure it when there's so much grand fresh air on deck?"

"Do let's go outside," agreed Nancy. "I've been wondering what the stars are like out there."

They escaped to the deck by a side door and finally worked their way to the prow. The black-out on the ship made the spangle of stars a thousand times more brilliant than Nancy had ever seen them. They stood at the rail a few minutes, watching the brilliant points of light swim crazily in a dome of purple velvet.



"Abandon Ship" Drills Were Held Every Day

"I can hardly wait to see the southern cross," said Nancy.

"A wonderful sight," he told her. "Two of the stars point toward the south pole, as Polaris indicates the north."

"You've been down under before?" she asked eagerly.

"I came out in the late spring, before Pearl Harbor, a civilian then. I remember I was sight-seeing at Pago Pago about the middle of May."

"I've never been any farther than New York by steamer," Nancy confessed. "I didn't dare hope I'd really make it down here—right where I want most to go."

"Things do work out sometimes," he said with deep content. "They have for me."

They fell silent a moment while they watched the other darkened ships moving across the wide expanse.

After an interval he said in a low tone, "Miss Dale, this is the first opportunity I've had to thank you for your cooperation."

"There was nothing else I could do."

"Of course. But you did it more tactfully and successfully than many others would have."

"Naturally I've been curious to know what really happened the other night when I went to Miss Hauser about Tini."

"It's a long story that goes way back," he began, and glanced around once more to be sure no one else was in hearing distance. "You've helped us trap two of a ring we've been trailing a long time."

"Oh, Major Reed, really?"

"Their specialty has been getting in with women in the service, not only nurses, but WACs, WAVES, and even Red Cross workers, to worm information from them by subtle tricks at which they're very adept."

"And Tini Hoffman's temperament made her a gold mine for them, I should think."

"Exactly. We took some great chances letting her stay as long as she did, but it proved to be worth it in the end."

"Then you did spring the trap Miss Hauser spoke of?"

"Indeed we did. We had had a plainclothes man watching Tini ever since we got to port, but without you on the inside even he might have failed."

"Oh!" breathed Nancy, just beginning to realize fully how important had been her position.

"We had had an eye on this woman who posed under the name of Mrs. Webber, before. She serves as the sister of any of the ring who have girls coming into the port."

"I see," said Nancy. "She looked capable of such a post—a hard-looking sister!"

"Tini got in such a dither to see Mrs. Webber that night, because Carl said he was flying out to see her before she left. She was to meet him for lunch at the Chinese restaurant next noon—then alert orders came and she couldn't get out, so she thought she had to go to Mrs. Webber so Carl could understand why she broke the date."

"Then Tini was not really crooked—a spy," said Nancy in a tone of relief. She couldn't bear to think that, even of Tini.

"No—just foolish when it comes to a realization of the danger she might have placed this convoy in."

"Did that have anything to do with the delay in our leaving?"

"I'm afraid it did."

"But you haven't told me just what did happen down there in room 705."

"We had placed a dictaphone in Mrs. Webber's room while she was out, and let Tini have her say, to get the record, before we went in to take them both into custody. Fortunately Tini mentioned the name of the place she was to meet Carl next noon, and it was a simple matter for the FBI to be there to pick him up. He had shaved his small mustache, but otherwise the description you first gave, served an excellent purpose."

"Well, what do you know about that?" Nancy said in wonder.

How little she had dreamed when she went into the service that she would become involved in such a plot!

"I was so miserable over the whole business," she added after an interval, "but Tini was always placed right under my nose. I couldn't help knowing the awful things she did."

"We placed her close to you deliberately. We knew you were entirely to be trusted," he said.

She flushed in the darkness and after a moment murmured, "Thank you, Major Reed. I'll try never to betray that trust."

"Miss Hauser told me one of your roommates asked about Miss Hoffman after she had been gone a half day, so I presume you gave no hint of what you knew to the others."

"No, I didn't. Tini had given herself a bad enough name. There was no use making it worse."

"You have a wise head on your shoulders, Nancy."

Her pulse quickened as he called her by her first name.

"No, Tini's not really a traitor—just one of those thoughtless, self-willed people, who can do as much harm as a real spy," said the major, "and you'd be surprised, Nancy, to know how many of those are crippling our war effort."

Nancy sighed. "We really do walk a narrow plank over dangerous waters, don't we?"

"Indeed we do!" he agreed. "But for everyone who would betray us there's millions loyal to the core, like you."

"I appreciate your telling me just what happened. Naturally I've been wondering, but hadn't dared ask."

"You have a right to know if anyone does. Such service as you've rendered never brings medals, Nancy—we have to keep too quiet about these undercover activities."

"At least I'm glad it's all over, and we don't have anyone else like Tini in our unit. They're a grand bunch—all of them."

"Are you telling me!" he exclaimed.

Nancy lifted her head, feeling a wonderful sense of freedom as she drank in great gulps of the clean, fresh air. "My, it's great to be here—on our way!" she said.

"It really is," he agreed. Then he hastened to ask, "Say, Nancy, have you seen the sick bay?"

"You mean there's a hospital aboard?"

"Almost inactive now. But it'll be jammed on the return trip."

"How do you find it?"

"I'll take you down and show you through right after breakfast tomorrow," he suggested.

"Oh, that would be swell!"

Nancy went to sleep that night with a feeling of eager anticipation for the morning. Sleeping was a tight squeeze amid all their possessions. Several times during the night Nancy was vaguely aware of Mabel giving her a shove and ordering, "Keep to your side, gal!" But on the whole she got the best sleep she had had in three nights.

When she remarked about resting so well Mabel said, "Yeah, I believe you could sleep through storms, fire and torpedoes."

Nancy's visit to the sick bay was really her first preview of the seriousness of overseas life. Here were careful preparations for looking after those who were giving their blood in battle, and must be taken home for recovery. The sick bay was really a miniature hospital.

"They've thought of everything that might possibly be needed to help our men," explained Major Reed to the nurses, for Nancy had asked to bring her three roommates along. "This operating room alone seems a miracle to me."

"Looks about like any other to me," said Nancy.

"It's so built that any jolt or tilting is overcome before it reaches the operator's hand."

"I've heard of such marvels," said Nancy with deep interest. "Much like the floating studios which radio companies use to counteract sound."

"Something of the same idea," said Major Reed.

They were shown the laboratory, a small pharmacy and some contagious wards. The double-deck bunks were hung from stanchions. There were dental chairs and protected sections for psychoneurotic cases. In fact, everything was there to make a miniature hospital.

"Maybe we'll get a chance to work in one of these on the way back," said Shorty.

"This one will probably be in use before we get over," Major Reed told them. "Among so many passengers there'll no doubt be some who will need attention on the way."

"If you need help let us know," said Nancy when they thanked the young doctor who had shown them through.

So the carefree days slipped by. The air was bracing; the food excellent. Nancy felt her skirts grow a bit tighter at the waist, and knew she was gaining weight. She didn't object, for she was sure much hard work and a rationed diet would soon reduce her to the old measurements.

There were games of all sorts, long walks along the decks, new acquaintances to broaden life's horizon, and every night dancing for those who liked the bright lights of indoors. Nancy and whoever she happened to be with, generally chose the deck with its stars and glimpses of their convoy. There was a hilarious celebration when they crossed the equator and another when they crossed the international date line. They began to feel then that they were truly in another sort of life. Before reaching port they had left the budding summer of their own hemisphere for the approaching winter of this strange southern world.

Then one noon Nancy and Mabel stood at the rail and saw their first flying fish.

"We're approaching land!" Nancy exclaimed eagerly.

"And look—there're terns skimming the froth in our wake," Mabel noticed.

An hour later planes came out to meet them, circling overhead, like guardian wings to watch them safely into port. And then at last their first glimpse of a foreign shore. Then a few minutes later the word went round, identifying the harbor in which they would land.

"It's Sydney, they say, Mabel!" cried Nancy joyously. "I can hardly believe we've really reached Australia."

A DREAM

Though there had been no one to bid them farewell there was plenty of welcome awaiting the Army Nurses on reaching Sydney. Australian Red Cross workers greeted the young women when they had marched down the long gangplanks. Cars were ready to drive them to the beautiful house, set amid lovely trees and flowers, where they were to stay temporarily.

The nurses had so long been accustomed to the motion of the ship that they now felt a little giddy and unsteady on their feet.

"I'll surely be glad to get my legs adjusted to earth once more," said Nancy.

"Feel as though I couldn't walk straight," Mabel complained. "Say, but isn't this a swell joint," she added, glancing around the lovely room to which she and Nancy had been assigned. There was everything for their comfort. The pretty curtains and bedspreads were a joy after the bareness of their ship cabin. The bath had a real tub in which they could compensate for weeks of indifferent bathing.

They had left late spring at home, but found approaching winter on their arrival in the southern hemisphere. Their heavy coats were in order on all excursions outdoors.

"Funny, but I had the idea we'd have to go round out here half dressed, drinking ices and waving fans," said Mabel.

"Tommy prepared me for this," said Nancy a little wistfully. "He left home last fall and found spring when he got here. Strange, but he seems so much closer now that I'm here."

"Gee, Nancy, wouldn't it be wonderful if he did turn up!"

"Oh, he must! He will, Mabel! Yet sometimes I think it's sort of selfish of me to—to think he may be spared when such terrible things have happened to other people."

"I guess it's natural for us all to have such feelings—that these horrible things can't happen to us."

"I suppose we'll have to get into the thick of it before we fully realize how terrible it really is," said Nancy, sensing that their first real tests were not far off.

That evening after dinner Lieutenant Hauser called them together and said, "We'll have several days here in Sydney. We don't know exactly how long before we'll be moved out to an evacuation hospital. You've all earned a little vacation. Take this time to see the city and enjoy yourselves to the full. Our real work is not far in the future."

Eyes sparkled, while happy laughter and comments filled the room.

"The only restrictions," continued Lieutenant Hauser, "are to guard your tongue and be back in your rooms by eleven at night. The Red Cross volunteers have planned many things for you, but you're free to do as you like. Have a good time, for you'll need pleasant memories when you get into the thick of things."

"I'm going to phone Miss Anna Darien," Nancy told Mabel at once. "Maybe I can go over to see her tomorrow."

"Oh, you mean your mother's friend who wrote you about seeing Tommy?"

"Yes. I can hardly wait to hear what she has to say about him. Don't you want to come with me?"

"Sure! But won't she be surprised when she hears your voice over the phone?"

"She lives somewhere on the harbor. It will all be sightseeing just the same," explained Nancy.

"I never dreamed Sydney was such a huge place. They say it's as large as some of our biggest American cities."

"It's surely nice to be in a foreign city where people speak English," said Nancy.

"Does make it seem more homelike," admitted Mabel, "even if they do express things a little differently."

Marian Albans, a Red Cross volunteer, helped Nancy get in touch with Miss Darien in a distant section of the city. Miss Anna was as delighted to hear Nancy's voice, as Nancy was to hear a familiar, loved friend, speaking in a strange land. Even slight bonds grow stronger when mere acquaintances meet in a strange land, and those bonds that are already strong are drawn much closer. Nancy felt almost as happy as if she were going to see her own mother.

"I hope this phone call isn't all, my dear," said Miss Anna over the wire. "We must have time for a visit with each other."

"That's what I called for," explained Nancy. "We have several days to do just as we please. I want to come out there to see you."

"Just fine! But it's not easy to get here, my dear. You'll have to come early in the morning on the ferry that crosses the harbor to take workers from here over to the city. There isn't another ferry until it comes to bring the workers home. Our manpower is very much rationed here."

"Then I'll come early and stay late," Nancy said with a laugh.

When she put down the phone Marian Albans said, "I'll be glad to see you to the ferry. It would be rather complicated to give you directions for going there."

"That's awfully nice of you," said Nancy gratefully. "That will make it easier, and you can point out the sights as we go."

When Mabel learned she would have to spend the entire day she decided to go only to the ferry with Nancy, so she could do more sight-seeing in the city.

When they went out early next morning a stormy wind was blowing, which Marian Albans called a "Southerly Buster."

"Feels as if it's right off the South Pole," she said as the two Americans and the Australian went out into the street bundled in overcoats and mufflers.

They caught a tram, as the Australians called their street cars, for a long ride through the fascinating streets of the strange city. By the time they reached the quay where Nancy was to take a ferry across the harbor a driving rain cut off their view. Wind whipped the water into whitecaps, and the crossing promised to be rough.

"Do I have to walk very far after I leave the ferry?" Nancy asked.

"I've only been over there once myself—to a place near your friend's address. But you take a tram on the other side, up the bluff, and get off at Military Road," explained Marian.

Marian was a very English-looking girl, who told them her parents had come out to Australia a few years before her birth. She had a fair, aristocratic face and the natural bloom in her cheeks of which so many English girls may well be proud.

"Maybe Miss Anna will come to meet me," said Nancy hopefully.



Nancy Was Delighted to Hear a Familiar Voice

"I hope so," said Marian, "for there's a half-mile walk through the bush after you get off the tram on the other side."

"The bush?" repeated Nancy.

Marian laughed. "I believe you'd call it the woods."

They put Nancy aboard the almost empty ferry, and started back to the tram in the storm. It was some time before the ferry moved out across the harbor in the pelting, chill rain. Nancy thought it was too bad to have such a miserable day for her excursion, for the rain cut off most of her view as the ferry finally moved slowly away from the dock.

This was the first time since she had left home that Nancy had really been alone. Suddenly she felt loosened and detached from all her recent experiences, and viewed her training as through a telescope. Though the time had not been long since she left home, she felt as different as if actual years had been required for her preparation.

The fact that her brother had been on this very ferry on his last visit to Sydney brought him still closer to her. He had constantly been in the back of her mind during her trip at sea, and today she felt more strongly than ever that he was really alive. She thought how lucky she was to be sent into his field of operations. It seemed prophetic to her that somehow, somewhere they were going to meet again.

The ferry staggered through the gale around a point of land and soon came into sight of the woods on the other shore. Nancy was thrilled to find Miss Anna waiting for her, bracing herself as the wind whipped at her raincape. Her face was damp with the mist as she caught Nancy to her and gave her a hearty kiss.

"How good to see a little bit of America!" she said. "And how stunning you look in that uniform!"

She held Nancy off at arm's length to inspect her, regardless of the rain beating down on them. And Nancy felt almost as happy as if she were being welcomed by her own mother.

"We'll be wet as rats by the time we get up to the house," said Miss Anna, "but it'll be cozy and warm inside."

They caught a tram promptly and were soon on the path through the dripping bush. It swung back toward the water and presently Nancy caught a glimpse of the large community building in which Miss Anna made her home with many other workers of various sorts. The house stood on a hundred-foot bluff overlooking the water.

"What a heavenly place!" exclaimed Nancy, looking around delightedly.

"So it is," agreed Miss Anna, her small brown eyes twinkling. They stepped inside the door and she threw back her raincape.

Nancy followed her upstairs after taking off her galoshes and dripping cap and overcoat. The home-cooked breakfast they sat down to a few minutes later was a feast indeed to one who had eaten camp and ship fare so long. There were peaches covered with thick cream to start with, scrambled eggs, delicious hot muffins and golden butter such as Nancy had not seen in a long time.

"We have our own cows and chickens here," explained Miss Anna by way of apology for the excellent items on which others were so closely rationed. "I had some coffee made especially for you. Most everyone out here, you know, drinks tea."

"And it is really good coffee," said Nancy gratefully.

Most of the other residents of the house had hurried off to catch the ferry back to the city, so Nancy and her friend were not disturbed while at their breakfast. Nancy told of her training and her voyage, and answered numerous questions about mutual friends back home.

Finally she burst forth, "I can hardly wait to hear about Tommy—how he looked, what he said when you last saw him."

"He looked really marvelous in his uniform, but he was a little nervous, and I'm afraid his visit here wasn't very relaxing."

"Why? What happened?"

"The very night he was here they caught some Jap subs in the harbor."

"Really! Seems I do remember hearing something about the nervy little Nips slipping into Sydney harbor."

"And we had a box seat for the whole performance," Miss Anna went on.

"You mean it was really near enough to see what happened?"

Miss Anna nodded, her alert eyes flashing. "During the night I was awakened by the most infernal noise—sounded as though it came from the very bowels of the earth—something you might imagine being a forerunner of a volcanic eruption. But it really came from under the water out in the harbor, the sub's torpedoes."

"Heavens! You must have been terrified to be so close."

"That was only the beginning. Then came our big guns roaring from the forts over on St. George's Heights. The reverberations shook some pictures off my wall."

"It must have been like an earthquake," put in Nancy.

"Then for a half hour there was peace, and by that time it was almost daylight. Then the commotion broke loose again. I got into my clothes and went out to find Tommy looking from the hall window. It was really the sight of a lifetime. There were four little corvettes dropping depth bombs as they careened around the harbor in wide circles."

"Oh boy, I'll bet Tommy was excited!" Nancy exclaimed.

"He kept saying, 'Oh, Miss Anna, if I were only in my plane wouldn't my bombardier like to drop a few? We'd soon blow those subs to bits.' But the corvettes were doing a good job. Every time they dropped a depth charge a huge waterspout burst high in the air—and such a terrific noise!"

"I think I should have been yelling—worse than at a football game."

"We were too tense and frightened. But those corvettes did get that sub."

"What happened then?"

"A huge dredge boat came out with cranes, and sat over the spot where the sub lay on the

bottom. But it was three days before they could get it to the surface."

"And by that time Tommy was gone," said Nancy wistfully.

"He was really disappointed not to be able to wait and see it brought to the top, but he had to go back on duty. I wrote him all about it, though. The dredge finally brought the sub up vertically, and it was towed across to Sharpe Island."

"What an experience that must have been—seeing all that."

"She had been about sixty-five feet long, but the rear end had been blown away. What crafty creatures those Japs are! You know the front of that sub looked like the mandibles of a beetle. It was equipped with cutting apparatus to tear through the harbor nettings."

"Gives me the shivers to think how close they came," said Nancy.

"They say one of the subs got caught in the nets at the harbor entrance."

"How many dead Japs were there?" asked Nancy.

"Six. Their bodies were burned, according to Japanese custom, and their ashes were buried with military honors."

"They didn't deserve it!" exclaimed Nancy bitterly.

Miss Anna looked at her with an odd expression. "We must not become bitter or intolerant, even toward our enemies," she said with gentle persuasiveness. "We would appreciate our dead being given honorable burial, wouldn't we?"

"Oh, yes, of course!" exclaimed Nancy, thinking at once of her brother, and how she had prayed that the enemy would treat him humanely if he had fallen into their hands. But she had seen too many pictures of scores of people thrown into common graves to credit the enemy with ever treating any as considerately as these men from the Japanese sub had been treated.

"If by treating their prisoners fairly it will make life easier for even a few of ours in their prison camps it will be worth the effort," said Miss Anna.

"But it makes me positively ill when I think that Tommy may have fallen into their hands," said Nancy.

"It would be better a thousand times if he were dead," Miss Anna told her with conviction. "Tommy had nothing to fear in death, but horrible things to endure if he's a prisoner of the Japs."

"I'm sure you're right," Nancy said. "But I simply can't believe he's dead—I can't."

"Don't let wishful thinking keep you from facing reality, my dear. There're many things worse than death in this war."

"I'm sure of that. But Tommy isn't dead! I—I just know it!"

Suddenly Miss Anna's palm stroked Nancy's cheek caressingly. "I hope you're right, my dear. I must admit I, too, have a feeling that Tommy is alive somewhere and needs help."

Nancy glanced at her friend's strong, kindly face, and asked, "What makes you think that way, Miss Anna?"

"I've never lost the feeling since I first learned his plane had gone down over enemy territory. Then the other night I had such a vivid dream."

"A dream?" Suddenly Nancy recalled that one of Miss Anna's lectures had been on the significance and meaning of dreams. She added her own illuminating interpretation to what the psychologists had learned on the subject.

"I thought I was moving through the jungle, trying to locate a voice that was calling me. Then as I went nearer I recognized it as Tommy's. He was burning with fever and I brought him water from a spring. I was so distressed because the water didn't quench his thirst. Then I woke suddenly with his words ringing in my ears, 'Thank you just the same, Miss Anna.' I've hoped all along that Tommy survived a forced landing. Since that dream I've felt certain that he is alive."

Tears were shining in Nancy's eyes as she said, "You really are a comfort, Miss Anna."

Her friend went to a near-by bookcase and took out a small volume of poetry. "Here are some verses written by Anna Bright, a friend of mine who lost her son in the last war. Instead of grieving, she used her genius to give comfort to those who had had similar sorrows. Listen to this:

"Were he dead, could I weep
For one who gladly bore
A cross that I might sleep
In peace? Could I shed tears
For one who died for duty;
Who laid aside his fears
That I might see the beauty
Of a brave soul; who went
Undaunted to the fray
Nor cared though he be rent
In twain?"

"That is really the way most of them go," said Nancy. "Not only our Tommy, but thousands of others."

"Not only our men, but our women, too, in this war," said Miss Anna. "I only wish I were young enough to do more. You're a privileged girl, Nancy, to be prepared to do so much."

TOMMY'S BOMBARDIER

Nancy's unit went into action in northern Australia. The trip up to the new hospital was an exciting experience to these nurses, most of whom had never left the States before.

"Seems queer to find it so much warmer as we go north," said Nancy during their first day's travel by train.

"I feel as though I'm living upside down, or something," remarked Mabel. "When we're asleep it's broad daylight at home. While it's warm at home we're shivering here."

Though it was late fall in the southern hemisphere, flowers were still blooming in great profusion in gardens and parks. Many of the flowers were unfamiliar, but Nancy did recognize the hibiscus bushes. The trees, too, were strangers to them and had strange names. They saw the eucalyptus for the first time. Another tree had needles like the pine back home, but fewer branches, which made it less picturesque.

To many of the American girls this was like another world. Yet when the train stopped at stations along the way veterans of the various campaigns came up to the windows of their carriage to greet them, speaking English and asking about America. Most of them had old-young faces, as if each year of fighting had been like ten of ordinary life. Some were so newly returned from the fighting they still had that fixed, dull look in their eyes that was to become so familiar to the nurses later, the look of men who had seen awful things, never to be forgotten.

"I know your men will be glad to see you American Sisters," said a veteran of Dunkirk at one station.

They learned that the Australian nurses were always called "Sisters."

The hospital to which they were assigned proved to be far more comfortable than they had anticipated. Several blocks of bungalows in a small town had been taken over for hospital use. These houses reminded Nancy of farmhouses in her own southland, for they were built high off the ground on stilts, so the air could circulate under them. Like the American houses also, they were surrounded by wide porches.

Again the nurses were packed four in a room, and Nancy had the same congenial roommates she had had on the boat. There was little chance to think of their own comfort, however, for they were plunged at once into work. For the first time since they left California their foot lockers were brought to their rooms, and once more they had all their baggage. It seemed good to settle down and actually begin the work for which they had trained and traveled halfway around the world.

The girls had just started unpacking when news spread that a convoy of patients, a day overdue, was coming in. These were American boys who had been given first treatments in field hospitals and had been flown back from the front.

In a half-hour Nancy had donned her brown-and-white-striped seersucker uniform and received her first assignment from Lieutenant Hauser. The walls had been torn out of the entire lower floor of several bungalows to make wards about seventy-five feet in length. Nancy's heart went out in compassion when she caught a glimpse of those long rows of beds and the faces on those pillows—faces gray with weariness, suffering and dirt.

Her first job, and that of many other nurses, was to get the men cleaned up, and begin dressing their wounds. The bandages had not been touched during the trying convoy journey from the landing field.

"It's glad I am to see ye," said the first man to whom Nancy ministered.

It must have taken courage to force that smile to his round Irish face, for gangrene had taken hold of his shrapnel-shattered leg, and Nancy knew it would have to be taken off promptly.

"And glad I am to be here," she told him cheerfully.

"How's everything back home?" the next boy wanted to know.

"Oh, just fine! We got here only ten days ago."

"Haven't had a scratch of mail in nearly four months. I hear you all are having it pretty tough with the rationing, and strikes and all."

"We haven't a thing to complain of as to food," Nancy retorted. "We're still living like royalty."

"So're we," agreed the man whose arm had been shot off, "except once when we ran short of supplies—caught on an island without reinforcements."

"We'll make that up to you here," Nancy assured him, and swallowed hard on the lump in her throat. She wasn't going to let any of this get her down, or she couldn't go on looking after them. "I'll see you get an extra helping of dessert this very day."

"Say, if you get a whiff of apple pie please label a hunk for me." Suddenly the blue eyes above the shaggy beard flashed. "You know it was a funny thing. While I was lying out there on the beach when they blew my arm into the sea I got to thinking about Ma's apple pies. Queer how a fellow can think of such a thing at a time like that. Like a dumb bloke I didn't worry about the arm much, just thought, 'Now it would be just too bad if I never get to taste one o' Ma's apple pies again!'"

Nancy laughed in spite of her stinging tears. "I'll see that you get a whole pie if I have to make it myself," she promised him.



"How's Everything Back Home?" the Boy Asked

And so she went down the line of beds, cheering and joking with them while she looked after their wounds. There were few complaints. But how eagerly they welcomed the gentle hands that came to minister to them. Most were ready with brave banter, but some, too ill for speech, turned pleading eyes that spoke volumes toward Nancy.

Nancy's supper hour was forgotten. There were too many who still needed attention. When her period of duty was over she went back to her room, feeling utterly spent. This first contact with those fresh from the fighting zone had taken more out of her than she had anticipated. In spite of the physical weariness Nancy had a wonderful sense of well-being. At the moment she felt certain there was no greater work in the world than that of any army nurse.

Mabel and Shorty had already gone out on duty when Nancy and Ida Hall returned to their room. Nancy was relieved to see that Mabel had put her clothes in order. The two nurses who had been off duty had arranged hanging places for their garments. Mabel had even put Nancy's pajamas on the foot of her bunk, and her bedroom slippers were near by.

"It's really going to be very comfy here," said Nancy when she came in from a shower at the end of the hall. However, she found that Ida Hall was already asleep.

Nancy scarcely remembered getting into her double decker before she, also, was asleep. That was the beginning of a routine that lasted for several weeks; eight hours' work eight hours' sleep, eight hours for eating, bathing, washing clothes, and a bit of recreation.

Even the southern hemisphere mid-winter which came in June had but a slight cooling effect on them, for they were too close to the equator. Nancy had been almost two months in Australia before she had her first letters from home. There were a round dozen from her parents. Eagerly she climbed up under her mosquito bar to enjoy them.

There was always the possibility that there might be news that Tommy was found. So many of their friends who had first been reported missing had later returned. The fact that Miss Anna also had a hunch that Tommy still lived, had boosted Nancy's own belief that he would eventually be returned to them.

With her usual orderliness Nancy arranged the home letters according to date and opened the oldest first. Each letter was filled with bits of news of home and friends and encouraging words for herself. But she read on and on without finding the longed-for news about Tommy. She had just picked up a letter from a friend when she heard Ida Hall exclaim, "Oh, say, there comes more work!"

Nancy crawled down from her perch to look out the window and saw a convoy rolling into the streets between the hospital buildings. First there were trucks packed with the wounded who were able to sit up. These were followed by Red Cross ambulances loaded with the seriously ill.

"They'll more than fill the long tent they put up back of ward three," Nancy predicted.

She was right. They filled the tent to overflowing and some had to be packed into the already crowded bungalow wards. Nancy was now serving on night duty. Orders came before she went on that evening to report for duty in the tent where the new patients had been put.

It was already dark when she took her G.I. flashlight, dimmed with blue paper, and crossed the street behind the buildings to go to her new assignment. Bee Tarver, the nurse she was relieving, told her the men had all been bathed, fed and their wounds looked after. Night duty was easier of course, though Nancy sometimes had to struggle to keep awake. She was rather relieved to know there would be plenty to do tonight, as Bee described the various cases.

"Number three there may have to have another hypo. He's very disturbed," she explained.

Some would have to have sulphur tablets, and others must have attention at regular intervals. One poor chap, who couldn't move, must have his position eased occasionally. Nancy went her rounds and toward midnight sat down at the end of the long tent, just inside the mosquito netting. This end of the tent was close to the bush, and the sounds of many strange insects was like a pulse beat in the night. Once she heard planes droning far off under the star-studded sky. Occasionally a groan escaped someone in the tent.

Their new tent ward boasted no floor, and Nancy had to keep on the alert for frogs and insects that got under the netting in spite of all their precautions. She finally decided the creatures must come up from the earth.

She had just caught a green frog in a small box and was taking him to the door when there came a prolonged groan from cot three. She washed her hands in the basin near the door, and hurried to the patient, who had been sleeping ever since she came in. The electric wiring had not even been finished, so she picked up a lantern and hung it on the tent post above the suffering patient.

She turned around and was moving closer when the man on the bed lifted his head and stared at her with wild eyes. Then a joyous expression broke over the gaunt face as he cried, "Tommy, old boy! I knew you'd get away from 'em."

Nancy wore her seersucker trousers and shirt, and had her head tied in a kerchief, a precaution against the wind that blew eternally across their campsite.

If the patient had fired a gun at her, however, she could not have been more shocked when he called her "Tommy!" Could he possibly mean her Tommy, her own lost brother?

When she recovered from the shock, she went nearer the bed. The brown-bearded man, his face haggard from suffering, fell back to the pillow in disappointment.

"Aw-w," he groaned, "I thought sure you were Tommy."

"Tommy?" she whispered softly, putting a soothing hand on his forehead, and brushing back the fever-wet hair. "Tommy who?"

"Tommy Dale of course. Never another pilot like him."

Nancy was so excited she scarcely knew what she was saying as she asked, "You thought I was Tommy?"

"I could have sworn those were Tommy's eyes. But maybe they did get him. He made me jump first," the sick man rambled on. "But the plane was still in the air when I saw it last."

"And Tommy was in it?" she encouraged him gently, fearing his memories might be so fragile the least shock would shatter them.

"Tommy would stick it till everybody was safely out." He broke off as the feverish eyes came back to the brown ones bending over him. "Your eyes are enough like Tommy's to belong to him. But maybe I'm dying at last and you're really Tommy come to see me over."

"I'm Tommy's sister," she said with bated breath.

He could only stare for a moment incredulously. "No, it can't be," he finally burst forth. "Things like that don't happen."

She pulled her dog tag from under her shirt, and held her flash so he could read the inscription.

"Glory be to the saints!" he burst forth, seizing her hand and pressing it to his lips.

Nancy put her flashlight on the foot of the cot for she was trembling. She pulled a packing box closer to the man and sat down from sheer inability to stand.

"Do you feel able to tell me what happened?" she asked.

"Gosh yes," he said emphatically. "I can get well now! Who couldn't with Tommy's sister for nurse? I know all about you," he said, his eyes beginning to have a more normal expression. "Tommy read me all your letters."

"Oh, then you're Bruce Williams, his bombardier?"

"Sure! We were real buddies, Tom and I. No crew ever had a finer pilot. He never gave me an order I didn't want to follow until that last command to jump and leave him alone to his fate."

"Do you think there's any chance he may be living?"

"We were over Jap-held territory. If he survived the jump there're nine chances out of ten he's a prisoner."

"But they didn't make you a prisoner!" she exclaimed.

"Oh, yes, they did! Three long months they held me. That's why I'm in this fix—I broke my leg in the parachute landing and it never healed properly, and we were all but starved to death. I hoped many a time while I was a prisoner that Tommy was dead and out of such misery."

"Oh, no, don't say that!" exclaimed Nancy, tears starting to her eyes. "I've never felt that Tommy was dead. He must come back to us, sometime, somehow."

Bruce closed his eyes wearily and turned from her a second. "I guess you haven't seen enough, yet, Nancy. The ones who get a clean ticket to the other side are the lucky blokes!"

Nancy thought of the poem she had copied from Miss Anna Darien's book:

"Were he dead, could I weep
For one who gladly bore
A cross that I might sleep
In peace?"

She took the sunburned hand lying on the sheet and stroked it gently. Tommy's friend brought her brother so much closer to her.

"Did any more of Tommy's crew come through alive?"

He shook his head. "Not that I know of. Two of us were picked up by a Jap boat and taken to a prison camp. Pete Crawford died of his injuries three days after we got there."

"I shouldn't let you talk any more," she said gently. "You must sleep now."

"I don't want to sleep. It's been so long since I talked to anyone who cared." He smiled diffidently, then apologized, "That may sound nervy."

"Oh, I do care—you know I do! It's next best thing to finding Tommy, having you here!"

"Thanks, Nancy. Thanks a lot—a fellow gets to feeling awful sorry for himself when he's sick out here alone. Now it looks as if I've got something to get well for."

"But you won't get well unless you obey my orders and go to sleep," she said with playful severity, as she pulled the sheet up around his damp chest and tucked him in. He caught her hand again and pressed it to his lips before she turned away.

There were a thousand questions she wanted to ask, but she dared not tax his frail strength further tonight. Tomorrow, after he had slept, she would ask him more about Tommy's last flight.

BRUCE'S REPORT

During her off hours next day Nancy went back to see Bruce. She found him propped up, having his lunch.

"How much better you look!" she said.

He smiled at her brightly. "You gave me a new lease on life last night."

She laughed, and suddenly he glanced up from his bowl of soup with an expression of appraisal. "Say, but you're pretty!" he said after his inspection. "Much prettier than those pictures Tommy had."

Nancy was glad she had left her hair unbound and taken pains with her make-up. But she flushed and said, "Don't you dare hand me blarney, Bruce Williams. I'm too tall to be pretty."

"The idea! I hear that's the kind they're hunting for the New York shows now—tall gals."

"Tommy's only one inch taller than I am, and our coloring and eyes are so much alike—no wonder you thought my eyes were his last night. Everyone says we do look lots alike."

"Sure do."

"People used to take us for twins when we were growing up."

"It's the eyes that are so much alike—something in those Dale eyes that goes straight to your heart."

She sat down on a packing box by his bed and said, "I wanted to ask you last night how you finally got away from those Japs."

"I guess God just answered my prayers and sent our own boys to Manka Island."

"Oh, were you there when they took it?"

"That's where they kept the ones who weren't able to work in their fields. I'd been better off if I could have worked. They get more food I hear, and have a better chance to store up supplies for escape."

"We've had some accounts back home from those who escape," she told him. "But just how were you freed?"

"Those Japs just cleared out and left us to our fate when the firing got too warm. Some of our own men were killed by the American firing. That's how I got the spatter of shrapnel in my side."

"It must have been marvelous to see your own countrymen coming ashore on that island," she said.

"You're tellin' me!" he exclaimed. "Santa Claus at Christmas when I was a kid, was never more welcome than those khaki uniforms coming in through the jungle."

"Had you been on the same island all the time?"

He nodded as he finished his soup and pushed the bowl to one side of the tray. "I haven't a very clear idea of the location," he admitted. "I never paid much attention to the directions. My job was to spill those bombs at the right place. I didn't worry about the rest."

He cleared a place on the tray and began to draw an imaginary map with his finger. "See, it was something like this. Here's Australia, and over here's New Caledonia where we took off, and here're the islands we headed for."

"Wait a minute," said Nancy. "I'll get a map, then you can sketch me a more detailed plan of the area you operated in."

"Sure," agreed Bruce. Then a shadow crossed his face. "But what's the use? We can't go out there and look for Tommy."

"Who knows?" she asked, stubbornly clinging to her hopes. "I may sometime get to the islands. I want to hear every detail you can recall about the location."

"Of course, I'll do the map for you." Then he added hastily, "But don't go for paper now."

"Sure. I'll get that later. But right now I want you to tell me everything you can remember about that last trip with Tommy."

"I could never forget any detail of it. Did you know it was Tommy's last mission before he would be free to go home?"

Nancy's heart almost stopped beating for a moment. "No, I didn't! He had written us he was almost through, however, and would be coming home soon."

"It's that last flight that generally gives our pilots the jitters," Bruce explained. "And the last five or six are no picnics."

"I can well imagine that."

"Naturally we had our bird tuned up and checked down to the last bolt. She took off, singing as sweet as any lark as we flew into the northwest. We had spilled our load on some Jap oil tankers and were on our way back when those nasty Zeros knocked one of our engines out of commission."

"How about the crew?"

"O.K. then, but the next hail of fire got our co-pilot, Jack Turner. Tom kept his head until the other engine began to sputter. For a while he tried to make it closer to our own territory, but it was no go."

Nancy was folding the hem of the sheet into tight little creases while she listened tensely. "Then you had to jump?" she asked.

Bruce nodded again. "Every man knew his job, of course. We had done it time and again in

practice. I destroyed my bombsight. All our bombs had already been spilled, but I saw that the bomb-bay doors were tightly closed, ready for the plane to hit the water."

"What was the use of taking all those precautions when you had to jump anyhow?"

"You know that bombsight, Nancy, is America's own prize possession. No bombardier leaves that for anybody to investigate. St. Peter wouldn't ever let anybody through the pearly gates who had left that little instrument intact behind him."

Nancy smiled in spite of her heavy heart. "I don't see how you can keep up your joking like that."

"Better to laugh than cry."

Janice, who was on duty, came to take Bruce's tray away. When she had gone Nancy asked, "You didn't see Tommy jump after you hit the water?"

"No. I think he meant to ditch the plane after we were out. He loved that bird like something human. He meant to stick to her till the last minute."

"Then you think he went down with her to the bottom—like a captain with his ship?"

"Oh, no! If he landed on the water O.K. there'd be a few minutes when he could get out and try to swim to one of the rubber boats."

"Oh, you had rubber boats?"

"Sure! Pete Crawford, our radio man, pulled the levers to release the life boats just before he jumped. You know, they inflate as they go down. Vernon Goodwin, our top gunner, had filled them with water, food supplies and navigation instruments."

"Did you find one of them when you jumped?"

"We were lucky. Pete and I came down close together and reached one of the boats. We might have made it somewhere with the provisions we had, if those Japs hadn't picked us up before dark."



"Did You See Tommy Jump?" Nancy Asked Bruce

"If you saw Tommy still in the air after you got into the boat he must have been too far away to swim to any of the other boats after he hit the water."

"I've worried a lot about that," Bruce told her. "But it looked to me as though the plane was turned back in our direction. There was a wooded island on the horizon, and pretty soon our ship was so low we lost sight of it behind those trees."

"An island!" exclaimed Nancy. "Do you think Tommy might have swum to it?"

"That was our only hope for Tommy and the others. Some jumped after we did, and might have come down nearer that island. Pete and I started paddling in that direction, but we'd both been hurt and the distances were deceiving. My cracked leg had begun to swell, and any movement was agony. Pete checked out clean for a spell, and I was afraid he was gone. Before we realized what had happened the island was nowhere to be seen."

Nancy smoothed out his sheet, and sat silent. After a moment she said, "Bruce, when you draw that map of the islands write down the names of all Tommy's crew and the positions they held."

"Now why do you want that?"

"I may run across some of the others somewhere. Maybe someone was nearer Tommy when he ditched and will know what became of him."

"Now don't you go getting your hopes up, Nancy. There's not a chance in a hundred that any of the others will turn up."

"You do what I ask anyhow," persisted Nancy. "When I get home I'll write to the families of all the crew and tell them what I know. Even though there may be no hope, it's some comfort to know the details."

"I suppose that would give our relatives some satisfaction," Bruce admitted. "I've been so full of my own woes since I got back I haven't thought of the folks back home wanting to hear about the others."

"Who in your condition wouldn't be preoccupied with his own woes?" asked Nancy understandingly. "But we're going to have you on your feet again before too long."

Nancy did all in her power to speed Bruce's recovery in the weeks that followed. She felt a real personal pride in his improvement. At last there came a day when he was able to walk to the recreation room with only the aid of a stick and her arm. The nurses had fixed up this room for the use of convalescing patients.

"I mustn't get well too fast," Bruce said with a twinkle in his nice gray eyes, "or they'll be sending me away from here."

Bruce was sitting opposite Nancy at a game of bridge that day, and she thought how really handsome he was, now that he had shaved off his beard, and his gaunt cheeks were beginning to fill out.

Pat Walden, the one-armed chap, for whom Nancy had finally made the apple pie, sat opposite Mabel. Nancy had devised a rack with nails driven through wood for Pat to stand his cards in while he played with his one hand. Her mother had sent out some magazines, published for the handicapped in the states. Nancy and Pat had quite an interesting time exploring the back issues in search of gadgets to help the one-armed. The magazines had gone the rounds of others who must begin life all over with various handicaps. Pat had a way of making jokes about his trouble, and Nancy had played the game with him as he learned to do things with one hand.

Many of the boys, however, were sullen and sensitive about their afflictions, and with these the nurses had to pretend that their handicaps didn't exist. Though the wounds in Bruce's side had been slow in healing, and he would always limp from the improperly knit leg bone, at least his body was whole, and the doctors assured him he would be strong again.

At the moment the number of cases was slightly reduced in number. Many of the earlier patients had been sent to ports to be taken home on ships that brought nurses and men over.

"I heard a rumor today," said Mabel, "that we may be moved soon—out to the islands."

"Soon?" asked Nancy eagerly.

"Don't know. I just got a whiff of a change."

"Nothing would thrill me more."

Bruce threw down a card with vigor and glanced across at his fellow-sufferer. "That's the way they treat us, Pat. Eager to leave us to our fate."

"You'll be moving on yourselves before too long," Nancy assured him.

"Just when I'm beginning to enjoy life here," said Bruce, "Nancy looks forward to leaving me."

Nancy flushed, seeing the other two at the table figuratively cock their ears.

"Oh, you'll soon be able to get along without any nursing," Nancy assured him.

"I can never get along again in this life without you," he told her, regardless of their audience.

"Say, what's all this?" burst forth Mabel. "A public proposal in broad open daylight?"

"Don't be silly!" exclaimed Nancy.

Bruce laughed heartily at Nancy's chagrin. "Thanks a lot, Mabel, for helping me out. I've been trying to figure out a good opening for a proposal for the last week."

"You'll surely have to make an improvement before I'll accept you," stated Nancy, triumphantly trumping Bruce's ace.

Bruce looked from Mabel to Pat Walden, and said mischievously, "You'll both stand witness that she's practically accepted me."

"Stick to your card playing, Bruce," said Nancy pertly. "This is no time to settle down to marriage. We have a war to win."

"But it's not too early to begin making plans for the peace," he retorted promptly.

PARTING

The nurses made quite a festive occasion out of the Fourth of July. Although it was midwinter, Northern Australia was close enough to the equator for the weather to be like midsummer at home. Nancy as chairman of the program committee, started weeks ahead trying to collect flags and bunting to decorate the wards. Miss Anna Darien and the Red Cross workers back in Sydney sent her boxes that were real gold mines for her purpose.

Their hospital was not far from a camp of negro soldiers from the states. These colored men were primarily employed in pushing convoys through northern Australia. Nancy, knowing how beautifully some of them sang, suggested that Major Reed invite a group over to entertain the wounded on their American holiday.

Nancy feared rain might spoil their program, which was to be outdoors, but she took chances on having the bandstand arranged in the middle of the street within view of most of the buildings. Though they had sloshed through enough rain to float a transport the last weeks, the sky actually cleared a few hours before time for their program.

For a change the nurses all donned their white uniforms, and in spite of the heat the medical officers put on coats and ties. The convalescents, still in pajamas, were supplied with benches around the bandstand. Everyone seemed excited at the prospect of a little diversion.

"Say, but you look like an angel in that white uniform," Bruce exclaimed when he saw Nancy.

He could walk almost erect now, without bending to the pain in his side. He had been given new clothes, which he wore for the first time that day, and Nancy thought him even more handsome than ever in his lieutenant's uniform.

"You're not bad-looking yourself," she told him.

"For the forty-ninth time, do I look good enough to be your husband?"

"Now, Bruce," she began severely, "I have to keep my mind on this program and can't think of the future just now."

"All right! All right!" he said and grinned impishly. "I won't ask you again today, but I make no promises for tomorrow."

"I have a surprise for you," she said, when she was about to leave him on one of the seats. "Hope you'll like it."

"I like anything you do," he assured her.

"I'm not so sure," she retorted. "Remember, I'm from Georgia and you from New York state."

"I can't imagine what difference that would ever make."

"Just wait and see."

The convalescents' band led off with *The Star Spangled Banner*. Though Nancy had stood at attention a thousand times or more she still thrilled to the stirring music, and her heart swelled with pride that she was now an essential part of these great armies, intent upon keeping their own flags waving over all the lands of the free and homes of the brave.

After the national anthem Lieutenant Hauser led the nurses in singing *America the Beautiful*. Then the negro chorus stepped forward to give them a program of spirituals in sonorous, harmonizing voices. First they chanted *I'm Goin' Down De River o' Jordan*. Then their choir leader sang a solo with a group behind him humming an accompaniment, soft and sweet as any deep-toned organ. They finished off their first group with *Swing Low, Sweet Chariot*, which brought such storms of applause the spiritual had to be repeated.

When the hospital band struck up a march a group of nurses stepped out, bearing flags of the Allied Nations, and took a snappy turn around the flagpole. Every spectator, down to the last crippled convalescent, sprang to his feet and stood at salute. Then suddenly Sousa's march blended into the lilting strains of *Dixie*. As the gallant music rang through the Australian bush, Nancy, who carried the American flag in the center of the group of nations, suddenly unfurled a small Confederate flag beneath the Stars and Stripes.

Bruce Williams and Pat Walden, standing on the sidelines, were the first to notice the battle-scarred Stars and Bars, and started cheering. The colored troops caught their enthusiasm and began to sing with the band. A moment later every spectator was singing the old song with all the zest possible. When the band crashed out the last notes the marching group broke up amid much clapping and cheers.

"You made a real hit with that, Nancy," said Major Reed when Nancy went back to the grandstand where he sat.

The Major gave a brief talk on the cause for which they were fighting. He praised the fine courage of the men who had already paid so great a price, and spoke words of commendation for the nurses and doctors who were serving them so faithfully.

After the outdoor program Nancy and Miss Hauser went into the wards with the negro chorus which was glad to sing the familiar songs over and over so that all might hear.

When they had finished Nancy and Miss Hauser were thanking the singers when Nancy said to Sam Turner, leader of the chorus, "There's surely something very familiar about your face, Sam."

Sam's wide mouth spread in a grin, "Reckon so. Plenty people seen dis mug, Miss. I used to be porter on de Dixie Flyer—dat special 'tween New York and Miami."

"Oh, then maybe I've seen you there. I used to catch that train north sometimes."

"Dem wus de days," said Sam, rolling his eyes. "Many's de time I pick up fifty dollar in tips on de way down." He grinned knowingly. "Dey wus neber quite so flush comin' back from Florida in de spring."

"That's all a thing of the past now, Sam—till we get this big job done," said Nancy.

"Yas'm, sho is, Miss. I'se mighty glad to see y'all folks from down home he'pin' wid it."

When the singers had driven away, Nancy's superior officer turned to her and said, "We have you to thank for a wonderful program, Nancy. I had no idea you could get up anything so nice."

"Thanks," said Nancy happily. "It really went off more smoothly than I expected. But I never could have done it without Miss Anna Darien, and the Red Cross back in Sydney. They got me the colors for decorations, and the flags of the different countries."

"Not the confederate flag?" questioned Lieutenant Hauser, and smiled reminiscently at the hurrah it had created.

Nancy lowered her eyes self-consciously. "I was a little nervous as to how they might receive that," she admitted.

"You made quite a hit. I'm sure I never felt such a wave of enthusiasm as they put into *Dixie*."



*"There's Something Familiar About Your Face,
Sam."*

"So many of the boys here at the hospital are southern boys," Nancy explained. "And I knew the negroes would love it."

"But where did you get the flag?" persisted Miss Hauser.

"I brought it over with me," Nancy confessed. "You see it's the same little flag that my great-grandfather Dale carried all through the Civil War. Dad gave it to me just before I left. He said it had brought Grand-dad through his campaigns safely, and he thought it might bring me good luck."

"I suppose there's still a lot of sentiment in the south about that old flag," said Miss Hauser.

"Yes, there is. It would be hard for anyone else to understand how we feel about the lost cause. Not that we would change things as they are now. But we have a lot of respect and love for those old fellows who fought and suffered so much for what they thought was right. There were some marvelous military leaders among them, you know."

"Indeed there were," agreed Lieutenant Hauser. "Our men study the military tactics of Lee, Jackson and the others."

"I didn't know that," said Nancy, "but I'm glad to hear it."

When they were about to separate, Miss Hauser said, "Oh, I almost forgot—Major Reed has asked to see you when your work is finished."

Nancy lifted her eyebrows slightly, wondering what was brewing. "Thanks," she said. "I'll go now."

She found Major Reed in his office. He had already discarded his coat and tie and was drinking a coke.

"I'll have one sent in for you," he said, as he motioned Nancy to a chair beside his desk. Chairs were luxuries and Nancy sat down gratefully, for she suddenly felt very tired.

"A fresh supply just came in from the States," Major Reed explained as he opened her bottle.

"My, that tastes like the corner drugstore at home," said Nancy.

He studied her a moment, then asked, "Homesick?"

"Oh, no. I'm having a wonderful time."

His face relaxed. "I was afraid you were homesick."

"Of course I'd like better than anything else to see Mom and Dad, and have a peep at all the folks back home, but I'd want to be right here the next day."

"You wouldn't mind going even deeper into it?" he asked.

She sent him a speculative glance. "Oh, Major Reed, are we going to get out to the islands?"

"You guessed right."

For a moment Nancy felt as uplifted as she had been on the night she took her Florence Nightingale pledge so long ago. Major Reed was opening the door to the goal for which she had worked so long.

"You've been such a good scout, Nancy, and put on such a splendid program today this was the only reward I could offer you right now—to tell you a little ahead of the others that we're soon going out into the Pacific. I fear the work here will seem like play compared with what we'll meet there."

"I'm ready and eager to go," she assured him. "When do we leave?"

"Shortly. But you are not to mention it until it's officially announced."

The general announcement was made sooner than Nancy dared hope—three evenings later. They had to be ready to leave the following morning. The new nursing unit was expected in that night to take over.

Before Nancy started packing she went to find Bruce Williams and tell him good-bye. He was genuinely distressed.

"I was afraid it was too much good luck, having you here even this long," he said.

"But you won't be here much longer either," she told him. She leaned across the table in the recreation room where he had been reading. "I'll tell you something if you won't mention it."

"Oh, jimminy! Nancy, are you really going to marry me?"

"Don't be silly!" she exclaimed. "We've got a war to win first. I was going to tell you that you're going to be sent home with the next bunch that goes out from here."

"Say, but that *is* great!"

"See, if I hadn't been sent out first, I'd be the one left behind."

"Seems as if it can't be true—going home at last. For so long I gave up hopes of ever seeing the folks, as you call them down south."

He caught her hand and looked pleadingly into her eyes. "But Nancy, when you come home, too, will you promise to think seriously about what I've been asking you every day?"

For the first time she took him seriously and said, "I surely will, Bruce. And you won't forget to pray that somehow Tommy will get back to us?"

"You bet I won't, Nancy."

When she stood up to leave he started to rise also, but she pressed her hand on his shoulder, holding him down firmly, for it was still difficult for him to get up and down.

"Don't stand," she said. "I must run along."

Suddenly she bent and kissed him lightly on the forehead, then hurried away before he could come after her, making their parting harder. Nancy found that the most trying aspect of her work was making friends, then having to leave them behind.

BEACH LANDING

The convoy in which they moved out into the Pacific again was quite different from that in which they had come across. There were beach landing boats of many kinds in the great fleet. Though this indicated that they were to go ashore on some beach, Nancy's unit had no idea what island that would be. To most it was a matter of indifference, but to Nancy it was immensely important in which direction their convoy moved.

In her musette bag she had tucked away the little map Bruce had drawn for her, with the names of Tommy's bomber crew. She would never give up hope of learning more from some of them as to Tommy's fate.

The crowded transport on which they traveled could not supply all with sleeping quarters. Nancy and Mabel were among the women who volunteered to sleep on deck the first night. The second night they took a turn below, but found it so crowded, and the air so bad they preferred their bed rolls on deck. Bathing was practically taboo, as their water supply had to be conserved for drinking. The second day out Jap fliers discovered them, so that helmets and Mae Wests were their inseparable companions. Their voyage across from home seemed like a pleasure cruise by comparison.

"I'll surely have more sympathy with the dirty men we have to clean up hereafter," said Mabel, trying to reach under her "Mae West" to do a bit of scratching.

"I've been wondering if I've gotten fleas or something," said Nancy. "I remind myself of old Bozo back home. He's always clawing at some part of his anatomy."

When the Jap planes came over they had their first real chance to discover of what stuff they were made. To Nancy's consternation she was almost paralysed with fear. She glanced at the few possessions she had with her, wondering which she ought to take to the lifeboat. It was awful to see those busters sending up great waterspouts where they fell, and never to know if the next would land in their midst. What a relief it was when their own planes went into action, and the Japs turned tail.

But the aggravating Zeros came over again in the night. Decks had been cleared and Nancy and Mabel huddled side by side on a bunk, listening to attackers and defenders roaring overhead. Nancy had been in a Florida hurricane once that made her feel like this. All night long the oncoming gusts of wind had threatened to level the beach cottage. She wondered how she had ever survived that night when almost momentarily she had expected death. But tonight she lived the horrible experience all over again. No one could tell as a plane zoomed low over their ship whether it was a Jap or American. Time and again they braced themselves for the explosion they were certain must come. She and Mabel clutched each other's hands till their fingers ached.

"It's beginning to look as though Major Reed has over-estimated my courage," she whispered ruefully to Mabel.

"I never before realized how wicked I am," groaned Mabel. "All my sins seem rising up to slap me in the face now."

Suddenly Nancy laughed hysterically, "You're the limit, Mabel."

Mabel giggled and their tension was broken. "Let's put on our helmets and go out in the hall where we can keep up with what's happening," Mabel suggested. "I always feel better in a thunderstorm when I'm standing where I can see the lightning strike."

They went out to the passage nearest their lifeboat, and felt more comfortable. Almost immediately after they stationed themselves there, however, the attackers were driven off and peace descended once more on the dark flotilla.

Not until next morning did they learn that a ship some distance behind them had been struck and sent to the bottom. She was a tanker, and only about half her crew were picked up by neighboring vessels.

"But for the grace of God that might have been us," said Nancy sadly.

When they were approaching the end of their dangerous voyage, the nurses learned some details of the situation they were to face. Their destination was Kosshu Island, half of which had already been taken from the Japs. The prolonged struggle to gain complete possession of the area had caused many casualties, making a hospital unit imperative.

There would be many more casualties they knew from this reinforcing armada of which they were a part, to replace those being sent out from the island by plane.

Excitement rippled over the transport when the troops and nurses sighted their destination, a fluted outline of ragged palms silhouetted against a white-hot tropical sky. The beach-head which they were to occupy had been taken weeks ago, so the landing would not be as dangerous as it had been for the earlier force.

About a mile offshore the flotilla came to anchor. All morning Nancy and her companions watched the landing craft of many types push in close against the beach, putting men and munitions ashore. Much of the infantry had come all the way from Australia aboard the larger landing craft. When these boats had discharged their passengers they returned to the transports, and filled up again. On one of these landing craft for infantry, Nancy's unit went ashore.

While they waited their turn, watching the maneuvers over the wide theater of action, Major Reed

proffered Nancy his field glasses. She shared them with Mabel, who stood at her side.

"Do look yonder," she said, pointing to the eastern end of the island.

Mabel whistled softly when she adjusted the glasses. "That must have been where they took the beach-head!" she said. "Our artillery surely did riddle that piece of coconut jungle."

Most of the trees had been topped, and reminded Nancy of blackened chimneys she had seen once when several city blocks burned. The open beach lying between the jungle and the sea was strewn with the wreckage of a campsite.

No nurse had been allowed to bring more than she could carry in her own hands, so Nancy's suitcase and musette bag were packed to heavy tightness. For two hours they waited with their baggage around them. But at last they went aboard the landing craft. Nancy was relieved when finally the boat moved toward shore to see that they were not headed for that battle-scarred point to the east. Buzzards still circled above it, and she surmised they had not yet completed their ghastly task of cleaning up the remains of battle.

It was exciting to see landing ramps go down on each side of the craft's bow, like stairs descending into the shallow surf. The nurses watched while the first men went ashore, their helmets on, their bodies padded with their packs, their guns held high above the lapping waves.

Then a line of men formed from the long ramps to the sandy beach as guard while the women went ashore. Nancy, Mabel and fifty others, took off their G.I. shoes, stuffed their stockings inside, tied their shoes together by the laces and hung them around their necks. They rolled the legs of their coveralls high above their knees, and with many excited squeals and giggles hurried down the ramps and into the cool water breaking on the shore.

As soon as she reached the beach Nancy sat down to put on her shoes for the sands were burning hot. Before she rose she paused to say a silent prayer of thanksgiving that at last she was on one of the Pacific islands, the goal of her dreams these many months.

"Surely looks as though we're in for tropical living here," remarked Mabel, glancing at the jungle wall not far from the lapping tide.

"Look farther down the beach," Nancy pointed out. "Isn't that a marvelous sight?"

As far as they could see along the beach, landing craft of every sort were pushing up to shore. The one next their own infantry craft was a huge affair, and even while they looked its large doors opened toward land. A tank rumbled forth into shallow water, and rolled up to dry land. It was followed by several others.

"Gosh, doesn't it thrill you to think how fast and efficiently our country works," said Mabel. "They tell me it wasn't till the fall of 1942 that the first models of these landing ships were made—and look at this already."

"Surely the Japs can't beat a country like ours!" said Nancy proudly.

But even while she spoke there came a rumbling of heavy guns far beyond that jungle wall. Mabel had taken off her helmet to let the wind play through her red hair, that was like a nimbus around her face in the sunshine. Suddenly at the sound of firing she slapped the helmet back on her head.

"Say, but that doesn't sound as if it's going to be so easy to whip them!" she groaned.

Farther out in the deep water they could see troops still being transferred from the great transports to the landing craft. Another landing boat pushed up to the beach close to where they stood. It didn't look to be longer than about a hundred feet. When its ramp was lowered it disgorged so many trucks and small tanks they wondered how they had all been stored inside.

As far as they could see along the beach, troops, equipment and boxes of supplies filled almost every available foot of space. The earlier invading army had cleared a road with tractors through the heart of the jungle. The leveled trees had been used on the most swampy ground to make corduroy roads. But the hospital unit was not to follow the marching troops into the interior.



Landing Craft Pushed up to Shore

A small detachment of men set up camp east of the road, while the western side was cleared for the hospital site. A small stream meandered through the grounds to supply them with water for bathing and laundry. They had brought their own drinking water against the possibility of not finding pure water.

A squad of negroes cleared underbrush from under the towering palms, cut a few trees here and there, and with almost magic swiftness the tent hospital went up. Those men took care of the long tents that were to serve as hospital wards and mess hall, but the nurses put up their own sleeping quarters.

The first night they had to sleep on their bedding rolls on the beach, for their campsite had not been entirely cleared. Before the second night, however, Nancy, Mabel, Shorty and Ida were prepared to sleep in their own tent.

"I never dreamed we could be so cozily settled in so short a time," said Nancy.

Even their mosquito bars were up, and they had the prospect of a decent night's sleep, for the previous one had been a nightmare. Only by covering up completely could they be free of the torturing pricks of mosquitoes, and then they sweltered.

At intervals during the first twenty-four hours there had come the rumble of heavy firing in the distance, like an approaching thunderstorm. No doubt those troops and tanks that had moved on beyond the jungle wall were already in the thick of the fight.

An hour before sunset of their second day ashore the thundering reverberations were increased ten-fold. Before dark, their tent hospital, not yet ready for patients, was precipitated into action. Ambulances began rolling in from the north. Those first patients had to be stretched on the sands of the beach. To Nancy's amazement she found that some were not bloody, wounded men.

In reply to her inquiry about them Captain Crawford said, "They tell me they're prisoners—our men, freed when they took over a native village."

Some had evidently been in line of the attacking fire Nancy discovered as she bent over a chap with a shredded arm.

"Were you a prisoner of the Japs?" she asked.

"Not me."

Even as he replied Nancy realized from his well-fed look that he must have been one of the attackers.

"I got this as we took the village. Those poor creatures in that ambulance yonder were prisoners."

"Many of them?" asked Nancy, wishing she could look after them.

"A dozen or so, I suppose. More had been there, but had passed beyond our help."

"Who are they? Did you hear any of their names?"

"Sister, we didn't stop for that. They were Americans and that was enough for us."

Nancy had been cutting away the boy's bloody shirt as she talked, and now she began to clean his wound. Captain Crawford came to probe for lead. Nancy gave the soldier a hypo and the doctor went back to his first patient while it took effect.

"You nurses and doctors got here just in time," said the young corporal gratefully.

"Then you were here before?" she asked.

"Three weeks we've been driving 'em north."

"You were lucky to escape so far."

"Glad they waited till you got here," he said, beginning to look drowsy.

A few minutes later the boy was sleeping, his wound dressed, and Nancy rose to go to the next cot. She sent a fleeting glance along the beach and under the towering palms where men with all manner of wounds were lying. Here was work enough for a hundred nurses. She saw there would be no sleep for any of the fifty who were here tonight. A doctor near by was amputating an arm, working fast while the daylight lasted.

Mabel worked with the released prisoners. She was giving plasma to one, evidently at the point of death. Nancy paused to give her a hand. She was amazed to see that the man's hair was snow white.

"Wonder how anyone this old got into the service?" she whispered to Mabel.

The man's face was brown and creased as cracked leather. Only a loin cloth hung about his waist, while every rib could be counted in his shriveled body. His limbs were mere skin-covered bones, making the joints seem abnormally large. In spite of all this they could see he had once been a powerful, tall man.

"He looks too dark to be an American," said Nancy dubiously.

"This sun can cook anybody's skin that brown. Look, his dog tag's still on. That gives his data," said Mabel, for she had already referred to it to get his blood type.

The man was in a coma. There seemed slight chance they could bring him around, yet there was life still in his pulse, and they did everything which modern science knew to strengthen that feeble spark.

Nancy picked up the tag from the bony chest and read, "Vernon Goodwin."

"Yep. I noticed that when I looked for his blood type," said Mabel.

"Nearest relative, V. P. Goodwin, Graceville, S. C. Not only an American, but a southerner!" exclaimed Nancy. "Protestant religion. Vernon Goodwin—Vernon Goodwin," she repeated softly.

To her surprise the sick man's eyelids fluttered, and Nancy thought the light of consciousness welled up as he looked at her a moment. The lips tried to move, but no words came.

"There's something familiar in that name, Mabel."

"Common enough name back home—Goodwin."

"Could he be one of Tommy's bomber crew?"

Again the eyelids fluttered, and again the lips tried to move.

"Mabel, I've got to know!" exclaimed Nancy. "I'm going to run up to our tent to get that list Bruce wrote for me."

Nancy was back in five minutes, but Mabel had moved to the next man. Her face was shining with an inner light when she went up to her friend and said, "It is one of them, Mabel. Vernon Goodwin, Tommy's gunner."

"Well of all things!" burst forth Mabel. "It's a little world after all."

"But he may die, poor soul!"

"He has only a slim chance I'd say, even to realize he's been rescued, much less to tell you about the disaster."

"But Mabel, we've got to bring him through—somehow! Surely he can tell us about Tommy. Why Tommy may even be among these prisoners."

As the idea seized her Nancy hurried off to search the faces of those prisoners. She looked at each emaciated face with hope, only to turn away with a heavy heart. Then the idea came to her that Tommy's suffering might have changed him beyond recognition, so she went back among the prisoners, this time examining their dog tags.

When she passed Mabel a second time her friend gave her a sharp look and said, "Snap out of it, Nancy! You'd better get back on the job or they'll be jacking you up for shirking duty."

Nancy flushed and came to herself with a start. She had never received a reprimand of that sort and would have felt disgraced to merit it in this first real testing hour.

Several times during the night, however, she returned to see about Vernon Goodwin. At last as she turned her light on his face to watch his breathing she thought she saw a faint color in his dry lips. He must live, he must! She kept saying the words to herself. If he died she might never know what had really become of Tommy. Vernon seemed her last hope of gaining some clue that might lead to rescuing him.

THE GUNNER'S STORY

The systematic routine of nursing, in which Nancy and her fellow workers had been so carefully trained, had to be forgotten in the trying days that followed. Although the nurses went on duty at stated intervals, theoretically to work for eight hours, few ever stopped before reaching the point of exhaustion. Even with their large and well-balanced unit there were not half enough to meet the need.

"If the nurses back home could fly out here for one night—just to see how badly we need help," said Nancy, "they couldn't get into the ANC fast enough."

"Don't you worry—I'm going to tell 'em a few things in my next letters home," Mabel assured her.

Mabel was beginning to look something like a guinea egg, for the hot sun and constant glare had peppered her fair face with freckles. She wore her hair pinned up tightly under her kerchief, as most of the others did. Wind blew almost constantly across the island, and without some protection hair would always be in their faces.

Nancy had burned badly on their last sea voyage, and was now beginning to peel. "There's one consolation," she remarked to Mabel. "Everybody looks about as bad as everybody else."

"And who gives a hang?" Mabel wanted to know. "There're really more important things to think about. It's what you can do and hold up under that counts these days."

It took some time for Nancy to condition herself to that constant rumble of artillery. At first each reverberation that shook their tent poles set her aquiver. She knew that every blast only increased the number of dead and wounded.

Life on Koshu was as complicated as a three-ring circus. Besides the continual rumble of artillery, as the Americans pushed north across the island, there was the constant drone of planes overhead. At first Nancy had the impulse to run out and look up to discover whether they were Japs or Americans, but she soon learned to trust their sirens to give her warning of danger. She had her job to do. If she was to keep fit for it she must concentrate on her own part of the great task.

By the third day the hospital was full to overflowing. Nancy and her quartette offered their private tent to give shelter to more wounded. Other nurses followed their example. The negro camp helpers built the nurses a long shelter, roofed with palm fronds. Some of the island natives, dubbed "Fuzzy Wuzzies" because of their bushy heads, directed the construction. The nurses called their new quarters the fresh-air dormitory. Though there was plenty of fresh air there was certainly little privacy.

"Who has time for privacy these days?" Nancy wanted to know.

Their new quarters proved to be much cooler than the tents. Mosquito bars were hung from the palm-trunk rafters. By the time the nurses were able to crawl under their nets they were so exhausted they missed none of the luxuries of normal life. To be able to stretch out and sleep awhile on a canvas cot seemed luxury enough.

The little area which each nurse's cot covered was her small kingdom. Her gas mask and helmet hung from the head of the bed when she was not on duty. Her packed musette bag was at the foot. Beneath the cot was her suitcase and other possessions.

The day after they moved into their fresh-air dormitory Nancy found a snake reposing in the cool shadows under her cot. He was the harmless sort, so with a long stick she prodded him until he decided to seek more peaceful quarters on the path leading to the stream.

Next morning Nancy stuck her foot into her shoe to find a lizard had spent the night there. She tossed the inhabited G.I. away with such a screech all her neighbors lifted sleepy heads to see if the Japs had labeled a bomb for her.

Though Nancy made light of the small difficulties of their quarters her heart was often heavy as she anxiously watched and prayed for Vernon Goodwin's recovery. During the first twenty-four hours after they placed him in the tent it seemed that life would flicker out at any moment. The news got round that Vernon had been one of Tommy Dale's bomber crew, and the entire staff concentrated their efforts toward his recovery. Lieutenant Herbert York, in charge of his ward, gave him every treatment that modern science had discovered for restoring life to a starved body. To her great satisfaction, they transferred Nancy to his ward.

On the fourth day Vernon showed the first real promise of recovery. An hour after daylight Nancy was scheduled to go off duty, but she didn't want to leave Vernon. He had roused and his lids had fluttered open several times. To the watching nurse's delight his look of confusion had vanished.

"Wouldn't you like something to eat?" she asked hopefully. "Lieutenant York said you could have something this morning."

He turned his head and looked at her a long time. "You're an American nurse," he whispered as if he could scarcely believe the wonderful truth.

She nodded and smiled. Then she took a grip on herself to keep from saying anything that would shock him.

"I suppose I don't look very much like one in this seersucker suit and with my head tied up. But you're safe in an American hospital, Vernon, and you're going to get well," she assured him.

"I never thought it could happen," he whispered. He turned his head slowly as if looking for someone. "Did they bring the others out?" he asked after an interval.

"Who?" she asked. "The rest of the bomber crew?"

A shadow darkened his eyes.

"Was Tommy with them?" she asked. Then she was frightened for fear his answer would bring an end to all her hopes.

"No."

"No?" she repeated in an agony of suspense.

"He wouldn't come back with us."

"Wouldn't come back?"

"From that island where we went ashore."

"You—you mean Tommy really got safely ashore somewhere?"

"Yes. Three of us did." Suddenly Vernon stopped and fixed his gaze on her. "Did you know Tommy?"

"He's my brother."

The ill man showed no shock or surprise at this. But he stared at her for some time before he continued, "I think I knew that anyhow." His tone grew more puzzled. "Don't know how, unless it was because you kept pulling me back from the grave—you wouldn't let me die."

"Maybe you realized some of the things we said around you while you were so desperately ill," Nancy told him. "Do you feel able to tell me more about Tommy? Was he injured when he jumped?"



"Tommy Made Us Leave Him There."

"All of us were one way or another. Tommy got his in here somewhere." The emaciated hand lying on the sheet, indicated his stomach. "He made Jim and me start off in our rubber boat. We had picked up some valuable information from the Japs that called for counteraction right away."

"And he made you leave him there?"

"Hardest thing I ever had to do, but he was our captain and we had to obey. 'Getting through with that information may save thousands of lives,' Tommy told us. He was like that, Tommy was. By staying we might've saved him, but he wouldn't hear of it when so much was at stake."

"But couldn't you have brought him away with you?" she wailed.

"He was too ill to sit up. That burning sun would have finished him in a few hours, even if the Japs hadn't got us."

"Oh—then they did get you before you came through with the information?"

He was silent a moment as if gathering strength for the awful memories.

"Picked us up at sea," he said finally. "We had water, food and navigation instruments and might have made it all right."

She feared the thoughts of what followed would be too harrowing, and stopped him there. "I'll go get you some milk," she said. "Then you must rest before you talk any more."

Nancy dared not weary Vernon with more questioning just then, so was silent while she fed him the milk through a tube. The information he had already given was broken at intervals for him to gather strength for the effort.

"You must sleep some more," she suggested when he had taken the nourishment, "and I'll come back to see you again this afternoon."

For the first time in many weeks Nancy found it impossible to sleep when she was finally stretched on her cot. She often used a blinder across her eyes to shut out the glare when she had difficulty sleeping in the day, but this time it did no good at all. She could not stop the working of her troubled mind, even though her tired body cried out for rest. Nor did she like to take anything to make herself sleep, for she knew, under the present stress, how easy it would be to get into such a habit.

After tossing from side to side for a couple of hours she finally got up and went down to the spring to do her washing. Soon her undies and seersucker suits were flapping on a line between two palm trees near their shelter. Then she took a bath in the wash hole at the stream, which they had made private by an arrangement of palm leaf screens.

When Nancy was coming back up the path from the stream she met Major Reed. Since they had landed on the island there had been little thought or time for military formalities. The entire unit, from the highest officers to the youngest shavetails, had become a harmonious working whole. However, Nancy saluted now as she came face to face with the major on the path.

He was about to pass on when suddenly he paused and said, "Nancy, there's no need of killing yourself. You look all washed up."

"Maybe I look pale because I just had a bath," she told him. "A rare luxury!"

He chuckled and admitted, "You do look mighty clean!" Then almost immediately he was serious again. "I've just come from your ward and York told me you worked long beyond your time this morning."

"More were coming in than the nurses on duty could handle," she explained. Then for fear she would be given more credit than she deserved Nancy hastened to add, "And Vernon Goodwin was so much better I thought he might rouse at any moment and be able to tell me something."

"And did he?"

"Yes he did, Major. He told me a little about Tommy. He wasn't able to talk much." Briefly Nancy repeated what she had learned from Vernon.

"Did he know the name of the island where they came down?"

"No—or rather I didn't ask him. I was afraid to let him talk too much. His life still hangs by a thin thread."

"How long since you talked with him?"

Nancy glanced at her watch. "Nearly three hours."

"Want to try again?"

"Oh, yes, if you don't think it would be too much strain on him."

They went to the ward and made their way down through the long rows of cots. They were a pitiful lot, those wounded men with bandages of every sort. But they wanted no pity, for they called themselves the lucky guys for having so much comfort and attention. Some were able to be propped up for the noon meal, while others must be patiently fed a liquid diet.

Shorty Warner was feeding Vernon a thin broth through a tube when Major Reed and Nancy paused by his bed. The ghost of a smile flickered to the gunner's face when he recognized Nancy.

"He asked for you as soon as he woke," Shorty explained.

"Feel like talking a bit, old chap?" asked the major, touching the prematurely white head and giving it a friendly pat.

"Think so, Major. I know Miss Nancy is anxious to hear all about Tom."

"So he was alive when you left him?"

"He was, sir. But I fear he was mortally wounded. Think he had a spatter of lead in his stomach—must have got it when they killed our co-pilot."

Though Vernon's voice was very weak Nancy saw that talking was less effort than it had been earlier.

"Can you give us an idea of the location of that island?" the major asked.

"Not too accurate, I fear," Vernon admitted. "I've been through such horrible things since. I'd say it's not more than a day's journey by water from here."

At this information Nancy's heart leaped up once more with hope.

"You took that fatal flight, you know, long before we started cleaning up this area," Major Reed

reminded him.

"So the nurse was just telling me. I've sort of lost track of time."

"Was it a large island?" asked Nancy.

"Big enough for a man to get lost in its jungles—entirely surrounded by reefs. No large boat could get in close to its shores."

"Plenty like that in this region," said Major Reed.

"Jim and I passed no others in our life boat as we came south. Then those devils picked us up."

"What about Jim?" Nancy asked.

"He had a nasty wound in his hip. Gangrene ended his misery two days after they put us in the prison camp. I've wished a thousand times it could have been me, too."

Looking down on this wreck of a man, Nancy wondered how he had lived through the ordeal.

"Any Japs on the island where you three got ashore?" asked the major.

"No village there, or camp, nor any sign there'd ever been any. The place was a solid jungle, except for a narrow fringe of beach. But we did find a Jap plane wrecked on the reef. Her crew had evidently all been wiped out by our fire."

"Was that where you got the information Captain Dale wanted you to bring back to us?"

Vernon nodded. "I brought the Jap papers away in the lining of my coat. Later when they were found on me those fiends stripped me of every rag for fear I might have more of their information hidden in my clothes." Vernon managed a rueful smile. "That's why you found me in only a loin cloth."

"Did Tommy have water and food with him?" Nancy asked.

"You bet. There was a good spring close by. He didn't need water, but we left him most of our food and medicine, and the supplies we took from the Zero. We put everything right to hand. Poor Tommy was already too miserable to crawl more than a few feet from where we left him."

Tears were streaming down Nancy's face, but she stubbornly held to her hopes. She couldn't give Tommy up now, even after hearing the worst.

"It's not likely he could be living still. But don't feel too badly about it, Miss Nancy," Vernon said kindly. "There's plenty of things worse than death in this war."

"I'm afraid we've let you talk too much this time," said Major Reed. "Sleep some more now and we'll see you again."

When Nancy and the major were outside she said, "Oh, Major, do you think there's anything we could do about it? Would they be willing to send a searching plane out to look for Tommy?"

"Of course they would, my dear. But Goodwin's information is rather vague about some things. We'll wait till tomorrow. Maybe with the aid of a map he'll be able to give us more accurate directions."

"Oh, Major, I don't know how to thank you."

"You don't have to, young lady. Captain Dale is about as important to the Air Forces as he is to you. We don't give up such men without a struggle." They walked on a few steps before he added, "Now you must go back and get some rest. We can't afford to have any sick nurses on our hands."

A TEST

Vernon Goodwin had a relapse that night, and for the next few days Nancy feared they had learned all from him they would ever know. In the meantime, however, glorious news was brought back from the fighting front. The great number of reinforcing troops had finished the job for which they had come. The last nest of "Yellow Jackets" had been cleaned from the island.

This news called for such a celebration as the nurses had not had since July Fourth, for their work had lightened somewhat. Planes had taken some of their serious cases back to hospitals in Australia. Even when the wounded were brought in after the final victory there were still some beds unoccupied, so the nurses found a few hours out of every twenty-four to give to personal needs once more, and a bit of recreation.

But Nancy had little heart for amusement during those trying days. She could think of nothing but Vernon Goodwin lying at the point of death, and that Tommy might be alive still, somewhere in that jungle a day's boat ride to the north.

"Ah, snap out of it, Nancy," wheedled Mabel, the afternoon before the party when she came upon her pal sitting on her cot, staring into space. "We've all decided to put on our whites for the shindig. It will be good for the morale of the patients to see us looking like real nurses for once."

"We'll only make ourselves targets for the Zeros that come over."

"Can't you realize yet they've cleared out those Yellow Jackets! We've got something to celebrate over."

"I'm really tired, Mabel," said Nancy, stretching out on her cot. "I honestly don't feel like going up to the mess hall to the party."

"Oh, but honey, you can't miss it! I'll tell you something as an inducement. We have a surprise. Some of the Fuzzy Wuzzies are going to put on a special ceremonial dance—the kind they use to celebrate their own victories."

These island natives had been most valuable in bringing back the wounded from the fighting front. Ned Holbrook, one of Nancy's patients, who had a broken back, had been brought out by them on a litter.

"They were as careful with me as any mother," Ned told her. "They saved my life, Nancy, that's sure! I never could have stood the jolting of our ambulance over those corduroy roads."

Nancy had read many articles in the magazines and papers of Australia about the Fuzzy Wuzzies, and the help they had been to the Allies, but she had to see them in action to appreciate their amazing gentleness and value. It seemed incredible that these dark-skinned men, who looked so savage, with their bushy heads, and their bodies naked except for loin cloths, could make such good hospital aides. She had often wondered how they acted in their native villages, and she knew the ceremonial dance would be something to remember always.

"The last plane that came out from Australia," explained Mabel, "brought some packages from the Red Cross for us to give the native helpers. We opened one just to see what they contained. Boy, will those Fuzzies be thrilled!"

"What's in them?"

"Each one had a loin cloth and a new girdle, a string of beads, a bracelet, an ornamental hair pin and a package of cigarettes." Mabel laughed. "I still can't get used to those men wearing fancy hair pins."

"I'm sure they're meant more for service than ornamentation," replied Nancy. "Yesterday a couple of Fuzzies came in with a litter. As soon as we had the wounded man on the bed they sat down on the ground nearby and began scratching their woolly heads with those pins."

"When they start that I always give them a wide berth. I don't relish the idea of any of the inhabitants of those bushy mops jumping on me." Mabel scratched her head at the very idea, then added, "But it will be fun watching the dance and seeing them get the packages."

"I'm afraid I'll have to miss it," said Nancy ruefully, as she yawned and stretched on the cot.

Mabel pulled the mosquito net aside and wheedled, "Ah, come on, lazy bones!"

She caught Nancy's hand to pull her off the cot, then stopped suddenly. "Your hand's hot as fire!" she exclaimed. "Nancy, you're sick."

"Not so loud. Somebody will hear. I'm afraid I have malaria. I've already started taking quinine. Think I had a chill on the ward just now."

"And you stuck it out—you numskull?"

"Please, Mabel, don't talk so loud. Somebody will hear. They may even send me back if they find I have malaria. I'm going to doctor myself and knock it out."

"When that bug gets a grip on you it's not so easy as you think."

"Please don't tell anyone, Mabel. It would be awful to be sent away right now, just as I'm about to get on Tommy's track."

"Of course—if you don't want me to. If you're not better in a day or two, though, you've got to see one of the doctors."

When the nurses, who shared their outdoor quarters, started off to the mess hall in white Nancy said wistfully, "It sure makes me think of home, seeing you all in regulations."

Mabel placed a glass of fruit juice on a box under Nancy's net before leaving, and ordered her to

sleep. The girls had been gone only a few minutes when Nancy dropped into a feverish sleep. She was roused some time later by sounds of the Fuzzy Wuzzies' ceremonial drums. She went to sleep again with them ringing in her ears, and didn't rouse till dawn. She was wet with perspiration and realized her fever had burned itself out. Though she was weak and her head ringing from quinine, she got into her clothes and went on duty. She knew she would have forty-eight hours before a chill gripped her again, if her heavy doses of quinine were not sufficient yet to knock it out.

How glad she was afterward that she did force herself to go on duty. As she entered the ward to take Shorty's place, her little friend said, "Vernon woke during the night and asked for you."

"Why didn't you send for me?"

"Mabel wouldn't let me. She said you were all in. But he's much better this morning—ate some breakfast."

Nancy waited for no more, but hurried to the gunner's bed. He was finishing some cereal, and gave her a wan smile as she drew near.

"That's the way you must eat," commented Nancy, taking his emptied mess kit. "You'll get well now."

"I believe I will, Miss Nancy. I may yet be able to point out that island where we left Tom."

"Oh, if you only could, Vernon!"

"I believe I could. Though a gunner doesn't bother his head with where he's going—got enough to think about to hit the targets, but I do remember something about how that island looked from the air, and I sure had to pay attention to directions when we were leaving in that rubber boat."

"Is it due north from here?" she asked.

"No, I'd say to the northeast."

"Entirely surrounded by coral reefs?"

"As much as we saw. Passages here and there, large enough for small boats."

Though Vernon's voice was still cracked and weak Nancy could see he was able to coordinate his thoughts more easily than during their earlier conversations.

"Major Reed said a searching plane would be sent," Nancy told him. "But of course we could do nothing while you were so ill."

"Has it been very long?"

"Almost a week—a sort of reaction I suppose from our too vigorous efforts to bring you back. But you're going to make it this time," she assured him.

"Sorry I delayed things," he apologized. "Poor Tom—if he's still hanging on I guess he's given up hope. How long has it been? I've lost track of time."

"The government notified us that Tommy was missing in action on March second. This is September."



Slowly Vernon Goodwin Gained Strength

"Lord!" Vernon groaned. "Miss Nancy, I don't see how he could have made it till now. There wasn't enough food."

"But there would probably be fruits, coconuts, fish like we have on this island. Tommy would find some way to catch fish," Nancy said, stubbornly clinging to her little shreds of hope.

It took all the will power she had to keep on her job that day, for she hadn't realized how fever could sap one's vitality. When she started back to her quarters in the late afternoon she stopped off to tell Major Reed what Vernon had said. As she talked an odd expression came into his face. She feared he had lost interest and would not push the searching expedition.

"I'm afraid Vernon Goodwin won't be well enough to go with any searching party before we have to leave here." Major Reed finally revealed what was on his mind.

Nancy's pale face grew more wan. "Oh, Major Reed!"

"Our job here is almost finished. Planes can clear out the patients faster and faster now that Koshu has been taken. We can expect orders for a change at any time."

Tired and ill as she was the news upset Nancy more than anything had since she first heard Tommy was missing. She took a grip on the tent pole to steady her wobbly knees.

Major Reed was aware of her condition and said, "You look actually ill, Nancy. Don't drive yourself so hard—ease up a bit." He turned away a minute and rummaged in a box of medicines. He found a bottle of golden pills and handed them to her. "Take these vitamins, two a day, till you get your pep back."

Nancy thanked him and hesitated a moment, wondering if she ought to confess about the chill yesterday. She decided against it, however, feeling confident she could take care of herself. She was to wonder later if things might have been different had she spoken then.

Nancy's second chill struck her the next morning before she was out of bed, and at the hour she should have reported for duty she was burning with fever. Mabel was scheduled to have the day off, so offered to take Nancy's place. She would report Nancy in need of a day's rest and otherwise keep silent. Their other dormitory companions were also asked not to betray her.

Nancy kept up her medicine and by dinner time that evening was feeling somewhat better. Hoping to evade too many inquiries she decided to appear at the mess hall with Mabel, Shorty and Ida. Shorty and Mabel were in high spirits and kept them laughing with funny stories about the Fuzzy Wuzzies throughout the meal, and Nancy's morale mounted several degrees.

The four friends, who had grown so companionable during these months of service, little dreamed that was the last meal they would have together on the other side of the world. But their routine came to an unexpected end just as they were leaving the mess hall.

Lieutenant Hauser rapped on the table and called out in her clear tone, "All nurses report for instructions just outside the mess hall."

"Somethin' cookin'!" Mabel said with conviction. "I've felt it all day."

The nurses found Major Reed outside, standing beside Lieutenant Hauser under the palms.

"Orders have come through," began the major, when he lifted his hand for attention.

Instantly the ripple of light talk ceased, and every ear became alert for the coming change.

"Half of us are to move up to open a new hospital. The rest will follow when this camp has been cleared of patients. The situation is now so well in hand that any on Koshu Island needing special treatment may be quickly flown out to larger bases."

Nancy caught Mabel's hand at this dreaded news. It threatened to shatter all her high hopes of an expedition to search for Tommy.

Mabel, fully aware of the cause of Nancy's concern, whispered consolingly, "Maybe you'll be allowed to stay behind and see it through."

"I'm afraid no one will push the expedition unless I'm here," she replied. "Especially if Vernon's sent back to a base hospital."

"The moving unit will be prepared to leave at once. The transport will stand by to pick us up at any hour now," explained Major Reed. "The following nurses will leave for the new base." He then proceeded to read a list of about twenty-five names.

When he called Mabel's name Nancy clutched at her friend's hand desperately. She had scarcely recovered from that shock before her own name was called. Weakened as she was with illness and fatigue she had to take a grip on herself to keep back the tears.

"You're too sick now to make a change," Mabel said, knowing how very much Nancy wanted to stay here. "I'm going to tell them you've been having chills."

This was a real temptation to Nancy. A week or two longer on Koshu might make all the difference in the world where Tommy was concerned. But had she any right to put her own personal considerations ahead of this call to more dangerous service? They might even think she was using her illness or Tommy's rescue as an excuse to cling to the safer work here on Koshu Island.

Her thoughts moved swiftly, but her decision was unshakable when she replied, "No, Mabel. I agreed to give myself to this work. I'll go wherever they send me."

ADRIFT

Change had always been stimulating to Nancy, but this time she found she could not shake off her depression even after she was aboard ship. Kosshu Island was a safe haven she was reluctant to leave. In total darkness they went aboard the transport and in total darkness they moved out to sea again. This ship had detached itself from the convoy to pick up the nurses and several hundred troops. Perhaps by daylight they would again be part of a great flotilla.

The air on deck was cold after the tropical nights they had endured ashore. Nancy's weakened condition made her super-sensitive to chill. She buttoned her overcoat tightly and turned up her collar, keeping her Mae West slung over her shoulder. Immediately on going aboard, and even before they were on the move, they had an abandon ship drill and became acquainted with the position of their lifeboats. Nancy's and Mabel's boat was number four, not more than fifty steps from the lounge where they were to spend the night.

There was not a bunk left on the tightly packed ship to assign to these last passengers. They were merely super-cargo, picked up enroute to the ship's destination. Since they expected to go ashore some time the following morning, their discomforts would not be too prolonged.

"I surely hate to leave," said Mabel as Kosshu Island became a dark smudge on the horizon. "Our life back there will be something to remember forever."

As usual leave-takings were hard for Nancy, too. But most of all she had hated to say good-bye to Vernon Goodwin. He had brought Tommy so close to her once more. How she had hated to disturb him with the news of her departure! She had urged him to insist that they send out a searching plane as soon as he was able to go.

"I've made Major Reed promise to see it through," Nancy told Vernon. "Now everything depends on your speedy recovery."

"I'll do my best," he promised. "But I surely hate to see you go."

"No more than I hate to go—with so much at stake here," she replied. "But when you're in the service it's Uncle Sam who gives the orders."

Vernon's bony hand took hers a moment. "If it hadn't been for you, Miss Nancy, I doubt if I would have come through."

"The whole staff was pulling for you," she reminded him.

He saw how frail and worried she looked, and tried to speak consolingly. "You go on to your new duties with an easy mind, Miss Nancy. I'll give 'em no rest till a plane goes looking for Tom. We'll bring him back if he's still on that island."

There were others, too, whom Nancy had left behind with real regret—Miss Hauser, Major Reed, Ida and Shorty were special favorites. Having Mabel with her, however, meant more than any of the others could have.

"They'll be following pretty soon," said Mabel, who seemed able to drift more lightly through the changing currents of their life than Nancy could.

"I know that's the program now, but you never can tell what will happen in this man's war."

They spoke almost in whispers for they had been warned against loud speech on deck. The great ship moved silently over the dark waters. So quiet was everything aboard that the wash of the waves along the hull was the only audible sound above the low throb of the engines. Only once did they hear the drone of a plane, low on the horizon. Their journey promised to be as peaceful and uneventful as a summer excursion up the Hudson.

Mabel, Janice and a couple of men officers made up a bridge game toward midnight, but Nancy felt too exhausted to play. With her musette bag and helmet beside her, her Mae West dangling from one shoulder she tried to get some sleep on a two-seated couch. By drawing her knees up under her chin she was fairly comfortable. The game near by was still going on when she dozed.

At the sound of a terrific explosion, shaking the ship from prow to stem, Nancy woke with a jolt to find herself on the floor. Total darkness shut her in like a pall, while pandemonium broke loose. She clutched at her life-preserver, buckling it into place as she called through the wild confusion, "Mabel, where are you?"

Her friend must have been sleeping on the floor near by, for she replied almost in Nancy's ear, "Here! So this is it!"

Even while she spoke there came the thunderous voice of the captain through the loud speakers, "Abandon ship! We have been struck! We are going down!"

To Nancy's surprise now that the crisis was upon them, she felt calm and collected. All lights had gone out with that first impact, but she had carefully memorized the route from her couch to the lifeboat. Clinging to Mabel with one hand, she felt around for her musette bag and helmet. She couldn't locate her helmet, but she did find her bag.

"Got your bag?" she asked Mabel.

"Went to sleep on it." Even as she spoke Mabel fished out a flashlight, dimmed with blue paper.

Lights twinkled here and there as people hurried by, some babbling hysterically, others silently intent on reaching their boats. The deck listed with a sickening lurch just as Nancy and Mabel got through the door. They went sliding with alarming speed toward the rail. Some, caught completely off their guard, were plunged into the water.

"God help us," moaned Mabel. "She's going under before we can get to our boat."

"No, here it is!" exclaimed Nancy, swinging her own light to a focus on number four.

It was one of the smaller boats, but three people were already inside. A man gave them a hand.

A woman spoke as they climbed in, "Where are the rest? There're supposed to be many more."

"I don't know," Mabel replied.

The woman's voice was not that of any of their own nurses.

"We can't wait much longer," said the man. "She's listing badly."

"Why don't they hurry?" wailed the woman.

"Don't be frightened. Here's someone now," said another man reassuringly.

"Is this number eight?" A man's voice asked as he stumbled toward the boat.

"No, but you get in," said the man who had spoken first. "No time to hunt yours. She's going down any minute."

He gave the man's arm a jerk and pulled him into the boat. Another man, evidently a sailor, let the boat into the water. The ship lurched dangerously and oily spray drenched the boat. They were not a dozen oar strokes away when acrid smoke billowed from every opening as the ship suddenly burst into flames. The oarsmen had a race to clear the area where flames lapped at the oil-coated water.

It was awful to see that towering bulk become a flaming carnival for some Jap, watching through the periscope of the sub that had struck them. A few minutes later the mighty ship went down with such an explosive churning of water that those in the lifeboats had to cling to the gunwale to keep from being swept overboard. For some time after the flames were extinguished they drifted in Stygian darkness. Nancy couldn't even see Mabel sitting next to her.

In those first stunned moments of escape Nancy had been aware of other boats around them, and people in the water. But when they found themselves in calmer seas some time after the sinking they seemed to be utterly alone.

"Where are the others?" the strange woman across from them asked.

"God only knows," replied her companion.

By the location of their voices Nancy surmised they also were sitting side by side. There was some comfort in feeling the physical nearness of another in that vast, empty darkness.

"We'll drop anchor and ride it out here till morning," the seaman decided. "We were due to be in sight of the convoy by dawn. If they got our SOS somebody should pick us up then."

The last man they had taken aboard had not spoken since their arrival. Nancy wondered if he had gone overboard while the boat pitched so wildly after the ship went down. But a few minutes later she realized she was ankle deep in water. When she lifted her feet she struck something in the bottom of the boat.

"Somebody's lying in the bottom!" she exclaimed. She found she had lost her flashlight in the scramble, but Mabel had hers.

"Don't use a flash!" warned the sailor. "Those yellow devils can see one miles away."

They could tell he was bending in the bottom of the boat as he spoke. Then they could hear him tugging at something. "It's that last chap who came aboard," he said. "He must have been knocked out."

"Lucky he is—not knowing he has anything to worry about," said the other man.

The sailor eased the man's head to a higher level and began bailing out the water. But the small boat heaved and pulled on her anchor chain so they took in almost as much as he cleared out. In another hour the girl across from Nancy was violently sick. But it was not long before Nancy, Mabel and the other man were all agonizing over the side of the boat. Only the sailor and the sleeping man in the bottom of the boat kept steady stomachs.

For the first time in her life Nancy prayed for death to relieve her suffering. Sick, cold and miserable as she was, the struggle didn't seem worth the effort.

From troubled dozing against Mabel's shoulder Nancy woke to find dawn breaking on a sea as empty and placid as a mountain lake. No rescue ship, nor even any lifeboat was visible on all that gray expanse. How could she endure this awful plight that daylight had revealed?

Nancy's gaze came back from her futile search to look around at her companions. The bluejacket sat on the floor in the prow, his arms bent over the seat, cradling his head. She discovered it was a young corporal who had come aboard last. He still slept in the bottom of the boat. The girl across from them was a nurse of another unit. She lay on the seat. The first class private who sat beside her couldn't have been more than nineteen Nancy thought, as she studied the sleeping face.

Everyone was covered with an oily scum that had swept over them from the sinking boat, and Nancy knew she must look as repulsive as the rest. Even before her inspection was finished the sailor roused and dragged himself to the seat. He took one look across the empty water.

"Well if that ain't a way to do us!" he growled, when the drowsy corporal sat up and wanted to know what the row was about. "They all beat it off to safety without ever waiting to see who else was here."

"They may have gone under for all you know," said Mabel.

"Where's the water?" asked the corporal. "I'm dry as a desert."

"You'll get your share along with the rest," stated the bluejacket. He had the look of a seasoned seaman. Nancy judged him to be well over thirty, the oldest person aboard. Suddenly he seemed to accept the situation with what grace he could. He glanced around at his boat-mates and said, "Well, ladies and gentlemen, looks like we're in for it."

Even while he spoke a brilliant red sun slowly became a burning disk where sea and sky met. It seemed a warning of what they had to endure.

"First thing in order," said the sailor, "is to take stock of all supplies—food and water."

Nancy and Mabel reached into their musette bags to bring out their bars of chocolate and the small tins of concentrated food to add to the common stock.

Nancy noticed that the girl across from them had her canteen, but no bag.

"I see the young ladies are good seamen and have brought their canteens," continued the sailor.

"I have mine, too," said the private, putting his hand to his hip.

"Looks like I forgot mine," said the dazed corporal, making a futile search for his canteen.

The bluejacket got out the boat's supplies and stored with them what Nancy and Mabel had contributed. There was food and water enough surely to last until they were picked up, and navigation instruments, too, in case no help came.



The Corporal Reached for the Water Keg

"I want some water now," demanded the complaining corporal, reaching for the water keg between the bluejacket's feet.

"You'll get your water when portions are dealt to all alike," stated the sailor.

"That's what you think," growled the corporal and made a lunge for the water.

The young private sitting behind him swung out a strong hand and drew the man back before he could reach the sailor. It took some handling to get him quiet in the stem of the boat, well away from the frightened women.

"You'll face court martial for this!" growled the corporal. "I'm your superior officer. I'm in command of this boat!"

"If anyone is put in command it must be one of the nurses," said the private promptly. "They are all lieutenants."

"That suits me fine," said the bluejacket.

"We know nothing about what should be done here," Nancy told them miserably. "Or at least I don't. I'll leave it up to Mabel or—" she paused to glance at the other girl.

"Hilda Newton," said the strange nurse. "But heavens, I have no idea what we should do."

"Neither have I," stated Mabel. "If you're all agreed I move we put the bluejacket in command. He probably knows more about this business than all of us put together."

This met with the hearty approval of all except the surly, still befuddled corporal. The sailor introduced himself as Olan Meyer, and the rest in turn told their names.

A few minutes later Olan dealt out the morning's portion of food and water. And so began the monotonous round of nights and days that were to stretch on as endlessly as the sea on which they drifted.

THE PLANE

At the end of the first week when there was still no hope of rescue, nor any sight of land, their water had to be reduced to one portion a day. Only by the notches Olan Meyer cut on the stem seat, could they tell how much time had passed. After the first few sunrises, days and nights seemed a muddled succession without hope of ending.

Once they saw a smudge of smoke on the horizon, but it vanished swiftly. Another time Nancy thought she heard the drone of a plane, but no moving speck appeared in all the cloudless, blazing blue overhead. She wondered if her mind was weakening and she was beginning to hear sounds, as a wanderer in the desert sees mirages.

On their second day afloat Nancy had had another chill, then to her amazement, after the fever had burned itself out, the attacks did not come back. Her illness made her think of the small golden vitamins Major Reed had given her. She found them still in her musette bag. By dealing them out one a day to each person there would be enough to last them two weeks.

A sail had been hoisted after their conference the first morning, and Olan Meyer steered toward what he believed was their original destination. But the wind soon died down, the sail fell slack, and it was only useful as shade from the blazing sun.

The day after her fever cleared Nancy was sitting beside Olan as he studied the Pacific map, which had been placed in the lifeboat along with a book of navigation instructions.

"Where is Koshu Island on this map?" she asked.

After a brief search he pointed it out with a grimy finger.

"Do you know of any coral-surrounded islands northeast of it?" she asked.

"Plenty. Why?"

"There was one—about a day by water from Koshu, where they tell me my brother's plane went down," Nancy explained. "His gunner was made a prisoner by the Japs. He turned up at our hospital back there on Koshu. Soon as he's able he's going to guide a plane back to the island."

"Got any more details?" asked Olan.

"Nothing, except that the island was covered with a jungle. As far as Vernon knew there were no native villages there."

"And it was surrounded by coral reefs?"

"Entirely, so that no big boats could go close. But he said there were passages where small boats could enter the lagoons."

"Twelve hours journey north of Koshu," repeated Olan, while making some mental calculations. "We must have been somewhere in that neighborhood when we were struck."

"Oh, are we?" asked Nancy eagerly.

"We were," he corrected. "Lord knows where we're at now. A fair wind for forty-eight hours took us in the opposite direction."

He pointed out where he surmised they had been sunk, and indicated the approximate direction in which the wind had taken them.

"I figure the group of reefs and islands you're talking about is somewhere back here."

"And northeast of Koshu," she observed. "Wouldn't it be safer to try to go back in that direction?"

"You're optimistic, lady. Distances in a tub like this take a hundred times longer to cover than on our transport."

"I know that. But we may as well be going somewhere definitely as drifting like this. We might even be able to locate the island where Tommy was marooned."

"Any land, no matter what—a jungle would be a thousand times better than this," said Hilda Newton.

It was two days later, however, before another breath of wind came to stiffen their sail. The heat was almost unbearable by day while the cold penetrated to their marrow at night. Nancy thanked her lucky stars that she had been wearing her overcoat at the time they were struck, and that Mabel had brought hers along. Hilda had not been so fortunate.

When the breeze stirred at last Nancy sat beside Olan, watching how he set the sail into the course he desired. It made little difference to any of the others what direction they took, so long as it brought an end to their misery. The very fact that they were moving boosted their morale.

But the fair wind was only a brief hope. It fell away after a few hours, and the horrible pall of inaction closed down on them again. Sometimes for an hour or so they would recite poetry, tell jokes or ask riddles—anything to keep their minds off reality. In this way the first week dragged by. Not once during that time was there a drop of rain to renew their diminishing water supply. So far they had used only from the lifeboat's supply, saving the individual canteens for a reserve.

The corporal, Ned Owens, showed little improvement in disposition, even after his mind cleared. He kept aloof from the others and seldom took part in the nurses' attempts to brighten their situation. The first few days a fever kept him on fire with thirst, and he was violently seasick. Knowing something of what he must be enduring Nancy offered him her portion of water at the end of an unusually hot day.

"You take it and I'll knock your block off!" Olan flared, when Ned hesitated at the offer.

Rather than precipitate a fight Nancy finally drank the water herself. By the end of the first week

the feud between the two men, which started with selfishness on one side and firmness on the other, had grown to alarming proportions. Every time Olan dealt out the water Ned accused him of giving him less than his portion.

One evening after they had sat through the worst heat they had yet endured, Ned demanded that Olan give him his entire allotment of water and let him drink it as he pleased.

"I won't do it! You haven't got the grit to restrain yourself," Olan stated.

Nancy had been surprised to find just before their evening ritual of food and drink that Ned had moved next to Olan on the boat seat.

Suddenly just as Olan was measuring out a portion of water, Ned's arm swung round and struck him in the pit of his stomach. Caught unawares the keg slipped from Olan's hand to the bottom of the boat, and the precious fluid gurgled out into the bilge water. While the two men went into a grip, Nancy grabbed the keg from under their feet, but she was not quick enough to save more than half of the remaining water.

She dragged the keg with her toward the prow as the raging men grappled. Jim Benton and Hilda were sitting in the prow, and the slack sail had at first cut off their view of what was happening. The men were already at each other's throats before Jim realized there was a row, and rushed to separate them.

Terrified, the women feared the struggle would capsize the boat. They huddled together in the prow to keep a balance. The corporal was a much larger man than the bluejacket, and soon had him down on the seat, his hands clawing at his throat. Jim could not break their grip with his bare hands. Hilda had snatched up one of the oars, as if to help. Suddenly he seized it from her and cracked it down over Ned Owens's head. The corporal crumpled into the bottom of the boat like a crushed egg.

The moment his hands relaxed their grip on Olan's throat, the half-conscious man rolled into the water with a list of the boat. Without a moment's hesitation Jim Benton went in after him, shoes and all. The shock of the cold water revived Olan's faculties sufficiently for him to get a death grip on Jim. In spite of all the soldier could do to break the hold, Olan pulled him down under the waves with him. The horrified women stared, helpless to save either one.

Nancy was making a motion to get out of her shoes, when Mabel held her back by main force. "You're insane!" she screamed. "You haven't strength to do anything for them."

But it was already too late. Even while Mabel held Nancy back the two men went down again, and they saw them no more. Too stunned for speech they could only stand and stare, hoping against hope that they might come up again.

Then Hilda, the little blue-eyed girl, wavered, and Mabel gently eased her to the bottom of the boat as consciousness slipped from her. After bathing her face with sea water Mabel and Nancy dragged her up to the boat seat, and Nancy held her head in her lap. For a long time they were too stunned for speech.

Mabel was the first to say anything as she stared with fixed eyes at the bottom of the boat. "Now we're left to the mercy of that thing!" she moaned, pointing to the corporal.

"It would be better if we were all dead," said Nancy in a hollow voice.

Mabel finally prodded Ned Owens with her foot, turning him over. Blood flowed from the gash on the back of his head made by the oar. Even though she dreaded to see him regain consciousness, the instincts of her profession would not be denied. She finally squatted in the bilge water to do what she could for his injuries. She cleaned the wound after a fashion and dusted it with some sulfa drug from her first-aid kit, then drew the edges together with some sticking plaster. They feared he would roll into the sea if they dragged him to the seat, so they pulled him into the prow where only his feet were in the water.

When Hilda stirred again she sat up, her fixed eyes turned across the waves that had swallowed the men. She was like one under the influence of dope and made no complaint, only sat there hour after hour as if the life had gone from her, too.

Mabel took a last look at Ned in the twilight and saw he was still breathing, though he showed no signs of regaining consciousness. "If he'll only stay that way till morning," she said. "I'll feel much safer."

For once Mabel's wish was fulfilled. The first rays of daylight revealed the corporal lying where she had left him. She bent over him almost eagerly. Her shaking fingers, that pressed his wrist, found no pulse.

"God is good," she said fervently, looking up from her knees at the other two. "No telling what we've been spared."

His passing was such a relief to them all, that even Hilda found interest enough to help them heave the body over into the sea.

When the lapping green water had swallowed him up Nancy said, "Let's recite the Twenty-third Psalm for *all* our dead."

She emphasized the *all*, for in spite of their relief at this last death, she felt that none should be excluded from their simple burial ritual.

With the knowledge of navigation that she had picked up from Olan, Nancy steered a southeast course with every fair wind that blew. Though their number was now only half the original, she dared not increase their water supply, as so much had been lost when their keg overturned. By careful economy they would have food and water for a few more days.

After the death of the three men they rarely spoke. There seemed nothing left to say, and speech was such an effort with rasping vocal chords and cracked lips.

Once they sighted a smudge of smoke that promised to be a boat on the horizon. Though there was always the possibility it might be a Japanese boat, even captivity seemed preferable to their present condition. Nancy tacked to catch a bit of wind taking her in that direction. But a nearer approach showed them it was merely mist from spray breaking on a reef. But the island was barren, with not a single palm to pierce the burning sky.

Before night closed them in they saw other reefs, but all were barren. They decided to lower their sail and drop anchor for the night to keep the current from sweeping them against some hidden reef.

Twice during that day Nancy had thought she heard the drone of a distant plane. If any had passed they had been hidden by fleecy clouds.

In mid-morning the following day they were becalmed again under a cloudless sky. By crouching in the bottom of the boat during the hottest hours they could shade their heads under the boat seat, making the heat slightly more endurable.

Nancy was lying there almost in a coma, when there came the sound of a plane, clear and not too far away. For a moment she did not stir, believing it the sound she had imagined a score of times before. Then suddenly Mabel called out, "Nancy it *is* a plane! I can see it!"

"Coming this way," Hilda added.

"Hoist the sail! They can see us easier with the sail up!" cried Mabel, her last reserve of strength pouring out into action.

The three of them tugged at the sail a moment, then Mabel stopped to bend over her musette bag. "I'm going to try flashing a mirror at them!" she explained. She opened her compact, containing a mirror almost as large as her palm. "I've heard of people catching the sun's rays in a mirror and attracting planes that way."

They had discussed this as one device for getting the attention of fliers in the early days of their shipwreck. Nancy and Hilda got the limp sail up, while Mabel set the mirror to catch the sun's rays and reflect them toward the approaching plane. Then they realized that the silver speck was not coming straight over, but would pass well to the south.

"Oh, dear God, make it come on!" prayed Mabel.

Both the other nurses were praying, too, in a frenzy of hope and despair. Mabel tried the mirror trick she had practiced several times. Three long flashes from the sun-touched mirror, then three short, then three longs—SOS. Again and again she repeated the signal, but the plane kept steadily on its course.

Nancy felt she couldn't endure to see it go entirely out of sight. Moaning she pressed her face into the slack sail, and leaned against their mast, certain this was their last hope.

RESCUED

"Oh, Mabel, they're going on! They don't see us," wailed Nancy when the plane dipped low on the horizon.

Better a thousand times that they had never seen it at all than to endure this agony of disappointment. But Mabel was too intent upon her sun and mirror trick to heed Nancy's despair. She shifted her position as the plane moved on, and continued flashing the mirror into the sky.

Suddenly Hilda cried out, "Look—they're turning! They've seen us."

Incredible as it seemed, the plane was swinging back toward them, but it was still very high as it came on.

"It may be a Jap Zero." Hilda dropped the words like a bomb into their midst.

They had been so obsessed with the hope of rescue by their own people that their dulled minds had not counted on that possibility.

"Too late now," said Mabel. "They evidently saw my light flashing."

"Could any thing be worse than this?" asked Nancy.

Their bloodshot, sunken eyes watched in an agony of suspense as the drone of the plane beat harder and harder on their sensitive ears that were so long conditioned to silence.

Suddenly Nancy's straining eyes recognized the insignia of her own Air Force, and she burst forth above the roar of the plane that was now almost overhead, "There's our white star in the blue circle. It's one of our planes!"

They began waving frantically as the plane circled high above them. The pilot was obviously taking no chances that this might be some trick of the Japs. From the burned color of their skins they could be mistaken for Japs from above.

Then Nancy thought of the American flag she always kept in her musette bag with the battered confederate relic. It was rather small, but surely bright enough to be distinguished from above. She was trembling like a leaf in a gale when she found it and waved it aloft. Almost immediately the plane dipped lower.

"Why, it's a hydro!" burst forth Mabel.

The great ship sped south again dipping nearer the water. About a mile away she turned back, skimming above the waves until she settled down with a great splash and came gliding easily toward them. Then the broad wings were at rest and the motor silent.

A hearty voice from the plane called out, "Can you row closer?"

"We'll try," replied Nancy, but she feared her faint, cracked voice did not cover the distance between them.

The oars had not been touched since that horrible day when the men had died. Mabel found one under the seat. Two of them could scarcely handle it. They could as well have used toothpicks for all the movement their feeble efforts brought.

"We can't make it!" wailed Nancy, and would have wept had her eyes not been too burned out for tears.

"Never mind. We'll come over," replied a kindly voice.

A rubber boat appeared under the plane wings, and two men paddled it easily toward them. When Hilda fell twice in trying to get over the gunwale one of the fliers stepped aboard and took her wasted form into his arms. Though Nancy and Mabel were both weak and trembling with excitement they managed to get into the rubber boat with the help of the second man. The other man went back for their coats and bags and soon they were under the shadow of the great wings. Eager hands lifted them bodily into the cabin.

Nancy could never recall afterward all that was said and done as they were lifted inside. But she did remember one man's hushed voice as he said, "Three army nurses."



Eager Hands Lifted Them Bodily into the Cabin

Those men in their spotless clothes seemed like angels to the shipwrecked women. They were put into bunks and almost as if by magic someone was handing Nancy a thermos top filled with hot tea. These things couldn't be real, she kept telling herself. She had only hoped they would happen for so long that now she believed they could not be true.

A doctor the fliers called Lieutenant Holmes, questioned them about how much they had had to eat and drink, then allowed them to have a small portion of concentrated food from a tin, and gave them a cup of water. But Nancy came back to her thermos top of tea. It seemed heavenly to have something hot. She could feel reviving strength flow to her very toes.

"Good thing we brought that hot thermos along," one of the men remarked.

"Thought Tom would appreciate it," replied his companion.

Nancy stared incredulously at the man. "Tom," she repeated. "I had a brother named Tom. He was lost, too."

She saw the men look at each other. "Tom Dale—your brother?" asked the flier who had given her her food.

She nodded.

"You can't be—"

"Nancy Dale, Army Nurse," she replied.

Suddenly a man in army clothes, turned sharply from where he held a can of food for Hilda, and stared at her. Then Nancy saw that the hair under his cap was snow white. Her eyes, so long conditioned to the glare, could see little when she was brought inside, but now she stared at this man incredulously. Was this another mirage? She brushed her hands across her hollow eyes and looked again.

"Take it easy," said the white-haired man with the pale, thin face. "You're going to be all right, Miss Nancy. I didn't recognize you at first."

"You can't be Vernon," she whispered.

"But I am," he assured her. "You asked us to come out and look for Tommy and here we are."

"You've found him?"

"We're on our way to pick him up now," Vernon explained. "But you'd better lie down now and keep yourself quiet or you won't be able to greet him when we take him aboard."

He forced her to lie down, and she glanced across to see others looking after Mabel and Hilda.

"You may not find him," she said wearily. "A person can stand just so much."

She felt it would not be so terrible after all if Tommy were really dead. Those who had known bitter depths of suffering had told her many times that there were things worse than death, and in those awful days adrift she had learned it was true. She had even stopped praying that Tommy might live. How could she have been so cruel all along as to try to hold him to a life of such hardships?

"A plane has already been over the island," Vernon explained in answer to her doubts. "A man signaled us from the beach. It must've been Tom."

"When?" she asked.

"Yesterday."

"We thought we heard a plane yesterday. Why didn't you rescue him then?"

"There was no place to land. Only a seaplane can get near him."

The great motors of the plane roared into action again as Vernon finished speaking. He motioned her to lie back and rest, for even his voice was not yet strong enough to carry above that roar.

Nancy had a struggle to force her mind to any degree of calmness. The swift changes of the last few minutes and her renewed hope about Tommy brought an enervating reaction.

Though the island where Tommy had been marooned was the goal of their sailing from the time Olan learned of it, Nancy could scarcely believe they had actually come within reasonable range of it. That the rescue expedition, which she had instigated back on Kosu Island, would be the means of saving her own life, too, seemed now almost uncanny. This war had certainly woven some strange and incredible designs into the tapestry of life.

So relieved was she to sink into the comfort of that berth and know she would be taken back to safety, that not even her suspense about Tommy kept off her drowsiness as the plane gained height. She felt as she once had when going under an anesthetic.

Some time later a gentle hand on her cheek roused her. "We're flying over the island," Vernon said in her ear.

She was confused for a moment, then asked, "Is there a window where I can look out?"

He helped her down and over to a window from where she could see the verdant blotch entirely surrounded by a blue lagoon fringed with reefs on which tumbling waves broke, an emerald set in sapphire and pearls. The plane crossed the island at great height, then circled and came back much lower, just leaving a safe margin above the towering palms.

"He signaled from the western shore," Vernon said.

Nancy saw the gunner's hand tremble violently as he steadied himself against the seat in front.

The great ship roared south, then north above the western shore of the island.

"There he is! There he is!" cried Nancy, tears of joy streaming down her thin cheeks.

There really was a man waving something white. From the way he ran back and forth Nancy saw he was not weak from hunger as she was.

A few minutes later the plane moved off a safe distance from the reefs and taxied cautiously nearer one of the inlets. A small rubber motorboat, manned by three men, headed toward a passage in the barrier reef. Nancy wondered if she could live through the interval until she could know if the marooned man was really Tommy. She and Vernon crossed to the opposite window, which gave a view toward the island, but the plane was too low for them to see beyond the high waves pounding on the reef.

"I'm sure I look like a scarecrow," said Nancy, suddenly aware of her looks. "Could they spare me

a little water to try to scrub some of the grime off my face and hands?"

Vernon put a bit of water in a helmet and took a folded handkerchief from his pocket to use as a washcloth. He even produced a small piece of soap. Though Nancy scrubbed and scrubbed, and felt slightly better for the performance, she decided that nothing less than a day's soaking in hot water would produce satisfactory results.

She saw that Mabel and Hilda still slept, and she left them in peace. Already she was beginning to wonder when they would let her have more water and another portion of food. But Lieutenant Holmes had been very positive in dealing out the amount they could have at first.

Vernon and Captain Crawford, the young blue-eyed pilot, filled the seemingly interminable interval by asking Nancy about the shipwreck. While she gave them the horrible details Nancy's gaze kept turning toward that door through which the boatmen would return.

"How long were you adrift?" asked Captain Crawford.

Nancy shook her head. "I'm not sure. Olan Meyer made notches on the stern seat until he died—after that it didn't seem to matter. There're seven notches on the seat."

"They left Koshu Island on October third," Vernon recalled. "This is the sixteenth."

"Thirteen days," said Nancy. "Seems more like thirteen years." She glanced toward the door again. "Why don't they come back? Could they have struck a reef?"

The captain glanced at his watch. "Not quite time yet."

But even as he spoke the throb of the motorboat beat on their ears again.

"They're coming!" she cried, and staggered toward the exit.

Minutes had never seemed so long to Nancy, but eventually the boat came into range. Aquiver with expectancy, she searched the faces of the boatmen. Then her gaze came to rest on a sun-baked, nut-brown man with a long brown beard. Sick with suspense, for she could not believe that man was Tommy, she wavered and the oncoming boat blurred. She felt Vernon's arm about her waist, steadying her.

Suspense, fear, then incredible joy followed in swift succession, for Tommy was calling her name. Her head was whirling so that he seemed very far away. But there he was really stepping into the plane. A moment later she was in his arms. Then all her agony was dissolved in complete joy, for his arms about her gave assurance that their suffering was over.

"They told me you were here," he said, when he could command himself to speak, "and also about the horrible things you've been through."

"No more awful than yours—nor half so bad," she said, looking up into his eyes that had been so much like hers before her own became so hollow.

"After the first month I didn't fare so badly," he reassured her. "For a while I didn't believe I'd make it. Since my stomach healed, though, it's been endurable."

"You don't look starved," she said.

"A man can live a long time on fruit, roots, coconuts and fish. But say, will I be glad to have a real meal once more!"

"Then what are we waiting for, old scout!" exclaimed Captain Crawford, slapping the rescued man on the back. "We'll take you straight back to Koshu Island where there's plenty of food and water, and a few decorations for all of you who've shown so much valor in action."



Transcriber's Note

Punctuation has been normalized. Variations in hyphenation have been retained as they were in the original publication. The following changes have been made:

The chapter entitled "Camouflage" on Page 65 is the second instance of Chapter Five. It has been changed to "Chapter Six", to agree with the Table of Contents and its sequential position.

Too many times spies have {deducted → deduced} from the nature of a group's training {P. 72} by the time we finish with all these {innoculations → inoculations} {P. 98}

a huge waterspout burst high in {the} air {P. 140}

"Don't {knew → know}. I just got a whiff of a change." {P. 166}

Those first patients had to be {stretched → stretcheder} on the sands of the beach. {P. 187}

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK NANCY DALE, ARMY NURSE ***

Updated editions will replace the previous one—the old editions will be renamed.

Creating the works from print editions not protected by U.S. copyright law means that no one owns a United States copyright in these works, so the Foundation (and you!) can copy and distribute it in the United States without permission and without paying copyright royalties. Special rules, set forth in the General Terms of Use part of this license, apply to copying and distributing Project Gutenberg™ electronic works to protect the PROJECT GUTENBERG™ concept and trademark. Project Gutenberg is a registered trademark, and may not be used if you charge for an eBook, except by following the terms of the trademark license, including paying royalties for use of the Project Gutenberg trademark. If you do not charge anything for copies of this eBook, complying with the trademark license is very easy. You may use this eBook for nearly any purpose such as creation of derivative works, reports, performances and research. Project Gutenberg eBooks may be modified and printed and given away—you may do practically ANYTHING in the United States with eBooks not protected by U.S. copyright law. Redistribution is subject to the trademark license, especially commercial redistribution.

START: FULL LICENSE THE FULL PROJECT GUTENBERG LICENSE PLEASE READ THIS BEFORE YOU DISTRIBUTE OR USE THIS WORK

To protect the Project Gutenberg™ mission of promoting the free distribution of electronic works, by using or distributing this work (or any other work associated in any way with the phrase "Project Gutenberg"), you agree to comply with all the terms of the Full Project Gutenberg™ License available with this file or online at www.gutenberg.org/license.

Section 1. General Terms of Use and Redistributing Project Gutenberg™ electronic works

1.A. By reading or using any part of this Project Gutenberg™ electronic work, you indicate that you have read, understand, agree to and accept all the terms of this license and intellectual property (trademark/copyright) agreement. If you do not agree to abide by all the terms of this agreement, you must cease using and return or destroy all copies of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works in your possession. If you paid a fee for obtaining a copy of or access to a Project Gutenberg™ electronic work and you do not agree to be bound by the terms of this agreement, you may obtain a refund from the person or entity to whom you paid the fee as set forth in paragraph 1.E.8.

1.B. "Project Gutenberg" is a registered trademark. It may only be used on or associated in any way with an electronic work by people who agree to be bound by the terms of this agreement. There are a few things that you can do with most Project Gutenberg™ electronic works even without complying with the full terms of this agreement. See paragraph 1.C below. There are a lot of things you can do with Project Gutenberg™ electronic works if you follow the terms of this agreement and help preserve free future access to Project Gutenberg™ electronic works. See paragraph 1.E below.

1.C. The Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation ("the Foundation" or PGLAF), owns a compilation copyright in the collection of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works. Nearly all the individual works in the collection are in the public domain in the United States. If an individual work is unprotected by copyright law in the United States and you are located in the United States, we do not claim a right to prevent you from copying, distributing, performing, displaying or creating derivative works based on the work as long as all references to Project Gutenberg are removed. Of course, we hope that you will support the Project Gutenberg™ mission of promoting free access to electronic works by freely sharing Project Gutenberg™ works in compliance with the terms of this agreement for keeping the Project Gutenberg™ name

associated with the work. You can easily comply with the terms of this agreement by keeping this work in the same format with its attached full Project Gutenberg™ License when you share it without charge with others.

1.D. The copyright laws of the place where you are located also govern what you can do with this work. Copyright laws in most countries are in a constant state of change. If you are outside the United States, check the laws of your country in addition to the terms of this agreement before downloading, copying, displaying, performing, distributing or creating derivative works based on this work or any other Project Gutenberg™ work. The Foundation makes no representations concerning the copyright status of any work in any country other than the United States.

1.E. Unless you have removed all references to Project Gutenberg:

1.E.1. The following sentence, with active links to, or other immediate access to, the full Project Gutenberg™ License must appear prominently whenever any copy of a Project Gutenberg™ work (any work on which the phrase “Project Gutenberg” appears, or with which the phrase “Project Gutenberg” is associated) is accessed, displayed, performed, viewed, copied or distributed:

This eBook is for the use of anyone anywhere in the United States and most other parts of the world at no cost and with almost no restrictions whatsoever. You may copy it, give it away or re-use it under the terms of the Project Gutenberg License included with this eBook or online at www.gutenberg.org. If you are not located in the United States, you will have to check the laws of the country where you are located before using this eBook.

1.E.2. If an individual Project Gutenberg™ electronic work is derived from texts not protected by U.S. copyright law (does not contain a notice indicating that it is posted with permission of the copyright holder), the work can be copied and distributed to anyone in the United States without paying any fees or charges. If you are redistributing or providing access to a work with the phrase “Project Gutenberg” associated with or appearing on the work, you must comply either with the requirements of paragraphs 1.E.1 through 1.E.7 or obtain permission for the use of the work and the Project Gutenberg™ trademark as set forth in paragraphs 1.E.8 or 1.E.9.

1.E.3. If an individual Project Gutenberg™ electronic work is posted with the permission of the copyright holder, your use and distribution must comply with both paragraphs 1.E.1 through 1.E.7 and any additional terms imposed by the copyright holder. Additional terms will be linked to the Project Gutenberg™ License for all works posted with the permission of the copyright holder found at the beginning of this work.

1.E.4. Do not unlink or detach or remove the full Project Gutenberg™ License terms from this work, or any files containing a part of this work or any other work associated with Project Gutenberg™.

1.E.5. Do not copy, display, perform, distribute or redistribute this electronic work, or any part of this electronic work, without prominently displaying the sentence set forth in paragraph 1.E.1 with active links or immediate access to the full terms of the Project Gutenberg™ License.

1.E.6. You may convert to and distribute this work in any binary, compressed, marked up, nonproprietary or proprietary form, including any word processing or hypertext form. However, if you provide access to or distribute copies of a Project Gutenberg™ work in a format other than “Plain Vanilla ASCII” or other format used in the official version posted on the official Project Gutenberg™ website (www.gutenberg.org), you must, at no additional cost, fee or expense to the user, provide a copy, a means of exporting a copy, or a means of obtaining a copy upon request, of the work in its original “Plain Vanilla ASCII” or other form. Any alternate format must include the full Project Gutenberg™ License as specified in paragraph 1.E.1.

1.E.7. Do not charge a fee for access to, viewing, displaying, performing, copying or distributing any Project Gutenberg™ works unless you comply with paragraph 1.E.8 or 1.E.9.

1.E.8. You may charge a reasonable fee for copies of or providing access to or distributing Project Gutenberg™ electronic works provided that:

- You pay a royalty fee of 20% of the gross profits you derive from the use of Project Gutenberg™ works calculated using the method you already use to calculate your applicable taxes. The fee is owed to the owner of the Project Gutenberg™ trademark, but he has agreed to donate royalties under this paragraph to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation. Royalty payments must be paid within 60 days following each date on which you prepare (or are legally required to prepare) your periodic tax returns. Royalty payments should be clearly marked as such and sent to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation at the address specified in Section 4, “Information about donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation.”
- You provide a full refund of any money paid by a user who notifies you in writing (or by e-mail) within 30 days of receipt that s/he does not agree to the terms of the full Project Gutenberg™ License. You must require such a user to return or destroy all copies of the works possessed in

a physical medium and discontinue all use of and all access to other copies of Project Gutenberg™ works.

- You provide, in accordance with paragraph 1.F.3, a full refund of any money paid for a work or a replacement copy, if a defect in the electronic work is discovered and reported to you within 90 days of receipt of the work.
- You comply with all other terms of this agreement for free distribution of Project Gutenberg™ works.

1.E.9. If you wish to charge a fee or distribute a Project Gutenberg™ electronic work or group of works on different terms than are set forth in this agreement, you must obtain permission in writing from the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, the manager of the Project Gutenberg™ trademark. Contact the Foundation as set forth in Section 3 below.

1.F.

1.F.1. Project Gutenberg volunteers and employees expend considerable effort to identify, do copyright research on, transcribe and proofread works not protected by U.S. copyright law in creating the Project Gutenberg™ collection. Despite these efforts, Project Gutenberg™ electronic works, and the medium on which they may be stored, may contain “Defects,” such as, but not limited to, incomplete, inaccurate or corrupt data, transcription errors, a copyright or other intellectual property infringement, a defective or damaged disk or other medium, a computer virus, or computer codes that damage or cannot be read by your equipment.

1.F.2. LIMITED WARRANTY, DISCLAIMER OF DAMAGES - Except for the “Right of Replacement or Refund” described in paragraph 1.F.3, the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, the owner of the Project Gutenberg™ trademark, and any other party distributing a Project Gutenberg™ electronic work under this agreement, disclaim all liability to you for damages, costs and expenses, including legal fees. YOU AGREE THAT YOU HAVE NO REMEDIES FOR NEGLIGENCE, STRICT LIABILITY, BREACH OF WARRANTY OR BREACH OF CONTRACT EXCEPT THOSE PROVIDED IN PARAGRAPH 1.F.3. YOU AGREE THAT THE FOUNDATION, THE TRADEMARK OWNER, AND ANY DISTRIBUTOR UNDER THIS AGREEMENT WILL NOT BE LIABLE TO YOU FOR ACTUAL, DIRECT, INDIRECT, CONSEQUENTIAL, PUNITIVE OR INCIDENTAL DAMAGES EVEN IF YOU GIVE NOTICE OF THE POSSIBILITY OF SUCH DAMAGE.

1.F.3. LIMITED RIGHT OF REPLACEMENT OR REFUND - If you discover a defect in this electronic work within 90 days of receiving it, you can receive a refund of the money (if any) you paid for it by sending a written explanation to the person you received the work from. If you received the work on a physical medium, you must return the medium with your written explanation. The person or entity that provided you with the defective work may elect to provide a replacement copy in lieu of a refund. If you received the work electronically, the person or entity providing it to you may choose to give you a second opportunity to receive the work electronically in lieu of a refund. If the second copy is also defective, you may demand a refund in writing without further opportunities to fix the problem.

1.F.4. Except for the limited right of replacement or refund set forth in paragraph 1.F.3, this work is provided to you ‘AS-IS’, WITH NO OTHER WARRANTIES OF ANY KIND, EXPRESS OR IMPLIED, INCLUDING BUT NOT LIMITED TO WARRANTIES OF MERCHANTABILITY OR FITNESS FOR ANY PURPOSE.

1.F.5. Some states do not allow disclaimers of certain implied warranties or the exclusion or limitation of certain types of damages. If any disclaimer or limitation set forth in this agreement violates the law of the state applicable to this agreement, the agreement shall be interpreted to make the maximum disclaimer or limitation permitted by the applicable state law. The invalidity or unenforceability of any provision of this agreement shall not void the remaining provisions.

1.F.6. INDEMNITY - You agree to indemnify and hold the Foundation, the trademark owner, any agent or employee of the Foundation, anyone providing copies of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works in accordance with this agreement, and any volunteers associated with the production, promotion and distribution of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works, harmless from all liability, costs and expenses, including legal fees, that arise directly or indirectly from any of the following which you do or cause to occur: (a) distribution of this or any Project Gutenberg™ work, (b) alteration, modification, or additions or deletions to any Project Gutenberg™ work, and (c) any Defect you cause.

Section 2. Information about the Mission of Project Gutenberg™

Project Gutenberg™ is synonymous with the free distribution of electronic works in formats readable by the widest variety of computers including obsolete, old, middle-aged and new computers. It exists because of the efforts of hundreds of volunteers and donations from people in all walks of life.

Volunteers and financial support to provide volunteers with the assistance they need are critical to reaching Project Gutenberg™’s goals and ensuring that the Project Gutenberg™ collection

will remain freely available for generations to come. In 2001, the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation was created to provide a secure and permanent future for Project Gutenberg™ and future generations. To learn more about the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation and how your efforts and donations can help, see Sections 3 and 4 and the Foundation information page at www.gutenberg.org.

Section 3. Information about the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation

The Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation is a non-profit 501(c)(3) educational corporation organized under the laws of the state of Mississippi and granted tax exempt status by the Internal Revenue Service. The Foundation's EIN or federal tax identification number is 64-6221541. Contributions to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation are tax deductible to the full extent permitted by U.S. federal laws and your state's laws.

The Foundation's business office is located at 809 North 1500 West, Salt Lake City, UT 84116, (801) 596-1887. Email contact links and up to date contact information can be found at the Foundation's website and official page at www.gutenberg.org/contact

Section 4. Information about Donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation

Project Gutenberg™ depends upon and cannot survive without widespread public support and donations to carry out its mission of increasing the number of public domain and licensed works that can be freely distributed in machine-readable form accessible by the widest array of equipment including outdated equipment. Many small donations (\$1 to \$5,000) are particularly important to maintaining tax exempt status with the IRS.

The Foundation is committed to complying with the laws regulating charities and charitable donations in all 50 states of the United States. Compliance requirements are not uniform and it takes a considerable effort, much paperwork and many fees to meet and keep up with these requirements. We do not solicit donations in locations where we have not received written confirmation of compliance. To SEND DONATIONS or determine the status of compliance for any particular state visit www.gutenberg.org/donate.

While we cannot and do not solicit contributions from states where we have not met the solicitation requirements, we know of no prohibition against accepting unsolicited donations from donors in such states who approach us with offers to donate.

International donations are gratefully accepted, but we cannot make any statements concerning tax treatment of donations received from outside the United States. U.S. laws alone swamp our small staff.

Please check the Project Gutenberg web pages for current donation methods and addresses. Donations are accepted in a number of other ways including checks, online payments and credit card donations. To donate, please visit: www.gutenberg.org/donate

Section 5. General Information About Project Gutenberg™ electronic works

Professor Michael S. Hart was the originator of the Project Gutenberg™ concept of a library of electronic works that could be freely shared with anyone. For forty years, he produced and distributed Project Gutenberg™ eBooks with only a loose network of volunteer support.

Project Gutenberg™ eBooks are often created from several printed editions, all of which are confirmed as not protected by copyright in the U.S. unless a copyright notice is included. Thus, we do not necessarily keep eBooks in compliance with any particular paper edition.

Most people start at our website which has the main PG search facility: www.gutenberg.org.

This website includes information about Project Gutenberg™, including how to make donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, how to help produce our new eBooks, and how to subscribe to our email newsletter to hear about new eBooks.