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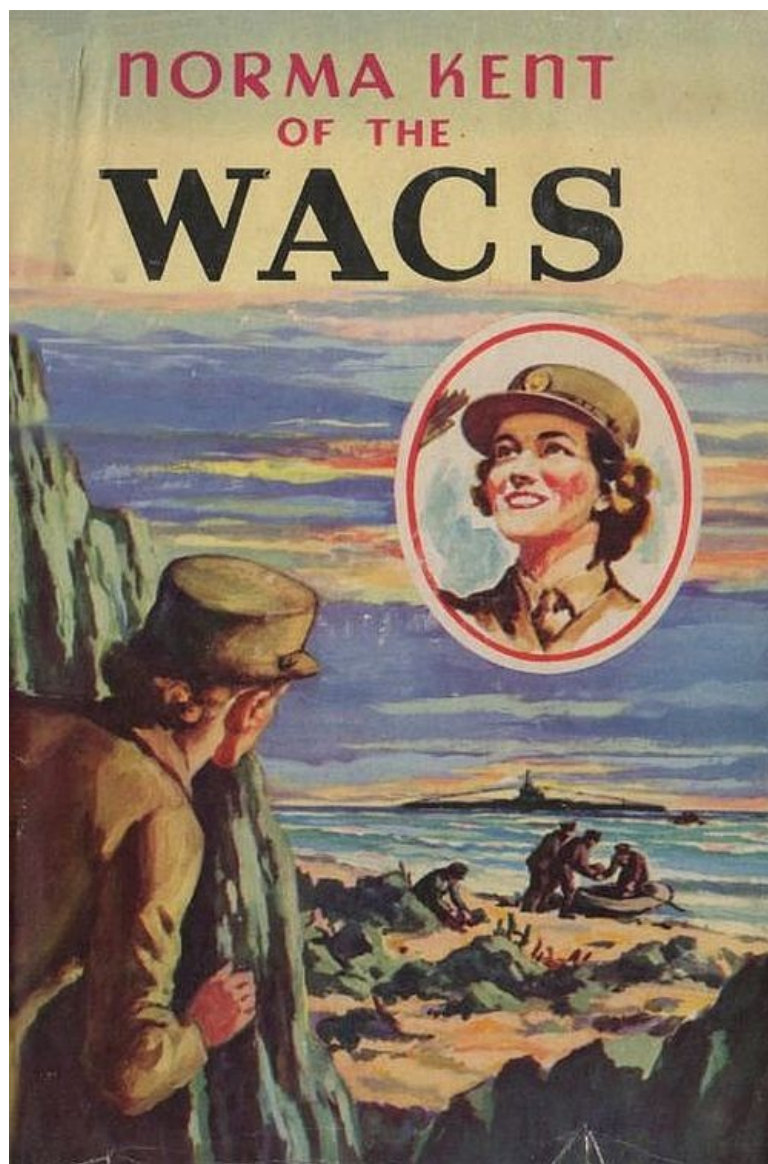
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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK NORMA KENT OF THE WACS ***



**NORMA KENT
OF THE
WACS**

Norma Kent of the WACS

By ROY J. SNELL

Illustrated by
HEDWIG JO MEIXNER



FIGHTERS
FOR
FREEDOM
Series

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*All names, events, and characters in this story
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*The Girl on the Cot Next to Hers
Whispered Something*

NORMA KENT of the WACS

CHAPTER I

GIRLS IN UNIFORM

Norma Kent stirred uneasily. Her army cot creaked.

"You'll have to lie still," she told herself sternly. "You'll keep the other girls awake."

Even as she thought this, the girl on the cot next to her own half rose to whisper:

"We're Mrs. Hobby's horses now."

"That's the girl called Betty," Norma thought as she barely suppressed a disturbing laugh.

"Shish," she managed to whisper. Then all was silent where, row on row, fifty girls were sleeping.

Fifty! And Norma had spoken to barely half a dozen of them! It was all very strange.

Strange and exciting. Yes, it had surely been all that. They had all been jumpy, nervous as colts, on the train from Chicago. If they were walking down the aisle and the train tipped, they had laughed loudly. They had been high-pitched, nervous laughs. And why not? Had they not launched themselves on a new and striking adventure?

As Norma recalled all this she suddenly started, then rose silently on one shoulder. She had caught a flash of light where no light was supposed to be.

"A flash of light," she whispered silently. At the same instant she caught the gleam of light once more. This time she located it—at the head of the cot by the nearest window.

"Rosa Rosetti!" she thought, with a start. She did not know the girl, barely recalled her name. She had a beaming smile, yet beyond doubt was foreign-born.

"What would you do if you suspected that someone was a spy?" That question had, not twenty-four hours before, been put to her by a very important person. She had answered as best she could. Had her answer been the correct one? Her reply had been:

"Nothing. At least, not at once."

Now she settled back in her place. The flash of light from the head of Rosa Rosetti's cot did not shine again. Nor did Norma Kent fall asleep at once.

"A flash of light in the night," she was thinking. "How very unimportant!"

And yet, as her thoughts drifted back to her childhood days not so long ago—she was barely twenty-one now and just out of college—she recalled a story told by her father, a World War veteran. The story dealt with a stranger in an American uniform who, claiming to be lost from his outfit, had found refuge in their billet for the night.

"That night," her father had said, "flashes of light were noticed at the window of our attic lodging. And that night, too, our village was bombed."

"Suppose we are bombed tonight?" the girl thought. Then she laughed silently, for she was lodged deep in the heart of Iowa, at old Fort Des Moines.

As the name drifted through her dreamy thoughts, it gave her a start. She was fully awake again, for the full weight of the tremendous move she had made came crashing back upon her.

"I'm a WAC," she whispered, "a WAC! I'm in the Army now!"

Yes, that was it. She was a member of the Woman's Army Corps. So, too, were all the girls sleeping so peacefully there. Here at Fort Des Moines in four short weeks they would receive their basic training. And then—"I may drive a truck," she thought with a thrill, "or operate an army short-wave set, or help watch for enemy planes along the seacoast, or—" she caught her breath, "I may be sent overseas." North Africa, the Solomons, the bleak shores of Alaska—all these and more drifted before her mind's eye.

"Come what may," she whispered, "I am ready!"

She might have fallen asleep then had not a cot less than ten feet from her given out a low creak as a tall, strong girl, who had caught her eye from the first, sat straight up in her bed to whisper three words.

The words were whispered in a foreign tongue. Norma was mildly shocked at hearing them whispered here in the night.

"She was talking in her sleep," Norma assured herself as the girl settled quietly back in her place. Then it came to her with the force of a blow. "She too might be a spy!"

"What nonsense!" she chided herself. "How jittery I am tonight! I'll go to sleep. And here's hoping I don't dream."

She did fall asleep, and she did not dream.

From some place very, very far away, a bugle was blowing and someone seemed to sing, "I can't get 'em up, I can't get 'em up. I can't get 'em up in the morning." Then an alarm clock went off with a bang and Norma, the WAC recruit, was awake.

Her feet hit the floor with a slap and she was putting on her clothes before she knew it. A race to the washroom, a hasty hair-do, a dash of color to her cheeks and, twenty minutes later, together

with thirty other raw recruits, she lined up for Assembly.

It was bitter cold. A sharp wind was blowing. A bleak dawn was showing in the east. Norma shivered in spite of her thick tweed coat. She looked at the slender girl next to her and was ashamed. The girl's lips were blue. Her thin and threadbare coat flapped in the breeze. She wanted to wrap this girl inside her coat, but did not. This would be quite unsoldierlike. So she stood at rigid attention. But out of the corner of her mouth she said:

"It won't be long now. Those soldier suits we'll wear are grand."

"It wo-won't be-be long!" the girl replied cheerfully through chattering teeth.

Norma permitted herself one quick flashing look to right and left. To her right, beyond the slender girl, stood the tall girl who had whispered so strangely in her sleep. Wrapped in a long black fur coat she stood primly at attention. There was something about this girl's prim indifference to those about her that irritated Norma.

She turned to the left to find herself looking into a pair of smiling blue eyes. The girl said never a word but her bright smile spoke volumes. This girl's dress, short squirrelskin coat, heavy skirt, neat shoes, and small hat spoke both of taste and money. Beyond this girl stood the little Italian who flashed a light at night. She stood, lips parted, eyes shining, sturdy young body erect, very sure of herself and unafraid.

"Whatever happens, I'm going to like her a lot, and that can't be helped," Norma assured herself.

Five minutes later they were all back in the barracks making up their bunks and preparing for a busy day ahead.

"Bedding down Mrs. Hobby's horses," said a laughing voice.

"Say! What does that mean?" Norma demanded, looking up from her work into a pair of laughing blue eyes.

"Don't you know?" asked the other girl, as she sat down on her cot.

"I don't. That's a fact," Norma admitted.

"Well, I'll tell you. But first," the other girl put out a hand, "my name's Betty Gale. Something tells me that we've both just finished college and that we're likely to be pals in this great adventure until death or some Lady Major does us part."

"You're right in the first count," Norma laughed. "And I hope you are in the second. My name is Norma Kent."

"Swell," said Betty Gale. "Now—about Mrs. Hobby's Horses."

CHAPTER II

THE TEST THAT TOLD

"Mrs. Hobby's Horses." Betty laughed. "That's really no great secret. Perhaps you didn't notice it, but we've been sleeping in a stable."

"A stable!" Norma stared. "A stable with polished floors?"

"Oh, they fixed them up, of course. But the row of buildings to which this belongs was all stables only a short while ago."

"For horses?"

"Why not?" Betty laughed again. "Fort Des Moines has always been a cavalry post."

"Oh! And I suppose it was from these very stables that cavalry horsemen rode thundering away to fight the Indians."

"Absolutely!"

"How romantic!" Norma exclaimed. "But I still don't see what that's got to do with hobby horses."

"I didn't say hobby horses. I said they called us Mrs. Hobby's horses. Don't you see?" Betty's voice dropped. "Mrs. Hobby is director of the Corps. And they say she's a wonder. All of us raw recruits must spend a week in these stables before we go to live in Boom Town. So you see, they call us Mrs. Hobby's horses."

"But Boom Town? Where's that?" Norma demanded.

"Oh! Come on!" Betty exclaimed. "You want to know too much too soon. Let's get our bunks made. We have a lot of things to do this day. One of them is to eat breakfast. That cold air made me hungry. Let's get going."

A short time later they found themselves caught in a brown stream of WACs pouring toward a long, low building. Once inside they were greeted with the glorious odor of frying bacon, brewing coffee, and all that goes with a big delicious breakfast.

And was it big! In this mess hall twenty-five hundred girls were being served.

As she joined the long line that moved rapidly forward Norma was all but overcome by the feeling that she was part of something mammoth and wonderful.

"It's big!" she exclaimed.

"Biggest thing in all the world." Betty pressed her arm. "We're in the Army now!"

Yes, they were in the Army. And this was Army food. On their sectional trays, oatmeal, toast and bacon were piled.

Their cups were a marvel to behold. Half an inch thick, big as a pint jar, and entirely void of handles, they presented a real problem. But Norma mastered the art of an Army coffee drinker in one stride. So too did Millie, the girl from a department store.

"Boy!" Millie giggled, balancing her cup in one hand. "Now let the Japs come! I'll get one of them and never even nick this cup! Honest," she confided, "I think this is going to be fun."

"Fun, and lots of work," was Norma's reply.

"Oh! Work!" Millie sobered. "Lead me to it! It can't be worse than Shield's Bargain Basement during the Christmas rush. It's 'Can you find me this?' or 'Can you give me that?' and 'Miss Martin, do this,' and 'Miss Martin, do that,' hours and hours on end. Bad air, cross customers, bossy floorwalkers. And for what? I ask you? Sixteen dollars a week!"

"Could you live on that?" Norma asked in surprise.

"No, but I did," Millie giggled. "But honest, I think this will be a lot better."

"It's not so much a matter of it being better or worse," Norma replied soberly, "as it is of what we have to give. This is war, you know. Our war!"

"Yes, I know." The little salesgirl, it seems, had a serious side to her nature. "I've thought about that, too. In the city where they examined us they said I might do library work. I sold books, you know, and I know an awful lot about them. And I can cook, too," she added hopefully.

"They have a cooking and baking school," Betty encouraged. "They teach you how to cook in a mess hall and out of doors for a few people and a great many. Perhaps for a thousand people at a time. And you do it all in the baggage car of a special train."

"Ee-magine little me cooking for a thousand people!" Millie wilted like an unwatered flower. "Honest, girls, I'm just scared stiff! I couldn't go back! I just couldn't! I'd rather die! And today they give us our special interviews and everything."

"You'll make it all right," Betty assured her. "Just drink the rest of your coffee. That will pep you up."

Once again Millie lifted her huge army cup. "Here's to us all," she laughed.

At that they clinked their cups and drank to their day that had just begun.

Mid-afternoon found Norma sitting at the end of a row of girls, waiting her turn at a private interview. In twenty-five open booths twenty-five interviewers sat smilingly asking questions in low tones of twenty-five new recruits, and carefully writing down the answers. In her row as she sat waiting her turn Norma saw Lena, the tall, strong girl who whispered strangely in the night, Rosa, who had flashed a light, Betty, Millie, and a few others.

As she waited—just waited—she began to be a little afraid. The interviewers were smiling, but after all, those were serious smiles. She could not hear the questions. She could guess them. These interviewers were asking, "What can you do? What would you like most to do? What else can you

do?"

All of a sudden Norma realized that she had never done a real day's work in all her life. She had always gone to school. Oh, yes! She could cook, just a little. But so little!

"I guess," she thought, "that I'm what they call a typical American college girl, not a bad student, and not too good, fairly good at tennis and basketball. I've got brown hair and eyes, and I'm not too tall nor yet too short." She laughed in spite of herself. "A good fellow, and all that. But," she sobered, "what can I do? What do I want to do? What else can I do?"

She had felt a little sorry for the shopgirl, Millie. Now she envied her. Millie knew all about books and she could really cook. At this very moment, smiling with fresh-born confidence, Millie was stepping into a booth for her trial-by-words. And she, Norma Kent, a college graduate, sat there shivering in her boots! Surely this was a strange world.

The booth that Millie had entered was wide open. Norma could see all but hear nothing of what went on. At first she was interested in watching the smiles and frowns that played across Millie's frank and mobile face. Of a sudden her interest was caught and held by the examiner. Tall, slim, looking very much the soldier in her neatly pressed uniform that bore a lieutenant's bar on its shoulder, this examiner seemed just what Norma hoped in time to become—a real soldier.

"She's not too young—perhaps thirty," the girl told herself. "And she's wearing some sort of medal pinned to her breast. Say! That's strange!"

And indeed it was strange. The Woman's Army Corps was as yet very young. Only a few had gone overseas and none, as far as she knew, had either won honors or returned to America.

"She's keen," she whispered to the girl next to her.

"Who?" The girl stared.

"That examiner," Norma nodded toward the booth.

"Oh! Oh sure!" The other girl resumed polishing her nails.

"All the same she is," Norma told herself. "And I'd like to know her."

As Millie, the shopgirl, at last rose from her place, a happy smile played about her lips.

"She made it," Norma said aloud. "And am I glad!" She smiled at Millie as she passed.

Lena, the "night whisperer" was next to enter the vacated booth. As the interviewer began her task her body appeared to stiffen.

"On her guard," Norma thought. "I wonder why."

On the officer's face there was still a smile, but somehow it was a different sort of smile.

And the tall girl? She too seemed rather strange. She appeared always on her guard. "As if she were speaking a piece and feared she might forget," was Norma's thought.

Still, in the end all must have gone well for, as she passed her on the way out, the tall girl flashed Norma a look that said plainer than words. "See? That's how you do it."

Whatever may have been Norma's reactions to this they were quickly lost, for suddenly she realized that the black eyes of the examining officer were upon her and that her name was being called. Her time had come. Swallowing hard, she rose to step into the booth.

"You are Norma Kent," said the examiner, flashing her a friendly smile. "And your home is—"

"Greenville, Illinois," was the prompt reply. The date of her birth, when she entered and left grade school, high school, and college, and other details followed.

"And now," said the examiner, leaning forward, "what can you do?"

"I—I really don't know," the girl faltered. "I've never worked at anything."

"Ah! So you've never worked? Can you cook?"

"Not very well."

"I see." The examiner studied Norma's face.

"How many in your family?"

"Just father and I."

"And your father? What does he do?"

"He's with the Telephone Company, in charge of a wide territory—equipment and all that."

"Hmm." The examiner studied her report. "Just two of you. You should be great pals."

"Oh—we are!" Norma's eyes shone. "You see," she exclaimed, "Dad was in the other World War. I've always loved him for that. He was in France."

"France," said the examiner, with a quick intake of breath. Norma did not at all understand. "What a lovely land to die for."

"Dad lost his right arm," Norma stated in a matter-of-fact tone. "That's why he can't go back this time, and—and that's why he wants me to go."

"Would you like to go overseas?" The examiner's eyes shone with a strange new light.

"I'd love to!" the girl whispered hoarsely. "But what could I do?"

"Oh! Loads of things." The examiner made a record on her sheet. "Your father must have driven about a great deal looking things over in his present occupation."

"Of course."

"Did you ever go with him?"

"Oh! Many, many times!"

"Did you ever assist him?"

"Oh, yes! Of course! It was all great fun. He had big charts showing every center, every phone. I helped him mark down each new installation."

"Ah!" the examiner breathed.

"Yes, and we had a grand little shop in the basement where we worked things out—lots of new things." Norma's eyes shone. "There were many rural centers where the switchboards were in stores. When a number was called a light shone on the board. But that wasn't enough. The storekeeper couldn't always see the light."

"And what did you do about it?"

"We fixed up a new board, just Dad and I. Put a tiny bell on every line."

"I see. The light flashed, the bell rang, and then the storekeeper really knew all about it?"

"Yes. But the light sometimes failed, so we put on bells with different tones. Each line spoke for itself." Norma laughed. "We called it the musical switchboard."

"And you say you've never worked?" The examiner laughed.

"That! Why, that was just fun!"

"Perhaps it was. The best work in the world is the kind we can think of as fun. All that time you were fitting yourself for two of our most important departments—Communication and Interceptor Control."

"Can—can you really use me?" Norma was close to tears.

"Can we? Oh! My child!" The examiner all but embraced her. "We'll make a major out of you! See if we don't!"

CHAPTER III

INTERCEPTOR CONTROL

Norma was not long in discovering the reason for that last surprising outburst of her examiner. When at last the report was finished, they looked up to find the row of chairs empty.

"Well!" the examiner breathed. "That's all for today. This," she added, "is not my regular work. My training was finished many weeks ago. I have been away from the Fort for some time doing a—well" she hesitated—"a rather special sort of work. Now I'm back for a brief spell. They were shorthanded here."

"So you've been helping out?"

"That's it." The examiner rose. Norma too stood. "We all have one great purpose. Each of us must do what she can wherever she is."

"To bring this terrible war to an end," Norma added.

"You're right again," the other smiled.

"Whew!" she exclaimed after looking Norma over from head to toe. "You certainly do look fit."

"I should," Norma grinned. "Our college has put us through *some* training, I can tell you. We marched five miles bare-legged in shorts, with the snow blowing across the field!"

"Climbed fences. I'll bet." The examiner smiled.

"Yes, and walls too. We did gym work and took corrective exercises."

"Grand! They were preparing you for—"

"Just anything."

"That's swell. My name is Warren." The officer put out a hand. "Lieutenant Rita Warren, to be exact. I'm going up to Boom Town. Want to go along?"

"I'd love to!"

"Right! Then come. Let's go." Swinging into the regulation thirty-inch stride, Lieutenant Warren marched out of the hall with her recruit and along the snow-lined path.

"That Interceptor Control sounds intriguing," Norma said as they marched over the crusted snow.

"Oh, it is! It really is!" Lieutenant Warren's face glowed. "The most interesting work in the world. I'll tell you a little about it. But don't let me tell you too much."

"I'll flash the red light." Norma laughed, as she asked, "How much is too much?"

Lieutenant Warren did not answer, instead, she said, "We are stationed along the seacoast."

"Just any seacoast?"

"Any coast of America. There are a number of us in each group. We take over some small hotel. The hotel is run just for us."

"Must be grand!"

"Oh, it is! But we don't have much time to think of that. We have work to do. Plenty of it. You see, along every coast there are thousands and thousands of volunteer watchers. They are there day and night."

"Watching for enemy planes?"

"Yes, that's it, and for possible enemy landings."

"But none have come?"

"Not yet. But let us relax our vigil—then see what happens! If an aircraft carrier stole in close in the fog and sent over fifty bombing planes, hundreds—perhaps thousands would die. That must never happen."

"No! Never!" Norma's hand clenched hard.

"That's the why of the Interceptor Control."

"Do the WACs help with the watching?"

"In a way, yes. But not out on the sandbanks and rocky shores."

"That's done by volunteers?"

"Yes. The WAC works inside. There's plenty to be done if an enemy plane is sighted. Just plenty."

"This," she said, changing the subject, "is Boom Town. Six months ago it was open country."

Norma looked up, then stared. So interested had she become in their talk that she had failed to note that they were now passing before a long row of new red brick buildings.



"This," She Said, Changing the Subject, "Is Boom Town."

"The two-story ones are barracks," her companion explained. "Some of the one-story buildings are Company Headquarters, some are mess halls, and some day rooms."

"Day rooms?" Norma was puzzled.

"Day rooms that you mostly visit at night," Lieutenant Warren laughed. "Lights in the barracks are out at nine-thirty. Most of the girls prefer to retire then. When you've been here three days you'll know why."

"Some hardy souls wish to stay up another hour, so they retire to the day room to lounge in easy chairs, write letters, read, or play cards. Bed check is at ten-forty-five. You'd better be in bed by then or you'll get a black mark."

"Every night?" Norma asked in surprise.

"From Saturday noon to Sunday night is all your own. You'll learn about that later."

For a moment they walked on in silence. It was Norma who broke that silence.

"Can you tell me a little of what the WACs of the Interceptor Control do?"

"A little is right," was the quick reply. "Much of it is a deep, deep secret. You'd love it all, I know."

"But listen. This is how it works," she went on. "Some high school girl is watching from a cliff. There are many girl watchers, and how faithful they are!"

"This girl hears a plane in the dark. It's off shore. She rushes to a phone and calls a number. A WAC at the switchboard replies."

"And then?" Norma whispered.

"Then the girl on the cliff says: 'One single. High. Off five miles. Going south.'"

"The WAC knows from the spot on the switchboard where the girl is. She reports the call. Another girl locates the spot on a chart. A third WAC reports to three men. One of these men represents the Army, one the Navy, and one the Civil Aeronautics Authority. These men consult their records. Perhaps they discover that no plane belonging to any of their organizations is supposed to be on that spot."

"And then they send out a fighting plane," Norma suggested.

"Not yet. Perhaps that girl watcher heard a vacuum sweeper instead of a plane, so they wait."

"And?"

"Then, perhaps two minutes later, there comes a flash from another watcher—this time a fisherman's wife."

"Flash! One single. High. Going south. Very fast."

"'Three hundred miles an hour,' someone says. Then a fighter plane goes up. And soon, if it's really an attack, the sky will be filled with fighter planes."

"Lives saved—many lives saved by the WACs," Norma enthused.

"We shall have done our part," Lieutenant Warren replied modestly. "And that is all our country expects from any of us."

"Lieutenant," Norma asked suddenly in a low tone, "did you notice anything unusual about the two girls who went into your booth just ahead of me?"

"Why no—let me see,"—the lieutenant paused to consider. "One was rather short and chunky—of Italian stock. And the other—"

"Tall, strong—and, well—rather silent."

"Yes. Now I recall her. No—nothing very unusual. Quite different in character, but capable, I'd say. They'll fit in. Of course, they're both of foreign extraction. The tall girl's parents were German-born. She's an American, as we all are. She was raised by her uncle. Something unusual, did you say? Why did you ask that?" She fixed her dark eyes on Norma's puzzled face.

"Nothing, I guess. No real reason at all. I—I'm sorry I asked. I wouldn't hurt anyone—not for all the world."

"Of course you wouldn't, my dear." The Lieutenant pressed her arm.

Lieutenant Warren seemed fairly bursting in her enthusiasm for the Interceptor Control. She told Norma more, much more, as they marched along. Then suddenly, as if waking from a trance, she stopped dead in her tracks to exclaim softly:

"Oh! What have I been telling you? I shouldn't have breathed a word of that! It's so hard not to talk about a thing that's got a grip on your very soul. Promise me you won't breathe a word of it!"

"I promise," Norma said quietly. "I'm sure I know how important it is."

"Do you know?" some sprite might have whispered. Soon enough the girl was to learn.

"Come on in here," the Lieutenant said a moment later. "I must pick up a suit I've had pressed."

The air in the large room they entered was heavy with steam. "On this side," said the Lieutenant, pushing a door open a crack, "is the beauty parlor. Some young reporters have made fun of it. As if it were a crime for a soldier to look well!"

"Those girls working in there," she said as she closed the door, "are civilians. They come over from the city every day. Sometimes they worry me."

"Worry you?" Norma was puzzled.

"Yes. You see, they're not checked."

"Checked?" Norma stared.

"Their records, you know. After all, this is an Army camp and, as such, is just packed with secrets. We send out a thousand freshly trained WACs a week. One of these days we'll be sending a trainload all at once. Where are they going? Are they being sent overseas? Will they be secretaries to commanding officers? What other important tasks will they perform? Our enemy would like to know all this and much more. And these hairdressers just come and go. Who are they? No one knows."

"But have we been checked?"

"Have you been checked?" the Lieutenant whispered. "Oh, my dear! The F.B.I. knows all about you. Your fingerprints are in Washington. Your life from the time you were born has been checked and double-checked."

"So none of us could possibly turn out to be spies?" Norma breathed a sigh of relief.
"I wouldn't quite say that," her companion replied thoughtfully. "But it would be very difficult."
"Oh!" Norma exclaimed, fussing at her hair. "Do you suppose I could possibly get my hair set?"
"I can't see why not. This is a slack hour."
"I'm going to try it!" the girl exclaimed. "Tomorrow I'll be getting my uniform, won't I?"
"Yes, you will."
"Then my cap must be fitted properly."
"Try it, and good luck." The Lieutenant held out a hand. "It's been a pleasure to talk to you."
"Oh!" Norma exclaimed. "I want to see you many, many times!"
"My visit here at this time is short. But in the future. Here's hoping."
"In the future. Here's hoping," Norma whispered to herself as she passed through the door.

CHAPTER IV

A LIGHT IN THE NIGHT

On entering the small, crowded beauty parlor Norma found only one vacant chair. She looked at the girl standing behind the chair. "Spanish," Norma thought. And yet her eyes were set at a slant like those of an Oriental. For all this she was decidedly not an Oriental.

"Oh, well," Norma thought, "she looks capable. It will soon be time for rattling those trays again. And do I need to get my fingers wrapped round one of those mugs of strong coffee! Boy! Has this been a day!"

"Hair set," she said, as she settled back in her chair.

Without a word the girl went to work. She was half finished before she spoke. Then in the most casual manner she said:

"Lieutenant Warren is a friend of yours?"

Norma was surprised. The door had been opened only a little way, and for a space of seconds, yet this girl had seen. "Yes," was her noncommittal reply.

"It is always quite fine to have an officer for a friend. She can help you, tell you things, and guide you," suggested the hairdresser.

"Yes—I—I suppose so," Norma murmured.

"She told you about the Interceptor Control?" The girl's whisper invited confidence.

At once Norma was on her guard. "We talked about Boom Town," she replied evenly. "It's interesting. Built so quickly, and all that. Yet it looks warm and cozy."

"Boom Town. Oh! Yes, it's quite grand." These words were spoken without enthusiasm.

After that they talked about trivial things—clothes, shampoos, and the weather. Twice the strange girl led back to the Interceptor Control. Twice Norma led her away again.

"Now why would she, a hairdresser, want to talk about Interceptor Control?" she asked herself.

As she left the chair she was not a little surprised to see the tall recruit, Lena, waiting to take her place. More surprising was the fact that as Lena's eyes met the hairdresser's, there appeared to pass between them an instant flash of recognition.

"And Lena hasn't been on the grounds a whole day!" she thought with a start.

"Spies!" her mind registered as she left the building. Then she threw back her head and laughed. "Spies in the heart of America!" she whispered. "In a woman's camp! I'm getting a spy complex—seeing ghosts under the bed! What's the matter with me?"

That evening, not wishing to retire at the "lights out" signal, she sought out the day room that is used at night, and found it.

It was a comfortable place, that day room. Half underground, it was not subject to draft. A large round stove gave off a genial glow and plenty of heat. A large cushioned lounging chair awaited her.

Only one other girl was in the room. "Lena, the one who whispers in the night," Norma thought. "Guess she's asleep."

Lena was not asleep, for as Norma sank into her chair, she opened one eye and drawled:

"Had a good day, didn't you?"

"Just fine!" was the smiling reply.

"Hobnobbing with the brass hats." Was there a suggestion of a sneer on Lena's face?

If it was there Norma chose to ignore it. "There don't seem to be any brass hats around this place," she replied, good-naturedly.

"Oh! Aren't there?" the girl exclaimed. "You just wait and—" At that the girl caught herself.

"Well," she finished lamely, "I'll admit I've been treated fine."

"Tomorrow we get measured for our uniforms," she added.

"Your uniform should need very little fitting." Norma could not help admiring the girl's look of perfect fitness and form as she stood up.

"I didn't get it sitting 'round," Lena laughed. "I'm going out for some air and a look at the moon. You're rather a perfect thirty-six yourself," she said over her shoulder as she marched toward the door.

Norma wondered in a vague sort of way how Lena had got her training. She knew about her own. It hadn't been easy.

After a time she began wondering about the moon. Seeing it shine over the stables, the barracks and mess halls would be a pleasant experience. She wasn't dressed for the outdoors, so she stepped to the window and looked up. She did not see the moon. Instead, her eyes fell upon two shadowy figures. One was Lena. The other, too, was a girl.

"Just another raw recruit," she thought.

But then the girl turned so the light of a distant lamp was on her face. She was the girl who had done Norma's hair that afternoon.

"Should have been back in the city hours ago," she told herself.

It all seemed very strange to her. Where had Lena known this girl before? Or had she? Why were they together now? Only time could tell, and perhaps time wouldn't.

She was just thinking of retiring when Lena again entered the room. Seating herself before the fire she held out her hands to warm them. For some time neither girl spoke. At last leaning far over and speaking in a hoarse whisper Lena said:

"You know that little Italian girl?"

"Rosa?"

"Yes."

"What about Rosa?"

"I think she's a spy. I saw her flashing a light in the night. Her cot is by the window, you know," came in Lena's insinuating whisper.

"Oh! Do you really think so?" There was little encouragement in Norma's tone. "Who's a spy?" These words were on her lips. She did not say them. Nor, having said them, could she have given the answer.

Two days later found them all in uniform. And did they look grand!

"Oh! Millie!" Norma exclaimed. "You look like a million dollars!"

"Do I? Then I'm glad." Millie beamed. "I was afraid I'd still look like a salesgirl."

"How does a salesgirl look?" Betty asked.

"Oh, sort of dumb." At that they both laughed.

"It's the grandest outfit I ever had!" Millie exclaimed. "Such a soft, warm woolen suit. And such tailoring! And my coat! Oh gee! I feel like Christmas morning!"

"The shoes weren't marked down to two dollars and thirty-nine cents either!" said Betty. "I've had a lot of fine shoes, but none better than these."

That afternoon a corporal formed them into a squad—Norma, Betty, Lena, Millie, Rosa and five other girls. Then they began to drill.

"One! Two! Left! Right! Left! Right," the corporal called. "Squad right! Squad left! March! March! Doublequick! March!"

Some of the girls found it difficult to keep in step and maintain that thirty-inch stride. But not Norma. The whole manual of drill was an old story to her.

Soon they were joined by other squads. Then, eager that her squad might look its best, when the Lieutenant who had taken them over was not near, Norma began calling in a hoarse whisper the counts and changes. "Left! Right! Left! Right! Squad right! March! Double quick!" They drilled until many a girl was ready to cry "quits."

When they broke ranks Lieutenant Drury singled out Norma's squad.

"Say!" she exclaimed. "You girls are wonderful! Been practicing behind the stable or somewhere?"

"It's her," Millie nodded toward Norma. "She keeps us going."

"That's swell. How come?" The Lieutenant turned to Norma.

"I knew it all before I was five years old," Norma laughed. "My father was an officer in the last war, and I am his only boy. He started drilling me when I was a mere tot. I liked it, so we kept it up. That's all there is to it."

"Well," the Lieutenant laughed, "I guess there are many of us who are our fathers' only sons. And by the grace of God we'll make them mighty proud of us before this old war is done!"

That night in a corner of the day room Norma had a little time all by herself. Her father was home all alone now. The chair she had occupied by the fire for so long was empty now, and would be for a long time.

"But I wouldn't go back," she told herself, biting her lip. "Not for worlds!"

And he would not want her back. She recalled his parting words at the train. "Norma,"—his voice had been husky. "For a long time I wanted a son. Now I'm proud to have a daughter to give for the defense of my country. Get in there, girl, and fight! Perhaps you'll not be carrying a gun, but you'll be taking a fighting man's place. And I'm sure you'll help show those fine boys how a girl can live like a soldier and die like one, if need be."

"I'll be back," she had whispered, "when the war is won."

That night Lena may have whispered in her sleep. She may even have gone out to talk with her hairdresser. If so, Norma knew nothing of it. She was too weary for that. She retired early. She did, however, remain awake long enough to twice catch the gleam of light from Rosa's cot. She liked the little Italian girl, but—

Once again she recalled one question asked her back there in Chicago. She had been given a final examination before her induction into the service. One of the women in that examining group, she had been told, was a psychologist. In the back of her mind all during the examination she had asked herself, "Which one is she?"

When a little lady with keen dark eyes had leaned forward to ask: "If you suspected that one of your companions was a spy, what would you do?"—a flash came to her. "She's the psychologist."

She had thought the question over, then replied slowly, "If I saw her setting a fire or stealing papers I'd report her at once."

"But if not?" the little lady had insisted.

"If I merely suspected that she was a spy, I'd wait and watch, that's all," had been her whole reply.

In the eyes of her examiners she had read approval. That's what she was doing now—watching and waiting.

"All the same," she told herself now, "I'm going to ask Rosa why she flashes that light at night."

CHAPTER V

SPY COMPLEX

The next day three things happened. Norma saw her favorite Lieutenant. She asked Rosa a question and received a surprising reply, and Millie, the shopgirl who was in the Army now, led them all in an amusing adventure that might not have turned out so well.

In the afternoon they drilled as a squad, as a platoon, and as a company. It was a hard workout, but to Norma it was a thrilling adventure.

"All this is the real thing!" she exclaimed once.

"I'll say it is!" Betty laughed. "These new shoes are burning up my feet!"

"It's the real McCoy, all the same," Norma insisted. "It's what I've been training for all my life! My father thought it was just for fun, for after all, I was a girl."

"How little he knew!" Betty replied soberly.

Marching and drilling were not hard for Norma. She had time to think of other things. She began studying the ancient fort, and the atmosphere that hung about it like a cloud.

She had begun to love the place, and at times found herself wishing that she might remain here for a long time.

"Four weeks seem terribly short," she told Betty.

"It may be much longer," Betty suggested. "You might join the motor transport school and learn to drive a truck in a convoy."

"Yes, and I might not," was her reply.

"Or attend the bakers' and cooks' school," Betty suggested.

"Not that either."

"Well then," Betty exclaimed, "since you're so awfully good at this drilling stuff, perhaps they'd let you attend the officers' training school."

"Hmm." she murmured. "Now you're talking! Maybe. I don't know."

On that particular day, as a bright winter sun shone down on the long parade ground, Norma thought only of the old fort and what it stood for.

It was quite ancient, but just how old, she could not tell. Always a lover of horses, she tried to picture the parade ground in those old days when a thousand, perhaps two thousand men, all mounted on glorious cavalry horses, came riding down that stretch of green.

"Dignified officers in the lead—band playing and horses prancing! What a picture!" she murmured.

On each side of the parade ground were rows of red brick buildings. On the right side had been the homes of officers. Now these were occupied by the officers of the school.

On the opposite side were barracks occupied by officer candidates in training.

"That's where I'd be training," she thought with a little thrill, "if I applied for entrance and was accepted."

On bright, warm days, she had been told, the whole school, six thousand strong, assembled on the parade ground and marched down the field. "That," she thought, "would be glorious!" She hoped that they would have fine weather before she went away.

It was after drill was over that a rather strange thing happened. There was, she had discovered, an air of grim, serious determination about this place that was almost depressing. You seldom heard a laugh. There was always the tramp-tramp of feet.

Even now, when her squad of ten had been put on their own, and they were headed for the Service Club for a bottle of coke or a cup of hot chocolate, they were still going tramp-tramp, in regular file.

"It's a little bit too much!" she thought.

Just at that moment a shrill voice cried out sharply:

"Left! Right! One! Two! One! Two." She recognized that voice. It was Millie, the shopgirl!

For a space of seconds they kept up the steady tramp, tramp, tramp. Then, with a burst of laughter, they all took up the chant: "One! Two!"

They kept this up to the very door of the Club. Then, all of a sudden, the chant ended with a low escape of breath. There in front of the Club stood a captain of the WACs.

As they filed past, the girls saluted, and the captain gravely returned their salute.

"Wasn't that terrible!" Millie whispered, gripping Norma's arm. "And I started it! Do—do you suppose they'll put me in the guardhouse?"

"I don't know," Norma hesitated. "No—not the guardhouse. No WAC is ever put in there. I guess it wasn't so bad. We were just letting off steam, that was all." Truth was, she didn't know the answer. Of one thing she was sure—she for one felt better for this little bit of gaiety.

The Service Club had a cheerful atmosphere about it. Straight ahead, as they entered, they saw at the back of a fairly large lounging room, a fire in a large open fireplace. From the right, where chairs stood about small tables, came the pleasant odor of hot coffee and chocolate.

As Norma turned to the right she caught the eye of Lieutenant Warren. She was seated alone at a table, sipping coffee. At once she motioned to Norma to come sit across from her. With some hesitation, Norma joined her.

"What will you have? It's on me," the Lieutenant smiled.

"That coffee smells just right," was the reply.

"Doughnuts—a sweet roll, or cookies?"

"A—a sweet roll. But please let me get them!"

"No! No! Permit me!" Lieutenant Warren was away.

"That training you received at college was fine," the Lieutenant said when they were seated.

"Grand stuff. I only wish all colleges went in for it. And they will. Our quota now is a hundred and fifty thousand. It will be a half million before you know it."

"But Lieutenant Warren!" Norma's brow puckered. "We're not to carry guns, are we?"

"No. That's not contemplated."

"Then why all this drilling?"

"We're going in for hard things—driving trucks, carrying messages on motorcycles, repairing radios, cars, airplanes. We're to take the places of soldiers so they can carry guns and fight. We've got to be hard—hard as nails."

"I—I see."

"That's not all." The Lieutenant's eyes shone. "Learning to drill properly is learning to obey orders. That's necessary. If I say to you, 'Take this message down that road where the bullets are flying,' you've jolly well got to do it."

"I—I see," Norma repeated.

"You don't mind this drilling, do you?"

"I love it!" This time Norma's eyes shone.

"I thought so. And you know a great deal about it—perhaps more than most of us."

"Per—perhaps," the girl agreed, hesitatingly.

"With your permission, I am going to suggest that you be given a company to drill."

"Oh! Oh, please! No!" Norma held up a hand.

"Wait." The tone was low. "You saw me examining recruits?"

"Yes."

"I was the only officer doing that work."

"I—I didn't notice."

"All the same it was true. Why do you think I did it?"

"Because you wished to serve," Norma replied in a low voice. "But with me it would be a step up too soon."

"We are in a war. A step up or down does not matter. All that matters is that we should be prepared for that step. You are well prepared. You won't refuse?"

"I won't refuse," the girl answered solemnly.

"Lieutenant," Norma said in a low tone a moment later, "when I had my interview they asked me what I'd do if I suspected someone of being a spy. Why did they ask me that?"

"The psychologist was taking your measure. That was a problem question. The answer would give her a slant on your general character."

"Then they don't expect to find a spy among the WACs?"

"It's not impossible for a spy to join our ranks, but certainly not easy. You filled out a questionnaire that told every place you had lived and when, every school you attended, and when."

"And if I had been working, I would have had to tell how long and when, why I quit, and all the rest. All the same," Norma spoke slowly, guardedly,— "spies have gotten into every sort of place, so —"

"So you think we have a spy?" The Lieutenant's voice was low. "Anything you'd like to tell me?"

"No. Not—not yet."

"Okay. Let's skip it. But just one thing. We all need to be careful about members of our organization who are children of the foreign-born. It's easy to do them an injustice. Too easy. They form a large group in our population. Take that little Italian girl over there. She's an attractive young lady."

"That's true," Norma agreed.

"And that big girl—Lena. Her parents are foreign-born. What a truck driver she'd make!"

"Yes—Oh yes. Sure she would."

The Lieutenant gave Norma a short, sharp look.

Nothing more was said. A moment later Millie stood by their table. There was a worried look on the shopgirl's face.

"Wasn't that terrible?" She did not smile.

"What's so terrible?" The Lieutenant smiled.

"What we did a little while ago," said Millie.

"Want to tell me about it?" the Lieutenant asked.

Millie dropped into a chair to tell the story of their hilarious march.

"Now," she exclaimed at the end, "It was I who started it. What will they do to me?"

"Nothing," was the instant response, quite as quickly rewarded by a golden smile.

"You were on your own," the Lieutenant explained. "We want you to be happy. When an army loses its sense of humor it begins losing battles."

"I—I'm so glad," Millie exclaimed.

"But let me tell you." The Lieutenant held up a warning hand. "There are other times and places. Take Inspection as an example. When you line up by your cots for inspection be sure there are no wrinkles in your blanket; that your locker is in order and open; that your shoes, towel, washcloth and laundry bag are in place. And above all, look straight ahead. Don't smile. Don't frown. Just look—and don't move a muscle—not even if a fly gets inside your glasses or a bee stings you."

"Jeepers!" Millie exclaimed. "This is some woman's army!"

That evening, by some strange chance, Norma found herself in the day room with Rosa, alone.

"It's my chance," she told herself with a sharp intake of breath. "Now I'll ask her."

"Rosa," she said quietly, "why do you flash a light by the window at night?"

"Oh!" Rosa exclaimed sharply. "Does it show?" Her face was flushed.

"Yes. Just a little." Norma was trying to make it easy. "But why should you do it at all?"

"I don't like to tell you." Rosa backed away. "You'll laugh at me."

"Rosa, I'll never laugh at you about anything."

"Honest?" Rosa's dark eyes searched her face.

"Honest. Never! Never!"

"All right, then. I'll tell you. My mother didn't want me to join up. She believes much in prayer. She gave me a book of prayers and said: 'Read one prayer every night.' I have read one prayer every night. But it was dark, so I hid a small flashlight in my bed. Now you can laugh." Rosa turned away.

"Rosa,"—Norma put an arm about her—"I think that's wonderful! But Rosa, your mother did not say 'Read a prayer in bed.'"

"No, she did not say that."

"Rosa, we are forbidden a light in the barracks after nine-thirty, so why don't you come down here to read your prayer?"

"Thank you! Thank you so very much. I shall do that." Instantly Rosa was away after her book.

Long after Rosa had read her prayer and left the room, Norma sat staring at the fire. In that fire she read many questions. Would she be asked to drill a company? Should she ask for the privilege of entering officers' training? Had Rosa told the truth? And Lena? What of Lena and the strange girl in the beauty parlor?

CHAPTER VI

A STARTLING ADVENTURE

At Fort Des Moines the WACs are on their own from Saturday noon until Sunday night. Needless to say, over at the mess hall, in the barracks, and on the field there was much talk among the new recruits about how these hours were to be spent.

"What do you do?" Norma asked a tall, slender girl from Massachusetts who had been in training for three weeks.

"Well," the girl drawled, "the first week I went dashing off to Des Moines, rented a room at a nice hotel, ate oysters on the half-shell, Boston baked beans, brown bread and all the things I wanted, and had a grand time all by myself. But now," she added, "I just get some books from the library, settle down in a big chair at the Service Club and loaf."

"But isn't Des Moines interesting?" Norma asked in surprise.

"Sure it is," a bright-eyed girl from Texas exclaimed. "Beth is just lazy, that's all. Des Moines is a nice big overgrown town, all full of nice, friendly people. It has the grandest eating spots! Yes, and halls where you can dance—really nice places."

"And boys to dance with! Umm!" exclaimed a girl from Indiana. "There are soldiers and sailors who come in from their camps and all sorts of college boys."

"A nice big, overgrown town, all full of nice friendly people." Norma recalled these words later. Truth was, she found herself a little homesick. At that moment she would have loved a good romp with her dog Spark, and after that a quiet talk with her dad.

"I know what I'll do!" she thought. "And I won't tell a soul! They'd laugh at me."

Betty, who more than any girl at camp had begun to seem Norma's chum, had decided to stay in camp. When the day came, Norma too remained until four o'clock. Part of the time she spent having her hair washed and set. It was no accident that she took the chair of the Spanish hairdresser who served her before.

"I'll bring up the subject of the Interceptor Control. If she asks questions I'll tell her things I read in that little book called 'The Battle of Britain.' Anything that's been published. Then perhaps I'll string her a little."

The hairdresser fell for the bait. Norma loaded her up with commonly known facts, then drew pictures from her fertile imagination. In the end she was hearing planes at unbelievable distances.

"But why are you so interested in all this?" she asked at last.

The girl shot her a swift look. "Oh! Miss Kent!" she exclaimed—there was a shrill note in her voice—"It is all so very interesting! Everything you WACs do is thrilling! It is a great organization!"

"Yes," Norma agreed. "It is one of the big things that has come out of the war."

To herself she was recalling Lieutenant Warren's words:

"These girls worry me a little. Their records have not been checked."

Then again she remembered how her own record had been checked to the last detail. "The examiners do not take your word for a thing," she had been told. "The F.B.I. questionnaire you filled out is checked and double-checked by men who know. Even your fingerprints are sent to Washington."

All this she knew was true. And yet the girls in the beauty parlor were not checked. "That tall girl, Lena, could tell this hairdresser anything—just anything at all. If she became the secretary to a colonel she could report anything to this hairdresser."

"But Lena—" it came to her with the force of a blow—"Lena's record has been checked. Her fingerprints were sent to Washington."

"What a silly young fool you are!" she chided herself as a short time later she took the car to Des Moines. But she was not even sure of that.

Arrived at the heart of the city she looked up a long street to see a tall, inviting brick hotel standing on a hill.



*And Yet the Girls in the Beauty Parlor
Were Not Checked*

After walking and climbing for fifteen minutes she found herself entering a long room filled with lounge chairs and lined on two walls by tall glass cases. The contents of these cases surprised her, for in them were more kinds of mounted fish than she had ever seen.

"Oh!" she exclaimed. "Am I in the wrong place? Is this a museum?"

"No, Miss." the smiling bellboy who took her bag replied. "This hotel was once owned by a very rich man who collected fish. He's dead now."

"But his collection lives on." She wondered vaguely what would live on when she was gone.

The first thing she did when she had been shown to a neat and comfortable room was strange. Opening her bag, she took out a cardboard folder tied with a ribbon. From this folder she selected a dozen pictures. These she proceeded to thumbtack, one by one, to the wall directly under a mellow light.

After that, without further unpacking, she dropped into a chair and sat for a long time looking at those pictures through moist eyelashes.

The house with the broad lawn and tall shade trees about it was her home. The tall, distinguished looking man with one empty sleeve was her dad. The picture done in color was her college chum. And the grinning young man in the uniform of a private was Bill—just plain Bill.

There were other pictures but these were the ones that counted most. They had adorned the walls of her room at college for a long time. When you bunk in a stable—even a glorious, glorified stable—with a hundred other girls, you don't thumbtack your pictures to the wall. It isn't allowed. Besides, it would be silly.

Norma wanted to see her pictures in their proper setting. Now she was seeing them.

"Norma, you're a silly goose," she told herself aloud. Then she wondered whether she had spoken the truth. Sometimes one drops into a new world too hastily. It does one good to take a look back.

It was Bill who had started her thinking of the WACs. She and Bill were grand good friends, that's all. No diamond ring—no talk of wedding bells—just friends.

All the same, when Bill came to the school all togged up in a new uniform, she had felt a big tug at her heart strings.

"Oh! Bill!" she had cried. "You look like a million!"

"And I feel like a millionaire," was Bill's reply. "Army life is the berries, and regarding the Japs, all I've got to say is they'd better look out!"

"Getting pretty good with a Tommy gun, Bill?" she laughed.

"And how!" was his prompt reply.

They found a log down among the willows at the edge of the campus, and there Bill, in his big, boisterous way, told her all about the Army.

"Oh, Bill!" she exclaimed when he had finished. "You make it sound so wonderful! I wish they'd let girls join."

"They do!" Bill stopped grinning. "Ever heard of the WACs?"

"Yes, I—" she paused. Yes, she had heard of them. That was about all.

"Bill, I'll really look into this."

"You'd better. They're a grand outfit. And boy! Are they going places!"

"I'll be seein' you," she said to Bill as their hands clasped in farewell.

"In the Army?"

"I shouldn't wonder."

"Hot diggity! That's the stuff!" He gave her hand a big squeeze, and was gone.

"And now I'm here, Bill," she said to the picture on the wall. "I'm in the Army now. But, oh, Bill! I do hope our companies will some time march in the same parade!"

After an hour with her pictures, Norma felt herself ready for one more week of drilling, police duty, study, and all that went on from dawn till dark at old Fort Des Moines.

After a hearty meal eaten in a big bright cafeteria where all the people seemed carefree and gay, she stepped out to see the lights of Des Moines at night.

Thrills she had experienced more than once came to her from exploring a strange city at night. Certainly exploring a city of friendly people, many of whom smiled at her in a kindly way as she marched along in her spick-and-span uniform, could not be dangerous.

For an hour she prowled the streets alone. Past dark public buildings that loomed at her from the night, down narrow dark streets where taxi drivers and workers sat or stood before narrow lunch counters, she wandered. And then back to the broad street where lights were bright and the throngs were gay.

A feeling of utter loneliness drove her once again into the shadows. And there she met with a startling adventure.

CHAPTER VII

A HAND IN THE DARK

She had rounded a corner and was walking slowly north, admiring the sight of the moon shining over the jagged line of rooftops, when suddenly two figures emerged from a narrow alley to turn in ahead of her.

"Been taking a short cut," she thought.

The steady swinging stride of the taller of the two girls, as they marched on before her, suggested that she might be a WAC.

"But she's wearing civilian clothes," she told herself in surprise.

The two shadowy figures seemed vaguely familiar. Because of this she followed them. They had gone two blocks when all of a sudden the taller of the two turned her head half about. The moonlight painted her features in sharp outline.

"It's Lena!" she whispered. "Lena, in civilian clothes!" What did it mean? Had this girl been found out and dismissed from the service?

As if the question had been put directly to her, the shorter of the two girls paused and looked back. Just in time Norma dodged into the shadows.

An inaudible gasp escaped her lips. The other girl was the one from the beauty parlor at the Fort.

As the two girls resumed their march, Norma followed them, without thinking too much about the reason or possible consequence.

At the next corner they turned west on a dark street. Here, on both sides, were auto repair shops and cheap second-hand stores.

Scarcely had Norma rounded this corner when the two girls swung through a door to disappear into a shop that was almost completely dark.

Acting purely on impulse. Norma caught the door before it had completely closed. Pushing it a little farther open she slipped inside and then allowed it to close noiselessly.

At the same instant a thought struck her all in a heap. Lena had a perfect right to dress in civilian clothes on her day off. All WACs have. She, Norma, had chosen to wear her uniform.

"In a way it is a sort of protection," she had said to Betty.

"Yes, like a nun's cape and veil," Betty had laughed.

"Is it a protection?" Norma asked herself now. At first the place seemed completely dark. Then she caught a gleam of light at the far end of the room. She began hearing low voices. The two girls were back there. Someone was with them.

"What a goose I am," Norma thought. "Lena has a right to dress as she pleases. Nothing unusual has happened. That other girl probably has a friend who works here. They have come here to meet him. I'll just slip out of the door."

But she couldn't. Not just yet. The door was closed and locked. Just a little frightened, she felt for some sort of bolt or spring lock that could be released. There was none.

For the first time in her life she was seized with a feeling very near to panic. She wanted to dash to the heavily shaded windows and pound on them for help. She wanted to scream. And yet she did not dare. Perhaps those people did not know she was there.

"And after all, why should I be afraid?" she asked herself. "This is some sort of a repair shop." That faint light from the back brought out the looming bulks of cars and trucks. "There's no law against going into a repair shop, even at night."

All of a sudden she realized that it was not fear of those who enforce the law that inspired her with fear, but those who hated the law.

"Spies," she whispered softly.

But were there spies in this city? Perhaps. Who could tell? Spies were everywhere.

Once again she tried the latch, lifting it up and down, pulling at the door without a sound. It was no use. Some mysterious type of lock held the door fast shut.

In the hope of finding a smaller door, she began gliding along the wall. All at once she bumped into something that toppled over to fall with a loud bang.

Like a wild bird in a cage she flew to the door to try the latch with all her strength.

"Who's there?" came in a hoarse voice.

She neither moved nor spoke.

A minute passed—two—three minutes—or was it an hour? Her heart was beating painfully. She had the sense of someone approaching, yet she neither heard nor saw a moving thing.

Then suddenly she did see it—a groping hand. The flash of light cutting through a spot beside a windowshade revealed it.

A scream was on her lips. And yet she did not scream.

And then the hand gripped her arm.

"What are you doing here?" a voice growled.

She tried to speak, but no words came.

"Oh! You are one of them." The voice changed suddenly. Now it was low, apologetic. "You are one of them lady soldiers. A WAC they call them, don't they?"

"Yes. Yes. That's what I am." She formed the words but could not say them.

There was no need, for the man went on, "You were perhaps looking for the WAC garage. It is not

here. That is another place. You came in—the door locked itself. Is it not so?”

“Yes! Yes! That is it,” she whispered. Lena must not hear her voice or see her face.

“I shall unlock the door. This is all too bad,” said the man who had gripped her arm.

By some magic the door was opened and she stepped out into the night. The light of a car illuminated the man’s face for a second. Then the door slammed shut.

“I’ll know that face if I see it again,” she told herself. She wondered if after all Lena had seen *her* face—and if she had, what then?

Ten minutes later, panting a little, she entered the hotel, called for her key, then dashed up two flights of stairs to her room.

Having locked and bolted the door, she sank into the chair before her array of pictures.

“Oh, Bill!” she whispered, “I wish I hadn’t come.” She was thinking not alone of Des Moines, but Fort Des Moines, the Army, and all the rest. She was wishing desperately that she might be back with her dad and her dog Spark.

After that she sat looking at her father’s picture. From his square shoulders and his twinkling gray eyes she drew strength. She seemed to feel again his hand on her shoulder as he said in his slow calm voice, “You’re the only boy I’ve got. Thank God they’re giving you a chance. I know you’ll do your duty as a good soldier.”

“No,” she whispered, “I’m not sorry. I’m glad.”

One thing she decided before she fell asleep in that big comfortable bed. This was that she would cease playing the part of an F.B.I. agent and start being a real WAC.

“I’ll put this Lena business out of my life,” she whispered. “This is the end of it forever and ever.”

Did some sprite whisper, “Oh, no, sister! No you won’t!” If so, it was all lost on her, for she had fallen fast asleep. But if there was a sprite hovering about and he did say that, he would have spoken the truth. There are some things that just won’t be put out of our lives.

When she awoke the sun was shining in her window. It was Sunday morning. But she was not thinking of that. Instead, a question had popped into her head. How had that man known she was a WAC? He had not seen her. The place had been completely dark. There could be but one answer—by the sense of feeling. He had gripped her arm. He had recognized the feel of her soft wool WAC uniform. And how had he come to know the feel of fine wool? Here too there could be but one answer—Lena. It was strange.

On the following Monday Norma was asked to take charge of the drilling of her company.

“I realize that this is an unusual request,” the officer in charge said soberly. “But this is an unusual war, and ours an unusual organization. For that reason we must perform unusual tasks.

“We are short of officers. The Army camps are constantly calling for more and more of our workers. They go out in small groups. An officer goes with each group. So now you see how it is.” She smiled. “What do you say?”

“I—I’ll try it.” Norma agreed.

She undertook the task with fear and trembling. It was not so much that she distrusted her own ability. She had been well trained. But how would the other girls take it?

“Some of them are thirty years old. One is a grandmother,” she said to Betty, as she broke the news. “And I am barely old enough to vote.”

“It’s not age that counts,” Betty replied in a tone that carried conviction. “It’s ability and experience. Go in there, old pal, and win. This is war. We all must do our best. And you can bet I’ll be right in there rooting for you.”

“Then—thanks! Oh, thanks!” Norma replied huskily.

All the same, when the time came for her first order: “Company, attention!” her throat was dry and her heart was in her mouth.

There was a surprised look on many faces as they turned about to line up. There was a smile or two, but they were not unkind smiles.

Then a thing happened that broke the tension. An officer of the old school, her father had drilled her in an unusual way. When as a child she stood at attention, he would call: “Hup, two, three.”

Now, in her excitement she called to her company:

“Hup, two, three!”

Then suddenly realizing what she had done, she laughed. And they all laughed with her. The ice was broken.

“Mark time! One! Two! One! Two! March.”

Feet came down with an even thud—thud—and crunch—crunch on the frozen path. The march was on.

Oddly enough, at the first rest period one of the older members said:

“Why not ‘Hup, two, three,’ for us?”

“Sure. That’s the way the soldiers get it. And we’re in the Army now.”

“They’ll call us the Hup company,” someone laughed.

“That will be swell,” exclaimed another. “And that’s what we’ll be, the ‘Hup an’ comin’ Company’.”

And so it came to be.

For two hours Norma put them through their paces. Only once did her attention waver. That was when Lena gave her a long, searching look. “She knows about that night,” she told herself, and all but lost a step.

When at last the tired marchers were once more on their own, many of the girls came forward to congratulate her and tell her how well she had done.

“They are won over. Just wonderful!” Tears of gratitude stood in Norma’s eyes as she reported to her superior.

“These came here for just one purpose,” the Lieutenant said.

“To help win the war.”

“Yes. That’s it. To hasten the end of this terrible affair and to help bring their brothers,

sweethearts, and friends back home again.

“So how could they fail to do their best or refuse to respond to the orders of any leader? But you, my child,”—she placed a hand on Norma’s shoulder—“you have real officer’s blood coursing through your veins.”

Norma thanked her, then marched away.

“She spoke wiser than she knew,” Norma thought with a smile. She had not told her that her father had been an officer in the other World War.

But did she really want to become an officer of the WACs? She did not know.

After that the days glided by. Drill was not all there was to their training. Far from that. The Articles of War were read to them. They studied long hours learning what it meant to be a soldier. They studied military regulations. They took gas mask drill, first aid, and a score of other activities that were likely to fall to the lot of any WAC.

From time to time each girl was assigned to K. P.—Kitchen Police—peeling potatoes, washing dishes, scrubbing floors, dishing up food.

Betty, who was a real student, hated this, for on that day they were excused from study. But Millie, who found study difficult, wished that K. P. came five times a week.

Though Norma had sworn that the spy complex should not tempt her again, strange things happened, and always her mystery-loving mind would ask, “Why? Why?”

There was the time she went with the little Italian girl, Rosa, to visit the airport on their day off. Then, too, Betty more than once tempted her to start spy hunting all over again.

“I won’t!” she told herself. “I won’t! I just won’t!” Positive as she was at the time, Norma did not succeed long in keeping this resolution.

It was really Rosa’s strange and mysterious adventure at the airport that got her going all over again.

CHAPTER VIII

ROSA ALMOST FLIES

On the Saturday that Norma and Rosa went to visit the airfield they doffed their uniforms and put on their civies.

"All the same," Norma said, "we'll take along our identification cards, just in case—"

Airplanes, especially those flown by the Army Air Forces, had always interested Norma, so she was more than delighted when shortly after their arrival at the field, a flight of small, sleek fighter planes came winging in out of the blue.

"Look, Rosa!" Norma exclaimed. "Aren't they wonderful! Like a flock of beautiful white pigeons!"

There was no need to say "Look" to the little Italian WAC. As if in a hypnotic trance, she stood with eyes glued on the flight of planes.

"See how they circle!" Norma herself was entranced. "This is like war. This is how they will come sweeping in after escorting a bomber squadron in Africa, or China, or who knows where. That's the way they'll look when we watch them beyond the seas."

"Yes, this is war," was all that Rosa said, as one by one the fighting planes taxied across the field into position.

Like a troop of boys the fliers came walking across the field.

"Bill is in flight training right now," Norma said, all excited. "If only he were in that group!"

"Who's Bill?" Rosa's eyes left the planes for an instant.

"Oh, he's just Bill." Norma laughed. "But he's not here."

Always interested in any person in uniform, Norma moved closer to the joking, laughing group.

"How young they seem!" she said, half aloud. It shocked her to think that some day, perhaps not too far away, from the blue sky, shot out of his plane, Bill would come hurtling down, tumbling over and over like a stick thrown into the air crashing at last to earth.

"This is war," she thought, with a shudder. "We WACs must do all in our power to make it end. And we will! Now we are a hundred and fifty thousand. Next it will be three hundred thousand—half a million—a million WACs marching away to win the war."

Looking up, she allowed her eyes to sweep the field. It was an inspiring picture—the men, the planes, the flag floating in the breeze.

"Oh!" she whispered. "Oh! How I wish Dad were young again!"

And then, with a sudden start, she realized that Rosa was gone from her side.

"She's vanished!" she thought, with a sudden sense of panic, as her eyes sought the girl in vain.

Just then, as if moving of its own will, one of the fighter planes began gliding toward the center of the field.

At once the quiet scene became one of action. A young pilot close to the plane made a running jump to grab the tail of the plane. He had just reached it when, in the midst of shouting and sound of rushing feet, the plane's motor went silent, and the plane itself came to a sudden stop.

Norma was thunderstruck when, from the pilot's seat of that plane, none other than her companion, Rosa, the little Italian WAC, was dragged out.

"Rosa! Rosa! You little dunce! Why did you do it?" she screamed as she raced forward.

By the time she reached the side of the plane Rosa was on the ground. A stalwart member of the Military Police had her by the arm, and was saying:

"Come along, sister. What's wrong with you? Drunk? Or just plain nuts—or nothin' at all?"

"It's the guardhouse for her," a second M. P. predicted loudly.

Realizing that for the moment nothing could be accomplished, Norma joined three grinning young pilots as they followed the M. P.'s and Rosa across the field.

"What's the matter with that girl?" one of the pilots asked in a friendly tone.

"I don't know," was all Norma could say.

"She was with you, wasn't she?" a second pilot asked.

Norma made no reply.

"She really had that plane going," said the first pilot. "One minute more, and she'd have been right up in the sky."

"And there's secrets in those planes that nobody but us are supposed to know," put in number three. "By George! Maybe she's a spy!"

"Hush," said Norma. "She's no more a spy than you are. She's a WAC."

"A WAC!" the first pilot exclaimed. "Well I'll be jiggered! And I suppose you're one too?"

"Sure I am," Norma agreed.

"Well, all I got to say is you'd look swell in any uniform," was the final rejoinder.

Just then the flight commander, a very youthful-appearing major who had come across the field in long strides, caught up with the procession.

"Caught this girl trying to steal one of your planes," said an M. P.

"Yes," said the other. "We're taking her to the guardhouse. C'mon, sister." He gave the weeping Rosa a gentle push.

"Wait a minute. Not so fast. Those are our planes. I'm flight commander. Let the girl go. She won't run away, will you, young lady?"

Rosa tried to speak, but no words came.

"Here's a young lady who was with her," said a pilot, moving Norma gently forward. "She says they're both WACs."

"WACs?" said the officer. "Hmm! Where are your uniforms?"

"We're on leave." Norma swallowed hard, then threw her shoulders back. "Saturday afternoon and Sunday we can wear what we please. And—and Major," she stammered, "I don't know why Rosa did it. I—I think the plane charmed her."

"Charmed her! Hmm! Now let's see."

"She's one of the best little WACs in our squadron," said Norma, half in despair.

"And are you the squadron's leader?"

"No, but I drill the entire company. And that's not all!" Norma exclaimed, gathering courage from the major's smiling eyes. "I'm the daughter of Major John M. Kent, who fought in the World War—"

"John M. Kent!" The major studied her face. "You do look like him. You've got his eyes."

"Then you know him?" Norma exclaimed.

"Quite well. He's a splendid man."

"His eyes are not all I have," said Norma. "I have his picture." She fumbled in her billfold.

"Here—here it is."

The officer studied the photograph, and, across the bottom of it, he read:

"To my beloved daughter Norma."

"Norma," he smiled. "That's a pretty name for a pretty girl. So you're a WAC? A chip off the old block. Shake." He held out his hand. She seized it in a good, friendly grip.

"And here's a picture of our squadron," Norma said half a minute later. "There's Rosa, right there, uniform and all. You know we wouldn't do anything wrong. I guess Rosa just lost her head."

"Yes, lost my head," Rosa sobbed.

"All right, boys," said the major. "You may let the young lady go. You can't put a WAC in the guardhouse. It just isn't being done, especially not here."

To Norma he said: "If I'm here long enough I'm coming to visit your camp. Yours is a grand outfit. We're going to need you all before this scrap is over."

"Oh! Please do come!" Norma exclaimed. "I—I'll get you the keys to Boom Town and to every other place in old Fort Des Moines!"

"Well, I'm jiggered!" exclaimed one of the pilots, as Norma and the still silently weeping Rosa hurried off the field.

Once she was safe on the streetcar and headed for the city, Rosa ceased her weeping, but every now and again Norma heard her whisper:

"Why did I do it? Oh why?"

What was back of all this? Hidden away in the little Italian girl's mind were secrets. Norma would never be able to doubt that from this day on.

"I'd like to go exploring in that mind of yours," she thought. That this type of exploring often leads to disaster she knew all too well. So, for the time being, she did not explore.

Arrived at the city, Norma at once sought out a restaurant with a little nook in the wall where lights were subdued and where delicious foods were served.

By the time they had gone all the way from soup to ice cream and were sipping good strong black tea, the little Italian girl's eyes were shining once again.

"Was that after all so terrible?" she asked.

"Of course it was," Norma replied instantly. The question surprised and shocked her.

"I did no harm to the plane."

"You might have killed someone, wrecked the plane, or even flown away in it."

"Oh, no, I—" For a space of seconds it seemed that Rosa was on the verge of revealing some important secret. "But—but I didn't do any of those terrible things," she ended lamely.

"The secret must wait," Norma told herself. To Rosa she said: "There were secrets in that plane."

"I didn't want their secrets," Rosa's cheeks flushed.

"How could they know that?" Norma was a little provoked.



*"You Might Have Wrecked the Plane,"
Norma Replied*

"I'm a WAC. When they knew that they saw it was all right."

"It was I who got you off." Norma's voice rose. "They thought you were a spy."

"I, a spy?" Rosa stared. "Yes, that is what they said, but they were joking."

"They were not joking." Norma was in dead earnest.

"But I'm a WAC! How can a WAC be a spy? My record, it was checked. My fingerprints—"

"Yes, I know all that. But even in a WAC uniform you might be a spy. My father told me once that during the World War many spies in France wore Y. M. C. A. uniforms. They were very hard to catch. Believe me, the Mata Haris of this war will be wearing WAC uniforms, too. We have to be careful, very, very careful." Norma settled back in her place to study the Italian girl's face. It was indeed an interesting moving picture of lights and shadows. But from it Norma learned little.

Twice Rosa seemed on the point of replying, but in the end no words were spoken.

By this time their group, though still together, had moved to newer and more comfortable quarters in Boom Town. That night Norma lay staring at the darkness for a long time before she fell asleep.

She was thinking of Rosa and Lena. Rosa's actions on that day had started her thinking things all over again and her thoughts were long, long thoughts.

Once again she caught the gleam of light from Rosa's cot and saw Lena sit up in her place at night as she whispered three mysterious words.

The picture of Lena and the Spanish hairdresser standing in the moonlight again fascinated her, and once more she felt that terrifying grip on her arm as a man's voice said, "Oh! You are one of them!"

A chapter or two had been added to Lena's story. Betty was responsible for this. One night she had come in rather late, but had remained up long enough to whisper to Norma:

"Who do you think I saw tonight down by the big gate? Lena and the Spanish hairdresser!"

"Is that so strange?" Norma had tried to seem indifferent.

"But there was a man with them." Betty's whisper rose. "He had a small mustache that turned up, and sort of staring eyes."

"Did he?" Norma's voice betrayed her excitement.

"Yes; and he said to Lena, 'You must!' Only his 'you' sounded like 'Du'."

"And Lena has her hair done every other day by the Spanish hairdresser. That costs money. Do you think she always pays?"

So Betty too had a spy complex! Well, let her have it. She wasn't going to be drawn into it. For all that, some things did seem very strange.

At that Norma turned over and fell asleep.

CHAPTER IX

SOMETHING SPECIAL

The period of their basic training at old Fort Des Moines was drawing to a close. Three more days and they would be scattered far and wide. Some, it is true, would remain for further training in the Motor Transport School, and Cooks' and Bakers' School. Some would take up officers' training, but out of the thousand who had been in training for nearly four weeks, the greater number would be scattered to the four winds.

"Just think," Betty sighed as she and Norma stepped out into a glorious springlike morning. "To leave this lovely place for some Army camp!"

"But that's why we came here!" Norma protested. "I'm eager to start doing some real work."

"Yes, and you're just the one who is most likely to be kept here to enter officers' training." There was admiration in Betty's voice, and a suggestion of envy. "Lucky girl, to have such a grand Dad."

Then Norma made a strange remark. "I'm not sure that I want to be an officer—at least, not yet."

"Don't be silly!" Betty exploded. "Who wouldn't like to be an officer? When you arrive at your Army camp you're right up there with the rest of the officers."

"Bill's a buck private, and he's good enough for me. Besides—Oh! Come on. Let's get our morning coffee. This is the day of the big parade." 79

Yes, this was the day. And such a glorious day! For weeks it had been too cold for a parade. Snow had lain on the parade ground. But now the snow was gone. The ground was frozen, but the sun was bright.

"Six thousand women!" Norma thought as a thrill ran up her spine.

Then suddenly her heart skipped a beat. She was to lead her own company. She was the only basic on whom such an honor had been conferred. She would do her best. Would it be good enough? Then there was that other—that very special thing. She shuddered afresh. And that morning for the first time she dropped her big handleless cup with a bang and a splash on the table.

"Nerves," suggested Betty.

"A bad omen." Norma frowned.

"No, a good one," Betty countered. "Shows you're sweating them out right now. You'll be cool as a cucumber when the time comes."

At one-thirty that afternoon they assembled on the parade grounds. Slowly they formed into companies and took their places in line.

Since this was to be a gala occasion, a military band from an Army post had been imported.

Each company had its flag and its leader. Norma thrilled to her finger tips as she stepped out before her "Hup! Two! Three!" Company. 80

"If only Dad were here!" she thought. "Why? Oh, why didn't I ask him to come!"

By the time they were all in their places, the reviewing stand was all aglitter with officers' insignia and decorations.

A hush fell over the ancient parade ground.

As the band struck up *The Star-Spangled Banner* they stood at rigid attention. When this was over, Norma glanced hastily over her company. It was perfect. Never, she was sure, had there been such a group of girls.

Suddenly the band struck up Sousa's stirring march, *The Stars and Stripes Forever*, and the parade began.

To Norma it was all a glorious dream. The flags, the music, the bright sunshine, great officers—some young and dashing, some subdued and grave, standing in review.

"But this is only the beginning," she told herself. "There is more—much more."

This was true, for once as she drilled her own company at dusk on the ancient grounds, having chosen a dark corner, they had put on something very special. It had been great fun, and gave them a thrill as well.

They had, however, made one mistake—the red brick officer's home facing that corner of the parade ground was occupied by the commanding officer. 81

Hearing the rattle of drums, she had slipped on her fur coat and had stepped out on the veranda.

"Thrilled and charmed," as she expressed it, by their performance, she had come down off the porch to congratulate their officer.

When she found a private at their head, she was amazed, for Norma was putting her company through an intricate drill.

"My dear, it is marvelous!" she enthused, when it was over. "And this little—ah—specialty of yours is charming. Let us keep it a secret, shall we? Until the day of the parade?"

"You mean—" Norma stared.

"Your company shall do this as something extra after the parade is over."

Norma gulped as she recalled the stirring words.

Without a word she saluted the commanding officer.

And that was why a chill sometimes ran up her spine, as the grand little army of WACs swept down the field. That certain "something extra" was yet to come.

The parade, with its marches and counter marches, in close formation and open formation,

following the band down the long field and back again, was an inspiring sight. There were those there that day who realized as never before what war could do to a nation and her people.

Since it had been announced by megaphone that an extra feature would follow the grand parade, the WACs, once their formation was broken, joined the onlookers at the side, all but Norma and her company. These hastened to one of the barracks.

Marching in close formation they were soon back on the field. However, three of their members had undergone a speedy transformation. Or were they members of the company at all? The spectators were unable to tell.

Leading the trio was what appeared to be a tall, gray haired man. In his hand he carried a drum. Behind him marched a mannish figure carrying a fife, and after him came a boy, also with a drum. Hatless, the man with the fife wearing a bandage on his head; and the other two lined up behind their leader, Norma, and behind them marched the khaki-clad company.

Suddenly, at a signal from Norma, the trio snapped to attention. Instantly the roll of drums and the shrill whistle of a fife greeted the listeners' ears.

Then, electrified, the audience knew. The three figures represented a picture they had known from childhood, *The Spirit of Seventy-six*.

Led by these three, the khaki host marched with perfect rhythm halfway down the field and back again.

An awed silence followed. Then rose such a cheer as the ancient barracks had seldom echoed back, even in the old Indian days.

Frightened—all but overcome by her sudden triumph, Norma tried to hide among her now broken ranks, but all in vain.

She was searched out and led to the grandstand. The first person she met was a distinguished-looking, gray-haired man with one empty sleeve.

"Dad!" she cried.

Soon she was being greeted by high-ranking officers and other honored guests.

"I shall recommend you for officers' training," the commanding officer whispered in her ear.

"Oh! But I'm not sure that I want to be an officer!" The cry escaped unbidden from Norma's lips.

"We shall see," was the reply.

Lieutenant Warren, her beloved Lieutenant, who was standing near, said:

"I would like to have you and your father at my house for dinner tonight. You know my house?"

Norma nodded.

"Will you come?"

Norma looked into her father's eyes. Then she said, "Yes, thank you. That will be fine."

As she stepped from the platform, Norma felt that she had lived a whole week in one short hour. But her day was not half done.

CHAPTER X

I'M AFRAID

Oddly enough, when Norma had conceived the idea of depicting *The Spirit of Seventy-six*, and had gone about the task of selecting her fife player and drummers, she had discovered that in all the company there were but two drummers, Rosa and Lena.

At first she hesitated to ask Lena to play the part for, to say the least, their relations had been none too cordial. In the end she had swallowed her pride and made the request.

"Oh, sure!" Lena had agreed. "I think it will be loads of fun!"

In the end, with her long legs encased in knee-length stockings and short breeches and with a white wig, she had played the part of a Revolutionary grandfather superbly. As for Rosa, she had been every inch a boy. A girl named Mary played the fife.

And so it happened that it was in the company of Lena, Rosa, Betty, and Millie that shortly after the breakup of the parade Norma found herself tramping toward the main chapel. Her father had been taken on an inspection of the grounds.

The company in which these girls at last found themselves was a thousand strong. These girls had all completed their training and in two or three more days would scatter north, south, east, and west to take up the tasks for which they had been trained.

"It's going to be swell!" Lena exclaimed. "We're headed for the coast!"

"The coast!" Norma stared. "How do you know?"

"Haven't you been told?" Millie exclaimed. "We've all been told. We're to be part of an Interceptor Control—catch planes that are coming to bomb us."

"Or spies that try to land from submarines," Rosa exclaimed. "It will be thrilling and dangerous, I guess."

"Only thing is," Millie pouted, "I'm afraid there won't be many soldiers there."

"Soldiers?" Norma stared at her.

"Well, you do like a date now and then," Millie drawled. "You get awfully lonesome when you don't."

At that they all laughed.

"Honest, haven't you been told?" Betty asked when she had Norma by herself.

"Not yet," was the slow reply.

"Oh! I know!" Betty exclaimed. "They're going to send you to officers' training school! Some people have all the luck!"

"Do they?" Norma said. Truth was, she was tired.

The thousand WACs now streaming into the chapel were being assembled for a final word from the top-ranking officers of the camp before they went out to their work.

"Where do you suppose we'll be sent?" Norma heard one girl ask as she took her seat.

"Perhaps North Africa," someone whispered.

"Surely not just like that!" was the surprised reply.

"A lot of WACs landed there just last Sunday. I saw it in the paper. And did they have thrills going over! Heard the siren telling of prowling subs, felt the thud of depth bombs, and—"

"Shish!" the girl's friend whispered. "You're almost shouting!"

"All the same they had a grand time! Danced with soldiers on deck, and all that. Right over there in Africa now. Girls! Tell me how I can get to go!"

Then all at once the khaki-clad throng was silent. The ranking officers were mounting the platform. In a silent salute, the girls all rose. When the Lieutenant Colonel in charge of the post, the commanding officer and two officers Norma did not at once recognize were seated, they all sat down.

The Lieutenant Colonel rose. "Fellow soldiers of America," she began. Norma was thrilled. "You have assembled here in order that we may give you a final greeting and farewell. During your four weeks of training you have conducted yourselves like soldiers. You will shortly be going to your various posts of duty. Your country looks to you for service, faithfulness to your task, and loyalty. We know you will not fail."

"No—no—no. We will not fail!" came in an inaudible whisper. Had one woman, or a hundred, said it? No one knew. It was enough that an electric thrill passed over the room.

"On such an occasion as this," the Colonel went on, "it has been customary for the commanding officer or myself to give you a brief talk in an effort to acquaint you with that which lies ahead. This afternoon we have delegated that task to one who, not so many months ago, went through her baptism of fire in Flanders Field.

"Lieutenant Warren,"—she turned about—"will you be so kind as to tell these young women what it really means to be a WAC?"

As Lieutenant Warren rose, the Colonel said:

"Some of you know Lieutenant Warren. To those of you who do not know her, may I say that during the fall of Holland, Belgium, and France Miss Warren drove an Ann Morgan Ambulance, evacuating old men, women, and children from those unfortunate lands, and that the medal pinned upon her breast is a Croix de Guerre presented to her by a grateful nation."

There was a rustle in the audience. Someone sprang to her feet. Instantly they were all on their

feet in silent tribute to a member of their own ranks who had seen service on the bloody fields of France.

"My Lieutenant!" Norma whispered chokingly. At that instant she knew that she would gladly follow this leader round the world.

"Tonight," she thought as she sank again into her seat, "Father and I are to dine with her. What a privilege!" She wondered what would be said at that dinner. And then the speech began.

Lieutenant Warren spoke slowly, distinctly. Norma caught every word and yet her voice never rose to a high pitch. She spoke at length of what she had seen, little of what she had done. Speaking of the enemy planes she said:

"They swooped low over roads that were crowded with carts drawn by horses or weary old men, and two-wheel carts pushed by women and children.

"These people were refugees. Driven from their homes, they were trying to save a little of that which they had once owned, for they had always been poor.

"But those enemy pilots!" There was biting anger in her low voice. "They came swooping down to shower machine-gun bullets upon these defenseless people.

"What did they want? To clog the road with helpless and innocent women and children so their armies might more easily destroy the defeated soldiers."

As the speaker paused for breath, Norma stole a glance at her companions. Millie and Rosa were leaning forward, lips parted, eyes wide, drinking in every word. Betty sat well back in her seat, listening as one listens who has heard many rare speeches, yet there was on her face a look that said:

"This is real, though it is terrible. I shall not forget it."

But Lena? Norma was startled. There was on her face a look as cold as marble.

Without knowing why, at sight of that face Norma suddenly felt terribly afraid. This mood passed quickly, for again Lieutenant Warren was speaking.

"We worked hour after hour, day after day, without sleep. On our ambulances we carried white-haired men whose legs had been shot away, mothers whose children had perished, children who had lost their mothers forever, and babies—tiny babies in cribs, in blankets." Her voice broke.

Then standing tall and straight, with the medal gleaming on her breast, she said:

"Hate! Terrible hate did all this! It is for you and me to take the places of brave young men who are eager to help put down this terrible enemy and to silence their machine guns forever. Are we going to do it?"

Instantly there came a cry that was like the roar of the sea. "Yes! Yes! Yes!"

But Norma stole a look at Lena's face.

Then, as if afraid she might leave a picture too terrible for all these young minds, Lieutenant Warren went back to the days before the defeat of France. She painted pictures of friendly villages in France. The grocer, the baker, the aged shoemaker, and all the little farmers—they were all there.

"These," she went on quietly, "are the people we are fighting for—the good, kindly, simple common people. In France, Belgium, the Netherlands, in Poland—all over Europe they are starving slaves today. We are fighting that they may be made free and that our own people shall never be enslaved."

Then she told of those good, brave days in unoccupied France, when a great general had pinned the *Croix de Guerre* on her blouse and all the good people had wept.

All in all Norma thought it the grandest speech she had ever heard.

Once again as the speaker resumed her seat the audience rose to its feet in a silent ovation.

Then someone swept her hands softly over the organ keys, and they sang as they had never sung it before: "Oh say, can you see!"

As the last note died away, Norma stole a look at Lena's face. It was cold, gray, and hard as steel. She had not been singing.

When, at last, dry-eyed but determined, Norma left the room she whispered, "Betty, I'm afraid."

"Afraid? Why?" Betty asked.

"I don't know—just afraid, that's all."

CHAPTER XI

TWO AGAINST TWO

At seven that evening Norma found herself in a place of great enchantment. Since her father was with her, the fear of mid-afternoon was gone, and joy reigned supreme.

Those ancient officers' homes that lined one side of the parade ground had always intrigued her. Now she was really inside one of them, and it was indeed charming.

The mantel above the huge living-room fireplace, as well as the walls on all sides, were lined with fascinating objects of art which she realized must have been brought by her hostess from France.

"Yes, they came from France, all of them—except these." Lieutenant Warren indicated a small group of photographs. "These," there was a change in her voice, "these are my people—my mother, my sister, my grandfather. They are from home."

"Yes, I know how you feel about them." Norma smiled. "You might be interested to know what I did on my first weekend here."

"That is always interesting," replied the hostess. "Girls are so different."

Norma told how she had rented a hotel room and had put up all her pictures. In her eagerness and excitement she came very nearly going right on, telling of her mysterious and startling experience following Lena and being trapped in a repair shop at night. Just in time she caught herself.

"These things are important," the Lieutenant replied in a quiet tone. "Don't let those feelings escape you. When you realize to the full what home and loved ones mean to you and when you contrast America and France as it is today, it makes you want to fight!"

"I am sure of that!" Norma's father agreed heartily.

"But all these beautiful pictures, these tiny statues, all carved in marble, those silver candlesticks, these etchings!" Norma exclaimed. "How could you afford them?"

"These, my dear," the Lieutenant beamed—"these all were gifts from those kindly and grateful French people. When I protested they said: 'But yes! You must take them! You really must! All France will be overrun. The Boche will get them. A thousand times better that you have them.'

"There are names on all of them," she added. "See? Pierre. Jeanne. Margot. When this terrible war is over many of them shall go back."

"How wonderful!" Norma murmured.

"These etchings are from that last war. I saw them in Paris," said Mr. Kent. "They are wonderful."

"Wonderful and terrible," Lieutenant Warren murmured.

One etching pictured a huge cannon belching forth hate in the form of black smoke, and emerging from that smoke was a beautiful woman. Her hands had been turned into claws, and on her face was a look of unutterable rage.

"And yet she is gorgeous," Norma whispered.

The second etching showed a valiant French pilot falling from his wrecked and burning plane down to certain death. But beneath him, hands locked, waiting, ready to catch him and bear him away, were two beautiful angels.

"Yes," said the Lieutenant who had been through so much in France. "This is war. It is beautiful and it is terrible."

"This is war," the gray-haired man agreed.

"And he really knows," Norma thought.

"Come," invited the hostess. "Dinner is about to be served."

There were busy and exciting times in Norma Kent's life when she ate a meal and enjoyed it to the full and yet, two hours later, she could not have told what she had eaten. This was to be just such a meal. The food was delicious, the silver and dishes charming, but the conversation absorbed all her attention. Little wonder, for it seemed to her that her whole future hung in the balance.

Somewhere between soup and roast chicken Lieutenant Warren said all too casually:

"Did I hear them say you had been asked to enter officers' training?"

"You may have heard that," Norma flushed. "It has been suggested by a lady in high position."

"It's quite an honor, don't you think so, Mr. Kent?" The Lieutenant turned to Norma's father.

"Yes, indeed. It's the first step up."

"And you deserve it," Lieutenant Warren said, with a bright smile. "We're proud of you. Please accept my congratulations, and allow me to wish you all the luck in the world."

"Wait a minute!" Norma exclaimed. "Put on the brakes! I haven't said I would accept."

Her father gave her a quick look. The smile on Lieutenant Warren's face appeared to light up a little as she said: "Do you mind telling me why you said that?"

"Not a bit," was the quick response. "It's because I want to come up the hard way, Dad," she said. "That's how you climbed up in that other war."

"Yes." A rare smile spread over the gray-haired man's face. "However, I had no choice. With me it was that way or not at all."

"All the same," Norma insisted, "I want to get out and do some real work. I was in college for four years, and now at the Fort for a month. What I want to know is, can I really do any worthwhile work?"

"Good!" exclaimed Lieutenant Warren. "I hoped you would say that. And now may I serve you

some of this chicken while it is hot?"

"But why are *you* glad?" Norma asked in a puzzled tone, after the chicken had been served.

"Because I am leaving here in two days and I want to take you with me."

"Going where?" Norma asked in surprise.

"To the coast. I can't tell you the exact spot because I don't happen to know, and because if I did know, I would not be permitted to tell. It will be somewhere on the rugged coast of New England, rather far north, I imagine. I am to be given a station of the Interceptor Control, and—"

"Interceptor Control!" Norma exclaimed. "Those words charmed me from the first. They somehow seem to suggest dark night patrols, intrigue, mystery, and perhaps real danger."

"Perhaps you are making too much of it. That depends," Lieutenant Warren drew a deep breath. "Be that as it may. I'm in for it, and I am to select a squad to take with me. It's a relatively small station. One squad will be enough at first."

"She's asked my squad to go," Norma thought. "She didn't ask me because she thought I might want to take a step up, join the officers' training school at once." Then she asked a question on impulse:

"Are you planning to take all my squad—all ten of them?"

"I had hoped to, if you cared to join us."

"Bu—but—" Norma caught herself. She had been about to betray her secret—her spy complex. What she had wanted to say was, "But how about Lena?"

"It is for you to choose," the Lieutenant said quietly.

"Oh, I want to go!" Norma exclaimed. "Count me in. Please don't leave me out, only—" There it was again.

"Only what?"

"Only nothing. Please forgive me," Norma begged.

And so it was settled. Norma was to be given a two-day leave to be spent at home with her father. Then she was to meet Lieutenant Warren and the squad in Chicago. There they were to board an eastbound train for fields of fresh toil and adventure.

Norma stirred uneasily in her place by the car window. She was on her way—had been for some time. Two or three hours more and she would be looking at the place she and her fellow WACs would call "home" for some time.

"I should be thrilled," she told herself. "But I'm half scared, that's all."

Lena and Rosa were together, five seats ahead of her. They had been together all the way. Nothing strange about that, really. They had shared a Pullman compartment, just as she and Betty had. All the same, it disturbed her.

Suddenly she made a great decision—she would tell Betty all about it. Betty, like as not, would laugh the whole thing off. Then she'd be rid of the spy business for ever.

"Betty," she said in a low tone, "There is something I want to tell you—a whole lot of things."

"Okay," said Betty. "I'm listening."

"Betty, do you remember the first night we slept in that stable at Fort Des Moines?"

"Do I?" Betty laughed. "First time I ever slept on a cot, and with fifty other girls! That was one nightmare!"

"Well, on that night Lena sat up in her bed and whispered. 'Gott in Himmel,' and Rosa flashed a light in her cot, where no light is supposed to show. That got me going."

"Going? How?" Betty stared.

"I thought they might be spies."

"Spies? Nonsense! But then—" Betty paused for thought. "I did see Lena down by the gate once. She was talking to that Spanish hairdresser and a strange man, who said, 'Du must!' There have been whisperings about that hairdresser. Three days before we left the Fort she disappeared."

"Betty!" Norma exclaimed softly. "You're no help at all. You just make matters worse."

"How? What do you mean?"

"I was hoping you'd rid me of my spy complex—just laugh it off, and here you are, taking the thing seriously. What's more, I haven't told you a thing yet."

"Well then, tell me the rest," Betty invited. "Then perhaps we'll both have us a good big laugh."

"And perhaps we won't," Norma added gloomily. "But all right. Here goes." She leaned over close, talking low. "I saw Rosa's light three times. One night I asked her why."

"What did she say?"

"She said her mother had asked her to read a prayer from her prayer book every night."

"That was nice," Betty murmured in approval.

"Yes, if it's true."

"How could you doubt her?"

"You have to doubt when you don't really know. Besides, how about this? We went out to visit the airfield one day, and Rosa, without anyone seeing her, climbed into a fighter plane and started across the field with it."

"She did?" Betty whispered in astonishment.

"Absolutely." Norma laughed in spite of herself. "And did that start something! She was almost arrested! You see, they were trying out some secret devices in those planes."

"How did she ever explain that?" Betty was filled with astonishment.

"She never explained it."



Norma Leaned Over Close, Talking Low

"Just left it in the air?"

"I thought she was going to tell me later, but then she appeared to change her mind. How would you explain it?" Norma asked. There was an eager note in her voice. She really wanted it explained.

"Fascinated by airplanes, perhaps," was the slow reply. "Some people are that way. Climb in, you know. Touch something here, another there, and away they go. Children often do that with a car."

"But Rosa's not a child!"

"We'll keep an eye on her," Betty said after a moment's thought. "We've got a real job to do. We can't have things going wrong. But Lena," she suggested. "She never did anything as bad as that, did she?"

"Perhaps yes, and perhaps no. Let me tell you. Then you be the judge." Norma leaned close. "I followed Lena and the Spanish hairdresser into a place as dark as a stack of black cats."

"You didn't!"

"I certainly did."

"Then what happened?"

"The door silently locked itself."

Betty caught her breath. "What chances you take!"

"I just sort of walked into that one." Norma sighed. "There were voices. Then I saw a hand. The hand gripped my arm until it hurt. A man's rough voice said something. He was very angry."

"And then?" Betty breathed.

"All of a sudden his voice changed. He was humble, apologetic. He said, 'You are one of the lady soldiers. You came here by mistake perhaps.'"

"But how could he know you were a WAC?"

"Only by the feel of the material in my WAC coat. Wasn't that strange!"

"Perhaps he'd been a tailor. It's wonderful the things you can do by the sense of touch when your hands are trained."

"He let me out," Norma said quietly.

"And you never went back?"

"Never!"

"We'll watch Lena, too," Betty said.

"If there's a traitor in our ranks, it's Lena."

"You can't be sure of that. In a murder mystery, it's always the one you least suspect."

"Yes, but in a murder mystery you always have a murder. What has Lena done that she could be arrested for?"

"Nothing that we know about. All the same, we'll watch her. We'll watch them both."

Just then Lieutenant Warren's voice rang out. "Our station is next. Get your coats on. And don't forget your parcels."

At Indian Harbor Betty whispered, "Lots of hard work and some little adventure."

"Or perhaps the other way round," Norma laughed low.

CHAPTER XII

HARBOR BELLS

The train came to a jolting stop and they all piled off. "Indian Point!" Lena exclaimed. "So this is it! But where's the city?"

"It's not quite a city," Lieutenant Warren said. "Two thousand people in summer, one thousand in winter, I should say. But there are year-round stores and shops."

"And a beauty parlor?" Lena asked.

"Oh, yes, I should guess so. At least a hairdressing establishment."

At that both Norma and Betty laughed. Lena gave them a sharp look.

Two large ancient cars appeared, together with a truck. Their bags were piled into the truck; they crowded into the cars and were driven away.

"Harbor Bells, that's the name of our little hotel," their leader explained. "And they call the building where we'll be working the Sea Tower."

"What fascinating names!" Betty exclaimed.

"You'll find them as fascinating as their names," Lieutenant Warren prophesied.

"And there's the sea!" Norma exclaimed. "How I shall love it!"

"It comes almost to our door when there's a storm. And the Sea Tower really gets its feet wet."

The road twisted and turned, first along the rocky slope, then above the edge of a beach that Norma thought must be grand in summer.

"There it is!" Lieutenant Warren exclaimed as they rounded a turn. "There's our Harbor Bells!"

Just as she said this their ears were treated to a shock—a great booming roar shook the silent air.

"Good grief!" Millie exclaimed. "Are we being bombed?"

"Not yet," Lieutenant Warren laughed. "That came from the fort up there on the cliffs, two miles away. You can see just a little of its wall from here."

"One gun salute for us," Norma suggested.

"Hardly that. Probably a practice shot. They don't waste shots like that on a handful of WACs."

At that they all laughed. And here they were at the gate of Harbor Bells.

Leaving their bags to be brought in by the truck driver and his assistants, they paired off and marched soldierwise up the broad sloping path to the wide veranda of the hotel.

Above the door hung five bells of different sizes.

"Oh! Harbor Bells!" Betty exclaimed.

Seizing a small wooden hammer that lay on the ledge, she struck the bells one at a time. Then, as they all stood by enchanted, she played in a simple manner a tune they all loved:

"Sweet evening bells, sweet evening bells,
How many a tale their music tells."

"Glorious Harbor Bells!" Norma exclaimed.

Harbor Bells, as they discovered very quickly, was no ordinary summer hotel. It had been built for both summer and winter. In the rich days when people had plenty of gasoline, tired business men from far and wide drove to Harbor Bells for the weekend.

Mrs. Monahan, the proprietor, was a rare cook. Her clam chowder, swordfish steaks, and home-fried chicken were famous.

"And this," said Lieutenant Warren after she had explained all this, "is Mrs. Monahan herself. She's agreed to stay with us and take care of us for a while, at least."

"Sure, an' if ye can stand to have me about!" Mrs. Monahan, a round, red-faced lady, let out a cackling laugh.

"We'll stand you for the duration if you'll only stay," the Lieutenant exclaimed.

At Harbor Bells there was both a large and a small dining room, with a huge fireplace, and plenty of cozy rooms upstairs. When the girls had eaten a hearty meal of fried swordfish steak, baked potatoes, blueberry pie, and coffee, and had settled themselves in their rooms, they were for the most part ready for a good long sleep.

Not so Norma and Betty. Mrs. Monahan had kindled a fire on the open hearth. Before this they dragged large, comfortable chairs and settled themselves for a good chat.

"This," said Betty, "is the real thing! But boy! Is it going to be hard to work here! It's too much like Natoma Beach in Florida. Dad has a shack down there. Oh, quite a place! And that's where we have our fun—or did, before the war."

"We have a shack—a real one," Norma said. "Nothing fancy—not even a fireplace, just a big kitchen stove—up on Isle Royale, in Lake Superior. It's really grand!" There was a pause.

"Work?" she murmured. "Oh, I guess we'll work right enough, and hard."

"You're just right you will!" It was Lieutenant Warren who spoke.

"Oh!" Norma exclaimed. "Let me drag you up a chair."

"No. Sit still. I'll get it."

"No! No!"

In the end they all took a hand at bringing up the chair.

"Umm! I like this!" Lieutenant Warren murmured.

"Who wouldn't?" Betty exclaimed.

"And you'll love the Sea Tower."

"I'm eager to see it," said Norma.

"You know," Lieutenant Warren mused, "every time I settle down in a new place I feel an urge to tell a story of a rather strange thing that happened to me in India. It's a spy story, really, although it didn't start out that way."

"India!" Betty exclaimed.

"A spy story!" came from Norma. She gave the Lieutenant a searching look.

"Does it have a moral for young WACs?"

"Not that I know of."

"Then please tell it to us," Norma urged.

"Just after I finished college," Lieutenant Warren began, "a friend secured a position for me as a teacher of English in a high-class school for British girls, in India.

"The school was located close to a fort, very much like Fort Des Moines, only much larger. Ten thousand British troops were stationed there.

"On my way over I had taken many pictures and wanted to get them developed and printed. I was told that a very good German photographer had a shop facing the army parade ground, so I hunted him up.

"'Oh, no! I couldn't do your pictures!' he exclaimed when I suggested it. 'I am far too busy. Besides, amateurs, they never take good pictures. Never! Especially young women! Their pictures are always horrible!'

"I didn't say anything for a moment, just stared at him and then at his studio. It was a remarkable studio. Every inch of the wall was covered with pictures—remarkable pictures, too. All the leading British officers were there, and rich rulers of India, too. And there were pictures of wild animals in the jungle, elephants, tigers, and water buffalo.

"Did you do all these?" I asked.

"'Yes, and many, many more. You see, Miss, I am really very famous as a photographer.'

"He was a remarkable man. His hair was white, and stood straight up. And his face was lined but round and smooth—unnatural, as if it might have been made up for a stage performance.

"'And you won't do my pictures?' I asked him.

"'I can't waste my time and money on such rubbish,' he fairly fumed."

"I can just see him." Betty laughed. "But did he do the pictures?"

"Oh yes. I was young then, and usually got my way. I told him that at least he wouldn't be wasting his money, for I meant to pay him. So he said:

"'Oh, all right! Bring them in and we shall see!'

"Well."—Lieutenant Warren leaned back in her chair. "My father was a good amateur photographer, he had taught me how to take pictures. My pictures came out very well. This eccentric photographer, who hadn't had time for me, complimented me."

"And after that," Norma laughed, "Herr Photographer was one of your best friends."

"Not quite that. But he did make many pictures and took an unusual interest in showing me his treasures."

"And that was how you discovered he was a spy?" suggested Betty.

"Well, yes—and no. Truth is, when I left India I had not the slightest notion that he was a spy."

"Then how in the world—" Norma broke in.

"Now—now!" the Lieutenant exclaimed mockingly. "No turning to the back of the book."

"But to make a long story short," she went on, "this photographer had a beautiful place back up in the hills. Once he took me there in his car. It was a gorgeous estate. Palm trees, rare birds, a fountain fed by springs, and a house built of teakwood.

"Back of the house were dovecotes where many rare varieties of pigeons billed and cooed. Some were jet black, the only black ones I've ever seen.

"Dogs! He had a dozen of them. Some of them really looked ferocious. And there were monkeys staring at you from the trees."

"Regular menagerie." Norma drawled.

"Yes, just that. And all for a purpose."

"What came of it?" Norma asked.

"Well," Miss Warren went on, "he made many pictures for me. We became quite good friends. He helped me and complimented me often.

"For all that he appeared to be a very strange person. He took pictures if it suited his fancy. If not, he refused. Some stuffy old grand dame wanted to sit for a picture and he refused to do the work. Then too he was away for weeks at a time. How he could support his shop and that mansion in the hills with so little real work I could never understand.

"In summer, when it was hot, I went to stay in a very lovely resort high up in the mountains. The resort keeper wrote Herr Photographer, asking him to come up and take some pictures. His reply was:

"'Miss Rita Warren is with you. She can take them as well as I.'"

"And were you flattered!" Betty laughed.

"Naturally. I went to see him as soon as I returned. He was very cordial. 'Come,' he said, taking my hand as if I were a child. 'I have a picture to show you. It is, I think, a masterpiece.'

"He led me into a fairly large room and switched on a light. There were three objects in the room—a large picture in a dull gilt frame, and two very ordinary chairs.

"'Sit here,' he said, 'it is the best light.' I sat down.

"'You know,' he said, 'that this part of India was once ruled by the French. Far up in the mountains is one of their ancient churches. I found this picture in the tower of that church. I think it is a Madonna by Godin.'

"I had studied art in college and was inclined to agree with him.

"One thing that struck me as strange was that in the background, on a large rock, sat three black

pigeons. Then too, in many places there were overtones of color that did not appear to belong there. Strangest of all, there were in places faint suggestions of geometric figures.

"He read the look on my face. 'I am now restoring it,' he explained.

"Well, I don't like your part of the work!' I had spoken without thought.

"This appeared to offend him. Or did it? I couldn't quite tell.

"He let a cloth fall over the picture. Then with a look that seemed to say: 'You may know too much,' he led me from the room. That look puzzled me for a long time."

"But it doesn't any more," Norma suggested.

"Bright girl!" Lieutenant Warren exclaimed. "No, it doesn't."

"Why? What happened?" Betty asked.

"Well. I left India and returned to America. I heard nothing from my photographer for a long, long time. Then England and Germany went to war.

"One day I had a letter from a friend in India. In it she said, 'You know that photographer who took such a shine to you? Well, he's dead. The British jerked him up and shot him as a master spy.'"

"Oh!" Norma breathed.

"End of romance," Betty exclaimed.

"Oh, it wasn't quite that, but I was shocked, to think that I could be so dumb. Those pigeons were, of course, for carrying messages all over India to his fellow-spies. The dogs were to ward off strangers."

"And the pictures?" Norma questioned.

"I never found out about that for certain." Lieutenant Warren rose. "However, I have been told that pictures such as those are often shipped from place to place to convey secret information. Each bit of 'restoring,' as they call it, means something. Properly coded, that picture could tell a whole lot.

"Well," she sighed. "He's dead. But he was rather good fun while he lasted." The three girls looked into the fire in silence.

"Millie is our bugler," Lieutenant Warren suddenly said, as she started for the stairs. "When you hear that bugle you'll know what it means."

"Breakfast, then work," Norma said.

"Yes, and lots of it. You get two weeks of hard training. Then you take over." She was gone.

"Do you suppose she suspects we're natural-born spy chasers?" Norma whispered.

"Can't tell." Betty whispered back. "But jeepers! If she didn't know that man was a spy, what about us?"

"We've not even got a clue." Norma agreed. "And, yet—" She did not finish.

Betty went at once to her room, but Norma, having caught a gleam of light through a window, stepped out on the porch for a look at the moon.

To one who sees it for the first time, the moon casting shadows over the rugged cliffs and painting a path of gold across the sea is a gorgeous sight.

Slipping silently to the top of the steps leading to the path, she stood there in the shadows.

Then, for some reason, or perhaps none at all—she snapped on the flashlight she held in her hand to paint her own path of gold down the gravel walk.

Then it was that she got a shock, for there, half hidden by the broad stone post of the street wall stood a man. He wore no hat. White hair gleamed over a round face. In his hand he held a black box with a reflector at the top, the sort of camera used most by newspaper men and other professionals.

To say that she was startled would be to put it mildly. This mood ended quickly, for the man snapped at her in the voice of an angry dog:

"Keep your light to yourself! This is a public street. I'll stand here as long as I choose."

Turning about, the girl marched back into the hotel. She was trembling all over.

"Right out of that story," she whispered. "Halfway round the world."

As she climbed the stairs she thought. "I'll not tell a soul. I didn't really see him—just imagined it."

As if to verify this, she went to her window and looked down. The moonlight was brighter now. There was no one by the gate. And yet, cold reason told her she had seen that man beside the pillar.

CHAPTER XIII

A WOLF IN WAC'S CLOTHING

The Sea Tower was all that could be desired. To Norma's romantic young mind it offered both comfort and romance.

"It used to be a lighthouse," the young sergeant, who led them up the stairs next morning, explained. "There are dangerous shoals off shore around Black Knob Island. Fishing boats have often been wrecked there in storms. Now there are modern lights to the north and south of us."

"I saw one flashing from the north," Millie put in.

"That's Fisherman's Home light. The light in this tower was taken out long ago. It's been empty for a long time."

"And now it's been all fixed up for us, like Mrs. Hobby's stables." Norma laughed.

"You going to work here?" the sergeant asked in surprise.

"Sure enough!"

"Well, blow me down!" He stared for a moment—then without further comment, led them to a large circular room where three officers and six enlisted men were working with maps, charts, and typewriters.

"You won't be working here," the Major in command explained. "We just want you to see it. I'm Major Henry Stark. Sort of in charge here, you might say."

He was a big man, not at all pompous, nor soft, either. His was a friendly smile.

"Want you to take the thing quite seriously from the start," he said. "Look at that map. We're way up here. Not close to any cities. Rather unimportant post, you might say.

"But look at this globe." He whirled a large globe around, then put his finger on a spot. "That's Norway. Here's Greenland. Planes coming from Norway to bomb Boston, New York, or Pittsburg would pass right over this post."

"We'd be the first to spot them," said Betty.

"That's the truth, Miss. And no mistake. So—" he let out a big breath—"we are important. Mighty important." He let that sink in.

"Lieutenant Warren tells me you're all serious-minded gals. Gals."—he laughed—"That's what she called you. That's fine. I take it she spoke the truth, and if so, we can use you."

"I—I hope so," Norma spoke for the group.

"We can, all right! Just wait and see!" he exclaimed.

There was little of adventure or romance in the days that followed for, as in Fort Des Moines, they were hard at work learning the tasks that lay ahead. Up at five forty-five each morning, they were glad enough to creep into their fine, warm beds at nine-thirty each night.



*"Take a Look at This Globe," the Major
Said*

During the first week they worked only during the day. They were being instructed, that was all. Eventually they would be divided into three eight-hour shifts, and the task of watching would go on and on round the clock. When the work really started in earnest, Norma, Millie, and Rosa were to work in one shift. Norma would be in charge of marking maps and charts; Millie would manage the switchboard and receive calls; Rosa's job was to carry messages and be on the alert for any task.

In the second shift Betty took Norma's place. A girl named Mary ran the switchboard, and Lena took Rosa's place.

The third shift was made up of the remaining girls of the squad.

Saturday, with its half-holiday, arrived. Norma and Betty rented bicycles and went for a joyous ride into the country. Norma, who had stocked up on films, took many interesting pictures, but on Major Stark's suggestion, avoided all military subjects.

It was because they were, as yet, working only in the daytime that an exciting event occurred that threatened disaster. One morning as the WACs were enjoying their wheatcakes, Vermont maple syrup, and coffee, Major Stark came walking into the room.

"Good morning, Major Stark," Lieutenant Warren exclaimed. "You're just in time. I'll have a plate set on for you."

"Thanks, very much." The Major's smile was slow. "I've had my breakfast. It's your young ladies I wished to talk about. Now, zeal is a commendable virtue. But I really can't have them coming to the Sea Tower demanding further education near midnight. It's a bit demoralizing and, besides, that is the most important hour of all."

"But I don't understand," Miss Warren looked puzzled. Turning to the girls she said:

"Which of you went to the Sea Tower after hours?"

Not a girl spoke.

"Do you see, Major?" She smiled. "Not one was there."

"But are they all here now?"

"Yes, all here."

"Then it was the ghost of a WAC, for Tom, my most trustworthy sergeant, told me a woman in a WAC uniform and with her identification card all correct, was at the Tower for an hour learning about charts and other matters last night. She looked dark and sort of Spanish," he said.

They all looked at Rosa, but Rosa shook her head.

"She was in bed," Lena stated simply. "We're roommates."

"And besides, she doesn't look Spanish," said the Major. "Well, there's a mystery for you. I'll send for Tom at once."

Norma leaned over to whisper in Betty's ear:

"The Spanish hairdresser!"

Betty nearly fell off her chair.

They were all in the big living room when the Major returned with a good-looking young sergeant.

"Now then, Sergeant," he challenged. "Which one was it?"

Sergeant Tom looked them over carefully, then replied:

"None of these, sir."

"Well now, Tom, make up your mind!" The Major's temper was rising. "You've been saying one was up there, and now you say—"

"There was a WAC uniform with a lady in it at the Tower last night!" Tom insisted.

"But don't you know all these ladies, Tom?"

"No, Major. I don't. I work at night, you know."

"So all the soldiers don't know all the WACs?" the Major exclaimed. "We'll fix that. We'll hold a dance."

Then suddenly his face purpled. "By thunder!" he exclaimed. "It's happened! A lady spy in a WAC uniform! It was bound to be that way. But why must we be her first victims! Tom, how much did you tell her?"

"To tell the truth, Major," Tom smiled sheepishly, "I didn't tell her much—at least nothing of importance. The truth is, sir, some of us boys sort of feel that having the girls around—well, sir—that's fine. But when they start doing our work—"

"Then you didn't tell her about secret devices and all that?" the Major broke in.

"Not a thing that she couldn't have gotten out of a book."

"That's fine!" the Major exclaimed. "Glad to see you so cautious."

"Beg pardon, sir," said Tom. "But this is my time for sleeping. I'll see you all at the dance." He grinned broadly as he went out.

"This thing must be looked into at once," said the Major. "I'll have a man in for that purpose. I shall need your help."

"We'll give you every assistance possible," said Lieutenant Warren.

At that the Major bowed himself out. Fresh coffee was poured, and the meal resumed.

"How terrible!" Millie exclaimed.

"The Spanish hairdresser," Norma whispered to Betty once more.

Late that afternoon the Major returned, bringing with him a bright-eyed little man who called himself Mr. Sperry.

"Mr. Sperry wishes to know," he explained, "if any of you can give him a clue regarding the young lady who undoubtedly is masquerading in a WAC uniform."

"That's it," the little man cackled. "Just that. The sergeant in charge tells me she had an identification card—forged, no doubt. Have any of you, by chance, lost your card?"

There followed a hasty delving into purses and pockets. Each girl held up her card.

"Ah, yes! I see! All quite in order. I suggest that fresh photographs of these ladies be taken—each young lady in uniform—and that they be placed on identification cards. These should bear your signature. Your men are acquainted with that signature?"

"Every man," the Major agreed. "The pictures shall be taken. There's a good photographer—excellent man, but eccentric—at Granite Head. Lieutenant Warren, have your young ladies ready at nine tomorrow. I shall send cars for them."

"Now," exclaimed the little man, dancing about. "Any of you know a young lady who wears her black hair high, and has rather slanting Spanish eyes?"

"Here?" Norma asked.

"Anywhere."

"There was one at Fort Des Moines," Norma hesitated. "But that—that's a long way off."

"Was she in training?"

"No. One of our hairdressers."

"Ah!" The little man whistled between his teeth. "Just the type! You haven't seen her here?"

"No."

Mr. Sperry asked the other girls about the hairdresser. Some recalled her and some did not. Watching out of the corner of her eye, Norma thought she saw Lena start as her name was called.

"Oh, yes. I remember her," she said in a low drawl. "She did my hair many times. She was really good. But I don't see—"

"No, of course not." the little man snapped. "That's not to be expected."

At that he closed his notebook and indicated by a nod that he had finished.

"The jeeps will be here at nine." said the Major.

"The girls will be ready," replied Lieutenant Warren.

"Oh, I just remembered something!" Norma exclaimed in a whisper a short time later.

"What was that?" Betty asked.

"I took a few pictures at Des Moines, but never had the film finished."

"Well?" Betty drawled.

"One was a picture of that Spanish hairdresser, just as she passed through the gate. Just a snap, but in bright sunlight. It should be good."

"That might be something."

"Sure, Mr. Sperry could show it to Sergeant Tom for identification. I have three films now. I'll take them to that photographer tomorrow."

CHAPTER XIV

PALE HANDS

Next morning at nine the girls, all but Lena, who had obtained permission to ride ahead on a bike, piled into two jeeps and were driven away to the photographer's studio.

The moment Norma stepped into the studio she had a strange feeling that she had seen it before. Its walls were crowded with pictures, many of them officers in uniform—from the fort above their post, she guessed. Then too, there were ship's officers, some of them from the United States and British Navies. There were pictures from the wilds of Maine and Canada as well, wolves prowling over the snow, a moose charging up from the waters of a lake, and many others. There were many wonderful pictures in the collection and she was charmed at the thought of having her films developed and printed here.

If the studio had been a surprise, the proprietor, as he came bustling into the room, was a great shock. His hair was white and bristling. His face was lined in spite of its round softness. It was he whom she had seen at the gate of Harbor Bells, he who had growled at her because she threw her light upon him.

"Good grief!" she whispered to Betty. "I hope he doesn't recognize me!"

"Recognize you?" Betty murmured in surprise.

"Shish!" Norma warned. She had never told Betty of that other encounter.

In her hand she held the films she wished developed. "Will you do these for me?" she asked.

"Amateur work!" he exclaimed. "Bah! What do amateurs know about pictures, especially young women? No! I cannot waste my time and money."

"But you'll not be wasting your money." Norma felt like one speaking a piece. "I expect to pay you for them."

"Put them down there on this table," he replied rudely. "We shall see."

"And now—" His voice took on a professional tone. "You are soldiers, is it not so?"

There came a murmured "Yes—yes."

"Lady soldiers! Ha—ha—ha! This is delightful! And I am to take your pictures. No retouching. Is it not so?"

"That's right." It was Betty who spoke.

"Then you will not be very beautiful in these pictures." He laughed again.

"They are for identification cards." Norma said—a suggestion of irritation creeping into her voice. "Beauty doesn't count. They must look like us, that's all. They are to keep spies from pretending they belong to our group."

"Spies? Ah! Is that so!" he said seriously. "Then they shall be very real indeed, these pictures."

He began his work at once. Since she did not particularly like the man and wished to get her part over with, Norma posed first. She realized at once that he proposed to take her in an unfavorable light and at a bad angle, yet she made no objection. As he was about to make the shot, she managed a derisive grin.

"No! No!" He stomped the floor. "That way you spoil the picture!"

Norma at once put on a perfectly dumb look. Then the picture was snapped.

"What's wrong with you?" Betty demanded in a whisper when they were alone.

"Nothing." was the quiet reply.

"Lena's not here." said Rosa.

"She'll be here." Norma said.

While the other pictures were being taken Norma wandered along the wall looking at pictures until she was near an open door leading to another room.

As she stood there she heard a man's voice say:

"You must!"

"I won't!" came a woman's reply.

Carl Langer, the photographer, must have heard, for he said, "Excuse me, ladies," and shut the door.

"What wonderful ears!" Norma thought. "He should be a plane spotter."



*"No! No! That Way You Spoil the
Picture."*

When the pictures had been taken and the girls were filing out of the room, Betty said to Norma: "Lena didn't show up."

"Oh! Sure she—" Norma hesitated. "Well, anyway, her picture will be in the lot, you can depend upon that."

As they climbed into the jeeps, Norma heard a pigeon cooing and, looking up to the studio roof, she saw two pigeons. They were jet black. This gave her a start, but she said never a word.

They were halfway back to the post when suddenly she realized that she had left her films without any decision having been made about them.

"I left my films," she said to Betty. "Do you suppose he'll develop them?"

"My guess is that he will."

Betty's guess was right. And this Norma would live to regret.

"All the while I was there I felt I had been in that place before," said Norma.

"I shouldn't wonder," was Betty's strange reply.

There was one extra person in the squad which meant that while the others were taking their turn at training, three at a time, one was free to undertake some special task. This was Norma's day off.

"Norma," Lieutenant Warren said to her after she had spent the greater part of the day working over some special type of chart, "I think you told me once that you had ridden a motorcycle."

"Oh, yes, many times," was the quick reply. "My father and I used to cover part of his territory on a motorcycle."

"Good! One of our tasks is to be that of keeping in touch with the plane spotters in our territory. They are all volunteers. They work without pay and are, I am sure, very conscientious people."

"They must be." Norma agreed. "And do you know, I really like these real New Englanders."

"They seem more genuinely American than most people I've come to know," Miss Warren agreed. "What I wanted to suggest was that now and then you take a motorcycle—there are two in the basement room of the Sea Tower—and visit these spotter sheds. There's one near Granite Head."

"I think I saw it as I passed this morning."

"I haven't a doubt of it. You might like to take a run out there right now," the Lieutenant suggested.

"That would be real fun. Thank you so much." A quarter of an hour later, dressed in her fatigue suit and with stout coveralls drawn over it, Norma leapt on her motorcycle and went pop-popping away.

She was not long in reaching the place in the road nearest the spotter shed.

As she paused to study the steep road leading up to the shed, two girls who were undoubtedly twins came hurrying from the opposite direction. Seeing that they were about to start the climb, Norma said:

"Going up? Hop on behind. I think this thing will take us all up."

"Oh, fine!" they exclaimed. "We're late."

"Late for what?" Norma asked.

"We're spotters. I'm Beth and this is Bess, my sister," one of the twins explained.

"We're on from now until midnight," the other said.

"Whew!" Norma exclaimed. "That's a long spot for a spotter."

"Oh, we don't mind," said Beth, laughing. "Only one is needed to watch at a time."

"The other one studies. We're still in high school," said Bess. "Sometimes we fall asleep."

With a final snort the motorcycle reached the crest of the hill, then circled to a stop at the foot of a crooked stairway leading to a crow's-nest perch above.

Up, then around, then up again, they climbed thirty feet into the air to arrive at last at a broad enclosed platform.

"All right, girls, you may take over." A tall man with prematurely gray hair turned toward a door leading from the platform. "Who's your friend?" he asked, turning half about. Behind his thick glasses Norma saw keen, smiling eyes.

"Why, she—" Beth hesitated.

"I'm one of those WAC's," Norma laughed, holding her cap bearing the insignia in the light.

"Oh! We've been reading about you. Welcome to our community." He held out a hand for a firm and friendly clasp. "So when we report 'One single, flying high,' we'll soon be talking to a lady soldier?"

"Guess that's right," Norma agreed. "My name's Norma Kent."

"I'm Vincent Garson," he said. "Here's hoping we meet again."

"Oh, we shall," Norma exclaimed.

At that a distinguished-looking man opened the door and stepped out.

"And this is Jim Marston," said Garson. "Used to be a parson. Now he's a plain American."

"And that," said the retired parson, "is a great privilege."

"They're really very famous men," Beth whispered as they disappeared down the stairs. "Mr. Garson designed the stained glass windows for half the big churches in Boston. And Mr. Marston was a famous Bishop. It takes all sorts, you see," she added.

"Well, here we are," Bess exclaimed. "This is our spotter shed. Isn't it neat?"

"Neat, and very comfortable." Norma held her hands before the glowing coal fire.

"It cost a thousand dollars. Everyone chipped in, but it's worth it. It must stand for the duration," said Beth.

"So you'll be listening to our reports?" said Bess. "It's nice to know you. We—we'll all stand together."

"That's right, we must." Norma's heart was warmed.

"Oh!" Bess exclaimed. "We've forgotten we're late. It's time to talk to grandfather."

Hastily unlocking a closet door in the corner, she wheeled out a strange-looking mechanism with a square of glass at its front.

After connecting some heavy electric wires, she turned on a switch and at once there came a low buzzing sound.

Night was falling. The room was full of shadows.

"Watch," said Bess.

The square of glass gave forth a faint glow. Then at the center of it, something moved.

"A hand!" Norma thought, with a start.

It was true. Behind that glass appeared a pale hand. It moved. It took on different forms. Now it was clenched with the thumb outside. Now three fingers were folded in while the forefinger and thumb stuck straight out. This was repeated. Once again the hand was clenched, this time with the thumb folded in tight. Three fingers up, one down—all fingers down, thumb bent in, then again three fingers down, forefinger and thumb up, and repeat.

Then the hand vanished.

"He says 'All is well.'" Bess said in a matter-of-fact tone.

"Talking with the dead," Norma thought with a shudder.

CHAPTER XV

SPOTTERS IN THE NIGHT

"That's spooky," Norma whispered. "Your grandfather doesn't by any chance happen to be in Heaven?"

"Yes, he is." Beth laughed. "His kind of Heaven. He's over on Black Knob."

"Black Knob? What's that?"

"It's an island ten miles off shore. Grandfather calls it his retreat. He's a writer on technical subjects, and an inventor."

"He has plenty of money," put in Bess, "so he just writes and invents."

"And by and by someone gives him money for an invention so he can invent some more," Beth finished.

"Sounds wonderful!" said Norma. "But what about this thing?" She pointed to the square of light where that expressive hand was opening and closing, pointing and writhing again.

Beth was writing down letters rapidly, so it was Bess who replied in a whisper:

"It's a great secret. Only Beth, grandfather, and I know about it. Shall I tell her?" She turned to her sister. Beth nodded.

"Cross your heart and hope to die," Bess whispered impressively. "You won't tell a soul?"

"Not a soul—cross my heart and hope to die."

"Well then—it's television," Bess confided. "Only there's no sound. Words without sound. It's a perfectly secret way of communication, as long as no one knows about it."

"But I don't see—" The hand was still going through its weird motions.

"It's very simple," said Bess. "Grandfather has two moving picture cameras trained on his hand over there on Black Knob."

"I guessed that much."

"The rest is deaf and dumb alphabet, that's all. A is a clenched fist with the thumb turned in, and C—"

"How stupid I am!" Norma exclaimed. "I should have guessed it at once!"

"Oh, no!" Bess laughed. "Strange things always stick us. We want a weird explanation, when it is something just as simple as that."

"It's quite wonderful," Norma exclaimed. "I shouldn't wonder if something tremendously important would come out of it." She was not wrong in this prediction.

"Black Knob is an important point," said Bess. "It's so far off shore."

"It must be," was the quick reply. "Particularly for enemy submarines. I'm going to tell Lieutenant Warren about it."

"But not about television," Bess warned. "At least, not without grandfather's consent."

"Not about television," Norma agreed.

Once again the hand had vanished from the square of light. This time Beth pushed the apparatus into a corner and threw a cloth over it.

"He reports once each hour until midnight," she explained. "If anything really startling comes up, he gives us a buzz on a short-wave radio and we turn on television for a special report."

"After midnight?" Norma asked.

"Two elderly ladies take over until morning. They use short wave entirely. During the day fishermen who live there keep a sharp watch."

"It's not much of a setup for so important a spot," Bess said. "One old man, two women and some fishermen. But it's all there is there in winter."

"It might be improved upon," Norma agreed.

"Well," said Bess, drawing on a heavy coat, "I'll get out on the listening platform. It's all ears from now till morning."

"Unless they show a light," Norma suggested.

"No enemy would show a light," was the reply.

As Bess left her comfortable place by the fire Norma noticed that outside the wind was picking up and snow beginning to fall.

"Not going to be a nice night," was her comment.

"Winter's almost gone," was Beth's reply. "We've had some really bad nights, I can tell you."

"What's the payoff?" Norma asked without thinking.

"This is our country!" Beth drew herself up proudly. "No enemy planes have ever got past us—I mean all of us—not just Bess and me. And they never will! There are hundreds of watchers all along the coast."

"And if you hadn't been here they would have tried?" Norma suggested.

"Absolutely!"

"It's grand work! We're going to help you all we can."

"That's not all there is to it." Beth leaned forward. "We saved two lives. Fighting men they were, too. They gave us the credit, just Bess, grandfather, and me. See?" She held out a medal that read FOR VALIANT SERVICE.

"That's wonderful!" Norma exclaimed. "I hope I can do as much."

"Oh! You will! And a lot more. You're a WAC—you are really in the Army. I wish I could be a

WAC." There was intense longing in the younger girl's voice.

"Perhaps they'll lower the age limit."

"Here's hoping!"

"Want to tell me about this rescue?" Norma asked.

"Oh! Sure! It wasn't much," was the modest reply. "Just our good luck, that's all.

"It was grandfather who spotted the plane first, just before midnight. He gave us the radio buzz, then started talking fast with his hands—television, you know. This plane had just passed over Black Knob. There was a fog. He heard it, that's all. It was going north slowly. We thought—"

Beth stopped short. Bess thrust her head in at the door.

"One single, going south fast, about five miles off shore," she announced. Instantly Beth was on the phone saving in a clearcut voice:

"One single going south, fast. About five miles off shore. Granite Head speaking."

She kept a head-set over one ear, but went on with her story.

"Bess reported that plane over Black Knob at once. The Army, Navy, and Civil Air Patrol had no such plane out that they knew of.

"That made it exciting, I can tell you. Might have been an enemy plane scouting. And there were too many lights burning in Portland that night."

"What happened?" Norma demanded eagerly.

"Grandfather kept hearing them and reporting for half an hour. Then a fighter plane went out, but couldn't find them in the fog.

"They came in quite close to Black Knob. Then the motor went off. Grandfather was outside. He was sure they went into the sea—thought he heard a splash. They—"

Bess broke off suddenly to press the head-set to her ear. She listened intently for a moment, then murmured into her speaker:

"Okay."

Stepping to the door she said to her sister:

"Just another Navy plane off its course. Pilot called for directions and got them."

"See? That's the way it is," she said to Norma.

"I see," said Norma. "Disappointing?"

"Yes. Every time but one out of a hundred, or a thousand, I guess, and then—"

"Tell the rest," Norma urged.

"Oh, about those two fliers? That was exciting, I can tell you. Grandfather gave us the word that the plane was down.

"Then he got the fishermen out of bed. Three boats went out. Grandfather's boat spotted them, just in time. Their plane sank ten minutes later.

"They were Army fliers—a trainer and a student. Umm! That student was handsome!"

"And he would have drowned if it hadn't been for you spotters," Norma said.

"Absolutely."

"That," said Norma, "was wonderful!"

As she stepped out of the comfortable room into the night, Norma saw a white-robed figure—Bess, covered with snow.

"Spotters," she whispered as she went down the stairs. "Spotters in the night."

CHAPTER XVI

THE VANISHING PRINT

Norma was up bright and early next morning. As she stepped out on the porch for a breath of air, her eyes were greeted by a scene of marvelous beauty. Back of a dark spot rising from the sea which must, she thought, be Black Knob, the sun was rising.

"What a picture!" She knew just how it should be taken.

Racing into the house she put her hand on the mantel at the spot where she had left her camera.

"Gone," she murmured. "It's gone!"

Well, after all, she might be mistaken. Perhaps she had taken it to her room. Rushing upstairs, she began a hurried search.

"What's up?" Betty demanded. "House on fire?"

"No, a gorgeous picture to be taken and I've misplaced my camera."

"Here. Take mine!" Betty took her camera from the shelf.

Without a word Norma grabbed the camera and raced down the stairs to take three exposures before the sun was too high.

"I can't imagine what could have happened to my camera," she exclaimed, after a thorough search. "I'm sure I left it on the mantel downstairs. I took two shots of the fishermen's boats coming in yesterday, then put it on the mantel and forgot it."

"Oh! it will show up." Betty was a cheerful soul.

At breakfast that morning, Norma sat by Lieutenant Warren and told her all about Bess, Beth, their grandfather, and Black Knob.

"That seems an admirable spot for a spotter shed," said Miss Warren.

"It must be," Norma agreed. "Of course it has its watching post but it seems undermanned—a grandfather and two old ladies for the night and fishermen keeping an eye out during the day. Doesn't sound very good."

"No, it doesn't. We may want to lend them a helping hand. I've asked for six more auxiliaries for just such emergencies."

"I'm glad of that," Norma said. "We may need them more than you think before a month has passed."

"Why? What do you mean by that?" The Lieutenant gave her a sharp look.

"Just a hunch, I guess," Norma evaded. She wasn't going to tell of the photographer with bristly white hair, of the voices behind scenes at the studio, the black pigeons, or the missing camera until she had more to tell.

Late that afternoon she picked up another shred of evidence. When the day's work was done, she got out one of the motorcycles and rode back to the photography studio. Carl Langer had promised that the pictures for their identification cards would be done. Then, too, she was wondering about the three films she had left on his table.

By the time she arrived fog had driven in from the sea, making everything look dark and gloomy. The studio seemed darkest, most gloomy of all. Only a faint light showed through the window. The three black pigeons sat silently along the ridge of the roof.

As if her arrival had disturbed them, they took off with noisy flapping of wings to soar away and lose themselves in the fog out over the sea.

Norma tried the door. It was locked. She rang the bell. No response. A second ring failed. A third long one brought an angry response.

The door flew open and Langer's white hair seemed to give off sparks as he stormed angrily:

"Why do you ring now? You know my hours. Everybody knows. You—"

He broke off short. At last he had taken time to look at his caller.

"Oh, it is you." His voice changed. "You are Miss Kent, one of those lady soldiers." He laughed hoarsely. "Come in. The pictures are done. They are not beautiful, but natural." He laughed again.

He did not turn on more light. A small lamp on a table gave out a feeble glow.

"See," he said, shuffling a pack of prints as if they were playing cards, "Here they are, all of them."

Yes, there they all were and Lena's picture was on top. "Really the best of the lot," Norma thought. She was not surprised.

"About my films?" She hesitated.

"Oh, yes! I have done these, too," he exclaimed with sudden enthusiasm. "They're very good. You really understand timing, light, grouping, and all that. Some of these village pictures, they are excellent. With your permission I shall retain three films for a short time only, that I may make enlargements."

"That—that's all right," Norma replied. She was looking at the pictures one by one and at the same time counting them.

In the end, she drew in a deep breath. There should have been twenty-four. One was missing. "And that one," she thought with a start, "is the one I took of the Spanish hairdresser at Fort Des Moines."

"What a fool I was to let this man do them!" she told herself.

"There are only twenty-three prints here," she suggested, trying to keep her voice on an even

scale.

"Twenty-three good pictures out of twenty-four!" he exclaimed. "This is remarkable for an amateur, my dear. What should one expect?"

She wanted to say, "You are telling a lie. That was a good picture. Taken in bright light, time—one twenty-fifth of a second and shutter half open, I couldn't have failed."

She said nothing of the sort. Instead she said:

"You'll make the some enlargements of the films you are keeping?"

"To be sure." He rubbed his hands together. "Very fine ones. And, my dear, they shall cost you absolutely nothing. I shall charge you nothing for these. You are almost a genius at light, shadows, and grouping. Such a choice of subjects! Such placing, to bring out the angles, and the contrasts. Please allow me to do all your films."

"Where have I heard all that before?" the girl asked herself as she left the place. The answer, she felt sure, was, "Never anywhere before." It was strange.

As she mounted her motorcycle and set it pop-popping, the three black pigeons, who had returned, once more went flapping out to sea.

"Pointing the way to Black Knob," she told herself. "I wonder if they ever go all the way?"

Days glided by. There was study and work, hours on end. At last more work and less study.

They studied types of airplanes and subs until they were fairly sure of recognizing them in daylight. Learning them by sound would be quite another matter. For some enemy planes they had sound recordings. Norma, who had quite a remarkable ear for sound variations, spent hours on end listening first to the American fighter planes that every day zoomed overhead, and then to the recordings of Zeros and Messerschmitts.

The day after her camera disappeared, she found it just where she had left it. Had someone taken it by mistake and returned it? Did Mr. Sperry or someone else suspect her of taking forbidden snapshots? This seemed improbable for she had taken two pictures and the spot still showed number three. What was more, the shutter was just as she had left it and the time, still set at one-twenty-fifth of a second.

"It can't have been someone who wished to use it for taking forbidden pictures either," Betty assured her. "No pictures have been taken."

To her great surprise, when at last the film was used up and she had it developed, she was told that the first two pictures had turned out as blanks. Carl Langer showed her the blanks as proof positive.

Yet, to Norma this was not absolute proof. "For," she told herself, "those were very ordinary snapshots. The other pictures were taken under the same circumstances, nothing had been done to the camera, and yet they came out very well."

Her curiosity was aroused. After two days had elapsed, she again left her camera lying about. Once again it vanished. In two days it was back. This time she had left number four showing. Hastily using up the film, she hurried to the studio and had the film developed.

"Some of your pictures are quite wonderful," Carl Langer commented. "but the first three—"

"I know. They are blank." Norma thought this, but didn't say it. She was wrong. The first three were quite black. Very much overexposed. They showed nothing.

"Perhaps," said Langer, "you were a bit careless putting in that film. It looks light-struck at the beginning."

She had not been careless. The film was not light-struck, yet she said never a word. She would get to the bottom of this yet.

The next day Norma forgot her photographic problems for at last a visit to Black Knob was on the calendar. Norma had made two more visits to the spotter shed at Granite Point. With ever-increasing interest she had watched the talking hands from the island and had listened to weird and interesting tales told of the great rock called Black Knob by those fascinating twins, Beth and Bess.

At first it was planned that only Norma and Betty should accompany Lieutenant Warren on the trip to Black Knob but at the last moment Lena asked permission to go.

Perhaps Miss Warren knew some things about this tall, strong girl that Norma had never learned. Certain it is that, had it been left to her, she would have said, "No, let's not take her."

Lena went along. The journey out was uneventful. Norma and Betty took turns at the wheel. Their experience piloting boats at summer camps stood them in good stead.

As Black Knob loomed up larger, they made out trees growing like bushy hair on its crest and, close beside a small harbor formed by an outcropping of rocks, a group of fishermen's cottages and summer tourist cabins.

A small, bright-eyed man with a full gray beard took their line at the narrow dock.

"Lieutenant Warren!" he exclaimed. "I am glad to see you. The girls have been telling me on short wave radio about you and one of your workers. They call her Norma."

"This is Norma," said Miss Warren, helping Norma out of the boat.

"Ah," said the little man. "I am indeed glad to meet you. As you must have guessed, I am the grandfather of Bess and Beth. Dudley Norton is the name I drew when I was born." He laughed in a friendly, cackling way. "And here," he added, as a nine-year-old girl came dancing down the path, "is my chief assistant, Patsy. Her principal task is keeping the bad Gremlins away."

"Gremlins," said Norma. "What are Gremlins?"

"Oh! They are little people," the girl, who was the living picture of Bess and Beth, explained. "The bad ones put ice on your airplane's wings and stop up your guns when you want to shoot. But the good ones get out, hundreds and hundreds of them, and blow on the sea to make a big storm when the enemy subs are about."

"Oh! That's the way it is," Lieutenant Warren said. "But aren't you afraid to live way out here when so many Gremlins are about?"

"No!" said the girl. "I'm not afraid." She took her grandfather's hand. "Besides I'm not allowed to be afraid. Grandfather and I have a big job to do over here on Black Knob—and we're in for the duration, aren't we, Grandpa?"

"That we are!" The little, gray-haired man agreed heartily.

"That's the spirit!" Lieutenant Warren exclaimed. "We'll win now for sure!"

After Betty and Lena had been introduced, they all took the winding path that led to Grandfather Norton's "House of Magic," as Norma had named it, long before she saw it.

CHAPTER XVII

THOSE BAD GREMLINS

This House of Magic she discovered was really a home and a spotter shed combined. Originally it had been a well-built summer home made of pine logs that had broken from a jam and drifted to the rocky shore of Black Knob. Since this cabin had been built on a high point, overlooking the sea, it was necessary to erect only a twenty-foot tower with a winding stairway. This led up from the front porch. Atop this tower was a room eight feet square with windows on every side. Outside was a two foot walk, railed in, which gave the watcher a view of every spot on the island and, on a clear day, many square miles of sea.

"It's an admirable spot for a lookout," Lieutenant Warren exclaimed. "But what about your force? Have you enough to do a really good job?"

"No-o," the little old man hesitated. "The Misses Morrison, Jane and Mildred, retired school teachers of uncertain age, who like myself have come to love the privacy of this rock, do their best to aid me, but Jane, I fear, is becoming hard of hearing."

"Not so good for night watching," the Lieutenant smiled.

"Oh! I have a way of—" The old man paused, studied the circle of eyes about him, then ended lamely, "a way, er—of using the help that is at hand."

"He doesn't trust us," Norma whispered to Betty. "At least not all of us." She glanced at Lena who was all eyes and ears.

"He was going to tell us of some secret hearing device," Betty agreed.

"There are other and more interesting secrets," Norma half confided. She had never told Betty of the talking hands.

"If there are," Betty whispered, "we'll have to wait for another time to learn about them."

At that moment the little girl came dancing up. Pulling Norma's head low, she whispered:

"My name's Patsy. I'd like to take you around the island and show you where I saw the sub."

"Oh! A sub!" Norma whispered. "I guess you must have imagined that!"

"No, a really, truly sub." The girl pulled at her hand.

"Patsy and I are going exploring," Norma explained to her commander.

"Quite all right," was the smiling reply. "If you sight an enemy plane, let us know."

Norma and Patsy were away.

"It's an awful little island," Patsy said as they marched along. "I can walk clear to the end of it in ten minutes."

"Then it won't take us long," Norma said. "But don't you get lonesome here?" she asked.

"Oh, no! There are three fishermen and two Miss Morrisons without any husbands, and Grandfather, and all the good Gremlins. Oh! there are a lot of us—

"Besides," she added a moment later, "I'd have to stay here anyway. Daddy's an officer in the Navy. And Momsie's helping make machine guns in a big factory. She makes good machine guns, good, good ones. No bad Gremlin can keep the bullets from coming out of her machine guns."

"I'll bet they can't," Norma said seriously.

"Grandfather says we couldn't beat our enemies at all if it wasn't for the women of America."

"I'm sure of that," Norma agreed again.

They were passing through a grove of pines that whispered over their heads.

"That's the bad Gremlins whispering." A note of mystery crept into Patsy's voice. "They're fixing up a storm, a really bad storm. They always whisper like that before a storm."

"Oh! then we had better hurry," Norma exclaimed. "My chum, Betty, and I piloted the boat. It's neither fast nor large. We don't know much about boats so we wouldn't like to get caught in a storm."

"Oh, we'll get back before they are through talking," was the quick reply. "We'll hurry. You just must see Black Head, Gray Head, and Bald Head."



*"Oh, We'll Get Back Before They Are
Through Talking."*

"Who are they? People?"

"No, they're huge rocks that slant away into the sea. When there's a bad storm it's just terrible to see the way the waves come roaring in.

"When that sub came up out of the water," the child's voice dropped to a whisper, "I laid right down on Black Head and—and hid my face behind a little bush."

"That was a wise thing to do." Had this child really seen a German submarine rise close to this island? Norma wondered. "It makes it all seem so close and so real," she whispered to herself.

"There they are!" the child cried as they emerged from the pines. "That's Black Head." She pointed. "That's Gray Head—"

"And the other must be Bald Head," Norma laughed.

"Yes, and right out there was where the sub came up." Again the girl pointed. "Come on!" Seizing her companion's hand, she dragged her along at a furious pace.

"Right here," she said, vastly excited. "I was just sitting here watching for planes, when I looked down—"

Suddenly she broke off. There came the whir of wings and then, just before them in the water at the foot of Black Head, two beautiful eider ducks came to rest.

"Going north," Patsy whispered. "The first ones I've seen this year."

In her excitement she allowed her voice to rise and suddenly the ducks were gone.

"Did you see that?" Patsy exclaimed. "They crash dived, just the way the sub did, only it didn't crash dive right away. Oh, no! You can't think how scared I was. Three men came up from the conning tower. They had a rubber boat and were blowing it up."

"Coming ashore," Norma whispered.

"Yes, that's what I thought. And was I scared! If they had seen me they would have shot me. Grandfather would have heard and there would have been a battle."

"A battle?"

"Oh, sure! We can fight a battle, a real battle. Grandfather has two tommy-guns. You ought to see him shoot them. Even Miss Jane Morrison can shoot them, and so can I."

How strange all this seemed to Norma as she sat there in the glorious sunshine watching the eider ducks who had come up again some distance away.

"Why did they crash dive?" she asked at last.

"Because they heard a plane. I heard it, too. It was coming from the land, an American fighter plane. I can tell them when I hear them, yes, and when I see them, too.

"You should have heard those men on the sub," Patsy laughed. "How they jabbered! They went down below, then they crash dived."

"What did you do?"

"I jumped up and told Grandfather, and he told Beth and Bess and they told the fort. Pretty soon there were just lots and lots of planes, but just no sub at all."

"Too bad," said Norma, "but how did your grandfather tell Beth and Bess?"

"Shish!" Patsy put a finger to her lips. "That's a military secret."

"Not bad for a nine-year-old," Norma thought. "She'll be a lady soldier some day."

Of a sudden the calm sea appeared to have been lashed by ten thousand tiny whips. Then there came a race of a million tiny waves.

"That's the bad Gremlins," Patsy sprang to her feet. "They are whipping the sea. Soon the sea will be very, very angry and then—"

"Yes—yes, let's go. I'll race you back!" Norma exclaimed. "Now get set. One! Two! Three! Go!"

They were away like a flash.

Because she knew a short cut, Patsy was first in.

"Oh, good! Here you are!" Lieutenant Warren exclaimed. "We've been thinking of starting back."

"Yes, yes!" Norma panted. "We must go at once. The Gremlins are whipping the water and—" she broke off short. "What nonsense!" she thought.

"So she's got you believing in the Gremlins!" the gray-haired man of magic chuckled. "She's got all of us here on the island converted to belief in those little people."

There was little enough to make anyone believe in the bad Gremlins as they took off from the small dock. Now and then little flurries of wind rose and raced across the sea. That was all. Betty was at the wheel.

"I'm going to send three of you over there to help out, at least for a while," Miss Warren confided to Norma.

"Oh! I'm glad!" Norma exclaimed. "It's really not safe for them there, three old fishermen, an aged inventor, two spinsters, and a child."

"And if you were there, you would protect them!" the Lieutenant laughed. "However, I wasn't thinking of safety, but of the rare opportunity they have for airplane spotting.

"Of course," she added after a moment, "it will, at best, be only an outpost. Our main station will always be at Indian Harbor."

If her superior was not, at that moment, thinking of the possible dangers of life on Black Knob, Norma most surely was. After recalling Patsy's words, she thought, "Spies have been landed on American shores from submarines and may try again. Black Knob would make a marvelous hideout if only—"

At that moment she was seeing a picture of herself and the aged inventor standing at the log cabin's windows that were like loop-holes, and firing tommy-guns while Patsy dragged up fresh belts of ammunition.

Real danger replaced her dreams and that in a very short time for, as if by magic, the sea began rolling in a most alarming manner and the wind began to tear at them like mad.

"I—I can't hold her on her course," Betty panted. "It's a quar—quartering wind and every wave thro—throws—"

At that a wave, larger than the rest, came splashing across the deck.

Half drowned Norma sprung to her feet, but Lena was before her. Crowding Betty aside, she seized the wheel and, bracing herself like a veteran, she brought the boat about to head it squarely into the storm.

She held it to this course until there came a brief lull. Then again she took up a direct course toward the shore.

The lull was short-lived. Soon the wind was once again cracking about their ears and the boat was bouncing like a cork.

With lips set in a straight line and every muscle drawn tight as a bow string, Lena braced herself for the task that lay before her.

Dark clouds engulfed them like a shroud. Waves, reaching for the boat and missing, gave forth serpent-like hisses as they broke into foam.

Suddenly Norma's lips parted for a scream of warning. The scream failed. A fierce gust of wind drove it down her throat. Before them, so close it seemed they could not miss, were two jagged piles of gray rock.

"Like the jaws of a giant sea serpent," she told herself with a shudder.

She stole a look at Lena. She was like a statue. Her strong arms were rigid. One moment they raced toward one reef, the next they had whirled half about and were racing for the other. Then, as a great wave, white with foam, hit them, they were lifted high to be shot forward in a mass of foam.

"Made it," Norma heard the astonishing Lena murmur.

It became apparent at once that this reef formed a barrier that held the water back for, once across it, they found themselves in calmer waters.

Lena's answer to this was full speed ahead and not one of them dared cry:

"Lena! You are wrong!"

All too well Lieutenant Warren, who had spent many months on the New England coast, knew that they had been caught in one of those brief but terrific storms that from time to time ravage the coast.

A quarter hour passed, then again they were in the midst of the storm.

For a full hour after that, never flinching, nor asking for quarter, the stout Lena held to her post until with a deep breath that was half groan and half a sigh of relief she slid the small boat into the narrow slip by the dock. Here, behind the breakwater, they were safe.

Sergeant Tom, who had been anxiously awaiting word from them, caught the line. Lena leaped to the dock, then, drenched as she was by cold salt water spray, went racing for Harbor Bells.

At that moment words were running through Norma's mind, the words of a child:

"The bad Gremlins do that."

As she trudged up the hill toward the spot where dry clothes, a roaring, open fire, and steaming coffee awaited them, Norma said to her Lieutenant:

"Lena was magnificent!"

"Yes," was the quiet reply. "We all have our big moments. Your big moment too will arrive, perhaps sooner than you think."

"Will it?" Norma asked herself. There was no answer.

CHAPTER XVIII

SUDDEN PANIC

When Norma awoke, a half hour before her regular time, next morning, it was with the feeling of one who has had her little world of thought turned topsy-turvy.

"It is Lena who has done it," she told herself.

Yet she could not hate Lena for that. It is not easy to hate any person who in the past twenty-four hours has saved your life. Lena, she was sure, had done just that. Neither she nor Betty could have brought the boat safely home through that storm.

And yet, when she had seen Lena in the big living room the night before, after dinner, and had tried to thank her, Lena had shrugged, mumbling something about, "All in a day's work," and "Handled a boat before," then had walked away.

"You'd think she was a man," Norma had said to Betty later. "That's the way men talk."

"We've given her rather a cold shoulder," was Betty's quiet comment. "It wouldn't be surprising if she paid us back in cold shoulders."

"Well," Norma had started to reply, "perhaps we had reasons. We—" She had gone no farther and, appearing to understand, Betty had not encouraged her to continue.

"But life with Lena has been strange," she told herself now.

Yes, there had been the whispered words on that first night at Fort Des Moines, Lena's apparent friendship with the Spanish hairdresser and that startling affair of the self-locking door at night in a Des Moines repair shop.

Then, too, she had quite recently heard a man at the back of the photographer's studio say, "You must!" and had heard a voice, which she was sure must be Lena's say, "I will not!" That Lena was there at the photographer's studio at one time or another was certain, for a picture had been taken there for her identification card.

"But why not?" Norma whispered now, almost fiercely. What did she, Norma, have against that photographer. He was undoubtedly a German, yet there were hundreds of thousands of loyal German-Americans. He looked like her mental picture of a spy she had heard Lieutenant Warren tell about, yet her mental picture of that spy of India might be all wrong. She had never seen him. Both these men were photographers, yet there were many like them in the world. Both kept black pigeons. She didn't know a great deal about pigeons so, for all she knew, there might be a million black ones in America.

Even the Spanish hairdresser had not been convicted of espionage. She had disappeared from Fort Des Moines, that was all. Some woman, with a Spanish look, had showed up at night at the Sea Tower with a faked identification card and dressed in a WAC uniform. But was this the Spanish hairdresser? Who could answer that question?

This brought her around to the missing picture from her film developed by Carl Langer.

"That was a picture of the Spanish hairdresser," she assured herself. "The film for it is still in his studio and I am going to have it even if I have to break in and steal it." At that she sprang out of bed and raced for the showers.

This, she recalled with sudden thrill, was their last day of training and probation. Today for the last time she would sit for eight hours with Sergeant Tom McCarthy at her elbow making sure that she marked on her chart the exact spot where an airplane had been spotted and seeing to it that she checked correctly with the representative of the Army, Navy, and Civil Aeronautics Authority to make sure that the plane really belonged where it had been spotted.

"Tomorrow," she told herself, "I'll be there all alone, doing my bit."

Ah, yes, and that was not all. Rosa, Betty, Millie, Lena, and all the rest would be there at their appointed hours. And ten sturdy young men would oil up their guns and go marching off.

Did these boys like it? Some, she knew, were raring to go and some would have been glad to stay for they were, after all, very human.

"What they want doesn't matter now," she thought grimly.

At the Major's dance held in the big dining hall at Harbor Bells, she had enjoyed their lively fun. Working shoulder to shoulder with them in the Sea Tower, she had come to know them better than she knew her fellow WACs.

Yes, she would miss them. One consolation was that Sergeant Tom McCarthy was not leaving. He had serious work to do here for, in the narrow harbor, between docks, was a seaplane called "Seagull." In this plane Sergeant Tom did patrol duty, and, if occasion demanded, could do his bit at hunting out an enemy plane, to shower its pilot with machine-gun fire, or drop a bomb on a prowling sub.

Today, however, since it was Saturday and she had an afternoon off, she was planning a land adventure, none other than obtaining by hook, crook, or downright house-breaking, the film showing the Spanish hairdresser. Little wonder then that, try as she might, she missed the exact spot in her chart for a reported plane and got her ears not too playfully boxed by Sergeant Tom.

In the end, however, Tom gave her an A rating and she was all ready for the big step forward, a WAC in the active service of her country.

It was a bright, brisk day. An inch of snow had fallen the day before. Cars had swept the snow from the roads. The night before it had frozen hard. In the bright sunlight the valleys, hills, trees,

and forests were all aglitter.

"A grand day for taking pictures," Norma exclaimed as she and Betty hurried home for lunch. "I'm going for a long, long bike ride."

"Wish I could go with you," Betty sighed, "but I just must catch up with my letter writing. I have a hunch that I'm going to be sent over to Black Knob for a while. There, getting off letters won't be so easy."

"I'd be glad to have just such a hunch myself. I like that little girl and her grandfather," was Norma's reply. "And the bad Gremlins!"

"I have an idea that Lieutenant Warren has other plans for you," Betty said slowly. "Something like making you second in command, a sergeant perhaps. Then there'll be two sergeants," she laughed. "Tom and Norma! That will be grand!"

"And will we tell you where to get off!" Norma's eyes shone. "But just you wait a while for that!"

"It won't be long now," Betty chanted.

"Look!" Norma's voice dropped. "That photographer over at Granite Head held out one of my pictures."

"He did!"

"He certainly did! The one of that Spanish hairdresser at Fort Des Moines."

"You don't think—" Betty stared.

"No, I don't think anything, but I'm going to have that picture if I have to lose an arm getting it."

"Don't be rash," Betty warned. "It's not worth it."

"Who knows?" Norma murmured thoughtfully.

She was still weighing this question when she arrived at the studio at Granite Head.

As she entered the studio she found Carl Langer talking excitedly to an elderly fisherman's wife. The woman's face, bronzed by many winds and seamed by many a care, was, she thought, most attractive.

Carl Langer was saying in a harsh tone, "No, madam! I can not take your picture. I am too busy, and besides—just one print. Bah! That is not enough! I would lose money."

"It is for my son." The woman's voice was low, pleading. "It is for my only son. He is a soldier fighting in Africa."

"Soldier! Bah!" The photographer's eyes bulged. "There are many million soldiers and most times they are drunk."

This last Norma knew was not true. Her face flushed but she said never a word until the woman was gone. Then she said:

"You don't know a picture when you see one!"

"How is that?" Carl Langer scowled.

"If you had seated that woman on a log, put a sea scene behind her, and given her a net to mend, you might have had a masterpiece."

Carl Langer shot her a look but said never a word.

"Mr. Langer," she said, after a moment, "a while back you kept some of my films."

"To make some prints? They were very fine pictures. I gave you some enlargements."

"Yes, that was generous of you."

"That was nothing! Nothing!" The photographer's chest swelled.

"You forgot to give me my films," she suggested.

"That is true. Wait. I shall bring them." He hurried to the back room.

"It's no use trying to get the Spanish hairdresser's picture today," she told herself. "He's in an explosive mood."

The films she had asked for showed scenes—a cozy white, New England village, a boy bringing in wood, and a rare shot of a deer deep in the forest drinking from a pool at the foot of a tiny waterfall.

"Here they are." He handed her an envelope.

"That's fine. Now sell me three films and I'll be off for another afternoon of shooting."

"You lady soldiers," he laughed, "you are the dead-sure shots."

"Who knows?" she murmured. She was seeing a little gray-haired man and a girl standing at the window of a log cabin on Black Knob Island with tommy-guns on their knees.

"Here are the films. And good shooting to you," he laughed.

"He wouldn't say that if he could read my thoughts," she told herself.

Having paid for her films, she stepped once more into the crisp air.

After wrapping her camera and new films in her utility coat and placing them in the bike basket, she paused to examine the old films he had given her.

"There are four instead of three," she thought with a start. Then, without knowing why, she pocketed the films and rode rapidly away.

Did she hear a distant shout while only a quarter of a mile down the road? She did not look back. She peddled for a mile or more along the shore road and entered a small fishing village. She was just in time to see the fisherwoman turn up the path leading to her own door.

"Wait a minute," she called. The woman waited.

"Will you allow me to take your picture?" she asked as she came close.

The woman looked at the girl's uniform for a moment. Then, as a smile spread over her wrinkled face, she said:

"You are one of them WACs, a lady soldier. Yes, miss. Take as many as you like fer my son. He is a soldier, too."

"I'll take two for you and one for me," Norma replied cheerily. "You must send one to your son in Africa."

"He shall have them both," said the woman tidying up her faded dress.

Norma posed her before her cottage, then down by the seashore.

"We'll say a prayer tonight asking that your son may come back safely," she said in a low, quiet tone.

"And may the good Lord bless you," said the woman.

"See!" said Norma, taking the envelope of films from her pocket. "I can take as good pictures as Carl Langer ever made and they won't cost you a cent."

She very nearly dropped the first film she held to the light. It was a good, clear picture of the Spanish hairdresser standing by the gate at Fort Des Moines.

"Did Carl Langer mean to give me that film?" she asked herself as she left the fishing village. She doubted it. He probably had put the film in the envelope by mistake, or had forgotten it was there.

She took a long, long ride that day. She seemed to hear more than once, when she thought of turning back, the good Gremlins urging her to go on.

At last, having circled a row of hills, she turned once more toward the sea and there, just before her, nestling on a sloping hillside and half hidden by pines that stood out black against the snow, was the most charming colonial home she had ever seen.

It was a large house. Shapely white pillars adorned its broad porch. There were three great chimneys.

"A fireplace in every room," she thought. "How old and perfectly charming it must be."

Back of the house was a red barn with three white cupolas. On the roofs of the cupolas were many pigeons.

"All black pigeons," she thought with a start.

Just then the bark of a dog startled her. The broad door to the house had opened. Three large dogs had come dashing out.

Their master called them back. She was glad. For a moment she had been terribly frightened.

She took one more look at the house, the barn, the dogs, and their master. Then, in sudden panic, she turned squarely about, leaped on her bicycle, and peddled back over the way she had come.

The man with the three dogs by the door of that lovely house was Carl Langer, the photographer. She still had that film he had tried to hide from her. But there were other causes for her sudden panic. Pictures were playing back and forth in her mind and she was hearing Lieutenant Warren telling of the man in India who had been shot as a spy.

"First it is Carl Langer who looks like that spy. Then he acts like that spy. He steals my film. He refuses to take honest people's pictures. He keeps black pigeons. And now I find him at his own rich estate back in the hills. It's too much, far too much."

CHAPTER XIX

A BATTLE IN THE NIGHT

Norma did not slacken her speed until she reached the shore road. When she passed through Granite Head lamps were being lighted. On coming to the narrow road leading to the spotter shed she caught a gleam of light up there. Feeling in need of friendship and good cheer, she sprang from her bike to go trudging up the hill.

She was given a joyous welcome by Bess and Beth.

"Come on in," Bess exclaimed. "We're just brewing a cup of tea."

"Just what I need." Nonna sank into a chair. "Tea, a kind word, and a smile."

"You shall have all three," Beth declared. "And you surely deserve it. Patsy told me all about your wild ride on the sea. Those bad Gremlins nearly got you that time."

"Patsy? Is she over here?" Norma asked.

"No, not here," was the reply. "She, too, can talk with her hands. Just as soon as she told me with those expressive hands of hers that you were out in the storm, I got on the wire and stayed there until I knew you were safe."

"That was kind of you." Norma felt that she surely was making warm friends. "Probably I shall need them," she told herself.

Bess went outside to take up her spotter's post. When tea was served, they passed her a big, steaming cup.

After eating delicious homemade cakes and thin nut-bread sandwiches with her tea, Norma felt ready once more for journey and battle.

"I'll be going now," she stood up, "and thank you a lot."

"Don't go yet," Beth begged. "We'll have a little chat with Patsy and perhaps with Grandfather, though he's often prowling about the island at this hour, looking for subs," she laughed.

After dragging both a television camera and receiving set from cabinets. Beth watched the clock for a short time, then set things humming.

Half a minute later a pair of tiny hands appeared in the square of light and began to talk.

"Patsy is here," Norma whispered.

Beth nodded, "Here and ten miles away. Isn't it strange?" She watched those hands and at the same time wrote down letters one by one. "She says Grandfather has been gone for an hour and she's a little bit afraid."

"I shouldn't wonder," said Norma with a shake of the head.

"He takes too many chances," Beth said soberly.

"Can you talk to her?" Norma asked.



"Tea Is Just What I Need," Said Norma

"Oh, sure. Watch me." Soon, with the television camera trained upon them, Beth's hands were twisting themselves in all manners of strange forms.

"Tell her I'm here," said Norma.

Again Beth's hands talked across ten miles of black waters.

Then it was little Patsy's time to talk. The words fairly flew from her nimble fingers.

"She says she loves you," Beth laughs. "She hopes you'll come often. But, oh, is she glad the bad Gremlins didn't get you that other night!"

"She's a dear child," said Norma. "I only wish I were going there to live for a time. But I'm a little afraid that is out."

"Too bad, I'm sure. Patsy'd love it. You'd have experiences you'd not forget."

"Looks as if I might have unforgettable experiences anyway," Norma laughed nervously. She was thinking of the Spanish hairdresser, of Carl Langer, and all the strange surprises that had come to her. "I'll tell Lieutenant Warren all about it very soon," she told herself.

Again Patsy was talking. It was an animated and joyous conversation they held with Patsy while Bess stood watch outside.

Then, of a sudden, all was changed. Patsy broke off short in the middle of a sentence. Her tiny hands disappeared and in their stead were larger, older hands.

"Grandfather," Beth whispered as if afraid he might hear. "And is he excited!"

Soon enough they knew there was reason for excitement. The trembling hands spelled out the words rapidly, one by one:

"Submarine—half mile off shore—Send help!"

Norma sprang for the telephone. Taking down the receiver she tried to speak calmly, distinctly:

"N-K speaking at G-P." Her words seemed to tremble. "Black Knob reports submarine, half mile off shore. Send planes."

At that instant Bess thrust her head in at the door to report:

"One single off Black Knob coming this way, moderate speed."

At that same instant Millie, who was standing watch on the top of the Sea Tower, took a frosty telephone from its hiding place and called down to Betty:

"One single. About six miles off shore, looks like coming from Black Knob, coming west, moderate speed."

At once Betty got in touch with the men below. In ten seconds she had her answer. "No plane due to be at that point. Wait for second report."

The second report came, not from Norma at Granite Point spotter shed, but from a fisherman's wife at the village which Norma had visited a few hours before.

On receiving the report, Sergeant Tom sprang up the stairs to stand at Millie's side and add his keen listening ears to hers.

"Circling as if for a landing," was his first comment. "Mighty strange, a small plane way out there at this hour of the night. It's not any American plane I've ever heard. I'm going out there. Tell Betty to notify the Rock Point airfield. Tell her to give the details."

Going down the stairs he all but fell over Rosa who was just going off duty.

"Oh, Tom!" she exclaimed. "Are you going after that plane?"

"Looks like I am." Tom bounded out into the uncertain light of night. There was no moon.

Rosa, who was right at his heels, called in a low, eager voice: "Tom, take me with you!"

"What, a lady? It can't be done!"

"I'm a soldier. I'll handle the spotlight."

"And the machine gun, too, I suppose," he grumbled.

"Yes, and that, too. Tom, please take me," she pleaded.

When the Seagull rose from the dark sea, Rosa rode in the second seat. Tom had extracted from her a promise of absolute secrecy, that was all.

There was reason enough why Norma's report of the plane and the sub had not come in. The phone at the Granite Head spotter shed was dead. Beyond a doubt the wires had been cut.

While they were finding this out, Beth had received a more complete report from her grandfather. He had been hearing sounds from the sea for a full half hour. Someone was working on a motor or some other thing. At first he thought some fisherman's boat was stalled.

As the craft was carried in by the tide, he caught words spoken in German. Then he made out the long, low bulk of the sub. Now he was telling of a mysterious plane that had appeared from just nowhere and was soaring out over the sea.

"I've got my bike!" Norma exclaimed excitedly. "I'll ride like mad. Be at the Sea Tower in no time at all!" She was away at once.

As Norma sped down those winding stairs she was thinking of the old man and the child out there on Black Knob and their great peril. "Those men were rigging out a boat," she told herself. "They were going ashore on the island. And then—"

She coasted down the hill at a terrific speed. Only a miracle saved her from a crash at the bottom.

She got her crash all the same. Having covered a quarter of the distance to the Sea Tower, she rounded a curve when to her consternation she saw a ghost-like figure, all in white, standing in the middle of the road.

Swinging as far as she could to the right, she attempted to pass when, with an astonishing leap, the figure landed upon the back of her bicycle and wrapped long arms about her. Instantly they went down in a heap.

"It's a spy," she thought. "He cut the wire. Now he means to stop me. But he won't."

Summoning all her courage and drawing heavily on her feeling of sudden desperation, she threw

all her strength into tearing away those arms.

The ease with which this was done astonished her. Those were not strong arms. They seemed to be the arms of a woman.

Norma's escape was, she discovered, not to be so easy. Her opponent was surprisingly fast. No sooner were her arms free than she was gripped by both ankles and thrown with a crash to the ground.

At last, struggling to a sitting position, she pushed the creature away and sprang up.

Leaping like a panther, her enemy landed on her back to send her crashing once again.

"I've got to be cool," the girl told herself. "This may be a fight to the death."

When once again she found herself on her feet she began sparring like a boxer.

Then, seeing an opening, she seized her opponent by one arm. Hanging on desperately with both hands, she started whirling. Finding her assailant surprisingly light, she at last swung her off her feet. Three more dizzy turns, then she let go.

The white figure crashed into the bank ten feet away. Without looking back, Norma seized her bike, mounted, and rode away at terrific speed.

In the meantime Tom and Rosa were out over the sea. First they headed for the spot where the plane had last been heard. They circled in an ever growing spiral but discovered nothing.

Switching on a light, Tom looked back at Rosa. The look on her round face betrayed no sign of fear. Instead there was a look of grim determination.

"We'll climb," he spoke into his phone. "It may be cold."

"Okay by me," Rosa called back cheerfully.

"We'll get up high. Then I'll shut off my motor and glide. Then you listen with both your ears."

"With both my ears," came echoing back.

They climbed. Then they began a silent glide.

"Out to sea." Rosa's ears had caught the sound of a motor. "Near the island I think. Black Knob, you know?"

Tom had heard, too. They were away.

Over Black Knob they circled again "No soap," Tom grumbled. "You much scared?" he asked.

"Not scared at all."

"Want to turn on the searchlight and sweep the sky as we circle?" he asked. "They may see us and shoot. That may mean curtains for us."

"But if it's an enemy scout plane from an aircraft carrier," this was the girl's answer, "then it is curtains for many people—women and children." Rosa snapped on the light. After that, as they circled low over the water, a pencil of light searched the sky.

Now and then the girl played the light on dark waters.

"Looking for the aircraft carrier," Tom thought. "She's sure got what it takes."

Suddenly Rosa exclaimed, "Look! What's that?"

"What? Where?"

"It was on the water. Not big, but long and low."

"A fishing boat, perhaps," said Tom. "They're coming in from the Banks these days."

"Mebby, yes, mebbby no," was the odd reply.

Truth was, they had sighted the sub, but, since Norma's report had failed, they knew nothing of that sub. So they circled on.

"Norma! You're a sight!" Betty cried as her pal at last stumbled into their Sea Tower watchroom. "Did you have a crash?"

"Yes—yes—a crash," Norma murmured half in a daze. "But, Betty, quick! Notify the airfield! There's an enemy submarine clo-close to Black Knob. They—they're trying to land, I think. That—that will be terrible!"

"A squadron of planes is on the way now!" Betty said.

"Who—who told them about the sub?" Norma stared.

"Not the sub," Betty corrected. "There is an unidentified airplane."

"Oh, oh, yes. Then, tell them to send out planes to look for the sub."

Betty got off the message while Norma collapsed into a chair.

"Here, drink this," Betty offered her a cup of steaming coffee.

"Oh, Betty!" Norma exclaimed. "It was terrible! I tried to call from the spotter shed but the wires were cut. I started coming here like mad on my bike. Someone attacked me—"

"Attacked you!"

"Threw me off my bike! We—we had a terrible fight. It was a woman or a boy in a white snow suit. Woman, I think. The Spanish hairdresser, I shouldn't wonder!"

"The Spanish hairdresser!" Betty's eyes opened wide.

"Yes—I have her picture." Norma dug into the pocket of her coat.

"It—it's gone!" she gasped. "It was the Spanish hairdresser. The picture was what she wanted. I—I lost the fight after all."

"Not by a long way," Betty declared stoutly. "If she's around here, we'll get her yet. I—"

"Wait," she held up a hand, then listened.

"Five more planes going out. We'll get that sub."

CHAPTER XX

PATSY WATCHES THREE SHADOWS

Once again Tom McCarthy and Rosa climbed to the upper sky where the stars seemed to reach down for them and the air was bitter cold.

"Now," Tom muttered hoarsely, as he shut off the motor and they started on a spiral glide, "listen!"

"Listening," came in a hoarse whisper.

At first no sound reached their listening ears. Then they caught a low, indistinct roar, like the approach of an on-rushing storm.

"A terrible storm coming." Rosa seemed a little frightened.

"That's no storm," Tom's voice was husky. "It's the roar of lots of planes."

"Lots of planes," Rosa repeated. "They come from an airplane carrier. They will fly to Portland, Boston, perhaps New York!"

"Who knows?" Tom's eyes were on his instruments. They were still spiraling rapidly.

"Damn!" he murmured, scowling fiercely. Where was the sea? To strike it head-on meant death. At night sky and sea look alike. And yet he wanted to listen to get the direction of that on-rushing squadron. At that moment he saw himself at the controls with Rosa manning the machine gun, surrounded by ghost-like enemy fighters shooting by them in the night. It was a fantastic, but not impossible, scene.

Suddenly a single flash of light appeared beneath them. One instant it was there, the next it was gone.

"Rosa! Quick! The spotlight!" He pulled the plane up so short that blood rushed to Rosa's head and it was with the greatest difficulty that she set the light playing on the water.

One frightened look down and she gasped. They were all but upon the water and going like the wind.

One more short pull and their ship leveled off. It was then that their spot of light, gliding swiftly across the water, revealed a secret. Their light crossed a long, low craft with a tower at its center.

"Sub," Tom shouted. But already it was too late to drop a bomb. They were over it and gone.

Instantly he began to climb. Not very high this time, perhaps ten thousand feet, then again silence.

The roar of distant motors was louder now, but even louder and closer at hand sounded a single motor.

"That's the enemy plane," Tom muttered. After listening with all his senses, he changed the direction of his plane and they went shooting away at full speed. Tom was flying by sense of direction alone, a dangerous business in the night.

Ten long minutes he stuck to his course, then, after climbing once more, he shut off the motor and began to glide.

"Huh!" he grunted. "We had that plane's course to a 'T', but they're fast. They've gone straight out to sea."

"Then we can't catch up with them?" Rosa asked.

"Never!"

"They go back to Europe?"

"That's impossible. Plane's too small to carry enough gas."

"Then the ocean will get them."

"No chance," Tom grumbled. "They'll keep a secret meeting with that sub!"

Realizing that his supply of gas would not carry him much further and allow them to fly back, Tom put his motor in motion and very reluctantly turned back.

At that moment, hidden by the night and the shadow of a great rock, Patsy and her grandfather sat huddled in the cold at the foot of Bald Head, listening and straining their eyes for some sight or sound from the sea.

"That was Tom McCarthy in the seaplane," the grandfather whispered.

"Yes, and that other plane, that was an enemy plane," said Patsy. "I hope the good Gremlins will pack its wings with ice until it falls into the sea!"

"But for us," said the grandfather, "the sub is more important!"

"Yes, they might land," the child answered and crowded close.

"Let them come," came in a low, even tone. "We'll take care of that." He patted the tommy-gun on his knee. "We—"

"Sh—" Patsy placed a finger on his lips. Her young ears were sharper than his. Had she caught the low murmur of voices? She could not be quite sure.

"People talking," she whispered, after a moment of intent listening.

Another moment of breathless silence and then: "Sounds like water splashing."

"Paddles." The old man gripped his gun tight.

Old for her years, Patsy knew this meant a boat of one sort or another. Without saying a word, she glided down the slope of Bald Head until her face was a scant two yards from the water that gently lapped the shore. Then, dropping flat on her stomach, she looked straight out across the dark surface of the sea. If a boat was out there it would show against the dull gray of the night sky.

A full five minutes passed without a sound. Then she whispered back:

"Not a boat, but three men sitting on the sea."

"A rubber boat!" Without a sound the grandfather slid down the dock to her side. Then, bidding her lie quite still, he put his gun across her slender body. She did not flinch.

He could see the men. There were three or four of them. They came slowly shoreward, pausing now and then to rest.

"Afraid?" the girl said.

"Yes, of a trap," was the all but inaudible answer.

Grandfather was thinking slowly, carefully, weighing the wisdom of laying a volley across the spot in the sea.

"They could be friends," he whispered. "We'll wait. Perhaps they will speak. Then we'll know."

So they waited and while they waited the low roar of many planes began beating on their eardrums.

"Oh!" Patsy squirmed in fear. "If these are enemy planes from a carrier—"

"They'll not bomb Black Knob," was the cheering assurance. "They only drop bombs where there are many people."

"Listen," he ended. "See if you can get their direction."

Once again, save for the occasional dip-dip of a paddle, silence hung over Black Knob.

Suddenly, after gripping the old man's arm with intense eagerness, the girl whispered:

"Grandfather! Those planes are coming from the south!"

"From Rocky Point airfield! They should have started sooner. Something must have gone wrong. But now—"

"Now will there be a battle?" The child was trembling all over.

"I don't know, child."

"Shall you shoot out there?"

"We must wait and see," was the calm reply, always in a slow whisper. "We cannot afford a horrible mistake."

And so, with the roar beating ever louder in their ears, they lay there, not daring to move, the man and the child.

As for the shadowy figures "sitting on the water," they too must have heard, for there came no longer the dip-dip of their paddles.

Tom and Rosa, too, were being cheered by the ever increasing roar.

"We'll leave that sub to them," Tom said through the speaker. "We can't have much more than enough gas to take us in."

At last they circled low, dropped to the surface inside the breakwater at Indian Point, then taxied in.

The instant the motor stopped and Tom had secured a tie line, he said in a low tone:

"This is our secret, Rosa. To anyone else, you just didn't go with me."

"Okay," was the frank agreement.

"Grab that skiff and row as fast as you can to the dock!"

"But you will come, too?" the girl demurred.

"Not yet!" He lifted her into the skiff. "Don't you see, you little goose? If you come back for me, then it will all be quite regular. You just happened along and gave me a lift."

"I see." The girl rowed swiftly away.

When, a quarter of an hour later, Rosa, still fairly shaking with cold, but managing a casual stride for all that, walked into the big living room, Norma exclaimed, "Rosa! Where have you been? They have looked for you everywhere!"

"I went out for a little fresh air, that's all."

Norma, studying Rosa's face, whispered: "Little Rosa has one more secret." And little Rosa had—just that!

Still the old man and the child lay in the darkness on the great rock, feeling the sound of motors growing louder, ever louder in their ears. Still the old man's fingers trembled as they gripped the gun that might have spelled death to those shadowy forms on the black waters.

At last the girl whispered, "They're paddling again! I can hear them, dip-dip-dip. Will they come ashore now? Will you shoot, Grandfather?"

"If they come ashore I will shoot."

Still, quite breathless, the child lay quiet, tensing as she lost the sound of the paddles. The roar of motors drowned it out. As her eyes searched the waters, it seemed to her that the shadowy forms were fading.

Then she lost interest in the sea, for coming like the wind, were airplanes, good American planes.

"They're coming to drive the horrible sub and all the bad Gremlins away!" she whispered.

She wanted to leap to her feet and scream, "Hurrah! Hurrah for our planes!" but she dared not.

The planes were not looking for the sub. They had been sent out to find an enemy plane. As if by magic a gray mist came sweeping in from the sea.

"It's the bad Gremlins." She spoke aloud at last. "They have hidden those men!"

"The men on the sub have made a fog to hide them," was the grandfather's reply. "Even the airplanes will not find the sub now."

"Come," he lifted her up, "we must go back to the cabin. You are freezing. We will listen there. You may talk with your hands."

"Grandfather," she said, as she trotted beside him, "will the sub come back?"

"Perhaps another day."

"And then will you shoot at those shadows on the water?"

"Yes, if I know they are our enemies, I will!"

Little Patsy did not talk with her hands that night, for, after drinking a big cup of hot chocolate and being wrapped in two warm blankets, she curled up on the broad couch and fell fast asleep.

It was the grandfather who, with his hands, spelled out their story to Beth and Bess, the faithful watchers at the Granite Head spotter tower. And all the while the searching planes roared on in the night.

CHAPTER XXI

NIGHT FOR A SPY STORY

And Norma too was on the watch—

It was one of those nights when one does not wish to sleep. The air was full of sounds, of airplanes roaring in close ashore, then speeding away to sea.

There were wild tales going the rounds of the village as Norma went there for a walk. There would be an invasion of America. Spies were being landed all along the coast from subs.

"I heard," said a fisherman, "that one of them lady soldiers, a WAAC do they call them, was beat to death on the road from Granite Head." As Norma listened in on this bit of conversation, she smiled. She, beyond doubt, was that "lady soldier." It all went to show how stories grew as they traveled.

"Or does it?" she asked with a start. "Perhaps someone is starting these wild tales to frighten us. If that's it," she squared her shoulders, "they've got a long way to go."

As she returned to Harbor Bells, she found herself in a mood for talking, telling tales, confiding in someone.

And there, sitting alone by the half-burned fire, as if she had been waiting for her, sat Lieutenant Warren.

"It's a wild night," she said, as Norma dropped into a seat beside her.

"Yes, a strange night. It seems to bring the war close."

"So very close to America," the Lieutenant agreed. "It's a night for a ghost story."

"Yes, or a spy story," Norma replied quickly. "Lieutenant Warren, I've discovered your German spy from India right here in America."

"What? Why, that's impossible!" The officer sat straight up to stare at her. "He was shot as a spy, two years ago in India!"

"Are you sure? Did your friend really say your photographer friend was shot?"

"Well, now," Lieutenant Warren went into a brown study, "perhaps not just that. She did say that a photographer who had a studio facing the parade ground—I supposed he was the one I knew—was shot."

"It might not be. Let me tell you all about it." Norma's voice dropped as she moved her chair close. From outside came the roar of a motor that slowly faded away.

"He calls himself Carl Langer," Norma said.

"That wasn't the name. But it's easy to take a new name. Most spies do, I guess," Lieutenant Warren said.

"I saw him the very first night we were here," Norma went on. "I went out for a look at the moon and the sea and there he stood by the gate with a camera in his hand."

"Oh, is he a photographer here, too?" Lieutenant Warren's voice rose a bit.

"Yes, of course, and a very good one. His hair stands up the way it does on a pig's back, only it's scrubbed and shines white. His face is lined but is round and soft-looking."

"What a remarkable resemblance!" Rita Warren murmured. "But why didn't you tell me any of this before?"

"I wanted to be sure," Norma said. "I could not accuse people...."

"Of course," Lieutenant Warren said.

"But listen! You haven't heard anything," Norma warmed to her subject. "He has a grand pose, didn't want to do my snapshots for me, said he couldn't waste his time and money."

"And you said—"

"I said, 'You wouldn't be wasting your money because I mean to pay you!'" At that they both laughed.

"Oh, it's been like doing a part in a play," Norma exclaimed. "Just as if I had been drilled in advance for every act!"

"And did he do your pictures for you?"

"Of course, but Miss Warren—" Suddenly Norma's face grew tense. "He held out on me. He kept the one I took of the Spanish hairdresser at Fort Des Moines."



*"I Had to Be Sure Before Accusing
People."*

"The Spanish hairdresser?"

"Yes. Don't you remember her? She and Lena seemed to be great friends. She did Lena's hair for her every other day and I doubt if she always was paid for it ... I followed her and Lena." Unthinkingly, Norma raced on.

"Followed them?"

"Yes, in Des Moines."

"Why?"

"I don't know why, I just did, that's all. They went into a dark repair shop on a spooky side street. I followed them in and the door closed behind me. It locked itself. I couldn't get out."

"Girl alive!" Rita Warren exclaimed sharply. "You might have been murdered!"

"Yes," Norma drew in a deep breath. "Yes, but I wasn't."

"What happened?"

"Some man gripped my arm. He seemed very angry. Then, suddenly, he changed and was very polite."

"Why?"

"Because he knew I was a WAC."

"But you said it was dark!"

"It was—I guess he knew me by the fine wool in my coat. That's one time when it really paid to wear my uniform."

"It may have saved your life," was the Lieutenant's slow comment. "He wouldn't have dared harm a WAC. Not in Des Moines. That would have brought the town down on his head."

"But, wait!" Rita Warren's voice rose as she continued. "How does Lena fit into the picture? Why did this Carl Langer hold out your picture of this Spanish hairdresser? Or did he? Perhaps the shot was no good. That often happens—"

"It didn't happen this time." Norma's voice dropped to a whisper. "He gave the film to me by mistake this very day. I got a look at it, that's all."

"Let's have another look."

"We can't," Norma whispered. "Someone in a white snow suit waylaid me on the coast road and took it from me, after a fight!"

"A fight!"

"And how!" Norma's voice carried conviction.

"This sounds interesting and rather dangerous." Rita Warren was impressed. "Tell me the rest. Tell me more of Fritz Kurnsen, no—no, I mean your Carl Langer. Fritz was my spy in India. It would be really ridiculous to think they were the same. He was shot, I'm sure!"

"Yes, that's what you think." The words were on Norma's lips, but she did not say them. Instead she said: "Let me see—oh, yes, Carl Langer is very selfish and doesn't work any more than he has to. He refused to take a picture of a poor fisherwoman. And she wanted to send the picture to her son in the service over in Africa."

"He would!" Rita Warren agreed. "That is, if he were Fritz Kurnsen. But tell me about this fight with the white-robed figure."

Norma told her. In a dramatic manner she described the entire battle.

"That's bad!" the Lieutenant exclaimed. "So they cut the wires to the spotter's shed!"

"They must have."

"The war comes closer to us every day. I must put Mr. Sperry, the FBI agent, on the tracks of these people at once—"

"But Lena?" The words slipped out unbidden.

"Lena must look out for herself." Rita Warren's words were spoken in tones cold as ice. "We are in a war. If Lena has been associating with spies, if she's been doing wrong things she must suffer for them."

"But it's not been proven yet."

"Not yet."

"Then there's Rosa," Norma said quietly.

"Rosa? Is she in on this, too?"

"I—I don't know. Just tonight she came in after she had been away a long time, with a strange, secretive look on her face. And back at Fort Des Moines, there was her flashing of light at night and the crazy thing she did at the airport."

"Tell me."

Norma told of the flashing lights and Rosa's book of prayers.

"That sounds innocent enough," said Rita Warren.

"I hoped you'd say that, but the airplane story is, well, sort of different."

Norma told of the time Rosa had come very close to running away with a secret fighter plane.

"What in the world made her do that?" Rita Warren exclaimed, when the story was finished.

"I'm sure I don't know," Norma seemed troubled. Then she exclaimed, "Oh, I'm sorry I told you! I never wanted to suspect anyone of doing anything wrong!"

"It's all right, your telling me," was the reply.

"About Carl Langer, yes!" Norma exclaimed in a low, tense voice. "He's a pig and in spite of the fact that he flatters me, I hate him. But Lena and Rosa—that's different." Her voice dropped. "Rosa's been a good sport and a regular pal. And Lena—well, she practically saved our lives in that storm."

"You forget that she was, at the same time, saving her own life."

"Yes—oh—yes, of course, but, Lieutenant Warren!" Norma's voice rose. "There is still more to be told about Carl Langer!"

"Let's hear it!"

"He keeps black pigeons. They roost on his studio roof. And today," she caught her breath. "Today

I went for a long ride up into the hills. And what do you suppose I saw?"

"An estate all surrounded with palms, with your Carl Langer standing at the door," Rita Warren laughed.

"The picture is perfect." Norma did not laugh. "Only instead of palms there were huge pine trees standing out against the snow. Even the dogs were there, three of them—fierce-looking beasts. And the pigeons were on the barn roof, lots of them."

"And you went up to the door and said: 'Carl Langer, please show me your ancient masterpiece.'"

"I jumped on my bicycle and peddled away as fast as ever I could. I was scared. Scared to the tips of my toes."

"The picture will come later no doubt. What a remarkable coincidence! I must see your Carl Langer!"

"I—I'll take you there. I'd love to."

"I'll go with you. Let me see," Rita Warren considered. "Not tomorrow. I am going to Black Knob, taking three girls out to assist with the spotting. That's just temporary, of course. Later we'll either make it a real center, such as we have here, or enlist more volunteers for the work."

"You—you're not sending me?" Norma asked.

"No, I think not. I need you here as my right-hand man. Then there's this spy business. We must look into that. You won't mind, will you?"

"Of course not. We're all soldiers and must serve where we can do the most good. Of course," Norma added with a touch of longing, "it would be nice to live there a while with that fine, old grandfather, the imp of a child, and all the good Gremlins."

"I'm planning to send Betty," said Lieutenant Warren. "She has a good head for things."

"She certainly has!"

"I'll send Millie and Mary. There'll be other girls arriving tomorrow. You'll have to help train them."

"Looks like a busy time ahead," Norma laughed.

"You don't know the half of it!" Lieutenant Warren agreed.

As they parted for the night, the clock on the mantel struck slowly twelve times.

"Midnight," Norma whispered, slipping out on the porch.

The stars were shining bright. The moon was just rising back of Black Knob. All the planes had gone home. The night seemed very still.

Had she been able to look in at windows at Black Knob, as the good Gremlins do, she might have seen the grandfather and child fast asleep while on the spotter tower a gray-haired woman walked slowly back and forth. And in a warm corner, downstairs, two rough fishermen, guns at hand, nodded sleepily, keeping watch, just in case—

As Norma turned to go in she whispered, "Lieutenant Warren said she would go with me to Langer's place, but not tomorrow. I hope she makes it soon."

CHAPTER XXII

FLIGHT OF THE BLACK PIGEON

"I'm going to miss you terribly," Norma said to Betty, as they all gathered at the fisherman's wharf next day.

"Wish you were going along to Black Knob," said Betty. "I know it's going to be loads of fun, and there might be a thrill or two. Who knows?"

"Thrills," Norma shuddered. She had not fully recovered from the shock of being sat upon by a white-robed figure in the dark. Every muscle in her body ached and there were three long scratches on her cheek.

"Tell me all about it, when you get to work," she whispered, drawing Betty to one side.

"Tell you!" Betty exclaimed. "Why, my voice doesn't carry that far!"

"No, but your hands will." There was a note of secrecy in Norma's voice. "They have a wonderful way of talking to the folks on shore, from over there—"

"Ah! A mystery!" Betty exclaimed in a whisper.

"Just that!" Norma agreed. "Sorry I can't tell you more, but they'll tell you more, when they learn to trust you and that will be very soon, I'm sure.

"Goodbye and good luck." She gripped Betty's hand hard. "Watch out for the bad Gremlins and give my love to Patsy."

"Okay, I will." Betty sprung into the motorboat and they were away.

Norma returned to Harbor Bells to sit by the fire for a long time thinking and dreaming, then to eat her dinner and retire for a few hours of sleep. Her shift at the Sea Tower for the present was to be the wee, small hours of the morning. "The most important of all," had been Lieutenant Warren's words for it. "It is during these hours that thieves, housebreakers, and safe-crackers prowl a city's streets, that ghosts walk, and spies fly the skies or creep beneath the sea."

"And that the bad Gremlins get in their dirty work," Norma laughed.

In spite of their fun Norma knew that the task she was undertaking was a serious one. Rosa and a girl named Marie were to work with her but she was to be in charge.

When at last Norma took her place at the chart table with Rosa at the switchboard and Marie ready for any task that might come her way, there was a sober look on her face such as had seldom been there before.

Two hours passed. Norma's eyelids were growing heavy; the first night was going to be hard. Then the switchboard rattled and Norma repeated after some voice:

"Two heavy twin-motors going south, fast!"

"That's from Kittywake," said Rosa. Norma searched her chart, then marked a spot while Marie was droning through a phone:

"Two heavy twin-motors going south, fast. That's from Kittywake."

"Okay, stand by!" came back in a man's voice.

A moment later the switchboard again rattled and once more Rosa repeated:

"Two heavy twin-motors going south.

"That's from Brink's Point," she said this time.

Norma marked the spot and marveled at the distance that had been covered. "If they're enemy planes!" She chilled and thrilled at the thought of a sky battle.

Before Marie got in her second report, there came a buzz and the man's voice from below reported:

"Those are Army planes of the Ferry Command. A little off their course, but they'll take care of that. As you were."

They all settled back to await the night's next little adventure.

At 3:16 a small plane was reported off Crow Point. It turned out to be a Navy patrol plane that had lost its way in an early morning mist.

A few moments later a wavering light was reported off Preston Beach. The watcher said it was six miles off shore. It was really only one mile and was a lantern atop the mast of a fishing schooner.

And that was the total bag of missing, misled, and enemy planes.

"Not so exciting," was Marie's sleepy comment as they went off duty.

"No," Norma agreed, "but standing guard at the edge of no man's land when nothing happens for months on end over there on the other side isn't exciting either. But let the patrol relax—"

"And then comes trouble." Rosa finished.

"Yes, and if we relax it will come here," said Norma. "Look at last night!"

"Okay," Marie agreed good-naturedly. "When it comes you'll find me right here with you, and I'll hope to do my bit."

"I know you will," said Norma with a friendly grip on the arm.

That first night might have served for the whole week's pattern, and for another half week after that. A plane lost and found, three planes off their course, a fast speed boat taken for a plane, these were the simple little stories recorded in Norma's book. But, for all that, they were learning their tasks, going through their work with greater skill every day, preparing themselves for any world-rocking and nerve-wracking events that lay ahead.

That is not to say that in this week and a half nothing exciting happened. Many things did happen,

but these came during off-duty hours.

One day, with Tom McCarthy as her escort, Norma peddled back to Carl Langer's studio. Her excuse for coming was to leave an unimportant film to be developed, her real reason to talk to Carl Langer about his estate up in the hills.

"Mr. Langer," she said, after the film had been listed and stored away, "that's a fine farm you have back in the hills."

The photographer started and stared.

"So you have seen it." He regained his composure instantly.

"He didn't see me on my bike," she thought.

"Oh, yes," she said. "I rode up that far on my bike."

"That farm," he said, swelling a little with pride, "occupies all my spare time. I am particularly fond of it because it belonged to my father before me."

"You see," his voice took on a conversational tone, "I was born in Portland. My father was a man of business. This farm was for him, you might say, a sideline. He kept a man to farm it. He spent week-ends there. I, too, enjoyed it when I was a boy. So now, you see—" he smiled, "it brings me great pleasure."

"That's quite wonderful," said Norma. "And did your father also raise black pigeons?"

"Black pigeons?" It seemed to Norma that Carl Langer started again, but once more he made a quick recovery. "Pigeons? Oh! No—this is something I have done. These pigeons, they are quite rare."

"I thought they were," said Norma.

"Oh, yes—very rare indeed. I only wish you had come in, when you were by my house. Gladly would I have shown you the choicest ones of the lot. And besides, I have something I should wish to show you. It is in the house, a picture. It is a masterpiece, I think."

"A—a picture," Norma's voice cracked. "There it is," she thought, "but I must not betray myself."

"Oh! A picture," she exclaimed. "A masterpiece—how fine! I'd love to see it. And I have a friend who is very much interested in pictures. But then, she's a very important and busy person."

"Surely she must not be too busy to look at a masterpiece. I truly think it is by Millet, the man who painted the Angelus."

"Oh! Then I'm sure she would come," said Norma. "She's a lover of Millet's work. His characters are so simple, so human and real."

"Ah! I see you also know pictures."

"A little," Norma admitted.

"Bring your friend out any time, just any time." The photographer's face fairly beamed.

"I'll bring her some time," Norma agreed.

"What's all this about a masterpiece?" Tom asked on the way home. "I don't get it."

"Oh, that!" Norma laughed low. "That's a sort of military secret between my big, high chief and myself. When it—well, when the story breaks, you might say, I'll try to let you in on it. But for the present mum's the word."

"Have it your own way," Tom grinned, "but, see here, sister, if you go out to that old geezer's house, don't go alone. Take that from me. I don't like his looks!"

"I won't," Norma agreed.

That night, on lonely Black Knob Island, Betty had a rather weird experience.

To make life safer for the plane spotters on the island, six enlisted men had been sent there. These had taken up their quarters in a small summer hotel that had been closed for the winter. Betty, Millie, and Mary were given rooms at the Norton cabin, but took their meals at the hotel which was presided over by Mrs. Pearl Tratt, a busy, friendly fisherman's wife.

In no time at all, Betty had won her way into the hearts of Patsy and her grandfather.

On this particular night, Betty was sharing the first spotter watch with Grandfather Norton and Patsy, who had not yet retired for the night.

Since the moon was not up, it was quite dark on the spotter stand. Grandfather Norton, who had already begun teaching Betty the deaf and dumb alphabet so she could talk to Norma "by hand," was now introducing her to a device which he had been working on for a long time.

"It's not yet perfect," he explained, "but I think it has great possibilities. With the unaided ear, one seldom spots a plane, by sound, more than six miles away. Even with my imperfect hearing, aided by my listening device, I have been able, more than once, to spot a plane coming from the sea ... American planes, of course ... at a distance of ten miles. Want to try it?" he asked.

"Of course," was Betty's instant reply. "Anything that helps us do our job well is just swell!"

"Well, now," said Grandfather Norton, "this listening device of mine appears to work best on sounds rather close at hand, so we'll just try it out on Joe Tratt. Just you put on these earphones, then I'll turn on the electricity. Got a small electric plant in the furnace room, you know."

"Joe Tratt—" Betty repeated. "What's he going to do, stand off somewhere and shout?"

"No—No!" The old inventor's voice cracked. "Joe always comes in from setting his nets out on the reef about this time. He's coming in now, probably, only his boat's motor doesn't make a great deal of noise, so you don't hear him with the unaided ear."

"Now—you ready?"

"Ready."

He touched a button. A faint light appeared. He put his hand on a large metal horn and began turning it slowly.

"When you pick up the sound of a motor say, 'Now'," he shouted.

For ten seconds she listened intently. Then suddenly she said:

"Now!"

"I'll test it." He swung it back and forth. As the sound of the boat's motor rose and fell with the

turning, Betty told him, by lifting and lowering a hand, how the sound rose and fell. When at last the spot was found where the sound was strongest, she held both hands straight out.

"It's like tuning in on a radio program," she laughed as she continued to listen. "This should be great. I only wish there were an airplane coming in."

"Oh! They'll come!" the old man crackled. "Perhaps sooner than you want them."

As she listened the sound of the motor grew steadily louder. "Coming in," she thought. Then she wondered what it would be like, setting nets off the shores of the British Isles where many subs lurked and planes, like birds of prey, haunted the skies, ready to pounce down upon you.

"Brave people," she thought. "They deserve all that we can do for them."

Tiring of the constant pounding on her eardrums, she nodded to Patsy, at the same time executing a circle with her hand.

Understanding instantly, Patsy began turning the big horn slowly. Gradually the sound of the motor faded into nothing. For a time, Betty caught only the slow wash, wash of waves on the shore. Then, little by little, she began to make out a different sound.

At first only a low snap-snap, like clothes cracking on a distant clothesline, the sound at last became a steady flap-flap that increased in volume with each second.

"I hear wings." She made a motion to Patsy, and the girl stopped turning.

"It's a bad flying Gremlin." Patsy danced up and down in her excitement.

"A seagull," said the more practical grandfather.

The speaker picked up their voices. Betty heard them.

"It's not like a gull's flight," she said. "I've heard them too often. This is something else."

"See!" Patsy danced again. "I told you. It's a Gremlin! A bad, bad Gremlin." Then, "Oh!" She covered her eyes. "I don't want to see him. He may come real close."

"We'll put the spotlight on him," said Grandfather, taking up a portable spotlight and adjusting a switch.

"He's coming right this way," said Betty. "He should pass over us."

"I'll be ready with the light," said Grandfather. "You tell me when."

In the dim light Patsy's face was a strange study, alternating curiosity and fear. Curiosity at last won the day. When at last the searchlight cut across the sky, she was watching, big-eyed and eager.

For ten seconds the light played across an empty sky and then:

"It is a Gremlin!" Patsy cried. "A big, black Gremlin!"

"No!" said Betty. "I'm sorry. It's a black pigeon. I didn't know you kept pigeons."

"We don't," said Grandfather. "What's more, he doesn't belong on this island. He's going straight on. Turn the horn about, Patsy—"

Patsy obeyed and once again Betty heard that steady flap flap of wings.

When the horn had been properly adjusted, she listened until the sound of the pigeon's flight faded into nothing.

For a moment Grandfather Norton studied the pointing horn, then he said:

"That's a homing carrier pigeon. The rookery he is seeking is somewhere near Granite Head. You may have made a very important discovery."

"I—I don't understand," said Betty.

"That pigeon never came all this way from shore by himself. That's not the way of pigeons."

"Then you think he came from a boat?" Betty was beginning to understand.

"Yes, or from an airplane."

"Or a sub." Patsy put in.

"Any of these or even an airplane carrier. Which means," Grandfather went on, "that somewhere on the mainland we have a nest of spies."

"Spies-spies! Oh, yes, spies," Betty murmured. She was thinking of her talks with Norma about many strange doings. There might be something to it after all, she concluded.

"They're up to something," said Grandfather. "Sending messages back and forth like that. Perhaps it's something really big. Just now they're just feeling us out, trying to see how well prepared we are."

"They got a sample the other night," said Betty.

"A very fine sample," the aged inventor agreed. "A very fine sample, indeed. What I fear most is that they may make this island a stepping stone."

"We have some soldiers now," Betty suggested.

"Yes, a few men. We'll have more men later."

CHAPTER XXIII

ROSA FLIES THE SEAGULL

The next day, on the mainland, Norma visited a place of many wonders, perfected some plans, was treated to a great surprise and made an interesting discovery, all in one afternoon.

Norma and Rosa retired as soon as their late night vigil was ended. By mid-afternoon they were up and ready for a prowl.

They struck off on foot over the road leading to the fort on the ridge that overlooked their village, Harbor Bells, and the Sea Tower.

They had gone but a little way when Tom McCarthy overtook them in a jeep. "Hop in," he invited after stopping his car. "I'll give you a lift. Where you bound for?"

"Nowhere in particular," was Norma's reply as they all crowded into the front seat. "We're out for fresh air."

"I'm going up to the fort," Tom said. "There's going to be a little target practice by the big guns. I want to see how good they are."

"Think we'll need their help some of these days?" Norma asked half jokingly.

"Well, now, you never can tell." Tom did not laugh. "There seems to be a difference of opinion. Some think America may be invaded, at least by the air."

"And others think it won't," said Norma.

"That's right," Tom agreed. "Me? I'm keeping my fingers crossed."

"Oh, Tom!" Rosa broke in. "Take us to the fort. I'd just love to see it."

"You're on your way right now," Tom assured her. "At least you'll see the target practice at a distance. And that's really something! But the fort, that's different. Too many secrets in there. It takes a terrific pull to get in."

"I'll bet it's a spooky place!" Rosa exclaimed.

"Oh, absolutely," was the quick reply. "Built right out of solid rock. It would take some bomb to smash into it."

A half hour later they found themselves standing on a sloping hillside, gazing out to sea. And at Norma's side was a handsome young Artillery Major. For the first time in her life, Norma found herself wishing she had remained behind at Fort Des Moines for officer's training. An officer may not date a private in the WACs, no matter how bright and attractive she may be.

For all that even a major can show just any attractive young lady who happens to visit his camp the proper degree of interest and respect due her. And Major Fairchild was not one to neglect this duty.

He explained that the large square far out on the water was not a sail but a target, that it was being towed on a long cable by a small motorboat some distance from it.

He also assured her that those huge guns poking their black barrels from the hillside would soon speak and that, when they did speak, she would do well to plug up her ears.

Some ten minutes later he said, "Now the target is in position."

"Such a long way off," Norma murmured.

"It's as far as Black Knob Island," Rosa exclaimed.

"Just about the same," Tom McCarthy agreed.

"We can blow the top off Black Knob any time we care to," said Major Fairchild.

"Please don't try it," Norma begged, half laughing. "I've got a good pal over there, a very good-looking WAC."

"Are all WACs good-looking?" the Major teased.

"My pal, Betty, is," was the prompt reply. "That's not all, her folks are rich. Her father owns a war plant. They have a Florida estate, a yacht, and all that!"

"And she's a WAC!" The Major whistled.



Even a Major Can Show Interest in an Attractive Lady

"Why not?" Norma's voice rose. "It's our war. We're all in it. One woman gave up a \$20,000 a year job to join the WACs. We have several girls who won the *Croix de Guerre* driving ambulances before France fell. Yes, and some of the girls joined us because their young husbands died at Pearl Harbor, or North Africa. Don't you think that's really wonderful?"

"I salute the WACs." Major Fairchild saluted the girl and she returned it in proper form. And he was not joking either. She could read that in his eyes.

And then Tom McCarthy said, "Get ready. There's the signal. They are about to fire."

"Here." The Major pressed balls of cotton into Norma's hand. "Put these in your ears. Then take these—" He held out a pair of powerful field glasses. "Watch the target. See if they miss. Your eyes are as good as mine."

The terrific flash and the roar of the big gun, together, made the rocks shudder! Norma felt her knees tremble but she held her glasses on the target and was rewarded by a black spot that appeared almost as if by magic on the white square.

"Good! Almost perfect!" she exclaimed. "A little to the right, that's all!"

"And how far from the surface of the sea?" the Major asked.

"Almost on the sea," was the quick response.

"This is important," said the young Major.

"It meant that this shot would have destroyed a submarine if it had been in the place of the target," Norma suggested.

"Good girl! Go to the head of the class," he exclaimed.

"Give the credit to my father," she replied modestly. "He was a major in the last war. He knows a great deal and since I was his only son, he taught me about them."

"Oh! Then we belong to the same tribe," exclaimed the Major. "My father was an officer, too. Very often officers are born and not made. You too will be an officer in time."

"When I'm made an officer," she said with a proud smile, "I'll bring my bars to you and you shall pin them on my shoulders."

"That," he said, "will be a privilege and an honor."

"They invited me to stay in Des Moines and train in the officer's school," she stated in a matter-of-fact tone.

"And why not?" he asked.

"I wanted some actual service first."

"Well, you're getting it." He smiled. "And unless I read the signs wrong, you are going to get your experience in overdoses from now on."

"Oh! Do you think so?"

"I'm sure of it. There are things I can't tell you. Keep your eyes and ears wide open and don't miss any bets. You'll get your bars sooner than you think."

"And now," he handed her the glasses again, "plug up your ears. Here they go."

This time she took things more calmly. But the hit was hard to spot.

"Right at the water's edge," she exclaimed at last.

"Getting better. That's real sub shooting."

"But if the sub comes in the night?" she suggested.

"Then you'll have to get out there in a plane and spot the sub for us with a spotlight."

"That," said Tom, with a good-natured grin, "is my job."

"And I'll fly the plane for you," Rosa volunteered.

"You fly my plane?" Tom gave vent to a roaring laugh.

Rosa's face crimsoned. For a time she did not speak. Then in a slow, even tone, she said: "Try me!"

"All right, I will." This time Tom did not laugh.

"All right, Rosa," Tom said, when their jeep drew up to the fisherman's dock, off which the Seagull lay at anchor, "the plane is yours, if you can fly her."

"You don't mean that!" Norma said in a low tone, as Tom bent over to untie his skiff.

"Sure I do!" he replied promptly. "Give everyone a chance to show what he can do, that's my motto. Climb in. The back seat is wide enough for you and me. We'll have Rosa for our sky pilot."

Norma hung back. "Come on," he urged. "I'll guarantee that no harm will come of it."

Ten minutes later Norma found herself beside Tom in the rear seat. Lines had been cast off and Rosa was warming up the motor. Norma, uneasy, heaved a sigh of relief when she noticed that Tom too could work the controls from where he sat.

As they taxied out from behind the dock, Norma noted that the water was a bit rough but she clenched her hands and said never a word.

The motor began to roar in earnest. Behind them raced the white foam. The plane appeared to skip from wave to wave. Then Tom said:

"Up!"

And up they rose.

Climbing steadily, they rose a thousand feet, two, three, four, five, six thousand. There above the bumpy clouds the plane leveled off and they headed straight for Black Knob.

Tom looked first at Rosa, then at Norma. Then he grinned as he formed the words with his lips, "Great stuff!"

Before they knew it they were over Black Knob and soaring down for a landing.

Near the tiny dock and harbor the water was calm. With real skill Rosa taxied the ship right to the dock where they were greeted with joyous shouts by Betty, Millie, Mary, Grandfather, Patsy, and all the rest.

"Norma," Betty exclaimed when the two were alone, "Rosa wasn't really flying the plane, was

she?"

"She certainly was!" Norma's tone was impressive. "She took off, climbed high, spiraled down, and all the rest!"

"Then that explains—"

"What?" Norma asked.

"Oh! A lot of things."

Norma's mind was too busy to carry this thought through for, as they wandered over the island, she felt like a general looking over a battlefield where the enemy might attack on the morrow. She noted low spots among the rocks where men might land from a plane or a rubber boat, tried to find the marks of high tide and studied with great care the narrow beach beside the harbor.

Why was she doing all this? Perhaps she could not have told herself. She just did, that was all.

After a delicious lunch served at the small hotel that had been made a barracks, they prepared for the return trip.

Again Rosa took the controls and once more she made a perfect take-off.

It was growing dusk now and, as they circled above the island, Norma turned on the spotlight allowing it to play upon the dark clusters of pines, the gray rocks and the cottage roofs. She was astonished to see how clearly everything stood out.

"An enemy plane could bomb it to bits," she said.

"Sure, but why?" Tom asked.

"It's an outpost and so dangerous to approaching enemy ships or planes."

"You mean it could be," Tom corrected. "Just now the few who are here could perhaps protect the island itself. That's about all. But, I say!" he exclaimed. "You're really good with that light!"

"Oh! Sure!" she laughed. "Rosa and I, we're a great team!"

Oddly enough, at that moment she had the feeling of one who acts a part in a drama, a part she is sure to act again. It was strange.

"Rosa," Norma said when at last they were back at Indian Point, headed for Harbor Bells and a good dinner, "I never dreamed you could fly a plane."

"Fly a plane," Rosa threw back her plump shoulders and laughed. "My father is a flier; he is also a guide. In summer he takes hunting and fishing parties deep into the wilds of Canada. Ah! That is the life, to come dropping from the skies like a wild duck and to light on a perfect spot of blue water where almost no one has ever been.

"And," she paused to look into her companion's eyes, "will you believe me? I have done that, too, since I was seventeen years old. Fly!" she exclaimed. "I know you thought I was crazy in Des Moines. And, yes, I was crazy. Crazy to feel the stick in my hands, to hear the motor and feel a plane move.

"Yes, I was crazy. But those boys who made fun of me, those young fliers—I could have flown circles around every one of them. But you, you were very kind to get me out of it so very well. I have you to thank for that. And we'll fly again some time maybe, huh? What do you think?"

"Rosa," said Norma, "you are a dear. And if we do fly again, I shall not be afraid."

After dinner Norma made a call. In her own village she had discovered a bearded veteran of the photographic world, who still did a little work in his own home. He was a picturesque character who, only two years before, had moved from Portland to Indian Harbor.

To this man she had entrusted the pictures she had taken of the poor fisherman's wife.

"How did they come out?" she asked as she entered his small, crowded room.

"Excellently, my dear."

He held up some fairly large prints he had made.

"Oh! You've done them so well!" she exclaimed. "Won't she be pleased!"

"She will," he agreed. "I have a son who works on a Portland paper. With your consent I should like to send him some prints of these studies. They should show up well in the roto."

"So little Norma makes the roto," she laughed. "That would be something. Wouldn't Carl Langer open his eyes!"

"What's that pig got to do with it?" the old man demanded.

"He refused to take her picture. Said he couldn't waste his time."

"My dear," said the old man, "time spent in bringing happiness to those who have very little of this world's goods is never wasted."

"That's right," Norma agreed, "but have you seen Carl Langer's estate? It is truly beautiful."

"Yes, I have seen it. It is attractive. However, Carl Langer did nothing to it. He only bought it."

"Bought it? He told me he inherited it from his father who lived in Portland."

"Neither Carl Langer nor his father lived in Portland. I was there for fifty years. I know. He purchased his estate from the heirs of old Judge Clark. Where he got the money I don't know. But I could make a good guess."

"Ah!" Norma thought as she walked slowly back to Harbor Bells. "So someone else is suspicious! I wonder why Carl Langer lied to me about his estate."

She found herself hoping that Lieutenant Warren would go with her to visit that estate and to look at the picture, the masterpiece, very soon. Yet she found herself dreading it and shuddering a little.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE DECOY BEACON

Once again the following night the trio, Norma, Rosa, and Marie, were on duty in the upper room of the Sea Tower, Rosa at the switchboard, Norma before her charts, and Marie at attention for any emergency.

For more than an hour, save for the clock on the wall that ticked loudly, there was silence in the room.

Then came a buzz at the switchboard.

"That's Beth calling from the Granite Head spotter tower." Norma knew the number. "What does she want?"

"She's relaying a report from Betty at Black Knob," Rosa explained. "They have discovered a light against the sky well out to sea."

"Tell her to ask Betty if it's an airplane light," Norma suggested.

Rosa relayed the message. For a time after that there was silence, and then came a second buzz. Rosa pressed the headphone to her ear and listened intently.

"She says that Betty does not think it is a plane light. It does not move across the sky and doesn't grow brighter as it would if it was coming in. It just sort of sways."

"Light on the mast of some ship," Norma suggested.

"Beth says she suggested that," Rosa explained. "Betty told her it seemed too high."

"Oh! Sublime sweet evening star," Norma sang softly. "How I wonder what you are."

Then came a third buzz. "She says Bess has heard a large plane, a long way off the shore, heading south."

"Might be an enemy bomber," Norma said, and sat straight up.

Marie got the men below on the phone.

Before they could report, the WAC watcher on the water tower roof popped her head through a hole to report the same plane.

Ten seconds later Beth relayed one more message for Black Knob. They, too, had heard the powerful motors of a large plane. It was some distance north of the mysterious light and apparently flying straight toward it. Here surely was a mix-up.

Then the report from the men below came up. No large plane was due anywhere in this region except some new transport planes being flown overland.

"But what would one of these planes be doing fifteen miles out to sea?" was the question that came from the puzzled representatives of the Army.

In the meantime, out on the Black Knob spotter tower, Betty and Grandfather Norton were wracking their brains for answers to all these problems.

"That big plane certainly is going straight for that strange light," Betty insisted.

"There's no denying that," Grandfather Norton agreed, moving his listening horn first this way, then that, to get its exact location.

It was strange, standing there, watching that light and at the same time hearing but not seeing the big plane.

Just then someone stepped out on the platform. It was Lena. Having a day off, she had, strangely enough, chosen to spend it on the island. A fisherman would take her ashore next morning.

"Lena!" Betty exclaimed. "I thought you were fast asleep!"

"I was." Lena shuddered from the chill of the night. "But something woke me up—so I came out here."

"It doesn't take much to waken you," said Betty. "The motor of a distant plane."

"What's up? Why are you so excited?" Lena studied their faces.

"See that light over there against the sky?"

"Yes, I see it."

"What is it?"

"Why that—" Lena broke off suddenly. She seemed greatly disturbed. "I—hear a plane!" she exclaimed suddenly.

"Yes, we've been hearing it for some time," said Grandfather Norton.

"What's it doing out there?" Lena asked. There was a strange quality in her voice. "As if she herself knew the answer," Betty told herself.

"Well," Grandfather Norton spoke slowly, "if I wasn't dead sure that there was nothing but water out there, miles and miles of water, I should say that the light was a beacon to a landing field and that the plane was heading toward it for a landing."

"Oh! But that's impossible!" Betty exclaimed.

"Certainly it is," Norton agreed.

Like a caged animal Lena began pacing the narrow platform. Once Betty thought she heard her murmur tensely, "It's terrible. Just terrible."

What was terrible and how did this big girl know it was terrible?

In the meantime the big plane was coming closer, ever closer to the swaying light. Those on shore, Beth, Bess, Norma, Rosa, and the rest, could hear the plane but could find no answer to the question, "Why is it there?"

Lena continued to pace the platform. Watching her, Betty realized that within the big girl's mind a terrific battle was raging. "What battle?" she asked herself. "And why?"

For a time she found no answer. Then suddenly the answer came. Or was it the answer?

"See here!" Lena exclaimed, suddenly gripping Betty's arm until it hurt. "I can't stand it! That plane is going to come down, close to that light. It will crash. The pilot will be drowned and—and all on the plane—unless—"

"Unless what?" Betty's throat was dry.

"Unless we go to the rescue!" Lena pulled at her arm. "There's not a moment to lose."

"But we have no plane." Betty stared first at Lena, then at Norton. It was a tense moment of indecision.

"There's a motorboat, a pretty fast one. I can run it, you know that!" Lena's voice was tense with emotion.

"Yes, I know. Norma told me how you saved them."

"Then come on. Come on, now! We—" Lena's voice broke; she did not finish.

Betty looked at Grandfather. He did not speak, merely nodded his head.

"All—" Betty gulped, "all right, I'll go!"

Instantly the two girls were down from the tower and racing like mad for the dock.

Once at the dock Lena unscrewed the gas tank cap, flashed a light down into the tank, then, after a few twists at the cap said, with astonishing calmness:

"Get in. We are off."



*"There's Not a Moment to Lose!" Lena
Exclaimed*

Strange questions and wild emotion came and went over Betty's active mind as they headed straight for that light and at full speed.

"Has this girl lost her mind?" she asked herself. "Or does she know some terrible secret? Will the plane really come down?" For the moment she found no answer. But the answer must come soon. Even as she thought this Lena exclaimed:

"There! What did I tell you? The plane is beginning to circle. It will come down. It is flying high, but it will come down."

This Betty knew was true. The sounds that came from the plane told the whole story.

As she watched, frightened, yet fascinated, she tried to measure the time it would take for the plane to come down. Now it must, she thought, be a quarter of the way down, now a half, and now three-quarters of the way. Her heart skipped a beat. What plane was this? Would it really crash? Was it friend or foe? Should she hope for a crash or an upward swing just in time? Her brain was in a whirl.

"The light has vanished!" Lena exclaimed suddenly.

It was true. The light had blinked out.

Still the plane came down, rapidly. There seemed no stopping it now. After breathing a prayer, Betty began to count. One, two, three, four—she had reached twelve when there came the sound of a muffled crash.

"Now, if only we can save them," she thought with a tightening of her throat. And yet, after all, who were they?

While Lena kept the boat at its utmost speed, Betty stood in the prow and strained her eyes for some sign of the wreck.

At last her vigil was rewarded.

"There's a tiny light. But perhaps that's the one that disappeared."

"It is not that one!" Lena headed straight for it.

The light grew brighter. A dark bulk loomed ahead. Betty heard a voice calling. A woman's voice. That, she thought, was strange.

They came closer. "Are you hurt?" she called.

"No, we're not hurt," a woman's voice answered.

"But please hurry," came in a different voice. "The plane may sink."

"We've been hurrying, quite a while," Betty called.

"How did you know we'd crash?" came back.

"I didn't. We—we just came," said Betty.

"That light was a decoy," came from the plane.

"You thought there was a field here?" Betty suggested.

"We were off our course and our gas was low," one voice explained. "We came down to see."

"And I took the plane too far," the other explained.

"Well, now you're safe enough," Betty said a minute later as Lena eased the boat in close to the plane's wing where the two women sat. At the same time she threw her light upon them. They were, she discovered, surprisingly young and, beyond a shadow of doubt, Americans. At that moment words from a very old book came to her. 'An enemy hath done this.'

"But what about our plane?" one of the girls on the plane asked. "We are of the Ferry Command. It's worth a lot of money."

"And it's hardly damaged at all," said the other.

"It's equipped with sort of water-wings that can be filled with gas in just no time," said the first one.

"Why don't you fill them?" Betty asked. "We'll stand by."

"We will!" They both sprang up. "We'll be right back. Right back."

A moment later there came a hissing sound and the plane began to lift slowly.

"The water is smooth. I'm sure we can save the plane," said Lena.

"Listen!" Betty said. "There's a boat coming."

Before the two girls returned, their arms loaded with personal belongings, two fishing boats pulled alongside. One was quite long, the other small.

"What happened?" Joe Tratt asked.

"They crashed," Betty explained. No mention of the decoy light. That would come later.

"We're going to try towing it in," said Lena.

"I'll help you," said Joe. "My boat draws a lot of water. Bill can take you all in. His boat is small."

So it was agreed. Betty and the two strange girls piled into Bill's boat. Betty called, "So long and good luck!" Then they were away.

"Lena is the strangest girl I ever knew," Betty told herself as she settled in her place. She wanted terribly to talk, but if she did, she might say the wrong thing. So she said never a word—not, at least, until she sat across a table from Grandfather Norton in his secret den. Then she really opened up.

They talked for an hour. The old man's voice was mellow. His words came slowly, thoughtfully, from a well-stored mind. Betty was not a child and still at times she sprang to her feet to exclaim, "Lena knew it was going to happen. She really knew!"

"Perhaps," was the slow reply. "Then again, perhaps not. Some people are gifted with intuition, particularly women."

"Yes, I know, but—"

"Even I suggested first that the plane might try to make a landing," he added. "There was the whole set-up, night, a plane seeking a landing place, and a light that seemed a beacon."

"And at the most, we must admit," he added thoughtfully, "that this big friend of yours, Lena, might well have been the means of saving lives. It was a mere chance that saved the plane."

For a time after that there was silence. Then he spoke again.

"It would seem that, after all, we are discussing a minor problem. The real problem is, who put out that decoy light, if it was a decoy, and how did they take it down?"

"Decoy?" Betty exploded. "Of course it was a decoy to lure our airplanes into the sea."

"Perhaps. Let's pass that up for the moment and ask ourselves how the light got there. Did you see or hear any surface craft leave the spot?"

Betty shook her head. "Not a sign, nor an airplane either."

"Then, only a sub could have put up that light. With a long telescoped steel pole, like a giant fishing rod, guyed by wires, they could hang out a very high light."

"It might have been an electric light on a wire," Betty suggested. "Then they could have blinked it out on the instant."

"Certainly. And when the plane came close, that's what they did. Has it not occurred to you that they might have been afraid of the plane?"

"I think they were afraid of us."

"With the plane thundering overhead, they could not have heard your motor. I fancy they thought the plane was out to bomb them. More than likely they crash-dived."

"Then why the light?" Betty was more puzzled than ever.

"That is a big sub. These large subs carry small seaplanes that can be catapulted from their deck. If their plane was out landing spies on our shores or spying out the land itself, they may have had a beacon out to guide it back."

"That," Betty laughed, "is good enough for a night cap. I'm going to retire. Goodnight!" She was gone.

When, at dawn, Lena and Joe Tratt arrived at the harbor the big girl appeared ready to drop. And yet, as soon as the plane was safely grounded on the sandy beach, she hired a fisherman to take her ashore.

Once there, she drank three cups of black coffee and then, still teetering on her toes, she climbed the stairs, entered her room, threw off her coat and shoes, and crept under the blankets to fall fast asleep.

CHAPTER XXV

THE MASTERPIECE

Early that afternoon, Norma, who had cut her sleeping hours short, joined Lieutenant Warren in one of those toy-like cars, known as peeps, and went spinning down the shore road.

Their first stop was the cottage occupied by Bess and Beth. School, Norma had learned, was out because of a teacher's convention so the twins were free to go with them to the spotter shed.

There they were able, with Beth's help, to hold a long, hand-to-hand conversation with Betty.

It was evident at once from the nervous movements of Betty's hands before the television camera that the affair of the night before had left her greatly excited.

They discussed the situation very thoroughly.

As they left the spotter shed Lieutenant Warren said, "It looks very much as if we were heading straight into a crisis of one sort or another. Such things as these can't go on. Big planes don't always crash-land safely in the sea."

"They seldom do," Norma added.

"That black pigeon of Betty's was taken from the shore by some traitor to our cause, and put aboard some craft."

"Probably the sub," Norma suggested.

"Yes, and in this way every secret of our defense will in time leak out."

"And any number of spies may land on our shores. Which leads us—"

"To Carl Langer, his black pigeons, his rich estate, his masterpiece, and, just perhaps, to the Spanish hairdresser." Norma found herself rather breathless at the end of this speech.

"You hope for too much," was the Lieutenant's quiet comment. "However, we will present Carl Langer with our calling card."

The photographer was not at his studio but the girl who kept the shop in his absence offered to call him at the big house.

"Tell him that Norma Kent and Lieutenant Warren would like to see his masterpiece," said Norma.

Word came over the wire at once that the great, little man would be delighted to see them.

"Now," said Norma, as they drove through the gate, "if his three huge dogs don't eat us up, peep and all, we'll get on fine."

Black pigeons, looking like dwarfed nuns, sat in rows on the barn roof, but no dogs appeared to announce their coming.

For all the world as if he had been watching at the keyhole, the photographer, whose hair seemed whiter and more bristling than ever, threw open the door the instant they rang the bell.

"Come in! Come in!" he welcomed.

"Mr. Langer, this is Lieutenant Warren," said Norma.

For a brief space of time he studied the newcomer's face intently. But Rita Warren was older than when she was in India. Then, too, she had made her face up rather well for the occasion and was wearing tinted glasses. Add to this fact that a woman's olive-drab uniform is in itself something of a disguise, and it may not seem strange that at first, at least, he did not recognize her.

"But then," Norma chided herself, "more than likely he is not the man at all. Spies who are shot seldom show up somewhere else!"

If Lieutenant Warren recognized the man, neither Norma nor Carl Langer could have detected it from her action. She thanked him for his interest and repeated her desire to see his masterpiece.

"You shall see it at once," he assured them. "After that we will have some tea—tea brought straight from India. You don't often get that. But first—"

He stepped to a table to press a hidden buzzer that sounded in a distant room.

"Is that for a servant or a couple of murderers?" Norma asked herself with a shudder. To Lieutenant Warren she whispered, "India!"

Lieutenant Warren lifted her eyebrows—that was all.

"Now if you will come this way," said their strange host, leading the way.

As they passed down a long corridor, Norma stole a glance or two into other rooms. In one, whose door stood ajar, she saw an open traveling bag, half packed.

"What is that for?" she asked herself.

At the far end of the hall they entered a room where but one light shone. This came from a long slender tube close to the ceiling. This light fell upon a large canvas.

Striking a pose, Carl Langer said, "Well, what do you think?"

For a full sixty seconds he received no answer. They all stood there looking at the picture. One of those simple things that can, if well done, be magnificent, it showed a peasant youth and a maid in her middle teens seated among the stubble of a partly mown field. Beside them were their scythes and rake and a rustic lunch basket. Back of them was a shock of wheat and behind that the waving grain. On their faces were smiles and over their faces played the sunlight.

"It's lovely," was Norma's comment.

"It may be a Millet," Lieutenant Warren said slowly. "Surely it is like his work, but some of the colors are a little strange. There are overtones—"

"To be sure," Carl Langer laughed hoarsely. "The picture has been neglected. I found it in an old

church in a French-Canadian village. I am restoring it."

Norma saw Lieutenant Warren start and stare. But she said never a word as they left the room.

As they prepared to take tea in the sunny living-room, a small brown man entered with a tray.

"You need not be afraid of Hanada," said Langer with a forced laugh. "It is true that he is of Japanese blood, but his home is in India. He has never seen Japan."

At that the little brown man showed all his teeth in a grin.

"I brought him with me from India," was the hasty reply.

"So you have lived in India? How grand!" Norma exclaimed.

"Yes, I practiced my art there for several years. Only four years ago, I sold out and came to America."

"Ah-ha," Norma breathed.

"Has your successor been successful?" Lieutenant Warren asked in an even tone.

"Oh, yes, indeed. In fact, he has become a permanent resident," was the odd reply.

"I shouldn't wonder," said Lieutenant Warren.

Norma barely suppressed a laugh. So it was the man who followed Carl Langer in India who had been shot as a spy!

All during the tea Carl Langer seemed ill at ease. His eyes often sought the room in which an open traveling bag awaited his return.

"Wonder if he is going on a journey?" Norma thought. The answer was—yes, a long, long journey.

"We'll have to be going back," Lieutenant Warren said at last. "Our watch changes very soon, and I must be there."

Their host expressed polite, but uneasy regrets. They bade him a polite farewell and were away.

As their car started they were greeted by a loud roar as three huge dogs came leaping at their peep. They were, however, quite safe in the car; so, avoiding running over one of the beasts, they glided out of the gate and were away.

"Well?" Norma breathed deeply.

"Believe it or not," said Lieutenant Warren, "he is my spy of India. I shall get Mr. Sperry on his trail first thing in the morning."

CHAPTER XXVI

A SUB—ON THE SPOT

Shortly after noon of that same day rain squalls came sweeping in upon Black Knob. It whipped the waters into foam and hid the island from all the world.

Riding the crest of this storm, three small craft approached the island from the east. One, boasting a small and ragged sail, towed a second. The third was being rowed by six rugged seamen who swung their long oars as men sometimes seem to do in their sleep.

It was Betty who first discovered them. She had wandered down to the dock when she saw them looming out of the fog.

At first she was frightened, but a second look told her that no invading force would be so poorly equipped so she raced away to the fishing village to tell the news.

At once two fishing boats took off. In due time they came in, with the boats in tow.

By that time everyone on the island was down by the dock.

There were men, women, and children in that boat, seventy-six of them in all, and they were a sorry sight.

"Ours was the Mary Sachs," one seaman explained. "She were a coastwise steamer bound for Baltimore. We had these ladies an' children with us as passengers."

"It were a sub to be sure," another took up the story. "They torpedoed us without warning."

"Yes," a woman broke in shrilly, "and they had an airplane with them. The plane swooped down and machine-gunned our lifeboats. Look at Sally here." She held up a child whose face was white as a sheet. "Both her legs are broken."

"We had a doctor with us. Thank God for that," said another woman. "He fixed her up good as he could."

Betty swallowed hard as she put out her hands for the child. Then, with sturdy tread she led the battered and half frozen band to the hotel where a great fire of driftwood roared up the chimney.

All that afternoon the WACs and, in truth, every other person on the island, worked with the ship's doctor making their new-found friends comfortable.

Cots and beds were improvised. Every available blanket or quilt was pressed into service. Great kettles of beef, beans, and soup boiled constantly on the hotel's range. It was only toward night that Betty felt free to creep away to the log cabin for an hour of rest.

Little Patsy went with her, but did not remain long. Soon she was out wandering among the rocks, keeping an eye out for bad Gremlins.

Just before dark Mr. Sperry, the FBI agent, made a surprise visit to the cabin. Grandfather Norton was there. Betty was wakened by Sperry's knock on the door, so these three shut themselves in the Norton den.

"I came over here looking for a spy," Sperry announced.

"A spy!" Grandfather Norton exclaimed. "We are all loyal people out here."

"You don't understand," said Sperry. "He was last seen heading this way in a small motorboat."

"It's that photographer over at Granite Head," he explained to Betty. "You may know him."

"Oh—oh, yes!" Betty was startled. "He did all our work. I never dreamed—well, yes, there were some queer things about him."

"Queer!" the secret agent exploded. "I'd say so. He's one of the most dangerous men on foot. We've been looking for him. He was a spy in India. Got out just in time to save his neck. He'll do the same thing here if he can. You haven't seen a small motorboat?"

"No motorboat," was Mr. Norton's reply. "Three lifeboats came ashore shortly after noon. They were in a sorry plight. Their ship had been torpedoed by a sub."

"Ah! Those subs," Sperry clenched his fists. "There are rumors of a sub being seen off shore here this very afternoon. Fisherman coming in from the Banks claims he saw it. All our small boats are out scouting for it. But me, I'm after just one man; and his name's Carl Langer!"

"Well, we haven't got him," said the gray-haired inventor. "But if we see him, we'll hold him for you. Never doubt that."

"I'll have a look about the island." Sperry was up and away.

A half hour later, just as Betty was thinking, "I should be out on the spotter platform right now," Patsy came crashing through the door. Her face was white, her eyes bulging.

"The sub!" she whispered hoarsely. "It's so close! I saw it! And there was a small boat, yes, and an airplane. There were men, many big men. I think they have come to carry us away."

"This," Betty thought, as she stood up, with shaking knees, "this is not one of Patsy's dreams about Gremlins. It's the real thing."

Thirty seconds later she was racing with Norton and Patsy for the hotel.

"They're invading the island," Betty exclaimed as they burst into the lounge room of the hotel. "There's a sub, a boat, an airplane, and many men."

"Where? Where? Where?" came in a chorus.

"Where?" Betty turned to Patsy.

"By Bald Head," was the prompt answer.

"The other end of the island," Grandfather Norton explained in a steady voice.

Instantly there was a rush for the door. But Grandfather Norton was there before them.

"Steady, boys," he held up a hand, "you're not going to a picnic. I don't know why those men are there, but I do know they are armed. We must organize our party."

"That's right, sir!" an Army sergeant agreed. He gave an order to his men. They disappeared.

Next instant the door opened, silently, and in stepped Sperry. His eyes were wide, his tongue fairly hanging out. "I ran into a hornet's nest," he whispered. "I got away just in time!"

What he had to say left no room for doubt. A fight was in the making.

When the Army squad returned it was with arms loaded. There were rifles, tommy-guns, pistols, and stacks of ammunition.

Then after one weapon had been selected for each Black Knob man, the sergeant said, "Take your pick."

Instantly, from every corner, came the men whose boat had been struck.

"We'll kill the rats," the burly seaman snarled. His right arm was in a sling, but with his left he gripped an automatic.

"Somebody find me a cane," one seaman begged. His leg was bandaged and splinted. "I'm the best darn shot in the crew. That's what I am!" From somewhere a crutch was produced.

One man half rose from his cot, whirled about, then fell on the floor. "No! Not you, Tom!" The doctor's voice was gentle. "You're too badly broken up."

It was a motley and dangerous crew that at last marched silently out into the night.

In the meantime things were happening fast at Harbor Bells.

While preparations were being made for the battle Patsy had slipped back to the cabin. There she wakened Millie and Mary, who were to take the midnight watch. With their help she set up the television camera and began telling the exciting news to Beth and Bess.

As fast as the words were told off by Patsy's talking hands, Bess phoned them to Norma at the Sea Tower.

Norma got Tom on the phone.

"Tom! Oh! Tom!" she stammered with excitement. "The sub is out by Black Knob, and the plane, too. If you could just go out and spot it, the big guns would blow the sub from the sea!"

"We'll go!" said Tom. "You and I!"

"Oh, Tom!"

"You'll have to go!" Tom's voice insisted. "There's not a man in the harbor who knows the tricks. They're all out in boats looking for that sub."

"All right, Tom. I'll meet you at the dock." She hung up.

"Marie!" she commanded. "You keep the switchboard. Rosa, get your coat and come with me."

One minute more and they were joined by Lieutenant Warren, who somehow had learned the news. Then all three raced for the dock.

Norma was faster than the others. She arrived in sight of the dock just in time to see a ghostly figure emerge from the shadows, leap at Tom, who was just coming to the dock, and deal a heavy blow with some blunt instrument square on his head. Without a sound, Tom dropped like an empty sack.

Norma had seen that white-robed figure before. She had battled with it and won. Not the least afraid, without warning, she landed upon it with a head-on blow that sent it crashing against a wall. It crumpled into a white heap and lay there like a pile of snow.

"Wha—what happened?" Lieutenant Warren panted, as she came racing up.

In a few, well-chosen words, Norma told her. "It's terrible!" she groaned. "Tom is out for keeps. Per-perhaps he's dead. We can't go!"

"We *can* go!" Rosa insisted stoutly. "I can pilot the plane as well as Tom could!"

"What do you think?" Norma turned to the Lieutenant.



*A Ghostly Figure Leaped at Tom and
Dealt a Heavy Blow*

"I'll not command you," was the slow and steady answer. "But if you two wish to volunteer for the task, I shall not stop you.

"I'll take care of Tom," she added. "There are fishermen near who will help me."

One minute more and the two girls were rowing rapidly toward the Seagull that was to fly them into new perils.

On Black Knob the battle lines were forming. Never had a band of Indians, in the days long since gone, moved more swiftly or silently than the island's defenders. And they were bent on swift vengeance.

Driven on by an irresistible impulse, Betty followed the last man, the one with a crutch.

As she glided through the night, one question was uppermost in her mind. Why were those men with sub, motorboat, and plane there? The sub had come from the sea, the plane from the sub, and the motorboat from the land. One thing was plain. They had chosen this island as a place of meeting. But why? And how—how had they dared?

"They haven't scouted the island recently," was her conclusion. "They thought it was occupied only by old men and women. Well, they'll soon know better. Just one more ridge and we are there!" Her pulse quickened.

Just as they left the grove of pines, the moon came out. A shadowy figure rose above the crest of the ridge. There was something vaguely familiar about that figure. One second it was there, the next it was gone, for rifles had cracked. The fight was on. There came shouts from beyond. They raced up the ridge. Their fire was returned, but feebly. There was the sound of scrambling feet. A motor roared, then another.

It was all over in a minute, and over forever for three huddled figures that would never move again.

"Enemies," Betty thought. "Perhaps they helped machine-gun women and children." Yet, in a way, she was sorry.

She flashed her light on the nearest figure. Then she gasped. It was Carl Langer. This time the spy had really been shot.

When the men reached the shore the moon was under a cloud again, the sub had vanished, the motorboat heading out to sea, and the airplane thundering somewhere in the sky.

Or was it the Seagull they heard out there over the black waters? One thing was sure—it was there. At the controls sat Rosa. Norma was casting her light about in search of the sub.

"We'll find the sub if we can," she had phoned to the major over at the fort. "When I hold the light on one spot, you'll know we've found it."

"We'll be waiting and watching," had been his answer. "Ready to blow them into Kingdom Come!"

And so now they circled slowly back and forth.

Only one question troubled her, and that was, "Is that enemy plane still in the air?"

"If that plane is armed and they attack us?" she said to Rosa.

"We will climb too fast for them," was the calm reply.

And then Norma's light fell upon something, a white spot. Not the sub. She was disappointed. Then her heart leaped. Off to the right was a long, dark bulk.

"The sub," she said aloud. "And that's the motorboat. They are coming together."

With all the skill she possessed she held her wide spot of light on the sub. Slowly, surely, the sub and the motorboat moved closer together. Breathlessly she awaited the roar from the shore.

"The major can't fail us," she clenched her teeth. "He must not!"

They were losing altitude and coming closer to the sub. Suddenly they were surrounded by balls of smoke and flame.

"Pom-poms!" she screamed to Rosa. "The sub is firing at us!"

The plane gave a sudden lift and shuddered.

"We are hit." But still they glided on.

Then came the distant roar.

"Thank God!" Norma screamed. "Climb, Rosa! Climb!" But they did not climb. They could not. The Seagull had been hit.

The first shot from the fort was quickly followed by another. Both shells burst almost beneath them, giving them a lift they would not soon forget. The shells, Norma saw, must have found their mark for, when she played her light on the water she found only tiny bits of something. The sub and motorboat had vanished.

"Quick, Rosa!" she cried. "Head for the shore."

"We will go to shore," was the slow reply. "Perhaps we shall go, but not quick. The Seagull, she is hit. She may die."

Norma came to realize this more and more as the gallant plane sank slowly toward the sea.

They were in close to land when, with a suddenness that was startling, the seaplane's motor stopped and then they plunged into the sea.

Norma hit the water hard. She sank. She rose. She sank again and then, as she rose, she began to swim.

"I'm not hurt," she told herself. "The water is terribly cold, but I can keep up for a time."

Her time was about up. Her body was numb with cold, her breath was coming in gasps when she became conscious of someone near her.

Then a voice said, "Put your hand on my shoulder. I'll take you in."

"Rosa?" she panted. "I can't do that, you'll drown!"

"Not Rosa," said the voice. "I am Lena. Believe me, I am fresh and strong. Put your hand on my shoulder."

"Lena!" she thought. "Why is she here? She is always where danger is."

At that she surrendered herself to the other's superb strength.

They had gone so for some time, when a skiff pulled in close to them. One man held a lantern. Another put out two hands to pull her in. It was the major from the fort.

Several hours later she awoke from a long sleep to find Lieutenant Warren sitting by her side.

"Everything is all right," the Lieutenant smiled. "More than all right. You got the sub and the motorboat, everyone on it. The sub was bringing spies to America. In their haste they left their traveling bags on the island. They were packed with American clothes, faked passports, everything. Then they had plans, maps, all they needed for destroying factories and shipyards.

"I think," she added, "that they meant to take Carl Langer back with them on the sub."

"But they didn't," Norma whispered.

"Lena has confessed," Lieutenant Warren added.

"Con-confirmed? Lena?" Norma's heart sank.

"She was part of the spy ring, a very small part, and against her will. Her uncle drove her to it by terrible threats. She is a loyal American at heart. She has turned state's witness. That will trap the real culprits and she, I think, will go free."

"I'm glad," Norma murmured. "And Rosa?" she asked after a moment's reflection.

"Oh! Rosa? She's a dear. Loyal all the way through."

"I know. But she was in the plane with me!"

"Oh—yes, of course! She wasn't thrown from the plane.

"We found her paddling about on a rubber raft, still searching for you."

"Good old Rosa," Norma murmured. "So I was partly right and partly wrong about all this spy business?"

"Yes. It is often like that."

"How's Tom?" Norma sat up suddenly.

"Tom's all right," was the reply. "He came round almost at once. And was he mad when he knew you were gone!"

"Then he wasn't really injured?"

"She couldn't hit him very hard."

"She?"

"Yes, the Spanish hairdresser. You guessed right there again. She turned out to be a professional spy, the lowest creature on earth. Sperry knew her the moment his eyes fell on her. She's through spying for good and all."

"Someone took my camera twice," said Norma. "Perhaps she did that."

"No. I'm sorry to tell you, but that was Lena. The pictures she took, however, were of no consequence."

"And the enemy plane from the sub?" Norma suggested as she settled back on her pillow.

"It was shot from the air by one of our fighter planes."

"Looks as if we have been in on something really big and carried it off," Norma murmured sleepily.

"There will be promotions all round," was the happy reply. "Very soon you will be wearing bars on your shoulders."

"Oh! And Major Fairchild is to pin them on," Norma exclaimed. "That will be one big day!"

"They're sending WACs to Africa now," Rita Warren said after a time.

"Shall we be sent there?"

"I don't know. Would you like to go?"

"I'm too tired to think about it." At that Norma turned over and was soon fast asleep.

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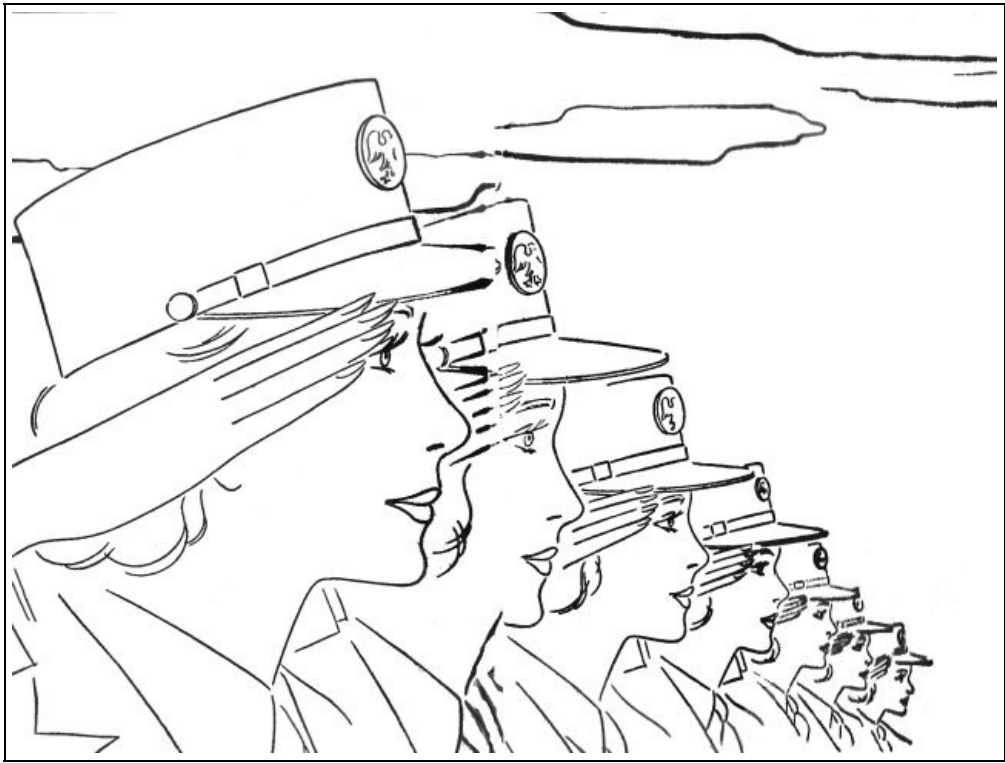
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Transcriber's Note

Punctuation has been normalized. Variations in hyphenation have been retained as they were in the original publication. The following changes have been made:

Her {principle --> principal} task is keeping the bad Gremlins away. {p. 144}
POLLY {AT --> OF} PEBBLY PIT {dust jacket advertisement}

The following discrepancy exists in the original:

The index lists the title for Chapter I as "Mrs. Hobby's Horses" while in the text, the title is "GIRLS IN UNIFORM."

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