

FRONT-LINE NURSE

WILLIAM STARRET

CHAPTER III

Laura Blake, army nurse, after active duty in New Guinea, has been back in the United States making a speaking tour to recruit girls for the Nurse Corps. But she longs to return to the Southwest Pacific, especially on her fiancé, Jerry Donaldson, bomber pilot is out there. Finally she receives orders to report in Washington to learn her next assignment. Arriving there she shares a taxi to the Pentagon building with Col. Bob Beston, flying ace who distinguished himself in China, and who also wants to get back to the front after a tour of duty as a flying instructor in Texas. He makes a date with Laura for dinner. Laura gets her orders to report to New York instead of San Francisco as she had hoped. She receives a telegram from Jerry in San Francisco and wires him to meet her at the Manhattan hotel in New York.

Her eyes swept the lobby as she almost ran through it to the desk. No sign of Jerry.

The clerk of the desk was the same one who had been so helpful the day before.

"No—no word of him yet," he called, as Laura approached. "I've checked with the others, too. There's no slip-up, I'm sure. And I'll be able to give you a room tomorrow morning."

"I won't be here to need a room tomorrow morning!" Laura cried. It was Laura who spotted Jerry first—about an hour later. She saw him as he pushed through the revolving door with such a shove that it almost swept a very dignified matron off her feet. He came bounding up the steps from the door, looking eagerly through the crowd.

It was in the middle of the lobby that Laura intercepted him—and there, oblivious to everyone around them they threw their arms around each other and clung tight. "What's all this?" Jerry exclaimed. "You'll think you had to get the cops out after me and all the time I've been breaking my neck to get here. Don't you realize, Laura my love, that I've broken just about all records for a trip from Australia to New York? And now these people are all saying 'She found him!'"

Laura laughed. "I'll tell you all about it," she said. "And how did you manage to get here so quickly from San Francisco?"

"Flew," Jerry said. "I was haughtily the airport out there, but without much hope, since I had no priority or anything. And then some nice guy happened to hear me telling my story for the umpteenth time to the ticket man and he said I could have his place. Just an ordinary guy traveling on business—but with a heart of gold I'll tell you."

"That's wonderful!" Laura cried. "And now let's go somewhere where we can talk."

"Where?" asked Jerry. "Where are you staying? Here?"

"It's almost time for lunch," Laura said. For some reason she could not tell him—yet—that she was staying nowhere after eight that evening.

"Okay, but I've got a couple of bags somewhere—dropped them here. Shall I check them for you now?"

"I've got them sir," said a bell outside when I got out of the cab" guess," Jerry agreed. "I'll worry about them later. Thanks."

As the bellboy ran off with Jerry's bags, the detective stepped forward.

"If you'll pardon me," he said, "we people in the hotel here get mighty interested in seeing you two people get together, what with your close connections—and all. We know you don't have any folks in New York, and so we thought—well, if you've got some other idea it's perfectly okay. You can do whatever you like, of course, but just in case you didn't have anything to do specially—"

At that moment the bellboy came back with the checks for Jerry's bags.

"What'd they say?" the bellboy asked the detective in a stage whisper.

"Shhh," whispered back the detective, "I ain't got around—"

"Luke's having a hard time saying his speech," Laura said. "Go ahead, Luke. Whatever it is, I'm sure it's verf nice You've all been so swell."

"Well, here it is," Luke said. "There may not be any regular rooms in this hotel right now, but there are private dining rooms, and we—the bellboys and clerks and loormen and all—sort of thought you might like to have lunch in one of them—as our guests, see?"

"Why, Luke, that's wonderful!" Laura cried, and she felt tears in her eyes. "Such swell people!"

"Gosh!" Jerry exclaimed. "But is it all right, Luke?"

"Does the management—"

"Say the manager and assistant manager are both in on the deal, too," said the detective. "We told them about it. It's all arranged already. Even the chief knows."

"He's got something nice planned of course, if there's something else you wanted to do—"

"We don't know where to go," Jerry said. "And what we want to do is look at each other and talk to each other. Just lead the way, Luke!"

So Luke proudly led them to a small private dining room where a table for two was already laid. And in a few minutes, two waiters appeared with trays containing a delicious meal.

But Laura and Jerry really had eyes and ears only for each other. "I don't like this a bit," Jerry said suddenly.

"Don't like what?" demanded Laura. "The meal? Why, Jerry, it's marvelous!"

"Not the meal! It is wonderful! notice me—that's all."

Jerry muttered. "You don't really Laura laughed. "Why, Jerry, you know perfectly well I've been beaming at you like a lovesick calf! What on earth are you talking about?"

"Only these little things on my shoulders, that's all," Jerry said. "Nothing important!"

Laura jumped up. She really had not noticed the captain's bars on Jerry's shoulders.

"Captain Donaldson!" she cried, throwing her arms around him. "I'm so sorry!"

"And now," Jerry said, "let's get married this afternoon!"

Laura's objection to Jerry's proposal was that she had to leave that evening. She had put off telling him this, had dreaded breaking the news, but now she had to—and that touched off their first argument.

"This evening?" Jerry cried in dismay. "Why, Laura, you just can't leave so soon!"

"The Army says I can and will," she replied.

"But listen—after I raced half way around the world to you, you can't rush off in just a few hours!"

"Jerry, don't be silly. You know there's nothing I can do about it. I've got orders and I've got to follow them. It's terrible to have so little time together, but let's be thankful that you didn't arrive in New York tomorrow, after I'd gone—and let's make the most of this one afternoon."

"Okay—that's my idea exactly," said Jerry. "Let's get married just as I said, and make this day a really important one, even if it so short."

"We are sure of each other's love," Laura said. "Surely marriage would make us no more certain of one another. The ceremony wouldn't tie us any closer together than we are. We'd be tied together legally, but that is not what we want, either one of us. We want to be tied by our feelings and not any other way if our feelings don't hold us together. Well, they do, so far as I am concerned!"

"Of course they do!" Jerry declared. "But there's something about marriage, Laura—something more than just a mumbled ceremony by a justice of the peace, something—"

"Sure, there's more, plenty more!" Laura agreed. "But only when you can really live your marriage. We can't! Oh, I can see where it might help a man a lot to go off to war knowing he's got a wife waiting for him at home. But that's not our case. I'm not waiting at home for you. I'm going off again myself."

They found themselves on Fifth Avenue, window shopping. It had always been one of their favorite pastimes together. So they enjoyed themselves for a while—until they saw a display of bridal gowns.

They walked until they found themselves in front of Radio City. "Let's look at the ice skaters,"

Laura suggested. Jerry came along, still reluctant about giving up his marriage project. Laura could tell that he had not completely given up hope.

It was six o'clock when they found themselves in Central Park. It was too late to do anything about marriage now, and Jerry knew it.

All too soon it was time for Laura to leave. She and Jerry took a taxi to her hotel to pick up her bags, then to Hudson tube for Hoboken.

It was at the entrance to the tube that they parted.

Jerry put his arms around her. "I'm going to feel awfully lost without you. I love you, Laura. Don't forget it for a minute. And don't forget it for a minute."

"Jerry laughed and put his head on one side—"it sounds sort of funny for a man to be saying to his girl, but I'll be waiting for you, darling."

"You'll be as busy as can be in a couple of weeks," Laura said. "Write me just as soon as you know where you'll be and what you'll be working at."

"I'm going up to Buffton for a while," Jerry said. "I'll see you folks, of course. I'm to report to Washington in two weeks. Pretty good guess that you'll be based in North Africa, flying wounded out of Italy. I'll start writing to your APO address right away."

"Jerry—" Laura was in his arms. Her lips sought his.

"Laura, my love—" She pulled away from him, snatched up her bags, and ran through the gate to the train. She did not look back.

He turned slowly and walked away.

The next day he wrote a short note to Laura before taking the train to Buffton.

"Not very satisfactory," he thought, "writing like this. I know she's on a ship somewhere, that's all. Golly, it may still be sitting at its pier over there in Hoboken. They do that sometimes."

He had no family now in Buffton, but it was where his family had once lived, where he had lived most of his life. Laura's parents had insisted that he stay with them as he had known they would.

They thought very highly of

Jerry and wondered why Laura had not married him before. So Jerry had a sympathetic audience when he told Mr. and Mrs. Blake how he had tried to persuade Laura to marry him before she sailed.

He saw his many old friends, and spoke at the high school as a returned hero. But he spent most of the time at the newspaper office where he had once worked.

And then, at the end of three days, he decided to leave Buffton. There was nothing there for him, nothing to hold him at all. He felt the same restlessness that Laura had noted in herself on returning home.

But where to go? He didn't want to go back to New York, and he was not due in Washington for days. Then he had an idea. He telephoned Jim Moody at the Newspaper office. Jim had a cabin in the woods about fifty miles north east of Buffton. It was still cold, but Jerry decided that was where he wanted to go.

He threw a few clothes into a bag, said goodbye and thanks to Mrs. Blake, picked up the cabin key, and caught a train for Takak Junction. There he bought some provisions, then hired a taxi to drive him out to Jim's cabin.

In Washington, he learned that someone, wondering what to do with this returned bomber pilot, had looked over his record and found out that he had been a news paper man before entering the army. So he was assigned to army air forces public relations without further ado.

"A desk job!" Jerry groaned, when he learned the news. "And I've been thinking it would be bad to have to go to teaching. But at least an instructor has a chance to fly."

Less than three weeks passed before he asked for a transfer.

"Captain Donaldson," said the colonel who was his immediate superior. "do you know that you fellows who have come back from fighting are terrible problems?"

"Why not let us go back to fighting, then?" Jerry asked.

"Sometimes we do," the colonel said. "But you completed a very concentrated tour of duty only recently. No—I must turn down

your request. The only thing for you now is a nice quiet job where you are proving yourself very capable and helpful."

Jerry went back to his "nice, quiet job" cursing to himself. (TO BE CONTINUED)

Charm-Kurl PERMANENT WAVE KIT
 Complete with Permanent and Wave Solution, curlers, shampoo and wave set—nothing else to buy. Requires no heat, electricity or machines. Safe for every type of hair. Over 8 million sold. Money back guarantee. Get a Charm-Kurl Kit today. **59¢**

Relieve COLDS WITH O & E
 money back GUARANTEE! 25¢ at the Economy Store 50¢

ALLEN DRUG CO.
BUY BONDS

PRESCRIPTIONS FILLED AT
Houser Drug Co.
 WE DELIVER PHONE 4771

IN NORTH CAROLINA
 More people drink Atlantic Ale and Beer than any other.
 It must be...
Good Taste!
 ATLANTIC ALE AND BEER
 FULL OF GOOD CHEER!

After the battle, brother!

War's stern needs, as you know, have far advanced the previous limits of gasoline performance. In all this progress our share has been great—especially because of our extensive research and process development. Whenever the same mature abilities can be focused on NEW-DAY CONOCO BRONZ-Z-Z GASOLINE, your car will get a strong "second wind." For there'll be new-day power in this high-octane fuel. And it will fire clean—to let your engine thrive. So then every latest gasoline feature will be yours—and you'll know it plainly—using NEW-DAY CONOCO BRONZ-Z-Z GASOLINE. Continental Oil Company

CONOCO
 Your gasoline today

Get it at Your Mileage Merchant's Conoco station. Then you'll know it's made to be every bit as good as the regulations now permit. Just be sure of your Station Identification—that big red Conoco Triangle. Where you see it you can buy with confidence.

Come In and See Our LARGE STOCK OF PIANOS

Not only will you find favored makes and styles in Upright, Grands and Players—you will also find that each instrument we have ready for sale will bear the most critical inspection. See this large group of pianos now—**TODAY!**

USE OUR BUDGET TERMS

Kester-Groome FURNITURE COMPANY

"Our Volume of Business Enables Us to Sell for Less"

SHELBY CHERRYVILLE ELLENBORO