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Tomorrow is Forever by GWEN BRISTOW

THE STORY THUS FAR: Spratt Herlong, motion picture producer, met and married Elizabeth, whose first husband, Arthur Kittredge, was reported killed in World War I, but who later, unrecognized, went to work for Spratt under the name of Kessler. Dick, 17-year-old son of the Herlongs, enlisted in the Marines. He was convinced that he had a job that must be done. After they saw him off, Elizabeth, recognizing Kessler as Arthur, told him about it. He denied that he was her former husband and told her that unless she forgot it, he would go away. He forbade her to say anything to her husband. He called it an illusion and tried to convince her that she was wrong.

CHAPTER XXI

"That you will not trouble your husband with this. For it would trouble him, more than you can imagine in your present state. He'll be here in a few minutes. Your first impulse will be to blurt out words that tomorrow morning you'd give half your life to take back. Will you promise?"

She did not answer, and he added, "If you don't promise, I'll leave Beverly Hills tonight. I will not be the means of wrecking your peace or his."

"Yes," she said faintly, "I promise that. But you haven't convinced me. Everything you've said—I know you."

The maid came in, bringing orange juice and the morning paper. "Why didn't anybody wake me?" Elizabeth asked.

"Mr. Herlong said not to. He said you were tired."

Spratt had left her a note, scribbled in pencil across a sheet of studio stationery. "Elizabeth—Glad you're getting a long sleep. I told Cherry and Brian to go on to school without bothering you. I have to leave now, will ring you later if anything turns up, otherwise will see you tonight. All well. Chin up, the war news looks pretty good this morning, anyway nothing lasts forever. I love you, thought I'd remind you in case I hadn't mentioned it lately. Spratt."

She got up and went to her telephone. Apparently he had been waiting for her call, for he answered the phone himself. When she told him who she was he said, "Yes, Mrs. Herlong?" and waited expectantly.

"First," said Elizabeth, "I want to apologize for my startling behavior last night."

"Then you do know this morning," he asked eagerly, "that you were mistaken?"

"I don't know that, not yet. But at least this morning I can promise you to behave like an intelligent adult. You told me I could see you today. May I come over?"

"Certainly."

"Now?"

"Whenever you like."

"Thank you."

Kessler's housekeeper told her he was waiting for her in his study. Elizabeth went in and shut the door behind her. Kessler had been sitting before his typewriter, with sheets of manuscript around him. For an instant she wondered if he had been working, or if he had set the stage to make it look as if he found this so unimportant that he could go on with his work without interruption. But she thought of that only an instant. As she came in Kessler put his hand on his cane and stood up. Their eyes met, and Elizabeth said,

"I came here this morning to see if I was right or wrong in what I said to you last night. I was right."

Kessler drew in a quick breath, without answering. Elizabeth came nearer and sat down. Holding her handbag in her lap, she leaned back to look up at him.

"She said, 'I have not been drinking and I am not hysterical. I had nine hours' sleep, and when I woke up my impression of last night seemed like a mistake based on a chance resemblance. It was not a mistake.'" She smiled at him, pleadingly. "Arthur, let's face this and talk about it."

"I'll talk about it as long as you like," he answered her, and as he spoke he smiled too, as though sorry for her. "But it's not true, Mrs. Herlong."

But Elizabeth continued, "You have a scar on your arm where you were burnt by a splash of boiling chocolate one night when I was making fudge. You have another scar on your right knee, made when you and I were practicing fancy dives and you hit the edge of the pool."

Kessler sat down, and moved a pencil that was about to fall off the edge of his table. "I have so many scars," he said, "that no doubt you could find two that would fit those you are talking about." Then, supporting himself on his cane, he leaned toward her, and continued, "Mrs. Herlong, my body is such an accumulation of patches and make-shifts that to prove or disprove my likeness to any healthy man would be very difficult. I didn't grow this beard to disguise my face, but to cover some ugly lines on my chin that would make me even harder to look at than I am now. Yet you insist I resemble your first husband."

chair, away from him. "How can you do this to me!" she exclaimed. "Don't you remember how I loved you?"

For a moment she covered her face with her hands. She did not know how thankful he was for that moment, when she did not see the tightening of his eyes and lips that even his grim self-control could not prevent. She got out a handkerchief and began twisting it between her fingers, then carefully untwisted it and folded it again. Her pause to regain her own calmness had given him time to regain his, and when he spoke again his voice was steady.

"Now that Dick has gone to fight for tomorrow's world," he said to her, "it would be a catastrophe to see his mother refusing to give up her dependence on yesterday."

Elizabeth started. "What on earth do you mean?"

He spoke to her in a low, intensely purposeful voice. "Mrs. Herlong, not long ago your son sat where you are sitting, defining in his own mind the question before this gen-



eration. At length he understood—I like to think I helped him understand—that he was living in one of the periods when the advance of civilization seems to halt because of forces that are trying to push it back instead of letting it go ahead as it was meant to do. He came to see that his side was the right and ultimately victorious side, because those who fight to raise up the dead past eventually destroy themselves."

Elizabeth shook her head with a puzzled frown. "I understand that, but what has it got to do with me? With us?"

"It has a great deal to do with you and me. This battle between yesterday and tomorrow is only occasionally an international affair. But it's going on all the time in our own lives. Some of us refuse to let go of what used to be. We cling to it even when it is nothing but dust and dead leaves, instead of accepting the fact that we've got to go ahead in time whether we like it or not."

Elizabeth did not answer. But she was listening to him, for he spoke so earnestly that he made her listen.

"Sometimes it's so obvious that a child can see what they're doing—baldheaded grandfathers acting like fools over young girls, women in their fifties making themselves up into ridiculous caricatures of adolescence. Hasn't it ever occurred to you that they do this because they've still got adolescent minds? They've never developed to the point where they can enjoy adult pleasures in the company of adults, so they try to imitate and associate with the children whose equals they are. A ripe mentality is an achievement. It takes effort, and some people have never made the effort. So instead of growing up, they stay half-finished, and spend what ought to be their most abundant years paying their dancing partners and beauty operators to tell them how young they look. You've seen them, and laughed at them."

Elizabeth caught her breath in protest. "But you were just telling me I wasn't like that. I'm not—for heaven's sake, I'm not going to be a fat old woman who gets her face lifted and goes stary-eyed over a gigolo!" She laughed shortly at the idea. "But even if I were, what has this got to do with us now, today, with what I came here to tell you?"

"It has a great deal to do with it, Mrs. Herlong," Kessler insisted. "You're a charming woman, not because you're sixteen but because you aren't. Genuine maturity has a gracious poise that youth never has. The charm of youth is in its physical freshness, but the charm of ma-

turity is a flowering of the spirit. Those others I was recalling to you, they have no youth and no maturity either. You have maturity, you know how fine it is—don't start to be like them. Don't reach back now!"

"I don't understand you," she exclaimed. "I want to know whether or not you are Arthur Kittredge come back from that German hospital where they told me you had died. What are you trying to tell me?"

He answered her simply. "I am trying to tell you that if you want to believe I am Arthur Kittredge, you can persuade yourself that I am. You can make yourself see me as a living reminder of a period of your life that was very happy—that perhaps has grown happier in your recollection of it."

"I didn't come here," retorted Elizabeth, "to be advised whether or not I should believe in fantasy. I came to be told the truth."

"I am telling you the truth," he insisted. "The truth is that you can stop living in the present if you want to. You can reach back and demand that the past be returned to you. But it won't be returned to you. You won't get back what you have lost, you'll only be destroying what you have."

"For the past few months you have found the present very hard to take. You have been looking back into a time when you weren't aware of the demands life was going to make on you. In those days every minute was delightful for itself. You had what you wanted and you didn't know you were going to have to pay for it. You've personified that lovely thoughtlessness of youth in the figure of the man who shared it with you. You want it back—not Arthur, but the young freedom Arthur symbolized for you."

"Is that what I've been doing?"

"Yes," he said, "it is."

Elizabeth was silent. She felt as if she had been accused of a sin, and found just enough echo of guilt in herself to be unable to speak in her own defense.

"You can't get it back, Mrs. Herlong," Kessler said gently. "But if you keep trying, you will lose what you have. And you have so much to lose now, so much more than you had twenty-five years ago."

Elizabeth moved forward in her chair, listening intently. The curious sense of guilt had not left her.

"As for your first husband—"

Kessler began.

"Yes—what about him?"

"How old were you when you married him?"

"Eighteen." After she had spoken she realized that her answer had come as readily as though she had never had any reason for believing he knew this already.

"Eighteen!" Kessler repeated. "What did you know then about loving a man?"

"I thought I knew a great deal," she retorted.

"Naturally you thought so. How could you judge your feeling for him except by the standard you had then? But look at it now and see what it was by the standard of love you have today. A bright girlish rapture. Beautiful, no doubt, but no more than that."

"But what else is a young girl's love? What else should it be?"

"Nothing else. That's what I'm trying to tell you. But what did you lose when you lost Arthur? A lover and a playmate. You had nothing else to lose."

Elizabeth drew back and stared at him, almost angrily, resenting what he said and fighting against having to accept it. He wanted a moment to give her time to get used to it, and then went on.

"When we get older, and are drawn into the depths of experience, it is sometimes very tempting to look back and regret the time when we were skipping over the surface without dreaming how thin it was."

Elizabeth still did not answer. All this was new to her, as relating to herself. It was as though he were accusing her of having been foolish just when she thought she was being wise.

"When we do look back," said Kessler, "it means that just then we are frightened at the challenge of being adult."

"I have been frightened," she acknowledged, still astonished at all he was showing her. "You know that."

"What we forget in those moments, of course," he went on, "is that the profoundest joys, as well as the greatest trials, are found in the depths of experience. The happiness of youth is a shallow merriment, it can't be anything else. But the happiness of maturity, I mean real mental and emotional maturity, is strong and deeply rooted because it comes of having tested this and that until we have discovered the permanent values. Cherry is heartbroken if she goes to a party and isn't dressed like the others. Some women of your age are too, because they're still judging life by Cherry's standards, but you aren't, because you long ago outgrew letting yourself be heartbroken over things that didn't matter. Mrs. Herlong," he exclaimed earnestly, "you have gone so far—don't turn back now!"

(TO BE CONTINUED)

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