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# THE SEARCH

By Grace Livingston Hill-Lutz

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"I see! You'd just applied for Officer's Training Camp?"

"Exactly, and you know you never can tell what rumor a person like that can start. He's keen enough to see the advantage, of course, and follow it up. Oh, he's got one coming to him all right!"

"Yes, he's keen all right. That's the trouble. It's hard to get him."

"Well, just wait. I've got him now. If I don't make him bite the dust! Ye gods! When I think of the way he looks at me every time he sees me I could skin him alive!"

"I fancy he'd be rather slippery to skin. I wouldn't like to try it, Harry!"

"Well, but wait till you see where I've got him! He's in the draft. He goes next week. And they're sending all those men to our camp! He'll be a private, of course, and he'll have to salute me! Won't that gall him?"

"He won't do it! I know him, and he won't do it!"

"I'll take care that he does it all right! I'll put myself in his way and make him do it. And if he refuses I'll report him and get him in the guard house. See? I can, you know. Then I guess he'll smile out of the other side of his mouth!"

"He won't likely be in your company."

"That doesn't make any difference. I can get him into trouble if he isn't, but I'll try to work it that he is if I can. I've got 'pull,' you know, and I know how to 'work' my superiors!" he swaggered.

"That isn't very good policy," advised the other. "I've heard of men picking off officers they didn't like when it came to battle."

"I'll take good care that he's in front of me on all such occasions!"

A sudden nudge from his companion made him look up, and there looking sharply down at him, was the returning captain, and behind him walked John Cameron still with that amused smile on his face. It was plain that they had both heard his boast. His face crimsoned and he jerked out a tardy salute, as the two passed on leaving him muttering imprecations under his breath.

When the front door slammed behind the two Wainwright spoke in a low shaken growl:

"Now what in thunder is that Captain LaRue going on to Bryne Haven for? I thought, of course, he got off at Spring Heights. That's where his mother lives. I'll bet he is going up to see Ruth Macdonald! You know they're related. If he is, that knocks my plans all into a cocked hat. I'd have to sit at attention all the evening, and I couldn't propose with that cad around!"

"Better put it off then and come with me," soothed his friend. "Athalie Britt will help you forget your troubles all right, and there's plenty of time. You'll get another leave soon."

"How the dickens did John Cameron come to be on speaking terms with Captain La Rue, I'd like to know?" mused Wainwright, paying no heed to his friend.

"H'm! That does complicate matters for you some, doesn't it? Captain La Rue is down at your camp, isn't he? Why, I suppose Cameron knew him up at college, perhaps. Cap used to come up from the university every week last winter to lecture at college."

Wainwright muttered a chain of choice expletives known only to men of his kind.

"Forget it!" encouraged his friend slapping him vigorously on the shoulder as the train dived into Bryne Haven. "Come off that grouchy and get busy! You're on leave, man! If you can't visit one woman there's plenty more, and time enough to get married, too, before you go to France. Marriage is only an incident, anyway. Why make such a fuss about it?"

By the fitful glare of the station lights they could see that Cameron was walking with the captain just ahead of them, in the attitude of familiar converse. The sight did not put Wainwright into a better humor.

At the great gate of the Macdonald estate Cameron and La Rue parted. They could hear the last words of their conversation

as La Rue swung into the wide driveway and Cameron started on up the street:

"I'll attend to it the first thing in the morning, Cameron, and I'm glad you spoke to me about it! I don't see any reason why it shouldn't go through! I shall be personally gratified if we can make the arrangement. Good night and good luck to you!"

The two young officers halted at a discreet distance until John Cameron had turned off to the right and walked away into the darkness. The captain's quick step could be heard crunching along the gravel drive to the Macdonald house.

"Well, I guess that about settles me for the night, Bobbie!" sighed Wainwright. "Come on, let's pass the time away somehow. I'll stop at the drug store to phone and make a date with Ruth for tomorrow morning. Wonder where I can get a car to take her out? No, I don't want to go in her car because she always wants to run it herself. When you're proposing to a woman you don't want her to be absorbed in running a car. See?"

"I don't know. I haven't so much experience in that line as you have, Harry, but I should think it might be inconvenient," laughed the other.

They went back to the station. A few minutes later Wainwright emerged from the telephone booth in the drug store with a lugubrious expression.

"Doggone my luck! She's promised to go to church with that cousin of hers, and she's busy all the rest of the day. But she's promised to give me next Saturday if I can get off!" His face brightened with the thought.

"I guess I can make it. If I can't do anything else I'll tell 'em I'm going to be married, and then I can make her rush things through, perhaps. Girls are game for that sort of thing just now; it's in the air, these war marriages. By George, I'm not sure but that's the best way to work it after all. She's the kind of a girl that would do almost anything to help you out of a fix that way, and I'll just tell her I had to say that to get off and that I'll be court martialled if they find out it wasn't so. How about it?"

"I don't know, Harry. It's all right, of course, if you can get away with it, but Ruth's a pretty bright girl and has a will of her own, you know. But now, come on. It's getting late. What do you say if we get up a party and run down to Atlantic City over Sunday, now that you're free? I know those two girls would be tickled to death to go, especially Athalie. She's a westerner, you know, and has never seen the ocean."

"All right, come on, only you must promise there won't be any scrapes that will get me into the papers and blow back to Bryne Haven. You know there's a lot of Bryne Haven people go to Atlantic City this time of year and I'm not going to have any stories started. I'm going to marry Ruth Macdonald!"

"All right. Come on."

### CHAPTER II.

Ruth Macdonald drew up her little electric runabout sharply at the crossing, as the station gates suddenly clanged down in her way, and sat back with a look of annoyance on her face.

Michael of the crossing was so overcareful sometimes that it became trying. She was sure there was plenty of time to cross before the down train. She glanced at her tiny wrist watch and frowned. Why, it was fully five minutes before the train was due! What could Michael mean, standing there with his flag so importantly and that determined look upon his face?

She glanced down the platform and was surprised to find a crowd. There must be a special expected. What was it? A convention of some sort? Or a picnic? It was late in the season for picnics, and not quite soon enough for a college football game. Who were they, anyway? She looked them over and was astonished to find people of every class, the workers, the wealthy, the plain every day men, women and children, all with a waiting attitude and a strange seriousness upon them. As she looked closer she saw tears on some faces and handkerchiefs everywhere in evi-

dence. Had some one died? Was this a funeral train they were awaiting? Strange she had not heard!

Then the band suddenly burst out upon her with the familiar wail:

There's a long, long trail awinding,

Into the land of our dreams,— and behind came the muffled tramping of feet not accustomed to marching together.

Ruth suddenly sat up very straight and began to watch, an unfamiliar awe upon her. This must be the first draft men just going away! Of course! Why had she not thought of it at once. She had read about their going and heard people mention it the last week, but it had not entered much into her thoughts. She had not realized that it would be a ceremony of public interest like this. She had no friends whom it would touch. The young men of her circle had all taken warning in plenty of time and found themselves a commission somewhere, two of them having settled up matters but a few days before. She had thought of these draft men, when she had thought of them all, only when she saw mention of them in the newspapers, and then as a lot of workmen or farmers' boys who were reluctant to leave their homes and had to be forced into patriotism in this way. It had not occurred to her that there were many honorable young men who would take this way of putting themselves at the disposal of their country in her time of need, without attempting to feather a nice little nest for themselves. Now she watched them seriously and found to her astonishment that she knew many of them. There were three college fellows in the front ranks whom she had met. She had danced with them and been taken out to supper by them, and had a calling acquaintance with their sisters. The sister of one stood on the sidewalk now in the common crowd, quite near to the runabout, and seemed to have forgotten that anybody was by. Her face was drenched with tears and her lips were quivering. Behind her was a gray haired woman with a skewey blouse and a faded dark blue serge skirt too long for the prevailing fashion. The tears were trickling down her cheeks also; and an old man with a crutch, and a little round-eyed girl, seemed to belong to the party. The old man's lips were set and he was looking at the boys with his heart in his eyes.

Ruth shrank back not to intrude upon such open sorrow, and glanced at the line again as they straggled down the road to the platform; 50 serious, grave-eyed young men with determined mien and sorrow in the droop of their shoulders. One could see how they hated all this publicity and display, this tense moment of farewell in the eyes of the town; and yet how tender they felt toward those dear ones who had gathered thus to do them honor as they went away to do their part in the great world struggle for liberty.

As she looked closer the girl saw they were not mature men as at first glance they had seemed, but most of them mere boys. There was the boy that mowed the Macdonald lawn, and the yellow haired grocery boy. There was the gas man and the nice young plumber who fixed the leak in the water pipes the other day, and the clerk from the post-office, and the cashier from the bank! What made them look so old at first sight? Why, it was as if sorrow and responsibility had suddenly been put upon them like a garment that morning for a uniform, and they walked in the shadow of the great sadness that had come upon the world. She understood that perhaps even up to the very day before, they had most of them been merry, careless boys; but now they were men, made so in a night by the horrible sin that had brought about this thing called war.

For the first time since the war began Ruth Macdonald had a vision of what the war meant. She had been knitting, of course, with all the rest; she had spent long mornings at the Red Cross rooms—she was on her way there this very minute when Michael and the procession had interrupted her course—she had made miles of surgical dressings and picked tons of oakum. She had bade her men friends cheery good-byes when they went to officers' training camps, and with the other girls welcomed and admired their uniforms when they came home on short furloughs, one by one winning his stripes and commission. They were all men whom she had known in society. They

had wealth and position and found it easy to get into the kind of thing that pleased them in the army or navy. The danger they were facing seemed hardly a negligible quantity. It was the fashion to look on it that way. Ruth had never thought about it before. She had even been severe in her judgment of a few mothers who worried about their sons and wanted to get them exempt in some way. But these stern loyal mothers who stood in close ranks with heavy lines of sacrifice upon their faces, tears on their cheeks, love and self-abnegation in their eyes, gave her a new view of the world. These were the ones who would be in actual poverty, some of them, without their boys, and whose lives would be empty indeed when they went forth. Ruth Macdonald had never before realized the suffering this war was causing individuals until she saw the faces of those women with their sons and brothers and lovers; until she saw the faces of the brave boys, for the moment all the rollicking lightness gone, and only the pain of parting and the mists of the unknown future in their eyes.

It came to the girl with a sudden pang that she was left out of all this. That really it made little difference to her whether America was in the war or not. Her life would go on just the same—a pleasant monotony of bustle and amusement. There would be the same round of social affairs and regular engagements, speeded with the excitement of war work and occasional visiting uniforms. There was no one going forth from their home to fight whose going would put the light of life out for her and cause her to feel sad, beyond the ordinary superficial sadness for the absence of one's playmates.

She liked them all, her friends, and shrank from having them in danger; although it was splendid to have them doing something real at last. In truth until this moment the danger had seemed so remote; the casualty list of which people spoke with bated breath so much a thing of vast unknown numbers, that it had scarcely come within her realization as yet. But now she suddenly read the truth in the suffering eyes of these people who were met to say good-bye, perhaps a last good-bye, to those who were dearer than life to them. How would she, Ruth Macdonald, feel, if one of those boys were her brother or lover? It was inconceivably dreadful.

The band blared on, and the familiar words insisted themselves upon her unwilling mind; There's a long, long night of waiting!

A sob at her right made her start and then turn away quickly from the sight of a mother's grief as she clung to a frail daughter for support, sobbing with utter abandon, while the daughter kept begging her to "be calm for Tom's sake."

It was all horrible! Why had she gotten into this situation? Aunt Rhoda would blame her for it. Aunt Rhoda would say it was too conspicuous, right there in the front ranks! She put her hand on the starter and glanced out, hoping to be able to back out and get away, but the road behind was blocked several deep with cars, and the crowd had closed in upon her and about her on every side. Retreat was impossible. However, she noticed with relief that the matter of being conspicuous need not trouble her. Nobody was looking her way. All eyes were turned in one direction, toward that straggling, determined line that wound up from the Borough hall, past the postoffice and bank to the station where the home guards stood uniformed, in open silent ranks doing honor to the boys who were going to fight for them.

Ruth's eyes went reluctantly back to the marching line again. Somehow it struck her that they would not have seemed so forlorn if they had worn new trig uniforms, instead of rusty varied civilian clothes. They seemed like an ill-prepared scum passing in review. Then suddenly her gaze was riveted upon a single figure, the last man in the procession, marching alone, with uplifted head and a look of self-abnegation on his strong young face. All at once something sharp seemed to slash through her soul and hold her with a long quiver of pain and she sat looking straight ahead staring with a kind of wild frenzy at John Cameron walking alone at the end of the line.

(To be continued next week.)

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