

Article ★ Story



Essay ★ Poetry

Love brings disaster to a man and his wife

By Art Adams.

The white-haired attorney for the defense had changed his plea at the last moment. The prosecuting attorney was nettled. He brought up the rules, and the skirmish ended with both men arguing hotly before the judge.

"My client has good reason to change his plea to a plea of guilty," the defense attorney said. He explained, in tones that were inaudible to the spectators.

The prosecutor pondered, then shrugged his shoulders in agreement. The judge ordered the courtroom to be cleared.

Reporters dashed for the telephones with what little news they had. A buzzing, disappointed crowd was ushered through the doors. The gavel rapped and the attorney led his client to the witness chair.

The accused was a slender, well-proportioned man of thirty-five. He was dressed in neat, blue, civilian clothes. He walked like a soldier, with his chin up and shoulders squared. And in his eyes was that straight-ahead, unseeing look of the soldier standing at attention.

Except for the haggardness in the lines about his mouth, he gave no sign of emotion. He seated himself calmly and placed his hands upon his knees. Grey eyes, a high-bridged nose, sharply-moulded features gave his face a fine, sensitive look. There was in his face—its clean lines and frank eyes—a suggestion of the poet, or the artist.

The court clerk performed his trite ceremony. Then the white haired attorney stepped before him.

"Will you repeat your name for the court?"

"Harold Randall." His voice was quiet and controlled, but obviously so. The men of the jury noticed the effort and admired him for it.

"What is your occupation, Mr. Randall?"

"I am a test pilot with the Corsair Aircraft Corporation."

"How long have you been with this company?"

"Three years. Since I left the army."

"You received an honorable discharge from the army?"

The prosecuting attorney was on his feet. His objection was sus-

tained. The defense attorney rumbled his hair and re-phrased his question. "What was the nature of that discharge?"

"It was an honorable discharge."

The lawyer paused, turning to the jury. He looked down the line of face until he had the attention of each one; then he turned back to Harold Randall.

"In your opinion, is being a test pilot a dangerous occupation?"

"Yes."

"Are the other men in your profession inclined to be superstitious?"

"They are."

"Do you rely on hunches when you are in the air?"

"Yes, I think that all of us do. We're forced to."

"Mr. Randall," the attorney's voice grew hard. "You are accused of murder. Did you or did you not commit that murder?"

"I did." Randall's hands clenched his knees. His voice low and controlled, was like a groan.

"A few minutes ago, you asked me to change your plea," said the attorney. "Will you tell the court your reasons for doing that?"

"People are talking; they are laying the blame where it does not belong."

"Mr. Randall, will you give us your testimony now, in your own words?"

Harold Randall nodded. He waited until his lawyer was seated. Then he looked toward the jury and found each man looking at him, but he did not drop his eyes. He looked into their faces, and the look in his own eyes was not that of a man who seeks acquittal; rather, it was the look of a man who would be understood.

"Gentlemen—" he paused as if not sure how to begin. For a moment he turned again to the attorney sitting at his table. His eyes flashed around the courtroom as though seeking some way out.

"It is necessary—that you go back in time with me."

"Five years ago, I met and married a woman who was to me—the ideal of all women. The romance that had begun when we met did not stop growing after we were married. It grew and developed as the days passed. Little common interests multiplied until our lives were inextricably bound together. Each day, we found new, mutual interests. We liked the same mu-

sic, the same foods, and the same people. We liked the same books, the same colors, and the same runsets. We seemed always to agree in all things. Our love deepened from mere romance into a great companionship that was, as we both felt, perfect. She became a part of me—the most important part—my life, I loved her.

"It is hard to say what such love is. It is something far stronger than the frenzied sighing of a puppy. It is far deeper than the power that a ravishing chorus girl has over her aged millionaire. It is as fine and deep as the life that throbs within our veins. It is life itself.

"There was never a quarrel between us that could not be smoothed by a kiss. There was never a day during all this five years of ours when she was not waiting impatiently for my return in the evening. I loved her.

But more unbelievable, she loved me. Do you know what it is to be loved by a noble woman? Few of us are privileged to know, for such a woman is a rare and priceless thing. When a woman loves truly, she becomes a thing to wonder at, to hallow and to protect. She stands revealed, and she is more than mortal. Why did she love me? I do not know. I am an ordinary man, I had no right to possess the greatest gift of God. I was not made to be worshipped. But she worshipped me as if I were a God, and loved me because I was human.

I did nothing extraordinary, but she loved me. If I became maudlin over the music that she played, she loved it because it was I who was maudlin. If I took unnecessary chances with planes, she loved me for my daring. If I drank too much, she treated my head as if it were her own.

She laughed when I forgot to shave. Once, when I forgot to bring flowers for her birthday, she cried because I was thoughtless; but she loved me too because I was thoughtless, and we chose her flowers together. Her trust in me was like that of a small child in her parent; but it was more than that, for she was wise and mature. She loved me with her whole heart. She made me her life.

You must think that I talk like a romantic schoolboy, but I am no schoolboy. I have lived a little, and I have seen others suffering through quarrels and divorces. I know that our life was different from these. I say that I loved her. It was a love stronger than anything that I had dreamed a man could know. I lived for her. But she lived for me. She lived in me. I was her life.

"It was January fourth, five weeks ago. We had retired early, but I lay awake, smoking. The job that I had to perform the next morning worried me. It was actually nothing but routine. A new ship was to be flown through her last tests. Observers and mechanics were to fly with me and record the performance. There was no cause for my uneasiness, but my mind insisted on reviewing each detail of the plane, searching for some weakness that had been overlooked by the engineers.

Evelyn lay by my side, asleep. Her head was against my shoulder. I could feel the steady rise and fall of her breast. Her face was calm. In the glow of my cigarette her

hair was reddish gold, and the smooth curve of her cheek was soft. She was more beautiful and more desirable in that moment than she had ever been. I had to look away in order to think of that morning job. There is some enchantment about a woman when she sleeps.

But as I lay there, a picture ran through my mind. Where it came from I do not know. It was like a vivid, suddenly-revived memory, or a horrible premonition. I saw the loading platform of a railroad station. Evelyn stood by a pillar. She was dressed in black. Beneath a dark veil, her face was pale with sorrow. Huge circles of shadowy blue under her eyes, showed that she had been crying. She stood there, her eyes on the baggage car, alone. She was desolate and miserable.

From the baggage car men were unloading a long, narrow box. That box was a coffin. I was the corpse with that coffin! I had died in a crash! How I knew all those things I do not know, but I did know them with a certainty that was overwhelming. I knew that I had been killed in a crash, and I knew that she was left alone.

There was sorrow in her eyes. There was desolation in every line of the body that I had loved so deeply. She was like a flower that would never blossom. She waited, and what she waited for was in the coffin. She was lonely, solitary; her eyes were blank and empty. I could not stand it.

I got up without waking her and went out. I walked the streets. I do not know how long I walked trying desperately to rid myself of that horrible dream. But I could not shake it off, for its prophecy was true. Someday I would crash and die, and she would be left alone in the world, to mourn.

It began to snow. I returned to our apartment. She had not moved, dow, light—I do not know if it was the moon—shone on her face. She slept peacefully, happily. She slept as if she knew that I was there by her side, ready to do anything to make her life happy. I could not bear to think that I would be the cause of her suffering. I could not

bear to think of her being miserable and alone in the world. She had been so happy with me!

Perhaps I am a great egotist to say and to think that Evelyn would have mourned my death. But she loved me—loved me as no man should be loved. My death would have been more to her than her own. I could not stand to think of her as I still saw her, there in the railroad station.

Without waking her, I kissed her, and she smiled; then I turned to the table by the side of the bed. My pistol was there in a drawer. The bullet killed her instantly.

Harold Randall dropped his head in his hands, swaying in his seat. The attorney came to his side, carrying a glass of water. When Randall had drunk from the glass, the lawyer said, "May I ask one more question?" Randall nodded, dully.

"What happened to the plane you were to fly?"

"Another pilot took it up. It crashed. The pilot and the mechanics were killed."

The attorney turned to the judge saying, "The defense rests."

The prosecuting attorney waived further examination. The jury was out for a quarter of an hour. When it returned, Harold Randall was seated at the table of his attorney.

"Have you reached a verdict?" the judge asked, speaking to the foreman.

"We have, your honor." "Then stand and read it." "We find the defendant to be guilty of murder in the first degree."

The judge was silent for a moment; then he called Randall before him. "You have suffered too much to be sentenced to live," he said. "You have been found guilty of murder. I therefore sentence you to death. You will be hanged by the neck—"

Randall, the soldier and the husband, bowed his head, saying nothing that was audible to the court; but the white-haired attorney heard the muttered, "Thank God!" of the condemned man.

Pacifism maintains victory impossible; to win is to lose

All of us are liable to questioning on our feelings about the war. The answers to many questions concerning the feelings of the individual are being made by various churches in the form of pacifist handbooks. It is an attempt to form a clear case for the millions who abhor war but don't know just how to make their stand clear and justify it before those who have militaristic ideas of international settlement.

Each pacifist, or war objector, has his own combination of practical, ethical and religious reasons. There would be some benefit gained by a uniformity of action among the pacifists.

The conscientious objector is any person, whether called to military service or not, who refuses because of his firm convictions, to support his country in the conduct of war, or to profit directly or indirectly from the war. This definition includes some who would not repudiate every war, and who

would help others who were similarly attacked.

Other conscientious objectors are opposed on principle to all war, whether offensive or defensive. They believe that war is the greatest crime against humanity. It is costly and wasteful of lives and property; it fills nations with poverty, disease, misery, suspicion, hatred, and fear; it exalts lying and hypocrisy and tramples on truth, justice and mercy; it denies expression and adds new wrongs to the old.

In the Pacifist Handbook many examples are given of stands taken in the last war. Eugene V. Debs, sentenced to prison in 1917 on the charge of obstructing the war, made this explanation: "I have been accused of obstructing the war. I have often wondered if I could take the life of my fellow men even to save my own, I would refuse to kill a human being on my own account. Why should I, at the command of anyone else, or at the command of any power on earth?"

They heed me not—the fools

By Donald Bower.
Die, you fools, I care not lest you do;
You matter not to me, fools, you matter not to me—
You are young, fools, but I am old and gray
And ready for the grave, fools, though
You still laugh with joy,
You cannot see as I can
How close you are to death;
You cannot see that you will die—
You think you are too young.
Do not laugh at me, fools,
Because I am gray and ill—
Do not laugh at me, fools,
For YOU are soon to die.

Think I have no heart, fools,
To say the things I do?—
I'm a fool, fools, and a blind like you;
I can see you dying there.

Without a laugh or tear,
You couldn't laugh, you couldn't cry,
You are too young to realize
That death can come to you
As it will come to me.

I'm crying because I love you
And wish you would not die;
I'm sad because I know you're through
And no longer fools will be.
Laugh, fools, for this will be your last,
For soon you are to die.
No longer will you sing and dance
But die instead, you fools.

Look at me and laugh, fools,
I am too old to care;
But soon you will be sorry
For soon you are to die.
Die, fools, lest you are like me;
You cannot be old like me, fools,
You are too young and gay,
Your life is fun and laughter,
Not sorrow and pain like mine,
Your life is short and joyful,
Not hard and long like mine.

March, you fools, gayly—
Down these narrow streets;
Sing your songs, fools,
And laugh right into my face
You're marching to your death, fools,
And cheering as you go.

Don't be a fool, fools,
But stop before you go!
You'll never see these shores again
If once you hit that deck.
Come back, fools, before your boat leaves port!
You'll never live another life
When once you go from this.

Come back, come back, don't go another foot!
Don't nod on foreign earth;
Don't fight yourselves to death!
Come back, fools, come back,
And grow old like me,
Don't leave this land you love
To view a foreign land;
But stay, fools, stay!
Right here where you are young,
Can't you see it isn't right
For you to go away?
Can't you see that you should stay
And keep us company?

There's the whistle of their boat,
And their waves to friends, below;
The anchor's pulled and now
The fools are set to go,
They pay no heed, the young and ruthless
fools,
To the pleas of an old gray head—
They think I'm the fool to keep them here
To grow old and deal like me,
Don't throw away, fools, the dearest
thing in life,
Don't throw away, fools, your one and
only life!

But speak I do in vain,
For no longer can they hear;
They sing their laughing songs
And sigh their laughing sighs,
'Tis not right that they must die,
No matter what the cause or need;
'Tis better they grow old like me
Than die, young fools they are.

I can no longer see them,
Their ship is out of sight;
The lives of fools I loved
Are past with that ship that is gone.
Gone to glory, and God bless them
In their fight for a gloric cause;
May their souls rest in peace, dear God,
Those fools who heeded me not.