AIR FORCE GIRL

Continued from last week

CHAPTER III

It was one cold January day as she was walking down the corridor toward the Operations room that she saw him coming toward her. By a miracle she was alone in that narrow passage. She stood aside to let him pass. Her breat caught in her throat. Now he was almost level with her. His thoughts were evidently far away. For a terrible moment she wondered if he were going to walk right past her. Then his expression changed. His eyes lighted up. His face seemed to come to life. "Good God!"

She smiled. "You said it would happen."

"It's been so long."

All her resolves now were shaken. Another moment and they were gone forever. He looked at her. "I just can't believe it's you! I tried so hard to find you." She knew it must be true. "I haunted that corner where I ran into you."

She smiled. "You couldn't anyway have found me. I joined Waafs the next day."

"Thank heaven you did!" They heard voices approaching them. "When can we meet? I've got to be in town this afternoon. I'm driving up directly after lunch. Can you come with me?"

"Only at the risk of being arrested. But I can meet you there this evening. I'm off duty at six."

"Can you be at Kettner's at seven?"

"Make it seven-thirty. I've promised to meet the girl I lived with for dinner."

"She won't mind if you tell her you're dining with your fiance."

"Am I?"

"What do you think, my sweet?"

She laughed very softly. "I think you're possibly right."

"Tonight then. I've got so much I want to say to you."

Two officers passed them. One greeted him with a smile. "Hello, Tips! Coming to have a quick one?"

"Yes, I'll be right along."

They passed on. "Tips?" she asked.

"Short for Timothy Ian Poel-Sanders. I've been Tips since my school days."

"I see."

"And you?"

"Jane Lambolt."

"The Lambolt is merely for the time being, Jane darling."

She was in a daze all the afternoon. She was reprimanded sharply three times. Sparks, the girl with whom she shared a room asked as they hurried back to their quarters once they were off duty what was the matter with her.

"I've never known you so woolgathered, Lambolt. What was it on? Or should I say who was it on?"

But Jane wasn't telling Sparks what had happened. She wasn't telling anyone, except of course Stella. But, somehow, when she reached the flat she found herself incapable of breaking the news to her.

She told her how sorry she was she couldn't have dinner with her. And Stella laughed and said it didn't matter at all. She said "What's he like? Where are you meeting him?"

Jane laughed softly. "Thank you for not minding. I feel rather mean about letting you down. Hello! You've cut this out, have you?"

She picked up the clipping from the newspaper as she spoke, the clipping with the photograph and news story of Flight Lieutenant T. Poel-Sanders.

"This man's at our airdrome," she said.

"Is he?"

Stella's eyes were hard. Jane knew instantly that something was wrong. She said quickly, urgently "What's the matter, darling?"

"Nothing."

"But, Stella, you seem so sort of —different suddenly. You don't know him, do you?"

Stella gave a hard, brittle little laugh. She snatched the clipping from Jane's hand, crumpled it into a tight little ball and flung it into the wastepaper basket. She said bitterly: "Yes, I know him. For a brief six months I was married to him. And now, darling, if you don't mind, let's talk about something pleasant. Tell me the name of the man you're meeting this evening. Is he tall, short, dark or fair, and are you going to be such a nitwit as to fall in love with him?"

Now it was Stella who realized that something was wrong. It was Stella, instead of Jane, who was saying quickly, urgently, "What's the matter darling?" and in a sudden flash of intuition, her eyes widening. "Jane, you're not dining with Tips this evening? He's not the man?"

Jane looked at her. "Yes. But I . . . well, I shan't see him again of course."

Stella flicked her hair back from her eyes with a little quick gesture. Her head was up. "Why ever not? See him all you want. Have fun with him. Tips used to be grand at giving a girl fun. Only—well, from one who once knew him only too well, don't be such a fool as to fall in love with him."

Jane said, not looking at her "Suppose you met him again, Stella?"

Stella drew a swift breath. She leaned forward, her hands gripping a chair. "I never want to."

"That's what you say. But are you sure, deep down in your heart that you really mean it? Remember what you told me the other night, the night before I joined up. You said they you had an idea you were still in love with him."

Stella was saying urgently "You're not to tell him you know me, Jane. I'm not a dog in the manger. He's free and you're free. Only I don't ever want to see or hear anything of him again. He's rotten through and through. And the leopard can't change his spots. Perhaps it's mean of me to say this to you now that you know him, but I can't help it."

Jane's eyes were hard. "You won't. I—I don't quite know what I'll do about him. For two pins I'd ring up Kettner's and leave word that I can't dine with him."

Stella laughed shortly. That's ridiculous. Go along and have a good dinner and enjoy yourself. Tips will give you a good evening. Only don't take him too seriously, and if he tells you he's falling in love with you, just bear in mind that that's his line with women. And now oughtn't you to hurry, darling? You're going to be awfully late if you don't."

Jane slid into her coat. Her eyes met Stella's. I shan't tell him I know you. If I ever feel I must, I'll tell you first. But after tonight I don't think I'll see any more of him."

Jane walked to Kettner's. It wasn't worth a taxi.

As she entered the brilliantly lighted foyer and saw him coming toward her she knew that she wasn't going to cut him out of her life as she'd thought at first. Oh, no! She'd do quite the reverse. She'd see him just as often as he wanted her to or rather as often as she chose he should see her. If he was in love with her now it wouldn't be her fault if he didn't fall twenty times as much in love with her. Then she'd give him a little of what he'd given Stella.

He stood smiling down at her and she told herself her heart was quite steady. It didn't mean a thing that he was so attractive that all the other women around were covertly glancing at him or that there had been no thrill as his hand had touched her arm—or had there? But no—of course there hadn't. Her feelings toward him had changed completely. She glanced at the clock and back again at him.

"I'm late, I know. I'm sorry."

His face was alight with eagerness at sight of her. It was as if flames burned in his eyes. He said urgently, "I was so desperately afraid you weren't coming, that perhaps I'd only dreamed that I met you this morning. Oh, Jane Jane! If you knew what you've done to me!"

She could have said that to him too, if she had come straight to Kettner's and not stopped to see Stella on her way. As it was, she was now immune.

Tips had booked the same table. There were champagne cocktails again. When the waiter moved away, leaving them alone, he said, wonderingly, "I just can't believe I've found you again. Darling, I love you so much."

"Tips, please, I want to tell you something. I . . ."

He smiled. "I want to hear only one thing from you."

"I can't say it."

He frowned. "What do you mean? This morning . . ."

"This morning was a long while ago," she said lightly.

He looked at her in bewilderment. "Are you having a little joke with me, pretending you don't care? If so, it's not very funny."

"No, I'm not joking." Then, remembering that she wouldn't cut him out of her life but instead she was going indeed to fool him, she added. "It's just that I've been doing a little straight thinking."

His brows drew together. "I see. And the result?"

She looked at him. "We know so little of each other. It would be crazy to rush into marriage. It is such a serious step."

"Don't I know it!" His face clouded. "I've been married once already. It was four years ago and a failure from the word go."

Jane's heart was hard. "I see. Is that meant to encourage me? How do you know you wouldn't be making a mistake a second time?"

"Because you're different," he said without any hesitation and with a note of deep conviction in his voice. "Because I don't believe you'll be stupidly jealous or suspicious if I look at another woman. I don't believe you'd call me a liar if I gave you my solemn word of honor I was speaking the truth."

The world seemed to stand still for a moment while Jane allowed herself to think that this might indeed be true, that in fact it was true. For this was the way she felt about him, too. Then she told herself angrily that it wasn't. She said in a light, odd, brittle voice: "Aren't you taking rather a lot for granted?"

"In suggesting that you're in love with me? No. Why shouldn't I say it if I believe it to be true? I knew it the moment you recognized me this morning. Of course I can't quite understand you this evening."

"It's the real me this evening," she said and told herself that she meant it. "I'm not in the least in love with you. I think you're attractive, but dozens of men are attractive. But we can meet. We're bound to, since we're both stationed at the same airdrome."

His face changed. His eyes met hers angrily. "Sure thing. We'll pass each other when you're with a bunch of your girl friends and . . . oh, blast!" He broke off abruptly and Jane looked up to see a woman coming toward them. She was tall and slender, with ash-blonde hair and a pink and white complexion. She wore mink and orchids and a smile that was all for Tips.

She came to the table. "Tips darling! How nice to see you!" She said warmly.

Tips rose to his feet. He clearly wasn't overly pleased to see her. He said in some embarrassment "Hello, Iris. I didn't know you were in London."

She laughed. "I thought it would be a surprise for you. I'm only here for tonight. And I've got an even greater one up my sleeve. Guess where I'm going tomorrow!"

Tips didn't try. "I give up," he said curtly.

(To be continued)

17 STATES REVEAL DEFENSE PROGRAM

Civilian Defense directors of the seventeen Eastern Seaboard States this week announced a joint "program of action" to maintain their organizations at "a high rate of efficiency and vigilance."

The action was taken with the approval of the United States Office of Civilian Defense and officials of the army's Eastern Defense Command and the First Fighter Command.

It was described at Maryland Council of Defense headquarters as a clarification of the muddled situation that has existed since the October 4 order of the War Department curtailing the activities of the ground observers, spotters, tellers and filterers.

It was pointed out that under the new program, activiites will continue as usual with the exception of the "spotter" organizations.

An accompanyng statement by Brig. Gen. Lawrence Craigie, of First Fighter Command, explained that the spotters were no longer needed because the Eastern Seaboardn ow is guarded by a "very accurate" mechanical device.

Maryland's nine warning centers most of which formaerly were in touch with the Baltimore filter center, will be notified hereafter directly from Philadelphia.

VETERANS—You men who fought the last War—make this your job. To see that no American boy shall fall because a lack of scrap deprived him of a fighting chance.

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Watch this paper for details of the big scrap drive and what you must do to help

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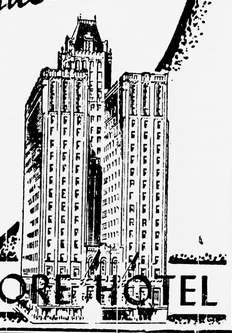

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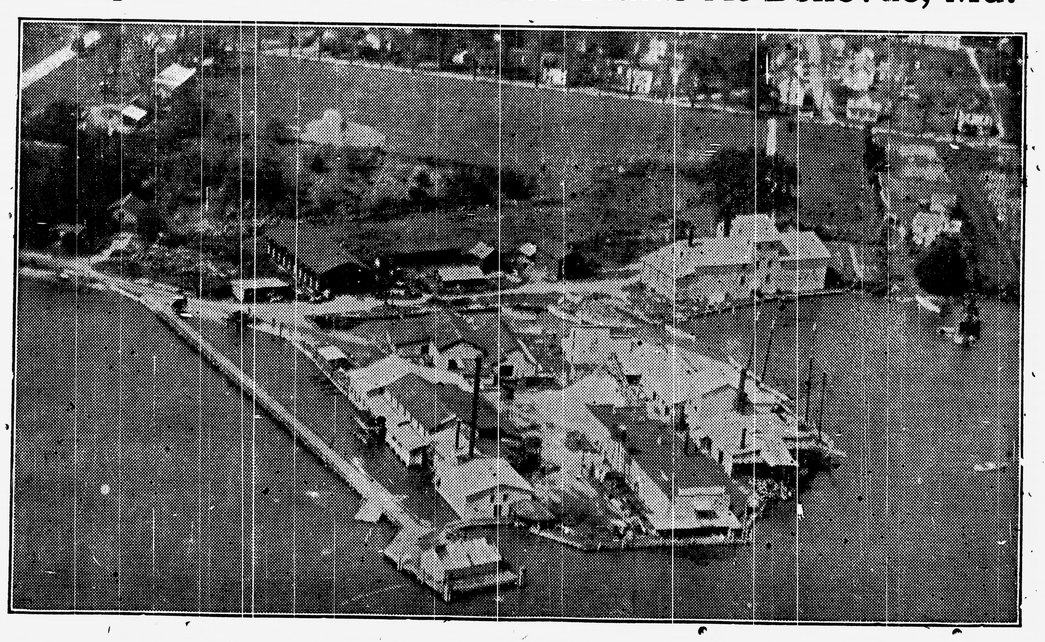
Airplane View of Valliant's Plants At Bellevue, Md.



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