

I Wrote a *Letter* for My Love

BY ROBERT FONTAINE

BILL'S parents had invited Emily down to their home in Philadelphia for a week-end. Emily packed a small suitcase and went down with a high heart, full of love for anyone who was in any way connected with Bill.

She had thought of Bill, almost anonymous in his corporal's uniform, as an ordinary guy she might have run into, war or no war.

In Philadelphia she was astonished at the grandeur of his home. Her own parents were modest, if not downright poor, and Emily had worked since she was fifteen.

Bill's mother, Mrs. Mason, had been nice in a far-off way. She had given Emily a bracelet, hugged her unenthusiastically, and called her attention to Bill's several college degrees, his affluent relatives, and his noble ancestors.

She had smiled a little patronizingly when Emily had defended beauty culture as "fun." "So many different people, all with their little, odd ways and they tell me all their closest secrets."

Emily told me about it. She told me, too, how Bill had asked her to marry him one night at Riverside when the Ferris wheel had stuck and how she had gone around after that in a golden haze.

I felt I wanted to help Emily. We were friends only because we both came into the same lunchroom at the same time and sat near each other. Eventually we had come to chat together aimlessly. I felt like an amused and tolerant older brother, and I was warmed by her pert, mercurial gaiety and her alarming dives into blue despair.

She confessed, after the Philadelphia episode, that she was afraid the Masons weren't going to like her. This infuriated me. There was something silly and old-fashioned about raising class barriers while men were dying for equality.

I decided to take Emily in tow. I began by writing a bread-and-butter letter for her.

"Mrs. Mason," I said, "is no doubt purring over her tea to the effect that you won't even have the breeding to write her a note."

So I wrote a note and had Emily mail it:

I bought her some violets and saw her off. I felt I ought to kiss her . . . I mean, after all I had bought the violets.

DEAR MRS. MASON:

I can't begin to tell you what a wonderful time I had on my visit. I must admit I was a little frightened at meeting Bill's relatives. But you were all so warm and friendly that I felt perfectly comfortable and at home. I do hope we have a lot more pleasant days together.

Affectionately,
EMILY.

P. S. Everyone thinks the bracelet you gave me is stunning. So do I!

During the weeks that followed I enjoyed my game thoroughly. I was determined to make Emily acquire a veneer of culture so shiny it would knock the eyes out of Mrs. Mason. We went to a local museum and I explained to Emily how modern painters were trying to paint the feeling of things rather than faithful reproductions of details.

We shopped. I got hold of odd little hats in out of the way shops, unusual combinations of frocks; pale blues and rich browns and colors that you didn't see together much but were simple and straightforward and went with Emily.

We laughed a lot. I wasn't much of a shopper but I had painted a good deal and knew something about line and color. All this was for the Masons, of course. In between we drank cokes, wore sport clothes and talked about Abbott and Costello.

Then one day Emily came running breathlessly into the lunchroom and announced the day had been set. She was going to Philadelphia to join Bill and his parents.

"I suppose," she said, "Mrs. Mason will

want the wedding in her house. She'll think mine isn't good enough."

"In that case," I said, "forget culture and poise and kick her shins."

I bought her some violets and saw her off. I felt I ought to kiss her. Very gently, of course. I mean, after all I had bought the violets. But I didn't kiss her. In fact after she had waved goodbye I wondered why I had felt I should kiss her.

I kept on wondering for some time. I tried to tell myself I had done a "good deed" but I felt lost without Emily. I informed myself sternly that virtue was its own reward. But that wasn't enough, somehow.

I realized with the suddenness of a November chill that I was lonely without Emily.

FINALLY I called up a girl I had once been in love with. She was as smart as they come. A little too smart, maybe.

"Would it frighten you very much," I asked after dinner, "if I asked you to marry me, May?"

May laughed: "Why?" she said.

"Why? I don't know. It's comfortable being with you."

"I wouldn't marry you if you were the last man on earth," May said. "You're too nice."

"That," I said wearily, "is the most gracious brush-off I ever did get." Still, before I had left, May had promised to think it over. Oddly enough, with a tear starting to trickle in her hard-boiled eyes.

I realized the next day, that we would both

be unhappy. I sent her a dozen scarlet roses and joined the army. Not in any Foreign Legion way, to forget Emily, but because it was time for me to do my share. I knew a lot about camouflage and they soon gave me a sergeant's stripes and I began to feel better.

Then one day I decided to drop into the lunchroom again.

I had a few days' leave. I guess I hoped, in some obscure way, to see Emily again. I hoped I could work a miracle, maybe.

And I did. She came in out of the splattering silver rain and said in a curious, quaky voice: "Hi, soldier."

We talked aimlessly for a while as people will in that position. It unnerved me, her coming out of the rain like that.

"How's everything in your heart?" I said finally.

"Fine," she said. "Everything is all straightened out. Clear as a bell."

I was honestly glad. It was that kind of a love by then. It was the kind where you can forget a little about yourself when someone's happiness is at stake.

"You might have invited me to the wedding," I said.

She looked at me a moment and then smiled as if she were a little afraid. Then she blurted out:

"I couldn't. Honestly. Those people were all on the outside. Bill was like that, too. Just surface. You and I were different. The music we heard and the paintings we saw and the food we [Continued on Page 22]



Illustrated by
Ralph Pallen Coleman

A ROMANCE WITH AN ASTONISHING ENDING

THE Housewife MAGAZINE

MAY 1943

Ten Cents



ARTHUR CAPPER PUBLISHER

MRS RUSSELL WEBSTER R
RI
LAFAYETTE MINN
4612