

Boy That really got his goat. So he left his number, and said, "Please tell her to call Joe Franklin." She called—not once, but five times, the next day. He had been in town helling everybody all day, and didn't get home till six o'clock that night. I met him at the door. "Hey, Bird," says I, "Mary called. She wants you to call her back." You should have seen him strut. Reminded me of a poor, unsuspecting gobbler the day before Thanksgiving. He strutted for an hour and a half. That makes the time exactly seven-thirty—too late to ask a girl for a date. I told him that. My gosh, you'd think I had kicked him with my spurs on. He drew up and said, "Well, she called me, didn't she?"

I said, "Sure, but maybe she just wanted to tell you she had a date."

"The devil. She wants a date with me."

"Just how do you know, *darling*?"

"Just because I do." Wow. What a blast that was.

Right here, I'll stop and do a little explaining. For eighteen years and three months, he had always gotten the best of me, if he tried. He could tease me, and I'd get mad and yell at him and cry. He was always the angel and I was the black sheep of the family. Just the same, though, we never really fussed or fought. I'd get madder'n a hornet for a few minutes, but I'd soon cool off and start waiting on him again. You might say I had, and still have, a bad case of hero-worship, but, no wonder, he's such a wonderful guy. He liked me pretty well too.

However, let's come back to this particular night. I was sitting on the porch with Grandmother and he was standing in the living room. Grandmother had sooner take up for Joe than for General Lee. Here's where she butted in.

"Well. Why shouldn't the girl want to have a date with *him*?"

"Grandmother, it's not that she doesn't *want* to have a date with him; she just *shouldn't* when he calls her at such an unearthly hour."

"I don't see why. Any girl should be proud to be seen with Lt. Joseph Franklin, Jr." She stressed the "Lieutenant" because she knew he would beam at the mention of his newly acquired position. It brought on a response from the owner of the handle.

"There. Grandmother ought to know. She's more experienced than you."

Oh yeah?

"Well, I think the girl's crazy if she does give up a date, and if she does, I wouldn't have one with her. I wouldn't have a date with any girl who'd give me one after calling her at such an ungodly hour." That was from me. You might know it.

"That just shows how smart *you* are." Very primly from Grandmother.

"It sure does. It just shows how much you know about these things. I'll go call her, and we'll just see what she does." Very superior, the general has spoken.

"Yes, go on, Sonny, and get your date." Confidently said by guess who?

"Sure, go on, old boy, and call her, but just remember what I said."

Into the hall he goes. Grandmother and I sit waiting, tensely, as if we were hearing for the first time bits of news broadcasts about the bombing of Pearl Harbor. Every once in a while, particles of conversation drifted our way, "Hello, sugar, where *have* you been all day?" Like she hadn't been sitting at home hanging onto the telephone. "Your eyes still as blue as ever—say, chick, I have a date with you tonight." Always soothing, endearing, you'd-better-come-on-cause-I'll show you a swell time but-I-know-you-will-anyway tone.

At that point Grandmother and I both began to talk very fast and at the same time about the weather. We were afraid to listen to the next words because our stakes were piled so high on opposite horses.

Sure, I love him. Well, who wouldn't? He's my brother.

What? What did you say? How did it turn out? How did what turn out? Oh! Oh, that. Why, don't

you know? You should. I knew before he called. He got the date.

## Prelude to Manhood

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an expectant thumb, he could not drive on without so much as a backward glance. "Hop in, Son," he said, as he brought his slick new roadster to a halt. With an approving glance he sized up the boy, missing nothing.

Jeff wavered. It was not often that people who drove such cars as this offered him a "lift," but when he peered into the upholstered interior and beheld a figure clad in overalls and a straw hat, he quickly opened the door and with a hasty "Thank-you, sir," settled back comfortably.

At length the driver spoke. "Goin' anywhere in particular, son? You don't look like you belong to these parts around."

Jeff shook his head. "No, Sir, I don't live here. I just drove out to think—and try to forget," he added dramatically. "As a matter of fact I was on my way back to Greenwich where I live, but my car broke down, so here I am. It was awfully nice of you to pick me up."

Josiah G. gave him a quick glance. "Oh, 'twarn't nothin'," he said. "Do it for anybody in your shoes. But looka'here, what did you want to come all the way out to Danville Junction for? It certainly ain't no place of beauty."

Jeff agreed that the Junction wasn't exactly scenic, but it was quaint and simple, and that's what he needed—something simple. He was tired of sophisticated people, of their superior attitude, especially women.

Josiah smiled. He had been seventeen once, and like this lad had suddenly realized that women were fickle. It had shocked him as it did Jeffery but he had grown out of it.

"The trouble is," continued Jeff. "I really believed her. When she said that I was the first boy whom she could really talk to, I read all the new books and consulted the daily papers so that we always could have some—"

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