



Bob waited for Jean to answer. "My father ran away when we were children." Her face felt stiff. "Is there anything else you want to know?" she asked

**S**HE saw the man as soon as she stepped out of the kitchen. He was lying belly down on the beach, the barrel of Willie's BB gun steadied on the log of driftwood before him.

Ping! The shot struck the tomato can sitting on the rock beyond the high-tide mark. When he raised his cheek from the gunstock and turned to Willie, she saw his profile, Indian red in the late California sun. He was nobody she knew.

Smoothing her skirt, she stepped

from the screened porch and walked toward them. When she was still some yards away Willie glanced up. He gave her the peculiar half-smile that made him look older than thirteen. It was a family smile, a secret smile of the blood and it said all the understanding, comradely things he never put into words.

Now he merely propped himself on one thin elbow and nodded at the man beside him.

"This is Bob," he said. "He used to be a Marine."

She stood above them, her foot almost touching the stranger. She saw that he was in his middle twenties. He wore jeans, and a white cotton T-shirt lay on the sand with his loafers. His body had the set of a man's body. His shoulders were heavy and he was thick-chested and, as he rolled over, he shielded his eyes with his hand and his gray eyes moved across her face. She felt as if she were being picked out of the darkness by a searchlight.

She sat down on the sand beside him and pushed her skirt down between

her knees. "Willie," she said. "Aunt May says to set the table. We'll eat on the back porch."

"This is Jean. My sister," Willie told the ex-Marine. "She goes to City College."

Again his gaze moved over her. She felt it linger on her blond hair, catch the color of her eyes and check the nose which was like Willie's.

"City College?" he said. "What are you taking?"

She knew he didn't care actually; he was asking because she expected him

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ILLUSTRATED BY HARRY FREDMAN

to ask. She smiled a practiced smile of dry amusement, knowing it made her look like Aunt May and being amused by that too.

"I'm taking Library Science," she told him. "I'm studying to be an old maid."

She watched the curiosity come into his eyes. All right, she thought, now you know I'm a little odd. But I told you before you found it out yourself.

"Library Science," he said. "Is that what you want to do?"

His tone held no mockery, merely Collier's for July 19, 1947

the casual interest of someone wondering why the snow fell or what made the sea deep.

She hesitated, then from habit ridiculed herself, "Old maids run in the family. I want to study and do it right." Before he could speak again, she turned to Willie. With Willie she could be brisk and certain. There was no twilight area of wanting something you pretended not to want.

"Go set the table, Willie. And wash your hands first," she said. "Dinner's nearly ready."

Under her aunt's guidance she was studying, alas, for a degree in spinsterhood. Fortunately, she flunked the course

Willie took the BB gun from the log beside the Marine's head and picked up his can of shot. As he knelt there in the sand, he paused.

"Look," he told the man. "Why don't you stay and eat with us?"

"Oh, Willie!" Her reproof was automatic, and immediately she was blushing. But really, what had got into Willie? He knew what Aunt May would say if they brought in an absolute stranger, somebody he had picked up on the beach.

"I mean, I'm sure, Mr.—"

"Bob," the Marine said.

"I'm sure Bob has another engagement, Willie. You can't just ask people for dinner at the last minute."

Willie's eyes met hers calmly. During all the years she had spent battering herself against the stiff code of conduct Aunt May threw about them, he had merely watched, making his secret judgments in silence. The few times he wanted something, he went after it and returned, quiet and satisfied, to take his punishment.

Right now, he was going to be stubborn. "Bob, have you got anything else to do?" he asked.

The man shook his head; he lay smiling in the warm, salty sunshine.

"Well," she said helplessly, "would you like to stay?"

He grinned. "Sure. Thanks."

"I'll go tell Aunt May," Willie said.

As Willie's thin shoulders swung away toward the house, the Marine moved nearer to her, closing the space the boy had left. It was a natural gesture, but she jerked as if he had laid hands on her.

"There's salad and hamburger," she said quickly.

"Who's Aunt May?" he asked.

"My mother's sister. She's our guardian."

"Your parents dead?" he asked.

She drew an arc in the sand. "My mother is. My father ran away when we were children." Her face felt stiff and her voice was rough against her throat. "Is there anything else you want to know?" she asked.

"Tough," he said placidly.

She got up and brushed the sand from her pale legs. "If you want dinner, you'd better come along."

He rose slowly and looked down at her. He stood close to her and she caught the smell of sweat.

"You can wash up inside," she said.

THEY sat at the table on the screened porch, Aunt May at the head, Jean facing her, Bob and Willie on either side. Jean concentrated on the familiar beach noises outside—the evening gnats, the surf, the screech of brakes above them on the highway—trying to escape the smile fastened to Aunt May's downy face, trying not to listen to her voice.

"I'm sorry there wasn't more," she was saying politely. "I wasn't expecting a guest."

He glanced at her across his plate. "I don't eat much," he said. His voice was pleasantly matter-of-fact. He broke a piece of bread and pushed it through the gravy with his fork.

"At least there's plenty of salad." Aunt May rose with the wooden bowl and put the last of it on his plate. For a moment she watched him eat, then said, "Do you live down here?"

"Los Angeles," he said. "I share a flat with a guy I knew in the war."

"Do you work at the beach?"

"No. I just drove out."

Aunt May said "Oh," and Jean wanted to warn him about Aunt May and work. She wanted to say, "Go on—tell her anything—tell her a lie—but don't let her think you were loafing on a weekday."

But he just ate the last of the watercress and said, "I don't have a job. I saved money; I'm looking around."

All the lines in Aunt May's face moved to touch other lines and her smile was acrid. "You must join our Order of the Lilies," she said.

"Yeah? What's that?"

Aunt May turned slightly and nodded at a framed sampler on the wall, stitched in green and black thread.

LILIES OF THE FIELD

"They toil not,

Neither do they spin."

Beneath the legend, four lilies were exquisitely embroidered. This was Aunt May's quiet joke. Whenever Jean or Willie forgot the dishes or slacked on repainting the house, whenever they sat idle at all, they were made members of the Order.

NOTHING was ever said about their mother who had died, or their father who had run away, but the sampler was always there to remind them that Aunt May had worked hard to support them. Even now the scent of lilies made Jean a little sick.

Bob got up from the table and teetered on the heels of his bare feet, his large hands on his hips, staring at the sampler.

"You did this yourself?" he asked Aunt May.

She frowned, the faintest gathering between her brows. "Yes. Why?"

"Good needlework." He turned, dismissing the sampler. "I've got nothing against work. But I can't see taking a job just to have a job."

She said, "You have something special in mind?"

"No," he said. "But on the islands I learned patience. There'll be something come along I want to do." He pulled out a cigarette. "Smoke?"

"No." This coldly. And then as he moved toward Jean: "And neither does my niece."

There was a short silence while Bob lighted a cigarette and looked around for an ash tray. Finally, he opened the screen door and flung the match outside.

"The paper said there'd be a grunion run tonight," he announced. "That's the reason I drove down."

"Grunion?" Aunt May said, as if she had not heard properly.

"Fish. I hear they come by thousands. They swarm up on the sand to lay their eggs."

"Oh!" Aunt May's tone questioned (Continued on page 58)

# SHERIDAN'S RIDE

BY JIM MARSHALL

Wild, free and Texan, Miss Ann Sheridan continues to gallop through the Hollywood scenery

**S**HE was born in Denton, Texas, on February 21, 1915, and christened Clara Lou, for her aunt and mother. Her father was George W. Sheridan, a prosperous mechanic. She has one brother, George, and three sisters, Kitty, Mabel and Pauline. Her father's great-uncle was General Phil Sheridan; her mother's family were the Warrens of Virginia. One of her ancestors was a Cherokee, but whether a chief or a princess is not recorded.

In Denton, a small town northwest of Dallas, the Sheridans lived at 304 South Elm Street. Clara Lou started her education at the Robert E. Lee School, being known as Lou-dee. Later she went to the Denton High School and sang with the band, mainly torch songs. After this she enrolled at North Texas State Teachers College, also in Denton, but never, as legend has it, taught school. The story that she did teach was started by a press agent and had school-teachers coming to Hollywood in droves for some time.

She is one of the very few beauty-contest winners ever to be heard from again after arriving in Hollywood. She got into the contest by the back door when her sister Kitty sent a studio portrait and a snapshot of her in a bathing suit to John Rosenfield, dramatic editor of the Dallas News. Mr. Rosenfield sent the pictures along to Paramount, which was operating a "Search for Beauty." This occurred in the middle of Annie's sophomore year, when she had become resigned to a future as a schoolma'am.

"You are making a fool of me!" Annie wrote to Kitty, when she found out about it.

Later she cooled down and had forgotten about the whole grim episode when Mr. Rosenfield phoned her and said Hollywood was calling. She signed a one-picture contract at \$50 a week and hopped a rattler. This was in 1933, a depression year. After the picture was made most of the beauty-contest winners were packed off home, but Annie stayed on—because she could ride a horse. She made five Westerns with Randy Scott and had her name changed to Ann.

Two years of this seemed to be getting her nowhere and she quit Paramount to free-lance. She worked a while at Universal, got odd jobs here and there and was threatening again to go back to Denton when she got a break at Warner's.

She played a nurse in a string of pictures and was not kissed for the screen until Fred MacMurray tackled the assignment in a picture called Car 99. It turned out okay and she has been kissed in every picture since, often with extreme vehemence.

Her first big part was that of a schoolma'am in The Great O'Malley with Pat O'Brien and Humphrey Bogart. She went on into Black Legion, Alcatraz, San Quentin and twenty others.

But still Annie was Number 27 on the fan-mail list at Warner's and a plenum of press agents was called to get her out of this cellar of celebrity. After talking over several dozen sobriquets which might be applied to Miss Sheridan, (Continued on page 61)

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