



Passengers, disembarked from the streamliner, flooded up the area-way toward their expectant rope-hemmed greeters like a stream from a vigorously turned-on tap. There was a solitary laggard, a slender girl in a tan gabardine suit carrying an overnight bag, whose copper-colored hair swung at her shoulders as she was buffeted by passing luggage and an occasional hurried hip. But her apprehensive feet refused to keep pace with the tide.

There was a tight feeling behind Susan's dark, doubt-haunted eyes. Maybe Steve wouldn't be there. Maybe his letters, as her mother had insisted, had actually been embarrassed fill-ins until he acquired courage enough to tell her that everything was all off between them. Six months of waiting had done something to the security she'd felt about their loving each other.

Susan was almost afraid to glance at the faces toward which her reluctant feet and the wave of people were carrying her. Her mother, who had never liked Steve, had said she was shameless, chasing a man who obviously didn't want her. Susan hadn't believed her—had refused even to consider that a Hollywood contract could have changed Steve ... that those golden days and nights of working together at

the summer theatre in the small Connecticut town could have been forgotten so easily. He hadn't sent for her because he couldn't find a place for them to live. Susan had believed him ... until her mother's remarks had become unendurable. She'd had to come — had to find out for herself.

She was closer now. People were climbing over the ropes to greet their friends and sweethearts and families. She couldn't avoid the issue any longer. She looked up.

Union Station seemed to be full of people kissing one another. But no one was kissing Susan. Her heart dropped way down into her boots. She scanned the faces, which were thinning out rapidly. She was looking for ablond-thatched head and a pair of confident blue eyes. They weren't anywhere. Steve hadn't come.

Susan choked down the desolated fullness which rose in her throat. Maybe he hadn't received her telegram. Maybe the girl at the office where she'd handed it in had lost it or gotten the address wrong or something. But deep inside she knew her mind was clutching at straws. Her mother had been right. Steve didn't want her any longer. She'd come three thousand miles. They'd been interesting, eager miles. The miles going back home would be miserable.

A forlorn hope kept her anchored there until the last group of happily-met people had melted away. Then she strolled slowly out into the large night-darkened patio and, because her knees felt weak, sat down on an iron bench. She'd have to go to a hotel, but just right now she felt too numb to move.

Someone sat down on the bench beside her. Susan didn't look around. She wasn't interested in people ... she wasn't interested in anything at all. She just sat there feeling empty, wondering how she could go back and face her mother now. She wanted to curl up into a tiny ball and roll into a hole somewhere. She leaned back against the comforting arm around her shoulders. That was what she needed ... someone to hold and comfort her ... a shoulder she could cry on ... she felt so alone.

Susan shocked aware suddenly. She was being kissed, gently but firmly. She gasped, sitting bolt upright, her eyes startling wide open. "Oh!" Completely unfamiliar gray eyes were smiling into hers. "I'm sorry."

"You—you kissed me!"

"The impulse was irresistible."

"I'm going to call a police-

man."

The dark eyebrows raised slightly. "That would be most unkind. I was only trying to be helpful. You seemed so forlorn."

"But -- but you can't just go around kissing people."

"I know." The irregular mouth twisted just a bit at one corner. "Maybe it was because you looked a little like the way I felt. And then, when you snuggled up to me ... well, you seemed so sort of sweet and woebegone and kissable, I had to do something about it."

Susan had changed her mind about having him arrested. He had too nice a face. But she was still indignant. "Well, go away now."

"A safe and sane remark." He nodded approval. "In other circumstances, I'd definitely recommend it. But you seem in some sort of trouble. I'd like to help, if I may."

Susan's eyelids flickered. This was obviously no ordinary fresh young man. Besides, he wasn't so young ... at least five years older than Steve, she would have said. He had tiny lines around the edges of his eyes and he didn't seem very happy either. "It—it isn't anything anyone can fix."

"Not even the man who didn't show up?"

"How did you know that?"

"I was meeting the train you were on ... expecting a friend who evidently missed it. I noticed the way your face changed when there was no one there for you. And if it hadn't been a man ... a man you're in love with ... you wouldn't have become quite so unhappy so quickly."

"Am I that transparent?"

"You don't hide the way you feel. Why don't you tell me about it? I might be able to do something."

Susan couldn't find anything but sincerity in his eyes. And she did feel so desperately alone and in need of someone to talk to. She shrugged self-consciously. "This—this is very irregular. Besides, you'll probably be bored."

"You can stop if I yawn."

He didn't, though. Her story of how she'd met Steve at the summer theatre, how they'd fallen in love and why she'd come out to California now to marry him despite the fact that he hadn't sent for her yet seemed to interest him a great deal. His eyes were puzzled. "But why don't you call his hotel?" Susan's lower lip

pushed out slightly. "Isn't his not meeting my train enough of a slap in the face? I should have taken the hint when his letters kept saying he couldn't find a place for us to live in. In a city the size of Los Angeles ..." She stopped, frowning. "What are you laughing about?" "Sorry." He subsided. "I shouldn't have. The housing situation here is no laughing matter. I can assure you that his not being able to find a place is legitimate."

"You—you mean mother was really all wrong about that?"

He nodded. "What's more, his not meeting you tonight means nothing. Your Steve comes under the heading of the 'Hollywood Hopeful'. The most important thing in the life of the 'Hollywood Hopeful' is meeting the right people and being seen in the right places. Either of those would take precedence over a mere detail like meeting the girl you love at a railroad station. Call his hotel."

Susan hesitated. "He—he won't just squirm and make excuses and try to let me down easily and make me feel even worse?"

"He'll probably be out."

He was. But the message the clerk at the desk relayed to her changed everything. It was very important business ... nothing else could have kept him from meeting her. However, he'd reserved a room for her at his hotel, would take her to breakfast the next morning and show her the town. Susan emerged from the telephone booth floating on a pink cloud. It really was nice to be so miserable. It made you feel so wonderful when you felt better.

The gray-eyed man, who had introduced himself as Gabriel Wells, smiled.

"Your expression indicates that all has ended happily."

Susan was bubbly inside. "I'm so grateful to you. I—I'm going to see him tomorrow."

"Which leaves tonight," the other said. "I wonder if you'd mind doing a favor for me."

Susan felt too good to be suspicious. "Of course. What is it?"

"I was in a mood ... one of those dark lonely ones. You've taken me out of it, and I'm not particularly anxious to return to it yet. Will you spend the evening with me?"

Susan hesitated. Then because, strangely, she felt as

*continued on next page*