

[No Bombs Dropping]

Rouldus Richmond 35 School Street Montpelier, Vt. Discard [????] [Change title?] NO BOMBS DROPPING

"This place is a mess," the woman said. "I just moved in today. I'm going to have my shop in the big front room, and live in the back part. There's plenty of space, you see. I wasn't in the block that burned. Just decided to move, that's all. The other girl and I decided to split up. We got along all right, but I wanted a place of my own. The equipment was most all mine anyway. This is a pretty good location, don't you think? Just off the square here. I thing I'll like it fine. And I know most of the old customers will follow me up here. I was the one that drew them, you know. They all know Lila, they didn't know the other girl. "

"Well, where's your husband?" the man asked. "The last I knew you were married."

"Which husband?" Lila asked, laughing. "I've had three, you know. Married! I guess I've been married. I'm a much-married woman, Arthur. But I'm single again now. And glad of it.

"You're still looking pretty nice," Arthur told her. "Still young and fresh, Lila. How do you do it anyway? Look at me, I'm getting to be an old man now."

"You've still got your hair and you're not fat, Art. You look pretty fit. You haven't been round here for a long while, have you? Oh, lots of people ask me how I keep so young-looking. 2 But I'm not so old, you know. I'm only thirty-four, Art."

"Is that so? I thought you were older than that, Lila."

"Well, I've been around a long time, Art. I was married when I was seventeen; the first time, I mean. Just my daughter's age now. You wouldn't think I had a girl seventeen years old, would you? There's a picture of her. Isn't she a sweet kid? She graduates from high

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school this year. And there's my picture beside hers. You wouldn't think that was mother and daughter now, would you? Looks more like sisters. Lots of people take us for sisters when we're out together. Yes, she looks like me all right."

Lila was tall and well-formed, with a manner of easy composure. Her speech was frank and brisk like her walk. It was impossible to imagine her ill-at-ease under any condition[.?] [Her skin was wonderfully clear. Only in her eyes and about her mouth did her age, and experience, show at all, and she was undoubtedly older than thirty-four. She liked men and she liked liquor but dissipation had not marked her. There were no false pretenses about her. Arthur regarded with her admiration.?.]

"Oh, it helps to have a beauty shop of your own, " Lila she said. "I'll admit that. It makes a lot of difference when you take all kinds of care with your skin and your hair, and not spend a lot of money doing it. A woman needs a lot more care than a man. Look at lots of women my age, even younger. They get married and let themselves go. They get fat and sloppy. They spread all over the place. They think because they got their man that nothing else matters. Then they wonder why their husband steps out on them! You can't blame a man for stepping when his wife get like that. 3 Well, I never let myself go, but my husbands used to step out on me just the same." Lila sighed. "I guess all men are that way."

"You used to do a little stepping yourself, didn't you?" Arthur inquired slyly. "Seems to me you used to cheat a little, Lila. Remember when you were waiting on tables in the hotel?"

Lila laughed. "I wasn't living with my husband then, Arthur. Sure, I cheated — if you want to call it cheating. If a man can't support you why be true to him? I was making my own living. Well, I lost that job because the men paid too much attention to me. That old senator — what was his name? I can't even remember it, or where he was from. Up north somewhere. He was quite an old sport[.?] Arthur. He used to spend money like a fool. Guess he had plenty of it. He sure threw it around anyway. It was really on account of him I lost my job. I couldn't help it. I couldn't get rid of the man. He was after me every minute.

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Then I worked down to Montpelier in the Pavilion. He followed me there. Old Hafer said I was the last young waitress he'd ever hire. I guess he's never hired another young girl. The ones he's got in there now are old enough to die. They can just about move a round. Soup gets cold while they're bringing it in from the kitchen."

"Did you marry that lieutenant you used to go round with? He was an engineer on that East Barre Dam. He was a pretty good boy, I thought."

"Yes, I married him[.?] " Lila said and sighed. " God, but he was a good-looking man! He was the last one, Art. It didn't 4 last long. He was too damn good-looking. How the women went for that guy! He was the last one and there won't be any more[.?] .. We used to have some good times with Eddie though. He was a lot of fun. Remember the week-end we went up to Gallagher's in Phillipsburg? [That was a time. We started for Montreal but didn't get beyond Phillipsburg. Yes, we did too, we got as far as St. John's. We stopped to dance there, and the girls tried to make you men. We found out later they were professionals. That was a tough joint, Art. But It's swell in Phillipsburg.?] Right on the water there. Mississquoi Bay right at your feet. I remember how the breeze blew in the window in the morning. Fresh and clean off the lake. [And I had a hangover, oh what a hangover! I don't often have 'em either.?] The water was dark blue that morning and there were white sails way out in the middle. [That crazy Eddie drank bottles of ale before he even got out of bed. What a man that Eddie was!...?] Say, Art, how come you never got married?"

"Never had time — when I had the money[.?] " Arthur explained. " Now I got all kinds of time and no money. I'd look pretty asking a girl to marry me the way I am now. Forty-two years old and broke. You know what I'm doing now? I'm working on WPA, a white-collar job. Fifty-eight dollars a month. I used to make that much a week. I used to make that much in one day. And spend it in one night. Fifty-eight dollars a month! What can you do with that? And Lila, you know what I was doing all fall? I was out with a pick and shovel. Right on the old chain-gang. Well, it put me in shape anyway. Took about four inches

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off my waist. See how loose these pants are. This is a tailormade suit too. 5 Boy, it was tough, that job. But I liked it. I liked it better than the one I'm on now. I feel kind of ashamed to go up to that State House where we work. You know how it is. I know everybody up there and they all know me. I'm kind of ashamed to go up there and sit around an office and proof-reading. All we do is proof-read — when we do that. Sometimes the fellow I work with don't show up at all, and then I just sit there. You know, one of us is supposed to read one copy while the other checks it. Can't do that alone. It's a hell of a job[.?] for a man anyway. But what you going to do?"

["The last I heard you were working in a shoe store."]

"Yes, but I got laid off. Didn't work at all for almost a year. They couldn't afford so many clerks so they let me go. I know more about shoes than any man in town, too. I really know shoes, and I can fit shoes. Yes,?] " I loafed for almost a year. That ate up all the money I had in the bank. I still got some in one bank but I can't get it out. It's been tied up since the bank holiday in thirty-three. I drew some unemployment compensation for awhile. It was tough, Lila. I ran up a big bill at the restaurant where I eat. I'm still paying on it. My goddamn check is gone as soon as I get it. Fifty-eight bucks a month! That's not even cigarette money. When I was on the road I used to spend that much a month on tips. I always had good jobs, Lila, but I can't get one now." Arthur shook his head. #

Arthur was a stocky-thick limbed heavy-set man with big large muscular hands. He had a homely red face and [blinked?] through thick glasses. / His 6 false teeth were very noticeable. He was His neatly dressed in a neat double-breasted suit of slightly shabby oxford gray showed wear . His brown hair was parted in the middle and brushed back. In spite of his unfortunate looks he had some quality that made him likeable and attractive. But he was personally attractive in spite of his shabby appearance[.?)

"Yes," Lila said. " You were with Liggett and Myers I remember when you used to come in the shop. I remember the first time I did your nails. You were pretty fresh too, Arthur

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my boy, pretty fresh. But nothing like the guy I had today. He was so fresh I wouldn't even take his money. When you called me he got mad because I left him to answer the phone. He was a wise guy [,?] I think he was a Jew. Anyway he who he thought he was a big shot. Big city stuff, you know. I told him what I thought about him before he left. I wouldn't take his money for the manicure. That's how burnt up I was. He won't be back — I hope. Nobody'll miss him."

"That was a good job with Liggett and Myers I had ," Arthur said. "Sixty dollars a week and expenses. They're A good outfit to work for. I made plenty extra on my expense account, too. They're very liberal. They expect you to stay at the best hotels and eat the best food. Boy, I was living high in those days. I had the old mazuma and I spent it."

"Don't I know it!" said Lila. "And you had a girl in every port too, sailor. A woman in every town you hit." Arthur grinned a pleased grin. "Sure, I could do it in those days. I had a car, plenty of money, the best clothes, everything. If I went out on a party I expected to spend fifteen 7 or twenty dollars anyway. Now what have I got? Nothing[.?] I haven't got a thing. I was checking up the other night. I've only got four decent shirts left. I'm low on socks and underwear too. I only got this one suit. I need a new hat. Why, I've never been so low in my life. I'm right on the old rocks for fair[.?]*1 Lila. [{"*1]

"Don't let it get you, Art," advised Lila. "Don't let it get you down. You'll come back all right. They can't keep a man like you down. You remember Helga Larsen, don't you? Sure, everybody knows Helga. She's younger than I am but she's been kicking round just as long or longer. She was going with another lieutenant the same time I was going with Eddie. He was married, too. Helga always went for married men. Well, Helga just got herself married. Was everyone round here surprised! Nobody thought that girl would get married. Of course the man is from out of town. He's from Providence and he's a good looking [fellow. I went out with him myself. He's a big tall guy, over six feet, and handsome. I was out with him just a few nights before they were married. Nobody thought he took Helga very serious. But she got him all right.?] Everybody says she hooked him quick

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before he found out about her reputation. He's kind of a funny fellow. I mean he's moody. Sometimes he'll sit there smoking his pipe and not saying a word. Sometimes he won't talk to anybody. Then again he'll talk and laugh and tell stories, be a lot of fun. He's got a swell job, makes good money. But he's kind of tight with it. He's a hot-blooded man too[.?] I know that, Arthur... Helga looks awful since she got married. Blue circles 8 under her eyes. I never could stand that girl. She always thought she was better than anyone else, and she certainly wasn't. I know plenty about that girl. I've seen her in action with my own eyes[.?] [Shels?] a hot number.

[There's another girl from that crowd going to get married, they say. This dumb young lawyer is going to marry her. Nobody else that lived round here and knew her would marry her. She's the one that fixed Doc Carter up last winter, and she gave it to a boy in Montpelier too. Doc gave it to Velma Burke, and she passed it around. The town was plastered with it all winter. They say the whole Ski Club crowd had it. I don't know about that, but I know quite a few of them gave up skiing all of a sudden, and quit drinking too. Now the girl that started it is going to get married, the sweet little thing!?] “ I'm an awful cat, aren't I though? I'm no angel and never pretended to be. You know that, Art. But these girls that pretend to be so damned nice give me an awful pain. This town is full of them. They act so sweet and innocent. But you ought to see then when they get with a man and have a few drinks in them. Innocent all right! Hot little sluts, all of them.” #

“I know the one you mean that fixed Doc up,” said Arthur. “I went out with her once, but I didn't make any passes at her. She looks pretty good.”

“Good thing for you didn't, I guess,” said Lila grimly. “A wonder she didn't make passes at you though. Yes, she looks all right — if you care for that type. Did she show you her scar. She's always showing her scar when she gets drunk. ?] 9 Appendicitis... I think some of these girls have had their appendix out two or three times.

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"How do you like the Christmas decorations[,?] Art? You know the Granite City got a big writeup a few years ago in the Boston papers. Praising the Christmas decorations. Some of the private homes have some lovely things too. This town is quite livewire in that way. They get out and do things here, you have to give them credit. Yes, Christmas is coming again. I feel kind of old at Christmas time. The years go faster and faster. Christmas doesn't mean much now. I always think of Christmases when I was a kid back on the farm. Sure, I was born on a farm up in Albany, Vermont. All the glamor girls come from the farm, you know[.?] / . / . / . Yes, another Christmas. Now it only means drinking and dancing at the Elks Club or some other place. The same guys, the same gals, the same gags. You have to drink to stand it. If you drink enough you think you're liking it. I don't drink an awful lot though. I take it pretty easy. At my age it begins to show on your face and figure. Remember that song, "Stay Young and Beautiful?" That's my business[,?] Arthur. Make others beautiful and keep myself that way — or try to.

"Did you see the big funeral procession today[,?] [?] Art? Another stonecutter's funeral. I did his wife's hair[,?] you know. She'd never been in before. She was a lovely little Italian woman. She cried all the time, couldn't stop the tears. I didn't know who she was[,?] of course. She didn't say a word. Most of these women talk your ears off. She had a face that was sad and noble, kind of. It made you feel like crying to see her. When 10 she was leaving I said: 'I hope you'll come back again.' She said: 'No, I don't come back again. I don't need to come any more.' Afterwards I found out who she was. A stonecutter's wife — widow, I should say. Her husband had just died. I wondered why she had her hair done. Somebody must have made her come. She won't ever care how she looks any more[.?] " Those Italian women really love a man and stick to him. The men may raise hell but the women are straight. They're brought up that way. Italian men don't stand for their sisters or daughters or wives playing around. All Europeans make a laughing-stock of American husbands anyway." End story here

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“I guess they got a right to. Most husbands here are scared to death of their wives. I know plenty of them that get tight or something and don't dare go home. I almost got married when I was in the army. One of those sweet southern gals — with a mother who might as well've carried a shotgun. That's when I was down at Camp Wadsworth, / Spartansburg, North Carolina. I enlisted at Fort Slocum, New York, you know. I was one of the first men from round here to join the army in 1917. I was just a kid... Well, one night this old southern belle came in and I was with her daughter. We were mussed up maybe but nothing had happened. All innocent, see? But the old lady was going to have us married right away. Well, I never called on that baby again!

“In Spartansburg there was a military school and the boys had uniforms that resembled our officers' uniforms. In the army you salute the uniform, not the man. That's the understanding. 11 Well, these kids used to get a great kick out of standing on the streets and making the soldiers salute them. But we got wise to those tin soldiers. One night we ganged up on a bunch of them, rushed 'em down an alley and did a good job on them. After that they weren't so cocky.”

“I was supply sergeant. Yes, I got across but I didn't get into action. I sailed from New York to Brest on the Leviathan, and I think it was the only troopship that went across unconvoyed during the war. It was originally a German boat, you know, a prize ship. I think there were 10,000 soldiers on board. And about 200 or 250 died of influenza on the way across. We flew the yellow flag all the way, the plague flag. They were dying right and left like flies. The 57th Pioneer Infantry, an all Vermont regiment, was on the boat and lost lots of men.

“We went into rest camp at Brest; then to a reclassification camp at Le Mans. After the Armistice I was stationed at the Central Records Office in Bourges. Central Headquarters was in Chaumont. In Bourges there's a cathedral with two towers, that they call the “Butter Towers.” Peasants sold butter to pay for them. I picked up a girl in Lyons and took her down to [Nines?], which is near Montpellier, the town our capital was named after. I

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remember there was a bridge in Lyons dedicated to Woodrow Wilson. This girl stayed with me fourteen days. She didn't want any money for it either. All she took was an American dollar for a souvenir! That was about equivalent to six francs at that time. She kind of wanted to get married too, and come back to the United States to live. But I couldn't see it that way, Lila. 12 Those French girls thought all American soldiers were rich. The American private drew a dollar day, while the French poilu drew about two cents a day. As supply sergeant I drew about three-eighty a day, so I was really in the money, see? And of course we scattered francs around like they were nothing at all.

"I spent some time in Paris. Stayed at the Hotel Continental there. I remember the Crystal Palace where Jack Pickford's wife died and there were naked dancing girls, and the soldiers and girls promenaded on the make for each other. It was a great war — but not for the poor guys up front in the mud and blood. And what a crime it'll be if they start fighting over there again now. What a slaughter. I mean if they really start fighting on land on the Western Front. Phillip Gibbs says the Maginot Line is practically impenetrable and could be taken only with the most awful slaughter you can imagine.

"Well," Arthur said finally. "I kick on being over here on the WPA. And you kick about going round to the same places with the same crowd. But I guess we're both pretty lucky at that. What kind of a Christmas do you think it's going to be for most of the people over in Europe?" At least the people on WPA can have some kind of a Christmas, not much but something. And no bombs dropping down chimneys instead of Santa Claus[.?] anyway. "