

Serial Story—

# Conscript's Wife

By BETTY WALLACE

YESTERDAY — Martha Marshall had been engaged to Paul Elliott for two years before she met Bill Marshall, Paul's school chum. And she had married Bill less than a month later. Still a bride, she and Bill make a foursome with Paul and Suzanne Decker. Comes registration for draft. Bill is in Class I, since Martha is financially independent and Bill's work is not essential to defense. Then one day, there is a letter for Bill. He has been drafted.

## CHAPTER TWO

SHE SEEMED TO HEAR him saying it again. "I've been drafted." And the room was still swimming around her.

"Honey," Bill pleaded. "Darling, don't look like that. It's nothing. If I have to go, I have to go." Martha steadied herself. Her husband's face came back into focus. She saw his crisp dark curls, the tightened line of his lips. Her fingers went up to pat his cheek.

So he had been conscripted, after all. There was nothing they could do to change it. He would go away. For a while year. His country needed him. The United States of America.

Her thoughts flitted in and out, like little darting birds. Bill would be a soldier. But there was no war. Only a precaution, a defense. Only a year in an Army camp. Duty. "Lots of men enlist," Bill was saying softly. "Lots of men join the army for a career."

His arms were around her. He kissed her. "It'll only be like—like having a job out of town, Martha. You could come up to camp weekends. I'll be home on leave sometime."

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THEY WALKED OUT INTO the street. Peg, so rusty and dilapidated, so contrary, was suddenly dear. "It's a good thing we have Peg," she said. "I can drive up to see you."

"Yes, if the camp's not over 10 miles away. I wonder—where do they send the men from this vicinity?" He added thoughtfully, "funny, how you never give the army a thought. I bet I can't name two forts off hand. And what I remember from ROTC drill in high school, you could stick in the eye of a needle."

Separation. She looked at him hungrily. She must remember the line of his jaw, the blue of his eyes, the way his hand was big and capable on the wheel. She bit her lip. They had never been separated, not even for a night, since the minister had said the solemn words over them. And now, they'd be apart for a year. A whole year. It stretched before her, barren and endless.

"In case I never told you before," Bill was saying. "I love you, Martha."

"In case I never told you," she whispered. "I love you, Bill Marshall."

He straightened his shoulders. "I'll break the news to them at the store." He was struck by another thought. "I wonder if I'll get the job back—afterward."

"There's a law about it. They have to take you back."

"Yes, if the guy who comes after me doesn't let a lot of deadbeats walk out with diamond rings so there won't be any store to come back to." He stopped. "You know, I always meant to get you a ring, Martha. Better than the one—the one—"

The one Paul had given her. "Don't sweet."

"But I should have saved my money. I didn't."

"I've got a ring," she said. "The only one I want."

His hand closed over hers. At the Air Transport plant, Martha said, "I'll ask for time off. I want to stay with you every minute, until you—leave."

She stumbled as she got out of the car. The blood pounded in her ears. It seemed to her almost as though she was saying farewell to the gay and careless life they had known until now. Saying farewell to the laughter and dancing and the irresponsibility.

The country had given her husband a stern duty to perform; and she, as his wife, had her part in it, too. She'd have to stay home, alone and waiting. She'd have to come to this office every morning. Not as before, simply because it made things easier — but because now there'd be her own living to make.

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DUTY. IT WAS a big word. Strangely, an unfamiliar word. Martha Marshall thought, as she walked into the sunny office where she typed specifications for airplanes, that perhaps the generation — hers and Bill's — had heard all too little of duty until now. It had never been a stern taskmaster to be reckoned with. No one had preached its necessities, it had had no part in their lives.

Paul Elliott raked his strong fingers through his hair when she told him Bill had been called. "Nice mess! I thought they'd use some discretion. First crack out of the fishbowl, they hook a married man."

He told her to go right home. "I'll fix everything."

The thought of duty stayed with her. While she helped Bill pull out dresser drawers, sort out underwear, pack his suitcase, she thought, "At least this isn't such a hard duty. I'm not sending him to war. Not yet."

The store had given him a month's salary. "For the next six months, Martha, they'll send you a check for half salary. Decent, huh?"

"Wonderful of them." They had awakened to duty, too.

It all happened so swiftly. She could hardly believe it when she woke one morning to the sound of Bill's shower running, the sun streaming in the windows, and the voice in her brain saying, "This is the last day. He goes tonight. Tonight!"

## HOLD EVERYTHING



## FUNNY BUSINESS



## THIS CURIOUS WORLD



ANSWER: Not because of any Federal law, as many people believe, but merely as a sanitary measure.

monotonous after a while. They'd gotten monotonous in New York. That's why he came here, she remembered.

She laughed it off. "The Army won't be monotonous. Not much. Drills and hikes or whatever they call it."

Paul rang their doorbell half an hour before train time. "I should have brought flowers," he said. "But I got this. It was a compact kit, leather, with comb and mirror and razor and chromium containers for soap, toothpaste, shaving cream."

"Say, that's swell!" Bill grinned. "The three of them piled into the front seat of the old car. Bill slung his suitcase in the back. A dejected Butch, leaping in behind them, sniffed unhappily and asked in low growl what was wrong."

"Look," Paul said, as they turned into the station drive. "The parking lot's jammed. Laughing girls and girls who weren't laughing and men carrying suitcases and older women clutching handkerchiefs were getting out of the other cars."

"I'm not the only one who's being left behind," Martha said. It was cold comfort.

Inside the station was crowded and noisy. As they pushed their way toward the gate, Paul said, "Remember me to a scene from a newsreel. Kissing the boys goodbye."

Martha's eyes stung, her lips quivered. But she had promised herself she would send Bill away with a smile.

"You'll write to me, Bill? Every day?"

Bill set his suitcase down. "Well, this is it, honey." His arms reached for her, and suddenly she was clinging to him. "Bill. Oh, Bill, darling."

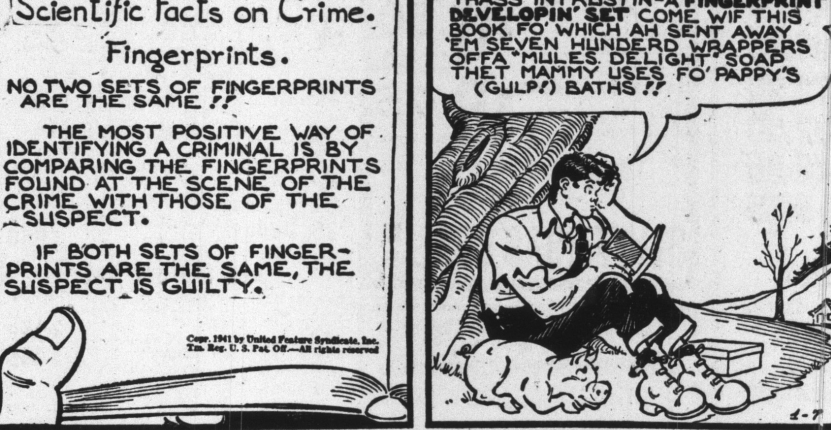
"Don't cry, honey. I'll be thinking of you every minute."

He shook hands with Paul. "Take care of her, boy," he said gruffly. "I'm depending on you."

## OUR BOARDING HOUSE



## Scientific Facts on Crime.



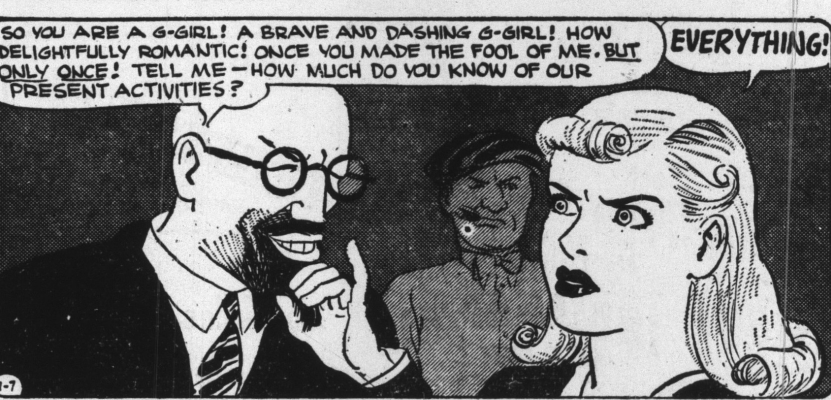
## RED RYDER



## NANCY



## WASHINGTON TUBBS II



## BOOK CLASS OPENS FOR LOCAL MOTHERS



## BOOTS AND HER BUDDIES



## ABIE AN' SLATS



## OUT OUR WAY



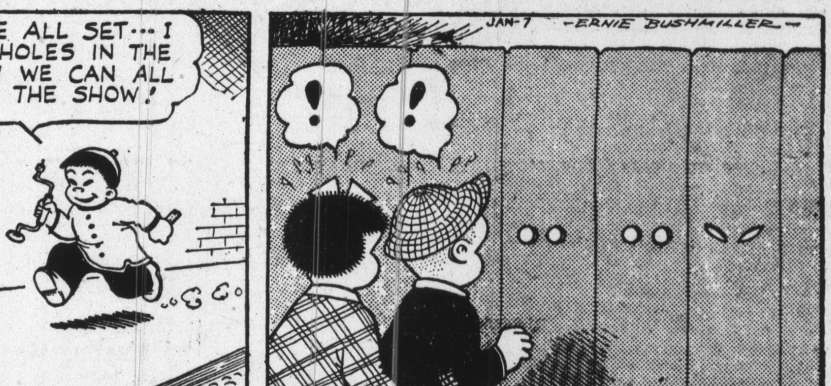
## THE WARRIOR



## RED RYDER



## FRECKLES AND HIS FRIENDS



## BOOTS AND HER BUDDIES



## BOOTS AND HER BUDDIES



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## BOOTS AND HER BUDDIES

