

IN A BROKEN DREAM

By Karla Tipton

Written
1976-1977
Barberton, Ohio,
when the author was 16 years old.

Pepi Brandon
Angie Jackson

Mick Jagger - Jeremy Starr

Keith Richards - Randall Clayton III

Brian Jones - Benji Holly

Bill Wyman - Curtis Christopher

Charlie Watts - Norman Highland

Rod Stewart - Treg McAllister

Elton John - Leevi Jone

Paul McCartney - Rick Travis

Rolling Stones - Children of Noveltty

Ronnie Wood - Ricky Kane

Mick Taylor - Robbie Summerfield

Bernie Taupin - Michael Allander

Johnnie Mae
at present in
business

11-24-51

They, like all the others, went to the concert. It wasn't just a concert; it was a free rock concert, and an important rock concert --for them. Their going changed them and their future, forever. Be it for the better or for the worse, it nonetheless happened.

---Their story...

PART I

Pepi's Story

Chapter 1---

Her head was painfully throbbing when she awoke, ~~and~~ something wet and sticky trickled down her cheek. Horrified, she opened her eyes to find herself staring at a velvety black sky. With ^{much} effort, she pulled herself ^{up} ~~into a sitting position~~ and buried her face in her hands, trying to remember what had happened.

Pepi and Angie had gone to a rock concert. They had driven themselves there by means of Angie's car, and upon arriving, ^{had} fought their way to the stage through the crowds of people on the field. Once there, they had quickly made friends of the people around them ^{who} ~~that~~ were to accompany them through the hot, endless afternoon.

Finally, with night almost upon them, the stadium lights flashed on, and the Children of Novelty, the group they had waited so long to see, leaped onstage.

The two girls had watched breathlessly, mesmerized by the electric energy onstage. The very closeness of the band and the tremendous loudness of the music had made them both oblivious of everything but the wild performance. The ear-shattering screaming of the fans, the reverberating sound of the amplified guitars, the rhythmic pounding of the drums, and ~~the~~ lead singer's wailing voice, all had merged into one. No one had actually been able to hear the music, but they all knew it was there, and that was enough.

But then what had happened? She had been so engrossed in the music that she didn't notice anything else. She recalled someone had screamed something about airplanes. Then that there had been an explosion and the lights had gone out. Pitch blackness and mass confusion, she remembered, and then she had fainted,

Pepi raised her head and looked at the destruction surrounding her. The sight nauseated her. The stage had completely collapsed and buried under the rubble somewhere were the people that had once been sitting by them, enjoying the concert as they had been. She didn't see Angie anywhere near her, and she was certainly too terrified of what she might find to look.

She ^{lay} ~~laid~~ back down, buried her face in her long, silky hair, and wept bitterly. ~~She~~ ^{No} longer caring what happened to her, ~~and~~ she fell asleep, ~~not caring.~~

Pepi awoke to silence the next morning. A cloudy, yellow haze hung over the devastated stadium like a dead weight, and an odor of destruction lingered in the air. She noticed now, in the light of day, that not only had the stage been destroyed, but the whole stadium had fallen in. Fear crept up her spine as she looked around, awed by the desolation of the area. Nothing could have caused that much damage except some type of nuclear explosion. She shuddered at the thought.

Not a living soul did she see. It was as if the whole place had been evacuated and only she had been forgotten. She felt so fiercely alone, ~~then,~~ so helpless. She had never been helpless before in her life, and now she was completely at a loss.

She began crying again, and then, in a moment of panic, screamed to anyone ^{listening} ~~who would listen~~, "Oh, my God! Isn't anyone else here?!"

She jumped, both startled and relieved, at the sound of a weak voice coming from the direction of the crumbled stage. "What?" she cried, "What did you say?"

"Over 'ere! I need 'elp! Me arm's 'urt!" came the forced reply.

Pepi stood up unsteadily, for this was the first she had been on her feet since the explosion, and stumbled toward the direction of the voice.

"I'm coming!" she called out, "Keep talking so that I can find you."

"Umm," he groaned painfully, "My name is...Troy McAllister..."

Troy McAllister, she thought, she hadn't known he had been at this concert, too. ^{He must have been watching from backstage.} Her heart beat a bit faster. One of the most well-known names in rock music, not to mention a personal favorite of hers, was lying only a few yards away from her, injured.

"I live in England..." he managed to mumble, "and I wish to 'ell I was back there now..."

He was on his back when Pepi found him; ^{WTO} his right arm pinned down by a heavy, wooden plank, his head resting on a crumbling block of cement, and his reddish tinted hair strewn across it.

"Thank God someone...else in this dump...is alive..." he murmured, "For awhile I thought... I was gonna lay 'ere and rot..."

"Yeah," she agreed, ^{weakly} stooping beside him. "I know the feeling. But right now we have to work to get you ^{out of} ~~outta~~ here."

She found another smaller beam of wood, ^{nearby} ~~nearby~~ and used it as a lever to pry free his arm. Troy winced in pain during the procedure, but once ^{loosened} ~~loosed~~, he sighed in relief.

"It feels a lot better now, but I still can't move it." he said thoughtfully, "I believe it's broken."

It's probably just sprained.
"Are you hurt anywhere else?" Pepi asked, concerned, "I mean, besides your arm?" She felt a strange comradeship toward this man who *had seemed to maternalize* ~~came to her~~ *just* when she believed herself the only person in the world still alive.

"No, nothing else." he said, watching her closely.

"Do you think you can sit up?" she questioned, her voice softening.

Troy was now staring deeply into her dark brown eyes, as ~~if~~ *if* trying to see the very core of her.

"Yes," he said slowly, "I think so."

Pepi stubbornly gazed back at him, determined not to look away first.

"Put your good arm around me, then, and I'll help you up."

"All right."

She was forced to look down then, in order to see what she was doing, but Troy continued to watch her steadily.

Once he was ~~in a sitting position~~ and had removed his arm from about her shoulders, he asked, "What's your name?" His eyes bored into hers.

"Pepi." she replied shortly, then turned to look for some material with which to form a make-shift sling.

"Pepi." he repeated carefully, ~~Then~~ *he* after a pause, said, "The name fits."

Since she didn't know whether it was meant as a compliment or otherwise, Pepi kept silent.

When she had finished devising her sling, she held it up for one last look.

"That's for me?" Troy ~~asked suspiciously.~~ *queried cautiously.*

"Yep." she answered quickly as she approached him.

Troy moaned with pain when she inexpertly set his injured arm and fixed it in the crudely built sling. When she finished, she noticed that his voice was trembling.

"You're certainly...not a...nurse..." he faltered almost apologetically, obviously in pain, but still managing a weak smile.

She secretly thanked him for his understanding and she took his hand tenderly in hers.

"We'll be all right." she assured, staring into his soft brown eyes. "We'll get out of this."

"Will we?" he asked, his steady gaze unerring.

"Yes, I know it." she insisted. Her voice, though, then changed to that of a persistent pleading, "We have to! You have to believe that!"

Troy released her hand and raised his own to stroke her soft brown tresses. His eyes bored into hers, and as he drew her face next to his, ^{he} ~~he~~ whispered, "All right, Pepi." He kissed her affectionately, grateful he wasn't alone.

Neither Pepi nor Troy had eaten for nearly eighteen hours now, and, as if to will their hunger away, they slept through that first long, hot afternoon. Night had long since fallen when Pepi awakened to the sound of voices in the distance.

"Troy." Pepi murmured as she rested her hand on his arm. "Troy, listen."

He turned his face towards her frightened one and returned, "Yeah, I 'ear 'em."

"Who are they?" she implored with bated breath, fear welling up in her.

"The enemy, I suppose." he answered.

"Enemy?" Pepi questioned ignorantly.

"Yeah, the enemy," he explained. "The Germans or ^{who} whoever they are. What do ^{you} ~~can~~ think 'appened?" he mused.

"You mean those planes?" she wondered incredulously. "They did this? They bombed us?"

"Yeah. Don't you remember?" he said baffled, amazed at her ^{ignorance,} ~~lack of~~ information.

"No-no, I never did know ^{what} ~~was~~ actually happened..." she confessed.

"Well, it doesn't matter," he lamented. "not now...not anymore..."

As if to remark on Troy's sadness, the grey clouds above began crying down upon them, showering them with nature's tears. The rain made ^{Pepi} ~~Angie~~ sad and in a sudden desire to be closer to him, she moved nearer and rested her weary head upon his shoulder.

"What are we going to do?" she whispered. "What now?"

He grazed the top of her head with his lips, then rested his cheek there.

"I don't know, baby, I just don't know anymore."

The rain stopped and they left the next day, driven out both by hunger and by curiosity. West was the direction in which they had decided to travel, for they both agreed that if anything was left of the United States, it would be westward.

Forcing themselves to ignore the destruction around them, they chatted lightly, almost cheerfully, as they walked through the dingy ^{back} alleys of the ^{abandoned} city.

The sight of the desolate surroundings reminded Pepi of the scene in "Gone with the Wind," after Atlanta had fallen, or in a science fiction flick she had seen once in which the Plutonians had taken over ^{the} earth.

She giggled at the latter thought, thinking how ironic it would be if it hadn't been the Germans that had attacked them after all, but the Plutonians. And when Troy inquired as to what she should be laughing so heartily at while they were in such a dire predicament, Pepi relayed her thoughts to him. Pepi sighed in relief when she heard him laugh along with her. It was the first ^{time} ~~he~~ ^{had} laughed since she had found him.

They weren't far from the edge of town when they stopped for the night. Both were exhausted from the lack of food, and both were ready for a rest. They then seated themselves on a grassy lawn at the side of the road, that, by some miracle, had escaped damage.

Troy settled his arm about her shoulders and smiled down at her.

"Ya know?" he ^{laughed} ~~said~~, "We might just get ^{out of} ~~outta~~ this thing yet."

Pepi smiled back, grateful for his reassurance, and snuggled closer to him. Together they watched the summer sunset bursting forth across the sky with hues of yellow, gold and red. Then, with Troy still holding her close, they layed back. And while watching the stars appear one by one as pinpoints of light on an ebony sky, they fell asleep.

In the wee hours of the next morning ^{time} ~~they~~ they awoke simultaneously to, ~~again~~, the sound of voices. This time, however, they were much nearer than before, and listening carefully, Troy and Pepi were able to make out bits and pieces of conversation.

One particular voice, gruff and commanding, was giving orders to a group of armed men.

"...^{zee} ~~the~~ ^{within} area ~~within~~ twenty-four hours..." they overheard.

Pepi shot a worried glance at Troy ~~and~~ and was alarmed when he also appeared anxious.

They rested, out of breath, behind a huge pile of rocks. But their rest was only momentary, for they were being closely trailed, and now their pursuers had brought out a huge spotlight to aid them in mercilessly tracking down their prey. The blinding light was flashed at the rocks which had acted as their cover, and it ~~dazzled~~ ^{dazed} them temporarily. Pepi stifled a cry, and Troy, still tightly gripping her hand, muttered another oath and started for the stretch of trees a hundred yards away. His start, without warning, jerked Pepi back to reality, and she stumbled after him, trying to keep up to his pace. The hellish light raced with them, and Pepi screamed as the first bullets whistled past their ears.

"Oh, Troy...Stop! I...I can't go on..." she ~~screamed~~ ^{bleated}.

"No! No! We can't stop now!" he ~~cried back~~ ^{insisted}, continuing to drag her toward the city limits and the protective woods beyond.

The Germans had ordered them to halt, that there had been barbed wire set up around the city, and that they couldn't escape, ^{but} in the mad rush, the warnings went unheard and unheeded by the escaping fugitives.

"The woods...are just ahead..." panted Troy. But just before they reached them, Pepi tripped, falling face first against the hard ground, and Troy, being unable to stop immediately, ran full force into the treacherous barbed wire fence.

Pepi's fall had merely knocked the wind out of her, so before the enemy reached them, she had recovered. Dizzily, she sat up and looked for Troy.

He was lying a few feet from her, thrashing violently and groping at empty air. She stumbled to him, crying hysterically, terrified at what she saw. Blood gushed steadily from the deep gashes on his arms and face, and his leg was tangled hopelessly in the mesh. His sling had been torn away and his ~~broken~~^{sprained} arm was carelessly flung across him.

"Troy! Oh, Troy stop it!" she screamed, "Stop it! You're making it worse!" She attempted to hold him down.

He stopped writhing and looked up at her tears. He put a hand on her arm, and exhaled painfully, "I'll...I'll be ~~all right~~^{all right}..."

Suddenly, a torrent of men were upon them. One unceremoniously took hold of Pepi's arms, and wrenched them back roughly, causing a stabbing pain throughout her body, while three others closed in on Troy.

"Be careful," she ~~cried~~^{sobbed}, tears streaming down her face, "He's got a ~~broken~~^{sprained} arm and..."

"Shut up!" ~~believed~~^{ranked} one of the three men, while grasping Troy under the arms. Troy winced at first, moaning almost inaudibly, but his moans of pain converted to screams of anguish when the ~~brave~~^{pitiless} men tore him from the sharp talons of the wire. Pepi felt his pain shoot through her and she squeezed her eyes shut to block out the bloody view before her.

"Damn you..." she cursed under her breath, "Damn you all."

Chapter 2---

The cell they were thrown in was located beneath the basement of the city jail house and was actually more like an eighteenth century dungeon than a prison cell. The tiny room would have been in total darkness had it not been for the soft glow of the lighted candle, the two cellmates had been given. A pitcher of water and a crust of bread were the only other items that accompanied them to that black hole in the earth, where they had been sent to rot.

The ^{floor of the cell?} ~~cell's floor~~ was hard to sit upon, as it was made of solid rock, and the ceiling was low enough so that anyone over four feet tall couldn't possibly stand upright. A musty smell of decay hung in the stagnant air, thick and heavy.

Troy's clothes were in bloody shreds and his silk shirt was now merely hanging upon his shoulders. The right leg of ^{his} the skin tight pants, ~~common~~ ~~to look singers~~, had been ripped to the knee; ^{and} the raveling threads were clinging to his badly torn leg, ⁴ blood ^{was} still oozing from the cuts. His ^{sprained} ~~broken~~ arm ^{had been twisted worse} ~~had come out of place once again~~, and it now was limply strewn across his lap. Along with several small cuts on his face, he had a deep gash just above his ear. His hair, matted with blood, was brightened to an even deeper shade of red. His watery eyes were swollen with hunger, and his lips were dry and cracked with thirst.

As Pepi gazed at him, a lump ~~drose~~ rose in her throat. She knew he needed professional help desperately, and she also knew that the only help he could obtain was the clumsy amateurism she could give him. With a candle, a pitcher of water, a crust of bread and the shredded ~~remains~~ ^{REMNANTS} of clothes, what

could she do ^{but} ~~besides~~ sit by and watch him die?

A cry welled up in her throat and, before she could stifle it, it had escaped her.

Troy turned to her and stared at her stricken face for several moments. He tried to speak, and after several failures at this, though it was dry and raspy, he managed a few words.

"Don't...don't cry... It 'urts worse...when you...cry." ^{violins}

A tear trickled down her cheek, and wiping it away quickly, she smiled weakly.

"It'll be ^{all right} ~~alright~~...We'll...we'll get ^{out of} ~~outta~~ this..." she said, resorting to their old, worn-out phrase, and hoping it would soothe their broken faith. There had been a hopeless sound in her voice, however, and she knew her effort to comfort ^{him} had been futile. Troy ^{saw} ~~did see~~ through her intentions, as she had predicted, and sighed tiredly.

He was giving up, she thought fiercely, ^{he} ~~he~~ hasn't got a chance if he gives up. If he loses faith, he might as well die and be done with it.

Pepi's own faith was slowly rebuilding itself, and a strong determination was taking the place of the sheer hopelessness ^{that} she had felt a moment before.

The strong will to live must have flashed in her fiery brown eyes, for Troy suddenly looked up at her and weakly, but hopefully, asked, "'Ave you got...an idea?"

"We ^{out of} ~~are~~ gonna get ~~outta~~ this dump!" she asserted forcefully. "If there is any possible way, I'm gonna get us ^{out of} ~~outta~~ this!"

Troy stared blankly at her, as if she had gone mad, but he knew that this time she meant what she said. He knew that if there was any way to get them out, she ^{would} find it. Troy knew that, and he believed in her. He hadn't really given up, not yet.

Pepi glanced at the burning candle and noticed that it wouldn't be long before it had completely burnt down.

Working quickly, ^{and} ~~she~~ as gently as possible, ^{she} tore the sleeves from Troy's ragged shirt. One of these was to be used for a rag and the other she made into another sling. A sharp intake of breath was his only response as she ^{placed his arm into it} ~~reset his broken arm~~, ^{when he} ~~and she~~ looked up at ^{her} ~~him~~, the stubborn gleam ^{was} still evident in her eyes.

By now, the candle had burned to an inch from the bottom.

She ^{pooured} ~~pured~~ some water from the pitcher onto the remaining, blood-stained material and began cleaning his cuts. The coldness stung slightly, but Troy kept silent and watched, unflinching. Even when she began on the gash above his ear, he sat unmoving. It was only when she had started to pick away the threads clinging to his battered leg, that he cried out.

"Take it easy!" he pleaded with a stricken voice.

Pepi looked at him for the first time since she had been working, and her eyes mellowed suddenly. She extended her left hand to him.

"Here," she ^{offered} ~~whispered~~ gently, "hold my hand."

Like a frightened child, he obeyed, and she tenderly began to wash his wounds. Troy clasped her hand firmly, and beads of sweat burst out upon his forehead. The stabbing pain was not only in his leg, but jumping throughout his whole body, and he gritted his teeth in a effort to drive it away.

She ought to go
in to the surgical
supplies
business

He moaned in anguish, all the while his grip tightening around Pepi's hand.

The candle flickered precariously.

Finally, after what ^{seemed} like an eternity, Pepi finished her amateur job at first aid, and together they sighed in relief. She returned to his side and sat down, ~~his hand still clutching hers.~~

Troy watched her, unwaveringly, with a somewhat curious look on his face, and when she glanced up at him, he held her gaze. She smiled uncertainly, wanting desperately to know his thoughts, but it was several long minutes before he opened up.

"Why are you doing this for me?" he whispered to her, truly puzzled.
"Why?" *I'm not partial to corpses she replied*

The bluntness of the question stunned her, and she turned her face from him.

Why, she thought, why was she helping him? She ~~pleaded~~ ^{begged} with herself to answer him. Tell him anything, anything at all, but the truth. Anything but the fact that she ^{believed she} was in love with ^{him} a superstar twice her age. ^{Yes,} Anything but the truth. And since she ^{didn't} ~~couldn't~~ possibly tell him that, she said nothing.

Troy, hearing no response, put his arm about her trembling shoulders and drew her close. Pressing his lips tightly against her ear, he murmured, "That's ^{all right} ~~all right~~. You don't have to tell me...I was just wondering..."

The candle jumped one last time, then left them in darkness.

Though their water was supplied by a constant drip of moisture from the damp ceiling, and was no problem, their supply of bread diminished with- in the span of a few days. They hadn't seen their ~~captors~~^{captors} since they had been imprisoned, and Pepi began to wonder if they would ever see them again.

Soon after the food had run out, Pepi's efforts to reassure Troy began to fail. The lack of nourishment was rendering him weaker every day, and his wounds weren't healing properly. He blacked out consistently, and now he was ^{even} too weak to sit up. He seldom spoke, and when he did, it was an almost inaudible whisper. He was hungry, always so hungry, and getting weaker.

Of course, she was hungry, too. Hungrier than she had ever been before. It became a constant, dull ache in the pit of her stomach, and she cried at times when it became unbearable. But she would survive it; she knew she would. It was Troy that hurt her the most. He couldn't last like this too much longer. He was losing strength, but more damaging, he was losing the will to live.

Throat time!
It was at these times, while Troy slept, that her mind wandered back to Angie. What had happened to her? Was she dead? Had she evacuated with all the others? If she had, perhaps she was still alive. Pepi knew this was too much to hope for, and tried desperately to push the disturbing thoughts from her mind. ^b But in the many long hours of silence, the uncertainty constantly haunted her.

"Pepi?" Troy whispered hoarsely. It had been two weeks since they had seen food. "Pepi?" he cried, ~~becoming~~ urgently. His eyes were glassy and his voice cracked. *skeletal*

"I'm right here." she assured. She was lying beside him, his hand in hers.

"Pepi?" he persisted.



"Yes?" she answered, trying to sound confident.

"Pepi...I'm cold..." he ^{muttered,} ~~murmured,~~ "so...cold..."

She moved closer to him~~x~~ and held him near to her. She held her cheek to his and smoothed his long hair. Oh, how often she had done this same thing over the past days, ~~holding~~ holding him close; trying her best to comfort him. She didn't know that her love was the one thing keeping him alive. And, though he had never actually heard her say it, he somehow knew that she loved him, ~~and he knew also,~~ that, for her, he had to stay alive.

Oh
God

"I'm here, Troy," Pepi murmured, "It's all right, now."

"Pepi?" he ^{stammered,} ~~pleaded,~~ "Pepi...don't leave me...Hold me...I'm...so cold..."

"I won't leave you." ^{His} ~~The~~ plea tore at her heart, and a lump ~~rose~~ arose in her throat. It was all so hopeless. A single tear escaped her eye and fell onto his cheek. She clung tightly to him, crying quietly.

Of course not, they're locked in

Troy felt her tears~~x~~ and painfully turned his face to hers to gallently kiss them away. He slowly inched his hand up to the side of her head~~x~~ and wearily stroked her hair.

She welcomed his painstaking efforts to comfort her, and finally felt consoled, at least for the moment. She ceased her ^{useless} ~~fruitless~~ weeping.

If you...give up," he whispered ^{beseechingly} ~~quietly~~, "we 'aven't got...a chance..." He gathered together the last remaining bit of strength he possessed, and tenderly touched his lips to hers for a single second of contentment. He then fell back exhausted, lapsing into blackness once again, while Pepi held his wasted body to hers.

How'd Keith get there?

Peacefully they slept, until Pepi was awakened by footsteps in the corridor outside. Troy heard them, too, for he groped in the darkness for her arm. Finding it, he cried out, his voice weak.

"Pepi...Pepi...They've got...food..You've gotta get some....!"

Before she could act however, the heavy iron bolt grated through the latch and the door swung open. They had been in the semi-total darkness for so long that they were momentarily blinded by the lantern light. Pepi was still blinking when the German guard stepped in.

"Is^t you both shtill alive?!" he asked incredulously.

The tone in his voice made Pepi despise their enemies even more and the hate was plainly marked in her voice when she retorted, "Yes,--barely."

The husky fellow was stunned for a moment by her vindictiveness, but he regained his dignity quickly. "Here," he sneered, thrusting out his hand, "Zum food."

She snatched it quickly, and slamming and bolting the door noisily, the guard left them, ~~again~~ ^{the} in darkness, ~~once~~ ^{once} again.

Troy hadn't quite comprehended what had happened, for he was still dazzled by the light.

Pepi crawled back to his side and put her hand upon his arm. "Troy?" she whispered. "Troy...I've got some food."

Struggling to sit up, he groped in the blackness for her. "Pepi?" he questioned urgently, "Pepi? There's food? Is there food?"

"Yes, Troy. There's food." she attempted to hold him down, and in his weakened condition, he didn't resist. "No, don't sit up," she commanded softly.

She broke off a small bit of the bread and put it to his lips. He took it quickly between his teeth and without bothering to chew, swallowed it. When the food kept coming, he slowed to a steadier pace, and began to enjoy it. Pepi hesitated ^{any herself} ~~at~~ eating, knowing that he needed it so badly, but with assurance from Troy that he had had enough, she gratefully ~~had~~ ^{it.} ~~some.~~ accepted. The bread disappeared quickly, and Pepi knew that, before long, they would be hungry again, but, at least for the time being, they were satisfied.

Troy's strength was returning gradually, as if his body were sapping every bit of energy from the one bit of food he had eaten, and he began to become his natural self again. He seemed to be in better spirits after sleeping for a while, and his usual wit began to sparkle.

Pepi began ~~to feel better~~, feeling better because he did, and it showed in her face. They had both regained their needs to survive, and they felt ~~much~~ ^{Geez!} better for it.

Now that her hunger was temporarily sustained, Pepi became restless. She relayed her thoughts to Troy. "I'm bored," she admitted, "think of something to do."

"Well," he began sarcastically, "we could sit 'ere and watch our stomachs bloat."

She sighed tiredly. Was he forgetting so soon that that was what they had been doing?

Troy moved closer to her, putting his face next to hers, and whispering softly in her ear, "but I've got a better idea..."

He took her gently in his arms and tenderly kissed her trembling lips. Afraid to respond, Pepi's muscles tensed.

Troy, ~~his feelings hurt~~, stared into the depths of her eyes. Her fear was obvious and the lines in his face softened. "Don't be afraid of me, Pepi. We're in this together. Always remember that."

Pepi looked away, ashamed of her coldness. Troy lifted her face to his, his lips encircling hers. She didn't resist him, but instead placed a soft hand upon his shoulder.

After a moment Troy remarked, "Now, that wasn't so bad, was it?"

She glanced up at him, then sighing softly, rested her head upon his chest. "Troy," she paused, not sure of what to say, "Thank you."

He sighed to himself and whispered back, "We will get out of this, baby. We will."

Some hours later, after they had slept a bit, the guard brought the ~~shocking~~ news that they were to be moved to a different cell. One they had just dug deeper in^{to} the earth. In this change, Pepi saw her chance for escape. Troy perceived her train of thought and realized her intentions. He also knew that, to escape, one had to run. He couldn't. His leg had only partially healed, and he could only limp. Fear began to rise in him. If she did escape, she would surely come back for him. She couldn't leave him alone, surely, he thought, not now!

Pepi interpreted his thoughts and placed a gentle hand on his shoulder. "Don't worry..." she assured.

Of course she would come back for him. There was nothing else she could do. But doubts crept into her mind. Coming back would mean risking capture again. How could she even think of leaving him there? She reprimanded herself sharply then put the problem

from her mind. After all, she hadn't escaped yet, and didn't true love conquer all? *Oh No!*

The guard returned, chains dangling from his hands, and Pepi's hopes for escape ~~was~~ ^{here} quickly diminished. How stupid she had been to think that ~~the Germans~~ ^{they} wouldn't chain them before moving them.

He slipped the handcuffs onto Troy's wrists and went for Pepi. Just as he was about to lock the first iron ring around her arm, Troy kicked out and struck the German on the shin. The man doubled over, clutching his injured knee. With his steel grip loosened, Pepi saw her chance and shot through the open cell door.

Troy, falling in his tracks, his leg again pounding with pain, ~~cried~~ cried to her fleeing figure, "Run, Pepi!... ~~Run!~~"

The guard, now realizing the situation, limped out into the corridor, and pulling the gun from his belt, shot at the escaping girl.

A whizzing bullet grazed her right shoulder, tearing the sleeve of her shirt and burning the flesh beneath it. A trickle of blood oozed from it, but in her rush to safety, she didn't notice ~~the~~ ^{more than} a tingling sting.

She turned a corner and raced through a long corridor. Fleeing up a flight of steep ~~steps~~ ^{stairs}, she stumbled into a dark passage deep in the core of the ambling building. She stopped for a moment to catch her breath and to listen for anybody who might be chasing her. Hearing no one, she continued quietly down the dark hall. Surely, by now, the guard would have set off ~~the~~ ^{an} alarm, and they ^{would} all ~~be~~ be looking for her. ~~so~~ ^{Why} didn't she hear ~~anything~~ ^{anything}? She finally came to the conclusion that she must be

in a part of the building that ^{had been done off.} ~~was golden wood.~~ She continued walking ^{to prevent her from bumping} ~~back~~ back through the dark tunnel, her arms outstretched, ~~so not to bump~~ into anything. The hall grew blacker until she could not see her hand in front of her face. She touched something cold and damp, and found it to be the wall. Groping along it, she found herself at a dead end.

Suddenly, she heard a movement at the entrance of the corridor, and a light flashed into its ebony depths. Pepi pushed herself into a corner and feared even to breathe. She felt sure the intruder could hear her pounding heart, and she prayed to God ^{that} the flashlight would spare her. Upon hearing the sound of retreating footsteps, Pepi exhaled a quiet sigh of relief, and relaxed her tense muscles. She was safe, at least temporarily.

Troy shivered involuntarily, for the cell they had moved him to was much colder than the first. The dampness rising from the floor stiffened his joints, and seeped into his healing cuts, causing them to sting unbearably. He yelped when he tried to change positions, and he prayed that Pepi would hurry, before he couldn't move at all. He pushed from his mind the fact that Pepi may not come back for him. Besides, it was something to hope for ^{had been saying} ~~wasn't~~ that what she always ~~said~~ ^{must} to do?

Startled, he awoke sometime later to the sound of a soft voice whispering his name. At first he thought ^{that must} he ~~might~~ be dreaming, or that it was just wishful thinking, but he heard it again, ~~and~~ this time he was totally in control of his ^{faculties.} ~~senses.~~

He laboriously crawled to the door and whispered through it, "Pepi? Pepi? It's me...Troy."

He heard the bolt begin to grate slowly from the latch, then stop. "What's the matter?" he ^{queried} ~~said~~.

"It's stuck..." he heard, muffled through the door. "It's rusty..."
^{No para.} ← "Oh no!" she exclaimed quietly, "Someone's coming!"

Troy heard her scramble away. Then, after a moment of silence, there came the sound of heels clicking just outside his door. The guard continued on past, undisturbed, so Troy reasoned that Pepi was safe. She returned after a considerable interval, and began to work on the lock again.

Finally, Troy heard the bar scrape noisily back and drop to the ground. He slowly picked himself up from the floor.

"Voila!" she ^{proclaimed} ~~said~~, pushing the door open.

Standing before her was Troy, his ^{weak} ~~injured~~ leg held slightly off the ground. She went to him and fell into his arms. She stayed there for a brief moment, then began to walk toward freedom. "Come on," she ^{sighed} ~~said~~, exhausted, "I've found a way out."

Troy was amazed at how quickly she had arranged things, and ^{inquired} ~~said~~ "ow... 'ow did you manage that?"

Pepi could have told him about the hell she had gone through to find him. About how she had crept, like a rat, about the prison, searching for a discreet exit for escape. How, when she heard one of the hated enemy coming, she would conceal herself in a dark corner or crouch scarcely breathing on the hard floor until they had passed. She could have described to him each and every risk she took, driving herself on because she was doing

ugh
it for him. Pepi could have told him all of it, but instead she passed it off by saying, "It doesn't matter. Now what matters is getting us out of here."

She lead him through the door by the hand, then shut^{ed} and replaced the bolt. After making their way through many cold, dark hallways, they came to a door which she had found earlier. They stepped out with no trouble whatsoever, and hungrily breathed the fresh air.

The Germans would never even know they were gone, until weeks later, when they would remember to throw them their ration of bread. Pepi chuckled grimly. ~~weren't~~ ^{were} They in for a ~~big~~ surprise. ~~At last~~

Chapter 3---

The train rocked back and forth gently as it ^{RACED} ~~sped~~ down the tracks. Then, hitting a rough spot, it jolted violently. The harsh motion awakened the two sleeping stowaways, en route to nowhere in particular, and traveling ~~via~~ ^{operated} a German controlled refrigerator car.

After making what had seemed enough distance from the prison, they had decided to stop and rest by a railroad track. Within a few minutes, a train ^{had} jangled towards them, then screeched to a stop before them. Spotting an open car a little ways down the track, they had hurried to it before the train had a chance to pull out. Pepi climbed in first, then helped Troy aboard. They hadn't yet noticed it was refrigerated, being distracted in the rush to get in, and the train started moving before they had had a chance to do anything about it, ~~anyway~~.

Pepi shut the door ^{all} ~~completely~~, but for a tiny crack, and the two sat back for the ride. Finally noticing that it was a car made for frozen food and not for people, they snuggled together for warmth. The gentle, consistant rocking of the train had been relaxing, and soon they were ^{both} lulled to sleep.

Now, they were awake again, though both were unaware of the other's wakefulness. Pepi shivered involuntarily, emerged in the after-effects of a bad dream.

It had been of Angie, as it often was ^{these days} ~~any more~~, and in it, her friend was still alive. She, too, ^{was} trying to escape the Germans.

Pepi tried to push the dream from her mind, knowing that it couldn't possibly be true, ^{Thanks} knowing that Angie was stiff and cold beneath the rubble of the stadium. Troy and herself had left far behind. But Pepi was always, always wondering--always uncertain. Suddenly a great sadness overcame her and she shivered again.

Troy, feeling her tremble for the second time, pulled her close. He attempted to comfort her, for he knew that she was troubled, sad for some reason. He wanted desperately to help her, to reassure her, as she had done for him ^{such a short time ago.} ~~not so very long ago.~~

Pepi began crying, and her uncontrollable sobs shook both their bodies. ^{Upon his shoulders, he felt her tears.} ~~Her tears, she cried onto his shoulder.~~ Troy spoke softly as he held her shaking figure to his.

Finally, she quieted and, gradually, fell asleep. Upon hearing her even breathing, Troy, also, never having known the reason behind her great sorrow, slowly drifted back to sleep.

They were both shaken out of sleep ^{for the second time,} by the violent jerking of the train skidding to a halt. After recovering from the shock, and while rubbing the drowsiness from their eyes, they simultaneously heard footsteps coming toward their ^{hideout} ~~refuge.~~

Troy, the first one to realize the situation, leaped to his feet and hurried to the sliding door opposite ~~the~~ the side where they had heard the footsteps. Dragging Pepi with him, he began working with the latch.

Finally, becoming aware of what was happening, Pepi jumped up and she, too, struggled with the door. It slid open just as ~~the~~ the one on the other side ^{did} and as they ^{lept} ~~leaped~~ to the ground, a surprized German engineer looked on.

The two ^{escapes} dashed between the many stationery trains and were lost to the band of German guards that had ~~been~~ ^{immediatly} ~~sent out~~ ^{immedrately} ~~immediatly~~ to capture them. They cautiously weaved through the steel jungle, as they were easily seen in the daylight, and disappeared in the shadows of a dark alley on the far side of the train yard.

Pepi sighed in relief and mumbled, "That was close."

Troy looked at her skeptically, "'You don't really believe that we're safe yet, I ^{'ope} ~~hope~~." he questioned. "They're gonna be looking 'ere next, you know."

"So, what do you suggest," Pepi began sarcastically, "oh ^{great} ~~god~~ of ~~wisdom~~?"

Troy ignored her, for, as he had predicted, the sound of running feet echoed toward them.

"Oh, damn!" Pepi blurted, as they dove deeper into the alley.

Troy tried the first door he saw along the back walls of the crumbling buildings and found it unlocked. Flinging it open, they plunged down into the safety of the inky blackness. They slammed ^{the door shut} ~~shut the door~~ just as the fleet of guards stampeded by. The exhausted couple, now safe from the Germans' clutches, fell to the floor, panting.

After catching his breath, Troy teased, "Next time, oh ~~not-so-great~~ goddess of sarcasm, you will know to 'old your tongue."

Laughing, he gathered Pepi in his arms and ceremoniously kissed her.
 "Those bloody Germans ran right past us, they did!" *Pip pip*

Playfully, Pepi tried to get away, though she secretly enjoyed every second of the attention, and they rolled on the floor drowning in mirth.

When they had recovered from their laughter, they picked themselves up ~~from the floor~~ and glanced around at their surroundings.

The basement was deserted, as was the upper floors of the building, and though it was dark, it wasn't so dark they couldn't see.

Curious, they ^{separated to} ~~separately~~ looked around, ~~exploring every corner.~~ Pepi, finding a candle and matches, lit it, and continued her investigation. She opened a huge wardrobe that loomed over her from its corner, and, setting the candle down, ~~she~~ began looking through it. It was packed full with clothes belonging to a generation long past.

The smell of mothballs lingered in the air, but Pepi, entranced in the beauty of the ancient gowns, didn't notice. She transferred herself back in time, the flickering candle adding to the mood, and she forgot all else.

Meanwhile, Troy had found some clothes, too, but they were much more modern, and instead of finding them in an old wardrobe, he found them in the dirty clothes basket. Though they weren't something he'd have personally chosen to wear, they were better than the torn shreds he was wearing now, and besides, they were his size. *How convenient* He crawled into a dark shadow to change, and in the process, ~~he~~ took a good look at his injured leg. *It* ~~it~~ no longer hurt. *technically* Though it wasn't ~~technically~~ healed yet, ~~the~~ the long cuts were still visible. *AND that they* ~~he~~ knew would linger on as life-long scars.

His arm was nearly healed, too, he noticed, though Lord knows how. Then he remembered that he owed that to Pepi. In fact, he owed his very being there to Pepi. He smiled at the thought of her and finished dressing.

He continued searching in various cabinets, and, finding three cans of baked beans, ~~he~~ stood up to call out to Pepi.

Turning towards the direction he had last seen her in, Troy stared, amazed, at what he saw. Standing behind him, she was there. In a soft, ruffling, pale, green gown that barely brushed the floor, she stood holding the candle before her. It was as if he had just seen her for the first time. It was still Pepi, but he had just now noticed how pretty she really was, how the soft lines in her face blended so perfectly with the rest of her. He gazed at her storybook beauty, agast.

Pepi set the candle down and went to him. "Troy?" she asked curiously, "Troy, what's the matter? I just thought I'd try this old dress on..."

Her voice was soft, too, he noticed as he stared into her eyes.

For a long moment he said nothing. Then, slowly, meaningfully, he gently took her hand and kissed it, whispering, "My lady, you are beautiful tonight."

Startled, Pepi looked at him incredulously. That was the first direct compliment he had ever payed her, and it had stunned her momentarily. Still trembling a tiny bit, she smiled and curtsied. "Why thank you, kind sir, I..."

But before she could finish, he had taken her into his arms. He didn't hesitate there, but instead pressed his lips to hers. In a kiss wilder than any she had ever experienced ~~that~~, she found herself being pulled, too, into ^a ~~that~~ swirling moment of passion.

Oh
GOD!

Georg

UGH



After what seemed like an eternity, their lips parted, and Troy held her tightly to him, breathing heavily into her soft, brown hair.

Pepi felt the heat surging throughout his body, and heard his heart pounding hard against her ear. After a while, he loosened his hold enough to permit her to look up at him, and she saw in his eyes ^{that} a longing she had never seen before. Then, as quickly as it had happened, it was over. He dropped his arms from about her waist, and sat down upon a nearby crate.

"Troy?" Pepi inquired softly, "What is it?"

What was it, he wondered. *Just*

"Nothing." he said.

"I found a wardrobe full of clothes over there," she smiled, attempting to change the mood, "but I see you've found some, already."

"Huh? What?" he looked up, "Oh...yeah...I found some baked beans, too."

"Did you find a can opener, too?" she chuckled, then turning serious, asked, "Troy? Are you sure you're ^{all right} ~~all right~~?" She stooped down beside him, and looked up into his eyes. "What's the matter?"

He quickly turned from her and murmured, "Nothing. Not a thing."

He began rummaging through a ^{nearby} box and quickly ^{snapped} ~~pointed~~ out, "If we don't find a can opener, we won't eat. ^{Amn't you going to} ~~Wanna help me~~ look?"

"I'm ^{going to} ~~gonna~~ change back into my ^{other clothes} ~~jeans~~, first, Okay?" ^{help} But she received no answer, and puzzled, she walked back to the wardrobe. Perhaps he hadn't heard her, she thought, then reconsidered. He had heard her, he ^{was} just ignored ^{her for some reason,} ~~it~~. Pepi didn't even try to figure ^{him} ~~it~~ out, for she knew it would be useless.

When Troy heard her leave, he relaxed his tense muscles and sighed heavily. What had happened, he asked himself for the hundredth time. Why had he gotten so carried away? He buried his face in his hands, and tried to think straight. He hoped it had been because she had looked so striking in the ^{glow of the candle} ~~hand~~; that it was because of that pale green dress that had made her look as if she had ^{just} stepped from the pages of a gothic romance. He hoped it was all of this brought together at exactly the right moment, but he knew it wasn't. He felt ^{different} ~~something~~, now; something he knew had been building up for a long time, and something he was afraid to admit. But through all his doubts and denials to himself, one fact stood out among all the others. He had fallen in love with Pepi. Love was something Troy didn't like to tangle with. It had happened to him twice before and both times he had been miserable. Now it had happened again.

An idea began to form in Troy's mind. Perhaps, now that they were free, if they ^{just} went their own separate ways, he could forget about her. A little regretfully, he decided he would mention it to her.

^{Transformed into her old self}
Pepi came back, a can opener in her hand, and explained, "I found this over there in a tool box..."

"Pepi..." Troy began slowly. But ^{even} as he said her name, he knew he could never leave her. He didn't want to.

^{A bit resigned} he smiled and tossed her a can of beans. "Oh, great goddess of beans!" he ^{joked quietly} ~~smiled~~, "urry and open them, before we both starve to death!" He loved her, and ^{had finally} accepted the fact. ~~No longer content.~~

oooh

^{for} The rest of the day, they searched the basement from end to end, for ^{any} the supplies they ^{MIGHT} ~~would~~ need for the long journey westward. Their hunting proved fruitful, for along with some of the necessities for the trip, they ^{also} found a mattress to sleep on for the night.

They finished the can of beans they had started during the day, and exhausted, they both ^{they should} agreed ~~to~~ go to bed early.

Pepi, the lit candle on the floor beside her, stood with Troy. The meager light the single glow provided, didn't show much, but what they saw didn't look promising. The mattress was small and crumbling, but Pepi supposed it was better than the hard ground they had been sleeping on.

Suddenly she became quite aware of the fact that she would be sleeping with Troy. She hadn't given it a second thought before, ^{for} she had been with him for so long, and a surprised gasp escaped her when the realness of the situation hit her. ^{smicker}

Troy turned to her, and upon seeing the pained expression on her face, ~~he~~ knew what she was thinking. The truth was, in fact, that the same thoughts had crossed his mind, too. ^{I'll bet}

Then, as if trying to reassure himself as well as her, Troy gently took her into his arms and rested her head on his chest. "'ey baby," he whispered uncertainly, "it's ^{all right} ~~all right~~. It's no different than before... really."

Pepi lifted her worried face to his. "It's weird," she puzzled, "How I feel tonight. I don't understand it."

"I know." he confessed, staring into the depths of her dark brown eyes, "I feel it too." He brought her face closer to his and tenderly kissed her. Their lips lingered together for a long moment, and when at last they parted, both were content. Troy knew now what he really felt for her, and he completely accepted it. ^{again?} And Pepi was secretly assured that she, too, was in love. With their minds now temporarily put at ease, they went to bed. ^{No!}

The next day they gathered the supplies they had found, including a canteen and the two cans of beans they hadn't yet eaten, and left before daybreak. They traveled down a back road, leading to the outskirts of the city just as the sun was rising behind them. They passed the sign reading, "You are now leaving Chicago, the third largest city in the United States. Come back soon." and stepped over the city line.

It would be a long, long time, Pepi mused.

Chapter 4---

They made good time during the first few weeks of their journey, sleeping beneath the stars at night and walking non-stop during the day. After their provisions had diminished, they didn't have to look far for food, ~~for~~ ^{because} for the first part of the trip, berries and fresh water streams were plentiful.

As the days passed ~~and~~ they pushed farther west, they noticed a change in the terrain. The acres of green, rustling fields of Illinois and Iowa, were ~~now~~ becoming more and more scarce, and the dry, open grasslands of Nebraska were taking their place. The sun burned hotter during the day, and the berries and streams became fewer. They had come upon the Great Plains.

The dry prairies stretched endlessly over the horizon, and, looking over it, a feeling of ~~despair~~ ^{despair} overcame ~~the~~ ^{the} two travelers. As they gazed at the awesome sight, Pepi's mind wandered back to the early settlers. Before they had attempted to cross these plains, ~~but they felt at such~~ ~~a loss~~ had they felt as small and insignificant as she did just then?

"Troy..." she sighed, touching his arm, "Oh, Troy..." *On God*

He looked at her uncertainly, and seeing her doubtful expression, he firmly clasped her hand in his. "We're gonna get ~~out of~~ ^{out of} this, remember?" he gently told her, "You said it yourself a thousand times... Now, it's my turn." Troy was determined to get them through it all--he had to. "You've got to trust me..."

A great relief swept over Pepi. She had depended so much upon herself lately, it was nice to have part of the load shifted to someone else's shoulders.

She smiled and patted his hand. "Of course I trust you..."

"Well then," he commented, ^{what} "What are we waiting for?"

And together they walked briskly toward the distant mountains to the west ~~that~~ ^{which} they had set as their goal.

When night had finally fallen, they, exhausted from walking all day in the scorching heat, settled down for the night. Troy, who had been carrying the canteen, opened it and raised it to his lips, taking a long drink.

Pepi, thinking of the long, hot days ahead, was angered when she saw this. He was drinking all of their water, she thought, infuriated. Unable to control herself, she exploded, "Troy! Don't drink it all! We're gonna need that!"

He ceased his drinking and stared at her blankly. Pepi snatched the container from his hands and replaced the lid, all the while, glaring at him furiously.

"Hey!" he protested. "We got enough! We'll just fill it up at the next stream..."

"Look," she pointed out, sweeping her arm through the air to refer to the land. "There isn't going to be any water for miles!"

"Well, I was thirsty, and I didn't think..." he defended himself, ~~and~~ inwardly hurting.

"Try it sometime." she retorted blandly.



← IPTON

Pepi had never spoken ~~so~~ harshly to him before, and she felt miserable about it, but she also felt she had been right to be angry. Secretly depressed, she lay down ^{upon} ~~on~~ the dusty ground, hoping the whole thing would soon blow over, and ^{blamed} ~~blaming~~ her crankiness on the heat.

Troy, attempting to regain his dignity, lay down a few feet from her, and in cold silence they drifted off to sleep, the cool night's stars shining brightly overhead.

Sometime during the early hours of the morning, when the air had grown it's coldest, Pepi awoke, trembling, the remnants of a nightmare still racing through her mind. Her eyes were damp from crying in her sleep, and her heart was pounding hard.

Troy, waking to the sounds of her moans, crawled to her side, and looked down upon her ^{frightened} ~~frightend~~ face.

Grateful for his being there, Pepi, her voice trembling, whispered, "Troy...Hold me..."

He cradled her quivering body in his arms. "'ey, baby," he soothed, "'ey, it's ^{all right} ~~straight~~..."

"It...it was that dream again," she cried, her voice muffled against his shoulder.

That must have been what had happened in the train, he reasoned, ^{to himself}.

"Ya wanna tell me about it?" he prodded gently.

Her breathing quieted a bit, and she lay against him, silent. After a moment, she murmured, "It...it was about..Angie..." Pepi swallowed hard, "It's always...the same thing...The same dream over and over."

"Angie?" He had hated to ask that.

"The girl I came with..." she explained painfully. "She was my best friend...It was always her and me....and now I'm all alone..."

A stab of pain shot through him. So that was it. Troy felt a combination of Pepi's ^{as bit of} and his own sorrow rise in his ^{throat} ~~throat~~. Finally, after a long interval, he assured her quietly, "But you've still got me..."

But Pepi hadn't heard him, for resting in the warm comfort of his arms, she had fallen back to sleep.

His mouth dry, and the sun burning his flesh, Troy woke up. Still laying in his arms, Pepi groggily opened her eyes, too.

Sitting up, she wiped the sweat from her forehead and rasped, "It's so hot..."

Troy pulled himself up, and, running his fingers through his wiry, red hair, mumbled, "Don't you think I know it?" He reached for the canteen, offering, "Want a drink?"

She nodded and he removed the lid, Pepi watching ^{ed} ~~ing~~ his every move. Lifting it to his mouth, Troy jerked it away, surprised. Frantically, she grabbed it from him and shook it. To her horror, she didn't hear the friendly splash of water, and when she tipped it over, nothing spilled out.

Pepi threw ^{the canteen} ~~it~~ hard upon the cracked earth, and cried hysterically, "It's empty! You drank it all!" she accused, "Didn't you? Didn't you?"

Taking her gently by the arms, he replied, "No, Pepi, I didn't."

"Yes! Yes you did!" she screamed, "You drank it all and now we're going to die!" Tears were streaming down her face, and she began beating him violently upon the chest. "We're going to die!"

Troy grabbed her wrists ~~in an effort~~ to control her, and rendered helpless, she buried her face against him and ~~cried~~ ^{sobbed} brokenly.

"Take it easy, Pepi." he commanded softly. "Quit your crying and get a 'old of yourself..."

After a while, her crying gradually slowed down, and finally stopped completely. Ashamed of her behavior, she turned from him and whispered, "I'm sorry..."

He let her go. "Don't worry about it," Troy told her stiffly. "It's ~~all right~~ ^{all right} alright."

"No...no, it's not ~~all right~~ ^{all right}..." she faltered. "I...I remember now... I didn't put the lid on very tight, last night and...and it must have leaked out...It was all my fault," she told him, "and then I go blaming it on you..." She bit her bottom lip, and looked down. "Oh, Troy, I'm so sorry. I don't know what's the matter with me..."

Troy looked at her pleading face. Pepi needed him, now, just as he had needed her, he thought. He knew that now and understood. ^{hand}

He took her ~~hand~~ ^{hand} in his, and, squeezing it, assured, "We'll be ~~all right~~ ^{all right} alright, just remember that." then as an afterthought, "Just forget it ever happened."

Pepi smiled weakly up at him, and nodded her head in silent agreement.

Together, they stood up, and a bit uncertainly, continued their journey west.

They pushed themselves harder that day, and the mountains loomed nearer. Hunger gnawed at their stomachs, and thirst drained them of their strength. The sun's rays pounded down on them, with fury, as they stum-

bled, heads bent, across the scorching prairie.

Each breath they inhaled, was smothering, and in mid-afternoon, with the heat at its peak, Pepi collapsed on the ^{dry} dusty plains.

Panicked, Troy dropped to his knees and shook her in an effort to revive her limp body.

She opened her eyes and stared glassy-eyed at him. "Troy..." she whispered through her parched lips, "I...I can't go on...You go on... without me..."

A sick feeling settled in the pit of his stomach, and fear crept up his spine. "I could never do that and you know it." he insisted. Blood was pounding against his ears, leaving him dizzy. "I couldn't leave you here to..." He didn't finish, but instead pulled her to her feet.

Leaning against him, she muttered, "No, Troy...I...I can't..."

"Please, Pepi..." he pleaded, ^{we're} "We're almost there." Then he added beseechingly, "Please...For me..."

For me, for me, for me. The words echoed through her brain. For him, she remembered, for Troy. And in this moment of confusion, she was reminded of the words of a song she had heard ^a ^{time} once, so long ago. Over and over through her mind, the words ^{repeated} ~~ambled~~...

I know now, can feel it in my heart,

A love that is true.

Though started for convenience sake,

At last the light shines through.

Pepi drew strength from those lines, and she knew that she had to go on, for Troy.

Together, they staggered a few feet, until Pepi regained her balance, and propelled by survival, they persistantly pushed west ^{WARD} toward the mountains.

Troy insisted that they walk long into the night, and when they finally did stop, their goal seemed close enough to touch.

The next morning, Troy awakened to a silent circle flying overhead. He weakly watched the birds for a while, wondering what had died. Suddenly, one began descending downward toward them and ~~he~~ landed beside ^{him} Troy. Startled, ^{he jumped} Troy struggled into a sitting position. The buzzard lifted into the air, again, and rejoined the circle above, ^{patiently} waiting.

Horrificed, Troy looked toward Pepi. She was a deathly shade of white, and he crawled to her, praying to God that she wasn't dead. The sun seemed hotter than ever as he bent over her, and relief swept over him when he saw she was still breathing. Troy knew she was in no condition to walk, and so, summoning all of his remaining strength, he picked her up and staggered toward the mountains. They were so close, ^{he} Troy thought dizzily, they just had to get there.

The day seemed to go on forever, the sun beating hotter, and Troy's ^{were} arms, aching from carrying Pepi, but somehow he lasted until dusk. ^{had} He reached the mountains now, and was stumbling through a dark woods. It startled him when he noticed he was traveling along a tree-lined



path instead of upon the cracked floor of the prairie, and he continued on, confused by his surroundings.

Suddenly he saw a cabin standing before him, its warm light spilling from its windows. In one last spurt of strength, he tripped to the door and fell against it, ^{collapsing} ~~clapping~~ with Pepi to the damp, mossy ground.

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Chapter 5---

Pepi drifted slowly back to the present, her dreams dissolving into consciousness. She blinked her eyes, trying to see through the darkness, then moaned softly, realizing she was lying in a bed. Suddenly, an indistinguishable figure near her gently took her hand.

Through the dull glow of the fireplace, Pepi strained against the greyness to see who was there. Staring hard through the glassiness of her eyes, the shadow focused.

She had expected it to be Troy, but upon finding it to be a soft faced young man, she, strangely enough, was not at all surprised, nor in the least bit frightened.

He had a princely handsomeness, and the eerie light of the fire flickered upon his golden, soft hair.

Pepi, enchanted by him, gazed at him with admiration.

A sort of sad smile crossed his face when he caught her glance and he slowly leaned toward her, as if he were about to kiss her. But when lips were just inches from hers, he straightened, frowned slightly, and walked away, disappearing into the darkness.

Mildly intrigued and strangely comforted, Pepi, affected by the crackling fire and the warmth of the room, fell asleep once again.

She awoke the next morning to the thick smell of coffee and the sweet sound of a song. The notes tumbled around her mind loosely, until they finally aroused her.

Seated beside her, Troy rested his head upon her pillow and quietly dozed. Someone else could be heard in the background.

Fully awake now, Pepi recognized the song on the radio as the one which had crossed her mind out on the plains--the one thing that had kept her going.

Struggling for a moment with the blankets, Pepi reached to touch Troy's hair ^{which was} strewn across the pillow.

He opened his eyes slowly and groggily lifted his head, murmuring, "Pepi? Pepi, you're awake!" Relief showed plainly on his face, "Pepi..."

She nodded and put her finger to his lips to silence him. "Listen..." she whispered.

The song lilted on, and Troy listened. He had heard it before, but the words had meant nothing to him then.

In the beginning, we doubted each other;

This I could see.

Brought together by need, not love.

For want of company.

We clung to each other to counteract the fear

That we felt within our souls.

But suffering together at last has shown

A change so clear.

I know now, can feel it in my heart,

A love that is true.

Though started for convenience sake,

At last the light shines through.

It needs no words; shared understanding,

Though left unspoken,

So deep and true, forevermore

Remaining unbroken.

The song ended and Troy looked up at Pepi. Their eyes met and froze together. Troy kissed her lightly on the forehead then on the lips, a drop of wetness falling from his eye and onto her cheek. Squeezing his eyelids shut, he rested his head on her shoulder, and sobbed, "Thank God you woke up!"

After a moment a voice a short distance away called, "Hey, Troy, is she awake?"

Troy raised his head and looked in the direction of the words. "Yeah, Tony," he smiled, "She's awake."

Tony strode across the room toward them and stopped. "Hello." he regarded her mildly, "You like taking long naps?"

Pepi's look of astonishment must have alarmed him and a smile melted his face. "Hey, girl, I was only joking..."

This wasn't the man she had seen the night before, she thought frantically, this man had curly, black hair!

Pepi's eyes darted around the room and seeing no one else, exclaimed, "But where's the other one?"

Tony and Troy both looked puzzled and she went on to explain, "You know, the one with the blond hair..."

Tony's face clouded. "You must have dreamed it." he accused, "You haven't been awake until now."

"No!" she insisted, "I woke up last night~~x~~ and that's when I saw him."

"Impossible." he determined shortly, "As you can see, no one else is here."

"Pepi," Troy began. He realized their host was getting annoyed. "Rest. You're tired and..."

"No, I'm sure..." Pepi interrupted.

"Pepi..."

Tony sighed irritably, "Well, I know it had to have been a dream." Then with a trace of disgust in his voice he announced, "I'm going hunting. I'll be back later."

Pepi watched closely while he hastened to the gun rack by the door and slowly took down a rifle. He stared at it for a long moment~~x~~ and Pepi gasped when he turned back toward them. He opened his mouth~~x~~ as if to speak, but changing his mind he exited abruptly and slammed the door behind him.

Troy stood up and glared at Pepi from beneath his bushy hair. "What did you 'ave to go and do 'at for?"

Pepi stared up at him, "What?"

Arms folded he began pacing, his back toward her, and sighing tiredly, ^{he said} "Getting 'im mad like 'at!"

"But it wasn't a dream." she sat up and defended herself. "I did see someone!"

Troy spun around, sitting himself in a nearby chair. Complaining, he said, "What a way to thank 'im. Argue with 'im first thing when you wake up."

"But Troy..." she cried, "I..."

The room began spinning and she pressed her palms against her temples. Weakly she murmured, "Oh...I'm...I'm so dizzy..."

Leaping from his chair, Troy ran to her side. He eased her gently back until her head touched the pillow.

"Pepi...are you all right? I'm sorry." He apologized, "I should have known you'd still be weak."

The dizzy spell soon passed and she quietly assured, "I'm...I'm all right, now."

"Want something to eat?" Troy asked concerned, "I'm sure I can find something. You must be starved!"

"No...no..." she replied, "I'll just rest. You were right, I am tired."

"Are you sure?" he inquired, "All we were able to get into you this past week was a little broth, and..."

"Week?" Pepi cut in, "I was asleep that long?"

Troy tenderly held her hand and gently put it to his lips. "You sure were baby, and I felt every second of it." His eyes softly gazed at her, and fleetingly she smiled.

Troy kissed her hand once again and instructed, "Go to sleep, lady. Forget these blond-haired blokes you dream of ~~x~~ and start concentrating on a charming red-headed fellow I know." AHHH

Grinning mischeiviously, Pepi mused, "But he tried to kiss me!"

"Well, I didn't hear about that!" He immediatly leaned over her and lovingly placed his lips upon hers.

"Now will you go to sleep?" Troy ~~was~~ ^{questioned} ~~And~~ ^{And} wake up much ~~sooner~~ ^{this time, okay?} Then as a quiet afterthought he murmured, "And Pepi... remember, I love you."

Pepi settled deeper into the cushiony softness of the bed and sleepily mumbled, "What? Oh. I love you ~~x~~ too, Troy." She closed her eyes and within a few minutes a comforting blanket of sleep enveloped her.

When she awoke later she was famished. Troy was sitting near her bed reading an old Field and Stream, while Tony was at the stove preparing dinner.

Feeling stronger and being much more aware of her surroundings, Pepi sat up in bed and stretched, a yawn escaping her.

Troy looked up from his magazine smiling broadly. "Well, you must be feeling better."

"Oh, I am," she yawned again, "But I'm starved!"

Striding over, black curls bouncing, Tony interjected, "Glad to hear it. Supper's almost ready."

When Tony had gone back to the simmering food, Troy lightly touched her arm and smiled, "I'm glad you're feeling better."

Changing the subject, Pepi asked quietly, "Um, Troy?" she hesitated, "We are still going to California, ^{Ace n't} ~~we~~ we?"

He looked a trifle alarmed, but after a short pause, answered, "Sure, we're still going." He stopped momentarily, then continued, "Tony offered to drive us there in 'is van."

"Tony?" she exclaimed softly.

"Yes..." Troy started, "Well, you see... 'e was in the process of packing when we showed up, and... well... 'e couldn't very well go with us 'ere... so..."

Hearing this, Pepi nervously professed, "But Troy... Something about that guy bothers me..."

"Shhh!" he cautioned, "I know, I know, but 'e's our only way back to civilization. We've got to tolerate 'im 'at long."

"But Troy," she insisted, "How long?"

"Just a few days, I'm sure." he hurried. "'ush... 'ere 'e comes."

"Supper's ready." Tony stated, walking over to her. "Think you want to come to the table, or do you want it in bed?"

Pepi glanced up at Troy and replied, "I think I can make it to the table... Troy?" she implored, "Will you help me up?"

Troy went to her and bowed, "Most certainly, Lady Pepi." *Gawd*

Pepi pushed the covers aside and turned herself around until she was seated on the edge of the bed. Troy sat down next to her. "'Ere... Put your arm around me." he gently commanded, placing his own about her shoulders.

She did so, and on the count of three they stood up together. Using him as a crutch, Pepi weakly stumbled to the table. Once there, she fell into a hard-back chair and sighed.

Troy stared at her anxiously, and after quizzically gazing back at him, Pepi urged, "Well, come on! I'm starved!"

While Tony was dishing up the food, Troy, seated next to her, quietly assured, "It won't be long now, baby..."

Staring at the ceiling, Pepi sighed. Half-darkness enveloped her as she lay in bed, and she pushed the covers from her. She glanced at Troy, sleeping peacefully beside her, and quietly crawled from the bed. She regained her balance and steadily walked to the fireplace. Seating herself upon the fur rug before it, she stared into the hypnotizing yellow and orange flames.. The heat warmed her cold limbs and she relaxed, surrendering completely to the mesmerizing spell of the fire.

Suddenly, Pepi gasped and jumped from her comforted state of mind. In the curling tongues of the fire, Pepi had discerned the face of the man whose soft blond hair fell in gentle circles at the nape of his neck and whose deep blue eyes had once held her gaze.

Gracelessly, Pepi struggled to her feet and stumbled ^{the} path back to bed, her breath coming in quick, sharp gasps. She climbed between the thick quilts, being careful not to awaken Troy, and lay watching for nearly an hour against his shoulder, terrified to remain awake and terrified to drift ~~to~~ sleep.



With a gentle shaking from Troy, Pepi awakened, considerably stronger, the next morning. Rain was splashing on the window outside and its consistant patter on the roof of the cabin was a trifle depressing. ~~She~~ yawned, still half asleep.

"Get up, lazy!" Troy laughed merrily.

Pepi opened one eye and gazed at him suspiciously. "On what reason has this intrusion of sleep been based, monsieur?" she inquired.

"We're leaving this morning, dear lady." He kissed her on the cheek and smiled. "Get up. ^{You've} ~~she~~ slept for a week already, are you going to sleep for another one?"

Teasingly Pepi grinned up at him.

Troy shrugged mischievously, "Well, I guess we'll just have to leave without you."

Pepi got up.

Just then the door opened and Tony hurried inside, shaking the rain from his rubber coat. He stopped short, seeing Pepi. Tony stared at her for a long interval, a puzzled expression set upon his face.

Pepi began to get nervous, and Troy, disliking what he saw, began, "Tony..."

"You know," Tony murmured, ^{I just noticed} "You look amazingly like someone I knew once..."

A bit startled, but also relieved, Pepi curiously prodded, "Oh? Who?"

Tony removed his coat and moved to the stove to brew a pot of coffee. He remained silent, however, and Pepi feared he would leave her

curiosity unsatisfied.

^{When} the coffee ^{was} done, Tony poured them each a cup. The three of them, seated around the table, slowly sipped their steaming drinks in silence.

Finally Tony spoke. He began slowly. "The girl I thought you resembled," he paused, "was my brother's fiancée."

Not really wanting to pry, but hoping for more information, Pepi smiled pleasantly, "Oh? You've got a brother?"

Troy, though also mildly interested, gave Pepi a warning look across the table.

Tony continued quietly, "My brother died a few years back..."

Pepi was stunned and even Troy raised his eyebrows.

"I'm sorry..." she managed under her breath.

Tony mumbled a thank you and Pepi suddenly felt very sorry for him. As he got up to clear the table, his black hair falling carelessly into his eyes, Pepi determined correctly that he hadn't yet gotten over his brother's death. ^{And} Possibly, he never would.

Troy, wishing to dissolve the depressing atmosphere, retrieved Pepi's clothes, now clean, and tossed them to her. "Get dressed or are you going as you are?" A smile lighted his face.

Pepi glanced down at the flannel nightgown she had acquired and blushed slightly. ^{Then} Tony showed her to a small room that lead out from the back of the cabin where she could dress in privacy.

Finally, Tony's suitcase in his hand, they raced through the miserable weather and into the van, Pepi and Troy choosing to sit in the back.

Tony pulled himself into the driver's seat and sighed, "Well, everybody ready to go?"

"Uh, ~~Hey~~ Tony," Troy began, "I just want to thank you for everything you did for us, you know?"

"Well..."

"And, Tony," Pepi quietly sympathized, "I am sorry about your brother. It wasn't just a tongue-in-cheek statement."

Troy glanced at her nervously, but she continued, "I can tell you ^{must} really miss him."

Tony smiled sadly, thankful for her concern. "You know," he admitted, "That must be true, because sometimes I'll wake up at night and imagine I see his blond hair shining or hear him laughing in another part of the room..." he shrugged, "But I guess that's just my imagination, too." He thrust the key into the ignition and started the van.

Attempting to ^{conceal} her shock, Pepi stared through the rain-speckled window of the vehicle at the ^{structure that now} ~~place~~ they were leaving. Suddenly, she dug her nails into the palms of her hands and gasped. The curtains of the front window of cabin had parted, and the yellow-haired man of her ^{mind} ~~imagination~~ was watching them slowly pull away!

Pepi ^{breathlessly} ~~secretly~~ wondered if ^{possibly} it really had been ^{it} ~~in~~ in her imagination, but even then she ^{realized} ~~knew~~ ~~that~~ she would never know.

Chapter 6---

Pepi shivered as the chill of the unheated room settled upon her. Troy, feeling her tremble, automatically placed his arm about her shoulders as he scrutinized their surroundings.

A frail, washed out woman stood behind them in the doorway of the dingy apartment and quietly explained, "Yeah, there've been lots that I've taken in that had escaped from the East, and I'll do the same for you. Just pay me when you get the money." Then, as an afterthought, she added, Yeah, there've been quite a few of 'em, but they've gone now. You two are latecomers."

"Well, we..." Pepi began.

"No, I don't want to hear it!" ordered the woman, "I don't want to know nothing about you. The police question me too much as it is, seeing as this ain't the best part of town, and I make it a point not to know anything about my boarders 'cept for their first names."

"Well, thank you for the room, anyway, Mrs. Prittchet." murmured Troy with a stiff politeness. It was hard, he thought, to be thankful for a room such as this, ~~was~~.

She shrugged, "It's nothing..."

Troy glanced around the room and grimly noted how much of nothing it really was. He sighed resignedly.

Mrs. Prittchet stepped from the cold apartment and casually informed, "Oh, and I'll try to get that heat fixed, too."

Troy shuddered as he watched her continue through the narrow hall and disappear into the darkness. After a moment he closed the door.

Pepi, who had kept quiet after Mrs. Prittchet had silenced her, shivered again, then sneezed. She laughed weakly, "I hope she gets it fixed soon. It certainly is cold in here."

Troy half-smiled as he walked around the room examining the contents. "Well, it's not much, but..." he continued, "It kinda reminds me of a flat I ^{had} ~~was~~ once in Chelsea."

"I love England." Pepi commented.

"You've been there?" his face lightened.

"No, but..." she stammered.

"Do not worry, my lady. I shall take you there myself, one of these days." He bowed, his smile flashing.

Then suddenly, it was gone. His face clouded and he ambled to the single window, thoughtfully staring out over the lights of the city.

After a moment, Pepi followed him and placed her slender arm about his waist. She glanced up at him, concerned, and noticed the lines of worry set in his expression. Quietly she implored, "Troy...What is it?"

He smiled sadly at her and gently put his hand ^{to} ~~on her~~ her ^{cheek.} ~~face~~ "Pepi," he began softly, his voice caressing her mind, "We've escaped from the Germans, but now what?" He continued, his voice dropping to a whisper, "All me bloody money's in England. I 'aven't got a penny. We'll starve 'ere." He looked to the floor and his hand ~~fell~~ from her.

Pepi retrieved it. "But Troy..." she puzzled, "This is L.A. Don't you know anyone here who could help you?"

A feeling of hope passed over him for a brief second, but was quickly dissipated. "There isn't anyone ^{here} ~~there~~ I know well enough to go looking like this." he replied. "I do still 'ave me pride."

"Well, what if one of the Children of Novelty made it to California," she suggested, "Like us?"

"Out of that mess?" he scoffed, "We're lucky we got out." he continued, "And even if one of them ^{bad} ~~was~~, ^{said} ~~was~~ be in the same spot we're in."

Pepi sighed uncertainly, "Proy, we'll manage. We have before." She paused, "We can get jobs."

"Sure, baby, doing what?" he asked sarcastically. "You're too young, and me..."

She rested her head upon his chest. "You can sing." she finished *for him*. "You've worked your way up once; you can do it again."

His arms went around her and he stroked her flowing hair. "Do you really 'ave ^{that} ~~such~~ much faith in me?"

She lifted her head and stared softly into his eyes. "I know you can do it, and I'm willing to see you through it every step of the way..." She glanced down and lowered her voice questionably, "That is...if you want me to."

He held her tightly and hissed into her ear, "Of course I want you to. I couldn't do it any other way."

Lifting her face to his, his mouth found hers and he held her in a kiss for what seemed an eternity.

When finally their lips parted, Pepi smiled and playfully noted, "We'll have to do this more often. I'm not cold anymore."

"Funny thing." he agreed, "Neither am I," his stomach growled and he chuckled, "But if we don't get something to eat soon, we'll starve before we 'ave to. Didn't Mrs. Prittchet say something about a few cans of beans in the cupboard?"

"Beans!" she exclaimed, "Yuk!"

He laughed, pulling her by the hand toward the cupboard. "Come on, Bean Goddess, perform your magic." He cheerfully tossed her a can of beans, happy to again have her reassurance.

After they had eaten their tiny meal, they fell upon the worn couch exhausted, cold, though not quite so hungry, and drifted to sleep beneath a faded blanket.

"None of those bloody pubs around 'ere wanted a singer." Troy complained the next day as he slammed the door and plopped down upon the couch. "Not looking like this, anyway. Not that I blame them." He disgustedly regarded his clothes, "And I even told 'em who I was!"

"They just don't recognize talent." Pepi reasoned. "Oh, Mrs. Prittchet managed to spare us a loaf of bread and another can of beans." she announced cheerfully, "And eventthough she didn't get the heat fixed, she did light the pilot light in the stove. We can have hot beans!"

"'Ot what?" he asked, having not been paying attention.

Pepi left her post at the stove and seated herself beside him on the couch. "The beans, of course."

"'Ot beans?" he exclaimed, staring at her in mock incredulity, "'Ow can we possibly afford it?"

"But it cost not a cent!" she replied. "The Goddess has worked her magic once again."

"Ah yes," he smiled, "^{My}~~the~~ Goddess of Beans." He kissed her lightly on the ~~forehead~~ ^{forehead}.

"Oh, and Troy." she whispered, "I almost forgot to tell you. I've got a surprise for you after supper."

"Um?" he inquired curiously, "What's ^{that}~~that~~?"

"Well, I can't tell you," she teased softly, "or it won't be a surprise."

By the time their skimpy meal was finished, the sun had sunk below the horizon and the room was growing dark. Troy lit the ^{single} ~~bare~~ bulb ^{hanging} ~~from~~ from the ceiling, their only source of illumination, and sank into the couch below it.

"Well," he implored, arms folded in front of him, "Where's ~~my~~ ^{me} surprise?"

"You'll have to close your eyes first." she insisted.

"Must I?" he sighed.

Pepi nodded.

"Oh, all right." He closed his eyes.

Pepi retrieved her surprise, and when finally told to look, Troy could hardly believe it.

"A guitar!" he laughed, "^{Oh}~~the~~ did you...Where did you get it?"

Handing the battered guitar to him, she sat down beside him.

"Actually, I found it over there in the closet..." she explained.

Overwhelmed, Troy hugged her gratefully. "Oh, Pepi...I 'aven't played since..." He strummed it. "It's pretty nearly in tune."

Sure it is!

He automatically began the song, one of his own, that had first entered his head, and softly sang to it. The notes flowed from the instrument and filled the air with sweet sound.

*Oh Maggie
I couldn't have
tried --*

UGH

Pepi rested her head peacefully against his shoulder and closed her eyes, allowing the music to envelope her. He finished, his voice trailing off with the last chord, and quietly Pepi urged, "Play another." He did so, and again she was filled with a sense of

security

He ended the song and gently set the guitar upon the floor.

Pepi's head still lay against his shoulder, and he placed his arm around her. When he tilted her face toward his, Troy noticed the sparkle of a tear upon her cheek.

"Your songs always did do something for me," she whispered. She shivered suddenly, "It's so cold in here."

Troy wrapped her in the worn blanket they had slept under the night before and Pepi snuggled deep into its softness.

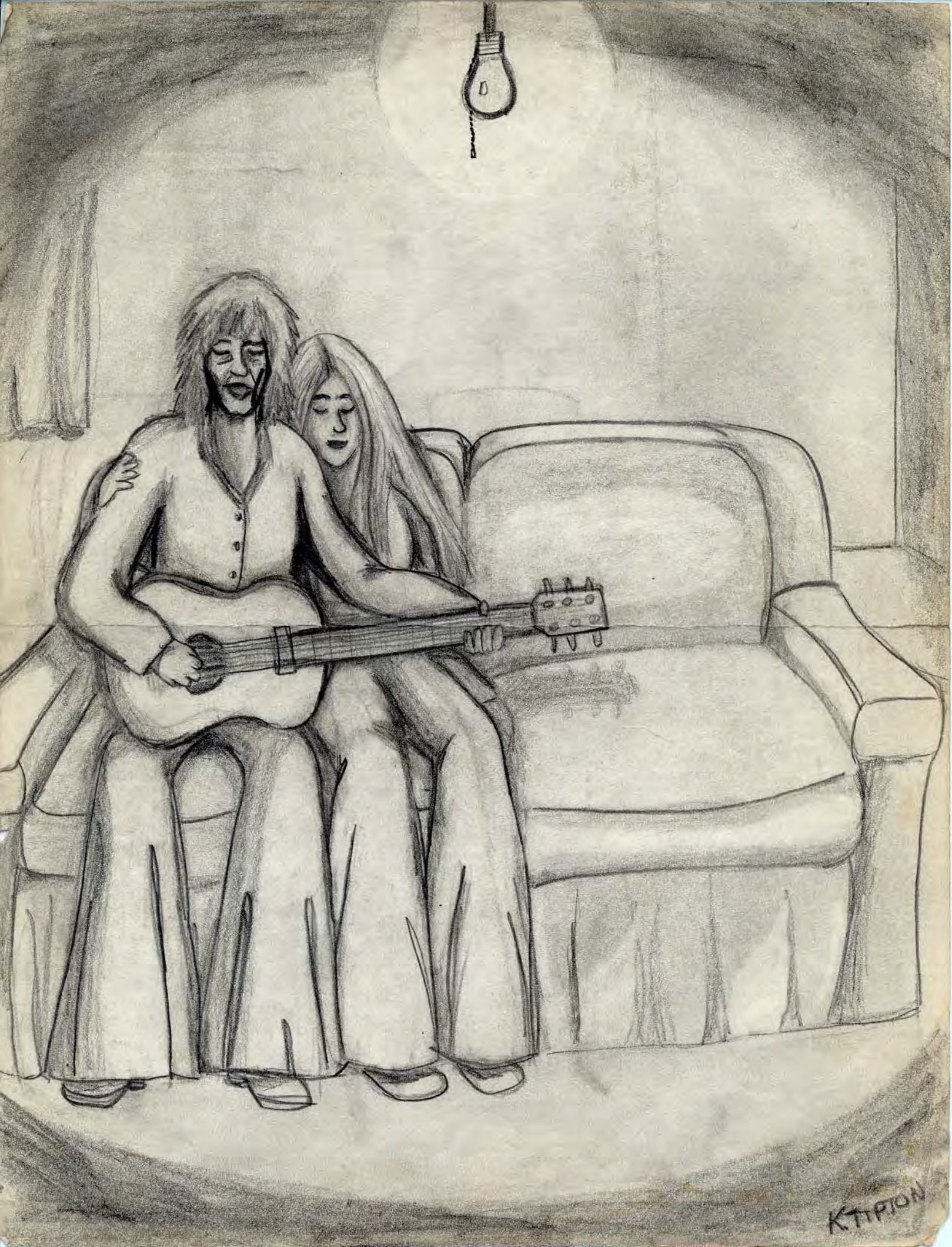
Feeling chilled himself, Troy pulled her closer for warmth and softly murmured in her ear, "I never knew California got this cold at night."

Pepi smiled to herself and the chill left her bones. How could she ever be cold with him there, so near, to warm her heart?

Ughhhhh!

"Oh, Troy..." she breathed.

"Dear lady," he whispered, "I know this must be a great imposition, but could you spare a wee bit of blanket? It's bloody freezing out 'ere."



She surrendered the covering, permitting him to slide in beside her. Suddenly, the light sparked and went out, leaving them in blackness. Pepi gasped, startled, and Troy pressed himself closer to her.

The warmth of his body next to hers was exciting and she spontaneously pushed herself tighter against him. Not quite understanding the burning emotion within her, she desperately pleaded, "Troy...?" *uh huh uh huh*

Pushing his mouth to her ear, he hotly breathed, "Yes?"

Her blood quickened in her veins and she trembled uncertainly. Her breathing grew heavier and her heart pounded against her chest. She stared into his flashing eyes searchingly.

Troy held her lovingly. He pressed his lips upon hers hungrily. His breath came in short, impatient gasps and he softly moaned, "Oh, Pepi...I love you..." *Green*

Pepi felt him tremble with burning desire as he eased her back upon the couch, his mouth passionately searching out hers. She fought to control her inflamed emotions. She wanted him, needed him, but she was so afraid. She knew nothing of love. *HA!*

His lips moved tenderly over ~~her~~ ^{her} face, gently caressing it, while his fingers uncontrollably entwined themselves through her hair. Pepi desperately clung to him. She could no longer hesitate and she surrendered completely to his will, giving in to his intense desires. *smack smack*

* * * * *

The guitar must have retained some luck, for the next day, Troy's search for a job was ended. In a bar quite a few blocks away, the owner was panicky. His singer had just quit, and Troy happened to be there at the right time. Although he was used to singing with a regular rock group behind him, he decided that money was money, and that as soon as he had enough, he would form a real band. Meanwhile, he supposed singing folk wasn't so bad.

When he returned to the apartment that evening and told Pepi, she was overwhelmed. She ran to him and threw her arms about his neck. "You got a job!" she proclaimed ecstatically, "I knew you could do it!"

"Yep," he laughed, picking her up and swinging her around, "and I start work tonight!"

Pepi ^{grinned} ~~smiled~~, "I'm coming along, aren't I?"

"What?" he wailed in mock horror, "I shall bore you to tears!" he concluded.

"I don't care." she insisted, ^{pouting} ~~with a pout~~, "I can't miss your debut." She smiled, "You're going to bring the place to their feet."

Thoughtfully he replied, "I 'ope you're right, baby."

They walked happily the distance to the bar, confident Troy would be a success. ~~¶~~ The place was located in an area of town that was well known for its seedy reputation, and upon entering, Pepi was assaulted by the dark, forbidding atmosphere. The ^{walls} ~~walls~~ were scarred by many a barroom brawl, and the air was thick and heavy with the odor of liquor.

Troy inhaled the air hungrily, unable to remember the last time he had drowned his ^{sorrows} ~~troubles~~ in a bottle of Scotch. Searching out the bartender, who was also the owner, he asked when he was to go on.

"I don't care." he replied irritably, "You should have been here an hour ago." Troy's employer viciously pointed to the small platform used for a stage. "Just get up there and sing or I'll lose all my customers."

Pepi sat down at a table near the front, while Troy nervously ascended the stage. A bit fidgety he glanced at Pepi, who immediately reassured him with a smile of encouragement. He seated himself ^{with his guitar,} upon ~~the~~ high stool, and staring out at the impatient crowd, began the introduction to one of his own well-known songs. The faces of the people remained unchanged, and they went on about their business without even noticing him. Troy wasn't used to that.

After the first song, the only applause came from the few onlookers near the front, one of which was Pepi.

He sounds a bit like Troy McAllister, ~~thought~~ ^{thought} a young vagrant standing at the bar, nonchalantly.

A rinsed-out blond nearby sighed resignedly. It had been her and her lover's song at one time. But that was a long time ago. She stared into her glass.

Troy's confidence sunk. They'd heard it all before. It no longer mattered to them. The war had changed all of that. His mind lay unsettled. Now he was just another guy trying to make a living.

He half-heartedly finished the songs he had selected to do, and the applause was light when he finally slid from the stage. He met Pepi and when they cornered the owner for the few dollars ^{Troy} ~~he~~ had earned, the singer delivered the news that he was quitting.

"They just didn't like you." the bartender agreed. "With this crowd," he glanced around, "they either like you instantly or they never will. Well, good luck." He sighed and turned to a none-too-sober customer ordering another drink. Now he had to find another singer.

Troy had known from the very beginning what the outcome would be. He knew that if he wasn't fired, he would have ~~had~~ to quit. He realized he could have waited until he had made a little more money, but perhaps it was better this way.

Pepi, however, was stunned, and when they had gotten outside, a lump had grown large in her throat. Choking back her sobs, she cried, "Troy? What happened? I...I don't understand. I thought you were great!!"

A cold wind blew their hair and lashed at their clothes, and Troy, who was plainly miserable, gently wiped the tears from her cheek. As they stood alone on the grey, desolate street, Troy murmured, "Pepi, don't you see?" He explained weakly, "I can't sing like that...I... I 'ave to sing with a band behind me. 'At's the only way I can do it. It's the only way it'll ever work for me."

Pepi didn't want to believe it, but there it was and she knew what he said was true. She stared at him through her tear-filled eyes and he gently took her in his arms.

"Are you sure, Troy?" she whispered faintly after endless moments.
She knew he was.

He hesitated for a minute, then concluded softly, "I think we both know it ~~was~~ to be this way."

So, left with only each other, and a little money, they set off on the long journey home. Comforted only by the other's closeness, they walked slowly through the lonely backstreets.

Chapter 7---

Pepi fidgeted impatiently at the door of the hotel suite while Troy hesitated by the doorbell.

"Go on. Push it." Pepi insisted, "I want to meet him..."

Troy glanced at the new clothes they had bought ~~with~~ with the money he had made. "Do you think I look all right?" he inquired nervously. "I mean do these clothes look too cheap? I don't want to give 'im the wrong impression."

"That's because they were cheap, and so what if you give him the wrong impression. He can only kick you out." she remarked, bemused.

"Now ring the doorbell. You look fine."

He took a breath to put the butterflies in his stomach to rest, then ceremoniously he pushed the small button to the right of the door.

They heard shuffling from inside the room, then after the sound of the chain being unbolted, the door swung open. There, in the entrance-way, before the awe-struck Pepi, stood Rick Travis.

"Troy...Troy McAllister!" he cried, "Come in! I don't believe this! We all thought you were..." he didn't finish, "Come in!"

They stepped into the room, Pepi still unnoticed, but not missing a thing, and Troy figuring in his mind what to say.

"Sit down." Rick offered.

They sat down.

"Well, Troy, what are you doing 'ere in Los Angeles?" he asked, his Liverpool dialect thickening his accent, "And who is this lovely young lady?"

"Oh, I'm sorry." Troy apologized, "This is Pepi Brandon. We escaped together from the East," he explained, "and finally, just recently, we made it 'ere."

"Ello Pepi."

She nodded politely, still a bit star-struck.

"You say you just got 'ere?" Rick inquired, a trifle surprised, "Why, the Children of Novelty 'ave been back for months!"

"They what?" Troy stammered, his breath leaving him. "They...they made it? From there?"

"Yes," he assured, "Didn't you know?"

"All of them?" Troy, unbelievably interrogated.

"Everyone."

Pepi sighed. Everyone seemed to have escaped but Angie.

"I can 'ardly believe it." Troy went on, "And after I thought they were dead all this time."

Rick smiled, "Well, that really must be news to you." He continued, "'Ow are you doing?"

"Oh...well..." Troy hesitated, "We're...doing okay, but..." he stopped, "Actually I was thinking of forming a group, and I was wondering if you'd 'elp me with it."

"Well..." Rick pondered.

"You see," Troy explained quickly, "We're living all right now, but we'd like to get a bigger house, a better car...you know."

Pepi, a bit stunned, glowered at him. Why did men have to have so much ~~self-dignity?~~ *damned pride?*

Rick caught Pepi's reaction and seemed to understand. "Well, Troy, no I can't help you," he confessed, "but I know Curtis would be willing to help. 'E's great at getting people together."

"Curtis Christopher, you mean?" Troy questioned relieved, not realizing his lie had been caught, "Of the Children of Novelty?"

"Yeah, 'e ought to be able to help you." Rick decided, "I can ring 'im up right now." He stood up and walked to the phone.

A brief discussion on the phone followed, which ended with Troy reciting Mrs. Pritchet's phone number. She had given it to them when they had moved in, in case they had ever needed it.

Troy replaced the receiver and grinned. "'E's going to call me when 'e finds a suitable studio and some good musicians." They shook hands. "Thanks Rick. You've really been a great help."

"Must you leave so soon?" their host implored.

"Er...Yes, we better go..." Troy stuttered, "Our car is double-parked." He fingered the change in his pocket, hoping he had enough for their bus fare home.

"Well, I'm really glad it all worked out for you." he remarked sincerely. Rick turned to Pepi when they had gotten to the door and reached for her hand. "It's been nice meeting you, Pepi."

Pepi took his hand and he clasped it firmly, pushing a ^{crinkled} twenty dollar bill into it. She stared into his blue eyes thankfully and smiled. She knew he understood. And as they stepped into the hallway outside and said their goodbyes, Pepi knew she liked Rick Travis. *loveshadowing!*

When Troy found out Pepi had accepted the money from Rick, he became a bit angry. Partly because it hurt his ego, and partly because his ingenuous little lie didn't work. He soon relented however, for he knew as well as Pepi how bad they needed twenty dollars.

With no hard feelings between them, Troy suggested they go out for dinner to celebrate the forming of his group.

They searched out and found a small coffee house a few blocks from their apartment, just as darkness settled.

The lights inside were dimmed for evening dining, and only a few people were scattered among the many tables. The tile on the floor was worn and the paper on the walls was faded, but all in all the place was decent and the prices cheap.

Upon entering, Pepi was greeted with an air of romanticism. She sighed and pressed closer to Troy as they were lead to a booth.

"Finally, after all these months..." Troy lamented after they had eaten. He ^{squeezed} ~~squeezed~~ her hand under the table and stared deep into her soft eyes, noticing how beautiful they were.

Pepi held his gaze and sighed quietly.

"We've been through a lot together." he continued, "and soon I'll be able to buy you anything you could ever want."

Pepi nervously sipped her wine and her mind reeled.

Had it been so long ago since she had lived a peaceful existence in the suburbs? Without even realizing it, the past few months had whisked her through a zillion events and experiences she could have never even imagined. Suddenly she was in California with a man she had only ever dreamed of meeting, who loved her, and whom she loved in return. Her breath suddenly left her body. She felt very old for her seventeen years. *cradle-robbing!*

Glancing toward the stage, she noticed a young man setting up with his guitar. Troy saw him too, and silently they watched as he began the introduction to a song.

Pepi immediately recognized it and softly insisted, "Troy...Listen."

He listened for a moment and smiled. He knew what song it was. It was "their" song. The singer began the first verse, and Troy wondered how the words could fit so well.

"Please, my lady," he implored, suddenly standing above her, "May I 'ave this dance?"

The other couples around them were already upon the dance floor, and Pepi nodded slowly.

Troy took her hand and gently pulled her to her feet. "Come ~~then~~ ^{then}, my lady." He lead her from their booth and tenderly took her into his arms. Slowly they swayed in time to the music.

Pepi was smothered in the atmosphere, and was vaguely aware of their surroundings. She was enveloped in a careless calmness, knowing Troy would handle any problems for her that ever came up.

Troy held her closely, the words of the song smoothly flowing through his mind. How lovely she was, he thought, breathing into her hair.

As the singer finished the last chorus, Troy lifted her face to his and gazed into her eyes. "Oh, Pepi.." he muttered, pulling her tightly against him and pushing his lips upon hers.

Pepi was suddenly hurled into a flaming second of passion. But finally their lips parted and they returned to the awaiting booth.

Dizzy from the wine and ~~deliciously content~~, Pepi fervently wondered why the moment couldn't have lasted forever.

"Troy." Pepi called from the open door, "Mrs. Prittchet says someone is on the phone for you."

The bright morning sun shone through the window and spilled onto the floor. Troy rushed through it excitedly, "That must be Curtis!"

Pepi was close at his heels as they followed their landlady down the stairs and through parts of the house they had never seen. They were lead to a tiny back room that was used for an office. .

"There's the phone." Mrs. Prittchet sighed, pointing to the desk. "Don't talk too long." She glanced at them, then exited, leaving them in privacy.

Troy picked up the receiver and put it to his ear, "'Ello...Curtis?"

Pepi took a step toward him, "Troy," she whispered, "Let me listen."

He shook his head violently then turned away, "Um..yes, this is Troy." he replied, answering the voice on the other end of the line.

"Troy! Let me hear!" Pepi hissed at him, stepping closer.

He laughed at an unheard joke and put his hand in front of Pepi's



face to prevent any further progress.

"Really?" Troy inquired, "You really got a studio? And musicians too? Already?"

Pepi attempted to dodge him, but he held her at an arm's length.

"Sure, we'd love to come." he accepted, "Ah..." he thought a moment, "5491 Brittain Road...Yeah." *Brittain Rd ?!?!?*

Pepi put her hands on her hips and glared at him.

"Ah, sure, Curtis, tonight then...Yeah, goodbye..." Troy replaced the receiver.

"Why didn't you let me listen?" Pepi demanded, "What'd he say?"

He chuckled, "Well, tonight we don't have to worry about where our next meal is coming from." he continued, "'E's invited us to dinner, and 'e's picking us up at eight."

"Yeah," Pepi grumbled and they returned upstairs, "While you talk music, I read a magazine."

"Why not at all." he denied, "'E 'as a lady friend...er...staying with 'im, and 'e wants you to meet 'er."

"I know how rock stars' girlfriends are..." she implied, as they entered the cold apartment.

Troy glanced at her from the corner of his eye, "Yeah?" he began snidely, "'Ow many 'ave you met?"

Pepi fell onto the couch and glowered at him. He had her there.

At eight pricisly a blue Oldsmobile drove up in front of the house. Pepi and Troy, ready and waiting, casually got in, Troy in the front seat and Pepi stranded alone in the back.

After they had pulled from the curb and back into the main stream of traffic, Curtis greeted her with a smile and a friendly, "Ello."

But before introductions were properly made, the two musicians were drawn into a conversation of "Gibson LG-1's" and the "thirds and tenths" on a bass, and "Stratocaster modules", ^{and} Pepi ~~being~~ ^{wad} left forgotten in the back seat.

As they entered the suburbs, the houses grew farther apart and grew more lavish, and by the time they finally pulled into the driveway of the Mexican style house, the stars were appearing one by one in the sky.

When the three of them stepped from the car, Curtis remarked, "Oh, yes, Troy. I almost forgot. There's a new Deluxe amplifier I 'ave in my trunk 'ere I'd like you to take a look at..." He turned to Pepi, "You may as well go up to the 'ouse." he smiled, "Someone will let you in. We won't be long."

Muttering to herself, Pepi circled to the front of the house and ascended the stairs. If she had to enter unaccompanied, she was going to do it in style. She'd show this glitter-queen. Smoothing her hair, she nonchalantly rang the doorbell.

A second later the door swung open, and astonished, Pepi stared dumbly at the person standing on the threshold.

"Pepi!" the other girl screamed hysterically.

Disbelievingly they hugged each other tightly.

"Angie!" Pepi sputtered, "How did you...I thought you were dead?"

They stumbled into the living room and together sat upon the huge couch.

"How did you find me?!" Angie stammered.

Suddenly Troy and Curtis tramped into the room. Seeing the girls bubbling with chatter, they stared at each other, puzzled.

"You two... 'ave... ah... sure taken to each other..." Curtis stuttered.

Pepi and Angie laughed uproariously, both smothered in the irony of the situation.

^{Curtis}
"Curt," Angie began, still chuckling, "I'd like you to meet my life-long friend, Pepi Brandon."

Curtis shook her hand. He recognized the name and was beginning to comprehend.

"Troy, this is my life-long friend, Angie Jackson." Pepi announced ecstatically.

"Ow about that!" he exclaimed, "I understand now!" Fate must 'ave been on your side." He smiled joyously. Now both Pepi and himself were happy. Who knows, he thought, maybe someday...

After dinner, Troy and Curtis headed for the studio in the basement, leaving Pepi and Angie to themselves.

They seated themselves comfortably on the plush couch in the living-room.

"Now," Angie began, "I'll tell you everything..."



P A R T I I

Angie's Story

Chapter 8---

"Oh, my God!" Angie croaked as she stared at the destruction around her. She pushed the hair that had fallen into her eyes behind her ears and frantically pulled herself to her feet. The stadium she stood in lay crumbled around her--tumbled into turmoil as if it had merely been a child's building blocks.

She glanced through the haze of the sun at the motionless bodies at her feet. Her breath left her. Pepi was nowhere to be seen.

Angie stood rooted to the spot. She was on the verge of screaming, but her practicality forced her to remain calm. She was still stunned by the scene before her, and had to get things straight. Automatically she sought to sort out the things in her head.

She wasn't hurt, she assured herself, and... Her thoughts were suddenly interrupted.

"By! Is somebody there?" cried a voice a short distance away.
"I'm over 'ere!"

Angie's attention was torn from her own problems and directed at the male voice coming from beyond. "Yes! There's somebody here. Where are you?" She started in the direction in which the voice had come, carefully stepping over the rubble.

"Well, I'm 'ere!" he stated, trying very hard to be helpful.

"But where is 'ere?" she mimicked, drawing nearer.

"I'm not sure," he called back, "All I can describe it as is "'ere", and I bet it looks a lot like there...or anywhere else for that matter."

Angie made her way around one of the larger building blocks, and on the other side stood the owner of the mystery voice. She stood agast for a long moment.

"'Ello." He flashed a smile as he stood before her. "I...er...guess you found "'ere".

"You're the lead singer of the Children of Novelty!" she exclaimed bluntly.

He glanced down and smiled shyly, "I prefer to think of myself as Jeremy." He rolled his eyes up at her innocently, an act he had found useful and had perfected for his convenience. "And you can too."

"Really now, Jeremy, this is no time to play games." she admonished, "We've got to get out of 'ere...I mean here. Those bombers really did a good job at wiping us out."

He seemed a bit hurt that his charm and wit weren't appreciated, but after he saw the irony of it all, his ego recovered quickly. Jeremy sighed, "I suppose you're right...a..a...I didn't catch your name."

"Angie." she told him.

"Angie." he repeated.

She took his hand and began leading the way through the fallen blocks.

"Now, wait a minute." he declared, "Let's get something straight."

Angie stopped and looked up expectantly.

He stared down into her flashing green eyes determinedly. "I've never had the opportunity to rescue a damsel in distress before." he

angie, I

charmed, "I'll lead the way."

She shrugged, "I'm not really in distress..."
This girl seemed to have
~~such~~ such a knack for making him feel ridiculous, Jeremy thought glumly. They continued to pick their way from the stadium, although in reverse order.

"Can't you find the rest of the band?" she asked blandly.

A stab of pain shot through him. His band. His best friends. No, he couldn't find them. He sighed. Maybe he could have looked harder. Jeremy could have turned back then, but instead he walked on.

After a long silence, Angie finally spoke. "I'm really sorry." She was sincerely sympathetic. "You guys have been through a lot together."

How would she know? Jeremy thought irritably forgetting he was a superstar and ~~his~~ *that* every move was reported. Angie was beginning to bug him, he decided, but he knew she was right. They had been through a lot together. A lump grew large in his throat, but his pace didn't let up. He had to forget.

"You've spent most of your life with them." Angie continued, only trying to make conversation, and not realizing what pain she was causing him.

Why was she doing this to him, he wondered, swallowing hard? But Jeremy finally decided that he couldn't close his eyes to the fact any longer. His band, his best friends were gone, and he was left with nothing. They ~~had~~ *had* all gotten together so long ago, and now... There had been five of them, each completely different from ~~another~~, and all brought together by one love--their music.

The Children of Novelty ~~was~~ an English group that played loud, basic rock and roll. There were no dreams, no fantasies, but all reality. They screamed songs of subjects no other group had even dared mention in that time past of sweet sixteen and teenage love, which immediatly won the disapproval of the older generations. They were ~~wrongly~~ ^{labeled} evil, wicked and satanic. All they were doing was playing the music they loved. On stage, while singing his well-known songs, Jeremy Starr danced as if he were, indeed, possessed by the devil. This, added to the fascinatingly subtle music, placed an unusual hypnotic spell over the immense crowds which came to see them, and their audiences was driven to a frenzy. The latter completed the picture, painted black with their villianous reputation.

"Jeremy?" Angie implored tenderly, "What is it?"

His thoughts jolted back to the present and he stopped walking. He turned to her and looked at her sadly, painfully. Why was she putting him through so much torture?

The lump in his throat grew too large to control, and he knew he could no longer fight the tears that pricked behind his eyes. His arms went around her hastily and he drew her tightly against him. He couldn't let her see him cry. He buried his face in her soft lengths of brown hair and choked, "Don't...don't be afraid...I'll be 'ere..."

Angie's arms received him and her heart went out to him. She knew he was crying, he didn't have to pretend. It made him no less a man in her eyes. She held him tightly, trying her best to comfort him without arousing any suspicions that she understood his situation. She would let him keep his pride.

His tears ceased soon afterward, for he knew them to be futile, and he gently released her. Jeremy quickly turned his face from her to secretly wipe the wetness from around his eyes.

"Come on." he half-whispered, "It's not far."

Angie sighed sadly as they continued the rest of the way through the destruction.

They had just escaped the bonds of the crumbled structure, when dusk descended upon them. Both Angie and Jeremy were weary, and when the darkness forced them to stop, they weren't regretful.

A chill took the air, and after they had lain there awhile on the ground, each noticed the cold creeping into their bones.

Jeremy, a set purpose in his mind, moved closer to Angie. She turned her head and gazed knowingly into his sparkling blue eyes. He put a soft hand to her hair and gently stroked it.

Angie smiled.

His arm continued the rest of the way around her, and he pulled her close. It was warmer this way, he decided.

Angie tenderly pushed ^{AWAY} the strand of his wavy brown hair that had fallen in his eyes, then rested her hand on his shoulder.

"I see you got cold, too." she commented, as if reading ^{the} fact from the World Book Encyclopedia. "It's always warmer with two, I've found."

Had this girl no tact, whatsoever, Jeremy seethed to himself? It may be true, but did she have to remark as such and spoil the mood? Not to mention that it deflated his ego. Well, he'd show her, he decided automatically. He'd prove to her it was more than just being cold---even if it wasn't. He'd make her believe it!

Jeremy firmly raised her face to his, and without warning, pulled her even tighter against him, demandingly pushing his lips on hers. He was surprised, however, to find her kissing him back equally as as passionately.

Angie's mind blurred for a moment, and she lay breathless from the impassioned interlude. Her breathing returned to a somewhat normal pattern, and after a few minutes of silence had passed, she hissed into his ear, "When you want to get warm, you sure go about it right."

Jeremy gave up. She was impossible, yet she was all he had. He continued to hold her in his arms, and secure in each other's warmth, they dozed off to sleep.

Jeremy was suddenly jolted from his sleepfulness by an anger-filled scream and a heavy blow on the face. He cried out in pain, and found himself staring into the infuriated faces of three uniformed men. He moaned and was again struck. Grabbing one of his arms, they wrenched him to his feet. Through the turmoil and confusion, Jeremy vaguely realized it was raining. He frantically searched through the darkness for Angie, but she had disappeared. His arms were roughly pulled back, and his wrists locked tightly in chains. He lost all self-control, and began to sob quietly.

"Shut up!" one of them ordered. They pushed him fiercely through the blackness. His tears mingled with the rain and his cries grew louder. But this only provoked the soldiers to be crueler.

"Shut up or..." another threatened.

Jeremy was terrified. It had all happened so fast. The ache in his wrists was unbearable, but what hurt worse was the fact that Angie had deserted him. Left him alone to... He was being forced to face ^{Alone,} whatever lay ahead, ~~alone~~. First he had lost his band, then Angie. He sobbed harder. There was nothing left. He wished he were dead.

The rain fell harder, and it seemed to Jeremy that they had trampled on for miles. Suddenly he noticed a building looming before him. This must be their destination, he thought numbly.

He was lead to an iron gate. One of the Germans pulled a ring of keys from his pocket and pushed the correct one into the rusty latch. The gate squeaked open, and Jeremy was unceremoniously pushed through it. He stumbled and fell heavily upon the wet, muddy ground. The door was slammed shut behind him and the men stomped away, muttering oaths in German.

There Jeremy was left; trapped in some hideous outdoor prison in the pouring rain--helpless and alone.

Chapter 9---

"Jeremy."

Jeremy awoke in a daze to the sound of his name being whispered.

"Jeremy!"

He opened his eyes, and was dazzled by the blinding sun overhead. He turned his head and blinked, moaning quietly. He was still in chains and only with difficulty did he pull himself up. His clothes were stained and streaked with dried mud from the night before.

"Jeremy! Over here!" the voice beckoned.

He gazed through the iron gate of the courtyard. "Angie!" he croaked, relieved, "I thought you'd deserted me!"

"I thought you deserted me!" she explained, "I got up for a minute and when I came back you were gone."

He stood up unsteadily and stumbled to the bars, falling weakly against them.

"Angie!" he pleaded hysterically, "You've got to get me out of 'ere!" He slid to the ground clutching insanely at the iron gate and pressing his face hard against the bars.

She sat down, only the gate separating them, and slipped her arm through the bars and about his shoulders.

"Calm down, Jeremy." she commanded gently.



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His hysterics died down to soft whimpers.

She comforted as best she could through the metal door. He finally made no sound at all, and for long minutes they sat in silence.

"How did you find me?" he eventually asked.

"I...I don't really know." she explained lamely, "I was mad this morning, that you'd left me, and I just started walking. I guess luck led me here."

"They'll get you, too!" he cried, his eyes wide with fright, "They'll lock you up too!"

"If I hear anyone coming, I'll hide." she told him gently.

"Don't leave me!" he ~~cried~~ ^{pleaded desperately}. "Please! Not again!" He frantically clutched her hand.

"I'm not going to leave you, Jeremy." she assured. "Try to relax."

"He relaxed his muscles obediently and closed his eyes.

Angie looked helplessly at his haggard features. What had they done to him? She feared for his sanity as well as his physical health. He had been so pampered for years, secure in his wealth, that now his mind couldn't comprehend what had happened. He was so used to closing his eyes to facts he didn't want to see, that reality frightened him. And what was happening to them now, was reality.

What had they done to him? She asked herself ~~this~~ ^{time} again and again. And what were they planning to do ^{to} him? That question frightened her even more, and she shuddered at the thought. A premonition of disaster overwhelmed her, and she ^{knew she} was powerless to do anything about it.

Eventually the warm sun lulled him to sleep, and Angie stood up. She felt guilty that she had to leave him, even for only a few minutes, and she hoped he wouldn't wake up. One thing neither of them had had and that was food. She had to leave him for a while. If only she found a fruit tree or a berry bush, it would be food.

She scanned her surroundings to be sure she couldn't be seen leaving, but the area was as deserted as when she first came.

Angie started along a path winding into the woods, and soon came across an apple tree. The fruit was small and green, but it was edible. She hungrily gobbled one, then gathered some others to take back to Jeremy.

When she returned, he was no long^{er} laying against the bars! She rushed, panicked, to the iron gate. He wasn't anywhere in the courtyard!

"Jeremy?" she called out desperately, clutching the door.

Fear crept up her spine as she realized he was no longer there. Her breathing was labored as she stood groping the bars, searching in her mind for some sort of relief.

The shadows lengthened quickly and dusk was soon upon her. She stood there for hours, it seemed, as it grew dark, and patiently awaited an answer.

The sky was completely black, when suddenly Angie distinguished the echo of footsteps coming toward her. Silently she slid into the shadow of the immense brick building surrounding her and the courtyard. The sound grew nearer and through the darkness, she saw the silhouette

of two figures. A tall, brawny man was in control of the situation, for he was cruelly pushing another man of smaller frame along in front of him.

Angie had to fight to stifle a gasp. The one being so roughly abused was Jeremy!

The prisoner was whimpering softly, and when the two reached the courtyard door, the German whirled him around harshly, pressing against it. Jeremy cried out in terror, and Angie cringed when she saw him struck again and again in the face by the ruthless captor. His arms were no longer chained, and Jeremy raised his hands to his face, crying weakly into them.

The guard unlocked the gate and brutally propelled him forward into captivity again.

Slamming the door, the man angrily bellowed, "You won't answer our questions?"

Jeremy only wept silently.

"Vell," the German foretold, "Enjoy your last night, zen." He laughed and ~~stomped~~ ^{stomped} past Angie, unaware of her presence, and on down the walk leading to the door of the brick building.

After Angie was sure he was gone, she rushed to the bars. "Jeremy? Jeremy, I'm here, now!"

He staggered to her and fell at her feet. "You left me, again!" he cried, tears streaming down his face, "You promised...you promised..."

Angie felt a stab of guilt pierce her heart. "I...I just left for a minute to find food..."

His sobs grew into hysterics. "Angie!...Angie!..." the words caught in his throat. "They're...They're...They said they were... going to...kill me!"

Fear welled up in her and she fell down beside him, "No...Jeremy.."

Terrified he grabbed for her sleeve through the bars. "Don't...oh, don't let them shoot me!" he pleaded, "Please...I don't want to die!"

"Oh, God, Jeremy...No!" She held him as close as possible through their barrier.

Suddenly a streak of lightening flashed across the cloud-covered sky. Rumbling thunder soon followed and within minutes angry rain poured down in buckets.

Jeremy shrieked at the first evidence of a storm and clung to Angie, terrified.

Angie, protected from the rain by an arch overhead, tried her best to comfort the trembling Jeremy, who in the courtyard had no protection from the elements.

Jeremy screamed at the next flash of lightening, and the next and the next. Was he really so horrified of the storm, Angie wondered incredulously. The rain beat down on him harder, and he wept miserably into her sleeve, drenched to the skin. She could do little for him through the iron bars, and he shook uncontrollably.

He was so sensitive, Angie thought, *for the moment caught in a web of emotion* ~~for the moment~~. He needed someone to take care of him. A sob caught at her throat. They couldn't kill him tomorrow! They just couldn't! Not in cold blood! *How about warm blood?* She needed him! She could never escape the enemy alone! She had to think straight, she told herself, getting a hold of her nerves. She forced herself to keep calm.

The storm didn't let up and Jeremy shivered violently, petrified at every streak of lighting and every boom of thunder.

"Angie!" he begged hoarsely, "Get me out of 'ere!"

"Jeremy," she wailed, "There's nothing I can do!"

"I'm so wet...and it's cold...and I'm scared!" he rambled.

"Jeremy..."

"And I'm hungry!"

"Hungry?"

"But that doesn't matter, does it?" he implored rhetorically. "Does it? I mean, I'm gonna die tomorrow."

"Jeremy don't!" she pleaded violently.

"I should be enjoying this, right?" He gazed insanely at her through the subsiding rain.

She stared ^{amazedly} into his wild blue eyes and attempted to calm him by stroking his wet hair. "Jeremy...Don't punish yourself!"

"Why not?" he questioned, turning from her, "Why not?!"

"Here," she said, pulling one of the apples from her pocket, "You said you were hungry."

He stared a long while at the object she held in her hand. "What's 'at?" he asked.

"An apple." she replied, handing it to him.

"It's green." he remarked disgustedly.

"It's food." she insisted, annoyed at his pickiness.

"Do you want me to eat it?" he asked her gently, truly wanting to know her feelings on the subject.

"Yes Jeremy," she answered, "I want you to eat it."

He ate it slowly, then rested quietly, in the drizzling rain, against the rusty bars.

Angie observed he was much like a gentle child. Wanting someone to take care of him, and baby him, and play up to his ego. A sense of panic overcame her. Tomorrow...tomorrow.

"Jeremy..." she whispered as she held him, "What's going to happen now?"

The next morning only a thick fog was left of the rain from the night before, and Angie thought perhaps this may be a good omen. Surely they would postpone their plans with the weather as bad as it was.

You can't kill someone in fog?

"Jeremy, I'm going to find some more food. I won't be gone long."

"You're leaving me alone again?" he implored hoarsely. He had regained some of his composure.. "Are you really going to find food, or are you just leaving so you don't 'ave to see me shot?" he accused cruelly.

"Jeremy!" she cried, "I wouldn't leave if I thought that..." she stopped short. She couldn't force herself to finish. She turned and fled in the direction of the woods without another word to him.

Angie had difficulty finding the path in the fog, but eventually she did find it, and was soon standing, again, before the apple tree. It was hard to see very far in front of her, and as she gathered more apples, she noticed this had to be the thickest fog she had ever been in.

Just as she was about to start back to Jeremy, she stopped dead in her tracks. She had heard a gunshot in the distance! She prayed that it had been something else, but she knew it was useless now to pray.

She carelessly dropped the apples she had so carefully selected, and stumbled along the path through the swirling mist. Her breathing was heavy and her heart pounded hard in her chest, but she was too numb to cry. She seemed to have run forever and she feared she was lost hopelessly in the fog. But luck was with her and she nearly ran into the forbidding building.

She frantically felt her way along the wall to the courtyard gate, and felt the iron bars beneath her fingers. Jeremy was no longer clutching the door!

"Jeremy!" she cried through the fog, "Jeremy!" She pounded ^{madly} upon the gate with her fists, "Jeremy! No!"

Angie could see no more than an arm's length in front of her, but she knew she had to get out of there before she went mad. She stumbled away, feeling her way along the wall of the building, the bricks hurting her hands. Tears were streaming down her face by now and she began running across the field surrounding the evil structure where Jeremy was... She had to get away! She had to escape!

Suddenly she tripped over some object and fell face first against the uneven ground. Sobbing uncontrollably she sat up, rubbing her stinging cuts. She stared hard into the thick mist to discover what had caused her fall. A scream erupted from her throat. Jeremy lay before her, ^{lifeless,} a pool of blood rapidly ^{growing larger} ~~increasing~~ around him!

Chapter 10---

"Jeremy!" she cried as the fog swirled around her. "Oh, God, Jeremy!" Angie buried her face in his shoulder and wept miserably, "They killed you...They killed you!"

She raised her head and looked upon his face. The tears fell from her eyes onto his cheek. "Oh, Jeremy..." She gently stroked his tossed hair.

Angie sighed tragically and tore her eyes from his palor face. Instead of the peacefulness of death, his features ~~contained a look of~~ *were contorted* ~~distorted pain.~~ *with pain.* Her eyes then wandered to his chest and again she turned away. His shirt was torn and crimson with blood, and this brought fresh sobs erupting from her throat. Weak from shock at her discovery, Angie fell down exhausted beside Jeremy's limp body.

"Why...?" Angie murmured to herself, fighting back the tears, "Jeremy...Why?"

Suddenly Angie felt something cold crawling over her hand! Fearfully, she looked, *and* finding Jeremy weakly grasping it, she cried, "Jeremy! You're still alive! They didn't kill you! You're not dead!" She sat up frantically, *and* ~~clutching~~ *ed* his hand.

"Angie?" he whispered hoarsely, almost inaudibly. "Angie?"

"I'm here," she told him reassuringly, "I'm right here."

"Shot..." he muttered, "They...shot...me..."

no kidding "I know," Angie murmured tenderly.

"It...it 'urts..." he croaked, staring up at her through ~~glassy~~ eyes.

"Jeremy." she soothed.

"Do something..." he pleaded, "Please..."

Angie remembered something she had learned in ^hHealth class. They had studied first aid, thinking they may never need it, but learning it "just in case." This must be one of those cases.

Angie concentrated for a moment, forcing her first aid knowledge from the back of her mind. Suddenly remembering, she carefully tore a piece from his shirt and pressed it hard against the bleeding bullet hole wound.

Jeremy jerked and groped for her in the mist. "Angie...Don't..." he moaned. But the plea fell on deaf ears, for Angie knew that to stop would be fatal.

"Angie...!" he cried hysterically, gasping for breath. "Angie...!" His pain was sharp and unbearable and he sobbed brokenly. "Angie...! Stop it!"

"I have to stop the bleeding, Jeremy!" Angie explained anxiously as he tried to pull away. "You'll die if I don't!" She grabbed his arms and he squirmed under her hold.

"Please...No!" he choked, "Let me go! Let me die!"

"Jeremy," Angie growled forcefully, pushing him down again, "You don't want to die."

He ceased writhing, stunned by both her anger and the truth in the statement she had just made. Tears spilled from his swollen eyes and he lay still on the hard earth. His breath came in short gasps and beads of perspiration burst out on his forehead.

Angie continued to press the bloody cloth against the wound. She looked at his desperate face and knew he was in terrific pain. She wanted to stop, wanted to wipe the hopeless look from his face, but she knew she couldn't. She had to stop that persistent bleeding!

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"Angie?" Jeremy gasped after a while, "Angie?"

"Jeremy...the bleeding's stopped."

He sighed and smiled weakly, "It...it stopped?"

Tears of relief filled her eyes, but she held them back. "Yes... Yes. You're going to be all right."

Suddenly his smile was erased. "The bullet...It's still there?"

Angie swallowed hard and looked away, and Jeremy knew the answer from her actions. His hand found hers, and weakly, he held it. He realized his chances of pulling through were slim, and so did Angie. There was no use in pretending. He wanted to console her, but there was nothing he could say. He didn't want to die, of course, but he didn't want Angie to fight the inevitable, only to ^{see} her efforts fail.

"Angie..." he began. But before he could finish, he arched his back in pain, gritting his teeth and crying out in misery.

"Jeremy!?" Angie screamed, grabbing him helplessly.

He relaxed again, wetness dripping from his twisted face. He gasped for breath. "It...it 'urts...so much..."

"Oh, Jeremy..."

"Angie..." he exhaled wearily, "It's okay now..."

Soon afterward he fell into a deep sleep, and so sans his company, Angie waited patiently for the fog to clear.

"Angie?" Jeremy asked groggily, awakening from the long sleep. He was staring at the velvety black sky, and for the moment he forgot where he was. He watched the stars twinkling lazily overhead.

Angie touched his hand, "I'm right here."

He felt a stab of pain in his chest and the memory of what had happened returned to him. He looked around at his surroundings.

"The fog...It's gone..." he murmured.

"Yeah," she remarked quietly, "It cleared up earlier this evening." Suddenly concerned she asked, "How do you feel?"

"As well as anyone would with a bullet in their chest, I suppose." He looked puzzled. "Where are we?"

Answering the latter question, she replied, "Behind the prison, somewhere." Reverting the conversation back to its original subject, Angie made another attempt to find out how he felt. "Is there much pain?"

Ignoring her, Jeremy continued, "'Ow did you find me? I mean, clear back 'ere?"

"Jeremy," Angie pleaded, "Stop changing the subject and tell me how you're feeling!"

He stared at her solumnly, "What would it matter, anyhow? You couldn't do anything."

"Jeremy.." she touched his arm gently.

Suddenly his face distorted in pain and his muscles tightened. A moan escaped his lips and a few drops of wetness escaped from beneath his tightly sealed eyes.

"Jeremy!" Angie screamed hysterically, "What is it? What's the matter?"

He relaxed, his breathing coming in short, hot gasps, and he looked at her helplessly, tears flowing down his cheeks.

"Jeremy."

"Angie," he croaked, "I...don't want to die..."

A sob caught at her throat, and she lay down beside him. Taking him in her arms, she held him close. "You're not going to die, Jerry, you can't."

He glanced up at her uncertainly and with his voice laced with pain, murmured, "You called me Jerry."

"Did I?" she asked rhetorically, "I didn't notice."

"Yes, you did." he insisted.

"Get some sleep, you'll need it for the trip in the morning." she advised, avoiding the issue.

"Trip?" he smiled weakly, "What kind of trip?"

"The kind that will get us away from the Germans. Now go to sleep, Jerry."

Exhausted, Jeremy didn't notice the second slip, and within minutes he was dozing peacefully, his troubles blurring into oblivion.

Sleeping like the pampered baby he is, Angie noticed, before she joined him in the unburdened world of sleep.

Angie awoke a little before dawn and stretched. She gave Jeremy a gentle shake, "Jerry...Jerry...Wake up."

He groaned quietly, then opened his eyes, "What is it? What's 'appening?"

"Nothing yet," she mumbled, "But if we don't get out of here.",

"I can't walk anywhere." he insisted painfully.

Angie froze and stared at him, "We have to get out of here."

She continued determinedly, "You have to walk."

"Angie, I...I can't..."

Her eyes softened and she bent closer to his helpless body, taking his hand. "I know how it must hurt, Jerry, but I know you can do it."

"You did it again." he remarked.

"Did what?" she inquired, fully aware of what she said.

"You called me Jerry, again," he pointed out to her.

"Did I?" she asked, seemingly unmindful.

"You know you did," he told her bluntly, "Why?"

"Don't you like it?" She straightened up.

"I don't mind really," he decided, forgetting his pain for the moment.

"Then why not?" she shrugged. "Besides," she explained, "It's shorter." She smiled, "Shall we be on our way?"

Jeremy sighed. He realized the subject was closed and he doubted that it would be brought up again in the near future.

He lifted his arm to her, "Well, 'elp me up."

Angie put her arm about his shoulders and aided as best she could as he struggled to his feet. Jeremy cried out in agony and fell against her, relying completely on her strength to support him. She staggered with his weight but managed to keep her balance.

Dance w/me



K. TIPTON

They tediously entered the woods beyond the rocky backyard of the Germans' make-shift prison just as the sun was peaking above the horizon. No one had seen them leave, so with the break of day they began their endless trek westward.

They walked on for miles, Jeremy collapsing at various points. He started complaining of his pain so often that Angie ceased to pity him and began to become annoyed. Couldn't he keep his misery to himself, Angie thought irritably.

"Angie..." he panted, "Angie...stop...stop for a minute...Let me rest." He fell to the ground truly exhausted, "I don't think I can go on."

She shook her head, disbelieving him, "Of course you'll go on. You've said the same thing the past fifty times we've stopped."

"We 'aven't stopped fifty times," he told her hoarsely, looking away hurt. "You don't believe me...You just can't understand this pain."

"You've described it to me in vivid detail every inch of the way."

He glared at her through glassy eyes, then began to struggle up on his own. Suddenly he cried out in pain and bent over double, clutching his chest wound. He screamed, the pain being too great to bear.

Angie rushed to his side and attempted to calm his writhing body, "Jerry...! Jerry...!" she cried, severely shaken up, "Oh, Jerry... I'm so sorry!" Tears burst from her eyes, but she quickly brushed them away. Her crying could only make it worse.

"Jerry!"

Jeremy ceased his thrashing and stared up at her through his blurred blue eyes. He shivered violently when the wind blew across his sweat-covered face and he gasped for breath. Through his parched lips he dryly murmured to her, "Angie...I'm going to die."

"No you're not!" she told him quietly, "Don't ever think that."

"But I am." he insisted.

"No...No you're not."

Jeremy's eyes were filled with hopelessness as he gazed at her incredulously, and when he turned away, his eyes brimming with tears, a lump grew large in Angie's throat. Doubt rose in her mind and ^{cold} fear settled in the pit of her stomach. He had been spared once, she thought desperately, surely he wouldn't die!

Angie made him as comfortable as possible, pushing dried leaves around him and forming a sort of make-shift bed. Trees surrounded them on all sides, and they couldn't see the sky, except for a few splashes of blue inbetween the branches. Angie noticed the woods and the sky above them was growing dark. She pillowed Jeremy's head with more leaves, cushioning it from the hard ground.

"Don't...Don't bother with 'at," he protested weakly, "It doesn't matter."

"Jerry," she whispered gently, "Jerry...don't put yourself through this." She stretched out beside him and pushed her cheek warmly against his. "It does matter."

He sighed resignedly. He knew he would never be able to convince her; not until it actually happened would she believe he would die.

Angie turned on her side and tenderly stroked his rumpled hair. Jeremy responded gratefully to the affection for it made him forget his pain. Careful not to cause himself more misery, he edged closer to her warmth.

The woods were completely dark now, and only a few stars were evident through the thick limbs overhead.

With Jeremy asleep in her arms, Angie sighed, troubled with their future and their fate. She knew she had to keep the faith. If not actually in her own mind, then in the eyes of Jeremy. She had to keep him hoping, believing he was going to live through this, or he would wither away with self-pity. She had to appear strong in his eyes, even if she wasn't, so that he would know he would always have someone to lean on. If she ever dropped this mask once, she knew it would be the death of them both.

Chapter 11---

"I'm leaving..." Angie began, standing up. The morning sun shined brightly through the trees.

"You're what?!" Jeremy weakly cried.

"To find food." she finished.

He sighed, "You're leaving me alone."

"I have to find food, or we'll starve." she determined.

"It doesn't matter--^{nothing}~~nothing~~ matters." he murmured hoarsely.

Angie glared at him for a moment, then stalked into the woods angrily. Would he never quit feeling sorry for himself?

After she had walked for nearly an hour, Angie found herself in a clearing. In the center of it was a neat white farmhouse and barn, no doubt taken over by Germans. Cattle grazed nearby and Angie could hear other animals, apparently still in the barn. The sun overhead was bright and Angie concealed herself in the tall grass at the edge of the field.

People were moving about, doing every day farm chores, and Angie knew there was no hope of getting food from there without being seen. Her stomach growled, however, reminding her of how very little both Jeremy and she had eaten in the past few days. Her only hope to get anything at all would be to wait until nightfall. Angie realized that if she did this, by the time she got back, Jeremy would be in a complete panic. No, she would have to go back to him, and soon. She had been gone far longer than she had anticipated.

She stood up, unseen, and began the walk back, deep in thought. Perhaps she could find berries or some other kinds of fruit on the trip back, to give to him, that she had missed on the way. She would return later that night, she decided, to this secluded farmhouse, and would take Jeremy back much more than just a few berries.

In the hour walk back, Angie gathered what edibles she could, picking as many as possible in the shortest amount of time. The woods were cool and comfortable, but the walk was long, and Angie, being in a hurry, didn't notice.

When she had finally completed her journey, she was worn and out of breath. Her pockets were bulging with ~~black~~^{rasp}berries, them being in season, and she fell down beside Jeremy, spilling them on the ground.

"I found us something to eat," Angie panted.

Jeremy's eyes were closed, and his lips parched. His breathing was labored and when he finally responded to her proddings, he stared at her as if he didn't recognise her.

"Where...where were you?" he croaked, "I thought you'd left...for good.."

"You know I wouldn't do that..." she assured tenderly. "I brought you something to eat..." She held a handful of berries out to him.

He glanced at them momentarily, then looked away. "No...no... I don't want any...You eat them..." he mumbled, his voice trailing off.

Angie hadn't had many yet, and so gratefully she ate a few, hoping this would prompt him to follow her example. It didn't. Finally she remarked, "You must be hungry...You haven't eaten in days..."

He shook his head, again refusing.

"I'm sure if you ate something, you'd feel better." she encouraged.

"I don't want anything!" he snapped vehemently, "Can't you see I'm gonna die anyway and it doesn't matter?"

"Jerry don't talk that way!" Angie screamed back, covering her ears with her hands to block out the sound of his words; the words she didn't want to believe. Expecting a retort and hearing none, Angie looked up again. Jeremy's eyes were shut once more.

She remained silent for many long minutes, then finally, quietly, she spoke. "I found a farmhouse about an hour's walk from here." She watched him for a reaction.

Jeremy turned his head and looked at her, mildly interested.

She stared down at her hands. "I'm going back there tonight," she continued, "to see what food I can find."

"You're leaving me 'ere alone again." he stated, sighing tiredly.

"To find food," she defended defiantly.

"You just never give up, do you?" he accused angrily.

"Not when there's a cause worth fighting for." she whispered softly, her voice edged with determination.

A tear fell from a swollen eye, and Jeremy turned his face from her. Almost inaudibly, he murmured hopelessly, "You're fighting a losing battle, Angie..."

Angie returned to the farmhouse in the blackness of night. She jumped at every sound, and when she reached the clearing, she felt it comforting to know there was civilization nearby.

She crept closer to the barn, keeping near the edge of the clearing and in the dark shadows of the trees. The moon was bright as day and being careful not to be seen or to disturb the animals, Angie drew nearer. Nearing the back of the house, Angie began searching for some clue of where she could find food. She spotted a garbage pile and moved closer. Wrinkling her nose with distaste, she carefully scanned it. A half loaf of stale bread crowned the very top of the pile, and Angie snatched it, stuffing it in her pocket. It may not prove to be very tasty, Angie thought, but at least it had more substance than berries. She chuckled silently. She knew Jeremy would go nowhere near it if he knew where she found it. *Why doesn't she just kill a cow?*

Angie noticed a rusty milking pail lying nearby. Another thing, she remembered--water. She recalled Jeremy's dry lips and cracked voice, and began looking for some source of water. Perhaps there was a hose hooked up near the barn that they used to water the animals.

She crept to the side of the barn, moving like a ghost, then continued on around it. Her hunch was correct, for on the other side of the barn she nearly tripped over the item she was seeking--the hose. Though she was on the far side of the barn, she knew she had to be even more silent. If the animals should happen to hear her and be alarmed, the whole household would be after her in a matter of minutes.

Hidden in the shadows, she slowly turned the water faucet on the wall. The water began flowing from the end of the hose in a quiet steady stream, and Angie waited for any sound that may disturb the creatures on the inside. ^{of the hose?} Hearing nothing, she moved back to the end of the hose and began filling the bucket.

When it was nearly full, Angie turned off the water, and retrieved her prize, proud that she had gotten away with it so easily. She forgot about keeping to the shadows and started out in plain sight across the moonlit yard.

Suddenly the lights of the house flashed on, and a dog began barking. Angie looked back, stunned. What had alarmed them? She ran frantically for the cover of the trees, most of the water splashing from the milk pail. Just as she was about to make good her escape, three shots rang out behind her. Angie's breath was coming fast, but she pressed on. A searing pain burnt her leg and she knew she had been hit. Suddenly the forest sheltered her, and she fell to the ground exhausted.

She still had the bucket and she found it had a small amount of water left on the bottom. The bread was safe in her pocket.

Angie felt something wet oozing down her leg, and she didn't know ^{whether} ~~whether~~ it was blood or water. She didn't want to know.

Unsteadily, she stood up. She had to get away from there and back to Jeremy. She couldn't walk without limping, and when she finally stumbled into their "camp", she had been gone for nearly four hours.

She collapsed beside a sleeping Jeremy and suddenly began crying, the shock of the night overwhelming her.

Jeremy, awakened by her bitter weeping, whispered, "Angie?...
Angie? What is it?"

"Oh, Jerry..." she cried, her voice filled with despair. "Jerry..."

Jeremy weakly pulled her closer, securing her in his arms. And when she finally ceased her crying, he neither knew nor cared what had happened. He was just grateful that she had returned.

Jeremy awakened the next morning to see Angie gnawing on the piece of stale bread. When she noticed that he was staring at her, she stopped eating. His eyes went to her leg. Her jeans were torn and blood stained.

"What 'appened last night?" he asked, truly worried, "What did you do to your leg?"

"I...I..." she stuttered, "It's just a flesh wound; they shot at me."

"Angie.." he responded protectively, "You shouldn't take so many chances."

"I...I did it for you, Jerry..." she explained eagerly, "I brought you food and water."

Jeremy glanced at the stale bread in her hand, then at the bucket of water sitting nearby. "I can't, Angie. I just can't eat anything."

Fear rose in Angie's heart, "Please, Jerry, just a little."

"Can't you see that it doesn't matter?" he scoffed, "It does not matter!"

But Angie could not be swayed, "Well then drink a little water."
She retrieved the water bucket. "Please drink some. You need something."

"No, dammit!" he cried vehemently, "I'm going to die! Why don't you leave me die in peace?!"

Angie's blood began to boil. He was such a fool! Just as she had been a fool to risk getting killed for him!

"I got shot trying to save your life!" she exploded, screaming furiously, "If you're so sure you're going to die, and you're so sure you don't need me around, then I'll leave you here to do it!" She ~~threw~~ ^{dashed} the water ~~she had poured over him~~ ^{into his face,} drenching him. "So much for self-pity. I think you want to die!" she remarked saucily and stomped away, leaving Jeremy, still very wet, alone in the forbidding dark forest.

Jeremy lay in the darkness of night alone. Angie hadn't returned, and he began to wonder if she had meant what she said and had truly left him there to die.

The night's noises closed in around him, and Jeremy fidgeted. He had tried to get some merciful sleep, but had found it was futile. The wound in his chest was healing, but slowly, and the dampness caused it to ache constantly.

Well, it won't matter in a while, Jeremy thought hopelessly. He wondered what her remark about self-pity meant. He licked his cracked lips, suddenly wishing Angie hadn't dumped the water on him. Wishing there was some left. But it was no use wishing, Jeremy decided, besides, it would bring the end that much nearer. He looked around at the mysterious, dark trees and noticed how deserted it was. So this was to be his grave. A month ago, sitting in his lavish hotel room, he could never have imagined such a fate. He would die here in this

dark place, helpless and alone. Reality suddenly jumped out at him. Angie had been right all along. He had been drowning in self-pity. He didn't want to die! He wanted to live. There was too much in this world to live for, than to just lie here and die! Lie here without ever even putting up a fight!

Jeremy forced himself to sit up. The pain enveloped his body, but he didn't give up. Feeling about on the ground, he found the few ~~rasp~~^{rasp}-berries that were left and stuffed them into his mouth. It felt good to swallow. He had been hungrier than he thought.

He fervently wished Angie was there. It was becoming quite apparent to him that she wasn't coming back. It would be so much easier to survive if she was there with him, pulling him through it, encouraging him. He had finally realized how much he really did need her. He needed her badly. Now more than ever. Why wouldn't she come back? Why? He questioned himself over and over again. He cursed himself for driving her away. She was too strong a person to tolerate a weak one for too long, and that was how he acted--weak. He had to get out of there in the morning, he determined decidedly. He had to find her. He would find her. He needed her too much to go on much longer without her.

Jeremy lay back down. His wound was throbbing, the pain unbearable now that he had moved. He would sleep now, he thought, drifting away, and leave in the morning. Leave to find Angie.

"Jerry." Angie whispered, shaking him gently to awaken him. "Jerry, I'm back...I've come back."

Jeremy opened his eyes. The woods were still black, and a few stars were peeping through the branches.

"Jerry..."

"Angie..." he mumbled, "Angie...You're here? I'm not dreaming?"

"Yes, Jerry," she assured, "I'm here. And if you're so sure you're going to die, I'll stay next to you till the very end."

"Die?" he cried, "Die? I'm not going to die! I'm going to live!" He continued hastily, "We've got to get out of 'ere." he tried to sit up, "We're going to..."

Angie pushed him back down gently, "Okay, Jerry, okay. In the morning...Sleep now."

Angie wondered what could have changed his mind. She had wandered in the woods for hours, following various paths, even returning to the farmhouse, looking for the answer. After much deliberating, she decided to stay with him. Her first impulse had been to escape without him, but on the second thought she knew she couldn't leave him alone, even if it meant her doom.

Finally after all her searching, she returned--returned to find the answer awaiting her. They would leave the next morning--^{together}~~together~~.

Jeremy relaxed. Gazing up at her, he smiled, "I'm glad you came back. I can make it now."

That's what he thinks.

Chapter 12---

Content now that Angie had returned, Jeremy fell into a dream-laden sleep.

His mind began spinning and suddenly he was on stage again. His voice blared from the amplifiers and resounded through the crowded auditorium. As he danced, he was aware of a group behind him and recognized it as his own. He raced to the microphone for the chorus of the wild song and was joined there by the rhythm guitarist. Together he and Randy belted out the defiant lyrics. The drums pounded behind him, Norman keeping the feverish beat without fail. And weaving tightly the rhythm section, Curtis on bass guitar stood unsmiling, his fingers barely moving over the strings. The lights flashed faster, driving the lead singer on. The lead guitarist to his right caught the mood and pressed on harder. Robbie's skill seemed to make the guitar talk, driving the wild crowd to even greater madness. The music raced, never seeming to reach its climax. The lights blinded ~~him~~^{them} as they sped faster. The crowds were screaming, drowning out the music. The entire place, including Jeremy, was at the peak of excitement.

Then it was gone. Jeremy could neither see, nor hear anything at all. He was alone--trapped within the blackness and the deathly silence. He tried to scream, to end the unbearable quiet! He cried out in the darkness for his friends, only to find they were no longer there!

"Jerry," Angie soothed, stroking his mousy hair, "Jerry...wake up.. It's only a bad dream." The blackness of the night surrounded them and only a few stars shone above.

Jeremy awoke, ^etrubling in her arms. "Angie?" he sobbed, clinging to her, "Angie...we 'ave to go back!"

"Calm down, Jerry." she whispered tenderly, wiping away his tears, "It was only a dream...a nightmare." She talked to him as if talking to a frightened child. "I'm here now, forget it and go back to sleep."

"No!" he insisted, sitting up and paying no attention to ^{her suggestion} ~~himself~~,
"No! I can't...We 'ave to go back!"

Realizing he was perfectly serious, Angie pulled herself up and asked, "Go back? Where to?"

"The stadium!" he answered impatiently, "The concert site!"

"But why?" she asked, totally ignorant of his reasoning.

"My friends are there," he went on to explain, "my group, my life..."

"But Jerry," she argued, "By now they would have left or have been captured, or are..." Suddenly she realized she had said too much.

Jeremy's eyes grew large with fear and his mouth partially fell open. A lump grew in his throat. "I should never 'ave left. I 'ave to go back to find out. I 'ave to know for sure." His eyes fell and he stared at his hands. "I 'ave to return." He looked up at her, "You can go on if you want...to escape." There was no trace of anger in his voice, just a grim kind of sadness. "I'll go back alone. It wouldn't be fair to hold you back." He turned his eyes from her, awaiting her answer.

A long silence followed, but finally she spoke. "No, Jerry." she told him quietly, suddenly remembering something she hadn't yet thought of, "I'm with you all the way."

Surprised at her reaction, he turned his eyes toward her. She hastily looked to one side as if attempting to hide her face.

"Angie?" He tenderly placed his hands on her shoulders, "Angie... What's the matter?" Receiving no answer, he gently turned her face to his, forcing her to look at him.

"Jerry...Don't..." A tear escaped from beneath her lashes.

Jeremy was alarmed to see her crying, and knew something was dreadfully wrong. "Angie?" He drew her into his arms, stroking her hair soothingly. "Tell me what's the matter."

Feeling safe in his arms, she answered quietly, "I...I have to look for somebody, too."

Mildly shocked by this revelation, he softly asked, "Who?"

Angie hesitated, as if afraid to go on. Finally she murmured brokenly, "My girlfriend...The girl I came to the concert with...Pepi..." She said her friend's name slowly, almost painfully. Then, a sob breaking from her throat, she wept bitterly onto Jeremy's shoulder.

Angie's mind swirled as Jeremy held her close, attempting to comfort her. She hadn't really forgotten Pepi. Actually, unknowingly, she thought of her often. But she had pushed the thought that her friend might be dead to the back of her mind, something she rarely did, because for once the truth was too brutal for her to take. Now with the facts coldly staring at her, she had to face reality. The shock of such a sudden realization had left her confused, and so comforted only by Jeremy's warm arms, she

had decided she must go back--she must return with him to look for Pepi.

With the answer seeming to come to her so easily, she felt foolish for crying and stopped immediately. She raised her eyes to him and smiled weakly. "I'm...I'm sorry...It was stupid to cry."

His sharp blue eyes pierced into her green ones steadily. "Don't be sorry," he whispered intensely, "I didn't mind."

"Oh...well.." she mumbled as she tried to loosen herself from his arms.

Jeremy, refusing to release her, pleaded, "Don't go."

She stopped and gazed deep into his eyes, wondering at his next move. "Why?" she muttered softly.

He gently pushed her head back onto his shoulder and began rocking her slowly back and forth. She relaxed her taut muscles and conformed to his lulling, rhythmic movement.

After a while, Angie, breaking the silence, whispered, "You never answered my question..."

He was silent for a moment. "It feels good to hold you in my arms," he confessed quietly, "To be able to comfort a person like you..."

"A person like me?" she questioned curiously.

Jeremy continued to rock, ^{her} "You're so strong," he explained tenderly, "And so seldom need comforted."

The lulling movement ceased and Angie lifted her eyes to meet his.

The crickets' peaceful song was the only sound heard in the black envelope of night, and a feeling of well-being overwhelmed them. Both caught in the ancient spell of the moonlight, Jeremy pulled her body tightly against his, and ~~rapturously~~ ^{rapturously} pressed his lips upon hers.

The next morning they began their journey back. Jeremy was feeling much better. His wound was healing quickly now that he had decided he really wanted to live, and he was in high spirits, positive that the warm, sunny day was meant as a good omen.

They made better progress now that Jeremy could walk without assistance, though their pace was still slow. He forced himself on, even when the pain became unbearable, telling himself over and over that he must find his friends, that he could not fail them again. Though the thought did have some emotion involved, it was mostly the gallantry of it that drove him on.

The trip took only two days. The evening of the second day, they spotted the skeleton frame of the stadium silhouetted against the gold and pink sunset. That night they camped nearby, being careful to keep themselves concealed from the searching eyes of any lingering Germans.

The pair entered the forbidding, broken structure in the early hours of sunlight the next morning, and separately began their fateful search.

Angie returned to the place Pepi and herself had sat during the concert, and looked futilely for her friend. With the sun beating upon her, and the unbearable stink of death lingering in the air, she searched for nearly an hour. She turned over huge pieces of rubble, and peered into the gaping faces of the dead, praying that none of them would be Pepi. When she could stand it no longer, the death and destruction, she stood up, and wiped the wetness from her face. After searching so long and hard, Angie was convinced that her friend was still alive, and if she knew Pepi, she was probably safe and sound and miles away from there.

Angie sighed and made her way toward the ruined stage and Jeremy. Not seeing him, she began looking herself for his friends. She wasn't worried about whether she would recognize them or not. She knew she would. Hadn't it been she who had gazed ^{and longed} at millions of their pictures, dreaming about how she would love to meet them. With the exception of Jeremy, she thought grimly, perhaps she never would.

Her group--The Children of Novelty. For she felt they belonged to her as she belonged to them. Could it be possible they had all died but Jeremy? Had not a single one lived? Randy nor Robbie nor Norman nor Curtis?

Suddenly she ceased her looking and scolded herself for thinking such negative thoughts. She was becoming a pessimist, the kind of people she hated most. Having decided to be more optimistic, Angie looked to the sky. The sun was still shining brightly overhead. She looked at the stage, fallen before her. A portion of it still stood, and a hole in its side gaped at her, daring her to enter. Angie sighed and glanced around, once more looking for Jeremy. Seeing him nowhere, she decided to go in alone. Certainly if there was anything--or anybody--to be found, logically it would be beneath the stage. She peered into the dark opening, then carefully stepped inside, the same musty stench of death greeting her at the entrance. She fervently hoped she wouldn't find anything.

Jeremy walked back to the stage, carefully stepping over the corpses and the rubble. He also smelled the awful odor of death, and nauseated, he closed his eyes and held his breath. The hot sun burnt his skin and his wound ached persistently, nearly driving him mad.

He continued on to the front of what was once a gigantic stage. Jeremy searched anyplace he believed his friends ~~my~~ have fallen. Suddenly realizing that any or all of them could have been hurt and could have crawled or limped to a new location, he stopped abruptly. He looked over the wide stadium. There was no way he could search the whole place, he thought defeatedly. They could be anywhere--anywhere at all. He began looking around the stage again, but his spirit was gone.

The sun was unmerciful, and the abhorrent smell was becoming stronger. Jeremy was sure his group was dead and buried deep beneath the rubble, and if they weren't, the Germans had them and they soon would be. He may as well find Angie and be on their way. He could do nothing for them now. He had failed them. His mind was burdened by a sense of deepening doom and a premonition of disaster. He quickened his pace. They had to get out of there!

In his hurry to find Angie, Jeremy failed to watch where he stepped. His foot catching on a piece of rock, he painfully fell to the uneven ground. A sharp pain shot through him as his chest hit, and only after several minutes did his mind clear. Slowly he opened his eyes. An object a foot or so from his eyes caught his attention. It sparkled and shone in the glaring sunlight, and recognizing it immediately, Jeremy sat upright, grabbing it as if it would vanish before his eyes. He held it up and examined it. It was a ring. A man's gold ring with a ruby stone. It was nothing extraordinary really, but Jeremy would have known it anywhere. He looked on the inside--though he already knew--and read the initials engraved there. C.C. Curtis Christopher. It was the bass player's ring, the only thing that remained of his band, his friends.

He sighed and got to his feet. At least their trip back hadn't been completely in vain.

Jeremy swallowed hard as he slipped the ring on his finger. He gazed at the ruby, slowly running his finger over its smooth surface. Suddenly his mouth fell open in horror as he realized something. The finding of the ring could only mean one thing! Curtis must be dead! A sick feeling settled in the pit of his stomach and he thought of the others. Surely they all weren't dead! he thought miserably. Surely there was another besides himself from the great Children of Novelty still alive! Surely...

Suddenly he heard a crash coming from the direction of the stage, then a scream.

"Angie!" he cried out, running in the direction of the commotion. "Angie! Where are you?" But silence answered him. He ran to the back of the stage and spotted the yawning hole. "Oh, my God!" he muttered to himself.

Jeremy stepped through the opening and into the blackness. When his eyes adjusted to the darkness, he glanced around at his surroundings. The space was surprisingly small, and he began to believe he had been mistaken and that Angie wasn't there after all. Just when he was about to turn around and leave, a weak voice called out to him.

"Jerry?" she murmured, "Jerry...Help..."

He raced to the voice, finding her almost completely hidden from view and covered to the waist by a huge ~~chunk~~^{chunk} of wood. Finding a long board to use as a lever, he fixed it under the piece covering her. Angie moaned painfully as Jeremy attempted to push the heavy object away, and her moans became soft sobs when he finally succeeded.

The pain in his chest throbbed, but Jeremy forced himself to ignore it. He picked Angie up as gently as possible and carried her from beneath the stage.

He set her down carefully on a bare spot of ground, and fell down beside her. "Angie?" he whispered.

Slowly she opened her eyes and gazed at him. He seemed so strong, she thought, her mind still muddled. Her brain cleared, and suddenly realizing something, she panicked. "Jerry? My legs...I...I can't feel them...!"

"You can't feel them?" he questioned concerned.

"No.." she insisted, "It was as if they weren't even there!"

Jeremy realized she was in terrific pain by the quiver in her voice, and taking her hand in his, he gazed into her green eyes, now dulled by pain. She smiled weakly back and Jeremy wondered at how she bore the pain without a sound. Then, looking upon Angie's strong features, he began to see her differently.

"Jerry..." she began, her voice strained, "I...I hear something... Oh, my God...Jerry...Look!"

Jeremy, looking over his shoulder, saw figures of men pouring over the horizon towards them. He was completely taken by surprise, but obviously they hadn't yet spotted them, for their pace was still a casual one.

"Jerry!" Angie cried hoarsely, "Run..! You can escape! There's still time!"

Jeremy looked up towards the advancing men. She was right. He could escape. There was time. But he couldn't just leave her!

Elleg 9



KTIPTON

"Jerry...Leave...leave without me..." she pleaded, as if reading his thoughts, "They'll never see me here!"

Leave her? He couldn't! His eyes wandered from her face to the Germans then back again. He could escape--escape their brutal ways and their unjust punishments. He could escape!

"You know I can't leave you!" he told her, making a snap decision, "I won't ever leave you..." he promised her. The words had come without even thinking. It was as if he was listening to someone else speaking instead of actually voicing the words himself.

A tear ~~rolled~~^{crept} from her eye and she weakly squeezed his hand. "Thank you..." she whispered, smiling gratefully.

Jeremy suddenly knew he had made the right decision. He couldn't leave her--he didn't want to. Separately they were doomed, he thought, but together they could escape.

Suddenly the guards had surrounded them. They had crept up silently as wolves circling their prey.

"Get them!" one of the men barked with a pronounced accent. "Before they try to escape!"

The Germans were upon them, wrenching their arms and chaining them behind their backs. Angie was crying softly, unable to control the pain any longer.

Jeremy submitted quietly, without even a fight. I could never leave you, Angie Jackson, Jeremy realized suddenly, I love you too much.

They were taken to a huge building, at one time the state penitentiary, and were thrown into a cell on the main floor. The tiny room was dark, despite its location, and heavy iron bars blocked their exit. Cement walls were on either side of them, and behind them was brick, with a tiny, ^{boarded up} window high above them.

Though they themselves were alone in the cell, they knew there were other prisoners beyond the walls on each side of them and also across the corridor. But because of the extreme darkness, they couldn't see far enough through the bars to see anybody else.

Angie's legs were paralyzed and she had been unable to walk to the prison. This had forced a grumbling guard to carry her, which he had done none too gently, and the experience had left her severely shaken.

After the German had slammed the iron door and had turned the key, he stomped down the hall, leaving them alone in the blackness. Angie was trembling, partly because the cell was cold and damp, but mostly because she hadn't yet recovered from the rough handling she had received.

Jeremy, a bit shaken himself, pulled himself closer to Angie and held her trembling body in his arms.

"Jerry..." she gasped, forcing back a sob, "I'm...so...scared..." There. She had let her mask fall. Her cover-up was gone. She was no longer invincible and she could no longer offer support to Jeremy. Were they finally beaten? She began to cry silently, overwhelmed by a moment of despair.

Her admittance of weakness, however, seemed to add to Jeremy's new-found strength, and understanding in his voice, ^{he}soothed, "I know... Angie, I know..."

Through her tears she mumbled her fears. "I...I can't walk, Jerry, and it's so dark..."

"Angie, don't cry..." he pleaded, pulling her closer, "I'm 'ere. I'll take care of you." There was a new sensitivity in his voice.

Angie sighed, relieved. He would take care of her.

Jeremy dried her eyes, "I promise..."

"But I'm so afraid...I can't walk...I can't even see you!" she cried, frightened, "It's as if you weren't even here!"

"But I am 'ere..." he told her sympathetically, "I'll always be 'ere." He squeezed her hand.

Thinking a moment, he pulled Curtis's ruby ring from his finger and pushed it into her palm. "I found this at the stadium," he explained, "It was Curtis's. It was the only thing I found--the only thing left." He swallowed hard. "I want you to 'ave it."

"Jerry...I couldn't..." she protested weakly.

He took the ring from her hand and slipped it onto her finger.

"Please, Angie."

Relaxing, she sighed and rested her head on his shoulder. "Now I know you'll always be here."

Jeremy kissed her lightly on the lips. Always, he thought, yes, always.

Sometime in the middle of the night, Jeremy awoke to the muffled sound of a conversation. Shaking the sleep from his brain, he listened. It was coming from the cell across from theirs. A tiny circle of light lit the face of the candle's owner. A German guard. Obviously he was talking to the ^{occupant}~~occupier~~ of the cell.

"But I can't do dat." the guard protested, "I would get in trouble!"

"Couldn't you just check?" the prisoner pleaded louder.

Jeremy gasped aloud at the man's voice. He recognized that voice!

"Quiet down." warned the German, "Do you want us to get found out?"

"No, of course not, but..."

Jeremy's heart was pounding hard against his chest. The voice belonged to Robbie Summerfield!

Chapter 13---

The conversation ended, and the German disappeared with his pinpoint of light, down the hall.

When he was sure he was gone, Jeremy crept quietly to the iron bars. He heard the man across from him sigh tiredly. Putting his face against the ^{door} bars, Jeremy whispered, "Robbie? Robbie? Is that you?"

There was no reply.

"Robbie? Are you there? This is Jeremy."

"Jeremy?" the other asked incredulously, "Jeremy! You're 'ere too?"

"It is you, Robbie! I didn't think anyone else made it!"

"Jerry?" a weak voice called from behind him. "Jerry, who are you talking to?"

He turned to her, "It's Robbie, Angie, he's not dead!"

"Robbie." she repeated quietly, remembering the soft face of the lead guitarist.

"Robbie," Jeremy asked hopefully, "Do you know where the others are? Do you know if they're..."

"Well," whispered the voice from the darkness, "I know Randy is still alive."

"Randy!" exclaimed Jeremy, hardly containing himself. Out of the rest of the band, Randy was the closest to Jeremy. He was his best friend. "Randy's alive! Is 'e 'ere too?"

"Keep your voice down, Jeremy." warned Robbie. "No, Randy's not 'ere."

Angie, straining her ears, could barely make out Robbie's words. "Jerry...What's he saying?"

"Randy's alive!" he told her.

Angie smiled. She was glad for herself as well as for Jeremy. She thought of Randy with his hungry look and his cool, suave ways. He had always seemed so cold and forbidding to her. Certainly he would be different in person.

"That guard I was talking to," Robbie murmured, barely audible, "Randy's with 'im and 'is wife." His voice became even quieter, "'E's going to 'elp us escape."

Jeremy's mind whirled with this new information. Robbie and Randy were both still alive and they were all going to escape!

"What did he say?" Angie questioned.

"We're going to get out of this 'ell 'ole." Jeremy answered.

Suddenly Angie, rubbing her thumb over the ring on her hand, asked, "What about the others?" She felt a strange union with the man whose ring she wore, "Norman--and Curtis..."

Jeremy felt sick as he remembered the fate of Curtis, but he relayed Angie's question to Robbie, saying nothing of his own beliefs.

For a moment Robbie said nothing, then, "I...don't know where they are....I asked Wolfram, the guard, to check for them, but..."

"Where do you think they are?" Angie asked, strangely disturbed.

"I don't know," Robbie replied sadly, "I really don't know."

In another part of the German prison, a part with much more light, a man sat dejectedly on the hard cement floor. He occupied the cell alone, and the cells around him were empty. He never saw anyone but the German guard who patrolled that deserted ^{section} ~~part~~ of the building. Often he could draw the guard into a conversation, for he had no one to talk to either, but it was usually a short talk that never amounted to much. The German would always remember some order given by his commanding officer and would disappear somewhere.

On this particular day, the guard, whose name was Yves, hadn't yet passed by, and the prisoner was tremendously bored. Hours passed and still the German hadn't appeared. Desperately wishing Yves would come, the nervous man began to pace the floor. He had something important he had to ask him, why didn't he come? ↩

Finally the sound of footsteps echoed through the empty hall. When the guard saw the prisoner awaiting him at the iron bars, he smiled, "You must be lonesome today, eh, Norman?"

Norman laughed heartily. "You would be too if you were locked up in 'ere alone."

"Vell, I vas kept busy today." he remarked, "A man downstairs is nearly half-dead, and going mad, too. Keeps calling for someone named Jeremy...I tried to shut him up--Oh, vell, he might keep quiet now..."

Norman swallowed hard. "J-Jeremy...did you say? He called for a-a Jeremy?"

"Yes," answered the guard, not noticing Norman's behavior, "But I shut him up good, I think."

Norman closed his eyes. These people were so brutal. It made him sick to think that one of his friends... It had to be one of his friends, he thought nauseated. But he mustn't look alarmed. He had to keep this man's friendship--to find his friends.

"I was wondering," Norman asked, attempting to keep his voice calm, "Would you do something for me?"

The guard looked wary, "And vat ist dat?"

"Do they keep lists of the people--kept--here?"

"Vell," the guard hesitated, "Yes."

"Could you look someone up for me?" Norman continued. He crossed his fingers behind his back.

The German looked relieved. If that was all he wanted. He was in charge of that himself, and Norman was his only friend there. "Sure, I suppose I could." He pulled a scrap of paper and a pencil from his pocket and handed it to him. "Write it down. I will check."

Norman sighed in relief as he carefully printed four names. He handed the paper back to the German, then watched him disappear down the corridor. He knew that one of the names would be on the list, he thought grimly, he only hoped that ^{whenever it was} he was still alive.

Robbie had persuaded Wolfram to unboard the window in Jeremy and Angie's cell, and with the sunlight pouring through it, the three prisoners looked one another over. Each could hardly believe the other two were actually there.

"Next maybe I can get Wolfram to let me come over there." Robbie smiled.

"Why not?" Jeremy suggested cheerfully, placing an arm about Angie's shoulders, "It's worth a try."

"He was so reluctant to unboard the window, though." Robbie reminded him, "He's so afraid he'll get in trouble and ruin--everything."

"Why does he want to help us so bad, anyway?" Angie inquired suspiciously.

"E never actually told me." Robbie revealed, "I suppose it 'as something to do with Randy, but 'e's been very mysterious about it all."

Just then Wolfram paced down the hall toward them. He had keys in his hand and they jingled as he walked.

Angie's heart jumped into her throat. Surely they weren't going to try to escape in broad daylight!

As the guard came closer, he chuckled. "Ve need more room," he said merrily, "So Robbie moves in with his friends."

Yves, after waiting an entire night and most of the day, had finally brought Norman the news he wanted so desperately.

Three of the names were on the list, Norman thought happily. Three of ~~them~~ ^{that he knew of} plus himself were still alive. Then the disturbing remembrance of near dead man Yves had "shut up" returned to him. Which one was it? Which?

Pushing the entire thought from his mind, Norman asked the guard to locate them for him, though he didn't tell him that he hoped he might be moved in with one of them. Norman crossed his fingers again. Perhaps they were all still alive.

Yves returned later the same day, his footsteps echoing in the deserted

hall and the keys in his hands jangling noisily.

Norman jumped up, "Yves!"

The German smiled, "Hello, Norman." Yves unlocked the heavy iron door and swung it open.

Jeremy's back was against the brick wall. A sleeping Angie sat beside him, her head pillowed against his arm. Robbie was lying on the floor nearby, also asleep.

Night had fallen hours ago, but Jeremy had been unable to sleep. He hoped Wolfram would hurry their escape. Jeremy tenderly looked down at Angie. He knew she couldn't walk and it worried him. If they could only get free they could find a doctor. He sighed. Things had gotten so complicated.

His mind wandered. He wondered if Curtis and Norman were still alive. It had been a miracle to find Robbie, Jeremy thought, and even a greater one to find out that the mischief-making Randy was better off than he was.

Jeremy smiled as he thought of Randy. Randall Clayton ^{the third} ~~III~~ was his real name--and he was Jeremy's closest friend. But his name gave no clue to the kind of person he really was. ^{so he was} Jeremy thought over the past many years they had been together, ~~and~~ chuckled. They had known each other from childhood, and in that time Randy had tried and done more things than most men do in a lifetime. And at the ripe old age of twenty-nine, he was still at it.

Jeremy dozed lightly, wondering if his friend, even after all this, would ever grow up. He fell asleep with a smile on his face. He was glad Randy was still alive--very glad.

Time out
for a long
irrelevant
description of
Keith.

Randy slowly and painfully opened his eyes. The bright sunlight streaming through the windows hurt them and he blinked. His body ached and his head throbbed. Where was he? He glanced around confused at the tidy little bedroom, American in style, but now owned by the Germans. He strained to remember what had happened. A feeling of nausea swept over him and he gave up the search for his memory. He felt hot and he guessed he had a fever. God, but he felt ~~ghastly~~ ^{ghastly}. He wished someone would come. *He needed a fix.*

Randy looked around the neat little room again. He had to remember! By sheer will power he forced his memory back. He remembered he was Randy Clayton, that he was in a rock band, that they were in concert in some beastly American city, and that they'd been bombed by someone. He obviously had been ~~injured~~ ^{injured} ~~for he felt miserable~~, but that still didn't explain where he was. It all seemed so long ago when he thought of it. First the music, flowing smoothly, then the blinding flashes, the stage collapsing, the sensation of falling, falling... He closed his eyes quickly, blocking out the fast fading memory. He didn't want to remember.

When Randy opened his eyes again, he was staring into the kindly face of a short, squat German woman. A bit startled, he jumped, rocking the bed and upsetting his stomach worse. He gaped at her and she smiled.

"Oo are you?" he managed to hoarsely mumble, "And where the 'ell am I?"

The woman picked up a thermometer from the nightstand and stuck it in his mouth. He didn't refuse it, and continued gazing at her, awaiting her answer.

"I ist Una." she stated sweetly. Her German accent was prominent and Randy was visually shocked at the sound of it. "I ist ze one dat find you near dead. My husband Wolfram and me, we take care of you while you were sick. We thought you would die, but you ist young and you live." She took the thermometer from between his teeth and examined it.

Randy's memory, having returned in full and registering crystal clear, asked, "But where are all my friends in the band? Jeremy and Robbie and..."

"Take dis..." she ordered firmly, handing him a pill and a glass of water.

Randy lifted his throbbing head and obeyed, forcing the pill down his parched throat.

"Ah yes," she said thoughtfully, "Your friends. You called for zem in your sleep." She smiled. "Vell, my husband found zum of zem. He ist a guard at ze prison. Dat's where dey ist at."

"Prison?" Randy cried, his voice coming out a whisper, "Why?"

"I suppose you don't know." she sighed again. "Ze Germans attacked ze United States. Zey control ze Eastern part now. Your friends are prisoners."

Randy's eyelids were becoming heavy. The sedative she had given him had begun to take affect. He forced himself to remain awake. "But...But why...did you bring me 'ere? You're German..." he muttered, "Why didn't you throw me in jail, too?"

Una looked down at her hands, "My husband and me ist against dis War. We always Vere." She swallowed hard as if it were painful to go on. "Our son Vas killed in dis War and..." She looked at him almost lovingly, he

noticed, as a tear rolled down her fat cheek. "You look like our Hans.."

As Una stood up and walked toward the door, Randy, hardly touched by the statement, wondered how he, with his long hair as black as coal, could look like some darling little ^{black-haired} German boy named Hans. ^{He did not feel complimented in the least, but} He did not question her, ~~she~~, and as he drifted off to sleep, he vaguely heard her say something about helping them all escape.

"Jerry! Look!" Angie exclaimed, not believing her own eyes.

Jeremy glanced quickly over his shoulder toward the door. "Norman!" he cried, as surprised as Angie.

Robbie looked up and his mouth fell open, agast to see the drummer standing there.

Yves unlocked the iron bars and Norman stepped inside.

"Jeremy! Robbie!" he propounded, "You're both 'ere! Together!"

The German turned to leave, sighing sadly. Norman was the only friend he had made at the prison and he would miss him, but he also realized how much Norman needed his friends. Besides, he thought, thinking loyally of the prison, they would soon need Norman's cell. There was a new truckload of civilians coming in tomorrow.

Norman turned to the departing guard, tears of gratitude filling his eyes. "I don't know how to thank you, Yves..."

The guard smiled sadly and turned away, hastening down the corridor. He didn't look back.

Norman turned back towards his friends, noticing the girl beside Jeremy and temporarily forgetting that the remaining name on the list Yves had given him was still ^{hidden} somewhere in the huge prison.

Wolfram returned later that day. He had finally managed to check the list of prisoners as Robbie had asked him to do, and he had been able to locate the remaining one. His head swam with the information he had gathered, and he regretted with all his heart the news he had to report, *to them.*

He stopped in front of the cell and stared at the ragged prisoners that had become his friends. When they saw him, they each knew something was dreadfully wrong.

"Wolfram," said Angie, the first to see his stricken face, "What's wrong?"

Wolfram looked away, unable to answer.

Jeremy
~~Robbie~~ stood up and walked to the iron bars, grasping them tightly.

"Wolfram?"

The German gazed at the cement floor, unable to look at the four people who stared so intently at him. Finally he forced himself to speak.

"I...I've found *him* ~~him~~," he muttered quietly, "I've found *Curtis* ~~him~~."

Da Da Damm Rumm

Chapter 14---

The narrow stairway was dark, lighted only by the guard's lantern. Jeremy carried Angie in his arms as they were lead downstairs, the passageway becoming blacker every step.

Curtis lay down there, thought Jeremy hopelessly, dying somewhere in the darkness. He shivered involuntarily. He was glad now he had decided to bring Angie; he could ^{have} never faced this alone.

Finally they reached the bottom. A cell was to their right, and to this the strange German turned. He thrust the key into the rusty lock and noisily turned it. Jeremy looked on fearfully while Angie held her breath. Certainly Curtis couldn't be in there!

The guard pushed open the door, and Jeremy and Angie breathlessly entered. The room seemed empty, but when the German lifted the lantern, the light flickered on a shape huddled in the corner. Angie gasped. The figure there hardly even resembled the man she knew as Curtis! He was hideously thin and his face was a deathly shade of white. Jeremy's stomach turned and he turned his face from the sight. ^{His} friend would have been better off dead as Jeremy had once believed him to be.

"Vell?" the German asked impatiently, "Ist dat him?"

Jeremy swallowed the lump in his throat and nodded.

Angie looked at the dying man and pitied him. She wore his ring, she must do something for him! She had to!

"Couldn't we take him upstairs with the rest of us?" she asked bravely,
"Perhaps there..."

Jeremy looked down at her, thankful she had taken over the situation.

But the guard sharply said, "No! He is too sick! I ^{have} ~~have~~ my orders!"

"Then could one of us stay with him?" she kept on persistently.

Jeremy turned to her horrified when the guard consented. "Angie...I
I can't..." Jeremy stuttered, frightened at the thought of being left there
alone with a dying man.

Angie's heart leaped into her throat as an idea came to her. "Jerry,"
she breathed, trying to control her pounding heart, "I'll stay."

He glanced at her concerned and said, "No, Angie. I won't let you.
Maybe we could get Robbie or Norman, but..."

"But we'd be taking such a chance, Jerry," she protested, "Once we're
back upstairs they might not let us come back. Then he'd surely die...
alone..."

Jeremy realized she was right and the remembrance of the night he had
spent alone in the woods fearing death stuck with him. How many nights had
Curtis spent wondering whether he would live to see the next day? No,
Jeremy couldn't let him die alone. He looked at Angie tenderly. She
had offered to stay, but he himself needed her so ^{desperately} ~~desperately~~. His eyes
fell on the wasted figure in the corner--his friend.

Angie followed his gaze and his thoughts, "I'll be all right, Jerry,
and you won't be alone. Don't forget Robbie and Norman are still there."

Jeremy licked his lips nervously and the guard sighed impatiently.

"Come on!" he growled.

Finally Jeremy agreed and carefully set her beside Curtis. He stared at her adoringly and gently kissed her, savoring each second.

"Angie?" he murmured in a moment of regret.

She smiled tenderly. "I'll be all right." she assured him again.

He gazed at her gratefully and mumbled, "Thank you.." He paused, "If anyone can save 'im, you can."

Jeremy looked at her one last time then, closely followed by the guard, slowly walked up the dark stairway, leaving Angie and Curtis in the empty blackness.

With a damp cloth the guard had given her, Angie gently sponged off Curtis' face. Besides the cloth, she had persuaded the German to bring her a candle and a pitcher of water. She had discovered that Curtis had a fever, and stubbornly she was attempting to bring it back down to normal.

He was perspiring profusely and he ~~trembled~~^{trembled} continuously from the cold, damp air. Angie noticed how pitifully thin he was and her hate for their enemies greatened. His lips were parched and she realized that he hadn't had a drink for days. Gently she lifted his head and allowed some water to trickle from the pitcher into his mouth. He didn't respond, however, and fear welled up in Angie when she thought that perhaps he was beyond help.

Still Angie refused to give up, and soon the days had lengthened into a week. She forced herself to go on, to faithfully cool his forehead and to attempt to get him to drink, knowing she could return to Jeremy any-time she asked. But despite Angie's unerring efforts, Curtis' body stubbornly refused to recover. Angie knew that if something didn't happen soon, Curtis would die.

Finally, painfully, he swallowed the life-giving liquid. Angie let a little more flow onto his dry tongue and this he swallowed immediately. She gave a sigh of relief, her faith regained. Angie smiled hopefully and mumbled, "Curtis, you're going to make it." She softly stroked his wavy, black hair, "We're all going to make it."

She started to give him another drink, but thinking she saw his eyelids flicker she stopped.

"Curtis?" she ~~whispered~~^{whispered}, wondering if it was just her imagination, "Curtis, are you awake?"

He let out an almost inaudible moan as he turned his ~~face~~^{face} toward~~s~~ her. His eyes slowly opened and his vision cleared. Angie's face was lighted by the soft flickering candlelight, and when he saw her he tried to smile.

"You're...you're an...angel..." he muttered almost lovingly, not even realizing that the face was strange to him.

Relief flooded her face and her heart warmed. He was going to live after all! She knew it! He had no injuries. All he had was a fever and that should disappear with a little food and water.

"Curtis...How are you feeling?"

He groaned as he chased the clouds from his mind. He was still weak, but he was now able to distinguish what was going on around him. Curtis' eyes fell upon Angie and he realized through a fog that he didn't know her.

"'Orrible...but...Oo are you?" His voice cracked, but his tone was gentle.

Angie was a bit surprised he was thinking so clearly so soon, but she answered, "I'm Angie..."

Curtis attempted a smile. "So I wasn't...so far off...when I called you an angel, was I?" he asked her softly. He seemed exhausted by the effort to speak.

"No, not at all," she answered, busying herself with wetting the shred of cloth and sponging his ~~forehead~~ ^{forehead}. "Actually, that's my real name. I just go by Angie."

Curtis remained silent for many moments, his strength very nearly drained. Finally, though, he asked, "'Ave you been 'ere all the time?" His voice was becoming hoarse and almost impossible to hear.

"No," she replied honestly, "Just for a little while. I came down with Jerry and..."

"Jerry?" he exclaimed breathlessly, "You mean Jeremy?" He attempted to get up, but fell back in exhaustion.

Angie, realizing she had, again, said too much, said tenderly, "Take it easy...Yes, Jeremy. And all the others...they're all right too. Just relax..." she soothed.

He obeyed, for fatigue overcame him, and he shut his eyes. "My God," he sighed, "I don't even know where I'm at..."

Angie eased herself down beside him. "That doesn't matter right now." she told him, "You'll find out soon enough."

Curtis painstakingly found her hand and squeezed it warmly. "You are an angel..." he exhaled, his voice trailing off as he drifted into a restful slumber.

Angie sighed, relieved, and blew out the candle. He had had such a close call with death, she shuddered, perhaps now he was finally on the road to recovery.

When Angie awoke the next morning, she had temporarily forgotten where she was. Groggily she wondered why she wasn't at home in her soft, warm bed. Her memory quickly returned to her, however, and it startled her to think how fast things had happened. Why, not long ago she was safe and sound among family and friends. Her mind cleared and she shrugged her shoulders. She had always been one for a little excitement and she never ^{had} ~~and~~ set much store in family--or friends either for that matter. Then she remembered. There was Pepi. Pepi had always been there when she needed her. Oh, if only Pepi were with her now, she thought sadly, if only...

Where, in fact, was her friend? What was she doing at that minute? Angie wished ^{desperately} ~~desperately~~ that she could know. She wished she could find out. She had to know if her friend was imprisoned as she was, or if she was...

Angie squeezed shut her eyes. The darkness swirled around her and she imagined the worst. She scolded herself harshly. If, if, if. She had no way of knowing and she had to stop torturing herself. ^{But Angie did make a resolution she had to, to find Pepi when & if they ever made it to the west.}

Curtis stirred beside her and Angie gazed at his stricken face. As soon as he was better they would all escape. Oh, he had to get better, she thought worriedly. And then she could find Pepi.

Angie ^{unconsciously} ~~unconsciously~~ rubbed the ring on her finger. Suddenly she stopped. Curtis' ring! She had to give it back to him. She looked at it closely and sighed regretfully. It was the only thing Jeremy ^{had} ~~could~~ ^{had} given her. It was the only thing she had. But it was rightfully Curtis' and she would ^{return} ~~give~~ it to him as soon as he woke up. Curtis would like that, she thought; it may even speed his recovery. ~~She~~

Curtis moved again, then opened his eyes. He noticed Angie was watching him and he moaned, "Could you 'elp me sit up?"

She smiled. He was obviously feeling better. "Sure." she said. Then, as gently as possible she helped him into a sitting position, propping his back against the wall.

"Could I 'ave a drink?" he whispered hoarsely.

She raised the pitcher to his lips and slowly he drank from it. She noticed his eyes were a bit glassy and when he had finished she cooled his face with the cloth.

Curtis sighed resignedly and weakly asked, "'Ow am I doing, Dr. Angel?" She managed a smile, then suddenly remembered the ring. "I have just the thing that may make you feel better." Though she didn't show it, she was regretful when she pulled the ^{ring} from her finger and held it up for him to see.

"My ring!" he cried excitedly, "Where did you find it?"

"Actually," she explained, "It was Jerry that found it...and he..he gave it to me ...to...to keep for you." She glanced away so he couldn't see the pain in her eyes.

Curtis gently took her ~~hand~~ hand in his. He had seen the look of despair. "Angie?"

Angie could not help but to look at him. He seemed to be in complete control.

"Did Jeremy really give it to you to keep for me," he asked her point-blankly, "Or did he think..that I was...dead and...wanted you to have something from him...?"

Angie answered brokenly. She never had been able to lie successfully.

"Yes..." she confessed, "Yes...he wanted me to have it...from him.."

Curtis sighed dejectedly. He felt no anger, just despair. So Angie and Jeremy were... "Well, I want you to keep it." he murmured shortly, dropping her hand.

"But...but it's yours." she told him helplessly.

"No..." he protested, "I..I want you to 'ave it.."

"But Curtis..." she started again.

"No..Really." he insisted firmly, "You keep it." Exhaustion overwhelmed him. He was weaker than he thought.

"Thank you, Curtis." she murmured, slipping it back on her finger, "You don't know how much..." *About a thousand bucks*

"That's quite all right..." he assured her quietly, "Now I really am more tired than I thought, so if you could just...help me lie back down."

Angie eased him down onto the cement floor. She was a bit disturbed by his actions. His gentle mood seemed to change so abruptly to a cold, businesslike one. She just couldn't understand it. He had insisted that she keep the ring. Angie was completely baffled.

She lay down beside Curtis. His eyelids were tightly sealed and he appeared to be sleeping. Angie quickly forgot the ^{unpleasant} incident and ^{suddenly} realized how much she actually liked the man beside her. He was so ^{much} different than Jeremy. So much stronger and so much more in control. He had always been the obscure one in the group and she hadn't ^{paid} ~~paid~~ that much attention to him. ^{Then} Suddenly, to her surprise, she found herself taking notice.

She shrugged it off as just normal curiosity and slipped into a dreamless sleep, having no idea what the future held for her and Curtis.

When he awoke later, Curtis slowly opened his eyes and weakly stretched. He glanced around, his eyes resting on the girl beside him.

"How are you feeling?" she inquired softly.

He moaned, "Better than I was, but I'm famished."

Angie brightened, "That's good. You have an appetite."

"So now I know when I starve to death." he mumbled glumly.

Angie struck one of the few matches the guard had given her and lit the candle. "I'm sure they'll bring us something."

Suddenly there was a movement outside of the cell, and startled, Angie turned toward the sound.

"Angie? Ist you in dere?" came a gruff German voice.

"Wolfram?" she called out, "Is that you? Yes I'm here."

"Shush!" he cautioned, "I sneaked down here. I brung you zum food."

"Can you bring it to us?" she implored hopefully, "I...I can't..."

"No!" he said hastily, nervously looking around, "Someone ist coming. I'll...I'll set it here at ze door..." Wolfram disappeared into the darkness.

Angie looked after him, then toward the iron bars and the loaf of bread lying just inside of them. Hopeless tears formed in the corners of her eyes. There was no way she could get it. She couldn't walk! She couldn't walk! Curtis needed food so bad, and she couldn't walk! She thought of crawling, but the door was so far from where they were it would take forever.

Curtis noticed Angie's silence and pondered her last remark. "Angie?" he murmured. When he received no answer he became worried. Something

was wrong. "Angie, what's the matter?"

Tears spilled from her eyes and she looked away, feeling foolish. "I...I can't walk..." she answered in a whisper, "A wooden beam fell on my legs and...I'm...paralyzed from the waist down." ^{Just now?} Her voice quivered and she fought to control the useless tears, but for once she felt too helpless to stop crying.

Curtis painfully pulled himself up and with much effort moved backward enough to rest his back against the cement wall. Angie had her head turned and though she had heard him moving, she was completely unaware of his change of position.

"Angie..." he whispered quietly.

She turned toward him and was startled to see him so close and at eye level. He gazed softly ^{into} ~~into~~ her eyes, gently brushing the wetness from her face. Tenderly taking her into his arms, he murmured, "Don't cry, my Angel..."

Angie rested in his arms for a few minutes silently thanking him for his understanding. As he held her, ^{she} ~~Angie~~ felt strangely touched. It puzzled her, so she pushed it from her mind and looked up at him. Producing a smile of gratitude she mumbled, "I...I'm all right now...but we still have to figure out a way to get to the food."

Reluctantly he released her. He didn't want her to think the wrong thing, not now that he knew about her and Jeremy.

Angie stared hard into the candle flame. "There must be a way."

Curtis, having a thought come to him, groped the side of the wall behind him and attempted to pull himself to his feet. Sweat burst out on his forehead and he gritted his teeth with the effort. Suddenly he groaned loudly.

"Curtis!" Angie cried, her head turning quickly around, "Curtis! Don't! Sit back down!"

Drawing all the strength he had in his body, Curtis pulled even harder, ignoring Angie's precautions. Finally, shakily, he stood on his feet.

"Curtis..." Angie started, afraid that he may fall.

"You...see?" he moaned weakly, "I'm not completely 'elpless..."

"Please Curtis..." she pleaded, "Sit back down..."

He looked at her, compassion in his eyes. "Really...I can do it. It's either this or starve." He rested against the wall for minutes, then began the long journey across the big room.

Angie watched him breathlessly as he slowly made his way to the door. He stumbled more than once and Angie cried out each time, but he always caught his balance and continued. When he finally reached the rusty bars, he groped them tightly, his breath coming in short, hot gasps. When his heart ceased pounding so hard against his chest and he breathed easier, Curtis painstakingly bent over and grasped for the loaf. He turned toward the circle of candlelight and the girl and began the clumsy trip back to them.

He sank to the ground beside Angie, panting and trembling and weak, but with the bread clutched in his hand. When he had rested a bit, Angie offered him the pitcher. He drank it gratefully and greedily, savoring every drop, and when he had had his fill, he leaned back against the wall and closed his eyes.

"Curtis..." Angie asked, tenderly wiping his perspiring forehead, "Are you all right?"

He sighed exhaustedly and turned his eyes toward her. "Yeah..I'm all right except..."

"Except what?" Angie asked, worried.

Curtis smiled, "Except I'm starved."

Angie sighed in relief and tore off a generous portion of the bread. "Eat up...You deserve every bite." she laughed.

Staring hard at the piece of food he now held in his hand he recited, "I came, I saw, I conquered."

They chuckled together at this as they ate.

Tomorrow Curtis would be much better, thought Angie happily, surely tomorrow they could join the others. Surely tomorrow he would be well enough, and she could return to Jeremy. Surely tomorrow...

"Guard!" Angie cried out to the German on his routine patrol the next day, "Guard!"

The guard went to the iron bars and peered in, holding his lantern high. "Vat does you vant?" he growled.

"We're ready to go upstairs now." she said ecstatically, "Curtis, this man here, is much better now and...a...we're allowed to...I mean we're supposed to..."

"Go upstairs!" he exclaimed unbelievably, "You doesn't go nowhere. I have my orders. Nobody moves anywere!"

"But..." she started. But the German was gone.

Angie's mouth fell open and icy fear touched her spine. Were they to stay in the darkness forever? Surely they would let them join the others! Surely she would see Jeremy again! She hadn't realized how much she really missed him until that moment!

"Curtis?" she cried beseechingly, "Curtis?"

Curtis sighed and replied, "Yeah, I 'eard 'im. I guess that blows our chances of escape..."

"But you're almost better!" she cried frantically, "You could make it now! You could all escape! We could all escape! Oh, Curtis!"

"Angie!" he demanded, shaking her, "Angie, stop it!"

But she only began sobbing hysterically, "Jerry! I'll never see Jerry again!" Tears were streaming down her face, "Oh my God! They'll all escape without us! We'll be locked in this black hole for the rest of our lives! We'll rot in here!"

"Angie! Stop it!" Curtis screamed at her. "Stop it! Angie!" Suddenly he slapped her across the face. *Future wife-beater!*

Her hysterics ceased and she looked at him *stunned* ~~gratefully~~. "Oh, Curtis..." she murmured, the tears spilling from her eyes. "Curtis..."

He gently pulled her close and she lay her head against his shoulder. Her sobs shook them and she trembled, frightened. Curtis stroked her soft hair and whispered words of encouragement into her ear. He told her not to worry, to have faith. He told her that he would be there anytime she needed him, and he told her that somehow he knew they would escape. He sounded so sincere about it, that she could do nothing but believe him. Finally comforted, she stopped crying. Somehow Curtis had convinced her that everything would be all right. Somehow he had made her believe it.

She raised her face to his, and in the soft candlelight she saw how strong ~~he~~ ^{was}, how determined. She ~~saw~~ ^{saw} him gazing back, and even when he drew her closer and kissed her, for one split second it seemed ^{all} right.

Curtis suddenly released her, horrified at what he had done. His heart burned for her, but he couldn't impose himself on her--not when he knew that Jeremy loved her.

"I'm...I'm sorry, Angie.." he turned his face from her ashamedly.

"I..I shouldn't 'ave done that...I'm sorry.."

Angie tenderly took his hand, "It's all right Curtis---Don't be sorry...Really, it's all right.."

He turned his face toward her, "You mean I'm forgiven?" he asked sincerely.

"There's nothing to forgive you for..." she insisted quietly, "and besides that, you have me convinced we are going to escape.."

He smiled sheepishly, "If that's what it takes to convince you of something, I wish there were more things to convince you of."

She laughed good-naturedly and he soon joined in. And with the remembrance of the kiss still lingering in her mind, she temporarily forgot their plight.

Sometime later, after Angie had put out the candle and she and Curtis were trying to get to sleep, there was a movement outside the cell. Angie thought she heard the shuffling of many feet and hushed whispers, but she put it off ~~as~~^{as} dreaming.

"Angie..." she suddenly heard through the bars, "Angie...It's me... Jeremy."

Angie's eyes opened wide as she strained to see. Her heart was pounding hard against her chest. "Jerry? Jerry, is it really you?" she whispered in return.

"Yes!" the voice answered.

Angie heard a key grate in the lock and then Jeremy's voice again.

"Wolfram's out 'ere. 'E's going to get you out."

Curtis awoke and clutched Angie's hand. "Angie? What's 'appening?"

"We're escaping!" she whispered excitedly, "You were right!"

The iron door squeaked open and Jeremy rushed toward her. He gathered her in his arms and eagerly pushed his lips on hers. "Angie..." he murmured, "I thought I'd never see you again.." He continued to hold her tightly, oblivious of Curtis. "I missed you so much."

Suddenly Wolfram hissed, "Come on, Jeremy, we have to get out of here!"

Then Jeremy remembered, "Curtis--is he..."

"No!" cried Angie, embarrassed she had forgotten him, "he's quite alive and he's well enough to go with us, but he needs a little help walking."

his heart still aching from the scene that had just taken place,
"No!" protested Curtis, "I can make it alone. Jeremy, are the others out there, too?" He was thinking of Norman, his best friend in the group.

much better
Jeremy, a bit stunned to see Curtis so ~~well~~, numbly answered, "Yes.. they're waiting just outside the cell..." Then he smiled, "I knew you could bring 'im around, Angie."

He then picked her up and carried her from the cell, Curtis stiffly stumbling after them.

Angie couldn't see the rest of the group, but she heard their muffled whispers as Wolfram led them *up the inky stairway.* ~~the light of the day.~~

He hadn't brought a lamp so that they could remain discreet, ^{but} she could hear Curtis fumbling in the darkness.

When they finally reached the top, Angie noticed there wasn't much more light there than there had been downstairs. She determined from this that it must be night. As Wolfram led them through the silent passageways, Angie saw the tenseness in each face. Curtis was walking easier now, she realized, for he was no longer stumbling and his pace had ^{quicken}~~quicken~~ed.

Finally they reached the door that led outside. Nervously the German scanned the area. There was no one in sight and he hastened the party outside. The cool, fresh air assaulted them brashly and each breathed it in hungrily. None of them could believe they were actually free.

The guard, having it all planned well, led them to his awaiting jeep, and they quickly climbed in.

Jeremy and Angie sat in the front seat with Wolfram driving, and the rest crowded into the back. The ride through the black night was rough and Jeremy held Angie close, believing she must be ^{frightened}~~frightened~~.

Angie, as it turned out, was not frightened at all, and found it all rather exciting. It annoyed her to think that Jeremy thought otherwise.

Wolfram pulled the jeep up in front of a small, white bungalow and stopped.

Puzzled, Jeremy asked, "Why did we stop 'ere?"

Robbie knew and answered him, ^{disputedly} "Randy's in there for one thing, and we are going to need food."

Jeremy, excited at the prospect of finally seeing his friend again, exclaimed, "Randy's 'ere? Is 'e inside?"

Wolfram affirmed that he was, and forgetting Angie, the singer leaped from the car and rushed inside, Robbie, Norman and ~~Wolfram~~ ^{the Germans} following close behind.

Curtis hadn't forgotten Angie, though, and struggling from the jeep, he opened the door beside her. Smiling he offered, "Need a lift?"

Angie, still steaming because Jeremy had left her, gratefully replied to Curtis that indeed she did.

When they entered the tiny house, they discovered it in an uproar. The entire group had congregated in the kitchen, and the noise was deafening. Curtis and Angie were the last ones to arrive there and though Curtis smiled at his friends antics, Angie ~~stood~~ ^{stared} disbelieving ^{ly} at the scene before her.

Una and Wolfram was dutifully preparing food and filling a knapsack with supplies, but the others were doing nothing but making loud, happy conversation and getting in the way.

It was during this that Angie first noticed Randy Clayton. He was talking in low tones to Jeremy, and the evil ~~and~~ ^{and} coldness that surrounded him sent shivers up her spine. She couldn't figure out what it was about him that bothered her, but it was startlingly frighteningly.

Jeremy, finally realizing Angie was there, walked ^{helplessly} toward her and Curtis. "Angie...I...I was so carried away that...I'm sorry..."

^{But had been so} Angie ~~was too~~ absorbed in the mystery of Randy that her anger had subsided and she was actually glad to see him.

Curtis, realizing he was no longer needed or wanted, set her gently in a nearby chair and joined the others, determining to keep an eye out for her.

Jeremy pulled a chair up for himself and sat down. "I can't believe that we're all back together." he told her, putting his arm around her shoulders and pulling her close.

"I know," she agreed, "It's hard to believe. She stared deeply into his ^{blue} eyes.

"All that time you were gone," he confessed tenderly, "I didn't know whether I would see you again..."

"I..I know," she whispered softly, her heart beating faster, "I felt the same way."

Jeremy stared lovingly at her, then drew her lips to his, kissing her adoringly.

"LEey Jerry!" a voice nearby drawled, "Join the party. You're missing all the fun."

Angie looked up, embarrassed, and a chill shot through her. Randy stood before them, a sardonic smile upon his face. Angie was even more shocked when Jeremy, instead of becoming angry at the intrusion, laughed heartily.

"All right, mate." he smiled, then turned to Angie. "This is my very good friend Randy Clayton, though I'm sure you don't need to be told. Randy, this is Angie Jackson."

Randy extended his hand and smiled, exposing ^{a mouthful} badly chipped teeth. Angie shuddered at this and at the fact that his hand was as icy as his gaze.

"LEllo, Angie." he said, a hint of sarcasm in his voice, "Very pleased to meet you."

Releasing her hand he turned ^{again} to Jeremy. "Well, join the party before it's over." At this he turned and sauntered back to the action.

To add to Angie's frustration and astonishment, Jeremy stood up and asked, "You don't mind, do you?" And before she could answer, he had joined Randy.

What kind of hold did Randy Clayton have over Jeremy, she wondered fearfully? It almost reminded her of black magic, and she shuddered at the thought.

She noticed that Curtis was in deep conversation with Norman and realized she had been left alone to watch.

Finally the supplies were gathered and the plans were being made. Through muffled conversations she learned that Wolfram wasn't going with them. They had to do it alone.

When they decided they should set out, they knew they would have to move quickly. Soon the Germans would know they had escaped, and would be out searching for them.

Jeremy forgot Angie once again, and Curtis again came to her rescue. "Forget you again did 'e? You'll 'ave to speak to 'im about that."

"I intend to." she growled under her breath.

They started for the door, but Curtis stopped when he realized not even Robbie had thanked Wolfram or his wife for their help. ^{and} He knew Randy wouldn't thank them.

Curtis, Angie in his arms, smiled at the German couple and said, "I just wanted to thank you for all you've done for us. I don't really know why you did," he explained, "but we all appreciate it."

Una smiled and nodded, tears in her eyes.

Wolfram murmured, "I hope you make it all right. You weren't the first, but I'm afraid you may be ^{the} ~~the~~ last."

Just as Curtis was about to ask what that meant, Norman called to them that they were leaving. He and Angie said their farewells to the couple and followed the rest of the group out.

As the party slowly struggled through the rubble, Angie had switched arms several times. Curtis now carried her for the second time, and as they continued on, she wondered at Wolfram's parting ^{statement} ~~statement~~. What had he meant when he ^{had} said there had been others? What?

Angie suddenly turned her head in the direction from which they had ~~just~~ come. They were far from the Germans' house now, but with sick feeling in the pit of her stomach, Angie realized what Wolfram had meant. To the east she saw a flaming glow rising above the dark horizon. That glow she knew was the tiny little bungalow they had ^{at which} ~~just~~ been ^{just} ~~at~~ a few hours ago.

Curtis stopped and turned, for he too saw ^{the fire} ~~it~~ and knew. ~~And then~~
And when Angie and Curtis' eyes met in the darkness, for one brief second both of them understood.

Poor Wolfram!
Poor Una!
Together with Hans at
last.

Chapter 15---

"I think we should split," Randy murmured under his breath, nervously looking towards the river, "I think the four of us should leave while we 'ave the chance."

"You mean just leave 'em 'ere?" Norman asked incredulously, his eyes too, focused on the spot between the trees through ^{which} ~~which~~ Curtis and Angie had disappeared. "Leave 'em 'ere to starve?"

"Look, it's either them or us," Randy argued, "They'll manage."

"Sure, they'll be all right," Robbie agreed. He hadn't been with the group long and it wouldn't bother him in the least to leave. Robbie was a follower, and besides, it sounded practical.

"No!" Jeremy protested vehemently, "No! We can't...we're NOT going to leave them!"

Randy's eyes narrowed as they focused on Jeremy. "And why are you so against it?" he questioned, his voice low and unwavering, "Or do we already know?"

Jeremy was unnerved by Randy's stare and glanced away. He wanted to retort, but the words stuck in his throat.

Randy continued evenly, his tone unchanged, "But then you 'aven't noticed 'ow much time your precious Angie 'as been spending with our charming bass player now, 'ave you?"

Jeremy knew all eyes were upon him, and he wanted to scream out how wrong Randy was, but the fact was, Angie had been spending a lot of time with Curtis and it would be useless to deny it.

His eyes drifted back to Randy, and for a moment he wondered at the strange persuasiveness the guitarist possessed.

"No-No Randy...I-I can't leave 'er...them." he stuttered.

"Then stay," Randy shrugged, "and make it a threesome. We're going--tonight."

Jeremy looked to the others, hoping one of them would object. His eyes fell on Robbie, but he knew by the strange glint in his eye, what his answer would be. Jeremy then turned to Norman.

The drummer refused to meet Jeremy's gaze. He knew it was wrong to leave Curtis and Angie, but somehow he couldn't bring himself to protest against Randy.

Jeremy sighed, and with a defiant glare at Randy, stomped off in the direction of the river.

Randy smiled, his chipped teeth flashing, and with a gleam of triumph in his eye, he watched Jeremy disappear between the trees.

As he drew closer to the river, Jeremy heard Angie's tinkling laughter. He couldn't leave her, he just couldn't, he decided, he loved her. But suddenly the hearty laugh of Curtis joined in and Jeremy stopped, hidden behind a clump of trees. They were in full view to him now and Jeremy stood quietly observing the scene before him.

Angie was sitting on a smooth rock situated beside the lazy, lolling river. She was clutching the rock tightly, for she still couldn't walk, and her slim ~~but~~ useless legs were dangling in the water.

Just then, Curtis appeared from somewhere and seated himself beside her. Jeremy watched as they both laughed hilariously at something Curtis

had ~~just~~ said, and a pang of jealousy shot through him as Curtis put his arm tenderly about her shoulders.

Silently, Jeremy made his way back along the path towards the others. Perhaps Randy was right. Angie and Curtis would be all right. They had each other, he thought grimly. She obviously didn't love him any more, or had she ever loved him at all, he wondered. Had HE really loved her? Jeremy pondered this awhile and finally, ^{respectfully} decided Randy was probably right. It was true that there wasn't enough food for them all, but to just leave them there? Surely to do that would be wrong, but... His mind puzzled over one idea then the other. Finally he sighed, remembering again the scene at the river. They would have each other, he told himself, and without Angie, there really wasn't any reason for him to stay and starve, was there?

"Jerry!" Randy hissed, "Wake up!"

Jeremy opened his eyes and stared at the face above him.

"We're leaving. Are you coming with us or not?"

The night was dark and the air crisp and Jeremy half sat up and rubbed his eyes. His mind whirled. This all seemed so heartless, he thought, looking over at the still sleeping figures of Curtis and Angie.

"Well?" the guitarist persisted, "This is your last chance."

Jeremy saw Robbie waiting impatiently nearby, and Norman, eyes guiltily glued to the ground. He suddenly felt very sorry for the drummer. It was obvious he didn't want to go. Curtis was his best friend, yet still Norman was leaving. Were they really that bad off or was it just another case of Randy's hypnotic spell? Jeremy dismissed the latter thought as ^{sheer} foolishness.

"Well, we're leaving." Randy stood up and began walking away.

"Randy!" Jeremy whispered, jumping up. He looked down at the sleeping form of Angie, hoping he hadn't awakened her. He hadn't.

Randy turned toward him inquisitively.

"I'll...I'll go..." he decided, "Please, just wait a second..."

Randy sighed and leaned against a nearby tree. He supposed his friend deserved a last ~~last~~ *goodbye*.

Jeremy silently knelt beside Angie. She was so beautiful when she was asleep, he thought. His eyes filled and gently he kissed her slightly parted lips. With a tear rolling down his cheek he whispered, "Goodbye, Angie..."

He stood up, wiping the wetness from his face, and joined the others. Like a pack of wolves they crept into the blackness of the woods, Randy leading the way.

When Curtis awoke the next morning, the sun was just rising. He blinked the sleep from his eyes and stretched. Yawning, he sat up and glanced around. Surprised to see that only Angie and himself were present, he stood up. Perhaps they were ^{all} at the river, he thought, puzzled. Careful not to awaken Angie, he silently crept down the path to the water, but the banks were deserted.

Suddenly, a thought crossed his mind and fear crept up his spine. He raced back up the embankment toward Angie. When he reached the campsite, his eyes scanned the ground. The knapsack was gone! That meant that all the food was gone, too! Piecing two and two together, Curtis realized that his suspicions had been correct. He and Angie had been deserted!

How could they have done this, he thought furiously, and why? How could Norman have left? Curtis knew he was his best friend. And besides, it wasn't like him. What could have convinced him to actually leave? Surely the food supply couldn't have been that low! And Jeremy, he thought, Jeremy loved Angie! How could he possibly have left her? Who or what could have prompted such a heartless and insane act? Then he knew. Only Randy could have done this. Randy with his threatening, persuasive powers. Randy with his ability to put people under his spell. Randy.

From the very beginning of the group, they had all been under Randy Clayton's spell. All of them, that is, except ^{Curtis}~~Curtis~~. He immediately had seen through Randy and his god-given power of persuasion. And Randy knew he knew, and recognized this knowledge as a threat. And so the conflict began, and would have developed into open combat---if Curtis would have let it. But Curtis didn't let it. He ~~also~~ realized that any open rivalry would tear the group apart, and he couldn't let that happen. So Curtis faded into the background, letting it remain a cold war, and letting Randy have his way.

Well, Randy had finally won, Curtis thought grimly, and would probably go unpunished for it, as he always did, unless... Curtis began in the direction he believed they had gone. Perhaps, if they hadn't left too long ago, he could catch up with them! Persuade them to wait till he and Angie could catch up! At this thought he began running through the thick woods. If only he could catch up!

"Curtis?" Angie called upon awakening and finding herself alone.

"Curtis?" Fear overwhelmed her and she struggled to sit up. Looking around she screamed, "Curtis? Jerry? Where are you?!"

Silence answered her pleas. Where were they, she panicked, surely they hadn't left her? Suddenly she noticed the knapsack was gone. Terrified, she screamed again, "You couldn't have just left me! I can't even walk! I can't walk! I..." Her screams turned to sobs and the tears streamed down her cheeks. She fell back onto the ground and wept loudly for what seemed an eternity.

"My God!" she cried raising her head, "I'm helpless and...and I'll starve here! Why..how could they just ...just leave?"

In a moment of hysterics she screamed, "Help me! Won't somebody please help me? Help!" But her voice again broke into sobs.

"Jerry...Jerry...I thought you loved me," she wept harder, "and Curtis.. oh, Curtis...Why?...Why?"

"Angie." Curtis assured, just returning from his foolish venture to find the others and hearing her sobs, "Angie...I'm 'ere."

"Oh, Curtis!" she cried, stretching her arms out to him, "Curtis, you came back to me!"

Curtis ran to her from the edge of the woods and fell to his knees beside her. "Angie..." he soothed, taking her trembling body into his arms.

"Curtis..." she sobbed, still terrified, "I thought you left me...I thought you weren't coming back..."

"Shhh," he murmured, smoothing her hair, "I'm 'ere now...I..I didn't really leave...I should 'ave told you...I'm sorry...Quiet now..." His lips brushed over the top of her head, "Quiet..."

Curtis tightly held her shaking body to his, and rested her head on his shoulder.

Finally, her sobs subsided, "Curtis..." she mumbled after several minutes, "Where are the others?"

Curtis sighed, grateful for the chance to hold her in his arms and said, "They've left, Angie...They've taken the food and deserted us..."

She pulled away from him, horrified, and stared incredulously into his face, "They've...they've left? But..but why?"

Curtis looked away and said grimly, "The food supply was low, I guess, and they knew they couldn't leave you 'ere alone, so...they obviously left me to stay with you."

Suddenly Angie realized something, "Even..even Jerry left?"

Curtis stared deeply into her green eyes. "Yes, Jeremy went with them."

"But...but how could he?" she cried, "How could he just go off and leave me...us...here?"

Curtis gently pushed her head back onto his shoulder and lied, "I don't know why, Angie." He knew perfectly well it was Randy who had persuaded them to leave, but there was no reason to tell Angie. It would only upset her more and it didn't really matter now anyway.

Safe in the warmth of his arms, Angie had calmed down ^{considerably} and was working on the puzzle herself. She remembered how Randy seemed to have some kind of hold over Jeremy and, her mind being quick, it didn't take her long to figure out what Curtis hadn't told her.

"It was Randy, wasn't it?" she whispered to him.

Curtis sighed tiredly. It would do no good to lie to her. ^{now} "Yes," he admitted, "It was Randy. It was Randy who persuaded them all to leave us 'ere. It was Randy who did a lot of things. But it doesn't matter now, does it?"

Angie lifted her head and stared deeply into his brown eyes steadily. "No, I don't suppose it does," she agreed softly, "The only thing that matters now is getting west."

Curtis' eyes were fixed on hers. "It's going to be a long walk," he mumbled, "but it will be more bearable with you there."

Her face drew nearer to his and her breath came harder. His eyes seemed to hypnotize her. Why was her stomach full of butterflies, she wondered, and her head so light?

"Oh, Curtis..." she muttered, confused.

Curtis, unable to resist her tempting lips any longer, suddenly pulled her close for a long kiss.

Angie's heart was pounding hard and her mind was spinning and when finally they parted, she was more confused than ever. Why did she have the urge to remain in his protective arms forever? Surely it wasn't possible that she was in love with him.

"I..I don't understand it...Curtis?" she implored, "Why do I feel this way?"

"Don't try to understand it.." he moaned softly, pulling her tighter against him.

Angie didn't resist, but instead closed her eyes and pressed herself closer. Suddenly it didn't matter that the others had left them.

She and Curtis could make it west alone. Oh, she thought helplessly, she really did love him.

Curtis sighed contentedly and murmured, "Don't worry; I'll take care of you. You're my angel now."

That night, with Angie in his arms, they set out westward. They had decided that traveling at night would be cooler and they would have less of a chance of being seen.

"I think we should try to find a town." Curtis remarked after they had been walking for a while.

"A town?" Angie exclaimed, "but the Germans!"

Curtis stopped and gently set her on the ground. Breathing deeply he stretched. They had been walking for a long time and he needed to rest.

"It couldn't be that dangerous," he answered, seating himself beside her, "especially at night."

"But they'll surely have guards!"

"Come to think of it, I don't see 'ow it could be dangerous at all." he reasoned.

"What do you mean?" she questioned, truly puzzled.

"The Germans couldn't 'ave possibly taken over every little town along the way. There's not that many Germans..."

"But all the places we've been..." she countered.

"Were near very big cities." he finished for her. "I'll bet more than 'alf the small towns from 'ere to California don't 'ave a single German in them!"

"You might be right." Angie agreed reluctantly.

"Of course I'm right," he insisted, "And if that's the case, we shouldn't 'ave too tough a time getting west."

Angie smiled, eager now to be on their way to civilization, "Then what are we waiting for?"

Thoroughly rested now, Curtis stood up. Picking Angie up, he tenderly placed his lips on hers. "We will make it to civilization again." he grinned as if reading her thoughts, "It won't be long now, my Angel, Just you wait."

Angie smiled softly up at him and he again kissed her. "California 'ere we come!" Curtis sang cheerfully.

The moonlight was filtering softly through the branches of the trees, when Curtis and Angie again set out. And though their pace was painstakingly slow, together they pushed relentlessly toward the west--- California and civilization.

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Chapter 16---

"Angie," Curtis asked gently, "I want you to live 'ere...with me." He tenderly pulled her closer to him. They were sitting on the couch in the huge living room of his Los Angeles home.

Angie, still ~~awestruck~~^{awe-struck} that Curtis had a house and ^{that} they were actually in it at that very moment, and not still running from the enemy's clutches, stared at him wide-eyed, ~~and~~ not uttering a word.

"Angie," he continued softly, "I know you don't 'ave anywhere else to go and..." he hesitated, "I want you near me--always."

Angie was still unable to answer him and she dropped her eyes to the floor. She knew she loved him; she had no doubts about that, but it had all happened so fast. Just yesterday they were still painfully making their way west and it confused her to think that they were safe. And in Curtis' house--a house she didn't even know he had. Suddenly she realized the shock of the war must have affected her more than she had first believed. She was still terrified and she was still running, and the fear revealed itself on her face.

"Angie?" Curtis whispered, tenderly taking her hands in his, "Angie, what's the matter?"

"Curtis," she murmured intensely, fiercely attempting to shake the confusion that racked her brain, "Curtis...I..I don't know...I just don't know...I'm so scared." Tears fell from her eyes and he gently pulled her into his arms.

"Quiet, Angel, quiet..You're safe now," he assured her softly, "You're in my 'ouse now. There are no Germans, no wars 'ere. Just me. And I love you, Angel, and I'll take care of you..if you let me."

Angie raised her gaze to his, questioning, and he continued, his eyes penetrating her. "I love you, Angie, and you are safe with me. Anything or anyone you're afraid of will 'ave to get past me first. And they'll never do that while I'm still alive.."

"Oh, Curtis," Angie cried, burying her face in his shirt, "I'm so afraid and I don't know why! I don't know why!"

"Quiet..." he told her gently, softly smoothing her hair, "Quiet now." He comforted her as best he could and when she had calmed down a bit, he carried her to ^{her} ~~an~~ upstairs bedroom. Laying her down on the cushiony mattress, he gently kissed her.

"Go to sleep now, Angie, it's been a long day." He sighed tiredly, realizing how true his words were. "And don't be afraid. I'll be right 'ere if you need me."

Angie looked up at him and smiled. "Thank you, Curtis, I...I love you, you know." And as she closed her eyes and slipped off into a much needed sleep, she knew that she would stay there with Curtis. Where else did she have to go? And why shouldn't she stay? Angie knew she could believe in Curtis to always, always be there when she needed him--and at that moment, she did so desperately need him.

As Curtis left the room and descended the stairs, his mind wandered over the past few months and their struggle to reach civilization and safety. They had been through hell, but to believe that even now they were safe would be complete foolishness. Anything could ~~happen~~ happen and they all ^{still} had a long way to go before they could ever ^{completely} relax again.

"Angie," Curtis suggested the next morning, "I think you should go see a doctor..."

"No!" she cried violently, "No, I...I don't need a doctor..."

"Angie, you 'ave to!" Curtis insisted, "You 'ave to find out why you can't walk and ^{now} ~~how~~ you can learn 'ow to again!"

"I won't see a doctor!" she declared nearly hysterical, "He'll tell me to take an aspirin, get plenty of rest, eat prunes and hope for a miracle!" she screamed at him, pulling herself up in the bed. "I don't need a doctor to tell me that and I won't, do you hear me, I won't see one!" At this she began beating the bed with her fists. "I won't!" she raved, tears finally spilling from her eyes. "No..." she cried, burying her face in her hands, "No..."

"Angie..." Curtis soothed, taking her in his arms, "Angie, Angie... don't cry." He gently patted her shoulder, "Don't cry."

Angie turned her face up towards his, tears still running down her cheeks and whispered, "Curtis...I..I never used to cry all the time..You ^{remember} ~~remember~~, don't you? I used to be a strong person. I..I just don't know what happened..." She laid her head against his shoulder and sighed wearily.

Curtis stroked her hair and murmured, "A lot 'as 'appened to us lately. Enough to make anybody cry. And you 'aven't changed. You're still a strong person. Nothing could ever change that."

She looked up at him once again and their eyes met in a steady gaze. He had always had the ability to help her to look to the future, she thought gratefully. What would she do without him? How could she face the world?

"Angie," he confessed, "Can't you see how much I love you? All I want to do is 'elp you in anyway I can. Can't you see that's all I'm trying to do?"

Angie nodded and smiled through her tears. "Yes. I understand, Curtis. And I will walk again. And when I do, every step ^{I take} will be for you." Angie then thought she saw Curtis' eyes water, but before she could examine the situation more closely, he had drawn her tightly into a lasting kiss.

Curtis ^{delayed} ~~waited~~ a week, waiting for Angie to regain some of her strength before again bringing up the subject of getting a doctor. She again, however, protested loudly, stating ^{that} if she ~~was~~ ^{was} ever to walk again, she would do it herself. Finally, though, after much prodding from Curtis, Angie made a deal with him. If there was no improvement in her condition after one month, she would go to a doctor. But that, she had stated firmly, wouldn't be necessary, for by then she would be as good as new. Curtis took heart in her optimism, but he had a feeling it was going to be a lot harder than she made it sound.

One night, Curtis came home from a short shopping expedition, in which he had been buying Angie some much needed clothes, and found her in the darkened living room making a feeble attempt to stand up. Just as he had walked through the door with his packages, however, she had collapsed ^{onto} ~~to~~ the floor in a heap. Curtis dropped his purchases and ran to her, fearful that she may have been hurt in the fall. Physically she was fine, but emotionally she was devastated and for the remainder of the night Angie cried hopelessly onto Curtis' shoulder.

This made Curtis aware, too, of her frazzled state of mind, and he realized that if she didn't walk again she would lose her mind. My God, Curtis thought, the girl was only seventeen; it wasn't fair that she should be crippled ^{for the rest of her life!} ~~all her life!~~ She had to walk again, he thought determinedly, and he would do everything in his power to see that she did!

Curtis sat at the edge of the pool, his legs dangling in the cool water. He closely watched Angie as she floated on a sturdy raft near the center of the pool. It was mid-October and the weather in ^{California} ~~the~~ was still warm enough for swimming. Curtis saw this as an opportunity to give Angie some form of exercise for when he found out she loved to swim, he had immediatly had the pool filled. They had been out in it at least once a day since, and each time Curtis had urged her to attempt to "kick", hoping, of course, this could develope strength in her legs. But though she tried hard enough, she could not even manage a small kick and always ended up relaxing in the sun.

Curtis continued watching her and realized that in three days, the month would be up and Angie would have to see a doctor. If only she had been able to kick one time, he would have given her more time. But there had been no progress at all in her legs, not a bit, and Curtis only hoped now that she wouldn't put up any resistance to fulfilling her part of the deal. He sighed and a sudden urgency overtook him.

"Kick!" Curtis called to her, "Try to kick!"

Angie raised her head disgustedly from the raft and shot him a piercing look. "I am not going to kick. I am going to relax." And with that she lay her head back onto the raft.

The raft drifted closer to Curtis, and laughingly he cried, "Come on! I want you to KICK!"

"No!" she protested, "I am not going to kick!"

"Just TRY!" he persisted, "Just TRY to kick!"

Angie grumbled to herself. Doesn't he know how hard she had tried to kick? Doesn't he know what an effort she has put into it? Why did he still urge her on? Why did he keep insisting that she try to kick?

"Kick! Kick!" he called out again.

Angie's temper suddenly rose to high above the boiling point and as the raft drifted closer to the edge of the pool and him, she cried, "All right! All right, damn it, I'll KICK!"

Suddenly there was a huge splash and Curtis, still dry and laughing and sitting at the edge of the pool, ^{had been} ~~was~~ dowsed. There, she thought defiantly, she ^{had} kicked.

The strength in Angie's legs increased at a surprisingly rapid rate and both she and Curtis felt a great load lifted from their shoulders. But as she was learning to walk, another burden weighed heavily on her mind. Where was Pepi? She ~~had~~ wondered constantly, and she began losing sleep over it. It was in her mind night and day, and there didn't seem to be anything she could do about it.

Curtis noticed her lack of enthusiasm right away and was at a loss for what to do. He knew something was dreadfully wrong but he didn't know what. He knew it couldn't be her legs, because she was progressing steadily and could even walk a few steps on her own now. No, he decided, it was something else. What then? Something he obviously didn't know about and something only she could tell him.



KIPTON

One afternoon, Curtis entered the living room and found Angie crying miserably, her face buried in a soft pillow. Greatly alarmed, he hastened to her and gathered her into his arms.

"Angie," he soothed, "What's the matter. Please tell me what's been bothering you so I can 'elp."

She caught her breath and managed to hold in the sobs that tore at her throat. Her heart pounded hard as she gazed into his ^{familiar} ~~strange~~ brown eyes. She loved him and suddenly she felt a great need to blurt out all that troubled her. He loved her, she knew, and he could help by just listening. And as he held her in his arms, Angie began.

"My...my best friend was with me when...when the bomb hit...and she.. Pepi and I...we..we got separated and..." her eyes wildly searched his face, "Oh, Curtis...I just don't know what to believe. I can't believe she's... I just can't! And the uncertainty...It's..it's eating me alive...Curtis, don't you understand? She was my best friend!"

Curtis held her close. What was he to do? In all likelihood her friend hadn't survived the bombing, but there was always that chance. Who would have believed that they ^{had} ~~would have~~ lived through it? Would it be futile to even hope that her friend Pepi was still alive? No, he couldn't believe that. Too many miracles have happened for him not to believe.

"I think," he whispered, "that if you believe ^{hard enough} that Pepi is alive and well, that one of these days she'll come knocking at the door. You have to keep the faith for there is always room for hope."

"Are you telling me you think she is still alive?" Angie asked softly.

"I'm telling you," he explained, "That until there is proof that she's not, you should keep hoping and believing that one day you'll find her."

Angie smiled and hugged him tighter, then looked up at him lovingly. "You made me believe that I would walk again, and I am. Now you tell me that I will see Pepi again, so how can I help but to believe you?"

She finished the last words breathlessly and Curtis sighed. He hoped she was right.

Angie's improvement proceeded even faster than before, now that she no longer worried constantly about Pepi. Finally the day came when Curtis felt she had recovered sufficiently, and he proudly announced to her that she had done it in a month and a half.

"It feels so much better to get places on my own and not have to be carried everywhere," she remarked relieved.

Curtis appeared to be considering something and after a few moments smiled, "I think this calls for a celebration."

"And what do you propose, dear sir?" she asked primly.

A strange longing appeared in Curtis' eye, but Angie hadn't seen it, and he answered, "Why don't we go out?" I know a great restaurant just outside of the city. It won't take too long to get there and they 'ave great food."

Angie smiled, "Sounds good. No offense, but I've been dying to get out of this house."

"Then it's a date." Curtis stated.

Angie suddenly laughed as an old cliché immediatly came to mind. "But I haven't got a thing to wear!" she exclaimed mockingly.

"Well," he cried, following her example, "why didn't you say so sooner!" He gently took her hands in his and staring into her eyes, told her, "Tonight, my dear, you will go dressed better than the queen 'erself."

And Angie's heart fluttered a bit.

The restaurant was an elegant building located on a shady country road leading from the city. The night was dark, but the restaurant was splashed with light. A sign standing directly in front of the building read "The Shamrock Inn," and a motel entitled the same was about a hundred feet ~~an~~ down the road.

Curtis parked the car close to the door and he and Angie got out. She was dressed in a full length shimmering light blue gown, and, Curtis thought admirably, she did indeed look more beautiful than the queen. He took her arm and when they had reached the door, he opened it for her.

When they had stepped inside, Angie could hardly believe the glamour and her eyes drank in everything that surrounded them. She felt Curtis' arm go around her and they entered the main part of the restaurant. In moments, a woman, in perhaps her mid-twenties, appeared from nowhere, smiled charmingly at them and led them to a private booth in a far corner of the restaurant.

The hostess disappeared and Curtis gently took Angie's hand and sat her down. The girl was still quite awe-struck and she stared up at him with wide eyes. Curtis smiled and sat down on the cushiony seat next to her.

"I really do feel like the queen!" Angie said suddenly and incredulously. She had been unable to utter a word until then, and even now it was just a whisper.

"Well, see," Curtis murmured back, "I always keep my promises."

A waitress appeared and asked if they would like a drink before they ordered. Curtis replied that yes, indeed they did and could she bring

them the best wine in the house. Angie gasped at his request and the waitress smiled at her, then disappeared. She was back in a few minutes with the bottle encased in ice and two wineglasses. Setting a glass before each of them, she poured a swallow into Curtis' glass. He drank it, testing it, and nodded. The girl then filled both glasses halfway, replaced the bottle in the ice, and leaving it there, disappeared once again.

Curtis lifted his glass and toasted, "To your first night out."

Angie smiled and whispered, "To my first night out."

The glasses clinked and they sipped their wine in silence.

After several minutes, Curtis spoke, his voice in a whisper. "Angie, now that you can walk," he hesitated, "Well, I just want to know what you're going to do..."

Angie looked puzzled and asked, "What do you mean, what am I going to do?"

Curtis leaned forward in his seat and professed, "Angie, I..I don't want you to....leave me. Not now, not ever, and now that you can walk... well I thought..."

Angie placed an assuring hand on his arm. "I'm not going to leave you," she told him softly, her voice like black velvet, "I love you."

The waitress returned just then, and Curtis, awakening from the spell, ordered their food. The girl smiled again, took the menus and left. Angie smiled, too and took another sip of her wine.

When they finally finished their meal, it was late, and as they were leaving, Curtis suggested, "Ah, why don't we, I mean instead of driving all the way 'ome tonight, rent a room at the motel over there?"

Angie thought a moment then agreed, "You're right. That would be a good idea. I don't really feel like going all that way, either."

Curtis smiled broadly, "Well, then."

Angie waited in the car while Curtis checked in. Suddenly a thought occurred to her. How could she have been so ignorant, she wondered horrified. He HAD said A room, hadn't he? A room meaning ONE room. My God, she thought, this had been planned all along! Her stomach fluttered strangely. What was she going to do? Perhaps she was wrong, she told herself again and again, after all it was just a suspicion. It could all be very innocent.

Curtis returned and Angie emerged from the car and followed him down the skinny sidewalk to a room marked "6".

Angie swallowed hard and asked meekly, "Is this my room?" All the time she had been living with him, they had had separate bedrooms.

Curtis thrust the key into the lock and gave her an odd look. "This is our room," he whispered tenderly. He turned the key slowly and they entered the dark room. Angie knew now that she had suspected correctly.

With heart pounding, Angie groped for the light switch, found it and sighed in relief when the light flooded the room. She turned toward Curtis, expecting to see some sort of mad hunger in his eyes. But there was none there. Her mind spun, for she realized that, not lust, but the same love she had always seen, ^{was still} in those familiar brown eyes.

"Curtis," she murmured, confused, "Curtis, I..."

But Curtis had taken her into his arms, pressing his lips hard upon hers and preventing all words.

*Then why rent
a motel room?*

Angie felt herself being pulled helplessly along, not understanding yet no longer resisting. She felt herself ~~Kissing~~ Curtis back, and she knew she could no longer heed her inhibitions. She was being drawn into a wild whirlpool of passion, but she did not attempt to stop herself. Her terror was no more and she realized suddenly how desperately she wanted him.

Curtis, deliriously lost in his love for her, sensed her desperation. With his breath coming in hot gasps against her neck, Curtis frantically grasped for the light ~~switch~~^{switch} and flipped it off. Now in complete darkness, he pulled from her feet and into his strong arms and carried her urgently to the awaiting bed.

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Chapter 17---

"And that's about it," Angie finished, a smile on her face, "Except I forgot to say that the rest of the band did finally apologize to us and that we're all friends again."

Pepi sighed and remarked, "And we all live happily ever after. The end." A tear came to her eye. "It's just too much of a miracle. I can hardly believe it."

"Well, I believe it's getting late." Troy remarked from the doorway. He and Curtis had just finished up in the studio downstairs. "I really think we should be getting along 'ome."

Curtis grinned at Angie, glad that now both their lives were complete, and said, "I never believed in miracles until now."

Troy strode to Pepi and placed his arm affectionately about her shoulders. "And besides that, things went beautifully downstairs, tonight. We may actually be able to get something together."

"It's going to be great, Troy," Curtis told him, "just great."

Pepi gave Troy a quick hug saying, "You're going to be great again!"

"Well," he said, looking at her comically, "What 'ave I been telling you?"

They all laughed and Troy pulled Pepi to her feet. "It's

"It is late," she agreed, yawning, "Maybe we should be going."

Angie walked to her friend and murmured, "You'll come back tomorrow, won't you? I still have to hear your story."

Pepi smiled and assured, "Sure, I'll be back. Nothing could keep me away."

Troy chuckled and remarked, "You're acting like you'll never see each other again."

Startled by his words, Pepi and Angie looked at him, fright evident in their eyes, and it made Troy wish he had never said it.

The two girls exchanged ^{parting} glances and handshakes and hugs went all around. Finally goodbyes were said, and by way of taxi, Pepi and Troy left for home.

That night as Pepi lay close to Troy upon the pull-out couch, her mind for once felt at ease. Could it be possible that now, finally, things would be all right? She believed they would.

Troy rolled onto his side to face her and pulled her close. "Things will be different now, Pepi, I know it," he murmured. He kissed her full on the mouth and gently caressed her hair. They had only one blanket over them and the apartment still hadn't been heated, but ~~it~~ seemed so much warmer that night.

Pepi held him tightly against her and rested her head on his shoulder. "I know it, too," she whispered into his hair.

"Pepi," Troy murmured, "I 'ave something important I 'ave to ask you."

"Yes.." she breathed, safe in his arms.

"I love you," he hissed into her ear, "And I want to marry you."

Pepi drew in a sharp breath and stared up at him. Had she heard correctly? She had always believed that rock stars liked to remain free and it was this that she had always secretly feared. She had always been terrified that ~~she~~^{he} would leave her, but now...

"Yes," she mumbled back, "Yes, yes, yes..."

Troy smiled and pulled her even tighter into his arms, pushing his mouth hard upon hers. They would be together forever, he thought, forever, forever, forever.

"What do you think," Angie remarked, "about everything happening at once?"

"What?" Curtis asked, dumbly, staring into her eyes. They were laying on the bed in his room, the light on the nightstand illuminating the room.

"Everything happened at once," she explained, "My walking again, the Children of Novelty getting back together, finding Pepi..."

"And," he added.

"And what?"

"And I love you..." he smiled, kissing her tenderly.

"And I love you," she told him, "but what does that have to do with what we were talking about?"

Curtis took her in his arms, "You were talking about it, not me."

"But it's impolite to change the subject," she scolded softly, holding back a smile.

"So who's polite?" he asked, again pressing his lips to hers.

"Don't you like that subject?"

Angie's arms went around him and she cuddled closer, resting her head on his chest, ~~and she~~ Almost inaudibly she whispered, "Need you even ask?"

Curtis smiled, reached for the light and clicked it off.

The night was misty and the pilot had trouble seeing. The airplane flew smoothly, though, despite the weather, and the German lit a cigarette. He kept wondering why They had chosen such a foggy night for this venture. He puffed nervously on the cigarette then realized he was nearing the city. And they didn't even suspect, he thought incredulously, this great United States, or what was left of it, didn't even know that he, and others, were coming. Didn't even know how near their complete destruction was. He smiled. They wouldn't even know what hit them, this city. There would be few of them left when he, and the others, were finished. Only a few survivors, perhaps none at all, left in the once largest city in America.

He was almost upon them now, and he put out his cigarette. In just a few minutes it would be over. He was over the city now and he strained to see through the fog. Now was the time! Now! And he pulled the lever on the control panel that released the deadly bomb.

Four people in particular heard the planes and the odd whistling. And they recognized it, for they had each heard it before. And suddenly all knew that nothing could ever be perfect and that nobody would live happily

ever after. They knew their miracles had run out and they cried on each other's shoulders for their lost future. They prayed and they savored their last few seconds of life. They had fought for life and love and had survived. *Now they were lost in a broken dream.* *and they realized they were hopelessly* lost in a broken dream. *lost in a broken dream.*

* * * * *

The night wind lashed viciously through the destroyed city and except for its whistling, there was complete silence. There was no familiar rumble of traffic, for there were no cars, and there were no voices for there were no people. They were all gone and all was still. The year was 1989 and it appeared to be the end of the world. And even for the few that survived, it was.