

INNOCENT LOVE

Sophia stood waiting in the church lobby, becoming restless as the minutes ticked away. Her dark-blond hair sloped gently over her round forehead and down the small egg-shaped ears, which were red from excitement and passion. Her red cheeks put on a full crimson color, and her nose puckered up like a blossoming rose. Her small shapely legs swayed spasmodically with anticipation on the two-inch black high heels that were cemented to the tile on the ground. She wore a gorgeous black, furry coat that clung desperately to her thighs, and her blue, cotton dress peeked from underneath the coat, just a couple of inches above her round, fist-shaped knees. Her left hand fiddled with her large black purse, while her right hand grasped with sweat around some secret object that she hid in her coat pocket. Her thin, pink lips lay inert, and her green eyes slyly glanced out of the corners to see if there was any sign of him.

Sophia had not seen him for a whole week. It all happened at a wedding last Saturday, when he didn't sit by Sophia during the reception. He sat by an old girl friend instead, and jealousy perked up in Sophia's heart. It was five months already since their hearts were tied together with love and mutual respect, and Sophia didn't want their relationship to end so abruptly.

Suddenly Sophia looked up the stairs that led to the sanctuary to see Paul coming down the stairs with a fast gait. He hardly saw Sophia as he was ready to turn the corner toward the men's room.

"Oh, hi," said Paul in an assumed manner of speech.

"Waiting for someone?"

"Here," said Sophia, as she slipped a piece of paper into Paul's hand.

"Oh, I see," said Paul. He started to move away, and then he suddenly stopped and turned toward Sophia, who was still watching him. "Wait for me right here. I'll be back in one minute."

Paul walked into the men's room and opened the little note as he stood over the urinal. He read:

"Dear Sweetheart,

"I want to let you know that I had to write this note to you. Maybe it won't mean a thing to you, but I had to do it.

"Honey, I want to say sorry for that night. I just don't know what made me say those ugly words to you. I really acted mean and rude toward you. I know I hurted you badly, but I ask you to forgive me for it. I will try to make up for it as much as I can.

"Honey, to tell you the truth, I really realized what you really mean to me. I was trying to see you Sunday morning and

talk to you, but you left and I couldn't find you. Paul, please let me know if you will forgive me for it or not. I will be very happy to hear from you. I still love you the same way."

Love you,
Sophia

Paul folded up the note with one hand and placed it into his suit pocket. "What a girl," he said to himself as he walked to the water basin and rinsed his hands. After he quickly dried his hands, he took out his comb and went through his long blond hair and straightened his tie before he finally opened the door and made his move. He walked up to Sophia, who was still standing in the same spot, and smiled at her. His big blue eyes looked anxiously at her. He was just a little taller than her small body, and he almost stood eye to eye to her as he stood looking at her.

"Well?" said Sophia nervously.

"Ready to go?" stated Paul.

"Where?" she asked.

"Anywhere."

"If you want to."

"I want to."

"O.K."

Paul took her soft hand and led her to his car. She followed him docilely without saying a word. Her mind soared with emotion, which could not be controlled. She once again felt the warm touch of her lover, and there was no other thought that predominated her mind. Her heart skipped a beat as he opened the door and said, "Be my guest."

Once in the car, Sophia sidled close to Paul as he switched on the starter and pushed into first gear. He was out of sight of the church building before he finally spoke.

"What happened to you last Saturday?"

"I got mad as hell because of that one old lady."

"What did she do?"

"Well, I was just standing outside talking with my friends when she came up to me and pulled my hair. She told me that my skirt was much too short. She really pissed me off. I almost slapped her in the face."

"And so when I wanted to talk to you, you took it out on me."

"I couldn't help it. I was in a terrible mood."

"Well, we can forget about it now. We're together. It's all over, and we're both happy. Right?"

"Oh yeah?" said Sophia with a smile as she moved closer to Paul.

"Where would you like to go?" asked Paul after a short silence.

"Anywhere you desire."

"Well, it's too late for the movies. You care to go to

a restaurant or a drive-in?"

"Not really. I'm still on a diet."

"Golly. When are you ever going to start eating?"

"I do eat, but very little. I'm trying to improve my figure."

"You sure are making a success of it."

"You think so?"

"I know so."

Paul continued to drive in the direction of the ocean. He took Sophia there very often, mostly because she enjoyed just sitting, talking, and making love with Paul. He didn't have to tell her where he was going to stop. She already knew, and she had no objections. Paul swerved off the main highway onto a narrow, sinuous road which led to a smooth plateau overlooking the boisterous ocean. The full moon hung precariously overhead, as if any minute it might be snapped from some invisible grasp and hurled on top of the two lovers. Paul stopped the car in front of a small rock, turned off the motor, switched the radio on softly, and pushed the button to allow the seat to slide further back.

"Weeeee..." yelled Paul as he took off his jacket and threw it in the back seat. He helped Sophia with her coat, as if she knew exactly what to do next. They moved around silently, without saying a word, just looking into each others eyes and smiling. Paul's hands slipped slowly around Sophia's waist, in response to which Sophia's hands moved around Paul's neck. Paul looked down at her soft pink lips for a long while before he gently pressed them against his own lips. She moved her breasts against his chest, and Paul continued to press her little body tighter against his body. His tongue started to search inside her narrow mouth, against her white teeth. Her tongue darted against his tongue, as she wove her tongue cautiously around the tip of his tongue. The saliva soothingly flowed from both of their mouths, and then the tongues shyly parted, and the lips parted.

"I really missed you," softly breathed Paul into Sophia's ear.

"So did I," replied Sophia, almost inaudibly.

"Did you really think I might not come back to you?"

"In a way. I didn't know what to think. I thought that you wouldn't care for me anymore."

"You know I couldn't do that," said Paul, as his arms curled around her waist. His hands found the parting place of the two-piece suit, and they searched the smoothness of the back. He moved his hands mildly along her spine up to the fastener of her brassiere. He took his time unfastening it, at the same time kissing her neck violently. Sophia tried to move her arms in protest, but she submitted when Paul pressed his body closer to her.

"Paul, wait," she moaned.

"What, sweetie?" he replied lovingly.

"Quit undressing me," she stated unconvincingly.

"I'm not. I just unfastened it." Paul grinned as he stuck at her mouth again with kisses.

"You don't have to do it everytime, do you?" she said, after she freed herself from his grasp.

"I like to feel your soft body. And you know that."

Sophia kissed Paul back and hugged him with all her might.

"Hey, wait a minute," said Paul, as he was slightly taken aback. "You're getting too passionate."

"Don't you like me that way?"

"I sure do, but you know what that does to me."

"What does it do to you?"

"It turns me on real hot."

Paul's hands brought Sophia down on the seat, so that she lay in a supine position, and then his left hand sought earnestly around her belly and then around her right breast. Her body jerked as he pinched her breast and then stroked and petted it. He squeezed the whole breast and then pressed down on it.

"Are you trying to hurt me?" asked Sophia.

"No. Does it hurt?"

"Not for me, it doesn't. My breasts are mature. But for an immature girl, you might really hurt her the way you treat a girl."

"I guess I'm too much in love with you to notice the way in which I love you," said Paul with a grin on his face.

"Oh yeah?" replied Sophia, moving her arms more firmly around Paul's neck. Her hands felt Paul's long blonde hair, and she squirmed away from the feel of it.

"Paul?" she said calmly.

"What, sweetie?" Paul answered, moving his mouth away from her smooth, silky neck.

"When are you going to cut your hair?"

"Do you have to mention that again?" said Paul disgustingly.

"Well you know that it's getting too long, almost as long as mine. You're almost looking like a girl."

"You know that ain't true."

"Anyway, the people at church are saying bad things about you."

"I could care less what they say. They're a bunch of bigots anyway."

"But I care. I don't like to hear them say bad things about you."

"Don't worry. Just pretend like you don't hear them. It doesn't mean anything at all. What matters is you and me, that's all."

"Oh, Paul. I wish I could believe you."

"You know you can."

Paul brought her head closer to his, and then he poked with his tongue at her ear.

"Paul, stop that! It tickles," giggled Sophia.

"You like that, don't you?"

"No, I don't. It tickles too much."

"Well, at least I know your weak spot. After all, you don't tickle anywhere else."

"But you do," she said, as her hands moved around his belly.

Both of them rolled around a while, giggling and laughing.

Finally, they were exhausted and they lay side by side with their arms around each other.

"Boy, you sure are too much," said Paul after he caught his breath.

Paul's hands started to search for the zipper of her dress. He started unzipping the dress with one hand while the other hand moved down her derriere.

"Paul, wait a minute," said Sophia, as she suddenly sat up, at the same time moving his hands away from her buttocks. "I want to show you something that I wrote." She picked up her purse from the floor of the car and opened it. She took out a piece of paper and handed it to Paul. He read it out loud:

Loveable City
Kissable State
Excuse me baby
I forgot the date.

City of Hope
State of Wishes
19 Hugs and
20 Kisses.

My Dearest Darling,

I love you, so please be true.
My Darling, I'll wait for you.
Your heart is like a lamp of gold,
Hard to get, but harder to hold.

In all my dreams our lips have met.
Just wait baby, I'll get you yet.
Written with love, and sealed with a kiss,
If you love me, you will answer this.

Some people say a kiss is sin,
But if this is true, when did it begin?
Adam kissed Eve, and Eve kissed back with another,
So Darling, why can't we kiss each other?
Kisses spread germs, and germs are hated.
Well kiss me baby, I've been vaccinated.

Love is
Eternal...

"Hey, that's cute. Did you write that all by yourself?" asked Paul, quite pleased with the poem.

"All by myself. You can have it if you want it."

"Thanks," said Paul, as he tucked the paper into his pants pocket.

"I wrote it in class one day when I was bored with the lecture," continued Sophia.

"It almost fits into the pattern of a sonnet. There's fourteen lines, except the beat isn't consistently pentameter. Anyway, it's very original and very cute."

"I wrote it just for you."

"Aw, cut that sentimental stuff out."

"Well, I mean it."

"I know you do, and I thank you very much." Paul took her into his arms again and pressed his mouth against her mouth. His hands proceeded with the unfinished job with the zipper. When the zipper was down, he slipped both his hands down her fairly tight girdle and began stroking her soft, yielding buttocks. Her hands glided along Paul's chest and grasped at the rough body. Paul grasped her behind more firmly, at the same time pressing her pelvic bone hard against his own. He secretly began to slide her dress above her hips and up to her navel so that he could have better access to her pubic region. Sophia gasped for breath as Paul began to pull down her corset. It clung securely to her moderately large hips. Nevertheless, Paul managed to concealingly pet her responsive and luscious hips, simultaneously uncovering her body. With his right hand he began to search for her vulva. He felt the small forest of hair as he pried open an entrance for his fingers. Sophia tried to pull her legs tight so as to prohibit entrance, but her body was responding too passionately to Paul's advances to even consider stopping. Paul's middle finger began to manipulate inside the vagina, probing deep into the warm, inviting, and lubricated channel. He began to gently fondle her clitoris, which aroused a voluptuous sensation in Sophia.

"Paul, please stop," she quietly pleaded.

"I want you, Sophia," said Paul with a quick breath, filled with desire.

"You know we can't go all the way," reflected Sophia, as her hands grasped Paul's hand. Her body shivered when Paul began to fondle her clitoris more firmly, stimulating her more and more.

"Paul, I want you too, but I can't be too sure that you won't think of me as a cheap prostitute or something like that."

"You know I respect you, and that I'll stick by you, no matter what happens to you."

"Do you really mean it, Paul?" asked Sophia with anxiety on her face.

"Yes, I do."

"Maybe we ought to wait a little longer, just to prove our love toward each other."

"Sophia, you know I can't wait any longer. Everytime I'm with you my body runs wild with passion, and I need you so badly that sometimes I feel that if I don't have you all the way, I might just go out of my mind and might even rape you."

"You wouldn't do that Paul."

"No, I wouldn't. But Sophia, I really, honestly need you. Every night when I go to sleep I dream of you and even think of having you sleep by my side, so that our bodies might be together."

"I have such thoughts also," admitted Sophia.

"Then why don't we just make these dreams reality?"

"We'll have to wait. Others have waited, so why can't we wait?" said Sophia, appealing to logic.

"I've waited patiently five months already. Tell me the truth, Sophia, you really think it's wrong to have sexual intercourse before marriage. That's why you won't let me take you."

"Not exactly, Paul. But I feel that if I am going to have a man own me, then I want him to own me for all of life, not for just one month or one night. It's just like stepping into marriage."

By now Paul had let go of Sophia completely and was sitting apart from her. He sat moodily, thinking what to do and say next.

"I don't know Sophia. I've always respected you, and I wanted to copulate under mutual agreement. Somehow I feel that if I continue to go around with you I might rape you. Maybe we ought to break up for a while."

"If you want to," said Sophia, as a tear started to form around her eye.

"I don't want to," said Paul, putting his arm around her shoulder, trying to comfort her. "Anyway, I don't think it'll work. We want each other too much."

Sophia's head was buried in Paul's chest as he continued to talk to her.

"Ever since I met you, I've been thinking of having you for my own. Your body must of really attracted me. But it wasn't all that. You see, I've been wanting to find the true reason for my existence. To me, sexual union is one form of finding the answer. I see coitus as the extension of a person's ego toward some universal identification. And when a person is identified with a person, then he feels like his life has found fulfillment. Otherwise, a person wanders like a nomad in this lonely world."

"I never thought you thought like that," interrupted Sophia.

"Well now you know my real motive," stated Paul.

"Most boys just want to get sexual satisfaction for themselves."

"Well I happen to be different. I wanted you to be satisfied also."

"That's very considerate of you, Paul." Sophia sidled towards Paul and kissed him strongly on the cheek. Paul took her in his arms and they once again embraced, kissing each other passionately.

"Let me take you now," whispered Paul in Sophia's ear.

"Paul, don't," exclaimed Sophia.

"I have to, Sophia." Paul was already pulling down her corset down her knees. Sophia struggled to get on her feet, but Paul held her down with his hands and feet.

"I don't want to hurt you, honey. I just want to take you nice and easy."

"Is this what you call love, trying to rape me."

"O.K. You said it, I didn't," said Paul, as he coerced her to remain flat on her back.

"I'm going to scream," cried Sophia.

"Go ahead," laughed Paul, at the same time shaking with fear. "There's not a soul a mile around."

"Stop it!" screamed Sophia, grabbing at Paul's hair and pulling at it as hard as she could. She fought desperately to get back at her feet. Finally, she succeeded to crawl into a sitting position, and then she started violently cursing and throwing punches at Paul, who held her hands from hitting his face.

"Damn you, you bastard," she yelled. Paul continued to paw her body, trying to seduce her. But by now Sophia had gathered enough vigor, anger, and strength to fight like a wild cat.

"Let me out," cried Sophia. She tried to open the door, but Paul held on to the handle.

"All right, now," said Paul. "Settle down, I won't hurt you. Just calm down a little. Boy, you sure are a wild thing."

"You forced me to be," cried Sophia, falling down on the floor and burying her head on the seat. She started to sob loudly.

"You know I wasn't going to rape you," said Paul. "I thought maybe that would convince you that I had a strong desire for you."

She did not answer.

"Get dressed," commanded Paul. "I'm taking you home."

Paul started the motor and let the car warm up. After several minutes he backed the car away from the oceanside and slowly drove onto the highway. Sophia got up from the floor and slipped up her skirt. She took a kleenex from her purse and wiped her eyes. She sat sullenly on the other side of the car and started to tidy herself up. She touched up her hair, face, and clothes before she reached into the back seat for her coat. She started to put on her coat and Paul reached over to help her put it on. She did not resist. After that she sat a little closer to Paul. She took out some gum out of her purse and offered some to him. He opened his mouth and she slipped it in.

"Thank you," he said with a smile. She smiled back.

"Paul, I'm really sorry about what happened," said Sophia, with a pleading look on her face.

"That's all right. It's all over."

"Are you mad at me?"

"No, not at all. I believe that your actions were perfectly legitimate. But I'm sorry that I gave you the impression that I was going to rape you."

"I really thought you were serious."

"Well, I just wasn't. I guess I was sort of too playful."

"I think you're right about our having to break up. It might be more serious the next time."

"I still don't believe it'll work. Sooner or later you will just have to submit."

"But I'm afraid, Paul."

"Ah! So that's it," said Paul with surprise. "There's nothing to be afraid of. I know just how to take care of it. You just let me handle everything."

"That isn't it, Paul. I'm afraid of being taken. I'm afraid of the mysterious thing about it."

"We'll work it out somehow," said Paul, putting his arm around her shoulder and kissing her gently on her cheek.

Paul kissed her again before he finally saw her walk into her house. He didn't say when he would see her again as he usually did. She somehow got the impression that maybe he wouldn't come back again. Five days later Paul received a letter from Sophia. He went into his back yard, sat on the bench under the apple tree and read the letter out loud:

"Dear Paul,

I am sorry for bothering you so much, but I can't help it. I still love you no matter how you feel toward me. Paul, when you left me that night, you said that you still loved me. If that's true, then stop hurting me.

You see, I never believed that I loved you so much until all this happened. You can never know for sure what a person means to you until you lose that person. Then you really find the truth. I really realized what you mean to me, and how much I love you. I know now that you are the only person that I care about, and no one else can take your place. Paul, if only you still have some love for me, then come back to me, and I will never blame you for anything. Paul I beg you, stop hurting me so much.

Remember when you just met me? I didn't have any desire to live. I didn't have any interest in anything. The only thing I really wanted was Death, because I lost the person that I really loved. I closed my heart and turned my face from the world of love. And I never cared about what was going on in there. Many times I used to go with boys just to get over my loneliness. But I never had the desire to love anybody. Sometimes the person would even feel that he loved me, but I just turned my back on him. Just because I was dead for love. I didn't feel anything when somebody took me into his arms and would kiss me. I never felt anything. I wasn't a person who desired to be loved, or even to be cared about. I was hard; my heart must have been colder than ice.

Then Paul, you came along, and you said that you loved me. I just don't know what happened to me. When you told me that you loved me, I felt as if I was asleep and those words woke me out of my sleep. It gave me the desire to love you and to care about you. You were taking me back to

that world from which I had closed my heart and turned my face, and to which I never wanted to go back again. I didn't even stop myself, I just let you take me, back to the past. You see, each time you took me into your arms, you were bringing me back to life again. Your kisses gave me a desire to love you. I took you as my life, as the only breath that I can breathe. Your arms were the only place for me to be safe. Your lips were my only desire; your love was my whole life; and you were my only dream.

Paul, I never told you this, but now I will. Every night when I go to bed, I think of you with tears in my eyes, because I had the sort of love toward you that wanted you close to me all the time. I had the desire to feel your arms around me, and your body close to mine. I cried because you never loved me the way I loved you. The only thing you ever wanted of me was my body, just to satisfy your desires. Paul, I won't be able to satisfy your desires, because I just am not that kind of a person. The only way it can be done is not for the purpose of satisfying each other, but because of love.

Do you know that deep inside of you is not just a desire, but a love for me, that makes you want me so much? Are you really sure that if you go all the way with me, you will still love me? Will you still have the same desire for me as you always have had? If you can answer these questions positively, then I don't have anything against it.

Paul, I really don't care even if you would rape me. Just as long as you would only love me. The only thing that keeps me fighting with you is that I am too scared to trust you. I feel that you will make a fool of me, just to make me lose all my pride. Then you will probably laugh at me. That is the only thing that keeps me from going all the way. As you know, when you love a person, it is so much temptation, that it is very hard to keep yourself away from it. I feel the same way toward you. That's because I love you. But if you don't love me, then don't fool me, I beg you please. But if you are really honest, and if you really feel true love for me, then I will accept your love, because I love you..."

"Boy, what a girl," said Paul, stretching himself on the green grass.

Next Sunday Paul approached Sophia casually, hoping that she got the message that he read her letter and highly esteemed her opinions.

"I missed you," said Paul, after they were together in the car, driving toward the ocean.

Sophia didn't say anything. She just moved close to Paul and began crying on his shoulder.

"Aw, come on. Everything will be all right."

She looked up into his blue eyes and felt happy once again.

At the oceanside when Paul proceeded with his regular advances, Sophia put her small, soft hands on Paul's hands and stopped him.

"Not tonight, honey. Some other time."

"Why not?" asked Paul, being nonplussed by her attitude.

"I'm having my period now." She smiled.

Proceed
to
Part 2

"Paul," called his mother. She opened the screen door and looked scantly through the yard for him. He was warming up his car and couldn't hear above the roar of the engine. She repeated the name again, adding "telephone" with a screeching voice. She didn't want to repeat herself again. Paul caught notice of the word telephone and looked around to see his mother waving her hand frantically for him to come in. Paul turned the ignition off and scurried around the car, up the porch steps, and into the kitchen, where he saw the telephone placed face down on the table waiting for his attention. Paul wiped his brow with his sleeve and sighed deeply, wondering who in the world wanted him at this hour and even right before he was ready to sit down for an old fashioned dinner. He picked up the phone gently and listened for a moment before he answered.

"Hello," said Paul catching his breath impatiently.

"Well," answered a thin feminine voice at the other end of the line. Her voice seemed to be frozen in mid-air and discontented with having to speak. "Did you want to see me?" she spoke in a spiteful manner.

"Oh, hi!" answered Paul, recollecting his thoughts with the surprise of hearing from Sophia so soon. "Sure. Yeh."

"Well, come over at 7:15, over my house." She seemed wanting to get over with the conversation as soon as possible. Her tiny voice rang with trembling shocks of regret, and the studded words were rattled off almost at random.

"O.K." answered Paul, nonplussed by the trepidation that he sensed in her voice. She closed the hasty parley with a stunning slam before Paul could inquire about the matter in more specific terms. He wasn't sure of what he wanted to question her about and quietly placed the receiver back in its normal position.

Ideas were floating ravishly through his mystified mind as he promenaded nervously into the dining room and out again before he decided to hurry into his room to change into better clothes. He dabbed at his food and left half of it wasting on the plate, while his mother and brother were poking questions at him intermittently. His mother surmised that it was the little girl he was romancing with and smiled with a cryptic understanding, while his brother was procuring the truth out of him with intimate cross-questioning. Paul excused himself from the table and abandoned the room before he was goaded into revealing more than he felt was necessary for the occasion. He stepped into his car and snapped the seat belt in place. After the motor turned welcomingly to the turn of the key, Paul switched on the radio almost automatically. His mind was still in a haze as he drove down the highway in a composed and unaccelerated manner. He scarcely knew where to start thinking, so he put it out of his mind to think and relaxingly listened to the music pounding into his ears, with his eyes glued to the road ahead of him.

He parked his car across the street from Sophia's house when he anon arrived in the big city. He locked the car door and slid off into the murky street. He gazed through the dim-lit street and descried two girls walking toward the corner of the street. Advancing slowly at first, and then quickening his pace, Paul casually strolled onto the pavement to meet what he discovered to be Sophia and her girlfriend.

"Good evening, ladies," broached Paul. He dug his hands into his pockets and glanced amiably from one face to the other, hoping for a friendly reply.

"Hi, Paul," greeted the girlfriend first so as to save Sophia any embarrassment of not returning a welcome note.

"Hi, Sophia," alleged Paul, reverting his serious and pleading gaze from the girlfriend to Sophia, whose pink cheeks glowed angrily in the dark evening air.

"Hi," she managed to reply as if the word stuck obstinantly in her throat.

"I've got to be running home," intruded the girlfriend while the others eyes were piercingly searching out each other.

"Yeh. Take it easy," replied Paul out of politeness, although he didn't pay any attention to the girlfriend as she shyly pulled herself away from an environment in which she knew she didn't belong.

"What did you want to see me about?" said Sophia, rambling the words out like a typewriter. She was leading him to her home as if it was her duty to do so. Anguish was written solemnly across their wrinkled foreheads as each trembled from coldness and fear. The fear was that of an excited cat who meets a possible foe and lifts its tail in defence.

"You received my letter, didn't you?" said Paul, wearied of having to talk at once. He was exhausted and depleted at having said so many words in one gulp. He swallowed hard as he anticipated a stern rebuke; he half-hoped for a minor compliment.

"Yes," was all that Sophia thought was necessary to be said at the moment. She refrained from looking at Paul as she mounted the wooden steps leading to the home where she lived with her parents.

"Then you know what it's all about," kindly apologized Paul for having caused the victim of having to see him.

"It's true what you heard about," replied Sophia with such mockery that almost made Paul turn around and run away for fear of losing his senses and his life. But he submitted to the open door and followed Sophia up another flight of stairs and into the living room where once they had met in devoted and intimate love. Now they were afraid of approaching each other like lions in a den. Paul walked over to the mirror and reflected on the paleness of his bearded face, while Sophia sat on a green sedan, turning her eyes occasionally in Paul's direction, but not looking directly at him. After a minute of silence Paul turned around and looked wearily at Sophia, opening his mouth as if to speak.

"Have a seat," said Sophia when she gathered that she would have to put up with him for a while.

"Thank you," breathed Paul, not expecting any kindness from her at all.

"So you're going to get married," started Paul at once after having crossed his legs and slumped down on the coach.

"That's right"

"I was quite surprised when I heard the rumor spreading throughout town like a forest fire."

"It's the real truth. And I love him, too!"

"It's hard to believe. I was sort of, shall we say, shocked when I first heard it. I could hardly believe that it could be you. So, you see, I had to find out for myself."

"Well, now you know."

"Yes, now I know. Tell me, when did you first make up your mind to get married?"

"Oh, a couple of weeks ago. We're going to get engaged this Saturday and the wedding will be in June."

"I'll have to make it a point to be at your wedding."

"You do that."

"What made you decide so fast?"

"Well, we loved each other."

"How long has it been?"

"Since January."

"And you've known him for only two months?"

"That's right." Sophia smiled and giggled softly.

"When did you first meet him?"

"Right after New Year's."

"Where?"

"He came over my house."

"Just like that? Without an invitation and without even knowing you?" Paul's face formed a queer shape.

"Yeh. He was so sweet and tender."

"Didn't you think of him as an intruder or a stranger to be shunned and not tolerated with?"

"Of course not. Why should I? He treated me as if I were a fragile thing, not like you, hurting my feelings and making me hate you."

Paul feigned that he didn't hear her last words, but he couldn't fool himself any longer. This girl evidently meant every blessed word she uttered and was quite serious in her intentions.

"I suppose you fell in love with him at first sight?"

"Not exactly."

"How many times have you seen him?"

"We went on three dates and he's been over my house quite a few times." Sophia was searching in her coat pocket for something.

"And your mother and father approved of him?"

"They really liked him."

Paul reflected in his own mind temporarily how much her parents had grown to hate him after he had supposedly ruined their daughter. He could not help feeling a deeply felt pity for himself, believing himself to be not half as degenerate as the fiend they were now graciously approving.

"Strange, very strange," muttered Paul, half to himself.

"That's how it is." Sophia pulled something from her pocket.

"And you say he loves you?"

"With all his heart. He handles me with such care that he's even afraid he might hurt me."

"How does he love you?"

"He shows me the kind of love that you never could have showed me."

"What kind of love is that?"

"It's real love."

"What do you mean 'real love'?"

"You wouldn't know what it is. Maybe someday you'll learn."

"Why don't you tell me, so I'll know where I goofed."

She stood up and walked toward where Paul was partially sitting and partially laying. She placed a piece of paper on the arm rest of the coach.

"Here, you can have it."

"You don't want to keep it?"

"What do I want it for?"

Paul wished desperately for her to keep the letter which he had written especially for her. He prided himself in his writing and didn't desire such a masterpiece to be forgotten so soon.

"I thought you'd like to keep it as a gift from me, you know, like, sort of a memory."

"Ha, ha. You make me laugh."

"How did you feel after you read the letter?" said Paul, expecting her to express sympathy; in fact, he almost wished that she would say that she cried after reading the sorrowful letter.

"Ha, ha," she guffawed. "I laughed so hard that I thought the whole block heard me."

"I expected something like that," replied Paul with remorse, lying to himself and to her.

"I want you to have it anyway. Do with it what you like."

"I'll probably burn it." She giggled.

"Might as well terminate our relationship with a symbolic act of burning the last thing between us."

"O.K. Let's go into the kitchen."

Paul handed the cherished letter to Sophia and together they marched down the hallway to the kitchen. Sophia turned the gas stove on full blast and held the letter in the consuming flames. She dropped the letter with a jerk when the flames enwrapping it almost singed her shaking white hand. The fire soon turned the letter into detestable ashes that nevertheless clung together in one piece as if struggling not to fall apart, which would be the final sign of disintegration. Sophia poked her index finger at the puffed up ash of a letter and the majesty of the artistic form collapsed into complete artlessness and oblivion.

"No more," said Sophia with triumphant glee.

Paul echoed the words with disbelief in his own mind as he turned and walked insolently back into the living room, where he breathed deeply of the aroma of fresh air.

"It's hard to believe you changed so fast," said Paul when Sophia returned into the room, clapping her hands to erase any sign of ashes on her.

"I'm perfectly happy."

"I'm glad you are. Ah, by the way, I, well, I, I thought of asking you whether you told him about our affair."

"Yes, I did."

"I don't think you should have."

"I told you when I would get married that I would tell my husband about everything. I wanted to be honest."

"Was he mad or terrified?"

"No, he said he didn't care what I did. He said that didn't matter. He loves me in spite of that."

"That's good. But I did kind of expect you to keep that affair as something only between you and me."

"That's too bad. I said I would be honest with my husband, and I believe I'm right."

"I just hope you'll keep it to yourself in the future. You didn't tell your mother, did you?"

"You crazy? I wouldn't dare."

"It's best for you that no one knows about it. It's like a protection from the nosy people around church. Otherwise, they'll be pointing fingers at you and saying what a horrible girl you are."

Sophia stared at Paul as he spoke these ghastly words, and she felt their impact bounce off the throbbing of her heart.

"What would you do if I told everyone of our affair? What would you do?"

Sophia stared in disbelief; she wanted to eradicate those words out of her conscience.

"I'd hate you forever!"

"You know, I could do that if I wanted to be a wicked man. But I wouldn't want to destroy your happy marriage. I'm too fond of you to do such an unforgiveable deed."

"I'm fed up with you, Paul. I think you better leave."

Paul bowed his head in shame for having caused the innocent lass such distress and worry. Since she did not repeat her desire for him to relinquish his presence in her home so as to extricate herself from the rogue, Paul sat quietly and musingly without stirring to fulfill her wish. Sophia sat down again after having risen to meet the trying occasion. She glanced at her watch and then loathingly fixed her eyes on Paul. Paul wiggled awkwardly in his uncomfortable position for several minutes before commencing to speak.

"You don't care for me at all anymore, do you?"

"My whole love is for Benny."

Paul's ears reverberated at the sound of that name. He remembered the little rascal when they were just adolescents, how they used to rummage in old, ghostly houses and buildings. Then there were the parties and etcetera; Paul didn't care to go to the trouble of re-remembering such pleasant experiences in the light of the present catastrophe.

"What does he have to offer to you?"

"More than you ever did."

"You sound as if you deny the fact that you ever loved me."

"It was just plain stupidity."

"You did tell me you loved me."

"You were like a solid rock to me. He is all sweet and gentle to me."

"But tell me, where did I go wrong?"

"You'll find out someday." She looked at her watch.

"Couldn't you at least give me a hint. It would be a valuable lesson for me."

"It's too late now."

"Well, yeh, but--"

"He's such a sweet person. We've been busy lately, talking all about our wedding day. I already have planned for the bride's maid's dresses, and, oh, there's so much to think about and do."

"It'll be good for you. It'll occupy your time and give you something to preoccupy your mind."

"You want to see the Valentine's card he sent me?" she said, getting up immediately at the thought of showing-off her new adoration.

"Sure," said Paul, not wanting to hurt her feelings and also to proceed with her in the amiable relationship that they all of a sudden found themselves.

She sent into her bedroom and brought the idolized card. Paul accepted it with outstretched hands and smiled feignedly at it. He opened it and read out loud:

Here's to a girl that is so sweet
That words themselves would be no treat;
So I will just present this card
And hope your heart won't be too hard
To say you are the only one,
That will adore the thing I've done;
And when you are my valentine,
Then will I know you're really mine.

"Very pretty," Paul lied again.

"You remember the little dog I found?"

"No, I don't."

"I told you about it before."

"You must have a better memory than I do."

"Of course I told you about my dream, remember?"

"I don't think I do. Tell it to me again, anyway."

"Well, I dreamed that I was walking through a big green forest and I stopped before this gray grave with a cross and flowers on top of it. And there was this big black dog who told me to dig up the grave. So I started to dig and when I opened the tomb, here was this cute, little doggie. I told you I was getting married, didn't I." Sophia praised herself with a jolly laughter for her ingenious dream. Paul could distinguish no significance in the dream of marriage.

"Not too bad a dream."

"You want to see what Benny gave me as a present?"

"Sure." It seemed like Paul was pampering the capricious nature of Sophia.

"He gave me this present of Red Roses powder and soap set," said Sophia, bringing a box of very aromatic toiletry.

"Mmm. Smells nice."

"See how nice he is."

"Yeh, I see."

Sophia closed the box and ran back into her room, coming back with a handful of records.

"Your records?"

"Whatever are his are mine also. We share all our things just like we share each other."

Sophia placed several of her favorite records on the phonograph and started to sway her body when the music started. Paul was tempted to discontinue his semi-slumber and indulge in dancing with her. But he declared to himself that she wouldn't approve of it, so he dismissed the thought as undigestible.

"Don't worry, sweetheart, you'll find yourself another girl."

"It's not so easy. I've become quite accustomed to you."

"Well, you don't have to think of me anymore. You might as well get me out of your mind."

"That's a hard thing to do. You know, a man needs a woman to keep him happy. Now that you're gone from me, I'll be miserable and quite a wretched creature."

"Well, I'll be happy with my darling. I can hardly wait to get married. I might even go with him to Japan next January."

"You mean he's going away?"

"After we're married in June, he'll go away for six months, and then he'll return. But then he has to go away for three years."

"Three years!"

"I might go with him. I'll dress up real sexy for all those sailors, and--"

"You really have wild ideas."

"That's why I love him. Because he's wild like me. We're just perfect for each other. When we get married we can go to dances and everywhere together."

"I suppose he's picked up some of the bad habits of the Navy, like smoking and drinking."

"Yeh, a little. But we'll have lots of fun together."

"You know something? You sound like a little girl who's just found herself a new toy, a new doll. You throw your old toys away because you've found yourself a new toy. You'll probably get tired of even that pretty soon."

"That's what you think. We're in love. --My love is deeper than a wishing well--" Sophia was in her regular mood of moving from stimuli to stimuli when she started to sing along with the song and at the same time shaking her head to the music and conversing with Paul.

"I have a theory about you. Somehow I think that when a lover loses a lover she immediately seeks someone to replace him so as to drown her sorrows and tears. This is precisely what you've done."

"I don't think your theory is true. You know, Benn--I mean, Paul,"

Paul was suddenly taken aghast as if he had been strangled.

"I think you've never lived up to what you preach. You don't believe a single word of the Bible."

"Listen, I've been educated, trained, and filled with the Bible to the point that it vibrates within every sinew and vessel of my body. You hardly know half as much Bible as I do."

"But you don't believe it."

"Do you believe it? every word?"

"Sure I do. Not like you."

"It's hard for you to believe that every principle that I stand on in life is a Christian principle."

"You're nothing but a beatnik"

"It's even hard for you to accept the fact that I've started to live a new life, dedicated to love truth, and despise ignorance. You can't understand that, can you?"

"Not after what you did to me."

"You mean our affair?"

"You took my innocence away from me, and I'll regret that for the rest of my life." Sophia looked at her watch again.

"Why do you keep looking at your watch?"

"My mother is supposed to come home in about ten, fifteen minutes."

"Oh, oh, I better be moving along. I don't want to cause any trouble."

"That's all right. You've got a few more minutes before she comes."

"Sophia, before I go I want to apologize for one thing--for taking away your innocence. I was wrong in demanding it of you, and regret that it happened because of my wild, youthful lust. I guess a young man at my age gets carried away with the animal nature within him and doesn't care much for the integrity of others. You will forgive me, won't you?"

Sophia sat with her eyes surveying the floor. She kept mum.

"I hope that in parting we can still be friends. I sure would hate to lose you for a friend. I sort of see my fault now of which you were talking about. I should have allowed you to be independent instead of forcing, kind of, everything on you. Will you forgive me, and will you be my friend?"

Sophia didn't move.

"I believe that above all a woman desires superiority and control over things around her. I imagine that was something I deprived you of. Will you still be my friend?"

Sophia stood up after Paul rose to his feet as a sign to her that he was preparing to depart.

"O.K." sighed Sophia, relieved that finally he was leaving.

"I wish you the greatest of luck in your marriage," said Paul as he stood at the top of the steps, ready to venture down the steps that were so familiar to him for the last time.

"Same for you," smiled Sophia, her eyes beaming a reminiscent tinge of former days.

"It's kind of hard to say good-bye."

"You've always been a good actor."

"Not this time. My heart is thumping like a machine gone out of order."

"Let me feel it."

Paul pulled his coat aside to allow ample space for Sophia's small soft hand to be placed. She held her hand for a time and felt the pitter-patter of his heart.

"Are you nervous?"

"I think it's just because I feel regret at having to say farewell to you."

Paul looked into her eyes and Sophia looked back into his blue eyes. Sophia's green eyes scintillated under the light in the hallway. Their gaze seemed to remind them of past, but unforgotten, passion that they shared. Paul felt that she was beckoning him to come to her and be her's once again, and Sophia would have felt the same also if she did not feel an obligation to her fiancée.

"I suppose you'll have a lot of fun when your husband is away."

"Sure. That's why I married him. I'll flirt with all the men. And when he'll come back, I'll go to my honey and tell him how much I love him and how much I missed him."

"What a girl you are. I almost believe you."

"I'll have me a real good time."
"I hope it'll be a good change after all the tears you shed while being with me."
"That's probably something I'll never forgive you for. That's why I'm so glad to have gotten rid of you."
"Well, I wish you all the happiness in the world."
For the last time their eyes and hearts met and rebounded in a pleasant, enduring smile.
"Sophia, can I ask you for a last request as a farewell?"
"What?"
"Can I kiss you?"
"On the cheek," pointed Sophia to her right rosy cheek.
"No. On the lips."
"Well, since it's the last time..."
Paul took her into his arms and whispered the words, "good-bye, forever," and kissed her with the gentle touch of his lips against her lips. He repeated, "Good Luck," to her without looking at her face and heard her say, "Good Luck," as he walked down the stairs and opened the door. Just before closing the door for the last time, he gently called up to her, "Good-bye, Sweetheart!"

Innocent Love

by Paul J. Wigowsky

1966