

Chapter Twenty

Halcyon: Winter 1938 – 1939

December, 1938

Louise had just received three letters from Herb, plus a check from Herb's insurance company in the amount of \$159, which would be their first deposit into a savings account.

Darling I sure was delighted with your letters. You are the dearest person there is in the whole world and I love you. (December 2)

She then begins to answer his letters, as she always enjoys doing, writing in response to each line or idea, in succession, as if she were with him and talking with him.¹

You are an angel darling really, to buy me so many things.

We'll have fun if we don't map out our lives and say just what we'll do next. I like to do unexpected things. However, we will map out how our money is going to be spent or we'll never have any. I tell you, when I get money, I get generous and give a lot of things to people.

It takes a long time to answer letters, doesn't it? It's 10:15 and I've been writing since 9:15, and only on page three. But I stop and think of you quite often, and of things I could say, but don't.

I must uphold my side. You can't spank me – you won't spank me, and I dare you even to try to! (I wonder what I'm letting myself in for?) So – I'm born to be spanked, eh? Not born to be loved, or kissed? Not even by you? Why honey!

Who cares if it would mix things up if you came back sooner than you should. I don't! And you shouldn't. I wouldn't care about anything if I could have you.

I've now come to the end of your last letter, and it's 11:00. My, my! And I'm so sleepy.

Good night sweetie-peach. I love you Herb, so, so much.

(December 2)

Wednesday afternoon Louise writes "It's been quite a while since I last wrote to you, but I honestly haven't had time – or energy. The last few days have been so hot" (*December 7*).

¹ Louise's letter was much longer than what is shown here. Her responses presented above are only a selection intended to connect recurring topics in their long-distance conversations.

Louise tells Herb that she and three others (Olive, Jean, and Patty) each now have a “steel guitar.” She explains they plan to form a guitar orchestra under her mother’s direction, and Bernard will play the xylophone, to carry the melody. “Her project² calls for teaching orchestra” (December 7).

Louise kept pretty busy the rest of that week, and on Sunday night she writes a letter.

I haven't written to you for ages have I dear? I seem to be so busy all the time, and even though I go to bed early – I don't write because I'm so sleepy. Tonight isn't early – it's 10:30, but then its Sunday night, and I hate to stay home on Sunday night. We went to the show and saw “Men With Wings.” Rather interesting, but also boring. ... Last Sunday I saw “You Can't Take It With You” ... it was very funny.

You know, I haven't bought any Christmas presents yet. I don't get any chance to go to San Luis. When you have to get meals, its hard to get time off because you have to be back at a certain time, and it's hard. I've got so many to buy too – I wish I didn't. My gifts aren't expensive ones, because of a lack of necessary pieces of silver – or paper.

Last night I took care of Mary Anne and Nancy again and earned another 50 cents and spent 40 of it tonight. I bought popcorn for Patty and me, some gum and 25 cents for the show. (December 11)

In the same letter, Louise refers to how long they still have to wait until Herb comes home, resolving not to be anxious about it.

I'm going to try very hard not to mind all the time that's left. I know the year will go quickly. Its when you look ahead and try to jump over these remining months, and find it can't be done, that everything seems hopeless. But living one day after another, why a week goes by, then two, then a month, and so on, and then looking back one wonders where the time went to. So I guess the best thing is to not try to hurdle the months too fast, don't you? (December 11)

Louise is still worried about what Herb will think of her actions after the dance a month ago. “I guess it's around now you'll be learning about what I did on Armistice Day. I hope you aren't disappointed in me. Were you?” (December 12)

Then Tuesday afternoon she is in agony over a dream that she had, so she writes to Herb.

I had an awful dream last night, I dreamed I received a letter from you and you said you didn't love me anymore. So, I answered and said to not make up your mind until you'd seen me again anyway. After all you might change after being with me. But you sent a card back and said it was no use. Its best to let it go like it was. So – that was that.

Isn't that terrible? Herb you would never do that to me would you? Oh you mustn't. I'd die I think if you did. It frightens me sometimes to think how easily all my hopes and dreams could be smashed – just by your stopping loving me. Darling I love you so. I just love you – and please don't ever stop loving me. Please. (December 13)

² Ebba was paid by the WPA to teach music and drama, including orchestra.

In closing she adds "I feel better after writing to you. You see, that dream bothered me – it's the first time that I've dreamed anything but nice dreams of us. I don't know why I dreamed that one" (December 13).

That evening Louise has a chance to type out a short letter to Herb.

I am writing this at Pearl's house. Pearl and Mother have gone to Atascadero for the night and will be back tomorrow some time, so I am here taking care of Flamore.

I really haven't much to say, but I'll do my best. Otto is moving over to Halcyon in a little house over there, to be nearer to people who can take care of him. On account of insurance, somebody has to be in the Sanatorium, so Bernard is going to live there. For the same reason, someone has to be in the Guest House, so I am going to live there. Imagine me all alone in that big house! Anyway, I don't mind; in fact, I love the idea, as I've always liked to stay at the Guest House. I'm to have a double room upstairs, as Pearl thought upstairs would be safer, not on the ground floor you know. I can have my radio, so I'll have a swell time by myself. (December 13)

Thursday evening Louise writes a short note before falling asleep.

Do you realize ... that we've been writing to each other for over fifteen months? Pretty nearly a year and a half. And we've loved each other that long – and been away from each other that long. It's gone so quickly, it seems shorter than that, and its hard to realize. But oh – the remaining months look so long.

I'm not being a very good sport lately. I haven't been for about six months – because all your letters now tell me not to mind, and that the time will go quickly. ... Well – I am not going to complain again in any letter. (December 15)

Friday afternoon while resting, she writes to Herb about Christmas shopping.

I bought seven Christmas presents yesterday, spent \$2.00 on four, and the other three \$3.50, I charged. Much as I hate to charge things, I had to because I haven't enough money now. I've only five more to buy and \$2.00 to buy them with. Which leaves me absolutely without a penny. (December 16)

Louise hadn't received any letters from Herb for two weeks – but later that afternoon she got four letters from him, and late Friday night she begins answering them, before falling asleep.

No dear – I did not mind your sending me money to get my own Christmas present. But – I do mind the amount. Its much too much for me. ... Gee darling \$5.00 would have been plenty. Oh honey – you're too good to me – how can I ever reciprocate? ... All you do is give me things, and I don't ever give you anything. You know I would if I could, don't you? All I can give you is myself – and that's yours already.

Also, to get to the hope chest. Although one will come in handy, I feel that we don't need one now – that the money is more important. Herb – you've given me so much already I couldn't take anything more – really, you don't mind if I don't get one, do you?

Darling I'm so glad you got rated – is that what you call it? Anyway, I'm very proud of you. (December 16)

Sunday afternoon, in between chores, Louise finds time to answer his latest letters. She begins with his letter of November 7, and tells him how she is spending her Christmas gift. "I bought a swell camera for \$4.50 And I am going to have fun with it! I can take pictures indoors with it too. So now darling you'll be getting a lot of pictures from me" (December 18).

She tries to answer his question about Temple Convention messages from the Master.

I don't know much about it myself, and have often wondered. ... The messages are received in a number of different ways. Sometimes direct from the Master, sometimes in symbols - or in a dream, or direct inspirations. That's all I know.... They are wonderful though. (December 18).

Responding to Herb's ongoing questions about whether to remain in the Navy or not, and where they might live, Louise writes:

I wouldn't call it being stuck in Halcyon if I had to live here the rest of my life. I'd love it. Only - I'd like to be able to go to San Francisco or Los Angeles once in a while. But its so hard to get a job nowadays - most of all a permanent one. (December 18)

Then Louise reads about what Herb did at a party on November 12, and how badly he felt about it. Comparing what he did to what she did on Armistice Day, she writes:

Your story of what you did on the twelfth was very interesting. Honey - don't worry at all about it - its o.k. by me. You should get as much fun as you can.

Darling, you make me feel so ashamed of myself, for what I did on Armistice Day. ... My goodness - it's quite a coincidence, isn't it? Anyway Herb dear - what you did was not wrong. What I did, was. ... You want to know how you can show me how much you love me? You can forgive me for what I did. Please? (December 18)

Late Sunday evening Louise continues writing the same letter.

Bob came home today about 5:30. He's going to stay till the day after Christmas. He hitch-hikes down and back - and so saves money. I was very glad to see him, he brought three records with him.

Bob and Mother will probably talk all night. They are still talking and its 11:30. We saw "The Great Waltz" tonight. Not bad. The music was grand. (December 18)

On Tuesday Louise received from Herb a Christmas card and a ten-page letter, which made her very happy. Thursday afternoon she has a chance to answer his letter and to fill him in on the news from Halcyon.

Bob and I have a bug for buying records. We went into a second hand store Tuesday with Byron, and bought some old records. Three for two bits.

I see again you won't send me any pictures. Remember you had some taken last December, and in May - and I received them a couple of months ago. You had thought they weren't good - but I liked them. Enough said.

I'm writing this while Bernard is lying face down on my bed with Anita massaging him. He has a cold, and she can take them out of people. Its funny though, because Anita likes

him a lot, but I don't know whether Bernard likes her or not. I don't think he'll ever like any girl, do you? (December 22)

Later that evening Louise continues her letter, telling Herb about the dances in Oceano.

I'll tell you about the dance I went to last night. It was at the Recreation Center at Oceano instead of the Pavilion. The same orchestra. I had a swell time. One guy there came from San Francisco, he and his brother, and the one – Ivan was his name – danced well, but he had quite a few faults. One, trying to dance cheek to cheek – I nearly got a stiff neck trying to keep my head away – but it was not much use. Two, he kept saying what a nice smile I had, and how pretty I was. Baloney! Three, he wanted me to go out with him. But aside from that – he's o.k. Good dancing makes up for a lot of it.

There's the orchestra leader – Art – who I like best. He's a swell dancer too. Art wants me to be sure and go next week, but I don't know – I might. The dances are from 7-11 now instead of 9-1. So, I'd get home earlier. You wouldn't mind if I went, would you? None of those men mean anything to me beyond dancing with. I just love to dance. And a good dancer is welcome, if he's not too obnoxious. (December 22)

Louise anticipates a very busy week for herself and decides to tell Herb in advance that she may not write much.

Tomorrow after dinner Bob is taking me to San Luis to do some shopping – and we're staying for the show.

Then Saturday I'll be awfully busy wrapping up presents and I also have clothes to wash. Saturday night is Christmas Eve, we go to Pearl's. After that we get home fairly early so I might be able to write then.

Sunday is Christmas and there's two meetings then, and when I'm not at the meeting I'll be at the Lodge helping. (December 22)

Very late on Friday night (actually Saturday morning at 12:45 a.m.) Louise is eager to write. "I just had to write to you – even at this hour. I've had the most marvelous day, and I must tell you about it" (December 24). Bob had gone to Los Angeles to pick up Dorothy, and they arrived at 3:00 a.m. on Friday the 23rd.

So the three of us went to San Luis this afternoon, and stayed all day. Pearl gave me \$5.00 instead of \$2.00, and I had your \$5.00 – you know, the other half of your present to me. (December 24).

Louise wrote out the details of how she spent her money, including treating Bob, Dorothy and she to the show. "Darling, I had more fun, so you don't mind if I spent that \$10.00 of yours in that manner, do you?" (December 24). Then she writes about Bob and Dorothy.

Now – Dot is in love with Bob – she's found out that absence makes the heart grow fonder. Evidently Bob has too, because they're obviously in love. It makes me feel so old to watch them together. But Bob feels he has no right to ask her to be engaged to him since it will be indefinite when they get married. I told him though, that if she loved him, she'd be willing to wait, and he agreed. (December 24)

Following their Christmas celebrations, and after going out each night with Bob and Dorothy, Monday evening Louise gets a chance to write. She tells Herb how much fun she had.

Well, this is the first chance I've had to write to you – incidentally, it's the first night since Wednesday that I've been to bed early.

Saturday night, we went to Pearl's for the Christmas tree, after which Bob, Dorothy and I went to the dance in Arroyo till 11:30, then we went to church in Pismo – midnight mass. Dot is a Catholic. Well – that lasted until 1:30 a.m. Then we had some hamburgers, and home. I got to bed at 2:30 – and up at 9:00 Sunday [Christmas Day].

I typed for Bob then, helped at the Lodge, went to meetings, and then supper at the Lodge – and (the crowning joy!) I had to sit at the kids table with Jean, and play nanny to them. Then Santa Claus came and went. After he left, we danced half an hour, then Bob, Dot, Byron and I went to Pismo.

First we went to Charley Langdons – a cute little place where they sell drinks. Dot and I had a coke and Bob and Byron had Tom Collins. Two of them. Then we went to the dance, but it was no fun. Byron doesn't dance, and wouldn't even try. Bob danced with Dot. Oh, he danced with me twice, and another guy asked me to dance. Well we left there at 12:00 and went back to Charley Langdons and had corned beef sandwiches, and I had seven-up. Then home at 1:30 a.m.

I slept until 9:45 this morning [Monday] and got up and didn't stop to get dressed even, because I had more typing to do for Bob. After dinner, Bob, Dot, Jean and I went to San Luis to take Bob to the bus. Bob and Dot sat in back – imagine! But that was so he could put his arm around her – Anyway, I had to drive. Dot is leaving for L.A. tonight at 11:30 on the bus. Believe it or not, I'm tired! In fact, I hardly know where I'm at.

Bob and Dot are engaged. Although they aren't going to be too definite until June, when he graduates. Then they'll know what he's going to do. He wants to send her a ring, but she says for him to save his money (sounds familiar?) Anyhow, I'm thrilled! Except, her being Catholic makes it rather complicated. (December 26)

She got a letter from Herb that day “And I nearly fainted! For there were two pictures in it” (December 26). She also wrote about the gifts she received for Christmas; many were for the two of them.

Thursday afternoon Louise gets a chance to write again, answering Herb's latest letter.

I went to the dance in Oceano last night again. I had a swell time too. That guy I told you about last week, was there but he wasn't as bad as last week. He hadn't had anything to drink.

Patty's cute. I was dancing with a kid – his name is Ted, he's only 19. He kind of liked me, and Patty noticed it, so after he'd danced with me two or three times, when we came back after the last one, she picked up my hand and said “Look Red.” Poor kid, it was quite a shock. Anyway, Patty also told this other guy I was engaged. (December 29)

January, 1939

Late Sunday, after returning from the show, Louise writes “Well there’s nothing like ending the old year right, and starting the new right too. I received a letter from you yesterday and one today too” (*January 1*). In answering his letters, she reveals concerns.

Evidently, from all I hear, navy life is hard for a woman. I’ll begin to believe it someday. I wonder if you are trying to discourage me?

You’re too pessimistic. Honestly, Herb, you could say you hoped you’d get home sooner. You could say it might be possible.

The next evening Louise tells how they celebrated Flamore’s birthday. “Pearl gave me the day off. ... We went to the matinee and saw ‘The Young in Heart.’ ... Fred, Ebba, Pearl, Flamore, Bernard, Patty and myself present” (*January 2*)

She closes her letter by comparing their horoscopes.

*Want to know something astrological? Your moon squares mine. Squares are bad. It’s something we are going to clash on at times. I guess that’s because we both are stubborn. I am, and you are too! (*January 2*)*

The next day she writes

*Today Mother gave me two small files, made of leather and shaped like a book, that she doesn’t care for much. They have the months on them as well as the alphabet, so I filed all your letters. All the letters you wrote in September I put in September, etc. One file is completely filled – I can’t even shut it. It’s from September 1937 to September 1938. (*January 3*)*

Louise went to the show on Wednesday night, and afterward wrote a short letter to Herb. The next evening, she writes another short letter. She is still anxious to receive his response to her news of what she did on Armistice Day. (*January 5*)

On Friday, Louise finally gets the letter she had been waiting anxiously for, and hoping for.

Oh gee, darling, I don’t know what to say about that wonderful letter. You are the most understanding person I’ve ever known, and you know me better than I know myself.

Herb dear, I guess I was awfully inconsiderate of you in the way I started out my letter, but I never dreamed you’d think I’d stopped loving you. ... I promise I’ll never say anything like that again, that I wrote in that letter.

*All I can say is, I’m so glad it’s you I love, and who loves me. But Herb, I didn’t lose my presence of mind, I don’t think I did. (*January 6*)*

Louise continues to be concerned about Herb writing he might spank her. She feels now that she must directly address this.

*I’m awfully afraid one of us is going to get a surprise some day when we’re married, and it will most likely be me. Referring to that spanking you threaten so often. Why must I be spanked at all? (*January 6*)*

The next evening, she exposes her fear that she might lose him.

Honey, please be careful of yourself, don't let anything ever happen to you. Darling, I'd die if something should ever happen to you. ... Imagine not ever being able to see each other again. Oh, wouldn't it be terrible?

All this comes from reading a book in which a woman's husband and two children were killed in an accident. She nearly went mad – and so would I. that's why I say please take care of yourself. (January 7)

She tells Herb that she is relieved over his response to her kissing a man last November.

You know Herb, I was awfully afraid you'd tease me about kissing Ray [Tom] – that is, after I got your letter in which you warned me about sailors. I'm so glad you didn't. And I'm glad you didn't get angry. In fact, nothing you could have said, could have been better, and helped me more. I want to say thank you. I am so grateful to you for everything. Oh darling, but I love you so – with a love that is deep and lasting, and every letter I get from you, everything you say makes me love you more. (January 7)

Louise found herself in an uncomfortable position after learning something about her brother's girlfriend, Dorothy. She gives Herb the details.

Annie [Patty's mother] came to me and said that the affair between Bob and Dot should be broken off. She didn't want to tell my mother as she said it would break her heart. ...

Annie said that Dot's aunt, Mrs. Brooking [with whom Dot was living in Oceano] found out about Dot, that she still drinks and smokes, and has a sex complex – that there was something between her and her cousin's husband [when she lived with them]. Well, it happened while Marie – her cousin – was in the hospital. When she came back, she made Dot get out.

But it seems Mrs. Brooking told Dot to tell Bob before she became engaged to him, but Dot wouldn't. ... Mrs. Brooking told Dot that she wasn't going to stand by and see Bob's life wrecked, but how do we know it will wreck it? ... Besides, I don't think its half so horrible as Annie and Mrs. Brooking think – everybody makes mistakes.

Enough of that. It helps to tell someone – I kept it bottled up as long as I could.

(January 9)

Then she tells Herb about letters from Ray [Tom]. "I'm not going to keep any of his letters, why should I? He always closes, Love, Ray. I close – 'as ever.' He's going to write to me while on the eastern cruise" (January 9).

Louise is typing her next letter, using Pearl's nice, new typewriter. It is just before 11:00 a.m. and she writes that it is time to start getting dinner ready.

I don't know what to have for dinner either. It sure is a lot of bother planning meals, especially to get a different dessert for every meal. There are so many things that Pearl and Flamore can't eat, which makes it harder. (January 13)

Louise tells Herb how she earned some money from typing.

Byron gave me \$1.05 today for typing 21 pages for him. Boy – a book of illegible geological terms. I got Fred’s big dictionary and when I come to a word, which is quite frequent, that I can’t understand, I look up all the things I think it looks like until I find what it is. I’ve got about a hundred more pages to type. (January 15)

Louise is again feeling bored with life in Halcyon, and she writes “I still have nothing to say – nothing ever happens here, really. The same thing over and over again” (January 16). Then she shares with Herb her concern for his safety.

Patty read the other day about a sailor who was standing some place on the ship during a storm, and a wave came and washed him overboard and he was drowned. So darling, for goodness sake be careful. As I’ve said before, I couldn’t live without you – if there are any typhoons, just don’t thrill at them too much so you’re careless. (January 16)

The next day she is bored again, and writes “When I write to you so often there is nothing to say. I just sit and think and think, but there still seems to be nothing” (January 17).

The guitar orchestra is turning out fine so far – we can play the “Pagan Love Song.” I’m trying to teach them other songs, but when most of them can’t read music, it’s hard to teach. (January 17)

Louise brings up one of the subjects on which their attitudes differ. She writes “I was naughty in my recent letters saying you didn’t seem to care when you come home. I’m sorry. I know you care, but I just want you to say it” (January 18).

Five days later Louise has time to write again, and she tells Herb what she’s been doing.

I moved into the Gust House yesterday, and am there now. I’ve the double room upstairs – its nice and large, and boy are the beds comfortable! ... I’ve got some of your pictures tacked up on the wall beside my bed. Now I shall answer your two letters. (January 23)

She enjoyed reading about his visit with Yoshiko and Gabriel, and their baby. She writes “You had a lot of trouble getting there and back, but I’m sure glad you saw them. I’m glad Yoshiko likes you too” (January 23).

Louise again asks him to send pictures of himself. This time she tries a bit of humor.

Now, I want to ask your advice. I have a boyfriend, who says he loves me – and I’m convinced that he does – and he says he’ll do anything for me, but when I ask him for pictures of himself, for I really want them – why he doesn’t send me any. I’ve asked him, I’ve said please, I’ve bribed, and I’ve threatened – but no pictures. He says – oh, some day. So I wonder if you could tell me what to do next to get those pictures. (January 23)

Again, a long period of time passes before Louise writes again. “It’s been so long since I wrote to you, and I’m really very sorry. But I’ve been so sleepy and tired every night that I haven’t been able to. And in the afternoons, I was also too tired” (January 29).

I've been having a swell time here in the Guest House. My being here is another reason I haven't written. The atmosphere is different. And I had to get you into the room before I could write.

The shows I've seen lately are: "Paris Honeymoon," "There Goes My Heart," "Thanks for the Memory." They were all good.

Louise continues her letter the next afternoon and evening.

Last night I dreamed over and over again that I got some letters from you. That must be because I'm wanting some so much. Because I really do want some letters very much – it's been so long since I have had any.

You know – I don't do much around here that would be interesting to tell you about.

We had a nice birthday party for my mother. Did I tell you she loved your card? ... We had eleven people up at our house for supper.

You still say it will be at least March 1940 before you come back? You should be more hopeful than that.

I've missed your letters a lot these last few days and weeks. It's been nearly two weeks.

(January 30)

The next day she writes another short letter.

I've at last got you into my room now. This room didn't seem natural before – but it does now, since you're here. And you're going to stay here too.

I still have nothing to say – it's been raining off and on today – and freezing cold.

I can hardly make the days go fast enough. It's been so long since I've had a letter. And it's been so long since I've seen you. I'd give anything to be in your arms now and have you kissing me. (January 31)