

Chapter Thirty-Three

Halcyon: Fall, 1939

September, 1939

Louise has been getting medical treatment for the infection in her hands, and it has now been three weeks since she last wrote a letter to Herb. Today she feels she needs to write at least something – even if a short note.

Gee darling – it's been so long since I wrote to you, but my hands just won't get better. It's been six weeks now that I've had them, and so I thought I'd better write to you even if it will only be a little.

I just came from the Doctor where I had a shot in my veins. I get a shot every other day. Once in my arm, twice where I sit down (which by the way was extremely uncomfortable) and now once in my veins. I really don't feel so hot darling – the constant pain is getting me down.

I received the material over a week ago. I'm sorry I didn't tell you sooner. Honey, it is beautiful! I'm just crazy about it. And darling my mother wants to know if you could get about five yards of the same kind of material, and of cream color, for her. She'll send you the money for it. And be sure it's not white – nor any bright colors. (September 12)

Louise is concerned about how the war in Europe might affect their plans to build a life together.

How about the war? If we go in – which we will sooner or later, how does it affect you? And suppose you did have to go, could you come home first? And would you marry me then? Darling – I hope you don't have to go, it would be terrible. (September 12)

Then she closes her letter “Honey, I've a lot to tell you but I really can't write any more. Please forgive me for not writing more. I love you so, I love you a lot” (September 12).

Just before sealing the envelope, she remembers something. She scribbles into the upper margin of her letter: “I thought of you on September 6, but couldn't write. Soon as I get better, I'll write pages and pages” (September 12).

Louise's Letter-Writing

After Louise's letter of September 12 there are no more letters from her in our collection. For the remaining chapters, Louise's story is told by Herb, through his responses to the few letters he actually did receive.

Louise's next letter was written on September 19, and it would have arrived in Manila in late October. Herb picked it up the day after his ship arrived back in Manila from Tsingtao.

The first thing Herb responds to is Louise's update on her medical condition.

I wonder what in the world ever made your resistance so weak to whatever it was that bothered you? Did the doctor know? Gosh you sure had a streak of hard luck for a couple of months. (Herb, October 25)

She bought a car in Santa Barbara for their use after they get married.

I was tickled when I read about "our" car. Maybe because it's the first car I've ever even partially owned. And I'm itching to drive it; and I first just about have to learn to drive all over again. I'm glad you got it as soon as you did Louise. You used a lot of common sense in doing it. ... And if you say it's a swell car, I know it is. How'd you come to learn about it; or did you just go down to Santa Barbara to buy any car. And its very reasonable too darling. ... Boy; gray, with red wheels. That's a nice color scheme. ... Yes, a Chevy is a very economical car when it comes to gas and oil. (Herb, October 25)

There had been a heat wave in California. "I don't wonder you were uncomfortably hot. I read about the long heat wave you had then, and now you've had another since then to make matters worse" (Herb, October 25).

Louise recently visited Yoshiko. "I'll bet Yoshiko's baby is cute. And will you give her and Gabriel my best wishes, next time you see them darling" (Herb, October 25).

She wrote that she feels bad about not writing more often. "Darling, you have no right to apologize for not answering my letters sooner, when it wasn't possible for you to" (Herb, October 25).

Louise figured out how to not let Bernard's behavior get to her.

If you say so darling, I guess Bernard has been doing a lot there lately. He does fit in well with any work connected with the Temple, doesn't he? I guess you are right, just don't let anything he says in an off moment bother you and you'll be all right.

(Herb, October 25)

She wrote about her disbelief in the idea of Herb spanking her.

Oh, so you think I wouldn't spank you? Well, my darling, you just do something real foolish some day and see if I won't? Huh, how much could you kick or fight? Remember you'll have a rugged sailor to deal with. (Herb, October 25)

Louise responded to Herb's stories of the Russian girl he became friends with. She also commented on the photo of her. Herb thought she was jealous.

Oh, now I hear what you have to say about the Russian girl who I was slightly acquainted with at Tsingtao this summer. ... Did I say Tamaro was pretty? No, she isn't; I agree with you. Just wistful looking or something; don't you think so?

I had just about completely forgotten about her until your letter reminded me of this summer.

Darling, that laugh in those pictures was for you; and I didn't laugh because of anyone else. Besides, Smitty took those pictures of me, not Tamaro. I doubt if she knows how to use a camera.

And wait till you see my album with all the pictures of my other Russian girl friends in it?? Ha, sounds like my darling was a wee bit jealous of Tamaro. (Herb, October 25)

She remarked about how long they have had to wait until they could be together. Herb tries to make sense out of how they perceive time.

Yes, Louise two and a half years is a long time, but that's about all over with now. I'll bet you had about the same thing happen to you that I did, by now. Once the time got under five months all of a sudden one day, I realized how little time there really was left; and I've been happy ever since. I know I won't spend another day worrying about the time. And I'll bet you'll do the same in the next, last months. (October 25)

Louise also responded to Herb's outburst of intense dislike for the Navy.

I knew that some day I'd get an answer to the one letter I wrote; and now I've about-faced since then.

Yes, I sure was angry at the Navy for a time there when I missed out on an exam, and angry at our old Supply Officer. But he is gone, and since then I have been able to take an exam which might turn out to be lucky for me. And if I make it [second class], it would put me on top of the world as far as the Navy is concerned. In other words, it might be a darn good idea for me to stick with it then.

And here I read how I told you I was determined to go out. ... Yes, I try to fool myself at times, but I've a hunch that I'll stick with this Navy because I know and you'll know that's about the most sensible thing for us to do. But as I always said, it depends upon your reaction to being a Navy wife, what we shall ultimately do.

Honey I must be an enigma to you. I can see that I just about had you convinced that I was going out, didn't I? And it's hard on you. I'm sorry darling; I didn't think I'd blow up like that any more when I know my feelings are only going to be temporary. But you're right; it did help to let off steam to you. (Herb, October 27)

October, 1939

It had been a long time since Louise last wrote to Herb.

For the first time in history, a President's Liner brought in a big bunch of mail the other day and I didn't get any letters on it. It's not that that worries me, it's the fact that there probably weren't any letters from you because you weren't able to write, which means that your hands must have been bothering you a good deal longer. (Herb, November 2)

Finally, her hands improved a bit. On October 6 she wrote a letter to Herb, which he didn't receive until over a month later. His reply reveals a little about what's happening with her.

I'm happy that your hands were so much better. I sure hope that you don't have to ever go through misery like that again.

Gee my sweets, you had to take medicine until you were "medicine dizzy;" didn't you.

So "Betsie's" a gas eater? But some minor adjustment will probably take care of that. Have a mechanic look into it some time.

Gee sweets I have no room to complain when you didn't get a letter for about three weeks. Don't know how that happened unless it was on account of the poor connections we had in Tsingtao. ... I'm sorry hon that you didn't hear from me for such a long time. Lately I hope that I've been making up for it. (Herb, November 13)

Gosh you have your troubles with "Betsie," don't you hon. Now it's the gas gauge. And it uses so much gas you say. (Herb, November 18)

Herb received two "long wonderful letters" from Louise, sent around late October.

Louise wrote that she had received eight letters from him all at once. He explained in his reply that for a period of time, all of the mail being sent out of Tsingtao had been held up for some reason. (Herb, November 27)

Louise still insisted that he stop telling her that there's only a little time left until he returns. She continued to feel anxious about having to wait for him for so long. He wrote back:

I'm not as darn cheerful about it; I'm just trying to fool ourselves. Seems as though I can 'psychologize' myself, but not you, hon. Yes, that's what I do. And I also try to keep busy enough all the time so that time never hangs on my hands. If minutes go by quickly, then also do hours, days and weeks. But then I'm in a better position to do that than are you. (Herb, November 27)

She asked about making decisions in their relationship, to which he replied "No hon, when it comes to something important in our lives, you will always have an equal say in the "yes's" or "no's" of it" (Herb, November 27).

Herb responds to Louise's letter of October 30. She wrote about plans for their wedding, to which he replied.

So we are having a fairly large wedding? You sort of scared me hon because you know how I feel about that. But then, when you explained; I guess that will be very nice.

Flamore maid of honor; Bernard best man of course; and Patty, Olive and Jean bridesmaids. ... And we have to invite everybody to it, don't we? Brr; I'm going to be nervous, I'm sure. (Herb, November 30)

November, 1939

Louise's next letter was mailed around mid-November. Herb responded.

I now have a letter of yours to answer hon. A long sweet one as usual.

Gee but I'm glad to hear that you are back at Pearl's and quite well again Louise. Honey, I know how black those couple of months must have been for you.

It is strange how taken for granted the war is, over there. ... I hope prices don't go up too much there. ... My, my; meat and sugar are up, eh?

Gosh, you've been unlucky haven't you, with all the flat tires you've had? ... Anyhow you just get anything you want with our money. (Herb, December 11).

December, 1939

Louise sent a short letter to Herb, probably around the first of December. Herb responded.

That car gives you some additional worries, doesn't it sweets? But still we have a nice car; and that's something. So don't worry about how much it costs to keep it in shape my love. (Herb, December 25)

A few days later Louise wrote a long letter to Herb and enclosed a Christmas card. Herb replied to several passages.

Seems funny to get answers to my letters written in Tsingtao. Gosh, and now I'm hearing about the time I took the examination last September (when I had such high hopes).

Do you think we can afford to have a radio in our car and home both? If you think so, then I guess it would be nice to have a radio in our car. So if you want to, go ahead and get one Louise.

I sure am happy darling, that you are all better. I hope those scars [on her hands] don't mean anything; what counts is that you have your health again.

So you haven't figured out our honeymoon yet, but our wedding is all settled. Well hon, I'll admit it would be very nice to have our wedding on Easter Sunday and we will if that's the way you really want it.

Well since you have it all figured out how long it will take before we can get married, I guess I'll just have to be patient. Nothing much else to do. It will be fun getting reacquainted all right.

I love the way you end your letters, Louise. You show me so fully how much you love me. (Herb, December 25)

Louise's last letters to Herb were all delivered to the Henderson upon its second contact with Manila, on February 3rd. Her letters were dated December 6, 21 and 31. Herb began answering them a week later.

I'm glad that you didn't mind a money order for Christmas. It was about the only thing I could think of.

You start to clean the car and you end up with having someone else [finish] it. But you sure do have your car troubles. However, that's to be expected when you have a second-hand car. And it was best to get everything all fixed up.

So, you are having a [wedding] shower on February 3rd? And you sure have a lot of things already. Sheets, silverware, etc. Bet that puff will be warm!

Pearl wrote me a nice letter. ... She said Bernard was ill. I hope he's feeling better and my regards to him, darling.

(Herb, February 10, 1940)