

# Situation normal?

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awoke only with difficulty. As he blinked his eyes, there stood Curtis, again in a starched, immaculately white uniform. On the shoulder it read «Med. Center. Extra. Night».

«Don't sit up, for heaven's sake,» Curtis said. His tone was light, almost bantering, and Hank was grateful. He could bear no pity now. «How do you feel, Hank?»

Hank tried to answer the usual but the usual wouldn't put in an appearance. «I feel alive now...», he finally brought out. «Newly built. With a lot of rubble still to be cleared away. But how come you are here, in uniform? Not that I'm not happy to see you.»

Curtis grinned—the first free grin Hank had seen. «I work here one night a week. It's illegal but I don't care. I am going to transfer from Lenox, anyhow. I don't like to be where I'm not wanted.»

Tentatively, Hank stretched out a hand. It hurt in the lower vertebrae but he had to do it. Slowly, Curtis took the hand and squeezed it between his two bony, thin hands which were not unlike those of Dr. Bill. Only, they had a prettier color. «You saved my life, Curtis,» Hank started. «Without you, I...»

«Hush, child, I'm going to send you the bill, you know that. When will you show me your place and give me that promised drink?»

«When I'm out and back to my old life. No, that's wrong. My old life died on the operating table here. It really started dying when you spoke to me at Harter, Curtis. You'll have to help me rebuild those ruins...»

Curtis got up. «I have no building permit, Hank, but I'll help you. A nurse can handle all emergencies. We've been taught that in Nursing School. And you, Hank Mercer, have been the toughest and nicest emergency I've ever known. You'll be out here next Friday, by the way. I'll take you home if your Larry...»

«Larry is not my Larry, and he has nothing to do with anything,» Hank said. All of a sudden, his voice sounded stronger than he had heard it for a long while. «You'll spend that weekend at Bank Street. I still need help.»

Curtis nodded. The green-blue eyes were grave, and there came a tenderness to Hank he could feel like something physical. Then Curtis turned and was gone. When the night nurse arrived with the pain killer, Hank shook his head. «I feel all right, Miss Madeline. I don't need a pain killer now. I think I'm going to be cured.»

## Situation normal?

by P. NITE

As I start this I think I will probably never finish it—and yet I know if I do put it all down I shall feel better afterwards.

We had completed two plays for the service personnel by the end of September, 1958. I played the lead in the first one and was assistant to the director for the second—both had been well received. The participants of the plays decided to form a little theater group on the base. I was elected as one of the officers and was the only civilian in the group.

That was the night it happened; I mean the night that I was elected to this little theater group, the night that I first knew Bill existed... It was so strange too because Bill had participated in both other plays and I had spoken to him before. He had been working on props and stage settings and had also been to several of my other shows on the base. To this day I don't remember seeing him before that

night—here's what happened: The meeting was over and I saw Bill (I thought for the first time) and spoke to him to welcome him, in my capacity as an officer of the newly formed organization, as a new member. As we talked I learned he had been with us through the other two plays and at the time I thought it was strange that I had never noticed him. I verified that he was telling the truth and then asked him to join us in the car that was taking me to my apartment in the city.

In retrospect I often wondered what attracted me to this boy that first night. I know of several things without stopping to think; his neatness—his curly hair was almost always combed and his clothes neat and pressed; his charming good looks attracted everyone and he was immediately liked by everybody (when he was noticed at all for he was very quiet). Yes! I know that's what attracted me most of all—his humility, his serene quiet dignity—without being haughty or shy either. He was there when needed most and other than that worked quietly and efficiently.

And so it was from then on. He was there when I needed him most, quiet and undemanding, most always happy and always willing to do more than his half in anything we did. He had a beautiful body, well muscled and proportioned from the hard work he has known all of his life. When we dug the garden that first spring we worked together, he did part of my portion. I hope the neighbors didn't notice that I spent a lot of time watching those smooth muscles turning the soil. The smoothness and coordination of his body was the oft written «poetry of motion». Many times when I would be tired from a hard day at work I would be surprised to find him at home, not having expected him from the base until later. He would have hot coffee ready for me and a supper by candle light that had been prepared superbly. When personal tragedy struck my family he was there with his strength of soul to comfort me. And so many, many other occasions, too numerous to relate, formed our nearly two years together.

Anyway, that first night, he joined us—the driver and myself. I was still not thinking about Bill in a personal way. It was a week-night. When we got to my apartment they both came in and we sat around small-talking for a while. About ten they decided to go. Very casually I asked the driver if he would like to spend the upcoming weekend with me to break the monotony of the service life. (Bill later told me he was rather miffed by this.)

The next night, also a week-night, much the same thing happened: After the rehearsal of our new play I was taken home by the same person and I had asked Bill to go along. Except this time my interest in Bill had grown and I began going through those same things that most of the readers of this are familiar with! —I wondered if he was gay, if he would accept an invitation, or if he was straight, would I be able to «make out» with him??

Bill was twenty-four and I was twenty-eight. He had accepted my invitation for the following weekend, and another weekend, and another, and then after work any night he could get away. By the time Halloween of that year rolled around we both knew we wanted to spend a great deal of time together. Also I had learned a good deal more about him: First, that he had been straight until that weekend he'd spent with me (except that he had a couple of adventures where he had been picked up...); second, that he knew he had gay tendencies and wanted what we now were both enjoying; finally, and most important, that he wanted it to last at least the two remaining service years. He had not thought beyond that.

Our romance grew and Bill lived with me when he could get away from the base. We began to make plans for the time when he would get out of the service and his time and decisions would be his own.

The thing most often said about Bill and myself, by the group that we ran with, was that it was too good to last.... I guess it was! «Our Group» was a wonderful bunch of people. We, about fifteen of us, did everything together and

we were happy during that year. Bill and I watched many romances bud and a while later separate, as is the rule, rather than the exception, in this life. And our group watched and waited for something to happen to us. «Ours could not last», they said—several things were noted and often repeated about us:—neither of us was feminine, we both liked to and did cook and do domestic things well, we both liked and participated in sports. All these things, they asserted, although we had much in common, would in the end be our down-fall.

Our balance was in the fact that I am an extrovert and noisy, and sometimes boisterous, always going and ready to give or to go to a party. Bill counter-balanced and calmed me. Thus I had a chance to watch what I was doing instead of tearing through and later wondering whether I had accomplished everything I had set out to do.

Without ever demanding, he had a wonderful way of calming me: He'd sit down, light his cigarette, and with almost a smile on his face—watch me, until I, right in the middle of doing six things all at once, would suddenly realize that he wasn't replying to my comments. Just sitting there with that almost-smile on his face. I'd start in again at about 60 mph hollering for him to come on, but his quiescence was arresting and I'd start and stop several times before I'd realize that I'd been «tearing» again. He was right though, I got more accomplished at a sensible rate.

We began to hear rumors in the autumn of 1959 that there was a shake-up on the base over an officer who had been caught with a boy—you know the old story. Then one day a friend came to us who was in the service too and warned us that his room-mate had turned himself in as being homosexual and had implicated everyone he knew, in the city and on the base, that was gay. We were forewarned. We agreed on what we would tell them (if only we had stuck to it).

Several weeks passed and then it struck as we knew it must. Even being forewarned it was a hell of a shock! They called me at work and insisted I come to the base to speak to them immediately—they would pick me up outside. They had already gotten a statement from Bill by threatening public exposure. They used the same threat on me and I had merely to agree to the statement they had written for Bill. I did. Bill was handed an undesirable discharge three months later. I had left the city to start a new life here and Bill joined me as soon as he got out.

Because of the type of discharge he had gotten he had a difficult time finding a job and our troubles were not yet over. After being together for four months Bill's father suffered three heart attacks in a month's time and Bill was forced to go in April of 1960, back to his home town in the mid-west where he is today, writing me twice a week and calling me every Friday night at the same time. I cannot join him because neither of us wants to live there and everything would have to be very secret. His never-understanding parents already suspect so much that I had to stop writing to him.

Does my true tale stop here? I've said nothing of the quiet times we spent together just content to know, «that look across the room» meant, «all the world was right for us» and our quiet times together, «was all our world». We often wondered later, why society could not just let us alone and leave us to whatever happiness was to be found in a too-often unhappy world?

I have indeed finished writing this but I can barely see the page and my hands tremble so I wonder that I find any of the correct keys on my typewriter.

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