

★ WAVES *of* FREEDOM • 3 ★

WHEN
TIDES
TURN

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Dedicated to the 86,000 women
who served in the WAVES during World War II.
Your patriotism, pioneering spirit,
and enthusiasm inspire us today.

1

Boston, Massachusetts

Thursday, July 30, 1942

A touch of kindness and enthusiasm could transform a person's spirit, and Quintessa Beaumont delighted in participating in the process.

"This is lovely on you, Mrs. Finnegan." Quintessa lined a box with tissue paper on the counter at Filene's.

Her customer giggled and tucked a gray curl behind her ear. "Listen to me. I sound like a schoolgirl. All because of a blouse."

"Not just any blouse. The perfect blouse for you." Quintessa laid the floral fabric in neat folds in the box. At first, Mrs. Finnegan had struck her as drab and tired and dowdy. Shame on her for thinking that way—so shallow. But as Quintessa had assisted the older lady in her search, she'd sensed a sweet dreaminess. Mrs. Finnegan deserved a blouse that reflected who she was inside, something to make her happy and confident. Quintessa had found it.

She settled the lid on the box and handed it to Mrs.

Finnegan. “Thank you for your purchase. It was a pleasure meeting you.”

“The pleasure was mine. You certainly have a gift, Miss Beaumont.” Mrs. Finnegan strolled down the aisle with a new bounce in her step.

Quintessa returned to the sales floor and straightened racks of summer blouses, which needed to be sold to make room for autumn merchandise.

Filene’s fifth floor boasted fashionable women’s apparel, designed to meet the War Production Board’s standards to limit use of fabric. For the past ten months, Quintessa had rotated among Filene’s various shops, learning the business and the wares. When her year in training was complete, she could finally put her business degree to use in the offices.

A few ladies browsed the racks. With so many women working now due to the war, business was slow on weekday mornings.

A figure in white caught her eye—a naval officer with a familiar determined gait. Quintessa’s heart lurched. Dan Avery? What was her roommate’s oldest brother doing here?

She smoothed her blonde curls but stopped herself. Why bother? The man was already married—to the United States Navy.

Although his stride didn’t waver, he gazed from side to side like a lost child, frowning and squinting. Then he spotted Quintessa, and the frown and squint disappeared.

He was looking for her. Another lurch, with a tingle this time, but Quintessa shoved it aside. She tilted her head. “Lieutenant Daniel Avery. Whatever brings you to Filene’s better blouses?”

“My mom’s birthday.” Dan rubbed the back of his neck and eyed the clothing racks as if they were a fleet of enemy vessels. “I tried to bribe Lillian to do my shopping for me,

but she refused. Some sister. Told me you'd help me find something."

Quintessa loved her roommate's forthright nature. "Does the bribe apply to me too?"

He didn't smile. He rarely did, and she didn't think she'd ever heard him laugh, but his dark eyes twinkled. A non-sense man, but not humorless. "I imagine Filene's disapproves of employees taking bribes."

"I'll settle for the commission." Shifting her thoughts to her former Sunday school teacher, Quintessa contemplated the summer blouses. "Let's see. Your mother is about Lillian's size and coloring."

"Plumper and grayer."

No wonder the man was still a bachelor. "We would never say that here at Filene's. She's more mature."

"I'd hope so. Raising the seven of us, she's earned her gray."

Quintessa smiled and flipped through the blouses. Mrs. Avery handled the business end of her husband's boatyard, and she was neither frilly nor frumpy.

"How about this?" Quintessa held up a tailored cream blouse with a brown yoke and short brown sleeves. An embroidered green vine with delicate yellow flowers softened the border between cream and brown.

"I'll take it."

"Let's see what else we have."

"Why?" Dan gestured to the blouse. "Is it her size?"

"Yes."

"Do you think she'll like it?"

"Well, yes, but—"

"I'll take it."

The man certainly knew his mind. One of many things she found attractive about him. "All right then."

Quintessa took the blouse to the cash register and rang

up the purchase. “How are things at the Anti-Submarine Warfare Unit?”

One dark eyebrow lifted, and he pulled out his wallet. “We’re making progress, but personally, I want to get back out to sea.”

“That’s where the excitement is.”

“And the real work. We finally have convoys along the East Coast, and we’ve pretty much driven the U-boats away. But they’re back to their old hunting grounds in the North Atlantic, and they’re wreaking havoc in the Caribbean and the Gulf of Mexico. The battle’s constantly changing, and we have to stay on top of it.”

Quintessa focused on making change. Concentration was always difficult when Dan Avery spoke about the war or ships or the Navy. Passion lit the strong lines of his face and animated his firm mouth. If only he’d remove his white officer’s cap and run his hand through his wavy black hair. The wildness of it.

She puffed out a breath. “Here’s your change. Let me wrap that for you.”

“Very well.” He slipped the coins in the pocket of his white trousers and glanced at his wristwatch.

Quintessa gritted her teeth as she pleated the tissue paper inside the box. What was wrong with her? She’d always been drawn to men who showered her with starry-eyed adoration. Now she was drawn to a man who looked right through her as if she had nothing of substance to stop his gaze.

Shame shriveled up her insides. How could she blame him? He had to know she’d come to Boston to throw herself at his younger brother, Jim—who turned out to be in love with her best friend, Mary Stirling. Dan had also been in Boston when Quintessa was dating Clifford White—who turned out to be married. Surely Dan saw her as a silly, selfish woman with poor judgment.

He'd be right.

She worked up a smile and presented him with the wrapped package. "Here you go. Thank you for your purchase."

"Thank you for your help. Mom will love it." He tipped his cap to her and strode away.

Just as well. She needed to set her head on straight before she started another romance. The past year had turned her topsy-turvy.

Miss Doyle arrived to relieve Quintessa for her lunch break, but Quintessa headed up to the offices on the seventh floor instead. Her former boss, Mr. Garrett, had retired last week, and she'd only briefly met his replacement, Mr. Young.

First she slipped into the restroom, powdered her nose, freshened her lipstick, and straightened her chic golden-brown suit jacket. She smiled at her reflection. Feminine, but smart and professional. Perfect for this meeting.

The business offices buzzed with a tantalizing sense of purpose. Mr. Young's office door stood open, and she lightly rapped on the doorjamb.

Her boss raised his salt-and-pepper head, grinned at her, and stood to shake her hand. "Miss Beaumont, isn't it? Yes, yes. I don't have the final sales figures for July, but you're in line to be one of the top salesgirls again. A true asset to Filene's."

An excellent start. "Thank you, Mr. Young."

He crossed his arms over his charcoal gray suit. "What can I do for you?"

"I wanted to speak with you about the next step in my training program."

"Training?" He narrowed one eye. "You're the last person who needs sales training."

A sick feeling settled in her belly. Hadn't Mr. Garrett told Mr. Young why she was here? "Mr. Garrett hired me to work here in the business offices, but—"

“You’re a secretary?”

Quintessa maintained her professional smile. “No, sir. I have a bachelor’s degree in business. Mr. Garrett wanted to give me a year of sales experience before starting here. He felt it was important for his assistant—”

“Assistant?” Mr. Young winced as if he had a toothache. “That might have been Mr. Garrett’s plan, but I just hired a man. These offices are no place for a young lady.”

“Unless she’s a secretary.”

“I’m glad you understand.” His face brightened. “Besides, you’re excellent at sales. Why would we waste your talents on boring old numbers and paperwork? And why would we hide that pretty face behind office doors?”

A pretty face. That’s all she was.

“Now, off you go.” Mr. Young guided her out his office door. “That’s a good girl. Go make Filene’s proud.”

Quintessa trudged down the hallway. She’d come to Boston for nothing. She’d worked for her degree for nothing. *Lord, what’s the reason for all this? What do you want me to do?*

Patriotic posters by the elevator reminded employees to put part of their paychecks into war bonds. The nation was at war, and everyone was working together. Her roommates Mary Stirling and Yvette Lafontaine worked at the Boston Navy Yard, where American warships were built and repaired. Her other roommate, Lillian Avery, worked as a pharmacist, freeing men to fight.

But Quintessa Beaumont was only good for selling blouses.



After a day like today, Quintessa needed this. She opened the door to Robillard’s Bakery and inhaled the scents of bread and pastry and hospitality.

“*Bonsoir, ma petite* Quintessa.” Madame Celeste Robillard raised a plump hand in greeting.

“*Bonsoir*, Madame Robillard.”

“I will be with you in a minute,” the bakery owner said in French, Quintessa’s father’s native tongue.

“*Merci*.” Her French roommate, Yvette, had introduced her to Robillard’s, a gathering place for Boston’s French expatriates and refugees.

With sugar on ration, Robillard’s carried fewer pastries and more breads, but today a row of *éclairs* called from the glass display case. Why not? If she were fat, Mr. Young might *want* to hide her in the business offices.

Maybe she’d buy two *éclairs*. Or three.

Guilt zinged through her. No, she’d buy four, one for each roommate. How could she forget her friends? After all, she planned to indulge in their sympathy this evening. Didn’t they deserve compensation in pastry form?

“Oh, *ma petite*. You are sad.” Madame Robillard’s brown eyes crinkled.

Quintessa waved her hand in airy dismissal. “Nothing an *éclair* can’t fix.”

“*Oui*.” Madame Robillard opened a pink pasteboard box.

“Four, *si’l vous plait*.”

“You are so kind. Such a good friend.”

That’s what everyone thought.

Madame Robillard stopped and studied Quintessa. Wiry curls in brown and gray framed her face, escapees from the loose bun at the nape of her neck.

Quintessa propped up her smile.

“Come, come.” Madame Robillard abandoned the *éclairs*, shoved open the half-door in the counter, grabbed Quintessa’s arm, and guided her to the back wall. “Paris is the cure for sadness.”

Quintessa had to smile at the Philippe Beaumont lithograph of the Pont Neuf, from Papa’s youth in Paris, before he’d come to America in 1910 and had fallen in love with

Mama. His early work sparkled with color and light, influenced by the Postimpressionists.

Madame Robillard squeezed Quintessa's arm. "You are sad because of Yvette, *non*?"

"Yvette?" Quintessa blinked at the tiny woman. "Why? Is something wrong?"

"Have you not noticed? She is not herself. At our meetings, what she says is tuned down."

"Toned down?"

"*Oui*. I am glad she is not so hotheaded, but I worry. It is not like her."

Quintessa had never attended one of the meetings with Yvette's French friends, but Yvette was always one to speak her mind. "Maybe she's preoccupied with Henri."

"Henri Dubois? *Non*." Madame Robillard fluttered her hand in front of her chest. "They are like brother and sister."

"Not anymore. Last week she told me they've fallen in love."

"*Non*, it cannot be. A woman in love is happy, not suspicious, always looking over her shoulder. Yvette is jumpy. Like a little flea."

Come to think of it, last night while cooking dinner, Yvette had jumped when the egg timer dinged. Quintessa patted Madame Robillard's hand. "I'm sure she's fine. Aren't we all blessed to have another mother watching over us?"

"You are too kind." The baker pressed her hand to her chest. "You young people are far from home with no one to look after you. And here I am, far from my Paris and my sons and my grandchildren. We must be family for each other. And now I must get to work."

Quintessa followed her back to the counter. An evening newspaper lay in an untidy mess on an empty table, so Quintessa picked it up.

The headlines made her shudder. Eight German saboteurs

had landed in the US by U-boat in June and were under trial for their lives, with the verdict expected any day. And the Nazi army was advancing in the Soviet Union, unstoppable.

Awful, awful. She folded the paper to hide the madness.

“Navy making WAVES.” She stood still and read the article. That morning, President Franklin Roosevelt had signed a bill establishing Women Accepted for Voluntary Emergency Service, the women’s branch of the US Naval Reserve.

Back in May, the Women’s Army Auxiliary Corps had been formed, and magazines showcased young ladies in olive drab uniforms. Now young ladies would parade in navy blue.

Purposeful women contributing to the war effort, selflessly serving the nation.

“*Ma petite?* Are you all right?”

“Yes.” Quintessa’s vision cleared. “I know what I’m going to do.”