

The Wisdom of Hollis Maynell

Pen pals were common during World War II, but this one started in an unusual way. Lt. John Blanchard picked up a used poetry book in a Florida bookstore. He found himself intrigued with notes penciled in the margin. The neat handwriting reflected a thoughtful soul and an insightful mind. In the front of the book, he found the previous owner's name: Miss Hollis Maynell. He bought the book. With some effort, he looked up her address and found she lived in New York. He wrote a letter introducing himself and inviting her to correspond. A week later he was shipped overseas to Europe.

During the next year and a half, many letters went back and forth and a romance blossomed. Hollis proved to be a wonderful writer and the woman revealed in her letters touched John's heart. Her warmth kept him going through many a tough time during the war. He requested a photograph, but she replied, "If you really care, it won't matter what I look like."

Now Lt. Blanchard was finally home and anxiously waiting to meet the woman whose heart he knew, but whose face he did not. She had written, "I will meet you at Grand Central Station at 7 pm You will know me by the red rose in my lapel." What a romantic she was! John straightened his uniform and studied the crowd.

It was 7 pm exactly when a young woman came toward him. She was tall and graceful, with curling blonde hair and eyes as blue as cornflowers. In her pale blue suit, she looked like walking springtime to John. She looked at him with a trace of a smile and murmured, "Going my way, soldier?" He shook his head and she just kept walking.

Then he saw Hollis Maynell. She was standing directly behind the young woman. She was past 40, with a plump face and wisps of grey hair tucked under her hat. And there was the red rose in her lapel.

The woman in blue was walking quickly away. John felt as if he were being split in two, so keen was his desire to follow her. But he had spent more than a year waiting to meet Hollis. Her spirit had kept him going through those long months in Europe. And there she stood. Her face was gentle and sensible and her grey eyes held a kind twinkle. This wouldn't be love, but perhaps a valued friendship for which he would always be grateful.

John saluted her and held out his poetry book to identify himself. "I am Lt. John Blanchard, and you must be Miss Maynell. I am happy to meet you at last. May I take you to dinner?"

Her face broadened into a smile. "I don't know what this is about, son, but the young lady in the blue suit begged me to wear this rose. She said if you were to ask me out to dinner, I was to tell you she is waiting in the little restaurant across the street. She said it was some kind of test."

I admire the wisdom of Hollis Maynell, and I admire Lt. Blanchard for passing the test!