

*up the steps, but she stumbles and drops the laundry. She goes back down the steps and crosses to the phone. She fumbles with it trying to pick up the receiver, then dials zero. During this, we see a man pass the window outside on his way to the street door. Into phone.) Fire department, please, hurry! (Pause.) Hello? ... I hate to ... Hello? ... I hate to ask you, but I think there's something burning ... I said I think something's burning. And I'm blind. ... I can smell it! I smell smoke! Could you send someone over? (Sound: Door buzzer. Into phone.) Hang on, someone's at my door. (Calls.) Wait a minute! (Sound: Door buzzer. Susan puts the receiver down and runs up the steps to the door.) I'm coming! I'm coming! (Susan opens the door and — Mike enters. He wears a Marine lieutenant's uniform with tie, cap, and military trench coat. He carries a duffel and a package.)*

MIKE. Mrs. Hendrix — ?

SUSAN. Am I on fire?

MIKE. What?

SUSAN. There's a fire, something's burning! (Susan turns, starts back down the steps, and trips. Mike grabs her just in time.)

MIKE. Easy now!

SUSAN. Can you see it anywhere? I'm blind!

MIKE. (Looks around.) I got it. (Mike sets down his duffel and the package and grabs the ashtray off the kitchen counter. He dumps it into the sink, turning on the faucet just long enough to put out the burning butt.) All clear. Fire's out.

SUSAN. Thank God ... What was it?

MIKE. Ashtray. Cigarette caught a gum wrapper on fire.

SUSAN. Little...! Where was it?

MIKE. The ashtray? On the thing under the mirror.

SUSAN. I don't know why I can't tell where smoke's coming from! I can smell it, but I can never find where it is! ... I don't know you, do I?

MIKE. Uhm, no. My name's Mike Talman. I was in Italy with Sam Hendrix.

SUSAN. In the Marines?

MIKE. We were attached to the same unit.

SUSAN. Ohh! You just missed him.

MIKE. You're kidding.

SUSAN. He won't be back till late tonight. Oh! I'm Sam's wife, Susan.

MIKE. Nice to meet.

SUSAN. He's going to be so sorry he missed you.

MIKE. It's my fault, I shouldn't have let it go until the last minute. I'm headed down to Washington this afternoon.

SUSAN. Do you live in New York?

MIKE. No, I was on forty-eight-hour leave. Me and four other guys got a suite up at the Astor. I was on my way to the station when it hit me this is where Sam ended up.

SUSAN. Are the other fellows from the same unit?

MIKE. Actually ... (Picks up the laundry from the steps.) Here, you lost some of your, uhm, lady things.

SUSAN. Thanks.

MIKE. Actually, these are guys from back in boot camp, Sam wouldn't know 'em from Adam. Can I give you a hand with that, Mrs. Hendrix? (Susan is trying to put the laundry back in the basket.)

SUSAN. Susan. No, I have to do this by myself. You never know when you might have your underwear all over the place and no passerby to swoop down and save you. This is Sam's reasoning.

MIKE. Sounds like Sam's way of getting out of doing laundry.

SUSAN. The thought had occurred to me. (Susan gets most of the laundry back into the basket. A sock hasn't made it, and Mike notices. Without telling her, he picks it up and drops it into the basket quietly so as not to let her know.) I missed that one, huh?

MIKE. Impressive.

SUSAN. (By way of explanation.) A brush of air and the scent of bleach. Did you know immediately when you came in?

MIKE. That you can't see?

SUSAN. Thank you for that. Most people say, "You're blind." Like, "This is what you are," not, "This is what you can't do anymore."

MIKE. So it's not something since birth...?

SUSAN. I was in a car accident a year and a half ago. They were able to fix everything but the headlights. Doctor's joke.

MIKE. I met Sam in a car accident.

SUSAN. (Almost laughs.) Really?

MIKE. I was driving our Jeep outside Palermo. Suddenly Sam yells, "Down!" and shoves my face into the steering wheel. He'd seen a reflection up ahead. Piano wire. The Germans string it across roads and bridges to slow us down. If you're going just 20 miles an hour, it'll decapitate you. The one Sam saw cut right through the windshield.

SUSAN. ... He never told me that.

MIKE. That surprise you?