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## Huntsville, the Arsenal, and Miss Susie: Recollections of Nancy Dickson

In early September 1941, three months before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, my husband, Tom Dickson, learned that a new plant was being constructed at Huntsville, Alabama. The plant was to be under the supervision of the Corps of Engineers for the Chemical Warfare Service and several of the surveyors he knew were going to work there. The work might possibly last for more than a year, and many men like him who had struggled to earn a living in the lean years of the Depression in the South were flocking to Huntsville. As the Reserves had just the month before been called up, there would be jobs in military camps and munitions plants opening up all around the country in what was still known as the "defense program" of President Roosevelt.

Even when we learned that the product of this manufacturing facility would be various types of poison gas, none of the outraged horror which seizes upon the innocents of today caused us to reconsider. Memories of Germany's first use of poison gas in World War I were still green in many families; my favorite uncle had died of its effects. It was assumed that the Nazis would not scruple to use it and that the United States must be prepared to counter any such plan with equivalent weapons. There was at this time an added sense of urgency; anyone who could read or listen to the radio knew that it was only a matter of time until we were drawn into the war. The Nazis now occupied most of Western Europe, and in June had attacked Russia, their partner in crime in the Molotov Pact of 1939. If Russia should again come to terms with the Germans, the position of our country would be perilous indeed.

Probably because of this unspoken sense of common danger, the Huntsville people gave the newcomers a kindly welcome. And, there were many newcomers, largely from the South — Tennessee, Mississippi, Georgia, and other places in Alabama; mostly men without their wives and families, unless they were married to childless women like

me who could find secretarial or clerical work in the offices of the Architect-Engineer, *Whitman, Requardt & Smith of Baltimore*, the General Contractor, *Kershaw, Butler, Engineers Ltd.*, the Corps of Engineers, or the Chemical Warfare Service.

Tommy returned from his successful scouting expedition to Huntsville to say that he had a job as a surveyor laying out warehouses, roads, and drainage facilities for WRS, and that he had rented a bedroom for us in a house near the jobsite where a friend of his also had a room. We would have to eat our meals at the cafeteria on the job or at a cafe. Having given notice to my employer, we packed our clothing, coffee table, record player, and several 78-RPM records (breakable) in the back of the 1939 black Chevrolet we had bought secondhand the year before for \$300 and set out for Huntsville, whose claim was to be known as "the watercress capital of the world."

As early as we arrived, that is, while surveying was still just beginning, the effects of the new money were already evident in the cafe where we stopped for hamburgers on the outskirts of town. The waist-high booths were so new that the shining varnish could not disguise the odor of rosin from the recently cut pine planks of which both walls and booths were built. Something else new to me was the sight of a large group of young officers in nearby booths. They were still wearing their summer white uniforms with gold buttons and braid, and my impression of the scene was that the war was already upon us. This sense of living in a world become completely unfamiliar was to last for the next four years.

Another unfamiliar sight greeted me when we arrived at the house where Tommy had rented our bedroom. It was a bungalow of the type thrown up everywhere after World War I. The exterior was of some sort of tarpaper patterned to resemble buff-colored brick. Access to the garage was by way of a dirt driveway, deeply rutted, with a

deep ditch on either side, so that the first time Tommy left me the car to go find a job, I promptly backed into the ditch and remained there until he came home to get me out. The interior was not better than the exterior. The bedroom was bare of any signs of comfort, the bedding scant, the mattress thin, and springs non-existent. Linoleum, worn through in some places, covered the floor. I had no idea of staying there more than a week or two and said so, not very pleasantly, I am afraid. Until Tommy's first paycheck came in, however, it would have to do.

I have never enjoyed looking for employment, but a few days of being immersed in that ghastly bedroom with no place to sit except on the bed, with no lamp to read by, with nothing to eat except crackers or sweet rolls, with no car until Tommy could arrange a ride to the job, made me eager to go back to work. After a few false starts, I learned the route to the arsenal, where salaries for skilled office workers were of course higher than in local offices. By this time, the fall rains had begun, and the scene of desolation which the jobsite presented was almost enough to drive me back to the bedroom. Bulldozers had cleared the site of every tree and shrub and blade of grass. Red mud in deep troughs stretched in every direction to barbed wire fences, broken here and there by guard towers in which were stationed M.P.'s. A number of regulation Army barracks had been erected, interconnected by wooden walkways, some bearing names of organizations painted on signs at the corners, others bearing only a letter and a number. At the front gate, every visitor was interviewed by an M.P. and, if given permission to enter, handed a temporary badge without which the visitor would not be permitted to leave again. When I learned the amount of salary earned by a temporary Civil Service clerk-stenographer — \$135 per month — sixty-five percent more than the salary I had earned in Memphis, the mud and the rain and our dreadful room seemed more bearable. It was several weeks, however, before I was called for an interview, and I learned that every employee was very carefully and fully investigated before being hired.



With a dated and signed permit from Personnel and conducted by an M.P., I was introduced to Lt. J. H. Kaminer, Officer in Charge of Piping and Mechanical in the Operations Office of the Corps of Engineers. I recognized him as one of the young officers we had seen at the cafe on the highway, but now he wore the brown-green trousers and tan shirt of the Army officer's winter uniform. He was not much taller than I, of stocky physique, somewhat hunched in carriage. His face was remarkable for the ivory pallor of his complexion, through which, though he was close shaven, his heavy beard showed blue over the jaws. His forehead was very high and broad, the top of the head covered with a cap of shiny black hair. His eyes under plainly marked brows were brown, direct, and very keen. Interrupted in his study of a huge roll of blueprints, he absentmindedly motioned me to the straight oak chair beside his oak desk. Saying that he had read the file from Personnel, he said he did not believe that I could do the work since I had had no engineering, oil refinery, or mill supply experience. Eager as I was to have the job, I pointed to my excellent scholastic record as proof that I learned quickly. Recalling that I had studied for two years at the Rice Institute, he allowed himself to be persuaded, told me to report at eight the next morning, and

handed me a huge orange catalog of the Crane Company, my homework being to learn the names and descriptions of all the pipe fittings described in it. He was right; it was a demanding job with constant pressure and the most exciting I was ever to have, because he was the most intelligent engineer I ever worked for.

About this same time, Tommy found us a better place to live. It was another bedroom for rent, but this time in the home of Miss Susie and Doctor Moorman, whose family had lived in Huntsville since before the Civil War. Up until then, we had had only a fleeting glimpse of this Huntsville during Sunday afternoon drives, but what we saw was different from Mississippi towns we had visited. Half

the size of Vicksburg but half again larger than Corinth, and older than either, Huntsville seemed to have settled long since into the bowl of its wooded foothills. Since before the Civil War a stop on the vital railroad line connecting Memphis and Chattanooga, its occupation by Union troops had left it virtually undamaged. Like most Southern small towns, it had grown around the county courthouse on the square, from which a few tree-lined streets, some still brick-paved, boasted a



number of stately antebellum homes, most of red brick, some with white columns and verandahs, surrounded by lawns shaded by magnolia, pine, oak, and elm trees. One such house was the Moormans', a two-story brick townhouse, soft rose red in color. Three steps led up to the

verandah, the plinth on either side of the steps supporting a large stone lion couchant. The wide planking and the balustrade of the veranda, which was some six feet in width, were painted gray like the rest of the trim. The veranda began at the left of the entrance and ran across the right half of the facade all the way around the right side of the house. Several tall, rather narrow windows, which began at floor level, lighted the right-hand half of the ground floor, which Doc Moorman used for his consulting room and dispensary. The front door with its sidelights and fanlight led into a hall at least eight feet wide and ten or twelve feet high, which ran the length of the house to a stairwell at the back leading to the second story, where four bedrooms and two baths were located. The wide planks of the hall floor and the baseboards, wainscoting, and trim were varnished dark brown. Between two separate Turkish carpets sat a large black Franklin stove on a tiled base, central heating for the house, augmenting separate fireplaces in most rooms. Double doors at the left of the hall closed off the parlor and behind it, the dining room.

Miss Susie Moorman, the lady kind enough and brave enough to rent a bedroom in her home to these two strangers, was the sort of Southerner who believed in Southern gentility, and my husband's Vicksburg connections may have had something to do with her decision. Other Southern gentlewomen were renting rooms to officers or company officials of WRS and KBE, though they, no more than we, took meals with the family. These ladies were not operating boarding-houses, though there were some of these where many of the workmen found rooms and meals. Miss Susie was shorter than I, with a slender, trim figure and a brisk manner. I saw her only rarely, though I lived in her house for six months or so, and usually she dressed in black crepe, with hems below the knee, black silk stockings and neat black kid pumps. Her complexion was very fine, the famous magnolia-petal skin of Southern women, and her gray hair, combed back and up from her face, escaped in little curls from the knot at the top of her head. I think her

eyes were brown, but with the liveliness of very bright blue eyes. Although we did not meet Doc Moorman until several days later and then saw him even more rarely than Miss Susie, he was as charming as she, a man a little above middle height, of graceful but gaunt physique, with wavy iron-gray hair and a leathery face creased by the ironic humor



so common to the family physician of those days. I am not sure that Doc Moorman was a family physician; I have some vague recollection that he was an eye doctor; he was not a dentist nor a surgeon, for when my tooth abscessed, he referred me to a dentist; and when Tommy had an attack of appendicitis, he told us how to find a physician and the hospital.

The bedroom Miss Susie showed us must have been a guest room or the bedroom of one of her sons, now away from home. It was located at the back of the second story



next to a bathroom which I think only we used. After the horror where we had been living, this room and indeed the whole house seemed the essence of luxury. Across from the door to the hall, on each side of the window were twin beds, separated by a night-table with a reading lamp. The wooden bedsteads were enameled green with sprays of flowers stenciled on the headboards in the manner of the Twenties. Pretty as they were, their real beauty was the plump mattresses and pillows and the clean white counterpanes. In the center of the right-hand wall was a fireplace, where a fine fire was burning to dissipate the November chill. Across from the beds was a large green-painted chest of drawers with a mirror and near the back window a small, armless, white-painted rocker. At the windows hung white net curtains; there was a carpet covering the floor; the walls were papered in white with a tiny flower design. It was a dainty room which reflected the personality of Miss Susie. We moved in that afternoon, our moving consisting of transferring clothing and the precious coffee table, which we placed at the back window with the record player and our records on it.

Only a week or so later, we became acquainted with Miss Susie's secret weapon in the housekeeping battle — Rose, a sturdy, comfortably padded mulatto, dressed in a long gingham dress, a white apron, and a turban. Older than Miss Susie, she had always kept house and cooked for her or her family. She and her grandson Benjy lived in the quarters, I believe, behind the house, and Benjy drove the car, kept the yard, the garden, and the fruit trees, and tended the fires. Rose's grumpy manner belied her kind heart, especially where Tommy was concerned. During the coming cold, dark, often rainy winter days when he had to report to the job by seven, she got up early to start the fire in her stove to make coffee and cook his breakfast. Generous as he was with tips, he could not have really paid for this kindness, because the cafes where we ate most of our meals were not open at that hour, nor the cafeteria at the base. Since I usually did not have to be at work until eight, I was

not often invited to Rose's breakfasts. Once or twice, though, I remember sitting down at the polished mahogany dining table to eat delicious pancakes from a fine china plate set upon a lace-trimmed doily anchored with a sparkling crystal glass. Truly gracious living!

As matters stood, however, we were to spend very little time in this island of tranquility. Even in the months preceding Pearl Harbor, the Operations Office of the Corps of Engineers, as well as the offices of WRS and KBE, was a very busy place. Field crews, including my husband's, worked six 12-hour days, usually half days both Saturday and Sunday; Operations inspected this work, though not on Sundays. The Commanding Officer, Major Carl Breitweiser, who wore riding boots and jodhpurs and carried a quirt, and his Executive, Captain Paul Sadler, were officers of the regular Army, and therefore supervised most of the work on roads, drainage, railroad sidings, and warehouses. The officers called in from the Reserve were more knowledgeable in the techniques of constructing a chemical manufacturing plant, which somewhat resembled an oil refinery. Among these, Captain David Fowler, Operations Officer, a graduate of Georgia Tech, was a tall, graceful, blonde in his early thirties who could have passed as a Confederate Army officer; Lt. Thor Ingvald Madson, Asst. Op., an honors graduate of M.I.T., was tall and burly with curly dark hair and spectacles, markedly Yankee in his manner and a fine theoretical scientist; and Lt. James Heath Kaminer, Piping and Mechanical, a graduate of The Citadel, had worked on refinery construction in Haifa and Houston before the call to the Reserves and therefore had more practical experience in this type of work than any other officer on the job. I do not remember the universities of the other four lieutenants assigned to Operations, but they were Lt. Reggie Murphy, another Yankee, a brown-haired, brown-eyed, debonair Irishman who had lately been employed by York in air-conditioning and refrigeration (at the beginning of the next summer, I found out that his air-conditioning skill was applied not to our office in the barracks, which utilized the open-

window method of cooling, but to the cooling of chemical processes); Lt. Major, a slight, quiet, kindly brown officer in charge of electrical work (subject to jokes about being called Major Major when he was promoted); and Lts. Hudson and East, assigned to inspection of layout and concrete work, I believe.

There were more than three secretaries, besides myself, working in the Operations Office, but I remember three especially, two because I worked with them daily. Captain Fowler's secretary, Grace Powell, was of my height, but willowy, with the pale skin, dun-colored hair, and the iceberg calm of a Greta Garbo. An efficient Civil Service employee, she and her husband had been transferred to the Huntsville project from the TVA project at Oak Ridge (before the atom bomb project, of course). Lt. Madsen's secretary, Mrs. Reilly, was pudgy, with brown hair straying out of the knot at the back of her head, myopic blue eyes behind spectacles, and an abstracted manner which matched Lt. Madsen's. The third, Jewel Henshaw, was secretary to Lts. Major, Hudson and East, but she caused more comment than the rest of us. She was unmarried, an inch or two taller than the rest, with a model's figure, dusky skin faintly flushed, smoky, wavy shoulder-length hair, and the most beautiful green eyes with long eyelashes, which the men referred to as "bedroom eyes." Though she was flirtatious in manner, she led the life of a proper young Southern lady, traveling back to her parents' home in Florence (or Anniston) every weekend.

For a week or two after I reported to work, Lt. Kaminer was busy hiring the three inspectors (Civil Service) assigned to him. Two of them, Roland Brooke and S. J. McCune, came from other peacetime Government projects. Brooke was a large, shambling, dark-eyed man with thinning straight dark hair, who was kindly, easygoing, and soft-spoken. McCune was short with graying blonde hair, disinclined to talk, constantly smoking a pipe, and always wearing a tan trench coat and slouch hat, the garb later caricatured as that of the OSS. Both Brooke and McCune were in

their forties. The third inspector, W. Harvey Allen, was senior to us all, being in his sixties; he was tall and angular in build, with wavy gray hair, blue eyes, an ironic sense of humor, and an authoritative bearing, because he had been assigned and transferred to this project by his permanent employer, Babcock & Wilcox, the foremost builders of industrial power plants of that day.

Working for and with all these people, I came to know them in their office personalities very well, but since we never met after office hours, I have no idea where or how they lived, what or when they ate, or where they shopped. I did know that most were married, that some went home when the pressure of the job permitted — rare after Pearl Harbor. Ships that pass in the night, to coin a phrase! Lt. Kaminer, being unmarried, did date several young women who left messages for him. One was Ruth deRussy, said to be the most beautiful girl in Huntsville because of her manner, elegant figure, creamy white skin, green eyes, and red hair.

The work was unremitting. The chemical manufacturing facilities, the power plant, and what was known as the ordnance plant had been designed and materials and equipment for them ordered months before in Baltimore by WRS under the supervision of Chemical Warfare Service. As soon as the site was leveled and fenced and spur tracks laid, materials and equipment began rolling in, to be unloaded, sometimes higgledy-piggledy, into warehouses whose concrete walls were scarcely dry. His function being to keep up with this flood of materials, Lt. Kaminer and his inspectors, aghast at the higgledy-piggledy, designed charts for scheduling and handling these. From these charts he was able to pinpoint those vital pieces of equipment whose delay might slow the completion of a unit, and take steps to expedite them. There was no time to write many letters, for none could be written except according to Army regulations, sometimes with as many as thirteen tissue copies "bucked" to various offices. (The only type of duplicating machine in use was the mimeograph, and it was not used for correspon-

dence. Xerox was a device whose invention was far in the future.) Officers of that day must smile at the hue-and-cry lately over recording telephone conversations. We secretaries recorded in shorthand all incoming and outgoing phone conversations as a matter of course, unless the caller told us to hang up, and then transcribed them. I also typed from each inspector's daily dictation what was called "the daily log," a detailed account of his activities, a record which was often used to substantiate facts in care of controversy. Since Lt. Kaminer worked with the steady rhythm of a piledriver, those of us in his section did likewise — not willy-nilly. Eight o'clock did not mean two minutes past eight, I learned, and lunch did not mean an hour of relaxation and chatter with the other secretaries. As often as not, breakfast was coffee and a cigarette while I was placing the first of several long-distance calls, and lunch was sometimes just a sandwich, coffee, and a cigarette at my desk.

I remember only one real controversy, and that a month or two after Pearl Harbor, though doubtless there were others I did not know about. Generally speaking, the impersonal relationship established from the first among so many different personalities, largely unknown to one another and to each other, persisted to the end of my stay in Huntsville. What social life we had was in the company of WRS and KBE personnel with whom my husband Tommy was acquainted. The only party I remember took place sometime in November when the field men reserved a large dance hall a good way up the mountain for anyone who contributed his share of the cost. When we arrived, one of many cars parked around the building in the pine woods, I saw that it was a long, rustic tavern, raised a foot or so above the ground, and made of pine boards that looked quite new. It was decorated, in honor of the coming Season, with a string of Christmas tree lights at the edge of the roof and over the gable of the small entry porch. When we entered, I could smell the aroma of the new boards. Though the dance hall, in which a jukebox was playing "Elmer's Tune," was large, there appeared to be at least one other room beside it,

I suppose for diners. I recall two other songs from that night: Dinah Shore singing "Blues in the Night," a very new song and new singer; and an old favorite "Deep in the Heart of Texas," which always evoked much clapping and stomping from the dancers.

Although Madison County was "dry," and strict about it, everyone brought a bottle, chastely concealed in a brown paper sack, and the waiters brought ice in bowls and glasses of Coke or Seven-Up. It was a wild party. We realized that as we drove back down the mountain over a road completely hidden by thick fog. Here and there, party goers, some very intoxicated, all unable to see the road through the fog, had driven into the ditches at the side, had climbed out of their cars, and were walking around them or leaning dangerously to leeward, depending on their sobriety, as they tried to find a way to extricate themselves. We arrived safely at the Moormans'.

Drinking too much could be expensive. If it was done on the job, the penalty was instant dismissal. If it was done in the town or in the county, noisily or otherwise improperly, a policeman or the sheriff might appear and jail the offender at once, freeing him the next morning only upon payment of a stiff fine. Nevertheless, there was much hard drinking among the men in the field crews, many of whom were living in bedrooms without their wives or families. Also, it was difficult and dangerous to get liquor. There was a State-operated store in Florence I think, but its hours were short and I believe the prices were high. The store just across the State line in Tennessee stayed open later and sold liquor by the case at cheaper prices. Many ran the risk of being caught; quite a few were. They were charged with transporting liquor illegally across the State line and found themselves in desperate trouble.

There were no more big parties for the next few months. As Tommy had gone to work early, I had slept late and was taking a shower when Miss Susie called to me

through the bathroom door. It was the bright, sunny Sunday morning of December 7. She had just heard the news of Pearl Harbor on the radio. Dreadful fear and outrage wash from my memory what I did that day after that; I have a dim recollection that Lt. Kaminer sent a staff car for me and I spent the rest of the day at the job, but I cannot really recall anything. On Monday, no one was absent and no one suggested we stop work to find a radio to listen to the President. We knew he would declare war. All leaves, including Christmas, were canceled, both for Operations and for the contractors' personnel. Anyone who did not report for work was subject to dismissal without recommendation. Manpower was frozen. The schedule became seven 12-hour days for field crews. Officers reported at seven instead of eight o'clock, and civilian personnel were subject to call seven days a week. Sometimes the work went on until nine or ten o'clock at night, with meals of sandwiches and coffee brought in on trays by enlisted men and eaten at the desk. If you were called and had no transportation, an olive-drab Ford was sent from the Motor Pool to fetch you. Bulletins from the Commanding General were circulated, warning workers against loose talk that would aid the enemies' spies.

Christmas was gloomy. The war had become personal. My sister's fiance had been drafted into the Army, and she had married him the Sunday after Pearl Harbor, but I could not go. When the Philippines were invaded, I learned that Lt. Kaminer had been born in Lingayen Gulf on the Mindanao Peninsula. We had just learned that Wake Island had fallen after a heroic stand by the Marines. The West Coast feared Japanese submarine attacks. In the Atlantic and Caribbean, wolf-packs of U-boats were sinking great numbers of our merchant ships. Gulf Coast ports and shipyards expected German commando raids.

Christmas evening we walked downtown to a fine hotel, the Russel Erskine, where we ate Christmas dinner. The dining-room was old-fashioned and stately, with buff-painted plastered walls above dark polished paneling, im-

mensely high-ceilinged, with deep recesses for windows, below which steam radiators hissed. Carpeting and heavy brocade draperies muffled sounds. The tables were covered with damask tablecloths and set with good china and crystal. The other diners were well-dressed, the atmosphere subdued. Our waiter was a polite, very elderly Negro dressed in the hotel livery. I suppose we ate turkey and dressing; what I remember is that the salad was the famous Huntsville watercress with vinaigrette dressing, a wonderful salad. The meal ended with dessert and a demitasse of strong, good black coffee, and we walked back to Miss Susie's, passing under the only Christmas decorations, some strings of colored lights across the streets nearest the courthouse.

Bad news grew worse: the terrible bombing of Britain, the siege of Leningrad, the increasing hold of the Japanese everywhere in the Pacific made us fearful that American would soon be left to fight alone. As the sense of urgency increased, we became more diligent. Since all the materials and equipment for the Arsenal had been ordered months prior to Pearl Harbor, our section was involved with expediting delivery of these, chiefly by long-distance telephone, as there was certainly no time to write letters according to Army regulations. I recall that dished heads for one particular pressure vessel had been preempted under higher priority. Upon learning that delivery of them would be delayed for perhaps six months, Lt. Kaminer began a telephone search for substitutes, beginning with Lukens Steel in Pittsburgh and extending as far west and south as Wyatt Metal & Boiler Works in Houston. Needless to say, he found them. In like manner, he uncovered sources of scarce pipefittings and valves, often appealing to old friends like Sam Wilson of National Supply in Tulsa and Art Allison of the Savannah River Project. I recorded and transcribed all these phone conversations, hanging up the extension phone only when Lt. Kaminer said, "Thanks, Mrs. D."

As deliveries of materials and equipment vital to erection of one unit or another were postponed, sometimes in-



definitely, Lt. Kaminer began to scrutinize the architect-engineer's designs for possible substitutions or shortcuts which would result in savings of materials or time. His efforts precipitated a controversy with Lt. Madsen, who staunchly defended the original design. Matters came to a head over the pipe-runs, shown in blueprints running overhead on stanchions of welded pipe, for which Lt. Kaminer proposed to substitute pipe-runs in trenches with runs supported on concrete pillars, thus saving much pipe, fittings, and welding. This controversy eventually moved from the office of Captain Fowler to that of Major Breitweiser to that of General Sieder of CWS, who came down on the side of pragmatism, that is, for Lt. Kaminer's solution — an early victory of the "Can Do" philosophy.

Shortly after, the officers in Operations were promoted: Captain Fowler to Major, Lts. Madsen and Kaminer to Captain, 2nd Lts. Major, Murphy, Hudson, and East to 1st Lieutenants. Captain Madsen and his secretary were transferred to another post, and Operations moved its offices to the second floor of the barracks building. Captain Kaminer was promoted to Assistant Operations Officer, and his desk and mine were moved to an office enclosure next to Major Fowler's office.

Though there was still no break in the constant stream of bad news, Tommy's working hours were cut back because the surveying was almost completed. At the same time, the relentless pace of the past three months slackened as materials and equipment rolled in, and erection of the various units got under way. All the officers and the civilian inspectors spent long days in the field.

The first Saturday afternoon I did not work, I went shopping downtown for material for an Easter dress. On the square was a drygoods store, narrow, with walls covered with dark shelving and a gray-painted ceiling. The dress materials were displayed on bolts standing on long tables. Most were light flowered or printed cottons, some cham-

bray, but only one piece of linen, not handkerchief linen, but linen customarily used for tablecloths. It was of beautiful quality and reasonably priced, so I bought it, some large pearl buttons, needles, thread, thimble, scissors, and a pattern. Since I had no machine, I made the dress by hand, sewing every night after work, and I was really pleased with it. At Easter we drove up to Sewanee on Saturday afternoon to spend the holiday with Tommy's mother and sister, who was married to Tom Govan, history professor at the University of the South and already an authority on Nicholas Biddle. Even on top of the mountain, the war had brought many changes. There was now a Naval ROTC unit on campus, and many students were wearing sailor's uniform. As the community was so small, Tom Govan had received his draft notice, though he was thirty-five years of age, and was to report for Army basic training at the end of the spring term. He and his good friend, the poet Allan Tate, no longer discussed the Agrarian South, but the status of the war. It was too cold for me to wear my new white linen dress; I went to church in a navy blue suit borrowed from Jane, my sister-in-law. As we drove down to Monteagle after lunch, Jane pointed out the abandoned Chataugua building, which Robert Lowell had rented to live in for the duration, where he scandalized the natives by practicing Yoga in the nude.

A few weeks later, we drove to Birmingham for the first time so that Tommy could talk to a friend of his about a surveyor's job when his work at the Arsenal ended, as it would in the next month or so. We stayed in Homewood and gazed in awe at the statue of Vulcan and the view of the smoky, fiery, city below.

Separations brought about by the war were only just beginning; there were many for millions of young people over the next four years. Tommy left that week to go on a surveying job at Covington, Tennessee, but I stayed on in Huntsville. Captain Kaminer was to be transferred at the first of June to Denver, where he was to be Operations Officer in charge of construction of the Rocky Mountain Arse-

nal. He would arrange my transfer there at the same time, and Tommy would finish the Covington job by then, and be employed by KBE, which had the contract for Rocky Mountain under the name of Kershaw, Swinerton, and Walberg.

Sometime in May, I made one more weekend trip, this time to Memphis, where Tommy met me at my parent's home. I had not seen my family for months, and the visit was all too short. As Tommy had to drive back to Covington that Sunday night, he saw me on board the Plantation Special in late afternoon. That train was fascinating, much like the Zephyr I had once ridden from Houston to Dallas. An aluminum bullet, it whizzed along at high speed, scheduled to arrive in Chattanooga — the Chattanooga choo-choo — just after midnight and in Washington by mid-morning. There was a Pullman, but the coaches were luxurious, decorated in pale green with scenic murals and seats comfortably upholstered in soft dark-green plush, seats which would recline with enough room for the passengers to stretch their legs. Most people rode the coach, and everybody enjoyed the club car. When the train arrived in Huntsville around eleven, I alighted at the long old red-brick station house with its high roof and its tall green freight doors (closed at night, of course) and found a taxi to take me to Miss Susie's. It was still too early in the war for women to be afraid to be alone on the streets, even late at night.

About this time, I was invited, surely by courtesy of Miss Susie, to the only truly social event I attended in Huntsville. A formal Sunday afternoon tea was being given to benefit some cause connected with the war effort, possibly for the U.S.O., at the Hutchens residence, I believe, and Miss Susie was to pour. Happy at having an occasion to wear my fine white linen dress, my best black Panama straw, and my white kid gloves, I walked downtown and beyond, to a tree-lined street one or two removed from the square, to a stately red brick house with white columns and a verandah. The matrons of Huntsville society were receiving the wives of the officers and the officials of the Arsenal. I

spent a pleasant hour listening to the cultured conversation of mostly Southern women of much charm.

The final memorable event of my stay in Huntsville was connected with the job. One night at the end of May, Captain Kaminer sent a car to bring me back out to the Arsenal for the start-up of the power plant. This facility, a huge dark iron monster, had risen from bare earth in the short period of nine months. I knew the names of all its components, as if they were old friends: the boiler, the turbines, the hopper, the coal conveyor belt, the condensate tanks, etc., which, now assembled, would furnish electricity, steam, and hot water for the manufacturing processes as well as for the office areas. Climbing up the narrow iron stair to the operator's platform and gazing down through it to the foundation so far below, I was thrilled at the idea I had had some part in completing it despite so many difficulties in locating and procuring the materials. Here was good news at last! All over the country men and women working under conditions of great stress were accomplishing their tasks in record time. I don't remember whether it was days before or days after that we heard the news of victory in the battle of Midway, but the two events, so far distant from each other in space, seemed connected in time and seemed to signal the ability of America to do!

Captain Kaminer left for Denver; Tommy left Covington and came back to Huntsville for me, my clothes, the record player, and the coffee table, and we too went west.

Huntsville and our life there for a few months became a fly caught in amber. As old Heraclitus remarked, "One cannot step twice in the same stream." Reminiscences of those days, incomplete, one-sided, partial as they may be, may nevertheless afford the reader, if there is one left, some insight into a particular time, in a particular place, and a particular frame of mind. A slice of life, that is, at least for the person remembering.

