

# I'll Be Seeing You

by

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*Golden Antelope Press*  
Kirksville, MO  
2003

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ISBN 0-9747968-0-8

Published by:  
Golden Antelope Press  
715 E. McPherson  
Kirksville, Missouri 63501

Distributed by:  
Golden Antelope Press  
(660)-665-0273  
[www.goldenantelope.com](http://www.goldenantelope.com)

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# Chapter 1

## The Meeting

The rain hit the window of the bus making small rivers of water run down the glass. Sarah looked out at the dreary, gray world. As the bus jerked along the wet pavement of the bumpy road, she was hardly aware of the chatter and giggling of the girls around her. She felt so alone and empty. It hurt deeply to realize that her life was in such a turmoil after all these months. Her emotions were on hold because she could not cry any more. Any joy she might have felt was locked away in the closet of her heart.

How she dreaded the next few hours she would spend with these coeds who seemed to have no losses or worries in their young lives. She envied their innocence and wished she too had not been torn from her adolescence by the war. How did they talk her into coming to this USO party to dance with the servicemen at Lowery Air Force base? It was the Dean of Girls in the university office who had suggested it. According to Dean Kelly, they only selected high quality girls to attend these chaperoned USO dances. Sarah thought that was just a ploy to encourage her acceptance. She never thought of herself as pretty, although everyone

told her she was. She was of a petite build, too thin she felt, although she had a normal appetite. It was her eyes. She had heard most of her life that she had beautiful and unusual eyes. It was something she didn't understand. She never wanted the extra attention some girls her age craved. Her curly auburn hair attracted attention. She walked with the grace of a dancer, her feet barely touching the floor, most likely from the years of ballet lessons.

This occasion wasn't a case of becoming involved with the young men. It was only to dance and to talk, giving them some comfort in the face of their future roles in combat. Let the young men know why they were there and for what they would be fighting. Sarah had called her mother about being invited and her mother thought it was a wonderful idea. How often in the last eighteen months had she tried to get Sarah back into her usual happy state of mind? Nevertheless, Sarah could not forget the pile of homework on her desk back in her college room. Between the two of them, Dean Kelly and her mother, Sarah had given in to something she did not want to do. She also had the alumni to blame; this trip came about in part because of those good patriotic graduates who felt they were helping out the war effort.

Sarah realized she was lucky to be in college at all. What would these coeds think if their families had the experience of hers? Money was still hard to come by but her parents were determined that their children get the education they had never been able to afford. She could not remember the Great Depression because she had been too young. She knew her father had lost everything for which he had worked. They had lost the gasoline stations and their home with its historical value, in the Highlands of old Northwest Denver. Her father had had to accept employment with the government's WPA relief program and dig ditches on the east side

of Denver for water mains and electricity. They had moved to a farm then east of Denver, which proved no better for their fortune. The baby chicks her parents had hoped to raise for sale were cooked to death one night when her father forgot to shut off the incubator. That was the end of being a farmer's daughter. Sarah vaguely recalled riding on top of boxes filled with family belongings in the back seat of her father's old Model T. Her brothers were also riding on top, trying to hold down other boxes. They were soon back in the old house which, years later Sarah learned, her beloved maternal grandfather had bought back from the bankruptcy courts.

From that time on, her father had worked wonders. He had somehow borrowed money to open another gas station, which did very well. A few years later, he started two more stations and life was getting easier for them. There were dancing lessons, auto trips to the World's Fair in New York City, and some money for college.

Life was perking along for Sarah. During this time, she fell in love with the most unlikely person — a boy she once hated. He was a neighbor the same age as her older brother who had always teased her to tears.

They called him Hanky Panky, because he was always pulling pranks on his friends. His real name was Henry Stewart. He lived up the street from Sarah's family and was a good friend of her older brother. One day, as Sarah began to develop an interest in the opposite sex, Hank's appearance became much more important to her than she had previously thought possible. She noticed his curly red hair and a dash of freckles across his nose. She herself had naturally curly hair that brought often unwanted attention to her in public. However, she didn't mind it as much as Hank did. He hated being a redhead, but he made the best of it.

That was most likely why he retaliated with pranks when someone joked about his hair. He was an excellent student in high school and had a sturdy athletic build. He was the star quarterback of the high school football team. That ability and his grades won him a scholarship to the University of Colorado. He was in his second year at the university and she a junior in high school, when they declared their love for each other. They exchanged friendship rings and they made plans to wed after finishing college. Sarah had never been so happy!

It all came crashing down three years later when Hank was drafted and sent overseas. He was killed fighting in Europe when his infantry unit was overcome by the enemy. She could still hear his mother's screams when she received the notice from the US Army. Sarah had rushed up the street when she noticed the official army car at Hank's house. That was the beginning of a nightmare she was unable to shake off for a long time.

The bus came to a stop. They had reached the gates of the military base. A soldier got on and welcomed everyone. The girls whistled and yelled like idiots, to Sarah's mind. The soldier directed the bus driver to a long bunker like building. It was a converted gym decorated with Christmas lights. Young Air Force Cadets lined the outside of the building and noisily welcomed the girls. Inside, middle aged women and older officers ushered the girls to coat racks and told them where the powder room was located. Noise prevailed as the girls shed their coats and hung them on the racks. Then, the juke box started up and the boys circled around the girls, finding dance partners.

Sarah avoided the crush and walked towards the tables loaded with Christmas cookies and punch bowls. Her throat was dry and she didn't want to dance with a stranger just

yet. Sarah always wanted to blend in the crowd, but instead a spotlight seemed always shining on her. Her mother had yearned for a daughter and although the birth was very difficult, Sarah's mother thought God had blessed her with a very special baby. If anyone doubted her, she would point out Sarah's eyes which were hazel ringed with a light blue circle. The black irises made an unusual painting. No one else in the family had that combination. "Don't the eyes reflect the soul within?" her mother always said and then she always declared that Sarah's destiny was to be great. Therefore, Sarah had tried to be a high achiever, if not for herself, then for her mother.

As she sipped at her cider punch, a nice looking cadet approached her and asked for a dance. Well, she was here just for that purpose, she thought to herself, so she put her cup down on the table and went off on his arm. Others followed him, asking for dances, all homesick and full of memories of their childhood Christmases and their families. Sarah realized that all of them, herself included, had been forced out of their familiar worlds by the war, and into unknown futures.

These young men could have been Hank before he went overseas. Were their fates to be the same as his? The gloom returned and Sarah could feel tears starting to well up in her eyes. She excused herself and went to a side wall where chairs were set up. She felt her pockets for a handkerchief but found nothing except chewing gum wrappers.

She was about to dash to the powder room for toilet paper when a large white handkerchief fluttered before her face.

A deep manly voice said, "Here you go, ma'am. Dry those tears before someone thinks I said something wrong to you."

Sarah looked up into the eyes of an astonishingly good-looking cadet. He had a wisp of dark hair hanging from his forehead. His smile was perfect, with the whitest teeth and bluest eyes Sarah had ever seen! His skin was flawless and his face was perfectly proportioned like the old statues of Greek Gods.

She could only stare up at him until he said, "It is clean. I always carry extra ones just in case a damsel in distress needs one."

"I am so sorry," Sarah said as she took the handkerchief, dried her eyes, and blew her nose. "I don't know what came over me."

"I know. It's the holiday season. All of us would prefer to be somewhere else." He sat beside her and studied her face. Sarah began to blush.

"I feel so stupid as it is," she said, handing him back the hanky.

"Do you want to dance? We could tell each other our life stories," he laughed. The music had started up again in a slower tempo. "This is one of my favorite songs. Shall we?" He stood and helped her up. His arm curved around her, guiding her as they started off to dance.

"By the way, my name is Derek. Derek Winslow, to be exact. What is yours?" he asked as they started moving slowly, her hands clasped behind his neck and his arms around her waist.

"Sarah Lewis," she said shyly, feeling so comfortable in his arms.

"Do you know this song?" It was Bing Crosby's rendition of 'I'll Be Seeing You.' Before Sarah could say anything, Derek began singing to her, "I'll be seeing yooouuuu ... in aaaaalllll the old ... familiar places ... that this heart ... of miiine embraces ... all night through! In the small café ... the

park across the way... " he continued to sing softly in her ear. An inner peace, one Sarah had not felt for ages, crept back to her. It was over too soon, and she was afraid he would walk away from her. Instead, he took her hand and walked with her over to the tables.

"What would the most lovely of ladies here tonight like to drink? Let's see," he said as he examined the drink section. "We have apple cider from the golden orchards of Colorado, or fruit punch with no punch to it, or maybe a little eggnog also without any punch." That made Sarah laugh.

"I think you're already full of punch! That is the first time I have been called a lady, let alone the loveliest." Sarah laughed. "Not that I am not a lady, but I feel more like just a coed tonight, and not nearly as lovely as some of the other girls here."

"That is debatable." Derek smiled. He reached for a cup of cider and handed it to her. Then he picked up another and nodded for her to follow him to some chairs set around a small table.

After brushing some crumbs off the table, he made himself comfortable, putting his drink on the newly cleaned space and sitting back to look at her. Sarah sat, put her drink down too, and stared at her hands. She felt that if she looked straight at him, he might fade away from her like a dream.

"So, Sarah, tell me about yourself. Are you from here?"

Sarah felt at a loss for words.

"Yes, I am a native," she managed to mutter.

"That's it? You don't look a bit like an Indian. Where is your horse?" He laughed.

"You know what I mean!" Sarah laughed, feeling a little more at ease under his gaze. "In fact, I would be as amazed to see any Indians as you would. They have blended in with the population here; you would have to drive down south to

a reservation in New Mexico to see them on horses, I think."

"That would be very interesting. What I meant is where does your family live in this great western state?"

"In the Highlands of North Denver, which was one of the early settlements here. Nothing elaborate. Blue-collar workers, they call us."

"How interesting! I am from a blue-collar family, too. I grew up in a little town northeast of Pittsburgh. My family's roots run deep there. This is the first time I've been out west. I think I like it. Do you ski?"

Sarah smiled at him. "Yes, I do. I actually belong to the university ski team. Do you ski?"

His eyes lit up with excitement. "Oh yeah. Every chance I get. I grew up not far from the Poconos. Have you ever heard of them?"

"Of course! They are a mountain range in Pennsylvania, aren't they?"

He smiled, and Sarah sensed his honest appreciation when he complimented her, saying, "Good girl. Intelligent too. Not many people know much about geography."

"I read a lot and want to visit the places that sound interesting to me some day. I did get to visit Pennsylvania once. I remember driving through Pittsburgh with my family in 1939. It was so dark from the factory smoke I couldn't believe it was only noon when we stopped for lunch."

"Yeah, that is one of the drawbacks of an otherwise beautiful Pennsylvania," he said, picking up his cup and taking a sip.

"It isn't that bad in the rural area where I grew up," he continued. "Skiing is a way out of the gloom and doom one feels in the smoke-filled villages. Anyway, I had to fill my glass jar and I earned money helping out as a ski instructor or a member of the maintenance crew at nearby skiing

areas.”

“Glass jar?” Sarah asked him, almost ready to laugh, until something in his face stopped her. She could tell from his serious expression that it wasn’t a laughing matter to him.

“I come from a large family. In fact, I have a twin sister who looks nothing like me.” He gave out a little chuckle. “Our parents wanted more than anything for all of us to go to college, not to the mines or the mills of our fathers and grandfathers.

“I don’t mean to give you a history lesson about my family, just enough for you to understand what I am about to tell you.” Derek tapped the table with his fingers. “So, my dear, as soon as we were old enough, my mother gave each of us a glass canning jar with our name on it. The money we earned was to be deposited in them until they were full. Then it went to a bank account in our names to be used for our higher educations.”

“How unique,” Sarah thought aloud. “How did you earn your money?”

“Paper routes, sweeping out schools, helping old people with their chores and the fun job of skiing as an instructor. I babysat when my sisters couldn’t and did anything else that came along and paid me a dollar.” He paused. “However, now the glass jars are empty, and like me, most of my siblings are in the service or at home struggling to understand mom’s theory about the glass jars. Was it all worth it?”

“Of course it was, if you started college before the war started! Did you?”

Derek nodded. “I got a scholarship to The University of Pennsylvania, which paid for almost everything. My parents were so pleased I swore to myself I would make them even happier when I graduated. One year to go before entering med school and here I am.” He sighed a slightly wistful

sigh. "A strange side trip from what was to be my shining goal of becoming a doctor. Now when I see a glass jar I wonder what is in the future for me. But," he said, recovering his poise quickly, "I'm meeting nice people and seeing new places, places I had only read about before, sitting in a small town in Pennsylvania."

Derek took her hand in his and kissed it.

"Enough of that. What has Colorado to offer skiers?"

Sarah went on to tell him about the Winter Park and Loveland ski areas near to Denver. It was a subject they both loved. Between dancing and talking the time flew by. It was amazing how light-hearted she felt. How nice it was to feel that way again. It was as though a heavy burden had been lifted from her shoulders. She was feeling alive again.

In the end, Derek walked her back to the bus and whispered in a singing voice, "I'll be seeing you... on all the slopes of pure white snow..." And kissed her on the cheek.

She climbed the steps of the bus and took a seat next to a window so she could keep him in view. How she wished they had made plans to meet another time! He waved at her and approached the driver of the bus. He nodded his head towards her causing the driver to look back at her. Derek laughed and shook hands with the man. With one last wave to her he turned away and walked off between the buildings. Later, as she was getting off the bus, the driver asked her how that young man back at the base could get in touch with her, if she didn't mind? She quickly jotted down her name and address and handed it to the driver, knowing that there was little chance that he would ever deliver it.

That night Sarah dreamed of Derek and woke feeling full of enthusiasm again, for the first time in a long time, about being young and ready to take hold of her life once more. No more self-pity for her, no more sadness to invade or interrupt

her thoughts! She hoped for rapid peace so there would be no more sad endings to lives such as Hank's. She secretly hoped Derek would look her up as his handsome face came to brighten her memories and frequent her dreams.