

AS EVER, SAM
by Rachelle Ferguson

ACT I

SCENE ONE - Saturday morning, May 6, 1944 - A park near Hudson Christian College

[Curtains open on an outdoor scene, some trees or bushes in the background, everything green and blooming. Two small bare tables sit Center Stage, and a basket of decorations sits on the ground. As curtains open, ALICE is working busily around the tables, covering each of them with a patriotic or picnicky tablecloth. She's reciting a poem to herself as she works. Just a few moments after curtains open, EVE enters Stage Right, carrying a crate full of picnic blankets, but ALICE has her back to EVE and doesn't hear her approach. EVE hesitates, listening with a growing smile to ALICE's delivery.]

Alice: *[quoting with feeling and some drama]* "...in thy sight, / storm flakes were scroll-leaved flowers, lily showers—sweet heaven was astrew in them. / Five! The finding and sake / and cipher of suffering Christ. / Mark, the mark is of man's make, / and the word of it Sacrificed—" *[turns, still caught up in the recitation, and starts with a little gasp at the sight of EVE standing there listening]*
Oh my goodness, I did not know you were there.

Eve: *[with a warm grin]* I didn't want to stop you. *[approaching]* Is that your poem for this afternoon?

Alice: Yeah. *[breathes deeply, amused but still trying to get her heart rate back down to normal]* Boy, did you startle me!

Eve: *[shrugs with a grin]* You knew I was coming. *[setting down the crate of blankets]*

Alice: *[smirks]* Didn't know you were lurking right behind me though. That's nightmare material.

Eve: Ouch!

Alice: Not you personally, just the lurking aspect.

Eve: *[with a little smirk]* I understand. Where do you want the blankets, Madame Poetess?

Alice: *[lightly rolls her eyes]* We'll try to spread them out over as much space as we can. But I think we should wait, since the grass is still damp.

Eve: Good call. So what can I help with?

Alice: Well, I think decor is our first order of business since we can't lay out food for a while. *[indicating the tables]* What do you think of adding some bunting along the sides?

Eve: Ah, that'll be swell. Very proper for a picnic. *[as ALICE fishes bunting out of her basket of supplies]* Do you have thumbtacks or something?

Alice: Uh...you may have to dig.

Eve: *[starts searching through the basket]* Hey, you know, speaking of food, did you manage the ice cream?

Alice: *[with sudden enthusiasm]* Yes, I think the recipe worked! Sam tasted it for me, and it was all I could do to keep him from chugging the whole batch.

Eve: So how did you have enough sugar? *[EVE finds a little box of thumbtacks or safety pins, and as they talk, the girls work together to attach bunting along the sides of the tables.]*

Alice: Oh, it was a challenge. But ever since we heard he was coming home, we've been mercilessly hoarding our ration stamps.

Eve: Your poor mother's probably been starving herself!

Alice: Well, she wanted Sam to have as many treats as possible while he was on leave. And of course his friend from training camp is staying with us too, so that's an extra stomach.

Eve: Boy, you and your mom have it hard, since we all know male stomachs are never full.

Alice: Yeah, tell me about it. *[Both girls chuckle.]*

Eve: So, how have you managed having company while trying to study for final exams? *[smiling, with feigned carelessness]* And, you know, also running the college War Board, and the Activities Board, and being class president and all that?

Alice: *[grins despite herself, then shrugs]* Well, I don't have a 4.0 GPA like you do.

Eve: *[light-heartedly rolls her eyes]* Alice, you make good grades.

Alice: *[shrugs with a little sigh, gradually getting more serious]* Well, Mom takes care of our company. The hardest thing for me has just been...how much I want to spend time with Sam, and not being able to, because of exams and...because of there being an extra person in the house.

Eve: *[gently]* An outsider? *[ALICE shrugs a little awkwardly, and EVE realizes she's actually holding back tears.]* It has to be so hard, to have your brother home for the first time in...a year? ten months? *[ALICE nods]* ...and not really be able to...have him to yourself.

Alice: *[after a moment, takes a deep breath, controlling her emotion]* Well—he's not mine to "have." *[with a quick little sigh and smile]* I keep telling myself that. *[busying herself again with the tables]* When did you last hear from Walter?

Eve: Wednesday. He seemed to hint that his regiment was moved to a different island, but of course he couldn't specify.

Alice: Now that's hard. Your young man fighting overseas, and you not even knowing where he is. *[EVE smiles sadly.]*

Eve: *[after a moment of silence]* Can I have another pin?

Alice: Oh—yes. *[hands a couple pins to EVE, as MARYJANE enters Stage Left, holding a box full of game supplies]*

Maryjane: Hey Alice, where do you want the game supplies?

Alice: Maryjane! Um...just set them over here for now and I'll figure out where we want them set up. Thanks so much for bringing them.

Maryjane: Sure thing. *[setting the box on the ground]* Is there anything else I can help prepare?

Alice: *[looks at EVE]* I think we're okay. Priscilla and Jean are doing most of the food, and Eve volunteered to help set up, so we should be alright. Thank you though!

Maryjane: *[grins]* Too bad—I was hoping for an excuse to get out of studying this morning. *[moving Stage Left]* My Greco-Roman final is gonna kill me.

Alice: *[smiles]* Eve could help you with that.

Eve: No, you'll do just fine. You always worry about exams and then you ace them.

Maryjane: *[grins]* Well, fingers crossed. See you girls this afternoon! *[exits Stage Left, and ALICE and EVE both smile thinking about her]*

Eve: *[after a few moments]* You know, between ourselves, I've never thought of Maryjane as having the very best study habits, but she sure does perform under pressure!

Alice: That's so true—it's kind of unfair! [*chuckles, then steps back and surveys the tables*] Well, I think this is looking rather nice. [*pulling a couple of small 48-star flags from her basket*] Do you think we should put these up, or not?

Eve: Oh absolutely.

Alice: I just didn't know if a graduation-themed picnic was quite the right occasion for flags.

Eve: It's always the right occasion for flags. And picnics are somehow patriotic by nature, aren't they? Fourth of July and all that?

Alice: [*with amused skepticism*] Well, maybe wartime picnics.

Sam: [*offstage, calls out*] Alice!

Alice: [*quickly looks out across the audience, her face brightening*] Hey, Sam! [*waves*]

Sam: [*offstage, beginning to approach up the aisle through the audience, accompanied by GUS*] Need some help?

Alice: Are you offering?

Sam: [*approaching the stage*] Well, we couldn't think of anything more interesting to do. [*He and GUS step onto the stage.*]

Alice: [*dryly*] Wow, you're too sweet. [*to GUS*] Why are you friends with him, again?

Gus: [*shrugs with a grin*] He needs someone to keep him in line.

Alice: That's for sure. [*smiling and extending a hand to GUS*] Good to see you, Gus.

Gus: [*shaking her hand*] You too. [*At the same time, SAM cheerfully shakes hands with EVE.*]

Sam: How are you, Eve?

Eve: Very well, thanks. Hope you are too.

Sam: [*grins*] Fit as a fiddle. This is my pal Gus, from training camp—Gus Monroe. One of Alice's good friends, Eve Wescott. [*GUS and EVE shake hands.*]

Gus: Great to meet you.

Eve: You too. And so you're staying with the Flemings?

Gus: [*with slight surprise*] Uh, no, actually my parents just live in Jonesborough, so I'm there.

Alice: Sorry, Eve, I was unclear. Sam has two friends on leave with him, and it's the other one, Kenny, who's staying with us.

Eve: Oh! I see.

Sam: Yeah, Kenny's from Oklahoma, but he doesn't have much family there so we convinced him to come with us on furlough. But Gus here, he's local.

Eve: So, you knew each other before training?

Sam: No, that's the crazy thing! We just met the first week, found out I was from Hudson, he was from Jonesborough, and then we had to be friends.

Gus: We figure we must have crossed paths before at some point—matter of fact I've probably met you all, or at least seen you sometime.

Eve: Did you go to Hudson High School?

Gus: Only for a year—that would have been 1935-36. I had to quit to help on our farm.

Eve: Ah, well, Alice and I started in the fall of '36, so we must have just missed you.

Gus: But so many local events involve both towns...revivals, the county fair.... I'm sure all of us were at some function or other at the same time.

Eve: *[grinning]* That's pretty neat.

Sam: Yeah—it's sure been nice to have a buddy in my unit who knows about home.

Gus: *[grins]* And more specifically, who knows about Blackman's apple cider donuts. *[All exclaim or groan with longing.]*

Eve: Oh, I miss those donuts so much!

Sam: *[nodding]* Yep, you only understand the loss if you've tried them.

Gus: When we heard about Blackman's closing down—

Sam: *[to ALICE, interrupting]* Oh, did I tell you? You wrote to me about it, and the same day Gus's mom told him in a letter too.

Alice: Well, it was a community crisis!

Gus: Exactly! And we were so devastated, we tried to explain to Kenny what had happened, and he just laughed at us. *[chuckling slightly, with a shrug]*

Alice: Oh, I'm sorry!

Eve: They must not have apple cider donuts in Oklahoma.

Gus: *[ruefully]* I don't think they have much of anything in Oklahoma.

Alice: *[after a moment]* So, is Kenny at the house?

Sam: *[glances at GUS]* No, he walked into Hudson to make a telephone call. He said he'd meet us here soon.

Alice: Okay. *[glances around with a smile]* Well, you're here to help, right?

Sam: Absolutely. Put us to work. *[GUS looks at him.]*

Alice: *[As ALICE speaks, GUS says something to SAM under his breath, trying to persuade him to do something. SAM at first seems reluctant, but finally nods.]* Great. Let's see, uh.... You boys could set up the games. I'm not sure what Maryjane brought...maybe sack toss and croquet—is everything alright?

Sam: Sorry. Um...I guess, we should tell you why Kenny is telephoning his dad.

Alice: *[confused]* His dad? I didn't think they— *[catches herself]* Sorry, go ahead.

Sam: Well, it's...the news we've been waiting for. We all got letters this morning, and...our division is being deployed. *[ALICE breathes deeply, taking this in.]*

Eve: *[after a few moments]* How soon?

Gus: Next week.

Sam: We're supposed to go by train to Boston on Thursday, and then we'll board a troopship there.

Eve: *[with slight surprise]* Europe, then?

Sam: Seems like it.

Alice: Italy? *[SAM shrugs helplessly.]* I suppose you couldn't tell us if you knew.

Sam: *[ruefully]* No.

Alice: *[sighs deeply]* So you've had your orders. Have you told Dad and Mom?

Sam: Yeah. *[after a moment]* Let's not talk about it anymore right now. I don't want to spoil our time, or your picnic.

Gus: And we still have nearly a week here: we'll make each day really count.

Kenny: *[offstage]* Am I in the right place?

Gus: *[as KENNY enters Stage Left]* Hey, Kenny, there you are!

Kenny: *[jovially]* Howdy, boys! And girls—morning, Alice, and uh...? *[extending his hand to EVE]*

Eve: *[shaking his hand]* Eve.

Kenny: Eve, nice to meet you.

Gus: Did your telephone call go through?

Kenny: It took a few minutes, but yeah. Do the girls know?

Sam: We told them.

Kenny: Good. It's exciting, isn't it?

Alice: I suppose that's one way to look at it.

Kenny: *[cheerfully]* It's the only way! What's not to be excited about? We'll be off across the ocean, new places, new people, and doing our part to beat the Germans. *[ALICE, clearly not wanting to discuss this, turns away and starts searching through her basket.]*

Gus: Well, your perspective may change when you get on the battlefield.

Kenny: *[with a laugh, almost scoffing]* How would you know? You're at least as green as I am, and your dad's not a war vet like mine.

Eve: *[seriously]* I think my young man, Walter, would agree with Gus. He's in the Pacific.

Kenny: *[after a moment, glancing at ALICE]* Well, look—I know it's dangerous, I know it's serious, I'm probably too excited—but the fact is, I've had it with training so any change is welcome. Besides, the world needs more optimists, right?

Gus: *[quietly]* That's a theory.

Alice: *[turning back to them with forced cheerfulness, holding a banner she's pulled from the basket]* Who can help me put this up?

Gus: *[offering to take the banner]* Where would you like it?

Alice: *[handing it to him]* I was thinking of just hanging it between the two tables. These will have the drinks, so most people will kind of start here. *[SAM immediately moves to help GUS hang the banner, which reads, "Congratulations, seniors!" and KENNY just watches.]*

Kenny: So what's all this for?

Alice: It's a picnic. *[busying herself with the tables and digging in the basket]*

Kenny: Well sure, but what for?

Eve: *[rescuing ALICE]* For the graduating class. Alice helps run the college activities board, so she has all the responsibility for these things.

Kenny: Impressive! *[to ALICE]* And what year are you?

Eve: We're both seniors. *[thinking fast, points to the crate of blankets]* Do you think...you could take this crate and put it...by that tree over there? *[points offstage Left]*

Kenny: *[looking]* The big one?

Eve: Uh no, beyond it, the willow.

Kenny: *[surprised at the distance]* Oh. Okay. *[picking up the crate, again tries to address ALICE]* So, uh, what's your major, Alice?

Alice: English.

Kenny: Swell! *[trying to stall, thinking of something else to ask ALICE]*

Eve: Thanks so much for moving the crate. *[She moves to help ALICE with something, and KENNY hesitates for a second, then reluctantly exits Stage Left. EVE and ALICE look at each other and roll their eyes.]*

[Cont. . .]

[END OF SCRIPT SAMPLE.]