

The Valentine Angel

A Story By
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February 14, 1945

Katie struggled to keep from crying while she cut out the paper hearts. It was her third Valentine's Day without Ron, but she had to keep a brave face for their little boy.

"Mommy, look! I cut out hearts," Jeff said.

He held up a mangled piece of red tissue paper that didn't resemble a heart. That one would be taped to the refrigerator door.

"Oh, that's beautiful, sweetheart," she said. "I wish your Daddy was here to see it. He'd be so proud."

The last Valentine's Day that she'd spent with Ron, she was pregnant with Jeff. They'd both known that they wouldn't be together much longer, so they'd made the evening as special as possible. After attending the dance at the Officers' Club, they'd come home and enjoyed their own private dance.

She missed the feeling of his strong arms wrapped around her, and the warmth of his neck against her cheek. Not to mention the tingle that shot through her when his hands drifted down to caress her bottom. She let out a sigh and gathered up the hearts into a paper sack.

"Come on, Jeffrey. Let's get dressed, so I can take our Valentine's to the post hospital."

"Why?"

She looked at his inquisitive stare. During the last few weeks, *why* had become Jeff's favorite word. At times, he used it to the point of exasperation.

"Because I want to cheer up the soldiers who got...hurt...in the war and had to come back home to stay in the hospital."

His little face brightened up.

"Like Be-an?"

"Yes. Like Ben."

An enemy grenade had wounded her husband's oldest friend. After six weeks in the hospital, he was finally back at home in the

loving care of his wife, Carol.

"As a matter of fact, I'm taking you over to Ben and Carol's to stay with them while I go to the hospital."

Jeff stomped his little foot and put his hands on his hips.

"Mommy, I want to go with you."

She bent down and tousled his sandy blond hair.

"You can't, honey. Children aren't allowed at the hospital."

Even if they were, she wasn't sure that she'd want Jeff there. Some of the men had lost limbs or been disfigured in other ways. Jeff was too young to understand their condition and might be frightened by it.

She bundled him up in his wool coat, gloves and toboggan. The wind was picking up, and the weatherman on the radio had predicted a chance of an afternoon snow flurry. They left their little army bungalow and walked next door to Ben and Carol's.

The aroma of vegetable soup and fresh-baked cornbread filled Carol's house. Her stomach growled. She and Jeff had eaten baloney sandwiches while she finished cutting out and pasting up her homemade Valentines.

"We just finished lunch, but I still have plenty of soup leftover if you'd like some," Carol said.

"I would!" Jeff said.

"My little boy isn't shy, is he?"

Carol grinned. "Well, neither is his Daddy. At least not when it comes to food."

Katie felt her cheeks blush. Ron had never been shy in other ways, either.

"Go ahead and put a bowl on the table for Jeff, but I want to get over to the hospital and deliver these Valentines before the weather gets too bad."

Carol placed a hand on her shoulder. "Sweetie, are you sure you want to go over there today of all days?"

She drew in a deep breath. "Doing my little part to help those soldiers is better than sitting at home alone feeling sorry for myself. I'll be all right."

While stepping back outside, she pulled the collar of her coat up around her cheeks. The temperature seemed to have dropped

since the sun had gone behind the clouds. Cold and gray. It fit her mood. At the hospital, she'd put on her cheerful face to hide the sadness in her heart.



One of her favorite nurses sat behind the desk at the entrance to Ward Number One. She was a young cadet who'd just entered the Nurses Corps. The patients loved her.

"Hi, Martha."

The girl's cherry red lips turned up in a smile.

"Katie. I didn't know that you were volunteering today. I thought it was your day off."

"It is, but I made Valentines for the patients."

"How sweet. They're still eating lunch, but you go on in."

She took off her hat, gloves and coat and hung them on the coat rack next to the desk.

"Oh, Katie," Martha said. "I should warn you that we have a new patient. He's in pretty bad shape, and he just had a dose of morphine a little while ago."

Clutching the paper bag against her chest, she said, "Thanks for telling me. I'll just leave his Valentine on the nightstand. He can look at it when he's able."

Katie entered the ward to the sound of whistles from the guys who'd been there a while. She'd been volunteering at the hospital for more than a year and had gotten to know many of the longtime patients on a first name basis.

"Katie," one of men called out. "Today must be my lucky day to get a Valentine visit from the sweetest little gal at Fort Jackson."

The patient in the next bed tossed a balled up napkin at him.

"Just don't you forget that she's Captain Miller's wife."

She grinned at the exchange. "It's okay, Joe. I know that Frank is harmless. Happy Valentine's Day," she said and handed each of them a card from her sack.

"Aw, now ain't that pretty. Just like you, Katie," Joe said.

She worked her way down to the end of the row where she saw the new man. Martha hadn't exaggerated his condition. He was bandaged from head to foot like mummy. Only one eye and one side of his face were visible. She tiptoed around to the side of his bed to leave her card on the small nightstand. She couldn't

resist staring at the part of his face that she could see. He looked so young.

She started to walk away and then she heard him whisper, "Am I in heaven?"

"No. You're not in heaven," she said

"I must be, because you look like an angel."

She swallowed back the lump in her throat. Those were almost the same words Ron had spoken before getting on the train that would take him away from her.

"I brought you a Valentine," she said when she regained her composure, but he didn't respond. He'd already drifted back to sleep.

The tears were threatening spill out. She couldn't let the patients see her cry. To dispel her melancholy, she filled her mind with good thoughts and distributed the rest of the cards. She didn't spend as much time with the patients as she usually did, but she managed to give each one a warm smile and a word of encouragement.



Snow floated down onto the windshield of her car—Ron's car. *I must be in heaven, because you look like an angel.* Between the snow and the steady stream of tears running down her cheeks, she hoped she wouldn't wreck on the way back to Ben and Carol's. The snow had turned into a white shower of large flakes and was beginning to stick to the road. Such a snow was rare in South Carolina, and she wasn't used to driving in those conditions.

After she made it home, she sat in the driveway for a few minutes before going inside. She wiped her face dry with a tissue from her purse and patted some powder from her compact on her nose.

She draped her wool scarf over her hat and tied it under her chin to keep the brisk wind from blowing it away. Thank goodness, she didn't have to walk far to Carol's front door. For once, the close quarters of army housing came in handy.

"I'm glad to see you," Carol said. "It's really coming down out there, and I was worried about you driving back over here from the hospital."

"I...uhm...didn't stay as long as I'd planned. I guess it's a

good thing.”

While Carol hung up her coat and hat, she warmed herself in front of the fireplace in the small living room. Jeff and Brian, Carol’s youngest, were perched on the back of the sofa, watching the snowfall outside the window.

“The boys are mad at me,” Carol said. “Because they wanted to go outside and run around in the snow, and I wouldn’t let them.”

“Please, Mommy. Can I go outside?” Jeff asked.

“We’ll be going outside soon enough,” Katie said. “When we go back our house, believe me, you’ll be glad to get back inside. It’s freezing out there.”

“I kept some soup warm for you,” Carol said. “I figured you might need it.”

“Thank you. You’re a true friend.”

“Oh, I almost forgot. Ben said that he wanted to see you when you got back from the hospital.”

She let out a sigh. Her hunger could wait while she visited one more wounded soldier.

Ben was sitting up in bed—his heavily bandaged leg propped on several pillows. His oldest son was sitting at the foot of the bed, and Ben was quizzing him from one of his schoolbooks.

Ben looked up and smiled at her.

“Robbie, bring me that box off of the dresser,” he said. “And I need to speak with Katie alone for a few minutes.”

“Sure, Pop.”

While Robbie retrieved the box, her curiosity grew. Ben motioned for her to sit down in the chair by the bed.

“I have something for you,” he said and held the box out for her to take it. “Ron sent this home with me and asked me to give it to you on Valentine’s Day.”

She took it from his hand and fought the urge to tear into right away. Something told her she needed to wait for a private moment.

“What is it?”

“He bought it at a wood carver’s shop in Rome. That’s all I know.”

He paused and shifted his weight. A grimace appeared on his face as he did so.

“Can I get you anything?” she asked.

“No. I’m fine,” he said. “Katie, I want to tell you something. There wasn’t a day that went by that he didn’t talk about how much he loves and misses you.”

Her throat tightened and tears formed puddles in the bottom of her eyes.

“And I’ll tell you something else. I never saw him even look at another woman. One time, the guys were all excited because Dorothy Lamour was coming over to do a USO show, and Ron said, ‘My wife is prettier than Dorothy Lamour’.”

She blushed and then giggled. “Oh, Ben. I don’t believe that.”

“It’s true. I swear on the Virgin.”

“Ben!”

He shifted his weight again, and she heard him groan.

“Anyway, I also wanted to thank you for everything that you do for those guys in the hospital. It means more to them than you might know.”

She drew in a staggered breath. She was about to choke up again.

“Thank you for the things you’ve told me,” she said and stood up to leave. “I think I want to open Ron’s gift in private.”

Before leaving, she did something that she never thought she’d do in a million years. She leaned over and gave him a little kiss on the cheek. In the past, Ben hadn’t been one of her favorite people. She’d often wondered how her husband ended up being such close friends with him. Now that he’d been wounded, he was a different man. She could see the change in him.



She took the box back into the kitchen where Carol was ladling soup into a bowl for her.

“Robbie, go into the living room and turn on the radio for me,” Carol said. “I want to hear the weather report.”

Carol set the bowl of soup on the table along with a fresh-brewed cup of coffee.

“I’ll be in the living room,” she said.

Katie opened the box. A small card was placed on top of the

layers of tissue paper that covered her mysterious gift.

*Happy Valentine's Day to my angel. The moment I saw this,
I thought of you.
All my love,
Ron.*

She removed the tissue paper from the box. Underneath was the most beautiful angel she'd ever laid eyes on. She ran her fingers over the intricate design of the wings. The wood was smooth to the touch. Her hair was carefully detailed—strand-by-strand. Her tunic had been carved to look as if it was fashioned from layers of silk and caught in an imaginary breeze.

Katie found it hard to take her eyes from the delicate features of its face. The angel was smiling at a small bird she held in her hands. She marveled at the amount of love the wood carver had to have put into such a creation.

"Oh, Ron," she whispered. "I love you so much. Happy Valentine's Day, darling."

She turned to see Jeff standing in the doorway. She wiped away her tears with the napkin Carol had laid by the bowl of soup.

"Whatcha lookin' at, Mommy?"

"It's a surprise Valentine from Daddy."

"Can I see?"

"Of course, you can."

She turned the box so that he could see the angel. A grin spread across his pudgy cheeks.

"She looks like you, Mommy."

She pulled Jeff to her bosom and hugged him.

"You know something, Jeffrey. This has turned out to be a good Valentine's Day after all and next year, I just have a feeling that Daddy will be here with us."

THE END

The characters in *The Valentine Angel* are also featured in L.K. Campbell's novels, *A Soldier's Love* and *Gold Star Wife*. Please visit <http://www.lkcampbell.com> for more information.