

The Corpsman's Wife

A Novel

Sabine Chennault

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THE CORPSMAN'S WIFE

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For Lance



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The US Navy Hospital Corpsman's Pledge

I solemnly pledge myself before God and these witnesses to practice faithfully all of my duties as a member of the Hospital Corps. I hold the care of the sick and injured to be a privilege and a sacred trust and will assist the Medical Officer with loyalty and honesty. I will not knowingly permit harm to come to any patient. I will not partake of nor administer any unauthorized medication. I will hold all personal matters pertaining to the private lives of patients in strict confidence. I dedicate my heart, mind and strength to the work before me. I shall do all within my power to show in myself an example of all that is honorable and good throughout my naval career.

A Corpsman's Prayer

Grant me, oh Lord, for the coming events;
Enough knowledge to cope and some plain common sense.
Be at our side on those nightly patrols;
And be merciful judging our vulnerable souls.
Make my hands steady and as sure as a rock;
When the others go down with a wound or in shock.
Let me be close, when they bleed in the mud;
With a tourniquet handy to save precious blood.
Here in the jungle, the enemy near;
Even the corpsman can't offer much lightness and cheer.
Just help me, oh Lord, to save lives when I can;
Because even out there is merit in man.
If it's Your will, make casualties light;
And don't let any die in the murderous night.
These are my friends I'm trying to save;
They are frightened at times, but You know they are brave.
Let me not fail when they need so much;
But to help me serve with a compassionate touch.
Lord, I'm no hero—my job is to heal;
And I want You to know just how helpless I feel.
Bring us back safely to camp with dawn;
For too many of us are already gone.
Lord, bless my friends if that's part of your plan;
And go with us tonight, when we go out again.

—*Author Unknown*

As of today, a staggering number of veterans commit suicide every single day. Twenty-three percent of all homeless Americans are veterans, often homeless because their benefits did not come through before they lost their homes. Of all those feeling that there was no other way than to end their life, sixty-eight percent annually were in the Navy. Sixty percent of all veteran suicides are committed with a personally owned firearm, not a military issued one.

These are our husbands, wives, fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters, and children.

They go to fight a war, which at some point no longer makes sense to them.

They grew up protected in a country with the prime purpose of instant gratification and are thrown into countries where people not only live by different rules but also will not stop killing those who disagree with their beliefs.

When the Navy, Marines, Army, Air Force and Coast Guard are done with them, vets all too often feel cast aside with nowhere to turn and without the ability to make sense of anything.

Any one of them may be living in a loving family but feel lost and alone without anywhere but the wrong end of a gun to turn to.

THEY SERVED FOR US, WHY ARE WE
TURNING OUR BACKS ON THEM?

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Most of all I'd like to thank all of those amazing men and women who continue to serve with little regard to their own physical and mental well-being. You are true heroes and deeply loved.

We believe in you,
We are here for you,
You will never be alone.

No matter what, help and a listening ear are never more than a phone call away.

The Corpsman's Wife

Prologue

SUSI SAT IN HER seat, blue eyes shrink-wrapped in tears as she stared out the window of the Boeing 777. She was on her way to Germany, and outside the small window, it was dark—the sky and sea the color of charcoal. A chill ran down her back with thoughts of her husband, Lance, the love of her life, lying on the floor, the empty bottle of rum and empty medication containers next to him. There had barely been a pulse or noticeable breath.

How could she have let things get that far? she demanded, wiping the tear from her eye. *Not seen the signs, let him suffer like that?*

Had she become so disconnected that she hadn't noticed his trips to the VA to get medication? The drinking, which she had been sure had stopped?

"You just don't miss things like that when you really love someone," she whispered to herself.

If she could do it all again, everything, from the moment she met him to now, would she do anything differently? The thought lingered. She smiled, thinking about how they'd met. The look on his kind face, the playfulness in his hazel eyes. That first night together had been so wonderful. He could be so gentle and romantic, and there was something in his eyes, in his touch, that she had never seen or felt before. Just the thought of his touch made her tingle.

He had said on multiple occasions that he never wanted to be a statistic, so why did he not think about that when he chose the pills and rum? He knew that she wouldn't be home for hours, that she wouldn't have a ride, that she would be worried if he didn't come to get her, and that she would panic when he didn't answer the phone. Why would he be okay with that? She gave herself a mental nudge. *Think about how desperate he was; this isn't about you.*

The Corpsman's Wife

The stewardess's voice jerked her back to reality. "Wh...what?" she asked, wiping the tears away.

"Can I get you anything?" the stewardess asked, her brown eyes soft. With a gentle smile, she leaned in. "Are you...is everything okay?"

"Oh, yes, yes, I'm fine," Susi snuffled and faked a smile, "but...a glass of the red wine would be nice."

The stewardess smiled and nodded.

Susi looked at the monitor in the back of the seat in front of her—four more hours to go. This trip had been long overdue and despite all that had happened, she looked forward to the distraction of old friends and family.

The stewardess laid a napkin on the armrest table between Susi and the passenger next to her. Susi thanked her, gave the glass a few short swirls, leaned back, and took a sip. She closed her eyes. The warmth of the wine took her back to Bennigan's, the night she met Lance.

ONE

Great Lakes

"I didn't choose his life, I chose him; the life was just part of the deal."

“HELLO?” SUSI ANSWERED THE PHONE. She was the last one in the office, just after eight in the evening.

“I knew I’d find you at work,” the voice stated. “Don’t you think you should go home?”

“Look who’s talking.” Susi smiled. “Hi, Tracy, what’s up?”

“Why are you at work so late?” Tracy wanted to know.

“Gene is at the house getting some more of his stuff,” Susi stated rather sarcastically.

“I have a proposition for you. Remember my little brother, Tony?” Tracy inquired but didn’t wait for an answer. “He joined the Navy a few months ago, and next Wednesday he’s graduating. I’m flying up, and our aunt and uncle from Ohio are coming. I want you to go.”

“I should just take a few days off, just like that on such short notice?” Susi joked.

“Yeah, why not?” Tracy fired back. “You told me two weeks ago that you’ve been working from seven in the morning till eight at night every day for weeks. You need to take some time off. You know what they say, all work and no play...blah blah.”

“I’ll call Dr. Carl and see what he says. Don’t count on it.” Susi sighed deeply. “I’ll call you right back.”

“Okay, hurry up, I have some great news for you that I want to share,” Tracy urged.

"Tell me now." Susi pushed.

"No," Tracy insisted. "I'll tell you when you call back." With that Tracy hung up. Susi laid the receiver on the cradle and hesitated. *Why does she do this to me. I know she means well, and she's really never been off in her suggestions. Oh fuck, fine.* She picked up the phone and called Dr. Carl's home number.

"Susi, are you still at the office?" the doctor answered.

"Yes, I'm about to wrap it up. I had a question for you. If it's not okay, I really understand and it's not a problem." She felt she had laid the foundation for him to turn down her request and not feel bad.

"What do you need, Susi? You have worked so hard and I cannot begin to tell you how much we appreciate you," he told her, and she knew she'd be going to Chicago.

"I'd like to go to Chicago for a few days," she said. "My best friend's brother is graduating from Naval boot camp, and she asked me to come up." She paused. "Like I said, it is not a must do."

"Of course," he responded. "You need a little time away and it is summer, so we're not too busy. How about Monday to Monday?"

"Oh, I won't need that much time. Tuesday to Friday is fine," Susi noted.

"As you wish." Dr. Carl chuckled. "Sounds good. We will see you tomorrow."

Susi bid him goodnight and wondered if she should call Tracy back right now or wait till she got home. She went for the latter, shut down all the lights and left. The building was old and needed renovation, but Dr. Carl was waiting for a younger doctor to come in, take it over and renovate the building.

Gene was gone by the time she got home, but as usual left the lights on. The grey brick house felt empty, even though she was happy he would be out of her life. The house was small, but they hadn't needed anything bigger since it was just the two of them. As soon as he stopped coming, she would repaint the whole house and replace the furniture.

She went to the kitchen, got a wineglass out of the old, brown, china cabinet she had inherited from her grandmother, poured a glass of wine,

and sat on the blue-and-white checkered couch. *I'm gonna have a bonfire with this thing if he doesn't take it.* Susi pulled the phone off the end table on her right and sat it on her lap, took a deep drink of her wine and dialed.

"Hello?" the male voice at the other end stated.

"Gene, listen, 'cause I'm only going to say this once." The wine gave her courage, and she took another drink. "I'm gonna be gone from Tuesday to Thursday. There will be no more of these little trips here and there to get your shit. Make arrangements to get what you want and then stay the fuck away from here. You do not live here anymore."

"Why are you so hostile?" he wanted to know.

"I'm not interested in a conversation with you, just please get your stuff," she sighed. "Whatever is left when I get back will get donated or burned. Got it?"

"Fine," he scowled and hung up. She really needed to call Tracy back. She pressed down on the cradle to get a dial tone and dialed her number. At that very moment, she remembered that with Tracy in Texas, she was two hours ahead. It was past eleven at night there.

"Jesus Christ, woman, what the fuck took so long?" Tracy announced at the other end. "Do you know what time it is?"

"I'm sorry, sweetheart." Susi kissed the phone. "I called Dr. Carl from the office, came home, poured a glass of wine and called Gene."

"How did that go?" Tracy asked.

"I told him that I'm gonna be gone from Tuesday till Friday and he needs to get the rest of his shit out of the house. What's left when I get back is going to get donated or burned."

"So, you're going?" Tracy inquired.

"Looks like it," Susi announced with the enthusiasm of a sloth. "Dr. Carl wanted me to take the whole week, but I told him Tuesday to Friday is fine."

"That works great," Tracy replied. "I'm relocating for my new job and I have to start there Monday after next."

"Nice, where are you moving to?" Susi asked and emptied the rest of the wine in her glass.

“I thought I’d fly back down with you since my new job is at McDonnell Douglas in Mesa.” She waited.

“What?” Susi jumped off the couch, and her mood improved instantly. “Are you serious?”

“Yup, they’ve been bugging me for a year, and they finally made the right offer, and I accepted.” Susi could feel her smiling at the other end. “I don’t have a place yet, and since you have the house to yourself, I thought maybe I could bunk with you for the time being.”

“Absolutely, it’ll be like old times.” Susi was elated. “Oh my god, I can’t believe this, this is seriously the best news I’ve had all year.”

They ironed out the details of the flight while Susi munched on some cheese and crackers.

Tracy was flying with Alaska Airlines from Dallas to Chicago. She was scheduled to arrive at Terminal 3. Susi booked a flight with Alaska as well, which would also arrive at Terminal 3 half an hour after Tracy’s. They planned to meet at Bubbles for some sparkling wine and some snacks. Susi would rent her own car since Tracy and Tony would have other family in town. Susi wanted to go to the Sears Tower and stroll along Lake Shore Drive. She was looking forward to the trip. She hadn’t seen Tracy in over a year, and it had been at least fifteen since she saw Tony.

“Don’t we have to be back by midnight?” someone behind Susi yelled. She had just gotten a glass of red wine at the bar. The bartender had suggested a Washington red blend, and she loved it. She took a small sip, smiled at the bartender and nodded. She turned and ran right into one of the many sailors in the restaurant, spilling her wine all over him and herself. His beautiful white uniform was drenched in the red liquid. She just stood there staring at him, her red hair framing her face like a burning halo. The look on his face was priceless. Everyone around them fell silent as they both started laughing. She hadn’t laughed this hard in she couldn’t remember how long. Tears were rolling down her face, and she had to grab hold of his arm to steady herself.

“I really don’t see what’s so funny.” She could tell he was trying to be serious. “I didn’t plan on having to go change.”

“Get over yourself, sailor,” she snickered. “You’re not the only one who’s wet here.”

They looked at each other and started laughing again. Several of his friends along with hers had gathered around them to see what was going on.

“Hey, Susi, I have a sweater in the car you can change into,” her friend Tracy yelled from somewhere in the crowd.

“Susi, huh?” He smiled at her.

She held out her hand. “Susi...Susi Jury. Pleasure to meet you, sailor.” He took her hand, and she almost pulled away. He had never felt anything like that before. It was unexpected, almost like an electrical surge. She held on, her tiny hand felt good in his, and there was something familiar in her touch. Susi turned bright red, leaving little difference between her hair and her face.

“Lance...” That was all he managed to get out before one of the other guys pulled him back. “Please, don’t leave,” he managed to yell as someone pulled her towards the door.

“Didn’t know we were chasing tail tonight,” Cory, one of Lance’s fellow boot-camp graduates, stated.

“Do you have to be such an ass?” Lance countered. He hadn’t cared much for Cory; he always had some derogatory comment handy when it came to women. Lance went to the restroom to assess the damage; it wasn’t that bad. She must have gotten the most of it on her.

He went back out to the bar, which was somewhat separate from the main dining room, Whether it was Chili’s, Applebee’s, or Bennigan’s, they all looked pretty much the same.

He couldn’t find her anywhere and went out to the parking lot. He saw her and another woman standing by a car under one of the lights. She was pulling off her wet blouse to put on something else, and he could see her silhouette under the light. Despite the fact that it had been a warm July day, since the sun had gone down, it was rather chilly.

He walked a little closer, hoping not to be discovered, to see if he could listen in on their conversation. Lance knew that he shouldn't, but there was something so intriguing about her. He couldn't put his finger on it just yet, but he was willing to find out.

"Susi? What's going on?" Her friend gave her a slight push.

"I'm not sure," Susi responded honestly, "just something...I don't know...when he took my hand...it felt like a strong electric surge right through my core."

Lance smiled; she had felt the same thing he did.

"Hey, ladies." He approached them with a big smile.

"How long have you been standing there?" her brown-haired, short, skinny friend wanted to know.

"Long enough." He smiled.

"This is my friend Tracy," Susi told him as she pulled a light, pale green sweater over her head. He could see the glow of a soft tan and the freckles across her chest.

"What's the idea of sneaking up on us, sailor?" Tracy demanded.

"Don't pay attention to her," Susi quipped. "She gets that way around guys."

"Um." Lance blushed. "I understand."

The girls laughed.

"That's not what she means," Tracy scowled. "Honestly, Susi, you need to watch what you say sometimes." Both girls laughed, and Tracy tossed the wet shirt in the back seat before the three of them headed back inside.

Their friends had moved to the main dining room where two tables had been pulled together. Lance sat next to Susi, and while everyone engaged in conversations about the unusually cold July nights to the beauty of Lake Michigan on a sunny day and some of the crap they had to deal with in boot camp, Lance and Susi talked about more relevant things. He wanted to know where her last name originated and told her that he detected an ever-so-slight accent.

She told him that she had been born and raised in Germany and that she came over not that long ago. He could tell that there was something she wasn't ready to share. Talking to her was easy. He felt as if he

could just go on and on, something just felt right, something he had never felt before.

“We better get going,” one of the guys suggested. “One more for the road while we wait on the cab?”

“Do you have to go?” Susi whispered to Lance, her voice shaking.

“What did you have in mind?” He looked at her, smiled, and took her hand. He kissed her fingers as they interlocked with his. He could tell that her friend Tracy, sitting only two seats away, wasn’t too thrilled with how close he and Susi were getting.

“Where are you staying?” Lance wanted to know.

“At the Candlewood Suites,” Susi whispered to Lance, “close to base,” her voice somewhat shaky.

“Did you drive or did someone else?” he asked, smiling.

“I did,” she said, returning a smile. “We came in two cars. Tracy has family here for her brother’s graduation and I wanted a little time to myself to bum around Chicago.”

“I’ll wait for you outside.” He squeezed her hand and pulled the collar of his coat up. The rest of them shared a long good-bye. Tracy even managed to give Lance and some of the other guys a hug. Susi pulled Tracy aside, and Lance could overhear what was being said.

“I’m taking him with me.” Susi didn’t hide the statement. “I’ll see you guys in the morning, okay?”

“Sure thing, sweetie,” Tracy said with a grin and a wink. “Have fun.”

“I’ll see you outside,” Lance whispered in her ear. He could tell that the wisps of his breath made the hair on her neck stand on end. He smiled.

Susi came out of the door and shivered in the cold wind coming off Lake Michigan.

“Crazy how cold it is in the middle of July, isn’t it?” Lance wrapped his arm around her. “Do you want my coat?”

“No, thank you,” she replied, snuggling closer to his warm body. “The car is just right there, the blue Pontiac Grand Am. Not my personal favorite.”

“May I?” He was at the driver’s side, taking the key from her hand. He opened the door, waited for her to get in, and then handed her back the keys.

“A true gentleman.” Susi smiled. He could tell how blue her eyes were even in the dark.

“Damn, it’s cold.” He rubbed his hands together in front of his mouth and blew warm air into them. After a few moments of silence, he gently touched Susi’s hand. “Can I tell you something?”

Susi nodded.

“Honestly, it’s not just the air that’s giving me chills. I have no idea where this is gonna go, but right now, in this moment, nothing feels more right,” he confessed. “You know I can see you blush, you don’t have to hide it.” He laid his hand on her shoulder.

“What’s next for you?” Susi changed the subject.

“You mean with the Navy?” Lance inquired, and she nodded. He could tell she was nervous and hoped that some small talk would help her relax. “I’ll be staying here for a few more months to go through A school. Are you from around here?” He smiled at her in the dark and gently squeezed her hand.

“I’m sorry, but no.” He saw the smile fade from her lips. “Right now, I live in Arizona, but I don’t want to stay there for long. I was just here to get away for a few days and to attend Tracy’s little brother’s graduation.”

“I see,” Lance stated matter-of-factly. “Anyone waiting for you back there?”

“Not really,” she said with a slight sigh.

“What do you mean by not really?” he wanted to know. “If there are things you’re not ready to talk about, I understand.”

She took a deep breath. “It’s not that, I’m just not sure how to lay out the last few miserable years. It’s not something I’m proud of. The guy I was married to, whom I came over here with from Germany, wasn’t what one might consider nice. You know what I mean?”

“Abusive?” Lance saw her nod. “I’m sorry,” he said quietly and squeezed her hand again. “I can’t stand guys like that; in my book they are sorry excuses of human beings. Sorry, just my opinion. One can only hope karma will take care of him.”

“Thank you, I really appreciate you saying that. I’ve filed for divorce, so that will all be over soon.” She forced a smile.

They pulled up to the hotel and she parked.

“I’m in 203.” She handed him the keycard. “I’m just going to stop in and tell Tracy good night really quick.”

They walked in together and made their way up the stairs without saying a word. Susi knocked on Tracy’s door while Lance inserted the key card just opposite of where she was standing. As he opened the door to Susi’s room, Tracy opened the doors to hers.

He closed the door behind him and looked around the room. A small kitchenette with basic appliances and necessities made way to an area with the bed and armchair on one side with a desk, chair, lamp and television on the other. The brown carpet made the room seem darker. He investigated the bathroom with its cool grey tile, white walls and shower curtain. Moments later he could hear the girls talking in the hall and looked through the little peep hole in the door.

Tracy gave Susi a gentle nudge out the door, but Susi quickly turned and pushed her hands against the door so Tracy couldn’t close it.

“I am really nervous!” he heard Susi quickly state. “Anyway, I really just wanted to know what time we have to leave in the morning?”

“We need to leave here no later than ten to make it to the airport on time.” Then she smiled. “I was gonna go and have breakfast with Tony, but you don’t need to go.”

“Okay, thanks. Give him my love and tell him to stay safe wherever they send him.” Susi leaned in to hug her friend and then turned and knocked on her own door. It startled Lance since he was so focused on their conversations.

He opened the door and smiled at her almost sheepishly. It was more than obvious that he was no less nervous than her. She stood by the door smiling at him. “Now what?”

He reached for her hands with both of his and, turning both of her hands palm side up, he kissed each palm gently, then looked at her and smiled.

“You have the most amazing blue eyes I have ever seen,” he declared and saw the warm blush rising in her cheeks, and she looked at the floor.

He gently lifted her chin and moved closer to kiss her. He could feel her melt against his lips.

“Shall we have a little nightcap?” He pointed at the limited variety of small bottles he had pulled out of the minibar.

“Sure,” Susi beamed and laughed. “Something should help make my hands stop shaking so bad.” She held both arms straight out in front of her, and he saw how nervous she really was.

He took two small bottles of rum from the counter along with a Coke and a couple bottles of water. Quickly depositing all the items on the small table at the end of the desk, he stood and wrapped his arms around her.

“My insides are shaking as bad as your hands.” He leaned down to kiss the top of her head, and she ran her hands down his back. He loved how small she was. She laid her head against his chest, and he leaned his against hers. They fit together like two odd puzzle pieces.

“I cannot recall ever having been so comfortable and content in someone’s arms,” she spoke softly. He breathed in the scent of her hair.

“It might sound silly for me to say this, but I have never felt so at home in anyone’s arms either,” he said tenderly. “Not to sound weird, but I felt it the moment you touched my hand.”

She pulled her head away from his chest and looked up at him, her big blue eyes filled with tears. “How am I supposed to let you go?”

“Don’t say that right now,” he urged. “Don’t even think that. Right now, we are together and right now is all that matters.” He lifted her chin with his right hand and gently wiped away a tear with the other, noticing how soft her skin was.

“We will figure this out,” Lance whispered as he took her face in both of his hands. “Right now, I don’t know how, but I promise you I will not lose you or let you go. It may be hard in the beginning. We both have a lot to deal with, but we will make this work.” With that he closed his eyes as his lips gently kissed hers. He could feel her body relax as she sank into his arms. Right now, in this moment, she was completely in tune with him. As they gradually began undressing each other, they moved slowly, their lips never separating. He picked her up

and gently laid her on the bed. There could not possibly be a more perfect moment than right now.

The next morning came all too quickly. Susi lay in bed next to Lance. His eyes were closed, but he wasn't asleep. He liked how gently she moved when she had to get up and how soft her skin felt against his when she snuggled against him. He had dated plenty in his time, but she was a first in every way. There was nothing fake about her.

"You look a lot more rugged with that three a.m. shadow on your face," she had said. Her long red hair draped across his broad chest. At one point during the night he had held his hand against hers and his fingers were significantly longer than hers. She could make a fist, and he could close his fingers around hers and cover her whole hand. Was it possible to feel this much love for anyone this fast? She snuggled in close to him without opening her eyes, and he pulled her closer. Her skin against his gave him a level of comfort he had never experienced. He had been adopted when he was three years old, in and out of foster homes from the time he was six months old. Abused from early infancy, everyone had written him off as a loner never able to really feel emotions or a deep connection with anyone. Being honest with himself, he had never allowed himself to feel anything. He'd been afraid to; nothing was worse than the pain that could result from deep emotions, and he'd had friends who were crushed after a breakup.

A couple of hours later, the rising sun woke them both. "Good morning, beautiful," he greeted her. "That brain of yours already hard at work?"

"Oh, hush." She rolled on her back. "You're not supposed to be awake yet."

He yawned and raised his arms behind his head in a long stretch. The comforter slipped to his waist, and his firm chest and stomach were exposed. She gently touched his stomach and he quivered.

"Don't take this the wrong way, but I really don't like those soft

touches, but I noticed that you really do.” He smiled and winked. She gently smacked his bare chest as she blushed.

“I think we need to get ready, so you can drop me at the base before heading to the airport.” No sooner had he said that when he saw the tears rise in her eyes, and she swallowed hard.

He got out of bed and grabbed a notepad on the desk. He scribbled something on it and handed her the piece of paper.

“This is my address, this is good until December. Now, can I have yours?” He handed her the pen, and she wrote down hers along with her phone number.

“Are you sure it’s okay to call?” he asked. She had told him that she filed for a divorce, but he didn’t know if her soon-to-be ex-husband was still in the house.

“He is supposed to be out of the house by the time I get back, but I will write you and let you know when he’s gone for sure.”

“We can go have a little breakfast somewhere or we can grab something downstairs on our way out the door if you’d rather play a little longer.” With that he picked her up and carried her back to bed. Gently laying her down, his lips never left hers.

They made love one more time before sharing a shower, and he helped gather her things while she packed, and they left the room. They had been on the second floor, and there was no need to take the elevator. They walked down the hall, down the stairs, to the lobby, holding hands as if they had been together forever, but neither of them spoke a word. Lance wondered what either of them could possibly have said to make the next hour any easier?

They had a cup of coffee and a Danish before making their way to the car. It was getting warmer outside, and there wasn’t a cloud in the sky.

“When do you start A school again?” Susi asked.

“Next week,” he stated firmly. “Not looking forward to the dead of winter here though.” He looked at her and smiled. “Don’t get me wrong, I love snow. We get plenty of it in Washington, but from what I hear, it’s just insane here, not to mention below zero temperatures and the wind coming off the lake, brrrrr.” He shuddered just talking about it.

“I bet fall is very pretty though. Anything is better than that terrible heat in the desert,” she proclaimed.

They were at the base in a matter of minutes. Susi pulled up close to the gate where Lance had directed her to stop. She put the car in park. He followed her every movement and could tell from her quivering lip that she was trying not to cry.

“What are we going to do?” she whispered. He knew it was a rhetorical question. He got out of the car, walked around to the driver’s side, opened the door and knelt down. He could have cared less at this point how much dirtier his dress whites got.

“Look at me,” he spoke softly, but she didn’t turn. “Please look at me.” Her head slowly moved. The tears made her blue eyes seem even brighter. He wanted to wrap her in his arms and tell her to stay, but he knew that wasn’t possible.

“I told you last night, right now there are things we both have to do,” he continued. “There is just no way around that.” He grabbed her hands the best he could with her sitting in the car. “I don’t know what will happen down the road, but I promise you right here, right now, there will never be anyone else in my heart...ever.”

She stepped out of the car while he held her hands and looked at him with all the hope of the world reflected in her eyes. He felt as if his heart were ripping in two as tears slowly rolled down her face.

“I need you to be strong, not just for you but for both of us,” he confided, smiling. “I will write as often as I can and as soon as it is alright for me to call, I will.” He pulled a handkerchief out of his pocket, softly wiped the tears from her eyes, and gently kissed her.

“I have to go,” he said, pulling her in close and hugging her tightly.

“I love you,” she whispered softly. He looked at her eyes while kissing her hands.

“I love you too, more than I ever thought possible.” He kissed her forehead, let go of her hands, and whispered, “I’ll see you soon.” With that he walked away.

The Corpsman's Wife