

SHORT STORY

(Continued from previous page)

Then I noticed that Marcia wasn't there.

"Oh, didn't you know?" said Helen. "Marcia's gone overseas as a V.A.D. Collecting experiences, she said. I'm trying to go, too, and so's Joan, but we haven't done our sixty hours' hospital training yet."

"Don't suppose we'll be able to get away now, anyway," said Joan gloomily.

"Why not?" I said.

"Be rather difficult travelling by then, don't you think?"

"I see the Head's back to pink chiffon," I comment.

"Dad dug our trench this afternoon," said Con. "I said 'You don't think I'm going to spoil my few remaining clothes by lying flat on my stomach in that, do you?' and he said, 'If there's a raid you'd be only too pleased to lie flat on your stomach anywhere.' Did you know I joined the W.A.A.F.'s?"

"No. How's Hilary's baby?" I ask.

"They're taking our house over to turn into an emergency hospital," says Marion. "I said to the man who came to inspect it that I thought I should be allowed to stay on as a canteen worker. After all I've lived there for twenty-two years and I do know something about running the place."

"Where else could you go?" I asked.

"Oh, didn't you know. They've got a wonderful scheme, all perfect down to the last detail, for evacuating all the women and children to the hills. Safe, I suppose, but awfully dull. Can't you imagine it? Crying infants and harassed mothers. I suppose one could play bridge."

"By the way, is Shirley engaged to Michael yet?" I interrupt.

"If this V.A.D. business falls through I don't know what I shall do," said Joan. "I suppose I'd better join the W.W.S.A., but as what? I can't make up my mind whether to go as a Plunket Aid and be sent up to the hills with the women and children, or enlist as a canteen worker and stay down here and cook for the Home Guard. The Plunket Aid business would be safer, but as Marion says, how dull. But if I stay with the Home Guard and the Home Guard gets captured what happens to me?"

"I'm all for dark glasses and hair in curl-papers," says Marion.

"Listen," I say. "Are you children being funny or something?" They look at me incredulously. "Do you honestly think there's going to be an invasion?"

"Well, it's quite likely," says Helen.

"But why? Why should the Japanese come here? What reason could they possibly have for wasting time and ammunition on a town with three thousand inhabitants and a bicycle or two?"

"There's the camp," says Helen.

"And it's near the coast," says Marion.

"And the Main Trunk," says Con.

"And didn't they say they would land in the centre and separate Auckland and Wellington?" triumphantly from Joan.

"Don't be ridiculous," I say. "It can't happen here." And ignoring the cries of "ostrich" and "What happened at Pearl Harbour?" I say firmly, "And now will someone please tell me when and how and where Sonia married the youth with spots?"



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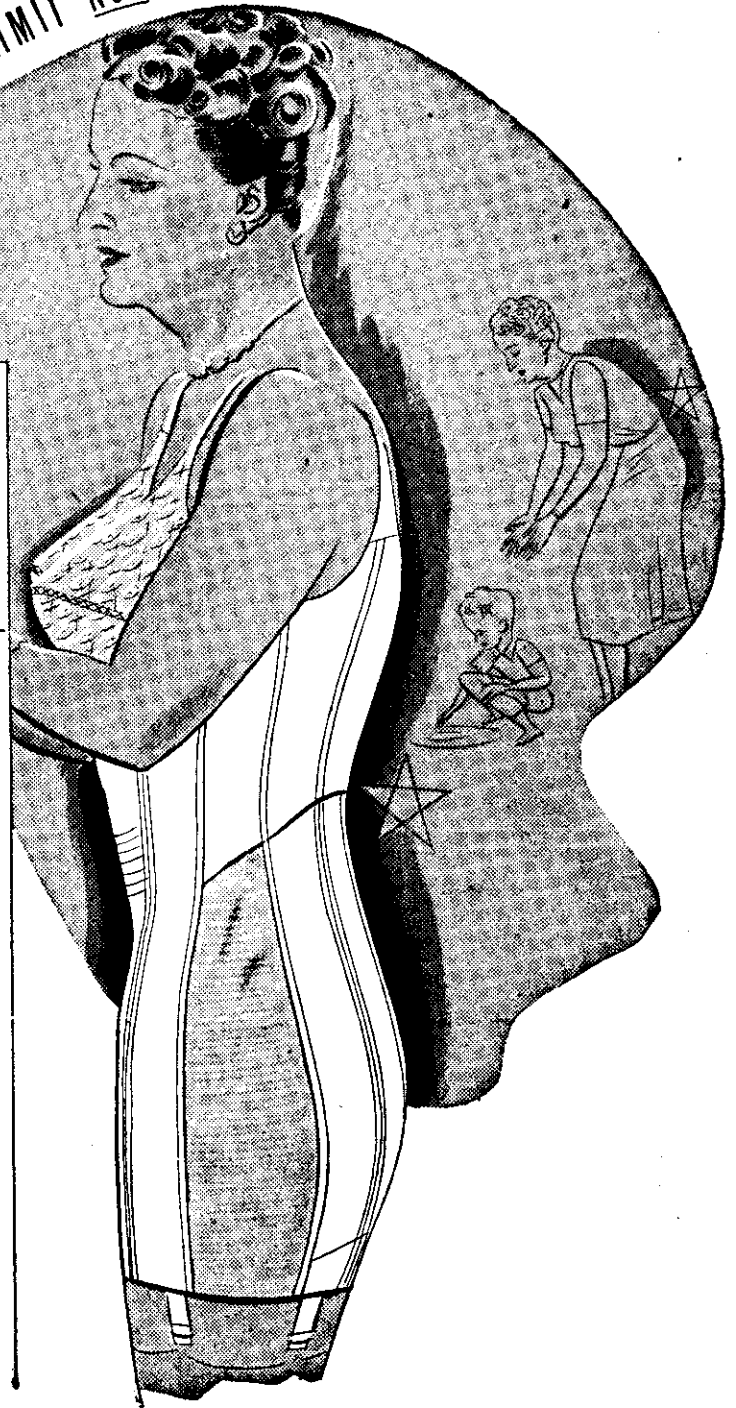
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