

Snowflakes blew sideways down Main Street in Richmond, Virginia. It was Valentine's Day. Newlyweds, James and Betty Smith cuddled inside the trolley car. Betty took the cuff of her coat and brushed it across the window. Snow powdered brick buildings, running boards of parked Fords and Packards heaped with flurries, the sun paused low over the horizon. The Capitol was dusted in shades of gray.

They'd taken the train from their home in Philadelphia. It was their first trip south of the Mason-Dixon Line.

James had saved enough for a few days off and asked his bride where she would like to go. Ever since Betty saw *Gone With the Wind*, she wanted to visit the South.

Betty felt ritzy in her stylish beret, the mauve gloves and matching scarf arranged in neat folds around her neck. Cold air stung her bare legs. Though rationing ended it would be another year before she could buy nylons.

For their first day in the city, they went to the movies.

Back home, as she watched the coming attractions for *Gilda*, she just had to see the movie. When Rita Hayworth tossed back her luxuriant hair, her low-cut dress revealing a generous bust, and smiled at Glenn Ford, Betty dreamed of seducing James in just the same way.

She didn't have the sumptuous hair, or the opulent cleavage, and gosh dang it, she wasn't beautiful like all the good looking dames in the movies, but she knew that James was dizzy in love with her.

The trolley clanged, stopped and picked up a man in uniform.

Betty's nose touched the glass as she stared down the street and saw the theatre marquee with neon lights. There were so many people, bundled in wool coats and hats. They gathered in the portico, buying tickets at the box office. A column of people stretched beyond the roped off barricade, so many movie goers that another line began on the opposite side. Even on a cold late afternoon, half the city came out for the premiere.

"I'll get the tickets," James said.

Betty kissed his cheek. "I'll miss you, darling."

The trolley stopped. James tugged at the brim of his fedora. Betty hurried down the aisle and stepped into a cold gust of air.

She rushed to the shorter line, brushed snow from her coat, and tightened the scarf around her neck. People filed behind her, James waited at the ticket booth. He blew her a kiss. She beamed.

Betty heard grumbling. Of all the days to get into a snit, she thought.

Across the portico, an older man glared at her. Why, she wondered? She smiled back. Perhaps he had indigestion, or the biting wind triggered his rheumatism.

James put the tickets in his pocket and dashed to Betty.

They nuzzled.

Low angry voices rumbled behind them.

Betty didn't move but glanced from side to side.

Two women in front looked over their shoulders. One scowled, the other clicked her tongue.

"Where's their southern hospitality?" Betty whispered to James.

"Beats me," he said and kissed her on the mouth.

Across the arcade, a woman shook her head and muttered.

Betty let go of her husband and stepped away.

"Hey, come here." James reached for her.

"No darling," she said, afraid she had offended their southern ladylike ways.

Muffled barbs. A woman cackled.

James took her hand.

"No darling. They don't like public displays of affection."

"Nuts!"

"They're genteel. I've heard that about the South."

A man across the way glowered and spat.

"Fuddy Duddy," James said, burrowing his fists into his coat pockets. "We're married." He yanked at his collar. "I spent four years fighting for my country, I have every right to hold hands with my wife."

Betty lowered her gaze and stepped further away from her husband.

She smelled aftershave lotion on someone behind her.

"Let's leave."

"You wanted to see this movie." James reached for her, wrapped his arms around her, and pulled her to his chest.

The crowd's pulse throbbed with a venomous beat, snaking its way around the colonnade.

"Please, James. Let's go."

People stepped out of line. Shoes squished. Twisted faces. Snarls. The mob moved in on James and Betty Smith.

Betty hung onto her husband's waist for fear they would tear them apart. Sweat soaked her blouse. She wanted to bolt. Run all the way back to Philadelphia.

"Trouble makers!"

"Wise guy!"

James' arms tensed. She felt his back muscles tighten. That frightened her more than anything. Open the doors, she prayed. She feared if they moved they'd be beaten to death.

"We've done nothing wrong," James shouted.

Atomic eyes. Incendiary mouths. spurts of vapor.

The theatre doors swung open, two men ran out, and the older one yelled, "Break it up, move back!" He pushed through the crowd.

Someone shoved James.

He swung around. "Hey! Step out in the open and fight like a man. I'll bust your chops," he seethed. Betty grabbed him and held on. "No darling."

"I said break it up!"

The younger man held out his arms, urging people to get in their lines. "Show's over. Except for the one inside."

The pack shifted, grunted and slowly began to separate.

"You agitators or something?"

Betty glanced at his name tag: Manager Michael Buchanan.

"No," James said. "We were minding our own business. Just holding hands."

"All we wanted was to see the movie," Betty said.

"I'll handle it, darling."

"Where you from?"

"Philadelphia," James said.

"Can't you read?"

"Of course I can read."

"You're standing in the colored line."

Betty reeled. Her gloves hid her mouth. Her romantic image of the South ruined forever.

"Northerners," he muttered. "Get in your own line and from now on remember where you are."

The young man stood at the door taking tickets from people across the portico.


Betty glanced around, ashamed, not for herself but for everyone there.

"Let's leave, James."

"You've been looking forward to this movie."

"Not anymore. Let's go."

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