

# 1 in 1,000,000 BY WALTER BLUME

I proposed to her that night, sitting there in the park. It was a black night with noises only from the leaves rustling by an occasional breeze. She looked at me with a look that Mothers give to a too impatient or unwise child, who wishes to do things he is not yet ready for.

"Tommie," she had said in a quiet voice, "we must wait until you finish school and get a job for both of us to live on. If we get married now, you'll never finish and someday you will hate me for it . . . Just think, Tommie Shelton, chemical engineer. Tommie, darling, I do love you so—but we must think of our future and perhaps someone else."

I knew it would be that way and to make it even worse, I knew that she was right. That she loved me was a certainty—as certain as grass is green.

Have you ever loved someone so much that your whole inside felt like a thousand little demons trying to cut their way out but were always being pushed back by society's conventions? Have you ever seen one of those strong men break a belt by expanding his chest? My heart felt imprisoned in a steel clamp and for all its incessant beatings could not break it. Love! Bah, men can't put it into words—it eats you up alive. I could never bear the thought of living the rest of my life without her. But you say, "She will wait for you, then in two, perhaps three years, all will be well."

Yeah—that's what I used to think and never doubted that all would come true as we had planned . . . Go on back to school and work like hell for two more years—get that sheepskin and then . . . go from office to office, town to town, and maybe somebody would give me a job. If I were lucky, I'd make enough so we could get married. That's all I wanted out of life—a job, a wife, a little home, and perhaps later one . . .

Damn that woman. Why did I ever have to see her?

I'd just made my third payment on an engagement ring. Walking joyfully down the street, I wanted to stop everyone and shout out that I was in love. Then that wretch seeing me rasped out, "Come in here for a minute young

man and hear the future." . . . Just for fun, I thought, I'd go in and let that silly old woman tell me how wonderful my future was. I'd never believed in them. They always told you, you had a girl and would live happily the rest of your life or some such bunk. But I was feeling grand and did not mind hearing a little bunk.

She had a little two-by-four joint and some dirty worn out cards. She looked as they all do—ragged black hair, beady black eyes, a peaked nose. She was different though. She told me that I would finish school in unusual circumstances and that success waited for me. That was fine; what about my girl? Squinting at me she assumed the pose of a sympathetic friend, "My son, you are young yet and have a lot to learn about the ways of women. Before much time passes there will come between you and your girl a difference in feeling. You will be the cause of it. You two shall never marry." Laughingly, I paid her and told her to go stick her head in some mud.

It was funny, ludicrously so. Yet the words she had uttered remained seared in my mind and bad dreams ensued. All my life I have had to work hard in order to go to school and many are the times that golden opportunities had been snatched out of my hands. Thinking back, I remembered how my friends were such pessimists. They had laughed when I said I was in love. They would say, "No girl will ever wait that long for a man." . . .

That night sitting there in the park, she fell asleep in my arms. It's no use describing her. Any man will tell you what she looked like if he's been a lover. To a man in love there is no comparison; his woman is the one supreme.

Madness! Was it? All I know is that when I looked down into her face, I did not want anything to come between us. I thought it would be wonderful to die together and never have to be separated. Without seeming to realize it, my pocket knife lay open in my hand. I stole a kiss from her and then plunged that dull knife blade into her breast. With a smile on her face she opened her eyes and then closed them again. God—Oh, God! What had I done—madness had left me and stary reality came . . . Perhaps it was not too late, I ran for a doctor.

Doctors, doctors, doctors, all the doctors in the world could not have saved her. Those I had brought to her stated that she had died almost instantly. Seeming to know what my intentions had been they looked at me as if to say, "You yellow livered dog—got scared and backed out of it."

No—I had not been afraid to die. I'm not afraid to die right now . . . Five, ten, fifteen years—that seems like a short time when you have the rest of your life to stay in jail. They probably knew that this would be worse than the chair.

That hag was right. I finished school right here by correspondence. I took up writing. I've never seen any of my plays, but I hear that Broadway calls them successes.

You ask if I still believe in fortune tellers? Well, you can judge for yourself. Here is a newspaper clipping that I have had for almost fourteen years.

The public is warned not to be taken in by spiritualists, fortune tellers, palm readers, and etc. As it is a proven fact that their work is 4% psychology, 2% research study, and 94% guess work. If your fortune should be told correctly, you are one in a million.