

*At Kent State University  
R.O.T.C. building attacked  
and burned to the ground ...  
May 2, 1970*

## DONNA – I – May 4

*“Your knowledge and practice of Army customs will enable you to eliminate and avoid many misunderstandings and uncertain moments that are apt to arise when you unintentionally disregard a practice or custom because of lack of knowledge or uncertainty.”*

The reflection of the oval-shaped face with its slightly brownish skin tone in the bathroom mirror is certainly her own Donna Lautenberg thinks. Yet her face doesn't give away any hints as to how she feels, standing here like this, anticipating her husband's first day of active duty. It isn't that she's having déjà vu. It's just that she feels ... different, a shiver of apprehension running up her back.

Will she fit in? Can she play by a whole new set of rules? After all those years of being an “army brat” of an enlisted man will she finally be accepted now that she is married to an Anglo and an officer, or will she still be a Puerto Rican outsider?

She continues to study her face, the face that reminds her of the other important people in her life, the face that reminds her of where she's come from. She'll write her brother tomorrow. She won't tell him about her fears of fitting in. He has enough to worry about.

"This apartment's not bad," Jerry says, coming into the bathroom behind her and putting his arms around her. He presses his muscular body up against hers and she feels his "excitement." He leans over and kisses her right ear, then looks at her face.

"Maybe you shouldn't have come with," he says. "It's only for a few weeks and I know how hard this must be for you."

She hugs him back, then pulls away and goes into the bedroom. There, lying on the bed, are six tiny yellow roses, still in their green tissue paper.

Jerry follows her out of the bathroom. She swings around and kisses him. "When did you get those? How did you know? You're so wonderful!"

He grins. "When I went out to get the milk. They're perfect for our first night in our new apartment."

She kisses him again.

"Come on, let's test the bed," he says. "That's the only thing that matters."

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*The shots scatter the students. They run, their breath jammed in their throats, anticipating the thud that can*

*bring them crashing to the ground. A National Guardsman aims his rifle at Donna.*

The blast wakes her.

She shakes her head in the early morning light. She knows the nightmare is of Kent State, a place she never heard of until the news yesterday.

In her mind she now sees the student protest against ROTC at Jerry's college as he once described it to her: Right after winter break, in January of 1968, when the students returned to campus, their bellies stuffed with home cooking and their pockets jangling with Christmas cash.

On the first day of classes the protesting students converged upon Jerry and the other marching ROTC students with banners displaying peace symbols and chanting, "Hey, hey, LBJ, how many kids did you kill today?" The ROTC cadets tussled with the protesters. By the time the campus police arrived, Jerry had a broken arm – and later a reprimand from his ROTC instructor for "engaging with the enemy without orders to do so."

Two months after that protest President Johnson surprised everyone by announcing he would not run for reelection and ordering a reduction in the bombing of North Vietnam. And another two months later peace talks started in Paris. Not that those talks have accomplished anything in two whole years. American military personnel are still dying daily halfway across the world – and now

American students are being shot to death on college campuses.

Donna looks at Jerry still asleep, then eyes the six yellow roses spotting the floor, knocked there by last night's "testing."

She climbs out of bed and steps over the flowers on her way to the bathroom. The diaphragm has been in long enough.

She ties on a robe as she thinks about Jerry. He's the best thing that ever happened to her, something so unexpected and sweet that it still makes her feel giddy when she pictures their first meeting. Even now.

She isn't superstitious, really she isn't, she just doesn't want to tempt fate by dwelling on her good fortune.

This morning she has to unpack before she writes her brother. After she and Jerry moved their suitcases and boxes into this furnished apartment yesterday evening, she'd been too tired to do anything else. "Let's leave everything for tomorrow and take it easy our first night at Ft. Knox," she had said.

The doorbell rings. Did the apartment manager forget to tell them something yesterday? Donna hopes the bell doesn't wake Jerry.

Outside the front door stands a short man wearing a Western Union uniform that pulls across a beer barrel chest. A yellow envelope dangles from his hand.

The next thing she knows Jerry has his arms around her and they are sitting together on the floor of the living room. "What happened?" she asks.

"You fainted."

Donna struggles out of his arms and stands up. Jerry, in a bathrobe that hangs open in front, stands too. "Why would I do that?"

"There was a man – it was a mistake – looking for someone named Holden to deliver a telegram to. You took one look at him and fainted."

This is bad, very bad. She'll never make it as an officer's wife if she overreacts to everything.

She takes a deep breath and kisses Jerry. "Maybe I'm hungry," she says.

He kisses her back. "Let's have breakfast."

She walks into the kitchen. The familiarity of a sink, refrigerator and stove calms her.

As she takes a skillet from the packing box perched on the tiny counter, she makes a resolution: For now she'll only think of the present.

She'll banish the past and future from her mind.