



The Convenient Wife (Best of Betty Neels)

By Betty Neels

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Yet, he seemed set on the idea of a marriage of convenience, and Venetia really had no choice but to agree. So, having found a sensible solution to her difficulties, surely she wouldn't be so foolish as to fall in love with him—would she?

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Editorial Review

About the Author

Romance readers around the world were sad to note the passing of Betty Neels in June 2001. Her career spanned thirty years, and she continued to write into her ninetieth year. To her millions of fans, Betty epitomized the romance writer. Betty's first book, *Sister Peters in Amsterdam*, was published in 1969, and she eventually completed 134 books. Her novels offer a reassuring warmth that was very much a part of her own personality. Her spirit and genuine talent live on in all her stories.

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Venetia Forbes, sitting at the end of the back row of Casualty's crowded benches, allowed her gaze to roam; it was a nice change from watching the clock on the wall facing her, something she had been doing for over an hour. She was a smallish girl, pleasantly plump, with an ordinary face redeemed from plainness by a pair of magnificent grey eyes, thickly lashed. She had pretty hair of a soft mouse shade which curled on to her shoulders, although at the moment she was so covered in dust and dirt that it was difficult to see that. Her clothes were torn and filthy, and one sleeve had been roughly torn apart so that a first-aid pad could be tied around her forearm, which she held carefully cradled in her other hand. She was a nasty greenish white, but she was apparently composed, unlike her neighbour, a stout woman who was threatening hysterics at any moment and with an eye rapidly turning from an angry red to a rich plum colour. By morning, Venetia thought, it would be an even richer purple.

She glanced at the clock again, and then studied her surroundings. Casualty was bulging at the seams, for not only had those seriously injured in the bomb blast at a nearby Woolworth's been rushed to St Jude's, but the majority of those less seriously hurt as well, St Jude's being the nearest Casualty—a large department, always comfortably occupied, but now crowded to the doors. Most of the people round her had minor wounds—deep scratches and grazes, sprained ankles, perhaps a broken bone or two, and until the really ill victims had been dealt with and warded they would have to possess themselves in patience. There were fifty or sixty people ahead of her, and already a number of them were demanding attention which the hard-pressed nurses and housemen were unable to give.

The woman next to her nudged her bandaged arm, and Venetia went a shade greener and closed her eyes for a moment.

'Sorry, ducks. 'Urt yer arm, 'ave yer? What abart me eye, eh? I've lorst me shoes. 'Ow am I going ter get 'ome, that's what I want ter know?' She surveyed her feet in their remnants of stockings. 'Can't walk like this, can I?'

'I expect they'll send you back in an ambulance.'

'An' when'll that be, I'd like ter know?'

'Not just yet, I'm afraid. They have to attend to the ill people first.'

'Course they do, ducks, but we've been 'ere for getting on for two hours...'

There was a good deal of shuffling from the front bench, and the first of the slightly injured was wheeled away to a cubicle. Venetia, to keep her mind occupied, began doing complicated sums in her head to discover how long it would be before her turn, and looked at the clock once more. Not too long, she hoped.

She was feeling sick.

Various persons had been hurrying to and fro past her for ages now, and she had kept her mind occupied by watching them. Quite a few of them she knew, at least by sight—Mr Inglis, the orthopaedic surgeon, his registrar, two consultant surgeons, the senior physician, and any number of house doctors and house surgeons—and she had more than a passing acquaintance with several of the nurses hurrying to and fro, but none of them noticed her. In any case, she reflected, she was probably unrecognisable.

She turned her attention back to the clock and watched the second hand jerking from minute to minute, and she went on staring at it as a very tall man went past and was met by one of the registrars, who ushered him into a cubicle at the far end of the department. She had never spoken to him, only attended his lectures, and she thought it unlikely that she would ever speak to him. Perhaps that was a good thing—from all accounts he was an impatient man, not suffering fools gladly, and with a coldly biting tongue when annoyed. Probably crossed in love, she decided, watching his large back disappear behind the curtains.

It was all of half an hour before she saw him again, and by then the occupants of the benches around her were being dealt with with efficient rapidity. He walked back the way he had come, talking to his registrar, and Venetia's neighbour said, 'Cor—look at 'im. There's an 'andsome bloke.' She put a large hand on Venetia's injured arm; Venetia gave a small, gasping sigh and little beads of sweat shone on her dirty face.

This time, she thought hopelessly, there was nothing for it—she was either going to be sick or faint. She closed her eyes, so she didn't see Professor ter Laan-Luitinga pause by her.

'This girl was here as I came in,' he observed. 'She's all in. I wonder...?' He lifted the pad off her arm and stood studying the splinter of glass which had gone in one side of her forearm and out the other.

Venetia opened her eyes and looked up into his dark face. Very handsome, she thought hazily, and indeed he was, with a high-bridged nose above a rather thin mouth, dark eyes under alarming eyebrows, and a head of dark hair sprinkled with silver. She said clearly, 'I'm so sorry, but I think I'm going to faint.'

And she did. The professor picked her up off the bench. 'An empty cubicle?' he demanded. 'I'll get this thing out—I'll need a local in case she comes round.'

Venetia had never fainted in her life; now she did the thing properly and stayed unconscious for all of three minutes, by which time the professor had made a neat incision, removed the glass shard and given a local injection. Just in time, for she opened her eyes and frowned.

'Lie still,' he told her. 'The glass is out. I'll put in a few stitches as soon as the local acts.' He stared down at her. 'Have you had ATS injections?'

She nodded. 'The last one about three months ago.' She added urgently, 'I'm going to be sick.'

Someone tucked a bowl under her chin and the professor, taking no notice, began his stitching. Presently he cast down his needle. 'That should take care of it,' he observed. 'Go home and go to bed, you'll feel more the thing in the morning. See your own doctor.' He smiled suddenly at her. 'You were in a lot of pain, were you not?' He said to someone she couldn't see, 'Get this young lady back home in an ambulance, will you?' Then he nodded at Venetia, patted her shoulder with a surprisingly gentle hand, and went away, dismissing her from his powerful mind, already battling with the quite different problems of the operation he intended to do on the boy with the damaged brain.

Venetia watched him go, head and huge shoulders above everyone else, his registrar beside him. It must be

nice, she reflected, to give orders to people knowing that they would be carried out without any trouble to himself, although, she conceded, it was only fair that anyone with as brilliant a brain as his should be spared the mundane tasks of everyday life.

Her rather hazy thoughts were interrupted by a brisk staff nurse.

'You are to go home and go to bed for the rest of the day. Will you tell me where you live, and I'll see if I can get an ambulance to take you?'

Venetia opened her eyes. 'The nurses' home. Here.'

'For heaven's sake! Why on earth didn't you say so hours ago? Whatever will Sister Bolt say? You should have told someone.'

'Who?' asked Venetia politely. 'When you were all up to your eyes with the badly injured. And I'm perfectly able to go over to the home by myself.'

'Don't you dare. Professor ter Laan-Luitinga will raise the roof in his nasty cold way if he hears that he hasn't been obeyed to the letter. I'll fetch Sister Bolt.'

Venetia closed her eyes again, trying to shut out a threatening headache. Sister Bolt was a veteran of St Jude's and, although Venetia had never worked in Casualty, she knew that its senior sister had a Tartar's reputation. It was therefore surprising when that lady's amazingly sympathetic voice made her open her eyes once more.

'Nurse? What is your name, and which ward are you on?'

'Forbes, Sister and I'm on Watts Ward.'

'You will stay here until the home warden comes for you. I will have a word with her. You fainted.'

'only because someone accidentally leaned on the splinter, Sister.'

Sister Bolt said kindly, 'You poor child. Very painful. You had better have the rest of the day off. Eight stitches inserted by Professor ter Laan-Luitinga...' She uttered the words as though conferring an honour upon Venetia, and went on, 'Did you become unconscious when the bomb exploded, Nurse?'

Venetia drew her mousy brows together, thinking hard. 'No, Sister. It surprised me, and I was blown off my feet, but there was a stand of winter woollies by me and they fell on top of me, so, except for the glass, I'm perfectly all right.' She added apologetically, 'I do have a headache.'

'I'm not surprised. The professor has left instructions as to your medication. When you have been bathed clean and are in bed you will be given what he has ordered.'

Sister Bolt sailed away, and very shortly the warden arrived. She was a nice, cosy, middle-aged lady who clucked sympathetically over Venetia and hovered round in a motherly fashion while she was transferred to a wheelchair, wheeled briskly into a lift, and then over the bridge which separated the hospital from the nurses' home. Her arm began to hurt, and she was grateful to Miss Vale for the speed with which she got her into a bath, where she was soaped and sponged and then sat with her eyes obediently shut while her hair was washed. She felt much better when she was clean once more, and as Miss Vale turned back her bed she said, 'I do hope all the other people in Cas have someone to help them.'

'You may depend upon it,' said Miss Vale cheerfully. 'In you get, and I'm going to get you a nice cup of tea and some toast and give you those pills. You'll feel as r...

Users Review

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