

*Backpack Adventures Series*

# *March Madness*

*by*

*Marguerite Swilling*

*Produced through the Partnership for  
Environmental Education and Rural Health,  
Texas A&M University*



**Marguerite Swilling**, author of the Backpack Adventure Series, has loved reading, writing and science all her life. From writing and directing an original play in sixth grade, she advanced to essay competitions in high school and published poetry at Texas A & M where she majored in English and minored in Earth Science. Although she is a certified secondary teacher, Mrs. Swilling has spent the past twenty-three years in the business world and has written and presented training seminars on a variety of topics. Mrs. Swilling lives in Georgetown, Texas with her husband and two daughters.

## **Backpack Adventure Series**

First Printing, June 2003

Produced through the Partnership for Environmental Education and Rural Health (<http://peer.tamu.edu>)  
Larry Johnson, PI

Funded by the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS)

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1 were other notes, cards in the mail over the years,  
2 always taunting me. The last was an obituary in  
3 1978—the funeral home had been instructed to send  
4 it to me upon his death. So I knew the clues were  
5 over, the game was finally up. He must have  
6 thought I would never live this long, long enough to  
7 be blessed with the return of my treasures.”

8 “I’m glad we could make you happy. Miss  
9 Annie,” K.T. said with a smile.

10 “There is one more thing you girls could do  
11 for me,” Miss Annie said as she slipped the note  
12 from Arlis into the silk bag. “Bury this bag deep in  
13 the dunes at East End Pier. I don’t want to travel to  
14 the past anymore. You don’t think that’s crazy of  
15 me, do you?” she asked with a gentle smile.

16 “Miss Annie, a little March Madness, digging  
17 in the dunes, burying the past, is not crazy to us,”  
18 K.T. answered. She put her arm over Connie’s  
19 shoulder.

20 “Not crazy at all,” agreed Connie with a laugh.

1 to admit I wished he had. No, he managed to turn  
2 an accidental fall off the pier into a way to torment  
3 me.” Miss Annie’s voice was momentarily filled  
4 with bitterness. Then a big sigh washed away the  
5 anger and she spoke matter-of-factly.

6 “First, he devastated my parents with  
7 accusations that I was a murderer, which they did  
8 not believe, and with the fact that I had walked out  
9 on that pier late at night, un-chaperoned, with a  
10 notorious scoundrel. My parents disapproved of my  
11 acquaintance with Arlis. I only spoke to him  
12 because Johnny had befriended him. Johnny was  
13 the only real friend Arlis ever had.”

14 “He repaid that friendship with jealousy and  
15 envy. He faked his death that night—I believed he  
16 had run away to avoid going back to war. But I  
17 could not prove his deception as he never showed up  
18 anywhere near Galveston for many years. After my  
19 mother’s death in ’48, Arlis returned, broke into my  
20 home and stole this box.” Miss Annie noticed the  
21 looks of skepticism on the faces of her three visitors.  
22 She pulled a yellowed piece of paper from her  
23 pillowcase and handed it to K.T. The writing was  
24 faint and faded, but the message was still legible.

25  
26 *I have stolen your treasure box, Annie, dear.*  
27 *You can find it buried in the dunes at East End*  
28 *Pier. I shall be with you always...Arlis.*  
29

30 “So he did steal it and bury it,” K.T. remarked.

31 Miss Annie nodded. “He knew I would look for  
32 it, that searching for it would drive me mad. There

## **An Introduction to Backpack Adventures:**

Welcome to the coolest club in middle school! Of course,  
no one outside the club can know just what makes this group  
so different. The secret is in the backpack.

**Roman Castillo**, a young teenage technology whiz,  
developed a powerful mini-computer that can transport  
people through space and time. He controls the computer  
with a wireless keypad complete with a screen that displays  
the coordinates for the time and space travel destination. He  
shared his invention with his best friend, Travis, as well as  
four others.

**Travis Allen**, Roman’s best friend since kindergarten, is the  
son of a veterinarian and loves animals, the outdoors and  
math. He wears western jeans and boots that highlight his  
long, lanky profile. He has a short temper except with his  
stepsister, Summer. He’s very protective of Summer and  
doesn’t like having her travel with the BPC as the group has  
nicknamed their awesome device.

**Summer Martin**, Travis’ stepsister, is two years younger  
than Travis and Roman. Her bright blue eyes are as merry as  
her laugh and her blonde hair is cut short and sassy. She  
loves to read and has a great memory for history and  
geography. She uses a wheelchair due to a terrible, traffic  
accident when she was five. Travis and his aunt built a  
motorized chair for Summer, and she can participate in just  
about everything with her two best friends, Connie and K.T.

**Connie Castillo**, Roman’s sister and Summer’s best friend,  
has long, silky black hair and her dark brown eyes are framed  
by thick, black lashes. She loves her brother, but sometimes  
questions the use of the BPC. Quiet and reserved, she is a  
serious student. Science is her favorite subject and dance is

her favorite pastime. She and Summer have a mutual best friend named K.T.

**K.T. Watson**, is an only child who loves her best friends, Summer and Connie, like sisters. She wears her curly, jet-black hair in dozens of tiny, tight braids so she'll look more like her favorite athlete, Venus Williams. K.T. is full of energy and courageous. A natural leader, she often instigates the adventures with the BPC. She loves soccer and cheerleading. She helped form the Backpack Club and brought in its newest member: her neighbor, Jace.

**Jace Long**, classmate and neighbor to K.T., grew up in China and moved first to California and finally to Texas. He loves soccer like K.T., is a whiz at math like Travis, and is especially close to Summer. As the newest member to the Backpack Club, Jace is the most reluctant to use the BPC for travel, but he thinks it's a great tool for communicating between the members and is the first to try the device for help with homework.

1 All was quiet in the narrow room with the  
2 drawn drapes, the tick of a wall clock the only sound  
3 punctuating the silence. Finally, Miss Annie spoke  
4 and the girls felt like they could breathe again.

5 "So he did bury it, after all. Near East End  
6 Pier, was it not?" She looked up at the girls for  
7 confirmation, which they gave with quick nods.  
8 They glanced at Mrs. Watson as Miss Annie  
9 continued. "He said that was where he took it after  
10 he stole it from my home. Everyone thought I was  
11 the crazy one, but it was him."

12 Miss Annie felt inside the bag for the  
13 newspaper clippings but did not take them out. "I  
14 suppose you girls read the articles and would like an  
15 explanation, eh? Well, it's a short, if ugly, story."

16 She drew a breath and seemed to focus  
17 somewhere high on the wall near the ceiling, seeing  
18 things from long ago. "These two things, the ring  
19 and the medal, represent my happiest and my  
20 proudest moments. Once in my life, I was in love  
21 with the bravest, most honorable person I've ever  
22 known."

23 Miss Annie's face glowed with a warm smile  
24 that seemed to melt the years away, revealing the  
25 beautiful young woman she had been in 1918. Then  
26 she touched the yellow silk purse with the clippings.  
27 Her face fell back into its wrinkles and lines, and her  
28 blue eyes lost their sparkle.

29 "These are reminders of sadder times, of loss  
30 and betrayal. I never murdered Arlis Cooper.  
31 Nobody did. He didn't die that night though I have

## *March Madness*

1 “I have visitors, do I? How lovely? Did you  
2 bring me a birthday present?” Even at one hundred,  
3 Miss Anna Ruth Dodd had a charming smile. All  
4 eyes fixed on the gentile old lady with gray wisps of  
5 hair peeking from beneath a robin’s egg blue knit  
6 stocking cap that perfectly matched her blue  
7 dressing gown.

8 “As a matter of fact, Miss Annie, my  
9 granddaughter and her friend found something of  
10 yours down at the beach today. They’d like to  
11 return it if that’s OK with you.”

12 Miss Annie looked expectantly at Connie and  
13 K.T. who had a sudden onset of shyness. What if  
14 she starts to cry? K.T. thought. Or worse yet, to  
15 scream?

16 “We were, um, exploring in the dunes with my  
17 new metal detector and we found this wooden box.  
18 Well, it was pretty rotten and the metal clasp kind of  
19 broke as we tried to open it, but...,” K.T. paused.  
20 “This was inside the box.” She handed the yellow  
21 silk bag to Miss Annie who had listened with a  
22 puzzled look that turned into a frown of concern.

23 “The things inside the bag were OK, though,”  
24 Connie added.

25 The girls watched with bated breath as Miss  
26 Annie’s slender fingers, covered with age spots and  
27 wrinkles, shook as she pulled open the bag.

28 Ever so gently, she drew the cross medal and  
29 then the ring from inside, ignoring the newspaper  
30 articles. Her eyes filled with tears of joy as she  
31 gazed in wonder at her long-lost treasures.

1 Choppy gray waves broke against the nearly  
2 deserted beach as a chill wind peppered the few  
3 remaining tourists with sand as they struggled to  
4 load toys, towels, chairs and children into the safety  
5 of their vehicles.

6 Connie shivered and pulled her windbreaker  
7 tight over her wet bathing suit. Goose bumps  
8 covered her long brown legs and her teeth began to  
9 chatter. She drew her jacket hood over her straight  
10 black hair.

11 “C-Can’t w-w-we w-walk back to your  
12 grandmother’s b-beach house?” Connie stuttered.  
13 “W-we’ve been looking for an hour and n-n-not  
14 found anything exciting. You’re crazy to stay out in  
15 this weather.”

16 K.T. seemed oblivious to the change in the  
17 weather. She had finally persuaded her best friend,  
18 Connie, to come out of the water when the clouds  
19 began to gather and the warm, sunny March  
20 morning turned into a dismal, cold-front afternoon.

21 “I’ve waited for 11 weeks for the chance to use  
22 my new metal detector. I was crazy to wait while  
23 you swam and boogie-boarded all morning. Give  
24 me a few more minutes while I search for buried  
25 treasure. Here, you can wear my towel to keep you  
26 warm.” K.T. handed her big beach towel to Connie  
27 and immediately regretted her generosity. Her light-  
28 weight cover-up was no match for the easterly wind.

1 "Let's go behind that big dune across from the  
2 pier. Maybe there's more stuff up in the dunes. Ten  
3 more minutes and I promise we'll go back." K. T.  
4 pointed ahead and held the detector before her like a  
5 dog on a leash. She felt sand filling her beach shoes  
6 as she struggled up the dune.

7 Connie wrapped the towel around her and gave  
8 a sigh of resignation. She knew it was no good to  
9 argue with K.T. when she had a mission to  
10 accomplish.

11 K.T. dropped behind the dune and held the  
12 metal detector out over the white sands. She walked  
13 a few feet down the slope and felt the stored warmth  
14 of the morning sun seeping from the top layer of  
15 sand. Connie slid down the backside of the dune,  
16 nearly bowling K.T. over. Her rubber sandals dug a  
17 trench down the slope and exposed the damp brown  
18 sand a few inches below the surface.

19 Suddenly the metal detector's alarm sounded  
20 over one of Connie's skid marks. Both girls  
21 jumped. K.T. took a small pink plastic scoop out of  
22 the pocket of her cover-up. She scraped the moist  
23 sand and found the corner of something sharp and  
24 hard.

25 Connie joined her in brushing away the bits of  
26 broken shells and packed sand. Her fingers ached  
27 with cold, but she dug her fingernail along the edge  
28 of the object, tracing its rectangular outline. Soon,  
29 the girls had uncovered the top half of a small  
30 wooden box with a corroded metal clasp and metal  
31 corners. Remnants of a heavy fabric still clung to

1 sisters and I were out looking for stuff on the beach.  
2 I was just like you, K.T. We came up on Crazy  
3 Annie digging in a sand dune near East End Pier.  
4 She kept ranting on about 'He stole it. He stole my  
5 treasure box. He came back from the dead and stole  
6 my treasure box with my ring and my medal.' We  
7 ran away and told Momma. That's when Momma  
8 had Uncle Rufus, who was about the age I am now,  
9 tell us the story behind Crazy Annie so we wouldn't  
10 make fun of her or think ill of her. She lost her  
11 heart. Then she lost her mind. Kept searching on  
12 that beach for the next 30 years. Guess she forgot  
13 where she herself buried this box. These must have  
14 been given to her from her fiancé who died in the  
15 Great War."

16 "I wish Uncle Rufus could tell us the story in  
17 person," said K.T. with a sigh. "Maybe all this  
18 would make more sense."

19 "No, K.T., Uncle Rufus passed away several  
20 years ago. And that's all of the story I remember."  
21 Mrs. Watson looked down at the faces of the two  
22 young girls.

23 "But Miss Anna Ruth Dodd just turned one  
24 hundred down at Stony Point ElderCare last month.  
25 I hear her mind wanders some, but the past is nearer  
26 to the surface than the present. Shall we pay her a  
27 call?"

28 "Can we?" exclaimed K.T. "Can we go  
29 today?"

30 .....  
31



1 in 1918.” K.T. showed her grandmother the fragile  
2 clippings. Mrs. Watson scanned the headlines and  
3 nodded.

4        “I remember my mother and Uncle Rufus  
5 talking about this event when I was a little girl.  
6 Crazy Annie was in her forties then. She was all  
7 alone in that great big house after her mother died.”

8       “Uncle Rufus? Am I related to the fisherman in  
9   the story?” asked K.T. incredulously.

10        “No, child. Uncle Rufus was just a neighbor,  
11 but we all called him Uncle out of respect. He  
12 always felt bad that Crazy Annie had to go to jail  
13 even for a short while though it might have saved  
14 her life. She was never the same they said after that  
15 fall. So much sadness.” Mrs. Watson laid the  
16 clippings tenderly onto the floor by K.T. “Where  
17 did you girls find these papers?”

18 K.T. handed the silk bag to her grandmother.  
19 “Inside this silk bag, inside this box buried in a sand  
20 dune down by...”

21 “The East End Pier,” Connie and K.T. said  
22 simultaneously while exchanging knowing smiles.

23 “This ring and this medal were in the bag too,  
24 Mrs. Watson,” Connie said handing the two  
25 treasures to her. They must belong to, um, some-  
26 body.” Connie caught herself just as K.T. gave her a  
27 gentle prod with her elbow. To whom they  
28 belonged was not something you could know from  
29 the articles.

30 “Well, I’ll declare, girls, you have solved a  
31 mystery. When I was about your age, in 1948, my

1 the splintered wood. Neither girl had spoken, their  
2 breath coming in heavy pants as they struggled to  
3 free the box.

4       The box made a soft sucking noise as K.T.  
5       dislodged it. She handed the box to Connie. K.T.  
6       swung the detector over the hole they had created,  
7       but it made no other sounds.

8        “That must be all of it,” K. T. said disappoint-  
9 edly. As if cued by the letdown in her voice, a light  
10 misty rain began to fall.

11 “Come on, K.T. It’s time to go back to your  
12 granny’s. We can open this great treasure there.  
13 I’m ready to get warm and dry!”

14 “Might as well go back,” complained K.T.  
15 “The beach is a typical spring-break-rainy-day-  
16 washout anyway. March is a crazy time for spring  
17 break. Spring break should be in July!”

18       As the girls trudged over the dune, the rain  
19 intensified, obliterating their tracks.

22 K.T. and Connie huddled together under a  
23 flannel blanket, enjoying the warmth of dry clothes.  
24 They had placed a towel on the floor and set the  
25 sandy box on top. Gently, Connie picked away bits  
26 of the rotten fabric. K.T. tried to pry the metal clasp  
27 open, but the whole lock fell apart in rusty crumbs.  
28 K.T. held her breath as she lifted the lid and looked  
29 inside. A faded yellow silk bag lay alone in the box,  
30 the strings of its pouch closure still taut.

1 K.T. lifted the bag and was surprised by its  
2 heavy, lopsided feel. She sat staring at it, imagining  
3 rare coins and jewels.

4 “Open it,” commanded Connie. “Your grand-  
5 mother’s note said she’d be back from the doctor  
6 any time now. She may not let us keep this in the  
7 house.”

8 “OK, OK,” K.T. answered, her hands trembling  
9 as she pulled the bag open with two fingers. She  
10 upended the bag and spilled the contents on to the  
11 towel. Three newspaper clippings, a military medal  
12 and a slim diamond ring fell from their shared  
13 hiding place.

14 “Bingo!” cried K.T. as she held the ring up to  
15 the light. A tiny diamond still shone in a dull white  
16 gold band. A delicate filigreed design was etched  
17 along the ring’s edge.

18 Connie examined the medal. A red, white and  
19 blue grosgrain ribbon was attached to a cross with  
20 ornate tips. On top of the cross, an eagle, encircled  
21 by a wreath, spread wide its wings. “I wonder who  
22 this belonged to,” mused Connie.

23 “Must have been a child because this ring is too  
24 tiny to fit me, except maybe on my pinky.”

25 Connie carefully laid the medal down and  
26 picked up a clipping. It felt brittle in her hands. “I  
27 don’t think so, K.T. These clippings are from 1918.  
28 Listen to these headlines: ‘Soldier Missing From  
29 Galveston Pier. Local Debutante Last to See Him.’  
30 ‘Miss Dodd Arrested as Murder Suspect.’ ‘Mistrial

1 Annie’s tattered shawl had washed up on the beach a  
2 few days later, but no shred of Cooper ever surfaced.

3 They read about the mistrial caused by so many  
4 townspeople being ill that a jury could not be  
5 formed. Annie’s father tended the sick, then com-  
6 plained of body aches. He died while she was  
7 isolated in jail awaiting trial. The judge finally freed  
8 Annie at Christmas since there was no murder  
9 victim’s body and no one to be jurors.

10 As they were reading the last article, K.T.’s  
11 grandmother returned.

12 “Hello, anybody home? Sure is quiet in here!”

13 “Hey, Granny, we’re in here,” called K.T.

14 “Well, I’m back from the doctor and I’ve made  
15 it through another winter season without the flu or  
16 pneumonia thanks to my flu shot.” Mrs. Watson  
17 took off her jacket and sat on the sofa behind the  
18 girls. “When you get to be elderly like me with  
19 chronic medical conditions, you don’t want to  
20 become just another number in an epidemic.”

21 “That’s right, Granny, we don’t want you to get  
22 some mean old viral infection and go into the  
23 hospital.” K.T. grinned up at her grandmother.  
24 “Then we couldn’t come stay with you at the beach  
25 house for spring break.”

26 “K.T., that’s not nice,” laughed Connie.

27 “Granny knows I’m just teasing her.”

28 “Say, what are you girls looking at and what  
29 trash did you drag off the beach into my house?”

30 “It’s not trash, Granny, it’s a mystery. See,  
31 here are three articles about a murder that happened

1 "I've already set my return coordinates. Call  
2 for help and then hold on to me. I'll take us back."

3 "Help! Help! He's fallen in, he's fallen..."

4 .....  
5

6 K.T.'s breath was coming in gasps as she clung  
7 to Connie's arm, rainbows of light swirling around  
8 them. They were back safely in her grandmother's  
9 beach house, clothes dry, feet clean and warm.

10 "Quick, K.T., I want to read those other  
11 articles," Connie demanded as she slipped off her  
12 backpack and reached to help K.T. out of hers. "At  
13 least we know Annie didn't kill Arlis."

14 "Yeah, she didn't even know he fell. I'm sure  
15 she thinks he went AWOL." K.T. agreed.

16 "A wall? What's that?" Connie asked.

17 "Not 'a wall,' but A-W-O-L. Absent Without  
18 Leave. It's running away in the Army."

19 "Well, I think he drowned. Did you hear those  
20 heavy boots?"

21 "Maybe he did, maybe he didn't. Let's check  
22 out the rest of the articles," K.T. suggested as she  
23 opened the yellow silk bag and took out three  
24 papers, the ring and the medal and laid them on the  
25 towel where the broken bits of the box remained.

26 K.T. and Connie huddled together again under  
27 the blanket and read the yellowed clippings that told  
28 the story of Annie's arrest and indictment for the  
29 supposed murder of Arlis Cooper even though Rufus  
30 Jones had seen her leave before he heard the call for  
31 help. "Our call," K.T. had surmised ruefully.

1 Declared in Cooper Murder, Body Never Recover-  
2 ed, Dodd Freed.'

3 "What's a debutante?"

4 "I'm not sure. Let me see if it says in the  
5 article."

6 As Connie read the article aloud, K.T. reached  
7 to find the backpacks she and Connie always carried  
8 with them. She felt inside for the special computer  
9 that allowed travel through space and time. K.T.  
10 began to form a plan.

11  
12 August 2, 1918  
13

14 Soldier Missing From Galveston Pier  
15 Local Debutante Last to See Him  
16

17 Galveston police authorities have confirmed  
18 that a local son, Lieutenant Arlis Cooper, US  
19 Army, is believed to be missing from a pier at  
20 Galveston's east end. On July 31, at 11 o'clock  
21 p. m., a fisherman saw a couple stroll to the end  
22 of the pier and talk. The young lady was  
23 recognized by the fisherman from this paper's  
24 recent photo-graphs of leading socialite  
25 debutantes at the annual Debutante Ball as Miss  
26 Anna Ruth Dodd, only child of Dr. and Mrs.  
27 Josiah Dodd. The fisherman, Rufus Jones, saw  
28 Miss Dodd running from the pier a few moments  
29 later and then heard a call for help from the  
30 Colonel and Mrs. Hannibal Cooper have not  
31 seen their son since the evening of July 31 when  
32 he told them he was going to deliver a message  
33 of condolence to pier. Police have been unable  
34 to identify any other witnesses. Nor have they  
35 found the body of Cooper, living or deceased.

1 Miss Dodd, a long time classmate. Miss Dodd  
2 had recently been distraught to learn of the  
3 death of another classmate, Private Johnny  
4 Schmidt, son of German immigrants, Rolf and  
5 Bertha Schmidt, who own a small, meat packing  
6 business.

7 Miss Dodd has admitted to being with  
8 Lieutenant Cooper on the night in question, but  
9 has no idea what may have happened to him.  
10 She suggested he left to avoid being shipped  
11 back to France. Colonel Cooper has vehemently  
12 denied such a vile suggestion has any validity.

13 Lieutenant Cooper and Private Schmidt  
14 joined the Army together by traveling to Camp  
15 Funston at Fort Riley, Kansas in February of this  
16 year, shortly before our own Texas National  
17 Guard was mobilized. Cooper received a com-  
18 mission as an officer due to his early military  
19 instruction. Anyone with knowledge of the  
20 whereabouts of Lieutenant Cooper should  
21 contact the authorities immediately.

22  
23 As Connie finished reading the article, K.T.  
24 threw Connie her backpack. K.T. slung her own  
25 backpack over her shoulder.

26 “You know where we’re going, don’t you?”  
27 K.T. asked as she gathered the items back into the  
28 silk purse.

29 “East End Pier, Galveston, Texas, July 31, 1918  
30 at 11 p. m.,” answered Connie as she punched co-  
31 ordinates into the keypad for her computer.

32 K.T. compared the display on her computer to  
33 Connie’s and nodded. “Ready to solve a mystery  
34 before my grandmother gets back?”

1 flea-ridden dogs instead of shooting them out right.  
2 He washed dishes, Annie. He was a lowly private,  
3 the lowest of the low, a dishwasher. Maybe that’s  
4 how he spread the illness at first. Some said he was  
5 a German spy sent to bring the fever to us. Well, he  
6 got sick too. But he’s not laughing now.”

7 “You cad! You scoundrel! How dare you!”  
8 Annie raised her slender hand to slap Arlis, but he  
9 caught her wrist and twisted her hand back, pulling  
10 her closer. Annie struggled and freed herself from  
11 the shawl and his grasp. She ran all the way down  
12 the pier.

13 Arlis was seized by another coughing spell. He  
14 spit into her shawl and muttered, “I hope you get  
15 this fever too!” He stepped to the end of the pier  
16 and looked out over the water. “I’m leaving, do you  
17 hear me? I won’t go back,” he moaned, clutching  
18 the shawl. He reared back to throw the shawl into  
19 the sea and slipped on the slimy boards, bumping his  
20 head as he fell into the dark swirling waters at the  
21 end of the pier.

22 K.T. and Connie had been entranced, listening  
23 to the argument above them. When Arlis fell, their  
24 first reaction was to jump out of the way. Connie  
25 covered her eyes, but K.T. watched his body hit the  
26 deep water. K.T. started to swim to the spot where  
27 he had fallen, but Connie held her back.

28 “No, K.T., you’re not a lifeguard. We need to  
29 get help.”

30 “But we can’t be seen, or else how can we  
31 return?”

1 platoon that he helped nominated him for the DSC  
2 right there in that battlefield hospital. Even  
3 strangers could see he would die of the fever before  
4 he got off the battlefield. He died of some mundane  
5 respiratory tract infection, Annie. I guess I owe him  
6 my life because I got the infection from him so they  
7 sent me back home. But the fever didn't kill me.  
8 And neither will the War. I am not going back."

9 Annie had been staring in astonishment at Arlis.  
10 "You're lying and you're crazy! You've been  
11 jealous of Johnny ever since he moved here. His  
12 purity made your treachery all the more apparent to  
13 everyone. He considered you a friend even when  
14 you did nothing but compete with him and try to  
15 best him. Why he tolerated your presence, I'll never  
16 know." She turned to go and Arlis grabbed her  
17 shawl, stopping her from leaving.

18 "You ungrateful little brat! Your parents knew  
19 he wasn't good enough for you. That's why they  
20 told him to stay away from you."

21 Annie clenched her fists. "Johnny left for  
22 Kansas so he could prove to my parents he was not a  
23 Kaiser-lover, but a patriotic American. You only  
24 followed him to keep competing, to show him up  
25 since your father could buy a commission for you."  
26 accused Annie.

27 "Your betrothed, silly girl, didn't have the good  
28 sense to stay well at Fort Riley. He laughed at all  
29 the folk remedies for warding off the fever: the  
30 onions in your bedding, the brown sugar sprinkled  
31 on hot coals, the whiskey toddies. He befriended

1 "Ready," Connie squeaked, as she pressed the  
2 keys, "or not!"

3 .....  
4

5 When the swirl of rainbow lights settled on the  
6 sand behind the tall wooden pier, K.T. and Connie  
7 could make out in the moonlight the figure of a man  
8 tending to a small fishing boat just where the dunes  
9 began on the beach. The East End Pier was very  
10 much like the piers of the present day: wooden,  
11 covered in barnacles, moonlight slipping through the  
12 spaces between the boards. The rest of the  
13 Galveston beach was unrecognizable.

14 Before they had time to marvel at the changes  
15 in the beachfront, they heard voices coming toward  
16 the pier.

17 "Duck behind here," whispered K.T., pulling  
18 Connie into a crouch below the pier. The girls  
19 grimaced as they felt the warm, mucky water swirl  
20 above their knees, the silt and sand squish between  
21 their bare toes.

22 "O-O-O! It's yucky under here and the water is  
23 so warm!" Connie complained. "I think a fish just  
24 bit my leg!"

25 "Hush, it's only tiny crabs. You are never  
26 satisfied!" hissed K.T.

27 A couple clambered noisily up the deserted pier  
28 and headed to the very end. The man was young,  
29 barely eighteen, and wore a drab, green Army  
30 uniform and heavy black boots. The woman was no  
31 more than sixteen and her long lacy skirts were of

1 the finest material, soft and flowing, and just  
2 touching her ankles. Despite the heat, she clutched a  
3 brocade shawl around her shoulders like a shield.  
4 Her blond hair glowed in the moonlight, and, even  
5 in the dim light, her beauty was evident. The girls  
6 could hear them talking, but couldn't make out what  
7 they were saying.

8 "We've got to get closer," K.T. decided. "Let's  
9 wade out till the water drops off."

10 "Where's that?" Connie queried.

11 "We'll find out I guess."

12 Connie rolled her eyes and followed K.T.'s  
13 dark figure out under the pier, closer and closer to  
14 the drop off. She tried not to think of the animals  
15 living under the pier where she couldn't see. The  
16 girls reached the next to the last piling and felt the  
17 current change where the water deepened. K.T.  
18 motioned for Connie to stand still. They were  
19 almost directly beneath the couple now and could  
20 make out every word.

21 "What I really wanted to tell you was how I  
22 missed you while I was away, Annie, dear. Did you  
23 miss me? You must know how it pains me to tell  
24 you about Johnny's last days. Johnny, the true-blue  
25 patriot, would want you to know the truth about his  
26 death. He was always such a stickler for doing the  
27 right thing, the foolish boy." The young man's  
28 voice dripped with sarcasm at these last words. He  
29 sneezed violently and blew his nose loudly into his  
30 handkerchief.

1 "I know all I need to know. His parents told  
2 me. They gave me his Distinguished Service  
3 Cross." The young woman's voice was nostalgic  
4 and calm. "There's nothing you can do for me,  
5 Arlis, but leave me alone."

6 "They gave you his Cross?" the man gasped.  
7 He was overcome with a coughing fit, his body  
8 shaking with every effort to catch his breath.

9 The girl recoiled from his coughing and from  
10 his comment. "Yes. Is that so surprising? His  
11 parents knew, it seems, even if mine did not, of our  
12 engagement to be married after the war."

13 Arlis' eyes were fierce as he sputtered through  
14 clenched teeth. "He didn't deserve that medal. He  
15 didn't even know what he was doing, the idiot. I  
16 ordered him to retreat. But no, Johnny wanted to be  
17 a hero. Once we reached France, he knew for sure  
18 he had come down with the Fort Riley fever. He  
19 was delirious, sweating, and shaking with chills. He  
20 knew he was as good as dead. He rushed forward to  
21 throw a grenade into a German trench, opening an  
22 escape route for one of our trapped platoons. He  
23 was disobeying orders, my orders, and they made  
24 him a hero."

25 His anger made Arlis cough again and his body  
26 was wracked by deep rasping breaths. He fought to  
27 gain control and finish telling Annie how pathetic  
28 Johnny's death had been. He wanted to hurt her  
29 now.

30 "He was shot through the leg, a minor wound  
31 that wouldn't have killed him. The captain of the