



"Which alias do you use most ordinarily?" Carrie asked

## *Seeds of Romance*

By HOPE CAMPBELL

*Carrie longs for the life of a riveter—until a farmer comes along, and plants a new idea in her pretty little head!*

CARRIE STEPHENS was depressed. She jammed her hands down into the pockets of the red wool that had seen its heyday three years ago and now, being somewhere between the not-good-enough-for-a-picnic and too-good-for-a-house-dress stage, did very well for the office.

She and her little seedlings, just they alone together in the basement, and watta life, Carrie thought. Above them ten million dollars' worth of state capitol reared its golden head, but what good did that do her? Stuck in the basement with a couple of white germinators, and envelopes of

seeds. And the glamour of thinking that each of those envelopes represented acres of waving ripening corn and wheat and oats had long since died the death of a dog in Carrie's mind.

Her for the gay life, the riveting gun, the swing shift, even the graveyard shift, the overalls and the turban, the Great Not-So-White Way, the speeding wheels of industry. And where was she? Counting seed sprouts in the middle of the nation's bread basket. Carrie chewed an unlipsticked underlip and prepared to call it a day.

She dropped a beanie on the top of her straight

black hair and let it lay where it hit. Who cared what a state seed analyst looked like?

Files. Carrie made a face at them just in passing to put them in their place, and then remembered that their little iron insides were bulging with undigested seeds. The heck with them. The heck with everything. But birds gotta eat, don't they?

Carrie sighed deeply and jerked out a desk drawer and pulled out a big brown paper sack and stuck it open in the center of the floor. She grabbed a handful of manila enveloped seed samples from the files and began to empty them in the sack. "Hey, hey, hey and a hi, hi, hi," Carrie sang drearily. "And I'll hate you till the day I die," and dumped the last sample, germ 86, weed content 6.8, noxious weeds 1.4, into the sack.

"Hey, hey, hey and a hi, hi, hi," and she reached into the file again.

"Vocal exercises?"

"Hymn of hate," Carrie said absently.

"Indian war-whoop?"

Carrie straightened as if someone had stuck a pin in her practically nonexistent derriere and glared. Those were still fighting words in the bread basket, though she would have been the last to deny her hair was black and straight, and her eyes black and tilted, and her skin like heavy unskimmed cream.

At least that was what all the romantic-minded dairy farmers told her, and Carrie never had disliked a simile more. What small amount of the milk of human kindness three years in the seed laboratory had left in her practically curdled at the thought.

**I**T WAS curdling now. Because while the young man was just about the size Carrie always had felt she could take with ease, something the right side of six feet, and dark and handsome, except for one eyebrow that wore a perpetual look of distrustful astonishment and a nose that undoubtedly was not as straight as nature had made it originally, he wore overalls. And he carried a little sack of seeds.

"Drop it on the desk. Name and address on one of those white cards. Report in ten days." Carrie said that like a tired phonograph record and turned her back.

"You're a servant of the state and all that. You put my name and address on a white card."

So he wanted to play like an illiterate.

"They have evening schools, you know," Carrie said wearily, and pulled out a card and picked up a pen. "Name?"

"Wellington Deale Allsworth Turner."

Carrie ran out of space along toward the second W.

"Which alias do you use most ordinarily?" Carrie asked.

"Deale Turner. Route Eight. And what's yours?"

The words, the tone and the voice were all extremely personal. Carrie gave him the glassy eye.

"Just address me care of the janitor. It won't reach me."

The eyebrow was not astonished. It was sardonic. "I'm touched at your courtesy."

Flirtatious farmers were nothing new in Carrie's life. They rated somewhere between bindweed and stink grass.

"Usually pronounced 'teched'." That should get him, if he got it at all.

"Are you asking to be fired?"

"I have. They won't." Carrie brightened slightly. "You might write a letter of complaint. To the Governor. Mark it personal and urgent, and make it strong."

"Don't you like being a seed analyst?"

"It was one of my cornier ideas."

Deale was a gentleman. He winced slightly and ignored that.

"But you do run the tests?"

"I run them and they run me. And if I ever get out of here, I'll run so far and so fast that I won't even have a speaking acquaintance with whole wheat bread for the rest of my life. Now you run. The office is closed."

Carrie picked up the sack filled with seeds for the little feathered fiends that awakened her at dawn each morning, tossed a beaver jacket no self-respecting beaver would have been caught dead in over her shoulders, and locked the door. She struck out down the marble corridor.

"Why won't they fire you?" He was a most persistent young man.

"Seeds are plenty and analysts are few. Law of diminishing returns. Or something."

"Oh." Interest lapsed. "Well, don't beard any wild oats in their den."

Carrie groaned automatically, turned left outside the door where Deale turned right, and skidded over two blocks of icy sidewalks to the furnished

room she never by any chance called home. She shed the beaver on the floor, the beanie on a chair, and flung up her window.

Just sowing her little seeds of kindness for the day, Carrie thought drearily, as she tossed handfuls on the outside sill. And added a few unkind thoughts about a fiend in need being a fiend indeed as a lethargic robin that had not got around to going South and six sparrows power-dived at her.

Then something suddenly registered on what Carrie would have been the first to admit was the blank film laughingly referred to as her brain, a sort of a time exposure.

“Huh?” Carrie cried, and slammed the window shut.

Had come the dawn and by the dawn’s early light, Carrie had caught a glimmer, on the fly so to speak, and so hard it practically knocked her off her feet. Carrie considered for five seconds, blinking rapidly in the blinding light of what could not be less than a thousand-watt idea.

“Yippee!” yelled Carrie and did some power-diving herself in the direction of the phone book.

Deale Turner was not listed. Carrie gnawed her nails and mentally connived, with all the passion of a prisoner seeing a lovely, lovely little steel file just out of reach. Because while iron bars might not a prison make, job freezing was giving Carrie a very fine imitation of same. But the Governor had said he would give her a release, a full lifetime pardon no less, if she could find a substitute.

Bearding wild oats in their den. That Turner man knew something. For that was the sort of erudite professional joke considered simply excruciatingly funny in the better college seed labs throughout the nation. Not that they ever got more than a hollow groan from Carrie. Was it possible she had had a real live genuine seed analyst practically in her clutches and presented him with nothing more encouraging than her glassy stare? The thought was sickening.

**B**UT when better mousetraps were made, Carrie knew how to be one. And the rat she had in mind to trap was named Deale Turner.

All state-house employees invariably had a whole phone book of weirdly wonderful social and political connections. Carrie dived in, made a few and came up with the red apple.

Pleasantly filled with the very worst intentions, Carrie dialed a number.

“This is Carrie Stephens of the seed laboratory,” she murmured sweetly. “And do you know I’ve done the most terrible thing? I was fixing a sack of seeds for my birds when you came in and I must have mixed yours in it. Were you really awfully anxious for a test right away?”

Beaming happily Carrie waited to see what her little crop of lies would reap her. For some moments, however, the receiver was so full of furious mutterings which seemed to range from sarcastic remarks about Mother Carrie’s chickens to bird-brained females to other less mentionable things that she considered it best for the sake of her innocent girlish mind not to listen too closely.

The mutterings finally simmered down to a mere steam bath and dissolved into a tangible suggestion, mingled with side remarks about the condition of country roads at this season and gas rationing and killing two birds with one stone, preferably with a certain Carrie Stephens first in line. Carrie didn’t follow it all, just the main point. Deale would be at her door, clutching another sample of seeds in his not-at-all grubby paw in a couple of hours.

Carrie felt that life suddenly had acquired any number of silver linings, all leading to a brighter and happier land. She dressed and she really did herself a job, from black sandals to a gold knit dress with swish and clinging ideas to a gold flower in her black hair. Carrie seldom had felt happier.

The doorbell rang in less than two hours and, for once in her life, Carrie beat her landlady to the door by a nose, and her landlady had a long nose in more senses than one.

Deale’s erratic eyebrow did an elevator.

“Whew, what is this? Your pre-midnight Cinderella incarnation?”

“You seem to be doing a first class Farmer in the Dell yourself,” Carrie said, the natural acidity of her nature, distilled of too long exposure to too many seed sprouts, asserting itself as she saw he was still in overalls.

“Dinner coats are not being worn in the stockyards this season.”

Carrie reeled slightly. Somewhere in the back of her mind, and put there logically too by the way Deale had been looking at her this afternoon, had been the idea that this might very well drift into one of the better dates. With her worming her way into his confidence and laying the groundwork for future operations.

“What stockyards?”

“The only ones I know of in this section of the country. Omaha. I was going to take these hogs down the first of next week, but consideringly I had to make this trip to town tonight, I thought I might as well load up and drive on through.”

Carrie clutched desperately at a rapidly fading vision of Navy Es and boom-time pay.

“My,” she said faintly, “I haven’t been to Omaha in simply ages.”

“I never take hints. But I just love suggestions.”

Carrie lowered long lashes over a look that badly needed dry cleaning.

“I don’t know when I’ve had a nice long drive in the evening. Why don’t you take me with you?”

“Sure. Get your brown bearskin, Many Sprouts on the Blotter, and we’ll be skidding into Omaha in high before midnight.”

Carrie danced upstairs, picked her coat up off the floor and absently shook some of the larger pieces of dust off it, and struck a fighting pose in front of her mirror.

“I call it beaver and he calls it bearskin,” she chanted happily. “So get in there, team, and win, win, win!”

Because Carrie knew now that she had something. Many Sprouts on the Blotter, indeed. That Turner man knew his onions, and probably his wheat and oats and corn, too. At least he knew how to run a germination test. So by the time they reached Omaha, Carrie intended to be operating in high herself and, if she knew her own strength, Deale would be on the skids.

The cab was warm and cozy, and the ice had been cleared off the highway. Carrie pushed down a wavering suspicion that there might be madness in her method, and went to work.

“You haven’t been on that farm long?” she asked silkily. “Not long enough to be listed in the phone book?”

“Not long. My cousin who owned it wanted to go over and I was just coming back, so that fixed it.”

“I’m sure it did,” Carrie said politely. “But please diagram. I follow better with pictures.”

“North Africa—discharged,” Deale explained. “I flunked my final. Paratroopers are not supposed to land on their heads.”

“Were you hurt?”

“You don’t need to sound so doubtful. Of course I was hurt. Where’d you think I got this

nose?”

“Parents sometimes have something to do with it.”

“Mine won’t have anything to do with this one. And I cracked my neck. Can only turn my head this far to the side. See?”

CARRIE watched, fascinated.

“Makes it a little hard for you to say no, doesn’t it? But can you shake it up-and-down-yes?”

Deale nodded, up and down.

“Fine,” Carrie sighed contentedly. “That was all that was worrying me. Continue.”

“My cousin was stuck on the farm, with all his brothers in the Army. And I didn’t see myself sitting behind a desk in an insurance company again. I’d snuck in all the ag courses I could in college. Liked them. So! All cleared up?”

“Stripped for action,” Carrie admitted truthfully. “Seed testing, too?”

“Sure. The works in that, all they gave. But I haven’t the equipment on the farm to run the tests properly.”

“Of course. You were absolutely right to bring them in.” Carrie was all warm agreement. “I’d never have forgiven you if you hadn’t.”

“And what are you doing in that laboratory?”

“I formed the habit of eating early in life and I’ve never been able to break myself of it.”

Deale took his eyes off the highway long enough to run off the road and back on again. It didn’t seem to bother him. But something, the look of the ditch or something, sent a little chill down Carrie’s spine. It was not an altogether unpleasant chill.

“Some girls get married.”

“Some do. I haven’t.”

“Why not?” It was more than just a question.

“No offers. No offers,” Carrie lied speciously.

“I don’t believe that.”

Carrie hadn’t really expected him to. She would have been hurt if Deale had believed it. As it was, she felt wonderful. The beautiful vision of the speeding wheels of industry went round and round in Carrie’s mind. Now *there* was life! There was the pounding lifeblood of the nation. There was her heart’s desire. Ah, rivets, ah, blowtorches. But this, Carrie felt, was not the moment to mention it.

Into every girl’s life, Carrie supposed, came one evening when she helped deliver hogs to a commission house. As they left, Deale swung the

truck toward the center of town.

"I've been holding out on you."

"Surprise? Surprise?" Carrie questioned. "I suppose we're taking cows back?"

"No. Surprise, surprise, I suppose we're going dancing. You do dance?"

Carrie eyed his overalls dubiously. She loved dancing, but headwaiters gave her an inferiority complex even without an escort in overalls. Oh, watta life indeed. Could you entice a man into doing your blotter work for you and still refuse to dance with him?

"Don't look now," Deale whispered mysteriously, "but there's a bag with another suit in it back of the seat. I usually do the town for a couple of hours whenever I bring a load in."

Suppressing an interesting little mental picture of them being grandly handed out of the truck by one of the better doormen around town, Carrie nodded, but the nod lacked verve. She had asked for a date but she feared she was being given a lemon. And in her social moments, she did give a fig for appearances.

Carrie blinked rapidly. Was that hollow feeling in her stomach bringing on all those fruity similes hunger, or was it a distinct feeling something in this situation was getting out of hand?

Deale swung the truck into the parking space at the Union Station.

"Procedure as follows. We leave truck here. I go, and I do know where, and change clothes. You drink coke and wait. Then we take taxi and are off in blaze of glory."

"Any other orders?" Carrie asked faintly.

"E-er, yes." Deale grinned down at her. "You start looking a little happier about it all."

He leaned over and caught her head comfortably in the crook of his elbow, tilted her chin up with his hand, and kissed her. Carrie considered, up to the point when Deale's lips touched hers, whether it was wise to let him kiss her. After that, she stopped considering anything. Wise was hardly the word she would have used anyhow. Hollywood has some good six-syllable adjectives.

"Feel better about it now?" Deale asked cozily.

"I'll give the matter some thought," Carrie said, climbing a little dizzily out of the truck. "Quite a little thought." And headed in the direction of that coke.

Afterward they ate two-inch steaks at a famous place near the stockyards. They were swept out,

with the rest of the leftovers from a large evening, of the best hotel dance and drink room in town. They helped close one roadhouse. They practically separated the town from the country.

"I know just one more place that might be open," Deale said. "Let's look."

Carrie looked and shook her head. It was not quite dime a dance. Maybe twelve cents. But everyone who could get inside was having their twelve cents' worth.

"Oh, no," Carrie said decidedly. "I hate the middle classes. They comes in such teeming masses."

"And a hey, hey, hey and a hi, hi, hi," Deale murmured thoughtfully. "What makes you like that?"

"I've spent three years alone in my basement, just me and my little seed sprouts," Carrie said gloomily. "Not only the weeds are noxious there. It's a wonder I don't do worse." And realized too late that was hardly the rosy enticing picture of her job she had meant to paint for Deale.

ALL the way home Carrie slept comfortably on Deale's shoulder. It was a very fine shoulder. Always allowing for the fact she never had slept on a man's shoulder before, Carrie still thought she could go farther and hardly do better.

They just beat the sun in. Then, because it seemed a shame not to finish the evening up right, they sat and yawned until it rose. Carrie staggered sleepily into bed and fifteen minutes later remembered bed was just wasted effort. Thousands and thousands of seeds were calling for her. And Deale had remembered to put his sample in her coat pocket.

For the next couple of weeks, the days slipped away as if running downhill on an icy surface. Carrie stopped chanting sad little solos to herself, the birds existed on a sketchy and badly balanced diet of whatever happened to come out of the files first when Carrie put her hand in, and the gold knit dress went to the laboratory increasingly often. Because, for a farmer, Deale seemed to have an amazing amount of business in town and especially at the state-house just around quitting time.

Cunningly, a couple of times, Carrie pointed out the scientific beauties of the germinators, the perfections of the scales, the excellencies of the filing system, the necessity for it all. But mostly she just went where Deale led and, for a stranger in

town, Deale led her an amazing number of places.

One evening when they were lounging over a beer apiece and getting pleasantly nostalgic to the records on the jukebox, a large rough character wandered over to their table. He gave Carrie the eye as she seldom had been given the eye before and presented Deale with an elbow in that crooked nose.

Deale was quiet and efficient. He stood up, took the character by collar and seat of pants, and deposited him outside the door, still in one piece but not quite sure what had happened to him and in no mood to return to find out.

Carrie beamed mistily at Deale. She never had wanted to be the backbone of the nation, but being a bone of contention was something else again. It was pleasant. She liked it.

"You're a funny man," she murmured. "Not funny ha-ha. Funny different."

"How?"

"You take me out practically every night for two weeks and you tell me I have pretty hands or nice legs or something often enough to keep me purring, but you haven't done it once since."

"I think better with pictures, too."

"The kiss," Carrie said, unable to believe Deale had not been thinking of it too, now and then in an odd moment. She was having a lot of odd moments lately.

"Oh, that. I just tried that one on for size."

"Oh," Carrie echoed a little blankly, and somehow at once felt less glamorous than she had in days.

That night Carrie had one of those serious girl talks with herself that every woman has when life reaches a crisis. Did she want to get out of the seed laboratory? A thousand times yes. But was it still her for the gay life and the riveter's gun? We—ell . . . Or did she want to turn into the sort of woman who counted from that year the corn was so poor or when Johnnie had the measles? A farmer's wife? No!

It was very depressing, and high time something was done. Because the more she looked at Deale, the oftener Carrie felt a weakening tendency to think it wouldn't be so awful to count from three years ago last harvest time. And he was a man who just tried kisses on for size.

But watta kiss.

"Yippee," said Carrie softly, in memory.

The thing to do, Carrie decided firmly, was to exit while she still had her strength. She would

sneak up on the subject of the laboratory the next time she saw Deale, being subtle as all get out.

**B** EING subtle called for a brand new dress and brushing the beaver so most of it looked so handsome that the bare spots were hardly noticeable at all.

"Think you'll have a good cash crop this year?" Carrie asked, attacking cunningly, when they had done a movie and were settled over a soda, this being their evening to be sedate.

Deale's eyebrows wigwagged surprise. "How do I know? It's not even planted yet, and I was never a man to count my ears before the corn starts tasseling. But that place always makes a living."

Plainly the commercial angle did not click. Carrie tried sneaking in from behind, hunting a blind spot.

"Won't the work be pretty heavy for you? That neck and all."

"I'm more scarred than hurt."

Subtlety was out. Carrie went straight in, guns blazing.

"Some farmers hold a job in town and work their places, too."

"Oh." Deale's eyes twinkled sardonically. "I wondered how long it would take you to get around to this."

"Huh?" said Carrie feebly. She had a distinct premonition that she should have looked before she peeped.

"Look, dear," Deale said, as gently as if to an idiot child, "I saw you coming first. But I didn't know how far you'd go. I've been watching with interest."

**A** LL was lost. Carrie knew that by the large lump of lead which suddenly was sitting where her stomach used to be. But she might as well get the horrid details. "Pictures, please," Carrie said.

Deale began to count on long brown fingers. "You hate that lab and you want to get away. You said it. You sang it. My guess is you're frozen and can only get a release by finding a substitute. By the way, how long did it take you to register on that oats crack of mine?"

"Not long enough," Carrie said sourly. She was a girl who knew when she had been took with a come-on. "But why?"

"I thought you were sort of cute. Or at least

different. I knew when you called me that you hadn't really lost that sample. I saw it on the desk when we left. Then you wanted to tag along to Omaha. And I hardly thought it was my beautiful brown eyes that had done it. So I decided two could play that game. Incidentally, it's no sale."

"Raw Deale Turner."

"You weren't playing very pretty yourself," Deale pointed out, and held her coat.

They drove home in silence, with Carrie wiggling inwardly as she realized Deale must have watched and understood her every move. Just like an insect under a microscope, Carrie thought furiously. Deale certainly was a man who had strange ideas of amusement.

Deale took her formally to the door. Then he put his hands on her shoulders and bent and kissed Carrie, kissed her long and deep and hard. "Give that one some thought, too," he said softly, and left.

But Carrie was not doing much thinking. Mostly she was feeling, and though what few stray thoughts were wandering around in her mind did relate to Deale, they were hardly the sort to enhance its girlish innocence. She never had disliked anyone more actively. At times it seemed to go even farther than dislike.

For two weeks, Deale had been her fellow, her beau. But as a beau he had too many strings on him, to wit, one farm and the idea that farming was living.

"Huh!" Carrie snorted scornfully.

But watta fellow he had been while he lasted. So what? Carrie tried to look tough.

"Yah, yah, yah, Farmer in the Dell," Carrie sang, but her heart was not in it. Because she felt, for some reason, exactly like what rhymed with dell.

So maybe it had been love, Carrie admitted finally. It often was when a girl suddenly started taking an interest in her clothes, and ordinary little catch phrases were important and heart-heightening not because of what they said but how they were said.

Morning, and the laboratory and the red wool dress again gave Carrie a distinctly jaundiced view of life. Deale had dealt her out of his life. No more gay and silly and happy evenings. No more kisses. No more nothing.

Carrie looked around the laboratory with a kindling spark in her eyes. No more nothing was right. If the Government thought it could freeze her

into a lifetime of nurse-maiding little seed sprouts, the Government was due to learn something new about the independence of the American character.

So then, ho, for the gay life, and, hey, for the speeding wheels of industry. She would be a career woman. She would rivet as rivets never had been driven before. And if she ever again came across any trace of a character named Deale Turner, he had better look twice to make sure she did not have her riveting gun in her hand. Because if she did have, Carrie was in a mood to make it forcibly plain that his ideas of amusement were not hers.

Carrie sniffed desolately. Success would be hollow, but it would be her own. At least she would not be a stupid puppet going through her transparent little gestures for the cynical amusement of a certain crooked-nosed character she could have named, if all the names she was able to think of for him at the moment had not been the type which a lady never would use.

Right now the Governor was going to hear a few things that governors seldom have said right to their faces.

"Did you give that one some thought?" a voice asked softly from the door.

Carrie whirled. "I'll say I have."

Deale nodded, up and down. He narrowed his eyes at the red dress.

"All your other clothes at the cleaners? Or are you just feeling like that?"

So he hadn't even missed that little trick!

"Something's going to the cleaners, but it's not my clothes."

Deale lounged into the room and then grinned. "And what have you been thinking and what is going to the cleaners, dear?" he asked enticingly.

**F**OR the first time in her life, Carrie found herself shaking a clenched fist under someone's nose.

"Don't call me dear!" she shouted. "And stop looking so darn handsome."

"Thank you," Deale said modestly.

"Because I'm not jumping through anymore hoops for you," Carrie raged on. "I'm not playing games any longer. I'm through being subtle."

"Was that what you were being?" Deale asked, too blandly.

Carrie fixed him with glittering eyes. "In short, I'm through. I'm still going to get out of here but I'm going out in my own way. If I have to tear the

joint apart to get out.”

“The taxpayers wouldn’t like that.”

“I don’t like taxpayers,” Carrie snapped, looking fixedly at a certain one. That was a mistake. He didn’t look like a taxpayer. He didn’t look like a farmer. He just looked like the man she loved. “Oh, go peddle your seeds somewhere else,” she sniffed.

“What are you going to do when you get away from the seeds and the taxpayers?” Deale demanded softly.

“I’ll rivet,” Carrie admitted.

“Do you really want to rivet?”

Now that she thought it over, Carrie was not so sure. “Well, a girl’s gotta do something,” she muttered defiantly.

“There are lots of things a girl can do besides rivet,” Deale murmured. “If a girl’s through being subtle, so a man has to be even subtler, they might both start playing pretty and then there are lots of things she can do. This, for instance.”

Carrie saw the light, as a blinding flash, practically the same moment Deale’s lips touched hers. Seeds gotta be tested, don’t they? Few can test but many can rivet. Just like birds gotta eat. And girls gotta be kissed. And farmers have to have wives, don’t they? So the heck with rivets. The heck with everything. Except Deale. And yippee for kisses.

“I could stay on here,” Carrie whispered

dazedly.

“You are staying on here,” Deale, said firmly. “Because I’m staying and I like my seeds tested right.”

Something was missing. Carrie looked questioningly at Deale.

“That’s all right,” he said comfortingly. “You had a strange fascination for me from the first. Then all at once, I got a little mental picture of you singing Hymns of Hate in my kitchen for the rest of your life. And as you pointed out, some people do two jobs. Though later I might entice one of my old college pals in to take this over. You must admit I entice just fine when I put my mind to it.”

Deale pulled her a little closer into his arms to show what he meant in her case.

“Yes, dear,” Carrie admitted docilely. But something still was missing. “Ye—es,” Carrie repeated. She sounded doubtful.

“You can go right on hating anything you like,” Deale murmured. “That’s part of your strange fascination. Except me. You gotta love me. Because I love you. You see, when I tried that kiss on for size, I found it suited me just right.”

“Well, why didn’t you say so before?” Carrie asked crossly.

And kissed Deale, not at all crossly. And he kissed her. It was lovely. It seemed they both were suited just right.