

You belong
to me

BUCKINGHAM PALACE, THE TOWER OF LONDON, MONTMARTRE . . . JEFF HUNTER SAW 'EM ALL. BUT HIS HEART NEVER LEFT HOME!

by Jim Burton



Four months away from home is a long time, especially if it's the first four months of your son's life! Barbara spent hours bringing Jeff up to date.

- When executives of 20th Century-Fox told Jeff Hunter he was to leave for England and make a movie there last summer, he stood looking at them in disbelief.

"But—" he said.

"Our British company is making the

picture," they said. "You're to leave about the middle of August."

"But—" said Jeff.

"It's called *Sailor Of The King*, and it will be shot both in England and Malta."

"But—"

"You'd better apply for your passport right away."

When he went home and told Barbara about it she managed to finish the sentence for him. "But what about the baby?"

Jeff gave a half-hearted shrug. What could he do about it? All his life he had wanted to see faraway places; during the war he had volunteered for the Navy in the hope he might be shipped out to the South Pacific, but he'd ended up with measles and attendant complications, and that was the end of his dream about joining the Navy and seeing the world. Now he'd been given his chance, given it on a silver platter with traveling expenses gratis, and to boot a good picture that was to be directed by one of England's finest, Roy Boulting (*Seven Days To Noon*). Here it was, and he was to leave a full two weeks before his first child was scheduled to be born.

Jeff was a completely normal expectant father in thinking his presence was necessary at the time Barbara gave birth. The doctor had said it might have to be a Caesarean operation, and Jeff was worried. Barbara was a normal expectant mother in wanting her husband to be with her when the great event happened. But

there was only one answer. Jeff might be a Hollywood actor, but he is like every other working man—he must follow his boss's orders.



"But . . . but . . . he's grown so *big!*" exclaims Jeff, when he's re-introduced to son Chris.

Gloomily, he packed a pile of suitcases, stashed them in fence fashion around the walls of the living room, and waited. From then on he lived out of suitcases, and was extracting a sport shirt from one the morning the phone rang. It was the studio, with news that gave them a slight reprieve. His departure had been postponed for another week. Maybe, they thought hopefully, the baby would come early. When consulted on this possibility for the eighth time, the doctor shook his

head. "Don't count on it before September 1st."

By the time Jeff got his smallpox vaccination and had received his passport, the studio had decided on two more postponements. He was due to leave the following day when on August 28th he received a cable from Malta from Frank McCarthy, producer of the picture. McCarthy knew how anxious Jeff was to stick around home as long as possible and was doing his best to stretch the starting date. The cable read to the effect that Jeff could count on September 5th as the absolute deadline for leaving the West Coast.

Mr. and Mrs. Hunter whooped and hollered and blessed the Irish in general, and the following morning Mr. Hunter noticed a vaguely puzzled expression on Mrs. Hunter's face.

"What is it?" he said.

"I think I'm going to cooperate," said Barbara.

On the doctor's advice they waited until noon before going to the Santa Monica Hospital. Barbara's mother was the only other person in the waiting room, and they consoled each other until shortly after five o'clock that afternoon, when a boy was born.

WHEN Jeff first saw the small scrunched bundle of humanity that was held up to him behind the glass of the nursery, he nervously fingered the pocket handkerchief he had removed

from a suitcase that morning. "Is it *mine?*" he mumbled.

Mrs. Rush was more appreciative in her verbal comment. "Oh, Jeff! It's a darling boy!"

"Oh," said the new father, mopping his forehead. "Is it?"

He had five more days to recuperate, and on September 4th put Barbara Rush Hunter and Christopher Merrill Hunter tenderly into the back seat of his car. He drove home as though Sunset Boulevard were paved with whole eggs, and gingerly installed his new family in their respective bedrooms, then backed off in bewilderment and gratitude while Mother Rush took over with an experienced hand.



With Barbara helping, Jeff got packed in a jiffy . . . then spent days just sitting, surrounded by suitcases, waiting orders to sail!

The next morning he gathered his luggage from the perimeter of the living room, took a last look at his new son and put his arms around his wife. It had been wonderful that he'd been allowed to stay as long as he had, but he was well aware that their parting now was even rougher on Barbara than it was on himself. Mrs. Rush would stay with her, and Jeff knew his mother-in-law would give service that would be the envy even of a mother hen. But just the same, he asked himself, what would happen when Barbara succumbed to the famous new-mother blues, and he wasn't there to console her? What would happen if Chris got the hiccups, or the croup, or maybe he might have that three-month colic they'd read about. He suddenly felt a lump rising in his throat, and he gave Barbara a hug that left her breathless, then broke away and ran down the steps.

He flew to New York and there boarded a plane for England but by the time they had reached Newfoundland the engine was spluttering in a frightening way, and passengers were informed there would be a nine hour delay. Jeff had promised to cable Barbara the minute he landed in London, and thinking that a delay of nine hours would make her frantic, he wired about it from Newfoundland. On receiving it Barbara didn't so much as raise an eyebrow. To her, an airplane is no more dangerous than a subway, and for years she has boarded airlines with the aplomb that St.

Peter might have in a similar situation. Boats—they are something else, and already she was worried about Jeff's decision to return home on the liner United States.

As Barbara knew it would, Jeff's plane arrived safely at the London airport. The ship flew in at dusk, and although the proverbial mist was in the air Jeff could see the ancient city beneath him, its lights twinkling as far as the eye could see. He stepped out of the plane with the conscious thought, "I am in England." When the voice of the announcer on the public address system crackled through the air in a Cockney accent, he grinned to himself. This was perfect.

IN order to keep it that way, he tried to dodge the loneliness that enveloped him whenever he thought of his family, 6,000 miles away. He kept busy, and was thankful that in that first month he was allowed a lot of free time. He saw London, upside down and inside out. He went to Madame Tussaud's wax works, to St. Paul's Cathedral, to the Tower of London. He watched the Changing of the Guard at Buckingham Palace, and he reserved a whole day for Westminster Abbey. Jeff had always loved history, and having the living reality of these old stones beneath his feet gave him a tremendous thrill. He recorded all of it for Barbara, who had yearned to see Europe as much as he, with his Rolleiflex camera. Whenever he left the hotel in the

morning his shoulders were criss-crossed with the straps of his photographic equipment, and wherever he went he caught only a portion of the guides' remarks because he was so intent on the problems of exposures, filters and speeds.



Presents from France and England flooded Barbara and the baby. Home again, Jeff hears Barbara admire the gifts he sent.

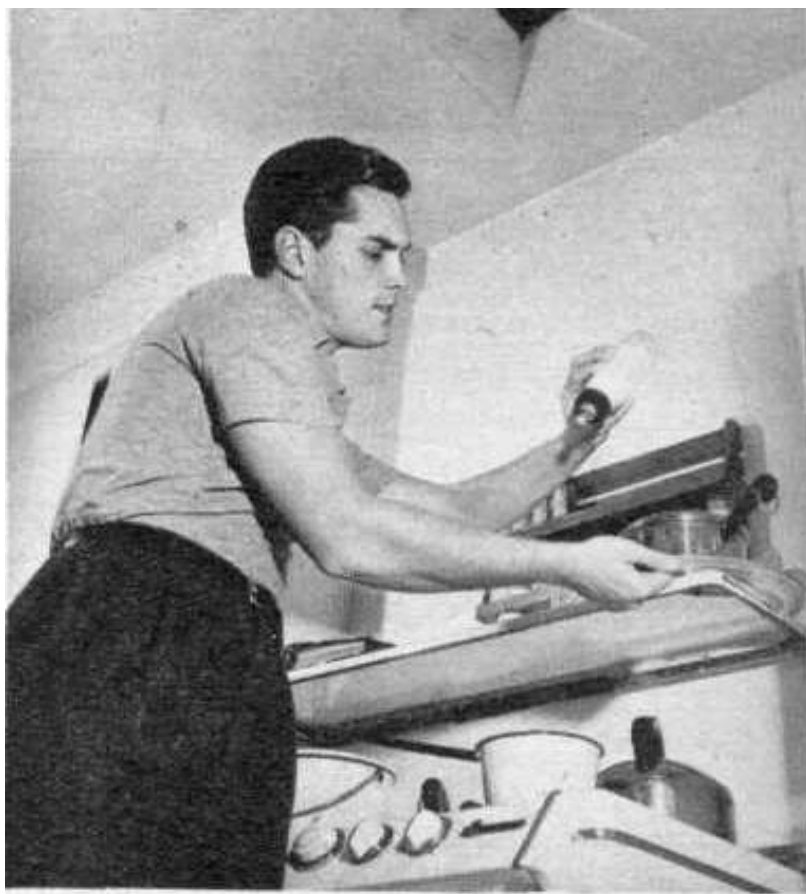
He had time to leave London and see more of England. He went up to Stratford-on-Avon and steeped himself in the reverence felt by the old town for Shakespeare. He went to Leamington Spa to watch the English at play, and he went down to Hampton Court, the famous old palace of Henry VIII. He watched an English soccer game and was deeply

impressed by the skill involved, and then he went to a cricket game and was stumped. Cricket was the only thing in all of England that left him cold—cricket and the London fog, which at the time Jeff was there blanketed the city in the worst attack on record. Otherwise he fell in love with the country, its cities and its scenery, and mostly its people, who were the soul of courtesy to Jeff. He grew to admire them tremendously. "Nobody can do so much, and so cheerfully, with so little," he says.

He met a surprising number of friends while there. In Westminster Abbey he was looking at the tomb of Edward the Confessor when he was suddenly slapped on the back and turned to find two college friends he hadn't seen in years. At Bushey Air Base, where Jeff made a personal appearance, he was introduced to the American personnel officer. "Lieutenant Bell, this is Jeff Hunter." They stared at each other a full minute before the officer said, "What's this Jeff Hunter business? Aren't you Hank McKinnies from Milwaukee?" And Jeff recognized him as another old school friend.

His birthday on November 25th was spent alone, but brightened by Barbara's thoughtfulness. More than a week before, she had given him a birthday party, and on his birthday he received not only a tie from her, a print job with English knights jousting across it, but also a piece of the cake, some of the candles, a chain letter

from the guests, and a flock of pictures showing the gang at home. That night he sat alone in his hotel room, and setting the time meter on his camera, took pictures to send back to Barbara. A week later she opened an envelope and saw him eating the cake, reading the letter, looking at the pictures and opening her package. It wasn't the same as being together, but it helped.



Jeff's busy making up for the first four months of fatherhood. Barbara takes a well-deserved rest while Pop heats a bottle.

THEIR letters to each other were frequent and full. Barbara sent him a daily report of their son's progress. Chris was healthy and happy, he had an appetite like a stevedore, and he was a rarity in that he had already got the idea

that nights are for sleeping. She sent him scores of pictures and Jeff spent hours trying to scotch-tape them together in accordion fashion so that when anyone inquired after his son he could whip a foot-long record out of his pocket. The pictures arrived in such volume, however, that he soon gave up the idea and instead strung them bunting fashion across his room.

His letters to her were often written in dialect, of which Jeff was learning a bewildering assortment, even within the confines of England. His letters from Paris were addressed to Mme. Hunter, and those from Rome came to Signora Hunter.

The visit to Paris stretched only over a weekend, but in that time Jeff saw more than the average tourist sees in a week. Frank McCarthy and director Roy Boulting went with him, flying across on a Friday night, and from then on Jeff forgot what sleep meant. They contacted a friend of a friend who worked in Paris with TWA and who was kind enough to supply them not only with a car, but with his services as companion and guide. They started out in Montemartre that night, seeing the Sacre-Coeur and then the famous night spots of that naughty hill. They went all over Paris and ended up at dawn in Pigalle at a cabaret which caters to American performers. The next day Jeff went on a shopping spree and bought Barbara a real French chapeau, for he is one of those rare men who

knows how and wants to shop for women, and even the language problem didn't stop him from choosing a hat that is currently the envy of other Hollywood actresses.

He went into Notre Dame and had lunch at a sidewalk cafe and then walked along the left bank of the Seine, wishing mightily that Barbara could be with him. He looked at the awesome spread of buildings that comprise the Louvre, and decided to wait until he and Barbara together could some day enjoy its treasures. The trip was finished off on Saturday night by a visit to the Folies Bergere, and he went back to London the next day still unable to believe that he had really seen Paris.

There followed six weeks of location work in Malta, and despite the fact it was wintertime in the rest of the world, the Mediterranean was in its perpetual state of summer sunshine. They worked on Gozo Island, a rocky promontory in the sea which afforded the stark and rugged terrain over which Jeff was required to walk, run, and crawl. The cast and crew of the movie lived in those days on the British cruiser Manxman, disguised for the picture as a German ship, and Jeff made fast friends with many of the ship's crew. In his free time he went spear fishing, equipped with spear, snorkel mask and swim fins made in Genoa, and although he caught nothing spectacular, he reported to Barbara that to his way of thinking this was the world's Eden for a

swimmer.

THERE was one more spree due him before he left for home, and that was Rome. He spent three days in the Eternal City before going back to England to board his ship, and they are three days Jeff will never forget. His first night there he met a young American on his way to Arabia, and discovering they were both long on curiosity and short on time, they teamed up to take practically every tour offered in Rome. They saw the Coliseum and the Forum and Hadrian's Villa and the Catacombs, and everywhere they went Jeff brought up the rear of the group, taking pictures while his pockets bulged with film and flashbulbs.

The Italian language was no more familiar to him than that of Pakistan, but he managed to get around via the tours without much trouble. His only snarl was the night he phoned the desk clerk at his hotel. For a half hour he studied his Italian pocket dictionary and carefully rehearsed, syllable by syllable, the sentence "Please awaken me at eight-thirty tomorrow morning." Then he picked up the phone and with gritted teeth intoned laboriously, "Piacere, io voglio essere svegliato domani alle otto e mezzo della mattina."

"Sure thing," replied the clerk in English. "You bet."

It was with a mixed feeling of relief and sadness that he boarded the United States at Southampton a week later, and

heard "the Americantongue" around him once more. The ship was big and unbelievably beautiful, and he was excitedly inspecting it when suddenly the whole ship shuddered. There were excited shouts and people running hysterically down on the dock, for in the process of being backed out of the harbor the ship had been hit by a 50-knot gust that sent her slamming back into the dock. It turned out all right — the stevedores threw coils of rope between the boat and the dock to cushion the shock, and a collision was avoided with the immense lifting cranes, but back in Hollywood Barbara read about it in the newspaper and felt the first real fear for Jeff she had known since his departure.

Four days later, even though Barbara was sure the ship would never make it, the United States docked safely in New York and Jeff spilled out, went through Customs in a fever of impatience, and in less than five hours was winging his way to Milwaukee to meet Barbara.

It was a mad, gay, crazy reunion after four months, and even though Chris had been left behind in Hollywood with his grandmother, Jeff felt it was the happiest moment in his life when he sighted Barbara, wearing that saucy hat, waiting for him at the Milwaukee airport. It was his first visit to his home town in more than three years, and they had a merry Christmas with his parents and then Jeff proudly introduced his wife to all his old friends, who numbered more than 200 on

that day they held open house.

THOSE two weeks in his boyhood home were fun, but as the days rolled by he found it difficult to keep his patience for the day when he could again see his son. When they finally landed in Los Angeles and whizzed through traffic to their Westwood apartment, Jeff took the steps two at a time. He flung open the door, with Barbara right behind him, and there was Christopher Merrill, big as life, in the process of having his triangular pants changed. Jeff looked at him in astonishment.

"But—but—" he said. "Is he mine?"

Mrs. Rush laughed. "You said that the first time you saw him."

"But he's so *big!*"

Barbara slipped her hand into Jeff's.

"Honey, he's four months old! Of course he's grown. I sent you the pictures."

"I know—but somehow—in pictures — well, for heaven's sake!"

Nowadays Jeff stays home and makes up for lost time with his son. In the closets and in the corners of the apartment are stacked piles of pictures, and all kinds of literature from Europe. There is even a full set of Linguaphone records in French, bought by Jeff his first day back in London after the Paris trip. Barbara has mentioned politely that it might be a good idea if Jeff would look at his pictures, read his literature, study his French, and then put everything away

in one place.

"Let's wait until we buy a house," he says. "Maybe next year. I'll go through it all then. Right now I'd rather sit and look at you."

END