



## MY NAME IS LOLA

by Lola Rozsa,

as told to and written by Susie Sparks

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## Hello, Ted! Goodbye, Charlie

Truth be told, I felt like Papa had sent me to Ann as an ambassador to try to make peace. After she graduated from college in 1936, Ann got a job at a newspaper in Olney and almost immediately met Ed who was employed at the Chevrolet garage across the street from her office. They fell madly in love and, when she came home to Eastland for Thanksgiving that year, she brought him along and introduced him to Preacher saying, “This is Ed Hart, my husband.”

Papa and Mama were shattered. No one in our family had been married by anyone other than our father – and for very good reason. He would have taken it as a personal affront. He made that very clear to everyone, including Ann and Ed. But, since then, three years had passed and he was beginning to mellow. It was time to let bygones be bygones.

I’m sure I wasn’t exactly pouting about having to entertain some friend of Ed. It’s not like me to sulk. But I’m equally sure I wasn’t looking forward to a boring evening with my sister’s married-couples’ bridge club. Oh well, once they all leave, I probably thought, it’ll be something I can write about in tonight’s letter to Charlie.

I helped Ann fix something for her share of the supper and changed my dress just as people started arriving, so I didn’t really have time to worry about learning some stupid card game. All the couples arrived, introductions were made, and Ann and I set up the

tables and arranged a buffet of all the pot luck contributions, and then there was another knock at the door.

Ed went to answer it and, just as I turned around, in walked the spitting image of Errol Flynn! He had come straight from the golf course – tall, tan, dark curly hair, beautiful beige suit, yellow tie. “Lola,” said Ed, “I’d like you to meet my friend Ted Rozsa. He’s working on Shell’s seismic crew just outside of town and he tells me he’s a bridge player.”

I was instantly smitten. If I looked the way I felt I’m sure I was lit up like a Christmas tree! He was drop-dead gorgeous and gentlemanly enough not to laugh at me at least until I regained my composure.

The rest of the evening still remains a blur. We were paired off as partners for the bridge game, and he must have coached me through it somehow because at the end of the evening we had won first prize. All I can tell you is that after everyone left, I didn’t write that letter to Charlie.

And I didn’t write one the next night ... or the night after that. I was far too busy agonizing over whether I would hear from Ted again. But finally he called and asked me to a picture show, which for the life of me I can’t remember. And the next night he said that a couple he knew was planning a fried chicken supper that evening and would I like to go with him. Would I? You bet I would!

Then Charlie called me. When was I coming back to Waxahachie? I’m embarrassed to admit that I didn’t have the courage to tell him that it was looking less and less likely that it would be any time soon.

Ted was finding reasons to come into town almost every evening, and then he started telling me about the nomadic life the crew had to live, picking up and moving camp every few weeks, until finally one night, as we sat in his car, he proposed to me.

Before I had a chance to accept, he immediately launched into all the reasons I *shouldn’t* marry him. Life on a seismic crew is unsettled ... it’s a constant migration from one dusty little community to the next ... the move to a new field comes every six weeks or

three months ... you'll have to live in close quarters with the crew who'll become your family with all the good and bad that goes with it whether you want that or not ... and there'll be times you'll have to spend alone because I'll be on fields where there's no housing of any kind ... and ...

I had to interrupt him to say yes. I was nineteen. Ted was twenty-four.

He wanted to go to Oklahoma and get married without any fuss, but I told him my father was only now getting over the fact that Ann and Ed had run off and married without any fuss. "It's not that a big wedding is something that I've ever wanted, but Papa would *never* recover if I ran off, too." We'd have to go home to Whitesboro so Ted could meet my parents.

I finally wrote to Charlie.

And then I discovered that Ted wasn't just another pretty face. He was the superstar second son of John and Lela Rozsa and had been raised with a work ethic that wouldn't quit. His father, a Hungarian immigrant, had arrived at Ellis Island a penniless young man with dreams of starting over in a place where he could make a life for himself without the entanglements of the past. He worked for a time in New York apprenticing as a barber to learn the trade and shortly thereafter took his new skill with him to Grand Rapids, Michigan. John married Lela and they had three children while they lived in a little house on the outskirts of town. The house had no electricity, and their children learned to read by lantern light. In time, though, the city's movers and shakers offered him an opportunity to own his own barbershop in the Businessmen's Club, and John learned from them what it would take for his American children to get a foothold on the ladder to financial success.

From the beginning, it was made perfectly clear to Ted that he would go to university, and that he would have to win a scholarship to do so. He finished at the top of his high school class in 1933. And, since he graduated with straight A's, Michigan Tech awarded him a scholarship that would cover his tuition. However, Tech was

in Houghton so he would have to feed and house himself for four years because his family was unable to cover his living costs. It didn't take him long to look at the projected budget and decide the only thing that would work would be to complete the four years of the BSc in Geological Engineering in two and a half years. So he did – after taking a 50 per cent overload just because he was interested in anything they had to teach him. He graduated with highest honours in 1936.

Stacked up against Ted Rozsa, I'm afraid Errol Flynn was coming in a distant second.

When I think about it now, I realize that Preacher's instincts were probably acting in cahoots with a higher power that knew very well I wasn't meant to be the wife of a Texas cotton farmer. Every time he whisked me away from Trinity and put some distance between Charlie and me, I think Preacher knew that eventually I'd discover that myself. So when I wrote to my parents and told them about Ted and our plans to come to Whitesboro in hope that Papa would marry us, I'm pretty sure Preacher offered up a quick prayer of thanks. And when he shook Ted's hand, he told him he knew I had made the right choice.

In 1936 jobs were scarce in the industrial north. More accurately, there was 40 per cent unemployment in Michigan, so jobs weren't just scarce, they simply didn't exist. But in Oklahoma, the 1927 boom in petroleum production had reached 762,000 barrels a day, making it the nation's largest producer. The huge discoveries had everyone excited and Shell Oil was intent on extending their exploration to other possibly productive sites in the state. So Ted, with the ink barely dry on his diploma, let Shell know he'd like to be one of those explorers.

Oil seeps had been recognized in Oklahoma long before white settlers came along, but as soon as they arrived they learned to scoop it up to fuel their lamps and collect dip oil to treat their cattle for ticks. However, it didn't take long for some enterprising entrepreneur to exploit its real potential, and the first commercial well was drilled

in 1896 near Bartlesville. That discovery well, as well as many subsequent finds, spurred the movement toward statehood in 1907 and brought Oklahoma into the club of major worldwide oil producers.

Shell hired Ted to be a computer on a seismic crew. His job was to help prepare the records and make the computations for surface corrections, for elevation corrections, and for weathering corrections. What they were doing was teaching him the trade because he'd had no experience or education in the field at all and, being the kind of student who is constantly seeking out new information, Ted thrived on it.

What Ted had been trying to tell me, though, was that life in those little boomlets scattered across Oklahoma was less than genteel. Usually, what happened was that some wildcatter would ignite a frenzy of speculation that would unleash the swarming bands of land-hungry land men trying to devour the most promising plays. Then the roustabouts would arrive to start drilling, but, with nowhere to live, they'd be sleeping in any vacant room, whether that room was in a hotel, a tent, somebody's barn, or in the local pool hall under the table.

Most of those migrant workers were unmarried, of course, so to attend to their recreational needs, business men and women followed close on their heels to set up establishments to cater to those necessities, and saloons and bawdy houses sprang up like tumbleweeds in spring. If the boom was short-lived, civilizing forces like schools, churches, and local law enforcement never had a chance to take root. However, if fortune smiled and the discovery proved bountiful, families arrived and brought along stability and those little hamlets became towns. Unfortunately, that didn't always happen and many boomlets died almost as quickly as they were born.

Ted was twenty-one and determined to put his education to work. He joined the other young guys on one of Shell's seismic crews in the summer of 1936. Their job was to relate the geophysics to the geology. Everything was to be done out in the field.

Unemployment in the United States, though beginning to improve, was still almost 17 per cent, and across the Atlantic the news was far worse. In violation of the Treaty of Versailles, Germany had just reoccupied the Rhineland. Ted was very glad to have a job. He had a chance to learn fast and an opportunity to be in on some of the technological innovations that would revolutionize the industry.

Three years later when he proposed, he was a seasoned veteran of exploration seismology and knew exactly what he was offering me. In fact, no sooner had I written to Mama and Papa letting them know we'd like to be married in Whitesboro at Christmas, Ted got word that his crew would be relocating to Stroud, Oklahoma, right away. My heart sank; I knew it was too far away for us to see one another – at least on a daily basis. And practically in the next mail, his father wrote to say he couldn't leave his barbershop during the Christmas season, and would it be possible for us to get married during the Labour Day weekend instead? The only practical thing to do was to get married and go to Stroud together. We had known each other barely three weeks.

We said our goodbyes to Ann and Ed, who were looking mighty smug about their matchmaking talents, and Ted drove me to Whitesboro to meet my parents. They obviously approved of *this* choice and Preacher and Ted established both a respect and fondness for one another that would last a lifetime. But almost immediately Ted hit the road for Stroud, leaving me in Whitesboro to pine away the few weeks left until Labour Day and our wedding.

I went to work in a dry goods store in Whitesboro to keep busy since weddings in those days most definitely didn't require any planning. There was no money to spend on all the accoutrements that seem required for a wedding today, so I was at best looking forward to gathering my family for a simple service and a farewell lunch. But that was before our church family and friends in Denton got word.

We all felt that Denton, where we had spent the happiest growing-up years, would be home. It was where our parents dreamed of perhaps retiring one day, and where all of their children would

gravitate for special occasions and, in the best of all worlds, to finally settle – all of us together. So maybe it wasn't really all that surprising when the Denton congregation insisted on throwing me a bridal shower.

And then, on the Friday before Labour Day, everyone started arriving at my parents' home in Whitesboro. Ann was to be my matron of honour, of course, so she and Ed came first, then Mac McKenzie, Ted's closest friend on the seismic crew came to stand as his best man. John and Lela Rozsa, Ted's parents, along with his sister Theresa, drove in on Friday evening, September 1, having just heard that Hitler's fifty-two divisions with some 1.5 million men including six armoured divisions had invaded Poland. For the first time in a very long time, John felt an agonizing kinship to the people he had left behind so long ago, and we all huddled around Papa's radio to hear the relentless updates on the world's inevitable plunge into war.

On Sunday, I'm sure my father preached a very different sermon than he had planned earlier in the week, but at its end he announced from the pulpit that his youngest daughter was being married the next day and he invited the entire congregation to attend. And taking him at his word, they all showed up at the church the next day to help us celebrate my wedding.

Papa had bought me a new outfit and, since it was to be a fall wedding, he reasoned that an autumn dress of rust-coloured wool would be both pretty and appropriate. (Even he knew that one puts away one's white shoes after Labour Day, for heavens sake!) However, since the day of the wedding dawned at 105 degrees and as humid as only east Texas can be at that time of year, that rust-coloured wool dress was pretty limp by the time I had donned my little black hat and orchid corsage for the march down the aisle accompanied by my brother Charlie. Poor Ted was equally overdressed. He had also bought a new serge suit for the occasion – double breasted, back belted.



Worse yet, neither of us had the good sense to change our clothes following the ceremony so we both sweated through the chicken salad and wedding cake luncheon that the ladies of the church served to all of us at the manse. Mercifully, most of the guests left after lunch, and I packed up my little suitcase containing all my worldly goods to start my married life – *still* wearing that cursed wool dress.

You might think our honeymoon was perhaps less than storybook perfect. But let me assure you, by Texas' standards, it couldn't have been better. Ted had to get back to Stroud the next day, so we drove over to Wichita Falls on the way to meet his crew so we could all watch the big high school north/south football game together. Let me just say, in case you don't know about high school football in Texas, this was a *really* big deal!

*Everybody* goes to the high school games in Texas: parents, grand-parents, siblings, aunts, uncles, cousins, distant relatives, and totally unrelated fanatics. Normally the games are scheduled on Friday nights, and for years it has been against association rules to permit television coverage of the games because it might affect ticket sales to the games. Back in 1939, of course that wasn't an issue, so the stands were packed on Labour Day Monday when we arrived dressed in our wedding finery. What with the very limp corsage still pinned to my wool dress and my now less-than-perky little hat, it was obvious to everyone that we were newlyweds, so we were subjected to all kinds of attention. And when we got up to leave, everybody seemed to know we were on our way to find a motel.

All I'll say is that *our* storybook wedding ended with a perfect happily-ever-after.



THE SEVEN ESTES CHILDREN, OKLAHOMA, 1920.



PREACHER AND NANNIE ESTES WITH THEIR BROOD OF CHICKS.

MY NAME IS LOLA



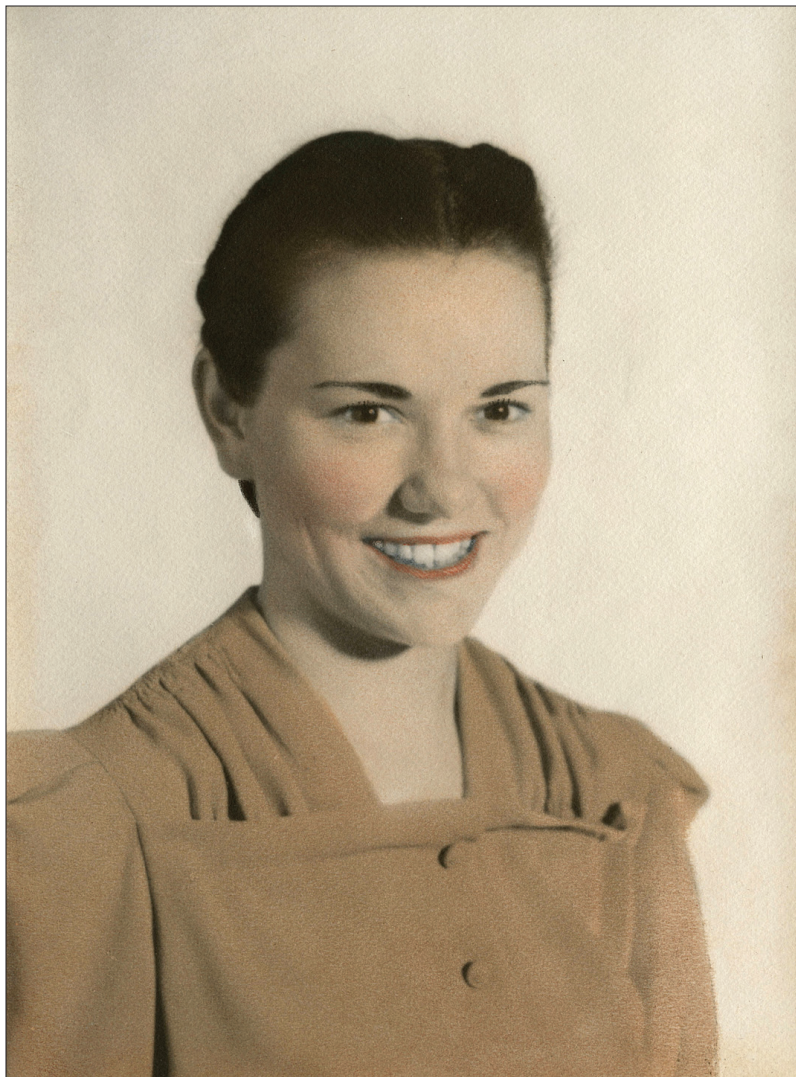
SWEET LOLA UPON HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION.



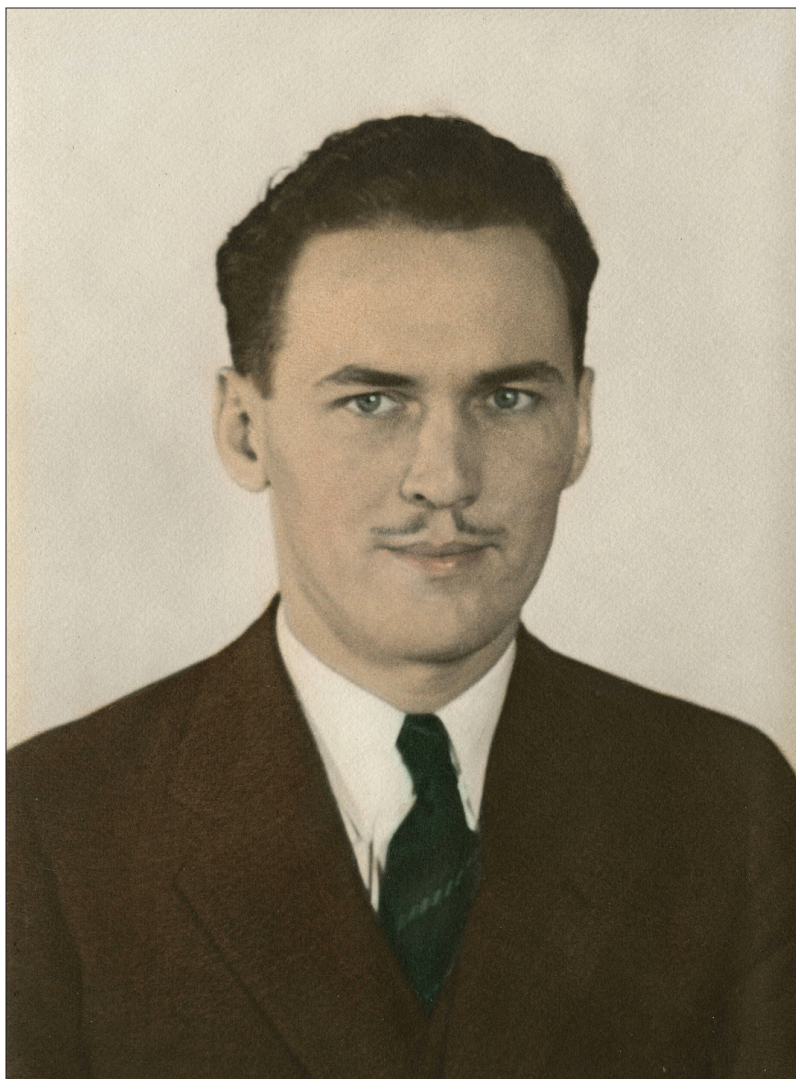


LOLA AT TRINITY UNIVERSITY IN WAXAHACHIE, TEXAS.

MY NAME IS LOLA



LOLA AT NINETEEN, WEARING HER WEDDING-DAY FINERY.



TED, THE GROOM.

