

There's a Soldier

DONNA HOFFMAN

As the peircing north wind blew his icy gusts around the corners and swept the streets with his broomlike blasts, the people stamped their feet and drew their coats more closely about them. It seemed as though Wind and Sun were having a terrific argument and Wind was doing his utmost to win this battle. The crowd was beginning to lose a little of the feverish excitement that a military parade always seems to cause. Suddenly the strains of the national hymn were carried to their ears; and, forgetting the cold, the crowd cheered and sang as the band marched into sight. What a day for a parade! What a day for fighting; it seemed almost a Russian day!

Little Jimmy hopped up and down excitedly as he heard the tramp, tramp, tramp of marching feet. "Here they come!" he shouted. "Man! Look at those guns!" (Gee, if only I were in Brother Danny's shoes, I'd show those Japs a thing or two! Wish I were a soldier, but Mom says I'm too little to fight. She says that I can help stop up the hole in the dike by putting my dimes into war stamps. Well that's something, but I do wish I could wear a uniform and carry a gun like Danny. There he goes now!) "Hey, Danny! Over here we are! D'ja see 'em, Mom? Gosh, isn't he swelegant lookin', huh?" (Maybe I'll look like him some day — tall and stern — marching with that carefree swing. Gosh.)

Down the block they come, smiling at the cheers from their people. Tall, short, thin and muscular, blond and brunette and red head — all just boys, but marching on toward the brink of manhood, their child-like qualities giving way to the grim, determined expressions of men who have something to accomplish.

Leaning heavily on his cane, Phillip Worth searched the young, hopeful faces of youths who were leaving behind them the comforts and fellowship of home and loved ones just as he had done in 1917. "I feel so old," he thought, "and so helpless." Sighing deeply, he remembered Armistice Day, and again he heard the cheers and singing of a different crowd — a happy, thankful, hopeful people. Then he had believed there would be no more wars for America. Then he had dreamed of having a son who could live in a peaceful, loving world — a son who would not have to endure the scarring agony of seeing bullet riddled bodies, helpless and squirming from pain, the screams and cries of children and women and old men. He had dreamed of a mankind constructive and not destructive — a people who would turn from hate and selfishness, from lust and greed to a universal brotherhood of kindness. What good dreaming? What good if a man dream ideals impossible to attain when other men were continuing to dream as of old. "Oh, my boys," he muttered under his breath. "God grant it will not be in vain. God give us the wisdom to keep it from being in vain." Shivering, he turned and limped through the throng unmindful of the tears slipping down his cheeks. He brushed past a young, lovely girl who was eagerly scanning the lines of marching soldiers. A picture flashed through his mind. Again he saw Lilian as she fluttered a gay handkerchief toward where he had stood on the deck. She had waited, just as this lovely girl would wait — a time lost out of their lives. It would be a time always lost which could never be made up

Jeanne's eyes darted to and fro over the lines of tramping soldiers. Don had

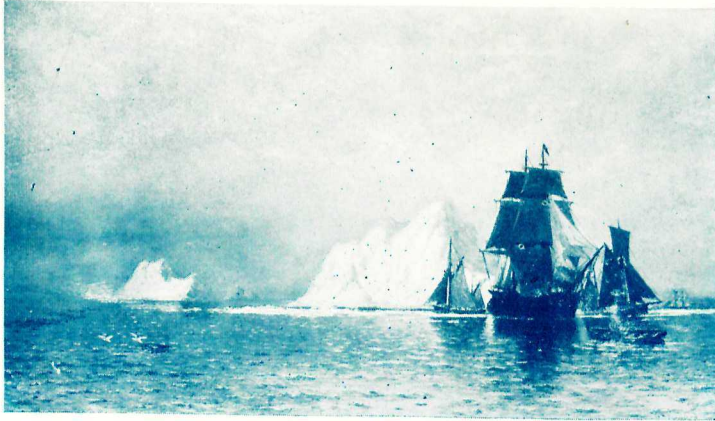
told her to stand on their corner where he couldn't miss seeing her. "This may be the last time I ever see him." Her heart felt laden at the thought. "Maybe he will find someone else where ever he's sent. Maybe — O, stop this nonsense," her head ordered. "It isn't as bad as all that." There he is! He sees me! How brave and strong and determined he is! They're singing, *Keep the Home Fires Burning*. I will, Don. I hope it won't be long. I'm so proud of you, dear. I know you'll do your best — a splendid best. Why is it men like you must sacrifice careers and futures because of the selfishness and arrogant superiority of men who destroy all that is light and good in the world? What right and through what power can men make mankind squirm and be smashed to pulp under their heels? But I must be gay and laugh and hold my chin up. Moping is no good, you said. "Good bye! Good luck."

"Huh, they're suckers to leave girls like that one behind," sneered Moore as he leaned carelessly against the flag pole and watched Jeanne's goodbyes. "Well, I'll not be caught keeping time to that kind of rhythm. Dad can take care of that. He knows all the ropes. They act so important and big. Think because they wear uniforms that they own the country. Well, it's their battle, not mine. Let them fight it. Some day they'll wake up to the fact that it isn't all just cop and robber play. Jeepers, she's

some gal! I think I'm going to enjoy being left behind."

As the parade moved farther from sight, Mother Pierce whispered a motherly "God bless you, my sons." Whisking the tears from her eyes, she smiled up at Father. "There they go — the last of the Pierces. The twins have grown up." Her proud head nodded. "I could almost see them grow from the boys who used to scuttle from my pantry with cookies filled pockets, to grown men who on accepting their inheritance, are going to see that inheritance preserved for all. They'll do it, too. They and all the other mothers' sons. They have the lives of great Americans before them to live up to, and they're not going to let them down. It will seem lonesome, though. Home will be so empty — Goodness, it's cold today. Let's hurry home."

The Wind, in its frigid determination, was still sweeping the earth with shivery gusts. Bits of paper and confetti were tossing and blowing in the deserted streets. No marching feet were treading time to the national anthem now. No crowds were thrilling to the strains of the great song of their land. They had scattered to warm homes to write cheery notes to men who had left home to keep their freedom. The wind and the gathering dusk reigned over the deathlike stillness of the empty streets.



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