THE ORDEAL OF SERGEANT SMOOT

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The Ordeal *of* Sergeant Smoot

by

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THE ORDEAL OF SERGEANT SMOOT

1

SERGEANTS ARE HEARTLESS

SERGEANT SMOOT tossed his sweat-stained web belt on his bunk in the cadre room. With that peculiar ability of the human mind to carry on within itself an idealized form of dialectic, his subconscious bemoaned in no uncertain fashion the cockeyed nature of fate. The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune kept coming at him continually from every direction. As far as Smoot was concerned, taking arms against a sea of troubles never seemed to end them. Wiping the perspiration from his beaded brow, Smoot mumbled the oldest rhetorical question of them all. "Why," he asked hopelessly of no one in particular, "does everything haff to happen to me?" Only yesterday Smoot had had dumped on him a whole new bunch of draftees.

Corporal Corky Smith, as sweaty from the recent drill period as Smoot himself, joined him in his cramped quarters. "Look," said Corky in a low, pleasant voice designed to soothe and disarm, "I need to borry a loaned of about exackly nine dollars and fifty cents."

"Go away from me," said Smoot.

"But this is a special case, Sarge. A girl who I use to know in Kansas City—well, I didn't know her in Kansas City because when I knew her it

was in Philadelphia, but now she's workin' in a fact'ry in Kansas City that makes corncob pipes, and—"

"Can't you see," said Sergeant Smoot, "that you ain't wanted? This is my rest period. Why don't you take a hint and beat it?"

"The reason I need this nine and a half bucks," said Corky, unperturbed, "is for the simple reason that this girl writes me a long letter that reminds me concerning the time I took her out some place and lost my wallet and had to borry nine and a half bucks off of her to pay the bill and now she wishes this money back because she has to belong to the corncob union and it costs nine dollars to join it and she says if she don't git her money by return postage she is gonna write to the Adjutant General's Office and git me courtmartialed or disagreeably discharged, and—"

"A gang of raw recruits to rush through their basic ain't enough that I haff to put up with," said Smoot. "It ain't enough that this ex-Corporal Edwards that we use to soldier with is now turned out to be the toughest Top Kick in the whole army. I guess you think it ain't enough that—"

The sergeant's diatribe was interrupted by the advent of a fresh pink-cheeked trainee who coughed politely and stuck his head through the door. "Pardon me, sergeant, sir," said the recruit. "I—"

"Well?" said Smoot petulantly. "Talk up. This is suppose to be my rest period."

"I—I'm writing a letter to my Aunt Charlotte in Minneapolis, sir, and I wanted to know if it's all right to tell her we don't have to wash our own socks and underwear. Or would that be considered a military secret?"

Smoot winced. "As far as I'm concerned I never had a aunt in Minneapolis, so I wouldn't know." When the recruit had turned away, puzzled, Smoot said to Corky Smith, "Why don't you go away somewhere so these here new soldiers kin pester the hell out o' me in peace?"

"If I don't pay that dame her nine-fifty I'll prob'ly get throwed into Leavenworth and become a disgrace to America," Corky declared. "This is a very serious thing."

Just then Harrison Hyler, an ex-philosophy student, came in with an Indian. "This is Private Charlie Blue Horse," said Hyler. "Lieutenant Hathaway assigned him to the Fourth Platoon."

Smoot raised his elbow as if to ward off a blow. "Now wait a minute. This ain't no calvary outfit."

"That's just my name," said the Indian. He looked pained and confused and embarrassed, awkward and altogether unsoldierly in his ill-fitting uniform.

"What am I suppose to do with an Indian?" demanded Smoot.

Private Blue Horse looked down sadly at his feet.

"He fainted at bayonet practice this morning," said Hyler.

The Indian nodded. "I told Chief Running Mountain—he's the man that's the head of the draft board on our Reservation—I told him I won't make a very good soldier. I like to be a conscientious objector but can't spell it." Charlie Blue Horse sighed a vast sigh of deep melancholy. "They say, 'Run fast, stick bayonet into that dummy's belly, then yell *Ahhhhh*.' I guess it's nicer to be back on the Reservation making potteries and selling them to tourists on Route Sixty-six."

Corporal Ortwingle came running in, pushing his way between Hyler and Private Blue Horse.

"What is this," said Smoot, beginning to fight for air, "the Union Depot in St. Lewis?"

"Don't ast me," said Ortwingle. "I'm a newcomer myself. But in case you are too busy, why jist let it go."

"Let what go?"

"Oh, that guy you put in charge of the boiler room, Private Rodzinsky or whatever his name is—the Polish guy, the one who he claims his uncle was the brother-in-law of that player piano. Well, you maybe better go down and take a look at that boiler, because this Rodzinsky says there's somethin' funny the matter with it. He says there's nine hundred pounds of pressure in it and he can't understand it because it's suppose to blow up at seven hundred."

"How about that dough you was jist on the point of loanding me?" said Corky Smith. "I got forty cents of my own money, so if you want to make it a even nine bucks, I'll dig up the other ten cents somewhere else."

"I forgot to tell you," said Hyler, "or rather I hadn't actually got a chance to tell you that Lieutenant Hathaway suggests you take Blue Horse in hand personally. It's merely some small psychic trauma or other, he thinks. Maybe if you baby him along for awhile the lieutenant has an idea he'll come around all right."

"I can't help it," murmured the Indian apologetically. "I was always like that, even when small boy. Other Indians on my Reservation have mighty nice amusement shooting rabbits, but I like to run around after butterflies. I sold a very scarce one once for twelve bucks. I told everybody I won't make very good soldier and nobody likes to believe me."

"That reminds me," said Ortwingle, "this bulletin board notice said you are elected to give a lecture this afternoon in Orientation."

"He means an orientation lecture," said Hyler. "They're organizing classes to instruct the recruits in the non-military aspects of warfare. At first blush you might naturally wonder how warfare could have any non-military aspect. But as I understand it these lectures deal with the indoctrination of the uniformed personnel with the tenets of the democratic ideal. News dispatches are discussed, the philosophy of the Four Freedoms is analyzed, the soldier thus clarifying in his mind the principles for which he is fighting."

"And I am supposed to give a lecture on that?" said Smoot.

"On some specific phase of a problem with which as an N.C.O. you are unquestionably familiar," said Hyler gravely.

"Or maybe he said the blood pressure in this boiler had rose to nine thousand pounds," said Ortwingle. "When I left he was shovelin' in more coal as fast as he could because that's supposed to keep down the heat for a while. But I don't know, maybe you better take a glance into that boiler room, Smooty."

"This girl is givin' me until this Wednesday to git that nine-fifty," said Corky Smith, "or otherwise she says I will wish I had of been took off in my childhood with Scarlet's fever."

"Pardon me," said a new voice.

"Who are you?" said Corky.

"My name is Private Jones, and something very queer indeed is going on around here." He wedged his way through the crowd. "May I speak to you alone, Sergeant?"

Smoot had been forced back onto his bunk. A cadre room in an infantry replacement company is designed to quarter two non-coms fairly comfortably if they don't yawn at the same time. "Go right ahead," said Smoot weakly. "These guys is jist some cousins of mine from the country that dropped in. But make it snappy, on account of in twenty-seven seconds a large hot water boiler is gonna shoot up through the floor."

"This is a very grave matter, Sergeant," said Private Jones. "We don't want to let him get away."

"Let who get away?"

"This spy. I'm positive he's an Axis agent. There can't be any doubt about it. You see, I had permission to go to the camp exchange to buy myself some corn plasters because my feet have been giving me some trouble, and coming back across the parade ground I noticed a man in uniform acting very suspiciously. He had a camera, and he was photographing the barracks

and other military installations. It oughn't to take more than six or eight men to capture him, Sergeant."

Hyler said, "Is this soldier a very heavy-set man with thick dark hair? Was he smoking a cigar when you saw him?"

"Why, yes!" exclaimed Private Jones excitedly. "How did you know—"

"That," said Hyler, "is Staff Sergeant McClennahan, the regimental photographer."

"Oh," said Private Jones. Backing out of the door, he murmured, "Well, anyway, I only wanted to be on the safe side."

Softly, calmly, almost timidly, Sergeant Smoot said, "Would you fellows all go out for a moment so as to give me enough room in here to kill myself?"

"That's Smooty for you." Ortwingle shook his head. "I never see a guy git upset so easy. Incidently, I jist notice a very pretty sight outside a couple of minutes ago, a submarine flyin' over the tops of the barracks."

"Gimme air!" said Smoot.

"It gives a person a real deep-seated thrill in his chest to watch one of them overhead submarines go sailin' by."

"Them is blimps, you dope," said Corky.

"So they're blimps. They're the same shape as submarines."

"Then I'll leave this Indian with you," said Harrison Hyler to Smoot.

"What are you gonna do about that boiler?" said Ortwingle.

Just then the company clerk came in looking for Smoot. The company clerk, Corporal Whitney, was a self-made wit. "If this is the local USO, will one of you soldiers point out the hostess? I think the name is Smoot."

"I am Sergeant Smoot, boy," said Sergeant Smoot, "and you've come to the right place if you are lookin' for a punch in the nose."

"You don't have to be so touchy," said Whitney. "Can't a guy have a little joke?"

"We don't need jokes in here," said Smoot. "What we need is a inspector from the slum clearance bureau."

"Excuse me," said Private Blue Horse. "I heard somebody say something about boiler too hot, only it's none of my business, so I wouldn't want to butt into it."

"The Top Kick wants you to fill out these questionnaire forms for each man in your platoon," said Corporal Whitney, depositing a stack of mimeographed sheets on the sergeant's table. "He wants them right after

Retreat. They're trying to find out how many men in the company can operate diesel engines."

"The reason being," said the Indian, "we had a hot water boiler on our Reservation pretty near like the one here."

"If you would jist fork over that nine bucks, Sarge," said Corporal Corky Smith, "so as I could go sent a money order to this Hazel Rosencranz, it would leave room in here for somebody else. By the way," he said to Corporal Whitney, "is it correct since this new mail a soldier don't haff to put stamps on that if he wants to sent it air mail he jist writes the word *Free* twice on the envelope?"

"Search me, friend," said the witty clerk. "I was drafted before that order went into effect."

"Well, it ain't that I am lookin' for attention," said Ortwingle. "But if you see a guy go sailin' past the winder, that would be Private Rodzinsky who use to be in charge of the boiler room."

"I could fix easy," said Charlie Blue Horse, "only I don't like it to seem as if I am butting into anything. If anybody just says so, I'll go turn a tap that lets the steam out when it gets too hot. I understand boilers."

"Well, come on," said Ortwingle. "Why didn't you say so before?"

"He said to handle him with kid gloves for awhile," said Hyler. "It's just that he probably has a certain native shyness that will undoubtedly wear off in time. You don't mind if I leave now, do you?"

"Make it six bucks," said Corky Smith. "I know a guy over in the FARC who'll hock me the other three on my portable radio."

Smoot capitulated, first making him sign a promissory note reading, "*I, Corp. Corky Smith, hereby solemnly swear if I don't return Smoot's six bucks on payday, said Smoot will knock the hell out of me*."

"Now beat it, will you, so that I kin look at what these damned questionnaires is about?"

A beautiful, a halcyon calm fell over the cadre room, a calm almost immediately shattered by the shrill blast of the Top Kick's whistle. Edward's bellowing voice yelled out hoarsely, "All non-coms front and center! All N.C.O.'s out for special instructor class." He passed by Smoot's room. "Fall out, Sergeant. Rest period's over."

"Rest period's over," said Smoot to himself. "Rest period's over." He sounded like a cracked record. "Rest period's over."

He had to push two lolling recruits apart to get through the barrack doorway. His ear picked up a snatch of their conversation. "Big pay and all

you have to do is yell at guys. Yes sir, sergeants get the gravy. That's what I'm gonna work myself up to be, a sergeant."

2

FOR THE ESPRIT DE CORPS

It was some weeks later that Sergeant Smoot stood at nicely balanced attention before Captain Hitchcock in the latter's office. First Sergeant Edwards was also present at the interview. The Company Commander of Company L leaned back in his swivel chair and rubbed his dark chin. "I'm gravely disappointed in you, Smoot," he was saying. "Stand at ease."

Smoot said nothing as he shifted his legs.

"When I recommended you for promotion to the rank of sergeant," Captain Hitchcock went on, "I had every right to expect that your eight years of regular army service, your experience of military routine, and your familiarity with discipline would make an efficient non-commissioned officer of you."

"Yes sir," said Sergeant Smoot.

"Sergeant Edwards, under whom you soldiered in the old days, felt the same way as I did about you. Isn't that so, Edwards?"

First Sergeant Edwards conceded with a nod that it was so.

"In a very definite way the safety of our nation is in the hands of men such as you, Smoot. An army is no better than its non-coms. It is the non-commissioned officer who sets the example for his men. Well, I am very

gravely disappointed in the way you've executed the trust we've placed in you. This business of the stud poker game, for one thing. The War Department isn't paying these youngsters their monthly salary so that you can win it away from them. Then there's the matter of the regimental drill last week in which your platoon disgraced the company. Again, you are perfectly aware of the regulation regarding inviting girls to the cantonment during—"

"Kin I say something?" interrupted Smoot.

"Certainly."

"That there was Ortwingle's girl, sir. I never seen her in my life before. Ortwingle is on guard duty and she comes out and so he astes me to—"

"I'd rather not go into the details now, if you don't mind. That wasn't the way I heard the story, but I'll give you the benefit of the doubt. What the whole thing comes down to, Smoot, is the shameful lack of military discipline in your platoon. Our Fourth Platoon is probably the worst drilled, the raggedest, the most awkward platoon in the entire American Army. Your corporals—"

"Well," said Smoot in defense of himself, "I guess all the wacks in the regiment is shoved off on my patoon. If they don't know where else to put some guy who can't remember which arm his left hand is on, why somehow that guy is bound to wind up in the Fourth Patoon."

"I know the men who constitute your platoon, sergeant. I put them there. With your experience and your long army training I'd purposely given the most difficult draftees over to you. Any young lieutenant can whip a lot of good men into shape, but it takes an old soldier to make a fighting unit out of a bunch of nondescripts. I purposely picked you for the difficult task of Fourth Platoon leader. And now you've let me down."

"Yes sir," said Smoot.

"What are we going to do about it, sergeant?" asked the Company Commander, turning to First Sergeant Edwards.

"I suppose Corporal Smith could take over if necessary, sir."

"Corky Smith?" Smoot shook his head. "Pardon me for sayin' so in the captain's presence, but if you would go ahead and hold a contest to see who is the dumbest corporal in the whole U. S. Army, why Corky Smith would win it without half tryin'."

Captain Hitchcock had no intention of allowing his gravity to relax. "The point is," he went on unsmilingly, "I don't like to be thought guilty of a mistake in judgment. As you know, in a week or so we're going out on divisional war games. We'll be on tactical maneuvers, with General Bartlett

commanding, and the mere fact that our outfit is made up of recruit replacements is of no moment to the general. If your platoon makes a mess of it I'll get a dressing down from the Old Man. And the colonel will get brotherly hell from the brigade commander. And so on and so on. Well, Smoot, what are we going to do to prevent this from happening?"

"I think if this guy Hyler is transferred over into my patoon it will be a big help."

"Hyler?"

"Private Hyler, sir," said Edwards. "One of the recent draftees."

"Yes sir," said Smoot. "Hyler's full of brains. He's a surgeon of philosophy or somethin'. If he is made into a corporal, with his brains and my experience I figger even this Fourth Patoon might turn out okay."

"We'll see," said Hitchcock. "You may return to your quarters."

"Very good, sir."

When Smoot had left, Hitchcock turned to his top sergeant and smiled. "I guess wishing that platoon full of hard cases on poor Smoot is a kind of a dirty trick, at that."

"Somebody's got to rassle with 'em," said Edwards, shrugging. "Smoot'd rather drown than be a non-com. But non-coms don't come a dime a dozen these days."

"What about this Hyler lad?"

"I'd recommend making out a warrant. He's raw, but he's got the qualifications. He was doing postgraduate work at one of the big colleges when the war came along."

"All right." Captain Hitchcock shook his head. "What an army. Shades of General Sherman! There's nothing the matter with the material, but they expect us to create a brilliant military machine in a month or two. Well, we'll do our damndest, Sergeant. Make out the order to headquarters for Hyler's promotion."

Corporals Ortwingle and Corky Smith found their buddy bent over his bunk, his elbows resting on his knees, his head in his hands. "When is the pie wagon comin' to take you away to Fort Leavenworth?" asked Ortwingle.

"This isn't no time for reparty."

"Huh?"

"Reparty," Smoot repeated, "is French for guys like you which is continuously shootin' off their mouths." He reached into his pocket and carefully extracted a cigarette from the package with his fingernails, a habit he had been compelled to acquire in the presence of his pals. "If you was

into the trouble that I am into, you wouldn't think it's so funny." Smoot raised his head and motioned toward a recruit a few bunks down the squadroom. "See that guy? That's Fleming. In three weeks he ain't been able to learnt to halt with both feet at the same time. And over there is Foster, who falls out for reveille without his pants on. And Wagnals and Johnson and that little guy with the sailboat ears—they couldn't keep in step if they was on a Georgia chain gang."

"Have you got a extry hankerchiff?" Ortwingle inquired of Corky Smith. "I am about to bust into tears."

"There is jist one break that I am got in my new patoon," said Sergeant Smoot, "and that is that this here is a infantry outfit instead of artillery, because if it was artillery and these guys had holt of a seven-inch gun I could expect to git the barrack shot out from under me any minute."

"Well, it ain't our fault that a war came along and they made you a sergeant in charge of the Fourth Patoon," said Corky Smith. "You talk like we was in cahoots with that Japanese hero, Hito."

"This is what I get repaid with," said Smoot, "because on account of my loyalty to the army for eight years. And now next week is divisional maneuvers, and some of my guys I am gonna haff to put signs on their shoulders so that when somebody yells *Right Shoulder Arms* they'll know which shoulder to put their rifle on. Please, this is not foolin'. Go away some place. I don't need no help bein' miserable."

The next morning after drill Harrison Hyler emerged from the orderly room and sauntered over to Sergeant Smoot's cot, a somewhat dazed expression on his countenance. In his hand he held a set of corporal's chevrons. "Look," said Hyler. "For the first time in my life I am wordless. Three months ago I was sweating over the seven postulates of St. Thomas Aquinas. Today I am a corporal in the United States Army. Do you know how to sew, Sergeant?"

"If that is what you call wordless then all them students in colleges must have sore throats most of the time. Certainly I kin sew. Here. Gimme them things."

"Aren't you completely amazed at this extraordinary turn of events?" Hyler demanded.

"No," said Smoot. "I am the one who I suggested you be made into a corporal and assigned to my patoon, because I am desperate for lack of a couple of brains."

"You're an altogether astonishing chap, you know," observed Corporal Hyler as Smoot, employing a skilled stitch, proceeded to attach the chevrons

to the new non-com's tunic.

"In about one week, as soon as you see what you are up against in this here patoon of ours, you will be callin' me a louse for gittin' you transferred into it."

"In that estimate, at least, I consider you to be something less than clairvoyant. Although conscious of my shortcomings as a soldier, and keenly aware of my lack of experience, I am not without a certain—well, shall we say a certain faculty for observation. It has been clear to me that most of the regiment's problem children have been assigned to our Fourth Platoon. For myself, I rather welcome the opportunity to aid in whipping this crude material into shape."

Sergeant Smoot blinked and let these euphonious words sink into his consciousness. It took a considerable while. "Here's your blouse."

"On whom do you suggest we start?"

"Start what?"

"Well, I gather that we are to engage very shortly in a series of field maneuvers under the eye of the commanding general. Without intending to overstep my authority, I think the most efficient method of preparing our platoon for the test to come is to use the intervening time thoroughly to tutor each one of our backward members in the function he will be expected to play."

"You mean you think there's a chance that it is possible to drill any sense into the skulls of them dummies that our patoon is full up of?"

"We can do no less than try."

"Okay," said Sergeant Smoot. "As long as I am puttin' in a requisition for a brain, I suppose I am got to use it. Only I figger I ought to warn you that you will find out pretty immediately how easily it is possible for one human bein' to have twenty-eight different headaches all at the same time."

"Why twenty-eight?"

"That is the number of recruits in the Fourth Patoon."

Hyler laughed. "I doubt very much whether it is possible to teach a student of Kant's transcendental dialectic anything new about headaches."

Nevertheless the new corporal in Company L was to discover things about the human intelligence nowhere to be found in Kant, Hegel, Spencer, Schopenhauer, or Nietzsche either. Such foot maneuvers as obliques, in which the platoon marched in echelon in column of squads, generally resulted in a debacle reminiscent of a poorly organized riot. A conception of the meaning of cooperation was absent from the Fourth Platoon. Life had imbued its members with an exaggerated sense of individualism. A straight

line as being the shortest distance between two points was still a fantastic abstraction to most of its recruits. Harrison Hyler made them reasonable little speeches on the philosophy of collective discipline, while Sergeant Smoot barked desperately at them in a hoarse drill-master's voice. As the day for the field maneuvers drew near the Fourth Platoon was persuaded to fall out voluntarily after supper for individual instruction.

"Look, Wagnals. Outside of Corky Smith, who is the dumbest man in the whole U.S. of America, and besides he is older and is had more time to git that way, I figger I am about as dumb as they come. And yet it took me only a week to learnt the manual of arms. If I kin learnt the manual of arms, anybody kin."

"The thing is this," said Corporal Hyler. "What they are trying to do is to implant in us a sense of inferiority. We're the black sheep of the regiment. Because we're slow to learn these unaccustomed drills they've transferred us all into the Fourth Platoon on the theory that we're somehow lacking in basic intelligence. I'm only a rookie myself, but I don't see it that way. Awkwardness may very well be the sign of superior mental processes. It is not intelligence we lack, but esprit de corps, that peculiar pride in ourselves that makes supermen out of simple mortals. I think it would be a magnificent thing if we went out on the field and demonstrated how wrong they are, if we came back covered with glory as well as dust."

The great camp sprang into excited activity the day of the big war games. Tanks, artillery, infantry battalions took their positions in the field, each unit cooperating through signal corps communications. Fast-moving reconnaissance trucks wheeled them into battle line. Engineers threw pontoon bridges swiftly over streams, while columns of troops, narrowed to the wedge shape of a human battering ram, thrust a mechanized spearhead into the so-called 'red' army. Mortars and tanks sped by, kicking up heavy clouds of dust, while machine-gun units sought and resought protected emplacements, attained fire superiority, and advanced again with amazing mobility. Where was L Company's Fourth Platoon during all this?

General Bartlett, with his aide de camp, spied them strung out in a patch of woods, separated from their battalion, spread out in disordered array, facing into the flank of the theoretical enemy's retreating line.

"What the hell are you doing with your men over there, sergeant?" the general bellowed.

Corporal Hyler stepped forward. "We were detached from our company by accident, sir. Instead of getting in the way, the sergeant thought it would be wiser to take up a position here where we could subject the enemy's retreating line to a cross fire."

The general scratched an ear. “Good. Remain in your position, sergeant, but dispatch a runner to keep you in communication with your company headquarters. The operation should have called for cross fire at this point, as a matter of fact.”

When the war games were over the Fourth Platoon of Company L was specifically mentioned in the general’s résumé. Captain Hitchcock was complimented on the initiative of his platoon sergeant. He called Smoot into the orderly room office. First Sergeant Edwards stood by during the interview.

“Congratulations on the conduct of your platoon during the maneuvers, sergeant,” said the Company Commander. “I’m making out forty-eight hour passes for all your men.”

“Yes sir,” said Sergeant Smoot.

The captain leaned back in his swivel chair and rubbed his dark chin. “I, ah—. Well, never mind. Maybe it’s better not to ask too many questions. All’s well, I suppose, that ends well.”

“Yes sir,” said Sergeant Smoot gravely. “Especially when a patoon like the Fourth Patoon is got the esprit de corps.”

3

THE CHOCOLATE SOLDIER

FIRST SERGEANT EDWARDS entered the first endorsement on the recruit's nice new Service Record, then filed it in its proper place. Things had been going much too well for Sergeant Smoot of late. Not since the business about the divisional war games had he had a new addition to his platoon. A slight smile hovered about the Top Kick's lips as he surveyed this new specimen before him.

"Well, you're in the army now, son."

The recruit's head resembled a large ripe pumpkin. "Yop," he said.

"I'm putting you in the Fourth Platoon with Sergeant Smoot. Come along, Holloway, and we'll get you fixed up in barracks."

"Okay," said Holloway. He followed the First Sergeant complacently, his neckless head hobbling from side to side as though at any moment it might become detached and drop off.

"Here's a new man for you, Smoot," said Edwards, still smiling.

Smoot glanced at the newcomer and his mouth fell open in amazement.

"See that his equipment is issued," said the Top Kick, "and tomorrow assign him to your recruit squad."

"Uh huh," Smoot grunted, unable to take his eye away from this latest addition to his platoon. After Edwards had gone he still continued to stare open-mouthed at the rookie. "Tell me," said Smoot, obviously fascinated. "How much do you weigh?"

"I dunno," said Holloway. "Have a piece of candy." From somewhere in his bulging uniform he drew out a half-dozen bars of chocolate. "Full of veetamins. Have one."

"No thanks," said Smoot. "I—"

"It's full of Veetamin D," said Holloway. "That's the anti-pellagra veetamin."

"What causes them to go ahead and draft such a guy that is as fat as you are?" asked Smoot. "They must've got Omar the Tentmaker to design that there uniform you have on."

"I wasn't drafted, I enlisted. My girl likes soldiers," stated Private Holloway. His speech was peculiarly declarative. Balancing his pumpkin-like head carefully on his shoulders, he answered Smoot's questions with great matter-of-factness. "No sir. This uniform come off a big pile at the recruit depot."

"Well, let it go, and we'll get you outfitted." Smoot didn't know whether to laugh or cry.

It should be stated that Sergeant Smoot was a disciplinarian by appointment only. The advent of the war, and its consequent need of competent non-coms, had forced duties upon him which, in calmer times, he had modestly shunned. Now here he was, nevertheless, in the position of being responsible for the drill and training of guys like this Holloway. On his way down to the supply room he stole a sidelong glance at the recruit and decided that there weren't any other guys like Holloway. Well, he would palm this monstrosity off on Corporals Ortwingle and Corky Smith. Or maybe on Corporal Hyler.

The supply sergeant, aghast at the girth of the rookie, heaped upon the floor the innumerable articles of equipment necessary for the outfitting of an infantryman. "When can I put in for a furlough?" inquired Holloway.

"Here," said Smoot, having examined the rifle being issued to the youngster. "This is not no toy, so don't go pullin' it apart until you are told to. It belongs in the gunrack. I figger in about two or three years it will be time enough for you to worry about a furlough."

"But the war will be over by then, sergeant," Holloway protested mildly.

"That's what I mean," said Smoot

"All right," said Holloway, bending over with difficulty and picking up the pile of blankets and equipment. "What time is breakfast?"

"Tomorrer mornin'," Smoot told him.

The following day he turned Holloway over to Corporal Ortwingle. "Here," said Smoot.

"What is it?" demanded Ortwingle, surveying the enormous bulk of the new member of the platoon.

"It's a recruit."

"Have they tore the buttons off the doctor's uniform who passed this guy into the army? Or ain't they cashiered him yet?"

"Ha, ha!" said Private Holloway. "I like jokes about bein' fat. Have a piece of candy, corporal." He whipped out a handful of chocolate bars. "The ones in the blue wrappers have got nuts in them."

"This guy is a violation of army regulations," said Ortwingle.

"Make up a joke about the army traveling on its stomach, Corp," said Holloway complacently.

"What do you want me to do with him?" demanded Ortwingle.

"Make a soldier out of him, my boy." Smoot grinned. "Take him out and whip him into shape. Harden him up. Sweat about fifty pounds of that fat off and replace it with sinew and muscle." He turned to Holloway. "By the time Corporal Ortwingle gits through with you, you will be turned into a Donis."

"Listen," said Ortwingle. "A gag is a gag. I never done nothin' very serious to you."

"Orders," said Smoot. "I knew the day would finely come around when all the heart burns I am suffered as a non-com would be repaid. Remember them rumors about wearin' pajamas? Remember them nights guardin' warehouses in the rain?" Smoot nodded at Holloway with deep satisfaction. "He is all yours, Corporal."

That night Ortwingle sought out his superior. "Look," said Ortwingle grimly, "don't give me that chocolate soldier to work on tomorrer, or otherwise I will do something terrible and prob'ly git myself flang into Leavenworth for fifty years and disgrace the whole Fourth Patoon."

"What's the matter, won't he drill?"

"Drill! That guy is one solid mass of vitamins. I run him ragged all day long. I never let him sit down once. We are doin' foot drill and manual of arms and exercises hour after hour in the blazin' sun. So what eventually happens? About four o'clock he notices I am all in and he says, 'Take it from

me, corp. It don't pay to overdo it the first day. You oughta save your strenth for tomorrer.' Nuts to that guy. Give him to somebody else. I resign."

It soon became apparent that Private Holloway was a trouble maker. His second day in the mess hall he complained about the beans. "These beans," he stated, "don't taste the way they taste when my mother makes them."

"You don't care for the way these beans are prepared?" inquired the mess sergeant solicitously.

"They don't pacify my appetite," said Holloway as he fished about in his pockets for a piece of candy to supplement the evening meal.

The mess sergeant consulted with Smoot, the recruit's platoon leader. "The sergeant tells me you don't like the way these here beans is cooked," Smoot said to Holloway.

"They don't pacify my appetite."

"Well, the mess sergeant is a very good guy, and he is gonna let you cook your own beans from now on. Report to the kitchen immediately after breakfist."

"Okay," said Holloway imperturbably as he opened a new slab of chocolate nutties.

In the morning the recruit presented himself to the kitchen as ordered. Mess Sergeant Sweeney handed him a fine new five-pound sack of white beans. "They're all yours, Peewee. The army wants everybody to be happy in it."

"Thank you," said Holloway as he moved his bulk in the direction of a large flat-bottomed pan. Dumping the beans in the pan, he ran his fingers expertly over them, smoothing them out, then lifted up the pan and deposited it in the oven of the big black army stove while the sergeant and his cooks looked gravely on.

Every twenty minutes or so Holloway, who was now wearing a high white cook's hat which he'd found in the storeroom, opened the stove and tested the dry beans. They were beginning to brown nicely, and to pop open. At eleven o'clock they were very brown, and had the appearance of shrapnel.

"I think they're done," said Holloway.

"Good," said the mess sergeant.

Holloway removed the pan from the oven.

"Now sit down and eat them beans, you blown-up imitation of an observation balloon," ordered the sergeant.

The beans rattled into Holloway's plate with the sound of whatever does the rattling inside a Marimba gourd. "The trouble with the way you cook beans in the army is that you take all the veetamins out of them," he observed. By the time the bugles sounded chow call Holloway had managed to eat a pound or so of the lethal beans. The cooks looked on, flabbergasted. "They give you something to get your teeth into," Holloway declared as he nonchalantly strolled out of the kitchen to take his regular place in the dining room.

"If that man stays in the company," muttered the mess sergeant, "I think I will ask to be busted and sent to North Africa or some other place about the same distance away from here."

"This is Private Holloway," Smoot informed his second deputy, Corporal Corky Smith, after mess.

"Where can I buy any toothpicks around here?" inquired Holloway. "Please to meet you."

"Why can't he train with the regular recruit squad?" asked Corky.

"Because he is in a class all by hisself. Quit astin' questions. Jist show him how to make his bunk and pitch his tent and clean his rifle—"

When Smoot had gone Holloway said, "Make up a joke about me being fat, Corp."

"You should have inlisted in the calvary. Now to remove the bolt from the rifle, you jist—"

"I know all about rifles, Corp. T' home I got thirteen rifles. I am an expert rifleman. My girl likes soldiers in the infantry. She wants me to sit up in a tree in the Solomon Islands and pick off Japs like they was rabbits. Have a piece of candy. It's full of veetamins. It keeps away falling dandruff and pellagra and I don't know what else. This bar, for instance, has got eighteen relative units of thiamin per standard ounce."

That evening just after Retreat, Corporal Smith buttonholed his platoon sergeant. "Is bein' crazy a good excuse to git discharged out of the army?" he demanded.

"What's the matter with Holloway now?"

"Nothin'. It is me that's crazy. First I tries to show him how to take his rifle apart. He has his rifle apart and together before I am able to take the floor plate out o' mine. Then I'm gonna show him how to make his bunk, only instead he turns around and starts tellin' me I been doin' mine wrong, and sure enough, I'm wrong and he's right. Finely he says I look all skinny and nervous and run-down and that maybe in a few days, if I will take his advice, he will be able to built me up a little and make a real soldier out o'

me." Corky was almost weeping. "A guy when he swears into the service, he expects to fight for his country. He expects to be shot at, to dodge machine-gun bullets, to git ran over by tanks, to jump out of arrowplanes or whatever else they tell him to do. But no oath would have in it that he has to put up with somebody like Holloway."

Sergeant Smoot was beginning to get mad. "I will fix this Holloway's wagon for him," he informed his corporal. "Who does he think he is that he can join up into the army and become a trouble maker? It is now time to show up the superiority of brains over brawns. By the time Corporal Hyler gits through with him this Holloway will wished he would of went and inlisted up in the WAVES."

At the end of the following day's drill period Corporal Harrison Hyler, to whom Holloway had been assigned for instruction, dismissed his plump recruit and proceeded to make his report to the platoon leader. "This new chap presents the student with a highly interesting psychological problem, Sergeant."

"Yeah," said Smoot. "That's why I wished him onto you. So what happened?"

"Well, to begin with, I made the mistake of supposing I could exhaust his complacency from the physiological standpoint. I made him run around the drill field with sandbags on each shoulder. Strengthens the pancreatic fibres, I told him. After a couple of hours of that he said he was beginning to feel his pancreatic fibres getting hard, and would I let him carry the sandbags all the time. I could see I was up against a pretty interesting psychic problem."

"I could of tole you that without you goin' to all that trouble," said Smoot.

"Anyway, I spent the rest of the afternoon becoming acquainted with his intellectual processes."

"Now we're commencin' to git somewheres," said the sergeant.

"That's what I thought at first," said Hyler sadly. "He has an extremely elusive psyche."

"I noticed that myself right at the beginnin'," said Smoot.

"I'll need more time to arrive at any scientifically tenable conclusion concerning the motivating factors behind Holloway's behavior," Hyler informed his superior. "Meanwhile I think you will have to excuse me just now. I probably shouldn't have eaten that sixth chocolate bar."

Sergeant Smoot became pink around the ears. "Okay. Okay," he kept mumbling to himself after Corporal Hyler had left. "Okay. If at first you

don't succeed, never give up the ship till you see the whites of their eyes. I'll break that trouble maker if it becomes the last thing I do."

Smoot lay and tossed in his bunk that night trying to devise some method of reducing his problem soldier to proper recruit size. In the morning he called his corporals into conference. "Well, boys, it is jist a question of whether we drive this Holloway crazy first or he drives the company crazy. We are each gonna take turns on him in rotation an hour apiece at a time. By the time we git through with him he will wished his girl liked sailors instead of soldiers."

Holloway, however, reacted to this concentrated regimen with his customary phlegmatic good nature. At the end of the hot afternoon his khaki uniform was soaked through, his pumpkin head was a shining globe of perspiration, his neck was pink with effort. Toward Recall his fat legs became a little wobbly, but he exhibited disappointment when the bugle finally sounded. Smoot had been giving him hoarse commands at double time while his three exhausted corporals looked on.

Holloway came to a halt at Smoot's final command. "Is that all?" he asked with difficulty after he'd managed to get back his breath.

"Yeah," said Smoot. "That's all for today."

Perspiration ran down the recruit's face in rivulets. "Too bad. I was just gettin' a good sweat worked up, but I guess tomorrow is another day, ain't it? Perspiration is good for you. It keeps open the pores."

"All right." Smoot turned to his henchmen. "I give up, too. He jist ain't human, that's all."

Holloway came over to the non-coms and smiled up at Smoot. "You see," he said, grinning, "a fellow as fat as me is bein' picked on all his life. They always give the fat guy the toughest job to do just for the fun of it. They are always makin' up jokes about fat fellows. Well, no hard feelin's, Sergeant. I can take it." Holloway offered one sweaty hand to Sergeant Smoot while he poked around in his uniform with the other. "Just four of 'em left. Whadye say, fellows? Don't forget, they're . . ." Holloway's eyes closed and he began to sway back and forth. "They're full of—" And then suddenly poor Holloway fell on his face.

4

YOU'RE IN THE ARMY NOW

ANOTHER problem child in Company L was Private Bradley. Unlike Charlie Blue Horse, he hadn't even a desire to run after butterflies. The young medical lieutenant at the regimental infirmary shook his head. "You here again, Bradley?"

"Yes suh. I feel right porely this mornin', lieutenant."

"What's wrong now?"

"Well, I hurt all up and down, and then I hurt a little crosswise also."

The doctor explored about the tall sallow recruit's person with his stethoscope, tapped his lungs, made him hop on one foot, asked him to cough, took his pulse and temperature. Then he scribbled a prescription on a blank. It was for a mild physic. "I can't find anything at all the matter with you, Bradley. The corporal in the dispensary will give you a couple of pills to take. Here."

"Yes suh," said Bradley dejectedly. "That's exactly what all the doctors tell me." He hunched his pale shoulders forlornly as he took the slip of paper from the medical lieutenant. "Seems mighty queer, suh."

"What seems queer?"

"Seems queer y'all cain't find nothin' wrong with me. Ever' time I take a right smart of a piece of exercise I hurt somethin' intolerable."

"Where do you come from, Bradley?" asked the doctor, looking up.

"I was born in southern Georgia, but I lived with farmin' kinfolks some o' the time in Tennessee and some o' the time in Mississippi. Then come along this yere draftin' law an' I figured to take up in the army for a spell, Uncle Sam bein' sort o' persistent about it."

"Well, as far as I'm concerned, you're as healthy as a mule. I'm returning you on report for duty. All right, next man."

"Yes suh," muttered Private Bradley resignedly. "Nevertheless I ache in my bones somethin' fearful. I got a humor all up and down me. Could be I got a rare-like disease the curin' men ain't never heered of yit."

The lieutenant glanced up from the sink where he was washing his hands. "I think you've got what medical science calls a case of galloping inertia," he told the tow-headed Georgia boy. "In other words I suspect you're a goldbrick, Bradley. The next time I see you up here on sick call I'll make it castor oil."

"I cain't hep it if I'm tarred all the time."

"Tarred?"

"Yes suh, Lieutenant. Tarred. T-i-r-e-d, tarred."

"Report back to your first sergeant for duty." The lieutenant grunted his dismissal. "Tired soldiers are his headache. Next man."

Private Bradley reported himself back to his first sergeant, as ordered. "I don't reckon that doctor gentleman figures to know what-all ails me," he complained.

Sergeant Edwards put aside the company roster he was working on. "Drilling with the rest of the men sort of tires you out, I gather," he murmured solicitously.

"I weary awful easy on the drill field."

"Your rifle gets pretty heavy, I suspect."

"Seems like it sags me down after totin' it a brief spell. It shore does," Private Bradley admitted.

"Feet get blisters? Legs want to buckle up? You sweat too easily?" went on the first sergeant.

"Y'all know more about my humor than that there lieutenant man at the Infirmary, Sarge, I do declar'."

"The army wants everybody to be happy and contented, Georgia," said Sergeant Edwards. "We never think of asking anybody to do anything we

wouldn't do ourselves. We're just like one big happy family, my boy. Why didn't you come to me sooner and tell me how you felt?"

"I reckon I didn't think of it."

"If drilling tires you out, we want to know it. I'll see that you're assigned to some light pleasant duty until your full strength and vitality returns. Come with me, Bradley."

Before Georgia could be sure of what was happening to him he had been turned over by Edwards to the mess sergeant. "Here's a new lad for you, Sergeant Sweeney. Drilling gives him unpleasant sensations."

"Ah, you don't say! What's your name, lad?"

"Private Bradley. Ever'body calls me 'Georgia.'"

"Well, and we're mighty happy to have you with us, Georgia. Glad to make your acquaintance."

"I've promised to assign him to some congenial duty that would not overtax his delicate constitution," observed Sergeant Edwards.

"Ah, now, and you've brought him to the right place." When the first sergeant had gone Sweeney turned to the recruit. "We'll nurse ye back to health, I don't doubt, in short order. Git over to the sinks and start wallopin' them greasy pots, me fine goldbrick, and I don't want to see your mugg again until every single last one of 'em shines fit to blind a man with smoked glasses on."

"That's a right proud stack of dirty pots," said Georgia, rather hurt.

"Stop wastin' me time with chatter, now. In fact if I even hear ye singin' at your work I'll have ye courtmartialed for violatin' the Ninety-Sixth Article o' War, which states that ye can be hung for anything I can think up to accuse ye of."

At nine o'clock that evening Sergeant Sweeney went back into the kitchen and found the lanky southern boy still bent over the sloppy sinks dreamily swabbing the gluey pans.

"'Minds me o' fishin' in Robins's Crick to home," he told the mess sergeant dolefully. "Catfish git t' eatin off the bait quickern man can fix it on. Same with these pots. Seem like these yere cooks keep dirtyin' up pots and ladles a sight fastern I can wash 'em, Sarge, I do declar'."

"Take your time, me lad," Sweeney advised him sweetly. "When ye finish up, go git a fine sound sleep, because the shift ye belong to goes on duty at three a.m. in the mornin'."

At supper time the next day young Bradley stood in melancholy splendor in the center of a mountain of dirty pots and pans, still swabbing away

dolefully, while the cooks bellowed for cooking utensils. The sergeant, after mess, collared his newest KP and hauled him back to Edwards in the orderly room. "Tis not me usual practice to look a gift horse in the mouth," he told Edwards coldly. "But do ye want the comp'ny to eat from now on, or don't ye?"

"Anyway, I'll say yes, for the sake of argument."

"Then keep this case of animated suspension out o' me kitchen, for otherwise I'll be cookin' me spuds in cardboard fryin' pans and boilin' me turnips in lily cups." Sweeney hurried away before any further discussion of the merits of the business could ensue.

"I'm afraid I'm going to have to take you before the Company Commander, Bradley. You're rapidly developing into a military headache. Come with me."

Edwards knocked on the captain's door. "Come in," Captain Hitchcock called.

The captain's frown deepened as his first sergeant acquainted him with the southern draftee's peculiarities. "I cannot countenance indolence and sloth in my organization, young man. What seems to be the matter with you? Don't you like the army?"

"I like it tolerable, suh."

"Then why do you shirk your duties? What makes you so lazy?"

"Could be I ain't well."

"Nonsense. These reports from the Infirmary say you're in perfect physical condition. Hmmm." The captain pursued his lips. "What about the Fourth Platoon, Sergeant?"

"Yes," said Edwards. "I think it'd be a good idea to let Smoot take him in hand, sir. It's worth a try."

At that very moment Sergeant Smoot was holding forth to the three corporals who staffed the Fourth Platoon, Corporals Corky Smith and Ortwingle, old soldiers like himself, and Corporal Harrison Hyler, erudite draftee whose promotion Smoot had recommended, as we've said, on the ground that a brain is sometimes a useful complement to a brawn.

"It is somehow a genius hidin' away in some place in this here regiment which when any dirty work is got to be done all he kin think of is to put it on me," Smoot lamented. "The next thing I know I will be ast to speak to a mothers' club on the subject of how the army done me good. Now here is the Fourth Patoon, into where they keep assignin' all the screwbugs an'—"

Whitney, the company clerk, came into the squad room with Georgia in tow. "Sergeant Edwards is putting Private Bradley in your platoon, Smoot.

Take 'im away."

"How are y'all? Ever'body calls me 'Georgia.'"

A certain cynicism born of experience spread visibly over Sergeant Smoot's features. "Well, what's wrong with you, soldier? There is never been nobody ever assigned to this here patoon that there wasn't somethin' wrong with them—not even me."

"I tar right easy," Georgia admitted blandly.

Corporal Hyler translated. "He says he tires rather easily."

The platoon sergeant waved his head from side to side mockingly. "Let's make it a game to see if you git tired of me quicker than I git tired of you."

"I don't tar of folks," explained Georgia unsmilingly. "I got a right smart likin' for people, I declar'."

"Is that accent real," asked Ortwingle, "or is he jist makin' it up as he goes along?"

"I'll give you a couple of men to haul your bunk and equipment over here," said Sergeant Smoot. Georgia nodded and moved away vaguely, like a day-dream photographed by slow motion camera. "Well," said Smoot to his corporals, "I guess we have got another one of them problem recruits in the Fourth Patoon."

Said Ortwingle, "Don't place him into my squad, Sarge. Remember, I got Quackenbush, who is the guy which I haff to give a bath to personal with my own hands twice a week."

"And I got Dopey McQuade," said Corky Smith. "Don't forget that."

"I figure I guess you're elected, Hyler," said Smoot. "You're the brains of this outfit."

"Considering the sort of chaps they've been assigning to us of late, I don't imagine we can be disconcerted by one who merely tires easily," said Corporal Hyler. "In any event, I'll study his weaknesses, whatever they may be, and make them the subject of discussion after drill tomorrow."

"Do that," said Sergeant Smoot.

After drill the following afternoon Corporal Hyler, while he removed his sweat-stained uniform, made a brief observation. "It's my conviction," he told his fellow-N.C.O.'s, "that Private Bradley would slow down a blitzkrieg by our forces more effectively than a thousand enemy tanks. I am convinced that whatever side this Georgia boy is on, the other side is being given an unfair advantage in this war."

"Well, what's the matter with him?" Smoot demanded.

"He has his verbs mixed up."

"Verbs? What verbs?"

"He doesn't tire easily, my friends. That is a misuse of a respectable verb. That boy starts out being as tired as it is possible for any human being to become. Like the hands of a clock, he manages to travel from point to point, but you can't see him do it. I will match him as an immovable object against any irresistible body you care to bring around. With Bradley in the army it's a waste of time to think in terms of Total War."

"Won't he drill?"

"With Georgia in my squad," said Corporal Hyler, "the word 'drill' takes on a subtle new meaning it never had before. He drills, yes. But he's infected the men with his lethargy, to say nothing of his Confederate accent. When I stop and look around for my number eight man, he's standing alongside Georgia saying, 'I think the corporal means for y'all and me-all to execute a left turn, I do declar'.'"

"As bad as that?"

"We're like a phantom squad of soldiers who've been killed in battle and don't know it yet."

"Is it possibly," asked Corporal Corky Smith, "that he ain't got any esprit de corpse? You remember how when we went on them field maneuvers we made everybody in the Fourth Platoon git some esprit de corpse even if we had to choke it into them?"

"You," called Sergeant Smoot in no gentle voice as the lanky Georgia came in from the washroom. "Come over here."

"Mind if I jest set down lightly on the aidge of this yere bunk?" Georgia inquired complacently. "My feet ache to about as far up as my shoulder blades."

"You are bustin' my heart, soldier—wait a minute until I cry a couple or three crocodile tears." Sergeant Smoot turned a cold glance on his obstreperous recruit. "We are used to various specimens of nuts and goldbricks and wise guys in this here patoon, see. So if you would like me to take off my chevrons and go out behind the barracks with you, I will be delighted to prove who is the patoon leader around here."

"I don't know what y'all are drivin' at," Georgia groaned as he took the weight off his painful feet. "I ain't said ary word no how to the contrary."

"I ketch me enough hell as it is," Smoot declared. "I don't need your help at it, see? What's the matter with you, anyway?"

"Ever'body seem like they ain't content without they ask me what's the matter with me," Georgia sighed. "I tar easy, that's all."

"What job did you work at before you come into the army?" Smoot demanded.

"I chored."

"Chored? What kind of a trade is that?"

"It ain't exactly what y'all would call a trade. First-off you has to find you a uncle with a farm, where you go and begin eatin'. Then this uncle soon gits right annoyed at seein' you do nothin' but destroyin' vittles, so presently he starts you off a-doin' of sech chores as splittin' kindlin's and carryin' the cows to pasture and feedin' slops to the hawgs and hitchin' the mules and cetera."

Smoot pursed his lips. "Well, this certainly is a problem to it that in all my experience of three hitches in the service I can't figger out the answer for," he confessed. "If it is possible that we could have some cows in the comp'ny to which you could bring them out to pasture it would be okay with me, soldier. I—" Smoot scratched his head despairingly. "Kin you curse and swear pretty good, Georgia?"

"I reckon I can swear a right proud mouthful." He let out a string of oaths as a demonstration of his prowess. "Why?"

Smoot sighed. "I figgered if you could curse real good you might take on the job of bein' a mule-skinner. But since this here mechanization of the army, what is the use to swear at a blitz buggy?"

"I shore would like to have a job whereat I would git me to set down a right smart part of the time," Georgia murmured. "I yearn to set somethin' powerful."

"Well, I am not no general in this here army," said Sergeant Smoot, "but if I was I would certainly order some pigs to be inlisted up or even drafted so that you could do nothin' all day but throw slops at them. But as I am on'y a sergeant, I guess I will haff to keep right on tryin' to make a soldier out o' you, Georgia."

Georgia nodded his head at the inevitable logic of the thing. "I declar', I'll do my best." He dragged himself with stoic effort to his feet. "I—"

"Yes?"

"Seems like I jest cain't keep my eyes awake no longer, Sergeant. Maybe if I slept off this yere tarred feelin' for a hour before supper I'd be tolerably refreshed come eatin' time."

Smoot threw up his hands. "Why not? I'll appoint one of my men to wake you up so's there won't be no chance that you will miss out on anything."

“I reckon that’s right kind of you, Sarge, it shorely is,” murmured Bradley as he crawled into his bunk and began to snore with that expertness which comes only from long practice.

“It is a good idear which is jist come into my head,” said Corky Smith, “that the best thing we kin do with this Bradley is to give him into the care of Holloway and git him filled up with them vitamins.”

“I don’t know what he needs,” said Smoot, shaking his head, “but with me I figger I need to go out some place and purchase some deadly poison that acks nice and quick so as it will put me out of my misery.”

“Bourbon usually acks nice and quick. A few jolts of Bourbon inside you, Smooty boy, and the troubles you got to suffer with these guys will disappear like bubbles up a smokestack.”

Hyler laughed. “An odd figure of speech, but perhaps Corky’s theory is fundamentally sound.”

“Come on,” said Smoot. “What are we waiting for?”

5

IT'S SORT OF LIKE A TRADITION

THE rain beat a monotonous but pleasant tattoo on the barrack rooftop. Gathering pools of water had begun to turn the company street into a lane of mud. Thick heavy black clouds enveloped the training camp in which for the moment a minimum of military activity was going on. It was a listless afternoon. The day of bad weather was a welcome respite, however, for the trainees of Company L after weeks of unremitting drill. Corporal Corky Smith was lying on his bunk reading.

Ortwingle came over and joined him. "One fly kin cause a guy to go half crazy," Ortwingle observed. "I am jist about to take a nice sleep, on'y this lousy fly figgers for some reason that I am his mortal enemy. Boy, this is one hell of a rainy day. Since when did you learnt to read, Smitty?"

"If you would of kept up goin' to school," Corky told him, "you would of found out they learnt you to read in the fourth grade."

"Well, I never seen you readin' a book before."

"You don't think I am doin' it of my own free will, do you? It is on account of a terrible experience that I am readin' this here book."

"What terrible experience?"

"Some screwy dame sends it to me. I never heard of her in my life. A girl by the name of Rosemarie Schwartz. She lives in Pocatello, Idaho."

"A girl is liable to do anything," said Ortwingle. "How did she get your name?"

"Search me. I never been in Idaho."

"Maybe she got your fingerprints from Washington," said Ortwingle.

"I never been in Washington either," Corky answered soberly.

Ortwingle reached into Corky's blouse pocket and neatly extracted a cigarette. "What is this book about?"

"Have a smoke," said Corky sarcastically. "I'm been readin' this book a couple of days and I ain't yet been able to find out what it's about. Some guy name Doctor Jerkle invents some kind of a medicine that when he drinks it his worse nature comes out in him. It's like a drug habit or something. I am afraid to go to sleep after readin' this book because it is prob'ly liable to give me the green creeps. Why do people haff to send someone a story like that?"

"Maybe this girl who gives it to you is a German Nazi Fifth Column undercover spy," said Ortwingle. "Maybe they are sending this book to a lot of soldiers all over the country so that they will get the green creeps. A whole army with the green creeps would certainly interfere with the war effort. It would bust down its morale."

"I don't need the green creeps to bust down my morale. My morale is in a mess already," said Corporal Smith.

"I still can't figger out why you are readin' this book against your will."

"Well, it started with this experience with General Duncan the other day. I—"

"What experience?"

"Oh, I'm on my way down to the bus station to meet my grandmother. I'm walkin' along mindin' my own business when—"

Ortwingle interrupted, scratching his head. "Wait a minute. This is the first I ever hear of you having a grandmother."

"Of course I got a grandmother. Some people is even got two grandmothers. Why should I be any exception to the rule?" Corky Smith was indignant. "Anyway, that's what I tole the captain, that I got to go to the station to meet this ole grandmother of mine."

"Well, what does the Company Commander care whether you meet your old grandmother or not?"

"Because it is drill time in the afternoon and I haff to have a pass to get off the reservation. I figure Captain Hitchcock is gonna take a different

viewpoint of the matter if I tell him it is a good-lookin' blonde waitress name Edna who I got a date with because in the afternoon is the on'y time she can take off to meet me."

"Since when is any waitress ever fell for a guy with a face the way you have?" demanded Ortwingle.

"What's the matter with my face?"

"Nothin," said Ortwingle. "It is just that it is very seldom anybody ever comes across a face like yours on a human being." He shrugged his shoulders. "With ten thousand soldiers to pick from, it is pretty hard to believe that a good-lookin' blonde is gonna make the mistake even by accident of goin' out with you."

"Okay," said Corky. "Don't believe it, then."

"What about this experience with the general?"

"That's what I'm comin' to. I'm on my way down to meet this good-lookin' blonde babe when this old grey-headed buzzard sticks his head out of a hole and—"

"A hole? What kind of a hole?"

"A hole in the ground. Is there any other kind of a hole you kin stick your head out of?"

"What is a general doin' in a hole in the ground?" asked Ortwingle incredulously.

"He's down there shovelin' dirt out of it with a shovel," Corky patiently explained. "Anyway, I'm walkin' along peacefully mindin' my own business, tryin' to figure out a place to take this Edna where it will be enough privacy around to see if I kin find out if it is jist my corporal's pay she is after, when this ole buzzard sticks his head out of this hole and hollers after me. He is got on a undershirt and a pair of fatigue pants, and there is dirt all over him and the sweat is running down his face. I says I am in a hell of a hurry and asts him what he wants." Corky looked out through the window at the steady downpour of rain. "I am glad the captain is got sense enough not to sent us out to drill on a day like this here. It gives me a drownding feeling jist to look at that parade ground."

"Well, what did the old guy want?" said Ortwingle.

"If a general is gonna shovel dirt in his undershirt they ought to pass a regulation in the army that he should have his name stenciled on it in black and white," Corky complained. "The ole buzzard calls me over and asts me to help him lift this machine into the hole."

"What machine?"

"Some kind of a sprinkling machine with a pump that is suppose to fling water around and sprinkle the garden. Well, I figure a buzzard that is old enough to be my grandfather is possibly liable to get hisself a hernia from liftin' on a heavy machine, so I go over and I help him put it down in the hole. Then I notice a sign on the lawn that says this is Brigadier General Duncan's house."

"Then you didn't know this guy was the general himself?"

"Certainly I didn't know it. That's what I'm been trying to tell you. I figure this buzzard is the general's gardner and I feel sorry for him. 'What is the lousy army comin' to,' I says, 'that they've got to put a ole buzzard like you to diggin' holes in the ground?'"

"What did he say to that?"

"'I like the exercise, Corporal,' he says. 'Thank you very much for helping me with the sprinkler. This is gonna be a fine thing for the garden.' Then I says to him how come he is in the army till he's grey-headed without ever gettin' promoted to be a non-com. I says to him he must be kind of dumb not even to be promoted up to be a corporal."

"What did he say to that?"

"He just grinned, so that made me mad, and I stood there tellin' him he should be ashamed of hisself. 'The trouble with you, buddy,' I says, 'is prob'ly the booze.' He nods. 'I admit I like my glass of brandy on occasion.' I says, 'You ought to be ashamed of yourself, because here with Hitler and so forth the world is in a hell of a condition, and all you kin do to help your country is fill yourself full of bug-juice.' I says, 'An ole buzzard like you should be settin' us young punks a good example in the army, whereas the on'y thing you are good for is to dig holes.'"

"What did he say then?"

"He says, 'Wait a minute,' and he goes into the house and finely he comes out with a couple of bottles of beer. I says, 'If that ole horseface Duncan ever ketches you drinkin' his beer, you'll go up to Leavenworth for life.' He jist hands me one of the bottles of beer, and then he starts astin' me questions about how I like the army. So naturally I tell him the army stinks. It is like a tradition or something."

Ortwingle laughed. "It is a tradition for a soldier to say the army stinks," he observed, "but not to a brigadier general."

"Yeah," Corky agreed sadly. "Anyway, I sit there and give this general a nice earful. 'The trouble with the army is the officers,' I tell him. 'In what way is the trouble with the officers?' he asts. 'You ought to know as much about officers as I do,' I says. I says, 'Officers is all stinkers. You can take a

very nice guy, put him in a officer's uniform, give him a paper signed by the Secretary of War sayin' he is now a officer and a gentleman, and right away he becomes a stinker.'"

"What did the general say to that?" asked Ortwingle.

"He says, 'What about another bottle of beer, Corporal?' By this time I'm beginnin' to feel pretty good, so I start tellin' him all the things I would put into effect if I was the commanding general of the army. I don't remember half the stuff I tell him, but it is a very beautiful earful. Then he asts me how come I am off duty in the middle of the afternoon, which suddenly reminds me of this important date I got with this very good-lookin' blonde waitress. I jump up. 'Here I been wastin' my good valuable time, old man, when I should be down at the bus station meetin' this blonde babe,' I says. 'Old man, if you wanna know what's the matter with the army, it is guys like me, who go to the trouble to lie to the Company Commander to git a pass to meet a good-lookin' blonde but forget all about her if along comes an opportunity to beef.'"

"So what happened then?"

"I highass down to the bus station and this Edna dame is nowhere in sight. I asts this lug that runs the newspaper stand if he is seen anything of a good-lookin' babe waitin' around. He's one of these wise guys. 'Good-lookin' babes don't haff to wait around here very long, soldier,' he says. 'The undersupply of good-lookin' babes is too great for the demand,' he says. 'Better luck next time.'"

"That is what comes of stopping to talk to a general," Ortwingle observed sagely. "So how did you finally come to figure out who this old buzzard really is?"

"Well, I'm on my way back from the bus station. I am pretty downcasted as the result of losing out with this frill. My morale is in the worse mess it is ever been in. By the time I get to the general's garden again I notice he is already begun to fill back the dirt into this hole with the machine in it. I go over and I say, 'Ole man, on account of stopping to do you a favor, I am jist lost out with the girl of my dreams.' 'Why, I am really sorry to hear it, Corporal,' he says. 'A ole buzzard like you wouldn't remember what it is like to be disappointed in love,' I says. 'Well, the next time I come along, I hope I don't see you drownding in some lake, because to do a favor to anybody in this world don't pay.' And then at that moment a maid comes out and she says to this old buzzard: 'General, suh, Mrs. Duncan tole me to tell you it is time to come in and dress for dinner. She tole me to tell you not a hour from now, or two minutes from now, but right now.'"

"When you found out this buzzard was General Duncan, what did you do then?"

"I snapped to attention and I saluted. So the ole buzzard laffs and laffs and finely he says, 'Well, corporal, thanks again for helping me out. I'm sorry you missed your appointment. Your ideas about the army interested me very much. At least you can be sure we won't get in trouble on account of drinkin' up ole Horseface Duncan's beer.'"

"That was certainly some experience you had," Ortwingle declared.

"Huh!" exclaimed Corky. "You still ain't heard the end of it. When I come back to the barrack, Sergeant Smoot is waitin' for me. 'The Company Commander is lookin' for you in the orderly room,' Smooty says, and he has got that funny smirk on his face which a'w'ys come on it when something is up. 'He says to send you right in jist as soon as you got back.'"

"You mean the general called up and—"

"General, hell," interrupted Corky. "I report to the orderly room. Sergeant Edwards closes the door behind him, and I am standin' there at attention in front of Captain Hitchcock's desk. 'Stand at ease, Corporal,' he says. Then he clears his throat a little, like he does. 'Uh, we've jist had a telephone call from the bus station, corporal,' he says. 'It seems that your grandmother is very much annoyed because you were not down there to meet her. You were supposed to meet your ole grandmother at the bus station, weren't you, Corporal? That's what you wanted the afternoon off for, wasn't it?'"

Ortwingle was laughing uproariously.

"You wanna hear the end of this story or don't you?"

"I can guess the end, but don't stop now."

"'Your grandmother has a very young-sounding voice, Corporal,' the captain goes on. 'I don't know but what I'd like to meet her sometime.' Then he reaches into his desk and he takes out this package and he hands it to me. 'Here's something that come in the mail for you, Corporal Smith. Apparently a book. I do hope it's a long, interesting story, because for making up a phony excuse to git a pass I am gonna confine you to quarters for one week. That is all. You kin go.'"

"And the book is this here book?"

"Yeah. And that is the reason I am readin' such a book against my will. That is why my morale is in such a mess. And that is also," said Corky as Ortwingle continued to laugh uproariously, "why you kin go to hell as far as I am concerned, because what is so damn funny about such a experience is beyond me."

6

STRICTLY LEGITIMATE DEALS

"IT is not I who figgers out the regulations for this here barrack," said Corporal Smith. "Accordin' to the rules, it is on'y suppose to be one close locker to each soldier."

"That's okay, Corp," said Private Benny MacClusky. "I won the use of this other locker off of Private Redbanks on a bet."

"Bettin' is also against the rules."

"This was a secret bet, Corp. Where else am I going to keep all this junk?"

"That's your tough worry. The regulations states that on'y one locker goes to a customer."

"How would you like to make ten bucks?"

"What are you tryin' to do, bribe a non-commissioned officer?"

"You got me all wrong, Corp. This is a proposition. Let's just forget about the locker. I'll make a deal with Private Redbanks to pay him a buck a month to let me keep my junk in his closet."

"You ain't got no right to have all that junk," said Corky Smith. "This is the army, not no rummage sale."

"How would you like to buy a nice pair of five-dollar military hair brushes for four bits?" asked Private MacClusky.

"I never haff to comb my hair," said Smith. "It a'w'ys looks like this no matter what I do with it. Where'd you git them brushes?"

"They're interest on a debt. I took them in as collateral on a loan to Private Horan. But about this ten bucks. How would you like to make ten bucks regular every month, Corp?"

"Doin' what?" asked Corky suspiciously.

"Well, I need a partner in my business," said MacClusky. "I need a kind of tough guy, preferably a non-com, to threaten some of my delinquent accounts."

"I don't git it," said Corky Smith.

"It's very simple, Corp. Nothing illegal, you understand. All my deals are strictly legitimate. But take Private Walso, for example. For a nominal charge of three-fifty I introduced Private Walso to the cashier at the Beanerie. I advanced him another three and a half to take her to see the Ice Follies. When payday came around he only paid me back the three-fifty cash because he said as soon as the show was over this cashier gave him the brush-off."

"So what?"

"So I really need a business partner to help me collect my legitimate debts, somebody to get tough and threaten them that if they do not come across they're liable to get a punch in the nose," MacClusky explained.

"Why don't you punch them in the nose yourself?"

"I'm a business man, not a pugilist, Corp. Physical violence is very abhorrent to me. What do you say—ten bucks a month, and five per cent of the gross collections."

"You would do better, MacClusky, if you'd put your mind on soldierin' instead of on propositions."

"I can't help it, Corp. I guess I'm a business man at heart. Think that deal over. In the meantime, if you don't need any military hair brushes, how about this fine suit of silk underwear? I picked it up for three packs of cigarettes. I'll let you have it for four—I like to make a small profit on a large turnover."

"What would I do with silk underwear, go out on maneuvers with it?"

"You never know," said MacClusky brightly, "when a suit of silk underwear will come in handy. Some future affair of the heart, perhaps. Endows one with a certain nonchalant self-confidence."

"The best thing you kin do," said Corky Smith, "instead of foolin' around with junk like that, is to git your bunk made up and swept under."

"Oh, that's all taken care of, Corp. Private Hapgood's doing my chores this week. He'll be around shortly. He made a bum guess on Michigan State last Saturday."

Corky Smith scratched his wiry head. "Up to now we have had some very odd characters which have came and went in this here comp'ny, but I figger you take the cake, MacClusky."

"As a matter of fact, Corp, I've got a very fine fruit cake here somewhere that I can let you have cheap. Somebody's grandmother made it for him and I took it over in part payment for a credit slip good for five gallons of gasoline that he needed to get some place with. I've also got three sweaters, an electric razor, and a set of books that teaches you how to be a cabinet maker. If you can use—"

"Maybe you never heard that we got a war on," said Corky.

"Certainly I heard of it," declared MacClusky. "Also that draft board that drafted me heard of it, too. And just when I was on the point of going into business for myself. This was a wonderful business I had lined up. I had a deal on to sell sailors to the navy."

"Sailors," said Corky Smith, running his hand over his face.

"That's right."

"Pardon me for seemin' to be acquisitive, but since when is the navy started in buyin' sailors?"

"Not the navy, exactly. I had this deal worked out with a guy in the naval recruiting office. He was going to give me five bucks apiece for every man I brought in because if he piled up a big record he'd be made a chief petty officer or a commodore or something."

"And how did you figger you would git these here guys to go into the navy?"

"It was all very simple. I figured I'd go canvassing from door to door. The way I used to sell vacuum cleaners was to go around from house to house and I would scare the ladies into buying them and in that way I made good. They used to have an advertisement in the paper saying, 'Our Mr. MacClusky made a hundred and twenty-three seventy-five last week, why can't you?' I figured I'd go around scaring guys into the navy. I figured after I perfected this system of scaring guys into the navy, I'd build up a crew under me and assign them to different territories, and—"

"Jist a minute," Corky interrupted. "I think I got lost somewhere. In the first place, how possibly is anyone able to scare ladies into buyin' a vacuum

cleaner?"

"First I'd get my foot in the door. I would ring the bell, and when the lady opened the door, the first thing I'd do is stick my foot in so she couldn't close it, and then I'd say, 'Good afternoon, madam, I am not here to sell you anything.'"

"But—"

"Then she'd make some wisecrack, maybe, like 'The hell you say!' or, 'Tell that to the marines,' or something. 'This is no kidding, lady,' I'd say. 'I'm here to give you a vacuum cleaner absolutely free—nothing down and five years to pay for the equipment that goes with it. And you better take it or I can guarantee you're liable to be dead in six months.' That was the gag that got 'em. When I was invited in to explain why they were liable to be dead in six months, I'd open up their carpet sweepers and put a pinch of dust on a slide and stick it under a microscope I used to carry around with me for this very purpose. When these ladies saw the germs doing the conga on that slide the rest was easy."

"So what is germs got to do with scarin' guys into the navy?"

"I figured I would operate on the same principle. I had it all worked out to go from door to door and talk to a lot of these guys that were going to be called anyway and prove to 'em that more people get killed trying to cross busy intersections than get drowned in the navy, and by a few other arguments to show 'em how better off they'd be if they came with me and signed up. Only just when I had this plan all worked out, the draft board got hold of me."

"Them draft boards is sure hell on guys, ain't they?" said Corky.

"I almost had a nice deal figured out to get to be a member of one of those draft boards," said MacClusky. "I figured if I was a member of a draft board I would probably be more sympathetic to the excuses I could think up for being deferred."

"On'y you never got on it."

"I had a nice plan. The way I planned to be made a member of one of those draft boards was to become a big merchant in one of those communities, so I rented a store and filled it up with different kinds of merchandise that I bought at a fire sale. As soon as a vacancy occurred I was going to apply for it. What knocked this scheme on the head was that the vacancy occurred in the army first, and I never got a chance to defer myself."

"Well, you are a soldier now," said Corky Smith, "and there is a war on. And if we ever expect to go ahead and win it you better git down to business and study them infantry drill regulations."

"Don't worry, Corp. Pretty soon I'll know 'em by heart. This Private Kiplinger who used to be a teacher in civilian life is my special tutor. I sold a guy a pack of cards in exchange for his pork chops at Sunday mess during our six weeks' basic training, and then I made a deal with this Kiplinger, who is very fond of pork, to be my private teacher in exchange for those chops. So don't worry about those regulations, Corp."

"Any time I have got a guy in my squad that does nothin' but figger out screwy deals like these deals you are tellin' me about, I am gonna go around with a continual headache until he is assigned some place else."

"A headache," said Private MacClusky, a sudden smile illuminating his features. "Corp, you are in luck."

"Why am I in luck?"

MacClusky began rummaging around in the pile of junk lying in the bottom of his locker. "This is something I intended to treasure for my own personal use. I hadn't intended to part with this, Corp. I go around boasting about being a business man, but I'm afraid my heart is softer than my head. When a friend makes an appeal to my better nature, Corp, I am lost. Here."

MacClusky held up a fantastic contraption, his eyes surveying it with rapturous admiration.

"What the hell is it?"

"What is it!" MacClusky slowly shook his head from side to side. "Words are ineffective to describe the wonders of an ever-advancing science. Do you know what aspirins do to you when you swallow them? They bust inside you. They detonate with the explosive force of a thousand-pound bomb—in proportion to their size, of course. Well, this miraculous device altogether eliminates the use of drugs, sedatives, injections, purgatives and pills. It dissolves the phlegm, it regulates the pulse, it softens the arteries and hardens the nerves."

"Yeah?" said Corky Smith, hypnotized.

"When these therapeutic machines are finally manufactured for general public use, the word *headache* will be removed from our dictionaries. The man who invented it, a Professor Sienkewitz, was forced to discontinue making 'em because of a shortage of basic materials. Only four of these devices are now extant in the world today, and here you see one of them."

"What do you do with it?"

"You draw it over your head, thus, then tie it under your chin. In these pockets, on each side, you will observe two small storage batteries which send a mild discharge of curative current coursing through your ductless glands."

"It sounds like a good thing if it does you any good."

"I used to have a hacking cough before I began wearing this helmet—we call it the Electric Doctor. Now I'm not only cured, but I see farther, I smell better, and I'm more attractive to women. Since I feel so well, I don't need it any longer. I'm going to give the Electric Doctor to you, Corp. A gift, with no strings attached."

"I guess I had you all wrong, MacClusky."

"Don't mention it, Corp. Of course you'll want to reimburse me for the batteries, which come extra."

"Oh, sure," said Corky.

"These two batteries are charged with therapeutic electricity, you understand, and cost three bucks apiece wholesale. If you'll let me have this purely nominal charge in cash to cover my outlay, the Electric Doctor is yours."

"That makes six bucks. It sounds reasonable enough."

"Reasonable is an understatement," said MacClusky, briskly rubbing his hands together.

"When do you put it on?"

"Any time. Any time at all, Corp. You can even wear it to bed and charge up your brains while you're sleeping."

"Well, here's your six bucks."

"Thanks, Corp. Any time you want to buy something or bet on anything, I'm your man."

"I'll remember that," said Corky Smith appreciatively.

Later Smoot and Ortwingle and Corporal Harrison Hyler noticed a strange apparition in Smith's room.

"Since when are they beginnin' to induct men from Mars into the U. S. Army?" inquired Ortwingle, staring at the figure sitting on Corky Smith's bunk.

"Well, what's so funny?" demanded Corky.

"What's that you got on your head?" asked Smoot.

"That's my Electric Doctor."

"It's his Electric Doctor," said Ortwingle.

"That's right," said Corky Smith. "I'm chargin' my brains."

"Look, boys," said Sergeant Smoot. "I'll stay here and stand guard over him, while Ortwingle and Hyler goes and telephones for a ambulance and some attendants from the psychopathic ward. The poor guy has went crazy."

“This is a fine thing,” said Corky Smith. “It cures headaches and chilblains or whatever’s the matter with you.”

“Where’d you git that thing?” demanded Smoot.

“I bought it from Private MacClusky.”

“That’s all I wanted to know,” said Smoot. “Go ahead out and phone for that ambulance, men.”

7

THE SOLDIER AND THE LADY

"THE way I gather it," said Corky Smith, "this hero name Private Brown is in love with this deputant name Elouise Randolph whose ole man is so rich he owns at least a small percentage of everything. He also owns a lot of farm blocks, and is in charge of tellin' Congress if it is okay to pass a law. In the meanwhile he is also a dollar-a-year man in Washington. The way I understand it, if he invites some soldier to dinner he has him made into a lieutenant colonel first because he don't like to have socialist intercourse with nobody except high-rankin' officers."

"In real life," said Sergeant Smoot, "such a guy would wind up behind stripes and bars."

"Well, the way these Hollywood scenarios figger it, people isn't gonna pay no four bits to go into a movie show to find out what real life is like, because for the other twenty-two hours of the day they git all they want of it free from personal experience."

"Also," said Ortwingle, "half the fun of a movie is sayin' afterwards how lousy it was."

"That's right," said Corky Smith. "There is nothin' that makes a audience nervouser than a good movie."

"Listen," said Sergeant Smoot, "this is the last time I am gonna tell you to lay off my Crême de Paris face lotion."

"Good," said Ortwingle, who was applying it with prodigal liberality to his well-tanned cheeks. Corky Smith and Corporal Ortwingle were putting the finishing touches on their toilet in Smoot's room. "Good. I was gittin' a little tired of hearin' you beef about it."

"You ack like a couple of prima donalds. You two dog-faces make me laugh," said Smoot morosely.

"Don't pay no attention to Smoot," said Ortwingle. "He is merely nauseous with envy."

"Well, the way I understand this story," Corky continued, "this here deputant which is engaged as the fiancé of Private Brown wants to have her ole man speak to General Marshall to have him promoted up out o' the ranks so he kin wear a pair o' silver wings or something."

"But this Private Brown wants to be a private," said Ortwingle.

"That's right. There's a dramatic part where he says darling or something you have got the wrong slant on things, and this deputant says how do you figger I am got the wrong slant on things, and he says all your life that ole man of yours has went ahead and gave you everything you wanted. With his political pull he has bought and sold men like they was judges. And now it is his philosophy of life that the object of this here war is on'y to wear the uniform of a officer. He thinks he will buy me a commission so's his daughter will not be seen goin' to the hot spots with a mere rear-rank private. And what is your philosophy of life, Arthur, asts this deputant, so he explains that he ain't lookin' for no high rank or fame but on'y to knock hell out o' the Axis. He says Elouise it is the common everyday soldier whom is fightin' this here war for freedom, and when it is over such people like your father is gonna be defrosted and done away with. So this Elouise says, hell, that is practically communism, and besides that Arthur, remember he is my father after all. Well, they bust off their engagement in a huff, and this Private Brown feels lousy and this Elouise Randolph feels lousier still, because underneath everything they are fundamentally screwy over each other."

Ortwingle nodded approvingly. "One good thing about movies is that in the end you kin a'w'ys figger that finely everything will come out okay."

"Them picture people from Hollywood," said Sergeant Smoot, "jist don't know what they are up against around here. Accordin' to past experiments, anything in which you two guys is got anything to do with never comes out okay."

Corky Smith shrugged his shoulders, and a knowing look passed between him and Ortwingle. "Smooty is jist green with jealousy because us two guys is been chose to re-enact the role of doughboys in this film clastic and he's been passed aside like an ole leftover glove."

"This director gives one look at me," said Ortwingle, "and he tells the comp'ny commander I am photogeneric. I ast Hyler what that stands for and he says it is havin' the luck to possess a face adopted to a motion picture's career."

"As far as I am concerned," said Smoot, "I wouldn't adopt your face if it was on an orphan that was left to freeze to death in a blizzard on my doorsteps."

"Well, Ortwingle may have a photogeneric face for pictures," said Corky Smith, "but I guess I am got the Hollywood mind, because this guy who keeps yellin' quiet please lets me take a scripture of this screen play to read, and that's how come I to know the plot. After this Elouise and this Private Arthur Brown bust up on account of a different slant on philosophy, then comes the real stuff that everybody likes. Private Brown becomes a tough commando and is finely put into the A.E.F. expeditionary force and leads a terrific raid—"

"How many minutes more is it till we haff to fall out to act in this Hollywood film drama?" Ortwingle asked.

"Not for a half an hour yet."

Ortwingle studied his face in Smoot's mirror. "It's funny that I ain't been gave instructions to put no makeup on. The way I been told, a acter puts some yellow glue or somethin' all over his face so that when the camera takes his picture he looks natural."

"Makeup," said Corky, "is on'y for the main acters who git paid for bein' stars. Another thing I notice about movies is that these acters a'w'ys look more like real people than real people do. If a acter is takin' the part of a criminal he seems like a better criminal than a criminal does. Another example is this acter who is takin' off the part of Private Brown in this celluloid clastic we are in. There ain't a guy in the whole battalion who he looks as much like a private as this Private Brown looks."

"So what happens after this guy becomes a commando and takes part in this terrific commando raid?"

"Accordin' to this scripture the scene shifts to this deputant name Elouise Randolph back home, who she goes to her father and demands to have this Private Brown transferred against his will to some safety zone so he won't git killed until they kin become fiancies again, because deep down she's still

nuts about this Arthur. But what happens is that durin' one of these raids this Private Brown is left behind in enemy's territory and is reported amongst the killed. Well, this deputant feels pretty lousy when she hears this and finely she gits a whole new slant on things and gives up fame and fortune and joins the WAACs. Because of her socialist position and education they want to make her a officer, but now she says no, the hell with that, I kin understand jist exactly how Arthur must of felt and so she becomes a mere private in the rear rank."

"This is the kind of a movie I like," said Ortwingle.

"All this makes Elouise's father think twice, and finely he realizes happiness cannot be bought so he puts his whole fortune into tax-exempt bonds and volunteers to cut the salary he gets from his corporations to twenty-five thousand bucks even after they killed this law, and decides to listen to Roosevelt's speeches and support the New Deal at least for the duration. And in memorial to this fiancé of Elouise's who died a hero's death in foreign soil he builds a lot of little sanitary places all along the highways for soldiers while they are waiting for a lift. In the meanwhile this Private Brown ain't dead at all but is masqueradin' under a fictitious accent to gather a lot of information that they kin use for a second front, and finely, after many hair-devil escapades, makes his way to India, from where he is flew back to Washington in a B-19 to be decorated by the President."

"And what part of the picture is the part they're makin' here?"

"The part in which he first goes to trainin' camp."

Ortwingle had begun to make grimaces, regarding himself approvingly in the mirror. "I figger I am more prob'ly on the Gary Cooper type than anything," he decided.

"As far as I am concerned," said Smoot, "you are more on the type that Corky Smith mentioned, the criminal which is more like a criminal than a criminal is."

"I am never seen a guy jealouser of anybody than Smoot here," said Ortwingle. "With him it is a pure case of the lion and the sour grapes. After the war is won I guess I will take a little whirl at pictures, if it is on'y in comedies to begin with."

"I forgot to mention that this Private Brown has a big fat buddy who gits killed in this raid and makes everybody cry when he smokes one last cigarette and asts this Private Brown jokingly to shoot two Nazis the first chance he gits to make up for them killin' a fat guy like him."

"I like to see this here movie when it comes out," said Ortwingle. "I like to see how photogeneric my face is when I'm lookin' at it from the angle of a

spectator."

"There's also a beautiful forward that the scenarios has wrote to go up on the screen before the picture starts," said Corky Smith. "It says that this movie is dedicated to all the soldiers who are fightin' to preserve the democracy of the democratic nations and that the great American democracy will never take no guff from nobody but will finely show these Axis bastards that our soldiers mean business and we will knock hell out of 'em on land and sea until they yell uncle. It kind of makes you feel patriotic and wish you was a Hollywood star or a scenarist writer or somethin'. *The Soldier and the Lady* they call it."

"Gosh, ain't them thirty minutes up yet?" asked Ortwingle. "I am liable to git nervous if they keep me on pins and hooks too long."

"There is lots of time yet," said Corky Smith. "So the way the movie finely ends is that this Private Arthur Brown in spite of himself is made into a major to train recruits to be commandos and the final scene is where this Elouise Randolph in her uniform of the WAACs and this Arthur Brown with his gold leafs is standin' on the Brooklyn Bridge watchin' thousands of bombers flyin' off to Europe and there appears a hazy face in the water and it is the smilin' face of this fat buddy of Brown's wishin' them good luck from the grave and by this time I guess everybody is sneakin' out their hankerchiffs and that's the way it ends. With my Hollywood mind this scripture gives me a new idear for a terrific scenarist that I think I'll jot down and submit—"

A shrill whistle cut Corky short. "Everybody chosen for the picture, outside!" a sergeant yelled.

"That's us," said Ortwingle. "Well, wish me congratulations, Smooty, on my first screen test of impersonatin' a movie hero in pictures."

"All I hope," said Smoot cynically, "is that them guys is got an extra few dozen spare lenses when they begin grinding your face into the camera."

"Ain't you gonna come out and watch us act?" asked Corky.

"No," said Sergeant Smoot. "I figger I see enough recruits drillin' all day without watchin' a movie bein' took of them on my spare time."

An hour later Ortwingle and Smith returned to barracks. They were dusty and tired and uncommunicative. Finally Ortwingle admitted that the battalion in which they'd maneuvered had never got within half a mile of the film company's camera.

"We never even got to see this feminine actress which is takin' off the part of this Elouise Randolph," said Ortwingle. "Even with a microscope attached to the end of a spy glass I guess you wouldn't be able to tell which

guy is me. The closest we ever come to the camera is once when we was runnin' like hell with our backs to it."

"I was gonna sent a special air mail delivery letter to my ole grandmother to be sure and see me in this movie," sighed Corky Smith. "But I don't think her eyes is so good any more."

"My heart," said Smoot with mock sympathy, "is breakin' for you guys. All the whilst that you are pityin' me because I am been excluded out o' that lousy movie I am laffin' to myself because of this new assignment that I'm about to be assigned to."

"What assignment?" demanded Corky Smith and Ortwingle in unison.

"This here assignment to escort a bunch of new raw recruits to New York. A free trip to New York will certainly break the monotone around here." Smoot grinned at his pals' astonished expression. "Big city," he gloated, "here I come!"

8

THERE'S NO PLACE LIKE HOME

"HOW long," said Sergeant Smoot, "am I been in the army, Corky?"

"How would I know?" said Corky Smith. "Why don't you write to the Department of Weights and Measures and ast them?"

Smoot, his back propped against the pillow on his bunk, stared reflectively at the barrack ceiling. "Anyway, it is seven or nine years at the very lease."

"What's the matter? Are you thinkin' of writin' up your self-autobiography or something?"

"No," said Sergeant Smoot, "I am on'y jist thinkin' that in all my seven or nine years in the army, I guess this is the first time I ever go and draw down a nice assignment."

"What is so nice about it?"

"A free trip to New York is a nice assignment," said Sergeant Smoot. "All I have got to do in the next week is to deliver sixteen draftee recruits up to their new training camp back East."

"Personally," said Corky Smith, "I would not care to be gave the assignment of delivering sixteen draftee recruits across the company street."

Smoot clasped his hands behind his head and blinked contentedly. “By this time the day after tomorrow I will be standin’ on the corner of Fifth Avenoo and Forty-second Street lookin’ up at the Woolworth Buildin’.”

“And then some guy will prob’ly come along and sell it to you,” Corky commented caustically. An uncomplaining Sergeant Smoot was a little hard to take. It was unnatural.

Smoot grinned superiorly. “Any time I go to New York and buy the Woolworth Buildin’ on my pay I will be gittin’ it at a bargain. Don’t be a case of the wolf and the sour apples, Corky. When I come back I’ll bring you a nice silverneer of the Big Town.” He gazed ahead of him dreamily. “Fifth Avenoo . . . Riverside Park . . .”

The morning following this conversation Smoot at last managed successfully to get his detail of newly inducted recruits entrained. For the five-hundredth time he counted heads, sixteen of them, sighed with profound relief, then sank into the double seats he had reserved at the end of the car for himself. Three of them had lost track of their barrack bags, one hadn’t known he was going, one had taken castor oil the evening before and was there one moment and gone the next, two others had girls to say goodby to, a guy named Feluppo who didn’t speak very lucid English kept calling him Sergeant Smut, and another missing member was finally found eating a second breakfast in the mess hall.

Now finally they were all aboard and under way. Smoot looked out of the window at the swift-moving scenery as the train gathered momentum. He and his detail had a whole daycoach to themselves, with a store of light rations to last them while en route. The man named Feluppo claimed to have cooked at a mining camp in New Mexico, and to him Smoot assigned the coffee and sandwich making. A Western boy with a body the size of a statue by Gutzon Borglum had begun to strum an instrument he called a “geetar.” Plaintively he sang:

> “Her cheeks that once glowed with the rose-tint of health
> By the hand of disease had turned pale,
> And the death damp was on the pure white brow
> Of my poor lost Lilly Dale.”

Sergeant Smoot hung his feet up on the opposite cushion and relaxed his tired muscles. The troubadour went on with his melancholy ballad:

" 'I go,' she said, 'to the land of rest,
And ere my strength shall fail,
I must tell you where, near my own loved home,
You must lay poor Lilly Dale.

" ' 'Neath the chestnut tree, where the wild flow'rs grow,
And the stream ripples forth thro' the vale,
Where the birds shall warble their songs in spring,
There lay poor Lilly Dale.' "

"Excuse me please," said Feluppo. "I theenk I don't fine the knife."

"What knife?" asked Smoot, startled from his reverie.

"The knife for to makin' the sam hamwidges. I am preparation to relieve the starvation at lunge time but eet ees umpossible to chop apart this loafs of bread for sam hamwidges without such a knife."

Smoot accompanied his chef back to the little improvised galley. He found the knife without much trouble. "Sergeant Smut, gracias." Feluppo beamed. "I theenk I am a leetle cockeyed in my looks bicause I don' seen that knife wherever. From now on I weel bigeen a preparation for this delicious bill of fare. Thank you."

A little while later all hell broke loose in the daycoach. Smoot leaped up from his cushioned retreat. A magnificent riot was in progress. Recruits lay strewn in the aisles. Wild yells and confusion filled the car. "ATTENTION!" roared the sergeant. "What the hell's the matter in here?"

The sixteen men paused in their frantic attitudes. The geetar player stood with a big round wad of newspaper under his arm. "Aw shucks, Sarge, we're jest playin' a little game for the fun of it. We're Michigan and they're Notre Dame. Whoever gits this here football into the other side's lavatory first scores a touchdown."

Smoot beat his forehead. "Gimme that paper. Back to your seats. This ain't the Rose Bowl in here."

He was about to launch into an exordium and a philippic or two on the philosophy of military discipline when Feluppo stepped proudly out of the galley and announced the completion of his preparations for lunch. "The bill of fare is now on the menu," he called. "Twelve o'clock. Come and take it."

The recruits piled up at the doorway to the galley. "What's this?" said the geetar player. There was a puzzled murmur from the rest of the men.

"Sam hamwidges," said Feluppo. "Hold forth the conteen cups for these remarkable nice coffee."

"The man's screwy!"

"Get a load of these sandwiches, Sarge."

Smoot worked his way through the crowd of hungry men, then stood gazing speechlessly at the pile of sandwiches Private Feluppo had begun handing out. Army "ham" is a rubbery kind of meat loaf, not quite so delicate in texture as its civilian counterpart. Feluppo had hacked it into fine thick masculine slabs. Between each two slices of ham he had placed a thick piece of bread carefully buttered on both sides.

The erstwhile chef smiled up at his sergeant with imperturbable self-confidence. "Oh boy," he said. "That is some sam hamwidges, ain't they, Sergeant?"

Smoot pulled at his shirt collar as though fighting for air.

"Looking through this boxes of chow I am hoppy to find too much ham," Feluppo explained. "So these time for once everybody he has eet no complaint of not enough meat in his sam hamwidges."

"Anyway this coffee tastes okay," said someone.

"Yeah. It's got body."

"What the hell. I'm too hungry to worry about whether the meat's on the inside or the outside," said someone else.

So was Sergeant Smoot. Taking his food back to his private retreat, he wondered if perhaps he hadn't accepted his present assignment with an unmotivated degree of optimism.

Smoot awakened that afternoon to discover a well-patronized crap game in progress, which he decently waited to break up until the roller had sevened out. The following morning somebody, possibly accidentally, stepped on the Western boy's geetar, and for the rest of the trip the statuesque giant sat moodily staring out of the window, inconsolable. For the last two meals on the train there had been practically nothing to eat, Feluppo having overestimated the contents of his chow boxes.

"Weeth all my braims I am not intelligent to understand the absence of these missing foods," he sighed, scratching his mop of black oily hair. "At first there ees sufficient to be plenty, and then all at once this boxes is full of nothing." Then Feluppo beamed brightly. "Sergeant, I am suddenly inspirited. If it ees agreeable this engineer to stop up the train at a farming house, I weel present myself to ask for some ears of corn. With ears of corn I shall pound out a great number of innumerable tortillas. A tortilla fills the soul out like a balloon, my sergeant."

Beyond a couple of wrestling matches in the aisle and an abortive fist fight between the man who had taken castor oil and a draftee who insisted on

his right to go in there once in a while too, their arrival at the metropolitan depot was accomplished uneventfully. Smoot lined them up as the train descended into the darkness of the tunnel.

"All you men give me your undivided attention," he said. "After a person who he is been in the service eight or ten years like me, why such a person gets a pride about the army. I don't know why, because what is so good about solderin' is beyond me. But anyway such is the case. Now since all you guys is dressed up into uniforms, it is gonna be natural that everybody in the city is bound to take you for real soldiers. It is for this here reason that I am making this speech so as to ast that each and every one of you birds, when you git off this train, that he tries to make belief like he is an old timer and stay in step and not ack like he is lost without the handles of a plow in his hands. There will be a driver with a truck to pick us up and take us out to camp, so everybody line up two by two on the platform and step out with your left foot when I say 'march.' You kin fool some of the people some of the time, accordin' to the old sayin', and that is all that even a army sergeant kin expect when it comes to recruits. Okay, fall out."

"I like very personally for to see the Statute of Leeberty," said Feluppo. "Perhaps these drive trucker can take us on a roundabout short cut to see a small glimpse of the Statute of Leeberty, no?"

"No," said Sergeant Smoot. "And what's more, if everybody in the country keeps on standin' around like statutes, pretty soon there won't be any liberty to speak of. All right, button up them blouses. Suck in your guts, boy. Straighten out them shoulders."

Feluppo turned away, disappointed, mumbling to himself. "These is a fine how-are-you when a United States soldier of America that ees just been drofted cannot even look at a small glimpse of the Statute of Leeberty. Jesú, Maria y José, a fine statement of affairs!"

For all Sergeant Smoot's exhortation the men straggled through the depot to the waiting army truck, words of the most impassioned kind being no substitute for close-order drill. Beads of perspiration stood out on Smoot's forehead. To an old soldier purgatory would be a place where formal guard mount would be performed every evening by a regiment of untrained recruits. He literally pushed his detail into the waiting truck under the curious eyes of the civilian onlookers.

The commandant of the recruit depot of the big new eastern camp relieved him of his charges and handed him an official receipt. "Everything seems to be in order, Sergeant. Men all well?"

"Yes, sir."

"Good. No doubt you're all hungry. Never met a soldier who wasn't. It's too late for supper, but you just take your men to the mess hall and tell Sergeant McCarthy to give you something to eat. Then report here to me immediately after you're through."

"Yes, sir."

Smoot herded his men into the depot mess hall. "Another bunch of 'em, 'ay? 'Tis nuts I'll be," said the mess sergeant, "before some genius figgers out a schedule that will land these transients in here before instid of after supper."

"Why don't you write up your troubles and send 'em in to some one of these here confession magazines?" said Smoot sarcastically. "We're hungry, been on a damn train two days."

"None o' yer lip, Sergeant," said the mess sergeant. "I'll jist snap me fingers and me cooks will come up with a feast fit fer a Chinese mandolin."

What they were given was army ham sandwiches and coffee.

Smoot barely touched the food, anxious to get back and pick up his release. He was waiting to wrap himself around a thick porterhouse steak smothered in pork chops. New York City, here I come, he hummed to himself.

The commandant of the recruit depot had other ideas. "Your special detail orders say you are entitled to liberty in town, Sergeant."

"Yes, sir."

"Unfortunately, we'll have to put your leave off until next time. I've got eleven men here who've been assigned to a regiment in your post, and I've been wondering who I could spare to send them out with. Duty before pleasure, Sergeant—the fate of the military man. You'll pick up these boys at five-thirty sharp in the morning. Train leaves from Penn Station at seven-two."

Now Sergeant Smoot was back in his home barracks, his head propped up against the pillow on his bunk. Corky Smith sat on the opposite bunk, the corners of his lips curved in an innocent smile.

"Ever since you returned this mornin' from that trip to the Big Town you ain't said ary a word to nobody," Corky observed.

"Yeah," said Corporal Ortwingle, who came over to join the group. "You look like you jist excaped from a mousetrap, Smooty."

"What do you expect me to do, get up on the roof and do a Highland fling?" Smoot mumbled.

"It seems to me like you got back awful soon from that nice assignment," Corky said. "What's the matter? Couldn't you git in to see them strip tease shows at half price?"

"Maybe," said Ortwingle, "maybe New York ain't such a hot place after all."

"New York's all right," said Smoot. "One town is practically similar to another. Take away the big buildings and the people, and what have you got left?"

Corky and Ortwingle exchanged glances. "I guess it's good to be back in God's open places after all the bustle and hustle of them big cities," said Corky.

"Me, I figger maybe there is no place like home," said Ortwingle. "Be it ever so humiliating."

Smoot shook his head. "How come you two guys to inlist up in the army I don't know, because never in all my life did I ever come acrost two guys that they would have made such good undertakers."

"In the army," said Ortwingle, "a guy is got to have a genius for bein' practically anything, even a undertaker."

"I would as rather be a undertaker as I would a policeman," Corky Smith declared. "A policeman that arrests people is about the one thing I ain't so crazy about bein'. This here new job that they got us assigned to on the bulletin board is one job I would jist as soon not haff to do."

"Yeah," said Smoot sarcastically. "If there is anything you like to do better than anything else, it is nothing."

9

THE BEAUTY PART OF A DEMOCRACY

CORKY SMITH made a sour grimace. "But I don't like to be no policeman," he protested, ineffectually, like a child. "I never inlisted up into the U. S. Army to arrest anybody. I like to fight Japs. I like to be gave a chance to invade Tokyo or Haki Saki. I—"

"Haki Saki ain't no city," said Ortwingle. "That's a drink."

"I didn't inlist to do a lot of things, like stand in' here arguin' with you guys, but I am doin' it. Come on, line up so as I kin inspect your side-arms." Smoot glanced with a quick expert eye at the automatics with which Corporals Smith and Ortwingle and Harrison Hyler were armed.

"Doesn't it strike you as rather strange," asked Hyler, "how often we four men are chosen to perform unusual military duties?"

"No," said Sergeant Smoot. "For one thing I am too busy to worry about why funny things invariably keep happenin' to certain people in this here world. For instance, why did Corky Smith and Ortwingle haff to go ahead and happen to me instead of somebody else in the whole army?"

"Ole Smooty is into one of his sarcastical moods," said Ortwingle in an aside to Harrison Hyler. "For about six or nine years us three guys is all been buddies in the army together. If ever Corky and me went away and left

Smoot all alone in this world, he would get the melon colic and die of a broken heart."

"He ain't got no heart," said Corky Smith. "They take them up to the infirmary and put one of these here periscopes against their chests, and if it turns out they ain't got no heart they promote them to be sergeants."

"And what do they make them into if they put a periscope against their heads and find out they ain't got no brains?" asked Smoot.

"I know," said Ortwingle brightly. He winked at Corky Smith. "He means us."

"Come on," said Smoot, impatient of this conversational horseplay. "We got a serious assignment. The train comes into the depot in less than a half a hour, so let's get goin'."

"Why don't they make these G men of the Federal FBI go ahead and arrest such people?" Corky demanded plaintively. "I don't like to be a policeman. I had a uncle once name Uncle Charlie who they swore in as a deputy sheriff one time and he got captured by these bandits and they made him be their cook and what happened was that that's the last anybody ever heard of my Uncle Charlie until a piece in the paper said they hung him."

"We ain't arrestin' anybody," said Smoot. "It's jist a job that we got to go and take this conscientious objecter to Pine Crest Camp because it is still under the military jurisdiction."

"Suppose he wants to shoot it out with us?" said Corky.

"Nuts," said Sergeant Smoot. "A guy volunteers to be a conscientious objecter. He wants to go to this camp."

"Then why don't they jist give him his fare and let him go by hisself?" insisted Corky Smith.

"I don't know," said Smoot. "But if you will write all them questions out on a slip of paper, the next time I am havin' luncheon wit' the Secretary of War I'll be on'y too happy to ast him."

"When Smooty is into one of his sarcastical moods it is nothin' you kin do with him," sighed Corporal Smith.

At the depot the four non-coms boarded the local train when it came in. Corky Smith ensconced himself comfortably on the cushion alongside the window, and although their destination was a short three-quarters of an hour away, he relaxed as for an all-day trip. "Travel broadens a person out," he observed, flexing his arms expansively. "When I'm retired from the service, I think I'll travel from place to place and write a dialogue of my adventures."

"A dialogue is a conversation between two people," said Harrison Hyler.

"All right," said Corky Smith. "I'll bring along a pretty secretary like big business men do and get a double berth and she kin also be my paramount. But what I can't figger out is what he objects to."

"What who objects to?" asked Ortwingle.

"This conscientious objecter."

Smoot stared despondently at the moving scenery. "All the government would need to do to save some train fare is to take a phonograph record of Corky Smith talkin' continuously and give it to us to bring along."

"Do we git ration money to buy our groceries on this here trip with?" asked Ortwingle. "I feel the fangs of hunger already inside my stummick."

"You on'y had breakfast a hour ago," said Smoot. "Well, the next station is our stop. It is a address on this envelope that we got to pick up this conscientious objecter at, and then take this bus that goes to Pine Crest Camp."

It was quite a little walk from the station to the address on Smoot's envelope, and uphill at that. "The army should of furnished a mobile unit to us on a task like this here," Corky Smith complained. "My sacred iliac is beginnin' to hurt me."

"If ever you sometime happen to be sent to them jungles out in the Pacific," said Sergeant Smoot, "you will wish that all that ever hurts you is your sacred iliac."

"If ever I am sent to them jungles I will be gunning for rice-eatin' monkeys, not conscientious objecters. I never did inlist up into the army to be no policeman. I—"

The conscientious objecter, his suitcase beside him, was waiting for them on the dusty porch of the little rural hotel and inn. He was a gloomy young man, physically awkward, with hazel eyes and an assumed cockiness of manner. He gazed with a certain studied contempt at the detail of soldiers. "I'm Beasley," he said.

"And I'm Sergeant Smoot," said Sergeant Smoot. "I got orders to take you to Pine Crest Camp."

"All right," said Beasley, picking up his bag. "Don't apologize. You're just a cog in the machine, a little wheel in the juggernaut of war. I'm ready."

"What does he mean," said Smoot to Harrison Hyler, "that I am a little wheel in the juggernaut of war? I know what a wheel is, but I never hear of a juggernaut before." Smoot turned to Beasley. "This is Corporal Hyler, who I a'ways ast when I need somethin' translated into English."

"I imagine he means to suggest that since we're blindly executing military orders he feels no personal animosity toward us," said Hyler.

"That's fine," said Smoot, turning back to Beasley. "Also I don't feel sore at you either. That's the beauty part of a democracy—we kin hate each other without gittin' mad about it."

"Don't prate about democracy to me, soldier," said Beasley. "I see you as a mere pawn in the bloody chess game of geo-political aggrandizement."

Hyler offered the gloomy youth a cigarette. "As the sergeant says, we're ordered to escort you to the objectors' camp at Pine Crest. It's a chore. Perhaps it would be better if we didn't discuss our individual political convictions."

"A soldier has no convictions, political or otherwise," said the belligerent Beasley. "For myself, I prefer the ignominy of a concentration camp to the regimentation of my intellectual faculties."

"I don't know what he is talkin' about," said Smoot. "He reminds me of Corky Smith."

"Could I remind you that my belly figgers my mouth has been gave a furlough?" said Ortwingle.

"After we deliver this guy to camp it is time enough to think about eatin'," said Smoot.

"I suppose you think I'm yellow," said the irrepressible Beasley.

"I don't think you're nothin'," said Smoot. "Things like this is continuously happenin' to me. I expect it."

"What I can't figger out," muttered Corky Smith as they boarded the bus, "is what he objects to."

"He objects to having his intellectual faculties regimented," said Hyler.

"I'd rather you didn't make fun of me," said Beasley. "I haven't taken this step without wrestling for weeks with my conscience. War horrifies me."

"We love it," said Harrison Hyler with heavy sarcasm. "We're all natural born killers. We'd have wound up in the electric chair if war hadn't fortunately come along."

"That's right," said Corky Smith. "I wake up in the middle of the night with a terrible incentive to kill Ortwingle here if he don't stop snorin'."

"If all of us refused to participate in the destruction of our fellowmen there would be no war in the world," said Beasley.

"That's what I understand Mr. Chamberlain told Herr Hitler," said Harrison Hyler.

"Busses have the effect on my stummick," said Ortwingle, "that they shake down any food which is still in it, which makes me hungrier than I was hungry in the first place."

"All wars are propaganda wars," declared Beasley. "Without the band-playing, the flag-waving, the song-singing, the chauvinistic patriotism, the hero-worshiping, the manufactured blood-lust, there could be no war."

Hyler was amused. "I don't want to debate your convictions with you, Beasley. As Smoot implies in his homespun way, the virtue of a democracy is inherent in the fact that it permits a man to be a conscientious objector."

"You think I'm a coward."

"Of course not," said Hyler. "If you persist in demanding to know, I think you're a nuisance."

"You haven't any right to say that to me," said Beasley almost tearfully. "Because I won't submit to mob passions and gang rule, I'm to be branded as a slacker and a coward. Because—"

"You're confusing a theory with an emotion," said Hyler. "An egoist such as you are isn't a coward in the accepted sense. He—"

"Why don't you leave the kid alone?" demanded Sergeant Smoot, patting Beasley on the shoulders. "Pay no attention to Hyler here, boy. He's got one of them fluid-drive brains. You jist stick to your principles or whatever they are. We got enough screwballs in the army as it is. A army can't win battles if it is gonna be filled up with screwballs."

"But I have a right to know why he insists on stigmatizing me as a nuisance."

"I'll tell you," said Harrison Hyler. "You're a nuisance because you think you can stick your foot out and trip up a historical process. You've got it figured out that everybody is a sucker for propaganda but you. You're not a coward, Beasley. You're not afraid of killing or being killed. You're scared to death of discipline, of being told what to do. You've an exaggerated opinion of your self-importance. You have somehow acquired the idea that the world revolves around an axis on which you happen to be standing. You don't know what evolution looks like when you see it. You're a nuisance because you're too human to shoot and too pathetic to step on." White-faced, Hyler got up and strode angrily to the opposite side of the bus.

"Now you went ahead and got him mad," said Sergeant Smoot. "You oughtn't to of did that. He's a awful nice guy when you get to know him, on'y he shouldn't ever be got into a argument with."

"*He's* mad!" exclaimed Beasley excitedly. "After all those names he called me?"

"Names," said Corky Smith reminiscently. "That reminds me of my ole grandmother. Whenever I used to do something which was not right, like buildin' a fire under the cow or shootin' the neighbor's chickens with my

twenty-two, she'd laugh and say that sticks and stones would bust my bones but names'd never hurt me and then beat the hell out o' me with a Louisville slugger. She's a hot sketch, my ole grandmother."

"You have hurted his feelin's," said Smoot. "He didn't ast to be no soldier. They was about to kick this old college president in the pants and give Hyler the job when war come along and he got drafted into the army as a private. Peace was okay with him, see?"

"He called me a nuisance," said Beasley.

"So what?" said Smoot. "You should listen to what I call these two guys here. Go apologize and tell him you are sorry."

"But I'm not sorry."

"Well, tell him you're sorry anyway. It will on'y be a little white lie. He can't eat when he gets upset."

"He cast a lot of slurs on my integrity," said Beasley.

"What of it?" said Sergeant Smoot. "There is more than integrity to worry about in this world. There is such a thing as bein' a decent guy." Smoot got up and brought Corporal Hyler back to join the group. "Beasley here says he's sorry he got into an argument about bein' a conscientious objecter. Ain't that right?"

Beasley looked about unhappily as if he were trapped. Nodding his head, he muttered an unwilling affirmation.

"So ever after this," said Sergeant Smoot, "as long as I am in charge of a detail, I don't want to hear nobody arguin' with any conscientious objecter. If they haff to be a conscientious objecter, that is their own lookout."

"I beg your pardon," said Beasley stiffly. "I don't *have* to be a conscientious objector, remember."

"Okay," said Smoot. "Okay. Whatever you say is okay with me."

"I'd like to see the man who would try to keep me out of the army," declared Beasley belligerently.

"You don't look like you would make much of a soldier," said Ortwingle innocently. "That's on'y one person's opinion, though."

"What's the matter with me?"

"You look like you would cave in the first time the comp'ny went on maneuvers," said Ortwingle.

Beasley's cheeks flushed hotly. "I am a citizen of this country just the same as you are. I could notify my draft board and they'd have to take me into the army. I believe I know my rights."

Hyler said, “He’s kidding. Don’t pay any attention to Ortwingle. We four fellows are always clowning around. I really want to apologize for my remarks a little while ago. They were spoken in the heat of passion.”

“So were my remarks spoken in the heat of passion,” admitted Beasley grudgingly. “I—Maybe I . . . maybe I’ve been looking at this whole thing wrong.”

“No,” said Hyler. “I admire your courage in standing up for your principles. When I made those remarks about you I was only generalizing. I didn’t mean them personally. I’m fighting in the army to preserve your right to be a conscientious objector.”

“Nobody has to do my fighting for me,” Beasley declared. “I’m no coward.”

“I didn’t say you were,” said Hyler. “I merely—”

“If I put my mind to it I’d make as good a soldier as anyone.”

“I thought I said there would be no more arguin’,” said Smoot.

“Wait until I am in your company before you begin giving me orders,” Beasley retorted.

“Some terrible things has happened to me,” said Smoot, “but havin’ anybody in my outfit that argues like you do would make my past life seem like a picnic.”

“That does it!” exclaimed Beasley. “I’ve taken just about all I can stand from you soldiers. I want to get off this bus at the next stop. I’m phoning my draft board and asking permission to enlist immediately! I’ll show you if I’m to be intimidated or not!”

Sergeant Smoot slumped down in his seat and gazed over at Hyler with reproachful eyes. “Now look what you went ahead and done,” he groaned. “Jist go ahead and look at what you done!”

10

A MEMORABLE EVENING

THE events to be recounted here took place shortly after Hyler's conversion of the conscientious objector. Properly to understand all the implications of our friends' experience with the Courtneys, it is necessary first to make the acquaintance of Mrs. Courtney personally.

Mrs. Courtney's wrists ached. She'd been rolling bandages. At first one rolled bandages because one had to if one wanted to be in the social swim. But now Mrs. Courtney rolled bandages in grim earnest. To one who had borne the rigors of competition in Society the task of conquering a few foreign enemies was a mere chore. There was something in the way Mrs. Courtney's features were organized that in itself would have made any one of the Axis partners unsure of itself.

When she got home Mrs. Courtney rubbed arnica on her wrists, raised hell with the cook for leaving the refrigerator open, then went up to the study to find her husband. He was dozing over a recent issue of *Fortune*.

"Some day you'll fall asleep with a cigar in your mouth and burn the house down, John."

"Oh. Good evening, Evadna."

"How did the railroad go today?" Mr. Courtney owned a railroad.

"Fairish. Somebody was raising hell all afternoon about a carload of paper doilies. What could anyone want with a carload of paper doilies in these times? Apparently the W.P.B. was holding them up. The other day it was, ah, sanitary tissue. The army requirements for sanitary tissue seem abnormally high to me."

"That reminds me," said Mrs. Courtney. "We're inviting four soldiers from the camp to come and have dinner with us Sunday afternoon."

"General Bartlett and his staff?"

"Don't be silly, John. This is war work, not a social affair. I've phoned the local U.S.O. to send four enlisted men who have no homes to visit. It's the least we can do."

"But I just bought a suitcase full of War Savings Bonds, Evadna."

"That's not a sacrifice, that's an investment."

"All right," said Mr. Courtney. "I'm for army morale as much as you are. But there's an inconsistency of some sort here. Six months ago you had me donate a big check to the U.S.O. to build places of entertainment for the soldiers, and now when they're built you won't let them stay there and entertain themselves."

"My wrists are too tired to argue. By the way, I've put your name in to act as air-raid warden."

"What!"

"You'll be in charge of this side of the block we live in."

"But I don't know how to be an air-raid warden," Mr. Courtney protested plaintively.

"Of course you don't. That's what I brought this manual home for. Study it thoroughly, and then I'll pass on your qualifications."

"You'll pass on my qualifications, Evadna?"

"Certainly," said Mrs. Courtney. "I've been given charge of the district."

"Okay," said Mr. Courtney, shrugging his shoulders resignedly. "I'm for an all-out effort too, you know. But—"

"But what?"

"Well, I don't exactly agree that you and I should try to win the whole war singlehanded."

Mrs. Courtney's expression assumed a quality which would have halted a dive bomber in mid-air. "Just wear a dinner jacket, John. It's to be quite informal."

"You mean for this air-raid warden business?"

"Really, John! I'm talking about the dinner for the soldiers on Sunday. They're to be here at four sharp."

Mrs. Courtney was a good deal surer of that than was Sergeant Smoot.

"Why does everything haff to go ahead and happen to me?" he demanded of his three pals, Corporals Harrison Hyler, Corky Smith, and Ortwingle.

They were still in barracks. The Sunday afternoon sun was waning. Corky Smith lay in his long woolen drawers, hands clasped behind his neck, and admired his feet. Obviously his three subordinates were deliberately torturing him. "Why shouldn't everything happen to you?" said Corky as he wriggled his toes. "My ole grandmother use to say that before everybody dies he a'w'ys gits what's comin' to him. She use to say that the Lord works in mischievous ways His wonders to proform."

"But what is this here hostess at the U.S.O. gonna think of me if we don't arrive at this old dame's house?" Smoot pleaded.

"It is my estimation that the worse she could think of you would be flattery," said Ortwingle. "Why should we go to some ole dame's house?"

"Yeah," said Corky Smith. "It ain't no rules in the regulations which says that we have got to eat in any ole dame's house."

"How would you know what the regulations says," Smoot demanded. "You can't even read the letters on them children's toy blocks."

Corky Smith flexed his arms. "That's all right," he said. "A dog can't read either, but he knows enough not to stick his nose into a mousetrap."

"Listen, fellers," said Sergeant Smoot. "Please! This isn't jist no personal matter of keepin' a promise. It is the honor of the whole U. S. Army which is at stake, see."

"How do you figger to arrive at that there conclusion?" asked Ortwingle.

"It's the duty of the army in wartime to keep up the civilian morale. If it's gonna keep some ole dame happy for four soldiers to eat at her house, that is a very small sacrifice to make. Ain't that right, Harrison?"

"Theoretically I agree with you, of course," said Hyler. "It is incumbent upon the military to instill confidence in the civil population. However, you must concede that army regulations are strangely silent on the matter of accepting dinner invitations. If my confrère here chooses to lie in his underthings and admire his feet in preference to accepting a social engagement, I fear he is wholly within his rights."

"You too, huh?" said Sergeant Smoot. "Okay. Well, all I kin say is that for guys who love their bellies more than they love their country, you are all makin' a great mistake."

"You mean we'll be missin' out on a big feast?" said Corky.

"Look," said Sergeant Smoot. "This here John P. Courtney is prob'ly about one of the biggest railroad magnets in the country. Try to imagine what you'd have every night for supper if you was a railroad magnet."

"Roast goose smothered with lamb chops," said Corky Smith.

"Don't let him weaken you," said Ortwingle. "He is jist tryin' to appeal to your basic nature."

"Or Chinese peasants on toast," said Corky Smith.

Harrison Hyler cut short the torture. "I suppose we ought to go anyway, boys. In a sense Smooty is right. Facing bullets in defense of one's country is an honor, but making some good lady happy is a stern duty. Let no one say of an American soldier that he saw his duty and wouldn't do it."

"I'd rather stir up a crap game somewhere," said Ortwingle.

"Or maybe fried pork tenderlion," said Corky Smith. "Fried pork tenderlion and johnnycake. Do you think this ole dame that we are gonna eat at her house kin work us up a batch of johnnycake, Smoot?"

"Never mind that," said Sergeant Smoot. "If I ketch you reachin' out in front of this dame to spear yourselfs the biggest steak offn the platter I'll stab you with a fork. Come on, Orty. Climb into them britches, and be sure to fix them claws of yourn, because in the high society this Mrs. Courtney travels around in they don't wait till they git to the dinner table to start manicurin' their fingernails."

"How do you know what they do in high society?" Ortwingle demanded.

Smoot became preoccupied with his necktie. "If you must know," he admitted not too willingly, "I— Well, I been readin' this book by Elsie Post jist in preparation for this emergency. A sergeant never knows what he will be called on to do next."

When they arrived finally at the Courtney residence a small baldheaded man with a severe face took their caps. They stood waiting for a few moments in a round, white-paneled reception alcove.

"I bet people could live in this here house all their lifes and still never git to meet each other," said Corky Smith. "What makes somebody ever want with all these rooms?"

"They don't want 'em, you dope," said Smoot. "A house as big as this needs a whole corpse of servants, and when you have a whole corpse of servants, you need a house as big as this to make room for 'em."

"I'm starved," said Corky. "I ain't had a thing to eat since a couple of hours ago. Boy, I sure hope this here ole dame puts out with a nice mess of groceries. My stummick feels like my throat is been disconnected for repairs."

Just then Mrs. Courtney herself sort of sailed up off the horizon. She was gowned in a smooth-fitting, simple, mauve velvet, a Harry Blumenfeld original. "Do come along into the drawing room, boys. We're happy and proud to have you with us. I'm Mrs. Courtney, of course."

"Yes ma'am," said Sergeant Smoot. "Uh, Corporal Hyler, may I present Mrs. Courtney?" He had a vague recollection that according to Elsie Post it was supposed to be the other way around, but it was too late to worry about that now. Anyway, the hell with Elsie Post. She was pre-war stuff.

"Corporals Hyler and Ortwingle and Smith. There, you see I'm very good at names. And this, boys, is Mr. Courtney."

"Mighty decent of you chaps to honor us, I must say," said Mr. Courtney. "A manly quartet of young soldiers, Evadna."

"No, sir," said Ortwingle in all modesty. "None of us except Smoot here sings a note, and he sings like a sea lion with a fish stuck in his throat."

"How very droll," said Mrs. Courtney. "Well, anyway, here's Charles with something for us to drink."

A pimply-faced guy in a white jacket came in with a trayful of drinks.

"Ginger ale," said Mrs. Courtney. Smoot had already choked on his. "Our little contribution to sobriety for the duration. Since the outbreak of war we've locked our wine cellars."

"My ole grandmother found a dead man in her cellar once," said Corky Smith.

"Really!"

"It was a myst'ry," Corky added. "The County wanted my ole grandmother to bury him and my ole grandmother said the County oughta bury him."

"And what happened?" asked Mrs. Courtney, fascinated.

"Nothin'," said Corky Smith. "While the County and my ole grandmother was arguin' about it the dead man jist disappeared."

"What an unusual story," said Mr. Courtney.

"That's what us kids figgered," said Corky Smith. "My grandmother a'w'ys did have the reputation of bein' a awful ole liar."

"Dinner is served, madam," the servant announced.

“Tell us all about the army, Sergeant,” said Mrs. Courtney after they were seated.

Corky Smith was staring at the muscular little grapefruit, a pale cherry sitting vaguely in the middle of it, resting in the huge silver chafing dish before him. “It’s hot!” he grunted under his breath to Corporal Hyler. He wasn’t afraid of being heard. His host and hostess were half a mile away at either end of the table. “Somebody is tryin’ to kid somebody. No one ever et no hot grapefruit in their lifes.”

“Well, lady,” Sergeant Smoot was shouting, “the trouble with the army is that there is too much chance for advancement. Before you know it you wind up as a corporal or sergeant, and that is the end of bein’ any fun in this world.”

“How quaint,” said Mrs. Courtney. “Surely you’re being facetious. I should be proud indeed to serve my country as a sergeant.”

“It ain’t no life for a lady, ma’am,” said Smoot. “But if they will let you inlist up I’ll be on’y too glad to teach you the ropes and let you run my patoon.”

The second course consisted of a potage Crécy, a clear soup with a carrot floating around in it. Corky Smith commented in his foghorn undertone that it tasted like some particularly delicious type of rainwater. “Somebody is astin’ a carrot to proform the impossible,” he said.

“So you were a philosophy student when you were inducted,” Mrs. Courtney was speaking to Harrison Hyler.

“Yes. I’m afraid I lived a rather sheltered life. I’d intended to take my Ph.D and then go on and teach other philosophy students the stuff I’d learned out of books. However, it seems to me that some of our philosophical concepts need overhauling when the world political structure permits a puling little guttersnipe like Herr Hitler to overturn the universe.”

“Oh, quite,” said Mr. Courtney.

“He goes whole days,” said Smoot, “without ever gittin’ one of them spells. Jist make belief like you didn’t hear him.”

“I’m beginnin’ slowly to starve to death,” muttered Corky Smith. “Maybe this ole dame is a fifth or six colonist hired by them yellow monkeys to starve the army to death one by one.”

“Shut up,” said Ortwingle. “All this stuff is a preelute to the preliminaries. It’s a lawr in high society to show a guy kin still laugh and talk while he is starvin’. In a minute the guys will come out with turkeys and pigs with apples in their mouths and roast sheeps on big platters, like they done in a movie I once seen.”

As a matter of fact the entrée consisted of half a squab on golden mandarin service plates the size of sewer covers. The squab looked like sparrows that had just undergone a long severe winter. The men who brought them from the kitchen didn't even laugh. There were also some diced parsnips and a tomato that had been emasculated and filled with something that tasted to Corky Smith like hardwood sawdust.

"This is a very special occasion for me," said Mr. Courtney. "I'm eating just about everything on the calendar. Ordinarily I have to stick to skimmed milk and Melba toast. Atrophy of the large intestine, you know. I feel rather like Henry the Eighth, but I suppose I'll pay for it tomorrow."

"I'll pay for this tomorrow myself," Smoot mumbled to himself.

For dessert there was a water ice and some wafers. "Isn't these what they crumple up and feed to goldfish?" asked Corky.

When the men had finished dinner, or rather when none of them could spy anything more to eat, Mrs. Courtney asked if they wouldn't like to retire for coffee and cigarettes. They all would.

"At lease we'll git a hot cup o' Java in our insides," said Ortwingle out of the corner of his mouth.

When the huge silver coffee service had been brought Mrs. Courtney poured. Naturally it was demi-tasse.

"This is very beautiful china," said Corporal Hyler, balancing the tiny cup and saucer delicately between both hands. Corky Smith was afraid to pick his up.

"Thank you," said Mrs. Courtney. "It was left me by my great-great uncle, Captain Ephraim Jones, who had it from the Ranee of Rhangpore. One or two lumps?"

"Puttin' a lump o' sugar in one of them cups," Ortwingle said under his breath to Corky Smith, "is like tryin' to drown a cat in a bowl of soup. In fact, I'm so hungry still I'd be glad to have a bowl of soup that a cat had been drownded in."

"Jist wait until we git out o' here," said Ortwingle. "This is all Smoot's fault. He must of knew what was gonna happen from readin' that book by Elsie Post."

Mr. Courtney put a symphony recording on the Capehart.

"My god!" said Corky Smith. Stokowski apparently was imprisoned inside the box with the whole Philadelphia orchestra and would either fight his way out or bust a blood vessel trying.

Eventually it was time to go.

"I trust you've enjoyed yourselves, boys," said Mrs. Courtney. "The value of relaxation in times of stress must never be underestimated."

"Thank you both," said Corporal Hyler. "It's been a memorable evening."

They climbed back in the rattletrap Ford they'd hired from Benny MacClusky at one dollar and fifty cents per hour. No one said anything for a while. Finally Ortwingle asked in a low voice, controlled but pregnant with sinister overtones, "Well, soldiers. What's the worst thing anybody kin think to do to him?"

"Now listen, you guys," said Smoot. "I—"

"That is easy," said Corky Smith. "Jist make him that he is got to take us to the White House cafeteria and buy us all at lease six hamburger samwidges apiece."

11

A DAY WITH DEBUTANTES

CAPTAIN JAMES, the regimental adjutant, banged down the phone. The West Pointer exhibited a smooth pink face and a boyish mop of blond hair; at one moment his language could be as sweet as soothing syrup, the next as violent as a talented mule-skinner. "Damn these blankety people!" he exclaimed.

"Sir?" said his clerk.

"I said blank these people," stormed the captain. "Blank them to hell!"

"Yes sir," said the clerk.

"I don't like that Intelligence officer." Captain James was an infantryman who didn't like anybody not of the line. Quartermaster and Supply people were an evil only problematically necessary. He hated Ordnance men, the Medical Corps. On maneuvers he kept yelling for the stretcher bearers to get to hell out of the way or he'd have them carried off the field on stretchers. As for the men in the Public Relations and Intelligence offices, they were his particular detestation. "The sons of dashes," he'd say. "The way to encourage public relations is to win some blank-damned battles."

"What do they want now?" asked the adjutant's clerk mildly.

"They want some non-commissioned officers. If there were any non-coms in this regiment we could spare I'd see that they got busted."

"I'm sure Captain Hitchcock can loan us some from L Company."

Captain James sighed. "All right. But it's a hell of a way to run an army."

On their way to headquarters in the wake of the regimental messenger, Smoot said to Hyler, "I can't figger out why we are bein' sent for. We are gonna be courtmartialed and flang into the can prob'ly."

"Maybe this here regimental messenger knows what this Captain James wants us four guys for," said Ortwingle.

"I'm just a cab driver out in civilian life that got grounded for the duration," said the messenger. "All I learned so far in the army is Mess Call and Pay Call. Even if I listened close I wouldn't know what anybody was talkin' about."

Smoot knocked at the adjutant's door.

"These are the four non-commissioned officers, sir," said the clerk.

"Well, what do they want?" demanded Captain James.

"You sent for them."

"Oh, yes. That damned Public Relations office. Here, what have you fellows been doing with yourselves in the afternoons?"

Smoot looked at Hyler and Hyler looked blank. "We been playin' Kelly which we sometimes switch off to straight pool jist for a change," Smoot admitted.

Captain James wiped the perspiration from his pink forehead. Profanity rolled off his tongue in a fluent stream. "Holy blanked sacred deity, am I a regimental adjutant or a figment of Lewis Carroll's imagination? Kelly pool and debutantes! The whole damned thing's a non-sequitur."

"Yes sir," said Smoot.

"There are a couple of million Germans and another couple of million Japs whom we shall no doubt permit you to annihilate all in due time. But for the moment the lousy damned blanking Public Relations officer would like to borrow your services."

"Very good, sir," said Smoot. "What are we suppose to do now?"

"How in the all-fired name of a beloved heavenly figure do I know? Report with your three corporals to Lieutenant Jones at the Intelligence office, or whatever they call it."

"I don't guess I know where that is, sir."

"If some hot-headed patriot hasn't already burned it down, it's in the Quartermaster building."

"Very good, sir," said Smoot.

"I'm glad you think so," said the captain.

"Public Relations," said Ortwingle on their way over to report to Lieutenant Jones. "Does that mean a person's relations that are on the public payroll?"

"No," said Hyler. Because Harrison Hyler had been educated at college it was incumbent upon him to explain anything, from the reasons why water swirled down the drain in opposite directions in the Eastern and Western hemispheres to the unaccountable length of the elephant's gestation. "No," said Hyler. "The purpose of the Army Public Relations office is to make sure that the soldiers and civilians pester each other according to regulations."

"It don't make hardly no sense to me," said Ortwingle.

"My ole grandfather who finely kilt hisself one day by a barn fallin' on him," Corky Smith related, "was a veterine of the Civilian War between the States on the Confederate side."

"That don't make no sense to me also," said Ortwingle.

"I ain't come to the part that makes sense," Corky protested. "My ole grandfather knew a girl down South who could cook very nice southern fried chicken, so he inlisted with the Confederates and all through the war he had public relations with this girl and finely when peace was let loose he married her and she turned out in the end to be my grandmother. I bet the movies could make another movie like *Gone With the Wind* out of stuff my ole grandfather could tell them if he wasn't dead."

"Maybe," said Smoot sarcastically, "maybe they could still hire him to write one of them screen plays on a ouija board. Well, here we are. This premonition inside me gets more foreboding the closer I git to this Public Relations office."

"Sit down, men," said Lieutenant Jones. "Ah—er—we have a task. Well, a sort of task." The lieutenant didn't seem to know quite how to explain. "Not a task, exactly. The truth is, we have four young Junior Leaguers on our hands—"

"I hope there is a fast-ball pitcher in them," said Corky Smith. "That's what we need worst on our team, a fast-ball pitcher."

"I'm afraid you misunderstand. These Junior Leaguers aren't ball players, they're debutantes."

"Wimmin?" Smoot blinked.

"Well, girls. Society girls, you might call them. Anyway their papas are somebody. They want to entertain four soldiers."

"As far as I am concerned," said Hyler curtly, "I didn't join the army to be patronized."

"Don't be stuffy, my boy. One wins a war the best way one can," said the lieutenant. "I wanted to join the Air Force and drop bombs on Tokyo, and look what they have me doing."

"I wanted to be a aviater too," said Corky Smith, "on'y they tole me I was too old for the amount of time I went to school. There wasn't no schools that went higher than the fifth grade in Oskaloosa County, so after commencement I had to go to work and that's the reason why they won't let me join up with the Air Corpse."

"However that may be, I wish you fellows would see that these four young ladies have a nice time."

"Well, I figger we been ast to do about everything else so far in this here conflict except stick bayonets into some Japs," said Smoot, "so I guess we kin take on some deputants."

"A waitress is the best kind of a girl to take out," said Corky Smith, "because from standin' on their feet all day they will almost sit on anybody's lap to git a rest."

"How do you go about actin' with a society dep—with one of them dames?" Ortwingle wanted to know.

The lieutenant smiled. "Just be yourself, I should imagine. Perhaps they'll take you men to the Lido and introduce you to café society. I understand the father of one of the girls owns the process for making synthetic rubber. He's a dollar-a-year man in Washington."

"If that's all they're willin' to pay for it," said Corky Smith, "no wonder it is such a tire shortage."

"Anyway, best of luck," said the lieutenant, "and don't let the army down. A chauffeur in a limousine is waiting at the reception center to whisk you off to town."

"Maybe this ain't gonna turn out to be so bad after all," said Corky Smith on their way to the reception center. "If I on'y git to ride in a limousine it will be a new experiment for me. Already I am got a strong taste for high society because I hear there is a fan dancer at that Lido Club who she wears so little clothes on that all the policemen fights amongst themselfs to see who gits to raid the place every now and then."

"For my part," said Smoot, "I will be glad to welcome a respite from roughnecks that I got to associate with as a general rule. Once in a while it is a change to glance at the finer things in life and converse with the better elements. I wouldn't care to be a member of a high social spear continually, but once in a while a guy would like to know how the upper crust tastes."

"Oh boy!" exclaimed Corky. "There's our limousine, which all it needs is a couple of wings to make it into a B-24. Well, if you ast me, this guy must sell plenty of that sympathetic rubber to somebody beside Washington, because at a dollar a year it would take him since the Revolutionary War to save the money to buy a boat like this. With me together beside a beautiful deputant in a limousine I think I would be able to go places."

"Deputants," said Smoot, "always have a chaparral with them, accordin' to what this Elsie Post says."

The automobile slid smoothly away. "I see a movie one day," said Corky, "in which the chauffeur of this rich dame's car was in reality a spy at the head of a spy ring who—"

"Did you ever see a movie once," asked Smoot, "in which they choked somebody because all he ever done was tell about the movies he seen?"

"No," said Corky, "but I git the hint."

The limousine drew up under the portico of a tall white mansion. "This is what I call society," said the irrepressible Corky. "I bet there must of been rich people in my ancestors, because it would not take me very long to git used to feelin' at home in a joint like this."

"I am Mrs. Fowler," said a tall, white-haired lady. "So nice of you to come. The girls will be down presently. Show the gentlemen into the garden, Franklyn."

Franklyn showed them into the garden and in a moment had brought them frosted drinks in tall crystal glasses. Ortwingle stared at the blue-tiled swimming pool, the grass tennis courts, the ping-pong equipment, the white enameled tables with glass tops under bright-colored umbrellas.

"I bet a girl who she owns a swimmin' pool is a simple matter to fall in love with her," observed Corky Smith.

"As I am the rankin' non-com here," said Sergeant Smoot, "I am givin' out a order for you guys to watch your language amongst these deputants because a soldier in the uniform of Uncle Sam is suppose to make believe he is a gentleman even if it kills him."

"I kin hardly wait until I git my pants off," said Corky Smith, "in order to leap into that swimmin' pool. Yes sir. First I like to take a swim, then lay on the grass and git some nice sun, then ast this Franklyn to fry us some bacon and eggs, then have a good dinner with roast turkey on the menu, then take in a double feature movie and finely wind up at the Lido Club to see this fan dancer."

At this point the Junior Leaguers came into the garden. "I'm Barbara Fowler," said the tallest of the girls. Smoot took it upon himself to introduce

his fellow soldiers. “They wanted to send us some officers,” Barbara explained, “but we told them what they could do with their officers.”

“What?” said Corky Smith.

“Be yourself, honey,” said Barbara. “Come on, let’s push off. What do a bunch of virile young warriors do on an odd afternoon?”

“Generally we shoot Kelly pool until we ketch somebody with three or four pills in his pocket,” said Corky Smith. “But it’s okay with us if we jist sit around here and swim and eat turkey and talk about the stock market.”

“Oh, let’s get away from this place,” said Barbara. “I never come here except to sleep. Don’t you guys know about some joint that we couldn’t get into unless we were with soldiers?”

“Yes, do let’s go to a joint,” said one of the other girls.

As they drew him forcibly away, Corky gazed back longingly over his shoulder at the cool tennis courts, the swimming pool, the awninged tables. “I think we jist as soon lay around and—”

“Don’t be a droop, boy,” said Barbara. “Wind yourselves up and let’s get going.”

“And I thought I was gittin’ into a high social stratosphere at last,” moaned Corky Smith under his breath.

They had some drinks in some places. “That lemonade,” said Barbara to Harrison Hyler, “is going to give you a sick headache tomorrow.” She had an inspiration. “Let’s drive over to Fenmore Park and see if we can stir up some fun. These dumps are dead.”

Ortwingle’s jaw fell. “That’s all we ever do when we come to town is hang around Fenmore Park.”

“So much the better,” said Barbara.

Fenmore Park was an amusement center with a gayway. Smoot & Company had shot so many clay pigeons there they’d begun to feel sorry for them. They’d had their weight guessed, won Kewpie dolls, and whistled at stenographers so often they could do it in their sleep. Alicia voted for the Tunnel of Love but Barbara wanted the roller coaster. “Don’t you simply adore hot dogs?” said Alicia in a muffled voice through a mouthful of roll. Alicia’s father owned half the cows in the Southwest and was trying to get his hands on the other half.

“Roller coasters kinda leaves my stummick in two different places,” protested Ortwingle.

“I rather have a table in the Lido Club right close to the fan dancer,” Corky Smith sighed.

Harrison Hyler smiled at Smoot grimly. “I think the copy of Emily Post’s book you’re familiar with must be the 1905 edition.”

“Deputants! The trouble with bein’ in the army,” muttered Sergeant Smoot as the roller coaster pulled up the steep climb, “is that for some unbeknownst reason everything happens to me. All I have ever ast for in this life is to fight about a thousand Japs singlehanded, but instead of any fun like that I am gave the assignment to ride on roller coasters with deputants. I guess I was born under an unlucky omen.”

“What’s that you say, Sergeant?” shrieked Barbara.

“I said if I ever fell into a diamond mine I would prob’ly come up holdin’ the bag,” said Smoot.

“You’re a card, Sarge,” she laughed. “I haven’t enjoyed myself so much since an uncle of mine busted his leg.”

Later, having all of this they could stand, Smoot protested gravely that a new regulation required them to be in barracks before dark. Gloomily they rode back to camp in the limousine.

“Anyway,” said Corky Smith philosophically, “we got at lease a quick glance at them tennis courts and swimmin’ pools and butlers.”

“I tole you guys I felt a forboding premonition of things to come,” said Sergeant Smoot. “Here,” he said.

“What do I want with it?” Ortwingle demanded as he opened the limousine window and dropped the big Kewpie doll out on its head.

“You should of kept it as a mimento of all the different battles you been in durin’ the war,” said Smoot.

“I don’t want no mimento of this here battle,” said Ortwingle. “My stummick is become enemies with them frankfurters I et since we shot down on that roller coaster.”

“Look,” said Corky Smith. “If you guys ain’t too tired after bein’ run ragged by them high social deputants, how about we tell this here monkey to turn around and drive us back to the Lido Club. We done our duty for the army, now how about we have some fun on our own time? I feel a strong impulse that I haff to see a fan dancer shortly.”

Harrison Hyler tapped the chauffeur on the back. “Driver, we’ve changed our minds. The Lido Club.”

12

A SONG IN HIS HEART

MAYBE it was the fun they had had at the Lido. Maybe it was the absence of any additional screwball recruits, maybe it was time's healing salve but the non-coms of Company L's Fourth Platoon were enjoying a small respite from their heroic labors.

Something very odd was happening to Company L, as a matter of fact. Smoot was not quite able to articulate his impression, but it seemed to him that its members were slowly but surely beginning to adhere. It was like a jigsaw puzzle, in which the odd-shaped pieces had only now begun to fit themselves together into a sensible picture. Bradley and Charlie Bluehorse, Benny MacClusky and Fortesque, fat Holloway and Fleming and Wagnals and Rodzinski had miraculously become real soldiers. One by one the recruits had changed from raw, awkward civilians into members of a well-functioning platoon. One day soon the orders would come for the company to leave for the battlefront. Meanwhile, the non-coms were enjoying a moment of relaxation.

Corporal Ortwingle chewed the end of his pencil stub. "What's the matter with you guys?" he demanded. "Can't you see I'm tryin' to concentrate my brains?"

Corky Smith grunted. "I a'w'ys figgered Ortwingle's brains oughta be in a concentration camp."

"If you are writin' a letter to that crazy uncle of yours," said Smoot, "be careful not to put no military information into it."

"If I like to write a letter to my crazy uncle, that is my business," said Ortwingle. "On'y with the noise that is goin' on around here in this barrack a guy would be lucky if he could hear hisself think." Ortwingle turned to Harrison Hyler. "How many *m's* is it in plumbing, Hyler?"

"Just the one."

"Except that the peculiar part of it is that this don't happen to be no letter, in case it is any of anybody's business."

Gorky's curiosity was aroused. "What is it, your life's hist'ry?"

"This," said Ortwingle, "is a learig."

"Is that something that is already been invented?" said Sergeant Smoot.

"Certainly it's been invented. It is a war learig. You haff to be a kind of a genius to make up these here learigs."

"I never hear of a learig in my life before," said Corky Smith. "But if you haff to be a genius to do it, I bet yours is a stinkeroo."

"I think he means lyric. A song lyric," said Harrison Hyler.

"That's it, a learig. What I am writin' here is the words that you sing when somebody writes a song that needs a learig to go with it. This learig is called, *Okay, Mr. Hirohito*, and in it it tells the Japs where to git off at."

Corky Smith scratched his head. "You mean anybody, even Ortwingle, kin write songs?"

"Certainly jist anybody can't write learigs," Ortwingle protested indignantly. "A person is got to have talent. This here learig called *Okay, Mr. Hirohito* ain't finished yet, but I will read it out loud. It starts off:

"America, the gem of the ocean
Has went ahead and declared war.
Them Japanees monkies got the notion
To bombe Pearl's Harber, which made us sore.
Okay, Mr. Hirohito!
We except your challenge bold.
We will eventually squash you like a mosqueeto
And knock your navy cold.
Uncle Samy's coming
So watch you're open pluming—

"Are you sure," he demanded of Hyler, "that 'plumbing' is got on'y one *m*?"

"One *m*."

Ortwingle continued:

> "—So watch you're open pluming.
> You'll never know what struck you
> When Our Boys sail crost the Foam.
>
> CHORUS:
>
> "Hirohito, you think your terrific
> Way out there in the pacific,
> But we'll make you dants to Yankee doodle yet . . ."

"That's about as far as I am got," Ortwingle added. "I am writin' this war learig for the boys to sing while they are marchin' to meet the foe."

"Who the hell is this Hirohito?" asked Smoot.

"One of them Jap admirables, I guess. I dunno. Anyway, he's a bastard."

"Where you gonna git the music from to go with them words?" asked Smoot.

Ortwingle shrugged. "Where does the music come from that goes with the words of any song?"

"I don't know," said Smoot. "That's why I'm askin'."

"As soon as somebody that kin write music writes some that needs words to go with it," Ortwingle patiently explained, "why then there's the words all ready for him."

"It don't sound like no sense to me."

"It don't sound like no sense to me also," said Corky Smith.

Ortwingle was hurt. "I might of knew better than to read you guys the outpourings of my brains, because you ain't got no finer feelings. A person who he wants to help his country by composin' a patriotic war learig to inspire the troops which is goin' into battle ought to be gave a little encouragement instead of bein' made a mockery of. Oh well. They laughed at Ford and Columbus."

"Then what are you kickin' about?" Smoot demanded.

"Some day after this here cruel war is over and we have returned to pre-war normalcy, I guess I will prob'ly take up to be a real song writer in Tin

Pan Avenue. I figger I might even take a correspondence course in composin' music for my learigs."

"You mean you got other learigs wrote up beside this war learig?" said Corky Smith.

"Certainly I got other learigs. I got one here that is also practically a war song, on'y instead of being sang by our boys when they go out to meet the foe, this here one is suppose to be a love song that I call *Be True to the Boy in the Khaki Suit*." Ortwingle fished around in his writing box. "Of course if you don't want to hear it, that is okay with me," he added modestly.

"I would not be able to sleep all night if we didn't hear this new learig," said Smoot.

"Well, the first voice starts off the way I have it here, it starts off:

"Since I been called to the colers, dear
You're face is a'w'ys in my mind;
I figure if I don't see you soon
I am very liable to go blind.
But your back home in Tennessee
While I am serving the Nation,
So do not pine,
As I am fine,
And some day I'll come back to you.

CHORUS:

"Be true to the boy in the Kahkey suit,
For no bullit can kill true love.
Remember the lad, and the fun you had,
For he still thinks your kinda cute.
Remember he was inducted against his will,
So don't let no worker in a arrowplane factery named Bill
Steel you're effections away.
Be true to the boy in the Kahkie suit,
And he'll come back some day."

"I think I got a typographical spelling of a misplaced letter in the word 'khaki,' but I figger the proofreaders'll ketch all them minor things when these here songs go to press. This song is what is known in the profession of learig writin' as a ballot."

"Maybe," said Sergeant Smoot, "maybe it is something you et."

"Is that a crack?"

"No. Why would I want to go ahead and make a crack? I jist thought maybe something you et disagreed with you and give you the nightmares."

"Why is it," Ortwingle demanded rhetorically, "that in the army if a person is got an unnatural talent in the line of some artistic endeavor everybody thinks they got to make a mockery of him?"

"I ain't makin' no mockery of you, Orty," said Smoot. "On'y it couldn't do no harm to report on sick call in the mornin' and let the doc look into you with a X-ray. Sometimes it is very possible to ketch a pretty serious disease in its infancy that way."

"Nuts," said Ortwingle.

Harrison Hyler tried to soothe the songwriter's ruffled feelings. "Of course I don't pretend to be expert in the matter of popular lyrics, but it does seem to me that Ortwingle's verses do definitely display a certain characteristic style, an imaginative something that one might conceivably term *flair*."

"Yeah," said Ortwingle. "It not on'y takes a person to be a genius in order to write learigs, but it is hard work."

"If it is hard work," said Corky Smith, "what is the sense to doin' it? Any person that he works when he kin be sleepin' is out of his right mind."

"That is your opinion, because there isn't no artistic feelings in you that bursts to be relieved," said Ortwingle. "It is prob'ly hard work for a martingale to sing them high notes, but what would the world be if all the birds laid down on the job and never done nothin' but sleep? The trouble is, you jist don't understand a person that he has a song in his heart."

"Ortwingle, of course, is right," said Harrison Hyler. "The ebullience of nature has inspired poets since time immemorial. Genius is never to be denied, but must needs express itself in song or poem or story. Impractical as art sometimes is, it nevertheless sums up the sweet yearnings and dreams of humankind. Whether song lyrics such as Ortwingle composes are to be classified as art may be a moot point, but they do unquestionably express the flowering of the creative urge."

"That's what I mean," said Ortwingle. "At lease around in this army there is one guy who is got some finer feelings down underneath him."

"Why, I thank you," said Hyler.

"I got one here that is prob'ly the best one of all," said Ortwingle.

"One what?"

"One song learig."

"Now wait a minute—"

"Okay," said Ortwingle. "Okay. All I said is that the one I got here is prob'ly the best one of all. I didn't say I would read it."

"For myself, I'd like to hear it very much," said Hyler.

"So would I," said Smoot. "Because with my imagination I have got it doped out already that we are gonna hear it whether we want to or not."

"The hell with you guys," said Ortwingle. "To read you one of my ballots is like castin' pearls into the Rhine."

"What's it about?" asked Hyler.

"It's a song about a draftee. I call it *The Draftee's Lament*. In a way it's kind of sad. But you monkeys ain't got no finer feelings, so what is the use to go ahead and be made a mockery of?"

"We won't laugh at you, Orty," said Corky Smith. "What would we laugh at you for when we feel sorry for you?"

"All right. Kid all you want. But some day, when my name is up in lights, it will be a horse of another color."

"I'm quite sincere," said Hyler. "Read it for me, anyway."

"Well, okay." Ortwingle drew out the wrinkled sheet of foolscap with a great show of diffidence. "If you other guys don't want to hear this, jist close your ears."

Corky Smith cupped his chin in his hands and stared ahead of him gloomily. "I hope this draftee's lament ain't too sad," he murmured, "because I cry very easy. I a'ways haff to bring three hankerchiffs with me to a sad movie."

"Aw, the hell with it," said Ortwingle, disgusted.

"Come on, git it over with," said Smoot. "The longer you wait the worst it is, like sittin' in a dentist's office listenin' to some guy howlin' inside."

"This here song would sound better if it already had music wrote to fit it, so I'll kind of sing it as I go along and that will at lease give you some idear of the way it should go." Ortwingle cleared his throat. "This song is entitled *The Draftee's Lament*."

"You said that a dozen times."

"And it starts off:

"In Civilian life I was goin along okay
Mindin' my business in every way.
Then along come Hitler, who is rotten to the core,
And he went ahead and started this war.
So F. D. R. who is prety quick hisself on the tricker
Set down and he begun to figure
A lawr out to draft guys for militery dutie
To keep the axes from runnin off with the bootie.
Then one fine day
In the mery month of May
The draft Board sent me this notice,
And to trainin camp I went away.

CHORUS:

"My mother didn't raise me up to be a soldier,
But Uncle Samy went and changed my mothers mind.
All I do is drill and run
With a gun out in the sun,
And I never git a sergeant that is kind.
My mother never thought I'd be in Karki,
Under the toughest Captain anyone could find.
She didn't know her pride and joy
Would become a soldier-boy,
But uncle Samy went and changed my mothers mind."

"Of course later," said Ortwingle, "I will haff to write out a second voice to go with this ballot. As soon as somebody composes some music to—"

The impetuous notes of a bugle call sounded in the company street, the sharply-trilled triplets of First Call for Retreat.

"The trouble with buglers," said Corky Smith, "is that they never know enough when to blow them horns. In the mornin' it is too early, and in the afternoon it is too late."

"That is some joke," said Ortwingle. "It is so subtle I don't even get it."

"Come on, come on," ordered Smoot. "Is this a army or a debatin' society?"

"Okay," murmured Ortwingle. "Some day my song learigs will wring their way into the hearts of the great American public, and then you guys will prob'ly go around braggin' that you knew me when I was jist a common ordinary soldier."

“God help the Japs if Ortwingle here is jist a common ordinary American soldier,” said Smoot.

“I knew I should of never read them learigs,” Ortwingle said dolefully, shaking his head. “I should of jist—”

“You will be writin’ them song learigs on the walls of the guardhouse if you don’t quit mumblin’ to yourself and git outside for Retreat,” said Sergeant Smoot.

“Okay, okay. But some day he who laughs last will be wearin’ the shoe on the other foot, that’s all I got to say.”

13

DOWN ON THE FARM

"THIS is worst than the worse thing that is ever happened to me in the entire past tense," groaned Sergeant Smoot. "This claps the climax!"

"What's the matter?" said Ortwingle. "Have they went ahead and promoted you into a higher rank?"

"No, but it is almost something jist as worst. This is like bein' hit with a piece of heavy irony." Smoot shook his head dolefully and held out an official envelope with its contents for Corporal Ortwingle's inspection.

Ortwingle's mouth fell open. "A seven-day furlough. Well, what is so contemptible about a seven-day furlough? You must of went ahead and applied for it, otherwise they wouldn't of gave it to you."

"I been applyin' for a furlough since about three years before Pearl's Harbor," Smoot said glumly. "I guess it is a gremlin which is been hidin' in my barrack bag to find out the psychological moment that I am not got a cent in my pocket to tell them at Headquarters it is still two weeks to payday and now is the perfect time to issue Smoot his furlough."

"Maybe Corky Smith will advance you a private loaned of some dough."

"Smith," said Smoot sourly. "Corky Smith reminds me of ole Prince Midas who everything he touched turned to gold. On'y in Smith's case the

example is jist backwards. Every time Corky Smith touches gold it turns into nothin'."

"I got sixty cents, if that will be any help to you."

Smoot completely ignored this exhibition of Ortwingle's liberality. "The tragedy part of the whole thing is that once a soldier is been issued a furlough he's cut off the mess sergeant's ration allowance for the duration of his leave." Not eating for seven days in succession was a somewhat melancholy prospect.

"Maybe me and Hyler and Corky kin sneak you some scraps out of the kitchen," said Ortwingle brightly.

"A ominous intuition tells me it is about time to start wishin' I was never born. I guess I am one of life's little haphazards," Smoot sighed. "My fate is a kind one—the screwy kind. I figger I am the darling of misfortune. I could hold every ticket in a lottery and I still wouldn't win. If the worse that happens to me is that nothin' ever turns out right, I think I'm lucky. Under socialism, where everybody is suppose to be equal, I bet the government would haff to start me off with a million dollars. I couldn't come out ahead if the dice was loaded, the cards stacked, and I had special permission from President Roosevelt to use soap coupons for money."

"What do you want me to do," said Ortwingle, "lend you a hankerchiff? I already offered to give you the loaned of my last sixty cents without no security."

"Look at this!" exclaimed Corky Smith, bursting into the room. He waved an envelope in front of him. "I am been gave a seven-day furlough that I forgot I put in for! Boy oh boy!"

Smoot and Ortwingle paid virtually no attention to this explosion of enthusiasm. "A furlough is yesterday's news," said Smoot. "It is a cold potato. It is like somebody rushin' in excitedly and tellin' you Lincoln jist freed the slaves." Smoot showed him his own leave. "Furloughs is as common around here as dopes in my patoon."

Corky Smith's face fell. "Oh. Well, when I received this furlough I immediately begin to worry where any jack is gonna come from to go to town and tear up a few sidewalks, but then I figgered all I had to do was to ast Smoot for a small loaned of around a hundred bucks till payday. I didn't figger ole Smooty would also be gave a furlough at the same time."

"You mean you ain't got no dough either?"

"I got some money that slipped down into the lining of my coat," said Corky Smith. "It feels like either a dime or a penny."

“I don’t think we are gonna be able to sneak enough scraps out of the mess hall to feed both you guys,” said Ortwingle.

Corporal Smith shook his head. “I kind of had my heart set on stuffin’ myself up with a lot of porterhouse steak smothered in pork chops, then stretchin’ out in some nice hotel suit and sleepin’ about eighty-five hours, and then finely after I felt good and rested to look around to see where some hell was bein’ raised and help ’em raise it. Now all my dreams has bursted like thin air into soap bubbles.”

“It is jist a matter of opinion,” Smoot told Corky, “as to whether it is sadder to have my hard luck with you, or go off some place and have it by myself.”

“Wow!” exclaimed Corky Smith. “Listen to this terrific inspiration that is jist struck my brain. I got a inspiration that will settle the whole problem of how to have a wonderful furlough in spite of the small matter of havin’ no money. The answer to the entire solution is my ole grandmother.”

“I thought that ole grandmother of yours was jist a pigment of your imagination that you made up on the spur of the moment out of whole cloth,” said Ortwingle.

“No sir. All we got to do is thumb a hitch to this farm in the country, and this grandmother of mine will throw out the welcome mat with open arms.”

“How far away do we haff to thumb a hitch to this old grandmother of yours’s farm?” said Smoot.

“It shouldn’t take us on’y a day or two. Boy, how I never thought of goin’ on no furlough to visit my ole grandmother shows how dumb I prob’ly am. Farm life is the on’y life, and wait until you see what my grandmother usually cooks for breakfist—first a stack of hotcakes swimmin’ in melted butter and maple surrip to lay a good foundation so that the real food don’t leak through, then comes a couple of mush melons and a pan of bakin’ powder biscuits and a half-a-dozen fresh eggs jist took from the hen house. Finely comes the real breakfist, composed of fried ham and sausages and hash brown batatoes and a couple of glasses of milk and some johnny cake and bacon a inch thick followed by a good healthy slice of hot mince pie. That’s the real country breakfist!”

Ortwingle swallowed uncomfortably. “I don’t suppose you guys would like to wait to see if I also could git a furlough.”

“Come on,” said Corky Smith to Smoot. “Seven days is a pretty short time to satisfy a appetite on a country farm.”

“I don’t know,” said Smoot doubtfully. “It sounds all right, but I still got this ominous intuition that tells me the best I kin expect is a catastropy.”

"How kin eatin' roast turkeys and lamb chops and pork tenderlions and sleepin' into feather-bed mattresses and stretchin' out before a blazin' log fire and listenin' to my old grandmother tell lies about killin' Indians barehanded in the good ole days turn out to be a catastropy?"

"I don't know. Maybe somethin' beautiful is about to happen to me jist to show me how unlucky I am the rest of the time. Well—" Smoot hesitated, then reluctantly took out his wallet and extracted a wrinkled, shopworn five-dollar bill. "This is a bill I been savin' for years for the case of some desperate emergency. It will prob'ly see us through if we need it for somethin' on the trip."

Corky blinked. "It on'y goes to prove you can't judge nobody by appearance's sake. I guess ole Smooty is got a heart underneath that harsh interior after all."

Later, out on the highway, Corky Smith sighed lightheartedly. "I feel like a eagle that has excaped out of his birdcage and is about to fly home to roast."

"We could use a pair of wings apiece," said Smoot. "A lot of automobiles don't seem to be passin' along this highway." Five miles later Smoot said, "Already my intuition tells me nothin' good is gonna come of this furlough."

"You're a'ways lookin' at the seemly side of life. Here's a milk truck now."

The driver said, "Hop up, soldiers."

"What's the matter that we don't see no cars?" said Smoot. "Is it a house has fell across the highway some place?"

"Haven't you boys heard of gas rationing?"

"We forgot all about that," said Corky Smith. "In the army we got jeeps that run all day on a squirt of Flit."

"Wish they'd draft me," said the truck driver wistfully. "Drivin' a truck on one cup of Java ain't much fun. How far you fellers goin'?" Corky told him and the driver said he could take them a good way. "I'm anxious to get home this trip—wife sent a special delivery letter sayin' she's holdin' two slices of bacon for me. This thirty-five speed limit gives you the idea you're a pioneer in a covered wagon. You boys had any pot-roast lately?"

"Yeah," said Smoot. "Why?"

"It's a privilege knowin' you. I never was lucky. Too young for the last war, too old for this one."

After dropping off at the truck's destination, Corky said, "That guy didn't make no sense to me. I still can't figger out what he was talkin' about."

"I guess we been in the army so long that people in private civilian life sounds a little screwy to our ears."

"How about eatin' a small repast in some restaurant?" said Corky. "I need a stop-gap to tidy me over until we arrive at my grandmother in the country's farmhouse."

"All right," said Smoot. "But order something that a little of it fills you, like bananas or dumplings or rock candy."

"For a light stop-gap to tidy me over I usually order corn beef and cabbage and cocoanut cream pie allamode."

"On my emergency five bucks," said Smoot, "you will haff to do without the allamode."

They sat up at the counter in the small restaurant and examined the menu critically. "This looks good," said Corky. "Hungarian galoshes."

"Sorry, soldiers," said the waitress. "Two spaghettis and meat balls," she called out to the cook. "We're fresh out of goolosh."

"Then how about some ham and eggs?" said Corky.

"We're fresh out of everything but spaghettis and meat balls," said the waitress, plumping the plates down in front of them.

"But how do you know we like spaghettis and meat balls?" said Smoot.

"If you don't like 'em, soldier, you should of stayed back in your camp. Ain't you ever heard we got a war on?"

"Yes ma'am," said Smoot, subdued. "Anyway, kin we have some coffee, about half cream?"

"I can give you some coffee, about half coffee," said the waitress.

"We ain't been around much," said Smoot. "Is it some congressman which is figgered a way that eatin' nothin' but spaghettis and meat balls will win us the war?"

"Don't ask me, soldier. I'm no claravoyant. All I know is that about eleven o'clock tomorrow mornin' we're also gonna be fresh out of spaghettis and meat balls, and then I'm enlistin' as a private in the WAACs."

The cook banged the coffee cups down inside his little grate. "Two anemics comin' up," he grunted.

"Maybe we would of done better at Ortwingle's suggestion to bring us some scraps from the mess hall," Smoot sighed.

"That's all right," said Corky optimistically. "Jist wait until we arrive in a little while at my ole grandmother's farmhouse." Outside again, they stood hopefully looking for another car to come along. "This gas rationing is okay, I guess," said Corky. "But it is too astringent. They at lease ought to allow

people enough gasoline in order to pick up and give a ride to the fightin' men of the armored forces who are layin' down their lifes for democracy."

"Anyway, you do enough layin' down," said Smoot. "Right now we better start hikin', because it's so dark already I can't see a face before my hand."

An occasional lift during the night on assorted trucks brought them at last within sight of their destination. "All our misapprehensions are about over," said Corky. "Jist around that bend in the road is this place in the country's of my ole grandmother. Will she be glad to see two conquered heroes returnin' from the wars!"

"I kin feel a ill omen runnin' up and down my spiral column," said Smoot. "If it turns out that we have a good time it'll be a big disappointment to me."

"Listen," said Corky Smith. "The minute my ole grandmother sees us she'll—"

"Well, I'm a cross-eyed pigeon if it ain't little Willie come home to see his granny!" exclaimed Corky's grandmother.

"This is Sergeant Smoot, Gramma."

"Big ugly devil, ain't he?" Grandma cackled. "Come in, come in. Well, well!"

"We got a seven-day furlough," said Corky, "and we're hungry."

"Any time a Smith ain't hongry he's been sewed up at both ends," declared Grandma, laughing. "Got a fine mess o' oatmeal slop a-cookin'. Take off your coats and shirts and set whilst I go fetch a mite o' skim milk. Oatmeal slop and skim milk is mighty fillin'."

At first they were too polite to say anything, but finally Corky could contain himself no longer. "Ain't you got no settin' hens, Gramma? Ain't you got cows that gives nothin' but skim milk? Ain't you cured no ten or twelve hawgs last fall? What's the matter, did somebody foreclose a morgidge or somethin'?"

"Listen at that boy raise gas! Got three hundred hens, but eggs is too expensive for folks to eat nowadays. War workers and sojers, them's the on'y one's kin eat eggs and hawg meat. Ain't you big overgrowed calfs heered they's a war on?"

"Sure we heard it," said Corky. "That's why we went ahead and ast for a seven-day furlough, to git a vacation from it."

"Well, well. Seems good to see a man agin," Grandma said. "Been milkin' an' chorin' an' curin' an' feedin' all by myself sense Harold, the hired man, left to go work on a airplane farm. You two big lazy devils is as

welcome as the flowers in May. Hurry up and git that slop swallered. They is some pairs of overhauls standin' up in the closet. Willie, I'll start you atotin' the pigs their mash. As for you, Major Smoot, fer years I been a-hungerin' to see this ole house take a paintin'. I'll point out where a fifty-gallon tub o' red lead is standin' in the wood shed. On and off it oughtn't to take more'n four-five days t'give it a coat. Look lively, men. Time's a-wastin'. If we don't git Hitler, he'll git us."

Smoot said something under his breath. It sounded like the growl of an infuriated bear. "Jist wait until I find you alone some place," he grunted at Corky Smith.

After supper that evening, Corky said, "I'm still hungry, Gramma. That soup is leakin' right through my crevices."

"Here's a nice piece of bacon rind to gnaw on, son. This is war times. Food is ammunition. Got to save it for our boys in the service."

"But we're our boys in the service, Granny," said Corky.

"Whoever relaxes helps the Axis, that's your ole grandma's motter. Be frugal and the bugle'll blow taps for the Japs. I'll set the alarm for two-thirty, boys. You kin start paintin' by the light o' them karosene lamps. Ought to have the weather side of the house done by sunup."

"But don't we git to have no ham and eggs and cornbread and pie for breakfist? I can't work on no empty stummick!"

"Paintin' ain't work, Willie—it's only fill-in ontil time to charn butter."

"I got a awful languish for a rare beefsteak, Gramma."

"Beefsteak? Why, boy, you got to have a ration card to git any beefsteak, and even then they on'y take the ticket and put you down for one after the war's over. Where you lads been o' late?"

"We been in the army," said Corky Smith.

"Well, that accounts for it. Enough of this fiddle-de-dee. Early to bed and early to rise, for when you're alseep you can't tell any lies."

At the end of the week Sergeant Smoot and Corporal Smith were hardly more than shadows of their former selves. "You boys is been a fine help to your ole granny, I'm a cross-eyed pigeon if you ain't," acknowledged Grandma Smith.

"I notice on the fence a sticker sayin' they got two double features at the Bijou Palace in the village," said Corky. "How about we all go in and celebrate the end of our furloughs?"

"Got no gasoline to go gallivantin' around the countryside," said Grandma.

"The three of us could all climb on Cross-Eye Nellie. It's on'y four miles to town."

"And have that mare chew up an extry bale o' hay?"

"But what does civilians do to have any fun in their lifes?" Corky demanded. "They can't ride no place, they can't have no pie allamode or beefsteaks—"

"Sest legare, as them foreign Latiners say," said Grandma philosophically.

In the morning Corky said, "Well, we got to leave in a couple of minutes." He sighed a vast sigh of relief.

"Wish you had a furlough to stay over another week. I been yearnin' to have the house wallpapered on the inside. What ain't to be jist ain't, however. Well, Major Smoot, if ever you git another leave you know where to come. The house looks pretty for certain. It's a proud piece o' dabbin' you did, boy."

"Yes, ma'am," said Sergeant Smoot. "I guess there ain't nothin' the matter with this sore, swelt-up arm that time won't cure."

"Anyway," said Corky Smith, "we had our furlough without spendin' much cash money."

"That is a real consolation," said Smoot, looking in his wallet to see if the remainder of his precious five-dollar bill were intact.

When Grandma Smith saw Smoot's money, she said, "Aha! Give that here, young man!" imperiously.

"What—?"

"Ain't you heered of inflation? Once inflation is let loose it's worst than a plagg o' locust. Jist a moment now." She went to a cupboard and withdrew a sheet of War Savings Stamps. "A fair exchange ain't no robbery," she asserted as she presented Smoot with the equivalent of his money in stamps. "Loose dollars is as bad as loose talk. I'm the volunteer agent to sell bonds and stamps around these here parts. It's a good thing for you I seen that money first, or Lord knows—"

"But we already am signed up to superscribe ten per cent of our pay envelopes for war bonds, Gramma."

"And little enough it is. Beat the Axis over the head with your taxes, that's your ole granny's motter."

"Well, we haff to leave by now," said Corky.

They walked wordlessly down the road, looking for a truck to come by. Smoot's brooding silence was unnatural, and finally Corky could stand it no

longer. “Ain’t you gonna say nothin’?” he mumbled uncomfortably.

“Huh?”

“I said, ain’t you gonna bawl hell out o’ me?” Not being bawled out left Smith frustrated, unsatisfied, and ill-at-ease.

“I been thinkin’.”

Corky looked at his partner quizzically. This was an unfamiliar side of Sergeant Smoot. “Thinkin’?”

“Yeah. I been workin’ out a new scheme to figger a way to git all the boys in camp to start sendin’ out chain letters to cheer up the civilians back home. We should tell them not to lose courage but to bear up with their hardships. We should maybe sent them a nice layer cake or something now and then, or maybe a cartoon of cigarettes if they are ladies.” Smoot sighed, not unhappily. “In the meanwhile, the soaner I git back to camp is not a minute too soon for me!”

14

AN OCEAN OF MELANCHOLY

SERGEANT SMOOT stood in the doorway and surveyed the deserted barrack. Each one of his features cooperated to produce an expression of profound tragedy. Smoot extracted a handkerchief from his back pocket and blew his nose noisily, the sound echoing hollowly against the wooden walls of the empty quarters.

Entering the room where his platoon had once been, he sat down on the springs of an unmattressed bunk and gave himself up to his emotions. A strong man in tears is a heartrending sight. "To think," he muttered in his wretchedness, "that the U. S. Army, to who I have gave some of the best moments of my whole life, should be doing this to me."

The sergeant, hearing a couple of pairs of footsteps approaching, blew one great final blast of his nose and put away his handkerchief. But his lower lip still quivered, like a heartbroken child's. He knew who the footsteps belonged to. Harrison Hyler and Corky Smith and Smoot were all the soldiers who were left of Company L.

"Hello," said Harrison Hyler sadly. One would have thought that Hyler's background, his philosophical education, might have endowed him with something of the stoic outlook. But he, like Smoot, was obviously overwhelmed by melancholy. As for Corky Smith, his face wore an

expression of disgust that would have turned sour a bucket of milk freshly extracted from the cow.

"Well," said Hyler, sitting down beside Sergeant Smoot.

Corky Smith, taking the opposite bunk, faced his downcast companions. "The way I figger, if it was on'y one thing to be sad about, a guy would be able to concentrate on that one worry. But with two tradigies to worry about, it makes it confusing."

"Tragedies," said Hyler absentmindedly. "From the Greek *tragoidia*, goat song, apparently by reason of the singers' custom of wearing goat skins."

"To think," said Sergeant Smoot, "that the army should do this to me after all these years of—" A lump came into his throat and he paused to swallow it. "And now all my dreams is scattered."

"I suppose you mean shattered," Hyler mumbled.

"Shattered. After what I sacrified to make soldiers out o' them draftees, after all these months of drillin' some sense into them recruits, it is them guys which gits to go overseas and Smoot is left to drill some more sense into some more recruits. It makes a person that he asts hisself finely if life is worth while."

"Don't you suppose Corky Smith and I are conscious of an equal degree of frustration?" demanded Hyler. "Don't you suppose we too appreciate the exquisite injustice of being left behind?"

"A'ways, after a long hot day tryin' to teach a guy like Private Bradley which is his right foot, I would lay in my bunk and dream of the future in which I would go forth and start bustin' the skulls of them Japanese against each other. Is it right that some people should git to bust Japanese skulls and some people shouldn't? Is that the fair sportsmanship we was learned about in school? Is the U.S. of America a democracy or ain't it?"

"A soldier," said Hyler, "can only obey orders."

"Or he kin go over the hill, like Ortwingle," said Corky Smith.

Bitterly Sergeant Smoot cast his eyes over the rows of empty bunks. "I ain't exackly sayin' Ortwingle should of deserted, because it is no excuse for anybody to be a deserter from the army in war time and become a man without a country. But on the other hand, when a soldier is tole he is bein' left home to train new recruits while his comp'ny is gave the orders to sail for overseas and come to gripes with the enemy, why that same soldier it is possibly his mind cracks under the strain. It is my candied opinion that Ortwingle right now is somewhere walkin' around in a daze under a state of amnesty."

"Yeah," said Corky Smith. "Even if our comp'ny has went and sailed for overseas to some foreign shore, at lease if we had ole Orty with us it wouldn't be so bad. At lease we could of played four-handed rummy until the new batch of raw recruits arrives. But three-handed rummy don't keep your interest in it." Corky Smith blinked, on the verge of tears. "Now also I am got no pardner to play tricks on Smoot with. I had Ortwingle trained good to play tricks, and now—" Corky, by an heroic effort, brought his emotions under control. "Besides all that, he never paid me back the eighty cents he owned me before he left."

"A army barracks without no soldiers in it kind of gives a person the willies," said Smoot. "It is sort of eerie, like a haunted house without no ghosts."

"In time of war, when they ketch a deserter," asked Corky Smith, "do they shoot him against a wall or hang him or electrify him in the death house?"

"Ain't things sad enough without you bringin' up the subjects of hangin' and shootin'?" said Smoot.

"I was on'y thinkin' a thought that came to me in case if they should bring Ortwingle back to be shot against a wall and in case I would happen to be picked out to be on the firin' squad, I'd go ahead and aim up in the air and shoot over his head. I don't like the idea of shootin' a close friend."

"Can't anybody think of something cheerful?" said Smoot petulantly.

"All right," said Corky Smith. "How about gittin' drunk?"

Smoot shook his head. "Gittin' drunk on'y makes me sad, and I am as sad now as I kin stand it."

"Then how about girls," said Corky Smith. "Girls is a cheerful subject. We could fling ourselfs into the arms of some beautiful girls and put all our cares and worries asunder."

"If there is any girls around here that is beautiful and also they have arms," said Smoot, "then they are prob'ly dated up ahead for fifteen years solid."

"Well, that's all the cheerful subjects I kin think of," said Corky.

"I understand they're going to increase the army by another three million," Hyler observed.

A painful look spread over Smoot's features. "Three million recruits!" he exclaimed, shaking his head dolefully. "And I bet I am got to drill a large percentage of the majority of them personally," he groaned.

"As I say, I had myself looked forward to the time when I should come with my company into direct contact with the enemy," said Hyler. "I

wouldn't like to describe myself as a blood-thirsty chap precisely. But I had rather anticipated rubbing out a considerable proportion of the armed forces of the Axis powers. But since it is deemed fit that I remain to instill a degree of discipline into our new fighting men, I can only bow gracefully to the inevitable. Nevertheless, I think this is that fat little regimental sergeant-major's doings, and I must concede that I should like nothing better than to catch him unawares some dark evening and bust him one in the nose."

"Listen," said Sergeant Smoot, "this is still the army, see, so control yourself. There is no corporal in this outfit that is gonna punch that fat guy in the nose. That is my job because I am still the rankin' non-com around here. It is traditions in the army, don't ever forget that."

"All right," said Hyler, chastised. "I am no doubt being victimized by an atavistic impulse. Unquestionably the sergeant-major in question had his orders from higher up. Reason tells me that each man in the military hierarchy must efficiently perform the function assigned to him regardless of his personal desires, but instinct tells me I would prefer to strew the battlefields with dead Japs." Hyler sighed. "We had that in Professor Hartrampf's psychology course in my junior year—the conflict between reason and instinct."

"I wished Ortwingle was here," said Corky Smith sorrowfully. "He could tell us a story about that crazy ole uncle of his that would prob'ly make us laugh. That crazy ole uncle of Ortwingle's certainly must be quite a cart."

"I suppose you mean a card," sighed Hyler. "The idiomatic meaning of the word 'card' in this context seems to escape me for the moment."

"I never thought Ortwingle would do this to us," said Corky Smith.

"Why," Smoot demanded, "don't you go out some place and look for a nice entertainin' funeril to cheer you up with?"

"Well, I was on'y tryin' to keep up my end of the dialect."

"Dialogue," Hyler murmured.

"Remember them song learigs that Ortwingle use to make up? Maybe he deserted the army to go to New York and be a song writer on Tin Pan Avenue," said Corky wistfully.

"With all due respect to one that is absent," said Smoot, "if Ortwingle was the last song writer on earth he would still haff to dicker to git them to publish them learigs."

"How long do you suppose it will be," asked Hyler, "before we receive our replacements from the recruit center?"

"I don't know," said Smoot, "but I will ast Madam Von Doehm at the Gypsy Tea Shoppe the next time I git my fame and fortune told with tea

leaves."

"Kin them gypsies accially glance into the future and tell people what is liable to happen to them?" asked Corky Smith.

"There are numerous schools of scientific thought which admit the probability of genuinely clairvoyant types," said Hyler.

"Because I would like to go and ast some one of them gypsies if Ortwingle really has went over the hill and deserted," Corky explained. "It is a theory which has suddenly came to me like a belt from the blue that maybe instead of desertin' he has fell into the hands of some fifth colonist spies. I seen a movie that a soldier was captured by the Nazis who they wanted to know the secret of a bomb sight, and started off torturin' him, but he would not tell them. In the meanwhile his buddies all thought he was a deserter, but instead of which he finally excaped from them spies and become a hero and was made a captin in the Air Corpse."

"Ortwingle wouldn't be able to remember the secret of a bomb sight if he invented it himself," said Sergeant Smoot.

"I would still like to find out from some gypsy where he went to, because even if I had to pay this here gypsy four bits to hear the future I would still make a profit of thirty cents by gittin' back the money Ortwingle still owns me."

Smoot looked at his companion sourly. "I will be gladly willing to give you thirty cents in cash if it is the on'y way to stop you from talkin' about Ortwingle. You are becoming a hypercrondriac on the subject."

"Well, how about goin' over to the P.X. and drowndin' our sorrers in a bottle of pop?"

"Skip it," said Smoot. "I would not mind goin' out and drowndin' myself, but not in no bottle of pop. I am too sensitive to enjoy any fun in this mental condition into which I been thrusted by the army keepin' me on domestic soil while my fellow-buddies is sailin' the seven oceans in search of skulls to bust. I even become a sergeant against my better nature, and this is the gratitude I get. It is enough to exhaust the patients of a saint. And then you come around and want somebody to go for a bottle of pop."

"I was jist tryin' to think of somethin' to relax the monotony of bein' on'y three non-coms in a comp'ny, with no First Sergeant around to yell at us, and no recruits that we kin yell at. Well, for one good thing, it is about time that chow call is about ready to blow. Chow call invariably places me in a better mentality most of the time."

"Myself," said Smoot, "I am got very little appetite to eat with when it is the case that our comp'ny has also sailed overseas with the best comp'ny

mess in the whole battalion and we are left to eat in Company K, who they have a mess sergeant that thinks the money he spents for chow comes out of his own pocket."

"I've never considered myself as possessing the attributes of the gourmet," said Hyler, "but I too have observed that K Company's mess leaves something to be desired." He looked down at his feet thoughtfully, then with a gesture of profound comradeship he put his arms around his two boon companions. "Perhaps our imaginations are playing tricks on us, fellows. Waifs of unstable fortune, all commonplace pleasures turn to dust in our mouths. Life strikes us as incongruous. We have been sideswiped by a capricious fate. No doubt we will mellow as times goes on. Our interest in corporeal things will unquestionably revive. But for the moment we stew in a veritable ocean of melancholy. We are wretched, miserable, bored, aggrieved. In spite of the sanctity of military traditions," he declared, "I still think I will punch that fat little sergeant-major in the nose."

"Look," said Corky Smith, "every suggestion I suggest gits turned down. Well, this is the last suggestion I am gonna bring up. How about after supper because of this place bein' so deserted we all go down to the camp movie and see this here picture. It is called *The Monster Is Loose* and it is all about a mad doctor who he kills hundreds of innocent victors to git their lungs which he is gonna transplant into sharks in order to see if with them human lungs it's possible that fish kin live on dry land. I guess a picture with hundreds of murders in it oughta take our disgust off our minds. The paper had an ad in it for this movie which it said it's a *Must* picture for all who would like to feel horrible."

"Did this mad doctor git any of them fish to live on dry land?" asked Smoot.

"How do I know? If they tole you that you wouldn't haff to go and see it."

"The hell with it, then," said Smoot. "If they ain't got confidence enough in their story to say how it comes out, the hell with it. I ain't gonna buy no pig in a poke."

"He is kind of hard to please sometimes," said Corky Smith to Harrison Hyler.

Just then mess call echoed up and down the company streets.

"Well, I ain't got no appetite, but I figger we might as well go through the notions of eatin' to keep our morale up," said Smoot. "Come on."

At that moment Ortwingle's apparition appeared in the doorway. "Ortwingle!" exclaimed Corky Smith. "Good ole Ortwingle!"

Ortwingle's face was dirty, his cheeks streaked with sweat. He looked pretty angry. "Don't talk to me, you guys," he said.

"We won't talk to you later," said Smoot. "In the meanwhile, where the hell did you git to?"

"Where did *I* git to?" Ortwingle sputtered. "Where did I git to?" He threw his side-arms on one of the empty bunks. "Three days I been standin' on that intersection directin' traffic without somebody comin' to relieve me, and he asts where did I git to!"

"What intersection?" Smoot demanded.

"Don't be so innocent," said Ortwingle. "When the comp'ny pulled out o' here in their trucks, that fat little sergeant-major assigns me to stand at that intersection and direct the traffic until I am relieved. 'Stay there,' he says, 'until you are officially relieved.' He says he will sent one of you guys to relieve me. For three days I stand at that intersection and nobody shows up. So now I am desertin' my post. I would rather be sittin' down in Leavenworth than standin' up on some intersection the rest of my life."

"The sergeant-major never tole us you was assigned to direct no traffic," said Smoot. "We thought you had went over the hill."

"Well, all I kin say is that it's comin' to be a fine army when they have sergeant-majors in it that leaves people standin' on intersections for three days," Ortwingle ranted.

"I hope you'll pardon me," said Hyler "for seeming to make a point of it, but it occurs to me that a certain sergeant-major who shall be nameless has got exactly four punch in the noses waiting for him."

"Punches in the nose," Smoot corrected him. "Try to keep a little better care of your grammar. Four punches in the nose."

Just then a detail of new recruits, barrack bags swung over their shoulders, clumped in through the doorway. "Pardon me, corporal," said the leader to Sergeant Smoot, "but is this Company L?"

Smoot drew his palm over his face in a characteristic gesture. "What does the sign say up over that doorway?" he demanded.

The recruit looked down at his feet a little foolishly. "It says 'Company L.'"

"And don't call me 'corporal,'" Smoot bellowed. "Button up the neck of that shirt! Damn it to hell, it is not two minutes peace in this army in which a man kin take off to be downhearted. Don't stand there lookin' like sawdust dummies. Line up accordin' to height. Come on, come on—we ain't got until doomsday to win this war. Line up!"

Hyler looked at Ortwingle and Ortwingle looked at Corky Smith. “Take a deep breath, boys,” said Corporal Smith. “Here we go again.”

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

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[The end of *The Ordeal of Sergeant Smoot*, by Louis Paul (ps. of Leroi Placet).]