

"A Bed-Time Story for Discontented G.I.s"

By

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ANNOUNCEMENT

This is a fable. It is written under conditions most humane, most humorous....and at great leisure; conditions which the Army refers to as 'seducing the dog.' It is recommended to the Govt. and Military Authorities as future material for a training manual on morale, a great problem in any Army. It is suggested that every sergeant read it, become familiar with it, digest its contents...perhaps even memorize it, so that at some crucial moment, which are always popping up in the Army, he can rush to the bed-side of some unhappy rookie and sooth him....read him to sleep with a fable written expressly for the men in the Armed Forces.

In addition to all this, I dedicate this fable to the men in my old outfit, Hq. Co. 706th. Tank Destroyer Bn. and to my comrades in my present home...Hq. 6th. Tank Destroyer Group.

Christopher S. Blake
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D plus 16
England

I

In the Army, when a poor little private has a complaint to register...he can do any one of three things. He can either take his T.S. card (which means 'tough luck' in polite society) to the Chaplain and have it properly punched; he can blow his top, or he can go over the hill...providing he can make up his mind which hill to go over. Will it be the strawberry one with the marshmallow top, or the chocolate one with the raspberry sequins.

II

Now once upon a time in a far away Army camp...a long long way from home, there lived a little private named Ernest Foohey. He was a sad little man and had many problems....and many complaints. He was perfectly frank, he didn't like the Army. Well, who does? Like so many little G.I.s, Ernest found himself confronted with all three alternatives, but unlike many a G.I., he decided to give them all a try.....one by one.

He had bitched so much, about one thing and another, they finally had to give him his T.S. card and time off to see the Chaplain and get it punched. Now you know there are two things they must always give you time off for in the Army; one is to see the Chaplain, and the other to go on sick call. Between the two, you can become quite a gold brick. But who wants to be a gold brick? You do.

Well, Ernest took himself that morning to the Chaplain, but when he got there, the Chaplain was out....and the card had to be punched by his assistant...a mere T/5 Corporal. That didn't satisfy poor little Ernie, they called him Ernie sometimes....and so he decided to blow his top. But all he could manage was to get up on a box and scream...which did him no good. So you see that he really did try every means of satisfying himself, and that he saved the most dangerous for the last. It was indeed a great under-taking to even think of going over the hill. Many a good little soldier had gotten into an awful mess because of it.

But this was the last straw so far as Ernest was concerned; he had to do something...and this was the only way out. After much reflection and much debating with himself, he decided that it must be done. He was going over the hill. He had even gone so far as to select the hill...that one. Nothing would stop him; he would show them. They'd be sorry too. He was sure they'd never find another G.I. to clean the latrines the way he did. It wasn't just fatigue detail with him....he put his heart and soul into it. He was the only one who ever washed the obscene writings from the walls. But they didn't appreciate him....and so he'd leave them.

One dark night, he wrapped a few essentials and a can of "C" rations in a knapsack and started off for the hill. He took one last look at his dear sergeant and said good night. He also left a note for his Commanding Officer, which read as follows:

"I haven't been very happy with you. Don't bother to look for me because you won't find me. And even if you do, I won't come home."

Ernest Foohey

With that he took one last look at the barracks, blew a kiss to his dear sleeping buddies, and in the dead of night, took off for the cruel civilian world beyond. Little did he know what dangers lay before him.

III

Now little Ernest found three things wrong with his life in the Army, that is three among many. Well, they weren't really big problems...but they made a difference. Had his Commanding Officer been at all nice, he could have fixed things to his liking, and all this distasteful business of running away could have been avoided. No one wants to run away from home, unless it's absolutely necessary. And this was vital, Ernest felt.

He thought of these things as he trudged along the road leading from camp...and climbing over fences and crawling under wire so as to avoid meeting up with any guards. Once more he recalled to mind the little things which annoyed him about Army life, which aggravated him...and which caused him to take this final step. Oh but they were distasteful. Yet, the anger they evoked gave him strength and grit to go on.

First there was the Mess Sgt. who wouldn't fix his food the way he liked it. He had asked him a hundred times to squeeze his oranges for him in the morning...and it was really only a trifle to dry his eggs to his liking. But would he do it? No, he wouldn't do it; he wasn't worth that much. They just ignored him. Then there was the little matter of passes. He wasn't greedy like the others, he didn't want a seven day leave every week. All he wanted was a twenty-four hour pass every other day. But they even held that back. And the last complaint, which always made him angry was the most humiliating of all. It was his d-----Draft Board. They insisted upon drafting him, even when he showed them his Good Conduct and three campaign ribbons. But they wouldn't believe that and kept sending him letters and threatening him with the sheriff. They refused to believe that anyone could be dumb enough to enlist.

Men have gone over the hill before...for less than this. He felt that his cause was a just one. He was never coming back. He had disowned them all. But he couldn't help but feel just a little bit lonely and homesick as he walked along the road in the cold of night.

IV

It was morning when he sat down on a street curb to eat his cold can of "C" rations. Soon a crowd of people gathered round him and watched him eat. They were odd people too, dressed in a variety of clothes. He started to take the first spoon-full, but could hardly finish it with so many people staring him in the face. What was wrong, he wondered? Soon a policeman came along and told him to stand up. He did.

'Where did you get that can of food,' the policeman asked?

'Why from the kitchen,' he answered.

'What kitchen, boy, what kitchen,' the policeman shouted?

'The kitchen, sir...any kitchen,' he cried.

This proved he was a shady character. Did he have a ration book, the began to ask. No, he didn't have a ration book....he didn't need one. Oh ho, he didn't need one...now they were on to him. Didn't he now? Didn't he know there was a war on? Sure he knew there was a war on. Well, what was he doing eating a can of beans without first registering it with the local authorities? This got him...he didn't think he had to. He was only going to finish the beans so as not to throw them away. Then he was going to the nearest cafe and have some eggs, bacon...some orange juice, toast and coffee. By time he finished that, it would be noon and he could then begin on a huge steak. He was going to eat all the things he liked...and have it just the way he wanted it too. Now, could they recommend him to the finest Cafe?

They all looked at one another. Was the man insane? Sure he was insane...mad as a hatter. Hadn't he heard of things? Where did he come from? Didn't he know there was no food in this town, and what there was was strictly rationed on points? The man was obviously mad and belonged in an asylum. He was surely suffering from some malady. Eggs! Bacon!....Steak! Good God, the man was looney. He should at least be brought before the authorities. He should not be let loose this way. So they took him by the hand and dragged him off to the local civil authorities...with the whole town tagging off after him. For by now the scandal had spread and people began to come out of the factories and collect about him. In the meantime, they confiscated his can of beans...counting each bean in the can to see if they had enough to go around the town. Imagine, keeping a whole can of beans to himself!

V

The judge was a hard man, a great big fat man with a red nose, and even more ferocious looking since he wasn't getting his proper vitamins and had to live on a very stringent diet. He was in no mood to contend with a culprit who was greedy enough to eat a can of beans all by himself. When they actually told him that this man had the cheek to sit on the curb and eat a whole can of beans by himself, he banged down on the desk so hard, that the ink bounced and splashed all over his utility suit. This made him all the more mad. He had never heard of so great a scandal in all his years on the bench.

They were all indignant; they didn't know whether to throw him in a dungeon or just hang him on the spot. And who was this brazen grandee, someone asked, who could parade the streets at ten o'clock in the morning, while everybody was hard at work in defense plants? He was a soldier, he said. They told him to shut up and called him a liar....a liar who would be treated with; and he would pay for this affrontery. So they threw him into jail for the night. And there he stayed, cold...hungry...tired, and alone. He dreamt of a huge hall, that night...with row upon row of bunks, and lots of men in khaki...and a great big crap game.

VI

The next day they took him to the town factory, a huge place which swallowed up civilians...men, women and children, and wouldn't release them till a whole line of tanks, planes and trucks came forth from the building. He could smell the smoke and hear the noises...and watch the silent workers, as they were chained to their benches. Oh what sort of world was this, he thought? Where were all the pretty things, the good food and the freedom; the nice soft beds and the happy times? Where was he? And he began to cry. But they dragged him by the feet and popped him before the foreman...who was a horrible giant and who drove his workers with a huge whip.

It was a huge factory too...that belched and snorted and that made all kinds of heavy equipment. It got bigger as you went inside...and you got lost if you ventured so much as ten feet from your bench. They tied him with a chain to a work bench and made him tighten screws all day long. When he asked for time off, they laughed at him...mockingly, and said he had five minutes during the day for his personal needs, and five minutes to eat his rations.

This made him very unhappy....and he began to think of his home far away, of the Army camp and the good times he left behind. Now he was a slave...working in a defense plant, and when they brought him his huge salary each week...baskets full of green bills, he cried all the more. He wanted his sergeant.

VII

But this wasn't the end of his troubles in the cruel civilian world. One of the old women in the plant, a grandmother of eighty-five...a toothless old hag who frightened him and who had thirteen grand-children in the service, spied on him one day and suspected that he was of military age and in good physical condition. She saw hair on his chest. She informed the authorities and in a flash the Draft Board officials were down upon him. They tested his blood and gave him a medical check-up; made him stand on his head and say 'ah'...and asked him if he liked women or preferred Persian cats..He answered all their questions and they told him if he didn't report for military duty the next day, he would be shot at dawn, since that was now the penalty. But he was in defense, he pleaded. No good, the Army needed him and they were going to ship him off tomorrow.

This was his Waterloo...this was the end. The scandal of it all. Drafted and shipped out to some strange outfit, shanghied by some Draft Board. This was too much, and so when they gave him his five minute break...he tore loose and ran as fast as he could...so fast that no one could catch up with him and he finally escaped from the cruel and wicked civilians.

VIII

When he finally stopped running, he found himself alone in the desert...surrounded by high mountains, and all sorts of reptiles and cactus. This was surely the end of the world, this was the finish. Here he could lay down and die. But instead he saw a ray of light....and looked up. There he saw a kind looking man.

'Who are you sir,' he asked?

'I'm the Chaplain,' the man answered, 'I'm your fairy God-Father...and I've come to help you.'

'Oh, no one can help me,' he cried, 'I'm finished. Just leave me here to die. Bury me and give me a decent funeral.'

'No,' said the Chaplain, 'you have everything before you. You must come home.'

'I can't go back,' he screamed, 'they'll court-martial me. They'll throw me into the brig...and kill me.'

'No, you come home with me,' the good Chaplain insisted, 'I have a surprise for you. Remember, I'm your Fairy God-Father, I've always looked after you. See, I've a brand new jeep that flies...and I'll take you all the way home.'

He persuaded him to get into the jeep and no sooner were they in it when it spread its wings and took off. And when it came to water, it swam across it with full grace. The sun was shining, and he was no longer miserable. He couldn't hide his joy...he was going home. So he sank back in his seat, and cuddled close to the good kind Chaplain.

IX

When they got to camp, it was retreat and all the men were lined up...waiting for him. They heard of his return and were expecting him. It was a great celebration...they rushed to him and picking him up and hugging him...carried him away on their shoulders. When they took him to the barracks, he found his Mess Sgt. waiting for him...with a glass of orange juice. And his First Sgt. hugged him...and led him off to a nice clean bed, with pillowcase and sheets...where he enjoyed a good night's sleep. And they all watched over him...and kept him from harm.

In the morning he got up and saw his Commanding Officer, who was over-joyed at having him back...and gave him a seven day leave.

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